

Text and photos by Ayesha Vellani

# Group Dynamics







**S**et up a year ago by a group of aspiring artists, Earthware Studio is bright, cool and peaceful. Strains of music waft in with the breeze, obscuring the barely audible voices. As one's eyes flit from the array of clay pots and piles of crockery to unfinished paintings leaning against the walls, order gradually emerges from within the organised chaos.

Shazia, Aliya, Saman, Abintah and Shahnaz share a common love for the arts. Between them, they paint, sculpt and

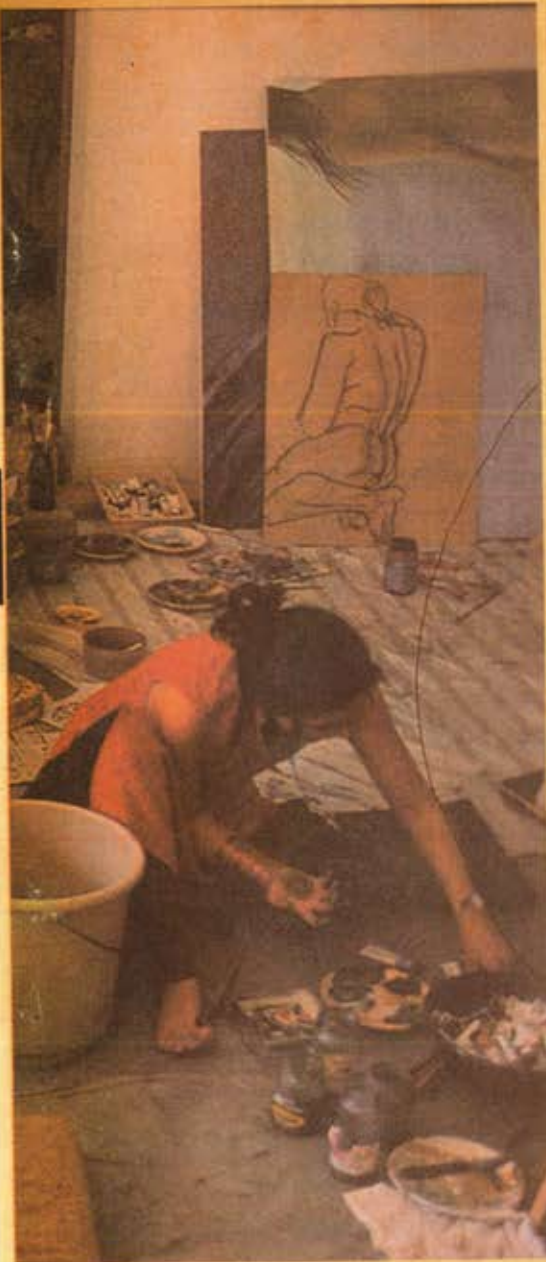




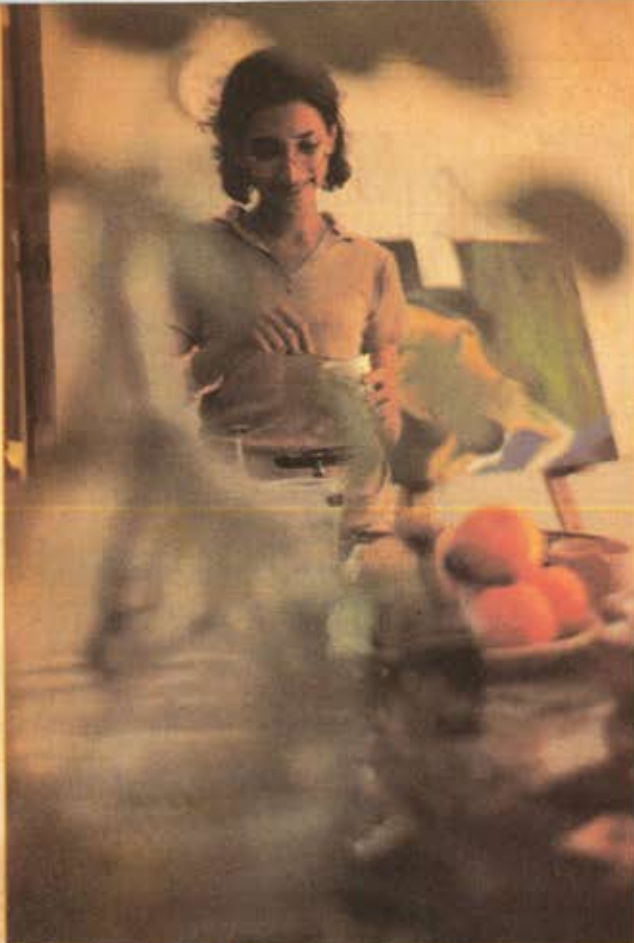


create unique pots from clay. This inadvertently all-female group wishes to encourage the concept of different artists working in one studio. "There are no burning ambitions here. We are constantly exchanging ideas. One thought leads to another almost like a chain reaction, and very rarely do







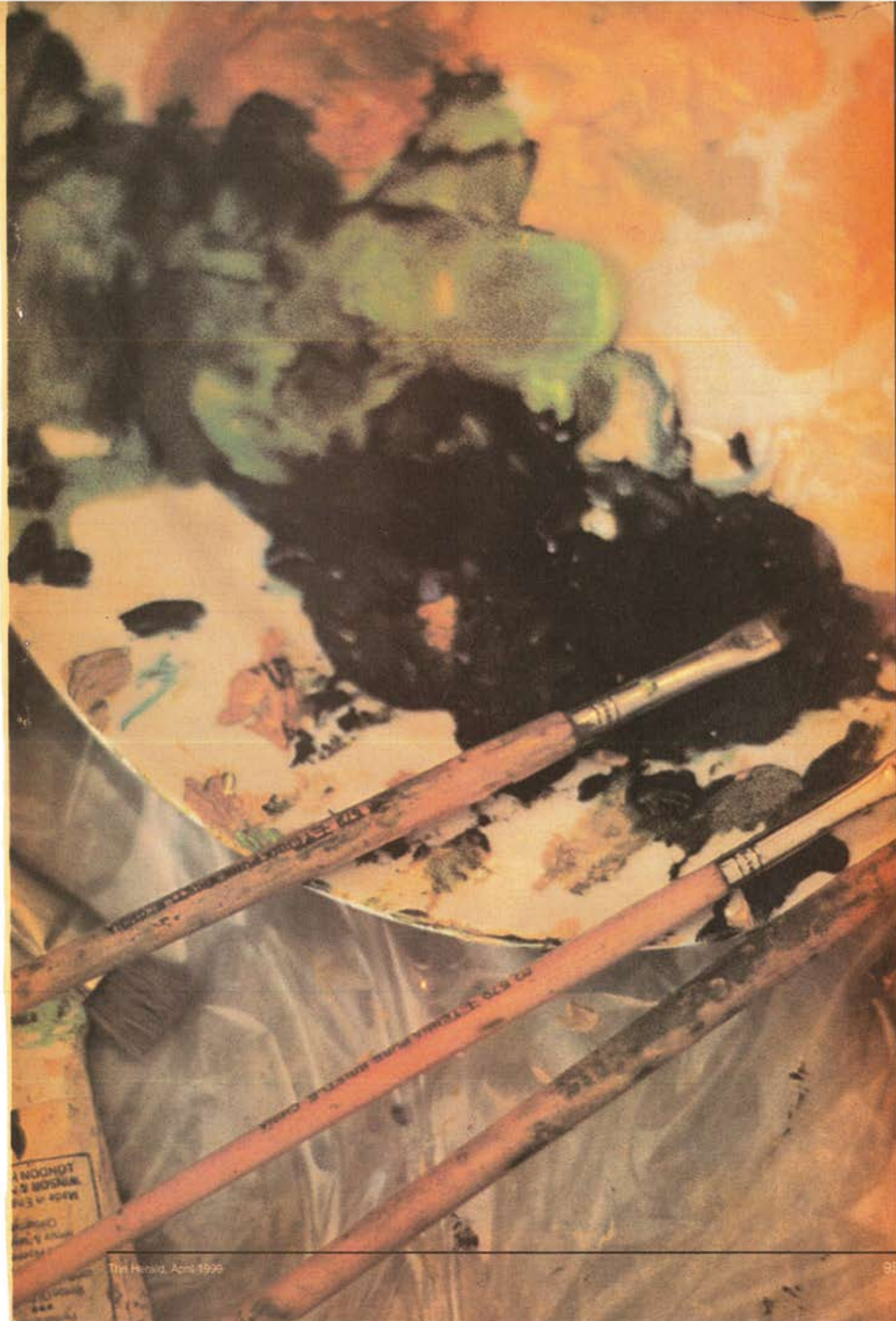


we get stuck in a rut. Moreover, criticism from each other results in fresh ideas and promotes the development of our style," claim the artists.

Being around different artists is inspiring. "Now I want to take up painting," says Saman, one of the potters. "I'll be guided by our in-house painters, Abintah and Shazia. Painting and pottery are very different. While a painting can be seen immediately after its completion, the true beauty of a clay pot emerges only after it has been fired."

Shazia, Aliya and Saman hope to be involved in the understanding and promotion of pottery by working with local craftsmen. During a recent trip to Hala, they found that the methods employed by the traditional potters were very different from their own and essentially dictated by the availability of resources. For instance, their glazed pots and tiles are only fired once instead of twice, as fuel is expensive and hard to come by. But now, with stiff competition from commercial tile producers, their business is no longer feasible. Apparently, there





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are only three tile-making *karkhanas* left in Hala.

Few people are aware of the precision and hard work that goes into the production of a ceramic. The temperature of the kiln is critical. "The new batch can't take the temperature of the previous one; it cracks much too easily," says Aliya. "It's a process of trial and error. The potters have to



continuously adjust the temperature of the kiln and chemical composition of their glazes."

To me, someone who has regretfully traded in the sketchpad for the camera, this place seems like a haven. Free from the pressures of deadlines, ideas germinate and are nurtured in these surroundings. Even Zeus, the Doberman from next door, prefers it here. ■