

# Living Arts

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Ambreen Butt grew up in Pakistan and trained as a painter of Persian miniatures. She has lived in Boston for a few years now, and her drawings poignantly embody that collision of cultures. Like Boroson, she may be on the cusp of a big career; she has just been awarded the Institute of Contemporary Art Artist Prize for artistic excellence and will be artist-in-residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum next fall.

In her show at the Bernard Toale Gallery, Butt uses watercolor and gouache to set small self-portraits against layers of mylar, stippled with rows or columns of dots. Drawings and textures fade beneath the outer surface of each piece, upon which we trace the adventures and quandaries of our artist/hero, and into which we read our own.

The young, dark-haired woman depicted in each drawing sets herself in situations that read like myths or fairy tales. Trees and the artist's own tresses play a big part in the drawings, the "Bed of My Own Making" series. In one piece, busy red roots sprout upward and circle in wisps about the woman. They gather together in her hand at the nape of her neck in the form of a ponytail, which she is about to cut off. That's a shocking image, given the importance of the hair, which not only haloes but connects and tethers the woman in other drawings.

In one, the woman's braid loops up into a fishing pole and snags the mouth of a giant fish, upon which our heroine stands. She at once pulls something up from the deep and tames it, using only her own resources. These images reflect Butt's cultural struggles, but they don't pin us down to a particular story. Rather they tease and pry at the viewer's imagination, using humor, compassion, and meticulous skill.

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## miniature myths;

