

The Nation

La Dame



"My main challenge
has been to
rejuvenate
miniature painting"

—**Shazia Sikander**

Moneeza Hashmi

The last distinction given to any final year thesis of a student of miniature painting in NCA

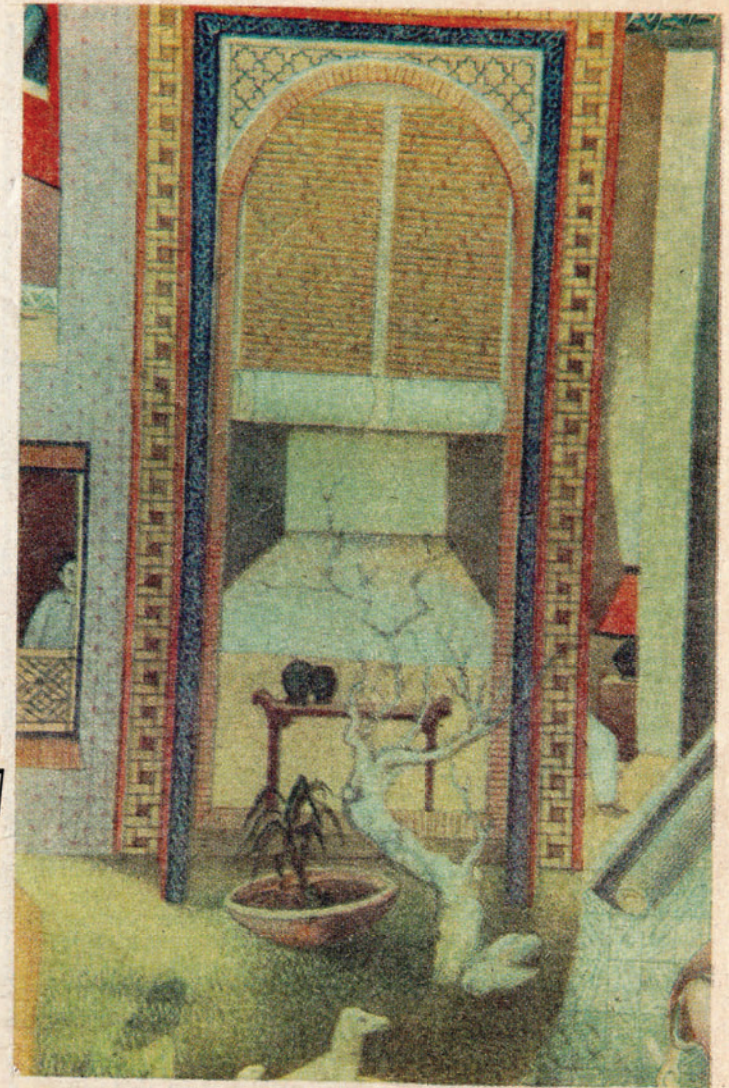
Shazia's destiny until a few years ago. "I was studying English, French and Mathematics at Kinnaird College when I decided to take up painting". Her first three

specialisation and she has not regretted that a single moment since then.

Miniature painting, says Shazia, is a highly designed and yet an equally simplified form of art. It developed from the concept of the Islamic book illustrations and later developed into a miniature painting.

miniaturists burnish each layer of paint as it is added, which gives the finished picture a laminated look." Shazia avoided burnishing her final work because she felt that by doing this her work would lose its painterly quality and become more like a print.

by painting the usual court scenes. "He would get very irritated with me when I discussed a new dimension of my work with him or if I wanted to include contemporary motifs or scenes in my work." But ultimately Shazia's stubbornness paid off and she got permission to



(National College of Arts) was more than ten years ago. Shazia Sikander is rightly proud to have achieved such a distinction this year.

Her thesis was a five-foot scroll which is considered a most unusual size for a miniature painting. She selected this size because her scroll was to relate a message and narrate a tale and she herself is the central figure. Painting was not to be

years at NCA were spent in seeking out the area that she wanted to major in. "A lot of people discouraged me from taking up miniature painting. They said it was very laborious work. Then they said I would not be able to create my own style but would simply copy paintings from books." But all such negative vibes did not stop Shazia from selecting and finalising miniature painting as her major area of

art. There are many styles of miniature painting. The Persian style is characterised by its rich and vivid colours, over-powering detail, aerial perspective and figures showing a frontal or a side view. The miniature style of painting which developed into the sub-continental style was a culmination of the local styles and the Persian influence brought in by the Iranian painters under the Mughal rule. According to Shazia, the highly skilled and traditional techniques are still the most delightful aspect of this art. "We as students are made to learn how to make our own brushes using hair from baby squirrels. The paper or *wasli* used is prepared by glueing several sheets together. A particularly hard, gem-like surface can be achieved by burnishing. Many

when Shazia finally decided to do her final thesis in miniature painting her challenge was to rejuvenate this art. She introduced new ideas and themes while at the same time incorporating quicker methods and mediums. Shazia feels that even today miniature is still looked upon as a merely copying practice. She wanted to infuse into her work some originality, some contemporary themes. "I wanted to break free but not to rebel. I wanted to branch away to achieve something which would be original but would still have roots in tradition."

Her scroll is a narrative of her past life. "It is my side of the story" says Shazia. It is a tale which is based on real facts, like her house, her room, objects, people, things which exist around her and are a part of her immediate surroundings. She has painted herself as a diaphanous form, floating in and out of rooms, always in motion. "This painting can be described as a frozen moment of time in which I separate myself from all of my surroundings and take a walk down memory lane. I see myself walking around, seeking the future, looking at the present and remembering the past." Shazia feels that as the viewers of her painting move from room to room, they could be walking down their own respective memory lanes, from one phase of life to another. I have used the colour white as a symbol of purity, serenity and knowledge. The translucent form within the painting is trying to uncover the enigma of its existence."

Shazia's five-foot long scroll took her about six months to complete. During that time she kept experimenting with colours, textures and surfaces. She wanted to avoid the traditional themes of seasons, events or moods. "I wanted to be really different" she says. She recalls having many arguments with her teacher who wanted her to conform to the "traditional" methods

break away from so many years of set patterns and do her thesis on a long scroll. "I would work long hours into the early morning, just bent over my painting". She finished one section at a time and then, when the thesis was delayed, she kept going back to it and discovering new areas to improve upon.

Her teachers are extremely pleased now with her final products and have complimented her work so far as to say that such talent has not been seen graduating from the NCA in the past decade or so. Shazia's other work is equally exquisite and finely executed. Intricate details in the borders around her paintings are breathtakingly beautiful. The expressions on the faces of two bulls locked in mortal combat are spellbinding. Her depiction of a group of wild animals frolicking is etched from memory of a visit to Africa. Her copies of Mughal courtiers are beautifully original, where Shazia has added her own touch in elaborating on the border or the attire of the subject.

Shazia has been offered a teaching post at the NCA, which she intends to take up so as to keep in touch with art in general and her college in particular. After an exhibition at Islamabad where her work will be displayed at the Rottas Gallery, Shazia would be willing to part with some of her paintings, for a price. "But I will not sell all of them, because I want to make them a part of my portfolio." She intends to travel and view other miniature work, especially in India. "There is still so much to see, so much to learn," says this pert little young girl unassumingly, totally unself-conscious of her own talent and quite humble about her achievements. "I want to give a bit of myself to my miniature painting. It may be true that there may be no art without its yesterday, but it is equally true that no art can survive out of contact with the present."

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