

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release

New Art from Pakistan



Murad Khan Mumtaz, *All Debts Public and Private* (2009), 6.25 x 2.75 in, opaque watercolor on dollar note

January 7 – February 20, 2010

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 7, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben is pleased to present an exciting group of emerging artists from Pakistan while also including distinguished professor and activist Lala Rukh (b. 1948, Lahore), whose pared down aesthetics have influenced many of the artists and historically anchor this exhibition.

Rather than subscribing to an avant-garde strategy of contesting the past, artists in South Asia are sensitive to their histories and traditions while simultaneously advocating the thrust towards modernity. For an artist working in Pakistan, the added current sociopolitical unrest forces the question of art's ability to respond to these external conditions.

Involved with women's rights from the '70s onwards, or, most recently, with the lawyers' movement, **Lala Rukh** resolves these tensions in her art through a politically informed formalism. Her works on display, for example, contain two newsprint images of equal size, both pasted side by side on graph paper. One depicts the Babri Mosque, which was destroyed in 1992 by Indian fundamentalists; the other shows a Hindu temple in Pakistan torn down in an act of reciprocal violence. Using a stark formal language of cancellation, Rukh blackened the images as if to sublimate the pain of these events.

Similarly, formal interventions to distill various concerns are being used by most of the artists in this exhibition. **Murad Khan Mumtaz** sublimates images of explosions, some executed on one dollar bills, through their execution in the miniature tradition, whereas **Noor Ali Chagani** extends the same into sculptural form with his deteriorated, slogan studded brick walls. Deconstructed into its various constituents - wasli paper, spatial configurations and painterly techniques - **Ayesha Jatoi** reinvests miniature painting through a more minimalist and analytical sensibility.

Nadia Khawaja, who works in a variety of media, approaches art making from an intimate and meditative position, while **Amna Hashmi** draws her consciously "silly" parallel worlds in a position of geographical and cultural distance to their *Manga* and *Art Nouveau* references. From a feminist

perspective, **Ismet Khawaja** addresses the viewer in her video "Look at me when I talk to you" with insistent urgency, whereas **Seema Nusrat** implies content through the use of men's belts to construct her bodily sculpture.

All of the works included allow for a multitude of readings while individual emphasis varies from one artist to the other, ranging from feminist to more overt political or formal concerns and in some cases eschewing them altogether. Although not encyclopedic in scale, this exhibition nevertheless offers to us an insight into the most current artistic production in Pakistan, while simultaneously highlighting some of its precedents.

In association with GreyNoise, Lahore.

Gallery hours: Tue-Sat, 10-6. For further information and visuals, please visit www.thomaserben.com or contact the gallery.

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