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Shakirullah and Ruth Young



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## **Editorial Note**

*Pakistan Heritage* is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, published annually. This volume included the papers on different aspects of archaeology and history of Pakistan and adjacent regions with subject matter ranging from the Prehistoric to the British Period.

We acknowledge the efforts of the members of the Board of Editorial Advisors, the contributors, the review and colleagues of the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra. On the other hand, we are grateful to the worthy Vice Chancellor and management of Hazara University Mansehra for support and encouragement.

## **Editors**

# Ali Sajid's Cityscapes: A Relationship between Elements and Principles of Art Infusing the Old City of Peshawar with a Fresh Ambiance

RABIA CHISHTI AND ZUBAIDA MUGHAL

## Abstract

*The current study formally analyzes Ali Sajid's cityscapes from the walled city of Peshawar and their compositional elements, content, and style. The study also examines the linear and atmospheric perspective and the line orientation employed by the artist. In addition, the study concentrated on an eclectic mix of architectural styles and the hybrid culture of the region depicted in these paintings. The study submits that his vibrant colors and style have given the old city a new ambiance. In addition to providing a thorough account of how design principles relate and unify the elements into a coherent composition, the study suggests these paintings an essential visual record of the region's cultural legacy.*

**Keywords:** Cityscape paintings, compositional elements, linear perspective, tilted lines, line orientation

## Introduction

Cityscape paintings act as cultural narratives, capturing the past and present essence. Beyond their visual appeal, they reflect the artist's creative journey, offering insight into their inspiration and artistic vision. One notable example is Ali Sajid, who uses his brush with a distinctive touch to portray the historic Walled City of Peshawar in his paintings.

Sajid, a renowned visual artist and skilled watercolorist from Peshawar, specializes in cityscapes and landscapes. Through his work, he highlights the traditional architecture of Peshawar's historic inner city and the breathtaking countryside of northern Pakistan. This study, however, focuses on his cityscape paintings, which vividly depict the region's architectural heritage and hybrid cultural identity. It delves into his use of pictorial elements, mainly how he employs perspective to create depth and organizes lines to structure visual space.

Cityscapes are often characterized by a skyline of tall buildings, a dense network of streets, and an eclectic mix of architectural styles (Samir, 2017, p. 9). In cityscape paintings, the illusion of depth and distance is frequently achieved using linear and atmospheric perspectives. Perspective is a technique used to create an illusion on a two-dimensional surface, giving the feeling of a three-dimensional space (Simmons, 1980, p. 122; Kleiner et al., 2001, p. 1158). It is one of the fundamentals that an artist needs to understand to create realistic and believable scenes (Evans, 2019; Prokopenko, 2013). This is accomplished by utilizing converging lines that appear to meet at a single vanishing point, giving the illusion of objects receding into the distance. Therefore, buildings, highways, and other constructions are frequently depicted in linear perspective to provide a sense of three-dimensionality and realism. Conversely, atmospheric perspective employs gradual variations in color and clarity, making distant objects look softer and less defined. By enhancing this effect, artists can increase the illusion of depth and make their work more visually appealing. Line orientation is another important component of cityscapes, significantly impacting how people



perceive and find interest in them. The way lines are oriented in a cityscape influences our sense of height, depth, and distance, affecting how buildings and other structures are visually interpreted.

## **Background**

Ali Sajid graduated from the Department of Fine Arts, University of Peshawar, in 2002. At that time, he was influenced by realism. After four years of intense study in Singapore and Japan (2008-2012), he returned to the country and displayed his watercolor skills by creating his unique interpretation of cityscapes. He initially evolved his unique style from training abroad and later from impressionism. Sajid was influenced immensely by his master, watercolorist Zhu Hong. Zhu Hong's paintings, showing scenes of Singapore streets, introduced Sajid to a new approach to illustrating architectural elements on the canvas. Later, his working experience with urban sketchers in Tokyo from 2013 to 2014 enriched his interest and passion for architectural design.

Sajid proved his talent over a very short period. He thus won several national and international awards, including the Daniel Smith Award at Fabriano, Italy (2016), the first position in the International Watercolor Festival Dubai (2017), Landscape Artist Award Albania (2017), and Global Association of Watercolor Artist Award Canada (2018). Among his national awards are the Living Human Treasure Award and the National Heroes of Peshawar Award by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He held numerous exhibitions in Tokyo, India, Italy, Dubai, Canada, Hong Kong, Albania, and Pakistan. He juried for the IWS Arab Nation Contest, the IWS Turkey Watercolor Contest, and Pakistan 1<sup>st</sup> International Watercolor Contest. His paintings enrich worldwide art collections, including the Office of UNESCO, UNHCR, Fabarino Museum Italy, the Consulate General of the US in Karachi, 11 Corps Headquarters, and the CM house KP.

## **Method**

The Artist's digital library was consulted at his place. Four paintings from his series on the walled City of Peshawar were selected and examined to analyze the artist's structural organization, pictorial elements, perceptual qualities, and subjective approach. For perspective analysis, two of his paintings titled Sethi Muhalla and Chowk Shaheedan were analyzed using CorelDRAW 2021. Digital scans of the original paintings were imported into the software and to make evident the linear perspective, converging lines, vanishing points, and horizon lines were drawn in red color.

An informal interview was also conducted to gain insights into his creative process.

## **Description of Subject Matter**

Four steps of formal analysis, including description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, were used to examine and discuss the pictorial features of selected paintings: I) Walled City; II) Gor Gattri; III) Sethi Mohalla; and IV) Chowk Shaheedan.

## **Walled City Series**

The most distinctive feature of Ali Sajid's paintings is their subject matter. He vividly portrays the historical architecture of Peshawar, focusing mainly on the old walled city. His works emphasize

architectural elements of cityscapes, including doors, windows, overhanging roofs, and projected windows (*jharokhas*), aesthetically capturing the life and essence of the area. Many of his paintings imbue a fresh aura into the old city, depicting iconic structures such as the buildings of Gor Gathri and Bazar-e-Kalan.

Ali Sajid's paintings capture the essence of historically significant buildings while integrating lively public spaces, including shops, streets, and passersby. His meticulous attention to detail brings objects to life with striking realism, whereas the human figures are rendered more impressionistic. The faceless individuals, drawn from everyday life, evoke a sense of familiarity, representing the bustling atmosphere of bazaars. Billboards and banners frequently appear in his compositions, enhancing the urban realism of his work. Vehicles are another recurring element, adding dynamism and variety to his scenes. Most notably, his vibrant color palette infuses energy into the architectural landscapes, making them visually captivating.

### **Pictorial Elements—Building Blocks of Art and Design**

Before analyzing Ali Sajid's work for a better understanding of the perspective he has used as a device for spatial illusion, it will help to introduce some of the significant aspects of his paintings. He is very keen on the elements and principles of art. Ali Sajid stated that young artists rarely employ art and design principles. He opined that an artist's brush should not ignore the principles of art. According to him, "these principles make the artwork up to the mark" and bring fluency to the artwork. His brush playfully employs the elements of art on the paper. The line is an exceptional segment of his paintings. According to the artist, "using straight, horizontal or vertical lines makes the work common. Instead, slanting and broken lines make the composition more interesting and energetic". Consequently, his vertical lines, either forming a window, wall, or electric pole, always leaned slightly towards the left or right, which cannot be noticed by the viewer's eye at first glance; however, it adds movement and energy to the overall painting. He also uses broken lines in his composition to make it more exciting. In addition, he composes the elements in his paintings according to the Rule of Third and employ golden points to emphasize the main subjects of the painting. The use of colors and shapes asymmetrically balances his compositions.

Another feature of his paintings is light and robust cast shadows. For this, he uses the rule of opposite to opposite in rendering light and dark shadows. Contrasts make his paintings more three-dimensional. The detailed work of the shadows of the awnings, windows, balconies, and overhangs of the shops can be viewed and enjoyed in many of Sajid's paintings. On his canvas, the shadow is painted cool when the light is warm, and when the light is excellent, the shadow is warm.

He employed the broken color technique in his paintings' large and small areas to depict the actual sensation of light. The broken color refers to a painting technique invented by the impressionists that some artists still use today (Lammers, 2012). They felt that one color in a large area fails to capture the viewer's interest; hence, the colors are left unblended so that the viewer's eye can visually mix these colors to perceive the desired hue.

Sajid's palette consists of vibrant colors, particularly yellows. Overdoing yellow in cityscapes gives the feeling of freshness and happiness. As far as cast shadows are concerned, he uses warm hues more than cool hues, giving a warmer effect to the overall streetscapes. In contrast, in landscapes from Naran Valley, the cooler hues, especially blue in the sky and green in trees, are used more than the warmer hues; thus, the overall scene results in a cooler temperature.

### ***Gor Gatteri*—Line Orientation (fig.2)**

In *Gor Gatteri*, Sajid documents one of the notable historical buildings of Peshawar, capturing the architectural design of the front elevation of a famous caravanserai of the Mughal dynasty. Sajid's brush depicts the magnificent gate, arch-shaped doorway, arch panels, and niches that are iconic of Mughal architecture with fluently flowing watercolors. This painting displays the elaboration of line orientation. One of Sajid's signature features is his use of lines, which sets his cityscapes apart from the work of other modern artists. Instead of static lines, he used active, energizing lines to create his cityscapes. A close look at this painting shows that all the verticals are drawn with tilted lines. He believes that tilted lines produce more interest, energy, and movement in the painting. Thus, tilted electric polls displaying banners are another characteristic of Said's cityscape. Researchers believe line orientation significantly contributes to paintings' aesthetic appeal (e.g., Joel 2017; Locher, 2014). All the vertical lines in Sajid's painting slightly lean towards the left or right, which suggests a sense of movement and dynamism in his cityscape. He concentrates more on curved or skewed lines for this. His lines imply peace, movement, and energy, which bring the scenery to life. Sajid motions abound in lines. For instance, motion is not added by static lines. Curved lines, on the other hand, add motion, and tilted lines improve motion, whereas zigzag, spiral, or rough lines increase the frequency of motion. It concerns line psychology, linked to and involved with human emotions.

Another essential feature is shadow and cast shadow. Shadow is created by mixing blue with the local color by applying layer upon layer and side by side. Analysis of this painting shows that the principle of emphasis, by contrast, is employed by shadow and cast shadow of several arches of the giant gateway, beautifully inclosing the focal point. Similarly, emphasis by color is employed by using blue auto against the yellow-orange panel of the wall. Additionally, the repetition of the lines forming arches and rectangles of the façade adds rhythm and variety to the pattern. The design principle of scale and proportion can also be noticed by being used in the small sizes of the blue *rickshaw* and visitors about the giant façade of *Gor Gatteri*. Likewise, the blue auto at the left breaks the monotony of the symmetrical design of the building. In contrast, the impressionist figures of the only source of movement add life to the painting. Among the other principles in this painting, emphasis seems to be the most significant principle unifying elements into a coherent composition.

### **Analysis of Ali Sajid's work**

#### **Perspective—the Pictorial Depth Dimension**

The use of perspective by Ali Sajid connects his work to the centuries-old tradition of Renaissance paintings. The Italian artists of the Early Renaissance, like Duccio and Lorenzetti brothers, practiced several techniques to get an illusion of depth and distance. However, they became successful in their objective when they used the actual linear perspective, discovered by the Italian architect Brunelleschi, as it was a mechanical and definite way to obtain the illusion of distance (Kleiner et al., 2001, p. 594; Lane, 1983, p. 36). Apart from linear perspective, Sajid used aerial or atmospheric perspective to capture a vast panorama in a small frame. This study examines Ali Sajid's work to analyze the visual space he created using perspective.

Perspective is vital to almost any drawing or sketch, as well as many paintings. It is one of the fundamentals an artist must understand to create realistic and believable scenes. The device acquires the illusion of space on a flat surface. It is determined by graphic characteristics, including the directional movement of lines and the positioning of forms up, down, and across (Collier 1985, p. 66). According to the linear perspective, parallel lines converge at a single vanishing point (one-point perspective), or two sets of parallel lines converge at separate vanishing points (two-point perspective) on the horizon. When seen from an angle, the two-point perspective represents the objects in space (Rathus, 1992, p. 15). The further linear perspective suggests that objects become smaller as they recede into a distance. In landscape drawing and painting, this optical phenomenon serves many functions: it creates a three-dimensional effect by replicating the size relationship among different things that we witnessed; on the other hand, the viewer's eye follows the converging lines into and around the composition, moreover, through perspective the artist create a vantage point, the viewer's position about the scene (Simmons & Winer 97, p. 122).

In addition, artists have used aerial perspective over the centuries to strengthen the sensation of space in their art. From an aerial perspective, depth is created through texture gradients, brightness gradients, color saturation, and warm and cool hues. Ali Sajid employed both perspectives in his paintings to create the illusion of deep vistas.

### ***Sethi Mohalla*—One Point Perspective (fig. 3)**

The painting *Sethi Mohalla* is an exciting example of how Ali Sajid proficiently incorporates one-point and aerial perspectives. In the foreground, two buildings on both sides of the street are composed in a one-point perspective. All the lines forming the awnings, openings, and overhangs on the left and the green bay window on the right converge at one vanishing point.

The one-point perspective of the cityscape powerfully leads the eye down the street and suggests the mosque as the focal point. The overlapping buildings in front, middle, and background have been fused with atmospheric perspective by rendering the buildings with sharp contrast in texture and color. The mosque is painted in the middle ground as if the viewer is looking straight forward without tilting the head or camera up or down. This angle of view or point of view is called normal view perspective. Normal view angle places the horizon line at a natural height or eye level.

The building in the right foreground has been defined in its architectural details. A green bay window is an archetype architectural element of historic houses, a resonant of Persian or Greek architecture. Due to the brighter colors, the central mosque seems to be in the middle ground. The use of primary hues, for example, blue behind the pale yellow mosque, makes the windows visible and invites the viewers to enjoy the features of wooden panel windows with glass tops of the Colonial period once used in the old buildings of Peshawar. The rustic brown pointed arch-shaped windows of the mosques also remind us of the gothic windows used by the Sethi families during the British Colonial period. At the same time, aerial perspective has captured a distant looming building in the upper part of the painting in gray. In the same painting, one can quickly locate the vanishing point by following converging parallel lines to where they intersect almost near the center of the composition. The digital image of *Sethi Mohalla* has been rendered in Corel Draw to make the one-point perspective visible (fig. 3).

The painting is a beautiful blend of elements of art and architecture. It records the antiquities of Peshawar, which are rarely seen in the city's modern urban dwellings.

### ***Chowk Shaheedan—Two-Point Perspective (fig.4)***

The *Chowk Shaheedan* is a scene of the famous Qissa Khawni Bazaar of Peshawar. The white marble monument ‘Yadgar e Shaheedan, a famous landmark in the walled city of Peshawar, can be seen on the right side of the painting. Here, Sajid has captured the old and new buildings in vibrant colors and documented the architecture of the bazaar, showcasing a blend of traditional-style buildings along with modern and tall structures that have replaced the older ones. The billboards painted in complementary colors make the buildings the focal point. Emphasis, by contrast, is employed by the use of the dark shadow on the road painted in white. Shadow is created by mixing blue with the local color. His paintings frequently employ a style like this. The shadow, on the one hand, depicts invisible buildings on the other side of the bazaar and expands the vista of the captured scene. While on the other hand, jagged and diagonal shadow lines on the road fill the space with movement and energy.

“Chowk Shaheedan” employed both linear and atmospheric perspectives. The building at the right corner of the street is a beautiful example of two-point perspective. Among the two vanishing points, one is outside the painting, and the other is at the left of the horizon; these vanishing points can be found by tracing the horizontal lines of the awning, eaves, and rooftops to the left and right (fig. 4a). An intriguing section of the painting is the readable banner *Ijtamay Aam* located on the left, which draws the viewer's eye towards the street painted with an aerial perspective. Atmospheric perspective is an effect of the atmosphere on the appearance of those aspects of a natural scene that are far from a viewer. Sajid reduces the contrast between images and the background and the contrast inside images, thus beautifully manipulating inter-contrast and intra-contrast in this case. Hence, increasing distance makes the scene's colors less saturated and lighter (Zhang et al. 2014: 653).

Once again, the playful use of lines, color palette, images of readable billboards, architectural design, and detailed work of shadows and cast shadows make it a significant piece of his paintings.

### **Conclusion**

Ali Said's impressionist cityscapes are a significant visual record of the cultural legacy and accounts of the region's hybrid culture. His paintings highlight the architectural features of these places and their aesthetic appeal and ambiance. In the Walled City series, Ali Sajid depicts history by reflecting the spirit of its time. His watercolors express the artist's passion for the Walled City by capturing its beautiful antique architectonics. In addition, Sajid's whimsical use of lines, vibrant colors, atmospheric perspective to capture a vast panorama in a small frame, and the attention to detail in the shadows and cast shadows all characterize the artist's style. To play with lines is one of the key features of Sajid's style and makes his cityscapes distinguishable from the work of other contemporary artists. He rendered his cityscapes with energetic and active lines rather than static. Sajid's lines suggest peace, movement, and energy, making the scenes alive. Sajid strives to develop cityscapes that speak to him and others, conveying the existing beauty. He combines broken lines and strong cast shadows to create an exciting and dynamic composition, and his paintings also demonstrate a balance between realism and impressionism. He places great

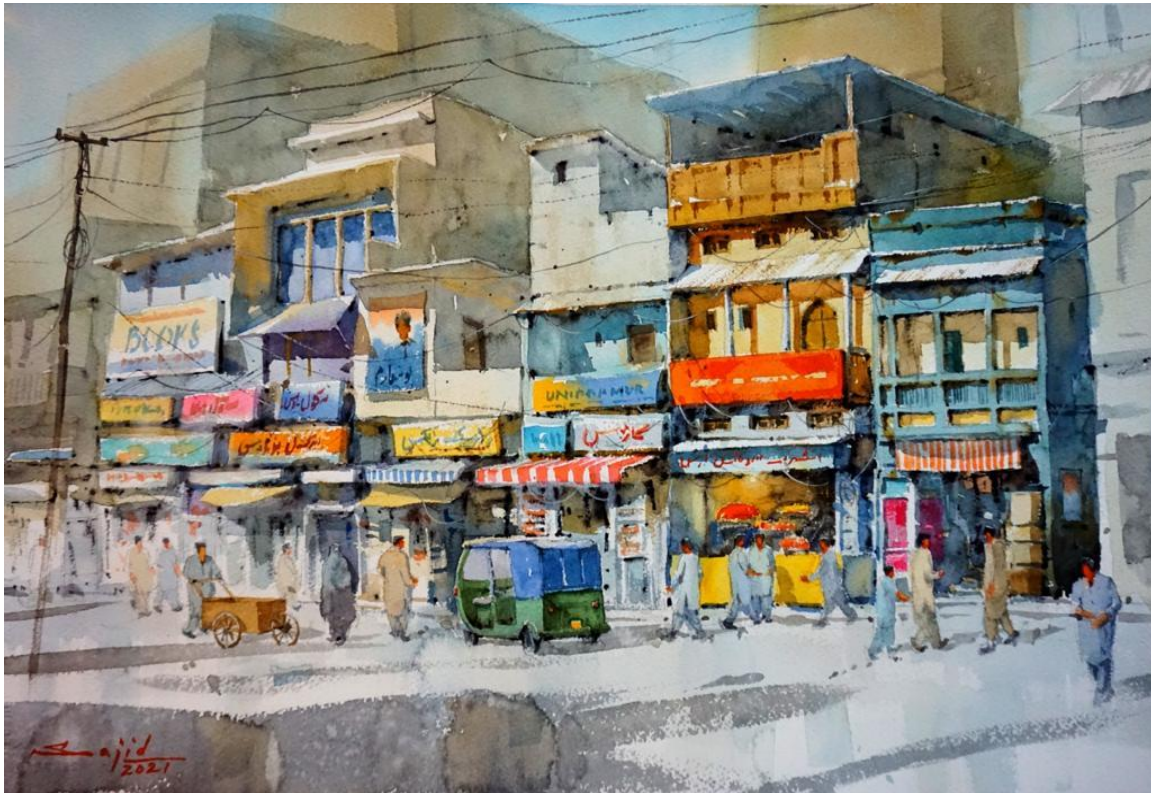
importance on the elements and principles of art and believes that the zenith of an artist's brush is how diligently it employs these elements to attain visual depth, as found in nature.

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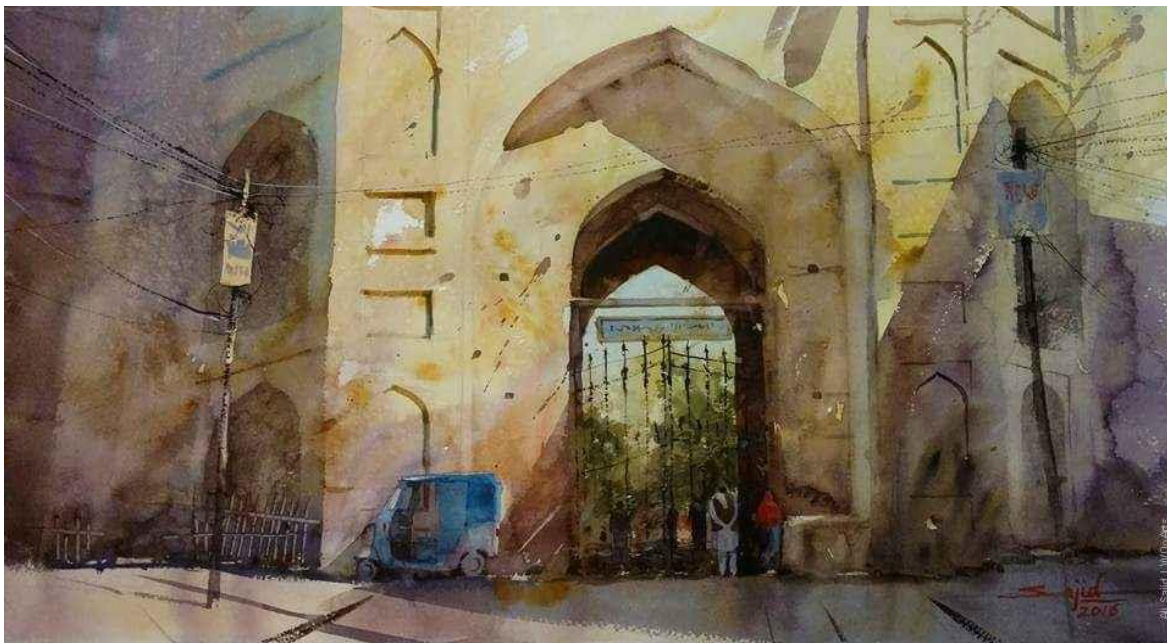
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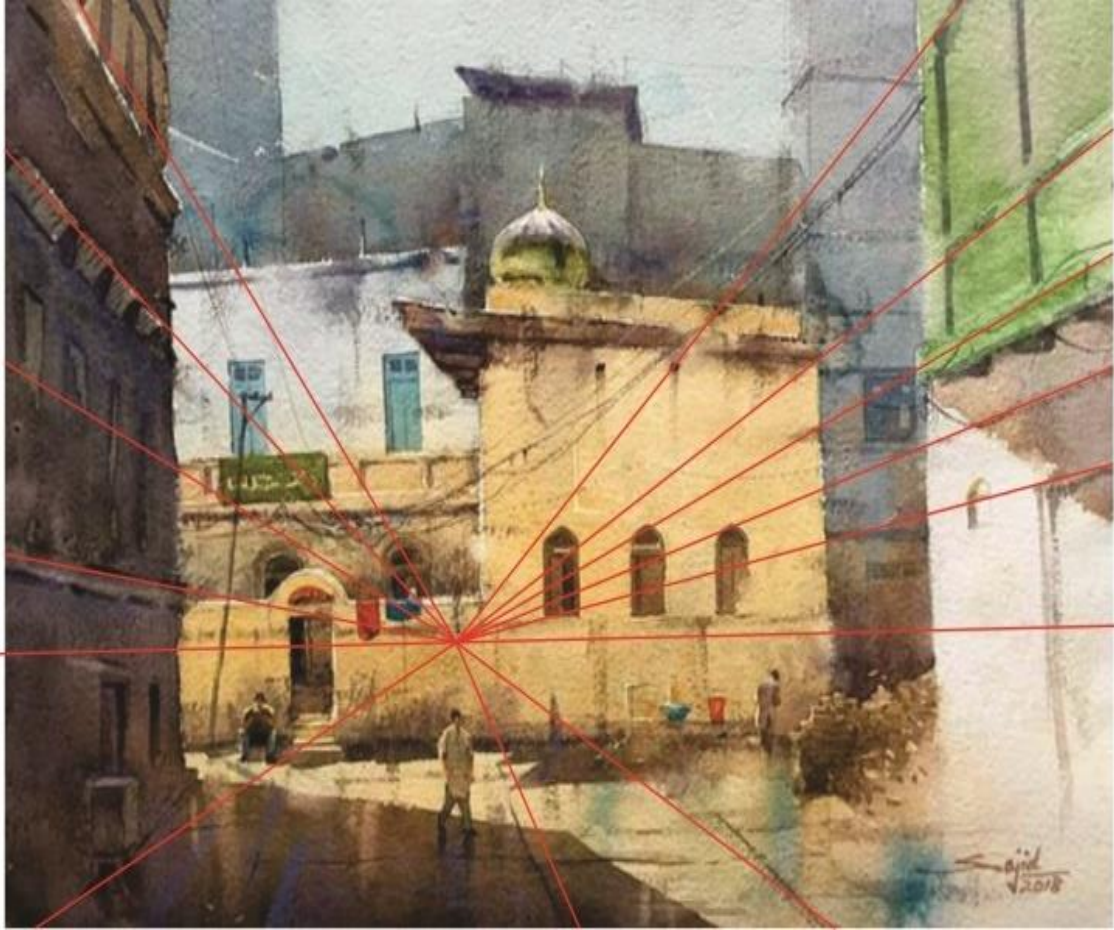


**Fig. 1:** Walled City Series, 15x20 inch

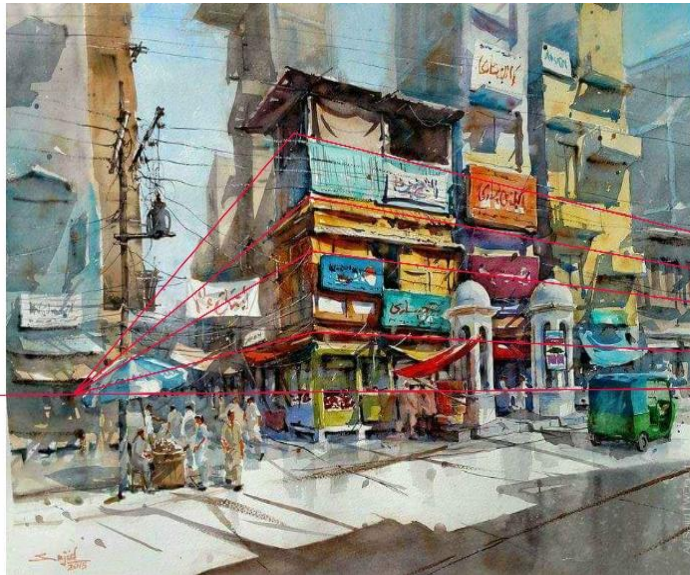


**Fig. 2:** Gor Gatteri, Watercolor on paper 16x230 inches





**Fig. 3:** Sethi Mohalla, A rendered image in Corel Draw to make the one-point perspective visible.



**Fig. 4:** Chowk Shaheedan 36×49 inches, watercolor on paper, A rendered image in Corel draw to make two-point perspective visible