



50 YEARS OF VISUAL ARTS IN PAKISTAN

LIMA HASHMI
&
QUDDUS MIRZA



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50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan

Introduction
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Research
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Dedicated to all the artists of Pakistan.

"50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan " is an experimental book, which documents the thinking and the philosophy of the artists of Pakistan .

The book is based on interviews with artists conducted all over Pakistan by Quddus Mirza, a project in which he was assisted by several young artists. Durriya Kazi has also contributed valuable material to the artist's introductions. Salima Hashmi's introductory chapter reviews the background of today's contemporary expression.

The Pakistan National Council of the Arts is grateful to many artists for providing the transparencies of their latest works. We do regret, however, that some artists' works could not be included.

Kishwar Naheed
June, 1997

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FRAMING THE PRESENT

Salima Hashmi

The painting traditions of Pakistan, like its many other traditions almost defy delineation. The absence of an hierarchical structure in the activity, its intertwining with the other arts, the historical and regional variants, make it a complex task to arrive at simple generalizations. The probability that painting was an important activity from the most ancient of times is established from the archaeological sites of the Indus Valley and at Mehrgarh in Balochistan dating back to 4000 B.C. and before, where there are signs of sophisticated animal stylizations on pottery and seals. Ancient texts from other parts of the subcontinent confirm that the painter and his craft were established features of society. From a close look at the craft traditions today, one can assume that the arts were hereditary, learnt through apprenticeship, and the artist-craftsmen must have been organized into 'baradaris' or guilds to safe-guard standards, professional know-how and economic interests.

The earliest examples of rock drawings are found in the North of Pakistan along the ancient trade routes from China and Central Asia. These include drawings from the third and second millenium B.C. depicting hunting scenes, dancing figures, animals and warriors. Later drawings from the 1st century A.D. have Kharosthi inscriptions and Buddhist imagery with the stupa's devotees and Buddha himself as the central figure.

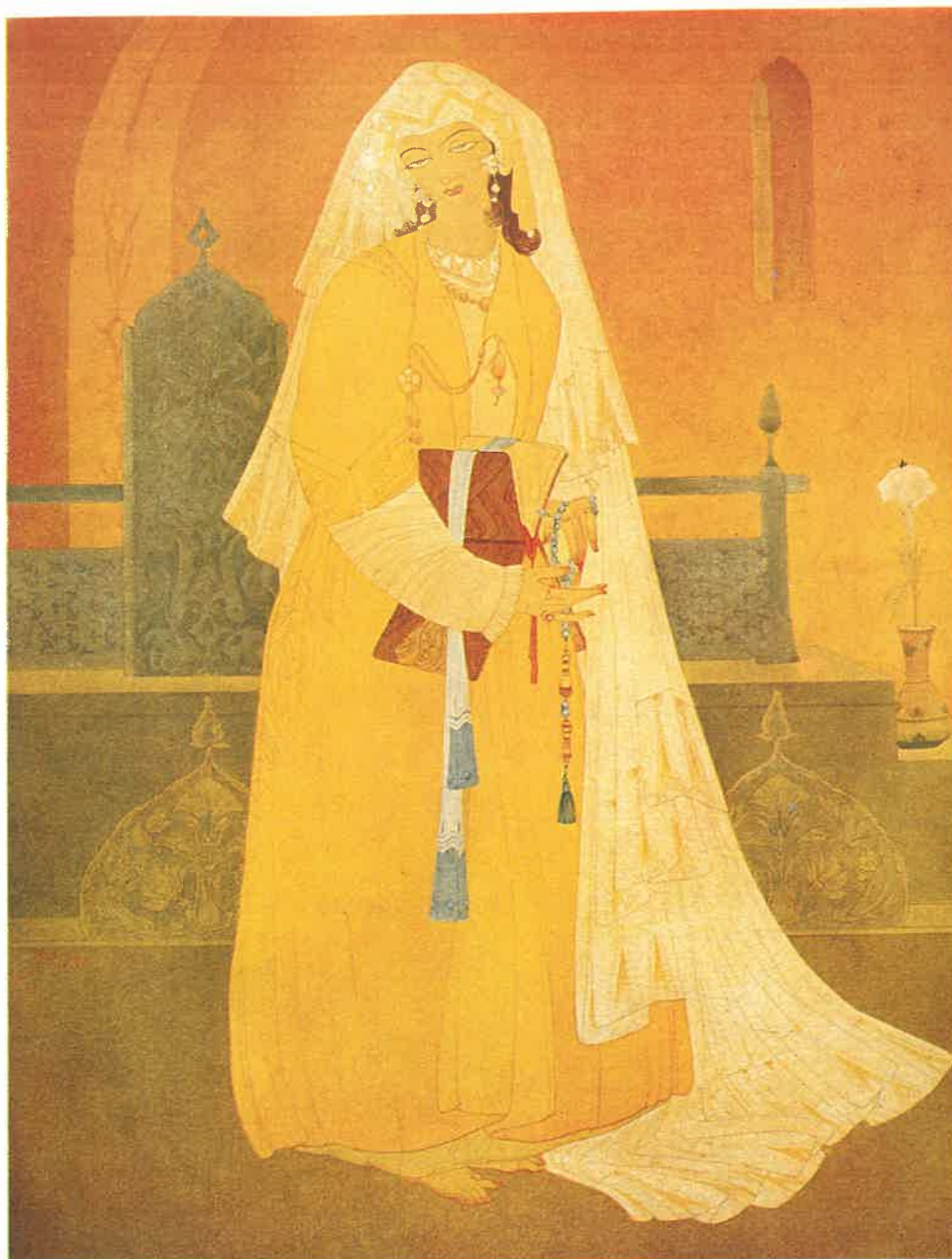
The frescoes in the cave temples at Ajanta in India, thirty in number, are the most impressive examples of the formal fresco tradition in the subcontinent. The early paintings date back to the 2nd century B.C. and the later ones are from the 7th century A.D. It is apparent that even the earliest of the Ajanta paintings reflect a mature and sophisticated tradition. The links to sculpture are present, yet the frescoes respect the two-dimensionality of the surface. The figures are flatly rendered and outlined in an undulating flowing manner. The colours employed are earth reds, ochres, terreverte, lampblack and white of lime.

The later frescoes from the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries grow closer to the sculptural tradition, with a greater feeling of physicality in the figures. There are architectural motifs, foliage and flowers, scrolls and animals emanating in all directions. The undulating physical presence of the cave seems to be linked with its surface treatment.

Examples of painting, other than those on rocks, walls, and pottery are known in the subcontinent only after the 11th century. It can however be assumed that the tradition goes further back in time. Buddhist works on palm leaves from the Northern part of the subcontinent are usually long and narrow and consist of images of Buddha or Bodhisattvas surrounded by worshippers or deities. The images were accompanied by text, a convention that came into its own with the flowering of the Moghul miniature tradition.

The arrival of the first Moghul Emperor, Babur in 1524, brought about a dramatic change in indigenous painting, where a profusion of stylistic conventions and elements came together to produce the Moghul tradition in miniature and wall painting. Early Moghul pictures were large and painted on cotton, perhaps because of Babur's nomadic ancestry which included the custom of hanging cloth paintings in tents. Although much is made of the Persian Central Asian and European influences on Moghul painting, it is now felt that the synthesis which occurred in painting during the Moghul period, was unique specifically because of the historical richness of the established indigenous painting practices. The Moghul palette was warmer and deeper than the Persian. The dynamic compositions and scientific observation coupled with a philosophic contemplation, made this an unparalleled period in the heritage of South Asia.

Each emperor set the tone for the artistic pre-occupations of his era. Artists often accompanied the Emperor Akbar on his military expeditions recording his battles and victories. Court-life, hunting scenes, and epics were other favourite themes. Accompanied by texts, the paintings were bound into volumes and stored in the Imperial library. Emperor Jehangir, himself a painter, brought a greater sensitivity of mood and nuance to Moghul painting. Specimens of fine calligraphy accompanied the painting folios, the margins were decorated in gold, with arabesques, flowers and animals. Jehangir was deeply interested in animal life and habitats. The works of his time combine observation with heightened lyricism.



A.R. Chughtai
Modesty 1950's
Water Colour, Wash technique
66x58cm

Emperor Jehangir's interest in painting from the West was reinforced by examples that came to the Moghul Court, copies of which were undertaken in the imperial workshops. Court artists introduced one point perspective into landscapes and stronger modelling in human figures, creating an interesting amalgamation of styles.

The informality in the painting of Jehangir's reign gave way to the stiffer pomp of Shah Jehan's rule. Exaggerated stylization and rich adornment, with a delight in rendering of textiles, carpets, jewellery and marble, characterise the painting of the Shah Jehani era.

The Moghul genre filtered into the provincial royal courts from the 16th to the 19th centuries and was modified according to local preferences and established artistic practices. Vernacular attributes and variations gave rise to a host of painting schools from the sophistication of Deccani painting to the robust 'folk' of Punjabi painting. Between the decline of one empire and establishment of the British Raj, artists looked for new forms of patronage and new mediums. In the nineteenth century artists discovered oil-painting, photography, engraving and lithography. They took up commissioned works for their new British patrons and for the fading local nobility.

Among the earliest industrial arts schools set up by the British in the subcontinent, was the Mayo School of Arts (now National College of Arts) in Lahore. Established in 1875, Lockwood Kipling was its first Principal. The school was set up like its counterparts in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, to help the local crafts and to ensure their development. As it turned out, the school imparted a mixture of local craft skills and British art education considered appropriate by the British rulers. The content of The Mayo School curriculum reflected the contradictions between the local art tradition and the dominant British aesthetic. The continuity and richness of the varied local painting tradition was taken over by the Victorian predilection for the academic and sentimental in art.

The independence movement in the late 19th and early 20th century had corresponding parallels in literature and the arts. There was a creative outburst of energy in poetry, theatre and intellectual debate among the intelligentsia everywhere in the subcontinent but especially in Bengal, which stimulated the most influential movements in art and literature. The rise of the Bengal School of painting pioneered by



Anna Molka Ahmed
Punjab Landscape, 1973 Oil on Canvas 122x153cm

the Tagores, shared the similarities with the emergent 'Lahore School' of the thirties and forties. Abanindranath Tagore chose themes which were acclaimed as expressions of nationalist sentiment. The figures were highly stylized and linear, far removed from the earthiness of the Ajanta frescoes. His special study of the "Indian wash technique" was taken up by other painters. Wash after wash of colour was laid down on paper with brushes and sponges, accented with linear brush work, somewhat reminiscent of Moghul or Pahari miniature, without recourse to burnishing or opaque colour. The rejection of oil painting on canvas became a political gesture i.e a rejection of the Western/British influence. The movement in Lahore led by Abdur Rehman Chughtai developed its own variations, in themes and techniques.

Political events often culminate in dramatic cultural mutations or developments. The emergence of the state of Pakistan in 1947, was marked by a massive population migration, creating many socio-political problems. These problems were reflected in the cultural sphere especially in the visual arts. Artists had to adjust themselves to changed circumstances. They had witnessed a violent political division of the sub-continent. For many, it involved a painful physical uprooting from what was India to the new State of Pakistan. The cultural landscape was truncated and had to be defined and populated anew.

The areas that comprised Pakistan had strong craft traditions, which did not play a part in art-education or the 'source' - stream for the Pakistani artist of the time. A Fine Arts Department had been set up in Lahore at the University of the Punjab in 1940, with Anna Molka Ahmed a British painter married to an Indian Muslim artist, Sheikh Ahmed, as its founding Head of Department. The Department only admitted female students for the first fourteen years of its existence. Both the art establishments i.e. the Mayo School of Arts and the Fine Arts Department were crucially depleted by the exodus of population across the border in 1947.

At the time, the figure of the painter A.R. Chughtai towered over all others in Pakistan. Having studied at the Mayo School of Arts, where he subsequently taught, Chughtai also studied printmaking in Europe and was the most expert of etchers in the Indian sub-continent.

Chughtai's special affinity for the wash technique although traceable to the influence of the Bengali



Ustad Allah Bux
Towards Mela, 1960's Oil on Canvas 83x137cm

school, evolved in an individual manner. His thematic concerns were also indigenous and he consciously acknowledged Mughal, Persian and other sources which comprised the Muslim visual traditions in calligraphy, architecture, and the applied arts. His palette distinguished him from other painters of the time. The colour in Chughtai's work even in the early years, was recognisable by its mature resonance and jewel-like quality. His delight in ornament and pattern was at once skilled and subtle. Himself a poet and short-story writer, his friendships with writers and intellectuals of his time ensured links with the text which developed into full fledged illustration for the poetry of Omar Khayyam, Ghalib and Iqbal. Affinity with text continued with his prolific graphic designs for book covers, magazines, and logo designs for a host of national institutions.

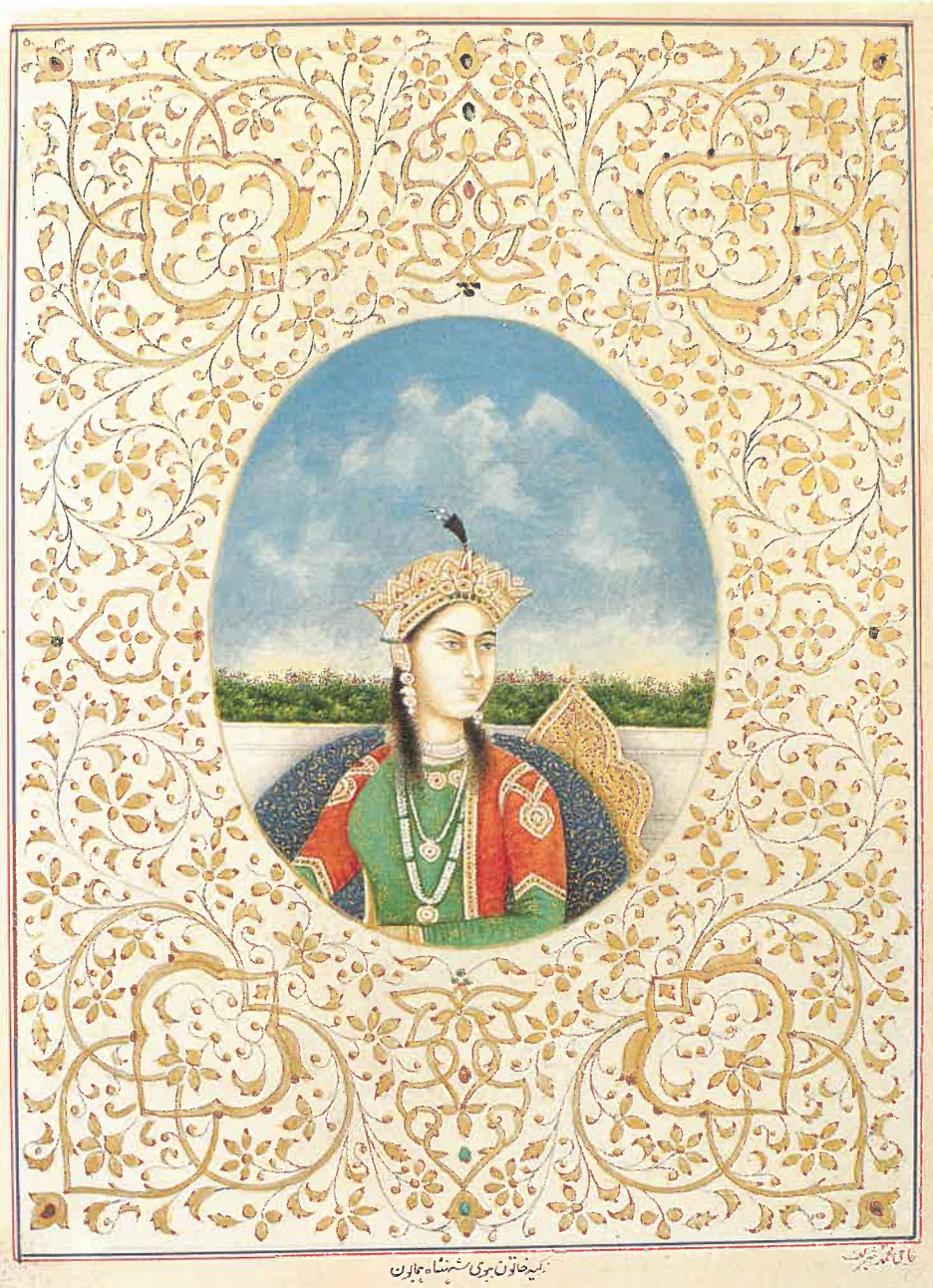
Borrowing from a variety of sources in folklore, literature and history, A.R Chughtai was a traditionalist who nevertheless adopted, transformed and reinterpreted the grandeur of a heritage with dexterity and passion.

A respected follower of the Western academic style was Ustad Allah Bux, who painted mythological themes, rural settings, and romantic folk legends in a style popular in the beginning of the 20th century. Familiar with both the oil and water colour techniques, Ustad Allah Bux worked with skilful ease in both. Working from observable phenomena which he later modified in the studio, Ustad Allah Bux's work was somewhat sentimental and reflected the conservative aspirations of his time. The utopian landscapes, and portraits, had great popular success, and nurtured many imitators. Born in 1885 and apprenticed at an early age to a master miniature painter, Allah Bux learnt his trade from a number of sources including a stint as a back drop painter for the theatre in Lahore. This experience may have contributed to the staged feeling of many of his epic works commissioned by a variety of patrons over six decades, ranging from the Maharaja of Patiala to the Government of Pakistan. His later "anthromorphic" landscapes reflect his rich experience in both colour and texture and are unusual in their vision.

A sophisticated and more delicate practitioner of the Indo-European tradition was Fyzee Rahamin, a friend of the Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, at whose request he moved to Karachi from Bombay. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art in London, was a student of John Singer



Fyzee Rahamin
Attiya Begum,
Oil on Canvas
153x92cm



Haji Sharif
Zakia Khatoun, 1995
Miniature
26x19cm

زکیا خاتون بری شہنشاہ جاورن

حاجی شریف



Shakir Ali
Untitled, 1976 Oil on canvas 61x92cm

Sargent, and exhibited in Europe and North America well before 1947. Using oil paint in a refined austere manner, his works recall traditions of frescoes and tempera painting. His cultivated portraits are spare, quiet, painted flatly; the third dimension suggested minimally. An urbane painter of eminence, Fyzee's themes ranged from interpretations of 'raags' to historical and ethnic themes.

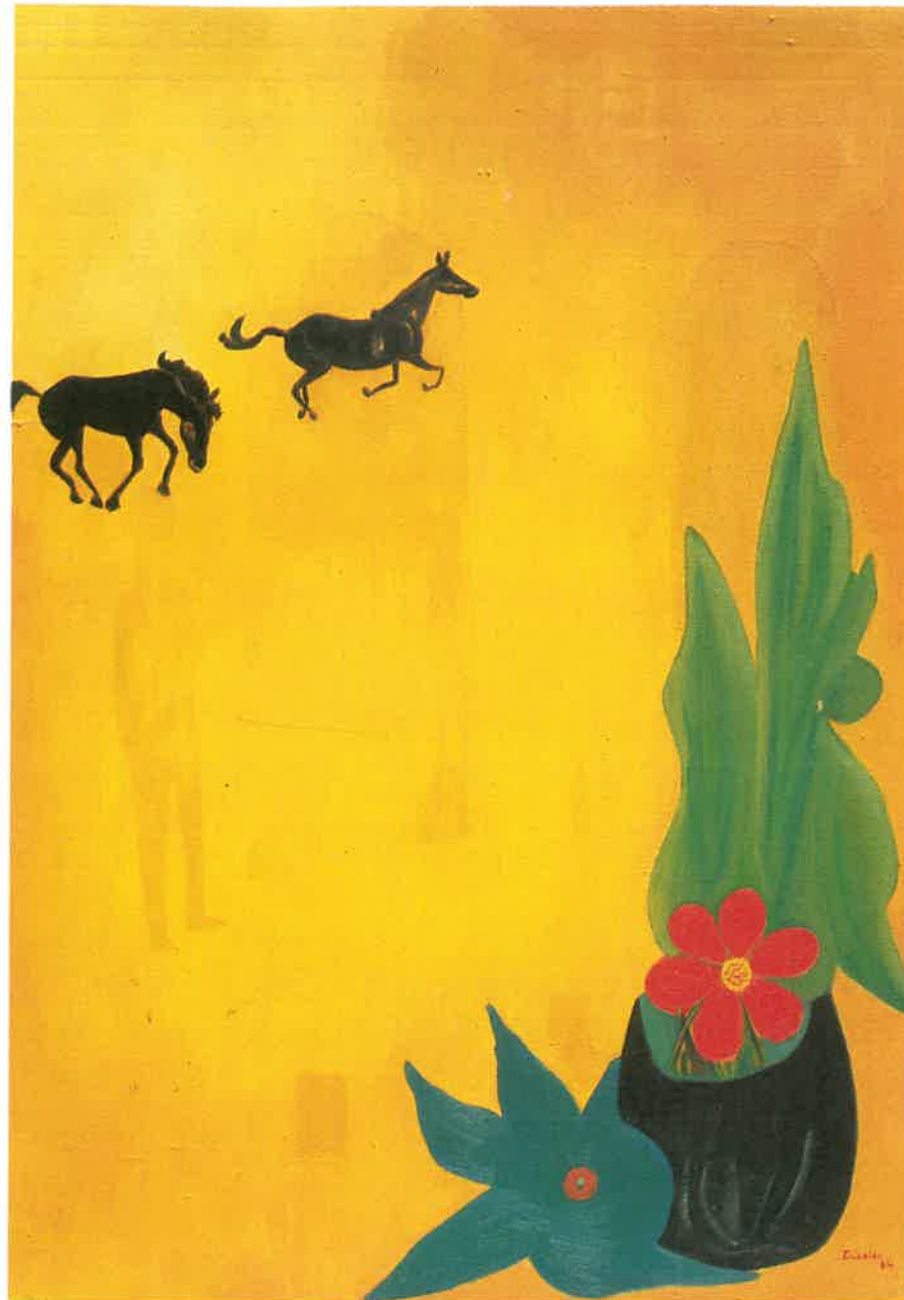
A vociferous and dynamic force in art education was Anna Molka Ahmed who trained many generations of art students and teachers at the Fine Arts Department, Punjab University in Lahore. Working in heavy impasto oils, her work although European in its genre also reflected certain influences absorbed during the five decades of her life in the subcontinent. Passionate about her allegiance to the post-impressionists, notably Paul Gauguin, her works betray a greater kinship to Van Gogh in terms of her palette. The sharpness of light and piercing pure colour corresponds markedly with her outspoken stance on the authenticity of her own vision.

Among the artists who made their way to Lahore from the small princely states across the border was Haji Shareef, whose forebears were court painters for the Maharaja of Patiala. Owing fidelity to the Moghul miniature, Haji Shareef's work nevertheless was hybrid in its palette and in its themes. His early patrons being the Sikh Courts, some of the thematic works are to do with the Sikh gurus and their royal followers. Haji Shareef's presence in Lahore helped to renew an interest in the traditional miniature painters' skills at the Fine Arts Department under Anna Molka Ahmed, and the National College of Arts, under Professors Sponenburgh and Shakir Ali.

The Mayo School of Arts was reorganized and upgraded into the National College of Arts in 1958 with Mark Sponenburgh as its Principal and has become the major Pakistani institution for education in art, design and architecture.

Shakir Ali, its first Pakistani Principal was perhaps the most potent presence in the early modern movement in Pakistan. Artists nurtured under his unassuming yet effective influence went on to form the core of what is now the face of contemporary art in Pakistan. Shakir Ali's early training in the years 1938-1944

Zubaida Agha
Black Horses,
1984 Oil on canvas
132x93cm



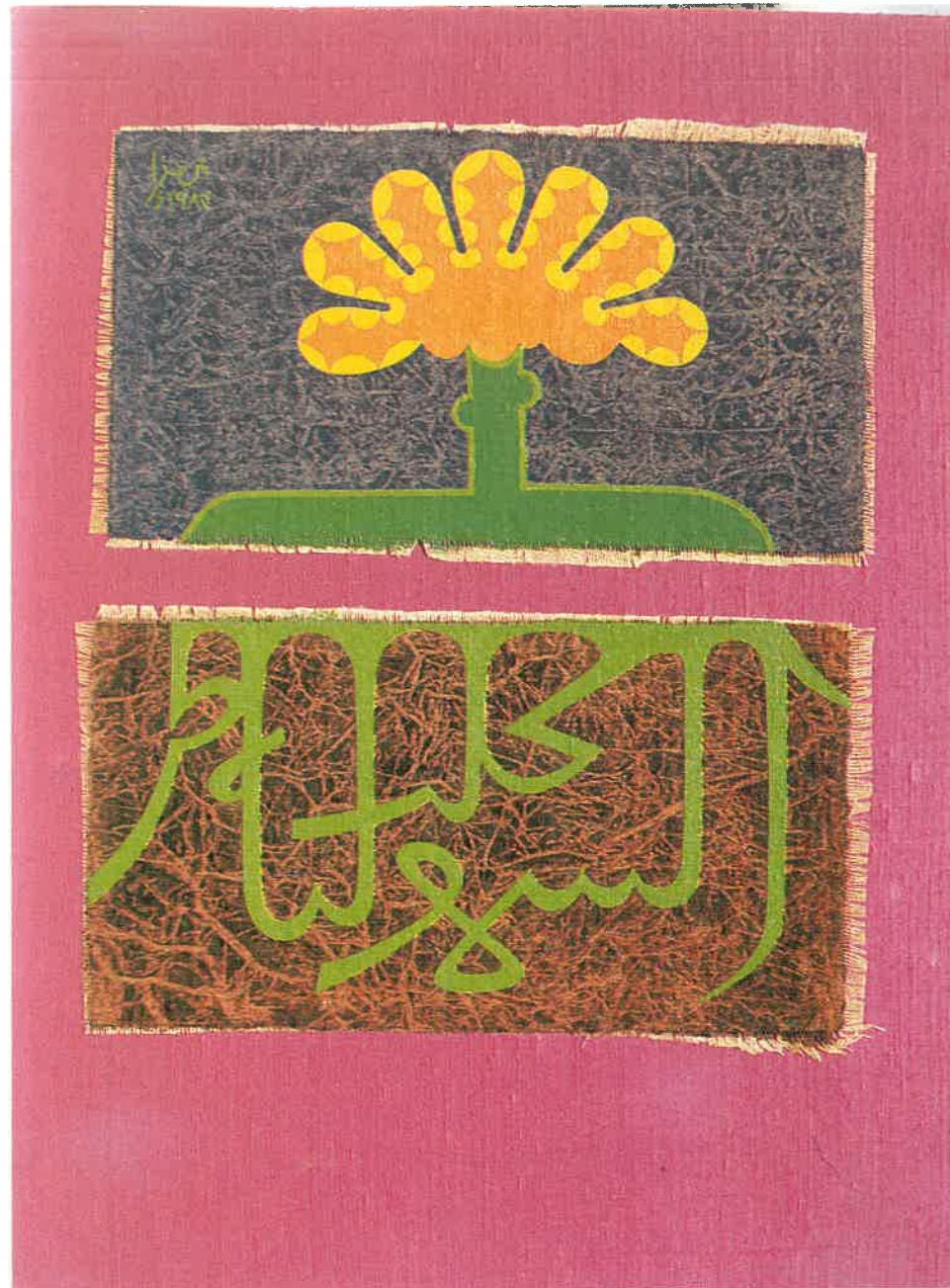
was at the J.J. School of Arts in Bombay, as a mural painter. The early work reflects an affinity for tradition; references to Ajanta, and folk stylization are apparent in the works that survive from those years. A dramatic change occurred when he went to the Slade School of Fine Arts in London, and at the School of Industrial Design at the Charles University in Prague. A summer with the painter Andre L'hote in France strengthened the shift towards a more contemporary cubist idiom.

Settling down in Lahore brought Shakir Ali into contact with other young painters grappling with problems of progressive change and a new vocabulary. Joining them in the struggle were writers, poets, critics and intellectuals.

Shakir Ali's painting moved from cubist still lifes and portraits to an exploration of indigenous themes, linked to his new surroundings. The archetypal village with its bulls, its potters, its farmers, carried echoes of his early Bombay themes but were now on the threshold of a transformation.

Shakir Ali's allusions to the past were not restricted to the sub-continent but consciously incorporated pre-history, Greece, Egypt, Crete, and many other ancient civilizations. The personal in his work was well-submerged in the language of the painter. His strong and some times severe palette, contrasted with the delicacy of cross-hatched brush strokes. Devoid of narrative, the work employs symbolism of many kinds during the different phases of his life and work. From myth to calligraphy, Shakir Ali's work is always deliberate in design and in manipulation of space. The imagery is spare, refined and understated even when texture and colour are lyrical and joyous.

Another pioneer of the modern movement who preceded Shakir Ali's appearance on the scene is Zubaida Agha. A political science graduate, Zubaida Agha took her first lessons in the 1940's from B.C. Sanyal in Lahore, and from Mario Perlinglieri an Italian prisoner-of-war, a student of Picassos'. She went on to study in London and in Paris at Ecole des Beaux Artes. An accomplished colorist, Zubaida's career has spanned more than five decades. Always very personal, with difficult to define 'phases' or preoccupations, her painting has drawn strength from her love of music and nature with both retinal and imaginative encounters. The floral, the architectural, the pastoral and the figurative, are suspended in space, often evoking a



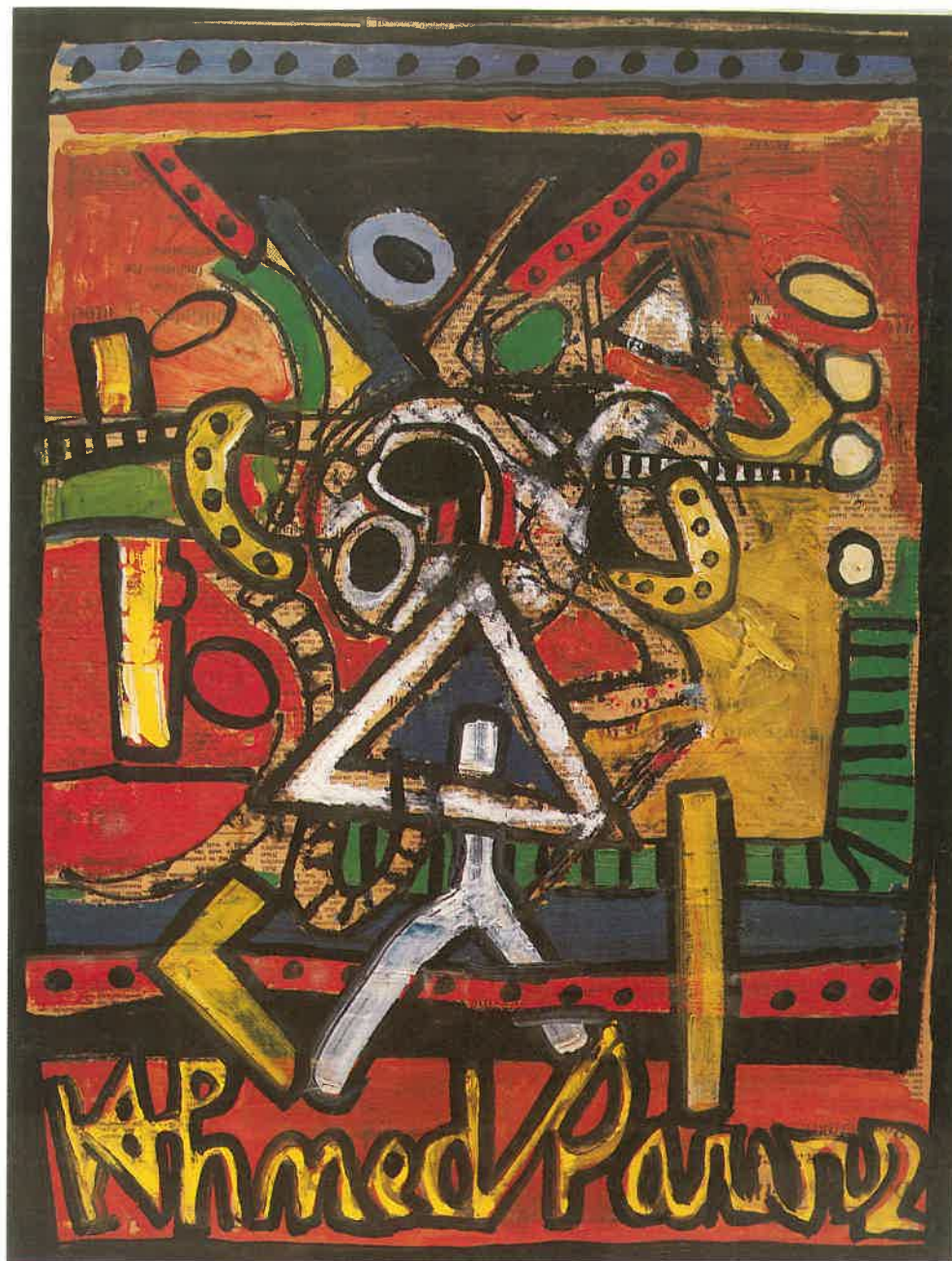
A.J. Shemza
Roots-9, 1984
Mixed medium
41x31cm

trance like state induced by colour and tenuous mood. The images while alluding to the real world, defy easy categorizations as symbols, taking on mysterious connotations and ambiguous meanings. Almost a recluse, Zubaida Agha, the doyen of Pakistani abstraction, lives in Islamabad and continues to paint in her inimitable, recondite style.

The decade of the 50's saw the emergence of an energetic group of artists in Lahore, with comparable but far more sedate counterparts in Karachi. Among members of the Lahore Art Circle were A.J. Shemza, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Parvez, Ali Imam, and S. Safdar. Early concerns were the conventional genres of landscape; both urban and rural, and portraiture, but Shakir Ali's influence transformed the group into abstractionists.

Moyene Najmi's works of the time are concerned with his immediate environment of the city of Lahore; its streets, rooftops and gardens. A painter of great sensitivity, Moyene Najmi has not been prolific. Employing a delicately lyrical range of earth colours, Najmi's works are poetic in mood and philosophical in content. A preference for texture is expressed with discrimination, ensuring its subservience to the grand design. His handling of two dimensional space is masterly and sophisticated and his paintings of the sixties remain some of the finest examples of the visual milieu of Lahore.

The dynamic Anwar Jalal Shemza, studied at the Mayo School of Arts, before going to the Slade School in London. Coming from a family of carpet traders, his inclination for traditional pattern and design was no doubt inherited and intuitive. His early work like the others in the Lahore group was semi cubist and vehement in its use of colour. His years in London re-introduced him to the geometry and spatial order present in his inheritance. Seizing upon Paul Klee as the window into his own exploration of Islamic calligraphy, architecture, and textile, Shemza's vision developed and matured. He returned to Pakistan briefly in the sixties with his British artist wife, Mary Katrina, before, eventually settling down in England. He continued to paint, and his work toured Pakistan in a posthumous exhibition in 1986, reasserting his delight in calligraphic form and pattern juxtaposed with the flora and the organic. Always an artist of finesse, Shemza's works were small in scale and intricate in their organisation of form and space. Learning from craftsmen of old, and reinterpreting two dimensional relationships was Shemza's forte.



Ahmed Pervaiz
Kapellmeister, 1974
Oil on news print
56x40cm

Colour too, played a subtle and definitive role in these intellectual yet visually sensual works. His use of colour refers back to the miniature tradition, and yet is wholly contemporary in its simplicity and directness. Rejecting the hegemony of oils, A.J. Shemza worked on paper and fabrics in water-based media, as well as in printmaking. The paintings of his last years moved towards the synthesis of his ancient artistic and cultural roots and his contemporary life in the West, with poetic clarity.

Ahmad Parvez, another iconoclastic artistic presence in Lahore in the early 50's, moved to London in 1955, where like A.J. Shemza, his figurative cubist beginnings metamorphosed into an ebullient, frenzy of exploding fragments of colour and shape.

Entirely self-taught, Parvez's temperament was inextricably intertwined with the vibrancy of his imagery. The early years in London were hard going, but in 1959, his first exhibition at the New Vision Centre Gallery of small water colours brought him some critical success. This first exhibition was followed by a number of shows in West End Galleries, and others in Oxford, Manchester and in Europe. This was a prolific period and his output was prodigious. He returned to Pakistan in 1964, and set up a studio in Karachi and exhibited all over the country. He continued to show abroad, and worked in New York for three years. His restless energy was reflected in the highly charged ambience in his work. His ability to articulate strongly felt emotions in visual terms was at once rapturous and combustible. Sometimes compared to the painter Alan Davies, Parvez's imagery was more wide ranging and harder to define. Forms emanating from a core, seemingly embedded deep within and beyond the picture surface, they defy easy comparison.

The brilliance and effervescence of colour coincides with the agitated movement of linear and non-linear forms. Although suggesting references from the figurative and the floral, they are sensuous and non-literal. The works on paper in his last year became more simplified, and smaller in size, reflecting perhaps his increasing ill-health and, unsustainable life style. He received the long awaited official recognition of the President's Pride of Performance before his death in 1979.

Better known as gallery owner and mentor of artists Ali Imam was also one of the founder members of

S. Ali Imam
Figures, 1973
Oil on canvas
91x76cm





S. Safdar
Indus Valley civilization, 1973 Oil on board 42x145cm



Qutub Sheikh
Untitled, 1974
Water Colour
15x20cm

the Lahore Art Circle. Like Shemza and Parvez, he too, made the journey to London in the mid fifties.

On his return, he taught for several years at the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in Karachi before establishing the Indus Gallery. The Gallery rapidly became the most important space for exhibiting contemporary art in Pakistan, creating a clientele and a rapport among artists. Imam's own work has remained figurative over the years, drawing its imagery from the indigenous. Deliberately textured, it is sedate and muted in colour, with a preference for tones of white peppered with darker values across the surface. Restricting himself to a few canvases a year, his time and energy has been spent on nurturing a dialogue between artist, viewer and buyer which has contributed in a significant way to the growth of an art market and the recognition of art activity as a valid career.

A steadfast main stay of the Lahore Art Circle was S. Safdar. Born in the same year as Ali Imam (1924) Safdar established the first advertising agency in Lahore. Not a full time painter, he nevertheless painted with great regularity until his death in 1983. A dedicated cubist, his work was firm in structure, although romantic in content, an apparent contradiction. Strongly influenced by Shakir Ali's work of the fifties and sixties, S. Safdar retained these influences for much of his artistic life. Strongly delineated, the work ranged from subtle geometric abstractions, to the genre of still lifes and well traversed figurative compositions.

Another abstractionist on the periphery of the Lahore Art Circle was Qutub Sheikh, who left Lahore early in his career to settle down in Germany. He returned now and again to exhibit and renew his personal associations. A work of lyrical form and colour, his painter has remained extraneous and unknown in Pakistan due to his absence from the gallery scene.

Raheel Akbar Javed, is yet another Lahore painter who moved abroad, having been an active participant in the Lahore art scene in the 50's and 60's. Experimenting with form and medium, he moved away from an early brush with cubism to a more subtle use of paper collage on board. The layering of thin paper tissue, in Raheel Akbar Javed's painting, reveals nuances of colour in carefully designed geometric compositions. Work executed after he emigrated to the U.S. has not been exhibited in Pakistan, and Raheel is represented in his country of origin, only by his works upto the seventies.



Raheel Akbar Javed
Epilogue to Eros 1, 1987 Mixed media 39x47cm

Among artists who followed a more conventional artistic path, have been A.S. Nagi, Ozzir Zubi, his wife Sughra Rababi and Sardar Muhammad. A.S. Nagi continues in a manner largely unchanged over six decades; working as a portraitist, as well as in a variety of other genres. His rather flamboyant studies of the female nude, place him firmly in the now dated academic tradition of the turn of the century. Indulging and encouraging younger artists around him, his studio was more often a centre of creative expression for others than his own works. The applied areas of art, and the dictates of commerce have been the compulsions that have shaped the work of Ozzir Zuby, Sughra Rababi and Sardar Mohammad in Karachi. A variety of techniques and styles are reflected in their varied interests including their work in advertising agencies, interior design, garment production and commercial public commissions.

Ozzir Zuby and Sardar Mohammad have both indulged in calligraphy. Sardar Mohammad's paintings have involved well worn themes from the regional cultures of Pakistan, while Zuby has concentrated on teaching and two dimensional and three dimensional design. Sughra Rababi's penchant for the decorative was manifest in designs for embroidery as well as her highly coloured thematic works involving women's themes.

Traditionalists of a different kind were Ustad Aftab Ahmed Khan and Sheikh Shujaullah, both miniature painters of quality, who came to live and work in Lahore after division of the sub-continent. The better known Sheikh Shujaullah, taught at the National College of Arts after Haji Mohammad Sharif retired. A subtle mix of Rajasthani and Pahari painting, Sheikh Shujaullah's own work is uncompromising in its rigor of line and pattern. Ustad Aftab Ahmed Khan's painting, on the other, hand was strongly influenced by his other career as a photographer. His father also a photographer and miniature painter of repute in Delhi, worked extensively for nobility all over India. Ustad Aftab Ahmed Khan's own patrons in Pakistan, included the Quaid-e-Azam. Apart from commissioned portraits his work dwelt on traditional darbar scenes.

Ustad Bashir Uddin who studied and taught at the Mayo School of Arts drew more directly from the masters of Lahore of the thirties and forties, mainly Abdur Rehman Chughtai, with great similarities in the



A.S. Nagi
Baluchi Girl with Chakaur, 1996
Oil on canvas
90x60cm

use of line and ornament. His work perpetuates the craft skills of Lahore School of the first part of this century.

Before 1970, painters from the Eastern wing of Pakistan were a formidable and meaningful presence in Pakistan. The doyen of them all, Zainul Abedin was frequent visitor to all parts of the country. Not only was his work exhibited and published extensively, he was instrumental in the setting up of the Department of Fine Arts at Peshawar University and was closely associated with the National College of Arts in Lahore. His friendship with intellectuals, writers and artists like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Col. Majeed Malik, A.R. Chughtai, Shakir Ali, Zubaida Agha and others, signified his influence and relevance to the art scene. His early work which established his international reputation, was a series of dramatic ink and brush drawings of the 1942 Bengal famine. Published all over the sub-continent and abroad, these stark images made the name of young Zainul Abedin synonymous with that of an artist with a social conscience. He went on to explore a more cubist interpretation of form, in a sensitive, personalized manner. Never very far from the visual traditions of his native Bengal, Zainul Abedin worked in several parallel ways; as a water colourist and as a draughtsman of ease and skill, who manipulated reed pen and brush with echoes of Shantinketan's romance with Japanese ink drawings. Although he worked mainly in water colour on paper, many major works were executed in oil on canvas. These were often romantic interpretations of the female figure, strongly delineated, broken down into geometric components yet retaining preference for pattern and colour which brought the work into the fold of the "Bengal School" sensibility. His position as Head of the Art Institute of Dhaka was only one aspect of his crucial influence in East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh). The breadth of his creative vision made him the guiding force in setting up innumerable institutions, as well as a gentle yet potent voice in ongoing artistic concerns. His work was seen regularly in exhibitions in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi until the independence of Bangla Desh.

The tradition of artists linking up with poets and writers as friends, illustrators, and participants in ongoing debate is an established one in the sub-continent. There is also the authentic tradition of the written word as art, with calligraphy as its mainifestation. The fifties in Lahore, saw the beginnings of a re-interpretation of calligraphic forms as element of a contemporary expression in painting. Hanif Ramay,



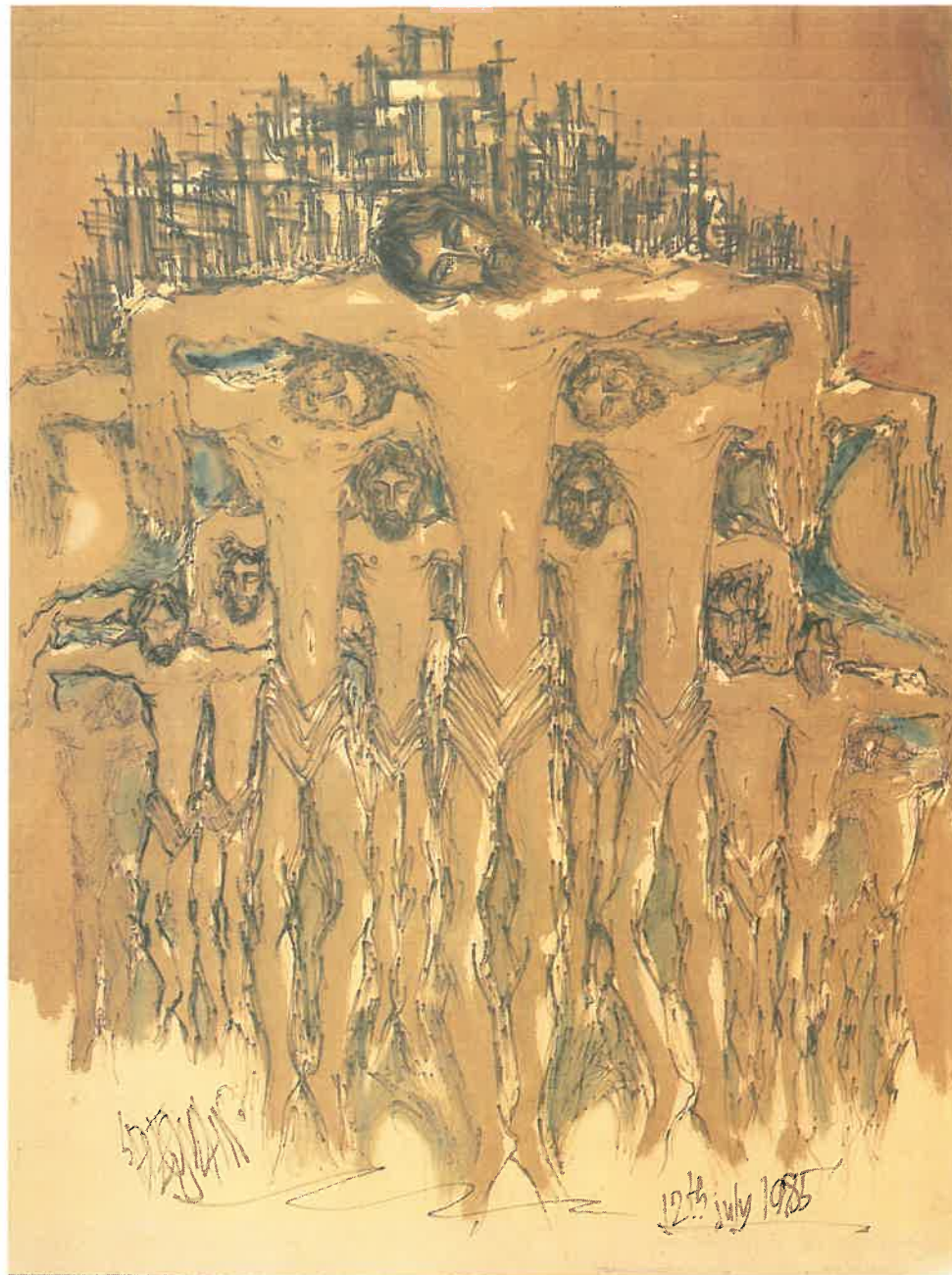
Zainul Abedin
Famine, 1943
Ink on paper
76x56cm

a writer and young painter, was among the first to investigate the possibilities of constructing a fresh idiom which looked at traditional forms in an objective way, and yet respected context and meaning. Being involved in the literary scene, both as the designer of magazine covers and as a writer, he explored the more formal aspects of this traditional art, often with an eloquence and clarity. Hanif Ramay's training as a painter was not in an art school but as a young student with Ustad Allah Buksh and the calligrapher Muhammad Hussain Shah.

His modernist beginnings on canvas like many others at the time, inclined to a cubist vocabulary, but the probing into line, space, and colour became far more individual when applied to calligraphic structure. There was obviously a certain predilection for content here, which evolved into a distinct and consistent framework for visual expression. Ramay deserted his painting for the turbulence of the political world; there was an interruption of almost two decades, before he returned to it with a solo exhibition in 1985, in Lahore. The new work was mellow in feeling; the calligraphic presence defined with careful control and a deft sense of line, colour and shape. This show brought him back into the discourse of contemporary painting as a mature critic and practitioner. The conscious political patronage of calligraphy as an accepted form of expression was the hallmark of the years of General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. The subsequent debasement of the form in an attempt to popularise it, did nothing to further serious development or creative maturity.

Among artists who turned to it as a major part of their life's work was Aslam Kamal and in his twilight years the eminent artist Sadeqain. Aslam Kamal has attempted to create a fusion between a several styles by subjugating them to his own geometric framework, relating them to architectural form and pattern.

Among the artists who were born in India and made Karachi their home after partition, was Sadeqain. Patronised at a young age by Prime Minister Suhrawardy, who saw promise in the young painter, Sadeqain was sent to work and study in Paris in 1960. Awarded the Laureate Biennial de Paris in 1961, he had already embarked on a meteoric artistic career. Until his death in 1987, Sadeqain defined the role of the modern painter in Pakistan, undertaking a number of public commissions including the Karachi Airport, the State Bank of Pakistan, the Mangla Power Station, the Lahore Museum and a host of others. Sadeqain



Sadeqain
Crucifixion, 1985
Mixed medium
180x120cm



Hanif Ramay
Caligraphy, 1983
Oil on Canvas
90x90cm



Gulgee
Untitled, 1996 Oil on Canvas 186x240cm

was a social commentator in his painting and a poet to boot. His later years saw a certain retreat into the safety of state-sanctioned calligraphic works, but for the large part of his career, he was a prolific and tireless painter. The paintings of his early phase were strongly figurative, complex works, grand in scale and ambitious in design. The themes were social, portrayed with conviction and dynamism. His family legacy of calligraphy, came through a few years later, as the work became more abstract and linear. The socio-political realities in Pakistan were reflected in his 'cactus' series, where he reduced human form to its skeletal structure and related it to similar configurations in nature. Close contact and friendships with poets, writers and intellectuals, influenced and informed Sadeqain's paintings of the late sixties and seventies. Works of this period range from the celebration of human labour and endeavour at Mangla, to the sophisticated more formal abstractions of the seventies. His extensive ceiling in Lahore Museum was a feat of creative endurance. He worked on an ambitious theme, employing vivid figurative imagery. Sadeqain's flamboyant temperament was reflected in strong contrasts of colour and shape, with little patience for subtle nuance of either. His affinity for both the literary and literal was confirmed by his paintings inspired from the works of Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz, often competent but not exalted. The slide into calligraphy in the eighties was no doubt comfortable, but added little to his aesthetic evolution. His valuable contribution to the modern movement in Pakistan had already been achieved in the work of sixties and seventies.

A star of another kind in the firmament of Pakistani painting, is Gulgee. Trained as a design engineer in the US, Ismail Gulgees' natural talent as an artist, transformed his career on his return to Pakistan, in 1952. He was working as an engineer at Warsak Dam, near his birth place Peshawar, where he first exhibited his paintings in the fifties. Originally a brilliant portraitist, Gulgee's successful career has encompassed abstract expressionist works, calligraphy, sculpture and architectural design. His meeting with the American artist, Elaine Hamilton, in 1960 in Karachi, introduced him to the New York school. Brilliantly coloured, Gulgee's abstract canvases have been unabashed in their use of the decorative. His irrepressible preference for the luster of gold, juxtaposed with the richness of lapis lazuli, have made his works recognisable for their heightened contrasts of hue and texture, and reliable use of materials and skill. Lauded by a



Laila Shehzada
Gandhara Series, 1979 Oil on canvas 37x67cm

number of public personalities, Gulgee has had the opportunity to demonstrate his skills as a portrait painter for most of his career. Among his early sitters was king Zahir Shah of Afghanistan; his mosaic lapis portrait of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was among his best known and most reproduced works. Apart from kings and presidents, Gulgee's recurring themes have been horses and calligraphic forms, treated with energetic if predictable results.

A painter of quiet almost silent determination was the shy Laila Shahzada. Working at A.S. Nagi's studio in Karachi, she had her first solo exhibition in 1959. Her "Driftwood" series, and works inspired from Mohenjodaro and Gandhara became well known in the sixties and seventies. Moving north into the mountains in her later years, brought about a significant change in her imagery and palette. The landscapes of the mountains gave her work a simplicity of form and a lightening of palette which echo with memories of Georgia O' Keefes' landscapes of New Mexico. Laila Shahzada was coming into her own as a poetic, essential painter when her life was cut short in a tragic accident in 1995.

Acknowledged as the foremost landscape painter in Pakistan, is Khalid Iqbal, who retired as Professor Emeritus from the National College of Arts, having taught there for several decades. Trained at the Slade School of Art under Sir William Coldstream, Khalid Iqbal's early works were in the usual academic genres. His concentration on the landscape in and around his native Lahore consumed his interest in the sixties and continue to do so.

A poetic observer of the changing seasons, terra firma, and light, Khalid Iqbal's paintings are gentle in their visual understatements. Paint is sparsely laid, and the brushes' existence is delicately unobtrusive. The palette is discreet, carefully nuanced and orchestrated. Landscape in Khalid Iqbal's work becomes a metaphor for the undertones in nature. He has many imitators but no real equals.

The contemporary art movement in Pakistan today owes a great deal to the complex socio-political and artistic milieu out of which it grows. The many influences, compulsions, and realities which have shaped the work of schools and individuals have established a framework from which young contemporaries are emerging with a profusion of artistic voices and concerns.



Khaild Iqbal
Canal Bushes, 1995 Oil on Board 46x76cm

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Voicing the Contemporary

Quddus Mirza.

A.R. NAGORI

Born 1938

A prominent painter, Nagori broke away from the Punjab University tradition to create the works he is better known by, works that express outrage at social and political injustice. He sees himself as the voice of the downtrodden in a feudal society, of victimised women and as a severe critic of the hypocrisy of society's self appointed moralists. He earned fame for his bold symbolic alphabet series that were targeted against the military dictatorship. Aside from the challenge of content, Nagori has a meticulous compositional language and a distinctive use of colours. Nagori established and headed the fine art Department of Sind's Jamshoro University until his recent retirement.

On my work

"The driving force behind my work has been to project social evils and crimes against women and children, in an aesthetic manner. I am very particular about the fundamentals of art which should be understood and it is my priority that painting should remain painting. But there is always a topic, like struggle against repression or about environment."

On colours

"Colours fascinate me. I use the colour from my surroundings. People look at my paintings and say that there are such unusual and strong colours that it hurts the eyes. I feel that it should hurt the eyes. I try to work in such a way so that the content should be heightened and understood. I don't want to make pretty pictures."

On painting

"The realization of when a painting is finished is most important one. The best painter is he who knows when and where to stop. If you keep working from spontaneity you will feel it when a painting is complete. Once you have developed that judgement then you are a mature painter."

On style

"The style is natural for a painter, I use brush in a special manner for a physical reason and this has been recognised as my style. I try to avoid my style, but again it appears naturally. I feel that the content of the work is more important."



A.R. Nagori
Post Blast, 1996 Oil on Canvas 107x61cm

AFSHAR MALIK

Born 1955

Afshar Malik is primarily a lithographer and also works in etching, clay, pastels and mixed media sculpture. The unifying element in this diversity of medium appears to be his keen eye to focus on the detail. It reminds one of the plastic treatment of miniature painting. Each work consists of a narrative, based on ever changing elements and meanings. He takes inspiration from child art, but works with a combination of visual and textural dialogue. The exploration of line is a significant element.

He studied at the National College of Arts and the Slade School of Art London, and is one of the leading artists working in printmaking.

On image and imagination

"For me painting is a non-literal medium. It has to do mainly with the imagination. I take inspiration from children. I think a child is a fresh idea within you. It is a way of looking at the world in a fresh and unconditioned way. I feel when I am working I have the same energy as I had playing as a child."

On the virtual and verbal space

"I try to make the illusion of space not with tones, and not by making any background or foreground. There is a sense of distance being created through the proportion of objects. We have a great advantage of the tradition of two dimensional images and the bird's eye view. I create a sense of space through that literal perspective. My work contains autobiographical images; it is like having words which can make a story as well. I make images first, and the title comes later. It is like a clue to me and to others for my work."

On the use of mediums

"There is no difference between drawing and painting for me. I deliberately try to break the boundary of these two. Drawing is a gesture: you start to make a drawing as a study but it can be a study in colour. You never know where a drawing ceases and a painting begins. A painting is a form of elaboration on the studies."



Afshar Malik
Drawing is a celebration, 1995
Water Colour +ink
32x21cm

AHMED KHAN

Born 1939

Trained as a graphic designer from National College of Arts Ahmed Khan has been working with two and three dimensional mediums. His work is deeply rooted in the visual diction of Islamic and Indian art and is a reinterpretation of these within a modern language. Working mostly as a commissioned artist, he maintains a unity of form and a strong sense of design in his public projects. He has been experimenting in various mediums in painting and has evolved a personal technique. He manages to unify his diverse mediums through his interest in geometry. He has also worked as a course director for the design department at the National College of Arts and was an influential person in shaping the aesthetic of young artists and designers.

On creativity.

"Actually art history is repeated in every human being's life. The way we create and recreate images in childhood, without going into the intricacies of drawing techniques, by directly transferring the picture from our minds, onto surface, using bold colours. Then with time the craft and intellectual aspects enter into art, this occurs in every person's life to some extent."

On the creative process

"Ideas keep coming to your mind even if the canvas is not there for you. It is like writing a letter, you don't have the complete picture in your mind before you start. Similarly in painting, whatever image is in your mind it may not be clear. As you go along it gets transformed and transferred on the canvas. In making a picture you use mathematical knowledge as you do in music, it is of colour, their values and impact. With the reference point of light you create something with the illusion of being three dimensional. In painting and in sculpture, areas are defined because of light divided in negative and positive spaces."



Ahmed Khan
 Alif Lam Meem, 1994
 Silver+good Leaf, Chemically treated with oil paint 101x134cm

AIJAZ ANWAR

Born 1946

A historian by profession, Aijaz Anwar paints his surroundings consisting of streets and old buildings of Lahore. He uses the soft and swift brush mark which is layered to construct a busy image, he manages to retain in his paintings the freshness of paint along with a keen depiction of details. His paintings can also be regarded as artistic documents of a fading tradition and past, recently he has been depicting various festivals of Lahore using vibrant and translucent colours. He is one of the leading painters of the country working in water colour.

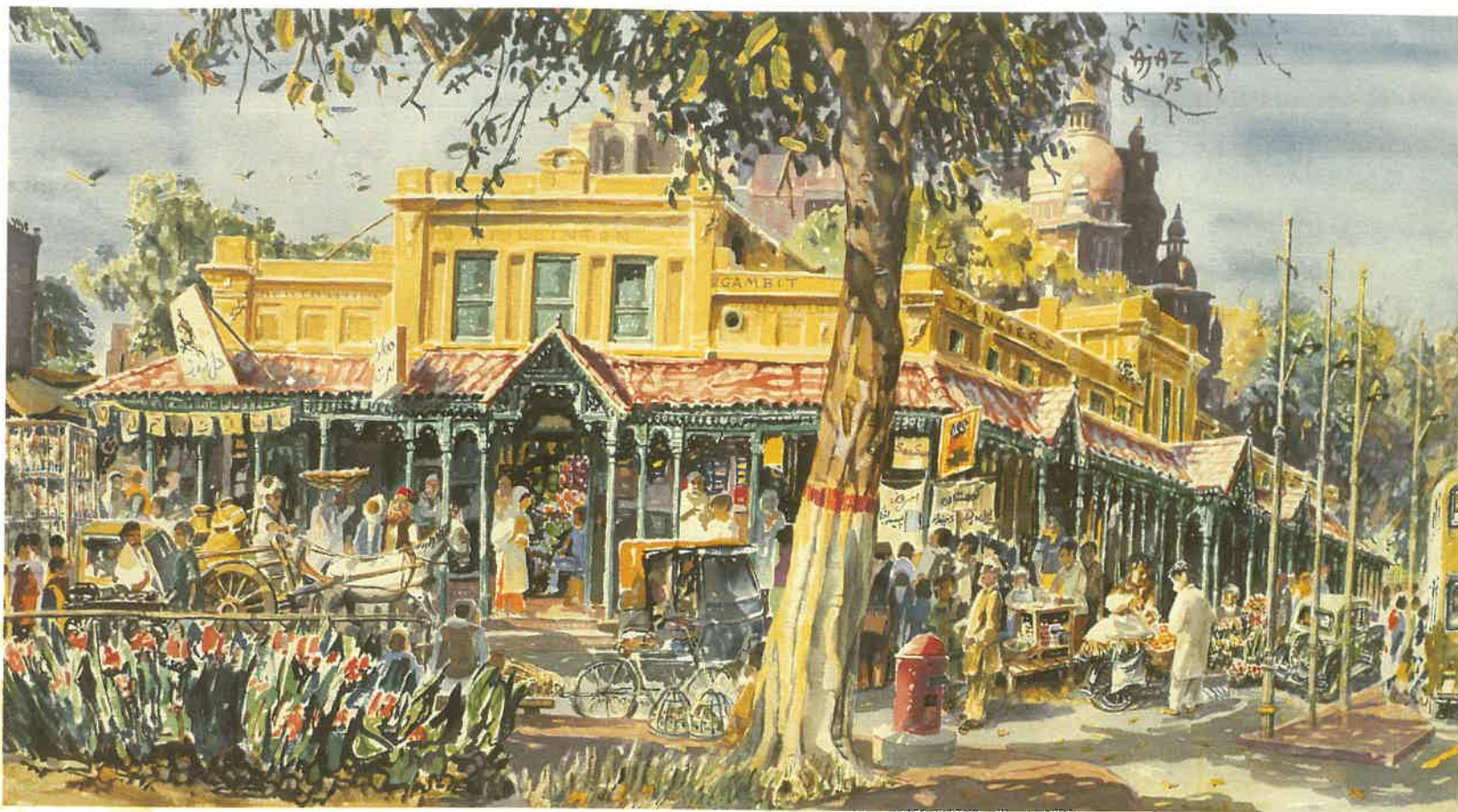
On painting

"I no longer paint from the spot, I used to do so, I used to make faithful renderings of nature. I think an artist lowers himself as a slave to that particular aspect of nature and secondly he does not use his talent in colour, composition either. The artist who is copying faithfully from the spot lacks the creative impulse. He does not have the courage to make changes."

Now my work has changed quite a lot. Behind every painting there is definitely a spot that I may have been seeing for many years or I have suddenly discovered.

I once knew a saying that if you are enjoying painting it means that the painting is going well. I had always doubted this. Then I come across someone who said "when I am painting, I am in agony" I think this is true. In the creative process the beginning can be comfortable, and after a while one thinks there are a lot of problems which are not going to be easy. When one solves these problems, new ones come in.

While painting, some times one is more active, sometimes one is painting less. During this period of inactivity the mind has been working and one might produce more quality."



Aijaz Anwar
Tollinuton Market, 1993 Water colour 82x112cm

AKRAM DOST

Born 1958

Dost was trained as a painter and print maker. He does not confine himself to one genre but has explored the realm of sculpture, drawing and wood carving. His work is a comment on the sociopolitical reality which can be applicable to any time and any place. The agony, pathos and helplessness of women appear in his work, confined in the border and decorated in the manner of traditional Baluchi motifs. Being a politically conscious painter he is also aware of the language of paint, the work seems to be an organic development of shapes, marks, colours and surfaces.

On my work

"In the beginning I did a lot of realistic studies. I did enough academic work, but at a stage when you have skill and experience and you have developed a certain style and manner, then you get more conscious about your surroundings and you have to find your own way when you are sure of your destination."

On the subject

"In my paintings I have described the problems of woman's confined place in our society and other related situations, like the suffering of the people. If an artist wants to work in his society he has to be committed to projecting the problems of that society."

On being an artist

"I think an artist is a very sensitive member of society who has a keen observation. If an artist is sincere to his work then he certainly has his contribution to society. I believe the contribution of an artist is in a day to day participation. It depends on the objectives and conditions. I am not in favour of spending a calculated and protected life. Through my efforts, I want to make positive changes in society."

On style

"I don't categorise myself as an expressionist or in any other category. When I depict a certain problem I don't know in what manner I am going to do it. I am inspired by the realities around me."



Akram Dost
Reflection of Society, 1993
Oil on Canvas
96x82cm

ANWAR SAEED

Born 1955

Anwer Saeed's work has evolved over the years with one of the most poetic and personal idioms. A great number of his works have a political connotation. At the time of political suppression he evolved the symbol of windows and birds to denote the prevalent times. This concern of depicting the present with the help of the past led him to explore the visual language of art history from the Greek to medieval iconography and from Buddhist to calligraphic imagery.

On work and symbols

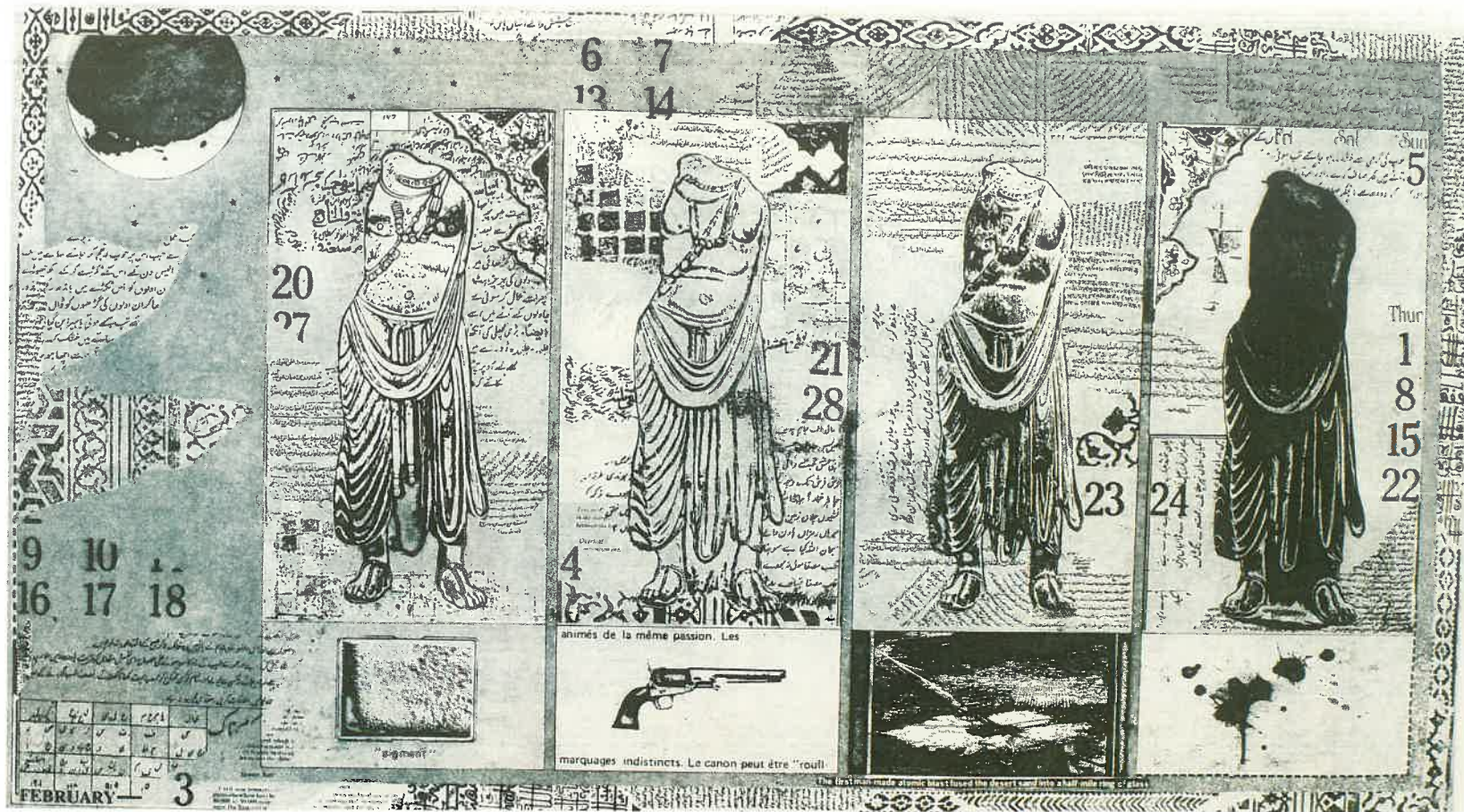
"I am interested in working with texture. The surface is very important for me. I try to build it up in layers of collage, and image develops from layer to layer. I use elements like animals, human form and other objects in relation to each other. There is a very deep tradition of story telling in our culture and our society. Our oral traditions are much stronger than the visual ones. The symbols in my work are often very subjective and far from typical meaning. The symbols I employ are about what is, not what should be hence the winged figure is the realization that the alienation is the fate of the individual and the space enclosed in the work is an alternative of an inner space, not merely a passive reconstruction of the scene."

On images

"What interests me most is neither still life nor landscape, but the human figure. It is through the figure that I best succeed in expressing my feelings about life, about existence. I take references from nature but I feel no interest in copying it in a servile way."

On colour

"I have reached a conclusion that minimum use of colour can create greater impact than all the colours put together. I try to make colour transparent so that the submerged images live only in the state of silhouettes and shadows. The images float through painted screens."



Anwar Saeed
 Different possible ending of a story, 1993 Etching 58x84cm

ASKARI MIAN IRANI

Born 1940

Askari Mian has combined various elements of traditional art to shape a contemporary imagery. His work reflects a nostalgia for the glorious past. The structure of his compositions are based on the traditional Mughal miniature paintings, not limiting itself to pictorial elements only, he has managed to incorporate the elements of border and flat surfaces. The use of Arabic script and Geometry in his painting bring out the complexity of symmetrical composition. He uses the transparency and opaque qualities of paint in a very individual manner.

On inspiration

"There is nothing as being satisfied in art, one learns from everyone. I feel that one takes elements and with thinking, evolves them into a new work. Sometimes it happens soon, some times later and sometimes does not happen at all.

In order to evolve my own language I worked in a diverse manner yet I was not satisfied. I did some monoprints in the seventies. One day I was looking through a book and found some 'Naqsh'. I thought of converting this into painting. These have both meaning and aesthetic value for me. I started using 'Taviz' for my source of inspiration, for me it contains both respect and mystery. Now I am using sacred numerology in my work."

On painting

"When I paint, I first make a decision about the composition. The painting takes its own course and it keeps on changing. If I am making 30 paintings not all of them are good and resolved. It is only five or six with which I am satisfied. I feel that painting is like a fight; a wrestling match or a competition between the artist and the white canvas. Sometimes you can win through destroying it."

On being an artist

"My training as a graphic designer helped me a lot, especially with the sense of colour composition. The acceptance of my work has changed my attitude. I have been labelled a calligrapher, I make it clear that I am not. I am a painter. I don't use the calligraphic pen or paper and don't work with the precision of a calligrapher. I just take the image and transform it."



Askari Mian Irani
Princess with the parrot, 1995
Oil on Canvas
46x46cm

ATHER JAMAL

Born 1952

Ather Jamal is one of the growing number of water colourists that emerged from Karachi School of Art and was the first to do his diploma show entirely in large scale watercolours. His sensitive observations of the bypassed beauty resting in drab surroundings of shanty dwellers are celebratory rather than tinged with any pathos. Skilled in classic water colour techniques, his work avoids the coldness of formula painting. Intuitive washes of modulated colours and light bring to life the portraits of the rural and urban poor. Ather Jamal aligns himself with mainstream painting rather than the distinct group of water colourists and shows regularly. Ather Jamal has produced a number of commissioned works in oil and water colour and has been a source of inspiration for many younger artists.

On my work

"I found my preference for work in water colours. There is a freshness and spontaneity with an element of mystery in this medium which holds a tremendous appeal for me. Initially, painting a variety of subjects, I gradually became utterly absorbed with the people of the *katchi abadis* scattered around Karachi and began to study and explore their way of living. Their customs, dress and life style gave me endless material to work with and I discovered many surprising factors; for instance, poor as they are, the women folk will only wear silver jewellery and their eating utensils are made from the finest brass.

Strangely assorted objects juxtaposed on the roofs of the dwellings create intriguing environmental sculptures. Old tyres, wooden boxes, tins, cloth and *charpoy*s. All unplanned form, a natural whole. My aim has been to portray the little known aspects of these unpretentious people, exploring form, textures and colours. Presently I am just beginning my work in art; changes come slowly in a natural manner and from deep within the artist.

In recent work I concentrated more on design and composition and thus experimented with different backgrounds and styles without distorting the figure."



Ather Jamal
Thar women (Seated Figure), 1993
Graphicure monoprint
57x44cm

BASHIR MIRZA

Born 1941

Bashir Mirza made his mark in the art world with his Lonely Girl paintings, strong contemporary re-interpretation of the miniature tradition. The restrained sensuality of the dark distant "Lonely Girl" became an icon of the modern woman (and the modern spirit), bold, self contained and challenging. After an absence of ten years during which he concentrated on the advertising industry, he developed his new manoeuvre of figurative expressionism using bold pure colours tamed with white in a calligraphic style reminiscent of his drawings. Bashir Mirza became Pakistan's first cultural diplomat in Australia.

On painting

"If you start with the subject matter already decided, then your painting becomes a craft. You should just sit before your canvas, apply a splash when nothing else comes to mind, you will see something emerging. Then you can find your starting point. Your inspiration can come from anywhere. If an image appeals to you then you get started. You just have to observe and keep your eyes open.

When you apply the colours, you judge where they are better suited often by trial and error. You carry on till you are satisfied.

Many people can paint, but knowing where to stop is difficult. Its like in music, how somebody becomes tuneless at times. If you understand music, you can pick that up. Its the same with painting. Don't overwork it."

On being artist

"To be a good painter knowledge of history is essential. Otherwise you indulge in portraits, landscapes etc., that in my view is craft. Unless you have your own interpretation of a subject matter, you cannot be a good artist.

The individuality of an artist should be apparent from afar, like your brush mark. The subject matter can change, but your stroke and rhythm don't go away."



Bashir Mirza
Landscape, 1996 Acrylic on canvas 60x65cm

COLIN DAVID

Born 1937

✓ Colin David's work has a distinct quality imbued with the aesthetics of this region; it emerges as the contemporary heir of Mughal miniatures, the three-dimensionally rendered figures juxtaposed with flat surfaces. He is acknowledged as one of the finest draughtsmen in the country. His sensitive use of medium supports the sensuality of the theme. Awarded the President's Award in 1982 and Quaid-e-Azam's Award in painting in 1979, he has influenced a number of young artists through his teaching at the National College of Art. ✓

On painting

✓ "I do a lot of sketching and from these smaller sketches I develop some compositions which I can paint, at that point the painting is already taking shape, then the act of painting is really fast because everything has already been solved on paper. //

I prefer a simple background. I don't like to complicate the canvas. I try to show that depth in my canvas comes from the perspective, not by tonal variation.

I have never stopped working at a painting being afraid that I will spoil it by over doing it. I know if I spoil the work I can always go back to it and make it the way I want, I don't restrain myself.

I enjoy painting a lot. This is one of the greatest pleasures in life and the reason for me to paint. One paints for one's own sake."

On subject and the model

"I think the female form is one of the most beautiful of forms, and that's the reason why I prefer to paint this quite often. Most of my paintings are in fact from imagination, I make the sketches from the model and then paint from these sketches. A lot of the work is done in the absence of the model. When I need a reference I bring the model back and make the changes which are required."



Colin David
Untitled, 1993 Oil on Board 60x121cm

DABIR AHMED

Born 1942

Dabeer's work is an example of a natural ceramist's attitude towards materials and colours. Trained as a graphic designer he has been working as a ceramicist for many years. A master in the technique, he has developed his personal language enriched with texture and designs from the strong heritage of this region. He has experimented in a variety of materials and glazes, and the work ranges from small objects to ceramic murals. The attention to detail and a strong sense of colour are the main qualities of his work.

On my work.

"Now I don't do preliminary sketches, the amount and quality of clay directs me towards what to make. When I work I focus on line, form, colour and texture in every piece. Clay is a fascinating and versatile medium, it has its own limitations. If I want to achieve a certain colour and form I may not be able to achieve it but sometimes the accidental results help to open help to open up new dimensions. I try to analyse these effects and create them again in the next piece. Ceramics is a combination of science, art and craft; in any piece, any one aspect takes over. The difference between the style of various ceramists is the difference in the composition of these three elements.

I look for the ultimate result, not the technique one has to evolve."

On tradition

"I enjoy working with traditional forms and motifs. The most important thing which I try to achieve is the perfection of form and the quality of the glaze. I think the aesthetic quality is as important in the work of the past as in the present."

On style

"Style is like your identity, my style is my technique which consists of using the local materials of clay and glaze. This is the link with tradition. I try to build an understanding of the medium and combine this understanding with traditional form, thus creating a contemporary work. The knowledge of materials brings out your creativity as well.

I find my decorative pieces more interesting. The glaze medium is like painting."



Dabir Ahmed
Calligraphy, 1996
Ink gold leaf and colour
100x75cm

DAVID ALESWORTH

Born 1957

A British sculptor who has settled in Pakistan, David Alesworth mostly works in a neoconstructivist tradition. His early work in carved and constructed wood, has been almost completely replaced with cast, forged and welded works in mixed metals. These are eccentric, witty dialogues with Victorian inventions and popular Pakistani art seen from his vantage point as both observer and participant. His enduring themes have been environmental degradation and the nuclear arms race in South East Asia. His work is in the National Collection. Recipient of a National Award, he is head of Fine Art at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors. He also published the only current artists newsletter in Pakistan and has recently established a gallery in Karachi that shows alternative art.

On creative process

"Whatever I do comes out of all that I have been interested in and what tends to happen is that I look at the history of what I do, where I recognise the similar interests in the present. I tend to look at art making as an all inclusive process, revealing the peculiarities of who I am, and all the things that have made me.

I don't try to psycho-analyse what I do, but I think as an artist I have a responsibility for the things that I bring into the world."

On sculpture.

"Some people try to think of sculpture as volume and space, I don't deny that because sculpture can be a piece of paper attached to a wall. When you are making a sculpture, you are not making a sculpture, perhaps you are in the process of thinking about bringing things together and tearing things down and moving things in and out of focus and the sculpture is a result of this process. I think sculptures are complete, but they are not complete in the sense that every sculpture leads to another sculpture and in that sense they are elements along a path way."



David Alesworth
Designer Garden, 1996 Mixed Media 25x30cm

DURRIYA KAZI

Born 1955

A sculptor who is well articulated in her medium. She works in terra cotta, metal and cement. Her work is generated by the images of her immediate surroundings and from the strong tradition of literature. One of the few sculptors who are creating space rather than making an object. Her work is reflective of the current themes yet the language is taken from forms of miniature or folk art. Her work deals with metaphysical subjects. Both in her drawings and sculptures she has used the image of human figure in her quest for an equilibrium of form and content.

The creative process

"The work usually centres around an image that has been travelling between conscious and subconscious for some time. It may refer to something seen on a billboard or a chance image while travelling in the city or it may be an idea seen as a symbol. Drawing is an important activity both as a thought process as well as a self contained activity. Material can also be the meaning as in using a brash "low" material such as Aluminium. In this sense material is image. The process of making is not mere illustration of idea. The image evolves in the course of making and becomes truer to itself. The image develops an autonomy. It dictates its appearance."

On interpretation

"The work is usually a personal and very private statement or crystallization related to events that have happened. It is a way of coping with life. But no one needs to know this when seeing the work.

Interpretation is the greatest mystery of art. The artist works from inside the artwork and yet colludes with those who view it from outside. The contextualising, re-interpreting, re-reading of the artwork is an ongoing process that the artist has himself become a part of. With conceptual art this of course becomes art's function. One can impose all sorts of readings onto an artwork and all would have some truth, but there is a sense that the artwork always slips away from a static meaning."



Durriya Kazi
Salik, 1995 Cast Aluminium 45x60x76cm

GHULAM RASOOL

Born 1942

A landscape painter, Ghulam Rasool has associated himself with administrative institutions immediately after graduating from Punjab University. His own work has changed from strongly composed flat landscapes in to modernist style landscapes, exploring neo-impressionist concerns, with light and atmosphere, returning from earlier flat areas of unmodulated colour to the Anna Molka tradition, of a network of brush marks, activating the surface, a change he attributes to a period of experimenting with etching.

On landscapes

"I use nature as reference. You can see a lot of exciting colour combinations everywhere. Nature has an answer to every thing. When I go and see something new I extend my vocabulary by looking at it."

On colour

"Colour compositions should fully interact within themselves. Colour should not only be decorative. If we look at our surroundings we find that our dresses are in accordance with the landscape the colours of clothes sensitively blend in with the bright sunshine."

On my work

"I have always studied, the colours of miniature paintings and the Asian tradition of combining various levels of view in one painting. This combination of perspective was used consciously in the modern art of the west in the late 19th century but painters of this area have always worked with it. I like to use these in my work.

I want my art to be understood by the people of my country. I feel that my paintings should have something for every one."



Ghulam Rasool
Mysterious Trichmir-Chitral, 1996
Oil on Canvas
90x60cm

غلام رسول ۹۶

HAJRA MANSUR

Born 1948

Hajra Mansur works mostly in water colour. It can be stated that she is a painter who has taken the tradition of Chughtai further in terms of its technique as well as aesthetics. Her imagery is a homage to being a woman. Most of the figures are enveloped in a mysterious background, in the recent work, the swirling figures are juxtaposed with the lyrical background. The work has a strong two dimensional quality, with the motifs and textures moving on the figure and background alike. Hajra's work is a continuation of the tradition of Oriental painting.

On style

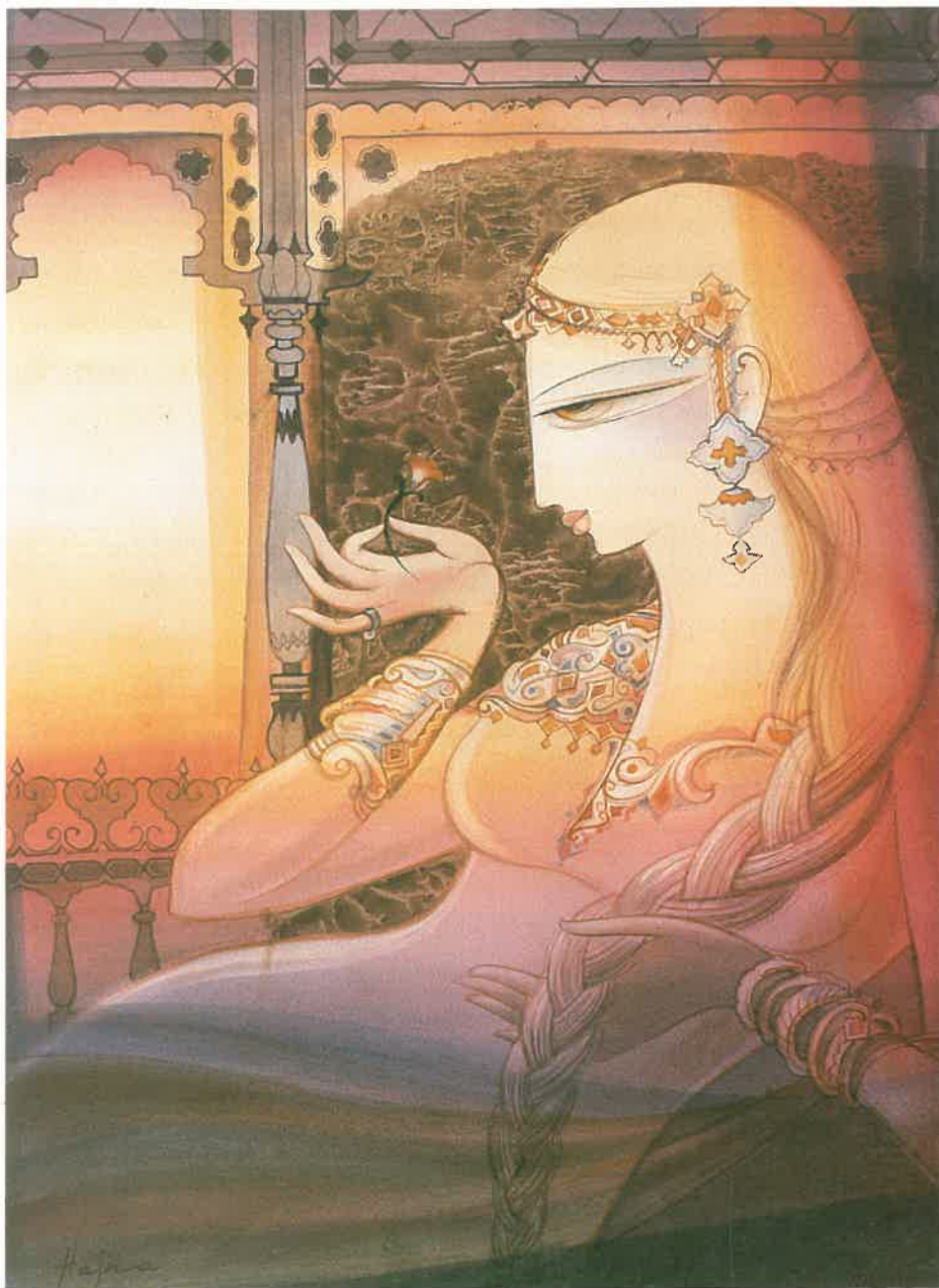
"Distinctive style emerges through time and working constantly. It is like handwriting. The quality which I seek to achieve is the spontaneity and naturalness in my work. I took inspiration from miniature paintings but developed my own style."

On abstract art

"Abstract painting is highly creative. One would not think that it is irrelevant to us culturally. I think the problem arises from a lack of communication, like comprehending a different language. Abstraction is a natural evolution of realism."

On the creative process

"I don't have to think about what I am going to make while I am painting. With white paper the image starts to appear. I take inspiration from my dreams especially ideas about colours. I use water colours so I have to make quick decisions. I try to improvise on my technique. When theme and the technique is well balanced, and in harmony, then I think the painting is complete. My personality comes into my work and expresses itself. I work everyday in my studio, but I can't work when I am depressed."



Hajra Mansur
Intizar, 1997
Water colour fixed wash on paper
75x55cm

IJAZ UL HASSAN

Born 1940

Ijaz ul Hassan's work is an interpretation of nature. There are two phases in his work: until 1970 he was painting symbols from the Vietnam war and the poverty around the world, juxtaposed with billboard images. Later he went in for a more decorative symbolic idiom. His work carries a mood of repose and tranquillity which one experiences in the nature. He is influenced by the eminent landscape painter, Khalid Iqbal, but also uses hard edge painting aesthetic in his work. His compositions do not follow the traditional division of sky and earth; in his landscapes the green area moves around the canvas and gives the illusion of emerging out of the two dimensional surface.

On my work

"I mostly use common images in my painting to address people. I am inspired by the social, economic or the political situations.

I was inspired by the Vietnam war, the Palestine movement and in Pakistan by the working class movement. I tried to paint these subjects. I try to take the subject as a part of my life. For an artist observation is very important, and at the same time colour itself is capable of awakening emotions.

My early work is not landscapes but figurative. It was the time when I made simple and larger than life figures. I have not exhibited my earlier work very much. Whoever sees the work formulates his own opinion about the work and derives the meaning he wants to see in the painting. Now I am happy that earlier work of the 70's which at that time was being taken as posters are now taken as creative work."

On inspiration

"In imitating or repeating, you are only showing your skills. It is like being a craftsman. Taking inspiration and learning from older artist's experiences is good, but it is better to make your own language or learn from your own experiences. I never try to repeat myself. Copying someone is a bad thing but the worst is to copy one's own self. One should never fix one's mind on a single point. I constantly evolve. There may be a silence in my work but it is not static."



Ijaz ul Hassan
Lilies at Night, 1995 Oil on Canvas 42x60cm

IMRAN MIR

Born 1950

Imran Mir is considered to be Pakistan's only true exponent of post-painterly abstraction. From large, fairly mechanical hard edge stain paintings, his new work sits on the edge of passion, using more emotive icons such as 'x' that elicit an emotional and intellectual response from the viewer. The paint surface is also more active with colour spilling into adjacent areas. Imran Mir has also experimented with computer paintings. As head of one of Pakistan's foremost advertising companies, he has also contributed to the graphic industry introducing high tech. computer facilities as well as encouraging clients to support art through company collections and art publishing.

On my work

"I think unless you can draw you cannot be a good artist. It is a process, later on you can make your own grammar, you can do many things, make and break your own rules.

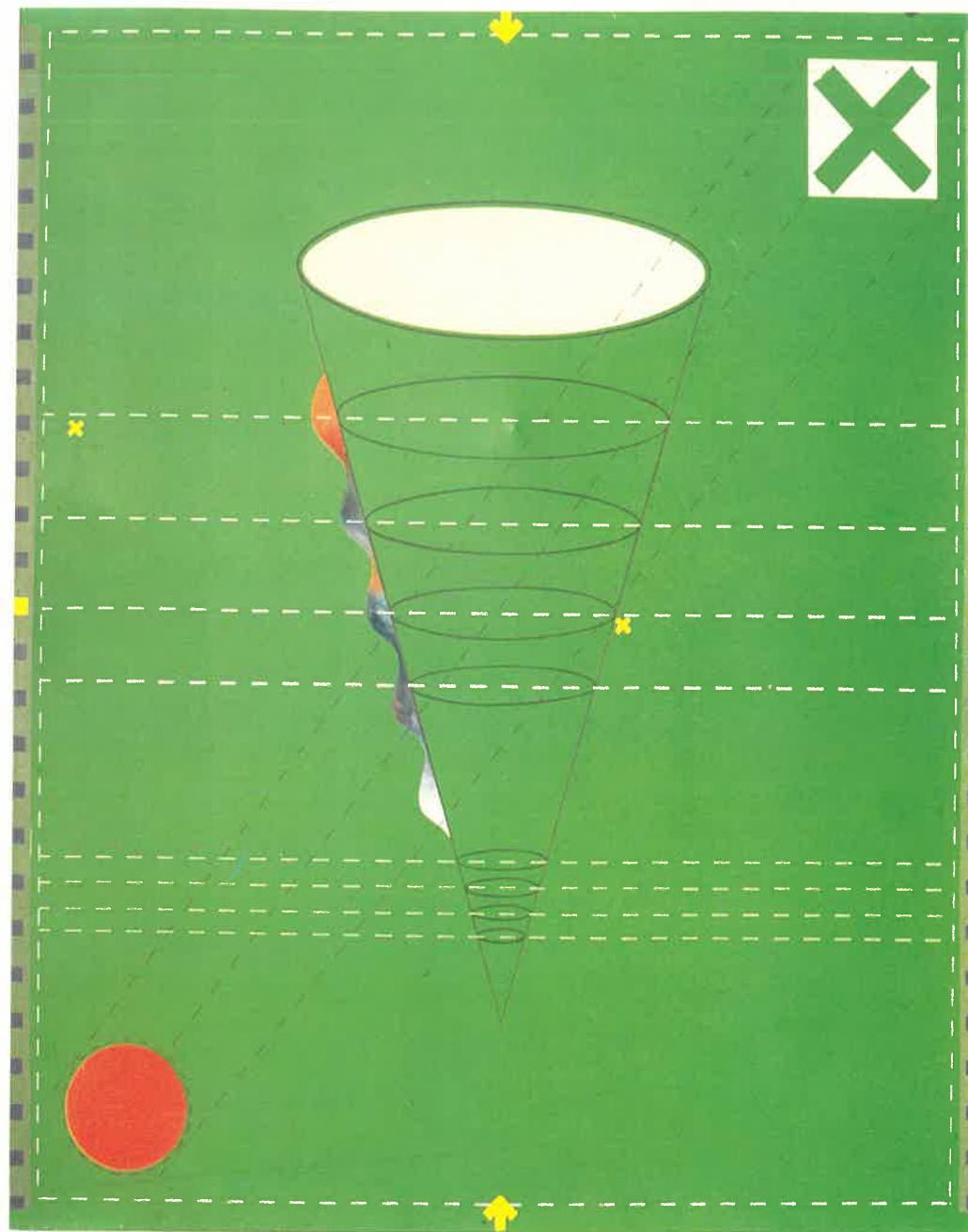
When I start, I have to have something in mind. I can't just put a canvas and start it. I always plan my things. In my work I take the space and solve that problem, like some mathematical problem. It is very interesting for me. I think that mathematics is like art, it is fun. My work is not very complicated, every body can see the voids, the lines around, which are elements of my work. I think on one level the people living in villages have a better sense of aesthetic and design. They can understand and relate to these more than us.

For me every thing is the same, three-dimensional or two-dimensional etc. To inquire, this is more important than why you make it. For me it is very difficult to explain my work. If you can explain it, then you would rather write a book than paint."

On painting

"I think to paint is a experience. To see something you have never seen, coming across something totally new."

Imran Mir
Green, 1994
Oil on Canvas
153x182cm



IQBAL GEOFFERY

Born 1939

One of the leading contemporary artists of the country, who has been working in mixed media and on various surfaces. His work displays the skill and the conceptual ideas behind the painterly surface. A sense of humour and a will to shock based on serious issues signify Geoffery's work. The work reflects the sense of time and the intellect of the creator. He has been working on two dimensional surfaces, sculptures and installations. A sophisticated aesthete by manner, his themes are linked with the social reality and the idea of being the "Other"

On creative process

"I work more like a computer. Things that I experience I study, I scan. Things that I relate to or reject or receive, sometimes germinate into art. Sometimes it is like a seed that does not grow. Often failures like painted over canvases are chapters contributed to the final art work. I can have a lot of ideas running parallel simultaneously and more often I don't find the need to convert these into art, or to relate them, much less to reproduce them."

On reality

"The thing which bothers me is the claim that some artists are creating reality. As far as nature is concerned one can't even reproduce one leaf, so you are only dealing in pseudo-nature or second nature. What you create may be a simulation of reality, something almost different from what has been observed or perceived. Just copying nature is, I think, a redundant act."

On the use of ready mades

"Artists have always used ready mades. Even the Renaissance artists did not create colours. Colours were extracted from some ready made source."



Iqbal Geoffery
The seven Henry, 1995
Mixed Media on metal
100x37cm

IQBAL HUSSAIN

Born 1950

Iqbal Hussain's work shows his pursuit into the real. The real in his work becomes the ephemeral reality of nature which has a delightful side and the brutal reality created by the culture of one of the oldest professions. His challenging subject matter co-habits with the painterly language. Though the work revolves around the relationships of a society which is based on the exploitation of the flesh, it ceases to be pitiful, and is infused with affection and the care demonstrated in every stroke.

On the subject

"The main thing in my work is the subject; the content which I am painting, not just the resemblance. I want to paint people I know. I want to paint the emptiness in them. I want to compensate people for their losses, want to establish that these people are also real. No one wants to hear a tragic story. Fortunately, the artist makes one feel the substance of his work, he doesn't have to narrate it. I have some affection, something I feel about the model, which may be inspiring. I go to my neighbourhood and keep on observing, if some image strikes me, it becomes an idea and I start working to develop it."

On painting

"There is a certain joy in painting, but it is frustrating also. I get frustrated when I am not able to find the right tone or colour. If I am not satisfied with my work, it irritates me, I can't relax all day, can't enjoy myself unless I am able to paint what I want. This gives me peace of mind when it happens. I work every day on three or four pieces at the same time. It is a type of psychotherapy, I keep on changing, either to add or to eliminate something. When I finish my painting, I give a gap of ten days or a week and don't look at the painting. Then I go back to it and if I feel that it lacks something, I start painting again. There is always something which is left, I think there is no such painting which is totally finished."

On interpretation

"What is the point of painting if you have to tell a short story also, then just write it. Painting and writing are two different arts. People should understand painting in its own language. You use a brush not words in making a painting."



Iqbal Hussain
Untitled, 1992
Oil on Canvas
122x122cm

JAMAL SHAH

Born 1956

A social realist by nature of his work, Jamal Shah has been working in many mediums. His work is an echo of the human situation particularly in our society and generally in every part of the world. He represents the body with its helplessness against the elements. He has worked on various surfaces from paper to windows and doors. Jamal Shah infuses the content with formal aspect. It can be enjoyed on its surface, decorative level and can reveal its harsh reality afterwards.

On my work

"My work is about associations and relationships with surroundings that has various levels. One level can be of appreciation, celebration. At the same time, if you are sincere with your loved ones, or with your household or your country, or with yourself, then you are bound to establish a critical relationship with it. When there is some criticism in my work, that doesn't mean that I hate this place. I actually love it and the state of affairs at that particular time might have saddened me.

I prefer to draw, with colours also I draw. In sculpture, I enjoy tampering with things, activating them, and at times damaging them, Something like a canvas restricts me, I need a hard surface to react better."

On art and being an artist

"I think that art is a mean of communication and will remain forever. Many other aspects have been added to it. In the beginning, at a superficial level, one would assume, that one who can make a picture is an artist. But eventually one realises that art is a way of life. It is a conscious choice to pursue art. Once you are in this field then you are faced with its elements of depth, layers, beauty. If you have an honest opinion about your own work then your work keeps evolving and changing.

I think no work can be apolitical. The artist is a political being. If the artist had no love for life and his surroundings, he would not be an artist."



Jamal Shah
Untitled, 1991 Mixed Medium on Paper 61x76cm

JAMIL NAQSH

Born 1939

One of the foremost modern painters who has evolved a distinctive visual language of his work. His work consists of his themes dealt with a new manner every time. The strength of lines combined with the sensuous quality of the surface has become his signature. A master draughtsman, his earlier training as a miniature painter gives his paintings a link to the aesthetic sensibilities of the region. He has been working on many themes and in many mediums but in each work his painterly quality transcends the appearances. He is a prolific painter, interpreting the tradition of modernism in his very personal style.

On art and culture

"Oil paints are not meant to be used in this region and same is true for ideas. Foreign ideas cannot survive here. All plastic arts have some origin over here, organic and geometric forms are the basis of aesthetics. Geometry is derived from nature, as the shape of circle is the shape of a drop of water.

The problem nowadays is that we know ourselves through others. What is our culture, is not decided yet. We have a strong heritage but either we do not know it or we deny it."

On colour

"I think colours are very personal expression of a painter: the change of material does not change it. For me colours are not the essential element. It is the form. I think colour is just illusion. Colours do not recede or come forward or expand or contract. They just reflect light."

On painting

"I paint for the joy of it. It is the pleasure of painting which I seek. I feel like the object myself which I am painting. To paint an object is to break monotony of it every time. Painting is creating the relationship of an object in its given space according to the painters sensibilities. When one puts a line that establishes a negative space and one works to build the harmony and dialogue between that line and the negative space."



Jamil Naqsh
Woman & Pigeon, 1976 Oil on Canvas 91x153cm

LALA RUKH

Born 1948

Lala acquired a formal training in art from Punjab University and University of Chicago, and soon after equipped herself with means of expression which can be called minimalism. She uses the human form as her main body of work but this form is reduced to movement. The lines not only suggest movement but they have a spiritual quality. Her charcoal drawings are like portraits of the soul. She has been working on photographs with texts and manages to create work which has a mysterious ever lasting effect. Her work blossoms in a realm between fantasy and reality.

On creativity

"Creativity is taking the something and doing it in your own way. Your creativity depends on your exposure, your experience in life and many other such factors, you can only create with what you have. You have to borrow from your memory of life experience and exposure. You can't create something you have not ever seen or have never heard of. A person may think that a particular work is totally out of his/her own imagination and creative impulse, but actually it is never so.

An artist has always been known as a romantic hero. That is a false impression, they are like everybody else. Infact artists have always abused women and taken advantage of them especially of their models."

On individuality

"Individualism is a western concept which came with Capitalism. It is not a concept which belongs to this part of the world. Instead of individualism we believe in working and sharing our successes and failures collectively."



Lala Rukh
River in an ocean, 1993 Graphite on Paper 41x48cm

MANSOOR AYE

Born 1941

A prolific painter who has been working in various styles simultaneously. His work has strong links with the traditional miniature painting. He uses a more impressionistic language when depicting Karachi. He is known for his highly acclaimed series of "Moon Faced Women". He has been working in three dimensional mediums as well. In any genre, he is capable of transferring mundane subjects into lyrical compositions. Working in various series, his work moves from realism to a more personal expressionistic idiom.

On painting

"I make a lot of sketches but some times. I just start working directly on painting. I make miniatures and also work in oil and water colours. If you work too much with one medium, you get bored.

As long as one is painting one feels happy. Nothing can be better than this. As in music the sound of the ocean, wind and storms evoke feelings similarly there are some paintings which evoke feelings as strongly.

On colours

"I have always used my favourite colours. For example, very early on I really liked the combination of blue and yellow ochre. Then I tried other colours as well. I feel that colours have appeal for certain age groups. A child is attracted to blue and after crossing fifty, I think a human being is attracted to this colour again. These days I have been paintings in blues and ochres again.

Colours have a language of their own, like in Chinese and miniature painting. From miniatures I pick up the elements to use in my paintings, whatever can be added with a modern sensibility."



Mansoor Aye
Beach Karachi (Clifton), 1996 Oil on Canvas 61x75cm

MANSOORA HASSAN

Born 1953

Mansoorah lives and works in the USA but regularly shows in Pakistan. Her works using mixed media reflect nostalgia through architectural imagery viewed through shallow layered washes that create time and space between image and surface. The nostalgia is not merely that of an expatriate longing for contemporary life in Pakistan but the imagery is that of pre-colonial court life. There is a sense of fatigue in the pale gestural strokes perhaps at the impossibility of the journey. Mansoorah Hassan is one of the artists viewing their culture from self-exile. She leads a very active life, participating in international shows, seminars, teaching and playing an active role in the running of a number of art institutions.

On my work

"My work is always embodied with the sense of design and form in the structuring of imagery. I combine it with nature. I feel myself close to the rich veins of possibilities.

The element of nature appears directly in your work if you adopt such methods, and I want to be as close to nature as possible.

If I have a muse, it must be Rumi, the Persian poet. The main reason is my passion for music. His poetry is so musical and it has a resonance with my work. Rumi teaches us to be human before becoming perfect human beings.

At home I am inspired by poetry. The poetry which appeals to the self-reliant woman who is mentally independent, I have chosen it because I understand and associate myself with it.

I think of myself as a modern painter, but draw inspiration from the old civilizations and use contemporary idioms in the structuring of my images. I used monolithic etching, figures and architectural settings of the ancient civilization of Bolivia and Peru, which I had the opportunity to study during my short stay there. I also use calligraphic elements from Alhambra of Moorish Spain and Ottoman Istanbul and a sprinkling of Gandhara civilization."



Mansoor Hassan
 To live is to step Outside, 1996
 Mixed media painting
 85x50cm

MANSUR RAHI

Born 1939

Mansur Rahi has been teaching and practising art for many decades. A painter who can claim to be a cubist yet has managed to infuse many traditions and manners into his work. His images and subjects are confined in a structure of geometric forms. His themes are humanistic and they become more lyrical with his use of colour. He was trained in the discipline of water colour painting of the Bengal school and his work still has very strong links with this training.

On the creative process

"Any object works as a kind of stimulus. Instead of painting a particular horse, I want to depict the complete form of a horse, a kind of muscular feeling. I start with various small sketches and arrive at a synthesised form. At that time I forget that I am an artist. I work more like a mathematician. After transferring the main image on the canvas I start by putting dark tones. It has to be according to area synthesis, not to do with drawing. I work on many canvases at the same time. I put the psychedelic values at the second stage to create depth. Then I use the secondary values and light colours to integrate the whole canvas.

At that moment comes the stage of contemplation. I keep on looking at the painting and making decisions about adding and eliminating certain colours. It takes almost four days for me to finish a painting."

On content

"The painting does not carry any sentimental stories. It deals with the images which can be repeated. The images have to do with the human concerns of a universal nature or themes like mother and child or anti-nuclear issues. When I start, the idea comes first, then the colour and composition. I choose colours according to the theme of the work."



Mansur Rahi
Monster Series, 1985 Oil on Canvas 76x92m

MAQSOOD ALI

Born 1935

Maqsood Ali's art education took place in Bombay and he migrated to Pakistan in the late 1950's. From the early 70's he has been involved in art education, first as Principal of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, Karachi, and currently as Principal of North City School of Art, Karachi. His work is steeped in the culture of Sind and his interest lies in the embroidery patterns of Sind. The strong colours, patterns of small squares and an organic weaving of lines have continued to intrigue him and he has explored these in painting as well as in cast metal reliefs. He plays with changes in scale and deals with pattern paintings as though they were landscapes.

On the creative process

"I have always used flat colours, the colours of Sind, I get inspiration from patchwork and other textiles of Sind. I try to simplify my work and the square form has become dominant in my work. If I am painting a particular subject, I do a sketch first, sometimes when I do abstract painting, in these the accidental can lead you, but I always have a strong idea to start with.

There is never a deliberate change on the part of any artist's work, I don't think there is a system for an artist that he should move according to a plan, he can work on anything that inspires him, his work should remain deep rooted. There should be diversity but the diversion should not be completely different from every thing you have done before."

On originality

"If we think art being original, is not a thing that can be systematically thought or worked on, it is an inner feeling that can come out of the canvas. Originality can be seen if the original feelings are translated on the canvas. It is important to be original, because every person has his own individual way of thinking."



Maqsood Ali
Bird and Moon, 1996 Oil on Canvas 61x76cm

MASHKOOR RAZA

Born 1950

A colourist who works in the manner of a cubist but emphasises the interpretation of abstract form for concrete images or script in his work. The forms are enveloped in various layers of bright colours. There are certain themes which appear regularly in his paintings like Islamic calligraphy and horses. The element of creating an activated surface by colour is enhanced with his use of open compositions. Mashkoor has started an art school in Karachi and is teaching art as well as working in his studio.

On my work

"Abstract art is apparently objective, I have given it a subject by introducing calligraphy. I like using geometrical shapes in my work especially cubes. Earlier I used to practice realism, I think you cannot execute something abstract without acquisition of skill. It is like learning the alphabet to write a sentence."

On colours

"Red, black and orange are my favourite colours and are dominant in all my paintings. They are highly contrasting colours and it is very difficult to use and control them together. I try to use them in a manner that in spite of being very brilliant and sharp, they do not shock the eye. Actually abstract art is the composition of colours, forms and space. I give special attention to the use of colour. Colours are like a ball: when you bounce it, it does not stop at once, it takes time and goes far away in a decreasing momentum, colours spread themselves in the same way. One has to take care that colours do not jump out of the surface, a sharp and brilliant hue will not look good with a light shade of a colour. Intensities of colours should change gradually."

Mashkoor Raza
Composition, 1983
Oil on Canvas
92x69cm



MEHR AFROZE

Born 1948

After a brilliant academic career at Lucknow College of Art, India, Mehr Afroze migrated to Pakistan in 1971. Mehr established herself as a printmaker but her growing interest in surface textures and layers brought her back to painting. Cultural memories stirred by ancient cave paintings, weathered walls with barely visible images, private sketchbooks of Mughal artists, all formed the subject matter of her complex layered paintings. Mehr Afroze has always experimented with processes working her surfaces with chemicals, stitching the paper, cutting back into the surface or building up layers with an intensity that makes surface become the object. The built up surface holds ephemeral, two dimensional images usually of anonymous faces reducing object to idea, allowing the past to claim them unlike the crusting of surfaces whose tangibility brings them into our space and time.

✓ On creative process

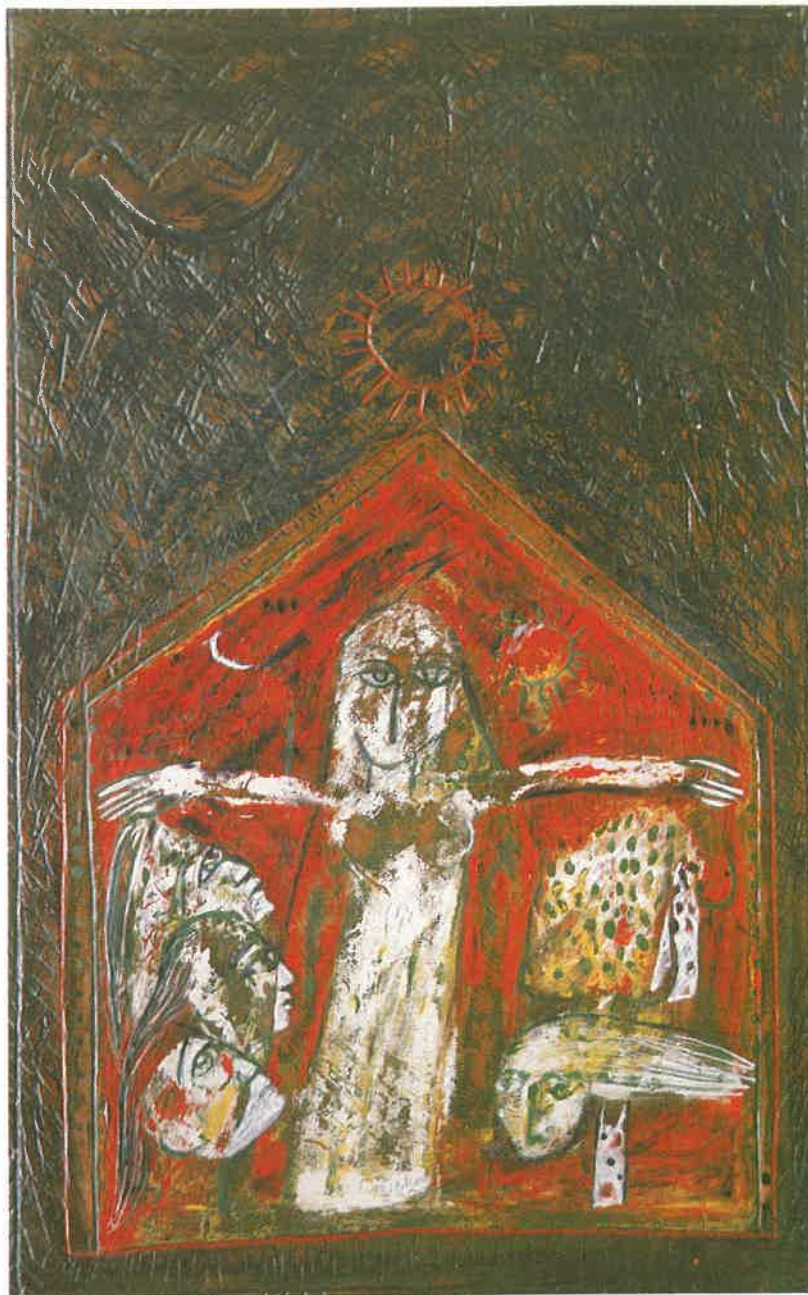
"I don't sit and think of what to paint. My work always comes from emotions, including human values. All these are recorded within oneself, intentionally and naturally; some things fade out, some are brought out through emotion and tradition. These things are of interest to me visually. I try to put my own sensibility into it. My theme is not painting a horse or a landscape, though the landscape is used as a part of the work, in a symbolic way."

On painting

"Before the white surface I start by staring at it for a good while. White paper is a complete joy. I work with layers. Normally on paper I give two, three washes to bring out the colours. I do sketches to form the idea but I never have the idea of the ultimate image. It is gradually formed, it is redrawn, erased. It passes through many changes.

In my painting layers and textures convey ideas of time, when you want to change the content, you change the medium. As sound and accent can speak about your feelings, thoughts and attitudes; texture can be read similarly. What I want to say is reinforced through texture."

Mehr Afroze
Niche Series, 1997
Oil on Canvas
93x70cm



MIAN SALAHUDDIN

Born 1938

One of the few ceramicists in the country who has been teaching at the National College of Arts, Salahuddin works with a diversity of mediums ranging from paper to wood, glass and steel. Clay has been his prime vehicle of expression. A formalist by choice, he represents contemporary sensibilities in his work. Choosing traditional forms of pottery, he transforms them into sculptures concerned with form and textures. His work is endowed with the layers of meanings and interpretations. He is a dedicated artist and has been experimenting in various modes of plastic art, often with humour and irony.

On my work.

"My work never follows any rules. I always follow how my senses have responded to something. I am neither pro-nature nor pro-man made world. I believe it is always better to combine the opposites. I take inspiration from many sources, sometimes it is words which I want to portray through my work.

I am never satisfied with my work, whether it is two dimensional or three dimensional. I feel one can't stick to any formula because of the rapid changes occurring even in the sensibility and aesthetics. Now I think I have become more and more symbolic and simpler. I have been eliminating details and the essence has been emphasised more in my work.

Over the years I have realized that the medium which I use has influenced me the way I react, my temperament, it's all because of my medium; clay. To me the pleasure in making and joy of what you have achieved is essential. It is a great feeling."

On creative process.

"It is very unpredictable. Thinking is very complex and I cannot say what I am going to do next. Sometimes the forms are taken from nature and then I manipulate them."



Mian Salehuddin
Cones, 1993 Fired Clay 13cm Height max

MUSARRAT MIRZA

Born 1941

Musarrat Mirza has not been tempted to run with the herd and places authenticity of experience over current styles. Her sensitive, almost monochromatic landscapes are evocative of the dusty desert towns of Sind suffused with laden ambient light. There is a powerful hypnotic atmosphere in these works and a sense of isolation which, while a real experience of town life in Sind, also allows these townscapes to be interpreted as symbols of political and gender issues. Musarrat Mirza has taught art at the Jamshoro University, Hyderabad, for a number of years and now heads the Fine Art department.

On my work

"In the beginning I was fascinated with the geometrical compositions. I used to paint my surroundings which consist of carts, children working and the tribal women of Sind, including it's faded landscape. I painted the narrow streets and box like houses juxtaposing them with pigeons representing a vast space. The most important thing for me is that the child inside me has never left me.

In my paintings the back ground is very important. The landscape, pigeons, dust and adobe houses has become the form of my personal expression. I try to create the feelings of depth, longing and tranquillity through colours. The birds resting on mud walls or coming back to their nests represent my spiritual self. The orange of the sun, the ochre of the earth, the dust storms, wooden doors and women hidden behind these, that now you see now you don't, are all extensions of myself. I am not in a hurry to paint them. For me to paint these is a form of contemplation and is the path leading to eternal truth."



Musarrat Mirza
Untitled, 1995 Oil on Canvas 60x92cm

MUSSARRAT NAHID IMAM

Born 1958

After her formal training in painting Mussarrat has worked in various mediums. Her keen interest in the visual vocabulary of ancient civilizations reflects in her work. Densely painted surfaces evoke the nostalgia for the remains of a lost heritage. She has been working in monoprints using multiple techniques. Her symbols stem from the cultural heritage of the Islamic world. She uses and combines these elements to create a contemporary pictorial language.

On the creative process

"Nature and music have always remained with me, I try to derive inspiration from these. Old architecture and civilization also inspire me. Currently I am interested in the oldest civilizations and Islamic calligraphy but I don't use it as merely a design element. I try to get the essence from my source of inspiration when I paint. It is not that I begin something and finish it, I keep on working on the canvas. When I finish my painting I look at it and might find something missing and I start working again.

I feel very good being a painter, I know this is a very tough position because you become extremely sensitive. For me it is very important to use art history, you can relate it to yourself, look back and derive inspiration from the past to do present work.

Painting is something that comes from within you, no one can force you. There are days when I am very happy and I sit in my studio and look at the work, paint and make decisions about composition and colour. I work in the studio if not everyday then after 2 or 3 days. The continuity of working also helps to create the analytical ability in the artist."

On colour

"Colours have always inspired me. I work on small sketches with colours. When they are transformed into big works, the colours take another direction, I don't really decide what to do."



Mussarrat Nahid Imam
Naqoosh Series, 1996 Mixed medium Collage 30x40cm

NAAZISH ATAULLAH

Born 1950

Naazish's work deals with the theme of women, using print making as her medium. She grapples with women's issues in a very subtle and poetic manner. The idea of seeing the hidden, ranges from the human form, to draperies to the organic object. A minimalist in her approach, she draws influences from miniature painting. The formal devices such as borders have become elements of composition as well as being conceptually significant. Her etchings are layered with multiple meanings, the simplicity of image leads to the complexity of association both visual and cultural, especially rooted in this part of the world.

On the creative process

"My work emerges mostly from ideas usually from a literary source, which is then transformed into a visual form. It then undergoes an analytical process which deals with formal aspects. My ideas also arise from an emotional background. After the choice of subject matter, the medium takes over, as one is dealing with the handling of the medium the original idea or concept recedes and becomes a form of the structure allowing the other aesthetic elements to emerge. These aesthetic concerns emerge from the society to which one belongs. The medium also brings its own dynamics, it directs one's concepts, which is an intellectual idea. When one starts work within a certain medium, it leads its own way and one responds to it."

On style and originality

"No one is such a genius to have an individual style, what happens is that one is influenced by other people's work and one tries to adopt the elements one likes. In this way one is trying to innovate all the time. But I don't know what is originality, it is interesting to talk about it because I think there is too much pressure on this whole concept of originality, it is like social pressure, I think there is a great danger, which is attached to this whole concept of originality or individuality. I really believe that people should work as honestly as they can. There will always be some elements of originality in what they are doing."



Naazish Atallah
Chaddar V, 1990
Etching & Aquatint
36x25cm

NAHEED RAZA

Born 1949

Naheed Raza has been working in various mediums. Her work is largely coded with the symbols and images stemming from feminist point of view. Naheed is among those painters in Pakistan who have developed a highly personal diction which at the same time is political. She has been using the structure of miniature painting in the sense of abstract design. Though her work is a celebration of woman it can be enjoyed from many aspects. This multiple meaning generates a continuous and ever changing response to her work. She is the principal and founder of the Studio Art School in Karachi.

On drawing

"I don't work from models as I don't want to torture them by making them sit for hours. Knowing anatomy very well is like knowing geography, you can get a clear picture and then you don't need to carry a map all the time. Once you know the exact form of your image then you can change or break that form according to your own thought process."

On painting

"One starts collecting the exposures and experiences that surround one. All these come to the canvas quite spontaneously. Sometimes I am surprised at the final outcome of the work, it is almost like a dream, and at times I even question myself about its existence. Art is like blood flowing through the body which is how colours and forms flow in and out of a painting. For me painting is a ritual which is very different from the usual rituals of life.

I really cannot tell when a painting is finished, actually at some point in painting when you are looking at it, you decide that you should just put the last touches and colours. You are so involved in it you just continue working without realizing what you are doing. Then after putting it aside you analyse it and decide whether it is successful or not."



Naheed Raza
(Women Series) Family II, 1996
Acrylic on Paper
93x74cm

NAIZA H. KHAN

Born 1968

Naiza's work is a discourse with line and surface. At times it appears in the form of prints, drawings and recently in paintings. Her concern has always been the body and the acceptance of the human body in a society which is not used to facing the flesh. The work takes its shape with the illusion of form and culminates it into the sensuous brush mark, ever inviting play of chiaroscuro and a collection of colours pulsating with the rhythm of the content. In her work the human body reaches at a state of spirituality. Her way of representing the reality is highly personal and at the same time evokes the inner feeling of the viewer.

On my work

"I have drawn intensively with the female model since my return to Pakistan. This activity has led me to focus on issues of sexuality and the notion of reclaiming the female nude. I have questioned the way the body is presented, perceived and often misread, becoming a subversive element, especially in the context of my immediate environment.

In the current work, I have tried to move away from my previous, idealized representation of the body. In the work there are two streams of thought running parallel. These are not separate issues, but inextricably linked and I feel, need to be seen together."

On drawing

"The recent drawings, I think work on different levels for me. First and foremost, they are deeply personal images - for myself as for the viewer, hair has very specific associations. I began to use this part of the anatomy for its qualities of sensuality, nostalgia and eroticism.

These drawings use a traditional language and technique. But I feel they are confrontational, and challenge this very language and the stereotype imagery associated with representations of the female nude. The hair pieces are displaced in this context, searching for a new definition of boundaries.

These drawings I think give an idea of reclaiming a part of oneself, realizing its 'feeling' potential in a way that reflects my own vision."



Naiza H. Khan
Fragment , 1995
Charcoal on paper
109x68cm

NAJMI SURA

Born 1951

A self taught artist and a pupil of Jamil Naqsh, Sura has evolved her personal style distinctive of her mentor's. Her canvases have the images of lonely women posed in a serene mood which is juxtaposed with intricate details in the foreground. A painter working mainly with line, her work portrays the delicacy of her subject matter through the medium. Miniature paintings are her source of inspiration, and she has used that tradition in a contemporary idiom.

On painting

"I study miniature paintings a lot and I like Bundi School's work. I keep looking at the compositions, they are fascinating. When I paint I use a model, I ask the model to pose following my requirements and start to paint. I work mostly in line using a lot of details. I use colours not in a planned way. Some of my earlier works were very colourful but now it is of more subtle hues. I like to emphasise drawing.

I paint mostly in oil and in water colours. I try to treat the back ground, the figure and the foreground in the same manner which is what I learned from miniature painting."

On subject

"I paint women because I like to paint them and traditionally it has been a subject in miniature painting. When I paint them I paint just one figure but with an emphasis on the composition."



Najmi Sura
Jodhabai, 1995 Water Color on paper 61x101cm

NOOR JEHAN BILGRAMI

Born 1950

An artist who is aware of her present and her surroundings, the work displays the sensitivity of touch and the richness of paint. She has chosen a not very popular domain as her means of expression but so far has been successful in exploring the apparently confined idiom.

Noor Jehan Bilgrami's earlier interest in painting was overtaken by the seduction of colour and tradition as practised in block painted fabrics which she elevated to a refinement that had been lost over the years. This practice and a deeply researched project into the elaborate art of Ajrak making drew her back into painting on canvas. Today her twin activities are linked with the same sense of spirituality: her fabrics have become minimal with indigo and other natural dyes that are a homage to tradition and her canvases use staining gestural marks that spring from a more personal spiritual experience.

On the creative process

"I think I need to prepare before sitting in front of a blank canvas, almost preparation of the self. I have to get focused. Then the canvas becomes a part of the process. There is some sketching involved.

I have not been painting continuously. It happens in bursts and then it is very intense. It's a complete commitment to what I am doing. I don't do other things then. I have to be all there. That is why I can't paint all the time. Because I can't get into that frame everyday. Once I start, sometimes I work simultaneously on two or three paintings, with so much energy gets build up, it is very immediate and spontaneous.

Even when I am not painting, things keep getting stored as impressions, whether it is texture, colour, sound, movement. Even on paper for example, a certain quality might start building up."



Noor Jehan Bilgrami
Rock Carvings of Hunza, 1994
Acrylic on paper
15x10cm

QUDDUS MIRZA

Born 1961

Quddus Mirza is one of the most challenging painters of the 90's. After graduation from National College of Arts, Lahore, he went on to the Royal College of Art, London. His work is a critique of painting, the images are deconstructed and subjected to their own internal logic. A witty irony challenges our expectations as we set aside our initial response of seeing a painting and instead find ourselves reading it. Deliberately two-dimensional, he uses the concept of space as practised by Indian Miniaturists in a faux-naif style, the gestural marking of the surface often incorporates writing. Pahari painting, magic realist literature, contemporary Urdu poetry and everyday incidents occupy the same creative space in an existential reading of the absurdity of life. Quddus Mirza teaches art at the National College of Arts.

On my work

"My work deals with the images I find in my surroundings. The forms which appear on walls, on the back of vehicles and on billboards are our true tradition. I try to infuse these with a political meaning. The imagery is not realistic on just one level but encompasses multiple reality which includes the magical, religious, literal and parallel realities.

The act of painting is very significant for me, especially the mark making. The open form of the completed work fascinates me. I take delight in the sensuous quality of paint and its application. I am trying to see space in the context of Indian Miniature which is not an illusion of western two point perspective, but a reality of a cognitive kind."



Quddus Mirza
Let the hundred flower Bloom IV, 1990 Acrylic on Paper 40.5x58.5cm

QUDSIA NISAR

Born 1948

Qudsia Nisar is an abstract water colourist. Rather than traditional watercolour washes, Qudsia uses the transparency of her medium to layer her surface with spontaneous sweeping brush marks. She works with changes of scale, from drawn line to wash and negative lines using resist. The calligraphic quality of her marks subtly change into symphonic musical structures. Colour is an important component of her imagery. The "drawn" lines made with masking fluid are like space cutting through the activity of bright colour. The works are filled with a sense of daylight. While her work is mainly formal, Qudsia Nisar has made thematic series such as the Voyage of Life, Echo and more recently works on contemporary life in Karachi.

On abstract art

"Abstraction is a highly intellectual activity. It is like a historical progress in perceiving things. You can omit a lot of unimportant details and just take the essence of reality. Abstract art from a certain place is different from somewhere else. It absorbs the indigenous sensibilities of a particular place. Every place and culture translates abstraction according to their own experiences and understanding."

On my work

"I have done work in all mediums, but I needed a medium which could work with my inner feelings. So the water colour appeals to me but then it is also very difficult. I work directly, I don't do any drawing. I start working with what is before the vision, the symbols etc, whatever I can visualize. Whatever comes out on paper could be from a recent happening or something that happened decades ago, but it comes out indirectly."

On style

"Style in true creativity is not created but formed by itself like an accent is formed. Each person speaks in his own accent using his own vocabulary, which is analogous to the mediums used in painting."



Qudsia Nisar
Jaltarang, 1996 Water Colour 56x75cm

RABIA ZUBERI

Born 1940

Her work has moved between formal composite, three dimensional works from a monumental to a tabletop scale and impressionistic reliefs. The activity of labourers in the eternally under construction city of Karachi and later a yearning for peace in the violence torn city have been some of the important themes of her work. In recent times, she was the first sculptor to be invited to install a public sculpture in the city. As Principal of the flourishing Karachi School of art, her creative oeuvre can be said to include the steady stream of artists the school has encouraged. She has inspired many who may have felt on the margins to pursue an art career especially many women.

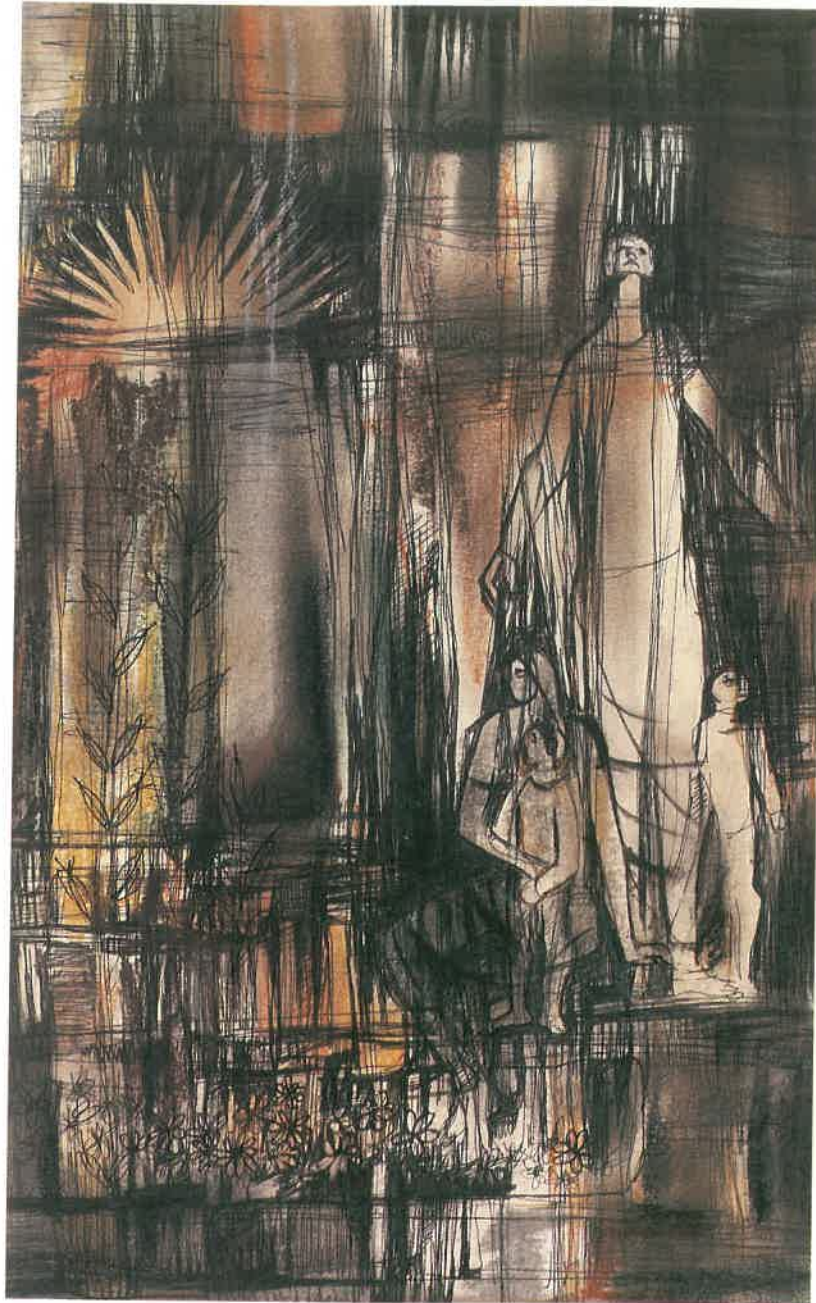
On my work

"We are the product of our circumstances, social, economic and political. My basic inspiration comes from the ambient circumstances, of which, we all are a part.

A retrospection of my work lets me conclude that there have been different phases of progress in my work. In my early sculptures till the mid sixties my ideas took their strength from the innocence of infants and universal mother love.

After migrating to Pakistan there came another existence and another perspective of feelings and experiences. Another phase started to respond to the circumstantial uncertainties and certainties. The form taken for expression is the very simplified human figure which expresses the most delicate feelings, having no form or volume of their own, for example hope, justice, love, fear and protestation.

The most significant period to come next is the deep study and research into human form for its beauty. The elements of investigation are delicacy of texture. Rhythmic beauty of posture, continuity of line and weight. The labour series appeared with same characteristics with its individuals and groups of figures, the homage to the dignity of labour, strength, grace and beauty of human figure."



Rabia Zuberi
Hope, 1997 Mixed Medium on paper 37x25cm

RAHAT SAEED

Born 1965

Trained as a graphic designer Rahat has been working in a variety of idioms. These consist of collages and mixed media assemblages. The work deals with power and its relationships with the objects of desire and humanity. He uses the available images to create new harmony. His recent work is moving away from creating an illusion of space. They are created on a variation of physical and symbolic levels. There are certain symbols which re-occur in his work, and carry significant personal meanings.

On the work

"In my work I am trying to see the unseen and trying to paint it. Painting is a constant process of knowing. I think the whole creative process is important, there is something in it you can only feel cannot name. In the process of creating, I am travelling to an unknown destiny and at some point I discover myself."

On symbol

"The chair in my work does not hold a political meaning. It is like a body. This image started to appear in my work in the early Nineties. I always feel that the chair and person sitting on it is a complete unity. The empty chair reminds the human presence. The chair which becomes a symbol of power is placed in a significant environment in my work. There are other personal associations as well. To paint is like a form of enquiry."

On form

"My early work was flat and I created the illusion of three dimensionality. Now the surface is three dimensional but the image is two dimensional. I see it like a gradual progress in my work."

On content

"There is a big gap between art and the public. I paint for the people who know the vocabulary of art. I think the idea is a very small image of a thing. My work has moved more in terms of content. The training of being a designer gave me a certain freedom in choosing the images."



Rahat Saeed
Night Bow, 1993 Mixed media on paper 69x81cm



Rahat Saeed
Night Bow, 1993 Mixed media on paper 69x81cm

RASHEED ARAEEN

Born 1935

Born in Karachi, Rasheed Araeen settled in England in 1965. Both the form and content of his work has centred around his political beliefs. The constructed unit that has formed the basic structure of all his object based works grew out of a need to develop a more democratic and equal alternative to the paternalism inherent in the aesthetic structure of a symmetry and the sum of the parts making the whole. This unit, developed in 1966, bore a marked resemblance to the work of minimalists although independently arrived at. Through a barrage of performances, lectures, writings, Araeen worked away at the exclusivity of the British Art world forcing them to include and acknowledge multiculturalism as more than empty rhetoric. He succeeded in "Making Myself Visible" which is also the title of his book published in 1984, gathering around him like minded and respected intellectuals of marginalised cultures giving them a platform through the publication of art magazines; first Black Phoenix in 1978 and then the Third Text begun in 1987.

Artist's words

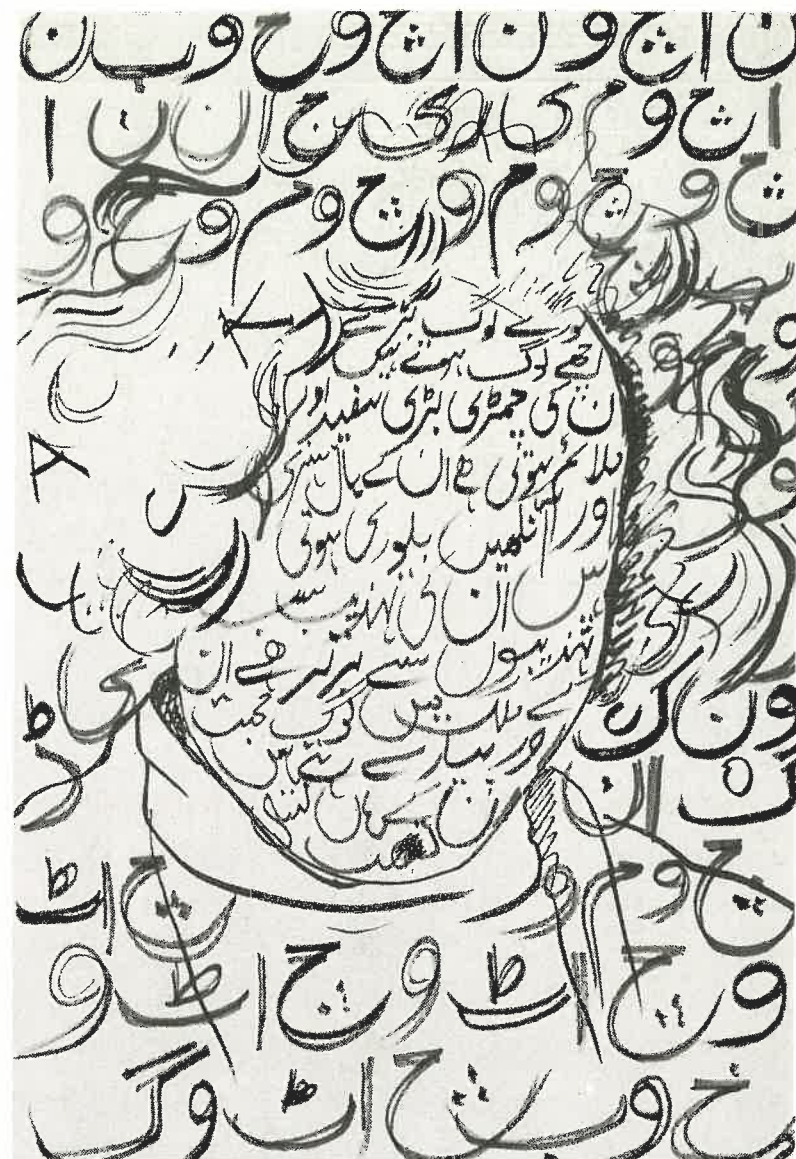
Extracts from "Making myself visible"

"Our art must therefore be oriented towards anti-imperialist struggle. It does not necessarily mean that art should become a mechanistic instrument of ideological and political struggle. It means that art should become a mechanistic instrument of ideological and political struggle. It should be part of the historical process in its own right, making its own contributions. That is, art must *also* wage a struggle against domination and reactionary forces/ideas within its own sphere, without being discarded for political activity and without being separated from it. It is not a question of *political art* but an art which embraces the radical consciousness of its time. Those political activists, or ultra-leftists, who see art only as an instrument of political reality and its propaganda and keep on reminding us about the "uselessness" of art activity (as opposed to political activity), are only revealing their own *philistinism*, if not actually betraying a lack of understanding of the true function of art, as well as its limitations.

The real function of art, of course, is neither a mere expression of beauty/self, decoration or entertainment (as is commonly understood), nor political propaganda. But this does not mean that art can be a *political* or *neutral*."



Rasheed Araeen
Ethnic Drawings, 1982 Ink on Paper 46x62cm each



RIFFAT ALVI

Born 1944

Riffat Alvi's work is based on themes, concepts and materials of the soil. Her work comprises of the images and the scripts from Mohenjo Daro. The heavily textured surfaces evoke links with ancient heritage. She uses clay mixed with paint and creates surfaces of tactile sensibility. Her colours embrace the iconography of this region, in a subtle way.

She has travelled widely and held workshops abroad. She heads an art gallery in Karachi that patronises young artists.

On work

"My imagery arises from the deepest recesses of the subconscious. In seeing flowers bloom, trees grow, birds in flight, ripples in the ocean, thoughts cross my mind. Intermingled with this is the sense of my own history, my upbringing, my unique existence in a rapidly changing world, with its own confused signals and messages.

I have always tried to make sense of the world around me through my art. I have already striven to assimilate my own cultural heritage with influences of other cultures in my work, while trying to retain my own individuality. I hope my art can communicate this attempt to find a response to these varied influences."

On being an artist

"I believe an artist must never be a prisoner of herself, prisoner of style, prisoner of reputation, media, success; an artist has to probe and move ahead with her aesthetic problems and his artistic expression of freedom. Therefore. I see things with the inner light within me, and which illuminates the exterior light and dark, in the outside world.

I search for signs, for scratched marks, for coded messages, for indications of a human presence that give insight into past cultures and past lives. This creates a framework in which I can understand and value my own position as an artist and also establish a much wider connection to an emerging art direction that is cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary.

My interpretation of the hieroglyphic is very personal combining perceptions, fantasy, imagination, speculation and research in an unusual way. All the facts and realities of these letters from Indus Valley, Mohenjo Daro become distorted intentionally by ignorance of deciphering the language. The freedom I have because of this ignorance, thus, I create new symbols from the original."



Riffat Alvi
City of Mohenjodaro, 1993 Earth Pigment 24x28cm

SAEED AKHTER

Born 1938

Saeed Akhtar is best known as an academic portrait painter. His portraits of national personalities include a massive portrait of Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah for the National Assembly and a set of sensitive pencil portraits of national heroes, portraits of military martyrs and Heads of States of Muslim countries. His elegant portraits of social personalities are well known. He works mostly in monochromatic tones, both in portraiture and in his paintings of horses in vast abstract landscapes. At present he is the Head of Fine Arts at the National College of Arts Lahore.

On the creative process

"The idea comes suddenly in my mind, I make sketches after the first idea, I rearrange sketches and keep on adding and subtracting forms. Every painting creates a problem for the next painting. In every painting there is an accident which leads to the new painting, these accidents which just happen are part of creative process. You can not force the work, the canvas has a mind of it's own you cannot control a painting."

On painting

"I use canvas as part of the painting, if you want to use white paint and the canvas is white then there is no need to use white paint at all. I use minimum colours for maximum effect, people use a lot of colour to produce three dimensionality, while I give the three dimensional impact through drawing.

I don't take very long on a painting and every time I use a different method. It is a difficult thing to decide when a painting is finished. My paintings have an unfinished sketchy effect. It is better than a complete, finished painting."



Saeed Akhtar
Naseem, 1984
Oil on canvas
92x61cm

SALIMA HASHMI

Born 1942

A renowned art teacher, critic and painter who also works as a photographer, her work deals with the issues of gender and suppression. Dealing with these issues, she works in mixed media, using photo images and collage.

Her work embodies the subject with the inter-play of several mediums. She works on paper and her surfaces are activated by a variety of mark making. Certain recurring symbols and motifs appear in her work, such as hands, windows and clouds transformed into sensory and tactile icons interacting with the surface.

On work

"I had been working in mixed media on paper, mainly watercolour, collage, graphite and conte. The issues were primarily social and political. The aim being to articulate a response to one's time and place in an idiom which reflected one's temperament and emotional sensibility. The work suggests a layered reality, colour laden yet transparent, organized into spaces reminiscent of architectural apertures and facades and traditional visual relationships. This urge for a spatial organization which courted the two dimensional, was punctuated by contradictory images and gestures which emerged from the surface and were also embedded in it."

On medium

"The recent work has developed to a point where the change in medium fuses with new experiences and passionate reactions. The recording of the observable threaded into the felt. The use of charcoal and pure pigment (unhindered by an intermediary medium) seemed to be both direct, and suggestive of the emotional subterranean."



Saleema Hashmi
Our Faces brief as photos, 1995 Mixed media on paper 76x54cm

SAMINA MANSURI

Born 1956

One of the new generation of feminist painters, Samina Mansuri's bold canvases have challenged contemporary Pakistani painting both thematically and formally. Her work explores personal myth and symbolism with intricate imagery seeking a way back into the individual psyche. Her first show in Pakistan questioned the norm with decentralised composition, blatant symbolism of over ripe fruit and truncated female bodies, that seemed disempowered and appropriated but maintained an inner certainty. Her subsequent work explores the body differently through process. Surface marking, layering and cutting back encaustic layers of colours that partially reveal make the tactile surface read as an extension of the body. Her imagery suggests intimate body experiences and mindscapes. There is a consuming preoccupation with process as repository of meaning.

On my work

"Artists have a responsibility as they are makers rather than just passive consumers of images. They are therefore in a position to resist and question the injustices of the society in which they live.

Finding the existing language inadequate, I have extended the visual language so that it can express my concerns, primarily what it is to exist inside a female body and how does it exist in the political, sexual and psychological space. By dispensing with the figure altogether, images are constructed to speak (indirectly) of the body in a non-literal way. By presenting a violent and uncontrollable nature in the paintings, I bring into question the idea of the high art depiction of an objective ideology. Thus challenging the enlightenment theory, by positing an alternative reality. The multicoloured, detailed execution, conjures up an alternative world, as "real" as the purported objective view, and brings into view other ways of looking, not just at nature, but also at society, the human body and the female experience. As a woman working in the traditional medium of painting, this act of transgression and subversion becomes an important element of the work by questioning from within monolithic fixed categories. Formally there is a subversion of the idea of objective still life and landscape painting. Images are drawn as much from an imagined nature as from a whole repertoire of natural studies, things seen through the microscope, botanical and medical diagrams, landscape, still life and figure painting."



Samina Mansuri
Shadow mourning, 1994
Oil encaustic on canvas and wood
106x106cm

SHAHID JALAL

Born 1948

Trained as an accountant, Shahid Jalal has been painting and exhibiting consistently. Landscape of the Punjab is his main theme, though he paints still life as well. His interest in depicting the light and atmosphere is reflected in his canvases, by creating a rich texture through the application of paint. His sensitive handling of the medium makes the landscapes something more than just representations. His paintings have been changing in its choice of elements, which now bear a distinctive style that is his.

On painting landscape

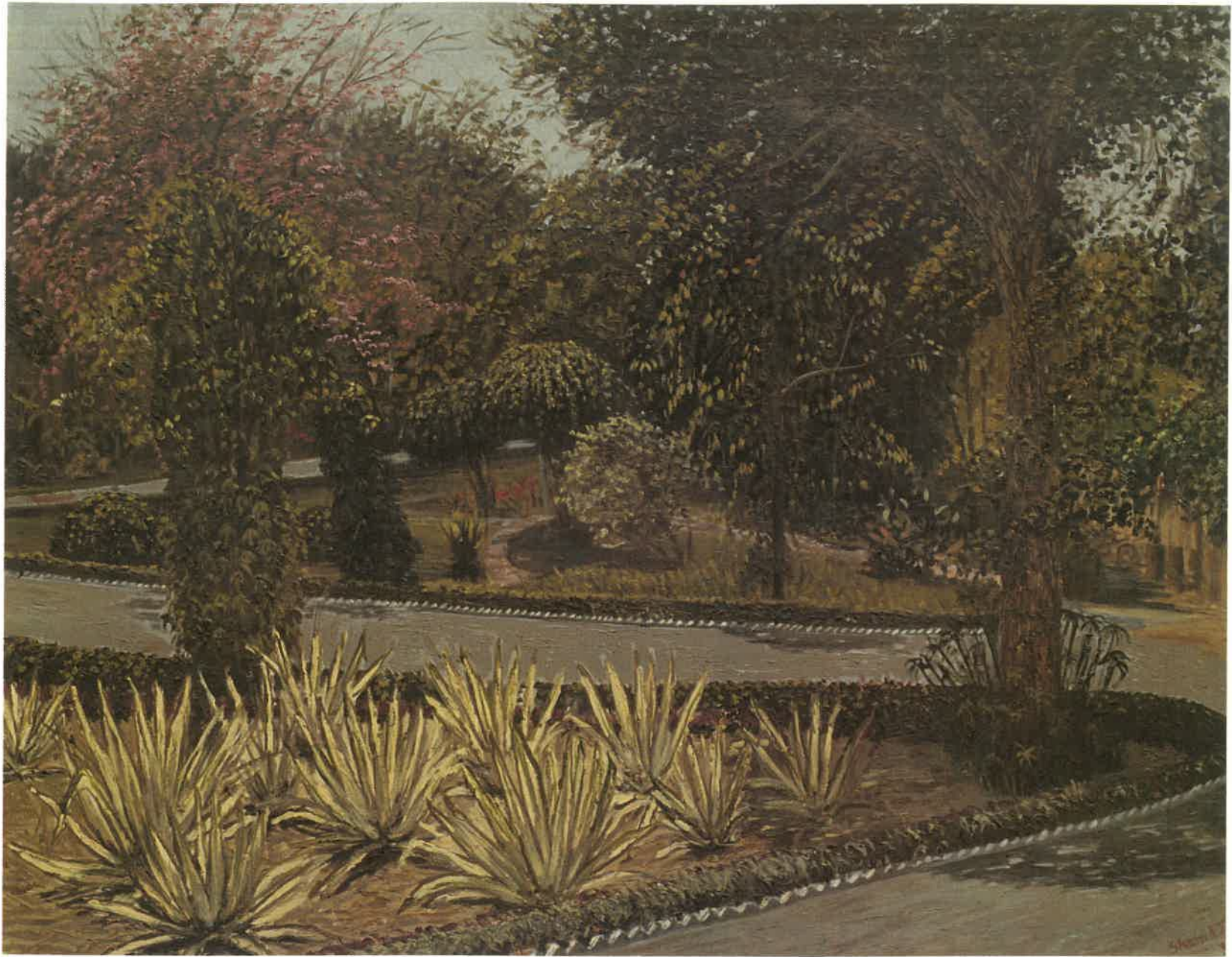
"Over the years I have been painting I developed a tremendous liking for the Punjab landscape; it is now the main source of inspiration. Landscape painting is about how light falls on a particular area or a tree, and about its composition, I edit the landscape according to my requirements. The composition is far more important to me than the landscape.

I think that photographic work is not relevant. It has to be an adaptation of what you see. It has to be according to the artist's vision and that only comes when you are interacting with nature.

Painting is an intellectual activity, you have to think about it. In my case it is more a reaction to a spot as a personal development of a painter."

On personal development

"When you are young you are bold and as you grow older you become more afraid. I used to work a lot in my youth time. You never question yourself when you are young. You feel what you are doing is the best. Now I have become much more selective, when I was young I used to make 3 to 4 paintings, sometimes more, in a month. Now I can hardly complete one in a month, because I spend more time with the landscape and I gradually develop the work. Previously my paintings had a lot of textures, then came the light. I had very dramatic effects of light and texture; perhaps I was more involved with the paint than the landscape. Now it's the whole atmosphere which I am more interested in painting."



Shahid Jalal
Landscape, 1995 Oil on canvas 60x65cm

SHAHID SAJJAD

Born 1937

A prominent figurative sculptor, Shahid Sajjad began his career making large figurative wood carvings inspired by the simple beauty of the villagers of East Bengal. The next stage of his work consisted of a large series of small bronzes that played with cantilever and simplified organic forms based on the human figure that were meticulously cast by the artist himself. Recently he has returned to woodcarving with impressive monolithic figures of male and mother, child. While the aesthetic returns to his early carvings, there is a technical sophistication as in the interlocked parts of the mother and child that add subtle dimensions of meaning to the work. Shahid Sajjad is a greatly respected personality of the art world and has represented Pakistan at a number of prestigious international exhibitions.

On creative process

"I wouldn't use the word creative process. As for myself there is no conscious effort. A lot of things start to happen, if you start becoming more aware of what you want to create. With me everything begins impulsively and then it creates its own form and understanding. I don't really plan. My work comes as naturally as walking."

On sculpture

"You don't choose, you only observe the interaction of materials which give birth to a sculpture, my role is only modifying it. It is not a creation like a mystical one or outside the intellectual realm. I think art has become more intellectual than anything else. Sometimes it is more verbalised than the actual spirit of work. Of course words are also a medium. The whole search for medium in life is in fact search for content. Sometimes the content becomes more important than the form. The fascinating aspect is that one leads to the other."

On progress in art

"There is no such concept as progress in art. Change is the modified shape of the same old idea. Like the word creation it has nothing to do with what we are doing. Knowledge is essential for invention not creation. In knowledge we feel secure. We can't ever understand that we made ourselves limited through knowledge. Knowledge is stored in memory and you can judge that memory by what you know or vice versa."



Shahid Sajjad
Hostages, 1994
Smoked Mulberry
102cm height

SIDDIQUA BILGRAMI

Born 1936

One of the early modernists of the country, Siddiqua's work has a strong idiom reflecting her personal world. Deeply spiritual, her canvases are also experiments in form. She focuses on the issues of mystical experiences through primordial images such as sunsets, trees and paths ways. These hold and form a visual direction yet layers of colours and texture in her work address the same emotions in a more plastic language. A persistent abstract painter she has been working in a diversity of mediums.

On my work

"External stimuli and inner turmoils produce reverberations in the innermost senses and an art form emerges. I simulate nature to express myself. Since movement is an essential ingredient of life and unlimited space and its depth is an invitation for exploration, these have been my props and my wonder. My earlier canvases were large and painted in oils and completely abstract. The later work is mostly in acrylics and on a much smaller scale. "Movement" and "space" still hold my attention.

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct approaches in my present work. The ascending compositions feature steps or path ways leading to a higher sphere of often unknown destination. This is a more spiritual approach "In Search of Light" The other type has a descending direction where a dissection provides a study of the subject concerned in cross-section or a finale is reached or a logical conclusion drawn. Common to both these approaches is the technique: acrylic paint thick and thin, applied with a painting knife cum. brush. Secondly, the painting has been restricted within a self-imposed frame, with one side spilling out. Here the negative space has assumed importance by giving an impression of limitless pace and continuing motion.

Despite self-imposed restrictions of space, these rather spontaneous 'Landscapes' and 'Seascapes', dug out of memory's immense treasure trove, have a haunting existence of their own. Though there are no figures, the human presence is felt. The path ways and steps, leading to often unknown destinations, illustrate the soul's search for intrinsic values and ascent to ever higher spheres. The large empty space around increases the poignancy of the drama within."



Siddiqua Bilgrami
Steps to dream castle series, 1994 Acrylic on paper 27x36.5cm

SUMAYYA DURRANI

Born 1963

Sumayya Durrani's work has journeyed from figurative expressionism to pared down monochromatic gestural paintings to the current sophisticated off set photolithographs that deliberately set out to "remove the artists hand". More recently her work has explored sexual stereotypes through the complex position of woman viewing man viewing woman. Earlier works in this series were a gentle critique of romantic nostalgia associated with Victorian voyeurism of the female nude. In her subsequent work, feminist rage gives an unrelenting satire to images of posed photographs from a manual of nude white women as "the ideal", juxtaposed with dinner settings. Sumaya seeks to explore the possibility of the artist as a manipulator of signs, as one who sets out to make the viewer self-conscious of his own "learnt" instincts.

On my work

"I feel that over a period of time, I have discovered a few things about what I feel, It is not what I want to say. I have explored this feeling by stepping outside of myself rather than inside.

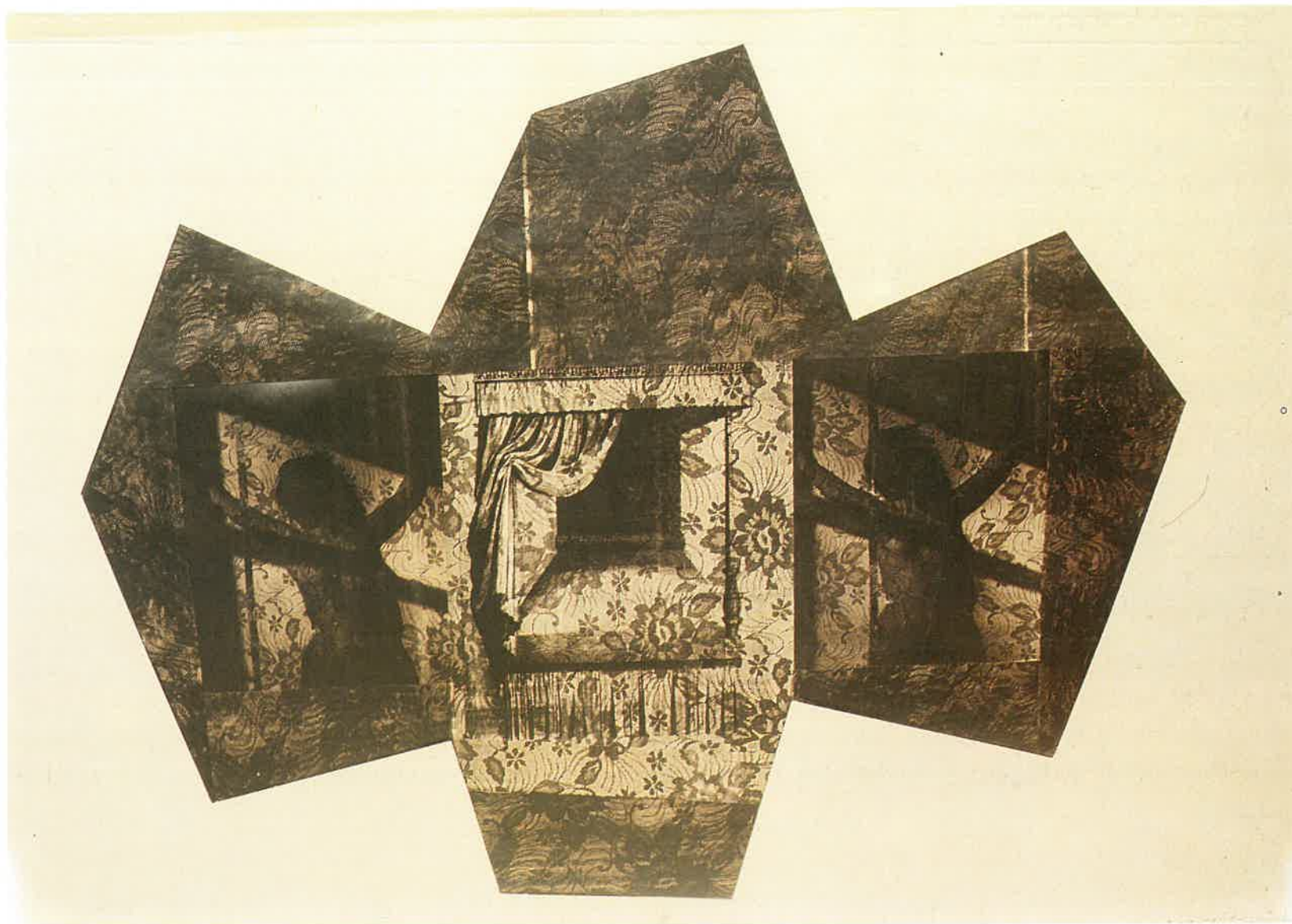
The images that I have used in painting are images that I don't relate with, images that I reject, that is why my own mark is not there.

When I was working in the U.S. the scale of my work was large, not because I was painting in America, but I missed home so much that I created a space that I could be within."

On imagery

"The female figures that I have used are the idealized figures in male fantasy. These are perfect bodies. They have not gone through child bearing for example. The fact that they are blond and white also includes the post colonial attitudes. I have incorporated all this in my imagery.

The colour that I am using, sepia, refers to the past. But the images I am using are of the present."



Sumayya Durrani
Untitled, 1994 Mixed Media on Paper
85x213cm

TALAT DABIR.

Born 1947

Talat has been teaching and working in sculpture. Her earlier works can be taken as reinterpretation of female form. Executed in metal and terra cotta these works have become her personal language in simplifying form. Her work has now moved to a more complex arena. These glazed reliefs are utopian images of existing realities. The work deals with women's issues and their relation to the veil and boundaries. Her work is a celebration of the cultural and historical visual knowledge and an attempt to reworking these according to her own predilections.

On sculpture

"I was always inclined towards things with mass, three dimensional things, more tangible things. I love the feel of clay in my hands, while painting is much more flat. I have painted a lot but my major interest has always been sculpture.

My sculptures are always covered, I don't make nudes all my sculptures are full of grace and dignity. I love to make draperies in clay, skirts and "Chadders" with flares. Hands and feet are a centre of attention, that's why I always give them more significance by making them large. Because in our society we use and see them a lot."

On my work

"When I work, I feel that I should not repeat myself. If I had perceived the image of city in texture previously, I now try to make it with reference to form. There are a lot of figures which are now becoming part of the composition. Though these reliefs are becoming more and more three dimensional physically, they are more unified and synthesised in terms of imagery."

On Images

"I take reference from my surroundings and the happenings around me. I try to capture that busy activity in my work in a simple form, because I feel that a good work should be simple; too much texture and colour can spoil the essence of the work. My major concerns is that my work should relate to our culture and time. At the same time I feel that it should have the depth of ambiguity."



Talat Dabir
City Scape, 1993 Ceramic 64x122cm

TARIQ JAVED

Born 1952

Tariq Javed is one of the most energetic and prolific artists practising today. A graduate of Karachi School of Art, his paintings explore a structured abstract expressionism, passion and energy barely rein in. Exuberant colours enhance the dynamics of opening and closing forms that create a series of continuous movement on the canvas. While some paintings are purely abstract compositions, others incorporate the female form as a stylised icon. Tariq Javed's work epitomises the public perception of modern art. In recent years he has added ceramics to his work fusing forms, experimenting with glazes, and applying the concerns of his paintings. Tariq Javed runs the ceramic workshop at the Karachi Arts Council.

On my work

"I give importance to the element of joy and happiness in my paintings. I don't like my paintings to have very crucial elements in them, I keep them light, which can be enjoyed aesthetically as well. I paint what is close to the human heart, love, peace etc. And sometimes I just want to be a child and paint flowers and butterflies. Because I feel that in these times, that is what is needed. The more cruel the society and times in which we are living, the more need there is for such work. I believe in my work and myself and it doesn't bother me whether my work appeals to others or not. A lot of my work depend on my feelings and surroundings."

On style

"I feel that an artist should be free. To stay with one thing for too long is very difficult for me and I keep changing. I don't believe in any style, I believe in good work, good theme and content; If you notice, my work moves through different stages. There is a lot of experimentation in it. I feel that so much is happening around me and it is necessary to record that as well.

Personally, I do not like myself to be associated with the idea of style, but a lot of people have that problem. I am just a painter and I am enjoying my work."



Tariq Javed
Untitled, 1993 Oil on paper 92x122cm

TASSADAQ SOHAIL

Born 1936

A U.K. based Pakistani artist, Tassadaq Sohail's work also moves between the East and the West. He has been exhibiting regularly in Pakistan and in the U.K. A writer of Urdu short stories as well, his paintings and drawings show the depth of his understanding and mastery of the art of the sub-conscious. The realities of the world appear to be disguised in the symbolic world of fantasy in his work. It has strong connections with the tradition of miniature painting and the illuminated manuscripts of medieval Europe.

On painting

"I think the way in which I paint is completely different from other artists. I don't sketch first, I don't think before the making of a painting. Actually I think 24 hours, I day dream. Anything I like in a painting take me away to a new story to a far away land.

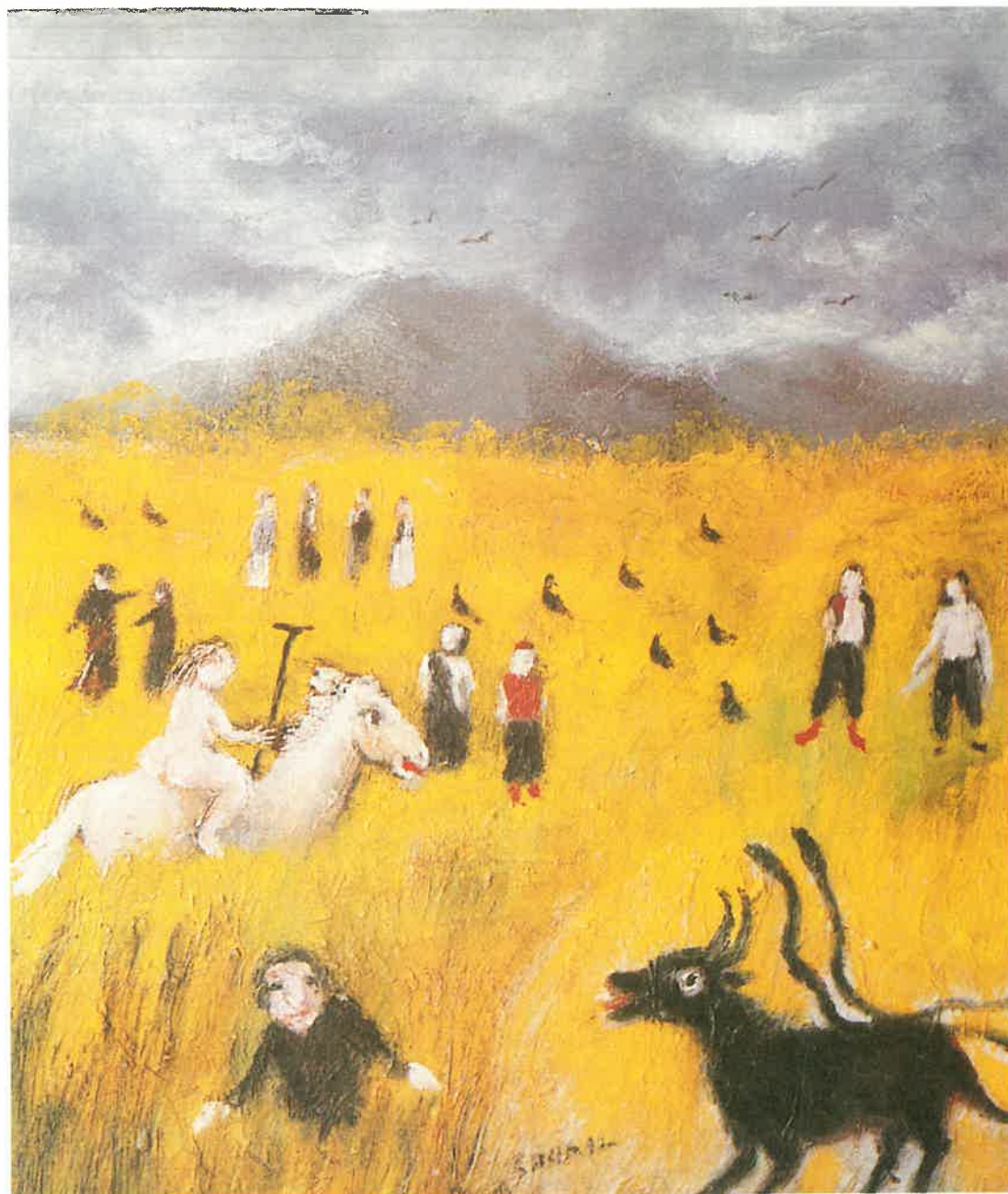
When I sit down in front of the canvas, I have no idea what I am going to do, I take two or three colours and paint an abstract composition. I put some more colour and start forming the image in it, because for me abstract is meaningless, I don't paint art for art's sake. I want to give a message, I want to tell them the truth. I want to satirize the situation, to comment on the moral and social values."

On symbolism

"I use the eye as a recurring symbol in my work, it stands for life. I started studying symbolism and it's origin in various civilizations. If you think twenty four hours that you are going to use symbolism, then it starts coming out automatically in your work."

On titles

"Every painting is a separate story. I sit in front of it two or three days to think of a title. It is easier to paint than to put a title, you can change the face of the painting with the words."



Tassadaq Sohail
Untitled, 1997
Oil on canvas
25.5x20cm

TAYYEBA AZIZ

Born 1951

Tayyaba has been working in oil and water colour; in both, her concern with the vibrance of colour and freshness of mark making is evident. Taking women as the main theme, her work explores not only the apparent but inner representation of her subjects. Recently her work is moving from realism to a more free and loose handling of the picture plane. Her work displays her control over skill and confirms her reputation of being a colourist. The themes of landscape and nature are elevated to symbolic expression in her painting.

On painting

"I paint mostly in watercolours. When I hold a brush it seems like meditation when, my "outer" and "inner" self become one. My recent work is more thought provoking, more transparent and free in technique. I draw on the spot by giving broad washes of different colours. The important moment comes after this. I concentrate and contemplate for hours at the incomplete painting and I do not start until I have conceived the complete image in my mind, then it takes one or two hours to finish it.

Recently I am working on very simple shapes using the reference from the human form with paper collage. I like to be free and not bound by rules. I take the liberty to add and subtract as I find appropriate, and feel excited when I make and break my own set rules."

On interpretation.

"When I am asked to explain my painting, all I say is just look at it, and keep looking with your "inner eye". This is how I paint, from within me. Everyone does not understand the concept of the inner eye and this is I believe, what separates the artist from the others. A work may be created for many reasons depending on the environment and human conditions."

On inspiration.

"Nature inspires me to paint, especially forms created by light and certain expressions on a face which give character to it, I feel deeply about the environment that I live in and the people around me."



Tayyeba Aziz
Landscape, 1992 Water Color on paper 38x50cm

UNVER SHAFI

Born 1961

Unver Shafi is a painter working in a self avowed modernist tradition. Working intensely from the insularity of his studio, Unver Shafi is a prolific painter. His paintings, use a witty rhetoric of personal hieroglyphs that are then depersonalized into compositional elements. His earlier work had a celebratory effusion of form and complex colour. Increasingly his work has become quieter with reduced compositional elements and palette. His latest work is pared down to a monochromatic minimal language. Concurrently with painting, Unver Shafi has produced major collections of ink drawings whose small scale intensity contrasts with the large, more "public" canvases. The drawings are in the vein of a continuous, lyrical, personal narrative. While many artists are exploring culture as an idea, Unver Shafi's work grows from the reality of the artist's own personal journey in the urban cosmopolis.

On painting

"I want to compose paintings directly on the canvas and the application of paint is also directly from the tube. However without a technique you cannot make anything, it is very crucial. It's like what you want to achieve and not understand how to go about it. I plan everything I have moved away a lot from "chance". Of course there is always a sort of moment of pure instinct when you are painting and take decisions instantly."

On interpretation

"As far as explaining the work I always get around it, I never actually explain my work. There is a whole range of emotions, ideas and thoughts that go into work."

On my work

"The paintings are very formal, in a manner they are sculpted, with a certain approach in mind. I am more concerned about colour, line, form and how it can be transformed and used to surprise oneself and take delight while doing it. I think I am going to spend my life playing these games but at the same time it has to have a lot of meaning.

I love the clarity of black and white, I made paintings in black and white but not many. It is nice to limit one self."



Unver Shafi
Yaadgar Chowk, 1992 Oil on Canvas 10x15cm

WAHAB JAFFER

Born 1941

Wahab started painting under the guidance of his friend the artist Ahmed Pervaiz. A colourist like Pervaiz, his earlier works are reminiscent of the influence of his teacher. A dedicated painter, he has evolved a loosely painted figurative style. His paintings evoke in their viewers the pathos and psychological feelings of the persons depicted. A recent black and white series has marked a departure from exuberant formal concerns to a more poetic content.

On my work

"I start thinking about the colours which I am going to use. I leave the painting for a couple of days and then see whether I need to change its colours or its form, I think more towards tactile quality.

I began in a colourful, abstract style, but gradually my work became influenced by the increasing figurative style of the time. I began to paint representational images, depressed faces, reflecting the oppression of the era. In spite of the adverse situation prevailing in the country and the lack of aesthetic freedom. I store to continue painting works of my choice.

I want to achieve both the balance of form and colour. I work completely from imagination, I just start in an abstract form, there are no references, of model or still life.

I don't have any plans of moving away intentionally from what I am doing at present but if it happens, while I am working I will be happy to do so. I personally seek quality in my work, quality of colour if it is balanced; I think abstract work is much more challenging and it takes more time to really know when the painting is finished. I find it difficult to do abstract painting but at the same time I enjoy it as well."

On being an artist

"It is difficult being a painter, but since I am enjoying it, I don't mind it. It is difficult especially to explain work or talk about art, also, what one wants to accomplish and what one is doing, it's not very easy for me I find it very difficult.

Painting gives me a great deal of pleasure since my childhood. I enjoy holding the brush and making a mark."

Wahab Jaffer
Mother and Child, 1993
Acrylic
109x63cm



ZAHOOR UL AKHLAQUE

Born 1941

Zahoor ul Akhlaque is an artist who is often called the painter's painter. He has emerged as one of the most important figures in contemporary art, trained in traditional art as well as having a grasp of contemporary Western art. Though his work does not often have any apparent recognizable imagery on the surface, it has links with Indian miniature painting and the Islamic arts of calligraphy and manuscript. His earlier work had a lot in common with the form of the manuscript, in terms of the border/rectangle-within-the-rectangle of the picture frame. Images and forms are enclosed in a grid which was the innovative continuation of keeping the painting flat in the tradition of the miniature. In his recent work the idea of constructing and questioning three-dimensional and two-dimensional form has revealed fresh insights into the whole business of painting.

On the creative process

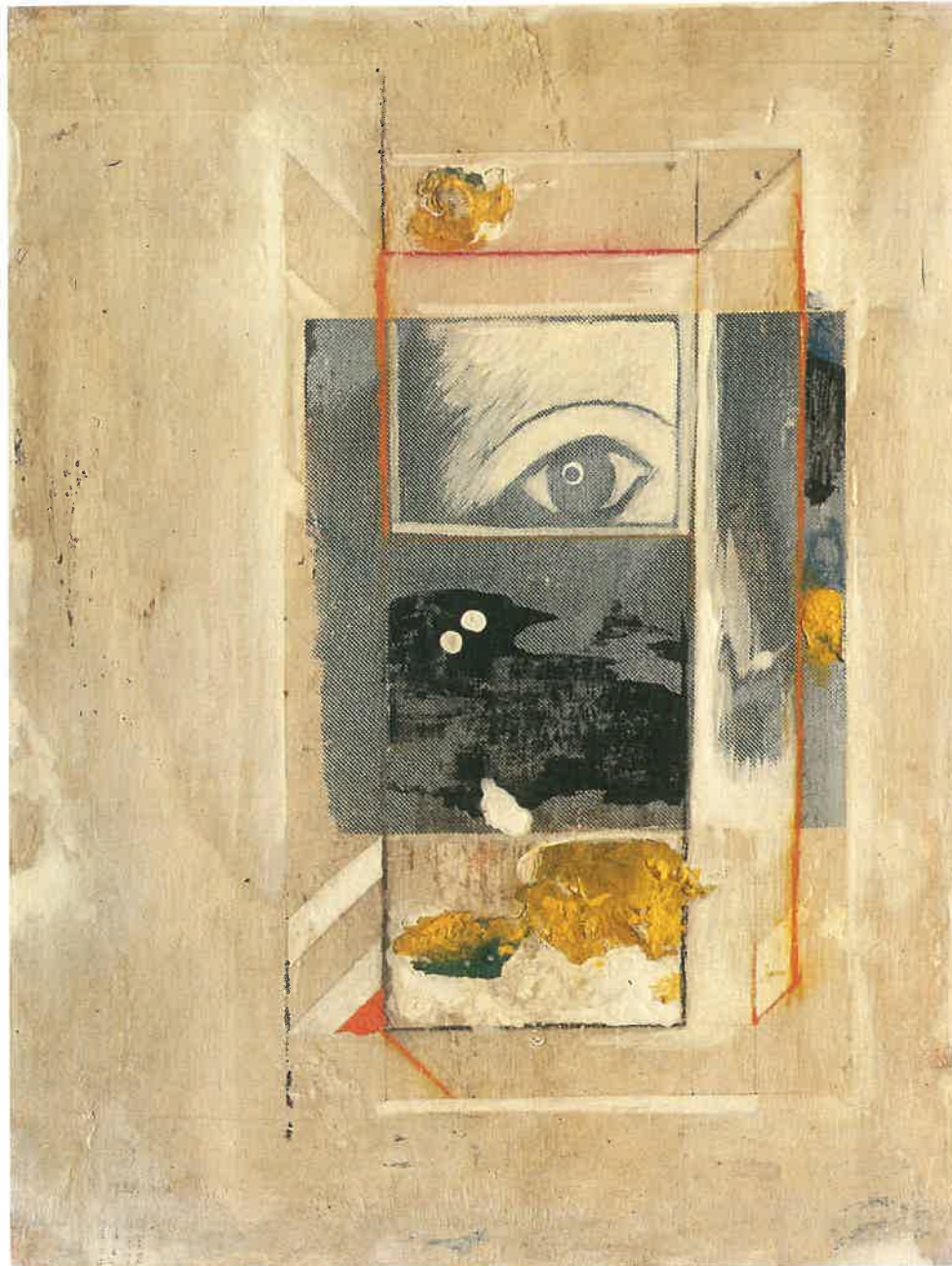
"I think that the creative process is a continuous cycle of change, which takes time and new meaning rather than repeating it-self. I believe that if I am not changing, there is something wrong with me, yet I feel myself connected with the cave man who started to draw or paint. Having a strong academic art training gives me the opportunity to loosen up as well and try to explore myself."

On painting

"The sheer act of just painting is important, you worry about what comes out, later, you may destroy it, burn the canvas or put it away. I think the act of painting is very difficult for me. One has to establish a dialogue with the surface. A blank surface is the most difficult thing to deal with."

On colour

A certain training makes you decide about colours. It could be a devil in you that says red looks perfectly fine but why not put purple instead. In terms of colours in my painting I feel it is all one colour. When all the colours are put together, the whole picture becomes one integrated and knitted image, rather than separately existing colours like, this is yellow, this is blue, etc. At a certain point I stopped seeing lots of colours but just black, the whole structure holds itself together as one piece and then I realize that the painting is finished."



Zahoor ul Akhlaque
The visionary, 1992
Eye I Acrylic on Board
30x23cm

ZUBAIDA JAVED

Born 1937

Zubaida Javed influenced a whole generation of young painters through her teaching at the Punjab University. Her work takes inspiration from her surroundings, and transforms these into almost non-representational compositions.

Her work reflects a strong colour palette. Her colours, are emotionally charged, it can be said that it has aesthetic linkages with Persian painting. Her work is distinctive and has become a different way of looking at the landscape, the mark making expressing considerable sensitivity. Her work stretches the imagination into the realm of spiritualism. She works in oils, acrylic and in pastels.

On creative process

"I work on many paintings at the same time. If I am not satisfied with one painting, I start another one, and may be work on that again after three or four days. Some paintings keep on lingering for a month or so until I come back to them. To paint is a delicious feeling, I paint for self satisfaction."

On colour

"The use of colour is not calculated, nor does it have to do with the subject matter. It comes from within me on the spur of the moment when I am painting and it keeps on changing. I am never satisfied with my colours. It is sometimes putting layers upon layers. Then comes a moment when I find that it is balanced. Colours hold a special interest for me. Nowadays I am working in greys, blacks and browns, I also like using red and blue a great deal. I use blue to make my compositions harmonious. I like to use the white area of the canvas as part of the composition."

On miniature paintings

"When I started painting I was working in the impressionistic manner. Then I joined the Fine Arts Department and started teaching history of Islamic and Persian Art. The thing which directly influenced me was the sense of composition in miniature painting. Critical analysis revealed their strength of simplicity along with the crowded elements. In these there are figures, objects, animals and background and it is not easy to compose so much within one frame. The values of these paintings are abstract not realistic."



Zubaida Javed
Railway Station, 1987 Oil on Canvas 60x92cm

ZULQARNAIN HAIDER

Born 1939

Zulqarnain Haider a dedicated painter who is involved with the tradition of representing the landscape of Punjab. Influenced by his teacher and mentor Khalid Iqbal, his landscapes reflect the atmosphere and the experience of being close to nature. He is one of the foremost painters of Pakistan working on this theme. He has influenced a lot of young artists through his teaching at the Fine Arts Department in the Punjab University.

On Painting

"I think there is nothing new in art. The painting can be good or bad regardless of its genre, I think that both abstract and realistic painting can be good or bad according to merits, but one should have access to the basic skill in order to go beyond it. I have been painting landscapes but each time it is a new problem for me, nowadays it is the mist sometimes it is composition. I think to paint is a joy. I think the words cannot explain the work, the work itself makes the viewer to understand its language.

To paint landscape in front of nature is essential for me and to do it from photograph is just like the difference of reaction created by watching a film about violence on T.V. and being there in reality where someone is stabbed. When I walk, I keep on looking for the places to paint and suddenly some image appears."

On being an artist

"Artist is ahead of his time and society, that's why sometime he is not accepted in the society. One works without getting any reward for the whole life. Every person is an artist, the art institution does not create an artist. It just cultivates him or her. The more you paint there are more problems to solve. One has to paint: if it is worthwhile it will be recognised if not, then it does not matter. There is no other satisfaction then in painting and the time is the greatest critic."



Zulqarnain Haider
Landscape, 1992 Acrylic on Canvas 61x76cm

SHAHZIA SIKANDER

Born 1969

Artist's word

*"Silenced I find myself in a delirium
Like a fluid there is no flat or static experience
Like always I still belong tied to a long rope
Stretched to a limit and beyond
And yet she still swims away.
But with her the desire was
So large that she could conceive of itself only in bits.
Always conscious of how segments of its body could go
wandering off....
Vacuums are created and taken over.
She thought her invincible
Power of depth could hold.
The vacuums captive leaving her in a freedom
undisturbed.
When at last the works were
Done and the links were complete and unbreakable
She found herself held in the vacuums' grip.
She asked if she could be given a habit
Free floating and aimless items.
Outline the space I am about to leave
A void, no longer mine, borrowed maybe
And then she takes over"*

Shahzia Sikander
Extra Ordinary realities, 1996
Vegetable Color Dry Pigment, Water Color,
Tea, Zerox on Wash Hand Made paper
27.5x18.75cm



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