





“Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner” is a seven minute observational one-take film that captures the middle of a practice session of a brass and pipe band, a colonial holdover for military parades, that she had hired to learn the American national anthem. Its off-key and out-of-rhythm starts and stops are simultaneously humorous and frightening. An American might assume, rightly or wrongly, that even a Pakistani ear would recognize their anthem from frequent playing on Olympic games television broadcasts, and thus would hear the yawning gap between intention and result, between message sent and message received.

Qureshi’s miniatures from the series “Moderate Enlightenment” play ironically on Musharraf’s 2004 Enlightened Moderation policy, by which he sought to control his “fundamentalists” by getting Western powers to control their own, hoping they could meet amicably somewhere in the middle. But in practice, where is that?

Qureshi has shown us, in his pictures of a head-covered woman with a book and purse clasped under her arm, a skull-capped student wearing camouflage-pattern socks, and a bearded, shirtless body builder pumping iron- all painted in the meticulous fashion of Mughal royal portraiture. Erstwhile extremists, now seeking personal improvement in their physique and intellect.

Standing in front of his paintings at the exhibit opening, Qureshi introduced me to his friend who had recently moved from Lahore to New York. She was wearing a camouflage hoodie- “Just something I threw on to come out tonight”, she laughed. An odd choice I thought for a dressy occasion on Park Avenue. Qureshi looked more than pleased.

And what to make of Huma Mulji’s taxidermied water buffalo perched atop a ten foot Greek column, or Hamra Abbas’ cherry red fiberglass version of Buraq that seems to invite a child to mount him as a rocking horse, or Adeela Suleman’s scooter helmets assembled from gaily decorated tinpot kitchenwares, or Asma Mundrawala’s paper pop-ups that land somewhere between a Bollywood set designer’s maquette and a Joseph Cornell box? Can they really all be traced, as Hashmi implies, back to the austere near-abstraction of Zahoor ul Akhlaq (1941-1999), who serves as her touchstone for the contemporary.

If it is true as critic Quddus Mirza contends in his catalog essay, that Pakistani artists who work at home have also become exiles at home, showing their work only to fellow artists and sending it out through the mediasphere and market to international galleries and museums, it is no surprise. Few artists in New York can afford the rents anywhere near the gallery district. Talk about a sense of exile!