REVIEW OF CRIME, PEACE AND SOCIETY
ISSN (O): 3079-6105, ISSN (P): 3079-6091
Vol. 3, No. 9, 2026, 233-246

From Memory to Canvas: Nostalgia, Cultural Heritage and the Changing Cityscape of Pakistan

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Abstract

Nostalgia is a complex emotional and social experience which allows individuals and communities to connect with the past. Whereas modern science is traditionally connected with personal desires and homesickness, nostalgia is seen as a social emotion that can reinforce social bonding, self-continuity, collective identity, empathy and loyalty to places. Nostalgia is particularly important in cultural heritage as historical buildings, streets, quarters, architectural details and urban landscapes may be material and visual triggers for personal and collective memory. The fast urban transformation of the Pakistan changed a lot of its historical urban landscapes which contributed to increasing the distance between modern urban life and well-known cultural landscapes. The Pakistani cityscape painting provides a vital visual response to this transformation through documenting, rebuilding and reintroducing urban environments with emotional evolution.

Thus, the study aims to see nostalgia as a form of social and emotional engagement with cultural heritage and to investigate its relationship to Pakistani cityscape painting. Special attention is given to how artists transform historic architecture, streets, bazaars, monuments, atmospheric conditions and daily urban life into visual representations of memory, belonging, and cultural identity. The study uses qualitative and interpretative methodologies that combine literature reviews, historical and artistic research, visual analysis, and selected case studies by Pakistani cityscape artists, including Ajaz Anwar, Ghulam Mustafa and Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi. The study focuses on a gap in existing scholarship, mainly on Pakistani cityscape painting's historical, stylistic and technical dimensions, with relatively limited focus on nostalgia as an emotional and heritage-oriented context. The researcher further shows that Pakistani cityscape painting is working not only as architectural documentation, but also as a kind of preservation of memory, emotional heritage and the cultural identity building.

Article History
Received 12 September
Revision 8 October
Accepted 4 November
Published 15 November
Corresponding Author*
OPEN ACCESS

Keywords
Nostalgia, restorative Nostalgia, reflective Nostalgia, cityscape Painting, urban Memory, heritage, Lahore, preservation.

Introduction: Understanding Nostalgia

Nostalgia, which comes from Greek's roots, meaning "homecoming" and "pain", is a human desire to reconnect with the past, which is full of warmth and sadness. In 1688, the term Swiss was coined by physician Johannes Hofer, which was taken from the Greek components nostos (background) and the Algo (pain), to signal the intense homesickness soldiers felt when they lived far away from their home (Hofer, 1934/1688).

Nostalgia was initially regarded as a pathological disorder that caused both mental and physical distress (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002). Centuries later, it was described in medical

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and psychological terms like morbid homesickness, often accompanied by several symptoms including insomnia, anxiety, melancholia and physical weakness (Starobinski, 1966). This first vision was a factor in the backward-looking nature of nostalgia, and thus was a blockage to reason and progress. With deep suspicion, it was the disease of displaced persons, of exiles or of people who parted with their cultural past, and demanded the values of Enlightenment, of reason and movement that they perceived. However, in the late 20th century, scientific discourses saw an unexpected and far-reaching paradigm shift. Instead of being underestimated as irrational, escapist or symptomatic of weakness, nostalgia began to be understood as a valid, multifaceted, and even essential emotional process that was closely related to individual memory, the formation of collective identity, and cultural imagination. Today, nostalgia is recognized to be a comprehensive emotional experience consisting of desires, memories, identity and cultural identities. Describes a nostalgic location or time that had significance. This emotional state can include personal memories of the past, stories, social/cultural identity. Nostalgia can be therapeutic, promoting the preservation and celebration of history by individuals and communities rather than being depressing.

Nostalgia and the Art of Painting

Nostalgia has long been a driving force of artistic vision, and has had a profound influence on literature, music, film and visual arts. Painting is a most expressive medium particularly for exploring its psychological and emotional dimensions. Photography may often literally capture a freezing moment, while painting is subjective and reflects time and memory in a way that is open to interpretation. (This has been hotly debated in the case of photography). Only painting allows the reconstruction of the description of the case: it is a mixing of different forms and emotions, and the artist can convey what he/she saw but, also, what he/she felt. The painters' "poems of space" are constructed through the use of compositional techniques, brushwork, color selection and textural layering, which evoke the "poems of memory" as they are described by Gaston Bachelard (1958/1994). The medium of cityscape painting is a rich one for nostalgic expression. The medium is used by artists to create urban narratives rich in atmospheric resonance and subjective meaning. A contemplative and peaceful mood can be inspired by perspective, texture, construction rhythm and manipulation of light and shadows, as can a mood of desire. Schaller (1998), emphasizes the emotional potential of spatial representation and points to architectural rhythm and colour. Light is an integral factor in the evocative connection between the viewer and the scene of the city being painted. The soft color patterns, blurred edges and layering lighting effects are often used in nostalgic cityscape paintings to stop time and transport viewers into a realm of transition between fantasy and memory. The foggy streets, the blurred edges and the golden light of old photographs are not the same as accuracy, but rather recall the feeling of memory - its warmth, fallibility, tendency to smooth hard edges and idealize the well-known. Visual techniques are rethinking cities, not just recording.

In history, artists from different backgrounds used nostalgia to convey existential contemplation, cultural shifts or chronological shifts. From the haunting scenes of urban

solitude in Edward Hopper's paintings to the emotionally charged paintings of rural landscapes of Vincent van Gogh, artists investigated the subtle tension between durability and inertia, presence and absence. The interior rooms and the streets of Hopper are silent and testify to the loneliness of the modern city, while the landscape and cypress trees of Van Gogh and his frenzied brushstrokes speak of simplicity and combination. Both are expressions of how, rather than sentimentalization, nostalgia can be a means of personal expression and cultural critique. Images of collective stories and the maintenance of affective memory is a key concern of scholars such as Aleida Assmann (2011) and Marianne Hirsch (2012). Painting, photographs and other visual media seem to convey an emotional ambience, tell the tale of the physical presence and evoke personality and collective memory. These are characters of collective memory and identity that are accessible in the visual realm, especially in regard to the forgetting of a place in cityscape painting. Thematic analysis of Pakistain artists' interpretation of the cityscape is explored in the following analysis of the themes of Nostalgia, Cultural memory, Heritage and Emotional Relationship to Place in the context of the cityscape. It delves into the mechanisms by which their art forms preserve memory of changing urban and natural environments and reflect Pakistan's cultural identity and its experiences of history.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the representation of nostalgia in selected Pakistani cityscape paintings.
2. To investigate how selected Pakistani cityscape artists represent cultural memory and changing urban heritage through visual elements of the cityscape.

To analyze selected Pakistani cityscape paintings using Boym's concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia

Methodology

- **Research Approach**

To deeply examine Pakistani cityscape paintings, the researcher uses both a qualitative interpretative approach and an investigative approach. Such an approach is relevant because the study focuses on an understanding of emotional, cultural, historical, and visual values related to nostalgia and cityscape painting, rather than their quantification.

- **Research Design**

The current study uses both historical and visual artistic analysis, supported by a literature review. Selected Pakistani cityscape artists are studied as a case study to understand how nostalgia and cultural memory communicate across their paintings.

3 .Data Sources

The study is based on secondary data, which is sourced from books, research articles,

exhibition catalogues, artists' writing, historical sources and related scholarly works on the themes of Nostalgia, memory, heritage, architecture and Pakistani art.

- **Selection of Artists**

The study focuses on selected Pakistani cityscape artists, particularly:

- Dr. Ajaz Anwar

  Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi

- Ghulam Mustafa

These artists are selected because their cityscape works provide relevant visual material for examining urban memory, historic architecture, cultural heritage, and changing city environments.

- **Visual Analysis**

Selected paintings are analyzed according to the following coding categories:

- Areas of Analysis
- Subject
- Urban Life
- Visual Elements
- Nostalgia
- Heritage
- Urban Identity
- Emotional Dimension
- Theoretical Framework

Nostalgic Cityscape Painting in Pakistan

Cityscape painting has become a key area for creative research in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, addressing legacy issues, memory, and change. Pakistani painters have often presented the metropolitan area as a living entity that reflects the passage of time, shifts in social morality, and contested identities since independence in 1947. The city here is a dynamic organism surrounded by symbols, with a flavour of history, not a static setting.

The nostalgic cityscape painting serves as a visual historian who not only documents the physical properties of the Metropolitan Space but also the affective currents of history and culture, which flow under it in this context. These are often evidence of the desire to combat the homogenization effects of modernization, the need to preserve an architectural heritage which disappears quickly or to appreciate the personal and regional experiences of city life. Nostalgia is used as a cultural preservation and criticism tool, allowing the artists to respond creatively to the temporal disjunctions of postcolonial urbanization, and to connect the

individual memory and the history of the community. Following are some of Pakistani cityscape artists vividly capturing the nostalgic character of Lahore, portraying its historic streets, architecture, neighborhoods, and everyday urban life through deeply emotional and evocative imagery. These works are thematically analyzed and interpreted to know how those are deeply connected with emotional nostalgia.

Analysis of Selected Artists: Exploring Nostalgia and Cultural Memory in Pakistani Cityscape Painting

Artist: Dr. Ajaz Anwar

Dr. Ajaz Anwar is one of the most important personalities of this tradition. His watercolours carefully depict the Walled City of Lahore, giving a powerful display of the architectural and cultural diversity of Punjab. His art takes a nostalgic tone that celebrates the visual salience and socio-historic complexity of the urban fabric of Lahore and seeks to problematise the 'neutrality' of an antiseptic documentation. His artworks are most of the cultural memories which are time capsules with historical and emotional meanings (Anwar, 2008). Anwar and its Indian and Bangladeshi counterparts have nostalgic forms which are particularly restorative, and are available as counter-narratives to dominating narratives of progress and modernity that are usually sponsored by the State.

Ajaz Anwar (Painting No#1)

The painting below (Pl.No.1), portrays a traditional urban marketplace characterized by historic architecture, an elaborately decorated arched entrance, aged building façades, traditional shopfronts, and bustling street activity. The architectural details, including balconies, windows, decorative arches, and colourful commercial signboards, reflect the cultural and historical identity of an older urban environment. The presence of human figures and everyday marketplace activities adds a sense of movement, social interaction, and collective life to the composition. The expressive brushstrokes and vibrant yet weathered colour palette create an atmosphere of nostalgia, recalling the charm and familiarity of traditional city life. The painting can be interpreted as a visual representation of cultural memory, where historic architecture and everyday urban experiences preserve a connection with the past. In this context, Boym (2001) explains that nostalgia involves an emotional relationship with the past, reflecting both a desire to preserve familiar memories and an awareness of historical change.



Pl: 1, Ajaz Anwar: Architectural nostalgia, Water color, (800 x 530 ource: Source:

https://www.bing.com

Table 1: Visual and Thematic Coding of Dr. Ajaz Anwar's Cityscape Painting in Relation to Nostalgia

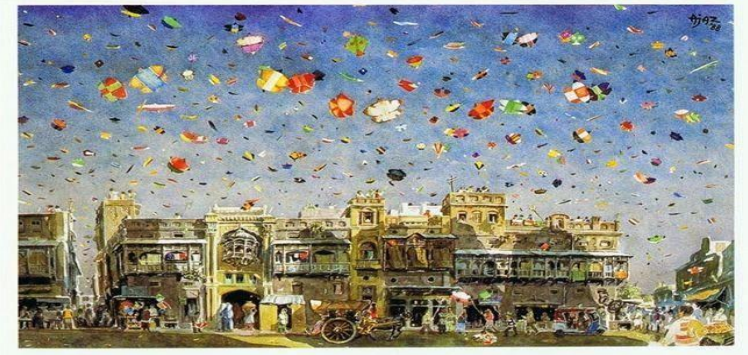
Coding Category	Key Codes
Subject	Walled City of Lahore
Architecture	Storefronts, balconies, arches
Theme	Architectural heritage as a living, active stage for community life
Nostalgia	Festive color harmony, romanticized historic facades, kites flying in the sky
Urban Identity	Old Lahore food and craft street market
Emotional Dimension	Joyful energy, warmth, celebration of public life
Cultural Significance	Preservation of festive urban traditions and traditional architectural craftsmanship

Interpretation: This artwork highlights the lively, festive atmosphere of Lahore's historic market districts. By pairing rich architectural details such as ornate *Jharokhas*, arched gateways, and traditional shop blinds with a brightly colored crowd and flying kites

overhead, the painting celebrates the continuous vitality of cultural heritage. Rather than treating historical architecture as a static relic, it portrays the street as an active, joyful space where community, commerce, and tradition thrive together.

Dr. Ajaz Anwar (Painting No#2)

This painting seems to evoke the energetic spirit of the traditional Basant kite flying festival, with a flurry of colorful kites flying high in the sky, creating a dynamic interplay with the earthly hues of the ancient buildings and structures in the foreground. The composition is rich with details such as the densely-packed rooftops, wooden balconies, and traditional jharokhas, which create a sense of authenticity in the depiction of urban life in South Asia. This is a beautiful water-colour piece that has delicate touches to water-colour textures and perspective, helping to create the impression of an open, dynamic sky – the scene extends as far as the eye can reach.



Pl: 2, Ajaz Anwar :Architectural nostalgia, Water colour (646*417) Source: https://www.bing.com

Table: 2. Visual and Thematic Coding of Dr. Ajaz Anwar's Cityscape Painting in Relation to Nostalgia

Coding Category	**Key Codes**
Subject	Walled City of Lahore
Architecture	Storefronts, balconies, arches
Street Life	Everyday urban activity
Theme	Cultural memory and heritage
Nostalgia	Intimate connection with the past
Urban Identity	Vernacular Lahore
Emotional Dimension	Belonging, remembrance
Cultural Significance	Preservation of threatened heritage

Interpretation: Anwar paintings illustrate the everyday life of vernacular architecture and Lahore. Combining old buildings with street activities creates a feeling of nostalgia, cultural memory and local fixation.

Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi (Painting No#1)

Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi portrays the real and busy morning life of a traditional Punjabi market streetscape. Framed by multi-tier vernacular architecture, featuring classic jharokhas, weathered brickwork and wooden pillars for the storefronts, the composition guides the eye down a narrow alleyway in a warm, misty morning light. Pedestrians, in traditional clothes such as shalwar kameez, chaddars and burqas, walk slowly alongside pushcart vendors and local transport, lending a slow pace to the everyday commercial life. Zulfi's work softens the dense layers of urban chaos, overhead wiring and shop awnings under a gentle, atmospheric light, turning a routine street scene into a poignant reflection on collective memory, community familiarity and the enduring cultural identity of old South Asian bazaars.



Pl, 3. Zulfiqar Ali .Nostalgia Lahore Water color: (785x 550) Source: https://www.desiblitz.com

Table 3. Visual and Thematic Coding of Zulfiqar Ali Zufis, Cityscape Painting in Relation to Nostalgia

Coding Category	**Key Codes**
Subject	Walled City of Lahore
Architecture	*Jharokhas*, weathered brick facades, shop awnings, wooden pillars
Street Life	Pedestrians, handcart vendors, shoppers, local transport
Theme	Lived-in urban space, everyday commercial sociality
Nostalgia	Soft morning light softening modern urban chaos
Urban Identity	Authentic Punjabi market alleyway
Emotional Dimension	Familiarity, collective warmth, continuity
Cultural Significance	Documentation of traditional public spaces in transition

Interpretation: Zulfi's painting depicts the busy yet peaceful morning routine of a traditional Punjabi bazaar streetscape. The work conjures a powerful sense of community intimacy, cultural persistence and the nostalgic recall of everyday urban life, through the use of multi-tiered vernacular architecture and the constant movement of people shoppers, vendors and local transport passing through under a gentle, golden haze.

Zulfiqar Ali (Painting N0#2)

The painting, created by a Pakistani realist painter called Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi, depicts a serene, foggy moment in an architectural structure reminiscent of the ancient Walled City of Lahore, which is visible through a large stone archway. The arc provides a natural frame as Zulfi contrasts the dark, shaded foreground with the soft, sunny alleyway that leads away into the distance. The piece depicts the use of light and atmospheric haze, where warm golden morning light pierces through urban fog, casting light on the traditional bazaar, and softly rendered pedestrians. The figures appear to be walking along the alley, with people wearing traditional attire of shalwar kameez and shawls, fitting into the old brick walls and overhead wires. With his realistic depiction and loose,

impressionistic strokes, Zulfi creates a surreal interpretation of a day in nothing special, but in reflecting on cultural identity, memory, and peaceful, time-honored living. (Tanzara Gallery, 2018). The composition is accented by centuries-old architecture, the weighty stone gateway, narrow lanes and the traditional stalls of the bazaar that symbolize the quiet and simple life in historic Punjab which is being lost in the modern urban centres of the region.



Pl, 4.Zulfiqar Zulfi : Cityscape Oil on Canvas (26 x 32)inches.

Source: https://www.bing.com/**Table4. Visual and Thematic Coding of Zulfiqar Ali Zufis, Cityscape Painting in Relation to Nostalgia**

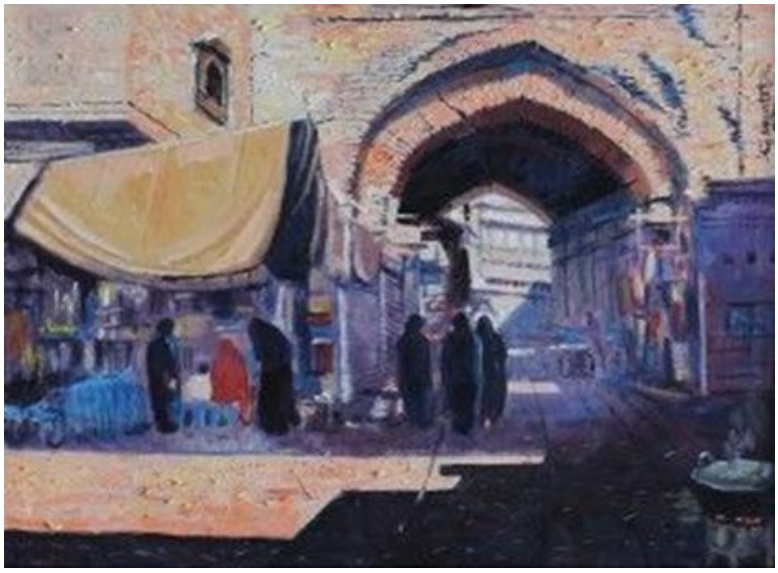
Coding Category	**Key Codes**
Subject	**Lahori Gate**
Architecture	Monumental stone archway, ancient masonry, receding bazaar stalls
Street Life	Pedestrians in *chaddars* and *shalwar kameez*, shopkeepers, quiet morning movement
Theme	Gateway to history, threshold between shadow and light
Nostalgia	Diffused morning haze, soft atmospheric glow, fading memories of old urban spaces
Urban Identity	Historic Walled City gate (Lahore/Punjab)
Emotional Dimension	Solitude, tranquility, mystery, sense of homecoming
Cultural Significance	Framing endurance of historic architectural monuments within daily life

Interpretation: This painting uses a monumental archway as a framing device to contrast the shaded foreground with a sunlit, misty alleyway beyond. By capturing figures quietly moving through the historical passage in soft morning haze, Zulfi creates a dreamlike atmosphere that evokes deep cultural nostalgia, timelessness, and a reflective connection to Punjab's urban heritage.

Ghulam Mustafa (Painting No# 1)

The painting depicts a traditional urban scene featuring a prominent pointed arch gateway, traditional architecture, and various elements of everyday life, such as people engaged in various activities. The artist uses a palette of warm earthy colors such as ochre, yellow, brown, reddish, blue and purple, with darker shades to add depth and contrast to the architecture, particularly in the shadows. Some of the brushstrokes are expressive and relatively loose, adding textural detail to the old walls, buildings, street and fabric awning. Simplified representations of human figures add scale, movement and social interaction to the architectural context. From the perspective of cultural memory, the architectural structures and marketplace environment can be understood as visual carriers of collective memories, as images and places contribute to the preservation and transmission of cultural experiences (Assmann, 2011). Similarly, Boym (2001) explains nostalgia through the relationship between memory, history, and the emotional attachment to places and the past. In this context, the painting evokes the historical

atmosphere of an older urban environment, preserving the visual character of traditional architecture, commercial spaces, and everyday social life.



Pl.5.Ghulam Mustafa, Red Gate Near Wazir Khan Mosque, (24 x 30) Inch, Oil on Canvas,

Source: https://it.pinterest.com/pin/olajkpek--371828512990693136/

Table 5. Visual and Thematic Coding of Ghulam Mustafa, City Scape Painting in Relation to Nostalgia

Coding Category	Key Codes
Subject	Traditional urban marketplace with an arched gateway
Architecture	Pointed arch, aged walls, traditional buildings, shopfronts, fabric awning
Street Life	Human figures, marketplace activities, social interaction, pedestrian movement
Theme	Cultural memory, architectural heritage and traditional urban life

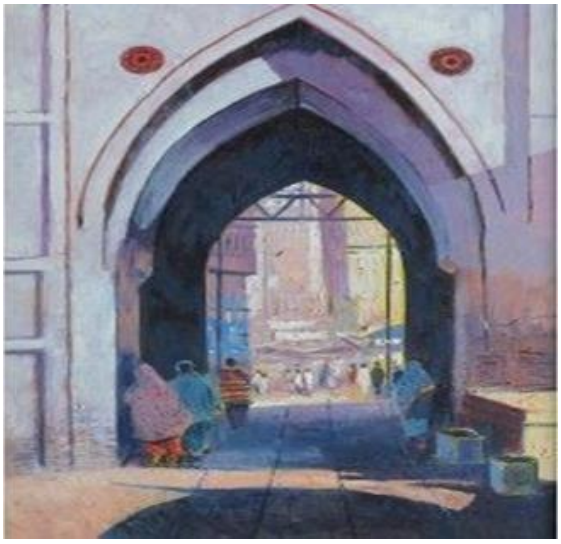
Nostalgia	Remembrance of traditional marketplaces and emotional connection with the past
Urban Identity	Traditional bazaar culture, historic architecture and vernacular urban character
Emotional Dimension	Belonging, remembrance, familiarity and attachment to historical surroundings
Cultural Significance	Preservation of traditional architectural features, commercial spaces and everyday social practices

Interpretation: Ghulam Mustafa's painting captures the architectural and social character of a traditional urban marketplace. The prominent gateway, aged buildings, shopfronts and human figures collectively evoke the cultural memory of an older city environment. The representation of everyday street life and historic architecture establishes a nostalgic

connection with the past, highlighting the relationship between urban identity, cultural heritage and collective remembrance

Ghulam Mustafa (Painting No#2)

The painting by Ghulam Mustafa is a classical urban landscape with a pointed archway style entrance to a large square or street in the background, indicating access to a traditional marketplace or street setting. The lightness of the background contrasts with the dark tones of the interior, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere in the gateway. The use of expressive brushwork and simplified architectural details is seen in the treatment of the walls, pavement and surrounding structures. Human figures appear near and below the gateway, adding elements of scale, movement and social interaction, indicating a continued use of this traditional urban space. It is possible to read the gateway and its architecture from a nostalgic and cultural memory point of view as visual markers for history, place and shared memory. Cultural memory is recorded and shared in material objects and cultural representations, and nostalgia as a feeling towards the past, especially in the face of loss and change in the present, is addressed by Assmann (2011) and Boym (2001), respectively. The painting can be seen as a symbolic representation of the relationship between historical space, cultural identity, and emotional connection to the past, highlighting the importance of preserving and celebrating the heritage of urban architecture and daily life.



Pl.6. Ghulam Mustafa, Bhati Gate Front, (24 x 36) Inch, Oil on Board, Cityscape Painting
Source: https://i.pinimg.com/736x/07/59/35/0759351b613415ccb721284f003d3f82.jpg

Table: 6. Visual and Thematic Coding of Jimmy Engineer's Land Scape Painting

Coding Category	**Key Codes**
Subject	Traditional urban entrance featuring a monumental pointed-arch gateway and an inner marketplace
Architecture	Layered pointed arches, decorative circular motifs, aged walls, traditional architectural openings and surrounding buildings
Street Life	Human figures, pedestrians, marketplace activities, social interaction and movement through the gateway
Theme	Cultural memory, architectural heritage, historical continuity and traditional urban life
Nostalgia	Remembrance of historic urban spaces, emotional attachment to traditional architecture and connection with the past
Urban Identity	Traditional gateway architecture, historic streetscape and vernacular urban character
Emotional Dimension	Belonging, familiarity, remembrance, historical attachment and a sense of place
Cultural Significance	Representation of traditional architectural heritage, preservation of historic gateways, public spaces and everyday social practices

Interpretation: From the perspective of cultural memory and nostalgia, the painting can be interpreted as a visual representation of historical architecture, collective remembrance, and emotional attachment to traditional urban surroundings.

Significance of the Study

Since this is not just an examination of Pakistani cityscape painting as a representation of architecture, but also as a visual form of cultural memory and emotional heritage, this research is important.

The study could contribute to the history of art in Pakistan by showing the role of cityscape painting in the recording of urban environment development and in the preservation of the visual memory of historical sites.

It also can play a role in cultural heritage exploration by illustrating the role of paintings in holding on to features of cultural landscapes which can be altered, neglected or even lost through urban transformation.

The study offers a framework for artists and art researchers to comprehend the phenomenon of nostalgia as a creative and visual one. The theory of Restorative and Reflective nostalgia of Boym can also be applied in a positive way to study the painting of the Pakistan's cityscape.

For future studies, the study could serve as a basis for other studies on the relation of nostalgic feelings, urban memory and cultural heritage architecture and visual art in Pakistan.

A brief explanation of the importance of the study to the "The-paper" is an investigation into the nostalgia of painting the Pakistani cityscape which is a means of cultural memory and preservation of the city's heritage. The study sheds light on how the emotional and cultural links to historic places can be preserved in the context of a painting by looking back at the selected artists and what they symbolize. It also generates awareness of the theory of cityscape art in Pakistan with an approach of restoration process and reflecting nostalgia.

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