La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

PAKISTAN AT THE 61. INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

Faiza Butt "Punj•AB – A Sublime Terrain"

May 9 – Nov 22, 2026

Ex Farmacia Solveni, Dorsoduro 993-994, Venice

Opening times Tue – Sun, 11 am - 7 pm (May to Sep); 10 am - 6 pm, (Oct to Nov)

May 7 - 8, 9am press previews, RSVP at claudia@mayvenice.com

May 2026 – The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan presents **Pakistan's participation in the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**, marking the country's second presence at one of the world's most significant international platforms for contemporary art, following its inaugural National Pavilion in 2019.

"Punj•AB: A Sublime Terrain" is a major solo exhibition **by Faiza Butt curated by Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano**, to be presented from **May 9 to November 22**, at **Ex Farmacia Solveni**. The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture appointed **Yaqoob Bangash** as **Commissioner** of the National Participation.

Conceived specifically for the pavilion, the project marks both a continuation of Butt's longstanding engagement with **identity, memory, and representation**, and a significant departure into **new material and collaborative, spatial practices**.

Reflecting on the responsibility of representing Pakistan on an international stage, **Butt notes**:

"To represent the national pavilion is a responsibility that really encouraged me to think in a way I've never thought before... I had to connect my thoughts and feelings with a bigger premise, with a broader view that represents the country in a way which is fitting."

The exhibition takes the region of Punjab as its point of departure – both a deeply personal geography for the Lahore-born artist and a historically rich site shaped by trade, migration, and cultural exchange from the time of the Indus Valley Civilisation to the present day. Rather than offering a single narrative, the pavilion unfolds as a transhistorical, layered journey through "chapters" of history. In doing so, it positions Punjab as a generative terrain, where material abundance has driven cycles of invasion and encounter, producing continuous cultural cross-pollination and growth.

Visitors will enter a space dominated by **monumental textile works**. Suspended like paintings, these tapestries transform traditional floor-based weaving practices into immersive visual fields. Combining *dhurrie* weaving, *ikat*, *jacquard*, and hand-spun cotton, the works are unified through symbolic colour, architectural motifs, and **intricate compositions that map the rise and fall of civilisations**.

Alongside the tapestries, the pavilion brings together paintings, sculptures, and video, creating a multi-sensory environment that moves between historical reflection and contemporary life. A video installation, shot in Shergarh and a factory in Johar Town, introduces viewers to present-day Punjab – its rituals, labour, and communal life – juxtaposing rural traditions with the industrial

rhythms of textile production. While one aspect captures the everyday and ceremonial life of a small town, another shifts to a factory, tracing the journey of textile production for local use and global export. A series of paintings further expands Butt's visual presentation, including a group of intimate portraits. These are presented alongside larger, *"Phantasmagoric"* paintings, weaving together migratory motifs, architectural fragments, and painterly traditions into richly imaginative compositions.



ARTIST FAIZA BUTT IN HER STUDIO





LEFT TO RIGHT, PORTRAIT CURATOR BEATRIZ CIFUENTES FELICIANO AND ARTIST FAIZA BUTT INSIDE EX FARMACIA SOLVENI; DETAIL, PHANTASMAGORIC, OIL GLAZES ON BOARD

Central to the project is collaboration. **Several works are produced in partnership with Punjabi artisans** whose inherited craft traditions, particularly textile weaving, form the foundation of the exhibition. Butt actively challenges the marginalisation of such practices within contemporary art discourse: *"These are inherited craft traditions... but by changing the scale, the motifs, the way we think about them, we take this tradition one step forward and bring it into the contemporary arena."*

In this sense, "Punj•AB: A Sublime Terrain" is not only an exploration of history, but also a proposition. **Curator Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano** states: *"Practices often categorised as "craft" are not peripheral, but central to contemporary cultural production. By recontextualising these traditions within the Biennale, the pavilion asserts their place within global conversations on art, materiality, and knowledge."*

Balancing intellectual inquiry with sensory experience, the exhibition invites viewers to engage with the textures, rhythms, and stories embedded in its materials – offering both a reflection on Punjab's past and a reimagining of its presence within contemporary art.

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Notes to editors

YAQOOB BANGASH, COMMISSIONER
Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash is a historian of Modern South Asia and a Fulbright Fellow at the Mittal Institute. His current research interests lie in the emergence of Pakistan as a post-colonial state, with broader interests in decolonisation, modern state formation, formation of identities, and the emergence of ethnic and identity-based conflicts. In 2016, Dr Bangash founded the first academic literary festival in Pakistan, the 'Afkar-e-Taza ThinkFest'. He has received several grants and honours, including a Senior Fellowship at the Religious Freedom Institute (USA), Fellowship of the Presbyterian Historical Society (USA), David M. Stowe Research Fellowship at Yale (USA) and the American Academy of Religion Collaborative Grant (USA). He also regularly writes for The News, Daily Times, The Express Tribune and other news media. Dr Bangash completed his BA from the University of Notre Dame, IN, USA, and his DPhil from the University of Oxford. He serves as the Director of the Centre for Governance and Policy at Information Technology University, Lahore, Pakistan.

BEATRIZ CIFUENTES FELICIANO, CURATOR
Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano is a curator, researcher, and author specialising in art and architecture from the Global South, with a focus on modern and contemporary art from South Asia and the Himalayas. With a background in art history, archaeology, and architecture, she has worked across leading international institutions, including Tate Modern, the British Museum, and the Victoria & Albert Museum, where she is a Research Fellow. Her practice bridges historical and contemporary collections through major exhibitions, displays, publications, acquisitions, and international research collaborations. It is shaped by extensive fieldwork across South Asia, a sustained engagement with the region's cultural and artistic histories, and broader interests in Latin America and the Middle East.

FAIZA BUTT, EXHIBITOR
Faiza Butt was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1973. She received her BA with honours from the National College of Arts in 1993, and was awarded the Berger Gold Medal for outstanding student of the year. She holds a Master's degree in Painting with a distinction award from the Slade School of Fine Art in London. In 1995, Butt was awarded a UNESCO-Aschberg Bursary and was an artist in residence at the Bartle Arts Trust (BAT) in Durban, South Africa where she produced a solo show at the BAT Centre. Faiza holds extensive experience in community engagement globally. She has worked with underprivileged social groups through her teaching career and has collaborated with various organisations to make art a medium of social consciousness and justice. Her work has been exhibited at various art fairs, such as Frieze London, Art Dubai and the Hong Kong Art Fair, and extensively in solo

and group exhibitions in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and the United States. Her work can be found in private and public collections, including the British Museum, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, the Burger Collection, and more. Most recently, Faiza was nominated artist of the month for October 2025, by Bradford City of Culture, UK.

Credits

COMMISSIONER
Yaqoob Bangash

CURATOR
Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano

EXHIBITOR
Faiza Butt

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