

# Female

# SUBSTANCE



Asma Arshad Mahmood



Tarunika Mansaram

Expressive strokes and the vivid play of colours make strong visual statements at the South Asian Gallery of Art. Titled *Women of Substance*, the group exhibition features the work of four contemporary artists from Ontario: Tarunika Mansaram, Asma Arshad Mahmood, Sylvat Aziz and Samina Mansuri. Tracing the journey from inner turbulence to inner strength, the artwork captures contemporary issues, humanistic ethos and a wide expanse over and beyond the collective theme. Located in Oakville in the basement turned art gallery of Ali Adil Khan, a tastefully positioned ornate wooden door urges you to explore more.

For Tarunika Mansaram creativity has been finding expressions in one form or another. "It has been appearing and disappearing like waves depending on the experiences, I was going through," says Tarunika. "Only the inner strength can sustain such activity for so long and make it enjoyable at the same time. The result is becoming a 'person of substance'."

Tarunika's work titled "Journey Within" follows a turbulent inner turmoil, which begins with rich shades of pink and red, however as the journey progresses darker hues move in. The imagery of pots and pans occur throughout the collection. "Clay and other mixed media in these images has become part of the interface between worlds of life, death and rebirth," says Tarunika. "My work is a garland of inner experiences. The experiences are both aesthetic and spiritual. My artwork per se is an inward journey; it is an ocean, every time you dive in you come up with a pearl. I may stumble a million times but will never fall down."

Tarunika has been painting and teaching art for the last 30 years. She received training at the Sir J.J. School of Art in Mumbai, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and the department of art education in New York on

a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship.

Asma Arshad Mahmood's work is predominantly figurative. Painting for her is a dimension of her own persona and a translation of her thoughts. Asma uses a rich palette to give her work depth and meaning. "The technique I employ helps me to develop layers of colour, and I love colour," she says. "I employ light to enhance and round up the other wise, flat images and thus create depth. I'm not scared of using colours, as I feel the palette reflects my personality and many moods and emotions I go through."

The images strike a chord. A captivating nude in blue looks poetic and conjures up feelings of loneliness. "I like nudes because they are usually so unflatteringly simple. My women do not have Ella McPherson bodies but rather a ripened, seasoned, wiser introspective form. To me it is not really the blatant sexuality that I intend to project through the nudes but the soft sensuous nature of human emotions. I want my figures to be very touchable, very approachable and rooted in the complexity of human limitations," reveals Asma.

She chooses the female form to express common feelings of loneliness, despair,



# Female EXPRESSION



Samina Mansuri

Sylvat Aziz

indecisiveness and companionship; however, she projects a very unisex emotion in her paintings.

Asma trained under well-known Pakistani artists Mansoor Rahi and Raja Changez Sultan. She has diversified into installation over the years. She received the Artist of the Year award by the South Asian Visual Art Collective (SAVAC) in 2003 for her installation at the Royal Ontario Museum. She also runs a business promoting art education.

Sylvat Aziz challenges traditional beliefs through striking imagery in her larger than life canvas diptych. However, she is most interested in comparative analyses and not unilateral 'exposing' of any one given tradition.

"I do juxtapose history and the contemporary milieu in an effort to trace causes and their effects which are usually social, political and religious in nature," says Sylvat. The work in question depicts the life within a burqa (veil) as dark and the world outside as flowery.

Sylvat explains, "All are symbols of historical mores of honour, the pain inflicted on women (by other women usually) in the name of beauty and traditional rites passed on through generations."

Her work on display also includes mixed media

- photography with period architecture, rendering and embellished with her own colouring.

Art wasn't Sylvat's first love. "I was a pre-med major when due to some government policies of mandatory service I had to change my mind. I approach art quite analytically and research the subject in depth as to its context, imagery, composition and message. I do owe a lot to the intuitive nature of painting, but I cannot let it get sentimental or sweet, a substantial potential weakness in visual art, in my view," she says.

Sylvat has degrees in literature and art from the National College of Art in Lahore, the Pratt Institute in New York and Concordia University in Montreal. Currently, she is assistant professor at the department of art at Queen's University.

Samina Mansuri's work has a modern flair. She voices contemporary concerns and portrays the flow of life with the sway of constant change. But she is not interested in finding a signature style. "To me, style comes from an artist's sensibility or temperament enacted on materials," says Samina. "I have been struggling for several years to invent a language that can express my concerns. It is that questioning, search and experimentation with different mediums and materials that has brought me to this stage. My artistic ambition is to make works that create a fundamental shift in public

perception and possibilities. I address contemporary concerns because I am directly engaged with the times I am living in, and I am also personally affected by the times I am living in."

Samina's paintings and sculptures are an extension of her drawings from 1999. "They form a hybrid and mutated figuration and speak to discontinuities, fragmentation, border crossing, malleability, flux, animation, fluidity, open-endedness, paradox, desire, memory, identity, place, movement, the natural and the manufactured," she explains.

Samina's work also assimilates drawing, sculpture, mixed media and most recently, video. "In my recent works, at SAGA, painting, sculpture and drawing happen simultaneously; the drawings lead to paintings and sculpture, and the sculptures inform the paintings, which then lead back to drawings," she says.

Samina moved to New York in 1982 and holds a bachelor of fine arts degree from Pratt Institute. She has also studied at the New York Studio School. AV

**The SAGA exhibition runs until November 30, 2005. For more information, check out [www.southasiangalleryofart.com](http://www.southasiangalleryofart.com).**

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