

DAWN

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The weightlessness of things

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Dust storm — Photo by White Star

Naiza Khan is one of those very few Pakistani artists who constantly reinvent themselves with the distinction that they don't like to reinvent the wheel, as it were, but themselves.

What's noteworthy about Naiza Khan is, and it is more than evident, that she has over the years grown both in terms of experimenting with technique and choosing issues that are close to her heart. The topics that are in vogue don't seem to impress her. An exhibition of Ms Khan's new series of artworks titled 'The Weight of Things' at the Koel Art Gallery is testimony to her artistic and intellectual progress.

What kind of weight is Ms Khan referring to? The question assumes more relevance when the viewer looks at the 19 exhibits whose media range from watercolour, oil-on-canvas paintings to installations and a single channel video. There's a definite subject approached through different media. And that subject is land — land lost, land forgotten, no man's land and land encroached upon. By the way, land is used not merely as a physical thing that has weight.

'Fossilised Land' (watercolour) sets the ball rolling by introducing the tussle between the organic and the mechanised.

The use of watercolours allows the artist to go gentle on the argument, and at the same time, the contrast achieved by the greyness around (of objects known to us) makes the heaviness of things, not lightness, pronounced.

'An Invisible Landscape Conditions the Invisible One' (oil on canvas) is an extraordinary work of art that can perhaps be described as euphemism at its best. The work of art communicates before it is understood. There's no need to understand it.

'Map-under-Construction' (watercolour) is a self-explanatory piece that is exactly what the artist wants the viewer not to look at it as.

Perhaps the most unusual exhibit is 'Constellations Adrift' (installation composed of objects cast in brass). It's the depiction of a universe made up only of tangible things. Tangibility implies material development, even with respect to those issues which were once related to metaphysical pursuits. It may sound irrelevant to mention here but they say 'brass is a metal of wealth achieved through methods based on chance than on labour'.

Exhibits 'Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966' (Chine-colle on Somerset paper) and 'Homage' (video) have definite socio-political overtones. To the artist's credit, these overtones do not drown out the voices that long for land, both tangible and intangible.