

Hair and there

Naiza Khan laid emphasis on the sensual and sinuous aspect of human body in her latest work shown in London

By Quddus Mirza

Human hair signifies two paradoxical concepts. It is associated with beauty, charm and youth. Innumerable words (both in our poetry and in the world of literature) have been written to praise long, black and shining locks. Despite this, hair can be unwanted and dirty.

For women in our society (and in a few others) hair on their head can be regarded as the sexually enticing entities. Hence according to the norms, it was required that females must cover their heads, and failing to do so was frowned upon. The tradition is so strong that women in Turkey wear headscarves, even if they are in skirts.

Naiza Khan's new work cannot be understood without considering these connotations related to hair. A Pakistani artist, who exhibited her work on June 23 at the Gaswork Studios in London (during her three months of residency at the same place), displayed a number of prints containing images of hair.



Innovations in art: (above and right) Naiza Khan's work.



Sensual and sinuous aspects or reading of hair were enhanced once the art pieces were viewed next to other artworks, especially with drawings of chastity belt, impression of cloth and screen prints with stains.

In a few drawings, there was a sieve with some liquid

dripping from the holes. Along with the drawings and silk screens on the wall, there was an installation in the middle of the room. It was built with a large role of paper on which various objects covered in latex were placed. One could glimpse at a chair and two sieves put on the sheet

through the latex, with drawings of the same things on the one end of the paper.

Probably this body of work by Naiza Khan was related to the subject of sexuality — its fear existing in a girl and social restrictions attached to it. Apart from the obvious and explicit image of chastity belt drawn in a sensitive manner on visually activated surfaces, there were other components of her work as well which were linked to a woman's body.

According to Naiza, "The sieve represents femininity." She found out that in the past this object was considered a symbol of chastity, for instance in some of the portraits of Queen Elizabeth I where she is seen holding it. Similarly, a blob of paint or a stain ceased to be a pure abstract mark. In fact it had

years, and has been applying it on her text pieces. But it was only in the recent show that the preference for this material and its specific usage unfolded other meanings — because the works of an artist created in a particular span of time may have different appearances, forms and mediums, but are based on the common concerns of an individual. Thus being aware of the objects/images in its immediate environment, the latex may be taken as a simile for other concepts and realities. It signified the adaptation of *pardah*, the act of concealing the body (head, face, legs and arms). It also suggested, as the artist stated, "The practice of fabricating the 'misinformation' in which the news of political events are blocked or hidden according to state's whims and necessities".

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sexual connotations— especially when displayed close to the drawings of chastity belts.

The most prominent section of her show was the installation of chair and sieves. All the objects were wrapped in layers of latex. Naiza has been working with this substance for a number of

On another level, the latex could be perceived as a substitute/metaphor to the hymn, which is connected with the concept of chastity — and to the social pressures emphasizing its presence. In a strange way, Naiza was making a comment on it (and extended it) by covering each article —

including sieves — with this thin film of transparent rubber, hence transforming every object into a significant and loaded entity.

Naiza Khan has been utilising the images of body, hair and text, and other materials like latex. If her earlier work revealed a more straightforward method with details of body, hair and words, open for direct comprehension, the new pieces contained a separate approach: In these she selected similar mediums and visuals but treated them in such a manner that they hinted at ideas rather than portraying them. This change may have come due to the artist being away from her usual audience, gallery and studio, and working in a different place.

This physical shift brought about some other dimensions to her art. The most important was that none of these pieces qualified as complete artworks. It was a positive addition in our art (though it was actually made and exhibited thousands of miles away, but it still belonged to the Land of the Pure), where the emphasis is on creating a finished 'product'.

Her major work at the Gaswork studio was installation, constructed with the roll of paper. But having a few drawings at its beginning, the large portion of the rolled sheet was plain, yet to be filled with images — implying that the art work is a continuous process of dealing with ideas rather than presenting alluring artifacts.