

Mass. gallery exhibits South Asian artists

Focus of the two-month show is building bridges between different cultures

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LOWELL, Mass. — An exhibition at The Brush Art Gallery and Studios in Lowell showcases South-Asian artists living in the region and reflects an intersection between Eastern and Western cultures.

Brush Gallery curator Linda Poras said the exhibit, called "Home? Crosscurrents in Contemporary South Asian/American Art," features painting, photography, and mixed media constructions. It runs through April 15.

The exhibit, Poras said, reflects South-Asian culture blending with the culture of the United States in the work of artists living here. The works explore issues relating to stereotypes, tolerance, women, spirituality, religion and identity.

The exhibit is third in a series that the gallery has organized along with a University of Massachusetts Lowell cultural program. Poras said the university's program focuses on building bridges between the diverse cultural communities in Lowell and the surrounding areas.

In 1999, the first year of the program, the Brush Gallery exhibited Cambodian and Southeast Asian art. Last year, it exhibited Latin American art.

"We try to be an educational resource for



"Finding Home Series #29," above, by Siona Benjamin, can be seen at The Brush Art Gallery and Studios in Lowell, Mass.

the community," Poras said. "People can learn about the cultures by coming to the exhibits."

For the current show, Poras said, "I found the best artists I could find in New England and New York."

The exhibit will showcase work from the following artists: Ambreen Butt, Siona Benjamin, Sabina Haque, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Kanishka Raja, Sejal Patel, Sukanya Rahman, and Ram Rahman.

According to Poras, the artists range from established artists such as Butt and Rahman to up-and-coming talents, such as Patel.

Butt, who teaches at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, has had her paintings shown at numerous galleries throughout the area. These include the Bernard Toale Gallery in Boston, the Boston Center for Arts, and the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln.

Photographer Rahman lives between New York and New Delhi, India. He has had his photographs on display all over the world, including Gallery 678, N.Y.; Gallery Chemould Bombay, India; and the Japan Foundation, Tokyo.

Patel, from Dracut, is a senior at the Massachusetts College of Art. Last year she won first prize in a photo exhibition at the Brush Gallery. She also received a Massachusetts College of Art travel grant, allowing her to travel to India and take photographs.

Poras said a special addition to the exhibit is Siona Benjamin, a professor at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Ill. Benjamin's paintings are known for bridging the cultural gap between India and the United States, Poras said.

In addition to having a master's degree in fine arts from Southern Illinois University and another one from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, she graduated from the J.J. School of Art in Bombay, India.

The exhibit will also feature a documentary video, by David Wells, about Asian Indian families in Greater Lowell. Wells, who lives in Providence, R.I., is a free-lance photographer.

On March 10 at 2 p.m. several of the artists featured in this exhibit will visit the Brush Gallery for a panel discussion on the work. An additional talk with other artists featured will be held on March 24, also at 2 p.m.

The artists will talk about the difficulties they have encountered when dealing with the differences between cultures, Poras said. "They will also talk about things that relate to

art and themselves."

Aside from the UMass Lowell sponsorship, the exhibit was funded by a grant from the LEF Foundation in Cambridge, the Lowell Cultural Council, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and the Bombay Mahal Restaurant in Lowell.

The Brush Gallery also provides studio and exhibition facilities for local artists. Though the artists pay rent for the studios, the Brush Gallery does not collect a commission on any work sold.

About 15,000 to 20,000 people visit the Brush Gallery each year, Poras said. She said the unique characteristic of the gallery is that all of the studios are open.

"People can come see live artists creating art," she said. "Here the doors are always open."

The "Home? Crosscurrents in Contemporary South Asian/American Art" exhibit will run through April 15: Wed. through Sat., noon to 4 p.m. and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. The Brush Art Gallery is located at 256 Market St., Lowell, Mass. Admission is free for all. For information call (978) 459-7819 or e-mail thebrush@netscape.net.



"Come Home," by Sabina Haque, is on display at a Lowell, Mass., gallery.



"Cognition Series," by Ambreen Butt, is on display at a Lowell, Mass., gallery.