

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release

**Vinod Balak - Faiza Butt - Hasan Elahi - Anoka Faruquee - Koshal Hamal
Ehsan ul Haq - Sreshta Rit Premnath - Schandra Singh**

New Selections: South Asia

January 10 – February 11, 2012

Opening Reception: Tuesday, December 10, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben Gallery is pleased to present work by a selection of artists related to the larger South Asian field, whose wide variety of concerns, media, and practices have recently garnered our attention.



The meticulously rendered paintings and pastel drawings by **Vinod Balak** (b. 1982, Kerala, India) are excessive in terms of aesthetics as well as social norms. Constructing his social allegories in the tilted, flattened space of miniature painting, Balak's human and/or animal protagonists are rendered in - and surrounded by - a brash, synthetic palette and jarring patterns. Loud yet static, the classical compositions allow for the hedonist impulse of contemporary consumerism to be perceived on a more reflective level.

Balak received his BFA from The Government College of Fine Arts, Thrissur, Kerala (2007) and his MFA from the S.N. School of Fine Arts, Hyderabad (2009). His work was included in *Roots in the Air*, San Jose Museum of Art, CA (2011) and a solo-exhibition was held at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai (2010). He currently lives and works in Hyderabad.



Faiza Butt (b. 1973, Lahore, Pakistan) composes her midsize drawings from collages of journalistic, personal and advertising images, touching on issues of cross-cultural integration, including sex/gender, religion, and aesthetics. She works slowly, incrementally growing imagery through innumerable colored felt-tip-pen dots on Mylar, which are then exhibited backlit, akin to advertisements. At the core of her practice is the hybridization of media – for example, a meticulous handmade drawing resembles a coarse offset print of a photographic image, glowing in a public ad display.

Faiza Butt received her BFA from the National College of Arts (1993) and her MFA from the Slade School of Art (1999), both in London. Her work was exhibited in *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, Asia Society, New York (2009) as well as at venues in the UK, France, Hong Kong, Dubai, Pakistan, and India. Solo exhibitions include: Grosvenor Vadhwa Gallery, in London (2010) and at Art Dubai (2011); Rohtas Gallery, Lahore (2009, 2008, 1996); Green Cardamom, London (2008). She lives and works in London.



Hasan Elahi (b. 1972, Bangladesh) is perhaps best known for his ongoing FBI tracking project. Ten years ago, Elahi was detained by the FBI for suspicion of housing explosives in a Florida storage unit. After an exhaustive investigation, the agents were convinced of their error. To avoid future “complications,” Elahi has since documented every detail of his life by providing a real time map with financial data, communication records and transportation logs. In our exhibition, a photograph of airplane meals demonstrates his interest in the public and investigative value of an overwhelming amount of personal information.

Elahi is currently Associate Professor of Art at the University of Maryland as Director of Digital Cultures and Creativity. Over the past years, his work has been included in exhibitions at venues such as SITE Santa Fe, Centre Georges Pompidou, Sundance Film Festival, Kassel Kulturbahnhof, The Hermitage, and at the Venice Biennale.



The densely patterned, abstract paintings of **Anoka Faruquee** (b. 1972, Ann Arbor, MI) are composed of tripods and asterisks. Her chromatically graded, hand painted surfaces recall warped pixelated spaces, Islamic tile geometry, and abstract color-fields. Adhering to a diligently methodical process, Faruquee has supplanted spontaneity and dramatic gesture through controlled repetition, thus finding self-expression within the potential of geometric space.

Faruquee received her BA from Yale (1994) and her MFA from Tyler School of Art (1997). She attended the Whitney Independent Study Program, the Skowhegan School of Art, and the PS1 National Studio Program. Her work has been exhibited at Hosfelt Gallery, PS1, Max Protetch and Apexart, among others.



Koshal Hamal's (b. 1988, Mugu, Nepal) works are engaged in a synthesis of appropriation, combining Western art with the historical format of miniature painting. Working in oil, he copies Western art historical works (and their gilded frames), in diminutive size, onto larger scale primed canvases. He grants these works the specialness of singularity, while simultaneously reevaluating and taking ownership – conceptually as well as culturally – through the act of appropriation and miniaturization.

Hamal received his BFA from Beaconhouse National University, Lahore (2011) on a South Asia Foundation Scholarship. His graduating exhibition was reviewed by Atteqa Ali: “The star of the show is a Nepalese artist Koshal Hamal. [...] His paintings examine complicated concepts; however, Koshal does not reduce the significance of the form. Instead, his visually compelling technique is a kind of foil for heavy ideas. It’s a powerful trait found in the most interesting art made in Pakistan.” Hamal lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal.



Ehsan ul Haq's (b. 1983, Lahore, Pakistan) sculptures, installations and videos are carefully considered arrangements of simple elements like rubble, cinderblocks, furniture, houseplants, light bulbs and, occasionally, live animals. His work transcends the symbolic and avoids flippancy, creating empathic poetry from everyday objects, which he organizes into flawed systems. The photographs included in the show document studio installations. One features a donkey, whose ability to roam is hampered by a tethered weight; the other, a rooster tied by the ankle to a feed-covered floor, resulting in a perfect circle of empty floor space over time.

Ul Haq received his BFA from the Beacon House National University, Lahore (2008). Most notably, his work was included in *Resemble/Reassemble*, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi (2010) curated by Rashid Rana. He had solo shows with Rohtas (2009) and the National College of Art Gallery (2010), both in Lahore, and has been included in exhibitions in the UK, Pakistan, and Germany.



The primary concern of interdisciplinary artist **Sreshta Rit Premnath** (b. 1979, Bangalore, India) is how "political and economic power produces [an] unequal distribution of knowledge" and "how paradigms of power produce and constitute our relationship to objects and events in the world." *Rhizome* – a photo series of manipulated roots, linked together with crimped metal inserts - focuses on the ginger rhizome, a household cooking ingredient with locally well know medicinal uses in India and China, whose genes have been patented by pharmaceutical corporations for commercial use. The ways in which systems of knowledge have been, and continue to be colonized is an underlying theme.

Premnath, founder and editor of *Shifter Magazine*, is based in New York. He completed his BFA at The Cleveland Institute of Art (2003), his MFA at Bard College (2006), and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program (2008). Solo shows include: Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin (2011) and Gallery SKE, Bangalore (2004, 2008, 2010), which also presented his work at *Statements*, Art Basel (2010).



Schandra Singh's (b. 1977, Suffern, NY) saturated, large-scale oil paintings executed on linen, feature lounging tourists enclosed in their own watery paradise. Built of faceted shapes as if their muscles and fascia were exposed, her figures threaten to disintegrate into the surrounding, equally fractured pool water. Singh's work, incongruously full of buzz and anxiety, exposes an agitation resulting from the psychological, and subsequently political, implications of leisure in an era of global crisis.

Singh completed her BFA (1999) at the Rhode Island School of Design and went on to receive her MFA in Painting (2006) at Yale. She had solo exhibitions at Nature Morte, Berlin (2011), Bose Pacia, New York (2010), Galerie Bertrand & Gruner, Geneva (2008) and has shown internationally, most notably in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2010).

Gallery hours: Tue - Sat, 10-6.

For further information and visuals, please visit www.thomaserben.com or contact the gallery at 212-645.8701.

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