

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

ART IN REVIEW; 'Playing With a Loaded Gun' -- 'Contemporary Art in Pakistan'

By **Holland Cotter**

Sept. 12, 2003

ApexArt

291 Church Street

TriBeCa

Through Oct. 4

A volatile, often violent piece of modern political history is examined with notable formal discretion by the 10 Pakistani-born artists in this show, organized by Atteqa Ali, a doctoral candidate in art history at the University of Texas at Austin.

Four of the artists, following an example set by Shahzia Sikander more than a decade ago, overhaul the conventions of traditional miniature painting. And if the results don't all have Ms. Sikander's combination of polish and imaginative breadth, they are still persuasive in giving an old form new content.

Reeta Saeed, for example, uses incisively brushed romantic images to refer to violence against women in Pakistan. Saira Wasim, who makes a striking contribution to the current show "The American Effect" at the Whitney Museum, addresses the same subject and expands the view to include international politics. Ambreen Butt and Imran Qureshi (who is also in the Whitney show), in different ways, adopt Mughal painting style, with its fantastic realism, to suggest a contemporary world assailed by weapons of mass deception on every side.

Similar ideas take other forms in photomontages by Rashid Rana that suggest the Vietnam-in-the-kitchen images of Martha Rosler; in a compact installation by Alia Hasan-Khan about the United States at war in Afghanistan; and in a multimedia piece by Risham Syed that includes a baby-size Pakistani shirt made from camouflage fabric.

Masooma Syed (the two artists are not related) distills a feminist take on physical beauty in delicate sculptures made of hair and fingernail clippings, as does Adeela Suleman with women's motorcycle helmets that turn bazaar souvenirs into queenly crowns.

Pakistan, like every other nation, may be on a crash course with destiny, but the wearers of Ms. Suleman's outlandishly funny headgear will at least meet their fate with flair.

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A version of this article appears in print on Sept. 12, 2003, Section E, Page 35 of the National edition with the headline: ART IN REVIEW; 'Playing With a Loaded Gun' -- 'Contemporary Art in Pakistan'