

# ICWA LETTERS

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LZK-7  
SOUTH ASIA

*Leena Z. Khan is an Institute Fellow studying the intersection of culture, customs, law and women's lives in Pakistan.*

## Part One Unveiling the Unspoken

By Leena Z. Khan

The mystery of the valley is immortal,  
It is known as the Subtle Female.  
The gateway of the Subtle Female  
Is the source of Heaven and Earth,  
Everlasting, endless, it appears to exist.  
Its usefulness comes with no effort.

- From *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu

FEBRUARY, 2002

CLIFTON, KARACHI, Pakistan—Many say that art is a reflection of society. I recently interviewed two Pakistani women artists whose work is both a critique and discourse on the society in which they live. I chose to write on two women artists belonging to two generations. One is a pioneer of feminist art in Pakistan; the other a young sculptor who is a recent college graduate. Each woman's work is bold, visually stimulating and intelligent. In her own way, each artist challenges cultural and religious mandates. Though they belong to two different generations, these women bear one thing in common — through art, they are calling for new social freedoms and alternative ways of living in the world. In both artists I sensed a changing consciousness that is struggling to emerge in Pakistani society. Progressive elements in the country are attempting to steer the country in the direction of moderation and tolerance. This is not easy when religious fundamentalism and orthodoxy continue to be menacing obstacles for the country's development.

I began my study on women and art in Pakistani by speaking with Zohra Hussain, owner and founder of Chawkundi Art, one of the most prestigious art galleries in Karachi. Since the gallery's opening in 1985, Zohra has displayed the works of some of the most prominent artists of the country. Over the years, Chawkundi Art has made a substantial contribution to the Karachi art scene by creating a viable and substantial market. Though not an artist herself, Zohra has a wealth of knowledge on Pakistani painters and the evolution of painting in the country.

I met Zohra through a good friend who has purchased a number of paintings from the gallery. She agreed to an interview at her gallery. Zohra is originally from Lucknow, India — a city famed for its etiquette, patronage of Urdu poetry, dance and classical music. The partition of India and Pakistan heralded an upheaval in the tradition-bound families of Lucknow such as Zohra's. Her family, along with thousands of others, migrated to Pakistan. Lucknavi culture was brought to Pakistan with the diaspora of families such as Zohra's. Zohra hosts Urdu *mushairas* (poetry symposiums) that can be traced back to the royal tradition of Mughal culture of North India. While she has made Karachi her home, Zohra embodies Lucknow in every way — from the silken sari she wore, to her genteel mannerisms, to the strength carried in her soft voice.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact time in Pakistan's 54-year history when

women artists began to emerge onto the art scene. Some say it was in the early 80s. In 1982 Pakistan's *Herald* Magazine (a widely-read monthly periodical) observed: "Some of the most promising painters at work in Pakistan today are women and not men."<sup>1</sup> Thirteen years later, *Herald* again pointed out that "women artists today have an edge over their male counterparts because they have the subject and perspective which can make art live again."<sup>2</sup>

Zohra says that male painters and sculptors ruled over the Pakistani artistic scene in the 50s and 60s. Dominated by such leading male artists as Sadequain, Chughtai, Gulgee, Ozzir Zuby, Shakir Ali, Jamil Naqsh, Mohammad Aye, Bashir Mirza and Ali Imam, art in Pakistan was a man's domain. All of that changed in the late 70s when women broke through the gender barrier.

From my discussion with Zohra I gathered that Pakistani women artists had tended to address social issues in their work, until they were jolted into action by General Zia ul Hag's military coup in 1977. Many women artists felt compelled to express their disgust over the repressive Hudood Ordinance (see LZK-2).

"Women artists had been painting in Pakistan since 1947 – when the country was still in its infancy. They only began making waves in art in the past 25 years," said Zohra. "I don't think there was ever a women's art movement. Individual women artists, poets and writers were vigorously responding in their own capacities to Zia's regime. The first all-women's art exhibition was held in 1982, thanks to Ali Imam and his Indus Gallery. Ali Imam gave space to artists such as Laila Shahzada, Lubna Agha,

Hajra Mansoor, Rabia Zuberi, Salima Hashmi, Riffat Alvi, Meher Afroz, Nahid Raza and others to put up their prints, paintings and sculpture." This opening was significant, since women artists for the first time were publicly recognized at a large-scale exhibition.

"Traditionally, art has not been considered very manly," Zohra said with amusement. She told me that more women than men go into the arts because of the cultural stigma. In addition, artists in Pakistan, as elsewhere, generally have to struggle to earn a living and support their families. Since men are still the breadwinners in many parts of Pakistan, they're reluctant to pursue art as a profession because of its poor financial returns.

As Zohra and I sat in her gallery's private lounge sipping tea, she spoke of her passion for collecting art and running the gallery. She holds a Pakistan law degree but has never practiced. After her husband's death she opened up Chawkundi Art. Zohra saw the need for a viable art market in Karachi. A number of prominent artists whom she personally knew encouraged her to go forward. Her single-minded involvement in the gallery has produced results. Over the years, Zohra has developed a reputation for selling the works of some of the biggest names in Pakistani art, male and female — Sadequain, Gulgee, Bashir Mirza, Ali Imam, Jamil Naqsh, Meher Afroz and Nahid Raza.

Zohra comes to the gallery every day. "I enjoy meeting the buyers and answering their questions. I don't want visitors to feel as if they have come to just any gallery," she says. Her presence makes a difference. Zohra gracefully acknowledges each visitor in the gallery with a subtle nod and warm smile. As we talked in the lounge, renowned ceramicist Sheherezade Alam came by the gallery to pay Zohra a visit. Sheherezade was a joy to meet. She filled the gallery with her radiant smile and energetic spirit. Accompanying the ceramicist was a young woman from Austria doing a thesis on Pakistani artists. We had a brief but illuminating conversation about women, art and politics. "So far there has not been a definitive women's-art movement in the country," Sheherezade said, in agreeing with Zohra. "There are so many dynamic women artists in Pakistan. It's a shame they are not more sup-



<sup>1</sup> *Herald*, June 1982.

<sup>2</sup> *Herald*, January 1994 at 286.

portive of each other. Unfortunately they go unappreciated in this country. When they go abroad, they suddenly thrive."

After Sheherezade left I asked Zohra what lay behind the secret of her success. "I don't settle for mediocrity," she said gently but firmly. "I have a highly trained and dedicated staff. There is no substitute for hard work and honesty. I maintain high standards in what I display at the gallery and when it comes to holding exhibitions. There is a great deal of interest in art these days in Karachi and many people *think* they are artists when they have never formally studied art. I get calls from *begums* [Urdu for rich housewives] from time to time telling me they have suddenly discovered they are artists. Some have actually *ordered* me to hold their exhibitions at the gallery! I find such demands inappropriate and in very bad taste. Many people say that I display only the work of big-name artists. The truth is that I display only art of high caliber."

As I walked through the gallery I noticed several nude paintings. I asked Zohra if she had ever encountered any threats from religious fanatics. "Luckily, I've never had a problem displaying nudes at the gallery. I have a reputation in the community such that if I display a nude painting, it will be in good taste. I have no interest in sensationalizing art," she said. Zohra told me that she has developed rapport even with her most conservative clients, who may not buy a nude painting but prefer to deal with Zohra because of her reputation. "Many clients have told me that the only reason they do not feel comfortable purchasing a nude is because they have servants in the house who may not understand or take the painting out of context," she explained.

While she has not been directly challenged by extremists, Zohra is highly cognizant of having to work within the confines of an Islamic society. "I have to be discreet when it comes to holding exhibitions containing any nudes. I recently organized an opening of a renowned artist who asked me for my opinion for the design of the invitation card. For the invitation cover he wanted to use one of his paintings — a nude tribal woman. I didn't think it was a good idea because I didn't know whose hands the invitation would get into. Some people, seeing a nude on the invitation card may not understand what this is all about. I knew he really wanted to have this particular painting on the cover. We ended up using the painting but added 'rights of admission reserved.' The opening was a huge success and there was no problem whatsoever," she said.

Toward the end of our conversation Zohra expressed a great deal of concern to me over the rise of religious intolerance in Karachi in recent years. "The targeted killings of religious minorities worries me," she said. "This is a dark time in Pakistan's history. I saw the same climate of intolerance during the Zia years. The main problem is that Musharraf is having to work with a cabinet



*Zohra Hussain, director and founder of Chawkundi Art, in her gallery*

that has underlying sympathies with the concept of jihad." As President Musharraf continues his dismantling of the extremist menace he inherited, Zohra — like many other Pakistanis — is questioning his ability to deliver his on his promise of restoring Mohammad Ali Jinnah's original Pakistan. There is also the fear of retaliation from the extremists. After all, a speech — no matter how visionary it may seem, does not in and of itself guarantee results.

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Through Zohra I met a Pakistani feminist painter, Naheed Raza. Nahid has been called one of the pioneers of Pakistani feminist art. For the past three decades she has been painting the life experiences of women seeking empowerment within a Pakistani cultural context.

Nahid was putting the final touches on a painting she called *Repeated Form* when I arrived at her home. "History continues to repeat itself," she said explaining the painting. "Despite the advances we have made, women continue to be treated as objects. Women artists are not common people. They have a mind within their mind, a heart within their heart, a soul within a soul. We think in a different perspective. We are like the sky and the sea. We inhale everything around us which we then reveal in our paintings."

Nahid's affinity for the sea became apparent as she spoke of taking long walks along the Karachi coastline, a few short miles from her home. "The sea is how we should live our lives. We should not set limits for ourselves or others. The sea is open, vast, dynamic and full



*Nahid Raza putting the final touches on "Repeated Form"*

of life. The sea has taught me lessons on how to live my own life."

This was perhaps one of the most unconventional interviews I have conducted, considering that I began my interview while Nahid painted. We spoke on a variety of topics, frequently digressing from art. "Artists are free thinkers and are not bound to any law, anything restricting free expression," she said. "By that I do not mean that we should go beyond the limits in a way that would create a bad example for your children, or if we begin to hurt others. Shortly after I was divorced and was living alone with my two children, people were very upset with me. I had friends, since nearly everyone dropped me, including my parents. Nobody supported me."

Shortly after the 1981 divorce, Nahid began painting — doors. "Doors are so symbolic — they stand for many things — transition, entering, leaving. Without the door in me, I would not have been able to do anything. The door gave me strength to go through my divorce and raise my children without anyone's support." Painting for Nahid was therapeutic, giving her freedom to express herself in an inhospitable society.

The 1980s were dark not only for Nahid but also for the women of Pakistan. Like thousands of other women, Nahid protested the repressive Hudood Ordinance. At Nahid's home I saw *Eve*, painted during the Zia years. *Eve*, a broken yet defiant woman, has the face of a high

priestess. With a single eye and the circle of eternity on her forehead, she is surrounded by shamanic symbols of religious rituals that undermine the rights of women. In the 80s, Nahid also began painting fragmented bodies of women — disjointed hands and feet, symbolizing bondage and servitude.

Nahid began her *Woman Series* shortly after her divorce. She painted with a number of issues in mind — divorce, prostitution, sale of women, motherhood, and the existence of platonic relationships between men and women. "Many of the problems in Pakistan stem from male dominance. This exists even among the most educated segments of society. I know educated couples where the husband goes out to dinner every Saturday night with his friends without his wife. But if his wife wants to do the same, she is told it's better for her to stay home with the children.

"When I first began the *Woman Series* I was painting broken, disintegrated women," Nahid continued. "I soon got tired of feeling sorry for myself and took control of my life." Reflecting her own emotional state, the women in Nahid's paintings became bolder and more confident. Celebrating motherhood, Nahid began painting pregnant nudes, directly linking human limbs and organs to the art of creation. Merging many influences, Nahid depicted maternal love projected in icons of Christianity, Hindu mythology and Mughal miniatures. Nahid's work also lamented the treatment of female children in Pakistani society, where the birth of a girl is mourned and the birth of a son is celebrated.

The 80s were marked by financial hardship, as Nahid struggled to make ends meet to support her children. "Money was in such short supply that I temporarily changed my medium from oil to crayons and water colors." Nahid took several jobs to support her family, from giving tutorials in English, Math and Urdu, to teaching art at various schools.

Raising a family as a single mother is not easy under



*Pakistani feminist artist Nahid Raza in her home*

any circumstances. This reality was compounded for Nahid due to cultural taboos surrounding divorce in Pakistani society. Despite the lack of support from friends and family for taking the decision to leave her husband, Nahid developed a resilience that became a driving force in her work as an artist. She produced some of her best work after 1981, including her renowned *Strength, Light and Service*, *Woman Series*, *Strength and Sorrow*, and *Responsibilities*.

Being a single mother provided Nahid a time for self-reflection and introspection. Nahid began visiting the ancient Chawkundi tombs for inspiration. About a half-hour drive from Karachi, the tombs date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Nahid remembers driving to the tombs in her second-hand car every day for over three months. She took her children with her, allowing them play among the ornately-carved tombstones. "I painted there day and night. I made over 200 drawings and paintings of the tombs. What inspired me were the floral reliefs and artifacts," she said. Despite the scorching heat of the unsheltered graveyard, Nahid returned week after week. Her Chawkundi-inspired paintings captured the spirit of the tombs of Sindh Province through her bold use of cerulean blue, turquoise, burnt sienna and amber. Nahid's *Chawkundi Series*, exhibited at the Indus Gallery in 1983, was a milestone in her career.

My curiosity was piqued after hearing Nahid speak of the tombs and seeing photos of her paintings. I hired a driver to take me to them. I arrived shortly after an unexpected downpour, which had settled the dust of Karachi and its surrounding areas. Perhaps because of the rain, the earthen colors of the tombs seemed to have taken on a new life. It was easy to see why Nahid kept returning to this sacred place. The tombs seemed to cast a spell on me as I spent over an hour wandering through the mazelike grounds. I was reminded of being at the pyramids. Many of the graves were made of large slabs of rock stacked upon each other, forming obelisks and ziggurats. The *chowkidar* (caretaker) was extremely helpful in pointing out elaborate carvings of necklaces, bangles, crowns and daggers on the tombs, indicating the gender of the dead.

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Nahid has painted a number of nudes throughout her career, from the *Mohenjo-daro Dancer* in 1987 to her *Woman Series*. The women in her paintings are ordinary women confronted by betrayal, loneliness and secrets. They also carry with them strength, wisdom and lessons in survival.

Nahid faced the most difficulty in conservative art circles when it came to her paintings of nude women. "I have always painted from a woman's perspective. It's a very difficult situation in Pakistan, where there is no support structure for artists. The majority of people don't understand why I paint. I used to paint a lot of nudes. For some exhibitions I was told not to paint nudes. When I am painting, I don't think I am painting a nude or a



*Oblong pyramid stone grave at Chawkundi Tombs*



*Floral relief on grave; necklace indicates that a woman is buried here*

clothed woman. I paint forms with color. Nudity is in your eyes. So it is rather difficult to paint nudes in Pakistan. Here most people look at a woman as an object. I am anti-*mullah*. They think this is about a woman's body, but it about an artist's expression. Here women think that a woman is only for bed. That's why these *mullahs* look at women in the wrong way and believe that she should be covered at all times," Nahid said passionately.

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Nahid has lived in Karachi most of her life. She grew up in various small towns in Sindh, moving to wherever her father's job took the family. Her father's job as a journalist was not always financially rewarding or secure. "We didn't have a lot of money because my father was too honest. My mother often complained that we would never have enough money because anytime my father faced corruption or dishonesty at the workplace he would quit his job." Nahid's family finally settled in Nazimabad – a middle-class suburb of Karachi. Nahid remembers trying to persuade her mother to let her enroll in Mina Art School, just a few lanes away from their home. Her persistence paid off. She can still remember the day when her mother untied the kerchief containing the weekly grocery money to pay her enrollment fees.

Today she runs *Studio Art*, her own private art academy. Earlier this year, she opened *Weavers* — an outlet for hand-woven *khaddar* woven by her students at the art school. Part of the proceeds go back to the students. "I have not opened this shop to earn a profit, since there is not much money to be made in *khaddar* sales. I am doing this to promote the craft and to encourage my students to keep the tradition alive."

#### DISPLAY OF COLORFUL KHADDAR FOUND AT WEAVERS

Currently Nahid is preparing for an international women's exhibition being held in the United Arab Emirate of Sharjah in March. Although she is looking forward to meeting artists from other countries, she is also somewhat reluctant. "I've been told by the director of the exhibition to 'cover up my women'", she said disdainfully. "They have told me that my nudes 'shouldn't look nude'. I wrote the director of the exhibition and asked her, since she knew I painted nudes, why I had been invited to participate. Consciously, I cannot cover my women. Unconsciously, I can paint a clothed woman, but if I am told *not* to paint a nude, then I have a problem. Painting is a natural phenomenon for me. I cannot push myself to paint." Not wanting to offend the organizers of the exhibition, Nahid has reluctantly agreed to tone down a painting already in the works for the showing. "I am painting a woman's figure; if they don't like it, then that's too bad," she said with some resignation.

Nahid has exhibited abroad, including countries like the U.S., Germany, Japan and Bangladesh. Nahid's first one-woman show took place at the Castle Zeilitzheim in



*Nahid Raza's "The Emerging Light" currently on display at the Art Gallery in Karachi as part of a two-week exhibition of painting by women artist.*

Germany. From there she traveled to Berlin, where her work was exhibited under the auspices of the German-funded National Geographical Society. "God has given me chances so many times. I was able to go abroad and see so many other artists' work. Really, creation and creativity has no limits."

Despite being ostracized by society and family, Nahid is a confident and resilient woman. The warm glow of colors in her work is a reflection of her personality. Her large body of work has made a vital contribution to feminist thinking in Pakistan, challenging patriarchal norms and gender roles. Nahid's pregnant nudes are a constant reminder to society of its responsibility to its women. A self-proclaimed nonconformist, Nahid says she will continue to celebrate womanhood and question cultural norms, religious mandates and taboo subjects as long as she continues to paint. Perhaps Nahid's women in her paintings mirror the contradictions in Pakistani society, where a woman can be a high-court judge but can also be ostracized if she is divorced; where a woman can be the president of a company but is still expected to fulfill all her domestic roles as wife and mother; where a woman can be prime minister but should not divorce her husband found guilty of corruption and high crimes. Nahid's work exposes such hypocrisies as she continues to work within her own cultural parameters.

It seemed to me that I had known Nahid all my life. We established a comfortable rapport the first time we met and ended up speaking for several hours without even once looking at our watches. "I hope you'll stay in touch even though this interview is over," she said as I was leaving. Something told me this would be a lifetime friendship.

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A good friend of mine who is a professor at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi invited me to view the final-year presentations of its graduating

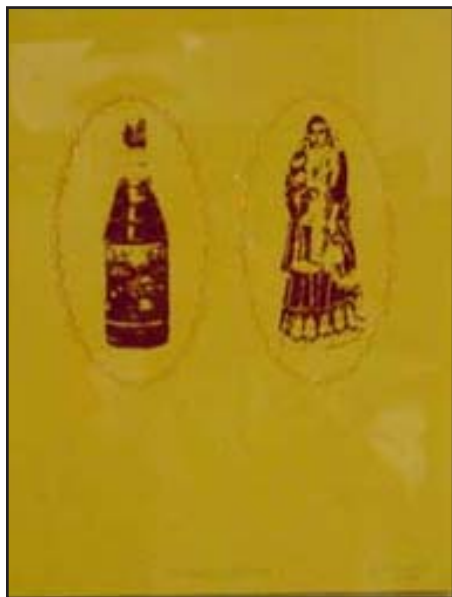
students. I spent the better part of one cool and pleasant morning strolling through the galleries where the final projects were on display. One installation left a lasting impression on me — a creation by 22-year-old budding artist Aysha Adil. The theme of the installation was marriage. But the overall picture was hardly a bed of roses.

After a walk-through of the installation, my friend introduced me to Aysha, who happened to be at the college that day. Aysha had just gone through the graduation ceremony and received her diploma in fine arts with a major in sculpture. Aysha's installation forces the viewer to confront what she calls 'the packaging and commercialization of the Pakistani bride.' "In this society marriage is a girl's greatest phenomenon in her life. From the day she is born, she is taught to believe that the sole purpose in her life is marriage. That is all she has to look forward to," Aysha explained.

In *Rooh Afza* (a sweet eastern drink) and *Shahi Mewa* (Urdu for royal fruit, also slang for 'babe') Aysha depicts the Pakistani bride as a consumer product. "Like *rooh afza* and *paan masala* [spices used in *paan* or betel leaf; *paan* is typically eaten after a meal] brides in Pakistan are supposed to be sweet and nice – sort of like a packaged product." *Shahi Mewa* is reminiscent of Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe, which forces the viewer to reflect on the subject through its use of repetition.

In *Aap kee pasand, hamaree pasand*, Aysha uses iron casting to mock the concept of arranged marriages. In this piece women are depicted as *bangan* (Urdu for egg-plant). "The selection process of a bride in an arranged marriage is a lot like selecting a *bangan* for cooking. The slightest difference of shape, color, size makes all the difference on which *bangan* will make the best curry," she said sarcastically.

In a similar vein, *Orange Glazed Duck* draws a paral-



"Rooh Afza" (An Eastern Drink)



"Orange Glazed Duck"

lel between garnishing a duck and decorating a bride.

While Aysha may be too young to remember the Zia years, she can see the effects of the brutal regime, particularly in the growing number of *burqa*-clad women attending right-wing Islamist schools in Karachi. The most glaring example of such a school is Al-Huda, run by Dr. Farhat Hashmi. The Saudi-funded, Karachi-based school for women has attracted thousands of individuals who mostly belong to the middle and upper class.

Although I have not been to the school myself, I have heard many women speak of the classes held at Al-Huda. I've heard some women praise the school for making the *Qur'an* understandable and applicable to modern-day times. Others vehemently criticize the school for subjugating women, reinforcing gender stereotypes and for its rigid interpretation of the *Qur'an*. Such classes, called *tafseer-e-Qur'an* (interpretation of *Qur'an*) are held on a weekly basis in the middle of a congested shopping area. Dr. Hashmi is also known for holding Islamic conferences for women at five-star hotels, such as the Marriott and Pearl Continental. Aysha told me that although she refuses to attend the lectures, her mother attends quite regularly. Women turn out by the thousands, making generous donations – all of which go to Al-Huda.

Aysha refers to the Al-Huda school as the "*burqa-cult*". In her painting called *Digitalization of the Veil*, Aysha sees the *burqa* more as a fashion statement than an Islamic dress symbolizing modesty. "I remember waiting in the lobby of the Pearl Continental for my mother to come out of one of Dr. Hashmi's lecture. All of a sudden the doors from the conference hall flung open and hundreds of women wearing *hijab* (head-scarf) began pouring out. Nearly every woman had a mobile phone in her hand and was getting into their chauffeur-driven cars. I wouldn't be surprised if their next stop was a shopping mall." Aysha sees the *hijab* as an artificial status symbol.

She criticized Farhat Hashmi for giving lectures to rich women living in Clifton and Defense [posh Karachi neighborhoods] and not reaching out to women in less affluent areas. "She is not helping women achieve equality with men, but is taking them back several hundred years. Even members of my own family have been brainwashed," Aysha remarked.

Aysha explained that her family has been involved with textiles for several generations. She learned how to sew bridal dresses by watching the women in her family. Not satisfied with simply sewing women's clothing for commercial purposes, Aysha rebelled and opted for a career in the arts. She was drawn to art school because she felt that a career in bridal-dress sewing would have deprived her of her creativity. She told me that at first her parents thought she had gone mad. "Now they have just gotten used to me and don't say much."

Aysha led me to a plastic model of a woman wearing a *gharara* (wedding dress) — with an ironic twist. Instead of satin and silk — fabrics typically used for wedding dresses, Aysha used *ghara* — a cheap vinyl material used to line the seats of buses and rickshaws. "I purposely used the cheapest material available in the market to



"Intel Inside" — Aysha mocking the 'burqa cult'

make the wedding dress," she said making her point.

Across from the bride in vinyl is her chilling *Fulfillment*. The mannequin bride has a dazed and vapid look, devoid of any emotion. "This is what a bride is expected to look like," said Aysha. Further inspection shows that the bride's heart has been sliced open and her sexual organs exposed. Aysha had covered the exposed heart in *warq*, or the edible silver leaf used to garnish desserts. In *Fulfillment* was the artist making a statement, or warning the viewer?

Finally, in *Ear Sequence*, the artist used locks and keys to challenge the way women are decorated as ornaments. Aysha explained that the absurd amount of jewelry a woman is expected to wear on her wedding is like wearing a lock and key. "Earrings are symbolic of ownership of a woman. After her marriage, she becomes someone's property."

The young artist has voiced many of the concerns I have heard young Pakistanis articulate to me on the subject of marriage. I have heard countless women tell me of the demands potential suitors make on the bride's family. One middle-class woman told me that her marriage was called off by the groom's family because her parents could not live up to their demand of a providing their son with a new car and apartment.

I could relate to the pressures of marriage on Pakistani women, whether they live in the west or here. A number of people have told me that I would be much better off married. This is not surprising in a country where it is uncommon for single women to live alone. Many "concerned" people have told me that being married is a necessary and vital aspect of life. Just



"Fulfillment"



recently, I purchased some cane furniture for my new flat. After the furniture was nicely arranged in my living room and study, the deliveryman asked me if I lived alone. When I replied yes, he told me “you young people wait too long to get married. I was married when I was sixteen. In Islam marriage is an absolute must!” I couldn’t think of anything to say, so I just smiled and thanked him for his advice.

I asked Aysha where she would like to be ten years from now. “It’s hard to say,” she replied. “It’s highly competitive to get good teaching positions. I wouldn’t mind teaching at Indus some day. I hope to hold an exhibition soon in a Karachi gallery like *Canvas*, which is giving young artists a chance to show their work. I’ve also thought about moving to Dubai, where some of my friends have gone after graduating. I hear there is a growing art community there. I still have so much to learn. I just hope I can find a job soon.”

In a word, Aysha’s installation was riveting. The viewer could not help but question why outdated customs, rituals and traditions are still being practiced today. By all accounts, Aysha has made the right career choice. If her future work is indicative of her final presentation at Indus, this young artist will be a force to be reckoned with.

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While there still may not be a recognized and definable women’s art movement in Pakistan, women artists are making their voices heard on an individual level. I feel extremely privileged to have heard personal accounts from these dynamic, forward-thinking women. Nahid Raza has been a crucial influence on feminist art and thinking in Pakistan, whose work has undoubtedly influenced the younger generation of emerging artists like Aysha Adil. What impressed me most about Nahid and Aysha was their unapologetic and bold defiance of societal norms. Though they belong to two different generations, both artists in their unique ways are exploring sen-



The young artist in front of “Shahi Mewa” (A Royal Fruit)

sitive issues faced by women in Pakistan.

Twenty-five years after General Zia’s conservative coup, Pakistan today is a far cry from the secular philosophy espoused by its founding father, the Quaid-e-Azam<sup>3</sup> — Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Will the country undergo the *ijtehad* (Arabic for social change) these artists are calling for? Perhaps Nahid said it best: “In order for a society to progress, it must continuously find new ways of looking at itself with honesty and self-criticism. We should not be afraid to look away, ever if the reflection in the mirror is ugly.” □

<sup>3</sup> Quaid-e-Azam – Urdu for ‘great leader’



## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

### Fellows and Their Activities

#### **Wendy Call** (May 2000 - 2002) • **MEXICO**

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

#### **Martha Farnelo** (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

#### **Curt Gabrielson** (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

#### **Peter Keller** (March 2000 - 2002) • **CHILE**

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

#### **Leena Khan** (April 2001-2003) • **PAKISTAN**

A U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement in Pakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

#### **Andrew D. Rice** (May 2002 - 2004) • **UGANDA**

A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew will be spending two years in Uganda, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

#### **James G. Workman** (January 2002 - 2004) • **Southern Africa**

A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his six years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

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