

**Contemporary
Miniature Painting in Lahore
1980 – 2007**

Vol-I Text

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by
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Summary

Lahore has witnessed a dramatic evolution in the art of miniature painting since the 1990s. Many young artists, mainly graduates of the National College of Arts, formerly Mayo School of Arts, are to be credited with this revival. The revival starts with the teaching of miniature painting as an optional subject at the Mayo School of Arts by the two *ustads* who were descendants of Mughal court painters, to its establishment as a degree course in the National College of Arts in 1982 and the subsequent work produced by its graduates.

The work of these prolific modern miniaturists is becoming widely known and many art galleries and curators readily showcase their work at home and abroad. There are reviews which are mostly centered on these exhibitions and interviews that cover individual artists and their works. However there is no comprehensive survey of the background study and a chronological survey of the works done by the contemporary miniature painters. My research attempts to fill this lacuna in order to make it easy for scholars and students to trace the antecedents of this movement and its artists in order to provide a base for future study on the subject.

What is attempted in this study is a systematic description of the movement, its origins and its final maturation. Interviews of selected artists have been taken and compiled with biographical details and analysis of their work, images of their work are provided by 185 illustrations.

Sources of this research are books on history of miniature painting, folios from the archives of the National College of Arts, personal interviews conducted with artists, visits

to contemporary miniature exhibitions, catalogues and reviews of these exhibitions and web sites of these artists. A number of earlier and unpublished works of these artists are made available here for the first time.

The first part of the thesis is largely committed to a concise history of the traditional schools of miniature painting that provide an essential basis for the study of contemporary miniature painting in its larger context. Only those schools have been dealt with that provide a source of inspiration in terms of concepts or visual vocabulary. This is followed by delineating areas of contemporary borrowing from these sources.

The history of modern miniature painting gives an account of the revival of miniature painting in Lahore in the twentieth century. It briefly outlines the events that lead to its reemergence in 1945 and its contemporary revival fifty years later. A concise account of its pedagogical evolution and its establishment as a major area of specialization under the Fine Arts Department at the National College of Arts in 1982 adds the integral framework in which the modern miniature has progressed.

A descriptive essay on the techniques of traditional and contemporary miniature painting is included to provide the necessary information for understanding the medium of this art work.

Personal interviews conducted with miniature artists provides a comprehensive profile on each artist with details of their paintings, career and observations made by the painters themselves and the author. One section includes interviews of painters whose work is mostly traditional with essays on the two aging *ustads* who taught miniature painting in the years between 1945 and 1980 at the National College of Arts and have since passed

away.

The second section comprises of interviews conducted with modern contemporary miniaturists. Biographical and analytical notes with images of their work have been provided. The number of painters has been restricted to eight as only those artists who have painted for at least five years have been included.

Finally my conclusion to the thesis recaps the elements that made it possible for an art form which was considered *passé* at the end of the nineteenth century to become the most favored art marking technique of third generation artists of Pakistan. I stress that this remarkable revival of miniature painting is a logical evolution of the arts that flourished in Lahore for almost five centuries and which we should acknowledge as the Lahori School of Arts as it is with those grand traditions of the past that this new practice has evolved.




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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Summary..... | ii |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Contents | vi |
| List of illustrations..... | vii |
| Chapter 1 | |
| The Heritage of Miniature Painting | 1 |
| Chapter 2 | |
| History of Modern Miniature | 30 |
| Chapter 3 | |
| Making of a Miniature: The Technique | 42 |
| Chapter 4 | |
| Contemporary Traditional Painters | |
| Ustad Haji Sharif | 59 |
| Ustad Sheikh Shujaullah | 68 |
| Shakeel Ahmed | 72 |
| Bashir Ahmed | 77 |
| Khalid Saeed Butt | 88 |
| Chapter 5 | |
| Contemporary Modern Painters | |
| Shazia Sikander..... | 97 |
| Imran Qureshi | 113 |
| Nusra Latif | 127 |
| Aisha Khalid | 136 |
| Saira Waseem | 149 |
| Talha Rathore | 160 |
| Waseem Ahmed | 165 |
| Hasnat Mehmood | 177 |
| The third generation of miniature painters | 184 |
| Conclusion | 189 |
| Bibliography | 195 |

List of illustrations

Fig. 1

Nusra Latif
Holy Alliances. 2004.
 Gouache, acrylic and paper on illustration board.
 32.8x45cms
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 2

Jahangir holding the Orb. Circa 1635
 Signed Bichitr
 A page from the Minto Album Chester Beatty
 Library, Dublin

Fig. 3

Nusra Latif
Red Bird Narratives -1. 2005
 Gouache, acrylic and gold leaf on wasli.
 28x21cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 4

Prince Khurram circa 1616-1617
 Signed Abu'l Hasan
 A page from the Minto Album
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Fig. 5

Saira Waseem.
Padshahnama I. 1999.
 Gouache and gold on tea stained wasli. 14x22cms.
 Collection Asia Society.

Fig. 6

Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings, circa 1615-1618.
 Signed Bichitr.
 Petersburg Album. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
 institute, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 7

Saira Wasim.
The Kiss from the Pervez Musharraf series. 2002.
 Gouache, goldleaf on wasli. 23.8x14.2cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 8

Hasnat Mehmood.
 Detail from *Krishna God of Love*. 2004.
 Digital media. 11.5x6.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 9

Waseem Ahmed
Krishna Series. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 6x9in
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 10

Nusra Latif.
Passionate beings in Flight. 2003.
 Gouache and Acrylic on wasli. 11.75x15.75ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 11

Imran Qureshi.
Easy Cutting. 2004
 Gouache on wasli. 20x26cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 12

Shazia Sikander.
Phenomenology I. 2000
 Vegetable color, dry pigment and watercolor on wasli
 10x7.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 13

Imran Qureshi.
The Game of Tenses. 2002.
 Opaque watercolor and Letraset transfer on wasli.
 26x34cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 14

Two Vultures c 1615-1620
 A page from the Kevorkian Album
 Signed Mansur

Fig. 15

Muhammad Zeeshan
Beyond Appearances 1 2006
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 28.5x14.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 16

Muhammad Zeeshan
 Detail from *Beyond Appearances 2* 2006
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 28.5x14.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 17

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Lovers 2004.
 Opaque watercolor, gold leaf and gum Arabic on
 wasli. 8x11ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 18

Hasnat Mehmood.
Love in the Time of Chaos 2004
 Gouache and lead on wasli. 8x5.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 19

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series 2005
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli.
 8.5x14.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 20

Jaipur c 1820
 Detail from a *Rasapanchadhyayi* Series

Fig. 21

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2005.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli.
 8.5x14.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 22

Sursagar
 Mevar, 1700-1725
 Collection National Gallery Ottawa

Fig. 23

Aisha Khalid .
The Birth of Venus. 2004.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 8x1 8cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 24

Aisha Khalid.
Form x Pattern. 2000.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 14x19cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 25

Nusra Latif.
Silent Spaces I. 2005.
 Gouache, paper, wasli and acrylic on illustration board. Each panel 30x40cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 26

Nusra Latif.
Plain Old Manifest Destiny 2005 Two panels. Total size: 80x200cms.

Fig. 27

Hasnat Mehmood
The Conference of Crows 2004
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 11 .8x1 5.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 28

Andy Warhol
Marilyn Diptych 1962
 Acrylic silkscreen on canvas. each panel 6.8x4.9ft.
 Tate Gallery , London.

Fig. 29

An illustration from the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* of Nasir-ud-din Tusi.
Painters and Calligraphers working. 1590-1595
 Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection.

Fig. 30

Portrait of an artist working on a miniature.Nd
 A page from the Gentil Album
 Gouache on paper
 Bibliotheque Nationale Paris

Fig. 31

Tracing of a portrait of *Amir Timur* on deerskin with marks of color guides
 From, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* by Percy Brown
 Fig. LXXI

Fig. 32

Detail from the margin of
Artists at work.

A page from Jahangir Album. Mughal c 1600

Fig. 33

The scribe Abd ur-Rahim Ambarin Qalam and the painter Daulat
 Detail from an illustration from the *Khamsa* of Nizami copied by Daulat. 1610 A.D.
 British Library, London.

Fig. 34

Contemporary miniature students working in the studio at National College of Arts circa 2007

Fig. 35

Detail from a painting from the *Berlin Album* Mughal, c. 1585
 Statsbibliothek, Berlin

Fig. 36

Final year students working on their thesis painting Miniature studio at National College of Arts. Lahore c.2007

Fig. 37

Contemporary miniature painters use Winsor and Newton water colors but mussel shells are still used to mix and store the prepared colors.
 National College of Arts Lahore c. 2007

Fig. 38

Haji Sharif in his Lahore studio

Fig. 39

Ustad Haji Sharif.
Bahadur Shah Zafar.c. 1950
 Gouache on wasli. 6x5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 40

Ustad Haji Sharif.
Princess Syeda-daughter of Shahjahan. c. 1950
 Gouache on wasli. 9x6ins.
 Ownership unknown.

Fig. 41

Ustad Haji Sharif.
Guru Nanak
 Gouache on wasli.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 42

Ustad Haji Sharif.
Noorjahan playing polo with other princesses.c.1 950
 Gouache on wasli. 32x24ins.
 Collection Muhammad Hanif

Fig. 43

Ustad Haji Sharif
Shahjahan playing polo with his four sons.c. 1950
 Gouache on wasli. 22.5x17.5ins.
 Collection Muhammad Hanif

Fig. 44

Ustad Haji Sharif
Emperor Jahangir riding with Nurjahan. c. 1950
 Gouache on wasli. 23x18ins.
 Collection Muhammad Hanif

Fig. 45

Ustad Haji Sharif
Emperor Jahangir riding with Nurjahan. c. 1950
 Gouache on wasli. 23x18ins.
 Ownership unknown.

Fig. 46

Ustad Haji Sharif
Jahangir and Nurjahan after hunting of a tiger with her spear. c.1950
 Gouache on wasli. 22x17.5ins.
 Collection Muhammad Hanif

Fig. 47

Ustad Haji Sharif
Jahangir hunting a tiger. c.1950
 Gouache on wasli. 1 8x23.5ins.
 Collection Muhammad Hanif

Fig. 48

Sheikh Shujaullah.
Emperor Jahangir. c. 1970
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. (size not available)
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 49

Sheikh Shujaullah.
Princess playing with bird. c.1970
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 26x18cms.
 National Gallery of Pakistan. Islamabad

Fig. 50

Sheikh Shujaullah.
Woman with sitar. c 1970
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 27x19cms. National
 Gallery of Pakistan. Islamabad

Fig. 51

Shakeel Ahmed.
Akbar. 2005.
 Opaque water color on wasli. 7x5in.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 52

Shakeel Ahmed.
Jahangir. 2005.
 Opaque water color on wasli. 7x5in.
 Artist collection. Lahore

Fig. 53

Bashir Ahmed
Noorjahan. 1972.
 Pencil drawing. 3x4in.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 54

Bashir Ahmed
Radha and Krishna. 1972.
 Siyah Qalam. 9x4in.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 55 Bashir
 Ahmed

Doctor. 1987.

Pencil Drawing. 7x6.5in. Artist collection. Lahore

Fig. 56

Bashir Ahmed
Saeed Akhtar. 1983.
 Gouache on wasli. 8x5.5in.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 57

Bashir Ahmed
Kangra Princess. 1987.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 0x7.7in.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 58

Bashir Ahmed
Lady with a peacock. 1997.
 Gouache on wasli. 8.5 x 5.5
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 59

Lady tempting a peacock. Guler. 1760.

Fig. 60

Khandita Nayika. Guler. 1780

Fig. 61

Bashir Ahmed.
The Hunter. 1997.
 Pencil on paper. 20x30ins.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 62

Maharao Ram Singh 1 of Kota pursuing a rhinoceros
 Kota c.1690

Fig. 63

Bashir Ahmed
Untitled. 1997.
 Pencil on paper. 20x30ins.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 64

Bashir Ahmed. *Untitled.* 1997.
 Pencil on paper. 20x30ins.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 65

Bashir Ahmed.
Messenger. 1996.
 Acrylic on canvas. 26x34ins.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 66

Zahoorul Akhlaque.
Untitled. 1980s.
 Oil on canvas. Size unavailable
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 67

Bashir Ahmed
Mughal Princess. 1989.
 Mixed Media 1 8x24 ins.
 Artist Collection. Lahore

Fig. 68

Bashir Ahmed
Mughal Dynasty. 1994.
 Mixed Media. 1 8x24ins.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 69

Bashir Ahmed.
Power.2005.
 Mixed media. 12x9ins.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 70

Zahoor ul Akhlaque.
Untitled. 1977.
 Oil on wood. 36x48ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 71

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Army Ceremonial Dress Series . 1979-85.
 Opaque watercolor and gold leaf on paper.
 Naushad Ali Khan. United States

Fig. 72

Imam Bakhsh Lahori.
A Muslim Gunner from the Fauj-i-Khas. Lahore
 1827-1843
 Court collection, Musee Guimet.Paris.

Fig. 73

Khalid Saeed Butt
Musicians. 1985.
 Opaque watercolor, gold leaf on wasli. 5.5x7in.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 74

Khalid Saeed Butt
Game. 1985.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 6x8in.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 75

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Lovers.2004.
 Opaque watercolor, gold leaf and gum Arabic on
 wasli. 8x11ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 76

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Lovers. 2004.
 Opaque watercolor, gold leaf and gum Arabic on
 wasli. 9.5x5.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 77

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Bathing. 2003.
 Opaque water color, gold leaf and gum Arabic on
 wasli. 11 .5x8.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 78

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Bathing I. 2003.
 Opaque water color, gold leaf and gum Arabic on
 wasli. 11 .5x8.5ins.
 Ownership unknown.

Fig. 79

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Untitled. 2006
 Ink and gold leaf on wasli. 6.5x10in.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 80

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Untitled. 2006.
 Ink and gold leaf on wasli. 6.5x10in.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 81

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Untitled.2006.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 7x9.5in.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 82

Khalid Saeed Butt.
Untitled. 2006.
 7x9.5ins. Opaque watercolor on wasli.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 83

Shazia Sikander.
The scroll (detail). 1992.
 Gouache on wasli. 14x60ins.
 Artist Collection. United States

Fig. 84

Shazia Sikander
Mirrat I. 1991.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, gold leaf,
 tea on wasli.12x8.5
 Artist Collection. United States

Fig. 85

Shazia Sikander
The Red Dress. 1995.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment watercolor and tea on
 wasli. 5x8.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 86

A mysterious figure from 1 000B.C discovered in the
 Gangetic plain, perhaps connected to the Vedic
 religion.

Fig. 87

Shazia Sikander
Space in Between. 1995.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, goldleaf,
 tea on wasli. 5.5x6ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 88

Shazia Sikander
Reinventing the dislocation. 1997.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, tea wash
 and xerox on wasli. 1 3x9.25ins
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Fig. 89

Shazia Sikander.
Fleshy Weapons. 1997.
 Dry pigment, watercolor, tea wash on linen. 96x70
 ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 90

Shazia Sikander.
Hood's Red Rider # 2.1997.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, and tea wash on wasli.10 1/8 x 7 1/8ins.
 Collection of Susan and Lewis Manilow, Chicago.

Fig. 91

Shazia Sikander
Riding the Written. 1993.
 Screen print, vegetable color dry pigment, watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 12x9ins.
 Collection of Bradford City Museum, Bradford, UK

Fig. 92

Shazia Sikander
Writing the Ridden. 1993.
 Screen print vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 12x9ins.
 Collection of Bradford City Museum, Bradford, UK.

Fig. 93

Shazia Sikander.
Phenomenology I. 2000
 Vegetable color, dry pigment and watercolor on wasli. 10x7.5in.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 94

Shazia Sikander.
PhenomenologyI. 2000.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment and watercolor on wasli. 10x7.5in.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 95

Shazia Sikander.
Pleasure pillars. 2001.
 Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, ink and tea wash on wasli. 12x10ins.
 Collection of Amita and Purnendu Chatterji, New York.

Fig. 96

Shazia Sikander.
High and Low. 1996.
 Acrylic on wall. Size variable.

Fig. 97

ShaziaSikander.
The Divine Circle.2003.
 Acrylic on wall. Dimensions variable.
 Installation View: Conversation with Traditions,
 Seattle Art Museum.2003

Fig. 98

Shazia Sikander
To Reveal or Not to Reveal. 2004.
 Acrylic, gouache and ink on tissue paper.
 Installation View, San Diego Museum of Art.2004

Fig. 99

Shazia Sikander *Chaman I*. 2000.
 Acrylic, gouache, ink and tissue paper on wall.
 Dimensions Variable
 Installation View, ' Acts of Balance'
 Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris,
 New York, 2000.

Fig. 100

Shazia Sikander
Still from SpiNN I. 2003.
 Digital animation with sound. 6.38 mins.
 Collection of Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehman.

Fig. 101

Shazia Sikander
Still from Nemesis. 2003.
 Digital animation with sound. 2.02 mins.
 Brent Sikkema, New York.

Fig. 102

Imran Qureshi.
Never Again. 1995.
 Gouache and tea wash on wasli. 24x36cms.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 103

Imran Qureshi.
Entangled Self I. 1996.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 5x21cms.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 104

Imran Qureshi.
Entangled Self 2. 1996.
 Gouache on wasli. 15x21cms.
 Artist Collection.Lahore

Fig. 105

Imran Qureshi
Chemistry of What Next? 2001.
 Opaque watercolor and gold leaf on wasli. 48x30cms
 Ownership unknown.

Fig. 106

Imran Qureshi
West is West. 2001.
 Mixed media installation, height 12ins.

Fig. 107

Imran Qureshi .
Take It Or Leave It. I. 2002
 Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 26x17cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 108

Imran Qureshi
Take It Or Leave It. II. 2002
 Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 26x17cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 109

Imran Qureshi.
Beginning of an End. 2000.
 Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 6x22cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 110

Imran Qureshi
Kagaz ke Sanam. (Paper Idols).2000
 Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 16x22cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 111

Imran Qureshi.
Lahore Resolution. 2000.
 Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 16x22cms.
 Ownership unknown

- Fig. 112**
Imran Qureshi
Missile Series. 2000
Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 1 6x22cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 113**
Imran Qureshi.
The Game of Tenses. 2002.
Opaque watercolor and Letraset transfer on wasli.
26x34cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 114**
Imran Qureshi.
How to cut a Burqa. 2002.
Opaque watercolor on wasli made with old manuals
.1 6x22cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 115**
Imran Qureshi
How to cut a Fashion Brassier. 2002
Opaque watercolor on wasli made with old manuals.
16x22cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 116**
Mughal. Akbar period.
Akbar and Tansen visit Haridas. (detail).
National Museum. Delhi
- Fig. 117**
Hyderabad
Ragini Kakubha. c. 1775
34.7x22.8cm s.
Bharat Kala Bhavan
- Fig. 118**
Imran Qureshi.
Detail of the tree form in his works.
- 119**
Detail of *Ragini Kakubha*. Hyderabad c. 1775
See entire painting in figure 117
- Fig. 120**
Bashir Ahmed.
Detail from *Kangra Princess* shown in figure 57
- Fig. 121**
Imran Qureshi.
Homage to Hope Street .2002
Opaque watercolor, Letraset transfer on wasli.
25x20cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 122**
Sultanate period.
Illustration from
Laur Chanda of Mulla Daud c. 1 6th C
- Fig. 123**
Imran Qureshi. *Reshape*. 2004.
Gouache, Letraset transfer on wasli. 51x76cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 124**
Image from *Karkhana* project .2003.
Gouache on wasli. 20x28cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 125**
Imran Qureshi.
Easy Cutting. 2004
Gouache on wasli. 20x26cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 126**
Imran Qureshi.
Easy Cutting. 2004
Gouache on wasli. 20x26cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 127**
Imran Qureshi. *Untitled*. 2006.
Gouache and ball point on wasli. 25x25cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 128**
Imran Qureshi.
Untitled.2006.
Gouache and ball point on wasli. 25x28cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 129**
Imran Qureshi.
Out of the blue. 2007
Gold leaf, gouache on wasli. 22x30cms.
Artist Collection
- Fig. 130**
Imran Qureshi .
Surrounded by. 2007.
Gold leaf and gouache on wasli. 27x36cms.
Artist Collection
- Fig. 131**
Imran Qureshi.
Portraits. 2007.
Gold leaf, gouache on wasli. 28x21cms.
Artist Collection
- Fig. 132**
Nusra Latif.
Holy Alliances.2004.
Gouache, acrylic and paper on illustration board.
32.8x45cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 133**
Nusra Latif.
Detail from: *Holy Alliances*. 2004.
Gouache, acrylic and paper on illustration board .
32.8x45cms.
- Fig. 134**
Nusra Latif.
Stranded .1999.
Gouache and silver leaf on wasli. 10x13cms.
Ownership unknown
- Fig. 135**
Nusra Latif.
Untitled.1999.
Gouache and silver leaf on wasli.10x13cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 136

Nusra Latif.
Mohabbat ka Mazar.2001.
Gouache and Acrylic on wasli. 16.8x19cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 137

Nusra Latif.
The Hilt overlaid with Gold. 2001. Gouache,
acrylic on wasli. 29x42cms. Ownership unknown

Fig. 138

Nusra Latif.
Passionate Beings in Flight. 2003.
Gouache and Acrylic on wasli. 11 .75x1 5.75ins.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 139

Nusra Latif.
Benevolent Creatures. 2005.
Gouache and acrylic on wasli. 28x21cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 140

Nusra Latif.
Familiar Desires I.2005.
Gouache, ink and gold on wasli. 28x21cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 141

Nusra Latif.
Familiar Desires I. 2005.
Gouache, ink and gold on wasli. 28x21cms
Ownership unknown

Fig. 142

Nusra Latif.
Shades of Red. 2004.
Gouache, acrylic and paper on board.Each segment
40x30cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 143

Nusra Latif.
Silent Spaces I. 2005.
Gouache, paper, wasli and acrylic on illustration
board. Each panel 30x40cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 144

Nusra Latif.
Plain Old Manifest Destiny. 2005
Two panels. Total size: 80x200cms.

Fig. 145

Nusra Latif in her studio in Melbourne.
Courtesy Nusra Latif.

Fig. 146

Aisha Khalid .
Lovers. 1994.
Gouache and gold leaf on wasli. 1 5x20cms.
Artist Collection

Fig. 147

Young Prince And His Wife On A Terrace Circa
1615-1625
Minto Album. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

Fig. 152

Brochure for Aisha and Imran's block printing show

Fig. 148

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 1999.
Opaque watercolor, goldleaf on wasli. 22.5x1 7cms
Artist Collection

Fig. 149

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 1999.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 22.5x17cms.
Artist Collection

Fig. 150

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 1999.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 23x20cms.
Artist Collection

Fig. 151

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 1999.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 1 5x2cms.
Artist Collection

.1999.

Fig. 153

Aisha Khalid.
Silence. 2000.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 14x19cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 154

Aisha Khalid.
Form x Pattern. 2000.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 14x19cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 155

Aisha Khalid.
Performance.2001.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 23x35cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 156

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 2001.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 36x24cms.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 157

Aisha Khalid.
Covered, Uncovered I. 2002.
Opaque watercolor on wasli. 50 x 70 cms & 14x19cms
Ownership unknown

Fig. 158

Aisha Khalid.
The Red Curtain. 2005.
Gouache on wasli. 8x1 5.6ins.
Ownership unknown

Fig. 159

Aisha Khalid
Conversation.2002.
Video Installation
Artist Collection

Fig. 160

Aisha Khalid .
The Birth of Venus.2004.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 8x1 8cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 161

Aisha Khalid.
Curtain I.2005.
 Gouache on wasli . 18 x 7.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 162

Aisha Khalid.
Curtain II. 2005
 Gouache on wasli. 1 8x7.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 163

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 2005.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 5x22.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 164

Aisha Khalid.
Untitled. 2006.
 Gouache on wasli. 1 5x22.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 165

Aisha Khalid.
Page from my diary.2006.
 Gouache on wasli. 40x25cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 166

Aisha Khalid.
Quilts. 2006
 Cloth, polyester, thread and needles on board.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 167

Aisha Khalid.
Better Half. 2007
 Gouache on wasli. 23x32cms.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 168

Aisha Khalid.
Kiss. 2007
 Gouache on wasli. 23x32cms.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 169

Saira Wasim.
Tomorrow? 2000.
 Gouache, gold leaf on wasli. 50.6x43.2cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 170

From an illustration by Norman Rockwell

Fig. 171

Saira Wasim.
Padshahnama I. 1999.
 Gouache and gold on tea stained wasli. 23.8x14.2cms.
 Collection Asia Society.

Fig. 172

Saira Wasim.
The Kiss from the Pervez Musharraf series. 2002.
 Gouache, goldleaf on wasli. 23.8x14.2cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 173

Saira Wasim.
Friendship after 11 September I. Bush series. 2002
 Gouache, goldleaf on wasli. 23.8x 14.2 cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 174

Saira Wasim,
History till 11 September.Bush series. 2002
 Gouache, gold leaf on wasli. 23.8x14.2cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 175

Saira Wasim.
New World Order.Bush Series. 2006.
 Gouache and gold on wasli. 25.8x16.1cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 176

Saira Wasim.
Peace Talks. 2004.
 Gouache, graphite and silver leaf on wasli. 20x18cms
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 177

Saira Wasim.
Seasons of Pretentious Friendship. 2004.
 Gouache, silver leaf, inks on tea stained wasli.
 20.7x1 8cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 178

Saira Wasim.
Fundamentalists. 2000.
 20x1 8cms. Gouache and gold leaf on wasli.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 179

Saira Wasim.
In the Name of Honor. 2004.
 Gouache, gold leaf on wasli. 25.8x16cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 180

Saira Wasim.
Lotuses.2004.
 Gouache and watercolor on wasli. 20.3x10.2cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 181

Saira Wasim.
Mourning Rocks. 2000.
 Gouache and watercolor on wasli. 20.3x9.5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 182

Talha Rathore
A Matter of Silence.2002
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 20x1 5cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 183

Talha Rathore
They Told Us It Would Be Like This .2002
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 20x15cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 184

Talha Rathore
Pearls without a Cloud. 2007
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 48x36cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 185

Talha Rathore
Imprints of Intention.2 .2006
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 48x36cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 186

Talha Rathore
A Boundless Sea .2006
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 20x30ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 187

Talha Rathore
Indigo Roots .2007
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 20x30ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 188

Waseem Ahmed.
Printmaking studio. 1999.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 1 0.4x7ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 189

An illustration from the Akhlaq-i-Nasiri
 From Nasir-ud-din Tulsi. 1590.
 Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection

Fig. 190

Waseem Ahmed.
The National College of Arts. 1999.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 4.5x7in.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 191

Waseem Ahmed.
Celebrating 125 years of NCA. 2000.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 7x10in.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 192

Waseem Ahmed.
Untitled. 2000.
 Opaque watercolor, tea wash on wasli. 9.5x17ins.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 193

Waseem Ahmed.
 2001. 'Burqa Series'. 5.5x8in.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 194

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2001.

Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 5.5x5.5ins
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 195

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series.2003.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli . 7x1 0ins
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 196

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 5.5x9ins
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 197

Aisha Qureshi.
Form x Pattern.2000.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 5x7ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 198

Waseem Ahmed.
The Burqa Series. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli.
 3.5x10.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 199

Waseem Ahmed.
The Burqa Series. 2005.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 7x8.5ins
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 200

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2005.
 Siyah qalam, tea wash on wasli. 7x9ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 201

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series.2006.
 Gouache on wasli . 9.75x1 5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 202

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2006.
 Gouache on wasli. 11.25x18.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 203

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2006.
 Gouache on wasli. 9.25x14ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 204

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2006.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 37.2x26cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 205

Waseem Ahmed.
Burqa Series. 2006.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 30.1x20cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 206

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2001.
 Opaque watercolor, tea wash on wasli. 5.5x7ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 207

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2001.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 5.5x8ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 208

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2002.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 6x8ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 209

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2003.
 Opaque water color and gouache on wasli. 4.5x8.8ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 210

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 6x9ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 211

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2005.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 8.5x14.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 212

Waseem Ahmed.
Krishna Series. 2005.
 Opaque watercolor and tea wash on wasli. 8.5x13ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 213

Waseem Ahmed.
Relationship. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor and ink on wasli. 6x8ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 214

Waseem Ahmed.
Landscape. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor, tea wash and silver leaf on wasli.
 4.5x10ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 215

Waseem Ahmed.
 Kalar Kahar. 2003.
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 6x9ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 216

Waseem Ahmed in his Lahore studio

Fig. 217

Hasnat Ahmed.
Hope. 2000.
 Mixed media. 8x5.5ins.
 Artist collection

Fig. 218

Hasnat Mehmood.
Self Portrait. 2000.
 Mixed media. 7.5x5ins.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 219

Hasnat Mehmood.
A Letter To All. 2001.
 Mixed media. 8x12ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 220

Hasnat Mehmood.
Untitled. 2001.
 Gouache and perforations on wasli. 7.5x12.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 221

Hasnat Mehmood.
Letter To All. 2001.
 Gouache and silver foil on wasli. 8x12ins.

Fig. 222

Hasnat Mehmood.
A Letter To All. 2003.
 Gouache and lead on wasli. 5.5x10ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 223

Hasnat Mehmood.
Conference of Crows. 2004.
 Watercolor and lead on wasli. 1 3x20ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 224

Hasnat Mehmood.
Conference of Crows. 2004.
 Gouache and inks on wasli. 13x20ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 225

Hasnat Mehmood.
Love In The Time Of Chaos. 2004.
 Gouache and lead on wasli. 8x5.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 226

Hasnat Mehmood.
Krishna God of Love. 2004.
 Digital media. 11 .5x6.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 227

Hasnat Mehmood.
Untitled. 2004
 Mixed media. 6x6.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 228

Hasnat Mehmood.
Untitled. 2006.
 Gouache on wasli. 9x12ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 229

Khadim Ali
The City of Worship. 2003
 Gouache on wasli. 6.5x9ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 230

Imran Qureshi.
The Game of Tenses. 2002.
 Opaque watercolor and Letraset transfer on wasli.
 26x34cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 231

Muhammad Zeeshan
 Detail from *Beyond Appearances* . 2006
 Gouache on wasli. 6.5x9ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 232

Nusra Latif
Specification of Desire. 2002
 Gouache on wasli. 6.5x6ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 233

Murad Khan Mumtaz
Book 4. 2004
 Gouache on wasli 8.5x12ins.
 Artist Collection

Fig. 234

Asif Ahmed
Season of Love. 2007
 Opaque watercolor on wasli. 24x44cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 235

Mudassar Manzoor
Untitled.2006
 Gouache on wasli. 38x38cms.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 236

Nida Bangash
Scroll. 2006
 Gouache on wasli. 12x60ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 237

Nida Bangash
 Detail of figure 236.

Fig. 238

Rehana Mangi
Untitled.2007
 Hair on wasli. 2.75x1.75ft.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 239

Isbah Afzal
Maze of Knots .2007
 Watercolor on wasli. 8x10.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 240

Sana Obaid
Remains.2007
 Gouache on wasli. 7x5.5ins.
 Ownership unknown

Fig. 241

Sobia Naeem
Untitled.2007
 Gouache on wasli. 28x28ins.
 Ownership unknown

Chapter 1

The Heritage of Miniature Painting

Before we begin to analyze and discuss the work of individual artists responsible for the evolution of miniature in the latter part of the twentieth century, it is important to make a short survey of traditional miniature schools of the subcontinent that provide a continuing source of inspiration for these contemporary works. The splendor of miniature painting that dominated world art between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries is legendary and many comprehensive histories have been researched and written by distinguished scholars giving us a better understanding of this art form.¹ However the concise discussion here is not aimed at following an exhaustive historical trail but to determine areas of its selective relevance to the modern miniature.

The pedagogical practice at the miniature department of the National College of Arts is based solely on copying existing paintings from Persian, Mughal, Rajput, and Pahari schools in the initial years of student training. The quantity and the easy availability in the college library of magnificently illustrated books on these schools provide an accessible source of visual inspiration. Hardly any students walk across to the Central Museum to see any of the miniatures in its display and fewer still show interest in the history of miniature painting.²

As they graduate, these miniaturists stop copying the entire paintings, taking instead particular icons for use in their individual undertakings. Most of them, in a distinct postmodernist trend, follow a selective borrowing of specific motifs to place in newer contexts in order to alter their original meaning. These motifs come mainly from the major painting schools such as the Mughal and Rajput, images they are most familiar with but in some cases one sees occasional icons from Company paintings. Endorsed as the traditional

art form of Pakistan largely due to its Muslim patronage, the Mughal miniature however remains the most popular and preferred resource for the new miniature works. Lahore being one of the locations where many manuscripts were illustrated during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan augments the sense of pride most modern miniaturists share in using an art form that belongs to this region. Distinct traditional features in their works can be traced back to Mughal, Rajput, Pahari, Deccani and even miniatures done during the British period. Contemporary miniature, although not a historical development of miniature painting that thrived in the subcontinent, continues to derive inspiration from it. What is attempted here is a short analytical essay on each of these schools and a closing section on what the modern miniature painters borrow from them.

Mughal Miniature painting

The foundation of the mighty Mughal Empire in India was laid in 1526 by Babur, a Chagtai Turk interested in art and literature. But it was his son Humayun who instituted a distinct art tradition when, after his exile in Persia, he brought back Abd as-Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, two reputed painters of the Persian court. These artists established the royal *karkhana* (workshop) on the lines of Safavid traditions of painting the emperor and his court activities. The technique and style of Persian painting provided a ready reference for the nascent Mughal atelier. Since Humayun did not live long after his return, his young son Akbar who ascended the throne in 1556 inherited the atelier.

Akbar commissioned illustrations for various literary manuscripts and imaginative tales in the beginning of his reign while in the latter half numerous historical manuscripts were written and illustrated. The character of subsequent Mughal miniature painting was

shaped by an energetic assimilation of diverse stylistic trends brought together by the strong influence wielded by the two Persian masters and the painting skills of the local Indian artists employed at the atelier. Akbar's personal interest in the manuscripts to be illustrated, the artists and their materials added to the vibrant eclecticism developing at the atelier.³ Another influencing factor on Indian painting during this period was the lasting impact of Flemish and German engravings, brought to the Mughal court by the Jesuit missions.⁴ Under the orders of the Emperor artists either copied these images directly or integrated motifs from them into their paintings.⁵ Mughal painting under Akbar was thus a convergence of Persian, Indian and European art.

Although the Mughal interest in recording specific imperial activities and court personalities started to evolve during Humayun's reign it was Akbar who is generally known for commissioning epic historical manuscripts.⁶ The state chronicles illustrating the rule of his ancestors and himself comprised of elaborate scenes of the court, the hunt and other events painted with numerous figures necessitating groups of artists to work on single paintings. The need for portraying likenesses became imminent too and Akbar commissioned a series of paintings of the who's who of his court. These early Mughal portraits often set against monochromatic backgrounds were single standing figures with their faces in profile. They sought to portray naturalism and developed a style that was to take on highly allegorical and symbolic nuances under Jahangir, the essence of which can easily be associated with modern contemporary miniatures in their concepts.

Jahangir became heir to a wealthy and consolidated kingdom when he became the new Emperor in 1605.⁷ Not only did he inherit his father's love for painting but also the

royal atelier. A great collector and connoisseur of art, Jahangir patronized painting even before he became emperor when he set up court in Allahabad after he rebelled against Akbar and established his own atelier there to create “one of the most fascinating byways of Mughal painting”.⁸ This and his close encounter with art since childhood were to instill in him a great artistic temperament and a passion for painting.⁹ While still a prince, he had the chance to see and collect European paintings brought by the Jesuit missions as souvenirs for Akbar, leaving him with an everlasting appreciation of Western Art.¹⁰ As emperor he continued to add to his collection of Christian images that provided a ready reference for his artists either to copy or to use as inspirations for other works. Consequently numerous western elements found their way into the Mughal iconography, prominent among them the *putti*, the nimbus and the terrestrial globe.¹¹ European techniques of imparting volume to the human figure, perspective and allegorical concepts also began to influence painting during Jahangir’s reign. Realistic portraiture, begun in the closing years of Akbar’s reign, gained more symbolic implications during Jahangir’s reign. His desire for accuracy and openness to western influences resulted in some fine single figure paintings with greater realism and psychological overtones marking the significant characteristics of portraiture during his reign.

During Jahangir’s reign the subject matter shifted from the earlier court, battle and hunt scenes to simpler but more elaborate allegorical compositions. Painted by individual artists, they fostered personal artistic styles that showed marked observation and insight in contrast to the large official manuscripts of Akbar that exuded action and vivacity. Jahangir preferred single paintings as opposed to manuscripts which were generally bound

into *muraqqas* (albums) with two facing pages of calligraphy alternating with two illustrations.¹² The calligraphies were mostly surrounded by borders filled with figures in various activities while the illustrations, although at times disparate, were bordered by floral or arabesque designs to bring an overall unity. The figural borders are a distinct characteristic of painting developed during the reign of Jahangir.

Like his grandfather Babur, Jahangir had a keen eye for unusual flowers and animals and would order his painters to make pictures of them. His interest in nature helped this traditional art form to reach its acme under him, and enabled painters such as Mansur to specialize in painting birds and animals.¹³ These excellent nature studies form a body of work that Beach traces back to flora and fauna painted in the Fitzwilliam Album and the Baburnama of the Akbar period and also terms it as the forerunner of natural history paintings of the British period. Ebba Koch has made an interesting comparable study of *pietra dure* bird representations in the Red Fort, Delhi and bird studies done by Mansur and finds a commonality between Mughal patronage of natural history drawings and their transposition in *pietra dure* to patronage of the Medici.¹⁴

Jahangir was succeeded by his son Shahjahan in 1628.¹⁵ His fondness for jewels and a deep knowledge of fine craftsmanship extended both to art and architecture. Demanding a dazzling effect in all that he commissioned, he ordered the lavish Peacock Throne made of gold and jewels.¹⁶ What has been said of Shahjahan's love for precious stones, jewellery and gold can be best verified from the various valuable items kept in every great museum of the world,¹⁷ and more precisely and significantly in the *pietre dure* work in the Shish Mahal and the Naulakha in the Lahore Fort. His interest in fine architecture is apparent in

buildings exquisitely finished in white marble and inlaid with colored stones instead of the red sandstone used by his ancestors. The Taj Mahal, mausoleum of his wife Mumtaz Mahal is the embodiment of his taste for the splendid.¹⁸

Shahjahan inherited an interest in art and accomplished painters such as Govardhan, Payag, Bichitr and Hashim from his ancestors, but he did not patronize painting as much as Akbar and Jahangir did.¹⁹ The *Padshahnama*, an illustrated history of his reign by Abd'ul Hamid Lahori, remains the most important manuscript of the time and the last of the illustrated memoirs of any Mughal emperor.²⁰ The manuscript, said to have been “offered” by the Nawab of Avadh to Lord Teighmouth, is now in the Royal Library in Windsor Castle. For India’s 50 years of independence, its 46 miniature paintings were exhibited in 1997, along with a publication by M.C. Beach and E. Koch which is a masterpiece of erudition with the reproduction of richly illuminated pages of an excellent quality.²¹ Ebba Koch’s “Hierarchical Principles of Shah-Jahan Painting” is a seminal study of the techniques used by the artists in fulfilling the mission of “absolute control of the pictorial world and its laws of representation” which Shahjahan expected from them in illuminating the chronicles of his reign.²² The illustrations, and especially the portraits of Shahjahan appeared posed and resplendent, his jewels adding a glittering effect to the paintings, but devoid of the naturalism of the Jahangir period as M.C. Beach had already noticed in 1992, before starting work on the exhibition of the *Padshahnama*.²³

The more ordinary paintings of the time, which form the bulk of the production in his era, were individual paintings, often equestrian portraits with elaborately painted borders. The margins and borders match the paintings with their formal floral designs that are either

painted only in gold or outlined with a regular gold line, which robs them of their naturalism.

Shahjahan also constituted albums or *muraqqas* of contemporary portraits and those from the Jahangir period with lavish jewel-like painted *shamsas* (suns) on the frontispiece. The Minto Album, the best known, has works of Bichitr, Govardhan, Hashim and Mansur.²⁴

But whatever can be said about the richness and precision Shahjahan expected from his painters, M.C. Beach scathingly sums up the characteristics of painting of this period in the following sentence: “Flawless technique and a concern for surface accuracy and beauty replaced insight into personality with increasing frequency.”²⁵

Shahjahan’s reign was marked with growing political insecurity and a beginning of the eventual collapse of the Mughal dynasty. After a series of battles ensued for the throne among his four sons, he was imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb who also killed his three siblings in order to proclaim himself Emperor in 1658.²⁶ Shahjahan died an unhappy man in 1666.

Although one finds portraits of Aurangzeb and court paintings from the early period of his reign, he did not deem fit to continue with the imperial patronization of art and the production of illuminated manuscripts gradually became less and less as he became more religious.²⁷ As a result most court painters sought work in Rajasthan while others followed the Emperor to Deccan, where he had moved to deal with the rebellions against Mughal rule. Still others continued to work in Delhi for less important patrons, although with the new trend of orthodoxy and fundamentalism in the Imperial policies, it is a fair guess that the *umara* (nobility) faithfully followed the Emperor’s lead.²⁸

Most historians agree that the superb phase of miniature painting commenced under Akbar, reached its zenith during the Jahangir era and finally edged towards its decline through Shahjahan's reign to its ultimate downfall with Aurangzeb and the decline of the Mughals themselves.

Mughal miniatures and contemporary miniatures

Contemporary miniature practice borrows heavily from Mughal miniature painting in terms of technique, format and imagery. The Jahangir period known for its symbolic and allegorical images has also been inspirational for the symbolic content of many contemporary miniature painting as opposed to the straight forward depictions of court, hunt and historical images of the Akbar period.

The Mughal technique of painting a miniature with some contemporary adaptations continues to provide a procedural prototype for most contemporary works. Although many artists make sporadic forays into combining traditional skills with newer materials and forms of making art, the use of the *wasli*, the opaque watercolors and meticulous detailing form a major bond with tradition and remain a dominant qualification. Artists like Shazia Sikander, Nusra Latif, Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid and others have done digital animations, videos and site specific installations at some point in their careers but remain keen on the miniature technique. A very recent example of the merger of traditional miniature and non traditional art forms was the 2008 thesis project of Amara Khalid, a young miniature student at the National College of Arts, whose only connection to miniature was the *wasli* that she used for creating the relief of a city facade.

Along with using materials that have their origins in tradition, many modern

contemporary painters like Hasnat Mehmood, Imran Qureshi, Muhammad Zeeshan and Waseem Ahmed use the double-page book format which comes from Mughal manuscripts. (figs.27,13,15 and 19).

The figural studies from Mughal paintings especially those that portray single figures of Emperors remain a model for both traditional and modern contemporary painters. The work of traditional painters Ustad Haji Sharif and Sheikh Shujaullah, Bashir Ahmed and others discussed in the following chapters consists mostly of replicated Mughal figures. The icon of the emperor which developed mostly under Jahangir as a symbol of autocracy is used by many contemporary painters in a context other than its original and mostly to deride the very grandeur it once sought to express. Nusra Latif uses Jahangir and Shahjahan as icons of grandeur to communicate her views about the menace behind their royal magnificence. In “Holy Alliances” (fig. 1) she replicates Jahangir’s image from “Jahangir Holding the Orb” done by Bichitr (fig.2) while in “Red Bird Narratives-1” (fig.3) Shahjahan’s image is taken from “ Prince Khurram” by Abu’l Hasan (fig.4).

Saira Waseem replicates entire Mughal paintings in some of her works but replaces the emperor with local or international ruling personalities in order to spoof contemporary dictatorship. A good example is her “Padshahnama I” (fig.5) where she reproduces “Jahangir preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings” (fig.6) but replaces the emperor with Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime minister of Pakistan.

The Halo or the Nimbus found popularity in Jahangir’s reign and one sees it in many contemporary works. Percy Brown traces its early form of a “celestial aureole of fire” to the Persians. The circular disk as it appeared subsequently had its origins in Gandhara

sculpture and later became an attribute for many Hindu deities before traveling westwards to Europe to become the accepted symbol of sainthood in Christian Art. Saira Waseem uses the golden halo to surround contemporary political leaders such as in “The Kiss,” not to enhance their image but to ridicule their autocracy (fig.7). Hasnat Ahmed uses the halo in his “Krishna, god of Love” (fig.8). Waseem Ahmed uses it often for its design value where it does not necessarily surround only the head of a person, sometimes using a large halo to form a backdrop for both the figures of Krishna and his consort (fig.9).

The *putti* or little angels in the western style are one of the Christian motifs that the Mughal artists adopted from European manuscripts. It is an image used by few contemporary painters. Nusra Latif uses it extensively as it provides her with an apt metaphor for the colonizers and fits in well with the focus of her work. She renders her *putti* either in flat colors or leaves them in outline suggesting the presence of the colonizers even after they have left (figs.1 and 10) Saira Waseem also uses *putti* to surround world leaders that form a major theme in her work (fig.7).

Another element that became popular during Jahangir’s period was the figures painted outside the decorative borders or margins. Contemporary artists like Imran Qureshi continue to use the element even in his non-figurative works where he often lets the contents of his painting continue outside the prescribed borders (fig.11).

Calligraphy formed an essential part of the illustrated manuscripts done under Akbar as it offered narration for the images. Jahangir was not interested in historical texts, hence the accompanying script fell into disuse and single paintings carried only his *farman* (seal) and the painter’s name. Calligraphy used by the contemporary modern painters is used

either purely as a design element such as in Shazia Sikander's "Phemonology" (fig. 12) or for satirical insinuation as in Imran Qureshi's "The Game of Tenses" (fig. 13).

Mughal paintings of flora and fauna developed during Jahangir's reign and done by Mansur provide images that are used by some contemporary painters. "Two Vultures" by Mansur (fig. 14) is used by Mohammad Zeeshan who transforms the image in his own works (figs. 15 and 16).

Rajput painting in Rajasthan²⁹

The Rajputs were culturally well advanced in their own right till 17th century. Mughal domination brought a marked change in most Rajput painting even as traditional Hindu texts continued to be illustrated. Seventeenth century Rajput painting thus comprised of elements from their own inherited tradition of Western Indian Art before the 16th century,³⁰ the painted scrolls from their folk art, and some specific aspects of the Mughal and Deccani styles. In all traditional Rajput painting, changes in conventional iconography were not often forthcoming. It is when new subjects were introduced that the artist dared to experiment.³¹

Rajput painting with its characteristic use of flatly laid primary colors and strong lines was a development of the Western Indian style of Jain painting.³² Episodes from

Hindu texts which dealt mostly with love or religion were illustrated and composed in units to form a single painting while the image and background competed with each in terms of vibrancy. Texts that expressed relationships between a man and a woman categorized by dawn, sunset or the seasons of the year and their emotional potential was the *Ragamala* series which consisted of a set of thirty-six paintings. *Bhagavata Purana*, a Sanskrit text

which dealt with the second major subject Vaisnavism centered on episodes from the life of Vishnu and his incarnation as Krishna. Exposed in the *Bhagavata Purana*, this subject became extremely popular in northern India from the 16th century onwards.³³ These two subjects were to become so intertwined gradually that Krishna was shown as the archetypal beloved even in the *ragamala* series. Later Hindu texts were done in a style that blended traditional Rajput iconography of the popular pre-Mughal *Chaurapanchasika* and other earlier texts with popular Mughal trends.³⁴ This style with its many variations was to remain popular till the 19th century.³⁵ A significant development in these paintings was that the text was moved to the reverse of the folio giving the paintings more space and dominance.

The Rajputs, a fierce warrior race from Rajasthan established themselves in central and northern India sometime during the first millennium A.D. Resisting Muslim advances for centuries they finally yielded to matrimonial alliances and positions at the court offered to them by the Mughals. During Jahangir and Shahjahan's reign, portraits of several serving Rajput rajas were painted for the Imperial manuscripts, copies of which often traveled back with them.³⁶ Some Rajput rulers even employed Mughal trained artists to emulate the splendor of the Mughal court.³⁷ Rosemary Crill aptly points out that "The twin themes of religion and love dominated painting at the Rajput courts until the taste for portraits and historical figures was introduced through contact with the Mughal court."³⁸

However the overpowering influence that Mughal court painting exerted remained superficial and Rajput painting retained its brilliant color palette and simple forms. The Rajput ruler was mostly painted amid scenes of festivals, hunts or activities of amusement rather than the austere Mughal court setting.³⁹ In contrast to Mughal painting which at this

point was moving towards a more naturalistic representation and a significant consideration for portraiture, Rajput figures remained archetypal even when specific persons were depicted. Faces were portrayed mostly in profile with particular characteristics developed in different Rajput courts.⁴⁰ The spatial treatment of paintings also stayed typically Indian with no attempt to emulate the sense of depth that under European influence was becoming central to Mughal paintings of the time.⁴¹

Rajput painting in the Punjab Hills

The Punjab Hills or the Pahari States founded by the ruling families of Rajasthan who came and settled there, lay at the foothills of the Himalayas and formed another conglomeration of Rajput States that comprised of Basohli, Chamba, Guler, Garhwal, Kulu, Jammu and Kangra, among other minor principalities. The Mughals captured the Kangra Fort in 1620 and subjugated most of the hill states later.⁴²

Despite the politically volatile situation, the rulers of these princely states extended avid patronage to artists. F.S. Aijazuddin observed that “without the Pahari painter, the Pahari states and their rulers might well have been forgotten;⁴³ without the Pahari rajas, the painters would certainly have been forgotten.” The Pahari School is one of the latest Indian schools “discovered” by scholars through the pioneering works of W. Archer, K. Khandalawala, B.N. Goswamy, M.S. Randhawa, F.S. Aijazuddin and a few other specialists,⁴⁴ and the story of this “rediscovery” has been briefly but interestingly told by Karl Khandalavala in his *Pahari Miniature Paintings in the N.C. Mehta Collection*.⁴⁵

Pahari painting which developed in the late 17th century and continued up to the 19th century, flourished over a period of almost two hundred years.⁴⁶ Popular texts such as the *Ma ha bharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Gitagovinda* along with

between Rama and Ravana, the many episodes from Krishna's life, love tales of Radha and Krishna and the gopis provided endless themes to the Pahari painters, while the beauty of the Himalayan foothills lent a picturesque setting to these episodes. Portrait painting also became popular with rulers from Basohli and Mankot and one finds the Mughal genre adapted to the strong colors and the sharp profiles of the traditional Rajput style.

Guler⁴⁷ is a significant school because it is here that the Mughal-trained family of the artist Pandit Seu introduced a new naturalism during the early 18th century. This family of painters was employed at Basohli, Chamba, Guler, Jammu and Kangra and other hill states.⁴⁸ Pandit Seu's family set a stylistic trend, which was carried to neighboring states and influenced the work done in the entire Pahari area for over three generations.⁴⁹ His son Nainsukh, who was trained by artists working in the Mughal style in the plains, worked under Balwant Singh, a minor raja of the ruling family of Jasrota.⁵⁰ His numerous portraits of the raja depict naturalism not seen in the Basohli portraits.⁵¹ Nainsukh moved to Basohli in 1763 where his brother Manaku was already working in a more naturalistic style.

Kangra⁵² is one of the largest Punjab hill states. The same family ruled Kangra from the 16th century till Raja Sansar Chand (1775-1823), who was a great patron of arts.⁵³ It was during his reign and with the third generation of the artist Pandit Seu's family that the "Guler style" reached its zenith. There is information on Sansar Chand's "fondness for drawings" in the 1820's and of his "'immense collection' of pictures comprising not only of portraits but paintings of religious and mythological subjects and that even after his political decline he still had several artists in his service".⁵⁴ The Lahore Museum has several drawings showing artists working in Kangra in 1775: the painter Kama, eldest son of

Nainsukh,⁵⁵ and his brothers Gudhu, Nikka,⁵⁶ and Ranj a.⁵⁷

In Kangra we find two groups of paintings: one is the paintings of Sansar Chand and his court activities,⁵⁸ which retain some of the flat bright colors and the stiffer style of the early Basohli portraits and the other, illustrations for the Bhagvata Purana, the Gitagovinda and the Ramayana. All these narrative paintings date from 1785 to 95 and are the works of the sons of Manaku and Nainsukh.⁵⁹ The oblong composition of these narratives is skillfully divided into units with figures done in flowing lines of the lyrical Guler style. The backgrounds abounded with resplendent landscape and foliage on softly rounded hillocks.

Rajput painting and Contemporary Miniature

Themes of love, the vibrant color and a stylized imagery that Rajput and Pahari schools are known for are shared by some modern miniatures with only a few contemporary miniature painters making selective borrowings from them. Rajput and Pahari themes that interest most modern miniature painters is love, and many have shelved their issue-related miniatures to produce an occasional painting on the subject. Of the traditionalists, Khalid Saeed Butt has used the lyrical Pahari theme in many of his works (fig. 17). In more recent times this theme is prominent in Hasnat Ahmed's "Love in the time of Chaos" (Fig. 18) and Waseem Ahmed's "Krishna Series" (fig.19 and 21).

Waseem Ahmed is one artist who borrows heavily from the Rajput school in terms of the theme, the brilliant color palette and the Krishna icon. He has painted an entire series named after the god, whom he sets against bright primary colors. Dressed in jeans and carrying a gun, Krishna is often portrayed with a modern female icon instead of his traditional consort, Radha (figs. 19 and 21). Hasnat Mehmood has also used Krishna as an icon of love

in some of his work (figs.8 and 18).

Many contemporary artists incorporate foliage from different Rajput schools into their paintings. Waseem Ahmed's arcaded foliage in his painting from the "Krishna Series" (fig.21) mimics similar foliage from the Mevar painting "Sursagar" (fig. 22). He also makes ample use of plantains from both Jodhpur and Mevar schools (fig. 19 and 20) Khalid Saeed Butt integrates the delicate Kangra foliage into many of his paintings (fig.17).

The lotus with its origin in Buddhist art is a typical image seen in foregrounds of many paintings from Jaipur, Mevar, Kishangarh and Basohli and appears in many contemporary miniatures. Waseem Ahmed uses the lotus and places it in much the same manner as some works from Jaipur (fig.20). Aisha Khalid uses stylized versions of the lotus which are closer to its Buddhist origins (figs. 23 and 24). Hasnat Mehmood's lotuses from the foreground of his "Love in the Time of Chaos" (fig. 18) are again similar to the detail of the Jaipur painting reproduced here (fig.20).

Paintings done during the British period

Even under Mughal supremacy before the foundation of Calcutta in 1690, the British had held important textile production and export interests in Bengal. Bengal (with Bihar and Orissa) was an area known for its cotton production.⁶⁰ After the defeat of Siraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, and his French allies at Plassey in 1757, the British became the recognized administrators of Bengal in 1765. By the late 18th century the East India Company had grown from a commercial enterprise into a military and administrative power controlling a large part of India.⁶¹

The break up of the Mughal Empire led to an evacuation of court painters from Delhi

who then looked to newer centers of British power such as Murshidabad, Patna, Calcutta, Lukhnow, Avadh etc.

The beginning of British patronage of painting in northern India can be credited to William Fullerton, the Scots surgeon stationed at Patna, who hired painter Dip Chand of Murshidabad in the early 1760s.⁶² His style, reminiscent of a portrait of Nawab Aliverdi Khan of Murshidabad made a decade earlier, was characteristic of painting of displaced court painters of Delhi of the Muhammad Shah period. However, portraits did not become popular during British rule, and with the decline of court patronage the Indian painters were accustomed to, they incorporated their new patrons' demands into the work they produced for them.

By the second half of the 18th century the British officers of the East India Company had started to commission local artists. The British were mainly looking for paintings that would document India in terms of its land, people, flora and fauna, sites, costumes, trades and crafts. The court painters were quick to adapt to the new subjects demanded of them. These paintings were either commissioned or bought ready-made to take back to England as souvenirs.⁶³ Such works were later called Company paintings,⁶⁴ a term referring to the East India Company whose employees were the main patrons, although earlier the French and the Portuguese had commissioned native artists to paint similar themes.

Many enterprising artists made sets of such paintings to be sold in bazaars, and train or river stations. After the British occupied Delhi and Agra in 1803, these two cities became thriving centers for the painting and sale of such sets.⁶⁵ The Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Humayun's tomb, Qutb Minar and various other monuments became the standard

subjects and a stereotypical and imagery emerged over time. Portraits of Mughal Emperors and sometimes Empresses painted on ivory also became popular subjects for these sets. Another common theme was the musicians and the *nautch* (dancing) girls, sets of which were often presented to guests after a *nautch* evening.⁶⁶

In the 1940s Mildred Archer discovered the paintings made for the British at Patna and published them as *Patna Paintings* in 1947.⁶⁷ Later, William and Mildred Archer published *Indian Painting for the British* (1955) that included paintings from other parts of India.⁶⁸ Murshidabad and Patna became the main centers of Company painting of eastern India and their artists also catered to the British living in Calcutta.⁶⁹

The earliest Company paintings commissioned in Calcutta, by Lady Margaret Impey, wife of the Chief Justice, were a series of some 300 nature studies made between 1777 and 1783.⁷⁰ Comprising of Indian birds and mammals, this series was painted in opaque watercolor on large sheets of European paper. The artists were Zayn al Din, Bhawani Dass and Ram Dass from Patna who were trained in the Mughal style. The other important patron from Calcutta was its Governor-General, Marquis Wellesley (1798-1805) who also commissioned paintings of birds and animals.⁷¹

Commissioned by two brothers William and James Fraser in 1815, about a hundred or more watercolors of the inhabitants of the Delhi area were painted by Ghulam Ali Khan and Lallji, the Delhi painters.⁷² One of the two brothers, James was a talented amateur artist himself.⁷³ They took these artists with them when they went on a tour to the Punjab hills where the artists produced some fine portraits of the Gurkhas. The work of these painters was extraordinary in their realism and of a much higher quality than the bazaar illustrations.

There is also mention of a Mazhar Ali Khan who worked in Delhi and made many of the illustrations for the Metcalfe Album for Sir Thomas Metcalfe, resident at the Mughal court.⁷⁴

The paintings of the Metcalfe Album do not include many major Mughal monuments that were painted by an Indian architect of Avadh for Colonel Gentil in 1772⁷⁵ and did not remain due to the rapid decay of the city between 1775 and 1844.⁷⁶ The Metcalfe Album is not the only one of its kind: a Skinner Album and a (William) Fraser Album are in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, with the portrait of each owner as frontispiece.⁷⁷

There were many French officers in Avadh prior to British supremacy in that area.⁷⁸ Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier, Major-General Claude Martin and Colonel Jean-Baptiste Gentil were prominent among the French who took a keen interest in Indian culture. They commissioned paintings of the inhabitants of northern India, landscapes of military interest, illustrations for books of fables and copies of earlier Mughal paintings. Gentil employed a team of Indian artists like Nevasi Lal and Mohan Singh for illustrating his French manuscripts.⁷⁹ Antoine-Louis Polier also had a splendid collection of Indian manuscripts - now distributed between Paris, Cambridge, London and Lausanne - starting with the full set of the four Vedas he got copied in Jaipur in eleven volumes, now in the British library. Polier while he was in Avadh commissioned the same artists who worked for Gentil, and his Persian Correspondence contains letters to some of them. He took his Indian collection with him when he went to England, then Switzerland and France, which was dispersed after his death in 1795.

Half a century later, the French officers employed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh took great interest in archaeology and the history of Punjab. Most of them had their own residences

sketched and painted by Punjabi artists, Allard in his first “family painting” in c. 1834⁸⁰ and Court by Imam Bakhsh Lahori,⁸¹ and the miniatures of Imam Bakhsh illustrating the Mémoires of General Court include views of the forts of Rohtas, Attock and Jamrud with the Khyber Pass.⁸²

Paintings for Europeans developed in a style different from Mughal miniatures technically and aesthetically. The British demanded many modifications to what the native painters, at least the “bazaar ones” had been accustomed to painting. To the British the greatest failings of the native artist were the use of brilliant opaque color, the lack of naturalism in architectural perspective, and figures and objects with no volume or shadows.⁸³ This criticism, which was not justified for the best paintings of Imam Bakhsh Lahori,⁸⁴ was true for most of the bazaar production. The British duly set out to rectify this after they took over Lahore. Most of the British officers were amateur artists or draughtsmen⁸⁵ who often guided the Indian painters about painting from observation and how to render the images more true to life. Watercolor became the new medium instead of the gouache that was used earlier. The brilliant colors of the Indian miniatures were given up and the British preference for softer blues, greens and sepia adopted.⁸⁶

Company paintings and contemporary miniatures

Among the contemporary miniature painters, Nusra Latif is the only artist who uses images from Company paintings. She borrows images from botanical studies and diagrams of instruments. Though not a direct borrowing from the art work produced for Europeans, she also makes use of Raj photographs and textile prints done for the European market in her compositions. By juxtaposing these images she offers a critical comment on colonialization

(figs. 25 and 26).

Along with taking pictorial and thematic references from traditional miniatures, many contemporary miniature painters also take inspiration from western iconography. Pop Art, popular culture as well as images of consumer society are some areas that they borrow from. Andy Warhol's use of multiple images in his paintings has been used by Hasnat Ahmed who often replicates multiple images in his works (compare figs.27 and 28) Warhol's use of popular figures also finds parallels in the work of Saira Waseem whose entire oeuvre is based on imaging political leaders and in Waseem Ahmed's uses of film stars in some of his paintings (fig. 19). Pop Art is sometimes described as witty and gimmicky, two adjectives that could well be attributed to contemporary miniatures.

Even as the modern painters deal with newer concepts, materials and ways of making art they keep an ongoing interaction with tradition in their technique, materials and the ethos of the medium where traditional miniature provides a steady source of imagery for their works.



Notes:

¹ Stuart Cary Welch. *Imperial Mughal Painting* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), 31-32 for a short bibliography & 40 color plates. Amina Okada. *Imperial Mughal Painters* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992). Milo Cleveland Beach. *Mughal and Rajput Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Percy Brown. *Indian Painting Under the Mughals* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publishers, 1981). Jeremiah P. Losty. *The Art of the Book in India* (London: The British Library, 1982). Milo Cleveland Beach. *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court*, (Washington: Freer Gallery of Art, 1981). Falk Toby & Archer. *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, (London: Library, 1981). B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer. *Wonders of a Golden Age*, (Zurich: Rietberg Museum, 1987). Linda York Leach. *Indian Miniature Paintings and Drawings*, (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1986). Barret, Douglas and Gray Basil. *La Peinture Indienne*, (Geneva: Skira, 1963). Rosemary Crill, Susan Stronge et al. *Arts of Mughal India: Studies in Honour of Robert Skelton*, (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2004).

² F.S. Aijazuddin recounted to the author that there were no students who wanted to attend his history of miniature painting class which he was teaching at the National College of Art in 2006.

³ Abu'l Fazl. *Ain-i-Akbari*. Translated by H. Blochmann (Calcutta: 1927, Lahore: Quasin Reprint, 1975), 113.

⁴ See the various essays of Ebba Koch collected in her *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). On Akbar, read the first pages of chapter 1, "The Influence of the Jesuit Missions on Symbolic Representations of the Mughal Emperors", pp. 1-11., with illustrations, including the frontispiece of the *Polyglot Bible* fig. 1.1. E. Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1932, pp. 222-267. Read the three volumes compiled by du Jarric from the documentation sent to him by the Jesuits of Goa, *Histoire des choses les plus mémorables advenues des Indes orientales* and especially volume 2 published in Bordeaux, France, in 1608. By 1626 it was translated into many European languages, including one in Latin. Subsequently it disappeared from the market, before being rediscovered by V.A. Smith in his *Life of Akbar* and his *Oxford History of India*. See J.M. Lafont, *Les Français / The French & Lahore*, pp. 38-39 and ill. No 39.

⁵ Khalid Anis Ahmed, ed., *Intercultural Encounter in Mughal Miniatures (Mughal-Christian Miniatures)*, (Lahore: National College of Arts Publication, 1995) 14. The Jesuit missions from Goa brought the Plantyn Polyglot Bible (1568-1572), with many engravings, with them as a gift for the Emperor. These fascinated Akbar so much that he had his artists make copies of them as well as had certain motifs incorporated in various Mughal compositions.

⁶ See painting 'Prince Akbar hunting a Nilgae' 1555-60, which corresponds to an actual event recorded in the *Akbarna* by ^{97A} a convenient chronological account of Jahangir in V.A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, pp. 634-635. See also *Akbarna* by Abu'l Fazl Allami, (Translated by H. Beveridge), reprint Delhi, 1972, vol II, p. 634.

363-375. Also J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 94-118.

⁸ As explicated by John Seyller, "The Walters Art Museum Diwan of Amir Hasan Dilhawi and Salim's atelier at Allahabad", in R. Crill, S. Stronge and al., *Arts of Mughal India. Studies in Honour of Robert Skelton*, pp. 95-111, 14 illustrations.

⁹ Barrett, D. and B. Gray, *La peinture indienne*, pp. 99-107. M.C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput painting* p. 107. Three stimulating studies on manuscripts illuminated under Jahangir: M.C. Beach, "Jahangir's Album: some clarifications, in R. Crill, S. Stronge and al., *Arts of Mughal India*, pp. 111-118; Friederike Weis, "A Painting from a *Jahangirnama* and its Compositional Parallels with an Engraving from the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*", *ibid.*, pp. 119-128; and the curious chapter of Susan Stronge, "Far from Art of Painting": An English Amateur Artist at the Court of Jahangir", *ibid.*, pp. 129-137.

¹⁰ E. Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, chapter V, "Jahangir", pp. 69-98. Also *Jahangir and the Jesuits... from the Relations of Father Fernão'5fo Guerreiro, S.J.*, translated by C.H. Payne, London, George Rotledge & Sons, 1930.

¹¹ See development of the nimbus in Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals*, pp. 172-174.

¹² According to J.P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, p. 96, no 78, only two large collections of Jahangir's album pages survive: the earliest, the Muraqqa' Gulshan, in the Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran... The second, this one [Staatsbibliothek Preussischer, Berlin].

¹³ M.C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial painting in India 1600-1660*, (Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Art Institute, 1978), 25.

¹⁴ Ebba Koch, *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology. Selection of Essays*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 92-93. Also S.P. Verma, *Mughal Painters and their work*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 261.

¹⁵ On Shahjahan's reign, V.A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, pp. 376-403 with a chronological tableau p. 402. J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 119-164, comprising two chapters, the second being "The War of Succession".

¹⁶ S.C. Welch, *India Arts and Culture*, pp. 210-270, covers approximately Shahjahan's reign and gives a rich vision of the various arts, including jewelry, dresses and arms of the court and time of Shahjahan.

¹⁷ Guy and Swallow, *Arts of India 1550-1900*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990, "The Art of the Mughals", pp. 56-107. Also S.C. Welch's *India Arts and Culture*, illustrations no 154 to 175.

¹⁸ We already mentioned the two most important books on the Taj Mahal: A. Chaghatai, *The Tadj Mahal d'Agra (Inde). Histoire et description*, Ph.D. (Paris), Bruxelles, 1938, giving for the first time the name of *Ustad Ahmed* as (one?) architect of the Taj. And W.E. Begley and Z.A. Desai, *Taj Mahal. The Illumined Tomb*, 1989, especially chapter 37, "The architect of the Taj Mahal, Ustad Ahmed Lahori" (p. 261-

276).

¹⁹ Anjan, Chakraverty, *Indian Miniature Painting*, pp. 55-56. T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, pp. 65-88.

²⁰ It is worth noting that the two great historians of Shahjahan belonged to Lahore: Abdul Hamid Lahori, whose prose was deeply influenced by Abul Fazl's style of writing and who wrote the *Padshanama*, and Inayat Khan Kambo and his brother Mohammed Saleh Kambo who wrote the *Shahjahan nama*.

²¹ *King of the World. The Padshahnama. An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle... with new translation by Wheeler Thackston*, London, Azimuth Editions – Sackler Gallery, 1997.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 130-143. Reprinted in her *Mughal Art and Ideology*, pp. 130-162, with black & white reproductions.

²³ M.C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p. 133.

²⁴ The Minto Album was (part of) a Shahjahan album which came into the hands of the Earl of Minto, Governor-General of India from 1807-1813. The album was dispersed in 1925

²⁵ Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p. 142.

²⁶ V.A. Smith, *Oxford History of India*, pp. 404-429. J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 165-252, with the section on "Sikh martyrdom" pp. 177-178.

²⁷ See the observations of J.F. Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-175 ("Islamic policies and Imperial culture"), and 175-177 (Islamic policies and non-Muslims").

²⁸ See the introduction "After the Great Mughals" by Barbara Schmitz to her (ed.) *After the Great Mughals*, Mumbai, Marg Publications, 2002, pp. 1-11.

²⁹ Guy and Swallow (edd.), *Arts of India*, p. 124-151, "The Rajput Courts". T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, pp. 253-281, ill. 504-542. D. Barrett and B. Gray, *La peinture indienne*, pp. 131-159, "Les Ecoles du Rajasthan du XVIIe au XIXe siècles". S.C. Welch, *India Art and Culture*, IV, "The Rajput World", pp. 330-387.

³⁰ Guy and Swallow (edd.), *Arts of India*, pp. 28-36, stating that Western Indian art has its origin in Jain and Hindu painting from the end of the first millennium

³¹ Beach, M.C. *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p. 163.

³² Shridhar Andhare, "Imperial Mughal Tolerance of Jainism and Jain Painting Activity in Gujrat", in Guy and Swallow (edd.), *Arts of Mughal India*, pp. 223-233, 4 color and 6 B&W illustrations.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 259-266, no 511, cataloguing "Ninety-five scenes from the *Bhagavata Purana* and other popular and religious themes", from Khandesh, Mewar style, c. 1780.

³⁴ Barrett, D. and B. Gray, *La peinture indienne*, pp. 135, "Lalita Ragini", full page color, by Sahibdin, Udaipur, 1628, and p. 139, illustration of the *Ramayana*, "style de Sahibdin, dated 1650".

³⁵ Guy and Swallow (ed.), *Arts of India*, p. 131.

³⁶ See “Suraj Singh Rathore”, c. 1590, by Bishan Das. (page from the Kevorkian Album, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). ‘Man Singh of Amber’, c. 1615, by Payag (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin). ‘The Maharana of Mevar making submission to Prince Khurram’, c. 1618, by Nanh. Images reproduced in text taken from Amina Okada, pp. 169,208.

³⁷ Falk, T. and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, pp. 253: “The arrival of Mughal artists and the spread of the Mughal style of illustration led to the development [...] of more polished and more sophisticated painting in Rajasthan”.

³⁸ Id., *ibid.*, p. 125-130. Also S.C. Welch and N. Patnaik, *A Second Paradise*, p. 87, ill. 24, “Rana Amar Singh II (ruled 1698-1710) at prayer”, Rajput, Mewar, ca. 1698. Also ill. 25 to 34, pp. 86-102.

³⁹ Guy and Swallow (edd.), *Arts of India*, “Rajput Court Painting”, pp. 131-141.

⁴⁰ Chakraverty, Anjan. *Indian Miniature Painting*, p. 76. Striking examples in S.C. Welch, *India Art and Culture*, ill. 224 to 228 on this ancient influence, or reminiscence, or tradition in the Rajput paintings. Guy and Swallow (edd.), *Arts of India*, p. 132, ill. 113, “A lady in a peacock skirt charms the snakes out of the trees”, Merwar, “from a series dated 1605”.

⁴¹ Beach, M.C. *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p. 174.

⁴² Detailed history of these states in J. Hutchinson and J.Ph. Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States*, 2 vol., Lahore, 1933.

⁴³ F.S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum*, Sotheby Parke Bennett, London and New York, Oxford University Press, Karachi and Delhi, 1977, Introduction p. xxvi.

⁴⁴ “Pahari and Sikh” is one of the last short chapters of T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, pp. 283-290, ill. no 543-558.

⁴⁵ Published by the Gujarat Museum Society, Ahmedabad, no date. Khandalavala gives this information in his “Foreword” (no pagination) and in the beginning of his chapter 1, p. 1.

⁴⁶ We refer solely to the introduction of W. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, pp. XVII-XXXIII; F.S. Aijazuddin’s “Introduction” to his *Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits...*, which is in to parts: “Part I: The Lahore Museum Collection of Paintings” pp. XIX-XXIII, and “Part II: Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraiture”, pp. XXIV-XXVIII; and ultimately Khandalavala, *Pahari Miniature Paintings...*, chapter I: “Origin and Development of Pahari Painting”, pp. 1-27. B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer, in their *Pahari Masters. Court Painters of Northern India*, Artibus Asiae, Zurich, 1992, give in the section “The Pahari Painter”, pp. 7-14 a short resume of the history of the “school”.

⁴⁷ W. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, vol. 1 pp. 124-169 and vol. 2, pp. 93-122. F.S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Paintings...*, pp. 2 1-37 and ill. plates 34-58. Khandalavala, *Pahari Miniature Paintings*, p. 23-24, “The Earliest Paintings in Guler”, and p. 26, “Late Basohli and Guler Paintings”.

⁴⁸ We already quoted K. Khandalavala chapter on “The Family of Pandit Seu”, in *Pahari Miniature Paintings*, p. 28-49.

⁴⁹Goswamy B.N. and E. Fischer, *Pahari Masters*, Zurich, 1992, pp. 7-8 and *passim*.

⁵⁰On Jasrota paintings, W. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, vol. 1, pp. 213-220 and vol. 2, illustrations pp. 161-166.

⁵¹M.C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p.197.

⁵²W. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, vol. 1 pp. 244-310 and vol. 2, pp. 193-234. F.S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Paintings...*, pp. 45-56 and ill. plates 67-72. M.S. Randhawa, *Kangra Ragamala Paintings*, National Museum, New Delhi, 1971.

⁵³See the documentation presented by W. Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 249-254.

⁵⁴W. Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 259, following the testimony of William Moorcroft in 1820.

⁵⁵F.S. Aijazuddin, *op. cit.*, plate 68.1(i) and 1(ii)

⁵⁶Id., *ibid.*, plate 68.1(iii)

⁵⁷Id., *ibid.*, plate 68.1(iv).

⁵⁸W. Archer, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, plates 193-232 which reproduce Kangra paintings till ca. 1850, only show Hindu subjects.

⁵⁹Chakraverty, *Indian Miniature Painting*, p. 128.

⁶⁰H. Kh. Naqvi, *Mughal Hindustan: Cities and Industries 1556-1803*, Karachi, National Book Foundation, 1968. [Rp. 1974], pp. 160-163 and 255.

⁶¹Smith, V.A. *The Oxford History of India*, "The British in Bengal", pp. 465-479.

⁶²Archer, M. *Company Paintings...*, pp. 72-83. Probable portrait of Fullerton by Dip Chand (signature of the artist) *ibid.*, no 37, dated c. 1760-1764. See the caption of this miniature for the correct spelling "Fullerton" instead of "Fullarton".

⁶³"All the Sahibs take it to show in England", is an inscription on a set of Punjabi paintings from the years c. 1860: M. Archer, *Company Drawings in the India Office Library*, London, 1972, set no 184 p. 217.

⁶⁴'*Kampani Kalam*' is a term that Mildred Archer first heard from Ishwari Prasad of Patna in 1940 to describe the paintings done for the British, as she recounts in her acknowledgments printed in the Victoria and Albert Museum catalogue, *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British period*, p. 7.

⁶⁵Archer, M. *Company Drawings...*, "Delhi and Agra" pp. 166-208. Id., *Company paintings...*, "Delhi and Agra", pp. 128-168.

⁶⁶Chakraverty, A. *Indian Miniature Painting*, 1996, p.138.

⁶⁷Her first book, published by the Royal Indian Society, London, in 1947. In this book M. Archer explained her choice of calling the painting she had just discovered as "Company paintings", rather than "Firinghi Paintings", an older and more widely used name for these Indian paintings. In 1947 M. Archer thus put the stamp of "Company paintings" on a very varied artistic production, a qualification which seemed obvious in her time, but has become less relevant and quite inappropriate with the new discoveries.

⁶⁸ OUP, Oxford, 1955.

⁶⁹ Archer, M. *Company Drawings...*, pp. 59-72 (Murshidabad), 72-95 (Calcutta), 97-119 (Patna) 133-154 (Benares). Idem, *Company Paintings...*, pp. 72-83 (Murshidabad), 84-94 (Patna), 94-105 (Calcutta) and 105-108 (Benares).

⁷⁰ Id., *ibid.*, p. 97-98, no 71.

⁷¹ Id., *Company Paintings...*, p. 96: "Wellesley soon began to assemble [in the Botanic garden of Calcutta] examples of Indian flora. He too appointed artists to paint the natural-history specimens as soon as they arrived. By the time Wellesley retired in 1813 some 2,542 paintings had been assembled".

⁷² Schmitz, B. 'After the Great Mughals', in *After the Great Mughals*, p. 7.

⁷³ Archer, M. and R. Lightbown, *India Observed. India as viewed by British Artists 1760-1860*, V&A Museum, Trefoils Books, London, 1982, pp. 100-102, no 124-127.

⁷⁴ M.M. Kaye (ed.), *The Golden Calm. An English Lady's Life in Moghul Delhi*, New York. Viking Press. 1980, p. 12.

⁷⁵ As already mentioned, exhibited in Delhi in 2000 (five original paintings) and in 2006 (all the paintings in reproduction): Lafont, *Chitra...* and *Lost Palaces of Delhi*.

⁷⁶ Considering what is discovered about Lahore, and knowing how demolitions of ancient buildings there after Annexation (1849) were concealed by so many writers during and after the British Raj, we cannot rule out the destruction of these monuments of Delhi by the British or under the British rule during a cleaning drive between 1803 and 1844, the date inscribed in the title page of the manuscript.

⁷⁷ Two similar albums which are now in the Bibliotheque nationale, Paris, were made for William Fraser and Colonel James Skinner, both close friends of Metcalfe. They are unpublished. Lafont, *Indika...*, pp. 137, 140 n. 5 and 148 n. 93 for the *Fraser Album*, and 140 n. 5 for the *Skinner Album* which has a portrait of James Skinner on the frontispiece. They have some more paintings than the *Metcalfe Album* has, e.g. *Constantia*, Claude Martin's last palace in Lucknow, today the La Martiniere School. The *Fraser Album* has the unmistakable portrait of William Fraser, copy of which has recently appeared in another publication, *Interaction of Cultures. Indian and Western paintings 1780-1910. The Ehrenfeld Collection*, Alexandria, Virginia, USA, 1998, no 18, pp. 94-96, with identification in the back. The portrait was made "possibly by Victor Jacquemont". W. Fraser is also probably the person in European dress seating on a terrace with an Indian gentleman: B. Schmitz, *Mughal and Persian Paintings and Illuminated Manuscripts in the Raza Library, Rampur*, Delhi, IGNCA, 2006, plate 156 (colour).

⁷⁸ See J.M. Lafont, "The French in Lucknow", in V. Graaf (ed.), *Lucknow. Memories of a City*, Delhi, OUP, 1997, pp. 67-82. For the cultural impacts of the French presence in Avadh and the "Pre-renaissance" movement there in 1765-1800, see id., *Indika*, the chapters already quoted and *passim*.

⁷⁹ Several illustrations of their paintings exhibited and reproduced for the first time in Lafont, *Lost Palaces of Delhi...*, illustrations 37 to 46.

80 Lafont, J.M. *Les Français / The French & Lahore*, cover and ill. no 131 pp. 96-100. The original painting was probably by Imam Bakhsh Lahori, who later made a copy of the French oil painting made in Paris, 1836, out of his own miniature: the copy, dated 1838 and first published by S.C. Welch, *Room for Wonder*, pp. 124-125, ill. no 55, is now in the Fogg Arts Museum, USA.

81 Lafont, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101, ill. 136.

82 Lafont, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh Lord of the Five Rivers*, caption to ill. 176 with more than fifteen illustrations from the *Gulgashat-i-Punjab. Les Français / The French & Lahore*, pp. 30-31, ill. 27 and 28.

83 B.H. Baden-Powell, *Handbook of the Manufactures and Arts of the Punjab*, p. 35.

84 Illustrations of La Fontaine's *Fables* often have shadows.

85 Like most of the European military officers of the time, and most of the educated ladies as well. See M. Archer, *British Drawings in the India Office Library*, volume I : *Amateur Artists* and volume II: *Official and Professional Artists*, London, HSMO, 1969.

86 Many artists like Imam Bakhsh Lahori used both gouache and watercolor. His *Fables de la Fontaine* illustrations are done in gouache while the illustrations for General Court's Memoirs are in watercolor on European paper.

Chapter 2

The History of Modern Miniature

Lahore was occupied by the British in 1846, and Punjab was annexed to British Territories in 1849. British policy, regarding the arts, was to establish art schools in India that focused on teaching vocational skills and encouraging the “right taste” in aesthetics¹ This plan which marginalized miniature painting put the indigenous artist and the traditional transmission of his skills into disarray, resulting in a significant segregation between art and craft.

The first “Punjab Exhibition of Natural Products, Arts and Manufactures of the Province” was opened on 20th January 1864 in the newly erected *Ajayab Ghar* (House of Wonders), also known as Tollinton Market.² (The building has been recently restored by the Lahore Museum and is now the City Museum) As if to corroborate the British attitude towards Punjabi artists in the early decades following annexation, there was a glaring

paintings on ivory, which S.M. Latif correctly ascribed as the “miniature work of Delhi”

alongside a series of “portraits of princes and chiefs of the Punjab during the reign o absence of miniature paintings in this exhibition. On exhibit was a single collection of

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Maharaja Ranjit Singh, by native artists.”⁴ This was meager representation, considering, as was well known at that time, that the leading families of Lahore had large collections of illuminated manuscripts and miniature paintings. The Fakir Family collection in Lahore is one such example. Presently some works from this collection are in the Lahore Museum. Others like the manuscripts and paintings belonging to the descendants of Diwan Ajudhya Prasad in Lahore were taken to Amritsar, Solan and then to Chandigarh in 1947. Percy

Brown's *A Descriptive Guide to the Department of Industrial Art, Lahore Museum* shows the exclusive emphasis given to industrial arts and antiquities till the early 20th century.⁵

The British plan to re-establish art in colonial India,⁶ included the establishment of four schools of industrial design.⁷ One of these schools was the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore founded by the British in 1875.⁸ It was also decided to build a museum in Lahore, the foundation stone for which was laid by Prince Victor in 1890.⁹ The primary aim of these schools was to train artisans not artists. Their curriculum was based on the one used by the Industrial School of South Kensington and stressed “scientific” or technical drawing geared to train the Indian artisan.¹⁰ John Lockwood Kipling, the first principal, had been teaching decorative sculpture for a decade at the art school in Bombay before he arrived to take charge of the school in Lahore.¹¹ The *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* founded by him in 1886 showcased Indian crafts. In a report by the Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, it is clearly stated that “It is the object of the Principal to make the institution emphatically a school of Industrial Art, and to give the boys a training that they can turn to practical account in later life.”¹²

The curriculum, with its focus largely on instruction in drawing, modeling, wood working, architectural and decorative drawing with photography and lithography added later, remained unchanged until the year 1893 when Kipling retired.¹³

After going through the prescribed course, forty-three students who passed out during the year 1893-1894 took up jobs mainly as draughts-men, or at best wood carvers and drawing masters.¹⁴

Scant information is available for the years immediately after 1894, making it difficult to ascertain the exact time when miniature painting came to be included in the Mayo School’s curriculum. A plausible explanation for its inclusion could be the shift of

focus from Indian design to Indian “fine arts” as advocated by Ernest Binfield Havell, the Principal of the Calcutta Art School.¹⁵

By 1910 a split had developed between the administrators of art education in India that gave rise to a new lobby for Indian art which declared it as “great art with a glorious past.”¹⁶ The rise of the Bengal movement and the influence of Abindranath Tagore spread to Lahore as Calcutta-trained teachers like Samarendranath Gupta, a student of Abindranath, joined the Mayo School of Arts as a teacher, to become vice-principal in 1911.¹⁶ The same year, Abdur Rahman Chughtai joined Mayo School as a student and later became a teacher there in chromo-lithography. His visit to Calcutta in 1916 reinforced his resolve to revive the greatness of Mughal art and to re-establish the loss of culture among Indian muslims. By 1920 Chughtai had become a renowned artist of Lahore.¹⁸ With the recognition of artists like Chughtai and Abindranath there was a resurgence of interest in Indian art and its historical past.

Although there is no documentation indicating when miniature painting was included as a subject in the Mayo School of Arts, the first *Catalogue of Paintings in the Central Museum, Lahore*, compiled by Samarendranath Gupta and published in 1922, gives generous evidence of the interest in Fine Arts.¹⁹

Himself an artist, Gupta mentioned in his introduction that the Central Museum’s collection was constituted at the time, “collected from time to time by different curators” and more recently “developed and materially improved by the present curator, Mr. Lionel Heath.” Gupta stressed the fact that “only those drawings and pictures which are exhibited are listed in the catalogue while others kept in portfolios in the Museum Office were not

worthy of inclusion in it". And that the main collections are from "Moghal, Rajput and Punjab Hill Schools of painting. The Sikh School is almost exclusively of portraits."

This catalogue also enumerates the Lahore Museum exhibition:

17 "Persian and Indo-Persian drawings and paintings," 87 "Portraits of Moghal Emperors and Noblemen," a short section titled "European Subjects," "Composite Animals," 131 "Portraits of the Sikh Period and Rulers of the Punjab States," "Paintings of Subjects from Hindu Mythology," "Portraits of Saints and Religious Leaders," "Paintings of Miscellaneous Subjects," "Paintings of the Rajput School," and "Paintings of Radha and Krishna". The section "Drawings" had 42 items of different times and origins, followed by a section "Lower Cases" with several reference numbers: "Animals and Birds," "Decorative Drawings" and "Calligraphy." The last section of this catalogue is "Modern Paintings of Bengal" with paintings done by A.N. Tagore, N.L. Bose, A.K. Halder, S.N. Gupta, S.N. Kar, K.N. Mozumdar, S.N. Dey, B.C. Dey, D.S. Bhattacharya and G.N. Tagore.²⁰

The date of publication of this catalogue is important, as it points to the time of a rising consciousness in Punjab of miniature painting as an independent part of the history of arts. Concurrently it shows the importance, in 1922, of this nascent collection, that was subsequently divided between Lahore and Chandigarh in the aftermath of 1947.²¹

And it stresses in its last section the importance, at least in the mind of the staff of the Lahore Museum, of the "Modern School of Bengal" in the resurgence of painting in Punjab. The enumeration of the section however reveals an omission: while a Sikh School was noted there was no Punjabi or a Lahori School. Not a single work by Imam Bakhsh, whose paintings must have been in some private collections in Lahore, was included.

Another interesting observation was that everything worthy of interest had been exhibited, with nothing of any value remaining in the reserve. Lahore was after all the last great state to be conquered and annexed by the East India Company,²² it might be thought that the miniature painting collection was either hastily or belatedly conceived or assembled.

The Lahore Museum and the Mayo School of Arts, (the National College of Art s after 1958), were envisaged as twin institutions and were under the common direction of John Lockwood Kipling. But, interestingly, more than twenty years after S.N. Gupta published his *Catalogue of Paintings in the Central Museum, Lahore*, there was still n record of the teaching of miniature painting in the sister institution that taught the arts.

Documentation for miniature painting as part of the curriculum in the Mayo School begins in 1945, with the appointment of *Ustad* Haji Sharif,²³ Miniature painting, however, remained an optional subject till 1958 when it was finally included in the Fine Arts syllabus.²⁴

On *Ustad* Haji Sharif's retirement in 1968, Sheikh Shujaullah, who also belonged to a family of court artists, took over the teaching of "miniature painting" at National College of Arts . For thirty-five years of their combined tenures, the two *ustads* followed a traditional mode of painting and its transmission of skills, forming "a cryogenic chamber" as Hammad Nasir puts it, where the genre lay frozen.²⁵ During this period, only one student opted to take miniature as more than a minor subject. In 1974, Bashir Ahmed, a young graduate in painting from the National College of Arts began a two year apprenticeship with Sheikh Shujaullah. In 1976 Bashir was appointed to the faculty of Fine Arts Department and after Shaikh Shujaullah's death in 1980, he became the next *ustad*.

The following year Bashir Ahmed started developing an academic program to

promote miniature painting as a major course. The miniature painting degree program at the National College of Arts, the only one of its kind in the world, commenced in 1982 with only two female students enrolled. Since its inception, the majority of students joining the miniature painting department have been females. They had taken over, so to speak, a precinct that traditionally belonged to men.

Bashir, a traditionalist to the core who was taught through an apprenticeship system himself, adhered to traditional ways of adapting Mughal, Persian and Rajput models in his work, rarely attempting any contemporary themes. His teaching focuses on a strict schedule of the prescribed exercises of painting a traditional miniature: from learning the preparation of *wasli* (paper pasteboard) and brushes to acquiring the rituals surrounding the actual practice. His students start by copying Persian, Mughal and Rajput paintings and only when they become proficient in these different styles, are they allowed to attempt individual compositions in their final year.

Before the nineties, miniature painting, outside its pedagogical domain, was equated with products produced by the heritage and craft industry of Pakistan. Miniature paintings were sold mostly at tourist spots of Lahore, like the Faletti's Hotel, Kashmir Handicrafts and the Lahore Museum's curio shop. They were often badly done cheap copies, perhaps from Jaipur.²⁶ Paintings made by the college *ustads*, which were also by and large replicas, were mainly bought by discerning, well to do collectors.²⁷ For forty-six years miniature painting remained an art form which was sustained mainly by replication.

The status of miniature painting in Pakistan underwent a major transformation when

Shazia Sikander, a young graduate of National College of Arts, initiated a major revival

in the genre in 1991. One of the most celebrated modern contemporary miniaturists and a recipient of the MacArthur “Genius Award”, she is credited with heralding the neo-miniature movement. As it evolved subsequently, and the core philosophy of this movement is the revival of the traditional idiom but with a contemporary vocabulary. Many young graduates of the National College of Arts, in line with this philosophy, have followed her trail and are now professional painters and, in some cases, teachers as well.

Although abiding largely by the traditional technique of the miniature, these revivalists allow modern concepts and art mediums to be incorporated in their work. Shazia does installations and has lately gone into digital animation and undertaken performances. Most subsequent contemporary miniaturists like Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid and Nusra Latif followed suit. These artists who intermittently incorporate the latest mediums in their work have simultaneously moved away from traditional themes while making ample use of traditional imagery in addressing contemporary issues.

Using separate figural images culled mostly from Mughal paintings, many contemporary miniature artists use a satirical stance to comment on global concerns of abject poverty, military power, war and imperial hegemony of the super powers, or address local cultural and social concerns that center mostly on women issues and gun culture. Interestingly, even as they paint the hard realities of the new world order, these artists continue to follow the rituals associated with the traditional genre. They work sitting on the floor and labourously paint detailed pristine surfaces on hand made *waslis* with squirrel hair brushes.

Most of these young miniaturists continued their education after graduating from

National College of Arts, living abroad while studying, taking part in residencies or exhibiting. Shazia Sikander left for the United States in 1993, to study at the Rhode School of Design and eventually settled in New York. Familiarity with an Eastern traditional art form and modern Western idioms enable her to successfully dovetail the two, all the time remaining deeply rooted in the miniature style and imagery. Nusra Latif completed her Masters in Fine Arts in Melbourne, Australia before settling there permanently. She combines miniature and contemporary art making techniques to address issues of colonialism.

Talha Rathore lives and works in the United States. She juxtaposes collages and painted surfaces that drawing inspiration from both the East and West. After her residency in the Netherlands, Aisha Khalid came back to Pakistan with a renewed vision of the Western woman. This experience emerged later in her tulip images. She also ventured into video and installation during her stay there (taking it up again after her return to Lahore and then going back to painting on *wasli*). Saira Wasim, who now lives in the United States, is the only one of these young painters, who stays close to the traditional miniature by way of images and technique. Her life away from Pakistan allows her a neutral vantage point from which to deride local and foreign politics. Imran Qureshi likewise has had the experience of doing a residency in New Delhi and has exhibited often in England. Their cross cultural experiences add to their influence and modulate their art expression. An unlimited access to information in today's world adds to the eclecticism of these miniature painters who continue to use traditional techniques increasingly juxtaposing it with postmodern concepts and practices.

While Bashir Ahmed still heads the miniature department at National College of

Arts in 2007 and remains a proponent of traditional practice, younger teachers like Imran Qureshi, (who joined National College of Arts faculty in 1994), Waseem Ahmed and Hasnat Mahmood, are all part of the revivalist group who also promotes experimental work. This ensuing difference of opinion over concepts and the teaching methodology has split the miniature department into two factions: the traditionalists and the modernists. While Bashir advocates a rigid adherence to conventional approach for the students during their entire learning period, his younger colleagues persuade senior students to experiment with content and execution after they have mastered the basic traditional techniques.

Bashir favors figurative compositions that are narrative and include all the ingredients of a traditional miniature such as flat opaque coloring with intricate *pardakht* (small strokes) for rendering volume; detailing on most areas; and ornamental designs preferably from traditional prototypes. Many of the modern miniatures ‘fall short’ of this from a traditionalists point of view but make up for it by their growing success and acceptance in the West. Subsequent groups of students graduating from the miniature department are aware of this aspect of the revival and contend with achieving just that. A more systematic survey of the modern production of miniature paintings by the Lahore artists and their brief resumes now follows.

Notes:

¹ Two important publications on that crucial point: Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

² Latif, *Lahore*, p. 373, explicitly states: "The existing museum (the one of 1864) was then... built to serve as a home for collections, illustrating the agricultural and forest products of the Province and its borders, and its artistic and manufacturing industries, as set forth in the two well-known volumes on *Punjab Products*" and "*Punjab Manufactures*", by Mr. B.H. Baden-Powell, C.I.E, the first Curator".

³ Latif, *Lahore*, 357.

⁴ Ibid., 356.

⁵ Percy Brown, *Lahore Museum Punjab. A Descriptive Guide to the Department of Industrial Arts* (Calcutta: Thaker, Spink & Co., 1909). It includes an interesting plan of the Museum with identification of the galleries from A to F (plate I, between 2 and 3) A- Entrance; B & C -Industrial Arts; D- Archaeology and Antiquities; E- Office and Sale Room; F- Economic Products, Natural History &c".

⁶ Guha-Thakurta, "The Training of the Artists: Motives of British art education in India and the working of the Government school of Art, Calcutta c. 1864-1894." In *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art* 57-77. And "Art education and Raj Patronage." In Mitter *Art and Nationalism*, 27-54. This chapter has subsections like "Art Schools in Colonial Cities", "The Progress of Art Schools" and "Art Schools for Sons of Gentlemen".

⁷ See the observation of Mitter concerning these schools: "Initially the exclusion of Fine Arts was a precondition of teaching," *Art and Nationalism*, 36.

⁸ A good history of the foundation of the school and its functioning in 1892 is in "The Mayo Industrial School of Arts." In Latif, *Lahore*, 304-306. In March 1891, 117 students were enrolled with an average attendance of 94. For an exclusive history on the formative years of the Mayo School of Art see Samina Choonara, *Official Chronicle of Mayo School of Art: Formative years under J L Kipling [1874-1894]*, ed. (Lahore: National College of Arts Publication, 2003).

⁹ See the short, but interesting "History of the Museum." In *Lahore Museum and Punjab. A Descriptive Guide...*, Percy Brown, 1-3 1909. The original name of the Museum, as S.M. Latif records, was the Jubilee Museum and Technical Institute (*Lahore*, 273-274). It includes engravings of the old Museum (called the Punjab Museum) and the new one.

¹⁰ Mitter, "Art Education and Raj Patronage." In *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 34-35.

¹¹ Mitter more than Guha-Thakurta insists on Lockwood Kipling's role in these movements: *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, index, s.v. Kipling, John Lockwood.

12 Samina Choonara, ed., *Official Chronicle of Mayo School of Art*, 33.

13 For detailed account of courses taught see Choonara "Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Punjab." In *Official Chronicle of Mayo School of Art*, 34-98.

14 *Ibid.*, 97-98.

15 The role and importance of Ernest Binfield Havell are clearly underlined in both Mitter's and Guha-Thakurta's book: see their indices, *s.v.* Havell.

16 Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art*, 164-65.

17 Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, 333.

18 For detailed information see Abdur Rehman Chughtai, *Lahore ka Dabistan-i Musavari*, (Lahore: Chughtai Museum Trust, 1978).

19 Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 156.

20 See plates in S.N.Gupta's *Catalogue of Paintings in the Central Museum, Lahore*.

21 At the time of Partition part of the Delhi collection was transferred to the Museum of Chandigarh, East Punjab.

22 Calcutta was founded in 1690, Bengal passed to British authority in 1765, the British conquered Delhi in 1803, and the Punjab was conquered and annexed in 1849.

23 National College of Arts Archives, *Haji Sharif File*, Folio 18.

24 The Mayo School of Art's course of studies was divided in three main departments: Fine Arts, Design and Architecture.

25 Hammad Nasir, "*Contested legacy, congested future* ".

<http://www.vasart.org/text>. (accessed January 16, 2007).

26 In 2005 when I asked the Curio shop owner at Lahore Museum about the origin of these paintings, he claimed that they came from Jaipur.

27 Bashir Ahmed, interview with author, April 26, 2005. The Maratab Ali family from Lahore had been a collector of miniature paintings. Mugheesuddin from the Fakir Khana Museum was a regular client and hired miniature painters to restore paintings in his collection.

Chapter 3

The Making of a Miniature: The Technique

Illuminated manuscripts of India were the collaborative work of painters and calligraphers, but while painters largely remained anonymous until Mughal times, calligraphers were mentioned by name in the colophons of some of the earliest Pala and Jain manuscripts. Early scribes and painters belonged to particular castes that learned their art through a customary apprenticeship system prevalent in their families.

Paper, although invented in China in the first century, was not introduced in India till the beginning of the thirteenth century,¹ and we know that all early Hindu, Buddhist and Jain manuscripts were on *Corypha* palm leaves.² Prof. Buhler in his investigation of writing materials in India writes “The *Corypha Umbraculifera* and the *Borassus Flabellifer* Palms.... the two large leaved palms, the *tadata* (*Borassus flabelliformis*) and the *taditali* (*Corypha umbraculifera: ad taliera*)....are the leaves that were principally employed in India as writing material.”³ Hieun Tsiang, a seventh century traveler, also speaks of the leaves of the *talipat* palm being used for writing in India.⁴

Both these species have large fan-shaped leaves from which individual straight strips were cut and used for the manuscript. The leaves had to be dried in the sun first, then boiled with herbs for an hour, dried again and kept in a special press for several weeks until they became flat. They were then cut to the required size of ten to twenty inches long and one to two inches wide before they were burnished with an agate stone to smoothen the surface. After an application of thin white paint, the final drawing was sketched in with red ochre. Color was added later to designated areas of the composition while details were finally highlighted with thin colored brush lines.

Pigments for painting were derived both from organic and mineral sources and

mixed with a gum before they were applied. Repeatedly application of transparent and darker tones of the same colors lent volume to the image in a technique very similar to the one used on the wall paintings of Ajanta.⁵ These early illustrations on palm leaves were usually small and square with calligraphy occupying a larger part of the horizontal format. Once the image was painted, these leaves were then strung together between covers by means of a cord that passed through holes made in the manuscript. The palm leaf continued to be used until the fifteenth century.

The Muslim Sultanates introduced paper to Northern India and the Deccan in the thirteenth century and it soon became the preferred material for manuscripts. The book took on a vertical format and began to be bound in leather cover. The use of palm leaves however continued up to the nineteenth century in Southern India.

The Mughals ruled India from 1526 to 1858; they commissioned innumerable illustrated texts and came to dominate the art of manuscript painting. For them painting was a court art and large *kitabkhanas* (ateliers) were established to cater to their demands of manuscript productions (figs. 29). The Mughal *kitabkhana* followed Persian manuscript ateliers, as the two *ustads*: Khawaja Abd-ul Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, who headed it, were of Persian origin and had worked at the Safavid court before they accompanied Humayun to India.

In the Mughal atelier it was usually the scribe who visualized the design for the entire manuscript. Sometimes a calligrapher was also the painter, like Khawaja Abdus Samad, who was given the title of ‘Shirin Qalam’ by Humayun.⁶

Under the Mughal system art was a family vocation and painters learned their craft

in family ateliers. Writing about teaching the art of painting Percy Brown says:

“Painting was taught in the same way as wood-carving, sculpture and metal work, and all the other Indian art industries, by a modified application of the apprenticeship system. The craftsman passed his knowledge of the art onto his sons, or failing these, the sons of a near relative, but rarely to anyone who was not a member of his own family.”⁷

This is also evident from Mughal miniatures where the relation of an artist to his artist father or brother is often endorsed.⁸ However this method of training was put in abeyance during Akbar’s reign as the enormous production of manuscripts demanded a large number of artists and apprentices. The need for more artists also led Akbar to frequently allow younger and less talented artists to do secondary tasks or to assist and work alongside the experienced masters.⁹ This provided many young men the prospect of learning the art of drawing and painting even if they did not belong to an artist family. The Imperial atelier and the *ustads* provided ideal opportunities to aspiring painters and in time replaced the traditional father-teacher pedagogical system.

Like other crafts, the teaching of art started early in the life of a student where the first lesson for novice painters was the preparation and care of their tools.

“The care of tools and the preparation of his materials were his first lesson, and these were no meaningless exercises, for the sculptor employed his apprentices, however young, in sharpening chisels and dressing his stones, while the painter utilized them in remaking his squirrel hair brushes, burnishing paper or grinding colors.”¹⁰

Once through with that, students were provided with a *qalam* (brush) made of goat’s

hair with which they did preliminary exercises of copying specially formulated patterns first and later figures of animals, architecture and flowers, using Indian ink on coarse *bhansi* or *basaha* (bamboo paper). In time they would become so adept that they were able to reproduce them without even looking at the original. In “a striking analogy to the teaching of spelling and writing,” pupils were taught how to eventually combine these individual elements to make a complete design.¹¹

Other early lessons included learning how to smoothen the rough surface of the paper to an enamel-like finish with a piece of polished agate and to transfer existing compositions onto the burnished paper by means of a process called ‘pouncing’. The master drawing or *khaka* (tracing) which was on *charba* (thin vellum), was pierced all along the outlines with a fine needle. After fixing it to the surface of the paper, finely powdered charcoal was dusted onto it with the help of a ‘pouncer’: a small muslin bag containing charcoal. When the drawing was removed it left an exact image made by the charcoal dust, which had to be immediately drawn over in light red color before it got wiped off. The *ustad* would then inspect the drawing and correct the errors if any, before reinforcing it with a permanent red or black ink, after which the drawing was ready for *rung amezi* (color application).

The color scheme or the names of colors were either indicated in small letters on different parts of these master tracings or shown as dabs of color on them so as to convey the color scheme to apprentices (fig. 31). Learning tracing or replication was thus an important part of the learning process.¹² Tracing by pouncing is an old Eastern process which was in use as early as the eight century by the mural painters of Eastern Turkestan

where many pouncings have been discovered. Many Persian pictures found their way into India through similar master tracings kept by painters as part of their portfolio that they carried with them wherever they migrated.¹³

Materials used in miniature painting

Paper

The Chinese introduced paper to the Arab world in the eighth century. Before that vellum, which was prepared animal skin, was used for writing. The first paper factory was established in Baghdad in 794 A.D and by the eleventh century paper manufacturing spread to the entire Islamic world through Turkey, Egypt and Persia. However paper was not readily available in India till the fourteenth century but as soon as it was, it became the preferred material for the preparation of manuscripts as it offered greater possibilities of size and format.

A paper factory established at Sialkot in the Punjab supplied the paper called “Sialkoti” which was known for its smooth texture and whiteness but it was used mainly for writing.¹⁴ As the demand for paper grew, many varieties began to be produced all over India. Kashmir, Kalpi, Ahmedabad, Daulatabad, Junnar and Sanganer became popular paper manufacturing cities of Mughal India. Akbar made sure that the painters at the imperial atelier lacked nothing to perfect their art and that they were supplied with the best pigments, brushes and paper.¹⁵

Various craftsmen were required to prepare the surface of the paper for illuminating manuscripts (fig.32). The *wasligars* (paper makers) were a special class of artisans who

prepared the *waslis* (pasteboards) by pasting together two or three thin sheets of paper with a bookbinder's paste called *laeey* (a gum made with flour to which copper sulphate is added). Apprentices would then smoothen the surface of the *wasli* by burnishing it with an egg-shaped polished agate. Repeated burnishing ensured a smooth shiny surface which made the paper less porous to pigments. Often when the paper size was not large enough, several pieces were skillfully joined together to produce the required size and the subsequent burnishing saw that the join was not visible in the final painting.

Pigments

The Mughal palette is represented by a large variety of colors. All pigments used in illuminated manuscripts were derived from either mineral or organic sources and had to be especially prepared before they could be used for painting. Pigments had to be first finely ground, then filtered with a series of washes to get rid of the impurities and finally mixed with a binding medium.

Black

There were two recipes for making black pigment.

Carbon Black was made by burning organic materials such as bone, oil or wood and collecting the soot produced in the process produced black color. This soot after being ground was mixed with a binder and was ready for use. Charcoal sticks used for sketching were obtained by burning twigs. Powdered charcoal was used for pouncing. Black was an inexpensive and readily available pigment. Lamp black as it is called has been used as a pigment since very early times.

Black inks were also made from lac resin. A typical recipe for permanent ink to use

on paper is to boil lac resin in water, then add a little borax and lodhi bark (used for various medicines and as mordant for dyes). It was boiled till only a quarter of the quantity remained and then allow to dry. Water was added to this when it was to be used.

White

There is mention of five or six kinds of white pigment but the most popular was *safeda* (white) which was lead white. Zinc white, which came later, was also called by the same name. White was used not only in the composition itself but also to prime the surface of paper and as an undercoat. It was also used to mix with other pigments to get lighter tones. The Mughals imported *safeda* from Persia for use in the Mughal atelier. Chalk was also often used for obtaining white by grinding it on a smooth stone slab with water. A white pigment with a high content of calcium carbonate was obtained by burning conch shells to produce white lime.

Red

Red is a color used extensively in Indian miniature painting and many varieties of red were available to painters. *Geru* (red ochre) was the most readily available and the cheapest. Obtained from red oxide it was used for drawing the preliminary sketches.

Brighter reds were obtained from vermilion or cinnabar, red arsenic, lac dye and from plant origins such as safflower and *kamela*.

Yellow

Yellow ochre was used to obtain various shades of yellow used extensively in miniature painting. Orpiment, which is a sulphide of arsenic, was used to make a bright yellow. *Peori* or Indian yellow was derived from the urine of a cow that was only fed

mango leaves for a week. Other yellows were obtained from turmeric, saffron and *Multan Mutti* (earth from Multan).

Green

The Indians preferred to use blue and yellow pigments to make green. However the green pigment in its pure state was also obtained from other sources. Verdigris, used more by the Persians than the Indians for its brilliant green color, was made by mixing copper filings with vinegar. This rendered it highly toxic to the paper and resulted either in brown stains or more seriously in charring the paper itself. Malachite also produced a bright green. Terra verte or green earth also yielded a green color which has been used since early times.

Blue

Blues were obtained both from mineral and organic sources. Ultramarine, a color obtained from *lapis lazuli* was used and prized by the Renaissance painters as well as by the Persians. The Indian painters have also used it since early times. Organic blue was a form of indigo blue dye and was used mainly in dyeing textiles.

Gold

Gold was used extensively in text illumination, in paintings and in borders of manuscripts. Certain details of jewellery, the armor and the nimbus were all painted in gold. Thin sheets of gold foil were pounded and mixed with gum Arabic to form a paste. This was then filtered with water washes. The sediment that fell to the bottom was collected and mixed with saffron and dry glue to make gold paint. Specialists attached to the ateliers generally handled the addition of gold leaf. Gold-flecked borders were done by covering the paper with a sizing medium and then pouncing with a cloth pouch containing flakes

of gold. Another method was to saturate a brush with gold and splatter it across the surface of the paper.

Binders

Both animal and plant sources were used as a source for binders. Animal glue was obtained by boiling shreds of buffalo hide to extract its protein content. Once the mixture attained a buttery texture, it was cooled and rolled into balls; they could then be dissolved in hot water whenever needed.

Gum Arabic was the traditional binder that was used both by the Persians and the Indian miniaturists. It is the gum from the *Acaciū Arabica*, a widely distributed small tree in India. Even today it is one of the most widely used binding media for watercolor and gouache.

Brushes and pens

The reed pen or the *qalam* was a versatile tool and great skill was required to carve it correctly. Calligraphers and painters used special knives for this. Different styles of calligraphy had prescribed formats and proportions of line thicknesses to letter size so that each required a different pen shape and size.

To execute the highly detailed miniatures it was important to have a precise and flawless paint brush which was one of the painter's prized possessions. The Mughals made brushes from the hair of the common squirrel whereas the Persians used the hair of a white cat specially bred for the purpose. The hair from the inner ear of a goat was used to make coarse brushes. The hair was fixed inside a quill from a pigeon's feather.

The making of a traditional miniature

Almost all Mughal manuscripts were produced either in the imperial atelier or ateliers that belonged to princes or nobles. These work places were large halls where painters, illuminators, gilders and bookbinders all worked under the same roof and were under the charge of officials called *daroghas*, who took care of its running.¹⁶

Here the painters would sit on the floor with one leg under their body and the wooden drawing board either resting on the raised thigh (figs.30 and 33) or placed on a slanting board resting on the floor (fig. 35). In figure 33 we see the painter Daulat and the scribe Abdur Rahim sitting on the floor and surrounded by their art materials including a wooden box with brushes and conch shells containing paint. There are also two or three books in the painting, one of which is lying open in front of the painter, perhaps as a reference for his painting.

The entire composition of the painting depended on the initial drawing. A master painter or *ustad* was delegated to visualize the composition and make the preliminary *tarh* (drawing). This was done either on a separate piece of paper and pounced onto the *wasl* by an apprentice or directly drawn onto the page by the *ustad*. In case the design was traced, it was quickly drawn over with a red pigment. After it was corrected by the *ustad* it was reinforced in black ink. An *astar* (thin coating) of white was applied to the entire surface of the paper. Usually less experienced artists then colored in the drawings though at times skilled painters also did the coloring. In between applications of color, the *wasli* was burnished repeatedly to ensure that the pigments were compressed with the paper and

rendered a smooth surface.

The next stage of painting was putting *pardakht* (minute stippling) in matching darker tones to impart volume to the images. A specialized painter would then work on the faces (*chehranami*) while the *ustad* lent the final touches to the work.

Gold was applied last of all, a tradition inherited from pre-Mughal and Persian paintings. The skill needed to prepare and apply gold is still considered the highest talent of a traditional miniature painter and is often a guarded secret. To achieve a dazzling gold effect in certain areas, the painted gold area was sometimes pricked with a needle. Raised effects in rendering pearl jewellery were built up by the application of a paste made by rubbing pottery pieces with a bit of water. A decorative effect especially seen in Basohl miniatures was the pasting of beetle wings to jewellery which gave it the effect of inlaid emeralds.

During Akbar's reign many miniatures were produced with the collaboration of two or three painters, but that did not remain a standard procedure during Jahangir's time.¹⁷

With his preference for single paintings, artists began to specialize in specific skills. Bishandas and Abu'l Hassan became portraitists while others such as Mansur specialized in painting flora and fauna. Illumination and border painting also became a specialized field.

Until the Mughal School was well established, the artist in India remained anonymous and it was only after 1580 that it became common for the names of artists to be recorded on miniatures.¹⁸ From Abu'l Fazl's accounts in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, we know that the *karkhana* official called a *darogha*. It was the *darogha* who looked after its daily affairs and kept a

(atelier) was part of the *kitabkhana* (library) and that both sections were under a court

record of the artist's work. Most often it was he who also recorded the name of the artist on the painting. The artist himself signed some paintings while others remained unscribed.

Abu'l Fazl says:

'The work of all painters is weekly laid before His Majesty by the *daroghas* and the clerks; he then confers rewards according to excellence of workmanship, or increases the monthly salaries.'¹⁹

We can conclude therefore that artists were paid monthly and when they excelled they received added bonuses or gifts from the Emperor and even had titles conferred onto them. Abu'l Hasan was honored with the title *Nadir-uz-Zaman* while Mansur was given the title of *Nadir-ul- 'Asr*. Many of the individual painters from the Mughal School achieved distinction and received admiration.

Abu'l Fazl says:

'Most excellent painters are now to be found, and masterpieces, worthy of a Bihzad, may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained world wide fame ...'²⁰

The making of a contemporary miniature

The National College of Arts in Lahore is one of the only colleges in the world that offers a degree in miniature painting and it is here that most known contemporary miniature painters have received their training.²¹ Other colleges at Lahore like the Punjab University, the Lahore College for Women University and the Hunerkada also offer miniature painting but not as a major subject. The Indus Valley School of Arts in Karachi has recently started official called a *darogha*. It was the *darogha* who looked after its daily affairs and kept a

a miniature painting department. At the National College of Arts the teaching of miniature

painting follows the Mughal atelier system and the rituals surrounding the techniques persist. The importance of materials and their correct use is instilled early in the students. Learning to make the squirrel-hair brushes is part of these early lessons on materials and the students even catch their own squirrels! Once the students have learnt how to prepare the *wasli* and the brushes, attendants take on this job to facilitate the students and to minimize the time involved.

In the miniature studio at the National College students sit on the floor along the wall, supporting their *wasli* boards either on both their knees or on specially made low boards for the purpose (figs.34 and 36). Here ipods and mobiles go hand in hand with the ritualistic array of long sharpened pencils, conch shells with paint and squirrel hair brushes. The basic drawing exercises for beginners starts with filling grids of one-inch squares with horizontal, vertical, diagonal and parallel lines followed by spirals and circles made with a hard pencil sharpened to a length of almost three inches. The idea is to develop, in time a lightness of line, which is considered quintessential for a miniature painter.

Once this is mastered, which may take weeks of laborious repetitions, the students move onto making copies of miniatures from Persian, Mughal and Rajput schools, so as to master the different *qalams* (styles). They then choose a particular painting and with a lightness of touch draw the composition onto their *wasli*, copying simply by eye.

The first lesson here is learning the *siyah qalam* technique. As the name suggests the *siyah qalam* is a technique where paintings are done in black watered-down paint or Indian ink only. *Rungamezi* (application of color) comes with the next painting. The students deftly apply layers of color starting with the background and culminating in the details

with the minute feather strokes called *pardakht*: the hallmark of a traditional miniature.

While contemporary miniature painters retain most of the traditional techniques and rituals, the exorbitant cost and time involved in the making of traditional paints from mineral and organic sources has contributed to its disuse. Winsor and Newton watercolors, quality artist paints from England, are now a popular choice. The addition of zinc white (*safeda*) and gum Arabic is a must though, as it is important to make the watercolor opaque before it is applied. *Safeda* is now available ready-made in the market but many students prefer to make their own by filtering white poster paint. Mussel shells continue to be used as containers for mixing and storing the prepared colors, as they provide a compact and comfortable receptacle that nestles easily between the thumb and the index finger. Imported sable-hair brushes are used for filling larger areas with color but the squirrel-hair brush remains indispensable for the delicate and detailed work (fig. 37).

Once the students have familiarized themselves with the main miniature styles and made a number of copies, they are then required to make original compositions in their final year at the college. The technique remains strictly traditional even as they experiment with contemporary themes and concepts. Once the students are out of the college, they experiment not only with the concept, but go on to subvert those very techniques acquired during their learning years.²² As we shall see in the section on the modern contemporary painters, the most popular themes remain the global concerns of war and western hegemony. Figures are absent from many latest works with many miniaturists moving away from meticulous detailing, opting instead for loosely rendered areas.²³ Contemporary miniature painters now are also increasingly experimenting in video making, digital and installation art.

Notes:

¹ Hameeda Khatoon Naqvi, *Mughal Hindustan: Cities and Industries*. 2nd ed. (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1974), 289.

² B.S.Kesavan, ed. *The Book in India*.(Calcutta: National Book Trust ,),9

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Ibid.,13

⁵ Madanjeet Singh, *The Cave Paintings of Ajanta*. (London :Thames and Hudson , 1965), 60-61.

⁶ Amina Okada, *Imperial Mughal Painters*. (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 14.

⁷ Percy Brown, *Indian Painting Under the Mughals*. (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981), 180.

⁸ Som Prakash Verma, *Mughal Painters and Their Works*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 25.

⁹ Amina Okada, *Imperial Mughal Painters*, 11.

¹⁰ Brown, *Indian Painting*, 180.

¹¹ Ibid.,181.

¹² Ibid., 183-184.

¹³ Ibid.,184.

¹⁴ Naqvi, *Mughal Hindustan: Cities and Industries*, 290.

¹⁵ Okada, *Imperial Mughal Painters*, 14.

¹⁶ Verma, *Mughal Painters and their Works* , 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰ Ibid., 4.

²¹ Bashir Ahmed, *Revival of Traditional Miniature Painting*. (Lahore: National College of Arts Publication, 2000).

²² A graduating student at the Thesis Exhibition of the Miniature Department in January 2008 had entwined hair in perforations made in the wasli.

²³ At the Thesis Exhibition of the Miniature Department in January 2008 it was observed by the author that out of twelve students only two had done figurative work.

Chapter 4

Contemporary Traditional Painters

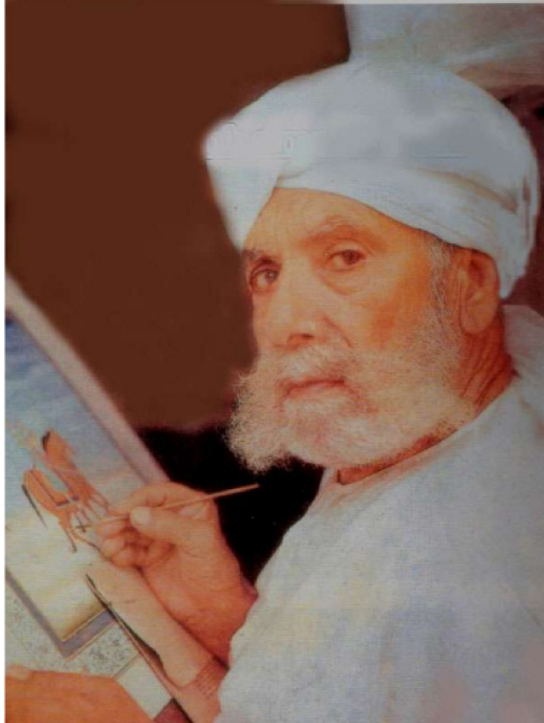
Ustad Haji Muhammad Sharif

Sheikh Shujjah Ullah

Shakeel Ahmed

Bashir Ahmed

Khalid Saeed Butt



Ustad Haji Mohammad Sharif

Born 1889 in Patiala
Lived and worked in Patiala and Lahore
Died 1978 at Lahore

Haji Mohammad Sharif was born in 1889 into a family of court painters. His father, Basharat Ullah and his grandfather Allah Ditta were both employed at the court of Patiala.¹ Sharif lost his father when he was still a child, consequently Bhupinder Singh, the Maharajah of Patiala, employed Haji Sharif as one of the court painters when he reached the age of fifteen.² Haji Sharif's son, Muhammad Hanif reiterated that his grandmother was the one who took an active part in his father's early training and made sure he got good *ustads* (teachers). Lala Shao Ram, one of his father's pupils and Ustad Mohammad Hussain Khan, a miniature painter of some renown from Delhi were his early *ustads*.³

While he was still a court painter at Patiala, Haji Sharif exhibited his work in London in 1924 which earned him the Order of the British Empire. He continued to paint at the court of Patiala till 1945 but at the age of fifty-six he applied for a job as an instructor of miniature painting at the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore.⁴ He was selected and he left the court to join his new post which displeased the Patiala durbar and no benefits were paid to him.⁵ The reason for his leaving the court was probably the quest for better prospects. According to Ijaz ul Hassan, Haji Sharif received a monthly salary of sixty rupees at the Patiala court, a paltry sum for late nineteenth and early twentieth century especially compared to the benefits that were bestowed on Mughal artists. At the Mayo School of Arts, Haji Sharif was appointed as an instructor on a salary of rupees three hundred per month. As he had already reached the official age of retirement when he applied at Mayo School of Arts, he was appointed on a contract basis there.⁶

Haji Sharif is considered a pioneer of miniature painting in Pakistan as he was the first to be attached to an educational institution. He not only taught at the Mayo School of

Arts, (later the National College of Arts), but also took some classes at the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University. However, since miniature painting remained an optional subject and a minor part of the fine arts curriculum it failed to generate an interest in the students in either institution at that time.

During Ustad Haji Sharif's first tenure from 1945 to 1958, only 21 students took miniature as an optional subject.⁷ The government, eager to popularize "old style" miniature painting at the Mayo School of Arts continued to grant special scholarships over a period of eleven years to miniature painting students but there is no evidence of any student becoming a miniature painter.⁸ One plausible reason for the waning interest was the stress laid by the British on the perpetuation of the crafts rather than the art heritage of India.⁹ The art schools established in India in the nineteenth century by the British were more concerned with teaching painting as an applied art.

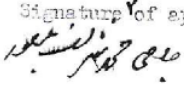
The Mayo School of Arts was reorganized in 1961 and became the National College of Arts. Haji Sharif, then seventy-four, was re-appointed to teach miniature painting. Haji Sharif continued to teach with failing eyesight and ill health as there was no one to take his place. In 1968 when Haji Sharif could no longer continue teaching, his post was filled by Sheikh Shujaullah, another ageing artist who was a descendant of miniature painters from Amber.

Haji Sharif held his first exhibition in 1960 at the Arts Council, Lahore at the age of seventy-one. The President of Pakistan, in appreciation of his work awarded him a lifetime pension of Rs.200 per month and in 1967 he was awarded the President's Award for Pride of Performance. In 1976, a medal of excellence was instituted in his name on the

occasion of the centenary of the National College of Arts. This medal continues to be awarded each year to an outstanding student from the miniature department.

It is difficult to study the entire body of work done by Haji Sharif as most of it is dispersed, though forty paintings are in his family's collection and a small number in the National Gallery in Islamabad.¹⁰ Unfortunately many works are undated and while some carry his name, sometimes in English and at other times in Urdu, they do not bear his signature. There is often a disparity in the appearance of the name also.

It seems out of place to see Ustad Haji Sharif's name written in English as it is not a common practice for miniature painters to sign their work in English, even today. His specimen signature from some documents and letters in the National College Archives shows that he signed his name in Urdu with *mussavar* (the artist) added to it. This particular signature appears nowhere on his paintings. Since most paintings of Haji Sharif are unsigned it is difficult to establish a chronology for them.

Signature of applicant.

 Specimen signature of Haji Sharif

Throughout his career, Haji Sharif's work remained within the convention of reproducing earlier works. "Copying or basing works on earlier paintings or combining various parts of different paintings was an accepted norm with traditional Indian painters."¹¹ Being a traditionalist, the work of Haji Sharif consists mainly of copies or appropriations of earlier seventeenth- century Mughal miniatures.

Portraits form a large body of his work and are mainly of Mughal Emperors and their consorts. In “Bahadur Shah Zafar” (fig.39) Ustad Haji Sharif has reproduced a later Mughal work but it lacks the sensitive coloring and the detailing of the original. However “Princess Syeda, the daughter of Shahjahan” is more delicately rendered with its elaborate borders (fig.40). The princess is portrayed in a traditional oval inset surrounded by a skillful and intricately rendered arabesque design which adds to the delicacy of the portrait. She is seated with her hand resting on the arm of a European- looking chair which is perhaps a contemporary addition by Haji Sharif.

Besides Imperial Mughal portraits he has also painted Sikh gurus. His “Guru Nanak” (fig.41) replicates the bright flat colors particular of the portraits done during the Sikh period. Besides painting portraits from the Mughal and Sikh eras, Haji Sharif also did commissioned portraits of some personalities of his time, including the Shah of Iran, Jackie Onassis and presidents of China, Japan and the Philippines, to whom these were presented officially by the government, but unfortunately there are no records of these works.¹² Other paintings were commissioned or bought by local collectors.

Haji Sharif continued to paint in the courtly style as it augured well with the newly established state of Pakistan and filled the need for a national art that had its roots in Mughal Art. As Virginia Whiles says the practice of offering miniatures to visiting dignitaries was a means to define a nationalist cultural role for miniature painting during the late seventies.¹³

But it has an even earlier precedent as well, during the time of the Mughals, when portrait of visiting influentials were painted frequently and given to them as souvenirs.

Equestrian Emperors or Empresses and polo players forms a second major them

in the work of Haji Sharif. These figures are taken primarily from Mughal prototypes and arranged in backgrounds of his invention. Often larger than the usual miniature size (32 x 24 inches) they follow a strictly symmetrical composition such as the one in “Noorjahan paying polo with other princesses” (fig.42) and “Shahjahan playing polo with his four sons” (fig.43). In both these paintings Haji Sharif has placed large figures in the foreground where they occupy a central position. The backgrounds are characterized by large barren expanses with sparse trees and small, barely visible hamlets that disappear into the undulating beige hillside. A vivid blue sky streaked with clouds meets the receding middle ground. A narrow strip of grass close to the bottom edge provides a shallow foreground for figures that stand apart from his pale and often sparse surroundings. The figures and horses appear in recurring poses with an equal number and identical postures on either side, making the entire scene look almost like a mirror image. The horses and their riders appear rather stiff and are devoid of the vitality that a polo game would generate. The repetitive postures and the pale coloring of faces are characteristic of his figurative work.

Looking at two paintings that bear the same title “Emperor Jahangir riding with Nurjahan,” (figs.44 and 45) one realizes that the images are identical except that one is a reverse image of the other, with minor changes in the background and the color of the horses. The painting in fig. 44 is in the National Art Gallery in Islamabad whereas the other is in the collection of the family of the artist. More than forty paintings still form part of the collection of his family. In keeping with the traditional norms, one can assume that Haji Sharif not only kept tracings of complete paintings which he used for reproducing the same but also had a repertoire of images that would appear from time to time in different paintings.

Hunting and battle scenes form the third theme. Here again Haji Sharif uses his characteristic pale backgrounds, bright skies and images placed very close to the foreground. In “Jahangir and Noorjahan after the hunting of a tiger with her spear” (fig. 46) the treatment of the background and the figures is visibly similar to his paintings of polo games and riding themes.

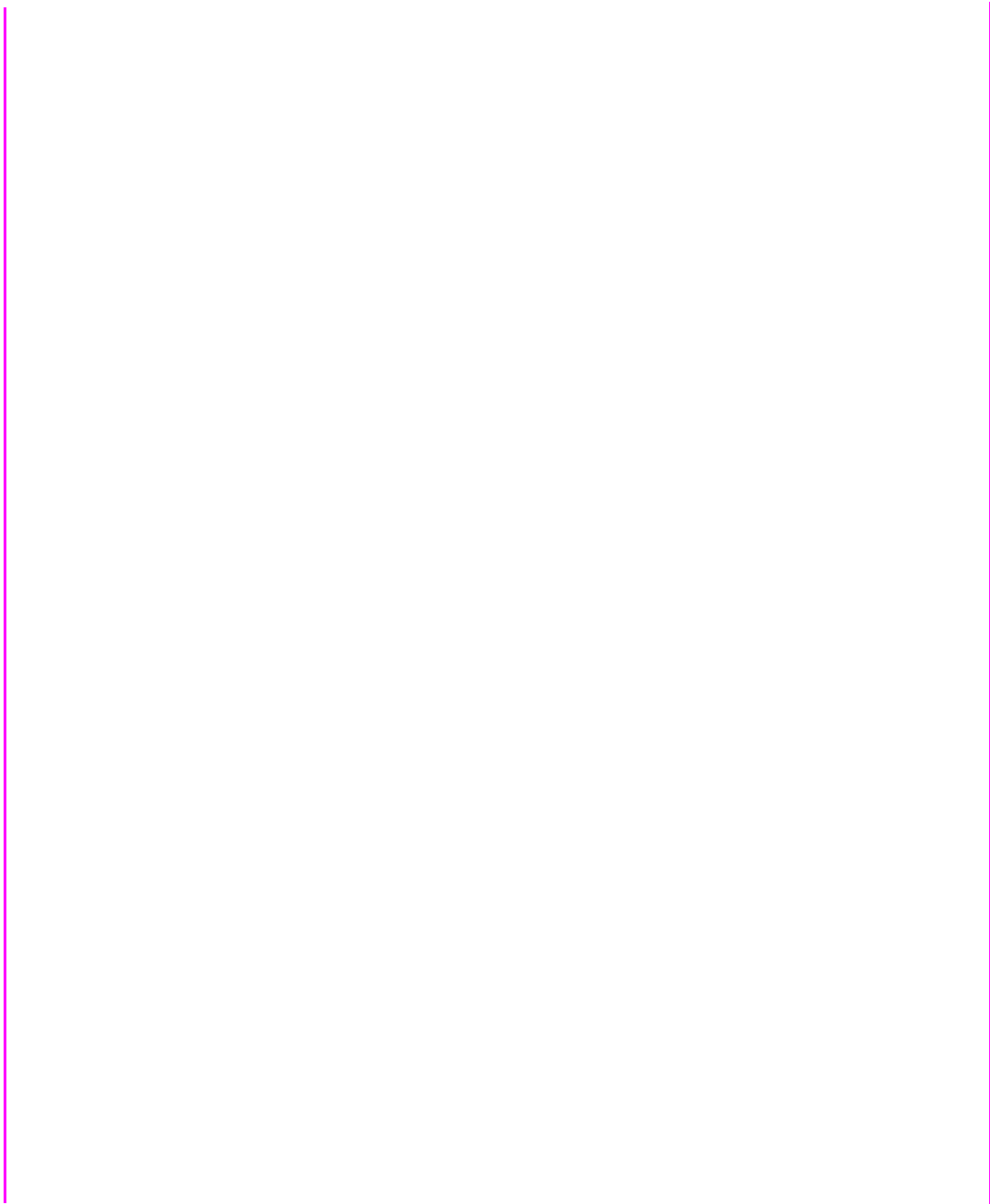
Haji Sharif's importance lies not so much in what he painted or the quality of his work as in the fact that he was one of the first to teach miniature painting at the Mayo School of Arts, subsequently the National College of Arts and also the University of the Punjab in the newly formed state of Pakistan. In the twenty-three years that he taught, the art of miniature painting remained suspended in its past glory. This was unavoidable as Haji Sharif was trained as a court painter who painted to please his patrons. Another reason for the scant importance given to miniature painting by fine artists in the early seventies was the flooding of Pakistan with modern western art ideas.

According to Akbar Naqvi both Haji Sharif and his successor at the National College of Arts, Sheikh Shujaullah “cultivated dead ends, a hiatus rather than possibilities of new openings.”¹⁴ Although that might be true, the fact is they continued to paint and kept the traditional skills alive.

Haji Sharif died in Lahore in 1978 at the age of eighty-nine. Muhammad Hanif, his son who learnt the art from his father, continued to paint after that but remained unknown. The British Council in Lahore arranged a posthumous exhibition of Haji Mohammad Sharif's work on the occasion of the golden jubilee of Pakistan in 2000.¹⁵ Many of the paintings exhibited in this show were his usual Jahangir and Noorjahan either hunting or

riding and playing polo (fig. 47).

Mansur, a grandson of Haji Sharif is also an artist and takes inspiration from miniature painting, but he prefers to paint in oils. He exhibited recently at the Punjabi University in Patiala and says “I chose Patiala because of my family’s close association with the former princely state.” He also says his painting is about ‘the necessity of relating the miniature art to modern times while retaining the best of the classical tradition.’¹⁶



Notes:

¹ B.N. Goswamy, "Sikh Patronage of Painting." In *Five Centuries of Sikh Tradition*. (Delhi: Manohir, 2005), 108-116 and R.P. Srivastava, *Punj ab Painting*. (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983), 56. R.P. Srivastava,

"Patrons and Artists." In *Art and Cultural Heritage of Patiala*. (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1991), 85-107

² Mian Ijaz ul Hassan, "The Way it Was," *The Daily Times*, Sept 8.2004.

³ Mohammad Hanif, Interview by author, Lahore, April 23, 2006.

⁴ Appointment letter of Haji Sharif gives the date as Dec. 20, 1944. Interestingly Aftab Ahmed, another miniature painter from Delhi who later migrated to Lahore in 1948 applied for the same post, as did a Jaipur painter by the name of Ram Gopal Vijaiwargiya. Ibid. Folios 5 and 18

⁵ National College of Arts Archives. Haji Sharif Files. Folio 195

⁶ Ibid., Folio 245. Haji Mohammad Sharif's age appears on an application written by him to the Board of Governors, National College of Arts in 1964 (after he was told that his services were no longer required.) requesting that he be given a pension and a piece of land in recognition of his services.

⁷ Ibid., Folio 245. Prof. Shakir Ali, Principal of National College of Arts, mentions in a letter-dated 27.Feb. 1963 to the Education Department.

⁸ Ibid., Folios 2,10,16,19,25,27,39,40,42,53,58,59,63,80,83,91,93,100,110 and 111.

⁹ Tapati-Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a new Indian art*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 151- 156. She gives a detailed analysis of the British education policies.

¹⁰ Mohammad Hanif, Interview by author, April 23, 2006.

¹¹ Robert J. Del. Bonta, "Late or Faux Mughal Painting." In *After the Great Mughals*. (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2002), 151.

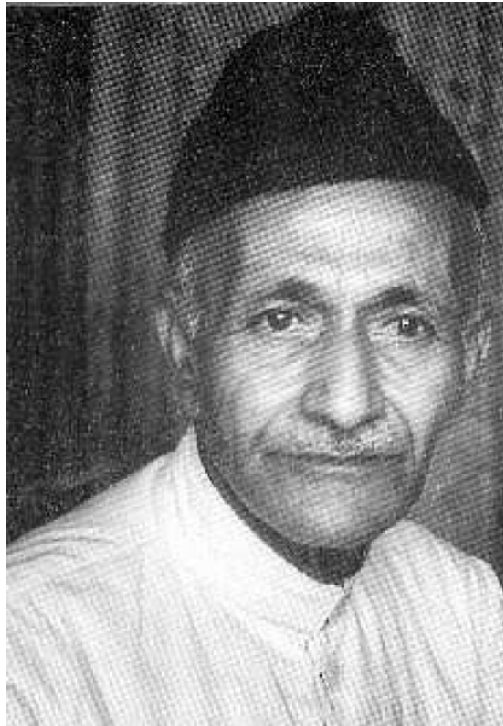
¹² Khalid Anis Ahmad, *The Legend that was Ustad Haji Muhammad Sharif*. (Lahore: British Council, 1999). Portraits presented: In 1951 .Shah of Iran, Arya Mehr Raza Shah Pehlvi; in 1961, the First lady, Mrs. J.F. Kennedy; in 1962, President of China, Mr.Liu Shau Chi; in 1962, prince of Japan, Mr. Ikihito; in 1963, President of Philippines , Mr. .Megapagel;

¹³ Virginia Whiles, *Contemporary Miniature Painting from Pakistan*. (Kyoto: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2004), 56.

¹⁴ Akbar Naqvi, *Paintings from Pakistan* (Islamabad: Pakistan National Council of the Arts, 1988), Introduction.

¹⁵ Khalid Anis Ahmed, *Legend that was Ustad Haji Muhammad Sharif*. A brochure printed in 1999 on the occasion of a posthumous exhibition of the artist's work.

¹⁶ Jangveer Singh, "Miniature Painter Returns to Family's Backyard": Pak Artist to Showcase Patiala Miniature Tradition. *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, India. Feb 11.2005.



Sheikh Shujaullah

Born 1912 at Alwar
Lived and worked at Alwar, Rawalpindi and Lahore
Died 1980 at Lahore

Ustad Shujaullah was born in 1912 at Alwar. He was the grandson of an accomplished calligraphist Rahimullah and a distant descendant of Abdus Samad, the noted Mughal miniature painter. He was a court painter in the small Rajput state of Amber before he migrated to Rawalpindi during the partition. He lived in Rawalpindi for a while earning his living there as a free-lance artist.

In 1965 he came to Lahore and taught at the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University for three years. In 1968 he joined the National College of Arts to replace Haji Sharif who had retired by then as the miniature-painting teacher.

Ustad Shujaullah belonged to a family that was closely connected to the art of miniature painting. His brother Zakaullah, along with other cousins specialized in *jidval* (border rulings) and worked from their house in old Anarkali on assignments from various artists.¹

The declining importance of miniature painting other than for its curio value compelled the offspring of Ustad Shujaullah not to follow in his footsteps but to go into other careers. However, one of his nephews, Ustad Aftab Ahmed, and the nephew's son Shakeel Ahmed did carry the family tradition in Lahore after an interlude of working as photographers.

Since 2000, Shakeel Ahmed who is a freelance painter has been teaching in the Naqsh school of Traditional Arts in the Bazar-e-Hakeeman, the environs of old Lahore.²

Ustad Shujaullah taught miniature painting from 1968 to 1980 at the National College of Arts. Although he had many pupils in these twelve years, it was Bashir Ahmed, who became his full time apprentice in 1974, who continued to work and learn with the *ustad* even after being appointed as a teacher in the Fine Arts Department in 1976. His sincerity to the Ustad is evident from the fact that he never sold or promoted his work during the Ustad's lifetime. Ustad Shujaullah died at Lahore in 1980

Unlike Ustad Haji Sharif who was fond of painting Mughal emperors, empresses

and their lives, Sheikh Shujaullah seems to have preferred the idyllic beauty of Rajput themes; he did paint some Mughal themes like the portrait of the emperor Jahangir (fig.48). “The Princess playing with bird” (fig.49) shows a young princess against a pristine white *jharoka* (balcony) whose brilliance contrasts dramatically with the deep blue of the sky and the dark hues of the floor, doorway and trees. She sits alone in a reverie as she plays nonchalantly with her pet bird and perhaps waits for her prince. There is a gentle reminder of similar *ragamala* paintings where lonely young damsels wait for their lovers on terraces. In figure 50, the solitary figure of a woman is seated on a terrace with a river flowing by and hills in the background. The hills with sparse vegetation on them and a small white building nestled on top are reminiscent of Pahari paintings. Irrespective of the theme in these two paintings Sheikh Shujaullah uses an overall patterned border in both the paintings, a popular Mughal characteristic.³ The subdued tones of a single color and a limited palette of this painting, echoed also in the border, give the painting a calm appearance

Like Haji Sharif, Sheikh Shujaullah is best known for his role as a teacher at the National College and specifically through his pupil, Bashir Ahmed, who is the current head of the miniature department. Sheikh Shujaullah was often employed for restoration work on miniature paintings and manuscripts by the Fakir Khana museum.⁴

It is difficult to comment on Sheikh Shujaullah’s work as most of it is unavailable now but like most descendants of court painters he was adept in the Mughal, Persian and Rajput styles of painting and incorporated them in his paintings. Although there are only three paintings shown here and they form a very small part of his painting career, they give one an insight into the mastery he had in delicate drawing, coloring and the penchant for copying seventeenth and eighteenth century borders.

Notes:

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Shakeel Ahmed

Born 1947 at Lahore

Lives and works in Lahore

Shakeel Ahmed belongs to a traditional artist family. His father Aftab Ahmed comes from a family of court painters and illuminators who were patronized by the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. Aftab Ahmed lived in the *Koocha Rehman*, the locale where most Delhi artists resided at the time. He migrated to Lahore during independence and it is in here that Shakeel Ahmed was born in 1947. He has lived and worked in Lahore ever since.

Aftab Ahmed, Shakeel's father, realizing that the times were not advantageous for pursuing a career in painting, started a photographic studio and worked full time as a photographer till 1961.¹ Shakeel Ahmed apprenticed with his father in his photographic studio. Aftab Ahmed started painting again in 1960 or 1961, and very soon began to devote all his time to it. Shakeel learnt the art of miniature painting initially by just observing the way his father painted. By the time Shakeel Ahmed was in his teens he was following in his father's footsteps and by early 1970s he took up his family profession of painting with great keenness.

Fakir Mugheesuddin, one of the owners of the Fakir Khana Museum at Lahore was an early patron of Shakeel Ahmed and his father. Over a period of time he ordered innumerable copies from Persian, Kangra and Mughal miniatures.² By the late 1970s his patronage declined and it left Aftab Ahmed and his son Shakeel Ahmed on their own. However they continued to work and sell their paintings which consisted mainly of copies of seventeenth century Mughal miniatures.

Shakeel Ahmed had his first exhibition in 1983 at the National Art Gallery in Islamabad and later that same year in a gallery at Karachi. In the Islamabad show he

exhibited about forty miniatures that drew inspiration from Mughal, Kangra and Persian styles. More than half the paintings in this exhibition portrayed Radha and Krishna and their romantic trysts. “For me there are no territorial barriers and as a painter I feel unfettered,”³ said Shakeel to a question about why he continued to paint Hindu mythology when Pakistan was eager to forge a national art that preferred to ally itself with the Mughals. This response was perhaps avant-garde, as today the contemporary miniature painters respond in a similar manner. They feel just as unfettered and free to take images and elements from varied sources and do not feel restricted to produce a nationalistic imagery. Painters like Shazia Sikander and Wasim Ahmed are two such painters that make liberal use of Hindu imagery in their work.

Shakeel Ahmed has taken part in various group shows arranged by the National Art Gallery and the Punjab Arts Council. In the year 2000 he was invited by Syed Babar Ali, a rich philanthropic businessman, to teach diploma courses in miniature painting at the newly established Naqsh School of Arts in the Bazar-e Hakeeman in the old city. The Naqsh School of Arts is the brainchild of Babar Ali and is aimed at reviving the traditional arts in the area popular for it during the Mughal era. With a very low fee structure, it provides a platform for under -privileged students to learn indigenous arts.⁴

Shakeel continues to teach miniature painting at the Naqsh School and to paint but he has not exhibited for the past twenty years. He is fond of painting portrait that are either direct reproductions or inspired by the seventeenth century court artist. He has long abandoned compositions that included themes of Radha and Krishna, working solely within a Mughal context.

The copies of portraits of Akbar and Jahangir shown in figure 51 and 52 were painted on a flat and neutral background and despite the use of bright colors in the two paintings there is a lack of luminosity when the paintings are seen in the original. Shakeel does not use traditional borders or the use of gold to embellish his paintings opting instead for simple ruled borders instead. Like all traditional miniature painters, Shakeel follows the prescribed methods of painting a miniature, from making his own *waslis* to using squirrel hair brushes.

By comparison to the miniature work being done at the National College of Arts, the work by the students of Naqsh School of Arts does not appear very refined as most of them have not been exposed to a varied teaching methodology and the necessary drawing skills. For the moment they are happy to reproduce miniatures to the best of their abilities.

Shakeel Ahmed is not very well-known or even economically successful as many of his contemporaries, who are mostly graduates or teachers from the National College of Arts. The reason for this is that the Pakistani art collectors are more art savvy and are no longer interested in mere reproduction of traditional miniature which is what Shakeel Ahmad does. However, his importance lies in the fact that he belongs to a family who have been court painters for centuries and by virtue of that have been instrumental in keeping the art alive. Unfortunately none of his children have inherited his love for miniature painting and do not want to pursue it for economic reasons. He is the last painter of his family.

Notes:

¹ Shakeel Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Sept 3, 2005.

² Ibid., Mugheesuddin would also ask Aftab Ahmed to restore paintings in the Fakir Khana Museum

³ Anis Mirza, "Cultural Roundup." *The Dawn*. Karachi. April 29, 1983.

⁴ Syed Babar Ali, the owner of Packages Limited, a paper manufacturing company in Lahore is the founder of the Naqsh School of Arts. This school, started in the year 2000, teaches the traditional arts of miniature painting, calligraphy and *naqqashi* (decorative tile work). Most of the students at the Naqsh School come from a lower income group, where the monthly fee is Rs. 200 only and all materials are provided by the school. The students receive a diploma after a two year course. This course is not comparable to the degree miniature course offered at the National College of Arts.



Bashir Ahmed

Born 1952 in Lahore
Lives and works in Lahore

Bashir Ahmed got his diploma in painting from the National College of Arts in 1974. He spent the next two years specializing in miniature painting under Sheikh Shujaullah, a traditional *ustad* who had been teaching minor courses in miniature painting at the same college since 1968. Bashir holds a special place as he has been trained in both western painting techniques and traditional miniature painting. In 1976 he was employed as a teacher in the Fine Arts Department of the National College of Arts where he now heads the Miniature and the Fine Arts Department simultaneously.

Bashir Ahmed, says, “when I took up miniature as a minor course, I was drawn to the serene and peaceful atmosphere in the miniature painting class”¹ Like most traditional *ustads*, Shujaullah tried to dissuade Bashir in order to test his dedication. “It is only when the *ustad* was sure about my determination that he accepted me as a pupil,”² says Bashir. From 1974 to 1976 Bashir almost lived with the *ustad*, spending long hours learning the technique of making a miniature painting from the *wasli*, the squirrel- hair brushes, the pigments to the completion of the painted image. He continued to learn from the *ustad* and served him relentlessly till his death in 1980. “As a token of respect I never sold any of my paintings during my *ustad*’s lifetime,”³ says Bashir. It is something most students of today would find hard to do. Bashir also spent time working and learning with Ustad Haji Sharif though it was really Sheikh Shujaullah who was his *ustad*.

After Sheikh Shujaullah died Bashir Ahmed took over as the new miniature painting teacher at the National College of Arts. In the next two years he designed and developed the first course of studies for a degree in miniature painting and saw its implementation in 1982.⁴ Miniature painting is now taught as a minor to all art students and as a major to students who wish to specialize in it. Bashir has been heading the department since its

inception. Initially only two students enrolled in 1982 and it took nine years for the interest to build up and the number of students to increase. Thirteen students graduated from the miniature department in the year 2000, while in 2003 the number rose to seventeen, which has been the highest so far.⁵

In her article on the history of miniature painting at the National College of Arts, Naazish Ataullah credits Zahoor ul Akhlaque, a contemporary painter and teacher at the National College of Arts, with promoting miniature painting as a resource for the painting department.⁶ She believes it was Zahoor who enabled Bashir to specialize in miniature painting and to introduce it as a major course in order to encourage an interaction between the miniature and a western form of art education.⁷ Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, on the other hand, thinks it was Shakir Ali and Khalid Iqbal, two senior painters and teachers, who persuaded Bashir to “prepare himself to be the next miniature painting *ustad* at the college.”⁸ Who actually persuaded Bashir to train as a miniaturist and work to make it into a graduate course is something he does not want to discuss. “Since I had spent two intensive years learning the traditional art and could see my *ustad* dying I knew I had to continue with his legacy, I did not need persuasion.” says Bashir.

While Bashir Ahmed was a student and later a teacher at the National College of Arts he was closely associated with Zahoor-ul Akhlaque, his teacher and later a colleague. “I lived in Zahoor’s house for a while, so I was often in his studio helping him prepare his stretchers and assisting him in his painting and sculpture and of course discussing art.”⁹

Zahoor, who trained as a painter at the National College of Arts, was appointed as a teacher at his alma mater in the mid-sixties. In the late sixties he went to the Hornsey

School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London to study printmaking. While there, he took a great interest in the extensive Mughal miniature collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This interest was to remain with him for the rest of his life and appear as an underlying influence in much of his work. Having learnt the art of calligraphy while he was still a youngster gave him an awareness of another art form to draw upon. Taking the traditional format of the oriental manuscript he used his postmodern aesthetic learning to produce a body of modern work. Many art critics label Zahoor as the most eminent contemporary painter of Pakistan and acquiesce that it was he who was the turning point in bringing miniature painting at the National College of Arts to its present status and to begin the discourse of “traditional elements and contemporary modernist painting.”¹⁰

However, this discourse and the importance of looking to one’s own art traditions was not new in the history of National College of Arts. As Mayo School of Arts it had close connection with the Bengal School, the first nationalist art movement of India, pioneered by Abanindranath Tagore at the Calcutta School. The moving spirit of this movement spread to Lahore through faculty such as Samarendranath Gupta, a pupil of Abanindranath, who came as Vice Principal of the Mayo School of Arts in 1911. Even Abdur Rehman Chughtai who taught chromo-lithography at the Mayo School of Arts visited Calcutta in 1916 and cultivated similar trends.¹¹

In 1970 When Bashir joined the National College of Arts as a student, some of the craft based courses devised at the inception of Mayo School of Arts were still part of the college curriculum.¹² Besides doing oils and miniature painting he also learnt wood and metalworking. The diversity of his training manifests itself in his earlier and recent works. He paints miniatures along with other “experimental paintings” as he likes to call them.

These vary from works in graphite, gouache, oil, acrylics and mixed media.

Bashir Ahmed held his first solo show in 1980 at Islamabad. The Pakistan National Council of the Arts gave him the Chughtai Award in March 1981 for the best painting in traditional style at the National Exhibition of the Visual Arts.¹³ Other solo shows followed, of which at least four were held in the United States. While there, he also delivered lectures and conducted workshops at the Pacific Asia Museum, Oklahoma University and University of Maryland. These were instrumental in introducing the miniatures being done at the National College of Arts to the west.

Bashir's earliest works are two small paintings done in 1972. One is a portrait of Noorjahan done in pencil (fig.53), the other a Radha and Krishna done in *siyah qalam* (fig. 54). Although these early works of his are copies of existing works, they both show his adeptness and skill even as a student.

The tradition of learning the technique by copying existed in Persian, Mughal, Rajput and Pahari painting schools and is the pivot of the training which continues even today. The students start their training by copying works of the great masters before they begin to do contemporary compositions.

The portrait paintings from the 1980s are both likenesses of contemporary personalities. The "Doctor" (fig.55) is a sensitively rendered drawing, composed in a traditional oval format and reminiscent of ivory paintings of the nineteenth century. The painting titled "Saeed Akhtar" (fig.56) is a portrait of his teacher in a Mughal costume. Another portrait done by him is of Maharaj Kathak, the legendary dancer from Lahore. It was painted on ivory and was acquired by the Asia Pacific Museum in 1984. A decade later he did portraits of other celebrities such as General Musharraf and the Clintons.

Like his *ustad*, Sheikh Shujaullah, Bashir has a penchant for Rajput and Pahari

themes. He usually paints young maidens adorning themselves in the company of their attendants or sitting alone and leaning against bolsters while waiting for their lovers. One can say that his work is generally serene and leisurely and very different from his younger contemporaries. Apart from doing miniature paintings Bashir does graphite drawings and acrylic paintings where he continues to draw upon the miniature imagery.

“The Kangra Princess” a painting done by Bashir Ahmed in the late eighties is a typical theme of the Pahari painters (fig.57). Here he uses the figures from existing paintings and relocates them into his own stylized setting. The painting is enclosed within a highly detailed and decorative border with the color and motifs of a Mughal *hash iya* (border). Most of Bashir’s works like the “Kangra Princess” follow the practice of appropriating images from various sources and integrating it into a single painting. This was the standard traditional procedure in most Mughal miniatures and often encouraged during the time of Akbar and Jahangir and attributed to their eclecticism. ¹⁴

Similarly, in the “Lady with a peacock” (fig.58) Bashir takes the image from two eighteenth century Guler paintings but gives the painting a Mughal border. The female figure and the peacock come from a 1760 “Lady tempting a peacock” (fig.59) whereas the background wall and the tree behind it are appropriated from a 1780 “Khandita Nayika,” (fig.60).

“The hunter” (fig.61) belongs to a series of large pencil drawings (20 in. by 30 in.) done in 1997. It is clearly a reproduction of the c. 1690 miniature from Kota, “Maharao Ram Singh 1 of Kota pursuing a Rhinoceros” (fig.62) except that it is in reverse. The ethereal landscape with the Persianised rocky formations and stylized clouds hanging on

the upper margin are elements that Bashir has added to the composition. Besides some tonal changes, the stances of the riders, the elephant and its trappings remain quite like the original. Over the years Bashir continued to use elements from existing miniature paintings in his work while adding few original motifs to them.

Two other untitled paintings that belong to the pencil drawing series (figs.63 and 64) take their reference from Pahari paintings where the spirit of love, seasons, *nayak* and *nayakas* abound. A beautiful young woman or perhaps a princess takes center stage in preparing herself with the help of her friends or attendants. She sits or stands bathed in moonlight that casts a romantic haze on the entire painting enhancing the poetic ambience of the image. The floral clouds while going beyond the margins occupy a prominent place towards the top edge of the painting: a stylistic accessory that Bashir has used in many of these drawings.

Although Bashir Ahmed moves away from tradition by way of experimenting with technique, medium and size, his themes and images remain rooted in traditional sources. In his enlarged pencil drawings, he subverts the traditional *pardakht* (small light marks put close together to give tonal effect and volume in miniature), using instead the usual way of shading with a pencil. A high contrast rendering further contradicts the trend of making very light drawings in the case of traditional miniatures.

Over the years, Bashir has repeatedly explored other painting mediums while culling themes and styles as well as merging different styles from the miniature tradition. In a series of acrylic on canvas paintings done in 1996 such as “The Messenger” (fig.65) a single female figure or sometimes two figures are the focus. The figures are not part of any

narrative setting but are surrounded by misty vignettes with his usual stylized clouds

hovering overhead. The significant element in these paintings is the series of borders that surround the central image and the use of silkscreen printing for a broad intricate border which in most cases frames either one side or three sides of these paintings.

Bashir did a number of mixed media paintings during the late eighties and mid-nineties and later in 2005 (figs.67 and 68). These images are mostly loosely painted single figures of Mughal princesses or princes riding. Sketchy and covered in a smoky haze they form the focus of the painting. While the images are certainly inspired by miniature paintings they also bear a close resemblance to some paintings of Zahoor ul Akhlaque. The muted colors visible through floating clouds and the use of frame within a frame are some distinct elements of Zahoor's work (fig.66) While Zahoor also used elements from the Mughal miniature, his approach was more towards a conceptual abstraction. Bashir uses the immediacy of images he is familiar with and layers it with a haze to lend it a predominantly ethereal and a bygone look.

"The power" (fig.69) is evidently work inspired from elements that Zahoor was well known for, the grid, the mushroom-like cloud and the muted somber colors of his palette (fig.70). His influence on Bashir's work is most visible in the mixed media paintings.

Bashir, who has been painting for over thirty years now, does not seem too keen to sell his work. "I have almost all my work with me" he says.¹⁵ It is difficult to say whether it is by choice that he does not sell. Bashir continues to paint traditional themes whether he is doing miniatures or experimenting with other mediums. Bashir's work can easily be divided into two main streams. Since his training is both in oils and miniature painting he continues to paint in both mediums. However even while he does oils, acrylics or graphite,

his work draws heavily from the traditional imagery of a miniature. There is little reference to the contemporary in terms of figures or in the concept.

Modern art critics often target him for being “firmly traditionalist”¹⁶ and of having a “conventionally more fundamentalist”¹⁷ approach to teaching miniature-painting. However they give him the credit for his dedication in establishing a one of its kind, miniature painting degree program in the world.

Bashir is very vocal about his views on the traditional art form and its teaching methodology. His approach in teaching comes from his traditional *ustad-shagird* (teacher-student) training and the belief that the student must follow the traditional way of learning how to paint a miniature. Talking about contemporary miniature he says, “I do not discourage students from using a contemporary imagery and concepts once they are through with their training as long as they follow the traditional technique of working each part of the painting in detail. Everything in a miniature painting should have detailed rendering, if the technique is absent then it is not miniature painting.”¹⁸

Of late Bashir Ahmed has been in the midst of a conflict between himself and his younger students turned colleagues and contemporary miniaturists. He is vehemently targeted for restraining students from experimenting and for his continued penchant towards conventional themes, yet all contemporary miniature painters in Whiles’s words “respect the medium and its mode of teaching at least in its early stages.”¹⁹ His conventionality though should not take away from his dedication to the genre, its establishment as a degree course and its growing popularity.

Notes:

¹ Bashir Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Oct 24, 2005.

² Ibid .,

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Naazish Ataullah. "The Making of the Miniature: an Overview." In *Contemporary Miniature Painting from Pakistan* (Kyoto: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2004), 60. Naazish underlines Zahoorul Akhlaque's intellectual role versus Bashir's conventional role in promoting miniature painting at the National College of Arts.

⁵ Bashir Ahmed. *Revival of Traditional Miniature Paintings*. (Lahore: National College of Arts, 2000).

⁶ Naazish Ataullah is Assistant Professor in painting at National College of Arts. Zahoorul Akhlaque a Professor of Art at the National College of Art was murdered in 1999. Naazish underlines Zahoorul Akhlaque's intellectual role versus Bashir's conventional role in promoting miniature painting at the National College of Arts.

⁷ Ataullah, "The making of the Miniature,"60.

⁸ Marcella Nesom Sirhandi. *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*. (Hongkong: Champion printing Co.Ltd., 1994), 49.

⁹ Bashir Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Oct 24, 2005. The mid sixties and seventies was the period when Pakistani artists who also taught at the National College of Arts or the Punjab University met frequently and exchanged views about the emerging art scene.

¹⁰ Whiles., *Contemporary Miniature Painting from Pakistan*, 56.

¹¹ Partha Mitter. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 333-377.

¹² Samina Choonara, ed. *Official Chronicle of Mayo School of Arts*. (Lahore: National College of Arts Publication, 2003), 145. Mayo School of Arts was founded by the British to improve the design sensibilities for industrial products, although that became a debatable issue later on. Wood working, carpentry and metal working were all parts of the industrial arts taught at the Mayo School of Arts.

¹³ Review. *The Muslim*. March 5, 1981.

¹⁴ Ahmed Khalid Anis, ed. *Intercultural Encounter in Mughal Miniatures*. (Lahore: National College

of Arts, 1995), 22-27.

¹⁵ Bashir Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Oct 24, 2005.

¹⁶ Whiles, *Contemporary Miniature Painting from Pakistan*, 56. ‘Bashir Ahmed being the apprentice of Sheikh Shujaullah is firmly traditionalist’. Whiles says that Bashir follows the nationalist discourse and in so doing he is more concerned with promoting the awareness of the dying art rather than promoting the technique as a means of engaging with the present.

¹⁷ Ataulah, “The Making of the Miniature,” 60.

¹⁸ Bashir Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Oct 24, 2005.

¹⁹ Whiles, *Contemporary Miniature painting from Pakistan*, 56-57. For a more detailed description of the conflict between the traditionalists and the modernists.



Khalid Saeed Butt

Born 1953 in Lahore
Lives and works in Lahore

Khalid Saeed Butt got an M.F.A in graphic design from the Fine Arts Department, Punjab University in 1976 and was inducted as a design teacher two years later in the same Department.

As he did not train to be a miniature painter, he had little knowledge of miniature painting techniques but his aptitude for painting intricate and detailed traditional motifs often led him to incorporate them in his advertising campaigns. In 1979, as a result of his penchant to paint decorative details, he got a commission to do forty miniatures portraying various army regiments of the subcontinent in their ceremonial dress during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This commission took him six years to complete but unfortunately Khalid does not have any record of these early paintings except for the one reproduced here which is reminiscent of paintings done for the British and other Europeans(fig.71). Although Khalid could not have seen the Imam Bakhsh Lahori painting of a gunner (fig.72) as it was not even published then yet his painting bears an affinity with it. It is evident that this commission not only honed his skill of doing detailed decorative work, it also gave him the impetus to continue doing miniature painting from then on.

Khalid says he was “drawn to miniature painting as it provided a perfect expression to my flair for detail and the urge to create beautiful motifs. My drawing skills helped me a great deal in further developing the strength of my line, which I believe is the quintessential element of miniature painting and my grounding in design gave me the ability to make innovative compositions.”¹

A self-taught miniature painter, Khalid learnt the techniques of miniature painting

by a trial and error method. “I did not know much about miniatures when I started out” he confesses, “but I have experimented, learnt, and have come up with my own solutions.”²

He believes there are no secrets in how to paint a miniature, they are explained in books and one does not have to spend years before the *ustad* agrees to share some of his methods. “I can explain the technique in five minutes as I do not want to be like an old *ustad* who wants to keep his techniques secret but learning how to paint a good miniature could take a lifetime,”³ he agrees.

“The importance given to the miniature technique is exaggerated,” he says. “Why does anyone not ask a printmaker what inks he uses or which press he has used for pulling out the prints or question the painter about how he has prepared the canvas or whether he makes his own pigments?”⁴ Khalid thinks that the technique was something the old *ustads* guarded because that was what gave them the “importance” otherwise he says most of their miniature paintings were merely copies with images taken from various sources. Interestingly he like many other traditional twentieth and twenty first century painters continues to use traditional ideas if not the direct iconography. Although Khalid does not make direct copies of traditional miniatures, his work can be termed as traditional as his themes are mostly derived from the Pahari School and embody its characteristics in the portrayal of figures and foliage.

Khalid criticizes the traditional miniature for its lack of originality and believes that painters used their set repertoire of images. I think when he says that, he means the copies done in the nineteenth century of seventeenth century manuscripts. He is also critical of the subject matter of contemporary miniatures and believes that “a miniature painting has a particular mood, an essence, and another-world charm,” which should not be disturbed by including images of guns, *rickshaws* (a three-wheeled local transport) sofas or jeans.”⁵

Khalid’s early work is simple and straightforward with somewhat awkwardly drawn

figures. “The Musicians” shows an outdoor scene with a group of people sitting under a large golden tree and playing different musical instruments (fig.73). Here man, animal, plant life seem to be in perfect harmony. Khalid says the tree is used as a symbol of our golden heritage of which music is an integral part.

The central figure in this group is larger in size than his companions, making him appear like the *guru* or *ustad* (teacher) of the group. A similar approach of enlarging figures according to their importance was also employed by Mughal and Rajput painters.

“The Game” (fig.74) is another early painting and is set against an architectural edifice which with its close rooftops, pigeon enclosures and the kite-filled sky gives a distinct Lahori ambience to the painting. A bright palette with rather contrived drawing marks these two early paintings.

Khalid’s recent work is about love, beauty and fantasy with subjects such as lovers, young damsels lost in their reveries or nudes bathing under cascading waterfalls. He says he did not want to paint ugly aspects of life, neither did he want to draw attention to any social issues through his art. Art for him is beauty, a maxim he pursues relentlessly.

Deriving inspiration from Rajput painting and the Pahari School, his work centers on the relationship between a man and a woman and has close parallels with the *Ragamala* and the *Nayak-Nayika* series whose paintings show relationships, according to the emotional bearing of seasons and time of day. Almost all his paintings feature either a couple or a single female figure surrounded by an abundance of trees, flowers and birds.

The feelings invoked by his figures are overt and follow the distinct character of *Ragamala* paintings where as Beach says “their physical union is foreshadowed by wild

jungle plants, whose rich buds and blossoms are emblems of divine creativity.”⁶

In his painting titled “Lovers” (fig.75) a pair of scantily clad lovers recline with limbs entwined in a secluded clearing amidst a hilly landscape. They are surrounded by blossoms and trees ending in slim branches that add to the delicacy of the scene. The hill slopes on the right hand side of the painting are awash with gold giving it a dazzling effect that contrasts beautifully with the dark and heavily textured craggy hillside on the left side of the painting. Texture is something that Khalid Saeed Butt has been experimenting with and evolving in his painting over the last eleven years. He applies gum Arabic to raise certain areas of his paintings especially those that show craggy hillsides or ravines.

His choice of themes, clothes and figures remain close to the miniature prototypes.

What he challenges is the flatness of a miniature painting surface by building up areas of low relief in his paintings. It is a technique that he has developed over the years. He applies layers of gum Arabic to build up textural effects mainly in the areas that form the background such as rocky hillsides, (fig.75) the temple like backdrop (fig.76) or the cascading waterfall (figs.77 and 78). The pale and smooth colored figures add a sharp contrast to the background in such paintings.

In another painting also titled ‘Lovers’ (fig.76) Khalid uses his special textural technique to build up a gilded rocky background for a particularly tall pair of standing lovers. Within the background two pairs of sculpted lovers resemble the ones in the temple of Ajanta and Khujrao. Other parts of this gilded background take the form of a cubist surface with geometric shapes and birds nestled between the sculpted lovers. Here Khalid

combines two examples of what traditional Indian art is known for: miniature and temple

sculpture.

In two paintings both titled “Bathing” (Figs. 77 and 78) Khalid again uses texture to build up large rocky areas around a young woman sitting serenely on a large stone bordered by a cascading waterfall. The surrounded area is filled with delicate Kangra-inspired foliage and tendrils that are laden with pink and white blossoms interspersed with birds that hover around or sit by the water’s edge. The landscape reflects the Kangra valley; its green hills and gorges with rivers flowing gently down the slopes. The use of birds in most of his paintings indicates an influence from early nineteenth century Rajasthani paintings of Mevar, Jodhpur and Jaipur where the lush foliage of trees is often studded with an array of birds.

Both these paintings are richly colored and contrast beautifully with the dark areas of the pool. Khalid uses his gold deftly, interspersing it with the flowing water to give the paintings a jewel like effect.

True to the Rajput tradition, the figures Khalid paints are types rather than individuals. His faces are usually in strict profile with the pupil placed in the inner corner of their large almond shaped eyes. The hands and feet of his heroines are often covered with red *henna*.

He keeps the miniature tradition alive in the form of figures and themes but adds texture to most paintings making his work unique in this genre. In other paintings he uses gold foil in large areas so that it highlights the uneven rocky landscape.

His latest work has departed from the small size miniature and the traditional opaque water color medium. He uses canvases as large as 4 x 2 feet and paints in acrylics and gouache while still using the miniature imagery. This is not a new phenomenon as Bashir

Ahmed has done many such paintings on large-scale canvas and paper prior to this.

Khalid still continues to do small scale traditional miniatures on the theme of lovers or a single female figure either playing a musical instrument or lost in a reverie. The latest of these are a series of drawings done in *siyah qalam* (black ink) adding gold to highlight certain areas of these monochromatic paintings (figs.79 and 80), a style said to have Persian origins which became popular with Mughal artists.⁷

Parallel to the *siyah qalam* drawings are the subtly colored series of paintings done by him (figs. 81 and 82). These remind one of the special technique of color application developed by the Bengal School where the paper is washed in between successive applications of color, giving the painting a muted effect as is familiar in Chughtai and Abindranath's works.

“If you compare my recent work with my work done in the eighties you will not believe that it is the work of a single artist,” says Khalid about his varying styles of painting. He believes that over the years he has evolved into an accomplished miniature painter but regrets selling his work before it could be put together for a show. A remorse he shares with most of his contemporaries is not having kept a systematic record of his work.

Khalid Saeed Butt has been teaching at the Fine Arts Department for almost twenty-eight years but has been unable to promote miniature painting as a major subject there. It remains as a minor subject despite its growing popularity at the National College of Arts across the road and in the contemporary Pakistani art scene.

Notes:

1 Khalid Saeed Butt, interview by author, Lahore, June 25, 2005.

2 Ibid.,

3 Ibid.,

4 Ibid.,

5 Khalid Saeed Butt, interview by author, Lahore, June 25, 2005.

6 Milo Cleveland Beach, *Mughal and Rajput painting*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992), 157.

7 Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals*. (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981), 193.

Chapter 5

Contemporary Modern Painters

Shazia Sikander

Muhammad Imran Qureshi

Nusra Latif

Aisha Khalid

Saira Waseem

Talha Rathore

Waseem Ahmed

Hasnat Mehmood



Shazia Sikander
Born 1969 in Lahore
Lives and works in New York

Shazia Sikander graduated in 1992 from the National College of Arts with miniature painting as her major subject. Destined to propel contemporary miniature painting into the limelight locally and internationally, her final year painting “The Scroll” (fig.83) was acquired by the Asia Pacific Museum at Pasadena, California as early as 1994 for an exhibition of Contemporary Paintings from Pakistan.

When Shazia opted to major in miniature painting, it was a genre that did not interest many students of the time and only two of them enrolled in the class.¹ ‘The choice itself was an act of defiance’, says Shazia. Her decision to opt for taking up miniature was a bold step in the face of suggestions to the contrary by her mentors.² Her interest she says “was to create a dialogue with the traditional art form.”³

Although technically working in the area of tradition, Shazia had an eclectic approach from the beginning, which is evident in her decision to challenge the existing size and format of miniature paintings that were being done at the college. She also studied David Hockney’s use of space while working on her scroll in order to “bring something modern to tradition”⁴ “The Scroll” with its similarity in format to the ‘Patua’ scroll paintings⁵ of Bengal presents a visual narrative of Shazia’s world. In this painting she abandons the norms of traditional heroic themes in favor of herself and her daily activities.⁶ The painting depicts her in a cohesive sequence of events played in her house. The two-dimensional architectural rendering of the house follows the miniature tradition of a multi-point perspective and the use of decorative pattern. With predominant use of rusts, dull oranges and ochres as the background color, Shazia appears throughout the painting in a white *shalwar kameez* (pant

and shirt worn by Pakistani women) and *dupatta* (veil) which is a translucent white whe

she is shown in movement and opaque when she is stationary. She remains with her back towards the viewer which in itself was revolutionary and a modern concept as there is no such tradition in miniatures.

Another early painting of Shazia is the “Mirrat II” (fig.84) which was done during her student days at Lahore in 1991. It is a painting that employs most formal elements of a miniature with its realistically done figures and detailed rendering of architecture within a marbled border. However what sets this painting apart is the uncanny and fragmented Chirico-like atmosphere of the scene. Even as early as 1991 Shazia was looking for inspiration beyond the miniature and a blend of diverse elements was beginning to set in her paintings.

A year after her graduation, she had her first solo exhibition at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, D.C. in 1993. In 1994 she shifted to the US to study for an MFA at the Rhode School of Design after which she was a postgraduate Core-Fellow at the Glassell School of the Museum of Fine Art in Houston for the next two years. Shazia opted to live in the New York after finishing her studies and has been living there ever since.

The move into a western environment and education was bound to wield an overt influence in her work especially in the early years. These have now matured and Shazia is able to synthesize ideas from her disciplined *métier*, her lived experiences and the western influences. This convergence, in her words is “the reinvention of a technique and the reevaluation of tradition to the extent that tradition is no longer opposed to modernity.”⁷

Shazia’s arrival in the West put her on the defensive for being an Asian Muslim woman working in a traditional art form. Her early years in the US were thus marked in

trying hard not to be labeled as that. “My being from a so-called Muslim country often became my primary categorization, unfortunately it still persists,” she says.⁸

The perception of women in different cultures which is often formed solely by their outward representations began to raise serious questions for her. Although wearing a *chaddar* or a *burqa* (the veil) was never her personal experience she wore one in the United States to understand how clothing can evoke reactions in the onlooker. She realized how the *burqa* while concealing the wearer, could also afford a sense of control and freedom by rendering one invisible to other people.

Questions of her identity and her chosen genre began to form as early as the 1900s heightened by the different culture she was surrounded by. Reading authors like Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous reinforced her investigative discourse. Influenced by Jacques Derrida and the theory of binary oppositions she began to look at opposing ideas in any given entity and it formed the basis of many of her works. Essentialism and the role of certain symbols that typecast one’s identity began to form ideas in her mind at the time and she says, “finding myself immersed in the early 1990’s politics of identity; I began to see my identity as being fluid, something in flux.”⁹ Her imagery began to include opposing elements that addressed the stereotypical in everything and anything. For example she puts the veil on a Hindu goddess or superimposes abstract loose daubs of color over intricately done miniatures to highlight and experience the tension that two polarities create on various levels of content as well as technique. Her expression combines her lived and learnt experiences in the form of traditional techniques and motifs, surreal forms, her identity, sexuality and growing up memories.

“The Red Dress” (fig. 85) is an early painting done as a student at the Rhode School and offers a good comparison with “Mirrat II” and “The Scroll” done in Lahore. Her precise and well finished Lahore painting has given way to loosely applied paint, the use of gestural strokes, non objective and geometric symbols and a loosely delineated border done with roughly applied lines, may well be from her new environment. The use of a stylized figure in the foreground which is a replica of a copper figure discovered from the Gangetic plain (fig. 86) shows how Shazia had begun to amass images and sensibilities of both the East and the West.

The vague form of a red dress, with tiny white splashes, is visible through a loosely painted red in the center of the painting. Though one sees indistinct references to the miniature in the small figure and the tiger, the overall effect is totally taken over by abstract symbols and gestural application of paint. Another painting from the same year titled “Space in Between” (fig. 87) also uses loosely painted areas that contrast with the delicately rendered fragment of a gazelle. The upper half of a *burqa* with a single eye looking through the cap radiates into roots and forms the central image here. These roots attach themselves to a veil-like shape on the right and an amoebic form on the left. Compared to “The Red Dress” this painting is less gestural with most of the background area in one flat color. Shazia continues to use the traditional materials while deviating in her ways of making art.

According to Shazia, the first serious introduction of her work in the US was in 1997 at The Drawing Center and the Whitney Biennial.¹⁰ “Reinventing the Dislocation” (fig. 88), one of the works from this show was acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and is in their collection. As the title suggests Shazia’s early work in the

US took reference from her new location or dislocation and the various questions that evolved from trying to get her work read on its merit rather than being typecast by her gender, religion or country. In this painting a traditional floral border surrounds the image of a seated Mughal female figure with her veil ending in a tangle of root forms. Above this image is an inverted torso of herself with hair flowing in all directions. The two images are connected with circles and intersecting lines that look like diagrams of inverted images recorded by the eye and the camera. This could well be an allusion to the fact that visual signs can be often incorrectly interpreted.

Among the earliest and prominent symbols that Shazia has used is the *burqa* juxtaposed with a multi-armed red floating female nude that carries different weapons (Figs.89 and 90). Both these symbols, with their intercultural nuances, have appeared in a number of her paintings since the mid nineties. In her paintings the *burqa* covers the body only upto the waist, is usually a translucent white with rope like lines radiating from it. The deep red female figure has multiple arms like a Hindu goddess. It appears to float with limbs ending in entwining loops instead of feet that could anchor her to the ground. The *burqa* with its Islamic association and the multi-armed goddess from the Hindu pantheon with their overt opposing elements forge new meanings in Shazia's paintings, many of which remain personal.

"*Fleshy Weapons*" (fig.89) is a large painting (96x70ins) where the many-armed Hindu goddess is painted in deep red and orange hues on linen treated with tea wash. It is a departure from many of her paintings by its size, the material it is painted on and the fact

that it does not have her usual profusion of images (fig.90). The floating Hindu goddess

including the face of the prince. Shazia uses dots profusely in her work and they form a

in figure 89 could well be the ancient fertility goddess with its accentuated hips and breasts.

Her entire body is discernable except for her face and arms that are covered with a white *burqa* with colorful polka dots on it. Each of her arms holds a different weapon except for the one that holds a circular loop with an unveiled slim girl on her tiptoes. The small girl is wearing a white t-shirt and has her legs exposed. A pink band around her head holds ribbons that fall over her featureless face.

The *burqa* or veil, although widely seen as a symbol of suppression in the West is not what Shazia wishes to highlight here. Through her work she wants to dispel the practice of looking at something from a preconceived perspective by combining the Muslim *burqa* with the Hindu goddess. Since Shazia loves to depict dual viewpoints, another aspect of this image could be the exposure of the goddess versus the covering that the *burqa* provides. Putting the two together she blurs the boundaries that exist culturally and religiously or defines the differences that exist within the East itself. “Even for me the veil remains exotic”; she says and agrees that it symbolizes a confrontational stereotype but argues that it is really the viewers with their preconceived ideas who project the meaning rather than the image itself.¹¹

Numerous small images make up the painting “Hood’s Red Rider # 2” (fig.90). The veiled woman with the weapons reappears but the central figure of a traditional Indian prince is the main character here. Images transmute through various shapes and fill the painting with a rambling imagery such as a torso with six arms, half a figure, a silhouetted figure with coiled ropes around it and a lotus. Dots swarm large areas of the painting

recurring part of her imagery. Dots as such do not belong to a miniature iconography but are popular design elements in wrapping papers or textile prints.

Shazia does not generally use text in her paintings. There are however a few paintings and animations where she does make use of its decorative quality. Taking the indication from her childhood ritual of reading the script of the Koran yet not understanding its content, she delves in cross-examining how language can become a formal motif if not accompanied by its meaning. She uses text to address issues of the usage and meaning of language and not as an accompanying narrative to her imagery. At the heart of all her work Shazia says is “the issue of translation and mistranslation” and these paintings among other works are associated to that concept.¹²

In “Riding the Written” (fig. 91) the entire painting comprises of tiers of some fragmented or entire silhouettes of horses and alphabets of the Arabic/Persian script that move horizontally across in the form of text across the page. Calligraphists often shape script into images but that is not Shazia’s intent. She is interested in how script alone can become a visual icon if one is unable to decipher its meaning.

“Writing the Ridden” (fig. 92) follows a formal manuscript composition where the image area is composed of tightly packed script. Using the script like she has, renders it illegible and endorses its visual character. The use of screen-printing gives a printed page look to these paintings and an insight into her capacity to take on and alter established parameters of miniatures. “Phenomenology I and II”(Figs.93 and 94) are also text related including the face of the prince. Shazia uses dots profusely in her work and they form a

paintings that Shazia did seven years after “Riding the Written and Writing the Ridden ”.

Compared to them these works are more gestural where she uses entwining script form

s

and delicately colored dabs of color to produce vaguely familiar shapes of elephants, birds, deers and the like in a lyrical composition. There is a rhapsody in the way the calligraphic characters and the fluid shapes mingle together on a serene dull pink background. In *Phenomenology I*, small delicate white flowers that could well belong to a garden in a miniature add to the decorative quality of the image.

Some of Shazia's paintings and installations are proliferated with diverse and incoherent imagery like in the "Pleasure Pillars" (fig.95). Dancing figures from traditional miniatures emerge from the four corners of the painting while her self-portrait takes central position. Only her face appears through a deep gray form giving the impression of her being veiled. Her hair is covered too and she wears a headdress that resembles the striped antlers of a ram. A parrot with human hands hovers over Shazia's head, apparently painting those stripes. A bright red heart appears in the dark form of her body, much like the exposed heart in Frieda Kahlo's self-portrait. A headless Venus de Milo flanks her on one side while an elaborate dress without anyone in it appears on the other side. Half a spiral staircase leading nowhere, a lion slaying a calf, an oncoming airplane and a circular arrangement of airplanes whose negative space becomes a flower add to the plethora of images in this small painting.

Dots cluster the lower half of the painting and cover the two dancers there while other patterns find their way in and around the imagery of the painting. The overall effect of "The Pleasure Pillars" is one of an enchanted land where characters belong to different histories and timelines. Drawing icons from Muslim, Hindu, American, contemporary pop and her own experiences she produces art that challenges singular ways of looking and

interpretation. It is also a perfect example of how Shazia juxtaposes images to experience the consequence of an incompatible coexistence between disparate representations. “I think a lot about fluidity,” she says, and “about icons when they exist in different combinations. The simultaneous existence of two forms of exploration within single space charges the work.”¹³

One of the underlying factors that shape Shazia’s work is her defiant stance and her interrogation of the apparent. Armed with the knowledge of theories of deconstruction, binary oppositions, mathematics and logic, she questions her chosen genre and its boundaries. “I question borders that define gender, religion, ethnicity and ownership”.¹⁴

Moving into the domain of murals, installations and lately into digital animation was an obvious development fuelled by the same approach of looking at the same thing from a different perspective, in this case a different media. While most of her recent work would hardly fit into the prescribed format of a delicately rendered miniature yet it remains its driving force metaphorically.

Shazia began to do wall installations very early in her career, while she was still at the Houston Core program. Taking images from her repertoire, she enlarges them, minimizes them or crops them to fit new dimensions and paints them in acrylics, ink or gouache on a wall or on layers of translucent tissue paper. At the heart of deviating from customary miniature painting is the pursuit to experience endless possibilities of change that occur with transformations of size, materials, technique and juxtaposition of a hybrid iconography. Exploring how images transmute through various forms of manipulation or mediums is her forte that legitimizes experiments with a traditional art form to let it thrive

in the present.

An early mural from 1996 titled “High and Low” (fig.96) has floating veiled female figures that have appeared in some of her other works on paper. One of the figures is upright and wears the *burqa* that takes a wing like form and adds to the floating effect of the figure. The other with the face of a bird is stooped, with what look more like wings emanating from her shoulders. She stands on a lotus and appears to be the fallen angel. Many of Shazia’s works do not provide straightforward narratives or simple readings. She says there are no stories to tell: “I want to frustrate meaning by maintaining that edge of multiplicity and contradiction.”¹⁵

In an interview with Homi Bhaba she talks about her diverse multi layered imagery and says, “every little mark is important but not to say they all have specific meaning attached to them. I am more open to meaning being constructed not simply within the piece but through a larger set of relationships that surround the work.”¹⁶ So when she is layering her symbols she is actually building up a combination of images, their demonstration and their meaning.

“The Divine Circle” (Fig.97) is a mural done in acrylics at the Seattle art Museum. The composition takes its name from the central wheel, from which pale colored figures radiate out. It is a silhouetted image that appears repeatedly in her work in varying proportions. Modern symbols such as a football, guns, Texan boots, a lock, male and female signs, traffic lights and elephants weave over and under this central motif. The piled up effect of the image has the look of a joyful illustration from a children’s storybook. Layering is a technique Shazia uses as a means to lock in all her ideas and concepts and bring varied

viewpoints to her paintings and installations.

Her large tissue installations are images painted on varying sizes of translucent tissue papers that hang from ceilings.¹⁷ The idea of tissue panels could have materialized from the concept of the veil itself. Although these installations comprise of two-dimensional images, the physical layering that results from these panels hanging away and in different directions from each other gives them a three dimensionality. The viewers rather than looking at the work are obliged to look into the work because of the labyrinthine effect that results from such an installation. With these installations she chooses yet another way not only to showcase her own overlapping experiences but also to involve the viewers to assimilate the layered metaphors.

“To Reveal or Not to Reveal” (fig.98) is a tissue installation done at the San Diego Museum of Art. Although the installations are often comparable to her miniatures on paper by way of their imagery, they are different because of their scale, execution and assemblage, which lend it a certain amount of spontaneity. Her assortment of images includes mostly everything that she has used before. The *burqa* with the root like appendages, the dots, the checkered amorphous shapes, stripes, animals, all form a suspended layering where one image covers another and another. The overlapping panels render them partly visible through the translucency of the tissue giving the work a palimpsest look. It is like Shazia has mapped her physical and metaphysical vision into a layered time frame.

Other tissue installations include “Beyond Surfaces” and the “Chaman” series (fig.99). In “Chaman”, which is an Urdu word for a garden, Shazia takes inspiration from traditional miniature foliage, enlarges some forms and intersperses them with various other

panels that have silhouetted figurines, stripes and checks on them. It is not the picture of a garden but a space where one can see Shazia's imagery blossom.

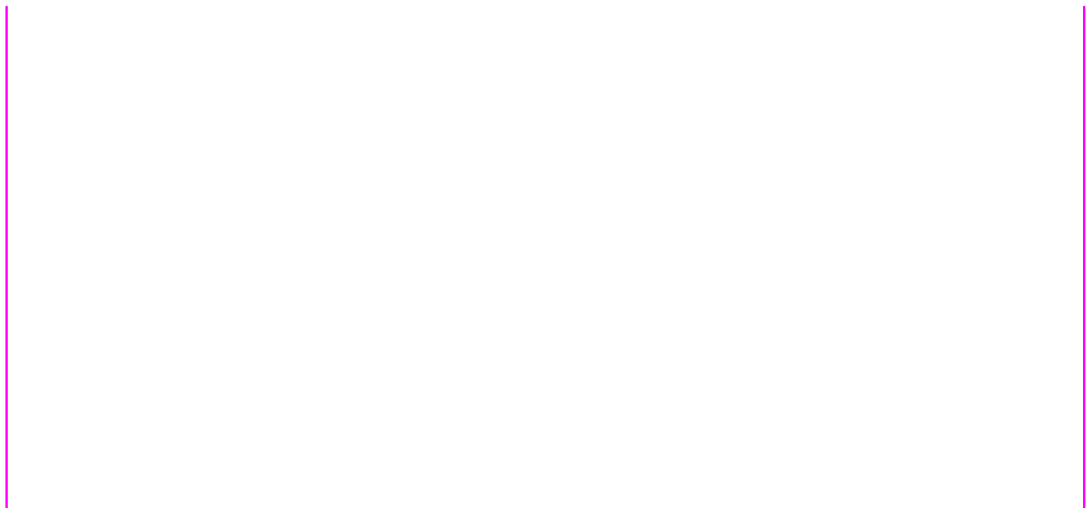
Her journey from learning a traditional art form in her hometown with its stress on technique to experiencing a Western art education based on concepts has prepared her to integrate the two within personal and cultural associations. Her capacity to incorporate various influences in her work does not limit itself to ideas but covers processes too. Along with painting and wall installations Shazia has started to use digital animation for the past six years. The new medium has given her the option to add movement and sound to her works which makes the transmutation of images more dramatic.

Shazia draws an image and scans it and by making successive changes to the same drawing she creates a sequence of stills that can be run as an animated video with music. The digital animation *SpiNN 1* (still frame in fig. 100) starts off with an incongruous combination of images from two different schools of miniature painting. The opening scene consists of a retinue of *gopis* from Pahari painting, which starts collecting in a typical *darbar* (court) from a Mughal iconography. This gathering starts to swell till it fills the entire hall. The bodies of these *gopis* then dissipate leaving their hairdos to take on the form of bats. The group of bats amasses together and becomes a dense black horde which keeps spinning until a winged warrior materializes from this tangle.

Slowly trumpet blowing angels that hark back to European influences on miniature painting, begin to enter the screen and bring serenity to the scene. The last scene however moves to the outdoors where evil still lurks in the form of demons. This video animation and a painting of hers with a similar theme were displayed facing each other on two closely

spaced free standing walls. Here too Shazia is underlining the difference that comes from treating the same subject by means of two different processes. “Nemesis” is a word taken from the Greek goddess of vengeance and it also means anyone or anything which seems to be the cause of someone’s downfall or defeat. It is a title Shazia chooses for another of her digital animation (fig. 101). It shows shows steps of a composite elephant being created out of a combination of different animals and a human figure. The composite animal had been popular in the miniature iconography through sixteenth to eighteenth century so the idea itself is not new. Shazia however gives the composite elephant a character when he fights and kills a demon that has climbed on his back. Both “SpiNN” and “Nemesis” use the universal theme of good versus evil or the weak versus the powerful.

By venturing into the realm of digital animation Shazia might be considered a defector in the eyes of the traditionalist but she is continuously drawing not only from the iconography of the miniature but from its essence and concepts, remolding it to bring its conceptual references to the fore front. Shazia excels in the diversity of looking at the same thing in a variety of ways, deconstructing and metamorphosing traditional images of the miniature into layers of new meanings and settings. The miniature is alive again.



Notes:

¹ Bashir Ahmed, foreword to *Revival of Traditional Painting: National College of Arts Celebrates 125 years of Excellence 1875-2000*. (Lahore: National College of Arts, 2000), 2.

Since the inception of the Miniature Department in 1982 there had been at the most two students enrolled each year. After Shazia graduated in 1992, the number of students increased steadily and by the year 2000 it had become thirteen.

² Bashir Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, Oct 24, 2005. Bashir remembers that most teachers at the Fine Arts Department, National College of Arts discouraged Shazia to take up miniature painting as they thought the traditional art form would stifle her creativity. Shazia Sikander, interview by Homi Bhaba, *The Renaissance Society*, Chicago, n.d. University of Chicago blog. [http:// shaziasikander.com/](http://shaziasikander.com/) (accessed November 9, 2005).

³ Shazia Sikander, interview by Ian Berry: New York: “*A Dialogue with Shazia Sikander* ” published in conjunction with the exhibition *Nemesis*, Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2004, 5.

⁴ Shazia Sikander, interview by Marcella Nesom Sirhandi. Catalogue from the exhibition *A Selection of Contemporary Paintings from Pakistan*, (Pasadena, California, 1994), 68.

⁵ Subsequently many miniature students from the National College of Arts have used the continuous scroll format for their paintings and it is still in vogue.

⁶ Salima Hashmi and Yashodra Dalmia, *The Sign Within: Memories, Metaphors, Mutations* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6. Nahid Fakhruddin, another final year student before Shazia did a series of paintings of traditional games played by women but it was Shazia who actually set the trail for modernizing miniature.

⁷ Shazia Sikander, interview by Homi Bhaba, “*The Renaissance Society* ”.

⁸ Shazia Sikander, interview by Ian Berry. “*Nemesis*,” 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Shazia Sikander, interview by Homi Bhaba.

¹² Shazia Sikander, interview by Ian Berry. 12

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sawhney Hirsh. *Time Out*: New York Issue 4-4. March 3- April 25 2004. <http://> March 10, 2006).

¹⁵ Shazia Sikander, interview by Meg Linton. New York, United States, March 19, 2005. <http://www.brentsikkema.com> (accessed January 6, 2006).

¹⁶ Shazia Sikander, interview by Homi Bhaba. “The Renaissance Society”.

¹⁷ The size of these tissue installations can sometimes be as high as 20 feet with lengths that can be even more than that with the depth from the wall upto 8 or 10 feet.



Imran Qureshi

Born 1972 in Hyderabad Lives and works
in Lahore

Imran Qureshi was born in 1972 in Hyderabad, Pakistan. He received his art education at the National College of Arts in Lahore where he majored in miniature painting and graduated in 1993. A year later Imran was inducted into the faculty of the same department.

While a student and later as a teacher, Imran was passing through an evolutionary period of contemporary miniature painting. Shazia Sikander, who graduated two years before he did, had already transformed the tradition and created a contemporary relevance for the genre. She was the trailblazer who boosted a renewed recognition for contemporary miniature painting in the West and in her home country. The path for the new entrants to miniature painting field was already marked by Shazia Sikander who achieved great success using traditional imagery in an entirely postmodern context.

Imran started his education by opting for painting as he did not think he was suited to the delicacy of touch needed for miniature painting. On the insistence of Bashir Ahmed, Imran finally relented to join after one term in painting. As a student Imran had to become an adherent to the ideology of the Miniature Department as laid down by Bashir Ahmed who heads it.¹ A traditional transmission of technique by way of copying Persian, Mughal, Rajput and Pahari prototypes is the backbone of miniature pedagogy. Although most contemporary miniaturists hold the technique of the genre in high esteem they severely criticize the disallowance of experimentation in the final year by the department hierarchy.

Now that Imran is on the teaching faculty he is more vocal about his displeasure “I am not satisfied with the way miniature painting is taught. I respect the technique and the orthodox teaching but I disagree with the restriction on experimentation.”²

He feels that once the technique has been mastered, the students should refrain from painting conventional legendary scenes and look to the world of today for inspiration.

“They should be encouraged to experiment with their acquired skill and incorporate the modern with the traditional to spawn a new tradition.”

In one early work Imran followed the traditional vertical format of the Islamic book and a typical imagery but introduced a modern concept, by using a patchy background instead of the immaculate color typical of a traditional miniature. The script was reversed and newspaper strips were used as a border. The title “Never Again” (fig.102) reaffirms his resolve not to replicate traditional imagery.

“Entangled Self 1 and 2” (figs. 103 and 104) are paintings that are devoid of the figure. His use of a contemporary garment on a hanger juxtaposed with elements from miniature painting is perhaps a comment on his state of struggle to break free from the entanglement of tradition and moving to form his own symbolic references.

“What relevance does an *angarkha* (traditional Mughal coat) clad person have for this age?” he says. Imran realized early that for the miniature to evolve it would not suffice just to replace the *angarkha* with jeans but something more had to be done. “To make the miniature relevant for this age it has to mirror its concerns not just its outer garb”.³ Imran continues to chronicle the concerns of his time and while he uses the formal devices of the miniature to do so, he refurbishes it with a contemporary idiom.

Until 2001 Imran Qureshi’s work was still more or less in the miniature format and loosely bordered within tradition. His first encounter with the West came the same year as a three-month residency at John Moore’s University, Liverpool, United Kingdom. The

experience of another place and way of life gave him visual and psychological material that he drew upon in many of his subsequent paintings. “The cultural reactions activated in the crucible of globalization”, have led Imran to experiment.⁴ Newer contents, medium and motifs began to surface in his work. His precisely painted images began to make way for loosely applied grounds and inconsistent imagery that suited his conceptual outlook. He began to experiment with the medium and motifs culled from his own experiences and although he still employs the basics of the miniature, his images began to take on a more abstract approach.

While in England the first painting he did was a self-portrait called “Chemistry of what next?” (fig.105). This traditionally done self-portrait shows him as a punk and was exhibited as part of an installation titled “West Is West” (fig. 106). Two plastic containers: one containing a crumpled miniature painting and the other, shredded bits of goldleaf were placed in front of this portrait. Together this ensemble questioned what makes a miniature, its chemistry or its approach. Some of Imran’s recurring motifs refer to his stay in Liverpool as well as his subsequent trips abroad. The image of the box comes from exquisite packaging of goods such as food and flowers in the West. He says “all goods are presented beautifully there but there is often no taste or smell in the actual merchandise.”⁵ He uses the box as a metaphor for the deceptively wrapped political agenda of the West.

The concepts for most of Imran’s paintings developed out of major political changes in the wake of the 21st century. The abuse of power thus became his essential theme with an imagery developed as a direct reaction to the political situation. The spate of events such as 9/11, the war on Iraq and Afghanistan and the ensuing war against terrorism provides

Imran with continuous themes that show his concern about the violence that threatens the world today.

America sending packaged food for the Afghan public is the idea behind *it* “Take or Leave it 1” (fig. 107). There are two boxes in the lower half of the painting. One is placed on a camouflage pattern and is outlined in red, the other outlined in white is packed with pale green conical leaves. The camouflage pattern with its amoeba-like shapes is seeping into the side of the box outlined in white, a reference to the military ambitions taking over the peace of the world. In his paintings one often sees boxes that are roughly sketched in outline and appear diagram-like, superimposing images without hiding what is beneath. These boxes allude to packaged goods or package deals that are transparent to the discerning eye. The upper part of the same painting has an aerial view of two tree forms covered in targets and being snipped by tiny scissors.

The painting titled “Take it or Leave it 2” (fig.108) shows four boxes. The box on the top right is covered in camouflage pattern and signifies warfare, the one next to it denotes life, both have a thin red line emanating from them. The two lower boxes are stripped of their covering and show that in actuality there is nothing in the boxes for the people. The red is used symbolically to show danger as well as blood.

Maps and other cartographic symbols appear in his work mostly in the context of warfare. During his trips abroad he observed the importance of maps to a European. “It seems as if they are always lost because they are looking at maps all the time,” he quipped.⁶

His work has appeared along with other artists in “The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States, 1990-2003,” a catalogue published for the exhibition

titled the same at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 2003. In her foreword the director of the Whitney Museum Alice Pratt Brown writes: “we would do well to gain insight, by examining this art, into how we are perceived as a nation by the world at large” and “we look to artists to teach us something about ourselves that we cannot learn from isolated introspection”.

Imran’s travels abroad brought many issues to the forefront but his criticism is not just directed at the West but at aggression and mass destruction of humanity perpetrated anywhere. A series of paintings that deride the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Pakistan was done by Imran in 2000. (The Missile Series: figs. 109, 110, 111 and 112). These four paintings are satirical representations of missiles and their use as self- aggrandizement by the leaders. Virginia Whiles compares them to “phallic monuments that are garlanded with flowers like the politicians who manipulate them.”⁷ Imran is critical of Pakistan’s obsession to become a nuclear power at the cost of denying the basics of life to the common man.

With his hand on the pulse of politics and atrocities committed in its name, Imran’s work has centered mostly on life and its destruction by the abuse of power. Talking about the war on terrorism, he laments that “in the name of peace a war is being waged.”⁸ Missiles, targets, dots, camouflage patterns, foliage being snipped with scissors and red sutured lines,

all form part of his distinct imagery to express this disdain. Titles such as “Crossing Boundaries” and “Mapping Terrains” are equally representative of the focus of his work. Imran’s painting is characterized by deconstruction of most of the traditional elements of a miniature. He experiments with the surface of the *wasli* by incorporating plastic sheets, pages from old Urdu stitching instruction manuals, grammar exercise books and various

other printed materials collected from old bookshops into it, thus enabling the surface to become part of the content of the painting.⁹

Imran began to use found text early in his career, not as a narrative but mainly for its ability to offer a play on words or phrases that could draw attention to the satirical message of his paintings. Imran often uses these existing comments to make his own remarks on many social issues. At other times he uses text purely for its intrinsic design value, transcending the customary use of text in the miniature tradition to make new spaces for it. Time worn sepia pages with parts of the text sandpapered away give his paintings an old manuscript look but the superimposed imagery talks of contemporary global concerns.

Occasionally he supplements these printed pages with the addition of more text which is often in the form of Letraset transfers in English, and are a comment on how the English language has been transferred and superimposed onto the East. “The Game of Tenses” (fig. 113) is an example of how these manual pages and their contents fit into his images to reinforce the satirical statement about power games played by the West with the use of a missile image and a witty insert of a page from a grammar book. It shows the future continuous tense of the verb “to play”. Words such as “Will he be playing?” “When will he be playing?” and “Will he not be playing?” take on another meaning when juxtaposed with a missile. War is often a game to be played by the aggressor and Imran asks a valid question as he refers to the missile as a toy in the hands of those who play these war games. Arms of mass destruction have appeared regularly in his work from his “Missiles Series” of 2000 to “The Game of Tenses” of 2002.

The image of a pair of scissors has been used extensively by Imran in many of his

paintings. “For me the scissors is a cutting tool that signifies destruction and it first appeared when I took part in the workshop “Darmiyan” at the Rohtas Gallery in Lahore.”¹⁰ Held in the aftermath of the 9/11 Imran put up four images of scissors next to four photographs of the beards of *maulvis* (Muslim clerics). In later works scissors have been used in other contexts and appear small and silhouetted in some works while in others they appear large, outlined or stained with red. Two paintings titled “How to cut a Burqa” (fig. 114) and “How to cut a Fashion Brassier” (fig. 115) are about the exploitation of women. A number of scissors point at the *burqa* and the bra, ready to snip away at them. “Whether they are in a burqa in the East or in a bikini in the West, the attitude towards women remains somewhat the same”, Imran believes.

The circular foliage form which critics have identified with trees in *Ragamalas* from the *Basohli* School is another recurrent image in Imran’s work (fig. 118).¹¹ Similarly shaped foliage has also appeared in a Mughal painting from Akbar’s period as well as in Deccani painting (figs. 116 and 117) but there has been no mention of this in any publication. In fact the tree that one sees in Imran’s work bears a closer affinity with the tree from the Deccani painting (see detail in fig. 119). Bashir Ahmed has also used a similar tree form in his “Kangra Princess” (fig.57) done in 1987 (see detail in fig. 120). Imran uses this circular tree motif as a metaphor for life and usually places it mostly from a bird’s eye view. Scissors snip it, dots scatter around it or meandering lines that look like trickles of blood entwine within its foliage. Perhaps the only time Imran has shown a tree from a front view is in his “Homage to Hope Street” (fig.121). During his stay in Liverpool, he lived on Hope Street and this painting is homage to the place. The tree in the painting

has his signature round shaped foliage but coupled with the bend of the tree trunk it reminds one of a similar tree seen in the *Laur Chanda Series* of the Sultanate period (fig.122). The two boxes in Imran's painting refer to an installation done by an artist who had suitcases cast in cement and which he left by the seaside near Hope Street. His use of the box in this painting also refers to travel or the short-lived moment of his experience while he lived there. Boxes are also reminiscent of memories as they are used to pack memorabilia that one opens years later.

Besides the rounded tree forms, Imran has also used single or detached leaves in many of his paintings. These leaves are often packed into shapes such as boxes, parts of missiles or even taking the appearance of what looks like the brain in "Reshape" (fig.123). The leaves stripped from the tree allude to their detachment from the source of life and their being packed in other forms. As Imran's recent work takes on a more abstract approach, these shapes become less recognizable and appear randomly. The circular tree form too has metamorphosed into strips, squares and arbitrary shapes (figs.125 and 126).

Dots, targets and lines find their way in almost every painting by Imran. Targets are scattered around his images to show what lies in the path of destruction. Camouflage prints take the form of boxes, a sewing machine or indiscriminate shapes and refer to military presence. Dots joined by lines refer to cities and call to mind his experiences of travels and maps abroad while others scatter benignly around paintings like "join the dots" puzzles where the drawing only comes to life once you join them. Child-like squiggles made with a ballpoint pen and areas that were till now not meant to be part of paintings, such as taped edges and dabs of color tests on the sides, are increasingly being pulled in

as part of his compositions.

His work from 2004 and 2006 shares many of the themes and motifs as well as the titles of his earlier works. Imran retains the double-page format and the browned pages from old manuals as the first layer on which successive imagery is laid. The theme of violence against life continues, such as in “Reshape” (fig. 123). Here leaves form the structure of the brain which is the dominant element of this painting and is being sliced through by a pair of scissors. Here life and intellect are both targeted.

Imran has been painting and exhibiting in group and solo shows since 1994 in Pakistan and abroad. His collaborative group show in 2005/2006 at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, with five other artists, all alumni from the National College of Arts was the result of a pursuit that he planned as early as 2001 during the workshop “Darmiyan” at the Rohtas Gallery in Lahore.

Imran Qureshi initiated and guided this unique project in the same vein that he challenges other established norms of his art. The collaboration styled on the theme of the Mughal *Imperial Karkhana* involved six miniature artists to replay the traditional practice of collaborative paintings of the Mughal period but on their own terms. Each artist was to start work on two *waslis* and send it to the next artist. These had to be circulated via the courier service since they all lived in different places and on different continents in some cases. No themes were discussed and each artist was free to use his/her own imagery and ideas. With absolute freedom and no restriction except the size (11x 8ins) each artist could add, alter or undo the last person’s work. Each of these artists brought their distinct imagery and contemporary approach in a quest to revive tradition by engaging with the present

Together they replayed the practice of collaborative undertakings of the Mughal *karkhan* ^a imbuing it with contemporary alliance that did not subjugate each other's individual traits. The results were hybrid paintings that alternated between collaboration and individuality. In figure 124 which is one of the images from these collaborations, the missile and an old found paper are distinctly recognizable as Imran's imagery.

The grid, which is a fairly recent inclusion in his work, forms a major part of paintings done from 2006 onwards. In "Easy Cutting" (fig. 125) the printed page still remains under the imagery but the tree foliage is cut up in pieces that lie arbitrarily in the picture along with a strip of camouflage print. Dabs of paint and dots are scattered around while some of them lie piled together at the bottom. In another painting titled "Easy Cutting" (fig. 126) all his imagery is confined to the grid with a more symmetrical composition.

By 2006 Imran had moved towards abstraction of his earlier work and further away from a traditional miniature. Retaining some of his earlier icons while discarding others and keeping the diminutive size and certain technical aspects of the genre, he now works with his own set of symbolic elements. Imran himself realizes that, when he says "I am a painter; I do not want to be labeled as a miniature painter."

In his recent paintings Imran chooses a pristine white background with a grid of pale, finely drawn horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines instead of the old found pages and the text dominated works. "The one-inch grid that forms the lowest layer in these series of paintings harks back to the early line assignments for beginners in miniature painting," says Imran.¹² While reverting back to his earliest lesson Imran takes a leap forward by juxtaposing all abstract elements on it.

In “Untitled” (fig. 127) Imran divides the space into two equal halves. Retaining his favorite foliage but not in its usual circular shape, he fills the lower half of the grid. Red and black dots cluster along one line of the grid while others fade out into the margin. Bold child-like marks made with a blue ballpoint pen mark the foliated surface indiscriminately. Two thick, short strokes in bright orange add the needed contrast for the predominant blue half of the painting. The upper half of the painting retains its pallor where sutured lines in deep red appear in each square with couple of them meandering out of the grid.

In sharp contrast to the structured images in “Easy Cutting” (fig.126) is the brightly worked image that covers the entire surface of the painting “Untitled” (fig.128). His signature blue foliage covers three-fourths of the surface with red sutured lines floating on it only to become loop-shaped as they reach the lower half of the painting. The center of the painting is dominated by an irregular camouflage-patterned shape and two oval forms. One of these is packed with leaves and is invariably symbolic of life. Thick blue loop shapes done with a marker and the scribbles of a ballpoint pen dictate the painting. Although these doodles are reminiscent of some of his work of 2002, recently they have become more animated, intricate and urgent. Black dots remain part of his coded messages in recent works.

Imran has been painting for over fourteen years now, evolving and reinventing the traditions of miniature painting to incorporate modern sensibilities and postmodern aesthetics. His latest work from 2007 is a rhapsody of gold and turquoise that is comparable in its gemlike quality to Persian painting. His “Out of the Blue” (fig. 129) replicates almost all the imagery of his earlier works with the addition of a lavish use of gold. Perhaps the title

alludes to the expression “appearing out of nowhere” or the literal sense his imagery now moving out of the blue and onto the gold. Using yet again a double-page format he fills one half with his signature blue foliage and the other with a grid, each square of which carries delicately defined lines in different directions. The foliage slowly drifts onto the gold half and as it does that, it changes from blue to a lilac-brown hue. Deep red lines and dabs mimic pen lines and globules of ink left by a leaking pen. Imran seems to enjoy the beauty of the gold leaf in his latest work. In “Surrounded By” (fig.130) two pairs of scissors surround a thin central blue strip but appear toned down as they snip foliage and thread-like lines scatter around. Other lines frame one edge of the painting while the bottom edge is taken over entirely by a band of his usual foliage

“Portraits” (fig. 131) is the title of another painting from his latest work. Taking his cue from the oval, a shape traditionally used for portraits, Imran portrays his favorite foliage in one oval while the other remains only as an outline. The oval here is also reminiscent of Nusra Latif’s use of the oval in many of her works (figs.132 and 142). These paintings (fig.129,130 and 131) showed in his last exhibition at London in 2007 verify how his work has moved entirely towards abstraction with its highly personalized and symbolic work which still claims the miniature as its underpinning. “I want to paint how I see and feel, not what the miniature painters of earlier centuries painted,” Imran sums up his work.¹³



Notes:

¹ Bashir Ahmed and Imran Qureshi, interview by author, Lahore, Nov 1, 2005 and Nov 4, 2005. There is continuing tension between the two schools of thought, the one headed by Bashir Ahmed believes in the continuation of the tradition of adapting Mughal themes to local subjects whatever they might be while Imran Qureshi propagates newer themes such as fundamentalism, American imperialism and exploitation of women to be addressed in paintings produced now. Another marked difference between the two schools of thought is the slant towards abstraction in the case of younger painters.

² Imran Qureshi, interview by author, Lahore, Pakistan, November 4, 2005.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Niilofur Farrukh, "Past Forward," *Newsline*, December 2002, 127

⁵ Imran Qureshi, interview by author, Lahore, Pakistan, November 4, 2005.

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Virginia Whiles, *'Muhammad Imran Qureshi'*. (Karachi: Chawkandi Art Gallery, 2002), 1.

⁸ Imran Qureshi, interview by author, November 4, 2005.

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ B.N. Goswamy, *Ritu: a gathering of seasons*, (New Delhi, Anant Art Gallery, 2005), 6.

¹² Imran Qureshi, interview by author, November 4, 2005.

¹³ Ibid.,



Nusra Latif

Born 1973 in Lahore

Lives and works in Melbourne

Nusra Latif was born in 1973 and is an alumna of the National College of Arts Lahore. and graduated in miniature painting. Immediately after her graduation in 1995 she became a member of the National College of Arts faculty. She taught there until 1999 and two years later in 2001 she left for Australia. She received a master's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Melbourne in 2002. Now based in Melbourne, she occupies a significant place in the re-invention of the miniature genre.

Moving to Australia as a postcolonial immigrant brought her face to face with how the West perceives the East. "Her reflections", in Virginia Whiles's words "have been instigated by her analysis of a westernized art education in its confrontation with a traditional practice."¹ "She deploys visual strategies learnt from her encounters with both sources in her postcolonial critique of the abuse of knowledge as a tool for dividing and ruling".² As soon as she arrived in Australia she started to explore the numerous facets of colonization and its impact on the cultural fiber of the colonized. With a heightened sense of the concept of "otherness,"³ she had chalked out her focus: "the area I am particularly working in has much to do with *otherness* in the context of post colonialism."⁴

"A lot of changes have occurred in my work since I moved to Australia. I had been challenging the integrity or formality of a traditional expression (miniature painting: *musaviri*) prior to moving to Australia but that was at a slower pace and dealt more with cultural specific issues. Moving to Melbourne has accelerated that change and has involved more cross cultural and overtly political issues that can be explored without inhibition and peer pressure and on neutral ground here." says Nusra. ⁵

Nusra appropriates images taken from Mughal miniatures; photographs from the

Raj period; plants, birds and instruments from Company paintings; and designs from seventeenth and eighteenth century textiles exported to Europe. She then transforms these existing images into contour drawings or colored silhouettes and patterned forms either layering them or juxtaposing them into seemingly unrelated and composite imagery as a critical comment on how histories get layered and distorted (fig. 132).

“My heightened awareness of cross-cultural politics has led to the use of a complex imagery that has developed in the form of layering of outlined forms and silhouettes with one image superimposed by many others. These imposed layers,” she explains, “challenge the ‘wholeness’ of a particular image and especially incorporate the difference in points of view of the colonisers and the colonized.”⁶

Typically Nusra starts by laying a flat colored ground that forms a support for her varied images. An intricately painted Mughal emperor appears in all his regalia with segments of an outline drawing drawn from a Raj photograph, Mughal daggers that hover portentously. In other works an amorous Mughal couple or a lone female figure take center stage entwined in an arabesque design. Brightly colored cherubs that look like stencil prints float around cut off abruptly by the margins in other paintings. Brightly colored silhouettes of birds, botanical plants or instruments culled from paintings commissioned by British officials form another line of imagery, adding to the multiplicity of the forms, such as in “Passionate Beings in Flight” (fig. 138).

She generates new meanings and contexts in her work by rearranging the images she takes from the miniature. Her seemingly random composition and the assorted visuals are often done in collage or even acrylic. The incongruity of her images, their disposition

and the resulting narratives not only recontextualise them but also push the scope of a traditional practice to fit into contemporary ways of making art.

Talking in the context of neo-miniature painting from Pakistan, she says, “I identified strongly with the movement but in the beginning I felt alone and misunderstood in Melbourne.

The lack of interest in my practice was shocking to me but it liberated me of the burden of expectations that were defined by the academics as good practice in miniature painting.”

Nusra’s work done before her departure to Australia in 2001 differs significantly from how her paintings later evolved. In many of these early paintings (figs. 134 and 135) there is an image of a lone contemporary female figure, often lost in a reverie.⁷ These paintings are worked in limited colors and have a definite mood of loneliness and contemplation. An important element of these paintings is the predominant use of stripes in the clothes of the figure, often repeated in an adjacent cushion. Although stripes were used often in the robes of courtiers in paintings done under Jahangir and Shahjahan, their dominance in Nusra’s work makes them closer to modern works and to perhaps an influence of Op art. The technique, the size of the painting, the borders and specifically the oval format and the posture of the figure follow traditional precedents while the significant use of stripes and the absence of any arabesque motifs or designs give it a contemporary look.

By 2001 one could see a distinct move by Nusra to use specific images from the past in conjunction with her lone figure. In “Mohabat ka Mazar” (fig. 136) the female figure which is very likely a self-image of the artist, turns away from the viewer to look contemplatively at the image of the Taj Mahal, an icon of Mughal splendour and artistic achievement. Here Nusra strips the Taj of the very beauty it is so well known for and

renders a skeletal emblem of it causing it to recede back into time as well as to appear in the present as one of its corners overlapping the figure. Although “Mohabat ka Mazar” takes its reference from traditional miniature in the perspective of the carpet and the figure seated on the floor among bolsters, the absence of any decorative elements and its subdued minimal colors give this painting a modern stance far from the richly embellished images of the traditional miniaturists.

Nusra juggles continuously between her legacy and its present bearing. In fact her entire art work now revolves around this duality as she tries to lift her genre out of the predicament of a long lost tradition to put it in its present relevance. Consequently the use of recognizable images from the past and their recontextualisation has become a major characteristic of her work.

Along with these early personalized paintings, Nusra also executed paintings with a definite political feature to them. “Nusra Latif’s work always had a political side to it which she manifested as early as 1995 when for her graduation paintings she chose to illustrate and present her view of the five decades of the political past of Pakistan.”⁸ It is this political side of her work which is manifest in most of her paintings of the last six years. By the year 2001 one could already see the emergence of particular motifs, the brilliant colors and the concepts which were to persist in her subsequent work.

“The Hilt Overlaid with Gold” (fig. 137) is a painting done almost the same year as the “Mohabbat ka Mazar” but the difference between the two is evident. Taken from an existing Mughal painting, ‘The hilt overlaid with gold’ mirrors images of the enthroned Emperor Shahjahan and his son on two adjacent panels. The panel on the right shows the

Imperial might of the Mughal Emperor as he sits inspecting some jewels. Daggers in outlines overlap the image in a number of places and suggest its duality of violence and beauty. The pale green color of this panel lends certain calmness to the image despite the menacing look of the daggers. The opposite panel shows the Emperor fading out while outlined British polo players begin to appear in the upper half. Although it is a mirror image, the royal figures on the left have been stripped of their facial features, jewellery and embellishments, painted instead in flat unrealistic tones and appear like a photographic negative as compared to the realism of the image on the right. The vermillion color used in the oval shape here begins to vibrate as if with the intensity of impending changes.

Nusra has almost abandoned the use of detailing and the building up of color gradations, long considered the quintessence of traditional miniature painting by traditionalists.⁹ Her paintings give the impression of being at the initial stages of a miniature painting when the first application of paint is applied. Most of the time she also leaves the faces of her figures undone. In figure 138 all the figures are featureless, be they the royal couple, the cherub or the British personnel. Her focus has shifted from the individual in the miniature to their meanings in a larger picture of histories.

Apart from her single figures of Mughal emperors, Nusra also uses female figures from the Mughal era. They appear alone or with a consort and are placed wherever she chooses to incorporate them, as part of a painting like in “Benevolent Creatures” (fig. 139) or as the main theme like in “Familiar Desires I and II” (figs. 140 and 141). Keeping close to a traditional book format in these two paintings, she chooses a central composition with brightly colored insets surrounded by a border, an addition which is absent in most of her

recent work. A seated prince and his female consort share the space with a sensitively painted lone female figure and meandering arabesques. The theme of love and the composition in both these paintings are at variance to her other work that deals mostly with geopolitical histories.

However in recent years the lone female figure of her early paintings, which had disappeared for a while, has resurfaced with an invigorated palette, and an imagery that uses both personal and historical references. The coming back of the contemporary figure also suggests the surfacing of more personal reflections. “Shades of Red” (fig.142) comprise of three equal panels .The panel on the left is in the format of a traditional portrait. A female figure in a white Mughal dress stands in a traditional landscape rendered in shades of blue-greens. In the middle panel she uses the image of Shahjahan and his son from an earlier painting, “The Hilt overlaid with Gold” (fig.137). A large plant in red silhouette, a pale turquoise oval and a patterned dagger form a layered image above them. White floral patterns fill the shape of a plant in the third panel.

“Silent Spaces” (fig. 143) is designed as a diptych where both panels are a brilliant red, color of gaiety and of life itself. The left panel with its outlined drawing of a vase with flowers is reminiscent of motifs used extensively on Indian chintz during the seventeenth and eighteenth century and exported to Europe. The motif appears on Mughal tent panels, carpets and various other textile items and originates in early Mid-Eastern and Buddhist art as a symbol of the tree of life.¹⁰ The use of an outline renders it as a tracing prior to printing or embroidery. The other panel is divided crosswise into equal halves. The top half

has a printed paper collage with a cutout which resembles a comma or a quotation mark

and reveals the underlying red. The lower half is a brilliant sea green on which sits the docile female figure of her early works. The simplicity of her garments which is devoid of any adornment is in stark contrast to the surrounding patterned designs. Embroidery, patterns and adornment have always been considered a woman's domain but here the unadorned figure wears a white dress and a black veil, both colors of mourning in the East. The simplicity of the figure contrasts well with the brightness of the surrounding red color.

Nusra uses diptychs and even triptychs in many of her works. The panels accentuate the narrative aspect presented in her work. The diptychs although fairly large in size also remind one of the traditional arrangement of album folios popular during the Mughal period. "Plain Old Manifest Destiny" (fig. 144) is another diptych and was done in 2005. Its large size, the silhouettes and the use of a photograph are a definite departure from the traditions of miniature painting. It is done on two large panels of which one is an actual photographic print. This barely discernable photograph from the Raj period shows George V with Chandra Sham Sher, the Prince Minister of Nepal posing with the tiger they have shot lying in front of them.¹¹ In the other panel Nusra translates the photograph into a mirror image. The two men and the tiger appear as green silhouettes that are partly overlapped by delicate floral filigree from a Mughal source. Part of a bright orange oval shape and the silhouette of a deep red flower along with the outline of a mechanical device of some sort along with the face of a tiger complete the irrationality of the scene. Nusra's use of the dead tiger and the colors of the flag of India are a definite allusion to its subjugation at the hands of the colonizer.

Nusra continues to paint while appropriating images "borrowed heavily from the

art of the Mughal era” as she says. “What I derive from that body of work is mainly its stylistic devices, the structures that make the paintings and then deconstruct those structures.”

“With that I also look at the physical attributes of the technique such as the delicacy and the details. That sort of analysis helps me retain an aspect of beauty and of sheer visual pleasure which I deliberately retain in my work to contrast the tensions and unpleasant argument I usually aim to present in my work.”¹²

She makes use of both her formal training as a miniaturist and the subsequent westernized art education to create an art form that takes its imagery from the past but imbues it with concerns of the present. As B.N. Goswamy says “Clearing the page of all unnecessary clutter to bring in a few clean and sharply chiseled images”,¹³ Nusra works as a minimalist with issues of identity and her personal experiences at the core of what she wants to represent.

Notes:

¹ Virginia Whiles, *Contemporary Miniature paintings from Pakistan*, (Kyoto: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2004), 63.

² Ibid.,

³ Many contemporary Asian artists influenced by Edward Said's discourse on Orientalism *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the East*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) are today questioning the Orientalist privilege which gave the West its all-pervasive influence on upon the East and the division of the West, perceived as 'us,' and the East, as 'they'.

⁴ Nusra Latif, *Altered Perceptions*, (Victoria: Art Holes Gallery, 2002).

⁵ Nusra Latif, interview by author via e-mail, March 3-12, 2006.

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Nusra Latif's work seen by author at Lahore Museum in 1997 and at Rohtas Gallery, Lahore in 1999.

⁸ Quddus Mirza, "The Court comes to Common," *The News*, Lahore, May 2, 1999.

⁹ Bashir Ahmed, interview with author, August 10, 2005. Bashir considers miniatures without detailing as no miniatures at all.

¹⁰ Rosemary Crill, John Guy, Veronica Murphy, Susan Strong and Deborah Swallow, *Arts of India 1500-1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), 160.

¹¹ Clark Worswick and Ainslie Embree, *Photography in British India 1855-1910* (New York: Millerton, 1976), 37.

¹² Nusra Latif, interview with author via e-mail. March 3-12, 2006.

¹³ B.N. Goswamy, *Ritu: A Gathering of Seasons* (New Delhi: Anant Art Gallery, 2005), 3.



Aisha Khalid

Born 1972 in Faisalabad Lives and works in
Lahore

Aisha Khalid was born in Faisalabad and grew up in the city of Shikarpur in Pakistan. After her early education there she joined the National College of Arts, Lahore in 1993. In 1997 she graduated with a major in miniature painting and the same year she married Imran Qureshi, her miniature teacher.

Like all beginners at the National College, Aisha followed the practice of reproducing traditional miniature paintings or appropriating from them to produce hybrid works of art. An early painting of hers is a copy of a Mughal painting by Govardhan (figs.146 and 147). Aisha made changes such as reversing the image and converting it into a night scene and adding a gilded moon. The languid figures from the Govardhan painting lingered in her work till 1999. It is only after her graduation, when no longer required to adhere to prescribed formats, did she investigate other possibilities.¹ Imran, her teacher and her husband was an obvious mentor.

Like Imran, Aisha's work also evolved into a minimal and abstract expression. Her last painting with a human figure is dated 1999 and shows a veiled woman disappearing behind a curtain (fig. 151). It was the harbinger of the total absence of human figures in her subsequent work. The absence of the figure from Aisha's work is due to her childhood memory of her mother telling her that angels will stay away from a house that has figure paintings. Although Aisha did paint figures initially she stopped doing that in 1999. "They never came out from behind the curtain," she says.² Subsequently they did re-emerge, superimposed or submerged within patterned surfaces, either partially visible or veiled and moving away from the viewer. The evolving plethora of patterns which began as early as 1999 was to have a significant bearing on her work eventually became the predominant

characteristic of Aisha's work.

Even as Aisha was using patterns from traditional sources in her early paintings, they were not confined to conventional areas of borders and garments but began to fill shapes such as squares and panels juxtaposed with figures (figs.148 and 150). The curtain which was later to become a standard element in many paintings also appeared for the first time in 1999 and provided an added space for patterns (figs.149 and 151).³

It is interesting that before Aisha launched into a full-fledged painting career, she and Imran started a block-printing atelier where patterns again figured prominently in the line of work. Their joint block printing show was held in 1999 at Islamabad (fig. 152), It is difficult to imagine that Aisha was not influenced by Imran, her husband, because by the year 2000 he was well on his way to contents and executions that belied the accepted norms of traditional miniatures, (his Missile Series of 2000) and had almost discontinued use of the human figure.

Aisha began to detach herself from the restraints of a traditional repertoire as well and looked for inspiration around and within her. "In my early work I had a lot of excess baggage" she says. "There was color, form, and of course issues... and the feeling that you had a lot to say through your painting."³ About her latest work she says "my work is much more simplified now and I feel that form, color and issues are not separate and once you get in the flow of painting all these things fall into place. I am enjoying my work now because it has become more personalized."⁴

Since 2000, Aisha has been moving towards issue-based works represented by a very personalized iconography. Although her themes and imagery take reference from he

own life, they address larger issues of gender. “My work has its inspiration in my lived experiences” says Aisha⁴. *Purdah*, an Urdu word which means both to hide and to conceal, is a term used for a curtain as well as to screen oneself from the male gaze. Growing up in a traditional patriarchal household, *purdah* became a reality for Aisha as soon as she gained puberty. She had to cover herself in the *chadar* (veil) while her older sister and her mother wore the *burqa* (veiled cape worn by Muslim women) when they stepped out of the house. “We had curtains in the rooms behind which the women of the house would disappear whenever male guests arrived”, thus becoming part of the peripheral imagery.⁵

The veil, the curtain and the burqa were part of her lived experience which later transformed into images that found expression in her painting. Her early work addresses the oppression of women in Pakistani society, with the format of most of her paintings likened to space bounded by the four walls of a house. Placing her shrouded figures in the confines of an enclosed space she comments on their anonymity in the pattern of life (figs. 153 and 154). Barely visible through the patterns of her surroundings the female icon became a metaphor for containment. The burqa-clad women of her paintings are always facing away from the viewer yet we know their faces are uncovered because we can see the folded part of the front of the burqa over their head.

In the painting titled “Silence” (fig. 153) the entire surface is eclipsed by a patterned floor. The three walls of this room are covered by a repetitive image of a Govardhan-inspired face framed by two red roses. Although the rose is a flower that has been used all over the world and transcends boundaries, for Aisha it signifies the East. A curtain panel on the top of the painting lends it a stage-like look. The torso of a woman in a red *burqa*

emerges from the bottom edge of the painting and faces inwards. While one cannot see the face of the figure in the foreground, the eyes on her burqa suggest that she is able to look back. The burqa, while it hides the woman from the gaze of others it also gives her the advantage of looking at others without being noticed. Aisha often symbolizes this inherent paradox.

In “Form x Pattern” (fig. 154) eight figures shrouded in blue burqas radiate from a central lotus and transform into a pattern in the overall scheme of the painting.⁶ The geometric patterns that have taken over her painting come from memories of her childhood home in Shikarpur. “The floors in our house were all patterned with brightly colored tiles” says Aisha. The floral motifs also have their origin in memories of her embroidering as a young girl. “I still have some of the embroidered pieces from that time.”⁷

Patterns have been an integral and important ornamental element in traditional miniature. Aisha however does not use them for their decorative value alone; in fact she undermines the beautifying aspect to identify other meanings. She proliferates the surface of her paintings with patterns and motifs to show the stifling existence of a woman or perhaps allude to the pattern of her life and its repetitive monotony. Over a period of more than seven years now, Aisha’s work has evolved into a purely pattern narrative. Her imagery retains no reference to anything recognizable as she continues to imbue her paintings with basic shapes and motifs.

In 2001 Aisha was selected for a two-year residency at the Rijks Akademie in Amsterdam. Already working on the subject of women, Aisha focused on the western woman. With preconceived ideas about the equality and freedom granted to the western

woman her trip to Europe told her otherwise. “When I came here this illusory myth was shattered. What I saw was a greater exploitation of women there than in Pakistan.”⁸ It gave a new direction to her work where she began a comparative analysis of the two. The tulip became a symbol of the Western woman and found its way into many of her paintings of that time. Looking at both the Amsterdam’s red light district and its tulip gardens Aisha discovered many parallels such as the exploitation and manipulation of both for an economic end. She began to juxtapose the burqa and the tulip to emphasize the divergence between the Eastern and Western woman.

New meanings and connotations began to emerge from her experience of the West. Her earlier images of curtains, floor patterns, burqas and flowers took on new meanings and contexts. Most of Aisha’s early paintings have a stage- like layout, which signified the *chardewari* (the four walls of a house) while the patterns, the curtains the burqa-clad women and the interior perspective each played its part to unfold the drama of an Eastern woman’s world. “My early work was about layering, I was intuitively covering but now I am doing the reverse: I am opening the layers” says Aisha. “The Performance” (fig. 155) is an apt title for her painting where the curtained surrounding has a peephole through which one can get a glimpse of the inner imager. The use of red and white in “Untitled” (fig. 156) draws a comparison between purity and passion and hints at the white curtains of the Dutch commune and the scarlet boudoirs of the Amsterdam brothels.

The tulip appeared in a number of paintings done by Aisha in Amsterdam and later. The painting titled “Covered Uncovered II” (fig. 157) belongs to a set of large paintings (50 x 70 cm) and has a tulip rendered in an outline on a red patterned surface. A painting

from a smaller set (14 x 19 cm) has Aisha's earlier images of a curtain and burqa-clad women with eyes painted on both the curtain and the burqas. It is an overt comment on the disposition of the women from the East and the West. The tulip and the curtain still remain as part of her imagery today.

The Amsterdam trip gave Aisha the opportunity to see another way of life and to indulge in a discourse. Going to the west with preconceived ideas of the independent Western woman Aisha was shocked to find that it was not true. According to her she felt that there was more exploitation of women in the West especially by way of exposure of their bodies. Of course the West does not perceive it as such and her colleagues at Amsterdam did not see it as a problem, and were more concerned about the problems facing the Eastern woman.

Her tutors at the Rijksakademie saw her as a traditional artist and coaxed her to experiment and to try modern mediums like video and photography. Upset at being labeled as a craft-oriented traditional artist, she became more determined to resist the suggestion and to continue with her traditional work. She even started to do embroidery and worked with the traditional wedding *gota* on wooden board.⁹

However at the end of the two years abroad she took the challenge not so much as giving in to pressure but more so as an act of curiosity towards the medium and her ability to use it. Her video "Conversation" (fig.159, a still from this video) was exhibited at the end of her residency in Amsterdam and later at Chawkandi Gallery, Karachi in 2002. It featured a double screen with two images running simultaneously. On each of them the image was a white cloth stretched within a circular embroidery frame. On one of the screen

a brown hand is shown slowly embroidering a red rose while on the other screen a white hand is undoing the same rose. The accompanying sound track was gentle for the embroidering and jarring during the ripping of the motif.

The video, a direct comment on the attitude of the West towards the East stemmed from not only her direct experience but also from the socio-political changes that occurred after the events of 9/11. The message could not have been clearer, yet many, according to her, did not even notice the difference between the two images when she showed it in Amsterdam.

Her two years of interaction with the West has given her food for thought and renewed concerns that began to find expression in her work. Wars waged by the West have given her reason to voice her concern about violence. Alternate mediums have been added in her way of working lately. From an embroidered rose on camouflage printed combat fabric to using upright needles to trace the image of another rose alongside, she hints at beauty and violence both at the hands of the needle. Her post- Europe works for a while centered on the altercation of the East and West and the use of a medium other than the miniature. Does she feel the miniature does not suffice as a medium of a strong protest?

Aisha took part in the *karkhana* painting project as part of a team of six artists that was initiated and planned by her artist husband Imran Qureshi in 2002. All these artists who studied at the National College of Arts did twelve collaborative paintings that were exhibited at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in New York in 2005. Each artist began by creating an image on a *wasli* and then sent it to the next artist who after adding to it mailed it onto the next artist and so on till all the twelve paintings were worked by each

of them. Envisaged as a modern collaboration it produced a collective response to the increasing intolerance after the September-11 events. They were replaying the traditional Mughal practice of several artists working on a single painting but with a 21st century sensibility.

Since 2004 Aisha's work has moved towards a noticeable minimalism. Her palette has become more sober with a lot of use of white. In the "Birth of Venus" (fig.160) white curtains frame all the four edges of the painting leaving a blue square in the center that has a water pattern. In this pattern one can recognize a burqa-clad figure in a fetus position with the stem of the lotus flower attached to her like an umbilical cord. One of the panels of the curtain is slightly parted, an element that she uses a lot later in her paintings of 2006.

Since 2005 Aisha has focused solely on the curtain such as in "Curtain I" and "Curtain II" (figs.161 and 162). Her signature geometric pattern remains there to enliven the large expanse of white. Working at times with just the form of the curtain, which has become more palpable, she layers it, leaves it a little bit open or shows only the pleated edges for example "The Red Curtain" (fig. 158). "It could be the edge of either a curtain or a burqa," she says.¹⁰ She takes comfort in her very personal imagery and resists giving too much explanation of her latest abstractions. She says "it is a form which can be interpreted however one may want to".¹¹

Red and white have become predominant colors in some of her latest paintings. She often uses only the bottom edge of a curtain within a symmetrical composition. A new element in these paintings is also the look of a page from an exercise copy book created by pale grey and two parallel red lines that go across from edge to edge like in two paintings

called “Untitled” and “Page from my Diary” (figs.163,164 and 165). The page, she explains is “like diary writing, and what she paints is becoming increasingly personalized.” She feels that contrary to her earlier work where layering was used to cover, the layering in her recent work is being peeled off. “It is as if something is being explored,” says Aisha.¹²

Her paintings done in 2006 are images of circular openings in surfaces covered in pattern that look like ruffled tops of a curtain surrounding a circular inset. The “Page from my Diary” (fig. 165) consists of two halves, the left half is a red patterned surface with a circular hole in the center, the edges of which are pleated like a curtain top. Through the hole the same pattern is visible underneath. The image on the right hand side of the painting shows the pleated edges of a white curtain going around another hole in concentric circles. Again one sees the same white of the curtain through the hole. A semblance of a page is superimposed over this half of the painting.

In 2006 Aisha did some installations. Titled “Quilts” (fig. 166) this series was an outcome of the devastating earthquake that hit Northern Pakistan .The idea came to her when everyone was collecting quilts to send to the victims. The white color she says “has parallels in the shroud for the dead.” Aisha says “I made these small white quilts totally by myself: stitching, filling and then embroidering or adding needles” and then having them set in wooden frames One of these quilts has half-finished embroidered roses on it with the threads hanging loose. Children are often likened to flowers in many works of Eastern poetry and prose, and Aisha uses the simile of the incomplete flowers for the lives of so many children that have ended abruptly.

The other installation, which is also a quilt, has the needles inserted in it where

normally just the stitching leaves its mark. A quilt denotes warmth but Aisha's quilt is a symbol of pain and destruction that she has embodied in it by means of the sharp needles.

Her latest work from 2007 shows how she has matured into an artist who works very minimalistically while clearing the painting of all extraneous imagery. "The Better Half"(fig. 167) and "The Kiss" (fig. 168) show how Aisha tackles a romantic subject just through color and pattern.

Having trained as a traditional miniature painter, Aisha did not hesitate to traverse many routes in a span of eight years in order to evolve into an artist who has transcended tradition. The opportunities of traveling, studying and exhibiting abroad have given her the enthusiasm to work in exceedingly diverse ways and on her own terms. Her stay in Amsterdam gave her the confidence in her own work. In an interview with Hammad Nasar while at Amsterdam, she gives her view about art in the west, "The work here is very superficial and there is no depth to it. They are concerned about formal values and have nothing to say."¹³ Having a lot to say, Aisha is now well on her way to doing just that.



Notes:

¹ At National College of Arts the curriculum for miniature painting is devised on the lines of a traditional transmission of learning. After going through a series of copying from Persian, Mughal, Rajput and Pahari samples, the students then pass onto making their own compositions with references again from traditional sources. It is only at the end of their course and for their thesis that they experiment with contemporary subjects yet remaining technically aligned to tradition.

² Aisha Khalid, interview by the author, Lahore, July 7, 2005. The absence of the figure from Aisha's work is due to her childhood memory of her mother telling her that angels will stay away from a house that has paintings of figures. Although Aisha did paint figures initially she stopped doing that in 1999

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid.,

⁶ Blue is the color of the burqa worn by Afghan women and has consequently become symbolic of them.

⁷ Aisha Khalid, interview by the author, Lahore, July 7, 2005.

⁸ Aisha Khalid, interview with Hammad Nasar. 'FINE ART Interview'. Lahore, *The Herald*, March 2003, 84.

⁹ Ribbons made of gold threads which are part of the embellishments of wedding clothes in the sub-continent.

¹⁰ Aisha Khalid, interview by the author, Lahore, July 7, 2005.

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² Ibid.,

¹³ Aisha Khalid, interview with Hammad Nasar.



Saira Waseem
Born 1975 in Lahore
Lives and works in Chicago

Saira Waseem received her Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a major in miniature painting from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 1999 and lives in New York. Saira is known for work that derides contemporary local and global politics, fundamentalism and sexism. She is the only artist among the modern miniaturists who uses a photo-realistic imagery and paints living personalities. She fills the entire surface of her paintings with impeccably drawn real life politicians, army generals and *maulvis* (Islamic clerics) as she takes it upon herself to condemn the prevailing corruption. Her art she says is a “plea for social justice, respect, and tolerance through the use of caricature and satire”.¹

Saira draws the contents of her elaborate paintings from the contemporary socio-political structure of the new world order and the global duplicity of power and war politics. Her imagery provides a clever synthesis of a contemporary vocabulary and the artistic style and symbolism of traditional miniature painting. For example she uses the traditional *putti*, the halo, and the coexistence of the lion and the goat in many of her paintings but gives them new meaning by juxtaposing them with contemporary images of popular rulers or personages, guns, missiles and truck art.

Saira appropriates not only from traditional miniatures but also from western art works. In her painting “Tomorrow” (fig. 169) she replicates a Norman Rockwell composition as well as the postures of his figures (fig. 170) while making the figures look like a cross section of Pakistanis, including some known personalities, who surround Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Some in the group carry the Pakistani flag. In the lower half of the painting four cherubs play around with missiles, hinting at the danger lurking around Pakistan's tomorrow.

While most contemporary miniaturists have evolved their symbolic vocabularies or ventured into various other mediums, Saira remains resolutely persistent with the content and execution of her work. A series of paintings for her thesis show set the course for her future art work. Talking about her paintings and their political inclination Saira says, “I mostly paint ironical political paintings and in my compositions, I depict political figures, emperors, and celebrities with a background of cupids and animal portraits”.²

Her first exhibit in 1999, critiqued the government of Nawaz Sharif where he featured as the main character of the socio-political drama that she chose as her theme. In “Padshahnama I” as it was called (fig. 171), Saira takes her inspiration from “Jahangi Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings” (fig.4). In Saira’s painting Nawaz Sharif sits on top of an hour glass like the Emperor Jahangir in the original painting done by Bichtir in the 17th century. The hour glass is suspended over a platform where a lion and a lamb sit keeping in line with the conventional symbol of coexistence used in the Mughal dynastic portraits. Two cherubs wearing local dress appear on either side of the hour glass. The chiefs of the three armed forces salute Nawaz Sharif while he holds an orb with a dove hovering over it. Her use of the peace symbol and the army personnel brings forward the duplicity of spending large amounts on defense budgets while propagating peace. An ex- President brings a replica of the Minar-i- Pakistan, a modern monument dedicated to the Lahore Resolution, while a member of his cabinet offers him a dagger. The decision to create Pakistan was called the Lahore Resolution as it was on the site of this monument that the resolution was passed on March 23, 1940). On the left side is the President with the flag, handing Nawaz Sharif the constitution. Below him the media chief holds a television with

the image of a lion on the screen. Incidentally the election symbol of Nawaz Sharif was a lion and Saira refers here to the use of the state run media for self glorification. The chief of the nuclear program with a missile under his arm adds to the same intent bevy. And of course the picture would not have been complete without Uncle Sam standing at the right edge with his own agenda. Above this assemblage and on the left is an impression of the partly submerged motorway that Nawaz Sharif flaunted as one of the major achievement of his presidency. Further back, the vague shape of a naval ship and a torpedo are visible while tucked away far in the top corner is a sleepy moonlit town unaware of the deeds of its rulers.

Saira builds up grand narratives with reference from actual events, to ridicule the political situation while pompous accounts of the ruler are doing the rounds. Other paintings from the same series show Nawaz Sharif doing frivolous acts like playing cricket or holding a feast for the Queen of England to glorify himself. There is hint of a lot going amiss while the Prime Minister just smiles.

Saira's iconography is distinct, with parody and satire at its heart. One of the few among the modern miniature painters who represent actual people, her characters prance around as if they belong in a puppet theater or a circus. In ridiculing contemporary events she puts forward a moral lesson "by providing a hilarious parody of local and global politics".³

Saira's aim could be considered an inversion of the Mughal miniature. Unlike the Mughal illustrated chronicles that were basically a means to glorify and exalt the Emperor, Saira's narratives strive to expose the malicious intents of the people in power be they

rulers or a group. Instead of the hunting parties, the battles and other royal pursuits of the Mughals she displays the activities of the contemporary rulers like a scene from a circus or marionette show.

Saira parallels the self aggrandizement and propaganda used by the Mughal emperors with contemporary media accounts of the political rulers. Since her narrative is mostly political she says “the Mughal style is the best medium to use as it is strongly narrative and relates to our own cultural behavior/context and reflects the South Asian theme of telling stories not only orally, but visually, too”.⁴

The contemporary political situation provides Saira with ample local and global themes to work on. With the world having undergone various changes after September 11, the Iraq war, the Afghan war and the war on terrorism Saira has ample events to critique upon. After taking on local leaders like Nawaz Sharif and Pervez Musharraf she has also pulled in George Bush and Tony Blair.⁵ Under the Mughals an act like this could have cost the artist his life but the contemporary artist enjoys a freedom of expression despite belittling the rulers.

“The Kiss,” (fig. 172) a painting from a series on Pervez Musharraf criticizes the Pakistani president’s obliging stance with Britain and America. Musharraf sits with a computer keyboard in his lap while the computer screen faces outwards and is inscribed with hearts and the words ‘online’, an obvious pun. Musharraf seems to be enjoying his exalted position, a position made more obvious by his halo, a western icon that entered Mughal imagery via Flemish engravings. However, Saira’s haloes are more sun-like as they end in flame like shapes. Surrounded by cherubs, Musharraf seems to be beaming as

one of them leans forward to give him a peck, as if he is pleased with his collaboration with the war on terror. A panel printed with missile shapes hangs behind Musharraf while the American and British flags flap on either side at the back. The scene looks as if it is being enacted in the skies as the lower halves of Musharraf and the cherubs dissolve into a blue-green color with a spattering of colorful star add-ons in the foreground. Saira uses a rich palette with most of her paintings in shades of deep red, a bright blue-green and yellows. A curtain provides the backdrop to many of her overly-peopled paintings which also emphasizes the drama therein.

Paintings from the “Bush series” ridicule the collaboration between Bush and Musharraf for the ‘war on terror’, an aftermath of post September 11. In “Friendship after 11 September 1,” (fig.173) Bush embraces a rather submissive Musharraf under a marquee. Pakistani and American flags flutter on either side while just below the two presidents the Statue of Liberty holds up the Pakistani crescent instead of its usual torch. Below this podium a medley of American and Pakistani characters and icons parade as part of a carnival. Masked characters, clowns, a general and maulvis frolic on a star studded ground. Half a dozen cherubs sit above the canopy of the marquee wearing tiger masks or blowing trumpets. A red curtain lends a theatrical backdrop to this performance.

In “History till 11 September” (fig. 174) Saira makes use of a European model. She restructures Raphael’s painting “The School of Athens” to show that the great people in contemporary history are no longer philosophers or thinkers who seek to learn about the universe. The leaders of today are busy in collecting arsenal to destroy the world. The painting shows Bush among the greatest philosophers, scientists and mathematicians of

classical antiquity with a masked Musharraf behind him. He stands draped in an American flag with a gun in his hand while he faces Socrates. There is apparently a discussion going on while the other philosophers are busy consulting or writing in books. According to the artist “they are designing weapon systems while in Raphael’s painting they were writing treatises on philosophy”.⁶ Alcibiades (a historical military leader) stands beside Bush and gestures as if supporting the importance of weapons. The marble block on the right with its engraved missile in the inset further augments the idea. A deep red curtain frames a classical statue that overlooks this assorted assembly of classical and contemporary figures.

Most of Saira’s political paintings have a strong element of dramatic irony and satire. Underlining her grandiose depiction of the rulers lurks the dark truth of their duplicity. Talking about this element she says “There is always satire and humour with royal majesty and grandeur which reveals that our government is a source of mere entertainment and fun making for us”.⁷ The satire in her work has many parallels in media such as the theater, the circus and political cartoons where truth is exposed via entertainment. Taken up with this form of expression she continues to “take inspiration from court scenes of Mughal miniature paintings, drama, theatre or circus, where the idea is to entertain”.⁸

“New World Order” (fig. 175) is a typical example of how Saira combines various elements of tradition and the contemporary from both Eastern and Western sources. Here she presents contemporary international leaders as the actors on a world stage. Following the Renaissance compositions, Greek Ionic columns flank a haloed George Bush who is seated on top of the world stage. Like a ventriloquist Bush sits with his doll Pervez Musharraf on his lap, while Tony Blair and Hamid Karzai peep from behind a globe made entirely of

beasts that rests precariously on a calf. Two masked figures appear from behind the other side. On the top and sitting on the architrave are two monkeys, one of them with a camera. Saira borrows heavily from theatrical and circus elements in order to emphasize the underlying sarcasm in her work.

A similar mockery is at the heart of another series of paintings that ridicule efforts to thaw relations between India and Pakistan. In “Peace Talks” (fig. 176) two cooks sit opposite each other peeling potatoes. At a glance they are both dressed and look exactly alike but a closer look reveals that each is representing his country. The monograms on their caps and parts of news headlines on the potato peels give away their identities. They mimic the representatives of the two countries who are busy peeling and tossing out clichéd statements while a cauldron of misinformation sits between them. The public is likened to cattle and appears as outlined images in the identical square panels behind the cooks.

“Seasons of Pretentious Friendship” (fig. 177) shows the two government’s representatives as clowns who have brought the house down. Reclining atop the arsenal and crushing people underneath them, they sip cups of tea indifferently. A small hour glass in the foreground emphasizes the time spent in futile exercises that yield no results.

As Saira Waseem lives away from Pakistan she has the freedom to do paintings that take on fundamentalists and the *maulvis*. “Mullahs are creating many problems in our country, and no one can raise a voice against them because people think it is against the religion to (contradict) them. And now they are imposing Sharia law in Pakistan, attacking the artist communities, and spray-painting billboards that display women’s faces”.⁹

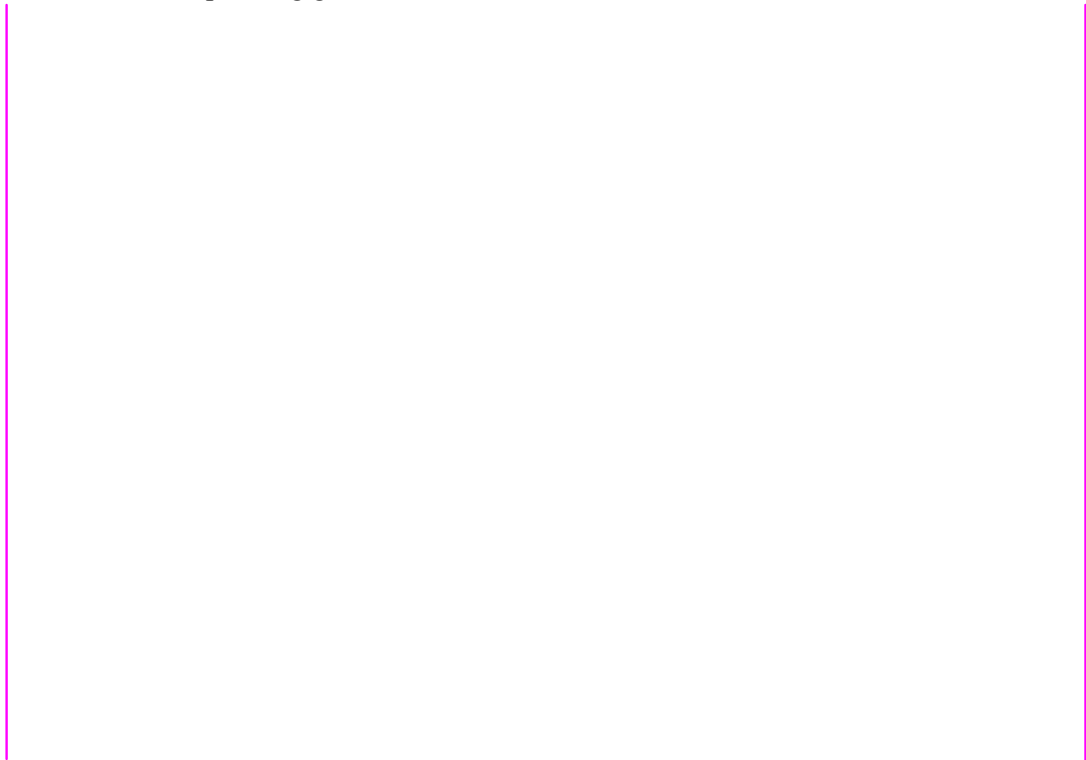
“Fundamentalists” (fig. 178) shows a bevy of armed zealots marching forward with

identifiable maulvis and religious leaders of Pakistan in the foreground. The younger lot is animated and equipped with *lathis* (batons) and missiles as it rallies forward at the behest of its self-righteous mentors. The painter is critical of the fundamentalist attitude of the religious leaders who persuade the youth to wage wars in the name of religion. “Our generation is holding weapons instead of books” she says and believes that “art and freedom of expression can be used to propagate the right Islam and create awareness in society”.¹⁰

Honor Killings is a social evil that she feels has been largely overlooked by the people in Pakistan. In a series of miniature paintings on the subject, she draws the viewer’s attention to the irrationality of murdering a daughter, sister, or wife who is assumed immoral by her bigoted male relatives, in order to preserve the family’s perceived honor. Saira says “Nobody has ever done paintings on honor killings, our government; even the media is silent about it”.¹¹ Although Saira portrays a serious topic here, she manages to retain the vividness of her paintings by using flowers as similes for the slain women. “Lotuses” (fig. 180) shows a nude woman emanating from one of the flowers that float in a dark pool in the foreground. Swords dot the landscape as they pin down the plants on the desolate shoreline where further back shrouded figures huddle atop the rocks that form the horizon. The imagery of this painting has a model in an earlier work called “Mourning Rocks” (fig. 181) where similar shrouded forms emanate from rocks piled up in the distance while swords pin down plants in the foreground. These paintings form a departure from her poster like paintings and have a spatial depth to them accentuated by the receding landscapes. They have an aura of desolation about them heightened by the choice of colors and the imagery.

“In the Name of Honor” (fig. 179), a painting from the same series as the “Lotuses” Saira reverts back to the color palette of her political paintings. On a blood red background she arranges her images quite like the earlier paintings but without the satirical nuances. Like most of Saira’s paintings the images float without any particular context of the location. In the center two large leafless tree trunks with their branches chopped up, stem from an orb. They frame a broken bust of a woman placed on another tree trunk. A gash reveals the veins pulled out of her chest while the used weapon rests wedged in the ground nearby. In the foreground amid fallen leaves a male and female figure metamorphoses into a seated cow underlining the passivity of the victims. The two collapsing pillars at the back and the portion of a column on the left and the female bust remind one of idealism of the Greeks.

Saira lives in the United States and continues to interrogate local and global issues in a truly cosmopolitan fashion as she weaves images from eastern and western art sources into a traditional painting genre.



Notes: 1 The Saira Waseem blog <http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/onewayoranother/index.html> ©2005
(accessed June 10, 2005)

2 http://www.TheAmericanEffect.com/global_perspectives_on_the_united_states.htm (accessed June 21, 2005)

3 Virginia Whiles. *Contemporary Miniature paintings from a Pakistan*: (Kyoto: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2004), 64.

4 Saira Wasim. Interviewed by Jan Mohammed, Zahir. 2006. http://www.altmuslim.com/perm.php?id=1808_0_25_0_C38 ©.2001-2007 (accessed June 20, 2005)

5 Review of 'Transcendent Contemplations' Laura Smith-Spark. BBC NEWS on line : Published: 2004/10/01 17:09:32 GMT <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pt/fr/-/2/hi/entertainment/3708382.stm> © BBC MMVII

6 http://www.TheAmericanEffect.com/global_perspectives_on_the_united_states.htm

7 Ibid.,

8 Ibid.,

9 Saira Wasim. Interviewed by Ellen Pearlman. 2003. <http://www.thebrooklynrail.org/arts/oct03/sairawasim.html> (accessed July 2, 2005)

10 Ibid.,

11 Ibid.,



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Born 1970 in Gujranwala

Lives and works in New York.

Talha Rathore was born at Gujranwala in 1970 and graduated in miniature painting from the National College of Arts in 1995. In 1997 she received a UNESCO grant for a residency at the Sanskriti Akademi in Delhi, India. It was there that she experimented with incorporating newer mediums with the traditional techniques she had acquired and a more abstract expression began to evolve in her work. Stamping and embossing the *wasli* were added to her repertoire and have remained with her since then. In 1998 she moved to New York where like many immigrant artists she began to draw heavily from her experience of living in another cultural milieu while remaining strongly rooted in her own. According to Salima Hashmi, the trip to India and the subsequent migration to America shaped the entire direction of Talha's art.¹ Like many of her contemporaries she uses the technique of layering to present a cultural confluence where printed images of maps, (a mass produced grid-based Western icon), share the space with lyrical and organic shapes of trees, seeds and insects.

Taking the Manhattan map, where she lives now, she incorporates it into her *wasli* in the form of a collage. This map, a distinct visual icon culled from the west, is one of the most significant imagery in her work which is directly linked to her experience of the city where she has migrated. Using the map, sometimes as an underlay and at other times as a border, she juxtaposes symbolic and lyrical shapes with it to create allegorical pictures. The cypress tree is another image that Talha uses in many of her works. Quddus Mirza confirms that the tree has its origin in Urdu poetry and literature, where a woman is often likened to a cypress tree because of its stately bearing.² Talha uses that metaphor for herself and it has appeared extensively in her work since 2000.

In the painting “A Matter of Silence” (fig. 182) she uses a double-page format similar to a traditional manuscript. A Manhattan map appears on one half of the painting with three translucent, upright cypresses superimposed on it, allowing the twisting network of the map to show. The other half of the painting is flatly colored with a rectangular inset in gold leaf that carries three green cypress trees that bend gently as they reach the top. Talha uses strips of the map as a border around her painting and stamps a pattern of small cypress trees on it. The map and the cypress remain a recurring image in her work.

Talha, who trained in the exacting techniques of miniature painting where the skill of the artist is paramount, undermines that aspect to incorporate many post-modern practices. Collage is one of them, embossing is another and using a rubber stamp to print a border pattern around her miniatures is yet another. With the incorporation of all these, her miniatures take on the form of modern art works that combine different art making devices.

In “They told us it would be like this” (fig. 183) she divides the surface again into two halves. As the title indicates, it is a painting that alludes to recollections of what people might have told the artist to expect in the West. Although it mimics the manuscript format, Talha might be using it to another end as well: where the two demarcated areas could denote East and West, an idea also reinforced by the sides that they occupy. The western side has the Brooklyn map while the eastern half is painted in vibrant colors and gold leaf. Cypresses abound in the painting and the stamped margins, with one of them swaying elegantly towards the West.

In “Imprints of Intention” her usual cypress has been replaced by a round-shaped tree (fig. 185). Subway maps find their way again into the imagery as an under layer and

collaged strips form a roughly executed margin. Talha juxtaposes the subway maps and botanical forms to create a formal synthesis of the two which seems to celebrate her position of being in a western milieu where she enjoys the best of both worlds.

Talha has participated in many group shows all over the world and has had five solo shows. She was also one of the six miniature painters who formed the *Karkhana* team to produce twelve collaborative works that were part of a moving exhibition in 2005.³

The work she exhibited at the Rohtas Gallery in Lahore in 2007 continued with the use of maps although now they are mostly relegated to the margins, a move that perhaps says that she knows the way home and does not need to consult the map. In this exhibition her works did not follow the double-page format, taking instead the form of single, slightly larger works. One set of these paintings have simplified minimal surfaces while the other is worked in intricate patterns. “Pearls without a cloud” (fig. 184) for example consists of a large bright red surface with a green outlined circle in the center. Concentric rows of stitches follow this central circular shape while strips of maps with serrated edges bordered the image in her usual style.

The other set of paintings exhibited in Lahore have intricate designs that look more like tapestries and give the effect of thick woven surfaces. These designs are placed in the center of the paintings and follow a symmetrical layout. Composed of repetitive patterns they remind one of Aboriginal art that represent land through a series of symbolic patterns. Talha’s heavily patterned paintings are done mostly in earth tones and are a fusion of symbols and colors that take their inspiration from her homeland and adopted land. Stamped repetitive motifs, mostly of the cypress tree border these patterned works. “A Boundless

Sea” (fig. 186) is a series of broad irregular stripes in tones of orange and rust that form the main image. The same design in darker tones forms a border around it. The map edge makes the last frame and is duly stamped with the cypress pattern. “Indigo Roots” (fig. 187) follows a similar concept and layout with minor changes in the colors.

Talha’s work like many of her contemporaries is devoid of figurative representation, relying instead on patterns that tell her story with symbolic references. These remind one of Aisha Khalid’s work where pattern too is the core.

Notes:

1 Salima, Hashmi. *Seeking, Seeping, Spreading*, (Lahore:Rohtas Gallery, 2007) n.p.

2 Quddus, Mirza. *Seeking, Seeping, Spreading*, (Lahore: Rohtas Gallery, 2007)n.p.

3 The details of this collaborative exhibition are under Imran Qureshi’s interview.



Waseem Ahmed

Born in 1976 at Hyderabad Lives and works
in Lahore.

Waseem Ahmed was born in 1976 at Hyderabad, Pakistan. He began to draw, paint and sculpt early in his life when he joined a local art academy in his home town. In 1993 Waseem was urged by his teacher to travel to Lahore and see the students' thesis display at the National College of Arts. He was greatly impressed by the college and the work he saw there but it was some years later that he was able to take admission there. Before joining the Fine Arts Department of the National College of Arts in 1996, Waseem obtained a Bachelors degree in Fine Arts from the Sind University in Hyderabad. For his bachelor degree Waseem was doing oils and says, "I naturally looked to the West for inspiration as books on western art and artists were readily available." As he was not familiar with miniature painting his repertoire consisted solely of western art images. Although he was already well versed in the basics of drawing, painting and sculpture, Waseem confesses that before he joined NCA he was not familiar with miniature painting at all, "I had never seen miniature paintings before I came to the National College of Arts."¹

In his second year at the National College of Arts, he took up miniature painting as a minor subject. "I found it difficult to draw on a small scale and to conform to the lengthy procedure involved in learning the traditional art" but he says "I took it as a challenge and actually started to enjoy it as time went by."² The next year he opted for miniature painting as a major and graduated with honors in 2000. In 2001 he was inducted as part of the faculty at the NCA and has been teaching there since.

As Waseem had received an art education that encompassed western techniques as well as those of traditional miniature painting, he naturally drew inspiration from both. While he often juxtaposes imagery from the two, his painting remains close to the traditional

miniature techniques. “Doing miniature was being able to experience art that I could relate to,” he says.³

His student work from 1999 remained true to the format of a traditionalist where he used a number of figures in a multi- point perspective interior and rendered the painting in immaculately flat coloring and intricate detail. However there are some marked contemporary elements even in this early work. “The Printmaking Studio” (fig. 188) is partially based on the sixteenth century painting from the *Akhlaq-i- Nasiri* (fig. 189). In the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* painting there is a sense of collaboration and an affinity between painters and calligraphers and their pupils, which has been replaced in Waseem’s “The Printmaking Studio”, perhaps unconsciously, with a contemporary individualistic approach to art practice. Waseem shows the printmaking studio of his college where students are engaged in various stages of the process and carry on with their own work rather oblivious of each other and without any interaction with each other. Other contemporary elements are the surreal presence of the sky where there should have been a wall and the fish and water emerging from the beds of the printing presses. The lower part of the painting is a rectangular register filled with swirling waves and fish upon which stands a printing press somewhat outside the studio and the border of the painting.

Other works from his student days also remain close to a traditional content and execution. ‘The National College of Arts’ (fig.190) and “Celebrating 125 years of NCA” (fig. 191) both belong to the same period and follow a composition based on traditional formats. “Celebrating 125 years of NCA” shows the genealogical tree of the miniature department of the college. On the top edge are the first principal, Rudyard Kipling on one

side and the present principal on the other. The old miniature *ustad*, Haji Sharif and the present *ustad*, Bashir Ahmed occupy the lower edge while in the center is a portrait of Waseem himself. The fact that both these early paintings use an existing place and real characters relating them closely to their Mughal prototypes. They are also important as samples of his early work and provide a point of comparison with the development of his subsequent work.

The same year that he did “Celebrating 125 years of NCA” he did a painting which he decided to leave “Untitled” (fig. 192). The two could not have been more different. By the time he graduated in 2000, Waseem had already started to challenge many of the formal manifestations of the miniature painting genre. In “Untitled” he abandoned his earlier symmetrical compositions and flatly laid backgrounds for a freer arrangement of imagery and smoky vignette effects. He continued to build the background of many of his subsequent paintings with small passages of varying hues but his figures remained detailed and delicately rendered.

In “Untitled” Waseem uses imagery from both Christian and Islamic sources in a sense reviving the use of Christian themes in paintings of Akbar and Jahangir’s time. The crucifixion is juxtaposed with the *Burraq*, (the legendary horse that took the prophet Muhammad to heaven). The cathedral and the Kaaba coexist in the same space while portraits of burqa-clad women and European women surround the multiple narratives.

The somewhat irrational juxtaposition of imagery from varied and often opposing sources began to form a key element in Waseem Ahmed’s work from the year 2000 onwards.

Like Shazia Sikander he also appropriates material from Hindu, Persian, Western and

contemporary sources. Virginia Whiles calls it “a plea for an eclecticism that existed in the reign of Akbar which has been marginalized by the Arabist shift in Pakistan today.”⁴

Waseem says his use of images from Western art is mainly because it forms a large part of his visual vocabulary. Intrigued by the opposing elements of any given constituent

Waseem says he likes “to highlight the opposites in everything: modern/ traditional, east /west and nude/ draped.”

In 2001 Waseem began work on two important themes which were to project him into the limelight. One of these was the “Burqa Series” while the other was the ‘Krishna Series’. In the ‘Burqa Series’ (fig.193) Waseem replicated famous nudes from Western Art and covered them with gossamer versions of the traditional burqa. These flimsy burqas look more like provocative accessories than a means of covering the female body.

Waseem says his burqa is not used in a feminist context. “It represents society and although people abide by the norms of society their actual character remains visible.”

When asked if the burqa represented society then why did he choose to show only women, he quipped “my next paintings just might show men in burqas.”⁵

In figure 193, Waseem recontextualises Manet’s famous “Olympia.” She reclines against a red traditional bolster. A rich orange colored curtain printed with apples forms the background and parts in the center to show the famous reclining figure. The white sheets of the original are replaced with a deep reddish brown tea wash that gives the semblance of a richly hued boudoir.

In another painting from the “Burqa Series”, (fig. 194) Waseem appropriates the two figures from Botticelli’s well known “Birth of Venus” and places them onto a large

circular shape that covers almost the entire painting. As in the original, Venus floats in a scallop shell but is covered in a flimsy burqa. A nymph, whose original dress is replaced with a long shirt and pants, welcomes her with an outstretched red cloak/veil. Green plantain leaves, so popular in the Rajasthani paintings, peep from under the circle and the edges of the painting to provide a brilliant contrast with the background and the red of the cloak. A characteristic tea wash which he used in many of his 2001 “Burqa” and “Krishna series” lends a rich golden and brown marbled effect to the backgrounds.

In the year 2003, Waseem continues the *burqa* theme with the earlier colors and the appropriation of the Western classical nude. In figure 195, Waseem lifts Boucher’s nude Diana, the goddess of the hunt, from her original milieu to set her against a red nimbus. The sheer burqa that covers her is attached with fine strings onto this. And Again in figure 168, Waseem shrouds Ingres’s “Valpincon Bather” in a lacy *burqa* while allowing her body to be seen through it.

While continuing to appropriate western nude figures for his 2003 ‘Burqa Series’, Waseem did some paintings the same year where he omitted the human figure altogether. Here he stylized the burqa form to create patterns that are similar to the work of his contemporary, Aisha Qureshi. (compare figs. 197 and 198).

In another set of paintings from the year 2005, Waseem uses tea wash and the *sayah qalam* technique to produce monochromatic paintings while continuing with his “Burqa Series.” He again incorporates western nudes, sometimes even using the same figure as in his earlier paintings. The composition and the coloring are minimal while the burqa appears either as an awning suspended over the nude or in the process of being pulled off

by means of strings attached to it (figs. 199 and 200). In his January 2007 exhibition held at Chawkandi Art Gallery in Karachi, titled yet again the “Burqa series,” (figs. 201, 202 and 203) the same images reemerge but some of these figures are no longer covered by the burqa. These paintings show a sparse white setting. In figure 201, two nudes sit overlapped by a pattern of evenly spaced squares. They are no longer covered by their burqas, which they have thrown off and are using to sit on. Since Waseem uses the burqa as a simile for society, it must mean a statement about the disregard for society by today’s women. A dark arched sky with a snake like cloud form frames the top edge of the painting: a foreboding?

In his latest paintings the earlier vignetted tea and gouache washes have given way to flat neutral areas. The figures with or without their burqas take center stage on these pale backgrounds and the sheer white burqas of his earlier paintings have changed to colorful blue-greens in most paintings (figs. 202 and 203). A new element that one sees in most of his work from 2006 is the image of fruit: bright red apples, a couple of peaches and even an orange add a brilliant, sensuous accent to the image. Part of Waseem’s latest work is an exercise in deconstruction where he has eliminated all unnecessary elements and focused only on what interests him. In this series his figures mimic the format of Company Paintings where solitary figures were often painted on flat, pale backgrounds.

Waseem incorporated calligraphy into many paintings of the “Burqa Series” done in 2006. In figure 204, the calligraphy occupies almost half the painting and appears on the horizon as a red drape that ends in scallops. In the lower half, five or six burqa heads peer out like aliens from behind the pale green hills.

Another painting with calligraphy differs from the usual vivid works of Waseem

as it is totally monochromatic with tones of grays and blacks (fig.205). The entire surface is equally divided into four horizontal panels with the image of a nude occupying the three upper panels. A panel of calligraphy divides this image into two while the lowest panel has three burqa heads emerging from the edge with lines emanating from them. Whenever Waseem has used calligraphy it is for its decorative quality rather than an accompanying text.

Waseem's "Burqa Series" has spanned a period of more than seven years now. He has persistently appropriated the nude from Western art, juxtaposing it in all possible contexts with the Eastern veil, the burqa. With this he brings to mind the eclecticism that was so much a part of miniature painting under the early Mughals. Asim Akhtar calls him 'a contemporary artist coming of age in both East and West'.⁶

The other theme that Waseem is known for is his "Krishna Series". In these paintings he juxtaposes the god Krishna with modern female icons. Talking about his Krishna series, Waseem says 'I was quite familiar with the Hindu traditions and their gods when I was in Hyderabad as there are many Hindus who live there. Krishna, in particular, is an entity that I visualized all the time. I think of him as a symbolic lover'.⁷

Waseem uses Krishna to represent a modern archetypal lover, dressing the dark skinned god at times in pants and a shirt and substituting the gopis with modern jean-clad women or in some instances with famous film stars. Waseem uses a typical compartmental format of the pre-Mughal *Gitagovinda* manuscripts in many of his paintings of the 'Krishna Series.' The image is often divided into two vertical registers with a decorative border along the lower edge of the painting. In one of the painting from the 2001 "Krishna Series"

(fig.206) Waseem shows legends from two different worlds. In the lower right quarter, the god Krishna stands hiding amid the plantain leaves, while trying to catch a glimpse of the glamorous Marilyn Monroe, a worldly goddess, who sits defiantly on a bright red background opposite him. The lower half of the painting is filled with rows of lotus leaves and flowers in the Jaipur style. In figure 207, Krishna stands on top of a flower in one half of the picture, attired in jeans and a shirt. Standing casually with a gun on his shoulders, he looks across at the other half of the picture where a Bollywood actress reclines on a large sunflower. Waseem's use of Krishna in mortal settings has often landed him in trouble when he exhibits his work in India.

In another painting from the same series Waseem reproduces Marilyn Monroe in one of her famous poses, while in the opposite panel, Krishna stretches himself against a bolster cushion (fig.208). The combination of these images could not be more different and is further heightened by the way the backgrounds are treated. Marilyn Monroe is placed on a background colored by intense hues of red and deep golden tea washes that lend a tumultuous atmospheric effect to her side of the panel. Krishna is sprawled out against a serene and flatly laid yellow background.

Waseem started his "Krishna Series" in 2001 and continued to paint the same theme till 2005. In his earlier paintings Krishna and the female icons always appeared in two different vertical enclosures. While both the images appeared on the same painting, each had its own delineated space and mood.

By 2003 a change appeared in some of his paintings and the earlier format gave way to an undivided painting surface (figs.209 and 210). One began to see a greater

camaraderie between Krishna and his female consorts. Krishna now begins to come closer and interact with his ‘modern gopis,’ as Waseem calls them. During the next two years Waseem continued to use both the single and the double panel layout for his “Krishna Series.” In most of the paintings of 2005, Krishna appears exasperated and tired with his pursuit of beautiful women (figs.211 and 212).

In figure 211 two identical leafy arcades are painted adjacent to each other. In one of them, a tired and crestfallen Krishna sits with his crown off while in the other a bikini clad female reclines. Both the panels appear independent and could well be separate entities. In another painting a bikini clad female sits on a hilltop looking faraway and unconcerned while Krishna is clambering up with a lotus in his hand (fig.212). The vivacious Rajput reds, oranges and blues which were a hallmark of the earlier Krishna series become less vibrant and give way to a more subdued palette of greens, greys and browns in many of the paintings of 2005.

Besides the “Burqa” and the “Krishna” series, Waseem did a number of paintings where he has omitted the figure altogether. Everything in these abstract paintings is reduced to basic shapes and minimal elements. A painting titled “Relationship” (fig.213) is one of a series of his abstract paintings. As in most of his paintings he has used the double rectangle format of an open book. The right hand page is a vivacious red divided into two triangles by a white dotted line. The left hand page is a bright yellow and a white with thin red stripes translucent triangle sutured together with red stitches. One can see clouds amassing behind the see-through triangle and slowly move out onto the adjacent red page.

The abstract works form only a small part of his work. “Landscape” and “Kalar

Kahar” (figs. 214 and 215) are far from what a landscape would really look like in a miniature painting and are closer to post modern work. In “Landscape” (fig.214) Waseem uses a deep blue for the entire surface where stylized rain clouds hang around on the upper margins while strings of drizzle trickle down to fill a small white pond nestled between a delicate growth of plants. “Kalar Kahar” (fig.215) on the other hand is the name of a town near Lahore which actually exists. Here it has been reduced into masses of color and intersecting lines to look more like a topographical study.

Waseem, who has been painting for almost a decade has predominantly used the *burqa* and *Krishna* as the main themes to reinterpret feminist allusions. Using images that are alien to his culture but an art practice which is not, he has made numerous connections between the two. Moving from intricately painted nude figures to layers of abstract washes of color he provides the viewer with contradictions on many levels.



Notes:

1 Wasim Ahmed., interview by author, Lahore, July 22, 2005.

2 Ibid.,

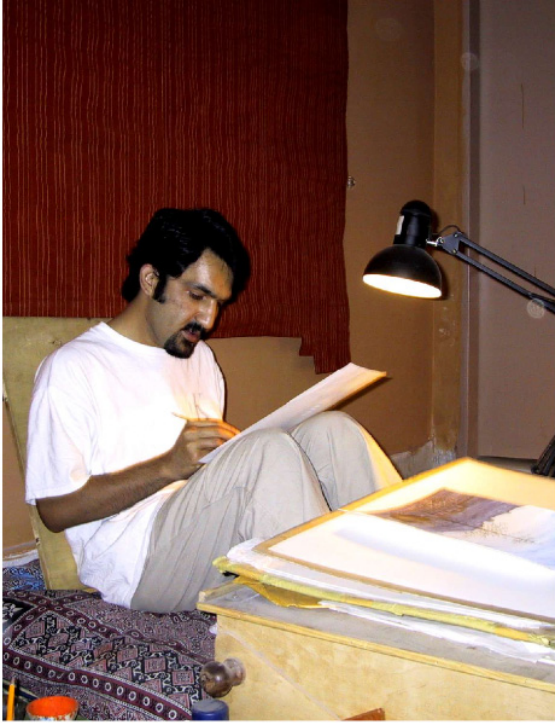
3 Ibid.,

4 Virginia Whiles, *Contemporary Miniature Paintings from Pakistan* (Kyoto: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum,2004), 64

5 Ibid.

6 Aasim Akhtar, *Travesty of Faith*. Karachi: Clifton Art Gallery, 2007.

7 Waseem Ahmed, interview by author, Lahore, July22, 2005.



Hasnat Mehmood

Born 1978 in Jhelum
Lives and works in Lahore

Hasnat Mehmood who graduated in 2001 from the National College of Arts has been on its miniature department faculty since 2005. Like most of his contemporaries Hasnat also approaches the miniature to express his feelings about the socio-political issues of the society in which he lives. His paintings are calm and muted even as they draw attention to injustice, proliferation of weapons and violence.

His student work was illustrative and showed greater experimentation in the use of different techniques within the traditional medium. These early paintings have a group of images clustered together into a narrative. "Hope" (fig.217) uses all kinds of imagery borrowed from traditional miniatures: the halo, the Persian cloud, a bit of arabesque and a floral motif, all competing for attention in the ensuing storyline. Likewise his "Self Portrait" (fig.2 18) uses all available space to group together images of floral motifs and xeroxed copies of family photographs around his self-portrait. In his student works done in 1998, Hasnat creates a palimpsest effect which is similar to what Imran Qureshi, who was his teacher at the time, did extensively in his paintings. Like Imran, Hasnat has incorporated old text pages in the *wasli*, superimposing them later with subsequent images. A year later Hasnat began to abandon most unnecessary elements from his work including the human figure but his preference for symmetrical compositions continued. The minimal effect that he obtains by using a very select imagery from traditional miniatures shows influences from both Imran Qureshi and Nusra Latif, who were both his teachers. Like most contemporary miniature painters, Hasnat's work takes its influence from socio-political themes as well as the prevalent gun culture of Pakistan. His trip to India in 2001 brought about renewed concerns of unresolved political issues in the region compelling him to work

on the theme of peace for his final thesis project.

The project on peace included a series of paintings that he fashioned as visual letters addressed to viewers, complete with a stamp and a post mark. These letters served as metaphors for the troubled world and are addressed to all as he seeks redress. He continued to paint these open letters even after he graduated. The stamp on these paintings often bears the profile of a Mughal prince as a silhouette or painted in a camouflage design and as a reverse stencil print or an image in silver foil. Certain other stamps carry the image of a gun. Hasnat says “I started using stamps after I came back from India.”¹ He says stamps not only identify a nation they also serve as a means of transporting ideas. The preoccupation with stamps probably also stems from his childhood hobby of stamp collecting, “I have a lot of stamps,” he reminisces while talking about his enormous collection.² The size and intricacy of the images on his collection of stamps must surely have left an added impression.

The dominant red of “A Letter to All” (fig.219) alludes to the bloodshed that coincided with the creation of India and Pakistan. A pale green inset takes centre stage and shows a replica of the *Bahai* lotus monument from Delhi. Hasnat, awed by this monument to peace, has used it in a number of subsequent works.³ On both sides of this inset are postage stamps of India and Pakistan hinting at a possible peaceful union. This letter addressed to people of both the countries is a plea for peace. A lotus emerges from the stylized water painted at the lower edge of this inset. The image of lotus appears in many Buddhist paintings as a symbol of holiness and is also a popular motif in many Rajput paintings especially those from Jaipur. Many contemporary miniature painters especially Bashir Ahmed, Waseem Ahmed and Hasnat Mehmood have used the lotus icon. Aisha

Qureshi uses it in a feminist context.

The grid, a popular element used by Pakistani artists such as Zahoor ul Akhlaque in the 70's, makes a comeback with miniature painters like Bashir Ahmed, Imran Qureshi and Waseem Ahmed. Hasnat Mehmood too employs it frequently in his paintings. The grid with its geometric simplicity is also part of early miniature painting exercises for students. In his monochromatic work called "Untitled" (fig.220) Hasnat creates the entire left half of the painting as a grid created by actual perforations which give it the look of the back of a postage stamp sheet. In the right half of the painting four perforated lines cross at right angles and confine a lotus in the middle of the square. The confinement of the lotus is an overt message of ensnared peace.

In another of his "A Letter to All" (fig.221) Hasnat uses the grid again but this time with an outlined image of a gun in each square, making it look more like a postage stamp sheet. Silver foil in the adjoining panel gives an animated abstract surface symbolic of devastation.

In "A letter to All" done in 2003 (fig.222), Hasnat uses the format of an actual aerogramme consisting of three panels. The upper panel is a pale blue color with lines for the address and barely visible lotuses in pastel tones cascading down. The usual silhouetted head of a Mughal prince appears as a stamp in the right hand corner. The central panel has multiple images of silhouetted guns superimposed on roughly applied brown paint that is left to trickle like dripping blood. Lotuses that face down add to the disturbance. The last section has three vertical panels. A central lotus pond is flanked on either side by an identical young man turning away from it. The painting delivers multiple messages of peace versus

violence.

The use of repetitive images by Hasnat to comment on the horrific aspect of the proliferation of guns mimics in a way the ‘pop’ paintings of Andy Warhol whose “simulation of mass production was a means to register social protest.”⁴

“The Conference of Crows” (fig.223) belongs to a series of paintings by the same name done by Hasnat in 2004. Atteqa Ali credits Fariduddin Attar’s book “Conference of the Birds” as a resource for the Sufi overtones of these paintings and their title.⁵ This twelfth century Persian poem is about the journey of the birds that went in search of *simurgh*, the leader of all birds. Hasnat uses this metaphor perhaps to advocate self discovery and the search of God within oneself and to cajole the viewer into making a similar contemplative journey in search of goodness.

Hasnat usually treats his paintings as two halves to emulate a vertical book format where opposing elements of a theme face each other. In figure 195 one side of the painting is a desolate landscape where dull and brooding crows sit facing away from each other and are overlaid by a white grid. The opposite side has two pairs of intricately drawn guns that face each other, portraying violence, while the side with the crows hints that people do not have the leadership to combat it. It is a clear insinuation that there is a lack of leadership against the methodical way violence is being propagated.

In another painting of this series titled “Conference of Crows” (fig.224), one side has multiple images of crows painted neatly, one in each square of a grid pattern. The other side has a fragment from a gun manual pasted onto it. Hasnat has highlighted the gun by leaving it neutral while giving the surrounding area a green wash. A couple of lotuses bloom

alongside the gun stressing the fact that peace is possible to achieve even in the face of violence.

In another series of paintings titled “Love in the time of Chaos” (fig.225) Hasnat shifts the focus from guns to comment on love and how it manages to conquer the adversity of violence and social unrest. His title and theme are directly motivated by the well known enduring tale of love recounted by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in “Love in the time of Cholera.” Following Waseem Ahmed, who has been using the Krishna image extensively for a series of paintings done over the past years, Hasnat chose Krishna to portray the hero of this series. In this painting, Krishna stands in the forefront with a row of lotuses on either side of him. He turns to look back at the expanse behind him where a gun appears in one corner and the horizon has turned a dull red. The entire scene is desolate with two pairs of crows looking on. Krishna, the lover is undaunted by the menacing scenery and reinforces the conquest of love over adversity.

In his work Hasnat consistently strikes a balance between the techniques and themes culled from tradition and the contemporary art and life. Like other young miniature painters he experiments and often incorporates modern ways of making art into the traditional techniques acquired at college. He has used collage, pierced the paper to make actual perforations and in his “Krishna, God of Love,” (fig.226) has even created the image digitally. In this painting, both sides of his usual double page format take on the form of a postage stamp sheet. An icon of a head and the denomination of the stamp appear on each stamp of the right panel superimposed on a large profile of the blue Krishna. The monochromatic left half has a gun image on each stamp.

In an unusual painting called “Untitled” (fig.227) Hasnat has used mostly graphite pencil with small areas done in tea wash. A palpable spatial effect is felt in the entire scene.

The figures and silhouettes of people in the foreground take on a more contemporary appearance while a plant rising from the middle ground is the only connection to a traditional miniature.

Although over the years Hasnat’s work has been mostly non-figurative, the human figure has resurfaced in many of his latest works. In his painting “Untitled” of 2006 (fig.228) he uses silhouettes, contour drawings and sensitively rendered Mughal faces to make up the composition. It draws heavily from traditional portraits but is equally modern in its presentation.

Notes:

¹Hasnat Mehmood, interview by author, Lahore , May 9, 2006

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Thomas, Crow. *The Rise of the Sixties* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 85-87.

²Farid ud Din Attar, *Conference of the Birds*,

The Third Generation Miniature Painters

Along with learning the traditional miniature painting ethics and its painstaking techniques at the National College of Arts, a third generation of painters is also heir to the style, concepts and icons of the past two generations.

Although replicating, copying and appropriating of images from traditional Mughal, Rajput and Persian miniatures remains at the core of the teaching of miniature painting, newly inherited themes have increasingly provided new archetype and the afflatus for the contemporary artists. Global themes of war, violence and gender issues expressed by means of appropriating images from traditional miniature painting images established by the revivalists in the nineties provided new prototypes for subsequent painters such as guns, icons of Mughal Emperors, Krishna, cherubs, haloes and lotuses.

Khadim Ali a young Afghan who graduated from the National College in 2003 belongs to the group who use war and terrorism as their subject and carry forward the themes and style established largely by their immediate predecessors. Their mentor and teacher Imran Qureshi has long abandoned the theme however. He now works on purely abstract paintings that explore formal components of a miniature and is possibly the driving force behind new minimal trends as well. A series of paintings done by Khadim Ali engages the destruction of Buddhist sculptures at Bamiyan; his hometown. If one compares his painting, "*Roz-e-niyayesh* (The Day of Worship)" (fig.229) to the early work of Imran Qureshi one can delineate some strong influences in both the theme and the style. The

foliage, the black dots which are actually grenades and the earth color with its areas of seeping red, all seem to find their origin in Imran's work (fig.230). Leonardo's universal man in the center echoes the use of images from western paintings in Waseem's miniatures

Muhammad Zeeshan, who also graduated in 2003, culls his thematic and stylistic

references from Imran Qureshi , Nusra Latif and Aisha Khalid. In his early works he followed Imran Qureshi's themes of gun culture and destruction. One also sees similarities between his work and that of Nusra Latif especially when one compares his painting from the series "Beyond Appearances" (fig.231) based on a Mughal painting of "Two vultures" by Mansur. The use of pattern to fill the bird forms bears a close affinity with Nusra's "Specification of Desire" (fig.232). Murad Khan Mumtaz, a 2004 graduate of the National College of Arts, produced an illustrated manuscript for his thesis. He follows the prescribed layering of often disjointed images from assorted sources juxtaposing them into a unit. For example in his painting titled "Book 4" (fig.233) he takes the famous image from "Jahangir holding the Orb," by Bichitr and replicates the head and shoulder while the rest of the body shows the continuation of the landscape where he stands, as if he is transparent. The random thread-like lines overlapping certain areas of the image and the fading out of some parts are reminiscent of Imran Qureshi's works.

Asif Ahmed another young graduate of the National College of Arts from 2004 takes reference from Hasnat Mehmood's "Love in the time of Chaos" (fig. 225) and moves away from the oft used theme of violence and destruction to celebrate love, a major theme of Rajput painting. His work remains stylistically similar to that of his recent predecessors. The central white area in his "Season of Love" (fig.234) echoes the use of the grid by Imran Qureshi and Hasnat Ahmed. The use of cupids and their representation is similar to Nusra

Latif's work. However the winged figure with the lotus also reminds one of work by

Pakistani contemporary painters. Influences from other contemporary painters such as

R.M.Naeem and Ali Kazim who are not miniature painters.

Mudassar Manzoor, a graduate from 2005, does not use overt icons from the traditional miniature except for a select imagery of the elephant, foliage and border motif that appear in restricted areas in some of his work. Rendered flawlessly in a traditional manner with significant spatial depth, his work is devoid of fancy titles and the contemporary miniature painting of layering images. Instead they are a uniform imagery. In his first solo exhibition at Lahore in 2007 he painted a series of male and female solitary figures amid surreal landscapes (fig.235). Clouds and rock formations surrounded many of his figures sitting in a Muslim praying posture. His work is highly personal and deals with beliefs, Sufism and the inner world of a being.

Nida Bangash, one of the students to graduate in 2007 is half-Iranian. Her thesis painting makes use of her Persian ancestry in the theme and the intricate execution of motifs painted in the Persian palette of blue-greens. Done in scroll format, (fig.236 and 237) this mythological-cum-historical work retains the traditional figurative emphasis and echoes the synthesis of Persian, Indian and European inspirations of Akbar's time. Reminiscing Persian history and the destruction of Persepolis she believes history repeats itself and depicts hybrid figures that are formed by devouring smaller beings. Her work is about history using an imagery related to her origins.

An interesting shift was apparent at the thesis exhibition of the National College of Arts held in January 2008. Looking at the display of these young miniature graduates one is awed by the fact that their work was mostly non-figurative, minimal and monochromatic, characteristics that one does not generally ascribe to a traditional miniature (figs. 238, 239,

240 and 241). There was almost no reference to any traditional imagery either. Shunning the prevailing emphasis on war and terror of the last decade, these young painters are dealing with more personal issues and metaphorically. Many painters also decided to use collage instead of paint, for example, Rehana Mangi's "Untitled" (fig.238). Her work consisted of hair woven in a cross stitch pattern on a 1.75 x2.75 ft. white *wasli*. Perhaps the only likeness to a traditional miniature in the latest works of many of the new graduates is the *wasli* and in certain cases the size of the painting.

Studying the work of students that have graduated between 2003 and 2008 there are some trends become evident using events that shape today's world or their personal worlds. Artists working at the end of the nineties and early two thousand, the second generation of contemporary miniature painters, adhered to traditional imagery, colors and formats to express and shape their contemporary views. However the new generation has abandoned themes of war and terror or any visual reference to tradition as is evident from their latest show.

At least fifteen students graduate every year from the miniature department of the National College of Arts. Following the popularity of miniature painting, many other art colleges such as Beaconhouse National University, Hunerkada and art departments at Lahore College for Women University and Kinnaird College in Lahore have added miniature painting as a major to their curriculums. The Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi also offers miniature painting as a major. However National College of Arts remains at the innovative forefront of the contemporary miniature tradition.

Conclusion

A constant artistic tradition that existed in Lahore since the 1500's has preserved and nurtured a new generation of miniature painters who are in the process of making a significant contribution to world art. This continuity is not one of mere replication of earlier works, as was being done by the two ageing *ustads* at the National College of Arts, but a daring experimentation of assimilating older imagery with contemporary concepts. This does not in any way attempt to put down the post-partition sentiment of a nationalist art which was central to the replication of traditional miniatures. In fact it was the replication itself that kept the skill of the genre alive till Bashir Ahmed opted to spend two intensive years as an apprentice with Sheikh Shujaullah. He took over the post of teaching miniature painting after the death of his *ustad*, has been head of the miniature department for almost two decades now and is the last of the *ustads*.

The miniature department has been experiencing a split between tradition and modernity for nearly fifteen years. Bashir Ahmed is fiercely targeted as a conventional traditionalist by his former students who have since become his colleagues. Muhammed Imran Qureshi, next in line to head the department is one of the artists/teachers who support the contemporary modern group.

The split, evident primarily in conceptual aspects, divides the practice between artists who sustain tradition with the use of conventional themes and formats and those who tackle social issues through their work. This further translates into two distinct styles. Although both groups accept the importance of the miniature technique and adhere to its rituals, the work of the traditionalists presents familiar styles of the past whereas the modernists inculcate experimentation and incorporate newer mediums and aesthetics in their work.

With this confrontational background, the modernist group gives little, if any credit to Bashir Ahmed for his effort in promoting miniature painting as a major subject for a bachelor degree, and least of course for any contribution in its modern development. Instead the setting of the miniature department and the contemporary revival are attributed to Zahoor ul Akhlaque, painter and former teacher at the National College of Arts.¹

However for an unbiased evaluation one must assess the facts. Zahoor ul Akhlaque who went to study at the Royal College of Arts in 1967 was influenced by the Victoria and Albert Museum collection of miniature paintings when he saw them. This consequently led to the use of miniature elements in some of his contemporary works on canvas. As he was not a miniature painter he stressed the need for students to use tradition but primarily as a resource for large contemporary works in oil and acrylic and not water color based miniatures on paper. Although Zahoor ul Akhlaque's influence on painting in Pakistan cannot be denied, he did not advocate the actual art of miniature painting. Shazia Sikander who joined the miniature department as a student in 1988 bears testimony to its unpopularity. About her decision to enroll for miniature painting she says, "the choice itself was an act of defiance. At that time there was no interest in the miniature department-in fact it was viewed with suspicion."²

Bashir Ahmed should be acknowledged adequately for his contribution in sustaining the art of miniature painting and its promotion, even though it is in the eyes of the modernists, on a mere technical level. The fact is that technique still forms a strong basis even for contemporary modern miniatures. The traditional pedagogical program put in place by Bashir Ahmed provided the time, concentration and an interaction between students that nurtured contemporary miniature painting. Without the miniature department, individual

undertakings might not have produced what we see today.

The revival of miniature painting and the contemporary movement owes much to Shazia Sikander who although migrated to the United States as soon as she graduated, not only left a legacy for all subsequent miniature painters to follow but also put miniature painting on the map of world art. Three years later Muhammad Imran Qureshi accelerated the new concepts on home ground. The success awarded to these two pioneers of contemporary modern miniature painting has attracted many new comers.

This current revival also owes something to the western exposure that these painters have had. Shazia Sikander as we know did her masters in the United States after her degree in miniature from Lahore and opted to reside in NewYork.It would be unthinkable not to surmise that her western education and the New York art scene did not influence her. Similarly Nusra Latif after leaving National College of Arts did her Masters in Fine Arts from Australia and lives there now. Waseem Ahmed did his graduation in painting, learning oils and sculpture, before he joined miniature and has subsequently been on various residencies abroad. Imran Qureshi initially opted for painting, before taking up miniatures painting. Later he went for a residency in London, while Aisha Khalid went to Amsterdam and worked with Dutch artists there . Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid have both exhibited in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The interest and the success these artists have experienced abroad has been phenomenal and is evident from the purchase of their work by well known museums of the world, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in United Kingdom , the Fukuoka in Japan, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York among others. Most contemporary modern miniaturists also find themselves being patronized by reputed western art galleries who now act as agents for them. This interaction with the

west has provided these young miniaturists with diverse influences that metamorphose into works held in high esteem. Influence from the west manifests itself mainly in the exploration of approaches in making the art work, while their themes remain firmly grounded in the personal and cultural realities that they have inherited. Their imagery encompasses concerns of the modern world yet it retains the essence of the traditional miniature even as they occasionally abandon the *wasli* and other traditional materials to work in medias such as installations and digital imaging.

In 2003, the Whitney Museum at New York hosted the first ever exhibition displaying the works of non- Americans: “The American Effect,” where Imran Qureshi and Saira Waseem were chosen to exhibit their work along with thirty eight artists from other non-American countries. Their work was bought by the Victor and Albert Museum to initiate a collection of contemporary miniature paintings. This has been the interest generated by this revival and the works of many young miniature painters is displayed in major galleries and acquired by museums abroad. Apex Art, New York and the Kunsthalle Fridericianum hosted the “Playing with a Loaded Gun” exhibition in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Australia-based Nusra Latif had a retrospective show at Smith College Museum in Northampton in 2004. In 2005 Karkhana, the collaborative show of six miniature painters showed in several museums across the United States. These are only a few of their achievements.

With the modernization of miniature painting there have been some note worthy developments. There are increasingly more female students who opt for this genre and present a marked departure from the traditional domain of only male artists.³ The development of miniature painting between 1980 to 2007 involves three generations of painters. Th first generation, the traditionalists sustained miniature painting mainly through replicatio

and relied heavily on earlier traditional prototypes. It is the second generation, of which Shazia Sikander and Muhammad Imran Qureshi form a pioneer role, that has made important contributions towards putting a new tradition in place which provides a source of inspiration for the third generation of artists active after c.2000. The second generation painters have also pioneered non figurative miniature painting that has no precedence in traditional miniature, but has gained popularity with many third generation artists.

Broadly speaking miniature painting done in the early years of the period between 1980–2007 could be termed as a continuation of the Lahori School that reached its zenith four centuries ago during Akbar and Jahangir’s stay in Lahore. But subsequent work carried out by the second generation artists has nurtured new traditions that provide newer concepts and icons to many emerging painters.

Notes:

¹ Virginia Whiles and Naazish Ataullah. *Contemporary Miniature Painting in Pakistan*. (Kyoto: Fukuoka Museum of Asian Art, 2004), 56,60.

² Berry, Ian and Jessica Hough. *Shazia Sikander: Nemesis* (New York: The Tang teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2004), 5.

³ According to the National College of Arts records, out of ninety five students who graduated in miniature painting between 1995 and 2005 there were only fifteen male students. Similarly in 2008 there was only one male student in a class of twelve.

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