

Interview by Salwat Ali



Humaira Abid

Dual readings

Pakistan, India and Dubai offer much insight into the creative growth of an artist who is consistently applying herself since her debut in 2001. Here she talks about her ongoing journey.

The sculpture genre has only lately begun to regain visibility here courtesy talented young artists but for a female sculptor, working in wood can pose problems. You had remarked in 2006, "I have never encountered problems which could not be resolved, (but) I know that some of my contemporaries have not been able to survive." How do you view the atmosphere now?

I agree that sculpture has regained visibility lately as earlier not many artists were doing 3D works. Some of my fellow artists majored in sculpture and later moved to other mediums or did not practise at all. I do believe sculpture is tough, not just physically but also due to other major requirements like material costs, studio space, equipment, packing, shipping, and storage costs. The working process is extended too. In sculpture it takes much longer to see results (for me months to a year or even more) compared to all other mediums.

In Pakistan sculptors face even more challenges as often people confuse 3D forms with idolatry. Female sculptors face additional trials. Regarding purchase of materials and equipment they have to deal with men or go to areas where mostly men are seen. This is uncomfortable as the menfolk are not used to seeing or dealing with women. In the beginning I felt challenged and many times I cried due to their attitude towards me but I never stopped working. After a while I found places to work and deal in where I was comparatively comfortable.



'All I need is one fertile egg'

Since more girls are practising sculpture so I am assuming the atmosphere is better. Although not many are using wood or metal as a major medium because places for material purchase and working facility in wood and metal are still difficult to access as they continue to be male dominated. But there is definite improvement, when one girl works, she opens the path for others and the sources

become available and possibilities grow.

Do you feel working and exhibiting abroad is beneficial to the art practice of the contemporary artists? What is your personal experience?

Oh yes, definitely. I feel I have learnt a lot while working, travelling and showing in other countries. Not just in terms of exposure but also learning from

art and artists of other countries. Other than personal rewards, it also benefits the art society of that country in general. Sometimes one or few artists do not just establish the reputation of others from the same country but also open doors for them.

Your work has moved from fun loving exuberant expressions to grave maternal concerns. Is this transition to serious personal issues disturbing or therapeutic for you? What is the premise of 'Red'?

My work is my reality and has always been. I work on themes and ideas, which affect me very deeply and I try to transform them into art with sincerity. I feel objects are like people, they can tell you where they come from.

My recent themes have come from my maternal experiences and sometimes converting them into art is therapeutic and sometimes a troubling reminder of the experience. "My Art is developed as a result of unsatisfied desires," explains Louise Bourgeois.

The current body of work in the show 'Red' is not just an outcome of personal experiences but also relates to national issues. Formerly personal concerns dominated my work but the Sialkot massacre of two brothers being brutally beaten to death jolted my sensibilities and for the first time an intermixing of individual and national conflicts has appeared in my work.

Dual meanings can be attributed to the works. Pieces like, 'Faces of Eve' and 'Miscarriage' do not just point towards a woman's miscarriage but also miscarriage of justice. In 'Faces of Eve', carved letters are not just definitions of pregnancy and miscarriage but also disruption of justice. When conditions deteriorate to an alarming extent we turn to prayer for assistance—the 'Lingering prayer' sculpture references me as well as the nation at large. Other works like 'Petty patriotism', 'Hung by the freedom of choice', 'All we need is one fertile egg', also go beyond private concerns to speak of the urgent need for solutions to address larger social problems. ■