

The theoretical art discussions in South Asia revolve largely around the concerns of authenticity and authority. The questions asked are, why has the local context of culture and socio-political dynamics not become an acknowledged voice within the grand narrative that is zealously guarded by the politics of power? Will the balance of art sales tilting in favor of Pakistani and Indian artists open a space for the authentic discourses that emerge from the place of origin of the new market favorites or will the control of canon making remain in the hands of Western institutions?

To initiate debate and investigate the ferment of ideas emerging from South Asia, *NuktaArt* in collaboration with Goethe Institut will host a two day seminar on art criticism in October 2008, in Karachi, under the rubric 'The Anxious Century: Discourses Waiting To Be Born.'

The readers get a preview of the four sub-themes under discussion, *Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space, Canons of Control and Subordination, Art Market: An Uncertain Progress and Transformed by Technology* in the abstracts of the papers by art critics from Pakistan, Germany, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and Maldives in an exclusive section of this issue.

*NuktaArt* acknowledges the impressive achievements of two contemporary spirits: Rashid Rana and Ali Azmat, who continue to challenge the canon in art and music. In *Nukta-e-Nazar*, Rana gives his perspective on issues in his art and how he has constructed a new language centered around technology, to communicate them. The eclectic art collection of Ali Azmat shows his fascination for faces which can be read as an emotive link to the way he intuitively connects to youth and street culture to create music that transcends time and genre.

The themes of Anxious Century are extended with multiple viewpoints. The impact of market forces on urban space is taken up by Arif Hasan, a guru to architects and town planners with a conscience, as he looks at some hard facts in how cities like Karachi are stalked by builders who are mutating its architectural face.

Negatives of a bullish art market are expounded in *ArtMart Inc*, with a discussion on how the relentless pressure of dealers is known to stunt the creative potential of artists. The writer goes on to lament how quadrupled prices have pushed art out of the reach of people who value and understand it and into the hands of speculators.

One high profile art sale inspires optimism as the Wahab Jaffer Collection, sold to the Rangoonwala Trust at an undisclosed price, will soon be displayed in a dedicated public gallery

in Karachi. The exclusive details of this transaction inform *NuktaArt* readers how history was made when art changed hands between two major collectors of Pakistan.

Looking at Iran, a country facing the challenge of change on the art scene, a European art critic sends in her report *Personal Perceptions of Contemporary Art in Iran* that candidly discusses her art encounters.

An in-depth article on Constantin Brancusi draws the great sculptor out of the history books to focus on his monumental work the *Endless Column*. The writer, whose roots can also be traced to Targu-Jiu, Brancusi's birth place, offers an insight into the folkloric significance of his iconography on this unusual homage to local war heroes.

The continuum of Pueblo Pottery is taken up in *Songs in Clay: Native American Pottery* which takes into account the dilemma facing its 21st century creators. Torn between purism and innovation, the choice becomes difficult when a break from rules is seen as a betrayal of tribal conventions.

*Art with Heart* on the art project at Machar Colony, one of the coastal slums of Karachi, comes under a new section: *Art Activism*. This project introduced art as a vehicle of awareness and discovery to vitalize the lives of children debilitated by poverty.

On the invitation of *NuktaArt*, three acclaimed photographers, Tapu Javeri, Ayesha Vellani and Kohi Marri, respond to a photo essay on the theme "The Anxious Century" with pictures in their portfolio. It's interesting to note that all three artists have independently selected to underline their concern for the most marginalized and the most vulnerable in our midst.

Over 30 years ago Lubna Agha with her white paintings commanded the attention of her peers and art critics. In a recent biography of Lubna Agha, *Points of Reference*, Marcella Nesom Sirhandi takes readers back to the vibrant 1970s in Pakistan.

Making connections between past success and future conundrums, this issue of *NuktaArt* attempts to extend the art debate on the Anxious Century.

**Nilofur Farrukh**

Editor

October 2008

**Rumana Husain and Amra Ali**

Senior Editors