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Marjorie Hussain reviews the exhibition at Amin Gulgee's gallery and writes about the promising future of Pakistan as observed at the VM Art Gallery.

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CRICKET FEVER

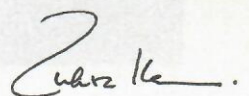
The world cup semi-final played between India and Pakistan stunned the entire nation and broke many hearts over Pakistan's team unexpected defeat at the hands of rival India. The defeat dampened the week long excitement of the whole country, gripped in a high-pitched cricket fever. The young, old, men, women and children alike prayed for victory of the Pakistani cricket team which had won more importance than the final of the World Cup 2011 tournament.

The cricket fever reached its unprecedented heights on the day of the semi-final, as people made special and elaborate arrangements to watch this historic clash of the cricket titans on the streets, at homes, offices and numerous public places. The entire nation was glued to the television sets while work remained suspended in homes, offices and at workplaces after 2 p.m.

A historical moment was observed when Prime Ministers of both the countries came on ground to greet the members of both the teams. It all seemed in good spirit and showed sportsmen spirit. Winning the toss was the first lucky sign for the Indians who seemed to have an edge playing on homeground. The hopes remained high and emotions charged till the national team players bowled the Indian team out for a reasonable total. Wahab Riaz was appreciated for his magical spell, due to which even the dropped catches by Pakistani fielders were forgiven. But, Tendulkar once again proved to be the lucky mascot for the Indian team.

When the Pakistani team started batting and players like Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razzaq got out, it became quite indigestible for people who had been involved in every ball of the game. Thousands of text messages were forwarded with prayers amongst friends and acquaintances in hopes of a miracle. Some tempers flared and the emotions started to take a different turn from one of admiration and support to criticism and dismay. Live television anchors began emphasizing that it is a game and the result should not be taken emotionally.

The whole nation anticipated the victory, from an ulema to a politician, from a taxi driver to a little boy on the road – everybody seemed to be on the same ground. India's victory over Pakistan may have left us low, but, what if Pakistan would have won this match? Past history of Pakistan's victory over India anywhere in the world proves that the reactions in India have been most unpalatable. Pakistan becomes a bogey and the Indian Muslims suspects. Thinking on those grounds one dreads to imagine the fallout if Pakistan would have won in India in the semi final and then go on to play the world cup in Mumbai! The backlash of the public reaction in India may have damaged the diplomatic gains between the two countries, possibly maiming the Water Accord coming through. The result could be fortuitous perhaps for both nations.



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Imag(in)ing Cities

THE AMIN GULGEE GALLERY

MARJORIE HUSAIN

The Amin Gulgee Gallery recently hosted a splendid and sparkling happening in coordination with SPARCK – Space for Pan-African Research Creation and Knowledge. In the exhibition titled Imag(in)ing Cities, Kadiatou Diallo and Dominique Malaquais joined hands with Amin Gulgee to curate an extraordinary display of video installation work by 54 artists from Africa and South Asia. Eight of the participants were Pakistani artists while the contribution of the African diasporas came from many parts of the world.

Starting from Amin's rooftop garden, participating artists present in the country were invited to meet the curators and the resident writer Stephane Gerard. Gerard who hails from the Cameroons, is an art writer who has written an extensive history of the art in that region. The French version of the book is currently available, but it will hopefully be translated into English in due course.

The three curators worked tirelessly to put the event together and invited what appeared to be a generous number of guests from Karachi art circles on several occasions, to view what in its entirety was a five hour programme.

SPARCK was founded by the artist and academic Kadiatou Diallo and Dominique Malaquais in 2007. It is a Pan-African initiative of experimental multi-disciplinary residencies, workshops, symposia, exhibitions, performances and publications centred on ethically driven approaches to urban space. Dominique was a fellow student with Amin at Yale University, and the two friends with much in common have kept in touch since that time. Amin Gulgee has been in touch with SPARCK since its inception and with characteristic altruistic enthusiasm, called upon the talents of some of the country's leading video installation artists and photographers.

The epic event was described as 'intimately linked to SPARCK projects that explore social, cultural, economic and spiritual ties between the African and Asian continents.'

Eager to view the display of video, sound and photography, I arrived at Amin Gulgee's gallery few minutes early and without distraction began to explore the exhibits, and there was much to see. The show started from the ground floor throughout the gallery and the adjacent room, before moving upstairs to a lengthy gallery. There were benches and earphones arranged before each video, offering an opportunity to enter the experience of the diverse artists. There was too much to elaborate on at length, each item full of impact, but one was deeply moved by the video of Stacy Hardy of Cape Town, South Africa, whose story titled 'I love you Jet Li' was largely filmed in the waiting room of an airport. It recounted the sad love story of a young woman who after numerous let downs looked back on the succession of disappointments that had been her lot. Actually, the film was so affecting that I had to slip away from the distinguished company and quietly sort out my thoughts on this rare and remarkable glimpse into other lives.



Opou Javeri



Adroa Mindrekolo



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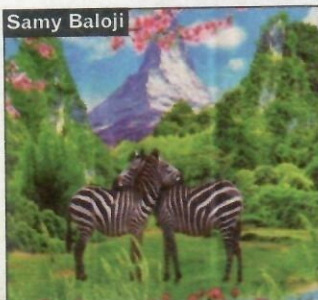
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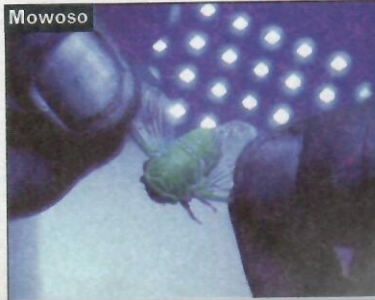
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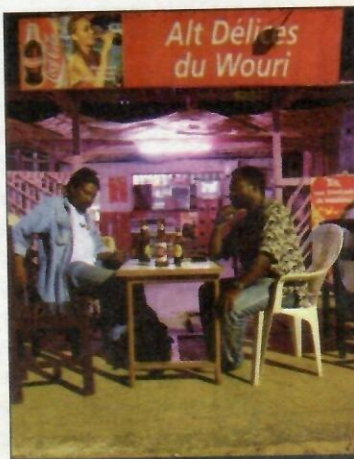
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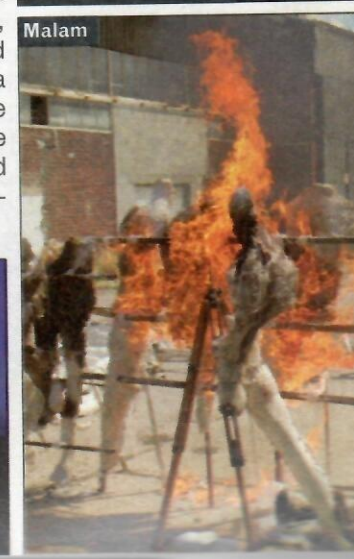
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Salifou Lindou Christian Hanussek



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Malam

EMERGING TALENT 2011

VM ART GALLERY

The ninth Emerging Talent, ET 2011, exhibition held at the VM Art Gallery, was a welcome addition to the exciting art and culture events that have taken place in Karachi recently. It offered a glimpse of the promising future of art in Pakistan with individual viewpoints fearlessly expressed. From 14 art institutes located throughout the country, came an interesting ensemble of mixed media expression. The young artists explored new ways of working, not only painting and sculpture, but expanding into new areas including text based art, digital works, video installation, as well as acrylic and oil paintings, ceramics and sculpture of a very high standard. The effect of new technologies has provided artists with ways of making new art and have also changed the way we view the world. One discovered in the work of the embryonic artists an adventure reaching realms of matter and spirit in a cacophony of method, style and media.

In recent years, there has been a considerable flowering of talent emerging from every province of the country. Sadly this year, there were no contributions from Peshawar, which in previous times has been a lively centre of art activity, with several active artists' studios, and a well staffed and equipped fine arts department at the University. The talent cannot be denied, though now the customary annual exhibitions paying homage to S.S. Hyder are mounted in Islamabad. One is confident that in times to come, that aesthetic ambience will again prevail.

Today's artists address personal and socio-political issues that concern us all; they are documenting history while examining the present and the past. Regarding the work of the young, one thought of the icons of the past Picasso and Braque who revolutionized art with the words: 'Art is no longer needed to be an imitation of the world around us', a remark borne out by the individuality of the fresh graduates. Concepts change with time and one recognizes traditions that women fought to have accepted as art, stitching, patchwork, and countless skilled aesthetic expression through colour now comfortably melding the needle with brushwork. Among the exhibits on display, the work of students from the National College of Art, Rawalpindi campus was outstanding, and one must give due credit to the faculty who gave us a new generation in the tradition of the NCA. The art institutions that made the event possible are situated in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Quetta, Jamshoro, Bahawalpur and Multan.

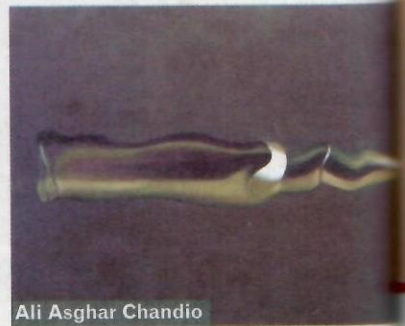
The Emerging Talent exhibitions are keenly awaited every year, justifying the enormous work load carried in the process by the director and staff of the VM art gallery. Eager to view the expression of a new generation, audiences of art enthusiasts flock to the event, a plethora of red dots proving their enthusiastic response to a perfect opportunity to add to their art collections. 



Intekhab Umar



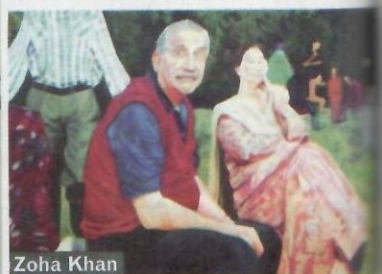
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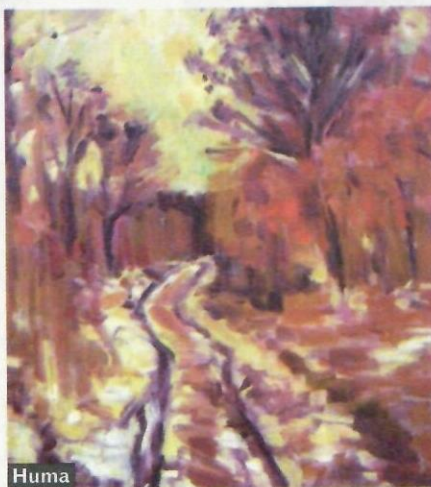
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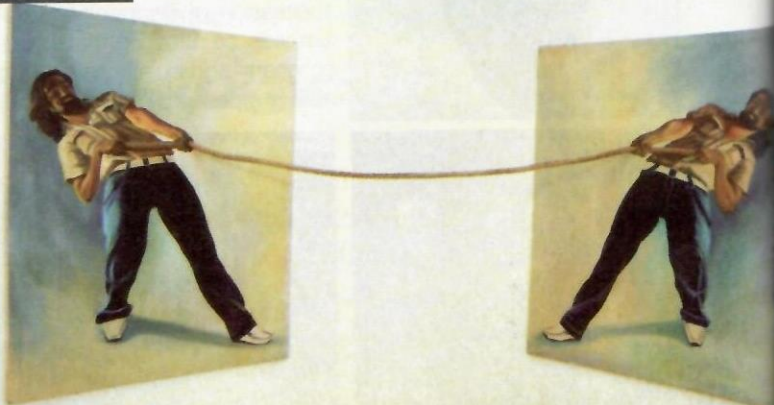


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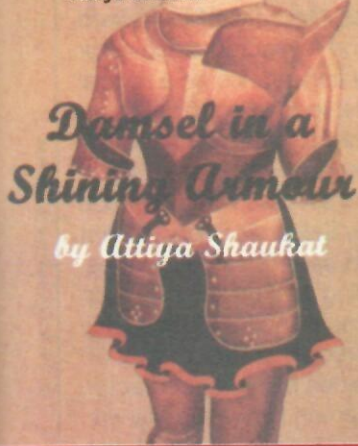
Zainul Abedin



LOOKING AT ART IN KARACHI

MARJORIE HUSAIN

Attiya Shaukat



Saba Qizilbash



Shezad Zar



Aisha Darr



After a period of hibernation, Gandhara Art Gallery recently exhibited a memorable collection of artworks, *Damsel in a Shining Armour* by Attiya Shaukat. The artist, who is based in Lahore, is well known to Karachi's art enthusiasts. The genuine artistry revealed in her work has earned her a significant following.

Poppy Seed Gallery exhibited work collectively titled: *Prying*, by a trio of artists who created intriguing impressions, while Art Chowk showed new work by Saba Qizilbash: *Not For The Faint Of Heart*, described by the artist in moving words:

An Urban battlefield/A finish line/A race to keep pace/ Survival: Right place right time... A Rigged battlefield/With no finish line/No pace, just race/ Survival: Maybe another time.

VM Gallery mounted the first exhibition of unusual ballpoint drawings by Aisha Darr. The collection assembled as *Shades of Black*, was untitled except by audience suggestion.

Jls Gallery showed the recent work of Shezad Zar, a colourful mix of media and design using the traditional concept of *Shadi* as his theme. The visually pleasing extravaganza consisted of daring collage elements. KOEL gallery held an exhibition of beautifully worked calligraphy *Nastaliq*, worked in black ink, colours and gold on wasli, and exquisite miniature pieces: *Darya ba Hubab ander* by Ahmed Ali Bhutta and Murad K. Murad.

It was interesting to share at Canvas some of the impressions gathered by Saba Khan while earning an MFA at Boston University. In a collection titled: *Culture Shock*, the artist revealed an ironic but sympathetic perception of life around her; the contrasts of pleasure and despair. Working with mixed

media, she detailed canvases illustrating a homeless man trundling his belongings in a trolley in contrast to a sleekly plump girl surrounded by luscious cakes. A harassed bus driver was at variance to the polished socialite posed with pet, a figure equally at home in east or west.

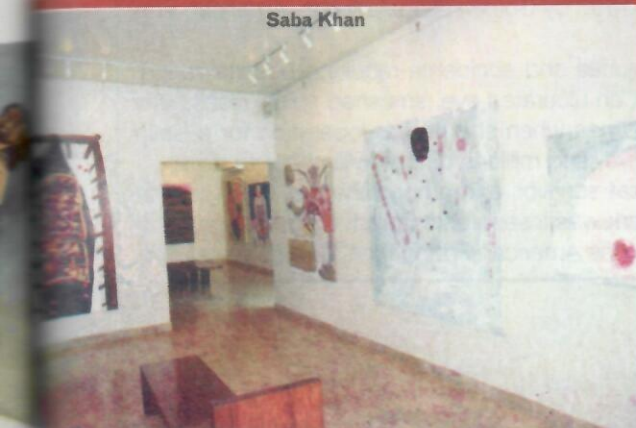
Two adorable pink pooches set against a floral background created a scenario of allegorical possibilities, as indeed did so much of Saba Khan's work. Among the images illuminated, a wedding scene was priceless. The bride and groom, decorated with beads and glitter, appeared as two dolls amid the elderly relatives, in a setting composed of a stunning array of colour and design. The artist employs an adept technique, brushstrokes rendered with great diversity, often manipulating strokes and marks that resemble stitching or weaving.

Saba's work included a series related to the devastation caused by suicide bombers, identified by severed heads amidst the chaos of destruction. "I imagine the explosion from his point of view," she states; "happily thinking he is shooting off to paradise."

In a freely depicted diversity of engaging skills, her work is tempered with humour/charm diluting the underpinning tragedy. One haunting image portrayed the dark face of a corpse shrouded in black cloth, a jarring yet stunning focal point being the brightly patterned cloth centered on the body strewn with flower petals. Awesome. 

(Corrigendum: The above article was misprinted in our March issue. It is being reprinted here. We apologize for the error.)

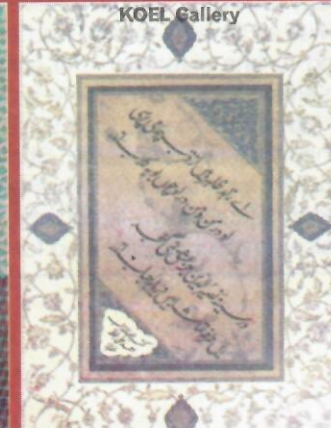
Saba Khan



Shezad Zar



KOEL Gallery



Saba Khan



Today, there is no educational institute in the private sector of Pakistan, which is not using an Oxford book! Ameena Saiyid, the brainchild of Oxford University Press (OUP) has been working for the same since 1979. She worked in various capacities in sales, marketing and editorial operations based in Lahore, along with responsibility for the Punjab and NWFP regions. In 1986, which is after giving seven years of commendable service to OUP, she left it as she had bigger plans. When asked to elaborate on that, Ameena explained, "Oxford University Press was initially trading books. I had bigger plans for this institute, I wanted to publish books!" As she said it, Ameena gave a challenging smile. She knew it would be a long journey, and a difficult one, yet she set up her own publishing house under the name of Saiyid Books and started operating from her house. Ameena, being very passionate about publishing, worked day in and day out and gradually turned Saiyid Books into a successful business.

Fate always leads the willing. Ameena Saiyid too, is the architect of her own fate. Soon after she established her own publishing house, she was invited by OUP to rejoin as Chief Executive for OUP Pakistan in 1988. This was the proudest moment for Ameena, having been recognized for her dedication at OUP and services she had offered while she was there. "Honestly, I was tempted. The position of a Chief Executive attracted me", shared Ameena. But of course! The same designation gave her the liberty to put her ideas into practice. She rapidly built up OUP Pakistan's publishing programme to such an extent that it began publishing one book a week! "Initially, OUP would publish one book a year," mentioned Ameena Saiyid triumphantly.

It's true, that great ideas precede great achievements. Ameena Saiyid became the first woman in Pakistan to become the head of a multinational company. She was elected Vice President of the Overseas Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) in 2009, and became the President too in 2010. It was the same year when Ameena founded and organized the Karachi Literature Festival, which was the first literary festival of its kind to be held in Pakistan. With her objective of promoting and projecting Pakistani authors, Ameena also attracted the masses to books and reading! Ameena Saiyid is very proud to have been privileged by the award for the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2005. "I was very excited to receive that award by the British Queen herself. She told me that I was being awarded for my services involved in the promotion of Anglo-Pakistan relations, democracy, women's rights, education and intellectual property rights, through the books OUP publishes."

Currently, Oxford University Press, Pakistan publishes books based on various genres like literature, art, culture, history, religion, politics, etc. However, the subject always has to be connected to Pakistan. When asked for the subjects that need to be written and published more about, this is what OUP's Managing Director had to say, "At OUP, we encourage all genres of writings and subjects related to Pakistan. However, personally I would like authors to write more about music and cinema." Speaking of Oxford University Press' standards, after accomplishing so much in her career, Ameena does not think the publishing house has become more picky when it comes to accepting manuscripts. The standards of OUP in fact, have always been high, and the OUP team has

always been extra careful before publishing anything.

Everyone makes mistakes, but only the wise learn from them. Ameena Saiyid too, thinks many aspiring authors make blunders when they present their work to her publishing house. There's lack of editing, too much irrelevant data, lack of shape or structure and sometimes, failure to re-write too! Many new writers especially think their job is done after hammering out 80,000 words. That is not the case! Every author should spend just as much time rewriting as he or she does writing. Once the story feels like it's complete, let it cool for several weeks and then go back. "Look for glaringly obvious clichés and weed out irrelevant parts." Talking more about the challenges, faced by her in her career, Ameena Saiyid shed some light on plagiarism and book-piracy! As a publisher, she understands that it is extremely unfair how pirated versions of books published by OUP are sold commonly and that too with the stamp of Oxford University Press on them. Ameena Saiyid has always aimed to publish and sell as many books as she can. But now, along with that, she is working for the promotion and rights of Pakistani authors by publishing and promoting their books (in Pakistan and abroad) by ensuring their intellectual property rights. It is commendable how Ameena is continually working on ways to protect authors' rights so they get a fair benefit from the sales. Nothing stops Ameena Saiyid, she aims to make writing and authorship in Pakistan worthy enough to grow the literary treasures and heritage of Pakistan.

As the world is becoming more tech-savvy by the day, general view of the public is that ebooks may be the future. Ameena strongly disagrees. She does not think books are threatened by ebooks at all or would affect the industry. "There is nothing like a real book in your hand! For references, ebooks might be helpful and fast, otherwise the real version is more portable and reader-friendly. You can take it anywhere with you, sleep with it. It's always there!"

The very talented Ameena Saiyid, carries simplicity as her weapon. She does not give outer beauty much significance, and hence looks beautiful in her simple and natural appearance. Ameena explains, "I am a very simple person. I do not wear jewellery and I think it saves a lot of time and worry. That way, I get to do a lot of work done! Otherwise I am not a short tempered person, but very relaxed. However, it bothers me when people are always relying on me and asking me to make decisions for them. I would prefer them to make decisions for me instead!" Ameena Saiyid, married and settled has been a remarkable lady in both her domestic and professional life. "The trick is to let the two overlap whenever the situation demands it. Do not give your complete attention to one aspect and ignore the other." Hence, the lady is busy being a mother and a wife at home, when not working.

OUP, has made its mark and is continuing to do so. Cramped in a small residential house in Karachi, from where OUP was operating initially, Ameena Saiyid has broken all barriers and has taken Oxford University Press to a greater level. Having been equipped with latest technology and business practices, about 300 people work under her command today. OUP and Ameena Saiyid are working out ways to develop a large number of bilingual dictionaries, to set the standards for school/colleges textbooks, to prop up readership, to contribute to the academic community and most importantly, to project a positive and educated image of Pakistan. 



THE AWAKENING OF THE SOUL

IRAM ANSARI

Luminous and symbolic, Rahat's paintings bring forth a strong message through the powerful images yet their serenity touches the soul. SHE talks to Rahat Naveed Masood, a sensitive artist, Professor and Principal of the college of Art and Design at the University of Punjab, about her solo exhibition *Ishq*, a series of paintings that earned her a doctorate degree.

The beauty of her work lies in the simplicity, detail and clarity with which she has depicted the endless possibilities within a human soul to reach the ultimate level of spirituality. Her paintings act like a bridge between ancient beliefs and the modern world. The quest of the human soul to unite with the divine, runs like a golden thread in her paintings.

The images and scenes used by Rahat in her paintings are taken from everyday life making it easier for people to understand the concept. The use of light and translucent handmade paper gives an organic feel that blends well with the theme. In order to reach a deeper understanding, Rahat has explored her topic of *Ishq* from many different angles.

"My own journey started with the portrait of Pappu Saeen I made in 1997. People felt that my work had a spiritual quality. Although I felt that my subject matter was not spiritual. That set my mind think about the true meaning of spirituality," says Rahat.

"When I embarked on my PhD program, my topic was Materializing the Spirituality. Spirituality is an elusive quality that cannot be described in words. I wanted to go to the depth of it and to find out what was the need for it. I read Tassawuf which is a softer and a more compassionate side of Islam. In Quran, there are two types of meanings, one is the esoteric, that is the formal aspect that are the rituals and the esoteric meaning that relate to your spiritual side and appeal to your emotions and intellect. I talked to scholars like Ghamdi Sahib, artists and people from all walks of life and came to the conclusion that spirituality is not synonymous with religion. In the West, I heard many people say that they are not religious though they are spiritual," adds Rahat.



"The burning moth" actually tells the age old story of "shama and parwana". The candle is the divine light within the human soul, man is flitting around that light and eventually is consumed by it. It symbolizes the unification with the beloved or the divine. The human relationships are symbolic of that unification of the soul with the divine." — Rahat

"In this process, I visited many shrines. In my paintings I have not represented what I saw but have used symbols to convey the message of whatever reactions and impression I had. My vision grew and I developed a deeper understanding," says Rahat.

She quotes the example of artist Mark Rothko who made big canvases with just layers of painting. "It has no form yet when you look at it, it evokes a strange feeling and has a spiritual quality. Even Taj Mahal has a spiritual effect," she remarks.

"God has said that he is closer to man than his jugular vein. That innate relationship between God and man is the inherent natural link. Spirituality can be evoked by an aesthetic experience. The 99 names of Allah are all present in small percentage in a man. This was a journey to discover that the ultimate is when you develop that bond with God. There is a philosophy that man created God but the question is why did he feel the need for it. The need to link with your creator is inherent and it depends on you how you express it."

"In Sufi traditions and philosophy, Ishq has many levels. It is a vast canvas. To reach that ultimate feeling you have to go through those levels until you reach the highest point. You have to develop yourself intellectually. It depends on you how much you can develop your own potential. Just to depict those abstract thoughts I have used symbols like rose, key, lock, moth and veil. Colour has also been used symbolically," she explains.

"White denotes purity, peace, it is untainted, pure and peaceful. Red is the colour of emotions, passion, love and vibrancy. Blue is related to the expanse of heavens. Yellow and gold again have a history, it has been applied in form of halos or for royalty in mogul paintings. It does not tarnish, it is pure, luminous and it glows. Spirituality like gold is also pure and untarnished," she says. Whether it is the Pharoanic era, Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, the symbolic representation of truth in art historically, has always come in form of gold.

The freedom of imagination and expression, one finds in her work is striking. Rahat has also used the symbol of pipal leaf and of lock and keys. She narrates an incident that when she went to visit the shrines she saw many locks on the *jaali* next to the shrine. She was told that people make a vow and once their wish is fulfilled the locks open themselves.

"It made me believe in a lot of things and then there were some more incidents that happened that changed my perspective. This again is the same concept I have depicted in "The lifting of the veil", there is awakening within you. In my paintings, lock and key symbolize the self knowledge. To open

up yourself for higher knowledge on how to lead your life in the way we have been told. It includes all aspects of life, your actions, your relationships and also what is within you. Doing it in the manner we have been told, we have been instructed to live our lives in balance. It is the biggest challenge we have been given as a human beings. Lifting of the veil and opening of the lock and key is a level of reaching that goal," says Rahat.

"In my painting *Lifting of the Veil*, there is a strong sense of self realization. It is a vision that is blurred. It is when the connection is on a spiritual level and there is opening up of windows on your own personality. The concept is similar to that of Iqbal when he talks about the importance of "*khudi*" in his poetry. It is actually self realization, the main idea is to realize your own potential. In a man there are immense possibilities to transcend to the higher grounds," she explains.

The *Burning Moth* actually tells the age old story of "shama and parwana". The candle is the divine light within the human soul, man is flitting around that light and eventually is consumed by it. It symbolizes the unification with the beloved or the divine. The human relationships are symbolic of that unification of the soul with the divine", adds Rahat.

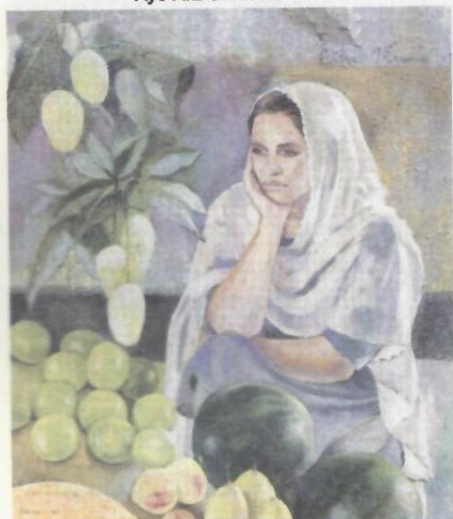
"The use of gold leaf is a distinctive element in the artist's work adding richness to the compositional design, as in the imagery of the moth with gold tinged wings. In her work the clarity of gold without tarnish stresses the artist's theme of purity and permanence", writes distinguished art critic Marjorie Husain in her review.

Rahat has used a dramatic video called *Annihilation* produced from footage taken at a festival at the shrine of Mian Mir in Lahore in May 2005 as a link to her paintings. It focuses on the crowded shrine with ecstatic dancers dancing on the beat of drums.

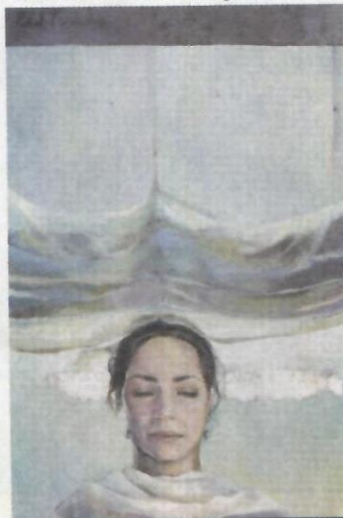
"Opening with the rich reds and oranges of burning clay lamps, the images move between black, white and colour, from the images of moths attracted to the bright evening lights to the *malang* who defiantly fixes his gaze on the artist behind the camera while smoking intoxicants. The video is mesmerizing and captures the powerful rhythms of rituals and the repetitive structures that are part of Sufi poetry and music", records Prof. Fran Lloyd, associate Dean of the faculty of Art, design and architecture at Kingston university.

"At the end of your life at least you should have the satisfaction that you explored it. The whole universe is knit into a fabric. Each one of us has to play our part and it is up to us how we play it!", concludes Rahat with a gentle smile. 🌸

Aye Arz-e-Watan



Self Portrait - The Lifting Of The Veil



A Self Portrait - Beyond The Realm

