



## From Steel to Symbol: Cultural Re-Authoring and Visual Hierarchy of Pakistani Truck Art

<sup>1</sup>Syeda Sana Munir Kazmi & <sup>2</sup>Ghani-ur-Rahman

<sup>1</sup>Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad

<sup>2</sup>Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad

### ABSTRACT

#### **Article History:**

Received: Aug 19, 2024  
Revised: Sep 11, 2024  
Accepted: Oct 10, 2024  
Available Online: Dec 30, 2024

**Keywords:** Truck-Art, Material Culture, Socio-visual Systems

#### **Funding:**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Pakistani truck art has been described as one of the most complex and socially integrated types of vernacular visual culture in modern South Asia. The practice started in carriage transport communities and not in institutional art spaces, and alters standardized industrial vehicles into highly ornamented, mobile cultural spaces. Working together in the workshop production of painting, calligraphy, mirror inlay, carved wood, embossed metal, illumination, poetic inscription, and devotional imagery trucks are re-written out of the utilitarian machines into stratified symbolic infrastructures. Based on the material culture theory, the paper discusses truck art as a vibrant socio-visual system between 1990 and 2023 affected by regional craft traditions, religious symbols and vernacular aesthetics. According to the multi-sited ethnographic research, the visual hierarchy analysis, the motifs categorization, and the regional comparison have been included into the present study. The research reveals the manner in which decorated trucks act as concurrent devotional technologies, work spaces, autobiography surfaces, and mobile artworks. Their visual hierarchy is structured to create sacred, narrative and communicative spaces so that they can be legible in motion and turn highways into a space of symbolic exchange. Finally, the adorned trucks also show how mobility is made culturally productive, steel is turned into symbolic, labour is turned into aesthetic expression, and infrastructure makes meaning in motion.

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**Corresponding Author's Email:** [sanakazmi87@gmail.com](mailto:sanakazmi87@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.61503/ciissmp.v3i4.383>

**Citation:** Kazmi, S. S. M., & Ghani-ur-Rahman. (2024). From steel to symbol: Cultural re-authoring and visual hierarchy of Pakistani truck art. *Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences and Management Practices*, 3(4), 386–399.

## 1.0 Introduction

Major highways of industrial regions of Punjab; and of mountain passes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to arid deserts of Baluchistan a unique fleet is visually impressive. The freight trucks, which were initially a standardized industrial transport machine, are turned into a highly decorated, moving cultural space. Colored in intense reds, green emeralds, blue cobalts and glowing yellows, covered with mirror mosaics, carved wooden panels, embossed metals, chain tassels and neon lights, and painted with poetry, religious invocations, and personal statements, these cars are one of the most excessive types of moving vernacular art in modern world.

The aesthetic density of Pakistani truck art is not the only characteristic that makes it stand out as a socially embedded art form. In contrast to works of art that are locked up in museums or organised exhibitions, truck decoration is generated out of labour circuits. It is made in garage workshops that are reeking with paint smells and metal particles, ordered by drivers and transport proprietors whose existence is based on long-range transport. Its readers are scattered, mobile toll collectors, roadside tea sellers, mechanics, other road users, city commuters and children who eagerly wait until convoys of decorated vehicles pass. The painting shifts, glitters, vibrates and fades away into dust, only to emerge hundreds of kilometres later. The highway is turned into uncurated gallery and mobility itself turns into the state of artistic experience.

Truck art is thus not merely ornamental decoration; it is a mobile meaning-making that is inbuilt into infrastructure. More recent work in the field of mobility suggests that mobility is not simply about physical mobility but a cultural-social process (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Adey, 2017). Identities, emotions, and social relations are formed by roads, vehicles and transport systems. Merriman (2012) goes on to suggest that infrastructures are not neutral contexts but culturally charged systems that structure the daily life. In this context, Pakistani trucks are not the passive transport of products; they are the active places of labour, devotion, aspiration, and identity materiality.

The material culture theory offers a critical point of view in explaining this change. The meaning of the social life of things that Appadurai, (1986) proposes is that objects acquire meaning when they are passed through various contexts. A truck is an industrial commodity when it gets out of the factory, but with the help of craft labour it acquires symbolic layers i.e. the religious inscriptions, poetic texts, landscape of a region, and autobiographical marks. Miller, (2005) also makes the same argument that material objects are inherent to identity formation; individuals externalize themselves in the objects that they make and live in. To the long-haul drivers, the truck is livelihood and lifeworld in motion of self-hood.

This further increases the understanding of art as agency by Alfred Gell (1998). Ornamented surfaces are not just an indicator of identity, but are socially active. A painted lion is a source of power and demands respect. Above the windshield, there is a Quranic verse that calls in the protection of God. Mirrors fitted on the body of the truck reflect sunlight outwards into the road generating blinding visual intensity which states presence in the traffic flows (Urry, 2007). These aspects mediate between the driver and deity, driver and peer and driver and the public.

The emotional aspect of truck art should not be neglected. Freight work in Pakistan is not

always safe, so irregular earnings, family absence, and unsafe road conditions are frequent phenomena (Anjaria and McFarlane, 2011; Rehman, 2021). During interviews, drivers often refer to their trucks as *ghar jaisa* (like home), which demonstrates the deep affection. Decoration is what fixes this relationship to provide spiritual reassurance, aesthetic pleasure and ownership in a profession organized by uncertainty. Drivers create personal spaces of meaning by ornamenting the standardised industrial machinery.

Meanwhile, the art of trucks exists in larger cultural economies. The aesthetics of this movement have spread around the world since the early 2000s via exhibitions, fashion partnerships, tourism promotion, and digital media (Qureshi, 2020; Khan, 2021). Vernaculars are transferred to other settings and this poses a question on commodification, authenticity, and the preservation of heritage (Harrison, 2013; Labadi and Long, 2010). The decorated truck, which lies at the border between local handicraft tradition and global cultural branding, bargains visibility outside of its freight context of origin.

This paper is a thesis that Pakistani truck art is an intricate socio-visual infrastructure in which craft labour, mobility, devotion, masculinity, memory, regional identity and economic aspiration meet. It is not a decorative addition to a piece of machinery, but rather an organized arrangement of visual precedence and figurative communication. Trucks are at once devotional spaces, autobiographical canvases, work locations and mobile artworks.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do collaborative craft practices transform functional vehicles into mobile cultural environments?
2. In what ways do visual hierarchies structure devotional, occupational, and public meaning?
3. How does truck art negotiate local identity within global cultural circulation between 1990 and 2023?

By situating truck art within material culture theory, this paper demonstrates that decorated trucks are central expressions of vernacular modernity, revealing how infrastructure itself becomes culturally productive, generating meaning in motion.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Historical Emergence and Transformation (1990 - 2023)**

Even though the art of truck decorating in Pakistan is not new, the years between 1990 and 2000 can be seen as the turning point of style exaggeration, regionalization, economic reorganization, and international recognition. What was initially a more or less occupational aesthetic inbuilt into freight circles began to become a nationally identifiable visual language and, ultimately, a globally distributed cultural icon.

The 1990s were characterized by the economic liberalization policies and the increased interprovincial trade routes in South Asia. The lengthening of trucking routes and the intensification of freight handling networks led to more competitive trucking routes (Anjaria and McFarlane, 2011). The drivers spent long hours and days out of their houses and in most cases they covered several provinces during one trip. Here, the adorned truck was not just a functional vehicle but it was also a symbol of professional identity among a fast-growing logistics economy.

Decoration was also used as differentiation. Within the congested freight stations an overly decorated truck was a symbol of elegance, trustworthiness and financial investment. It strengthened the community associations between drivers, who perceived stylistic markers based on region and shop heritage. The development of road infrastructure at this time increased the presence of the trucks in the national space, and the decorated vehicles started to become more and more prominent participants of the visual game in the daily life.

Differences in style were also acute in the 1990s and early 2000s. According to Elias (2011), the "Peshawari style" was synonymous with carved wooden panels, relief ornamentation in three dimensions and sculptural front facades. Such trucks commonly had elaborate latticework and brash structural decoration that ran outside of flat painted surfaces. By contrast, Karachi style trucks placed more emphasis on mirror mosaics, reflective surfaces, metal applique, and radiant colour layering which may be due to the access to a wide variety of materials and cosmopolitan craft traditions available to the port city. The Punjabi artisans created highly painted floral designs, calligraphy lyrical, and pastoral designs that were based on agrarian symbolism. Stylistic differences were not strict types, but dynamic trends determined by geography, accessibility to trade and mastery in the workshop.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought mass media visibility. Images of decorated trucks started to circulate outside transport communities through documentary films, coffee-table books and through digital photography. The rising access of the digital cameras and internet platforms facilitated quick visual propagation. What had traditionally been created by drivers and artisans as an occupational item was now finding its way to an urban middle-class audience as well as an international audience. This is also the time when there was a general interest in vernacular and folk aesthetics in the contemporary design discourse (Harrison, 2013).

Truck art became more visible in the global cultural circles by the 2010s. Its patterns were manifested in global shows, fashion alliances, and business-based designs (Qureshi, 2020; Khan, 2021). The urban boutiques featured prints on textile that were based on truck art calligraphy and floral. Mirror mosaics and painted panels were used in cafes and creative studios by interior designers. Truck-style typography was used by graphic designers in the branding campaigns. The aesthetics of truck art in the diasporic communities, especially in the United Kingdom and North America, became a shortcut to the identification of Pakistani culture, with its manifestations on festival stages, restaurant interiors, and community art projects.

The practice was not ousted by global circulation as it had its origins of freight. Two lines of development took shape: truck art was turned into an exportable aesthetic to be displayed in gallery spaces, runway fashion shows, and tourist promotion, and workshop-based truck decoration was further developed in the transport economies, being subjected to the occupational networks, apprenticeship, and long-distance freight labour.

The period of 2010 -2023 was also characterized by technological change. Photographic reproduction of portraits, vinyl graphics and quick motifs were made possible through digital printing (Ali, 2023). There were workshops that incorporated computer-designed templates to save on time and cost. However, this technological change brought up controversies on authenticity and

craftsmanship. Elderly craftsmen tended to differentiate between hand-painted trucks and digitally applied surfaces, with brushwork being one of the indicators of competence and ancestry. Instead of ousting traditional craft, digital techniques inspired hybrid forms of printed portraits that were hand-painted with ornamentation.

Stylistic decisions were also influenced by economic pressures. Increased fuel prices, unstable freight rates, and reduced profit margins also rendered massive decoration more economically difficult to some of the drivers. Unlike in the previous decades when there was a heavy use of ornamentation on virtually all surfaces, there is selective ornamentation on some modern trucks because of the budget limit. However, even small decoration still claims identity and spiritual invocation.

As of 2023, the aesthetics of truck art spread to various spheres:

Apparel design and fashion textile.

Commercial decor and interior murals.

Online graphic design and advertisement.

Festivals and installations Diasporic cultural branding.

The campaigns of national identity in tourism. Those expansions show the elasticity of truck art as a system of visual. But the context of its foundation is freight mobility. Trucks are still commissioned, painted, fixed, and reconfigured in workshop economies situated in transport infrastructures. The decorated car continues on dusty roads, hauling farm goods, building materials and industrial supplies in addition to poetry, prayer and dream.

The history since 1990 to 2023 is thus not a straightforward move of local artisans into a global product, but a complex process of change. The economic liberalization, infrastructural expansion, digital technology, and cultural globalization have seen truck art adjust to them, but the art still has its grounding in occupational life. It is an example of vernacular modernity, when the knowledge of the craft is overlapping with industrial systems and international networks (Harrison, 2013; Lababi and Long, 2010).

Instead of being drained by modernization, Pakistani truck art proves to be extremely resilient. It unveils the ways in which infrastructure may be expressive, the aesthetic innovation of labour communities, and the aesthetic work of mobility itself.

## **2.2 Pakistani Truck Art**

Pakistani truck art needs an interdisciplinary approach since it overlaps with material culture, mobility studies, infrastructural theory, labour practices, vernacular aesthetic, sensory anthropology, and globalization scholarship. It cannot be properly categorized within one discipline but rather opens up to dialogue between these disciplines. The review will arrange the discussion around four interrelated bodies of literature material culture, mobility and infrastructure, vernacular aesthetics and globalization which shed light on a different aspect of truck art.

### **2.2.1 Agency of Material Culture and Object.**

The study of material culture offers a basis of understanding decorated trucks as social and active objects, instead of tools. The social life of things is one of the most influential concepts

proposed by Arjun Appadurai (1986). It states that commodities can gain meaning by means of circulation. Objects pass in and out of regimes of value and acquire new identities with each change of context. The Pakistani trucks are a bright example of such a transformation: they start as industrial commodities in the world automotive supply chains, but the localized craft interventions make them have a devotional, autobiographical, and symbolic meaning.

Daniel Miller (1998; 2005) stresses the importance of the fact that material objects actively construct social relationships. Materiality is not just an expression of identity but also a way of making it. When applied to truck art, decoration enables drivers to reveal their dream, masculinity, religious beliefs, longing to country life, and their pride in their job. The truck therefore becomes part of the self; what Miller may call an externalization of internal values.

The theory of art as agency provided by Gell (1998) also re-frames the truck decoration. Artworks are not representations as such, but agents of social relations. A lion painted on the back of a truck does not merely signify bravery, but it establishes a hierarchy of dominance in competition on the road. The inscriptions in the Quran are not decorative in nature, but they invoke divine protection and define how the drivers and viewers perceive risk. Mirror mosaics are light scattering and create visual intensity which commands attention. These surfaces are pro-active in perception, behaviour and emotional response.

The work by Tim Ingold (2013) about making shifts is aimed at building an emphasis on product to process and understands craftsmanship as embodied knowledge that was built through correspondence between the maker and the material. The Pakistani truck art workshops work in the following manner: the apprentices learn by watching, repeating and by touching the paint, wood, and metal. Competencies pass down through informal intergenerational exchanges and this places truck art under the umbrella of living crafts, but not the aesthetics production.

Resilience and adaptation in vernacular making practices have also been emphasized by recent scholarship in craft (Adamson 2007; Risatti 2007). The craft is not maintained under the influence of modernity but rather negotiated by these industrial systems. Truck art is one of the most eloquent forms of such negotiation: mass-produced vehicles are matched with hand-made aesthetics, which break down the simplistic dichotomies between tradition and modernity. Together, these insights make truck art a dynamic system in which objects gain stratified meanings by circulating, labouring, and engaging in relationships.

### **2.1.2 Mobility and Infrastructure.**

Mobility retheorises movement as a social construction and not as accidental. The paradigm of new mobilities by Sheller and Urry (2006) highlights that the contemporary societies are characterized by flows of people, goods, and images. Mobility is not only a matter of physical movement but also creative and emotional movement. Freight trucks are mobile infrastructures that are involved in these flows but with rich cultural stories on their surfaces.

Peter Adey (2017), points out the creation of emotional geographies of fear, anticipation, longing, and excitement by mobility. There is risk, fatigue and separation with the family in long-distance trucking. Surfaces with decorations react to these emotional states: holy texts alleviate anxiety; rural scenes remind us of home; slogans about poets bring humour or desire. The truck

therefore becomes car and emotional point of reference.

Merriman (2012) builds the infrastructure theory by claiming that infrastructures are systems of culture fashioned out of daily practices. The roads, cars, and logistics networks are not neutral and neutralized channels but socially created spaces. An example of this is the Pakistani truck art that takes steel chassis built to be mechanically efficient as canvases upon which symbolic layers are superimposed, and infrastructure is rendered aesthetical and affective.

The work on politics and poetics of infrastructure by Brian Larkin (2013) also provides additional insight into the fact that infrastructures create atmospheres of affect and moral imaginaries. The use of decorated trucks interferes with the anonymity of the logistics systems making infrastructure visible, expressive and culturally textured.

Further elaboration is offered by transport labour scholarship. Anjaria and McFarlane (2011) discuss informal labour networks in South Asian transport economies with precarious working conditions and survival strategies. Rehman (2021) records the experience of Pakistani drivers who overcome risk and variable freight rates as well as extended family absence. In these precarious labour forms, truck adornment serves as a claim to dignity and recognition, and in this way, truck drivers are able to invest in a sense of pride and identity in the face of structural uncertainty.

Mobility and infrastructure studies have shown that as a whole, truck art is entangled in the wider circulation, labour and affective geography systems connecting material aesthetics with lived experience on the road.

### **2.1.3 Sensory and Aesthetic Experience.**

Truck art is a kind of art that lies between the craft and the public art and the vernacular expression. Vernacular aesthetics are highlighted by scholars, with a focus on ordinary creativity by going against the hierarchy that favors institutional fine art over community-based production (Harrison 2013). Heritage frameworks tend to institutionalize some of the practices and ignore dynamics of life. Truck art does not conform to these categories: it is not an anonymous folk object, but elite contemporary art, but is a living, adaptive, and highly skilled visual culture that is part and parcel of everyday life. Scholarship Public art Scholarship in the study of public art often concentrates on permanent urban murals, monuments, or sculptures that are embedded in the urban landscape. Truck art on its part is temporary and mobile. Its publicity is produced by circulation and not place, and every small experience of it generates visibility as time passes.

Ethnographic studies are especially applicable to pink (2009). Truck art appeals to a variety of senses: the clanking of chains on metal frames; broken sunlight on mirrors; neon and LED lights on highways at night; embossed surfaces are touched. Movement alters the perception because the images pass by quickly creating a kinetic aesthetic peculiar to the mobile visual culture.

The scholars of visual culture also observe that popular and vernacular forms of art are dialogical, meaning that they interact with the daily audiences (Mirzoeff 2015). The slogans of trucks such as humorous, romantic or philosophical slogans engage people to interact with the driver. The back side is transformed into a communicative space in the traffic. This literature makes the truck art a part of larger discussions on everyday aesthetics and visual culture of the

masses, focusing on experience instead of institutional classification.

#### **2.1.4 Impact of Globalization**

Since the early 2000s, Pakistani truck art has increasingly entered global cultural circuits. The globalization of vernacular aesthetics often involves abstraction and stylization. Labadi and Long, (2010) cautions that global markets can detach cultural forms from their social contexts, transforming them into commodified motifs. Truck art patterns reproduced on handbags or café walls may lose their freight-based significance. Qureshi (2020) documents how truck imagery is simplified and standardized for export, while Khan (2021) examines how cultural branding repositions truck art as a symbol of national identity. Ahmed (2022) highlights hybridization in design economies, where traditional motifs intersect with contemporary branding logics.

Digital technologies accelerate these processes. Ali (2023) notes that digitization in South Asian craft sectors brings efficiency gains alongside concerns over diminishing artisanal depth. In truck workshops, digital printing allows rapid reproduction of portraits and complex gradients, yet many artisans maintain hybrid practices, combining printed imagery with hand-painted ornamentation. Debates over authenticity emerge not as static opposition but as ongoing negotiation between economic viability and craft lineage.

Global circulation also intersects with diaspora identity formation. Pakistani truck art appears in festivals, restaurant interiors, and public art projects across Europe and North America, functioning as a visible marker of heritage. The migration of motifs raises questions of ownership, authorship, and cultural translation. Contemporary truck art embodies ongoing tensions: authenticity versus commodification, heritage preservation versus creative adaptation, occupational specificity versus global branding. These contradictions are not resolved but lived through the practice itself.

#### **2.1.5 Synthesis of previous studies**

Across these literatures, several converging insights emerge:

- Objects acquire meaning through circulation (Appadurai; Miller).
- Artworks act as agents within social relations (Gell).
- Craft knowledge is embodied and transmitted through apprenticeship (Ingold).
- Mobility shapes affective and social life (Sheller & Urry; Adey).
- Infrastructure is culturally and politically charged (Merriman; Larkin).
- Vernacular aesthetics challenge institutional hierarchies (Harrison).
- Globalization expands visibility while risking decontextualization (Labadi & Long; Qureshi; Khan).

Pakistani truck art sits precisely at these intersections. It is material and mobile, devotional and economic, local and global, handcrafted and technologically adaptive. This literature underscores that truck art should not be approached as mere decorative excess but as a complex cultural system embedded within infrastructure, labour, and circulation.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The research followed the qualitative, interpretive, and multi-sited ethnographic approach in order to record Pakistani truck art as a socio-visual system that is dynamic and embedded in

mobility, labour, and craft ecologies. The research places seasoned trucks in the inhabited infrastructures of freight transportation, workshop manufacturing, and religious practice, instead of analyzing them as isolated aesthetic objects. The methodological shift is based on sensory ethnography (Pink 2009), material culture theory (Miller 2005), and mobility studies (Adey 2017), which enables one to focus on a combined approach to studying trucks as mobile material space, not as a fixed artefact.

The fieldwork was done between 2018 and 2023 in major carriage routes in Punjab, Sindh (including Karachi), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and selected routes between Baluchistan. It was observed at truck terminals, repair depots, roadside dhabas (highway eating joints), and artisan workshops (specializing in painting, carving, and embossing metals). The multi-sitedness of the research indicates the state of mobility that is the main focus of truck art: production and display are geographically dispersed, and meaning is created in movement as opposed to within the fixed spatial frame.

There were more than two hundred decorated trucks photographed, paying attention to the hierarchy of the panels, the repetition of motifs, colour richness, the light used, and the overlay of materials. These pictures were not handled as objective images but as visual information that needs to be interpreted in a context. Eighteen long-distance drivers and eleven workshop artisans (master painters and apprentices) were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Topics of conversation were devotional motivations, cost negotiations, hierarchies in workshops, route identities, risk perception and intergenerational transmission of skills.

The motif analysis was designed in terms of identification, contextualization and functional interpretation, and extended to economic signalling and tracking global circulation. This stratified design enabled repetitive features like lions, Quranic texts, village scenes, or poetic proverbs to be read at the same time as aesthetic, social, devotional, and work technologies. The combination of sensory observation with narrative accounts makes the methodology both preempt material surfaces and lived experience.

Informed consent, anonymization when requested, and sensitivity to sacred imagery were all considered ethical issues. Since the design of truck art motifs is growing more and more commercial in the world markets, the specific attention was paid to avoid copying the proprietary designs of the workshop without the owners being informed.

### **Ecology and Craft Workshop Collaboration.**

Production of truck art is supported by highly collaborative workshop ecologies of artisans, mechanics, and designers. A decorated truck is hardly ever the creation of a solitary artistic idea; on the contrary, it is an outcome of stratified specialization in a system of workshops. Master painters control conceptual design and colour-matching, and base coats and detailing are done by apprentices. Calligraphers, who are usually taught differently about religious or poetic scripts, provide inscriptions with accuracy. Wood-carvers make gilded relief panels, especially visible on trucks in the Peshawari style, and metal embossers beat sheet metal to relief designs of floral and geometric patterns. Electricians combine neon tubing and LED systems, which make the truck a glow-in-the-dark vehicle.

The workshop is an economic venture and a pedagogical area. Apprenticeship is still the most prevalent way of passing skills, and young employees are taken as assistants and slowly gain knowledge of design literacy and brush control. Learning is embodied and observational and it resonates with (Ingold, 2013) understanding of making as process of attentive interaction with materials. No standardized curriculum exists; knowledge is spread by repetition, correction and imitation.

The production occurs in layers. The surfaces are washed, sanded and primed. Large fields are usually done in base colours of vibrant reds, greens, blues, and yellows. Decorative patterns are then drawn in a free hand and then detailed painting is done. Majority of relief elements like mirrors, carved wood and metal applique are added later. Lastly, inscriptions and lighting are used to complete the transformation. The process can last several weeks or six months depending on the financial investment.

Hierarchy is expressed in the ecology of workshops in an economic sense. The richer fleet owners can afford to have a lot of ornamental work commissioned and the small operators do it in bits. Ornament is sensualized and monetized. In cooperation, the truck is slowly re-written, in which the steel chassis yields to stratified story and devotional symbolism.

#### **4.0 Findings and Results**

##### **4.1 Hierarchical Visual Structure**

The Pakistani truck art has a familiar but variable hierarchical visual logic which organizes the symbolic meaning in a spatial way on the surface of the vehicle. This pecking order makes it legible in brief periods of roadside glimpses. The meaning is structured in vertical and spatial ways where the viewers are able to decode devotional, narrative, and social messages even in motion of the truck. The principal panels, usually those above the windshield or at the top of the cargo body, are used to inscribe sacred texts, verses of the Quran, prayers, e.g. Mashallah or Ya Ali, or sometimes stylized images of mosques or shrines. The fact that they are elevated means that they are transcendent and under God. These inscriptions are often referred to by drivers as protective shields against highway danger, and mobility has become the risk management of a spirit.

The middle panels carry narrative pictures: pastoral scenes, snow-white mountains, rivers, village houses, movie personalities or national shrines. These pictures fixate mobility on recollection. The truck is an autobiographical surface, which the long-distance drivers physically ship pieces of home through the landscape, and the truck serves as an industrial steel tracing of emotional geography. The rear bumper and lower panels work in a communicative manner. In this case, comic poetry, coquettish couplets, philosophical quotations, or social criticism are posted above the highway to the passers-by drivers and pedestrians. The inscriptions usually leave a smile, contemplation, or identification, generating brief social interactions in the traffic. This stratified structure is to provide devotional precedence, narrative continuity and social intercourse an orchestrated system as opposed to arbitrary decoration.

##### **4.2 Devotional Symbolism and Sacred Mobility**

The central place of truck adornment has been filled with the devotional symbolism which embodies the entwining of faith and labour as part of everyday life. Long distance trucking is a

source of mechanical uncertainty, dangerous road conditions and a long period of separation with family members. In this regard, sacred writings serve as defensive technologies. The truck becomes a moving shrine with verses of the Quran, the name of God, and the mention of the respected personalities. Imagery of Shrines stretches sacred geography through mobility. The imagery of Sufi shrines or the mosque silhouettes make drivers symbolically related to spiritual centres, shrinking the distance between pilgrimage place and highway. Instead of place being abandoned, mobility reconstructs it; the sacred presence with the driver.

Talismans crescent moons, stars, stylized eyes are cut in mirrors or metal panels. Mirrors already have the symbolic resonance of reflection of light, dispelling evil, and scattering glare. Aesthetic practice is therefore materially inculcated with spiritual protection. Notably, devotional images are in tandem with humour and ambition. Religious and secular themes are blended with each other as a manifestation of the whole-person approach to faith, livelihood and personality in driver identity.

#### **4.3 Identity at Work, Male, and Pride.**

It is also used as occupational signaling in competitive freight networks with truck decoration. The highway is not just an infrastructural space but social space. Decoration turns out to be an announcement of ability, persistence and prosperity. The animal motives especially that of lions, falcons and horses depict power, vigilance and speed. These characters are usually hyper-realistic or dramatic, with their assertive masculinity. Visual bravado conveys strength and pride in an occupation where a man is expected to endure physical punishment and spend long periods of time alone, which is a male-dominated profession. Economic potential is indicated by financial expenditure on decoration. Heavy ornamented trucks suggest stable contracts or good routes. Drivers state that beautiful trucks attract the attention of transport companies, which indirectly affects the employment opportunities. Decoration mediates labour hierarchy. It claims respect in a precarious industry whose salaries are unpredictable and hazards are eminent. Aesthetic investment puts drivers into position of being the authors of otherwise industrial machines that are standardized.

#### **4.4 Regional Styles and Cultural Variation.**

Pakistani truck art is greatly influenced by regional diversity in terms of stylistic variation. Although some of the motifs, religious inscriptions, animal figures, poetic slogans are common, their material implementation varies depending on the lineages of crafts, availability of resources, and trade routes. Such differences are traditionally enshrined in the artisan communities.

Trucks in Punjab style tend to focus on bright floral and detailed brushwork, due to the tradition of regional painting and agrarian symbolism. Trucks based in Karachi often use large quantities of mirror mosaics and metal applique, as a result of the trade networks of the coast and access to industrial supplies. Heavy carved wood relief panels predominantly dominate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa giving the trucks a sculptural architectural look. Baluchistan is predisposed to a large-scale contrast of colours and a relatively meager ornamentation due to the influence of the desert routes and the lower density of workshop networks.

These stylistic differences can be used as pointers of origin and belonging. A glance at the

workshop lineage can oftentimes be made by drivers and artisans, and this strengthens regional identity at national freight systems.

**Table 1. Comparative Regional Features**

Region	Dominant Materials		Visual Characteristics			Cultural Emphasis		Mobility Context	
Punjab	Paint, brushwork	floral	Bright patterns	palettes, dense		Agrarian poetry	symbolism,	Intercity	freight corridors
Karachi (Sindh)	Mirrors, appliqué	metal	Reflective geometric layering	surfaces,		Maritime influence	trade	Port-based	transport
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Carved relief panels	wood,	Sculptural architectural motifs	depth,		Tribal craftsmanship	lineage,	Mountain routes	
Baluchistan	Paint, relief	minimal	Bold colour expansive space	blocks,		Regional austerity		Long	desert routes

Regional variation demonstrates that truck art is not monolithic but adaptive, shaped by geography, economy, and artisan heritage

#### 4.5 Sensory Aesthetics and Kinetic Experience

Pakistani truck art is a form of art made to be moved and its form cannot be separated with mobility. During the day, sunlight is reflected through mirrors and forms glittering pieces, whereas at night, highways are illuminated and become glowing thanks to neon and LED lines. Metallic sounds are produced by chains that are suspended on bumpers, which gives the visual show an aural quality. Painting surfaces are not used to be contemplated but to have a brief glimpse by passing cars, creating a kinetic experience that is created during transit (Pink, 2009).

This kinaesthetic aspect exaggerates the spectacle of the truck. When it is in motion, it turns into a moving festival, which, at least temporarily, breaks the monotony of asphalt landscapes. Brightness, sound and reflectivity sensuality dictates life in otherwise industrial and utilitarian transit systems. Emotional uplift is frequently reported by viewers who view decorated trucks: the feelings of surprise, admiration, and nostalgia are frequently listed and reflect how vernacular aesthetics interfere with the routine mobility and turns the routine traveling into embodied experience (Mirzoeff 2015).

#### 4.6 Financial Investment

Truck decoration is a major financial spending. Full decoration can be an expensive percentage of the annual income of a truck depending on the amount of ornamentation. Nevertheless, drivers do not stop investing, which is driven by many, multi-layered reasons: prestige among peer networks, spiritual protection, increased employability, and pride in themselves (Rehman 2021; Anjaria and McFarlane 2011).

Pakistan has informal and precarious freight labour. Earnings are erratic and road accidents are expected at all times. Decoration here is a symbolic insurance against uncertainty where the drivers need to demonstrate control, identity and status in the unstable economic systems. The monetary expenditure on ornamentation is also an indicator of competence and success in the competitive transport networks.

New efficiencies have been brought by digital technologies. Photographic portraits can be reproduced in printed vinyl in large numbers, but hand-painted decoration is still in demand by many artisans and drivers as a source of authenticity, permanence, and cultural connection (Ali 2023). A modern practice is usually a mix of digitally printed images, with the embellishment being done by hand. In this regard, decoration does not suggest unnecessary luxury but a measured symbolic as well as economic investment in precarious labour economies.

## 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Pakistani truck art is one of the most complex and socially entrenched vernacular art systems of South Asia today. Industrial vehicles are subjected to collaborative workshop ecologies, hierarchical visual logic, devotional embedding, regional variation, and sensory spectacle to become complicated cultural infrastructures. Steel gets surface; surface gets narrative; narrative gets a moving history of memory, devotion and identity.

Truck art has survived liberalization, globalization, digitization, and precarity in labour in the period between 1990 and 2023 without leaving freight communities. The modernization has not led to the degradation of the practice but instead, the practice has evolved to incorporate new materials and technologies without leaving behind the craft lineage. This resilience in adapting to the global pressures defies the assumptions that the vernacular traditions invariably fade in the pressure of globalization (Labaidi and Long, 2010; Qureshi 2020; Ahmed 2022).

In theory, truck art makes one rethink infrastructure. Roads are not simply a medium of capital; they are platforms of the aesthetics. The cultural aspect of mobility creates symbolic expression since labouring bodies and industrial machines co-create meaning through motion (Sheller & Urry 2006; Adey 2017).

In addition, truck art subverts traditional art and craft, religious and secular, usefulness and aesthetics. It brings out the existence of devotion, masculinity, memory, humour, and economy in the same material environments. Creativity is not only a thriving activity in the curated institutions, but also in the workshops that are full of paint fumes and roadside dust (Ingold 2013; Pink 2009).

Finally, Pakistani truck art makes mobility memory and labour art and steel symbol. It is not just a decoration; it is a touching philosophy of persistence, belief, and belonging that is written on the highways of South Asia.

## Contribution

**Syeda Sana Munir Kazmi:** Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

**Ghani-ur-Rahman:** Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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