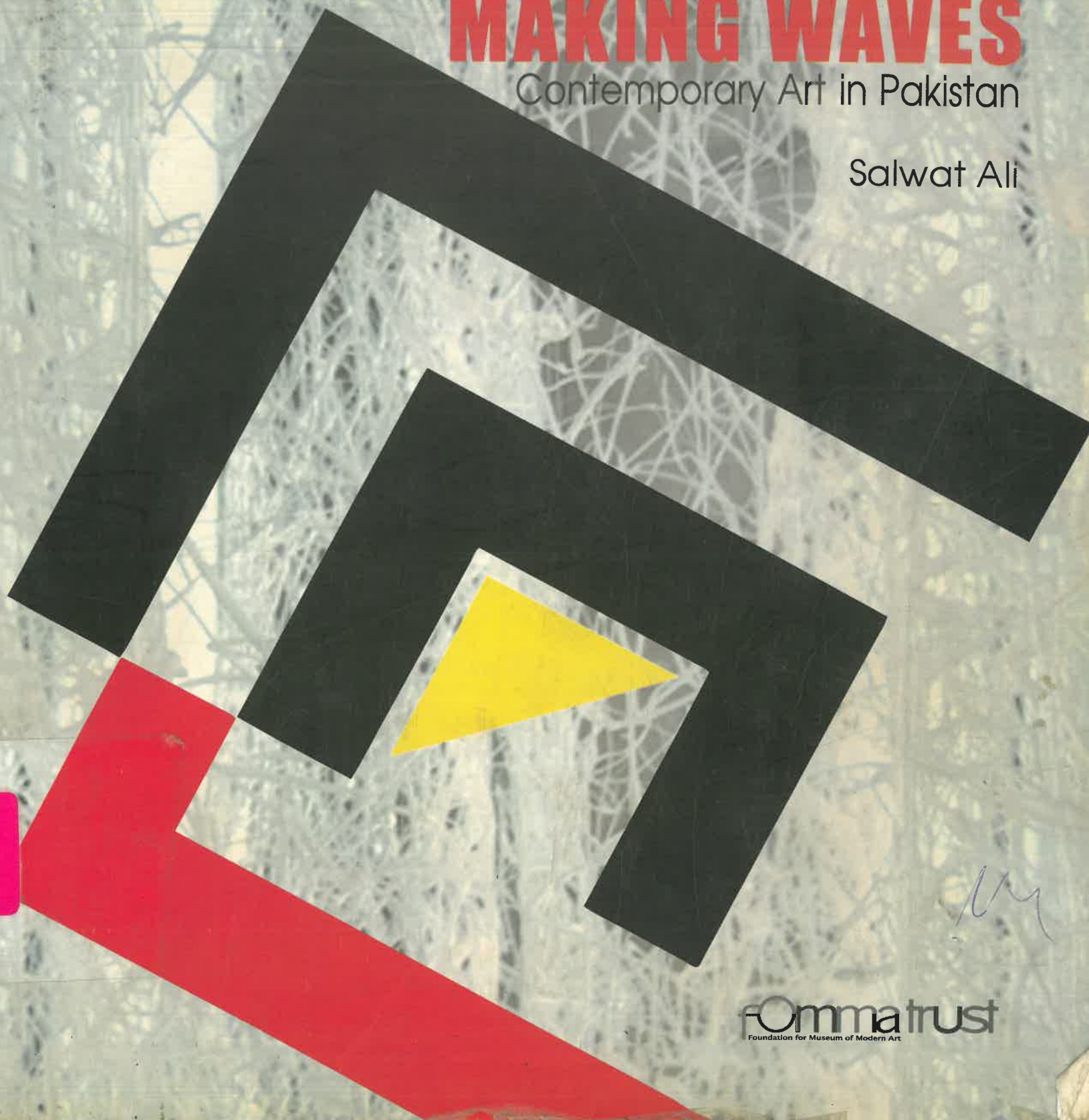


MAKING WAVES

Contemporary Art in Pakistan

Salwat Ali

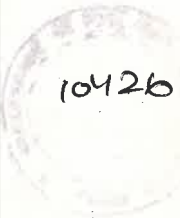


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MAKING WAVES

Contemporary Art in Pakistan



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CONFRONTING NEW ART FORMS

INTRODUCTION



Gallery going can be an intimidating experience for the ordinary visitor. While still coming to terms with the complexities of abstract and expressionist art the average viewer in Pakistan now has to contend with new media art forms like assemblage, performance, video and installation. Unlike art on the walls installations are ephemeral, site specific arrangements of objects that you can walk around, into and through to experience their message, Performance art too is a modern but transitory derivation or extension of primitive rituals or theatrical acts. Video as compared to a still and mute painting is animated art which is technology reliant and needs to be viewed on a screen which demands a different viewer mindset. Art here is also largely associated with ownership and works in these new media cannot be brought as wall decorations either which further alienates the viewer/ buyer.

New media arts are established genres in the west but their artistic expression and public displays have escalated in Pakistan only in the last few years. Young art enthusiasts may seem fairly conversant with the mediums but there is an obvious element of "disconnect" among the senior viewership. Intimate with the skills and nuances of the traditional art of painting they are baffled and bewildered by these new mediums and question their context, content and mode of expression. They are by no means alone in this feeling of alienation. A paragraph excerpted from Thomas Crow's book, "American and European art in the Era of Dissent" echoes these very sentiments quite aptly. He writes,

"Ordinary viewers of today, hoping for coherence and beauty in their imaginative experiences, confront instead works of art declared to exist in arrangements of bare texts and unremarkable photographs, in industrial fabrications revealing no evidence of the artist's hand, in mundane commercial products merely transferred from shopping mall to gallery, or in ephemeral and confrontational performances in which mainstream moral values are deliberately travestied."

Many a confused viewer may identify with this but such points of view when seen in a historical perspective assume another dimension. History reveals that new art has seldom had easy transitions. In the 1860's the Impressionists were censored, ridiculed and condemned for defying established academic doctrines. They tried to project contemporary life in a new objective mannerism by capturing an 'impression' of what the eye saw in one particular moment rather than paint elaborate biblical or historical narratives. Likewise the modernist movement in the arts was also widely regarded with great suspicion and often denounced with derision and contempt in its early phases. Indeed every successive movement was often a reaction to

the previous one. As a product of its times its survival and longevity lay in its ability to reflect the aspirations of its practitioners and viewers.

On home ground our post colonial art has been subservient to western 'ism's' and the dependence continues to this day but many artists of the younger generation are no longer enamoured by the act of painting in heroic or emotive gestures. Rather they are finding subjects within the immediate environment of their popular culture and incorporating them into their art through 'cool' depersonalized means. Presently in the post modern new genre's there is no dominant style, medium or movement that can be termed a trail blazer but there are a number of themes recurring in the works of the younger generation which define their mindset. Among these an interest in identity politics and gender; in exploring the province of public and private space, in geopolitical and socio cultural concerns as well as investigating the possibilities of hybrid art forms are prominent. Young artists have successfully reinvented the indigenous Mughal miniature by investing it with a contemporary vocabulary and efforts, albeit sporadic, to engage with and revitalize calligraphy are evident too. While retooling their kits with fresh ideas young minds are seeking fresh pastures. Their art is fuelled by the mass media and technology revolution and they are locating their subjects and accessing materials from the wide spectrum of populist culture. It is these shifts which are changing the look and feel of their art. Moreover it is generally seen that art of one age does not always speak to the next generation or century and to a certain extent this generational divide causing ruptures from traditional methodologies is creating a penchant for radical originality no matter how un - painterly like it is.

PREFACE



Today we face an art world more changed over the course of the past 20 years than the preceding 100. The hegemony of metropolitan art centers, whether New York, Paris or London as 'the' centers of modernism were eroded by the end of the 1980's and the rigid structures of modernist art history have started to breakdown. In Pakistan post independence engagement with modernism, that drew on tradition yet remained committed to the present still prevails, but, the up and coming new art is elbowing in to establish its presence. As a rising radical new wave it has precedents in the art revolution sweeping through the rest of Asia.

After the lapse of modernism the emerging post modernist strains in art hit fertile ground in Asian countries in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Phenomenal changes in new Chinese and Indian art catapulted it straight into the heart of western art centers and leading auction houses, Japan and South Korea are already on the circuit since the earlier modernist phase and many art groups in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal have embraced the new sensibility with considerable élan. New Iranian and Turkish art is asserting its existence now and the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia are the most recent to feature on the new Asian art map. Here in Pakistan the new wave that began to surface in the early millennium years continues to swell and soar as initial players mature and new ones enter the fold.

In order to understand this development it is necessary to examine what are the determinants of a contemporary art phenomenon evolving outside a western context? While new art in Asia resists easy categorization most Asian countries, including Pakistan, share common causal forces. Informed by Asian anxieties related to histories of colonial domination, independence struggles and post colonial hiccups, art making is also evolving in an atmosphere of cultural turmoil, where tradition and modernity exist in (un) happy confusion. Volatile political conditions, religious constraints, socio economic crisis, gender inequalities, ethnic strife, violence and state censorship are other significant commonalities.

In a postcolonial politically chaotic Asia a search for a new artistic language and dialogue has driven new generation artists in pursuit of multiple lines of enquiry and the post modern western construct of new media arts has surfaced as the most favoured vehicle for articulation of these diverse concerns. In Pakistan it was deconstruction of the Mughal Miniature that initiated the new discourse phase while the digital arts, installation, assemblage and video came later but are now gaining ground.

Other than the compelling inner circumstances that gave birth to new metaphors it is the outer interventionist forces that have given Asian art its peculiar profile. Postcolonial Asian artists are articulating their identities in a situation where an outside power has interrupted and redefined their culture and altered their means of expression. Old boundaries are continuing to crumble but recent Asian art is still under the shadow of Eurocentrism. It is still unable to interpret its complex existence. This inability is the real crux of the identity crisis most third world artists are facing. Instead of undertaking the daunting task of re-building their independent ability to interpret contemporary cultural reality the urge to identify with the West or to gain the recognition of the West dominates artmaking strategies. ¹ "Experimental media was preferred by many younger generation artists during the 1980s, many of them curious about Western culture and art history, which seemed more progressive, exciting and liberating than the type of activities conventionally regarded as culture in their own, often tradition-bound, societies. ... Through the adoption of experimental media, Asian artists were able to engage with an international art world: they began to be included in large thematic survey exhibitions outside Asia, as well as art magazines and popular studies of contemporary art.

The knowledge of experimental contemporary art was transmitted to artists living in Asian countries through multiple channels. One obvious route was imported foreign art magazines and books, which provided much needed historical and visual information." During the 1980s and 1990s, transmission of experimental art came from artists who had returned from study overseas but, perhaps the single most important influence was the international and regional biennial and triennial exhibition. These events not only brought significant international art and artists to Asian cities, often for the first time, but they also fostered a new sense of a regional contemporary art identity. First, they united the work of contemporary artists from different countries in one place, and second, they created spaces in which artists from these countries could meet, see each other's art and discuss shared issues and concerns. In the absence of pertinent mentions concerning these developments in World Art History volumes, subsequent exhibition catalogues remain some of the most important primary documents for Asian contemporary art.

² While it was artists from the Asian countries who brought in the new era, it was not they who defined and managed the new era into the future. In the absence of a serious critical discourse in contemporary art that would have consolidated the new movement, the directional guidance for contemporary Asian art was set by art curators from

the developed world, funded by wealthy museums and galleries. It is important to note that the Asian art world had no intra-or-inter-regional institutional connections of any significance until the 1990's. Sri Lankan artists were totally oblivious to the changes that were occurring in India or China, while Pakistani women artists did not exist for them until as late as early 2000. It was via international curators, exhibitions and art activities curated by them that Asian artists from different regions met each other and artists' networks were established. Through a process of acknowledgement, recognition and presenting with opportunities to show Asian art in international exhibitions, international art curators played a pivotal role in consolidating the radical developments in art in Asia during the 1980's and 1990's."

There have been several curatorial and scholarly attempts to record and define this important growth in Asian art. Survey exhibitions such as *New Art from South Asia – 1992*, organized by the Japan Foundation, the *Asian Art Shows* of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and researched book projects such as *Tradition and Change* edited by Caroline Turner, published in 1994 coinciding with the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art of Queensland Galleries, are some examples of such attempts. Exhibitions such as Apinan Poshyananda's *Traditions / Tensions* 1996 and Gao Minglu's *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* 1998, both organized or co-organized by Asia Soc New York have been influential. In the year 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision fifty years of painting and sculpture from Pakistan assembled by British curator Timothy Wilcox was shown at the Brunel Gallery in London. This was the first survey of historical and contemporary art from Pakistan.

While the western curator initiative was instrumental in putting contemporary Asian art on the map critics and analysts soon discovered the inherent flaws in this endeavour. David Clarke rationalizes that "few curators have a detailed knowledge of more than one part of Asia (if that), and thus are rarely in a position to 'discover' relatively unexposed artists. Those who do possess local expertise will be familiar with the role of informant they are often called upon to play, providing jet setting curators lacking contextual knowledge with shortlists of potential artists and other necessary information."

Pakistan's relatively small art milieu, as compared to huge art production of much larger economically stronger and politically stable nations, has not attracted western curators other than Wilcox. Fortunately, the curatorial effort, albeit very limited, has come from within. International exhibitions like *Beyond Borders*, the first museum scale exhibition in India of contemporary Pakistani art and *Desperately Seeking Paradise* the Pakistan Pavilion at Art Dubai 2008, were organized by local curators. Presently the first US museum to focus on

contemporary art from Pakistan did so in Sept 2009 when Asia Society Museum presented *Hanging Fire*.⁴ Representing the current energy, vitality, and range of expression in Pakistan's little-known yet thriving arts scene, the exhibition comprises nearly 50 works by 15 artists, and includes installation art, video, photography, painting, and sculpture. Curated by Salima Hashmi—one of the most influential and well-respected writers and curators in Pakistan—the exhibition presents a comprehensive look at recent and current trends in Pakistani art."

Other than organizing exhibitions to showcase Pakistani talent the inception of organizations like Fomma (Foundation of Museum of Modern Art) - now operating as a non-profit educational and cultural Trust - have brought institutional support to art in the country. Fomma Trust is a registered Charity. Its aim is to promote the study and critical appreciation of Modern Art and Architecture and its immediate objectives are to set up a Museum and an Art Library in Karachi. Fomma is also involved in the reference and documentation of contemporary art and is active in the production of monographs and books on art and artists of Pakistan. An art journal *Nukta* also launched during this art amplification phase broadens the art publication base as do art pages of leading dailies and local English journals but much more needs to be done in art writing, criticism, documentation and art education in order to familiarize the public with the evolving new sensibility. New generation art at present is still largely dependent on validation from the west to determine its technical and material value and to establish its worth on home ground. An art seeking certification and opportunities elsewhere makes one wonder on whose terms it is being produced.

Other than the need of an informed audience for technical and conceptual assessment a vibrant art market also plays a vital role in energizing the arts. With the commodification of art worldwide the art market (in the pre recession era) emerged as a dominant player in the evaluation of art. When the world economy began to globalize, the most daring Western art lovers were seen scouring China, India, and other developing nations for new work. And the prediction was that the best artists' prices are bound to soar as emerging economies grow and their newly wealthy elite take up collecting. With the phenomenal rise in prices of Chinese and Indian art in the international market the value of art from other Asian countries also increased. Ripple effects of this trend has stirred local collector interest and escalated art prices in Pakistan. When prices increased art began to be appraised for its material worth. Art as investment heated up the art market. Today in a post recession scenario the tendency to acquire art as a cutting edge or high end luxury and speculative entity continues, albeit selectively.

New art in Pakistan is a product of the times. It is courting the art market; it mirrors societal apprehensions, aims and aspirations and strangely enough, in many ways, is still faithful to the dominant western discourse. Can any clear signals or messages emerge from this confusing array of influences and motivations? Art scholar / activist Rasheed Araeen points out that ⁵"It is not that one should not express one's predicament or use the predicament of the oppressed as part of one's discourse. But the artwork which does not at the same time engage critically with the system 'from which it seeks recognition' is simply reduced to a rarefied commodity for the art market. I do not just question the nature of these activities, but also the power of the art institutions which legitimate these activities. What is the basis of this legitimacy? Is it the power of the powerful, or have they a theoretical basis which recognizes the work of both white and non-white artists in the same way? How come these institutions never use the ideas which recognize the importance of radical innovations and historical shifts in art when it comes to the work of non-white artists? The ideas of postcolonial theory and post-modernism are not only inadequate but also inappropriate in this respect."

It is surprising that in this age of increased cultural exchange, technology and rapid communication our art relationship with the west is still skewed and stilted. It is still the Asian contemporary artist who knows what his or her Western counterpart is doing and not the other way around. In the west Asian art is being accommodated but only as a "novelty for Western palates."

⁶ Caroline Turner suggests in her book *Art and Social Change* that instead of making use of objects, styles and experiences from elsewhere to address issues at home the emphasis has to be on locating meanings of Asian art in the local context. Going even further Rasheed Araeen proposes that ⁷"In order to deal with this difficult situation today, we need radically new ideas, new strategies, and a new discourse not only to produce art but how to recognize and legitimize it"

The documentation of new generation art in the Fomma production *Journeys of the Spirit: Pakistan Art in the New Millennium (2000-05)*, published in 2008 continues in the present volume. The endeavour is to capture the form and feel of the new spirit and to view the motivations and directions it is adopting.

Bibliography.

¹ Melissa Chou – *Asian Contemporary Art: An Introduction*.

² Jagath Weerasinghe -*Asian Art Today: Exploiting the Code*.

South Asia Journal for Culture -a practicing artist and Prof of Archeology at Post graduate Institute of Archeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

³. David Clarke: *Contemporary Asian Art and its Western Reception—Third Text Asia*.

⁴ Text posted by Balithak Asia Soc Museum

^{5, 7} Rasheed Araeen: *A new Beginning Third Text*

⁶ Caroline Turner (AAA collection.), Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University. Caroline Turner, ed., *Art and Social Change: contemporary art in Asia and the Pacific*, Canberra, Pandanus Books, 2005.

Salwat Ali

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Many debts of gratitude have been incurred during the course of this book project. I am particularly beholden to the art fraternity for the assistance rendered in collection and provision of visual data for publication purposes. The generous response of individual artists and art galleries is much appreciated. A considerable amount of text is devoted to artists in diaspora and the particular art galleries/museums in UK, USA and UAE who facilitated dialogue and correspondence for interviews with artists as well as timely provision of press images, deserve special thanks - I am also deeply grateful to the photographers whose visuals grace the pages of Making Waves - their contribution to this 'not for profit project' is invaluable.

Fomma Trust who initiated the "Making Waves" project have shepherded it through with the same enthusiasm (if not more) that they bestowed on the earlier volume Journeys of the Spirit. Their interest and keenness was a source of constant encouragement and added momentum to the entire exercise. Kudos to the Art director and his newly recruited computer graphics assistant for their personal involvement and eagerness in making the volume as reader friendly as possible.

On behalf of the book team I also thank Fomma Trust patrons, benefactors and friends for their faith in Fomma productions.

Salwat Ali

MIXED-MEDIA & MULTIMEDIA

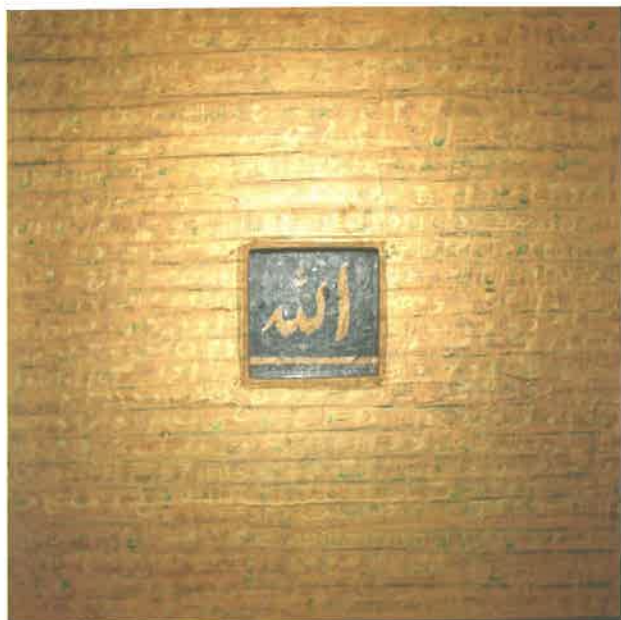


GROUP EXHIBITIONS

DOUBLE TAKE

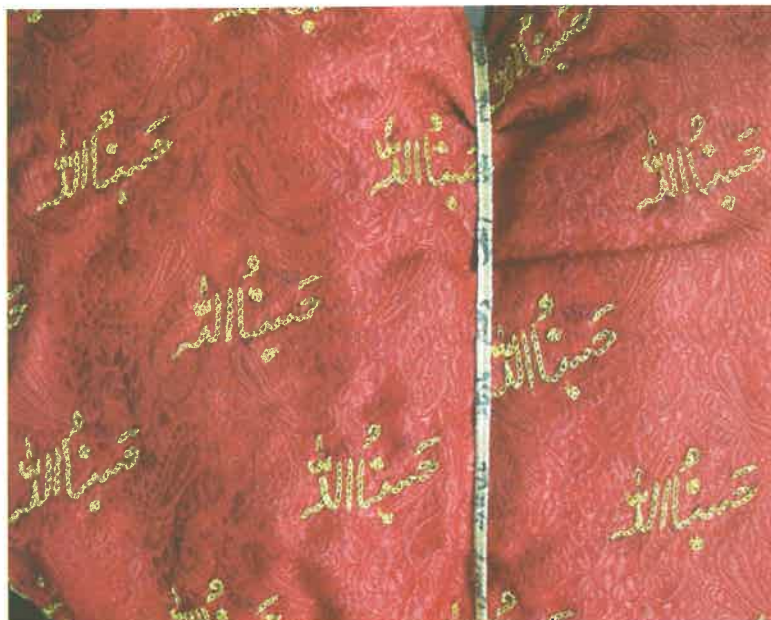
There is an important distinction between "mixed-media" artworks and "multimedia art". Mixed media tends to refer to a work of visual art that combines various traditionally distinct visual art media. For example, a work on canvas that combines paint, ink, and collage could properly be called a "mixed media" work - but not a work of "multimedia art." The term multimedia art implies a broader scope than mixed media, combining visual art with non-visual elements (such as recorded sound, for example) or with elements of the other arts (such as literature, drama, dance, motion graphics, music, or interactivity). Mixed media in this sense was popularized by the Dadaists and Surrealists, to whom the use of unconventional materials was an aspect of artistic anarchy and freedom. The term 'Multimedia' is used primarily in another sense also, referring to the publishing of various types of information—text, pictures, sound—on CD-ROM

Mehr Afroz



While new ideas have rejuvenated the miniature other genres here are either languishing in apathy or are subsisting on complacent art and it is exhibitions like Artists Voices: Body and Calligraphy that serve as reminders to artists that fresh levels of inquiry are necessary for the growth and invigoration of art forms. Moreover it also directs a confused younger generation of artists towards an epicenter. The figure is an essential component of art and an infinite array of expressions can be related to it likewise the possibilities of reinventing calligraphy, an indigenous art form, are manifold. In this exhibition artists with established signature styles have made a distinct effort to 'engage' with the two genres within the ambit of their own idioms and without compromising their identity Co-curated by Sheharbano Hussain and Amin Gulgee Artists Voices, is divided into two collections which are being shown independently, one after the other. The first focuses on Calligraphy while the other revolves around the human figure. The thematic structure underpins and co-joins the two exhibitions and it is the curators attempt to motivate the artists to 'engage' with these two apparently contradictory themes, that brings significant meaning to the display. The show therefore needs to be understood in context.

Naazish Attaullah



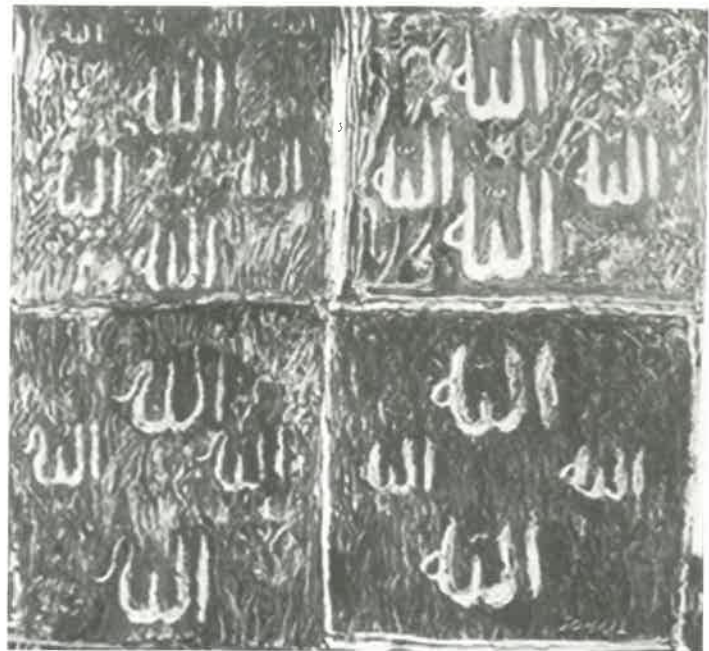
Amin Gulgee and Athar Tahir are the only two artists in the exhibition whose original expression is script oriented, for all the others it was a challenging exercise which they took on with aplomb. Viewers familiar with virulent figurations in Tassadaq Sohail's art may need to look anew at his relatively innocuous rendition of Allah. Similarly Moeen Faruqi has put aside his figurative vocabulary to construct his Alhamdulillah in a geometric complexity of square kufic evoking European modernist Mondrian's minimalist style. Riffat Alvi's spiritual odyssey and romance with earth pigments resurfaced in an installation of clay moulded Arabic alphabets spilling out of a clay crafted, divine book. Roohi Ahmed a sculptor chose to build her idea on parchment like paper with the alphabet Alif, a measuring unit in a script. Mehr Afroz known for somber, intense imagery had crafted an illuminating set of three boxed surfaces encrusted with mirrors in the centre to reflect the divine word. Shakil Saigol's scripted expression reiterated the name Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Tapu Javeri's three dimensional projection from the centre of his painting support was a distinct shift from his photo painting. While many artists stepped beyond their usual boundaries to initiate a relationship with calligraphy some chose to incorporate it within the range of their established expression. Artists Lala Rukh, Noor Jehan Bilgrami and Sheharbano are known to invoke the metaphysical in their very personalized imagery and for this show they chose to align calligraphy within the rhythms of their compositions. A host of other works like Nazish Attaulлах's calligraphy on cloth, Anwer Saeeds on the body, and exquisite penmanship by Wajid Ali and Afshar Malik had a novel stance which impacted the mind.

If the Calligraphy exhibition was eclectic the Body show was more so. Artists played on the presence or absence, symbolic inference or allusion to the figure. Amin himself opted to display an organic brass sculpture of plant origin with copper leaves titled, Eden Plant 4: Where is the Apple, as his take on the body and Asim Akhter chose to speak through a black and white photograph of a magnolia flower. An installation by Roohi Ahmed made from fabric, silk threads and lights mourning the loss of her mother, was a body and soul evocation while Sheharbano's exhumed form was another aspect of the inner body. Saeed Rehman's photographic print focused on the body as a gender issue and Akram Dost's dismembered image reminded one of Picasso's portrayals of Dora Maar. Diverse use of materials and icons of popular culture also gave definition to the objectification of the body. Adeela Suleman had assembled a sculpture using drain covers and screws and Auj Khan chose to

critique a luscious ice cream advertisement with his C print called Magnum B. By focusing on the psychological, personal, metaphysical, and sociopolitical the artists broke the myth that the body is just a physical decorative piece.

Familiar sounds of the Islamic world incorporated in a performance, video and sound installation by Shah Murad Aliani on the opening day further enlarged the scope and message of the exhibition. While the show underscores the need to innovate, a reminder of past experiments with calligraphy also need to be considered to place it in its true perspective. As early as the 1950's artists like Shemza, Hanif Ramay, Shakir Ali and Rashid Arshed had begun infusing it with the modernist spirit. Prolific production by Sadequain, Gulgee and even Jamil Naqsh carried this further but now we need to speak of today. Such exhibitions reiterate the fact that every age has to generate a spirit and level of engagement which is representative of its own time and cultural climate.

Tassadaq Sohail - Allah



Sheherbano Hussain



Roohi Ahmed - Body and Soul



Farah Mahbub



Wajid Ali



6 / 6 - THE LABYRINTH

If we uphold the premise that art should provoke more questions than answers and, most of all, should make us think about what we rarely want to contemplate then 6 / 6 The Labyrinth qualified in this context. Brainchild of artists / curators Roohi Ahmed and Abdullah Syed the exhibition centralized on six selected artists' individual relationship with the city of Karachi. The curators chose these artists not just because they are residents of Karachi but because they own the city as 'home,' for better or for worse. It is how they intercepted the rhythm and pulse of this metropolis on a physical and psychological plane and on a personal and collective level that twined and intertwined the exhibition into a labyrinthine maze.

The show opened on a philosophical note with the paintings of Syed Danish Ahmed. The artist paints reductive imagery with a miniature sensibility in a vibrant palette of bold reds, blues and blacks but it was his nihilistic equation, Mankind = Zero that piqued the imagination. He feels mass urbanization based mainly on technological advances has overwhelmed mankind leading to an essential loss of spiritual moorings. His paintings literally delineate this sense of loss through symbolic references of glaring, blank canvases, denuded trees, scattered showers and ghostly solitary, figures.

Photographer Farah Mahbub has the instincts of a survivor and wages this very onslaught with the unifying power of 'deen'. She has the soul of a native and gains that essential vitality of life from this city where she says she has the freedom to practice her religion. She locates her epicentre through photographs that are spare and contemplative and crowded and intense by turns.

The third artist in the show Sumaira Tazeen also approached the subject from a temporal and physical angle. An exponent of contemporary miniature she visualized the city as a web "which has an entrance but no-exit," and her silken skeins, unfurled, knotted and twisted decried chaos within and without. Living just off Shahrah e Faisal she has suffered the harassment of impromptu road closures when a VIP dignitary is in town and the red and white bars in her paintings delineate the menacing barricades that callously disrupt the rhythm of daily life. The calming tonalities of tea stains and the iridescence of silver leaf in her paintings evoking the dazzle of glitter and the tranquility of a restive mind is yet another juxtaposition of opposites that life is so obviously riddled with.

The cacophony of everyday encounters takes on greater urgency in the works of Roohi Ahmed as she identifies and confronts the

layered interweave of cultural flux through symbolic tears, flickering 'diyas' and graphic text. By emphasizing pointers like "simmt," "umeed," and "shanakht" she tried to establish a sense of direction, which is further augmented by the compass image and the faint mapping trails in her work. Her installation, a mass of interwoven paper strips called "Mobius Karachi" is almost a literal translation of the flexuous, crowded multi layered existence of city dwellers. "Ones life seems to twist from the inner to the outer and back again," she contends, "like the Mobius strip which gives an illusion of double surface and double edge but has only one surface and one edge." Her use of the kitchen sieve / colander speaks of sifting through the political, domestic, social and cultural chaos surrounding life as it is so essential to determining ones priorities and goals.

For artist Munawer Ali Syed pressure is triggered by the written word the kind found on vandalised street walls, at intersections and main thoroughfares. The artist appropriates the half rubbed scrawls, bit words, incomplete sentences and trailing messages on walls defaced by offensive graffiti and political slogans, to reinvent his own walls of protest. The curators had tried to capture this effect of graffiti bashing by erecting walls within the gallery space. Munawer's paintings exploiting the audacious vocabulary in a painterly context lost some

Danish Ahmed



of their sting in the process of reinterpretation and the intention of creating cultural confusion and implosion was somewhat diluted but the message registered nonetheless.

To Abdullah Syed the use and misuse of the written word renders it an agent of confusion. It becomes counter productive when it is misappropriated. His painting Discarded Proverbial Wisdom comments on the demise of the written word, the Xerox copies a boon and bane of the mechanized world. Similarly he observes, "words To Let as To Let, accompanied by digits on vacant billboards in Karachi, form an encrypted code – a communication error – a gap between our desires and errors." To recapture the power of text prompted him to learn Braille and feel first hand the intensity of encrypting thoughts with words. Instead it was the tactility of the medium and the order of raised dots that drew him into its own web of design and pattern raising the issue of missing links among what we see, feel and communicate.

Basically a frank, young generation insight on life in a burgeoning, third world, mega city, this exhibition went far beyond a show of decorative canvases only. Abdullah's take on his own brainchild 6/6 Labyrinth, was by far the most circuitous in comparison to other participating artists who approached the theme with relative directness.

Danish Ahmed



Other than Danish Ahmed's painterly exercises, the rest of the works were in mix media and concentrated more on projection of potent ideas and their requisite display rather than their aesthetic attributes. As such the show required thoughtful engagement rather than easy viewing, but the subject is topical and most of the art is easily identifiable when understood in context. Most of the artists dwelt on the conflict between the spiritual and the material which shows that there is a struggle to keep the alive the soul of the individual, on a personal level and the city on a collective plane.

Karachi Kiya.

An adjunct to 6/6 the Labrynth was an installation constructed out of a collaborative community project called Karachi Kiya. This exercise gave wider breadth to the theme of the exhibition as it solicited public participation.

What is Karachi and what it means to me?

This question was posed by the curators to the public in various localities of Karachi. They were asked to record their impressions on small yellow Post-Its. What they received in return was a plethora of thumbnail sketches, doodles, scribbles and notes of a remarkably varied order. A visual ventilation of thoughts that ranged from grudging

Roohi Ahmed - Mobius Strips



patriotism to absolute disgust at the breakdown of civic amenities, abuse of official power, high rise menace, lack of civic consciousness amongst the people as well as the (dwindling) joys of 'home sweet home' kind sentiments. The scathing, humorous, biting nature of these responses was a very interesting index of public opinion related to Karachi.

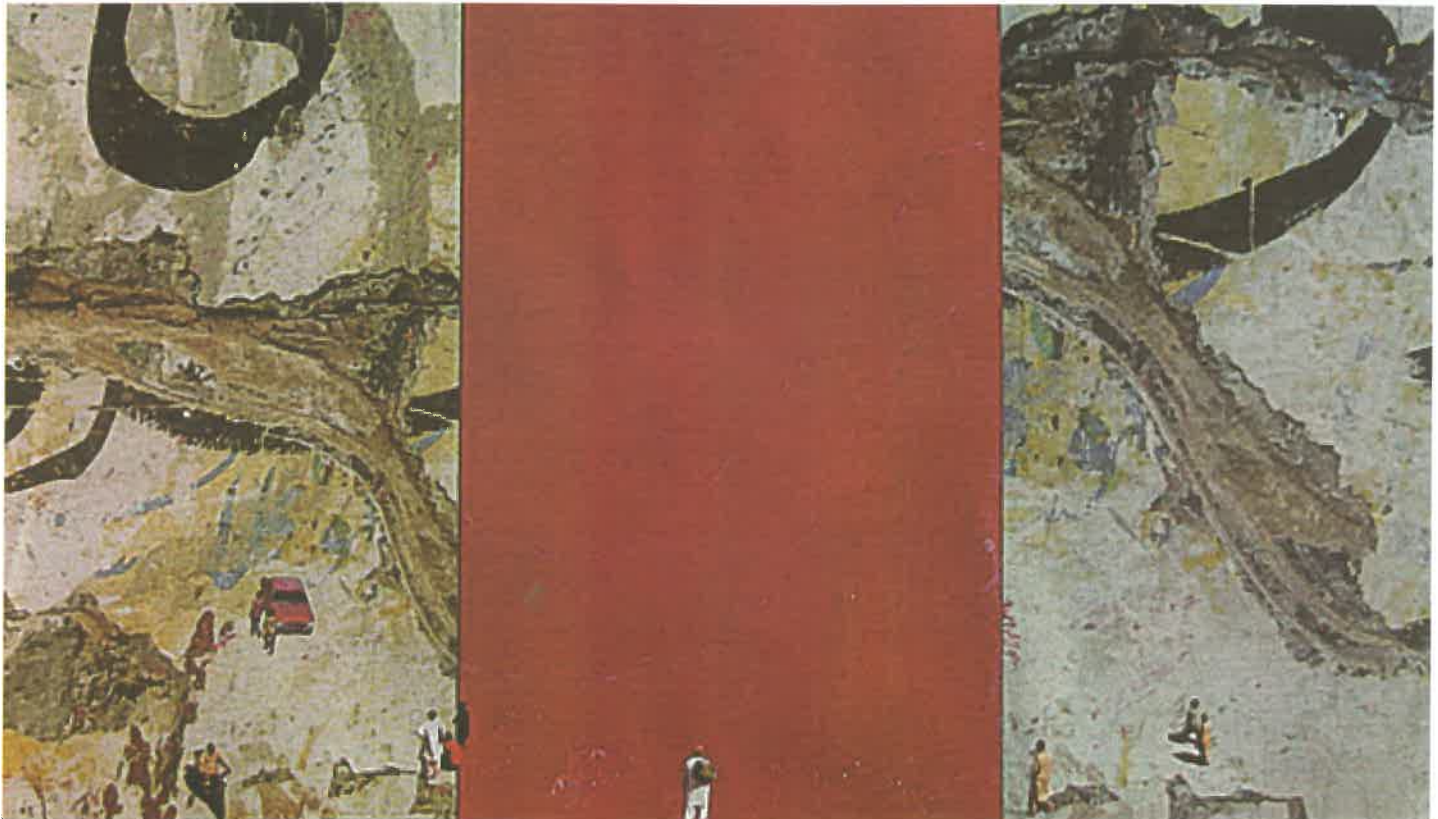
Abdullah Syed - Toilet

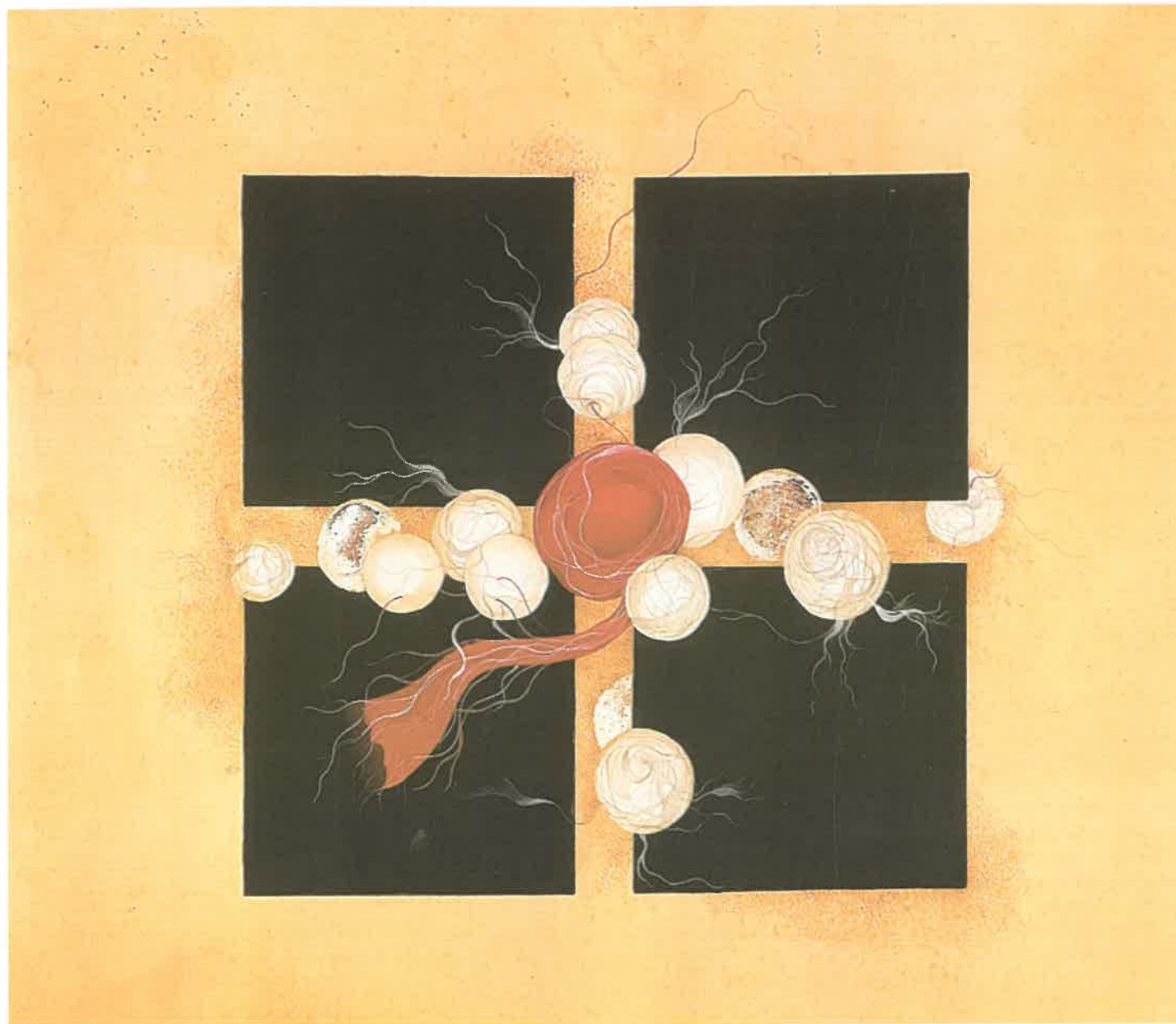
Newsline July 2006

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Munawer Ali - Walls





Fareeda Batool. Nai Reesan Shehr Lahore Diyan



Unlike lighthearted often frivolous jubilations marking Independence Day celebrations Shanaakht a multi media festival distinguished itself by offering audiences diverse forms of entertaining, engaging and exploratory events revolving around the complex issue of national "identity." Organized by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) the festival was spread over several programs centralizing on the genres of audio, visual and performing arts. The art exhibition in the festival titled Sohni Dharti was arranged in collaboration with Vasl, an International Artists Collective largely responsible for the currency of new and mix - media expression here.

Sohni Dharti's populist stance is a radical move. Fine arts patronized by and confined largely to elitist circles is seldom so easily accessible to the common man and to exhibit in a communal venue rather than regular gallery surroundings was a deliberate choice on the part of the organizers. For a public that still associates art with oil on canvas and watercolour on paper providing them a fare of conceptually motivated, digitally manned, multi media expression is an advanced exercise – but perhaps a necessary one. Such exhibitions will not only acclimatize the general public to the changing face of art but also jog their cognitive abilities by involving them as active participants.

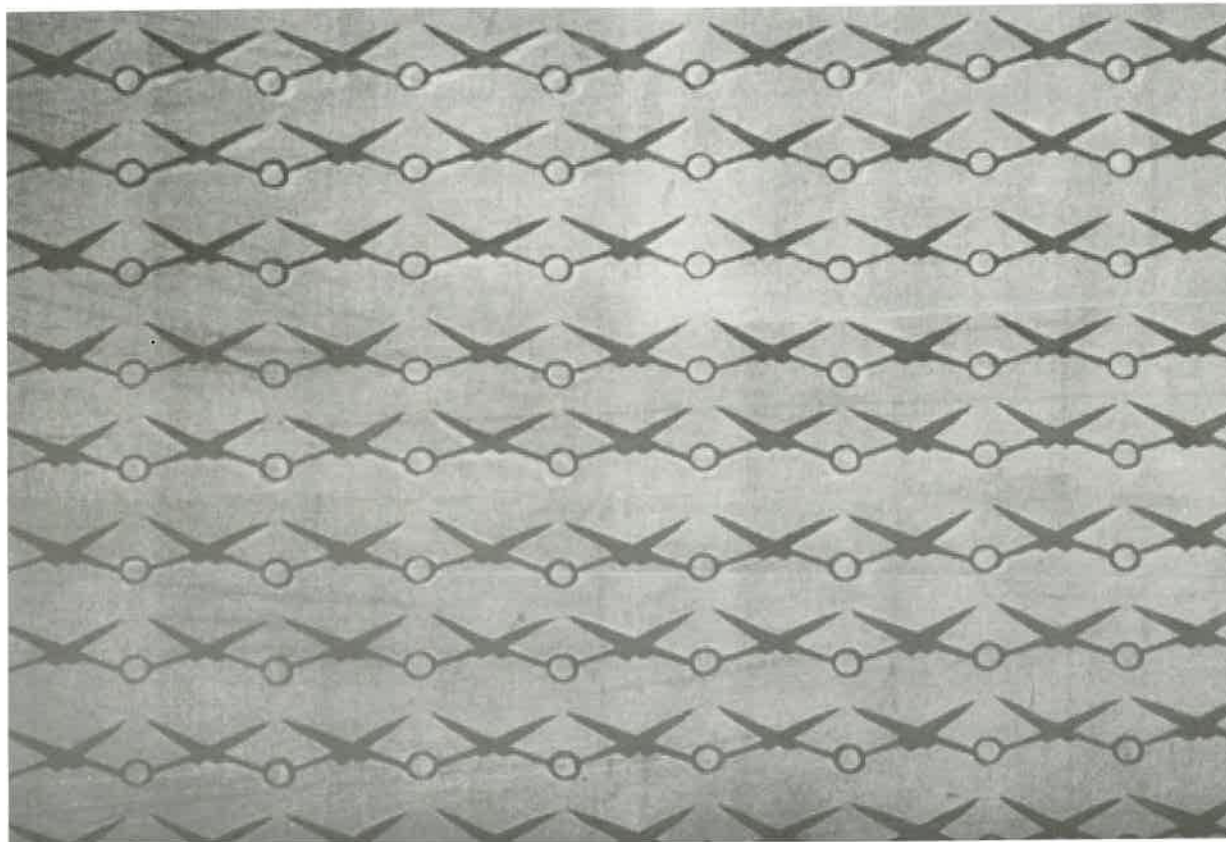
SHANAAKHT FESTIVAL -- SOHNI DHARTI

In art of this nature they are not expected to 'see' as passive onlookers but perceive the exhibit as an event or situation. Sohni Dharti as a mix-media show played on this interactive exchange to further the dialogue on the concept of "Shanaakht" with the public.

The art on display, by a special selection of seventeen artists "openly embracing all media" was a mix of audio, video and sound installations, sculpture, painting, photography and prints. As almost all the artists were young with a fondness for experimental work one expected some fresh perspectives and novel expressions to come forth. The large floor space at the entrance was well utilized by Ahsan Iqbal for his site specific work in progress. Using broad strips of red canvas tape he had constructed a meandering trail dividing the floor

space much like the LoC separating Pakistan from its neighbour. The colour red signified blood and the trail interrupted, after a certain length, by a drain cover appeared as if it was exhausting itself into the manhole – an oblique comment on Partition and lives lost in vain – a memory that still mars identity issues.

Conceptually complex at first glance most works revealed themselves on engagement. Asim Butts oil on canvas tableau Tutti Frutti was one such piece. The artist had used his drawing abilities and knowledge of anatomy to skillfully construct a pre and post Partition scenario. Playing with see through effects he had merged historical images with present day figuration set on an antiquated map. This juxtaposition of past and present addressed the complexity of developing an identity from various angles. Are we as a people caught in a time warp – or



Zahid Hussain

shackled to tradition – or victims of historical mishaps? The artwork was open to independent inquiry.

Auj Khan's rather shabby but very red Hot Seat set against an (acrylic on canvas) army camouflage print backdrop was self explanatory. The raring, ambition personified horse symbol, amidst veiled sterling and dollar currency icons and images of Bush and Blair as restraining agents spoke of our precarious military might and the hidden hand of western intervention.

The pivotal seat of power was also the subject of Bani Abadi's *The Address*. Recreating the set of table, chair, discreet vase of flowers and the Quaid's national photograph in the background, (usually arranged for heads of state during their address to the nation on television), she made her point by leaving the seat empty. She had locked the image on a television screen placed in the hall. The static image invited debate on the leadership vacuum we have had since the death of Quaid-i-Azam.

Images of open scissors, ready to snap, stenciled all over the canvas in sludgy army greens screamed secession. Zahid Hussain had skillfully manipulated the cut and divide inference of scissors. Munawar Ali's clay and copper objects supposedly two halves of a whole rent asunder objectified partition very clearly also as on the surface both had similar appearances. The twist lay in the difference between clay and copper. Placed on a cushion splashed with blood the evocation was palpable but the piece deserved a pronounced display.

Mahbub Shah's *Sabz Parcham* in varying tonalities of green can be interpreted as a lack of consensus on crucial national issues. As a nation we vehemently purport many hues and shades of opinions and fail to maintain a unified front. Fareeda Batool's lenticular print *Nai Reesan Lahore Diyan* projected an ill kempt street scene of shabby high rise buildings. On account of the biconvex nature of the print one could actually feel the young rope skipping girl in the front, galloping forward. The work critiques unregulated urban sprawl. Taken symbolically it alludes to our rapid progression towards an uncertain, disparate sense of modernity. Ahmed Manganhars blurred chalk drawings, were hazy portraits of Muslim literati of the 1900's. Archaic imagery, tools and media sits uncomfortably in a high tech, digitized era – somewhat similar to our national and international status.

An animated video by Marium Sohail called *Refining Islamabad 2006*, a 6 inch LCD display was a new take, but an apt one on our political identity. The artist explains that "The video *Refining* is a speeded up run through of photographs taken by me in Islamabad on the 23rd of March 2005 (the day of the National Day Parade, being broadcast

live on TV) and then on the 3rd of March 2006 (the day President Bush visited Pakistan and met with President Musharraf)." The video has then been shot off a computer screen while the pictures are being viewed, repeatedly, back and forth, almost like a neurotic activity.

The term "refining" appears on the screen as the software runs through the pictures, as a default action in the popular picture viewing software called Picasa, which refines each image as you see it. The Artist is originally from Islamabad and has been documenting various aspects of the city since 2001.

Under a tree in the forecourt artist Seema Nusrat performed an interactive piece called *Altamas – e – Dua*, (A prayer when all else fails) by distributing paper flags amongst the public. Ayaz Jokio's interactive piece centered on hand prints as identity icons. The audience was invited to cast their impressions on tablets displayed on the venue walls.

The Audio piece from an ongoing project by Sophie Ernst (Lahore Berlin) 2007 was a narration of subjects from India and Pakistan talking about the homes they left behind at Partition.

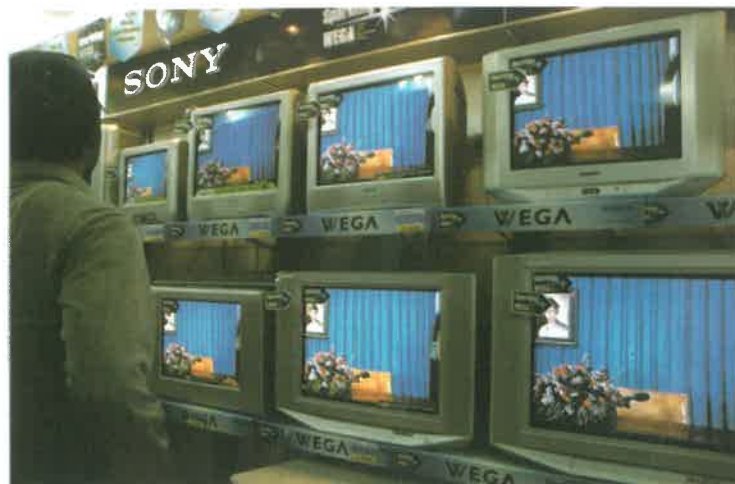
It was of great significance that the Indus Valley School of Art, Karachi agreed to lend the famous Bashir Mirza mural "The last train from Amritsar" to CAP which went on public display at this event for the first time as a tribute not just to the sacrifices made on partition but also to the late master of Pakistan.

Events of this nature designed for viewer participation are few and far between and crowd involvement is negligible at the moment but if there is a rapid succession of such programs interaction is bound to increase as the will to engage and exercise one's right to think is now on the rise. The electronic media has already nudged awareness levels and public participation is very much in keeping with the present emphasis on democracy. Stimulating dialogue, discourse and interaction can lead to a better understanding of one's identity. VASL's main motive behind *Sohni Dharti* was to utilize its art resources to put together a broad array of contemporary work that functions around themes and concerns surrounding Pakistan as it marks its 60 years and its attempt to stir the perceptions of the people needs to be acknowledged.

Ahsan Jamal



Bani Abidi - The Address



Ayaz Jakhio



LINES OF CONTROL

Addressing conflicting issues through the lens of art may not change the shape of the world but it can certainly elevate our understanding and awareness of them leading to informed choices and conscious decisions. A deliberative exhibition, Lines of Control, needs to be accessed as much for the art on display as for the spirit in which it was conceived. Curated by Hammad Nassar, cofounder of the London based arts organization Green Cardamom, the exhibition is a contemporary take on the physical, psychological and cultural disruptions created by geopolitical divides the world over - but it is LoC's special emphasis on the Partition of 1947 that will strike chords amongst audiences with sub-continental roots.

Curator Nasar observes that, "Partition has been referred to in local popular literature and the media as a 'holocaust'. But unlike the holocaust of European Jews during the Nazi regime, it has not spawned a visual culture of commemoration." And, "If memorials are the mechanism through which 'people make promises to the future about the past,' then this suggests a troubling lack of commitment from those who lived through it and the generations that have followed."

Indeed critical artistic production exploring this rupture began to emerge only as recently as the Babri mosque destruction in 1992 and the Gujrat genocide in 2002. In 2005 a LoC project, coinciding

Rashid Rana. Offshore Accounts.

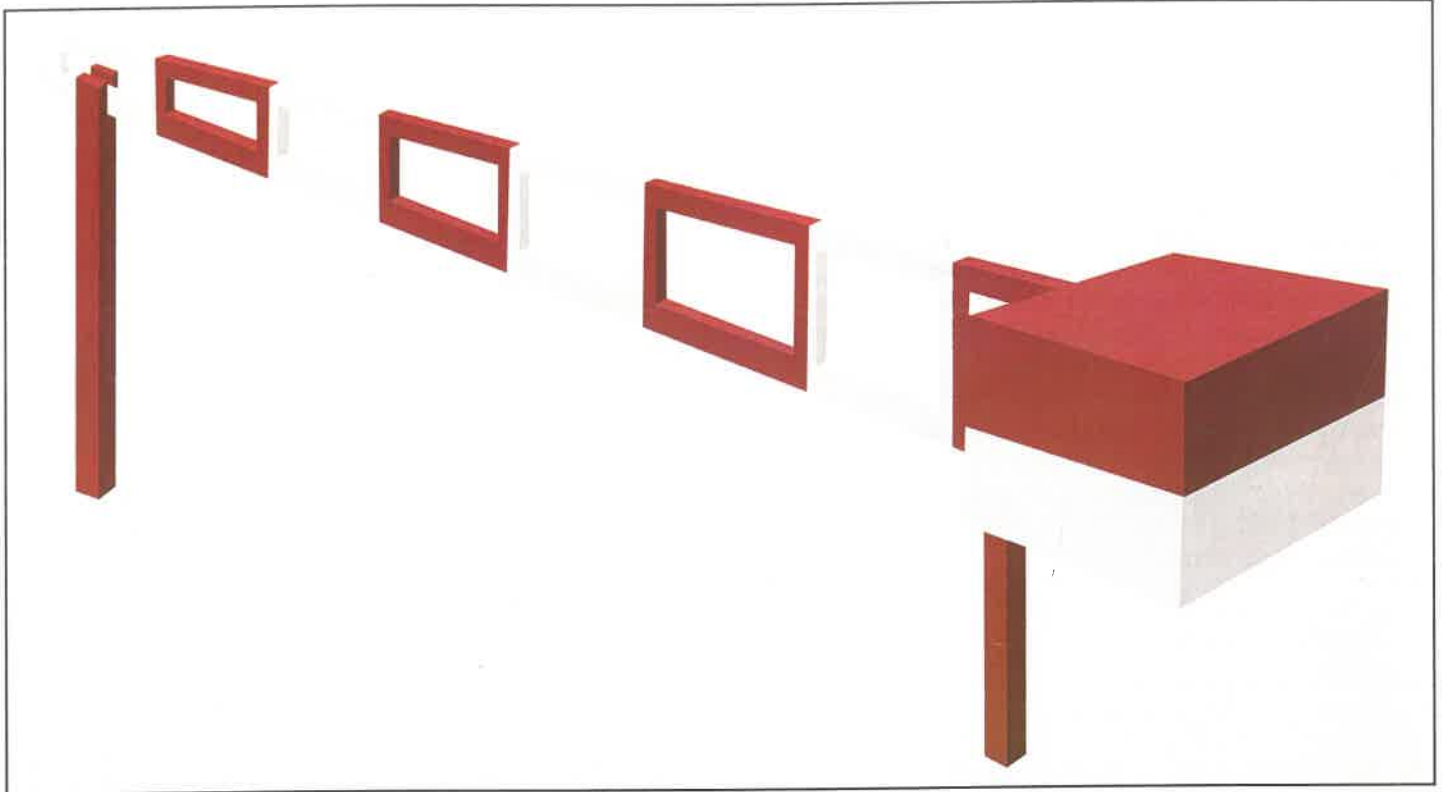


Rashid Rana. Detail

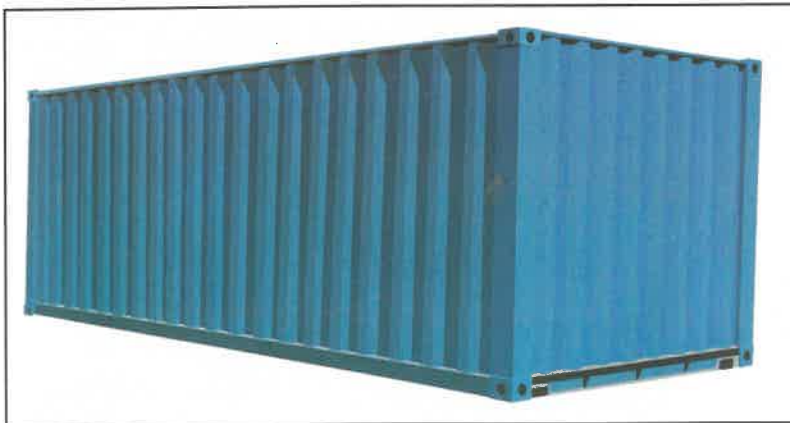
with the 60th anniversary of Partition, was initiated in a symposium at the Royal Geographical Society, London. Instead of 'a big exhibition' the group of twenty odd artists, curators, film makers, cartographers and critics opted for "a constellation of events that would build on each other and spark different enquiries often tangential, and with no specific end in sight".

The subsequent Green Cardamom LoC project adheres to this spirit of inquiry - where ever it may lead. The contemporary works released from the format of 'fixed ideas' embrace new perspectives screening

BANI ABIDI Security Barrier Type E- Jinnah International Airport, Karachi.



BANI ABIDI Security Barrier Type H-Near the American Consulate, Abdullah Haroon Road Karachi



Amar Kanwar -A Season Outside



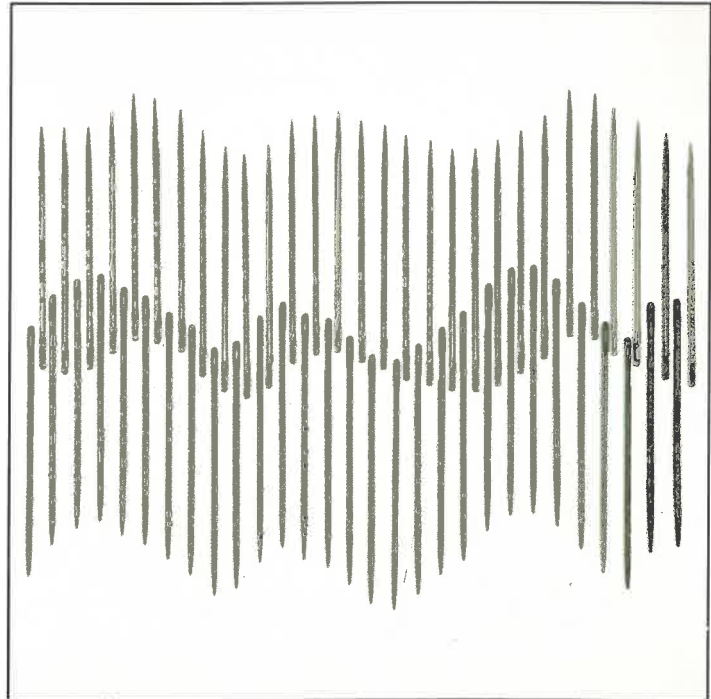
Partition objectively and subjectively. Veering between clarity, relative clarity and mere suggestion, the works, essentially by artists born in a 'free' state with considerable familiarity with western constructs and existing new media techniques, are best scrutinized technically and conceptually.

By far the most direct interpretation of LoC is Bani Abidi's Security Barriers. A-L, a composite piece comprising several digital prints of metal containers, barriers, obstacles, barricades et al. More than a physical manifestation of enforced border controls they come across as a slice of daily life in cities under siege from dictatorial regimes. Easily identifiable to the checkpoints, hurdles and impediments set up, on a routine basis, to restrict movement, cordon off or segregate the populous from the vicissitudes of the ruling junta such graphics make for palpable protest art emanating from third world nations. While not as literal, sculptor Roohi Ahmed's, Between the Lines, and Fireworks series is also pointedly suggestive; comprising radiating and linear arrangements of large piercing sack cloth sewing needles, the works evoke the trauma of state control through coercion /intimidation.

Appropriating historical images to build a new synthesis Rashid Rana's Offshore Accounts, addresses LoC in form as well as content. His V shaped installation, comprising two independent hoarding sized images of ocean waves joined at the centre, optically straightens into a single rectangular span of choppy waters when viewed from a distance. Other than the physical play of cleavage upclose and union from afar it is the twist of micro pixels on the installation dissolving into an illusive macro image that critique Partition. Countless minute photographs of 18th century British frigates juxtaposed with similarly small pictures of garbage and detritus imply the presence of the East India Company as an agent of subsequent destruction.

Yet another digitally manipulated commentary on the historic split Concrete Oracles by Seher Shah conjures a clash of civilizations. Playing with architectural iconography of various cultures, Greek, Jewish, European and Indian she fabricates arcane scenarios which intrigue but not necessarily grip the mind.

Similarly most works by a host of other artists are elaborate exploratory exercises open to as much debate. Indeed the farther away we are (read distanced in time from Partition) the greater (often less accurate) the generalizations we make. The speculative nature of the show is the curatorial premise. The onus is thus on the viewers to exercise their own sense of judgment.



ROOHI AHMED
Two Nation Theory, Between the Lines Series

ART DUBAI - OPPORTUNITY AWAILED

An ambitious undertaking, Art Dubai, Middle East's premier art fair, unsurprisingly, wants to be on par with its European and American counterparts in Basel, New York, London, Berlin, and Miami. Even though some of these fairs are much older, with plenty of hype, Art Dubai, like a child prodigy has taken a great leap forward. Revising and augmenting its breadth with each successive show the management is aiming for top line scores regarding production, performance and sales. Among the many innovations introduced in 2008 was the policy of specially selecting and inviting one country to spotlight its art, not in the commercial booths allotted to other galleries, but in a customized pavilion area. Pakistan was the first proud recipient of this invite.

From the Pakistani perspective Art Dubai 2008 was opportunity time. It was the right art in the right place at the right time. Curator Salima Hashmi's premise, *Desperately Seeking Paradise*, was not only well

assimilated and expressed by the artists she had handpicked for the exhibition, the work seen by a diverse viewership touched just the right chords. Politically, socially and culturally Pakistan is in the eye of the storm and the media blitz worldwide is in many instances adding to the woes. As nationals amidst this very chaotic environment Pakistani artists are now producing very reactive art.

Director Pakistan Pavillion Salma Tuqan while acknowledging that "*Desperately Seeking Paradise* demonstrates Pakistan's vital contribution to contemporary art in Asia" was also perceptive enough to understand that "Pakistan's distinctive art scene has developed independent of commercial influences dictating its content, giving birth to art channeled by its artists own beliefs and imaginations."

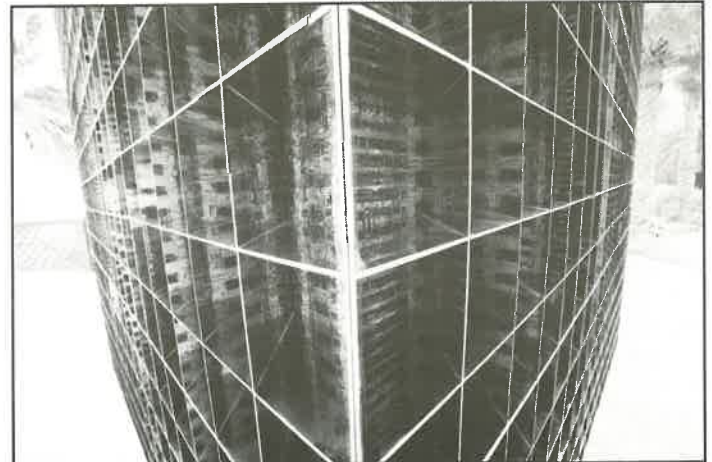
Hashmi's concept of *Desperately Seeking Paradise*, so reflective of the current miasma here, is borrowed from British Muslim intellectual Ziauddin Sardars witty travelogues of 2004. It identifies with his futile quest to reconcile liberal ideals with an increasingly authoritarian and fundamentalist Islamic world. But by keeping her "curatorial premise fluid" she had given her artists the freedom to play with their own notions of Paradise.

Among the unmissables in the pavilion Huma Mulji's *Arabian Delight* was an eye-ful. A life size, taxidermied camel crammed into an oversized, common labourers traveling suitcase as an exotic offering was an ironic / contradictory image of the respected and resilient 'ship of the desert.' This deliberate inversion symbolized the unfulfilled dreams of the hardy migrant workers who always conceived Dubai

Khalil Chishti, *Take a Break*, 2006.



Rashid Rana, *Desperately Seeking Paradise*



as the ultimate land of plenty and whose sweat and toil has transformed a desert city into an ultra urban megalopolis it now is. A video installation by Lahore-based Sophie Ernst, *There is No Place Like America*, portrayed young Pakistani men talking idealistically - and with ridiculous naivety - of their dreams of a rosy future in the west; but the videos were screened in fractured form on cardboard boxes, emphasizing the transitory nature of their imaginings.

Using optical devices such as mirror images Rashid Rana's mammoth pixilated cube as alluring as a kaleidoscope seduced the viewer's eye only to discover that it was mired in an array of conflicting imagery. This is Rana's "un-reality" - the not so heavenly paradise that distances him from the truth.

For a (Pakistani) public desensitized by a media overload of blood and gore paintings by artist Ali Reza sprang no surprises. Projecting extremist elements, military and police mafia and an abundance of weaponry is trite as it no longer elicits the response it should.

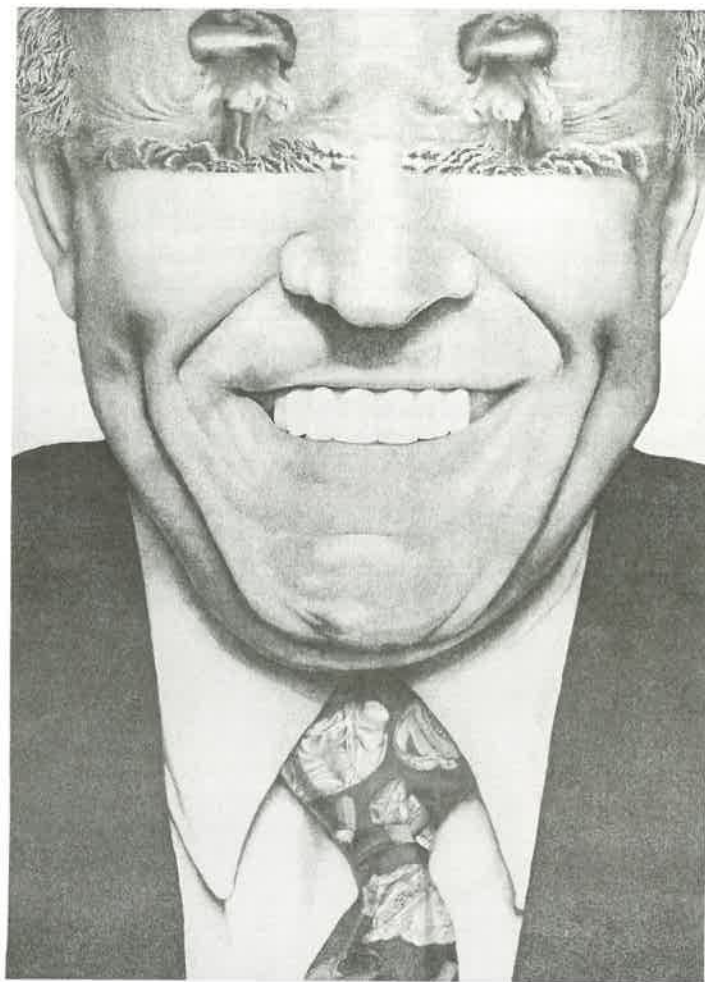
Durriya Kazi's raw clay bodies lying in the mud patch amidst the flower beds did not create the poignancy they deserved either. The piece also suffered from a not so vantage display. A dust to dust concept it evoked the fate of the forgotten dead - she was addressing the war victims of Afghanistan and Iraq.

While impressive in concept Naiza Khans, *The Crossing* staged on a dhow lost on impact amidst the vastness of the artificial lake bordering the pavilion, Iron / steel plated body armour inspired by her

Nusra Latif Qureshi - Garden Visits



Faiza Butt - Moderate Fantasy Violence



lingerie series were like 'skins off the body that we shed or embrace as we negotiate the ... *The Crossing*.' She stated, adding 'They mirror the body that stands for a dysfunctional system... at war with itself.'

If art in the pavilion was ticklish, gritty and oblique, Pakistani works at London based Green Cardamom Gallery in the main venue, was edgier still. Curator Hammad Nassars succinct choices were, hard hitting and pointed - this helped consolidate the rebellious Pakistani stance of a country grappling with a siege mentality within and without. Taking pot shots at the national flags of politically significant



Naiza Khan - The Crossing

countries Muhammed Zeeshan's album of miniature paintings extolled the artists' working skills and conceptual acumen. In the Art Park downstairs his installation of the American flag enacted a similar subversion with the use of the red and blue of Pepsi cans. By asking visitors to partake of the canned drink right off from the installation he managed to disintegrate the said flag. Hamra Abass's filigreed plates composed of fine paper strips were exquisite paper sculptures but it was the not so savoury text message of "Please get served," even more finely imprinted on them that jogged the senses and sculptor Khalil Chisti's life size, thrash bag plastic, sculpture effigies addressing the human condition were very potent and confrontational. The coveted red dot adorned Rashid Rana's digital print at Green Cardamom and he scored a third showing at Art Dubai in yet another gallery. An impressive, oversized digital print of a red Persian carpet by him was exhibited for sale at India's leading Chemould Prescott Road, Contemporary Art Gallery. With a successful Sotheby sale behind him

Rana is presently one of Pakistan's most successful international artists. Young upcoming Sana Arjumand's painting was also among contemporary Indian art at Aicon gallery from London. Art that pulses with strong critical observations addressing human injustice, frailty, violence and discrimination is bound to stir the senses of any thinking individual and Pakistani works at Art Dubai had enough pizzazz to engage the serious viewer.

It was reported that Huma Mulji's 'Arabian Delight' was acquired by representatives of the media mogul Charles Saatchi for \$8000. It is exciting for a young artist to have her work acquired by Saatchi but this is a very paltry amount offered by a collector especially known for his exorbitant spending on art. After all the camel was purchased, slaughtered, skinned, stuffed and transported to Dubai – it deserves better!

Muhammad Zeeshan, Flag Ceremony, 2007





Huma Mulji Arabian Delight

FRESH AGENDA

In the exhibition Fresh Agenda three art educators, Adnan Lotia, Sohail Abdullah and Zairah Maher reexamine their artistic practice and re-evaluate their concerns as artists and educators.

Adnan Lotia received his B.Sc. in Art from New York University School of Education in 2001 and has participated in select group shows. Since 2007 he has been heading the Art department at C.A.S. School. Guiding students through their O and A Level curriculums has made him realize that 'drawing' is generally perceived as a physical exercise where the emphasis is merely on technical rendering only. There is a need to distinguish between mere draftsmanship and an animated drawing where the artists hand, through effective, individual stroke-play and composition sense, imparts feeling to the subject. In the light of this experience Lotia asked himself, "what would a drawing produced entirely with technical skill resemble? Can the limit of precision and competence touch the edge of expression?" His series of finely drawn portraits of family members in pencil on canvas, define this research into what a good drawing is supposed to be. Precisely drawn and with great attention to detail, proportion, posture and expression the works still lack the essential vigour that brings life to a drawing. Rendered in pencil the overall tenor of the works is 'grey'-inspite of delicate tonal variations the dramatic contrasts of light and dark that accentuate dimensions, is absent. Lotia reiterates "Stripping

these portraits of the artist's touch and relying entirely on my skill was a demanding process, but hopefully, it will help me understand my students' work better." Not having divulged his deductions Lotia has left the average viewer to draw his/her own conclusions. His premise could have created greater impact if he had juxtaposed the bland drawings with their animate versions in order to highlight the essential difference.

Zairah Maher a 2005 graduate from The City and Guilds of London Art School teaches A-Level art at The Lyceum School and has undertaken some curatorial projects for the Shanaakht Festival. This is the first exhibition of her work in Karachi. Revisiting her understanding of the female body and psyche Maher deconstructs conventional notions to evolve contemporary expressions of the feminine spirit. Playing with the ladies (red) handbag and its varied connotations she has created three bag forms that illustrate the womanly presence. The bag/ purse as an everyday wardrobe accessory and the bridal bag symbolizing joyousness of an auspicious event are easily deciphered. The bag as a womb or container of the pregnant form tickles the imagination giving the viewer a taste of the postmodernist mindset. She carries this further in the canvas series where wooden stretchers represent bodies that she has constructed, and then 'clothed' with

Zairah Maher



muslin. A finish of rabbit skin glue forms a 'skin' or a membrane, which are perforated with a needle and embroidered with silk thread. She discloses that "the decoration on these 'bodies' grows out of drawings made from embryonic cells, pomegranate arils, and traditional jewelry." And adds "The embroidered forms can be seen as a growth on these bodies, nurtured and gemlike, or as something possibly festering away quietly." A nuanced viewpoint this premise becomes somewhat credible only when the works are viewed in context.

Sohail Abdullah an Indus Valley graduate finished his B.F.A in Sculpture and Photography in 2006. He was a Resident artist at Khoj and Shantiroad Studio, Bangalore, in 2008 and has been a Support Teacher at British Overseas School and Visiting Faculty at IVSAA since 2007. Raising more questions than answers Sohail Abdullahs relook at the equation between the photographic image and the memory of a moment is worked through a series of photograms and prints.

This is a personal revisit and for an onlooker to accord meaning to the content the imagery needs to be reprocessed according to his /her imaginative stance. He states that "The photograph created to remember and share experiences is created at the cost of memory". Memory appears to reside within the photographic image, to tell its story in response to our gaze...Yet memory does not reside in a photograph, or in any camera image, so much as it is produced by it.

The camera image is a technology of memory, a mechanism through which one can construct the past and situate it in the present. Images have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals. They can lend shape to histories and personal

Sohail Abdullah



stories, often providing the material evidence on which claims of truth are based, yet they also possess the capacity to capture the unattainable.

Like Mahers canvas series Abdullahs propositions demand extended engagement .

Dawn Gallery February 14 2010



Adnan Lotia



FRAMING THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Based on a series of scholarly readings held from Feb to May 2010, this exhibition evolved out of a conscious examination of literary and cultural traditions to discover and build original forms/ imagery, as opposed to borrowing and improvising western constructs. Curator Sumbul Khan persuaded artists Danish Raza, Syed Faraz Ali, Salman Hassan and Hajra Haider to come on board as participants and senior artist MehrAfroz, who has always derived inspiration from the vernacular and the indigenous, agreed to mentor the complex act of interpreting and translating literary text into visual imagery. Assimilated thoughts were given practical implementation during the summer break and Framing the Local Context came forth as a composite show espousing personalized expressions of art that speak of today but in the light of the artists individual understandings of those readings.

Having read Tilism Hoshroba during his childhood Danish Raza found resonance in Asif Farukhi's lectures particularly his description of 'musawir jadugar' and the power of the artist to change the reality around him. Rather than opt for 'good magic' which he feels may not be able to counter the adversities hitting us, his turbulent paintings imagine an 'evil musawir jadugar' wreaking havoc to portray the chaos and destruction surrounding us. Danish's embrace of the fantasy epic character sits well with his surreal art leanings. Positioned somewhere between a graphic artist and miniature painter he has brought new meaning to his penchant for embossed pattern and metallic paint. While the menacing waters in the Great Serpent of Sorrow spell the devastating floods and the reality of Killing Targets hits right at the heart of Karachi, it is the intricate Garden of Death prayer rug (simulation) which draws you in. Bordered with a minute edging of mosque domes and minarets on one side and dripping droplets on the other and an explosive rehash of oriental design in between, the work, prosaic at first glance is quite a twister. But it is in Mother of Lies where the artist moves away from tentative modulations to give free rein to his flair for fantasy to craft a fictional monstrosity. As an artist Danish Reza has responded intelligently to this exercise of accessing graphical and painterly descriptions from cultural and literary sources.

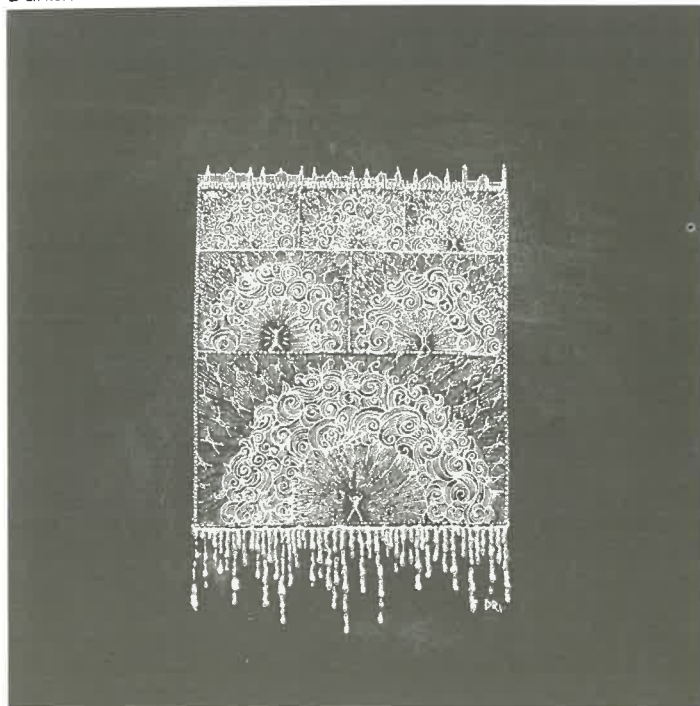
Veteran Mehr Afroz's Gulistan Hamara series is a sombre but potent take on the cliched concept of Paradise as a Garden. Drawing inspiration from the pictorial imagery found in Urdu and Persian poetry, particularly compilations like the Gulistan (Rose Garden) or Bostaan of Saadi, she has inverted the pleasurable sentiments of natural splendour by intersecting the frames with images of missiles and warheads and pain inflicting agents such as thorns and nails.

This inversion is common fare in today's terrorist induced art but it is Afroz's adroit manipulation of the symbols and use of the Paradise garden as it appears in literature, miniature and architecture that makes the works a well-articulated series. Technically her choice of motifs, style of page making, the element of stitch craft and the drawn images reference the ancient craft and art of album making and theoretically she plays with the positive and destructive sensibilities the 'garden' concept can generate in people. In Sabz Bagh Dikhana she critiques the clerics for prompting suicide bombings with false promises of paradise.

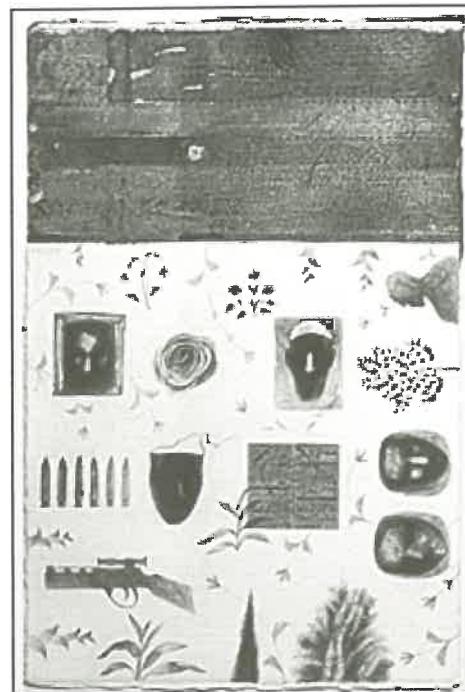
"Living in four centuries at the same time," a point made by Dr. Wahab Suri struck chords with Hajra Haider. But her outsize installation, a ball of rope-threaded in red and blue was a somewhat unresolved attempt to describe this possibility. Syed Faraz Ali's attention was drawn to the role of common people in our lives during the lectures which resulted in portrait paintings of the support staff at his work place – not very exciting – one expects more from this artist. Photographic prints translating a verse of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, by Salman Hassan, needed extended engagement to be understood in context.

Studying, owning and evaluating homegrown ideologies as points of artistic references is a direction that needs to be pursued with serious intent and purpose if we desire to bring authenticity to our art and this exercise proves that it is doable.

Danish Raza

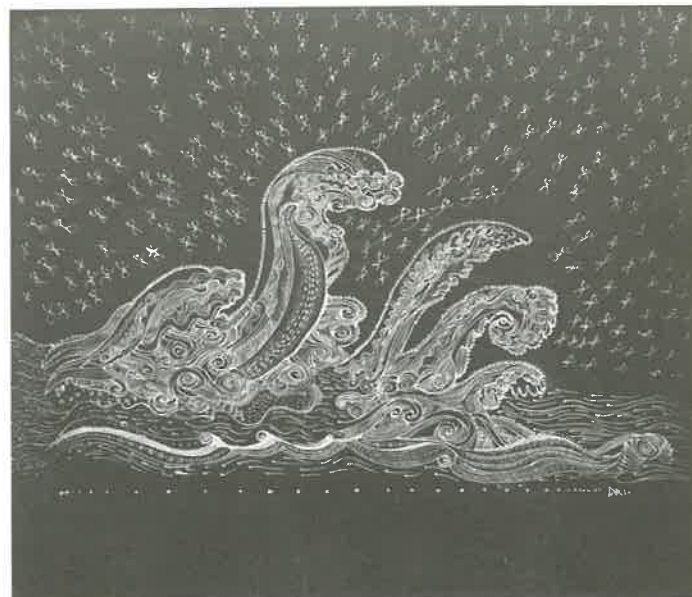
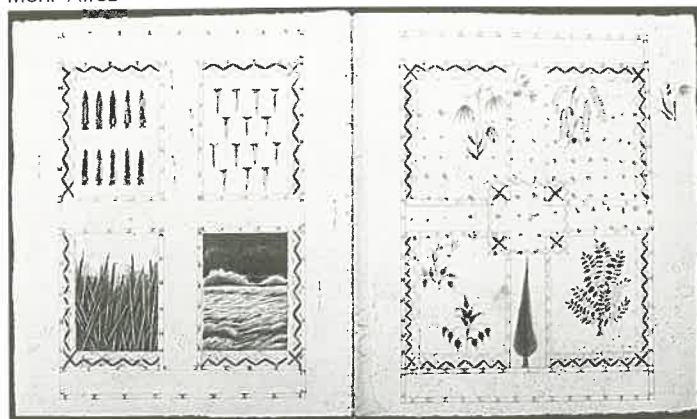


Mehr Afroz



Danish Raza

Mehr Afroz



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

A STATE OF FLUX

Art today needs a new effort at clarification of its principles because we are living in an age that is giving itself over to self-destruction with terrifying enthusiasm. However much art was of its times, it always had something timeless about it. But present art seems completely of its times, Pop art was the moment when this truth became self evident but a rapidly changing / deteriorating world order in terms of moral, social, political, economic and cultural values has radically altered the status of selfhood. Having lost its idealism art is now a bewildering array of expressions. Recent works by artist Samina Mansuri centralize on the prevalent confusion and loss of self. In a series of drawings, paintings, mix media works, video and sculptures she portrays man's transition through mutation. Her hybrid figures, part human, part machine and part animal are genderless stereotypes with no individuality. They are malleable and capable of changing into something else - thus purporting the idea that today identity itself is not fixed but in a state of flux. The core content of Mansuri's art addresses the current complexities - this state of flux and man's ability to adapt to the pressures confronting him.

Under siege on many fronts be it psychological or physical, moral or material man is constantly battling / juggling for survival. By inventing a sub human species of mutants Mansuri endeavours to portray a humanity open to change - and capable of taking on this chaos rather than succumbing to it. Her figures are not rigid and firm but pliant and mutable as if they have accepted the fact that flexibility is the only form of permanence.

Visibly ambiguous and bizarre her paintings begin to reveal themselves, to some extent, on deeper engagement. Viewed collectively one can locate in them a complex discourse on world issues threatening humanity like poverty and hunger, environmental pollution, biological warfare, gross misuse of technology, natural calamities and man made disasters. The dominant impact however is of the living forms that she has invented - it is a new visual language of robotic figures. They are not persons but still occupy a social place. Apart from their social roles they appear to be sub human blanks with no inner lives. Lacking critical consciousness of their inhuman condition they mirror a soulless society. This is the most disturbing aspect of Mansuri's art - an indifference to the spiritual condition. The best traditional art reveals qualities like dignity and empathy that makes us human. It is morally concerned and often shows the moral under siege in an immoral world. Integrity and generosity of spirit struggle to hold their own in a world that lacks both. Mansuri's art registers a life devoid of these essentials, one that records a synthesis between humanity and the changing environment as a survival measure with

Samina Mansuri

scant thought of salvation through the spiritual. A loveless art is the epitome of the modern denial of love - indeed the modern inability to love. Her predictions appear far fetched and extremist but the sad reality is that this stance is generated by a very palpable current reality. This imagery because of its shock value can be considered as a wake up call for humanity.

Art now exists in the shadow of science and technology which are worshipped more than ever. Disillusionment with art - even by artists - seems to go hand in hand with its development in modernity, so much so that disillusionment seems to drive innovation. Mansuri too, driven by an inner flux, has fabricated a novel species - an absolute antithesis of the human beings pictured in traditional art - which asserts that there is no escape from unhumanity today - from the superficial self of daily life.

Simply titled, *New Works*, this exhibition is a continuation of a series of drawings by the same name, shown as early as 2000 when this peculiar figurative imagery first came to the fore. The current works pertaining to 2002-05, show further evolution of the same model as she moves from monochrome drawings on paper onto painting in acrylic on mylar and casting of sculptural forms and fabrication of architectural drawings. While these works were a logical next step they were also influenced in a large measure by her move to Canada. The shift was an upheaval that Mansuri needed. An artist who assiduously courts challenge as a necessary element of growth and discovery she found relocation in the new environment a liberating experience. It gave her the scope and independence to indulge in installation and video art.

Samina Mansuri - Enigma



Samina Mansuri - Distance



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A post 9 /11 project, DARR, 37 Conversations, a video installation, was a discourse on fear followed by Oration, yet another installation. A 2006 drawing installation, Future Lines, a series of architectural mappings was executed on the gallery walls with plastic tape. The ephemeral nature of such works aligns them with the "Ephemerization" typical of contemporary society where the eternal is no longer the norm by which art measures itself.

It is also a coming together of the many levels on which she was working. Her conceptual and aesthetic development has been in tandem and she tries to blur the boundaries between drawing, painting and sculpture. Working in a sculptural expression was inevitable as her earlier drawings already had a sculptural feel to them. The influence of technology too was not just visible in her concepts and imagery but also in her use of painting supports like mylar, a polyester film of high tensile strength and colour preferences which mimicked the hues of magnetic resonance imaging. The arts friendly environment gave her the breadth to expand her imagery from the two dimensional to 3 D as she moved from illusionist painterly space to real space in which she devised installations. And carving a niche for herself while addressing a western audience changed the context of

her work giving her a broader format and greater freedom with which to reinvent herself.

Another commonality that binds her work is the organic nature of all her varied expressions. Even the new architectural drawings so severely linear, geometric and angular, have an emergent characteristic where they seem to spread out haphazardly from one source. Samina Mansuri as an artist has also evolved in stages. She began her studies in Pakistan then continued them at the Pratt Institute in the US from where she acquired her BFA in 1982. This was followed by a study stint at the New York Studio School and work experience in the same city. In 1990 she returned to Pakistan to join the faculty of the Indus Valley School of Art. She has exhibited extensively in Pakistan, US, England, Paris, India and Canada. Residencies at Gasworks London in 1999, The Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta in 2004 and recently at Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico are other developments that have contributed to her art expression.

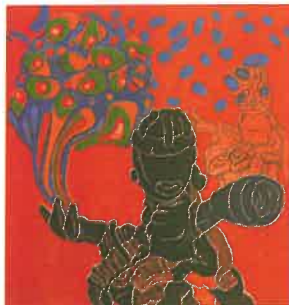
For an artist who asserts that "she always needs to be on the verge of things" it will be interesting to see the directions in which she moves - for the moment Mansuri has only captured a process of transformation the rest has yet to evolve.



Samina Mansuri - Warrior



Samina Mansuri - Landing



Dawn Gallery January 13 2007

DAWN
GALLERY

NEGOTIATING THE MEDIATED IMAGE

If we desire to distinguish between the real environment and the pseudo-environment, sketched and delivered by the mass media it is important to examine the role which various media play in creating the images which impact our lives: how visual images create a language with profound psychological meaning, and how print, television, and film media manipulate images to create desired emotional effects. An exhibition of digital prints *After Images* – from the ASH archive 2007 – 2009 by Samina Mansuri references this crisis of representation to explore visual subtleties through such areas as digital manipulation of aerial views, camera attitudes, and contextual framing, as well as the social consequences of "image" as an abstract concept expressed in concrete visual terms. Her current artistic practice is interdisciplinary. Using a variety of materials like wood, metal, plastic, clay, sand powdered pigments, foam, modeling clay felt and acrylic paint she creates multi-media installations that work across the mediums of architectural/sculptural sets, painting, video and digital photography.

Appropriating media coverage of conflict centered areas such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq and Pakistan as well as the Twin Towers and places like New Orleans, ravaged by natural disasters, Mansuri builds her own trajectory of imaginary locations that mimic the ethos of tragedy associated with these sites.

"Many of the images one sees on the news are aerial views of a specific place. Aerial views tend to provide viewers with a detached sense of actual place. Through a transformed language of aerial cartography I create subjective mappings of an ambiguous location of trauma," she explains and adds that "I am presenting public sites of violence and trauma to address traumatic loss not simply as an isolated and individual process but as a global one. Viewers around the world are simultaneously detached consumers as well as mediated witnesses to trauma of a place they have not experienced firsthand. I document these sculptural sets in digital photographs and video and dispense with the actual sets as I am interested in the mediated image."

In recent years the concept of the aerial view has gained a new centrality – as both an object of criticism and an interpretative tool. As against the closeup image which gives a personalized account, the aerial view because of its distanced sighting supports anonymity and detachment. The on-the-ground perspectives of television news cameras, as well as aerial images together provide the dual vantage

points that increasingly are used to manage global crises and media events: the human tragedy at close range and the long-range impression from afar that unhinges it from reality and dilutes or alters its impact.

With her fabricated aerial views of fictional locations, Samina Mansuri substitutes media generated images of war zones with a haunting psychological terrain. She recreates sites of distress but in an impersonal context. This double take of further digitizing the already manipulated image mocks at the authenticity of reality. In giving the viewer a taste of how the media spin can redefine the image or layer it with multiple meanings, Mansuri's art addresses her premise of questioning the validity of the image yet at the same time it stands independently as an aesthetic exercise in its own right also.

Viewed out of context the artists abstracted aerial views evoke the metaphysical. Inspired by the real and the palpable, yet consciously fictitious, her meticulously grafted landscapes speak of a rigorous art practice that focuses intensely on the changing order of existence in this world.

Samina Mansuri - *After image* from *Ash Archive* 2007



Dawn Gallery January 3 2010

DAWN
GALLERY

Naiza Khan

RECLAIMING MANORA

The cultural and architectural erasure of old Manora - a developers delight and an artist's dilemma - has fuelled an inquiring series of works, in a mixture of watercolor, drawing, and both new and traditional print techniques, by Naiza Khan. Pointedly titled *Restore the Boundaries: The Manora Project*, the portfolio was exhibited at Art Dubai 2010 under the auspices of Rossi and Rossi, a London based gallery.

Ironically the island of Manora only a twenty minute jetty ride away from Karachi shares none of the bustle and verve of the parent port city. Unnoticed by the busy citizenry it quietly slipped into decline years ago even though it is home to a functional naval base and an army cantonment for the last sixty odd years. Its local population spread over traditional boat building communities and fishing villages has suffered considerable setbacks due to over exploitation of fishing resources and is now impoverished and fragmented. Manora's rudimentary infrastructure too is antiquated and according to the 1998 census its population of 9,987 residents has dropped to less than half. The islands attractions, a primitive jetty, the pyramid shaped Shri Varun DevMandir temple, the Manora Lighthouse and the protestant St Pauls Church have also succumbed to the ravages of time. It is still listed as a picnic spot and is home to precious(albeit depleting) mangrove forests, rare species of marine life and bird sanctuaries but its passage from a strategic historical peninsula to a commercial beachfront tourist project has put an end to any vestiges of old world romance still associated with the outpost.

As an issue of concern The Manora Project seems to add another dimension to Naiza Khans repertoire of gender and body centric investigations. Her oeuvre, peppered with provocative feminine symbols like lingerie, chastity belts, metal body armor, figurative henna applications, latex sheaths, girdles, stays, straps, hoops and cords, has always emphasized body constriction and containment as a suppressive measure. Lobbying for Manora brings an apparent shift in her vocabulary as we encounter prints and watercolours immersed in site plans, historical edifices, graveyards, ruins and imaginary reconstructions. But this swing is just another manifestation of the artists' dissent against desecration of norms and requisites concerning the quality of human existence. In her *Exhale* (2004) series she had portrayed women in a state of collapse, trying to emerge from capsules or exhorting the need to be vocal in order to express the value of 'individual space' as a personal territory where the self can ventilate. She again played with space and social intolerance when she used henna templates to plaster female body figurations on public and

community walls only to see them disfigured or deleted. In her show *Heavenly Ornaments* (2007) it was metallic vestments, corsets and skirts that voiced the complexities of conflict. Having evolved from the bulletproof vest image the body armour / ornaments celebrated and desecrated the female form simultaneously as she asserted her right to self-defense.

It is this same need to reclaim and protect private space, its psychological and physical presence, that has prompted the need to *Restore the Boundaries: The Manora Project* - to salvage the natural tranquility of Manora.

Steeped in history this crucial vantage point established by the British Indian Army in 19th century British India was taken over by the Pakistan Army in 1947 but much earlier the island was the site of a small fort constructed in the eighteenth century when Karachi traded with Oman and Bahrain. It was the landing post of Arab armies during the conquest of Debal and Dev Mandir itself is centuries old. Though few traces of this history remain, the site had continued to boast the serenity of a humble resort and offered visitors a welcome respite from the uproar of a mega city. Needing space to reflect and think as a creative person Khans recent visits revealed a new sort of conquest. As the buildings of the modest seaside retreat are left to crumble questionable plans are being made to build high-rise tourist hotels around them. Today under MoU's signed with foreign investors the island is to be converted into a flashy sightseeing reserve.

Documenting over a period of eighteen months Khan has negotiated her personal musings on Manora through a vast repertoire of video, drawings, site-specific interventions and interviews of residents. Her aesthetics centralize on creating a jugglery of vanishing acts. Works like *Ghost blocks*, *Graveyard series*, *Collapse* etc. etc. capture the islands transition in nebulous detail. Linear constructions splashed with aqua pigments or muddled with faint earthy chromatics come across as precarious and ephemeral.

In *Graveyard*, a series of tombs, with ziggurat like tiered bases and cemented memorials, are preceded by fresh graves circled with just stones and no display of traditional markings. They lie there anonymous in an abandoned cemetery under the chilling specter of a high-rise looming in the distance. *Shell Homes* is an evocative façade whose filigreed tracery, redolent of 19th century decoration, exactly rendered in a mixture of ink drawing and watercolor, wavers like an apparition. *Floating Blocks* also rise like smoky phantoms but it is the cumulative chaos of *Collapse* that best speaks of the annihilation of

Manora where demolition, eviction, displacement and homelessness has disrupted the sense of continuity that gave life to the haven.

Fragile, transient and vaporous, the Manora portfolio, is as much a subjective narrative as it is an external reality. Evolving out of an

individual concern it is also a grave public issue that draws attention to the politics of conservation and (dis) regard for the human condition

Dawn Gallery March 14 2010

DAWN
GALLERY

Naiza Khan - Shell Homes



Hamra Abbas

DISCOVERING HAMRA

In the last few decades many young artists from Pakistan have travelled and trained abroad, and some have emigrated to new lands. Striding many worlds and breaking out of narrow home grown agendas their works contemplate a universal culture. Creating art in their native locations as well as studios overseas they are juggling diverse sources to illustrate a global sensibility.

Currently living and working between Islamabad and Boston artist Hamra Abbas is amongst the top tier young generation artists experimenting with assorted genres, strategies and subject matter. Riding high on the twin attributes of a refreshingly fertile mind and an array of complex technical and manual skills her versatile art practice straddles a range of media, from paper collage and painting to sculpture, sound, photography, video, writing and installation. By appropriating culturally loaded imagery and iconography, and transforming them into new works that may be experienced "spatially and temporally", she creates new platforms from which to view ideas of culture, tradition and interchange. Such approaches are giving new readings to our traditional understandings of the relationships between the global and the local, race and nation, the sacred and the secular as well as the postcolonial discourse.

A globetrotting artist Abbas has had more significant solo showings abroad than at home in Pakistan (only two in Lahore and none in Karachi) consequently her work is not widely known or understood at large here. A recently released Green Cardamom publication, *Hamra Abbas: Object Lessons*, can address this deficit considerably. It is a comprehensive monograph that consolidates her art practice and acquaints the art enthusiast with her eclectic repertoire. The detailed visuals and evaluative text, by several international writers, critics and curators, is bound to satisfy the most curious reader/ viewer.

A Pakistani born in Kuwait Abbas relocated to Pakistan in 1985. With sculpture as her major and miniature as minor she completed her BFA and MFA from NCA Lahore in 2002. Availing a DAAD scholarship she acquired a Meisterschueler degree from the Universität der Künste, Berlin and was awarded the Meisterschueler Prize in 2004 - she also taught contemporary miniature there before returning to Pakistan in 2006 to work as Associate Prof at NCA Rawalpindi. Honing her talent as artist in residence at several institutions like Vermont Studio Center, Künstlerdorf Schöppingen, Gasworks and V and A Museum London she also bagged the jury prize at the Sharjah Biennial 9 recently.

The multiplicity of practices that define Abbas's oeuvre owe their origin in some measure to her exposure to a varied range of art practices, stimuli and environments she has lived and worked in but

more to her alternative even "endless ways of 'seeing' or knowing" (Anna Sloan). Possessing an uncanny ability to capture and transform a passing encounter or a random thought into a creative exercise she branches into unexpected levels of intellectual and physical interpretations that surprise, amuse and engage the onlooker.

In conversation with Sharmini Pereira Abbas discloses "making objects and images through labour intensive ways has been integral to my art practice." This can be a result of her rigorous training in miniature art or a compelling need to constantly challenge herself because for each project she devises a new language of unique combinations. Indeed as Anna Sloan reiterates "it is hard to find an artist using more diverse strategies and subject matter than Hamra Abbas."

Playing with scale - often from micro to macro - and dislodging objects from their familiar context and imbuing them with new and multiple meanings - often playful and humorous or ponderous and grave - is common to Abbas's methodology and this is most apparent in her flings with the miniature. In *All Rights Reserved* (2004) she reproduces elements from an exhibition catalogue titled *King of the World - The Padshahnama*, published in 1997 when the *Padshahnama* was exhibited in India, Britain and USA. The concerned images depict delivery of gifts (the *sachiq*) from the bridegroom to the bride for Dara Shikoh's wedding. The original illuminated manuscript is now housed at the Royal Library of Windsor. Digitally removing the round trays of *sachiq* and transposing them to another panel Abbas creates two panels one with gifts trays sans bearers and the other panel of bearers sans gifts. This apparent dislocation printed alongside the catalogue's copyright page declaring All Rights Reserved critiques the movement of cultural property from one continent to another and consequent debate over legal ownership rights.

Similarly *Battle Scenes* (2006) art work references a pair of miniature paintings from *The Akbarnama* depicting a gruesome battle between the emperor Akbar's army and his warring enemies. Decontextualizing this battle scene to relook at "war and contemporary systems of neo-imperialism" Abbas creates an animation and lenticular prints mimicking the battle ground scene in the *Akbarnama* miniature. Persuading visitors at various London parks to pose for her, Abbas's animated work depicts an array of figures of different ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, posed warrior-like against a black background. Ludicrous, fragmented and farcical the parody critiques the hold of imperialism past and present.

God Grows on Trees (2008) consists of 99 individual portraits of children and a diasec digital print. "The portraits of the children were painted

over a year and informed by my visits to Madrassahs. Viewing the current fascination with Madrassahs as being akin to the orientalist painters' fascination in the 19th and early 20th centuries with the harem, I attempt to thwart these exoticised readings to portray the universality of childhood experience. In painting the portraits I attempt to reproduce the faces as faithfully as I could, marrying realism with the techniques of the miniature " she explained.

The miniature becomes resource for another turnover as she converts its figures into sculptural form in her Lessons on Love series. Here Abbas stands out as the only artist to mould characters from album painting into three dimensional figures but the obvious reference to Kama Sutra renders the works too explicit for general viewership here.

Other stand out works include Woman in Black (2008), Abbas's sculpture of a female super-heroine, hair streaming down her back, stands at two meters tall. Brandishing a stick, this proud, buxom figure plays on the iconic press images of burka clad women yielding sticks as weapons when Islamabad's Red Mosque seminary was stormed in 2007 by government troops. In It's a Boy! (2008), the familiar figure of a plump baby boy from Woodward's trademark gripe water bottle is blown up into an outside entity that mocks the sub-continental tradition of placing emphasis on the birth of a male.

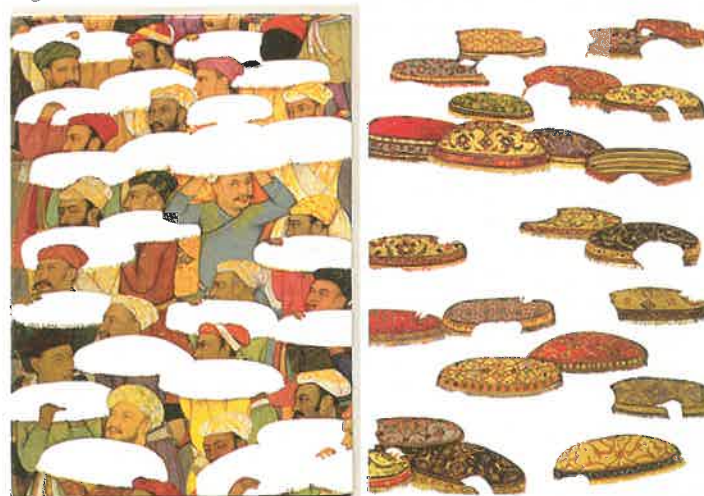
Read is a multi-media installation, a suspended labyrinth-like wooden structure, concealing speakers playing the sound of children reciting the Qur'an as they memorize its verses, the standard method of instruction in Pakistan's madrassahs. The viewer must walk through the labyrinth, close to the speakers, to avail the immersive experience of the work but the cacophony of sound filtering through the speakers, of children reciting the Qur'anic verses, is not the orderly regimented harmony that might be expected. Indeed, the chaotic babble is reminiscent of the sounds of a large number of noisy children gathered together anywhere in the world.

The manner in which Abbas accesses and builds on her cues reveals the confidence she has in her abilities and sense of inquiry. She lunges fearlessly towards the radical and the new which can often be preposterously humorous as well. While this monograph captures her most significant moments she has just begun to peak and her best is probably yet to come.

Hamra Abbas - It a Boy



Hamra Abbas - All rights reserved



Riffat Alvi

REALITY CHECK

The present climate of insurgency, suicide bombings, kidnappings and shootings is not just a reality that peppers the print and electronic media it is also essential fodder and fuel for contemporary art now. Indeed engagement with terrorism has brought new meaning and expression to art practice here. This changing face of Pakistan's artistic messages is in tandem with the emergence of contemporary genres. Mixed media, installation, video art, film and interactive graphic and digital design techniques have radically altered the portrayal of political and social upheaval in comparison to its manifestation through traditional media. However illustration of aggression in art is not always blatant. Many artists turn away from overt references, choosing to comment on themes of paranoia, fear, disorder, tyranny, poverty, inequality, repression and abuse.

Artist Riffat Alvi's new works was among the most recent examples of violence and terrorism induced art. Pointedly titled *Siyah Safaid*, Alvi's collection of paintings, smoke drawings and installations chronicle the physical, moral and psychological dimensions of prevalent chaos and turmoil. While the immediate relevance of the message gives life to the show, the artist's technical experiments with varied media to bolster the message also engage the eye. Senior artists proficient in conventional genres seldom articulate through new media techniques to convincing effect but Alvi's inventive spree of unconventional applications in unusual media jogs viewer interest.

Metaphorical connotations of *Siyah Safaid*, light versus dark, applicable to several levels in life define the ethos of this show but in some works the terms *Siyah* and *Safaid* are interpreted almost literally by the artist. The most obvious use of *Siyah* is found in the black smoke works executed with artful manipulation of paper over burning candles. Initially appearing to be mere renditions of smoke clouds the drawings take a turn for the ominous when viewed in context. In works like *Khudkush*, *Na Umeed* and *Anjam*, Alvi is recording a suicide bombers immediate post blast moments of explosive burst and vaporous dissolution. Similarly the pristine purity of a distant patch of *Safaid* (white) in the painting *Ray of Hope* signifies light at the end of the tunnel. Technically the colour red is an intermediary that counters the chromatic starkness of *Siyah* and *Safaid* but in some paintings like *Yeh Lahoo kis Ka hai* and *After the Drones*, its association with blood, gore and annihilation is palpably direct.

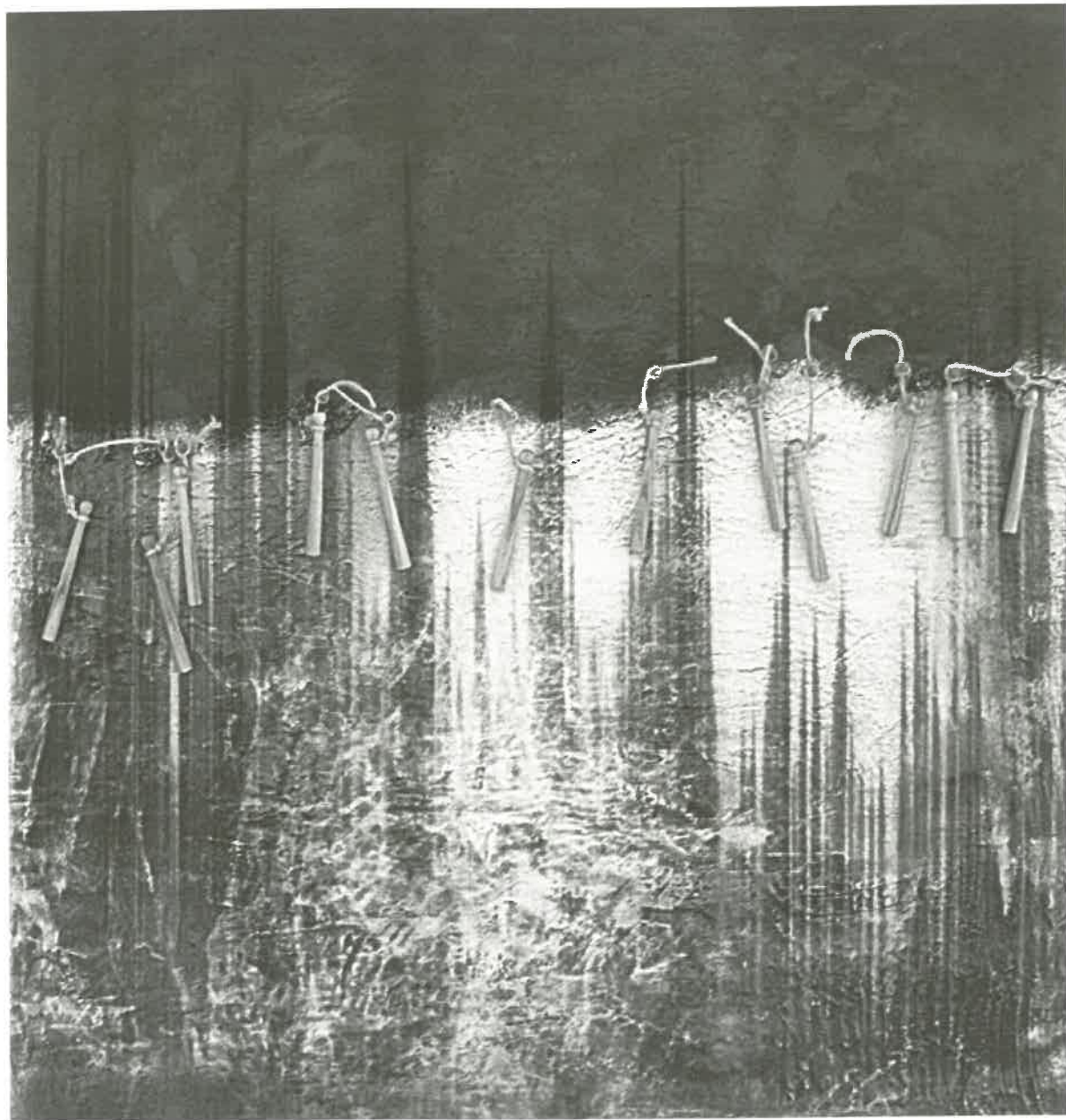
Riffat Alvi's experiments with smoke evolved accidentally when prolonged and repeated power outages forced hapless citizens to turn to the common candle for light but her use of clay pigment as a painterly medium is a deliberate choice. As a painter she goes beyond the brush to rollers, scrapers, stubs, palette knife, hands and fingers to

apply her pigment. In this show we see a more adventurous play with surface treatments. In the *Investigators Team* painting she approaches the art work with a printmaker's sensibility while in others there is caked paint on her canvas / board and in some works her surfaces are crudely fissured, scratched, smudged or sponged. Here she continues with her practice of enhancing abstract forms with technical innovations, but in works like *And They were Lynched* and *Barriers* she gingerly steps out into tactile mix media effects. The *Barriers* painting is constructed with coloured pins / buttons and iron nails hammered onto the surface and in the *...Lynched* painting there are stick figures dangling from pieces of rope across the canvas.

Veering from political dichotomies to social and cultural disparities her *Hunger Bowl* series of installations intricately embellished with ornate henna patterns critique wealth, opulence and luxury with an end message that concentration of capital in the hands of the few breeds inequality, hunger and starvation among the majority. The decorative clay bird figurines, harbingers of peace and harmony also point to possibilities of using henna pigment and folk art patterns as aesthetic devices.

This exhibition inspite of its almost abstract, non pictorial imagery is easily read because of its direct relevance to print and news media reports of current affairs. The news bulletin vocabulary is particularly pronounced in the titles of the artworks which do much to put the art into perspective as does the artists focus on militancy and its effect on daily life from an average citizens point of view.

Riffat Alvi - And they were lynched



Noorjehan Bilgrami

CONCEPTUAL TRIGGERS

The enigma of the void continues to haunt Bilgrami's oeuvre. The making of emptiness, its visual apprehension as contained absence, made whole and present in the eye of the viewer, is still central to Noorjehan Bilgrami's art. The spectator's interaction with the painting involves a process of questioning the underlying conditions through which the work becomes a visual experience in the first place: how can the conceptual void be made visible?

Setting aside image-making associated with visual pleasure to reveal emptiness, darkness, blankness or the blind spot, Bilgrami's art is ensconced within the linear boundaries, the picture rectangle, the Cubist grid and the indigo vortex where the void manifests itself as an aureole, as a luminous square, a black disc and a whirling epicenter. As the eye negotiates its way through the geometrical and modular simplicity of her vocabulary, graduated scales of surface tonalities and illuminations, worked with successive layers of color and superimposed on each other, create a tension of lines, planes, and small geometric elements. This trajectory brings cohesion and solidarity to the paintings, individually and collectively and draws the observer towards the focal point. Like a mind map of an inner landscape she steers the viewer towards her encounter with the void and in doing so sets in motion a spirit of inquiry not just about her conceptual triggers but also her art practice and relevant media used to process the content.

An artist, textile designer and researcher Bilgrami moves freely between the studio and the workshop and incorporates her craft ethos into her art process with considerable ease. Cherishing the woven cloth as a living entity her crusade for the ajrak in particular and handcrafted textiles in general has been documented extensively. Her use of mix media for her painterly practice also has organic, craft connotations and the manual aspects of art making in her work are as integral to her expression as the emotive elicitations she is endeavoring to portray. Painting with primitive tools on unbleached cotton cloth (kora) for several years she has now opted to express on thick Arches paper mainly because of its affinity to cloth regarding consistency and absorbency in dyeing and staining. Unwilling to abandon the cotton cloth the fabric does reappear as a mixed media appendage. The thin white 'mulmul' gauze, pitch black cotton cloth and the 'kora' unbleached variety are torn into strips, folded into layers, cut into pieces and meticulously glued together, over or with the paper. The entire process comes across as a meditative exercise from which emanates an art ethos centralizing on an inner quest.

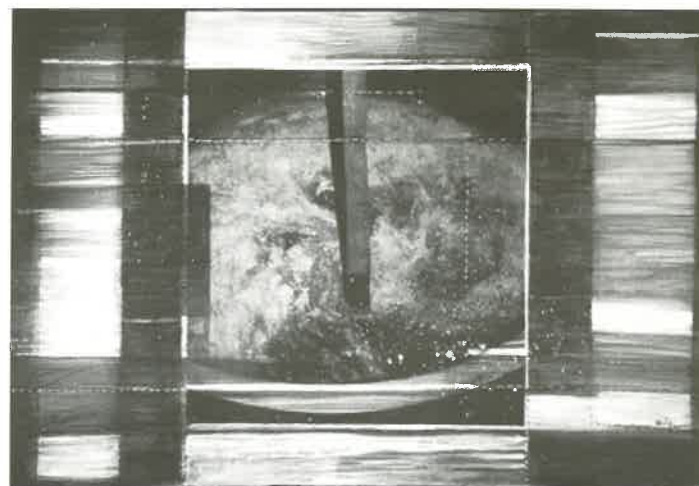
The second segment of the exhibition, *Alchemy in Blue*, comprises a

mix of natural indigo pigment brushed on digital prints. A floor installation made out of indigo stained wood divided into a network of squares filled, much like a mosaic, with indigo and digital images blurs the line between art and craft. A recipient of the Japan foundation fellowship Bilgrami pursued a research project on indigo in Japan in 2001. This was complemented by investigative studies into the vanishing traditions of indigo cultivation and dye processing in the Sindh hinterland. The swirling sea of blue in her digital prints is an image of the circular motion of indigo dye which is ardously processed in several stages in a series of primitive underground vats. Heating, hand stirring and dissolving the indigo solution to extract the precious blue dye is a labour of love. A ritual that has lost its significance with the onset of synthetic dyes. Somewhere between reviving tradition and locating a new identity for an ancient craft Bilgrami was able to discover metaphors that symbolize her journey of the spirit - here the craft researcher and the artist become one. The profiles verge together, the void resurfaces and everything is covered in an atmosphere of mystery that takes the viewer down a path of unique interior resonances

Dawn Gallery February 21 2010



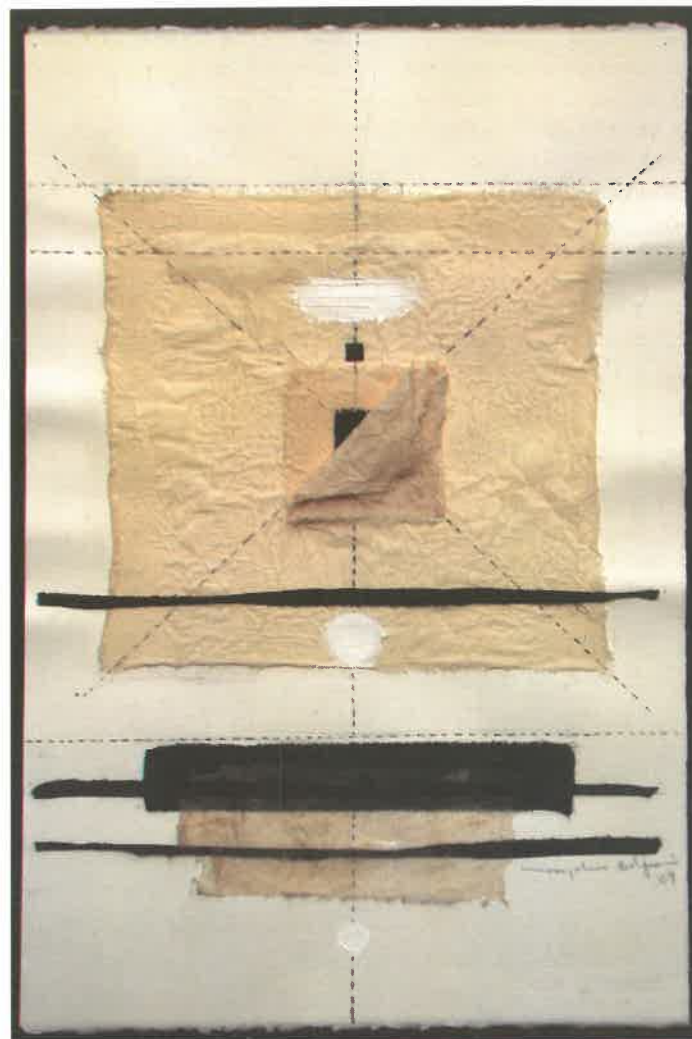
Noorjehan Bilgrami - *Alchemy in Blue*





Noorjehan Bilgrami - Void Luminous - seeds from Kadura tree

Noorjehan Bilgrami - Void Series - New works on paper



Jamil Baloch

DISORIENTATION

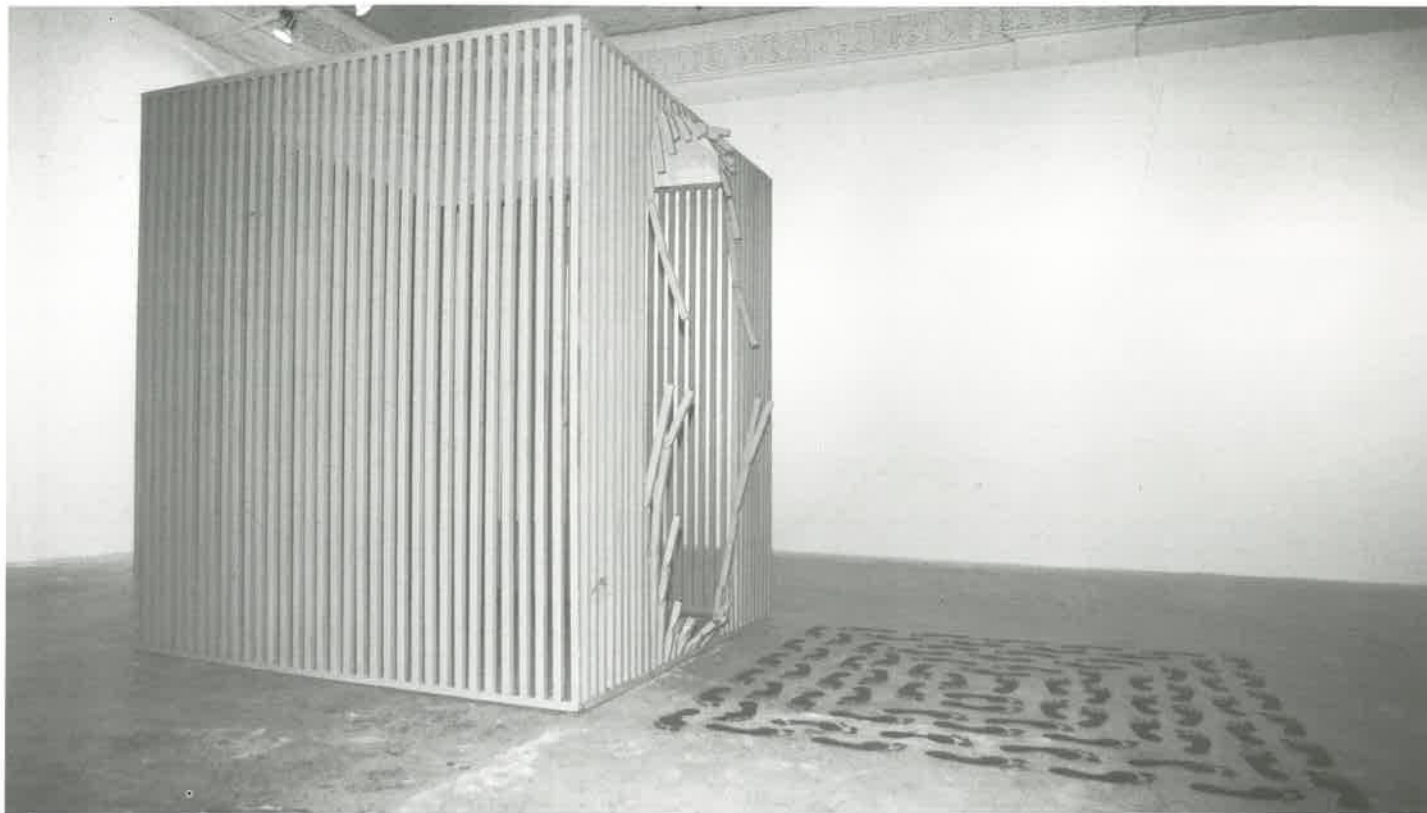
Disorientation, by Jamil Baloch is an exhibition that justifies its premise. By grouping disparate works into a single show the curator succeeds in 'disorienting' the eye and mind of the viewer. Segmented into video, installation, relief panels and ink on paper paintings the technically varied works emit independent readings. First impressions, seen collectively, jar the senses. On deeper engagement a loosely centered focus evolves within the garbled narrative as strains of the artist's recurrent concerns emerge.

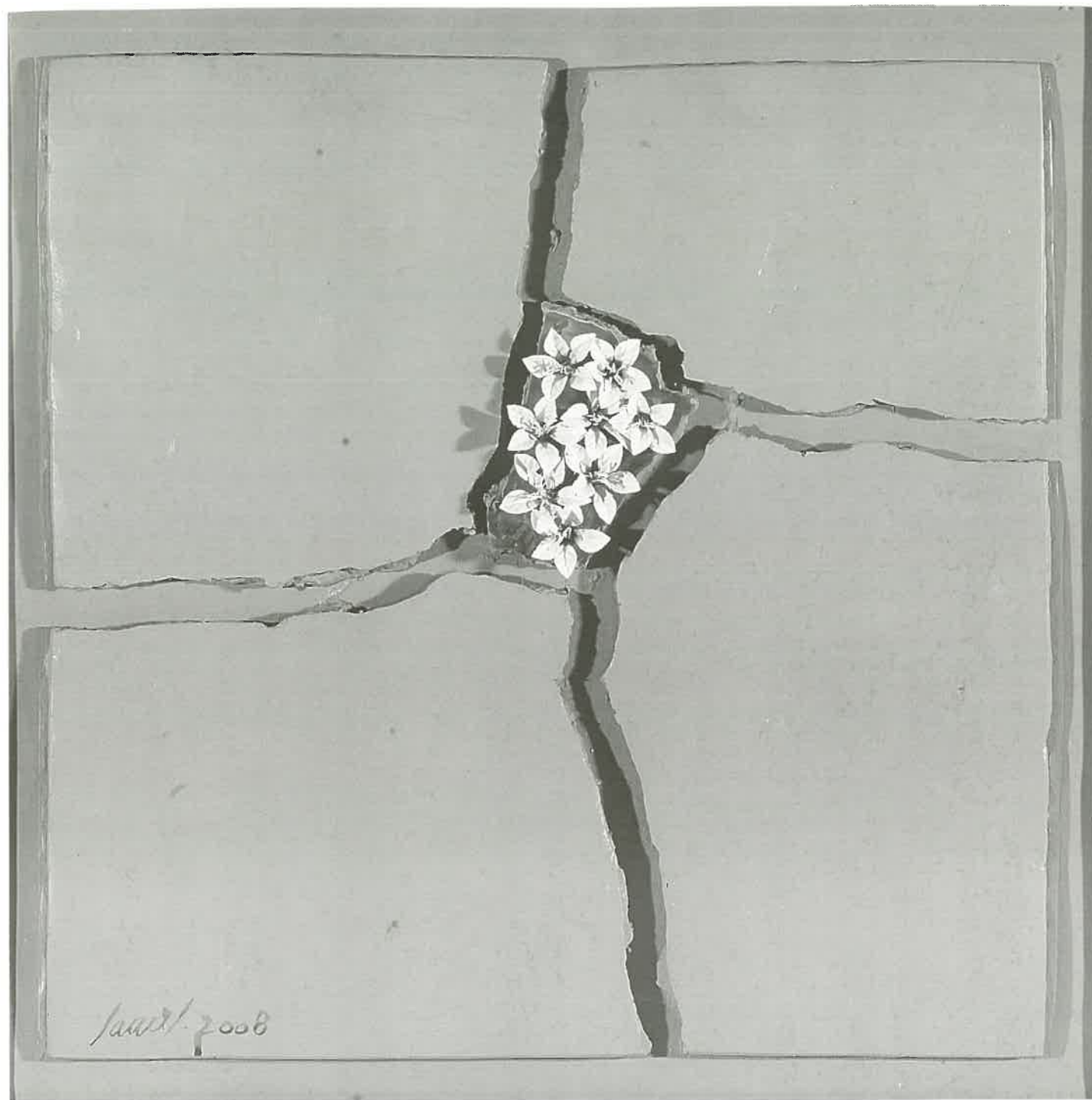
A sculptor who draws and paints with equal facility Jamil Baloch is at ease with experiment and innovation but, rather than being confined to a particular style, medium or genre it is political and social conflicts, predominantly gender suppression and provincial discrimination, which continue to be a constant in his oeuvre. In the global context as human suffering continues to escalate and political engagement

becomes more muddled balancing the competing factors of political rebellion and pursuit of individual ideals is becoming ever more complex for artists. In Baloch's current show the personal and the particular interweave and viewers need to extract meaning from buried references to partial histories, hushed subjugation and annoying frustrations.

Most works in Disorientation critique the validity of a nation state that is still grappling with post independence issues. The art gains clarity when viewed through the prisms of international, national, cultural, religious, social, political, economic and historical factors since it is hegemony of power politics and a complexity of parallel and interacting realities that have created most of today's Catch 22 situations. Such communication must thus be read off by the receiver across layered contextual values.

Jamil Baloch - 60 Years-Metal Paint

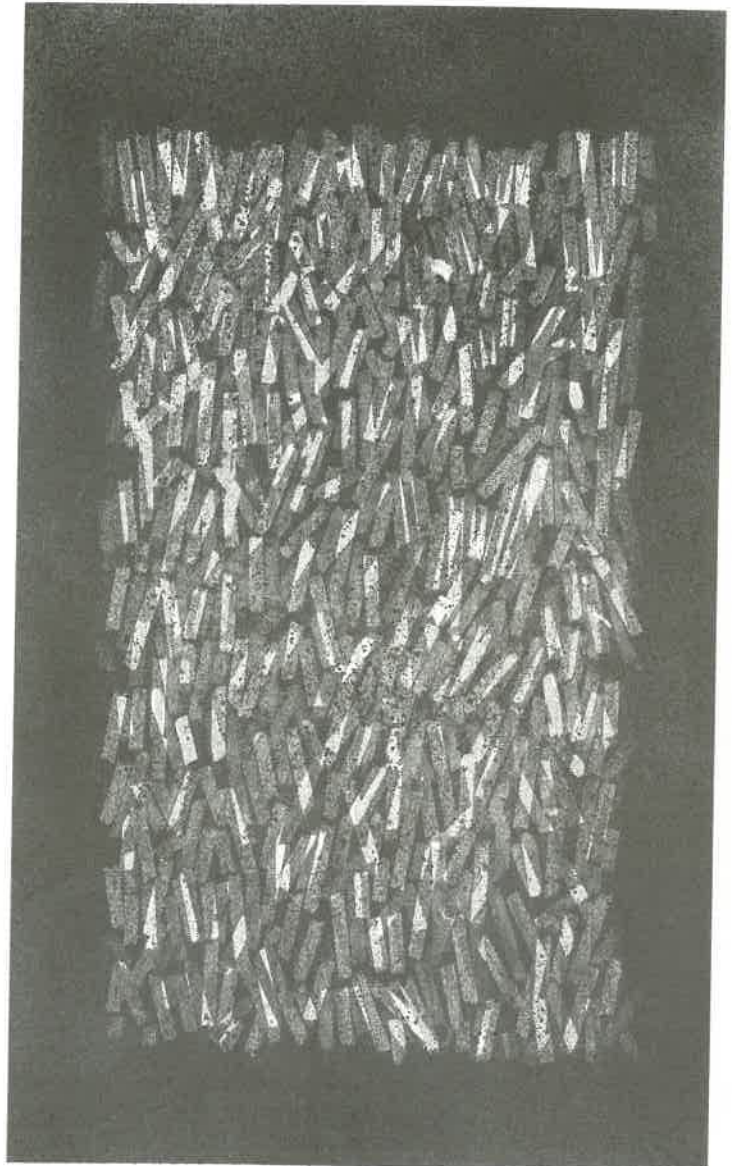




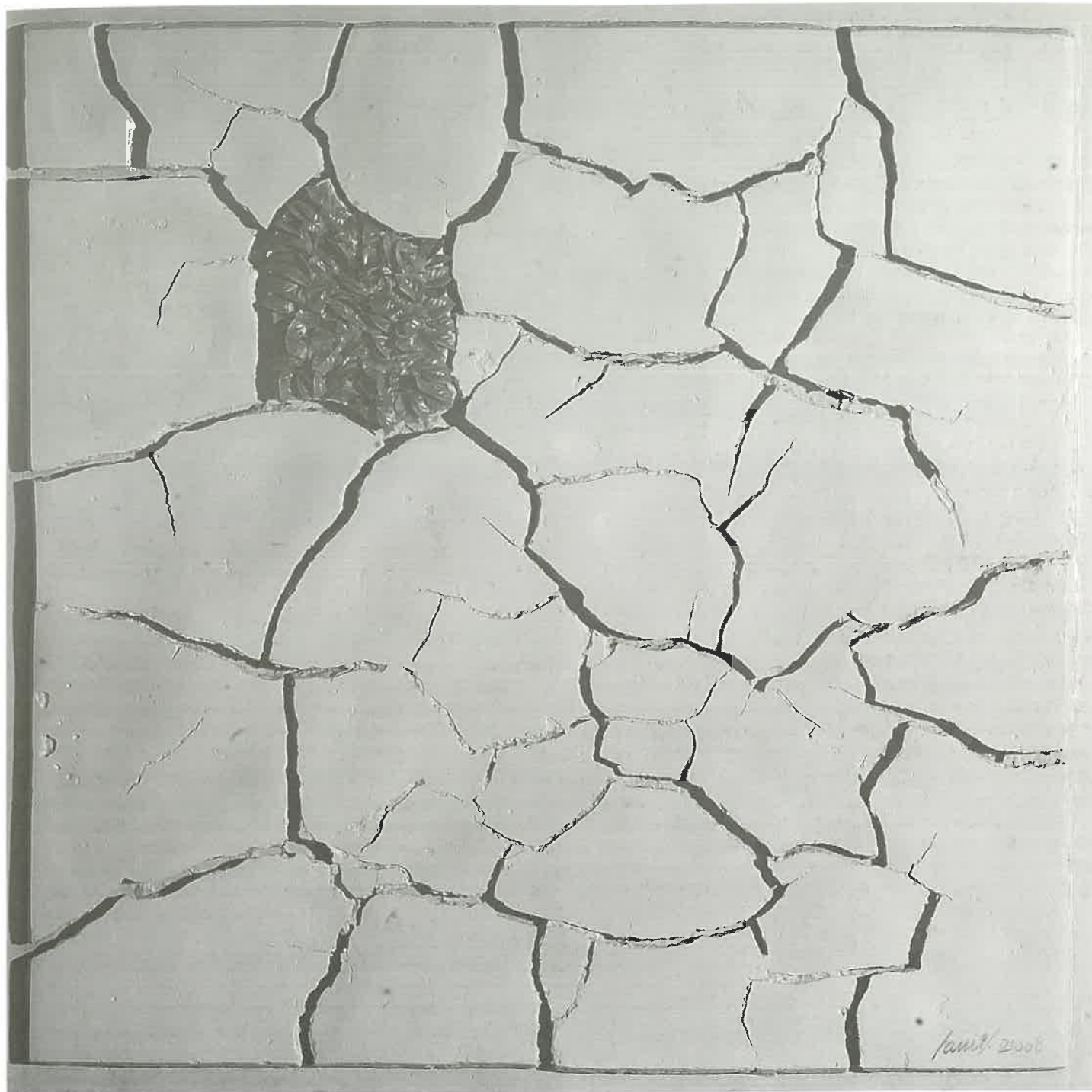
Huge enough to rivet the eye Baloch's six foot cuboid installation titled *Sixty Years*, constructed out of steel rods mimics a barred cage with a ripped entrance immediately opening onto a floor stencil of bloody footprints. As confining as the cell it emanates from the ,stenciled square is marked with footsteps evolving from a centre but caught in a vicious circle of limited motion. Likewise his video installation also points to the exhaustion and futility of going around in circles but this time the protagonist is not the nation but the artist himself, laboriously charting his aesthetic journey.

A series of fiber glass relief panels simulating the texture of parched earth in all its fissured glory, variously titled *Spring*, *Hope*, *Deprivation*, etc allude to surges of activity within a fragmented landscape. In *Spring* the fractured terrain is dotted with images of fighter jets, in *Hope* a hand is shown trying to creep out of a crack and in *Deprivation* a fissure is plugged / smothered with a cloth. Fresh blossoms spurting out of a crevice in *Together* are fetching inspite of their life draining bleached whiteness. The *Zuban* series interspersed among the relief panels is an artist's personal indulgence with linear expressions and technical manipulations. They are more convincing as markmaking exercises than a frank dialogue on *Zubaan* and politics of language.

Today, a considerable amount of art emanating from troubled regions of the world is politically motivated and such projects on the whole have become predictable and formulaic and one is left wondering whether engaged art looks for 'effect' or 'change'. In the *Disorientation* cache a number of works thrive on largely on 'gimmickry'. For a mid career artist with some memorable art already to his credit catering to the prevalent and the trendy should not be on Baloch's agenda. He should be moving towards mature expressions that do not bewilder but meaningfully challenge the imagination of his audience.

Jamil Baloch - *Zuban Series*

Jamil Baloch - Equity-Fibre Glass



Naveed Iqbal

ISSUES OF OUR TIMES

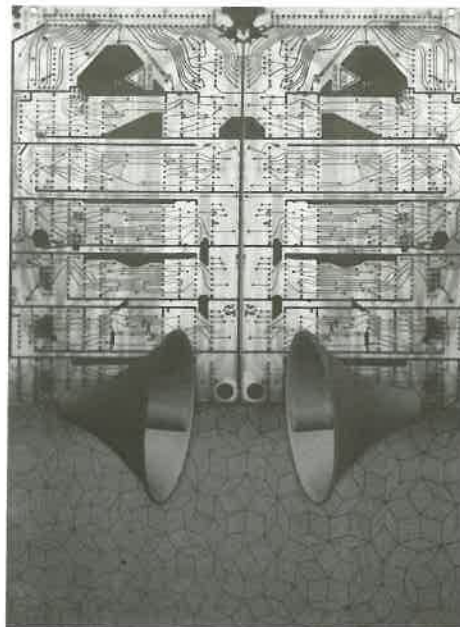
One of the greatest paradoxes of contemporary culture is that, at a time when the image reigns supreme – from the home TV, video, or digital graphics to the posters and neon signs which festoon the public highway – the very notion of the creative human imagination seems increasingly under threat. We no longer seem to know who produces or controls the images which condition our consciousness. All varieties of textual imagery as in wall graffiti, banners, billboard text and slogans etc so peculiar to the urban landscape, jostle for attention in our daily interactions. So overwhelming is this deluge that it has begun to not just invade but also consume the human psyche. A considerable amount of young generation art today is devoted to the exploration of this assault on individualism by the public image.

When reality is camouflaged or deliberately engineered the common man either flows with the tide as a victim of this superimposition or he tries to sift fact from fiction. An exhibition of artworks titled *Ittihad Bain ul Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood) by Naveed Iqbal centralizes on this 'confusion' perpetrated by various religious factions in the name of religious righteousness. Overpowered by the emphatic visual, textual and verbal sermonizing and moralizing rampant everywhere, he tries to probe and document the duality / contradiction between the outer image and inner reality. The anchor piece of the show, an installation titled *Ittihad Bain ul Muslimeen*, questions the validity of being a Muslim in the light of conflicting slogans chanted by various 'tanzeems,' groups and parties.

With the help of an ordinary tent partition the artist had transformed a part of the gallery hall into a religious 'jalsa gah' (congregation venue). The stage was set as in a 'farshi nashist,' it was festooned with lights and faint strains of 'naatla shairi' and music created the ambience of a religious 'taqreeb.' The oddity that impacted the eye instantly was the blitz of banner slogans boldly imprinted on a multitude of white pillows bordered with typical greens, browns and greys associated with colours of religious parties. Protest statements like 'Allah, Quran, Hadis aur Islami Jamhooreat ki beihurmati karnewalon ko phansi' and 'Haqooq i Niswan ka naam nihad – na manzoor na manzoor' etc are typical textual messages that accost the common eye as they are chalked on walls, emblazoned on street hoardings, hangings, fliers and banners that litter the main thoroughfares and city centres. Set on a stage and balanced on tiny 'rehels' the inscribed pillows gave a birds eye view of this sloganeering chant and clutter. The conflicting statements / declarations / announcements seen in unison mocked the very nature of unity and oneness that Islam purports. This installation drove home the point that the umbrella structure of 'Ittihad Bain ul Muslimeen' is fragmented into

groupings where each faction is pushing its own hidden agenda onto the innocent populace. How legitimate and purposeful is it then to rally the public under the banner of a Muslim 'Ittihad' which in reality is based on as many manifestoes and interpretations as the groups within it.

The second half of the exhibition pertaining to miniatures gave further vent to this issue through use of relevant symbolic imagery. Most of the compositions revolved around mosque interiors and meeting / gathering venues. The artist made extensive use of the loudspeaker image as a message transmitter. Portraying the amplifier object (s) collectively and in disarray he commented on division within the ranks and a consequent lack of conviction in the end message and hence the common man's lack of interest and state of confusion. Repeated use of the fan symbol also pointed to the diffusion and dispersal of the message as a disillusioned public no longer paid heed to it. Naveed Iqbal is a relatively new entrant in the art fraternity. He graduated from the Visual Arts Dept of the Karachi University in 2003 with a major in miniature and a minor in film making and has since participated in several prominent miniature shows, the Vasi Residency exhibition Taaza Tareen, amateur film festival at UET Lahore and has attended the Theertha International Workshop in Sri Lanka.



Naveed Iqbal
Jalsa Gah
Congregation Venue

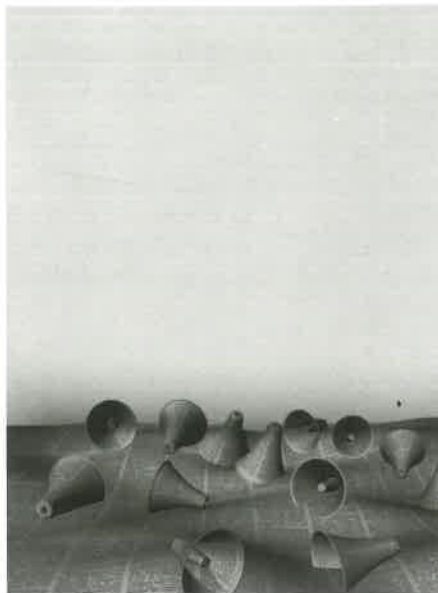
Dawn Gallery
July 28 2007

GALLERY

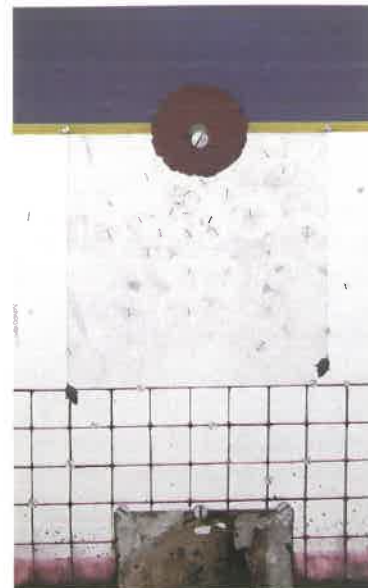
Naveed Iqbal - Jalsa Gah



Naveed Iqbal - Message Transmitted



Naveed Iqbal



Naveed Iqbal - Installation - Jalsa Gah



CONTEMPORARY MINIATURE



In this age of growing art awareness a deeper engagement with new art can facilitate a better understanding of the young generation mindset and emergent vocabulary. The new sensibility is most apparent in the indigenous Mughal miniatures adventurous journey towards contemporary aesthetics as young artists continue to dismantle its orthodox mannerism and align it with the current 'cheeky pop.' The rigorous yet exquisite workmanship and the unusually minute scale reaffirm its allegiance to the parent model and distinguish it from the dynamics of easel painting but it is the peculiarity of the content that is determining and defining its rambunctious course ahead. Often enlivened with daring, audacious makeovers the genre has been accosted to address social and political issues, used as a sounding board for gender concerns, a vehicle for diaspora sentiments and a forum for voicing east west cultural differences. Exploring the metaphysical and positing an inquiring look at religious extremism miniature art today is as explosive as the current burning issues it is reflecting. Highjacked by the young generation as a medium of dialogue with 'self' and others it has provided them an avenue they proudly proclaim their own – an exclusive new

age reinvention showcasing their point of view. Some radically singular approaches have in turn influenced a host of mutations which collectively amount to a pot pourri of styles and trends within the new form of the genre today.

Well out of its infancy the contemporary miniature has an established repertoire of content and workmanship levels but it now needs to raise the bar. This will not just sustain current viewership but also elevate appreciation levels as audiences now are much more discerning and aware of the genre's merits, flaws and topicality.

Essentially a product of young artists the contemporary version carries within it most of the attributes of youth. If it is fresh, bold and daring it is also immature, unresolved and clumsy and its rollicking journey forward is often riddled with growing pains. The genre has been under fire for not upholding its essential essence and regressing towards the bizarre and the tawdry. Excessive mutilation and grotesquerie also disenchant viewers. There is abundant production but no stringent scrutiny to ensure quality control. Often exhibitions are uneven mixes of the good the bad and the ugly. Prolific production generates momentary excitement but it is only few quality

Shoaib Mahmood - Brand Culture



Aisha Rahim
Feelings



GROUP EXHIBITIONS

pieces that will stand the test of time. New work, even by experienced artists often lacks depth and is too market oriented – galleries across the border and in London and New York are the exciting new sales outlets. Should this not be reason enough to pay even greater attention to content and quality?

ASSOCIATED METAPHORS

A fair sampling of young generation mindset was witnessed in the miniature group show Associated Metaphors, which was faculty member IVSSA, Sumaira Tazeen's first curatorial venture. She had brought together five independent miniature artists who were directly or indirectly creating work related to gender issues. As an exhibition Associated Metaphors, was built on the premise of gender interactions, reflections, concerns and observations. Artists Aisha Rahim, Hadia Moiz, Mahreen Zuberi, Naveed Iqbal and Shoaib Mahmood had created artworks relevant to their personal understanding of this broad based theme.

Aisha Rahim's miniature art centralized on creating visual manifestations of emotional exchanges between members of the opposite sex. Her thrust was on semi abstract representations of 'feelings' mutual and exclusive. Pleasure, was amongst her most memorable painting, a mixed media exercise on wasli rendered in a pleasing burgundy hue. Particularly worth noticing was not just the ripple effects emanating from the deep red poppy image, but also the finely painted detail of stamens, stigma and pollen dust in the inner nucleus of the floral construction. However the concept of, Beyond the Reality, did not reveal itself instantly.

For Hadia Moiz it was depiction of intimate togetherness that was paramount. She chose organic shapes tubular convolutions and mushroom capped, intertwined images to portray her feelings. If working on newsprint was meant to bring added significance to the painting it failed to do so. Newsprint text relevant to the concept being interpreted could have given a larger meaning to the work. Mahreen Asif Zuberi distinguishing herself as a miniature artist and an art educator at the Visual Arts Dept of Karachi University has already exhibited works pertaining to gender intimacy in a solo show. Her current paintings take off from her previous work where she was toying with the drill machine form as a representation of love in the 21st century. Her current images of 'drill bits' and an industrial age vibrator, the form of which is very similar to a hand drill, give definition to her concepts of gender relationships in this show. While the work is in context to an established expression and connects with the premise

of this show the imagery if seen independently can take a while to divulge itself. The paintings carrying seating arrangements can suggest two is company and three is a crowd and the drill bits and vibrator in, With Attachments, is also understandable but most of the other untitled works are open to speculation. Unlike other artists who capitalized on the emotive aspect of togetherness Mahreen prefers to cut the chase and zero's into the nitty gritty of the matter as objectively as possible. As an artist she is meticulous about her drawing and painting skills and crafts her idiom with confidence.

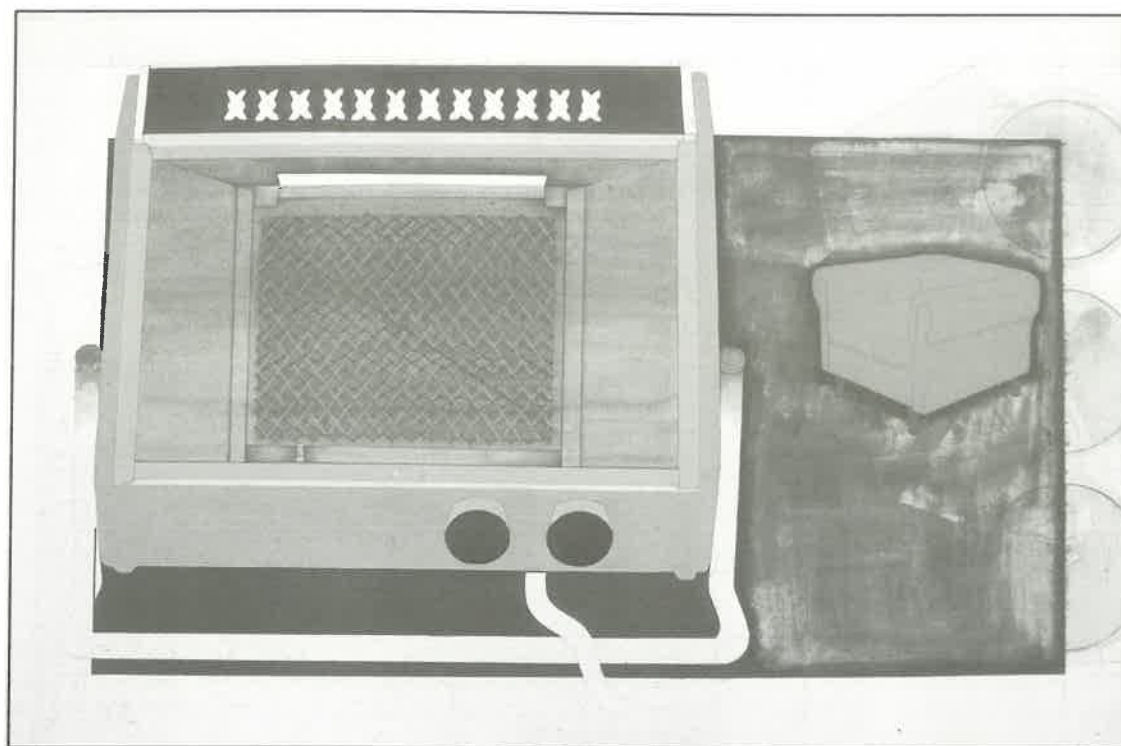
The current social and political chaos in the country is taking its toll on human relationships. Artist Naveed Iqbal's work alludes to the strain of maintaining balance and harmony in such an environment where bedlam and confusion "stretches you across the limit sometimes." His visual implications are still vague and can be enhanced with a dose of directness.

Upbeat and trendy Shoaib Mahmood has set his pace in the realm of contemporary miniature with a specific focus on the bane of brand culture. He extends his signature style further to incorporate the theme of this show. Juxtaposing swimwear staples of bikinis and swim suits alongwith his usual Nike T shirts and denim jeans he establishes a ying yang chitter chatter. An apt commentary on the influence western brands can wield on the psyche of susceptible young generation populations of third world nations – a form of neo colonialism. In the present work he is now referencing the segment of misdirected youth who not only patronize brandwear but also adopt western behavioral trends in their conduct with each other.

Offering diversity in thought Associated Metaphors comes across as a revealing document of young generation artists' attitude and thoughts on the vital aspect of gender attraction. Romance as a sentiment seems out dated – theirs is a direct take on the physical and the material. Living in a culture under siege they are internalizing the atmosphere of disarray and distress. The mechanical and the substantial have replaced the poetic and the lyrical. Some artists attempted to create a bold and open stance in their work inferring a subtly put explicitness – perhaps to create shock value – or are they mirroring reality – if so is this a developing trend soliciting acceptability?

As a curator Sumaira Tazeen has been able to muster enough works to articulate the dictates of her central idea. The thrust would have been stronger if she had removed some of the weaker and more ambiguous paintings

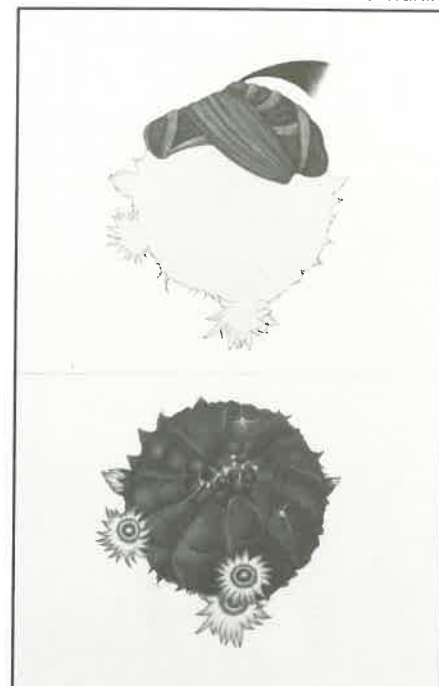
Mehreen Zuberi - Drill Bits



Shoaib Mahmood



Aisha Rahim



HOME AND DISPLACEMENT

In the current climate of social and political upheaval the term 'displacement' is loaded with connotations and its aesthetic translation has become just as diverse and potent. There are multiple temporal and discursive layers through which artists are now working and encountering resonant images that refuse to be read directly and which oblige the viewer to arrive at independent conclusions have become commonplace. A group show comprising works of four artists, three from interior Sindh and one from Azad Kashmir invites speculation on such developments. Addressing, social, class and political frictions as agents of dislocation a pot pourri of oil on canvas, watercolour on wasli and gouache on railway ticket art works draw ones attention to this disturbing reality.

Artist Nizam Dahiri, a 2002 graduate of NCA, plays with iconic images to create a sense of flux that is undermining our cultural, national and economic stability. Capitalizing on the misprint effect (when a printing error renders an image out of focus) he has recreated large oil paintings of the Mona Lisa, Mohenjodaro's Priest King, a Mughal Emperor, a 100 rupee currency note bearing an image of the Quaid and a popular Allah Buksh landscape in double or triple layers. Confronting the blurred picture, onlookers are encouraged to re-focus their gaze and imagine the original or ideal version and in doing so, to re-address their own socio-political beliefs. This shifting focus speaks of the impermanence of the power structures, be it the Indus Valley Civilization, Mughal India or the European Renaissance as well as the edgy politics, skewed social standing and dwindling reserves of Pakistan.

Unlike Dahiri whose work is new Amjad Ali Talpurs signature of the picture puzzle board game variety is well established. His imagery is painted on wasli squares which are movable. A single shift of a square can dislodge the harmony of the image in an instant. The 'artistic disaster' is his statement. A disjointed Pakistani flag cuts a sorry figure next to the bold crisply painted stars and stripes of the American emblem in his two flag miniature painting. Similarly the map of Pakistan sliced in half and the mangled portrait of the Quaid I Azam is self explanatory. Images of technical tools, musical apparatus and writing instruments rent asunder with a simple move of squares here and there, critiques the tilted state of the arts and crafts. The artist continues to maintain his painterly skills but repetitiveness of image and theme brings a sense of déjà vu to his repertoire.

The ordinary is rendered extraordinary in fresh NCA graduate (2008) Nizakat Ali Depars treatment and use of the railway ticket. Using the ubiquitous travel voucher as a painterly support he cuts through the class divide of high and low art / culture to paint mini portraits of a

Nazakat Ali Depar - Hinterland Travellers

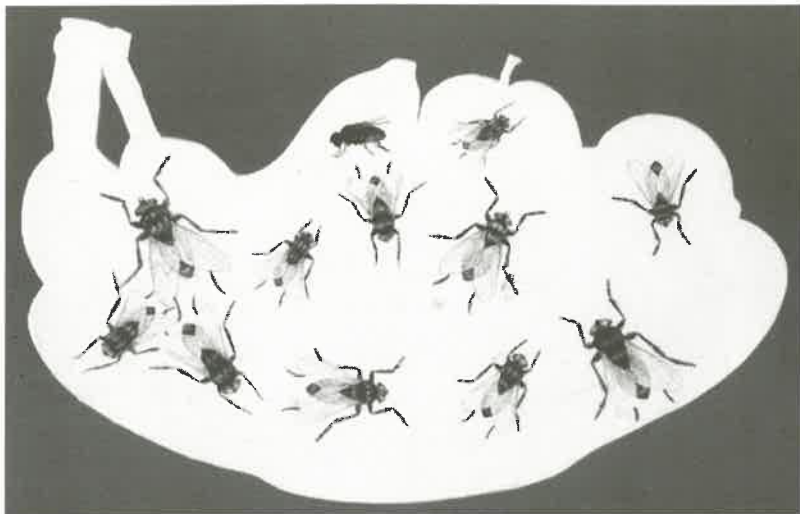


varied group of hinterland travelers, village natives and peasantry for whom the railway is a passage to greener pastures. The portraiture is a pointed commentary on the predicament of the migrant worker, the woes of child labour, the increasing presence of religious extremists, infiltrators and rogue elements.

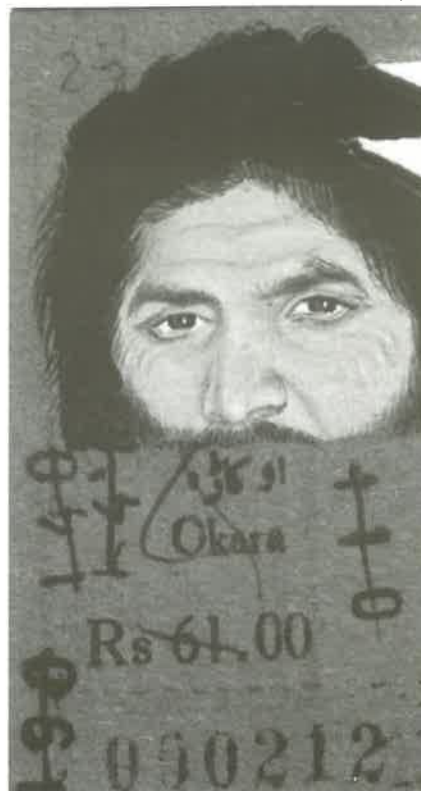
For Hammad Malik, hailing from Kashmir, it is reflections pertaining to his immediate environment that are a source of concern. A carpenter's saw imprinted with images of foliage is immediately recognized as an agent of deforestation, an assortment of fruit infested with vermin speaks of produce depletion, hunger and poverty. However, some of his works lack maturity and their symbolic significance is confusing.

While artistic strategies like Dahiri's picture shifting and Talpurs picture puzzle three D effects are palatable the cut and paste elements and use of new media by the other two artists is not very effectively handled. Viewed collectively the exhibition presents a multilayered interpretation of the concept of 'displacement' - the invitation given to the viewer to take an active stance in relation to the painting is often a political one even when the subject matter is not obviously so. The production of politically motivated art conforms to the need of the times but its proliferation has upped the ante - most artists are capitalizing on clichés but it is only the fittest who will survive.

Hammad Malik - Hunger and Poverty



Nazakhat Ali Depar



Amjad Ali Talpur - Art and Culture



Nizam Dahiri - Mughal Emperor



Dawn Gallery June 7 2009

DAWN
GALLERY

MINIATURE ON THE MARCH

A four artist group exhibition explores a number of contemporary issues as seen through the eyes of young minds - their concerns, hopes and fears and most of all their interpretations of the current social and political complexities that have become so integral to daily living.

Miniature artist Ayesha Duranni, a 2004 graduate of NCA, addresses the plight of women through images of headless mannequins. Having worked as a fashion designer for two years she draws on her experiences in the tailoring room and plays with pattern, fabric and garment to further complement her ideas. A female figure sans head nullifies the intellectual capacity of a woman and presenting it as a mannequin highlights the 'body' as a decorative object. An array of ensembles and designer materials indicating the roles she has to play also enhance this objectification of the body. A miniature painting of a tear in a pattern template revealing the colourful fabric underneath urges one to think of the feeling human being inside the outer casing of the body. Yet another painting with a cluster of mannequins surrounding a fellow mannequin titled, *Collective Energy*, speaks of women power -- but then where are the thinking heads?

Mahreen Zuberi a 2003 NCA graduate is much more forthright about gender equation (read interaction). Her miniature series, *Doing Krishna*, is loaded with suggestive content but it is her manipulation of innocent images to create compromising situations which piques the imagination. Zuberi has used the electrical drill, wire, plug and socket to create the polarity of intimacy and aggression between male and female. Her paintings of a plug in the socket, the seductively coiled wires, the penetrating swivel, the charged butt end of the drilling machine are presented as various acts of contact and closeness. The imagery is bold with a tongue in cheek explicitness.

The global versus the regional, the third world pitted against the first, the politics of power play and the slavery of brand culture are among the major concerns of the new miniature artists. Painting pseudo power images of Mughal royalty and powerless (headless, armless) bodies of young men in Nike tee shirts and denim jeans, Shoaib Mehmood tries to evoke present day imperialism. This brand centered life with bondage to foreign consumer goods, a neo colonial strategy to subjugate the masses, is well put in some of his paintings. But his Nike shirt and Jeans as a symbol of servitude has been repeated much too often and its sameness dilutes impact.

Elusive but enigmatic, Hasnat Mehmood's imagery does not reveal itself instantly. A 2001 graduate of NCA this artist has painted a quiet, mature body of work His painting, *Who is who*, 2006, juxtaposes a homosapien against a homoerectus. Considering how barbaric

modern man has become he poses the question "Who is who." His *Landscape Series*, is stark, eerie and under the shadow of the gun. A past present evocation of paradise lost perhaps. And, Krishna God of Love, maybe among the miniature staples but as a general symbolic reference the deity carries greater significance for audiences across the border than at home.

Almost all the artists in this miniature collection have displayed quality workmanship and there is a greater emphasis on concept and compositional skills in their paintings than on pictorial or decorative elements to carry the message across. Contemporary imagery is dominant in the paintings with Mughal icons sourced in some works as points of reference only.

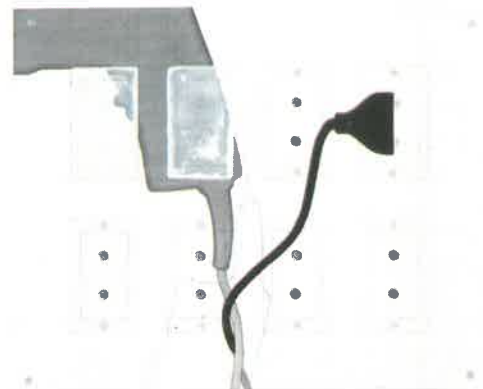
Hasnat Mehmood - Landscape Series



Shoaib Mehmood - Brand Culture Politics



Mahreen Zuberi - Doing Krishna



Ayesha Durrani - Headless Mannequins

TRADITION AND MODERNITY

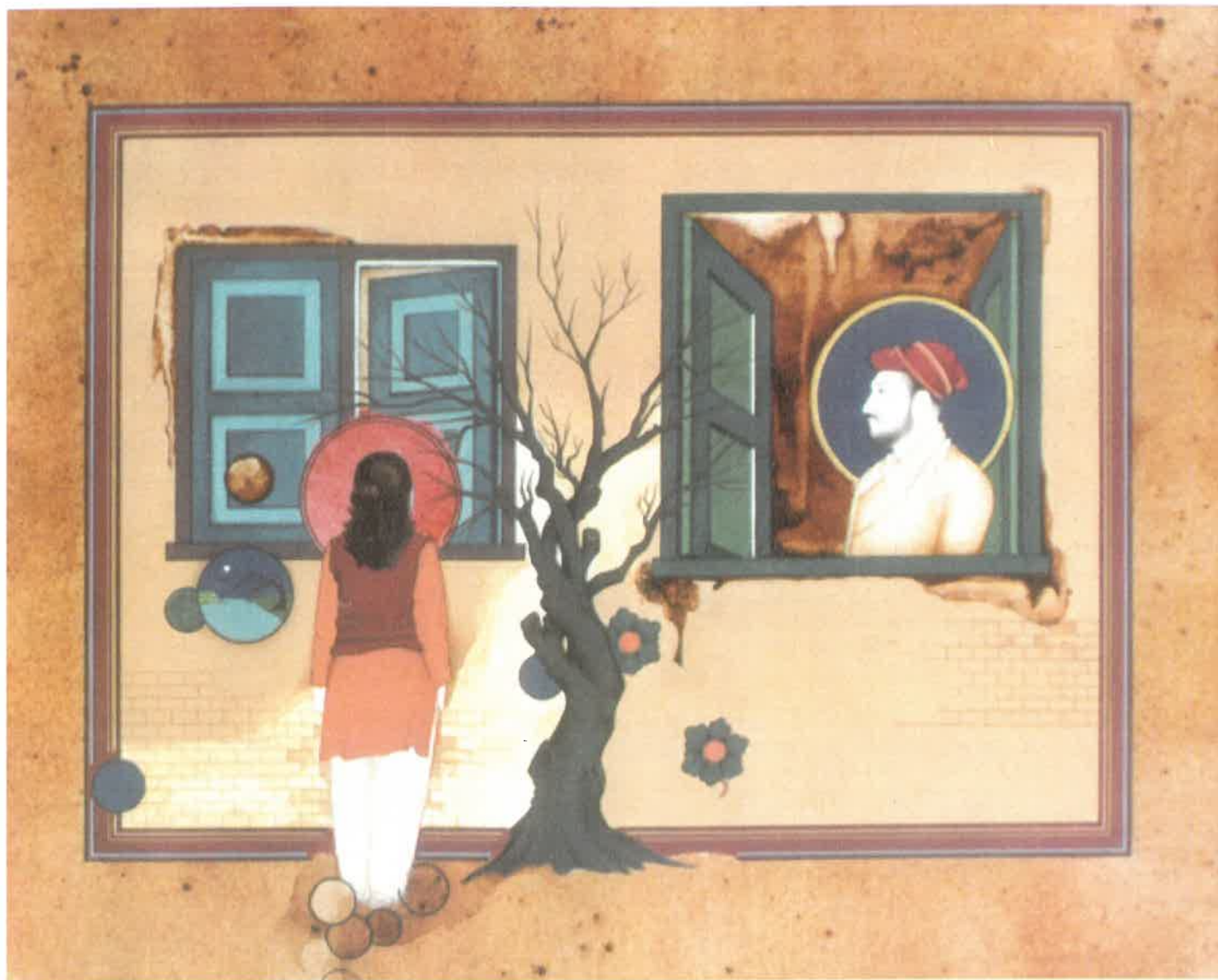
Today when much miniature art is formulaic and sub standard a delightful new assortment stood out on account of its fresh approaches and delicate workmanship. Executed by 2002—04 graduates of NCA, all students of Ustad Bashir, these miniatures explored subjects relevant to the artists' immediate personal lives and their musings, sentimental gestures, awkward and naïve outpourings - this endowed the paintings with a fetchingly innocent appeal.

The only male artist in the show Asif Ahmed has already created a positive impression when his thesis project "Banjaranama" was exhibited in 2005. Thematically and technically sound the work gave

tidings of an artist with potential and in his current miniatures he maintained that certain finesse peculiar to his drawing and painting skills. The young artists feel for the lyrical and the poetic is visible in his lines, colour harmonies and compositions and regarding content and style he also borrows from the Persian miniature. While he has a healthy respect for the traditional mannerism of miniature painting his personal expression is a synthesis of the old and the new. Mixing experimental forms with typical miniature vocabulary he tries to achieve a con-

Asif Ahmed





Kiran Saeed

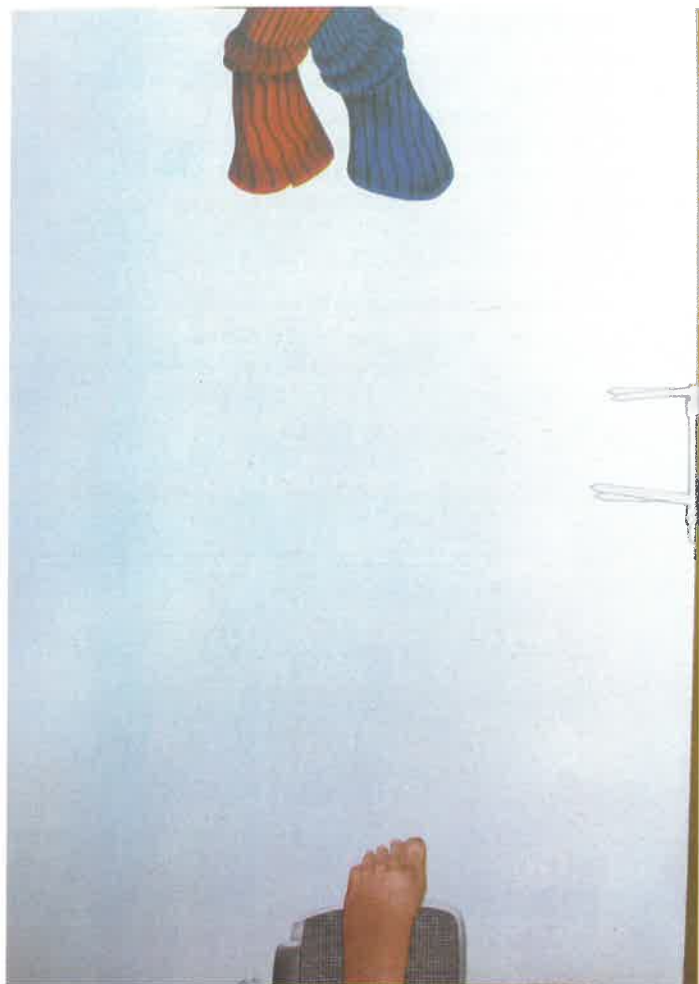
porary style that is oriental yet modern. Painted in a romantic strain his current works are an ode to love.

When Attiya Shaukat fell from a great height her accident provided her with a theme she could express with personal conviction. The gauze bandages on the feet, splintered bones, surgical incisions and back injury has been expressed almost literally by specific imagery and by dividing her paper surface into two separate halves and clamping or stitching them together with string to simulate a grafting process. Meticulously painted this ventilation has been therapeutic for the artist and has given an unusual twist to the picture content but it has also made the work much too individual and subjective. Moreover in her eagerness to say it all she has cluttered her compositions with symbolic references not all of which are coherent. Recall and recount defines the content of Kiran Saeeds nostalgic musings. She indulges in childhood reveries through a series of windows, reliving her haunts, dreams and aspirations. Similarly Sobia Ahmed locates herself in imaginary and introspective compositions related to growing up in a tradition bound society. Both works are figurative but Kiran opts for a pictorial narrative while Sobia divides her surface into abstruse, planes and rectangles interspersed with circular patches. The lotus flower and wave like patterns typical to miniature vocabulary are common to Farwa Hussain Naqvi's oeuvre. She uses them to express a mood, as an atmospheric element or to bring movement to a static format. In this show her work illustrating lotus buds adrift in a torrid sea evoke a diaspora situation as the painting is also affixed with stamps as on a postcard. Traditional dancing figures by Farah Jabeen presented in compositions of geometrically divided vertical and horizontal spaces, is a lukewarm attempt at mixing the traditional with the modern. Her previous studies of traditional Mughal miniatures reveal her considerable working skills but it is strong meaningful content in contemporary compositions that makes the new miniatures engaging.

Group exhibitions of miniatures are common fare these days which should auger well for the genre but sadly quantity is overshadowing quality. Surprisingly the current show was not bumpy and the viewing experience was pleasant.

Sobia Ahmed





Attiya Shaukat



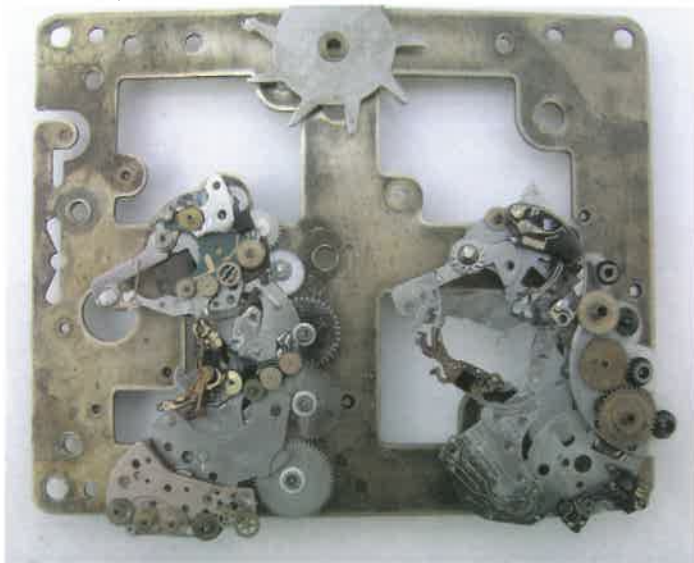
Asif Ahmed

THE KARACHI MINIATURE

Is the open-endedness of contemporary art accommodating the new miniature or is the genre's mannerism and vocabulary so fertile that hybridizations instead of diminishing it only seem to strengthen it? Various tagged as modernist or post-modernist art the contemporary miniature, undeterred by critical reasoning, continues to flex its muscles much to the delight of its practitioners and viewers. The Karachi Miniature exhibition, a curatorial collaboration between director Poppyseed Sumbul Khan and Mahreen Zuberi and Sumaira Tazeen (who teach and formulate miniature curricula at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and Karachi University), invites fresh speculation on its precarious journey forward. Termed 'semantically redundant' by curator Sumbul Khan and also heralded as the Karachi chapter of miniature art the show pushes forward in spite of its unresolved status.

As an indigenous art form the miniature sits well with its practitioners and audiences not just because of its rich pictorial content but also its arduous training. The learning regimen, demanding devotion and determination, develops and braces the students tenacity and working skills. The attributes of character building, application abilities and the vital connection with one's social and cultural history establish the sound grounding an artist needs as a takeoff point. For those interested in current expressions this foundation equips them with the confidence to innovate and radicalize within a contemporary ambit

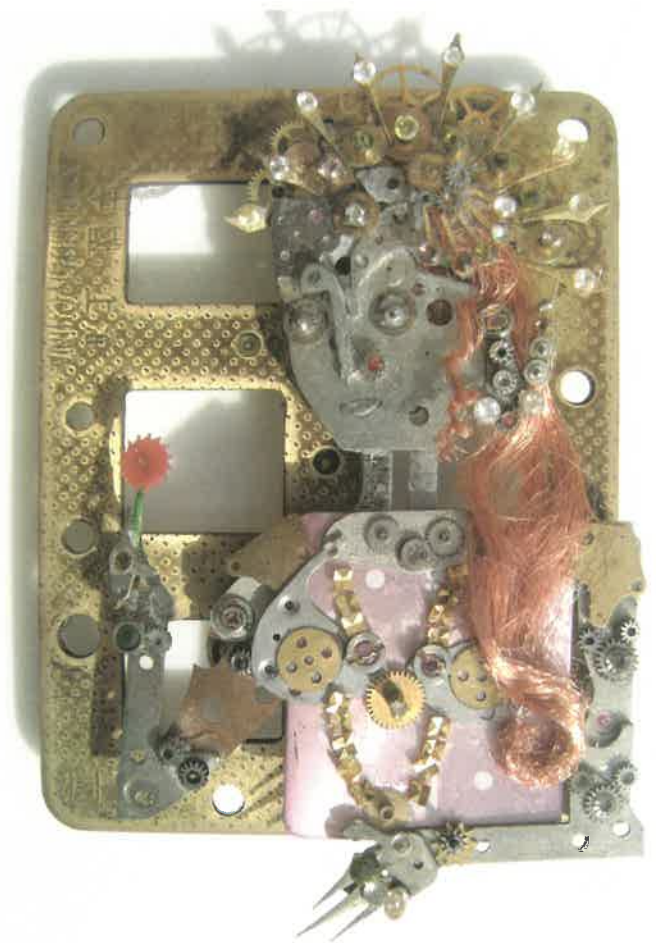
Nosheen Iqbal - Horse Power



without breaking ties with the miniature ethos. With some artists the miniature sensibility is so entrenched that even when the art is totally removed from its parent form it still references the miniature in essence.

Wholly contemporary in concept and idiom Mahreen Zuberi's Sub series takes its cue from the removal of the submarine from the landmark Submarine Chowk. Establishing a sense of loss of a familiar site and the disorientation it creates in the human psyche she goes onto play with the 'sub' to reinforce the current state of disorder in society by placing it alongside a water sprinkler or a dripping hose.

Nosheen Iqbal - Once Upon a Time



The cheeky humour soft pedals the irony intended. Employing a minimal and subtle design module Zuberi expects the viewer to engage with the art on her terms. Similarly her deep attachment with the miniature technique is revealed in stages as one ponders over the exactness of her rendition and the restrained, minute scale of her work.

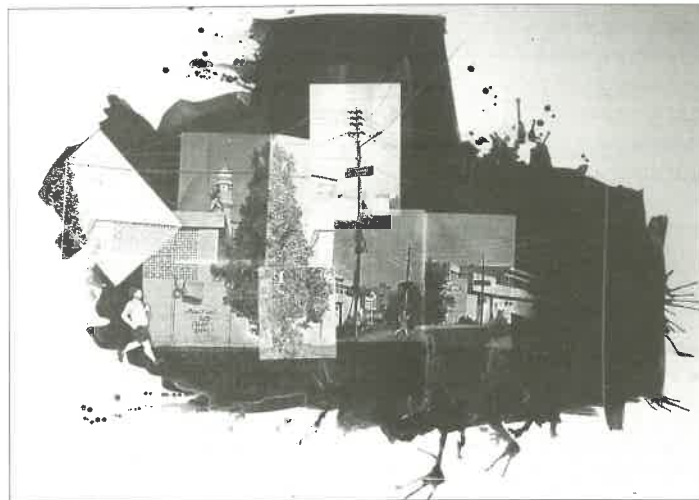
The child (read little girl) in Sumaira Tazeen continues to surface in her work. Introducing the concept of 'miniature sculpture' in paintings she toys with handcrafted objects that remind one of dollhouse furniture. Titled *Dur Kai Dhool* her three dimensional arrangements in this show reference her earlier dowry box theme. A fusion of conventional *gud rung* technique and lace, velvet and *gota* the works speak of pre-nuptial preparations peculiar to this region. Gender disquiets with a focus on issues concerning unmarried girls is an ongoing concern in Sumaira Tazeen's work which of late was stationary. In comparison to a somewhat uncertain workmanship display of her current theme in another recent show she is now innovating with flair, finesse and confidence.

A humorous take on obesity to assuage the battle of the bulge comes forth in Hina Farooqui's *Size Zero* series of work. Taking advantage of a Mughal era reproduction of an obese *Baba Bharat Singh* she paints present day prototypes (fat uncles) she encounters in her daily urban environment. Working in *gadrang* and cyanotype on *wasli* she brings a similar mix of the old and the new to her technique also.

Specifically painting /photographing intimate home interiors to evoke an aura of silence and communion with self Madiha Suboors work is a combination of digital print and gouache on *wasli*. The reference to the miniature is in the technicalities only.

Following the Sufi trail Malika Abbas centralizes on the shrine as a haven in her miniatures. Paintings on *vasli* with gouache and hand painted photographic renditions focusing on Sachal Sarmast's tomb in Fakhir Jo Goth, Khairpur Village in interior Sindh are imaginary narratives glorifying the sufi '*silsila*' and devotional sentiments. Scale and use of media are the only indirect links to the original miniature.

A wrist watch mechanism is as technically precise and intricate as a miniature painting. Building on this equation Nosheen Iqbal sculpts delightfully minute profiles of Mughal era royalty and related imagery out of mechanical components like computer chips, discs, snaps, clock and hand watch screws, tacks, rivets, studs, clips and fasteners. Novel as well as contemporary this interpretation plants miniature aesthetics right into the heart of the mechanical age.



Hina Farooqui - Size Zero

Painting portraits of ordinary people onto heads of pawns on a chess board to highlight the exploitation of the masses enables Rahêela Abro to justify her commitment to the spirit of the miniature. Fariha Nader's *Tanao* comes across as an implosion within the miniature genre – a symbolic manifestation of upheaval within the discipline.

As a Karachi Miniature this body of work is not entirely city specific – other than Zuberi most artists have focused on art in an urban environment. The effort to capture the Karachi temperament is missing. Likewise the miniature philosophy is unevenly distributed – some artworks purport a genuine will to contemporize the genre while others seem to be stretching the sentiment.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

MINIATURE BASHING

Endgame histrionics or tectonic shifts - The Dying Miniature exhibition of drawings by Muhammed Zeeshan sparks debate on the psychological and physical hold the miniature genre exerts on its proponents and how they are reacting to it.

If the miniature is to be quantified in terms of extinction versus permanence then the venerable discipline began dying the day it was first desecrated / resurrected as the neo miniature. That artists have been able to drag so much mileage out of its waning form is a testament to the wealth of imagery, technique and cultural substance existing within the genre that could be successfully extracted for varying degrees of exhumations, makeovers, inversions and dissections for a considerable number of years. The miniatures supposed annihilation is also intrinsically related to the rise of radical element that is trying to evolve a new art mannerism in tandem with the requisites of the 21st century.

Indigenous to the region the new miniature acquired emblematic status as soon as it became a degree course and was put on the anvil for experiment and innovation. As a home grown toy it was freely played around with, twisted, turned and spun till some practitioners began to outgrow its format as they became increasingly susceptible to the new realities prevalent in art world wide.

As a miniature artist with considerable command over the painterly process Muhammed Zeeshan's miniature practice has always centralized on subversive non miniature vocabulary to address issues like terrorism, militancy, decimation of human values as well as gender concerns. At first it was the innocuous banana that was inverted as a (gun) weapon and a phallic symbol and then his miniatures comprised exquisitely painted (hairy) rats and vultures (swathed in bandages) as peculiarly representative elements- the tough, indomitable survivors of culture. Interposed with the finely rendered horse, striking tulip flora or explicit female imagery the gross and the attractive were intentionally brought together to draw in and unsettle the viewer. Talking in innuendoes and leaving much to the onlookers imagination the artist further stretched the miniature ethos with threading, stitching and punching through the wasli surface to emphasize his premise and express his creativity.

Currently his work is a deliberate reversal of all things miniature. Forsaking the mini scale he has opted for large formats. Having exhausted his antics on the wasli he has shifted to the unconventional sandpaper as his drawing surface. From a highly burnished white surface on which he painted with a squirrel hair brush he has moved to a dark extremely abrasive support on which he has drawn

Muhammed Zeeshan

with graphite pencils. Instead of finely painted pictorial imagery on wasli he has scratched large stark silhouettes into the coarse sandpaper surface. Rising like apparitions his shadow figures, culled from the Mughal era, have been meticulously rubbed (read burnished) onto the sandpaper with the same finesse Zeeshan reserves for his miniatures. The sooty black tenor of these works ironically reminds one of the all-black paintings of Ad Reinhardt--what the artist called "just the last paintings anyone can make."

The single drawing with non-miniature imagery titled Dying Miniature and Angels from Galatea also focuses on the miniature in spirit. Referencing Raphael's fresco The Triumph of Galatea, Zeeshan has painted cherub angels armed with Cupids bows and arrows who aim at the heart of Galatea. This is more than just a poignant illustration of the artists love hate relationship with the genre. History tells us that, 'Somewhere along the line between medieval and Renaissance painting, the rules of the game have changed.

Galatea was an example of High Renaissance painting in its most evolved form, one in which the transition to a new approach to art was complete.

Contemplating a shift by diverging from the norm the artist has made a concerted effort to obliterate the miniature but it continues to haunt his oeuvre, physically through the pseudo imagery and psychologically through his workmanship. This inability to oust the miniature ethos altogether from the psyche is a predicament common to most new miniature artists keen on branching out in other directions without losing sight of their roots. In this regard the Dying Miniature exhibition helps to limn the multifarious pressures and impulses that motivate / decimate miniature (mal)practice today.

There seem to be two bases for making the statement that miniature painting is dead or dying. The first is that prevalent conventions of modernism are producing diminishing returns-- fresh ideas have been exhausted. The other is that the centrality of the new miniature as an indigenous medium (discovery) is now increasingly marginalized in relation to other technology inspired media - the obvious historical ones like photography and film, plus all manner of printing technologies, and the newer ones like video, installation and digital arts.

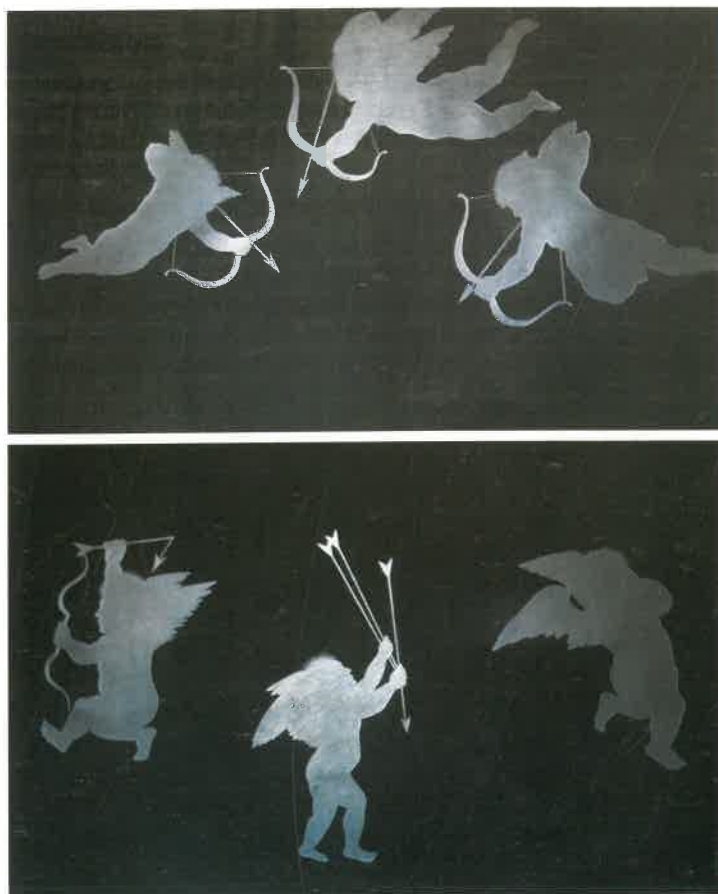
In an art atmosphere dominated by the postmodern theory there are today multiple modes of seeing and production which have obviously changed the meaning and practice of painting. It is now technically possible and institutionally legitimate to make art out of anything and everything. Boundaries severing art from non-art (and those delineating painting and sculpture, for example) have become fuzzy and

permeable. When such is the case that anything can be art, it is very easy to make art and very hard to make high-quality art, because the temptation is great to escape from the pressure of a specific tradition like miniature painting by taking the alibi of a tradition where the pressure is lower. In the current era of Conceptual Art it is possible to be an artist without being a painter because ideas and concepts take precedence over the rigours of the painterly approach, technique or process.



Muhammed Zeeshan - The Dying Miniature

Intricate and labour intensive conventional miniature art is at odds with the current informal 'anything goes' category of art. It was mainly the ingenuity of the new miniature exponents that a fusion of the old and the new was put into effect and some exciting amalgamations came forth. But today if the miniature is losing ground does that mean the problem lies with the medium or is it the artist who has begun to concede to prevalent forces and is no longer interested in rising to the challenge of perpetuating the genre and asserting his will.



Muhammed Zeeshan - The Dying Miniature

Nusra Latif

THE INVISIBLE GUN

A part of the early group of NCA miniature art graduates who spearheaded the genre's revival through experiment and deconstruction, Nusra Latif, a Melbourne based artist for the last many years, continues to innovate within her chosen ambit of post colonial critical discourse. Addressing current social, political and gender concerns through intelligent insertions of historical reference she brings the same lively mix of the traditional and the contemporary to her technical application also. Building her narrative with extracts of conventional miniature imagery, visual data of colonial India, organic (often ornamental) foliate pattern, silhouettes of figurative and animal forms and contemporary juxtapositions of flat colour tonalities, she opts for compositions that are open to several readings.

The current Invisible Gun body of work conforms to her practice of using coded imagery to enticing brain teaser effect and the miniatures succeed in drawing in the viewer on the strength of their

considerable visual appeal. Nowhere as sinister as the title Invisible Gun suggests, the paintings explore the colonial imbroglio through recourse to a gamut of familiar but diverse graphics emanating from the historical and cultural landscape of the region. Picture play of the 'lota', 'takht', 'armour' and 'sword' images invokes the history and current state of power politics in the Rules of Warfare paintings, the Regal Blessings and Invisible Gun series. The boat and water indicators and the English Rose garden painting / drawing of Her Majesty's regiment, reiterates colonial intervention and our subaltern status. If this is the premise of Invisible Gun then it is only partially addressed as the rest of the miniatures stray in other directions.

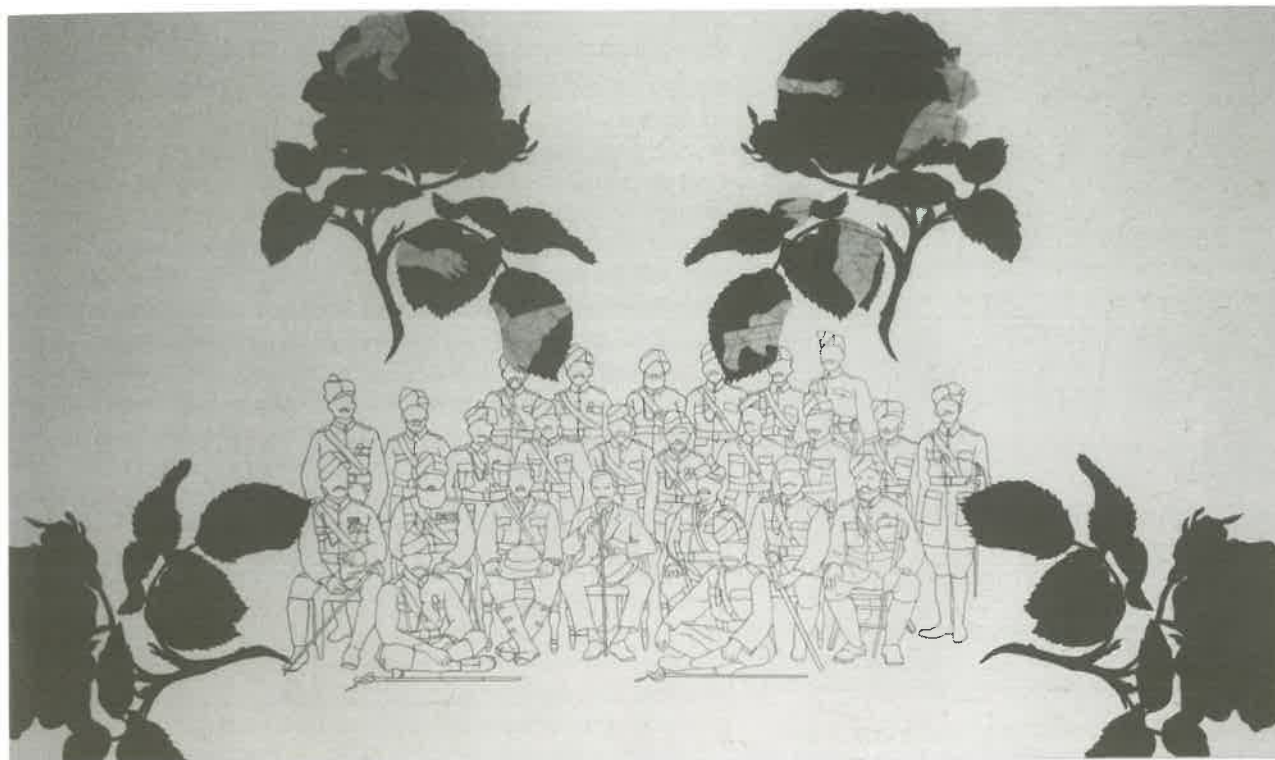
The use of decadent imagery is deliberate – it is visually attractive and connects with the traditional miniature but beyond that it is also a symbol of colonial baggage that has lost its essential value or purpose now that time has moved on. Paintings like Some Old Things and



Nusra Latif
Some Old Things



Nusra Latif - English Rose



Shipping the Memories question the validity of objects that speak of another age. Having lost their efficacy these remnants of the past can either survive as artifacts or be discarded altogether. The artist seems to be exploring sentiments of nostalgia and practicality from various aspects. Yet another set of paintings like Shipping the Desirables, A very subtle Pain and A Thousand Summers appear autobiographical in nature. They speak of diaspora existence, the pangs of dislocation and readjustment to a new set of rules and requirements.

Technically Latif uses a pictorial fragment from a Mughal or Rajput miniature as a starting point and then builds her composition layer by layer with contemporary art making strategies. By far the most appealing of these plays is the overlay of single line drawing she spreads quietly around, over or alongside her disparate but finely worked pieces. The linear network has a conceptual reference and it also brings cohesion to the fragments. This is not a fine brush, miniature induced, line but a graphic art inspired, thicker, uniform and plaint

contouring executed with considerable ease and perked up with colour. The artist's attractive chromatic choices and their flat, bland applications to optimize impact is another significant move towards contemporary art practice. Similarly incorporation of other mixed media devices like prints, collaged effects etc and minimal recourse to traditional miniature making trace the gradual progression of her oeuvre away from detailed and specific references to relatively ambiguous and more abstracted forms.

Exploring the traditions of Mughal miniature painting and colonial imagery is common to most contemporary miniature painters but Nusra Latif is among the few who have evolved a distinct signature. Defining her work motivations she states that "My presence as a woman, as an Asian, as a Muslim, as a migrant, as an ex-colonised, as a dark skinned individual and as a painter determine the course of images I make."

Newsline November 2009

NEWSLINE

Sumaira Tazeen

THE INNER LANDSCAPE

The contemporary miniature, specifically a new generation art, is now easing into a phase of maturity as some of its early exponents move away from the gimmickry of popular terminology towards deeper self examination. Miniature artist Sumaira Tazeen, a 1996 NCA graduate, has run through the gamut of socio – political critique and issue based pot shots peculiar to the new art, to arrive at a state of quiet introspection. Her exhibition Mawadda 2, following in the wake of Mawadda 1, continues to explore an inner landscape. Studying Quranic text to acquire spiritual knowledge and awareness has given Tazeen a new understanding of life. This has brought a radical shift in her aesthetic expression. Vibrant pictorial figurations, objects and design elements have faded out of her compositions – her picture planes now resound with the profound silence of empty spaces. Working with a minimal and very unusual vocabulary of buttons, maple leaves and skeins of thread she alludes to the complexities within relationships. Unlike the Freudian 'male' context of the button Sumaira Tazeen attaches feminine connotations of 'fastening and securing' to it. A painting called Dorrae, literally a zig-zag of strings fastened to buttons on either side, spells the complex male female exchange. The maple leaf of the Chinaar tree is found in the work titled Pattae Tankana where she alludes to the act of respectably cloaking a situation to guard another's privacy. Here she references the fig leaf which protected Adam and Eve when they were expelled from Eden.

Resting her premise on Mawadda (a heart full of love) Tazeen builds narratives like Udhair Bun, Taar Kashi and Bakhiye that express inner turmoil, insecurity and mistrust. Apparently contradicting her concept of Mawadda these emotional states, through their very negation of steadfastness, reiterate the need for love to acquire spiritual harmony. Compositions with titles like Zakara, Unsa, Ummania, Wadda, Tehreem

and Afaida are also a vivid manifestation of her concentration on Quranic scriptures.

A miniature artist with deft working skills Tazeen has set herself a challenge by opting to work with unconventional and personalized vocabulary. In Mawadda 1 her language and concepts were somewhat unresolved but in her current exhibition she has moved ahead with greater confidence. Her reductive palette of red black and white has also acquired a stronger sharpness and pungency which enhances the presence and meaning of her delicate imagery of tousled silken skeins and fine hairlike strands.

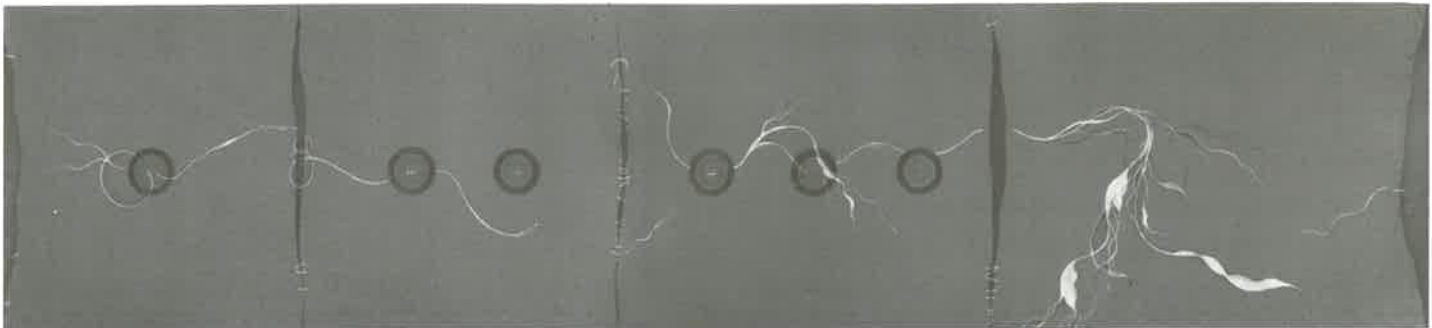
Hers is a very feminine approach – the obvious reference to stitchcraft and needlework, the consistent use of the tangled silken strands as defining forms, interesting as it maybe is still limiting.

While she brings poetic rhythms to her undulating forms and has worked towards strong colouration it still does not strengthen the extreme fragility of some of her images. This dilutes their impact. Tazeen's expression veers towards organic abstraction and her minimal vocabulary may move in that direction in search of new metaphors to counter sameness which is already becoming apparent in the current work.

Newsline May 2007

NEWSLINE

Sumaira Tazeen - Bakhiye



WASTED THEATRICALS

The miniature painter who gave us delightful teasers, like the tongue in cheek Krishna series and the nuanced Burqa paintings, sheds his humour as he struggles to distinguish and define the subtleties of primordial desire and reverent adoration. In his show of paintings titled *The Sacred and the Profane* Waseem Ahmed shifts from populist art probing an east west friction and pointed gender discriminations to boudoir fantasies where he tries to locate the fine line between the sacred and the profane. In this move from apparent cultural conflicts to disturbing inner realities his art turns away from chromatically vibrant pictorials within miniature boundaries towards stark monochrome effects on open-ended wasli's. This swing in mood and application adds a new dimension to his artistic repertoire in terms of aesthetic vocabulary, painterly ability and conceptual breadth not essentially as a miniature artist but a modern painter.

The current body of work comprises sparse compositions of the nude body enveloped in fiery veils of desire. The elated, consumed, helplessly entangled and readily succumbing postulations of the bare figures spell a losing battle of the senses. Waseem Ahmed lavishes much attention on the expression and body language of the partially revealed figure, male and female, to suggest an encounter between carnal desire and hallowed sentiment. Misty, vaporous clouds composed of clusters of fine lines fan out like flames emanating from an inferno while some configure into fiendish animal profiles to enact a tableau of human passion pitched against inner demons. The theme initially appears to be bold and strong but on prolonged engagement fails to grip viewer imagination as the issue is not resolved successfully. The artists projection of self as the male protagonist does not really add to the drama in spite of the emphasis on theatrics. The emotional pitch is not palpable enough, most works seem contrived and repetitive - 'playboy magazine' visuals mixed with acts of repentance and self immolation make for confused viewing.

In the small group of dedicated miniature painters Waseem Ahmed is among the few who continue to maintain their painting and drawing skills. He paints with an even more measured hand than before in this series. The brushwork is close and deliberate - precise well blended tonalities animate the nudes with dimensional projection as in the photo finish of western academic painting but quite unlike the flat colour applications of the true miniature mannerism. Even his colour palette is a departure from the true spirit of album painting. It is the minutely intricate and very striking ornamental qualities of the miniature that endow it with its brilliance but these works echo the monochrome effects of sepia tinted or black and white photography. Yet another aspect which goes against the 'true miniature' grain is the

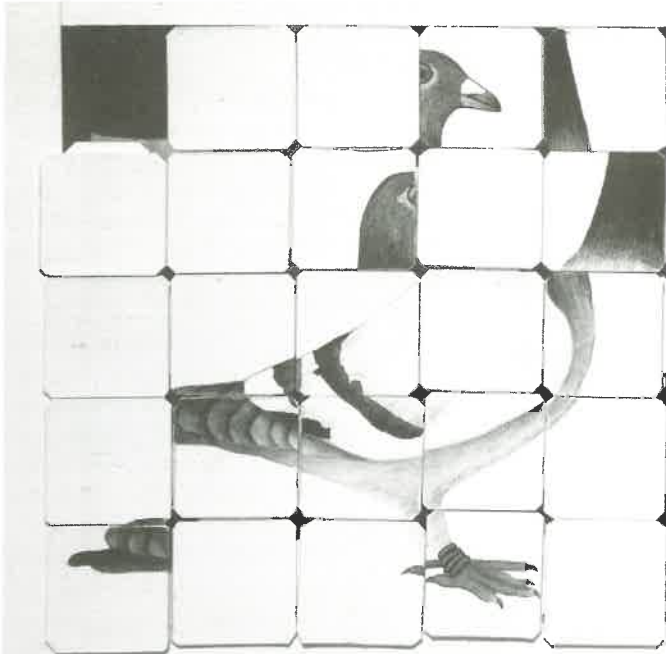


Waseem Ahmed

size of the works. Simply by being 'miniaturized' in scale, with no recourse to the genre's technicalities, is not enough to declare the works as miniature paintings. Today the contemporary miniature enjoys a wide berth and such liberties are common but Waseem Ahmeds evolution has always retained the spirit / essence of the miniature even during his abstract phase but in this collection there is a greater shift away from the principal genre. Most of the miniature painters who pioneered this contemporary revolution are moving towards hybrid stylizations but fortunately the genres contemporary format is still alive and kicking. Waseem Ahmed has the ability to constantly strike out and break fresh ground - carrying works to their logical conclusion however requires reasoning and logic. His innovative streak has brought forth some engaging earlier series followed by some not so interesting mid career works and now we have his new paintings which are well executed but fall short of being truly dynamic.

Amjad Ali Talpur

THREE DIMENSIONAL MINIATURES



Amjad Ali - Hawks And Doves

Rupture from tradition was the contemporary miniatures first claim to fame. Many defiant somersaults later the genre continues to build and thrive on the process of deconstruction and reinvention. Readily embracing new media strategies and devices it is now composed of several radical strands that purport a modern / post modern stance. Conforming to this spirit of experimental crossovers the exhibition by Amjad Ali Talpur presents the miniature as a three dimensional entity. An NCA graduate Talpur has been exhibiting since 2003. Pointedly political his work has stood out on account of its distinct imagery and specific treatment. Proliferation of mass media forces and their constructive and destructive role in moulding popular opinion is also a determining factor in his work. He is critical of media spreading disinformation and its capacity to overwhelm consumers with advertising plays. Reverting to Islamic and sub-continental history he has selected portraiture of historical figures to address current concerns. By painting profiles of prominent Muslim monarchs, imperial heads and military commanders he critiques present day power politics, dictatorship and army intervention. The painted visage



established his prowess as a miniature artist but it was the fractured, manipulated image that gave meaning to his content. Segmenting and adeptly cutting his wasli portrait painting into sliding, square tiles he composes small pocket edition jig saw puzzles. When the tiles are shifted the portrait is split into a mass of broken images creating conflict and discord. In this show imperial likenesses are replaced by the Pakistani flag and a formal portrait of the Quaid i Azam. Reshuffling the tiles he creates a scrambled image of the Quaid to portray a leadership deficit and chaotic circumstances. Similarly the presence of hawks and doves in the political arena is enacted through literal images of the species and guns are portrayed as strategic weapons of terror. The umbrella, an obvious object of shelter is inverted to form a destructive missile and the dissected scissor image speaks of unseen hands cutting through the fabric of life here.

Considered a novel projection when it was first exhibited, Talpur has since exhausted the jigsaw puzzle idea. The current display charts the artists technical and conceptual progression towards other, more pronounced, three dimensional projections. His new miniatures

painted on finely crafted, ribbed pieces demand active viewership. Playing with symbols synonymous with political manipulation he alludes to power struggles between third world nations and super powers. An image of the presidential chair appears red when seen upfront, it turns blue when viewed from the right and green when we shift to the left of the picture. He brings the same variableness to the frontal image of the American flag and the chess pawn and king juxtaposition. This play with political suggestions and engagement of the viewer into a deliberate act of seeing to decipher the contents perks up the viewing experience.

The artist's present invention mimics the effect created by lenticular displays, which are capable of presenting changing images, animations, 3D presentations and the like. Known for many years

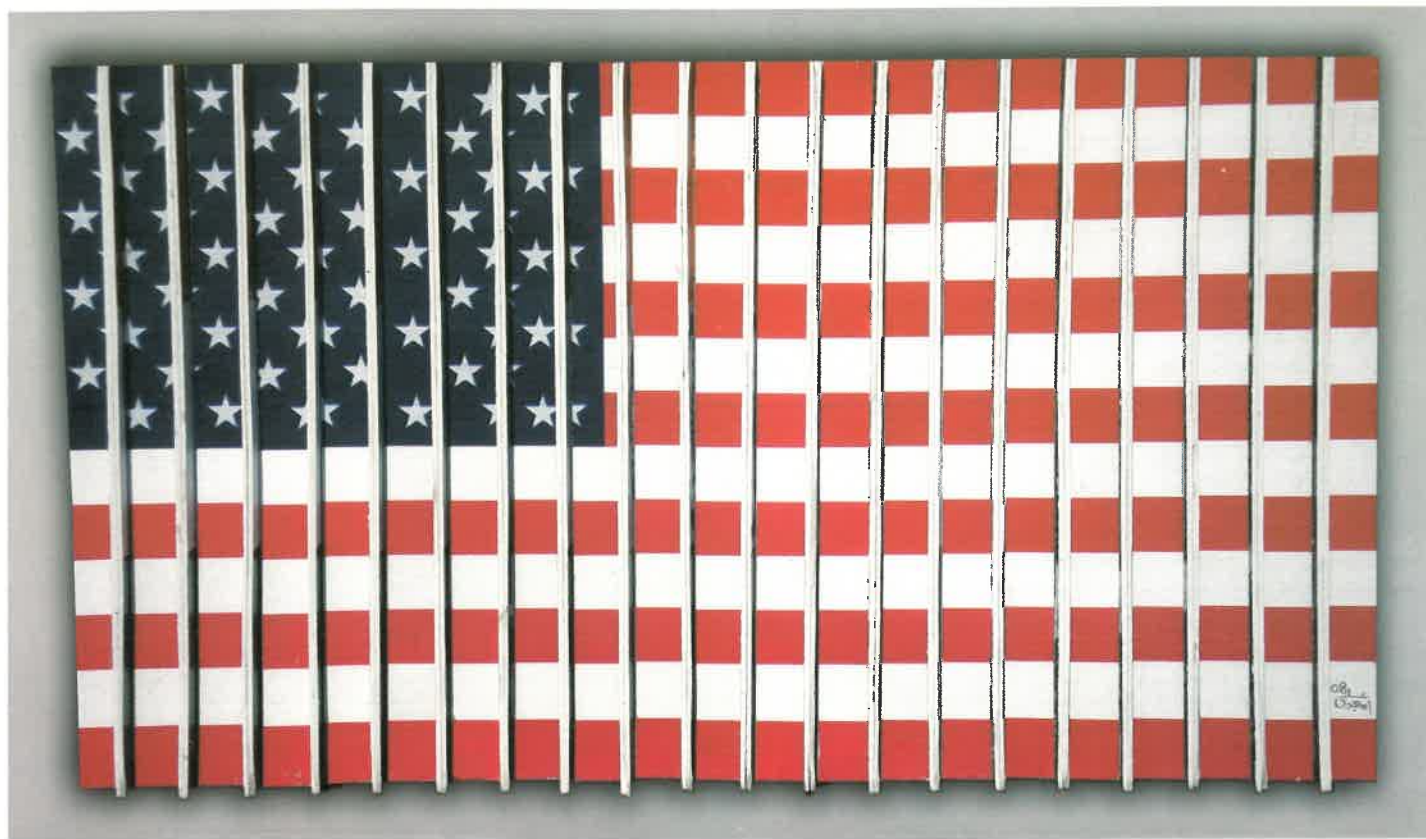
lenticular displays are used for projecting changing images as a function of the viewing angle. Just tilt the picture or walk past them and see the action take place.

Blurring the boundaries between a classical discipline and a commercial graphic technique Talpur presents the miniature as an active board display. This interdisciplinary fusion has enabled him to reconstruct the miniature in puzzle pieces and now in grooved corrugated forms. Elbowing his way into three dimensional spaces the artist could well be moving towards sculptural formations in the miniature mannerism. This direction is full of possibilities.

Dawn Gallery March 8 2008

DAWN GALLERY

Amjad Ali - 3D Flag



Mudassar Manzoor

REINVENTING THE MINIATURE

Debut solo's by miniature artists are few and far between as most prefer to show in groups which require a limited number of paintings only. An exhibition, *Belief's*, by Mudassar Manzoor is not just a maiden venture by the artist but also an evocative display of miniature art. His thrust regarding concept, style and treatment is pronounced for a newcomer and it accords strength and cohesion to his series. Conceptually Manzoor's miniature paintings evolve around a spiritual centrality but it is the visual evocation of the heavenly that brings impact to his work. The artists considerable ability to create atmosphere with colour and suggestive forms gives meaning to the compositions. Innovating on the cloud formations typical to the Persian miniature and Japanese and Chinese scroll painting the artist creates his own billowing surge of curling vapours and misty haze. Often revealing layers of diaphanous spreads like transparent but mysterious flowing veils of colour he alludes to the proverbial seven heavens. In this backdrop the invocatory figures, arms outspread, beckoning or raised in prayer seem to be located in a far off cosmic space. If the atmospheric he conjures are suggestive the figurative element in his paintings is more so. The postures and movement of his models conforms entirely to the invocation of the divine. Bare bodied, shrouded or veiled his figures appear to be in communion with their saviour. At prayer as in *rukuh*, *salaam*, or *dua* during *naamaz*; crouched, standing or simply summoning the heavens he adheres strictly to the state of transcendence.

Ability to render the figure correctly and attention to anatomical detail bring considerable credence to the body language of the people who inhabit his paintings. Oblivious to the world around them these lone protagonists purport a distinct attitude and the artist maintains the momentum in his paintings through this consistency.

The organic vegetal forms so peculiar to the Mughal miniature landscape especially the foliate variety do much to build the allusion of the other worldly. Manzoor improvises on the conventional forms to create mythical shrubs and trees. Gnarled, twisted or dense with leaf like magical bonsai's or blossoming into aureoles on bleached branches his imaginative flora conform to the levels of transition that he is trying to depict.

Other allusive references include the wispy floating feather, an angelic wing, textured crater like discs, prickly shimmering haloes, exotic clouds etc.

Dramatic use of colour spreads are another major ploy the artist uses

to advantage. His palette is rich and subtle by turns – deep midnight blues placed against resonant greens are sliced with silvers of brilliant reds or glowing golds. The sparing use of red and yellow to project an ethereal light or luminous sparks adds distinctly to the imaginary aura of divinity the artist is keen to build. This is especially evident in the illuminated lights projected around, like a halo, and in close proximity to the figures.

Mudassar Manzoor - Gouache with Silver on Wasil



Viewed in totality however, Beliefs, as a series of paintings is so consistently structured around a theme that at times it appears contrived and 'managed,' even repetitive and monotonous but the artist has a skilled hand and keen imagination which is bound to develop further. He merely needs to broaden his conceptual range.

The insertion of traditional geometric borders is superfluous – their hard linear presence disrupts an otherwise seamless atmosphere of organic imagery. Moreover the artist has painted his models in states of individual worship, prayer or meditation which may refer to an act of believing but the term, Belief, is still open to discussion.

Contrary to the current tempo of popular, politically motivated, socially critical or gender based themes, Beliefs is a quiet, calm meditative series of paintings which invites deep introspection. The artists colour palette of deep resonant hues has immense decorative appeal but at times it negates the stark stoicism and simplicity the theme has intended to create

The contemporary miniature is moving in several directions these days and Mudassar Manzoor's paintings add a new strain to this medley.

Mudassar Manzoor - Gouache with Silver on Wasil



Mudassar Manzoor
Gouache with Gold and Impression on Wasil

Irfan Hasan

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Just when one thought the contemporary miniature had already somersaulted many times over an exhibition named Coded by Irfan Hasan rolls out as yet another variant. A miniature enactment within the theatre of the absurd this delightfully crazy selection is an assortment of wit, observation and youthful exuberance spun into an individual voice.

A 2006 graduate of NCA Irfan Hasan has earned just the right credentials to spotlight his work to advantage. A distinction in his thesis project at art school was followed by 'Best Young Painter Award' for two consecutive years at the Alhambra Arts Council and his work first drew attention in Karachi when it was shown as part of the third Vasi Taaza Tareen 2008 residency. The rapid growth and emerging maturity in his work is also attributed to his affiliation with Studio RM where he was given the opportunity to share work space, immediately after graduation, with mentors RM Naeem and his group of talented artists like Mudassar Manzoor, Sadaf Naeem and Ali Kazim. Hasan points out that for young graduates, especially those who come from lower middle class families, the greatest problem is how and from where to initiate ones art practice. Accepting the challenge to adjust in the RM Studio environment he admits that "it is impossible to explain how much I learnt from the experience – it is like putting the sea into a bottle. Due to this training, a tremendous growth occurred within all aspects of my work, intellect and personality."

With a debut solo in Karachi and then Lahore Irfan Hasan has exercised his training in the art of miniature painting to move forward. Extracting the technique of miniature painting from the genre he has reapplied it to a vocabulary of his creation. His figurative compositions spell a bizarre circus of surreal antics, whimsical and funny at first glance, but potent with meaning when deliberated upon. Far removed from everyday reality his protagonists emerge as players in an imaginary world but strangely enough this fantasy is underpinned with everyday concerns. It is culled from his subconscious or referenced from his personal experiences, thoughts and feelings but it critiques the anomalies in the apparent world. This is where he displays his perceptive abilities, stoking grave concerns with a humorous and at times outré expression. Thus his whizzy 'genie out of the bottle' images, the audacious monkey, the dim-witted donkey the cheeky child and the quirky dwarf are not deliberately inflated to create dramatic effects. Rather for him they are live creatures that he identifies with and seems to be developing as his signature vocabulary. He adds that the "donkey and dwarf point to the deprivation, the lack of acknowledgement and status that these characters have in our society." Similarly the gas mask alludes to detrimental effects of environmental

issues like pollution – "the 'delusion' of survival from suffocation ... or the cause of suffocation itself."

Stripped of its traditional borders / frames and embellishments the void / space in the new miniature can be problematic and is often refilled with contemporary substitutes or trivia. Unafraid of empty space Hasan seems to have a flair for using it to his advantage in his compositions. Concentrating only on his area of activity he leaves the rest of the page undisturbed, but not on a jarring note. Here he makes clever use of soft tonalities which harmonize with the acute whiteness of the page and his painting becomes part of the surface. It is also interesting to note that he succeeds in building a quirky comical narrative not with bold, garish or multiple hues but with just a minimal palette of soft browns, grey blues and mild greens. In spite of colouristic restraints he is still able to infuse energy into his characters.

An artist with potential Irfan Hasan needs to concentrate on originality. For the moment one can read influences of Ali Kazim, Mudassar Manzoor and one or two other prominent contemporary miniature artists from Lahore, in his work. Work by emerging artists often bears traces of art of their immediate seniors but with the passage of time their uniqueness and creativity propels them to seek new directions. Hopefully Irfan Hasan will also search for that individuality.

Irfan Hasan





Irfan Hasan



Naveed Sadiq

THE SEPIA VOYAGE

Defying pronouncements that 'the miniature is dead' the venerable discipline continues to attract new talent adventurous enough to embrace its complex terminology and laborious working skills. The *Sepia Voyage*, by Naveed Sadiq, was the most recent exposition of the spell the genre can cast over its exponents. Existing in several guises it is widely deconstructed and fragmented to align it with the requirements of modern and postmodern art but the miniature also thrives at a more conventional level as a contemporary interpretation of its old classical self. A devotee of tradition but with a foothold in the present Naveed Sadiq had indulged in a 'back and forth' in his paintings.

Referencing Persian and Mughal schools he borrows and utilizes typical miniature imagery without distorting or twisting its true form – it is the context of his compositions where the contemporary element takes over as he reframes orthodox images in new perspectives. In works like the *Sepia Voyage*, *Timur Khadim aur Mein*, *Mere Saath Chalo*, *Janney ki Khawaish* he is seen journeying through time, reconnecting with history to enlighten himself or see old truths, (or untruths) with new eyes in order to draw fresh conclusions. Repositioning Mughal characters he comments on the *ustad shahgird* equation and the need for dialogue in paintings like *Mein Nahin Dekh Sakta'* and the *Guftagoo* series. Here it is pertinent to note that lifting resolved miniature characters, be they figural or animal forms or natural landscape elements, and relocating them in new arrangements is handled with a fair amount of confidence by the artist. But, he is unable to establish a sense of balance wherever he has tried to mesh current vocabulary and contemporary compositional modes with classic miniature components as in the *Mushaida* series of paintings which have an air of incompleteness about them.

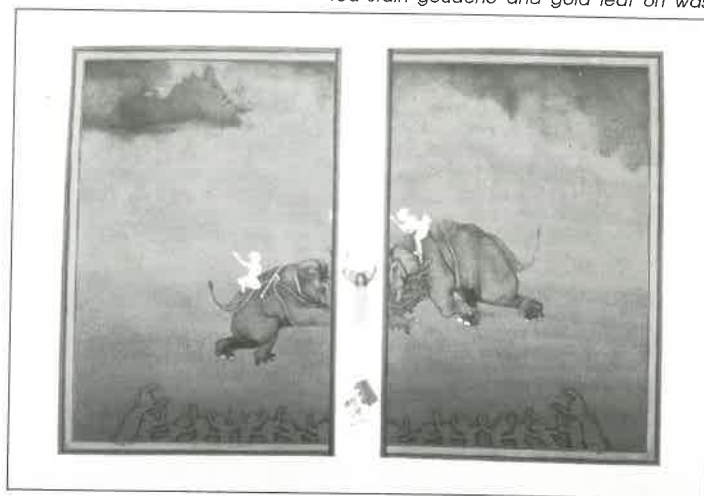
Resolving the tussle between tradition and modernity theoretically as well as technically is the litmus test for most successful miniatures navigating this terrain. While Naveed Sadiq's compositional skills are still developing his tremendous grasp of technique and deeply sensitive rendition is brilliant enough to mesmerize audiences, be they collectors / connoisseurs or just viewers. His application of gold leaf is raw and earthy but adjusts well with the miniature temperament. In this act of traversing time through miniature paintings the sepia hue of the works is a deliberate choice- to evoke the ageing, distanced in time, effect – and he handles the tea stain effect with a fair amount of maturity in some of the darker hued works. (The work is all acid free and only natural materials are employed in the process of making it.) But it is his study of old miniature models and the ability to recreate original features and figures with such empathy that express his

reverence for the genre. One would like to believe that this will minimize the likelihood of hacking and mangling the discipline to contemporize it as is the current trend.

Born in Hyderabad, Sindh Naveed Sadiq graduated with a Distinction, from NCA, Lahore in Miniature Painting in 2006. He has participated in many group shows nationally and has been part of various workshops like the one on Drawing at the College of Excellence Art and Design, Jamshoro, Sindh and has also worked at RM Studio as a drawing instructor. He currently lives and works in Karachi and is part of the faculty of Miniature Painting at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

This show has been curated by artist/ printmaker / IVS faculty member Usman Ghouri whose interaction with the artist over a period of several months encouraged a fruitful dialogue on the merits and demerits of the work. Having perceived his potential he raised the benchmark for Sadiq who responded positively to the challenge. Ghouri was of the opinion "that his mastery of the technique is conveyed by an outstanding command over the brush." And the artists "focus on values, tradition and environment struck a common chord with (his)my sensibility."

Naveed Sadiq - Na Larro
Tea stain gouache and gold leaf on wasli



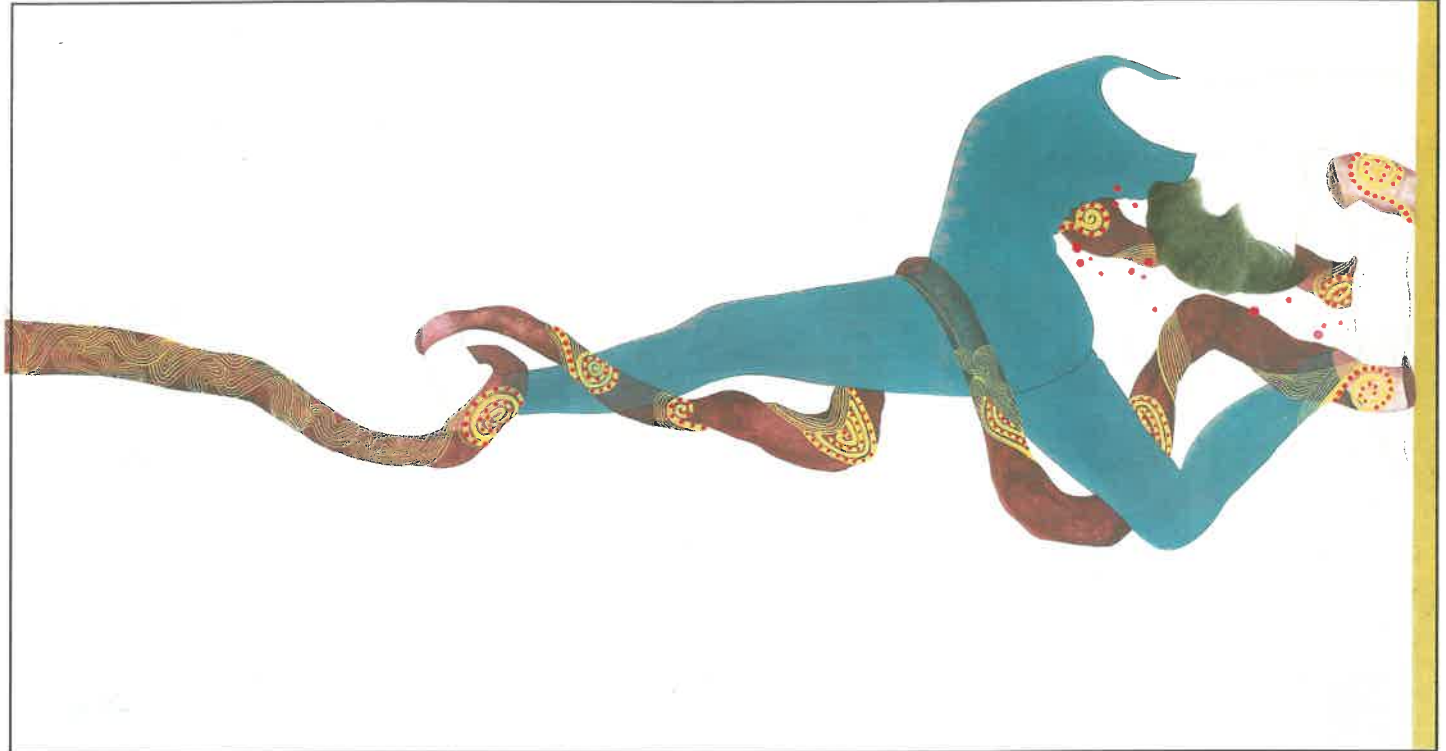


Naveed Sadiq
Shah Jehan, Dara Shikoh Aur Mein
Tea stain gouache
and gold leaf on wasli

Attiya Shaukat

FROM OUT OF PAIN

Attiya Shaukat - A Step Forward



Viewing, *A Step Forward*, by Attiya Shaukat was a humbling experience. A stirring package of art and angst the show was as much about the amazing versatility now found in the contemporary miniature as it was about the artists enhanced working skills and poignant recount of personal tragedy.

In 2003, while working on her mini thesis, Attiya Shaukat sustained serious injuries in the lower part of her body as she fell from a height of eight feet. This staircase fall fatally damaged four vertebrae in her spinal column. A grueling regimen of physiotherapy and exercise restored feeling and sensation in most of the injured areas except her lower limbs. Rendered immobile she confronted the most traumatic chapter of her life with the heroic decision to turn disability into a positive force. Drowning her distress in the creative energies of art making Shaukat successfully concluded her thesis, *Flick of a Second*, in 2004. Two subsequent solos, *Free Fall*, at Anant Gallery, New Delhi in 2007 and, *Bones and Steel*, at Rhotas 2 Lahore reaffirmed her brave stance.

Attiya Shaukat's new work is indeed 'a step forward' when viewed in the context of her previous showings. Her rendering skills, as a miniature artist, have refined and her composition sense has matured.

The clutter and disarray in her earlier work has given way to a more meaningful juxtaposition of elements defining her predicament though there is still room for considerable improvement in the *Bits and Pieces*, series. The few paintings that stand out are the ones where she has utilized empty space to advantage as in most works of the, *Step by Step*, series.

"The most prominent elements in my paintings are my feet," the artist rightfully points out and they appear in various stages of dress and undress to articulate her plight. To define her ordeal she makes creative use of medical aids like forceps, stretchers, binders, fixators and wheel chair to strengthen her narrative. The ceiling fan form appears frequently as it is the image she had to live with the most during her extended supine stretches on the hospital bed

The crucial vertebrae are painted with exquisite perfection and artistry and the cord image is also well modulated to create movement and suggest injury. Its most delightful formation is its undulation around and through a jumpsuit clad body in a yogic posture. As the only comprehensive figure in the entire series this could be an indicator of the artists future move towards figuration to enlarge her vocabulary.

Like the rest of her repertoire her colour palette also relates to her physical trauma and suffering. The red tonalities spell states of alarm, fright and panic while blue is a relatively warm calming tone.

Attiya Shaukat - Bits and Pieces (*right*) Bones and Steel



Disability motivated art is not a new phenomena Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's oeuvre is a prime example of captivating aesthetics provoked by pain and injury. The turn towards the creative in life has a healing and transformative effect on people, particularly those with a disability. So not only do such exhibitions help others see and value the creative force in those with disabilities but they also encourage the disabled to turn towards the creative in life whether as a "formal" art or a life lived to its fullest.

Dawn Gallery May 3 2008

DAWN
GALLERY



Amna Hashmi

ANIME IDEOLOGY

Amna Hashmi's anime inspired miniature collection was a delightful new variant within the miniature genre. Fascination with the miniature technique and strong bent for graphic art and story narration prompted her in this direction. Hashmi's favourite album portfolios of old miniatures pertained to adventurous exploits and fables like the Hamzanama, Kalilah wa Dimnah, Anwar-e-Suhayli etc where fantasy and reality mix in an engaging storyline. She is particularly drawn to the Persian Miniature and its incorporation of Chinese and Japanese features and brush techniques. She traces her own interest in Japanese anime and Manga series through this link.

Anime is a Japanese term for animation, whether hand drawn, computer generated, or a combination. Storylines, typically fictional, are aimed at boys, girls, and specific adult audiences. Anime features a wide variety of artistic styles which vary from artist to artist and are characterized by detailed backgrounds and stylized characters in different settings. Characters have very large eyes, a range of hair colors, and exaggerated physical features especially regarding anime fantasy creatures, (e.g. witches, spirits etc.). Emphatic gestures communicate their emotional states, bright colours are rarely used unless needed to and the works are always designed to look as realistic as possible. Anime appears in many formats, including movies, original video, and television.

Miniature and anime are two individual genres with very distinct characteristics and Amna Hashmi's renditions presently are anime's in a mini format. She is faithfully adhering to the anime ideology and if the distant perspective, trailing clouds or foliage patterns are representative of the miniature imagery the difference is barely perceptible. It is her exquisite brushwork and a sensitive and meticulous linear rendition that aligns her more to the miniature tradition than anything else. Her paintings can qualify more as miniatures if there is an obvious fusion of the two genres. This synthesis can spawn an exciting hybridization.



Amna Hashmi - Anime Series



Sculpture, dormant for the last many years in our art milieu is now being rejuvenated by new generation artists. Their free and fluent use of non traditional means has brought a postmodern accent to the genre. Particularly striking is the role of female artists who are highlighting a woman's point of view by focusing on issues of gender sensitivity and the fragility of human dignity.

SIMPLY PAPER

Once a most unlikely medium for sculpture, paper today – whether recycled, industrially manufactured, or handmade – invites study and experimentation, making it an ideal means for artistic expression and as a show. Simply Paper, demonstrated this well. Primarily a paper sculpture exhibition this collection explored the nature of a material often taken for granted but for which there is virtually no limit to what it can do and how it can be fashioned. Seventeen contemporary artists, most of them sculptors by profession, illustrated innovative and exciting uses of paper from utilitarian objects to fine-art sculpture.

Although all the artists incorporated paper into their artwork, they employed a wide range of techniques and styles, including mixed-media assemblages, three-dimensional collage and papier-mâché techniques. They also took advantage of the contradictory nature of paper, which can be transient and enduring, delicate and strong, smooth and highly textured, can act as a filter or a barrier, and can be transformed from the flat to the voluminous. As contemporary artists their thoughts and ideas voiced current concerns largely revolving around identity under threat politically or jeopardized through abuse of social norms and the deteriorating world situation.

For Roohi Ahmed the political dispensation as a determinant of the public and the personal has been a constant in her oeuvre. Defining polarities, her, New World Order, Rubik cube cartons and conical world maps sculpture / installation delineated how nations are being segregated. The boxed contents personified those who are at the receiving end of this political rearrangement.

The critical punch emanating from, *Souvenir*, a box bearing a 'United States Postal Service' mark and containing a miniscule pair of crutches on a bed of blood red matting, was strong. Soft sculpture artist Ruby Chishti had reasoned that a support, no matter how attractively presented, sometimes becomes the cause of permanent disability. Her paper crafted, miniature crutches embellished with gold and metallic silver buttresses, she cautioned, "need to be judged critically" before they are accepted as supports.

Ruby Chishti - Souvenir



In a lighter vein Abdul Jabbar Gulls, Referendum, invited the viewer to pen his / her thoughts on paper and then throw the paper in the dustbin – an apt portrayal of the value of public opinion here – but does the work qualify as serious sculpture?

Disposable tissue paper crafted into a telephone with multiple receivers enabled Sadia Jamal to address the 'disconnect' issue in human conduct. Her piece titled, Warning – I may not be listening to you, tried to emphasize that 'hearing' may not necessarily mean that the person is 'listening.'

Composed of kite and rice papers Farah Jamluddins, Cocoon I and II, dwelt on personal isolation and retreat, as in a cocoon, vis a vis the ability to open up and engage with life. Her choice of rice paper connects with this perception of release and evolution. Trying to project the toughness of paper rather than its fragility she remarks that rice paper like human skin has the ability to stretch and expand and gives the feeling of skin – soft yet protective. Hers was a deeply thought, intricately worked piece where special attention was given to concept and choice of paper very much in keeping with the sculptural aspect of the exercise. Vastly different in thought and approach the indulgent, Pumpkits, by Sohail Abdullah also played on the appeal of form, shape and colour.

Another work equating physical properties of paper with conceptual concerns was, Web – Sighting, by Fahim Rao. His premise was that paper is inherently delicate fiber that gains resilience when woven into a mesh much like the fragile network of fibres when knitted form a strong spider's web.

Identity, collective and individual, was well depicted, simultaneously, in Fraz Mateens portraits carved out of well endowed telephone directories. Literally hewed like wood, the portraits chiseled and cut out of the voluminous directories couldn't have been more private and public at the same time.

Urban madness, mass media proliferation and in your face propaganda, an ongoing concern in Munawar Ali's work is well suited for projection through the paper medium. Reworking and subverting the text and pictorial matter on the covers of popular fashion and political magazines he articulated critical commentary on current socio-political issues.

Paper currency notes folded and reconstituted as intricate geometric designs enabled Abdullah Syed to create 'commodity sculpture.' Diffusing the fine line between high art and low craft he purported that his "folded US dollar planes, in Islamic geometric patterns, suggest the

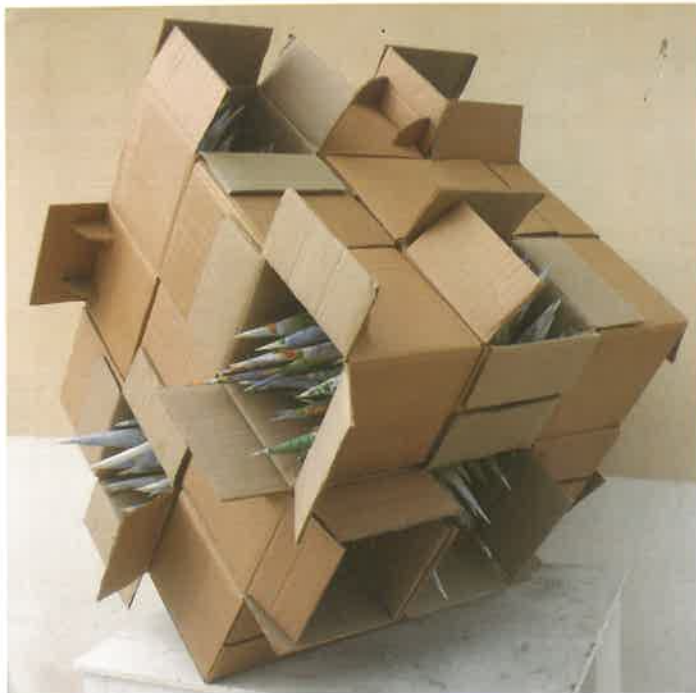


Faraz Mateen

commercialization of art, and culturalization of economy." Likewise the hexagonal folds of the Pakistani rupee notes create an attractive angular design that mimics the Sindhi "Ralli" patterning in spirit.

As a curator Roohi Ahmed had been able to motivate artists and sculptors to think beyond their established styles and mediums to entertain new ideas and expressive means. Most participants had risen to the challenge and delivered intriguing interpretations of their concepts. This bodes well not just for the sculpture genre but the creative act as well. Artistic ingenuity and emphasis on interpretation of concept were prominent features of this novel exhibition. Simply Paper, suggests flexible definitions of a work of art that accommodate the variety of creative practices that now constitute contemporary art.

Abdullah Syed - Under The Rug



Roohi Ahmed - New World Order



Farah
Jamaluddin
Cocoon

Amin Gulgee

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

CREATIVE CONTINUUM

At a time when so much art is ironic, distanced and parasitically given to quoting the all encompassing Media, Amin Gulgee's work goes against the grain. Scientifically structured or organically configured his copper and bronze metal sculptures are imbued with formal vitality and pulse not just with material energy but discreet inner rhythms. They are productions of a restless soul struggling to balance theoretical and formal concerns with complex issues of self discovery and identity in a culturally chaotic and politically volatile 21st century.

Well conversant with the dynamics of his chosen genre within the western construct Amin remains at heart an artist from the Asian sub-continent who, in his own words, is striving to "understand my God, my culture and myself" through his art. His expression gains true meaning when examined in the light of this east west juxtaposition.

Reveling in the 'process' of working the artist in him capitalizes on the 'creative moment' to evolve. Foraging his storage spaces filled with unassembled pieces, cast offs, objects in the making and related bric a brac he commences the act of sculpting much like a doodler sketching an idea. Drawing a line here, catching an impression there, he joins welds and fuses shapes and forms as possible ideas. Some begin to structure instantly others demand deeper engagement while a few just resist definition and are set aside to mature and emerge as and when the instant arrives. Amin Gulgee's current series titled Drawing the Line kick started with Broken Leaf, an unresolved piece from his organic Eden Plant sequence first created six years ago. Recasting partial, incomplete or rudimentary impressions to initiate new beginnings he transcends time in this act of making. Reviewed and reinterpreted Broken Leaf, today, enjoys a new life.

As a sculptor with a major thrust on constructive geometric forms, Amin's oeuvre rests on patterns and relationships derived from classical ideals of balance and symmetry. Armed with the credentials of western academics, a graduate in Art History, Architecture and Economics from Yale, he deliberately accesses Muslim and Asian traditions to build his vocabulary. Innovating with the intention of creating an idiom that speaks of new post colonial realities Amin's primary source of reference is Islamic Calligraphy, sacred text of the Muslims which is also a highly sophisticated artistic discipline in its own right.

Breaking new ground he has given calligraphy a three dimensional sculptural form. For the first time in Islamic art history, calligraphy is not used to adorn functional form -- be it architecture or a bowl -- but to create form itself. The Square and the Eastern Kufic, Surah Rehman,

Iqra and Al Hamdolillah among his favoured scripts, verses and sayings, have been reinvented in a host of entrancing sculptural stylizations. Severely structured, jauntily tilted or rippling with rhythmic undulation his scripted sculptures cast in bronze invite the viewer to partake of the geometric aesthetic as interpreted through his cognitive and technical abilities.

A conceptual object maker Amin Gulgee plays with form as an impersonal mathematical equation as well as a subjective heartfelt entity. This polarity between the calculated and the instinctive enables him to perfect his craft on the one hand and address his deep emotional concerns on the other. The intellectual and the palpable as parallel and intersecting strains have evolved independently as well as collectively in his vast body of work spanning almost two decades.

An extensive recent collection the Body and Soul series is a fine manifestation of formal order and inner turmoil. Defying gravity the precariously tiered copper pieces such as Habitat, Metropolis II, and Steps I and II emerge as complex balancing acts where a rigid and very emphatic grid arrangement of Square Kufic is projected in a trajectory of cubes. Drawn to the cube for the challenge it offers metaphorically as well as a mathematically complex entity Amin has resolved it as a mind bending theorem in Structure, approached it as an ornament in Growing in my Cube and contemplated on the void within in the Steps series and Iqra Text Nakshi pieces.

Researching his focus before plunging into the creative act, a recipient of the Cooger B Goodyear Fine Art Award for his thesis on Mughal Gardens, Amin is one of the few artists whose premise is underpinned by a strong theoretical base when constructing angular and planar sculpture. Mathematical staples the square and the circle are central to his geometric expression and he roots them at their Islamic source before endowing them with new meaning. His Four Gardens (Char Bagh) series inspired by the Mughal Garden grid of two lines intersecting at a perpendicular, which can define both a circle and a square, has been conceived in several complex manifestations incorporating the sphere and cube.

Beyond the rigidity of pure geometry freer formations in works like the Fragment series assert the sculptors artistic spirit. Entering the liberated zone of abstract expressionism he straddles the traditions of the east and the west with remarkable ease. Isolating a letter of Surah Rehman like the Meem or Noon and removing the essential dots he renders it almost unreadable forcing the viewer to concentrate on the essence of the alphabet -- its linearity and gestural posture. An Iqra piece just radiating off the ground minus its base plates is another delightful

Amin Gulgee - Ripping The Birds Nest



attempt at releasing his creations from confinement. This particular sculpture is Amin Gulgee's Salaam to the grand dame of American art Louise Bourgeois and her humongous Spider sculpture Maman which too takes off directly from the ground. His most recent fling with impetuosity - the playful linear contouring in the Embedded Line Series also thrives on rhythm and cadence - the closest that Amin has come to manifesting the pliant physicality of the line in three dimensional structures.

If the depiction of Soul in sculptural form for Amin is loftily abstract and contemplative, with extreme attention to intricate design, the Body aspect of his work is direct and deeply personal. Using figuration,

Amin Gulgee - Broken Leaf - Eden Plant Series



bodily or vegetal, to convey raw emotion often in primitive, crude, forms he brings out moody pieces that capture the moment. His, *Touching my Face*, a soul baring exercise, has a primal totemic feel where the hands and face play an autobiographical role. Speaking of inner angst his groping hands and anguished face reveal a need to be understood and comforted. Similarly the mythical Eden Plant and Climbing Copper speak primarily of the vigorous energy of life. But when the lush foliated pieces and entangled vines and tendrils are rent asunder they become emblems of destruction – *Ripping the Birds Nest* sequence exposes this fragility and vulnerability of life.

Growing up amidst his parents vast collection of Buddhist, Indian and Gandharan artifacts has bred in the sculptor a love for antiquity that rises above the mere observance of ritual and historical affiliation. Relating intuitively to the Bodhisattvas, Krishna's and Indus Valley relics he tries to capture their reflections in the light of his own feelings. Working with a mixed vocabulary of pictorial and symbolic representations pieces like *Forgotten Text* and *Buddha Head (Climbing Series)* encapsulate the many strands of his imaginative thoughts.

A contemporary artist living in an age of interdisciplinary fusion Amin Gulgee freely accesses and interweaves through other mediums to express his wide visual curiosity. Embracing mix-media he extends his talents into the realm of fashion design, performance and installation assemblages - here he again concentrates on the social culture and history of the region. His most recent tableau the lavish *River Dreams* chronicled the saga of love, prophecy and death in the life of Alexander the Great. A costume and performance extravaganza recounting the last days of the legendary hero's life the show was composed, designed and directed by Amin. Likewise his homage to painting, well channeled in the art of jewel craft, comprising metal and brilliant hued semi precious gemstones, addresses a need to reinvent traditional jewel craft as yet another insignia of a liberated nation proud of its rich heritage. Constructed on small scale some jewellery pieces often serve as 'rough sketches' for larger sculptures and vice versa. He finds that switching scales from small to large energizes his work process.

If there are echoes of Cezanne's Sphere, Cone and Cylinder in Amin's sculptures his work also touches base with the fundamental modernist movements, seizing and transforming something from each of them. From Cubism and Constructivism comes the planar organization of form and the abstract language and from Surrealism the sense of encounter with inner self. But, hailing from the subcontinent, it is the push and pull of tradition and modernity here that is at the epicenter of his creativity.

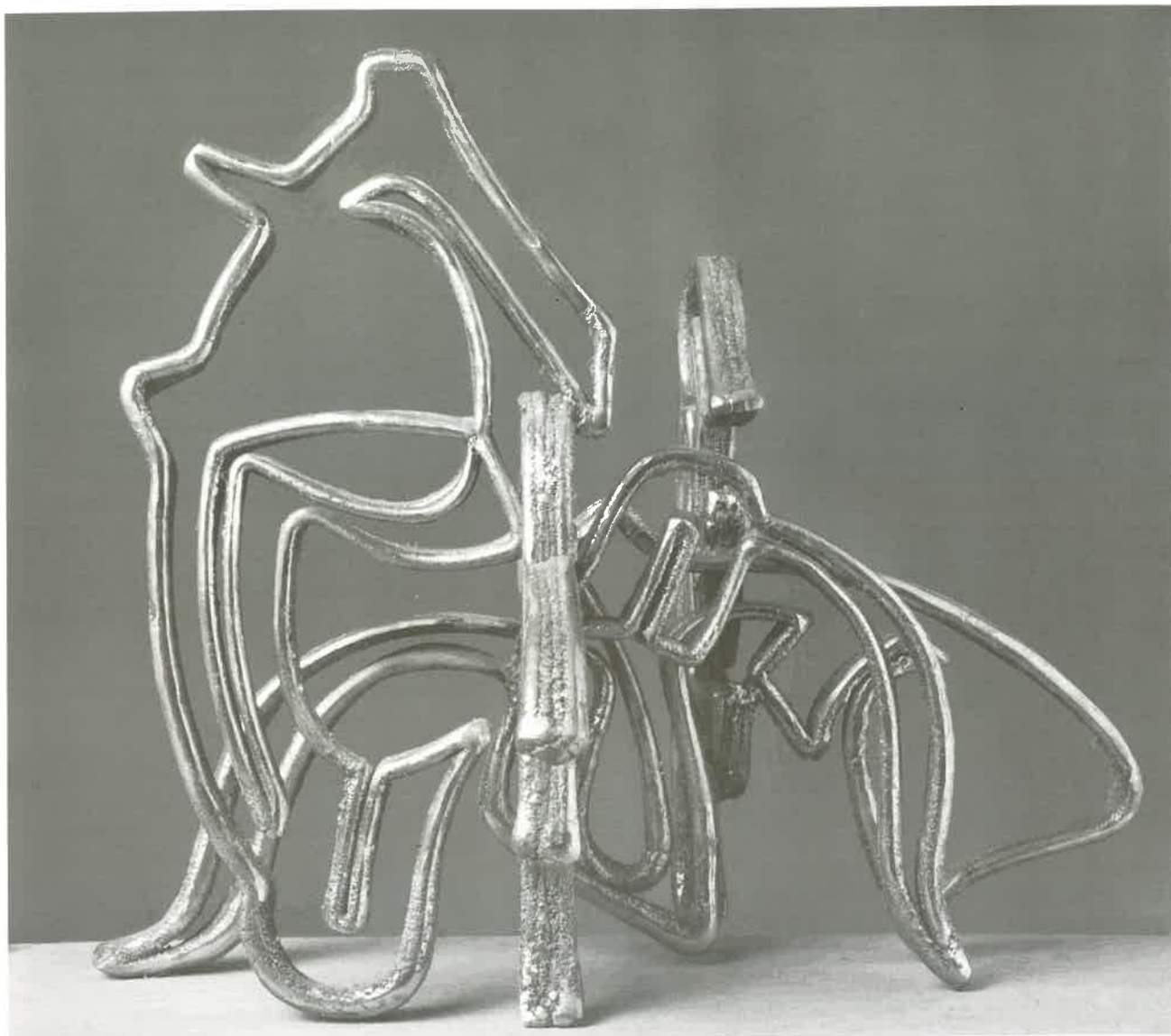
Amin Gulgee - The Spider



Creativity is often misunderstood to be an act of the ego and intellect. In truth the process is primarily spiritual. For Gulgee grappling the creative experience is fundamental to the act of living. It enables him to connect with his inner self, spurs him to think, discover and above all locate himself.

Currently the premier contemporary, young generation, sculptor in Pakistan Amin has exhibited extensively at home and abroad. He has hosted a number of solo exhibitions in the US, China, Portugal, Turkey, France, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and Malaysia apart from regular showcases in his native Pakistan. Gulgee's works adorn public collections at The International Monetary Fund; Jordan National Gallery; Hofstra University, Hempstead; and The WAH Centre, Brooklyn.

Catalogue essay - Nov 2008 exhibition at Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Amin Gulgee - Embedded Line

Naiza Khan

FEMINIST POLEMICS

Artist Naiza Khan's show 'Heavenly Ornaments' reiterates her focus on the body as the site for multiple debates. Through provocative conjunction of text, image, sculptural forms and subtle use of unconventional media like latex, organza and henna paste she endeavours to give feminist polemics a formal language in art. Attempts to define what it means to be a woman, to experience life from within a woman's body, and to understand one's subjectivity as feminine have always been central to her expression. Investigating gender role in the socio-cultural context particularly female oppression under patriarchy brings the essential larger meaning to her work. In 'Voices Merge', she articulated sacrilege and defilement of the body through inverted use of decorative henna stencils. In 'Exhale ventilating through the archaic chastity belt' and 'sieve' emblems she spoke of body constraints and the freedom to express physically and emotionally. In her exhibition, 'Heavenly Ornaments', Khan continues to emphasize bodily concerns and conflicts but her stand has shifted from the critically explanatory, the illustrative and the workable to an unyielding new position of defiance and intractability.

At once combative and defensive Naiza Khan's metallic sculptures of female body armour, corsets, stays and chastity belts emit a bipolar intensity. Having evolved from the bulletproof vest image the body armour / ornaments celebrate and desecrate the female form simultaneously. For women as victims of oppression the armour serves as a protective covering in their confrontation of aggression. But it is severe physical and emotional constraints on the body and the psyche that provokes such reactionary behaviour making self protection and rebellion imminent.

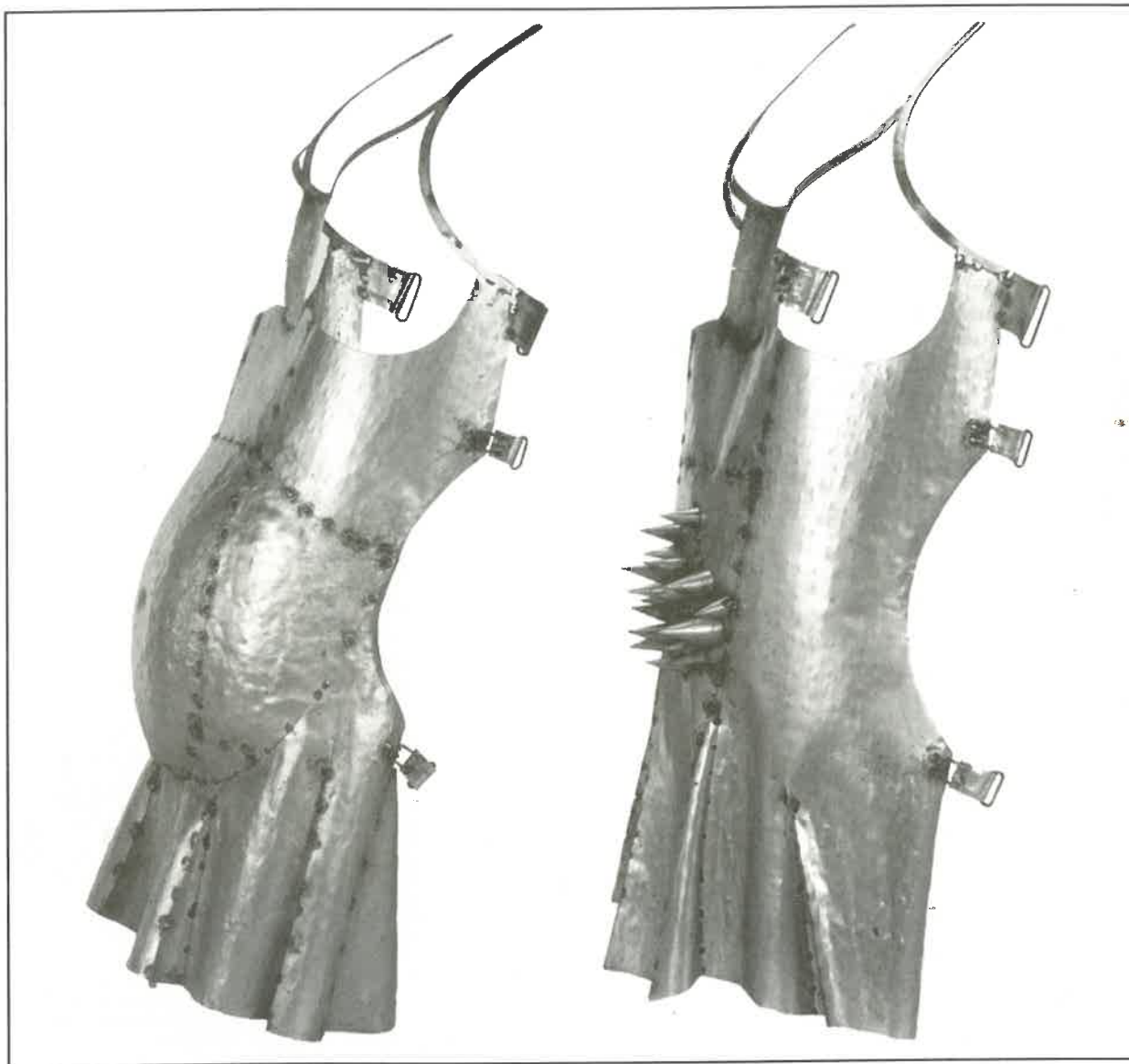
The religio-cultural climate of a nation has a profound influence on women artists from Muslim backgrounds. Internalizing the mixed signals that liberal secular thinking and fundamentalist Islam transmit about purity, female strength, and compassion, they reinterpret them to explore the ambiguities of the female role in contemporary society while also examining their conflicts about their own sexuality. There are religious roots to the way they deal with issues of body, identity, and sex. In the traditional context religion and avant garde art are by definition adversaries. But in fact, far from being irrelevant or antithetical to advanced art, religion has been a powerful source of artistic inspiration for many contemporary artists. However, this influence does not always manifest itself in obvious ways, or in forms acceptable to the various religious establishments. Instead such work reflects the contradictions that arise from the problematic place of religion in secular thinking. 'Heavenly Ornaments' provokes debate on the complex issue of understanding modern South Asian women who as

products of Muslim cultures and Western liberal thinking are searching for a space that defines their identity – a space that accepts and celebrates their mixed heritage of modernity and orthodoxy. Among women artists woman as a subject not only reflects other women, but herself as well. Naiza Khan's conscious position is an obvious factor in 'Heavenly Ornaments'. Forecasting an ever increasing loss of the real, of the social, a questioning of what it means to be a woman Khan's sculptures, more in the nature of metallic vestments in the making, deal with interior and self contained space rather than solid volumes. This also indicates an ironic attitude towards her subject matter. The welded metal casings have loose ends and give the appearance of work in progress, unresolved and still developing, but the armour image immediately spells a premeditated stance, a confrontational or distrustful position.

Images of the human body reveal a great deal about the cultures that produce them. Naiza Khan's artworks mirror the social and political conditions under which it was made. Somewhat threatening yet provocative, straying into forbidden territory and making explicit something that we don't wish to acknowledge or confront — they stand for a larger truth about us all.

Naiza Khan





Naiza Khan - Heavenly Ornaments

Adeela Suleman

PLIANT AND LYRICAL

Adeela Sulemans experiments with traditional metallic art reaffirms that sculpture is gaining a new palpability in the expressive content of female artists. A departure from the male defined perspective, the womanly approaches, applications and treatments, especially on gender issues, are insightful and refreshing. Suleman located new metaphors in her, *Salma, Sitara, and Sister – Motor Cycle Workshop*, in 2002 when she pointed at women pillion riding on motor bikes (a precarious balancing act) to define the disadvantages and under-privileged status of the average female in urban society. Loyal to her premise of examining gender travails and equations she still continues to explore the issue technically and conceptually at various levels.

Her oeuvre is best known for its novel use of stainless steel hardware and kitchen utensils as identifying agents of female trials and tribulations. Funnels, metal bowls, tongs and measuring spoons as well as drain covers, screws, nails, bolts and fasteners have been variously crafted into elaborate safety helmets, jackets, seats and foot rests. In a later exhibition, *Confinement*, it was ingenious use of bathroom fittings, shower heads, water pipe chain connections and steel silencers that enabled her to suggest provocative references to the human body to highlight intimate gender politics. Evoking images of private body parts, confining rib cages and contorted spinal columns her sculptures were disturbing and pointed.

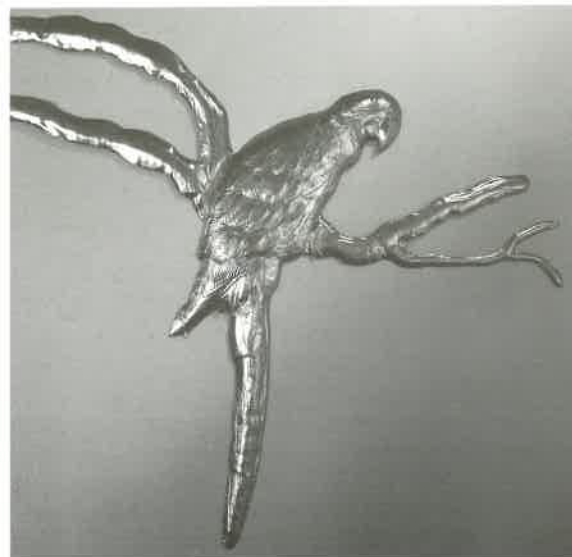
Comfortable with an illustrative language comprising fixtures and fittings Suleman has concentrated on joining, welding and soldering domestic hardware and kitchen objects to create teasing, discomfiting and confrontational images. The emphasis has always been on producing a structured form like an in your eye, uneasily tiered or awkwardly protruding skeletal object.

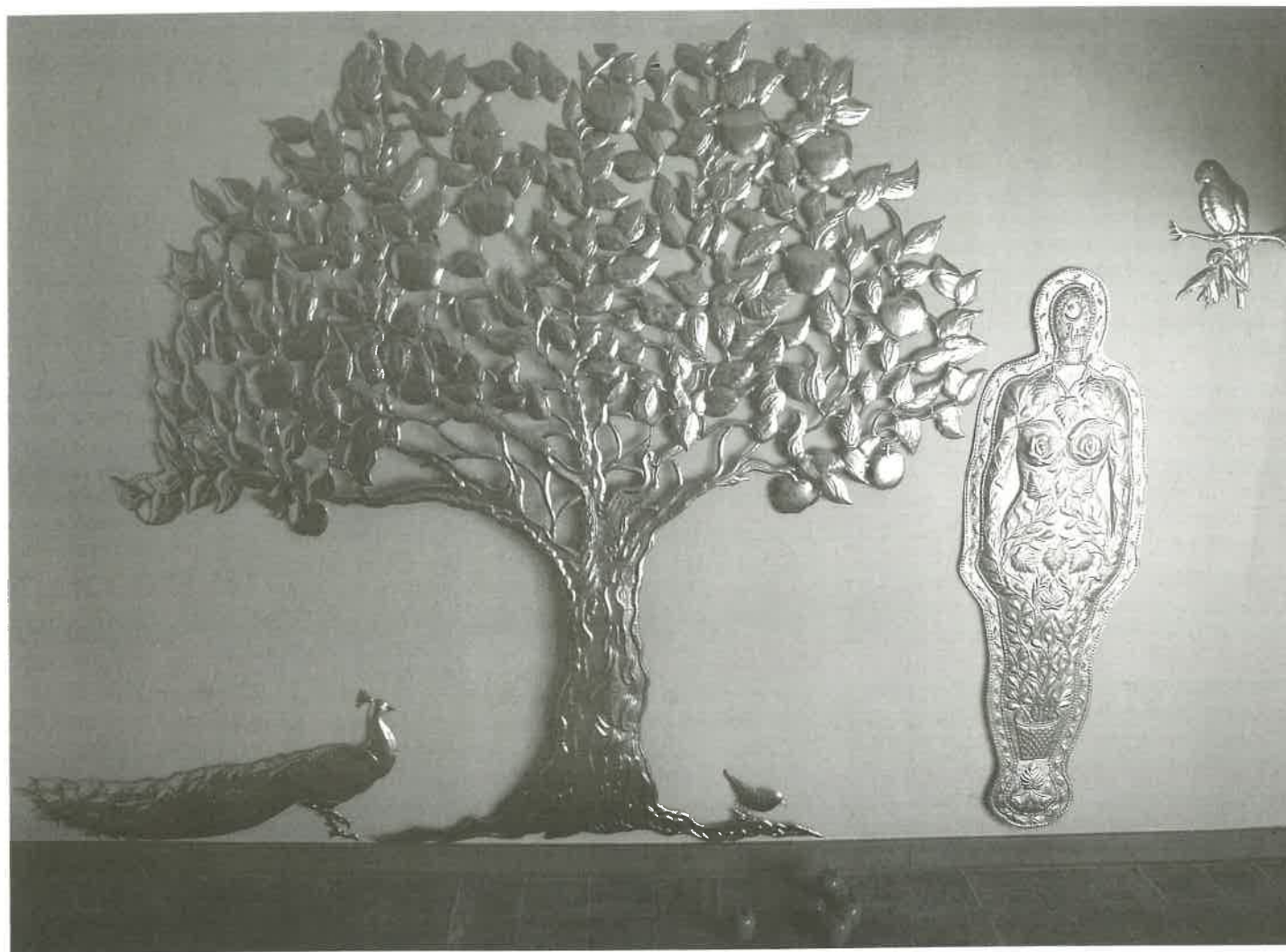
Still working with rigid metal her sculpture, comprising three wall installations is remarkably pliant and lyrical in contrast. Setting aside her penchant for artificially 'assembled' or 'constructed' forms she opts for rhythmic nuances of the human figure and natural organic forms to build her narrative. She is still crafting in rust-proof steel but her emphasis now is on creating intricate pattern formations as story elements in her work. Mimicking the detailed ornamental designs on beaten silver platters, ewers, 'paandaans' and jeweled objects of yore, she embellishes her metal sheets with repeat border patterns, foliated and floral arabesques and vine creeper imagery. Acknowledging the assistance of skilled artisans whose services she availed at various stages of her work Adeela's elaborate wall installations comprise faceless female forms named *Khalida, Hajra and Hawwa Bai*. Each has an avian reference of peacocks, dead birds or parrots accompanying it. The main piece consists of a tree laden with fruit

and the ubiquitous red apple on the floor. A *Garden of Eden* recreation is an instant reading but the peacocks guarding *Hajra* instead of *Hawwa Bai* throws the storyline in other directions. The parrot as spectator enlivens the atmosphere but is its exotic reference related to the exoticism of the figures, similarly the 'dead birds,' specifically eighteen in number, also raise several questions. The lotus rose and vine patterns again allude to contradictory ritualistic practices like entombment or glorification and veneration. The works can also be interpreted as explorations of the boundaries between spirit and matter, the spiritual and material components of womanly existence. The artist has accessed her own memories to create these characters, but has deliberately left them relatively anonymous and the intricate finery enveloping them also lends itself to speculation. Symbols in western and eastern mythologies enjoy diverse meanings and keeping in mind the 'mixed' nature of the work it is best to assimilate this art in a broad rather than a specific perspective.

When Adeela Suleman came forth with the *Salma Sitara Workshop* exhibit she had broken fresh ground. An old problem was addressed in a novel manner – she had a tightly knit concept but her creations were stilted and mannered. Presently her concepts have loose ends but her expression is most engaging. Technically her aesthetic sensibility has matured. The ornamental, mythical nature of the work is visually appealing even if the substance emits multiple readings.

Adeela Suleman





Adeela Suleman

Dawn Gallery, March 8 2009

DAWN
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Roohi Ahmed

'SIMT' (DIRECTION)

Societal flux imperils human values compelling the conscientious to voice their concern and in the art community artists have addressed this unrest through a multitude of expressions. Roohi Ahmed opted to evince this sentiment through, Simt, a mix media sculpture show. Seeking the righteous path she has manifested her observations through three dimensional formations, digital photo prints and installation. Questioning life in the light of ethics and ideals has always been central to Ahmad's aesthetics and in this show she prompts the viewer to examine his / her location in a world fast going awry. An amalgam of references based on disquieting encounters in daily living, the off kilter political and social fabric of life and her own sensibility as artist and educator have enabled her to articulate her unease and emphasize the need to position ones life in the right direction.

A compelling urge to document her stance has brought forth art in which theme takes precedence over style and medium. A trained sculptor from the Karachi School of Art Ahmed however has not restricted herself to only one mode of expression. It is her concepts that determine her choice of media and style of expression. Opting for contemporary fusion and mixed media vocabulary her idiom is stylishly inaccessible and invites closer engagement to reveal itself.

Two series of digital prints on professional metallic paper are subtle manifestations of 'simt.' The first five titled, Are we Aware of the Directions of the Winds, contain images of silk strands, cast shadows and shafts of light which allude to a mysterious illuminated path. Silk filaments are peculiar to the artists oeuvre, she has made significant use of them in earlier shows to suggest the finer instincts, the most basic inner consciousness, the soul. In "Altitude changes with Time she documents shifting levels of perception and its bearing on the self.

Human values that reflect the sensibility of, Esaar, Khuloos, Wafa, Shukr etc are crucial character building sentiments which unfortunately are no longer an essential factor in human interactions. Ahmeds metal sieves, silk threads and china dish on board sculpture / installations bearing these titles portray the loss of these noble qualities. The china dish placed at the bottom as a vessel of containment is a symbolic representation of the artists effort to cherish and hold onto remnants of these virtues. The, Taryaaq, series consisting of truisms inscribed in Arabic, on pinewood with sieve and compass also emphasize the presence of these dictums in human nature as determinants of ones sense of direction.

A series of eight images on board made with packing needles tellingly enact the disarray that can ensue if one is rudderless. Aptly titled "The

distance between two points is a flat line" the various pieces show that the line loses its equilibrium whenever it deviates from the straight path. An appropriate finale to the artists beliefs was well projected in the body and soul installation hung in the gallery space. A body apparition woven in silk was attached to the ceiling and suspended from it were clusters of nylon fish strings edged with plastic balls. The balls were grouped into a supposedly physical body image that was further reconnected with the apparition, heart to heart, through a cord of red balls. The communication between the tangible and the intangible was clearly manifest.

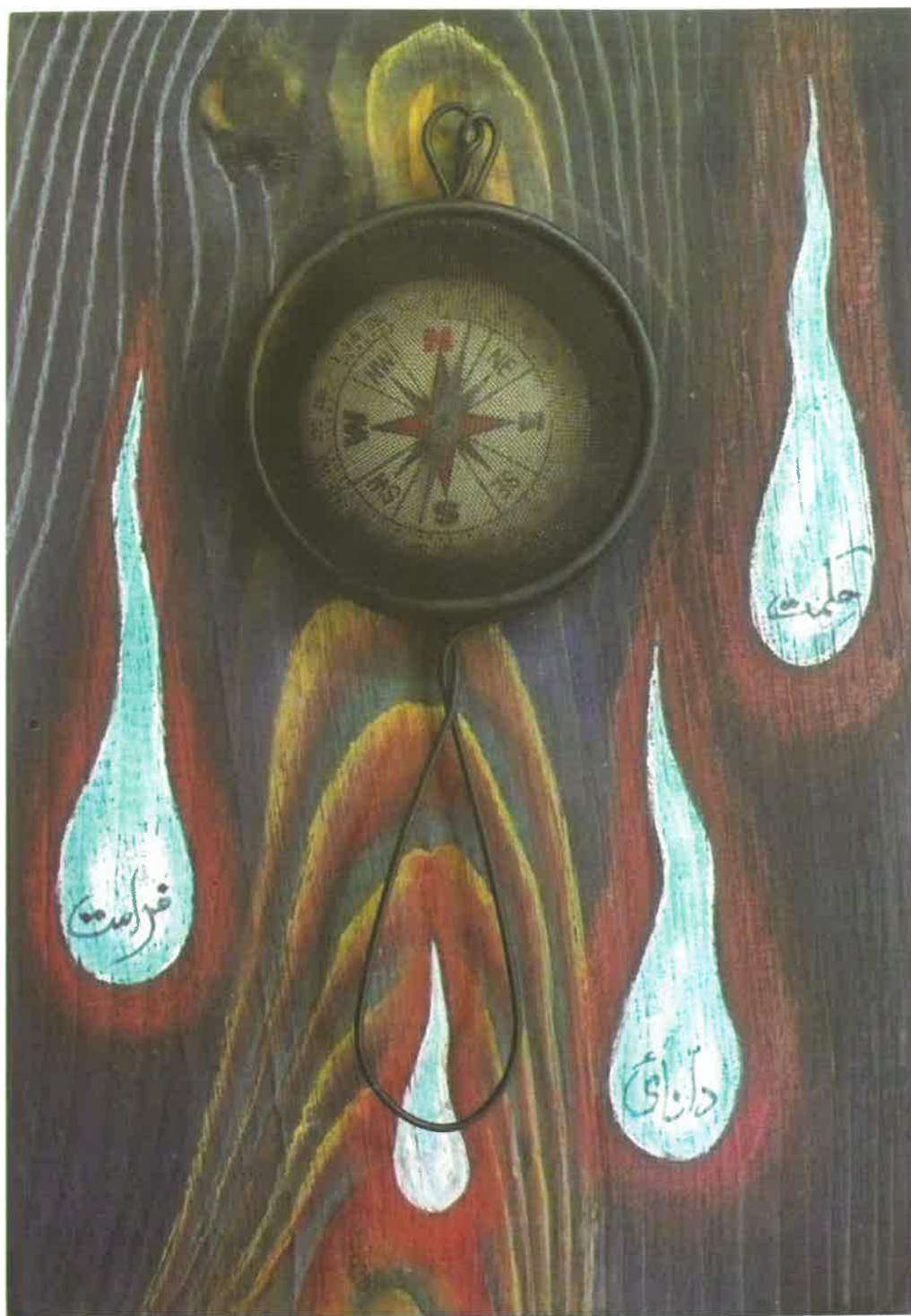
Consistently delving into themes related to directions since she first began exhibiting her work Ahmed is now acquiring a certain degree of poise in her presentations. The high finish and assurance of the recent work deemphasizes novelty and oddity in order to stress and crystallize her point of view. The artist is now confident about her chosen path.

Newsline June 2008

NEWSLINE

Roohi Ahmed - The distance between two points is a flat line





Roohi Ahmed - Taryaaq

Ruby Chishti

SOFT IMAGES – HARSH REALITIES

Soft sculpture, stitched, stuffed, plaited, knitted or meshed is a post modern variant of the traditional sculptural genre. The unconventional expression enjoys currency abroad but has only just begun to reveal itself here and young artist Ruby Chishti is perhaps among its most eloquent exponents. Her exhibition, *There is no Hero*, is not just a very inventive take on fabric formations but also a very creative manifestation of her ideas. Related to the artist's incessant need to translate her emotions and memories into a stimulating language of forms her hands work in tandem with her feelings endowing her with the unique ability to create objects that initially appear naïve and simplistic but in reality are psychologically complex and compelling.

As early as 2001, referencing her own childhood trauma of an unwelcome fourth daughter, she crafted a poignant floor piece, a motley group of stuffed handmade dolls hunched in a circle. With faces buried in their arms their heart wrenching act of lament, while assuaging her personal ordeal, voiced the pain of an unwanted, neglected and discriminated existence millions of females experience in this part of the world. Titled, *My birth will take place a Thousand Times*, no matter how you Celebrate it, this simple group of mourning women became an anchor piece for her subsequent shows, almost defining her stance on gender issues. Her new work opens with yet another variation of the same title, a wall hanging implanted with scores of plaited heads, (not entirely dissimilar to the famed dolls of the Cabbage Patch Kids). Projected from behind, the buried faces, when viewed in context, echo the same sentiments of hurt and pain as expressed in her original floor piece.

Decidedly more ruthless and direct in approach, *Unmonumental*, is an installation where she seats a headless, tattered and bandaged female figure next to a head of a buffalo / cow. This identification of woman with a beast of burden again negates her 'human' status and lends credence to the fact that in primitive cultures women are treated as sheep and cattle. The woman like the domestic animal is also a provider of sustenance and contributes at many levels. In 'I don't remember when we separated' Chishti ponders over woman's fabled standing as a celestial goddess and how, why and when she fell from grace.

The Chador / Burqa as a confining shroud for a woman is an image that has been hacked to death by the western electronic and print media yet artists continue to add it to their repertoire. Ruby Chishti alludes to gender repression by sewing a series of miniscule 'burqas' onto a large canvas titled, *Landscape of a Prosperous Society*. In spite of the triteness of the visual the intended barb still has a sting



Ruby Chishti
I Love my Prison, My Prison Loves me
(sanitary Napkins Threads and Lace)

and the small fluttering burqas do manage to create an aesthetic presence. In, *For Sale* ordinary vegetable and fruit baskets are filled with naked doll like bodies of women and burqas as saleable wares to highlight the weaker sex as a marketable commodity.

Exploring gender relationships and disparities in the light of personal experiences and traditional beliefs she often makes pertinent use of titles to evoke sympathy, bring humour, subversion and sarcasm to the viewing experience. A male bridal turban crafted with sanitary napkins, thread and gold lace in, *I Love my Prison, my Prison Loves me*, is a fetching yet bizarre ode to togetherness.

Using scraps of cloth, thread, string, rope, wool and cotton in much the same manner as fine artists use knife, brush and oil on canvas the artist had executed a number of works that qualified as fibre and fabric paintings. In, *There is no Hero*, a winged 'Buraq' soars away from a charred landscape dotted with mutilated bodies alluding to the apparent disconnect between the divine script and barbaric human will. While not explicit the work mocks the 'hero' concept in a world shorn of idealism. Reflecting the current fascination for oddities Chishti's deftly formed black crows, a constant in her oeuvre, emit

Ruby Chishti
Unmonumental...Bra, Fabric, Bandage, Polyester

mixed signals of friend and foe. They are watchful, are always around, herald the arrival of guests but are also scavengers with predatory instincts.

Living, working and exhibiting abroad Ruby Chishti is familiar with prevalent art practices in the west and draws influence from them in approach treatment and presentation. For the moment however, her work stems from personal experience and past identity. It still reflects her affiliation with her cultural roots. One hopes it will continue to do so.

An NCA graduate Chishti was artist in residence at Harris Art Museum in 2002 and has exhibited at a number of foreign venues. Her sculptures have been acquired by Walsh Gallery in Chicago, Whitworth Art Gallery and Embroidery Gallery in the US.

Dawn Gallery February 9 2008



Ruby Chishti - Soft Restraints - For Sale



Khalil Chishti

A LIVED REALITY

Deeply personal yet very topical Khalil Chishti's sculpture show *Toys Are Us* comes across as a humorous reality check of life within the super power socio political structure. A product of NCA, Lahore, Chishti concluded his BFA in 1998 and later acquired an MFA from the California State University in Sacramento in 2006. Trained as a sculptor in the traditional mannerism his grasp on the human anatomy is acute and penetrating. A productive association with leading modernist sculptor Shahid Sajjad, a long teaching spell at his alma mater in Lahore and in California, successful execution of several massive public projects at home and abroad have not only sharpened his observation and honed his working skills but also matured his focus on life. A native of Punjab his deep affinity with the Sufi doctrine of "love" is his guiding force enabling him to cast a benevolent eye on the ugly realities of life. This compassion imbues his work with a rare sensitivity that often cuts deep. Currently he works in the US and claims he has no home.

Experiencing life abroad at close quarters has brought Chishti in touch with the systems operative behind the façade of prosperity in the land of plenty. Perceiving humanity as pawns/ toys in the hands of mega powers he builds his premise by subverting / punning on the title of the famous chain *Toys Are Us*. His figurative sculptures in toy like semblances are expressions of people living a programmed existence. Amongst his most telling exhibits is *401 K*, the anchor piece of the show which references the coveted US Retirement Plan. "People make their life miserable to achieve this program" he remarks, adding "I have met some good artists who have compromised their creativity to avail it – they are waiting to acquire the security benefits when they reach retirement age and then revert to freedom of expression they long for." Negating the right to free will *401 K* is a carrot and stick program implemented by subtle coercion and scare tactics he opines. As victims of a manufactured security system a godless public soon acquires the characteristics of zombies. Chishti's figurative sculpture of a nuclear family, a couple and an offspring, android like in appearance, are an expose of this syndrome. Mimicking the umbilical cord attachment to the womb he has connected his 'beings' to a machine similar to one that dispenses gasoline. He deliberately presents them as transparent, down to their undergarments, to accentuate how see through their life is and yet he emphasizes "this transparency is opaque ... it hides all truths" making it difficult to understand how "healers are actually the ones causing pain."

Likewise, *Humiliation*, is a gateway to peaceful living. A standing contraption with arms spread out and personal belongings tumbling out of its boxed compartments, it critiques present day air travel to

foreign destinations. The sculpture illustrates the shame and embarrassment travelers feel when they are subjected to demeaning security checks through body searches, removal of shoes and socks, and use of dogs sniffing through their private luggage. An adult on a toddler tricycle in, *Rider*, again speaks of the absurd level to which a person is reduced when following the States mantra of a safe and secure haven. Other works like *Philosophers Key* and *Winged Loser* are variants on the same dilemma.

It is interesting to note that Chishti in exposing a system is also revealing his own insecurities. A one time victim of the very culture he critiques he has since been able to grapple his own demons and transcend the situation. Distancing himself from the lure he examines it objectively to produce works that will enable others to free themselves also.

As truth to self is expressive in his content so is his use of new media as a sculptural tool. Living in the age of plastic he has adopted this unorthodox substance as his agent of transmission. Chemically manufactured, very commonly used plastic sheets of the garbage / thrash bag variety moulded into ghostly figurations by an individually perfected application of heat allows Chishti to create works in a state of incompleteness. The gnawed texture and wispy strands of plastic trailing / hanging from the objects and bodies of his protagonists speak of work in progress as if the artist is deliberately purporting a tattered, ragged look. The mixed readings of disarray, ambiguity and a chilling ingloriousness these works spell, physically as well as conceptually, are so characteristic of this age. This is where the artist makes his mark – in his identification with the material, cultural and spiritual ethos of the environment in which he exists.

As an artist it is Khalil Chishti's imaginative use of his chosen medium 'plastic' that brings engagement value to his work. Moreover it is his ability to experience life's challenges, its twists and bends and still emerge unscathed that infuses the essential 'feeling' in his creations.



Khalil Chishti - Rider-Plastic toy, plastic bags

Khalil Chishti - Winged loser -Plastic bags



Khalil Chishti - Plastic bags

Seema Nusrat

"MY MEDIUM IN MY TIME."

An exhibition of soft sculptures called *There are no two ways about it* by Seema Nusrat saw the flowering of a new vocabulary inspired by an old language. Originally a student of miniature this IVSSA graduate devotedly practiced the venerable discipline for over three years before the realization dawned on her that she had absorbed as much as she could. As an under graduate an earlier fascination for mass produced found objects and materials like ribbed plastic pipes, newspapers, polythene bags and electric wires found in wholesale markets, reclaimed her attention once again as a medium of expression. Indulging in the freedom to experiment she realized she was approaching her projects by employing the miniature mannerism of what she termed "detailing in thinking and working." This process was visibly manifest in her work for Vasl's Taaza Tareen residency programme held at the Commune warehouse. Inspired by the oversized paper rolls she saw being unloaded in the opposite storehouse she went on to produce monochrome, monolithic paper sculptures in semi abstract forms. Underscored by the rules that govern the study of drapery and costume design she first drew basic blue print images then wove, knotted, looped, draped and hung massive lengths of paper to "explore the aesthetics of fashion and its impact on the human figure's stylisation."

Having discovered an idiom she felt comfortable in handling Seema Nusrat has explored it further in, *There are no two ways about it*. Her current body of work centralizes on an innovative manipulation of a generous collection of neck ties. She was captivated by the sight of enormous swathes of the fashion accessory being offloaded from trucks at the Light House market and as with the paper sculptures she visualized three dimensional apparitions created entirely with ties. Her main thrust was on accentuating the female figure but the works on view speak of an approach that is still vaguely suggestive and non-representational. As before the collection is underpinned by fashion aesthetics of draping the figure. She initially chose the tie, a specific male icon, as a contradictory element to critique male supremacy and emphasize women empowerment. As her work evolved the tie's linear construction also enabled her to highlight the structure of line in her sculpture. Other than contouring she has rolled the ties into cones, whorls and coils and pinched them into ruffles, taken out plain strands and flamboyantly tied them into bows. This essential craftsmanship, entirely self taught, is visually attractive mainly because of the rich silky texture of the ties and their very exotic hues.

Mimicking the fabled jewel like brilliance of the Mughal miniature Seema Nusrat concocts a striking palette of many tonalities. Relating to the miniature art principle of extracting many tones from a single

colour she fleshes out myriads of related hues in each mono colour piece. There were exquisite variations of spotted, plain, floral, geometric motif or striped ties all in pink in one sculpture piece, red in another and yellow and then green in yet others. Very cleverly crafted on wire frames the soft sculptures were expertly stitched and stood their ground.

While the artist is drawing inspiration from traditional techniques and forms the new creations have yet to find their niche. Seema Nusrat has exhibited her ability to interact with unconventional material, to conceptualise and reinvent with aplomb but the very newness of the medium and ambiguity of form renders them enigmatic here. Yet in the west this art has existed for the last fifty years. Made of pliant materials, such as cloth or foam rubbers "Soft Sculpture" is usually created by manipulating fabric or soft materials into a 3-dimensional shape with any number of binding and filling processes. It evolved in the Pop Art Movement of the 1960's and Claes Oldenburg is credited with popularizing soft sculpture with flaccid everyday objects such as a fan, light switch and drum set. Not only did this start a new art form, but it set weavers and other fiber artists free to seek new ways to express their creativity. Appreciation levels for this art exist in the west but in our milieu it has yet to develop. For the moment the work catches the viewer off guard, it is visually uncanny but it is neither revolutionary nor rebellious. This new direction spells a very personal and individualistic aesthetic at work; the central activity of which is the liberation and explication of the self through a three-dimensional art form.



Seema Nusrat
Draped...
Paper Sculpture
(detail)

Seema Nusrat - Detail



Seema Nusrat - Draped...Paper Sculpture



Seema Nusrat - Draped.. Mens Ties



Humaira Abid

HOME SWEET HOME

Centered on marriage and impending motherhood new works in Humaira Abids Lullaby series celebrate togetherness, expectancy and the courage to bear loss. What piques interest is the evocation of a male / female relationship not through recourse to human figurative forms but merely by the creation of an intimate domestic environment.

Making public the personal and the immediate Abids sculptures quietly draw in the viewer with their apparent simplicity and latent profundity. The Companion pieces consisting of his and her garments and the Journey collection of hand and trolley bags details her own experience of getting married, acquiring a companion and moving to USA to settle down. Nostalgia and homesickness prompted the Fountainhead pieces – Laptops with fountain taps sculpted in wood spell vital internet connectivity with loved ones at home. All works under the Mother and Child series pertain to the joys of maternity. The guessing game phenomenon representing the wait and preparation of the mother is well enacted through the complex sewing machine images caught in the process of embroidering names of boys or girls. In the same context of approaching motherhood pieces like Untitled and Home Sweet Home, accompanied by surgical instruments like scissors, clamps etc symbolically allude to mishaps like miscarriages or infertility. Similarly the Lullaby sculptures and accessories dwell on the pain of dashed hopes, anxiety of surgical procedures and the need for consolation. Accessories like well-worn shoes, baby bottles/ feeders, soothers / pacifiers, pillows, his and her razors and traveling kits do much to evoke a cherished domesticity.

Working on and off the lathe and labouring over traditional methods like manual carving Humaira's work practice also relates to experimental techniques like texturing wood with axe and sand blasting to finish her forms. Particularly fascinating is the attention to complex details in industrial items like computer keyboards, sewing machines and wheel / handle gadgetry in her Journey bags.

Humaira Abid - Emerging Brio



Humaira Abid
Home Sweet Home

Humaira Abid - Perfect Figure



Humaira Abid - The Journey



Humaira Abid
Fountain Head



Newsline June 2006

NEWSLINE

Munawar Ali

A REFLECTION OF THE TIMES

In this age of nuclear proliferation inhabitants of politically volatile states live a life fraught with stress, anxiety and apprehension. As hapless citizens battered by constant upheaval and flux they find themselves increasingly confused and ill equipped to navigate through the maze of social and political chaos that mars their daily life. Munawar Ali's collection of sculptures titled *Overloaded* centralizes on the strain of bearing these pressures. He plays on the meaning of 'overloaded' to define a physical as well as a psychological state.

A collection of wooden sculptures mimicking nuclear warheads, missiles, rockets and hand grenades appended with profiles, busts and body parts of extremist fundamentalists, terrorists and ordinary souls is an acute representation of the prevalent religio-political siege constricting the common man's right to normal existence. Presenting war weaponry loaded with human arsenal Munawar Ali comments on the unjustifiable proliferation of the arms race which perpetrates a defensive mindset and a tension riddled life.

As an artist Munawar's work has been constantly motivated by the out fall of the mass media explosion. He protests against the abundance of audio / video propaganda and how it can subtly manipulate the psyche into forming opinions - how innocent people are confronted / bamboozled with diverse points of view as each faction pushes its agenda forward. In *Overloaded* he again targets the media for overwhelming the ordinary public not just with a profusion of information but also making them pawns in the crossfire between warring nations.

Carved from single logs his sculptures are slim upright columns of wood conforming largely to the shapes and sizes of missiles and rockets. The insertion of the figurative elements melds naturally in some pieces but sits uncomfortably in others. It seems the artist is more preoccupied with the thematic thrust and less with the sculptural concerns of the work. Hints of other third world issues like poverty, hunger and identity crisis woven into the sculptural forms maybe adding to the conceptual aura he is trying to create in the viewers mind but they disturb the aesthetic balance of his individual pieces. The emaciated body image, the empty belly carvings etc are also not new and have been used much more effectively by other young sculptors.

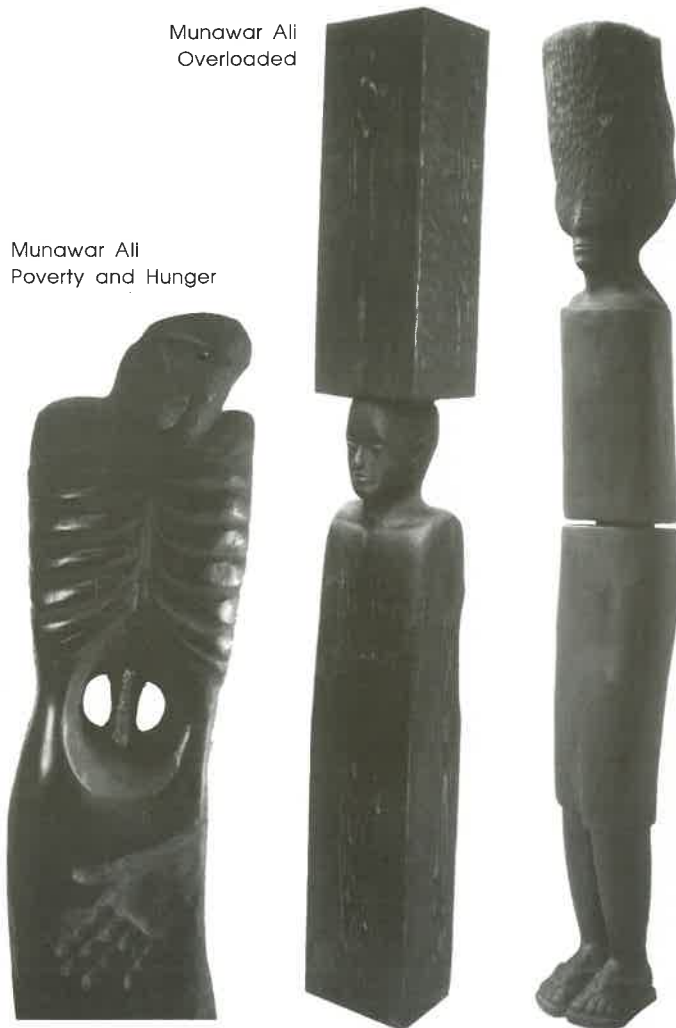
Seen in unison *Overloaded* is morbid and disturbing - a reflection of the times. And that perhaps is the greatest pull factor of the exhibition. If suitably infused with rhythm and lyricism sculpture pieces gain in elegance and sophistication but a considerable amount of current art is abrupt and matter of fact, possibly due to its thematic nature.

Munawar Ali overly concerned with the message he is trying to convey

has neglected to concentrate on the aesthetic appearance of his pieces. He could have strived for a more artistic balance regarding shape and form without jeopardizing the gravity of the message. Presently his pieces need to be seen collectively - they lose stature when viewed individually.

Munawar Ali
Overloaded

Munawar Ali
Poverty and Hunger



Newsline September 2007

NEWSLINE

Fahim Rao

WORKMANSHIP POTENTIAL

Motivated by poetic references Fahim Rao's "Paiwasta" (inseparable) series carved from single logs of wood, spoke of emotive capacity and workmanship potential. Taking inspiration from the works of established sculptors around him the artist is following a trodden path and will need to assert his individuality if he is desirous of carving a niche for himself.

A product of CIAC (Central Institute of Arts & Craft) Rao received his diploma in fine arts in 2005 and has since experimented with several media like wood, terracotta, fiber glass etc as possible forms of expression. There is a distinction between carving and modeling, the former is subtractive where you cut away to release a figure as in wood or stone and the other is an additive method where you build up or create out of pliable material like lumps of clay.

His progress and understanding of his chosen medium is well defined in the Paiwasta collection where he has endeavoured to extract poignant expressions from inert blocks of wood. Vertical, standing pieces on pedestals, the finely polished teak brown sculptures gain

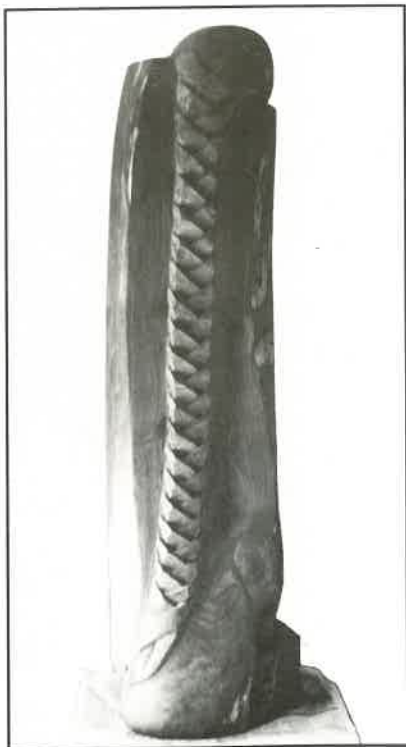
impact on account of the angst they emot. Easy to read expressions like hunger, fear, shame and the mother and child bonding of love affection and protection pull in the viewer. Looking skywards they seem to be imploring the heavens for succor. Other than effective body language the artist has played with textural nuances which however seem imposed in some of the works as they do not contribute to their meaning.

As viewable objects the sculptures are not frontally oriented to a single viewpoint and can be accessed from multiple angles - some reveal themselves to advantage from the sides. While the onlookers engage with the mood the pieces emit it is the artists ability to perceive those emotions in dead logs of wood that needs to be taken into consideration. The artist is developing his observational skills and the labour he has invested in the Paiwasta series manifests his commitment to the genre.

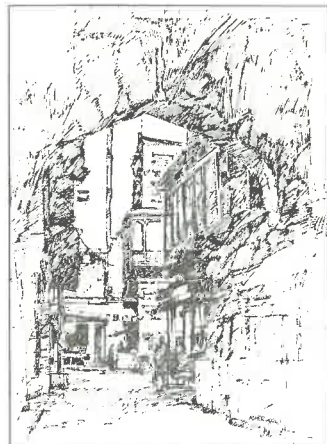
Newsline September 2008

NEWSLINE

Fahim Rao - Paiwasta Series



Athar Jamal



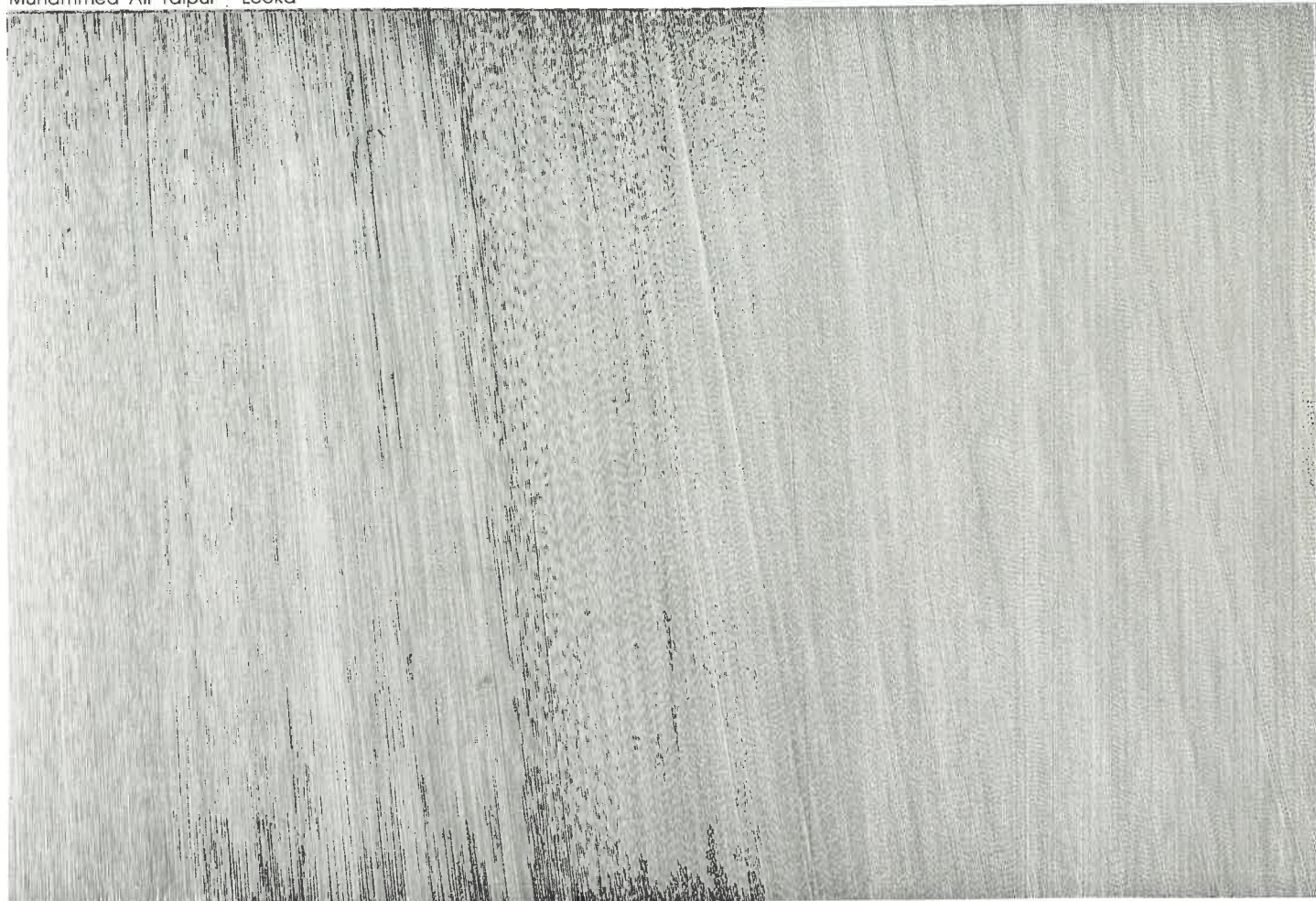
Tassadaq Sohail



Moeen Faruqi



Muhammed Ali Talpur - Leeka





Drawing is the most fundamentally spiritual – i.e. completely subjective – of all visual artistic activities. Once considered foundational to all visual arts it was deeply rooted in pictorial representation but today the genre is enjoying fresh perspectives that have radically redefined its form and application. Historically, drawing and narrative have been successful partners but it is becoming increasingly apparent that in the contemporary art climate, 'narrative' has been largely ignored by artists in favour of conceptual modes of expression and delivery

CONTEMPORARY DRAWING PRACTICE

What is the status and importance of drawing in current art practice? A collaborative effort of two young curators Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed, Lets Draw the Line, nudges viewers to explore the validity of the discipline through a wide trajectory of over seventy five drawings by as many as twenty two prominent artists of Pakistan. The show attests to the unique properties of drawing and its standing as the most intimate, immediate and versatile art medium.

Among the most basic and direct, (easily qualifying as bland or novel too), some works by new generation artists pushed the envelope as they went for a very contemporary take. Studying and questioning the visible in very low decibels, M A Talpur manipulated the power of the striated, naked line, alone and en masse, to advantage in his Leeka and Bird Flight, drawings. Equally austere Jamil Baloch's rush of broad strokes pulsed to a much stronger beat of raw emotion. Progressing towards lines / strokes with the barest hints of a visual presence Rashid Arshads, Mother and Child, and Sumaira Tazeen's, Muwadda series, though vastly apart in approach, invited speculation too. Providing clues but still soliciting inquiry abstruse drawings by a host of participants were essentially artist specific.

Emanating from, relating to or complementing individual signatures these drawings were independent entities, preparatory studies for future paintings or just preliminary sketches Overlapping organic references like the bougainvillea leaf, peacock feather and sperm image, artist Aasma Hashmi had evolved an individual gender centric vocabulary. Similarly fetal images of the womb by Naiza Khan also defined personal gender concerns. Expressing symbolically Durriya Kazi portrayed the struggle to survive under trying circumstances through charcoal on paper.

When alluding to the metaphysical, artists almost always create a very personalized language. Mehr Afroz's floral symbol paired with the

cross hatched and darkened 'poshak' image defined her, Soof, series. Using smoke, soot and graphite powder artist Riffat Alvi, foregoing the linear process, expressed the state of 'fanaa' through misty, vaporous mark making. But for Tassadaq Sohail fantasy was delineated in meticulous fine line detail in his pen and ink, Jewish Dreams, series. Figurative, pictorial drawings by artists Ather Jamal and RM Naeem upheld the norms of traditional drawing practice – direct, plausible and pleasing they affirmed the artists grasp of the medium by

Munawer Ali Syed



emphasizing the familiar, standard act of drawing. However in Moeen Faruqi, Jabbar Gull, Rabia Zuberi and Nahid Reza's semi abstractions it was the artists special vocabulary, his / her signatures that dominated the drawing experience.

Curator Roohi Ahmed continuing with her 'mapping' idiom had added the ECG cardiogram graphics to her repertoire to comment on the geo political boundaries and unrest within the country. Likewise Abdullah Syed's Anthology of Anar (Pome-grenade) was also politically motivated and engaged attention more for his clever manipulation of the image and word Anar to infer Anar - kali, Anar - chy and so forth, than for his drawing ability. As curators both artists deserve a pat on the back for undertaking the arduous task of envisioning this show and persuading artists to submit meaningful work to it.

The discipline of drawing tunes the sensitivity of the drawer to a higher pitch. Minus the dazzle of colour, sans embellishment and the trappings of mix media, the drawn image emerges as the most honest

manifestation of an artists intention and almost all the works in this exhibition qualified as candid expressions reflective of personal identity. Showcasing the growth of contemporary drawing the artists had presented imagery that refers as much to the language of life around us as it does to fine art. The drawings communicated information, narrated a story, created a scenario or conjured a world or a system of belief.

Seen in unison this exhibition can shed new analysis on the tradition of drawing in our art milieu. Examining the importance of drawing as a contemporary art form and the dynamic ways in which artists are pushing the medium into new, creative territory, the show encourages viewers to redefine their notion of drawing, its aesthetic range, visual power and expressive potential. Along with examples of innovative approaches to the medium, the selection included works by artists who exploit, in extraordinary ways, traditional aspects of drawing.

Dawn Gallery March 08.2008

DAWN
GALLERY

Rashid Arshad - Mother and Child



R M Naeem



SIZE DOES MATTER

The take home message from the exhibition, *Size does Matter*, is that young artists here are now availing options to undertake drawing as their principal medium, confident in the knowledge that their work will not suffer in status as a result. Radically removed from the traditional preparatory drawing variety the genre today flits easily from monumental to micro, from conceptual to three dimensional and from black and white to full colour. The large 'size' of the artworks the other unusual feature of the show also has precedents in current global art. The massive and the colossal are by no means new to art but enormity in contemporary art became trendy and commercial when art was taken out of the limited gallery spaces into the vast expansive exhibition venues of biennials / triennials and art fair extravaganzas mushrooming the world over. The increasing use of abandoned factory warehouses, depots and stores as popular alternate art spaces have also fostered immensity in scale. At home absence of or confined studio spaces of middle class artists and limited gallery and other display areas has impeded the development of 'big' art especially site specific work that needs to be constructed on location.

Undertaken with the intention of pushing the boundaries *Size Does Matter*, a four artist initiative comprising sculptors Munawar Ali and Asad Hussain, educational illustrator and graphics expert Adeel Zafar and painter Naseer Bhugri, materialized as a viable project with the effective collaboration of a local gallery. Completing the early phases of their work independently all four artists formalized the end stages of their drawings in the spacious gallery halls before their final installation. If contemporary art is to thrive and prosper here then aiding artists with opportunities and backup support by way of necessary studio spaces, sponsors, catalogue publications etc is needed to encourage and facilitate the artistic effort. The artists on their part have to learn to walk the extra mile if they are desirous of making their mark. Alongwith their study of developing trends internationally they need to have a much deeper engagement with the traditional and indigenous if they are keen to reinvent and reconstruct an authentic meaningful reality.

Capitalizing on the immediate impact of opposites, massive artworks versus intricate workmanship, the four wall - sized works of *Size Does Matter* called for instant viewer ship. Fundamentally handmade, the drawings maddeningly linear and labor-intensive spoke of technique as a dominant component in the artists' expansive art making process.

Employing the scratch method to build his trajectory of mark making Adeel Zafar literally worked from the inside out on a thick vinyl base which lends itself well to grazing, scraping and scoring lines. His drawing support, the reverse side of full scale vinyl sheets, were roller painted pitch black on which his image was etched out line by grey

line. Previously given to collating smaller elements to assemble the big picture Adeel reversing his process in this instance had magnified a tiny toy image into an extra large scale. His subject an innocuous stuffed toy donkey (peculiarly similar to the very sprightly and talkative 'Donkey' character in the animation movie *Shrek*) wrapped completely in gauze bandage challenged viewer perceptions on a technical and theoretical level. Adeel used sharp edged, improvised, carpenter tools with remarkable dexterity and sensitivity to create the wavering linear patterns of fine gauze mesh. The process calls for a fair amount of control and concentration because when etching on a surface for tonal effects mistakes can seldom be erased. Conceptually the toy form and bandage wrap suggested several readings of a social and political nature ranging from censorship to camouflage, from child play to power politics and from freedom to manipulation. The faint roaring tiger profile concealed in the posterior form was a covert articulation of menace. A 1998 NCA graduate Adeel's main line of work as a children's book illustrator has not only given him the edge to invert toy imagery with considerable aplomb but also to create nuanced linearity.

Building mass on the sheer strength of individual hair like lines is peculiar to the oeuvre of Naseer Bhugri. A feat of immense patience his art making called for further endurance when the current drawing inched from the floor to the roof in scale. He confesses to deriving "great pleasure from the spontaneous lines that form ambiguous shapes." While a significant proportion of contemporary art practice seeks to interpret complex realities, artists like Bhugri actually set out to create them through construction of highly personal, alternative worlds. The resulting images, snapshots of impossible states, underpin the artist's own desire to make sense of reality while also investigating man's attempts to come to terms with existence.

Asad Hussain, a sculptor, who has a day job as a studio set designer with a leading TV channel is used to vastness in size. His installation cum drawing on gold vinyl/ rexine, the only coloured work in the otherwise monochrome show, was a commentary on current affairs - an influence of his daily, news channel encounter as well as his attempt to negotiate the chaos /stress surrounding our lives. Interweaving the deadly drone visual into his play with the doves and hawks imagery he brought the same subversion to the baby child figures to create a state of violence, fright and terror (on innocents). His blatant use of garish hues, opulent gold and menacing red comes across as raw and resolutely populist - bordering, even, on kitsch. This appropriation of popular style and content within a fine art context questions long-held assumptions regarding the parameters of art itself.

Chaos finds an entirely different interpretation in the works of Munawar Ali. A sculptor who has always spoken on issues of identity, individuality, and social pressure through fragmented and distorted sculptural forms and textual graffiti scrawls, he now conveys the overload of urban detritus through drawing. On a floor to ceiling semi cubical, two pieced, corner construction in matt black board as the support for his drawing he created a flowing mass of interwoven pictorial imagery. Working with white Conte pencil he had drawn his disparate visuals of savvy urban consumers and domestic luxury goods in an amazingly pliant unbroken line. The insertion of tiny cutouts of average city dwellers in between the lines brought into sharp contrast the variance that exists in what should be and what is. This rhythmic narrative spoke of lives overloaded, entangled and swarming with material desires and acquisitions - a situation veering out of control.

This new concentration on drawing augers well for the development of art practice - not so market-driven, its increase in profile might be a far slower process than the currently trendy genres - hence the emphasis will be more on serious experimentation than on gimmicks and fads.

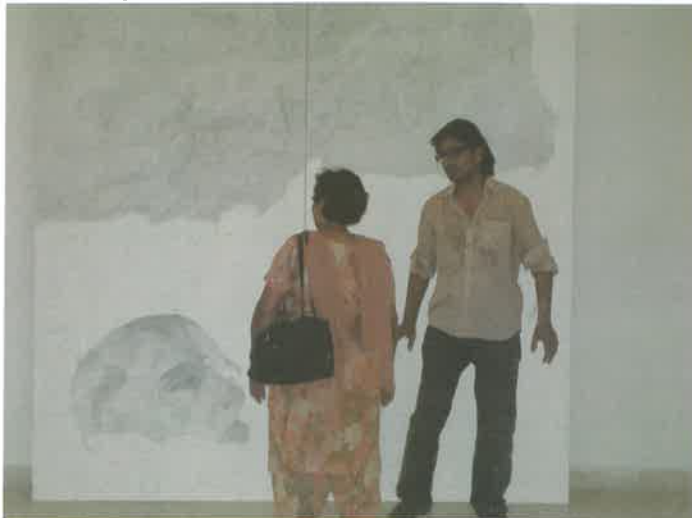
Dawn Gallery August 16 2009

**DAWN
GALLERY**

Asad Hussain at work



Naseer Bhugri showing his work to Rifat Alvi



Munawar Ali Syed at work



Adeel Zafar



DRAWING TODAY

Embracing novel interpretations an exhibition, *Drawn from Life*, at Green Cardamom, London, focuses on the nature and value of drawing across a broad range of contemporary art activity. Spread over a year, *Drawn from Life*, has been composed as a trilogy of exhibitions that explore the drawing practice through the art of twenty contemporary artists from Asia, Middle East and Europe. Working in diverse visual languages they have presented works that access nature, three dimensional forms, design, science and technology as viable means of expression. Challenging the usual aesthetic and functional associations of the medium the artists have created a vast body of art that include installations in paper, plastic and light as well as regular two dimensional renditions variously inspired by the South Asian miniature, Islamic geometric design and colonial architecture. Segmented into three independent shows the first exhibition in the trilogy titled *Drawing Process* concentrated on methodology.

Examining the opposing role of strategy and instinct in drawing it was based on the work of twelve artists from Pakistan, India, Iran, Germany

and Sri Lanka. The two categories distinguished between those artists that relinquish control and rely on probability and intuition to guide their drawing, and those who draw with deliberation and forethought.

Armed with just a felt tip pen Mohammed Ali Talpur indulges in a desire to observe and trace the flight path of birds, as seen from the rooftop of his studio in Lahore. His emerging abstracted lines articulate an 'art without content.' Similarly Beate Terfloths minimal tree bark outlines on white paper also attempt to capture the ephemeral and the elusive. Premeditated art on the other hand is engineered to create specific portrayals. Afsoons photo etching on matchbox art works reframe photographic imagery of the early 1900's but it is her wry mix and juxtaposition of the profound with the humorous, the romantic with the prosaic that engages the viewer at first sight.

How is it that the process of drawing is able to pull together fragments of space, time and memory?

The second exhibition in the trilogy, *Drawing Space*, taps on memory as

Elizabeth and Ifthikhar Dadi - *Ishara Series*



a resource for accessing the intangible while the material and the concrete is drawn from the presence of physical objects. Memory as a drawing source needs and uses mental and physical mapping processes as part of its make-up. Linear constructions of patterns and planar shapes on graph paper by Sehar Shah chart significant aspects of her life. Composed as an amalgam of reminiscences they speak of her architectural background, childhood memories, her Islamic heritage and issues of identity encountered in New York. However, to the uninitiated they appear as an interesting patchwork of organic and geometric shapes to which any number of meanings can be attributed. Another artwork, *Scapes and Shapes*, by Muhanned Cader also capitalizes on the fragment impact. According to Bernice Rose (*Allegories of Modernism*, 1992): "In current practice the fragment is itself a mode...Dual readings are a continual theme, along with...the power of language, the sign, and allegory in unexpected places". Painting Scottish landscapes Cader, originally from Sri Lanka, removes all traces of Celtic reference from his drawings. By doing so he is able to allude to or access his native home in his minds eye.

For artists who forego the manual for the digital in drawing practice one is left wondering why, in the face of 21st century technology, we still draw. With technical manipulation the possibilities of reinvention, interdisciplinary fusion and hybridization are limitless and some artists in the Cardamom show attempted to further the scope of basic drawing with some very imaginative digital inputs.

Exploring the relationship between the public and the private through drawing Nazgol Ansarinia played between the lines. Her decorative drawings of traditional Islamic / Persian motifs and patterns were animated with humorous tongue in cheek narratives. Tiny figures in varied daily motions of eating, travelling and talking woven within her intricate sequential drawings altered the strict pattern image from a design to a storyboard.

The Ishara series of digital prints on archival paper by Elizabeth and Ifthikar Dadi defined as 'quasi scientific specimens' were even more technology reliant. They came across as distant deconstructions of native architectural facades, fading emblems, motifs, bits of painted signage, vernacular scripts and trivia that clutter everyday existence in post colonial mega cities. Among the few polychrome artworks in an otherwise monochrome show it was the attractive chromatics that first drew in the viewer, engagement with contents and technique followed later.

Line may be the single most important element in drawing because it defines it as a drawing, but the second most important element would

be space and the shapes created by them. The works in this exhibition push boundaries of ordinary drawing with large papier-mache sculptures and collages such as Sojwal Samant's tower blocks and Hamra Abbas's paper plate installations where small houses pop out at every angle. These exercises develop ones facility at perceiving objects as physical shapes rather than as verbal descriptions. It is the implied context of the white or negative spaces that gives meaning to the art in question.

Exhibitions of Pakistani art abroad are also interesting case studies of the varied levels at which the art is internalized. The cultural climate of a region has a strong role to play in determining the reception of the art on view. Dwelling on notions of space and attempting to locate the intangible Muhammed Zeeshan redraws scenes from the Kama Sutra using only the fine hair on the body to indicate his forms. A miniature artist by training his experimental stance conforms to the premise of *Drawing Space*, it -kows the mood of contemporaneity in miniature art and his sensitive rendering of an erotic theme is accepted accordingly by viewers abroad. However the subject and treatment of the same works elicits an entirely different response from the average viewer here where gender explicitness is taboo. Often differences in perception alter the viewing experience. But then multiple readings enlarge the scope of the art opening new debates on the definition of the personal and the public as well as the relationship between the artist, his art and the viewing public.

Collectively the exhibition represents a very broad range of new drawing expressions. From academic considerations, to the very personal enjoyment of a drawing notebook, and from expressive, gesture drawings to precisely accurate CAD drawings, it's all here. As a show, *Drawing from Life*, thrives on the individual perspectives of its artists and among the amazing multiplicity of views and portrayals coming forth it, surprisingly, still manages to cohere to its premise. As for the viewer - the show demands an active process of reflection on the role of drawing in contemporary art practice.

Green Cardamom is a London based international arts organisation. They develop and run visual arts projects in collaboration with public museums and galleries. They also maintain a gallery programme and represent contemporary artists from Pakistan, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East. The Gallery works on a not-for-profit basis.

DRAWING FORM – A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH

A yearlong curatorial project *Drawn From Life* exploring process, inhabitation of space and use of form in the drawing practice of more than 20 artists from Asia Europe and the US, undertaken by Green Cardamom, London, concluded recently with their third and final show titled *Drawing Form*. Centered on the works of thirteen artists the exhibition, comprising sculpture, video, collage, photography as well as pencil on paper attempts to redefine the conventional notion of drawing. Its radical stance is apparent not just in the use of new media to delineate form but also through recourse to a new language game of attributing or extracting meaning from complex, ambiguous mundane or perverse content.

Form drawing is a method of recording the principal facts of form with rapidity and ease and of necessity deals only with large general truths. While attention to line and the work of the artist's hand remain important to the definition of drawing, today artists are pushing the idea of drawing across all media to create new hybrid forms. Definition of form in these unorthodox works is often in terms of its analogical structure. Most of these visual forms have no immediate utilitarian sense, so their meaning can only lie in their contents and in the feelings that are associated with the composition of content.

Most works in the Cardamom show aspire to meanings beyond their apparent arrangement. In the *Dead Soldier* mixed media on paper drawing of Hajra Waheed the form and analogy equation is dominant. Hajra Waheed who lives and works in Montreal, explores the symbolic 'language of flowers', specifically when used to commemorate military heroism. It is this association with a distinct sentiment that is the primary experience in the artwork, while the drawing ability engages the eye as a secondary factor.

However in Imran Mudassars *Life Drawing* the presence of the figurative form is as assertive as the associations one draws from its content. A young artist from Lahore, Mudassar draws on photo prints. Photographs of bullet-riddled walls taken in Kabul form the surfaces on which he renders delicately penciled figures. The juxtaposition of punctured walls to create wounded bodies is a clever mix of technique and concept- a simultaneous highlight of drawing ability and underlying perceptions.

Well-constructed drawings begin with a specific 'given' nuclear form or form sequence which is a key to the whole work but in contemporary parlance a considerable amount of drawing relies on making and reading material marks. A circular impression on paper created by fungus harvested in a coffee cup is how Naima Dadabhoy chose

to emote her feelings of a particular moment- leaving the form(less) renderings open to multiple inquiries. Similarly New York-based, Huma Bhabha, whose practice includes figurative sculpture and drawing, had resorted to ink on photographs to explore the vertical body in space. As a very personal investigation the work invited speculation.

Sidestepping drawing acumen it was the collage technique that took precedence over all else in Ayaz Jokhio's portrait of Rabindranath Tagore in acrylic and newspaper collage on board. Similarly it was treatment of form that was riveting in *The Boy and the Dragon fly* (watercolour pigments on wasli) by Ali Kazim. His ability to mimic the texture /pigment of the human skin in watercolor is most remarkable. It is also heartening to know that even in a foreign environment his work still emanates from a vernacular ideology.

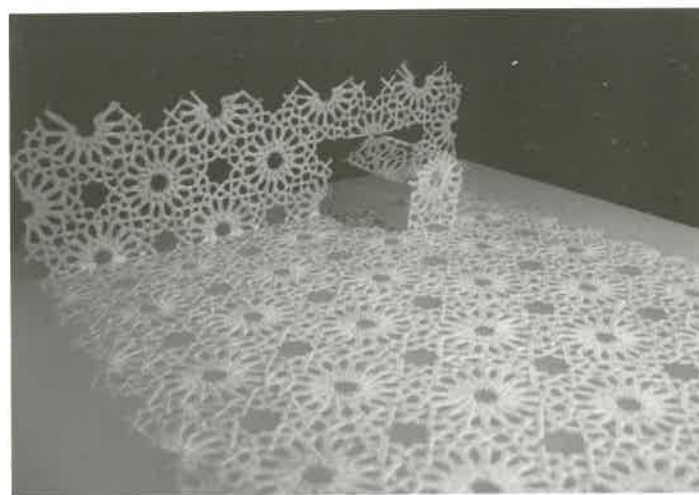
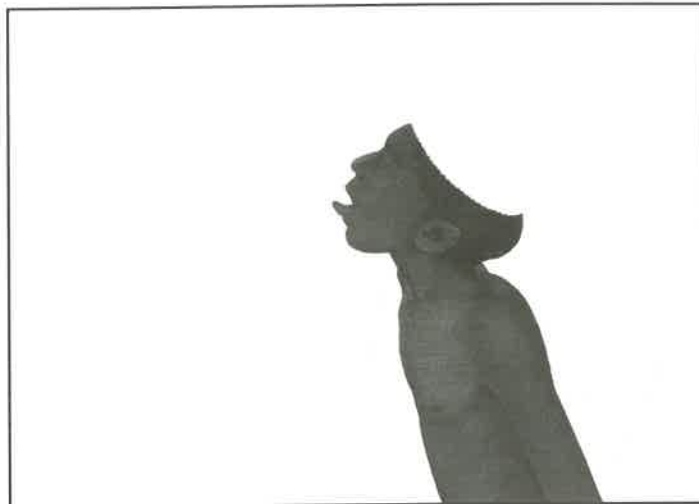
Ranging from representations of the human body to formal artistic investigations artworks in the show inspired by the artists immediate environment engaged with the physical world, from daily news stories to the landscape around them, both natural and man-made. By no means a show with a thumping impact that instantly fires the imagination, the art in *Drawing Form* complied to subtleties and intricacies where meaning had to be drawn, sifted or tweaked out of the very personalized content.

Drawing no longer conforms to the traditional sketch or preparatory art variety that once kept its place in the artworld's hierarchy of art forms. Having declared its independence it is vying for a higher ranking in the tiers of contemporary art. The Cardamom shows importance lies in spotlighting Pakistani artists considerable understanding and projection of the genre in an international context.

Imran Mudassar - Life drawing



Ali Kazim - The Boy And The Dragonfly



Hamra Abbas - Paper Sculpture

Ayaz Jokhio

SOLO EXHIBITION

SO CLOSE YET SO FAR APART

On the verge between art and documentary the exhibition, Ayaz Jokhio – Drawings, plays with the objective and the accurate to accent the critical. Large graphite / charcoal drawings, singular projections of ordinary, commonplace imagery, bound together and serialized as diptychs draw attention to “similarities and differences” inherent in images which may resemble each other physically but are far removed in meaning. This twist, creating polarities, building contrasts with the intention of alluding to contemporary social, cultural and political conflicts is essentially Jokhio’s thrust.

In the current mad rush for the new and the exciting the known and the recognizable is often ignored or pushed aside as too humdrum and banal. Concentrating on the very apparent and the very familiar the artist invites the viewer to re-look and re-think on the significances that can be accrued from the obvious. The diptych *Bullet:Pen* projecting a mega image of a fountain pen on one side and a bullet on the other are almost alike in height, breadth and volume. The tickler lies in the split in meaning. Through a deliberate, somewhat revised, replay of the common adage “the pen is mightier than the sword” Jokhio prompts the viewer to bring new connotations to an old metaphor. The *Handcuff:Bracelet* twosome, a pair of ornamental wrist adornments juxtaposed with a pair of bands for shackling prisoners, invites fresh musings on the issue of confinement at varied levels, symbolic, physical as well political.

Easy on the eyes and the imagination Jokhio’s simplistic imagery is tweaked with humour as well. At times his equations are so direct and naive that one cannot help but be amused by his selection. The *Wrestler: Bomb* diptych featuring a weighty sumo wrestler in attack mode alongside a heavy bellied atom bomb image is as funny as it is grave.

Essentially an exhibition of drawings there is however no defining linear strength or brandishing strokeplay, pronouncing the artists individuality, in the works. Jokhio opts for a soft look. Creating tonalities with shading and blending he has been successful in producing clean large drawings on pristine white paper. When paper stubs and fingers are used to lay down and merge tones it is often difficult to maintain the crisp whiteness of the paper. Successfully managing this impediment the artist has projected dramatic presentations that magnify his otherwise basic / ordinary picture making skills which while realistic in appearance are far removed from ‘realism’ as such.

Today the term ‘realism’ is next to meaningless in that it is used as a shorthand expression for everything from photo-realism to all manner of kitschy art. And while they all owe some degree of descendancy

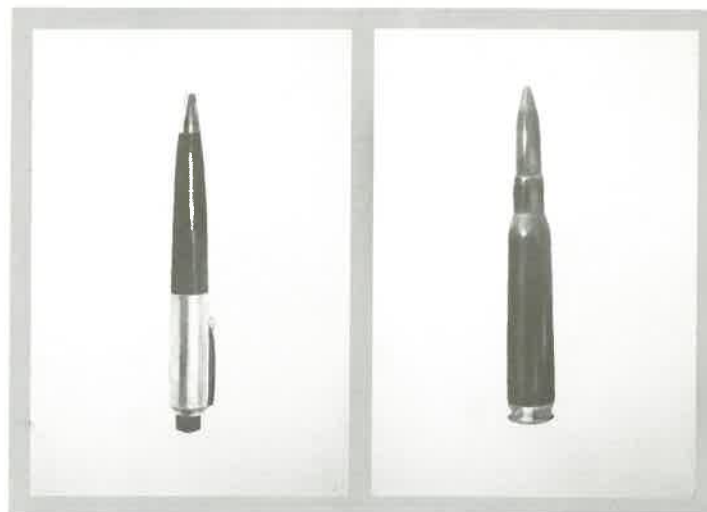
from Realism, they are pretty far removed from what the original movement was and what it meant. In current usage Contemporary Realism advocates a simple realistic painting style. The artists of the genre come from various backgrounds but are united in their choice to depict their subjects accurately, rather than conform to the more abstract movements popular in Modern art. Contemporary Realists choose subjects from daily life but it is the critical and ideational aspect that determines their choice and use of imagery. By creating simplistic mildly critical visuals that address current issues Ayaz Jokhi’s rudimentary realism relates to the contemporary manifestation. As an artist Jokhio relishes change and enjoys the excitement of discovering and crafting novel presentations. His literary grounding enables him to question existing reality and produce art that challenges the norms but he has yet to produce work that requires deeper engagement, stylistically and conceptually. The sensibility and potential to handle the technicalities seems to be there – he just needs to apply himself more seriously.

A 2001 graduate of NCA Ayaz Jokhio has availed fellowships and awards from the Arrus project Moriya Japan and from Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuggart, Germany where he also held solo exhibitions of his work. His current solos in Pakistan including this exhibition have been arranged by the virtual gallery Grey Noise.

Dawn Gallery June 14 2008

DAWN
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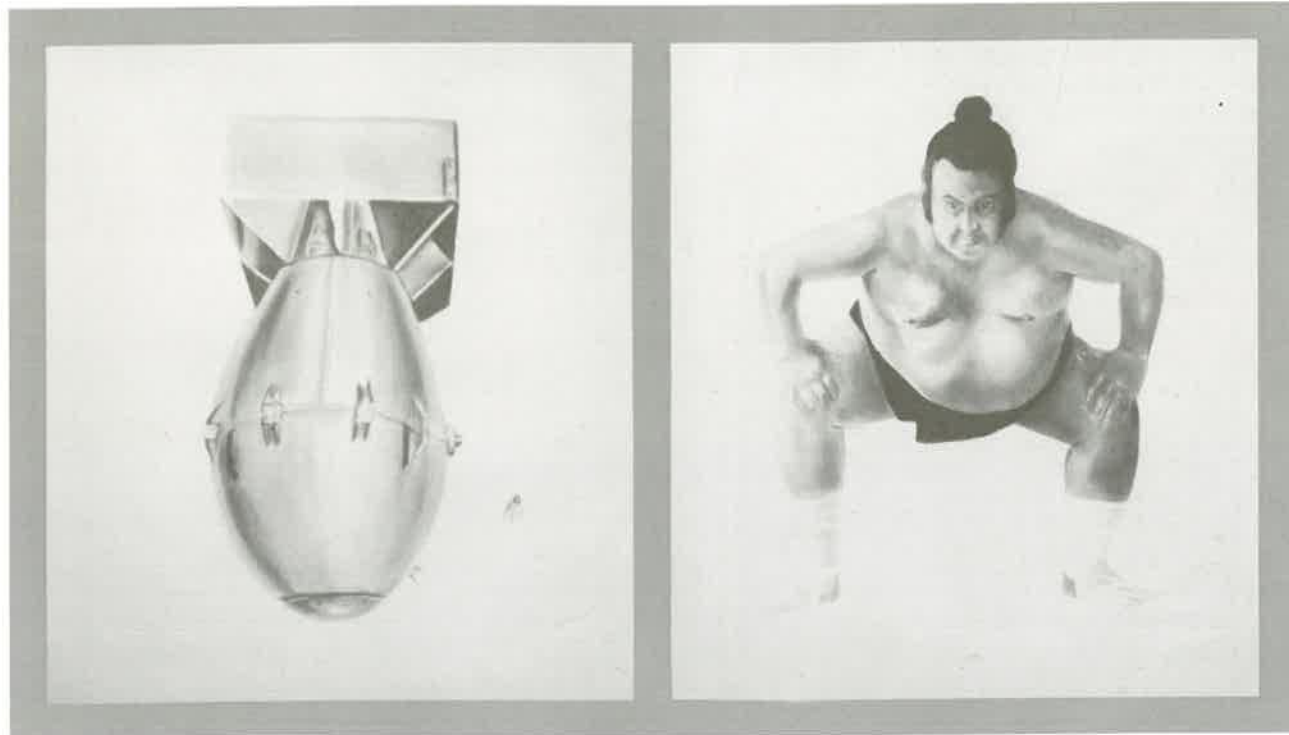
Ayaz Jokhio - Bullet : Pen



Ayaz Jokhio - Handcuff : Bracelet



Ayaz Jokhio - Wrestler : Bomb



Painting continues to be redefined with new imagery, techniques and meanings in spite of its proclaimed death in the late sixties. Contemporary practice comprises an assortment of styles, materials and methods but it is essentially paintings inherent conceptual content that is aligning it with the new face of art. Open to a vast range of possibilities it is variously being used to address current cultural, social and political concerns and conflicts. For contemporary artists tutored in the western model of art the embrace of Islamic tradition is tantamount to opening up an alternative space where we see Muslim thought articulated with modern non Islamic vocabulary. Postcolonial theory and its attention to identity issues, cultural confusion and crossovers also have a direct bearing on the work of contemporary painters. Young artists, caught between the innocence of youth and a harsh paradoxical existence, are projecting a painterly realism that is often partial, hybrid or paranoid. Their content, radical, parodist or subverted is deliberately ambiguous, illusory or open to several interpretations.

ART POWER

An ongoing manifestation of politically provoked art reinforces the realization that political/social conflict is being chronically internalized within individuals.

The show Give and Take goes a step further to prove that the ethos of protest is very much a live issue in the student teacher interaction as well. Sameera Raja as curator has brought together the work of four artists in accordance to her assessment of their artistic and conceptual bent. She selected educator Masuma Halai and her student Faraz Ali and Jamil Baloch and his student Zahid Hussain for a collective display. Assigned individually all the participants worked independently without prior knowledge of each other's productions yet when seen in unison the thread of dissent ran through all the art works.

Conflicts surrounding identity, public and personal, are source of much concern in artist Masuma Halai's work and she approaches them as a concerned citizen, a mother, a woman and as a patriot. The Arab headscarf, (keffeyeh) in the Turban Settlements piece is a symbolic reference to the wave of religious extremism sweeping through the country and its juxtaposition with photographs of architectural

landmarks of Pakistan is a pointed reminder of alien influence on home ground. Similarly the Domino Effect and Shades of Black also reiterate the rapid and blind conversion to fundamentalist ideologies. Works like The Silent Scream and What Now are the other side of the story – how upheavals disrupt the lives of ordinary people. Other than the conceptual thrust Halai's recourse to mix media effects in her work, painting over digital photographs, needlepoint stitchcraft, and deliberate use of collage also engage the eye. This emphasis on the 'process' of art making aligns her work ethos with the printmaking genre.

Zahid Hussain



The potential one saw in the thesis projects of Indus graduate Syed Faraz Ali in 2005 is beginning to translate well in his work. Still making use of prominent political logos, emblem and insignia graphics to enunciate protest his work like Halal's also centralizes on identity crisis and a partiality towards the graphic arts and print media. His use of the flag to assert identity is clever and witty. Dramatic use of the male figure and sparse but bold chromatics are other significant features that bring strength to his ink and watercolour paintings on Arches paper.

Jamal Baloch - Zubaan Series



The muffled voices in Jamil Baloch's intensely abstract Zubaan series are finally beginning to articulate through a distinct pictorial language. Formerly just a hash of broad and thin linear strokes in various tonalities of black the work now supports distinct narrative content. A native of Baluchistan Jamil's work has always been underscored with the politics of the region. He rebels against authoritarianism and oppression, but his focus on gender suppression; poverty and ethnicity are cultural discrepancies common to other regions of Pakistan also. The accent on 'hope' gives a positive definition to paintings in the current show.

Syed Faraz Ali





Masuma Halai

The shrouded female is seen emerging (albeit cautiously) from the shadows that once shackled her, the fighter jet missile heads now sport bouquets and sprays and the mutilated human body also rises phoenix like as a symbol of resurrection. Most elevating is the rooster image associated with protection of good against evil. Essentially a sculptor Jamil has been proving his mettle as a painter for quite sometime and this series affirms his grasp over the medium.

As a student of Jamil Baloch, Zahid Hussain draws inspiration from his mentors thought process but strikes a new chord with his rather radical imagery. Playing with the graphic crescent arc he has concocted inventive narratives. Used in the political context the star and crescent as essential components of the Pakistani flag spell the state of the nation. Reconstituting them as waves, birds and a gun trigger the artist speaks of peace and hope under the shadow of militancy. Minimal, starkly monochrome and still striking there is a naivety about this expression that draws in the viewer.

Unlike the bizarre and the grotesque that creeps into most conflict riddled art, the imagery in this show was visually appealing and conformed to the dictates of contemporary realism. As a critical commentator on the sociopolitical crisis Pakistani art appears now to seek a constructive and fruitful dialogue with viewers.

Syed Faraz Ali



Newsline November 2009

NEWSLINE

Summaya Durrani

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

FROM MODERNITY TO TRADITION

Nurtured as a child of modernity but evolving as a devotee of tradition it is artist Sumaya Durrani's leap of faith that now gives substance to her aesthetic expression. Initially trained in the techniques and philosophies of western art Durrani acquired her Bachelors and Masters Degree in Fine Arts from The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, in 1985, followed by postgraduate studies at Sir John Cass School of Art London till 1987. "No one questions you when you arrive from the US or Europe and I was greeted with a lot of applause - but I am glad the standing ovation did not go to my head," she muses while recounting the reception she was accorded here, as a radical artist, early in her career.

Today, in keeping with the Islamic chain of spiritual transmission, "tareeqat ka silsila," she acknowledges Faqir Nasiruddin as her Murshid and seeks direction from her Spiritual Guide Syed Imamuddin Qadri. This transition in thought and attitude is grounded in Durrani's eventual realization that "modernity was imposed on us (as a people)." Remarking that "modernity is a very noble strategy except that it happened in another time for another civilization for a people who wanted it," she feels that "it (modernity) is obsessed with only the 'individual' and how he can change things - so the individual is prompted not to surrender" but rather pushed to constantly validate his independence with innovations, the more shocking the better. Recalling the inclusion of her work in a notable Pakistani women painters' exhibition "Intelligent Rebellion" held at Bradford Museum UK in 1995 she now wonders what the 'rebellion' and defiance was all about and what meaningful victory did it achieve.

While conflict between individual and society is a social reality Durrani has moved on to another plane where the individual's ability to recognize totality and "to weave into the whole" is primary. Subscribing to the principles of Tauhid (unity in multiplicity) she is inspired by the Sufi or mystic strand of Islamic knowledge. In the Islamic order Sharia dictates the formal relations of Muslims towards God and their fellows while Sufism teaches Muslims how to know God in their hearts. Clarifying her stand the artist explains that in "Tareeqat" you obey by choice - "because of love or "chahaat. It is love, not intellect that brings you into the 'Tauhid ka diara."

Summaya Durrani's recent art delves in and around the 'inner way' or the spiritual journey towards God. Her Ibn e Maryam print series (2006) dwelt on the Virgin Birth as an article of faith. Aspiring for nearness, through the mediation of the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), was the motivation behind the subsequent Rukh e Mustafa print (with glaze) in which the recurring calligraphic text emphasized "Tasbih" or "Vird of Zikr e Ilahi." Yet another series under process Jad ul

Hasan wa Husain examines digression and return to the circle of unity, (Tauhid ka diara).

Still focused on the mysteries of the spiritual world Durrani's current exhibition titled Shahab e Saqib, references a Quranic Sura that warns against the snares of evil spirits. The Sura accentuates how angels manifest the power of God and how different is Good from Evil and Truth from Falsehood and speaks of the final extirpation of Evil. The defeat of Evil is throughout connected with Revelation, and in this verse the ranged fight is illustrated by a reference to the angels in the heaven and to the earlier prophets in our earthly history.

When viewed in this context Durrani's artworks document the artist's personal struggle with inner demons, the eternal tug of war between forces of evil and goodness that man encounters at every stage in his life, and her ability to cleanse and purify her 'self.' She works intuitively building her forms on flat painted surfaces that evoke the concept of infinity, which is a constant, as against the variables of form implanted on it. In a severely abstract and pointedly geometric visual idiom a concentrated fusion of shaded, dark and luminous facets project the varying levels, degrees or 'kaifiyat' of the soul as it fluctuates and oscillates between moments of clarity and illumination and depths of despair and confusion.

To the uninitiated viewer however, her geometric forms speak of a cubist trajectory belonging to the manifesto of modern art because the inherent distinction between the 'abstract' nature of Islamic art and Western art is not widely understood or manifest in prevalent art expressions.

"The two stand at opposite poles. The result of one form of abstraction is the glass skyscrapers which scar most modern cities and the fruit of the other is the Shah Mosque and the Taj Mahal. The one seeks to evade the ugliness of naturalistic and condensed forms of nineteenth-century European art by appeal to mathematical abstraction of a purely human and rationalistic order. The other sees in the archetype residing in the spiritual empyrean the concrete realities of which so-called realities of this world are nothing but shadows and abstractions. It therefore seeks to overcome this shadow by returning to the direct reflections of the truly concrete world in this world of illusion and abstraction which the forgetful nature of man takes for concrete reality. The process of so-called 'abstraction' in Islamic art is, therefore, not at all a purely human and rationalistic process as in modern abstract art, but the fruit of intellection in its original sense, or vision of the spiritual world, and an ennobling of matter by recourse to the principles which descend from the higher levels of cosmic and



Summaya Durrani



Summaya Durrani

ultimately Metacosmic reality." (Excerpt from Foreward by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in *ART OF ISLAM: Language and Meaning* by Titus Burkhardt.)

For Summaya Durrani "language is just a vehicle," she feels "Your vocabulary is determined by what you want to say and how you want to say it." For her the communication of the 'essence' is of primary importance - the syntax of form is subservient to the portrayal of the experience. Yet when we examine the history of Islamic art we are confronted with a tradition where use and beauty go hand in hand. Titus Burkhardt argues that "The divorce between 'art' and 'craftsmanship' is a relatively recent European phenomenon which parallels the scission between 'art' and 'science.' Formerly, every artist who produced an object was called a 'craftsman', and every discipline which demanded not only theoretical knowledge but also practical ability was an 'art'." Taking into account Islamic calligraphy, painting, architecture and the plastic arts, we have evidence of the inner dimension of Islam and see the role art plays in the life of individual Muslims and the community as a whole -- the role of inspiring the remembrance and contemplation of God. Islamic artists developed geometric patterns to a degree of complexity and sophistication previously unknown. These patterns exemplify the Islamic interest in repetition, symmetry and continuous generation of pattern. The superb assurance of the Islamic designers and architects is demonstrated by their masterful integration of geometry with such optical

effects as the balancing of positive and negative areas, interlacing, with fluid overlapping and under passing strap work, and a skillful use of color and tone values.

For contemporary artists tutored in the western model of art the embrace of Islamic tradition is tantamount to opening up an alternative space where we see Muslim thought articulated with modern non Islamic vocabulary. Summaya Durrani's art can be placed within this hybrid art practice which solicits the divine not through the traditional Islamic art methodology of utility and beauty through symmetry and repetition but in the prevalent language of art. This recourse to ones roots spells a rejection of Eurocentrism, at least in thought if not imagery (as yet) and a conscious effort to seek and own Islamic tradition as a means of understanding and elevating the state of the soul or "qalb ki kayfiyat."

Like artists viewership here has also been weaned on the formula of modern art and a change in sensibility is required for the assimilation of alternative practices. For an artist to achieve the goals set out during the creation of artwork, the viewer of the piece should experience the same passion, inspiration, and spirituality felt by the artist during the creation of the piece—and such an accomplishment is, by definition, the origin and purpose of art

Newsline July 2009

NEWSLINE

R M Naeem

WINDOWS INTO THE SOUL

In the aftermath of the World Wars explorations of the irrational and the intuitive in art gave birth to a host of naïve and primal modes of expression, arcane abstractions as well as modernist inversions of Renaissance realism. The current climate of political turmoil, social upheaval and spiritual crisis has unleashed a host of 'other' forms within the metaphysical questioning of art. Particularly pertinent are developments that bear the physicality of western academic painting but remain rooted in Asian thought and temperament. In these new forms we see diverse and opposing responses to this spiritual interrogation, sometimes as answer, sometimes as further question but most importantly it is the mystical inner dimensions expressing hidden archetypes in concrete symbols that are defining the emergence of 'another' spiritual trajectory.

The Faith Soul Search exhibition of paintings by RM Naeem is a compelling selection of art that explores the meditative and transcendental purpose of spirituality, as a means of salvation. The contemplative stance dominant in his work provokes religious readings even though as an artist he has drawn inspiration from his experiences in life, his immediate environment, folk culture, historical legacies, and the vast reservoir of South Asian heritage he has encountered in his travels to Asian countries.

The art engages the eye and the mind because the artist concentrates on formal aesthetic concerns and the metaphysical phenomena with equal vigor and intent. Working on the premise that art and society are interwoven RM expounds his ideals in a traditional pictorial vocabulary that has immediate cultural relevance yet

R M Naeem



worldly because it purports an alternative reality. His figurative profiles have an Asian countenance and their perennial state of submission, trance, or obedience is a gesture that lends itself to familiar spiritual rituals within the South Asian milieu. The human-manikin analogy is central to Dada and Surrealist art and R M plays on the pointed implications of this animate – inanimate inversion to conceive protagonists that address his analysis of life. Similarly the pyramid, Khanna e Kaaba and veil /shroud images are common cultural and religious references but in his bid for personal expression, an artistic oneness, and soul-searching he liberates content from its constrictive mode

Employing the device of 'visual enigma's' RM pushes content beyond the tangibility of material substance. Attempting to making real and comprehensible the improbable or illusory, by juxtaposing it with normal everyday imagery, he persuades the viewer to delve into the mystery and peculiarity of his narrative

Simultaneous and interchangeable images occur regularly in his paintings, coupled with the frequent use of dislocation – the removal of an object from its normal place or context and its introduction into an unfamiliar environment. The more familiar an object the louder it screams when divorced from its habitat and shown in a new light - the traffic signals / road signs and paper boat graphics are among the most obvious examples of dislocation in his new paintings. They sit uneasily in their new supernatural environment until one begins to attribute meaning to their presence.

The enclosed spaces, the recurrence of frames, windows, mirrors and 'pictures within pictures,' the distant utopian horizons and occasional exaggerated perspective are other technical devices that help to recreate the enigmatic effects of metaphysical paintings. The mask a common theatrical device is used symbolically to enact a recreation or transference of an ideology from an enlightened individual to a novice. A consummate draftsman and accomplished painter RM's painterly strategies aid and abet his conceptual concerns also - specially pertinent is the varied use of textural effects and calligraphic scripture to construct complex scenarios and create states of fusion or amalgamation so central to the spiritual experience.

Following a distinct line of thought RM Naeem's oeuvre, for the last many years, has centralized on a specific vocabulary that is now his signature. The element of uniformity does appear as a repetitive gesture but it also reiterates his stance. He speaks about a mystical-spiritual unity, man's autumnal awakening and the struggle for social

justice. The emphasis on family, the sacred mother and child bonding and the child as inherently pure and innocent are other readings that come out of these paintings. The current collection is by far his most mature body of work chromatically and conceptually.

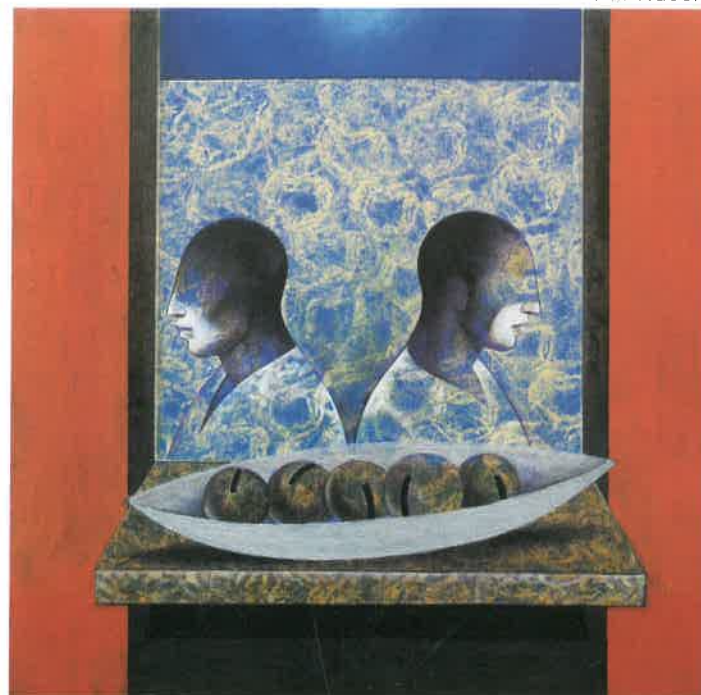
Dawn Gallery November 27 2009

GALLERY

R M Naeem



R M Naeem



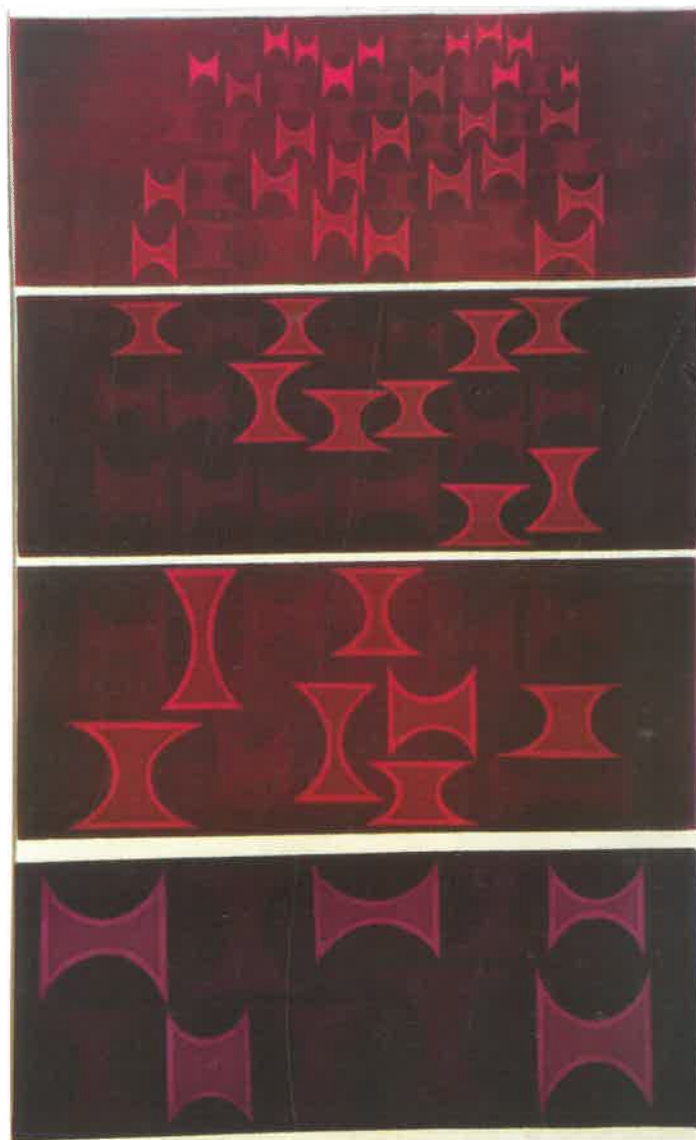
Anwar Jalal Shemza

REVISITING SHEMZA

Finally home, away from home! London based Green Cardamom gallery (whose programme is informed by artistic practices in Pakistan, South / Central Asia, and the Middle East) recently launched Anwer Jalal Shemza, Take 1: Calligraphic Abstraction (curated by Ifthikhar Dadi) an exhibition that breathes new life into the works of an early, almost forgotten modern master. The initiative based on a series of exhibitions spread over the next two years revisits the Shemza cache for fresh historical, intellectual and artistic inquiry. Each exhibition examining a particular area of his work will be organized by a group of art historians, curators and artists who have been engaged with the artist's oeuvre in different capacities. This study comes at a time when art innovation, here in Pakistan, enjoys a much wider context in terms of awareness, understanding and appreciation levels. Later generation Pakistani artists and enthusiasts are largely unaware of Shemza or his art as he relocated to Britain in 1962 and remained there till his death in 1985. The Cardamom show can be accessed by those interested in reclaiming lost space. How does Shemza fare on the anvil? This research and analysis driven project will throw new light on modernist calligraphy, his muse, and the levels of abstract formations he was able to bring to it during his work span between the sixties and the eighties.

A 1947 Mayo School (presently NCA) graduate and member of the radical Lahore Art Circle of the fifties Shemza pursued further studies at the Slade school of Art, London from 1956 – 59. During that period he exhibited alongside contemporaries like F N Souza and held solo shows at the influential New Visions Art Centre and Gallery One. He briefly came back to Pakistan in the early sixties and there is a record of selected solo shows at the PNCA Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi, from 1960 – 620 – but he was unsuccessful in his desire to contribute to the art education and development of students in his homeland. "Bitterly disappointed to find that a teaching salary was inadequate for what he considered a reasonable standard of living," (Search for Cultural Identity..Mary Shemza) the artist "returned to England and anonymity."

Today when much attention is being lavished on the intricacies of current Diaspora Art we have before us an example of diaspora work that began in the early sixties. Unlike the present pertinent, but often hyped, bizarre, anything goes, publicity crazed, bicultural or migratory, art Shemza's oeuvre impresses the mind as a disciplined, profoundly, contemplative body of work preoccupied with the dynamics of form rather than the narration of content. The acumen required to interact and work in an intellectually and aesthetically stimulating western art climate and as well as bearing and giving creative expression to the



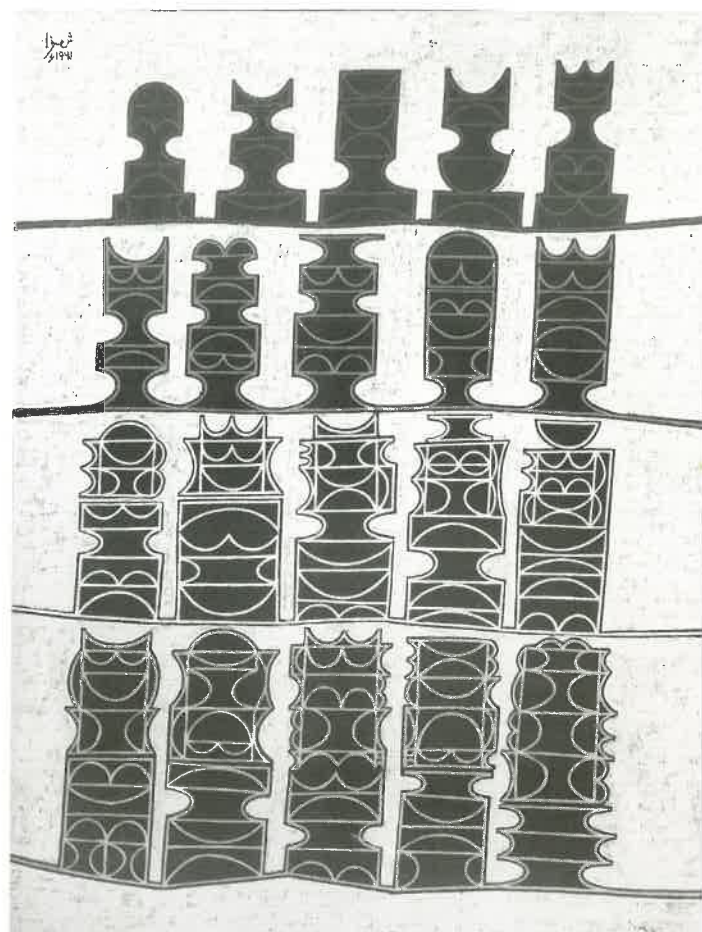
Anwar Jalal Shemza - Forms Emerging 1967

anguish of diaspora, gave his work. (in his own words), "the lightness and joyousness of a springtime which never lets anyone suspect the labours it has cost."

Mainly inspired by Arabic calligraphy to which he gave a mysterious personal interpretation Shemza, a Muslim of Kashmiri descent whose family business was carpet making and military embroidery also referenced Mughal architecture, particularly the walls and gates of Lahore, prayer carpets, and floral and foliated arabesque motifs. Almost obsessed with serialized linear convolutions he seems to mimic the 'infinity' ethos of Islamic geometric pattern as much as he tries to capture the rhythmic swings and decorative elements of calligraphy. The Love Letter series of works and Circuit Three paintings in the current Cardamom show echo this ethos. And then there are compositions of motifs in imaginary modulations that speak more of an inner state of mind than the oriental pattern vocabulary they resource, the airy, buoyant Poppy Heads drawing/painting is a vivid case in point.

Contrary to the general tendency of South Asian painters of the sixties, working in Europe who were slavishly close to western abstraction Shemza had studied Paul Klee closely but preferred to move in an individual direction of his own invention. Partial to abstractions minimalist approach he pared his semi circles, spheres and discs to their basic linear representations which, with imaginative use of flat colour distributions, were arranged into attractive design compositions. These exercises, though far removed from their original source of inspiration, can be traced to an association to carpet design, a study of illuminated pages of the Quran or even the minarets and domes of mosque architecture.

Shemza's preferred medium was oil on canvas and ink on paper and the production of a number of silkscreen prints speak of his fondness for etching. He also had a liking for working on cloth which he prepared by staining through successive dippings in diluted paint. In 1977 Shemza began his Roots series which continued till his death in 1985, the year in which he showed his work at Indus Gallery Karachi. These works have a tughraic conformity, stylization and interconnect-edness to them but the working idiom is so entirely modern, unconventional and personal that the tughra or calligraphy connection is reduced to a distant reference only. And this is what Shemza has done with all his inspirational elements – he distils and synthesizes them with his temperamental nuances, his aspirations and desires and his very work methodology to create an expression so individual that it opens up new readings altogether.



Anwar Jalal Shemza - Chessman 1961

Anwar Jalal Shemza - Square Composition 1963



Mansoor Salim

PSYCHIC FOSSILS

It is not unusual to be baffled and bewildered when confronted with Mansoor Salim's art. His recent paintings reiterate his ability to produce the extraordinary and the strange with amazing frankness.

Art inspired by unusual phenomena calls for extended viewer engagement and special understanding. Attributing the content of his painting to "psychic flashes" Mansoor Salim invites the viewer to experience the tangibility of the intangible. Defying categorization his art freely accesses and modulates realism, abstraction and other relevant isms to record his 'epiphanies of the Geist.' Employing a visual vocabulary of familiar recognizable elements, often those of everyday use, he constructs the improbable and the unlikely. Extra terrestrial bodies on terrestrial terrain, cosmic atmospherics scribbled with mathematical equations and geometric graphics binding scattered body limbs are as common to his oeuvre as are inversions of rural landscape, urban interiors and exteriors. Removed from their natural environment, often liberated from the laws of weight and gravity, juxtaposed with disparate elements and purporting uncanny situations his paintings are entirely open to inquiry.

A half open leather bedroll, the kind used in train travels, is painted in detail perhaps symbolizing a journey, but of another nature. In yet another odd composition a royal blue wall with gold motifs sports a triangular cavern sheltering tiny twin abodes. But it is the panaflex print on a white canvas that best defines the status of his work. A teak brown horizontal plank is shown cutting through a vertical panel of wood to create two sides of a divide, the side visible to the viewer is painted as a three dimensional corner of a room. A heap of dust / wood shavings cover the cutting edge of the plank as it slices through the panel and the corner walls are perked up with geometric graphics of semi circles and triangles. This image symbolizes the divide between the known world and the unknown - a feature peculiar to Mansoor Salim's art which professes a reality beyond reality.

Recourse to the esoteric in art is by no means a new phenomenon. Almost a thousand years ago individuals and movements concerned with some sort of personal, eccentric unorthodox, mystical or supernatural expression were already in existence. Christian artists from the 4th to the 16th century tried to depict the indescribable punishments of the sinners and the ecstasies of the blessed. Sporadic efforts at examining the super natural continued through the 18th century, most notably in William Blake's mystic visions and Francisco Goya's macabre and powerful nightmares displaying a blighted world. As Romanticism and Symbolism grew and spread in the 19th century, visions of imagined worlds appeared in many forms in painting sculpture and architecture. Late 19th century explorations of

the irrational and fantastic and the growing interest in naïve and primitivizing modes of expression culminated in World War 1 in the form of Dada, which in the mid 1920's developed into Surrealism. The Dadaists felt that reason and logic had led to the disaster of world war, and that the only way to salvation was through political anarchy, the natural emotions, the intuitive and the irrational. In the search for new content it was the Metaphysical painters like De Chirico, Magritte and Carra who took the first deliberate step to make real and comprehensible the improbable and the illusory, by juxtaposing them with normal everyday experience.

Mansoor Salim's deconstruction is also executed with the vocabulary of the ordinary and the mundane but his expression is not entirely imaginary - the intuitive images are recordings of psychic flashes. The artist claims that he has moments of sudden realizations which he records instantly in hastily scribbled notes - these then become the basis of his paintings. The "kayfiyat" have no time constraints and he is often compelled to document them even in the middle of the night - such is their intensity. Some paintings on display at the gallery did have faint scribbled text, peculiar doodles and cursory ink sketches that could well be these initial messages. An art practitioner since the 1970's Mansoor Salim completed his formal art training from the

Mansoor Salim





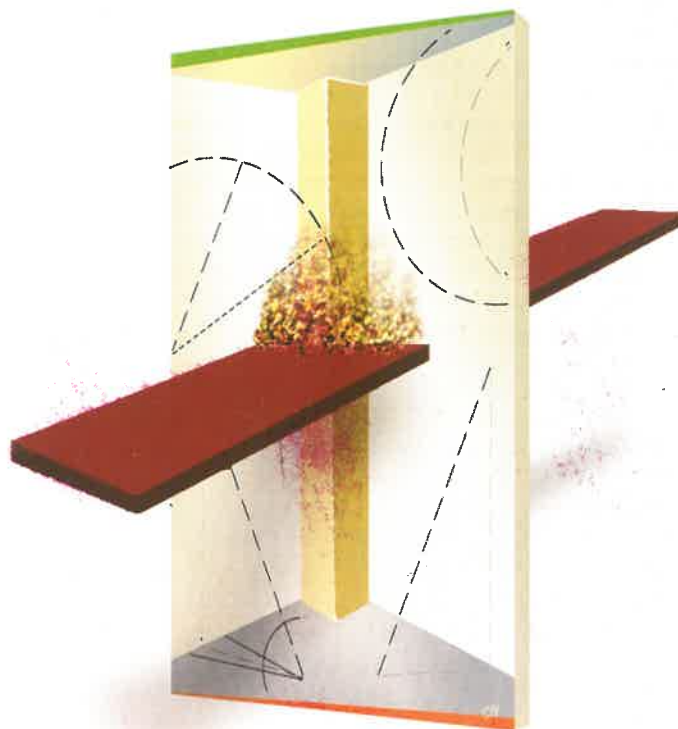
Mansoor Salim

Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in 1983 followed by a Masters degree in History and specialization in archeology, from the Karachi University. Terming his 'kayfiyat' "psychic fossils" Mansoor Salim likens them to archeological fossils whose readings yield secrets about the planet earth – similarly he feels his flashes need to be read and deciphered.

Exhibiting irrational art consistently through eight solo shows and scores of group participations since the 1970's the artist was indeed ahead of his times for it is only now in the liberal art climate of today that the bizarre and the awkward is enjoying common currency and validation.

The visual history of the metaphysical and the irrational is well documented in the west. In the east within an amalgam of Asian spiritual ideologies its manifestation is diverse and erratic. There is no consistent tabulation of this phenomenon in our art either inspite of the fact that several strands of the metaphysical experience are purported by our artists. Artist Tassadaq Sohail's pygmy people inhabit an imaginary underworld, Mussarat Mirza and Mehr Afroz explore the Sufi trail in their art one creates a cerebral dialogue while the other emotes from the heart, Noorjehan Bilgrami's transition towards the unknown is influenced by Zen aesthetics and Riffat Alvi envisages the state of 'fanaa' in her latest work. As more and more artists paint visions of imagined worlds Mansoor Salim's request to open debate on this issue is timely and necessary. This phenomena needs to be categorized and documented for its true worth.

Mansoor Salim



Dawn Gallery May 17 2008

DAWN
GALLERY

Ahmed Ali Manganhar

NOT MADE FOR EACH OTHER?

In his new works *Not Made for Each Other*, Ahmed Ali Manganhar processes the pedestrian art of painting cinema hoardings into a painterly exercise. This relocation of cinema billboard art from its vantage public venues to an exclusive gallery space challenges the autocracy of high art with the veracity of popular culture.

Bawdy, garish and titillating the local cinema billboard is not just a film advertisement but a piece of public art that has roots right in the heart of populist culture. Its loud chromatics and inflated imagery centralizing on the emotive appeal of heroic gestures, soft romance, raunchy frolics and comic gesticulations provide the man in the street with a free fantasy trip in just a glance - yet in aesthetic parlance this art is kitsch and not worthy of consideration.

Originally a native of interior Sindh Ahmed Ali was weaned on the primitive culture of billboard painting long before he ventured into formal art education at NCA. He reminisces "as a child I spent much time watching the craftsmen who came every Thursday to my small town, Tando Allahyar, from neighbouring Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas. They came to paint large film billboards in water colour, inside of three hours - the masters asking students to make graphs, to paint in middle tones in a half finished form that seemed so magical to me. Then the master would take the brush and lay out the finishing touches in fluorescent colours that brought alive the faces of the actresses but killed the painterly quality of the image."

Today a practicing artist and lecturer at NCA with local and international showings of work to his credit this small town resident has made it to the big city but the nostalgic impulse continues to inform his work. Giving new meaning to 'kitsch,' not as a ploy to capitalize on the coarse and the crude, but as a sincere effort to reconnect with his cultural roots Ahmed Ali mixes academic art theory and technique with the homespun ordinariness of regional culture. He creates a narrative that is essentially personal but in a broader sense it also contributes to the current exploration of the indigenous and the home grown for a more authentic art expression.

A film buff Ahmed Ali taps into Lollywoods golden years as well as the Indian classics to extract fragments of billboard imagery that best identify with his premise of *Not Made for Each other*. His approach in some of his paintings mimics the ethos of Urdu shairi (poetry) where the 'mehboob' or 'sanam' (beloved) is often an imaginary reference to which the poet addresses his heartfelt sentiments. Based on personal musings, desires and emotions Ahmed Ali has lifted specific images of actors painted on billboards that complement or set off his thoughts to telling effect within aesthetically composed frames.

Building a fact fiction equation he chronicles moments of his life as portrayed through those images and at the same time critiques commercial films as deathly 'dream merchants' where cinematic reality is at odds with actual existence. In this overlap of contradictory realities he creates the polarities that define *Not Made for Each Other*. The most obvious is the Waheeda Rehman, Guru Dutt paintings hung on two walls directly opposite each other to signify their famed cinematic pairing and real life distance. Weaving the personal into the reel and the real standing of icons like Waheed Murad and Sultan Rahi and yester year Punjabi sirens like Aalia, Aasia and Najma not to mention atrocious villains like Adeeb, he persuades the viewer to engage with the art.

At this juncture it is important to bring the artists context to the viewing experience because the paintings are watered down versions of the original billboard art. Peeling away the superficial layer of gaudy fluorescent overtones the images stripped of their thunder are a tame spectacle. This state of incompleteness is intentional - it recaptures Ahmed Ali's childhood fascination of watching a billboard painting in the making only. The slapdash brushwork, the base undercoat effect now interwoven with the artists memory, his present sentiments and aspirations is the artistic statement. A mutation, the painting now has another life as an independent artwork. Presently this new expression is exciting but still rudimentary - and Ahmed Ali's best is yet to come.

The accent on cinematic billboard visuals in this exhibition sheds light on the craft/art disposition of the genre. Billboard painters can be considered an intermediary link between the craft artisan and the fine artist as they execute their craft through the act of drawing and painting but in a traditional manner. Comprising unlettered ustads and shahgirds operating in bazaar studios or street workshops / 'addas' this practice has been the initial classroom to several aspirants from the hinterland who went on to graduate as artists from academic institutions. They carry with them a vernacular art history that is begging to be archived and reopened for fresh inquiries.

Ahmed Ali Manganhar - A Song of Changing Seasons



Ahmed Ali Manganhar - Duet of Bygone Years



Sana Arjumand

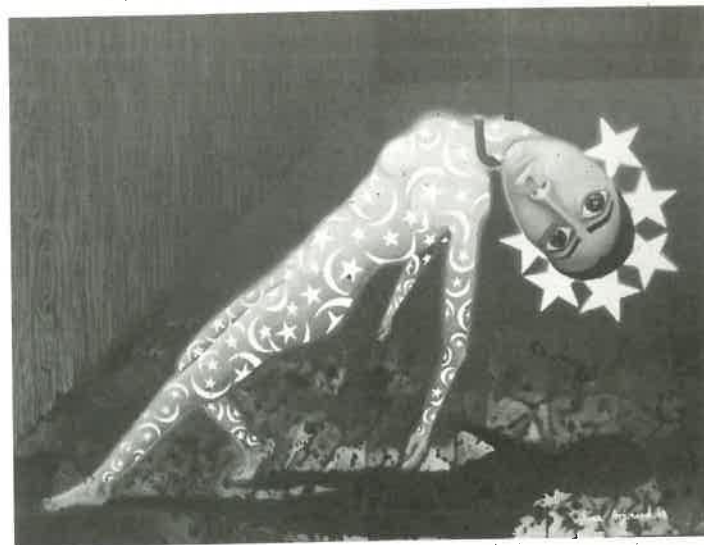
REALISM TODAY

Young Sana Arjumand's solo *The Bold and the Beautiful* charts her aesthetic progression within the faux naïf style so characteristic of her oeuvre. An ominous mix of fantasy and reality her paintings, segmented into several mini-series, embrace and critique the world around her as much with humour and affection as with caustic observation.

Ubiquitous subject matter in a pictorial but naïve jargon soft pedals the critical gravity of issues and encourages prolonged viewership. But realistic art practice today is as complex and distorted as the environment from which it emanates and the complicity between painting and viewer often calls for a skewed level of understanding. Young artists, caught between the innocence of youth and a harsh paradoxical existence, are projecting a realism that is often partial, hybrid or paranoid. Resorting to plays like deconstruction, appropriation and grotesquerie to make their work pungent as well as palatable they are creating a new vocabulary that needs to be assimilated with a pinch of salt.

A child of her generation Sana Arjumand brings the same youthful mix of trepidation and gusto to her work that most newcomers are experiencing in this milieu. Sourcing the current age of plastic as a metaphor Sana's, *Latex People*, purport an artificial existence, mimicking characters found in comic books. While the concept is full of possibilities the works are somewhat unresolved and fail to go beyond mere comicality. The same application in, *She raised her Daughters*, speaking of mothers bringing up daughters in their own image, is well put and creates a far better impact. Similarly her paintings *Beautiful Man* and *Handsome Woman* are far more explicit. Other than the physical gender bender reading they emit they also comment, albeit a little over dramatically, on traditional role reversals. The increasing responsibilities shouldered by women outside the house and the growing interest of men in womanly activities like frequenting grooming salons, and indulging in designer wardrobe etc is breeding effeminate men and macho women. Sana's portraits play with this concept literally as the woman sports a beard and the man is veiled.

Opting for adult concepts wrapped in childlike simplicity the artist borrows her imagery from the pictorial idiom of fairytale illustration to produce the wide eyed wonder kid variety of figuration. While still retaining the naivety of a fantasy world she explores other influences also. In her current show she references old biblical paintings to create distant other worldly expressions on her subjects who are adorned with starry crowns and haloes. Allusions to Neue



Sana Arjumand - Can you make me a star

Sachlichkeit, realist painting in the Weimar republic are other recent developments in her work.

In Germany Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity was a remarkably self conscious stylistic development responding to the collapse of expressionism's subjective pathos and emotionalism in the wake of defeat in World War I. The social reality of Weimar Germany was as riven with conflict as the art of that period executed among others by exponents like George Grosz and Otto Dix. There was a need for the ordinary to be reinstated and artists resorted to the esoteric and the arcane to attack social turpitude. The ferment in current art in our milieu with increasing recourse to the abstruse gains credibility when read in the light of such historical references. Sana's *Animal Kingdom* series using suggestive, symbolic, culture and ferocious canine images is insidious and interrogative. Similarly her exaggerated three faces of eve, *Birds of a Feather*, trilogy, which reminds one of Otto Dix's *Three Women*, is expressionistically manipulated to highlight negative instincts in order to reveal the inner truths of human society.

Other than concepts and language Sana indulges in technical and painterly experiments to enlarge her repertoire. Crusty textural imprints, pattern and motif, incorporation of mixed media elements like printed fabric and stitchcraft and new spatial distributions speak of the artists desire to grow. For a newcomer with potential Sana Arjumand is applying herself to her art and exposing it at significant locales. Her work has been exhibited abroad in selected group shows in Hong Kong, Dubai, London, Jordan, Korea and Hawaii as well as solo showings at home.

Dawn Gallery November 15 2008

DAWN
GALLERY

Sana Arjumand



Sana Arjumand

Babar Moghal

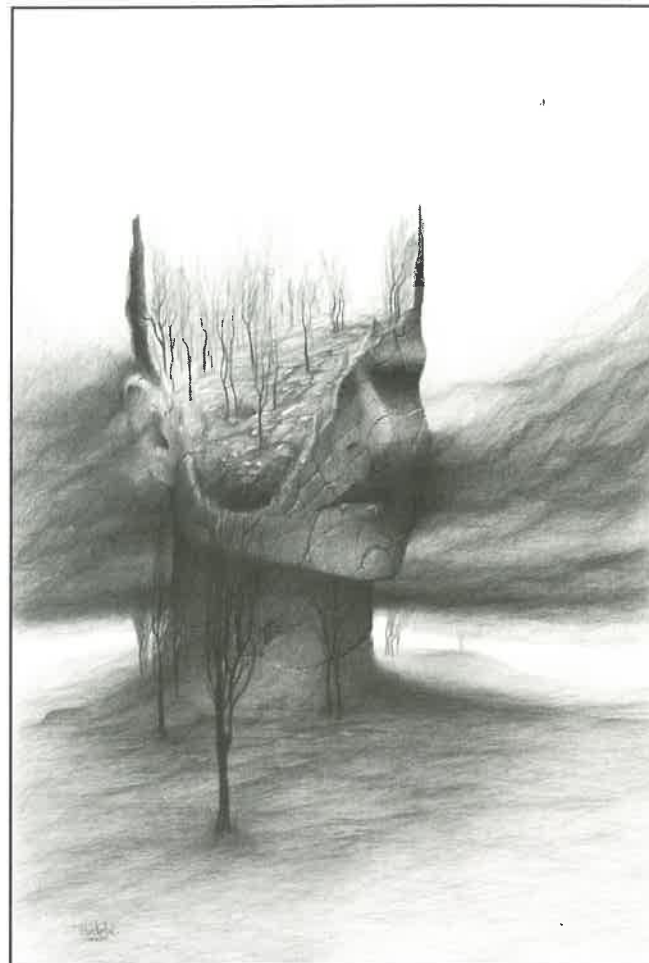
ALTERNATIVE ART

Still mining the vast trajectory of 'alternative art' graphic artist Babar Moghals new body of work speaks more of an enduring attraction to the genre than an evolution of a specific thought process. His aesthetic expression has always veered towards sub- cultural themes and the current works are also fragments of an imaginary world as seen by 'new age' artists.

The present collection featuring two segments is divided into graphite on paper and gouache / watercolor works. The graphite pieces an incongruous mix of myth and dream come across as allegorical landscapes that typically feature pensive figures, night skies, morning mists, barren trees and medieval ruins. Here Moghals primary interest as an artist centralizes on the contemplation of nature and it is the intrusion of supernatural phenomena into an otherwise realist narrative that brings otherworldliness to his compositions. Other than random images of a windmill, a post box and an organic innovation, the chromatic works feature figurative paintings of the female form. His thinking and choice of subjects are random and disparate defying coherent explanation but the concentration on the feminine body can be interpreted as a new direction / interest that is engaging the artist's attention. Seated and reclining figures, their faces embellished with a tracery of twirling patterns like tendrils on a leafy stem, have a vague air of mystery about them. A mask like face dissolving into the cavernous confines of haunted ruins, vaporous clouds, mesh of cobwebs; silhouettes of bare trees and fallen moons speak of the emotional complexities peculiar to Dark Art. Indeed a pervasive air of gloom, reflection and edginess are a distinctive part of Babar Moghals repertoire.

The wide umbrella of 'alternative art' encompasses new age, visionary, space, sci-fi, the surreal, fantasy art and psychedelic hippie culture of the 60's and 70's. Babar Moghal not only accesses his visual vocabulary from these sub categories but also aligns his painterly practice with them. Visionary artists are surprisingly united in their tastes, temperament, and preferences. Though their methods may differ - some preferring classical techniques of oil and varnish, others the airbrush, as Moghal also does, and others still the new graphic capacities of computers - all agree that as precise a rendering as possible is absolutely necessary for vision-inducing works. Fine lines, gradual transitions, infinite details - there is no limit to the pains endured nor the patience required to successfully rendering a vision into image form. Technique and treatment is a very noticeable feature in Babur Moghals art also. His artworks are small in scale almost like the modern miniature and he draws and paints with a deft, delicate and relatively precise hand building his drawings and

Babar Moghal



painterly forms with transparent washes, thin fragile strokes and fine linear modulations. The only jarring feature in this entire exercise is a lack of originality. Instead of constructing his own vocabulary or concepts he is sourcing or modifying existent imagery into new models. As partial reproductions, revisions or rip offs, the works do not have the strength or impact of strong original compositions executed with a deeper self involvement. He has the manual skills and should endeavour for authentic expression rather than opt for remixes.

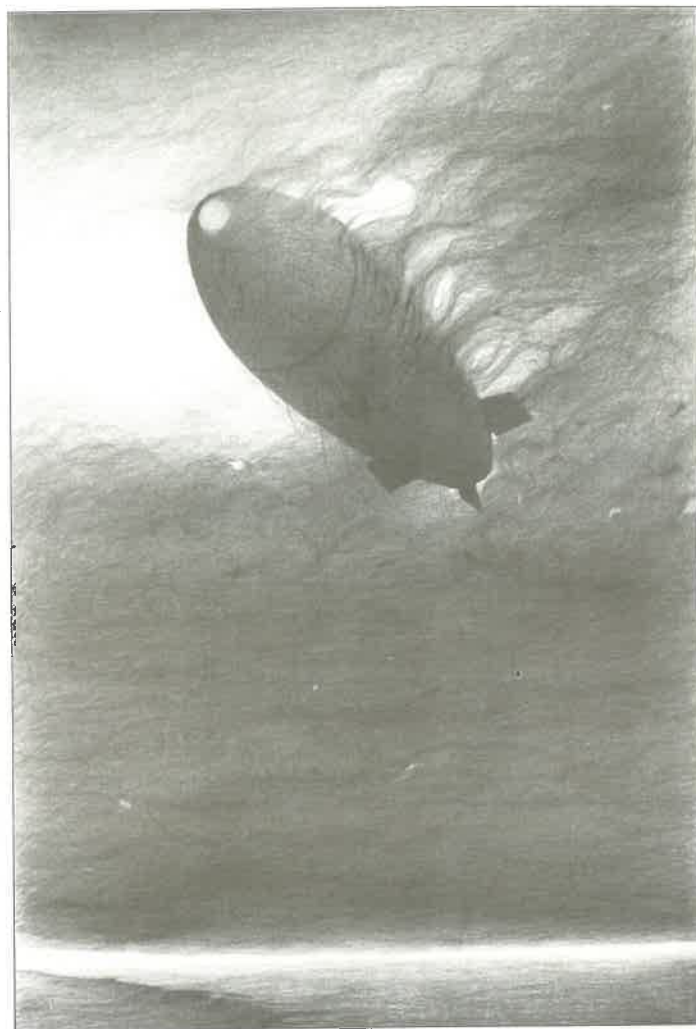
Newsline June 2009

NEWSLINE

Babar Moghal



Babar Moghal



Babar Moghal

Mehnaz Lakha

UNRESOLVED CANVAS

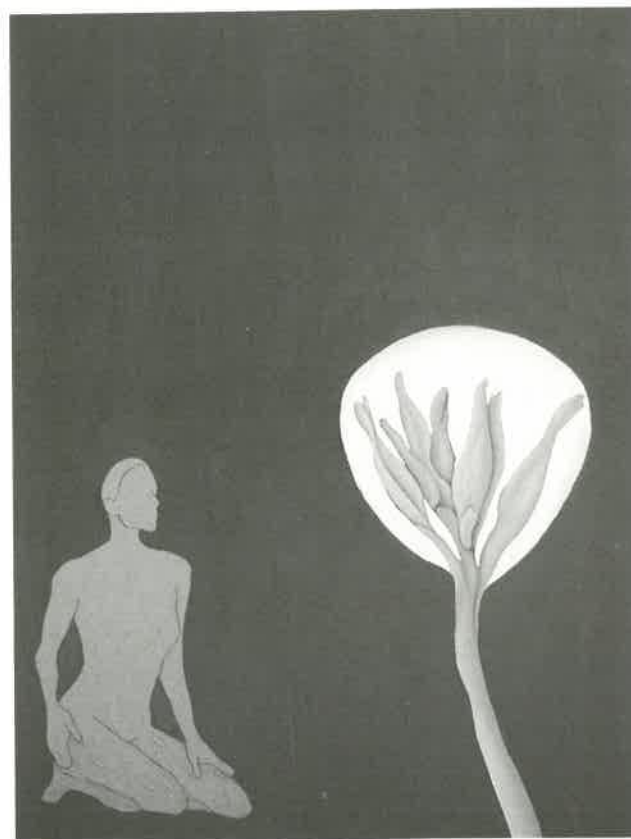
Mehnaz Lakha's new body of work centralizes on the young generation predicament of locating self in a culturally complex and pluralistic society. Simultaneously personal and social her figurative forms emote states of alienation, isolation and transcendence. Rendered in a palette of weighty dark tones they radiate from the canvas in a plane beyond the physical, where they often appear as phantoms or apparitions of the real self. In this manifestation of the inner self through the physical being of the body Lakha explores relationships that exist not just between body and self, but between individuals, between the individual and the universal, and between the infinite and the finite. Painting aspects of existence that are often overlooked by society — the struggle, turmoil, triumph and oddity of the self she endeavours to portray moments of withdrawal, confusion and uncertainty on the one hand and fantasy states of dream, desire and tranquility on the other.

There is interdependency between the location and the ways in which one identifies and feels his/her own self. Self is a construction of its location; the location is an expanded projection of self. Therefore making the self is associated with how one positions his/her self in the locations of one's choice. For Mehnaz Lakha self discovery is centralized within the ambit of relationships, on a palpable level with fellow humans in society, on a transcendent plane with natural elements and as a technical painterly exercise with her medium and forms of expression.

In order to integrate thought and content she translates her concepts through spatial, colour and linear relationships. In these paintings her figurative forms repose independently, hover in close contiguity, or communicate over apparently vast distances. They complement, echo and extend each other, on a planar level and through space. Paradoxically it is as if they were further away, but nearer at the same time. She makes compositions using acute perspective to emphasize this contradictory state of 'so close yet so far away.' By creating angles and dimensions with frequent recourse to broad black lines and textured bands of bold colours she positions her figures in a matrix of corridors and labyrinths that draw in and thrust out her forms. The artist interacts with the surface through impasto sweeps of paint as well as combed linear strokes. Raw, garish and heavy the works initially appear to be hard hitting but do not sustain prolonged engagement because in most paintings the imagery is stilted and wooden.

At the most basic level her compositions consist of dark and modulated expanses but there is an absence of relief creating light notes.

Similarly the formal balancing of the human image is not entirely resolved either. In spite of a body language the figurative content lacks emotive appeal. The use of organic elements as a substitution of the human form is also very rudimentary. Geometric severity hits the eye and can often be tempered with pliancy through colouration or formations. The artist can soften the harshness in her work with rhythmic or lyrical insertions. However, it is to Lakha's credit that she is developing a personal vocabulary regarding human and organic form and chromatic preference but presently she is still searching for answers and her work echoes this indecisiveness and ambiguity.



Mehnaz Lakha



Mehnaz Lakha

Mehnaz Lakha



Mehnaz Lakha

Wajid Ali

A PROMISING START

Unlike the new generation's fast track towards mix media, and technology aided art Wajid Ali's inclination for the traditional practice of easel painting predicts a desire to master the basic essentials and move on a steady incline

A 2004 Karachi University art graduate he concentrated on concept and theme to determine the vocabulary and painterly process of his work. Articulating his views on the current climate of social injustice and oppression his collection of paintings titled, *Haalaat i Haazra* wavered between philosophical musings and direct translations of ongoing incidences of lawlessness and violence to trace what he termed "recession of values, behaviour and lifestyle." The natural and the organic had been accessed by the artist to build a stark equation between eroding ideals, human callousness and environmental destruction. Cloudy skies and rippling waves of water padlocked with ordinary locks and bolts in paintings like, *Aab i Hayat* and *Barasnay ko Tarse*, voice his concerns on the exhaustion of natural resources and impending doom. Juxtaposing the material with the natural, the padlock symbol, a crude metal object, imposed on scenic imagery is

uncomfortable on the eyes but it forces the mind to engage with the art and the message it is purporting. And, *Rehai 1* and *2*, are ironical too - caged birds are free while man struggles with self imprisonment.

Killing victims while snatching mobile phones at gunpoint is an everyday occurrence here and it is well captured in paintings like, *Rabita Barqarar Hai*. A cell phone lying half buried in the sand next to a dead body with splayed feet spells the aftermath of a shootout. The red petals (very similar to a noted cell phone company's connectivity emblem) showered over the deceased speak of the 'rabita' we allege to have with the dead.

Yet another reality check hits the eye when confronted with, *Juhkay Jhukay*. Pictorially rich this work critiques social behaviour as revealed within the interior of a typical G T bus plying our roads. The title relates to the stooping posture standup passengers have to assume in the low ceilinged interiors. Day commuters commence and conclude their daily journey in this apologetic de-moralising body language. More critical commentary follows as we see a seated passenger

Wajid Ali - *Barasnay ko tarsay*



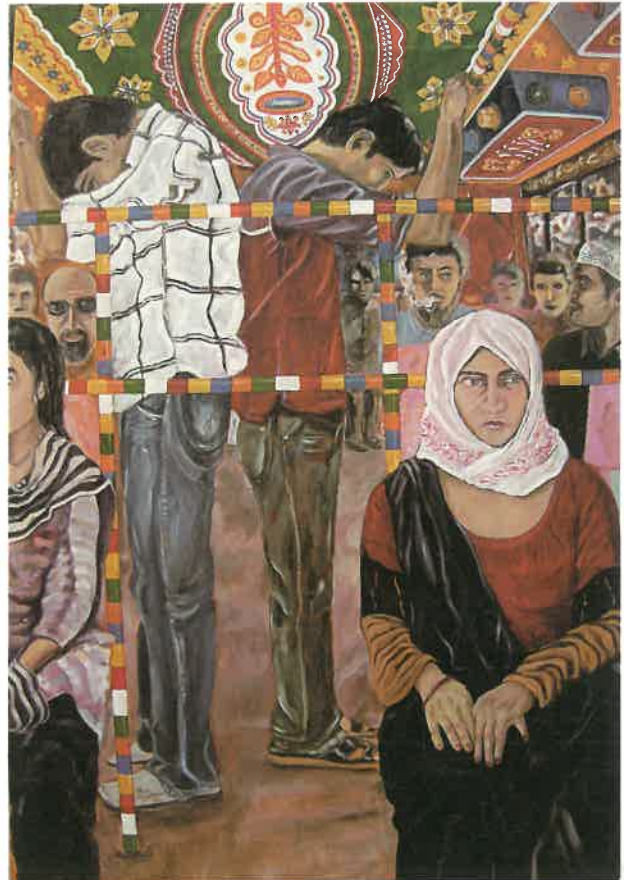
Wajid Ali - Rabita barqarar hai



Wajid Ali - khuda ra balith jao

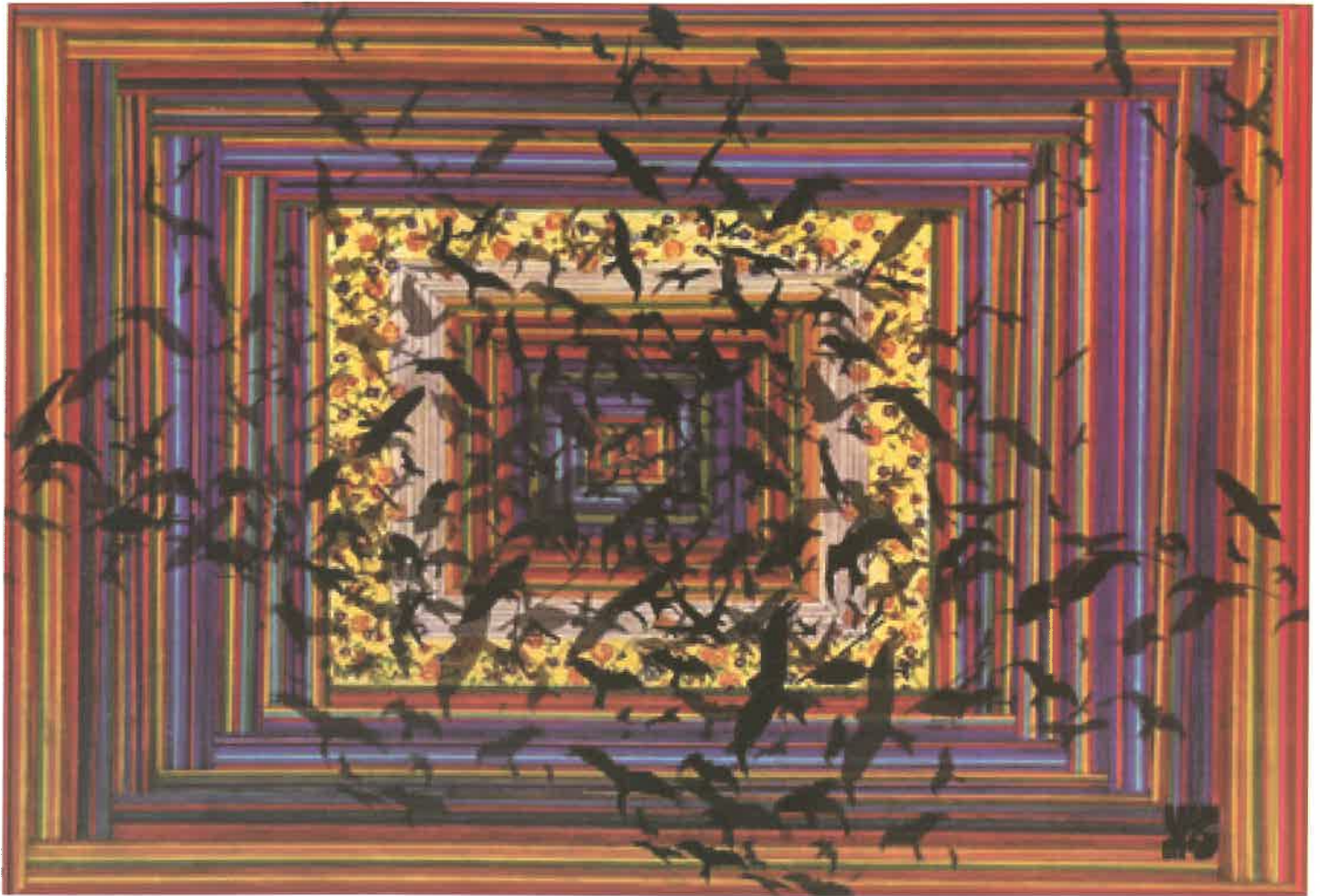


Wajid Ali - Jhuke Jhukey



puffing away at a cigarette, violating the smoking ban and a hijab clad women flaunts a low neckline while a non - hijabi sitting closeby is modestly/ decently attired for travel in such coarse company.

As a painter Wajid Ali has the sensitivity to feel, comprehend and translate the moral depletion that is eroding the fabric of life but presently his expression borders on the naïve. Conceptually he is moving in the right direction but he needs to refine his ideas, give them a sharper edge to drive home his point. In an art climate where innuendo, ambiguity and anomaly tantalize, intrigue and torment the onlooker the rudimentary and the direct also have to accost and hit the viewer with a thump if they want to score.



Sylvat Aziz - Flying Blind



The print genre languishes on the margins not for want of artistic endeavour or academic neglect but largely because of low awareness levels and a tepid market. Audiences are still sorting through the confusion centered on prints versus reproductions and purchasers are still wary of investing in an artwork that has multiples. Maintaining independent studio practice is difficult for most printmakers because the import of basic materials and printmaking machinery from abroad is expensive and this confines the medium largely to art schools' facilities only.

DIFFERENT DRUMMER BOX PRINT PORTFOLIO PROJECT

The Different Drummer print media show was a high moment in the printmaking genres otherwise uneventful existence in the art milieu here. Comprising individual prints of seventeen Pakistani and two American artists this exhibition was essentially a Box Print Portfolio Project. The portfolios of nineteen prints each all similar in size and produced in a limited number of editions were cased in an exclusive, custom made, wooden box. The aim of the project was to establish an international exchange program, strengthen bonds and work relations with artists as well as national and international art institutions.

The novelty of purchasing the boxed portfolio was a rare opportunity for art collectors and for the average viewer the Different Drummer display was a singular occasion to engage with a diverse collection of prints by professionals (faculty members of NCA and IVS) some of whom are among the leading lights of the art world here. It was individual expression and technical virtuosity in the print genre by artists with otherwise pronounced signatures in other media that perked the viewing experience. Although the nature of the printing process is overly technical, most artists had pushed ideas beyond just technique to align their concepts either with their signature styles or with other disciplines without compromising the print genre etiquette.

Printmaker Usman Ghouri's etching and silkscreen print, *Floated*, bore his familiar fish imagery. His personification of fish with life on account of its ability to flow with the waters as well as blend in the deep sea is one of his most known symbols. Other easily recognizable prints included Ali Kazims untitled etching of one of his typical male figures and Mudassar Manzoor's embossed print of his ubiquitous paisley motif - faint and quiet in appearance it characterized the contradictory states of the



Usman Ghouri - *Floated*

inner and outer world. Similarly an etching titled, *Lesson*, a meditative journey of mystic rituals, was clearly RM Naeem's handiwork.

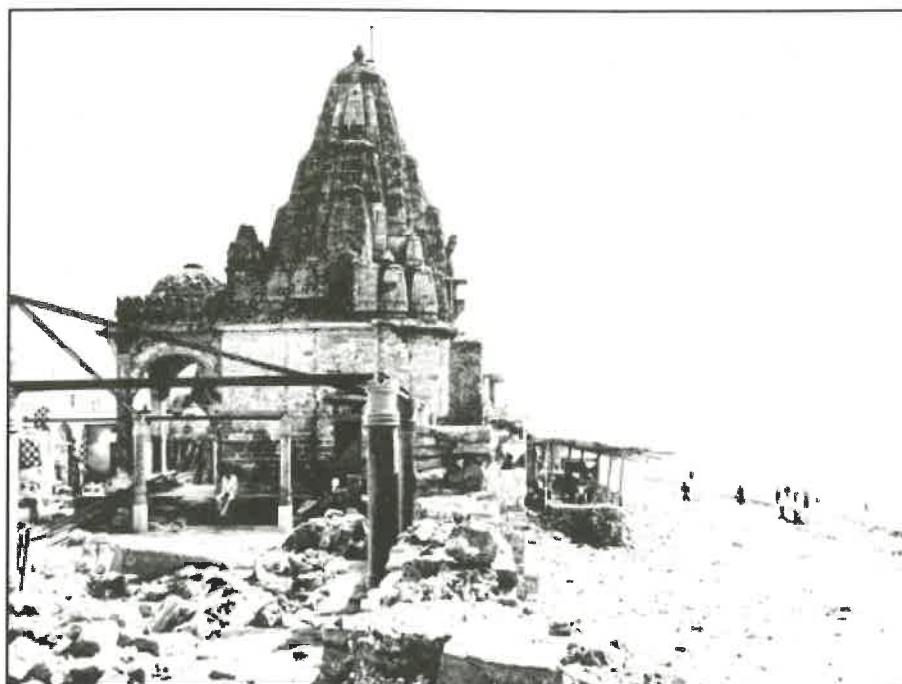
A fusion of historical traditions of the medium with contemporary applications has enabled printmakers to develop some truly unique methods and visual vocabulary. Making inventive and conceptual use of print media to address critical and contemporary issues in art the,



Mehr Afroz

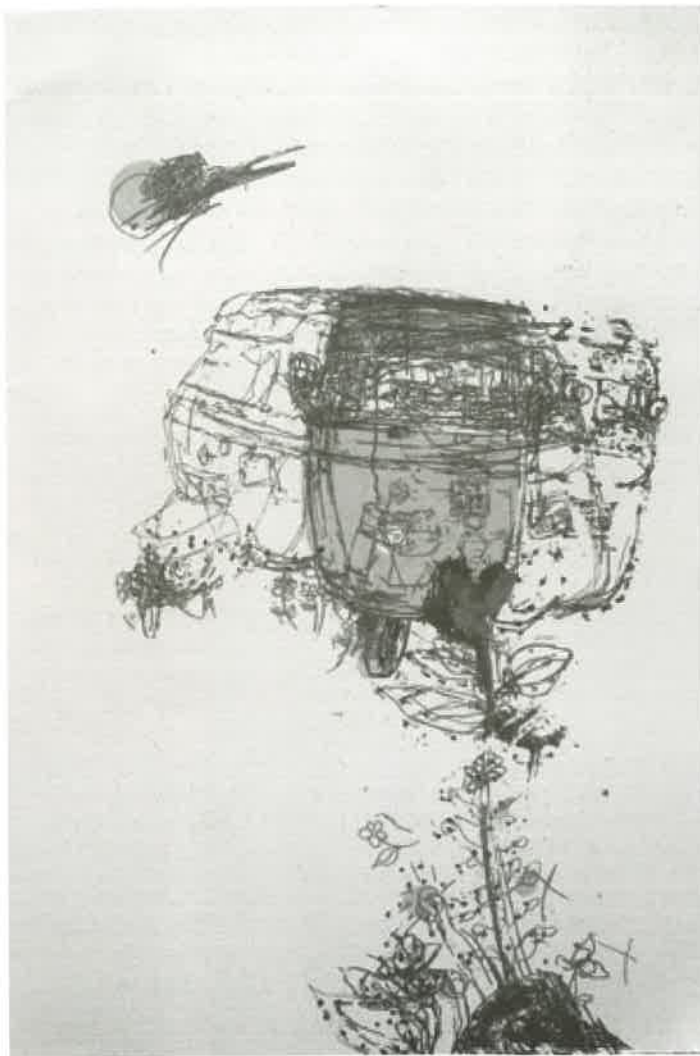


Adeela Suleman



Naiza Khan

Rabeya Jalil - First Lesson



Flying Blind, digital print by Sylvat Aziz spoke at several levels. Working in print and photo based processes her work is informed by medieval Islamic culture and applications of industrial materials and methods to studio practice. Theoretically Flying Blind, mimicking the sightless flight of bats / birds, conveys a feeling of mass confusion and the need to locate proper direction – a concept so peculiar to humanity in this part of the region. Another print addressing issues usual to societies under transformation in third world nations, is Naiza Khans print Manora Temple (Photo Polymer Etching). Manora exemplifies the fate of forgotten localities that are losing their historicity in the name of progress but the promise of a better tomorrow continues to elude them. Imran Qureshi's Reshape also grapples the overlap of antiquity and modernity, but on a different scale altogether. The old and the new sit (un)comfortably in his etching dry point print which is informed by his deeply grained miniature art practice as well as a commitment to contemporary art. He fuses intricate miniature foliate pattern with liberated mark making of new age art to define an east west synthesis.

Printmakers have a reputation for being overly technical and slightly old fashioned in their preference for process over concept and The Different Drummer collection had its share of technique enthusiasts. An intaglio on zinc by Muhammad Atif Khan drew in the viewer through impact of his visual presentation rather than the idea inherent in his piece titled Aim. Similarly in Rabeya Jalils, First Lesson (Serigraphy with Chine Cole), the concept was elusive but the print was visually appealing. Afshar Malik is among the very few artists who are recognized solely on the basis of their prints. His career devoted primarily to the print genre spans many years and audiences are familiar with the nuances in his technical applications and fantasies he can weave with them. Unfortunately the print in this show was not very exciting.

Currently the contemporary miniature and new generation mixed media art has captivated audiences and energized the art market but the print medium's unlimited range of experimentation and expression have not been capitalized to advantage. Audience and collector / patron apathy as well as dearth of printmaking studio facilities impede its progress. Within the art community the will to engage with the print aesthetic is alive and the genre continues to evolve at its own pace. Occasional primary shows like the Different Drummer play their role in spotlighting developing trends.

Dawn Gallery August 29 2009

DAWN
GALLERY

A MATTER OF PERCEPTION

Every age has a defining ideology and in the present climate of shifting realities it is the mantra of relativism that has hit fertile ground. A considerable amount of young art is centered on ideas relative to individuals, cultures, time periods and contexts. The show, *Figure of Speech* by Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed expounds on current perceptions through a personalized vocabulary of symbols and metaphors that have relevance to the artists' oeuvres yet are still open to viewer interpretations.

As an exhibition *Figure of Speech* comprises a vast body of prints, embossed prints, objects and related material accumulated during the two artists residency at the Cicada Press, a research group within the School of Art at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), a faculty of the University of New South Wales in Sydney. Segmented into his, her and their work the collection is threaded with symbols and references individually specific to both artists but which are later employed in a collaborative process also. Initially multiple articulations confuse the onlooker but when examined in context the contents spread into several stands of thoughts, conversations, views and musings that the artists had purported on the basis of new research or because of its linkage with their previous work.

The needle image is synonymous with Roohi's repertoire by now as she has explored it at several levels and under various guises as a tool for inflicting pain and as an instrument for garnering divisive elements. In this show her regimental grouping of needles surrounding the figure and leaf image invokes a hostile environment in which human life is under constraint and attack. Subsequent, exultant, works like *Cascade* and *Few Leaves on the Ground* show the artist liberating herself from belligerent forces by identifying with pliant organic references. Myths and folklore associated with trees and seasonal fall of leaves as symbols of renewal, rejuvenation and restoration support her quest for life enhancing metaphors. This desire to reinvent herself within the comforting confines of nature rather than the rigid material world becomes more evident in works like, *Leave me Be* and *Turning Over a New leaf*. These messages give voice to the feelings of a nation under siege as much as they speak for the human psyche under duress. The body and soul exploration is yet another area of investigation that has been manifest in Roohi's work for quite sometime and she carries this forward in her engagement with the leaf. She says "The figure and the leaf are about the ephemeral nature of life and the similarity of the life force behind the two elements. It is also about coming together of the two areas of my

interest and establishing a link between the two. There is another kind of mapping happening here, which I am currently exploring."

Abdullah Syed's anchor piece the *Buzzwords* portfolio of seven etchings evolved from the bee hive grid. In the fine and applied arts the lucid modular structure of the beehive had a considerable influence on the architects and artists who founded the Modern movement but other than this the beehive is also seen as a model for an ideal society, while honey and wax have provided the basis for countless positive metaphors of sweetness and productivity and Syed's use of the grid conforms more to this cultural significance. Playing on the Islamic reference to the bee and its usage by the Muslim organizations as a symbol of struggle and martyrdom and President Bush's much publicized 'Beehive theory' he has compiled a collection of seven buzzwords Jihad, Fatwa, War on Terror, Axis of Evil, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Islamophobia, Us and Them. Other than illustrating the power of words as agents of propaganda the hexagonal etchings on paper contain a host of pictorial references / puzzles that allude to the misconceptions, disinformation and paranoia central to the ongoing conflict between the Muslim world in this region and the western super powers.

The hand woven traditional prayer rug (evolving from an earlier paper sculpture *Flying Carpet* series) is also patterned with what appears to be a linear modulation of the honeycomb grid. Technically it is the neckar cube lattice referencing the core Islamic geometric pattern of tessellation which is based on the belief that Allah is one and only and has an infinite presence. The pattern is therefore composed of multiples of one element, a point and a line. Regarding the imposition of the Kaaba motif Abdullah points out that "The traditional image of the Kab'ba (means Cube and Baitullah or the House of Allah) on the rug provides a focus for the person praying. However here, it acts as a spectacle, a focal point where the design radiates and to where it converges back." The prayer rug installation object is essentially meant to highlight the supremacy of the geometric grid as a Muslim invention first and a component of modernist minimalism later- another pointer elucidating the nitty gritty of the east west divide.

The beehive metaphor has most commonly been used by critics of Bush's policies and Syed's silkscreen print, *Hive*, depicting a swarm of bees attacking a hive constructed of blades implies how ineffective Bush has been in his bee-killing sprees. The blades variously used by the artist as an injury causing implement and as a cleaning / shaving tool, in this print refers to the aggressors under assault by the sufferers.

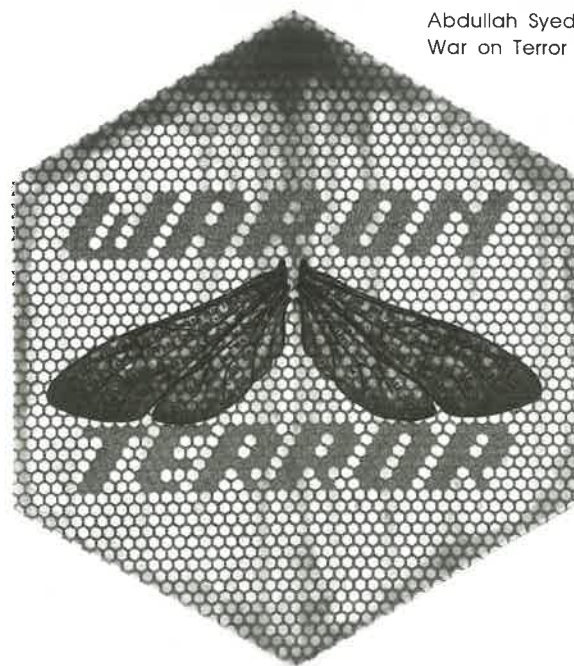
In the collaborative works the blade, cube and rug are juxtaposed with the leaf, body and needle image. An uneasy mix of the mechanical and the organic the works are thought provoking in some instances but their impact is diluted by the profuse and larger presence of the individual art works.

Having established their credentials as educators and curators Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed are among the few young artists here who have the capacity to go beyond their personal art practice to contribute to the uplift of artmaking in Karachi. Committed to a professional work ethos, their ideas are technically and conceptually researched (albeit too intricately at times) and currently they are bracketed in the 'artists to follow' category where their progress will be watched with interest.

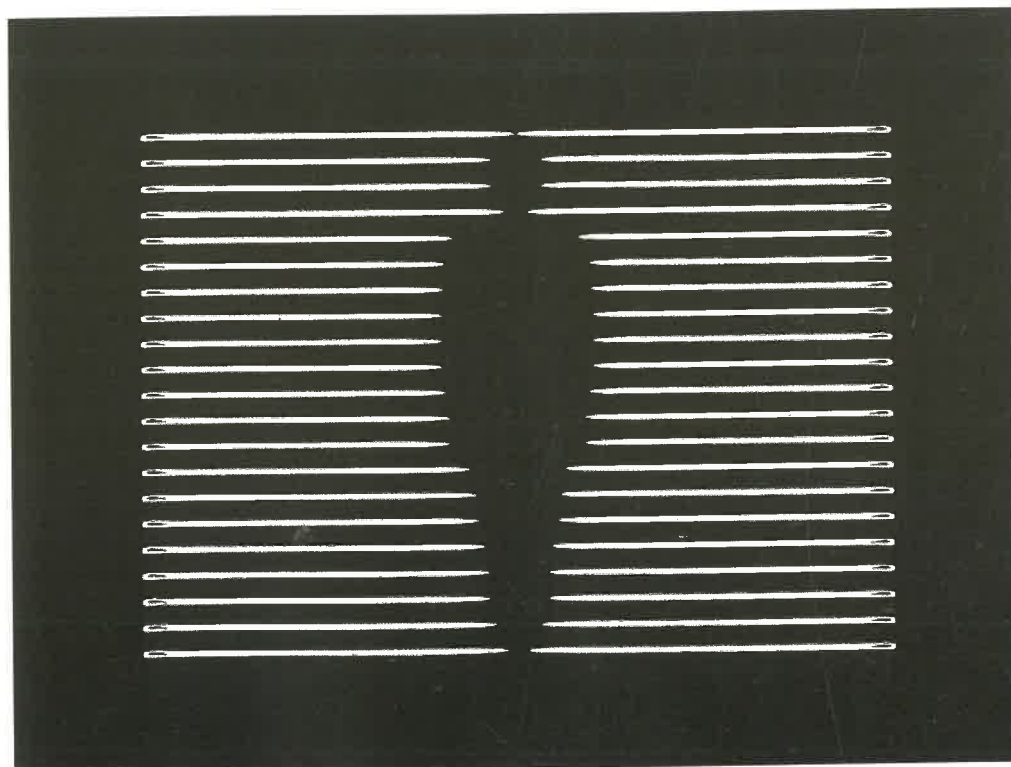
Newsline November 2009

NEWSLINE

Abdullah Syed
War on Terror



Roohi Ahmed
Beleaf

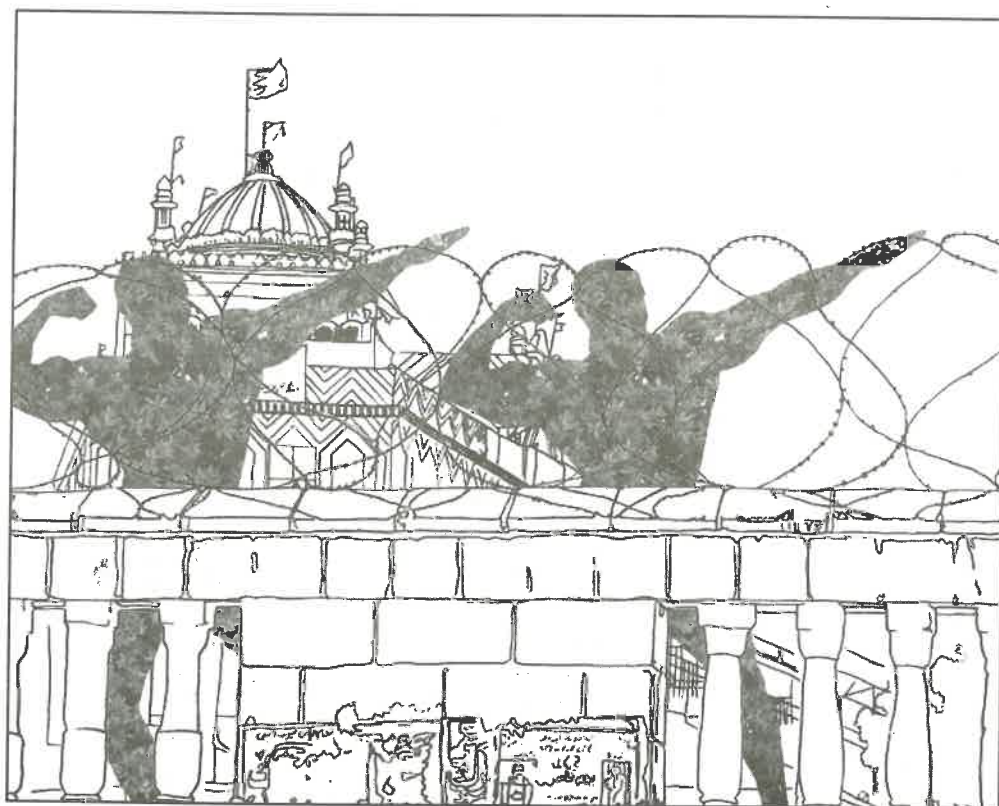


MINIATURE ON THE MARCH

The exhibition, *Making of the History and Green Patrol*, was an odd pairing of art and artists as each collection purported an individual expression and needed to be accessed independently. While both artists drew inspiration from the miniature mannerism and both made use of contemporary print media techniques to express their concerns the art on show was artist specific.

Mehreen Zuberi, an NCA graduate with a major in miniature is wholly contemporary in concept and approach but it is the meticulous attention to detail and fine technical edge in her workmanship that reveals her essential grounding in miniature art. This was widely apparent in her previous gouache on wasli paintings, *Doing Krishna*, relating to gender intimacy, also shown at Canvas. Still small in scale she has now opted to express through print media in this show. Concentrating on issues related to societies in transition Zuberi addresses the psychological impact environmental changes can

have on the inhabitants psyche. The plant *Conocarpus Erectus* which she says has been 'recently mass planted across the chaotic Karachi landscape' is used as a motif by Zuberi to depict a sense of resilience towards the state of flux and unrest in society. *Conocarpus Erectus* native to the tropics is a mangrove shrub / tree that thrives on high temperatures and absorbs brackish water. Placing muscle flexing body builder silhouettes / figurations decorated with the plant motif against line drawings of the city's architectural landmarks like Mohatta Palace, Hotel Metropole and Tariq Road etc etc she not only reminds one of the 'good old days' but also comments on the need to arm oneself against detrimental effects created by political upheaval, ill planned strategies and poorly managed city infrastructure. As an artist Zuberi has the ability to innovate radically and she utilizes her working skills to advantage but at times her concepts are provocative enough theoretically but remain somewhat abstruse or unresolved visually.



Mahreen Zuberi
Mazaar - Abdullah Shah Ghazi, Karachi

History manipulated to serve state policy or sanction official rule is the central issue in Imran Channa's portfolio of prints titled *Making of the History*. He references 'the most celebrated book on Mughal miniature painting called *Badshahnama* (The book of Kings)' to critique the credibility of official visual history. Emphasizing that the *Badshahnama*, executed during Shah Jehans rule, is a promotional volume designed specifically to glorify Mughal supremacy he proceeds to tamper with the imagery of the sacred miniatures and render them ineffective. Working through digital prints of the original *Bahshanama* miniatures he lifts some of the figures from their actual positions creating voids that upset the pictorial balance of the compositions as well as the official hierarchy that the image purports. Rather than removing key figures from the imperial court scenes in relation to their official ranking and thereby creating alternate history he merely plays with the act of voiding, deconstructing and dislocating pictorial images to destabi-

lize the composition and disturb its intended message. Attacking contrived state expression as propagandist and slanted his work urges us to explore and examine the hidden realities behind the façade. Translated in contemporary parlance it prompts the questioning and investigation of current historical records which have been tinkered, altered or defaced altogether. On a technical level his prints of Mughal miniatures pocked with vacuums or packed with dismembered miniature imagery veer towards an overkill at times. His large panels, a mosaic of fragmented and dissected bits of Mughal miniature vocabulary and smaller prints of disjointed figurations are chromatically attractive but a subtle and serialized sectioning of parts could have lent greater credence to his otherwise pertinent concept.

Dawn Gallery April 25 2010

DRAWING GALLERY



Imran Channa
Making of History

PRINTODAY

In the current art climate frequency of print exhibitions has increased and young generation artists enthusiastic embrace of the discipline indicates that the genre is alive and kicking. But unlike painting the subtleties of print media are not widely understood by the public, sales are still uneven and general viewership indifferent - so where do we position printmaking in our contemporary art practice?

The exhibition Printoday, entirely a young artists effort, featured works of ten participants from different areas of Pakistan who were invited to work on a given theme simply stated as 'today.' Each artist had the freedom to individual interpretation of the subject and they were asked to submit three works produced within the conventional techniques of printmaking. The stated mission of the project, curated by Muhammed Atif Khan, is to support, promote, preserve, and advance the art of original prints

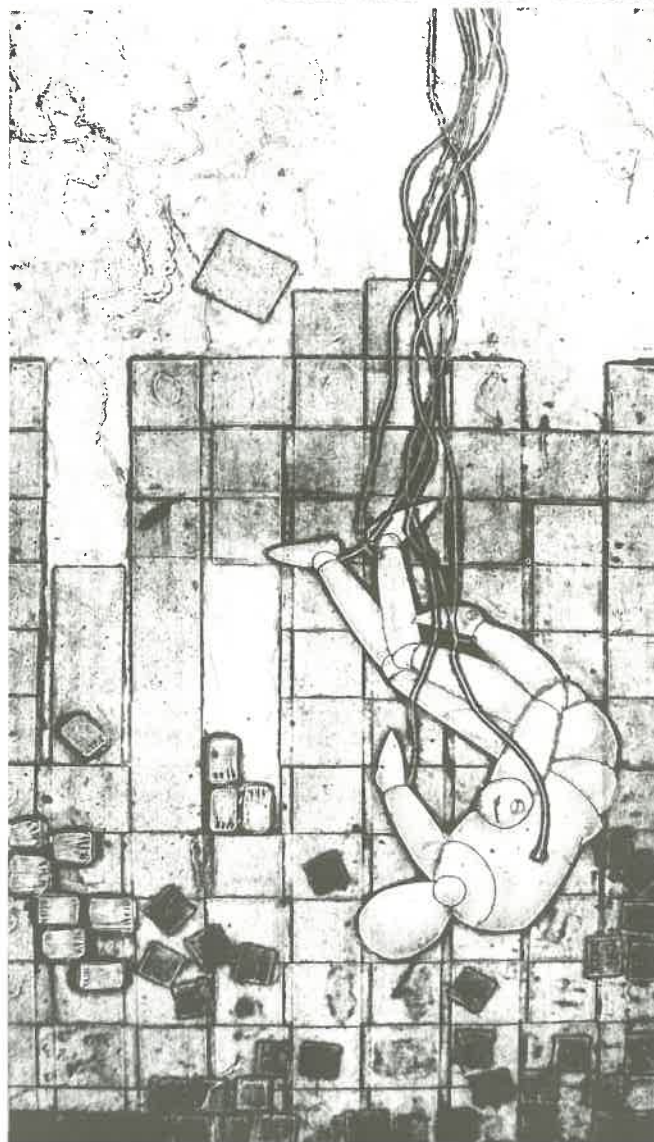
Post 9/11 'today' has gradually taken on sinister meanings for Pakistanis who are now countering jihadist terror, social chaos and political collapse at home, loss of credibility and the stigma of a failed state in the international arena. Presently the whole nation is feeling the stress created by this turmoil and its impact on artistic expression is all the more pungent because the manifestation is so 'visual'. A pared female figure in Rabeya Jalil's print, Clipped, hits out on the status of women in our society, or, on another tangent, of a young a nation rendered powerless while, The Ideal Package collograph etching, of a ticking bomb is spot on as well. Currently a Fulbright scholar at Colombia University USA, Jalil has been working for the IVSSA Print Dept after her graduation from NCA.

Tongue in cheek and caustic as well Sophiya Khawaja's, Ignorance and Deception (drypoint, chine colle) print of a candy licking girl appears to critique drug abuse among ill-informed youth yet can also be inverted to read as a scathing comment on the political condition we are in. Her Evil Tower and Precious Situation works also allude to an explosive, precarious, booby trap situation. The works possess linear strength and figurative components are rendered with confidence. An NCA graduate Khawaja also concluded her Masters program under a Fulbright scholarship, from the Rhode Island School of Design, USA, and is presently a lecturer at NCA, Rawalpindi.

Mohsin Shafi, in his photo etched prints, has made prominent use of Arabic calligraphy and subversion of the veil as a shroud to enunciate female suppression particularly so in the light of extremist fundamentalist ideologies. He is currently enrolled in the Masters program at NCA. A collograph, Tangled, of a marionette caught in a twirl of strings, by Hasnain Awais spelled disorder and confusion and seemed

open to several interpretations as well. An etching and aquatint series titled Samandar Mauj, by Hajra Haider depicts how the sea is encroaching on habitable land and pushing mankind further inland.

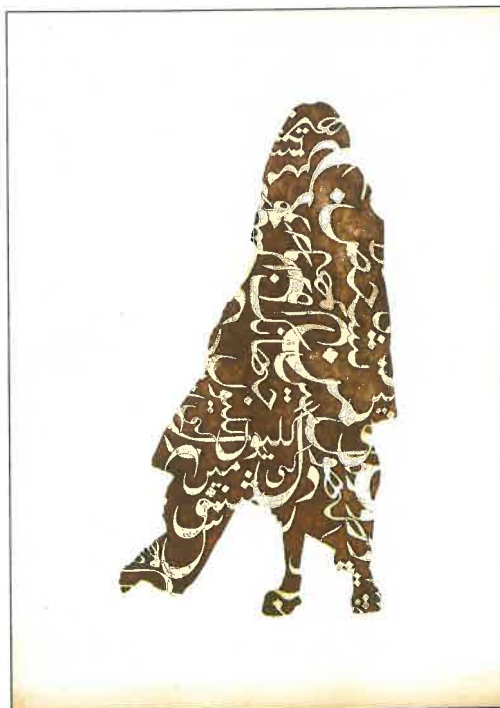
Hasnain Awais - Tangled - Collograph



Other than the eco disaster understanding, the ebb and flow of the tide can even be applied metaphorically to the flux in life. Hajra Haider is currently attached to the IVSSA's Print Dept. Another etching and aquatint series, *Towers of Silence*, by Wardah Alam, comments on the trials and tribulations of isolation and insularity of self and society at large. A product of NCA she is teaching in the Post Graduate Centre for Multimedia Arts of the same institution. Blurred, repetitive images of the human figure, in drypoint, summed up as, *Dislocation*, by Saba Raza Kahn reference her close association with an Alzheimer's patient. Naveed Sabir and Sarah Zahids collagraphs subscribed to the real and the imagined world in content while Sadaf Farooq likened the complexities of life to the geometric twists and turns of roller coaster rides.

As exhibits the artworks in Printoday were coherent enough to be read at a number of levels but aesthetic presence and workmanship standards were variable. If this project aims to become an annual event then greater emphasis on not just content but quality of prints, can strengthen the impact of this otherwise well-coordinated effort.

Sophia Khawaja - Ignirance and Deception



Mohsin Shafi

Rabiya Jalil - Clipped (left)

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF THE IMAGE

In a world increasingly dominated by graphic imagery 'looking' at visual information today is rapidly displacing the act of 'reading' textual information and this shift reflects directly on the quality and content of the photographed image. The viewer must now have the cognitive ability to distinguish between the trite and the commonplace and the genuine and the heartfelt image. An effort to raise the bar of the photographed image was apparent in a photography exhibition, *Images: There and Then*. By inviting some of the country's finest photographers to capture the hue and temperament of a land and its people through their individual lens the curator went beyond the average tourist portfolio visuals of Pakistan to assemble a perceptive, thought provoking collection.

Focusing on people and their environment, *Images: There and Then* is essentially culture photography by as many as 16 photographers whose that many interpretations spanning from the traditional to the postmodern have been knit into a composite whole.

Acclaimed veteran Syed Javaid Kazi's insightful collection of photographs (example, *Ageing Together*) reveal his considerable acumen as a documentary portrait photographer interested in recording culture for history and artistic purposes. But it is his eye for detail – a feel for authenticity and clever play with light to reflect what is real – reconstituted in luminous, grainy, black-and-white prints, that infuse his portraits with the gravity of art. The unaffected beauty of the girl child and the innocence of boyhood is well caught by Umair Ghani and Danish Tapal also but theirs is a lighthearted approach in both choice of subject and its projection. Accentuating religious ritual and folk culture through the human form Kohi Marri's *Gunga at Sufi Festival* is a story picture where narrative is built through gestural body language and persona of the subject as well as an emphasis on strong chromatics (which just might be digitally enhanced).

This ability to skillfully zero in on gesture, glance and movement, was common to most photographs. Absorbing the spontaneous behavior of their subjects in environments charged with aesthetic tension the photographers captured attitudes, norms and typicalities at several levels - Izdeyar Sethna's, *Prisoner City Courts Karachi*, chronicled the travails of captivity. A critical take on child labour Ayesha Vellani's *Children of Brick Kiln workers* was easy on the eye but heavy on the heart. Asim Akhtar, one of the few photographers who can tune profundity and aesthetics to a fine pitch, captivated the viewer with his *Bathers- Borit Lake, Ishkoman*, series. Imbuing the glacial northern landscape with a pristine purity he transformed the simple act of bathing in the lake into an intriguing experience.

In sharp contrast to the joyous simplicity of nature Ameen J's *Urban Landscape* image, a charred corpse of a vehicle, spoke of another palpable reality – the physical and psychological tension generated by the current climate of fear, violence and destruction that surrounds us. Other concrete realities of the urban landscape, *Lahore Railway Station* by Farah Mahbub and *New Kaiser Hotel* by Arif Mehmood reminded us of colonial legacies and how they still continue to permeate our lives.

Urban detritus an enormous health hazard is yet another face of city life. It is said that Malcolm Hutcheson consistently points out and photographs what we do not want to see and his seemingly uninteresting and ordinary but perhaps among the most message driven images in the show, the *Gunda Nullah* series, dwells on the mismanagement of sewage waste in the city of Lahore. He consistently photographs the poor and how the environment impacts their lives to ferret out root causes of social ills. Preferring to photograph with the most basic equipment the surfaces of his images are marked with scratches and dust, showing the circumstances under which the images were made.

Appealing and attractive to look at images of the Kohli tribe of Mitthi by Akbar Khushik speak of beauty in simplicity and document a primitive lifestyle still in existence in the 21st century. But often the happy face of underprivileged communities masks the hardship and sadness that surrounds their life of poverty, illiteracy and disenfranchisement. Unlike the spontaneously shot images a 'posed' photograph of a group of transvestites as a candid portrait of gender constraints was also true to life.

Spectacles in motion are among the most difficult subject matter to photograph. In most cases you only have a fraction of a second to choose an interesting subject, focus your camera, choose your zoom setting, and press the shutter. To make the most of your performance experience as a photographer, you need to be ready to make quick decisions and several images encapsulated the split second 'moment' but it was Shamy! Khuro's *Khattak Dancers* that dwell primarily on movement.

Possessing a keen sensitivity to the human condition and with minimal emphasis on technical manipulation the photographers of this show have tried to see beyond the surface to capture a deeper, richer culture on film. In this attempt to depict the essential character of the photographed environment they have tried to preserve the integrity of the image.

Kohi Marri - Gunga



Malcolm Hutcheson
Ganda nullah Series



Newsline Feb. 2010

NEWSLINE

Farah Mahbub - Lahore Railway Station



Izdeyar Sethna - Prisoner City Courts Karachi



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Abdullah Syed

'BORN TO BE' ... IDENTITY POLITICS

"We are going through fire: the sunshine has yet to come....."
 Quaid i Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah - Dec 1947 - welcome address to the officers of the North- Western Railway.

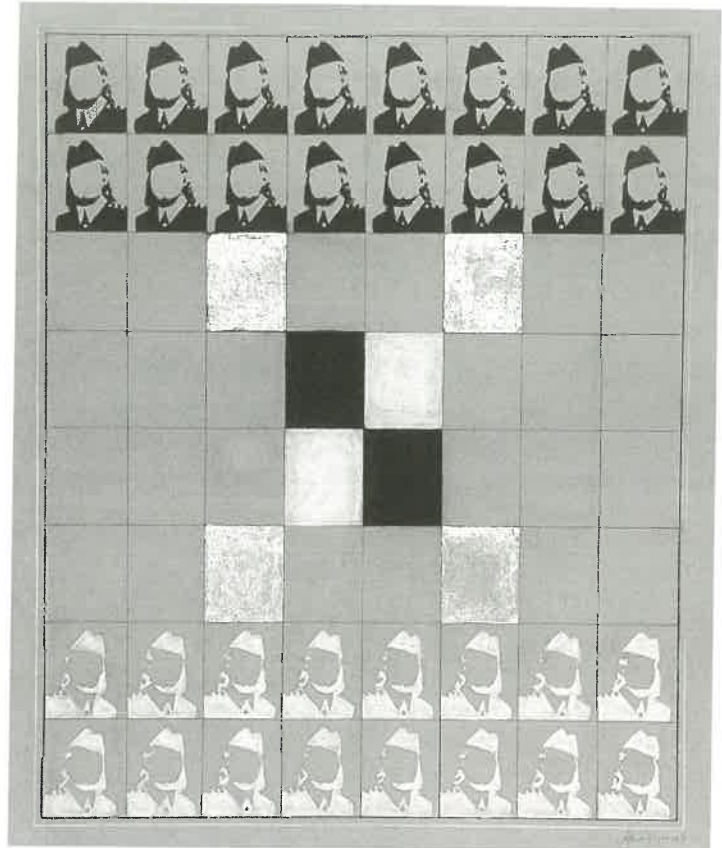
How ironic, what the Quaid affirmed sixty years ago still holds true today. The sunshine of unity, faith and discipline still eludes us as we continue to be consumed by the fires of hatred, violence and sectarianism. Taking its cue from 1947 onwards a researched project interspersed with extracts from addresses by Mohammed Ali Jinnah 'born to be' artist Abdullah Syed's exhibition of prints examines leadership anomalies and the complexities of identity politics that it has brewed. Investigating personal and collective identity in the context of a national and international presence Pakistan maintains, his tableau of portraits, drawings and textual commentary questions the legitimacy and veracity of the political, social and religious leadership we have. His implication is not just restricted to what has been imposed on the people but also hints at the insecurity, mistrust and confusion it has bred in them.

Pakistan's political history, checkered with civilian and military rule, is portrayed to telling effect in digital prints where he is photographed as a model dressed in a self designed ensemble which is part military uniform and part national dress. His apparel of shalwar and sherwani, army boots, belt and medals is an instant juxtaposition of the political dichotomy that has been our dilemma since independence. His symbolic use of rose, jasmine, sweet pea, the colours red, blue and green, white collar, gloves, handkerchief and brass buttons are pointed reminders of lingering colonial legacies, hegemony of foreign powers, geo political strategies, role of foreign interventions and the governments tacit / complicit attitude.

A display of sequenced shots subtly carries the viewer from formal full length portrayals to smaller close ups, half figures and busts towards diminishing imagery in a series of drawings where only the photo collages or outlines of the face / head remain. This progression towards fragmentation and emptiness is a sad / oblique commentary on the erosion of social and cultural values, the ebbing political stature of the country and the baffling status of the average citizen. The deliberate textual messaging 'born to be blue - red - green etc and titles 'born to be millat born to be pasban - liberal- patriot - conservative' etc reinforces the identity crisis which is the crux of this show.

These works of art speak about the conflicts and ambiguities of the self mainly as a political construction. Within this setting, the role of conscience and the citizen's ability to think is subdued and the opportunity emerges to consider the effectiveness of symbolic

Abdullah Syed - Check the Differences



representation, not simply to articulate difference, but to "make" a difference. The art works mock the viewer as dumb and the leadership as perpetrator, or elegize the voiceless, nameless and faceless for being non entities. For the viewer the question "Who do you think you are?" takes on new meaning: It is on the one hand, humiliating, and yet awareness generating issues are empowering also. Are we or are we not looking for an art dedicated to expressions of the self, and the ability of that art not only to have an impact but to make a difference in a culture overburdened with indifference and discrimination, and armed with defenses to absolve itself of any complicity. Are we nurturing, tolerating or opposing the social, political and religious culture we are part of? From the point of view of the citizens, there are many possibilities. They can resist it; they can stay or leave or perhaps just exist in a perpetual state of confusion. The statement "People are

Abdullah Syed - Born to be Patriot



products of their time" is ambiguous it does not define a stance or spell a particular attitude. Identity issues are resolved as much from within as from without – as much from personal choices as from external imperatives

On a technical level this kind of post-modernist art can be seen as an outcome of new communication technologies and processes. This exhibition introduces viewers to the novelty of the Light Jet process Lambda prints. For buyers still reluctant to invest in prints, conventional or digital, one of the qualities of Lambda Prints is their highly sensitive and improved colour quality acceptable for museum and archival collections.

As an artist Abdullah Syed has a flair for improvising prevalent western techniques and in this show he has not only experimented with new forms but has retained and enlarged upon some of his previous vocabulary. He played with messaging, typed text and Braille in his last exhibition Labyrinth 6/6 and the blank spaces / faces in the recent show connect with his theory of voids initially seen in his exhibition Subliminal Voids and Discourse on Circles.

Conceptually and technically the exhibition offers new ways of interpreting, representing and viewing art and one expects more globe trotting young generation artists with their experiences and visual expressions of place, belonging and subjectivity to inject fresh perspectives into our politics of identity and its relationship to contemporary art.

Abdullah Syed - Born to be priceless

Abdullah Syed
The Hive

Newsline
July 2007

NEWSLINE



Sheharbano Hussain

AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

Visual expression of an inner inquiry has always been central to Sheharbano Hussain's oeuvre. Her body of work, *Ayn - Al - Qalb*, charts the progression of an odyssey she has been painting since her debut solo in 2001. In an earlier series, *Metamorphosis*, she tried to capture those "elusive moments of truth" that enable us to understand the relationship between the tangible and the intangible. Her sense of questioning took her in several directions bringing forth varied imagery and diverse concepts. Initial exercises were also explorative technically. Most of the former works affirmed the artists concern with pictorial structure, mix media experimentation, chromatic and textural contrasts and attention to detail. An installation, *Shrine of Heart*, constructed as member of The Vast International workshop 2006 at Gadani Beach received much appreciation from a majority of the young visitors, and many of them took the time to scribble verses and sayings about love in different languages on the walls of her shrine.

In comparison to what she terms 'managed' effects of previous works the current series is relatively sparse and direct. There is a greater emphasis on instant depiction of feelings or thoughts rather than an elaborate show of skills. Without making any radical departures from her original stance Sheharbano nonetheless has narrowed her search into a specific direction - instead of raising questions and examining them as a conscious exercise she now paints / executes work that is intuitive and directly related to her evolution as a human being. This series is informed by her immediate interests and experiences and rendered in relatively minimal vocabulary. She has retained only those graphics and symbols from her repertoire that are relevant to her new specificity and most prominent among them is the recurring image of the heart.

Titled *Ayn Al Qalb* this collection illustrates works seen through the eyes of the heart rather than rationalized through the mind. A series of prints titled, *An Artist of the Floating World*, are renderings of the heart as an organ within which she has implanted her dreamscapes. Technically, using the cut and paste process Sheharbano has constructed a collage / photomontage within a stenciled heart image and then made Xerox copies of the compositions. By spray painting the background in solid black she has been able to project the organ as a window opening into a private world of heartfelt moments. Culled from memories the compositions are intensely personal and need to be seen as contemplative paintings. They nudge a viewing public attuned to enjoying surface delights to look within themselves and respond to the imagery with individual interpretations.

Other chromatically vibrant mix media paintings also portray the heart as the epicenter of human existence. In, *A sort of Homecoming*, and,

Island of the Dead Revisited, the fleshy heart appears as a potent life sustaining entity. A clever twist here is the ironic use of the physical to invoke the metaphysical. Incongruous juxtapositions of the bare body and its organic appendages are skillfully manipulated to build arcane scenes.

This category of art also conforms to the symbolist manifesto. The Symbolist painters mined mythology and dream imagery for a visual language of the soul, seeking evocative paintings that brought to mind a static world of silence. The symbols used in Symbolism are not the familiar emblems of mainstream iconography but deeply personal, private, obscure and ambiguous references. Carrying vestiges of everyday life yet far removed from it Sheharbano constructs vignettes of an unreal almost supernatural world which can stimulate the imagination of the viewer as a manifestation of the subconscious mind. Although some of the paintings may suggest a sense of loneliness (aggravated by isolation and prompted by anxiety) that can be read in the dark empty spaces, imagery of the divided self (body), hands reaching out for contact and mute flocks of sheep, are mystifying expressions that reaffirm man's forbidden love for the unknown and his ceaseless efforts for self realization.

Newsline May 2009

NEWSLINE



Sheharbano Hussain
A sort of home coming

Sheharbano Hussain
An artist of the
floating world (left)



Sheharbano Hussain
Island of the dead revisited

Usman Ghouri

ETERNAL VERSES

Essentially a printmaker Usman Ghouri merges the print aesthetic and the painterly process in, *Eternal Verses*, which comes across as a visual indictment / chronicle of aberrant behaviour. The artist projects the tragic spectacle of human digression with chilling intensity. Juxtaposing the seven sins against the divine scriptures he tries to document 'what is' in the light of 'what should be.'

The Seven Deadly Sins have long been a source of inspiration for writers and artists due to the influences of the sins on society. Also known as the cardinal sins they are a classification of vices used in early Christian teachings to educate and protect followers from fallen man's tendency to sin. Ghouri draws on this eternal struggle between vice and virtue to vent the voice of his conscience. However his idiom is contemporary, he concocts his own mix of tradition and modernity and he critiques the concerns of his own age.

A series of five small paintings of reclining nudes, male and female, mimic Manet's *Odalisque*, *Olympia*, in attitude and mannerism but it is their allusion to lust, depravity and extravagance that gives them deeper meaning. Prominent use of ornamental folk motif, garish palette, lavish and crude application of gold and silver, indolent inviting postures of the human figures and exchange of affectionate gestures between male nudes succeed in creating an aura of unwholesome morality.

Alienation and estrangement between the individual and society and particularly between genders is another malaise of the urban milieu which Ghouri highlights through aloof, distrustful expressions and cold demeanor of his subjects. Projecting nature as pure and sublime he introduces the natural elements to emphasize his contrasts. Stony images of withdrawn individuals when posed with clusters of soft foliage appear all the more embittered. Water and fish are inducted in his art as symbols of purity and their frequent appearance emphasizes the absence of this sentiment from human life. The artist also indulges in displacement. By encrusting the flesh of a male image with fish scales he creates an impression of unbecoming superficial ornamentation. Here, the sheen and shine of the scales is equated with the glitter of wealth and greed of a miser. Such artistic liberties need to be understood in context if their significance is to become meaningful.

Similarly loss of faith in the sublime and an increasing reliance on astrology, palm reading and fortune telling to determine the future is suggested through obvious drawings of open palms. Some hand images smeared with gold allude to the Midas touch, greed and over indulgence. Stern and tightlipped with haunting, penetrating eyes

Ghouri's subjects are grim reminders of a troubled humanity whose psyche is plagued with a thousand ills.

While concepts express an ideology for artists technique and style are also instrumental in furthering an idea. Usman Ghori paints with the sensibility of a printmaker and his acrylic on canvas which is again pasted on board and etching and aquatint pieces are as raw and caustic as the thoughts he is conveying. Relentlessly scraped or crudely encrusted his paint applications are palpable and their rough abrasive starkness is disturbing. Scratching and layering define an artist's emotional pitch - it is that essential process of struggle which enables him to reach a level where he can emote with conviction. Ghouri's painterly attitude is in tandem with his thought process because the imagery of *Eternal Verses* is also coarse and severe with frequent recourse to primitive, stylized rudimentary forms of nature and mask like expressions of his subjects. He divides space on the canvas by constructing squares and rectangles to create window like insertions, scenic enclosures or gradual bifurcations where he travels from reality into surreality. Indeed his work often borders on the metaphysical as he tries to transcend the worldly to reference the other wordly.

Angst ridden and complex Usman Ghouri's cryptic imagery does not rest easy on the eyes. Pungent and raw it is not attractive in the traditional sense but then it has the claw and bite that accosts the viewer.

Born in Sukkur, Ghouri received his Bachelor of Design from National College of Arts, Lahore, in 1992, and his Masters of Art from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia in the year 2000. He has been teaching Printmaking since 1996 at Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. The artist has held a number of solo exhibitions at home and has also participated in several group shows internationally in USA, UK, Japan, Oman and in Mauritius. He has worked for VASL the local chapter of Triangle Trust Network, UK and attended the International Artist Workshop in Mauritius in 2004. Currently preoccupied with the thematic thrust of *Eternal Verses* he continues to paint his point of view.

Usman Ghouri



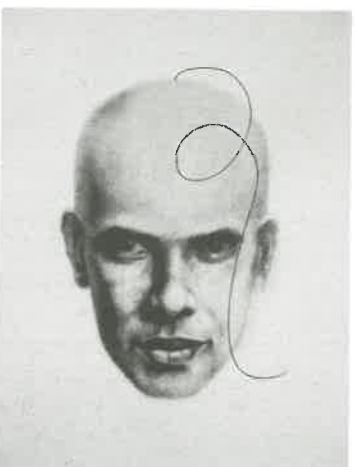
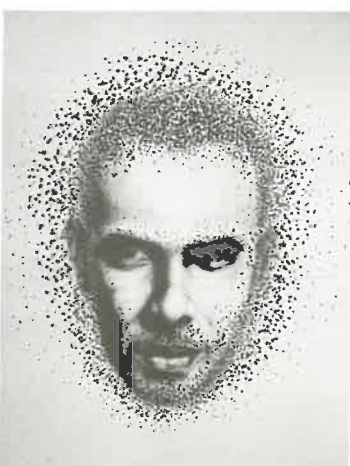
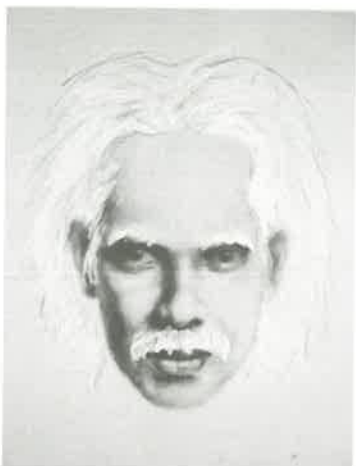
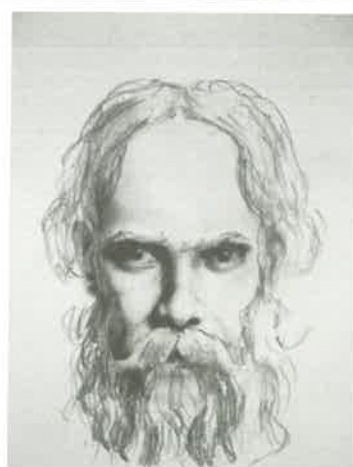
Usman Ghouri



Usman Ghouri



Ayaz Jokhio
Moon main ahien toon
(you are in me)

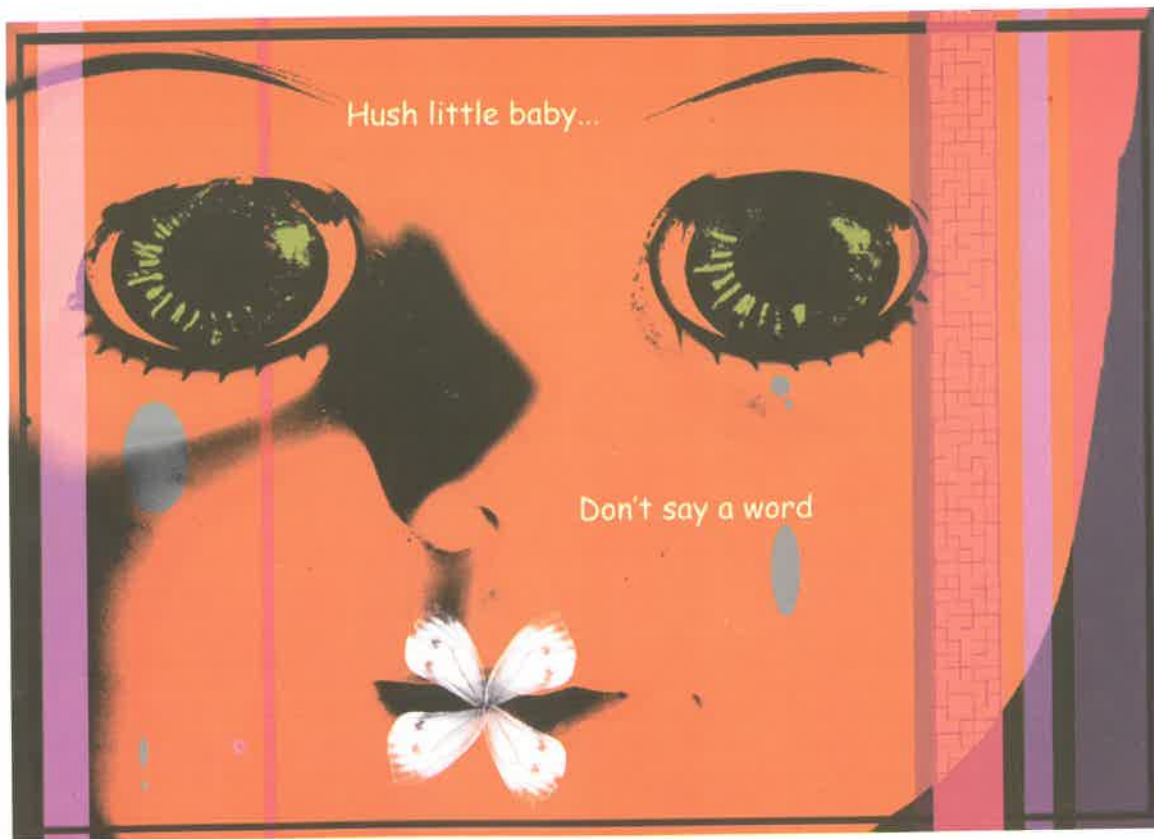


7 VIDEO



The term video in conjunction with commercial film or television is easily recognized and understood in our milieu but the meaning, terminology and content of Video Art does not enjoy the same currency. Video art, a lens based expression, is enjoying the 'medium of the moment' status internationally but here the genre has yet to debut formally. Infrequent, rather modest showings sandwiched between larger displays of established genres like painting and sculpture etc kept the art form on the periphery and its "new media" status also places it among the "emerging arts" which are still struggling to define and establish their standing in our art environment.

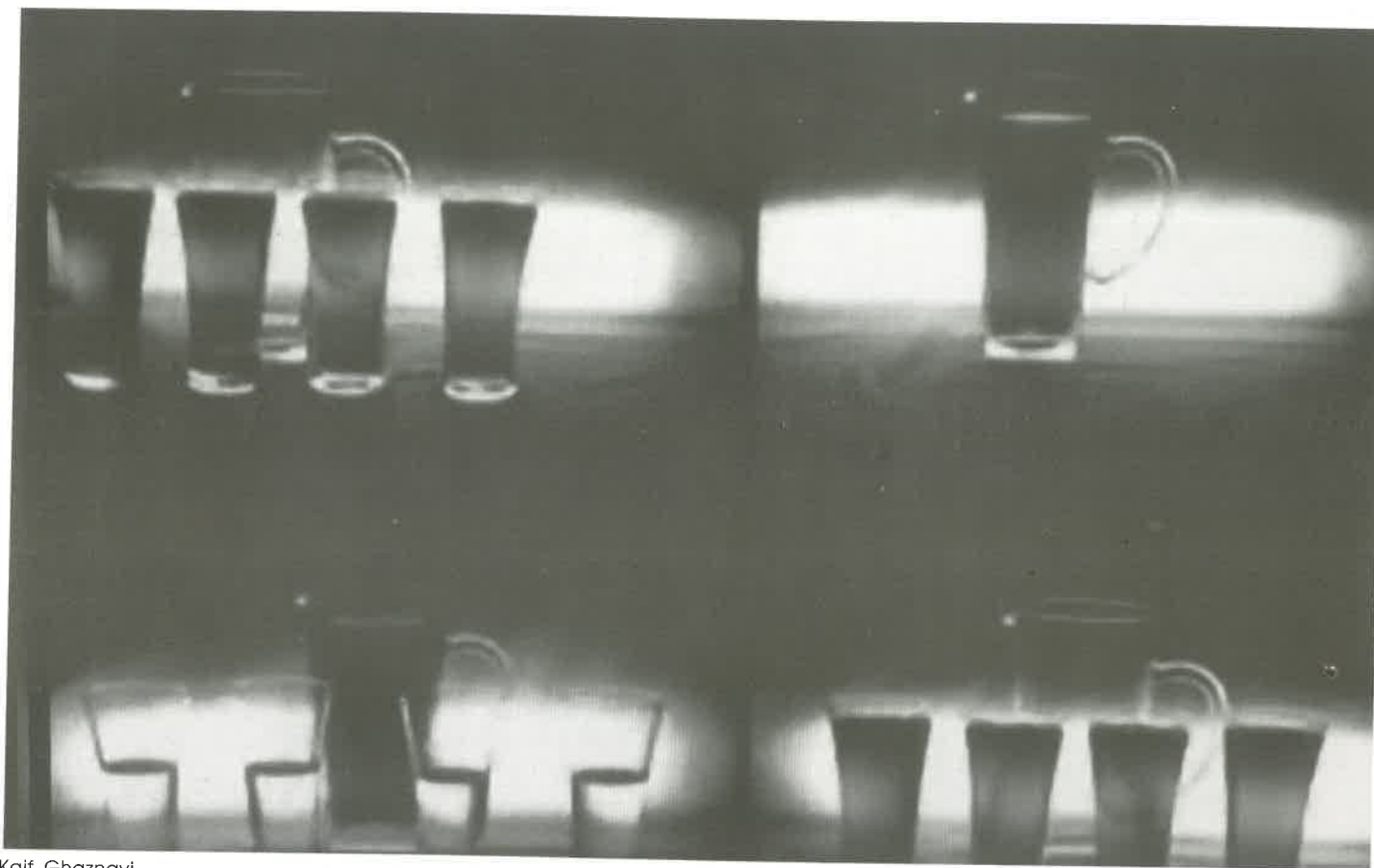
For purposes of definition video art is a medium, like oil painting or photography, not a style; the colour can be intense or washed out, the images can move or be still, the recorded material can be spontaneous (as in television news coverage) or highly scripted (as in a sitcom), the work can celebrate popular culture or it can be critical of it. It uses the technology of commercial television but for purposes regarded as artistic rather than commercial. The genre is also frequently combined with other media and disciplines like architecture, design or sculpture or is integrated with installation or performance art to enhance its expression.



Zarmeene Shah
Hush little baby
dont say a word

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

VIDEO ART: OUT IN THE OPEN



Kaif Ghaznavi

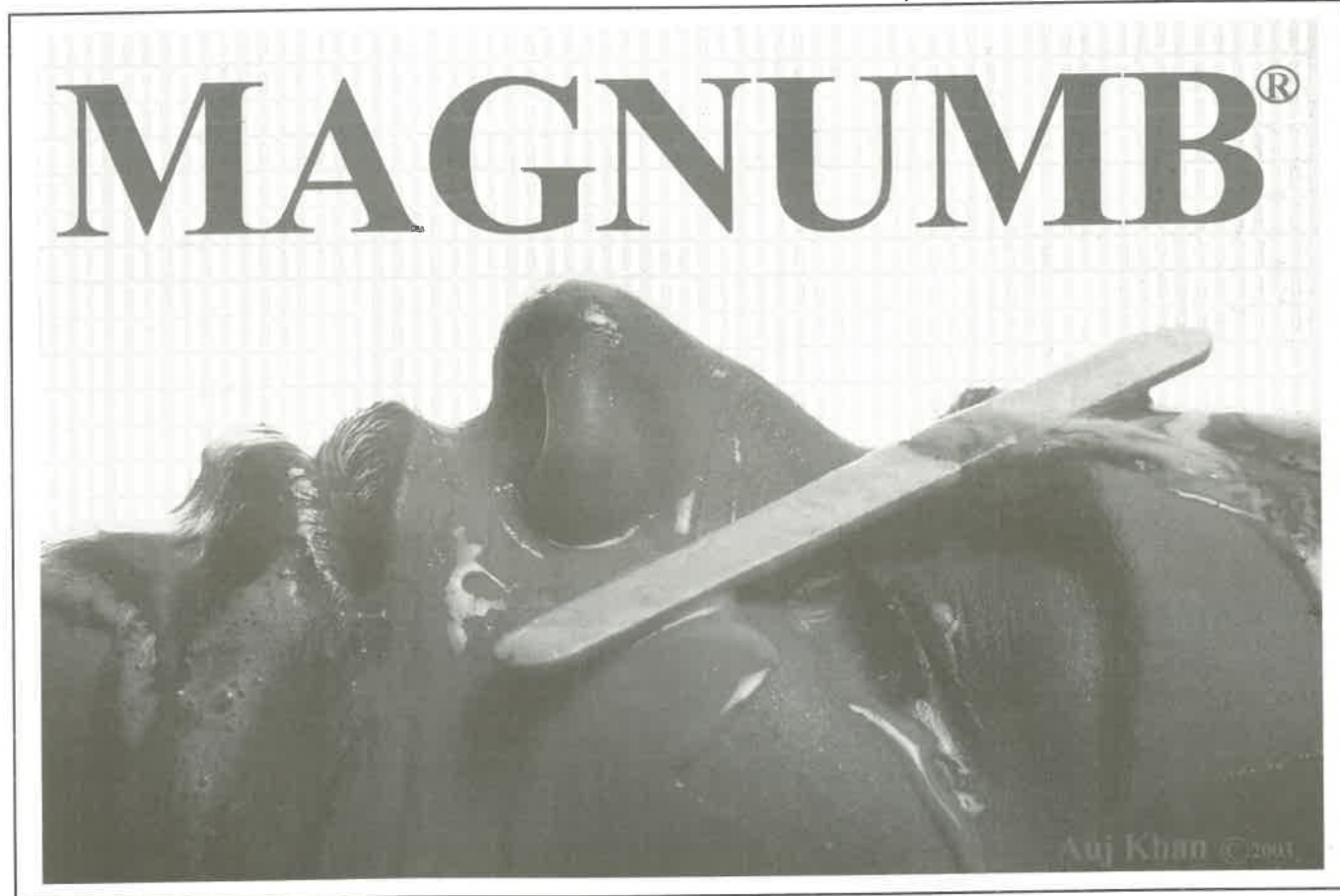
A space to space collaboration between Vasi Pakistan and Artist Commune Hong Kong, 256 Shades Media Art Show initiated by Adeela Suleman of Vasi and Shin yi Yang from Artist Commune Hong Kong, showcases digital and video art from the two countries. While video is a new media art just gaining currency among our new generation artists its origin in the west is attributed largely to Nam June Paik's (musician, sculptor, filmmaker) recording of Pope Paul the sixth's visit to New York from a taxi using a portable Sony Porta Pak videotape system, as far back as 1965.

Sponsored mainly by LG electronics regarding screen display and sound equipment, 256 Shades, is the first large group display of the new genre here as well as the first collaboration with the Artist

Commune Hongkong. The exhibition opened with Ayaz Jokhio's animated still image projected on the gallery entrance wall. Titled Moom Mein Ahien Toon (You are in me) the large male portrait image was a photographic still which was constantly being made over through changes in hair styles and facial cosmetics. Each makeover, of the same face, resulted in a completely new personality. This video addresses the issue of identity politics in a shrinking global village where we all share the same human clay yet are essentially products of our particular environment. Artist Bani Abidi's video, Mangoes, also explores the 'similar yet dissimilar' equation but within the sub-continental divide. The exotic mango is eaten with much relish all over Pakistan and India and Abidi uses this innocuous trait to highlight



Auj Khan - Magnumb (light box and C print)



the many other cultural similarities that bind the people of the two countries together yet the religious and land divide segment them into two entirely different nations.

Digital artist Rashid Rana's *Ten Differences*, a 53 sec video loop, examines the double image within and without. He remarks, "In this age of un-certainty we have lost the privilege to have only one world view. Now every image, idea and truth (may it be ancient or media generated encourages its opposite within itself)." By reversing his self image with gun in hand, in his video, he is actually confronting his own double with weapon in shooting position. This apparent self attack is a physical manifestation of a much deeper inner confrontation with conflicts and unresolved issues often environmentally induced by disturbing socio cultural and geo political conditions.

Preoccupation with self continued in Ayesha Naveed's video and sound installation. She preferred to project her film on the floor space through an overhead projector. Her video *Subsistence with Psychosomatic Space* was a recount and recall of her existence as a child, young girl, student, married woman and mother of a child in the light of her fears hopes and aspirations.

Video art by Hamra Abbas titled, *MOMA is a Star*, focuses on the opening of the Museum of Modern Arts show in Berlin. The event generated so much excitement among the public that Abbas was able to virtually film a show outside the show centralizing on the interesting behavioral quirks and reactions of the visiting public. Her second video panning a billboard advertising *Have a Break (with Kit Kat)* is superimposed with images of a rush of people going to or returning from work. This video critiques the lack of leisure and 'working like a machine' concept that has begun to creep into our lives. Young artist Auj Khan's 2ft by 3ft light box and C prints titled *Magnumb* is also a pot shot at the proliferation and passive consumption of advertising and the increasing reliance on the provocative female body and face to sell a product.

Computer manipulated drawings of Navin Hyder were subtle and sophisticated but seemed subdued on the large gallery walls on account of their minimalist imagery and quiet colouration. She made clever use of the graphic traffic and road signs to induce the concept of 'waiting'. Durriya Kazi's untitled digital portraits of women muffled in a veil / chador was an obvious comment on the plight of women in our milieu.

A number of other videos, digital prints, light frames and computer manipulated photography highlighted the experimental nature of the genre, technically as well as conceptually. In many instances the

meaning of the subjective experience was indirect and had to be teased out of the moving or still imagery. Most of the Chinese videos and prints retained this subtlety and ambiguity.

Named after the 256 colour levels of a computer, *256 Shades* as a composite multi media show has brought video art out in the open, hitherto, modest showings mixed with fine art exhibitions was not giving the genre the leverage it needed to impact audiences. However the display of video as an art form here is quite different from that in the west where galleries and museums are suitably equipped with multi media gadgetry to handle the showings. While the gallery had the requisite space to accommodate over 2 dozen monitors, small and large screen televisions, projectors and sound systems, the curators had to request LG Electronics to provide the electronic equipment without which the exhibition would not have been possible. Video is a technology reliant genre and in a city where power outages are frequent the gallery has to ensure generator back up to keep the show alive. If video art has to flourish here these prickly issues of space, energy and sponsorship need to be resolved

THE SIXTY SECOND FILM

Art audiences received a taste of the latest offering in the new media arts category – the sixty second film – when a moti roti international arts project 60 x 60 Secs comprising sixty one minute films by artists from Britain, India and Pakistan, was presented as a multi-screen installation.

Moti roti (literally fat bread) is essentially the brainchild of Ali Zaidi who was born in India, grew up in Pakistan and now lives in Britain. "His personal experience of not being fully accepted in each of these places raises issues about the meaning of 'home,' what it is to 'belong' and what national identities and borders really mean.... For the last ten years the company has made internationally acclaimed award winning art that transforms relationships between people, communities and spaces." Its work is led by visual and media arts, participation, new technology and design. 60 x 60 Secs is the first in a new series of works for moti roti's latest project 360 Britain, India, Pakistan (2007 – 2010). Using, residencies, publications, exhibitions and collaborations 360 explores relationships between three countries to demonstrate how art can be used to forge new connections across cultures and open up different spaces of cultural exchange. The sixty second films were commissioned by moti roti via an open submission and established and emerging artists from the South Asian Diaspora – twenty each from Britain, India and Pakistan – present their personal perspective on what identity, home and boundaries mean to them in this age of migration and movement. Other than Ali Zaidi as Artistic Director of the project it was Creative Associates from India and Pakistan, Nila Madhab Panda and Shalalae Jamil – producer/artists specializing in new media who acted as collaborators, curators and mentors. 60 x 60 Secs was first launched in Britain, then published on the web and later premiered in India and Pakistan simultaneously in 2008.

The one minute film is at its most powerful when, like instant messaging, ideas are communicated rapidly and clearly and among the Pakistani entries 505 fared well. The handiwork of Juhi Jaferi, Komail Naqvi and Taimoor Tariq, all students of Economics at Lyceum, Karachi, it succinctly dissected culture into the class divides that exist here. Charting the parallel journey of a five rupee coin and a five hundred rupee note it showed us the different lives they live, the different places they inhabit and the different people they meet. The piece was honoured with the Impact Award at the Ivey Film Festival 2009, London, Ontario. A performance piece by a Karachi based Iranian ceramic artist Shahziah Gorji was engaging too. It explored a question migrants frequently encounter "Where are you from?" Tracing her ancestry to forefathers of Georgian descent Gorji portrayed her multilayered existence through a frustrating change of (petticoats) undergarments. She finds the effort futile and eventually abandons it

with the conclusion that "it does not really matter where I am from." Among the more subtle films David Alesworths 'Jhoank' did not reveal itself easily while Ferwa Ibrahims entry *Estrangement* addressing the notion of change and transience in identity with symbolic use of the shifting human shadow invited reflection. Film maker Adnan Malik's *Telephone Piyaar*, a mix of archival material, clips and 'totas' from Bollywood films and intimate voice over telephone conversation, was a racy, humorous critique of sexual identity as projected through Pakistani films.

Seeking filmmakers who adore seconds, flourish in miniature, and consider a standard minute to be an infinite amount of space the sixty second films is the medium of the moment. The proliferation of the home video camera and improvements in mobile phone technology opened new vistas in film making and provided a new audience for filmmakers but it is TV commercials that are the touchstone of this genre. As Ali Zaidi points out, "If tractors, shirts and lipsticks can be sold – why can't we sell an idea in one minute." Short, snappy and loaded with meaning the sixty second film, if intelligently executed, can resonate far beyond its customary one minute and the 60 60 Secs mosaic tried to capitalize on the impact of this brevity to compress a wide assortment of views and opinions into an hour long viewing

The open ended nature of the films and use of creative media techniques like animation, photography and computer graphics brought immense diversity in thought and approach to the works. This multiplicity unfortunately was the boon and bane of this entire exercise. The 60 x 60 Secs artists transcending stereotypes opted for candid heartfelt expressions – the sheer force of such honesty and bluntness was a huge learning experience. One begins to realize not just about the intricacies of cultural anomalies but how globalization is transforming identities. Condensing or squeezing this assortment into an hour however did not translate well into an informed viewing experience. Only the most articulate films left their imprint on the mind while the rest were a blur which is a disservice to some very intelligent portrayals. While compiling the segments if the organizers had loosely slotted them into categories like intimate self portrayals, general cultural snapshots, historical or current pieces etc internalizing them would have been much easier.

When moti roti says that they are "Pushing the boundaries of where work can be seen, audiences will encounter these films in conventional as well as unconventional settings: TV, digital arts and film festivals, art galleries, cinemas, public spaces and in-flight entertainment" their intention of opening a new space for cultural exchange becomes plausible. In India and Pakistan moti roti are also targeting the young

new audiences found within the burgeoning urban café culture, by screening the works within shopping malls, cafes and restaurants. In Pakistan a huge segment of the illiterate and semi literate population needs to be directed and educated. If our local artists concentrate on this medium to address issues of ethnic divides, regional bias,

cultural conflicts and people displacements within the country and play these videos in public places like airports, hospitals, railway stations etc the works can be accessed by the common man and the efficacy of the genre as a learning tool can be put to advantage.



Malik Adnan

Murtaza Mehreen



Juhi Komail Taimoor - 505



Komail Juhi Taimoor - 505



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Bani Abidi

NEW WAVE ART

Not many people are working on video here and video artist Bani Abidi's show was a good opportunity to interact with this new wave art. Abidi is a graduate of NCA and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. As an artist she has a background of painting and sculpture but her chosen medium of expression is video. She has shown at exhibitions and film festivals nationally and internationally for the past six years and her most recent participation was in the Fukuoka Asian art Triennale 2005 and Commonwealth Contemporary 2006, Melbourne.

The content of Abidi's show centered on challenging established perceptions in order to examine the truth behind the so called reality. Her thrust was specifically on the issue of editing history in school and college text books during Zia ul Haq's regime. She is particularly intrigued by the status accorded to Arab Gen Mohammed Bin Qasim in the official history of Pakistan and the subsequent marginalization of civilizations, culture and religions already in existence before the Arab conquest of Sindh. This widespread tampering and manipulation of text is carried out by regimes in power to serve their particular agendas and the artist observes,

"Currently caught in the throes of a violent Wahab-i-sation of local Islamic culture, Pakistanis yet again attempt to seek validation by aligning themselves with the Arab World, denying the rich and tolerant strain of Islam that has been the norm for centuries in the sub continent."

Using fictional photo and video narratives she has constructed three separate segments revolving around the mythological figure of Mohammed Bin Qasim. The first, a series of eight large photo prints titled, *The Ghost of Mohammed Bin Qasim*, refers to the identity crisis of Yusuf Masih a choir singer from Hyderabad. On conversion to Islam and change of name to Yusuf Khan he readily denounces his former life without being able to grasp fully the enormity of his decision. Dressed as an Arab warrior, and believing himself to be Muhammed Bin Qasim, he rides all over the city in search of a reality that does not exist. At odds with himself and those around him he regresses into an "urban eccentric."

The idea of false identity and its valorization is explored on a larger scale through the supposedly harmless practice of hero worship. Abidi critiques the "new genre of studio photography in Pakistan" where "Many parents would come to the studios to get their young sons photographed as Mohammed Bin Qasim." On display were photographs collected from two commercial studios to prove her point of view. She ascribes this blind devotion to the intentional emphasis on our Arab Muslim heritage.

Subtle dissemination of concepts through common media channels is another effective means of converting mindsets without the public being aware of it. In Abidi's third segment called, *This Video is a Re-enactment*, she plays a clip from a historical drama aired on June 19th, 1993 on a local TV channel in which Muhammed Bin Qasim and his companions are shown riding towards the sea to rescue Arab prisoners captured by Hindu pirates in the Arabian Sea. This heroic departure is shown in extreme slow motion during the broadcast even though it was not shot or edited in this manner at all. By highlighting this innocuous act she has tried to emphasize how innocently but deliberately facts can be twisted and opinions altered by hidden forces. Abidi "by presenting exaggerated scenarios of a nation which takes refuge in a selected glorious past," tries to nudge the viewers to shake of their complacency and question reality by thinking for themselves.

A current and pertinent issue is raised by Abidi in this exhibition but her approach is much too subtle. A harsher more vigorous thrust would not only have spotlighted the new genre to advantage but would have brought strength to her message. In a country still not familiar with video art its equation with film and television is inevitable. If video art aims to gain populist appeal it may have to compete with the other two mediums in order to distinguish itself from them and hold its own.

There is no local market for this genre.... Abidi speaks out.

"Video art is not very common in Pakistan primarily because a lot of art here is made to be sold but presently there is no local market for this genre. It sells internationally and hopefully foreign patronage will prompt collectors to start buying it here too. At the moment showing in a gallery is a challenge because it means renting projectors which cost Rs 4000 - 5000 per day and if the work does not sell than one ends up self financing the show or relying on sponsors for support. Abroad even in countries like India galleries have projectors because a lot of artists do videos. I have been doing video for six years but I have had to buy my own camera, computer and related materials

without any financial assistance. My work began selling internationally last year and now curators are interested in commissioning me --- that kind of support is a positive step forward. I teach video art at BNU in Lahore and by the time my students graduate next year this infrastructure would be far more tenable than when I started out here. Audiences digest readily from television but their expectations from the gallery are still traditional. They are comfortable buying paintings but cannot initiate a dialogue with video. As long as art remains focused on ownership, rather than on experiencing it, video is going to have a problem."

Bani Abdi - The ghost of Muhammed Bin Qasim



Newsline
April 2006

NEWSLINE



Kalif Ghaznavi - Scissors



Shazia Zuberi

Occasional exhibitions of contemporary ceramics here remind us that the genre is alive and kicking - but unfortunately still confined to the back burner. If studio pottery has to flourish as a significant art form then it is vital that our contemporary potters and ceramists make an extra effort to push the genre into the limelight to increase awareness, viewership and sales. Indeed a pioneering spirit is needed to ignite a studio pottery movement otherwise the genre will continue with its present sporadic existence

Unlike traditional clay art and pottery which dates back to Mehar Garh, Harrappa and Indus Valley civilization, studio ceramics is a nascent post independence genre with limited progress. A volatile political environment, absence of state support and lack of museum infrastructure impede its growth and low awareness levels and a non-existent market adds to

the woes of the few practitioners who try to brave the odds. Technical problems have retarded progress as well. Maintaining private studios with the right equipment is an expensive proposition. Constructing kilns and making wheels also requires a great deal of interaction with the technicians and there are no local ceramic centres that can provide use of these two essentials to visiting ceramicists. The non availability of suitable readymade materials is a constant drawback and clay bodies and glazes have to be self prepared from locally available materials which tax the creative process making production long and arduous. Often graduating students major in sculpture or mix media and indulge in ceramics as a minor discipline which is a disservice to a genre blessed with a rich legacy of native forms that have the potential of reinvention to address contemporary concerns.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

CLAY'S NEW VOICE

Exploring issues of personal and national identity and ways in which the clay traditions of the past can inform and inspire contemporary work is a means of locating important new directions for ceramic art in Pakistan. The Asna Clay Triennial is a platform where dialogue between tradition and modernity has been initiated with the express purpose of creating a new ceramic presence. Its third clay extravaganza, a two week art event, included an International Ceramics Exhibition with participation of 53 artists from Pakistan as well as 12 other countries, a two day seminar, workshops and a Kumhar Mela.

The, Tale of the Tile exposition at Mohatta Palace resurrecting the magnificent ceramic traditions of Pakistan reminded us of the past grandeur and excellence of the genre. Post independence art history tells us that subsequent interplay of traditions and twentieth century sensibilities needed to effect a transition of clay craft into fine art did not evolve meaningfully in the last fifty years as the ceramic genre

had lapsed into near dormancy. While NCA at Lahore boasted a ceramic faculty manned by pioneers like Mian Salhuddin and the husband wife duo of Talat and Dabir, enrollment was meager and production insignificant. The mega city of Karachi fared no better as it had no ceramic curriculum till recently and the medium languishing in the backwaters failed to create any ripples. Awareness levels however were jogged in the 1990's and Asna was one of the positive initiatives that emerged from the flurry of activity. Today the Asna Initiative is the new voice of clay. By questioning the tradition that ceramic forms must be utilitarian and by exhibiting instead non functional, sculptural works that give the medium a new freedom of expression it has opened the door to experiment and innovation as the way forward.

Inviting ceramists from other countries enables local artists to see foreign works in the flesh and exchange information and ideas with the guest artists. The impact of such exposures is far more

Riffat Alvi - Hunger Bowls



comprehensive than just referencing through films, slides, videos, books and magazines. Meaningful results can be obtained by absorbing new influences not through copying styles but through changing attitudes. Imitation is not the sincerest form of pottery. Real achievement will come when we liberate the minds of ceramic artists to be more ambitious, and to use tradition as a step ladder, not as a prison and shows like the current Triennial Exhibition are telling indicators of changing trends and mindsets

Boasting its fair share of the bold and the brazen young ceramists in the show critiqued social mores through provocative statements. Kaif Ghaznavi's large clay scissors clawing at embryonic vessel forms were harsh and disturbing. Equating women with the vessel image she spoke of severe gender suppression. Inflated egos and misconceptions bolstered by false media hype have destroyed the human sense of balance. Munawar Ali tried to capture this apparent displacement by fragmenting his clay figures. His series of segmented forms signified division, confusion and breakdown of the human psyche. Sadia Salim's cone shaped forms' also spoke of balance, the kind that is achieved with co existence and tolerance for others. An experiment in atmospheric wood firings her pointed, seemingly (un) balanced pieces emphasized the need for giving space to others to find their own bearings.

Raania Durrani's Kiln Gods, tiny mythical icons, were an interesting reflection on the crucial psychological bonding ceramists have with the kiln. Shazia Mirza's dark Raku figures, capturing the antics of her eight year old, were spontaneous and expressive. Among the few ceramic installations on display Riffat Alvi's Hunger Bowl series was a pot shot at the uneven divide between the haves and have nots. She evoked the sentiment of greed and inability to share by juxtaposing lavish ornamental table structures with empty, unglazed terracotta bowls amidst a wasteful scattering of grain.

In the foreign category participant Christine Michael's ceramic ware beckoned engagement. A graduate in Industrial Design she had indulged in a wild and creative assimilation of ideas and techniques. Using Pablo Neruda's 'Ode to Salt' as her point of reference she had interwoven the message of infinitude hidden in this 'crystal of the sea' with scanned images of her own previous sculptures and her technique of salt glazing. Excerpts of the salt song imprinted on the dinner plates amidst splashes of sea water and images of sea shells evoked Neruda's homage to this 'piquant powder sprinkling vital light upon our food.' The basketry weave meticulously interpreted in clay was the apparent source of fascination in the ceramic vessels of Rimantas Sahalaushas from Lithuania. For the sculptor however the

deliberate use of primitive expression was an assertion of the right to inner choices in an overwhelming complex global environment. Traditional motifs on our pottery platters were resourced very imaginatively by Irida Cano from Spain. Her elegant floret of ceramic tile petals encased in an iron base was stamped with Pakistani folk patterns which she had accessed during a workshop in Karachi.

When rooting for ceramics as an art form its utilitarian aspect should not be overlooked. Instituting academic courses in industrial ceramics can significantly augment the genres profile because triennials alone cannot revolutionize the present status of ceramics. Asna has honoured senior ceramists like Mian Salahuddin and Scherezade Alam but there are still others in the clay continuum with considerable contributions like Masood Kohari and Talat and Dabir.

The second segment of the Triennial a paper reading seminar and dialogue approached ceramics on multiple fronts. While speakers elaborated mainly on the personal and the technical other linkages of ceramics with archeology, environment and heritage architecture, traditional history and contemporary ceramics were also discussed.

Keynote speaker, Canada based potter Scherezade Alams narration, Aik Dafa Ka Zikr Hai (Once upon a time), deserves special mention on account of its impassioned, theatrical delivery. Her life is as intimately one with clay as the laali (red) inside her pots. Australian ceramists Gwyn Pigott's reticent discourse surprisingly was also very endearing as she delved into her mysterious fascination for simply shaped objects. Archeologist Dr Asma Ibrahims paper on pottery finds of Mehargarh Harappa and Moenjodaro was extremely informative. It was supported by visuals of old vessels and a fascinating array of primitive decoration which just needs to be taken out of history books and infused into contemporary aesthetics.

A Kumhar Bazaar of craft pottery was the last program of this event.

CONTEMPORARY MIXED MEDIA CERAMICS

Spunky, young curators low on funds but tall on ideas need to be heard, understood and if necessary supported. Determined to redefine the role of clay in contemporary art here ceramist / curator / educator Kaif Ghaznavi has floated the Clay Clan initiative. Liberating it from its traditional mould Clay Clan seeks to invest the genre with a new age sensibility of mixed media and interdisciplinary fusion. Emboldened by the positive response / feedback generated by the Clay Clan 1 in 2007 Ghaznavi, mustering a show on a skeleton budget, has now displayed Clay Clan 2. Adhering to the initiative's premise of engagement with other media also a group of eight clay artists came forward with installation and video art, assemblage and sculptural expressions.

Inspired by the antiquated clay tablet, one of the earliest means of disseminating information, ceramist Maliha Paracha, adjunct faculty NCA, had assembled a wall installation which played on the meaning of Separate or Separate? Composed of several small and not so small individual tablets the work centralized on the polarity surrounding 60 Years of Partition / Independence. Essentially a subject of personal inquiry based on extensive research Maliha shared her selected discoveries with the viewer. Her clay tablets were imprinted with chronicled evidence of the country's transition, photo transfers of pertinent newspaper clippings and historical images, currency notes,

postage stamps news magazine covers and other related memorabilia that, when read up close by the onlookers motivated them to recreate the historical scenario and draw their own conclusions. A mix of paper clay and stoneware the tablets were sturdy and unbreakable and the small composite group was selected from hundreds of pieces, the graphics were finely worked upon with graphite and the photo transfers were also very clear for such a medium.

A graduate of Bennington College USA, Shazieh Gorji's clay collection of sculptural ceramics had a distinct character of its own. Small in scale the pieces nonetheless asserted their presence on account of shape, technique and colouration. The artist had modulated the vessel and container forms to produce objects that hinted at human interaction. Playing with funnels and spouts, lean, craning, willowy necks, bulbous bottoms, stodgy undersides and pear shaped torsos resting on small feet, paws and appendages, she had created a series of objects in conversation with each other much like members of a family, together yet independent in character and appearance. Pock marks, textural manipulations, accidental markings created where the fire had let the glaze repel it, and a deliberate scraping of clay to produce raw faceted edges were technical modalities that gave the pieces an edge. A low key palette of cool creamy, ochre tinged whites and grey

Shahziah Gorji



Ghania Badr - Condolences



hues added to this feel. Most of her works were within the high fire range, mainly wood and soda; the process and results of such firings lent varied elements and layers to her work.

Visiting faculty NCA Islamabad Ghania Badr had created an installation consisting of a sand box and bowling alley pins. Broken, ruptured, half buried in sand or split asunder the bowling pins appeared cast aside as damaged material. Titled, Condolences, the installation was Badr's reaction to the brutal army operation against the people who had hidden in the Lal Masjid last year. The equation was astute. Innocents forcibly targeted almost like the bowling alley pins which are aimed at and hit hard from afar while they are just standing inside the alley enclosure. Technically the artist had worked in stoneware and deliberately used a very commercial glaze in the hope that it would develop faults in the kiln. Instead of physically amputating her pieces she had created surfaces with tension so that they would crack naturally.

As an experimental project Clay Clan has opened new vistas for ceramics which is still caught in the urban rural divide between the artisan and studio potter. Its contemporary perspective has freed the genre from the baggage of tradition but the new idiom has yet to find its feet.



Ghania Badr



Maliha Piracha
Dont Rob The Nation



Shahzleh Gorji



Maliha Piracha
Separate or Separate

DIALOGUES IN CLAY

Dialogues in Clay by newcomers Fraz Abdul Mateen and Aliya Yousaf affirms young artist interest in the medium as an experimental art form but, unlike the growth amplification and expanding international reach, of the contemporary miniature or new media arts, ceramics still has few loyalists ready to pursue it intensively and extensively.

The two artist initiative Dialogues in Clay centred on non functional, sculptural ceramics invited engagement on account of the expressive qualities of the pieces. In contemporary ceramics, not only are shape, glaze, color and texture in line with the artist's personal aesthetic concepts in terms of the pure expression of form, but the artist's conceptual expression has also become more and more individual and tailored. Drawing inspiration from shapes and forms found in the vegetal world of nature Aliya Yousuf a 2003 graduate of Indus Valley School of Art, tried to imbue her works with sensual, emotive content. Her sculptures revealed a pleasing convolution of organic form and surface through the manipulation, distortion, and combination of disparate yet related natural elements. There was much play with the sunflower motif, the mushroom image, the pod container, furred and serrated edges and huge villi like fringes. Illustrating nature through the

imagery of botanical and cellular biology in this way, the work becomes strangely and unnervingly familiar.

According to the creative philosophy of contemporary ceramics centered on individualism and the principle of freedom in the need to constantly express and recreate the self the central construct is the individual. Fraz Mateens repetitive use of the human face each adorning a different expression reiterates this existence of the human being as a singular entity. A series of portraits almost similar in size and shape but distinguished from each other by personality traits is a celebration of individuality. The repertoire limited in content was made interesting by varying technical ploys.

By creating pieces with conceptual underpinnings the two artists managed to shift the work away from the usual understanding of ceramics as just a décor object or utility piece. A show of their personal expertise in handling the technical aspects of crafting in clay was also noticeable and evocative use of colour, shapes and textural treatment carried impact. However, in defining these works it is important to realize that they conform to the novelties of the western construct and kowtow the trends in evidence globally. An abundance of attractive imagery and technical information easily accessible on the websites and foreign magazines has diverted artist attention away from experimentation with indigenous forms. They now prefer to emulate what is universally understood and acceptable rather than labour over the creation and introduction of an original vocabulary relevant to the environment they belong to.

Faraz Mateen



Aliya Yousaf



Newsline August 2009

Salman Ikram

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS

Salman Ikram

Having last exhibited in the year 2000 young ceramist Salman Ikram has now returned with a fresh collection. Small scaled delicate forms, keen attention to detail and finish with particular reference to glazes were some noticeable features of his earlier work. His current solo is in many ways an affirmation of this specific approach. By and large the new body of work, still small in size, consisted of non functional display pieces with focus mainly on shape of form and accent on glazing and chromatic distinctness. However, the presence of calligraphy panels, tiles, and wall hangings signaled a move in another direction.

Salman Ikram is among the new generation ceramists of Pakistan who are translating its venerable traditions into a contemporary language. While western aesthetics exert an influence on his expression the Islamic and the sub continental ethos is also very much there. He innovates by modifying the vessel form. Playing with its size, rim, neck or belly he introduces subtle or obvious variations characterized by a very sensitive sense of balance. He admits to "throwing my shapes on narrow feet" which adds to the dramatic liberties he takes with other parts of the object. In his, Flying Series, the compressed belly of the sphere is stretched laterally to an elegant roundness much like a UFO spaceship. Capped with a short neck and undulating rim the spheroid fans out like the flowing robe of a dancing dervish. He has cleverly managed to emit the feel of the whirling movement by keeping its resting base or feet hidden from view.

As a studio potter Salman Ikram works towards a geometric as well as an aesthetic balance but he is not always successful in integrating the two. Quite often his pieces, finely worked and stylishly rounded, sport an idiosyncratic eeriness. A wide rimmed, long necked piece maybe balanced on a small bulbous base while a short and stout, wide bellied form maybe supporting a small thin neck without proper recourse to an optical equilibrium. However, he makes creative use of flared rims, spiraling edges and undulating contours to impart flowing, often lyrical rhythms to his otherwise static objects.

Porcelain, stoneware and earthenware are categories of clays. Glazes are liquids often applied to their surfaces to seal colour and smoothen them. Firing is the process of heating the clays and glazes to harden them and make them more functional and longer lasting. As a ceramist Salman Ikram has an indepth working knowledge of glazing techniques. When it comes to finishing his pieces he is partial to satiny glows and glossy, finely flecked sheens but at the same time handles crusty, ruptured surfaces, volcanic textures and matte finishes with equal ease. Using both reduction and oxidation processes for desired effects he opts for the greater flexibility of gas firing.



In his calligraphic wall hangings he has written the Arabic script by hand in simple flowing text on rough abrasive textured surfaces. For a ceramist with an imaginative approach he has not brought much by way of innovation to these works.

Viewed collectively Salmans current ceramic exhibition was marred by low impact even though individually the works scored on points like conceptual and technical expertise.

Dawn Gallery December 2005 January 2006

NEWSLINE

Salman Ikram



Salman Ikram



Salman Ikram

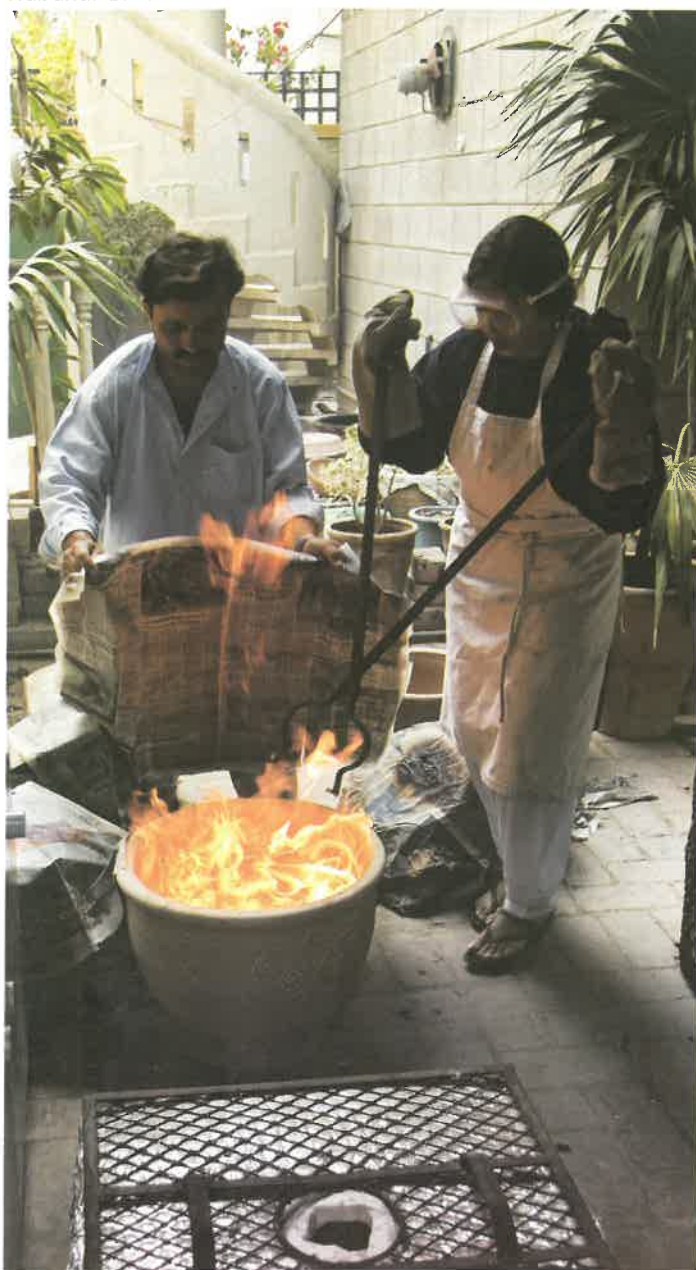


Salman Ikram

Nabahat Lotia

KILN CREATIONS

Nabahat Lotia



Creative claycraft exponent Nabahat Lotia's, *Kala Jadu*, exhibition was not just the first ever solo showing of Rakuware by a resident ceramist but also a mark of progression in a studio potters career. Nabahat is among the handful of practicing contemporary potters who continue to experiment and evolve gradually rather than indulge in occasional bursts of creativity only. Likewise she did not jumpstart into abstract configurations rather began by imbibing traditional techniques of the local kumhars before moving towards a modern idiom.

Nabahat Lotia's, *Kala Jadu*, is less about exploration of forms and more about technical manipulations. She has hand moulded platters, bowls and wall plaques through the slab method but it is the Japanese Raku technique of firing her wares that has brought novelty to the collection. *Rakuyaki* or Raku is a form of Japanese pottery invented expressly for the Japanese Tea Ceremony in 6th century Kyoto and it is characterized by low firing temperatures, lead glazes, and the removal of pieces from the kiln while still glowing hot. The kiln is heated to a low temperature, and then the ware is pulled out of the kiln while still hot (using tongs) and smothered in ashes, paper, or woodchips. This can be done in an enclosed container, which allows the supply of oxygen to be cut off and reduction to take place. The finished products of this process are not suitable for functional use, as the clay remains porous and may have some toxic chemicals held within it as a result of burning the surrounding woodchips or paper used to smother it. However, because of the low temperature, it is an extremely quick and easy technique to do, and the clay has a distinctive black colour. In Nabahat's collection the dark bases had a dazzling metallic glow in gold, bronze, burgundy, turquoise and vermilion that attracted buyers and prompted many a viewer to finger the pieces. Her decorative table pieces were also innovatively textured with pit marks, slashes and scratches that left the makers stamp on them.

9 ARTCRAFT

Unlike developed nations where large scale mechanization / industrialization has virtually ruined the efficacy of craft, the genre still enjoys a fruitful existence here but largely for its basic utilitarian value. Qualitatively the present standard of craft is a far cry from the level of inventiveness, excellence and expertise it enjoyed many centuries ago. Disruption and decline set in the craft ethos in the subcontinent when colonial intervention ushered in the culture of modernity. Today in the aesthetic environment here craft and art stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Fine art widely taught through an academic curriculum modeled on the western construct, distinguishes itself as a creative activity. Craft derided for being primitive and tradition bound is artisan centered and merely an expression of technique handed down from father to son.

Scholarship on the existing polarity between art and craft weaves through the complex terrain of cultural and religious beliefs of different nations as well as the developing concept of art philosophy worldwide. The debate around whether craft is art, design, both or neither is not a new one. But the present climate is raising new issues for contemporary craft. With changes occurring in the craft landscape, including the dwindling number of master artisans, drastic decline in working skills and closures of prominent craft organizations/ karkhanas, and the simultaneous boom in art and design sales, practitioners, gallery owners and the designer community alike are considering crafts place in the wider cultural marketplace once more. Artists are considering art / craft mergers in their search for the new and the indigenous in their quest to locate idioms relevant to their cultural roots.

Noorjehan Bilgrami



Noorjehan Bilgrami

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Is the growing appetite for originality and authenticity stifling the success of contemporary craft or in fact creating new opportunities and energy for art or craft or both? In this fusion how is crafts functional aspect balancing with arts abstract nature? These are issues that will resolve as and how the artist and artisan community work together to evolve a new equation. Attempts to engage with craft to produce contemporary art forms is a direction that needs to be explored with serious intent and purpose if we want to develop and strengthen indigenous art expression and revitalize craft arts. Current efforts are rudimentary but should be supported for the potential inherent in them.

CHITARKARI COLLABORATION OF A DIFFERENT KIND

Seldom (if at all) are craft art mergers the subject of formal gallery shows. The few that have managed to materialize are so art and artist dominated that scant thought is given to the craftspeople and the contribution of his craft expertise.

Simply called Chitarkari, an exhibition of work by Ustad Muhammed Ilyas – Chitarkar and Noorjehan Bilgrami, an artist and artisan collaboration, is the journey of schist from traditional tombstones to abstract sculpture.

Schist, also called slate, is quarried in the Gangar Mountain ranges in the vicinity of Haripur, Tarela and Taxila regions and is used exclusively for the production of ornamental tombstones defining the identity of the deceased, much like their Chawkandi tomb counterparts in Sindh. Some of the oldest tombstones being anywhere between six to ten feet tall, the decorative vocabulary calls for a considerable amount of chiseled embellishment but unfortunately slate engraving like much specialized local traditions is a dying craft. Artisan Muhammed Ilyas of village Bhel, having inherited the skills from his father, has mastered the craft to a considerable degree of perfection and has even passed the tradition onto his two sons. But it was Noorjehan Bilgrami's pattern sketches, blue prints and vital on location dialogue with the artisan families, convincing them to think beyond conventional methods, that enabled the Chitarkari collection to evolve.

As an artist, textile designer and researcher Bilgrami's passion for traditional crafts led to the establishment of Koel, a workshop/ gallery that pioneered the revival of hand block printed fabrics in Pakistan. Years of research into ajrak, a traditional Sindhi textile, led to publication

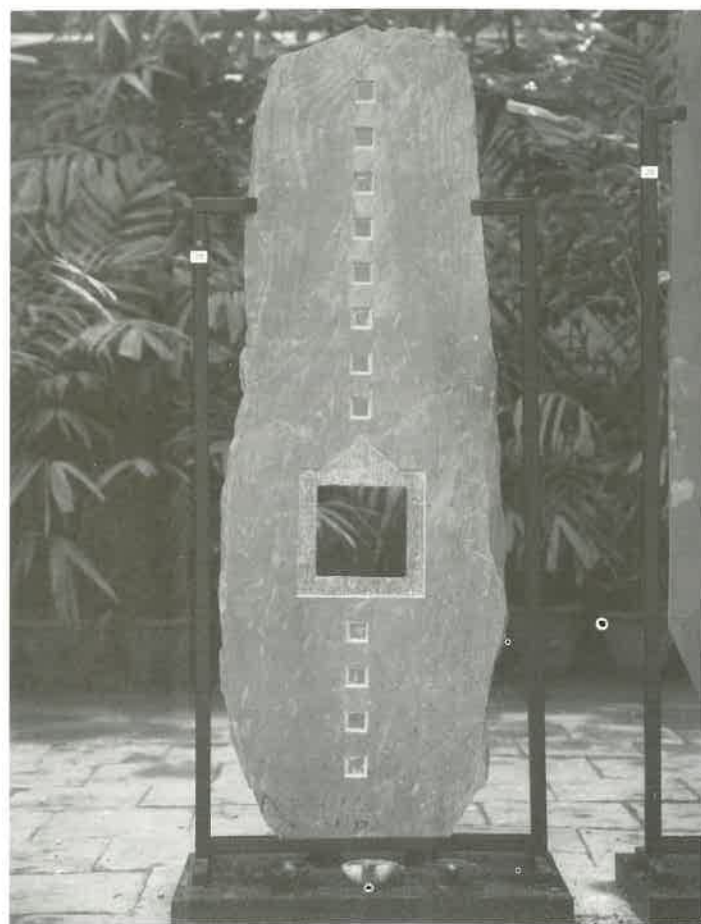
of the book, *Sindh jo Ajrak* and later to the making of the documentary video, *Sun, Fire, River, Ajrak- Cloth from the Soil of Sindh*. Today with several years of experience in dealing with village craftspeople behind her she handles the craftspeople and artist interaction with considerable understanding. Moreover her deep interest and working knowledge of traditional pattern and design vocabulary as a fabric designer and block printer as well as her status

Noorjehan Bilgrami



as a fine artist / painter enables her to bridge the divide between the two genres with relative ease. It is this art craft symbiosis that has to be communicated effectively to the unlettered craftsman if he is to rise to the challenge of collaborating with artists on an equal footing.

As a sculpture exhibition Chitarkari was a slow move from craft towards art. It was on Bilgrami's persuasion that the schist slabs were utilized in their original uncut state vis a vis the arched or rectangular cut, set and polished head stones the artisans were used to working on. Schist is a rock whose minerals have aligned themselves in one direction in response to deformation stresses, with the result that the



rock can be split in parallel layers. Relatively thin but extremely weighty, tall tablets of raw slate stone mounted on iron frames / pedestals, much like marble slabs, formed the basic body of the sculptures. It was also on Bilgrami's behest that the stone's natural patina and lacerated abrasive streaked or smooth surfaces in slate grey tonalities, occasionally slashed with ochre, were retained. The adornment of the stone with traditional pattern however was an area where the artisan held sway. Bilgrami's requests to conceive and compose individual pieces by rearranging motifs, distributing space and opting for a minimal look fell on deaf ears. Intent on showing their working skills the master artisan put emphasis on intricacy and profusion of pattern. The end result was an uneven mix of some very heavily worked pieces, along with a few where rudiments of change - a forced restraint in patterning, was apparent. It was only in the end piece where Bilgrami was finally able to have her say entirely. She had a grid arrangement chiseled by the artisans exactly according to her requirements.

This partnership was a give and take exercise where each protagonist tried to understand how to adjust their limitations and qualities with the other in order to create a unique piece. The resultant exhibition was interesting on several accounts. It introduced urban audiences to an exclusive craft tradition; it spotlighted schist as a sculptural medium, as a collaborative venture it showed artist and artisan working together as equals and defying the high art and low craft divide it attempted a fusion of the two. However art is a work that transcends its humble materials to create an original statement or expression in a meaningful and enduring way. Crafts will need to transcend their humble materials as well to become art but it will require experienced and determined (and moderately, contemporary art literate) craft persons to do this.

Here it is worth ruminating over the idea of 'artist craftsman' floated by William Morris in the 18th century. In this model the craftsman looks to the artworld for a stylistic or conceptual framework. Morris was a committed Socialist whose aim was that, as in the Middle Ages, art should be for the people and by the people, a view expressed in several of his writings. For him art was the very highest of realities, the spontaneous expression of the pleasure of life innate in the whole people. A notable advance on his theory was made by the Bauhaus, the famed school of architecture and applied art in Germany, where Walter Gropius and his colleagues applied Morris's principles to the machine and scientific technology.

Dawn Gallery 20 September 2009

DAWN
GALLERY

Wajid Ali / Nusrat Iqbal and Assistants

W 11: KARACHI 2 MELBOURNE

Home grown potpourri of folk and primitive art was spotlighted to advantage when Pakistan participated in the cultural festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games with a vibrant presentation and performance of art on wheels, from Karachi. The very popular W 11, running from New Karachi to Kemari, is one of Karachi's most elaborately ornate buses. When its entire decorative trappings were transferred onto the body of a tram plying the City Circle route of Melbourne's transit system a dazzling cultural cross over came into effect. Ablaze with a riot of colours and wild imagery common to Pakistani truck / bus art the Australian tram became not just an exact replication of W11 but also an attractive cultural novelty in a formal, orderly English speaking environment. A collection of photographs and video films documenting the joyous rides and inaugural tram event were the subject of an exhibition W 11: Karachi to Melbourne.

The videos screened at the exhibition consisted of W-11 Karachi to Melbourne a 45 minute documentary film by Wajid Ali, Piyar Zindagi Hai - a 12 minute video compiled by Mick Douglas from digital camera footage taken by hosts and passengers and Liminal Tram a video composition made from mobile cameras with a 30 second loop by Marsha Berry. A selection of 40 photographs highlighting the decorative artmaking and crafting of the W11 exterior and interior, complemented the videos. Wajid Ali a graduate of Karachi University Visual Arts Dept having already concluded a residency in Australia was pivotal in the project as production coordinator, photographer and videographer while the project itself was co-ordinated by Mick Douglas from Australia and Durriya Kazi Incharge Visual Arts Dept Karachi University.

Anyone who has travelled to Asia will be familiar with the way people like to decorate their vehicles. But in Pakistan, it is elevated to an art form. The trucks, many of them old Bedford Rockets, provide a moving canvas for the artists, who compete to see who can execute the most daring and outrageous designs. Buses too enjoy the same lavish outpouring of primitive aesthetic pattern, colour and form. Narrowing his search to excellence in workmanship Wajid Ali selected, from amongst the large number of vehicle decorators established in Karachi, Nusrat Iqbal and his assistants Arshad, Nadeem and Safdar Ali to craft two W11 casings that were co joined to adjust to the measurements of the large Melbourne tram exterior. The entire body was prepared in separate panels in Karachi and later assembled in Melbourne by Nusrat and his team who were invited expressly for this purpose to the Australian city.

Truck / Bus decoration evolved here in the decade of the 70's when ownership moved away from the elite to the working class. While this

art form traces its immediate origins to the decorative horse drawn carriages made for the gentry during the Raj its basic expressiveness stems from the rural craft / art ethos of embellishing objects with garish rudimentary designs to brighten up a drab rustic existence or as a reflection of their inner exuberance. Noteworthy here is the progression in this art form with the relocation of these craft artists to urban city centres. While the thrust is still on crude primal art the influence of producing work in urban centres has brought noticeable change in use of materials, concepts and imagery. Through the years the materials used have developed from wood and paint to metal, tinsel, plastic and reflective tape in fluorescent and radium colours and the very fancy incorporation of full lighting displays. While trucks are mainly decorated with painted images on wood panels the steel bodies of buses respond very well to the sticky plastic "chamak patti" medium. The highly ornamental pictorial imagery on W11 appears to be a very slick paint job but is in reality a very skilled manifestation of chamak patti art.

The self adhesive, multi coloured, reflective plastic tape or 'chamak patti', available in large rolls is the primary art material with which this bus is decorated. Line drawings of patterns are stenciled onto the vinyl material and cut as per design requirement and pasted onto the bus exterior. This expertise extends to an amazing variety of floral, geometric, all over, corner as well as border patterns, idyllic landscapes, attractive female faces, exotic birds, fish, tigers and lions and also weaponry, rockets and landmark heritage sites. The W11 implanted in Melbourne also had its fair share of stylized imagery. Particularly noticeable were the relatively new art images invented especially for this occasion by artisan artist Nusrat Iqbal and his team. These included stylized and ornate mythical bird creatures resembling peacocks, idealized female portraits as well as flashes of modern 'disco art' all drawn, stenciled, cut and pasted onto the body of the bus. The cut and paste technique peculiar to 'chamak patti' is an acquired skill entailing years of laborious training. Nusrat Iqbal discloses that during his initial training in Lahore, under an 'ustad' he spent a whole year just perfecting the art of cutting straight 'Pattis' from the plastic material before progressing to circular forms and the equally complex art of pasting the cutouts.

Truck art is denigrated to a lower form of craft art expression here mainly because the workers are unlettered artisans with next to no concept of formal art academics. However they are proficient in the technical application of this art which indicates that it is not dearth of artistic talent but lack of requisite education which prevents an artisan from becoming an artist.

For twelve days the W11 tram in Melbourne, carrying the same title as its Pakistani counterpart here, "Piyaar Zindagi Hai," circled the city almost 120 times carrying as many as 80,000 passengers in the process. Video shots of the bus interior showed an enthusiastic cosmopolitan crowd rollicking to the Bhangra beat and raunchy Punjabi songs by Noorjehan while conductors handed out specially printed Tram tickets as souvenirs. To recreate the complete W11 experience conductors along with the Melbourne City bus stops also called out the names of the Karachi W11 route stops. It was the gay, festive appearance created by this artform on the Australian Tram and an atmosphere of jubilation and camaraderie generated by the mix blend of Asian and Australian passengers and attendant staff that defined the Pakistani sentiment of good will and friendship. The tram proved to be the most vibrant emissary we have had to date.

While it did not introduce our more classical finer arts it did project the colourful, populist face of Pakistani craft /art which alone was enough to counter the bogey of 'terrorism' associated with the image of Pakistan. By showing a lighter side of the national psyche it opened the doors for other exhibitions of indigenous art.

Social Pages 2006

Social
Pages



Assistants at work



Asif Shariff

REINVENTING THE FRESCO

If the Mughal miniature can stage a comeback and be remodeled to address current art concerns surely the possibilities of reinvention with other traditional media are worth exploring.

The most striking feature of the exhibition, *Finding Ways*, by Asif Shariff was its rooted-ness in the fresco technique. As contemporary constructions of a vanishing art form his paintings gain relevance and deeper meaning when seen in their historical context. Greco-Roman fresco work in Pompeii and Michaelangelo's breathtaking handiwork in the Sistine Chapel ceiling maybe fresco arts most easily recalled references but Asif Shariff's fresco resource stems from the genre's indigenous roots.

Among the important ancient frescoes that have been found outside Europe are those in the cave temples of Ajanta and a group of Buddhist decorations in Kansu province in China as well as Tibetan temple decorations. They were also found in the Ummayyad and Abbasid palaces in Spain, Iran and in the harem quarters of the Mughal palaces. While fresco art in most of these locales pertained to figurative expression on a monumental scale it was the Islamic arabesque and geometric patterns decorating heritage sites like palaces, mosques and mausoleums in Pakistan which was the artists main source of inspiration. The Badshahi and Wazir Khan mosque, Shish Mahal and Lahore Fort, Shahlimar Gardens, Empereor Jehangirs tomb etc are just some of the many architectural sites adorned with exquisite fresco tiles and wall patterns.

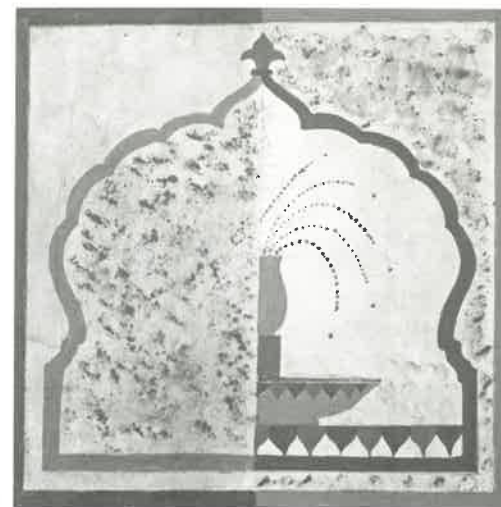
When Asif Shariff graduated from the NCA his major was sculpture but his art practice changed radically when he enrolled in the Institutions MA programme. The MA (Hon) visual arts programme at NCA, established in 2000 is groundbreaking in several aspects. It not only emphasizes the development of intellectual growth and critical discourse, but also the examination of continuous links not only between art theory and art practice but also between the historical and the contemporary. The programme encourages students to interact with the wider environment of the city and specifically to forge links with traditional practitioners and artists who may fall outside of institutionalised art practice. This encourages the reclamation and validation of the rich cultural heritage of this region and its contribution to art practice the world over.

Since the fresco technique involves important differences from conventional easel painting at every step of the procedure, it is best learned by firsthand apprenticeship to an experienced fresco painter. Aware of the fact that traditional fresco 'Naqashi' and 'Kamangari' would require a different kind of discipline Asif Shariff became a

disciple of the acclaimed artisan Ustad Saif ur Rehman who himself was an apprentice of the renowned British era artisan Ustad Ghulam Mohiuddin. In 1986 Ustad Saif was awarded the President's Pride of Performance award, and twice the Lok Virsa Award.

In order to gain a broad based understanding of the medium Asif Shariff proceeded to research and document fresco painting and to acquire knowledge and practical experience by examining traditional forms and contemporary innovations in the craft. He gained hands on skills while working with Ustad Saif on various sights such as the Lahore Fort and the Shahkot village mosque, where he repaired frescos in the mosque, damaged by water logging and salinity. In 2004 he availed a visiting fellowship programme under the Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust. Presently he is a faculty member of MA visual arts programme at NCA and is coordinator for their diploma course in fresco painting.

Fresco is a method of wall-painting in which pure powdered pigments, mixed only in water, are applied to a wet, freshly laid lime-plaster ground. The colours penetrate into the surface and become an integral part of the wall. This technique is also called buon fresco (true fresco) to distinguish it from painting on dry plaster, which is called fresco secco. Also, one can work in true fresco only as long as the plaster remains wet; therefore corrections and second thoughts are somewhat more troublesome to execute in this medium than in others and it is often this challenge that deters the fainthearted from adopting this technique.



Asif Shariff
New Image

The exhibition Finding ways came across as a fusion of easel painting and buon fresco. Plaster tiles painted in the fresco mannerism were mounted on frames and hung as paintings. This physical shift was complemented by a conceptual rearrangement also. In order to modernize his content and accord it a personal approach the artist had attempted several socio political compositions in a vocabulary of traditional symbols and decorative imagery specifically inverted to address current concerns. A quartet titled "Assassination" deserves

Asif Shariff - Installation



special mention. It is a horizontal wall hanging composed of four tiles, three in glaring red, individually record the time, day and year of Benazir Bhutto's assassination in Arabic numerals. The fourth black panel carrying the first initial of her name and a glowing candle in a starry firmament pays homage to the departed soul. An inset on another dark panel with a preliminary imprint of a prominent government figure alludes to his diminishing political stature. Likewise floor installations composed of coloured tiles also attracted attention because they had political inferences. Other attempts at fusing the old and the new however were still rudimentary giving credence to the fact that the artist while having initiated a breakthrough is still Finding Ways, to carry his work forward meaningfully.

Newsline May 2008

NEWSLINE

Asif Shariff - Conversation



Amin Gulgee Sheharbano Hussain

The growth of new generation art in Pakistan is a 'happening scene' which, if sensibly directed, can create new linkages with international art and give greater breadth to our limited art horizon. The urge and the talent to experiment with new media is there and it has identified installation, video, performance and assemblage as our emerging new arts, but presently this scramble is restricted to individual efforts of a few enterprising artists only. Unfortunately the infrastructure of curators, art dealers and evaluators, large alternate exhibition spaces with requisite technical equipment, discerning viewership and healthy collector interest has yet to evolve. There are also no clearly defined policies regarding government subsidies and facilities for international showings and interactive exchanges with neighbouring countries. In the absence of such supportive backups flowering of young art will remain erratic and incomplete prompting young talent to avail opportunities beyond home ground.

ARTISTS VOICES: BODY AND CALLIGRAPHY

A year in the making Artists Voices: Calligraphy and Body was co-curated by Amin Gulgee and Sheharbano Hussain. The project became a collaborative venture when both realized that other than Amins passion for Calligraphy and Hussains interest in the Body both shared common concerns regarding the present lack of aesthetic development in the two genres. Amin pointed out that, "most thinking artists do not engage with Calligraphy," and added, "miniatures are successful because the west is applauding them – calligraphy not as yet – are we waiting for the west to okay our own traditions. Can't we appropriate it ourselves?" Emphasizing the need to innovate he stressed on a serious dialogue with the genre that will also attract local viewership and generate essential feedback here, rather than cater to a western audience only as a sensational item. Hussain too observed that "the Body is commonly seen just as a nude or a titillating object. The wider aspects like the metaphysical or inner body should also be considered."

During Zia ul Haqs era Calligraphy was touted as the medium of the moment and the Body was put down as a taboo subject. In this exhibition participants had to produce work for both shows. The curators were keen to see what the artists working on Calligraphy would do with the body and vice versa. When inviting artists the

curators said they "went beyond art camps" and disclosed that "the younger artists were not so problematic, but the ones in the 50's and 60's were difficult to convince because it was outside their comfort zone." Today when the work is finally up on the walls for showing Amin enthuses "we managed to break through a mindblock. The artists have been so 'cool', they came through on time with the work and I am so humbled by the amount of belief they had in me."

The two artists did not just curate the show they confessed "we did everything ourselves from pursuing the artists to having the cards printed and mailed to laying out the catalogue and editing it too – it was exhausting and at the end of the day we had a lot of bills and no sponsorship --- until OUP agreed to fund our catalogue—other than that it was self help all the way

Seen in unison this exhibition can shed new analysis on the tradition of drawing in our art milieu. Examining the importance of drawing as a contemporary art form and the dynamic ways in which artists are pushing the medium into new, creative territory the show encourages viewers to redefine their notion of drawing, its aesthetic range, visual power and expressive potential. Along with examples of innovative approaches to the medium, the selection included works by artists who exploit, in extraordinary ways, traditional aspects of drawing.



Amin Gulgee



Sheharbano Hussain

Dawn Gallery April 08.2008



Abdullah Syed Roohi Ahmed

6 / 6 - THE LABYRINTH



Roohi Ahmed



Abdullah Syed

An exhibition centralizing on six selected artists' individual relationship with the city of Karachi, 6 / 6 - The Labyrinth was organized by artists / curators Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed.

If artmaking trends here have to keep pace with global developments in art then exhibitions of this nature have to be encouraged. They present art in its wider context where ideas take precedence over artmaking. In this shift from the manual to the cerebral audience awareness levels have to be nurtured otherwise such projects will be an exercise in futility. The infrastructure of intelligent curators, arts friendly, heavyweight sponsors and keen government interest provides the essential framework in which such performances can be mounted. Unfortunately we have a dearth of all three.

The emergence of artist Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed as curators is a healthy addition to the meager list of such managers that we presently have. They have made an honest effort to establish their credentials and virtually self financed the project. Thematically they have capitalized on a live issue /subject and have tried to coax the best out of their team of artists.

The exhibition is elaborate but well co ordinated. The works stand as individual segments as well as a collective without jarring the viewing experience

Karachi Kiya.

An adjunct to 6/6 the Labrynth was an installation constructed out of a collaborative community project called Karachi Kiya. This exercise gave wider breadth to the theme of the exhibition as it solicited public participation.

What is Karachi and what it means to me?

This question was posed by the curators to the public in various localities of Karachi. They were asked to record their impressions on small yellow Post-its. What they received in return was a plethora of thumbnail sketches, doodles, scribbles and notes of a remarkably varied order. A visual ventilation of thoughts that ranged from grudging patriotism to absolute disgust at the breakdown of civic amenities, abuse of official power, high rise menace, lack of civic consciousness amongst the people as well as the (dwindling) joys of 'home sweet home' kind sentiments. The scathing, humorous, biting nature of these responses is a very interesting index of public opinion related to Karachi, and the curators' intention of soliciting sponsorship and compiling them into a book format is a good idea. Presently the Post-It notes are pasted on plexiglass panels that represent 18 administrative towns of Karachi.

Adeela Suleman

CONTEMPORARY DRAWING PRACTICE

Another collaborative effort of young curators Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed Lets Draw the Line nudges viewers to explore the validity of the discipline through a wide trajectory of over seventy five drawings by as many as twenty two prominent artists of Pakistan. As organizers they tried to highlight the importance of drawing as a contemporary art form and the dynamic ways in which artists are pushing the medium into new, creative territory. Along with examples of innovative approaches to the medium, their selection included works by artists who exploit, in extraordinary ways, traditional aspects of drawing. The exercise was meant to encourage viewers to redefine their notion of drawing, its aesthetic range, visual power and expressive potential.

Dawn Gallery March 08.2008



Adeela Suleman



256 SHADES MEDIA ART SHOW

Groundbreaking in many respects "256 Shades" has brought video out in the open but the nascent genre has its share of teething problems. This show identified Adeela Suleman as a curator capable of mounting an event of this scale, she and her consultant Sohail Zuberi term this a "modest effort," as a number of concerns need to be addressed before video becomes a viable option for individual artists here. Video making is encouraged but is still not a full fledged academic subject in all the art schools as yet. Video equipment is costlier than regular art materials and video making and showing require extensive use of specialized cameras, projectors, computers, monitors, printers, scanners, DVD's and televisions of various sizes. For this show Vasl had to request LG to provide the large flat screen televisions, multi media projectors and sound systems. This opens a new chapter of business sponsorships that needs to develop to facilitate the arts. Screening shows of video films requires suitable viewing space too and presently VM is the only gallery providing this facility. Display, presentation, control and amplification of sound also require technical expertise of which there is a dearth here. Last but not least in a city where power outages are the norm such shows can only run in spaces with adequate power backups. And then there are no easy answers to the question of audience appreciation of video as an art form here as yet either.

Newsline September 2006

NEWSLINE

SOHNIDHARTI

Marking Independence Day celebrations, Shanaakht, a multimedia festival organized by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) was spread over several programs centralizing on the genres of audio, visual and performing arts. The art exhibition in the festival titled Sohni Dharti was arranged in collaboration with Vasl, an International Artists Collective largely responsible for the currency of new and mix - media expression here. Adeela Suleman, of Vasl took the initiative of inviting art works from artists who have worked on themes concerning Pakistan. Many works have also been part of reputable shows and were presented together under one roof at the event.

Adeela Suleman, responsible for the arrangement and display of the art in the Gulrang premises of the Karachi Arts Council disclosed, that the art was rigorously selected from a cross section of artists openly embracing all media. Interactive pieces were solicited due to the public nature of the event alongside painting, sculpture and video, allowing maximum exposure of art at this well attended public event..

Dawn Gallery 2007



Sumaira Tazeen

ASSOCIATED METAPHORS



Sumaira Tazeen

A fair sampling of young generation mindset, a contemporary miniature exhibition, Associated Metaphors was miniature artist and Indus Valley School of Art faculty member, Sumaira Tazeen's first curatorial venture. She had brought together five independent miniature artists who were directly or indirectly creating work related to gender issues. As an exhibition, Associated Metaphors was built on the premise of gender interactions, reflections, concerns and observations. Artists Aisha Rahim, Hadia Moiz, Mehreen Zuberi, Naveid Iqbal and Shoaib Mahmood had created artworks relevant to their personal understanding of this broad based theme.

Sumbal Khan

A FRESH AGENDA

In charge Poppy Seed Sumbal Khan is presently the only art gallery curator in Karachi whose qualifications include a Master's degree in Art History - Islamic (2003 — 2005, Tufts University) and allied experience as visual archives assistant, visiting lecturer, cataloguer, curatorial assistant and dissertation tutor at institutions in USA and Pakistan. Emphasizing curatorial activity, Poppy Seed art gallery's primary concern is to research, organize and present exhibitions and art related programs of contemporary Pakistani art that are relevant, innovative, and scholarly. Challenging our notions of conventional gallery practice Khan through her curatorial perspective, organizational skills, background in art history and critical writing has set out to build a thought-provoking program of thematic exhibitions. Other than the traditional modes of expression and art and literature readings, encouraging experimentation in multi-media /installation/ interactive projects that challenge the Gallery's audience and encourage reflection on cultural issues, are also on the agenda.



Sumbal Khan

In today's technology inflated world education in the arts trails far behind education in engineering sciences and does not compare favourably with management and medical sciences either. In our milieu an artist is still not accorded his rightful place in society and there are limited job opportunities for the utilization of his capacities. This can only be remedied if there is a rightful understanding of the range and use of acquiring aesthetic education.

Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, Martha Nussbaum has examined this subject at length in her essay *Teaching Humanity* in a leading international journal. Her premise is that in our globalized world an arts education is more crucial than ever as a way to cultivate sympathy for others. She contends,

"We live in a world that is dominated by the profit motive which suggests to concerned citizens that education in science and technology is crucially important to the future success of their nations. I have no objection to good scientific and technical education, and I don't wish to suggest that nations should stop trying to improve it. But I worry that other abilities, equally crucial, are at risk of getting lost in the competitive flurry. The abilities associated with the humanities and the arts are also vital, both to the health of individual nations and to the creation of a decent world culture. These include the ability to think critically, to transcend local loyalties and to approach international problems as a "citizen of the world." And, perhaps most important, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person."

In her opinion one of the best ways to cultivate sympathy is through instruction in literature, music, theatre, fine arts and dance. By way of example she reverts to ancient Greece noting that, "The cultivation of sympathy was a central public task of ancient Athenian tragedy, and thus a key element in ancient Greek democracy." She advocates the development of imagination through

which we can have insight into the experience of another group or person that is difficult to attain in daily life particularly when our world has constructed suspicions and divisions that make any encounter difficult. To cultivate our students' "inner eyes" she recommends carefully crafted instruction in the arts and humanities, which will bring students into contact with issues of gender, race, ethnicity and cross-cultural experience. In her concluding remarks she says,

"Democracies have great rational and imaginative powers. Yet they also are prone to irrationality, parochialism, haste, sloppiness and selfishness. Education based mainly on profitability in the global market magnifies these deficiencies to the point that they threaten the very life of democracy itself. We need to favor an education that cultivates the critical capacities, that fosters a complex understanding of the world and its peoples and that educates and refines the capacity for sympathy. In short, an education that cultivates human beings rather than producing useful machines. If we do not insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away. They don't make money. But they do something far more precious: they make a world worth living in."

(Arts Education: *Teaching Humanity* - Newsweek International Aug. 21-28, 2006 issue -

Nussbaum is the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago)

The News 2006

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

FRESH PAINT

Once it was the mature and the established who brought meaningful substance to art, today it is the young radicals who are invigorating the scene. Thesis shows at college institutions are the new hunting grounds for fresh talent with young graduates getting more media and buyer attention than ever before.

The Indus Valley Degree show, a well attended yearly event, attracts attention because of its progressive stance and a bold aesthetic approach. This year's batch of fine arts graduates was larger than before and particularly noticeable was the keen student interest shown for the age old art of painting and drawing which hitherto seemed to be fading from the Indus curriculum. Most of the thesis concepts centered on exploration and location of self in an urban environment with particular relevance to the political, social and cultural climate of the region.

Young artist Sausan Saulat searched for identity in the many "Paradoxes modern living presents us with." Titled, Don't rain on my Parade, her works, daring and fun loving as they were, remained underscored with the endeavour to retain ones individuality while trying to grapple with the complex business of living in a modern society. Sausan is proficient in the art of drawing and painting and is able to make attractive presentations, if she sharpens her concepts and brings them at par with her technical expertise she can easily qualify as an artist to watch out for.

Asim Butt is another artist with potential. He paints with confidence and his pronounced expression, deconstructing what he terms "ideals of machismo and manhood received through myth and history," veers closely around his original concept. Eliminating some of his rather bizarre works through a stringent selective process would have added to the impact of his otherwise strong repertoire. He is focused and gutsy enough to engage with complex issues.

In sculpture, unlike the thesis paintings, the narrative was not quite as explicit or intentional. Young Sohail Abdullah's anchor piece, an electrically heated table - filled with sand and dotted with varied forms of stones, offered viewers sensory experiences that were completely unintellectual. The warm stones had small balls inside them that could be turned and twisted, listened to and played around with. These fun pieces offered tactile experiences where people could interact and engage with themselves. A promising student with deft working skills Abdullah's thesis repertoire however lacked centrality.

Printmaker Subika Naseer's work explored the hidden clues of life and she had used aquatint, line etching, soft-ground stippling etc to unfold its complexities. The only other printmaker, Sara Ansari had titled her work "Solving a puzzle named thesis." Her focus was on what she called "my immediate space," and added that "the chine collage in my work concerns my feelings regarding those spaces."

Asim Butt



-- Nida Aqeel



Madiha Hyder



Ideas and concepts were given some interesting interpretations in the ceramic sculptures section. Sabeen Ashraf Sattars cut fruits, like pineapple, pomegranates coconuts and bananas were likened with the external and the internal differences in appearance that are peculiar to humans also. The idea has significance as a concept but the works stood out more on account of their attractive appearances. Moomal Halepota had made abstracted, cylindrical and tubular bottles inspired by female forms and postures to express her throwing, slabbing, pinching and coiling techniques, treatment and texture. Uzma Abids functional impact lights were created in interesting shapes of basic forms. Hina Ali Dawood had worked with nesting forms and her pieces came together to form a family and she equated this with the human characteristics of individuality and ability to group together as a family. Farheen Mehdli's outdoor pieces were inspired by zen garden aesthetics while Sonia Durrani capitalized on the increasing popularity of Japanese food here to make Utsuwa, a Japanese name for serving dishes. Wood fired and food specific her Utsuwa were entirely utilitarian and conformed to Japanese aesthetics. The utility aspect of ceramics enlarges its reach, according to a usefulness that decorative sculpted forms often lack.

A substantial thesis turnout gave a fair indication of the new generation mindset and their dilemmas. The inescapable stamp of western imagery, especially the kind accessed directly from magazines, journals and the internet, was evident but the students also expressed genuine concern for complex issues. Last year a number of graduates opted for a major in miniature painting. Sadly this year miniature scored no hits but the painterly exercise, the oil on canvas variety, has made a grand comeback. Drawing and painting are essential building blocks of the academic regimen and Indus harvested a bumper crop this year.



Sausan Saulat - Don't rain on my parade
Sana Shahmim



Newsline January 2007

NEWSLINE

RING IN THE NEW

In a recent article "Pakistani Art: Under the Gun," in the Times magazine, Carla Power writes that the global art market has begun to take notice of the wealth of Pakistani talent and further observes that, "A burgeoning interest in South Asian art, coupled with the topical nature of their work, has given Pakistani artists an increasingly high profile overseas."

Ripple effects of the current popularity and rising sales graph of new generation Pakistani art on the international circuit is energizing under graduate and graduate art at home. Instead of drawing influences from the well worn art of the senior cadre of painters young aspirants are now emulating our recent, globe trotting, wonder artists. Embracing new media arts, interdisciplinary fusion and issue based concepts they are bringing new meanings and interpretations to topical concerns. Among the themes in play are explorations of identity, race and nationality, as well as investigations of gender and body image.

In the year end degree projects 2007, thesis art at IVSSA and KU Visual Arts Dept addresses a broad spectrum of positions, some of which carry resonations of power politics while others are steeped in personal, social and historical artistic concerns. The new miniature which emanates from an NCA stronghold in Lahore is also finding a niche in the Karachi institutions and has presently been projected with new media, modern points of view, and a strong current of wit and comic sensibility.

At IVSSA there were four girls graduating in fine arts and only one in miniature from the class of 2007.

In synch with the new wave young graduate Sehr Naveed had created interactive art where messages in public spaces were interwoven with personal sentiments to formulate a fresh vocabulary smacking of a young mindset. Fascinated by the act of wall chalking especially the stamping of political graffiti and symbols on street walls she had photographed specific sites in DHA's Neelum and Delhi colony to reconstruct new frames, with added imagery, in her studio. Particularly interesting were the twists she gave to the kite and umbrella symbols, signs of prominent political parties. By juxtaposing stencils of a playful, rope skipping young girl with the party emblems and graphics she changed the sinister, hard hitting symbols and messages into humorous spoofs. This ability to create polarities by shifting and adding content brings new considerations, evaluations and levels to an existing order. Full of possibilities this thesis has the makings of a fine solo.

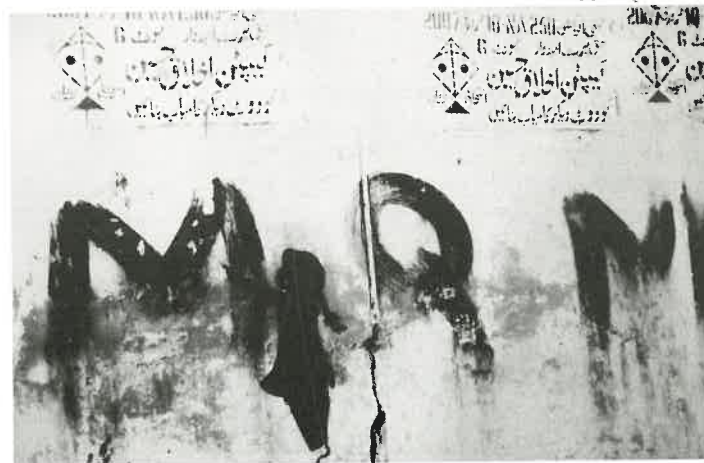
The political gained a more direct manifestation in the work of Samar Faisal Zia. Frustrated with the current turn of events and her inability to come to terms with it she protested against state imposed rule through paintings like the, Ittehad-i Topis. Setting all the 'topis' together like the army / commando berets, and representative regional/ provincial headgear as well as the Jinnah cap she proved that Pakistan is heterogeneous and that we need to exist by embracing the differences. In yet another painting, Unwinding the Pagree (Turban), she speaks of liberty and the freedom to evolve personally.

The only miniature artist to graduate this year from IVSSA, Alia Bilgrami compiled her thesis around the theme of displacement. Having lived

Marium Ahmed - Barh muqabla kar chalawa



Sehr Naveed





Saher Rashid - Demographic Surveys

in several cities as well as various homes within those cities she identifies with the packing box as an agent of dispersal and containment. Referencing the cardboard box as the displaced object her miniatures attempted to express the psychological and physical dislocation that departure and arrival, packing up and settling down, accommodating and adjusting creates in human lives. Delicately rendered the work was approached from various aspects involving questions of identity, interactions with others and ability to alter and modify.

The graduation count at KU was confined to eight female students and one male student. Unlike other institutions where students pursue subjects and mediums of their choice as a major and a minor KU Visual Arts Dept purports an integrated arts program that challenges existing art and design education in Pakistan. Reflecting the current cross-disciplinary nature of art, students explore the whole range of art media to include painting sculpture, miniature painting, printmaking, photography, video, animation, and computer arts

The dept claims that their programmes provide excellent opportunities for employment. Their graduates are employed at the best advertising and architectural firms, textile mills, manufacturing industries, television channels and are showing at art galleries both national and international. Former graduates are beginning to make their mark in the art world. Naveid Iqbal has participated in international workshops and had a solo show. He also won an award for his video. He was recently approached by the acquisition section of the Tate Gallery London. Wajid Ali managed the well known W11-Karachi to Melbourne tram project in Melbourne Australia, 2006. Sheema Khan recently showed in a London Gallery. Sanya Arif has won an international award for her miniatures.



Sameen Raza



Sara Khan - Walnut Sculptures, miniature in 3D

The current degree projects were an interesting mélange covering a wide range of concepts. Those related to miniature art were widely explored and well executed while the remaining works thrived on novelty and experimentation with medium.

Using the walnut image to symbolize the stereotypical Pathan, miniature artist Sara Khan attempted to dispel the common perception surrounding these people as trigger happy, gun toting terrorists. Like the hard exterior and soft interior of the walnut she differentiated between prevalent fact and fiction by painting armed Pathans carrying their weaponry as a source of pride, more in the nature of cultural emblems rather than as objects of destruction or symbols of insensate power. Her freshly painted self portraits implanted alongside antiquated photographs of her ancestors also reflected her eagerness to identify with her rich cultural roots. Compositions interspersed with images of women and children, suggesting a family milieu, supported her contention of Pathans as peace loving law abiding citizens who are perhaps militant in appearance only. Her small walnut sculptures, miniatures in 3 D, were worked at within the nut without disturbing the outer shell. Modeled in clay the finely executed pieces related to concepts from Roman Greek and Egyptian folklore.

Graduate Madiha Saboor's art spoke about confronting conflicts, personal fears and irritants. Using shadows, dark spaces and the cat image, a pet she thoroughly abhors, she built sinister and menacing backdrops to conjure life under pressure. Technically the artist's fusion of photographic processes with the miniature technique is interesting and points to possibilities of new developments.

Newsline January 2008

NEWSLINE

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

The current buzz surrounding thesis art is emanating from the NCA Degree Show 2007 (Dept of Fine Arts). A leading pre partition (formerly Mayo School of Art) art institution of Pakistan NCA enjoys the privilege of nurturing alumni who are contributing as prominent artists, art educators, critics, scholars and activists in the country. On account of its historicity and faculty competence there are greater expectations attached to graduate art springing from this institution than from others but subsequently created art establishments are also rising to the challenge now and a sizeable amount of juvenile art is surfacing. If this outflow of thesis art continues to grow it can liven up an otherwise stodgy art scene considerably but it is imperative that quality is given preference over quantity in order to raise the bar and bring a degree of edge and excellence to this particular category of the genre.

Segmented into painting, printmaking, sculpture and miniature painting the NCA degree works were meant to demonstrate the students understanding of artmaking as a practice and representation of ideas and interests through their interpretation of subject matter and use of expressive forms. In painting, extra large oils on canvas compelled instant eye contact but eventually it is validity of content that impacts the mind. In spite of much diversity in concept, approach and treatment most students resorted to the figure as protagonist in

karen david



their canvases. While evincing an impressive bent towards realism it was bodily concerns that were primary in Karen Davids figurative studies. She focused on gender bending to explore the psychological traumas of those who challenge the norms through androgynous behaviour and atypical gender roles. Candidly expressed in the west this issue has only just begun to come out of the closet here. Emphasizing malicious domination within similar genders, woman against woman, Aneela Mehmood enacted a subversion of the natural order of the sisterhood. Paula Regoish in feel, her work dealing with social realities that are polemic, carried a sinister edge. For Arif Hussain media exploitation of the female figure was a source of concern in his canvases. This is an ageless, unresolved issue - but one that still needs to be addressed at many levels - especially in a Muslim society in a state of rapid change. A sign of the times Amra Khan's 'impotent spectator' portrays the current human condition - man overwhelmed and immobilized by societal flux. A Dali inspired surreality mixed with arabesque patterning and geometric op art illusory effects by Sahar Noon made for some very decorative dreamscapes where the artists technical virtuosity was well exploited. Accessing the primitive and the naïve Fatima Umar painted the inner landscape through childlike fantasy. In contrast Syeda Meera Shafi

Aneela Mehmood



resorted to the sparse and minimal to sense the mystical. And for Kiran Shah the enigmatic found expression in a transparent white cube. The use of X-rays, fluorescent colours and black lights as representations of the subconscious, by Sana Younas Horani, was novel. The rapidity and near blur of sights and sounds was captured through clever use of mirrors and photographs in the works of Tahira Noreen. Bearing traces of Rashid Rana's pixilated imagery the works aspired towards an original style nonetheless.

The miniature divested of its classical trappings is now a vehicle of contemporary thought. While the painterly technique still references the indigenous parent model concept and composition are built on current art practice. Artist Akbar Ali's contemporary miniature: Accepted / Not Accepted was among the few whose colour palette carried hints of the jewel like brilliance of the original Mughal miniatures while the rest veered towards monochrome or subdued tonalities. It was works incorporating the fine line, woven in tangled webs by Isbah Afzal, crisscrossed into minute grids by Rehana Mangi, spread as microscopic text Aisha Abid Hussain, encircled in, Madar e Gul, by Rubaba Haider that stood out, less as independent entities and more as direct influences of immediate mentors and artists such as Aisha Khalid, MA Talpur etc etc. Super realism in miniature mode found convincing effect in Sobia Naeems, Untitled, folded paper imagery, and Sana Obaid's, Remains, of burnt matchsticks and charred paper as well as Nerissa Fernandez's Intertwined collection of twigs and stems.

Print maker Saba Manzoor expressing an urge to 'hold onto her belongings' originally began with a wrapping and tying of personal effects much in the Christo and Jeanne Claude mannerism. The concept lost its impact when she translated it in print through mezzotint and line etching on zinc plate.

Many works by the graduating students were created in open veneration of works or artists whose practice has been studied in the historical and critical component of the course. As well as demonstrating evidence of learning, this type of work is particularly important to the young artist's developing sense of style. As with much postmodern work where specific art references are made, the original work or artist may not be familiar to the general audience, inhibiting the viewer's capacity to respond positively. However it is the changing nature of art in the global context that now seems to have a direct bearing on young art. In a scenario of skills versus thrills, shock value precedes quiet logic and thoughtful substance

Sehar Noor



Amra Khan - Impotent Spectator



Emerging Talent Exhibitions 2008 - 2009

CATCH THEM WHILE THEY ARE YOUNG

Bushra - Photographic Memories



Farooq Chandio - Me and Myself



The sixth edition of Emerging Talent opened to a packed house. Brimming with the exuberance of youth this thesis fiesta had enough substance to tease the eye and provoke the imagination. Featuring wide stylistic differences ranging, from abstraction to realism, from digital photo art to conventional oil on canvas the works needed to be accessed on many levels. Art is first and foremost an aesthetic expression and needs to be internalized as such. But moving beyond the individual worth of each work the art also speaks as a collective and Emerging Talent 2008 when viewed in unison evinced a variable tenor. There were selected thesis works from the Art Depts of Baluchistan, Jamshoro, Punjab and Karachi University as well as National College of Art, Indus Valley School of Art, Beacon House National University, Karachi School of Art, North City School, Central Institute of Art and Hunarkada Lahore all displayed together as a combined show - but the art was assorted, it spoke of multiple influences.

This diversity becomes comprehensible when the works are examined in a regional and institutional context. A cosmopolitan city atmosphere, provincial hinterland environment and diverse aims and objectives of educational institutions are factors that do become manifest in the art in some form or the other. Students from the Baluchistan University and University of Sindh Jamshoro expressed painterly styles and approaches that were different from their counterparts in Karachi and Lahore and there were polarities between schools within the same city also.

Institutional temperament and standing are also major determinants in defining the art on view. While some colleges still bank on traditional, tried and tested methodologies there are others who pursue a liberal curriculum and expect their students to push the boundaries. This mix makes for a happy mélange for casual viewing but on a serious note the exhibition is an excellent opportunity for making a comparative analysis of prevailing art trends/mindsets in various institutions of Pakistan in order to arrive at some conclusions. If the equation between the progressive mindsets and regressive vision is lopsided then it is time to reevaluate the status of art in our society. On which rung of the ladder does art education stand in the academic hierarchy here? Are art curriculums tailored to equip students to pursue meaningful careers within their own country? And is the current validation of Pakistani art abroad the only reason that the genre is being accorded some spotlight of its own now?

Mainly chock a block with paintings the show also had prints and some sculptures. Capitalizing on scale to attract attention many students had opted for extra large oils on canvas. A Punjab University entry, over six feet in size, by Asmarah dwelt on uncertainty and improbability but it was her slick rendering of the leaf and embryo image that first drew in the viewer. A play on the colour red by Maryam Riaz and a similar emphasis on a very literal depiction of rope as frayed, tangled and knotted did more to entice viewership than

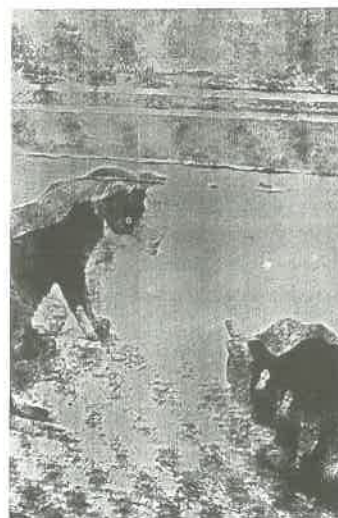
Ambreen Ahmed



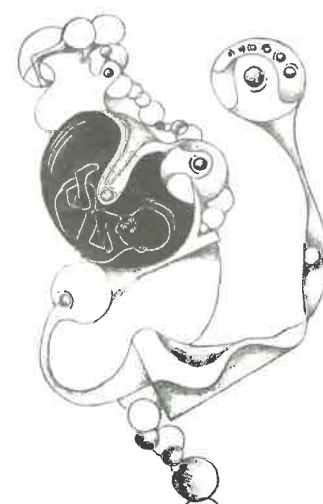
the pithy concept of 'enigma' that motivated it. A novel focus on self by Bushra also from PU was a flip use of photographs. Simply titled, Photographic Memories, her five feet wide canvas carried painted pictures of cherished recollections and childhood photos. For Indus Valley School of Arts Samar Zia it was treatment as well as idea that impacted the mind in the paintings titled, Ittehadi Topis, a comment on the current political imbroglio. For Sehar Naveed, from the same school, it was a playful innocuous interaction with the gravity of life that came across in her compositions. Similarly for Saneeya Ghadiali also from IVSA: it was the underlying concept about impermanence of existence that invoked the metaphysical at first look. Stepping out from the painted image on the canvas into the surrounding gallery space Sehar Noon from NCA tried to mix the real and the imagined world in her reverie series. While Farooq Chandio from Jamshoro painting, Me and Myself also focused on inner and outer reality but mainly through figurative projection and garish colouration.

Entries in sculpture, printmaking and photography were limited in number. A fibre glass sculpture of a male figure slumped on a seat of thorns, by Rabia Dawood from KSA, greeted the visitor at the entrance. Titled, Catharsis the piece sprang no surprises as the hot seat issue and the life size figurative form have been worked upon frequently. However, reinventing the walnut as a sculptural item Sara Khan from Karachi University had created an original take on an indigenous product. Opening the fruit like an oyster she had scooped out the nutty meat and refilled the hollow spaces building a series of unusual compositions. A tiny sleeping figure huddled under a blanket in the first, an embalmed mummy was in the second and yet another had two shells opening like a mouth with the tongue visible between the set of teeth lining the edges. Rudimentary in form, a five feet tall metal wire and rope sculpted into an eye, by Mir Askari from CIAC, was an eye catching focus on the multiple meanings, literary and physical, that are attributed to the optical image. Likewise Sabeen

Madiha Saboor



Meherunissa



Ahmed from Karachi School of Art had crafted abstract mixed media arrangement in glass and acrylic on board. They had a more striking visual presence as 3D geometric ensembles rather than as critical statements.

A photo etching with line print featuring a foetal image of a child by Mehrunnissa of Hunerkada was among the very few imaginative works in this genre. Digital prints by Moira Plair from BNU extolled the power and effectiveness of pharmaceutical products – as life saving drugs if used with caution but addictive and detrimental if intake was compulsive. With titles like 'sub cutaneous' and 'withering away' she had concentrated on creating fleshy cloyingly gluey imagery and crumbly textures to evoke the penetration and effect of medication within the human body. A lively inversion of the real and the concrete, courtesy photoshop, was visible in the digital prints by Rabia Tariq also from BNU. Associating personalities with home décor products, 'my parents dining room' and 'my mamu's ornaments' etc she had indulged in humorous flights of fancy. The conventional was incised to good effect in a staid woodcut print of the outdoors by Ambreen from the Baluchistan University.

The Emerging Talent show is not exactly a level playing field. While viewers may or may not dwell on the variability it is the students from various art schools who can benefit the most by looking simultaneously at their own as well as the works of their contemporaries from other areas. This is a learning exercise that can enable them to gauge their own standing vis a vis their colleagues. Punjab University particularly has learnt from previous participations - they responded wholeheartedly to the current call this year – in terms of the quality and quantity of their paintings. And if sales are an indicator of success then the show scored on that account as well.

GROWING PAINS

A rich sampling of art radiating the enthusiasm and conviction of young minds (or so one thought) blazed off the walls (and floor) of the gallery as it rolled out its 7th edition of Emerging Talent. Ranging from fun and funky to provocative and profound the vibrant art assortment, as a collective, tantalized the eye but individual engagement with the pieces brought other realities to the fore. A synopsis is a brief explanatory adjunct of the thesis artwork which defines the premise of the project but the artist statements accompanying most of the artworks in the show did not fulfill these requirements some were gibberish, others confusing and most were wandering, poorly worded documents. Some graduates had resorted to fanciful poetic musings and surreal thoughts to justify their concepts others had taken refuge in loose historical narrations and those who opted for reality checks failed to identify and project their areas of conflict with clarity and confidence. This apparent disconnect between synopsis and final artwork indicates that sufficient time is not given to resolving ideas before they take practical shape. On a negative note it also speaks of borrowing or lifting images from the print media and attaching garbled, hurriedly composed commentary to it as a statement. If the sourced original image is well resolved (technically and conceptually), it still retains some measure of impact even after being 'used' or 'madeover' thus enabling students to get by or make do.

Among the graduates whose work bore traces of originality and technical virtuosity IVSAA's Abeer Asim fared well with her, Lalaland, an "exploration of the wonder and marvel of the three wheel rickshaw." A rickshaw drive is a unique experience and her mélange of ceramic pieces, mini models of the ubiquitous three wheeler, reflected the bluster and verve of an edgy street culture. However profusion and smallness of the objects demanded closer and prolonged scrutiny. Seen independently without recourse to the synopsis charcoal sketches by Ammad Tahir also focusing on street culture, its seamier side where thuggery and vagrancy is rampant, was noticeable. Similarly Najia Tariqs use of the ordinary suitcase as an agent of 'displacement' in its varied hues, and Numrah Javoids reminiscences through baby doll imagery caught the eye momentarily.

KSA student Sana Naveed's warp and weft fabrications were a novel mix of oil on canvas and fibre art and an installation by Arif Taha impacted the eye mainly because it was composed entirely of nails. Special effects collaged onto oil on canvas by Uroosa were attractive and a fashion accessory, the stylish stiletto heeled shoe, was well, primed by Aisha Amin Gul as an art object to define gender interaction. Other noticeable painterly efforts included a faceted

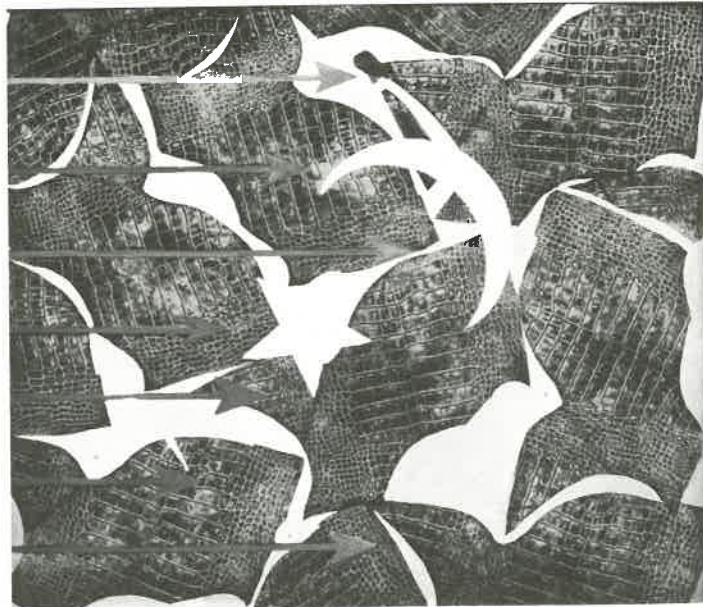
streetscape, Shining Tomorrow, by Mohsina Bi and confined (literally bottled) humanity by Sarah Mirza.

Well conceived, direct and simple NCA graduate Madiha Arif's paintings relating to voyeurism were among the few memorable images in the show. Using harmless everyday occurrences like a

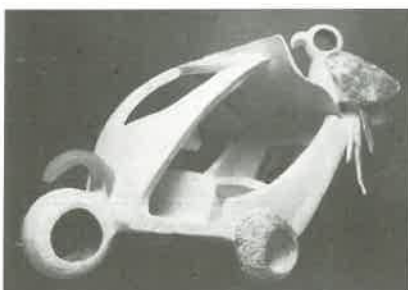
Shoaib Mehmood - Sare jehan mein dhoom hamari zaban ki hai



Abdul Haleem



Alsha Gul



Abeer Asim - Lalaland

woman being measured for size by her local tailor or a girl child tentatively approaching her Qari sahib for Quranic lessons, she critiqued the validity of the penetrating male gaze. Other NCA entries by Adeela Shah, Saba Raza Khan and Naureen Qamar were conspicuous more for technical experimentation like intaglio process and textural manipulation than for execution of strong ideas.

Artists from Punjab University also concentrated on the painted image to voice political commentary. Asad Ali painted dilapidated chairs ('hot seat' symbols) to pronounce his version of Law and Disorder and Abdul Haleems screen printed effects, doves, arrows and inverted crescent and star image was also opinionated. But it was Shoaib Mahmoods calligraphic text, Sary Jehan Mein Dhoom Hamari Zuban Ki Hai, that scored a hit. A clever imposition of English text cutting through Urdu lettering enabled one to take a critical look at the changing status of Urdu as a spoken and written language much like the intrusion of Mingleish in verbal and scripted Urdu. Another innovative artwork, but from a KU student Fasiha Batool, was a variation of miniature album painting. Illustrating a religio-historical incident in a book format and encasing single pages in individual see through



Ammad Tahir

plexiglas frames she had literally compiled an upright book with boxed pages that can be displayed on a table – an idea full of possibilities.

High on surface treatment and visible appeal Emerging Talent 2009 celebrated the painterly practice more as a vehicle for technical innovations than the projection of thoughts. This bent veered towards the currently popular trend of 'new and mix – media' effects. In the west the use of new media – as a means of creating art and as a medium itself presents a critical challenge for art faculties. It is an umbrella term for a wide variety of cross disciplinary creative fodder that is completely changing the face of art. At the heart of this change lies a debate about whether visual art curricula should reach deep or spread wide. On home ground our art schools too need to examine art curricula in order to formulate an art equation that balances the indigenous and the foreign. This will enable students to ground themselves and locate their directions with a more informed sensibility.

Dawn Gallery June 2009

DAWN
GALLERY



Demand and supply of artist in residence programs are increasing world wide. Due to its current popularity it seems we are dealing with a fashionable phenomenon that owes its explosive growth solely to globalization of artists' 'nomadic' behavior. However, artist-in-residence programs have a history that stretches back much further than is often thought. The phenomenon has been part of the international art world for over a century.

Residency opportunities allow visiting artists to stay and work 'for art's sake'. These programs offer conditions that are conducive to creativity and they provide for working facilities, ready to be used by individual artists. Such artists communities are research and development labs for the arts, providing artists of all disciplines with time, space, and support for the creation of new art and ideas.

Variously titled 'residency, workspace, retreat and colony' these communities are not about retreat; they are about advancement. Advancing creativity, human progress and the way we examine the world. Here in Pakistan artists have only just begun to realize the catalytic role residential arts centers play in the development of contemporary arts in all cultures worldwide and across all creative media.

THE RESIDENCY EXPERIENCE

The Vasi Artists Residency program regarded as novel and experimental when first introduced in the year 2001, has begun to establish its credentials. Six years down the line it is now an annual feature in the Karachi art milieu. And as an event it observes all the specifics peculiar to residency programs of this nature in developing countries.

The Vasi Intl Artists Residency 2006 was, as before, a mix of artists from Pakistan and other countries of the world. The art on show, by a group of five young artists, had varied approaches which they explored independently as well as through dialogue with each other. French artist Stephanie Dachary accepted the Vasi invitation mainly because she wanted to collaborate with Pakistani artists. Her artworks on paper, cloth, as installation, sculpture and painting were all examples of interdisciplinary

collaboration. A world map stamp used by schoolteachers was reprinted on several sheets of paper and Stephanie invited as many as 24 artists to inscribe, paint, draw or imprint their interpretation of "How the World Turns" in collaboration with her. Informal and opinionated the works were literally a visual dialogue but more in the nature of an exercise than a finished body of work. Other cultural crossovers included compositions of collaborative calligraphy where French epithets, poetic sayings, phrases etc were written alongside their Urdu translations. Fellow participant Wasim Ahmed composed and wrote the Urdu equivalents to Stephanie's French (when translated into English by an intermediary). Such joint productions may or may not be conclusive in their own right but are healthy exchanges nonetheless because they encourage experiment and innovation.

For Christina Mackie, from Canada, the Vasi invitation was an exciting opportunity to engage with the Pakistani art scene firsthand because she had limited knowledge of this part of the world. Fascinated by the jungle of telephone wires and poles sweeping across the city's skyline she played on the theme of "communication." Highlighting connectivity and communication as an essential part of the growth of a city she had constructed an installation of poles, telephone towers and grids with ordinary plastic shop materials like straws, laundry pins, feather dusters etc. Though conceptually coherent the work appeared lightweight, innocuous and playful and quite unlike the usual perceptions we have of art here.

In the field of modern ceramic art Taiwanese artist Samuel Hsuen - yu Shih has considerable command over the medium. He brings the kind of meticulous machine precision to his clay crafted musical instruments that a wood carver would to wood or a miniature artist to a miniature. In Pakistan our clay traditions can be traced to the Indus Valley civilization and it was this interesting heritage background and abundant availability of clay here that prompted the young Taiwanese ceramist to join the Vasi residency. His disappointment knew no bounds when he discovered that unlike modern Taiwan claycraft in Pakistan has not progressed much beyond Mohenjodaro. His lament "no machinery and no tools" (in Pakistan) is a sad reminder of the sad state of this art form. Overcoming his initial reaction Samuel decided to enter the work experience as a challenge and did manage to construct a musical sitar with the barest of essentials. The gigantic work displayed vertically on a pedestal in the gallery was an assembly of three pieces so scientifically crafted that they locked

into each other even after firing and shrinkage in the kiln. Moreover surface treatment of varied textures also displayed the ceramists skilled hand. Exquisite filigreed patterns, abrasive roughness, Chinese calligraphy, and cookie cutter incised designs simulated the elaborate appearance of a decorative wooden sitar. The rich polished teak hue peculiar to wood was achieved by applying brown shoe polish. The artists immense technical proficiency is not just an indicator of how advanced this genre is in an Asian country like Taiwan is but also how far behind we are.

Unlike previous miniature artists who opted for other art forms as they were not comfortable with painting miniatures in their short

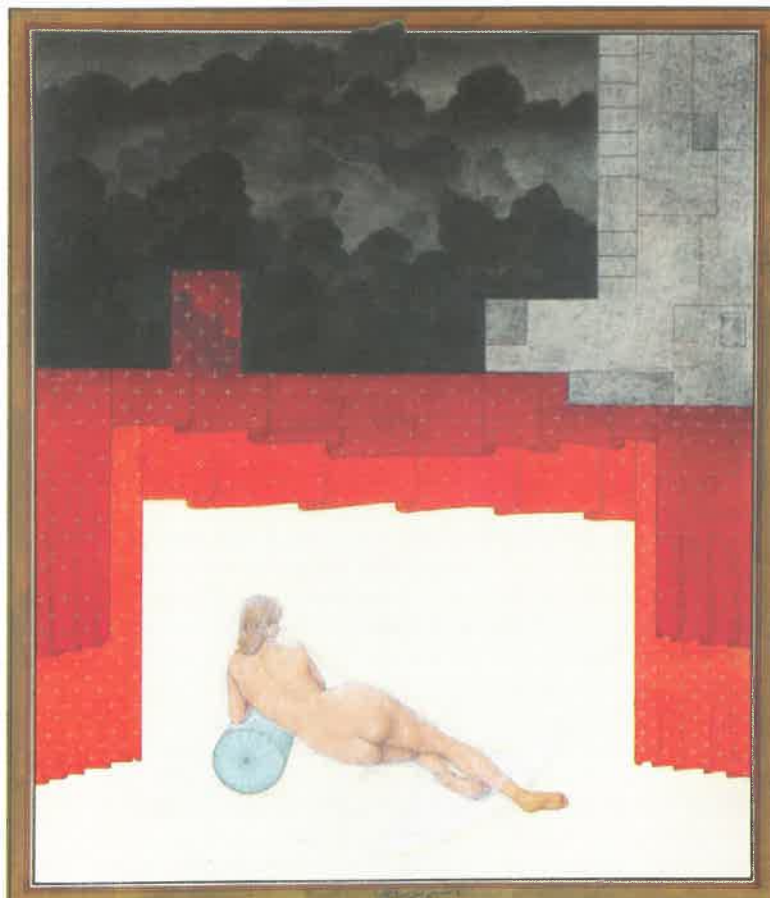
Waseem Ahmed



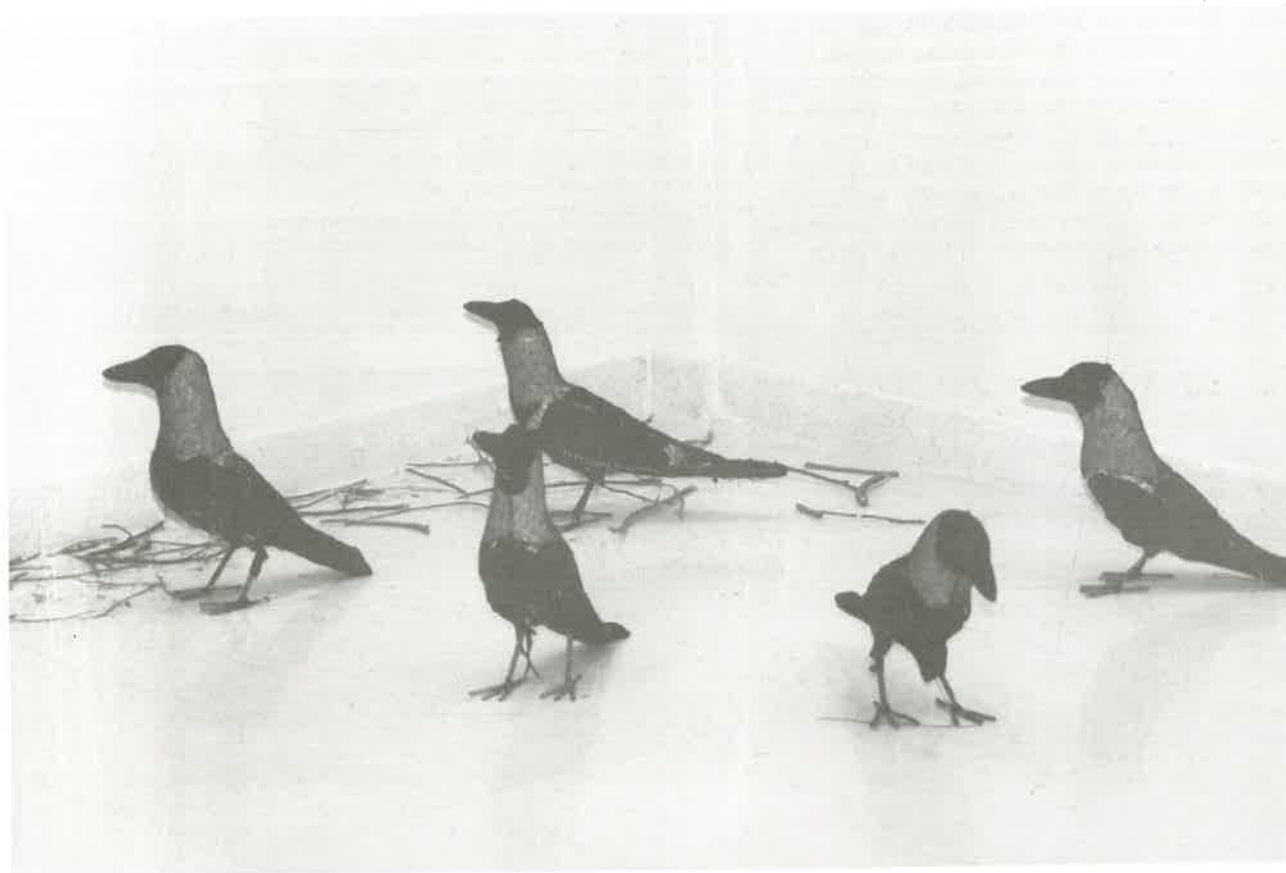
residency sojourn, artist Wasim Ahmed was able to do both. He utilized the residency opportunity to explore new forms and ideas and integrate them with recurrent themes. His miniatures retained his old flimsy burqa veil and female nude imagery but calligraphy emerged as a new alphabet in his vocabulary. Among the few miniature artists who have maintained the quality of their painting and drawing skills Wasim had incorporated calligraphy in his work only after proper study and training in khatati under an ustad.

Shifting away from a miniature scale Wasim bravely ventured into mega sized installations also mainly because he was working for a residency show and was not confined to the dictates of a

Waseem Ahmed



Ruby Chishti



commercial exhibition, and the large size of the gallery permitted it too. While the miniature paintings on show appeared somewhat unresolved the new openings one encountered in his work are bound to resonate though his future compositions. He seems to have utilized the retreat to advantage.

Ruby Chisti is among those few artists who carry their retreat within themselves. Everytime she works she is freed from the cares of the world as she devotes herself entirely to the experience. Self exploration came early to Ruby courtesy a sad childhood marred with personal tragedies and traumas and she was able to emote with her work at a very poignant level through cast, stitched and stuffed fabric. Her soft sculpture installation was moulded from the wooly material used to manufacture sanitary napkins. The

selection of material bonded with her theme of childlessness and how it can put a strain on connubial bliss. A white and gold bridal turban and a hat indicated the male presence, broken wedding garlands, empty pages of a woman's diary and finally a cherubic but lifeless infant cosseted between soft white pads told their own heart wrenching story.

Residency art unlike commercial exhibitions is not predictable. Unlike the limited range of observations one can access from commercial exhibitions there are many lessons to be learnt from artists workshops and residency shows as they relate to the art experience on other levels.

Newsline May 2006

NEWSLINE

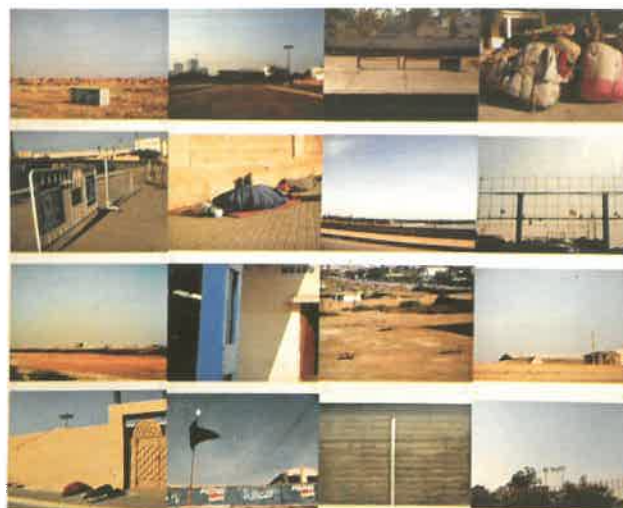
TAAZA TAREEN – 3

Post College is a trying time, with students struggling to make ends meet whilst simultaneously making sense of their emerging visual vocabulary. Many new aspirants are also in need of guidance and encouragement in their search for a platform that allows them to explore and test the limits of their practice. Yet another first, the Vasl Taaza Tareen Residency initiated in 2005 provides this intermediary space to fresh graduates where they can experiment, invent and research among peers. Freed from the daily grind of life, here they are able to pursue independent lines of inquiry, which can stimulate and develop their personal art practice. In Taaza Tareen 1 participants like Mehreen Zuberi, Ali Kazim, Ayesha Khan, Naveed Iqbal, Auj Khan, Mohammed Ali Talpur and Ayesha Durrani brought forth an engaging residency exhibition in 2005. Most of them are now emerging as competent artists, educators and co – ordinators in the art milieu here.

Taaza Tareen 3, 2008, culminated recently. It was composed of six artists, Ayesha Sultana from Bangladesh and Raju GC from Nepal, both BNU graduates, Irfan Hasan and Rabya Naseer both from NCA, Iqra Tanveer from K U and Sohail Abdullah from IVSSA. Their work was on view at an Open Studio session. Each residency has an educational dimension where artist give presentations, talks or workshops. In the T T 3 artists conducted a 3 day outreach program with children from the ABSA School for the deaf and dumb.

A fine artist with a major in painting Iqra Tanveer was the only artist in the group who translated her interaction with the special children into a new media art exercise. Her installations using sound boxes enabled viewers to experience or hear sound through the sensation of touch.

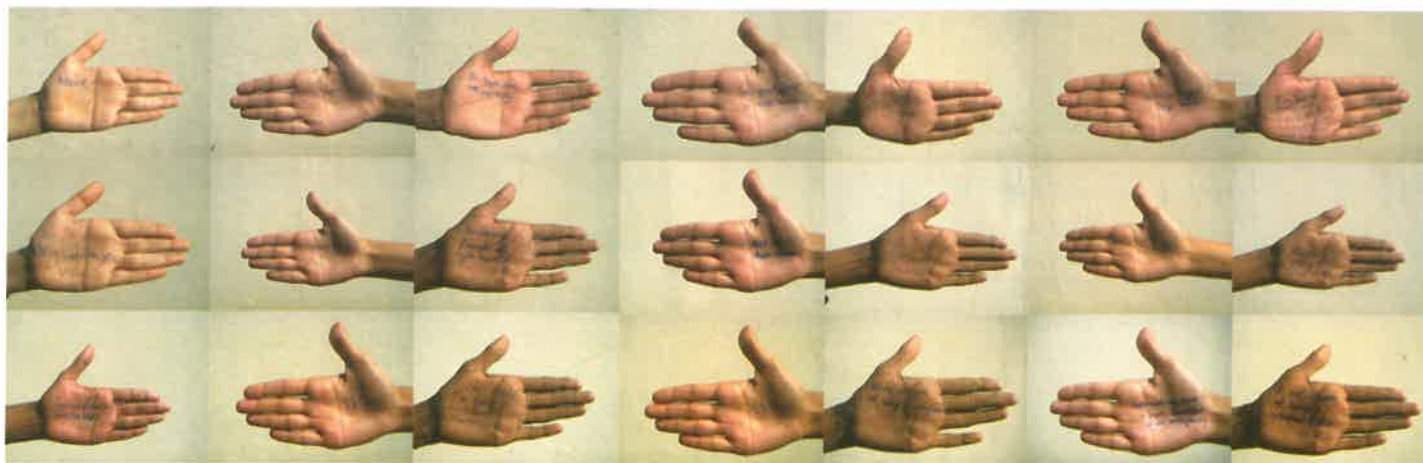
Iqra Tanveer



Ayesha Sultana



Sohail Abdullah



Onlookers were asked to put their hand over or seat themselves on her voice boxes; the vibrations that then emitted from the boxes enabled them to visualize and feel the impression of sound. The emanating sound from a box implanted within a running video of a seashore was instantly associated with the lapping of waves.

A somewhat similar take on prodding viewer imagination but in an entirely different manner was undertaken by Sohail Abdullah. Using technical ploys in his photographs of the old Parsi Colony he tried to undermine the banal and the ordinary and highlight the charm of old architecture still surviving in the area. Enlarging his black and white pictures in the darkroom he burnished them with sepia tints to evoke a vintage look. Current abuse of old structures with detritus, encroachment, litter, decay and rot was faintly hand coloured to separate them from the original construction. Not entirely a new idea the concept still has possibilities of a 'message' if pursued with serious intent and purpose. Abdullah had also showed a video of his site specific project 'agli gali' where he painstakingly scrubbed clean and de-odorised a smelly, dingy alleyway. A transient undertaking more in the realm of public art, this was a new direction for the artist.

Miniature artist Irfan Hasan had produced three works, graphite drawing of an ABSA inmate at play with a puppet, an unfinished portrait study in gouache on wasli, and a 3D pixilated portrait composed of Lasani wood cubes overpainted with white acrylic. An interesting feature of this exercise was that the artist had released himself from his miniature regimen to experience other forms and media. Similarly Sohail Abdullah a sculpture major had concentrated on photography his minor in art school. Iqra Tanweer had also gone beyond painting into video and sound installation. The residency had given these artists a chance to attempt other means of expression.

Drawings and unfinished paintings by Ayesha Sultana relating to the cityscape were minimal and sparse, a possible reaction to the crowded imagery of her previous work, she opined. The collection also included a set of photographs of the suburbs of Karachi. She seems to be examining the divide between the vast expanse of empty, natural space and inhabited / populated areas but the work was yet still exploratory.

Artistic perspectives can be engaging when strong, intriguing or purposeful currents of thoughts are being investigated. Most artists in this residency had a considerable number of elusive, ambiguous 'works in progress' which robbed the show of 'inherent substance' and visual impact.



Irfan Hasan

STUDIO R M RESIDENCY

As early as 1995 artist R M Naeem had established a studio venue to provide art students with foundation training in art basics. Today this artist's run 'not for profit' studio also offers career counseling and guidance to up coming artists and now a residency program has been introduced to provide young and established artists with workspace in which they can experiment explore and exchange ideas. Some in - house artists now part of the studio management that runs these programs include the young and very talented Ali Kazim, Mudassar Manzoor and Sadaf Naeem whose work commands high prices and is currently much sought after.

A native of Mirpurkhas R M Naeem's childhood exposure to the popular art of cinema hoardings and signboard painters was instrumental in defining his career as an artist. He argues that "Just as the cinema and signboard, truck and rickshaw painters have done a service by making art accessible to the public, we at the Studio RM feel that an artist should not work in total isolation from the community he or she lives in but work in an open and accessible environment." This notion of being an active contributing member of society gains larger meaning with yet another objective of Studio R M that of exploring / referencing the South Asian heritage in order to place current contemporary art in its correct perspective. Senior artists passing on their experiences and knowledge to the next generation is also a practice that holds value at the Studio R M. Beholden to the tutelage of masters like Colin David, Ahmed Khan, M Asif and Jamil Naqsh during his early years R M Naeem feels that young artists should be given similar opportunities to derive inspiration and strength from the knowledge of senior artists.

Envisioned as a permanent studio residency the initiative plans to have two sessions annually. The current three week long Studio R M international residency consisted of five participants. Visualized as a space for 'serious artists' co ordinator Sadaf Naeem emphasizing the purposefulness of the program stated that there were rules and regulations under which the program was instituted and this was not "a place for people who are not prepared to work."

The art exhibited at the conclusion of the residency was an interesting medley of concepts and styles. There were two artists each from Lahore and Karachi and the fifth was from Bangladesh. Having participated in several residencies / workshops and international shows Tayeba Begum Lipi from Dhaka is a recipient of the Grand Prize, a gold medal she received at the 11th Asian Art Biennale organized by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. She is one of the trustees/founder and active board member of the Britto Arts Trust. Her work explores the role of women in a volatile sociopolitical



SABA KHAN



IRFAN HASAN



SADAF NAEEM



environment. She paints the feminine form in a state of struggle, constantly grappling with gender conflicts, constraints and pressures. Reacting against aggression and militancy she resorts to the use of harsh symbols like razor blades, decapitated bodies, coffins and shrouds.

Paintings by Sadaf Naeem also address the South Asian woman but she evokes the metaphysical to narrate the unspoken. Simple, primitive and in communion with nature her women seem resigned to their fate. Located in an other-worldly environment these cloaked mute creatures are bound by ritual and tradition. The eerie silence in her paintings prompts the viewer to explore the reality beyond the reality. Technically Sadaf Naeem has an individual painterly style where "content is more about the relationship between the spaces and objects" than random placements of form.

Topical socio-political realities define the aesthetics of the talented young artist Saba Khan. Canvases crowded with images of humanity in states of distress, aggression and helplessness, superimposed on a dense backdrop of traditional folk pattern make for some very disturbing (optically and conceptually) paintings. The artist has the potential to evolve new metaphors from conventional imagery.

Miniature artist Irfan Hasan's art also portrays the ability to reinvent the past. Bringing new perspectives to the ordinary and the mundane he concentrates on evoking the personality of the

characters he paints. His monotone portraiture is simply rendered but dramatic in effect.

Having already participated in several residencies Usman Ghori from Karachi availed the current program to advantage. His work carrying glimpses of his signature style also shows signs of growth and newness. A series of digital prints on paper simply titled *Playing with the heart* are a humorous departure from his otherwise complex paintings exploring human beliefs and attitudes.

As an artist in residence program Studio R M Residency seems to be exploring art within the Asian context with a deeper engagement and is also evincing a commitment to maintaining a certain aesthetic level. These defining points will enable it to develop a strong profile.



Art today is facing challenges as chaotic and complex as the world order of which it is an integral component. Once distinguished by a purist pursuit of ideal beauty or worship of sublime nature art's tumultuous and sad evolution through the eras has led to its present contentious standing as an interpreter of new social realities. As is the case in many places where contemporary art institutions are in their infancy conceptually centered art, as against a tradition based aesthetic, is seeking new frontiers for its validation. New media art and issues considered 'too hot,' 'bizarre,' 'diasporic' or just plain 'complex' for local viewership find receptive audiences in the west as well as Asian countries where art literacy has advanced and perception levels are varied. Other than this the disparities between the international and domestic art market also affect the valuation of art at home and abroad. Moreover art that was once regarded by Europe and the United States as coming 'from the margins' and thus being scarcely worthy of consideration, is now asserting its presence as a legitimate entity with independent discourses that go far beyond Eurocentricity. Today a new transnational perspective is needed to place this neglected body of work in its appropriate context within the art hierarchy. Other than meaningful production it is advances in art scholarship, dialogue and debate also that is providing marginalized art the platform it needs to project itself. A new art history is in the making and it is worthwhile connecting with these developments and evaluating art and artists in the light of what they are producing, where they are exhibiting, who is responding to their art and why. This knowledge can add new dimensions to the evolving contemporary art scene here and the art produced can then be understood in context.

ART DISCOURSES - NEW REALITIES

CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART A NEW CARTOGRAPHY OF CULTURES.

Contemporary art, in a Western context, usually means the updating of modern art, whether as post-modern or else as just recent. But, the term 'contemporary' in the Asian environment differs from the European standpoint. Asian art showcases values and criteria other than that of Western art or art that is produced in the West for the Western art market. It is a postmodern and post-ethnic art that, through paintings, installations, film, video, photography, sculpture, and objects is trying to grapple with post colonial realities. Poised at the crossroads of ancient traditions, post modernism and commercialization, contemporary Asian art is wrestling with cultural influences and identity issues in a backdrop of geo political conflicts and socio economic crisis. However the shadow of Eurocentrism still looms large and non-western cultures are still unable to interpret themselves. This inability is the real crux of the identity crisis most third world nations are facing.

In the realm of art the urge to identify with the West or to gain the recognition of the West dominates artmaking strategies. This has veered us away from the daunting task of re-building our independent ability to interpret contemporary cultural reality. A considerable amount of new Asian art, underpinned with the Western canon, has impacted western curators, dealers, gallerists and collectors and this has upped its profile in the western art markets. Experimental media was preferred by many younger generation artists during the 1980s, many of them curious about Western culture and art history, which seemed more progressive, exciting and liberating than the type of activities conventionally regarded as culture in their own, often tradition-bound, societies. Through the adoption of experimental media, Asian artists were able to engage with an international art world: they began to be included in large thematic survey exhibitions outside Asia, as well as art magazines and popular studies of contemporary art.

Under the aegis of the term 'globalization' art from emerging nations was now being elevated/ reduced to a global platform where it had to conform to global requirements. The notion of a "world art" is the child of western civilization, born of the ideological intention to suppress and exclude any artistic expression that does not adapt to the western canon. But fortunately the will of non-western countries to preserve their identity from a western cultural model is beginning to manifest itself. Works by an exciting range of contemporary Asian artists, for whom the clash of cultures means fertile new fields of work, is focusing on various aspects of the issues at hand. What now appears to be a babble of voices can eventually streamline into a

coherent voice if and when the sensibility to assert ones independence is fully realized.

The most recent showing of Asian art (from our part of the world) at a prestigious world art forum is ex Tate curator Jemima Montagu's Turquoise Mountain presentation East-West Divan: Contemporary Art from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan at the 53rd International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. The exhibition includes recent works by ten artists from three countries, better known in the West for stereotypes of terrorism and Islamic extremism than for their rich artistic heritage and vibrant contemporary cultures. East-West Divan challenges these negative perceptions with works by both emerging and established artists, who are engaged in an ongoing dialogue between the artistic traditions of East and West. Far from being overburdened by the baggage of tradition the artists have reinvented the arts of miniature painting, calligraphy and Islamic geometric design to address contemporary concerns. Playing with a broad range of references which bring together Pop art and Shi'ite shrines, modernist abstraction and Islamic architecture, the exhibition reflects upon the realities and perceptions of contemporary life, history and politics in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, unraveling, albeit to some extent only, the complex relationship between the eastern and the western cultures. From slavish imitation of western ideals to confrontation and assertion of actual realities, a transformation in attitudes on both sides of the divide is gradually becoming evident.

In the editorial of *Thermocline of Art* 'New Asian Waves' Peter Weibel writes "The problem already is prefigured in multicultural societies of the West in which minorities may not share the mainstream definition of art. In this respect the former colonies or Third World countries, on the one hand, will look for their own art to represent their culture. On the other hand, however, their claims will have to acknowledge their place in the new process of global art. It is evident that art and politics will more and more interact with or contradict each other, as especially the conflict with Islamic countries brings to the fore. It seems that the future of art in the 21st century will be determined in such parts of the world, which have not yet raised their voice. It is therefore essential for institutions to respond to a changing art discourse that will develop in a new cartography of cultures"

IDENTIFYING AND COUNTERING NEW HEGEMONIES

Here in our milieu the enormous problems faced by Asian artists as they begin to assume a new responsibility – that of restructuring the sensibilities of a society in transition, is fuelling the creation of art that is volatile and questionable – a disturbing reflection of the times. A recently held regional seminar aptly titled 'The Anxious Century – Discourses Waiting to be Born' co - hosted by Nukta Art and Goethe - Institut centralised on the forces that are contributing, directly and indirectly, to this agitation so peculiar to 21st century aesthetics.

Keynote speaker Arif Hasan, architect, planning consultant and social researcher, set the tone of the discourse with his observations about the new socio economic reality in South Asia. His research revealed that in the middle and lower class, family structures and gender relations have undergone chronological and demographic shifts leading to a drastic conflict between old values and current mores. Commenting on the lack of consensus on how to reconcile these conflicts he wondered if art had a role to play in easing the turmoil – if it had the breadth and capacity to support these societal values on the basis of equity and justice.

Multipart in nature the seminar examined various aspects of the issue under debate. On the theme of, Multiple Modernities – Reclaiming Cultural Space, Professor Nazish Attaullah, Principal NCA, tracing the rebirth of the college from Mayo School of Art, a replica of the British model exported to the colonies, to its current indigenous temperament, also spoke of altered realities which unfortunately have yet to justify their shift. Questioning if we were still looking at our own work through the eyes of the other she called for a deeper engagement with concerns to locate a more palpable reality.

In his paper, *Replacing Language: Identifying strategies in Post - colonial Art Production*, Ziaul Karim editor of *Jamini*, an arts quarterly from Bangladesh, cautioned against confusing the post colonial with the post modern as the time frames of both generally intersect. Describing the Post Colonial agenda as specifically political intended "to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as 'us and them', 'first world and third world', 'white and black', colonizer and colonized" he supported its effectiveness in building a more authentic identity vis a vis the passive, epistemological post modern stance. Citing "globalization" as the new machinery of colonization, variously termed *Coco-colonization* or *Macdonalization*, he argued that the threat it poses is far greater than the earlier brand of colonization as its "hegemony goes beyond the metropole and touches lives in the margins." A frequent visitor at leading art biennials

he critiqued the new formula of representing Asia through the Asian Diaspora. Consisting of artists with a hyphenated identity as in British-Indian, or Arab-American he questioned the validity of representations by those who have "learned about their Asian origin from their parents and may or may not have visited the land of their origin." Karim also expounded that equality of status between the two protagonists has also been denied through a deliberate time scale strategy as "the colonized country is set within a past period of western progress" to imply that Asian art is at an "arrested stage of development."

Probing further the cultural and political alienation of the Diasporic artists Amra Ali senior editor Nukta came forth with a volley of questions. Speaking of a sub-culture, a third space neither here nor there she queried, where is home? What happens when identities are dispersed – is there a loss and what is the gain? Citing names of known migrant artists like Rasheed Araeen, Zarina Hashmi and Naz Ikramullah living in the Diaspora she conjectured whether they were acknowledged or accepted in their host countries.

German participant Heinz Norbert Jocks expressing deep concern wondered if the Europeans were really making an effort to understand art emanating from different cultural contexts. Among other nations in the Asian milieu, Iranian art, opined speaker Hamid Keshmirshakan, was entertaining multiplicity and contradictory ideas as new generation artists began disengaging from the nationalist agenda to access universal trends. His talk was supported by an excellent slideshow. Sasanka Perera of Sri Lanka also spoke about the travails of the not yet realized South Asian identity with special reference to art in his own country and emphasized on the need to "critically explore the centers" of art to identify areas of conflict.

Establishing historical context, defining the current status quo and raising a plethora of questions the seminar, with no easy solutions in sight, concluded on an 'anxious' note.

Is Eurocentrism over or is it manifesting itself in other guises? Beguiled into thinking that we are free are we not becoming victims of these 'other' more subtle hegemonies implanted on us by those who wield power. Suggesting rebuttals like "counter discourse" and "alternative space on the other" Ziaul Karim emphasized on the need to keep a vigilant eye on the politics of western hegemony. Rumana Hussain senior editor Nukta spoke of "engaging in a process of enquiry that seeks to deconstruct the myths and fetishes of the dominant Western discourse and its critical framework of hegemony and colonization" in order to gain autonomy.

Art, unfortunately, is subservient to power politics and economic clout and will continue to be dominated and manipulated by the existing or emerging super powers. (Chinese and Indian art is thriving currently because China and India are emerging power centers). But once polarities are defined then the way forward to an independent identity is by taking sides and exercising ones right to freedom "since unquestioning subservience to authority in today's world is one of the greatest threats to an active moral and intellectual life." (Edward Said)

Newsline November 2008

NEWSLINE

MAINSTREAMING THE MARGINALIZED

Distinguished by its singular thrust Rasheed Araeens Third Text is more than just an 'international scholarly journal on art and visual culture.' In the current uneven art climate the validity of Eurocentrism is being widely contested now, but art scholar / activist Araeen had begun questioning the status quo as early as 1970's. While the Modern Art Movement made claims to being of universal significance, and while it also plundered freely from non-European cultures (as Picasso did from African art in *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907), it remained in all essentials a strictly Western European phenomenon. The art which was considered truly modernist was produced either in Europe by Europeans or else (through an extension of western cultural hegemony) in the United States by Americans. All other modernist expressions were denied due acknowledgement and relegated to the margins. Third Text emerges as a spirited undertaking because it consciously confronts and challenges the Western Modernist Canon and strives to give a comprehensive and legitimate voice to the marginalized.

An artist Araeen first became aware of the implications of discrimination when his attempts to evolve as an innovative modernist sculptor in Britain were thwarted by UK's metropolitan art world of the early 1970's. He recalls being seen as the 'Other' an artist 'whose place was not within the trajectory of modernism but in what was deemed outside of it, some other place and culture.' By the time TT was launched in 1987 he had become fully aware of the complexities of the issues surrounding this phenomenon and had identified himself with marginalized communities bearing the yoke of inequity, bias and prejudice.

The artists personal belief in the critical potential of art, its ability to initiate dialogue and question and confront the prevailing order to encourage humanity to move forward is another constant that ensures that TT articles have enough 'bite' to provoke and empower the reader.

The current launch of the Asia edition of Third Text further increases the breadth and sharpens the stance of the magazine as it now becomes available to the very people whose freedom and acknowledgement of expression it so fervently champions in the west. The current rise of Asian art also makes it imperative that critical content of the kind produced by Third Text be freely accessible to an Asian readership in order to enlighten them about the ground realities underlying art developments in the west.

In Araeens own words "What we face today is not colonialism but its legacies, its continuous attempts to keep the world dependent on the political, economic and cultural models of modernity developed in the West for its own interest." He argues that the West unable to reconcile with the reality that it is no longer a colonial empire continues to exert its dominance. "Its failure to redefine its world-view, clearly and institutionally, in recognition of the post war reality of the world, its own and that of the others on equal terms, so that both are liberated from the colonial past, has led the West into an intellectual paralysis." Going deeper into the issue he points out that "Western society today is going through a kind of self- created neurosis, a paranoia resulting from a pathological fear of losing its power over the world. It is therefore unable to share anything with the world on equal terms."

This then is the bottom line to the crisis / confusion prevalent in the art world. The premise of the art agenda being purported by the west is still the same as the one which defined the colonial discourse.

"The aims and objectives of Third Text have been to expose the nature of this discourse which continues to prevail not only in contradiction to its humanist claims but also against the historical reality and aspirations of the world." The journal publishes information about ignored and suppressed artworks, highlighting their historical place within modern developments, along with theoretical articles which critique and analyze the prevailing situation.

Third Text Asia, TTA, jointly published by Black Umbrella London and Fomma, Karachi, Pakistan was initiated by Dir Fomma, Jalaluddin Ahmed. Its very first issue, contains a many pronged inquiry into the past and present of Asian art. Examining the nature of Indian nationalism in his article "E B Havell: The Art of Politics and Indianess" writer Osman Jamal concludes "The nationalism which informs the Havell inspired art movement is, as we have seen, an imperial construct, subaltern in orientation, representing the regressive wing of a contradictory middle class, spawned and reared by the Empire. This is not the liberational nationalism of the colonized. Its art is escapist;

delicate, sentimental rehearsals of myth and tradition. Nevertheless it rode the high tide of Indian nationalism."

Moving into present times David Clarke's paper, "Contemporary Asian Art and its Western Reception" is an insightful survey of hard core realities behind current cosmetic changes in the art world. He observes that despite vastly increased possibilities for travel and high speed exchange of information in our electronic age the asymmetry of knowledge which prevailed in the 1920' and 30's still exists: it is the Asian contemporary artist who knows what his or her American counterpart is doing and not the other way around. Moreover contemporary Asian art still suffers from limited address in notable history books of world art issued in the west. To de- centre the existing hegemony the author solicits for "a more extensive coverage in the art historical literature of previously marginalized Asian modern and contemporary art."

A half dozen other articles examining the art struggle in the Japanese, Palestinian, Iranian and Chinese cultural context do much to unravel the complexity and intensity of the Asian aesthetic discourse. While TT justifies its claim of dealing with ignorance by confronting it with knowledge the final chapter of TTA concludes on a grim note. Rasheed Araeen reiterates that even after twenty years the "The history of modern art is still being written on the basis of the privileged position of white European and North American artists, and all those theories which underpin this position are still being seen historically a legitimate discourse."

Instead of a recognition that the problem lies with the mainstream, that there is an urgent need to look critically at its own discourses and institutions, it has been assumed that it is the others who have been unable to come to terms with modernity and modernism and that they therefore need a specific constituency tied up with their own cultures. This has now resulted in the creation of separate constituencies based on racial or cultural differences, similar to the apartheid in South Africa."

What muddies the waters still further is the mask of liberal benevolence the west is now purporting, (which instead of being a remedial measure still very cleverly camouflages the underlying age old discriminatory culture) to give an illusion of equality. Araeen admits that the task of TT has become even more difficult now then it was in 1980, "not only because Western institutions have opened their doors to those artists who are prepared to pay multicultural games but also because these institutions have been able to lure many 'postcolonial' Third World intellectuals and writers into supporting their misguided and

(neo) racist policies and programmes. All this is now part of multicultural globalization with an apparent benevolent façade of art institutional neoliberalism difficult to penetrate and expose."

A journal that informs and empowers TTA is not just essential reading for Asian artists aspiring to locate themselves in the global arena but is also very educative for the average reader sensitive to post colonial operatives and the identity flux they are generating.

Newsline October 2008

NEWSLINE

REVISING THE GENEALOGY OF ART HISTORY

A special issue of Third Text Asia titled, Arts, Scholarship and the Arab/ Muslim World, was launched by Fomma in the Bidoun Lounge Art Park at UAE's leading art festival Art Dubai 2009.

The foremost article in this Spring 2009 issue is most certainly Araeen's 'Preliminary notes for the understanding of historical significance of geometry in Islamic thought, and its suppressed role in the genealogy of world history.' He undertakes a serious investigation of geometry as an artistic form in Islamic art and how and why the Muslim world lost the tradition of rational thinking that emanated from it. He wonders why it has "trapped itself within a world view that in fact opposes and denies the Muslim world not only its own spirit but its place in the genealogy of world history" and questions if it is "possible now to recover the past achievements of the Arab / Islamic history and its own worldview – and how."

The pyramids, temples, palaces and sculpture of Egypt and Mesopotamia are among the earliest expressions of geometric abstraction but in a Greek artscape, preoccupied with visual manifestations of its Gods, the artistic spirit of geometry did not evolve to greater heights. According to the author, "The important point here is that although modern Western philosophy began its journey with the knowledge that originated with the Greeks, it was the Arabs who had developed this classical knowledge further and elaborated it before it reached Europe and produced the European Renaissance." The arrival of Greek knowledge in 9th century Baghdad (especially Euclid's geometry) played a fundamental role in Arab science, philosophy and astronomy but it also led to the emergence of a unique sensory form of art. Defined by a complex physical symmetry this art went far beyond pattern making to provoke the imagination to penetrate the cosmos and perceive the invisible. Its true spirit revealed not only the abstractness of the Divine but also the nature of the infinite cosmos which it created. In this context "Arab Islamic history is therefore

central to the history that links Europe with the ancient Greeks and the knowledge Europe produced following this link that laid the foundation for the modern world." Unfortunately this role of Islamic history was completely removed from the genealogy of art history and direct links were established between modern Europe and ancient Greeks. Fortunately "the emergence of abstract form in modern art with symmetry under pinning its formations, particularly in Minimalism, has in fact vindicated the centrality of geometry in the spirit's historical journey from its earlier periods to the modern..... Minimalism, one of the most important post war avant-garde movements, depends on the symmetry and seriality that are fundamental to the geometry of Islamic art, and confirms the importance for the modern world of those ideas that emerged almost a thousand years ago from the Islamic spirit."

Yet another article that resurrects the Islamic spirit, but in an entirely different manner, is Rana Kabbani's, Behind him lay the Great City of Cordoba, in which she heatedly claims "And yet as Muslims, we receive no share in the glittering prize of contemporary civilization, which we were instrumental in making. When a curt acknowledgement of Islamic Spain's role becomes unavoidable, Europeans quickly reduce that masterly contribution to menial size, by suggesting, in a manner that is deliberately misleading, that Muslims were mere transmitters of Greek learning to a Europe which then burst into a Renaissance. This well-honed cultural cliché is a dizzying travesty of what actually took place."

Other articles also expound the issue of identity and deliberate displacement but with reference to a more recent past. It is easy to empathize and locate similarities in Zeynep Celik's recount Colonial / Post Colonial Intersections – Lieux de Memoire in Algiers, as we too have been (and still are) victims of colonial strategies, machinations and post colonial confusion. Similarly, Anwar Jelal Shemza – Search for Cultural Identity, by Mary Shemza is not just a very interesting read but also treads familiar ground to as it sheds light on an old master whom we lost early to the London art scene of the 60's but who continued to explore his Islamic roots.

Presently Third Text is the only journal available here that presents contextual studies of Asian art, past and present, with the intention of reclaiming lost space in the art historical index. It publishes information about ignored and suppressed artworks, highlighting their historical place within modern developments, along with theoretical articles which critique and analyze the prevailing situation. Today when Pakistani art has just begun to step out in the global arena this journal should be considered 'essential reading.'

Dawn Gallery April 5 2009

DAWN GALLERY

INTERVIEWS

FOR ART'S SAKE

From a fledgling art gallery in 1987 to a premier art space today VM owes its frontline status to the devoted efforts of Riffat Alvi. As the moving spirit behind VM she sheds light on her role as Gallery Director and what it takes to steer it forward.

A commercial art gallery manager is responsible for the commercial and artistic success of a gallery. Because of this scope, the role demands a combination of artistic awareness, business acumen, interpersonal skills and practical abilities. In the light of this how would you define your responsibilities as Director VM Gallery. ?

Behind the obvious functions of dealing with clients and installing exhibitions there is a huge amount of multitasking, like networking, searching, organizing and establishing contacts locally and internationally, that need to be accomplished before an exhibition is ready to be mounted. Invitations have to be released on time and if catalogues are accompanying a show then writing and printing schedules have to be met. As an established artist and art educator I am very active within the art fraternity here and enjoy cordial relations with my seniors, contemporaries, upcoming artists as well as the undergraduate student body. This enables me to tap a vast reservoir of artistic talent which translates well into a wide variety of shows. While VM promotes and attends to the commercial sales of artworks like any normal gallery its aims and objectives go far beyond the average focus on marketing. I maintain a constant liaison with the cultural wings of diplomatic missions as I believe in the educational value of international shows. A considerable amount of effort and planning goes into bringing original artworks here from other countries and then insurance issues, security arrangements, suitable publicity and healthy viewer turnout has to be ensured to maximize its success locally. Among the many a glass and ceramic shows by Late Endic from Turkey was memorable, as was curator Sabah Hussains rare Ukiyo Japanese prints exhibition. Goethe institute has always been a remarkable supporter, their recent Sigmar Polke Show and the Bernd and Hilla Becher photography exhibitions were outstanding and a Gerhard Richter exhibition is in the pipeline. The Henry Moore show under the auspices of the British Council was another feather in VM's cap as were the current Michael Esson and Mike Kempson print shows where the two Australian artists were personally present to explain their art and give workshops.

Gallery directors have to work closely with individual artists, develop relationships with new artists, and extend relationships with established artists from the gallery 'stable.' Do you agree?

Riffat Alvi

Riffat Alvi



Yes Gallery Directors have to work closely with individual artists as each one of them has his/her sensibility and I have to respect that. Interaction is through verbal exchange of ideas and there have been times when what they say or imply is not on the canvas. Translating a thought or idea into a painting is not a joke – coordination of eyes mind and hands is extremely necessary.

How can galleries elevate art appreciation and awareness levels here?

In the west children are taken to museums to avail guided tours and that is where art appreciation first begins. Here gallery shows can provide this experience but there is a lack of support from schools to further the art sensibility among children. Whenever we have had school visits, as in the Sigmar Polke and Henry Moore show, the

Hammad Nasar

BEYOND THE PAGE

response from the primary and secondary level students has been extremely enthusiastic. I aim to officially inform schools that VM is interested in initiating guided gallery talks for school children. Other than children most of our major shows are accompanied by talks for the benefit of art students, viewers and buyers/ collectors. A talk by eminent art historian and critic Geeta Kapur and her husband Vivan Sundaram, nephew of legendary Indian Modern Artist Amrita Sher-Gil, in 1987 was amongst the first of many discourses, dialogues and slide shows I have arranged at VM.

Today galleries here are not fully equipped to handle new mixed and multimedia media art because it is technology reliant. As a director how do you arrange for such exhibitions to take place?

Multimedia art is flourishing not just in the west but also in other Asian countries and here, multinationals, especially those dealing with the requisite technical media equipment need to step forward and assist our galleries, through sponsorships of such shows. Such supportive measures enabled us to equip VM Gallery with suitable flat screens, monitors, DVD's, sound systems and other technical paraphernalia in order to mount successful exhibitions like The Vasl multimedia shows, Kathy Hinde's video and sound Installation and Moti Roti's sixty second film screenings and many others.

Now that young generation art is on the rise how do you perceive the scene?

Other than welcoming solo exhibitions by young artists I have also initiated the annual Emerging Talent Show, based on selected thesis artworks of art institutions all over Pakistan, specifically to highlight promising graduate art. Young curators should enter the arena also and there are examples of exhibitions like Clay Clan, Labyrinth and Karachi Kiya, Seen Unseen etc etc at VM where artists like Kaif Ghaznavi, Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed emerged as young curators. In a developing art scene art graduates should be given opportunities, through additional courses, to train as gallery directors / assistants, manage art archives, read art history and take up critical writing. There is a dearth of trained art personnel to conduct allied art activities. I am persuading my management to hold courses at VM which will enable art students to branch out into affiliated directions. Eventually this will add to and brace the inadequate art infrastructure that we have.

Just how contemporary is the miniature today? An ongoing exhibition, Beyond the Page: The Miniature as Attitude in Contemporary Art, at Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, California captures the genres postmodern spirit to grand effect. Organized by Green Cardamom and Pacific Asia Museum the exhibition is guest curated by Hammad Nasar with Anna Sloan and Bridget Bray. Describing his role as curator Hammad Nasr spoke at length on the dynamics of the show, what the miniature is now and how the miniature sensibility informs contemporary non-miniature art.

Artists featured in the exhibition include Hamra Abbas, Zahoorul Akhlaq, Faiza Butt, Noor Ali Chagani, Ali Kazim, Aisha Khalid, Rehana Mangi, Hasnat Mehmood, Imran Qureshi, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Rashid Rana, Anwar Shemza and Muhammad Zeeshan.

How do you see your role as a curator. What objectives did you keep in mind while framing this collection?

Hammad Nasar



For me art is a carrier of ideas, and an exhibition is one way that knowledge is produced through creating a framework around the ideas embedded in art works. It is akin to the publishing of a book, or a panel discussion around a given theme or topic. In that context, I see the job of the curator as analogous to that of an editor, or a moderator in a series of critical conversations. It is a creative role in as much as the choice of who you invite and how you juxtapose different points of view which creates new meanings.

This expanded and updated version of *Beyond the Page* builds from an exhibition I curated in 2006 for Manchester Art Gallery and Asia House in the UK. Since that point I have had the opportunity to reflect on the feedback of artists and critics, and become familiar with newer (and indeed some older) artists, whose work is significant in the consideration of the idea of the miniature as an attitude.

In developing this new version of the exhibition, myself and my co-curators (Anna Sloan and Bridget Bray) were trying to add new layers to the mix: work produced in the last few years that has advanced the notion of what miniature has become, as well as historic work by artists such as Anwar Jalal Shemza, who studied at what used to be the Mayo College (now the NCA) in the 1940s and carried his miniature lessons with him right until his death in 1985. So we have moved from showing the work of eight artists in 2006 to the work of thirteen artists in the show at Pasadena.

What do you mean by the "miniature as attitude in contemporary art"?

Through the vehicle of this exhibition we argue that the miniature is not just a technique or a collection of tropes and media, but a sensibility that is shared by these artists. These artists share not just conceptual interests but also formal ideals, which converge to form a sensibility or attitude reflecting the significant role of the visual language, framework and conventions of miniature in each artist's training or early development. This attitude, for example, has at its core a rigour of application, reflecting the laborious work of the miniaturist; there is a continued reference to the art of the book, referencing the manuscripts that miniature paintings were traditionally composed within; also geometric designs, characteristic of Islamic art and architecture and particularly the grid that underpinned this (and that also resonates with modernist ideas) also figure large in these works. Drawing parallel lines in a tight grid are the first lessons of miniature painting, and almost all of the artists would have spent some time doing that. The exhibition embodies the intensity of experience and a framework for art making that is common to practices as diverse as

Rashid Rana's composite photographs where each single photograph is like a single *pardokht* application of paint in miniature painting, or Rehana Mangi's meticulous, obsessive grids and patterns created out of human hair. Though these artists take the historical miniature in multiple directions, and nearly half of them did not train as 'miniaturists,' their work shares a singular attitude, a set of common principles.

How do you perceive the miniature moving forward in the light of this show?

I do not think the show is going to propel the miniature forward, it is actually a reflection of what the miniature has now become. In assessing its propositions I am struck by three things. Firstly, that the historical arc of the miniature goes back beyond just the recent past. Shemza studied miniature painting in 1940s, Jamil Naqsh in the 1960s and there were dozens, if not hundreds of other artists whose practice was influenced by it before the 1980s and the foundation for contemporary miniature through the pioneering work of Zahoor ul Akhlaq and the elevation of the miniature department at the NCA to a 'major' under the guidance of Bashir Ahmed. Secondly, the commonality and strength of this sensibility or attitude in the work of artists who did not train in miniature per se, for example, Rashid Rana, Faiza Butt, Hamra Abbas or Ali Kazim, is striking.

And finally, the work of the youngest generation of artists to come through the miniature department has begun to radically question the formal bases of what miniature practice is. Muhammad Zeeshan's *Dying Miniature* series of pencil on sandpaper works is an attempt to define the boundaries of what could be called miniature. But I would refer in particular to the two youngest artists in the show — Noor Ali Chagani and Rehana Mangi — who practice what one could call *Miniature 2.0*. Chagani, for instance, produced installations from tiny fired clay bricks for his graduation thesis in miniature painting. And in that gesture showed everyone who follows that the limitations of the miniature (like in any other form of art) are only those of the artist's imagination.

Is there a possibility of this exhibition coming to Pakistan - if so, then when, if not then why not?

Absolutely. Precisely when I cannot commit now, as it depends on venues, funding and logistical issues. But we have been encouraged by the growing interest in having a public engagement with art in Pakistan, and would be keen to bring a version of the show back home to where it came from.

A number of artists in this show are settled abroad - their art practice is influenced by global trends and they exhibit more

frequently in foreign venues than at home in Pakistan with the result that local audiences are not completely in touch with the developments in their oeuvre which leads to a 'disconnect' situation. What are your comments on this ?

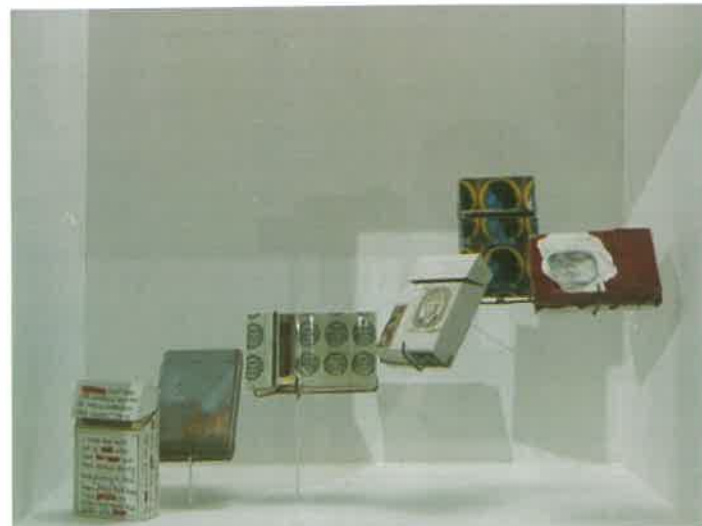
Given the lack of functioning public institutions and the nascent critical engagement with art I would argue that there are no artists that local audiences are 'completely in touch' with. Lack of public funding and museum culture also means that opportunities to realise large-scale or ambitious works also tend to happen outside Pakistan, I can think of Hamra's work at last year's Sharjah Biennial, or Rashid's work for the Pakistan Pavilion in Dubai the year-before, or Imran Qureshi's commission for the first Singapore Biennial, as cases in point. Better knowledge of an artist's oeuvre will have to come from more and better publications, and new, economical, internet-based platforms starting with the artists' own websites.

Having said all this, running through the list of the thirteen artists in Beyond the Page, the only ones who have not shown in Pakistan in the last two to three years are those that are no longer with us:— Shemza and Zahoor ul Akhlaq! For both of whom a properly researched and funded retrospective is long overdue.

Dawn Gallery April 11 2010

**DAWN
GALLERY**

Hasnat Mehmood - Addiction



Rashid Rana, Hamra Abbas, Nusra Latif



Anita Dawood

A TRIBUTE TO SAEEN FATAH

The idea of investigating the early influences and directions of contemporary artists emanating from Sindh has been under discussion for a number of years - but a concerted effort to visualize and formulate a project on it has only become apparent in the show Fatah Jay Aasay Passay (In the Milieu of Fateh Halepoto).

Fatah Halepoto of Hyderabad taught and inspired a generation of artists now enjoying national and international acclaim. In the exhibition a series of artworks by his students Imran Channa, Nizam Dahiri, Fakeero, Mohammad Ali Talpur, Arif Hussain Khokhar, Ahmed Ali Manganhar and Ayesha Jatoti rekindle his dream of interpreting the imagery of Sindh with a reflective new vision. Stoking old flames they sift through a blur of vanishing cultures to reclaim fragments of snuffed histories and personal memories to attempt a contemporary realization of a mentors mission

Curated by Hammad Nasar and Muhammed Ali Talpur this effort has been documented in a bi-lingual book accompanying the exhibition. Editor of the volume Anita Dawood while talking about the how and why of the project discloses that the exhibition began to materialize two years ago during a conversation between curators, Mohammad Ali Talpur and Hammad Nasar. Talpur's early training in drawing was with Fatah Halepoto, an inspiring teacher and personality. Halepoto envisioned that his students would study art at NCA, realize their potential and return to Sindh to capture its imagery in a way that he felt had not yet been done. 'Look at that dancing girl sculpture from Mohenjodaro, she has been standing there with her hand on her hip for 5,000 years and no one has yet made her dance,' he would say. Like others in the exhibition Talpur has been haunted by the idea of returning to Sindh and completing Halepoto's 'mission' - although perhaps not in the way imagined by their mentor. Talpur discussed the idea of an exhibition with Fatah's old students with Nasar and they decided to work on this together.

Gradually the project became more refined tracing, visually, the concentric circles generated by the milieu of Fatah Halepoto. She further divulges that it was Engro Corp's support for the exhibition which allowed them to take these works back to Sindh. Fatah Jay Aasay Paassay opened at the Sindh Museum, Hyderabad in the beginning of June. The exhibition and the artists reclaimed an institution that exists for precisely such initiatives but lies underutilised. Engro's sponsorship also enabled Green Cardamom to publish a book accompanying the exhibition. The publication is important because it will remain, post-exhibition, as marker of a cultural contribution. A shortage of funds and scant commitment from the public sector for cultural projects means that the private sector has a

valuable role to play, and they are waking up to this. It is happening not only in the visual arts but also elsewhere, the hugely successful Coke Studio sessions are an example. Where corporate initiatives are focused and sustained they can have a huge and positive impact on our cultural landscape but obviously the corporate sector need as pre requisites an independent creative vision, and the sense that they can rely on the project being delivered

Anita Dawood



Anita Dawood, co-founder Green Cardamom and Editor of its publishing programme, answers questions related to Fatah Jay Aasey Passey.

There are a number of academically qualified artists hailing from interior Sindh – what was the criteria for selecting this particular group of artists?

The criteria was to create an exhibition that hung together thematically and conceptually – that offered an insight into some of the ideas that the artists who trained with Halepoto were engaging with – at one level the exhibition can even be about pedagogic influences and how these play out, and incidentally not all the artists are academically qualified. But the combination goes beyond just those who trained with Fatah, it includes artists like Ayesha Jatoti and Arif Hussainkhokhar, associated with this group through their interaction with them or the work they have produced. Many of the ideas these artists work with speak of a particular time and place, there is a use of imagery which brings to mind histories that relate directly to Sindh. Ahmed Ali Manganhar for example uses in his work the portrait of Seth Naomul Hotchand – ‘a so-called ‘traitor’, or some say not, from Sindh – or the cityscape of old Hyderabad. There are also visual themes of erasure, of blurring, and of layering imagery, that cut across the exhibition.

Will this initiative spearhead further research and exploration of art history in the Sindhi milieu? Do we see the evolution of a new chapter in the existing history of Pakistani art through this investigation?

Rather than a new chapter, I think it is an on-going one. Much art in Pakistan today is preoccupied with identity – who we are and what is our collective history as a young nation? Imran Channa’s *Memories* series, in graphite on paper, depicts a blurring of imagery and a looking to the past; Fakeero’s sensitive rendering, of a vision obscured with water droplets, again graphite on paper; Nizam Dahiri’s skilful play on faulty print registration in ballpoint, Ahmed Ali Manganhar’s swirl of characters and scenes, his elusive horseman in the distance, all can be seen as comments on the layers of history, written and overwritten, that lurk beneath the reality of not just Sindh but Pakistan today. Erasures and a blurring of vision resonate with the erasures we have brought about in our society, in our landscape, even in the diversity of our peoples that have made it easier for us, as a nation, to disregard our pre-Islamic past. Take the significance of Mohenjodaro to human civilization, no less and the lack of interest and attention given to it in Pakistan. These issues do not seem to have public fora

and remain marginalized – like much of contemporary art in Pakistan today. Rather than this initiative spotlighting Sindhi art I would hope it widens what people view as art from Pakistan.

What insights did you gain as editor of the publication accompanying the exhibition?

While working on the book I found myself thinking a lot about the context of these works and the ideas with which Halepoto launched most of these artists on their careers – which are documented in the book. They highlight the importance of Sindh, an area accorded a secondary status often by urban Karachites as ‘the interior’ – terminology that sits wittily alongside Ahmed Ali’s depiction in this exhibition of ‘interiors’ in film sets. Sindh has a notable living literary culture with large numbers of newspapers and magazines (perhaps more so in the 1990s than now) in circulation and Sindhi poetry is still passed down verbally from generation to generation. Yet this literary milieu is often overlooked in Pakistan. In Karachi, one hears more about Lahore’s literary cafes and culture than Sindh’s and as we all know most of the reasons for this are economic and political but to me these works help transcend that. Time and again I came across the words ‘a love for Sindh’ – something Ayaz Jokhio talks of eloquently in his essay in Sindhi for this bilingual publication. For all these artists, clinging on to the very idea of Sindh as a place seems to be a passion. I feel much of this passion is tied up with an awareness of the history of Sindh, and its significance for the subcontinent, going all the way back to Mohenjodaro. The word Sindhu, from Sanskrit is the root of the word Sindh and Indus, from which came the word India – underlining the importance of Sindh to the subcontinent. The fact that there is enough artistic momentum today to develop an exhibition and a book out of works by a group of artists from Sindh, an exhibition that has fore-grounded Sindh but is not necessarily a Sindhi exhibition or an exhibition about Sindh, suggests that Sindh holds a cultural significance for Pakistan today. Art is a means to see the world around you differently, to view the familiar in an unfamiliar way, a line that apparently Halepoto would repeat numerous times to his students. As someone who has viewed these works repeatedly and engaged in conversations about and around them, it has reminded me of the richness of Sindh’s history and culture and made me wonder why this is not a source of national rather than provincial pride.

Adeela Suleman

CURATORS PERSPECTIVE

As curator of, Being There, Adeela Suleman discussed the status of curatorial practice here.

Is there is a curator deficit in the art community?

The art scene is small so we do not need too many curators right now. Generally galleries host solo shows and occasionally call in professionals to curate exhibitions. We do not teach curatorial studies in our art universities. Our curators are not trained - most of them are almost full time artists, educators or critics. They curate shows because of their long association with art practice and experience of handling international shows. Most of the exhibitions on the inauguration of National Art Gallery, Islamabad, were curated by the artists, critics and art teachers. Some significant exhibitions have been curated by Salima Hashmi, Quddus Mirza, Imran Qureshi Naiza Khan, Nilofar Furrukh, Amin Gulgee, Atteqa Ali, Rashid Rana, Sumbul Khan, Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed.

For me it always works better if the show is curated rather than just getting hold of a few artists and showcasing their work which makes no point. But that is my view. I enjoy making connections with works by simply placing them next to each other and the way the work can grow in the gallery space and assume a new meaning/interpretation/context.

How did you determine your choice of artists for, Being There - was it on the basis of potential, originality, skills conceptual content or all of these attributes?

I selected the artists because I like what they do. Their humour, sense of mystery and bizzare compositions fascinate me! They use diverse materials and they represent contemporary Pakistani art. As I stated: The exhibition shows work which is in between an object and being flat, which instigates thoughts and then being very direct, it questions and provokes discussion.

Are you satisfied with the technical and conceptual quality of the work these artists submitted?

All the 8 women are practicing art for some years. They know what they are doing and they handle material with their individual sensibility. In this group only Sara Khan and Nosheen Iqbal are young in the art scene; and of course there is always room for being better.

Do you feel that your choice of artists was correct but perhaps you were not strict enough to extract the best out of them?

You cannot be strict with the artists. They are what they are. Little looseness but not laziness sometimes makes the work more interesting. I cannot stand works which are finished to the limits but offer nothing.

Your comments on the future of sculpture in mixed and multimedia?

Great great and great! Now there is so much new which has become the language of art - this is what is making it interesting & exciting. Everyone is an artist and everyone is using everything. Very few are hard core sculptors now.

Dawn Gallery March 28 2010

DAWN GALLERY

Adeela Suleman



Mahreen Zuberi

CONTEMPORARY ART AND MINIATURE SUBTLETIES



Mahreen Zuberi

Currently coordinator Fine Arts at Karachi University and visiting faculty at Indus Valley Mahreen Zuberi is a 2003 NCA graduate with numerous group participations, workshops and residencies, national and international, to her credit. She has exhibited at Canvas, Koel, Poppyseed and Rhotos 2 and her work was part of Resemble Reassemble, Devi Art Foundation, India and Hanging Fire Asia Society Museum, New York. A miniature major Zuberi airs her views on the genre's odyssey from an exotic art form to a defining, foundational tool of contemporary, ideational art.

How do you define yourself- as a contemporary miniature artist or just a contemporary artist?

Understanding "now" and responding to it in a visual language that is from today is how I translate being a contemporary artist.

Though it's interesting how you've suggested a split in a contemporary miniature artist and a contemporary artist. Post Shazia Sikander contemporary miniature thrived as a genre. These were exciting times when tradition was being reinterpreted. Boundaries broken, redefined, only to be broken down again. Fun!

Beyond the Page, curated by Hammad Nasar and Anna Sloan marks what the genre has shaped into today. Miniature painting has moved beyond being a novelty. There is urgency in the expression of the artist; the medium they chose is what best expresses their conceptual concerns.

How do you perceive the status of miniature art today, at home and abroad.

I constantly question myself about how art from Pakistan is perceived and contextualized at home and abroad. Since miniature painting has been tagged ornate and ritualistic, there has been an immense interest in its technique and craftsmanship. What a wasli is, how the paints are prepared, are squirrels killed to make brushes and so on. I've not killed a squirrel for a brush, but I speak only for myself.

In 2003, the year I was going to finish college, I met Virginia Whiles an art historian visiting NCA, who had for a while been intrigued with and following the developments of the contemporary miniature painting movement. Quoting myself from the Q & A with her, I had said "my work is minimal, to avoid getting lost in trash and deco." Repeating it after seven years I realize how arrogant it sounds, but I did not want a standing ovation for how detailed and decorative my painting was; I wanted to be applauded for how great my idea was. Ideally that is how I would want to perceive the status of miniature or any other contemporary art form. Though today how people respond to miniature painting is varied. There are some who are still curious about the technique others who have latched on to new trends and find miniature so passé. And then there are few, who respond to ideas irrespective of the medium.

Now that the discipline is being taught at IVSSA and Karachi University do you feel a Karachi chapter is also evolving?

Sumbul Khan, the curator for Poppy Seed gallery was the first to formally point it out. I recently co-curated a show with her and Sumaira Tazeen titled "The Karachi Miniature". I will admit it was tricky selecting a group of artists for this show since it is difficult to identify what is purely "miniature" or even if there really is a need to make that distinction. We came to an agreement that besides the technique and medium there was also a sensibility that was attached to miniature painting. That sensibility surpassed the technique and medium itself. Like, we had works by a young Karachi University graduate, Nosheen Iqbal who had constructed tiny sculptural pieces from broken down watch parts. The show reinforces the emergence of a Karachi chapter, on a superficial level maybe. But end of the day when we speak in a global context these distinctions are insignificant.

How does your training in miniature painting translate into your current, apparently contemporary, art practice?

I think more than my training as a miniature painter, life and my experiences play a more dominant role in my art practice. Though I am not playing down the importance of its history and its contribution in giving art from Pakistan its very own indigenous brand and putting us out on an international platter. Miniature painting is a tool I am

Salman Ikram

CRYSTALLINE WORKS

most comfortable with so naturally it becomes the first I reach out to. But my art making process usually starts from visualizing the final piece and then gearing up with the most appropriate apparatus to build it.

Your current ongoing series centralizes on the city of Karachi. You address the psychological impact cities in transition have on its inhabitants. What particular issues are you highlighting.. and what kind of vocabulary are you using for it ?

Earlier this year I witnessed a phone-snatching incident at a very busy traffic light here in Karachi. For a Karachite it should not have had an impact on me since incidents like these and much worse are coffee table conversations. I guess witnessing it from a distance and looking at expressions of the people who were acting as a passive audience, of which I was also a part, had an effect on me.

As a defense mechanism we isolate ourselves from situations that we cannot deal with or have no control over. The Karachi I imagined myself in was not the Karachi I was living in. I started observing extensions of walls that had been erected all over the city whether it was by increasing the height of a former wall or creating an additional super wall made of cargo containers. These sites I was familiar with but I never thought about them. Did these walls actually protect or did they only provide psychological security, in either case they arose out of a sense of insecurity.

In the work that followed, I made drawings of the various add-on walls and enclosed them in leather bound 'taweez'. I was attempting to record the landscape of our times and simultaneously provide a 'for' for it.

The works that are shown at Aicon gallery are from the series called, Green Patrol, part of which I have earlier exhibited at Canvas gallery in Karachi. The inspiration came from the recently mass planted button mangrove hedges all over the city. The button mangrove originally comes from tropic and sub tropic parts of the western hemisphere. Using these foreign flora walls as metaphor, I talk about an ongoing imposition that the physical and emotional landscape is subjected to. I transform these shrubs into large topiary body builders sprinkled across popular landscapes in Karachi, like Quaid-e Azam's Mazar, Seaview, Hotel Metropole etc. The Green Patrol imitates a security force; its origin is not indigenous yet it appears to be at home, publicly flexing its muscles. This work is more whimsical; it gives us a chance to inwardly smile at ourselves.



Salman Ikram

Contemporary ceramist Salman Ikram answers questions about his show Crystalline Works and the sporadic existence of studio ceramics.

The growing number of qualified contemporary ceramists, triennial events and interest levels have not generated the expected increase in solo shows or production of ceramic art. What is retarding the flowering of studio pottery / ceramics?



Public awareness about studio pottery is not rising in tandem with its development as an art form amongst contemporary ceramists. Studio potters are innovating but are not consistent in their efforts. The current socio-political upheaval is also not conducive to production. I too have come to Karachi for a solo after a lapse of five years. Maintaining private studios is expensive and constructing kilns and making wheels also requires a great deal of interaction with the technicians and there are no local centres that can provide these facilities to visiting ceramists. The non-availability of suitable readymade materials is a constant drawback and clay bodies and glazes have to be self-prepared from locally available materials which tax the creative process making production long and arduous.

If there are impediments how did you as a ceramist overcome them?

I have made a determined effort to establish my art practice. Setting up a studio with a kiln was my first priority after graduation. I continue to upgrade it and now have a couple of kilns. I constantly wash my clays to create compositions suitable for my category of work as there are no refined products available here unlike the west where prepared clays and readymade glazes can be ordered from the market.

Describe your work process?

Primarily I throw to create a sculptural form and my emphasis on shape or surface textures is a pre-planned effort. If I am highlighting form then I opt for dry glazes in attractive tones but when accent is on glazes then the shape is simple. My colours are oxides and I purchase them from wherever and however I can.

Your works are distinguished by their unusual and varied glazes.

I have experimented with a host of glazes including dry, matt, volcanic and crackled varieties but presently I am concentrating on crystalline surfaces. Glaze crystals spontaneously form and grow in the molten glazes while the pieces are cooling in the kiln. Many opaque and matt glaze textures are the result of multitudes of micro-crystals, so minute that they are invisible to the naked eye. The macro-crystalline glazes, or more commonly known simply as crystalline glazes, have crystals that grow large enough to see. They develop "growth rings," halos, star-bursts and auroras, which record changing conditions within the kiln. I do not embed the crystals on the porcelain, nor can I see them growing in the kiln. A piece's relative quality can only be judged after the firing cycle is complete. I enjoy the challenge of controlling this process with extensive record-keeping, experience, observation, and attention to detail. My ceramic surfaces are my canvas where my artistic acumen is at play.

Are you exhibiting internationally?

Recently a collection of my work was shown in an art fair in Madrid, Spain. The feedback on my web page www.salmanikram.com was very positive and another show is in the pipeline. I am part of the American Forum of potters on the web where there is a constant exchange of experiences – they work with natural kilns and are really amazed how I manage to achieve crystalline effects through firing in a gas kiln. The ongoing sharing of knowledge on the web energizes one's art practice, one's work is given larger exposure and one gains from the insights of others. Unfortunately this interest and dialogue is missing within the ceramic community here.

Dawn Gallery May 9 2010

DAWN GALLERY

Sara Salman

ILLUMINATING THE TRADITIONAL ARTS



Sara Salman
Jerwood Prize

2 In the all-enveloping post-modernist glare the spotlight beamed on traditional arts as Sara Salman received the Jerwood Prize from HRH Prince Charles at the Princes School of Traditional Arts. Established with the Jerwood Foundation in 2008, the prize is awarded annually to one student at PSTA to recognize exceptional work and talent in the field of traditional arts and craftsmanship. Sara is a proud recipient from amongst five students who competed for the £5,000 Jerwood Prize.

Graduating from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 2002, with a major in painting Sara practiced as a professional artist and teacher before coming to the PSTA. For her final project she has used geometric design to explore floral structures and patterns. After graduating in July 2009 she returned to Lahore where she will teach the philosophy and approach to art that she has practiced at the School. Here she discusses the PSTA philosophy and her approach to art.

Can you tell us something about the Prince's School of Traditional arts and its core philosophy?

The Prince's School of Traditional Arts was founded in 2004 by HRH The Prince of Wales as one of his core charities. It developed from the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts Programme (VITA) that was

established at The Royal College of Art in 1984. The Prince's School offers practising artists the opportunity to undertake research at the highest level with post-graduate degrees (MA, MPhil, PhD) validated by the University of Wales.

The fundamental principle of The School is that tradition is continual renewal. Experiencing the traditional arts as living skills students participate in their vibrancy and regeneration. Although theoretical programmes exist at postgraduate level at many western universities, there are few, if any colleges, apart from The Prince's School, where the practical skills of the traditional arts are taught at this level. The School holds that the practice of the traditional arts is a contemplative process based upon universal spiritual truths. Art is seen as an integral part of everyday life and not a luxury; neither is it a subjective psychological experiment, nor a whimsical exercise in nostalgia.

Today most contemporary/ postmodern art is at loggerheads with tradition - innovation is through distortion, grotesquerie or shock tactics. How does PSTA encourage imaginative initiatives without creating ruptures with tradition?

The School's programmes aim to encourage an awareness amongst

Sara Salman - Passiflora



students that form, pattern and colour as manifested in the various branches of the traditional arts, are not simply pleasing to the senses, or demonstrations of good design, but are created to embody beauty — they teach about the beauty of the permanent that shines through into the world of the transient.

How does the PSTA curriculum address the art craft divide?

According to the PSTA philosophy the distinction made today between Fine Art and Craft is entirely modern. In a traditional society painting, pottery, carpentry, agriculture and music were all expressions of art or making and the artist's practical activity was integrated, not only into the wider community but also into a more profound order.

What effect has the PSTA philosophy had on your art practice?

Being exposed to the practical and philosophical aspects of different traditions and the beauty of symbolism of the forms from these traditions has indeed broadened my perspective as an artist. Moreover, I have developed a strong fascination with sacred geometry which harmonises and unites different parts into a whole and has the capacity to bring underlying beauty to all forms of art, whether it is visual, auditory or performed.

Can you explain how you deconstruct geometric pattern to create floral structures? Geometric pattern is angular, severe and repetitive whereas floral forms are pliant loosely structured and rhythmic.

Sara Salman - Tulip



In his book *Religion and the Order of Nature*, distinguished philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, "Our existential situation here on Earth leads us directly to the experience of order. In fact, the Greek word for order, *cosmos*, is still used to refer to that totality of external reality which is perceptible....". It is this 'order' that human beings have been trying to understand and explain, scientists through science, philosophers through philosophy and religious people through religion.

The inspiration for my work comes from the manifestation of this order in the cycles and forms in nature. There is an inherent number symbolism constantly unfolding and expressing itself through natural forms. I have tried to use these numbers as symbols and as a source for the construction of geometric patterns inspired by the Islamic architectural tradition. I have attempted to bring out the underlying biomorphic quality of the forms of flowers using these crystalline grids. The selected flowers have also inspired the color palettes providing an infinite exploration of tonal spectrum. My attempt has been to create images that radiate the essence of the flowers and invoke in the viewer the beauty and the sense of the sacred that the natural order holds within.

Dawn Gallery March 2010

**DAWN
GALLERY**

Ayaz Jokhio

ART AND INDIVIDUALITY

Born in Mehrabpur, Sindh, NCA graduate Ayaz Jokhio features among young generation contemporary artists whose work is creating ripples at home and abroad. Easy on the eyes and the imagination, Jokhio's simple imagery laced with humour is underscored with insightful reflections. Short-listed for the 'Asian Art Prize 2009', Sovereign Art Foundation, Hong Kong, his recent exhibitions include Resemble: reassemble, at the Devi Art Foundation, India, Hanging Fire, Asia Society, New York, and Newspaper-collages (solo show), Canvas, Karachi. Talking about his thought process he explains how it filters into his work.

As a new-generation contemporary artist, what are your aims and objectives?

Being labelled as 'contemporary', 'modern' or even 'post-modern' is immaterial. Primarily an artist needs to be clear about the aims and objectives of art itself. To me art is a way to express and share my thoughts, feelings and understanding with others. Translation of one's unique perspective brings individuality to a subject and communicating in a fresh and more effective way should be one's aim. It's never about a target to be achieved—it's a way of living.

You solicit viewer engagement by inverting commonplace items like nails and needles or footballs and pens into insidious objects. Is there a

Ayaz Jokhio



method to this selection and inversion of subject or are you drawing inspiration from your immediate political and cultural environment as and how you encounter it? How does your calling as a poet and a cartoonist inform your art practice?

An artistic act is never a solitary effort ... by interpreting its essence the spectator becomes a participant. Sometimes I use commonplace items (a more appropriate term would be 'realistic imagery,') so that a common person can relate to it.

Regarding images of needles and pens - I have made only one of each in my whole career- there were different reasons for doing so. When I made the pen image it was beside a bullet, a diptych - it's not very difficult to grasp the idea—it's an old cliché. Similarly you can only understand the method /-reason for the selection of other images (of a nail or a needle) in the context of images accompanying them.

Like a child speaks the language he hears, a painter paints what he sees around him, so I also draw inspiration from my immediate environment.

Fundamentals of various art forms are similar and poetry enables me to understand the mystery of art.

My habit of sketching evolved into cartooning when I was working as a news editor. This was also my first encounter with visual arts. Moreover, journalistic humour is always underscored with serious issues - these subtleties in cartooning, mixing humour and satire with something serious, as for example, politics or religion, is visible in my recent body of work.

You play with the objective and the accurate just to accent the critical. Expressing yourself mainly through the literal/realistic image, your emphasis is not on developing a signature or defining your skills---what is the role of medium and treatment in your art practice?

I try different techniques to construct a certain image, but that does not mean that I don't follow any medium or I don't have any signature. Signature, I think any artist has, it's just who that person is. A signature style also means having a trademark and repeating successes---something I intentionally avoid. I believe it is a pattern set by galleries, collectors, critics and art institutions.

There is nothing wrong in selling art but producing saleable work is not for me. Nowadays fresh graduates only familiar with curriculum requirements also have a signature style ... it's become a formula for easy success.

Galleries advise artists to produce more work in a particular style that is their 'true signature' so they can sell these works to collectors who love to buy them. Many artists today secretly believe that the measure of their success lies in whether or not they have developed a style that attracts the buyer. I find this strange.

Your innate expression should not be consciously formulated by adopting similar styles or techniques---that is the end of true possibilities and creativity. You can truly know and develop your signature retrospectively; when over the course of time you start finding similarities in different things you have done. Trying different techniques polishes your skills

The definition of the term 'medium' in visual arts is often narrowed down to certain techniques like 'pencil drawing' or 'oil painting' ---but for me all these are different ways of making an image. My medium encompasses the whole field of visual art---creating a visual experience, no matter what technique I employ.

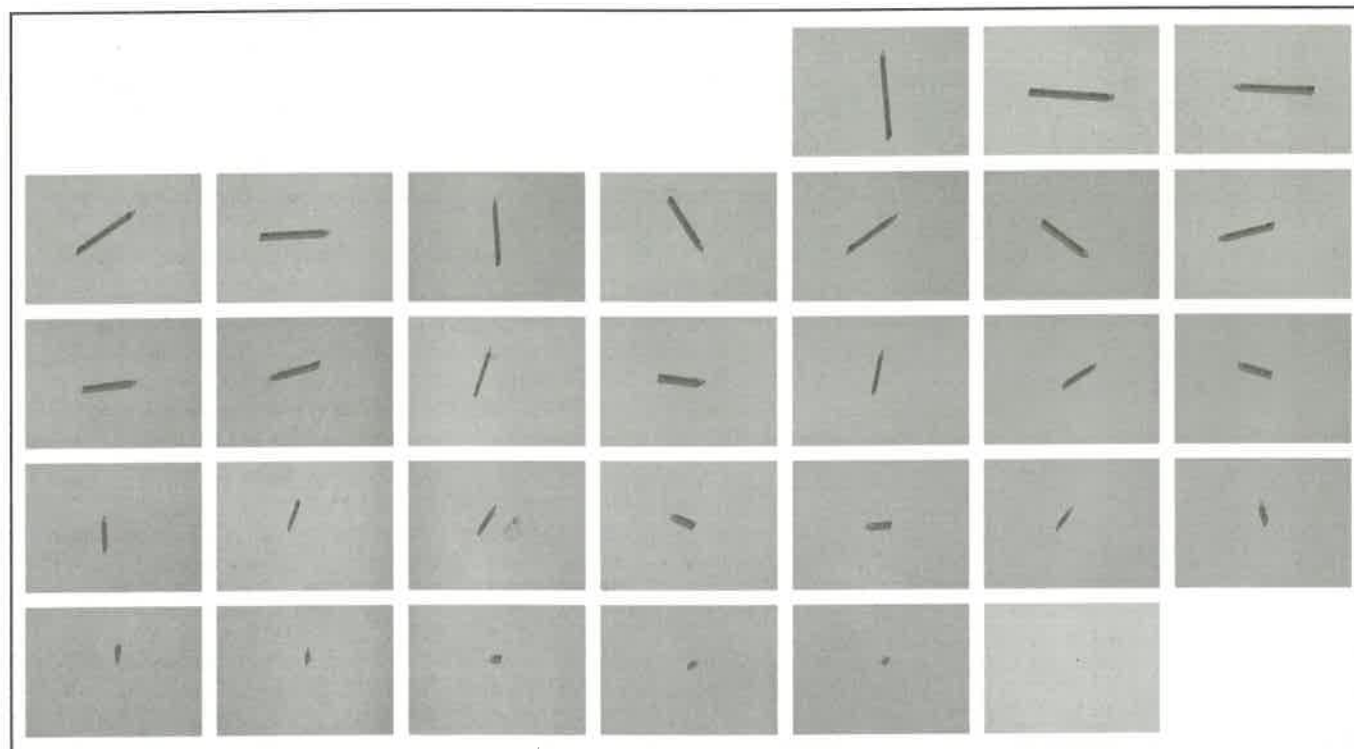
What are you emphasizing in your series 'Medium as metaphor' currently on show at Green Cardamom?

Translating an idea into art is my primary concern --- even when I am addressing political, religious, cultural, social or spiritual issues. I have only displayed three works in the Cardamom show and interestingly the title of each work is the same as its medium. In the work 'Pencil on Paper', 30 drawings of a pencil are made with a pencil; a new pencil image in the first drawing keeps getting smaller in successive ones till it is reduced to a tiny piece of lead. This could be perceived as an act of killing time or of comparing the pencil with life, creating a metaphor in the process. Having said that, I am really not trying to emphasize anything, and the work retains a certain emptiness, which can be filled with anything you want.

Dawn Gallery 01 August 2010



Ayaz Jokhio - Pencil on paper



Sana Arjumand

LETS FLY FIRST CLASS

Sana Arjumand



An edgy mix of fantasy and reality young Sana Arjumand's solo, Lets Fly First Class at Aicon Gallery New York, affirms her ability to temper critical social, political and gender concerns with whimsical, quirky funniness. Speaking about her work she sheds light on the motivations behind her parodist often radical content. Other than a showing at home she has also exhibited abroad at Aicon Gallery and Flux Festival, London, Broadway Gallery, East West Center, Honolulu and availed notable residencies, such as Art Omi in New York. The artist currently lives and works in Islamabad.

In a matter of just five years you have shifted from graduation at NCA, exhibiting locally and now showing solo, internationally

- how have you assimilated this rapid shift from emerging to rising artist?

I think that in today's world time has lost some of its relevance and hence measurement in this context. The support I encountered at VM, where I showed first and then at Canvas where I was noticed by Aicon as well as the critical appraisal of my work were early sources of encouragement that made a positive contribution to my work. Otherwise there is not much difference between the emerging and rising me, because I think there is rising in the emerging and emerging in the rising. There are always people who do not know about my work and there is something new that I am always discovering about my work. This is such a vast subject without many rules and restrictions and no amount of work will ever be enough.

Do you feel there is any difference in viewership and audience perceptions at home and abroad regarding content and quality of work, especially with reference to socio-political, religious and cultural issues emanating from this part of the region?

I welcome feedback and discussions- the first impression of my work has been the same at home and even in New York, which is that people notice the painterly techniques. Viewers are also curious to know what it is like to be a female artist in Pakistan and if there are many women in the arts. I enjoy answering in the affirmative. In my new work I have shifted from the very obvious political / religious / cultural representations to undertones of symbols and hints of these issues.

One of the differences in reaction toward my work is that people in New York have been more intrigued with my visuals - in the sense that they see my work as a window into a broader perspective of the representation of Pakistan. It gives an impression of the diversity of the country, which the media isn't representing very well. They also get to see that an artist like me has a place in my country. The country is open to new ideas and voices - this is also a truth in Pakistan. While we have another image of us, there are still new voices emerging, perhaps more than before.

Can you comment on the influences that go into your potpourri of fun, fantasy and humour so apparent in your paintings/prints?

For me, inspiration comes from the street culture and imagery in my land. I get ideas while stuck in traffic jams and in the darkness of load sheddings. I have fun analyzing words that are merely placed for decorative means on buses. The fun and humour aspect comes from a cultural method of communicating, in that the most intense of matters can be commented upon in a very tongue-in-cheek manner. I

quite enjoy observing people's manner of communicating with each other and just generally watching people go about their daily lives. I get a kick out of picking things up, twisting them around and turning them in to images. It's also a technique to really get to confront, confess or question comfortably.

The level and intensity of visual excitement in Pakistan that comes from the chaotic energy gives birth to ideas that are impossible in other environments or in other societies. Developed societies have a kind of neatness to them, they have lost a kind of chaotic creativity. At the same time, the visuals that I make are very global, in the sense that they're comprehensible cross-culturally.

What are the specifics of Lets Fly First Class - can you detail your thrust with direct reference to your artworks?

The show is really a web of ideas, I have works from 4 different series that kind of relate to the same concept. The idea of titling the show Lets Fly First Class came from the word "TAYARAH" (the Arabic word for aeroplane) behind a bus which also motivated me to make a life size aeroplane. I enjoyed interpreting how the drivers actually may have thought of their buses as aeroplanes. Turning these words in to literal objects twists their meaning, which is quite open to interpretation. The public transport is hardly anything like flying first class. On the other hand, flagged cars fly on the roads because they get a huge protocol. That's just a direction but these pieces (Lets Fly First Class, Bureau Car) can be seen in any way they want to be seen in.

The, Let's Give Each Other Space, series is more about how comical it is to give human personalities to an inanimate object, and aeroplanes in particular. Because the aeroplane is such an important and iconic machine on a global level - bringing the world together and also tearing it apart as a vehicle of destruction - it was interesting to place these aeroplanes in states of "love".

The, Massive Human Search, series is a comment on the meaning of search in today's world. Search for us has become Google, Wikipedia and other search engines. We sit and type to find answers to a range of questions, where as in the old times the uniqueness of a person's search varied from individual to individual. Search was more about leaving one's comfort zone and physically challenging oneself to find the meaning of existence. My interest is more about the fantasy aspect of the meaning of search, being a physical and spiritual challenge rather than a web-based activity.

In The Playground (Dialogue, Nurture and Voyage) plays with the concept of human lives being intertwined with divine reasoning, and the process of growth never ends. The children metaphorically represent humans of any age, because the search for answers is present through our existence. Playground refers to the universe in general. Coming back to the heading of one of the paintings in the show and also the title of the show itself, Lets Fly First Class is, also relevant to a search to go higher with one's own self, and that exists in a lot of my work. I refer to it with a different flavour each time.

Dawn Gallery June 13 2010

DAWN GALLERY



Sana Arjumand - Bureau Car

Bani Abidi

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

An NCA graduate, Bani Abidi, secured an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999. Her recent credits include participations in Xth Lyon Biennale France, Hanging Fire, contemporary art from Pakistan at Asia Society, New York, Where Three Dreams Cross' at White Chapel Gallery, London, Art HK10 Hong Kong Art Fair, and a solo at VM Art Gallery, Karachi. MOMA (NY) acquired her video as among Art Forum's top 10 films in 2006.

Now working between New Delhi and Karachi, Abidi uses video to explore issues related to identity, power politics and historical and cultural manipulation, often through apparently benign, humorous, everyday events. Here she speaks about her formative years and her current art practice.

It was your generation of artists that steered art away from the existing format of painterly practices towards issue-based concepts and radical new media expressions. Define the influences that prompted this transition?

In my case the pivotal turning point was exposure to the work of the Indus Valley faculty in the mid '90s. The 'Popular art' movement at that time in Karachi, spearheaded by Durriya Kazi, David Alesworth, Elizabeth and Iftikhar Dadi was beyond popular categorisations of 'high' and 'low' art as it's commonly seen to be.

It was a seminal moment where the focus of art suddenly shifted from the elevated sublime self to mundane visual details of life around us. In the case of these artists it was an exploration of mainstream visual language and the psychology of design, objects and materials that were found in Karachi. For others, it took on different manifestations over time; the crucial point being that the possibility of the 'everyday' as a profound place took root in the minds of many artists. It was not as much about steering away from painting or gravitating towards sculpture or video, as much as it was about the ideas that inspired us. People still continued painting around these ideas.

Then in the mid '90s I went to study in Chicago. It was a one stop shop of contemporary art from everywhere and my frame of reference grew by leaps and bounds. The commercial boom of the '80s in the New York art world was over. There was a humbling effect of sorts and an attempt at opening doors to artists from diverse spaces. And the Berlin Wall had also come down, so internationally, the cultural landscape had suddenly become richer and wider. I evolved through other peoples' political concerns in addition to mine.

Your videos evince empathy for the human condition which you address through social and political issues. Most of your subjects emanate from our particular culture but instead of

dramatizing you temper situations with humour and irony by tapping social behaviour and capitalize on typical attitudes, gestures and nuances. Can you comment on this element of 'humanness' in your works?

I think you put it really well when you say that I 'temper situations with humour and irony'. At least that is what I attempt, to make gentle works which people hover around and sip slowly, rather than get overwhelmed by. The 'humanness' in my work comes from the process of my work. Every idea comes from things I have actually noticed in real life, in some form or the other.

Life is far more interesting than art, but its only making and experiencing art (in a broad sense) that makes one notice particular details of the same life you and I live every day. So my training as an artist is actually something crucial to my being, whether I make art or not.

Bani Abidi



Usman Ghouri

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

For instance my video, *Reserved* which is about a city in which people are waiting for a VIPs motorcade to drive by, came from years of waiting for some VIP to arrive at some event or the other, an idea which is inherently absurd and comical. As you say it's only when I was exposed to translations of life in, say, Iranian cinema that I also developed the confidence to take those daily jottings and observations to an iconic level. And another thing that is important to me is to not attempt to resolve stories, I like particular moments and think that those are meaningful enough to work around.

In your 2006 exhibition, *The ghost of Mohammed Bin Qasim* at VM you had remarked, "Audiences digest readily from television but their expectations from the gallery are still traditional. They are comfortable buying paintings but cannot initiate a dialogue with video. As long as art remains focused on ownership, rather than on experiencing it, video is going to have a problem." Do you perceive any change in attitude now?

No perceptions have worsened. Owning art is exactly like owning a Gucci bag, you don't know why you prefer it over another, but you have it. Art as an investment, and lesser so as an intellectual /aesthetic experience is still the norm in Pakistan, like in many other countries experiencing a sudden boom in the art market. But since the boom has facilitated the making of so much art, sensibilities will evolve and mature.

I showed my video, *Reserved*, at VM Art Gallery in March this year, four years after it was shown in various other countries mainly because VM and Green Cardamom were able to rent projectors and ensure that it was installed according to its original plan for a couple of weeks. Also the showing of this work was a most heartwarming experience. The diversity and range of age groups and people who sat back and enjoyed it was really thrilling for me.

Do you think gallery showings limit the range of your work - should they not be shown at other more easily accessible public venues?

Yes definitely, videos have the potential of being projected in a variety of spaces, and it would be great to install and screen a video in say, Frere Hall Gardens, even if it is for an evening. But a project like that would take logistical organization and permissions and some money, so would need time to set up. But one can be extremely creative about using public spaces for video. I showed *Reserved* in Toronto a couple of years ago, projected very large on a wall in a parking lot of a police station.

Dawn Gallery June 20 2010

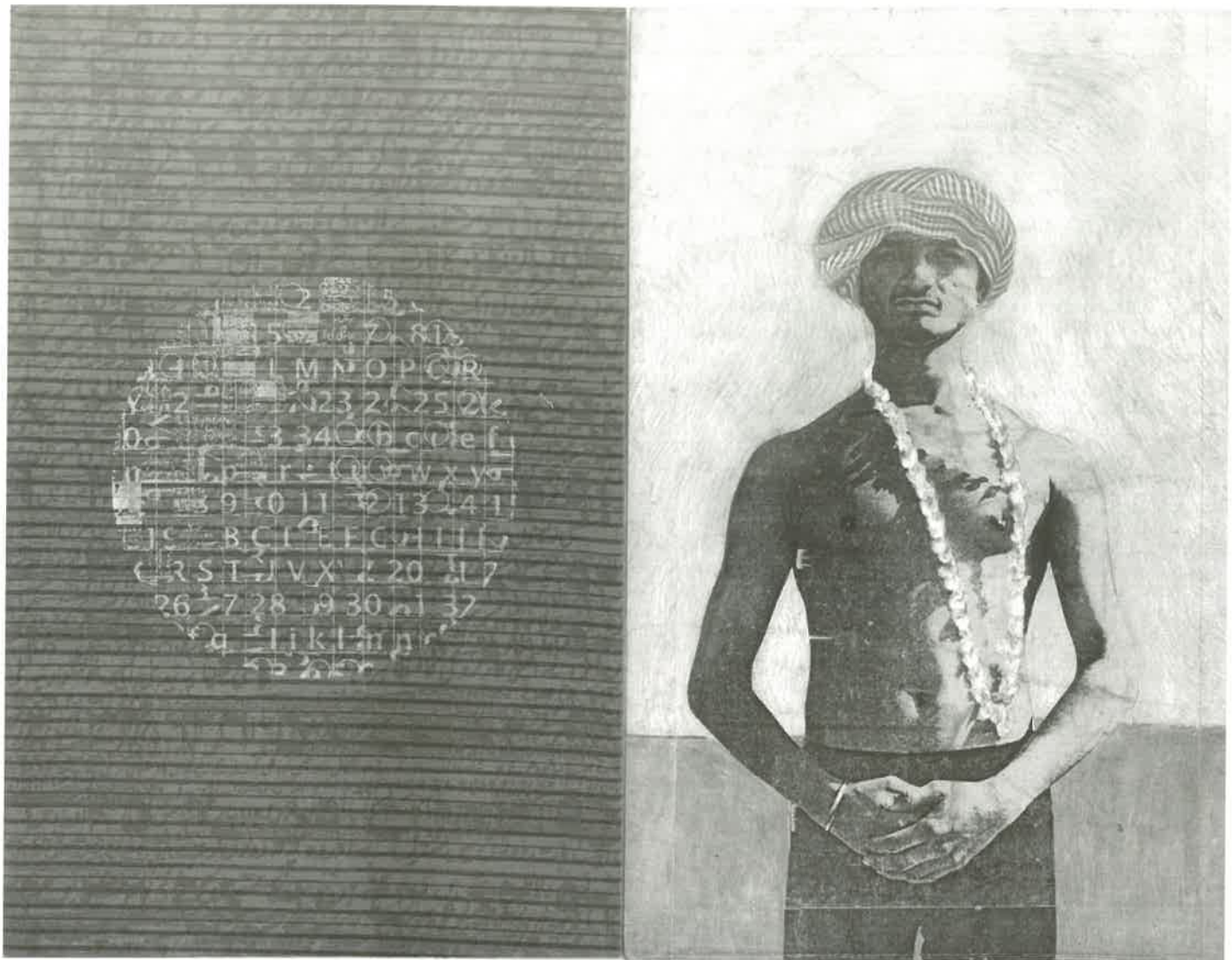


Usman Ghouri

Usman Ghouri, Associate Professor Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture is an established printmaker artist and curator with several solo exhibitions (at home) and international group participations in USA, UK, Japan, Oman and Mauritius, to his credit. Here he answers questions about his art practice and his efforts to promote printmaking.

Can you describe your printmaking background and significant features of your work?

I graduated from NCA in 1992 with a major in Communication Design and a minor in printmaking and my subsequent work experience was that of a designer. Printmaking took precedence when I was enlisted in 1996 by the Indus Valley Communication Faculty to teach print media techniques to its design students. In 1998 when I was transferred to the Fine Arts Dept as head of the Printmaking Faculty I felt I needed



to enhance my knowledge and skills in the finer arts of drawing, painting etc etc. The opportunity to gain further understanding, polish my skills and consolidate my grasp of art fundamentals came in the year 2000 when I enrolled for a Master's program in printmaking at the College Of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. After obtaining my master's degree I spent another year there to further explore and expand my art practice. I experimented with alphabets and scripts as an expressive visual language. Writing and textual imagery became part of my visual vocabulary, for example to evince a cultural crossover I interwove Urdu and English scripts into a symbolic narrative. The fish image was another recurring feature in my

work - I equate water with the human soul and fish with the human body in my prints examining the body and soul conflict. Likewise other organic forms like trees, flowers and seeds have a decorative and symbolic function in my compositions.

What is the status of printmaking in the current art scene? How are you promoting the genre? Is there an increase in student enrollment to study the subject, likewise has viewer interest / awareness and collector base grown?

There is a dearth of professional printmakers here and the few who produce prints prefer to be known as visual artists. I am the only one

who is working consistently with print media as an artist and educator for over a decade. My stance is experimental and I have pushed the image transferring technique beyond traditional methods towards procedures like photocopying, embossing, Gum Arabic, silkscreen, stenciling, Raisin Casting etc on varied and unconventional supports. like fabric and canvas as well as three dimensional arrangements in wood and metal. This is apparent in my current work consisting of installations and wall hangings.

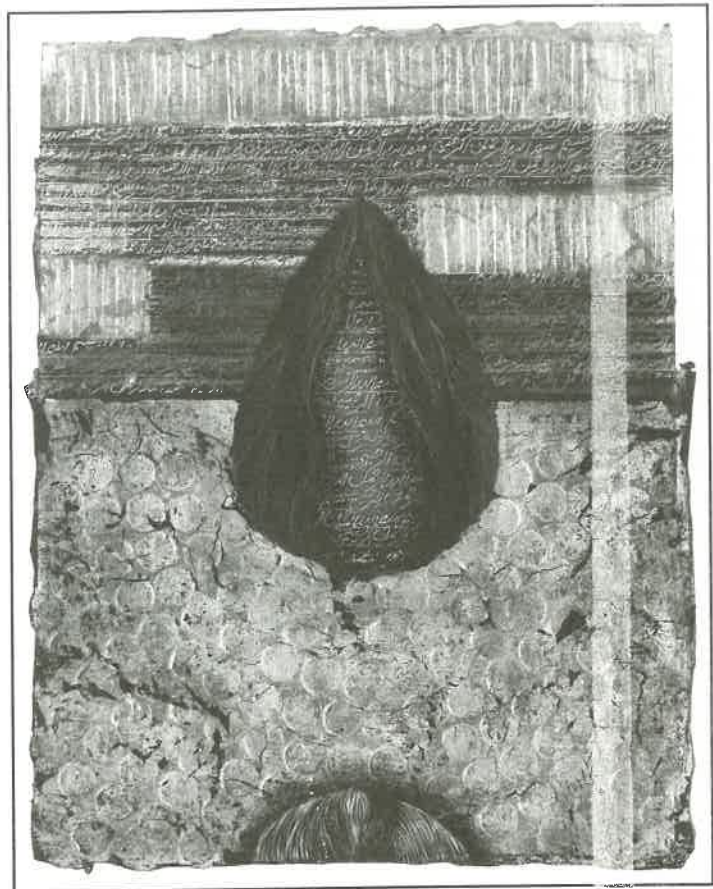
Innovation has not only energized my art practice but has also motivated the students and it ties in with contemporary art approaches and expressions. However, as a process based art form printmaking entails laborious engagement with technique and equipment and this often deters student enrollment as they prefer to opt for the 'quick result' oriented media so freely accessible nowadays.

Other than sustained efforts on the academic side I plan to facilitate printmaking by building a studio for professionals where artists can execute printmaking projects to their satisfaction. The genre's progress has been hindered by lack of studio facilities and provision of such services will encourage production and innovation.

As member IVS faculty I introduced the Box Print Portfolio project a few years ago to build printmaking awareness. The 2009 Different Drummer and the 2010 Mike Kempson workshop and Box Portfolio shows were a huge success. The aim of the project was to establish an international exchange program, strengthen bonds and work relations with artists as well as national and international art institutions. The novelty of purchasing the boxed portfolio was a rare opportunity for art collectors and for the average viewer the two shows were an occasion to engage with a diverse collection of prints by professionals (faculty members of NCA and IVS) some of whom are among the leading lights of the art world here. The events will also be a fundraiser to enable the Fine Art Department to buy a large-scale intaglio press for the development of the printmaking facilities.

You were curator IVS Gallery for some years - What does it take to 'curate' a show? How do you view the present practice of artists doubling up as curators?

For some curating a show means to book artists and assign them a certain number of paintings and then organizing an exhibition with the collected work. For me as curator Indus Valley Gallery, the working ideology was based on 'what needs to be shown'. During my tenure I introduced annual faculty exhibitions, box print portfolio shows, watercolour exhibitions, young talent was encouraged, ceramics was brought to the forefront and retrospectives of forgotten pioneers like



Usman Ghouri - Bismillah Series - 2010, mixed medium on paper

Mian Salahuddin were arranged. In my role as curator of the current Koel exhibition Sepia Voyages I exchanged views with miniature artist Navid Sadiq for several months. We discussed his focus on traditional methods and values and their contemporary interpretations. The resultant work is particularly interesting from this angle of dialogue between traditional imagery and modern execution. As curator I feel this is what needs to be highlighted today.

Dawn Gallery September 5 2010

DAWN
GALLERY



Sameera Raja

An architect who found her calling as gallery director Sameera Raja is the moving spirit behind the success of Canvas. A 1990 NCA graduate, Raja, after a brief spell at architectural practice went on to establish Canvas in 1999. In just over a decade, expanding her space, influence and areas of interest / business, she has positioned Canvas among the leading art galleries of Pakistan. Dealing in modern, miniature and contemporary art the gallery is committed to the discovery, support, development and promotion of Pakistani art and artists from various parts of the country. Making bold, eclectic choices and handling a constantly changing inventory of approximately 1,000 original works by more than 100 established and emerging Pakistani artists keeps Raja on her toes and Canvas in the news. Internationally recognised, Canvas Gallery has also curated Pakistani art shows in USA, UK, Middle East and Far East. For perceptive collectors as well as first time buyers Raja offers services that range from general advice to searches for particular pieces - to consultations for individuals, businesses or corporations wishing to start or build their collections. Answers to further questions reveal more about the gallery philosophy and her advice to upcoming artists.

How do you balance the commercial and artistic requirements of running a successful gallery like Canvas?

If you do anything with passion, faith and conviction, the result is positive. Our primary philosophy at Canvas is to showcase art and artists that we believe in. It does not necessarily mean that every show is a success in financial terms as success is manifold and relative. Some of our best shows have not sold at all, which does not mean they were unsuccessful. Nor does it take away from the fact that we will still exhibit their work, irrespective of its "commercial" viability.

Sameera Raja

GALLERY DYNAMICS

You have a talent for ferreting out edgy young art. Is there a method in this selection - if so how do you determine your choices?

Ferreting is not a word I would use for being able to spot talent. There is immense talent in the artists of Pakistan. All it requires is the faith to believe in yourself and the artist and to be steadfast in your belief. We do not wait for the market to determine the calibre of the artist. We believe in our own ability to spot talent and hence do not wait for a green signal from other artists / critics / collectors / curators / gallery owners / buyers and others.

By introducing diversity into the regular exhibition schedule you have perked up the normal gallery viewing experience - exhibitions of Deepak Perwani handbags or Vada designer furniture are a case in point. Are these moves deliberate or inevitable keeping in mind the current atmosphere of fusion between various art disciplines? What is the viewer / buyer response to such exhibitions?

All shows at Canvas are consciously thought of and scheduled. A lot of thought process goes into making our annual schedule.

By exhibiting Deepak Perwani's furniture and handbags, and A.J Gull's furniture line amongst others, we wanted to expand the boundaries of art. We have started taking ourselves too seriously, leaving no room for experimentation. By these shows, Canvas is broadening the predetermined perimeters of art.

The viewer reaction to these shows is diverse...some love it...some hate it.. no one is indifferent to it, which is all positive.

As Gallery Dir what advice would you give to upcoming artists?

Work.. Work.. And work ... diligently, passionately and honestly and the world will be your oyster...

Think long term and plan how and where you want to see yourself ten years down the road. Do not think of a short term approach or aspire to become a millionaire overnight. Success comes to those who persevere.

What is the relationship between the art market and art production here in Pakistan?

Some artists subscribe to the supply and demand of the art market. Canvas gallery, nor its artists, subscribe to this philosophy.

Shakira Masood

ONLINE GALLERY

Going beyond the traditional art gallery format Art Chowk was conceived in virtual space as an online gallery. Artist Shakira Masood a founding member and creative spirit behind the venture answers questions regarding how this 'contemporary art company' evolved and what it takes to run it.

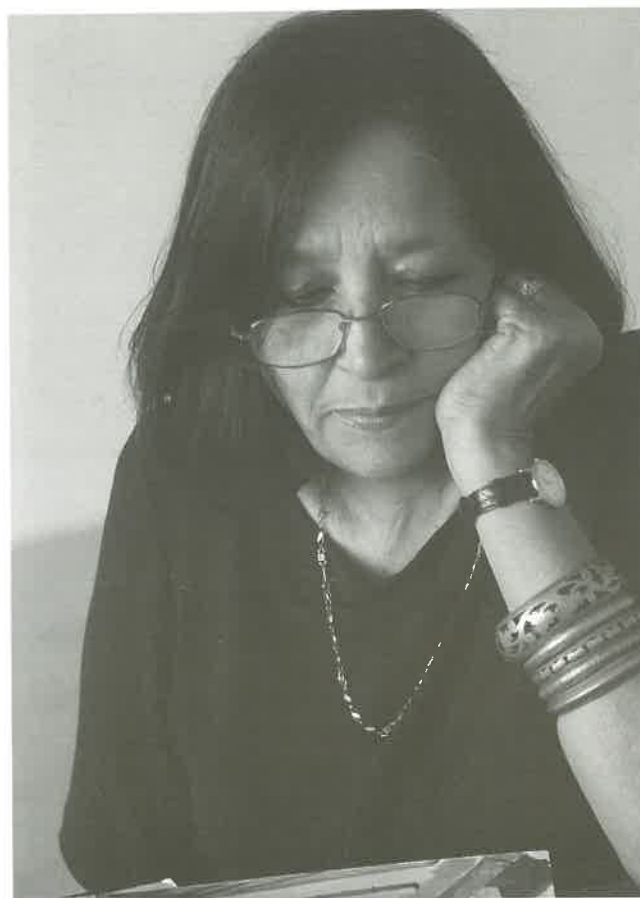
Running online galleries is not the norm here - can you relate briefly how Art Chowk evolved? Is it a collaboration? You are an established artist yourself how has that contributed to this idea?

The idea of an online gallery was Camilla Hadi Chaudhary's (in 2007), who, as a collector living outside the country discovered the difficulty of accessing and viewing work remotely. Thus Artchowk.com (url: www.artchowk.com) was created to provide an online platform to showcase the great narratives emerging out of Pakistan to a global market of international collectors and expatriate Pakistanis who want to be integrated into the local art scene. I personally have been involved from the start, from conceptual and structuring stages of the company and the website. My being an artist initially was very important in building the trust and credibility among the artist fraternity. We have been very fortunate to have come to the level now where non Pakistani artists are also reaching out to us.

Online purchasing involves considerable documentation and verification, financial and otherwise. How different is the modus operandi of an online gallery vis a vis regular galleries here where customers can view and buy artworks in the flesh?

All work that is placed on the website is kept with us physically and along with the artist biography, is documented before going online. ArtChowk.com also serves as an online resource for the artists represented with biographical data and profiling of the artist and their practice. All details of the artist and work (including prices) are available for viewing on the website along with professionally photographed images. The objective of the image is always to catch and represent the essence of the artwork. This can be tricky particularly for three-dimensional work and requires extensive effort on our part. From the user perspective, Artchowk.com is tailored to be user-friendly and interactive where patrons can become members for free and personalize the website with their preferences. Once purchased the works can be shipped directly to the buyer. An ArtChowk authentication certificate accompanies every work sold.

Which foreign countries have you dealt with - do you encounter difficulties in your international sales? How do you guarantee customer satisfaction, safe delivery and



Shakira Masood

authentication of artwork and conversely how do you protect yourself from fraudulent customers.

The website www.artchowk.com has a global reach. We have shipped work right across from North America to Hong Kong. It makes it very exciting, as there is no way of knowing where the next buyer will be from. A testament to our hard-earned success is that we have been able to persuade customers through personal interaction that the image reflects the true nature of the work, and thankfully we have had no complaints. To avoid the risk of fraud, works are shipped once payment is received. The element of trust goes both ways. We have been very fortunate in our dealings both with buyers and artists.

Masood Kohari

A MODERN MASTER

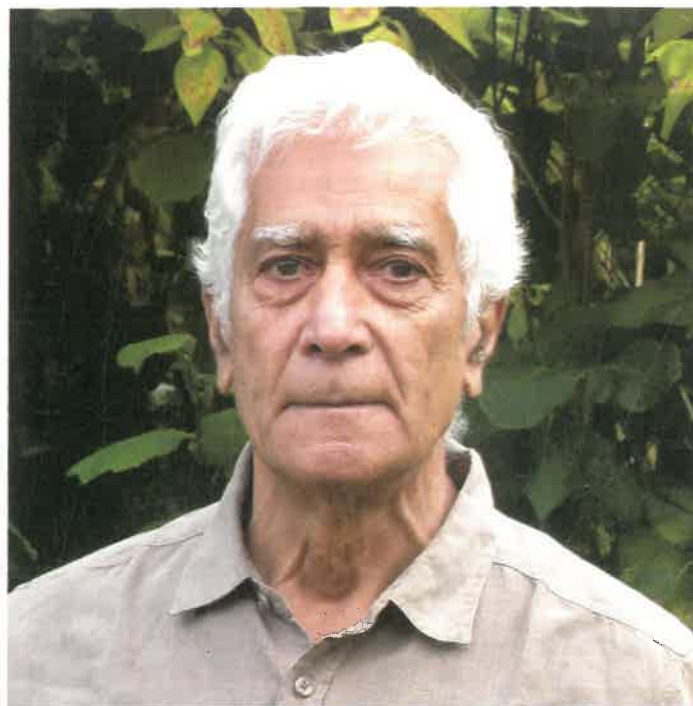
How do you select your art – is it personal choices or market demand?

The team comprises Camilla Hadi Chaudhary, Bushra Hussain and myself, Shakira Masood. We curate the work for the website jointly. Our main criterion is quality on which we do not compromise. So far we have covered sculpture and all media and styles of two dimensional work. Our upcoming shows at Art Chowk the Gallery will include multimedia installations.

Briefly describe Art Chowk's recent expansion from onscreen to actual space.

Artchowk the Gallery is an integral part of the online gallery. All works shown on site are available at the gallery, and all shows curated at Art Chowk the gallery appear on the site as the current exhibition. We found it a very natural step to go from a virtual to a physical gallery, enabling us to curate thematic shows. The gallery opened its doors in October 2009 with, *Out of Balochistan*, by the two brothers, Akram Dost and Jamil Baloch. The show, *Being a Man in Pakistan*, was followed with works developed by four young male artists Faraz Ali, Wajid Ali, Naseer Bhurgri and Adeel uz Zafar. The exhibition studied the question of what it means to be a man in present day society. Our upcoming show *Homepage* is our first international show comprising five young women artists from Pakistani, India, China and Taiwan, who live and practice in London. As all the artists live away from their homes they study the issue of identity from an external viewpoint.

Our future plans also include using our gallery as a multipurpose space dedicated to supporting art and culture in the country with related events. These will be supported by the website by providing similar online coverage and discussion possibilities.



Masood Kohari

Since the advent of Cubist collage in 1912 any material in theory is grist to the mill of the artist. While the traditional approach to oil on canvas sufficed for most it also became clear as early as the mid 1900's that not everything a modern painter wants to say can be expressed in such a manner. Emphasizing the critical mental aspects of technique, as opposed to the mere physical application of paint characterized the art of the 20th century. Choice of materials and working methods went beyond mechanical and manual processes to reveal crucial attitudes through which modern artists redefined not only the object of their creativity, but also the process by which it is produced. Just such a radical redefinition of technique and material is evident in artist Masood Kohari's Crystal Collages and Fire paintings. Answering interview questions he set the record straight on the highlights of his career and work production. Among our pioneer artists and a recipient of many awards Masood Kohari now divides his time between France and Pakistan.

A bright young painter in the early sixties you eventually found your métier in ceramics and over the years produced a

Masood Kohari
Ceramic Collage



dynamic body of work – but as a diaspora artist - with only occasional exhibitions in Pakistan. As a dedicated artist, your experiments with clay and glass have yielded remarkably individual, exciting and eclectic expressions but unfortunately our new generation artists, who can benefit most from your expertise, are unaware of your existence. Is this because, being a migrant, you are not a mainstream artist in your homeland or is it because your work has not been given the publicity, acknowledgement and credit it deserves by the concerned authorities or galleries? Do you believe that artists like philosophers and scholars should also pass on the torch to keep the light burning?

Since my early period in the sixties, I have been experimenting and working with different materials that could lead to innovations. My approach has not been understood by concerned authorities and critics. Only the oil paintings or watercolour mediums are perceived as

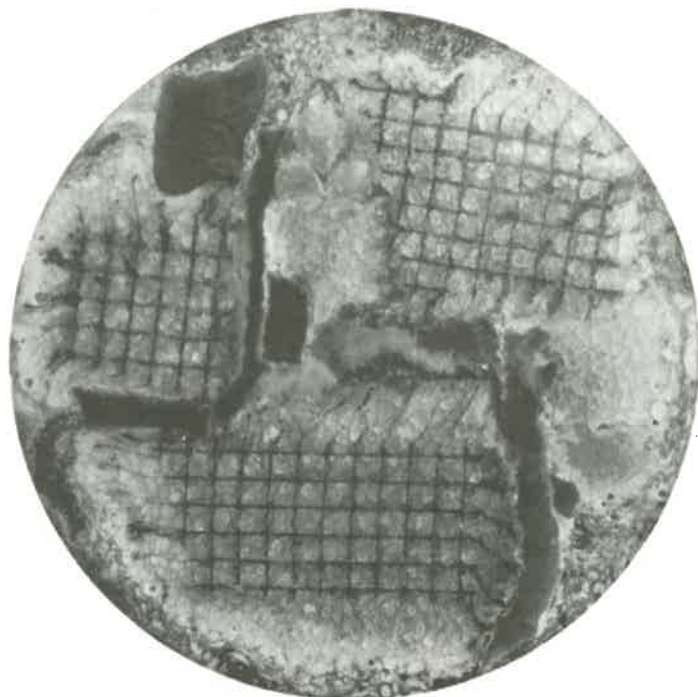
art forms in Pakistan. They labelled me "ceramist", not understanding that an artist is free to use and choose any material for his creative urges, experimentations and expressions.

Also, being often out of the country has not contributed to an easy acknowledgement of my work.

I believe an artist's role is to explore the mysteries of the unknown with the medium he finds appropriate. Each practicing artist also can burn and carry his own torch. The artist is an adventurer rather than a scholar, although he can be an inspiration to young artists.

Initiated by an inspirational journey through Thatta and Hala, developed through an enduring interaction with the kumhars of Gujranwala and sparked with creative discoveries in France as well as ceramic centres of several other countries, your clay odyssey is an expression of your commitment to your art. How do these associations with home and adopted home, continue

Masood Kohari - Crystal Collage



To inform your art practice and what are the salient features of your works which have been variously termed as Crystal Collages, Fire Paintings and Glass Art?

Miniature painting and Ceramics have been the oldest mediums for arts and craft in the Indian continent before the coming of the British. I wanted to use the traditional ceramic as medium for my expression, as some European artists do.

My nomadic life provided me the opportunity to discover different materials and have different experiences. In Gujranwala, I was inspired by local potters who led me to use discarded material like car batteries, broken bottles, window glass, iron nets and metallic pieces to make glazes and colours. They baked ceramic objects with wood fire in simplicity. Fire is used to bind and hold the material together for ceramics and glass, just as oil is the binding medium for an oil painting. This is why I called my work Fire Paintings. My Ceramic Collages involve the same firing process but carry different materials such as metal and glass pieces.

In France, beside my oil paintings and sculptures, I simplified my ceramic collages and fire paintings by eliminating clay as a base. My work evolved into creating pieces with glaze, glass and metal only, which I called Crystal Collages.

Ceramics and glass provide a variety of intense colours, transparency, translucency and opacity. The light behaves in diverse and very interesting ways.

The chemistry and firing techniques that are used allow a transformation process that give results full of surprises.

The ceramic genre here is dotted with notables like you who introduced the practice in the late sixties as well as others like Mian Salahuddin, Talat and Dabir who maintained its status but beyond that the discipline has few takers and is still confined to the back burner – Why?

To use ceramic as a medium, one needs a working knowledge of the complexities of Chemistry and firing techniques. This is a life time process of learning and experimenting. Without the urge for creativity and the necessary technical knowledge, successful results cannot happen.

In your extensive work experience with the potters of Gujrat did you do any collaborative work with them. Do you think that bridging the gap between studio ceramics and the clay crafts can energize the ceramic genre and give it a meaningful direction?

In the Ceramic Institute in Gujarat, where I have worked for many years, I formed students while creating murals. They assisted me and thus learned techniques of mural making. I did not make pottery and thus did not work with potters.

A bridge between artists and ceramists can be built if regular workshops could be organized in which both sides can participate and interact.

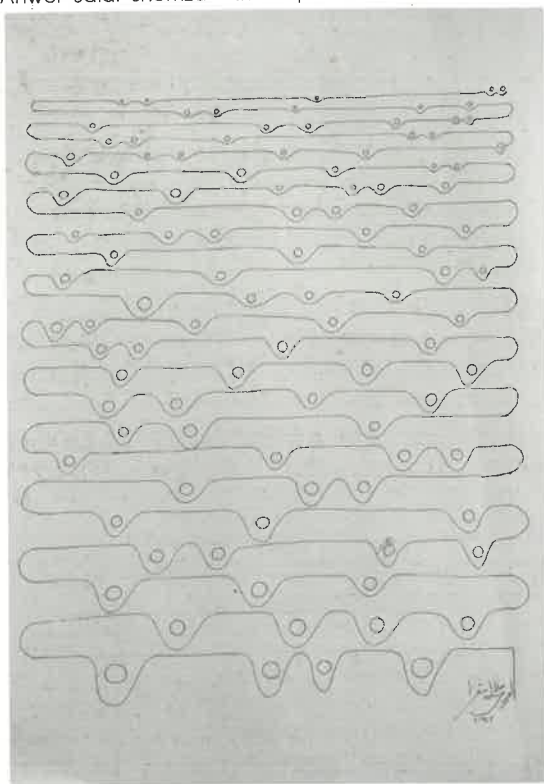
In recent years, ASNA has made a great effort and inspired local craftsmen, studio potters and ceramists by exhibiting their works with International reputed ceramists.

Rachel Garfield

NO SECOND FIDDLE

A 1947 Mayo School graduate and member of the radical Lahore Art Circle of the fifties Anwer Jalal Shemza studied at the Slade School of Art, London (1956 – 59). During that period he exhibited with contemporaries like F N Souza and held solo shows at the influential New Visions Art Centre and Gallery One. He briefly returned to Pakistan in the early sixties but "Bitterly disappointed to find that a teaching salary was inadequate for what he considered a reasonable standard of living," relocated to London where he continued to paint and exhibit his work. Abandoning his earlier figurative approach to modern art he opted for new directions more in step with the then prevalent spirit of inquiry. Marginalized as a South Asian artist by the critics his work did not receive the critical evaluation it merited. The current Green Cardamom exhibition Take 2: The British Landscape, the second in a series of four,

Anwer Jalal Shemza - Interruptions - 1972



Rachel Garfield

revisits the Shemza cache for fresh historical, intellectual and artistic inquiry. Curator Rachel Garfield, artist, writer and lecturer in Fine Art (Critical Studies) at Goldsmith College, University of London, examines his practice through the lens of landscape painting. Since Shemza's art cannot be bracketed easily into that category Garfield elucidates her curatorial perspective through her answers.

What are the important aspects of Shemza's oeuvre that prompted you to curate this show?

I loved Shemza's work when I saw the, Other Story, curated by Rasheed Araeen in 1989 at the Hayward Gallery and so was delighted when Hammad Nasar approached me to curate the exhibition. There

Anwer Jalal Shemza - CityWalls - 1961



are many aspects of Shemza's work that interest me, some of which influenced my own work in the early 1990s. I think what is important about his work is the way he experimented with modernist and culturally specific motifs together in a layered and complex way. There was no one working in the way that he was in Britain at that time but because he was not born in the UK his work was not really considered by art historians who were researching British painting. This was because he was considered a Pakistani artist and therefore only of interest in Pakistan. My aim in this exhibition was to call for a reappraisal of Shemza's contribution to modern art of the mid-twenties to be made visible in the country in which he lived and worked for most of his adult life.

Shemza's art does not easily fall easily into the landscape category so how do you apply this genre to read his works? Can you elucidate with specific reference to significant paintings?

I am interested in how paintings of landscape in Britain are excluded from the genre unless they fulfill a very narrow remit. There is value in stretching the term beyond its historical sense, particularly within a climate of omission. Although Shemza's work does not fall easily into landscape as you say, there is a strong sense of place. My question with Shemza is: how does it broaden the understanding of his work to look at it as landscape. There are several ways that Shemza's work can be seen in this way. For example, in its simplest terms, many of his

works have a strong horizontal composition. If you look at the drawing Letter for example (1976) or Interruptions (1972) the horizontal lines recede into the horizon. These are abstract (and calligraphic) works but evoke a terrain through the lines that denote spatial distance rising up to the top of the image. Works that reference Pakistan directly can be seen as landscape through the sense of place in the imagery such as City Walls (1961) or Dream Home (1984). These are architectural and urban, but I would include them under landscape in the same way that John Piper's architectural works would not preclude him from being seen as an artist preoccupied with landscape.

What is the significance of re-examining Shemza's works?

Does the re-look imply that he will be relocated from being an Asian artist in the margins during the 60's to a his rightful place amongst his peers and contemporaries?

The re-examination of Shemza is to bring him into dialogue with other artists. If he has a milieu critically then his place in history is made more secure. Iftekhar Dadi brings him into dialogue with other Islamic artists internationally and I bring him into dialogue with other British artists. In the next two 'takes', as I understand it, Amna Malik will bring Shemza into dialogue with Bauhaus design and Savitha Apte will bring him into dialogue with Avinash Chandra and FN Souza. It is hoped that this will relocate him, as you say, to his rightful place as an important artist of his generation.

What, in your opinion, is the reason behind this interest in reevaluating South Asian artistic presence during the 60's - why was it marginalized at that juncture in time but is being considered worthy of examination now?

In the 1960s a South Asian artist would have been seen as not belonging to the tradition of Western art. This can be seen in many of the reviews of Shemza's work: it was written about as Pakistani art rather than as simply art. Now, in Britain at least, there is a substantial and vibrant population from Pakistan that forms British culture, indeed from other former colonies and elsewhere. This builds interest in artists who came to Britain as immigrants at an earlier time. Of course the rise in economic power in South Asia is also a key factor in the current reappraisal that cannot be ignored.

Anwer Jalal Shemza - Roots - 1977



Murad Khan Mumtaz

GHOST NATION

Well out of its infancy the contemporary miniature now has an established repertoire of assorted content and workmanship levels but its rapid regression towards the bizarre and the tawdry is becoming an issue of concern. Associating the contradictory values of traditional and modern societies to the rift that has been created between the classical and contemporary miniature Murad Khan Mumtaz attempts to capture the essential essence of the discipline by bringing it under the umbrella of the Traditional School of Thought. Here he talks about his influences and the context of his current exhibition Ghost Nation shown at Canvas Gallery recently.

Murad Khan Mumtaz studied miniature painting at the NCA, Lahore, and has been actively practicing and teaching traditional miniature technique, history and theory for the past seven years. Recently he received an MFA from Columbia University, which he attended on a Fulbright Fellowship. His drawings and paintings have been included in solo and group exhibitions in the U.S. and Pakistan. Upcoming exhibitions include a group project with Tracy Williams Ltd for Art Basel Miami. He lives and works in Lahore.

Your current exhibition Ghost Nation is a quiet body of work compared to earlier works containing searing images of nuclear blasts and fiery clouds on dollar bills. Viewed in that context the silence emanating from these idealized landscapes is ominous – can you define the gravity of your premise?

By creating idealized landscapes of a culture far removed from ours, I have tried to create a parallel between two peoples; one, the Native American people, who have already been almost reduced to myth and quaintness, and the other, our own people, who are going through a massive degeneration. The disintegration of both cultures resulted from an inner weakness which allowed modernist imperialism to devour them.

While my previous body of work, which involved interventions on the American dollar bill, was more immediate and accessible, the current work is quieter and more contemplative. It aspires towards Beauty, not as a subjective sensationalism which 'lies in the eyes of the beholder', but as something for which the eye has to be trained before the beholder can internalize and assimilate it in order to understand it.

How does your bent towards the Traditional School of thought translate into your art. Other than your personal travels and exploration of the American Plains Indians are there any Perennial philosophers whose works have inspired you in the production of Ghost Nation?



Murad Khan Mumtaz

Murad Khan Mumtaz
 Ghost Nation I - Opaque watercolor on wasli paper



This entire body of work revolves around the philosophy and works of Frithjof Schuon. His symbolist paintings based on the Plains Indians were a driving force behind this work. Another big influence has always been the writings of A.K. Coomaraswamy. These two thinkers along with Rene Guenon were the first to criticize progress and development as early as the 20's and 30's and realized that by severing our link with the pre-modern traditions we were hurtling down towards our own destruction.

As a devotee of the miniature tradition how do you react to the

current spate of 'miniature bashing' by our artists, in order to contemporize it. is it possible for the miniature to move ahead and still retain its integrity?

First of all why do we always have to talk about 'moving ahead'? Why do we have to chase this illusory, non-existent future? Why can't we just be? Our blind faith in this for the sake of 'progress' has led us to our current predicament. Once we put our faith in progress this forced contemporization of tradition becomes inevitable. It is part and parcel of the development (postmodern) paradigm.

The only way of retaining the integrity of anything is to fully understand it and immerse oneself in it. Unfortunately miniature painting in Pakistan is not taught with the view of understanding it, but rather of blatantly exploiting it. As long as it "looks" like a miniature painting we succeed in creating an illusion of tradition and a fake connection with the past; it becomes an effect; a mannerism which is quaint enough to look unique within a contemporary context.

Within a hundred years the conquering Europeans managed to demolish a timeless tradition; what was left of the Native American traditions was a handful of 'natives' forced into cement blocks surrounded by fences. We have done something similar to our own culture and miniature painting is just one tiny example.

Dawn Gallery Oct 24 2010

GALLERY

Aisha Khalid and Imran Qureshi

MINIATURE MAVERICKS

Miniature mavericks Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid, a duo in real life but pursuing vastly independent approaches in art, answer questions related to their latest works on show at Chawkandi Art. In Imran's works, titled, All are The Colours of my Heart, he emotes physically with a spate of action painting to vent his shock and anguish at the gruesome mob attack on two brothers in Sialkot. Aisha on the other hand aspires for an inner calm and equilibrium to battle the worldly chaos and finds solace in the rhythmic nuances of Islamic Geometric Pattern. Her series is called Pattern to Follow.

AISHA KHALID

Geometric pattern and play with the line is almost a staple in your work. How did this happen?

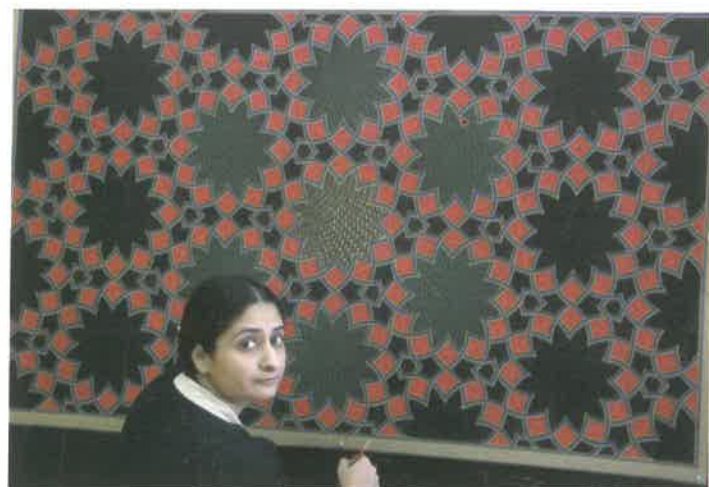
Initially pattern came into my work from the tiled floor of my old house where I had spent my childhood - eventually I started making squares and dividing them with layers of colours to create my own geometrical patterns - this has been going on for almost ten years now.

As a contemporary miniature artist you have addressed a host of current issues just through creative manipulation of pattern and line. Can you briefly describe this process?

In my earlier works I played with the iconography of women's art and craft in Pakistan to comment on the womanly presence in our society. The female figurative impression was merely within the patterned arrangements of the composition. Clad head to toe in 'burqahs' and disguised further by flowers, the figures were present, yet simultaneously absent and in many of the works, they become virtually invisible, blending into the richly coloured, geometric design that surrounded and engulfed them.

Gradually the figurative implication dissolved altogether as the mathematical precision of pattern became emphatic. In my recent Hong Kong shows I created massive works. The painting titled, Distance, contained a finely worked grid pattern trailing across a huge wall. It was interspersed with huge circular patterns that mimicked the (mosque) dome effect. The optically complex oscillating patterns in the circles were meant to draw in the viewer and encourage reflection upon the concept of infinity which the linear severity of the grid form indicated.

Recently I got a chance to play just with the single 'line' when curator/publisher Shermini Pereira of Raking Leaves commissioned me to produce a book. The motivation for my book 'Name Class Subject,' came from the Urdu medium and English medium divide so common in our schools. Inspired by the typical exercise books used by government schools in Pakistan to teach writing in Urdu and English I



Aisha Khalid - Work in progress

have actually painted and placed together pages of ruled lines, broad ones for Urdu and thinner ones for English to highlight the segregation a bilingual culture can create.

Your current large scale paintings of geometric design hint at a more coded iconography and meaning. Can you elaborate on this?

Two paintings in the Chawkandi show are inspired by Allama Iqbal's poetry 'Shikwa' and 'Jawab-e-Sikwa' and the other four have the same title 'Pattern to Follow'. My main focus is on classical Islamic Geometric pattern which I am combining with my own geometrical formations in a contemporary way - to arrive at something more abstract and symbolic. Line is an integral part of the pattern but it is the solid spaces of these Islamic patterns that are intriguing. There is so much in them that I feel if I take just one pattern out of them and work with that, even then I cannot explore it in my whole life.

Geometry and Mathematics are 'Divine Knowledge'. God is the Mathematician and the world is based on Geometry and Mathematics. This is an inspirational concept for me and I am trying to make my work correspond to this ethos.

What is the value of 'process' in your working method? Do you find the intense and intricate repetitiveness in a pattern taxing or elevating?

For me repetition has a calming almost spiritual effect - almost akin to the work practice like 'mashq' or 'riazat'.

IMRAN QURESHI

From participation in East West Divan at the Venice Biennale, 'Mashq', at Green Cardamom, 'Outside In: Alternative Narratives in Contemporary Art' University of Hong Kong to ArtHK09, Hong Kong 'and then Hanging Fire' Asia Society Museum, New York, you have had a very eventful 2009, what about 2010?

I personally think that the year 2010 was very important for my art practice. In May my Artist's books 'Side by Side,' commissioned and published by London based curator Sharmini Pereira's nonprofit organization 'Raking Leaves,' were launched at Free Words London and then the Rohtas 2 Art Gallery Lahore as well as Koel in Karachi. This first called 'The True Path' consisted of a concertina format that unfolds the pages of a painted landscape to a full 25 feet length. The second titled "Moderate Enlightenment," a collection of 20 figurative miniatures portrays religious people carrying out everyday activities, such as working out, enjoying nature, and reading. These paintings were of ordinary (moderately enlightened) people whose appearance can be misread by western audiences not familiar with our cultural nuances.

Later I had a solo at Pao Gallery, Hong Kong Art Center and a double show with Aisha at Corvi-Mora Gallery. Among group participations Beyond the Page at Pacific Asia Museum, Art Dubai 10 and, Mazaar Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan at NCA gallery were important exhibitions in which I continued to explore socio political issues with a rational, moderate stance.

A radical change is noticeable in your work displayed in the, The Rising Tide, at Mohatta Palace Museum and your current Chawkandi Gallery exhibition. Can you comment on this?

For the last year or so I could feel a breakthrough situation evolving in my work and in August 2010, when the incident of mob killing of two innocent brothers happened in Sialkot, it simply stunned me (and everyone in this country). The psychological impact of the brutal assault robbed me of sleep and rest and I bolted to my studio in the middle of the night. This recent body of work is a gut reaction to this act of barbarism - a quick and emotional response. After many years I was making work which was not meant for any show or to meet any exhibition deadline. The urge to paint was simply unstoppable. But once the series (titled, All are The Colours of my Heart) had finished it was Aisha who insisted I exhibit it. We both thought that it was extremely important to show this work in Pakistan instead of immediately sending it to some international venue.

Can you explain why you have shifted from a controlled and

meticulous work process to an intense and frenzied spattering of red in this collection?

In this series of paintings I myself was performing by taking impressions of my own hands and body directly on the painting surfaces as the video of this horrific incident just kept turning in my mind. For me this direct, physical involvement was the most important development in the formal making of these works, especially pertinent is the painting, All are the Colours of my Heart, which is a full length impression of my colour spattered body.



Imran Qureshi

Dawn Gallery Nov 21 2010

DAWN
GALLERY

Hamra Abbas

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

The spotlight shone on Hamra Abbas recently as she became one of the five recipients of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize 2011, an annual award granting, \$120,000 each, to artists from the Middle East, North Africa & South Asia (MENASA). Currently living and working between Islamabad and Boston she talks about how her art practice derives inspiration from Pakistan but is global as well.

Initially an NCA graduate you are among our young generation artists who have not just travelled and trained abroad but have had more significant solo showings in foreign venues than at home in Pakistan (some in Lahore but none in Karachi). How important is it for a rising artist to stay connected with home audiences?

There is no issue about the importance of exhibiting, or staying connected with home audiences, especially when most of my practice integrally references 'home'. But I do not entirely agree that I have had more significant solos outside Pakistan. *Read*, was conceived and made for NAG, Islamabad, and was exhibited at the inaugural show. *God grows on trees*, *Paper plates* and *Please do not step 2* were all made in Pakistan and shown at NCA gallery, Lahore before anywhere else. The body of sculpture works, namely *Ride 1*, multiples of, *Its a Boy*, and *Woman in Black*, made in 2008 at NCA, Rawalpindi campus were shown at the college's gallery, as its inaugural show. And this body of work has not been shown collectively in any foreign venue to date. Hence I consider the NCA, Rawalpindi campus show quite significant for myself. But the question remains, how we measure 'significance'.

The reason I have not yet shown in Karachi is mainly because I put unrealistic amounts of work on my plate, and almost always run short of time and resources that is much needed in organizing and mounting a show, especially when it deals with a practice such as mine than that of 2D works (paintings or digital works/media). And when it comes to spending time and resources I always prefer spending it on making new work, after all organizing a show is not what I am known for. Hence the main reason behind not showing in Karachi has been primarily on account of pragmatic concerns rather than any conflict of interest.

Conceptually you draw inspiration from the cultural, religious and socio - political, complexities and peculiarities of this region. Yet your versatile art practice straddling a range of media, from paper collage and painting to sculpture, sound, photography, video, writing and installation has largely been realized in studios abroad. What are the major impediments here that force artists to seek opportunities elsewhere?



Hamra Abbas

Again, I would slightly disagree. As mentioned above, a large body of my work, namely *Read*, *God Grows on Trees*, *Paper Plates*, *Please do not Step 2*, *Buffaloes in Combatt*, *Woman in Black*, *Ride*, *Its a Boy*, have all been realized in Pakistan between 2007-2008 - a period I gleefully mention as the most productive in my practice.

In these times when everything is short lived, be it practices or ideas, we need to revisit the popular understanding of foreign as being automatically synonymous with success. My distance from Pakistan

has entirely been in the pursuit of academic degrees, first mine and now my husbands. And having said that, I do not mean to belittle the possibilities of finding inspiration, knowledge and value in foreign and novel places, an experience that is unique in itself, but home is where you arrive at a comfort zone that automatically helps you to embrace the wider environment with greater facility, which I value highly.

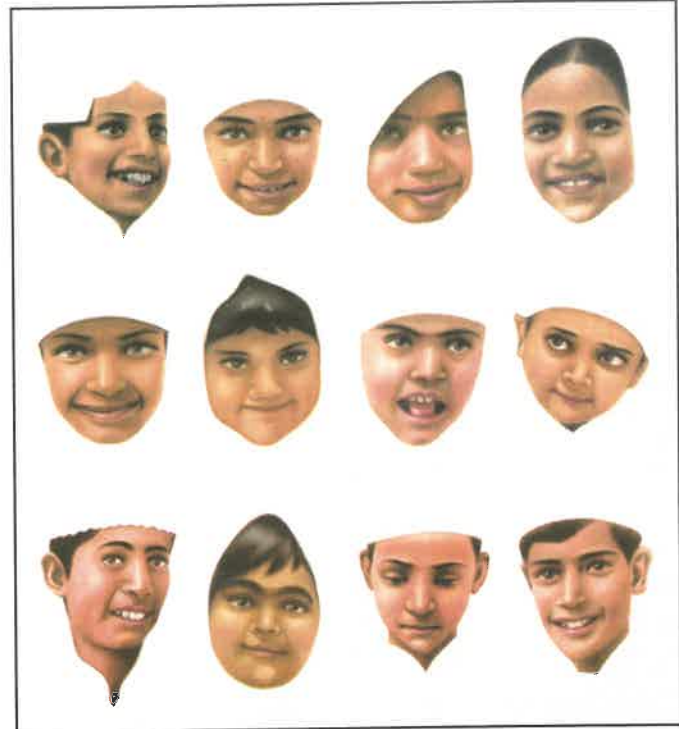
Does validation of your work abroad strengthen your base here or does the complex and multi-faceted nature of the art push you further away from home? Is it possible to exhibit the same works in galleries here?

Yes, gaining international success certainly allows for greater recognition at home, and there are some works that would be problematic to exhibit in Pakistan, e.g. my recent pieces like *Love Yourself* and *Paradise Bath*. So yes, having a leg outside Pakistan does allow me the freedom to be naughty as well. But each piece has its own configuration, and contextual importance, hence I do not find the above dichotomy as being such a major problem. As far as being pushed further away from home is concerned, hopefully that is something that will not apply to me. I will always stay in conversation with my home base. And for that I have a 'plan':

What is the significance of the Abraaj Award to you as an artist and to the art community at home? Is it too early to ask or would you like to share your plans for the Abraaj project with the readers?

First and foremost, I receive this award as an artist who owes her formative training to the community of artists in Pakistan (part of MENASA region). Specifically, it is an affirmation of my artistic background that is firmly rooted in NCA, Lahore. So needless to say, the award therefore marks a milestone for us as a community. This is how I like to see it. The work is still in progress.

Hamra Abbas - God Grows on Tree 1



Hamra Abbas - God Grows on Trees 2



Muhammed Zeeshan

ONE FOR THE RECORD

Miniature artist Muhammed Zeeshan made news recently when his artists book, A Colligation, (Isolated Facts), was acquired by the British Museum for their permanent collection. The finely crafted pages are a commentary on super power hegemony and its effects on third world nations. Here he discusses how Colligation evolved.

Can we call Colligation a reinvention of the classical miniature album?

The concept of Colligation was inspired by the practice 'bhaikhathay', otherwise known as record keeping books in English - such books contain details of names and daily activities of workers, financial structures, materials used etc. But regarding the 'reinvention' bit, I think the album as you rightly called it, is connected with the miniature practice of illustrative drawings/paintings existing as archives of historical events, culture, society and practices of a particular era. If that era had the choice of photography or other digital media, I believe they would have documented their history accordingly. Even though the sense of documentation is diverse as a book, A Colligation, retains traits of Classical miniature specially the technical mannerism.

How did its structural form and technical applications evolve? Briefly describe its contents?

The idea of, A Colligation, evolved from my 2007 residency project at Gasworks in London. This was the first time I experienced my country's independence day on a foreign land. Quite interestingly the marriage anniversary of Queen Elizabeth was also being celebrated then. Using pictures contrasting the celebration with the partition event I created a video montage and a book dealing with what 14th August 1947 meant to me now.

Regarding technical applications it is imperative to explain the modifications that I introduced in my wasli surface. My design desired both sides of the wasli to be drawn upon, which made choosing paper a challenge. Close attention was paid to the thickness of the papers so that the album after its binding would not be thick and uncomfortable to hold, or too sleek and unstable to grip properly. You will also find a lot of punctures in the wasli. This is not the first time I have used holes to create a network in my images. But this project was unique because the face of the holes was as important as the backside. Using a cobbler tool I produced neatly drafted and very calculated perforations to enable the threads that I painted to weave their way throughout the book, at times in neat stitches and at times in numerous tangled strands. One behavior is consistent, all the



Muhammed Zeeshan

threads continuously move across and through the punctures from one side of the page to the other so that the back and the front is inconveniently deciphered or not recognized at all -because technically there was no front or back side to these leaflets.

Relatively selective series of flag images are created with varied weaves of painted threads. The choice of three threads is significant in recognizing not only the American Flag but also the British Flag... prominently the American flag because the flags used in the album

have in one way or another a remarkable relationship with America, either at present or in the past. The altering dynamics of such relationships is what I was trying to discuss and understand while composing the album - the linkage that these threads, flags have amongst/between each other and with the common threads found within the album. All the flags in the album are complete except one - the Iranian Flag. This was the only flag, which I couldn't decide whether to complete, or not. It is in a state of either weaving itself to a finish or unraveling consistently.

Has Colligation been acquired by the British Museum to facilitate a better understanding of the contemporary miniature at large or because of the edgy political readings it emits?

I guess this question the British museum shall best answer; why they collected this project, what purpose it serves for them and their audience. As an artist I can only speak only for myself. One cannot deny the political dialogue that the project emits notably due to the

presence of the flags. I am also hoping that by confronting an audience from an extremely multi-cultural society the album could facilitate a dialogue which not only deals with the past and the present but also changes the image of Pakistan from its backward fanatic stance to that of an aware, educated and intellectualized nation. I am also happy this project went to a prestigious museum which has a mature understanding of various cultures.

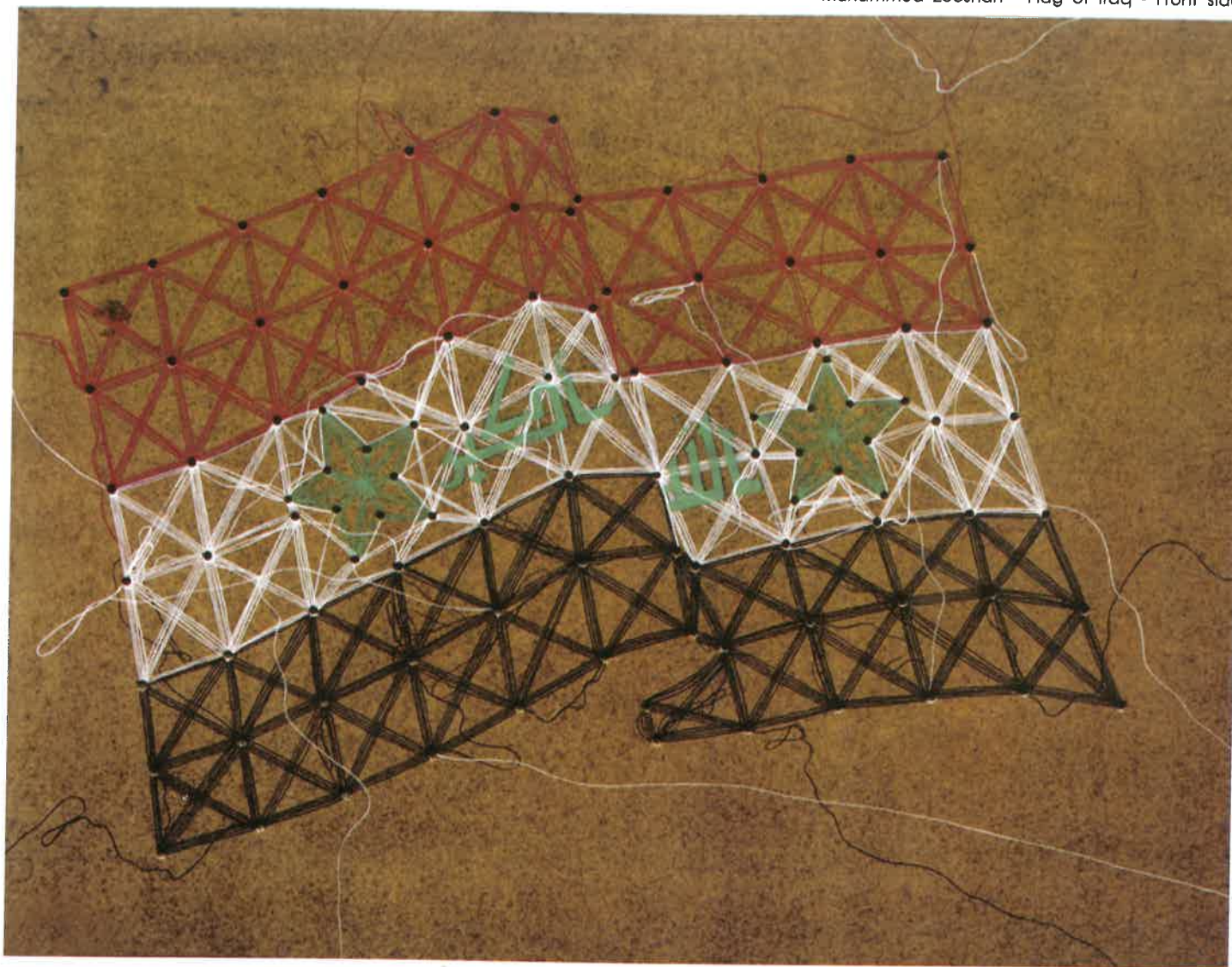
What is the role of galleries (like Green Cardamom) in giving leverage to such works and making such developments possible?

Green Cardamom was the organization that made me aware of the significance of 'public art'. This drastically changed and I would stress, enhanced, (by Hammad Nasar, co-founder / curator GC) my understanding of museums and institutional spaces. Hammad has a wonderful habit of having detailed conversations with the artists varying from critiques on their works in various stages to the potential spaces the work can be presented and exhibited in. For an artist who

Muhammed Zeeshan
Iraq (Back Side)



Muhammed Zeeshan - Flag of Iraq - Front side



has never traveled abroad the idea of being introduced to museum spaces and to have that particular arena for one's art is quite liberating. The possibilities of showing work multiplies and the conceptual development of the artist undergoes radical changes. A huge reason for museums and other public spaces being out of reach for Pakistani artists is because we are not part of their contemporary dialogue. Green Cardamom through collaboration with international sites and organizations has catered to both the

progress and training of the artist within Pakistan as well as contributing to the contemporary dialogue through public projects and exhibitions, creating award and residency venues for Pakistani artists like myself coming from small towns who couldn't see themselves fitting in the big picture of the art world because of lack of exposure.

Dawn Gallery Dec .12 2010.

GALLERY

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Making Waves

Contemporary Art in Pakistan

By **Salwat Ali**

Rooted in the practice of the present, **Making Waves**, a compilation of published art reviews, attempts to identify and examine recent art trends and the forces defining their development.

New media arts are established genres in the West but their artistic expression and public displays have escalated in Pakistan only in the last few years. Retooling their kits with fresh ideas, young minds are seeking new pastures. Their art is fuelled by the technology revolution and mass media proliferation and they are locating their subjects and accessing materials from the wide spectrum of populist culture. Art making is evolving in an atmosphere of cultural turmoil, where tradition and modernity exist in (un) happy confusion. Volatile political conditions, religious constraints, socio economic crisis, gender inequalities, ethnic strife, violence and state censorship are other significant determinants. This volume reviews these shifts and the changing look and feel of art.

Diverse manifestations of this new sensibility are documented in the opening chapter, Mixed Media and Multi Media. Pages devoted to the Contemporary Miniature chronicle the indigenous 'disciplines' new adventures. This radical redefinition of traditional art practices continues in the chapters on Sculpture, Drawing and Painting. Struggling genres and art related activities are gaining momentum and their journey is chartered in segments pertaining to Print Media, Video, Ceramics, Art Craft, Curators Wanted and Residency Programs. The status of graduate art is deliberated upon in Art Education. In many places where contemporary art institutions are in their infancy conceptually centered art, as against a tradition based aesthetic, is seeking new frontiers for its validation and text. In Dialogue on Art examines these new realities through a transnational perspective.

A new art history is in the making and this volume concentrates on this progression by evaluating art and artists in the light of what they are exhibiting, who is responding to their art and why.

Making Waves contains 252 Pages, with 175 images in colour and 161 images in black and white.

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About the author..

Salwat Ali, born in Karachi in 1952, studied at Holland Park School, Airlie Gardens London in her early years but was mainly educated at St Joseph's Convent, one of the premier educational institutions for girls in Pakistan where she was a student of art since Junior school.

In 1974, after graduation from Karachi University, she joined Pakistan Art Institute to pursue advanced education in art under the tutelage of artist Aftab Zafar, a teacher known for his strict regimen of drilling art 'basics' into his students. A drawing curriculum emphasizing 'co-ordination between hand and mind' and exercises of painting with 'feeling' complemented with on-job training in the final years, equipped Ali with the necessary understanding and skills to become a practicing artist. A course in writing from the London School of Journalism sparked her interest in art writing. As founder member and Associate Writer of The Fine Arts Society she commenced formal writing on art for local publications in the early nineties. She has been writing on a weekly and monthly basis for the country's leading newspapers and periodicals. Currently she writes regularly to **Dawn Gallery**, art supplement & **Artline**, the special art pages of the morning paper.

In 2005 Fomma published **Laila Shahzad's Inner Landscape**, a volume she wrote on one of a prominent woman artist of the sixties. Her winning publication **Journeys of the Spirit**, Pakistan Art in the New Millennium (2000 - 2005) was published by Fomma in 2008.

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