

Ceramics, as an art form, enjoys limited appreciation in our cultural milieu, but in the last few years a number of solo and collective displays, spotlighting clay art and craft, have managed to jog awareness levels. Young talent is investing this genre with fresh vigour, as their creative expression bordering on the experimental and the innovative is



bringing thoughtful new meanings to moulded forms. Shazia Zuberi's display of ceramic sculptures at Momart Gallery is one such exhibition where much can be read beyond the apparent and the obvious.

A contemporary ceramist with a strong individualistic bent, Shazia has a minor in Studio Art from Allegheny College, USA. She started her career as a painter but found her true expression in ceramics. A committed ceramist, she initiates dialogue with clay through concepts. Her ideas meander to fruition through a series of equations, translations and stylisations. In her first solo, she explored the conflicting states of freedom and repression, inner turmoil and displacement. She borrowed the organic imagery of nature to develop her visual vocabulary. Drawing inspiration from aging, eroded tree trunks, hollowed furling barks, she carved sombre, melancholic forms in clay. These brooding, cloaked sentinels, fissured, scarred and gouged, were destined to become emblematic. Today, they are her signature pieces. Even the present show at Momart has a few of

these totemic icons standing guard over her new collection, reminding viewers of her initial journey with clay.

Her current exhibition is her third solo in a span of just four years. The focal point of her thematic concerns is gender disparity. She focuses on women under constraint – entombed, incarcerated, stoned and pelted into the abyss of the living dead. She turns, once again, to nature for visual reference and picks on the stone as her leitmotif, classifying it as a weapon of aggression. The stone/pebble image weaves through the collection in varying shapes and sizes, linking her works into a single chain of thought. A sub-text running parallel to, and complementing, the main issue is that of erosion which also correlates with the concept of abuse and degeneration. To address this environmental issue she tackles erosion as the visible factor. Her heavily scratched, meshed, fractured forms with clefts, punches and chinks, weathered rims and frayed borders help her to exploit the varied range of shape and texture. Abrasive, gutted and etched surfaces are obvious marks of erosion



technically proficient mind has been able to capture some very appealing mixes. However, it is the picture-making aspect of her work that gives direct definition to the gender struggle she is endeavoring to portray. Painting the forlorn captive figure in a state of self-defense, onto the platters and vessels, spells her social concerns much more effectively than the other expressions.

Artists have to find ways to engage audiences; only then will they see that although nothing in a painting or sculpture moves – at least in the sense that sound moves in music or bodies move in dance – everything in a painting/sculpture is alive. And then the surface opens up, and effects multiply, and you see more and more. In this exhibition, Shazia Zuberi has refined her technicalities giving a fine finish to her works. Her fluted whorls, serrated bowls,

FRACTURED FORMS

The focal point of ceramist Shazia Zuberi's current work is gender disparity.

and Shazia has maximised on their visual impact. Add to all this natural colours of decay and rot, and a vast palette of earthy browns, ochres and greens reveal themselves in subtle interplay with the hue of the eroded object. The artist's keenly observant eye and

supple masses and glossy platters are very obviously attractive and consequently distract the viewer from the main theme. Shazia's techniques have improved but her expression has suffered. The raw primal nature of her

earlier work spoke of an inner angst with scant concern for beautification. The present expression has been handled with considerable subtlety but, in the process, the emotive concerns have lost their urgency. ■

