

Saba Khan

Artist Statement

An expedition was made around the barrages on River Indus to record Indus dolphins that momentarily swim above waters to draw in a breath of air. This river species evolved over millions of years to adapt to the muddy waters of Indus, letting go of its eyes and relying on sonar for communication. Indus is a dark river because 'young' Karakorum mountains continue to erode and silt the rivers. In geological time the dolphins are as old as the nearby coal mines in Thar. During irrigation projects of the British Empire, barrages were constructed/planned to divert water and to make water more productive for barren regions of Sindh and Punjab. The dolphin habitat is now between barrages, limiting their gene pool and their natural environment. The colonial water irrigation project still continues in the form of hydropower mega dams and other infrastructures like the coal-fired power plants for producing energy. This top-down approach has illuminated urban centres, but create inequality and stark poverty, as resources are pushed for elite centres. I use the metaphor of the dolphins' slow blindness to the blind use of nature by extracting aquifers for mining and using water as a machine for productive use.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Artist Statement

These works are from the ongoing series Bulhan Nameh, or Dolphin Diaries. This body of work's main objective is to "see" the cultural, historical and human landscape of the Indus River in Sindh through the eyes of the Blind Indus River Dolphin. The focal area of this research is city of Sukkur where shrines, temples, forts, iconic bridges and massive irrigation projects crowd a less than 10 km stretch of river that is also home to one of the highest concentration of dolphins in Pakistan.

These particular pieces talk about the enigmatic and pan religious figure: Khawaja Khizr, who is also known by the epithets, Jhule Lal, Zinda Pir and Darya Badshah. His island shrine in the Indus once housed a temple and mosque flanking his Asthana or throne. The two were separated in the late 19th century and a separate Hindu temple now sits on the banks of the Indus overlooking the shrine. These pieces explore the relationship between Khizr and the Indus River dolphin. Khizr is known as the ever living saint and is regarded as the prophet written about in Surah Kahf of the Quran. He never died so he has no tomb and instead lives eternally in the dark and eerie rivers and seas.