

LIST OF WORKS

1. HAMRA ABBAS

Battle Scenes, 2006. Computer generated animation on DVD.

2. KHADIM ALI

- a. *Untitled*, 2007. Opaque watercolour with silver leaf on wasli paper; 30.3 x 21.5cm.
- b. *Untitled*, 2007. Opaque watercolour with silver leaf on wasli paper; 30.3 x 21.5cm.
- c. *Untitled*, 2007. Opaque watercolour with silver leaf on wasli paper; 30.3 x 21.5cm.
- d. *Absent Kitchen*, 2006. Opaque watercolour with silver leaf on wasli paper.

3. HENNA NADEEM

- a. *Summit*, 2000. Paper collage; approx 26.5 x 21.5cm.
- b. *Waterfall*, 2000. Paper collage; approx 31 x 24cm.
- c. *Snow Melt*, 2000. Paper collage; 27.5 x 21cm.
- d. *Sunset*, 2000. Paper collage; 27.5 x 21cm.

4. HITESH NATALWALA

- a. *'It suddenly struck her, fate had taken a turn for the worse'*, 2007. Paper collage; 29.8 x 21.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney.
- b. *'There's always a price tag'*, 2007. Paper collage; 29.8 x 21.2cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney.
- c. *'Her life changed when she saw Monica sitting on Nat's knee'*, 2007. Paper collage; 29.8 x 21.2cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney.

5. TAZEEN QAYYUM

- a. *Test on a Small Area Before Use*, 2007. Installation: opaque watercolour on wasli paper with photo-transfer prints, stainless steel pins, cardboard boxes in display case; each display case: 50 x 35 x 5.5cm.
- b. *May Irritate Eyes*, 2007. Opaque watercolour on wasli paper with typed paper label; 37 x 41cm.

6. NUSRA LATIF QURESHI AND NAEEM RANA

- a. *Overleaf*, 2007. Digital Projection

7. SABEEN RAJA

- a. *I am not forgiven*, 2006. Opaque watercolour with gold on wasli paper; 14 x 11.5cm
- b. *Buraq (How I got my wings back)*, 2007. Opaque watercolour with gold on wasli paper; 16.25 x 12.5cm
- c. *"How do I tell my wife that I'm gay?"*, 2007. Opaque watercolour with gold on wasli paper; 7.5 x 15cm

8. NAEEM RANA

- a. *Jwani* 2006. Digital archival print; 88 x 90cm.
- b. *Keep everything nice 2006/2007*. Digital archival print; 88 x 132cm.
- c. *satisfaction guaranteed 2006*. Digital archival print; 88 x 90cm.

9. AMIN REHMAN

Black Hole, 2007. Vinyl lettering; dimensions variable.

10. SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR

Untitled (The Shadow of Murder Lay Upon Her Sleep), 2006. Dolls: calico, silk organza, cotton thread, watercolour, glass beads; each doll approx 100cm long. Collection of the artist, courtesy Murray White Room, Melbourne.
Paper cut-outs: paper and glitter; dimensions variable, approx 65 x 45cm each. Courtesy of Private Collections

11. ALIA TOOR

- a. *Aprons/Veils*, 2007. Soft transfer print on archival paper with cotton embroidery; 38 x 58cm.
- b. *99 Names of Amman*, 2004. Installation: dust masks with cotton embroidery; approx 60 x 50cm.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Tania Creighton for her enthusiastic support of the exhibition.
Many thanks also to Anneke Jaspers for her efficiency and warm professionalism.
Thanks also to Lisa Hayes, Emma White, Jay Ryves, Matt Cox for their contributions. UTS University Union, Artspace, Sydney, British Council and Canada Council assisted with artists' travel. Many thanks to SAVAC for their continued support of my curatorial projects. And warm thanks to the participating artists for the privilege of allowing me to work with them.

Design by Jay Ryves, Al Goh Future Classic. Printed by Finsbury.



UTS:GALLERY

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

HAMRA ABBAS

- Born Kuwait, United Arab Emirates 1976; lives Islamabad, Pakistan/Berlin, Germany.
- 2004 – Meisterschuler, Universitat der Kunst, Berlin, Germany.
- 2002 – MA (Honours) Visual Arts, National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.
- 1999 – BFA (Sculpture), National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 – *Hamra Abbas*, Gallerie Dorothea Konwiarz, Berlin, Germany.
- 2005 – *Lessons on Love*, Rohtas 2, Lahore, Pakistan;
I can't really explain what it's like where I live, but someday I'll take you there, The Phactory, New York, USA.
- 2002 – *Art and Ashes*, Gallery NCA, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – Istanbul Biennale, Turkey; Inaugural exhibition, National Art Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan; *Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, USA; *Divination B 22*, Hamburg, Germany and Paris, France; *Politics of Fear*, Albion Gallery, London, England.
- 2006 – *Desi Pop*, Maison Folie, Lille, France; *Beyond the Page*, Asia House, London; Manchester Art Gallery, England (catalogue); *Zones of Contact*, Biennale of Sydney, Australia (catalogue).
- 2005 – *Something Purple: Media Art from Pakistan*, Artist Commune, Hong Kong; *Layers of Time and Spaces*, ifa Gallery, Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany (catalogue); *KOVIDEO 1st Durban Video Festival*, South Africa; *13 Boxes*, Goliath Art Space, Brooklyn, NY, USA; *Beyond Borders*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai (catalogue).
- 2004 – *Art from Pakistan*, Houses of Parliament, London, England; *Aar Paar 3* Lahore and Karachi, Pakistan/Mumbai and Juhu, India; *Miniatures from Pakistan*, Fukuoka Museum of Asian Art, Japan (catalogue); *FreiRaume, FreiStil e.V.*, Berlin, Germany (catalogue); *Love It or Leave It*, 5th Cetinje Biennial, Cetinje (catalogue); *Along the X-Axis: Digital Art from India and Pakistan*, New Delhi, India; *Playing with a Loaded Gun*, APEX Art, New York and Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (catalogue).

KHADIM ALI

- Born Quetta, Pakistan 1978; lives Quetta, Pakistan.
- 2003 – BFA (Miniature Painting), National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.
- 2000 – Short courses in mural painting and calligraphy, Tehran University, Iran.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2005 – *Qaeda-e-Riyazi (Math Book)*, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan.
- 2004 – *Jash-e-Gull-e-Surkh (The Celebration of Red Tulips)*, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *SCAI SCAI Gallery*, Tokyo, Japan.
- 2006 – *Winds of Artists*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan; *The 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (catalogue); *Lila-Play: Contemporary Miniatures and New Art from South Asia*, Span Galleries, Melbourne (catalogue).
- 2004 – *Contemporary Miniature Paintings from Pakistan*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan (catalogue).

HENNA NADEEM

- Born Leeds, England 1966; lives London, England.
- 1993 – MA Fine Art, Royal College of Art, London, England.
- 1989 – BA Hons (Fine Art), John Moores University, Liverpool, England.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 – *Heaven 'n Earth* (permanent installation), Department for Culture, Media & Sport, London, England; *Henna Nadeem: A Picture Book of Britain*, Charleston Farmhouse, Fife, as part of Brighton Photo Biennial, England (touring); *Henna Nadeem: A Picture Book of Britain* (artist book) published by Photoworks, Brighton, England.
- 2005 – *Henna Nadeem*, Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance, England.
- 2004 – *trees water rocks*, Piccadilly Circus Underground station, London, England; *Billy Bragg* (billboard), Project Art Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *Wood for the Trees and Falling Leaves*, Gimpel Fils, London, England.
- 2006 – *Alien Nation*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England (touring); *Green*, Winchester Gallery, England.

- 2005 – *Picture of Britain*, Tate Britain, London, England; *Ricochet*, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- 2003 – *I want! I want!* Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, England (touring).
- 2002 – *Message to India*, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai, India (touring).
- 2001 – *Landscape Trauma in the Age of Scopophilia*, Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, England (touring).

HITESH NATALWALA

- Born Nairobi, Kenya 1964; lives Sydney, Australia.
- 2003 – Diploma in Multimedia TAFE, Sydney, Australia.
- 1993 – Post Graduate Certificate E (Art and Design), London University, England.
- 1989 – BA with Honours (Fine Art Painting), St Martins School of Art, London, England.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *Let's Talk*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney, Australia.
- 2005 – *Jeez*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney, Australia.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 – *Lila-Play: Contemporary Miniatures and New Art from South Asia*, Span Galleries, Melbourne, Australia (catalogue).
- 2005 – *International Works on Paper*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney, Australia.

TAZEEN QAYYUM

- Born Karachi, Pakistan 1973; lives Toronto, Canada.
- 1996 – BFA (Miniature Painting), National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – Artistic Director, *Double Date* a collaborative inter-disciplinary performance project, SAVAC at Lennox Contemporary Gallery, Toronto, Canada (catalogue); *Women Looking East*, URI Providence Campus Gallery, Rhode Island, USA.
- 2006 – *Contemporary Miniatures Between Two Worlds*, Croweaters Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan; *Gendering Detail: Contemporary Miniature Paintings*, Art Square Gallery, Toronto, Canada (catalogue).
- 2005 – *Ongoing Dialogue*, Foresight Art Center, Amman, Jordan; *A Thousand and One Days: The Art of Pakistani Women Miniaturists*, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, USA (catalogue).
- 2004 – *JALA – Japan Afro-Asian Latin American Exchange Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, Japan (catalogue).

- 2003 – *43rd Suzzara Prize – Spirit and Body: Between Tradition and Cybernetics*, Padova, Italy (catalogue); *Negotiating Borders: Contemporary Miniature Paintings*, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal (catalogue).
- 2002 – *2nd Painting Biennial*, Saba Cultural and Artistic Center, Tehran, Iran; *10th Asian Biennial*, Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh (catalogue).

NUSRA LATIF QURESHI

- Born Lahore, Pakistan 1973; lives Melbourne, Australia.
- 2002 – MFA, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia.
- 1995 – BFA (Miniature Painting), National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *A Garden of Fruit Trees*, Anant Art Gallery, New Delhi, India.
- 2005 – *Acts of Compliance*, Studio Glass Gallery, London, UK (catalogue); *Intentions of Memory*, Joshua McClelland Print Room, Melbourne, Australia; With Naeem Rana, *Heavenly Products Exotic Bodies*, Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia and Nexus Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.
- 2004 – *Exotic Bodies*, Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia; *The Way I Remember Them*, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA.
- 2002 – *Altered Perceptions*, Artholes Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; *Postcolonial Representations*, Joshua McClelland Print Room, Melbourne, Australia.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *Landscape/Form and Thought*, Ingrao, New York, USA.
- 2006 – *The 5th Asia Pacific Triennial*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (catalogue); Croweaters Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan; *Common Destination*, The Drawing Center, New York, USA; *Beyond The Page*, Manchester Art Gallery and Asia House in London, UK (catalogue); *Meeting Place Keeping Place*, George Adams Gallery, The Arts Centre, Melbourne; *Lila/Play: Contemporary Miniatures and New Art from South Asia*, Span Galleries, Melbourne, Australia.
- 2005 – *Papercut*, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; *A Thousand and One Days: The Art of Pakistani Women Miniaturists*, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, USA (catalogue); *Karkhana: Collaborative Painting from Pakistan's Avant-Garde*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, USA (catalogue/ touring); *Beyond Borders: Art of Pakistan*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, India (catalogue); *RAPT: AustralAsia Zero*

Five, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia (catalogue); *RITU, a gathering of seasons*, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, India (catalogue).

2004 – *Contemporary Miniature Paintings from Pakistan*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (catalogue); *Miniatures*, Queensland Arts Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

NAEEM RANA

Born Lahore, Pakistan 1974; lives Melbourne, Australia.

2001 – Graduate Diploma (Visual Arts), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne.

1998 – BFA (Sculpture), National College of Art, Lahore.

1986 – 1989 Training in Nastalique style calligraphy from father, Usman Rana.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2007 – *Heavenly Pictures*, Anant Gallery, Delhi, India.

2005 – *It's still hard being british-1, but where are you really from?* (With Faiza Butt), Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford, England; *Exotic Bodies, Heavenly Products* (With Nusra Qureshi) Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia and Nexus Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

2004 – *Heavenly Products*, Counihan Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

2003 – *Colour, Pattern and Desire*, Span Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2006 – *Nai Azadi*, Annual Kara Film Festival, Karachi, Pakistan; “*Who are you? Where are you really from?*”, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, England; *Desi Pop Art*, Maison France, Lille, France; *Fremantle Print Award*, Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia; *Meeting Place Keeping Place*, George Adams Gallery, The Arts Centre, Melbourne.

2005 – *Paper Chase*, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; Span Galleries, Melbourne, Australia.

2004 – *Practice in Progress*, Counihan Gallery In Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia (catalogue).

2003 – *Shopstop Art*, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Australia; *Darebin-Latrobe Acquisitive Award Exhibition*, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne, Australia; *North and South of the Border*, Studio 48, Newcastle, Australia.

2002 – *Kiss My Art*, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Australia; *First*, Spencer Street Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

SABEEN RAJA

Born Lahore, Pakistan, 1977; lives Virginia, USA.

2003 – MFA (Painting) Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, USA.

1999 – BFA (Miniature Painting) National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2005 – *Krishna Love and Sex*, Gallery Joe, Philadelphia, USA; *Sabeen Raja: New Miniature Paintings*, Conner Contemporary Art, Washington DC, USA; *Sabeen Raja*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, Australia.

2004 – *It's a Small World*, Gallery 3, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, USA.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2006 – *Cotton Candy on A Rainy Day*, The Proposition, New York, USA; *Two cubes*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia.

2005 – *paperchase*, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; *FAITH*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, USA; Kaliman Gallery, Sydney, Australia; *Scope NYC*, Conner Contemporary Art, Washington DC, USA.

2004 – *Figure Out, Drawing as Narrative*, Gallery Joe, Philadelphia, USA.

AMIN REHMAN

Born Lahore, Pakistan 1957; lives Toronto, Canada.

1996 – Certificate in Digital Art, Digital Media Studios, Toronto, Canada.

1988 – Diploma in Art Gallery and Museum Studies, University of Manchester, England.

1982 – Diploma in Design, National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.

1978 – BA (Painting), University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2006 – *Market Values*, South Asian Gallery of Art, Toronto, Canada and Nairang Galleries, Lahore, Pakistan.

2002 – *Their Lives//Our Culture*, Praxis Gallery, Toronto, Canada.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2007 – *Big Stories, Little India*, Gerrard Street East public art project, SAVAC and [murmur], Toronto, Canada; *Climate for Change*, Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, Toronto, Canada; *8th Annual Juried Drawing Exhibition*, John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Canada.

2006 – *4th Biennale of Contemporary Islamic Painting*, Tehran, Iran; *In Your Face*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada; *This is not a propaganda Zone (Art + Activism)*, YYZ Artist's Outlet, Toronto, Canada; *Lila-Play: Contemporary Miniatures and New Art from South*

Asia, Span Galleries, Melbourne, Australia (catalogue).

- 2004 – *Creative Insecurity*, SAVAC at Marilyn Brewer Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Canada.
2003 – *Peace Taxi*, SAVAC, Toronto, Canada; *Elements*, Tod Mordean Mills Heritage Museum and Art Centre, Toronto, Canada;
Takhti, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Canada.

SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR

Born Brisbane, Australia 1977; lives London, England/
Melbourne, Australia.

- 2004 – PhD, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia.
1999 – Graduate Diploma (Visual Art), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia.
1998 – BFA (Painting), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *Untitled (All four hundred...)*, Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia;
Theatre of the oppressed, Johnston Gallery, Perth, Australia.
2006 – *The Shadow of Murder Lay Upon My Sleep*, Murray White Room, Melbourne, Australia; *There is No Light*, Johnston Gallery, Perth, Australia.
2004 – *Peculiar to...*, Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia.
2003 – *Goddess of Flowers*, Mori Gallery, Sydney and VCA Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.
2002 – *That Happened Which Did Happen*, Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 – *Stick and Move*, Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco, USA;
Blast!, Redcliffe City Art Gallery and Logan Art Gallery, Queensland, Australia; *Cut 'n' Paste*, Peloton Gallery, Sydney, Australia; *Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Traveling Fellowship*, VCA Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; *Paradise Love Bar*, Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2006 – *The 5th Asia Pacific Triennial*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (catalogue); *Meeting Place, Keeping Place*, George Adams Gallery Art Centre, Melbourne, Australia; *Light and Shade*, 24HR Art, Darwin, Australia; *Lila/Play: Contemporary Miniatures and New Art from South Asia*, Span Galleries, Melbourne, Australia (catalogue).
2005 – *Asian Traffic*, Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia (touring); *C'Town Bling*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia.
2004 – *NEW04*, ACCA, Melbourne, Australia; *Primavera*, Museum of

Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; *Miniatures*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; *Heavenly Creatures*, Heidi Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Australia; *Second Auckland Triennial*, New Zealand; *Home/Ground: Scape Biennial 2004*, Christchurch, New Zealand.

- 2003 – *Papercuts*, Monash University Faculty Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; *Tale Chaser*, Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia; *A Third Place*, SOFA Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand.

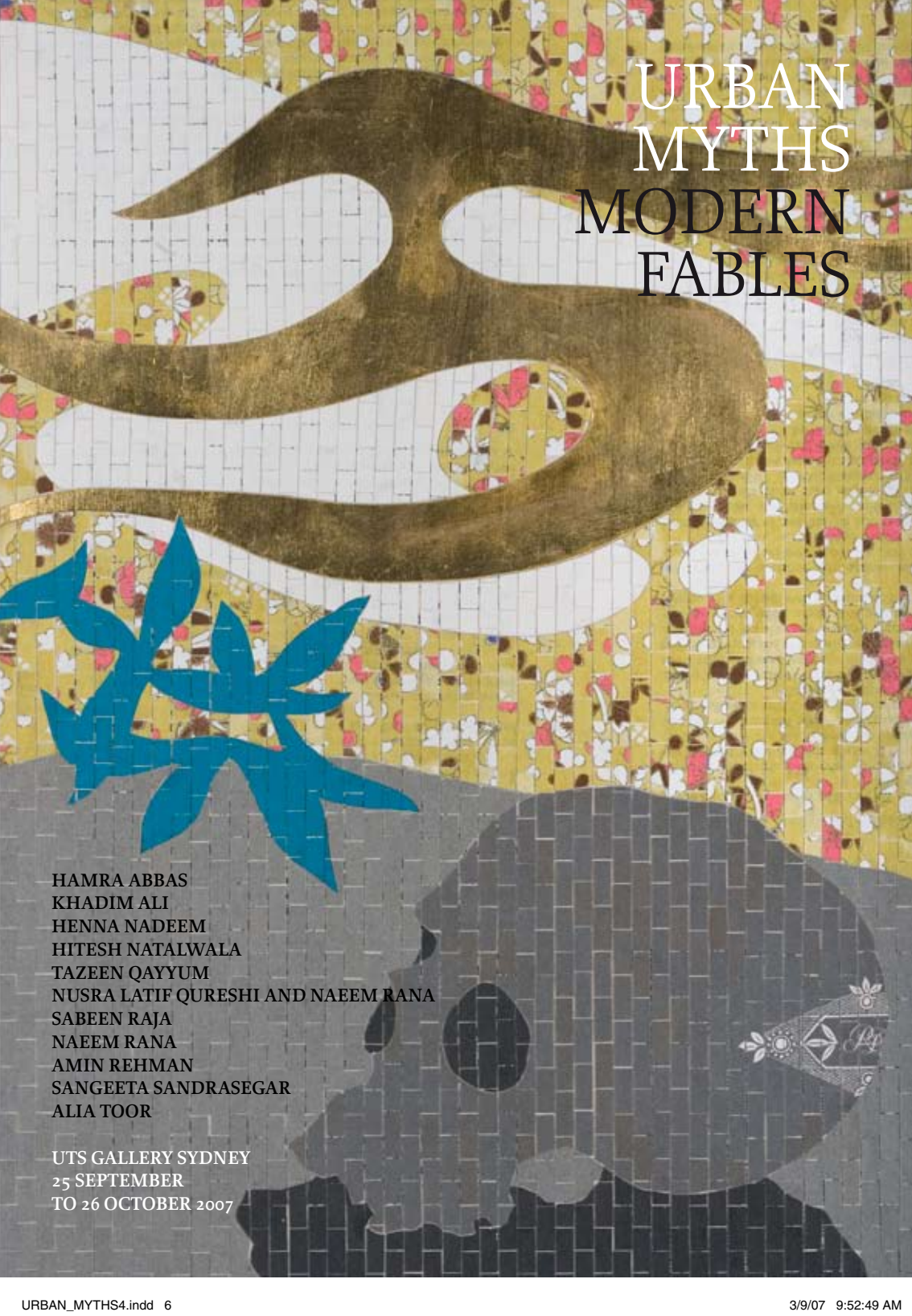
ALIA TOOR

Born Karachi, Pakistan 1966; lives Toronto, Canada

- 2003 – MA Communication (Art and Technology) & Education, Columbia University, New York, USA.
1993 – Graduate. Diploma (Art Education), Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.
1989 – BA Fine Arts Studio, University of Waterloo, Canada

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 – *Regent Park Film Festival*, Toronto, Canada.
2005 – *Artwallah Festival*, Los Angeles, USA; Artists Gardens, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Canada
2004 – *Toronto Alternative Art Fair*, invitational exhibition, Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, Canada; *Creative Insecurity*, SAVAC at the Marilyn Brewer Gallery, *Masala! Mehdni! Masti! Festival*, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Canada.
2003 – *Peace Taxi*, SAVAC public intervention project in Toronto taxi-cabs, Canada; *Art Against War, Drink(ink) juried exhibition*, New York, USA.



URBAN
MYTHS
MODERN
FABLES

HAMRA ABBAS
KHADIM ALI
HENNA NADEEM
HITESH NATALWALA
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SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR
ALIA TOOR

UTS GALLERY SYDNEY
25 SEPTEMBER
TO 26 OCTOBER 2007

FROM THE DIASPORA

In a black field, a sea of agile figures dressed in jeans and T-shirts are posed warrior-like. Animated, they appear as though engaged in a choreographed dance. *Battle Scenes* (2006) refers to a pair of paintings from the Mughal epic, *Akbarnama*, which records the victorious battles of the great 16th century emperor, Akbar. The artist, Hamra Abbas, draws on her sophisticated knowledge of miniature painting to construct a work that infers a relationship between historical and contemporary events. Through her staging of these battles scenes, Abbas reflects on the grand absurdity of war. But what is more interesting is Abbas' study and interpretation of the paintings themselves. Her understanding of Mughal modes of pictorial composition is highlighted through the arrangement of battle-ready figures. Her use of an empty black background emphasises the hyper-stylised realism of her contemporary army. Her careful study of posture, gesture and movement presents the act of battle as a ludic and ludicrous dance. Abbas' modern-day warriors don't go anywhere, their jerky movements engaged in a hapless and farcical repeat.

The exhibition, *Urban Myths & Modern Fables* brings together the work of eleven artists of Indian and Pakistani background, working in the international diaspora. Drawing on the notion of a myth, a perpetuating narrative featuring heroic or supernatural characters and events, or the idea of a fable, an aphoristic or instructive story, these artists use the narrative form to comment on the world. An 'urban myth' refers to a contemporary narrative describing human actions or occurrences which have a quality of believability, but which are typically founded in misconception or rumour. An urban myth reveals how the circulation of beliefs about culture in the contemporary world is socially mediated, partial, sensational and incomplete. On the other hand, a 'modern fable' proposes a moral or ethical lesson. It is instructive or allegorical in the way that it addresses lived experience. These stories often suggest the reiteration of history – the idea of history repeating

itself, or of the past being embedded in the present. It suggests the irrevocable vestige of history but also reflects on its contingency insofar that the recording of history is also partial, political and incomplete.

Many of the artists included in this exhibition take up a questioning of history in order to reflect on issues of cultural politics – its antecedents and imperialistic resonances. Working in the diaspora, and thereby drawing on both Eastern and Western references, the artists included in this exhibition are engaged with a critique of the naturalised discourses of culture. The issues addressed are particularly informed by the post-9/11 landscape, the events of which have significantly impacted on the lives of many of these artists, particularly those who were born and schooled in Pakistan. For the latter, the events of 9/11 have forced a critique of both the Western perception of Islamic culture as well as issues of Islamic conservatism and political nationalism. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent 'War on Terrorism' have raised concerns of social ethics, media responsibility, and the fetishisation of the symbols of Islamic identity. For some of the artists born in the diaspora, however, the overriding concern is with the trauma of displacement. Mitigating loss against gain, these artists are engaged with the possibility of transforming culture through a process of negotiation. A consistent theme is the problematisation of the dichotomies of West-East, good-evil, friend-enemy, self-other. A key objective is to humanise notions of cultural otherness in an effort to affect a dialogue.

MORAL DILEMMAS

Drawing her inspiration from a 1938 poem, *To Posterity* by Bertolt Brecht, Sangeeta Sandrasegar's haunting installation, *Untitled (The Shadow of Murder Lay Upon My Sleep)* (2006), consists of a series of paper cut-outs – templates of European designer chairs, engraved with horrific scenes of war. Alongside, Sandrasegar has created a series of puppet-like dolls – flaccid bodies, hung, naked, dead. The work describes the resemblance of the current

'War on Terrorism' to World War II. Sandrasegar's practice draws on a range of cultural influences, from Indian henna stencils to Chinese paper cutting traditions and Japanese Manga, as well as Indian and Southeast Asian traditions of puppet craft. Her cut-outs are displayed so as to cast shadows on the wall, the cut-out and its shadow – the play of light and dark – being equally integral to the work.¹ It is significant that Sandrasegar has chosen to produce this series of cut-outs from black paper, reinforcing the darkness of the scenes depicted. Sandrasegar speaks of the work as a critique of capitalist consumerism and the price of first world excess at the cost of third world lives. The work comments on every persons' complicity in war, contending with an ethical dilemma.² However, the work also attempts to literally 'bring home the reality of war' by superimposing graphic scenes onto images of domestic furniture.³

If Sandrasegar's work addresses the lack of social consciousness in the globalising world, then Amin Rehman's work investigates its banality. Rehman's text-based installation *Black Hole* (2007) reiterates and re-defines the tabloid headlines and media grabs that inundate our airwaves. Working specifically with the language concerning the war in Iraq, Rehman examines the construction of media hype. He is particularly concerned with addressing the persistent rhetoric of fear and its racialisation. Rehman's text-bytes are primarily in English, but he intersperses these slogans with romanised Urdu references – kala pani (black water), agg kadarya (endless fire), naukar chakar (servant-master) – to reflect on twin approaches to the language of fear-mongering. Rehman regards his work as a testimonial to the victims of the war. But the work is also an expression of distrust in the processes of democracy.⁴

Drawing on similar concerns, Tazeen Qayyum makes miniature paintings of exquisitely detailed cockroaches and decorated fumigators. They are allegorical works that reference the colloquial Pakistani description of the treatment of Muslim soldiers as insects.⁵ Qayyum's paintings and



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installations reflect on the de-humanisation of soldiers fighting the 'War on Terrorism'. Her work comments on the West's aggressive response to an insidious yet somewhat intangible threat, where terrorism posits that the identity of the enemy is not openly declared, and where, in the interests of 'national security', all Muslims are viewed as adversaries.⁶ Her work reflects on the current state

of political anxiety, where the enemy, like the cockroach, is elusive, fugitive and unknown.

NEW NARRATIVES

A number of the artists included in this exhibition have trained in the traditional technique of miniature painting at the National College of Art, Lahore, Pakistan. The historical miniature, conceived to illustrate or evoke mythical or poetic genres, is inherently concerned with narrative. In the West, Modernist concerns of formalism and conceptualism have to some extent sidelined the genre of narrative painting. However, in Pakistan the contemporary miniature has become an important forum for the critical and political investigation of everyday life and culture.⁷ The genre of the miniature allows the artist a personal voice and speaking position in a context where alternative voices and discourses have been lacking. Moreover, like video, it is a medium that is easily and cheaply disseminated by post or courier, having the potential to reach wide audiences. It is therefore a powerful medium for artists working at the margins of the Western world.

Khadim Ali is an ethnic Hazara whose familial connections are to the Afghan city of Bamiyan. Since the mid-1990s this region of Afghanistan has been occupied and destroyed by the Taliban regime, resulting in the brutal killing and massacre of thousands of Hazaras.⁸ Living and working in Pakistan, Ali uses the genre of miniature painting as a means to tell a story of ongoing persecution, and as a means to contend with enormous loss – of country, family, culture, home. Perhaps more than any other artist in this exhibition, Ali draws on art as a 'strategy of survival',⁹ as a means by which to maintain a voice in a context of grave insecurity. In this ongoing body of work, Ali explores the psychological effects of war on a generation of Hazara children who have grown up under Taliban rule. Superimposing his own paintings over drawings made by Hazara children in Bamiyan, Ali contextualises the childrens' images of warfare within a landscape dominated by the looming hollows

of the recently destroyed colossal Buddhas. He explores the loss of childhood innocence and reflects on the insidious means by which children can become easily indoctrinated into a culture of violence.

SUBVERTING STEREOTYPES

A number of artists included in this exhibition demonstrate a concern with the ethical questions informing the current state of global politics. Yet other artists are more focussed on a critique of cultural stereotypes. Drawing on strategies of parody, irony and punning Naeem Rana and Alia Toor appropriate the iconographies of both the East and the West to subvert typecast notions of culture. Naeem Rana produces digital prints that reference his interest in the conventionally Islamic art forms of calligraphy and geometric patterning. Juxtaposing Urdu calligraphy alongside pop-culture images drawn from B-grade movies and the tabloid media, Rana is engaged in a provocative critique of both Western and Islamic propaganda. *satisfaction guaranteed* (2006) depicts a nubile female figure armed with the phallic machinery of war. The calligraphy reads: 'for any solution/two jet fighters/one good-looking sheila'. Rana is as much concerned with challenging Islamic militantism as he is with overturning the West's blind acceptance of the stereotypes of Islamic culture. All the while he undertakes a complex critique of the media, reducing it to pornography – a passive and easy means to seduction.

In *Aprons/Veils* (2007), Canadian Alia Toor draws a visual pun between the image of the niqab (veil) and that of the apron. Contesting the West's fascination with the oppression of Muslim women, Toor draws out symmetries and correspondences between Islamic and Western cultures. The niqab and the apron are depicted as masks of gendered identity, designed to conceal, control or domesticate sexuality. At the same time both garments lend themselves to modes of fetishisation by their very concern with concealment. Toor's work tackles issues of masking – of hiding, protecting, disguising, and of 'performing' an imagined



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self in response to perceived cultural expectations or social norms. Informed by the work of American women artists of the 80's/90's, Toor problematises the performance of sexual identity in accordance with culturally determined systems of control. By contrast, Sabeen Raja defies accepted convention by producing miniature paintings that explicitly address contemporary themes of sexual fetish and perversion. Her paintings are semi-autobiographical, and derive from her experience of living in the United States. Her recent paintings reflect on the apparently melodramatic concerns of contemporary American society, and marvel at the permissiveness of American culture, which is at odds with the conservatism of

Raja's middle-class Pakistani upbringing. *'How do I tell my wife that I'm gay?' (2007)* draws on a long tradition of Mughal and Rajput portraiture, but Raja subtly manipulates the iconography to cleverly re-interpret and subvert the form. The extraordinary beauty of her painting and her use of humour are foils to address, in this case, the culturally contentious issue of homosexuality. In this way Raja challenges the polite and romantic depictions of love that are a defining theme of the historical miniature.

REALITY AND FICTION

Working in the medium of collage, Hitesh Natalwala draws on myth to contend with the trauma of a multi-generational history of migration. Natalwala's forebears migrated from India to South Africa, then from South Africa to Kenya. His family then moved from Kenya to the UK and finally, from the UK to Australia. Natalwala's story is not unique, but it is paradigmatic in that it defines the post-colonial experience as being centred on a history of displacement. Since immigrating to Australia from England in 2001, Natalwala's work has been concerned with negotiating a family history of rootlessness and dispersal. The series of collages included in this exhibition draw on the Hindu myth of the *Descent of the River Ganges*, an epic story of sacrifice and redemption, in which Natalwala identifies broad themes of movement, change, loss and adaptation that reflect on his own experience. Natalwala's appropriation of the myth is informed by a process of investigation and interpretation. His research is indicative of the second-generation immigrant's need to consciously learn his native culture. Natalwala has adapted and transformed the narrative of the myth, re-interpreting its imagery for a contemporary context. In this way, Natalwala demonstrates a concern with the processes of re-configuring cultural forms as a means of re-generation.

Henna Nadeem plays with the notion of myth to unsettle romantic notions or constructions of place. Working with found images from old tourist posters, calendars, books and magazines, Nadeem layers and

splices together pictures of monumental European landscapes, producing fantastic hybrid scenes that challenge comfortable and 'natural' notions of landscape. Nadeem's collages are grafted together through the use of Mughal architectural patterns and vegetal motifs, introducing a third, and somewhat foreign design element to shape the inter-penetration of forms. Works such as *Summit* (2000), *Waterfall* (2000) and *Snow Melt* (2000) collapse compositional elements of foreground and background to produce disorientating vistas, deconstructing the picturesque ideal conveyed by her touristic source images.

Nadeem regards her work as being concerned with ideas of cultural dissonance, tackling issues of inaccessibility, isolation and the illusion of the idyll. Nadeem states,

"By appropriating imagery...I am playing with clichés assigned to me as a 'British female Muslim', in an attempt to avoid a fictitious construction of my identity...This conceptual blurring of reality and fiction encourages the work to be experienced as a series of possibilities..."¹⁰

Her work is concerned with transforming the inherent tension between culturally specific visual forms in order to realise new potentials. Like the other artists included in this exhibition, Nadeem draws on her art practice as a constructive means of contending with the tensions of living in the diaspora. By understanding and transforming this tension, however, Nadeem nicely sums up the relationship between the fictions that we draw on and the stories we live out.

HAEMA SIVANESAN is an Independent Curator, and Executive Director of South Asian Visual Arts Collective, Toronto, Canada.

- 1 See Julie Ewington, "Sangeeta Sandrasegar: Shadows and Substance" in *The 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (2006, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art), pp208-211.
- 2 Conversation with the artist, 15 May, 2007.
- 3 Coincidentally, in a recent article in *Artforum*, "Domesticity at War: Beatriz Colomina and Homi K Bhabha in Conversation", (Summer 2007, p442-447) Colomina and Bhabha explore how the mediations of public and private in the context of war are domesticated and inform developments in design and architecture.
- 4 Conversation with the artist, 16 June, 2007.
- 5 Conversation with the artist, 2 April, 2007.
- 6 "An adversary is a legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy. But our disagreement concerning their meaning and implementation is not one that can be resolved through rational agreement, hence the antagonistic element in the relation", Chantal Mouffe, cited by Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (2004: Verso, London and New York), p90.
- 7 For a more comprehensive analysis of the development of the contemporary miniature as a forum for addressing post-9/11 concerns, see Hammad Nasser and Anna Sloan, "Postcards to Empire: The Politics of Resistance in the Karkhana Project" in *Karkhana. A Contemporary Collaboration*, (2005, Ridgefield, CT: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum and Green Cardamom), pp26-33.
- 8 In the late 1990's tens of thousands of Hazaras were massacred by the Taliban in Afghanistan in a project of ethnic cleansing. A large number of the Hazara population sought asylum overseas, in Pakistan as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US and UK. Many asylum-seekers arrived in Australia on Indonesian shipping vessels. The most notorious case was the MV Tampa incident of August 2001.
- 9 "Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational.", Homi Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern. A Question of Agency" in *The Location of Culture* (1994, London and New York: Routledge), p172.
- 10 "Henna Nadeem: Statement of Artistic Practice", via email correspondence with the artist, 26 June, 2007.



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IMAGE CAPTIONS

COVER IMAGE

HITESH NATAWALA

'It suddenly struck her, fate had taken a turn for the worse', 2007.

paper collage; 29.8 x 21.2cm

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney

1 SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR

Untitled (The Shadow of the Murder Lay Upon Her Sleep),

2006 (detail)

paper cut-out; paper and glitter; approx 65 x 45cm

Private Collection

2 NAEEM RANA

Satisfaction Guaranteed, 2006

digital archive print; 88 x 90cm

Courtesy of the artist



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3 HAMRA ABBAS

Battle Scenes, 2006

computer generated animation on DVD

Courtesy of the Artist

4 HENNA NADEEM

Snow Melt, 2000

paper collage; 27.5 x 21cm

Collection of the Artist

5 TAZEEN QAYYUM

May Irritate Eyes, 2007

opaque watercolour on wasli paper with label; 37 x 41cm

Courtesy of the Artist