

'Art out of a box' looks at post-WTC world scenario

GEORGINA L MADDOX
DECEMBER 17

AN alumnus of the MSU School of Fine Arts, Baroda, has come to town with a unique travelling art show. Avantika Bawa, a professor of the Savannah College of Art and Design in the US, is criss-crossing the country with her exhibit comprising a collection of drawings and paintings, all contained in a wooden box.

After shows in Chandigarh, she is now in Mumbai. Bawa, an artist, teacher and curator, calls her show *Carry on Drawing*. It also features a CD with sound components and video documentation of audience reaction, all of which fit into her box! "These are drawings done by various artists," she says holding up what looks like a complete painting, as the curious crowd at Prithvi theatre gather round. "Why are you wearing gloves?" comes one query, "What is the meaning of this drawing?" says another. Bawa answers all the questions patiently, happy to explain the idea behind the show.

"I want to create a dialogue with the expected and the unexpected, exhibit without restrictions and compel the audience to re-evaluate the role and definition of drawing in the contemporary art world," she says. She wants to create a process of drawing that will bridge the contemporary art practices of the East and West.

"It was really interesting when I opened this box on the train to Mumbai and a group of 'aunties' responded to it in a way that proves you don't need a PhD to under-



One of the works on show, provoked by ethnic discrimination

stand or appreciate art," she says.

Her trip from the US coincides with the current political unrest in the world. This reflects in some of the artwork that she is carrying with her. Byron Barton's book *Airport* inspired James Sturm to create a six-page black and white booklet called *Return to Normal*.

Through simple line drawings, Sturm creates a typical American scenario at an airport where men with beards, whether they were Sikhs, Jews or Afghans, were often told to disembark from a plane and put through various checks that would have been unnecessary if the authorities had known that they belonged to different ethnic groups. "Sturm talks about the kind of ignorance of ethnic differences that the Americans displayed post-September 11," explains Bawa to the audience.

Matthew Nothridge has made a photo litho called *Time Lapse*. It merges the city-scape of Chicago, New York and St Louis creating a

ubiquitous background of skyscrapers. A calligraphic squiggle that resembles Urdu is superimposed on the cityscape leaving an ominous mark on the already blurred memories of urban dilemma.

The sound pieces by Bret Hinton and Louis Herrin also recall the confused cacophony and doom that was prevalent during the catastrophic collapse of the World Trade Centre. Voices echo and sounds that resemble a grinding machine form the sound-scape where these memories are relived.

The show was truly interactive with a sketch book for visitors to draw in and a comment book that the audience willingly filled. Interestingly, patriotic sentiments were running high as some members of the audience drew flags in the sketch book with *Mera Bharat Mahan* written above it.

The show is on at Jehangir Art Gallery's Samovar on Tuesday from 11 am onward.