

**Catalogue essay by Roobina Karode for solo exhibition at Art Heritage Gallery
New Delhi India 1998**

The more one encounters works of art, one tends to affirm that artists often imagine reality better than they can understand or explain it. Sabrina's attempt here, to me, is to present her reality in an imaginative way, drawing upon her most private moments and personal possessions. Her interest lies in capturing the temporal aspects of her-personal history and the extended nostalgia of an ancestral context. Time, in its metaphysical dimension, imparts to her, not just the sense of the now, but implies a sense of the past and the future as well. Irreversible and fluid, time in its temporality is the motivation behind her building of personal archives. To her, the coiling and uncoiling of time is manifest as the maker of personal meaning, sometimes invested in contained moments, sometimes as a course of events, and as the artist's vision, compiled as her history.

Sabrina's collages are a calligraphy of memories, inscribed in the form of recollected images, presented with a special vividness and in physical dimensions. The 15 inch square wooden boxes act as a store-house and tomb that house the fragile, aged, and the worn out- a profusion of material in the form of actual objects, physical fragments, pictures and words, combined and juxtaposed, laden with intended as well as unintended meanings. These boxes reveal a retrospective longing as they deal with the sentiments of times revealed to her through stories narrated by her grandmother or echoed by her parents, of events often only heard of and people only seen and recognized in photographs/portraits, all becoming perfect material for her imaginative visualization. This reverting back thrives on the power to 'recall and restore'. The past is somehow always golden, precious as a bygone; its abstractness has a lingering presence, a sacredness that is imperative to preserve, stamp and inscribe as a carrier of ancestral memory, one's personal heritage or then even one's identity.

-From the preserved family photographs that have paled and faded in color, to the objects and fragments that surround them such as dull copper coins, rust iron blades, the piece of a dried bark of a tree and blackened utensils, all speak of time's working upon them. Amidst the objects that bear their archaic and antiquated look with a certain dignity, the artist has used gold leaf that illuminates and spreads a precious glow, enlivening the dim and the decaying.

Objects associated both with the sacred and profane co-inhabit the constructed space. Often the background is prepared by layering adhesives with color or gold dust, or by pasting fabric, colored photocopies, painted in acrylic or using a freckled color glass sheet which act as flat areas on which the collage can be fabricated. There is playfulness and a quick wit in the way Sabrina re-allocates the objects and magically transforms their nature and at times their function as well. The phenomenon of collaboration tends to upset conventional relationships and reveal unforeseen affinities between objects, also articulating subtle relationships between spaces and sensations. There is an accidental or unknown order of forces determining the assembling of components. Objects are liberated from their context of transience and released into timelessness. She plays on the truth of the image, which is not a single one, but a many-faceted one, for the image in memory is many actions and many things.

Sabrina strongly believes that there is no homogenous world established once and for all. It is the magnetism of the yet unknown, the mysterious and hidden that inspires the artist to penetrate deeper into the layers of reality and discover inherent possibilities within the visible and the familiar. The creative act for Sabrina is a constant state of movement, steered by inexplicable currents of feeling, intuitively addressing the latent states of the mind. As an artist, she not only draws and paints, but also works like a potter, weaver, carpenter and a goldsmith, exhibiting a plethora of skills in making her collages. Sabrina's work firstly stands for aesthetic autonomy where for her, creativity is not restricted to conventionally devised aesthetic materials and methods. Her artistic imagery necessitates freedom to deploy all possible forms and techniques. For Sabrina, the collage happens to be an apt form of expression where incompatible fragments are bonded by the similarity of the

feelings they evoke in her. She uses an arduous methodology, quite unspecified, even unpremeditated, that rather grows out of its own as she proceeds. These works take shape through a slow emergence with multiple layering. One finds a wide spectrum of matter assembled that vary from the self-made to ready-mades, to found objects and natural ones. Especially fascinated by discards in nature and the man-made that she invariably finds on the road, Sabrina invests expensive memories in inexpensive materials.

Childhood memories are a source to the oft-repeated images in her work such as the kite, the bird and wings that symbolize flight and freedom, and perhaps, pursuit. The boat too symbolizes the journey and the feeling of floating, the flowers symbolic of beauty and blossoming, feathers of lightness and fairies and the clock, of movement, the pulse of time ticking away. There is a sense of the marvelous imparted by the transformations innovatively arrived at- the draped golden veil shapes into a boat that carries feathers and broken stars, a white feather in an upturned vessel metamorphoses into liquid pouring, the demarcated area of burnt wood under the small terracotta head becomes its body. Depths are created by using the hollow of broken containers, the play of concave and convex curves of the terracotta fragments and the vertically hanging strings of beads. Reeds, peeled skin of a branch, dried fallen vegetables, wild flowers are juxtaposed in stark contrast with sharp iron blades bringing as if the rural and the urban, nature and industrialization to precariously co-exist, as they do in our country, still in conflict, seen as incompatible though not undesirable. Some of the boxes are converted into little shrines, where matter objectifies the unseen primal force. Objects like incense sticks, coins, haldi flowers, sacred threads, wicks and inscribed Sanskrit texts harmonize to evoke visually a spiritual presence.

As a child who preferred her solitude, there was a great preoccupation with herself, whereby a significant role was played by fantasy and day dreaming to fill in vacant moments. Though born and brought up in Aligarh, for Sabrina, it was Pundri, her ancestral village that held great fascination. She moved to Delhi to graduate in Painting (Fine Arts) both at the Bachelor's and the Master's level from the College of Art. With her energy to experiment with diverse materials, she was constantly engaged in the interaction between the concept and the material. This led to her transition from a pure painter to work like a sculptor, incorporating materials through tactile feel. What is of great interest to me in Sabrina's art, is her method of working in which I very much find an enhanced feminine sensitivity. Her delicate hand is both tender and firm when engaged in the creative act. Employing indigenous craft traditions of weaving and embroidery, a variety of materials are rolled, coiled, stitched, knotted, woven and patched to transform into objects that substitute the real with the ones artistically produced. As an artist, she combines her skills of creating and collecting fragments and details to enhance the visual power of her aesthetic experience. Often, the incongruous is exalted in the collages. Some of the multi-media paintings in the present show are in many ways composed like the collages with different pronounced areas and fragments, the base of which is prepared by papier mache and adhesives pressed by the fingers. Focused on the female form, the paintings make metaphoric references, treating the body as a container. The body is visually shaped as a bottle, made transparent, to bring in view, its inner dimensions. In one of the works, the flowing garment around the realistically painted female face is made of white bandage strips that reveal bloodstains beneath. Close to it, is a gramophone record, the black antique disc, here, taken as a record of time and a scissor placed on it, as if to cut. through it. The deconstructing of the house is influenced by the recounted stories of the large family fractured with time. One sees the intertwined geometry of the house, the dots lining out the making and unmaking of it. As much as there are overt clues such as lightning rupturing the unity of the house, the more subtle one is suggested by the faded fabric. In yet another work, the female figure is caught in metamorphosis, exploding as if in flames. Sprinkled and spilled paint, glued mirrors, broken bangles, bits of transparent cellophane tape provide expressive textures that emotionally charge the surface. For Sabrina, art is a means to have an intimate encounter with life that results in a cathartic experience.

From 'Soliloquy' to 'Murmur', Sabrina continues to be self-absorbed, earlier talking to herself and now listening to the soft whispers of a strange inner voice. Her poetic imagination is galvanized by moods that oscillate between nostalgia and sentimentalism, made lyrical by unknown hopes and desires.