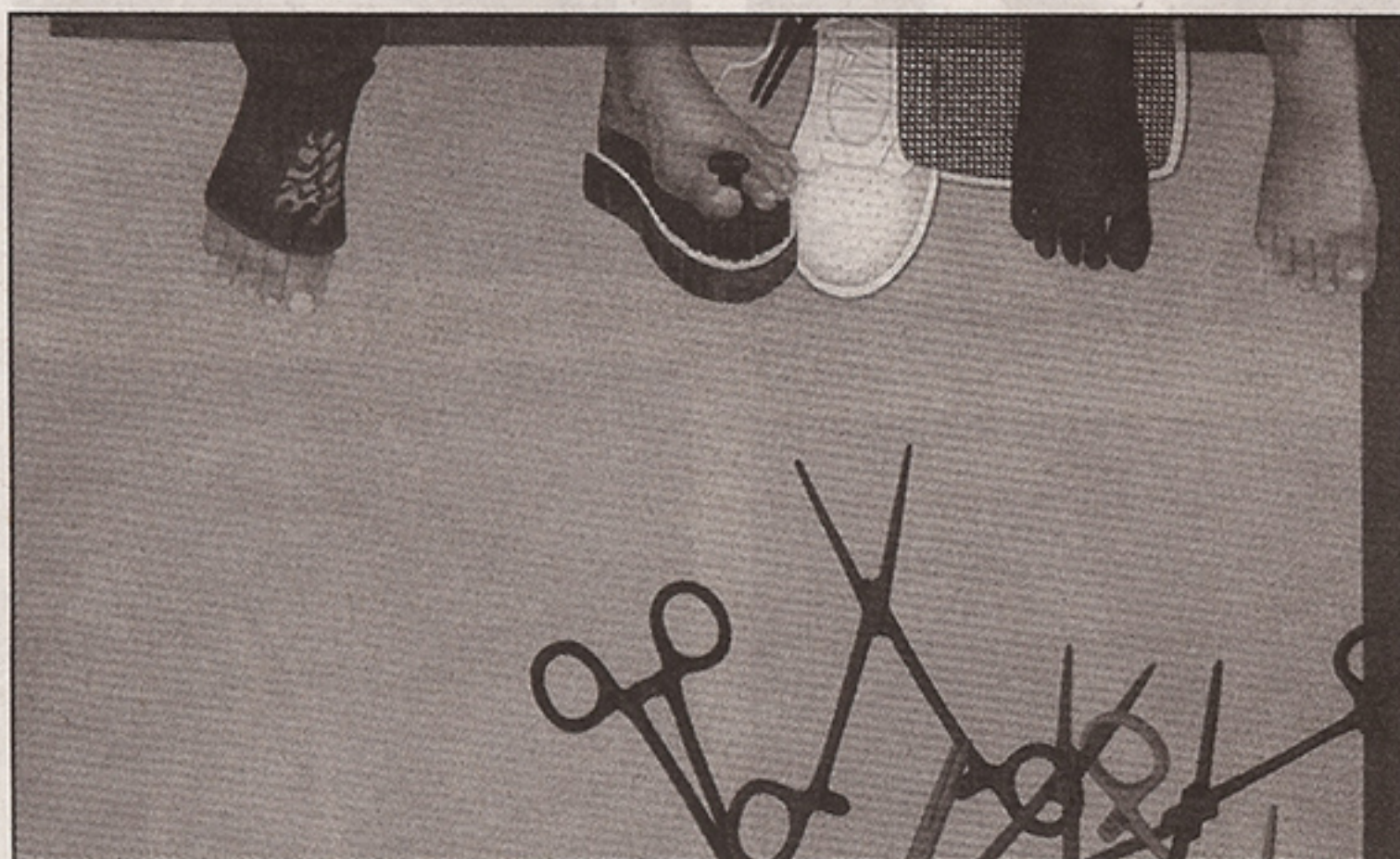
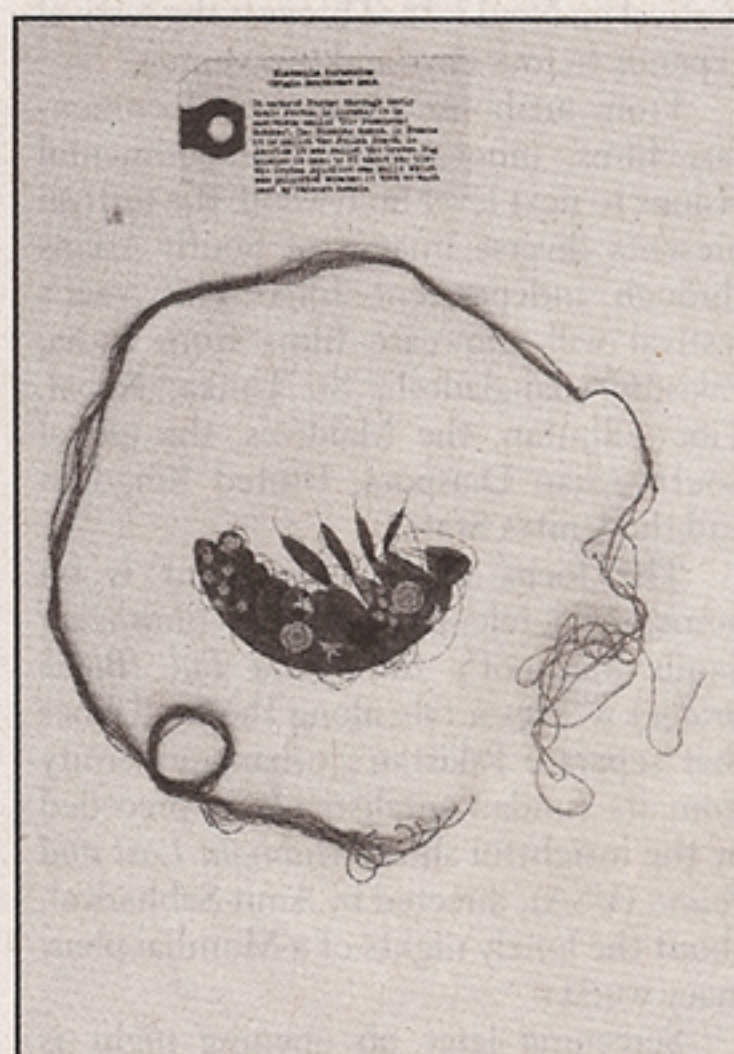


Quddus Mirza

# Making Sense(s) of Art



(Above) Attiya Shaukat's exhibit, "Flick of a Second," illustrates the feelings behind an unfortunate fall that left the artist wheelchair-bound. She uses color and symbolism to show after-effects of trauma and loss of sensation. (Right) Tazeen Qayyum's "Read Safety Directions Before Use" depicts the diminished value of human life.



## Pakistani exhibition explores humanity, fragility

Throughout the ages, art has evolved as a medium by which its creators are able to contradict, question, and explore the confounding dichotomies that make humanity so intriguing. Questions of human nature, underlying worth, emotion, and fragility have pervaded artists' thoughts endlessly, and in turn have given way to artwork that challenges its viewers.

Four Pakistani artists have done exactly that: Tazeen Qayyum, Attiya Shaukat, Aisha Hussain, and Rehana Mangi. Presented by Aicon Gallery, "Human Dichotomy" is a production of work that is, at the very least, an exploration of the human condition, and, at the most, an avenue for contemplation of one's own nature.

Qayyum explores the intricacies of humanity in a body of work that focuses on the repeated image of a cockroach. The insect serves as a symbol of dehumanization, and the diminished value of human life. The methodic and detached treatment of the cockroach communicates an attitude of homogenization that calls into question how political systems regard their multitudes of constituents.

From afar the patterned work is attractive; it is only when the viewer inspects each

image closely that they are faced with the unpleasant reality. The contrast between beauty and death is inescapable.

Shaukat delves into a far more individual and personal aspect of humanity. The artist's work explores how the human body and mind respond to physical trauma: the voyage from experiencing the trauma itself to the recovery from such an experience.

Shaukat suffered an eight-foot fall that left her wheelchair-bound. "To survive is to find some meaning in the suffering. I paint because I need to and my art is a primitive need for my treatment," Shaukat says. "I explored my inner self and want to heal myself of the trauma by expressing it fully. My work depicts different feelings and after-effects of trauma."

Feelings of pain, fear, bewilderment and resolve are illustrated by two distinctly opposite visuals: the mechanical and the organic. Images of cold and impersonal medical instruments are in sharp contrast with those of the organic and fragile vertebrae, creating a dichotomy between the human and inhuman.

Hussain's body of work is a compelling collection of dualities: personal and political, organic and structured, story-telling

and somehow illegible. Hussain's script begs to be read, but instead is understood as pattern work, texture, a foundation on which her images and graphics can find a place to sink in and be part of a whole.

The form recalls that of a book, yet the content is chaotic and not meant to be "read" in the most logical sense of the word. Hussain's intention is a commentary on any and all dualities; her oeuvre, in turn, is a physical tribute to the contradictions one may come across in all walks of life.

Mangi incorporates a very personal facet in her work: human hair, an aspect of the body that is exceptionally representative of life and personality. Mangi's utilization of this medium continuously calls the viewer to recognize the organic and life-infused nature of her medium, but the artist simultaneously applies the human product in gridded, linear, structural ways.

There is an apparent rift between life and mechanism, emotion and void, which shows in Mangi's collection. Emotions and humanness give way to an invasive sense of nihility and vacancy.

Showing through Nov. 29. Aicon Gallery, 535 Bryant St., Palo Alto. (650) 321-4900. [shona@aicongallery.com](mailto:shona@aicongallery.com). [www.aicongallery.com](http://www.aicongallery.com).