

LITBAS

INTERNATIONAL

VOLUME 30 ISSUE 1, 2017, RS. 600

THE EDIT
FASHION
S/S

KAMI SID
REVOLUTIONARY
RANI

AJAZ SHEIKH
DUBAI'S TOP GUN

MOLLY CRABAPPLE
ARTIST & REBEL

**BEGUM
SULTANS**

HOW TO SURVIVE A LIT FEST



art

TOUCH WITH
YOUR EYES
IN THE ROSE
GARDEN OF
LOVE

SHAHZIA SIKANDER

by Vivek Gupta



L and R: stills from 'Disruption as Rapture' (2016)
 Original music by Du Yun featuring Ali Sethi on voice
 HD video animation with 7:1 surround sound; 10:07 minutes
 Commissioned for Permanent Installation, South Asia Art Galleries, Philadelphia Museum of Art
 Photo credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

Shahzia Sikander experiments with light, scale and touch in her recent animation inspired by a Deccan manuscript at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and her glass installations on Princeton University's campus. Vivek Gupta, a historian of Islamic and South Asian art, reviews the artist's latest works.

Shahzia Sikander's animation in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's recently reopened South Asia galleries takes visitors for a walk in a rose garden of love. It teaches viewers how to touch the pages of an illustrated manuscript with their eyes – a gaze with haptic abilities. Sikander is a trained Indo-Persian miniaturist and made 'Disruption as Rapture' in response to the Philadelphia Museum's *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* (Rose Garden of Love), an eighteenth-century illustrated manuscript produced in the peninsular Deccan region of India. The text of this book is in neither Persian nor Arabic, rather it is poetry written in the Central Indian, Dakani vernacular. It derives from a tradition of the archetypal Sufi love story (*premakhyān*) told in a more Sanskritized



Photo credit: Matthias Ziegler

چلیا تہجوانی چیم بلیط
 جوعاشق کینا کجمازانک صفا
 قضا لہ یکن کھان کین بون
 جمہاز انکون سب پارینچی بلا

A page from *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* (Rose Garden of Love) (1743); Artist unknown
 Opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper; leather binding with embossed gilding
 14 x 10 x 2 3/8 inches; Photo credit: The Philip S. Collins Collection, gift of Mrs. Philip S. Collins in memory of her husband, 1945 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art



A still from 'Disruption as Rapture' (2016)
 Original music by Du Yun featuring Ali Sethi on voice
 HD video animation with 7:1 surround sound; 10:07 minutes
 Commissioned for Permanent Installation, South Asia Art Galleries, Philadelphia Museum of Art
 Photo credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art



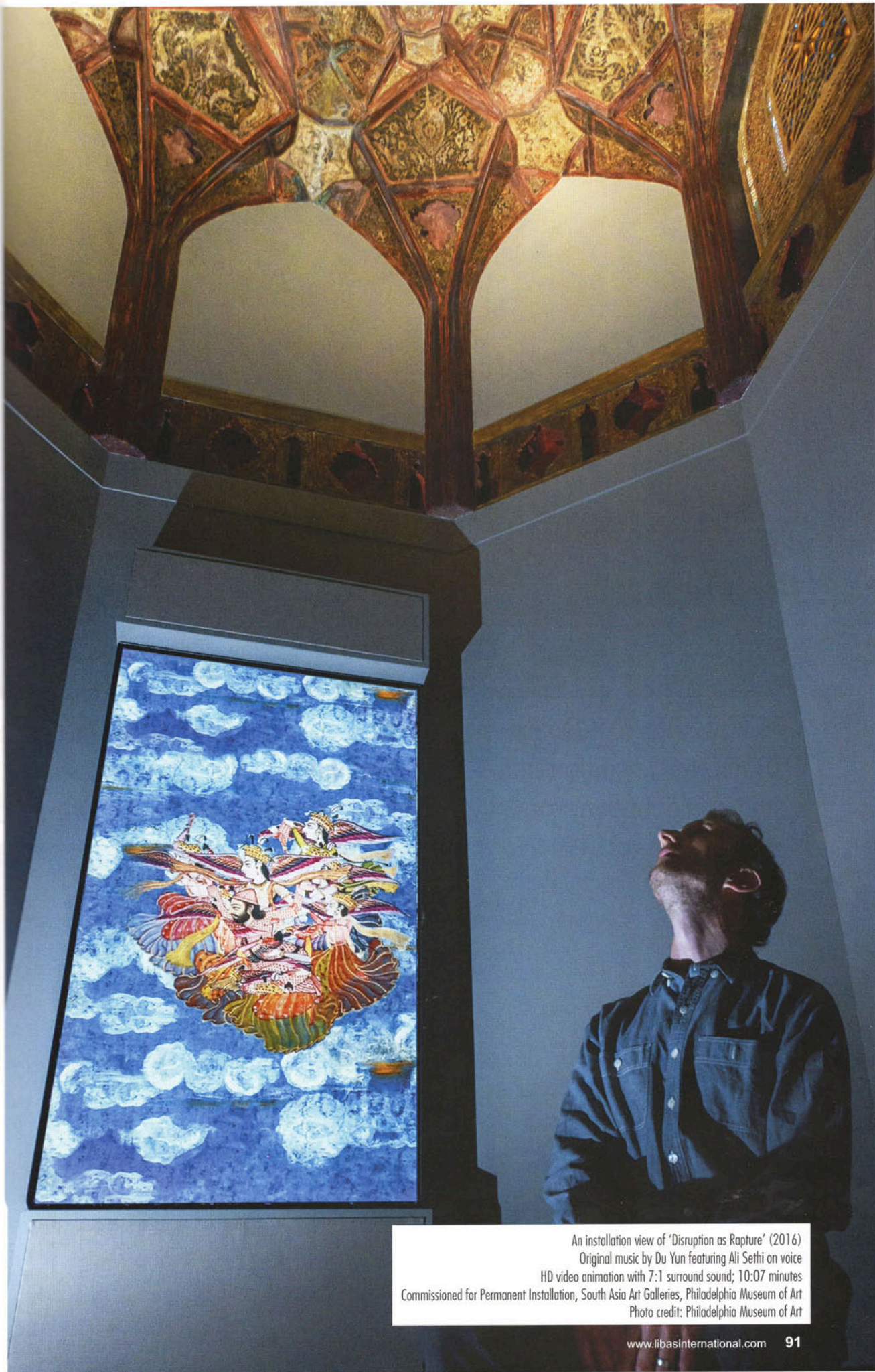
'Disruption as Rapture' makes the surfaces of the pages of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* come alive – a sense of life so often lost in historical works of art. The jewels of a king, which are often made three-dimensional in miniature painting, start to flicker. They eventually fill the screen like fireflies

idiom called Avadhi, the earliest of which was written in 1379. This genre blends tropes from Sufi love (*'ishq*) and Hindu devotion (*bhakti*) in both Islamic and Indic vocabularies. Because of its heterogeneous qualities, not many can decipher the text of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* let alone grasp the story's many layers.

'Disruption as Rapture', however, brings one into the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq's* paintings. It makes the surfaces of the pages of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* come alive – a sense of life so often lost in historical works of art and architecture. The jewels of a king, which are often made three-dimensional in miniature painting, start to flicker. They eventually fill the screen like fireflies. The intimacy of sitting with the book, following its narrative and sensing the awe of a king's attire becomes realised through animation. As Sikander's work interprets a book from centuries ago it instructs us to reconsider a linear flow from past to present.

The Philadelphia curators have also elegantly woven together a manuscript, architecture and an artist in this installation. The space is largely defined by a small room rebuilt from seventeenth-century Safavid Iran. Numerous architects and artists from Iran travelled across the Indian Ocean to the Deccan where the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* was made. The plan of the installation makes that history felt. Outside of the Safavid room on the sides of its entryway are the original manuscript of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, left open to a painting, and a facsimile. The curators invite us to sit and page through the facsimile. While the texture of the painted surface is lost in this facsimile, the closeness to the book is preserved. Sikander's animation illuminates the interior of the vaulted room where visitors can view the work and contemplate revisiting the manuscript and its facsimile.

It has been nearly two decades since Sikander's "Acts of Balance" held at the Whitney Museum of Art's Phillip Morris Building in 2000 and her early career retrospective "Directions: Shahzia Sikander" at the Hirshhorn Museum in 1999. Even in 2000 Sikander experimented with wall paintings working outside of the miniature format. Continuing to push how the picture plane of a miniature can be inhabited, Sikander has, since 2000, created large-scale drawn animations ('Intimacy', 2001; 'Nemesis', 2002; SpiNN, 2003; 'Pursuit Curve', 2004; 'Dissonance to Detour', 2005; 'The Last Post', 2010; 'Parallax', 2013; 'Pivot', 2013; 'Singing Suns', 2016), an outdoor installation ('Gopi-Contagion', 2015) and most recently a group of glass windows and iridescent mosaics for the Princeton University campus. Even while her medium changes, light and scale, two notions that are fundamental to the miniaturist, remain integral.



An installation view of 'Disruption as Rapture' (2016)
Original music by Du Yun featuring Ali Sethi on voice
HD video animation with 7:1 surround sound; 10:07 minutes
Commissioned for Permanent Installation, South Asia Art Galleries, Philadelphia Museum of Art
Photo credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art



'Ecstasy as Sublime, Heart as Vector' (2016)
Glass, ceramic, marble; 2011.7 x 152.4 x 1.3 cm
Princeton University Permanent Installation
Photo courtesy of Shahzia Sikander Studio



'Gopi-Contagion' (2015)
Video installation
Photo credit: Ka-Man Tse for @TSqArts

Of Sikander's latest experiments with light and scale are her works for Princeton's new Economics Department building is a sixty-six-foot painting. For both commissions, Sikander collaborated with Franz Mayer



Of Sikander's latest experiments with light and scale are her works for Princeton University. The first of the two site-specific works for Princeton's new Economics Department building is a sixty-six-foot mosaic and the second is a twenty-five-foot multilayered glass painting. For both commissions Sikander collaborated with Franz Mayer of Munich, a German studio that is a leader in glass techniques. For instance, the image of the Buraq, the steed the Prophet Muhammad took on his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, is rendered in a dark glass that shifts with changing light, so as to suggest its flight and *mi'raj*. Such lively uses of glass bring Sikander into dialogue with what Matthew Saba has called the "aesthetics of '*ajab*'" vis-à-vis medieval 'Abbasid lusterware. For Saba, 'Abbasid lusterware displayed an instability that many medieval sources have referred to as *abu qalamun* or a kind of brocade or cloth with a light sheen. The instability of glass as a medium allows Sikander to create such lively renderings, such as the disappearing Buraq.

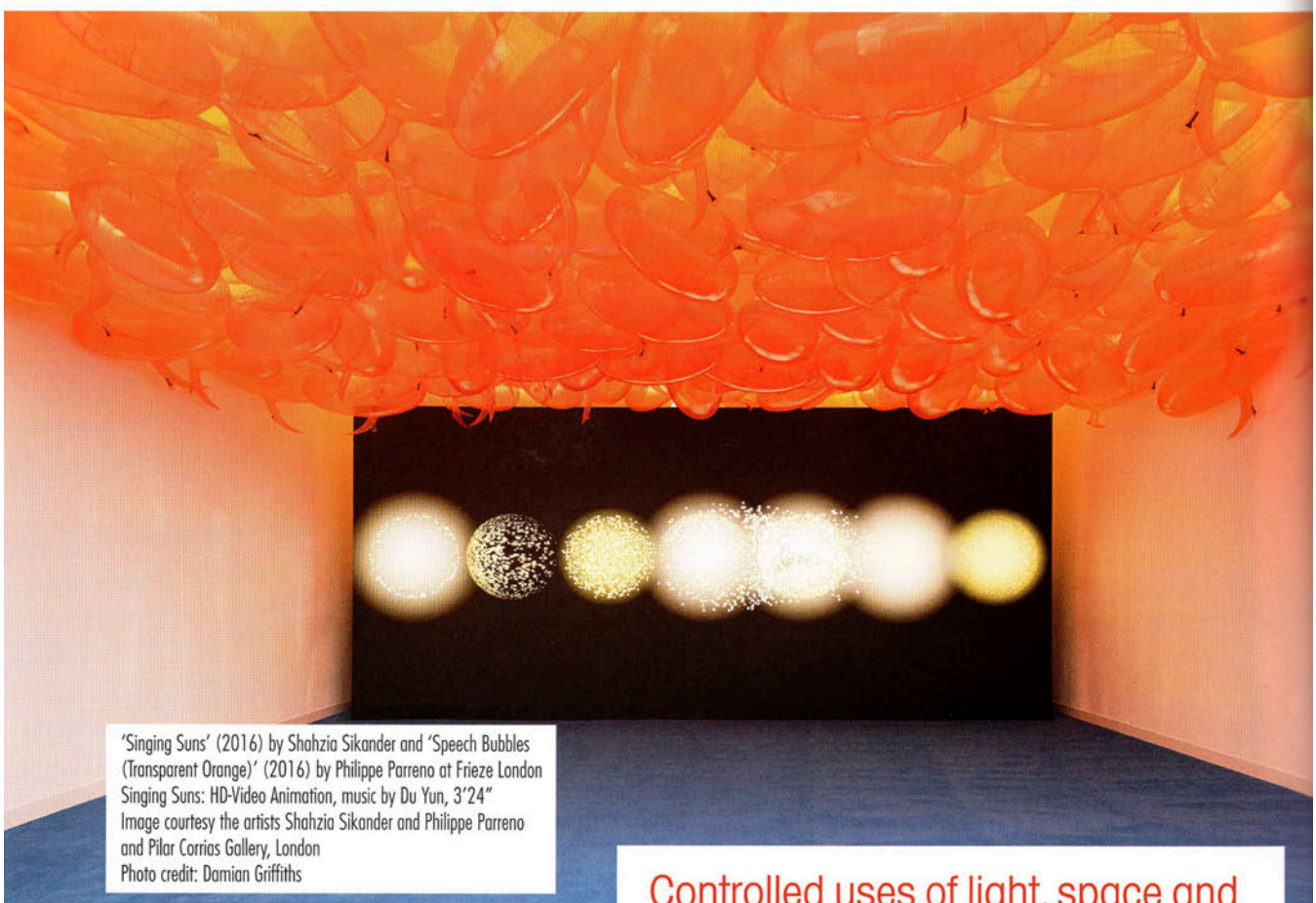
Such plays with light and scale also come across in 'Gopi-Contagion', a monumental work that was displayed each night for a month in October 2015 in Times Square from 11:57 pm to midnight. Swarming particles composed of *gopi* hair took over the heart of the city for a few minutes. The coiffure of a *gopi*, one of the Hindu lord Krishna's maidens, has become part of Sikander's idiom factoring prominently in her animation work 'Parallax' at the 2013 Sharjah Biennial. Since the *gopi* is a quintessentially feminine figure in Hindu bhakti who often acts in large groups of her girlfriends, Sikander's decision to abstract this form is laden with meaning. This work relates to other artists also playing with the notion of a particle such as Bharti Kher's use of *bindis*. The artist drenches Times Square with the feminine for a few minutes.



Princeton University. The first of the two site-specific works for mosaic and the second is a twenty-five-foot multilayered glass of Munich, a German studio that is a leader in glass techniques



'Quintuplet Effect' (2016)
Paint on glass, steel; 654.7 x 152.4 cm
Princeton University Permanent Installation
Photo courtesy of Shahzia Sikander Studio



'Singing Suns' (2016) by Shahzia Sikander and 'Speech Bubbles (Transparent Orange)' (2016) by Philippe Parreno at Frieze London
 Singing Suns: HD-Video Animation, music by Du Yun, 3'24"
 Image courtesy the artists Shahzia Sikander and Philippe Parreno and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London
 Photo credit: Damian Griffiths

Controlled uses of light, space and touch evoked by Sikander's latest works bring to mind the work of Gulam Mohammed Sheikh. As leading South Asian artists such as Sikander and Sheikh work within or respond to the miniature tradition, they also instruct us how to look at those works from the vantage point of today, essentially changing their meaning

And yet, the hair particles start to carry different meanings when they are dislocated from the *gopi's* body. They start to look like insects and birds taking flight. The swarms of *gopi* hair have contagious movements – becoming less about the feminine and shedding light on ideas of collective behavior. The luminous, moving lights of 'Gopi-Contagion' direct the gaze to crisscross the space of Times Square. To look up to the lights is a social act. Precisely where swarms of people gather, Sikander lifts a mirror to the city with 'Gopi-Contagion'. Such effects are only accomplished by bringing the work off the page and outside to inhabit the city.

Controlled uses of light, space and touch evoked by Sikander's latest works bring to mind the work of Gulam Mohammed Sheikh. A similar notion of being able to inhabit and touch the miniature came across clearly in his 'Balancing Act' shown at the >>216



'Balancing Act' by Gulam Mohammed Sheikh (2014)
 Kochi Biennale
 Photo credit: Vivek Gupta

<94 TOUCH WITH YOUR EYES IN THE ROSE GARDEN OF LOVE SHAHZIA SIKANDER

2014 Kochi Biennale. 'Balancing Act' was a carnival-esque sculptural installation within the central public Vasco Da Gama Square that drew on eighteenth-century Rajput court painting to satirise key political "acrobats". Political figures from all over the world hovered as acrobats above the public – similarly addressing issues of collectivity as in 'Gopi-Contagion'. As leading South Asian artists such as Sikander and Sheikh work within or respond to the miniature tradition, they also instruct us how to look at those works from the vantage point of today, essentially changing their meaning.

Over the course of her career, Sikander continues to grow as an artist. Even though her medium may change (animation, glass, outdoor installation) the miniature remains her process. It is not that similar motifs are quoted in a variety of mediums. It is the poetics of the images that she creates, from the shimmer of an animated jewel to the instability of the vanishing Buraq.

<98 CELEBRATING THE RENAISSANCE MAN, JOHN LOCK- WOOD KIPLING

What were some of the challenges you faced while organising this exhibition?

One of the interesting challenges was working on someone who was so little known and who has been overshadowed by a world-renowned author in the figure of his son. Another challenge was having the time and the resources to ensure that scholarship from India and Pakistan was included in the exhibition and accompanying publication, and a diversity of views were voiced.

The exhibition also features a film, Lahore 2016, made by Professor Majid Khan and his associate director, Mujahed Butt from the National College of Arts. How did you collaborate with the NCA, Film & TV department to conceptualise the film on Kipling?

This commission is part of a yearlong project and the centrepiece of the show. As so much of Lockwood's work is architectural sculpture, it was important to give a sense of the city itself and to be able to capture the detail. Over the past year, it has been fascinating to work with Profes-

sor Majid and his colleagues as they filmed each site, and to storyboard the sequences as the exhibition developed.

Professor Khan and his team have created stunning panoramic cityscapes. Their use of drone footage has enhanced the film through breath-taking shots of key sites like the Museum and NCA, Aitchison College, the High Court, etc. It captures the beauty of the historic walled city and contextualises many of the works from Pakistan that we are showing alongside the film. We are showing the film as a large-scale projection to provide an immersive experience of the city. The film will become part of the V&A collection.

<116 ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GLASS AND GOLD

The man's enthusiasm for embellishment in all its forms is apparent as I look around. From the living room I step into an adjoining, smaller room that is divided into a richly stacked bar and a cluster of smart, black sofas. The chairs circling the counter of the bar have spindly, golden legs; the backs of their short, black seats are framed by curling leaf motifs in gold. They look like they will break into a trot and chase each other out of the room, rather like Cinderella's magically animated pumpkin-carriage (the fact that there also sits a decorative, silver pumpkin – complete with crisp, silver leaves and tendrils – on the coffee table in the living room only accentuates the unexpected fairy-tale feel that governs parts of the house). A shiny, bronzed sculpture of a nymph sits by itself in a wood-panelled niche next to the bar. Around the room are plaster nudes holding up white lampshades, coquettishly gripping the stands behind their backs. The statuary aspires to French classicism but comes off as more homely than elegant. Nonetheless, a general desire for the furniture to be decorative as well as functional is evident. And, Bhatti informs me, these are all replicas that he has had made in Lahore, by Lahore-based craftspeople and artists.

An unmistakably appropriated design ethos informs most of the interior. Outdoors, too, as I cast my eyes around the poolside, I am reminded simultaneously of Moroccan baths, European gardens and Arabian oases. An arbour pathway leads from the front porch to the open pool on one side of the house. The pool is tiled with mosaics in different shades of blue. It looks brilliant, buzzing – electrifying in the sun. To one side of the pool is another bar – spherical, done up in turquoise, with a glass dome. Date trees and wrought-iron lamp posts stand side by side around the pool as if illustrating an excited vision of a customised, multicultural paradise. A long, covered patio connects this example of overly imaginative landscaping with the living room inside. On this patio are two different arrangements for sitting and relaxing – one a set of pouffes and settees clothed in brightly patterned local fabrics, the other a tidy little square of white armchairs propped up by thin black bars.

These juxtapositions – minimalistic with folk, faux-classical with modern, eastern with western – speak not only of the hotchpotch of artistic influences on Bhatti himself (gleaned, one can imagine, over the course of his years of