

CLAY FEAT

In her ceramics, Shazia Zuberi successfully manages to straddle the divides between art and craft and between painting and sculpture.

“**T**he Shyok and Indus conversation... two rivers originating in Tibet, flow parallel to each other for 700 kilometres, and finally converge near Khaplu (Baltistan)...”

Thus Shazia Zuberi explains the context from which emerged her current collection of ceramics, exhibited in November at Chawkandi Art, Karachi. It is within a relatively short time that Shazia has been able to establish a personal vocabulary in the age-old tradition of clay. Her bond with clay started less than five years



ago, when Shazia started working on developmental projects in the remote areas of Baltistan. What began as a hobby soon became an intense interaction with form and material.

The artist now looks back on the helplessness she felt when trying to educate herself, while looking for clay and glazes. She encountered an uncooperative attitude from other artists who were unwilling to impart or share information. After the initial problems, Shazia set up a studio where

she and Saman Shamsie shared studio space. Both graduates of the same college in the States, they undoubtedly found this interaction beneficial to their growth. The problem of working in isolation has often been felt by painters and sculptors. For potters or ceramists, it must be more so because they are relatively fewer. As with any discipline, technical and conceptual expertise is nurtured by interaction with others in a field.

In the present exhibition, Shazia has been able to resolve her dialogue with the figure in relation to nature. The elongated figurative form seems to be etched within the rugged grains of clay, dancing to the circular movement of the potter's wheel. The artist's experience in remote areas is translated in the forms and textural quality of her surfaces. “The harsh, barren terrain subject to constant battering is represented in the earthy and textural glazes,” she writes in her statement. Shazia uses a double-glaze, where she glazes her piece once and fires it. If she wants a combination of matte and glossy surfaces, she does a second firing at a lower temperature in the kiln.

The form in Shazia's work is approached in an experimental way. The fluidity of form in a vase, for example, which is often elongated, is both figurative as well as abstract. On the one hand, it is a figure bent inwards fighting against nature, on the other, a free flowing form. In the end, it is also a

vase. This balance encompasses a dialogue between ‘art’ and ‘craft.’

Shazia's ceramics stand somewhere between painting and sculpture, and dispel the notion of pottery that has usually been designated as a lower form of art. The link to ‘matti’ or clay is a reassertion to go to the very beginning, an age-old profession translated into a contemporary language. ■

