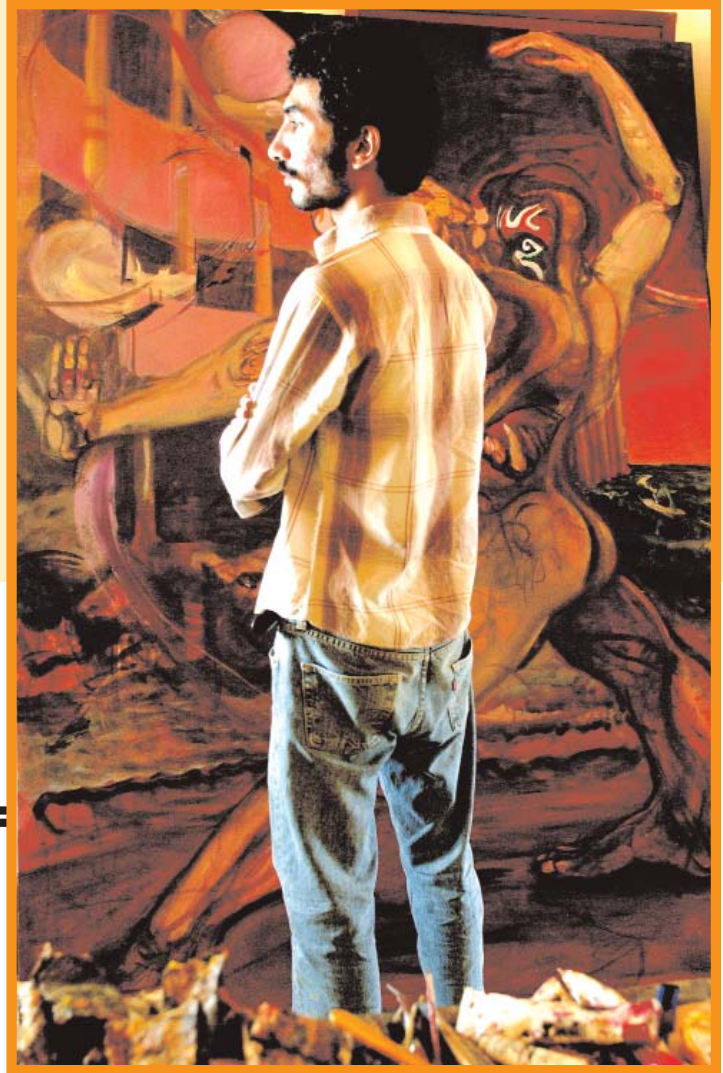


**Asim Butt** is responsible for painting illegal murals and anti-dictatorship “eject” symbols on the streets of Karachi. If this was not enough for fame, if not fortune, he has been banned from the Mohatta Palace Museum for a performance art piece he staged there. But his interests do go beyond breaking the law. This 31-year-old is a painter, sculptor and printmaker who has exhibited in group and solo shows in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and London. The *Herald* finds out that Butt listens to French rap, thinks originality is almost impossible and loathes dictatorship.



Arif Mahmood/White Star

## In SHORT...

**Q. What is the personal significance of public art?**

**A.** Foisted onto the public whether they want it or not, public art is the gatecrasher moment of my mostly law-abiding practice. It defies authority and pilfers space from advertisements that have to pay for it. What this means is that it allows me to run around with a backpack listening to French rap and getting some fresh air and cheap thrills.

**Q. How did you come up with the “eject” symbol in 2007?**

**A.** I’ve done a lot since. Please can we not flog this one any more? I merely appropriated it from the DVD machine to express my frustration with dictatorship and arbitrary power.

**Q. What would be a good place in Karachi to do another performance piece?**

**A.** I’ve got a graffiti spot in mind but my performances tend to be more spontaneous and can happen anywhere.

**Q. What does it take to be termed original in the Pakistani art world?**

**A.** Even Darwin’s theory is now doubted as being entirely original. The pursuit of originality is often a waste of time.

**Q. Is it possible to be creative in Pakistan today without being political?**

**A.** The very act of creation in what we are constantly being told is a collapsing world is political. If you refer to the narrower sense of the word, I’m afraid it is entirely

possible to be oblivious to the doom drummed up in news media and to not draw on the politics of state for symbolism. Personally I do find it necessary to engage the political moment.

**Q. Why do you love being photographed?**

**A.** Because it reverses for a moment the persistent gaze I subject the world to and it gives me something to base my self-admiration or, as the moment may dictate, self-loathing on. ■

— Madiha Sattar