

At Canvas Art
Gallery,
Naiza Khan's
interaction with
her own body
comes out as a
statement

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Expressions of life

artreview

A western educated artist, Naiza Khan has the best of both worlds, East and West. Her education and exposure to western culture has not affected her eastern upbringing and accepted norms of Pakistani culture and society. Except that, being an artist, she has her own language to express herself. She has a vocabulary all tied up within a human body, especially female. What she looks at, she paints but that is only the image. It is when she comes to define these images (mainly sketches and drawings), that she starts to feel herself being identified in the language being produced.

Naiza's present set of paintings titled "Exhale", now on display at Canvas Art Gallery is an attempt to rediscover the link between mind and body. Mind is for thinking and creating and eventually gives way to body to take a form and become expressive. This is the essence of art's aesthetics.

'Honesty' with work demands that one should choose the language one is fluent in and the subject that one knows inside-out and only then what one is delivering or producing makes an impact. Naiza's subject is close to her heart, and thus she knows it inside out, being a woman herself. 'knowing a woman' (feelings) is not that difficult. However, Naiza seems to have found a vocabulary she would

her, it is simply the concept of breathing—inhalation and exhalation.

An eastern upbringing, tied up fully with her family, it must have been difficult for her to be 'bold and brave' at the same time because these are not the characteristics of an eastern model; but the honesty and openness that she exhibits must have been acquired by exposure to western system of education.

She says: "The body is a complex thing; do we draw it as we see it, or as we feel it?" One may find the question as simple, but the answer lies in what one wants to express: the beauty of the figure, the smoothness of curves and the enchanting furrows, or merely a reaction where feelings are the interpreter. It's not about a 'thing' but about 'what it means'. It is in 'what it means' that the difference stands out.

For Naiza, 'sieve' is through



want to express herself with, and that also facilitates a wider interpretation that she requires.

Naiza's female nudes are, in fact, her vocabulary to speak to herself. By producing it for the audience she has opened up a dialogue. It's a woman's perspective of defining herself, and with that she raises some of the issues that confront her gender today.

Talking to Naiza was a pleasant experience. The artist seems to know herself well. Pointing at the drawings at the far end she tells, "That is when I came out to be 'open with myself' about myself. It is like being honest to yourself, saying what you feel and behaving the best you know." In my opinion, that is how artists should 'come out' in the open, i.e. by speaking their own language. Naiza is doing exactly that.

Talking about "Exhale", one may take it as an act of holding one's breath until it becomes unbearable and then letting it all out. Naiza, however, doesn't agree with my interpretation. For

which one becomes visible; chastity belt is what negates a woman's existence, coming out of confinement is her 'exhale' and then there are shrouds and strands and lines of communication, including what one is leaving behind and what one is holding to one's heart. Naiza's metaphors are live; she uses them when some of the meanings of her vocabulary become obscure. With this, she tells a story of traps and trepidation that most women go through in their lives. 'Exhale' is what reassures and brings comfort. Naiza has erected signposts with messages of 'discovery'.

Naiza has been to highly reputable professional institutions, such as University of Oxford, Somerville College, Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art and Wimbledon School of Art. She has exhibited her work regularly in group shows and solo exhibitions, and has received appreciation and awards for her various thematic works.

