

AICON GALLERY

Palo Alto, CA

SPECIALITY: South Asian Art

With bases in New York, London, and Palo Alto, CA Aicon Gallery is not just a showcase for art from the Indian subcontinent, but in its way, a forum for exposing South Asian expatriates to the thriving culture of their homeland. The gallery is the brainchild of Prajit and Projjal Dutta, a pair of brothers whose father ran a noted fine arts academy in New Delhi. Says Shona Dutta, the Palo Alto gallery's director (who is unrelated): "They grew up surrounded by artists coming in and out of their home, so their interest in the subject is far-reaching and deep-seated... They have an inherent love for it, and want to see it promoted as much as possible." The brothers started the venture online in 2001, and opened the New York space in 2002 (they're moving this fall to the Bowery). The Palo Alto gallery opened in 2004. Why Palo Alto? Because the affluent segment of the South Asian community in Northern California is centered toward South Bay, and the stately university town was accessible to both San Jose and San Francisco.

Considering its focus, Aicon shows a surprising range of voices: "artists from India and Pakistan, definitely, but also first-generation artists who live in the U.S., but were born in the motherland." The gallery's September exhibition is a Modernist group show which features some of the top names in Indian Modern art from the 50s, 60s, and 70s. In May, the gallery showed the work of Mayyur Kailash Gupta, an Indian sculptor who crafts lyrical heads atop stark, mystical stems.

Over the summer, the gallery showed a trio of young Pakistani artists—Farida Batool, Adeela Suleman and Ayaz Jokhio—who address issues of technology, tradition and even sexuality in diverse ways: Batool crafts eloquent lenticular photographs with ironic double meanings, as in the Shiva-like multi-armed girl jumping rope before a bombed-out street scene, Suleman constructs metallic sculptures from "things like shower drains, spatulas and spoons, to create organic, skeletal forms," Jokhio offers precise charcoal drawings of formally similar, contextually pointed objects, such as pens, screws and syringes. It would be provocative work in any context; coming from South Asia, the work seems startlingly cutting-edge.

Regarding their collecting base, Dutta observes: "The Indian contemporary art market is still a fledgling market. It hasn't broken through, so a lot of our collectors are of South Asian descent. People following the Chinese and Indian art markets see similarities between the two," she adds. "The Indian market is following in the same path, it's just ten years behind."



"NAI REESAN SHEHR LAHORE DIYAN," 2006, Farida Batool

LENTICULAR PRINT, 34" X 48" EDITION 5/7

PHOTO: AICON GALLERY, PALO ALTO