

PAKISTANI ARTISTS MAKE STRONG VISUAL STATEMENTS

Three Artists from Pakistan at Aicon Gallery, by Erin Goodwin Guerrero

Tradition, Technique and Technology, as a title, does little to prepare one for the surprising artistic statements of three Pakistani artists at the Aicon Gallery in Palo Alto. Rather than being three artists that explore any kind of unified theme, it is best to approach this exhibition as a three-person show. The media is varied, as is the content. It is helpful to know that the violent history of Pakistan, its struggles to reconcile the past and present, along with other radical oppositions in contemporary life is the stuff from which these artists take inspiration.

Aicon has long been a site where viewers could see contemporary art from India, so I was intrigued and anxious to see works from artists residing in Lahore and Karachi, Pakistan in this setting. I was not disappointed in the show.



Assembled Bondage by Adeela Suleman, 2008, made of chrome plated utensils and bathroom fixtures.

Adeela Suleman was born and schooled in Karachi at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. Her figurative sculptures are provocative in that they direct attention to the body. The forms she constructs grow out of the spine and become suggestions of rib cages, necks, heads and faces. For the most part we identify with them for their human proportions and contours although they become many other things as well. Suleman uses a rather limited repertoire of chrome-plated utensils and sink or shower drains, along with nuts and bolts to form her skeletal bodies.

Quddus Mirza, a Lahore artist and art critic comments in the catalogue that (at least in Pakistan) we can read the materials associated with the bathroom fixtures as related to the discovery of our bodies and their sensual pleasures in the bath, more than anything else. In the Western World, I am not sure that reading holds up. There is nothing warm or flesh-like in these metal constructions. I rather felt these skeletal forms to be like braces and cages that hold together the original or virginal form of a diminutive human-like creature. Some seem fetus-like in their spinal curve. Some are so intricate and lovely in the repetition of the flowery drain patterns that they recall the exotic deep-sea creatures one can only see in big aquariums. Finally, when I view the back of these spines, held together by unapologetic bolts that stick sharply, another inch out of each nut, I return to the thought of a surgical apparatus that holds together a fragile, crippled and perhaps abused body, probably female. Some of the titles support this interpretation.



Jokhio's *Point to be Noted* addresses our habits of stereotyping.

The delicate and perfect charcoal drawings of Ayaz Jokhio are presented in series. If a sequence of isolated objects have only their circular shape or pointed ends in common, Jokhio proves to us that we tend to look for commonalities, make assumptions and generalizations about the group, simply because of this one characteristic in common and the fact that we find them together. I certainly found myself trying to construct a scenario of related meanings from his series, *Point to be Noted*. Of course this survival tactic, probably outdated in contemporary social relations, is well known in psychology, and we often discover that we must fight against it. Jokhio intends us to question our first instincts.

Jokhio received his BFA from the National College of Arts in Lahore, where he lives and works.



And She Wondered by Fareeda Batool, 2008

Farida Batool is another graduate of the National College of Arts in Lahore. Her photographs seem to celebrate sensuality and gender liberation in a gritty urban setting, and to be upbeat and optimistic. Batool stages her images. Titles like *Love Letter to Lahore* – red lipstick kisses seen on top of shattered store window glass — and *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* — male and female feet seen intertwined on the shower floor — confirm a youthful zeal, sexual impetuosity and sense of invulnerability. Against the gray architecture and everyday activity of men in the street of an old city, a beautiful young woman in pink traditional dress skips high over her ribbons and flowing drapes. She appears to be absorbed in her own world and pleased with herself.

Batool uses lenticular plastic to encase her layered photographs and give each image movement. For the most part I found that element of her work unnecessary and excessive. However, in the bare truncated torso against a black field, entitled *And She Wondered*, the effects of the slight movement of the torso in this stark image worked well for me.

This show runs through August. Aicon Gallery www.aicongallery.com

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