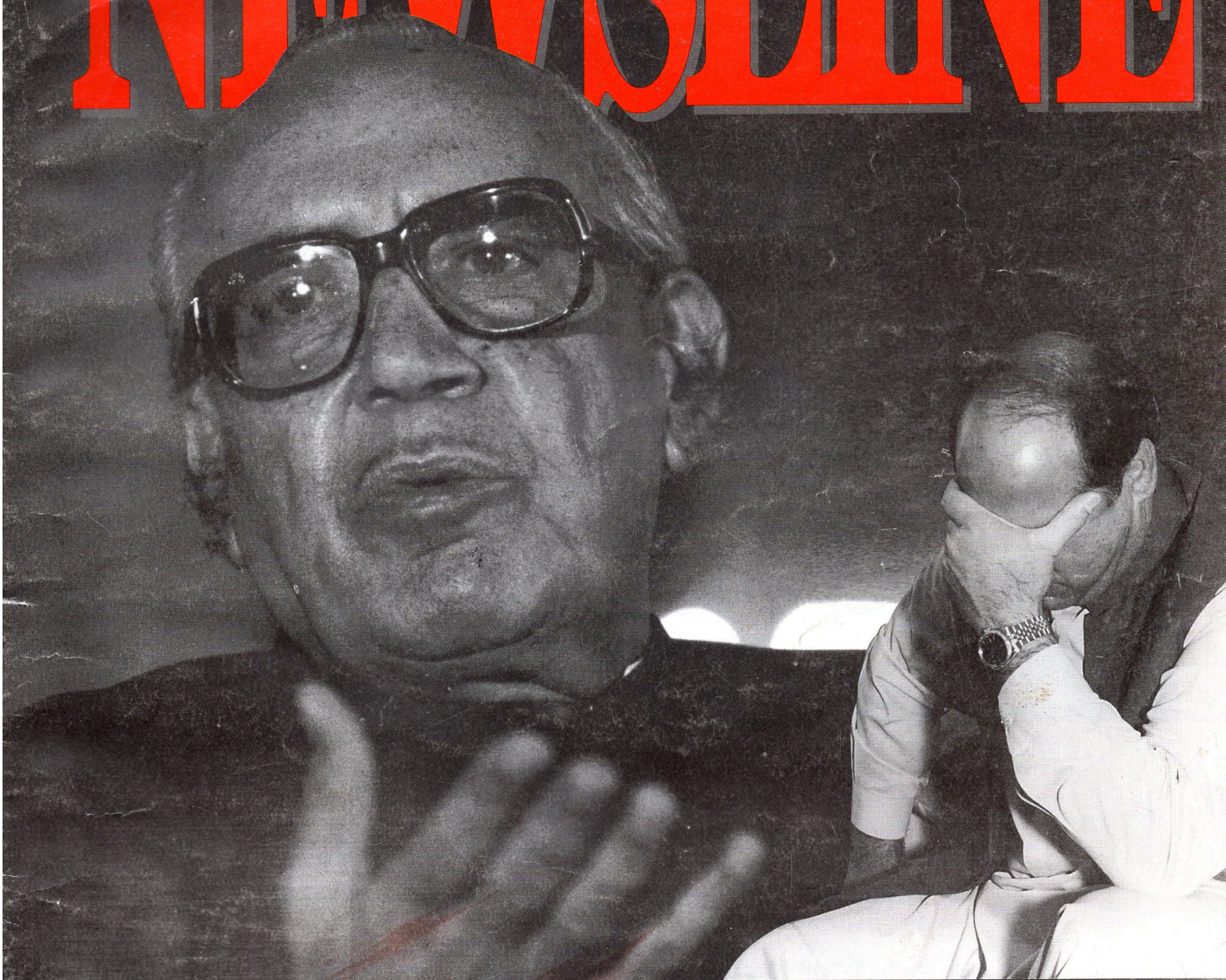


BHUTTO-ISHAQ: THE NEW DEAL

APRIL 1993

NEWSLINE



ISHAQ STRIKES AGAIN

By Salima Hashmi

Shazia Sikander's exhibition of miniatures draws on both traditional and contemporary themes.

Fine Art

Pakistani embassies abroad are not known for their efforts to promote Pakistani culture.

At best their efforts consist of the occasional fashion show put together by embassy wives wanting to show off their wardrobes to the locals or boring Independence

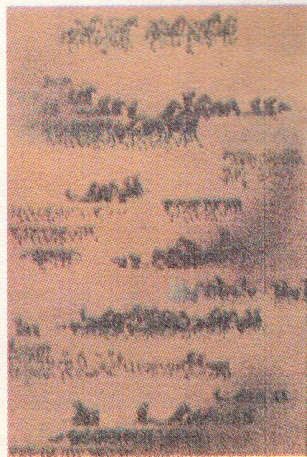
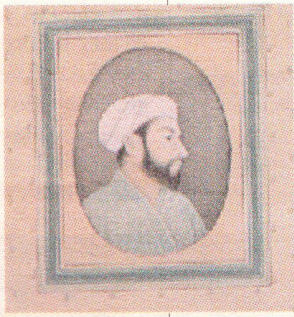
Day receptions enlivened by piped PIA music. Exhibitions of authentic art or craft are extremely rare. A visit to any important embassy to see what's on display on the walls inevitably makes one cringe. There are endless crude colour photo-blowups of the Shalimar Gardens, Lahore Fort or K2 behind darkening cellophane, framed in gilded plaster. The few Chughtais, Ahmed Pervezes and Jamil Naqshes that you see are on display at the respective ambassador's residences, not at the embassies. Moreover, the chanceries are ill-equipped to display works of art, lacking exhibition lights and proper wall surfaces.

Despite these handicaps, however, the occasional exhibi-

tion does make its way to official venues abroad. A recent show at the Washington embassy was an exhibition of miniatures by the young and

dynamic Pakistani painter Shazia Sikander and it proved to be a refreshing departure from normal embassy art.

A recent graduate of NCA, Shazia walked off with the majority of fine arts awards and prizes at the convocation held in January '93. Awarded the Shakir Ali prize for best student in the fine arts department as well as the Haji Sharif prize for miniature painting, Shazia was also on the princi-

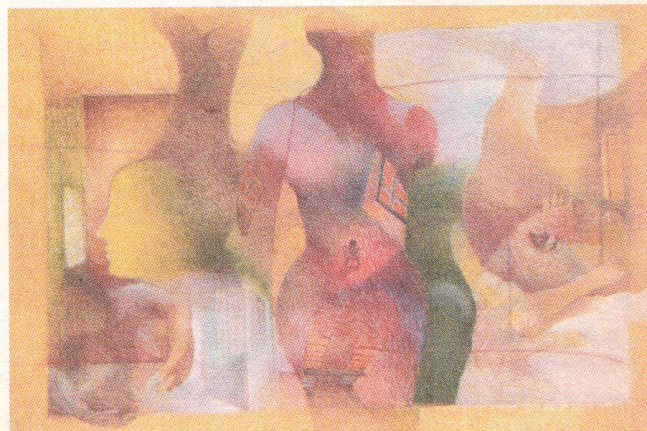


pal's honour list. Her thesis exhibition last February was the highlight of the graduate show and deserved the critical acclaim that followed. Since then, Shazia has been teaching, painting and travelling. She was offered a show in the Washington embassy to help fund her art studies abroad. An exceptional young artist by any standards, Shazia has been offered admission for post-graduate studies in five of the best arts departments in the US.

Her Washington exhibition included some of her traditional miniature works, as well as the more interpretive paintings which attempt to com-

tain authenticity to what are, after all, copies. The painter's talent is revealed more forcefully when she uses her facility with delicate detail to address themes and materials which are personal to her. A series of contemporary interiors done in mixed media using wood bark, acrylics and collage were both intriguing and precise.

Shazia has been through the rigours required of a miniaturist but retains an innovative sensitivity which is essential if she is to grow as a painter of her time. Treading a difficult tightrope of artistic skills and intention, she is grappling with the whole



bine tradition with a more contemporary idiom. Shazia Sikander exhibited 35 works in a variety of mediums – paper, board and 'wasli,' which is the traditional miniature surface. The paintings included portraits in the Persian style, screen-printed calligraphic works, drawings in 'siyahqalam' and mixed media works which include collage.

The traditional paintings not only demonstrated the high level of skill that this young painter has achieved, but was also evidence of an intelligent and discriminating mind that is able to lend a cer-

question of the relevance of tradition.

This exhibition was well-suited to its venue, partly because the scale of the paintings made them easy to display even on small walls, and also because it raised questions about the conflict of tradition and modernity in culture. Many visitors to Shazia Sikander's exhibition were Pakistanis living in Washington who may have found some of their concerns reflected in her work. As a painter who is both thoughtful and demanding of her work, Shazia's first solo show is a significant start. ■