

MEASURED MOTIFS

Aisha Abid Hussain, Varunika Saraf and Hiba Schahbaz, based in Lahore, Hyderabad and Brooklyn, started with a centuries-old form and embarked on a quest; arriving at their own distinct perspectives

POINTED PRECISION AISHA ABID HUSSAIN, LAHORE, 36

We've seen her blur boundaries between text and image, and in her answers – crisp yet wholesome – and intricate analyses, you get a sense of her aesthetic that is detailed yet free of clutter. Aisha Abid Hussain, who hopes for “a slightly less commercial approach towards art making in the future”, doesn't believe in “career milestones”, a terminology that seems too pedestrian to weigh her life experiences in. Just as well; for this star student – who graduated at the top of her class from the nucleus of modern miniature art that is the National College of Art (NCA), Lahore – is far more interested in broadening her horizons than merely resting on her laurels.

ON STUDYING MINIATURES

As they say, the devil is in the detail. I was in awe of the technique and was really keen to learn it. But once I enrolled myself into the major at NCA, it dawned upon me that it is much more than that. The historical and the political contexts of the genre are extremely rich and deeply rooted in the region. The formal as well as the conceptual aspects are the core of miniature painting and that eventually became my focus of interest.

LAHORE TO LONDON

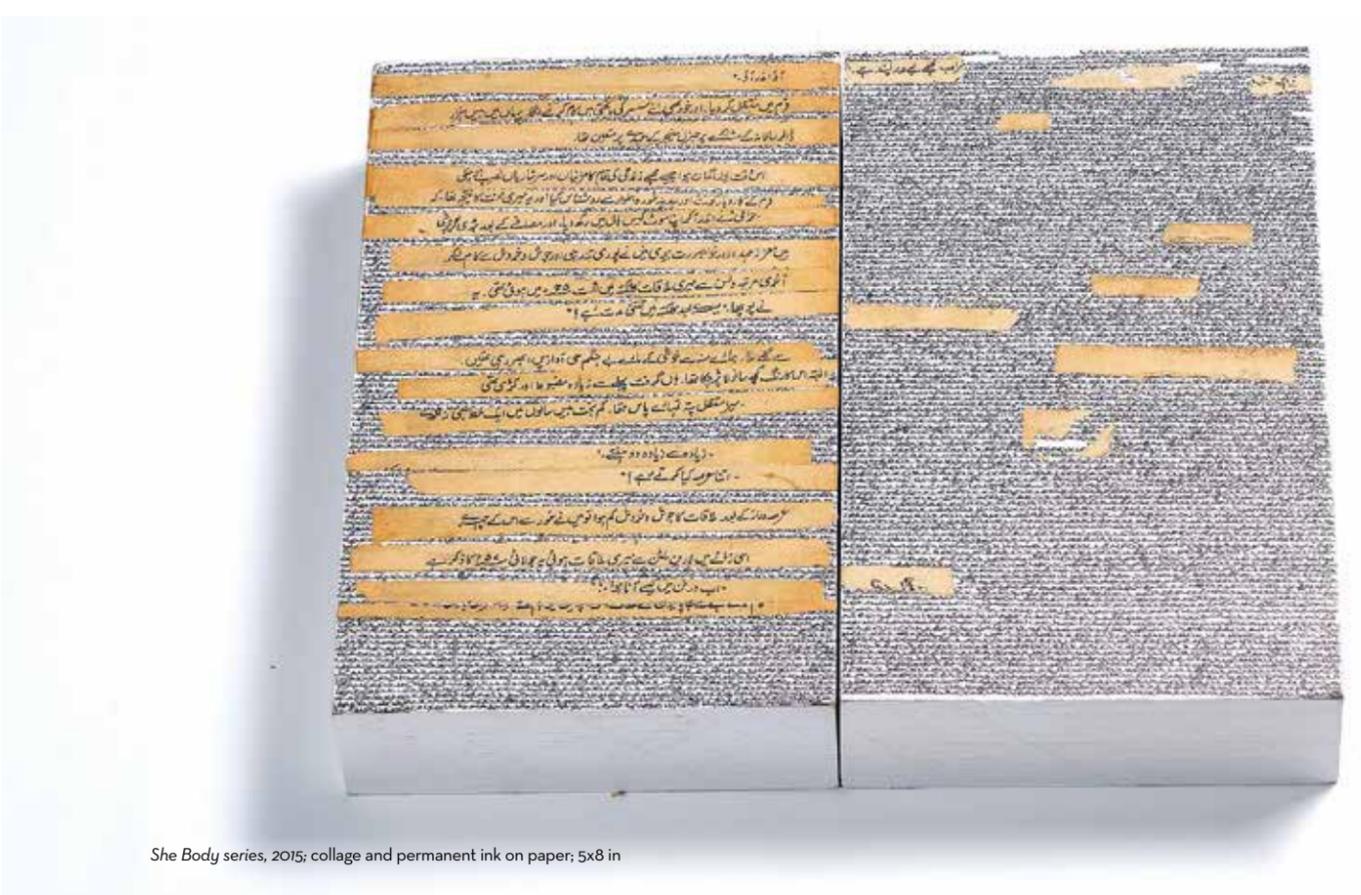
When I decided to apply for an MFA, I was seeking an environment that could play a pivotal role in pushing me out of the comfort zone that artists



SAAD SARFRAZ SHEIKH

are prone to reside in. As a practising artist, I was interested in developing a new visual idiom to find my place within the contemporary art scene. Great facilities, the cutting-edge programme and the help of experts at Goldsmiths made it possible for me to explore new mediums in my practice. What it provided me as an artist is an enhanced vision that I used

to analyse various art forms and look at things from a different perspective altogether. I was forced to reflect on my practice, to bridge it to the context I was probably shying away from. Interaction with and exchange of ideas between fellow artists from diverse backgrounds actually changed my perception about art making.



She Body series, 2015; collage and permanent ink on paper; 5x8 in

DRAWING FROM REALITY

My themes and concerns are based on life and relationships. I don't plan to critique things or ideas; it won't work in that manner. As a human being, I believe in observing and thinking about them; and as an artist, I reflect on them in my practice. Gender, the power play between the two and marriage being an overrated phenomenon are critical and contemporary debates, specifically in our region. It is so natural to talk about them through practice.

NOUVEAU MINIATURES

I love their element of storytelling – there are so many layers that can be explored and investigated each time you look at those works. The new trend is about reviving this aspects. But I feel that when any movement starts following a trend, it can speed up the process of decline. The commercial aspect is attached to each and every kind of art making in present times, and the 'exotification' of the genre by the West is the reason behind the commercialisation of miniature art.

THE INDIAN ART SCENE TODAY...

...is exciting. I believe that the art produced here is much more interesting and multi-layered. First, the Kochi Muziris Biennale, and now the upcoming Srinagar and Lahore biennales are going to provide platforms for more emerging and underrated artists to share their practices with a much wider audience. As artists, we are very fortunate that we belong to this part of the world where we have such intriguing problems that we are never short of food for thought.

ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS

Many artists, including the younger ones who are my students. That's what makes art making and teaching very special. Sharing of ideas and concerns, reflecting on them together and learning from each other is the key. That one person who has been a mentor to almost generations of artists in Pakistan is Professor Salima Hashmi.

BEST-LOVED WORKS

My recent body of work, which was part of the *Embodiment of the Sublime*

solo show at The Loft in Mumbai, is really close to my heart because of the exploration of personal narrative through the idiom of text. I feel I could articulate the idea of text as an image well in those works. I really enjoyed putting together my *Two Not Together* solo show at Hanmi Gallery in London in 2014 too. The shows that stayed with me for a long time are Nasreen Mohamedi's retrospective at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Delhi, Pipploti Rist's show at Hayward Gallery, London and Agnes Martin's retrospective at Tate Modern. I find Martin's work very special. It speaks to me on many levels, the linear quality and the minimal aesthetic is extremely impactful.

DREAM COLLABORATION

It would have been with Nasreen Mohamedi, but alas I was born too late. I would also wish to work with Zarina Hashmi and Walid Raad if possible.

LOOKING AHEAD

For this remaining year, group shows at Gallery Threshold, Delhi and Hanmi Gallery in Seoul.

-RANJABATI DAS