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## Exhibition: Current realities, new perspectives

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**A considerable number of young contemporary artists of Pakistan now enjoy the privilege of exhibiting at home and abroad.** Validation of their work in foreign locales often brings new interpretations to our traditional understanding of the relationships between the global and the local, race and nation, sacred and secular as well as the postcolonial discourse.

The current group exhibition, 'Reprise' at Aicon Gallery, New York, a recap of works by some of their most popular artists of 2010 featured an exciting roster of edgy Pakistani artists of whom some already have an international standing while others are in the process of establishing their credentials. Among the 20 odd South Asian artists in the group, works by four Pakistani artists was a ticklish take on the present environment here.

Young artist Huma Mulji whose taxidermied camel, 'Arabian delight' brought international spotlight to her innovative abilities at Art Dubai 2008, had works from her 'High-rise' series on show. She describes the time we live in as moving at a remarkable speed and in the context of Pakistan, Mulji refers to the experience of 'living 200 years in the past and 30 years in the future all at once'. Her prints, 'Pardesi pride' and 'Housing scheme' are an oblique statement on the chaotic urban sprawl in our major cities.

"All photographs in this group are, first, a comment on contemporary photography itself; second, they confirm the advent of the age of 'photoshop', the possibility of playing between truth and fiction. In the photographs, I do this quite obviously, e.g. the buffaloes on the roof of the apartment block in the 'Housing scheme' print are an impossibility, the scale is too large in proportion to the rest of the landscape—but it's believable as a narrative, like much else around us, and at the end of the day, does it matter anymore what the truth is?" she remarks.

Regarding 'Pardesi pride', she explains, "It is like a symmetrical butterfly design image, folded in the middle to create a mirroring of the 'absurd collisions' between the past, the present and future in the 'landscape of discord'.

On a similar note of topicality, Sana Arjumand's digital prints, 'Let's give each other space', (about fighter planes readjusting positions in air space) are humorous jibes at the apparent

lack of tolerance between nations internationally and on the political, social and religious fronts at home.

“For me, inspiration comes from the street culture and imagery in my land,” she confesses and further adds, “I get ideas while stuck in traffic jams and in the darkness of loadshedding. I have fun analysing words that are merely placed for decorative means on buses. The fun and humour aspect comes from a cultural method of communicating, in that the most intense of matters can be commented upon in a tongue-in-cheek manner.”

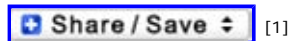
She is essentially a figurative painter who puts her point across through quasi comical, macabre or quirky expressions. Arjumand sidesteps into lighthearted repartee in these works but without diluting the gravity of her message.

Miniature artist Shoaib Mehmood’s paintings critique the proliferation of brand culture. Fascinated by the ubiquitous Nike brand he looks into the absurd herd mentality that global trademarks can generate. The concept was impressive when initiated a few years ago but his work is beginning to suffer from sameness now.

The chador/burqa as a confining shroud for a woman is an image that has been hacked to death by the western electronic and print media yet artists continue to add it to their repertoire. Ruby Chisti alludes to gender repression by sewing a series of minuscule ‘burqas’ onto a large canvas titled, ‘Landscape of a prosperous society’.

In spite of the triteness of the visual the intended barb still has a sting and the small fluttering burqas do manage to create an aesthetic presence. A soft sculpture exponent, Chishti’s repertoire centres on deeply poignant works relating to the travails of the girl child, and gender sensitivities regarding women. ‘The Blemishes’ series of stuffed and stitched figure sculptures at the show were very representative of her oeuvre.

The new generation Pakistani artists are confronting emerging realities and finding their own way to deal with them. They are not creating art just to please the eyes of the viewers but to make them conscious about the thoughts and feelings that animate the art work. Such works are best appreciated when viewed in context.




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