

art

in pakistan

With Compliments To 
Fine Arts Dept,

Prof.

Anna Holke

1994

ART IN PAKISTAN

JALAL UDDIN AHMED

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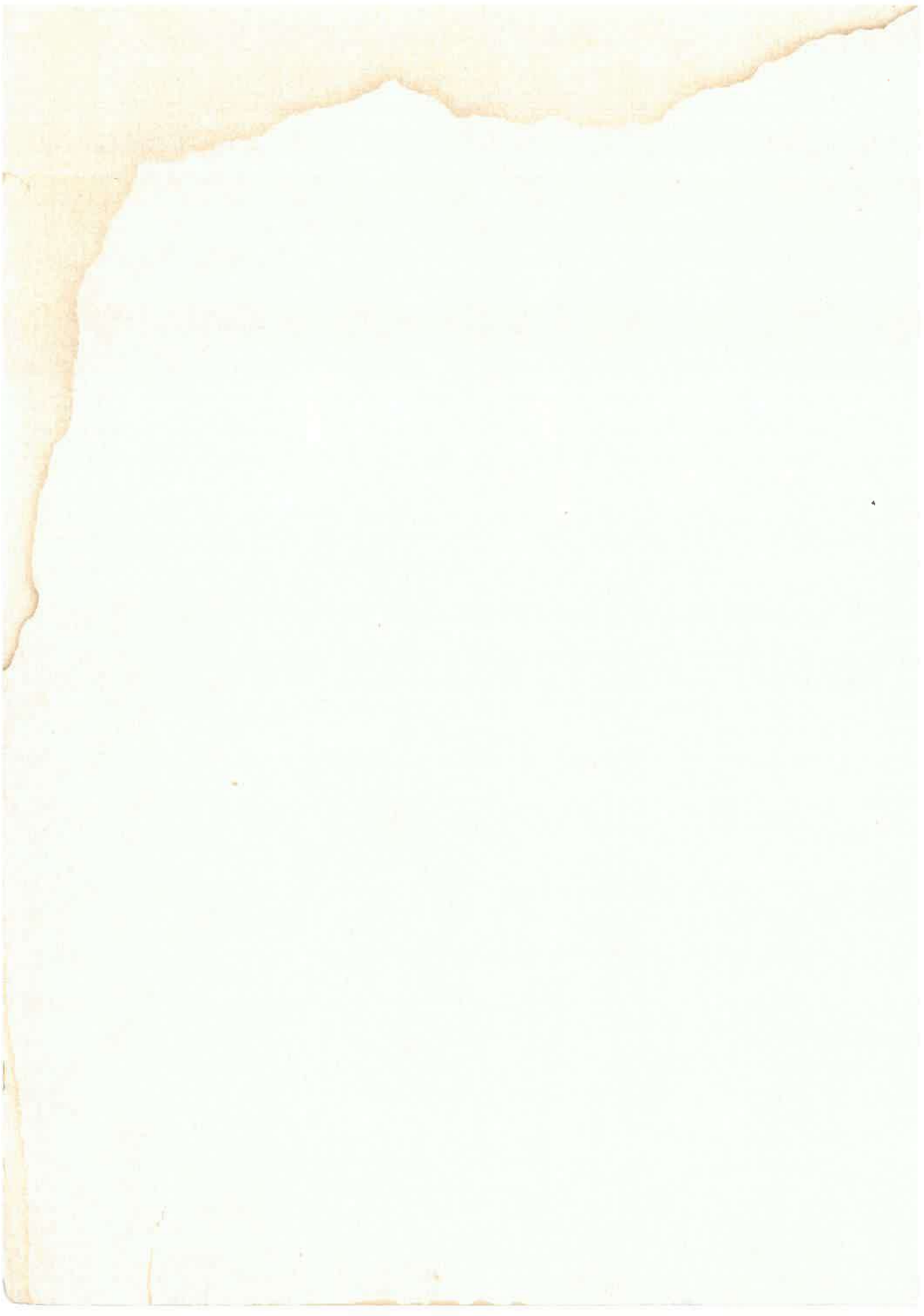
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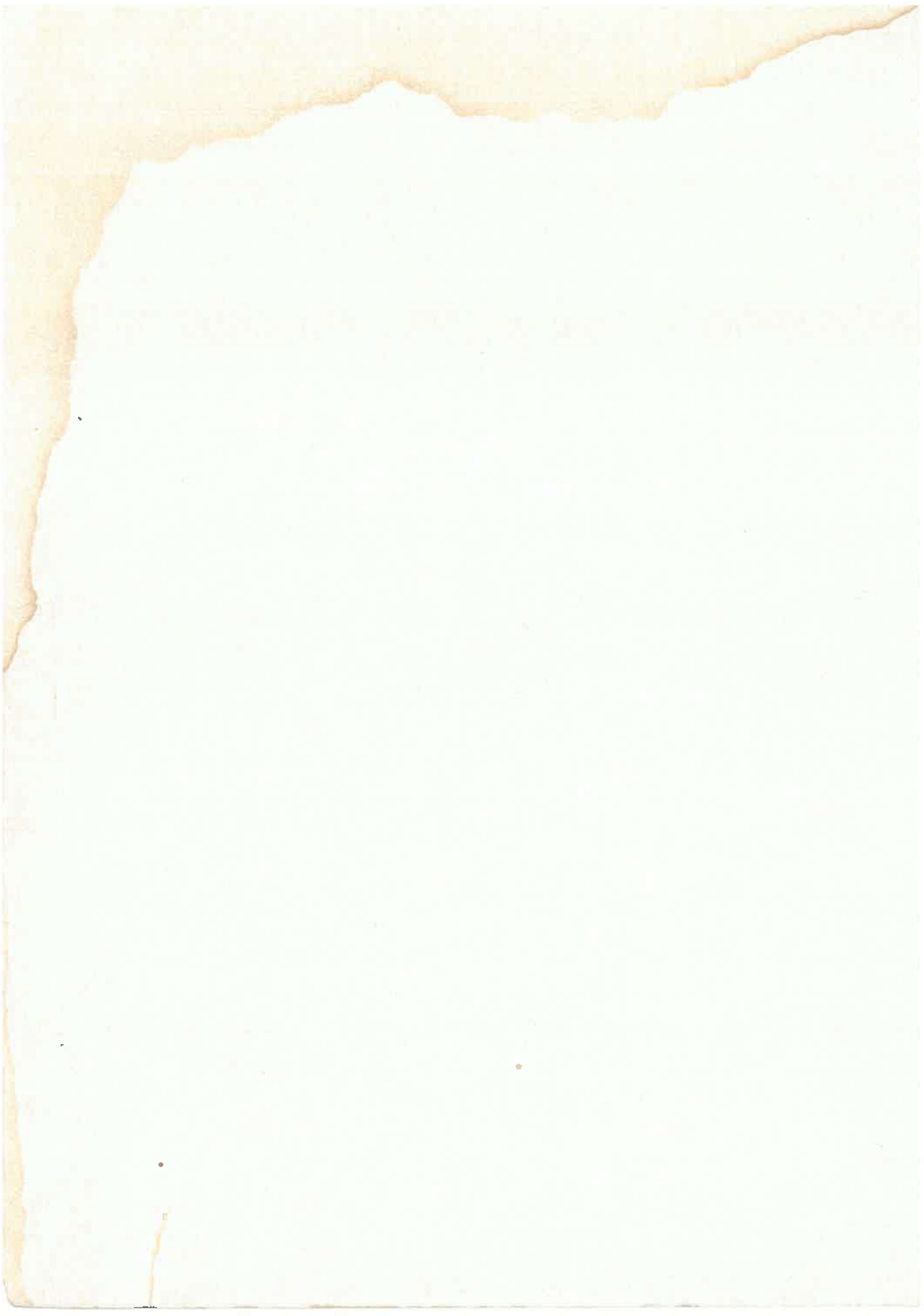
In the years since the first edition of "Art in Pakistan" was published in 1954, the art movement in the country has grown in several directions. The text for this new edition, therefore, has been thoroughly revised and rewritten, and apart from the new works of earlier artists, those of several younger artists have also been included.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the painters and sculptors whose works have been reproduced here, and many of whom have offered generous help and co-operation in preparing this new edition. Thanks are also due to the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, for permission to use some of the material contained in the author's earlier work "Contemporary Painters of Pakistan", published by the Arts Council in 1958.



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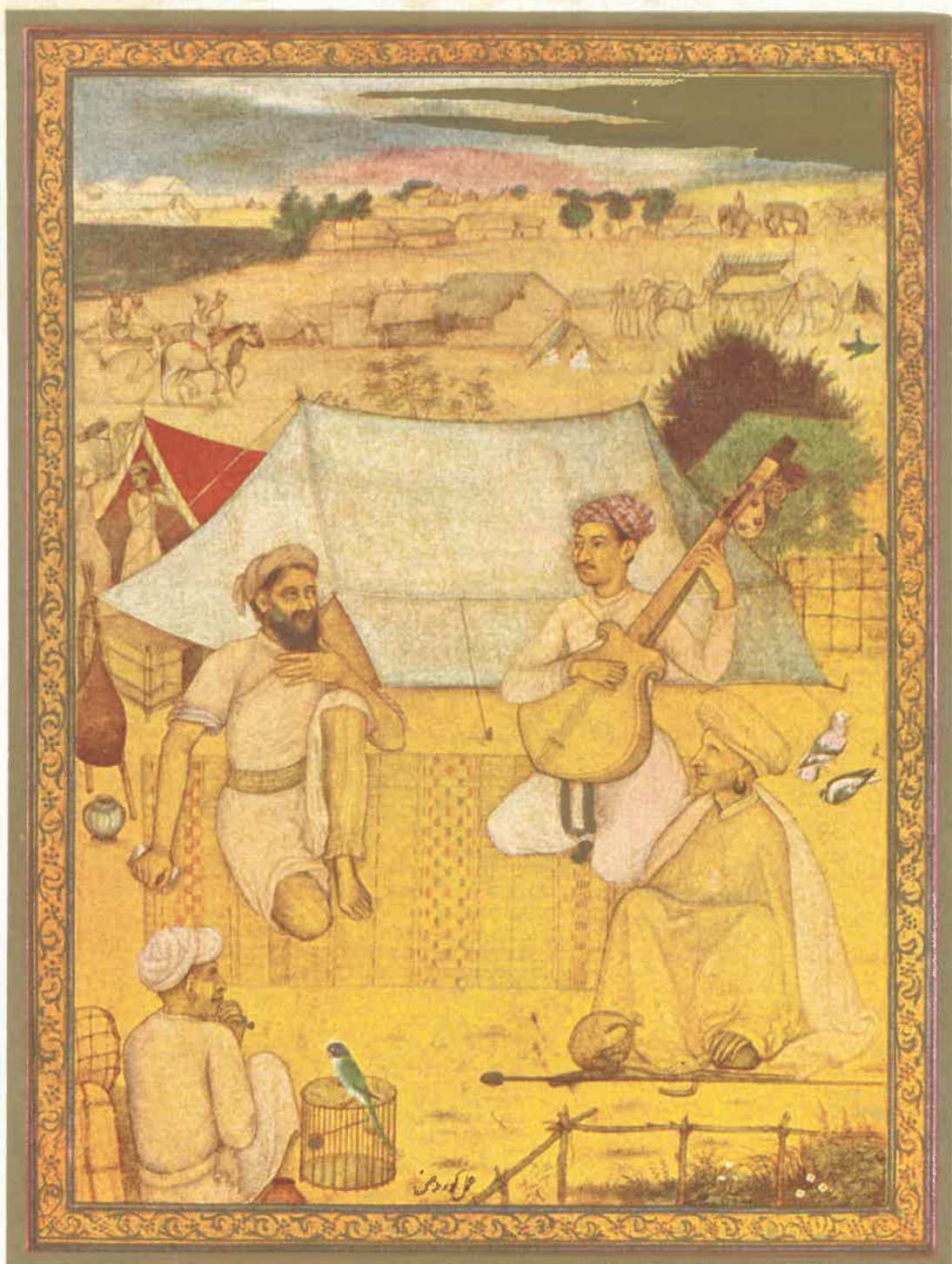
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▲ *A Group of Servants:* Miniature painting from Jahangir's Album.

CHAPTER ONE

HERITAGE

OF HISTORY AND PREHISTORY

Any discussion of the contemporary art movement in a young and newly independent country like Pakistan must begin by enquiring into its cultural past, particularly in view of the rich artistic tradition and heritage of its people, and the historical circumstances which have subscribed to it. For, Pakistan is often referred to as a 'crucible' of cultures, a traditional meeting-point of the East and the West, the Aryan and the pre-Aryan, the Buddhist and the Greek, the Mughal and the Rajput. All these influences are clearly visible, though aesthetically integrated, in the arts and crafts of the people who have inhabited these areas over a period of four to five thousand years.

The arts of painting, modelling and engraving have had their roots deep in this land. Though political history would not allow Pakistan to claim more than a few years of independent national existence since 1947, yet these arts have flourished here through successive periods of history and pre-history. The last of these periods, and the nearest to our own time, historically speaking, was dominated by the Mughals, a dynamic, vigorous and highly artistic people who, in the course of several centuries, became fully integrated with the local population, and greatly contributed to the cultural renaissance in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

MINIATURE PAINTING

Actually, the areas constituting Pakistan, being in closer geographical proximity, were the first to come into contact with the highly developed Muslim miniature painting of the 13th and subsequent centuries. Towards the middle of the 16th century, when the second Mughal Emperor, Humayun, after years of exile in Safavid, Iran, finally marched his triumphant armies into this sub-continent, he also brought in his train two distinguished Muslim miniature painters — Mir Sayyid Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samed, both pupils of that great master, Behzad, often referred to as the 'Raphael of the East'. They

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Paul Klee, and yet their own work marks a logical evolution of Mughal miniature painting from the illustrational and the documentary to the lyrical and the decorative. The subtle fusion of colours through the wash method as well as the strong linear quality so vital for portraiture, have been mastered by them and used to great effect in works which assume a beauty and authenticity of their own.

Chughtai and Fyzee Rahamin, however, are not the only 'traditionalists' living and working in Pakistan today. Among the older generation of practising painters — Ustad Allah Bukhsh, S. H. Askari and Haji Mohammad Sharif — almost everyone has been influenced, inspired or stimulated by the Mughal and allied schools of painting, with scant respect for the rules of perspective, and a distinctive stress on the decorative and the documentary, revelling in delightful geometric and calligraphic flourishes, and a certain flat, two-dimensional, illustrative quality.

GRAECO-BUDDHIST STATUARY

But the Mughal tradition, though dominant, is not the only one in Pakistan. In the middle of the fourth century B.C., nearly two thousand years before the art-loving Mughal adventurers of Central Asia came down the Khyber Pass to found an empire — and find a permanent home — in the rich, fertile lands of the Indus and the Ganges, something else had happened. The triumphant armies of Alexander, in their unexplained retreat from the hurriedly-abandoned eastward march across what is now West Pakistan, had left behind some of their more romantic retinue who married here and settled down. Also

Stone figurine, depicting a sleeping musician. (Gandhara, Circa 2nd-3rd Century B.C.)





▲ Stone head of a Satyr. (Gandhara, Circa 1st Century B.C.)

ing piece by a contemporary sculptor
 FIMED (*Blind Philosopher*. Plaster.)



they left behind something else: a deep impact of Greek sculpture, which later flowered into the chiselled classical features and pure sharp outline of Graeco-Buddhist statuary, strewn all over the Gandhara valley in north-western Pakistan, abode of what has come to be known as Gandhara sculpture.

Closely interwoven with the Greek influence was of course the Buddhist tradition which found its finest consummation in the sculpture, pottery and other exquisite objects discovered in excavations at Taxila, in West Pakistan, and dating back even earlier than the famous Buddhist cave-frescoes of Ajanta. Buddhist statuary, though of a later period than that of Taxila, has also been discovered at the extensive excavations carried out in the Eastern wing of Pakistan, at Mainamati.

PREHISTORIC MOENJO DARO

In addition to these comparatively 'recent' cultural traditions, there also exists a nascent prehistoric heritage of unparalleled cultural and ethnic significance, familiarly known as the Indus Valley Civilisation. It dates back to nearly four thousand years ago, and has had the land of contemporary Pakistan for its cradle, its meteoric effulgence, its wonderfully synthesised socio-economic structure, and finally, for its glorious, petrified resting-place, found by archaeologists in Pakistan's sand-refrigerated Moenjo Daro, literally, "Mound of the Dead".

From this "mound" comes the meticulously sculptured *Dancing Girl*, which is the oldest known specimen of womanhood from the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, found in a remarkably well-preserved state. From here also came





ted Priest from Moenjo Daro, seat of Indus Valley Civilization.
: specimens of sculpture from Moenjo Daro: (from left to right) *Dancing Girl*,
er-Goddess, and *Head of a Woman* with attached oil-lamp.

the natural chalk bust of a *Bearded Man*, of about the same period, (probably a priest, with a strong well-modelled face), numerous bronze statuettes and clay figurines, decorative bull and bird motifs, and engraved steatite seals of great aesthetic merit.

THE SURVIVING FOLK TRADITION

Running through the forty odd centuries of known cultural history of the areas which comprise Pakistan, there has also been a continuing, though often very vague, thread of folk motifs and traditions, which find expression in toys and playthings as well as in articles of daily use, like embroidered *Kanthas* (quilts) ceramic utensils, door carvings etc.

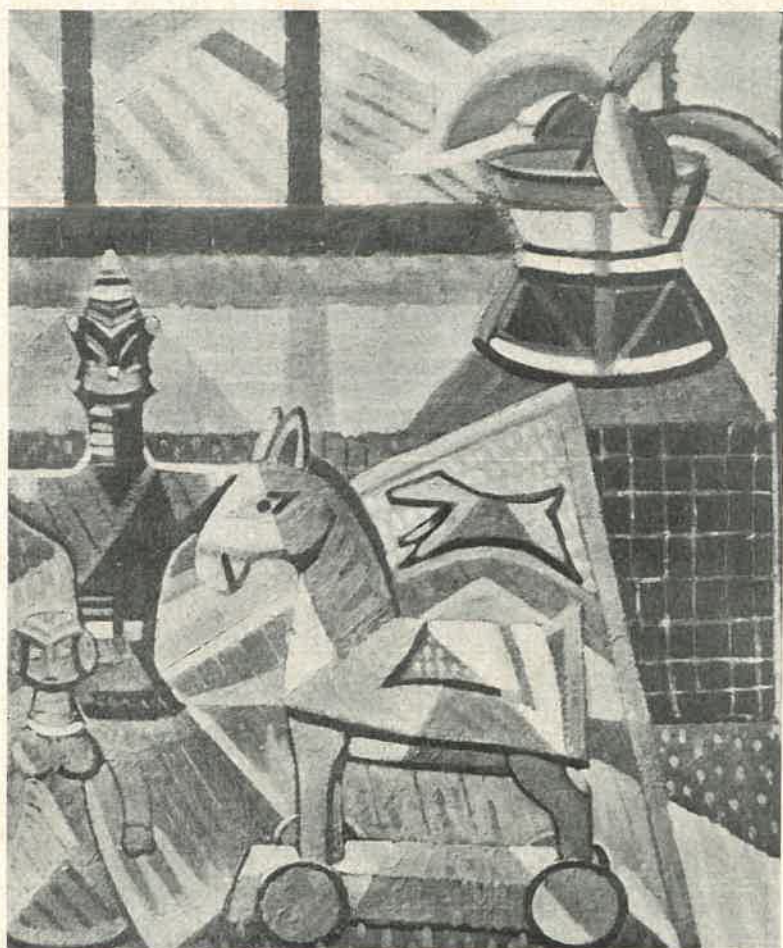
Again, the features of the pre-Aryan *Bearded Man* of Moenjo Daro may still be traced in the *haris* (farmers) of parts of the lower Indus valley, while in the north-western regions of Pakistan, the strong-muscled, masculine bodies and Hellenic features of the vigorous Khattak-dancers, "stilled" from a perfectly poised 'end-of-the-swing' may, in a flash, remind one of the classically proportioned Gandhara sculpture!

CONFLICT BETWEEN OLD AND NEW

The emergence of Pakistan after a century-long struggle for freedom and self-determination waged by the people, created a deliberate awareness of these traditions and gave new impetus to aesthetic and creative activity. At the same time, it also accentuated the eternal conflict between the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, the secular and the ritualistic, the accepted and the experimental.

By its very nature, therefore, art in Pakistan today has a transitional quality, breathing fresh air brought from all sides, and reflecting a wide range of traditions and influences. Some of these have been intelligently absorbed and assimilated, producing significant and individual work. Others—claiming the great majority — have overcrowded the speculative Art market with hybrid imitations and works having a certain technical virtuosity but without any soul, passion, or vision.

This is true not only of the 'modern' painters who are busy experimenting with contemporary Western techniques, but also applies to many traditional and 'academic' painters whose work tends to become highly stylised and stereotyped, thanks to its stress on the illustrative, the exotic, and the pretty.



▲ A contemporary painting by
SAFIUDDIN AHMED.

◀ Specimens of toys and terracota
sculpture turned out by folk
craftsmen and potters in East
Pakistan as a cottage industry.



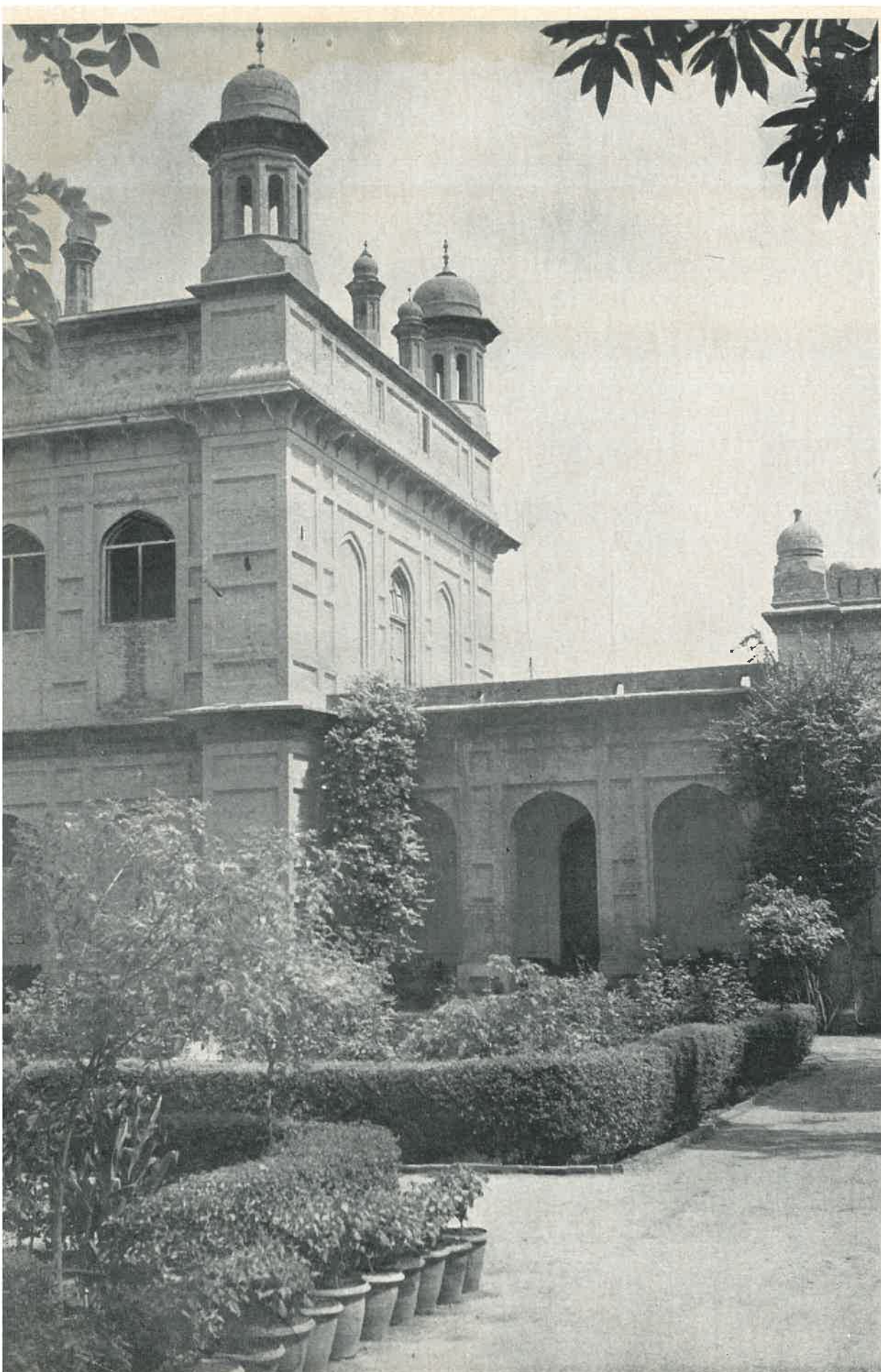


▲ Students of the Fine Arts Department of the Panjab University, learning their first lessons in modelling.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEMPORARY

ART EDUCATION AND PATRONAGE



◀ A view
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As we turn from the traditional to the contemporary artistic scene of Pakistan, certain facts emerge prominently. One of these is the great and unprecedented interest evinced by the ordinary educated young men and women in the fine arts. This has led to a generous and appreciative patronage being offered to even the promising beginner in art. The result of this encouragement is that, compared with the small number of amateur painters that took to brush, palette and easel 15 years ago, today there are at least four to five hundred professional and amateur painters and sculptors, a number of whom have received certain amount of international notice and recognition.

Of course, financially painting in Pakistan, as in many other countries in this part of the world, is more or less an 'honorary' profession, one that obviously does not pay. Even the more promising painters must often turn to teaching, commercial art, designing and cartoon-drawing for the daily bread. In spite of these difficulties, however, throughout the country art exhibitions are held every other month, and range from one-man shows to group exhibitions, comprising Pakistani as well as foreign works.



▲ SHAKIR ALI, Principal of the National College of Arts, Lahore, scrutinising a scale model of the proposed new building for the College.



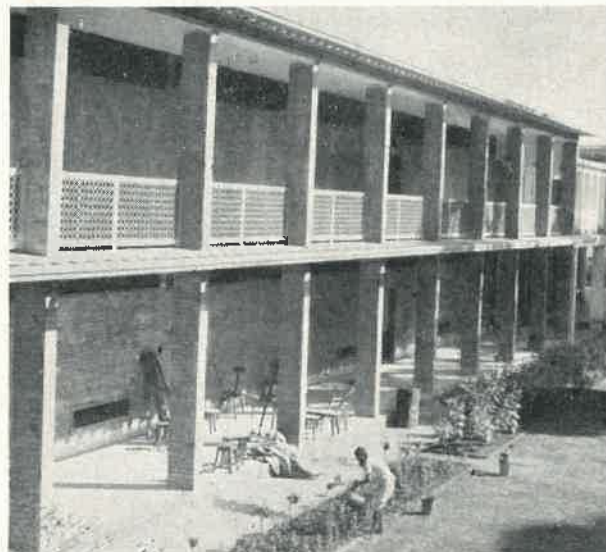
▲ ANNA MOLKA AHMAD, Head of the Fine Arts Department, Panjab University, which offers courses leading up to the Masters' degree in Fine Arts.

ART SOCIETIES AND SCHOOLS

Already during the first few years after the establishment of Pakistan, small art groups and societies were formed in the principal cities like Lahore, Dacca and Karachi. As early as in 1951, the Karachi Fine Arts Society, which was just one of a number of art societies then functioning in Pakistan, had organized a dozen major exhibitions. Their subjects ranged from the works of individual Pakistani painters, to Chinese rubbings, Canadian silk-screen prints, and modern British and Western paintings. During the same time, the Dacca Art Group, led by Zainul Abedin, had held a number of exhibitions in Comilla and Chittagong besides three large exhibitions in Dacca, which brought together a wealth of works in water-colour, oil, tempera, charcoal and dry-brush, as also lithographs, woodcuts, etchings and engravings.

In Lahore, epicentre of cultural activity of all kinds, the growth of art programmes was even more remarkable, and understandably so. At the time of partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the only two art institutions inherited by Pakistan were both based in Lahore. They were the Mayo School of Art, (now known as National College of Arts) which has produced artists like Chughtai, Muhammad Husain and Allah Bux; and the Fine Arts Department of the

▼ A view of the Art Institute building in Dacca.



EMERGENCE OF ART COUNCILS

With the steady growth of art programmes and activities, multi-purpose Art Councils are taking the place of smaller art groups and societies throughout the country. The first to be formed (1953) was the Pakistan Art Council in Lahore, followed the next year (1954) by one in Dacca, and a year later (1955) by yet another in Karachi. Similar Councils have been established in other regions also, and have given a big fillip to the art movement by organising individual and group shows, of Pakistani as well as foreign artists.

These Art Councils are public bodies, raising funds on their own as well as receiving *ad hoc* grants from the Government. Their administration is entirely in private hands, mostly through governing bodies composed of eminent personalities in the field of art and culture. A Coordinating Committee comprising representatives of the various Art Councils meets periodically to review and coordinate art programmes on a national level.

Apart from the facility of organising and sponsoring art exhibitions, these Art Councils have also established art galleries with permanent collections of the work of Pakistani artists. Simultaneously, picture-selling galleries are also coming up, like the Contemporary Art Galleries in Rawalpindi, which was set up towards the end of 1961, and has already attracted the topmost artists of the country.

All these factors have combined to bring about a widespread awakening and interest in art, and it is gratifying to note that while this cultural renaissance has deepened the consciousness of past traditions, it has also broadened the outlook, so that the artists today are looking for inspiration wider afield and are eager to learn from the artistic achievements of the West, as of the East. The art of contemporary Pakistan, as already mentioned, breathes fresh air brought from everywhere, and while the individuality of the artist is given full play in subjects and themes which are specifically drawn from the soil, modern Western styles and techniques have been sympathetically studied and pursued, often too vigorously and at times, a little too imitatively.

With this introductory background, let us now see what kind of work is actually being produced by contemporary painters and sculptors in Pakistan. It is naturally too early yet to look at these works in terms of specific movements or 'schools' as such: fifteen years is too small a 'period' for this. It should, therefore, be easy as well as logical to see and discuss these as works of individual artists, sensitive to a multiplicity of influences, but sincerely and enthusiastically trying to evolve individual styles of their own.



▲ CHUGHTAI. *The Ambassador*. Watercolour.

CHAPTER THREE
CHUGHTAI
AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES



▲ CHUGHTAI. An Etching.

Three generations of artists are active in Pakistan today. There is the elder group of what may, for want of a better term, be called 'traditional' painters. Secondly, there are the 'young elders' who form the link and mark the transition from traditional and academic painting to modern techniques, including variations of abstract and near-abstract art. And finally, there are younger painters and sculptors, mostly in their twenties and thirties, whose work is mostly experimental, but who form the most active and prolific group of artists in Pakistan today.

Let us first of all take up the elder painters, headed by 63-year-old Abdul Rahman Chughtai, and comprising several senior artists like Fyzee Rahamin, Ustad Allah Bux and Haji Mohammad Sharif. All of them are in their sixties and seventies, and their individual styles were formed in the years before 1947, when the main body of their work was produced. It is true that they have continued to paint and produce original work, particularly Chughtai and Allah Bux, who have been unusually active and productive in recent years. But their work and style have not changed very much, and are almost dated, standing apart from the main current of 'contemporary' Pakistani painting as it has surged in several new directions during the years since 1947.

The indigenous Mughal tradition and its later variations have made a deep impression on them, though in a varying degree in each individual case. Also, it would appear that each one of them tried to adapt and blend it with some of the 'Western' styles and techniques, as practised in the nineteenth century Europe. It is interesting to note here that it took more than half a century for European art movements to travel, mostly through Britain, to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent so that while these painters were all working in the early decades of the twentieth century, their European masters continued to be Gainsborough and Reynolds, even Sisley and Aubrey Beardsley, rather than Van Gogh and Cezanne or even Monet and Seurat. Perhaps the romantic temper and themes of the former, and a fetish for vivid documentation, blended more naturally with the lyricism, aristocratic grandeur, and a certain decorative aloofness of the Mughal tradition itself.

This decorative aloofness and lyrical fervour fascinated Abdur Rahman Chughtai the most, and he adapted it to equally poetic themes which he chose for his early works. Born in 1899, he comes from a family which for generations has produced architects, engineers, painters and decorators. He claims to be a direct descendent of Emperor Shah Jahan's chief architect Ustad Ahmad. No wonder Chughtai's father wanted him to be an engineer, but young Chughtai rebelled and made up his mind to grow up as an artist. Apparently there was little sympathy for his decision, and Chughtai's early education suffered in the bargain.

Chughtai, however, persevered, and got himself admitted into Lahore's Mayo School of Art, which then emphasised crafts more than art. Chughtai did not stay there very long, and started learning on his own, concentrating on the traditional methods and techniques of the Mughal artists. He then moved on to Calcutta and worked there for several years painting in the style of the Bengal school, but already showing his overwhelming interest in illustrational and 'episodic' themes. By 1923, when he was only 26, Chughtai started developing his style of drawing luscious, languid, narcissus-eyed, and manneristic figures with erotic overtones and heavy with fictional content: "an air of dreaminess, almost unreality", as one of his early critics, Mr. A. A. Hamid, pointed out. "Though their dresses are vaguely of 16th century Central Asia", Mr. Hamid remarked, "they never seem to have existed anywhere in the world. Most of these men and women seem to have stopped their activities for a moment and appear to be lost in thought. When a group is shown, each one appears to be absorbed in one's self and almost unconscious of the existence of others".

Chughtai's stay in Calcutta also introduced him to some of the Western art techniques, chiefly as practised by the Victorian artists, and to the cave paintings of Ajanta which were then in the process of being re-discovered by contemporary painters. It was in this formative phase of his career that Chughtai imbibed a certain stylisation and mannerism, including extensive use of architectural motifs and pictorial nuances which mark his illustrational paintings of this period.

It was about this time, in 1927, that Chughtai published *Muraqqa*, his first major work, which comprised a series of illustrations he made for a new edition of the thought-heavy and highly imaginative verses of Ghalib, the nineteenth-century "poets' poet" of Urdu and Persian. These illustrations were naturally much more than a mere translation in visuals: for the artist, they offered a convenient 'peg', a point of departure, as it were, for his own imaginative studies and creations in line and colour. While the tradition he had



imbibed was precise and well-defined, Chughtai had by now developed a 'signature', a distinctive style which has to this day remained his own. As James Cousins pointed out in the introduction to the *Muraqqa*, "Chughtai's conscious relationship to his art has never been narrowed down to an *ism* in either subject or technique. Not that he was aesthetically unintelligent. He had ideas — not mental notions or speculations, not any attitudinal claims of self-expression but a deep sense of sharing in a mission for the discovery of the supreme achievement in creation".

Early in the thirties Chughtai visited Britain and the European continent, for the first time seeing, in original, the work of contemporary European painters as well as the classical Masters. A few years later, he again visited Europe, on an extensive study tour, taking notes as well as painting and drawing. He was specially attracted by the new freedom offered by etching and engraving, and concentrated for many years on these expressive new media, using these with great felicity and vigour. Commenting on his work about this time, the London art magazine *Studio*, pointed out that Chughtai's work was not merely influenced by Persian and Mughal painting of the past, but it was also "an avowed re-birth of that art, with some recognition of modern progress and the stamp of individual genius". It added: "There is an exquisite refinement of mood and method, a lyrical fervour in every line. Effects are economically achieved through concentration on the main theme of the picture."

CHUGHTAI. *Mother and Child*. Watercolour. ►





Modesty. Watercolour.

That indeed is the secret of Chughtai's fatal charm — fatal to the critical faculties of the spectator — because there is something magical about the working of his imagination, something fantasmagoric. There is seduction in every turn and twist of his drunken reeling lines, as they entwine round one's heart. He depicts life through 'stills' as it were, transforming the particular and the momentary into something universal and abiding. There is apparently no action in his pictures; all the figures are shown in repose, but there is an emotional tension which suggests that something has happened or is about to happen. Also there is the element of an "unconscious symbolism", several examples of which have been pointed out by Mr. A. A. Hamid: "Near a very old decrepit beggar in tatters, a spray of brightly coloured flowers is in full bloom; a small bird is singing happily near a woman broken with grief; the hallowed trunk of a dead tree lies near the feet of a youthful and robust prince; two lines of beautiful trees make an arch towards a mound behind which a spotted black leopard is lying waiting. These are only a few examples. This unconscious symbolism really expresses the traditional Asian view of life which accepts everything with resignation".

Chughtai has rarely painted from models: he draws and paints mostly from memory. The artist's scrap-book, in his case, is his own mind and imagination. This is indeed a double-edged weapon. While it gives freedom, it also encourages idealization and exaggeration. His emphasis on decorative motifs arises chiefly from such idealization. He takes meticulous care in rendering the most intricate tapestries, carvings, garment borders, floor designs and so on, but when it comes to figure-drawing, he paints types rather than individuals. His portrait gallery consists of highly stylised figures which have an air of familiarity, but would not answer to a name. His *Mir Sahib* and *the Ambassador*, his *Mother and Child* and *Modesty*, are portrait studies of a culture and an age rather than of the individuals depicted. We may admire their grace and sophistication but cannot recognise and identify them. His *Tribal Girl* and *Fragrance of the Valley* are bewitching, but lacking in authenticity; his *College Girls* are models of elegance but transparently unreal. As a critic writing in *The Artist* of London, pointed out: "Chughtai's whole outlook is romantic; he works, as do most Orientals, by rule of thumb rather than observations; he sees through the spectacles of his ancestors, rather than with his own unaided eyes. Everything he touches is a superb piece of craftsmanship. He has almost swaggering command of the brush so common to the Japanese and Chinese Masters: his handling is more akin to the neat and precise style of Persian and Mughal painters. He uses the pencil with the delicacy of silver point in style. The European student can learn much from his remarkable economy of means and material."

▼ CHUGHTAI. *Mir*





nce of the Valley, Watercolour.

Though water colours account for the bulk of Chughtai's work, his drawings, in particular his etchings, are remarkably effective and successful. The simple, effective use of lines and curves in his own free felicitous style has yielded beautiful works. Indeed Chughtai is never too proud to learn; the progressive changes in his colour composition after his tour of Europe in the early thirties, the studied economy and strength of his line drawings, and the tremendous interest he showed in etchings, all indicate that he has brought an open mind to bear on contemporary techniques and mediums. But he still belongs more to yesterday than today. He is still as active as any other of his younger colleagues, having recently completed his monumental illustrations based on the verses of Iqbal. A selection of these were seen at a recent exhibition, and demonstrated his zeal and talent for aesthetic creations and technical flourishes. That these underlined the element of illustration only proved that Chughtai has grown without either changing very much, or being swayed and swept off his feet. Also, it puts him right where he belongs: at the head of an impressive tradition which he himself furthered and almost rebuilt. It is another matter, however, that his style has found few followers among the younger generation of Pakistani artists.

CHUGHTAI. *Tribal Girl*. Watercolour. ►





▲ CHUGHTAI. *College Girls*. Watercolour.

FYZEE RAHAMIN

Among Chughtai's own contemporaries, now living and painting in Pakistan, Fyzee Rahamin is easily the most outstanding. He has had a thorough grounding in, and cultural and temperamental affinity with Western methods and themes. He studied art at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and has had a long apprenticeship under the brilliant portrait painter, John Singer Sargent. He stayed in England and on the European continent for a considerable time, painting portraits in the then accepted academic style, also building up his deep acquaintance with the technique of mural painting which he later put to effective use when invited to decorate the interior of the New Delhi Secretariat domes.

FYZEE RAHAMIN. *The Scholar*. Tempera. ►



A European by birth, Fyzee Rahamin settled down in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, and married Atiya Begum, a lady of infinite refinement and taste, herself an accomplished musician. It is interesting to see an artist like Fyzee Rahamin, so thoroughly steeped in the Western tradition, gradually coming under the spell of the indigenous Mughal and Rajput painting, with its rich store of objective and historical themes as well as a vast repertoire of form, figure and faces. His symbolic, sometimes obviously mystical treatment of subjects like the series of musical representations — *Rag Megh*, *Rag Deepak*, *Ragni Gujri*, etc. — and his ambitious murals with extravagant use of symbolical motifs, all stem from the same source.

Unlike Chughtai, Fyzee Rahamin has a freer, larger style, painting life-size portraits and ambitious murals, as well as elaborate landscapes and pictures with symbolical motifs. He has executed a series of Kashmir landscapes, and has also painted several symbolic themes, like *The Seasons* series, and personification of *Justice*, *Peace*, *Power*, and *War*, for his murals.

These works are not at all lavish in the technical sense of the term, and even his oils are so subdued and thin that they give the impression of pastel or tempera. But the firm lines of steel in which he frames his picture combine strength with beauty in a way that only a master can effect; and the simple flat colours are so judiciously selected and applied that the effect could not have been more colourful and satisfying if all the colours of the palette had been lavished on the canvas.

Fyzee Rahamin's earlier work mainly comprised portrait studies done in a Western manner so different from his later style that the spectator finds it difficult to believe these have come from the same hand. These portraits won for him wide acclaim and recognition as one of the powerful portrait painters in the Western style. But as the artist grew in years and experience, he grasped the significance of the cultural and artistic traditions of this sub-continent, and was gradually attracted by indigenous themes like his 'type-faces' or his interpretative rendering of musical subjects like the '*Rag*' series. His superb handling of colour and effective figure-work in *Chand Bibi* shows a mature technique as well as an imaginative sympathy with the subject and its full comprehension.

His crowning work has been the murals which he painted on the domes of the Imperial Secretariat building in New Delhi, planned by the famous British architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens. Instead of the European method of *al fresco* paintings, he used the indigenous technique of mural painting. He made his pigments "from different coloured stones — not earths", and his vehicle came



IN. *Rani of Raipipla*. Oil.

AN. *Chand Bibi*. Tempera.

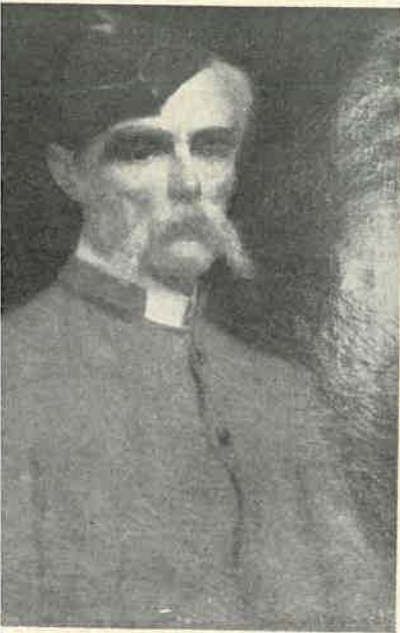


▲ FYZEE RAHAMIN. *Mahmooda Begum*. Oil.

from linseed, gum, sugar and other ingredients. The colours were applied "directly on to the dry plaster of the walls". His palette was based on minerals, thus yielding simple colours, namely yellow, blue, white, green and three kinds of red, with secondaries purple and brown and, in addition, a vegetable black. The very nature of the colours kept them in harmony with one another.

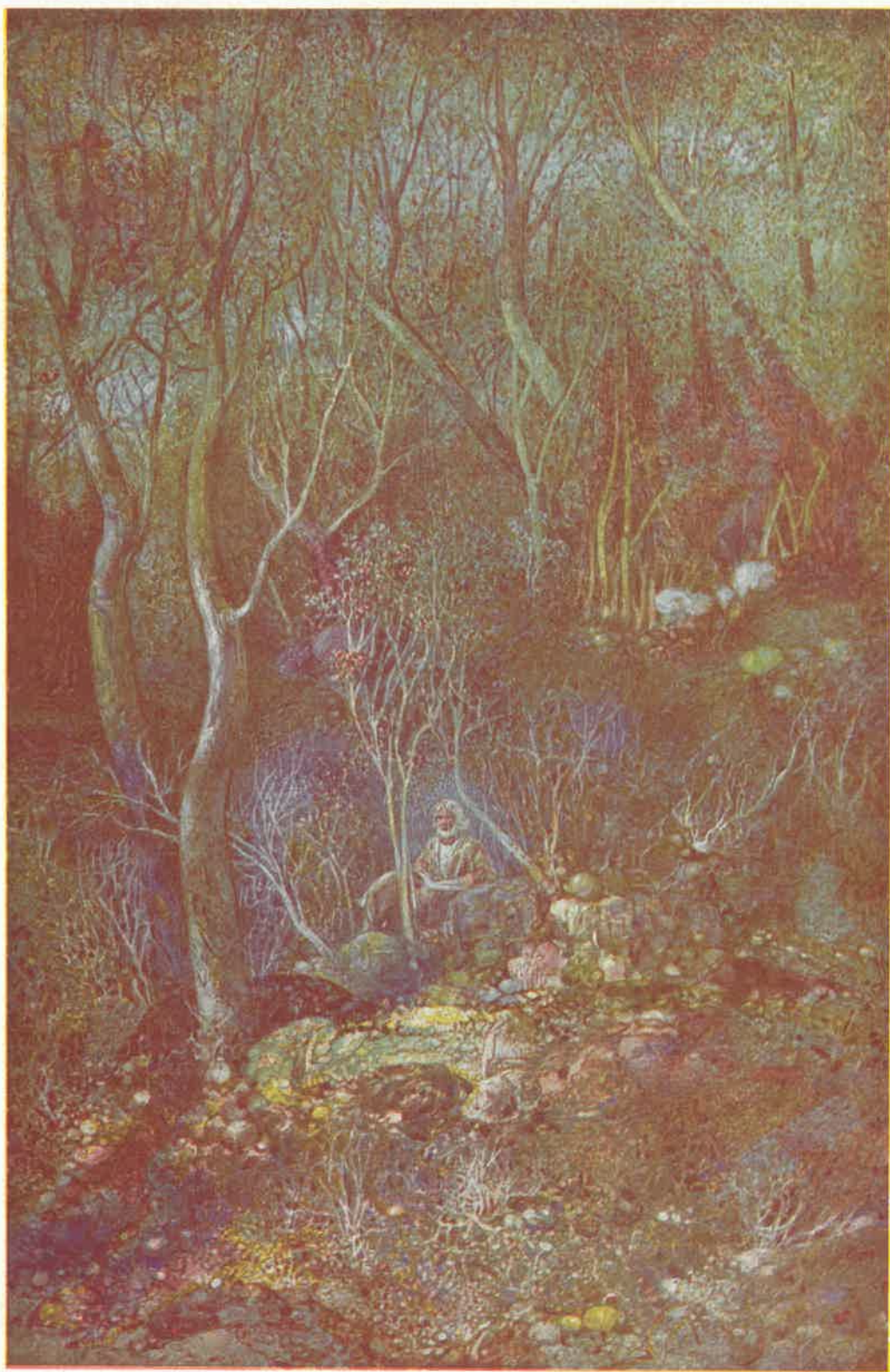
Now in his late seventies, Fyzee Rahamin still paints occasionally. The art world around him has changed, but he can look back with pride on a long and successful career as a painter as well as a writer on art subjects. He was already acknowledged in the nineteen thirties as one of the most competent and accomplished painters working in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. His portraits were very favourably compared with those of his teacher, Sargent, and his paintings were seen in exhibitions all over Europe, at the Royal Academy in London, at the Gallery of George Petit in Paris, at Knoedler's in New York, and at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Though sceptical of some of the modern trends in contemporary Pakistani painting which, he argues, are not too deeply rooted either in the soil, or in human conscience, he still continues to be a most sympathetic guide and teacher to the younger painters.

AHAMIN. *Portrait.*



▼ FYZEE RAHAMIN. *Kathleen.*





▲ ALLAH BUKHSH. *The Poet*. Watercolour.

"Ustad" Allah Bukhsh ("Ustad" is an honorific which means "master") and Haji Mohammad Sharif are also in their seventies. Both of them are prolific painters, almost religiously devoted to art. To this day, they have kept up their routine of working several hours every day.

Allah Bukhsh started his career early, learning to draw in the traditional manner, and concentrating on allegorical figure drawings. This early interest in legends and mythological themes has introduced a certain super-imposed mystic element in his otherwise simple descriptive and decorative works. These reflect the mood and temperament of this "artist-recluse" in its colourful though conventional manifestations, often reminding one of the paintings of Blake and his school at one extreme, and those of the early nineteenth century book illustrators on the other.

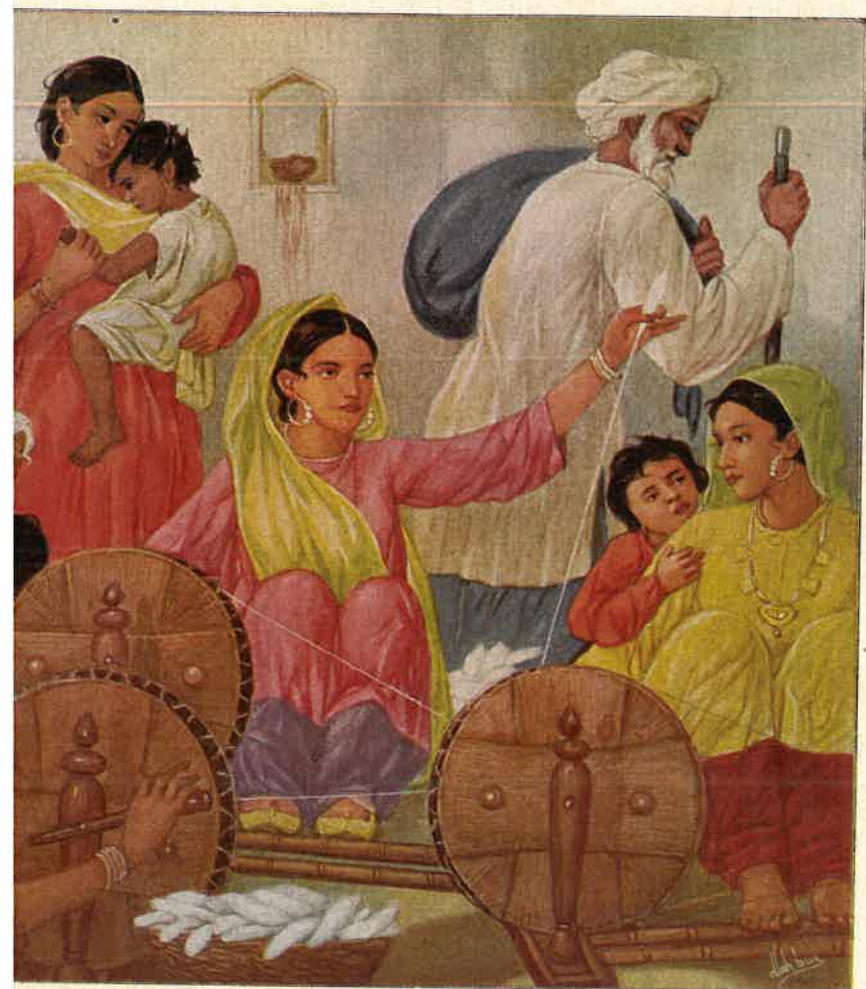
This is true of his emotional treatment of legends and legendary subjects as well as of his "mystical" rendering of rocks, rivulets and tree-forms, where technique is often subordinated to over-riding thematic demands, thus accounting for a certain flatness in his paintings, too obvious in their statement, even when it comes to mystic statement. Nevertheless, there is a felicity and ease of manner, and also an understanding of the rustic and folk idioms which marks out his otherwise native treatment of legendary themes and popular scenes. Allah Bukhsh revels in a sympathetic, often flattering portrayal of the life and chores of the commonality of men and women. His flat, almost photographic realism has an unostentatious charm and a validity of its own.



Like Chughtai, Allah Bakhsh also has had no strict schooling in art, and learned it the hard way — on his own. Even today, the world outside does not bother him too much; neither is he interested at all in the changing trends in art. "I paint what is in me", he says modestly but firmly, and he sincerely means it. He has no use for theories. "The eye is the best guide for the hand: that is all there is to it. The rest depends only on work, on continuous, consistent discipline" he often muses as he works on one canvas after another with the astounding speed and felicity of a craftsman who seems to multiply even without growing!



ALLAH BUKHSH. *Jatti Punjab Di*. Oil. ►

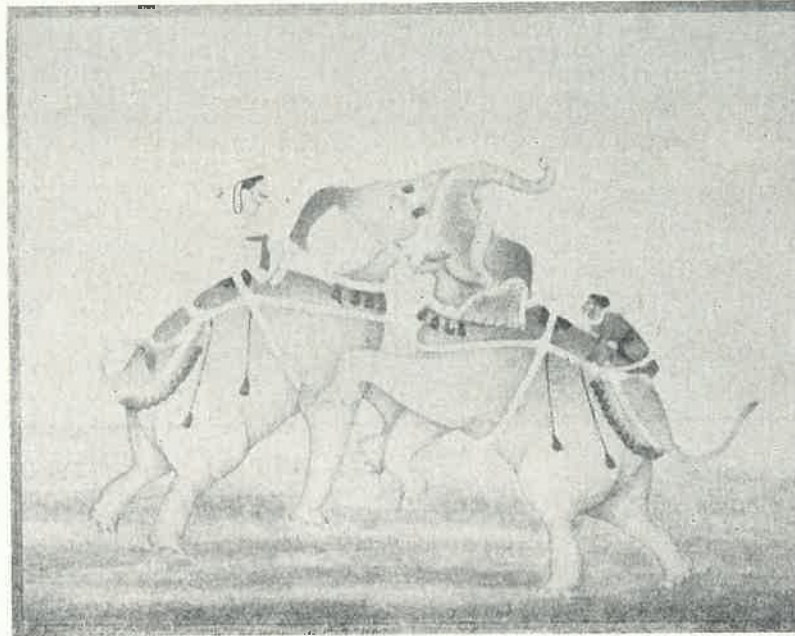


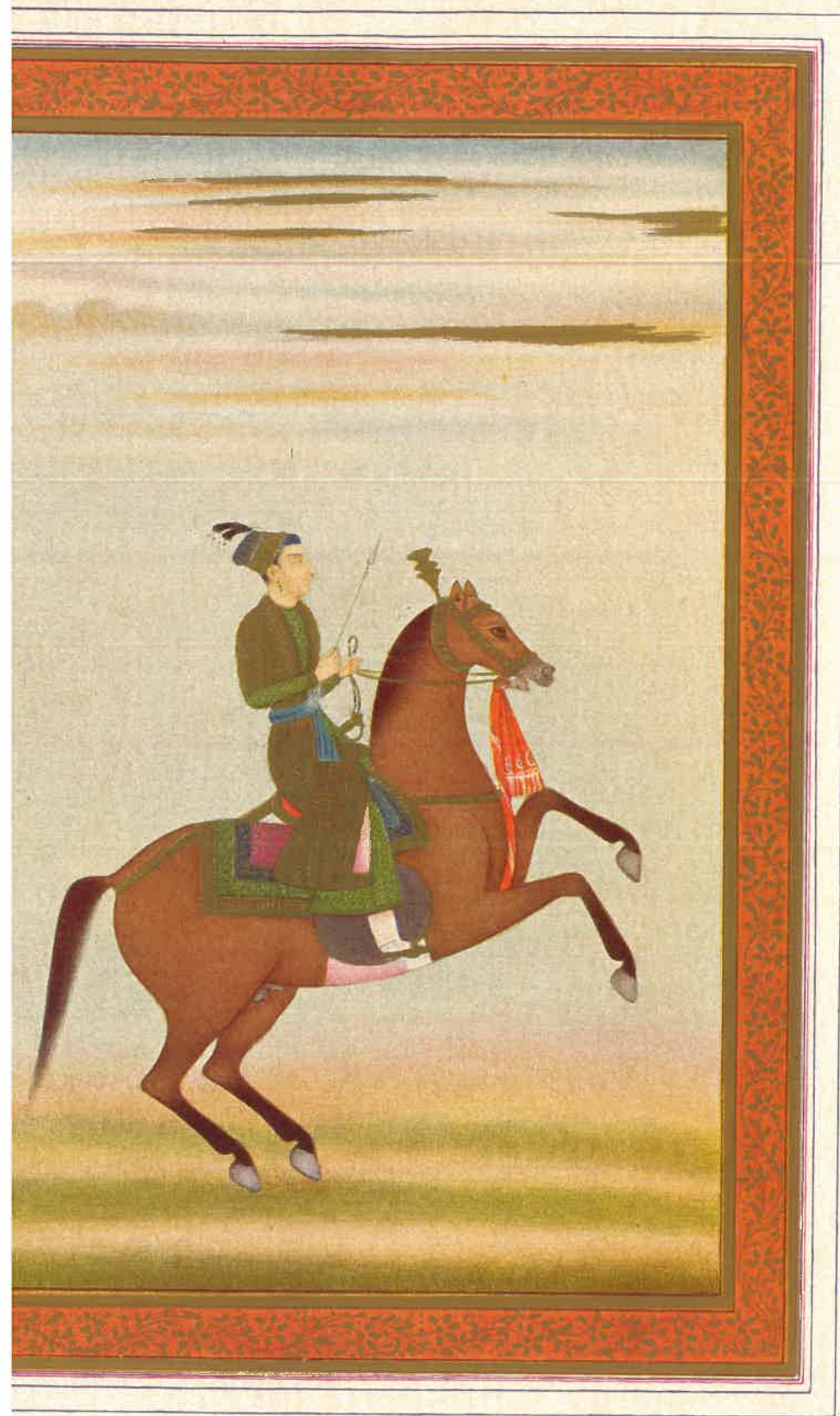
KHSH. *Charkha*. Oil

HAJI SHARIF

About the same age as Allah Bukhsh, Haji Sharif has been teaching the technique of miniature painting for more than 40 years now, and is himself one of the finest living exponents of the traditional methods of Mughal miniature paintings. It is true that his own work is almost entirely derivative, an echo, as it were, of well-known Mughal and Kangra miniatures. But he is quite outstanding as a master craftsman. As pointed out by Zainul Abedin, his painter-colleague who heads the Government Art Institute in Dacca, "The competence and craftsmanship of the Master is astounding, and it is an inspiration to see him at work. He prepares his colours to his own formula from earth colours and vegetable and mineral ingredients. He prepares his own paper, and brushes are made from local squirrel tail and feather quills, while raw gold is beaten into gold leaf for illumination".

▼ HAJI SHARIF. *Elephant Fight*. Watercolour.





ce Salim. Watercolour.

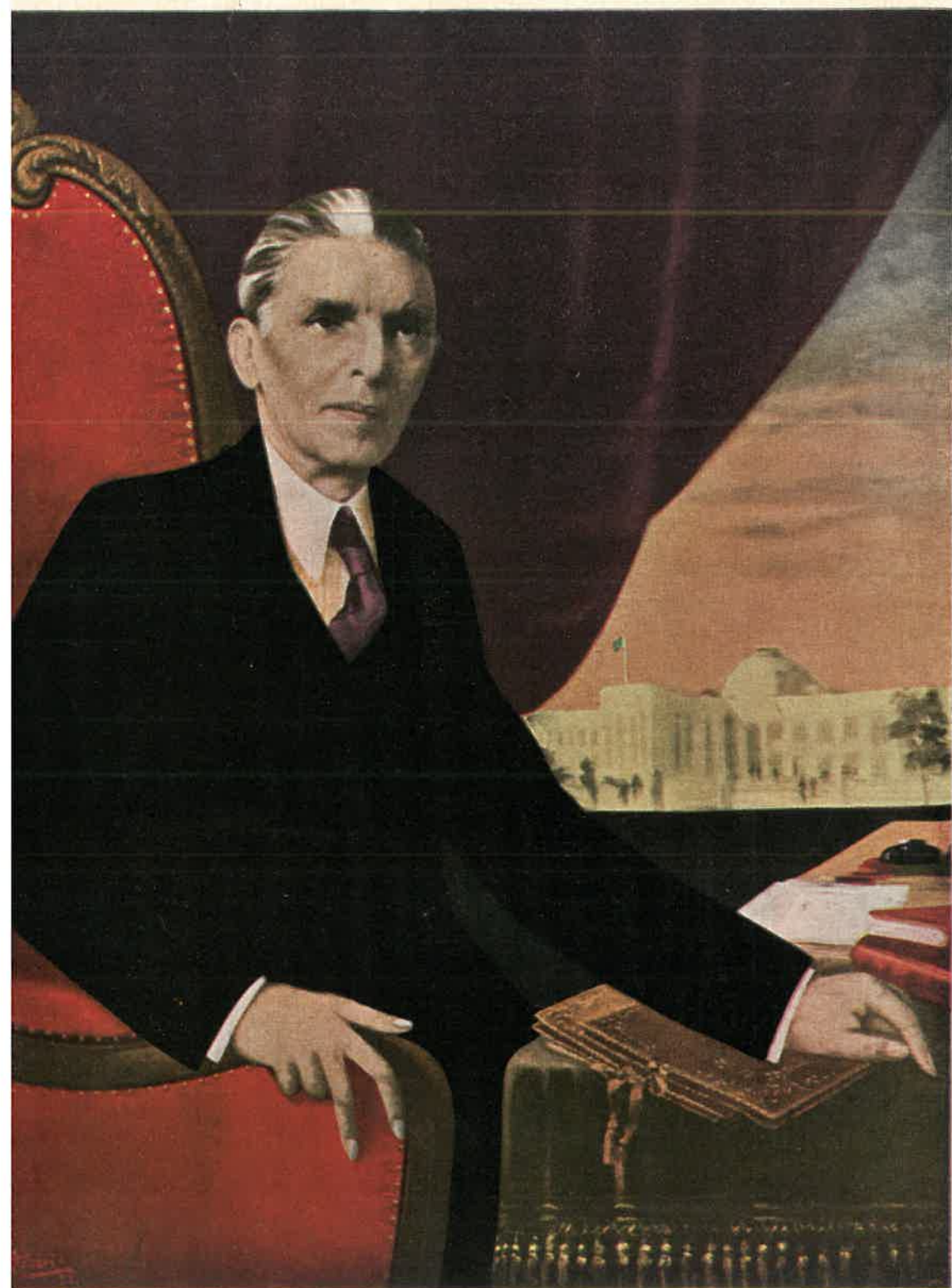
Two other teacher-painters who may be discussed along with the older group, though still in their fifties, are Syed Hasan Askari and Sheikh Ahmad. Both of them have had active careers as Vice-Principals of Art Schools, and are now doing considerable work as commissioned painters and also, occasionally, as art teachers.

ASKARI

Askari is chiefly a portrait painter, and his portrait gallery is filled with high personages, obviously delineated with an eye on elegance rather than characterisation. It includes a number of imaginary portraits of Mughal princesses like *Zebunnissa* and *Jahanara*, and comes down to contemporary equivalents of equally sophisticated *elite* of the society. His academic training as a painter, and his subsequent teaching career have marked him out as a proficient artist. He seems to know all the classical rules of the game, and yet his work is lacking in that essential element which distinguishes prettiness of a sort with real aesthetic quality of a work of art.

Askari has travelled all over Europe, in particular the United Kingdom, studying the rich art collections there. He has illustrated books like *Marsias* (Elegies) of the Urdu poet Meer Anees, designed stained-glass windows for a chapel, painted murals such as a huge painting of the great battle of Kerbala for the Nawab of Rampur, modelled relief panels and statues and painted landscapes. But above all his fame rests on his work as a portrait artist. In the days of the British in India, he was commissioned to paint numerous portraits for the Viceregal Lodge and the War Office; and many of the ruling princes also were among his patrons. In Pakistan, he has painted several portraits of the Quaid-i-Azam, apart from stray portraits of leading personalities, and a whole gallery of portraits executed for the Nawabs of Khairpur.

His work is all done in the good old academic style, with a wealth of detail, meticulous drawing, and carefully graduated colours and tones. The dark palette and the reposing harmonies differentiate his work from latter-day styles. Most noticeable is the nature of his aesthetic ideal — a delectable and somewhat dramatic kind of beauty. This makes him select such subjects as gorgeously dressed princesses, romantic scenes in a setting of fabulously adorned palaces, and great public dignitaries glimmering out of the dark panoply of their setting. As a corollary to the above, he lavishes all his care on the textural beauty of skins and stuffs, making them pretty and attractive. There is no hint of tragedy or bitterness or cynicism in his work. Everything is sweet and honied, devoid of passion, movement or characterisation. It is a very different experience from what one gets from the paintings of these days generally.



RI. *Quaid-i-Azam*. Oil.

SHEIKH AHMED

Sheikh Ahmad, now in his fifties, has had an interesting career, spending a number of his early years in the United States where he first started his study of painting. Later he went to Britain where he taught at the Central School of Art, before returning to Pakistan where he was appointed on the staff of the then Mayo School of Art. Lithographs were his early interest, and his work done in this medium in U.S.A. more than twenty years ago, demonstrated the strict schooling in draftsmanship which he had.

Sheikh Ahmad is also a keen portrait painter and has done very considerable work as a commercial artist, illustrating books for a number of publishers in Pakistan and abroad. He has also created striking designs based on traditional motifs, and some of these have been effectively used for crystal glass and glazed pottery. He is at present busy organising an Institute of Art and Design in Karachi, and it is chiefly as a pioneer and teacher of art and design that Sheikh Ahmad has made his most valuable contribution to a better appreciation of artistic tradition and heritage in Pakistan.

▼ SHEIKH AHMAD, *Musicians*.





SHEIKH AHMAD. *Dark Lady*. Oil.



▲ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Madonna* 1943. Brush and Ink.

ZAINUL ABEDIN

Most popular among this group of "realists" is 45-year-old Zainul Abedin, to whom recognition came relatively early in life, when he was only 26. It was 1943, year of the big rice famine in Bengal, when nearly three million men, women and children suffered the agony of starvation, disease and endemic death. People from the villages marched in hundreds and thousands to the metropolis, Calcutta, in search of food. Many died on the way, while others fought a losing battle with growling street dogs and crows for bits and morsels of food in rotting dust-bins.

Zainul Abedin, then a young art teacher who, as a boy, had run away from his home because he wanted to grow up as a painter of romantic landscape, and spent his vacations painting the colourful Santhal tribal women, one day saw a mother and child very different from the kind of 'Mother and Child' pictures he used to copy from classics or paint from life. He forgot his art classes and went back to his basement roomette almost in a trance. That evening he painted his *Madonna 1943*—a powerful drawing, with the barest economy of line, on an emaciated buff background. It depicted a child scavenging for milk in the famished breast of a horrifying skeleton which was, not long ago, its mother! The intrigued, innocent and unquenched search of the child stood out as the most eloquent commentary on the whole tragic situation, and haunted the viewer with a challenge of which nobody seemed to know the answer!

ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Famine Sketch*. Brush and Ink.



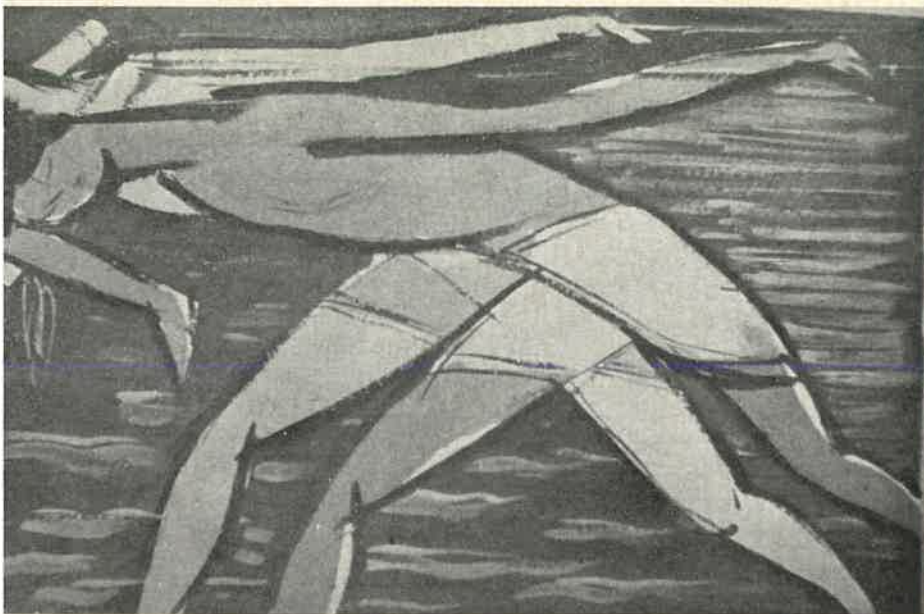


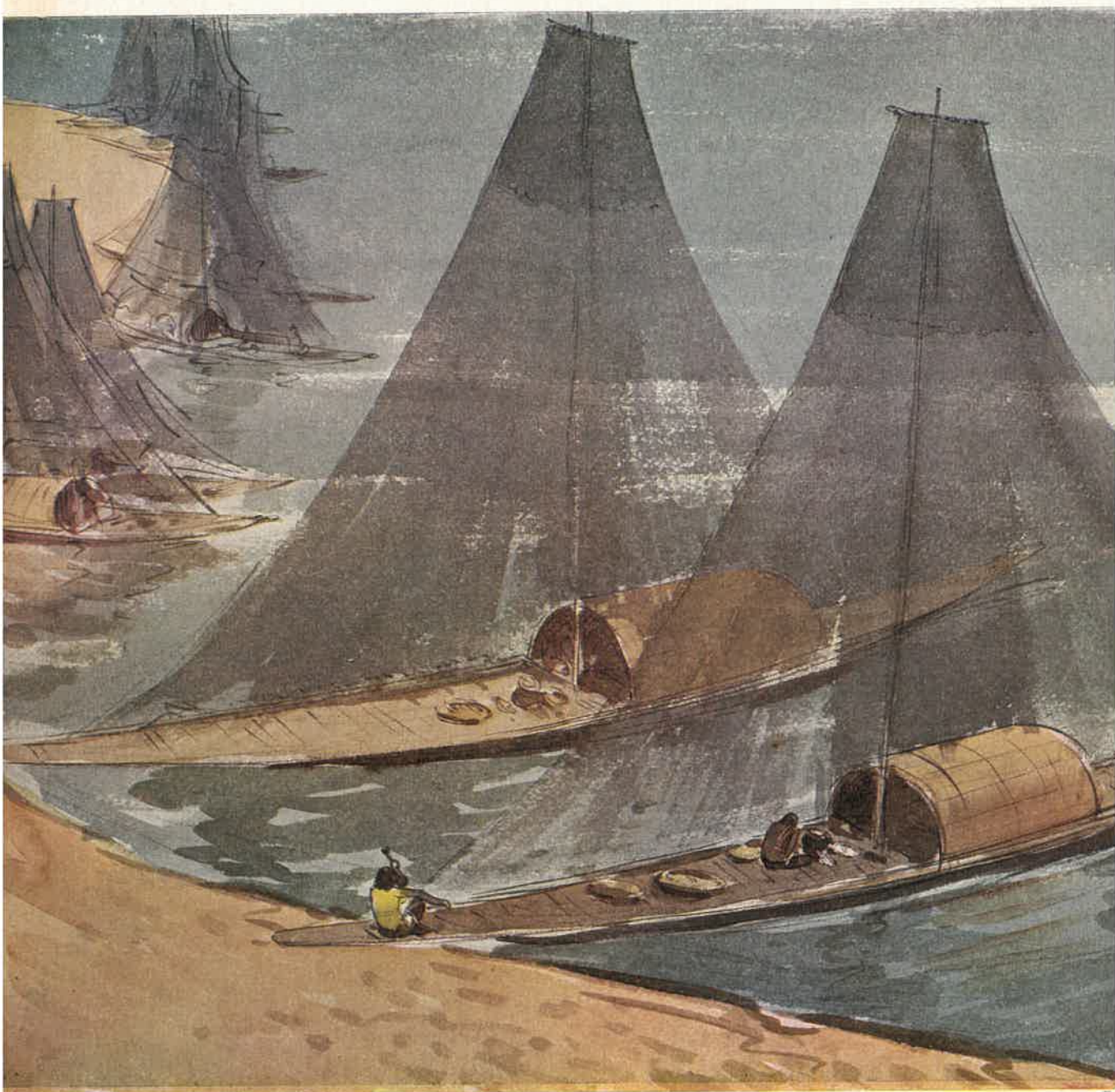
▲ ZAINUL ABEDIN, *Toilet*. Mixed Media.

This was the first of a large number of sketches, executed with astonishing speed, and with no other material except Indian ink and brush, on ordinary pieces of brown wrapping paper or strawboard. Almost overnight, the name Zainul Abedin flashed across artistic circles. While art critics talked of his unsurpassed mastery of line and the staggering impact of his concentrated vision, young Zainul Abedin himself silently worked for months on one drawing after another.

Recreating the scene a few years later, one of his critics, Stuart Griffin wrote: "Like a Goya angry over captive suffering over what wounds and war do to human beings, Zainul Abedin grew angry and, like the Spaniard, he painted, angrily. Day and night he sketched, for days on end, his eyes glued to the terrible panorama, and when the hunger finally lifted, 2,000 sketches were there, to depict the Indian horror, for anyone to come and see and try to fathom. A young, virtually unknown artist, became almost immediately recognised".

Today, Zainul Abedin — shy, sensitive, strong-willed as ever — is the leading artist of what has come to be known popularly as the Dacca Art Group. He is also Principal of the Government Art Institute at Dacca, in East Pakistan. His paintings and drawings have been widely seen and admired in exhibitions organised by the UNESCO and various international bodies, as well as in major one-man shows in the United Kingdom, France and Turkey, in Japan, Mexico and the United States.





▲ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Boats*. Watercolour.

Wrote a Japanese art critic, Elise Grilli: "In design, approach and in technique, this painter sums up the heritage of a very old art and the new ideas that now circle the globe so quickly. He is well aware of the complexities of space, the fragmentation of form, and the geometrization of nature that the cubists advocated, but he takes from this new lore only as much as he can blend with the tradition that so richly abounds in his own land."

Reviewing an earlier exhibition of Zainul Abedin's works at Berkeley Galleries in London in 1952, Eric Newton had observed: "Here one can see the combination, which one had thought almost impossible, of Orient and Occident. He is capable of observing and of contemplating at the same time, and the tempo of the brush that never hesitates yet is never flustered is exactly right for his purpose. It is as though the Oriental hand, holding the brush in the traditional Oriental way, and using nothing but fluent black ink and water on absorbent paper, had been guided by a European eye."

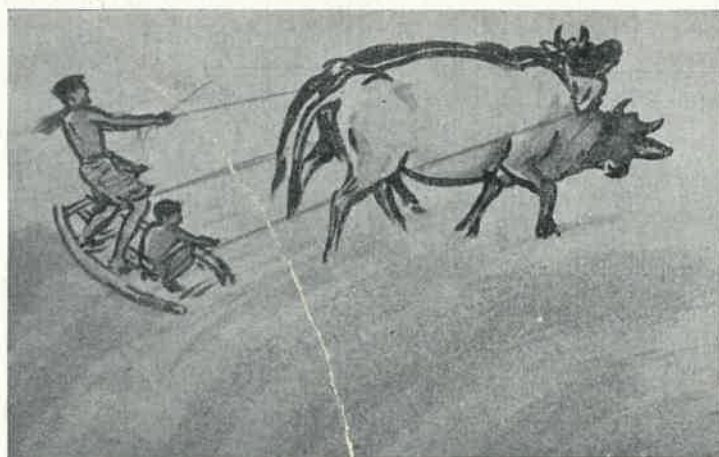
Born in 1917, in East Pakistan's pastoral and paddy-growing district of Mymensingh, Zainul Abedin grew up in an atmosphere of unsophisticated life and landscape, enlivened by the quiet-flowing Brahmaputra river, majestically winding its way through the countryside. On the banks were fishermen's little huts nestling amidst tall, graceful palm trees and coconut groves, suddenly brought to life by strong-muscled boatmen pulling their boats and ferries to anchor, and women working in the fields, their shapely, graceful figures almost bare, ebonised by the vagaries of tropical life out in sun and rain. It was this simple beauty, with its sad introspection, and a certain tragic quality about it, which he later deftly captured in the scaffolding of his brisk, bold and strong lines, and his soft, glistening watercolours.



▼ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Mogh Girl*. Watercolour.



▲ ZAINUL ABED



▲ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Mowing*. Brush and watercolour.



Zainul Abedin has literally painted his way through poverty and suffering which came to him in the wake of an early rebellion from the family tradition and aspirations which wanted him to shape as a Police Officer. Instead, he found his way, with remarkable perseverance and steadfastness, to the Calcutta School of Art and completed his six-year Diploma Course in Fine Arts with distinction. Immediately he was appointed on the teaching staff of the School.

In 1947, when Pakistan emerged as an independent country, Abedin drew up plans for an Art Institute at Dacca which has since grown to be the finest institution in Pakistan, imparting instruction in fine as well as graphic arts through a five-year course. Zainul Abedin himself is the Principal and even now, in the midst of the withering administrative routine which his full-time job as the head of a teaching art institution entails, he still manages to find time for paying a painter's tribute to El Greco's house in Spain, spends weeks of wayside sketching in Mexico, flies to Japan to learn the technique of Japanese print-making and woodcuts, or simply disappears in the fascinating wilds of East Pakistan's tribal hill tracts, and returns after months of hectic semi-primitive living, armed with fondly collected specimens of tribal and folk art, and scrap-books full of a thousand sketches and powerful drawings.

In the years since his earliest paintings and sketches brought him international acclaim, Zainul Abedin has painted extensively, in a wide variety of style, ranging from the purely objective and almost photographic, to various abstract and semi-abstract studies. Besides watercolours, and brush and ink which are his favourite, he also handled oils, producing some lovely figure studies like *Santhal Maidens*. Among his mixed media and egg tempera studies, two are quite outstanding: *Woman with Pitcher* and *Toilet*.

Already in his post-famine paintings there was discernible a definite search for poise and restraint, which marks his maturer work like the powerful *Way to Quaid's Grave* and *Santhal Maidens*. As Eric Newton pointed out while commenting on his watercolours and oil paintings of this period: "Here the need for urgency has disappeared. There is no longer any need to force the pace of the brush. The water-borne vegetable market is a joyful, colourful sight, full of details bound together by the rhythmic sweep of the boats. Here the artist's faculty for composition is called into play; and here again East is fused with West. The spacing of the main masses is Oriental; the observed fact is Occidental. Again and again the placing of each feature is reminiscent of Asia, yet the detail itself might have been drawn by an English water-colourist." It is this ability to fuse the East and the West that makes the student of art watch out for Abedin's future work with considerable optimism.

▼ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *Three Figures*. Oil on paper.



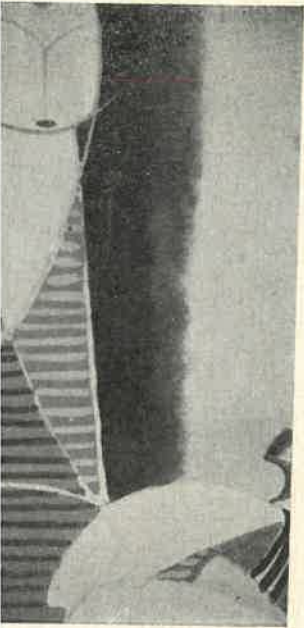
▼ ZAINUL ABEDIN. *A Maiden*. Pen Watercolour.



ABEDIN, *Poise*, Pen and Watercolour. ►



MIN. *Woman with Pitcher*.
Gouache.



SAFIUDDIN AHMAD

While the search for realism and a certain emotional content mark the work of Zainul Abedin, the indigenous folk tradition inspires the work of another artist-colleague of his, Safiuddin Ahmad, whose career has closely followed the pattern of Abedin's, but whose work differs very significantly from his. Safiuddin also teaches at the Dacca Art Institute, and is head of the Graphic Section. He is primarily a craftsman, with great technical ability, and a rare feeling for form and composition. For more than two decades, he has been experimenting with various techniques of wood-engraving and etching, including aquatint and drypoint. It was in 1946 that a number of his works, including *Dumka* (Wood-engraving), *Happy Home* (Aquatint) and *Homeward* (Dry-point) were selected and exhibited in Paris at the International Exhibition of Modern Art sponsored by UNESCO.

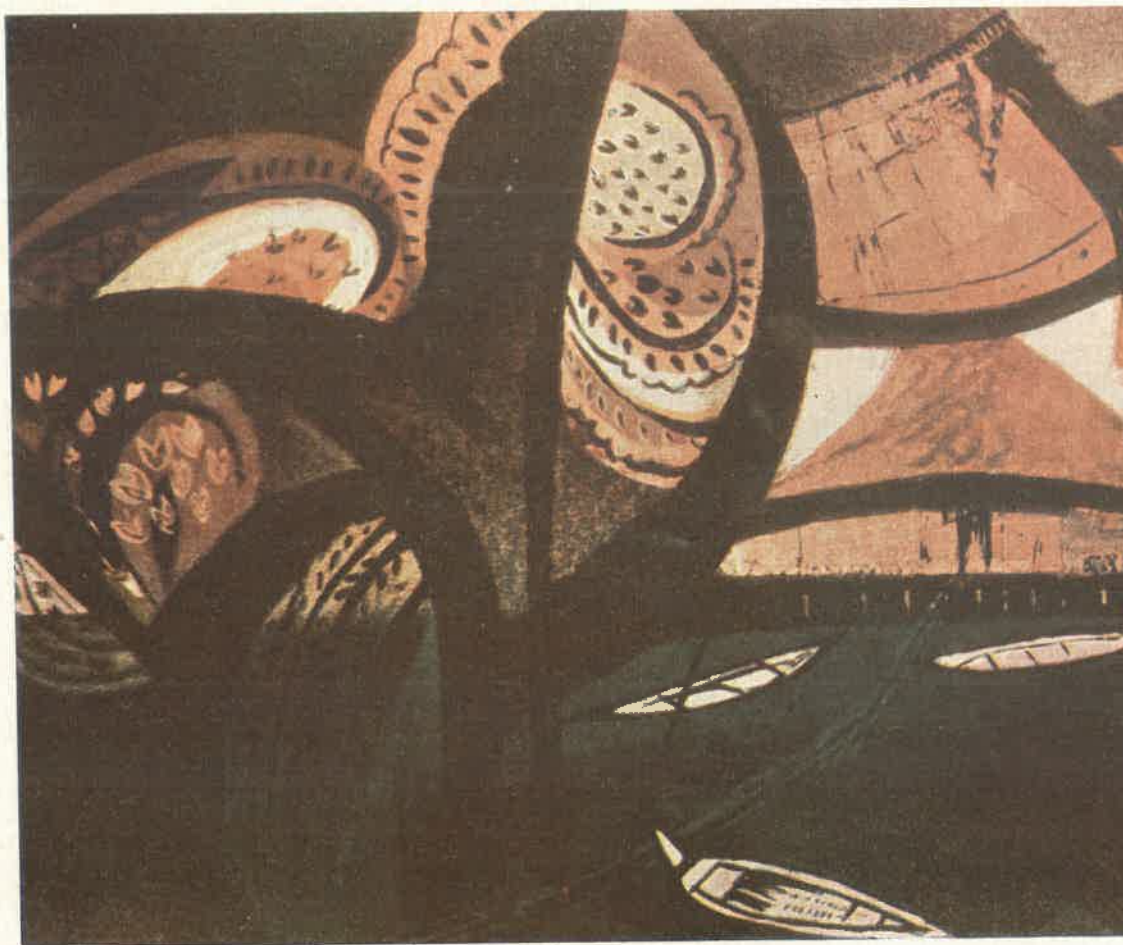
Born in 1922 Safiuddin has had strict, academic training in art, having graduated from the Government School of Art, Calcutta (now Government College of Arts and Crafts). He also carried out post-graduate practical research there, specialising in Etching, Wood-Engraving and Mural Painting. Safiuddin's early interests also included a formal study of the folk tradition, and its visual and aesthetic manifestations in such things as ceramics, toys and fabrics.



▲ SAFIUDDIN. *Way through Jungle*. Wood-cut.



▲ SAFIUDDIN. *The Bridge Across*. Etching and aquatint.



▲ SAFIUDDIN. *Receding Flood*. Aquatint.

A good example of his early work is his fascinating study of *Santhal Women*. Here the folk idiom has been dexterously used to give a rare authenticity to what is essentially a lyrical statement. The turning and twisting tree-trunks in the distance harmonise with pitcher-curves and the supple, subtly balanced figures of the Santhal girls, while the horizontal strokes of the water-surface and tree-texture in the foreground are brought out in sharp contrast with short vertical strokes of the simple embroidery motif and the drooping hands and feet. This gives a certain massiveness and solidity to the whole composition, blending life with landscape which his selective eye carefully chose in its lush abundance of foliage and its perennial pastoral mood.



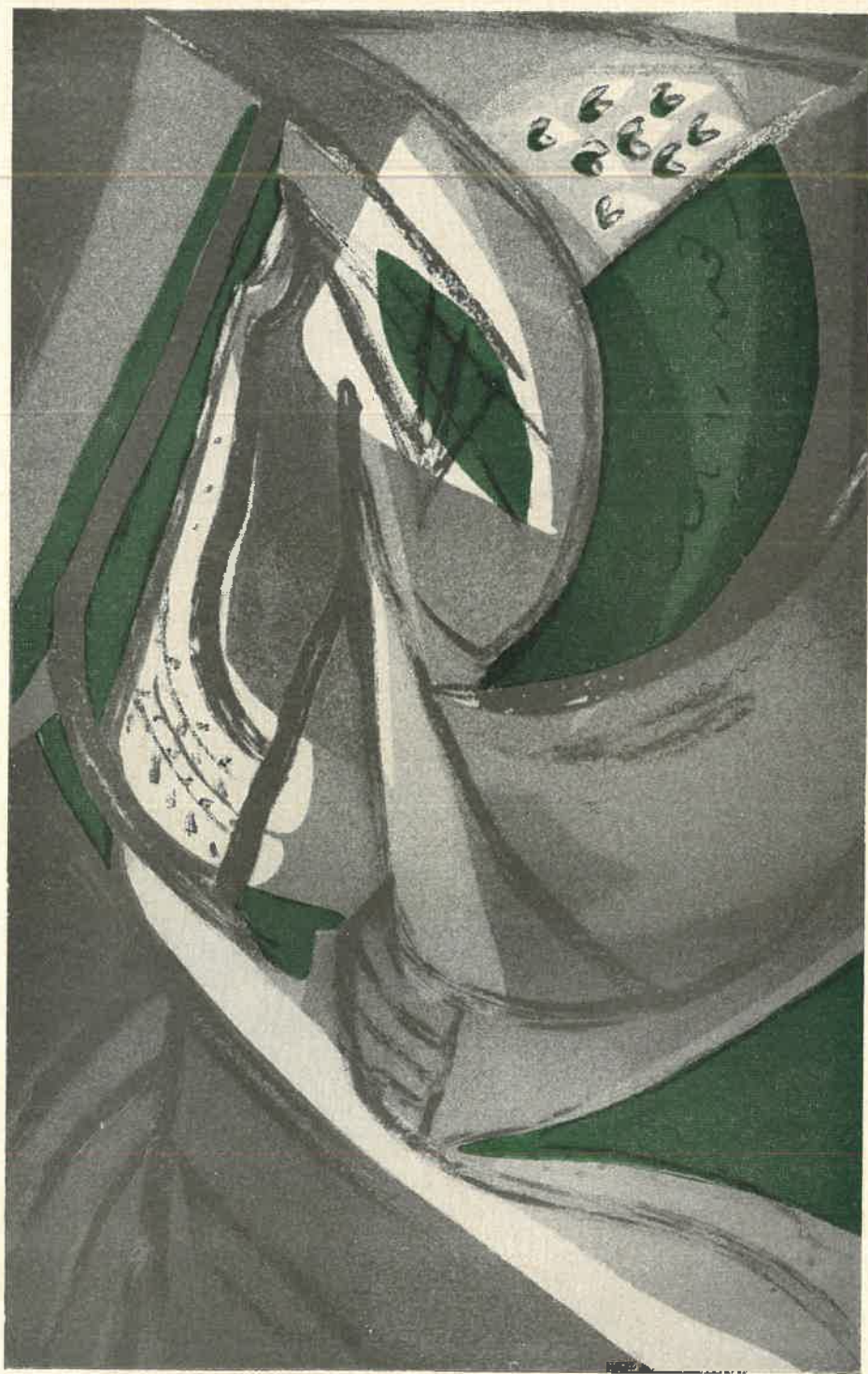
▲ SAFI UDDIN. *Santhal Maidens*. Woodcut.

Safiuddin has worked in several mediums, but above all else he is an etcher. In 1956, Safiuddin went on a study tour of United Kingdom and the European continent, and also took Diploma in Graphic Arts from the Central School of Art in London. This introduced him once again to the technical possibilities of etching and aquatint, and his new works, including a series of etchings on the theme of floods, are powerful as well as refreshing. As one of his critics, Fazle Lohani, pointed out in the introduction to the catalogue of Safiuddin's one-man show at London's New Vision Centre Gallery in 1959: "For this highly sensitive artist the many patterns in gushing water, the ebbs and the whirlpools, the low-clouds and the high-tides, have a different meaning. And he has followed this verdict of his own feelings as truthfully as he can. By reason of the fact that he has been able to comprehend the intrinsic nature of this — for him — new realm of discovery, his work has become enormously exciting, sincere and persuasive".

Actually, Safiuddin's new work, as will appear from the specimens reproduced here, has taken him further away from naturalism, and nearer to the group of innovators whose work will be discussed in the next chapter as part of the evolution of a new visual vocabulary.



▲ SAFIUDDIN. *Flood (1)*. Aquatint.



▲ SAFIUDDIN. *Flood (2)*. Aquatint.

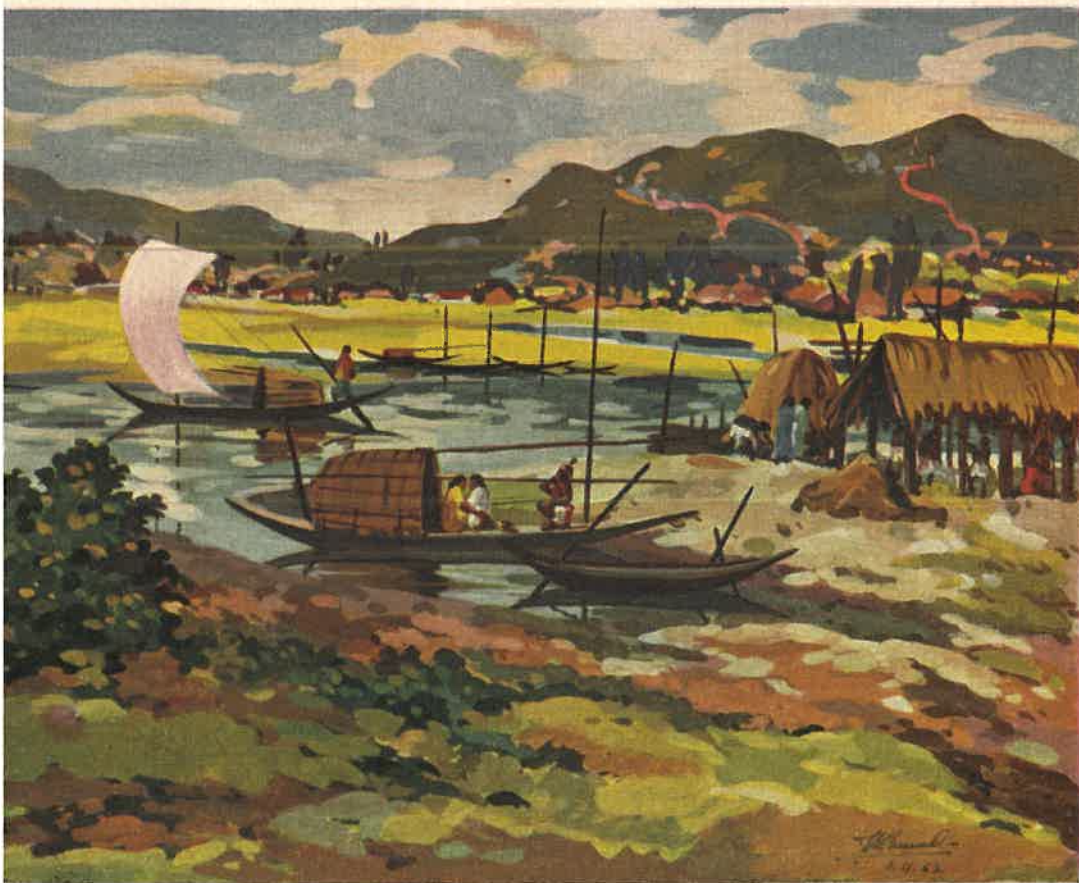
ANWARUL HAQUE

Other teacher-painters on the staff of the Dacca Art Institute, who have produced some interesting work, are Anwarul Haque, Khwaja Shafiq and Qamrul Hasan. Anwarul Haque is primarily a landscape painter, though some of his earlier portraits showed considerable talent for characterisation. He has painted exclusively in and around Dacca, devoting his attention more and more to the sad but colourful life of fishing villages, evoking in charming watercolours their simple dwellings, their crafts and the air of uncertainty which dominates their entire outlook.

A frugal, slow painter, Anwarul Haque often works for weeks on a particular canvas, suddenly abandoning it, until long afterwards when he "comes back" to it, as he says. Among his more interesting works are the delectable canvases of the vigorous, expansive landscape around Garo hills on the Pakistan side of the Indo-Pakistan border, which depict the post-monsoon lush greenery in all the myriad shades and tones of green and blue, with occasional violets, purples and mauves glowing in sharp contrast.

▼ ANWARUL HAQUE. *Boats*. Watercolour.





KHWAJA SHAFIQ. *East Pakistan Landscape*. Mixed media.

KHWAJA SHAFIQ

Khwaja Shafiq is fond of watercolours, and some of his studies are quite striking, like his *Mohurru Procession* and *Chowk Bazar in Flames*, which he painted on the spot during the big fire in Dacca a few years ago, which completely destroyed the main Chowk Bazar area. From the very beginning, he showed an interest in graphic arts and his early lithographs like *Narbada Waterfalls* and *Nakhuda Mosque* showed his episodic and documentary genius. In recent years, commercial art has increasingly claimed his attention, but it must be said to his credit that he has not allowed the commercial idiom to colour his creative work. His *East Pakistan Landscape* reproduced above, has obviously an illustrational intent, but the freshness and authenticity of vision imparts to it considerable aesthetic integrity.

QAMRUL HASAN

Younger in age as well as in spirits than his other two colleagues, Qamrul Hasan is fast and prolific: he is tough and vigorous in appearance as in his work. He has recently given up his art teacher's job and is now working as Chief Designer with the Small Industries Corporation in Dacca, where his talent as a painter as well as a designer have found fuller expression.

Born in 1921, Qamrul Hasan has had a chequered career, having struggled hard before getting admission in the Calcutta Art Institute in 1938. Two years later, he had to abandon his studies temporarily to make a living. It was during this period that he found an interesting job with a doll-maker, painting in Chinese lacquer the eye-balls, the eye-lashes and the lips. "As the featureless lump of baked clay sprang to life under my brush, I realised for the first time the great power of art", he says. Three years later he returned to the Art Institute, and completed his Diploma course. While still a student, three of his watercolours were chosen for display at the then All-India Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition held at Museum Hall, Calcutta. A year later, 30 of his watercolours, pencil-sketches and line-drawings were accepted and shown.

▼ QAMRUL HASAN. *The Villoge*. Tempera.



QAMRUL HASAN, *Neighbours*. Oil. ►



SAN, *Mother and Child*. Watercolour.





▲ QAMRUL HASAN. *Gossip*. Oil.

Qamrul Hasan is not particularly happy in painting landscapes; also urban buildings and architecture are no themes for him. "I have always been fascinated by the endearing variety and suppleness of the human figure and form", he quietly muses. His early figure-studies, almost in monochrome, were executed with watercolour washes providing the textural background and bold brushwork in black, used to create strong, broad outlines of such subjects as a woman bathing in a pond with drops of water quietly dripping, a girl waiting for the unknown lover and a snake-charmer whose hypnotic concentration is caught in all its warmth and beauty. He is also an ardent lithographer, working deftly on the stone with litho chalk or litho ink. Some of his lithographs and line-drawings have been accepted for use in UNESCO-sponsored books for new-literates in Asia.



▲ QAMRUL HASAN. *Morg, Morgi*. Oil.

SULTAN

Perhaps the most promising among this group of realistic painters was S. M. Sultan, a wandering recluse by temperament. A painter of the impressionist school, Sultan showed himself an astute draughtsman, capable of using watercolour and oils as well as pastel and pen-and-ink with unhesitating felicity. His primary interest seemed to lie in capturing the mood, the movement, the liquid atmosphere caught unawares, as it were.

Being essentially a landscape painter, with a feeling for colour, he chose idyllic scenes from Kashmir and Bengal for the majority of his paintings. Born and bred amidst strife, Sultan craved for peace: and he found it only in Nature, in deep waters 'stilled at even', in timeless mountains and valleys, in the carefree poise of trees and the transparent expansiveness of boundless fields. He contrasted this "inner peace" of Nature with the struggle and strife which is the essence of human life. He spoke with pride of his ambition to make nature more natural, to add more of autumn to autumn, more of spring to spring.

In 1954, Sultan visited the United States and brought back with him the deep impression which some of the American painters like de Kooning and Motherwell made on him. But he has since shut himself up in a small village in Jessore (East Pakistan) shunning visitors and experimenting with many varied techniques. He has not participated in any exhibition ever since his return from the United States, and his recent work is yet to see the light of day.

▼ SULTAN. *Village Scene (I)*. Oil.



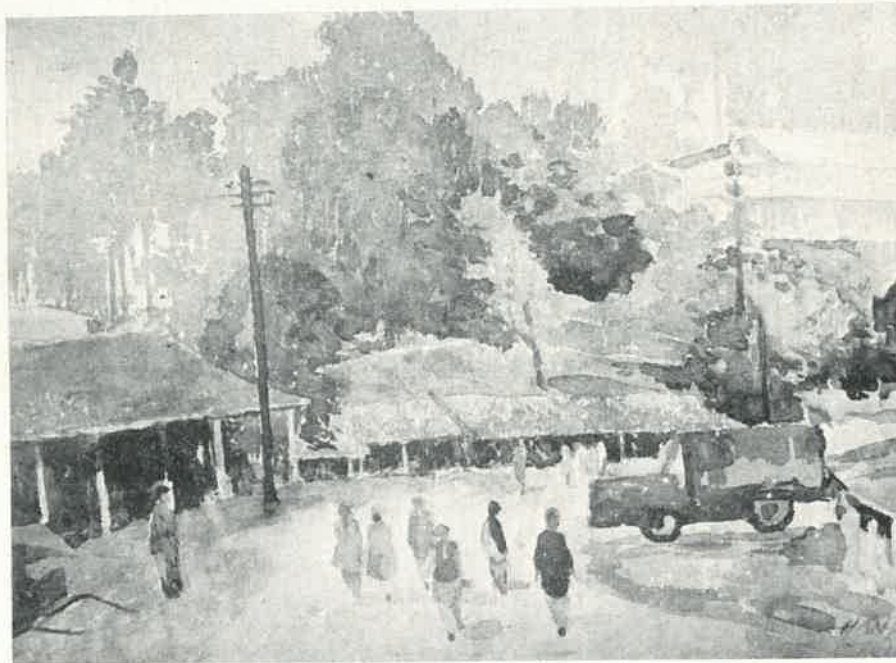


Village Scene (2). Oil.

Like Qamrul Hasan, Khwaja Shafiq and Anwarul Haque in East Pakistan, there are painters in West Pakistan too, who have been attracted by traditional motifs and designs which have been rediscovered and exploited as directly "contemporary" forms and expressions. A. S. Nagi, essentially a commissioned portrait painter, has done this as part of his subsidiary interest in interior decoration, while Hanjra, Mubarak Husain, Sardar Mohammad and Latif have given it a commercial orientation, painting delectable landscapes and exotic life-studies which go so well on calendars and for illustrational purposes.

HANJRA

Muhammad Husain Hanjra, like Sheikh Ahmed, is a teacher as well as a painter. Two of his works are reproduced here, and serve to bring out his humanism, and the long discipline he has had as a naturalistic painter of life and landscape. In turn, he has rigidly enforced this discipline on his students and several of his colleagues who came under his influence during the last decade and a half.



▲ HANJRA. *Frost in Murree*. Watercolour.



. Oil

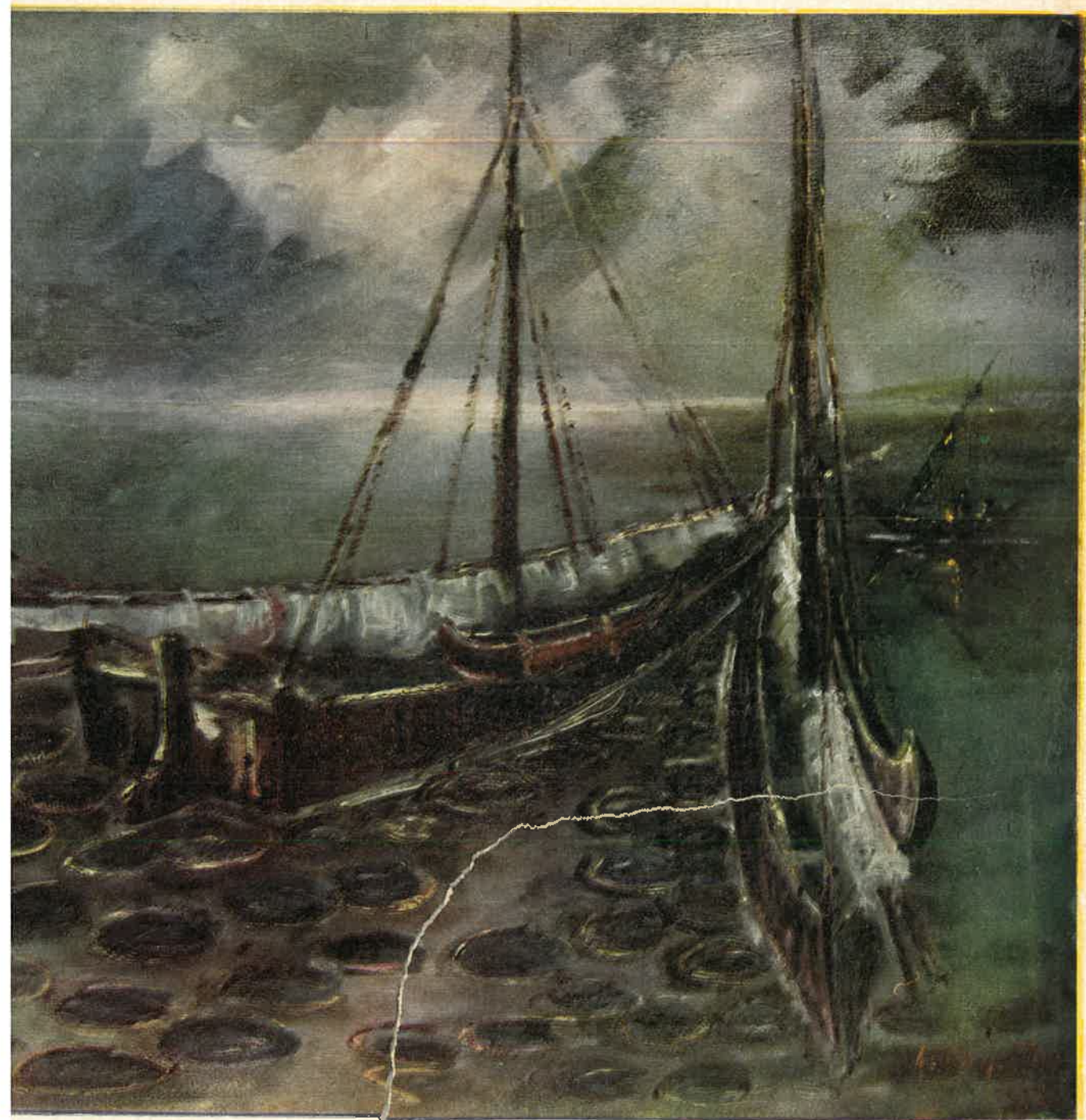
The group of naturalistic painters working in Karachi have found an attractive market in commercial art and advertising, a fact which tends to influence their attitude and style to a considerable extent. The art world here, as in any metropolitan town with its new-rich art patrons, has its share of flattering and glamorous portraits, pretty landscapes with so-called "local colour", and decorative treatments of one kind or another. However, quite apart from any commercial commissions they may execute to earn a living, some of these artists have produced genuine and serious works of art.

NAGI

A. Sayeed Nagi is that rarity—a "prosperous" artist—and is greatly in demand for his bright, slick and colourful resemblances in paint, which he executes with unusual speed and forthrightness. His interests are varied, ranging from elegant, colour-spangled figure-studies, to flattering luxuriant interior decoration. Anything colourful and gay draws him irresistibly: fabrics, flowers, clouds, waters. And he paints them with great abandon and gusto.



▲ A. S. NAGI. *Awakening*. Oil.



MUBARAK AND NAZIR

Though working in different mediums, both Mubarak Husain and the late A. B. Nazir (who died in 1961) may be termed 'academic' painters. The works of both abound in picturesque sights, scenes and type-faces from various parts of Pakistan. But while Mubarak Husain comes out most successfully in his glistening landscapes and delightful paintings of hills and dales, the *forte* of the late A. B. Nazir was romantic portraiture for which he found exotic subjects in life as well as in imagination.

Mubarak Husain's work ranges from canvases which please the popular eye to those bold departures which are more in keeping with modern temper. His eye picks out cool green spots, lagoons, glistening harbours: such scenes as are a pleasure to watch and make one yearn for outdoor life. His treatment of these subjects has changed from the soft-graded tones and gentle contours in the beginning, to more vigorous treatment in oblong patches of colour in his recent work.

NAZIR. *Toilet*. Oil. ►





AK. Landscape. Oil.

SARDAR, LATIF, MEHRAJ

Though pre-eminent in the field of advertising and commercial art, Sardar, Latif and Mehraj have in recent years devoted themselves increasingly to fine art, participating in local as well as national exhibitions.

Sardar in particular has shown considerable merit. He has been the recipient of several honourable mentions, and in 1960, his *Flight*, reproduced on the opposite page, was awarded one of the top prizes at the Third National Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture in Karachi.

Like Latif and Mehraj, Sardar also has a whole-time job as Art Director of an advertising agency, and together the three artists organised this year a combined exhibition of paintings done on the spot in Swat, a picturesque area in the north-west of Pakistan. The paintings by Latif and Mehraj, reproduced below, were included in this exhibition. One misses here any evidence of urgency or originality, but these are pleasing compositions with plenty of local colour.



▲ LATIF. *Swat Landscape*. Watercolour.



▲ MEHRAJ. *Rice Husking*. Watercolour.



Flight. Oil.

WOMEN PAINTERS

As pointed out earlier, an interesting aspect of the art movement in Pakistan is the keen enthusiasm shown by women as practising painters and sculptors. In fact among contemporary artists in the country, the names of Miss Zubeida Agha, who pioneered the Abstract art movement in Pakistan, and Miss Novera Ahmed, who has produced outstanding work in sculpture, are pre-eminent as *avant garde* in painting and sculpture respectively.

The most senior of them all is of course teacher-painter Mrs. Anna Molka Ahmed, at present Head of the Department of Fine Arts at the Punjab University in Lahore. Apart from her own work as a painter, her contribution to the promotion of art education among women in this country is immense. Her zeal and indefatigable work in this direction has been carried on over a period of two decades.

Mrs. Ahmed began by crusading for the recognition of Art as a University subject specially for women, and in the years since Pakistan came into being in 1947, the number of her students has shown a steady increase, term after term. Many of them have taken up art as a career, and quite a few have been abroad for advanced studies in the teaching and practice of art.

▼ RAZIA FEROZ. *Landscape*. Oil.





AN. Peacock. Powder Colour.

In recent years, there has emerged a very active group of women painters in Karachi, including Mrs. Atia Hasan, Mrs. Sughra Rababi, Mrs. Laila Shahzada, Khadija Begum and Mrs. Talat Qayyum. Two interesting additions have been Mrs. Mariam Khan who returned this year after a stay of five years in Japan, during which she acquired remarkable felicity in the Japanese technique of painting, and Mrs. Rummana Said, who is about the only one among the women painters, apart from Miss Zubeida Agha, to abandon naturalistic painting in favour of bold new experiments, which will be discussed separately in a subsequent chapter on the evolution of a new visual vocabulary.

▼ ABBASI AKHTAR. *Houses*. Oil.



Manipuri Dolls. Mixed media.



▲ *MARIAM HABIB. Portrait. Oil.*



▲ ZUBEIDA AGHA. *Clifton Lights*. Oil.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVOLUTION

OF NEW VISUAL VOCABULARY

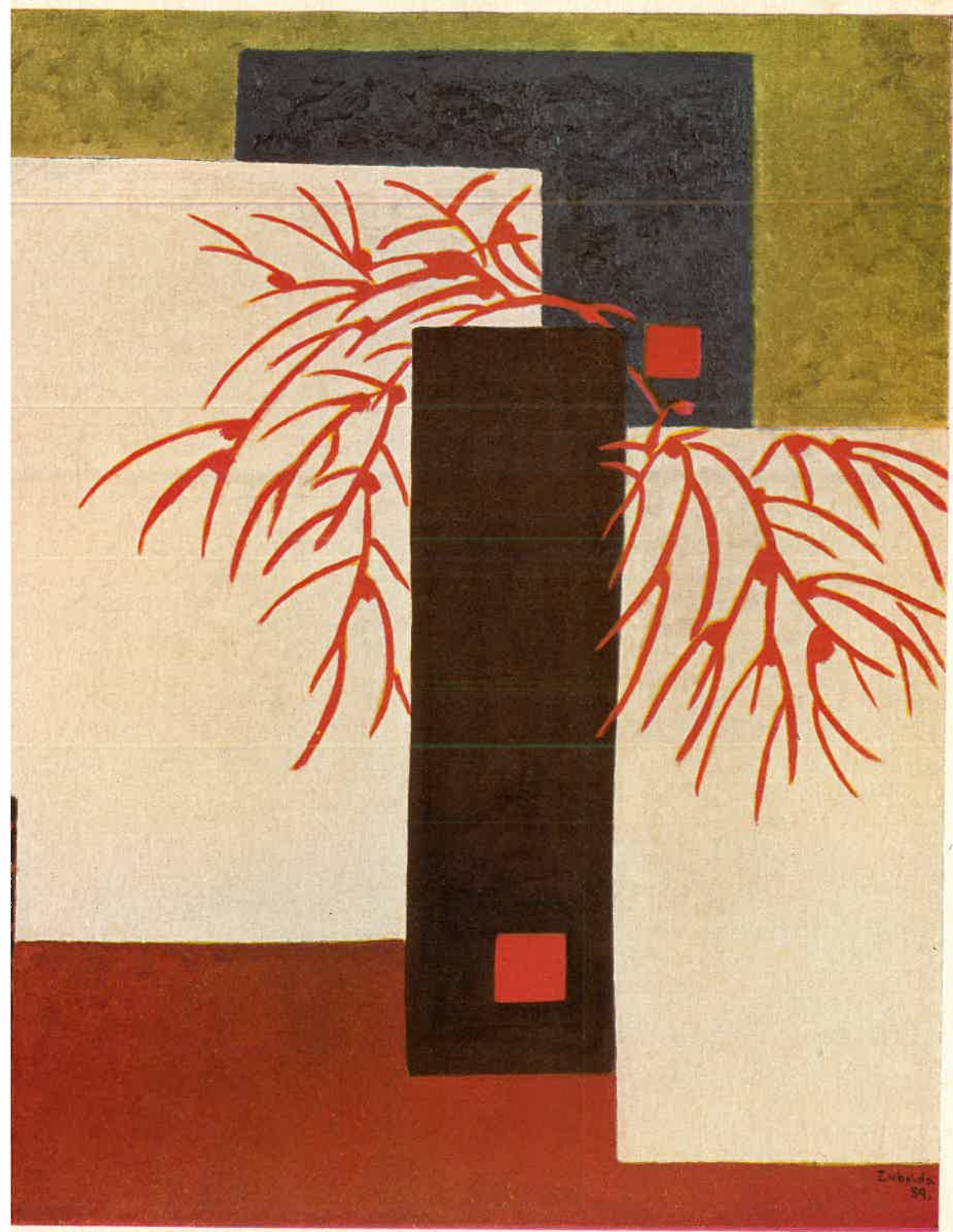
While the search for realism and a renewed interest in the folk tradition and indigenous styles represented one aspect of the reaction against traditional techniques and themes, there was another aspect of this reaction also. It stemmed from the "near-abstract" and futuristic work of a group of painters who were obviously influenced by the contemporary European movements, but instead of taking and accepting the whole of the "abstract"—theory and practice—they started by *re-learning* its alphabets on their own.

The texts did not all come from Mondrian, Klee and Picasso, but also, as was natural, from Cezanne, Van Gogh and even Rembrandt (particularly his etchings). With the result that the work of the first "abstract" painters in Pakistan was marked by genuine misconceptions as well as certain deliberate compromises. Figure and form, though subjected to distortion and exaggeration, were still not completely "broken" after the manner of the Cubists. As a critic remarked while reviewing the first exhibition of abstract paintings in Karachi: "There is a touch of the abstract in the general pattern of the composition, but the meaning of the still recognisable shapes is unmistakable".

That was the beginning in 1949. Within a few years, many painters came under the spell of the abstract movement. They were fascinated by the abstract idiom, which helped to bring out in bold relief the architectural quality and plasticity of form, lending itself at the same time to a certain suggestive and decorative treatment.



▲ ZUBEIDA AGA. *Cotton Pickers*. Bronze relief.



EIDA AGHA, *A Composition*. Oil.

ZUBEIDA AGHA

It was a young woman painter, Zubeida Agha, who did the pioneering in the field of abstract art in Pakistan: an expressive, thoughtful philosophy graduate, who literally 'fired the first shot' by introducing her abstract work at an exhibition held in 1949, soon after the establishment of Pakistan. She was then in her twenties, and had worked and produced some outstanding non-figurative work during the years since 1946, when she met an Italian painter, Mario Pirlinieri, who had himself been a pupil of Pablo Picasso. The exhibition was received with a storm of protest from the majority of viewers, and a fond curiosity from some of the more discerning minority opinion.

It was a far cry indeed from the Old School; and the idiom which Zubeida Agha chose for her first adventures in abstraction was so mystifying that the kind of angry, mostly uninformed, and highly irrelevant criticism with which it was greeted in the Press can be easily understood and explained. But it succeeded, in one bold sweep, to break the ice of inhibitions and mental reservations, which, until then, precluded the acceptance of anything beyond the confines of the familiar and the descriptive.

Zubeida's own style has since moved a long distance away from her earlier work, and in any case the abstract movement in the hands of other painters has, in the subsequent years, so drastically transformed itself, that much of what

▼ ZUBEIDA AGHA. *Horses*. Oil.





AGHA. *Yellow Flowers*. Oil.

was said on either side then, is hardly relevant in today's conditions. But it may be interesting to quote here from one of the articles written about Zubeida's first exhibition by N. K. Sen Gupta:

"The first response to Miss Agha's painting in one's mind is of wonder. What are these shapes never before seen and yet strangely familiar? Why does the artist express herself in a language which appears to be her and only hers?

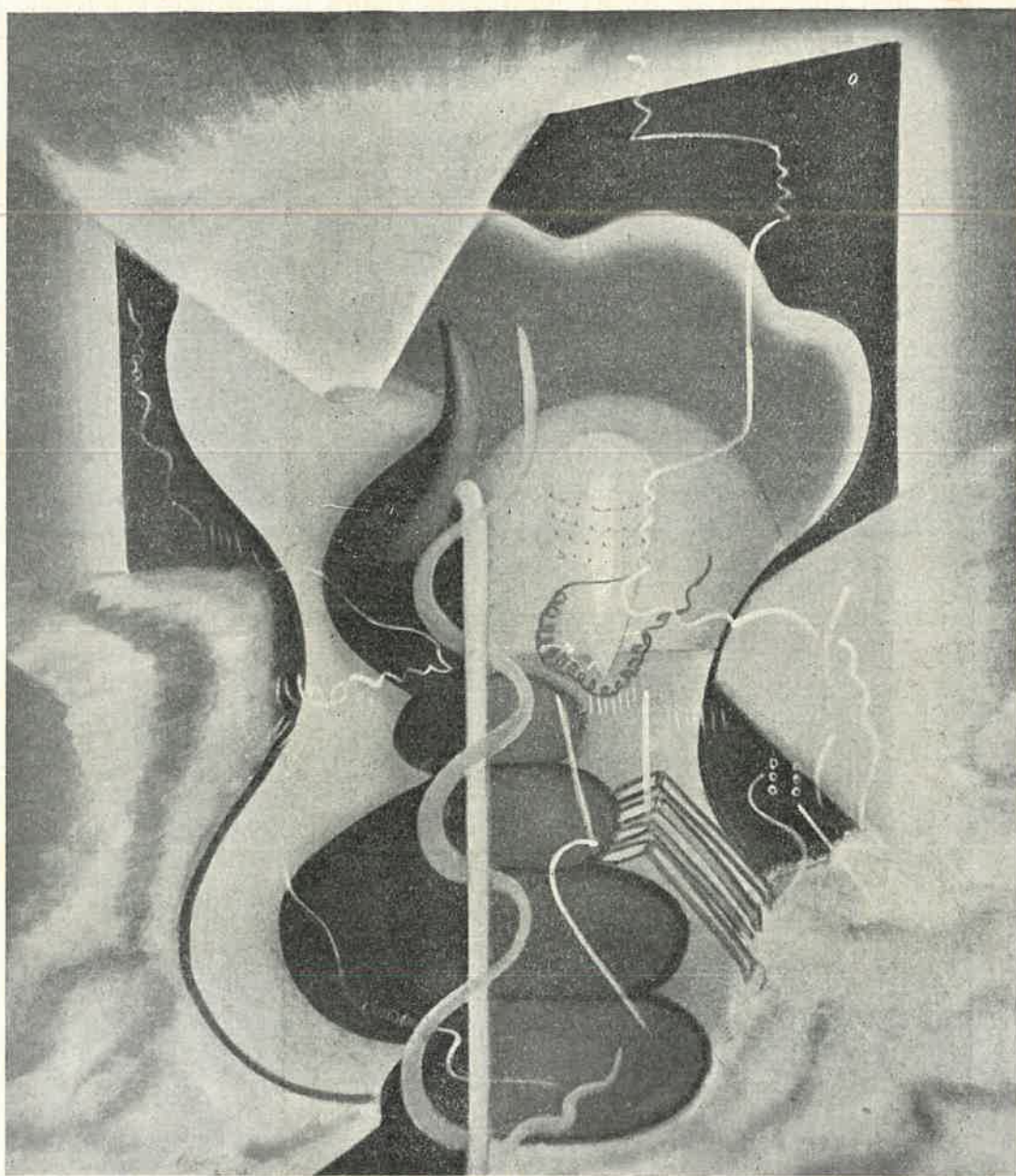
"Ideas, Zubeida Agha believes, are as real as Real Things. She insists that her paintings do not consist of symbols which are creations of individual imagination, but of Ideas which, because they are real, are universally understood.

"It would seem that the emphasis of the artist is shifting towards the aesthetic. The near-visual forms are being given up in favour of hieroglyphs of volumes and space-relations, as in the use of a top-heavy upturned mass to denote the instability of the *Future*. While this tends to bury the meaning even deeper into the picture, it gives the artist greater freedom to choose her elements to make the whole aesthetically more pleasing."

Four years later, Zubeida Agha exhibited in London, at the Trafford Galleries, and her work was at once compared with that of her earlier compatriot, Amrita Sher-Gil, the most outstanding woman painter of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent in the nineteen thirties. Critics noted that instead of the flat, two-dimensional quality peculiar to Eastern painting, Zubeida's own work evidenced a definite search for the 'third dimension', which is 'always of architectural origin'. "She seems", wrote Melville Hardiment, "to employ arbitrarily selected shapes thinly painted, and giving one the general feeling and atmosphere associated with the work of Klee and Miro, and yet at the same time, despite this dream quality, remaining objective."

"To Western eyes", he added, "and especially to those of us who look to the East to lead us back to that classical form of art whose roots are buried deep in the Byzantine culture, this fact is an exciting thing."

From London, Zubeida Agha travelled to Paris, studying at Ecole des Beaux-arts and Galerie Henri Tronche, and showing her work at a retrospective exhibition there. She returned to Pakistan in 1953 and two years later offered her recent work for one of the most impressive one-man shows in the country. The artistic climate had already started changing and unlike the first exhibition of her works, this one was received most enthusiastically, giving her full credit for the most exciting *avant garde* work in Pakistani painting.



▲ ZUBEIDA AGHA. *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony*. Oil.



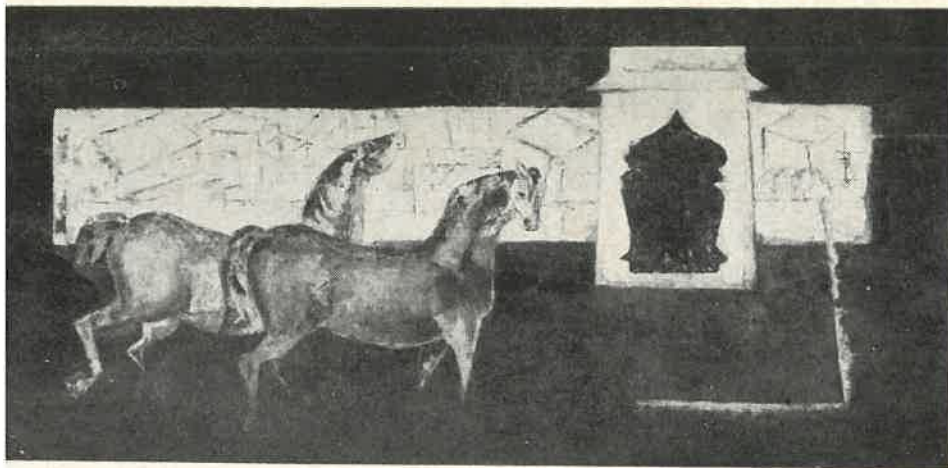
▲ SHAKIR, ALI. *Girl with Birds*. Oil.

SHAKIR ALI

The spatial quality of the third dimension and the solidity of architectural form, however, has found its most effective and vigorous expression in the work of another abstract painter, Shakir Ali, who was already exhibiting his abstract and semi-abstract paintings in some of the Central European countries about the time Zubeida Agha held her first exhibition in Karachi in 1949. But the difference of *locale* in the two cases is significant; and shows itself very distinctly in their respective work.

While Zubeida Agha was trying to evolve an alphabet of her own, and was in that process engaged in a more or less metaphysical treatment of her 'Ideaviscuals', arriving at the abstract idiom through her intellectual strivings rather than fascinated by the apparent freedom and inherent expressiveness of form, Shakir had before him the whole body of post-war European experiments. Form, thus, became his first, almost exclusive concern, and visual content the only validity. All else was extraneous. And even today there is nothing that puts off Shakir as completely as the attempt to draw him out on the subject of 'meaning'. He does not bother whether a painting 'means' anything at all: for him, it just *is*.

His early work, done in Europe as well as on his return to Pakistan, was obviously derivative and experimental. For nearly fifteen years, he worked quietly,



▲ SHAKIR ALI, *Horses at the City Gate*. Oil.



▲ *Still-Life with Pineapple*. Oil on Board.

and hard, rejecting and destroying a number of his canvases that did not satisfy the high standards he set for himself, and incessantly trying to express and discover, with insight and without emotion, the basic relationships that existed in strange new combinations and compositions.

Shakir's recent works have shown very definitely the long distance he has travelled away from his early works, which almost seemed to carry the invisible tag "Imported from Europe", to the recent sensitive studies and compositions of objects, shapes and forms nearer home and belonging intimately to the soil, and yet reflecting the human heritage in its sweeping expanse from the cave-painters to this day.

Shakir Ali is the head of what has now come to be known as the National College of Art, Lahore. He teaches as well as paints, and as the most senior among the modern abstract painters in the country, he wields considerable influence among the younger painters of Pakistan, most of whom have been attracted by the abstract technique in its exciting variations.



SHAKIR ALI. *Composition with Cows*. Oil.



▲ OZZIRR ZUBY. *Wishful Mother*. Tempra.

OZZIRR ZUBY

Two other contemporaries of Zubeida Agha and Shakir Ali, who came under the spell of the modern movement, are Ozzirr Zuby and Nasir Shamsie, both of them practising sculptors as well as painters. In fact, Ozzirr Zuby is primarily a sculptor, and even his paintings are, to use the hackneyed but quite apt description, 'sculpturesque colour fantasies'. His lines are endowed with the strength and massiveness peculiar to sculpture, and he has succeeded in arriving at an individual style of his own, seeking and finding remarkably alive and striking figures, forms and patterns latent in the curves and contours of the wildest landscape—in trees, stones and incongruous-looking rock formations, which he balances and exploits in exciting new compositions.

Zuby took his Diploma in Modelling from Lahore's Mayo School of Art, in 1944, and has since worked extensively in various media, in particular clay and gesso, using his chisel even more than his brush. In 1950, he visited Italy for further training in art, and stayed for a year at the Accademic di Belle Arte, Roma. His happiest and most rewarding work in sculpture is the series of "heads", being vivid character studies of several contemporary Pakistani writers and poets. He modelled these early in the fifties, when his Lahore studio was the rendezvous of the town's creative *elite*.



◀ OZZIRR ZUBY. *Mother and Child*. Plaster.

NASIR SHAMSIE

Like Zuby, Nasir Shamsie has also evinced an increasing interest in modelling. Now in his early forties, he started his career early, and he was one of the first to be picked up by the Karachi Fine Arts Society in the early days of Pakistan's establishment to hold a one-man show.

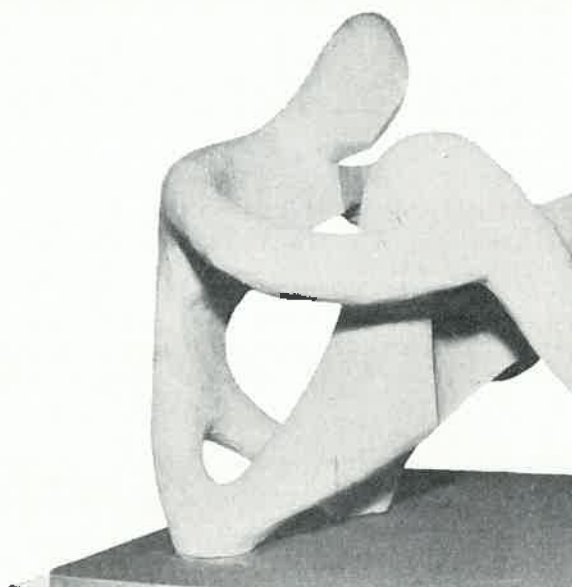
Almost immediately after his Karachi exhibition of 1949, Shamsie left for Europe for a long, active stay in London, where he was tempted by the adventurous new world of creative design. Coming back to Pakistan in 1952, he took up a career as a commercial artist.

Shamsie has lately concentrated more on modelling, and three of his pieces won acclaim at the Third National Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture in Karachi in 1960. He has also executed some reliefs and mobiles which have not been put up for exhibition so far, but can be seen at his modest house-cum-studio in an impressive array.



◀ NASIR SHAMSIE. *Standing Figure*. Plaster.

▼ NASIR SHAMSIE. *Seated Figure*. Plaster.





. Still Life. Plaster Relief.

NOVERA AHMED

Born in Chittagong, East Pakistan, in 1935, Miss Novera Ahmed showed an early interest in modelling, but was discouraged by the family elders in her plans to shape as a sculptor. In 1950, she left for Europe to study "Social Science", but actually joined the Byam-Shaw School of Arts in London. From there, she later moved to the Camberwell School of Arts, and obtained the National Diploma in Sculpture. She also worked for sometime in the studio of the late Jacob Epstein, and in 1957 she returned to Pakistan. A year later, she visited Rangoon to study traditional Burmese wood-carving.

During the last five years, Novera has worked very hard, executing large-sized murals in plaster and relief, as well as a large number of pieces of domestic and public sculpture, in clay, plaster and marble-powder. When casting in metals posed a difficult problem, Novera began experimenting with locally available material, in particular wood and cement. Early this year, she was awarded the First Prize for Sculpture at the National Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture.

NOVERA AHMED. *Progress. Cement.* ►

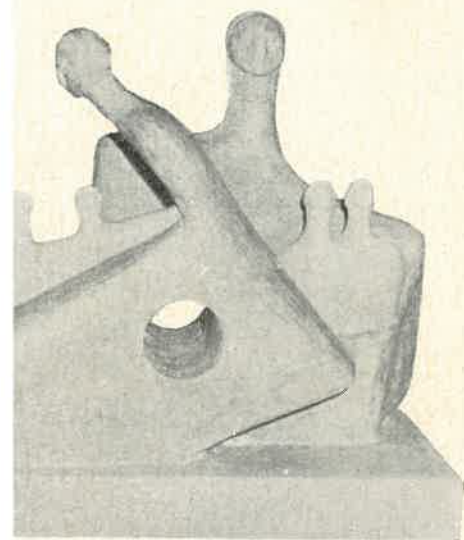
NOVERA AHMED. *Composition (1).* ▼





▲ NOVERA AHMED. *Family*. Plaster.

◀ NOVERA AHMED. *Composition (2)*. Plaster.



AJMAL HUSAIN

Among the painters now living and working in Karachi, 38-year-old Ajmal Husain is easily the most outstanding. His early training as a cartoonist has admirably fitted him for bringing out all that is "essential" in a figure and giving it a turn here or a twist there to heighten the effect and to dramatise it. This has imparted to his paintings a striking linear quality, and the intensity of a frozen moment, which he catches with a "brilliant eloquence of colour". He paints with a flourish, spreading pure colours in large areas on the canvas, and balancing these with uncanny dexterity and boldness. He has an intuitive sense of composition and design, and his control of space, on the canvas and outside it, is noteworthy. He is at his best in capturing and recreating moods and moments in pure striking colours, which create and evoke images and patterns of beauty and richness.

He has travelled very widely all over Europe and the United States, exhibiting his work in Bonn, Madrid and New York. Reviewing his exhibition, the *Arts Digest* of New York noted Ajmal's combination of stylised figures "with a pointillistic colour atmosphere", and his use of the palette knife and flattened colour areas, juxtaposing "architectural shapes and shadows to create a mood of wild severity". Other critics stressed his skill in finding "patterns in movements", and his talent for "characterization in quick watercolour sketches".





▲ AJMAL HUSAIN. *Revelations*. Oil.

GULGEE

An engineer by training, Gulgee gave up his profession early to devote himself more fully to drawing and painting. The remarkable talent and felicity he showed as a portrait painter won him several commissions, from Pakistanis as well as foreigners, including a Royal Commission to paint the King of Afghanistan and other dignitaries.

The visit to Kabul, however, introduced him to a new medium—marble in its infinite variety of colour and pattern, and fascinating textural effect. It was while going round a marble factory that he first thought of working in this medium. From thin slabs of marble he had several smaller pieces cut out in various sizes and shapes according to their colour. These he later glued together with special stone cement to make brilliant “paintings” in marble, like the *Cockfight*, reproduced on the opposite page.

On returning to Pakistan, Gulgee persevered with his new experiment, and was gradually drawn from academic figure paintings to ‘Action’ paintings of the New York school. His subsequent work has tended to be in that direction, as in the work reproduced below.

▼ GULGEE. *Composition*. Oil.





17. Mosaic in marble.

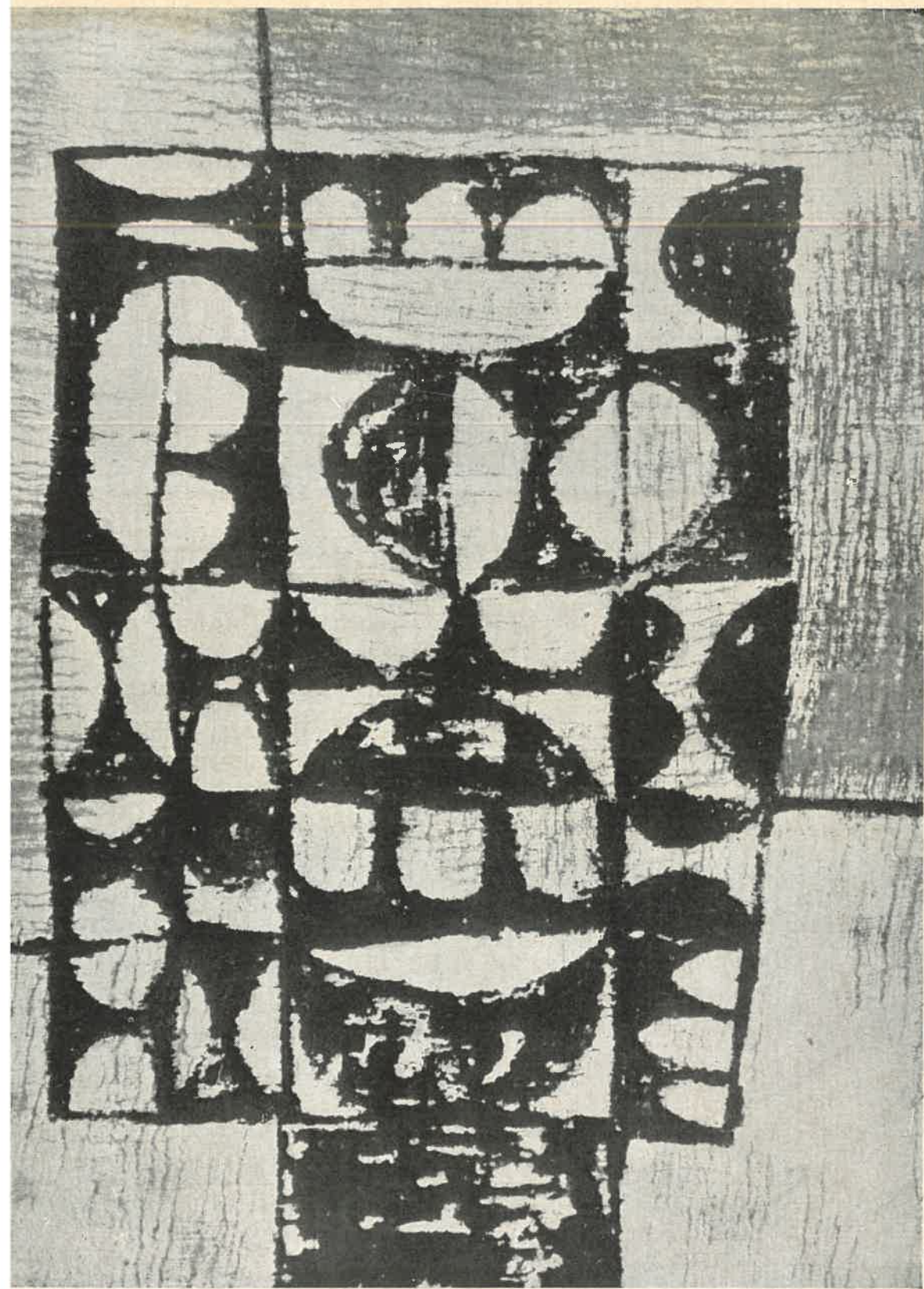
RUMMANA

Rummana Said, a young woman painter, has already made an impression as a competent colourist and a versatile painter. Born in Bombay in 1935, she spent two years at the Sir J. J. School of Art there. In 1956, she visited Europe and stayed in Paris until 1959, familiarising herself with the techniques of painting as well as stain-glass windows, tapestry, mosaic and ceramics. She is now permanently settled in Karachi, and has this year (1962) offered her recent work at an impressive solo exhibition at the Arts Council galleries in Karachi, having exhibited earlier in Paris, Delhi and Bombay.

There is an absorbing elemental quality about her work, infused with an inner architectural strength and charged with high sensitivity. As an art critic, reviewing her work in the *Times of India*, pointed out "Rummana's compositions radiate the rhythms of her personal vision. Here is reality seen through the spiritual medium of Rummana. All the melancholy, mystery and intensity that the artist has within her, wells up and goes to build up those strange 'objects' which are of the earth and yet not of the earth. This radiation is almost sensuous in character—you can feel it enveloping you."

▼ RUMMANA. *Monsoon*. Oil.





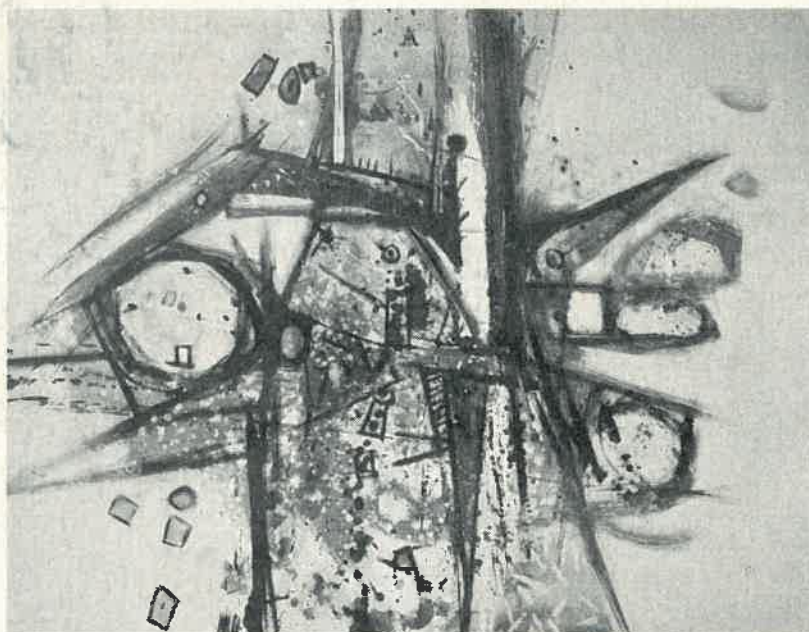
IMZA. Drawing No. 8,

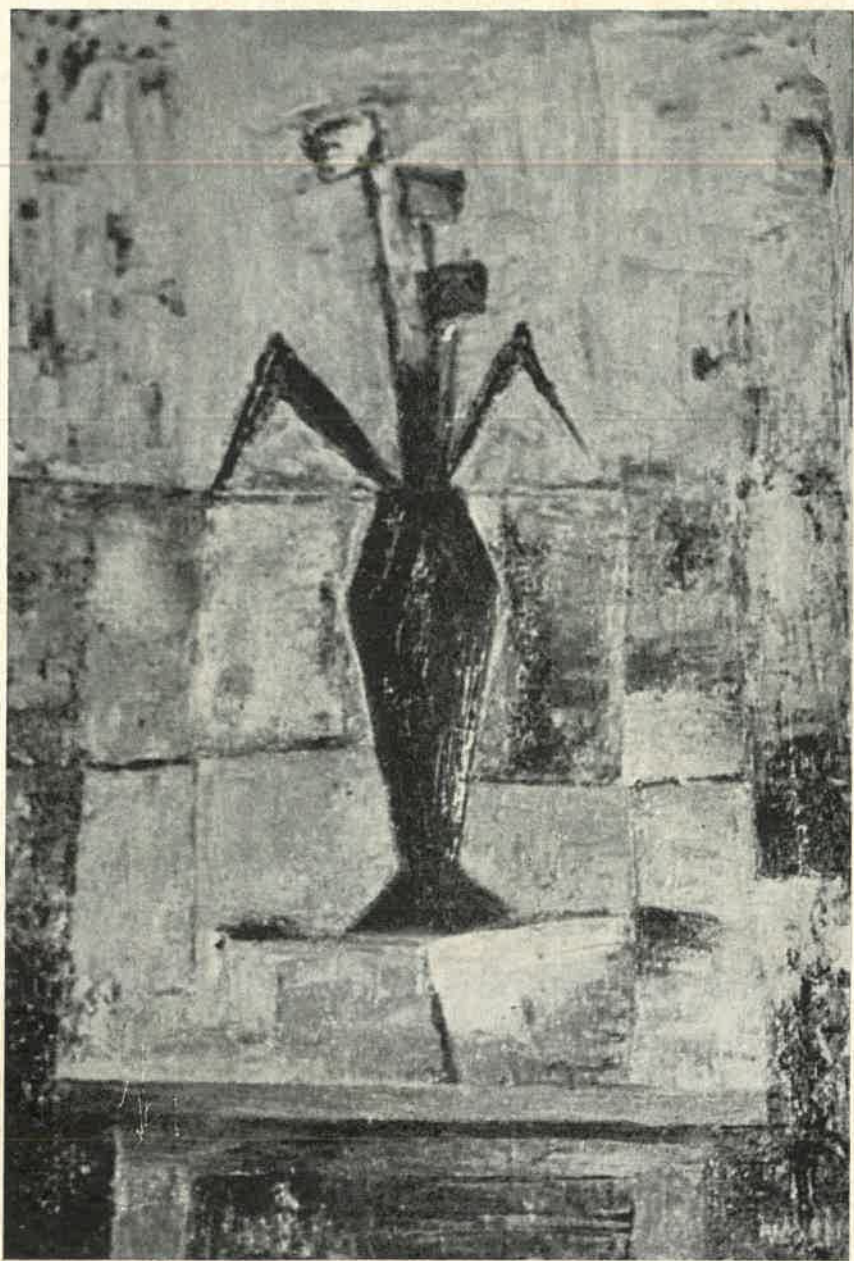
PERVEZ

Like Shemza, Ahmed Pervez and Ali Imam also went to London for higher studies, and report of their one-man exhibitions and group-shows held in U.K. and on the continent indicate the lines of their growth and development. Commenting on one of the earliest exhibitions of the works of Ahmed Pervez in London, Mr. Alastair Gordon wrote in *Art News and Review*: "There are ripples of light and passages of glowing, yet subtle colour threaded into his abstract frameworks, and their frameworks have a mathematical certainty in rhythm through the simple process of recognising fundamental laws in balance. And so a kind of passionate geometry emerges, both at once apparent because it is refrained, but the vigorous Muslim mind behind the paint brush gives the geometry its extra shot in the arm to produce telling effects."

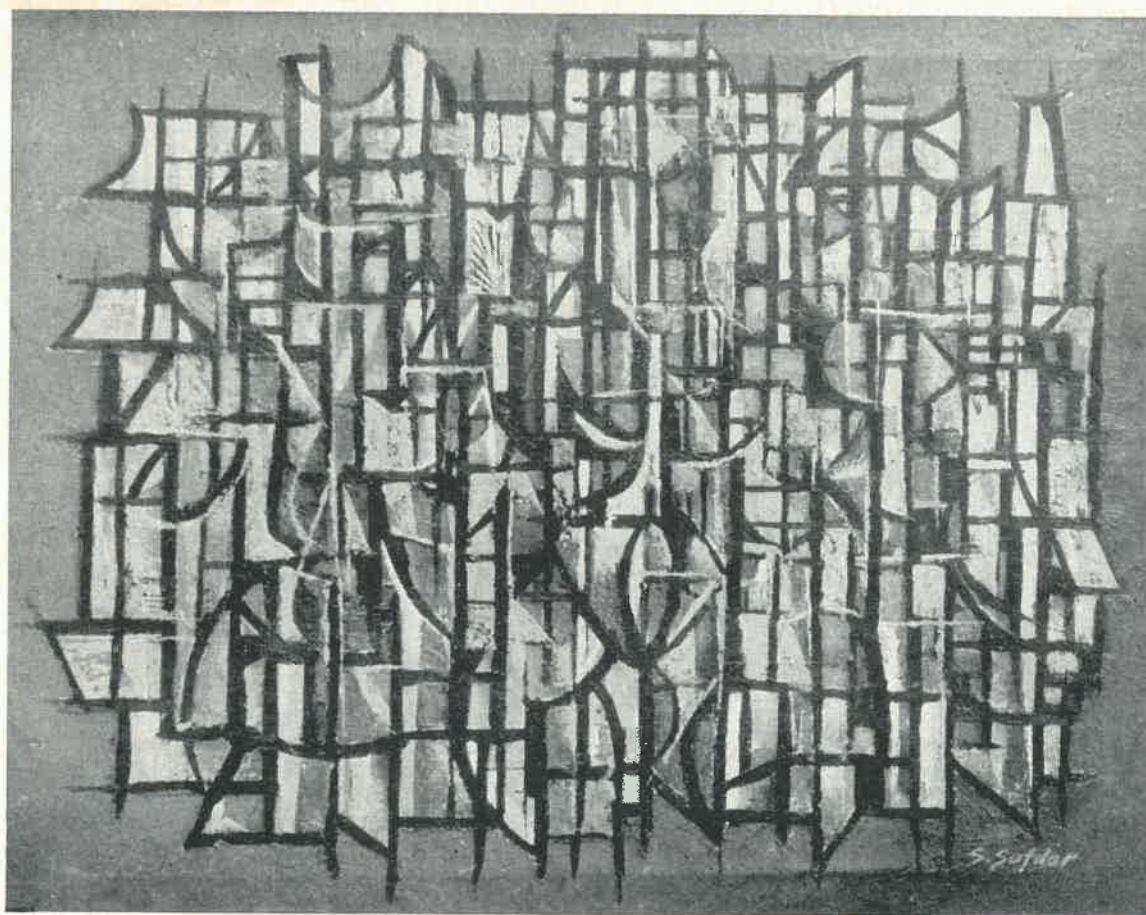
Another critic, Mr. Roderic Knowles, in an introduction to the catalogue of Pervez's recent exhibition at Lincoln Art Gallery in London, noted that "in his work Nature is not entirely rejected; its outward appearance is destroyed to make way for its inner penetration so that its essential reality may be revealed to us."

▼ PERVEZ. *The Image-Breakers*. Oil.





▲ ALI IMAM. *Still Life*. Oil.



▲ S. SAFDAR. *Interior*. Oil.



SAFDAR AND AMEEN

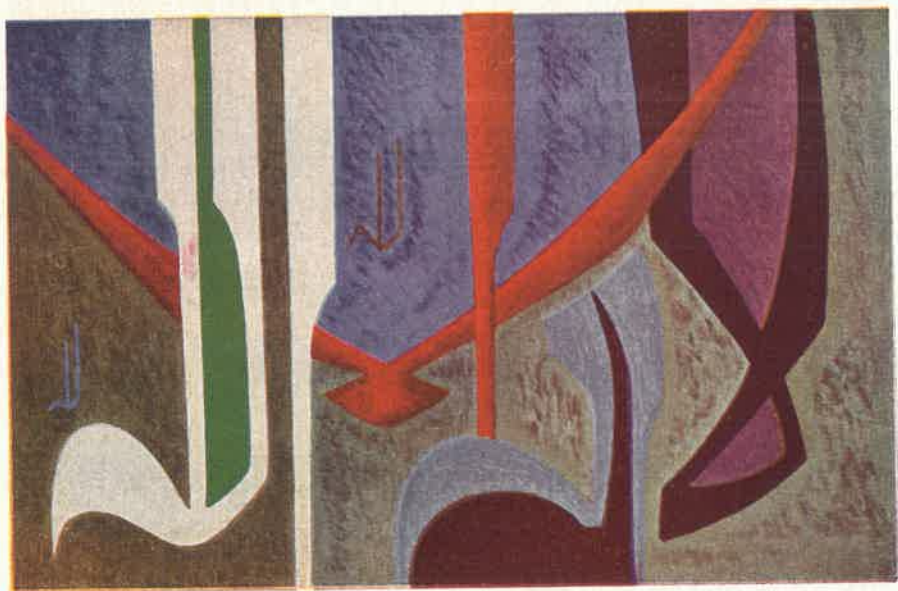
Sheikh Safdar and M. Ameen, both in their late thirties, provide the happiest examples of successful commercial artists who also continue to be in the forefront of the contemporary art movement in the country.

Sheikh Safdar has been one of the early adherents of the Lahore Group, which was formed about 1954. His early work, obviously influenced by the commercial idiom, was documentary, and linear in quality; so also were the illustrations he made for the English edition of Manto's short stories. Safdar's new work, however, has changed very much. And while design continues to be his chief concern, he has learned to handle colour on the canvas with competence and dexterity. His paintings on display at the National Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at Lahore in 1962 demonstrated a strong sense of discipline as well as confidence, and the award of one of the top prizes to him was richly deserved.

M. Ameen is a brilliant colourist, and his ingenious use of burnt and engraved wood for evocative paintings has made him pre-eminent in a difficult but most rewarding technique. Apart from the purely painterly qualities, his works have a haunting, vibrating atmosphere which may be attributed to his passion for folk music and to his pre-occupation with mystic thought.

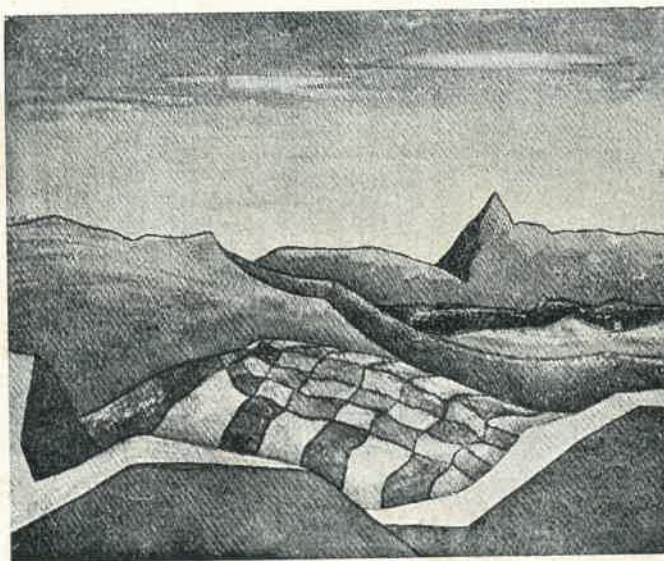
▼ AMEEN. *The Silent City*. Oil on Wood





▲ HANEEF RAMAY. *The Kalima*. Oil.

▼ HANEEF RAMAY. *Tribal Area Landscape*. Oil.



IQBAL AND RAMAY

Khalid Iqbal and Haneef Ramay, both based in Lahore, are frugal but accomplished painters. Khalid Iqbal teaches as well as paints, being on the teaching staff of the Panjab University Fine Arts Department. Unlike his other colleagues whose studios are cluttered up with paintings that can generally provide a reasonable sampling of the artists' style and work, Khalid Iqbal has very little to show, except perhaps, the lone canvas on the easel with the paint still wet on it. He is at his best in painting portraits which are vivid character studies executed with great technical competence and virtuosity.

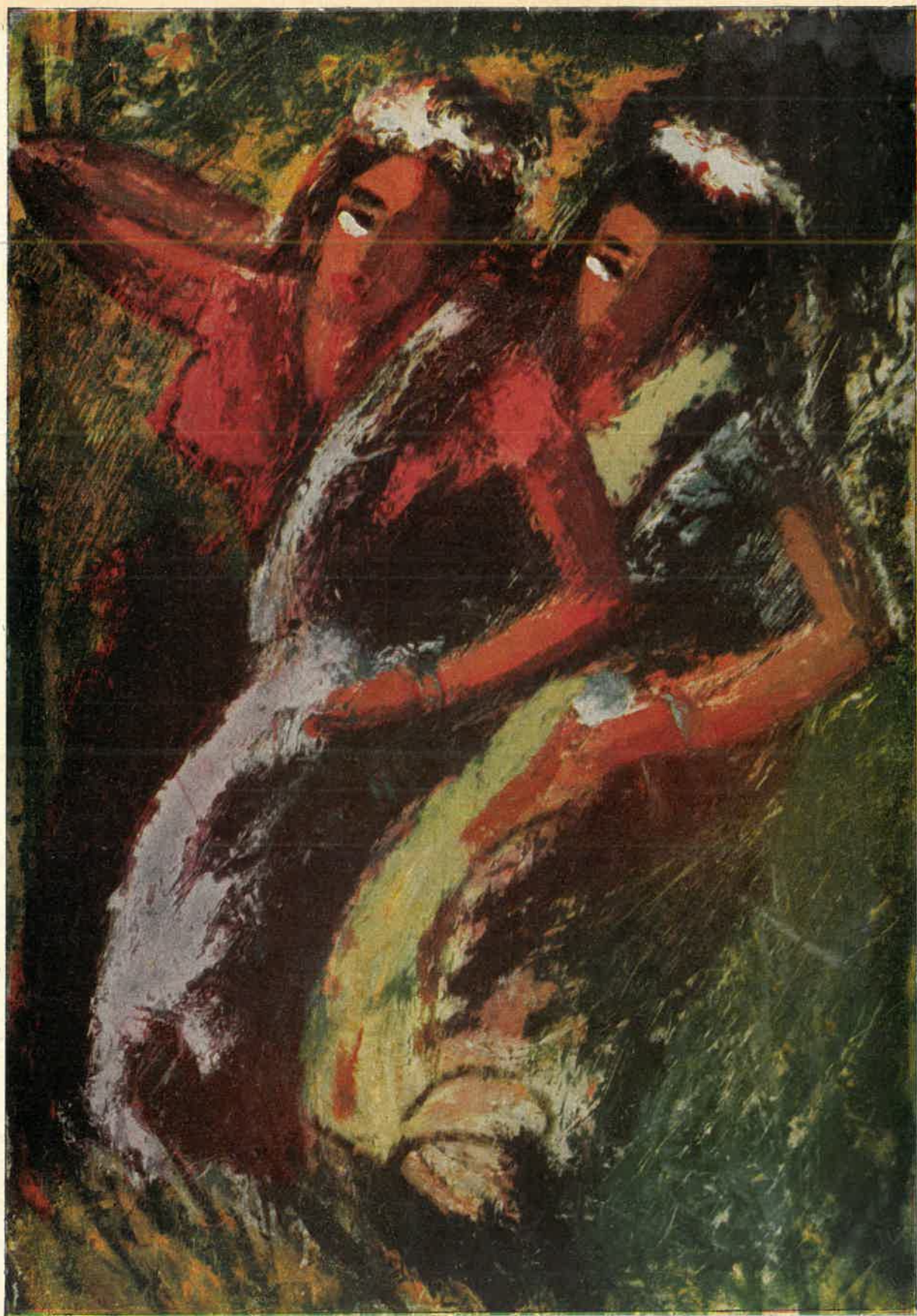
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HANEEF RAMAY. *The White Pigeon*. Oil.

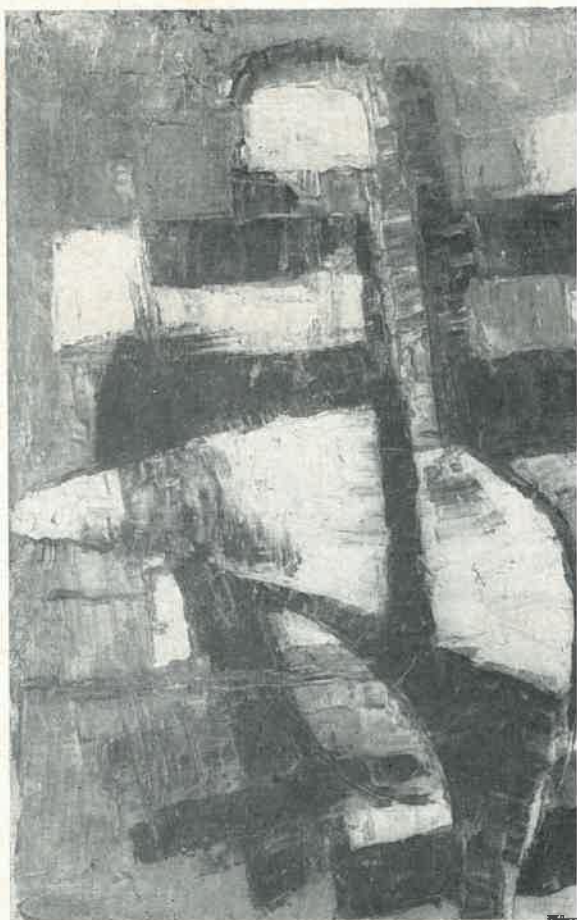




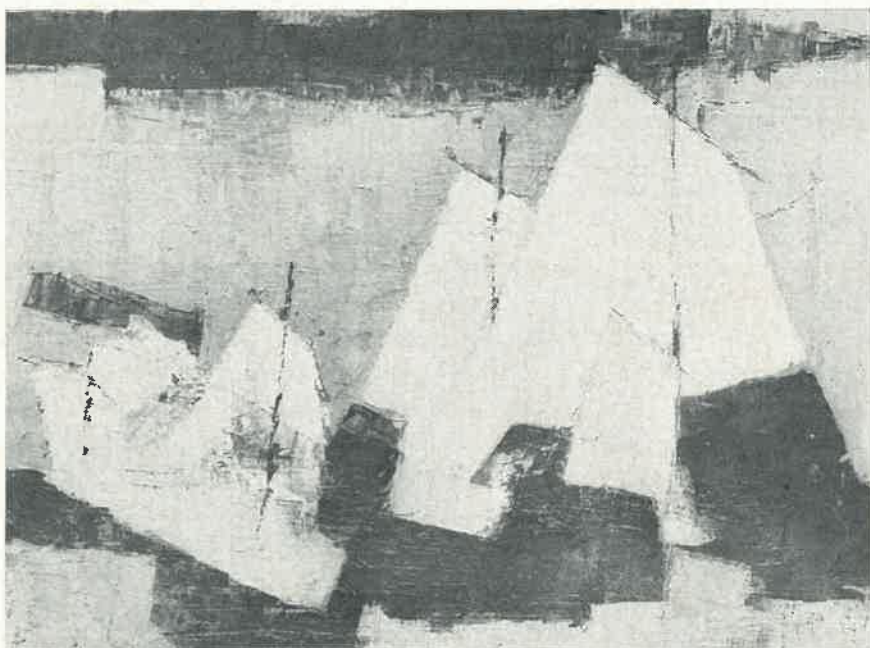
▲ SADEQUAIN. *Relations*. Oil.



AJMAL HUSAIN. *Toilet*. Oil. ►



AJMAL HUSAIN. *White Sails*. Oil. ▼





Revelations by Ajmal Husain

▲ AJMAL HUSAIN. *Revelations*. Oil.

GULGEE

An engineer by training, Gulgee gave up his profession early to devote himself more fully to drawing and painting. The remarkable talent and felicity he showed as a portrait painter won him several commissions, from Pakistanis as well as foreigners, including a Royal Commission to paint the King of Afghanistan and other dignitaries.

The visit to Kabul, however, introduced him to a new medium—marble in its infinite variety of colour and pattern, and fascinating textural effect. It was while going round a marble factory that he first thought of working in this medium. From thin slabs of marble he had several smaller pieces cut out in various sizes and shapes according to their colour. These he later glued together with special stone cement to make brilliant “paintings” in marble, like the *Cockfight*, reproduced on the opposite page.

On returning to Pakistan, Gulgee persevered with his new experiment, and was gradually drawn from academic figure paintings to ‘Action’ paintings of the New York school. His subsequent work has tended to be in that direction, as in the work reproduced below.

▼ GULGEE, *Composition*. Oil.





br. Mosaic in marble.

RUMMANA

Rummana Said, a young woman painter, has already made an impression as a competent colourist and a versatile painter. Born in Bombay in 1935, she spent two years at the Sir J. J. School of Art there. In 1956, she visited Europe and stayed in Paris until 1959, familiarising herself with the techniques of painting as well as stain-glass windows, tapestry, mosaic and ceramics. She is now permanently settled in Karachi, and has this year (1962) offered her recent work at an impressive solo exhibition at the Arts Council galleries in Karachi, having exhibited earlier in Paris, Delhi and Bombay.

There is an absorbing elemental quality about her work, infused with an inner architectural strength and charged with high sensitivity. As an art critic, reviewing her work in the *Times of India*, pointed out "Rummana's compositions radiate the rhythms of her personal vision. Here is reality seen through the spiritual medium of Rummana. All the melancholy, mystery and intensity that the artist has within her, wells up and goes to build up those strange 'objects' which are of the earth and yet not of the earth. This radiation is almost sensuous in character—you can feel it enveloping you."

▼ RUMMANA. *Monsoon*. Oil.





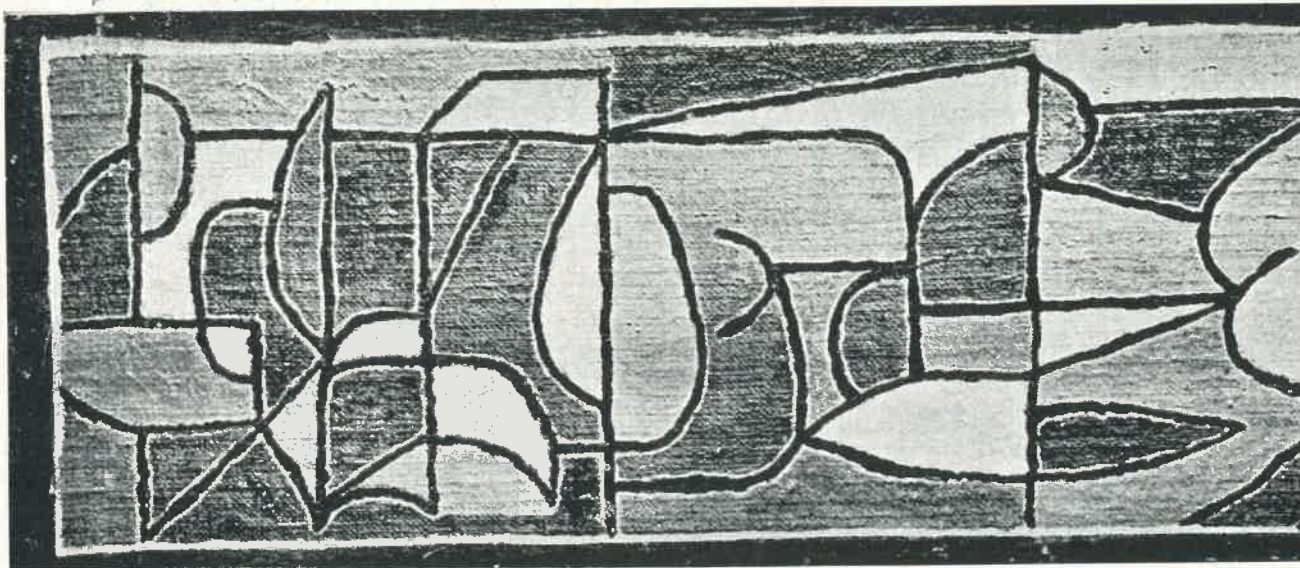
NA Thatta. Oil.

Three of the painters who founded the "Lahore Group" in the early fifties, are now in London—Anwar Jalal Shemza, Ahmed Pervez and Ali Imam. Each one of them has had several one-man and group exhibitions in the United Kingdom, and though they have been away from their country for several years, they continue to exercise considerable influence on the painters working in Pakistan.

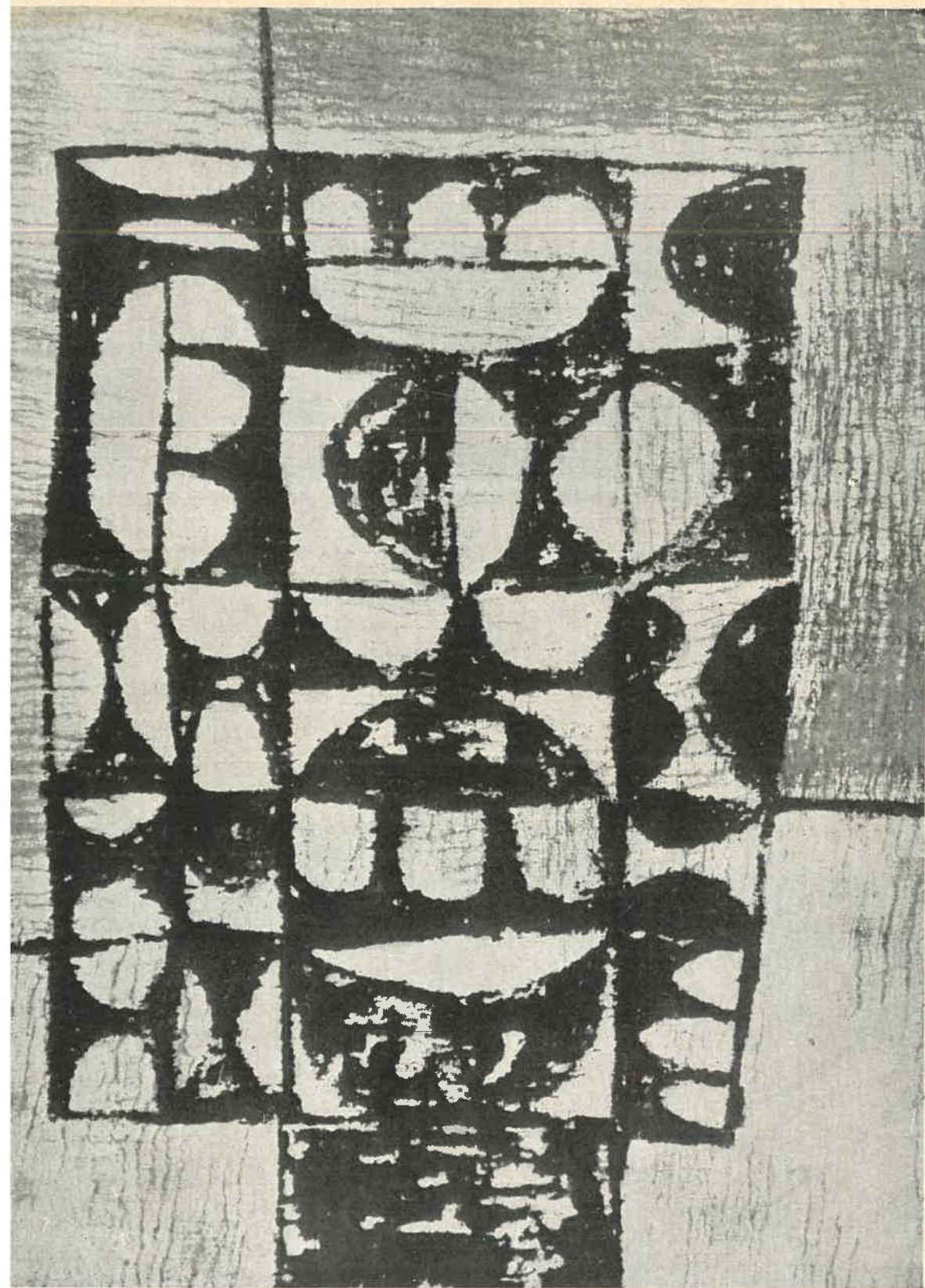
SHEMZA

One of them, Shemza, recently visited Pakistan for a brief stay and his etchings and drawings in particular received wide acclaim. He has already completed a two-year course at the Slade, and is at present teaching Basic Design in an art school in London. His own creative work shows a refreshing interest in decorative and compositional designs inherent in simple and bare hieroglyphs of the alphabet. He has also evinced a feeling for texture, often imparting a certain architectural verisimilitude to his near-geometric trellis-work of lines against stone-rough background.

As one of his critics, Mr. Andrew Forge, pointed out: "Shemza has largely rejected the strongest traditional characteristic of Western art in its three-dimensional plasticity. He has been intelligent enough to grasp European art at the point at which it was stretched nearest to the East—in the work of Paul Klee. He has made a special study of Klee and has been able to use his influence positively, applying his principles of growth and development to the sort of forms which he knows intimately himself. His paintings derive equally from the rhythmical space-filling patterns of the rug and from the 'growing line' of modern Western art."



▲ SHEMZA. *Landscape.*



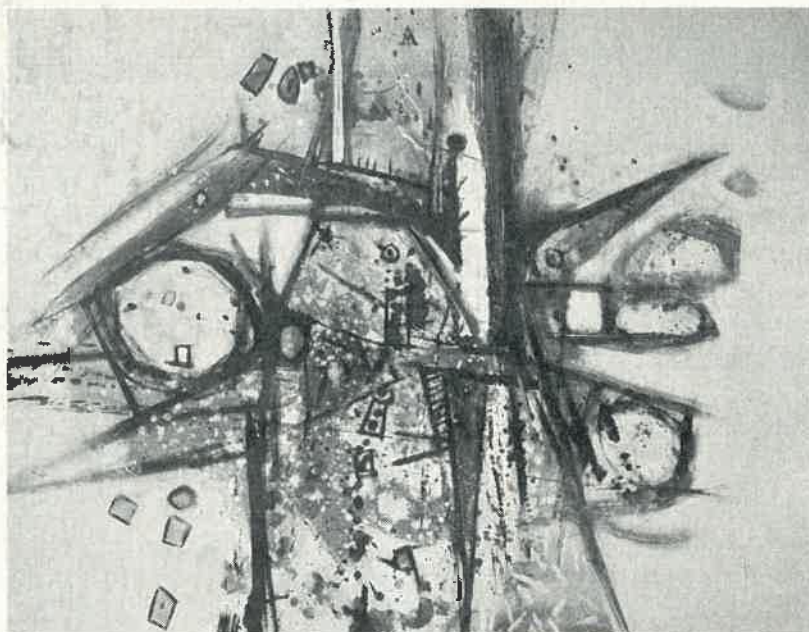
BMZA. *Drawing No. 8,*

PERVEZ

Like Shemza, Ahmed Pervez and Ali Imam also went to London for higher studies, and report of their one-man exhibitions and group-shows held in U.K. and on the continent indicate the lines of their growth and development. Commenting on one of the earliest exhibitions of the works of Ahmed Pervez in London, Mr. Alastair Gordon wrote in *Art News and Review*: "There are ripples of light and passages of glowing, yet subtle colour threaded into his abstract frameworks, and their frameworks have a mathematical certainty in rhythm through the simple process of recognising fundamental laws in balance. And so a kind of passionate geometry emerges, both at once apparent because it is refrained, but the vigorous Muslim mind behind the paint brush gives the geometry its extra shot in the arm to produce telling effects."

Another critic, Mr. Roderic Knowles, in an introduction to the catalogue of Pervez's recent exhibition at Lincoln Art Gallery in London, noted that "in his work Nature is not entirely rejected; its outward appearance is destroyed to make way for its inner penetration so that its essential reality may be revealed to us."

▼ PERVEZ. *The Image-Breakers*. Oil.





▲ PERVEZ. *Eve*. Oil.

ALI IMAM

Ali Imam, we are told, has used an essentially figurative idiom, developing what Mr. G. M. Butcher calls "a post-cubist language with overtones of Mughal pattern". "It is, however, only within the last year or so", he says, "that he (Ali Imam) has finally been able to translate this conceptual language into one which is fundamentally painterly. One is now no longer so conscious of his 'alphabet'; what emerges is a pictorial unity defying strict analysis."

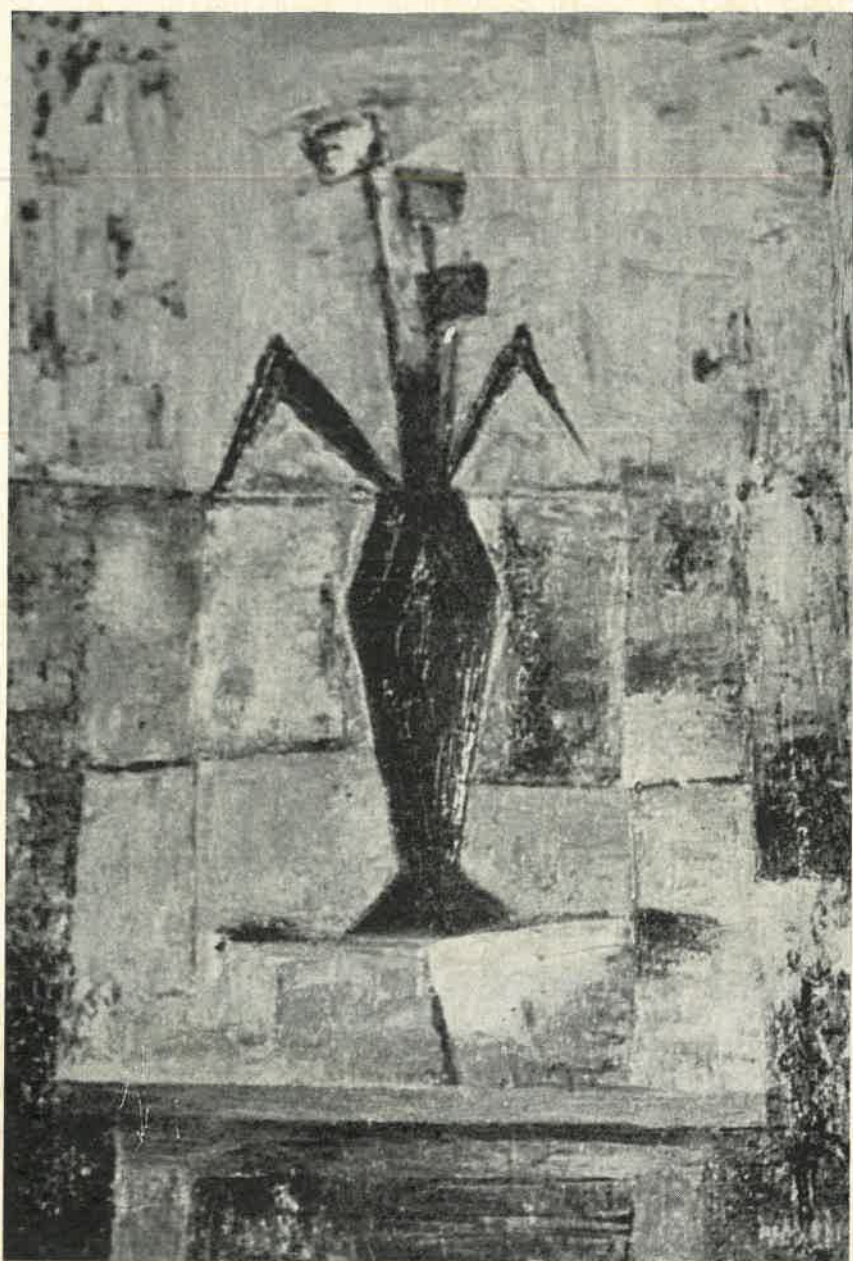
These young painters, he points out, may be on the edge of their particular cultural situation where there are no rules for them to follow. But in their work, he asserts, one can "find tendencies toward the future of painting, not only in Pakistan, but throughout the newly emerging countries of Islam from Morocco to Indonesia".

▼ ALI IMAM. *A Study*. Oil.

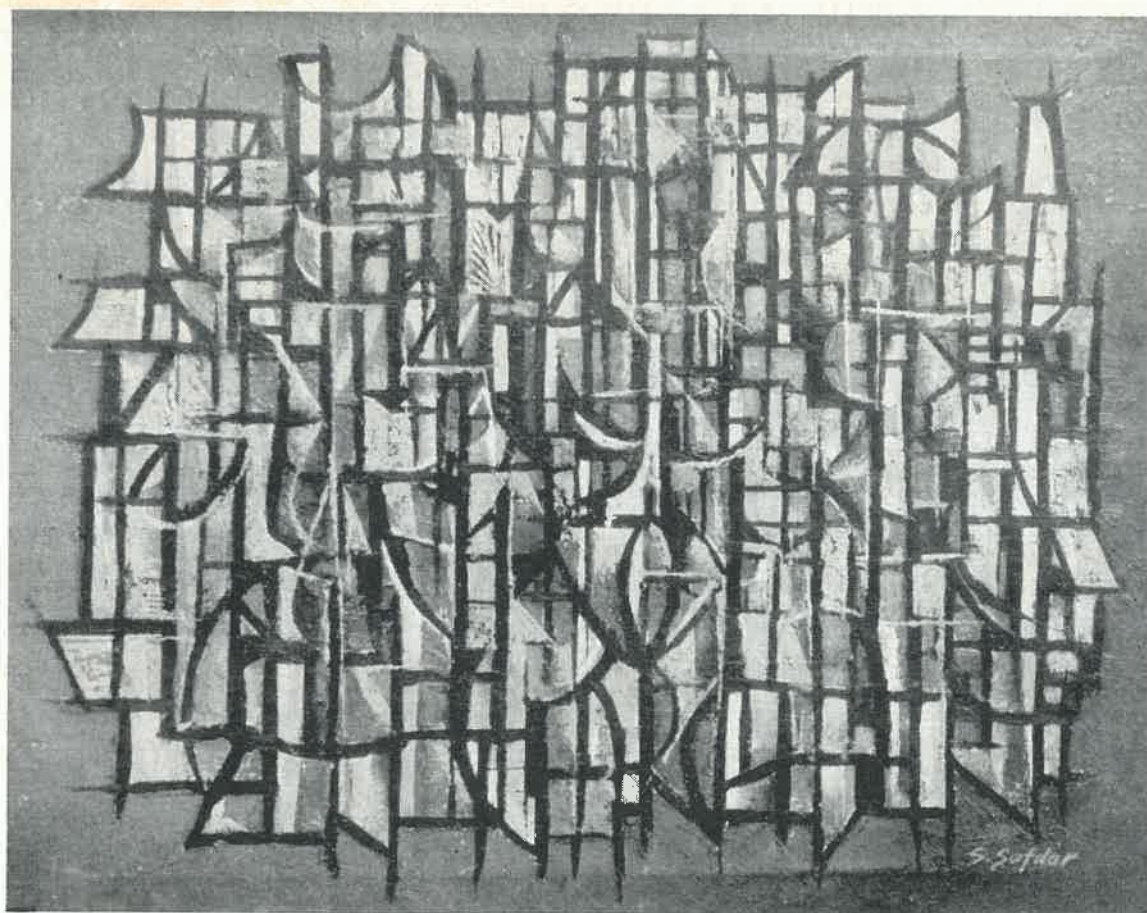


▼ ALI IMAM. *Woman with Bird*. Oil.





▲ ALI IMAM. *Still Life*. Oil.



▲ S. SAFDAR. *Interior*. Oil.



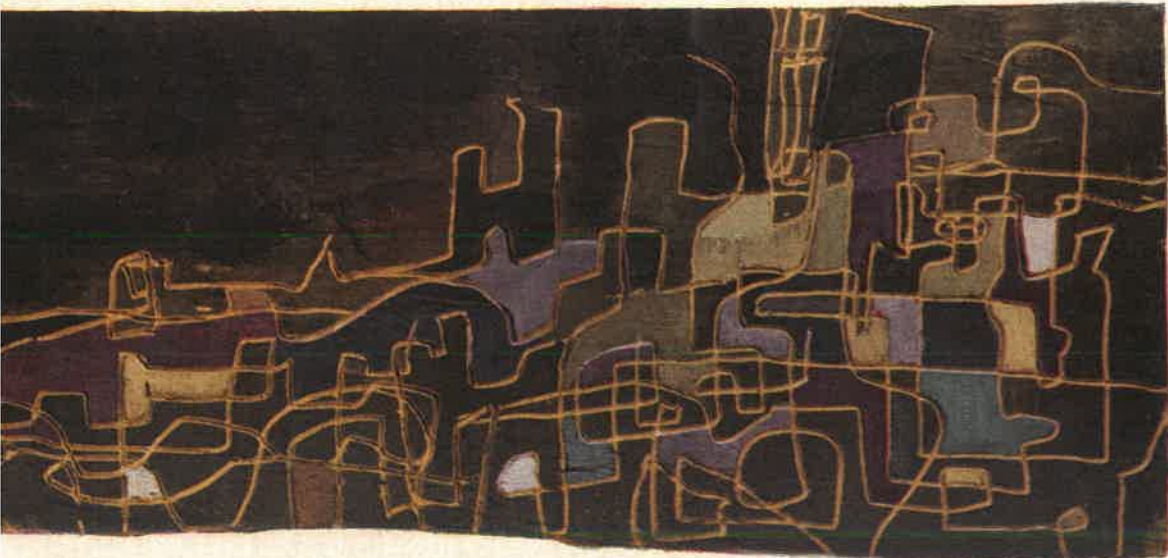
SAFDAR AND AMEEN

Sheikh Safdar and M. Ameen, both in their late thirties, provide the happiest examples of successful commercial artists who also continue to be in the forefront of the contemporary art movement in the country.

Sheikh Safdar has been one of the early adherents of the Lahore Group, which was formed about 1954. His early work, obviously influenced by the commercial idiom, was documentational, and linear in quality; so also were the illustrations he made for the English edition of Manto's short stories. Safdar's new work, however, has changed very much. And while design continues to be his chief concern, he has learned to handle colour on the canvas with competence and dexterity. His paintings on display at the National Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at Lahore in 1962 demonstrated a strong sense of discipline as well as confidence, and the award of one of the top prizes to him was richly deserved.

M. Ameen is a brilliant colourist, and his ingenious use of burnt and engraved wood for evocative paintings has made him pre-eminent in a difficult but most rewarding technique. Apart from the purely painterly qualities, his works have a haunting, vibrating atmosphere which may be attributed to his passion for folk music and to his pre-occupation with mystic thought.

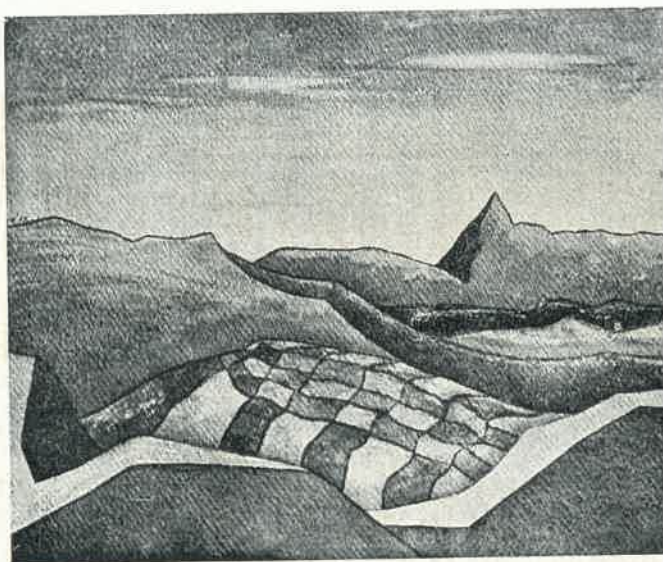
▼ AMEEN, *The Silent City*. Oil on Wood





▲ HANEEF RAMAY. *The Kalima*. Oil.

▼ HANEEF RAMAY. *Tribal Area Landscape*. Oil.



IQBAL AND RAMAY

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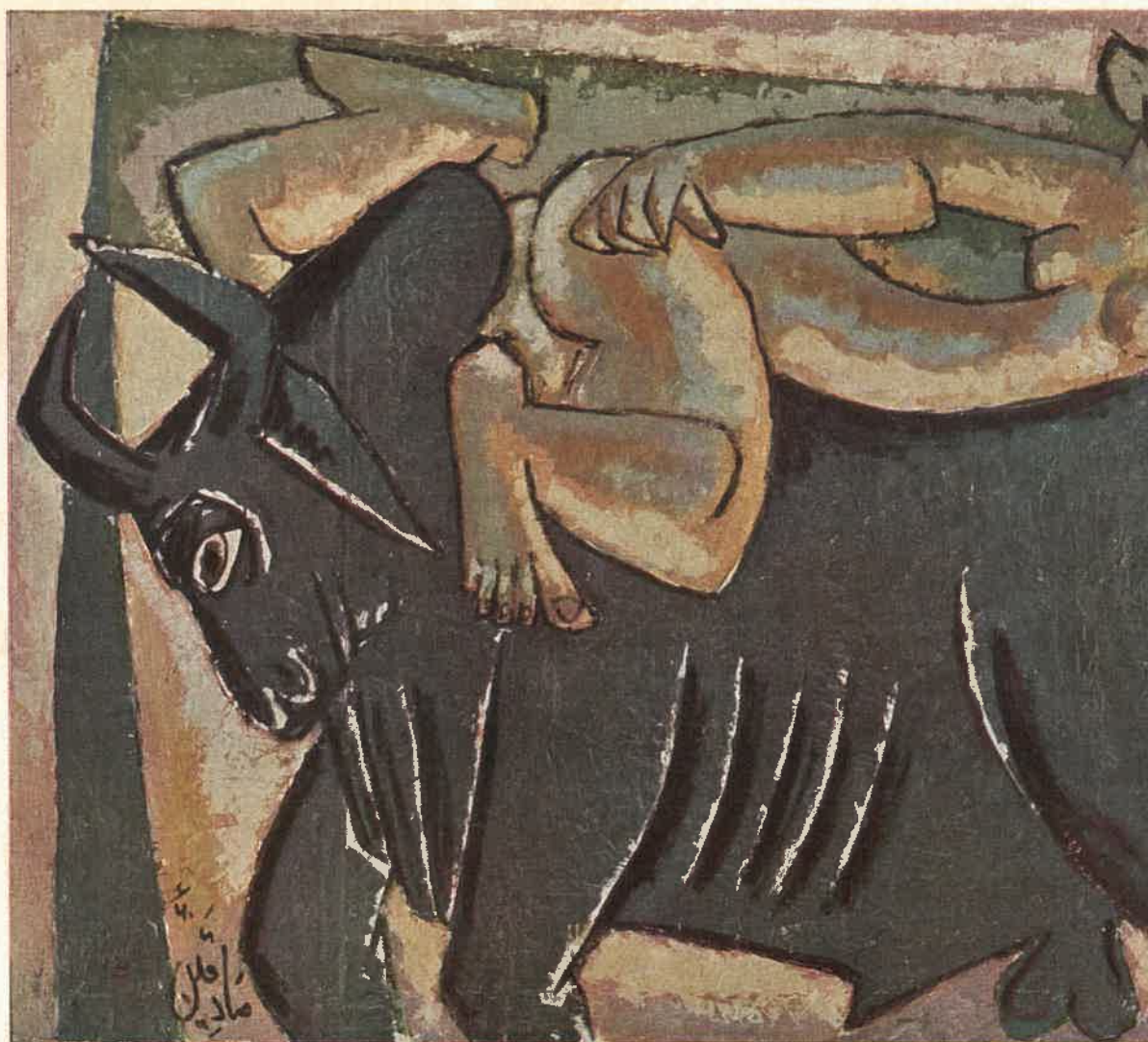
HANEEF RAMAY. *The White Pigeon*. Oil.





▲ SADEQUAIN. *Relations*. Oil.

CHAPTER SIX
EXPERIMENTS
BY YOUNGER ARTISTS



▲ SADEQUAIN. *Repose*. Oil.

It is perhaps characteristic of the developing art movement in Pakistan that apart from those artists who have gained some recognition, there continues to emerge a strong and active 'second line' of painters and sculptors, eager to try new experiments in theme and technique, and reasonably well-equipped for such fruitful experimentation. Perhaps for this reason, the contemporary artistic scene in Pakistan appears to be dominated not by the more experienced and established painters like Chughtai, Zainul Abedin, Sheikh Ahmad and Fyzee Rahamin, nor even by the maturing young elders like Shakir Ali, Zubeida Agha, Safiuddin and Ozzirr Zuby, but by these up and coming younger painters who are providing the motivation and momentum for the art movement in the country today.

By the very nature of things, these younger artists work with certain advantages and disadvantages inherent in their peculiar situation. For example, they are conscious — often a bit too conscious — of the value of publicity which they seek — and often do receive — in direct proportion to the volume and quantity of work produced and exhibited, often to the obvious detriment of quality and creative expression. Also, the feeling of urgency and spontaneity, so essential for the honesty and integrity of artistic communication is not always there. It is not unusual to see them still paint or draw when they have nothing very much to express or convey. In fact the bulk of their work tends to be mere exercise, which is often paraded as and even passes for genuine creative work. But in the process they have produced some outstanding works also which mark the emergence and evolution of individual styles.

SADEQUAIN

Pre-eminent in this group of younger painters is 31-year-old Sadequain, who won an international award at the Paris Biennale of Young Artists in 1961. A prolific painter, Sadequain works with astounding speed. During the summer of 1960, for example, he painted more than a hundred large-sized paintings and murals, and put them up for the first one-man show in many years that filled both floors of the Arts Council galleries in Karachi, and left out many more paintings and drawings for which space just could not be found.

Sadequain's interest in painting grew and developed during long periods of illness which provided for him what he merrily calls 'large chunks of forced idleness'. He started painting on his own, inspired as he was 'by the life of



▲ SADEQUAIN, *Mother and Child*. Oil.

common people as I saw it everywhere, on the streets, in pigeon-hole houses, even in the agonizing stillness of the hospital'. His early sketches of that period have considerable vigour and feeling, and have served an unending reservoir as for many of his later works.

He is at present in France, where he went at the invitation of the French Section of the International Association of Plastic Arts, and his work evoked great interest. Wrote one critic, Barnett Conlan: "Unlike some of the contemporaries from Pakistan and India, Sadequain does not appear to owe very much to Western art, but stems directly from his own Muslim past and from the natural forms met with in the country around Karachi. In all his forms he goes back to the native calligraphy. The Kufi character with its remarkable beauty of abstract pattern would seem to be at the basis of his art. Here one can, perhaps, find a parallel with ancient Chinese art which took its source from the brushwork involved in the writing of Chinese ideogram."

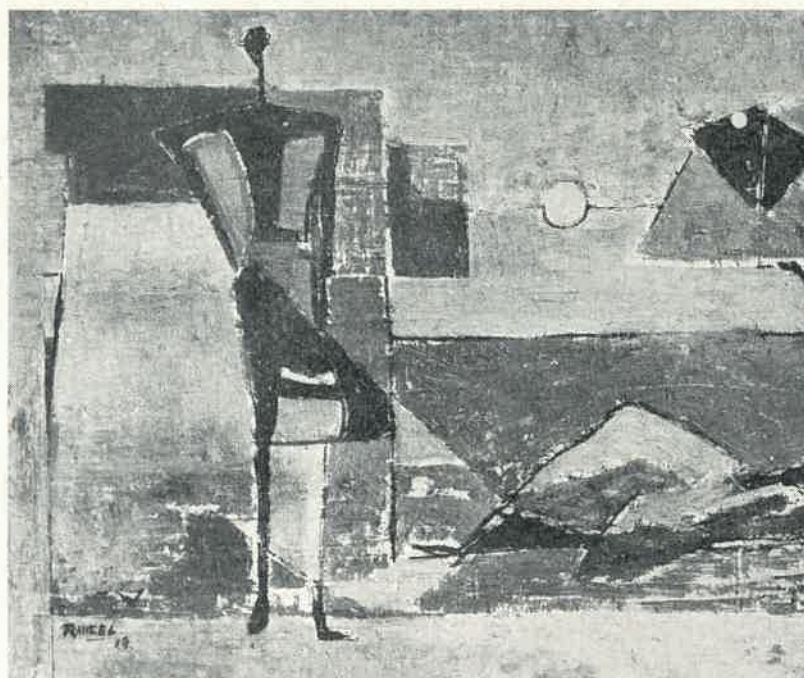
The Last Supper. Oil.



RAHEEL

Young Raheel, who is a writer as well as a painter, lives and works in Lahore. He made his mark with his early experiments of depicting lonesome figures painted flat against subdued or stark backgrounds, as in *Siesta* and *The Picnic*, reproduced here. One finds here an almost linear effect of etching or engraving. The overall feeling of his work, as pointed out by one of his critics, Mr. Safdar Mir, is rather weird, as in *Among the Ruins*, "where the human figure as well as the lines of landscape and the walls of a city, expressed through these broken lines and masses, appear to be like a cross-section not of the surface of the earth but its depths. It is as if earth's strata, piled one on top of another through millions of years' sedimentation, and moulded into synclines and anti-clines, by the furious raging passions of the core of the earth, have suddenly been disturbed. As if there has been a slight shift in pressure somewhere, and the miles and miles of these depths are ploughed up by a severe earthquake, violently merged and mixed together brokenly, and brought to the surface."

▼ RAHEEL. *The Picnic*. Oil.





Fiesta. Oil.



▲ HAMIDUR RAHMAN. *Pet. Oil.*

In the eastern wing of Pakistan, the art movement is confined by and large to those working in and around the Art Institute in Dacca. Some of the younger painters, like their elder colleagues, are on the teaching staff of the Art Institute itself, while others have gone abroad or moved over to West Pakistan, working in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Almost each one of them has graduated from the Dacca Art Institute and while individual works and styles do naturally differ, the stamp of the Institute, in most cases, is easily discernible.

Among these young painters, two, Mohammad Kibria and Rashid Chaudhry, are at present abroad, in Tokyo and Paris respectively, where they went for higher studies in art. Hamidur Rahman and Murtaza Bashir have spent several years in Europe, and have lived and worked for the most part away from Dacca, in Karachi and Lahore respectively. Qayyum Chowdhury and Jahangir have accepted commissions for designing and decoration, painting only in the odd chunks of time in between the commissions. Others, like Aminul Islam, Baset and Razzaque, have continued to teach at the Institute as well as paint and draw.

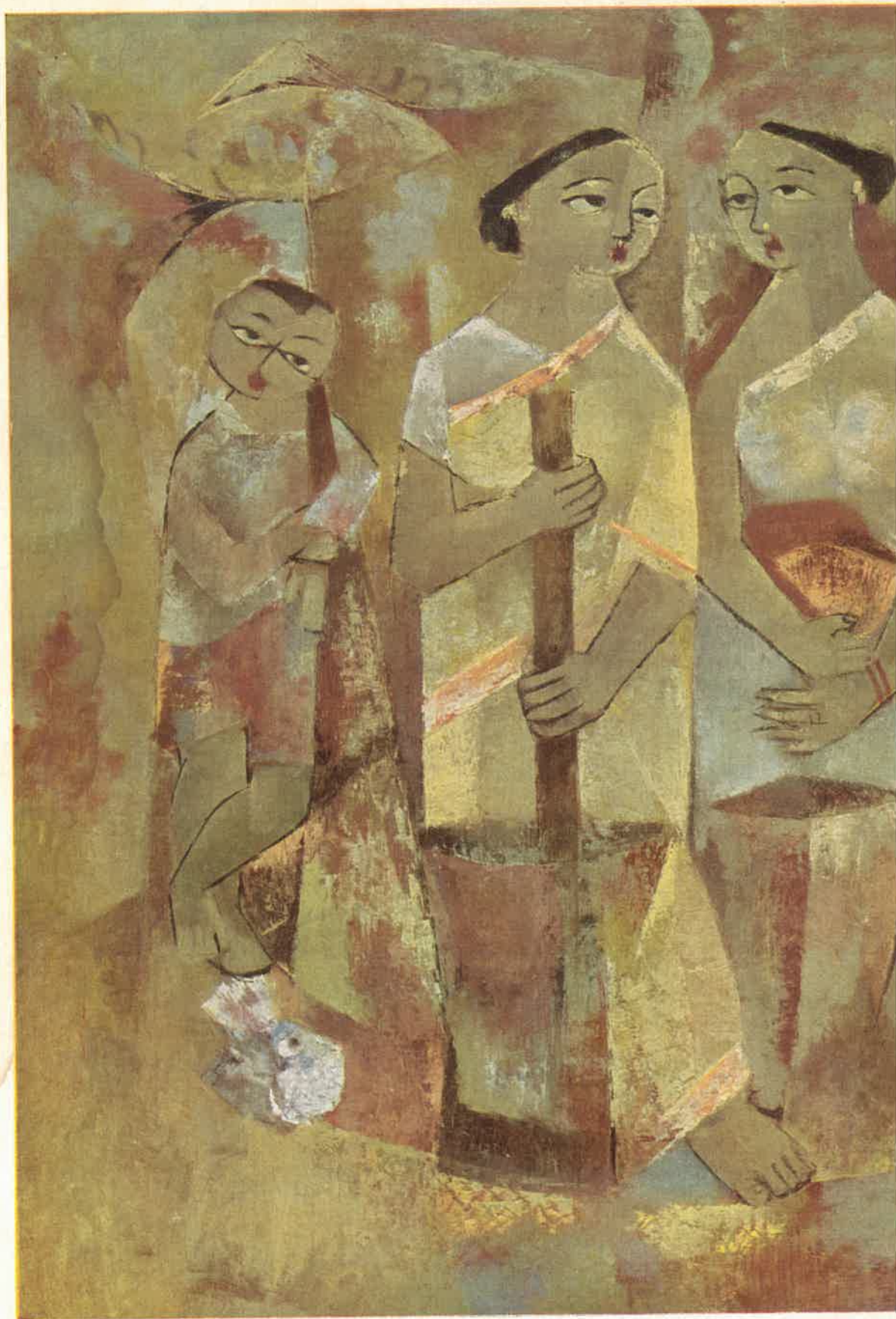
HAMIDUR RAHMAN

Hamidur Rahman took his diploma in Mural Painting from the Slade and has also spent sometime in Italy. Returning to Pakistan in 1957, he was commissioned to do murals for the Public Library in Dacca and for the Shaheed Memorial, and thus embarked on his pioneering work in this field. He has since executed several other murals for the headquarters of the State Bank of Pakistan and for the Pakistan offices of an American bank.

While concentrating on murals, however, Hamidur Rahman has not neglected serious easel-painting and drawing, which he has exhibited in Lahore, Dacca and Karachi. A student of Victor Pasmore, Hamidur Rahman has learnt well his lessons in basic design, and has already made his mark. He is at present setting up a modest studio of his own in Dacca and is also lecturing at the Institute of Architecture there.



◀ HAMIDUR RAHMAN. *Boats at Rest*. Oil.



AIJAZ AND BABAR

Compared to painting which has developed and progressed so well in recent years, the movement for sculpture has been relatively slow and sporadic. Reference has already been made to the work of Ozzirr Zuby and Miss Novera Ahmad. Two other young sculptors, whose works have received attention in the country as well as abroad, are Towfeek Aijaz and Babar Hamid. The former is the head of Sculpture Section at the National College of Arts in Lahore, and last year (1961) his sculpture pieces were selected from Pakistan for the International Biennial Exhibition of Young Artists in Paris.

Babar Hamid, like Ozzirr Zuby, is a painter as well as sculptor, and has lived and worked for the last several years in Italy, obtaining his degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome and exhibiting his works in Italy and Sweden. One of his works has been acquired for the UNESCO building in Paris, and a major exhibition of his recent works is scheduled to be held in Pakistan towards the end of this year (1962).



◀ BABAR HAMID. *The Penitent*. Plaster.

▼ BABAR HAMID. *The Nude Gaya*. Plaster.





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