

# PORTFOLIO: DINING ON IMAGINATION

Introducing the work of emerging artists, Portfolio focuses this issue on the paintings of Rabiya Choudhry, first seen at the Collective Gallery's New Work Scotland Programme 2004. Choudhry has since been selected to exhibit at the Prague Biennale 2005



'Moona Mother Paki Lover: and the coffee coloured children', 2004

Drawings on her studio wall operate as Choudhry's sketchbook and are the origin of her many lines of enquiry. But her work culminates in painting in a biting style as fissured in form as it is in content. Pointedly staying clear of painterly expression, she conveys complex ideas and explores intense situations.

Choudhry describes herself as a woman, a daughter, a sister, a lover, a friend, a colleague, a cook, a listener, a Scot, an Asian and an artist. Her paintings are enigmatic and layered—visual composites of her identity. Viewed in relation to internationalism and post-colonial thought, her paintings question both national authenticity and identity. Rooted in Scotland, she also joins the debate surrounding cultural cohesiveness in a country with a newly established parliament. It is impossible to separate her art from the social and political context she lives in.

Choudhry's paintings expose cultural tensions in Scotland, exploring the relationship between the public and personal. Her questions are fundamental to human experience. Who am I? Who am I in relationship to other people? And, how do we interact with one another?

But the answers are often not so clear. Her paintings have a fluid and hallucinatory feel. Negotiating a path between a complex and surreal mix of fantasy, autobiography and social realism, she discovers a seemingly magical dimension full of lyricism. Images are collaged from an imagination searching for clarity. The resulting work has a palpable energy and a ferocious veracity motivated by an uncompromising response to the social realities she encounters.

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'Brain Deid', 2004

Realities like cruelty and prejudice are unflinchingly confronted. Using words as well as images, she taps into the invisible codes which subliminally seep into society by stealth. 'Moona Mother Paki Lover: and the coffee coloured children' uses the language of children's taunts, filtered through the adult mind. Choudhry exposes language as a powerful tool and then corrodes it.

A sharp tongue and Glaswegian vernacular are further weapons in her arsenal against hierarchal structures. Her paintings speak out with defiance and humour, recycling a working class sensibility which offsets heavy emotion with comic relief. Easy sentimentality is vigorously rejected.

'Brain Deid' is a visceral, otherworldly fantasy set in the 'Elite Café'. The menu and diners are as tantalising as they are hellish. This sinister scene throws corporeal desire onto the table leaving us to digest it. Interior voices overflow onto the surface, conscious and unconscious, real and unreal, fused at this manic counterpoint.

Choudhry describes her approach as humanist rather than political, poetic rather than documentary. Transforming the world around her into a personal mythology, she still allows a uniquely individual response to her work.

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