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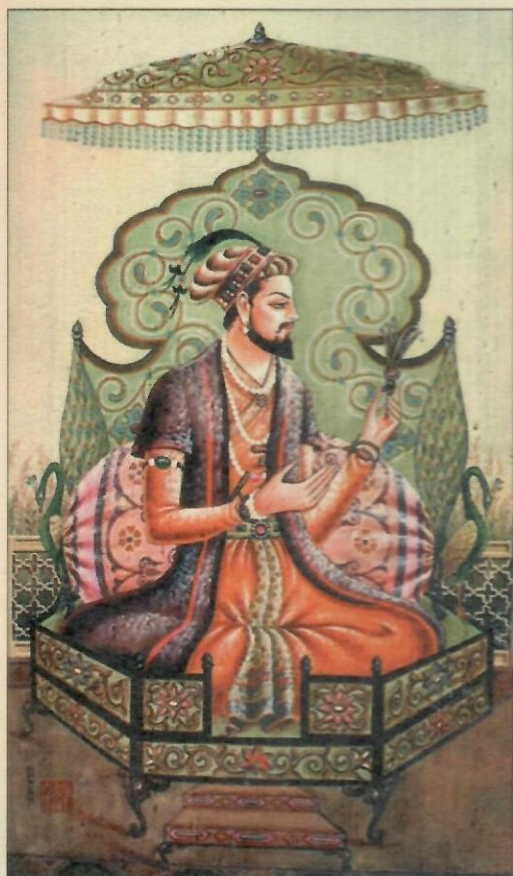
# SHE

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# THE NEW AGE LOOK

WE'RE BRIGHTER AND BOLDER

## ART OF THE PAST AND PRESENT



Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal : Painting on silk by Mariam Saeedullah

When paper was introduced to the subcontinent in the 14th century, artists were freed from the restrictions of the narrow palm leaves used as manuscripts, and, encouraged by the Moghul rulers, were influenced by a Persian format of album painting.

Unhampered by caste restrictions, the aesthetically enlightened rulers developed the brilliant **School of Moghul Miniature** painting which considered and assimilated elements of Chinese and eventually western art to produce an art which was totally of the Moghul era. Each ruler added some quality uniquely his own to the Imperial studios.

**Akbar**, young, imaginative and fond of adventure and fantasy stories, had his artists and scribes write and illustrate epic adventures. **Jehangir** the lover of nature, had his master artist Mansur illustrate the unusual flowers, birds and animals that interested him.

The leisurely, aristocratic lives of the nobles and their families were reflected in the

contents of the paintings. The appreciation of the sophisticated court style, spread to the provincial courts of the Hindu rulers. The great Emperor Akbar's generous and tolerant cultural outlook led to the production by court artists of two ancient Sanskrit epics, the **Mahabharata** and the **Ramayana**, which Akbar had translated into Persian.

Raja Man Singh of Amber commanded Akbar's armies when they conquered Orissa and Assam. He was the Governor of Kabul, Bengal, Bihar and the Deccan and the brother-in-law of Akbar's son Salim. From this Rajput-Moghul alliance was born **Shah Jahan**.

A fascinating style of miniature art were the **Ragmala** (garland of Ragas) paintings, visual interpretations of classical music. All known surviving examples of this art were painted between the 16th and the 19th centuries in Rajasthan, the Deccan, the Ganges-Jamuna plains or the Pahari regions. Of the hundreds of ragas known in music, only

**The artistic traditions of the subcontinent are among the oldest and most richly varied in history. Perhaps the most prized are the various schools of miniature paintings, from the 11th century continuing up to the 19th century.**

**MARJORIE HUSSAIN**

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a fraction were used in Ragmala painting.

The most frequently used were illustrated in albums throughout the centuries. Devotional ragas to be played in the mornings or the seasons were often painted according to the patron's personal preference.

Interpretations popularly fell into three categories. They portrayed the divinities and their consorts or the nobles and their ladies, either devotedly together or separated and lovesick. Subtle and symbolic, the

paintings hold none of the overtly erotic qualities often found in the early art of the subcontinent. The third group portrays the activities of the patron's lives.

Ragmala paintings ceased to be a living art with the decay of the feudal system and its culture and the growing influence of the west in the 19th century.

About this time artists began to emulate miniature paintings on ivory. Imaginary portraits of the famed consorts of royal rulers and the beautiful court ladies, found a ready market among the British residents.

With the emergence of Pakistan, miniature relationships in the world she finds surrounding her. Powerful, uncluttered and painfully candid, the paintings evoke an atmosphere of unspoken desperation. Painters including the distinguished artists **Shaikh Sugullah** and **Haji Sheriff** reproduced masterpieces of the past in their effort to keep the art alive. The enchantment of the art of miniature painting still prevails.

Recently at the **National Exhibition of Paintings** held in Islamabad, extraordinary paintings were produced by the students of the **National College of Art, Lahore** using a miniature style.

One, a vertical map of Lahore, another showing the workings and layout of a palace consisted of numerous miniature compositions combined.



In Karachi, a recent exhibition by **Mariam Saeedullah** focused on the Moghul rulers and their love of pageantry. Painting on a large scale, Mariam portrayed hunting scenes, feasts, and royal ladies at their leisure.

The artist has studied the period in great depth and attempted to bring authentic elements into her work. The costumes, even the colours favoured by the nobles, jewellery architecture, utensils, and costumes are all part of Mariam's collections. Painting on silk, she uses a

method she was taught at the Oto Shute School of Art, Japan from where she graduated in 1960. Working under the guidance of the renowned Japanese artist **Aria Shorie San**, Mariam won awards for her brush work of the Sumi-e tradition. The artist paints on silk using a method of steaming the organic colours into the material which ensures the durability of the painting.

In complete contrast was the painting debut of **Rooha Ghaznavi** recently held at the **Indus Gallery**. Known in Karachi circles for her talent as a photographer, Rooha reverted to her earlier love of painting, showing a collection of approximately thirty-five paintings.

The results of years of observation and conclusion, Rooha journeyed far beyond the camera to portray women's lives and their Without the comfort of a Feminist ethos, they depict the anguish of the psyche in isolation.

Using acrylic paints on paper as her medium, Rooha uses a disciplined palette of tonal contrasts. Startling areas of white add to the drama of her approach. In the traditions of Frida Kahlo and Paula Mandherson-Becker, Rooha offers a revealing and moving glimpse of a woman's world without the gloves on. ♦

Above : Haji Sheriff at work  
Below : Painting by Rooha Ghaznavi at the Indus Gallery

