

NUKTA ART

Biannual ■ Contemporary Art Magazine from Pakistan

Vol. 1 - TWO - 2006 ■ Pk Rs. 520 ■ ISSN No. 1991-0304



Contents



4
CONTRIBUTORS

5
EDITOR'S NOTE

10
ART@NUKTA



34
ESSAY

Bindu-Bindi-Nukta: The Infinite in the Finite by Jasleen Dhamija

39

A Journey of Materials and Tools, Processes and Practice:

Miniature and Neo-Miniature by Rumana Husain

46

Devotion and Iconography: The Figures of Popular Piety in the Indus Valley by Michel Boivin

56

Marketing to a Global Audience: New Trajectories in Contemporary Art in Pakistan by Amra Ali

64

Turkish Painting in the Light of its Historical Traditions

by Jale Nejdert Erzen

70

ART GLOBAL

Understanding Installation Art by Sangeeta Thapa

77

PHOTO ESSAY

'Unexpected Vistas' by Qamar Bharoocha Bana



106





86

ART GLOBAL

Cholamandal Artist Village: A Vision Fostering an Artists' Commune

by Ashrafi S. Bhagat

90

Asian Art Biennale 2006 - Art of a Shared Genealogy by Nilofur Farrukh

102

ART CONSERVATION

Art Conservation and Restoration by The Nukta Team

106

ART COLLECTOR

Nukta visits Anita Ahmed

114

MUSIC

Funk Carioca "Favela Rap" the Popular Music of Rio de Janeiro

by Asma Husain and Vincent Rosenblatt

120

BOOKS

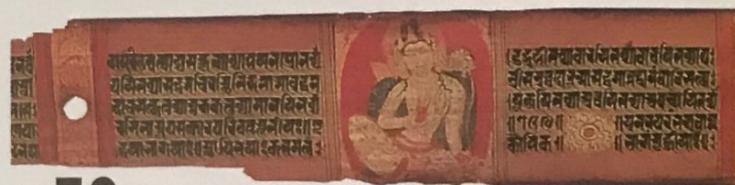
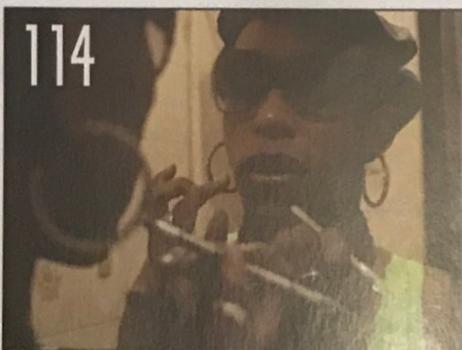
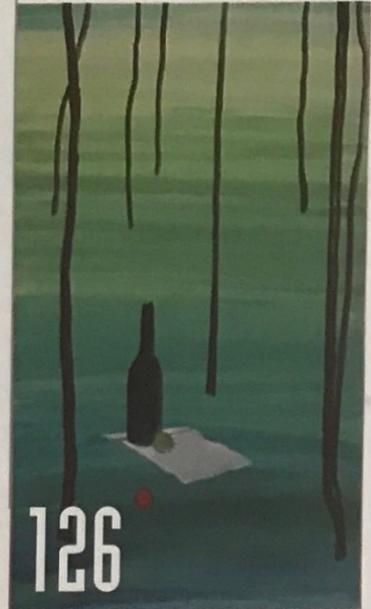
Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History

Review by Leon Wainwright

126

NUKTA -E- NAZAR

Nukta in conversation with Colin David



Prof Abul Mansur is a professor of Art History at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He has authored and co-authored books on art and related issues in Bengali and English and has published numerous articles in international journals since 1984. He has also written monographs for many renowned artists and art exhibitions in Bangladesh and abroad. Institutions in several countries, including Pakistan, have invited him to present papers, curate shows, and conduct workshops.

Adnan Madani is a Karachi born artist and writer, and is currently studying for a postgraduate degree in Visual Culture at Goldsmiths College, London. His research interests include the philosophy of language and ideas of cosmopolitanism in contemporary art, as seen through the works of Wittgenstein and Derrida.

Dr Ashrafi S. Bhagat is the Head of the Department of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai, India. Her doctoral thesis was on the *Madras Art Movement*. She has published research articles in books and journals, and written exhibition catalogues for artists. She is a freelancing art critic for the national daily - The Hindu.

Asma Husain is a Pakistani researcher who spent six months in Rio de Janeiro in 2005-2006 studying the favelas - low-cost housing in Brazil - from an architectural standpoint. She became involved with numerous organizations that worked within them, and focused on the development of the community as well as of the physical structure of the favelas. She is undertaking a comparative study between Brazilian and Indian low-income housing problems and solutions. She has a BA Fine Arts from Colby College, Maine, and is presently studying for her Masters of Architecture at Rice University, Texas, USA.

Ateeqa Ali is a doctoral candidate in the Art History Department at the University of Texas at Austin. She is completing her dissertation that examines the genesis of socio-political art made in Pakistan today. It looks at the colonial history of South Asia and traces the last two decades of art-making in the nation.

Batool Mahmood is a writer and the author of a children's picture book on mime. She has written on art and culture for both local and foreign publications, including daily *Down* and *The Asian Wall Street Journal*. She has also worked as a television reporter.

Claire Eckert has a Masters of Art History from York University, Toronto and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Queen's University, Kingston. She is currently a Curatorial Assistant at the Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga. In addition to programming activities at the Blackwood, she has been involved in exhibitions and screenings at organizations such as Vtape (Toronto), Gallery Stratford (Stratford) and Modern Fuel (Kingston).

Dr Jale Erzen teaches art history, aesthetics and criticism and other art courses at the Faculty of Architecture, Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Turkey. She is an exhibiting artist and has many publications in Turkey and abroad on modern art, aesthetics in the East, and on Ottoman aesthetics and architecture.

Jasleen Dhamija, author of numerous seminal works on the textile crafts of India, is known internationally as a *philosopher of living cultural traditions*. Her main speciality is the history of textiles and costumes. She has worked and researched throughout India in developing the handicraft and handloom industries. She has worked in Iran, the Middle East, Central Asia, South East Asia, the Balkans, as well as with 21 countries in Africa. UNESCO has appointed her as President of the Jury of Asian Awards for Creativity in Textiles. She has been awarded Hill Professorship by the University of Minnesota for her work on Textiles. She is also on the faculty of the National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, and has lectured on Textiles at numerous museums in India, Europe, UK, USA, Japan, Australia and South East Asia.

Dr Leon Wainwright of Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, has a background of teaching and research in Art History and Visual Studies. He received a PhD from the School of Oriental and African

Studies, University of London, on the topic of contemporary art and artists of many Diasporas - African, Asian and Caribbean - living in Britain. His current work deals with the Caribbean, specifically Trinidad and Guyana, where he is conducting long-term field work in preparation for a book on art and agency in the region. He has several publications to his credit, including *Shades of Black: Assembling the 80's*, *Black Art in Postwar Britain (2004)* and *Visual Culture in Britain at the End of Empire (2005)*.

Dr Michel Boivin is a Research Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of Advanced Study of Social Sciences, University of Paris. He is doing fieldwork on the identity making of Muslim communities in the 19th and 20th centuries in South Asia. He is currently conducting research on the cultural expressions of devotion in the Pakistani society, including literature, music and iconography.

Mohsin S. Jaffri is a writer, journalist, and an art critic based in Karachi. He is presently working as a senior editor for an English newspaper, *The News*. He is the author of *The Other Half: Discrimination Against Women*, a well-received book in literary circles in Pakistan. He is also editor, *Business & Finance*, *Investor's B&F* and *Tapestry*, at *The News*.

Naz Ikramullah is a senior Pakistani visual artist based in Ottawa, Canada. She studied art at the Byam Shaw School, and later lithography at the Slade School in London. She has had a long career as an art educator, and is currently teaching at the Ottawa School of Art. Her paintings and prints are mostly about memories, and some of them have political undertones. Her works are displayed in many international collections.

Qamar Bharoocha Bana - a freelance photographer - was born in Mumbai and grew up in the sub-continent. She enjoys documenting people, buildings, interiors, traditional events/artifacts and sometimes landscapes too. She had her first solo exhibition at the Dante Alighieri, Karachi, in March 2005. In December 2004 she participated in the SAARC photo exhibition in Delhi alongside 30 other professionals. She has to her credit a couple of group shows in Nairobi, Kenya, where she lived for over four years. Currently living in Karachi, she travels when she can.

Rita Sodha did her doctoral thesis on the *Sursagar Paintings of the Mewar School* from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. She is a freelance writer. Presently teaching in the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara, her publications include cataloguing Raja Ravi Varma's paintings from the Gaekwad collection (Vadodara), writings on Pushti marg - the cult of Vallabhacharya and related visual culture, case of refashioning authority, resultant works of art and their semantics. Her area of research is the study of text-painting relationship in miniature painting.

Rukhsana David is a Lahore-based artist and educator. Presently she is the Head of the Dept. of Fine Arts at Kinnaird College, Lahore. She is married to the renowned Pakistani artist, Colin David.

Sangeeta Thapa is a curator and art promoter from Nepal. As the director of the Siddhartha Gallery in Kathmandu, she has also curated shows abroad. She is a member of the Nepal Heritage Society and contributes art writings to VOW magazine, Nepal.

Vincent Rosenblatt is a French photographer living and working in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is the founder of the organization *Olhares do Morro*, which is set up in three of Rio's largest favelas and provides interested youths with photography equipment and training. Their photographs show the slums as witnessed by them, not as seen by the media, thus challenging popular opinions. It also provides them with opportunities of employment and sustainable development. They have already exhibited in various international events such as the *Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie of Arles (France)*, and the *Art Basel/Miami Beach International Art Show*, among others.

Hybridism, fusion and interface are the mantras of contemporary arts. They are indicators of a world gearing up for a free flow of a non-hierarchical exchange of ideas to construct a new present.

Satellite television, with its global footprint, and the more focused access via the Internet, has dissolved barriers. However, what makes us stop short of a universal culture is a strong sense of history and identity. Culture, like a resilient membrane allows the osmosis of influences, yet separates the 'self' from the 'other'. In such an environment, hybridism becomes a tool. It is as much an attitude as a device that creates space for the contemporary without abdicating other identities.

We discuss hybridity, particularly in the context of contemporary visual art.

Amra Ali provokes a debate on how the artist faces the danger of becoming a stranger to her/his location with the 'ethnic gaze' of an outsider. If appropriation is without deeper engagement it can transform borrowing from popular/traditional art forms into an act of consumption.

The history of Installation Art in Nepal, by Sangeeta Thapa, presents an interesting subversion of this art form to reach a larger audience in the public space. She writes how the idiom of this art form has been indigenized to support the strong Nepalese content of social awareness.

In tracing the genealogy of Turkish Painting, Dr Jale Nejdert Erzen writes of the ongoing cultural dialogue with Europe, since the Ottomans. Her essay brings into focus the identity crisis of the mid 20th century that compelled Turkish artists to ask 'How can an art which is both Turkish and Modern be created?' - a question, not far from the minds of artists from over 30 nations, at the 12th Asian Biennale 2006 in Dhaka, of which **NUKTAART** carries an introspective observation.

Moving away from content, Rumana Husain presents the mysteries of material and technique with a discussion on how the Neo-Miniaturists, despite rigorous training in purist skills, are integrating innovative processes.

The book, *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, reviewed by Dr Leon Wainwright reminds us that cultural exchanges have not been without the politics of power. Dealing with racism is an integral part of the art discourse, as the grand narrative of the 'West' has long been a club closed to subaltern cultures.

Interestingly *Funk Carioca: Favela Rap*, an indigenous expression of the marginalized in Brazil has the pathos and power to catch the imagination of mainstream music makers. This story is told by Asma Husain and Vincent Rosenblatt from the favelas of Rio De Janeiro.

NUKTAART with its commitment to extending the discursive space has this time included an important essay on the informative research of Dr Boivin on the popular iconography, developed and sold around the shrines of the sufi saints in Pakistan.

We are honored to carry an essay by Jasleen Dhamija, one of South Asia's most committed craft historians. In reply to the news of the birth of **NUKTAART**, she emailed back telling us how much the name Nukta had inspired her. Out of this has come the multiple reading of Nukta, the dot, the point, in the light of South Asian symbolism.

This year, we lost two stalwarts of Pakistani art: Mian Salahuddin, the pioneer ceramist and long time teacher at the National College of Arts, who passed away after a prolonged illness, and the painter Nagi, one of the last of the first generation of artists who contributed to the nascent art scene. We are saddened by their demise and honor their memory.

As the readership of **NUKTAART** spans continents, it strengthens our resolve to expand the art discourse from Pakistan by bringing multiple viewpoints from home and other art communities.

We are happy to inform you of the generous grant that **NUKTAART** has received from the **Prince Claus Fund**, the Netherlands, which will enable us to consolidate our work.

NUKTAART has begun its second year. We would like to say to our readers and friends...we could not have done it without you!

Nilofur Farrukh
October 2006, Karachi



left to right Nilofur Farrukh, Amra Ali, Sabiha Mohammed and Rumana Husain

Photography: Nisa Alam

Karkhana:

charting
new
perspectives

The brainchild of Mohammad Imran Qureshi, the *Karkhana* project marks an engaging dialogue initiated by the Neo Miniaturists from Lahore. The project started by involving six Pakistani artists now residing in three different continents. Qureshi devised a process according to which twelve *waslis* were rotated among the artists by courier, and the artists were presented with the freedom to alter, undo or add to each one of the collaborative work. The twelve *Karkhana* works were first exhibited in Rochdale, UK, in 2003-4, and more recently at the Aldrich Art Museum, with propositions to continue the journey to other locations, including Karachi.

Located in Jhelum, Lahore (Pakistan), New York, Chicago (USA), and Melbourne (Australia), the artists were presented with an engagement with the political significance of their Pakistani identity in the aftermath of 9/11, in which the assertion of the Diaspora became a significant perspective of negotiation. Most of them have now settled in countries outside their places of birth. While a piercing socio political commentary marked the overall dynamism of the works, there was an equal thrust on addressing the issue of viewpoint. The artists, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Hasnat Mehmood, Saira Wasim, Talha Rathore, Aisha Khalid and Imran Qureshi, each became participant to the traditional system of Court Miniature where the manuscripts were worked as a collective by many hands. However, as in the words of the curators, Hammad Nasar, Jessica Hough and Anna Sloan, new interpretations located within contemporary concerns 'evoke traditional symbolic forms to take on new meanings, and as a result, they bear the potential for creative acts of dissidence', and in 'transforming the "workshop" into a stage for social and political resistance'.

Each of the artists contributed his or her individualistic stylistic or symbolic iconography and concerns that became part of a whole, the course of which was mostly unpredictable, without the boundaries usually associated with the traditional format of the Miniature. If the references to Pahari, Rajasthani or other schools have seen a revival here, there is an equal, if not stronger move to subvert those traditions to bring Miniature to engage with the contemporary as a voice that seeks to readdress issues of post colonization and globalization from perspectives located within the psyche of South Asia in all its manifestations - old and new.

aica



Karkhana 7

The Commune Artist Colony, K a r a c h i

An 'artists colony' where creative practitioners of the visual arts can get together, exchange ideas, rent studio spaces to work and hold exhibitions, is a new concept for Pakistan. Situated in *Sadiq Godaam*; a colony of old warehouses at Miskeen Gali, off old Queens Road, (M.T. Khan Road) Karachi, is the 'Commune,' which opened its doors to visual and performing artists a year ago. Jawed Bashir, an apparel designer cum photographer and Raania Azam Khan Durrani, a ceramist, who is the Director of the Commune Artist Colony, run it.

The Commune is currently equipped with two large well-lit multi-purpose spaces ideal for exhibits and performances, and a small coffee bar. Warehouse spaces can also be rented by production houses/filmmakers. It also hopes to provide a one-stop shop for artists, with services such as documentation of artwork; photography, catalogues and printing. Surrounded by the sounds and lights of urban Karachi and the colors and chaos of Miskeen Gali, the Commune Artist Colony tries to involve local residents - the underprivileged community of the area. In August, for Independence Day celebrations, an on-going community mural, 'W-11 - Sarkon ki Shahzadi,' (*W-11 - Princess of the Roads*) represents the vibrant appearance of the buses of Karachi and the daredevil speed with which they rule the road. Similarly, involving children of the community, another mural has been initiated.

Murals are well suited to the place, as the front face of a warehouse, 64 feet in length, suggests. One can also see on the façade 'Pulse', a mural by Sarah Bakhtiyar based on the idea of women desiring sovereignty in relationships. Displayed in the Commune gallery are a series of large-scale paintings and smaller studies that accompany the mural.

Recently, the Commune has announced an exhibition - the *Akasa* series - by Fareen Butt, a New York-based abstract pointillist. The series reference the writings of Suhrawardi, a Persian Sufi saint, that explore light, space and sound. The series consists of 101 paintings, done on gallery wrap canvas. Fareen's work will be featured at the Christie's auction house in November.

Commune, Karachi



Art Dialogue in Addis Ababa

A seminar titled *Art Criticism and Curatorial Practices in the Marginal Context* was hosted jointly by AICA Paris and Zoma Center of Contemporary Art, Ethiopia, in early 2006. From AICA Pakistan, its president, Nillofur Farrukh, was invited to contribute a paper to the three-day dialogue.

The focus of the seminar was to explore the movement of ideas and art between the dominant discourse and 'fringe' cultures, and the urgent need for an evenly balanced discursive space on the global level. The presenters from developing countries from Africa and Asia pointed to unresolved schisms created by the demand for conformity to the established standards of the West. This uni-linear reading by Western cultures, they discussed, has been responsible for a deep sense of alienation among a people that believe the authentic is located in their own culture and its art. A recognition of multiple cultural trajectories that accommodates the multiplicity and complexity of the local context could see the emergence of a multi-cultural interface beyond tokenism.



Commune, Karachi

NuktaArt in Dhaka

The 12 Asian Art Biennale Committee invited NuktaArt to launch the publication during its International Seminar on March 6, 2006. A presentation on the aims of Pakistan's first international magazine of Contemporary Art emphasized its objective; to strengthen art dialogue in the region, with countries that have similar concerns. The magazine was well received by art historians, art critics and artists from the 33 countries represented at this mega art event. Also present were members of the Bangladeshi art community who were delighted to learn that Zainul Abedin, a prominent artist whose legacy is shared by both Pakistan and Bangladesh, was extensively covered in NuktaArts's inaugural issue.

In Dhaka, NuktaArt will be available from the city's prestigious Bengal Art Gallery.



Fort Care

Today Sher Shah Suri's grand Rohtas Fort located some 16 km north-west of Jhelum, Punjab, is facing severe deterioration, as only a few of the original buildings remain: the 'baolis' (water wells), haveli Man Singh and a section of Shrimati Rookh Kumari's haveli.

Encroaching on the ruins is a small town that has developed inside the fort. Big enough to boast of ten schools and twelve mosques, it also includes a vast tract under cultivation.

Himalayan Wildlife Foundation, Ministry of Culture, Shell Pakistan, and National Fund have jointly launched a vigorous conservation program for the Rohtas Fort for Cultural Heritage.

The formal inauguration was conducted with an impressive sound and light show, sketching the reign of Sher Shah Suri. It is hoped that the show will be used as an added attraction in future to draw tourists to the restored historical site.

Shell Pakistan has been a generous corporate donor to the Himalayan Wildlife Foundation for the restoration of the Fort, but also needed is a concerted citizens' effort to restore its past grandeur. This can include the active participation of school and college groups to carry out small tasks like tree planting campaigns or washing off the defacements from the ancient walls.

It bodes well for the future of the Rohtas Fort, now that it has finally been declared a protected monument under the Antiquities Act 1975. A fine specimen of medieval military architecture in Pakistan, it was also inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997.



Rohtas Fort

A Gift for Art

Pakistan will get its first purpose-built National Art Gallery in November 2006.

After many setbacks for over a decade, today the gallery building is in its final stage and has emerged as an impressive repository for the nation's art. Located on the prestigious stretch of the national capital, Islamabad, it will be inaugurated with a series of curated shows.

The architect, Naeem Pasha, has designed a cluster of galleries on two floors around a central foyer. The galleries vary in size: from spaces with double-storied vaulted ceilings to less imposing medium-sized spaces. These gallery halls will serve as both permanent and rotating exhibition spaces. Two relatively smaller galleries have been dedicated to ceramic art and miniature painting.

The basement, with its well-equipped storage facilities, is expected to develop efficient support services to store, maintain and conserve the national art collection. The open-air sculpture patio, enclosed by the Honor Galleries for Masters on the first floor, offers a view of the scenic landscape. Also included in this cultural complex is an open-air theatre, a gift shop and a cafeteria.

Chamakpatti Art in Melbourne

Truck artists' gift from Pakistan to the 18th Commonwealth Games in Melbourne was a tram dolled-up in *chamakpatti art*. This highly skilled art, based on stencil cutting and layering of florescent tape, with its distinct iconography and brash color palette is integral to the embellishments seen on public transport vehicles in Pakistan.

Aptly called the *Nai Naweli Dulhan* (newly-wed bride), the tram, with its festive trappings and kaleidoscope of colors, offering songs of the all-time Pakistani favorite vocalist, Noor Jehan, was a cultural experience passengers will not easily forget. After its twelve popular days on the streets of Melbourne, the *Nai Naweli Dulhan* is presently looking for a permanent home in Australia.

This artists' collaborative project grew out of an idea conceived by Mike Douglas, head of the Cultural Transport Unit in Australia, and was co-ordinated by Durriya Kazi, Head of the Dept. of Visual Arts, Karachi University, with the help of Nusrat Iqbal and his team who are among the talented artists who create countless *chamakpatti*

buses and trucks for the streets of Karachi.

Chamakpatti in the Nai Naweli Dulhan



Art and the Missing Box

The packing box is central to Karin Dohler's art. She has innovated with it both as a mold and wrapped object in the past. At her show at Goethe-Institut Karachi, *Traveling Light - Boxed in Art*, she painted its unfolded surface and grouped folded ones in vibrant configurations.

One box, painted on the inside, was folded into its original form, weighed, stamped and posted to Pakistan so it would reach well in time for the show. But unlike the other traveling boxes that came in Karin's luggage, she kept waiting for the posted box. One could not help but speculate on the fate of the box. Did the post office chuck it in the garbage because it was empty, or perhaps it was trying to solve the mystery of the empty box?

Epilogue: It was learnt that Karin's box finally arrived just before the show came off, and was without doubt the most-traveled box of the entire collection.

VASL

International Artists' Workshop, 2006



Auj Khan



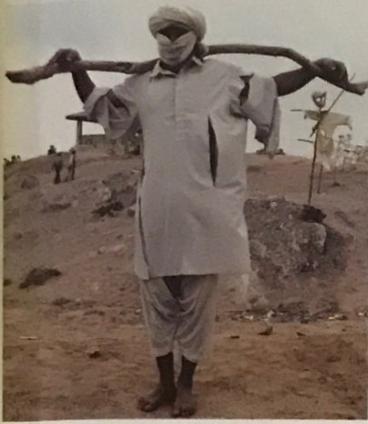
Vasl artists at Gadani

At the 2nd International Vasl residency in February 2006, some Pakistani artists and their international counterparts came together for two weeks of sharing of ideas, at the end of which the work they produced during the two weeks sojourn was opened to the public. The exhibit spread over a large area covering both the floors of the rest house as well as works *in situ*, created around the sands and rocks of the clear crisp waters by the Gadani beach. To be transported to view art outside the metropolis, about an hour and a half's drive from Karachi, the unpolluted blue waters at Gadani and its magnificent rocks, stood at once to overwhelm. Within this context, the issue that surfaced was the relevance or irrelevance of the life cycle of a work, as the preciousness of 'art' became easily moldable. Impermanence, if it did become one of the defining criteria for the making of the work here, lead to more obvious questions of the content and intent of art that was created within such close proximity to nature, and of the idea or concept overtaking the physical entity that we could touch and call 'art'.

There were varying levels at which each artist chose to connect with the landscape, while locating it within the parameters of her/his creative radius. The most challenging

aspect of such a short residency would be if the artists were able to transport work out of the studio and begin a process that could lead to the questioning of pre-established molds; and would such an intercultural interaction help alter or widen their outlook or approach over time? Perhaps, as we try and decipher the undercurrents, structural hierarchies and priorities for this and other residencies working under the umbrella of the *Triangular Trust (UK)*, it does seem plausible that the making of the work is quite irrelevant against the interactive process that has potential to be developed through the sharing of ideas and of past strategies. Were it possible, it would be educational to follow each artist's development following the residency and trace the shifts, even marginal, within their work and to look if there has been any significant impact of such programs within local structures over a longer time span.

When taking view of its immediate concerns, *Vasl* may be prompting Pakistani artists to seek newer routes, which is where lie possibilities for a dynamic change, but at the same time, also becomes a possible facilitator for nurturing a bandwagon of artists producing forced work, simply to enable themselves to be included in the international circle of more residencies and exchange programs to follow. What has already happened with alternate routes in the West is the danger to create focus so narrow that it verges on intolerance, and questions of *inclusivity* and *exclusivity* do immediately follow, which demand a deeper understanding. Moreover, when the framework within which the residency culture operates is based on an uncompromising shift, then there are questions if such directions will allow for the artist, who is part of a specific and different cultural heritage, to even look back and extract other forgotten or less (mis)understood patterns of creativity located within her/his own context. The dynamics that does operate within the indigenous past and present is of a nature and pace that takes shape due to the evolving socio-political changes and influences, often misunderstood to be static, of the past, and therefore, irrelevant. These cultural or ideological specificities should not be generalized as possessing characteristics seeking a 'global sameness', such as by those in the west where more dominant processes of artistic frameworks do reside. The work of Karachi artist Auj Khan at this year's workshop makes a good case for the use of the 'local' as a tool for an



Jamil Baloch

exploration that may be providing an 'interesting' and possibly 'exotic' work, as clearly visible from the structure - an installation of a fish silhouette with local, plastic, spray-painted flip-flops of a neon-orange color against the backdrop of the bright blue ocean. On one level, the formal qualities of the installation presented possibilities of a strong link of the artist and his material to the local bazaar from which this work was developed; yet why was the artist not able to take the work beyond its exotic impact to that of a dialogue of introspection? The "local" seems manipulated, or at best, slick. However, the video installation by Germany-based Lahore artist Hamra Abbas, of repeated images of the rocks at Gadani and its armed 'guardians', and other marching guards, marked a process that integrated both the immediate situation on site, and linked it to the larger context of the militarized state and security issues in the regional and global arena. Similarly, the understated computer generated prints by Indian artist Navjot Altaf, with the central rock at Gadani, and different

solutions of interaction with the large pink rock as recorded in conversations with the other residing artists, and two of the armed guards on each print, revealed the process of a strong conceptual intervention by the artist. It is almost like putting the artist in a completely new and unfamiliar situation and seeing what happens, if it does. In that vein, Quetta artist Jamil Baloch's series of scarecrows, with himself as one, led to wonder if the artist was perhaps unable to adjust to this framework. At this time we must ask if the artist must necessarily produce something, when for some this may be a narrow timeframe to 'produce' at all. It might be worth a thought that the workshop focus can become a series of lectures in which artists verbalize their thoughts based on the interaction of the two weeks.

The broader implications of the 'Triangular Trust' residencies in South East Asia seem to be based on the priority to explore 'other' cultures in their local settings through a carefully structured blending of a 'global' community of artists. Even if it may be too early to say, will such strategies, in the final analysis, provide for more and more open-minded creative energy, or become the basis of further appropriations, and grounds for international networking, threads of which can already be traced. There are many more related unresolved issues that do take root from here, but one lies in the hope that these concerns themselves will be altered over a longer period of time by such questioning that must come from artists.

Amra Ali

"When you go to the desert, there is nothing there, no hills, as in Europe, rivers, not even clouds... When you penetrate deeper in the desert, you discover what it is. It is not visible, it is abstract. It is the essence of the desert's nature that you feel", explains Yousef Ahmed, artist from Qatar, who knows the desert intimately and has made it the subject of his art. His collection of mammoth mixed-media paintings titled *The Languages of the Desert* share the name with what has been heralded as the first major show of Contemporary Arab Art to tour Europe.

For the visitor, the first visual impact of *The Languages of the Desert* exhibition at the Kunstmuseum, Bonn, from Sept.-Nov. 2005, and at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, from April to July 2006, comes from the site-specific calligraphic work on the wall. A careful reading of the work by Khaled Al Saai of Sharjah, reveals that it fuses classical tradition with the sensibility of modern painting and can be taken as a symbol of the ethos of the 21st Century Arab society.

The show, which sprawls over a large space, includes the work of twenty-one artists, both men and women that project the different trajectories of art in the Gulf Countries. Provocative both in its content and technological engagement, the artists while working within the cultural and historical framework, have created an art that is reflective of the rapid transformation in their social and physical environment. Mohammad Kazim's lens is turned to the concrete towers that are swallowing up the timeless sands of Dubai. In his *'From Windows'* series, he captures the concrete environment in straight-forward shots but the poignancy lies in his choice of subject like the builder's gloves lying forgotten in the sand and a lonely man, repeated like a motif. Photographed silhouetted against a window, standing in a balcony, the man's images resonate with a life lived away from loved ones, the lives of thousands of workers in the Gulf Countries. These works draw you into



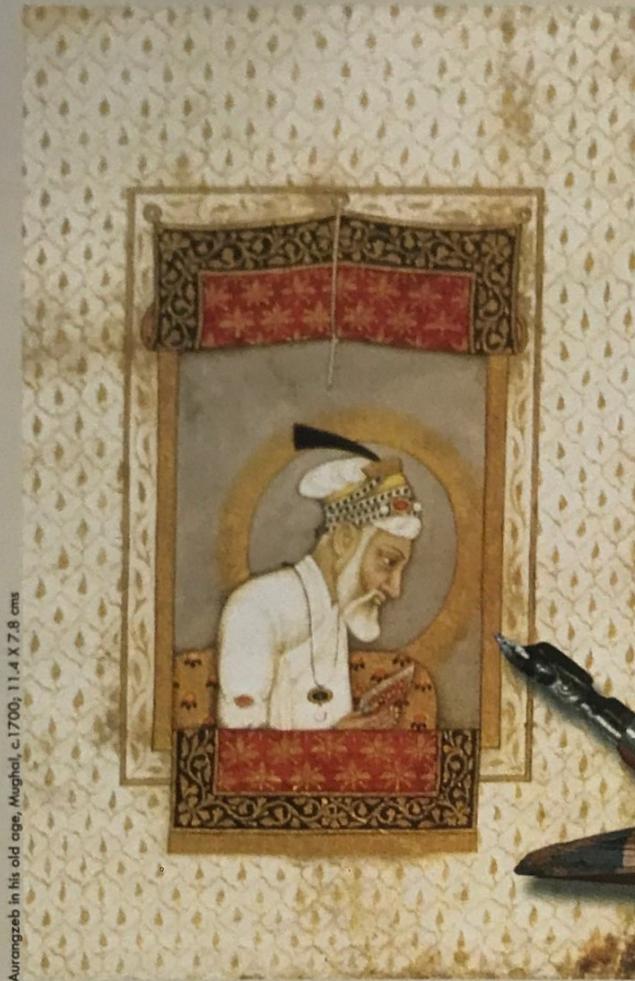
Mohammed Kazem, From Window 2003-05

Languages of the Desert

continued ►

Khalid Al Obeidi, Sand Dunes Show

By Rumana Husain



Aurangzeb in his old age, Mughal, c.1700; 11.4 X 7.8 cms

A Journey of Materials and Tools,
Processes and Practice

Miniature and Neo-Miniature

I have closely inspected posters and small paintings in the traditional miniature style, selling in Zainab Market, in Karachi. The paintings are on canvas, fabric, silk, and even *Pipal* leaves (*Ficus religiosa*) enclosed in decorative frames.

"Where are these made? Who are the artists? What are the materials being used?" I inquire for this article, which explores the many traditional and modern implements and methods utilized by breeds of conventional, hybrid, modern and contemporary miniature artists. However, I have been unsuccessful in extracting a straightforward answer from the shopkeepers who say only that the artists are anonymous but live within the city. As for the materials and tools used, they are not concerned with such mundane issues...

The Pakistani dealers have apparently not learnt to exploit the buyers. However, on a recent visit to India I came across hundreds of shops in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Udaipur in Rajasthan, where similar miniatures are sold. Dozens of artists sit inside and outside curio shops and churn out generic scenes: landscapes and belligerent hunting or fighting scenes of the Mughal and Rajput rulers. They also include stereotypes of elephants, camels, peacocks and horses - the revered animals of India - symbols of good fortune and good health.

While the grand forts and palaces of Rajasthani cities engrain an indelible mark on the traveller, these purely commercial miniature paintings too are tourist-pullers as they further affirm the sightseer's love for the exotic. Images of adorned elephants, dazzling forts on high mountains and Rajput men and women in fine apparels and ornaments are ubiquitous. From minuscule paintings of elephants on thumbnails to selling greeting cards and poster-size paintings, these 'miniature artists' have also decorated walls with murals and embellished doorways and entrances in the cities, particularly in Udaipur.

On inquiry regarding the materials used for creating the paintings on paper - pieces of colorful rocks are on display at all the workspaces - I am informed, "All the rocks are obtained from the surrounding mountains. Rubbing of the rock on a piece of wood or a slab of stone with some water brings out the pigment, which is then applied to the drawing." The artists insist that their pigments are only from natural sources. However, their students can attest that this is not always so and the use of chemical paints is on the increase.

One such student is an Australian woman who is doing a six-month miniature-painting training in Udaipur. She confides, "The bit about natural materials is a popular selling tactic. The artists take short cuts and use chemical colors as well. I am also taught to use a mixture."

Tracing the history of manuscripts, we learn that palm leaves have been the most popular writing materials historically in India. Manuscript writers used iron stylus for incising text and patterns on their surface while knives were used for trimming and erasing. Paper, which was invented in China in the 1st century, came into general use in northern India as late as the 13th century.

In regions under Muslims extending from Turkey to Persia, the first examples of illustrated text came much later than

the evidence of early figurative painting found in fragments of wall paintings, textile designs, and painted ceramic pieces. This was either because the introduction of paper to the area came later, or paper deteriorates so much more quickly than other products. The earlier illuminations accompanied



Elephants painted on thumbnail and greeting card in Udaipur



Guards of all varieties at the entrance to the City Palace, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

translations of Greek scientific works into Arabic. These were illustrated with miniatures in brilliant colors, sometimes against a background of gold. Animals painted together with elaborate and intricate designs, often depicted accounts of the beasts and the medicines extracted from them. Originally a physician to the Caliph in Baghdad compiled this scientific knowledge in the 11th century. Two centuries later it was translated from Arabic into Persian and illustrated with 94 delightful miniatures.

From Turkey to Mesopotamia, from Persia to India and Pakistan, examples of surviving miniatures include medical discourses, travelogues, animal studies, scenes from hunts, battles, and the royal court. A few are based on personal and political commentaries.

Post Mongol invasion after 1258 brought the influence of Chinese painting and many miniatures painted in a linear style began to appear. The artists utilized light, feathery brushstrokes to apply delicate tints. At first the old Mesopotamian style illustrations and the new Chinese style miniatures came into view side by side in the same texts, but from the mid-fourteenth century the blend became so complete that a new style emerged. This fusion represented the basis of Persian miniature painting.

The Muslim conquest at the end of the 12th century introduced into India the Persian tradition of court patronage to ateliers of book production. Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin

Akbar (1556 -1605), who was a great patron of the arts, established a vast studio.

The art of the book refers to the manuscript (text), illustration (figural and scenic documentation or painting), illumination

to play in Turkish miniature painting, which was full of life and action, thus different from the magical and captivating dream world of Persian miniatures.

Indian miniature is categorized with reference to different



Lokeshvara, from a Ashtasahasrika manuscript, Pala, c.1175, Opaque watercolor on palm leaf

(embellishment with abstract design in gold and other colors), calligraphy (fine writing) and binding (decoration of the cover). The term *miniature* does not refer to the size of the finished work, but rather, it is a concern with minute detail and a two-dimensional drawing style. The challenge is to translate the image into fine line drawing and, in the process, to flatten it out. More often than not, illustrations or paintings made in the Mughal ateliers were collective undertakings.

(1.) "A handful of pigeons pecked at the heap of eggshells. The yolk had been extracted from them to be mixed with gum and stirred to form a yellow pigment. Rotting leaves drew flies. The servant poured a cup of resin and then started to beat the mushy leaves with a spoon till they turned a lush green. Empty jars stood ready to be filled with fresh paint."

This passage from *The Miniaturist* - a novel - presents intricate details of opulence and colorful references to Mughal miniature painting.

The Ottoman Sultans were also great patrons of the arts, with work of very fine quality being executed under their aegis. In the 15th century, Turkish painting was characterized by a dynamism and realism which was absent in Persian art of the period. This was the time that some miniature painters began to sign their works. The most famous of all was Behzad (1440-1514), whose style was more dramatic than that of other painters of the age, showing an interest in the individual and in the affairs of everyday life. Romance had little part

schools: Pala, Orissa, Jain, Mughal, Rajasthani, Pahadi, etc. These schools are products of conservatories cultivated over generations and their varied locations explained by the changing sources of patronage due to shifts of political power. The 11th century Pala miniatures were the earliest to appear. Their symbolic use of color, in particular red for backgrounds has come to be associated in subsequent tradition with sensual and passionate longing.

The use of pure colors and heavy gold outlines in Jain miniature is reflected both in Rajasthani and in Pahadi painting. Miniature painting came into great prominence in the 16th century under the Mughals and the Muslim kings of Deccan and Malwa, as under the Hindu Rajas of Rajasthan. During the two-hundred year colonial British rule in India, the Indian miniature tradition was mutated in 'The Company Painting.'

(2.) *The officers of the East India Company, living and working in what were called 'mofussil' postings in the provincial fastness of the land, bought Company paintings for the families and folks back home.*

From the late 18th century on, Calcutta grew to be a booming center of Company Painting, but this adaptation of the miniature painting was weakened when art schools opened by the British laid emphasis on Western tools and techniques. Art education as a whole got a Western orientation. Materials changed; oil paint and canvas was used instead of natural colors and traditional handmade paper - *tasli* or *wasli*. Manuscripts containing miniature art were taken apart and

the illustrations relegated to museum walls.

Now reintroduced by the miniaturists from Lahore, Pakistan - Neo-Miniature is a contemporary revival of miniature painting. Making its presence felt since the 1990s, it forms a powerful case for the continued relevance of traditional art forms by dismantling the hypothetical dichotomy between old and new. The protagonists of 'neo-miniature' have recaptured the rich hybridism of the miniature practice. The content, the approach, the context, the materials, the tools and the processes may be different and new but it is the technique that ties it together.

In the newly created independent Pakistan, Abdur Rehman Chughtai (1899-1975) modernized the tradition of Indo-Persian miniature - (3.) *"He revived it as a new incarnation, and it had a grand life until Partition,"* writes Akbar Naqvi in his book, *Image and Identity- Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, and adds, *"He created his own history and art from the skills and materials of his age. He drew according to the European method; learnt application of color from another source with decided inventiveness and originality. He was very partial to materials made in England and used only the best British paper, paint, and brush. His painting was a radical departure from the Indian and Persian miniature tradition of the past, but still within its history."*

With the emergence of organic chemistry, a new discipline in the mid nineteenth century, benzene-based compounds - aromatics, formed the source of many synthetic dyes. Aniline dyes, with great color intensity, were easy to use. German, French and English chemists developed these dyes and patents flourished.

Regarding the colors used by Chughtai, Naqvi says, *"Chughtai claimed that the colors fixed on his paintings could not be washed away by several immersions in water. What we notice in the paintings are the subdued hues, and the painter's preference for monochromatic tonality. The trace of immersions in water hangs over the paintings as an ineffable veil. His process, whatever it was, had to be mysterious, magical, and ritualistic."*

Ustad Bashir Ahmed, who has headed the Miniature Department at the National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore for several years, has been instrumental in facilitating the revival of miniature art with a contemporary course. Bashir Ahmed started his career as an apprentice under the tutelage of traditionalists Haji Sharif, who came from a family of



Sumaira Tazeen

I visit Sumaira Tazeen at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi (IVSSA) and ask her about the materials and tools used during her own training at the NCA. I also want to know whether she expounds the same while teaching at the IVSSA.

Tazeen says that she had a strictly traditional training in the techniques of making a miniature - from preparing the "authentic" wasli paper, which is grain-free and smooth, and is created by combining four sheets of water-color paper, to making the brushes and mixing the paints. She imparts the same expertise to her students.



Traditional seating in the miniature department



Madder

Gum

Tesu

The glue, mixed with copper sulphate to guard against insect infestation, is for pasting the paper, one on top of the other. Tazeen elaborates that instead of using pulp-made paper, which is not acid-free and yellows with age, she prefers to use rag-made (fibre) paper, which has more strength and is more durable. To burnish the surface of the paper a large cowry lies near Tazeen's feet. She wields another burnisher, "a gilder's tool" which has an agate on one end.

Gum arabic or keekar or babul ki gond is used for joining paper to make wasli, as well as for mixing and binding the colors. Calligraphy pens, sharpened pencils and seashells are some of the other tools.

"Miniature painters always mix their watercolors in seashells. It is the most convenient container to use and can be stored in a small box." Tazeen then adds, "But we use only a few vegetable dyes now as chemical colors are readily available."

Sufaida or white color is an essential material for a miniature painter. A thin white coat - *astar* - of white lead is treated with gum arabic medium. Tazeen explains that the pigment from white poster color is extracted by separating the gum and binder in a fifteen-day process. I ask why pure pigment cannot be bought to avoid such rigmarole, to which she says that by applying this particular technique students learn how materials are deconstructed and purified.

Creating the right brush is an important part of the miniaturist's expertise. "We use squirrel hair to make our brushes. Squirrels breed fast and shed their tails. They do not have to be killed to obtain the hair. Each hair is sorted and inserted in a pigeon quill. Bamboo or reed is used for the handle and the quill is secured at its end with a tape."

The meditative quality of working slowly and patiently in the personal format of a small-scale painting can completely immerse a miniature artist. The intimate manner of working with the materials while being seated on the floor, resting the *wasli* on a raised knee, allows the artist to enter a world that blocks out the cacophony of the mundane...

Materials, Tools and Processes



wasli



Cowry



Tools



Sufaida



Seashells with paint

court painters to the rajas of small hill states of the Punjab, and Sheikh Shujauallah.

Bashir Ahmed later learnt from Zahoorul Akhlaque, who took over as head of the Fine Arts department of the NCA in the mid eighties and whose influence reached the new exponents of miniature, including well-known names such as Shazia Sikander, Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid, Nusra Latif Qureshi and many others.

The Miniature Department, which started in 1982 and had just one or two students, now, almost quarter of a century later, has several hundred graduates. They are taught to use traditional materials and tools: vegetable dye, dry pigment, watercolor, precious and semi-precious stones like agate, rock crystal, lapis lazuli or jade, gold leaf, and tea on traditional *wasli* paper. Some of them keep to the manuscript-page scale and format of traditional miniatures.

Some artists, like Imran Qureshi and Kazim Ali have increased the size of the *wasli*. Imran Qureshi and a few others like to use yellowing pages from old books and collage components to the otherwise sanctified *wasli*. Shazia Sikander, Nusra Latif and others have used digital technology to expand their exploration of the miniature. Aisha Khalid, and more recently,

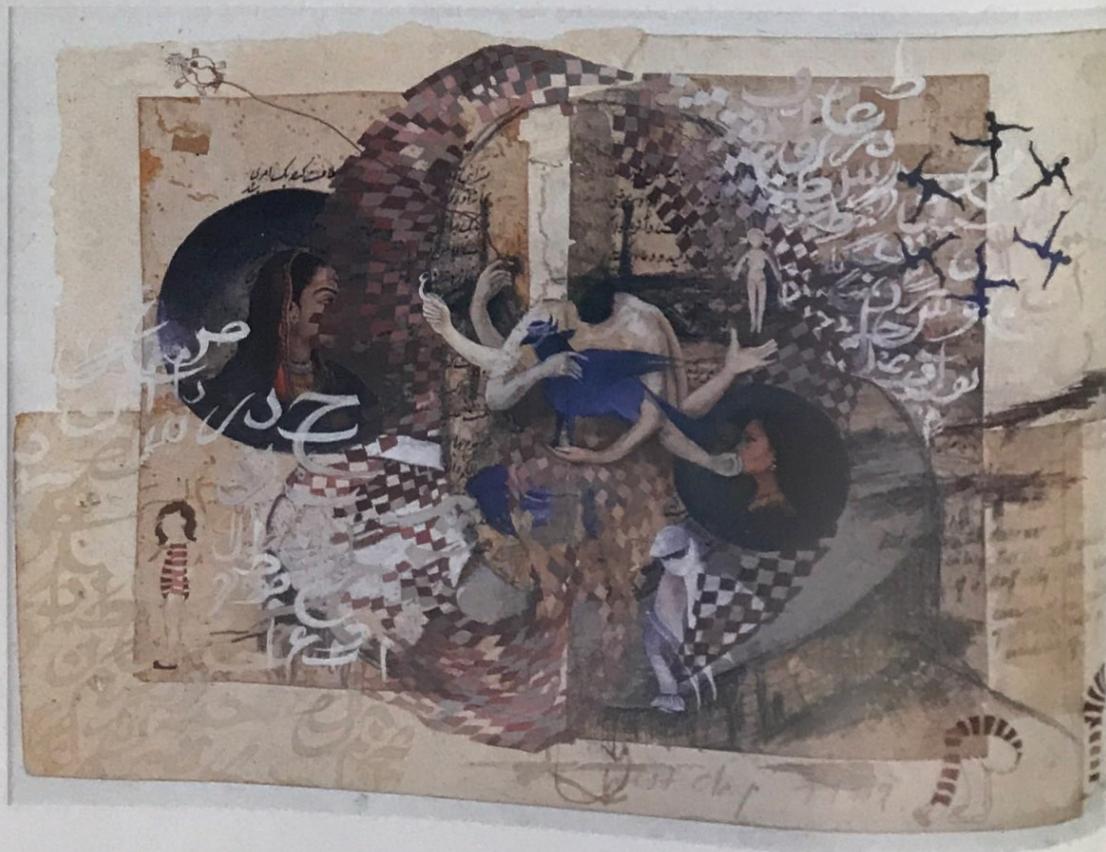
Talha Rathore embellish their miniature painting with stitches, embroidery and fabric.

The link and continuity of traditional process may still begin with specialized training in old techniques such as *sona balkari* (application of liquid gold), the *Lahori khat* (a regional style of Urdu calligraphy), or the use of beaten silver and gold foils. It could also entail catching a squirrel for its tail hair to making a brush, and spending hours to burnish the *wasli*, but there are profound changes in the artist's social reality, which impact on the content, the approach, the context, as well as the implements used. Perhaps today's urban-based neo-miniaturists may be ill equipped to use *peori* (yellow) from fine sediment that is separated from the urine of cows, fed only on mango leaves or use tiny cuttings of beetle wings to painted jewelry for creating an effect of encrusted emeralds! Nevertheless, the Pakistani protagonists of Neo-Miniatures are even using animation or creating installations constructed from found objects. Their experiments with diverse materials, tools and processes will continue...

Shazia Sikander

References:

1. *The Miniaturist* - a novel by Kunal Basu, George Weidenfeld & Nicholson, March 2004
2. *The Art of the Book in India* by Jeremiah P. Losty, The British Library, London, 1982
3. *Image and Identity- Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* by Akbar Naqvi, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1998
4. *Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments* by Francois Delamare and Bernard Guineau, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers
5. *Indian Miniature Painting* by Anjan Chakraverty, Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd., 1996



by Michel Boivin

DEVOTION

AND ICONOGRAPHY:

THE FIGURES OF POPULAR PIETY IN THE INDUS VALLEY



Shop selling posters etc.

One of the first things a foreign traveller observes in Pakistan is the dynamism of pictorial production. Pictures are everywhere: on walls, on trucks, on buses... Books, and even documentary films have been devoted to this genre of public art.

This paper though, focuses on a more controversial specificity: the popular iconography related to devotion. The use of the word 'devotion' is meaningful and it will not be restricted to the Sufi image. Other forms of devotion, such as Shia devotion or Hindu devotion will also be included. Crossing the so-called religious barrier seems to be the better way to evaluate the iconographical legacy of the province of Sindh; knowing that it mirrors the diversity and the treasures enshrined in its culture and history.

The topic of devotional iconography did not deserve much attention! In South Asia, one can find many publications on the Mughal or Rajput Miniatures but popular iconography is not seen as a fine art. This paper therefore wishes to give a brief introduction to this popular art. The first part will be devoted to general information related to the perception and the creation of these images. The second will introduce the main figure of the posters of the wise man, in the form of the Sufi. However, due to paucity of data and the complexity of the question, one cannot find definitive statements on these matters.

Usually the specialists do not even use the word 'iconography' for coining the posters. It looks like this word was to be used only for 'noble' art. From Grecian origin, the word 'icon' only means an image. Iconography is consequently the study of various figurative representations. Although in Pakistan one could also find it on trucks as well as on some rickshaws, the most common shape of popular iconography is the poster on paper. It is interesting to note that contrary to miniatures, there is no precise and unique word used for this production. Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont use the word 'stamp' (French *estampe*) with the meaning of 'printing

on paper' (Centlivres et Centlivres-Demont 1997: 11). In Pakistan, different words are used for the stamps: *manzara*, *taswir* or *sindri*. The most common word is nevertheless *poster-e-dini*, or religious stamps (prints).

The stamps are chromolithographies on paper, with different formats ranging from 7 x 5 cm up to 80 x 62 cm. The most common format is however 20 x 25 cm. The different sizes of the posters come from the different uses. The smallest are to be kept in the pocket, while the middle range ones are to be hung on walls at home. Most of them are produced in Punjab, and a few in Sindh. *Dargahs* are the main places around where a few shops sell such posters. There are also specialized shops in different bazaars of Karachi, like Jodia Bazaar, which mainly sells different kinds of Quranic calligraphies, footprints of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), representations of Mecca, and other sacred places of Islam. These shops mainly sell non-figurative stamps. In South Asia, it is to be noted that the stamps are often used with the narration of the storytellers. In Peshawar for instance, they are sold in



the Qissa Khwani Bazaar, which is the bazaar of the storytellers (Centlivres et Centlivres-Demont 1977: 17). Another interesting point is how people react when asked these questions. They state that these are not real representations but only products of the imagination.

It is difficult to know the origin of the figurative representations because industrial processes now produce them. Nobody seems to know where the models and patterns come from, or when they appeared in the market. In the French colonies of North Africa, it is probably due to the influence of the famous Images d'Epinal.³ In Turkey and in Egypt, popular iconography is said to have appeared in the markets at the end of the 19th century, although their mass production really began in the 1940s. In the Indian subcontinent, it is possible that the production developed with the coming of the first press. Lithography appeared in Karachi in 1853, but there is no evidence that it was also used for printing these posters.

In his work on the mystical imagery of Algeria, Zaim Khenchelaoui put forward the hypothesis that these posters can also be understood as an indigenous resistance against colonization. The French governor of Sub-Saharan Africa (Khenchelaoui 2005:14) forbade them in 1908. Though nothing allows us to draw a comparison with South Asia, there is another important query: was the *poster-e-dimi* influenced by European religious figures? In the second half of the 19th century, the Christian missionaries distributed many pictures of Jesus, and other Christian religious figures. It is possible that the indigenous posters were printed in response to this challenge. A sharp study of the composition of the representation would be necessary to go further.

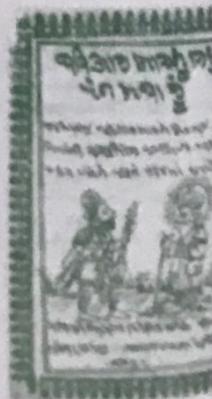
It is true that figurative representations are condemned in Islam, not by the Quran but by some *Hadiths*. This interdiction was nevertheless twisted by the miniaturisation: this process meant that the real was not created, not even represented as such. Miniatures were mostly a profane activity, although there are different samples where the Mughal emperors are

drawn in the company of Sufis. However, it does not seem that a real miniature tradition has developed in Sindh, even if some Sufi masters used to be pictured before the advent of photography.⁴ The closest miniature production was in the princely state of Kutch. The *raes* (wealthy) of Kutch used to be represented, but in the typical Mughal posture of the half-length portrait. Moreover, as we will see, the stamps of popular iconography do not follow this pattern.

On the other hand, it is well known that the cult of the icons is a main feature of Hindu devotion. In Sindh, popular iconography appears for instance in some *pothbis*, or booklets published in the 19th century. They were usually related to religious or folkloric topics, such as the story of *Sassi and Pannu*, and also local deities like Udero Lâl. The pictures look to be drawn only for decorating the first page of the booklet. No color is used, and the drawing of the character is done in a typical naïve style.

It is finally to be noted that vision is a key concept of Hinduism. The *darshan* of the deities "brings good fortune, well-being, grace and spiritual merit to the devotees, especially if they go to the temple early in the morning just after the deities have woken up" (Fuller 1992: 59). It is believed that the deities also see the

Lithography



followers. In Hindu iconography, Shiva is in particular often represented with a third eye in the center of his forehead, from which his terrific powers flow. There is, to a lesser extent, a concept of vision, or *didar*, in some Islamic traditions like Ismailism, Bohraism and Sufism. But this is the interior vision, the spiritual organ by which one can be taught the esoteric knowledge from a master.

Signs - in either script form or poster form - nowadays

saturate big cities. Moreover, political leaders in Pakistan use photography as a political instrument. Every rally organized by the MQM shows big posters of its leader Altaf Husain. Some Shia communities also use the portraits of their religious leaders, like the Aga Khan - the leader of the Ismailis, or the Syedna - the leader of the Bohras. Consequently, though it is not possible to trace the origin of devotional iconography, it is obvious that it appeared and developed in a context where figurative images were everywhere. Around the *dargahs*, the popular stamps are sold with other objects, like necklaces or bangles, as well as amulets. It is then obvious that the representation of the saint is supposed to help and to protect. It is believed by some that as a saint, God chose him, and that through his mediation the deciple is protected. Buying a stamp also means to be pious.

Every representation is personified by a specific posture and gesture. Pierre Centlivres qualifies the aesthetics used in the stamps as "realistic-naïve" (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1997: 17). In some cases, the posters seem to have been reproduced from photos. Thanks to the new techniques of printing, including offset, some pictures have been modified through different processes. Consequently, the variations related to a single picture can be countless.

In the pose of a wise man or a learned man, is by far the most common picture. It can be found in a number of representations, but it is most of the time suitable for Sufis. It is to be noticed that some Sufi masters now sell their own photos instead of the traditional posters. In the bazaar of Sehwan, one can buy pictures of Nader Ali Shah, the *zinda pîr* of the Pathan Kâfi. One of the

oldest images is in Sehwan Sharif: it is lithography of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. It is interesting because this representation looks like a miniature, although it is not possible to know when it was drawn, but probably at the beginning of the 20th century. The saint is praying on a prayer rug with a rosary in his hands and his white beard informs us that he is old. The inscription at the bottom of the colorless picture states that he is Hazrat Sakhi Shahbaz Qalandar. Interestingly,



the present representations of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar are quite different in composition. It is possible to understand that this picture could be seen as a kind of transition between the Miniature school of drawing, and the popular iconography as it is presently known in Sindh.

There is a lot of variety on the representations of the master of knowledge. He is usually a Sufi saint, although we can also find some Hindu deities or heroes, with a great number of them linked to the Sikh tradition. Among the Sufis, there are usually three basic elements: the central character, a building, being most of the time his *dargah*, and finally scriptures. All the scenes are strongly colored in blue, green, yellow or red. The other elements (which we will call the secondary elements), are used to identify a specific tradition to which the Sufi is attached.

One can note that there is a variety of Islamic referents. The Quran can be seen in a poster of Mohammad Haji Ganj Bakhsh. The saint is praying, with the Sacred Book on his knees, while he is looking at Sain Pir Rahman, who looks to be his main follower. The most common posture of the Sufis is nevertheless to stay kneeled down with the rosary in the hands. Other basic elements of the poster are the Kaaba in Mecca and the green dome of the Prophet's mosque - *Masjid-e-Nabvi* in Madina. Among the scriptures, there are two categories: the first allows us to know the identity of the saint, and the second category is made of religious sentences, mostly borrowed from the Quran. The *shabada*, or *kalima*, is by far the most important. Others are limited to interjections like "Ya Allah" or "Ya Muhammad" (pbuh).

It is possible to draw a typology while considering different topics. The Sufis on the posters are more or less famous in the country. The famous Sufis of Punjab are usually pictured in a standard and rigorous mood. Baba Farid Ganj Shakar and Imam Bari Sarkar are located on the left side, kneeling down with the rosary in their hands, while their *dargahs* are on the right side of the poster. Although these pictures are strong in color, one can note that the simplicity of the representation contrasts with other more recent posters. This second category is by far the most in number. Pir Meher Ali Shah is represented sitting on a prayer rug, with the rosary in his hands and a somewhat mysterious smile. The picture is divided in two equal parts: he stands on the right, while

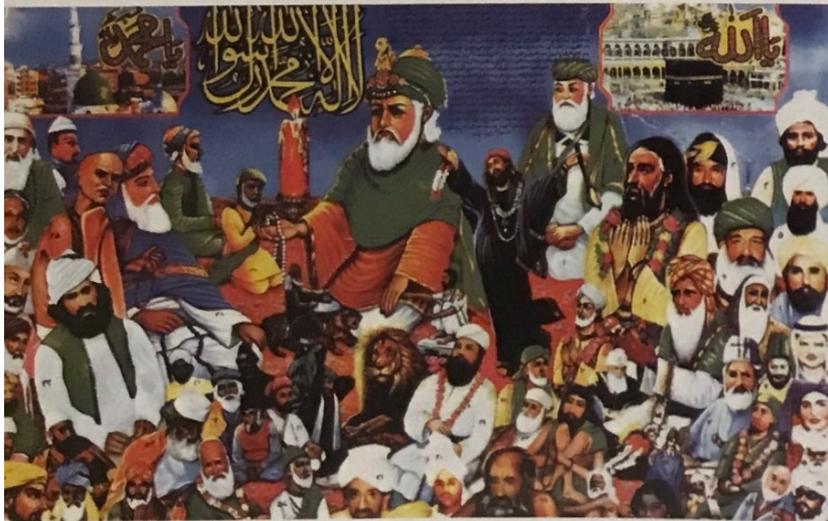
his *dargah* of Gotara Sharif is on the left.

In some cases, the descendants, who are the present *sajjada nashins*, surround the Sufi saint. For example, Sultan Bahoo (1631-1691 A.D.) is represented with *sajjada nashin* Pir Tariqat Hazrat Mahmud Amir Sultan, as well as others among his successors. In the same mood, some posters depict a complete narrative on the saint and his family. The whole composition of the poster is meaningful: it looks like an act of appropriation by the heirs. Who are finally the persons who manage and control the printing of the posters? Is there any copyright? In this case, it is obvious that the heirs of Sultan Bahoo use the posters to inform people, and to prove to some extent, that they are the ones in charge of the pilgrimage center.

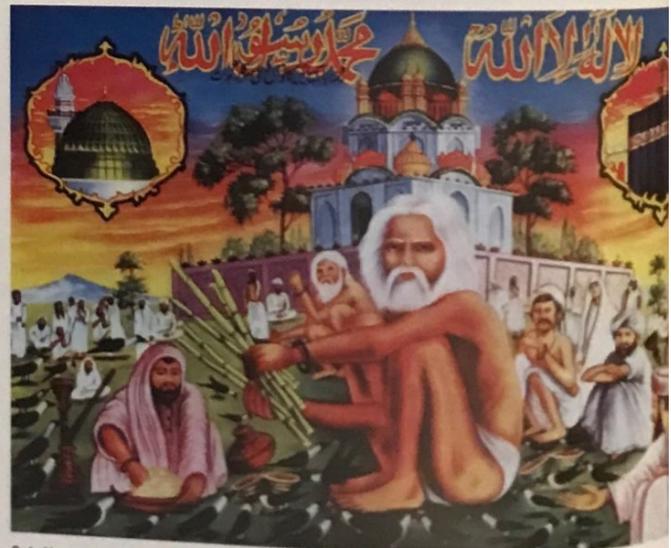
Another very popular poster picture, Ghaus Pak (the sacred refuge), is also known as Ghaus ul Azam (the great refuge). It is a *laqab* for Abdul-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166), one of the most famous Sufi saints of the whole Muslim world. Interestingly, he is the only non South Asian Sufi saint to be pictured. In the 12th century, he was the founder of the *Qadiriyya Silsila*, which is up to now the most powerful Sufi brotherhood all

thanks to his *karamaat*, a boat emerged from the sea with all the passengers miraculously safe. Abdul Qadir Jilani lived in Baghdad on the Tigris, but the river could be understood by his followers as the Ganga or the Indus.

Two posters are more difficult to categorize. The common element is that the saints are represented almost naked, like Sayyid Lal Badshah or Kanwanwali Sarkar. Sayyid Lal Badshah is clean shaven and he is very thin: one can see his bones. The landscape behind him is that of high mountains, while a lion is sitting at his feet. Kanwanwali Sarkar from Gujrat has long white hair and he is feeding crows that surround him.⁶ The almost naked Sufis remind us of the Shivaite tradition in which nudity is a key symbol of renunciation. The absorption of Hindu elements shows to what extent the Sufi tradition was indigenized. The integration of these elements never distorted the Islamic message embedded in Sufism, but it allows the Sufis to deliver a message, which could be properly understood by the local inhabitants, knowing it was expressed with symbols they are used to dealing with. Another difficult question arises: why have some famous



'Timeless conclave' of 57 Sufi saints



Sain Kanwanwali, the 'saint of the crows' (Gujrat)

over the Muslim world. Many South Asian Muslim communities, like for example the Memons, are said to have been converted by a descendant of Abdul Qadir Jilani who settled in India. Although there are different pictures that always depict the miracle in which, according to legend,

Sufi saints not been represented at all, while others are; either by virtue of unique posters, which are always the same, while some others are represented by different posters. For the first case, it could be that the managers of the shrines do not allow drawing a picture of the saints. For the second and

the third questions, the answer could be in the study of two cases that will allow us to form a hypothesis: Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. There is only one picture of Shah Abdul Latif. He is sitting on a prayer carpet under a big tree (it is not possible to see if it is a very big tree or two separate trees). The scene seems to be on an island, because it is surrounded by water with many lotus flowers. Near him on the left side is the *tanburo*, the stringed instrument he created. On the bottom, there is the *shabada* in big letters, colored red, and "Madina mubarak" written below on the left side. On the right is the Kaaba. I could not identify the cupola that stands just below the *shabada* though according to the poster tradition it should be Shah Latif's *dargah*. If that is the case, it could represent an old *dargah* because the present one does not look like this: the cupola is not green but white. The architecture can be coined as 'Sindhi style', while on the poster, the cupola is in a more neutral style. Finally yet importantly, the most surprising is Shah Latif's posture: he is sitting on the prayer rug, but his legs are crossed, which is a very uncommon posture in the Sufi posters. He is said to have travelled with the company of Kanphata Yogis. Therefore, could it be a reminiscence of

want to satisfy the different tastes of the clients. One of the specificities of The Qalandar's posters is that they utter a narrative related to his most famous acts, some of them being miracles attributed to him. The two main features are his flight and his dance. Usually, Lal Shahbaz stands on the right, either praying on a rug with the rosary in his hands, or praying with the Quran on his knees. On the left side, and in a smaller size, he is shown dancing or/and flying through the air. The most current inscription is "dama dam mast qalandar" - a chant that was popularized by a song in the 1960s.

Another very popular composition in Sindh represents Lal Shahbaz Qalandar with Shah Abdul Latif and a saint from Badin wearing a typical Sindhi ajrak. Only the name of Lal Shahbaz is inscribed, although the *dargah* of Shah Latif is pictured in the background. The three saints are nevertheless represented with the same format. The last composition, which appears in 2005, shows Lal Shahbaz with Bodlo Bahar.⁷ Could it be that the *sajjada nashin* (heir) of Bodlo Bahar's *dargah*, maybe the one to order this new composition.

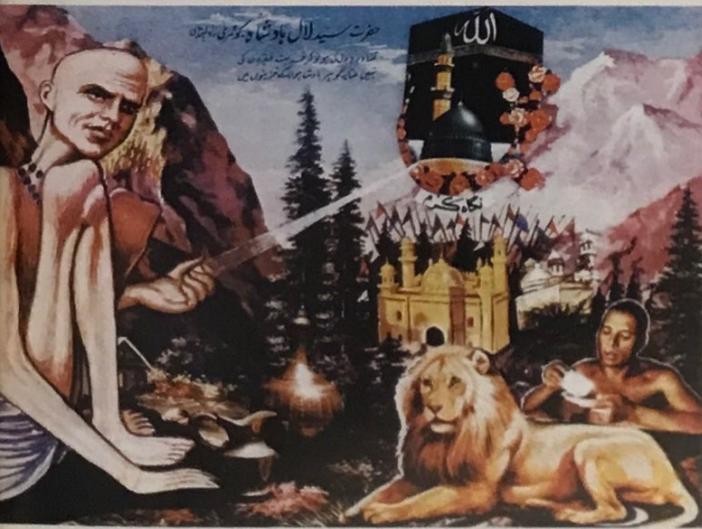
A few shops specializing in *poster-e-dini* can be found on the bazaar of Sehwan Sharif. Sufi posters are mixed with the Shia ones. In one of them, I could find the *dargah* of

Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. One can note that the circulation of the posters through India and Pakistan is limited, while a majority of Shia posters come from Iran or are reprinted in Pakistan.

Among the different Hindu communities in Sindh, it is obvious that iconography is an ancient tradition. The paintings can be on paper, textiles or even on walls. Udero Lal is mainly represented with two positions: in his youth as an equestrian, and as a wise man when he was elderly. However, in Hindu religion, the worship of the representation (*smriti*) of the deity is a main practise of the faith. Here, the images are icons. Pictorial representation plays a secondary role in the worship. In fact, the statue is the most important and 'best' representation of the god. Like in ancient Egypt, the statue of the god is regularly taken out in processions through

the city, so that the followers can see it.

Two other Hindu pictures are very close to Udero Lal as an equestrian: Ramdeo Pir and Pithoro Pir. These two deities, like Udero Lal, are also worshipped in Rajasthan and Gujarat.



The ascetic Qalandar saint Baba Lal Shah (Muree hills)

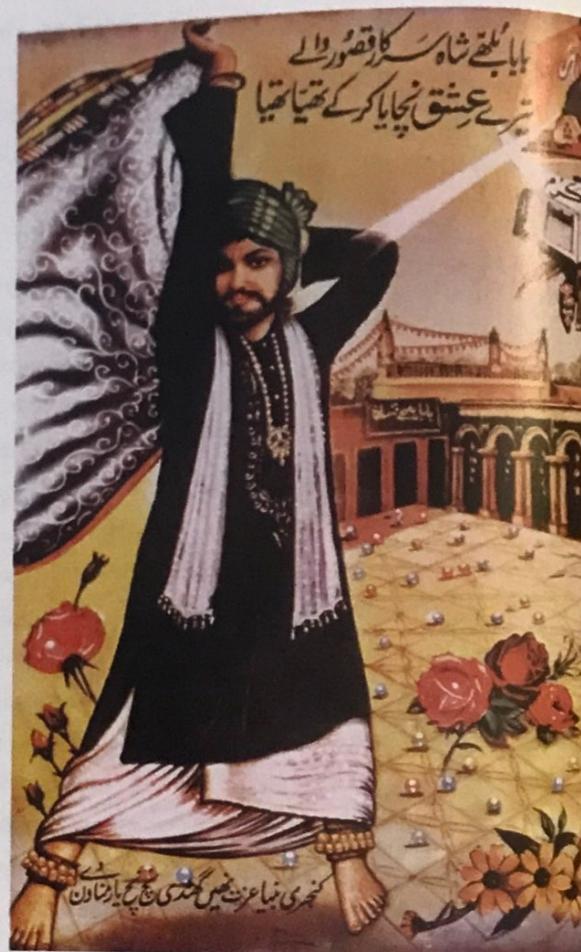
a yoga posture?

The case of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is quite different. Every year, it is possible to find a new poster in the bazaar of Sehwan Sharif. Due to the popularity of his *ziyarat*, one is allowed to think that there is a big need, and that the publishers

Like in the case of Abdul Qadir Jilani, one can note slight changes in the representations. They are related to the color used, but also to the background which is either a landscape or a walled city. The "divinized heroes", as Chris Fuller calls them, were obviously historical figures, who were Hindus or Muslims. The case of Pithoro Pir is very significant. According to the official tradition related by the present pir, he was a Muslim Sufi who was initiated by the famous saint Bahauddin Zakariya. Even if some Muslims can now be numbered among his followers, his disciples are mainly from the Meghwar community.

This brief paper is devoted to popular iconography as an expression of piety, but we notice that many areas remain ignored, as up to now these posters are not understood as a cultural or artistic production. Beyond the expression of the devotion, it is obvious that popular iconography reflects the way by which groups or communities utter a discourse on them, and while doing this they convey their status inside the local society. This discourse is uttered according to local aesthetic rules, which are usually shared by both Muslims and Hindus. It should be remembered that Hindu artisans could work for Muslim patrons, and Muslim artisans could work for Hindu patrons. A detailed study will be conducted later on the secondary elements like the animals, the attributes, the inscriptions... It is therefore not surprising to find common symbols, colors, and even topics. It seems however that the main distinction between the two traditions comes from the function attributed to the posters. In Sufi and Shia contexts, the picture is a support for piety and devotion. It is obvious that there is also a magical power attributed to the Sufi saint and to the Imam who are supposed to protect and heal the people. Though we can observe a great variety of roles given to the pictures, they obviously have patterns in common rather than real icons. They were probably more influenced by European pious imagery than by the Mughal tradition of Miniature Paintings. The scenes described in the posters usually depict both daily religious practises, like prayers, and extraordinary actions performed by the saint, like miracles. This dual function allows the followers to look for the mundane as well as the celestial world.

Images courtesy: Michel Boivin



Baba Bulhe Shah dancing in rapture (Kasur)

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

1. Boivin, Michel (2003), "Reflections on La'li Shahbaz Qalandar and the management of his spiritual authority in Sehwan Sharif", *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol. LI, n°4, pp. 41-74.
2. Boivin, Michel (2005), "La figure du fakir dans l'Inde britannique: historique d'une représentation orientaliste", *School of Advanced Studies for Social Sciences, University of Paris*, unpublished paper.
3. Centlivres, Pierre, Centlivres-Demont, Micheline (1997), *Imagerie populaire en Islam*, Genève, Georg Editeurs.
4. Centlivres-Demont, Micheline (1976), *Popular Art in Afghanistan. Paintings on Trucks, Mosques and Tea-Houses*, Graz, Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt.
5. De Jong, Frederick (1989), "The Iconography of Bektashiism. A survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical object and pictorial art", *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4, pp. 7-29.
6. Fuller, Chris (1992), *The Camphor Flame. Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India.
7. Khenchelaoui, Zaim (2005), *L'imagerie mystique dans le folklore algérien*, Alger, CNPRH.
8. Syed Ashfaq Ali, Lieutenant Colonel (1994), *The Saints of the Punjab*, Rawalpindi, Pap-Board Printers.

by Amra Ali

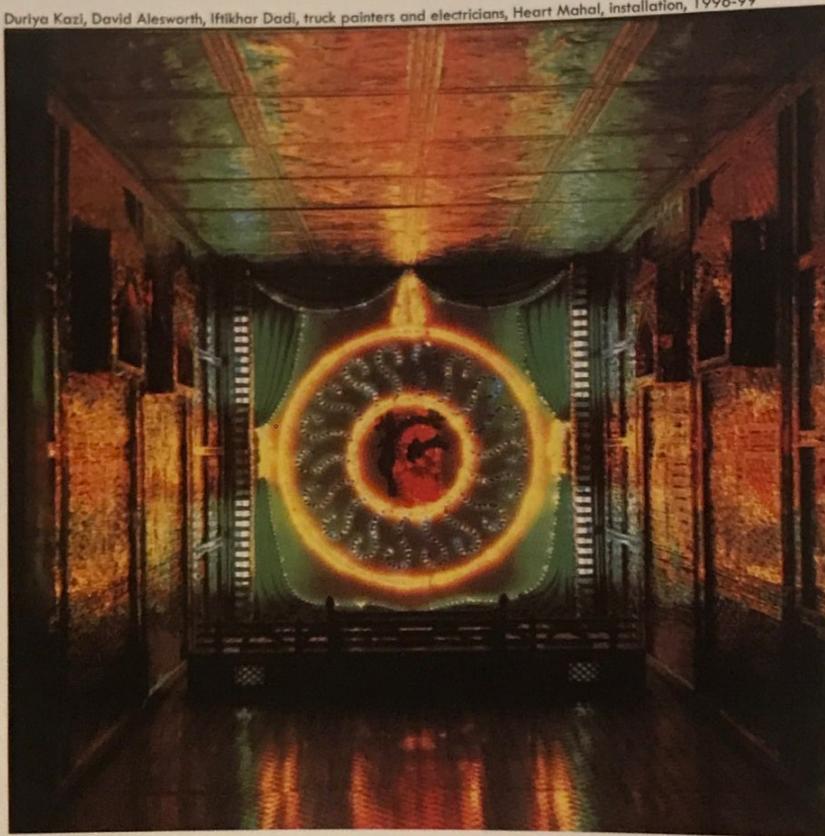
but have brought with them a transformation in the cultural fiber that has led to the present state of contradictions in terms of attitudes towards aesthetics and a confrontation between the 'traditional' and the 'contemporary' as it exists and operates within the specificity of art-making in Pakistan. Functioning on a multilayered existence, these layers unravel

a generation trying to grapple with the dilemmas of identity both within Pakistan, and of new identities of the displaced and the dislocated, all of which remains saddled with the colonial mind set.

Conscious efforts to detach from a historically significant past and to seek a denial of its validity to current artistic practices appear to be some factors that have contributed to the surfacing of the dilemmas of identity and possibly also of an identity crisis. As a result the dichotomy that surfaces can be seen as a symptom or condition, but also as

Marketing to

Duriya Kazi, David Alesworth, Ifrikhar Dadi, truck painters and electricians, Heart Mahal, installation, 1996-99



a global audience: new

art in Pakistan

trajectories in contemporary

The mapping of new directions (and hence of new traditions) evolves out of a process of cultural conditioning that is the structural basis of attitude and viewpoint. A viewpoint that seems to be located within the postcolonial construct acknowledges the significance of gaze as an integral factor that contributes to the nature of artistic practices and readings of it. The issues that are the outcome of the socio-economic and political developments of the recent past have shaped not only the artistic sensibility particularly in the third world,

a point of celebration of contradictions. That is if we are able to decipher the influences and the undercurrents that shape it and pose the challenge of looking at the self from a 'gaze' that is free from stereotypical pin-holing and a resistance to producing a 'package' that can gain validity within the domain of the western metropolis. The location of the self has become more complex with newer trajectories that have been rooted in a western hegemony coming in when the 'foreign' educated returned to teach at the country's

art schools especially during the early 90s and since. Many other interconnected factors have brought in a deep sense of alienation and of a disconnect of artists with their particular socio-cultural environment, having posed new questions in the validity of art and its interpretation with regard to the specificity of 'context'.

The visibly marked shift in gaze since the 90s now appears like a second coming and could be identified as one of the key elements that has contributed to the existing schizophrenia, although the process of indoctrination of foreign ideas and intervention with the introduction of western art history in art schools had begun in the 60s. Nilofur Farrukh writes that the advent of Modernism must however be

seen as a continuation of the politics of cultural interference in South Asia. Systematic meddling by colonial powers through overt and covert means during the British Raj had eroded the craft base and mutated Miniature Painting into the Company School of Painting. Marginalized and misrepresented, the collective cultural legacy was being erased from the Indian mind. The critic sees the advent of Modernism of 'post-Partition artistic synthesis as the intellectually motivated decision of free citizens, symbolizing freedom, progress, nationalistic zeal, and a search for

identity for a new nation', and cites the problems that came with the 'initiative to de-hegemonize'. 'Eurocentric art scholars could not appreciate works outside fixed notions, privileging one-way appropriations: all non-European works had to conform to categories of the exotic or the derivative. The canons of European Modernism were simply not open to accommodate multiple modernisms.'[1]

The concerns of the new Modernists through the years leading to the 70s and up until the 80s remained linked to an ideology of plurality, and from Allama Iqbal's vision of *Kbudi* (ego, self, signifying individualism), encapsulating a new freedom for the individual as well as for the new nation on the eve of its independence. Western Modernism was internalized as a supportive force to the ideals and context of the emerging socio political equations. Bashir Mirza's 'expressionistic' brush strokes in his *Black Sun* series stemmed from here, as also translating the anguish of a nation at war. Sadequain's satirical



Company School, detail



Sadequain, detail, oil on canvas



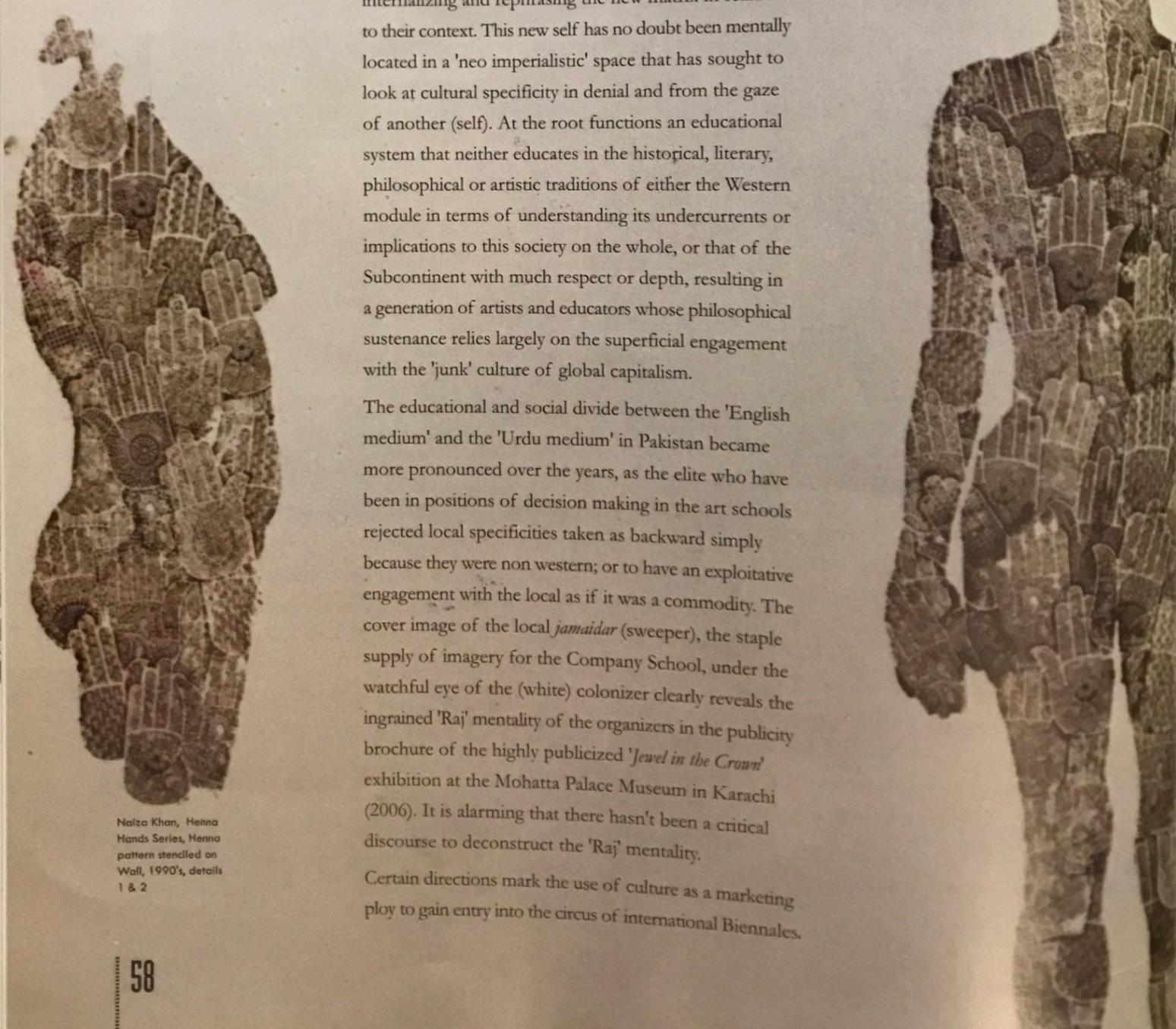
Bashir Mirza, acrylic on canvas, 1999

works, displaying bleeding fingers and a truncated head with a crow's nest, and his imagery inspired by the Gadani cacti, were frenzied expressions of an artist connected very much to the 'land' and its socio-political reality.

There has been an ongoing process of assimilation of multiple identities within local art practices, but the new trajectories that have come to surface more recently due to the result of newer ideas and imported ideals pose questions related more specifically to a clear shift in focus of audience and market; of marketing a certain kind of art that will easily fit a specific mold and expectation of a targeted consumer; it seems that artists who did seek this route were consciously indifferent to internalizing and rephrasing the new matrix in relation to their context. This new self has no doubt been mentally located in a 'neo imperialistic' space that has sought to look at cultural specificity in denial and from the gaze of another (self). At the root functions an educational system that neither educates in the historical, literary, philosophical or artistic traditions of either the Western module in terms of understanding its undercurrents or implications to this society on the whole, or that of the Subcontinent with much respect or depth, resulting in a generation of artists and educators whose philosophical sustenance relies largely on the superficial engagement with the 'junk' culture of global capitalism.

The educational and social divide between the 'English medium' and the 'Urdu medium' in Pakistan became more pronounced over the years, as the elite who have been in positions of decision making in the art schools rejected local specificities taken as backward simply because they were non western; or to have an exploitative engagement with the local as if it was a commodity. The cover image of the local *jamaidar* (sweeper), the staple supply of imagery for the Company School, under the watchful eye of the (white) colonizer clearly reveals the ingrained 'Raj' mentality of the organizers in the publicity brochure of the highly publicized '*Jewel in the Crown*' exhibition at the Mohatta Palace Museum in Karachi (2006). It is alarming that there hasn't been a critical discourse to deconstruct the 'Raj' mentality.

Certain directions mark the use of culture as a marketing ploy to gain entry into the circus of international Biennales.



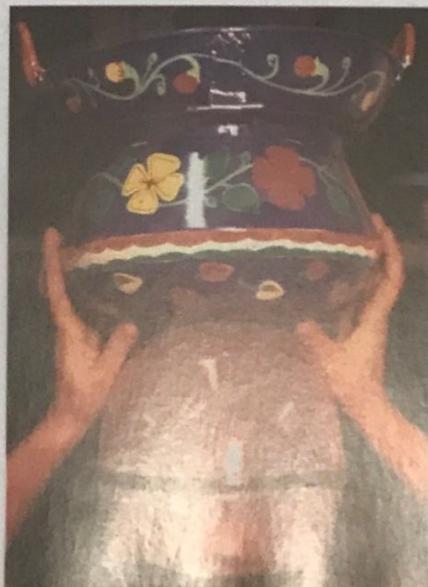
Naiza Khan, Henna Hands Series, Henna pattern stenciled on Wall, 1990's, details 1 & 2

Interventions such as the collaborative work of visual artists and truck and cinema billboard painters, (*Heart Mahal*, '96, '99, *Arx-e-Maood*, '97, *Very Very Sweet Madina*, '99) that had the potential to engage new audiences at home, and to explore the popular in art and the popular as art, might have raised new issues at home, but perhaps the need for cultivating newer audiences on the international forum was greater. Many other artists, like Adeela Suleman, who has done installations with discarded and found objects collected from Karachi's local markets, have shown mostly to audiences outside Pakistan; thus engaged with the local only to the extent of appropriation, the emerging parallel initiatives disregard the relevance of a significant critical discourse at home. Self-censorship and stereotyping appear as the most devious participant of the artist's gaze, also visible in the '*Henna*' series, '90s (life size silhouettes of the female figure, decorated with henna patterns) by Naiza Khan. Questions such as what is the artist's own conceptual intervention and location are revealed amidst a clutter of derivative approaches. By relying on a 'conformist' formula, the work negates its own validity. Similarly, the network of residency culture seems to be dictated by a global oneness, thus becoming initiatives of exclusivity with heavy funding bodies located in the West; they automatically



Duriya Kazi, David Alesworth, *Very Very Sweet Madina*, installation, 1999.

'the (western) art market that declassifies national artists, or at least subordinates the local connotations of the work, converting them into secondary folkloric references of an international homogenized discourse'.



Adeela Suleman, installation, Brisbane, c 2000

marginalize others whose works do not fit into their mold of expectations. They seek to 'de-territorialize form and encourage artists to adapt to different 'global' publics. The art fairs and Biennales also contribute to this multicultural game'. [2] The result of such an exploitative dynamics is that such systems at home imbibe 'the (western) art market that declassifies national artists, or at least subordinates the local connotations of the work, converting them into secondary folkloric references of an international homogenized discourse'. [3] As the chain of demand and supply to a new market is underway, a new dynamics comes into play at home: the marginalization of artists taking the more lateral route.

"Other" agendas and interventions can be seen as subtle, but racist tools of manipulation serving the interests of another consumer. In 1988, the South Asia Solidarity Group outlined this approach: "*Like Orientalism it seeks to define our culture for us. It tells us that it is about saris and samosas, melas and traditions. That it is complete and of the past, passive and unchanging and finally that it is something that need only be recapitulated.*" [4]. There is, therefore, a constant two-way manipulation and propagation and construction of what could be termed false, or imagined identities. '*Pakistan, Another Vision: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture from Pakistan*', was the largest exhibition of Pakistani Art

in recent years, curated by Timothy Wilcox, held at the Brunei Gallery UK in 2000. The criticism that followed in Pakistan was why it was necessary for a Western curator to do the selection for a show of such magnitude. Why wasn't there a co-curator from Pakistan? Was that the only way for art from Pakistan to gain legitimacy in the West? In the absence of state sponsorship to the arts, artists are hungry to gain access to the metropolis. The state has its own agendas of projecting the 'correct' image. At the same time, we may also ask why western curators are unwilling to walk the extra mile and educate themselves before they come to unfamiliar environments such as ours.

Situated amidst these conflicts, the Neo Miniature may seem to support the manipulation of an 'exotic' identity. But the work of Aisha Khalid and Mohammad Imran Qureshi from Lahore has in fact been able to explore new configurations that acknowledge the traditional South Asian framework narrative. The impact of these pioneers on future directions may open new possibilities whereby the artist may neither be looking to the Western module, or remain fixed within traditional 'constraints'. Khalid's preoccupation with the iconography of the typical 'image' of the veil and Muslim female, subverts the new conventions of exploitation, especially by the Western media post 9/11. In her work, decorativeness becomes a pictorial device, and also a defiant political statement. Seen from the local context, the work at first is an acknowledgement of a historical past. On another level, it refutes 'tradition' by developing/discovering its own directions as well as each artist searching for his/her individualistic direction (or stylistic identity); and therefore not wanting to merely recapture the richness of a past tradition long dead. Most miniaturists will put a signature, which is

incidentally inscribed in Urdu, both a gesture of cultural specificity and a detachment from the holds of the past. The ceramist Sheherezade Alam (70's, 80's), whose approach was shaped by the Sufi traditions of the Subcontinent, however, did not sign her work. 'The perfect picture needs no signature', comments Orhan Pamuk, and weaves a story that discusses issues of 'style' and 'signature' as 'means of being brazenly and stupidly self-congratulatory about flawed work'. [5] Qureshi marks the points of possible attacks by the U.S., and of new territories of colonization. The recurring image of the scissor encapsulates a broader concern for the rearrangement of boundaries and ideals. If Khalid's work opens questions of gaze and aesthetics, Qureshi's politically

charged iconography confronts questions and location of viewpoint. "Miniature painting is like expressing yourself in Urdu," notes Imran. [6]. The work of Khadim Ali, originally from Bamyan, Afghanistan, explores the East-West connect within a more piercing and direct iconographic framework. In his reference to the 'Quaid', the first lesson of the Urdu primer being taught at *madrassas*, "Alif", "Bay", "Pay" (ABC), stands for "A s l a b a "



Sheherezade Alam, clay works, c 1980s

(ammunition), "Baarood" (gunpowder) - having replaced "Aam" (mango), "Bakar" (goat), and so on - of the past. Khadim's family, who still lives in Bamyan, says that their children will be killed, if they were to learn about apples and oranges. Similarly, Aisha's video, *Stitching, Unstitching* (2005), shows two hands in two frames, one brown, embroidering a red rose; the other hand, white, simultaneously unstitching the same pattern.

Not to say that work cannot be reinterpreted in new contexts, Neo Miniature remains at the risk of being critically engaged with only at the level of the Diaspora. Hence the Western approach that places work from the South Asian Diasporic



Aisha Khalid, *Conversation*, video, 2002

artists into one category leaves a narrow space for indigenous or local concerns to become relevant. The question of belonging or of containment, becomes relatively marginalized, if not irrelevant, its significance blurred in an environment that is increasingly under pressure from a fixation to fit into a 'trans national' mold that seeks conformity, uniformity and standardization, all in the name of 'Development' and 'Globalization'; a constant and continuing negation of the indigenous context, which has raised issues such as: what is the 'indigenous', the 'traditional', the 'local' or that which may appear to border on the 'nationalistic'; a negation that has altered the perceptions of the self towards issues of 'authenticity', thus informs the emerging dynamics of contemporary directions in art in Pakistan.

References:

1. Nilofur Farrukh, *Decolonizing the Spirit*, Art India, Prodon Entreprises, Mumbai, vol. ix, issue iv, 2004
2. Nestor Garcia Cancilini, *Remaking Passports: Visual Thought to the Debate on Multiculturalism*, Third Text, Kalapress, London, 28/29, 1994, pg. 168
3. Shamim Ahmad, *The Art of Mystic Figuration*, Sadequain no. 1961, Pakistan Publication, Karachi. Reprinted in the *Holy Sinner*, 2004
4. Nestor Garcia Cancilini, *Remaking Passports*, Third Text, 28/29, 1994, pgs. 141-2
5. Tania Guha; Mrinalini Mukherjee, *Labyrinths of the Mind*, Third Text, Kalapress, London, 28/29, 1994, pg.168
6. Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001, pg. 80
7. Timothy Wilcox, *Contemporary Miniature 1999*, Pakistan, Another Vision, Arts and The Islamic World Ltd., London, 2000



Imran Qureshi, pigment on wasli, detail, 2005



Imran Qureshi, pigment on wasli, detail, 2005

Khadim Ali, pigment on wasli, 2005

