

Continued from page 21

uses negation as a form of self-censure. "I don't think censorship was an issue at the time, because the drawings are so explicit".

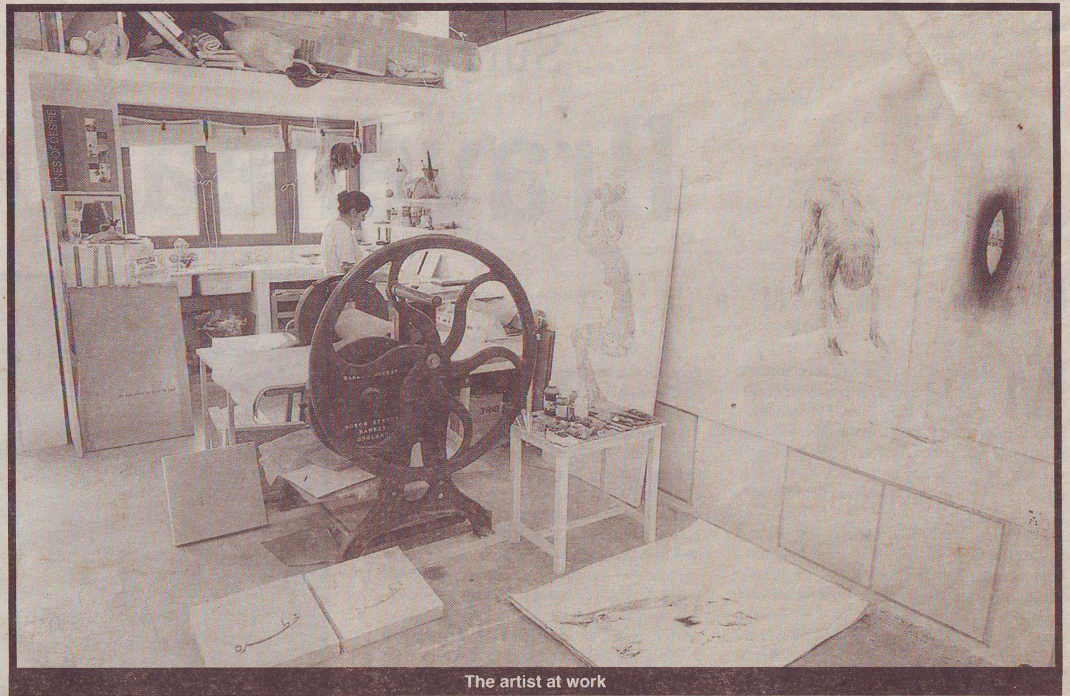
The ephemeral impact is emphasised by the very 'raw' marks, and the deliberately created unfinished effect, which makes a dual statement about the debilitating effect of the past on the present, as well as how our present states of mind affect our interpretation of the past. Concurrent to this effort is the impulse to unhinge the self from the inhibiting forces of the past. You get to feel the frictional effect of the divergent forces, and if you are lucky, you might also get a glimpse of the 'hidden and disconcerting' layer of perception, where the subtle yet persistent effort to create something new goes on, perhaps within every individual. As Khan puts it, "You want to be walking a tight rope".

Does she ever feel that she has finished a painting, and nothing more can be done to it? Khan explains how important it is to stop regularly to critically examine one's own work. "I have learnt through a lot of pain that you have to work very, very slowly, and really look at the work. It is essential to stop and look and look. Sometimes you have to be able to leave a drawing in a state of flux, even if it's bothering you and you don't know what to do with it. Then, through the process of looking, it starts to gain coherence. I think that is a very important lesson I have learnt by just making a lot of mistakes and losing images. I have lost a lot of work when I have not been patient enough. But I have learnt".

Khan's new body of work, titled "Voices merge", which is currently being shown at Chawkandi Art in Karachi, is a departure from her earlier work. She cleverly uses a *henna* pigment directly stencilled on to the wall to incorporate more space into her work and give it a broader context. It becomes difficult to decide whether the walls are a necessary extension of her art, or whether the works themselves are an extension of the physical reality. This is a clever device because there appear to be no limits to the artist's work. The use of *henna* is ingenious, Khan has found a whole new medium with which to express herself. Incidentally, the use of *henna* itself speaks volumes given the way it is loaded with symbolism in the culture of the subcontinent.

In addition to the *henna* images on the wall, the show also includes panels of text, four pieces of organza mounted on a board, and drawings of the human form in various poses. Given the broad range of media and techniques used and the timeframe involved in compiling the works, it would be misleading to try and categorise them in a way that would not allow for a holistic and multi-layered interpretation. Perhaps it would be best to describe the different parts of the exhibition as the passages of a novel. The passages would work well within the framework of the narrative, but they can have meaning and relevance even outside the context of the novel.

The overall mood of the works in the current exhibition is very much akin to that of 'mini-narratives' that have become so popular a medium of expression in the postmodern world, as opposed to 'grand-narratives', the myths and 'stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs'. At the



The artist at work

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"Boundless" charcoal and conte on paper

same time, Khan's art is situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality or stability.

The most interesting feature, therefore, that emerges from this interplay of personal impulses and external stimuli is that Naiza Khan's art captures the 'big picture' despite her primary preoccupation with deeply personal issues. No doubt this lends more elasticity to her field of resonance, and the viewers are left with the liberty to fill the gaps in meaning with their own emotional or intellectual responses and renditions. ■