



BY SHANZAY SUBZWARI

A constant stage of intermediacy

Syed A Irfan's exhibition titled 'Women's Feelings' was recently held at Citi Art Gallery, and comprised of water-colour on *vasli* miniature paintings – a technique that the self-taught Irfan has been practicing for years.

Irfan's pieces comprised of imagery that was derived, in part from Mughal miniature painting, and in part, it seemed, from images of middle-class Pakistani women in digests, magazines and perhaps even television. This deduction is made with respect to the way the figures seemed to be aware of someone watching, or photographing them, and hence were consciously posing in various ways.

While Mehtab Ali depicted exoticised women in his works, Syed Irfan's women seemed to be real and grounded. They seemed to be lost in thought, either day dreaming, longing, wishing for something, or perhaps waiting for someone. The 'feelings' that the women imbued seemed to imply a constant stage of intermediacy: that there was something that had to happen, or a state of emotion or being that the women were expecting to experience, but had not done so, yet. The women also seem to be strangely comfortable in unlikely scenarios – lounging on sofas, playing with pigeons or resting on *gao takiyas* in the middle of scenic landscapes and gardens, inspired directly from Mughal miniature paintings. Perhaps this reflects the compromising nature of women, or their ability to find security in self-created



'bubbles'. Recurring imagery included the golden sun, trees and doves, representing brilliance and richness, life and fertility and peace: possibly attributes that the artist associates with women. Overall, there was calmness in Irfan's works and an element of surprise in terms of imagery, coupled with his skill in terms of intricacy while rendering delicate motifs.