



'The mourners', a drawing by Naiza Khan

ART

By Marjorie Husain

Point of departure

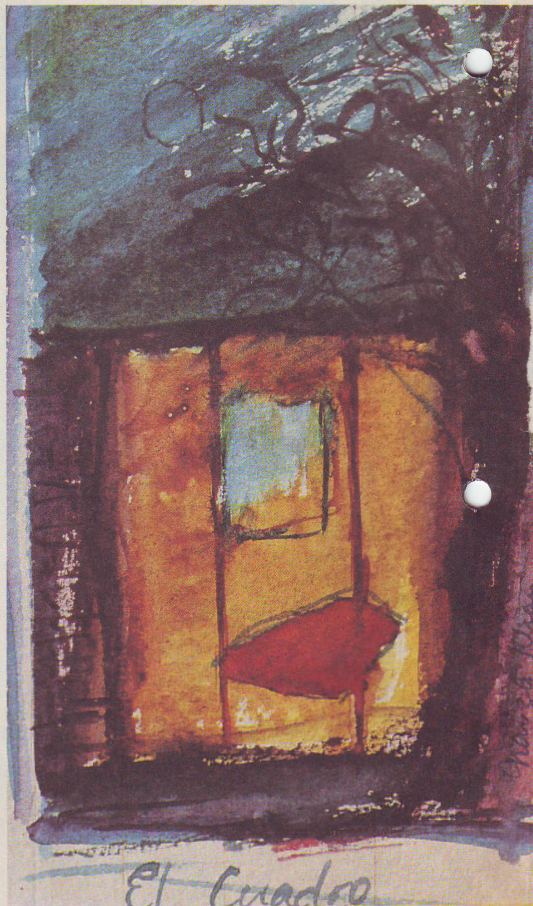
The future of art belongs to, as yet unknown artists in forms unforeseeable at present as norms constantly change. In the '50's, Bridget Riley was an inconspicuous art student at the Royal College of Art, who, it was assumed, would teach a bit in the provinces, get married and fade from the scene. From such unlikely material emerged the Op-Art artist with an international reputation. Artist Damien Hirst, a few months ago in London, won the attention of the media and respected art critics with his exhibited work: "I want you because I can't have you." Hirst's installation consisted

of fish preserved in formaldehyde, presented in two glass cases. Hirst explained his work wasn't really about fish, it was a statement about people and wanting to live forever. Life through the eyes of young artists can be tremendous fun. Currently, Chawkandi Art, Clifton, is holding an exhibition, archetypal of its kind, that of a young artist repositing the eternal questions about form, about space and the validity of the symbol.

Naiza Khan, presently teaching printmaking and drawing at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, returned to Pakistan in 1991

with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art, from Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Somerville College, Oxford University, where she majored in printmaking with woodcut and copper engraving. While in England, Naiza participated in several student exhibitions and on her return to Karachi, took to the local art scene like the proverbial duck to water, participating in group shows in Karachi and Islamabad.

The current exhibition is a landmark in the artist's development, her first solo exhibition where she displays four canvasses, a number of drawings and four woodcut



'El Cuadro (The room)', a water colour by Naiza Khan

Tuesday Review Nov 16 — 22, 1993



'Woman and shadow', an oil on canvas by Naiza Khan

prints as well as richly coloured, miniature scaled watercolours which form part of her English experience. Though a small body of work, it offers the viewer an opportunity to witness the artist's handling of a reality existing on unseen and uncountable planes.

Of the four oils on canvas, three of them achieve a still fragility that is already beginning the process of inevitable decomposition. The remaining canvas, centres on a figure that retains its solidity, controlling the space around it and taking energy from the dominant hands. In Naiza's own words, she sees the form in her paintings as a point of departure. Her involvement is with the problem of getting beyond the obvious surface,

to grasp reality not through description but by feeling the essentials. She concludes that what is left after a lot of 'looking' is the residue of vision.

The artist's graphic versatility is demonstrated in the precise drawing necessary to produce woodblock prints, and the more relaxed line used in the collection of drawings.

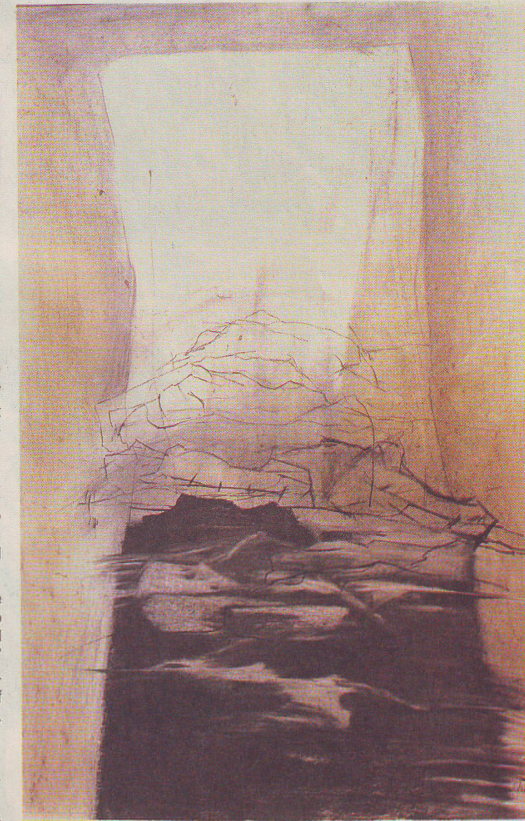
The drawings reveal the young artist's reaction to facets of her own cultural heritage. Attending a 'Milad' for the first time, her imagination was stirred by rows of identical, shrouded women. Timeless and anonymous, they inspired a series of drawings in which swathed forms appear to brood upon columns consisting of remnants of bodies, the victims of car-

nage. Through the drawings, the artist makes her statement on a world beset by turmoil. The obelisks of death refer to the hideous landmarks left behind by nomadic marauders of ancient days, linking past and present. Calligraphic symbols, sparked off by classic poetry are manifested in the artist's current work; yet at the early stages of analysis.

While at Oxford, Naiza discovered the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy, the distinguished art historian and critic and friend of Tagore. Coomaraswamy had described Mughal miniature art as being painted with a "precision of feeling", that expression etched its impression on Naiza's imagination and influenced a set of jewel like paintings. Smaller than the miniature format, the pieces

described the artist's reactions to glimpses of interiors of unknown rooms seen by a passer-by. Warm with light and promise, they imbibe the ambience of the lovely old town of Oxford. Summer skies and houses with French windows that, uncurtained reveal the inner sanctum. The artist has chosen to enclose the unpeopled space with slim, vertical bars which guard a painting or window beyond.

It is useful to refer to the artist's earlier work where it is possible to trace the beginning of her involvement with multiple dimensions. Enjoying the experience of experimenting with media, form and scale, Naiza is open minded, and receptive. One is left with the feeling that she is going to achieve a great deal and take pleasure in the process. ■



A drawing by Naiza Khan

Tuesday Review Nov 16 — 22, 1993