

September 30, 2005  
Art in Review

**Raqib Shaw: Garden of Earthly Delights**

Deitch Projects  
76 Grand Street, SoHo  
Through Oct. 8



A detail from "Garden of Earthly Delights," from Raqib Shaw. (2005)

Labor-intensive and intensely active, Raqib Shaw's paintings look like X-rated, subaquatic hybrids of Hieronymus Bosch, Victorian fairy painting, Persian miniatures and Bollywood films of the Ramayana. Mr. Shaw was born in Calcutta, grew up in Kashmir and now lives in London. Kashmir, with its fantastically florid beauty, is a place where cultures meet. It is said to be home to Hindu divinities. Mughal emperors spent summers there; so did British

colonialists. Mr. Shaw saw evidence of all of this as a teenager.

But he went to art school in London and has lived there since, so he isn't an "Indian" artist, though there are elements associated with Indian art in his work. Human-shaped figures have animal heads, like Hindu gods. Nature is an all-enveloping, erotic force. In Mr. Shaw's paintings beasts and humans copulate; phalluses crop up everywhere; ejaculation produces a constellation of butterflies.

The butterflies are almost literally jewel-like: Mr. Shaw creates them, and most of his other images, with an elaborate painting technique that emulates the low-relief, compartmented effects of stained-glass work or cloisonné. The pieced-together look that results nicely suits an art that is built up from many cultural strands. What's important, though, is that the strands have been imaginatively joined to create art with an organic look of its own.

HOLLAND COTTER