

frieze

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Lines of Control

Green Cardamom, [London, UK](#)



'Lines of Control', installation view (2009).

'Lines of Control' is certainly an ambitious undertaking. Designed in three parts, the exhibition takes place in three venues across three countries – UK, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan – in a rolling programme whereby each show overlaps with the next. Its subject matter is similarly complex, addressing various kinds of partitions. In this set of exhibitions, the partition in question is of India (last year of course saw the 60th anniversary of the creation of Pakistan); a later series of shows, taking place next year, will explore the divisions in the Middle East.



Sophie Ernst, *Home (Zarina)* (2008)

Despite the richness of this topic, in terms of India it has been surprisingly under-explored in the visual arts. This is especially remarkable when considering the enormity of the partition, when nearly a million people were killed and 15 million people were displaced. The most affecting work in the London tranche of 'Lines of Control' is a piece by the Berlin-based artist Sophie Ernst, which addresses this displacement through interviews with people who lived through it (*Home (Zarina)*, 2008). She asks them to talk about, and sketch, the houses that they left behind, with films of their hands drawing their former homes then projected onto an architectural model. Through the conversations many of the most pertinent consequences of partition emerge. Notions of identity, and the trauma of the events, are discussed, alongside the emotional ties we have to houses. Despite its specificity to the events in India, Ernst's work emphasizes how the experiences discussed can relate to other partitions elsewhere in the world.

The question of identity, and of how this can be manipulated for political gain, also arises in a work by Naeem Mohaiemen. *Kazi in Nomansland* (2008) contains a series of horizontal images showing the eyes of poet Nazrul Islam. Nazrul was a vocal opponent of partition as it gained momentum in India, though by the time it came to pass he was suffering from Pick's disease, leaving him mute and suffering from dementia. Unable to express himself, Nazrul was then bizarrely co-opted as a figurehead for both India and Pakistan, and later also for Bangladesh, with each country adapting his fame and significance for its own purpose. His importance is commemorated on stamps issued by all three countries, piles of which also form part of Mohaiemen's work.



Roohi Ahmed, *Fireworks* (2008), installation shot

Other works at Green Cardamom emphasize the 'control' aspects of forcefully imposed division by considering various ideas of the military. Roohi Ahmed places large needles used for stitching hessian in configurations that reference military manouveres, while Ahsan Jamal has painted a series of miniatures that depict men in various military uniforms. Seher Shah tackles the lack of any public memorials to the partition in India or Pakistan in a series of works that combine archival photography of architectural scenes with Shah's own drawings of imagined monuments. In Farida Batool's lenticular print, the line of control is formed by the dividing lines of two bodies pressed together. The fleshy forms allude to sex but in this context also to the intimacy that remains between two countries that have been partitioned. The print sways and shifts as the viewer moves before it, yet its central line remains constant.



Farida Batool, *Line of Control* (2004)

It's intriguing to consider the differing reactions that may have been provoked by 'Lines of Control' in its three venues. The catalogue accompanying the Green Cardamom exhibition also reveals works in the Dubai and Karachi exhibitions not on show here; as most people will only visit one of the exhibitions, many of these works will be seen by only one audience. In this sense, the London stage feels like a launch pad for what could be a larger exhibition, which will explore the complexity of partition in further depth. But for now it offers a compelling introduction to an unduly overlooked subject.

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