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Contemporary Art from Pakistan

Salima Hashmi
Aisha Khalid

the eye still seeks

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CONTEMPORARY ART FROM PAKISTAN

Anwar Saeed
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Faiz Ahmed FAIZ

the dawn of freedom

Pakistan 1947
Translated from Urdu by Shoaib Hashmi

This leprous brightness, this dawn which reeks of night
This is not the one - the long awaited morn
This is not the shining light which beckoned
Beckoned men ever onwards, to go on
Seeking
The final starry destination in the heavens
The final edge where ends the endless night
The final rest for the anguished heart

When first we set out, urged on by young blood
What temptations were there by the wayside
From the restless abode of love and beauty
The beckoning gestures of hands, the call of young bodies

And above all else, the call of beauteous dawn

The call of beauty, shining like a light
A dull tired pain vying with a hidden need

They say there has already been the separation of darkness and light
And that the journey has already come to end
They say the system of the world is changed
And that separation is no more, and togetherness is all

And the heart still aches, and the eye still seeks and will not be still
And this togetherness, it will not suffice

Dawn's maiden, it seems, has been and gone
And the lover waiting by the wayside knew not her coming, nor her going

And the dark weight of night is not lifted yet
And the heart and the eye have not found their rest
Let us press on for the culmination is not yet.

Sue ROWLEY

witness

'This is not the long-awaited dawn', Faiz wrote of the newly-formed Islamic state of Pakistan in 1947: 'the heart still aches and the eye still seeks'.

This exhibition evokes the poetic quality of Pakistani cultural life, a quality in stark contrast to the prosaic theatre of Australian political culture. Together, the works of Salima Hashmi, Anwar Saeed, Naiza Khan, Mohammad Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid and Ruby Chishti give insight into personal and cultural concerns forged in a distinctive and harsh political environment.

In censorious and tumultuous political cultures, expressive and personal work may entail acts of resistance. Figurative and sculptural work may voice rebellion and at the same time call into question our own over-determined ideas about Islamic religious -aesthetic strictures. Experimentation and critical intent invest miniature painting traditions with renewed vigour as a contemporary artform.



The eye still seeks bears traces of historical allegiances and trajectories

In Australia and elsewhere, Salima Hashmi is highly regarded as a curator, writer and eloquent advocate for Pakistani contemporary artists. At home, she is regarded with affection and admiration as a teacher, mentor and friend to a wide circle of artists. As we developed this exhibition, Salima proposed a small group of artists whose work gives voice to deeply personal engagements with the Pakistani life, expressed in the lyrical mode that is the gift of the great Urdu poets.

Like many cross-generational shows, *The eye still seeks* bears traces of historical allegiances and trajectories. In the Pakistani context, a close-knit community of artists, many of whom have known each other as teachers and students, is counterposed with the rapid and dramatic events of five decades. Salima Hashmi retains childhood memories of Partition and has lived through decades of hope and despair, of false springs and terrible repressions. Daughter of the distinguished poet Faiz and journalist Alys Faiz, Salima Hashmi belongs to an activist family for whom TV, film and print journalism complement poetry and more personal artistic media in giving testimony to brutality and inhumanity while also strengthening ties and voicing hope.

For Anwar Saeed, Salima's student and later colleague, the dread-filled years of General Zia's rule were formative. Even the younger artists - Naiza Khan, Mohammad Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid and Ruby Chishti - know political upheaval and uncertainty on a scale unimaginable in Australia. And yet, for all that, these are not heavy-hearted works. There is humour and the pleasure of intellectual enquiry as visual and literary traditions are exquisitely unpicked and re-stitched. Matters of the public domain are approached obliquely, counter-balanced by the intimacy and ambivalence of the heart and of domestic life and a quality of introspection.

Always the act of art-making is foregrounded in the sensitive and committed use of materials and technical consideration and the referencing to art and cultural traditions. There is an intensity here that, arguably, reflects the pivotal role played by art education. Indeed the critical role of art educators in general, and the National College of Art in Lahore in particular, is acknowledged readily. If art education in Pakistan draws artists together, then art schools abroad also represent formative opportunities for artists. Taken together, it is not surprising that aspects of art-making are central to the work of these artists.

In the work of Anwar Saeed, Naiza Khan, Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid and Ruby Chishti, there is a resonance with Salima's expression of her own desire '... to articulate a response to one's time, and voice it in an idiom which attempts to be at ease with one's temperament and sensibility.'

One episodic story is that of Rudaki, a relatively minor poet but the originator of the great poetic form of the 'Ghazal'. With Rudaki in his entourage, his king set out on a campaign of conquest which continued for years. The entire army was homesick and no one dared say it to the hero in the midst of his bid for world conquest. Then Rudaki read the very first 'Ghazal' remembering the perfumed waters of the little stream of his hometown. It is said the king called for his horse and rode back abandoning his quest and instructing his army to follow. The other one is of the poet who, in verse, threatened to give his king's empire away to another. The king relented and obeyed.

More deeply and permanently there is the poetry of the Sufis. Sufi poetry is the poetry of Divine Love, but the Divine of Sufi poetry is the Unity of all creation, most especially man. It is thus the poetry of universal love. It is beautiful and enigmatic and intensely moving and it comes straight from the heart. Somehow it also finds its way to the heart without much owed to the words. It came in the wake of the great

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Muslim conquests and made its own conquest. That was a conquest of the heart and so more enduring. In lands where Chengiz Khan is known only for having lent 'Horde' and 'Urdu' to the languages, a hundred poets are still revered as Saints.

In India colonial supremacy lasted for two hundred years. Perhaps that was possible because the poets, even the greatest of them, Ghalib and Mir, had turned to more personal things and did not involve themselves with the affairs of men. When poetry, in Iqbal, turned the supremacy crumbled before the spirit. Iqbal had none of Caesar's legions, but the people of my homeland have never doubted that the first impetus which moved the spirit came from his words.

Before the spirit moved, life still went on, and we were the Commonwealth which had to be defended. And so men from here went and died in the mud of Flanders in the Great War. Meanwhile here back home, they made poetry and sang it. Little children sat at their grandmother's knee and listened to a song which had the cute refrain, 'May the Kaiser's cannons be infested with worms!' I do not quote this as the stuff of what makes the pen mightier than the sword, but it was our equivalent of 'Your Country Wants You'!

As for what has befallen us, and man, since those times, people often ask why we have not culled great novels or great films out of such momentous events. The reason is that our art is the art of poetry. And the truest delineation of our own times is to be found in the poetry of Faiz, and then of Jalib and Faraz and all who have followed them. And not merely a delineation. To the extent that history is shaped by men's view of their own circumstance, they have been, and continue to be, movers and shakers much more than any king or potentate.

And the power lives. In any other country, a politician who spouted poetry on the hustings would be laughed out of town. Here the first prerequisite of politicking is to learn up a few choice verses to be incorporated whenever necessary. That is the low end. The high end is that it would not be an exaggeration to say that all opposition, all dissidence, perhaps all progress has sprung from, and found its main vehicle in poetry. That is why Faiz and Faraz and Ustad Daman are known to, and quoted by many, many more people than the 30 percent or so who can read.

So that a whole generation of younger poets, Kishwar Naheed and Fehmida Riaz among them, have adopted the idiom and consolidated the genre which is 'Subversive Poetry'. So was the poetry of the Sufis, especially in our languages of Punjabi and Sindhi, but in that different epoch the 'subversion' was diffuse. The 'subversion' of poetry today is direct and topical.

As for art the tale is easily told. The injunction against idolatry was extended to image making, so on the one hand artistic expression took to calligraphing the word in a myriad different ways. On the other hand, it bent to poetry. All the lore and the great stories had already been given to poetry, many of them more than once, in the monumental epics. There was no injunction against them. To this day there are wondrous copies of the Shahnama of Firdousi, and from the Khamsa of Nizami, illustrated with magnificent miniatures which the guides cannot tell from Turkish textbooks.

With the new involvement, poetry changed and took a different form. The habit of seeking the wellsprings of inspiration in poetry has not changed. Just as in the West, a great deal of art has found its inspiration in the moving force of faith. We who had adopted poetry as the expression for all matters of the mind and the spirit, now turn to it for the content of pictorial expression. The poetry of Faiz or Kishwar is not epical poetry and does not have heroes. It is poetry taking on the mantle of the Sufis in a modern idiom. And the art is following it, becoming free spirited and involved, and a wee bit enigmatic!

Shoaib HASHMI

'... all opposition, all dissidence, perhaps all progress has sprung from, and found its main vehicle in poetry'

art bent to poetry

It is said that the genteel young ladies of upper class England swooned when Byron read 'Childe Harold' to them. That was probably a case of 'the singer, not the song'! Here in the Orient we have always taken our poetry a whit more seriously. More than a thousand years before Byron, whenever one of the numerous bards of Mecca wrote an especially notable ode, they inscribed it on parchment and suspended it on the doorway of the Kaaba. And seven of the greatest of these 'Muallaqaat', or 'Suspended Odes' are still known and read.

The place, the Kaaba, is significant now as the center, the very 'sanctum sanctorum' of the faith of the Muslims; but its history, or at any rate the local tradition of the history, is steeped in Biblical lore. It is said to have been built by the Patriarch Abraham and his son Ishmael who, with his mother Hagar, was abandoned here as an infant. It still has the great natural spring of Zam Zam, sprung from the spot where the infant Ishmael lay and cried in his thirst; and the twin hillocks of 'Saffah' and 'Marwah' where Hagar wandered in her desperation. So that suspending a piece of writing here was acknowledgement that it shared somehow the deep sanctity of the place.

By contrast, seventeenth century writing in the young new language of Urdu was called 'Rekhta' which is Persian for 'the discarded' or 'thrown away', as distinguished from the raised and 'suspended'. But that was before the greater Urdu poets wrote and raised it to its own pedestal.

Along with the sanctity, there was more down to earth usage. In the tribal society of desert nomads, one chief occupation, and the only politics, was making war, and poetry was an essential element in the weaponry. That was the 'Rijz', a kind of martial song written and sung, often by the women, to inspire valour and praise bravery.

The ritual of war, among the Arabs, was elaborate and followed the strict idiom of honour and tradition. Before the opposing armies fought, heroes from either side stepped forward to challenge in single combat. And, it is said, even before the heroes, the poets came forth for jousts of poetry. It is recorded at least in some instances that victory or vanquishment was decided by the poetry alone.

The ancient Persian Empire was quickly taken over by the Muslims in the eighth century. And just about as quickly the Persians conquered right back in their poetry. The edifice of Persian poetry is one of the chief glories of the literary heritage of mankind. But along with the artistic content poetry was a great moving force in its day.

which country it should be part of. A cease fire was eventually brokered and a line of command established in Kashmir to separate the two nations.

Pakistan's identity was thus in its early years partly defined by the circumstances of partition which established strong hostility towards India and by the war in Kashmir which similarly defined Pakistan through its negative relations with India. The sense of hostility remains a strong factor in the emotional make up of Pakistani foreign relations and internal popular attitudes.

Even more important in defining national identity was the key issue of the kind of state which Pakistan was to become. Jinnah wanted a democratic structure, one essentially secular. Though Pakistan was to be a homeland for Muslims the role of religion in the functioning of the state was to remain limited - his vision for Pakistan was not a fundamentalist state. Jinnah died of TB in 1948 before he was able to implement his vision fully nor was his chosen successor, Liaquat Ali Khan, able to do much before he was assassinated in 1951.

A crucial historical axis is the very idea of Pakistan

Nevertheless a Westminster structure of parliamentary government did come into operation with a governor-general (and later a president) providing an apex to the system. Successive governments proved increasingly ineffective - so that control came to depend largely upon bureaucrats who not only administered the nation, which was of course their job, but also determined policy. The parliamentary system had become ineffective and even corrupt by the mid 1950s. It was at this point a new and pervasive element became embedded in Pakistan's history.

In 1958 after a military coup Pakistan found itself under a military dictator, General Ayub Khan. Thereafter the story of Pakistan was to alternate between military dictators and democratically elected governments. Ayub established a paternalist structure and achieved a stability which enabled him to deconstruct his dictatorial structure and move to a form of elected government. But he too was replaced as a consequence of popular unrest and elections were held in 1970-71 to enable a transfer to parliamentary government.

The result was that in East Pakistan the Awami League was overwhelmingly returned so that it should have formed a government and ruled Pakistan. West Pakistan and its leadership could not cope with losing control of the nation. The army cracked down in East Pakistan and Mujib ur Rehman proclaimed a new nation, Bangladesh, out of East Pakistan. Jinnah's two nation theory was in tatters with Bangladesh demonstrating that factors other than religion were needed to maintain national unity. Another war followed with India, and Pakistan split into two: East Pakistan became Bangladesh and West Pakistan became Pakistan.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the most popular political leader in the western wing, became Prime Minister and was faced with handling the traumas of the loss of territory and the destruction of national pride. Bhutto was a brilliant speaker, a populist figure who had won a mass political base. In the end though his government was not especially effective and in the lead-up to subsequent elections the military again stepped in and took over command. The new dictator, General Zia, immediately had Bhutto arrested and eliminated through 'due legal process' - a high court trial for the murder of a political opponent. Bhutto was found guilty and was executed, Zia refusing him clemency.

Zia remained in power from 1977 to 1988 during which time he introduced measures that gave Pakistan an increasingly Islamic look and thus wooed support from more orthodox Muslims. But he too had a dramatic end: he and other top military officers were killed in an explosion on a plane in mid-flight.

The country returned to democracy. Thereafter leaders from two competing parties fought for dominance at the hustings and in parliament though their ability to effect significant change was limited by the influence asserted by the military and the President. In the first post-Zia elections Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, became prime minister. She was defeated in the next elections by Nawaz Sharif who was himself defeated in later elections by Benazir. She, in turn, was replaced by Nawaz Sharif at subsequent elections. In his final term as prime minister, Nawaz Sharif ensured that Benazir was charged with corruption; she was found guilty and went into exile. Nawaz Sharif did not enjoy his dominance for long as he in turn was overthrown and jailed by another military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, who continues in power to the present.

Thus alternations between parliamentary government and military rule have been a feature of Pakistani life. In the process, the nation has become increasingly Islamic as military and political leaders have wooed the more orthodox for support. In the periods of political freedom and military paternalism there has been freedom from overt censorship and some reduction of other controls on intellectuals and creative artists though other times have been less benign. All form part of the past and its discourses which the artists here relate to.

Jim MASSELOS

pakistan has many pasts

Pakistan has many pasts. Most immediately it has a political history as an independent nation from 1947 after a period under British colonial rule. Before then, its precolonial pasts saw its area successively under Sikh, Mughal, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist rulers. Even earlier it was the location of much of the great Indus valley civilisation which centred around Moenjodaro and Harappa. Power configurations aside, Pakistan has other lineages of equal significance in that it also inherits religious, social and intellectual pasts ranging from 19th and 20th century ideas of nationalism and political liberty through to Islamic ideas of state and society. The referents to which artists can relate are hence rich in possible allusions ranging from the postcolonial present, through the colonial past and the pre-colonial and non-colonial heritage - a complex, intensive mix.

A crucial historical axis is the very idea of Pakistan itself. Contained in the notion of this new entity were (and still are) complex and even conflicting values and interpretations. The original drive for carving a separate Pakistan out of parts of British India was propounded with powerful and totally effective advocacy by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Quaid-i-Azam ('Great Leader') in the seven or so years before 1947. In those final years of the endgame of the British raj, Jinnah refused to accept anything short of an independent nation with its own separate identity and its own territory for the Muslims of British India. He articulated a two nation theory which asserted that Muslims were not to be seen as one of the communities within a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic Indian or Hindu-dominated nation but were by any definition a nation in their own right.

The Muslim League under Jinnah's guidance adopted the specific objective of Pakistan quite late in the liberation struggle through a formal resolution at Lahore in 1940. Even its name was new, having been coined in 1933 by a Muslim at Cambridge out of the first letters of Punjab, Afghani, Kashmir, Sind and the final part of Baluchistan: additionally the letters when put together meant land of the pure.

When Pakistan was achieved in 1947 it was at great cost: the larger area Jinnah had wanted was reduced. Bengal was carved up to produce East Pakistan (with a Hindu dominated West Bengal in India) and the Punjab was likewise divided with its western portions joining Pakistan. The partitioning intensified rioting, and civil war and anarchy spread through the divided areas - massive numbers of people fled from their homes in what was virtually an ethnic cleansing of the contiguous areas. Over half a million people died and over ten million people crossed the borders as refugees as a result of the 1947 partition.

The situation was exacerbated when war broke out in 1948 between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and

Diane LOSCHE

how to look at a persian painting

To Pakistan - That I Know So little Of

The title of this essay, How To Look at a Persian Painting, is meant in both a serious and an ironic vein. Ironic in that I know the unlikelihood of telling others how to look at a painting, especially in a thousand words and I wouldn't want to be involved in a didactic art appreciation exercise anyway. However the question implied by the title is certainly a serious one. How does one 'look at' a work from a place one knows little about? How does one approach the practices of an 'other' place? The answers to these questions are neither simple nor straightforward but in this brief essay I want to present my own entry to communication with the works in this show as one mode of beginning to 'look'.

I was invited to visit Lahore in Pakistan by Sue Rowley the facilitator of this show and then Head of the School of Art History and Theory at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney. We had a range of business to conduct in Lahore because Sue had organised a dynamic exchange relationship with the National College of Art in Lahore. What did I know of Pakistan, of Lahore, before arriving? I suspect about as much as many of those who see this show. I knew the CNN Pakistan - information bites run across the LED screen of the mind - partition in 1947, a seemingly endless flow of unstable governments, mostly military dictatorships, Islamic nationalism, poverty - not much more than that. I don't apologise for this ignorance since the world is large and these days one has to work very hard to survive on one's own small patch.

I had two more, seemingly minute, things going for me - a human connection in Lahore, and curiosity - the desire to know more about something. These twin impulses, of connection and curiosity, became my path to the paintings in this show. My human connection was a postgraduate student, Farida Batool, who, along with her family, became my hosts for the too brief stay in Lahore. The other strand that formed the basis of my connection was a tiny fragment of knowledge, hardly more substantial than a CNN sound bite. For many years I had known vaguely that Urdu, the language of Pakistan, was among one of the most recent and most poetic languages in the world. I sensed that I had learned somewhere that this poetry was entwined with music and with the mystic tradition of Sufism where God is spoken to as one would speak to a lover. Somewhere in the past these fragments had seduced me, even if they were wrong, undoubtedly superficial, dream-like images from half-remembered conversations, from concerts and CD covers.

Inadequate as these may have been, such fragments became my path to the art works here, for it was my desire to know more about this poetry and this mystic tradition where God is a lover. Luckily for me I possessed an excellent guide in Farida.

She and I arrived at night at her family's house where, after being fed and after my mumbled, jet-lagged mention of poetry her father, Syed Afzal Haidar, an illustrious lawyer who had spent much time in jail for his defence of democracy, and a friend, Gulnar, also an activist, recited for me the poetry of Ghalib, a celebrated Urdu poet. They spoke the lines without recourse to a written text and it became clear that poetry was indeed woven not only into the fabric of language but into the heart and soul as well.

This is how my journey to the art works you see here began, with passionate poetry spoken over a dining table. I knew immediately that my desires to know more would be fulfilled. When I look at these paintings I hear the song of the voices of my so hospitable, warm and gracious hosts, speaking poetry to me, a rare and precious gift indeed. My time at that dining table contained all that I would need to know in order to communicate with the paintings that you see in this show. I would learn of the entwinement of passionate, dedication to the life of one's country, (pathetically summed up by the English word politics) with an unashamedly romantic poetry of the soul. I would learn of the connection between the intimate and the public, between interiority and the outside world. Let me be clear - this connection between the poetic and the activist, has not been forged in an easy climate. This is a poetry that must have the strength of steel - many of the people I came to know during my stay had spent not days, but months and years in jail for their activism. In these jails they may often have been sustained only by their poetry.

now I know a little more

I give you highlights of my stay. Once again no apologies for my condition of privileged tourism, for many of those looking at these works and reading this essay, may be in the same boat as I, with perhaps even less knowledge than I. Highlights of my trip were the shrines that my student and guide, Farida, took me to. We scattered rose petals on the saint's tombs as singers sang the saint's story for us. We visited a shrine filled with tiny clay horses, offerings to the saints. There were nights in courtyards listening, under the stars, to the voice of one of the most beautiful ghazal singers I have ever heard. We had dinner in a rooftop restaurant under a full moon in the shadow of a great mosque.

I could go on attempting to beguile you, to see what I saw, to hear what I heard. But that is not the point of this essay. Yes, of course these are tourist images, but such images can be more than trophies of travel. I would hope that they are also signs which indicate that a place is so much more than CNN can convey. This place, Lahore, surprised me. I had, despite myself, been lured into the image of a city captured on our ubiquitous television screens as part of an Islamic nation with all the stereotypes that entails. But the images I keep from my stay are signs to me that this place is much more than that. My progress, halting and feeble though my journey to knowledge may have been, is that I now know how little I know. This essay is offered in that vein, an attempted honesty - I do not want to pretend that I know more than I do, nor, I would suggest, should the viewer. Communication can only take place between oneself and the work by making one's own journey, from place of origin to destination, whatever the limitations of one's knowledge.

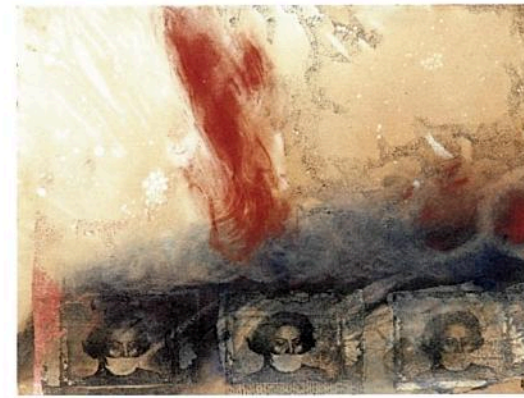
a valentine for lahore

In ending I would like to return to the opening paragraphs of this essay - how do we look at a painting from an 'other' place? It is not an easy task and effort is required to enter its space. One must gather together one's own necessarily fragmentary knowledge - and by knowledge I don't mean information but rather the knowledge of eye and of heart, of sound, smell and touch - and take the first steps toward the work. It is wise to be generous here. If you judge the frames to be a bit shoddy, if you find the lack of the digital and the virtual disappointing, remember that Pakistan is a materially poor country (even poorer than Australia!) and that riches may better be judged by the wealth of spirit than the flow of materiality. Remember that there are times when the small, the humble and the microcosm may be more 'fit' than the large, the rich and the arrogant.

The great poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, whose words provided the Ariadne's thread for the synthesis that this show represents, should have the last word

Speak, for your two lips are free
Speak, your tongue is still your own;
This straight body still is yours-
Speak, your life is still your own.

(Faiz, A.F. 1971:87) Faiz, Ahmed Faiz. 1971 Poems by Faiz. trans. by V.G. Kiernan. Oxford India. Oxford University Press, New Delhi



Salima HASHMI

Poem for Zainab 1996
mixed media on paper
50 x 76 cm

Adonis awakes 1998
mixed media on paper
76 x 50 cm

Anwar SAEED

He knows better than all of us 1998
acrylic on canvas
76.5 x 106 cm
collection Naazish Ataulah

Quddus MIRZA

salima hashmi

Probably it would not be unreal to describe Salima Hashmi's work as the true representation of Pakistan. Hashmi is amongst a few artists of the Islamic Republic who were most active in the long reign of General Zia. During this period she was involved in defying the rulers and their policies regarding culture and rejecting their decrees against women. This crusade was carried politically as well as through her art. Salima employed the simile of a nude figure, which in 1980s Pakistan meant treading a dangerous path. The socially, ethically and religiously forbidden image served to depict the condition of the society under the most atrocious dictatorship in the history of country.

Her paintings were not about the repressive aspect of political scenario only; rather they envisaged a possibility of transformation. Nature was treated as a metaphor or symbol of hope, with leaves and flowers painted next to closed doors and windows. Elements of nature, such as the clouds, rain and the effect of a strong wind, frequently appear in her work. To depict these phenomena, which usually are perceived more through senses other than the visual, Salima employs the language of miniature painting, where they are portrayed in a narrative manner (especially in the paintings about seasons and Ragas).

The appropriation of vernacular art forms appears in other ways in Hashmi's work. She deliberately chose paper and water based mediums, in contrast to oil on canvas, introduced and later made popular by the colonial rulers. Along with the painting on paper she pastes the layers of hand-made papers on the surface. The preference for local materials coincides with the exploration of indigenous forms and techniques. Like on her mixed media, Salima fabricates the image with the help of miniature's pardakht (the traditional method of shading by putting small marks). She appropriates this conventional device to suit the depiction of human body. The manner of putting these lines has another connotation: that the tiny marks resemble the thread line of the embroidery, and through this formal component Hashmi acknowledges the importance of craft and heritage.

For a number of years the human figure has been a recurring motif in Salima's paintings. The body is represented as a sensuous object. In the middle of the composition, most of the works have the naval part, surrounded with hair like texture. Besides the thin washes of paint and the mark making, the collaged layers of hand-made paper create tactile surfaces. In her recent paintings the human body does not suggest any specific gender, but becomes a kind of landscape occupied by sensitive and sensuous lines. At different areas the body shifts to turn into fields of white lilies. In this category of works the political content mingles with the minimal imagery and monochromatic palette.

For example 'The poems for Zainab' is a series of paintings which deal with the issue of repression in all its forms - imposed by the state and religion and practised in gender relations. The genesis of this group of paintings was an incident in which a Mullah brutally mutilated his wife Zainab. The image of a strangled female's face appears in these works as in a sequence of film. This technical device - of repeating the same image - conveys the continuation of the crimes and criminal attitudes against women in our society. On another level it connects the imagery to the most popular art form in our surroundings, the film. The subtlety in rendering the message expands the meanings of these paintings.

In a state where most individuals are engaged in churning out commercially oriented art or pleasing paintings, the work of Salima Hashmi stands for the collective voice of consciousness. It heralds a new sophistication in her art as well as bringing the art of painting close to life.

Salima HASHMI

anwar saeed

As an art student, Anwar Saeed witnessed a public hanging during General Zia's regime. His first solo exhibition in Islamabad in 1984 was raided by the police. Entitled 'Windows' this show of drawings in pencil, pen, ink and collages comprised two parallel strands of imagery juxtaposing protesting tormenting figures with serene images of love, desire and escape.

Afforded an opportunity to go to the Royal College of Art in London on a scholarship, Anwar Saeed travelled to Europe and focussed on etching. The meticulous rendering that was a part of his drawings transferred itself to the etching plate. The loneliness suffered in this alien environment found its expression in the selection of photo-images from his historical heritage. This continued after his return when he began teaching at the National College of Art in Lahore. His penchant for



'working' the surface continued in his printmaking as well as his painting. In the 1990s Anwar's works, still on paper, were layered both in terms of materials and in images. A meticulous craftsman, he layered found and selected texts with washes of pen and ink. These were drawn on to create dense fields of monochromatic colour. The images, often sleeping winged figures and flapping shirts, were in limbo, wanting, yet unable to communicate except through muted suggestion. The move to acrylic in the 1990s shifted his intricate focus from monochromatic mark making to an enjoyment of colour.

A painter who has always been deeply interested in literature, Saeed looks deeply at symbol and metaphor in text and finds equivalence in his own vocabulary. A shooting incident two years ago that killed Pakistan's leading contemporary painter, Zahoorul Akhlaq, left Anwar Saeed critically wounded, the radial nerve in his right hand was severed. He now uses a hand brace and has taught himself to work again. The new work, joyously colourful, is also deeply personal. Concerns for sexuality, desire, joy and pain are knitted together. Anwar Saeed looks constantly to tradition as a resource of knowledge and experience. But his own experience of living in his time influences this sensibility.

Salima HASHMI

naiza khan

Born and brought up in Lebanon and England, Naiza Khan came back to live in the land of her parents only after she was married. But growing up elsewhere did not mean that she was away from the orbit of Pakistan's culture. She describes learning to love Urdu poetry by listening to the tapes of Faiz being sung by Nanyara Noor. This was simultaneous with her study of Neruda (who was a friend of Faiz) and the making of books at the Ruskin School of Fine Art at Oxford. Her final year work involved the male and female body, and employed printmaking as its final process.

Finding herself in Karachi where access to nude models was denied, Khan discovered the body anew. She began investigating metaphors for the body which could transcend its physicality. This preoccupation with the human form was parallel to her awareness of the political turbulence in which she was placed.

She was to identify with social activists and women's issues. A horrifying incident of two rural women immolating themselves to protest injustice led her to make a book which drew its inspiration from this event. All that remained of the women was their long hair. The vulnerability, the sensuousness and the poetry of hair found its way into the next series of Naiza Khan's work, *Lines of Desire*. Probing symbolic materials associated with women, she sifts hair, henna and the body, layering patterns which vibrate secretly. She explores gender issues with a gentle lyricism which belies the undertone of pain.

Salima HASHMI

imran qureshi

Text is important to Imran Qureshi's work. Apart from the tradition of book illumination that it grows from, he uses it to 'bounce' off the divergent voices to which he gives credence. He uses pages from old exercise books and tailoring manuals, which set up trains of thought and ideas. When using these pages he enjoys the multiplicity of messages he creates. Similarly, the use of images such as the missile are threatening and endearing at the same time. There is a shyness about this symbol of militarization as if it is surprised to find itself thrust into the arena of conflict. To subvert its purpose, Qureshi incorporates the clinging red vine, a sign of love, a gentle presence. He says that his paintings 'come as a shock' because of the unexpectedness of social comment.

As Qureshi undermines the symbols of war, he also overturns the conventions of miniature. He does away with borders, parameters, established 'settings'. The 'wash' is left unadorned. Calligraphic borders are composed of collaged strips of newsprint and masking tape becomes an extension of the composition.

At other places, he enjoys exactly those conventions that he flouts elsewhere. Uncovering the process, the lusciousness of texture, the mark is laid bare. The daintiness of practice is displayed for everyone to see. The tradition of 'covering' up the underlying drawing is not followed.

Naiza KHAN
Boundless 2000
conté on paper
122 x 90 cm
collection -Khurram Kasim

Imran QURESHI
Love Story II 2000
gouache on wasli (paper)
21 x 15 cm



Salima HASHMI

aisha khalid

Aisha Khalid's years of study in the miniature painting department at the National College of Arts, Lahore (NCA) culminated in a somewhat predictable way. A final year project which dwelt heavily on historical material in context as well as style, it was distinguished primarily by its unusual level of skill. Married to Imran Qureshi, she was gingerly trying out more of the same after graduating. Teaching for a while at the NCA, the suicide of a cousin was the catalyst for turning her work inwards. The cousin, a young married woman, could not face the social stigma ascribed to those who are unable to have children. Aisha's painting of a young woman seated with fruit in her lap was the first in the series. Others showed the figure moving behind a curtain into oblivion. In others, she was absent, but the fruit remained, a symbol of the life she could not have.

For Aisha, this journeying into symbol and meaning became crucial to her development. From the well-defined historical lore, she was out on her own, constructing a new glossary for herself. The lexicon that she invented was to do with emotional stirrings. The works followed in quick succession as she realised that the matrix could be transformed.

Salima HASHMI

ruby chishti

Ruby Chishti's paintings, completed during her final year at the National College of Arts, Lahore, contained references to poignant childhood experiences and the pain of caring for a sick parent. She disappeared from the art circuit soon after graduating, returning eventually to undertake the MA course. This time her return to her own art practice has been intense in terms of her exploration of new material and reclaiming her voice. Initially, she worked with material she had been familiar with. Well versed in clay, wood, stone, fibreglass, she went over the possibilities. But the emotional backlog insisted on a rougher, personal, edgy path. Moving to paper mache, Chishti created a forest of upturned faces resting on cylinders. Passive, mute, they posed questions of dialogue and conversations. The group of figures was a departure for Chishti, but the material still resonated with her earlier experience of the adding on of clay, and the skills of modeling in pliable material. Wanting to recall the experience of making things as a child, Ruby Chishti reverted to the memory of making dolls.

The tradition of making dolls out of scraps of material was very much alive (and continues in rural areas). The link between her life caring for a paralyzed inert mother for more than a decade and the act of giving life to a creature fashioned out of cloth is sensed by Chishti. It is a deeply felt connection. Re-cycling cloth is endemic in Pakistan. Bridal trousseaus become quilts in the next generation. Old cloths are remade into appliqued bed coverings, floor mats and dusters. From generation to generation, fabric perseveres until it gives up its warp and weft to time. Some of this feeling is conveyed in Ruby Chishti's worn 'Kapda'. Its faded life is renewed.

"Mere art making activity means nothing to me, it has no meaning if it does not have any connection with life. That is why every work of mine and the material I have used, be it used fabric or waste paper or throw-away plastic bags, is a reflection of concern towards an impaired being who is living with or within ourselves."

Aisha KHALID
Form and Pattern I (detail) 2000
gouache on wasli (paper)
17.5 x 13.5 cm

Ruby CHISTI
immortal fabric II 2000
cast, stitched and stuffed fabric
height 40 cm

notes of the artists

Salima HASHMI

b: Delhi 1942; lives in Lahore
positions held: Professor of Fine Art, National College of Arts, Lahore
Principal, National College of Arts, Lahore 1995-9
education: National College of Arts 1962; Bath Academy of Art, Corsham UK 1965; Rhode Island School of Design, MA 1990
exhibitions: Lahore, Hawaii, New York, Karachi, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, Dhaka, Delhi, Pasadena, Bradford
curator and writer: *An Intelligent Rebellion* (with Nima Poovaya-Smith); Asia-Pacific: Triennial of Contemporary Art 3, Brisbane, 1999; numerous publications

Anwar SAEED

b: Lahore 1955; lives in Lahore
positions held: Lecturer, National College of Arts, Lahore
education: Royal College of Art, London
exhibitions: Islamabad, Karachi, Leicester UK, Dhaka

Naiza KHAN

b: Bahawalpur, Lebanon 1968; lives in Karachi
positions held: Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture: teaching printmaking, 1991-4; teaching drawing 1998 - ongoing
education: Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, BA 1990; Wimbledon School of Art, London, Art Foundation, 1986
exhibitions: Karachi, New York, London, Islamabad, Hong Kong, Dhaka, Bradford, Liverpool

Imran QURESHI

b: Hyderabad 1972; lives in Lahore
positions held: National College of Arts, Lahore, lecturer in miniature painting
education: National College of Arts, Lahore, BFA 1993
exhibitions: Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Dhaka, Bradford, Kuala Lumpur, Brisbane, London, Finland, New York

Aisha KHALID

b: Faisalabad 1972; lives in Lahore
education: National College of Arts, Lahore, BFA 1997
exhibitions: Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, New York, Finland, England, India
residences: Bombay, Rijksakademie, Amsterdam

Rubina Shaheen CHISHTEE (Ruby Chisti)

b: Lahore 1963; lives in Lahore
education: BFA National College of Arts, Lahore, 1988
commissions: book illustrations, including OUP (Oxford University Press) 1995 - ongoing, and Punjab Middle Schooling 1998-9; public sculpture commissions, Karachi and Lahore

list of works

Salima HASHMI

People wept at dawn 1 2000
mixed media on paper
50 x 76 cm
collection Zeeshan Khan

People wept at dawn 2 2000
mixed media on paper
50 x 76 cm
collection Naeem Pasha

Adonis awakes 1 1998
mixed media on paper
76 x 50 cm

Adonis awakes 2 1998
mixed media on paper
50 x 76 cm

Poem for Zainab 1996
mixed media on paper
50 x 76 cm

Anwar SAEED
Presence 1999
acrylic on board
64 x 94 cm
collection Saadia Sharif

Angels are rare to find these days 1998
acrylic on board
34 x 63 cm
collection Ghazala Aziz

Love is a lung fish 1998
acrylic on canvas
79 x 109 cm
collection Ghazala Aziz

Night zone (age of sin and fear) 1998
acrylic on board
45 x 60 cm
collection Brigitte Neubacher

He knows better than all of us 1998
acrylic on canvas
76.5 x 106 cm
collection Naazish Ataullah

Toy boats 1998
acrylic on board
57 x 30 cm
collection Brigitte Neubacher

Naiza KHAN
She told me about her dreams 2001
conté and acrylic ink on paper
122 x 90 cm

The space within 2001
conté and acrylic ink on paper
122 x 90 cm
collection of the artist

Dream of Awabi – 1815 2000
charcoal and conté on paper
122 x 90 cm
collection Naureen & Moazzam Mehmood

She has hands 2000
charcoal and conté on paper
122 x 90 cm
collection Khurram Kasim

Volumatic 2000
charcoal, conté and acrylic ink on paper
122 x 90 cm
collection of the artist

Imran QURESHI

Her Letter on my Name 2000
opaque watercolour on tea stained wasli paper
20.5 x 14.5 cm

Kagaz Kay Sanam 2000
opaque watercolour, gold leaf on wasli paper
20 x 13.5 cm
collection Virginia Whiles

Lahore resolution 2000
opaque watercolour, gold leaf on wasli paper
19 x 14 cm
collection Virginia Whiles

Tight Security 2000
opaque watercolour on tea stained wasli paper
24 x 18.5 cm
collection Virginia Whiles

Walled Tree 2000
opaque watercolour on wasli paper
19 x 14 cm
collection Virginia Whiles

Missile is a Missile 1999
gouache, gold leaf on tea stained wasli paper
22 x 15.5 cm
collection Salima Hashmi

Aisha KHALID
Amsterdam one 2001
opaque watercolour on wasli (paper)
5 x 20 cm

Birth of Venus 2001
opaque watercolour, gold leaf, tea on wasli (paper)
27 x 27 cm

Form and Pattern I 2000
gouache on wasli (paper)
17.5 x 13.5 cm

Perday Kay Peechay (Behind the Curtain) 2000
gouache on wasli (paper)
26 x 19.5 cm

Silence with Pattern II 2000
gouache on wasli (paper)
35.5 x 25.5 cm

Ruby CHISHTI

Buddies on line 2000
stitched and stuffed fabric
length 104 cm

immortal fabric I 2000
cast, stitched and stuffed fabric
height 30 cm

immortal fabric II 2000
cast, stitched and stuffed fabric
height 40 cm

Say cheese 2000
jute, stuffed fabric, lace
height 71 cm

The more fast you tie, the more defined I feel by 2000
cast, stitched, stuffed and tied fabric
height 44 cm

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The Eye Still Seeks

Contemporary art from Pakistan
3 May - 2 June 2001

Artists: Salima Hashmi, Anwar Saeed, Naiza Khan, Mohammad Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid, Ruby Chishti.

Curators: Salima Hashmi, Sue Rowley & Rilka Oakley

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further reading

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An intelligent rebellion: women artists of Pakistan, ex. cat., cur. Salima Hashmi and Nima Poovaya-Smith, City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, Arts, Museums and Libraries Division, 1994

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