

# Breaking free in miniature

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THE NEWS (INTERNATIONAL)

AS THE political and economic texture of the globe is changing against the backdrop of a monopolar world, a strong urge to defy it is also emerging beneath the surface of a soul-searching attempt in the form of a cultural resurgence which finds expression in the creative art of youth ready to question 'traditional art' in order to rejuvenate it!

Instead of aping traditions on the pretext of following the footprints of the forefathers or emulating the contemporary western art without realising its incompatibility with the oriental art, there is an effort to link the present disjointed phenomena with the cultural heritage across the Third World. And this is a manifestation of the cultural resurgence not only in the developing nations but also in developed countries.

Shazia Sikandar, who recently graduated from the National College of Arts in Fine Arts Department has characteristics to be described as original in her thinking and art. Her command over art which attributes to the professional patronage of her teacher, Bashir Khan, elevates her to the slot of 'bonafide' artists in her youth.

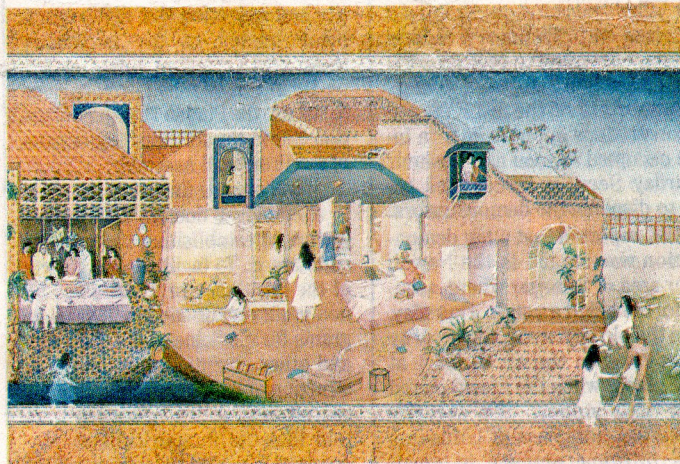
She lives a life full of experience in an age when everything is questioned. So does she.

But it is her distinction that she questions traditions not to brush them aside. She questions them so that they could be rejuvenated if they are worth it. She sees and tries to help others see through the traditions of the contemporary age. Problems, feelings and quests of the contemporary human being are her subject.

She says "An artist is bound to help people to understand art and the world and facilitate an interaction between a human being, nature and culture. Because culture is the essence of life and society which gives progression dimension to life. Nations emerge stronger if they have strong culture. With this strength, any cul-

tural invasion can be countered. Artists should help enlighten people to bring out new elements in an art. His or her art should not be drawing room art. There must be a comment. In this way, aesthetic sensibility of common people could be re-enlivened if beautiful things are created in the contemporary perspective.

Shazia has made an innovation in the medium of miniature painting as she has combined in one graphic art and collage to use the medium to express the quest of a



contemporary human being. Miniature paintings which so far have been limited to only reproducing the old Persian, Turkish, Mogul and post-Mogul art including Pahari, Rajsthani and Gujrati in two-dimensional form, has now been extended to portraying today's world and issues.

It remains to be seen whether art pundits approve this innovation or discard it, whether they declare it permissible or not. Students and the city's elite were enthralled when they visited her painting exhibition this week at the NCA where her thesis was put on display along with other graduates'. Shazia does not care whether 'custodians' of art approve it or not. She believes in defiance. But not for the sake of defiance. Rather she en-

deavours to find something meaningful when she makes a visual walk in her paintings.

This walk down memory lane is conspicuous in her five-foot long scroll of miniature painting which is distinct as well as wonderful because she has painted a contemporary subject in a traditional miniature style that appears to have lost its vitality and is generally considered an art of the days of yore. So far the miniature painting style has been used just to depict a courtly life of the feudal past.

one might wander, moving in certain ways, stopping in certain places and in so doing reconstructing the space. And when one has reconstructed the space then one's eye is free to roam from room to room taking in more detail. I am there and yet not there and as I move from one place to another I take the viewer along with me through the labyrinth which exists around me. I want to draw the onlooker into almost a near physical participation also affording the onlooker great possibilities of visual perambulation.

As we travel from one room to another we could be walking down our respective memory lanes from one phase of life to another. Therefore the house could be any house and the people are not somebodies but could be anybodies. Thus the elements within my painting become symbolic.

The white colour is a symbol of purity, serenity, knowledge and relates to opening up. The translucent from within the painting is trying to uncover the enigma of its existence".

She says in her dissertation: "As Andre Gide says, each individual wants to escape his race but paradoxically he cannot do so without belonging to it and conforming to its behests.

This brings us to the question of tradition and miniature painting as a "traditional art". I personally feel that tradition is something which is inherited, where our roots lie, but to grow and go forward one has to forego those strings, break free and not conform to it but to branch away to achieve something which is original".—SAQLAIN IMAM

The miniature scroll is not only an outstanding piece of art produced by a fresh graduate but also an attempt to revive a dead style in the modern context to strengthen a contemporary person's bond with cultural heritage.

Shazia says: "A scroll is a traditional format used by Chinese painters to paint their landscapes and also by the Gujrati painter to illustrate Hindu Mythology. Scroll has also been used to relate a message and narrate a tale.

"I have taken this format because of its immediate relation with the narrative. Such a 'continuous method' also aided my visual illustration. Similar to the traditional scroll yet unlike it, my painting is meant to be seen all at once. I have suggested a space through which