

PAKISTAN ART REVIEW





Issue of Time & Feelings in Miniature Painting

By Shamim Akhter

Syed A. Irfan is a miniature painter by inclination. Inspired by the high renaissance of Mughal miniature painting, his recent work at Citi Art Gallery is an effort to amalgamate time and feelings. On the backdrop of settings seen in the traditional Mughal miniature paintings he juxtaposes women from today's middle class society. The effort is to create a sensation felt by the modern man when he is driven back into times long past.

Irfan creates an aura of the Mughal period by painting situations like holding pigeons, or sitting on thrones decorated with 'gao takyas', holding a rose in hand like a Mughal princess, heavily curtained large windows etc. Plants on his canvases are also derivative from the Mughal miniature. Exploring small details of a situation or thing is an essential of miniature painting. Irfan does not ignore this element of the genre. He shows his expertise of working minute details when he paints jewellery. Women are wearing jewellery designed in the past times. The palette also supports his unique idea. His experimentation with the subject brings forth an interesting scenario. Women on his miniature canvases give an impression as if they are, there for an act on a stage. Their feelings are like those of Alice in Wonderland.

Irfan relates the act of painting with emotions. His work to a large extent is a reflection of his life. He has accepted the challenge of keeping alive the spirit of traditional miniature painting in post modern times.





There came a time in Irfan's life when he had to define himself. He opted for miniature painting because this art form is a reflection of his life. He belongs to a family which adheres to its traditional cultural and social values. Traditional miniature painting is the title song of art and culture of the subcontinent. Irfan uses miniature painting as his language to tell the audience we have not forgotten and still love our traditions. But as he lives in the present times, he cannot ignore the claims of contemporary necessities. Miniature painting is no more confined within the geographical boundaries of what is India and Pakistan today. With new images and messages it has made a place for itself across borders and oceans. Remaining within the periphery of traditional miniature format, he gives exposure to his emotions and philosophy by incorporating forms other than the prince and princess with rose in hand. His Buddha series in the past show was an outcome of his concern



about the turmoil on the northern borders. His longing for peace appeared in the form of Buddha on his canvas. Buddha became the focal figure which predates the Mughal times. For his aesthetic satisfaction, Irfan painted the headdress of a Mughal prince above and higher than the head of the Buddha. He made subtle variations in his story for peace on various canvases.

Occasionally he paints portraits of children, senior citizens, and damsels from various regions of Pakistan. His natural calling made him paint and draw as a child. At a later stage, he learnt the poetics of miniature painting at a private institution of learning miniature. After a little while he carved his own style which merges tradition with contemporary requirements.