

Art exhibit talks war, gender, independence

Worcester Art Museum displays Butt's paintings

By MARK PICKERING
INDIA New England Staff

WORCESTER, Mass. — Ambreen Butt has a major exhibit of 24 paintings at the Worcester Art Museum. She is perhaps the most prominent of a new generation of South Asian artists creating

works in New England.

The exhibit, "I Must Utter What Comes to My Lips," is on display through May 11. While these 21st-century paintings cannot actually talk, hers do wrestle with issues of war, gender, independence and human relationships.

The museum has set up a large room to feature Butt's paintings, which draw on the Persian and Indian tradition of miniatures.

As part of the display, the works sport subtle "frames" painted onto the gallery's walls.

In one painting, two women with pistols are

blindfolded and standing back to back, ready for an old-fashioned duel. They have, seemingly accidentally, already shot a bird. High above them in the painting, the bird is now plummeting to Earth.

The two women's blindfolds are an American flag and a Muslim prayer scarf.

That piece and most of the others at the Worcester show are untitled works named, as a group, with the same title as the show.

There are also five pieces from her "Farewell" series; these paintings feature trees with light-colored "leaves" that have words painted onto them. "Lust," "just," "self," "desire" say some leaves on one painting.

Because there is no apparent sentence there, the words are like an incomplete utterance on these topics.

The paintings in the show feature a stylized representation of Butt herself — often with surreal images. These include pieces where the young woman's hair turns into tree roots or, while she is lying down, a tree grows out her belly.

Butt was born in 1969 and raised in Lahore, Pakistan. She majored in miniature painting while attending the National College of Art in Lahore.

Since moving to the United States, she has trained in contemporary Western styles. She has a master's degree from the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston.

In 2001, her works were part of an exhibit at The Brush Art Gallery and Studios, which is

next to the visitor center of the Lowell National Historical Park. The exhibit featured South Asian artists now practicing in New England.

That show had earlier works by Butt that, she said, stayed "within the limitations of miniatures" while including somewhat more of a social and political content.

Those paintings illustrate the subservient status of women in feudal South Asia, particularly in the case of royalty. In one, many of the women are naked and fawning over the prince, who is clothed.

Butt's works have been displayed such places as the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln and the Bernard Toale Gallery and Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

Her paintings have been shown at the India Center of Art and Culture in New York.

The "I Must Utter What Comes to My Lips" exhibit of Ambreen Butt paintings is on display through May 11 at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass. Tickets: members free; non-members — adults: \$8, seniors and full-time students with current IDs: \$6. Free admission for students under 17 and is also free for everyone on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon.

The museum is open Wednesday (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.), Thursday (11 a.m. to 8 p.m.), Friday (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.), Saturday (10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Free from 10 a.m. to noon) and Sunday (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.). It is closed Mondays, but open some Monday holidays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For info., call 508-799-4406.



South Asian artist Ambreen's Butt's paintings, including the ones shown above, are on exhibit at the Worcester Art Museum through May 11.