

Salima Hashmi

Unveiling the Visible

Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan

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pakistan

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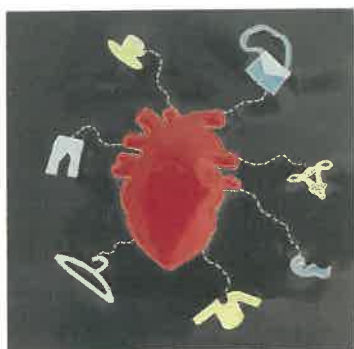
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Huma Mulji
Heart is where the home is— 1997
Rexine on board
28 x 35 cm.
Coll: The Artist

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Introduction

Surveying the last fifty years of women's activity in the visual arts in Pakistan, one becomes aware of two distinct phases.

The first two-and-a-half decades constitute a period in which women pioneered and widened the discipline of art education. In the newly founded state of Pakistan, art was hardly distinguished from craft at the official level, and the status of painting in the public domain was yet to be determined. Being a peripheral activity at that stage, it could safely be left to women.

The vice-chancellor of the Punjab University was only articulating the pervasive assumption on the objective of fine art teaching – that the aim was to train women to be 'artistic', not 'artists' – when the Department was reserved exclusively for women in 1940. Art education would 'enhance the natural proclivities of women', making them better 'home decorators', and nurture the finer sensibilities expected of mothers, wives, and daughters.

Women could be indulged in their pursuit of art as a harmless bit of freedom, which was to be an ornamental, non-competitive, non-threatening occupation. The setting up of a university department solely for women implied a covert discrimination against both women and art, which becomes clear only in hindsight.

It was with the passage of time that what had begun as a safe educational pastime for middle-

class women, became a vehicle for communication and expression in the public domain, and paved the way for personal and cultural insurrections. In this phase after Partition, women art educators laid the foundations for the teaching of art all over Pakistan, in schools, colleges, and universities. It is therefore surprising that apart from a few well known exceptions, they were noticeably absent as practitioners. The discourse in art therefore lay with male artists, either the traditionalists and romantics like Chughtai, Allah Bukhsh, and Zainul Abedin, or the emerging modernists like Shakir Ali.

As art educationists, women did not question the content of what they were required to teach. The 'Indian' art school curriculum pattern had been established all over the sub-continent by the British in the 19th Century, and continued to be followed with a few minor changes!

The curriculum at the Punjab University Fine Arts Department adhered to the dominant colonial academic tradition, and was replicated elsewhere as well. Influences from the Calcutta school and Shantiniketan had filtered into Lahore classrooms via Chughtai's popularity, and Anna Molka Ahmed's well-meaning ambitions to make the teaching of art more 'Pakistani'. These endeavours remained mainly at a theoretical level, involving lecture courses in art history, with occasional demonstrations of the Bengali 'wash painting' techniques. The main business of the teaching of painting

Ruby Chishti
Gadani – 2001
Plastic bag installation
Size unavailable

reiterated the established western genres of landscapes, still-life, and portraiture, in the prescribed manner.

Outside the classrooms, artistic concerns were being expressed somewhat differently. Artists of the Lahore Art Circle – A.J. Shemza, Moyene Najmi, and Ahmed Pervaiz – hotly debated formalist issues, their painting echoing cubist models of the ‘international style’.

Not surprisingly, women were excluded from this discourse, which was restricted to the ‘practitioners’ of art, rather than the ‘teachers’. Teaching came to be viewed as a lesser function, reinforcing the notion of artists as male trail-blazers. The word ‘artist’ therefore, was hardly gender-neutral.

An artist of those times, Zubaida Agha resisted the label ‘woman artist’, aware of the dangers of being relegated to the ‘reservation’ that the label implied. She remembered the time when her achievements were ‘contained’ in the cultural ghetto marked out for women. In the fifties, for her to be recognised as an artist implied a transgression of the defined female role – to be seen as the ‘male’ woman. She believed the term ‘woman artist’ to be a patronising epithet.

The better known artists of the fifties and sixties – Shemza, Ahmed Pervaiz, Murtaza Bashir, and Sadeqain – were unconventional in their lifestyles, strengthening the popular belief which linked artistic creation with bohemian behaviour. For serious female aspirants to the title of ‘artist’, access was also blocked by the apparent necessity for defying social norms and conventions – a problematic proposition for most.

The context in which art making was presented in Pakistan, as everywhere else, was inevitably tied up with its creators. It is not surprising that women involved in the teaching of art

became cautious, almost apologetic, when it came to art practice and presentation. Their pluralistic realities of the social order – husbands, children, in-laws, domestic servants – left little room for creative manoeuvres.

Women could be indulgent to themselves as academicians of the art world, but as creators, they would have to redefine the production framework. A decade later, the political and social imperatives drove women to do just that.

The deaths of both Shakir Ali and A.R. Chughtai in 1975 closed the early chapters in the traditionalist/modernist debate. The social upheavals of the Bhutto years re-phrased populist views on art. Official patronage for the regional and folk music, art, literature, and other forms of cultural expression, became an alternative potent source of inspiration.

Women, having been the primary reservoirs and transmitters of folklore and folk art historically, emerged on the national scene as important participants in the cultural landscape. Women artists were poised to move into the second phase of their development.

By the time the military coup of 1977² took place, women were responsible for almost the entire activity of art education in Pakistan. The teaching of art had given them a niche in the art world; it had allowed them to be ‘artistic’, and to promote art as a valid, commendable activity.

In order to comprehend the impact of General Zia-ul-Haq’s government on art in general, and women artists in particular, one has to look at the cultural climate that preceded it.

During the People’s Party government of Z.A. Bhutto, the extent of private and public art patronage ensured the social acceptability of art and artists as respected and worthy members of society. Artists could be counted upon to reinforce the State’s image of itself and the identity of the people that resided

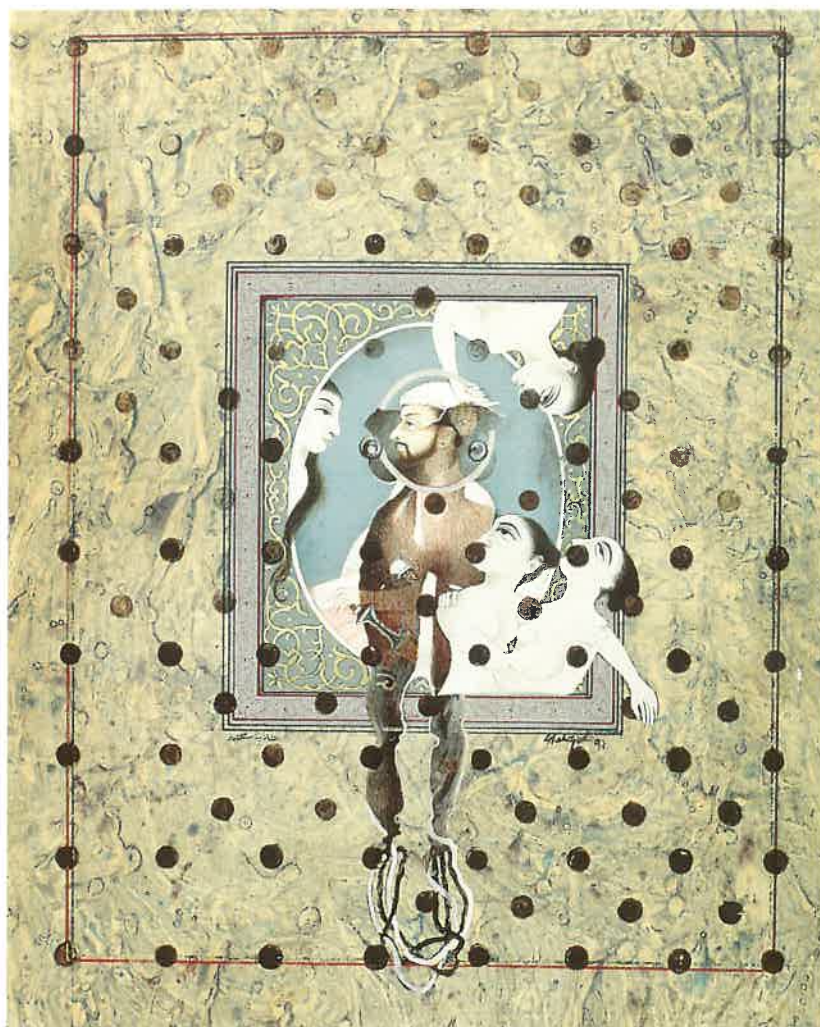
within it. For the post-1977 military regime, to take on the role of the patron meant a modification of that image and a restructuring of that identity.

Literature, being by far the most influential and widely identified vehicle for cultural communication, was the first to be carefully monitored by the regime, as was the mass media. The electronic media were censored strictly, and acceptable codes of dress, behaviour and language were quickly imposed. Dance was eliminated entirely from public view. As attention turned to the fine arts, certain problems presented themselves.

Figurative painting and sculpture, although not forbidden, were frowned upon except where they employed images of acceptable political power, as of the ‘Father of the nation’, or the President. As part of the new cultural construct, it became necessary to encourage fresh pictorial content in art, since the regime presented itself as a progressive conduit to the free world engaged in the Afghan war.

Calligraphy and the genre of landscape painting were swiftly appropriated as being suitable, for several reasons. The combination of these two genres evoked both a sense of national pride, and a wider ‘Islamic’ identity. The celebration of ‘land’ – rural, fertile, and undisturbed – posed no challenge to the carefully maintained façade of political equilibrium. Paintings, which could be ‘read’ either literally or in terms of covert symbolism, could not harbour hidden uncomfortable, suspect, or degenerate meanings. Calligraphy loaded with historical, traditional and religious overtones could also be manipulated into a ‘modern’ idiom. State patronage was available for the painter who adopted these or other ‘amenable’ genres.

Not a single woman artist took up calligraphy or changed her mode of working to bring it in line with official State policy.³



Shahzia Sikander

Perilous Order – 1997

Vegetable, water colour,

dry pigment on paper

Size unavailable.

Coll: Whitney Museum, NY.

The National Exhibitions in Islamabad and Lahore were important signifiers of the State policy on art. The ones held in 1977, '81, '82, and '85, were noteworthy for the number of

awards won by women artists. Ironically, while women artists were winning national awards, recognition, and acceptance of their achievements, discriminatory laws were being

enacted against their gender in the legal arena.

The 1981 National Exhibition was significant for the removal of works by Jamil Naqsh, Jamila Masood, and Salima Hashmi, shortly before the inauguration. Naqsh's female nudes were unacceptable for reasons of 'social morality', and the works of the two women artists were deemed to have unacceptable political content.

The number of women artists increased significantly after 1977. What women were painting was even more significant. Unlike many of their better known male colleagues, women artists chose not to modify their creative vision, or to realign their focus. Probably unaware of the feminist maxim of the seventies – 'the personal is the political' – women artists intuitively disengaged themselves from the prevalent ideology of the time. Ideological dominance had to be challenged at a number of levels: in the retrieval of meaning, the construction of alternative imagery, the exploration of medium and scale, and in sensitising their audience.

By ignoring officially sanctioned art, women artists were challenging the assumptions being floated regarding the 'national', the 'traditional', and 'identity' in art. The substandard 'official' calligraphic work, based on misreading of tradition, contrasted with the energy emanating from the works of Meher Afroze, Nahid Raza, and Qudsia Nisar. It was perhaps not coincidental that all three artists chose to work on paper. This was a trend which linked many women painters, then and later.

Moving away from the pomposity of oil on canvas, a medium introduced and sustained by the British intervention in the sub-continent, women artists took up water-based mediums as well as print making techniques. The medium and appearance of these works by women presented problems of acceptance in



**Women's demonstration
against the law of evidence - Lahore, Feb 12th , 1983.
Photo - Azhar Jafri**

the art world. Provoked by the reduction in scale dictated by these works, their seriousness was questioned by critics and audiences⁴. The National and Provincial Exhibitions routinely herded these works into the category 'Drawings and Watercolours', entitled to prizes and awards of lesser amounts and, presumably, less worthy of recognition. The hierarchical superiority of works in oils continued to be maintained for a decade.

The retrieval of the tradition of the Miniature also took place in the eighties, which helped to give credence to the diminutive scale in painting. Though not consciously questioning colonial mores, the rejection of the supremacy of oil painting opened up other issues for all artists, male and female. For women artists, the convenience and mobility of the smaller scale meant that the work could be produced in corners of the home and kitchen.

The women artists of the late seventies and eighties juggled marriage, motherhood, careers, and art production in an increasingly hostile political and social climate. Achieving equity for their medium and scale was not the only problem. Moving away from obviously representational imagery, women were crossbreeding ideas from a multiplicity of sources. Across the world, feminists were debating what Pakistani artists, driven by circumstance, were practising.

In an economy bolstered by the war in Afghanistan, with money siphoned off from drugs and armaments, consumer appetites were flourishing and the art market grew apace. While the demand for the 'superstars' of Pakistani painting – Jamil Naqsh, Gulgee and Sadeqain – continued, a steady 'hidden stream' of the works of women artists grew and established its own demand.

An undeclared and tacit bonding among women artists was reaffirmed at the National Exhibition of 1983 at the Alhambra Art Centre

in Lahore. Fifteen women artists signed a women artists' manifesto drafted by Salima Hashmi, Lalarukh, and I.A. Rehman. The experience of these discussions and putting their signature to this document gave an impetus to the work of many of the artists present. Looking to their own lives, personal narrative, psychological states and mystical predilections, all came to be explored as the basic stuff of their picture making. The diversity of the experience was reflected in the diversity of their imagery, medium, scale and idiom.

Literal references emerged from the political and social landscapes, such as the *chaadar* or veil, taken up by artists such as printmaker Naazish Ataullah and sculptor Rabia Zuberi.

Touted as an official symbol of protection, women artists, poets and writers focussed on this symbol as a signifier of disenfranchisement and constraint. Exploiting its spiritual, physical, religious and mystical aspects stimulated a range of visual and literary responses. From camouflage and claustrophobia to ambiguity and rebellion, artists explored the masking and unmasking of the female form. Fuelled by political rage and satirical good humour, women used the *chaadar* as a symbol of their experience. The formal image became loaded with intensely felt emotions and statements about physical denial. Other schematic metaphors culled from a variety of historical and socio-cultural sources found their way into women's painting.

The female nude, a constant and favoured subject of male Pakistani painters, as of painters everywhere, fulfilled the accepted function of the female as object. The sexual positioning of the female in these works betrays the artist's intention. Retrieving the woman from this universally accepted context was one aspect of the woman artist looking at the female body. In a social framework where women's visibility is undesirable, the

depiction of the female nude assumes potent political meaning, especially when enunciated by a woman.

By uncovering the female form, women artists were taking charge of the form. They were uncovering the duplicity and hypocrisy of the dominant fundamentalist order. They challenged the male gaze in a way that the male painter's female nude image could not. It became instead a celebration of self, an ode to her rights of ownership, an act of rebellion. Man, always the source of the context for the female body, was now being defied as women strove to liberate the historical art context of the female nude. Artists like Sumayya Durrani added both irony and humour to their exploration of this theme. Nahid Raza assumed the power of sensuality and acknowledged woman as both the victim and the slayer.

The evolution and the development of the visual vocabulary has matured radically in the nineties and beyond, and has widened the context of how art is to be comprehended and enjoyed.

The work of women artists who step into the new millennium is stronger and more confident than of those who preceded them. Unhampered by many of the conflicts that sapped energies and emotions of the earlier generations, these women emerge with clarity of vision and a sense of purpose. Entering an art market which is generally supportive, and benefiting from a more accepting social climate, women artists are articulate about their right of self-expression and a productive professional life. Role models in teaching and art practice are accessible and well known. The making of art is a recognised, legitimate activity in cultural life, albeit not always an economically viable one. However, the idea that women have played and are playing a crucial and pivotal role in the arena is now taken for granted.



Art students, Central School of Art, Karachi – The 1960's

1947 – 1957 THE FIRST DECADE

The first decade of Pakistan's existence was fraught with political and social upheavals. The role played by women in the struggle for independence and the Muslim League's Movement for Pakistan was important, and occasionally crucial. This was especially true in the urban areas where the women's vote had made a substantive difference in the elections of 1946, resulting in resounding success for the Muslim League.

But the casting of the Muslim women's vote, presented and encouraged as a religious duty, held serious implications for women in the future state of Pakistan. The enlightened leaders of the Muslim League could not have foreseen these political strategies leading to orthodox interpretations of the ideology of the state. The aftermath of the Partition carried no great message of social development for women. The horrors suffered by thousands of women in the communal bloodbaths, and the migrations of populations have been well recorded.

The women in public life, although highly visible, came from the handful of economically privileged families whose male members were known political figures. Their major concerns were the re-settlement of displaced refugee women, setting up of educational institutions, and other 'social works'. Their role in political life, or in the constituent assembly, was marginal and did not focus on real issues related to women.

Women leaders, being from the dominant

classes, were also reluctant to risk destabilising the social order by indulging in any broad-based political activity. Tentative legal and social concessions which were non-controversial, were the most that could be extracted from the conservative, feudal, patriarchal order; and these were welcomed, as was the setting up of the Commission on Marriage and Family Laws, in 1955.

Looking at the lives and art of the women who began their careers in the first decade of Pakistan's existence, it is clear that they act as emblems of social change and signifiers of new avenues of activity. The political upheavals and social dislocations gave individuals the occasion to make certain choices for the first time. For these women pioneers it was an opportunity to establish the validity of the activity of painting as a career, at a time when it was a barely acceptable pastime for men.

Co-relating their own training with its dissemination by becoming art educators is understandable when one views the conventional function of women as nurturers; the role of the teacher becomes somewhat acceptable, although most of them had to initially resort to vigorous persuasion for their families' consent. In some cases, subtle forms of rebellion, aided by sympathetic male family members, accompanied the persuasion. There is also evidence of a strong inclination on the part of most of these women to identify with male role models, coupled with a desire to reject preordained and socially sanctioned female roles.

Examining the artistic output of this generation, one can perceive a desire to emulate the role model of the male artist. This is accompanied by the pervasive presence of the Euro-centric academic painting genres, and an acceptance of the colonial male vision.

There is a sentimental, academic, conformist tone to their work, which is perhaps a result of their energies and rebellions being diverted to the personal. Denying their close ties with the artistic output of the generation of women before them – since it implied confinement and tradition – they chose instead to echo what they perceived to be 'masculine', and therefore 'independent'. They made little or no connection with the high levels of skills of their mothers and grandmothers; the art practised within the home, a living visual legacy. Their own art education, and what they passed on, were the genres of the still-life, landscape, portrait, and figure compositions, as laid down in the South Kensington Art School tradition, re-interpreted by the 'native' art schools of the sub-continent. The strong limitations of this way of seeing afflicted their vision, and handicapped their subsequent development.

There were notable exceptions, like Zubaida Agha, a uniquely self-contained individual who chose the isolated path of an abstractionist image-maker. It is significant that she was unwilling to describe herself as a 'woman painter', insisting that she had won the distinction of being 'a painter' in a world where professional artists were male, and the 'teachers' of art were female.



Anna Molka Ahmed (1917 – 1995)

In June 1947, when the Punjab University in Lahore closed for the summer vacations, the Department of Fine Arts had two hundred young women on its rolls. When it re-opened a few months later, it was left with five Muslim women students. The partitioning of India had taken place, and conditions in the fledgling department reflected one of the great popular migrations of this century.

The Fine Arts Department of the University had been established seven years earlier in June 1940, and was housed in the University building opposite the Lahore Museum and the well-known Mayo School of Arts. The justification for setting up a fine arts department in the University when the Mayo School already offered a Diploma in the Industrial and Fine Arts would seem weak at best, but there were new compulsions in the fast changing socio-political scenario of colonial India.

Anna Molka Ahmed, the first appointee to the Department, remembered the reasons as stated by the then-Vice-Chancellor, Mian Akhtar Hussain: "Women's emancipation means that women are beginning to take up subjects like chemistry and physics, and we don't want to clutter up those classes with them. It's a waste of space and time since they'll get married anyway. The Department of Fine Arts will admit only female students"! Anna Molka recalled the insult vividly, and remembered being given a glass of water by the VC's *chaprasi* to soften the blow.

She also recalled the social divide between fine art and the other forms of expression at the time, "The literary figures were the 'artists' and the painters were the 'craftsmen', at par with the shoe-maker and the tailor. The artists were really looked down upon as they were usually not educated and seldom came from 'good' families." The strength and the status of the potent literary forms, especially poetry, as a means of communication and expression, remained largely unaffected by the colonial presence.

Painting, the 'courtly' art, had had to compete with the 'crafts', and had suffered more overtly from colonial cultural intervention. The British were far more inclined to admire the skills involved in the strong and varied 'craft' tradition, than to appreciate the alien aesthetic of Indian painting and sculpture.

The establishment of the Arts and Crafts Schools in the sub-continent, intended to channelise and to patronise the neglected craft skills, was in itself a comment on the social status of the craftsmen, who usually came from the lower Hindu castes or from the economically deprived Muslim classes, and needed patronage. The effect however, was to further solidify the hierarchical division between the 'folk' and 'court' conventions. This may be an added reason for the introduction of fine art into the Punjab University – an attempt to dissociate it from the craft-based Mayo School, and to flaunt its 'socially superior' academic credentials.



**Anna Molka Ahmed,
daughter Zarah and husband
Sheikh Ahmed - 1945**

Anna Molka Ahmed
Flood –
Oil on canvas
88 x 82 cm.
Coll: Z. David

The choice of Anna Molka Ahmed to head the Department was unusual. A British lady from a family of Jewish refugees of Polish and Ukrainian descent, she had grown up in England. She recounted the strongly anti-Jewish feelings that were obviously an important factor in her childhood and youth. "My brother, who was brilliant, was voted head-boy of the school, but the governors of the school refused to let a Jew become head-boy, until the boys protested and it was allowed. As for me, I hated school because of all the prejudice. I was almost expelled. It was my art teacher who saved me. She entered me for an art scholarship, which I won, and was accepted at the St. Martin's School of Art. My father was against my studying further, saying that since his education had ended at age twelve, I didn't need it either. Anyway, he allowed me to go to college, but only for a year, to do fashion designing. My scholarship was for three years but I didn't argue. I worked hard from nine o'clock in the morning until late at night, and at the end of the year, the Principal intervened and got me permission to stay for another year. I was also taking evening classes at the Central School of Art. At the end of two years, my name was put up for the Senior Arts Scholarship. I did a terrible thing—I forged my father's signature on the scholarship forms. And I got it! My father was furious, and I threatened to leave home, so that was how I went to the Royal College of Art! Being orthodox Jewish, my father wouldn't have my paintings in the house, so I had to leave them in the college."

While at the Royal College, Anna Molka met Sheikh Ahmed, a painter who had originally set out to do aeronautical engineering in America, but having developed lung trouble, ended up studying at the Central School of Art, where he also taught. Through Sheikh Ahmed, Anna Molka met the painter Abdur Rehman Chughtai, also at the Central School, and many young writers, poets and intellectuals from India, some of whom were the founders

of the Progressive Writers' Movement. They included Dr. M.D. Taseer, Mulk Raj Anand, Dr. Nazir Ahmed, Mahmud Ali Kasuri, and Hafiz Jallundhari (the poet reciting his verses became the subject of a caricature, which went unappreciated by him).

Anna Molka went to painter Fyzee Rahamin's exhibition, organised by his wife Attiya Fyzee, and remembered being unimpressed by the British Academic influence in his work. She was, at the time, doing wood engravings at the RCA, illustrating the works of Omar Khayyam. That she was emotionally involved with Sheikh Ahmed was no doubt a major influence. She confessed to being "mesmerised by the romance of the Orient."

Talk of a free India, and the newly developed enthusiasm for a political entity called 'Pakistan' entranced the twenty-one-year old Molka. The adoption of a new religion, Islam may have appeared as a desirable escape from her Jewishness. She had sentimental notions of "going out and helping village women" in India. To quote her, "I didn't think of barriers of language, all I knew was that I must spend my life usefully."

She remembered arriving in Bombay with Sheikh Ahmed on the 3rd of October 1939. Professor Sirajuddin, later Principal of Government College, Lahore, was on the boat with them, and introduced the wide-eyed Anna to all the sights and smells, and the fruits. "I thought a *chikoo* was a potato, and that everyone had TB because of the blood on the walls; I didn't know about paan."

The journey across India, north to Amritsar, was hideous and the welcome in Amritsar non-existent. "I was twenty-two when I came to Amritsar, full of dreams. Sheikh Ahmed had been away from India for thirteen years and didn't know his own country. He had built a fairy-tale image in my mind, but it all looked different from the picture he had envisioned.

I didn't blame him; he was a patriot and wanted to serve his country. But it was all too much for me."

Sheikh Ahmed moved to Dr. Taseer's house in Amritsar, which was the hub of literary get-togethers at the time. Faiz Ahmed Faiz was teaching English at the MAO College, where Taseer was Principal, and had already met Alys, his wife-to-be, staying with her sister, Mrs. Christabel Taseer. Anna Molka soon got a radio programme delivering lectures on art, in Lahore. Sufi Tabassum would receive her at the railway station and deposit her at the radio station.

In June 1940, the Punjab University advertised the post of Lecturer in Fine Art and Anna Molka appeared for the interview with a high fever, unaware that she had typhoid. She gratefully accepted a salary of Rupees 150 a month, and was taken straight to a hospital, leaving her portfolio behind with the interview board, which was never retrieved.

Anna Molka began the Department with no other faculty, no space, no syllabus, and no student. She got down to designing the furniture, which was made in teak on the insistence of the VC, as a result of which the drawing boards were impenetrable by drawing pins. Some of the equipment she had made has survived student riots and police action and is still in use.

Finding students was a more daunting task. Anna Molka was sent on a round of girls' colleges to lecture teachers and students alike on the advantages of taking up art. The VC himself painted delicate watercolours of insects and bees and encouraged his own daughter to join the Department. The response from Lahore College and Maha Vidyala College was positive, but Islamia College received her with the audience behind a *purdah*. Anna learnt later that behind the curtain sat a congregation of anjuman maulanas, checking out what she



had to say! She was followed out of the college by a group of girls who had been denied access to her lecture but wanted to know what she had come to say. The maulanas in their wisdom withheld permission for Islamia College students to take up art, a decision which is still in force.

Anna Molka began the Department with twenty-one students from five different colleges. The two-year FA course was soon upgraded to a BA. The faculty was occasionally supplemented by visiting lecturers, but Anna Molka was the sole permanent pedagogue. The Department grew in student strength and was apparently a lively place in the late forties, before the break in 1947.

The stamp of Anna Molka's personality was as unmistakable then as later, with a strong emphasis on painting, drawing, and sculpture in the British academic South Kensington mode, with a supplementary fare of Bannister Fletcher's comparative studies in the History of Architecture. The aesthetic cocooning of the Indian art student was not surprising. The only major break from the British academic art tradition had come from the rebellion in the Calcutta School when the principal, Abanindranath Tagore, had walked out

Anna Molka Ahmed

Colin David –
Oil on canvas
61x 91 cm.
Coll: Z. David



accompanied by thirty of his students, and set up the alternative art school Kala Bhavan in Shanti Niketan – miles into the countryside.

The possibility of the rejection of the accepted British formula for art education in India had not yet penetrated institutions in Lahore. Artists co-opted into the cultural wings of the freedom movement evolved a romanticised, so-called 'Indian' vision, which reflected a strong affinity with pre-Raphaelite conventions and Art Nouveau as much as a connection to authentic indigenous roots.

The political chaos and Hindu-Muslim polarisation began to be felt in the University with students putting up posters and joining protests and strikes. Anna Molka fought to keep communalism out of her student body, but the more practical problems of finding paint and canvas were also major concerns.

Partition eventually came during the summer of 1947 while Anna Molka and her family were in the Murree hills for the summer holidays. They returned to a Lahore ravaged by riots, burning, looting and curfew. Post-Partition Lahore was in no mood for activities like art. Along with Molka's Department, the Mayo School of Arts, across from Kim's Gun, was also bereft of both students and faculty. Anna Molka helped her few students mix oils

Anna Molka Ahmed

Self Portrait –

Oil on canvas

60 x 74 cm.

Coll: Z. David

with textile dyes to continue painting. Two former students, having graduated under her tutelage, came in to teach and the Department struggled to survive.

The mood was ugly. Molka found herself the subject of Friday sermons from the mosques of Lahore, partly because of her insistence on holding music classes for her students. Working from the human model was deemed un-Islamic and disallowed. The Department of *Islamiyat*, next door to the Fine Arts Department, was also not much comfort. Molka however was able to introduce studies from the nude model for her students and to exhibit them in the annual show. These life-drawing classes were conducted behind a curtain and the students were sworn to secrecy.

Her aggressive, vehement manner stood Molka in good stead with the clerics, but was often an inhibiting factor for her students, whose work began to display the patent imprint of her own vision. Male students were allowed to join the



**Anna Molka Ahmed
With elder daughter Zarah - 1946**

Department in 1956 with the addition of the first male teacher, Khalid Iqbal, who had returned from the Slade School of Art in London. But for a while, male and female students worked in separate studios.

In a long, turbulent, and eventful career as Head of the Fine Arts Department, as well as Professor Emeritus, Molka developed and added to the Department a large number of students and disciplines in an inimitable manner, often controversial, but always vigorous. Brooking no dissent, she lost some of her most talented teachers to other institutions, but also retained a strong band of loyalists whose work carried her own stamp.

In the late fifties, she introduced art classes for children at the Lahore Arts Council at Alhamra, which have continued since. She helped draft and develop curricula for school art and led a crusade for the retention of art in schools. Her students branched out to teach art in colleges all over Pakistan, and it is mainly her syllabus, now sadly dated, which continues to be followed in colleges and university departments in the country.

In a career spanning fifty-five years as a painter, art educator and crusader, she consistently sustained and defended a particular academic approach to the practice of painting and sculpture which continues after her death. Her personal life too carried the marks of her vehemence. She regretted the breakup of her marriage to Sheikh Ahmed, an equally abrasive personality, whom she supported for their first five years in Lahore. He eventually left her and their two daughters in Lahore, and later set up a teaching studio in Karachi, where he died.

Anna Molka exhibited her work regularly after her arrival in the sub-continent in 1939. She often acknowledged the influence of Gauguin whom she passionately admired, but her own use of colour and impasto owed more to the

Expressionists.

A series of three self-portraits done at intervals of almost a decade each, are revealing in their indication of her development. Her work of the fifties, although flamboyant in its palette, is discreet in the manner in which she explores nuances in colour-tone relationships. Always impatient and spontaneous in her reactions to people and places, Anna Molka surprisingly has been a painter of evocative landscapes, having more success with this genre than with the ambitious 'theme' paintings undertaken in her later years. Being a great lover of gesture, the heavily textured surface and grand design form the backbone of her works on the heroic scale.

Anna Molka recorded the social and political turmoil of Partition, floods, religious events and festivals, and themes of heaven and hell and purgatory. The Lahore Museum held a retrospective of her work in 1984 where the full range of her output was on view. The volume of work executed in these fifty odd years of painting has been immense. Apart from major commissions, Molka painted steadily even during times of great physical pain, injury, and debilitating illness. Often choosing themes which she was unable to exhibit because of government policies, she could also not show them privately because of the sheer scale of the work. Maintaining that all of these grand works were to do with the history of Pakistan, and her experience of life as she felt it, Anna Molka regretted her inability to reach the audience she addressed. As she put it, "Doing pot-boilers for the rich who want to purchase pretty pictures for the house – we paint for them to earn a living; but the things artists really want to paint are the things to do with life, hunger, pain, and suffering."

Anna Molka Ahmed passed away in Lahore in 1995.



Anwar Afzal

Burnt House, Murree – 1948 - 49

Oil on board

62 x 36 cm.

Coll: Alhamra Art Gallery

Anwar Afzal (c. 1930)

Among Anna Molka's earliest students was Anwar Afzal who eventually succeeded her mentor as the Head of the Fine Arts Department at the Punjab University, and founded the Art Education programme at the University's Institute of Education and Research.

Born into an educated Punjabi family, Anwar remembers watching her mother who would draw and embroider, and a governess, an Anglo-Indian lady who would paint watercolours of flowers in the garden. An indulgent father bought her a paint-box, but felt that painting would distract her from her studies. She hid herself away one day and diligently copied a chocolate-box bunch of pansies, which eventually brought praise and encouragement from him. After her matriculation in Delhi where her father was posted as a magistrate, Anwar announced her intention to study at Shanti Niketan, the

legendary university of art started by the poet Rabindranath Tagore and his nephew Abanindranath.

The family was aghast at the thought of a young Muslim girl heading for Bengal, and quickly found an alternative at the Punjab University in Lahore, where Anwar became a member of the second batch of students joining in 1942.

About her purposefulness at the time, Anwar had no doubts, "I had seen some tragedies in my family where women were not educated and had to stand on their own feet and support themselves. That confirmed my feeling that I must have a profession and be self-sufficient. I remember at my admission interview I said quite brashly, 'I want to take up art provided there is a profession in it', and Mrs. [Anna Molka] Ahmed jumped because I was the only girl who said that!"

There were only four other students in that second group with Anwar. She began teaching at the University as a Demonstrator around the time when the rumblings of Independence and Partition arose. Her father summoned her to Rawalpindi where he was now stationed, but Anna Molka persuaded him to let Anwar stay in Lahore until the June vacations. Anwar remembers the sounds of rioting, bolting doors and windows, and the fear of attack. She recalls Anna Molka sleeping with a large knife under her pillow to keep them 'safe' as she put it. The vacations were spent in Murree.

As Independence Day dawned, Anwar remembers houses burning – an experience she turned into a painting – as well as the sadness of destruction, but also the pride of experiencing freedom.

"At the time I felt it was going to be a golden Lahore. Then I saw the bloodshed. My father was now posted in Attock as Deputy Commissioner and the refugees were coming with the stories. Trainloads massacred, children murdered in front of their parents, slaughtered with a sword, with their heads on swords, children separated from parents, announcements on the radio to find them. Going to those camps was different from reading about it in the newspapers."

Anna Molka suggested a teaching post at the Lady MacLagan Training College. A reluctant father gave his permission when Anwar promised that it would only be for a year and "for the experience, just so that if at any time in life I needed it, I could do it. Well he agreed, but his brother was furious; he accused my father of being unable to feed his own child!" The first woman in her family to take up a job, Anwar was also the youngest member of the staff at Lady MacLagan, and was teaching students older than herself.

She recalls how her marriage was arranged with her cousin, "I didn't know who I was getting married to, or that I was getting married at all. I didn't know that the preparation was

for my wedding. My parents would come to Lahore and take me shopping for what I thought was a cousin's wedding. I chose things that I liked until we got to the shoes! I told them I couldn't choose the shoes because the bride's feet were a different size – then the cat was out of the bag! I didn't mind. I knew my husband; we were a close family. When we got married I was living in the college hostel and it was a bit of a shock when I realised I was going to have a baby!"

Anwar had already joined the MA programme at the University as a student at the same time, and she realised that her studies were in jeopardy. She recalls her desire to somehow forego the pregnancy, bicycling furiously over the potholes in roads of Lahore, until she was scolded by her colleagues. Motherhood only delayed her determination for a year and she joined the faculty of the Fine Arts Department as soon as she had her degree.

"I used to feed the baby and bathe him, then cycle to the University, then come back in time for his feed, then cycle back again. My husband was very supportive; his salary wasn't much but I knew we had to run the show together." Eventually Anwar's parents



**Lt – Rt: Anwar Afzal,
Zarah David and Naseem Qazi,
Lahore, 1960's**

intervened and took away her son. "I think he was about five months old when my parents took him away. So that was very difficult. Of course he always called me Apa after that; for all practical purposes he was my brother, not my son! He lived with my parents until he was seven. In between I had a second son and I went through looking after him, the house, teaching, having visitors – all at once."

In 1960 Anwar had her first solo show at the Arts Council at Alhamra, Lahore; it was also the year she was awarded a scholarship to go to the U.S to do her MA in art education. Her family pitched in to help look after the children, her sister giving up two years of college to help their mother. Anwar was at Indiana University for two years and recalls the fear of being on her own for the first time, her longing for her husband and children, and turning down an offer of a Ph.D. fellowship because of the desperate need to come home. "I told my supervisor, every day I come home and cross the date off my calendar, and I have fixed my clock for twenty-four months and I can't stay for a day over that. I must get home!"

Returning home in the beginning of 1963, Anwar was asked to introduce art in the newly set up Institute of Education where she taught for five years, before returning to the Fine Arts Department where she shared the post of Head with other senior teachers in rotation.

She remembers the sixties and seventies as being the years when political interference made itself felt in the Department. "Political pressure changed everything. There were students who were there not because they were talented, but because so-and-so was the daughter of an army officer. There was a case in which a girl had not attended any classes at all and as Department Head I was asked to allow her to pass. Well, everything was done to force me. I was given a message that the Minister wanted to talk to me about that girl. I insisted I would only do it on a written order

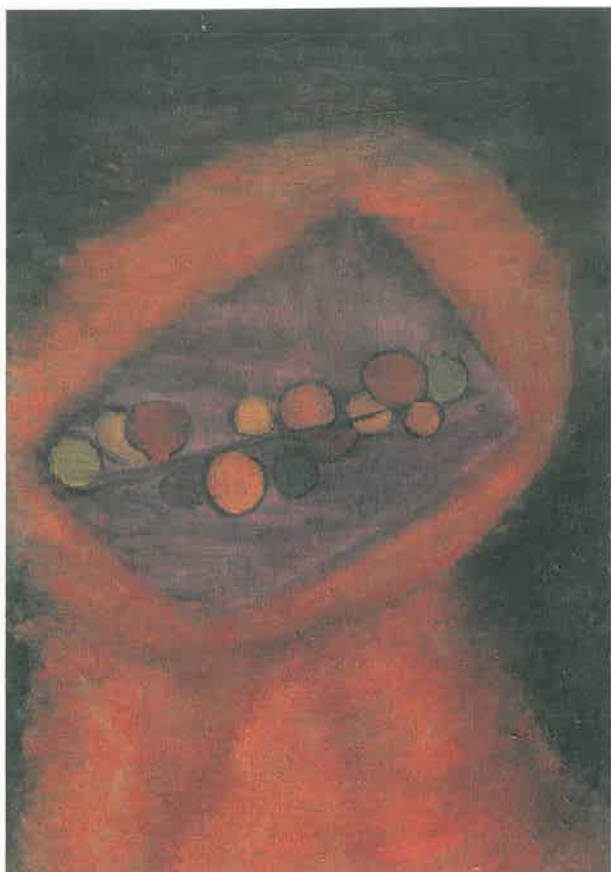
from the VC. Then there was the threat of income-tax inspection. A brigadier came to see me and I said let me introduce my staff to you and you can see their registers, that sort of thing – one can laugh about it now, but then..."

Anwar also emphasises the effect of politics on the syllabus and teaching. The rise of the militant student wing of the *Jamaat-i-Islami* and its takeover of the University was reflected in the content of the courses. They interfered in the examination system and in the study of the human figure. Bureaucratic attitudes in the recruitment of teachers, where the professional experience of a teacher was often considered unnecessary and indeed inappropriate, also led to a decline in teaching standards.

Anwar has played a more visible role as a teacher and nurturer of talent than as an artist. The years as a young teacher were more prolific than her years as an art administrator. She displayed formidable academic skills and a sensitivity to portraiture very early in her career, but her development as an artist remained comparatively static, partly because of her commitment to her family. The question arises whether the sacrifices required of a young mother inhibited the unrelenting concentration required of a painter.

She has worked mainly on portraits and some cameos of her garden and her house, along with the occasional commission. Her work has always been academically proficient and painterly, but she herself is more than aware of the lost years. "I do not know how to put it into words. I get so frustrated when my fingers itch, but our culture is such that one is bound by family pressure. The time I want for myself, I don't get."

Anwar Afzal is now retired and resides in Lahore with her husband. The easel is always set up, and she paints now and again.



Abassi Akhter Abidi

Onion - 1958
Oil on canvas
66 x 97 cm.
Coll: The Artist



Abassi Akhter Abidi

Blossom - 1992
Oil on canvas
122 x 92 cm.
Coll: The Artist

Problems with her eyesight suddenly became acute and she was advised by a leading eye specialist to discontinue her studies immediately. Deeply depressed, Abbasi gave up studying altogether and stayed home, painting and drawing until she was persuaded by Anna Molka to come back to the University to do her BA. She went on to do her post-graduate Diploma in Art, cycling everyday to the University across almost the whole town

as she lived at the Engineering University Campus with her brother Akmal, who was the one who had indulged and bought her the bicycle.

In 1954, as her course at the University neared its end, Abbasi represented the student body at the first National Art Exhibition in Dhaka (then East Pakistan). Among the artists travelling from West Pakistan were Chughtai,

Allah Buksh, Zubaida Agha, and Shakir Ali. Abbasi sold three paintings for 1300 rupees and, spying a travel office at their hotel, inquired about the boat fare to England. She immediately put down the 950 rupees required for a one-way ticket and on her return to Lahore announced her plans to an astounded family. Her brother refused to support her plans to study in England. Unfazed, Abbasi left home with £150 in her pocket, provided

Abbasi Akhter Abidi (b. 1930)

For women however, certain educational priorities were mandatory. Abbasi Abidi, a student of class seven in Aligarh, took up drawing instead of Persian and was admonished by her mother who told her that all girls from 'good' families needed to know Persian, while drawing was of no use. Abbasi remained silent and continued with art.

Remaining silent in the face of opposition was a trait learnt from her widowed mother, and from the early trauma of her father's death. Indulged by her father as a small child, Abbasi's shortsightedness was discovered by him when she complained that she couldn't see the school blackboard, and was accused by her teacher of copying from her neighbour. Strongly powered spectacles were prescribed for her just before her father died. At the funeral, which was held in their ancestral home in Patiala, the elderly women present commented on six-year-old Abbasi's audacity in daring to wear glasses, considered to be a sign of fashionable frivolity. The spectacles were immediately taken away by her mother, and Abbasi was left almost sightless until they were restored much later on the intervention of her elder brother.

Her father's demise was one of four family deaths in a row and the household was deemed to have been taken over by *jinn*s. A white-robed, bearded sage was sought and the house exorcised, with nails being hammered into floors, and a white horse being paraded in the courtyard and forced up the stairs. Abbasi

remembers this as a time of superstition and fear, spent in uncontrollable fits of crying, which was finally relieved by her being sent on a tour of the holy sites in Iraq with some elders.

Coming back to school in Aligarh, Abbasi faced a changed atmosphere in the house of her eldest brother. She remembers a lack of love, great regimentation, and her mother's suffering, which bred a stubborn rebellion in the young Abbasi. Going to school in the horse-drawn *tonga* which was covered with curtains on all sides, Abbasi would on occasion drive the carriage herself, well hidden from view, until one day the curtain slipped and elder brother got to know.

Doing brilliantly in her matriculation examination, Abbasi announced her determination to become a doctor; her brother immediately quashed the idea: "You are in purdah, there is no question of doing medicine!"

Partition occurred while Abbasi was still in her first year of college and the family became part of the exodus to Pakistan and to Lahore. This time another brother encouraged her to take up studies in medicine. He also allowed her to discard the purdah on their arrival in Lahore. She began taking art classes with Anna Molka Ahmed at the Punjab University, and continued with them until she joined the Fatima Jinnah Medical College as a first-year student.

The mass exodus of the Hindus and the Sikhs from Pakistan in 1947 was matched by the influx of Muslim refugees from newly partitioned India. Among these were migrants from what were considered to be centres of Muslim culture, with a strong court tradition in the arts and in literature. The appreciation of poetry, music, and to a lesser degree of painting, was an accepted part of the upper-middle-class Muslim tradition.





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Oil on canvas
66 x 97 cm.
Coll: The Artist



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by yet another brother. An uncle pledged financial support after interrogating her and finding her determined to work and support herself.

Abbasi arrived at the docks in London and found her way to a hotel and onwards. Doing the rounds of colleges, she joined a course in mural painting at the Central School of Art in London. She recalls an unpleasant tete-a-tete with an official at the Pakistan High Commission who propositioned her when she appeared to apply for a foreign exchange permit. She left the office empty-handed and lived frugally for six months on the £150 before showing up again.

This time the permit was issued immediately, and her uncle redeemed his pledge. It was in London that she met her husband-to-be, also an official at the High Commission. She worked during the vacations and did a summer stint as an arts and crafts teacher in Cooperstown, Ohio, having got to America on a student boat and an overdraft.

Returning to Pakistan, Abbasi helped set up the design department at Packages Limited, Pakistan's first modern packaging plant. Her generous pay-package was of more help to her out-of-work brother than to herself. She decided to get married, once more in revolt against her devout Shia family, who refused permission for her marriage to a Sunni Muslim, an army captain. Getting married anyway, Abbasi found the duties of an army wife in a country under martial law, suffocatingly oppressive. While not a political person, Abbasi remembers being upset by the first military parade she attended with her husband, and the interminable official dinners.

Her naturally intrepid disposition has also been a feature of her later years. She took up Principal Mark Sponenberg's offer to teach at the re-organised National College of Arts in

1960, and returned to Lahore with her small son. Pioneering the Department of Textiles with Italian artist Ensa Benson, Abbasi recollects the support of her husband, his pride in her first exhibition, and his interest in helping her research materials for her teaching programme.

Widowed in 1968, Abbasi contracted another marriage within her own Shia community with less than happy results. She had to be fiercely protective of her son, and face the upheavals at the NCA where factionalism among the students and staff paralleled the political events shaking President Ayub Khan's regime.

Transferred out of the College, Abbasi spent almost eight years in the Audio-Visual Department of the Punjab government. She returned as Principal after another period of internal turmoil at the College. This was followed by further traumatic events in Pakistan's chequered political history when Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was unceremoniously removed from power by military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq. For Abbasi, steering a highly visible liberal institution through a politically treacherous and uncertain decade, was a difficult and often personally threatening task.

Abbasi Akhter Abidi managed a team of teachers of diverse political, social, and religious backgrounds in an atmosphere of growing state interference in academia. Cautioned more than once, she faced the political divides of the body politic of Pakistan in its manifestation within the institution. The attempts of the militant *Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba* to infiltrate the staff and the student body of the College to bring it in line with the special brand of religious fundamentalism being patronised by army rule, made her years as Principal strife-ridden and difficult. Student clashes between right and left, witch-hunting of liberal teachers, a government hostile to

liberal thought, made every educational institution a battleground, with most of them losing out to the fascist order of the day. Abbasi, and a supportive faculty, walked the tightrope with cautious deliberation and succeeded in thwarting most attempts at interference. One major violent confrontation with a posse of baton-waving storm troopers ended in the ransacking of her office, but she stood her ground, and criminal proceedings were conducted against the leaders, who were sentenced – the first time an educational institution had succeeded against *Jamiat* students.

Abbasi's years as an art educator made the practice of her art and craft erratic. Supervision of the Department of Design, and the management of what was now the premier art, design and architecture college in the country, had become a full-time job. Constant economic and academic problems took their toll on Abbasi's growth as designer and artist, her professional life being put on hold until she held an exhibition based on the poetry of Iqbal. Assessing her own work, Abbasi says of this time, "It was the first thing I had done after Saeed's death. I felt I couldn't do justice to painting." Her career as designer and motivator for projects was more successful.

After her retirement from NCA, Abbasi's next major enterprise was the setting up of the Pakistan School of Fashion Design in Lahore. Financed by the Export Promotion Bureau of Pakistan, the School was set up in collaboration with the French Fashion Institute (La Chambre Syndicale) in 1993. A pioneering effort in the fast growing garment sector, the School was intended to train designers for the fashion industry. However, bureaucratic meddling ended Abbasi's tenure in 1998 before the first batch of students could graduate. However, she is active as adviser to institutions such as the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi.



Nasim Qazi

Woman in Burqah –

Oil on board

44 x 58 cm.

Coll: Alhamra Art Gallery

Nasim Hafiz Qazi (1931 – 1995)

As a teacher and sedate mentor, Nasim Qazi taught hundreds of students at the Punjab University and the Lahore College for Women. This was a fact easily forgotten if one visited her home in Lahore, where not a single painting adorned the walls in her living room, dining room, or bedroom which she shared with her ailing mother. The paintings were there but stacked away in her studio, neatly removed from the business of her daily grind. A revealing indication perhaps of the austere manner in which Miss Qazi, as she was universally known, worked out relationships between her teaching and her practice of art.

Wanting to become a doctor, like most ambitious women in her day, her ideas were put paid to by a brother in medical college who instead encouraged an interest in taking up art professionally, something that she had dabbled in as a child.

Nasim remembered walking to the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University; the year was 1945 and there were a number of Hindu and Sikh girls in the class. For her, the time before Partition was one of agitation but also of excitement. She and her class would go to the debates at Government College and listen to people like Sarojini Naidu.

She recalled, “Communal tensions were there. There were sirens and curfews and fires in the night, and the girls in the hostel slept with daggers under their pillows. The Fine Arts Department ran two ‘shifts’ for the girls from the various colleges. The DAV College, the *Arya Samaj* College, and Lahore College, each had a group. The classes were full upto Partition, then suddenly they were deserted, and in the post-graduate diploma class in 1950, I was the sole student.”

Daughter of a forest conservator, Nasim received her early education in Quetta, before coming to Lahore. Her father retired to the family village lands near Mianwali when Partition took place. The village had a large Sikh population and Nasim’s father was entrusted with the care of the fleeing women and children.

Nasim’s first art teaching appointment was in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) where she began the very first college art department outside Lahore, at the Girls Government College. She taught there for more than a year before returning to Lahore to teach at the Lahore

College for Women, and to start her MA studies at the Fine Arts Department of the University. Graduating in 1956, Nasim then went to the Escuela Centrale de Bellas Artes in Madrid, Spain, on a Spanish government scholarship.

The family was encouraging, which was unusual for the time, and for Nasim the two-year period in Spain was a time of sound academic training and a very appropriate, protected social life. Having access to the Prado, she made a number of copies from the old masters – Titian, Reubens, and Goya – which were part of her first solo show at the Pakistan Arts Council at Alhamra, on her return in 1960. This exhibition reflected Nasim Qazi’s competence as a draughtswoman, as well as her interest in a tonal palette.

Her teaching at the Lahore College continued until 1985 when she retired as Head of Department. In between, she taught art classes for children at Alhamra, and earned diplomas in Bengali, French, Spanish, and German.

Nasim Qazi’s retirement was marked with a retrospective held at the new gallery at the Alhamra. The largest number of paintings were on the theme of children. Ironically, this series may have made up for the vast gaps in her personal life. Reflecting Nasim’s life as the proverbial teacher, her students are teachers and practitioners of art all over Pakistan.⁵ A rather academic instructor, she was thorough in the imparting of skills, backed up by the teaching of art history.



Nasim Qazi
Window Sill –
 Oil on board
 90 x 60 cm.
 Coll: Alhamra Art Gallery

Leading a singularly uneventful personal life with an emotional involvement barely hinted at, Nasim recognised the need for time to focus on her own work, although she painted religiously through all the years of teaching. She was modest about her own contribution to art education in Pakistan, without doubt her major commitment from which she derived a great deal of satisfaction.

Nasim's painting developed under the influence of Khalid Iqbal's thinly applied, crosshatched colours in the fifties. But her experiences in Spain helped to bring about a richer, purer, darker palette. Black was added

to her restricted repertoire of colours. Atmosphere, distance, and tonal values still occupied her as she approached the figure, the still-life, and the landscape.

Commenting on the restriction on the physical movement of women, the rise of fundamentalism, and the timidity in women's behaviour patterns in the Eighties, she compared these years with the sixties when one could draw and sculpt form the female nude in Lahore College. She felt the political and social climate intruded in her life both as a painter and as a woman.

Nasim Qazi noted that the numbers in the Art

Department at Lahore College had grown from about a dozen in 1960 to two hundred in 1980, but it was accompanied by a loss in academic freedom, and was therefore of little comfort to her. The evening classes at Alhamra had registered a corresponding growth with hundreds of part-time enthusiasts, children and professionals using the premises.

The Alhamra Art Academy⁶ originally began in a modest hut put up in the lawns during the time when poet Faiz was the Secretary of the Arts Council. Nasim started teaching there in 1960 and continued to be associated with it until she passed away suddenly, just after her mother's death, in 1995.

Jalees Nagi (b. 1938)

Coming from a literary family, with a large brood of brothers and sisters from her father's two wives, Jalees remembers being a tomboy among her many brothers. Sensitive to the injustices she felt women were subject to, Jalees says, "I've always had this desire to be different, to be free of a man's bondage. My father was very short tempered and I remember being hurt by his treatment of my mother. I once left a caricature I had done of him on his table – but he was always indulgent towards me and understood my rebellious nature. I had this great desire to be a social reformer for women. As a little girl I had a Hindu friend and we used to make mud toys together. My father, a judge, was religious, but tolerant and abhorred narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy. There is no doubt he influenced my life. I

remember when I came home from college, I was expected to sit and read to him. He always chose traditional texts. He would ask me to read from the magazine *Tulu-i-Islam*; things like 'Letters to Tahira' which made my blood boil. I'd complain to my mother who'd admonish me about learning my role as a good wife and mother. I realise he meant well and tried to prepare me for living in this society. On his deathbed he advised me to get married, saying, 'You may one day become an artist, but as an unmarried woman you will never have a status in this society', and he was very right; as a single woman one faces so many taboos."

Qualifying with an MA in Fine Arts from the Punjab University, the young Jalees moved from her first teaching assignment in Lahore College to the Home Economics College in 1960, and soon qualified for a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin in the USA. She broke an engagement arranged by the family when she was seventeen and told her father that she had opted for a career.

For two years in the US, she revelled in the freedom to explore and experiment with materials and methods, especially in the crafts, and came back in 1965, poised to introduce many of them into the rather sedate curriculum at the College. Block-prints, rug-making, weaving, stained-glass, batik, leatherwork and pottery were among the courses she introduced.

Looking back at her thirty years of teaching, Jalees reflected on the growing lack of artistic and personal freedom, the changing mores and values. She says, "When I was doing my MA, we worked from the nude model; it was compulsory, and it was difficult at first, but I got used to it. Now look at the atmosphere - how can an artist exist in this stifling atmosphere. The artists are afraid; the skills and techniques are there, but what else? It was Bhutto's pandering to the *maulvis* which was the starting point. Then came Zia and life became even more suffocating. We felt it within the four walls of this educational institution. Male visits were disallowed. Government ministers could come but not ordinary men. What about the clerks, the male servants and gardeners? What a contradiction! Why is woman the main target of all repression? I have felt that we haven't gone forward at all. My girlhood was far more liberal; we moved without *purdah* and attended male-female debates and college functions. It was a less hypocritical society than it is today.

"Being a woman is so difficult. The limitations are tremendous. Then being a single woman, the things one faces. You go into an office and the official opposite wants to know why a good-looking educated woman like me never married. You want to tell them that it's none of their business, but you learn to stay silent."

Not regretting her decision to stay single in the face of many offers of marriage,



Jalees Nagi

Untitled –
Mixed media metal sculpture
85 x 158 x 35 cm.
Coll: Alhamra Art Gallery

Jalees feels that the propagation of art and her own teaching has been akin to creating a new life. "A mother should really give up other things for a child, otherwise you have no right to be a mother. I wonder if I could have faced that responsibility. I feel a sense of creation when I am working, and actually I don't miss anything, no, not even a man. Sometimes the companionship of another person is missing,

or sexual contact, but perhaps my interests have been different. There is a strong sensuality in my work. I do it with warmth and feeling. There are the usual comments from friends that unmarried women are traditionally hard and cranky, but I'm a happy person. Not that I haven't been in love, I'm not a saint! But the thought of the bondage of marriage! If I want to go out at midnight, I will - I have

never felt insecure. I solve my own problems. In fact, a lot of the time I'm solving my married friends' problems too; and the students too. People say they find peace in my room. I've spent a lot of time nurturing other people - the motherhood has gone into that. Now, sometimes I realise I've done that for too long and not enough of my own work. I want to leave everything now and be totally by myself, and work. It's been difficult working in a very conformist institution, a girls' college. My deviations are viewed as arrogance."

Jalees feels that women today are beginning to have an inkling of the possible choices they may have. For her time she was an unusual person, taking a decision about not 'marrying for security', preferring the other choice. As she succinctly says, "There were a number of men available - men with property, but I was looking not for a man but for a real human being, and couldn't find that. But I was very clear about myself and what I wanted. My judgements about people are usually correct. I could never have tolerated what many women tolerate. If marriage cannot offer total satisfaction, it's better you delve into your art - it's more uplifting than a man who takes you down - so that was my decision."

Jalees Nagi's major contribution has been in forging a curriculum which focussed on craft skills, original research, and auxiliary fine art courses. Rebelling against the image of domestic science students dabbling in watercolours, her own practice ranged from stained-glass windows to sculptural assemblages in metal. Some of her work followed a more predictable academic pattern, with portraits, still-lives, and landscapes as part of the repertoire.

Retiring from the College of Home Economics in 1998, Jalees Nagi has chosen to live in the U.S with her brother, and visits her beloved Lahore only occasionally.

Jamila Zaidi (b. 1935)

Jamila Zaidi's father was very much a part of the liberal Muslim tradition of pre-Partition India. An urbane, educated, literary man who was passionately interested in music and politics, his indulgent feudal home allowed Jamila unusual license in behaviour and dress. As she puts it, "My father defended me against my mother's and grandmother's efforts to teach me sewing, cookery, or wearing the *chaadar*. My father was a lawyer and an active member first of the Congress and later of the Muslim League."

"He sang very well himself, and the house was always full of music, both live and on records. His library was extensive too, but he

was also religious and would say his prayers. I would run around without a *dupatta*, climb trees and play games. I also discovered that I liked to draw when I was about twelve, when I copied a portrait of Byron from one of my father's books. Of course my father's liberal attitude towards me scandalised many people in the family, including the fact that I was not in *purdah*! He even sent me away to Lahore to study, which was unheard of in a Muslim family. Then came Partition and we were suddenly refugees without anything. My father settled in Rawalpindi and tried to set up his legal practice."

Jamila was already at the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University before the events of 1947. She had been taken there by her father while she was studying for her FA, and had been cajoled by Anna Molka into joining. Jamila remembers Sheikh Ahmed and Anna Molka as the mainstays of the Department, with some visiting teachers who left after Partition. Later, Anwar Afzal and Zakia Malik joined the faculty. She recalls the depletion of the student body, and the complete change in personal circumstances. She was doing her Teachers' Training at Lady MacLagan Training College, as well as her studies at the Fine Arts Department.

The first effect of Partition on Jamila's personal life was having to take up the *purdah*, as the new home in Rawalpindi was in a conservative area. A *burqah* was sewn for her; she would leave for Lahore wearing it and take it off on

reaching the University. She also felt the need to help out the family in their altered economic circumstances. She took up a teaching job while continuing to study for the Fine Art Diploma, and sent home her first paycheck of 100 rupees. Deeply touched, her father sent it back with another 400 rupees, telling her to buy herself a bicycle and a sitar.

Jamila's interest in music, nurtured by her father, continued with her study of the instrument. She carried the sitar back and forth between Lahore and Rawalpindi until a stray comment at the railway station, "There goes a *bai-jee*!" made her get a separate one for each city.

Engaged to a cousin in her childhood, Jamila deftly ended the betrothal by announcing her intention of going to London to study. Again supported by her father, she studied Art Education in London, on the understanding that she would be back in nine months. Doing exceptionally well at the Institute of Education, she soon ended up at the Slade School of Fine Art. Her tutor wrote home for her father's permission to stay on for three years. Jamila joined every class she could, and also took piano lessons.

Her years at the Slade gave Jamila's work a strong academic bias towards drawing. She remembers the lack of colour in the environment of the studio. The whites, greys and blues which were the major colours in the surroundings were a long way from her earlier



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON. SLADE SCHOOL

May 1955

Jamila Zaidi
Middle row, fourth from Rt.
Slade School of Art, London - 1955

vivid palette in Lahore.

Jamila returned to Pakistan in 1957 and taught briefly at the Lady MacLagan College before moving to the Lahore College for women, where she was part of the group of teachers who set up the Fine Arts Department. The opportunity to join the faculty of the newly re-organised National College of Arts came in 1960, and Jamila moved again.

Her marriage to Dr. Zaidi, who was stationed in Hyderabad, meant giving up living in Lahore in 1962. Both compromised by finding jobs in Peshawar where Jamila took the chair in the Department of Fine Arts in the newly established campus of the Peshawar University. Her vision of a craft-based syllabus for the

Department was never to be realised as she followed her husband yet again, this time to Iraq and England. She was to be away for eleven years, until her husband's death.

Coming back to Rawalpindi and looking after her recently widowed mother, and unravelling the intricacies of her seniority in government service, took up all of Jamila's energies as she settled down to teach art at the Government College, Rawalpindi. She was determined to start a Masters programme in fine art, the first outside Lahore, and she succeeded in railroading the Education Department into sanctioning staff, equipment and a miniscule budget. The Department flourished but her administrative duties grew; nevertheless, she accepted the vice-principalship of the College.

Although due to retire in 1985, her tenure was extended by an additional three years. Ten years later, in 1998, she was invited to teach art history at NCA, a position she graciously took up, albeit only briefly.

Looking back at her years as a teacher, she says, "I never meant to be only an educationist – I got involved in it. I tried to paint. I managed it while I was in Lahore in my office – but it's a full-time commitment – when I paint then I can't do anything else, no one should even talk to me. My mother-in-law knew that after I was married. I was really tormented by housework – I refused to do anything..."

Jamila is highly critical of the way art education has been deleted from school

curricula in Pakistan. She is especially bitter because she was instrumental in formulating recommendations to make art compulsory in school education, to the Education Ministry in the sixties. She differentiates between artists and art

educationists, of whom she feels there is a great dearth in Pakistan. "Artists may not necessarily be art educators. Art teachers have to be trained to understand the objectives of education, to understand methods and child development, and how to stimulate creativity."

She also disapproves of the content of fine arts courses in colleges and universities. "The kind of training we are giving – it's neither Eastern nor Western. We are teaching observation but in a superficial way. We need to go into the essentials, of line qualities, form. You have to go to the level of the student and try to understand their vision, instead of imposing your own vision and your own wavelength."

She debates the relevance of the current college and university syllabi to the present, or future, Pakistani art, "The system is wrong. The courses are irrelevant and 'heavy'. The emphasis is on the history of Western art – why not African or Pakistani? The teachers are not practising artists. And there is no academic or artistic freedom; imitation is not art, that's the real problem!"

Jamila's own work has been interrupted for years. She is nostalgic about her promise as a painter and printmaker. "My fingers itch – I remember the paintings I did at the Slade – the pale skins of the models – the grey room – the light." She is wistful and sometimes sounds quite determined in her plans to get back to the easel, but the years slip by as she dusts off the sketchbooks and looks through her etching portfolios, all testimonials to an era of practice and expression in paint, overtaken by her responsibilities in her home and classroom, as a nurturer of others.



Jamila Zaidi
Old Age – 1955
 Oil on board
 34 x 40 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

Zubaida Agha
City –
 Oil on canvas
 Size unavailable
 Coll: Canvas Gallery



Zubaida Agha
Blue Vase – 1993
 Oil on canvas
 76 x 91 cm.
 Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.

Zubaida Agha (1922 – 1997)

Standing well apart from the academia of painting was the intriguing doyen of modernism in Pakistan, Zubaida Agha. Zubaida, perhaps the first abstract painter of her age, worked on non-figurative themes in the forties, when fellow painters were still following the 19th century European tradition, or were taking up the delicate Bengal School watercolour techniques with overtones of Japanese or Chinese influences. The only exception was the charismatic Amrita Shergill, who took the art scene in Lahore and Delhi by storm, artistically and otherwise! The young Zubaida was much impressed by her.

Dr. Charles Fabri, the curator of the Lahore Museum, wrote about Zubaida's work on her first entry into the Lahore art world in 1946: "The most remarkable exhibits in the first room are four oils by Zubaida Agha; three

abstracts, more correctly surrealist. 'The Wind' is brilliant and profound... I recommend those who are not accustomed to non-representational art to have a long look at its interesting rhythm." It was the All-India Exhibition, and Zubaida had paid four *annas* to gain entry, while professional painters were charged a rupee.

In 1949 Zubaida had her first solo exhibition, and S.N. Gupta, a former Principal of the Mayo School of Arts, wrote, "Zubaida Agha is the only abstractionist painter in Pakistan. The alphabet of her painting is largely unknown here... The first response to Miss Agha's painting in one's mind is of wonder. What are those shapes, never seen before, yet strangely familiar? I have asked the artist many a question. Her answers are invariably brief and yet complete. I pointed to one of her paintings and asked for an explanation. This is 'Ideal Life' she answered with a quiet finality which told me there was nothing more to add."

Zubaida Agha grew up in Montgomery (now Sahiwal), where she lived on a farm with gardens, horses, and what she remembers as idyllic rural surroundings. Her family was educated; her brothers were professionals and one brother, Agha Hameed, was a civil servant, influential as a cultural figure and as a well-known art critic. Zubaida was a great favourite with him, and with her father.

Zubaida came to Kinnaird College at Lahore; while there, she studied the piano, but took

up painting lessons with the painter B.C. Sanyal only after graduating. Another teacher was Mario Perlrighieri, an Italian prisoner-of-war and pupil of Picasso's who was sent to Lahore during the War to decorate the Lahore Gymkhana Club. Zubaida became a willing pupil and the P.O.W, who was a Count, would cycle over from Harbanspura to Mayo Gardens every day to teach her abstract painting. It was 1944 and he taught her for eight or nine months, insisting on a regimen of six or seven drawings a day, constantly selecting and getting her to do and re-do them over and over again.

Zubaida recalled doing eighty sketches of each figure in a painting called 'The Cotton Pickers'. It was also at this time that she took to painting to music, a practice which she continued to the end of her days. The daily routine consisted of drawing, mysticism, Greek philosophy, and Western classical music. Perlrighieri taught her to paint ideas rather than pictures, and as Zubaida put it, "The eye can grasp even the ungraspable, the invisible, if it is trained to see, not just to look!"

She rejected the kind of painting she saw around her in Lahore, even her teacher Sanyal's work, which she "wasn't much carried away by." Awarded a scholarship, Zubaida travelled to London carrying eight hundred drawings with her, which were seen with great interest by her teachers. She transferred to the Beaux-Arts in Paris after a few months and had solo exhibitions in both cities before coming back home.

Zubaida's single-minded and almost lonely pursuit of her work set her apart from other painters of the early years. Years were spent constantly working at the easel, occasionally on larger murals, and on sculpture. She worked primarily in oils on canvas. A demanding craftswoman, she stretched her own canvases, preparing the surface with traditional oil grounds.

Zubaida Agha lived in Lahore and Karachi before finally settling further north in Rawalpindi in 1960, where she set up Pakistan's first private art gallery the following year. She ran it for sixteen years before moving to Islamabad and gifting her own private collection of paintings to the National Collection. This included a portrait by Amrita Shergill, which was later stolen.

Her gallery gave Zubaida a valuable niche in the art scene, putting her in touch with artists from both East and West Pakistan. She was able to nurture younger painters and show their work in the company of established names like Zainul Abedin, Shakir Ali, Ahmed Parvez, Chughtai, and S. Safdar – all personal friends. For the shy and retiring Zubaida, these were years of interaction with the milieu surrounding her, a time when she was almost forced into public view, not because of her own painting, but because of a forum which made strong demands on her as a curator. The Contemporary Art Galleries in Rawalpindi became a centre of shows from both wings of the country, a venue of important annual exhibitions and a meeting place for local and visiting artists. The newly established capital at Islamabad, having little or no cultural life, gave Zubaida the patronage and the focus for her establishment.

She called it her 'best period'. "It was the most creative period. I gave the best years of my life to the gallery. I was young, had energy, and could work." Then suddenly contradicting

herself, "I wasted those sixteen years on administration and introducing other artists; it went down the drain. I didn't have the time for my own work."

She succeeded in ensuring a certain standard in the level of work exhibited, which was indisputably the best of its era. It must however have been a trying time for an artist who was known for working in isolation, undisturbed by anything other than family concerns.

The contradictions within Zubaida Agha were further reflected in her claims that she was not interested in politics, or aware of what went on around her, preferring the company of her music and her paintings in the studio. Yet she was a keen observer of people and events, commenting on social conditions and cultural politics with insight and a sarcastic wit. Deeply interested in philosophy and literature, Zubaida conceded that those sources were more likely themes for her painting than



Zubaida Agha
Reclining Figure –
 Oil on canvas
 77 x 92 cm.
 Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl

current trends and popular fads. Fiercely supportive of the contemporary idiom, she scorned official attempts to 'guide' Pakistani painting along politically or socially 'acceptable' lines.

Recipient of a number of national awards, she was on the jury of numerous exhibitions and examinations, and represented the country in international exhibitions on many occasions. She remained a sceptic about any popular movement and her attitude was characterised by an unassuming but vehemently independent spirit.

In her personal life, marriage was never on the cards mainly because, as she put it, "I was not interested enough. Good looks were not an attraction. Basically I'm a warm-hearted, affectionate, gentle person, and I have known people who are not so gentle. And also I never met someone who I could share everything with... You can call it selfish, in the way that I wanted a lot of time for myself."

In a painting career spanning half-a-century, Zubaida Agha moved back and forth between a deliberately naïve and symbolic use of recognisable human and animal forms, and a highly personal vocabulary of abstract notations. She explained it thus, "You get hold of an idea and you want to translate it in abstract form. That is how it starts. I used to take down notes and then think of forms and lines to express that in colour."

Seemingly impervious to external events as a motivating factor, she did acknowledge being affected by the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, and the fate of thousands of Pakistani prisoners-of-war. The paintings on these very specific events were abstract, as were others based on more personal family matters. She admitted to awareness of a certain kind of loneliness, but was quick to insist on how busy her work kept her, and the constant

loyalty and affection of close family and friends.

Not accepting that her work had passed through phases, Zubaida viewed it as a whole rather than a string of developing stages. That she was thoroughly involved in, very close to, and terribly attached to her work, made it difficult for the outsider to enter into her experience without seeming gauche and obtrusive. About her manner of working she was explicitly forthright, "Sometimes you are very clear about your idea and it comes freely. Other times you go on and it takes a long time. The oil takes a certain time to dry and if you want to give it a special layer or something... For example, I do use a deeper colour to give it a certain light inside it, then I wait until it is completely dry and then add a layer. My work looks very simple, but it's not simple because it takes a lot out of me... it is so difficult to express yourself in simple lines. There is a lot of physical and mental work involved. There is a process of change all the time. Sometimes you don't get the effect you want with only a few coats of paint, so you go deeper and deeper. Some paintings are hiding a lot!"

Zubaida was emphatic about using artists' colours and was meticulous about the technical and material aspects of her work. She concerned herself with the effects of weather, temperature, climate, and the physical survival of her paintings. She never used varnish and was proud of the unchanging intensity of colour apparent in her work over the decades.

Zubaida Agha has been called 'mainly a colourist', a reference to the single constant in her work. Reflecting on her manner of working, she said, "Sometimes I feel a tandem of difficulties and 'you don't like your own work and sometimes you do'. It changes. I don't repeat myself. I think it is essential for each artist to give up painting for some time;

read a book or do something else. It has happened that I have to leave painting because I don't know what to do with it. After four months I returned to look at it, and then I knew what I had to do. Sometimes you become stale if you work on something for too long."

Zubaida Agha's painting is well represented in this last remark. She moved into imagery that ranged from cityscapes to horses to floral bouquets. There were also the forays into figurative compositions which had undertones of Jamini Roy and the Bengal tradition. Yet none of these motifs were resident for long. Amorphous forms floated in and out of her canvases, defined by line, colour, dots, and dashes. Indifferent to environmental references, she did on occasion introduce recognisable forms in a deliberate, personal manner.

She was a regular studio painter in a rarefied environment that set her apart from the streams and issue-specific areas in Pakistani painting. Her work seems at once fresh and childlike, and also naïve, eternally poised in an artistic Peter Pan land; endearing, yet isolated from the concerns of the Pakistani woman painter.

Yet Zubaida wondered if her being a woman was relevant to the viewing of her work. She conceded in the interview that there was a kind of sensitive delicacy in her colour, which may owe something to her gender. She added that political opportunism had been apparent in the work of male painters, but not in women's art, and summed it up, "Women seem to be more pliable, but actually they are less willing to compromise."

Living alone in her studio home in Islamabad, Zubaida Agha continued to paint as she grew steadily more frail. She insisted on her privacy and discouraged family and friends from visiting too frequently. She passed away in 1997, aged seventy-five.



Esmet Rahim
Self Potrait - 1961-62
Oil on board
43 x 58.5 cm.
Coll: S. Rahim

Esmet Rahim (1904 – 1963)

A name unknown in the art history of Pakistan, whose presence went almost unnoticed, yet whose body of work remains of undisputed value and highly individualistic – that was the unsung Esmet Rahim.

Known mainly as the wife of her more well known husband, the diplomat and later politician, J.A. Rahim, Esmet grew into a painter of maturity and significance in her later years. This was a fact known only to a handful of close friends, and the small number of viewers of her posthumous exhibitions.



**Esmet Rahim
In Germany – 1920's**

Born Esther Maria Joesten, on 25th June 1904 in Munich, Germany, she chose the name Esmet when she married J.A. Rahim in 1929. Her father was a doctor, Joseph Joesten, and her mother Amalia Von Nesselrode-Hugenpoet, was a painter. The family lived in the Rhineland and Esmet went to school in Cologne, and then to a girls' boarding school in Holland. After her father's death in 1920, her mother supported the family as a portrait painter, an unusual thing at the time. Esmet studied art in Dusseldorf and is also thought to have studied sculpture with renowned sculptor Bourdelle, in Paris. She then joined the university in Munich to read psychology. She was the only woman in the department, and she wrote her Ph.D. on vision and memory. This interest surfaced in her painting much later.

She met the young and reportedly debonair J.A. Rahim at the same university, where he

was studying chemistry. They were married in 1929. Their son Sikander tries to piece together why two such very different people were attracted to one another. "They were two very different people. She was definitely full of vitality, that's what people remember. She was very energetic, constantly working; she'd exhaust herself... couldn't sit still... outgoing, restless. He was the opposite. His favourite activity was sitting and reading. But this made their life together very turbulent. It was one of the major causes of friction between them...."

But these differences surfaced much later. The young couple, if one is to judge from their early photographs together, was much in love, and moved to India in 1930. The young man was the son of an eminent father, Sir Abdul Rahim, and the expected career of an ICS officer began for him in 1931. After a stint as District Magistrate in Madras, he was transferred to Calcutta as Trade Commissioner. Their elder child, Razia, was born there in 1932.

Calcutta was then a lively cultural centre, intellectually and artistically stimulating. Esmet took to working at sculpture. Lady Ninette Constantine, of French origin, was her sister-in-law at the time, being married to J.A. Rahim's brother. She remembered their gay existence, a social circle containing Sarojini Naidu, Malcolm Muggeridge and Shahid Suhrawardy the brother of Shaheed Suhrawardy, who taught literature at Calcutta



Esmet Rahim
Mother and Child – 1945
 Oil on board
 56.5 x 73 cm.
 Coll: S. Rahim

University, and married Rahim's elder sister. Esmet's younger child, a son, Sikander was born in Calcutta in 1939.

In 1940, Rahim was transferred to Delhi, which meant that the next five or six summers were spent in Simla. This is the period when one comes across the first mention of her drawing and painting. Hunter Wade, a New Zealand official, a neighbour and friend recalls, "It was the beginning of the 1932 Simla Season, when we got to know them well; we took an apartment in the same house, 'Snow View'. Esther (Esmet), Eleanor Sinclair, Sheila Auden (the Bengali sister-in-law of poet W.H. Auden) and Avela (Mrs. Wade) became close friends.

"In September 1942, just as we were all getting packed for the annual move back down to Delhi, the Government of India issued an order that, as a war-time measure, everyone would remain there for the duration. So we spent the winter of 1942-43 snowed up in Simla. It was really all rather jolly. Majid (that was J.A. Rahim's 'given' or 'family' name) was however called to Delhi at some stage, and he only came up for holidays and weekends. Esther told Avela that the moment he arrived on these occasions, irrespective of time of day or what she was in the middle of doing, he always insisted on taking her straight to bed. She did not seem displeased."

He remembers Esmet's excursion into oil painting, when she chose to do a view from their house. "She painted it quite rapidly, as the brush-strokes show. This was March or April 1943, when the winter gloom had dissipated, and before the summer haze had begun. To Avela and me, it was completely entrancing and we immediately asked to buy it... it was Esther's first oil in Simla, and also her first sale!"

To other friends who remember the gay Simla

Seasons, the tensions between Esmet and her husband seemed more apparent. Mrs. Enver Ahmed recalled, "She was a Bohemian, not interested in jewellery or status... being Sir Abdul Rahim's daughter-in-law meant nothing at all to her. Her devotion and her commitment to her children came first. He was a difficult man. You couldn't begin a conversation without ending up in a heated controversy on any subject. I think she took up painting as an escape..."

Hunter Wade pointed out other possible pressures on the young couple: "Though we ourselves moved actively, easily and happily in high British and Indian (mostly Hindu) Delhi and Simla society, as New Zealanders we did not take up the attitudes of that society. It was our impression that Esther however, did not seem to move very comfortably in it, nor really I think did Majid, in spite of his high family social background. Esther, though German, never gave us the least hint of pro-Nazi sympathies, but we didn't feel quite so certain about Majid. I expect too that in their more junior years, they had probably served out-station, where perhaps anti-German and anti-mixed-marriage prejudices were more to the fore. Whatever the reasons, it was our impression that neither of them seemed to fit with complete ease into the social life of the Simla of that day."

Among the 'group' were Amrita Shergill, her sister Indu, whom Mrs. Enver Ahmed described as "looking bored all the time"; Rajan and Bijjoo Nehru. Amrita Shergill was ten years younger than Esmet, but seemed to have had a strong influence on her vision. She gave Esmet a small portrait which she had done of Malcolm Muggeridge, reportedly her lover.

Esmet continued to paint when they moved back to Delhi, painting portraits on commission. There were no two opinions



Esmet Rahim
Spring – 1961-62
 Oil on board
 31.5 x 41 cm.
 Coll: S. Rahim

about her exemplary housekeeping and her passion for the welfare of her children, but there were personal problems with Majid, and discreet whispers. A friend says, "There was no scandal... she was so discreet. I got the impression that there was a European. Indian men avoided Esther. They thought her quarrelsome, not feminine. She was particular about being slim. In the heat of April in Delhi, she'd wrap herself in a blanket and lie around in the sun with an umbrella. 'What on earth are you doing?' I'd say. 'That's how you melt fat!' she'd reply. She wasn't feminine... she was very well-read... serious..."

Sometime in the late forties, the marriage fell apart. Esmet, now living in Bombay, still exhibited her work as Esther Rahim. A review of her painting in an unidentified magazine of the time, makes no mention of her marriage to Rahim, and quotes Esmet as saying she was "so fascinated by the poise and dreamy melancholy of the Indian" that she decided to settle here. The review goes on to say, "She is best known in India for her portraits. Her own preference now is for figure groups, and she likes to work chiefly with wide-eyed countrywomen in their colourful attire and with their brown, naked children. She has been deeply impressed by the paintings of Ajanta and Ellora and is herself experimenting with murals; but she feels that the strong influence of these paintings on modern Indian art is not altogether healthy. It has tended, she thinks, to make India's new art too weak and unoriginal with no fresh strong impulse of its own."

Reproductions of her work accompanying the write-up reflect varied influences. A portrait of her daughter is somewhat academic, but direct, and quotes her describing it as reminiscent of "an early Renaissance style." Other works were influenced by Shergill and carry traces of the Bengali 'Jamini Roy' treatment of colour and form. Incidentally, the subjects are all women and children.



Esmet Rahim

Mother Earth – 1961-62

Oil on board

60 x 48.5 cm.

Coll: S. Rahim

Esmet moved to Alexandria with her children – their father was already in Cairo as Trade Commissioner in the Pakistani Embassy. The children went to boarding school, and only met their mother at weekends. Her son Sikander talks of these years as the time when she lived the life of an artist. Alexandria was as intellectually alive as Calcutta had been in the thirties. The city was culturally diverse with Arab, Turkish indigenous elements, as

well as the Greek and Jewish quarters. The British were tolerated, but the Italians and the French were more influential, with French spoken by the educated elite. Esmet was a lively addition to the artistic circles; she owned an art shop, was an interior decorator, book and magazine illustrator, and portrait painter.

For herself she painted groups of women, still reminiscent of her work in India; stylised

forms with a linear emphasis and a strong, vivid palette. She introduced Sikander to the museums of Europe, and taught him how to look at and appreciate painting. Esmet left Alexandria just before the overthrow of King Farouk, and lived for a while in Paris in the company of several friends from Alexandria's artistic milieu, who had also settled there.

Rahim was by now ambassador in Brussels, and for reasons not entirely clear, the two re-married and returned to Karachi when he became Foreign Secretary in 1953.

In Karachi, Esmet threw herself into the task of enlivening the city's artistic scene. Discovering Hala pottery, she brought back bowls and plates and took to using them on formal occasions, encouraging the rest of the high profile family, including the Suhrawardys, to patronise local pottery and handloom *khaddi* cotton. She was also one of the founder members of the Karachi Arts Council.

She organised textile workers who had flooded into Karachi as refugees from India, herself designing blocks for them based on motifs from Moenjodaro. She got the workers together with indigenous printers, and introduced them to local vegetable dyes like indigo. She used hand-woven *khaddar* to print cloth for curtains, table linen and upholstery materials, which found their way into public buildings and into the homes of the educated elite. This grew into a thriving enterprise which eventually came to be known as Zarina Fabrics. Esmet later sold the business to an American when she left for Germany where Rahim had been posted as ambassador.

She found time to paint and to do a little sculpture in Karachi. A family member remembers her painting the walls of the beach-hut, large murals with all the members of the family. Her housekeeping skills were exemplary, and her dedication to her children



Esmet Rahim
The Tree – 1961-62
 Oil on board
 31.5 x 39 cm.
 Coll: S. Rahim



Esmet Rahim

Danger – 1961-62

Oil on board

60 x 48.5 cm.

Coll: S. Rahim

made her a role model for the young mothers in the family, who learnt baby-tending and housekeeping without depending on an army of servants. A niece remembers her aunt's desire to please her husband, once working all day in the sun to transform the garden, adding a rockery and new shrubs. When Rahim came home from the Foreign Office, Esmet expected appreciation, or at least a nod of approval. It didn't happen. He was pre-occupied and left again immediately with an armful of files, leaving his wife quite devastated.

Lady Ninette Constantine remarked that Esmet's reactions at such times were predictable, "She was always in tears. She was a Ph.D. but my husband called her 'a doctor in tears'!"

Both her children went abroad during the school term. Esmet missed them and had their photographs in constant view, fussed over other children in the family and showered her affection on animals and household pets.

Returning home to Germany as the

ambassador's wife was a different experience altogether. The themes of her paintings from the sub-continent were irrelevant. An admirer of the German painter Kathe Kollowitz, the emotional Esmet found an occasional echo in paintings of groups of peasants, and of women. She turned to landscapes, and again to portraits. The landscapes were emotive, often done at their summer home with mountains and rolling meadows.

Theodor Heuss, the German President, said to be an authority on art, sat for a portrait and took an interest in her work. Otherwise, she dreaded the trappings of being the wife of an ambassador, preferring to take long trips to other parts of Europe, especially Greece.

In 1959, Rahim was transferred to Spain. It was becoming clear that Esmet's wellsprings were drying up, and for a while she stopped painting altogether. Sikander Rahim recounts, "This period of aridity ended suddenly with a surrealist self-portrait painted in 1960 or '61. She had a heart attack on the ship enroute to Karachi in January 1961, a consequence of a life-long problem with high blood pressure." On her return to Spain, there followed a rich and highly fertile period of painting. She died barely two-and-a-half years later in September 1963, in Paris, where her husband was now ambassador. Her work was exhibited there posthumously.

As with any artist, Esmet Rahim's art and life were inextricably linked. A volatile, dynamic and irrepressible person, the immediate relationships with Majid, her daughter Razia and son Sikander, were all intense and profoundly irreconcilable. The small family, driven by passionate loyalties and equally agonising divides, was traumatised by personality clashes and incompatible temperaments.

Her relationship with her undoubtedly brilliant daughter Razia was permanently strained.



Esmet Rahim

Stonehenge – 1961-62

Oil on board

64 x 52.5 cm.

Coll: S. Rahim



Esmet Rahim

Mother Earth – 1961-62

Oil on board

60 x 48.5 cm.

Coll: S. Rahim

Mother and daughter held diametrically opposed views on art and art making. Both women, talented, sensitive and forceful, were incapable of bridging differences. These ordeals continued after Esmet's death; Razia, artist and poet, died suddenly and inexplicably four years later.

Esmet's determination to be a model mother and wife was thwarted by circumstances, and her own inability to indulge the painter within herself. Known in Indian and Pakistani circles only as 'J. A. Rahim's wife', she was denied what should have been an intensely fulfilling career as a painter. The conflict between the biological and the cultural role assigned to all women, and her individual genius, was partially resolved in the final years of her life, when, faced with a premonition of death, she painted instinctively with fierce insight.

Looking at her work of the forties and fifties, where she concentrated on domestic scenes and the 'populace', the folkloric and stylised approach suggests a delicate, painterly sensibility. Her focus was always on women, not in the sense of being individual portraits of women, but more as icons, cast in pre-determined roles as mothers and nurturers, having to make do with life as it was. The influence of Amrita Shergill persists in the palette, but Esmet Rahim's vision is varied and diverse.

The paintings of her last two prolific years are a definite departure from the main body of her previous work. Surrealist landscapes filled with sand dunes, ominous insects, threatening faces of indescribable origin, maimed trees in almost monochromatic colour ranges, are in oil on board and seem strangely

and deliberately naïve. There are several self- and imaginary portraits, sad, direct and deeply moving. There is a singularity of vision, a subjugation of formal issues to the primary or emotional content. The work is highly skilled and meticulously crafted, in keeping with the need for detail in some of the work, and a more simplified use of medium in others. The symbolism is not accidental; it is literal in some paintings, and intuitive in others.

The concluding years of giving room to her fears and recurring fantasies matured into these compelling individual works which deserve a wide audience, to be seen and read in the context of other women painters of her era, especially Frida Kahlo with whom there is an affinity in thematic choices. Esmet Rahim's final paintings are intriguing and infinitely moving.



1957 – 1967

A Promise of Progress?

The decade 1957 to 1967 falls almost too neatly into General (later Field Marshal) Ayub Khan's self-proclaimed Decade of Progress, which stretched from his coup d'état in 1958 to his unceremonious political exit in 1968. For women, this decade was invested with contradictory messages of legal victories and political repression. The Commission of 1955 on 'Marriage and Family Laws' eventually led to the framing of the Family Laws Ordinance of 1961. The Ordinance was a compromise for women who wanted sweeping legal reforms in their rights to property, divorce, custody of children, and the banning of polygamy. But the implications of the law were revolutionary in a hitherto orthodox Islamic male-dominated order, as it helped evolve a framework of registration of marriage, created impediments in the practice of polygamy, and led to the setting up of family courts.

However, being the decree of a military regime, its significance was narrowed and made little impact on the lives of women at large. It was

continually attacked by the religious and feudal opposition, and the undemocratic nature of General Ayub Khan's rule further ensured that the Ordinance never permeated down to those who needed it most.

The extent of the General's political power was reflected in his government's cultural policies. The need to rein in dissent was crucial to the imposition of Martial Law. While large scale arrests, muzzling of the Press, and suppression of regional rights were hallmarks of the regime, its patronage of the arts and culture was ostensibly benign. The government undertook funding of official arts bodies, and encouraged exchange of exhibitions and publications between different parts of the country. Through judicious bureaucratic intervention, state patronage became available for writers, intellectuals and artists. This however, assumed the absence of any undesirable political agenda. A Bureau of National Reconstruction was set up in 1959 which in 1968 became the Pakistan Council for National Integration, to serve as a conduit for artistic and literary ideas to travel between East and West Pakistan. National exhibitions were held regularly in Dhaka, Lahore and Karachi, with awards for painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts. The prestigious President's Award for Pride of Performance was instituted to honour writers, musicians and artists. Among the earliest recipients were classical singer Roshan Ara Begum, and artist Zubaida Agha.



Novera Ahmed
Exterminating Angel – 1960
Cement
98 x 184 x 62 cm.
Coll: Dr. Amjad Riaz

Novera Ahmed (b.1939)

Sculptor Novera Ahmed, hailing from what was then East Pakistan, was a meteoric and transient presence in the sixties in both wings of the country. A shadowy, enigmatic, utterly private person, who made a brilliant debut in the National Exhibition in 1962 by winning the President's Award for a bronze head of a child entitled 'Child Philosopher', she made a swift exit from the national scene. She moved to Paris and died there in the late eighties, unbeknownst to her family in Bangladesh.

Perhaps the first sculptor in Pakistan to adopt a thoroughly contemporary idiom, Novera kept her origins much to herself, and little is known about her. She conceded that she began learning sculpture in London in 1952, when she was thirteen years old. She joined a stone-carving class at London's City and Guild School and then went on to do her National Diploma in Sculpture at the Camberwell School of Art. Moving to Florence, she studied at the Art Academy for two years before returning to Pakistan.

It is known that she had the opportunity to work with Jacob Epstein while she was in London. Her first major solo exhibition was held in Dhaka in 1960 at the Central Public Library, which elicited a great deal of comment, her work being very unusual and avant-garde for the time. The catalogue for this exhibition was entitled 'Inner Gaze', and was sponsored by the United Nations Association in collaboration with the Asia Foundation. The catalogue notes included

comments by Zainul Abedin, then Principal of the Arts Institute of Dhaka, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, then Secretary of the Alhamra Arts Council Lahore. The exhibition had over a hundred works, many of them larger than life-size, reportedly in cement, bronze and metal. Novera won a state award and several public and private commissions. Her first public commission was in East Pakistan, a frieze on the wall of the Central Public Library unveiled in 1957, followed by Dhaka's first open-air sculpture, completed in 1958.

Novera came to Lahore for the National Exhibition in 1961, and stayed for almost a year. Her works were exhibited at the Alhamra Art Centre – then known as the Pakistan Arts Council – and bought by important private collectors. The 'Child Philosopher' was in the private collection of Mian Mumtaz Daultana; the 'Exterminating Angel' in the collection of the late Dr. Riaz Ali Shah; and the 'Female Form' in that of Alys Faiz. Two works were gifted to Faiz Ahmed Faiz, to be placed at the Arts Council where they still remain.

Novera, a physically striking and self-contained person, had an indefinable aura. Always dressed in black, she was socially aloof, often accompanied by her journalist companion Mahmud Ali at concerts, exhibitions and performances in the Lahore of the early sixties.

In a year or two she was back living in Paris, where she had her own studio, but avoided



**Novera Ahmed
In her Studio in Dhaka – 1960**



Novera Ahmed
Standing Figure – 1960
 Cement
 48 x 185 cm.
 Coll: Alys Faiz



Novera Ahmed
 In her Studio in Dhaka – 1960 with sculpture 'Give us this day'

publicity. The one notable exception was a large exhibition in Bangkok in October 1970, sponsored by Pakistan International Airlines, the venue chosen probably because her friend and devotee Mahmud Ali was living there.

The work had developed from her more plainly figurative pieces of the sixties, to more simplified archetypal forms in welded metal. Using sheet metal, rods and parts of aeroplane scrap, Novera's works suggested a remote and occasionally primitive quality.

There were several reliefs in stainless steel, copper and bronze, and some large free standing forms in welded sheet metal, and a seven-foot female form in bronze. There are strong connections with the early cubist sensibilities of Julio Gonzalez and Picasso, with no attempt to disguise the process of working with metal. The work is almost blunt in the way she insists that conflicting elements come together. Rivets, welded seams, nuts and bolts are candid about holding these parts together.

The only concession to the starkness of the

surface is the occasional textural treatment of the sheet or the bronze surface. Novera's work is marked by a severity and a plain-speaking directness which borders on brutality. She did however, display a certain sense of humour and playfulness in some of her figurative groups. A tongue-in-cheek piece entitled 'Zebra Crossing' in welded steel, done in 1968, used both colour and form as an amusing aside on a policeman at a crossing. Her family group, in steel, is also reminiscent of the paper cutouts that children first learn to make with a pair of scissors and paper. The 'Standing Female Form' in bronze, has furrows on the abstract head, and the simple torso which reflects its clay origins.

During these years Novera divided her time between travelling in Asia and working in Paris. There were visits to the temples in Burma, India and Thailand, as well as dance lessons in *Bharat Natyam* in India. Her insistence on her privacy meant an eventual break with her family in Bangladesh, she lives and works in determined seclusion in her studio in Paris.

Siddiqa Bilgrami (b. 1936)

A painter who conceals more than she reveals, Siddiqa Bilgrami is complex both as a person and as an artist. She moved to Karachi from her native Hyderabad Deccan in India, in the mid-sixties, following most of her family who had already emigrated. The move was made as much to test the artistic waters as for filial reasons. She had exhibitions in Karachi in February 1965, and later in Lahore, but the milieu was a disappointment after what had been exciting debuts in Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad.

Probing into Siddiqa's childhood in Deccan seems an easy task, until one comes across sensitivities and hurts which are difficult to explain. Product of a Shia-Sunni marriage, with an accomplished and adored elder sister who, presumably, was more in the limelight, Siddiqa was closer to her brother, just a year younger than she. She played cricket and hockey, flew kites and spun *latoos* with him, but also made dolls and outfitted them, as did all other little girls.

The family was cultivated in the Deccani tradition, with an affinity for the arts, and there was music in the house. Siddiqa's elder sister

learnt classical music and sang very well; as Siddiqa says, "She was very valuable, she could hold everyone's attention, which I couldn't."

Nevertheless, Siddiqa did well in school, and was discovered to be gifted in drawing and painting. The realisation of her own talent made her decide not to follow the familiar pattern of going to college to do "a simple BA like the other girls... I wanted to do something else." She was interested in astronomy, but wasn't sure what she could do with it, so the art school in Hyderabad became the only option, and she joined in 1954.

Doing the four-year Diploma Course in three years, Siddiqa was an accomplished student who excelled in portrait painting. She learnt to draw and paint in the British academic mode, but the influence of Shanti Niketan had also permeated the school through its Bengali principal, and they imposed an 'Indian Heritage' style by working in Bengali wash painting technique and in tempera. She found the traditional approach to composition, taught through copying old masters, rigid and unbearable and got away without doing a single copy.

She did an advanced diploma in portrait painting under the guidance of one of her innovative teachers, and applied for a scholarship to Italy. Among the three finalists who were then asked to go to Delhi, she ended up being selected. Being shy and hesitant

about leaving home for two years, Siddiqa was persuaded by her mother into going.

Settled into a convent in Rome, she made friends with young women from other countries. Her scholarship was for a shorter tenure than required for the full-length course of study, so she took drawing and etching classes at the Academia di Belle Arti, and ceramics at the Centro CALAL. An art critic Professor Venturi introduced her to a well-known abstract painter Professor La Regina, who allowed her to come and work in his studio. She worked there in 1959 for a year until, as she puts it, "I felt I should not take him any longer, otherwise I shall be too influenced by him."

An attractive young woman alone in Rome must have attracted a great deal of attention, and Siddiqa laughingly concedes that, like other young women, "I also fell in love with the wrong person... things like that happen"

Back in India in 1960, after a solo and several group shows in Rome, Milan and Lugano, she had a large exhibition in Hyderabad, amid much indulgent encouragement and support from the family and her old teachers and friends. An uncle was, at this time, President of the Lalit Kala Academy in Delhi, and offered Siddiqa a job as his personal assistant. For her it was the opportunity to become part of the Delhi art scene, and the year 1963 is a landmark in her professional and emotional development.



Siddiqa Bilgrami

Untitled – 1963

Oil on canvas

106 x 76 cm.

Coll: The Artist

Without indicating the reasons why, there are subtle hints pointing to it being a time of enriched emotional experience, and a sensitivity to poetry: “In ‘63 I wrote the most and painted the most... there was this striving for light, and striving for truth...”

That ability to sublimate emotional and intellectual experience to extract essences and deny particularities remained with Siddiqa’s painting. She had solo exhibitions in Delhi and Bombay and participated in a number of group exhibitions before finding herself in Karachi where a match was arranged and she became engaged. She describes the ritual: “In fact I refused to meet him. But then I refused to meet anybody... my answer was always that I’m wedded to my art. But my aunts and uncles were going to meet this Syed at a cousin’s house and insisted on taking me... You know what it was like in the old days... I didn’t want to see him but my cousin went on

insisting. I peeped, and I said, “My God! He’s so much like my father! I think I’m going to marry him!”

Motherhood, and her husband’s career in the army meant a long interruption for Siddiqa’s art, although she is quick to point out that her husband was supportive of her work. She was part of the group at Yasmin and Suhail Lari’s home in Karachi, where artists and writers would drop by and talk and sometimes work together.

She met Sadequain, Mansur Aye, Naz Ikramullah and Kohari. They would make batiks together or paint murals. Poets and writers would drop in, but Siddiqa still missed the liveliness of the Delhi and Bombay art world. Moving with her husband to other places, Lahore, Kakul, Sialkot and Quetta didn’t help. She couldn’t stay with her painting, although she took up commissioned portraits for the army; not a very satisfying experience, though it brought in a little money.

Siddiqa had an exhibition at the newly formed Arts Council in Quetta in 1975. She felt moved by external circumstances – by the floods in what was East Pakistan, or by the civil war in 1971 – to paint, but the interruptions were long and unavoidable. “Syed was the Station Commander in Karachi, and I was also extremely busy, because it was a protocol-oriented job. We had to go to the airport all the time to receive or see off people. It was compulsory...” Around this time she took up jewellery design and became a designer for the Gemstone Corporation, something she did for more than seven years.

In February 1991 Siddiqa Bilgrami had a large retrospective at the Karachi Arts Council, almost a survey of the external and internal imperatives which shaped her work over thirty years. A number of contradictions were present in her work, in the energetic, unabashed gesture, and the contrary desire for sanguine form; the passion for spontaneity, and the need for order and compromise.

Siddiqa concedes that she is a conservative person in all else but her painting. There remains a chasm which she struggles to cross. The desire for communication, to be heard, is strong, and she interprets feeling in the minimalism that she always allows herself. “Line is to do with thought, and colour with emotion.” Where earlier it was oils on canvas, she now works with acrylics on paper.

She has reclaimed what she says was always her inspiration: motifs from nature. The references to water, sky, foliage, have become more obvious at this stage – a need to explain herself? The dynamic and explosively uninhibited statements of the sixties have evolved into quieter and sadder works. The rebel seems to have been tamed in Siddiqa’s work, raising myriad questions about life swamping art, especially when it comes to women.

Abida Ehsan (b. 1936)

Coming from Kahuta in the Rawalpindi District, Abida Ehsan's family had close ties with the Valley of Kashmir and with the hilly regions around Rawalpindi. So it seems appropriate that Abida should have established the first Fine Arts Department in a degree college in Rawalpindi.

Abida remembers her family as being passionate about poetry. Her grandmother was illiterate but knew reams of poetry, including the *Masnavis*, off by heart. She would recite in Persian to her grandchildren, emphasising the finer points of the more important pieces as she went along, in the time-honoured oral tradition. Her grandfather was an Honorary Magistrate, a member of the Viceroy's council, and a known figure of the area.

Her memories of childhood trips to her grandfather's house are full of images of mountain streams and waterfalls and clear ponds, of women bathing and washing clothes by the river, and of children swimming in the water. Her mother was firmly religious and

constantly at prayer, but regaled her children with tales of her own childhood, when she had gone swimming in mountain pools and travelled on horseback from one village to another.

Abida's father Raja Hassan Akhter was a civil servant, but also an active sympathiser of the Pakistan Movement, something he couldn't own up to during the day, but indulged in at night. The house was a hotbed of political discussions and meetings, infused with a lot of poetry. Abida remembers being woken up each morning to sing Iqbal's poem,

*'China is ours, and Arabia, and India too,
For we are Muslims, and the world is our
homeland.'*

Apparently, her father had been a follower of Allama Iqbal, and had often sat at the poet's feet. Their own house was the venue for *mushairas*, with Akhter Shirani, Josh and Abdul Hameed Adam being prominent participants.

Abida, then a child, was witness to the passing of the Pakistan Resolution at Lahore in 1940. Not knowing what was going on, she and the other children in the family were told to sit at a distance at the massive, and now historic, rally.

Her father's job meant that they moved every few years; at the time of Partition they were in Sahiwal, having already served in Gurdaspur

and Sheikhpura. Her father wanted Abida to become a doctor, the ambition of all bright young women of the day (and since), and she joined the Lahore College for Women to do her F.Sc. Watching the fine arts students going off to the Punjab University for their classes, loaded with their art materials and canvases was, however, too enticing, and she finally broke the news to her father that she had no desire to be a doctor. She became a student of fine arts soon after, and remembers both Nasim Qazi, and Khalid Iqbal as important teachers. She wistfully quotes Khalid Iqbal saying, "If she continues, she is going to be something someday."

Her father continued to be her friend, mentor and guide, whose extensive library was at her disposal during her post-graduate work. He was a friend of S.N. Gupta, the Principal of the Mayo School of Arts next door, and often took his advice on additions to his library.

Abida was the first woman in the family to take up a job. As soon as she had finished her MA, a teaching position fell vacant in the junior section of the Aitchison College, Lahore. Initially nervous about teaching young boys, Abida made a tremendous go of it, reading up books on child psychology and art education, and getting the children enthused about group murals and collaborative art work. Her own painting also kept pace in the two-and-a-half years she taught there, until she was offered a job at her old alma mater, the Lahore College. Not wanting to pass up this career opportunity,

she switched jobs and joined the painter Asma Haq in the Department at Lahore College. Haq, a talented mural painter, later married a Bengali, became Asma Sirajuddin, and now lives in Bangladesh.

The two young teachers enlivened their academic programme by arranging tours outside Lahore, taking groups off to Sindh and to "look at the sea" in Karachi, an unusual event for the time.

Marriage followed according to the traditional pattern, in the mid-sixties. Abida is emphatic that it had to be the way it was, "I couldn't dream of marrying a person I had chosen – the other option was not to get married at all. The idea of marriage always terrified me. We Rajas never marry outside our clan... my family was known to them, and our fathers were friends. His sisters were educated and were doing their MA. I met him, saw him, just once. I didn't know what it was about... we went to their house for tea... He came in and sat down... Then the proposal came... My sister-in-law, who was close to me, came and asked my opinion, and I said, 'As my father wishes...' This was taken to be a 'Yes'.

"So we got married and settled in Rawalpindi. And then a Department was proposed in Rawalpindi, so I got a transfer from Lahore College to Rawalpindi, and started the Department in 1964. I ran around getting the furniture made, and collecting books with the support of Dr. Kaniz Yusuf, the Principal. I expected to have only a few students to begin with, but was astounded when twenty-five girls showed up in the first batch in April '64."

The pressure was enormous, and tragedy struck six months later when Abida's father died. Stunned by the loss, and finding it difficult to adjust to a new domestic joint family set-up and her job, she was further devastated by the death of the brother closest to her, in the war of 1965. She struggled to cope with her staggering losses, and with the birth of her

first child, a daughter, in 1966. The immense toll of her time and focus meant that she gave up painting almost entirely.

In the years that followed, she built up the Department helped by her colleagues. Between them they spawned several other departments in the area, including the ones in the women's colleges in Islamabad. Post-graduate classes began with the arrival of Mrs. Jamila Zaidi; and Abida became a confident art academic with a major contribution to look back on. She is wistful about her inability to continue painting, but has undertaken intensive journeys

to art galleries and museums in the West as well as in China and Japan.

Realising that she has missed out on certain things, Abida is thoroughly supportive of both her daughters' careers. She remembers how her own mother vetoed a chance for her to take up a scholarship abroad, and is keen that her daughters don't pass up any opportunity. She has returned to the easel in recent years, and her paintings, often landscapes, are romantic, gentle, intensely coloured, and retain a certain wistful quality that echoes her life's realities.



Abida Ehsan
Untitled –
 Oil on canvas
 60 x 60 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

Naz Ikramullah (b. 1938)

legendary experimental nursery school, learning the tactile pleasures of working with clay, and painting, and dancing. The experience is still very much alive in Naz's memory.

"I refused to leave when my brothers and sisters went to a regular school. I might still be there if Pakistan hadn't taken place! Gauba was a very profound influence. We were writing stories and doing things on Gandhiji and Quaid-i-Azam, knowing about the freedom movement long before Partition. It was quite unusual in those days... we used to write the *takhti*... In my *Dada*'s house, my *Phuphi* was in *purdah*, and I used to like to dance, so all the doors were closed before I could dance and she could watch. This also made me realise that dancing – which I wanted to do – was not on. Much later, when I came to Karachi, I realised that for a girl to want to become an artist was also bad."

The immediacy and the strong presence of the politics of the time shaped Naz's early awareness. Apart from Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Asif Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Syed Zakir Hussain and other political leaders were visitors to the house. She remembers the riots in 1947. "In front of our house in Tughlak Road...we were standing there...my brother's teacher who was a Sikh, came by...told us to stay indoors and was angry with the servants for letting us stand outside. He also found that our house was marked with a cross... On the day of Pakistan's Independence, we were in Calcutta because my grandfather was ill.

People were in the street and we were walking about with Pakistani flags and shouting 'Pakistan *Zindabad*'...then somebody put a flag on the house and my mother said, 'Why did you do that? Put both [Indian and Pakistani] flags up'...then we had to run... I remember my mother telling our Anglo-Indian *ayah* to take us quickly. I was very frightened. We finally got to Bombay, and then a boat to Karachi. This was September. There were a lot of people on the docks shouting 'Pakistan *Zindabad* and that's when we saw Pakistan."

Naz went to school in Karachi from 1948 to 1951, when her father was appointed to the High Commission in Canada, and she was sent to boarding school in England. It was during those years that she came to verbalise her ambition to go to art school. Her father responded by saying that first she had to get an education. Her school was a very rabid High Church affair, and Naz established her identity by wearing her *shalwar-kameez* every evening when it was allowed.

It was almost seven years before she came back to Pakistan, a fact much lamented by her mother who felt the gap to be very detrimental for her children. By this time she had been to the Byam Shaw School for painting and drawing, an experience she found very nurturing but culturally distanced. The school encouraged her to work from her own heritage which only made the confusion worse.

Her first exhibition in Karachi in 1960 consisted of the academic work that she had

In the early sixties, the young Naz Ikramullah came home to work, from London to Karachi. Known initially as the daughter of Ambassador Ikramullah and Shaista Ikramullah, and niece of Hussain Suhrawardy, one-time Prime Minister of Pakistan, she first came to be known in her own right after her participation in the printmaking workshop conducted by the American printmaker Ponce de Leon. Working with other artists like Ahmed Khan, Shahid Sajjad and Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq meant that Naz was officially taken into the fold of young professionals in Lahore and Karachi.

Her high profile political family, of mixed Bengali, Indian and Pakistani lineage, and her own peripatetic childhood has given Naz an acute awareness of the fragility and actuality of borders.

Born in England just before the start of the Second World War, she and her parents returned to Delhi soon after, where she eventually went to Elizabeth Gauba's

brought with her, and Sadeqain bought one of her few original compositions, an occasion remembered fondly. Sometime later, Naz's father was taken ill and she accompanied him to England to nurse him; there she also joined the printmaking department at the Slade, studying with Stanley Jones and Clinton Mann.

She returned to Karachi and rented a small studio space with Nahid Jaffery, working on her own and avoiding the social demands on her time which went with being Shaista Ikramullah's daughter.

Although upon looking back Naz says she didn't do anything her mother did – no politics, no parliament, no writing – but the role model of an independent woman was there. Marriage came when Naz was thirty and she realised that she had to make up her mind about that particular option. "It was semi-arranged. I had met him when we were in Canada...the families had become friends. Then he showed up again. Basically it was a formal proposal. He was looking for someone... But I did get to know him, although my mother feared that I would waste his time and send him packing!"

Naz also realised that she wanted to have children, and admits that it nudged her into accepting the proposal. She is candid about the difference in cultural background. Her husband is from Uttar Pradesh, very particular about his roots and the mores of an old and urbane order. Naz found herself very westernised by comparison, and highly independent, "I had been used to living my own way, painting when I wanted, never bothering about eating or any other formalities." The couple settled in Ottawa where her husband worked for the Canadian government, but Naz found it hard to fit in.

Sensing her unhappiness in Canada, Naz's husband suggested moving to Karachi. There, her daughter Amna was born, and then they

were thrilled by the opportunity to move to East Pakistan, where her husband had got a job as manager of a factory. Naz's own ties with Bengal, and a sister married and living in Dhaka, were added incentives, until the trauma of 1971, the separation of East and West Pakistan, and the creation of Bangladesh. For the second time in her life, Naz Ikramullah experienced the partitioning of her country and the personal anguish is still part of her life and work.

For Naz, the civil war and its aftermath meant being uprooted again. She and her husband flew out of Dhaka on 18th March as the military action of the Pakistan Army began. Her sister and her husband were primary political targets for the army, and the two separate and harrowing escapes were a nightmare the whole family went through.

Naz remembers with bitterness a remark overheard in Karachi in those days, "Why didn't you finish Naz off? After all she's half

Bengali!" Leaving more than a home and an existence behind, Naz moved back to Canada, where the struggle to re-adjust, make a home, find jobs, and look after a small child, meant that, "art had to be put on the back burner." For her daughter, Naz made the effort to make her at ease in several different worlds: India, Pakistan, and the West. For Naz the matter is more complex.

"I have lived abroad from the age of twelve. I know what it means to be on the outside. At least my daughter will have the feeling that she has a family, relatives... it's given her a lot."

For herself, it gave Naz the long awaited span of time to focus on her own work. She taught printmaking and painting at the Ottawa School of Art, and exhibits regularly in Canada and in Pakistan, working to promote the idea of multi-culturalism wherever she is. And the social, political and personal continue to come together in her work.



Naz Ikramullah
In Nadira's Town – 1982
Etching
35 x 21 cm.
Coll: Chowkandi Art

It was in Ottawa that she finally put together a very fragmented experience in a way that her imagery and the medium were truthful to exactly that experience. Using photography as a means to record as well as to interpret, Naz began to use collage to “make composites of things.” She came upon the use of the colour xerox, “which triggered off a particular need I had to say things in a certain way, to layer the work. It was a combination of printmaking, collage and so on. It came out of the necessity of re-cycling every idea that you have....”

She recalls that she didn’t produce a single piece of work in Bangladesh, perhaps because it was there that her daughter Amna was born. The shock of the civil war was also responsible, just as she couldn’t work during the Gulf War, or during the ethnic riots in Sohrab Goth in Karachi. The work came later and was interpreted differently by different people.

The work on Sohrab Goth, called ‘Continuing Anguish’, in colour xerox and paint, was thought to be about Partition by some and about Palestine by others. Her distancing from Pakistan has also meant that there is an oscillation in her allegiances to roots; overviews become more attractive. Where she visits the *dargahs* and shrines in Pakistan, she also goes to Ajmer, or to Nizamuddin in India – the search for the mystical transcends borders and barriers.

The deep nostalgia for sights, sounds, smells, music, and architecture, all find their way into the paintings which clearly speak of Naz’s physical and spiritual journeys. She admits that she battles the nostalgia, because it can become too sweet, or particularise the emotion that the work stems from. Debunking the description of her work as being ‘feminine’, Naz is emphatic that it has to do with her being ‘me’, a woman, with its many diverse implications. She identifies with the woman’s struggle in Pakistan and this finds its way into her work.



Naz Ikramullah

Remembrance of Things Past – 1991

Mixed media on parchment

23 x 30 cm.

Coll: Zohra Husain

Zubaida Javed (b. 1937)

Much before that, her father had noticed her notebook doodles, and had taken her to Anna Molka Ahmed who admonished her for copying illustrations, which terrorised the young Zubaida, but still earned her a place at the Department.

Her mother's influence was more indirect. Zubaida remembers her as being sophisticated and discriminating in her choice of colours in the home and in her clothes, a gift that she has also inherited. Deeply religious, her mother drew the line at the sculptures which Zubaida brought home from the Department, and instructed that they be kept out of sight. Her father took umbrage and insisted that they be brought out and displayed. But her mother had a soft corner for her paintings, missing them when they were taken off the walls to be returned to the classroom.

Never having been interested in portraiture, Zubaida wonders whether there was some inhibition instilled at an early age. Her preference for landscape and cityscape was strengthened by the encouragement of the teachers at the Fine Arts Department, who introduced her to the work of the Impressionists. She remembers Anwer Afzal and Khalid Iqbal for their enlightened and gentle direction.

Anna Molka lent her a book on modern composition, and one on Persian painting which puzzled the young Zubaida, who saw them as being in contradiction to one another.

But a deeper and more sustained study of Persian painting over the years has been significant in her understanding of spatial manipulation and the intricacies of colour.

The Department was visited by painters and intellectuals like Shakir Ali, Zainul Abedin and Faiz, and Zubaida remembers her work being singled out for praise at the National Exhibition in 1962, as well as at the Annual Fine Arts Department Exhibitions.

She began teaching at the Fine Arts Department almost immediately after she graduated, and continued to teach there until longer and longer bouts of ill health made her take an extended leave of absence, and eventual retirement.

Marrying after eight years of teaching, at what was considered a fairly late stage, Zubaida was not terribly enamoured of the idea of marriage, but conceded that she needed companionship, having lost her mother in 1964 after a sudden heart attack. The match was arranged by her father, who agreed to it after he saw the extensive library belonging to Zubaida's husband-to-be.

Her husband proved to be supportive towards her painting, demanding that her palette should 'never be dry'. She still found juggling her job, her domestic pressures and motherhood, overwhelmingly difficult. A literary husband who was comforting and gently approving of her work could not combat the expanding

Zubaida Javed's career epitomises the struggle for academic freedom among the tense battles fought for political supremacy in the classrooms of the first Art Department in a Pakistani University. Zubaida's talents were nurtured by her educationist father Chaudhry Abdul Ghafoor, who was a close friend of Dr. Zakir Hussain and Dr. Mahmood Hussain, and a professor of education at Aligarh University.

Members of a liberal, cultured family, Zubaida and her brothers were encouraged to listen to and to practice music. Her brother Hassan, a medical student, learnt the *sitar*, and Zubaida took up singing while a student at the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University.

academic problems of the Department. Zubaida is emphatic about the deteriorating atmosphere caused by the *Jamiat*, the student offshoot of the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, which infiltrated the student body and the faculty of the whole University.

The Fine Arts Department kept the *Jamiat* at bay as long as it was possible, but eventually the student groups were in a position to dictate syllabi, examination results, and all else that happened in the classrooms and outside. Zubaida was bitter about being let down by colleagues who compromised too easily. One can make a connection between her ill health and the mental torture she endured as a teacher and creative artist on the faculty of the Department of Fine Arts.

Believing in an individual vision for each student, Zubaida was committed to a liberal ethos, which began to be systematically destroyed after Ayub Khan's Martial Law. It became aggravated in the seventies when the University became a battleground between populist forces and the firmly entrenched right wing student militia.

The Zia regime led to a consolidation of these elements, which allowed no dissent from faculty, student body, or University administration. Zubaida described the syllabi and approach to teaching as one of excessive academic narrowness. Any deviation from a strictly set-down pattern of observing and rendering was discouraged, resulting in a mundane and predictable form of artistic expression, which came to be expected from a graduate of the Department, and was quite out of step with the contemporary art idiom.

Zubaida remembers her years as Chairman of the Department as years lost to her painting. Describing herself as "originally a painter of atmosphere, and later a painter of feelings", her early work was heavily impastoed and manifested an affinity with the cubists; a trait



Zubaida Javed

Untitled – 1985

Oil on canvas

92 x 61 cm.

Coll: Dr. Ghazala Aziz

shared with a large number of painters at the time, but her subtle, and rather evocative palette set her work apart. Her ability to articulate atmosphere, season and mood was distinct and personalised.

Extremely critical of her own work, Zubaida has been particular about what she exhibits. Remembering an exhibition held in Karachi in the eighties, she concedes that she never would have shown her work without the urging of her husband, brother and sister-in-law, who literally dragged her off to attend it.

Her painting has become more minimal and

abstract in recent years, with delineation of forms becoming less noticeable, and a restricted use of the palette knife. Interestingly, this simplicity indicates a stronger underlying spatial structure, and a more confident feel for composition. Zubaida has investigated the mores of the Persian miniature and experimented with its imagery. Returning to familiar territory, she carries overtones of these experiments with her. The paint is more fluid and colour-relationships more understated and muted. She is regretful of the time lost to illness and domestic involvements, and strives to explore fresh ideas culled from the interests and work of younger artists.

Hajira Mansur (b. 1946)

Hajira insists that she was never considered the 'artist' in the family, "That was Rabia, or even Farida who is younger than Rabia. I loved singing and dancing – I was good at my studies, at science ... my mother wanted me to be a doctor. I would have been [one] if circumstances had been different. It was my parents' coming to Pakistan ...and they couldn't take me with them at that stage...."

Her parents left her behind in Lucknow in 1961, with an uncle who declared that college was much too far away, and that she'd better join her sister in art school. Distances and



**The Zuberi Sisters,
Rabia and Hajira in Aligarh.**

convenience being crucial to a girl's education sealed Hajira's artistic fate; she found she was good enough to qualify for a scholarship, and was economically independent all through art school.

Perhaps the affinity for art-making had been there all along. She remembers being good at crafts, and making tiny paintings. She also remembers tearing across open spaces, swings in the monsoon, watching the skies at sunset, and a fascination with cloud formations. But music and dance were her first loves. She took dance lessons at school, and sang *Naats* at *mushairas* held at home.

After her parents left for Pakistan, living in her uncle's home in Lucknow was a drastic change. In a strictly run household, Hajira remembers feeling regimented, and hungry all the time. The two sisters took their work very seriously, working constantly, and trying to keep a low profile in the house. Hajira loved working outdoors, painting landscapes and city scenes. "Women in the streets would stop me and ask me to paint 'their *Gali*' or their house, I enjoyed all of that attention and admiration."

After graduation, the two sisters were to join their parents in Karachi, to the consternation of one of Hajira's teachers at the college, who had harboured hopes of marriage. The proposal was put to the guardian, the elder sister, who dismissed it saying they were off to Pakistan, and in any case Hajira was "the youngest of

five sisters!" Hajira declares that she had no notion that she had caused a commotion.

Hajira found coming to Karachi and visiting the Arts Council a depressing experience. Devoid of any ambience, there were no sculptures or murals or atmosphere to the place. The two sisters decided to make their own ambience and began tutoring young women, relatives and neighbours. The artist Lubna Agha was one of their first students.

Putting sculptures around their art school aroused interest as well as religious ire. Hajira remembers a visitor who arrived and objected to the '*Butkhana*'. On being made welcome, he soon relented and consented to have his portrait painted.

Mansur Rahi joined the school as a teacher, and eventually became Hajira's husband. The legend goes that Mansur came to West Pakistan from the East wing on a grant to have an exhibition in Karachi. He had other plans; having a Kashmiri grandmother, he nursed the romantic notion of finding a Kashmiri girl, and living in the hills for the rest of his life. He found himself becoming a suitor for Hajira, and got the painter Zainul Abedin to plead his case. Hajira's mother trotted out the old excuse of her four older unmarried daughters, and added a few other conditions. He had to learn Urdu (while she learnt English), send for his parents, and set up house in Karachi. She was confident that the matter had been deferred for a decade or so, but a determined Rahi

managed all in four years.

Hajira's domestic set-up in Karachi with Rahi's family is a time she does not like to dwell on. Her relationship with her mother-in-law was benign, but the joint family household left its mark on her life and work. Unable to cope, her painting suffered, and so did her mental and physical health. She looks back on those eight years as time lost, with nothing to show for it in her painting.

Periodic escapes to the mountains with Rahi and her two children were interludes of much needed solace and calm, during which she managed to paint and reclaim her equilibrium. Rahi's family obligations were finally taken care of, and they made their home in the North, a desire fulfilled for both of them. Rahi and Hajira both taught in the Fine Arts Department at the Peshawar University for a while, before settling down in Islamabad in the late eighties, where they have built their own house and have their own studios.

Discussing the contradiction between being a painter and a mother, Hajira is emphatic about the intrusion of motherhood into the woman artist's domain. "I feel a woman has to be brave... she has to constantly have her mind on three or four fronts ... the children resent the work... my husband never has, but they do! It's always the mother who has to go to the parent-teacher meeting, or write the *dhobi's* list... I want to be free of that... to roam..."

Her painting has remained committed, over almost three decades, to a romantic, blithe tenor. Her idiom harks back to the New Bengal School of painting, with its watercolour wash technique, and a nod towards the stylised Pahari miniature.

Hajira admits to being a recluse in artistic terms, and is clear that she tries to deter the world from impinging on her painting. She says she works hard to consciously remove

all vestiges of the ugliness of the reality around her, its violence, its conflicts, and its problems.

Her determination to avoid controversy may have something to do with her girlhood; a member of a minority, migrating to another country and becoming a member of yet another minority. She also chose a life-partner who himself became yet another member of an even smaller minority living in West Pakistan after it was separated from the Eastern wing in 1971.

The themes in her work become almost iconic: wide-eyed women, architectural backdrops, flowers, ornament, pattern, birds, a world which she constructs with an ease brought on by constant repetition. Rahi's influence became more apparent in late seventies, with an attempt to make the forms more cubist and geometric, denying their sensuous linearity. This disappeared in the work of the late eighties and early nineties when she began, gingerly,



Hajira Mansur

Memories – 1993

Colourwash, oil and watercolour on paper

43 x 57 cm.

Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.

to approach texture and to forego delineation of form. This may partly have had to do with a change in medium. She moved from watercolour in the sixties and seventies, to gouache. Taking up acrylics in the nineties, she continued the transparent washes, now thickened and substantiated with gel.

The colour range in her watercolour era suggested a proximity to Chughtai, Abanindranath Tagore and other painters of the thirties and forties. This has undergone a transformation. The palette has mellowed and become understated, the acrylic range suggesting its own relationships and intensities. There is an unwinding of forms, a greater flow, seeping and spreading out of her sensibilities. The closer Hajira's work comes to her true sensory feelings, the truer it will be as a reflection of herself. For the moment, she is content to traverse the familiar artistic pathways that have been her mainstay.

Musarrat Mirza (b. 1939)

The dusty streets of Sukkur, its earth-coloured architecture, the shafts of sunlight on its mud walls, half-opened doorways, and the brooding skyline, is the environment that informs most of Musarrat Mirza's painting.

Musarrat has lived away from the mainstream of art production in Pakistan since the late Sixties, teaching at and, until recently, heading the Department of Fine Arts at the Sindh University at Jamshoro. The physical distance from the art discourse in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad has reinforced her introspective outlook and her sense of isolation. Yet it has also been instrumental in enhancing her involvement with her surroundings, and giving visual voice to the spirit of the desert, its textures, colours and essences.

She has spent many hours on the roof of her house in Sukkur – the rule being for women not to be seen outside without good reason – looking out at the river and the changing light. The family was not originally Sindhi, although they have been in the area for three generations.

Musarrat's paternal grandfather, from Akhnor, was of Moghul stock, and is said to have been a dealer in arms and ammunition. He was a young man of twenty-two when his father Mirza Sultan Beg was poisoned, and so he left Akhnor to come and live in Khairpur State at the invitation of the Nawab, in 1890. His brother, who was Musarrat's maternal grandfather, left home at the same time, going much further to Nairobi to work for the British Government. The family thus came to have two branches, one in East Africa and one in Sindh.

Her father was born to her grandfather very late in the latter's life, into a household with deeply religious, culturally refined, and almost esoteric traits which have continued into Musarrat's generation. It is strikingly apparent that her father played an intense and crucial role in shaping Musarrat's personality, and in directing her art.

Noticing her talents very early, he brought her a watercolour box, and arranged for an elderly Hindu drawing teacher, who had studied art in India, to come to the house and teach her. Musarrat remembers with fondness her teacher's encouragement of her talent. She often wondered what happened to him, learning later that he had left for Bombay, and that one of her early still-lives was reproduced in an article about him and his students, in an Indian magazine.

Being one of a large brood of brothers and

sisters, she had to make do with being hustled off to a local school by a kindly neighbour. Her younger sister was luckier; a visiting aunt from the Nairobi branch insisted that the local 'Convent' was more suitable for her. Musarrat is still wistful about how she missed out on having an 'English education' by such a quirk of fate.

But there were compensations in the humble school round the corner. A prestigious Hindu school before Partition, some of the rooms were used for arts and crafts and were still piled high with statuettes and craft materials. Sneaking out of her class on any pretext, Musarrat would spend her time handling these treasures, and modelling things out of the materials she found.

Other pleasures included playing with pieces of coloured glass collected from broken bottles, and drawing with charcoal or anything else found at home. She remembers cutting out reproductions of Chughtai's or Zainul Abedin's paintings from newspapers and magazines, and looking through literary magazines for pictures to view.

Her siblings did well with their 'English' education, but Musarrat gravitated towards the visual, and was allowed to accompany her sister to Lahore to study fine arts, while the latter was at medical college. By the time she was in her fourth year at the Lahore College for Women, she was already something of a legend among her fellow students. Perceived



Mussarat Mirza

Dimensions of solitude – 1984

Oil on canvas

84 x 84 cm.

Coll: N. Pasha

as a recluse, and formidably talented, Musarrat could be seen around the campus and around the parks of Lahore, painting constantly.

Equally adept at portraiture, Musarrat's work quickly began to reflect what has been her major thematic interest, a portrayal of the people of the area in close interaction with the environment. She graduated with Honours from the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University, and had her first solo exhibition at the Karachi Arts Council in 1968. She also

showed her work at Mirpur Khas and at Sukkur.

Wanting very much to set up a gallery in Sukkur, she had to go further afield to earn her living, and after a brush with the advertising world, ended up teaching at the newly established Fine Arts Department at the University of Sindh.

The Women's Hostel where Musarrat resided for over thirty years, was both a refuge and a

cloister. She continued to paint through the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties. Her early work showed strong cubist influences. The visual experiences of her home in Sukkur – gazing out from the windows at children in the streets, the dust storms, the gypsy caravans passing through the town – were all painted from memory.

An accomplished draftsman, Musarrat's skills at drawing animals and humans alike meant that the works of these early years jostled with strongly delineated forms in an architectural or landscaped environment. The colours were strong, yet somehow infused with an earthiness which gave them an impenetrable, mellow feeling. Working with oils on canvas with a palette knife gave a textured, impasto painterly quality, which has been modified over the years as she has experimented with her brushwork and the density of paint.

The major formal developments, which have occurred over the past two decades, have been a complete break with the cubist approach to form, and a change of palette. An even more important change has been in the way Musarrat has re-interpreted the relationship of the figure and the environment. The two elements in her paintings are now no longer perceived as being apart; on the contrary, they fuse together until they are indistinguishable from one another. The human and animal actors in her cityscapes, streetscapes and landscapes, are barely discernible from the ray of light or a dusty doorway, a minaret at dusk or a shadow at noon.

One doesn't have to look far to see the imperatives which have shaped Musarrat's vision. The violent political, social and ethnic upheavals and conflicts in her area have reinforced her withdrawal into herself, and the desire for seclusion and peace. She witnessed the Language Riots⁷ and feels bitter about being classified as an 'outsider' and a

'Punjabi'. Having been in Sukkur for three generations, and being fluent in Sindhi has not given her the right to belong to a land she feels deeply about. For a while, these savage divides left her unable to paint. She describes herself as a 'hybrid', transplanted originally from somewhere, but now flourishing in a soil from which she draws all her intellectual nourishment and artistic inspiration.



Musarrat Mirza
Untitled –
 Oil on canvas
 62 x 91 cm.
 Coll: Chowkandi Art

A student of mysticism and a devotee of the poets of Sindh, she seeks the answers in a philosophical acceptance of things as she finds them. Deeply religious, she avoids conventional ritualistic forms of worship, preferring a personal and private observance, rejoicing in nature and the exquisiteness of human heritage.

Musarrat is adamant that her vision is in tune with where she lives, with the air she breathes, and the distances she can see. As she puts it, "I can see beyond what other people see... I have moved beyond people... I have started painting animals, especially donkeys... they are sad as they stand isolated in the landscape... and then women... I paint them covered up, hidden from view, that is how I see them, hiding, in a doorway, in a shadow, sometimes slipping out of their homes. That is how I have seen Woman. I never paint her face... she has no face... she just has a back, a *chaddar*, that is Her".

Never married, Musarrat concedes that she was protected and cloistered in her girlhood, to the extent that she was barely aware of the physical aspects of love. Adoring her father meant that she was exacting in her expectations of men, and, as she put it, "I left it to my father to arrange a match, but somehow no one ever came up to scratch... he feared for me when he came up close to people... I have seen good friends, including men of my own age, but somehow I never found someone I could be married to. It's not that I didn't have proposals, or that my father would have objected... I just saw too many unhappy marriages and was not prepared to make the required compromises... I have always been alone... I knew it since I was a small child, that eventually each person has a journey, which is their own".

Musarrat's choices in a strongly male patriarchal society have increased her solitude and underlined her isolated existence. She

goes as far as saying "I knew too much to be taken in by the things women are taken in by... the lure of *Mehndi*, the clink of a bracelet... bright lights. I knew these things couldn't make me happy... my instinct told me that". She recognises the need for companionship, but realises that she and her work are demanding and uncompromising.

She also experimented with watercolours, liberated from any suggestion of observed or figurative form. These passionately instinctive and spontaneous works were done in the late Eighties, and were a watershed in Musarrat's work, giving it an openness and release which was later reflected in her more formal oil paintings. She analyses it as a throwback to her childhood, when she would make abstract shapes with her watercolours. Except that the works of the Eighties were done in exceptionally difficult political circumstances, when the university was closed down after riots, and she was unexpectedly back in Sukkur. Without her materials at hand, Musarrat used textile dyes in a number of experimental ways to create a series of brilliantly hued abstract works over a short period of time, in an environment of intense political conflict – reaching into the inexplicable turmoil of human beings around her.

The asceticism that is part of Musarrat's life also informs her paintings of the Nineties. Colour drained of its hue and intensity is delicately handled; whites, mellowed with hints of earth colours, accented with purer blues and reds, suitably softened to converse with the pervading dusty tones inhabit her canvases. Themes are to do with solitude and loneliness. The sense of the mystical is always there, moving away from the tangible; the universe presents itself in totality.

Musarrat Mirza retired from the University of Sindh in 1999 and moved back to her family home in Sukkur, where she continues to paint.

Laila Shahzada (c. 1930 – 1994)

Shy, reticent Laila Shahzada only began painting seriously in the early sixties in Karachi. Born in Kathiawar, India, she remembered her father being an early influence on her, "He was a jeweller, and I used to sit and watch him working with stones and the design. It was there that it started. I was always interested in painting. I did drawing in school. This was in Panchgani, near Mahabaleshwar."

Her father's indulgence ran out when he saw her interest become more serious. She vividly recalled him destroying all her books on art, with pictures of Leonardo's 'Last Supper' and the Michaelangelos. He yelled at her, "This girl is a *Kaffir*!" At that her mother defended her, but the experience lived on in Laila's memory, and she developed the lifelong habit of hiding her books, "I still do that, because of the pictures" her voice faltered and she was silent.

Her wedding, held in Ramnagar State, led to an unhappy and short-lived first marriage; an experience which led to her finding refuge in painting. She was encouraged by painter Nagi, whose studio she used to visit in Karachi, and who taught her to work with the figure, as well as the use of watercolour and oils. Finding herself the only woman in the company of painters like Sadeqain and Sultan must have been intimidating for a tentative beginner.

Laila recalled that her early paintings were devoid of colour and she was teased about it by the artists around her. She ran a small design shop in Karachi and took up

commissions, including one to design the uniforms of the PIA airhostesses.

She married again and from then on painted and exhibited intermittently. Motherhood, and being the wife of a successful advertising executive, took their toll on Laila Shahzada the artist. Reluctant to verbalise on the problems of being a painter and the multitude of other roles she was called upon to perform, she said wistfully, "Sometimes I was ill. Sometimes I was working in advertising. Sometimes I was cooking and dreaming. There were always gaps of that sort ... I didn't realise what was happening. Perhaps if I had been stricter, I could have done both. But I just wasn't aware. I think one doesn't know one's own feelings...." However, the drawbacks to performing these various roles were offset by certain advantages. Her social status allowed her the opportunity to travel and to exhibit her work in Europe and North America.

In the early nineties, she moved into her own studio flat where she worked away from the family, and went home only on weekends to her husband, to be "his hostess for his social life." She said of this coveted and hard-fought-for independence, "For the first few weeks I was very jittery, but felt now I've really taken off. I had decided when my kids grew up and got married... Zahir was the last one. So four years ago in 1988, I bought this place and decided, 'Now I'm going to start, to finally work'!" But the time left to her was painfully short.



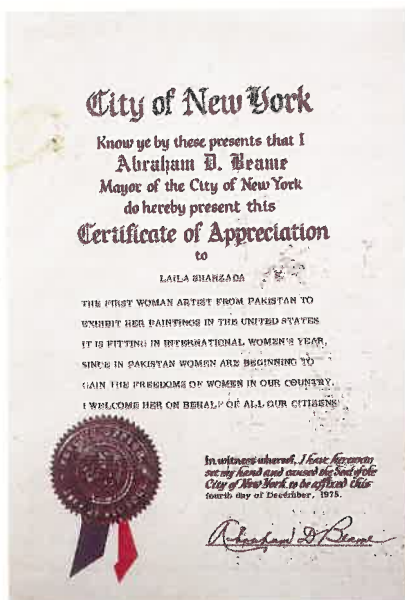
Laila Shahzada



Laila Shahzada
Thar Series - 1993
 Oil on canvas
 Size unavailable
 Coll: Shaheen Shahzada

Intensely private, Laila's work also reflected her contradictory relationships. The themes of her early exhibitions were themes like 'Driftwood', 'Gandhara' and 'Moenjodaro'. These series demonstrated her struggle to acquire the required technical skills for defining her content. She was self-conscious about the need to have a 'message' to prove her seriousness of purpose. These canvases embodied a naïve intention, which is persistent in its sincerity. These series are emotional, yet extremely guarded responses to the symbolic signifiers of nature, history and civilisation. As she finally began to break loose from self-imposed confines on her art and on her time, the work blossomed into evocative landscapes and emotional responses to events.

A revealing self-portrait led into the work of the 'other' Laila Shahzada, as did her paintings done in response to the hanging of Z.A. Bhutto. Solitary journeys to the north of Pakistan and to Balochistan resulted in a series of works which were dramatic developments in Laila's painting. To facilitate these mountain journeys, she moved to Islamabad and set up an alternate studio space. The simplified mountainscapes were strangely reminiscent of Georgia O'Keefe's New Mexico territory. Laila Shahzada had shed her dense palette and moved on to a lightened range of colour. Her overt symbolism was dispatched in exchange for a more sensuous response to nature. Her constancy had won out over problems to do with medium and image. Her tenacity became concentrated and focussed in churning forms, defined by a sharp, blinding highlight of blank space. This minimalism, a far cry from her overloaded early canvasses, suggested the evolution of a more discriminating eye, coupled with a more relaxed and confident handling of the surface.



Laila's New York scrapbook



Laila with poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz in Karachi - Late 1960's

Sadly, few of these works were seen publicly. Laila Shahzada died in a tragic domestic accident, caused by a fire in her home in Islamabad, in 1994.

Rabia Zuberi (b. 1940)

Rabia and Hajira Zuberi grew up in Aligarh, in what they describe as a family typical of their milieu. With an enlightened and educated father, who was a part-time poet and full-time police officer, Rabia remembers literary *mehfils*, *mushairas* and musical evenings in the house. As a young girl she tried her hand at writing plays and stories, and had some published while still at school.

Her other passion was making and playing with dolls. Her mother was a highly skilled doll-maker, and each doll was outfitted with several sets of clothes and jewellery. The doll, dressed in an ornate bridal *gharara* was accompanied by her *gudda* and several tiny children in premature attendance.

Rabia also remembers that her father's police job meant a public profile. Weeping women besieging the house had an early impact on her. She started an 'Art Club' in her eighth class in school, and made money painting saris and cushions. She spent the profits on paying for young girls to go to school.

This feverish art and craft activity met with some scepticism, the implication being that her 'formal' studies would go by the board. Winning the prize for sculpture in the All-India Youth Festival four years running, helped deflect the criticism, and also got her permission to study at the Lucknow School of Art, after her graduation from the Aligarh Muslim University.

The two sisters, Rabia and Hajira, stood apart

as young Muslim girls studying art and winning scholarships and prizes, both in Aligarh and later in Lucknow. The experience of art school was a time of taking responsibility for themselves. Their parents had moved to Karachi in 1961, and the two were living with an uncle in Lucknow. It was a time of economic hardship and frugal living. They suddenly found their stipend withdrawn when it was discovered that their parents had migrated to Pakistan. They were now presumed to be 'Pakistani' as well, and as such, not eligible for government help.

Rabia remembers not being able to afford meals in the college canteen. They would bring two bananas from home, and have one each, until they went home at five. Their drawing and painting would continue in their shared room in the evening. They would pose for one another undisturbed since the room was set apart from the rest of the house.

Hajira was specialising in painting, and Rabia in sculpture, an unusual choice for a young Muslim woman, perhaps a rediscovery of the tactile experience of making dolls years before.

Rabia was offered a job at Aligarh University, but it was decided that the two were too young to be left on their own, and they joined their parents in Karachi in 1964. Their introduction to Karachi was a shock. They immediately realised that art exhibitions and related activities were highly elitist, centred round a few homes and the Karachi Arts Council. The two women felt themselves



Lt - Rt:
Rabia Zuberi, Salima Hashmi
and Riffat Alvi, Karachi School of Art – 2001

Rabia Zuberi
Quest for Peace – 1988-90
 Mixed media on paper
 51 x 34 cm.
 Coll: The Artist



Rabia Zuberi
New Concept of Drapery
 Series – 1986-87
 Bronze
 22 x 26 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

socially handicapped by their inability to speak English. Rabia is quick to acknowledge that she was unable to relate either to the kind of work she saw, or the people who were artistically visible in the early sixties.

The migration from Aligarh to Karachi had left their parents economically distressed and culturally dispossessed. The two sisters were, however, determined to make use of their shared talents and set to. They rented a small room in Nazimabad where they lived, put up a sign saying 'Meena Art Institute' and started art classes for young women.

Hajira began teaching miniature painting and the Bengali 'wash' technique in watercolours; and Rabia, for lack of facilities, taught sculpture in plaster in the class, and herself worked in terracotta. The 'school' first began in the dining room with chairs set round the dining table.

The young men of the neighbourhood soon protested at this discrimination, and the Zuberi ladies hired a male teacher, the Bengali artist and teacher Mansur Rahi, to teach the new male students at a salary of a hundred and fifty rupees a month.

Shakir Ali and Abbasi Abidi came to the school, and suggested a change of name; and the 'Karachi School of Art' came into being in 1964. Since that time Rabia has worked with ferocious energy to make the Karachi School of Art an institution which fulfills the needs of a particular economic segment of the city, and serves to provide skills for the advertising and communications sector.

Rabia Zuberi's early work in sculpture in the sixties was undoubtedly in the Indian Art School mainstream tradition, with its emphasis on academic observation, and a rather sentimental approach to nature and figurative form. She quickly moved on to



Lt - Rt:
Nahid Raza, Rabia Zuberi and Riffat Alvi.

works which were more abstract, a result of becoming absorbed into the milieu of Karachi-art-making in the seventies. There appeared indications of social themes, as in her 'Labour' series of the late seventies when she chose to diversify her materials, groping her way into bronze and fibreglass.

The work of the eighties reflected the anxieties of most women artists having to deal with the realities of Zia's regime. Rabia attempted to rationalise the political constraints which specifically applied to sculpture with a series entitled 'A new concept of drapery'. It dwelt on the symbol of the *dupatta* as it envelops the female form. The interpretation of form, while strongly related to her earlier figurative works and their Henry Moore overtones, seemed strangely passive in comparison. The punctuation of the mass is almost absent, and the presence becomes decorative. It suggests that Rabia was marking time.

The political upheavals and ethnic violence in Karachi are the obvious stimuli of Rabia's

'Quest for Peace' series. Her accompanying drawings and collages of the eighties and nineties seem more personal and revealing than the sculptures that by their very nature were more public works. Interestingly, it is in the drawings that Rabia finds the medium to suit her temperament. The works are explorative and powerful. Her deft handling of the graphite on paper, and the lingering quality of the mark, suggests a playful wistfulness that her sculpture denies. The public commissions for the city of Karachi in cement and fibreglass were ambitious in scale and faithfully followed the vocabulary and intimacy of the maquette.

In the meantime, her institution the Karachi School of Art has grown into a thriving centre, with morning and evening classes in drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, textile, and graphic design catering to hundreds of students. The largest institution of its kind in Karachi, it is Rabia's personal contribution to the city and its lower and middle-class communities.



1967 – 1977

Promises Redeemed, Promises Broken

In 1968, the army rule of Field Marshal Ayub Khan gave way amid great public protest and demonstrations, to be replaced by that of yet another General – Mohammad Yahya Khan. The new man in power would preside over not only Pakistan's first 'free and fair elections' in 1970, but also over the dismemberment of the State.⁸

The establishment of the breakaway state of Bangladesh obviously had deep implications for the State of Pakistan, but the effects on cultural and artistic life were even more critical. Although the democratically elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto propagated a progressive, liberal ideology, the religious opposition constantly threatened the political stability and extracted important politico-legal concessions, consistent with their vision of an 'Islamic' ideological state. Liberal, enlightened politicians could no longer call upon their allies in the Eastern wing to help deflect the orthodox onslaught.

Implementing a National Cultural Policy, Bhutto followed a populist agenda with greater access for women in culture. A Fine Arts Department was set up in the Sindh University in 1969, and the one in Peshawar had already come into existence five years earlier. The establishment of private art galleries in Rawalpindi and Karachi (Contemporary Art Galleries, and the B.M Gallery, respectively) provided venues for the increasing number of younger practitioners. A larger number of

middle and lower-middle class women received training and gained jobs in the applied arts, advertising, publishing and television. A number of public commissions became available for all artists, and women began to find in art activity a possible means of earning a living.

Women in the performing and visual arts were publicly honoured, as were women in other fields like nursing, social work, health and education. The Constitution of 1973 made it clear that one of its objectives was to ensure equal rights under the law for women and children.

The influence of the media became significant and often crucial during the Bhutto years. The participation and promotion of women became increasingly noticeable in television, in the press and in government services. Women became eligible to represent Pakistan in the Foreign Service and several were appointed Ambassadors.

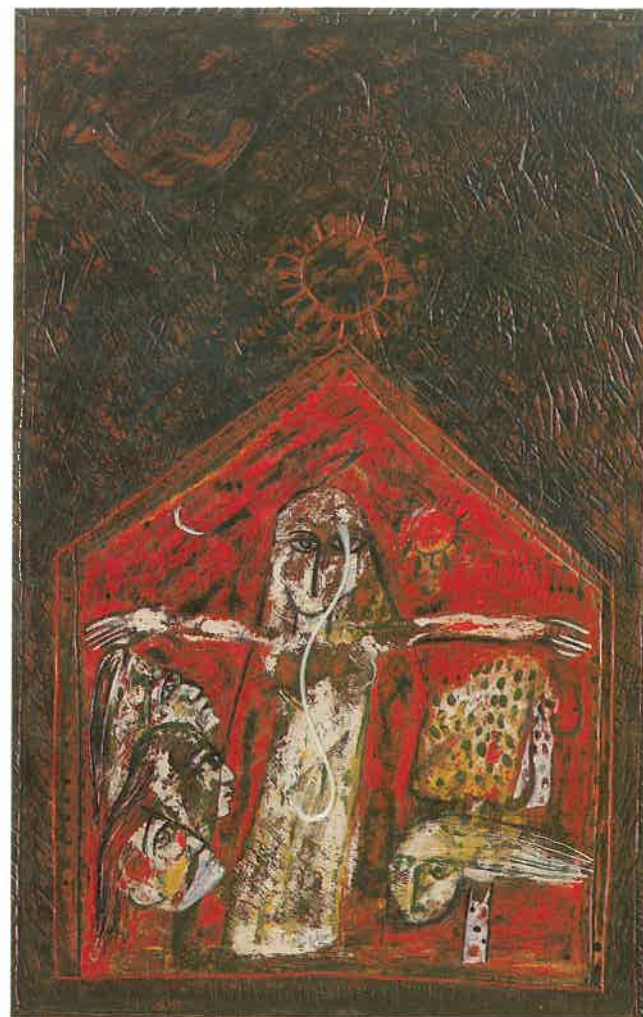
These signs, although marginal to the lives of the greater number of Pakistani women, still stirred up the beginnings of a liberal feminist sensibility which soon appeared in the works of the younger women writers and the crop of artists just beginning their professional careers.

Sitting Lt – Rt:
Ather Jamal, M.Kazim,
Naiza Khan, Walter Crump,
Nahid Raza, Duriya Kazi,
Riffat Alvi

Standing Lt – Rt:
Shahid Sajjad, Amar Jamal,
Zohra Hussain,
Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq, Zahin Ahmed,
Gulgee, A.N. Nagori,
Laila Shahzada
David Alesworth, Rabia Zuberi,
Unknown, Shehla Haeri,
Unknown, Marjorie Husain,
Meher Afroze



Meher Afroze
Zindaan Series – 2001
 Acrylic on board
 30.5 x 53.3 cm.
 Coll: The Artist



Meher Afroze
Niche Series – 1997
 Acrylic on wood
 40 x 63 cm.
 Coll: Dr. G. Aziz

Meher Afroze (b. 1948)

The Pakistan Army's action in East Pakistan and its subsequent defeat at the hands of the Indians had serious repercussions for the Muslim minorities in India. Dormant communal antagonism flared again – a sad reminder of the conflicts and migrations of 1947.

Meher Afroze's family made the move to Pakistan from Lucknow after the 1971 war, when existence in their ancestral community became too difficult. For Meher Afroze the shift meant a complete dislocation of her professional, cultural and intellectual life.

Born and brought up in Lucknow in a typical middle-class Shia household, Meher's home was an example of courtly urban tradition, which had been in existence for several centuries. Although things were changing by the time she was growing up, she remembers the strong dos and don'ts that pertained to the upbringing of any girl child.

Seasons were marked by certain familiar rituals; *dupattas* were dyed according to the

time of year, songs were sung and swings set up for the monsoon. *Moharram* was observed with a solemnity that included the making of *Alams*, *Patkas*, and *Tazias*. She remembers a box in the house where all the objects to do with *Moharram* were kept, and its ceremonial opening when the annual occasion arrived.

There was a prestige associated with good craftsmanship, and there was much shaking of heads at the decline of standards. Young girls specially were expected to speak in lowered voices, to have a sedate gait, and to cultivate a sensitive awareness of how to dress and conduct themselves appropriately. Meher and her sisters were never allowed to be decked out or dressed up in a manner deemed undesirable in young unmarried ladies. Meher, who took after her father in her physical characteristics, was always being told to talk softly, since, "a girl's voice must never be heard outside the house!"

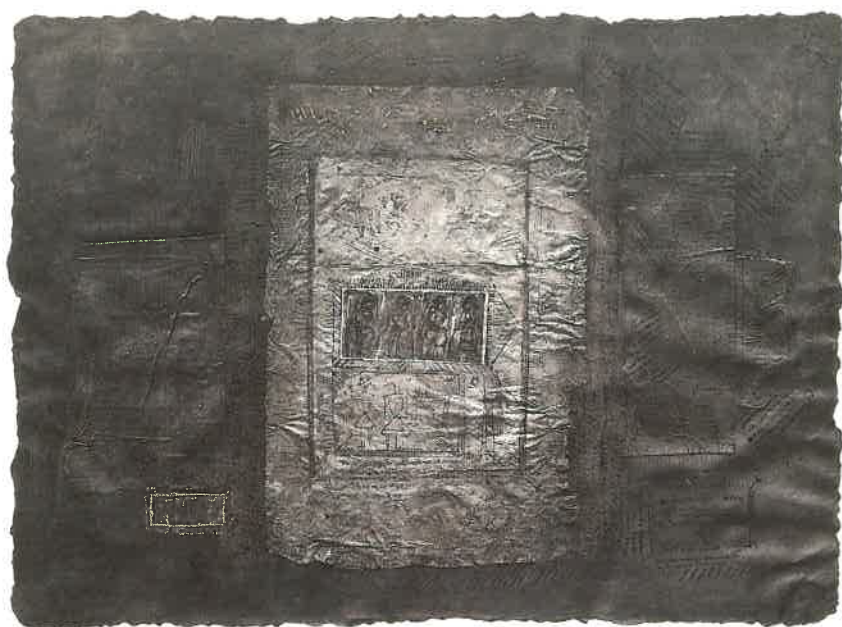
She recalls that her paternal grandmother was a dominant influence in the household. Although highly religious and critical, she was supportive of her granddaughters' education. She would urge them to study hard, and approved of the family tradition of sending the girls off to study at the Aligarh Muslim University. For Meher Afroze, her grandmother was the first admirer of her artwork, carefully preserving the little clay figurines that the young girl would make out of the clay brought into the house to repair the stoves. Art was part of the school

curriculum, and Meher suddenly found herself being singled out for her accomplished efforts.

In the culturally rich and varied life of the city of Lucknow, Meher Afroze remembers the mingling of many cultures. The late fifties and sixties were times of cultural revivalism in India, and there was emphasis on the traditional legends, mythological heroes, music, dance and drama. Meher would be asked to make masks for the school play, paint the props and stage scenery, and anything else that involved her skills in sculpture, drawing and painting. She would join her Hindu friends in whatever festival they were observing.

The decision to go to Art College in Lucknow followed on from school, and it became an experience which was pivotal to her development. The first three years consisted of an academically rigorous programme which concentrated on the development of skills. Meher found that the imagery she was working with was bogging her down. She was also unhappy with the realistic, figurative work required in her fourth year, a feeling compounded by the disappointment expressed by her teachers at her efforts.

She joined the academy in Lucknow, where students were expected to be independent and were left to follow their own direction. Here she found the confidence to build upon her own vision and experience. Delving into the historical tradition, Meher began to compile a vocabulary of symbols and motifs which suggested a link with history, a continuity with



Meher Afroze
Woman Series – 1998
 Mixed media on paper
 90 x 70 cm.
 Coll: Dr. G. Aziz

the past. On trips to Ajanta and Ellora, she examined the persistence of certain forms and symbols. The mingling of Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist arts demonstrated the multiplicity of available sources from which she could draw together a “manuscript of visual imagery.” This was work that both Meher and her teachers found exciting, especially when she discovered printmaking to be most conducive to her new vision.

Before moving to Pakistan, Meher Afroze participated in two exhibitions in India, one at the Lalit Kala Academy in Lucknow in 1970, and the other – the All India Graphic Exhibition – in Calcutta in 1971. At this time, the tensions between India and Pakistan aggravated her parents’ unease, and the difficult decision to migrate was finally taken.

The family found the unfamiliar social and cultural milieu of Karachi quite baffling, but for Meher Afroze it was professionally

formidable. As a printmaker, she found a widespread ignorance about the process not only among the limited audience, but also among gallery owners and fellow artists. She describes with amusement how one gallery owner pointed out that prints were not really art “since each print was identical to the others”! She also felt handicapped by her unfamiliarity with English, the lack of which she had never felt in Lucknow.

She was offered a job at Rabia’s school, but the salary offered would barely have covered her fare. Instead, she chose to set up a teaching studio with fellow painter Sumbal Nazir. The two young women tried to rent a flat, and had to bring along Meher’s father as the prospective tenant, since no self-respecting landlord would have rented property to two young single women. They paid six months rent in advance, brought furniture from their own homes, had stationary printed, and set up shop to await students.

The experiment failed and Meher began teaching summer classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. There, the Principal, painter Rasheed Arshad, who had seen her work at the National Exhibition of 1972 held in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi, became a reassuring counsellor. That exhibition had given Meher Afroze the first opportunity to show her work publicly. She had attended the inauguration at the Arts Council in Karachi, and had met a number of artists, who had commented on her work, and the first contacts had been made. The second important event which followed soon after, was an invitation by the Pakistan National Council of the Arts to participate in the International Graphic Exhibition entitled ‘Asia Today’, which opened in Milan and went on a tour of a number of European cities.

Meher Afroze then took the plunge and had a solo exhibition of her prints at the Arts Council in Karachi. But she did not make a major sale until the next year 1975, when she received a cheque for 1500 rupees – a handsome amount then – from sales at the Fourteenth Anniversary Show at Zubaida Agha’s Contemporary Art Galleries, in Rawalpindi. She opened her first bank account with this cheque!

Meher had become a regular teacher at the Central School in 1973, getting a salary of 435 rupees a month, which she found most satisfying. The fact that she meticulously remembers these sums reveals how important this economic independence was to her. Her exhibition at the Arts Council, and her presence at the Central School in the same building, brought her into contact with a number of painters and critics, including Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq, Ahmed Parvez, and Dr. Akbar Naqvi who was from Lucknow and had known a number of her former teachers.

She also met Nahid Azfar and gained access to her etching press, which was then transferred

to the School. Before the printmaking workshops could be set up properly, Rasheed Arshad left for the USA, and the school went into a rapid decline.

For Meher Afroze, however, the subsequent years were highly fruitful both in terms of work, gaining national and international recognition, and winning awards and prizes. On a personal level, circumstances were more demanding. Her brothers had found employment abroad, and with the death of her father, Meher became the economic and emotional anchor of the family.

Meher's family had always had progressive views on education and on professions for women, but being an unmarried woman in Pakistan has its own compulsions. As Meher puts it, "this society gives an *Ijzatnaama* in the form of the *Nikah Naama*. Because I am not married, in spite of complete trust, if I am late home the household is worried! My mother says 'I understand, but what will people around us say!' One has had to argue it out, but the compromises have had to be made on both sides." She points out that Pakistani society sets up separate compartments for men and women, with defined roles, and everyone has to fit in.

For Meher, the question of marriage as an end in itself has never been attractive. She concedes that as a woman, and especially as an artist, all experiences are valuable, but she is wary of depending on a husband for economic support. She has had the satisfaction of a man nursing sentiments for her, but is philosophical about these feelings transforming themselves into commitments of a different kind.

The setting up of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture offered Meher Afroze the chance to be part of its pioneering team. She has continued her career as an artist alongside her work as a senior teacher at the

school. Her maturing as a printmaker and painter has been consistent, and her creative energies have been focussed.

Meher's work has evolved slowly from being sensitive to motif and texture in the early years, to very intricate statements with images in mysterious and complex relationships. Known initially for her prints, which were mainly collographs, she chose to indicate these ideas through interpretive cityscapes over which the moon or the sun presided.

Her very early ventures into historical motifs gained much from her realisation that every surface, every mark, is a testimonial to history. The weathered images on the city walls, the deposits left by human existence, the traces and tell-tale marks waiting patiently to be given significance by the seeing eye, were and continue to be the stuff of Meher Afroze's work.

She thinks also of what goes on beneath and behind these surfaces, and therefore the painting series 'Puppets and Masks' of the eighties. She dismisses the idea that titles are important to her work, but the series run their course in explaining a theme or group of images. This series hinted at pattern, and some symbolic portrayals were reminiscent of the Jamini Roy spirit. The colours were deeply hued, jewel-like, but somehow aged and corroded – a feeling difficult to achieve with the brashness of acrylics.

Meher is insistent on the importance on the one hand of roots, and on the other, the relentless continuity of nature which frames the human habitat. She looks for symbols which combine both, such as the lotus which, as the legend goes, re-invents itself in a myriad ways through time. Cut off from her roots in India, she struggled to make connections in her new milieu. The motifs and symbols in Sindh are equally prolific, and historically



**Second from left
Meher Afroze at the Sindh Artist Association
meeting, Karachi. Also present Nahid Raza, Fourth from left**



Meher Afroze
Collograph – 1984
 40 x 63 cm.
 Coll: S. Ismail

substantial. She recognised that the same image is susceptible to subtle changes in meaning when placed in a different context.

Meher Afroze feels that her way of carefully layering her work is dictated both by the medium and by her need to not reveal too much. Mystery is important to the work, which must withhold as much as it conveys. Layers of history sustain meaning and haunt the present with possible interpretations and secret disclosures. The square, the circle, the rectangle appear and disappear as she works and reworks the medium, colour and context. 'Muted Voices' was a muted look at the "wretched of the earth" who barely make a difference, yet make up the warp and weft of human society. Meher's marks are never overt; the mixed

media works give up their meaning reluctantly, emerging out of the fabric in which they are embedded.

Her painting owes much to her experience as a printmaker, in the manner that she fabricates the texture. There are hints of embroidery and stitch-like marks which are intuitively worked into the surface.

Her 'Taaviz' paintings have also come closer to printmaking in terms of colour. Earth tones, pigments tinged with a corrosive feel, are noticeable in this series done on wood. The surface is engraved, and alternatively layered, becoming rich and dense with marks which are transformed into meaning. In the 'Niche' series, women emerge as icons, archetypal creatures, silent yet triumphant.

Meher's works have invariably been small in scale, and she agrees that size often defines a woman's work, confirming the feminist observation that when a male painter is painting, it is 'work', but not so for the woman painter. "Women don't have the means to spread their work around the house; they have to be unobtrusive."

But on being drawn into a discussion about whether scale is an intrinsic part of aesthetics, she agrees that there is a definite Western bias involved in looking askance at works on a smaller scale; whereas in the East, skill is often 'tested' by miniaturising the work. "I cannot conceive of an artist working on hillsides, like Christo. We come from a tradition in which people carve the Kalimah on a grain of rice, or make a portrait on a sesame seed. With us there is no distance between art and craft!"

Her exhibition of prints and paintings at the Chawkandi Gallery in 2001, entitled 'Zindaan', reveals a consistency of concerns in Meher Afroze's work. The continued references to the past – royal courtly personages, legends, childhood memories – are present but curiously deceptive. This latest imagery has a duality of content emblematic of her deeply felt beliefs. A dynamic control over medium and image demonstrated by a minimal use of form and colour brings the message into acute focus. In each work essentials are pared down, becoming simple yet exquisite. There appear parallel interpretations, which can be understood in the context of the particular as well as the universal.

The intensity of Meher Afroze's faith becomes a banner drenched in blood, triumphant in the rapture of love. She is careful to point out that the essence of all commitment transcends the narrowness of the 'name' of any faith; there are many paths on that journey, the milestones along which may be the blood of Hussain, or the fasting Buddha.

Lubna Agha (b. 1949)

The early and mid-seventies shaped the progressive image of the Pakistani woman of the future. Lubna Agha personified the energy, creativity and promise of progress projected by the media.

Growing up in Karachi in a family where art and literature was encouraged, as a child Lubna copied the pictures that her mother had collected of paintings and photographs gleaned from newspapers and magazines. She would show them to Lubna and the other children as a treat, when they had been especially good.

Her mother was an important early influence, creating wonderful embroideries of landscapes and flowers which find an echo in Lubna Agha's own work today. Lubna and her sisters were also taught to embroider, but her own talents were channelled into drawing and painting. Her dexterity with charcoal, watercolours and coloured pencils was soon recognised and appreciated at school, and gave her an early sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Her paternal grandmother was a published author, who was a regular contributor to 'Ismet', the woman's magazine, and was a champion of women's rights. Reading was another habit inculcated and encouraged in the home, ranging from Ismet Chughtai, Manto, and Quratulain Hyder in Urdu, to Hardy, Tolstoy, Gorky and Steinbeck in English.

Lubna was one of the first students at Hajira and Rabia Zuberi's Art School, joining when she was just thirteen and staying for five years. She learnt to paint in the traditional watercolour wash technique, a discipline she enjoyed immensely. The Zuberi sisters were joined by Mansur Rahi and Lubna acknowledges their strong influence on her academic training.

Having grown up in an atmosphere of enlightenment and involvement in the world around her, Lubna was a politically conscious young woman. She remembers the fall of Dhaka in 1971, and the disillusionment of losing half of the entity called Pakistan. She was also sensitive to the formal issues related to her own work. The struggle to break out of the academic mould and to chisel an individual path was essential to her. She was fascinated by the minimalists, the lure of modernism, and the purity of abstraction. These were the years of the 'People's' rule of Bhutto, when a futuristic, modernist approach was acceptable and encouraged, both by the galleries and by the government. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's personal tastes in painting were also eclectic, and there was patronage for experimentation and the contemporary idiom.

Lubna had an opportunity to visit Britain in the late sixties and early seventies, in the midst of the political and cultural changes which had ramifications for the 'new woman'. Viewed in that context, one is struck by the simplicity of Lubna's 'White Paintings' of the seventies. Emotions were sublimated, and the



Lt - Rt:
Ali Imam, Tajjamul Husain,
Mansur Rahi (with Ahmed Pervez
behind) Hajira Mansur, Rabia Zuberi
and Lubna Agha in Karachi, the 1960's



Lubna Agha

Night and Day (Raat aur Din)– 1994

Acrylic on canvas

121 x 160 cm.

Coll: Z. Husain

imagery only hinted at references to landscape and, occasionally, to the human body. There was an aura of spirituality, a calmness, expressed through subtle and delicate tonal differences in the pristine whiteness. An incisive edge would pierce and accent the form in sharp vermilion or a cadmium red, to suggest the umbilical cord. According to Lubna, these red accents and lines emerged as symbols, sustaining life and, paradoxically, also suffocating it.

By the time Lubna left Pakistan with her husband to live in the USA in the late seventies, she had had a large number of exhibitions all over the country and was one of the leading young painters in Pakistan. Her move to Sacramento, California has meant what she described as “a cultural exile.”

Identifying strongly with the political situation in Pakistan, she reacted angrily to Zia’s coup in 1977 and the regime’s policies towards women. The figurative found its way back into her imagery, perhaps as a reaction to what she perceived to be an assault on society in general and women in particular. She was deeply conscious of the disturbing changes that took place in the eighties – the intolerance, the persecution of minorities, and the growing violence. As she puts it, “it didn’t seem to be the Pakistan of my childhood!” The distancing from her homeland made her somewhat wistful, and philosophical about life.

However, living in the U.S gave her certain advantages. The children had access to good education, and she ran a successful graphic design studio and enjoyed working on the “cutting edge of new technology.” She continues to exhibit in Pakistan, which she calls her “real home” and during this period the work has explored many pathways, sometimes seeming to have come full circle. The minimalism of her oils-on-canvas of the



Lubna Agha
Painting in White – 1972
 Oil on canvas
 61 x 76 cm.
 Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.



Lubna Agha
Loh-e-Azal (Secrets of the Palm) – 2000
 Acrylic on canvas
 30.5 x 40.6 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

seventies was shelved for good, and there was a definite shift towards the figurative. Human forms appeared – newborn infants struggling in a labyrinth of bodies. Lubna Agha was commenting on the state of her homeland, with a passion and finesse borne out of her practice as a communication designer. Her early sparing use of colour was forgotten. There appeared a dramatic profusion of colour; strong reds and cadmium yellows, blues, indigos and purples came together with startling intensity and deliberate collusion. Multiple images were loaded with meanings, to be unravelled and understood in the contexts she framed; human forms, foliage, fish moving across the surface in unfamiliar configurations, invoking primitive, yet fresh associations.

The works of the eighties and nineties

commented on the many worlds that Lubna Agha traversed, physically and in the spirit.

From Sacramento, the family moved to Boston, which brought Lubna Agha closer to the expatriate Pakistani community. She has been able to reclaim language and other facets of cultural experience and memory that are important; music, poetry, conversation, food, and the minutiae of life that are vital to the existence and treasured in the life of the émigré, are the undercurrents in her apparently allegorical work. Hands have been an important emblem for Lubna, as has Urdu poetry.

She deliberately searches for the political and elaborates a creative response. She says, “The recent global events have left me quite

distraught. I know you can never turn back the clock, but I fear Pakistan is changed forever and it saddens me.” These complex concerns are yet to be articulated in her work.

But it can be said safely that all of this is informed by what Lubna Agha describes as “my driving force, which is the passion for beauty in its many faces.” It is this passion for beauty that on occasion overly ‘sweetens’ both the content and the images which materialise on the surface. She is candid about the pleasure it delivers. The medium acrylic on canvas, flowing, almost watery in its layers, employs a brilliant luminosity of colour in association with the drama of mixed hybrid imagery. It illustrates “the in-between-ness” of her realities.



Riffat Alvi
Death Trap – 2000
Natural earth, calcite on wood
22 x 32 cm.
Coll: The Artist

Riffat Alvi (b. 1948)

The economic pressures on the lower middle-class, coupled with the visibility of professional women in the media, gave social sanction to young women wanting to enter the job market in the early seventies. Families who would have frowned upon the idea of their daughters having to earn their own living, even when economic imperatives demanded it, relented when induced by the acceptability of professional women operating outside the domestic arena.

Riffat Alvi came from a background where economic compulsions shaped her career, ultimately channelling her talents into her current position as Director of the V. M. Art Gallery in Karachi. Her father was an architectural engineer in the army; the family was conservative in its attitude to the arts, seeing it as a highly unsuitable interest for women to pursue. Her mother was adamant that Riffat do a simple BA, but Riffat indulged herself, surreptitiously taking up short courses whenever she could. When the family settled in Karachi, Riffat persuaded her father to allow her to join the Karachi School of Art.

Her mother's opposition continued, going so far as to insist that Riffat would draw the wrath of God upon herself on the day of judgement, when she would be asked to breathe life into her creations. Undaunted, Riffat hid her sculptures behind flowerpots at home. She revelled in her art studies with Mansur Rahi and the Bengali painter Hamidur Rahman.

Finishing at the Karachi School of Art, in 1973 was not enough for Riffat, but the family could no longer afford her studies and she had to earn her living. She began by teaching art to children in her own area. Eager for recognition as well as financial reward, Riffat remembers selling her paintings for as little as fifty rupees if she could find a buyer. Together with other young artists she would solicit a wall space in the only two galleries in town, Ali Imam's Indus Gallery, and Bashir Mirza's Gallerie B.M.

She taught art and craft for several years before landing a job as product designer with the Sindh Small Industries Corporation in 1982, which gave her the opportunity to work with foreign designers, and also the chance to travel to Europe and the USA in the eighties. Her appointment as Director of the newly established V. M. Art Gallery in Karachi in 1987, helped focus her energy into promoting the work of younger painters, and gave her time to go back to her own painting. Riffat is candid about the absence of the figurative in her work, but is also emphatic that this is an unconscious preference, and not one shaped by the dictates of the Zia era. However, it could perhaps be a result of her mother's admonishments of the past.

Riffat has used the gallery space to encourage exchange of exhibitions from other countries, and to provide the opportunity for works of younger artists from all over Pakistan, to be seen in Karachi, where other private galleries are constrained to exhibit the works of better known artists.



**Family photograph with
Riffat Alvi in her mother's lap,
India - 1947-48**

She faced problems during the Zia years when the winds of orthodoxy were felt everywhere. She makes light of the legislation, the tampering with the laws of evidence to make the evidence of women half that of man. Recalling the policies that promoted calligraphy and discouraged figurative art, she says, "That was a dead end when we received a letter from the Arts Council, telling us what to paint, and to put calligraphy in our painting. Art does not need dictation, we were not willing to compromise and did not enter works for the [National] Exhibition."

She is of the view that the Zia years encouraged mediocrity in art and gave credibility to artists "who were just copyists." She used her position in the Gallery to promote creative individual vision wherever she found it. But she is aware of the economic compulsions that pressurise artists into producing works of low calibre for the art market, and is sad to see artists succumb to the pernicious demands of commerce.

The opportunity to travel opened vistas in her own painting: while working with the Sindh Small Industries Corporation, she "discovered Sindh." The civilisation of the Indus Valley moved from motif in her work to the more organic and spontaneous, surprising even Riffat. Her deeply held religious convictions seemed to find a voice in these literally earthy marks.

Living alone she ponders on the importance of marriage and motherhood in a traditional society. "The act of creation is beautiful, more beautiful than anything else. People say a woman is incomplete until she produces a child. But making a good painting... it is equal to producing a child."

The recent years of ethnic and political violence in Karachi shook her faith in her ability to paint. "When we have a period of violence in Karachi, I can never communicate



Riffat Alvi

Kanchev – 2000

Glass collage, natural earth on wood
107 x 76 cm.

Coll: The Artist

with my canvas. The firing is not at me... and it is not the subject matter of my painting, but it has destroyed my work."

Looking at the past in the context of the breakdown of urban existence, led Riffat Alvi to seek the assurance provided by mother earth. Sifting pigments from diverse terrains and soil types, she constructs works on paper and board. The first sample came from a trip to Zimbabwe in 1991; others followed fast from Moenjodaro and Taxila. The palette expanded as she travelled within Pakistan and abroad.

Working on the theme of 'Lost Civilisation' was perhaps Riffat's way of combating the destruction in her own environment; a somewhat naive, but tender feeling for the past and its destroyed cities which once saw times of great glory.

These and subsequent works, are almost bas-reliefs or incised assemblages, re-enforced by experimentation with oils, graphite, and a

variety of binders. Each sortie into a time or place is documented physically as well as through form and image. The continents of Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia have provided the substance of her surfaces. Soils are ground and processed in her studio, which has the look of a fragmented moonscape; they speak of a close alliance between Riffat Alvi and her place on the planet.

In the past two years (2000 – 2001), Riffat Alvi has worked to expand the Gallery she helped set up. A newly constructed exhibition space, studio facilities, seminar space, and an artists' residence, are evidence of the confidence she has earned from the business family, the Rangoonwalas, who are the Gallery's patrons.

Riffat Alvi's energies being centred on the V. M. Gallery may now culminate in its coming of age; her persistence is paying off in providing the city of Karachi with a much-needed cultural asset.

Qudsia Nisar (b. 1948)

Qudsia Nisar comes from a family where music, drama, poetry and an appreciation of art was taken for granted. Her mother was a university graduate, and her father was from Lucknow, and had studied at the Aligarh Muslim University; later he established the Physics Department at the Agricultural University at Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), and also the first Dramatics Club.

Qudsia remembers constant drama rehearsals, impromptu music concerts and *mushairas* in the house, where a major influence was her maternal Uncle Yunas Wasti, litterateur and friend of Hafiz Jalundhri, Nasir Jehan and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Early games consisted of laying out town plans from ancient Egypt in the garden, digging canals and watching the water wind its way. She collected boxes, tinfoil, and matchsticks – playing with them ad infinitum. The family insistence that everyone study science was the norm for the time, and applied to her as well; and she complied with the policy until she finished school.

The Girls College in Lyallpur offered Fine Arts as a subject, and Qudsia jumped at the opportunity, winning top honours at the University. A scholarship to the Fine Arts Department at the Punjab University followed and Qudsia joined the Master's programme.

The 1965 war with India disrupted life in Pakistani society. The University closed down

for several months of blackouts, air raids and subsequent demonstrations, strikes and the general political upheavals, which followed the Tashkent Declaration in December.

Finishing her MA in 1968, Qudsia was immediately appointed lecturer at the Department, and taught there for three years before moving to Karachi. She describes her student years as a time of great struggle to establish her individual identity. Her insistence on seeing things her own way invited the wrath of Anna Molka Ahmed, who would insist on a prescribed manner of approaching both subject and medium.

Qudsia recalls her experimentation with both oils and watercolour, which never quite followed the rules, laid down by the Department. But her talent was undeniable, and Anna Molka acknowledged it by inviting her to become a colleague. Qudsia remembers her mentor's amazing organisational capabilities, and her ability to marshal energies around her. They never saw eye to eye about how to teach art or to practise it, but Qudsia came away from the Department with a strong work ethic, which continues unabated.

The move to Karachi was dictated by family needs. Her father had retired, her brother had left for Canada, and she was entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the unmarried brother and sister, since her mother had developed a heart condition. Anna Molka made no bones about the thought of Qudsia's



Lt - Rt:
Meher Afroze, Qudsia Nisar
and Nahid Raza, Karachi, the 1980's

move, as the latter recalls, “[Anna Molka] told me that I’d be just a nursemaid to my mother... I tried to explain to her how responsible I felt since my mother was unwell – in the end she gave in and said I could come back whenever I wanted to.”

But Qudsia never did go back. She found the move to Karachi exhilarating in terms of artistic freedom, and being with the family was not the expected burden. She had her first exhibition soon after she arrived in the metropolis, and felt encouraged by the response. “My experiments were accepted here, and it was the opening of a new chapter.”

Her early works were tentative in their use of colour – she describes them as monochromatic – quiet, lightly composed. At the time her predilection for watercolour had not been established, and she worked in a variety of mediums before deciding that the transparency and spontaneity of watercolour was essential to her work. These works still described recognisable objects, although they also served as visual and emotional stimuli.

The ‘Voyage’ series of the early eighties catapulted her into an inner voyage, which she herself found both amazing and illuminating. She recognises that the disappearance of objects, and their replacement by personal signs and symbols, was of special significance to her.

Her mother’s hospitalisation, and subsequent death, in 1975, was a turning point for Qudsia. She considers it a time of recognising and reclaiming close family ties. Internalising her grave new responsibilities towards her father and younger siblings, she found the dialogue with her materials of immeasurable value. She recalls working out her fears and her pain with paper and watercolour late at night, when the household was asleep. She began teaching at the Central School of Art in 1977, and became Principal in 1992.

The work matured greatly in the eighties, when Qudsia was honoured with a prize in the National Exhibition, but also suffered the predicament of the artist being a woman during the Zia era. She recalls the insecurity and the rabid talk of ‘*Chaadar aur Chardiwari*’ which hinted at the possibility of women being removed from public life. She remembers ridiculing the idea that a *burqah* could offer a woman any security from molestation, or somehow make the social atmosphere more moral. She nurtured a tremendous resentment

against the strictures being publicly propagated, and yet her work of the period was lively and energetic.

Qudsia strenuously denies narrative in her work, yet insists that external influences inform what goes on in the interplay between support and medium. The work is therefore tantalising in the effort it requires to decode its symbolic notations. One begins to conclude that there is a rebellion abroad in the work, which defies the external condition, and seeks to create an



Qudsia Nisar
Human Faith/Fate - 2001
 Mixed media on paper
 41 x 51 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

inner ideal order. A very private approach to Islam is expressed in a quiet observance of ritual, and a nonchalant occasional reference to her personal relationship with God.

Qudsia's marriage to a young businessman in 1980, who was frequently away on business trips abroad, seemed to entail no major change in her work schedule. An inability to have children has been a factor in her devotion towards her work.

Travels abroad and a large number of exhibitions within Pakistan and elsewhere, heightened Qudsia's vocabulary and gave her the confidence to articulate ideas with precision. The experience of living in Karachi through times of civic turbulence involved her in a struggle to interpret these pressures in an intuitive manner.

Qudsia set herself up as a transmitter receiving "diametrically opposed entries" – sounds, human talk, silence. In her series 'Silent Shootings' she reinterpreted the realities of a battle-scarred city into a fabric of nervous, ominous hieroglyphics. She talks of an inner space, where feelings reverberate and re-arrange themselves into telling marks on the pristine white surface of the paper. Qudsia's deft handling of the medium of watercolour, often on a small scale, is highly individual. There is a delicate gestural quality to the way she makes the brush-mark, mixing it with marks made by other means – imprints of textile, metal, wood, alternating with feathery movements across the surface. Her mischievous use of symbols and mysterious configurations, sets off a chain of visual associations which charm and provoke. Her use of colour is also deceptively beguiling. There is a sophisticated sensibility which is programmed to appear accidental.

Qudsia's departure from the Central School in 2000 was unsolicited and therefore



Qudsia Nisar
Foot Prints, Nepal - 1999
Mixed media on paper
36 x 51 cm.
Coll: The Artist

traumatic. She has struggled to come to terms with being alone and working in isolation, distanced from the companionship afforded by the avenues of interaction available at the school. Since then she has travelled to Nepal, which has admitted changes in medium as well as imagery. The roughness of hand-crafted paper and motifs from Buddhist temples and tankas appear in her work as reinterpretations. She now has the time for complete focus on her painting, with intent and a certain philosophical approach.



Qudsia Nisar
Faith or Fate - 2001
Mixed media on paper
42 x 61 cm.
Coll: The Artist

Looking at almost three decades of Qudsia Nisar's work, one had begun to detect a slight reluctance to move farther afield from what had become familiar territory. The work now persists on an upbeat note with commitment to issues of peace, tolerance, and cross-cultural religious connections. The lure of the unexplored may now be a way for her to manoeuvre her way out of what had almost become an impasse in a fruitful body of work. There appears a sublimation of personal pain, in the shape of triumphant rebirth and energetic mark-making.

Nahid Raza (b. 1947)

Nahid Raza's life and work confronts the experience of being a woman in a conservative, patriarchal society. The direction her life has taken, and the choices she has made and stood by, epitomise the predicaments faced by women committed to creative experience.

Born in Delhi, she was brought up in Karachi in a family where two uncles on the paternal side were well-known artists – the Indian artist Raza, and the Pakistani Ali Imam. But for Nahid there was an early conflict between the traditional, conservative pressures of her mother, and the liberal, intellectual influence of her father, whose leftist political leanings made the family's economic status uncertain. Growing up, Nahid was conscious that hers was not what is called a 'privileged education'.

Belonging to a devoutly Shia family, Nahid remembers the observance of *Moharram* spread over two-and-a-half months every year; the whole ménage would shift to Lahore to concentrate on the rituals. Nahid recalls staring at the *Alams* for hours, fascinated by the dominance of its form. For a while they lived in Hyderabad, Sindh, where the *Tazias* are exceptionally intricate. She would sneak out with an elder cousin to watch the paper being cut, and the bamboo forms being put together like a jigsaw puzzle; a fascination which earned her the occasional spanking for coming home late.

Nahid studied for some years in a small school in Lalukhet, where she discovered her skills

at drawing. Encouraged by her father who bought her coloured pencils and drawing paper, she showed off her talent in her class, and carried right on drawing in her Persian and geography lessons, until she was discovered and suitably punished. Undeterred, she doodled her way across the school walls and ended up in the *Murgha* position in the Headmistress's office. Her art class laurels continued however, and she remembers a 'Morning Scene' which won her praise and a five rupee bonus from her father, who continued to be a friend and inspiration throughout her life.

Her mother's training was unflinching in its cultural conservatism. Nahid's tomboyishness was not condoned, and there were continual admonishments concerning how a young girl should conduct herself. There were pronouncements on how to sit, how to talk; whispering among young girls was forbidden, the *dupatta* had to be draped in the decreed manner, and the voice to be measured, and the language discreet. Nahid found this hard to bear, and chafed against what she saw as different behavior parameters for her brothers, and humiliating constraints on herself and her sisters.

Academically, she found herself struggling with the science curriculum, and having failed miserably several times, she was finally allowed to do art after her uncle Ali Imam declared that 'she is an artist!' For Nahid it was a proclamation which liberated her mind and gave her the chance to take charge of her life.



**Nahid Raza as a student,
Central School of Art,
Karachi, the 1960's**



Nahid Raza

Buraq – 2001
Mixed media on canvas
63 x 63 cm.
Private Coll.

Much against her mother's wishes, who violently disagreed with her studying art, Nahid started at the Karachi School of Art. After a year she went to the Central School of Art, where Ali Imam had taken over as Principal.

For the first time Nahid was confronted with class differences in Pakistani society. Never having studied in a co-educational institution, she was naturally uneasy, but more traumatic was the realisation that her educational background and her inability to understand or speak English was to be a major stumbling block in her social acceptability in her new environment. She taught herself English by reading novelettes and pestering her father

and uncle with questions. She soon began to fathom the lectures on art history, but verbal fluency evaded her for a long time.

Nahid's vivacity, good looks, and talent soon made her the favoured companion of other artists in Karachi's restricted art circles. For the first time, she became aware of the underlying chauvinism of the seemingly avant-garde young men. Refusing to name names, she remembers how a well-known painter declared, "No woman can ever be an artist!"

Graduating from the Central School in 1970, and utterly involved with the romance of being a painter, she was a challenge for the male painters around her who wanted to dominate

her artistic direction, as well as to dictate her choice of a life-partner. Nahid's work at this time demonstrated her delight in the tactile sensuousness of paint, which referred to her urban surroundings without being figurative. There was a patchwork quality to her canvases, which were energetic, if loose in construction. She married fellow painter Maqsood Ali shortly after a successful group show at the Indus Gallery in 1972. She remembers this time as being full of contradictory pressures from friends and mentors.

Nahid candidly acknowledges lack of maturity, and a state of unpreparedness for the adjustments required in her new situation. Self-involved, emotional, and passionate about painting, she found herself in a demanding domestic scenario which was hard to cope with, including her first pregnancy.

She handed over her daughter Zainab to her mother for the first three months after the baby's birth. Nahid confesses to being torn between her desire to paint and her new motherhood. She immersed herself in her domestic obligations during the day, sat down to paint in the evenings, and would then go to visit her infant daughter at her mother's home. She'd hold the baby for an hour or two, and then go home to play hostess at her husband's numerous social get-togethers.

Nahid reflects on the problems arising out of two painters marrying one another. She realises that she naïvely visualised two creative people working side by side in an idyllic artistic environment; the actualities turned out to be radically different. She found that the attention she showered on her work infuriated her husband, who insisted on taking her out on social jaunts whenever she sat down to paint. She travelled to Paris with him, and visited her Uncle Raza in his studio. In his work she found an endorsement of her own intuitive vision.



Nahid Raza

Woman Series - 1991

Acrylic on paper

56 x 76 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi

Her work continued, with exhibitions in Karachi and Rawalpindi in 1973 and 1975 and again in 1978 at the Indus Gallery in Karachi. Working in heavily impastoed oils, Nahid returned to the figurative, ruminating on her second pregnancy, and the birth of her son Afsar. Her palette became darker; the verve was subdued.

Professionally, the eighties were years of growing maturity. Her 'Chaukandi' series, based on the Sindhi tombs at Chaukandi near Karachi, gave focus to what had been at times a fervent but perfunctory abstract, expressionist approach. It was increasingly obvious that the linear motif and pattern was the 'take-off' point from which Nahid constructed the textures of her surface. It also provided the content which could be expanded to suggest narratives of moods and time.

Her decision to seek a divorce was not taken lightly and, as expected, brought on intense family opposition. It was considered a highly controversial and socially unacceptable step. Nahid accepted her husband's demand to promise not to remarry if she wanted to keep her children. Refused child maintenance, she fell back on painting to support herself and her children. These difficult years coincided with the larger and gloomier national situation for women. The Zia years with their legal onslaught on the status of women, the restrictions on women's participation in national life, the growth of a fundamentalist orthodox lobby in all avenues of socio-political existence, all formed an ominous background for a woman divorcee who also happened to be an artist.

Surprisingly, in Nahid's case, as in the case of numerous other women, these dismal circumstances served as a gauntlet, stimulating a flurry of activity. Nahid had always been politically conscious, joining student demonstrations, and supporting leftist politics as a matter of course, but all this was never

an active component or influence in her painting, until now.

Nahid's personal complications found expression in a mushrooming of themes to do with women. Her personal struggle fused with the larger struggle of women brewing in Zia's regime when, ironically, she won her first National Award in 1980.

The implications of new legislation enacted by Zia, like the Hudood Ordinance, were not lost on Nahid. That these were thinly veiled attempts to legitimise an illegal regime by its emphasis on 'Islam', was a fact quite obvious to her and other creative women. Nahid intuitively understood the relationship between the fragility of her own social status and the larger political game in which an insidiously discriminatory Islamic card was being played. The new laws and decrees equated rape with adultery, recommended restrictive dress norms, and frowned on women in the cultural sector who did not conform to a specified code of behavior and expression.

Nahid's prolific artistic activity was her specific form of reply and rebellion. In her quest to universalise the particular, Nahid looked at Egyptian and Indian mythology, sifting motifs and symbols that answered her needs. A much-needed interlude in Germany and the USA introduced her to printmaking and acrylics, which gave a fillip to her work. Emotional recoveries were possible when themes evolved out of direct female experience.

Nahid embarked upon a series of works which referred to her experience, as well as the socio-political circumstances. The titles of the series are indicative of their content: 'Biography of a Woman', 'Woman for Sale', 'Divorce', 'The Letter – A Reply'. She felt that her own response to the female was strikingly different from that of male painters whose gaze confirmed the female body as an object. For Nahid, the woman's body carried an abundance of meanings. The deeper emotional



Nahid Raza

Code of Silence – 1981
Acrylic on hand-made paper
36 x 53 cm.
Coll: The Artist

connotations were apparent. Images flowed out of feelings of fear, betrayal, loyalty, affection and sensual lyricism. The contrasts between pain and pleasure, anger and joy were often sublimated by her virtuosity in texture. A flamboyant use of gesture was coupled with an equally flamboyant use of colour.

Symmetry has a special place in Nahid's spatial preferences. For a long time, she has placed a deliberate emphasis on boundaries, as though hemming in and curbing her own.

Her works in the eighties were done almost exclusively on paper, heavily impastoed encrustations worked and reworked. Her delight in colour was sometimes curbed, and she worked equally deftly in black and white with delicate, finely tuned marks. One found in Nahid's work contrary messages of defiance and seduction.

With her children grown up, and with a number of national and international awards to her credit, Nahid set up her own Studio School in Karachi in 1994, which was a logical extension of her outgoing, communicative temperament.

Years of combat in an often unfriendly, censorious environment have produced a more wary, but not less spontaneous attitude to her life and work. Exhibiting with a dedicated regularity, she has had solo shows every year since 1996 in Karachi, at the Indus and Chawkandi Galleries. Recent works on canvas and wood draw inspiration from truck art. Peacocks, patterns, and garlands galore jostle one another on the canvas – a busy tapestry. The textures and meanings in the variegated landscapes of her life come together in swathes of colour and ebullient images. Her energy is undiminished.



Nahid Raza
in her Studio – 2001



Women's demo Lahore - Feb 12th , 1983.

1977 – 1987

Calling their Bluff: Women Under Martial Law

Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government was overthrown by a military take-over on July 5th, 1977. General Zia-ul-Haq's coup d'état which followed in the wake of the opposition's call for the vaguely defined 'Nizam-e-Mustafa' or 'Islamic rule', took very clear cut steps to consolidate state power with a blueprint of its interpretation of a truly Islamic State. For women the implications were serious, since the emphasis of the new policies seemed to be legislation which undermined their already tenuous legal and social status.

While this may not have radically affected the lot of rural women, for the educated middle-class and upper-middle-class women, this gave legal sanction to the vision of a theocratic, fundamentalist state propagated by the clergy and the 'Islamic' parties.

One manifestation of the new Islamic policies promulgated by General Zia was an official disapproval of those arts which were deemed to be ideologically objectionable. Dance was forbidden, music frowned upon, and the visual

arts directed to be 'Islamic' in form and content. This was implemented through policy letters circulated among institutions, through speeches in public forums and media, and patronage of 'acceptable' works of art, i.e. landscapes, calligraphy, and portraits of national leaders. These restrictions, although privately ridiculed by the educated liberal intelligentsia, were nevertheless followed in the public forums, and carefully adhered to in the media.

For women artists, who had seldom viewed their work in the socio-political context, these new developments appeared ominous. Their creative activities, which they themselves had believed to be marginal in the wider national framework, slowly became to be viewed as a subversive act of resistance, in an atmosphere antagonistic to all women, regardless of their class or social origin.

In 1983, a group of women artists met during the National Exhibition at the Alhamra Art Centre in Lahore, and drafted a manifesto for themselves. The fifteen signatories included Abbasi Abidi, Meher Afroze, Talat Ahmed, Veeda Ahmed, Shehrezade Alam, Riffat Alvi, Mamoon Bashir, Salima Hashmi, Birjees Iqbal, Zubeida Javed, Jalees Nagi, Qudsia Nisar, Nahid Raza, Lala Rukh, and Rabia Zuberi. In this they bonded for the first time with women activists, journalists, lawyers, writers, performers, and poets. The manifesto was never made public but the act of getting together was symbolic of their growing

awareness of a possible focus for their artistic practice. It began:

We, the women artists of Pakistan, having noted with concern the decline in status and condition of the life of Pakistani women, and having noted the effects of the anti-reason, anti-arts environment on the quality of life in our homeland, and having noted the significant contribution which the pioneering women artists have made to the cause of arts and art education in Pakistan, and believing as we do in the basic rights of all men, women and children to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labour and cultural self-realisation and our commitment as practitioners and teachers of the arts to the noblest ideals of a free, rational and civilised existence, affirm the following principles to guide us in our struggle for the cultural development of our people to serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan...

There followed seven principles⁹ which acknowledged the contribution made by women artists to art education and art practice, paid homage to women's struggle, and proposed to work for a society free from the constraints of intolerance and obscurantism.

Ironically, this decade of extreme political and social oppression found a response in the work of women artists who not only refused to comply with the dictates of the State, but also emerged as significant artistic voices of their time.

Nilofar Akmut (b. 1956)

Nilofar Akmut's travels and nomadic existence have shaped her art. Delving into the social and historical currents in Pakistan to mould her work, it is ironic that she is almost unknown in her own country. It is only recently that she has taken to "coming home." As she puts it, "It is only now that I could afford to do so, financially, intellectually, and emotionally; even though I still find it difficult, given my personal history."

In 1947, her family moved across the partitioned sub-continent to Pakistan. Her father's job took him across the country and Nilofar remembers the early experience of constantly moving as an important one. She recalls that her father was interested in historical sites, and they travelled by car mainly in Sindh, making Nilofar aware of ancient civilisations at an early age. She also remembers being encouraged by her father in her interest in art. He took her to a friend's studio where she did some woodcarving.

Art materials were available in the home, and she knew that she "really wanted" to be an artist, "even when my family tried to persuade me otherwise, with a lot of leg pulling and laughing about me."

Growing up in Karachi, she went to the Grammar School and attended the conventional art classes which she found excessively boring. She found her way to the National College of Arts in Lahore, where she worked at painting and sculpture. These years

away from home were the beginning of a different kind of odyssey.

Nilofar began to get a glimpse of what was to be a major struggle to find a voice and a sense of selfhood in her work. The College was not equipped to allow her the opportunity to explore the possibilities in sculpture. The out-moded and rather uninformed approach to the three-dimensional sapped her enthusiasm and her energies. She managed to make her way into the ceramics studio and worked in ceramic sculpture entirely on her own initiative, bulldozing it briefly into the curriculum. However, the four years at NCA did strengthen her determination to be independent, in both the personal and the professional sense. Supported by her brother, she went to the Byam Shaw School of Art in London, where she was somewhat withdrawn in the first year, trying to work out what she wanted to do as a painter. It was two years later, after many discussions with her peers, mostly women, that she began to understand and make sense of her unexpressed affinity with sculpture. She went on to St. Martin's School of Art and finally to the Slade, where she became a graduate student in the department of sculpture.

Nilofar's migrations drew her inward, forcing her to counteract the external with thoughtful excursions into her own past, and of where she came from. She remembers her struggles with life drawing and her attitude towards the human body: "In an Islamic country the figure is something which one does not look at. One



Nilofar Akmut
Heads on Beds Series - 2002
Installation
Size unavailable
Coll: The Artist

did not look at the naked body. In Art school in England, when we drew from the nude, my teacher told me that my attention span was exactly 20 minutes! After that I just couldn't seem to hold free and draw! I thought a lot about this problem. I had my 'conservativeness' or inability to deal with that situation."

Distancing herself from her home and its trappings created opportunities for Nilofar to sift and analyse influences, components, and compulsions. The exposure to feminist ideas in conjunction with delving into personal memories, and the experience of being a woman from Pakistan, were important factors; dealing with the reality of sculptural materials was also a major challenge. Discarding most of the obvious choices which she found irrelevant to her thematic concerns, Nilofar worked in non-traditional materials such as human hair, perhaps an indication of her desire for human connections and bonding, or the subliminal understanding of the invisibility enforced on women, rather than "mere vanity of the hair as adornment."

Nilofar's choice of a life partner also came about as an extension of living in London. Naveed, a young Pakistani chartered accountant, was enlightened and understanding of her vision and commitment to her passion. Moving to Dubai for his work made Nilofar's physical existence even more peripatetic as she shuttled between London and the Middle East, sometimes taking up projects in Germany and later in Thailand. The constant voyaging crystallised into complex multi-faceted approaches in her work, which defy easy classifications. Nilofar remembers the evolution of content in her work: "I started collecting material from my family album, putting together images, my perceptions. I started looking at how I could combine these with my sculpture, bring them together in one piece."



Nilofar Akmut
Testimonial – 1999
 Installation
 Size unavailable
 Coll: The Artist

These very first projects in the mid-eighties explored her family's history, whose lives were interwoven with the freedom movement, on both sides of the clan. Nilofar's study of the colonial history of the sub-continent, as well as the feudal traditions that shape women's lives everywhere, has been visible in her work. Standing back from and immersing herself in what she calls "my own culture", has necessarily meant defying taboos

and embracing history all at once. Nilofar acknowledges this paradox of the 'insider-outsider' when she points out that she is an observer, and also at the same time "carries history like a burden on my shoulder."

Large thematic works which melded photography, textiles, plastic as well as wood, were ambitious in their imagery and the underlying questions of belonging and

meaning. Nilofar has employed light and sound as intrinsic stimulators to the dialogue when confronting a work. She muses on the process of working, "In sculpture, I have a lot of sensual contact; also in photography. There is a sensual thrill when I see the image emerging from the photograph. With sculpture it is so much slower. It can take months to make a piece because I work on a large scale. One can also keep making changes in a photograph – not with sculpture."

There are contradictory elements of randomness and order in Nilofar's work. Often working within a visual and physical grid to lay connections and parameters, she then subverts the geometry. This defiance is inherent in all her constructs, and reaches its extreme when she destroys the work itself, questioning its need to exist beyond the life ordained by circumstance and the artist.

Living in the U.A.E. has not been easy for Nilofar who resents the validity of her work being questioned. She muses that, "It is not the way we dress or look, but the way we think that is dangerous. It bothers me that when we live in the west we proceed in this manner which is weird for them, and then when I'm in the east, I'm treated as a westerner. Its very tiring to keep explaining yourself to others – the best way perhaps is to spend your life in silence!"

But to remain silent in her work is not one of Nilofar's options. Reclaiming her own history for herself and for others has been a recent theme.

The traumatic events of the Partition of the sub-continent, viewed in a feminist perspective, were the subject of an ambitious installation in a travelling exhibition titled 'Transition of riches'. It was originally seen in Britain at the Birmingham Museum and City Art Gallery.

"Dislocation, suffering from politics of pain



Nilofar Akmut
Bodily Perceptions – 2002
Installation
Size unavailable
Coll: The Artist

and conflicting loyalties of migrants from one land to the other", was how Nilofar described her 1994 installation 'Dear Women of the Indian sub-continent'. In it, she also looked at the freedom movement from the woman's point of view. "Too often, women's active participation in making history is overlooked and goes unnoticed. The women of India were politicised during the freedom movement and the women's movement owes its existence to national politics; mothers, wives, daughters, sisters found themselves plummeted into the forefront of politics."

Nilofar used photographs of the time along a grid, together with a map of the sub-continent hanging upside-down. Objects from the lives of women – real bags of salt (a reference to

Gandhi's march against the imposition of a salt tax – and photographs of the sea (where the march culminated) were part of the mosaic. The element of sound was added with a rendering of Faiz's poem 'Yeh dagh dagh ujala' ('This night-bitten dawn'). Viewers had to move along the walls, scanning, reading, becoming part of the ritual of the processions as they moved along. Photographs of flames and the sea on opposite walls were symbolic of the eternal paradoxes and contradictions.

Quite logically, the element of performance came to be incorporated into Nilofar's installations. The spread of her vision is paralleled by the diversity of her methodology. Her research includes fieldwork that consists of interviews, photo-journalistic searches, written records, and primary data. Her visual references and materials are equally diverse and all encompassing, moving from the physicality of steel, wool and feathers, to architectonic structures and furniture. When scale and expanse defy her, Nilofar turns to performance as an extension of the process. This performance is not taken on as an elegant resolution, but as a rough, often brutal questioning. Not bothered with the demands or pre-conceived conjecture of her audience, she sets out to disturb the status quo.

Nilofar Akmut withdraws into isolation to take on punishingly ambitious themes. She looks at issues of militarisation, of the madness of nuclear testing in South-Asia, as well as the human body. As she puts it, "The body, as a site of investigation, political/sexual – to be debated in terms of the female gaze, investigating herself outside the patriarchal gaze." She emblazons her body with 'nuclear' clouds or militaristic images.

These layers of narrative and meaning – the physical and ephemeral – run parallel and deep in Nilofar Akmut's work. They raise unanswerable questions about the continuities and discontinuities of our time.

Naazish Ataullah (b. 1950)

Naazish Ataullah is a painter and printmaker who came to her idiom later than most, having chosen to marry and have children before looking to her own expression. Although her mother was a woman of many talents, including being a painter of no mean accomplishment, Naazish, a student of literature, never thought the visual would be her option. She has strong memories of sitting in the *sehan* of their home in Rawalpindi, on a potty, looking up at the sky, or at the buffaloes in the house. "I must have spent quite a lot of time on that potty, because I'd just daydream and look around. There were elder family members, their faces, gestures, the way they said their prayers..."

As children, she and her brother were made to pose for their mother, and they learnt to take

the activity very seriously. Also taken seriously were the codes to do with clothes, food, the manner of living and social behaviour.

The family's origins were from the Indian side of the border and Naazish was very aware of the liberal Muslim tradition in the arts as she was growing up. "My grandmother came from Bareilly, from a 'Nawab' type of background, and they had lots of people in the house, including a lot of musicians. I remember a man who must have played the harmonium, who landed up in Karachi without any means of income. He knew my grandmother, was from her hometown, and taught us singing. So at the age of five, those were the sort of things which were a part of one's upbringing. We had a *tanpura* in the house, and a harmonium and *tablas* and we were made to sing. My mother was learning classical dance, so there was the sound of *ghungroos*, and those were the things you took seriously, that you learnt and acquired."

There were some other unusual members of the household who added flavour to Naazish's childhood experience: "My father's distant cousin, whose name was Jalil-Ul-Qadr, was nicknamed Pyaare Mian. He was quite a famous musician. He had done the usual thing – broken away from the family, left his wife, learnt singing and gone off to Lucknow, marrying a lady called 'Bibbo'... Then he came to Pakistan in the sort of sorry state that a lot of other people did. He came to live with us because he didn't have a place to live... For

two years Pyaare Dada lived with us... because of him, every musician of repute who came to Karachi came to our house... There was always a *mehfil* and we were made to participate. I remember I had to sing '*Basant Bahar*'... one was taught to differentiate between what was good and what was mediocre."

Naazish's father, Aftab Ahmed Khan, had been assigned to Bengal from 1941, where he served in the Civil Service until 1947. He spoke Bengali, and was close to the political leaders including Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, who chose him to be his Principal Secretary on becoming Prime Minister. This was seen as a political promotion for which he later suffered.

At the time of Major General Ayub Khan's military takeover in 1958, Aftab Ahmed Khan wrote him a long paper evaluating the political situation in what was then East Pakistan. The paper suggested that the imposition of Martial Law would be highly detrimental to the political process, and might lead to a severing of East Pakistan from the rest of the country.

Naazish remembers that the General did not take kindly to this long memo from a civil servant, and her father was one of two civil servants sacked for political reasons, among the famous three hundred and three dismissed for 'corruption and inefficiency'. Aftab Ahmed Khan came to Karachi, was promptly implicated in the 'Poster Conspiracy Case', and found himself in prison.

The accused were tried by military tribunal, and Naazish's father was sentenced to ten years imprisonment, later commuted, and he was released in 1962 after having served three years. Naazish muses, "When you come from a protected, a professional bureaucrat's background... and are suddenly confronted with a situation like this... most people shunned anyone who was in trouble... one became aware of the fact that we were being ostracised... we had the CID outside the house... Suddenly you are thrown out of a set up house, your stuff is thrown in the road, police is all over the place... and then we lived in one room in my grandmother's house..."

The visual images that have remained with Naazish are strong: "The barracks inside the jail... looking at the gallows, vast expanses of space, the way the sun is coming down on the flat, parched earth... which is being swept by jailers." The family decided that Naazish and her brother could not be subjected to the political tribulations that besieged all of them. They were packed off to boarding school in England. They would come home for the summers, and so were here when their father was released. He suffered a severe heart attack immediately afterwards. Naazish recalls, "When my father came out of jail, the house became a place where there were politicians in and out. Discussions about what was to happen... One came into contact with a wide range of people – writers, political workers."

Naazish was very close to her father, and greatly admired his unruffled calm. His ability to be optimistic in the most difficult of circumstances and to cater to the needs of those around him, shaped her own personality and informed her social and political awareness.

She does not remember there being many prominent artists in Karachi society, unlike the large number of writers and intellectuals.



Naazish Ataulloh

Chaadar VI – 1987

Aquatint

27 x 42 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi

"There were very few people who were practising as artists. Sadeqain was given a lot of patronage by Suhrawardy, who was one of the first people to organise an exhibition for him. But because there was no institution of any kind in Karachi, it didn't reach many people. Lahore was different."

Her mother was keen that Naazish take up a career, but for the daughter it was a time of rebellion. There may have been strong reasons for her mother's insistence, which she acknowledges. "It was very much because she was not a career woman herself, even though she was a very talented person. She felt that she could have pursued a career very successfully..."

Naazish's rebellion took a different turn when she met her husband-to-be, son of family friends, and got emotionally involved. "It was the first time that I had got seriously involved, so consequently I got married very young. Very shortly afterwards I realised that I should have completed my education, or got on with a profession. So the first opportunity that I got, I took up my education."

Naazish's daughters were in school when she looked around for opportunities in higher education, and found that all avenues were closed for anyone wanting to get into university after a break. Twenty-seven years old and eager to improve her qualifications, she found that no institution would accept her. Someone suggested the National College of Arts, at the time open to applicants of all ages, and she prepared for the test. "I was now twenty-eight years old, and I went into it very, very gingerly. At the end of the first year, I felt this is what I want to do..."

But for Naazish, as for other women in the same situation, the problems of balancing her education with the responsibilities of the home and children were strenuous and demanding. "I lived with the same kind of guilt that other

women live with. The same dilemma about neglecting your children, that your role is perhaps solely to be looking after your husband, your children, to see that your kitchen is clean... There is a kind of schism. You are very schizophrenic sometimes, one thing weighs more than the other does, depending on what the requirements are."

But Naazish managed to graduate in 1983 with a first class. She discovered a preference for printmaking during a trip to New York and a short stint at lithography at Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Studio. She was awarded a British Council Scholarship in 1984, and went to the Institute of Education at the University of London to do her Art Teacher's Certificate. Simultaneously, she did post-graduate work in printmaking at the Slade School with Bartholomeu Dos Santos.

Coming back to Lahore after a year, she was appointed Lecturer at NCA and set about reorganising the printmaking department with Anwar Saeed, another printmaker and colleague. She recalls the facilities as she had experienced them as a student: "...there were two old lithographic presses, seventeen or eighteen litho stones... one of the old *Ustaads* was essentially a press man. So really there was nothing in terms of technical facilities."

Naazish set about changing all that. She and Anwar, joined later by Afshar Malik, undertook a crusade to improve the studio facilities, order materials and equipment, and raise funds. All this was achieved with a fierce determination and missionary zeal. Teachers from abroad were persuaded to conduct workshops, among them Dos Santos, and Peter Daglish from the Chelsea School of Art. The first student with a specialisation in printmaking graduated in 1986, and the department is now one of the strongest in the college, and the only one to offer facilities of its kind in Pakistan.

For Naazish, the energy, enthusiasm and the input into the Department and into her teaching has meant little time being left over for her own work. "I feel angry at myself... the volume of work I had wanted to produce, I have not done... But I don't have that kind of driving ambition for myself... I have a lot of drive and ambition for developing the studio, for it to be the 'best in Asia'... For getting good things for my students, for setting up other workshops or whatever. The work I do gives me tremendous satisfaction. I'm not in a panic because I haven't had twenty solo exhibitions. I'm not in that ball game..."

Her protestations notwithstanding, Naazish Ataullah has produced a body of work in painting and in printmaking, which is a thought provoking statement in terms of both form and content. Embarking upon her professional career in the mid-eighties, Naazish became a member of the Women's Action Forum, and later the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, political commitments which came to inform her work. "There are events which occur which have acted as a sort of catalyst for me – propelled me into doing a certain kind of work... the whole business of women's issues in this country... you have to respond to it, and one's work was the only means one had at hand..."

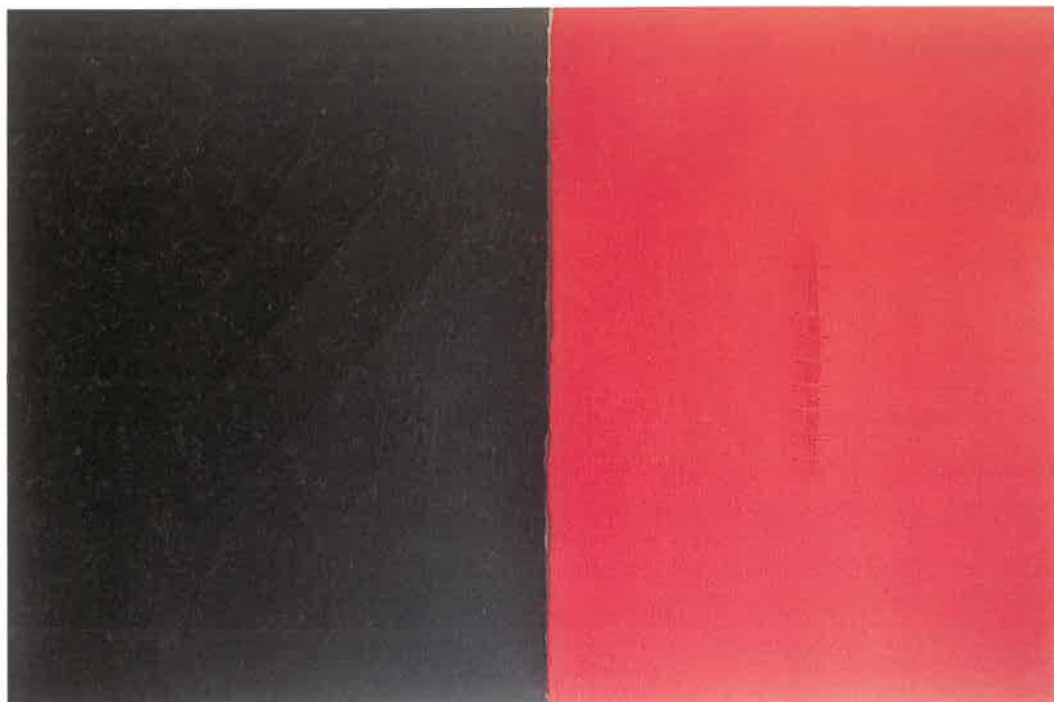
Naazish has tried to find metaphors which connect with tradition, but become transformed in their fresh contexts. She uses the symbol of the shell, juxtaposing it with suggestions of layers. "I held the shell upright, it was not lying down, not supine at all, so it had different connotations... It is the kind of form which is instantly recognisable. There are the inner and outer layers. The obvious and not so obvious... Choosing the shell, which I know is a sexual form, has many connotations. To me it was a very interesting form in terms of its volume, its strength and its power." Working earlier with the *Chaadar* as a metaphor, Naazish

was concerned with both its claustrophobic, shroud-like, savage attributes, and its protective, comforting secretive presence.

Among the taboos enforced during the Zia regime was the ban on dance. Nahid Siddiqui, the eminent *Kathak* exponent, lived and performed in exile. Her few performances in Pakistan had to take place in private homes, or in diplomatic venues such as the Goethe Institute or the American Centre. Naazish based a series of works on one of these clandestine performances. "Nahid is so brilliant, and the fact that this woman was not allowed to express herself openly for political reasons, and because of the existing bigotry – I felt very strongly about it, so those works on paper were an immediate response to it."

Apart from the significance of content, Naazish's work in printmaking and painting carries a deep concern for its formal aspects. Technical processes, the medium, the imperatives of surface are all addressed with a meticulous care. Looking for contrasts in meaning, the interest of juxtapositioning of materials and marks works to reinforce the imagery. Spatial divisions and relationships have fascinated her, reminding one of her serious interest in architecture; traditional motifs, apertures and tensions are re-interpreted. The storyboard or film strip appears as a device for rhythmic movement and story telling; the frame is consciously employed and re-employed in a number of ways, alternately decorative and stark.

The desire to be both contemporary and traditional is a common phenomenon with artists attempting to bridge many worlds and centuries at once. But for Naazish it is not a self-conscious act; rather, a philosophical venture which encompasses many aspects of a woman's existence. The social and political underpinning to her images have a strong gender bias, and yet carry any number of



Naazish Ataullah

Sunless Monday I – 1999

Acrylic and thread on paper

115 x 77 cm.

Coll: N. Pasha

multiple meanings which exonerate them from being strictly bound in time and place.

Naazish's recent work contemplates the hierarchies invested in the 'making' of work. Engaged in the reclaiming of craft as a valid vehicle for her practice, she negotiates the 'mark' with needle and thread, and with slits and tears, which rip open the surface. The works speak of grief, anguish, and subsequent return to philosophical repose. The medium is heavy handmade paper, saturated with layers of acrylic wash in deep cadmium reds and brilliant ultramarines. Working with knife,

hammer, thread, and hair, she constructs an image which is minimal, abstract, and essential. These works may be read on many levels – purely formal, or deeply emotional.

Concerning women artists debating the pros and cons of their role in the future, Naazish is forthright about how she sees their contribution: "In a country like ours, it becomes a sort of moral responsibility, which weighs heavily on one. I can't change the whole of society, but as a conscious, educated person, at least I can, in my own sphere, do the best I am capable of doing."

Sylvat Aziz (b. 1954)

“... The fifties... until 1965, we roamed from Karachi to Islamabad to Peshawar... it was the best time a child could have had. It was secure – going swimming, meeting kids, girls and boys from the same kind of background. One was free within one’s social circle.”

Sylvat’s mother is a doctor who got married while still a student, and had three children before she completed her degree. There was no dearth of role models for Sylvat as there were other professional women in the family – doctors, engineers, teachers.

For Sylvat Aziz, her future had been charted out for her as early as she can remember. “My career was planned since Day One; I was going to be a doctor and that was that. In our family you were supposed to study, and you were supposed to excel! But then you were also supposed to get married and have children!”

She realised that she was good at drawing while at school. Her art teacher Yasmin Khattak told her that it was obviously going to be her career.

But it was much later that Sylvat realised that art may be an actual option, when a friend who had been admitted to medical college dropped out to do textile design at the National College of Arts. She remembers, “There was a certain rebellion... My parents certainly didn’t want me to go there. Not that I was highly motivated or anything, but the

wonderful co-ed atmosphere impressed the seventeen year old’s mind. I guess I went to NCA for the sense of freedom, or perhaps a sense of adventure. NCA was an alternative to marriage in those days.”

Coming to the National College was a radical change for Sylvat. “The political atmosphere there was really charged. One got into talks with all kinds of people. The male and female Left Wing, the mixing of classes, nationalities, ‘Urdu-medium’ and ‘English-medium’, which in itself was political.”

After finishing her Diploma in Art, she took up a job in an advertising agency as a visualiser; but wanting to continue her studies in another field, she joined the MA classes in English at Government College. The Zia era had begun, and educational institutions were beginning to bear the brunt. “A lot happened in those years. The whole state of affairs was very sad. Suddenly we stopped discussing things. Unfortunate things started happening to some of the student union people.”

All of this was not reflected in Sylvat’s art, as she did very little of it in those days. Gaining admission to the Pratt Institute in New York, she studied printmaking for a year. “The year I spent there was absolutely invaluable, and the lessons I learnt at the time are still helping me. It gave me a discipline, and a habit of working. It made me give up my craze for fashion, and made me live with the bare minimum, and made me stronger. Then I

For Sylvat Aziz, Pakistan’s political scenario after 1977 caused a major disruption in her academic career. Studying literature at Government College, Lahore, her two-year MA course took five years to complete due to the disturbances following Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s trial and death sentence.

Sylvat’s cocooned upbringing as the daughter of an Air Force officer had never been affected by Pakistan’s turbulent socio-political history before. Growing up in Air Force cantonments all over the country, one being identical to all the others in terms of the social, educational and professional environment, Sylvat remembers it as being protected, privileged and indulgent.



Sylvat Aziz
Sculpture – 2001
 Copper over welded steel
 covered with dyed cloth
 ht. 335 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

couldn't afford it. I wasn't getting any money from home, so I applied to Concordia [in Canada]. They offered me an assistantship for two years and everything fell into place."

The Montreal experience was invaluable for Sylvat professionally, even though it ran parallel to tremendous emotional ups and downs. She comments on the fact that women from her kind of background are never equipped to deal with the emotional and physical aspects of life, and now analyses how the problems to do with being a woman from a Muslim culture affect her life and sensibilities, "...we have problems because of class structure, segregation, different ambitions, different freedoms. I think a woman carries out her objectives very differently from a man... we pretend to be a little stupid, or a little wise... you have to do this dance... it's a kind of trade-off."

For Sylvat, meeting her Spanish husband Ricardo was, "the best thing that happened to me... he's a sculptor and a person who's very sensitive to various issues, and I didn't have to teach him anything... my family accepted him." Motherhood for her was something which was mutually decided on with her husband.

But for her work, it has meant a greater sharing of responsibility, looking after her daughter during the day, spending the evening with her husband, and painting late at night.

The experience of motherhood has yet to come out theoretically in her work, as she says it's not an experience for public consumption, even though she once used the baby's footprints in one of her works. "Having a child is a magic thing. I wouldn't have it with just anybody. I've been through great trouble to avoid it with the wrong person. I had this ten years later than I should have..."

Her years of living away from Pakistan have

imbued Sylvat's work with a multiplicity of issues to do with her feminist concerns, her Muslim background, and her research into the material culture of many regions. She empathises with her origins, both as a woman and as heir to an ancient, conservative, traditional edifice. "You can hardly live your life in an Islamic community and not notice how it is an over riding factor. I don't see any male willingness to re-interpret or give up certain privileges... In the Pathan community so much potential is going to waste. There's little you can do within the veil. This leads me into the political arena, since the veil is a political tool; it confines you, it restricts you physically. The society is divided into male and female squares, and devices such as female veiling are limitations... limits access to information, and restricts your function as a meaningful individual doing meaningful work in the social network."

Sylvat extensively researched art forms in Islam for her post-graduate studies in religion and her artwork reflected these academic investigations; her images referring to the culture, religion, and politics of the regions she looked at.

Not surprisingly, contrasts have always presented themselves to Sylvat as formal stimulators, and as the premise from which her work proceeds. She withdraws from the lyrical just in time, then juxtaposes it with the harshness of circumstance. The desire to ornament is kept on a tight leash as she lays it out in a 'context' of severity or irony.

She researches her themes with great thoroughness, addressing internal networks and visual connections, keeping an eye on the relevance of politics and power games. Living in the first world, she sublimates anger and injustice, both past and present, and translates it into what she hopes will be provocative positions. This has required keeping close to



Sylvat Aziz
Maqamāt – 2000-01
 Oil on canvas
 152 x 304 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

socio-political realities both in Pakistan and other such countries of the world. "Through contrast and analysis, I compare the political and socio-religious imagery of folk art traditions and culture of Pakistan and other Islamic countries, with the West's driving socio-economic cultural forces."

In the 1992 series, 'Screens', Sylvat was, "using walls... bright... the *Shamiana*, hiding perhaps, deprivation... the images of veiled figures... Unfortunately some women who have power, whether it is social or religious,

seem to wear the veil as a privilege, they're proud of the fact that men have killed for them... they are unmoved by the plight of those women who are in jail in rape and *zina* cases... I find it sickening that when the Shish Mahal was declared a World Heritage site, the dungeons in the fort were still being used..."

Sylvat's training as a printmaker and photographer was instrumental in the shaping of her imagery in the eighties and early nineties, reflected in the openness with which she assembled materials and medium into cohesive dialogue. "I strongly believe that used judiciously and competently, a crossing of borders in the visual arts media is enriching, and makes more interesting art-making possible." This experimentation has led to a concern for conservation of materials; she notes, "Mixing media is a risky business." The investigation into and respect for materials has emerged as a crucial component in her work. This interest is now a formal research project at Queens University in Canada, where she is currently Associate Professor in the Art Department. She is studying the adaptation of industrial methods and materials for the contemporary art practitioner. In collaboration with her colleague Bernard Ziolkewicz from the Department of Physics, she has devised a revolutionary electro-chemical etching process for the printmaker.

Scale is important to Sylvat's work. She has aspired to create environments which draw the viewer into their confines and then allow him or her to ruminate in their details. "I wanted to get away from printmaking and cover a large substantial area. One piece was the story of Anarkali Bazaar, a busy sun-saturated streetscape." One can sense a nostalgia here which Sylvat struggles to overcome and intersperse with reminders of grim social realities of life 'back home', together with vividness of motifs, colour and texture.



Sylvat Aziz
Beyrun – 2000-01
 Oil on canvas
 305 x 213 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

In 1993's 'A Map is not the Territory', a series executed in pigments, dyes, henna, printing ink, woodcut and collage, Sylvat explored "how an arbitrary line can bring into question the validity of an entire people's right to be." The narratives were about political ramifications in the not-so-distant past in the Subcontinent and the Middle East.

In 1997, Sylvat participated in a group show entitled 'Mappings: Shared Histories-A Fragile Self', with other artists from India and Pakistan. The artists were looking at the changing maps which had to do with fifty years of South-Asian history and Independence, and the controversial divisions which continued to mark the lives of the people of the region.

Sylvat's research into cartography has merged the political with the visual. The distance from home and the opportunity to roam the world has afforded her an overview alongside the intensity of in-depth investigation. She looks into the symbolic and functional testimonies that she can own or reject, on many levels; intellectual, cultural, emotional, and visual.

In Istanbul, Turkey, she takes images from manuscripts and juxtaposes them with contemporary imagery, demonstrating perhaps the mosaic of her own life. She looks at the Persian notion of the 'paradise' as the 'garden'. The Islamic architectural space, seemingly functional, opens up to suggest an intuitive inner space, which speaks of repose and a desired state of being.

The evidence of these concerns forms the visual substance of the work, which continuously changes its scale, medium, and material. Says Sylvat, "The confluence of cultural imperatives interests me." The 'Muqaddama' series of 1998 was composed of installations of monumental and mysterious female forms, draped in copper foil. Sylvat acknowledges her husband's input into solving the technical problems of producing welded steel armature, to be covered with copper sheets.

Sylvat Aziz's current work underlines the advantage she has as a Pakistani living in Canada. In a collaborative project with a friend, she is fabricating a series of archetypal figures to be draped in textile blockprints, using the paisley as a motif. This motif hints at its many cultural and aesthetic journeys, from Kashmir to Scotland, and back. Sylvat's work continues in its intersections and recurring crossroads. The 'woman' returns in many configurations, although Sylvat is careful to explain that this is never to do with 'essentialising' the woman, but more to do with the 'today' of living, of unnamed deprivations, and glossed-over pain.

Tayyaba Aziz

(b. 1951)

Over the years, Peshawar University has sheltered many academics needing a sanctuary for their scholarly pursuits in a politically unsettled environment. Tayyaba Ahmed, current Head of the Fine Arts Department, has found a personal and professional refuge within the precincts of the Campus.

From a business family of Peshawar, originally of a modest educational background, Tayyaba was sent to Convent of Jesus and Mary in Murree for quality schooling. Her father, a grain merchant, encouraged a liberal atmosphere at home in which music and poetry were understood and appreciated. Tayyaba doesn't remember being particularly interested in art, but her parents have preserved her letters, embellished with drawings – evidence of her budding talent.

It was later, when time came to choose her courses at college, that she and her group of friends chose to do art, primarily so as not to have to overly tax their minds! This was at St. Xavier's College in Peshawar, which was

affiliated with the Convent. It was here that the art teacher stirred her interest and encouraged her to take her work seriously.

There was talk of her going to the National College of Arts in Lahore, which was torpedoed by a relative who came up with the piece of misinformation that there was no girls' hostel there. Tayyaba now regrets that as a missed opportunity. Once she had finished at St. Xavier's and joined the Fine Arts Department at Peshawar University, still with the same group of friends, she realised that this was what she should have been doing all along.

Jamila Zaidi was Head of Department, but left for England a few months later. Tayyaba's next teacher, Rafiq Hussain, was a pupil of Zainul Abedin's, and a watercolourist. She began her encounter with watercolour, which became her overriding passion. She worked at it constantly, ignoring the mandatory oil painting classes, and was often pressed into working on her friend's paintings after finishing her own work. As Tayyaba describes it, "Sometimes I couldn't tell which work belonged to me and which to my friends!"

Her skills were not lost on her mentor, who offered her a teaching assignment in the Department as soon as she had got her Diploma. Taking up a job was an unusual proposition for a woman in Peshawar in 1974, but Tayyaba had been groomed for it by her supportive parents. "They had allowed me a

great deal of freedom. Imagine, in those days I would drive my father's car from home to the Campus, and drop off my friends on my way home. It gave me a lot of confidence."

She began teaching students who had been her own contemporaries at St. Xavier's College. Taking over as Head of Department in 1988, she held the post for nine years and after a four-year break, reassumed the position in 2001.

While Tayyaba's professional life has gone well, with a great deal of support from the University itself, her personal life has had its ups and downs. Married in 1976, her husband and his family were known to her own, and she knew her husband slightly, enough to agree to the match, even though her family had their doubts.

Analysing her domestic troubles, Tayyaba grants that her husband was an amiable, outgoing person, indulged by his family and therefore not obliged to earn his living. Everything changed for her after marriage, when she found herself unable to paint because she had to support the family with her own earnings. Having two children, with still no financial input from the husband, was a further strain on her mental and physical energies. Her desire to get back into the mainstream of art activity became the cause of additional conflicts.

"He felt neglected when people were around

me. It was not the major factor in our break-up, but it was part of it. I thought 'I have to paint!' So after a break of eight years, I took up a pencil and tried to work again. Putting aside all unnecessary things like going places and meeting people..."

Tayyaba reflects on the fact that although her ex-husband was a nice person, the unhappiness caused by his attitude to life, and her lack of freedom, had to end in a separation and divorce when he re-married. She has no regrets, as she feels that she earned her freedom, which gave her a deep sense of fulfillment, and the ability to devote herself to her children and her work.

"I feel it was important that such a thing happened to me, as a woman and as an artist. It has affected my work positively... Before, as a student, I painted still-lives and landscapes; now I'm beginning to work on the human figure. I love watercolour; it's more like me, quiet, flowing, quick, sensitive, delicate, transparent and pure." To her, oil paint seems alien; the space required for it is often not available to women in the home, and very unsuitable when there are small children in the house. She draws from observation, imprinting it on her memory, and employs the drawings for painting, modifying them from imagination.

Tayyaba comments on the changing social and political climate during and after the Zia decade and its effect on her teaching and the social milieu, "Peshawar and the rest of the Frontier have always been conservative –the social structure is very different from the rest of the country. You will never see a woman without a *chaadar*, unlike Punjab or Islamabad. But in the seventies, when I first came to this Department, we used to wear bell-bottoms and a *dupatta* and go on a bus! Imagine, the local bus! I used to drive a car with a *dupatta* around my neck. We used to go in a group to paint outdoors!"



Tayyaba Aziz
Today's Woman – 1994
 Water colour on paper
 38 x 54 cm.
 Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.

All that changed because of the Zia years and Pakistan's involvement in the war in Afghanistan. "No woman can go out alone, with or without a *chaadar*. With the Afghans coming, our region has gone back a hundred years. For a woman to go out and paint outdoors, you need a chaperone, and then of course how can you work with someone standing over you!"

The impact on the University was even more direct for women. Orders were issued regarding women's dress; "I had written instructions for women to wear overalls or a *chaadar*! We had to get special permission to change from white to grey overalls. We had to fine girls who turned up without overalls; they were often from the Punjab and they didn't like it!"

She remembers the time when they had an exhibition, a dinner and a small musical get-together at the Department. The hall was surrounded by a mob of *Jamiat* boys, and Security had to be summoned to save them from an attack. She also recalls the vandalism wreaked by 'persons unknown', who destroyed all the sculptures in the Department, including a life-size one of the late Chairman.

These years cast an indelible shadow on the Campus, although Tayyaba now senses a positive change. She also points out that the University is supportive of women on its faculty, and struggles to ensure a safe and forward-looking workplace.

Living quietly on the Campus, with her son and daughter, Tayyaba was almost a recluse when she decided to re-marry a longtime friend and well wisher. The years of being looked upon with disdain as a divorcee have been hard. A great deal of soul searching was required before she seriously contemplated the change in her single status. She says, "I couldn't paint during the unhappy years; my works are happy works. I was asked a long

while ago to re-marry, but the children were so small, I postponed it. Now they are grown up and can understand my need for support and companionship. But my father has always been a pillar of strength who has faced everything with me."

The fact that her husband is interested in art, design, and photography, has been no small satisfaction. The success of the partnership is reflected in her newfound confidence in her painting. The works are lyrical renditions of

trees, waterfalls, rocks, and shadows, skirting the confines of academic documentation. There is however an approaching impasse which she is aware of. Tayyaba expresses the need to make a radical departure from familiar content. She is now experimenting with works in a small format, which are to do with poetry, phrases in flat areas of colour, and the human figure as a motif. Still in the ruminative stage, it remains to be seen whether these works represent a breakthrough in her practice, or a retreat into the tentative.



Tayyaba Aziz

Untitled – 1994

Water colour on paper
36 x 52 cm.

Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.

Noorjehan Bilgrami (b. 1950)

Noorjehan Bilgrami lived with her grandmother in Hyderabad Deccan until she was nine years old. Her parents were divorced and her mother moved to Karachi where she married again. Noorjehan came to Karachi in 1959 to join her parents. The early years in Deccan were significant in forming her aesthetic sensibilities. She played with clay, threaded bead necklaces, and made doll's clothes. There were *banjaras* living nearby. She recalls, "There were these huts of *banjaras*. They wore bangles, embroidered clothes. They would dance every now and then. So there was a lot of music, movement and colour. Visually, I was surrounded by that."

She remembers the house being stimulating in its attitude to the arts. Her aunt was interested in art and her cousin was an artist. Noorjehan herself won a painting competition when she was just six years old.

Coming to Karachi, she went to the Grammar School for her O' and A' levels, where art was an important subject. Somehow there was never any question of her not taking up art, although she became interested in psychology in her final year at school in 1968.

Not having a sister and being distanced from her three brothers because of an age gap, made Noorjehan an intense loner, but also purposeful and determined to pursue her inclinations. There was no question of travelling abroad to study art so the only possible institution was the National College of Art in Lahore. But there were problems to contend with. There were no hostel facilities for girls so it was arranged for Noorjehan to stay with relatives. At the time, her insistence on studying art was seen as "a waste of time, 'don't you have anything better to do, the concept of art is frivolous' etc., etc."

Giving in to family pressure and finding a suitor – her cousin Akeel, an architect and a sympathetic kindred spirit – Noorjehan quit NCA after two years in 1969, to get married in Karachi.

Noorjehan is candid about the fact that marriage gave her the personal freedom to work, it being a social sanction that allowed her out of her parents' orbit to become her husband's responsibility. She began teaching art at the Convent of Jesus and Mary, but her career was put on hold when she discovered she was pregnant. Hoping to continue her

studies in art, she joined the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and completed the programme in 1974.

It was then that she became involved in the traditional craft of block-printing on cloth. Noorjehan attributes this interest (which later became a passion) to her Hyderabad background, as well as the need to give meaning to her life in a culturally barren city. Frequent trips to India helped her to familiarise herself with the variety and richness of the tradition. Sitting down and working with the craftsmen in Karachi was both challenging and saddening for Noorjehan. "The state of the craft, and their lives, were so depressing. The craft of block-printing was a pre-Partition activity in Karachi, which had died out – it was so hard to get them to go back to it."

What began as a modest interest grew to become a professional occupation for Noorjehan. Within a few years, her artisan workshop outlet, 'Koel,' became one of Karachi's most prestigious and aesthetically accomplished sales outlets for block-printed garments. Her insistence on the quality of craft led her into research. Her travels into the interiors of Sindh in the pursuit of traditional blocks and motifs became a serious quest which culminated in the publication of her book on *Ajrak*, 'Sindh jo Ajrak' in 1990.

Moved to respond to the horror of ethnic strife in Karachi, in which the local Mohajir population found itself pitted against the recent Afghan settlers who had moved into the



Noorjehan Bilgrami

Untitled – 1995

Oil on cloth

69 x 94 cm.

Coll: The Artist

outskirts of the city, Noorjehan went back to painting in 1987.

The carnage in the shanty town of Orangi was fanned by the drug and arms mafia of Sohrab Goth. There was blood in the streets, and the smell of burning flesh, and the city was in mourning. Noorjehan, stunned like many others, describes feeling helpless, inadequate and unable to go back to her craft as a textile artist, which now seemed superfluous and almost frivolous.

The return to canvas and paint came together in a series of works she called 'Crying for the light', which was shown at the Indus Gallery in Karachi in 1987. The sporadic bloodshed and butchery in Karachi has continued over the years, deepening along sectarian, ethnic and political lines, but Noorjehan has gone on to other images and preoccupations in her painting. However, 'Crying for the light' set in place the leitmotif, and the facility and predilection for a certain medium. Working in acrylic on canvas, the early works were brooding, dark, uncomfortable images of doorways, bullet-scarred surfaces, parts of bodies. The closeness to events was palpable, direct and intense.

As the initial shock of events receded, Noorjehan Bilgrami, together with a number of friends, looked around for a project in which they could invest some of their concern and a lot of their energies. Discussions became concretised in the setting up of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture; a private institution which proposed to make what was felt to be a much-needed contribution to art education in the city of Karachi. It began modestly in 1989 on premises loaned by private benefactors, and has since moved into its own, more roomy, building by the sea.

The Indus Valley School has grown into a full-fledged art, design and architecture academy with degree awarding status, the only



Noorjehan Bilgrami

Sigriya Rock 3 – 1992

Acrylic on paper

28 x 38 cm.

Coll: The Artist

one of its kind in Karachi. Noorjehan's energies were focussed in ensuring that her own purposefulness would be reflected in the institution.

A visit to Sri Lanka and its Buddhist sites in 1992 inspired a series done in Sigriya. The

acrylics were gestural, but carefully designed. Her discrimination in colour relationships became almost fastidious in its sensitivity and the designer's eye moved to the fore, hard at work to balance each element in space. This could also be read as a moving in from the periphery of the harsh realities of Karachi,

towards more introspective goals. These works, exhibited in the Chawkandi Gallery in 1992, were elegant, with little trace of the rawness of the 1987 statements in paint.

Noorjehan's works of 1994 and 1995 also referred to ancient wisdoms and human traces. She looked at areas in Pakistan where rock-carvings speak of "primordial manifestations of the creative urge of man." Still working in acrylics (now on paper), she mimicked the incisions and the fossilised marks, which she as a designer knew well how to knit into luscious textures and surfaces which seem suffused with ageing, smouldering colours. The spatial structure was carefully constructed and concealed in what appeared to be an intuitive selection of images, of man – the hunter, of the ibex, and the deer, forever locked in ordained connections.

In 1995, Noorjehan Bilgrami stepped down from her duties as the Executive Director of the Indus Valley School, deciding that she needed to go back to her work as a textile artist, which she missed a great deal. It is the lure of investigating natural and vegetable dyes that has revived her interest in research. She says of her experience of working on the textile surface, "The medium has become the fabric. Usually the dialogue starts with the first mark, but the cloth had umpteen layers already there. So now I had to start blanking it out. You can call it a reversal."

Noorjehan's indefatigable travels and studies have led her to exhibit worldwide, from North Africa to Asia- minor, to the Far East. The indigo dye has become a passion – its cultivation, processing, and dyeing. This quest has taken her to Japan to Professor Hiroko Shindo, with whom she is working to make the connections between the pigment and the painter's palette. Noorjehan admits candidly, "Indigo has taken over my life. Let's see where it leads me."

Summaya Durrani (b. 1963)



Summaya Durrani

Untitled – 1994

Mixed media collage on paper
32 x 75 cm.

Coll: The Artist

Summaya Durrani is a painter who spent almost seven years away from home, studying in the US, returning with a double major in painting and jewellery design in 1987. The years spent away from the oppressive atmosphere of the Eighties allowed her to explore options available in the well-endowed art department at Ann Arbor in Michigan. “I was very happy when I went there. I could do anything I wanted to do. I had never done any three-dimensional work, and that was a bit difficult for me at first, but slowly I began to understand it and enjoy it, but it took me almost three years to get the hang of it. I can think in 3-D. Before, I used to think in the two dimensional, and then translate it. The work there was more a celebration of the media itself, directly expressive.”

The formal problems encountered by an art student were the meat of Summaya’s training, and she revelled in problems of scale, colour, texture and medium. Her romance with scale and colour was propelled by the intense energy and involvement which she brought to these years of learning and working in an alien place; as she says, “Seven years was a very long time in that environment. I think I absorbed a lot of things. Now when I look at the work I did there, I’m a little afraid, a little disturbed... There are one or two that I still like... I think those pictures are about sound.”

Summaya discovered that she was well able to tackle the formal problems arising out of

the tasks she set herself. Looking back for signs of artistic activity in her childhood, it seems that it was her mother’s work which was the deepest influence. “My mother came from a very rich family. Her father dealt in carpets in Kashmir. Her *nikah* was performed when she was fourteen years old, and she was divorced at fifteen. [This was before her marriage to Summaya’s father]. It was then that she decided to stand on her own feet. She came from a very conservative family. Her brothers didn’t want her to work, but she got a small place of her own. She actually wanted to go to medical school, but they wouldn’t let her... So she sold her books and started.” Summaya’s mother became a pioneer in the bridal-wear business in Lahore, establishing a successful retail outlet, with a branch in Karachi as well.

Summaya has inherited more than her work ethic from her mother. She is still amazed at the wealth of knowledge that her mother brings to her embroidery business. “I used to do embroidery on a ring as a child... I grew up in an environment in which I took certain things for granted. My mother never studied colour theory, but the unbelievable things she did intuitively... She knew motifs, and she could tell you ten thousand names of a single motif. She could tell you how to embroider a single flower in a dozen different ways.”

Summaya took up art in school, but she felt



Sumayya Durrani

Faceless Nude Series – 1995

Mixed media collage on paper

25 x 35 cm.

Coll: Chowkandi Art

she was not very good. She then did a year as a design student at the National College of Arts. She was far more taken with painting, and would have made the switch if she had not received a scholarship to go to the School of Art at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

spirited approach to teaching at NCA also Returning to Pakistan was not a simple matter of physical homecoming. Summaya had been away from Pakistan during the years which were politically and socially the most repressive. Her buoyant, aggressive works seemed to belong to another planet. Her full-

found its critics. But for art students and young artists alike, her painting and her provocative classroom tutoring were stimulating and productive. She recalls, “When I started teaching, I had to unlearn all the things I’d learnt. I consciously tried to do things I had done unconsciously. I wanted to strike a balance between something very free and something restrained... Form became important... All this was a formative experience.”

For Summaya, learning to live again with the social limitations of Pakistani society had ramifications at many levels. She began to become aware of the political scene, and took part in a women’s procession, waiting until three in the morning to catch a glimpse of Benazir Bhutto. She participated in discussions with women’s groups, and experienced firsthand the discrimination against her sex when the women of her area were not allowed to vote in the elections of 1988 on feeble grounds. She made her first impromptu political speech outside the polling station, galvanising the women into action. She contends, “When one is working in a comfortable environment, there aren’t any challenges. It starts when there are obstacles and when there is a struggle, when you are affected and people are affected around you... Now I’m far more aware of being a woman... I see how the image of a woman is exploited, and it makes me angry.”

Speaking about how marriage has recast and reconstructed her work, Summaya says, “Nadeem [her husband] is involved and understands what I’m doing. Before we got married, we talked about my work. That’s a rarity. He’s interested in music, he sings, he knows about creativity. He’s shared my struggles, and faced things with me...”

Summaya taught for a year at Bilkent University in Turkey, and was there during the Gulf War. She felt intensely for the silent,

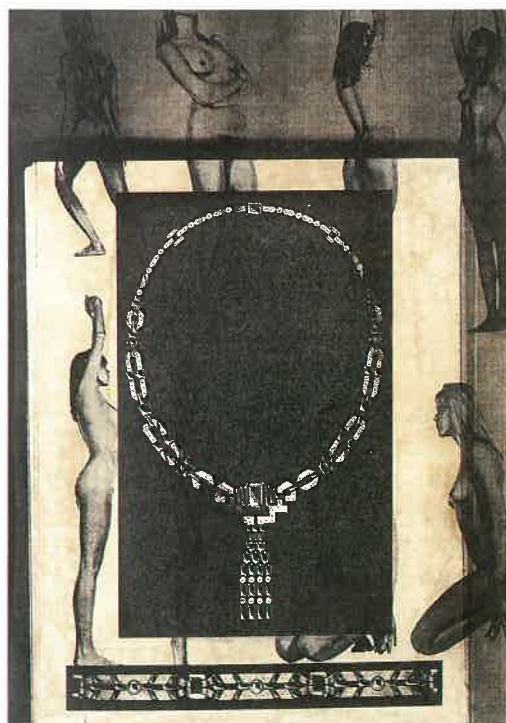
defenceless victims, and the worldwide conspiracy of the 'haves' of this world. The compulsion to remain silent in an environment that sided with the First World resulted in a series of ominous, painful drawings exhibited on her return. These were images of doorways, dark, shadowy and savage. Graphite on paper was used in layers of tense, brittle marks. She found the exercise of expressing her emotional responses in a cerebral manner something of a milestone in her development as a painter.

Summaya's painting has travelled a great distance since her first exhibitions in Islamabad and Lahore in 1987. The massive surfaces, the flamboyance and spontaneity of the Eighties, which owed much to the years at Ann Arbor, were informed by the De Kooning milieu that produced them. The vitality has continued, but Summaya has long since shed many of the connotations of scale and image that accompanied her back home. The two decades since have witnessed a deep and critical questioning of her work and its context. In 1995, she said, "My work addresses questions that are important to me now. The whole idea of being a woman and an artist, how do you communicate that? For instance, the female body and how it has been used in art; you elevate it and you subjugate at the same time. In the past, my concern has been with textures, tactile surfaces and colour. But now I believe they are not appropriate for the kind of subject matter that I'm dealing with..."

In the nineties, gender moved away from the sub-specific and became a crucial element of her imagery. The blitheness and playful energy of the Eighties, with their gestural, somewhat evasive images, evolved into more radical statements. Her tongue-in-cheek humour was still there, but as a tool for the examination of serious issues, both emotional and intellectual. In her series 'Faceless Nude', she served up mail-order catalogue images of the female body in faultless place settings, complete with

paper doilies, silver cutlery, and gilded tablecloths, in sumptuous collage.

In Summaya's works of this phase, women were a central concern. She took up cudgels for women, setting them up in scenarios which are familiar to viewers of the history of the nude in men's art. She delighted in a variety of visual references, from op art to historical stereotypes. Re-inventing signs and images which were very demanding yet elusive, these



Summaya Durrani
Faceless Nude Series – 1995
 Mixed media collage on paper
 25 x 35 cm.
 Coll: Chowkandi Art

works were about a lot of things. They were about women looking at men looking at women; they were about camouflage and counter-camouflage; they were about male-female manipulations, and about the seductiveness of rhythm and pattern. There was a soft visual stroking here, but it was accompanied by a cerebral nick of the razor blade. These works used collage culled from a variety of sources, including her own photography, and offset prints.

Summaya intended the work to be 'unpainterly'. There was little evidence of the early pleasures in marks and gestures. She went to great lengths to obliterate the signs of her interaction with the surface. Colour vanished, leaving layers of rich, velvety, tonal blacks.

Being an intensely self-critical practitioner, Summaya allows long periods of hibernation before presenting her work in the public domain. The process is paramount, often being the final statement. She has worked on enormous drawings to do with the sensuality of human hair, without sharing them with an audience.

Summaya Durrani, the consummate designer, views and weighs her own processes and solutions most carefully. She does not intend her viewers to be passive receivers, or herself to be a producer of art objects. She claims a serious interaction and dialogue, making both herself and her audience vulnerable. "Art is not a trivial activity. It has to be taken more seriously. One has a social responsibility. When I exhibit my work in a gallery, I'm making a statement. I'd better have something to say which has substance and which has been thoughtfully done."

Summaya lives in Karachi with her husband and two sons, teaching at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, and running an embroidery-cum-jewellery business.

Humaira Ejaz (b. 1956)

their door, and she would lie by it for hours, watching tadpoles being born, and catching fish with her bare hands.

Her father, a Pathan, was a liberal man who encouraged his daughter's education, even though money was scarce. Humaira started drawing at an early age, although there was no money for materials other than a notebook and pencil. Her mother made her practice her handwriting constantly on a *takhti*; Humaira would draw on it instead, to her mother's chagrin. She never had the luxury of using colour until she went to college.

There were books in the modest home, Humaira's maternal grandfather being a friend of writers and poets; and Humaira read Manto and Ismet Chughtai while still at school. She did brilliantly in her school work, and was all set to go to medical college when, while dissecting a frog, she decided that this was not for her. By this time the family was in Rawalpindi, and she switched to fine arts at the local college.

Developing a sudden lesion in her spine had grave implications for Humaira's studies, as she was put to bed for six months, in a cast. She insisted on going to college after the six months were over, still in a cast. She continued studying, on painkillers, and managed to do her BA, and then joined the Fine Arts Department at the Punjab University at Lahore to do her MA.

Tragedy struck again, this time with her mother's terminal illness, and it was decided that urgent marriages would be arranged for all three sisters. Recalled from her studies, Humaira was never able to go back. She valiantly joined evening classes to make up for what she feels was irretrievably lost.

For Humaira, marriage also became the arena where disparate values and conflicting ideas had to be sorted out, often at her expense. She acknowledges that her liberal upbringing hadn't prepared her for the strong male-female demarcations she faced in her husband's home. She points out that the woman's role in a joint-family is often worse than that of a domestic servant. "A servant has a salary; if lucky, a pension, and even the option of leaving. For women it is much worse."

Humaira never enjoyed her pregnancies, not having her mother to turn to, and missed a sympathetic companion to share the complexities of motherhood with. Her husband, a doctor, was absent all day. Her father had re-married, and she found herself alone in an antagonistic domestic environment. She was disturbed at the birth of her daughters, which she took as a sign of her own "*Jahalat*", but she now analyses it as a fear for their well-being. "I think perhaps it was a wise thing, to bury the girl-child at birth, in ancient societies; she has to face so much in life. My daughter once said to me, 'a woman is just a servant' – it hurt me. I grew up in a home where there were no distinctions... when my daughters

Humaira Ejaz remembers her childhood as being a time of constant movement. Early memories are of growing up in Gilgit. There was no school, so she was taught to read and write by her mother, or whoever happened to have time.

Her father worked for the Civil Aviation Department, and had a new posting every two years. The family lived in Dhaka, in Chittagong, in Karachi, in Hunza. Her earliest visual memory is of Chittagong, when she was just two years old. Humaira was alone at home, and remembers a violent storm, and lightning striking the tree outside her window. In Gilgit, there was a stream which flowed by

were born, I realised why it is considered so bad... because the sufferings are to be repeated... the woman is a third class human being."

Now that her children are growing up, they share a great rapport; she feels that her being an artist has given them an insight into matters they may never have been sensitive to. "One hopes one's children will be human beings with depth. I pray a lot for them... that they turn out alright... then the guilt I have carried around for so long will be gone, or I'll never forgive myself."

Humaira took up painting again in between her domestic and motherhood duties, a difficult task without a supportive background. She suffered the guilt that creative women do about whether or not she was fulfilling her obligations. She concedes that her childhood circumstances had conditioned her to moving, to change, which has made her restless. "An artist cannot turn her creativity on and off like a switch... you may want to work at a time when there are guests, your mother-in-law is unwell, or your husband needs attention! It is killing. You need to fulfil your relationships, look after the children. I had notebooks, sketchbooks all over the place, jotting down things when they came, but the guilt lived inside me..."

The activity and process of painting has been a driving force for Humaira. She had her first solo exhibition in Islamabad in 1991, and participated in a number of group shows. She gave up the academic genres very soon after she had studied with Mansur Rahi, and began experimenting with acrylics and mixed media on paper.

The limitations of working space and lack of an emotional support system hampered Humaira's development. She worked frenziedly in short spans of time, a routine she eventually adjusted to and turned to her



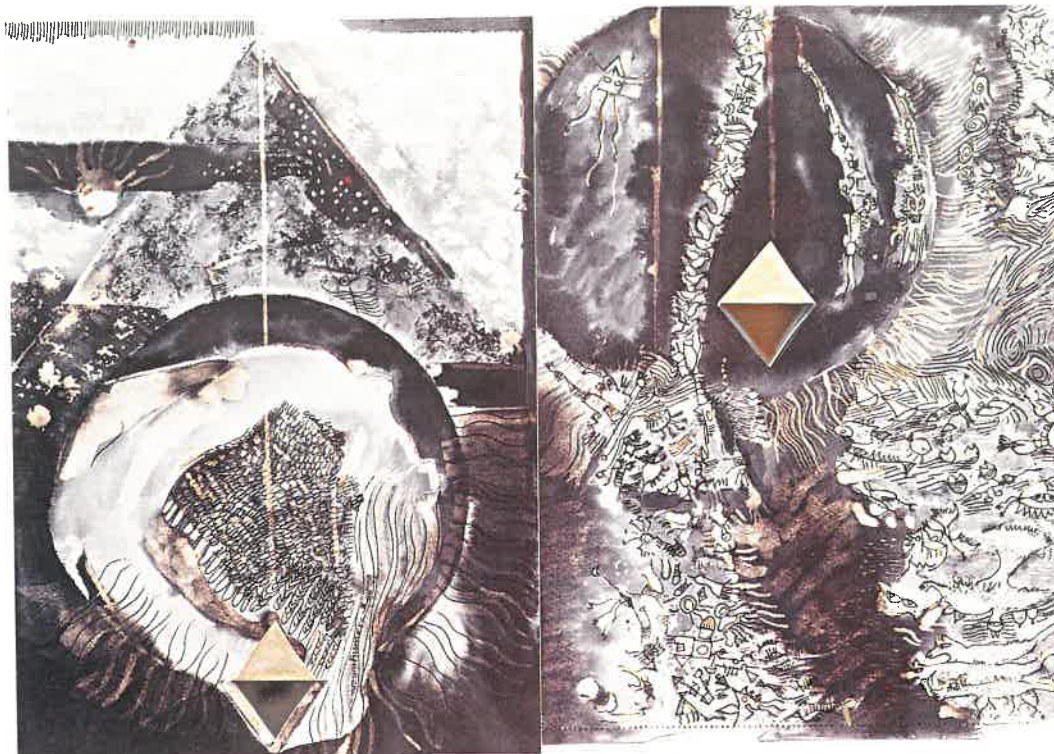
Humaira Ejaz
Verse from Iqbal – 1992
 Oil on paper
 54 x 70 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

own advantage. A passion for vibrant colours, strong blues, deep cadmium yellows and magentas took their time to acquire the constancy of a personalised palette. She worked hard to resolve formal problems of space within the given format – stroke, texture and line; the imagery was a more elusive matter.

The female face became the focus as Humaira began to explore her own body. She used the work as a vehicle of emotional expression, often consciously, and concedes that her closeness to the work helped her sort out her priorities. “I really like my work. I don’t know whether it likes me or not. It is a two-way relationship – I give it shape, it gives me happiness. The pain and hurt that I carry and nurture in life is there, and transforms itself into something else.”

Having parted with her husband, in 1994 Humaira moved to Norway with her children, where she tried her hand at being a single parent, but returned a year later. She now lives with her children in Islamabad, making her living as a painter. She declares almost defensively, “You know, I am a free spirit.”

The last three years have witnessed a maturing of form and a confident handling of medium in Humaira Ejaz’s work. Her studies in mysticism have informed her works of 2000-2001. She muses, “I want to create a ‘whole’, and that happens when one is totally ‘in tune’, a state of grace, not in the conventional religious sense, but in the sense of spirituality.” There has occurred a retreat from colour, as she now works in black ink on paper, bleaching out the darkness with ordinary household bleach. There remains a ghostly semblance of colour which occurs as a result of the removal of the ink. The new series are a tapestry of marks which are fluid and sure. Humaira cuts into the surface of the paper, creating a void and then filling it with a mirror, thus reflecting back on the onlooker. It poses the question of



Humaira Ejaz

Quest for the Lost Dimension – 2001

Pen & ink, mirror on paper

54 x 30 cm.

Coll: The Artist

what is there yet not quite there. She works around the edge of her work, a boundary yet to be crossed. In this there is evident a searching, passionate struggle, described by her as a desire for the fourth dimension. Commenting on her works on canvas, titled ‘The Twilight Zone’, she posits, “Canvas is less ‘giving’ than paper”, and therefore, she contends, less fulfilling.

Recalling a contemptuous remark once made to her – that she amounted to ‘a zero’ – Humaira is confident that the pain suffered has ensured that she has grown from that time of being just ‘a dot’, into a wider ‘circle’; or even the triangle, which is both female and male. “And anyway,” she says, “a circle with a dot is the full cosmos.”

Mansoor Hassan (b. 1953)

A number of avenues opened up for young women of means in the seventies, when travel abroad and work became more widespread.

Mansoor Hassan graduated from the National College of Arts in 1971, and began working in Pakistan Television as a designer, but she was determined to pursue her studies abroad. In 1974 she left for the USA and the Pratt Institute in New York to do her MFA. Since then she has lived abroad but has made regular visits home to reclaim her roots, and to be reassured of the multiplicity of her context. These journeys, together with many others to various parts of the world, have become pivotal to Mansoor's life, and integral to the nature of her art.

Mansoor Hassan grew up in Lahore; the family lived in the Nedou's Hotel Building, an aging colonial structure of great charm, now the site of the nondescript Avari Hotel. She remembers being a rebellious, unruly child, climbing walls, ripping her clothes and refusing to study. Her elder sister Nasira was the serious, accomplished one, an example Mansoor never cared to follow. Their younger sibling was a child with serious medical problems, a fact which Mansoor feels must have taught her to cope with a number of unexpected situations.

Her father, a highly authoritarian figure, was in the police, and his 'position' involved a variety of public duties. Mansoor remembers

being dolled up to present bouquets to visiting dignitaries, which meant missing school and learning to be poised and self-confident.

Her mother was the perfect foil to a despotic father, who encouraged an interest in music in her daughters. She sang, and played the sitar, a means to cultivate a personal expression and a desire for tranquillity. Mansoor feels that her mother would have loved for one of her children to have been a musician. As it happened, Mansoor was playing the sitar at the age of nine, but, as she puts it, "it had no feeling... I was devoid of passion."

All in all, Mansoor's mother achieved a great deal, considering the circumstances. Mansoor herself carried heavy emotional baggage, and having a father who was distant, drew closer to her mother whom she still cherishes as "not a figure of authority, but a friend"; a friend who would regale the children with tales of their father's bravery as a police officer. This, Mansoor feels, is something she might have wanted to emulate, since she describes herself as "totally fearless."

After the typical Convent education mandatory for girls of her social class, Mansoor chose to go to the National College of Arts, in spite of her mother's opposition who objected to it on the grounds of it being 'co-ed'! This was Mansoor's first major decision, and one which was to prove important.



Mansoor Hassan
Transformer - 2000
Video Installation.



Mansoor Hassan
Whispering Images – 1986
 Monoprint etching
 62 x 47 cm.
 Coll: N. Pasha

Her younger sister's death, which was inevitable but still traumatic for the whole family, was harder for Mansoorah because she was away on a college trip when it finally happened. She internalised the loss in her own dogged way.

The third and fourth years at college were especially significant as they were marked by emotional rebellions at home and artistic rebellions in the studio. The vehemence with which Mansoorah was determined to pursue her independence was reinforced by her decision to take up a job and work towards gaining a place at an art department abroad.

Her imminent departure became a turning point in her relationship with her father. Mansoorah recalls, "My father... I discovered (him) when I went to Pratt in 1974, before that I didn't know him. He called me to the drawing room and said, 'Any moment, any time you want to come home, for whatever reason... we won't ask why, just come...' Since then everything changed. I could actually communicate with him."

The two years in New York, working with Arthur Freed and Ponce de Leon, were important to Mansoorah's work in terms of development of skills in printmaking, but more so in terms of image and content. The decision to marry a young Pakistani economist at Yale with the right educational and social credentials was easy since she was emotionally involved anyway, but looking back many years later, Mansoorah can be more analytical, "I'm convinced that the only way for the liberation of women like me is marriage. I had to learn to be a survivor. This was out of necessity. It was a form of self-defence. A fear of non-identity."

Her husband took up a job in the World Bank which ensured a peripatetic future for Mansoorah, something which has shaped her

work and her artistic vocabulary. Her commitment to her work as a printmaker, photographer and painter has been constant during the years of living in Washington, Bolivia, and now Egypt. She has had exhibitions all over the world and most regularly in Pakistan, in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.

Through her travels, Mansoorah sought to explore, and to use motifs and signs of civilisations as ancient as her own, in her journeys to different countries. In Bolivia, the archeological site of Tiwanaku gave her a visual inventory to work from. She juxtaposed these symbols with others from Turkey, Iran, Spain and the sub-continent, assembling the images in an attempt to instigate a dialogue between human cultures. These cyphers seemed to conceal answers to the myriad questions which fascinated Mansoorah the traveller. They involved her skills as a photographer, as a printmaker and as a painter,



Mansoorah Hassan
Transformer - 2000
Video Installation.

and most recently as a video artist.

Having three children has not been an obstacle: "Motherhood never hampered me... It was at an abstract level actually... I wasn't ready for motherhood. Alia [her first-born daughter] was an object, she wasn't my child. It has to do with being free. There is a basic contradiction between playing the role of a woman, and being an artist." Now that her children are grown up, she muses, "I'm happy I have them now, especially the girls. I've discovered they are superior human beings. But it is not the fulfillment of what women call their *tammana*. It's nothing like that."

Mansoorah speaks of 1989 as being a turning point in her spiritual life. When questioning her viability as a financially independent person, she debated the significance of 'real' freedom. This questioning led her towards the Sufi order Nimatullahi.¹⁰ Another factor in this quest is her passion for music. Often bonding her work and her life, she uses music to illuminate passages of feeling which would otherwise defy articulation. The deep sensual and spiritual experience afforded by music gives a sense of liberation and fulfillment which fuses with the process of working. "As differences disappear, things merge and become simpler... there is the 'true' liberation once you are a *dervesh*. She cites the example of Lutfi, the Iranian classical musician, a Sufi himself, whose music has transformed her vision.

Discussing some of the elements associated with gender, Mansoorah talks about scale, which is sometimes considered a 'masculine' attribute. The inference that the monumentality of a work in terms of its size makes it more worthy of notice is familiar to feminists. "I've had the need to work large, because I want to be taken seriously. The mural is considered important...."

But Mansoorah is quick to point out that a



Mansoor Hassan

Spiritual Journey Series – 2001

Pulp paper painting

35 x 35 cm.

Coll: The Artist

woman handles scale differently: “The details are different. One sees a difference in technicalities... Men are wrapped up in scale in the way it is put together physically. Of course this is a generalisation, but it may be a small detail... a wooden nail in this or that corner. A sensitivity to detail which is different. Men’s work has a coldness, it is technically complicated – even if it is conceptual or minimal. Some male artists have tried very hard to bring in their sensitivity, but you can tell... as you can when a woman tries to do ‘manly’ work!”

Mansoor agrees that the relationships in one’s life-experience seep into the artist’s work – the sexual, the emotional and the philosophical: “You and your work are utterly intertwined. Art cannot exist in a void. Your culture and life are one and the same. I have a significant private life, which is very, very private. There is a conflict between that and the public life.

In my work, the conflict is there. In successful works, you can see the conflict.”

There is therefore a stronger adherence to centralised simplicity. The veils are there, but promising a final denouement. As Mansoor puts it, “I am aware that there are often too many elements in my painting. There are norms of good painting, and I try to resolve some of them, like the expressionistic versus the minimalist.”

Describing the process of putting the work together, which in Mansoor’s case is a complex mix of materials and mediums, she says, “The relationship is both physical and emotional. There is a strong physical involvement. Several different processes are part of it. In the exploration of different processes, there is an appropriation of my own work, a putting together. I’m continually thinking about it, materials, paper... fluke is

another thing, process is something else. Work that evolves out of a process is far more significant. I have control now.” Colour has been distinctive in Mansoor’s painting. Always luxuriant, and intense in feeling, it has varied from the brazenly decorative to the consciously subdued and muted.

Participating in an exhibition with eight other women from non-US cultures entitled ‘Eight Paths to a Journey,’ in 1991, helped to resolve the anger and the sadness she had experienced over the Gulf War. Mansoor realised suddenly what it meant to “belong nowhere” while living in an aggressive alien culture. But, as she puts it, “If you don’t have a home inside you, you’ll be running all your life.”

Her works of the nineties incorporated texts of various kinds. She worked from the writings of the Sufi poet Rumi, as well as from the more contemporary works of the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi, and the Pakistani feminist poet Kishwar Naheed.

For three decades, Mansoor Hassan has been a prolific artist, with more than thirty solo exhibitions spread over galleries from Dakar to Fez to La Paz. Her nervous energy and incessant work has ensured her presence in Pakistan’s art institutions as well as venues abroad. Her visual repertoire has been vast, but her references often have to do with her travels; photo-transfers of architectural settings, embossed with “flora, fauna, and adornment, oil and acrylic, collage and chine collé” – a personal ‘mix’ achieved with deftness.

In her most recent work entitled ‘From the Nile to the Indus’, Mansoor Hassan sums up the many strands that have reoccurred in her work over the years. She assembles motifs, marks and indentations, producing works on fragile, layered paper which can be viewed from both front and back. The suggestions of veils, shrouds, and mysterious mirages are eventually ambiguous.

Sabah Hussain (b. 1959)

Unlike other artists who were heading for the US and Europe, Sabah Hussain chose to go east after her studies at NCA. Her political awareness and social activism may have had something to do with her decision. She comments, "The decision to go to Japan was very conscious. I did not want to go west to study because I thought it was so far removed from us in terms of what our heritage is... and our socio-political present. I thought going east would help me understand, in an unsentimental way, what we are all about, even in a different culture."

There were also other interests that Sabah thought would be served by going to Japan. "I had been participating in the Women's Action Forum since I was in the second year at NCA. I thought it would be interesting to know what women were like in Japan, one of the most modern nations in the world. I wrote that in my application for the Japanese scholarship, which is probably why I never got it! Women were in terrible shape there... we are a better lot! Even in Kyoto, where I

was studying... it's a university town, and there was not a single woman professor there, not a single one!" But Sabah's personal background had prepared her to be assertive and confident in an atmosphere not congenial to women's interests.

She had lost her father when she was five years old, and watched her mother cope with the problems of bringing up four small children. Sabah describes her mother as being a woman of strong spirit, with a great sense of humour, who decided not to re-marry for the sake of her children. She also owes her awareness of the visual to her mother, who used to paint, was creative with her hands, and had learnt to sing and to play the *sitar*, and as a young mother of two children, had studied for a Masters Degree in Urdu and Persian.

Among other strong women around Sabah was an *ayah*, a refugee from East Punjab, who had been widowed at the time of Partition. Left to look after five children, Sabah remembers her as a woman of great resilience, and a wonderful storyteller.

For Sabah, going to the National College of Arts in 1978 was a natural extension of an atmosphere in which she could express herself, visually and verbally. The impact of Zia's laws against women found Sabah in the ranks of women activists demonstrating against the Law of Evidence,¹ and being vocal in a number of ways, including her painting in college.

"My thesis work had a lot to do with women as its theme... the struggle. There was resistance to women... to women in art colleges. You became aware of things you would never have dreamed about, like police brutality, the Family Laws... all these things combined..." Sabah used the female nude gingerly in her thesis paintings, well aware that there would be resistance to their being viewed.

Leaving college in 1982, Sabah freelanced for a while before deciding that printmaking might be her forte and that Japan would be the place to learn it. She investigated possibilities of scholarships but was told there were none for single women, since Zia's government had just ruled that women were not to leave the country, on official postings or scholarships, unaccompanied by a *Mehram*. She initially financed herself, and then won a Rotary Scholarship that took care of her final two years.

She recalls the experience vividly: "Going to Japan was a terrifying experience, but I can't blame anybody since it was my own idea. Japan is a very difficult country. It's probably the only country in the world where they don't like you learning their language, because they feel it gives away their secrets! It was tough, but because Kyoto was a university town, there were foreign students from all over the world, women as well as men, and since the non-Japanese are not really regarded as part of their society, one could get away with a lot!"



Sabah Husain

Rāg Mala (Bhairavi Ragni)

Series of three prints – 1988

Woodblock printing and etching

167 x 75 cm.

Coll: Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Sabah launched into her printmaking studies immediately on arrival at Kyoto in 1984, at the Kyoto Kogei Senii University. She was especially interested in the woodcut, and researched the rich and varied Japanese heritage in that medium. She was equally dedicated to the task of learning the Japanese language, and spent a summer teaching English at the same time.

Coming home only twice during her four years in Japan, Sabah missed Pakistan, especially Lahore. The years spent in an alien environment made her introspective, and brought her closer to her own traditions of classical music and dance. These

preoccupations were accompanied by her commitment to women's issues, especially as she found Japanese society no different from her own as far as the absence of women in positions of influence or power was concerned.

But Japan also exerted a more positive influence on Sabah's work, in terms of her concentration on skills, and focus on content. She found the traditional and the modern cohabiting more successfully in Japan than anywhere else. She found their sense of design, especially the use of space – which is at a premium in their physical environment – highly instructional. The restrained use of colour and the propensity to use half tones

was different from anything she had experienced. The dramatic use of black and white, and the sense of simplification, were all food for thought. She became interested in paper and papermaking, and made that a component of her work. Her theoretical studies led her to look at the cross-cultural exchange between China, India and Japan, in relation to the woodcut and the miniature.

The woodcut prints done during these years were layered and somewhat spartan in form and colour. The female forms, enclosed in space, were simple, two-dimensional ciphers. The use of space, colour, line and form became increasingly complex and refined as Sabah's

concerns became more abstract. The involvement with the formal became paramount, even though it was informed by parallels to music and dance. As she proceeded with her paper works in 1988, her marks became more obvious; the layers of paper fibre opting for subtleties of surface variations and densities.

Coming back to Pakistan in 1988, Sabah faced her homecoming with mixed feelings. The desire to be back in touch with her roots was coupled with the social constraints faced by an independent single woman. As she describes it, "There is the problem of everyone making your business their business. My own family is very supportive... my mother and brothers. But the pressures to get married... I have told them I will not get married until I find someone suitable, and they understand that..."

Sabah has set up her own studio space with a press and has given printmaking workshops and art classes in schools in suburbs and the more underprivileged areas of Lahore. She believes in the necessity of building a base among younger people, making them sensitive to art processes and their own creativity.

Her own work has grappled to come to terms with various factors which are operative within and without herself. She is continually drawn towards the political realities in Pakistan, and fears that there are inherent dangers when approaching such themes in painting. "They tend to come out looking illustrative, or poster-like. I have not been able to find a way in which one does justice to painting itself, and also conveys what I'd like it to."

Sabah has struggled to portray the political commitment that she admires in other people, and has experimented with it, but is not pleased with the outcome, finding the figurative limiting and too direct. She has had more success with works that contrive to be inspired by music and dance, with shades of her

Japanese experience still showing through in the calligraphic gesture, or in the traces of the medium.

In a series of large paperworks executed in 1993, Sabah worked in low relief, in which forms in dyed paper and pulp were juxtaposed with accents of black and white threads, serving as sharp edged lines. The series was entitled '*Zard patton ka ban*' and '*Roshniyon ka shehr*', both references to Faiz's poems on the plight of his city and his land. These were reflective of Sabah's yearning to draw closer to her viewers. "You feel that the audience should be able to relate to an image, and

therefore it should be easily recognisable... but I can't seem to do it... I always feel, when I do a representative thing, it is not sensitive enough; that I'm just leaving something halfway..."

In the nineties, Sabah Hussain commenced an exploration of the functional possibilities of using the paper in a three-dimensional manner. She has set up a design studio where she designs furniture and light fixtures that incorporate handmade paper as the major element. She also teaches at NCA and conducts nation-wide workshops on papermaking and woodcut.



Sabah Hussain

Composition – 1995

Handmade paper, water colour and sumi
142 x 87 cm.

Coll: The Artist

Mussarat Nahid Imam (b. 1958)

Brought up in Rawalpindi, Mussarat Nahid Imam comes from a family of six sisters and two brothers, among whom, as she says, "...my father never made a distinction. The daughters were brought up like sons, with equal opportunities in education, even though some people in the family didn't approve."

Her mother's family was equally progressive. Originally from Patna in India, they were part of the Muslim aristocracy, and one aunt was a member of the Indian Parliament.

For Mussarat, there was the familiar family pressure to become a doctor, but in her senior years at school she decided that she would do anything but medicine. With no certain predispositions, the family first suggested 'home economics'; but that being unavailable as a subject in the local college, the choice of fine arts was a convenient one. Mussarat remembers being influenced by her mother, who would take great pains over dressing up meals, decorating the dining table, designing clothes for the family, all with impeccable taste.

Going to the Government girls' college in Rawalpindi, where she studied Fine Arts with Jamila Zaidi, gave Mussarat a sense of her own predilections. Mrs. Zaidi tutored her with great zest. "I did not think that I would be so serious about art. I found my vocation with Jamila Zaidi. She had just come back from the UK and she involved us thoroughly in what we were doing. She made us aware of light, line, and for me, most of all, of colour."

Unfortunately, the art education experience with Jamila Zaidi was not sustained during her MA studies at the Punjab University in Lahore. Mussarat found the experience educationally claustrophobic. "The approach was very limited and narrow. I went there with high hopes... the first time away from home... but honestly speaking, I spent those four years in a state of pain. My colour sense was suppressed; the vibrancy and life went out of my work. I almost gave up painting..."

Armed with her MA, Mussarat came home and entered the job market. She landed a job as interior designer at a four-star hotel, where she first encountered the problems of an attractive young woman working in a male-dominated environment. She found her male co-workers either overbearing or over-familiar, and quite unable to cope with her as an equal on a businesslike footing. She worked there for almost two years, painting on the side, until she found a job with the Pakistan National Council of the Arts.

Meanwhile, the social and family compulsions to find a match became urgent. Mussarat laughingly remembers how she vetoed one especially eligible proposal because the young man made the mistake of laying down an imposition on her career before the engagement. "I told my father 'nothing doing! I have to live my life my own way. Please close this chapter'. My father was slightly stunned, but he told the young man that his daughter had refused him."

Mussarat goes on to debate the choices that a woman, especially an artist, faces in Pakistani society. She is candid about the advice that certain older women painters have given her: "They warn me about loneliness, and advise me to think it over very, very carefully... I know the other side too. It's a risk; there are very few exceptions... men who can take a woman's commitment to her work. If I get married, it will be a definite commitment, and I will have to compromise and give up many things, but the chapter is not closed..."

Her job as an officer in the Pakistan National Council of the Arts, brought her into association with the National Art Gallery, whose collection of paintings bore the brunt of the careless, almost hostile official attitude to the arts, especially during the decade of General Zia.

Being a working woman, she also became aware of the effects of Zia's policies on the

way people behaved in public places. She points out that women began to feel unsafe in public transport, in shopping areas, and in the average workplace. For herself the effects were more to do with official preferences and governmental policies in the visual arts. "We were discouraged from doing anything too modern. We did a lot of calligraphic exhibitions, a lot of landscape. I have to say that many of my male colleagues started working on landscapes and calligraphy. Beautifully framed landscapes... very saleable..."

Mussarat is quick to point out that most women did not switch their themes to bring them into line with official patronage. She also emphasises that it was not just male artists who were eager to compromise, but also cultural officials who were reluctant to take any risks. She recounts incidents when she insisted on displaying controversial works, risking her job in the process. Using her persuasive skills with the media and with officialdom alike, she ensured smooth passage for works which otherwise might never have been displayed.

Mussarat Nahid sees her role as one that carries the added responsibilities of educating the public into accepting the contemporary art expression, and raising consciousness among gallery viewers. She insists that the diversity of the work being done by Pakistani artists must be represented in the National Gallery, and that 'official art' must be discouraged, as it implies a lowering of artistic standards.

She regrets that her administrative duties leave her with little time for her own painting, but she struggles to maintain a presence on the gallery scene. A short Art Residency and the opportunity to do printmaking at the University of Hawaii gave her work a valuable impetus. And that, together with a chance to travel abroad exposed her to fresh influences, and access to technical know-how. Her interest in

printmaking helped develop her imagery and use of medium in a way that has moved into her painting.

Mussarat also acknowledges that spending so much time in the National Gallery has broadened her vision and helped her to critique her own work. On a personal level, the loss of both her parents "left a vacuum", but travelling afforded the required emotional distancing. On her journeys she acquired a variety of symbols and motifs culled from historical sources. This plethora of visual graffiti, which includes coins, seals, calligraphy, and patterns, all interconnected

in a textural fabric stretched across the surface. The desire for ornamentation is manifested strongly in Mussarat's work, constructed with acrylics, collage, and mixed media on canvas. Thematically, she stays with the observed imprints of historically recognisable civilisations. Any event, incident, or image can set off a response in paint. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha was one such incident; in a darkened palette, Mussarat rephrases the sense of shock. Alongside this response she states, "The future lies in one's commitment to the aesthetic. The creative spheres are the ones that have a chance."



Mussarat Nahid Imam

Enlightenment – 1998

Collage and painting mix on board

46 x 46 cm.

Coll: The Artist



Duriya Kazi
Salik – 1995
Aluminium cast
66 x 76 x 54 cm.
Coll: The Artist

Duriya Kazi (b. 1955)

Duriya Kazi declares that she is not really “about being a professional artist.” With her, being an artist is incidental, and her main concerns are “coming to terms with my experiences.” This may have a good deal to do with a family history, which has encouraged an active interest in politics and the nature of the human condition. From her mother’s side, Duriya’s lineage goes back to Maulana Muhammed Ali Jauhar and the Khilafat Movement!² There is also a family tradition of eminence in the arts – Shakir Ali was her mother’s uncle.

As she remembered, “Everyone in my family draws and paints. My aunts were very involved with it. One aunt in particular made us very conscious of line quality. Colour was never that important.” Which gives one an insight into Duriya’s early strengths.

In her years at school – St. Joseph’s in Karachi – she was encouraged to continue with the activity, which made her think of coming to NCA. However, Shakir Ali was surprisingly discouraging and suggested that she do her

BA first. Being deflected from going to art school in Lahore, she ended up doing her BA at Karachi University, which “led on to an MA in English Literature before I knew it.”

It now seemed too late to think of beginning art in Lahore, so she took off for a six-month course at the Heatherly School of Fine Arts in London. She remembers it fondly: “They had three sessions, morning, afternoon and evening, and I did all three! I was so thirsty for it.” She found everyone there applying for art-college, and so Duriya applied too, not knowing if she’d get in, or where she would get the money to pay for it if she did.

Duriya did get in, and with her father’s support, went on to do her BA with Honours at the Kingston Polytechnic in London. Here she met David Alesworth, an English sculptor, who was to be her husband.

Duriya’s marrying an Englishman was surprisingly not too difficult for her family to accept. Religious and cultural differences were easier to reconcile than the political ones. Duriya remembers being concerned about her own political views, which were vehemently anti-colonial. Long discussions with her mother helped to sift political issues from the personal ones.

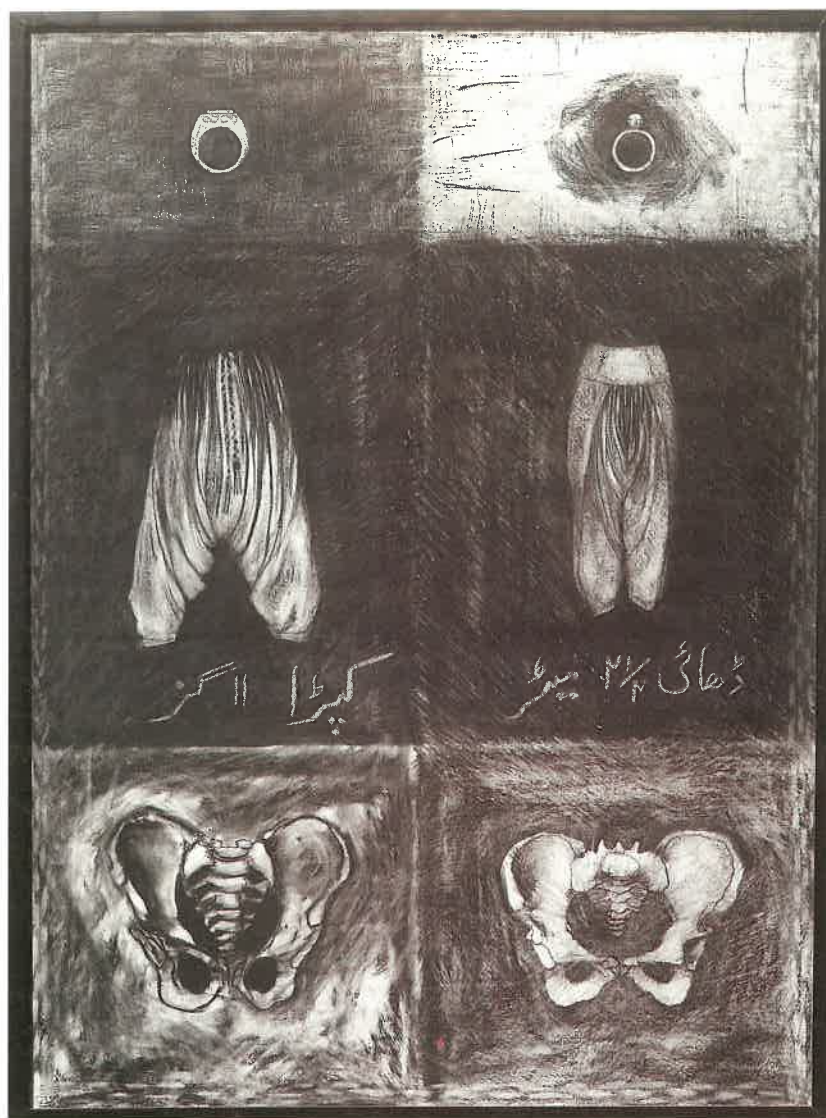
Her mother has been a defining factor in Duriya’s life. She observes candidly, “My mother is a very unusual woman; she never fitted into the mould – but she’s a very

stimulating character for all of us. Her whole life revolves around analysing politics. So it’s natural to me. Politics is over and above gender; none of us has ever been restricted by being female.

“The atmosphere in my home was an unusual one, where the question of male and female never came into things. My father was extremely supportive of women being independent... always telling us that we should never be dependent, and have a means of earning our own livelihood. All the women in my family are very strong.”

Duriya began teaching at the Karachi School of Arts after settling in the metropolis in 1988. She also taught at the Indus Valley School, and in 1999 was invited to set up the Department of Visual Art at the University of Karachi.

Duriya has a strong position on teaching: “Art education here is very firmly in the Western tradition. There are these appendages of miniature painting and calligraphy, which are add-ons. One has to find new ways of approaching the whole thing.” She attempted to change the syllabus of Art History at the Karachi School, taking into account the multiple identities that exist. “I feel there’s a whole range of Islamic concepts that we never explored in their secular applications. Strangely enough, a lot of Islamic art concepts work much better in a very avant-garde art form... when you examine these concepts, they’re



Duriya Kazi

Muzakkir – Muanis
(Male-Female) – 1999
Charcoal on paper
54 x 74 cm.
Coll: The Artist

very conceptual, rather than sensual, although that element is also there. I think the art of the sub-continent is very tactile.”

Duriya is of the view that being obsessed as

we are with ‘identity’, can be limiting. “Maybe you have to embrace the hybrid. You can’t deny reality... it’s a mistake when people say ‘forget about everything else, just do this...’ The end is ultimately art in its most universal

context. Eventually, we are looking at the same human issues, the same formal issues. But the way we approach it... is from where we are.”

Teaching at the comparatively upmarket Indus Valley School, and the lower middle-class and ethnically homogenous ‘*Mohajir*’ Karachi School of Art, has given Duriya the opportunity to observe two very different segments of the Karachi populace. She finds the lower middle-class totally unconcerned about the possible conflicts between religious convictions and the practice of art; while at the Indus Valley School it has often been the subject of discussion. “There were some girls saying, if they do a portrait they will have to breathe life into it! Such an issue has never come up at the Karachi School of Art. Perhaps, as George Bernard Shaw said, ‘Morality is a very middle class activity!’”

About the evolution of imagery in her own work, she says, “I started off initially with images to do with women in *chaadars*. The first work which I did, which I consider independent of art school, was to do with the idea of clothing... the folds... the *chaadar*. I did a lot of photography. I used folded masks where the women inside did not exist. I made these hollow images of brides, where her *chaadar* was her identity rather than what she was. It’s such a strong image... it’s not just an image, it’s an experience.”

Duriya’s main body of work until the mid-nineties focussed on sculpture. She had earlier had varied experience in illustration and landscape design. She also worked in ceramics, not as a potter but as a sculptor. She was amused by someone’s suggestion that it was a ‘feminine’ material because ‘it gives’ and is ‘not so demanding’! She noted cheerfully that she found it very demanding, especially “when it explodes at you!”

She acknowledges the importance of the handling of clay, and remembers rolling out

the material very thinly, relishing its fragility. Its cracking in the firing was important to her, a part of the process. She marvels at the resilience of clay as a material which survives in archaeology in all its brittleness and frailty, and lives to tell the tale.

The dilemma of being a working artist and a mother is a constant she lives with. "I came across a lot of criticism from my family about being a bad mother. The best way of being a mother is for your entire attention to be in the nurturing of the child. But I also feel that I may be adding to their experience when they sit and play with clay. I feel in the end everything is evened out."

Duriya worked in a number of materials until the mid-nineties, mixing ceramics and welded metal, stone, aluminium, cast iron and resin. "In a way I feel I've wasted a lot of time... I feel the content of what I wanted to say was very dominant, and that I should have tackled a lot of formal issues at the same time. Of course when you approach art very formally, the language is very satisfying, and you end up with things that look very seductive. Then you think 'what is it about? How is it different from everyone else's work?' Of course being a woman has affected my work and the direction its taken. But being an individual is what it's really about."

Duriya looked to history and location as catalysts for her work, and her studies into the lands of the Indus led her to explore other crossroads and intertwinings. These new intellectual discoveries had to be organised and led into her own language and its imagery. She revelled in her diverse sources, which ranged from Tantric to Sufi traditions, Islamic patterns and temple forms.

In the harshness of Karachi's fratricidal wars in the nineties, Duriya found herself "entangled in the events" around her. As a mother, she

worked with the imagery of the child with the protective shield of motherhood. "The same images of motherhood keep coming back into my work, which is not about a private relationship between a mother and child. It has a lot to do with the fact that they are there, physically, around me."

She was now also working on a series of charcoal and conté drawings, dark and spontaneous, which, through the medium, communicated the urgency and drama of their content.



Duriya Kazi
Very Very Sweet Madina - 1999
 Installation
 183 x 274 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

As Duriya's experience with her materials widened, she cast around for other contexts, which she drew into her contemporary fold. She found it hard to respond to work that lacked a sense of where it was. "So much art here is about buying and selling... I suppose people don't want to live with ugliness... there is no real art criticism. The magazines have wide readerships. The idea is to bring people to see work into galleries. It's not about a conversation with the artist. I think [this] has a very negative influence."

This desire to take work to where the people are, led to collaborations with other artists and urban artisans. In 1996, with artists David Aylesworth, Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi, Duriya worked as a member of a team comprising sign-painters, truck decorators, metal workers, and electricians. Their first collaborative project was 'Heart Mahal', a 'container' inspired by the decorative truck which plies the roads of Pakistan. The artists relished the humour and the 'hybridity' that emerged from the process of fusing a host of skills and materials. Fluorescent tapes, flashing lights, and embossed metal were appropriated to arrive at an uninhibited work process.

Later works with David Alesworth were 'Arze-Maood' ('The Promised Land') in the Frere Hall gardens in 1997, and 'Very, Very Sweet Madina' in 1999; interactive installations which attempted to incorporate the fantasies and desires of the urban populace. These works acknowledged the divide between the artist and those addressed. The struggle was towards "creating new physical spaces in order to open the artistic encounter to different audiences."

Duriya Kazi's new duties at the University of Karachi have slowed the tempo of her own work. This may be an interlude, perhaps in preparation for a new direction.

Lalarukh (b. 1948)

Lalarukh returned to Pakistan after her studies in the USA in 1977, fifteen days before Martial Law was declared and General Zia-ul-Haq took over from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. She remembers her return as the time when she began to get politically involved, "I suddenly had the realisation that things are happening around me. Up to that point, other than exposure to various political ideas, I was really out of things... this jolted me into reality."

Lalarukh comes from a family where all the arts, especially music, have been central to their lives. She remembers growing up in a milieu in which theatre and music were "part of our growing up... Always going to the Arts Council... as kids, listening to classical music, sitting up till two o' clock in the morning... often sleeping through it."

These were the early sixties in Lahore, when there was much state propagation of the arts, and the exchange of artists and musicians from the East Wing of the country enriched the urban cultural atmosphere.

Lalarukh's father, Hayat Ahmed Khan, was himself involved in the promotion of music in the fifties and sixties, being the organiser of the All Pakistan Music Conference, a major event held each year in Lahore. All his daughters were encouraged to follow their artistic inclinations; and it was taken for granted that Lalarukh's talents in art would lead to a career.

Art was part of her school curriculum, and the gentle urging of her art teacher Mariam Habib kept Lalarukh deeply involved in her art class. She joined Lahore College as a prelude to moving on to the Fine Arts Department at the Punjab University. She remembers, "The University, in those days, was a very liberal place, and we were very protected by the head of the Department. We had heard that there had been an attack on the Department by the *Jamiat* in the sixties, but not in our time."

Lalarukh recalls classes studying the nude in their drawing and painting courses. "The women students would be drawing female nudes, and the boys would be doing male nudes; separately of course, but it was quite acceptable."

She remembers an incident during a landscape class within the University premises, when she had hung up her *dupatta* while painting. A bearded old man came up to her and began admonishing her; he was cut short by Anna Molka Ahmed's voluble intervention, telling him to go reprimand his own daughters!

Lalarukh enjoyed teaching part-time at the University, and also at the Lahore American School, before going off to the University of Chicago to do her MFA. The US experience was significant for Lalarukh, being independent of the family for the first time, making decisions, and travelling. She camped



Lt - Rt:
Lalarukh, Rahat Masud
and Zubaida Javed

all over Europe on her way home, living for six months on \$200. "It was a mind-expanding experience for me that really made me think that this was the life for me."

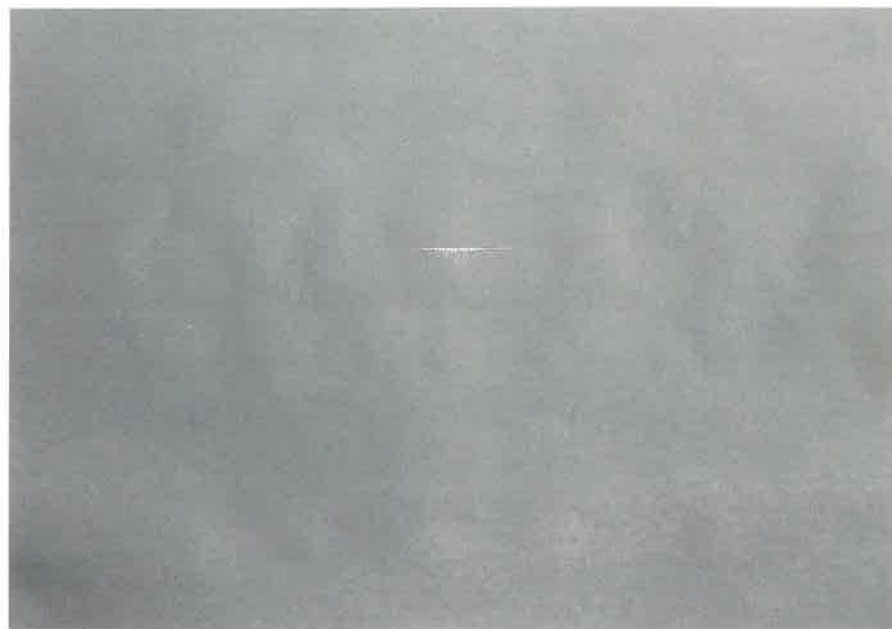
She had arrived at certain other decisions also: "I decided that marriage was not for me. That was the crucial time when families normally decide that they should get you married, otherwise it will be too late."

The first year in Lahore after her return was a time of major adjustment. It was made slightly easier by her job at the Art Centre¹³, a privately owned gallery-cum-atelier-cum-performing arts centre. She ran art classes and supervised the gallery and the music performances, something she enjoyed, until the Centre closed its doors permanently in the early eighties.

Lalarukh was offered a teaching post at the Punjab University and although she was reluctant, she accepted it, because she didn't want to be economically dependent on her family. Although, as she put it, "I'd rather have just bummed around... I was dreading being back in a controlled environment."

Having known the University very well in the past, Lalarukh was ill prepared for the change which the Zia-ul-Haq years had wrought in academia. "The University was changing, and the Jamiat had already taken over. In our Department the Head actually allowed the *Jamiat* to come in... everyone with a 'different' beard was a 'leftist'. If I was seen talking to someone the *Jamiat* didn't like, they would actually come up to question it!"

Lalarukh stuck it out for four years, witnessing the witch-hunts at the University. Her growing commitment to the Women's Movement, specially the Women's Action Forum¹⁴, was making it impossible to continue at the University. On being offered a job at the National College of Arts, she moved across



Lalarukh
Gadani Beach 15 – 2001
Silver paint on paper
29 x 21 cm.
Coll: The Artist

the road to a more liberal and less beleaguered environment.

In the eighties her time was taken up with women's issues, communications workshops with underprivileged women, teaching, and her own art. Talking about those years she says, "You must view things from the perspective of a woman. A lot of my awareness grew from the Women's Action Forum. Of course I got hold of a lot of books and theoretical knowledge. But the practice of what one believed did start off with a feminist organisation, although we never claimed that

that's what it was, because we wanted it to be open. It operated in a democratic fashion, being non-hierarchical."

In 1985, Lalarukh started Simorgh, a women's resource and publication centre, together with activists Neelam Hussain, Farida Sher, and Nasrene Shah. This brought Lala into contact with women at the grassroots level through workshops. She introduced them to techniques of making posters and screen-printing, getting them to articulate their own issues visually. It was both valuable and enriching; "their analysis of images is wonderful. I intervene

only to the extent that they need. They have to draw properly... There is a concept of transforming an idea into an image... in one sense it is unique and in another it is so predictable.”

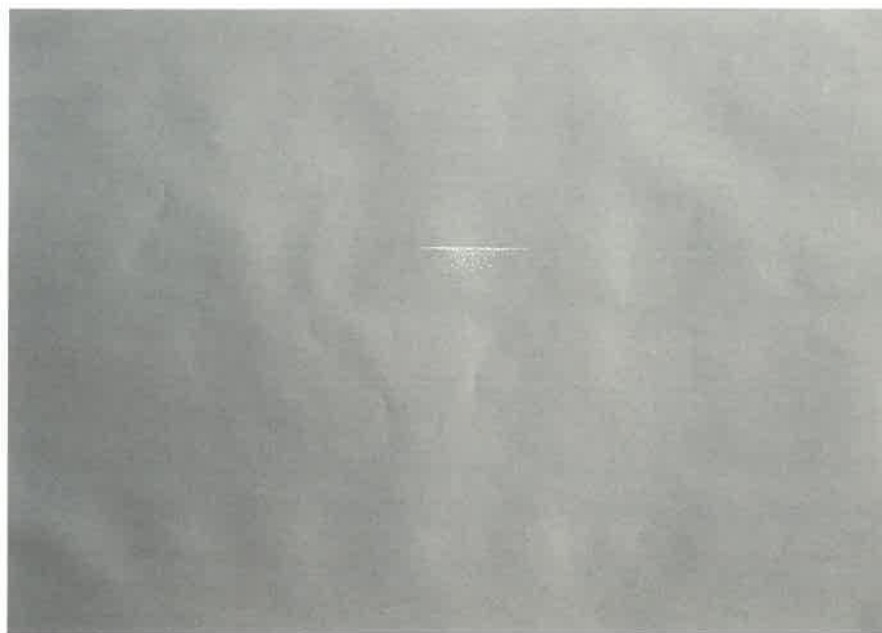
Lala’s workshops gave her an insight into the world of a class of women which she herself was never part of. “I think if you belong to a privileged class, half your problems are already solved... My immediate family was my support base... they rarely imposed anything... as far as the extended family... I think they have always thought I was a bit crazy... so everything was forgiven because of that.”

Lalarukh’s early works to do with the human form were linear, very minimal demarcations of the movement and the alignment of the form. The marks were rhythmic, sometimes staccato, mere hints of what was beyond the predictable observable phenomenon.

Her skills as a photographer were employed in the eighties to record social and political events, and as an aid to her workshops. The rejection of oils-on-canvas was a decision taken intuitively by many women painters, but consciously by Lalarukh. She points out that this alien tradition is very distanced from our own experience, and the history of our way of rendering form.

Experimenting with the photographic process, Lala merged darkroom experimentation with the tactile seduction of drawing materials, arriving at intense, contemplative mixed-media works on photographic paper. Entitled ‘River in an Ocean’, they began with Lalarukh’s focus on water-tanks, empty, full of water, and covered with water lilies. They originated as serigraphs culled from a series of photographs taken in Sri Lanka, and then transformed themselves into seascapes after a trip to Goa.

Lalarukh turns to a number of media – crayon,



Lalarukh

Gadani Beach 14 – 2001

Silver paint on paper

29 x 21 cm.

Coll: The Artist

graphite, metallic paints, acrylics and ink – with a minute brush to achieve a mysterious cohesion. There are associations with the miniature tradition, the delicately worked surface, the intimacy of scale, the preference for stylisation, and a repudiation of the conventional Western notion of deep, three dimensional space.

The death of her mother in 1997 left a deep imprint on Lalarukh’s creative output. This was a time of withdrawal, with some images emerging out of the shock of the departure of a loved one. Never a prolific artist, her duties as the coordinator of the Masters programme

at NCA have inhibited her output as a painter. However, she does go back to her practice when moved to do so by events or emotional needs.

Discussing where her feminist position is reflected in her work, Lalarukh dismisses the notion of having to consciously bring the two together. She rejects the idea of a ‘feminist’ image as being something to do with overt female symbols, or certain colours, or other recognisable elements. She is quite emphatic about why this is so, “Because ultimately, whatever you are comes out in your work!”

Samina Mansuri (c. 1950)

Graduating from the Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1977, Samina Mansuri seemed poised to pursue a successful career in the thriving advertising world in Karachi. Two years with an ad agency raised uncomfortable questions about personal fulfilment and self-realisation: "I hated working every second and was very depressed. I could not work out what was really wrong... I was already in a senior position and had not much further to go. Then I thought, perhaps if I continue my studies abroad... I got a scholarship to Pratt in Graphic Design, which seemed exciting..."

She did extremely well during her years at Pratt, winning yet another scholarship and graduating with honours. Sensing that something was missing, she took extra classes in drawing and creative writing in an attempt to explore avenues which might provide answers to what she was looking for. Living

in a studio with other artists, she began to paint, and sensed a glimmer of direction.

Joining the New York Studio School of Painting and Sculpture in 1988 gave Samina the confidence to consider herself a painter, an idea she had dismissed in earlier years. "I did not have enough exposure to painting... you see them at exhibitions, that's it! Even when I started working in an agency, and decided it was not for me... I couldn't allow myself to be a painter, I could not, did not, believe in myself! I thought very few are going to be any good, and I'll be just another painter..."

The time in New York, although invigorating for her work, were years of financial struggle, loneliness, and learning to fend for herself, all very difficult for a young woman of her somewhat sheltered background. Samina's father was a well-known writer and journalist in Karachi, and her mother was educated, interested in literature, and exposed her children to good writing. In her home, literary expression was generally more acceptable than the visual, although Samina did art in school, and was encouraged to take up design.

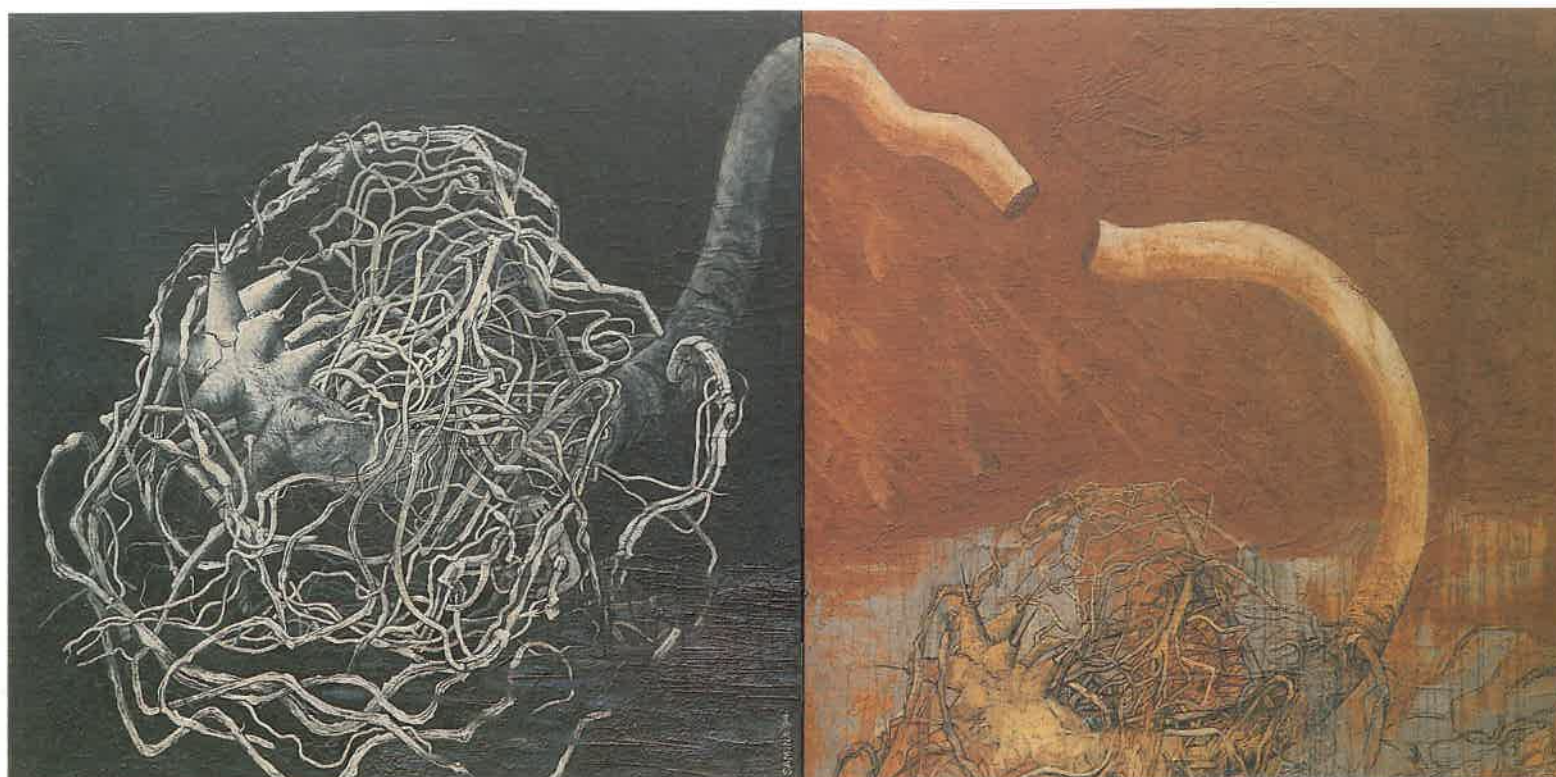
The traumatic suicide of a close painter friend seemed to push Samina in a direction which she eventually found herself moving towards, and may be responsible for the kind of work she is still doing. She remembers the Z.A. Bhutto era as being politically stimulating, with the sense of freedom for women. Her

mother encouraged her to read, exposing her to feminist writings, and reinforcing her pride in being a woman and an individual.

Samina was leaving for New York when Zia-ul-Haq assumed power on July 5th, 1977. For her, "it was a horrifying time. In that short time I really felt paranoid about my existence. I felt, as a woman, I was being attacked... I was very glad I left then... But coming back, I feel I cannot escape what happened. During this time, a lot had changed." Eight years in New York changed Samina. Coming home in 1990 was challenging in terms of adjustments to be made, building relationships, and constructing contexts for her work.

She immediately began teaching at the newly set-up Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, something she was glad of: "My first teaching job was tremendous for me, very fulfilling... having this interaction with younger people, sharing what they're thinking, and meeting other people through the school... People are doing pretty interesting work here, and it is good being in touch."

Other problems, to do with being an unmarried woman in Pakistani society, remain. Samina faces these questions with philosophical good humour. "You are silenced very early in life. Too many negative voices telling you things, 'you can't be a painter... don't voice your thoughts... don't get too serious about your work, it will take you away from marriage... if you ever meet this guy, don't get into serious



Samina Mansuri

Black Light (diptych) -1994
Pigment wax and earth on board
232 X 116 cm.
Coll: G. Aziz

discussions about your work!’ This used to upset and frustrate me. I began to feel that it was impossible to find a happy medium in a relationship, finding it necessary to cut it off, because the person was in my way...”

The closeness to painting has been encompassing. Samina analyses the issues which concerned her in the mid-Nineties: “In New York, I’ve seen a lot of work done by women artists, but basically I’ve wondered what it would be like to find my own voice...

what is the struggle all about... You want to find out how authentic you are... what the struggle of living your own reality is in this society; what it means to be a woman here. I have had a difficult time playing that role... all the questions, conflicts and adjustments.”

The conflicts she refers to arose partly out of the decision to come back, and partly out of the constraints and demands the work itself places on her. She claims that she wants her painting to be “honest, even when it horrifies

me”, and finds that since the work has a lot to do with gender, she occasionally censors herself! Operating from the female reality, Samina’s work in 1991 and 1992 was loaded with overt meanings. The references to the human body, especially the female body, were passionate and lyrical.

Fruit, particularly the pomegranate and the *sharifa*, were symbols of fecundity. Exploring the idea of giving birth while denying herself that particular physical choice had multiple

meanings. The form, fascinating in itself, begins to imply both the male and the female. Samina explains, "When one talks of unity as an idea... one is talking of uniting the male and female within oneself. One has to do that first, before one finds it outside, in a relationship."

The essence of the fruit also suggests the physicality of the body "in which we are grounded!" This probing into her own compulsions has led Samina to look back at her years of self-combat with insight. "When I was much younger, there were so many years of frustration... trying so hard to fit in... A confusion over what was suppressed, not being able to handle a relationship, it created a tremendous anger within me... that is perhaps one of the reasons that I think I would not want to have children... companionship would be enough..."

She points out that women have a tendency to support the man they live with, in their work. "His work becomes more important. I have seen so many of my friends downgrading their own work and supporting their husband's. I really question why I would want to do that with my life. Once the relationship is there, you start feeling he is more important... the conflict is always there... for our generation, and for generations to come..."

In the mid-Nineties, Samina moved on to images of cacti, roots, thorns, entanglements, snares, and tubular forms. The fecundity of nature was overtaken by its violence, its convulsions. Metamorphoses occurred, "celebratory and ominous, joyous and brooding."

Samina intentionally used images with literal connotations, embracing the possibilities of communication with the audience she aspires to, one day, "make my own." These cerebral preoccupations were persuaded to be effectively involved in a dialogue with the

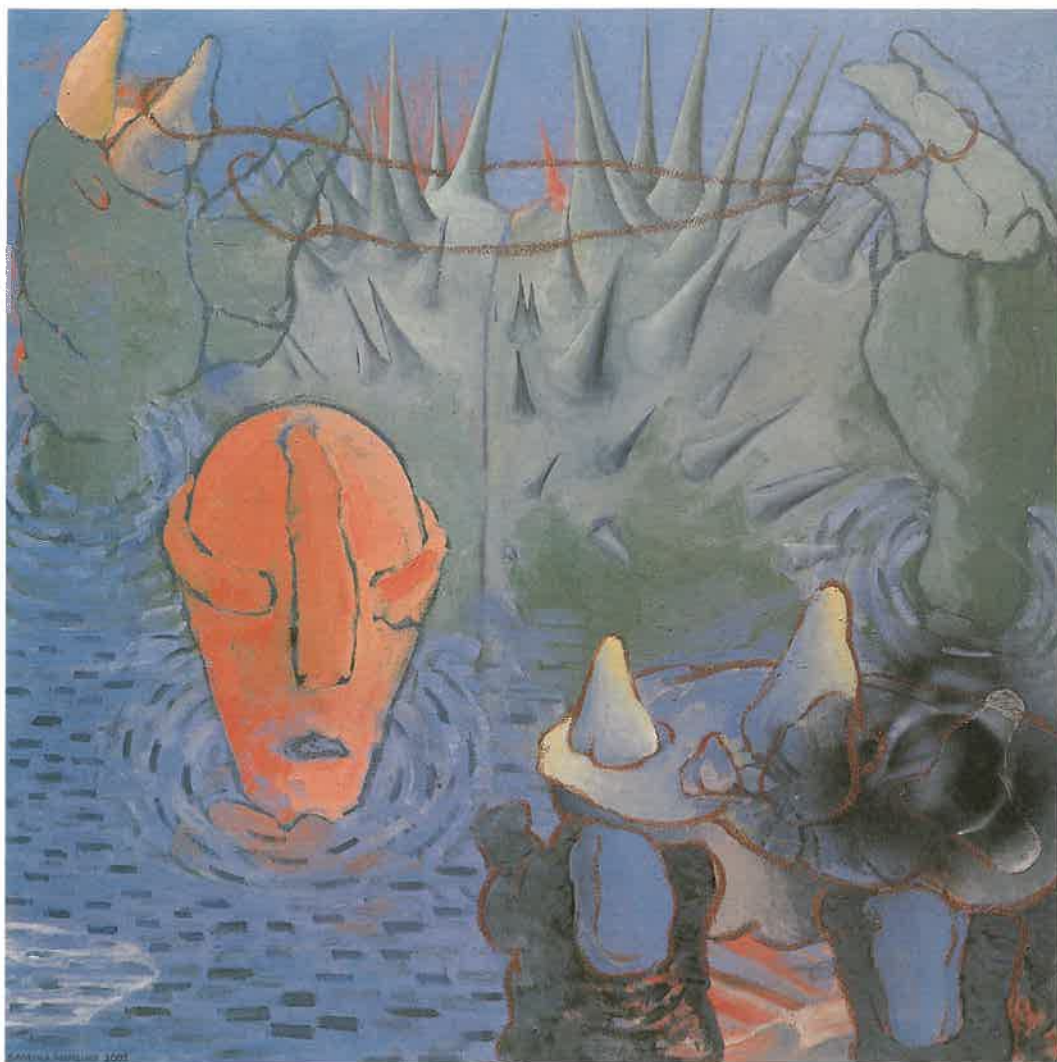
Samina Mansuri

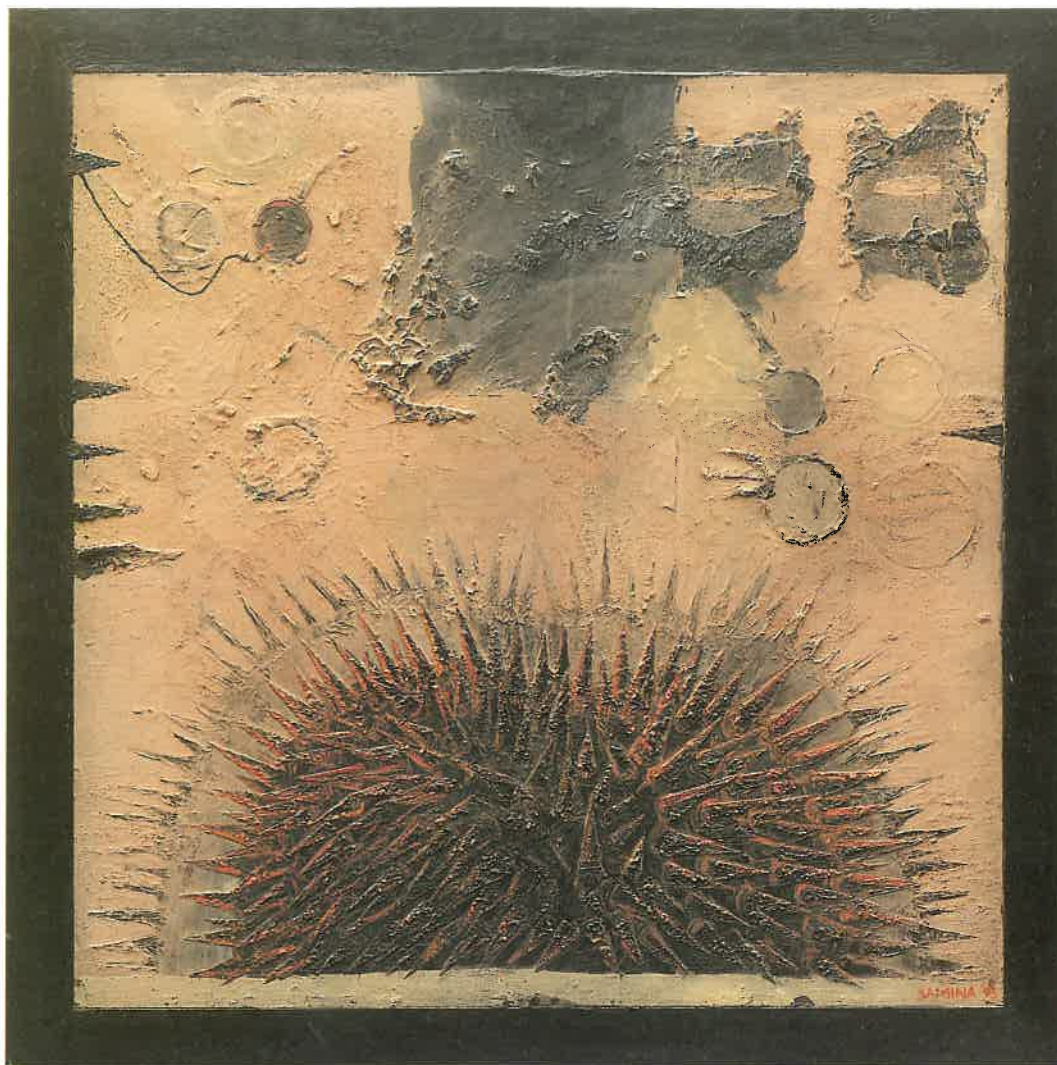
Gadani IV- 2001

Acrylic on board

114 X 114 cm.

Coll: Z. Husain





Samina Mansuri

Raging Eye -1993

Brick dust and acrylic on canvas

92 x 92 cm.

Coll: G. Aziz

medium and the visual process. The literal was transcended.

These paintings were large, often to be seen as parts of a whole. Painstakingly worked on over an extended period of time, she explored a range of mediums in the works. Layers of pigment, sand, ground down wax, acrylics, oils, and graphite came together with a sensuousness and a physicality that she revelled in. The cerebral understanding of what she was doing, and an ability to be both analytical and articulate, did not stand in the way of either the medium, or the lyricism of the work. The profusion of materials, the process, and the interaction with both images and medium as it unfolded, made the act of painting an act of fusion.

She said of the context of this particular body of work, "Being here is definitely important... one can have a life anywhere else, but you are from this place after all, and it is here that one will make one's audience."

Since 2000, Samina Mansuri has occasionally distanced herself from the location she was referring to. A residency at the GasworksStudio in London in 1999 resulted in a series of drawings which she exhibited at the Chawkandi Gallery in Karachi upon her return. This work signalled a radical departure in medium and content. Unlike her earlier work, the drawings were direct and spontaneous. Samina herself seemed almost surprised at the vehemence the drawings were infused with. She was also taken aback by the criticism they evoked. She said of this work, "These are dysfunctional characters who are barely holding it together, or are in a general state of splitting or falling apart. Here identity is unfixed and unstable, these forms are part amorphous, part defined, and keep changing shape."

In fact, these works may have been heralding a state of mind and indicating the desire for a fresh start. In 2001, Samina Mansuri departed for Canada for an unspecified period of time.

Rahat Naveed Masud (b. 1953)



Rahat Naveed Masud
Self Portrait – 1994
Oil on board
60 x 90 cm.
Private Coll.

Rahat Masud's upbringing did not prepare her for the politically difficult years of teaching painting at the Punjab University.

She had grown up in a home where literature and politics were taken for granted as the major ingredients in life. Her Uncle Mumtaz Hassan was an eminent man of letters. Her father Naseem Hassan, a lawyer, had been Faiz's roommate in Government College, and while there, had been editor of the College magazine, 'Ravi'. He became active in Muslim League politics before Partition, and was advisor to Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar. He resigned for reasons of conscience, and later formed the Nizam-i-Islam Party with Chaudhry Mohammed Ali. Actively associated with Fatima Jinnah in the anti-Ayub Khan movement, he gave up politics after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Rahat and her four sisters were brought up in a liberal atmosphere by both her parents, and she feels that not having had a brother may have been a factor. She remembers having had far more freedom than her cousins; she climbed trees, played gulli-danda, flew kites, and roamed the neighbourhood in a manner unheard of for young girls of her background. All the sisters were encouraged to be serious about their education; the arts, especially literature, were considered essential components of being cultured.

Rahat remembers visitors to the house who were political figures as well as intellectuals,

like Hafiz Jallundhari and Faiz. She recalls discussions on poetry in which her mother would often correct her father, to his delight. Art materials were accessible, and all five sisters displayed some talent. Their mother was a woman of taste and was particular about developing theirs.

Rahat took art as a subject in school, and went to the Lahore College to become a student of Nasim Qazi in 1970. Luckier than her elder sister, who was equally talented but got married as soon as she had graduated, Rahat joined the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University in 1974 to do her MA. The Department was in the throes of an academic crisis, with the faculty having been depleted by the departure of several teachers. Anna Molka had retired, and there was a vacuum, not easily filled:

Nevertheless, Rahat remembers it as a time of self-exploration and exposure to European painting through books and reproductions. Zubaida Javaid was a kindly influence, with her strong affinity for colour and light. Rahat remembers her own interest in both these elements being paramount. She delved into the Impressionists with passion, especially Manet. She now acknowledges that there was a lack of exposure to contemporary painting, both Pakistani and Western, which restricted exploration and experimentation.

The complete reliance on observational processes, although valuable, became

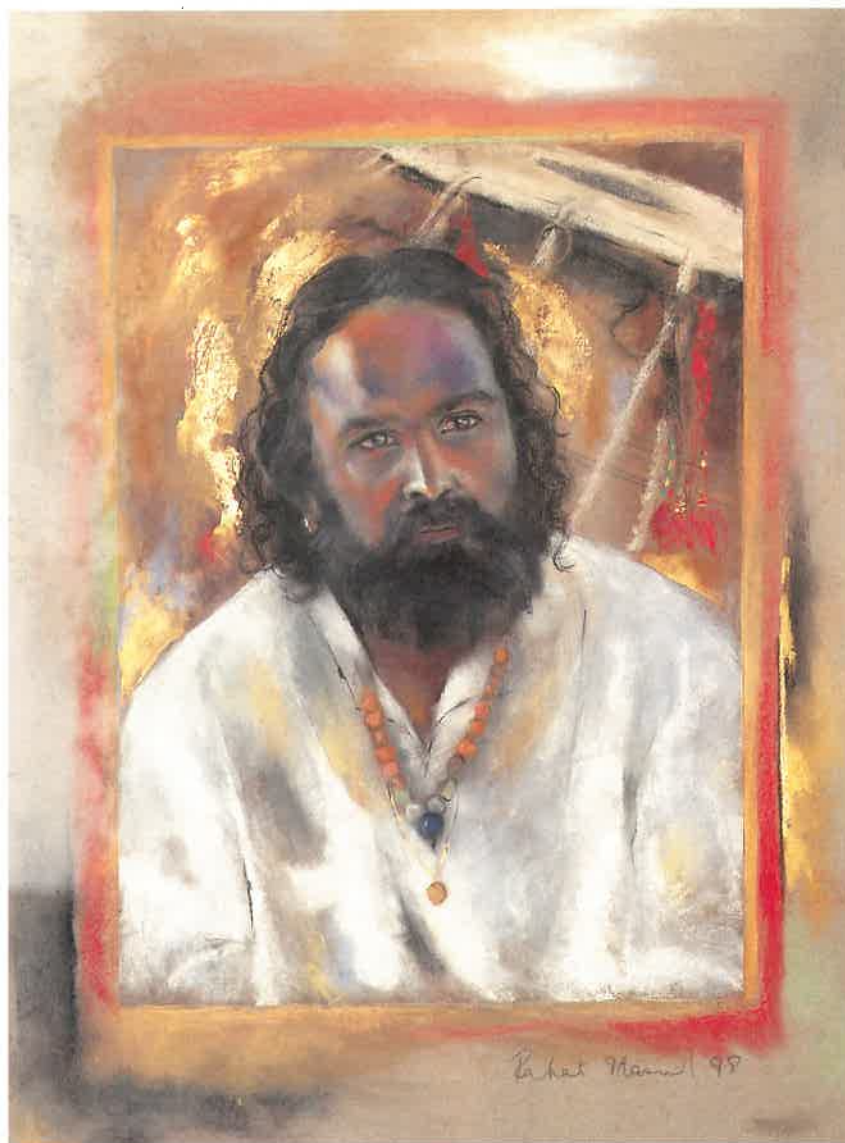
inhibiting. Rahat concedes that she herself was always aware of the fact that "pure observation had to be more than just that... you had to have something deeper to say."

She finished her MA in 1976 and got married immediately after. She now views the event with a little amazement: "I had never even seen my husband... can you imagine? It's shocking!" Her husband, a distant relative and a banker, has been encouraging of her work and supportive of her taking it seriously. But motherhood ensured that Rahat did little work apart from "a little landscape... a still-life here and there."

She received an invitation to return to teach in her Department in 1980, and took it up. She admits that she was taken aback by what turned out to be a harrowing experience, for political reasons, although she enjoyed the teaching itself.

Rahat, along with many others, suffered gross interference in the academic programme by the student wing of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, and is bitter about the inability of the University administration to defend its teachers. She recalls when she was made a target over an innocuous incident involving Turkish academicians visiting the Department. Intervening on behalf of one of the visitors who was being derided for wearing western dress by a group of women students, Rahat was accused of being 'un-Islamic' and found herself being denounced in posters the next day. The incident was traumatic, and symbolised for her what had happened to the University in the post '77 decade.

She also muses on the fact that apart from political factors, the teaching programme is irrelevant and out of date. She is especially critical of the teaching of art history, which does not accommodate the Pakistani reality of the non-Western point of view. Mummified in a pre-Independence ethos, the teaching of



Rahat Naveed Masud

In Search of a Soul – 1998

Pastel, gold leaf on paper

75 x 100 cm.

Coll: The Artist

art history is antiquated and grounded in an Euro-centric outlook. Since the Punjab University syllabus serves as a model for all the other university fine arts departments in the country, this outmoded approach is reproduced countrywide.

In this atmosphere, Rahat's struggles with her own painting have been long-drawn out. As a young mother she laboured to focus on her work whenever she could find time. Determined to continue in the manner which she considered to be her forte, she worked from direct observation. She points out that the pressures that affected her experiences as a teacher acquired a presence in her painting. Several works have alluded to these concerns, including her 'Self-portrait' with a veil, which won a prize in the Punjab Exhibition in the early nineties.

These and later works, ostensibly to do with a gifted observation of three-dimensional forms and light, hint at the inner questions which have disturbed and occupied Rahat as a painter in a difficult aesthetic environment. She concedes that while the message is submerged, it is nevertheless there, and she is amused at the misreading of her painting. Living in London where her husband was posted for a few years, Rahat took the opportunity to do post-graduate work in art history and illustration at the Goldsmith College of Art. She worked on a series of illustrations of Faiz's poetry, and sought to deviate from the purely figurative. The exposure to a different milieu raised questions about her own manner of looking, and she became involved in a radical re-thinking of her painting and its theoretical framework.

Her return home to Lahore and to the University altered her focus as well as her medium. Referring to her early 'Self-portrait', Rahat suggests that while that work was reflective of the time, with the female tied to her *dupatta*, she now regards the predicament



Rahat Naveed Masud

Dream Land –

Pastel and silver leaf on handmade paper
85 x 67 cm.

Coll: The Artist

of both men and women as being inextricably entwined. She muses, "Perhaps the woman in my work now represents both man and woman... Mortals oscillate between a sphere of isolation and an acceptance of worldly realities." There is a retracing of steps to childhood memories of *melas*, wandering *faqirs*, and the singing of the *Qawwali*; the beat of the drum is recalled as the sound of mystical energy. These have filtered into Rahat's new images as a result of something she describes as "an inner search."

Temporarily discarding oils on canvas, she is working extensively with pastels on paper, finding in this medium the layered, subtle mark that captures the fragility of physical being. The handmade surface reverberates with the pressure of the hand, an intimacy absent in the distance of the brush from the canvas. In her conversation, Rahat talks of

"the vibrancy and intensity of oil paint, which contrasts with the temperament of pastel", but then quickly, she makes a reference to nostalgia as an instinctive presence in her preference for the buoyancy of pastels.

In these visually nuanced works on paper, Rahat has ventured into 'mood' pictures, taking up 'man-woman' themes, and portraits. Going beyond the purely descriptive, she attempts to conjure up a lyrical, somewhat wistful locale. The nostalgia occurs in the approach to these forms, as well as in her partiality to a palette which avoids any disharmonious notes or hint of harshness. Even in the portrait of Pappu the drummer, the ominous flash of passion is subjugated by the totality of her 'correctness'. There is the possibility that Rahat may yet venture into the unexplored territory of rapture without her roadmap.



Tanvir Rehman

Tree – 1995

Oil on board

120 x 90 cm.

Coll: Alhamra Art Gallery

Tanvir Rehman (b. 1962)

Growing up without a father was the defining factor in Tanvir Rehman's life. Her mother struggled to provide for her four daughters in the single-parent household and Tanvir remembers it as a traumatic influence, even though she later had "a wonderful stepfather."

Landing up at the National College of Arts after her Senior Cambridge in the early seventies changed her life. Coming from a broken home, Tanvir found direction and a camaraderie that she had missed out on earlier. Although she avoided painting classes initially, perhaps from a lack of confidence, she eventually focussed on still-life and found herself warming to the medium. Her work became interesting enough for Principal Shakir Ali to advise her to "come back and paint" – words she recalls with great fondness and awe.

However, economic compulsions and a desire to help out her mother resulted in Tanvir taking up a job which left her no time to paint. She returned to painting after a lapse of about five years, and acknowledges today that she feels she still hasn't painted enough. She taught in school for a long time before deciding to set up her own teaching studio at home, where

she instructed students and interested amateurs in drawing and painting. In between, Tanvir got married to Asad Rehman, a political activist, and had a son who is now a very major focus of her life.

Tanvir views herself as being an outsider. The sense of emotional deprivation and economic hardship of her early years have left an imprint on a person who says she was born in "the wrong society; I'm not very feminine in my attitudes. I have had to struggle. I do feel we are equal to men. Being without a father or brother – my fantastic stepfather came later – those who have them don't know how it is. A male is very important in this society. I really had to fight for my rights."

Musing on her work she says, "I think of myself as a mediocre painter. I feel other people have advanced much further, and I haven't. I don't even know how good or bad I am." Her early interest in still-life, plants, and trees, has been a constant in her work, from then till now. She views her progression as being slow, but fulfilling and logical. The major developments in these paintings have been in her use of two-dimensional space and her technical clarity.

As Tanvir continued to paint plants and trees, she moved away from observed phenomena to a more deeply felt sensitivity and exploration of form. She pared down the elements to the bare essentials, imposing severe restrictions on her palette, which is understated, primarily

earth tones delineated by carefully drawn edges.

Returning to the same forms over and over again, Tanvir jokes about "having a love affair with a certain tree in Lawrence Gardens." But there is a meaningful undertone reinforced in the work. Surface textures on tree bark, dusty dunes, and gnarled branches, have an obsessive intensity. There is a search for order and equilibrium. The desire to speak of isolation through the work is apparent in her stark juxtapositioning of certain elements which does not occur in nature, and which lays bare something beyond a barren landscape.

In recent years Tanvir has taken up more than one form of communication. Working with the Punjab Artists Association, she organises exhibitions, and also works with handicapped children in Lahore. Since 1996 she has successfully ventured into film production and art direction, a brave attempt to make aesthetic inroads into the stagy pastiche of Pakistani films. The world of cinema in Pakistan is a male preserve where apart from actors, singers, and a handful of directors, women have had little or no role to play. In the area of set design and art direction, Tanvir has redefined its parameters, and has received many major awards for her work since 1999. As she puts it, "I took it as a challenge. I was already working as a designer, and like everyone else, I was cribbing about how our films look. So I decided to attack it from the inside instead of from the outside."



Naheed Saleem
Rohri Sahib V– 1996
 Oil on board
 76 x 96 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

Naheed Saleem

(b. 1957-2002)

On the main highway from Abbottabad to Kakul, in a quiet suburban house, is Naheed Saleem's studio and art gallery. An unassuming but enthusiastic endeavour to "create an interest in, and an environment for, art activities." Naheed was helped by her husband, who devoted himself to this joint effort.

Naheed's father was an architect in Rawalpindi, and it was the natural thing for her to take up fine art in school, and then in college, where she was taught by Jamila Zaidi and Tasnim Abbas. Going on to the University of the Punjab, she remembered Zubaida Javed as being instrumental in her development. She did her MA in 1984.

Her marriage was arranged by her sister-in-law-to-be, who lived in the same hostel as Naheed, and decided that she was the right girl for her brother "who was crazy about

painting." Her husband went away to work in the Gulf and Naheed was not able to paint while he was away; but joining him in Saudi Arabia helped her get back to painting. Returning to Pakistan periodically, she exhibited in group shows, and had her first solo exhibition in 1989.

Naheed found living in Saudi Arabia restrictive to women and antagonistic to her talents as a female artist. Finally coming home to Pakistan, she and her husband decided to devote themselves full-time to Naheed's special talents, her painting, and the propagation of art activity at all levels. For her husband, a computer specialist, it was a major decision.

They toyed with the idea of living in Gujrat, her husband's hometown, but finally decided on Abbottabad. It seemed an arbitrary decision at the time since neither of them knew a soul there, but the painter Mansur Rahi whom they had met earlier encouraged them.

Naheed had a little teaching experience previously, which she set out to enlarge. Both husband and wife visited schools and colleges in the vicinity, and convinced principals and teachers alike that introducing art into their curriculum would be an enriching and educative experience for the children. She also made inroads into the education of the military cadets at the Academy in Kakul. She lectured the young men on the finer points of painting, as well as coaching them in their arts and crafts classes.

Naheed set up an 'Art Club' in the house, and fostered a special interest in art classes. Although she had no children of her own, she concentrated on nurturing a love for art in children, holding art competitions and talks for them, as she felt that if children can be familiar with the names of film stars and pop singers, why not with the names and personalities of artists. She found a number of exceptionally talented young students, and was animated by their development and progress.

Her own work continued, parallel to her art classes. She drew upon stimuli from the architecture and visual motifs of the area, abstracted and worked with impastoed and fluid layers of paint. Intent on developing a personalised vision, she was open to influences and images around her. Her use of colour owed little to observable natural sources, and was more introspective in the struggle to evolve a palette appropriate to her themes. She viewed her work as a joint crusade with her husband to energise the community around her into participating in artistic activity, which would draw them together in a cultural context.

As Naheed's school gained popularity and numbers grew, other artists, notably Mansur Rahi and Hajira Mansur, contributed to the teaching programme.

From 2001, to 2002 Naheed Saleem struggled against cancer finally losing the battle in April. Her husband, Saleem, aims to keep the school going in her memory.

Mobina Zuberi (b. 1945)

The turning point in Mobina Zuberi's life came in 1980, when, living in Dubai, she experienced a crisis. "I had had just about enough. I wanted to do something that was important to me, something I had wanted to do for a long time, so I told my husband, I want three months... just three months, to learn to paint!"

After major arguments, which included her threatening to leave without his consent, Mobina won her point, and chose to go to India, which was a more economical prospect than going to London. She went and worked in Garhi, the artists' village in Delhi, and painted non-stop for three months, before coming home to Karachi to exhibit at the Indus Gallery, in 1981.

The phenomenon of economically advantaged women like Mobina, who seek a sense of their individuality after having gone a long way to fulfill their obligatory social and biological roles, is not unusual in Pakistani society, and the moderated rebellion can be both painful

and fulfilling.

For Mobina, having been brought up in a culturally aware home environment in Karachi, music, dance and literature were part and parcel of her upbringing. But it was during her teenage years, living with her parents in America, that she discovered her interest in art. She took courses in high school and wanted to continue with them in Karachi when the family came back, but college art courses were not available. She joined the St. Joseph's College for a straight BA, and then did the 'proper' thing by getting married and having a baby. She attempted to continue with her interest in art by working with Ali Imam in his studio.

Moving back to America with her husband in 1967, Mobina joined the Art Students' League in New York, working there during the day, and taking evening classes at New York University. Being able to work with a model gave Mobina an insight into her preference for the female form.

She concedes that she had no perception of her own predicament, "I had no concept of women's issues. I was thinking alone. I was not a captive or anything in my house, it was more psychological." She also points out that for women in art, motherhood may not be the overriding, consuming passion that it is for others. "A part of you wants to do something else. It's not a lack of love for your children, it's something else."

As she describes it, the next ten years or so were spent "being a good housewife, socialising and doing the right thing." They had moved to Abu Dhabi by then, the children were at school in England, and she found herself beset by loneliness and a growing sense of futility.

Her decision to give herself the time to focus on painting, was acquiesced in reluctantly by all the family; and was the subject of domestic disapprovals and controversies, even though there was an aspect of pride in her accomplishments on the part of her husband and daughters.

Her initial success, at the Indus Gallery, encouraged Mobina to work more consistently. She began to take time out to paint, away from the home. While in Karachi, she began using a friend's flat two or three days a week, and occasionally going away to the mountains for a few days. The family eventually moved to Islamabad and she took advantage of the proximity of the mountains, going there periodically to paint in isolation.

The move to Islamabad encouraged Mobina Zuberi to set up a private art gallery, adding to her involvement in the activity of painting. She works to encourage younger artists, while providing a venue for the exposure of artists from Karachi and Lahore.

Talking about how she actually feels when she begins to paint, Mobina is frank about the

fact that for her it is a tense time, until it's behind her – these spans of painting last for ten or twelve days at a time. Now that her daughters have grown up, she realises that her own attitude towards herself, her physicalities, and her painting have also evolved. “I remember when I was younger, I was very vain about my body, but now I have begun to gain weight and I don't give a damn. I have reached a stage where appearances don't bother me. There has always been an introspection in my work... now it is more so.”

Her early works, all oils on canvas, were thinly layered portraits of women, often reminiscent of her own face. Somewhat stylised, sad and passive in looks, the palette was deliberately composed of monochromatic earth tones. Sepias, umbers, ochres and siennas formed the range of the rather loose, watery use of the paint. The imagery, the colour and the treatment, all brought to these works a suggestion of a worn, renaissance ‘under-painting’.

Mobina's images have continued to be about women, although as she says, “It is not about those rural women, or political turmoil in the country. It is more about the psychological turmoil, the compromises one has to make, the guilt, the balancing act!” She remembers the Zia years, when women didn't succumb to the pressures to take up calligraphy or the other ‘sanctioned’ themes, “Politics does affect and carry a certain pressure. Galleries won't show certain works. I'm not a brave person in that respect and I didn't want to be pointed out as the person who painted nudes... This was not conscious but it must have been at the back of my mind.”

Mobina often works from the model, but not exclusively so. The exploration of form has become more intuitive – the female, a device for delving deeper into psyche, mood and idea. The ‘Umbilical Cord’ series explored the relationships between the body and its

embryo, and between women of different generations. Coincidentally, Mobina is now a grandmother.

In 2000, Mobina and her husband built a house in the wilderness between Islamabad and the mountains. The move to the countryside may have coaxed a change in direction of medium. She has recently taken to working with gouache on paper, a medium unfamiliar to her. The focus is still the female body, but not discreetly layered; instead, confrontational and brash. She describes her desire for change, “I wanted a stark, mask-like feeling to the



Mobina Zuberi

A page from history – 1994

Mixed media on paper

59 x 81 cm.

Coll: Nat. Gall. Isl.

figure. I have made the face purposefully pretty, but there is a sense of fury about the body. It is simplified and delineated, but somehow one can never escape that body.”

Having once described painting as “a tragic activity”, Mobina Zuberi is distancing herself from the safety of her previous years of work. She is broaching an uncomfortable appraisal of the female form in works that are ruthless but, paradoxically, also naïve. They suggest memories of folk paintings, or ‘art brut’ with indigenous roots.



1987 – 1997

Towards the Millennium and Beyond

By the end of a decade of Zia-ul-Haq's rule, contradictions in the social and official attitudes to women had sharpened. Yet the proliferation of women's pressure groups and the increasing number of women entering the work force, sustained an atmosphere which suggested dissent and change.

The attempt to legitimise the military rule by setting up a 'controlled' civilian administration in 1985 was accompanied by a greater visibility of women in the media and in public life. The regime took great pains to present a more 'liberal' interpretation of Islam to women, while simultaneously continuing its policy of incorporating anti-women legislation into the legal framework.

Zia-ul-Haq's sudden death in the unexplained plane crash of August 17th, 1988, seemingly altered the course of Pakistani politics. Pakistan became the first Islamic State in the world to have a woman Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, raising interesting questions among the citizens of Pakistan about the acceptability of Zia's 'Islamic' policies vis-à-vis women. For women, the event was a portent of possibilities, a symbol of hope and change, grounded in the awareness of the realities of the unchanging patriarchal state of Pakistan.

Subsequent events proved otherwise. The two short-lived tenures of Prime Minister Bhutto and her successor Nawaz Sharif, demonstrated the ineptness of politicians as well as the

fragility of the democratic process. The governments were marked by increasing obscurantist pressures on women's social status, but women continued to make impressive contributions in the social sector. Dealing with the day-to-day constraints of a conservative, male dominated society, Pakistani women found ingenious ways of compromise and self-fulfilment.

Poor governance and the deteriorating relationships between the judiciary, executive, and the legislature, encouraged yet another military coup on October 12th, 1999. On this occasion, the army General, Pervez Musharraf, unveiled an ostensibly liberalist agenda. The contradictions of the loss of the democratic process on the one hand, and the supposed empowerment of women on the other, send mixed messages.

However, the decade-and-a-half since 1987 has seen a dramatic increase in the number of professional women artists. Of these, a significant number have moved into the international arena. Growing impatient with the ineffectual working of the official arts bodies and councils in Pakistan, they have also become independent curators, art critics, and gallery owners. Participating in international Biennales in Asia, Australia, and Europe, on their own initiative, Pakistani women artists have negotiated and achieved the right to speak on behalf of the contemporary art movement in Pakistan.

Sitting 1st row Lt - Rt:

**Omer Bukhsh, Farah Kardar,
Laila Rehman, Noor-us-Shahar,
Masood Hameed, Liaqat Ali Sherafi,
Tabassum Shaheen.**

Sitting 2nd row Lt - Rt:

**Uzma Durrani, Naazish Ataullah,
Afshar Malik, Quddus Mirza,
Salima Hashmi, Summaya Durrani,
Iqbal Hassan, (Principal) Abbasi Abidi,
Bashir Ahmad, Saeed Akhtar,
Talat Dabir, Zahid-ul-haq**

Standing 3rd row Lt - Rt:

**Nasir Bashir Alvi, Mohd Tayab Sajid,
Mohammad Asif, Iqbal Husain**

Roohi Ahmed (b. 1966)



Roohi Ahmed
'Dekh Bhal ke Jaana'
(Watch how you go) – 1999
Mixed media on gypsum board
46 x 76 cm.
Coll: D. Kazi

Roohi Ahmed wanted to be an engineer like her father, whose passion was aviation. She was her father's chota – the apprentice – when he fixed things around the house - electrical appliances, the plumbing, the car, etc. Doing things with her hands was the tactile experience when she was growing up. Sculpture came much later but the skills were learnt early. Her mother led her through the other experiences, of cooking, baking, and sewing. Both her parents are vociferous readers so there were always books in the house. Her father was talented at drawing but had been discouraged from taking it further by his father.

The family had migrated from Aligarh, their roots in Bijnaur in India. Although originally well to do, they filed no claims once in Pakistan for assets left behind; the challenge was to establish themselves in the young country. They chose to do so by putting all their energies into education. For the women in the family this meant taking up jobs alongside the men after finishing their training - "Something that would have been unthinkable in Aligarh," comments Roohi.

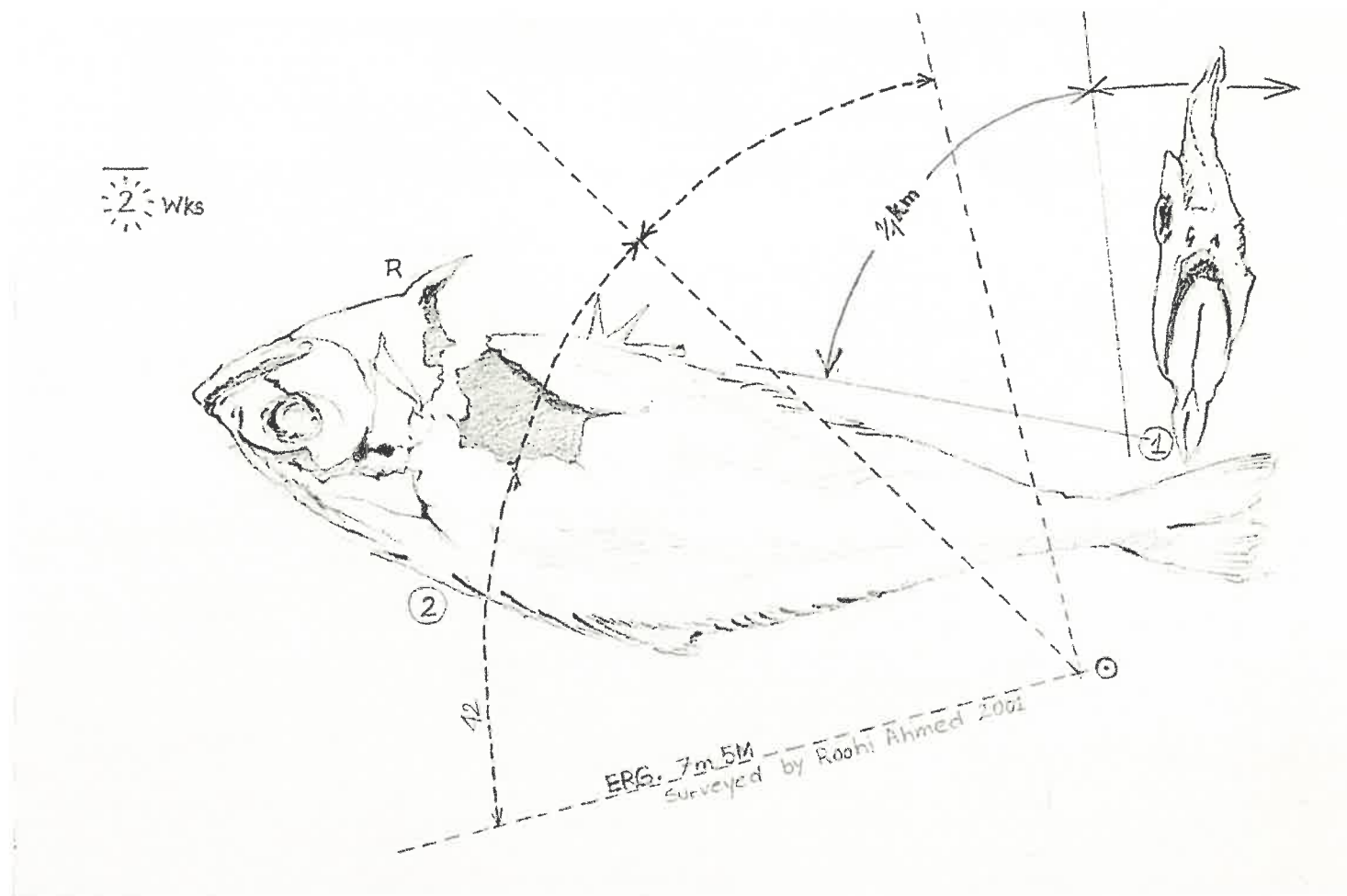
However, the urban conflicts and periodic turbulence in Karachi in the 1980s put paid to Roohi's aspirations to be an engineer. The academic calendar for professional colleges being in disarray, her mother suggested she join the Karachi School of Art to mark time, until such time that the engineering classes began. By the time this happened, she was so immersed in painting and sculpture that she

couldn't extricate herself; engineering was abandoned.

Of her teachers at the School, Duriya Kazi was instrumental in leading her towards sculpture. By the third year, Roohi was working in Duriya and David Alesworth's studio, where she learnt the ropes of sculptural practice. She moved on to teaching at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, and carefully balanced this with a strong commitment to art practice.

Roohi Ahmed's initial work was to do with the exploration of organic forms. Although good at figurative drawing, she moved away from the representational. Her interest in the sciences provided a theoretical framework for sculptural forms. She spent time at kumharwara, the potter's colony in Karachi, where she worked in clay on the wheel, studying the behavior of the material and its transformation. The vessel symbolised the human body, its form implying the boundaries between the inner and the outer space.

A lot of drawing accompanied these works, as did her continuous reading, ranging from poetry to the latest publications on DNA or the galaxy. Gradually the potter's wheel receded and the spiral took on significance as a form. Alongside this went questions to do with the nature of art and its context. From thrown forms in clay she moved to press-moulded forms and aluminum, debating the characteristics of matter and anti-matter as



Roohi Ahmed

Untitled – 2001

Pencil & tea wash on paper
20 x 15 cm.

Coll: Chowkandi Art

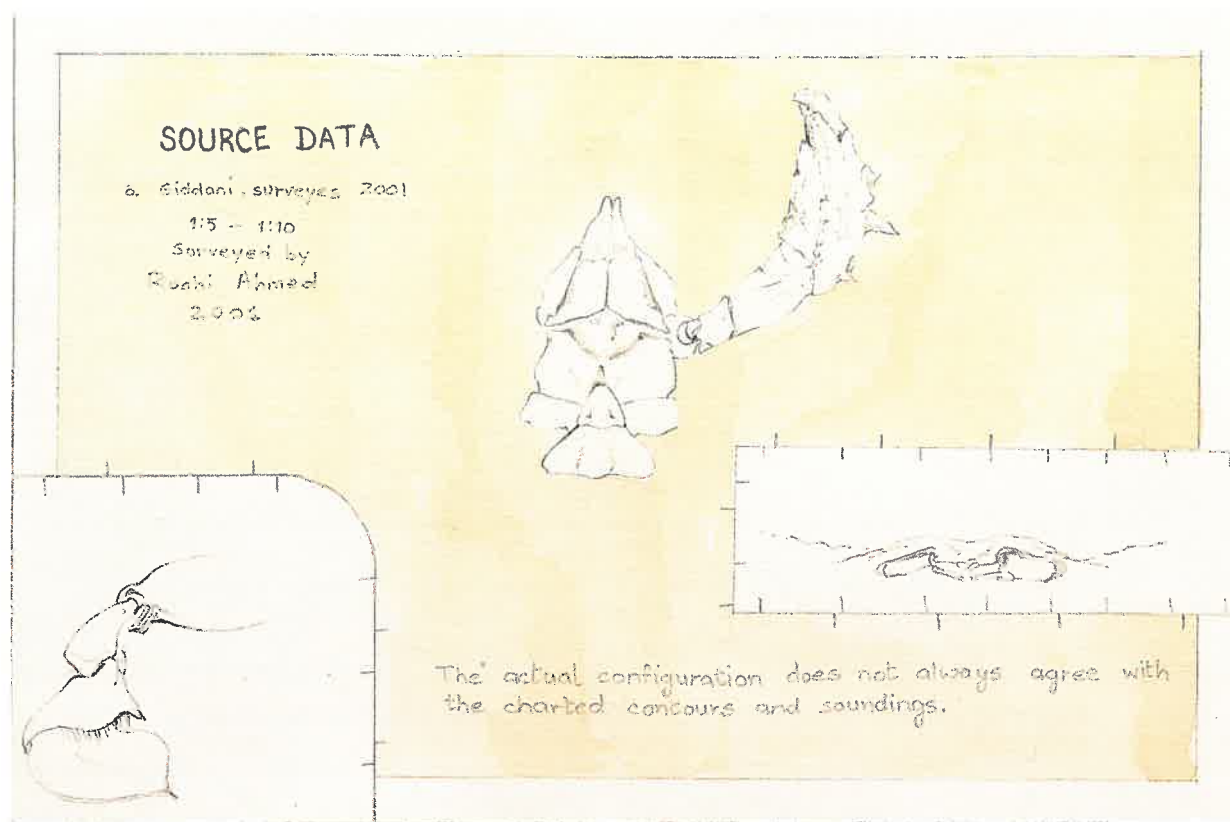
experienced through the mould and cast.

As a citizen of Karachi, Roohi found herself living and working on opposite sides of the city. In an environment beset by ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic strife, her journeys to and fro from home to work, were punctuated by 'safe' and 'no-go' areas. A series of works made in 1999, were mappings of the routes

she devised for these daily journeys. They embodied the grim reality of the lives of Karachi's inhabitants, but also simultaneously proclaimed her right to live her life as a commentator on the absurdity of the city's constraints.

Roohi's participation in the international artists' workshop 'Vasl' at Gadani Beach in January

2001 resulted in very diverse works. The first was an installation specific to the site, employing the sea and surrounding rocks as elements. Enlivening the landscape were buoys she had devised. At the same time, she roamed the beach and recorded environmental debris in a series of drawings. She incorporated the delicate tracery of marine maps found at Gadani into her documentation of random



Roohi Ahmed

Untitled – 2001

Pencil & tea wash on paper

20 x 15 cm.

Coll: Chowkandi Art

objects and signs left in the sand. She discovered that, “Although we live by the sea, it doesn’t really enter our culture.” The persistence of cultural behavior patterns from a landlocked past?

An avid observer, Roohi is forthright about her role. “As a person I am concerned about what happens around me,” she says, “Human values, morality, the city, the country, the world – I am compelled to enquire about the state of things – the issues of war and peace. I read a lot, all that comes my way, everything from books and journals to comics. And the feedback from my students, I love to talk to

them. People are important to me.”

In this, Roohi has yet to find a partner in marriage. The suggestion that the conventional partnership would not work for her is smilingly accepted. “My parents know that my own development needs a special partner. So I can stay ‘at home’ as long as I like. There is no real pressure. Men are hesitant upon encountering a confident woman, and I have found that to be true not only in our society. I have also seen from my own experience that men can’t handle two things at a time. Women can. I see my mother as she binds and threads the family together.”

Through her work, Roohi Ahmed investigates ways to make similar connections in a different and wider sphere. When the tightrope she walks between the many roles she plays becomes intense, she hides her fatigue, not wanting to be told by the family that she does not need to take so much onto herself.

Roohi philosophises that her work is the outcome of active questioning, rather than a statement. “I don’t limit myself to materials, or a definition of whether I am a sculptor or painter – that is irrelevant; it’s what one has to say.”

Ruby Chishti (b.1963)

Ruby Chishti's paintings in her Final Year Thesis Exhibition at the National College of Arts, in 1988, contained references to poignant childhood experiences. One of six children, she remembers being left to her own resources as a child, allowing her a certain degree of freedom to be a tomboy, climbing trees and being on her own. With it went a sense of being on the periphery of the family unit.

"I felt my elders never gave me the love I needed, no one was really concerned about me... I remember being constantly heartbroken because of this."

But with her elder brother, there was a special bond: "My world was connected by him. He would talk to me... he was kind and friendly. My father died in 1975, and it was this brother who looked after him in the last illness. He wrote poetry and I spent a lot of time with him. He wrote a poem on my father's death; I live with this poem. I too wanted a language to express myself in. Then tragedy occurred. My brother was diagnosed with cancer. He was only twenty-seven. I was in FA, only sixteen years old. I saw the suffering, perhaps that is what has brought me to my work."

Ruby describes her father as being an extremely honest man. An engineer by profession, he was able to provide only a half-built modest structure of a house before he passed away. For Ruby, coming to NCA in the midst of much personal tragedy, was a time of discovering preferences and making

choices. She had never imagined the arts as being her medium. "I was never really inspired by the work around me," she says, "it didn't touch me deeply; I was always moved by work with emotional content."

It was after she formed a relationship with a classmate, Khalil Chishti, later to become her husband, that Ruby felt reassured and confident. She describes the experience as "making you more complete as a human being. Love enriched me; it meant so much to me. The work in the classroom flowed from that. I have never pursued the acquisition of skills, that happens along the way."

She had moved in with her husband after graduating in 1988, settling down to a professional and domestic partnership, when catastrophe struck the family once again. One day in 1991, her mother left home carrying her widow's pension forms, fell down, and was paralysed. Ruby recalls how she and her brother sat by her mother's bedside, day after day. She retreats from the memory, too painful to go over in detail.

"I became ill with the stress. I never realised that this would go on for ten years. I was never close to my mother; it was a strange relationship... I wanted physical love, which I never got, and now... I was with her, loving her, putting life into her... I never knew I had this dimension in me."

"My mother is like a child, she repeats things



Ruby Chishti
in her Lahore studio – 2001



Ruby Chishti

Ever After – 2001

Stuffed and stitched fabric

on cardboard box

Size unavailable

Coll: The Artist

told to her, she enjoys music, she moves a hand sometimes... she cannot really speak... sometimes she has an epileptic fit, which is frightening to witness.”

Her mother’s almost inert body became central to Ruby Chishti’s life. She and her sister in Sargodha shared the responsibility of caring for her. The younger brother has made his home in the United States. During these years, Ruby helped her husband in his sculptural work. They worked together on large public commissions, as assistants to Shahid Sajjad, the eminent sculptor, as well as on their own projects in Lahore and Karachi.

Ruby’s belated return to her own art practice in 2000 demonstrates the toll these years have taken. There is a forceful appearance of a highly personal iconography. She recounts how she would draw small sketches by her mother’s bedside, a “treasure-trove of thinking; the helplessness of this person has evoked such love.”

It was almost inevitable that she has chosen not to have children herself. “Giving birth is not motherhood... so many people indulge in this ‘act’. It is my decision not to. I felt there have been too many things I have been unable to share. It is too serious a matter. I don’t want a child to suffer the many things that can occur.” In this her partner supports her: “He believes in personal liberty and accepts it, even though sometimes it makes me feel guilty.”

In 2000, Ruby went back to her alma mater NCA, joining the first batch of students commencing the new Masters Programme in Visual Arts. The move brought her back to her own art practice, although she left the programme after a brief period. She comments that “the programme was everything that I didn’t need, even though it was embarrassing to leave it, but all my life I have done what I

have felt deeply about. Still, it was valuable because my work started. Suddenly, I knew that this was my moment. If I didn't hold on to it, I would never face myself again." Participating in 'Vasl', the international artists' workshop at Gadani Beach near Karachi, reinforced this resolve.

To begin with, Ruby went back to her previous materials, which she quickly discarded as "not having the potential to express my thoughts." Sifting through alternatives, she chose papier-mâché as being more appropriate. These first works made in her studio gave her the confidence to shape images that were closer to the experience she needed to articulate.

Over the years, Ruby had collected pieces of cloth, remnants of materials used for dressmaking, old quilts, bedsheets, linen, rags, to which she now turned. She reminisces about her passion for doll making and sewing as a child. She once made a pair of pajamas for a doll, whose legs turned out to be too long; Ruby unceremoniously chopped off the legs of the doll to make the pajamas fit! At the time, she wondered why this caused so much amusement in the household.

At the end of the year 2000, Ruby Chishti's experiments with cloth stuffed with straw began to take shape. The early stages of using the materials now were exciting in the possibilities that unfolded. "The material was friendly and behaved the way I wanted. The ideas came rushing, faster than I could realise them. The form helps the thought along, reinforces it." The fragility of the material, its pliability and its history, all echo Ruby Chishti's expressive needs. "The dialogue between the old and the new occurs. I tighten and loosen the material. I stuff it with cotton, polyester, and then straw. There is a tactile, pleasurable feeling."

Ruby casts the faces of the figures in fabric,



Ruby Chishti

Untitled – 2001

Fabric, cast, stitched and stuffed
ht. 61cm.

Coll: The Artist

working from the originals in clay. "I remember the early memories of doll making. I think of my own birth. The suppression that is a woman's lot. The grief that women carry gives them a lot of dignity. Perhaps weeping aloud is a way of expressing the survival instinct." She imagines how the moment of her birth was received and constructs the group of lamenting women in a piece titled 'My birth will take place a thousand times, no wonder how you celebrate it'.

She insists that she still respects traditional sculptural materials that she was trained in – wood, metal, clay, and stone – but working in her own intensely personal materials is clearly exhilarating. "I am astounded by this material, and the way it surprises me. As a human being, one has to select a material that brings out the truth in oneself."

From figures Ruby Chishti has moved to objects like a sewing machine or a birdbath that are humorous, vulnerable and dignified. Each object narrates histories of use, neglect and survival. She uses the lowly crow as another symbol. Remembering how she once looked after an injured crow, Ruby was surprised by its intelligence and gentle disposition. Commentators and victims, crows perch in groups around her figures.

Piece by piece, Ruby's works seek to construct a reality which runs parallel to the one we know. They encroach, dovetail, disturb and enrich the environment they sit in.

Ruby Chishti's mother died in the spring of 2002. In the summer of 2002, Ruby took up a residency at the Harris Museum in Preston, England.

Sabina Gillani (b. 1965)



Lt - Rt:
Iffat Manzoor, Sabina Gillani,
Ingris, Naazish Ataullah, Anwer Saeed,
Jahanara Akhlaq and Aliya
Printmaking studio, NCA- 1986

It was on her return to Pakistan in 1989 after two years spent in France, that Sabina Gillani became conscious of how much she had changed. "During my years at NCA, I wasn't really conscious of my development. I was too sheltered. It was when I came back that I really began to fight. It was because I had experienced independence." Sabina constantly refers to her early sheltered existence as an inhibiting, yet stabilising factor in her life.

Her family encouraged her early talents. Sabina's father wanted her to be an architect, something he himself had wanted to do but couldn't, "because it wouldn't have been economically stable." Her mother encouraged her preference for drawing and painting in school where she diligently painted flowers for her O' Level exams.

When the time came for her to take up art seriously, the matter of her going to NCA became a family controversy. "NCA had a 'bad reputation in those days and my mother knew it. She wanted her daughter to grow up and get married and someone told her, 'if you want your daughter to get married, don't send her to NCA.' In the end it was my father who supported me."

Just after a year at NCA, Sabina found that she no longer had much in common with her old classmates from Kinnaird College. She found herself isolated from her old friends and her family's milieu, a natural consequence of 'going in a different direction'. "Everything changed drastically for me. I couldn't talk to

them anymore. It became even more difficult after coming back from France. Working in the studio was a way out of all the problems around me."

Sabina remembers her years at NCA during the Zia regime. "It happened when this teacher came to teach Islamiat and said, 'OK, all the girls sit on one side and all the boys on the other side.' It made us feel sick, the way he said it. Someone spoke up and told him to put a screen between himself and the girls. He asked us to apologise and no one did. I also remember going across the road to the [Punjab] University. I had to ask some other girls to go with me because alone I felt so threatened. It wasn't like that in my mother's time in Peshawar University. When I listen to her about her adolescence, it was quite different."

Sabina acknowledged that she was not in any way an 'activist' at the time. She steered clear of women's demonstrations and the political protest going on around her. She points out that her rebellions were more personal. She had to battle for permission to go on school and college trips, her father insisting that it was "too dangerous."

Her decision to specialise in printmaking as one of the first graduates from NCA's newly organised department gave a crucial direction to her work. "I took up printmaking to escape from the future. I think it was the best decision of my life. I tried everything: woodcut, etching, litho; I think I liked etching the most. You had this beautiful plate and you could dig into it



Sabina Gillani

Untitled – 1994

Etching

88 x 43 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi

and do all sorts of things. It's the sensuous quality of copper that I like so much. With litho stones, you can't carry them around. It's a more macho medium."

Talking about her work of those years, she said, "It sounds corny but I start with an initial line in my head. But then it's my feelings... and the copper itself speaks... my feelings dictate and the copper dictates." About her imagery, she says, "It was the woman as an image at that time... just any woman, you or me or anyone... those images had a 'womanly' quality which even a man could relate to."

Sabina began working systematically in Naazish Ataullah's printmaking studio. "I kept building layers upon layers from a very deep white to shallower, subtle tones. I loved blacks and I loved putting on dark tones. People told me my work was morbid. I used a lot of fabric

textures, maybe because I found fabric very sensuous. I don't think of fabric as confining. I don't think of it in the sense of the veil or *purdah*... perhaps because I've never been forced into it." These etchings and aquatints were a sensitive rendering of the female body in conflict, reticent yet demanding, struggling yet autonomous.

Sabina's family migrated to Canada in 1991, leaving her in Lahore to await the processing of her visa application. Joining them in Toronto transformed her attitude to the female form and underlined the importance of context to imagery. In her new environment, the female form was no longer a subversive statement – quite the contrary. "Canada is very alien and very cold. I could identify with the people in Pakistan. Over there, I was criticised for the nudes in my work. The feminists in the West see it very differently. At home, it was a form

of protest and defiance. Pakistan taught me far more than what feminists are fighting for over there." Remembering the experience, Sabina says, "I felt lost and betrayed. My work stagnated because I needed an environment to identify with and draw inspiration from."

Being away from Pakistan also injected nostalgia into Sabina's work. She agrees that the forms of windows in her work harked back to the apertures in architectural patterns of old Lahore and Peshawar, her family's ancestral city. But she is wary of picking up images from her past "as a gimmick," and insists that those have to carry meanings that go deeper than mere cultural identification.

Moving on to parallel images for the female, she has used the moon as a metaphor. Studying at the Slade School of Fine Art in London in

1992 gave her the opportunity to explore a variety of technical solutions that her imagery demanded. Chine collé offered a painterly overlay to her smaller prints of Lahore windows. "I experimented by confining certain colours to different places. I realised that, just as in painting, the painterly aspect can come into a print."

Sabina was working in the printmaking studio at the Slade with Bartholomeu Dos Santos and says of the experience, "The studio was like a womb where I felt secure, completely divorced from reality. I think now that those were selfish years. I was enjoying the Sufi concept of an inward journey and a discovery of the transcendental. My imagery consisted of black and white landscapes with a dream-like feeling of not really existing, suspended in time... floating."

Sabina's developing interest in mysticism can be read into these works. These landscapes are more a quest for an inner truth than an observance of external phenomena. They can be read as seascapes, flanked by stones, rocks, and boulders, balanced precariously yet convincingly responding to a higher sense of order. These prints are technically sure; there is little hesitation in the spontaneity with which she layers her mark. It was the following year that Sabina injured her shoulder while working at the printing press, which, as she puts it, "[put] an end to my hopes and dreams of becoming the consummate printmaker."

At that time, Sabina spoke of the personal options available to women artists. "If I had to choose a life as only a wife and mother, I would rather choose my work because women are supposed to give up everything. The woman is supposed to be a reflection of her husband and children. I would like to find a balance between the two. But it depends on your husband and other people... people can never understand the amount of time you have



Sabina Gillani

Untitled – 1993

Etching

89 x 57 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi

to give to your work. I do think of life and having babies... but you feel possessive about your works. They are your own creation... both the sexual and the spiritual aspects are there... it's another form of expression, but not a compensation."

Since making that observation in 1996, Sabina Gillani has met and married Philippe Vigliano who was the Director of the Alliance Française in Lahore. She accompanied him to Africa and they now live in Paris. She says, "Paradoxically, since my marriage, there is a sense of belonging. Though physically we leave a nomadic life, I have found an anchor in my partner. In a way, I have achieved one 'goal in life' as imposed by culture, family and society. I feel free to do as I please and my husband is supportive of my work."

Sabina has struggled to continue her art practice, finding means to adapt the scale and the medium to her space and geographical location. She studied miniature techniques with painter Imran Qureshi in Lahore and seized upon the convenience the genre provided. The intimacy of the miniature has matched the introspection and rigour of Sabina Gillani's temperament. She enjoys the precision of the mark on the surface of the wasli, which reminds her of the needle on the copper plate.

Her travels to Africa have brought colour into her work. Sabina says, "Since 1998, I have been recording feelings and momentary sensations. I feel I have woken up and am rediscovering myself. I feel ready to explore, exploit and interpret the world I live in."

Aisha Khalid (b. 1972)

Aisha Khalid's early intimation of a sense of herself was predictably a passionate yearning to be a doctor. Her family, émigrés from India at Partition, had made their new home in the town of Shikarpur in Sindh. Settled on agricultural lands claimed in return for those left behind, the family was conservative and kept to themselves. Observing small town conventions, Aisha went to school in a *chaadar*, while her older sister already wore a full-fledged *burqah* from an early age. This was underlined by General Zia's edicts, requiring all school and college-going girls to wear the *chaadar*.

On matters to do with education, Aisha's father was both progressive and indulgent. Aisha was given the freedom to focus on her studies and was an academic achiever. It was the ethnic Sindhi-Punjabi strife that drove the family to migrate once more, the second time within a single generation. They sold the house and lands for whatever little they could fetch and headed for Lahore. Arriving at the house which they believed they had bought and owned, the family discovered that they had been defrauded; the estate agent had disappeared, and the family sat in the driveway with a truck full of all their worldly belongings,

dispossessed yet again. Aisha remembers the helplessness and the turning away of those closest to her.

Dislocation, uncertainty, and betrayal formed the core of young Aisha's experiences. She had just finished school with an excellent result, well on her way to what she thought would be a medical career. Instead, she found herself in a second-rate girls' college, a family oversight at a time of stress. She rebelled, and with her younger brother, went back to Shikarpur to complete the first two years of college education. To return to and continue at any college in Lahore she needed a 'migration certificate'; she recalls with irony, "A migration certificate to move from one city to the other – in the same country!"

Thwarted by the red-tape involved in gaining entrance to a medical college, the National College of Arts emerged as the only option for Aisha, on the suggestion of a family friend. For her, to suddenly shift her aspirations was painful. "It was so hard, medicine was the only career I had heard of. I had no idea what 'art' was. I had always been taught to be 'correct'. I was self-conscious and had so many complexes, which came from being a girl. I had no sense of myself, or of exploration. I had to work on myself; I was so shy, and coming to a co-educational setup was so difficult." The extended family thought it was all a mistake and a persuasive matchmaking excursion began, firmly resisted by Aisha and her parents.

At college Aisha strove to not draw attention to herself, and was known for a conscientious devotion to studio skills. It was in her second year, on one of the college study tours, that she first noticed and seriously focussed on Imran Qureshi, her young teacher and budding miniature painter. Aisha is frank about the fact that he seemed to be the embodiment of everything she was not. She tells the story with obvious amusement: "He was so relaxed, so alive, so mysterious, yet so serious. I made up my mind and told him I wanted to marry him! He was totally shocked and told me that we didn't really know each other. That in turn shocked me; I had plucked up the courage to say what I had said, and had been refused."

But two years down the line, Imran suddenly proposed to her. It was almost too late: at home, the rituals of matchmakers' visits with prospective suitors were in progress. Aisha was non-cooperative and defiant. Her parents resorted to subterfuge when 'hopeful' bridegrooms' families came calling. When she broke the news to her mother about Imran Qureshi's proposal, pandemonium followed. "Is that why we sent you to college? Your father will kill you!"

But Aisha reveals that eventually her mother became her ally, and with the help of the same family friend who had suggested her entry to art college, her father was approached. The proposal was formally launched, norms were judiciously followed, and the sanctity of tradition seemingly upheld. Aisha observes



Aisha Khalid

Form x Pattern V – 2000

Gouache on wasli

26 x 20 cm.

Coll: Sameera Raja

sardonically, “I think my father knew all along I could only be happy with someone like Imran.”

Setting out to be a miniature painter in a department where skills and studio discipline were paramount suited Aisha Khalid’s cultural conditioning. Her work adhered strictly to the parameters defined by the Department and its pre-dominant thematic concerns. A revisiting of well-established pedagogic pathways, these early paintings give no indication of the avenues and radical options she was to explore later. Parallel to this was her shyness and her dependence on the well-defined do’s and don’ts of her home. The colours she wore were the colours she painted with. “It was unthinkable to wear red!” she says, “I lived and worked with greys and browns.”

Marriage to Imran Qureshi soon reverberated in her work. They set up a textile block-printing workshop and jointly tried their hand at designing and producing craft products. She declares, “This shared experience brought colour and pattern into my life and liberated me. My work is totally tied up with my life. It is a blessing that I can paint. It is an obsession, and now more so because of him. It has saved me. If I have a child I will be equally passionate, and will need to devote my time to that.”

The emergence of colour and pattern in Aisha’s work can be traced to a series of works done in early 2000. They portrayed a seated female figure with a lap full of fruit, with a curtain in the background. Or alternately, the setting sans the figure and only a fruit bowl with the curtain. She was alluding to the death of a cousin who, being childless, had taken her own life. Several works followed in quick succession, the figure now in the process of disappearing behind, or being swallowed by the curtain. The curtain as a symbol now became a constant and compelling presence. The female as individual evaporated or

metamorphosed into the *burqah*-clad figure. It was now a shrouded form, crouched on a patterned floor or melting into brick walls. Another symbol that entered her vocabulary was the lotus. Delicately edged in pink, the white flower was in stark contrast to the deeply hued patterns that filled the *wasli* field.

The 'female-ness' of Aisha's work is confident and overt. It is enjoyed in the manner of a banner or manifesto, yet the content can be disturbing, sombre or wry. It can refer to the claustrophobic experience of being female, hemmed in by encroaching walls, smothering drapes, or deafening patterns. Or it can intimate the sensuousness of the female body, and the sheer lyricism of visual contact. The range of colour employed is equally diverse, from menacing saturated blacks to insubstantial whites; she delves into divergent sources for inspiration.

Having won a fellowship to Rijks Akademi in Amsterdam, Aisha is now engaging with fresh contexts for her work. In a society where, "curtains remain open and everything is visible," Aisha states, "there is an illusion of freedom, of the 'independent' woman." She has talked at length to female colleagues working alongside her. "The independence is certainly to do with the body, but women still feel 'used'. So the 'independence' seems fake. Relationships change very fast and attachments seem temporary, the turnover is quick. When I tell them of our 'friendships' without sexual connotations, they are surprised. Such closeness without sex seems alien to them."

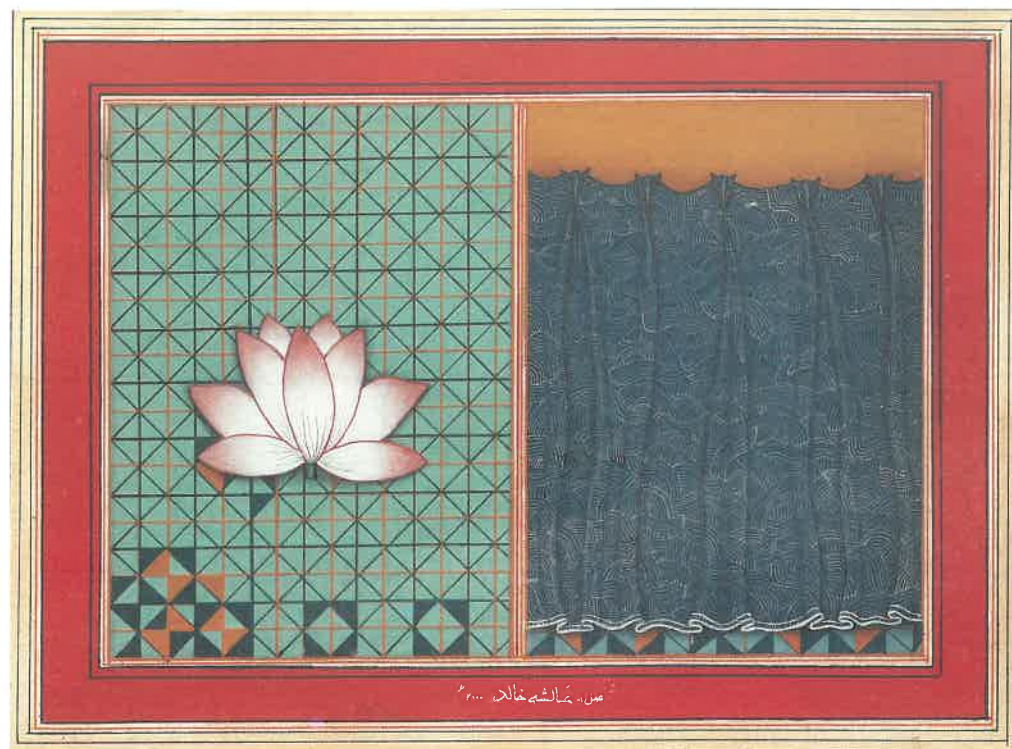
A visit to Poland and discussions about Auschwitz with her fellow artists has further intensified Aisha's investigation into notions of beauty, which she claims is "the essence of our life and work. Perhaps in Europe, because of the War, there has been the 'Death of Beauty'; life no longer strives for the ideals

it used to strive for. Yet the memory of the War is strong here, and it effects the landscape. I am thinking of working with that."

Being away from her environment has also stifled her perspective with regard to the meaning of symbols in her own work. She ruminates that the interiors or *chardiwaris* present in her work are changing, as is her definition of the *chaadar*. "Perhaps the wearing

of the *burqah* can be a convenient way of returning the male gaze, unseen by him," she says, "Who knows, as with everything else from the East, it may become a fashion in the West to wear a *burqah* or a *chaadar*!"

She concludes on a more serious note, "But it has to be a choice, an option open to every individual, not a matter of coercion."



Aisha Khalid

Behind the curtain – 2000

Gouache on wasli

20 x 26 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi



Naiza Khan
Dream of Awabi 1815 – 2000
Charcoal on paper
90 x 116 cm.
Private Coll.

Naiza Khan (b. 1968)

Unlike other women painters who went west to study and work after growing up in Pakistan, Naiza Khan 'came home' to get married after growing up in the west. She spent her childhood in Beirut in Lebanon before the Israeli invasion forced the family to move to Britain. She studied at a private school in London where art was a major activity. Her mother and aunts have all painted, having studied art at the Lahore College for Women before settling down to lives of domesticity and family rearing.

Naiza's schoolgirl interest and talent was encouraged and she went to the Wimbledon School of Art in 1996 for her foundation course, where she concentrated on painting. Later, wanting to apply to art school, she chose the Ruskin School of Fine Arts in Oxford mainly because she "wanted to meet people who weren't one-track art students. I wanted to be with mathematicians or people doing English literature."

This was the time she made a trip back to

Pakistan after a long break and became more conscious of where she was from. The complexity of the environment, her own feelings, the onslaught of a fresh set of visuals – all deeply affected Naiza and her work. She recalls struggling to improve her Urdu, going to sleep with volumes of translations of Faiz under her pillow, following the Urdu text over and over again.

She began to work in collage because she felt it answered the need to think and work in layers. She recalls how a painter visiting her class said, "It's funny that I know only two or three women painters from Pakistan and they are all working in collage; and now you – it's an interesting link." Her years at the Ruskin School from '87 to '90 were enriching and pivotal to her development. Oxford attracted a number of artists who were eventually as influential as her own tutors. She had progressed quite naturally from collage to printmaking, which she had done before at school. "I somehow got drawn into printmaking. The atmosphere was more hardworking. A lot of Japanese artists came... Krishna Reddy came... the people from the Hayter studio in Paris came. My head of department was a wonderful person. She was very strong, stable and quiet. She used to work in Paris in her studio on the weekend and was making books in collaboration with poets and artists."

It was here that Naiza had the opportunity to probe and savour the connections between

one material and another. "We started paper-making, which became crucial for my work. In paper-making, the creative process starts right at the beginning... from the kind of pulp you use... from the way you dye it... the coarseness to which you grind it. From that you imbibe things and you arrive at a paper sheet full of images." The making of paper led to book-making and tactile merging of text and image. Naiza specialised in woodcuts and engraving, ostensibly very diverse forms of printmaking, and used texts over-printed with woodcuts. Her first engraving took her almost a month, but others followed more quickly. She found a narrative appearing in the series where it never had before.

Naiza had begun to work on the figure, although she said it 'petrified' her. It soon became central to her imagery. "I got a grant to do a film in the middle of my course. I did a seventeen-minute film... it was silent and very much to do with my personal work. It ended up being shots of women in *burqahs* moving through space. There was a 'still' of a woman in a *haldi*-coloured *burqah* in the Lahore fort with the wind blowing. It went on to become a photo screen and to be printed on canvas. I did eight or nine variations on the theme and in one of them, a woman is clad in a *burqah* and on the other side is completely nude. In essence, they were the same woman, but on one side I wanted to show the totally vulnerable and on the other side, the protected. A lot of work emerged from this idea of the 'inside' and the 'outside'."



Naiza Khan

Like two drops of blood
(diptych) – 2000

Acrylic and ink on board
40 x 20 cm.

Coll: N. Pasha

Layering different media and imagery was inherent to the framework of her own life. Commenting on this, Naiza said at the time, “All my work came out of personal feelings... anything consciously done was a disaster. Consciously, gender was not an issue, but then I’ve never thought of it that way. It is there and very important... a woman artist cannot deny that. The way I represent the male is different... male artists represent the female in a certain way. I’ve always thought of male sexuality as opposed to a woman. I remember in Oxford... I had done a painting of male sensuality and this art historian said, ‘This is terribly violent and sexual!’”

While still at college, Naiza tried her hand at political issues that she felt strongly about. Her feelings for the Palestinians were heightened by her childhood in Beirut. She

worked on large collages while reading Edward Said and works by Palestinian poets.

Naiza Khan married her first cousin who was doing his chartered accountancy in London and they made the decision to come back and live in Pakistan – it would be the first time for both of them. The idea was daunting, even before she took the plunge in 1990. She had read about the incident of Colin David’s nude paintings being trashed by *Jamaat-i-Islami* activists in Lahore and quailed at the thought of how her own work would be received. “It scared me to think that I might be employing self-censorship – that I would camouflage.” Her husband has been interested and understanding, which has sustained her; the work being figurative, and sometimes explicitly so, has never been an issue.

Finding her feet in Karachi’s social set-up was a different matter. “The funny thing is that when I came here I felt that I was finally coming home and that I belonged. But to my horror I found that I didn’t belong at all... going to coffee mornings... and everyone was pregnant or had just had a baby! I decided that national identity is nothing. Your roots are within yourself... you don’t have to completely conform. Living abroad, you think you’re a Pakistani... and now I feel that maybe there’s a bit of something else in me, which is not...”

Some years ago, Naiza Khan acknowledged that she did find that the Pakistani milieu shaped her concerns and her work. “Living here is more political. That’s one of the things the English establishment shies away from – the political angles to your work. Whereas

when you look at the work of South-American or Indian artists who live in England, they have this edge to their work."

Having exhibited in group shows in galleries in England, Naiza had her first solo show at the Chawkandi Gallery in Karachi in 1993; with this show, she entered the mainstream of art in the country.

Drawing is and always has been a primary activity for Naiza. It becomes a catalyst for seeking meaning as well as a probing into the disposition of the medium. She has explored the female body as a vehicle for formal concerns but also to probe deeper issues of sexuality. The controversial connotations in the way that the body is 'presented, perceived and often misread' are crucial to Naiza's questioning. She takes up the formal with the passionate eye, engaging with the model in a multitude of ways. There is almost a frenzy to her 'looking', an uncovering, a dissection, a restructuring. There appears a dichotomy in her investigations. It is alternately tender and brutal. There is also a duality, a constant reworking, a retreat and an advance, in the way she proceeds with her mark making. As she described it in an interview with Mamduh Waheed in 2000, "I think the rubbing out is definitely a kind of negation... the reason I started doing that initially was a kind of dissatisfaction with what was there, which was very process-oriented... You do something and then you think 'Oh my God! This is back to exactly what I did last week, and I cannot do that!'... So you rub it out, and then the ghost images start to work in some ways... you want to be walking on a tightrope."

The desire to be 'walking on a tightrope' reveals an important aspect of Naiza's critical thinking and the need to journey into what does not present itself easily in the overt. These drawings are communiqués which hint at messages of another kind. There is anger as well as submission, a will and a desire to have a life and a space of its own making.

Naiza Khan penetrates women's lives and then connects them to her own. She has commented poignantly on the self-immolation of two women who despaired of receiving justice in Pano Aqil in Sindh. For this, she returned to her book making in a fragile work laced with the pain of poetry as fragile as the hair and skin of the burning women.

Hair and henna become signifiers of the lyricism as well as the tenacity of 'woman'. The woman becomes monumental in a series exhibited as part of a solo show 'Voices Merge'



Naiza Khan
Henna Hands (detail) - 2002
Stencilled henna paste
on walls, Karachi
Size unavailable

at the Chawkandi Gallery in 2000. Naiza uses henna pigment reminiscent of how women's hands are decorated for festivals, except now the pattern caresses and delineates her whole body. The scale is human, the figures move across the wall, are 'an extension of the wall or the walls become an extension of the art works.'

These works are open to multiple readings, as in fact is the rest of Naiza's work. They are controlled, persuasive and extempore all at once. It is the 'extempore' which is under examination, now that Naiza Khan is the mother of two children. She muses on the constraints that motherhood imposes, noting that "there is a realisation that one will never get that expanse of time again. Eight hours at a stretch will never be mine again. But I try my best to string two hours together... since the intense period of time is not there, so the nature of the work is changing – it is stretched across." Yet having children has had its own oblique input in the work. Text has been a continuous thread woven through, and re-emerges from a remark by her daughter. 'She told me about her dreams' became one of a series of works which submerged text into its physical structure. To somehow muffle the blatant sound of the word, to absorb it into the 'body' without undermining its potency or presence, seems to be a priority. Again, one can sense that duality. The rational or sequential suggested by the text even when fragmented, and the other, purely visual. Yet, the 'visual' is never 'pure'. It operates on many levels, of feeling, memory, sensuality and sensuousness of apprehension, emotion and instinct.

Naiza Khan deliberately sets up dialogues and confrontation, the outcome of which she herself is unsure of. She becomes the beholder, intrigued by what is an encounter with an unpredictable outcome. The works have a life of their own and she joins the viewer in finding fresh readings and constructing hitherto latent hidden meanings, fleeting as well as timeless.

Huma Mulji (b. 1971)

Huma Mulji is the eldest of five sisters, born into a family she describes as being “vocal, conservative, assertive.” Her father, a leader in the *Khoja* community, started his career in Bombay, assembling toys. Patronised by a Japanese businessman, he moved to Karachi in 1946 to set up a manufacturing plant.

Huma’s mother was born in Chittagong and Huma remembers her as being the cementing force in “a totally female household, [although] my father ruled the roost.” Her father was active in national and community politics and his passions left an indelible mark on his family life. Giving voice to difficult, contentious issues and fighting for deeply felt lost causes, he spent time in jail.

Huma recalls her mother’s fighting spirit, driving to visit her husband in jail while expecting her third child. She remembers little else of her childhood, saying that she and her siblings were “rather like a litter of puppies; we discovered the world as individuals much later.”

Huma refers to her father as “a very spiritual person” and attributes the sense of the ‘paranormal’ in herself to his influence. However there was no interest in poetry, music or literature evident in that source; this came about due to her own explorations. Nor was there any connection to art. Huma studied commerce and completed her B.Com degree in 1991.

It was her mother who suggested to Huma that she try out for NCA, which Huma herself could not visualise doing. By sheer chance, she happened to see a billboard announcing the opening of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and, almost for a lark, entered to take up some of the workshops offered. She filled out the forms and enrolled most casually. She graduated in the first batch in 1995.

Huma describes her time as a student as being “years in which I was on auto-pilot. I felt most inadequate. Unlike the other students, I came from a Matric background. I read voraciously but I could not write. Still, it was a time of discovery and of shared interests.”

In the years since her stint as a student at Indus Valley, Huma feels she has returned to her roots. Ruminating on her father’s influence, she remembers that as children, she and her sisters would wait for him to be out of the house so that they could be free to “do all the things we wanted to do.” Today she finds that the things she fought against are the things her father was right about. His socialist ideals might have been left behind, but Huma acknowledges that “We have all realised that we have his traits.” All five sisters follow their predilections with the focus and passion they have inherited from their father. In marriage too they have made their own decisions, marrying out of the community.

In her work, Huma Mulji questions the premise



Lt – Rt:
Farina Alam, Asma Mundrawala,
Bani Abidi and Huma Mulji,
Karachi studio – 1996



Huma Mulji
Art Vendor – 1999
 Perspex, PVC and aluminium
 56 x 76 x 51 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

of art as an activity in the context of society. Since 1999, she has worked in materials which relate directly to the everyday urban experience. Her father's business may have influenced some of these choices: vinyl bags, plastic dolls, acrylic sheets etc.

Looking long and hard at her surroundings in the house in Karachi where she was born and raised, Huma uses its motifs for the stuff of her painting. The mosaic-tiled floors are

symbolic of a fragile unity. The dreams of people around her enter her work without guile. The objects desired by the multitude – kitchen gadgets, high-heeled shoes, ornate purses – spring from the heart. A vending machine dispenses plastic hearts for ten rupees a go. Huma's 'heart machine' makes each piece available to people. It takes art off its lofty pedestal but also gives a nod to the effectiveness of commercial production. The ordinariness of those mass-produced articles

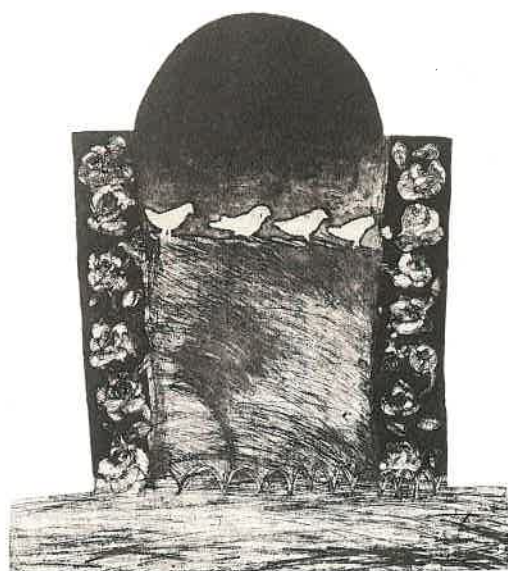
acquires a certain beauty when they embody the hopes and reveries of the people. The process employed in assembling the work lends it stature, questioning the 'sacredness' of the precious art object.

Huma Mulji is careful to explain that although she understands the 'art market' and its purpose, she does not see it working for her. The response she demands hinges on the emotional, not the analytical.



Asma Mundrawala
Ladies First Choice – 1997
Oil and gold leaf on board
Size unavailable
Coll: Unknown

Asma Mundrawala (b. 1965)



Asma Mundrawala
Untitled – 1995
Etching
Size unavailable
Coll: S. Ismail

Asma Mundrawala was inducted into art practice at Nayyar Jamil's private studio in Karachi. An introverted child, she had not wanted to go into banking or medicine, which her family would have preferred. Believing herself to be a slow learner lacking the confidence to go to university, Asma opted to be a schoolteacher until the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture opened its doors in 1990.

Asma was four years older than her classmates, some of whom she had taught art at school. Asma describes the teaching team at Indus Valley as being "brilliant, exuding energy and dynamism." Samina Mansuri, David Alesworth, Elizabeth Dadi, Naiza Khan, and Quddus Mirza, among others, were stimulating influences. "They were like-minded people, we bonded on issues and work. There was great optimism. Some of us stayed together; Huma Mulji, Saba Iqbal, myself. We set up a studio and made it a point to work together."

Asma Mundrawala's student work incorporated intensely felt personal imagery, which in turn referred to family photographs and picture postcards. She describes her family as being "small, insular, not outgoing or extroverted. My father was a self-made man. There is a fifteen-year gap between my brother and myself, and so they were older parents with a young child. My mother didn't believe in 'spoiling' a girl. They had done with their struggle so I was their focus. We have a quirky sense of humour. I was always glued to the

television and absorbed all the humour of the time."

After graduating as a painter from Indus Valley, Asma undertook research and commissioned work with Huma Mulji. She also started teaching again. In 1997, she became involved in theatre, making connections between her own work and the community. The experience, working with Jamil Ahmad of Dhaka University on *Tehreek-i-Niswan's* adaptation of the Arabian Nights, was initially hard for Asma. "I found it so contrary to my nature and upbringing. I became almost physically ill because it was so flamboyant!" But eventually the ordeal came to be an enriching experience. "The association with the community theatre, taking it to the *bastis*, and the audience interaction has been important. The audience doesn't look at it as a 'designed form'. They talk about it and go straight to the issues. Women's issues, the role of women in society – they came out of the Arabian Night stories. It has been a learning experience to see the women in Orangi. They work in the city and yet have time to educate their children. There is eighty percent literacy in this township. The community experience must feed into my studio work; they connect at some level."

The sense of theatre and theatricality is very much a component in Asma Mundrawala's work; there is a presence of great colour, vibrant in contrasts of hue, which underlines a debt to cinema posters and oleographs. This



Asma Mundrawala

Untitled – 2001

Oil on canvas

56 x 41 cm.

Coll: The Artist

is accentuated by the narrative that which draws elements from available popular imagery that was part of her early vocabulary. But the quiet humour found therein is in contrast to the brashness of the public ‘voice’. Describing her early work as “unguarded and innocent”, Asma now approaches the same issues with careful deliberation. “I am looking at the woman who is constrained by her circumstance. She is a ‘wallflower’ but there is space between her and the wall. She manages to project herself gracefully with all the

resources that she can get.”

Currently in England for a year in an academic programme which she hopes will help her explore the conceptual framework for her studio work, Asma has been disappointed by a western institution’s capacity (or lack thereof) to understand ‘the other’. But she struggles to sift through and analyse the ambiguities that infect her practice. Discarding safe, convenient or nostalgic options, she investigates the many prisms through which

ideas pass and coagulate. The work in London is ‘work-in-progress’, as well as ‘work in another context’.

In a sense, much of Asma Mundrawala’s work is a tribute to the courage and cultural tenacity of the ‘little people’. She is aware of the painful struggle it takes to put together the ingredients that can make life a beautiful, enchanting place.

Tazeen Qayyum (b. 1971)

Moving around the country with her father's postings, Tazeen was in class five when her parents decided that they needed permanent residence in Karachi for the sake of the children's schooling. Her father's presence in the home became intermittent, restricted to holidays and weekends.

For Tazeen, the move to Karachi was traumatic. Coming from an 'Urdu medium school' background, she had to learn to cope with a demanding academic schedule. She recalls, "Fine Arts was thrust at me in the O' levels. There was no option. But surprisingly, I did well and enjoyed it, as the teachers were really good. I thought I should continue, and so took up art in my BA. I had never heard of NCA but I did do drawing after college hours at the Karachi School of Art."

Around this time, two of her friends were preparing for the admission test for NCA and Tazeen contemplated attempting it too. Her parents allowed her to appear for the test on the understanding that even if she got in, she would not actually join the College. Describing her mother as "open-minded but strict", Tazeen remembers that she wanted her to get married as soon as possible. As it happened, it was her father who supported her coming to Lahore to study at the NCA when she did get admission. Parting advice from her mother was, "Never marry an artist, nor fall in love."

Tazeen describes her early NCA experience as one that "changed my life. I painted, made

music, did mime, took part in a puppetry group. I selected miniature as my specialisation because I thought it was something I could continue to do on my own in Karachi. It also taught me patience, of which I had little." She relates how her return to Karachi for the holidays depressed her family. "They saw the change in me every time I came home. My mother had never thought I would complete the course."

Being the first young woman from her family to study away from home in a co-educational institution brought its own sense of responsibility. Meeting Faisal, her fellow student and future husband, in the college puppet and theatre group, was not initially a romantic encounter. The proximity resulted in friendship and a sharing of ideas and interests.

The fact that Faisal was a Punjabi was not welcomed by her family, but Tazeen concedes that they were eventually very supportive once she had made her choice clear. It was the first marriage of its kind in the family and heralded an acceptance of changing norms.

Postponing starting a family, Tazeen concentrated on her work after the marriage. Settling down in Islamabad, away from both families, was a conscious choice, determined by the promise of independence and new opportunities. Faisal's expertise as a designer led to their setting up a small art and craft

Tazeen Qayyum is convinced that her mother 'infected' her with her own creative ambitions, urging her daughter to do the things she herself had not been allowed to do.

Tazeen remembers her mother being passionate about singing, doing embroidery, and other creative pursuits. Both sides of the family came from Hyderabad, Deccan, and one grandfather was a grandee of the *Nawab* family, who consequently refused to work throughout his life. Both her parents made up for it: her father joined the army and her mother became a schoolteacher.



Tazeen Qayyum

Catwalk – 2001
Guouache on wasli
37 x 30 cm.
Coll: The Artist

gallery which offers comprehensive design services.

Awarded a UNESCO bursary for young artists in 2000, Tazeen got the chance to travel to Austria, where she worked and then held her first solo exhibition, at the Galley Jutner in Vienna. She describes the experience as being crucial to her understanding of how artists work elsewhere. “For the first time in my life I was really talking about my work, and people listened to what I had to say. I was questioned about being a woman artist. It was a time for exploring, questioning and absorbing, rather than painting. The talking and sharing with other artists was rewarding, and affected my work. It gave me the strength to be more daring. I discovered that I was so open to others and their work. In our culture, we are often very critical and judgemental, especially

of artists, poets and musicians. Then, being critical, we are in turn unable to accept criticism from others! I am also very curious about other people’s art, what makes them do what they do.”

Tazeen looks at her own work as being a commitment and not self-indulgence. She examines the thematic interests that appear in her work and links them to issues of women’s lives and their visual appearance in the fabric of society. Female icons in the shape of actresses, popular symbols, and juxtaposed stereotypes, have been recurring images. “I like debate and arguments,” she declares, “My opinions are fluid and open to question. When I employed the *burqah* as an image, it was criticised by a religious group. What I was saying was that both kinds of women – the veiled and the vamp – co-exist in society.”

Tazeen feels that her training as a miniature painter is not an inhibiting factor but a bridge between a receding history and an evolving present. She senses that it’s more than a formal technique, and consequently approaches it with respect. There is an accompanying playfulness and a penchant for pattern, which has become more emergent in recent works. She refers to the naivete of folk and home crafts, and incorporates them along with the human forms in a manner reminiscent of patchwork quilts and tapestries.

Drawing upon a diverse reservoir of ornament and image, Tazeen Qayyum is not constrained to anchor the vocabulary of the miniature in sub-continental history. Instead, she uses it as a challenge to comment on the turbulence of life as she perceives it.

Ayesha Qureshi (b.1970)

Ayesha Qureshi is a solitary figure, not quite part of the artistic mainstream yet not entirely aloof either. This apparent remoteness may be attributed to her atypical schooling in art. Unlike many of her peers, Ayesha Qureshi chose not to go to art school, training instead with Nayyar Jamil – also her former teacher at St. Joseph's Convent in Karachi – in the latter's private studio. By the time Ayesha left high school, she was vehement about "never wanting to be part of any educational institution." She was equally resolute about wanting to make art.

Ayesha looks back at the rigours of her training with her mentor: "Nayyar put me through the discipline of learning drawing. I see that I couldn't have moved away from the 'expected' if I had not been trained the way I was. Both my mother and Nayyar gave me space and great strength. Nayyar had faith in me, which is why I was able to wend my way forward..."

Ayesha Qureshi was seven years old when her father died, an event critical to her future. "Something happened to me at that time... My mother raised the three of us, a brother and two sisters, as best she could. She educated us well, and while there were no luxuries, there was always fantastic food and fruit in the house. I was introverted, and not

academically inclined. So I was labeled 'well-behaved' and 'responsible' at the Convent. Mother Andrews reassured my mother, telling her not to worry because I was 'gifted'. I think half of my struggle vanished, because as a kid I was clear about what I wanted. When the environment is hostile, it reinforces one's determination."

Ayesha's mother worked for an airline, which allowed the children opportunity to travel to London every summer, an experience that Ayesha has had her fill of. Her mother remarried, and her *Nani* came to look after the household. Ayesha smilingly describes it as a "totally female household, with my poor brother having to be the male figure!"

The marriage was not a happy one, the implications of which her mother met with great fortitude and courage. For Ayesha, the experience defined the solitariness and depth of her work. "When I look at my grandmother and mother's life, I feel very inadequate... the things they have coped with... I have never faced the situation they did, and I wonder if I ever would be able to."

In spite of her vow to not enter any educational institution, Ayesha did take up teaching seven- and eight-year-olds, before retreating back into Nayyar Jamil's studio. Here she continued teaching children, which she loved. In partnership with her aunt, Ayesha then set up an arts and crafts outlet of some distinction, which has steadily taken her away from her

art practice. She muses that from the life of an artist she has taken on the shop as an expression of her vision. "I've been handling everything, design, production, and marketing. I'm not money-minded so that doesn't push me. It is almost three years since I did my own work. I realised that anything I do will be secondary to reality. Every time you name something, express it, it moves away from you. Perhaps that is the real challenge, to continue. I don't think you can truly repeat yourself, and creation never stops."

On the personal front, Ayesha affirms that her mother would like to see her married, like her sister, but has never pressurised her. She poses the question, "What does one mean by 'a nice boy'? I think a good husband should have a sense of humour, should not be stingy, and not be a liar." One senses this characterisation comes from closely observed relationships. "I have been through a lot because of my father's death, perhaps he was my first love. But I am very content. One's concept of love changes, and the meaning of the word evolves... that kind of person is missing... I cannot bear conflict, so the person would have to know that. I would be scared of the challenge of having children, the responsibility frightens me." She is candid about being a person of deep faith: "I feel something so clearly that I think it may express itself in words, but I have never written. Your entire being is taken care of. You only realise that at a point of crisis. It can tip the balance, or make your life more meaningful. Perhaps faith is the only thing



Ayesha Qureshi

Untitled – 1998

Mixed media on board

70 x 55 cm.

Private Coll.

that takes you through to the other side.”

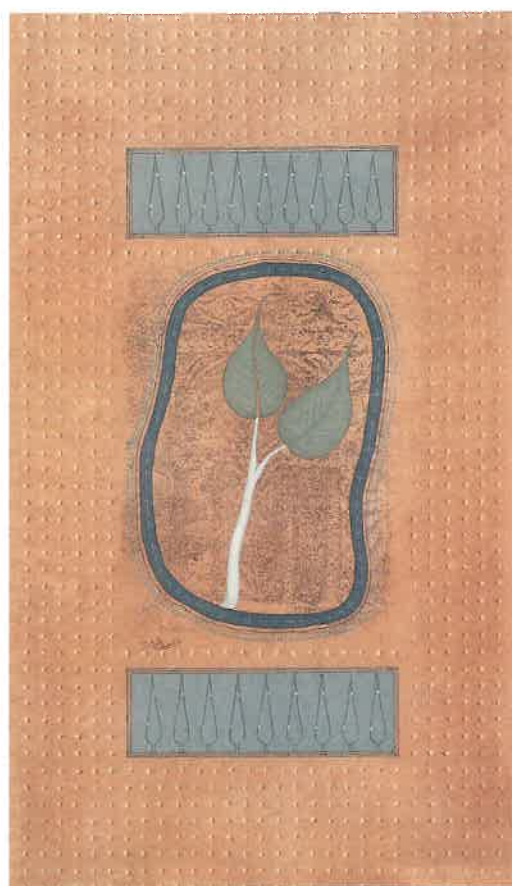
Between 1990 and 1992, Ayesha Qureshi had two major exhibitions which introduced her to gallery audiences in Karachi and Lahore. Subtly textured, the mark making was forceful and self-assured. Ayesha acknowledges her problem in dealing with colour: “I was so good at working in black and white that it took time to break away from charcoal. Since colour was difficult for me, I took up the

challenge. Giving up one’s strongest point is one way of progressing beyond it, it helps one grow internally.” The works in oil on board were still restricted in palette, moving from black and white into earth colours, mellow, brooding, almost sombre.

Ayesha’s earlier works were on a single plane, resonating with references to observed objects. The works of the mid- and late-nineties are condensed, the references personal, almost

iconic. Handling of the medium became more sophisticated, the surface acquiring a delicate sheen, which was deceptively simple to look at, but difficult to describe. This elusive quality suggests an inner determination, an explosive centre, carefully submerged and camouflaged by its many layers of glazed, transparent colour. The delicate construction of these works, in terms of the rendered surface, is matched by a meticulous sense of composition; eventually, the works are austere and meditative.

Talha Rathore (b. 1970)



Talha Rathore

Untitled – 1997

Gouache, phototransfer and
embossing on wasli
30 x 53 cm.

Coll: The Artist

Talha Rathore grew up not far from Lahore in Gujranwala, today a burgeoning industrial sprawl but back then just a sleepy old town. One of six children born to a conservative middle-class family, Talha always felt “the odd man out.” It may have been because in a Kashmiri family where “everyone was fair-skinned and good looking, I felt I was often the ugly duckling.” But, she is quick to add, “My parents never made the distinction, it was in the extended family that it was commented on.”

Talha compensated by excelling academically in school, raising the family’s expectation that she would embark on a medical career. But as she recalls, “I was a confused personality. I found no satisfaction in my work. I was hostile, rebellious and angry, and didn’t want to do what was expected of me. I wanted something else... but didn’t know what.”

She had always been fascinated by art, although it was not an obvious choice in a traditional family. But Talha does remember being singled out for her aesthetic sense as a child. Her father encouraged all the children to write, telling Talha that her writing was “the best.” Her mother would also comment on her work: “She always told me that my hands were delicate and that my work was neat, whether it was embroidery or knitting.” Talha recalls her mother as being interested in literature, but “in a very private way. She would always read books at night before she went to sleep. But the family set-up was such

that she could not express her interest or have it acknowledged in any way. She was never given the privileges given to us. She was from a conservative, repressed environment. But my father always gave us the best... always ‘within limits’ of course. It is only now one realises that one was carefully controlled.”

As a child, Talha was the shy, fearful one, but was also determined to overcome her fears. She narrates an instance when, being terrified of the darkest corner in the house under the stairs, she sat there one night for a long while. “I deliberately sought that darkness which I was so frightened of – and nothing happened. I felt that I had overcome my fear, and it made me confident.”

In her last years at school, and during her F.Sc. at college, Talha grew increasingly frustrated by her studies and became rebellious at home. Participating in every extracurricular activity at college, she demonstrated her confidence by acting and singing; it was clear that she was giving up on the route to medical college. To her parents’ fury and dismay, she failed her F.Sc. examination, and found herself facing an impasse. It was at this time that she took the plunge and decided to prepare for the NCA admission test. Her parents, frustrated and befuddled by her erratic behaviour, gave in and granted her permission, albeit reluctantly.

Taking up art studies in a co-educational institution was an unheard of move in the conservative household. Talha posits that



Talha Rathore

Garden of Eve 6 – 2001

Gouache, collage,
blockprint on wasli
48 x 28 cm.

Coll: The Artist

despite all the constraints, her parents gave her “a strong sense of values, which are ingrained in me... a sense of right and wrong, and honesty.”

In her years at NCA, Talha struggled with the demands of the curriculum and her own desire to “be a good artist.” She remembers that initially she was desperate “to make my mark and to be acknowledged”, and was also overwhelmed by the feeling that she was not making any headway in her work.

She graduated with a degree in miniature painting in 1994, having by this time met and become emotionally involved with her fellow

student and artist Fasihullah Ahsan. She looks back on those years: “NCA changed me; the exposure was great, it was such a dream to be there – it was the same for Fasih. Once I was committed to him, my life centred round him.”

Both Talha and Fasih were inducted into the faculty as visiting teachers in 1995. They were married the following year and soon after Talha sensed a breakthrough in her work. She moved away from the familiar, well-trodden path of faithfully copying from the traditional court miniatures, a practice which had helped hone her technical skills but had not involved her emotionally. “I had not felt close to the imagery or the specified use of medium. Then

came the work ‘High Spirits’, which I felt was simple but original.” She emphasises that simplicity is an essential ingredient, one that she strives for.

It is the emotional strength within that Talha relies on when she embarks on the process of painting. In her first two-person show (with Fasih) held in Lahore at the Alliance Française in 1996, her works were characterised by a bright palette, sans the human figure but full of objects – kites, trees, curtains and pavilions.

Awarded a UNESCO bursary for young artists, Talha spent two months at the Sanskriti Akademi in Delhi in 1997. She recalls that

the isolation in that idyllic artists' sanctuary gave her the time to explore the miniature in the context of a contemporary idiom, which involved incursions into its formal vocabulary. She experimented with the *wasli* surface, embossing it delicately with an allover pattern with a nail and hammer. Woven on top of this were the forms of seeds and trees that surrounded her in the gardens of the residence.

In 1998, soon after Talha's return from India, she and Fasih went to New York for a holiday, and stayed on when she got admission in the MA course in painting at the Pratt Institute. However, she had to leave her degree incomplete when she became pregnant. Since then, Talha and Fasih have settled in New York where they are struggling to continue working as artists to support themselves and their baby boy.

It is only recently that Talha has had the opportunity to seriously get down to work for longer periods of time. She dwelt on the experience of her pregnancy, reflected in the plant imagery which reappeared in her work, this time as a metaphor for the embryo within. She notes that she has been "very depressed because of the gap in the work. I wondered if I would ever survive living here. The tribulations of living in this country without support have been tremendous. Fasih has sacrificed his work in order for me to go back to mine. He has to do a job to support us and is too tired to paint after that."

Now that she is able to paint again, Talha reflects on content: "I realise that all of my work, now as well as previously, is to do with being female... But I was unaware of that before, I did it without even knowing that I was referring to my situation as a woman."

But now Talha analyses earlier imagery and is also looking critically at fresh developments. The use of the New York subway map as a

painting surface in the *wasli* is an interjection of her physical reality. She uses the miniature format but experiments with multiple ways of mark making, staining the surface with tea and brushed lines. Using a lino-block, she prints flower bulb forms to surround the image like a picture frame. An emblematic flower grows out of the centre; as it unfolds into a 'field', a sensuousness is apparent.

Talha Rathore describes the flower and the plant as the female hedged in by constraints,

allowed certain freedoms but all the while carefully monitored. The work is fragile, but simultaneously seductive, strong, almost strident. Talha is emphatic that she has only recently felt a clarity of vision, which promises her fulfilment as well as a sense of power. She dreams of returning home to Pakistan to share her work with her peers: "That is where I will really communicate and receive both the criticism and the understanding that is crucial to my work."

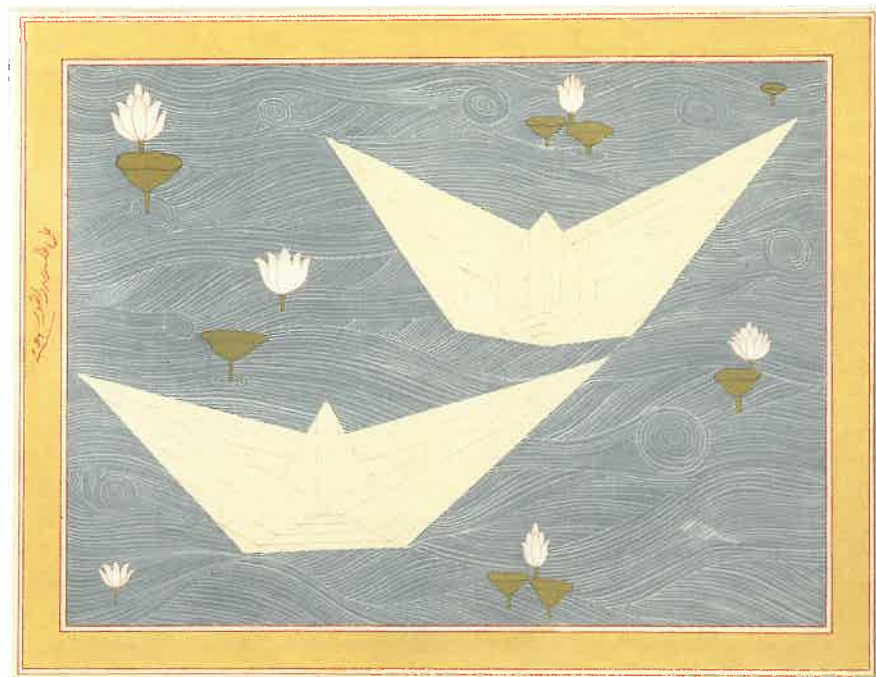
Talha Rathore

High Spirits – 1996

Gouache on *wasli*

24 x 19 cm.

Coll: S. Hashmi



Laila Mehreen Rehman (b. 1966)

Laila studied painting and sculpture at the National College of Arts during the mid-eighties. With unusual family antecedents – her maternal grandfather, G.D. Sondhi was the Principal of the Government College Lahore and a Christian, and her father was a feudal Pathan – she grew up shuttling between urban Lahore and rural Mardan. She says, “Mardan was a happy childhood. We would cry when we had to come back to Lahore! Except that my father was there and my mother in Mardan. I learnt Pushto before I learnt any other language. The two heritages come in two separate boxes.” Her grandmother lived in India, but would come and stay for six months at a time. The first time Laila really met her Indian cousins was when she was eleven years old and then, many years later, met them again in Cambridge with her husband and realised, “We share so much, in spite of the divide.”

She was just thirteen when her father died and life changed forever. She recalls, “People changed in their attitude, visitors dropped away. It was so difficult to take in. That was when I began to ask my mother how she did what she did. She changed her religion, had to find new roots. With her liberal upbringing, there she was in a *haveli*, cut off from the

world. But she told me, ‘I had your father and that was enough.’ And honestly, I have never felt that there were any differences or divides, so it never came down to me.”

Laila also observed *purdah* when she was in Mardan, as she says, “It was the natural thing to do. It was never an issue. Battles are to be won in other ways. The *hujra* and all that went with it was part of my life. My father was strict in these matters, my brothers less so... when my husband saw this, he was so astonished, saying, ‘You live in another century here.’”

In spite of a convent school education and a regular BA from Kinnaird College, Lahore, Laila was always certain that she would eventually do art. The Zia years saw her becoming involved with women’s issues while still a student at NCA. The imagery in her paintings of the time was to do with plant forms – perhaps a conscious linking with the female body.

She drew closer to these images once she went to the St. Martin’s College of Art and Design in London in 1991. She now drew upon her intellectual understanding of attitudes towards women’s bodies as the framework for her painting. She sketched figures that were deliberately “devoid of sensuality, of erotic appeal.” She also looked at the phenomenon of birth and the stereotypical roles assigned to women.

Laila went on to do her MA in printmaking at the Slade School and became deeply involved in examining gender and myth as sources of imagery. This was accompanied by the problems of grappling with an unfamiliar medium and its very demanding imperatives. As she worked in the etching studio, her readings led into a landscape where female forms moved through the cosmos of magic and myth, and transformed themselves into androgynous beings. Other concerns to do with the human experience evolved into questions of empowerment and interpretation.

Stories, legends, and magic have been important to Laila’s work. She moves with ease between history and fantasy, blurring categories, traditions and civilisations. She draws upon forms which are linked to different codes of belief, and recycles them as devices which set up intriguing stories. Interpretation of her selected symbols can be approached in the manner she determines or they can be left alone to unfold in ways she herself may not be aware of. Temporarily living in Cambridge in England, where her husband was pursuing post-graduate studies, Laila went back to painting. While her experience with engraving re-enforced the use of line as the dominant formal element, she continued to explore it as a connecting force on the canvas.

Her theoretical studies in the Mughal miniature as her dissertation also led to the inclusion of architectural motifs and calligraphy in her



Laila Rehman

'How shall we know the dancer from the dance' – 1996
Aquatint and etching
49 x 52 cm.
Coll: N. Pasha

work. Diverse sources of inspiration have underlined the choices available to the growing number of artists today, whose travels make a number of worlds accessible in every sense. Yet Laila Rehman, like many others, stresses the relevance of the primary source – her geographical location.

Speaking of the need to address the problems of being in Pakistan, she says, "England is okay while I'm there, but here is where I'm comfortable and it's only right to deal with what's here."

On her return to Lahore, and as a mother of a twin boy and girl, Laila has managed to continue painting, as access to a printmaking studio is not in the offing. Commenting on these changes, she says, "The domestic

becomes more turbulent because of the children. And yet I am calmer. There is not so much angst about showing the work. I enjoy it so much more. Also things that were 'forbidden' before are now within my reach; for example, using 'gold' in my painting, which I would have considered decorative and silly. I am now confident, at ease and relaxed about my preferences. I don't have to justify my themes, way of working, nor am I looking at a timetable."

She wonders if the headless figures of her London etchings have metamorphosed into headed figures because she now has children. But she is certain that her awareness of her environment is the milieu of her work. "One stores away a lot of knowledge to be used at a later stage. You see injustice but at a certain

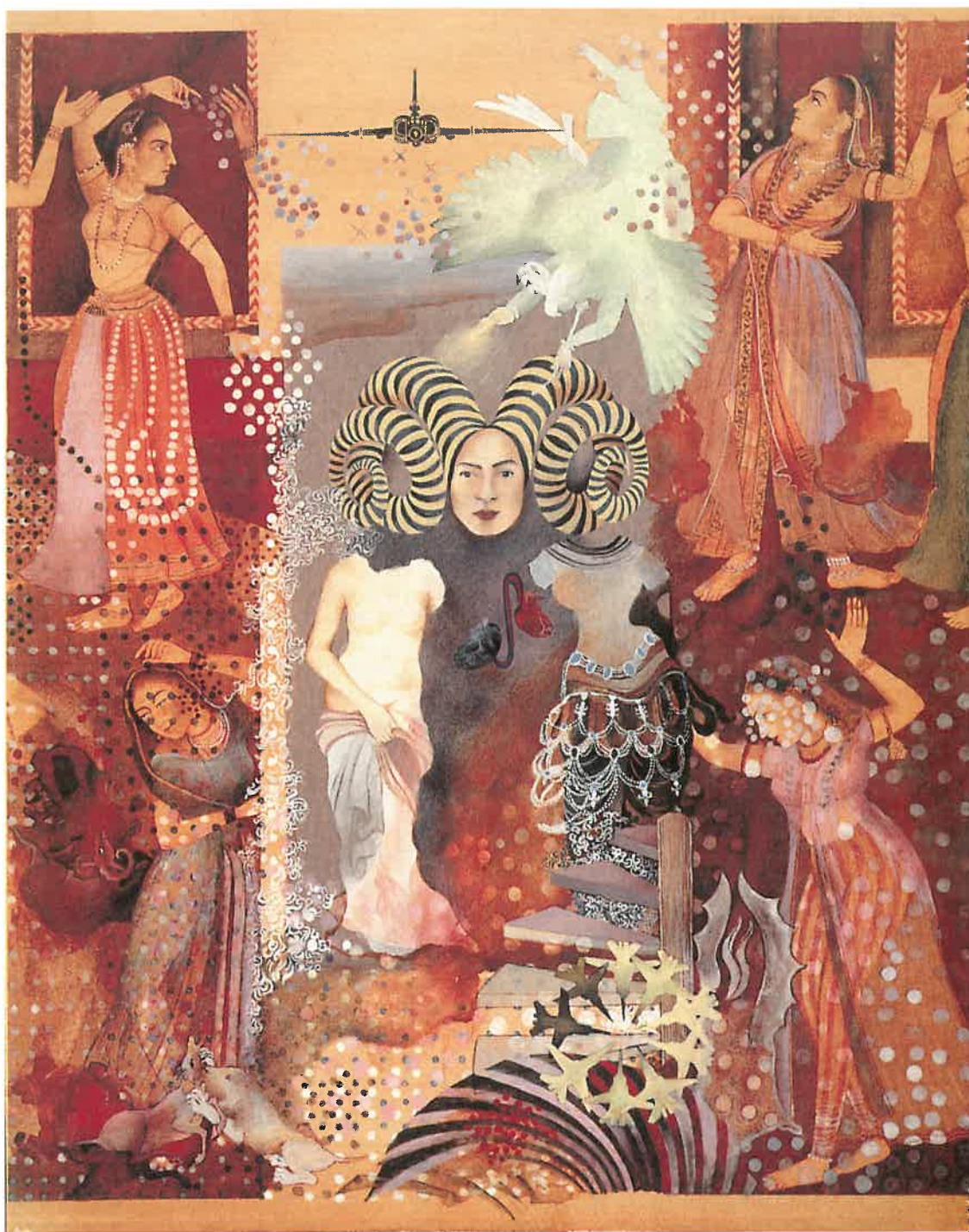


Laila Rehman

Crucifixion – 2000
Oil and pencil on canvas
127 x 127 cm.
Coll: The Artist

stage, you have to stop it." Her new works are dramatic, occasionally more strongly coloured, almost baroque in their tonal contrasts, but the sinuous quality remains. Laila says, "My concerns are still about the dichotomy of living. There are so many layers within one and I want to explore them. It intrigues me, amuses me, but can also be dangerous. I feel strongly about what happens around me – I may not go on a rampage, but I am concerned about issues."

The fact that she continues to employ what some may read as provocative imagery is indicative of her intent. She concludes, "A head-on collision is not necessary. One changes one's tactics." But she also notes that, "Battles are there to be fought, both as an artist and as a woman."



Shahzia Sikander

Pleasure Pillars – 2001

Vegetable colour, water colour,
dry pigment, tea wash on wasli
25 x 35 cm.

Coll: Mita & Parminder Chatterjee

Shahzia Sikander (b. 1969)

It is now that Shahzia Sikander summons up the memory of her paternal grandfather and describes him as being a pivotal presence in her childhood: "Early memories are of a joint family. My grandfather was a strict *Wahabi*, extremely pragmatic, realistic, practical. I realise now that my pragmatism came from there, which I now use as a tool and as a weapon. It is a means of keeping myself in check, and helps me to be objective. I was a very emotional person, a haphazard person in terms of my decision making. So it's interesting that now I can see my grandfather as being so important an influence."

Shahzia recounts the joint family as being a religious one, with firm rituals set in place by the elders. But this authority sat lightly upon the household. "My grandfather made it very accessible. The family was close-knit; we said our prayers, we fasted, we celebrated... there was the excitement of getting up early...

Religion was not a problematic experience. These experiences over my first ten or fifteen years were so strong that they became spiritual and personal. There was something wholesome about living with my grandparents... It was also fortunate that they believed that women should be nurtured, be heard, and be financially independent. The family was very open-minded. Everything could be discussed as long as it was brought to the table... But there was no pampering."

Shahzia's parents were great travellers, taking the children all over the country. She remembers being bundled into the car at regular intervals, even being driven to Karachi, with a stop en route at Moenjodaro to take in the 'sights'. She also has early memories of Taxila, at age four and then again at seven. "I was made aware of 'seeing', especially by my mother... to see everything that Pakistan had to offer... We travelled for days and days in the car, even sleeping in it! Perhaps one never contextualised it, but we were exposed all the time, to different cultures and traditions, soaking it all in. We would go to Swat... sit with the women, talk to them. We visited the village homes in Dungagali, looking at how the women decorated them; one ate there, even slept there. We bought things they made... It was a personalised experience."

Like countless others of her privileged background, Shahzia's schooling took place at the Lahore Convent. She describes her self as being "a quiet, shy person, hardworking

and conscientious, learning everything off by heart! I never knew how to take shortcuts, I always took the long route!" She also muses that being the firstborn, the pressure to perform was excessive, but acknowledges that some of that may have been self-imposed. Her mother, being a perfectionist, was an exacting parent. Shahzia recalls, "There was a desire to work hard, to compete... perhaps connected to the desire for approval. There was the urge not to have confrontations, to keep the frustrations within me, and to internalise them..." She also concedes that "all that conscientiousness helped me to develop an independent relationship with my work."

The Convent of Jesus and Mary was also a place for the confluence of beliefs. Shahzia remembers venturing into scripture, as well as choir practice, parallel to studying *Islamiyat*. "There were the nuns at school and *namaaz* at home. It was a blending... In fact we had a Jewish tenant in the house, a student who came to study medicine in Lahore." There were no discernible contradictions in the teaching and practice of faith, and Shahzia recalls an early physical independence, which included riding a bike, *patang baazi*, and *kabutar baazi*, also thanks to her grandfather.

The ability to draw was always there and she drew diagrams and maps for all her cousins, young and old, and for her brother. "I also made portraits for everyone... I had figured out a formula. I could make a realistic rendering of a photograph, get it xeroxed and



Shahzia Sikander

Untitled (detail of scroll) – 1993

Gouache on wasli

152 x 38 cm.

Coll: The Artist

fill it out. I could do this from the age of ten or eleven. Being a quiet child, I could bridge my distance by either doing someone's homework, or making them a portrait as a present."

After the Convent, Shahzia went to study at the Kinnaird College for Women, "because my mother went there, like the Convent!" The college experience was not an edifying one, even though there were girls from all kinds of backgrounds. The focus was on what one wore, whether one repeated one's wardrobe

and whether one's father was of the requisite social status."

She prepared for the test for admission to NCA, describing it thus: "I knew there was a formulaic way of preparing, which I grasped very quickly, even though I know that if you learn something by rote, it can abandon you at any time... But I did it and could draw 'a perfect figure'!"

But the four years at NCA until 1992 were precious. "I had spent enough time at frivolities

at Kinnaird. I came to NCA very focussed. At first I thought I would do architecture because I was interested in structure, in design, in ornament. My inclination was also towards illustration... but it unravelled slowly. You meet so many different kinds of people, you start to define your territory. The fact that it's a co-ed institution with so much freedom of expression and the liberty to be comfortable with your own being... even for girls who after that get married and may not work, it's a critical experience at many levels." Shahzia describes it also as a time of isolation in which

she “connected with very few people, in the students and the faculty. It was through my work that I could communicate with Zahoor [ul-Akhlaq] or you [the author].”

Her opting to specialise in miniature painting reinforced Shahzia’s ability to embrace and absorb rigour and traditional practice. She matched her teacher Bashir Ahmed’s exacting regime with intellectual and visual explorations of her own.

Her thesis project was an autobiographical narrative in which the handmade *wasli* was extended to a length of five feet, challenging the notion of the genre of ‘miniature as manuscript’. A study tour to India in 1992 initiated further probings. “It was a liberating experience, as an artist, and as a woman. It was so mind expanding – a jolt! It seemed so unfair that here you were in Pakistan, and there across from you was something you needed which was denied to you. India exposed me to a lot of art practice that one could connect to... It saddened me that one couldn’t access it at one’s will... that was ridiculous and offensive... I was looking at architecture as well as painting... I went to Ahmedabad, experienced Corbusier and Louis Kahn. Then in twenty days the trip was over and one was cut off again.”

At the time there was an opportunity for Shahzia to do a workshop with Indian artists Nilima and Gulam Sheikh, but visa restrictions were an impediment and so, as Shahzia put it, “I ended up in the US!” But preparing to go abroad was preceded by a growing awareness of her environment and her relationship with her work. “I was slowly beginning to articulate my thoughts... I was leaving my shyness behind as well as my inability to confront things. I was aware of the Hudood Ordinance, that made one hypocritical and prone to deviousness and camouflage... One didn’t yet know how to speak of one’s work, one knew a lot, but wasn’t

eager to express it.” It took another four years, after she was done with a Masters at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and a residency at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas, before, as she puts it, “One could make sense of what one was doing... and to connect it to the four or five years before that.”



Shahzia Sikander
'Knock, knock whose there? Mithilia, Mithilia who?' – 1996
 Installation at
 Row Houses, Huston.

All this while, Shahzia was grateful that her family did not overly pressurise her to return. “Once they had allowed me to go, they let me pursue my work... but I needed them to share what I was doing... I would ask them to see what I was doing... The ability to be honest happened maybe because of the distance, or perhaps I was now a stronger person, or perhaps on a subversive level there was a desire to shock as well.”

The subversion that she mentions may be a continuous thread in her life and work, but one she chooses to repudiate when speaking of her work to Homi Bhabha in 1998: “My aim is not to subvert, let alone to reinvent a tradition; such boundaries are blurred in the act of painting miniatures. I knew from the start that I was engaging in an anachronistic practice, labour intensive, limited in the scope of its impact... But I was interested in an art form whose present was of the past.” This linking of the past with the present and its fissures, which may have originated in the childhood experience, is the critical fabric of her work today. The early years of assembling an impressive array of skills in material and formal terms now rest easy in an odyssey of a different kind.

The two years at RISD were lonely, in that the context of the individual and the work appeared irrelevant. There was a protracted but eventually fruitful struggle to understand, define and circumscribe the ‘dislocation’.

Trying out photography as a vehicle instigated a desire to ‘retreat’ into the ‘core’. Embryonic forms floated in dreamlike plasma, indicating perhaps the limbo of her experience. This was a time of unfeigned confusion, accompanied by an intractable sense of purpose. Shahzia bided her time as she worked. A number of options surfaced, some of them visually palatable, which were discarded in favour of a stringent sifting of formal and contextual concerns.

The strength of the connections to the individual and 'collective' past and present were persistent. This grew not out of any inflexibility on her part, but from an intuitive commitment to certain intellectual, emotional and aesthetic imperatives. During all of this, she moved from graduate school to a residency at the Glassel School at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. What accompanied her was the sense of irony and her social concerns.

The opportunity to work in the Row Houses Project gave her the contextual thrust she had missed. The 'hands on' experience of working with marginalised Afro-American women and children in the abandoned housing project, and relating it to her own stake in gender issues, prised open the physical scale as well as the delicacy of practice in the installation "Knock, knock, who's there? Mithila, Mithila who?"

Shahzia's selection as one of the artists at the Whitney Biennial in 1997 was a culmination of a relentless, consistent hammering out of her talents. This was followed by her inclusion in 'The American Century', also at the Whitney in 1999, and a solo show at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, which might have heralded an 'arrival' of her capacity to innovate within the parameters of a 'given' discipline. It proved to be nothing of the kind.

Together with the pragmatism that she alludes to, there exists an utter fearlessness in Shahzia Sikander's leaps of intuition. Her ability to simultaneously be immersed in and stand back from the process of 'making' is exhaustive. This desire to invite tension at every level occurs in terms of scale, medium and content. Many internalised rebellions metamorphose and are sharpened. This happened while physically revisiting and reworking the 'classical' work, as in 'Perilous Order', or in confronting the gallery expanse at the Drawing Centre or at the Hirshhorn. Shahzia has



Shahzia Sikander
Ready to leave – 1997
 Vegetable, water colour,
 dry pigment on paper
 Size unavailable.
 Coll: Whitney Museum, NY.

initiated these multifaceted dialogues in tandem, demanding urgent shifts on the part of the onlooker as well as the maker. These shifts are not only of scale and medium, but also conceptual. The 'burdens' of histories of mark making, meaning and associations mingle and reverberate. Our shared predicaments are investigated with humour, sympathy and a scalpel.

This time of receiving great media and critical attention brought its own stress into Shahzia's life. She resisted the pressure to 'perform', to make art on demand, preferring to go into collaboration with activist groups and taking part in performing arts ventures. At the time, in 1999, she also spoke of other predicaments. "My family is very supportive... and I don't feel the pressure to get married, but one has never separated one's work and one's life... I do worry and fear that a relationship may start affecting my work. Perhaps I'm on the periphery of a generation for whom it has been easier, and one has had a choice... not only because I'm here... there are friends in Pakistan too who also have chosen not to get married. But in the culture here in the U.S, women can become obsessive about being or not being in a relationship. Sometimes they think I'm a freak! But I think the whole institution of marriage needs to be rethought and reinvented."

By 2002, Shahzia's stance had altered and she welcomed the idea of getting married to a friend from New York. She muses, "Life is too short and too complicated and too full of meaning... you have to juggle everything, and as a woman I was doing so... You have to be what you have to be in all different roles. I have not come to this decision because of social or personal pressure, I came to it by an understanding of who I was... then I was happy to accept it... It became possible to think of work as well as to live one's life with a friend." About having children, she says, "I



Shahzia Sikander

Entanglement – 2001

Photogravure, Vegetable colour, ink,
water colour, dry pigment, tea wash on wasli
14 x 20 cm.

Coll: Anita Rehman & Ronald Creamer



Shahzia Sikander

Spinn – 2002

Installation at Urgent Painting Show

MOMA, Paris.

670 x 548 cm.

don't feel like I'm losing out on something, it will be a pragmatic decision; when I know that I can take care of a child, then it makes sense. I will negotiate it when I decide what I want to do with that notion."

Before arriving at this juncture, Shahzia's work in 2000 consolidated its earlier directions. She worked on large, layered installations at the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago in 1998, at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1999, and in the Phillip Morris Branch of the Whitney Museum in New York in 2000. She juxtaposed these with smaller works, enjoying the contradiction. The rummaging around for imagery that was present earlier became more intense. The

personal references to people, places and things continued, but the severity of practice was absent.

2001 heralded further sorties into diverse mediums, languages and connotations. The implications of these penetrations were well understood; Shahzia was intent on destabilisation and turning up the intensity of dialogue. As she ruminates on the installation 'Intimacy', which incorporated digital technology into the imagery already in place, she says, "The parallels existing between a miniature painting on *wasli* paper and a high resolution screen are subjective at best, but primarily they exist in the usage of space and time. The focus is on communicating a

technical understanding of a labour-intensive precision applied to both. The expression that evolves on screen has a lineage of its own, completely independent of what it stood for once on a flat paper surface... it now allows one to peek through old transparencies, through layers that secretly preserve the integrity of what remains behind."

Here, in these digitally sequenced animated 'miniatures' which mutate ever so slowly, Shahzia is setting up tensions. She says, "One plane is a meticulously painted surface created with precision that is in keeping with tradition; the other is its violation." It is clear that instead of a possible feared confrontation, there occurs an intimacy, much awaited, much desired.

Adeela Suleman

(b. 1970)



Adeela Suleman
Working on 'Salma- Sitara- Behnen'
Installation for Asian Art Triennale
Fukuoka, Japan – 2002

Adeela Suleman attributes her affinity for 'making things' to her great-grandfather, who fashioned objects out of wood. Her father was less enthusiastic about such inherited inclinations. As a struggling doctor, he was dedicated to providing a sound education for all his children. Although, seeing her draw, he was willing to let her become an architect, but for him becoming an artist implied a precarious future.

Adeela studied painting and drawing at Nahid Raza's studio, but did her degree in International Relations at Karachi University, where she also met her husband. She subsequently joined the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture once it had acquired degree-awarding status. By the time that she reached her third year of study, she was already married.

Adeela is grateful for the nurturing role played by her husband and his family during her studies at art college. As a final-year student, leaving the house at 8 a.m. to return at 11 p.m., the newly wed bride in a conservative household was never coaxed or reminded of her filial responsibilities. Her new family endorsed her commitment to her work; they themselves were deeply involved in community work in the interior of Sindh. Her parents were similarly disposed, being dedicated to social work.

As a young woman growing up in a conservative household, Adeela was subject to prevalent matchmaking rituals. Having already fallen in love, she nevertheless went through the motions to satisfy conventional customs. The inescapable 'tea-party', in which the bridal candidate wheels in the tea trolley as all eyes turn towards her, later became the subject of her thesis project. She recalls being tense and miserable during these charades. The serving of the tea as the focal point of her first major work conveyed with humour and insight the dilemma of the female participant, and the rigidity of the system that defines her role in her own future. The large installation explored the idea of 'tea' as an element of social currency, with the *chai-khana* or tea shop as a site for the criss-crossings of conversation; the serving of the tea as a sacrament, a rite, a demonstration of perfection. All of these concepts were expressed through a variety of means involving sound, movement, and diverse materials both two- and three-dimensional.

Adeela suggests that the dominant presence of social issues in her work comes from her studies in international relations; but her family's social awareness and commitment may have played an equally significant part. She states, "I am against talking of 'women' apart from 'men'. I was brought up to fight for my rights, as part of the larger context of rights for everyone." She has become a mother

since graduating and manages to juggle her work, baby, and home. Her work continues to address social issues and observed phenomena. The work in progress is an installation project which looks at the motorcycle as a vital part of Karachi's environment. Notwithstanding her insistence that she is not focussing on women, Adeela looks at the motorcycle from the woman's standpoint. Women do not sit astride in Pakistan, inspite of the dangers of the posture they adopt. Sitting sidesaddle without a helmet, with several children sandwiched between and in front, the sight is heart stopping. "And yet," Adeela muses, "they have fun, they enjoy it, the speed, the *dupatta* or *burqah* flying." Concerns about their safety have been the motivating force behind her project, which has been selected for the Fukuoka Triennale in 2002.

Adeela proposes helmets, low-cost, maybe made from the *karhai* or cooking pot. She notices that policewomen are not provided helmets as part of their uniforms. She is devising a workshop space full of gadgets for 'women on bikes'. These may be portable seats for them and their children, places to put their tiffin boxes and other essential knick-knacks. The space itself will be a 'work in progress' with drawings, helmet prototypes, possibly a video as a mark of the clutter that is the essence of life and work.

Adeela Suleman's work makes no distinction between drawing, constructing, and piecing together elements from diverse sources. She professes that she does not "intellectualise, or deal in words. I feel that the work has to speak for itself. My approach is consistent, although the issues I confront are varied." She credits the freedom she was allowed at the Indus Valley School as an important component of her work. But even more decisive is the financial and emotional support of her family and her partner.



Adeela Suleman
Tip-top-tea (tea fountain)– 1999
 Metal
 91 x 198 cm.
 Coll: The Artist

Risham Syed (b.1969)

The recurring images in Risham Syed's painting disclose submerged intensities. She grew up in a household where the pursuit of art and literature was tangible. Her father, Najam Husain Syed, a celebrated Punjabi poet, and her mother an accomplished singer who nevertheless rarely performed in public – both were early role models.

Risham is emphatic about how she hated school, and tells of how she was labelled 'inattentive' by the nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent in Lahore. The school, one of many such across the sub-continent, allowed no leeway to dreamers, instilling vigorous Victorian values in the young girls in its care. Risham learnt needlework and knitting as part of the curriculum. But at home too, the overall living patterns were "deeply rooted in the feudal, urban-middle-class colonial tradition", says she.

Yet the atmosphere was creative and music was omnipresent. Her father turned on early morning *ragas*; her mother wanted her to pursue music, and at one point subtly led Risham away from the classical dance she had started learning. To the bewilderment of both parents, she developed a passion for mathematics. She reckons that "it was the mechanics of it. I was really good and could do it without getting really involved. I never did any extra-curricular activities. When I went to Kinnaird College, I took up statistics and economics, and my parents could not relate to that. It was a time of alienation. I

wasn't really connected to what I was doing. It was at this time that my friend applied to NCA, and because I enjoyed drawing, I did too. My father supported me in this, saying that I should do what I enjoyed doing. But my mother couldn't see me pursuing this. Perhaps it was a kind of rebellion on my part. It happens when there is a powerful, imposing presence."

Risham notes that there were these two poles in the home. Her mother represented the socio-cultural role of the female while her father sabotaged it. Her inherited religious lineage required certain behaviour patterns. She remembers reacting against having to cover her head in the bazaar, and other trivial social impositions. She explains, "My father taught me to compromise with the constraints. For him, memorising the holy verses was not as important as the values they signified. I think it is important to have faith... He had a very open approach, which surprised me. My mother's beliefs seemed more like rituals. In a way, both were counterweights." She is careful to point out that there was no gender differentiation in the home, although her brother was pampered as the 'male child' by her mother, in the usual way.

Joining NCA brought about a certain awareness and enjoyment, but she still felt distanced from her work. She thinks that her turning towards art was more to do with the emotions than a preference for visual expression. She had become engaged to her cousin – more her mother's idea than her own



Lt – Rt:
Front row: Masooma Syed,
Aisha Khalid, Imran Qureshi
Back row: Risham Syed,
Naazish Ataullah,
Salima Hashmi, Saamia Vine
Quddus Mirza,
and Saniya Samad.



Risham Syed

The line between series

Coming in full circle - 2002

Acrylic, chalk, sand, photoetching,
graphite on board

71 x 56 cm.

Coll: The Artist

— later to be rescinded. The emotional turmoil gave her the strength to test her ideas in another realm. “It was the space I required to grow.” The opportunity to go abroad and study at the Royal College of Art in London was the crucial factor in her development. Being immersed in her work and the freedom it afforded her led to “another level of self-awareness.” By the time she returned, she had given up the idea of marriage, however her cousin reappeared, a suitor once more.

“When I came back, I realised Marriage was an institution in our society which gave one independence... Tariq is very kind, supportive, and gives me that space. Our intellectual pursuits are different but he honours my work. He has a good eye and is intuitive. He probably wanted to be involved in design when he was younger, but never got the chance, but he has that spark...”

Into her third year of marriage, Risham has a son whom she terms “a grave responsibility that I was not prepared for. Initially it was too overwhelming an experience, but now I am back into work, and it has changed me... I value time as a result of having a baby.”

Risham Syed’s earlier work was largely to do with an overt socio-political content; the people of her surroundings, their daily lives and compulsions. Interested in history, she related her experiences in England to the sub-continental colonial heritage, connected to where she came from. The echoes of “both sides” reverberated in her work. Her own analysis of her childhood and subsequent personal history has altered this perspective. As she puts it: “Now it has a lot to do with womanhood, based on my own experience; before, it was an overall perspective. Male structures, their dominance, and ways in which to ‘own’ the woman... the ideals constructed by society. I am critically examining the male gaze. I think back to my childhood and how

the young girl grows up and is made conscious of her body. She is trained to become a competent homemaker... I am also looking at images collected over a period of time, in an intuitive way, and juxtaposing them with images I consciously make. I like to draw parallels... The ‘other woman’ as an object of pleasure, projected through the media.”

The work employs a variety of images from the media; screen sirens, Barbie dolls, domestic appliances, gift packages - seductive but somehow distanced because of their familiarity. She strives to make the work look ‘sweet’, almost syrupy, to divert attention from the

seriousness of the messages they convey. Almost making fun of the hackneyed images of baby paraphernalia, Risham discloses its frustrations and pressures. Fulfilment runs parallel to yearnings in silent, strong statements.

Negotiating the needs of a small child who accompanies her everywhere, and the demands of being partner to a professional, gives Risham Syed a sense of accomplishment when an idea germinates and is realised. “My work has become so important to me... If I don’t work, I feel the pressure. It connects me to life. This realisation was never there before.”



Risham Syed

The line between series – 2002

Acrylic, embroidery,
Hennastamp on board

61x 48 cm.

Coll: The Artist



Sumaira Tazeen

Saeed – 2001

Opaque water colour, gold leaf
and tea stain on wasli

46 x 31 cm.

Coll: The Artist

Sumaira Tazeen

(b. 1973)

College of Arts induced Sumaira to take her talents in that direction. The ensuing four years were spent as a resident student at the NCA hostel, "far from home, but having a wonderful time."

As a student at the Miniature Painting Department, Sumaira was studious and skilful, but cautious. Her thesis painting on the preservation of wildlife was presented to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II when she witnessed a Miniature studio class in session upon her visit to the College in 1996.

For Sumaira, graduating from NCA did not mean heading back to Hyderabad; she had already set her mind on commencing an artistic career in Karachi. Her father's support was crucial to her taking up paying-guest accommodation and looking for work in the metropolis. Luckily for her, the eminent contemporary artist Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq was looking for assistants to help out with a major commission at the Governor's House. Working with him was an experience essential to her visual and intellectual development. Her association with him proved valuable in other ways too; he facilitated her entry into the art circuit, introducing her to many of his artist friends.

Her father's death in 1997 was a watershed in Sumaira's life. She became the breadwinner for herself and her mother, living together in a flat in Karachi, her siblings having busied themselves with their marriages and their own

households. She is sanguine about the demands of holding down two part-time jobs as she struggles to find time to paint. Coping well with the problems of being a woman in a male-dominated milieu, she concedes that the ever-present pressure of marriage is a possible solution.

These and other matters are transferred into the imagery in her painting with humour and panache. The colour palette has been radicalised after a trip to India with fellow miniature painters. From a pale, tentative vocabulary, the work has now moved into an expression far more vivid and assured in its symbolic range. She chooses the theme of marriage with the *peti* or wedding chest as its major leitmotif; the invitation cards, the dowry, and other trappings of the nuptials are celebrated and castigated simultaneously. The source of her visual content is the popular vocabulary of greeting cards, buses, calendars, and embroideries. The mood is joyous in a deceptive way; there are serious undertones to be fathomed.

Sumaira Tazeen is certain that the evolving form and content of her work is indicative of the intensity with which she gazes at the world around her. "Working is so utterly important to me," she enthuses, "I cannot live without it. This search within has created an awareness that is appearing in the painting. Of course one does talk of issues that are socially relevant, so that even if the work is about myself, it does have a larger meaning."

Sumaira Tazeen remembers being indulged in her early inclinations by a father who considered a good education indispensable for all his children. Sumaira was born in Hyderabad Sindh, but her family was originally from C.P in India. Embroiled in Pakistan People's Party and local municipality politics, her father nevertheless found the time to encourage his daughter's leanings. Watching a television programme about the National



Ruby Chishti

*My birth will take place a thousand times,
no matter how you celebrate it – 2001*

Fabric, cast, stitched and stuffed

Size unavailable

Coll: Tehmina Durrani

Notes

1. Schools of Industrial Art were established at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1867. In 1878, the Mayo School of Industrial Art was set up in Lahore, together with the Lahore Museum, both headed by Lockwood Kipling (father of famed author Rudyard) as Principal and Curator. The main objective was "the rejuvenation of Indian Crafts for European consumption. It was decided that Indian Art students should (also) be given lessons in European designing. In order to be aware of the scientific principles that controlled the scheme of designs, Indian Art students should continue with their lessons in linear geometry, freehand outline drawing, shading and drawing from actual objects." (Chatterjee, R. 'Nationalism and Form in Indian Painting'. Journal of Arts and Ideas. No. 14-15, Delhi, 1987.)
2. The government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was toppled on July 17, 1977, by General Zia-ul-Haq's coup d'état. This was preceded by months of demonstrations by the opposition parties against alleged rigging in the March 1977 elections. This, Pakistan's third coup, happened as an agreement between the Government and the opposition was reportedly imminent.
3. Several contemporary artists had worked with calligraphy and form derived from that source prior to 1977. These included Shakir Ali, A.J. Shemza, Hanif Ramay and Rasheed Arshad. Sadeqain incorporated calligraphic texts in his illustrations of the works of poets Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz. He turned to Quranic calligraphy more seriously from 1977 onwards, as did Gulgee, Ahmad Khan, Shafique Farooqi and Askari Mian Irani, among others.
4. Artist, critic-mentor, and gallery owner Ali Imam, in an interview with the author on women artists (1992), stated, "Nahid [Raza], Mehr [Afroze] and Qudsia [Nisar] are very talented, but they won't be taken seriously if they work only on paper."
5. Among the many students of Nasim Qazi are: Mussarat Mirza, Salima Hashmi, Rahat Masud, Tasneem Abbas, Riaz Fatima, and Abida Ehsan.
6. The Academy still functions with courses in painting, drawing and graphic design. No longer housed in the 'huts' of the 1960s, the classes are conducted in the new buildings of the Alhamra Art Centre, on the same site.
7. The language riots in Sindh, which occurred in 1972-73, were the culmination of simmering resentments between the indigenous Sindhi

population of the province, and the Mohajir or settlers from India, who were Urdu speaking. Sindhi was the official language of the province until it was replaced by Urdu in 1958 during General Ayub's regime. This order was revised by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and was seen by the Mohajirs as an attempt to downgrade Urdu. The riots shook the city of Karachi, but also spread to other towns of the province with large Mohajir populations, like Hyderabad.

8. In the aftermath of the overthrow of General Ayub Khan by a popular revolt in both wings of the country, the establishment, in the person of General Yahya Khan, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, were constrained to hold an election. The general election of 1970 elicited tremendous enthusiasm and was the first clear map of political thinking in the nation.

The Awami League with its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the clear overall winners with a nationwide majority, though concentrated in East Pakistan; while Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's People's Party gained a plurality in the West. But prior to this, East Pakistan had become largely alienated from the establishment and from its perceived constituency of West Pakistan. As a corollary, the political ambitions of Mujibur Rahman were perceived as a separatist movement in the West, and the establishment could not bring itself to hand over power to the Awami League as was warranted by its national majority. Brutal army action was initiated against political leaders, the intelligentsia and the masses, which was met by an armed struggle for separation. A hostile neighbor India, was only too willing to help in what became an independence movement for the East. Amidst great bloodshed, the two wings of Pakistan separated and Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation.

9. The original copy of the manifesto is reproduced on pages...193,194,195.

10. The Sufi order Nimatullahi was founded in Iran at the end of the 14th century A.D, by the Iranian Sufi master and poet Nimatullah Wali (1330 A.D – 1431 A.D). The current master of the Nimatullah order is Dr. Javad Nurbuksh.

11. In April 1982, the Council of Islamic Ideology proposed a new Law of Evidence, 'to replace the Evidence Act of 1872, supposedly to bring it into conformity with Islam'. The draft among other things prescribed that in the absence of two male witnesses required for proving a crime, one male and two female witnesses would be acceptable. The reaction to this proposal by WAF was vehement, and led to the demonstration of February 12th 1983.

12. The Khilafat Movement (1920-21) in British India, led by the brothers Maulana Mohamad Ali and Moulana Shaukat Ali, demanded the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire in its 1914 frontiers (after the Balkan wars) and the continuation of the Caliphate; they also demanded Muslim control over the holy places of Islam (including Palestine). The movement mobilised Muslims in India (including women) into civil disobedience and migration out of British India into Muslim countries. "It was also the high point of Hindu-Muslim co-operation against the British, espoused by Mahatama Gandhi." (Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back. Mumtaz and Shaheed. Vanguard Books, 1987.)

13. The Art Centre was set up by art patron and entrepreneur Sehyr Saigol in Lahore in the mid seventies. It later became a women's boutique.

14. Alarmed at the measures being taken by General Zia-ul-Haq's government to segregate women and erode their rights in the name of Islam, Shirkat Gah, a women's NGO in Karachi called a meeting of women in 1981. This first meeting was attended by 30 women, some representing other organisations, and the name Khawateen-Mahaz-e-Amal (Women's Action Forum) was adopted. Within six months there were chapters in Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar. WAF not only opposed Zia's laws through legal action, but through mobilisation of public opinion and as street activists. By 1983, WAF had more than a dozen endorsing organisations. (Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back. Mumtaz and Shaheed. Vanguard Books, Lahore. 1987.)

We, the women artists of Pakistan

having noted with concern the decline in the
status and conditions of life of
Pakistani women; and

having noted the adverse effects of
the anti-reason, anti-arts environment
on the quality of life in our homeland; and

having noted the significant contribution the
pioneering women artists have made to the
cause of arts and art education in Pakistan and

believing as we do in

the basic rights of all men, women and
children to a life free from want and
enriched by the joys of fruitful labour
and cultural self-realisation; and
our commitment, as practitioners and
teachers of the arts, to the noblest
ideals of a free, rational and civilised
existence;

affirm the following principles to guide us in our
struggle for the cultural development of our people, to
serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan:

1. We acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by women
artists to the conservation and promotion of the artistic
genius of our people and their role in pioneering art

Contd. P/2

**Women Artists Manifesto
Signed by 15 Women Artists
in Lahore - 1983**

education in the country; we salute them for this and for their determination to spread out at all levels of education and to all strata of society.

2. We unreservedly support the Pakistani women's struggle for equality of rights, status, and dignity with menfolk.
3. We call upon women engaged in any creative field in Pakistan to stand together for the cause of women's emancipation not only from all constraints, perpetrated in the name of law and morality, but also from all forms of prejudice, superstition and cant.
4. We recognise, respect and uphold the right of every woman artist to her own faith, her individual approach to content, form, medium, method, technique and style in the realisation of her artistic ideals. And we denounce any attempt, overt or covert, to suppress, inhibit, control or regiment her artistic functioning, or to interfere otherwise, with her basic right to freedom of expression.
5. We vigorously condemn the attitude which minimises woman's constructive role in society, and attempts to restrict her active and rightful participation in society.
6. We condemn the attitude which distorts the original and age-old role of woman as the giver and sustainer of life,

Contd. P/3

**Women Artists Manifesto
Signed by 15 Women Artists
in Lahore - 1983**

love and affection and vulgarises it into an image of obscenity.

7. We call upon all women artists to take their place in the vanguard of the Pakistani women's struggle to retain their pristine image and their rightful place in society.

So that we may replace in the lives of our people despair with hope, brutality with compassion, darkness with light, and anarchy with culture, and leave the world a happier, more beautiful and more peaceful a place than we found it.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Rishi Zaid | 9. Shehrezade Khan |
| 2. Sahar Ali | 10. Jalus Wasee |
| 3. Mamoona Bashir.
(MAMOONA BASHIR) | 11. Birjees Iqbal |
| 4. Salima Hashmi
[SALIMA HASHMI] | 12. Riffat Ali
(RIFFAT ALVI) |
| 5. Laila Raza
(LAILA RAZA) | 13. Meher Afroz
(MEHER AFROZ) |
| 6. Talat Ahmad.
(TALAT AHMAD) | 14. Nahid. |
| 7. Zubeida Javed
ZUBEIDA JAVED | 15. Qudsia Nisar
(QUDSIANISAR) |
| 8. | 16. Veeda Ahmed
(VEEDA AHMED) |

(1983).

**Women Artists Manifesto
Signed by 15 Women Artists
in Lahore - 1983**

Glossary

Ajrak: Traditional Sindhi cotton fabric, block-printed with intricate designs in natural colours of crimson, indigo and black.

Alam: Literally a 'War Banner'. It has become the special symbol of the Shia sect, from the banners in the Battle of Kerbala.

Annas: The coin of the realm until the coming of the decimal system. An *Anna* was one-sixteenth of a 'Rupee'.

Arya Samaaj: A progressive Hindu socio/religious organisation founded by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati, very active working for the uplift of people, setting up schools and colleges in the time just before Independence.

Ayah: A female attendant, usually a children's nurse.

Bai-Jee: A respectful term for a courtesan or singer.

Banjara: Literally the carrier of a sack of grain. In poetic metaphor it has also come to mean a pallbearer.

Basant Bahaar: Literally the spring season; also one of the *Ragas* of our classical music.

Basti: A settlement or village.

Bharat Natyam: One of the ancient forms of Indian classical dance. It is distinguished from the other great forms, the Kathak, the Orissi and the Manipuri by a more strict reliance on stylisation.

Burqah: The traditional instrument of *Purdah*. A stitched shroud which covers a woman from head to foot, including the face with a small see-through patch of netting for the eyes.

Butkhana: Literally a 'house of idols'. Thus it was originally the word for a heathen temple; but in poetic usage it has also come to mean a 'house of beauty' or generally a forbidden, but nevertheless attractive place.

Chaadar: A lady's shawl, which serves as head covering and body shroud. The word has become a symbol for a woman's modesty.

Chaadar aur Chaardivari: Literally the 'shawl' and the 'four walls'; it became the general term for the promised peace and security for women in the Zia years.

Chai-Khana: A teahouse.

Chapraasi: A peon or attendant. Also when intended, a 'lackey'.

Chikoo: A succulent Sub-Continental fruit, looks like a potato.

Dada: Paternal grandfather.

Dargah: A shrine or tomb; literally the place where you gain entrance to the presence of a saint.

Dervesh: A man of God, not much interested in the material world.

Dhobi: The washerman.

Dupatta: The lighter version of the *chaadar*; a largish scarf which is the normal part of almost all female dress.

Faqir: A mendicant. The word comes from *Fuqr* which is both poverty, and a disassociation with worldly things.

Gali: A small street.

Gharara: The lower half of female attire associated with the Court of Oudh; it is basically a very voluminous, full-length skirt.

Ghungroo: The ankle bells of a dancer.

Gudda: A male doll, and opposed to a *guddi* which was a female doll. Also a male kite distinguished by a triangular tail-fin, whereas the 'female' kite, the *guddi* has a bushy tail.

Gulli-Danda: A children's game played with two wooden staffs, one short and one long. The long one is used as a bat, and the short one as the piece to be hit.

Haldi: Turmeric, both as a condiment, and as a deep yellow colour.

Haveli: A squire or gentleman's large house.

Hujra: The small room, usually attached to a mosque or *madrassa* of a monk or scholar.

Ijazatnama: A written missive giving permission to do or perform something.

Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba: The militant youth and student wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami.

Islamiyat: The study of Islam as an educational subject.

Jahalat: Ignorance. In particular, the times before the coming of Islam is the time of ignorance.

Jamaat-i-Islami: One of the main religious organisations in Pakistan; high profile, plenty of street clout, political pretensions but little political success.

Jinns: In our lore, a race of other-worldly beings, created of fire; roughly the originals of both 'Genie' and 'Giant' in English.

Kabutar Baazi: The traditional sport of keeping and racing pigeons.

Kaffir: Our word for an 'infidel'.

Kalimah: The Muslim Creed. A short incantation which is the profession of the faith.

Karahi: A local 'wok' used for deep-frying.

Kathak: Perhaps most lyrical, and the most recent of the classical dance forms, developed during Mughal times.

Khaddar: A hand-woven cotton fabric; the product of the *Khaddi*. During the Independence Movement, worn by Mahatama Gandhi, it became symbolic of patriotism and simplicity.

Khaddi: The traditional handloom on which cloth was woven.

Khoja: A sub-sect of the Shia community mostly mercantile, originating from the coastal regions around Bombay.

Latoo: A child's top.

Mahal: A palace.

Masnavi: The second of the great poetic forms in Arabic/Persian/Urdu poetry. It is the epic, or 'narrative' poetry as distinguished from the *Qaseedah* which is the ode, or descriptive poetry.

Maulvis: Generic term for Muslim clerics.

Mehfil: A congregation or gathering of friends; a musical or poetical soiree, or just a party.

Mehram: Literally 'worthy of respect'. In usage it means a cousin, uncle or other relation so close that a woman need not observe *Purdah* in his presence, the test of which is that the two cannot be married – thus a legitimate chaperone.

Mela: A fair.

Mohajir: Literally a migrant or seeker of refuge. It is most commonly applied to the people who moved between India and Pakistan during the events of 1947.

Muharram: The sacred month of the Muslim Calendar. Now marked by the first ten days of mourning as Hussain, grandson of the Prophet was martyred in the great tragedy of 'Kerbala'.

Murgha: A cock or rooster; it is also the traditional position of punishment in school, where the offender is required to squat with arms passing under the folded legs, and holding the ears.

Mushaira: A poetical, public gathering, wherein poets recite their verse.

Naani: The maternal grandmother.

Naat: A piece of poetry, recited or sung, written in honour of The Prophet (PBUH).

Namaaz: The Muslim ritual prayer, performed five times a day.

Nawab: Literally a ruler or prince. The Muslim Princes of 'Princely India' were *Nawabs*, as the Hindus were *Rajas*. In time the word came to be associated with the decadence and the pretensions of the ruling classes.

Nikah Namah: The Marriage Deed, wherein the fact, and the conditions of a wedding are recorded.

Nikah: The Muslim wedding ritual.

Nizaam-i-Mustapha: Literally the 'System of the Prophet (PBUH)'. The word was popularised by the clerics for an 'Islamic System of Government' as opposed to the other 'Western' forms.

Patang Baazi: The sport of flying kites. Over the years this has developed into an elaborate business of the making of kites and preparation of the string with which they are flown; and the basis of one of the biggest festivals in the world – *Basant*.

Patka: A 'cummerband'.

Phuphi: Father's sister.

Purdah: Generic term for the seclusion of women from the male gaze in Muslim societies.

Qawwali: A popular devotional Sufi musical form of one or more lead singers, with a choral accompaniment who sing along, and also add to the very strong rhythmic pattern.

Roshaniyon Ka Shahr: The City of Lights.

Sari: The traditional and elegant female attire. Basically a single, long stretch of fabric, girdled round the waist and the end slung over the shoulder.

Sehan: The inner courtyard of a house.

Shalwar-Kameez: Trousers and tunic, the *shalwar* being a loose, baggy trouser. It is the most usual dress in Pakistan.

Shamiana: A large tent, to shelter gatherings at weddings, funerals etc.

Sharifa: A custard apple.

Sitar: The most popular, sophisticated and lyrical of sub-continental musical instruments. Like the lute or guitar, it is a plucked string instrument with frets.

Taanpura: A stringed drone instrument which sets the base note for a vocal recital in classical music.

Taaviz: An amulet.

Taazia: One of the most elaborate symbolic emblems of the event of Kerbala. It is usually a highly decorated replica of one of the sacred tombs in Najf, Iraq.

Tabla: A pair of drums, reputedly invented by the great Amir Khusro, which provide the percussion rhythm in music.

Takhti: A wooden tablet, covered with a thin layer of clay, it is still used to practice calligraphy on.

Tamanna: A wish or desire.

Tehreek-i-Niswan: Literally a 'Movement of Women', it is best remembered as the title of one of the first and very influential women's magazines in Urdu at the beginning of the century; now a women's organisation.

Tonga: A light, open, horse-drawn carriage; the most usual means of transport until the middle of the century; still there in the countryside and smaller towns.

Tulu-i-Islam: Literally the 'Dawn of Islam'. The title of one of the first and very influential Urdu magazines set up specifically to propagate the cause of Muslims in India.

Ustaad: Literally a 'teacher'; in time it has come to mean a great maestro in any of the arts.

Wasli: A handmade layered paper used by miniature painters.

"Yeh Dagh Dagh Ujala": "This Dawn with a thousand blemishes". The title of one of the great poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, written at the time of Partition.

Zard Patton Ka Ban: Literally a forest of yellowing leaves.

Zina: Fornication. The word is generally used for the act in its forbidden forms, in legal or religious parlance.

Zindabad: Literally may it, or he or she 'Live for a long time'. It is thus the equivalent of 'Long live....', or the French *Vive*.

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The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work.
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The Achievements of Women Artists
in Re-envisioning Feminine Identity.
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and Democratic Development (Montreal), 1998.
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and Ideological Issues.
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A History of European Reaction to Indian Art.
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Rewriting Women and the Symbolic.
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Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories.
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Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970 – 1985.
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Women, the Arts and Society.
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Women's Press (New York), 1989.

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Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture from Pakistan.
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University of California Press (Berkeley), 1990.

Artists C.V's

Meher Afroze

Education

- 1971 BFA (Honours) –
Government College of Arts & Crafts, Lucknow

Selected Solo Shows

- 2000 Bretton Hall Gallery, University of Leeds
1996 LRBT Show – Karachi
1994 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1992 Dubai & Abu Dhabi
1990 Gallery Interior, Islamabad
1987 Chawkandi Gallery, Karachi
1984 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1974 Arts Council, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 1999 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1998 Printmakers of Pakistan: 1947-1997 –
Cartwright Hall, Bradford
1997 Goethe Institute, Karachi
1996 SAARC Show – Delhi
1995 Nafa Gallery, Kathmandu
1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1993 6th Asian Biennale – Dhaka
1992 American Centre, Karachi
1990 Ziggurat Gallery, Karachi
1986 Pasadena Museum of Art, California
1986 Women Painters of Pakistan – Honolulu
1980 Fourteen Painters – Indus Gallery, Karachi
1976 Western Pacific Biennale – Melbourne
1970 Annual Exhibition – Lalit Kala Academy, Lucknow

Awards

- 1996 Award (Painting) – National Exhibition, Islamabad
1993 Honourable Mention – 6th Asian Biennale, Dhaka
1985 First Prize (Graphics) – National Exhibition, Islamabad
1982 Second Prize – National Exhibition, Islamabad
1981 Second Prize – National Exhibition, Islamabad
1977 First Prize – National Exhibition, Islamabad

Lubna Agha

Education

- 1969 Diploma – Karachi School of Art

Selected Solo Shows

- 2000 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1991 Himovitz Solomon Gallery, Sacramento
1987 Indus Gallery, Karachi
1983 Rara Avis, Sacramento
1980 Indus Gallery, Karachi
1976 Contemporary Art Gallery, Rawalpindi
1975 Pakistan Art Gallery, Lahore
1969 American Centre, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
1995 Out of Pakistan – Northeastern University, Boston
1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1987 Himovitz Solomon Gallery, Sacramento
1986 Art Bridge – City Gallery, Kobe
1984 Watercolours – Rara Avis, Sacramento
1980 American Centre, Karachi
1979 Contemporary Arts Gallery, Rawalpindi

Roohi Shafiq Ahmed

Education

- 1999 Advanced Drawing Course – School of Visual Art, New York.
1992 Four Year Diploma (Fine Art) – Karachi School of Art
1986 BSc (pre-engineering) – Islamia Science College.

Selected Group Shows

- 1999 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
2001 KARA-ART 2001 – SG Forum Art Gallery,
Alliance Française, Karachi
2000 Vast – Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi
2000 Aar Paar – Collaboration between Indian & Pakistani artists,
Karachi & Mumbai
2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield, Oldham,
Bath, Glasgow

- 1999 Cityscapes – Gallerie Sadequain, Karachi
- 1997 High, Low and In Between – A.N. Gallery, Karachi
- 1997 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
- 1996 7th National Exhibition – National Art Gallery, Islamabad
- 1995 Kanagawa International Print Exhibition – Kanagawa Kenmin Gallery, Kanagawa, Japan
- 1992 Printmaking Exhibition – American Centre, Karachi

Nilofar Akmut

Education

- 1986-88 Slade School of Art (Sculpture) – London
- 1983-86 Byam Shaw School of Art (Mixed Media) – London
- 1976-79 National College of Arts (Painting) – Lahore

Selected Shows

- 2001 Breaking Boundaries – Tokyo
- 2000 Nuclear, Nuclear – Karachi
- 1999 International Women's Day – Rama IV Park, Bangkok
- 1998 Out of Place – Chapter, Cardiff
- 1997 Drawing With a Line – London Art Forms
- 1995 Shapeless Shape – Wat A Moong Temple, Chiang Mai
- 1995 It Fell Out of My Body & I Confronted My Mortality – Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo
- 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan – Touring Exhibition, UK & France
- 1993 Keepin' it Together – Pavilion Visual Arts Centre, Leeds
- 1992 Transition of Riches – Birmingham, Southampton, Smith Art Gallery & Museum
- 1991 4 Artists – Temple, Karlsruhe
- 1990 Value for Culture – Black Art Gallery, London

Naazish Ataullah

Education

- 1992- Reading for Ph.D. in Art Education – Institute of Education, University of London
- 1984-85 Post-graduate studies in Printmaking – The Slade School of Fine Art, University of London
- 1985 Art Teachers Certificate (post-graduate qualification) – Institute of Education, University of London
- 1983 National Diploma in Fine Art (Painting) – National College of Arts, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

- 2001 The Takhti Exhibition – Gallerie Sadequain, Frere Hall, Karachi
- 2000 White on White – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
- 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield, Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
- 2000 Remembering Zahoor – The Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery, NCA
- 1999 The Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, Oregon
- 1999 Art in the Time of Zahoor at the Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
- 1997 Scope VII – NCA
- 1994-96 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan – Touring Exhibition, UK & France
- 1991 Punjab Exhibition – Alhamra Art Centre, Lahore

- 1991 Three Pakistani Women Artists – Centre For Contemporary Art, New Delhi
- 1989 4th Asian Art Biennial – Dhaka
- 1988 Third International Exhibition – AIFACS, New Delhi
- 1987 Contemporary Art from Pakistan – ICIS Gallery, London
- 1987 Seven Artists from Pakistan – Kunstnersenter, Oslo

Solo Shows

- 2000 Sim Sim Gallery, Lahore
- 1988 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad

Awards

- 1997 Conferred Associateship of the National College of Arts by the Fellows of the College
- 1995-96 The Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Award for research.
- 1992-97 Overseas Research Students Award, UK
- 1988 Prize in Graphics – First Pakistan Art Biennial, Lahore
- 1984-85 British Council Scholarship

Tayyaba Aziz

Education

- 1986 MFA – Peshawar University
- 1984 BFA – Peshawar University
- 1972 Diploma in Fine Arts – Peshawar University

National Exhibition 2001, 1999, 1996, 1994, 1988, 1985, 1975, 1973

- 1991 Exhibition of SAARC Countries Festival – Delhi

Solo Shows

- 1997 Peshawar, Islamabad
- 1995 Peshawar
- 1994 Islamabad

Sylvat Aziz

Education

- 1986 MFA (Printmaking) – Concordia University, Montreal
- 1976 Diploma (Visual Arts) – National College of Arts, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

- 2001 The Monkey's Wedding Series 2 – Hollins University, Roanoke
- 1999 *Maqamaat* – Etherington Art Centre, Kingston
- 1998 Re-telling *Muqqadimah* – Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville
- 1997 *Muqqadimah* – Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary
- 1993 A Map is Not the Territory – The New Gallery, Calgary
- 1993 Photo-Montages – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
- 1992 Nairang Gallery, Lahore
- 1988 Recent Works – Stride Gallery, Calgary
- 1986 The Cult of Saints – Gallerie Bourget, Montreal

Selected Group Shows

- 1995 AAMARP Group Show – Northeastern University, Boston

1994 1st International Exhibition of Islamic Artisans - Islamabad
 1992 L'Exile – Gallerie Articule, Montreal
 1988 Voices of Freedom – KAAI Gallery, Kingston
 1984 Graphex 9 – Art Gallery of Brant, Brantwood
 1982 Pratt Institute Print Show – New York
 1976 Graduate Exhibition – NCA, Lahore

Siddiqa Bilgrami

Education

1958 Advanced Diploma (Portrait Painting) –
 Government College of Fine Arts, Hyderabad
 1957 Diploma (Painting) – Government College of Fine Arts, Hyderabad

Selected Solo Shows

2000 Retrospective – Zenaini Art Gallery, Karachi
 1996 Art Gallery, Islamabad
 1995 Retrospective – Arts Council, Karachi
 1975 Arts Council, Lahore & Quetta
 1964 Taj Art Gallery, Bombay
 1962 Cama Hotel, Ahmedabad
 1961 Ajanta Pavilion, Hyderabad
 1959 Circolo Canova, Via Canova 23, Rome

Selected Group Shows

2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
 Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
 1997 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1996 Paa Ya Paa Art Gallery, Nairobi
 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK & France
 1985 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1973 Indus Gallery, Karachi
 1967 Commonwealth Art Exhibition – London
 1964 The Museum, Ahmedabad
 1961 All-India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, Delhi
 1959 Galleria Giardino, Lugano

Noorjehan Bilgrami

Education

2001-02 Japan Foundation Fellowship, Tama Art University, Tokyo
 1972-74 Diploma in Fine Art, Central Institute of Arts & Crafts, Karachi
 1968-69 National College of Arts, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

2000 Art Fest 2000 – Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Karachi
 1999 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1998 Urban Voices 98 – Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Karachi
 1997 Inspiration – American Centre, Karachi
 1996 7th National Exhibition of Visual Arts, Islamabad
 1995 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK and France
 1994 PNCA Travelling Exhibition of Pakistani Artists
 through the Middle East
 1992 Women Painters' Exhibition, American Centre, Karachi

1991 All Pakistan Women Painters' Exhibition,
 National Art Gallery, Islamabad
 1990 The Gallery, Islamabad
 1987 Biennale Pakistan Painters, National Art Gallery, Islamabad
 1974-86 Participated in several Group Shows in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad

Selected Solo Shows

1999 Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, Oregon
 1995 Black Silence – Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1992 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1987 Crying for the Light – Indus Gallery, Karachi

Ruby Chishti

Education

1988 BFA – National College of Arts, Lahore

Exhibitions

2001 Solo Show – Rohtas2, Lahore
 2001 Group Show – Amin's Gallery, Karachi
 2001 The Eye Still Seeks: Contemporary Art from Pakistan –
 Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney

Humaira Ejaz

Selected Solo Shows

1997 Indus Gallery, Karachi
 1997 Alliance Française, Lahore
 1995 Clodion Art Gallery, Oslo
 1994 Alliance Française, Islamabad
 1991 Interiors Gallery, Islamabad

Selected Group Shows

1997 Lok Virsa, Islamabad
 1995 Pakistani Painters -Tajikistan
 1993 PNCA Gallery, Islamabad
 1992 Alliance Française, Islamabad
 1990 Abbasin Art Gallery, Peshawar

Sabah Hussain

Education

1988 MFA (Printmaking) – Kyoto City Art College, Kyoto
 1982 National Diploma in Arts – National College of Arts, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

1994 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1993 Art Gallery, Islamabad
 1991 Lahore Art Gallery, Lahore
 1990 Gallery Beni, Kyoto
 1988 Nairang Gallery, Lahore
 1987 Inter-linked Rhythms – Gallery Space 21, Tokyo

1986 Nairang Gallery, Lahore
1982 Goethe Institute, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1994 National Exhibition – Islamabad
1993 Goethe Institute, Lahore
1988 Kyoto Museum Exhibition – Kyoto
1986-88 Exhibition of Kyoto City Art College – Kyoto

Awards

1988 Graduate School Award – Kyoto City Art College, Kyoto
1988 Murasaki Award – Kyoto Museum Exhibition

Musarrat Nahid Imam

Education

1980 MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

1996 University of Oslo, Oslo
1995 Shakir Ali Museum, Lahore
1992 Studio Gandhara, Islamabad
1989 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1988 Alliance Française, Peshawer
1987 USIS, Islamabad
1986 John A. Burns Hall, Hawaii

Awards

1996 Best Painter (mixed media) – Punjab Artists Association

Zubaida Javed

Education

BA – Lahore College for Women, Lahore
MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

1995 Lahore Art Gallery, Lahore
1982 American Centre, Karachi
1975 Islamabad
1975 Society of Contemporary Art, Rawalpindi

Selected Group Shows

1994 Los Angeles
1980 Dhaka Biennale – Dhaka
1977 2nd Punjab Exhibition of Paintings & Graphic Arts
1976 National Exhibition – Islamabad
1975 Women Painters of Pakistan Exhibition
1968 Punjab University, Lahore
1963 Department of Fine Art Two-person Show – Punjab University, Lahore

Durriya Kazi

Education

1981 BA (Honours - Sculpture) – Kingston University, UK
1977 MA (English Literature) – University of Karachi

Selected Shows

1996 Tampered Surface – UK & France
1996 Container 96: Art Across Oceans – Copenhagen
1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1994 Six Artists – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1990 Group Show – American Centre, Karachi
1986 Solo Show – Isis Gallery, London

Aisha Khalid

Education

1997 BFA, Miniature Painting – National College of Arts, Lahore

Solo Shows

2000 Sim Sim Gallery, Lahore
2000 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad

Selected Group Shows

2002 Second Asian Art Triennale – Fukuoka Museum, Fukuoka
2001 Admit One Gallery, New York
2001 Annual Exhibition – Rijksakademie, Amsterdam
2001 Manoeuvring Miniatures – Delhi; Mumbai
2001 Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
2000 Tao Gallery, Mumbai
2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
2000 Didrichsen Art Museum, Kuusisaari
2000 4 Person Show – Canvas Art Gallery, Karachi
1999 Scope-8 – National College of Arts, Lahore
1999 Off Set Gallery, Islamabad
1997 Alliance Française, Lahore
1997 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1997 National Painting Exhibition – Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore

Awards

2001-02 Two-year residency at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam
2000 Open Circle Workshop – Mumbai, India
2001 International Artists Workshop – Skoki, Poland

Naiza Khan

Education

1990 BFA – Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Somerville College,
Oxford University, Oxford
1986-87 Art Foundation Course – Wimbledon School of Art, London

Solo Shows

- 2000 Voices Merge – Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1995 *La Linea Negra* – Gallery 7, Hong Kong
1993 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 2002 Gasworks Studios, London
2002 ArtSouthAsia – Harris Museum, England
2002 11th Asian Biennale – Dhaka
2001 The Eye Still Seeks – Ivan Dougherty Gallery,
University of New South Wales, Sydney
2001 *Vas!* International Artists Workshop – Gadani
2000 Women of the World – White Columns, New York
2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
1999 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1998 Lines of Desire – Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool
1998 7th International Dhaka Biennale, Dhaka
1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1994 Seven for Seven – Gallery 7, Hong Kong
1994 6th National Exhibition of Visual Arts, Islamabad
1992 8 Printmakers – The American Centre, Karachi
1990 The Young Unknowns Gallery, London
1988 Horizon Gallery, London
1987 Smiths Gallery, London

Lalarukh

Education

- 1976 MFA – University of Chicago, Chicago
1970 MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

- 1981 Gallery Hildebrand, Klagenfurt
1980 PACC Gallery, Karachi
1977 Maison de la Culture, Rennes

Selected Group Shows

- 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield, Oldham,
Bath, Glasgow
2000 Millenium Exhibition – Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore
1999 9th Asian Art Biennale – Dhaka
1997 Open Wounds – Eicher Gallery, Delhi
1996 7th SAARC Festival – Pragati Maidan, Delhi
1995 Pakistan Festival – Birmingham
1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
1994 A Selection of Contemporary Paintings from Pakistan –
Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena
1993 Scope V – Gallery NCA, Lahore
1976 Two-person show of paintings & drawings –
University of Chicago, Chicago

Hajira Mansur

Education

- 1964 Diploma – Government College of Arts & Crafts, Lucknow

Selected Solo Shows

- 2002 Ejaz Galleries, Lahore
2000 Clifton Art Gallery, Karachi
1998 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1992 Alliance Française, Peshawer
1990 Indus Gallery, Karachi
1989 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1983 Arts Council, Karachi
1981 National Gallery, Islamabad
1977 Gallery Atelier B.M., Karachi
1969 Arts Council, Karachi
1966 Karachi School of Art, Karachi
1963 Government College of Arts & Crafts, Lucknow

Selected Group Shows

- 1996 Two-person show with Mansur Rahi – Izmir
1982 Hirshorn Museum, Washington
1981 Five Women Artists – Indus Gallery, Karachi
1981 17th Asian Art Show – Tokyo
1979 Asian Art Show – Fukuoka
1973 National Exhibition – Indus Gallery, Karachi

Rahat Naveed Masud

Education

- 1995 MA (Art & Design) – Kingston University, UK
1976 MA (Painting) – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Shows

- 2001 Sharjah Biennale – Sharjah
2001 The *Takhti* Exhibition – Gallerie Sadequain, Karachi
2000 Land and Cityscape – Lahore Museum
2000 Remembering Zahoor – NCA, Lahore
1999 Sami's Gallery, Lahore
1998 *Sohni Dharti* – Co-opera Art Gallery, Lahore
1996 Free Painters & Sculptors – Loggia Gallery, London
1996 Art Connoisseur Gallery, Ridley Art Society, London
1995 Creators & Innovators – Surrey
1994 Fantasy: Women's Art Library Show of
Fifteen British Women Artists – Abu Dhabi
1993 Summre Show – Heatherly School of Art, London
1991 Artists Association of Punjab, Lahore
1987 1st Pakistan Art Biennale – Lahore
1986 Visual Arts Gallery, Islamabad
1984 National Exhibition, Lahore

Awards

- 1999 Artists Association of Punjab Award
1991 Painting Prize – Punjab Council of the Arts
1976 Gold Medal – Punjab University
1973 Painting and Academics prizes – Lahore College for Women

Mussarat Mirza

Education

1962 MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

1989 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
 1983 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
 1970 American Centre, Karachi
 1969 Dust & Desert – Hotel Inter-Continental, Rawalpindi
 1968 Reflection of Mehran – Arts Council, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

2001 5th Sharjah International Arts Biennale – Sharjah
 1998 Asian Invitation Art Exhibition – Seoul
 1995 Kunj Gallery, Karachi
 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK & France
 1990 International Watercolours – Seoul
 1988 Pakistan International Biennale – Lahore
 1986 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1986 Le Centre International d'Art Contemporain, Paris
 1982 19th Asian Arts Exhibition – Tokyo
 1976 National Exhibition – Lahore
 1965 Mural Paintings & Cultural Life of Kenya – Kampala

Huma Mulji

Education

1995 BFA, Sculpture/Printmaking –
 Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

2001 Open Studios – Gasworks Studios, London
 2001 6 Pakistani Artists – Jay Grimm Gallery, New York
 2000 Diversity and Direction: Contemporary Art of the 90s –
 Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi
 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
 Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
 1999 Cityscapes – Gallerie Sadequain, Frere Hall, Karachi
 1999 Urban Voices III – Karachi Sheraton
 1999 Engro Chemicals Pakistan Residential Colony, Daharki, Sind
 1999 Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Memorial Show – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
 1998 Urban Voices II – Karachi Sheraton
 1997 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
 1996 17th National Biennale of Visual Arts, Islamabad
 1996 6 Women Artists – Gallerie Sadequain, Frere Hall, Karachi
 1995 Inaugural Group Show – Kunj Art Gallery, Karachi

Asma Mundrawala

Education

1995 BFA – Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

2000 Selections: Six Artists from Pakistan – Jay Grimm Gallery, New York
 2000 Aar Paar – Mumbai
 1999 Urban Voices III – Art Fest, Hotel Sheraton, Karachi
 1999 Art in the Time of Zahoor – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
 1998 International Women's Day Show – Zenaini Gallery, Karachi
 1997 Spaces Within – AN Gallery, Karachi
 1996 National Exhibition – Islamabad
 1996 Seven Women Artists – Gallerie Sadequain, Karachi
 1993 American Centre, Karachi

Samina Mansuri

Education

1988-90 New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting & Sculpture
 1985 BFA – Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York
 1973-77 Diploma for General Art & Design –
 Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, Karachi

Solo Shows

2001 Institute of Women's Studies and Gender Studies, UT, Toronto
 2000 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1997 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi

Selected Solo Shows

2001 The *Takhti* Exhibition – Gallerie Sadequain, Karachi
 2000 Khoj International Workshop, Delhi
 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
 Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
 2000 Contemporary Visual Arts – Alliance Française, Karachi
 1999 9th Asian Art Biennale – Dhaka
 1997 Open Wounds – Eicher Gallery, Delhi
 1996 Between the Visible and the Invisible –
 National College of Arts, Lahore
 1995 Karachi Artists Group Show – National Gallery, Islamabad
 1995-96 Tampered Surface – Huddersfield, Oldham, Middlesbrough,
 Leeds, Liverpool, Paris
 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK & France
 1993 Ziggurat Gallery, Karachi
 1992 Bergan Fuel Company, Two Person Show – Brooklyn, New York
 1990 NYSS Gallery, New York Studio School, New York
 1985 Puck Gallery, Pratt Institute, Manhattan, N.Y

Awards

1999 Gasworks Residency – Gasworks Studios, London

Qudsia Nisar

Education

1968 MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

2001 Jahanzeb Art Gallery, Karachi

- 1997 *Jaltarang* – Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1993 Statements – Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1990 Tianjin, China
 1986 Qudsia & Germany – Goethe Institute, Karachi
 1986 Goethe Institute, Rothenburg
 1979 Abstraction in Watercolour – Goethe Institute, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 1999 Patan Museum, Kathmandu
 1996 Paramount Studios, Hollywood
 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK & France
 1993 Painters from Pakistan – Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena
 1990 1st International Exhibition & Seminar on Asian Watercolour – Tianjin
 1987 Grand Palace, Paris
 1981 Beaux Art Club, New York
 1981 Royal Overseas League, London

Tazeen Qayyum

Education

- 1996 BFA (Miniature Painting) –
 National College of Arts, Lahore

Solo Shows

- 2001 Woven Narratives – Rohtas2, Lahore
 2000 Gallery Jutner, Vienna

Selected Group Shows

- 2002 10th Asian Biennale – Dhaka
 2001 Contemporary Artists from Pakistan – Athens & Warsaw
 2000 Didrichsen Art Museum, Kuusisaari
 2000 Open Studios – AIR Studios, Vienna
 1999 American Club, Islamabad
 1998 Off-set Portfolio Centre, Islamabad
 1996 Thesis Exhibition – National College of Arts, Lahore
 1995 Miniaturists – Shakir Ali Museum, Lahore

Talha Rathore

Education

- 1995 BFA – National College of Arts, Lahore

Solo Shows

- 1998 Gallery Espace, Delhi
 1996 Alliance Française, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

- 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
 Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
 1998 Zenaini Art Gallery, Karachi
 1997 Pakistan Golden Jubilee Show – Art Connoisseur Gallery, London
 1997 Being Minorities: Contemporary Asian Artists –
 Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong

- 1996 National Exhibition – Islamabad
 1994 1st International Artisans at Work Festival – Islamabad
 1993 Young Artists Show – Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore

Nahid Raza

Education

- 1970 Diploma in Fine Art – Central Institute of Art & Craft
 1970 BA – Karachi University

Selected Solo Shows

- 2001 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1999 University of Houston, Texas
 1998 Indus Gallery, Karachi
 1995 Museum of Modern Art, Amman
 1993 City Bank House, Karachi
 1992 The Gallery, Islamabad
 1990 Interior Gallery, Islamabad
 1989 Anna-Blum Haus, Heidelberg
 1988 Rohtas Gallery, Rawalpindi
 1988 Geo Gallery, Berlin
 1986 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1983 Indus Gallery, Karachi
 1979 Goethe Institute, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 2000 Crow Eaters Gallery, Lahore
 1999 Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore
 1998 Ziggurat Art Gallery, Karachi
 1997 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
 1995 American Cultural Centre, Karachi
 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
 Touring Exhibition, UK & France
 1993 Indus Gallery, Karachi
 1992 SAARC Exhibition – Delhi
 1991 Three Pakistani Women Artists – Delhi
 1990 Ziggurat Art Gallery, Karachi
 1989 Asian Art Biennale – Dhaka
 1988 Ishikawa Museum – Japan
 1988 National Biennale, Lahore
 1984 Arts Council, Karachi
 1981 National Exhibition, Islamabad
 1971 Indus Gallery, Karachi

Awards

- 1988 Third Prize – National Biennale, Lahore
 1984 Best Entry Award – Arts Council, Karachi
 1981 Second Prize – National Exhibition, Islamabad
 1969 Best Entry in Oil – Annual Exhibition, Arts Council

Tanvir Fatima Rehman

Education

- 1972 Diploma (Fine Arts) – National College of Arts, Lahore

Participated in various group shows in Lahore, Islamabad & Karachi

Sabina Gillani

Education

- 1992-94 Post-Graduate Higher Diploma in Fine Art (Printmaking) –
Slade School of Fine Art, London
- 1987-89 Bachelor of Language Sciences
(Teaching French as a Foreign Language) –
University of Franche-Comté, Besançon
- 1983-87 BFA – National College of Arts, Lahore

Solo Exhibitions

- 1996 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1996 Gallery NCA – Lahore
1992 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1992 Gallery 306, Toronto
1991 Chawlkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1991 Interiors Gallery, Islamabad

Selected Group Shows

- 2000 Pakistan: Another Vision – London, Huddersfield,
Oldham, Bath, Glasgow
- 1997 Rumours of Spring – Colombo
- 1996 National Exhibition – Islamabad
- 1995 Out of Pakistan – Boston
- 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
- 1994 Prints from the Slade – Elektra Fine Art, Toronto
- 1991 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
- 1991 Women Painters of Pakistan – National Gallery, Islamabad
- 1990 Shakir Ali Museum, Lahore

Awards

- 1994 Presidential Gold Medal –
Pakistan National Council of the Arts
- 1992-93 Aga Khan Foundation Scholarship
- 1991-92 Don Philips Scholarship for Etching and Lithography –
Open Studio, Toronto
- 1987-89 French Government Scholarship

Nahid Saleem

Education

- 1983 MFA – Punjab University, Lahore

Held seven solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions.

Awards

- 1st Prize, Quaid's Portrait Painting Competition – Rawalpindi Arts Council
- 3rd Prize – S.S. Haider Awards Competition 1993

Laila Shahzada

Exhibitions

Numerous solo shows & national & international group shows

Awards

- 1995 President's Pride of Performance (posthumous)
- 1986 *Tamgha-i-Imtiaz*

Shahzia Sikander

Education

- 1995 MFA – Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
- 1992 BFA – National College of Arts, Lahore

Selected Solo Shows

- 1999 Hirshorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.
- 1998 The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art & Design, Kansas City
- 1997 A Kind of Slight & Pleasing Dislocation – Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
- 1994 Veil: In Their Minds & On Our Heads – Sol Koffler, RISD, Providence
- 1993 Pakistan Embassy, Washington D.C.

Selected Group Shows

- 1999 The American Century – Whitney Museum, New York
- 1998 Cinco Continentes y una ciudad – Mexico City
- 1998 Global Vision: New Art from the 90s – Deste Foundation,
Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens
- 1997 Out of India – The Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadows
- 1996 Tranversions – 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg
- 1994 An Intelligent Rebellion: Women Artists of Pakistan –
Touring Exhibition, UK & France
- 1992 New Artists, Recent Works – Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad

Awards

- 1999 South Asian Women's Creative Collective Achievement Award
- 1998 The Joan Mitchell Award
- 1997 The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award
- 1993-95 Graduate Fellowship Award – Rhode Island School of Design
- 1993 Shakir Ali Award/Kipling Award – National College of Arts, Lahore
- 1993 Haji Sharif Award – National College of Arts, Lahore

Adeela Suleman

Education

- 1999 BFA (with Distinction), Sculpture –
Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, Karachi
- 1995 MA, International Relations – University of Karachi
- 1992 BA, Political Science & Psychology –
St. Joseph Government College for Women, Karachi

Group Shows

- 2001 The *Takhti* Show – Frere Hall, Karachi
- 2000 Art Festival: Urban Voices – Karachi Sheraton

Risham Syed

Education

- 1996 MA – Royal College of Art, London

- 1993 BFA (Painting, Printmaking & Miniature Painting) –
National College of Arts, Lahore
1989 BA – Kinnaid College, Lahore

Selected Group Shows

- 2001 Manoeuvring Miniatures – IIC Gallery,
Delhi & Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
2001 *Darmiyaan* – Rohtas 2, Lahore
2000 Three Person Show – Sim Sim Gallery, Lahore
1998 Vague Terrains – Touring Show: Rouen & Herbert Read Gallery, Kent
1997-98 Mappings: Shared Histories – Touring show, Delhi, Mumbai,
Lahore, Islamabad
1996 National Exhibition – Lahore
1996 Corum Gallery, London
1996 Figure It Out – Gallery 7, Hong Kong
1995 Queen Elizabeth Conference Hall, London
1995 Mermaid Theatre Gallery, London
1994 National Exhibition – Islamabad

Awards

- 1996 Stephenson Harwood Award – Degree Show, RCA
1996 Charles Wallace Trust Scholarship
1995 Cite International Des Arts – Paris
1995 Charles Wallace Trust Scholarship
1993 Honours, Thesis Project – NCA, Lahore

Sumaira Tazeen

Education

- 1996 BFA, Fine Arts – National College of Arts

Selected Group Shows

- 2002 Crow Eaters Gallery, Lahore
2001 Contemporary Miniatures – Athens
2001 *Vasl* – Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi
2001 National Exhibition of Calligraphy – PNCA, Karachi
1999 Miniature Show – American Club, Islamabad
1997 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1997 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1997 Kunj Art Gallery, Karachi
1996 Degree Show – National College of Arts, Lahore
1995 Miniaturists – Shakir Ali Museum, Lahore

Awards

- 1996 Haji Mohammad Sharif Award for Miniature Painting – NCA
1996 Gold medal for Outstanding Student – NCA
1993-4 Principal's Honours List – NCA

Rabia Zuberi

Education

- BA – Aligarh University
BA (Sculpture) – Government Art College, Lucknow

Selected Solo Shows

- 1990 Mubina Zuberi's Art Gallery, Islamabad

- 1989 Nageen Art Gallery, Islamabad
1988 Chawkandi Art gallery, Karachi
1969 PACC Gallery, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 2002 Women Artists of Pakistan – VM Gallery, Karachi
1998 Sohni Gallery, London
1996 National Exhibition – PNCA Gallery, Islamabad
1988 International Biennale – Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore
1987 Women Artists of Pakistan – PNCA Gallery, Islamabad
1972 Indus Gallery, Karachi
1963 All India Youth Festival – Delhi

Mubina Zuberi

Education

- 1965 BA – University of Karachi

Selected Solo Shows

- 1999 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1989 Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
1987 Interior Gallery, Islamabad
1985 Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad
1983 Indus Gallery, Karachi

Selected Group Shows

- 1995 Women in Creation – Alliance Française, Islamabad
1992 National Art Gallery, Islamabad
1990 Through a Woman's Eye – National Art Gallery, Islamabad
1986 Helios Gallery, Islamabad
1984 Hilton Hotel Abu Dhabi
1981 Shri Dharani Gallery, Delhi

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