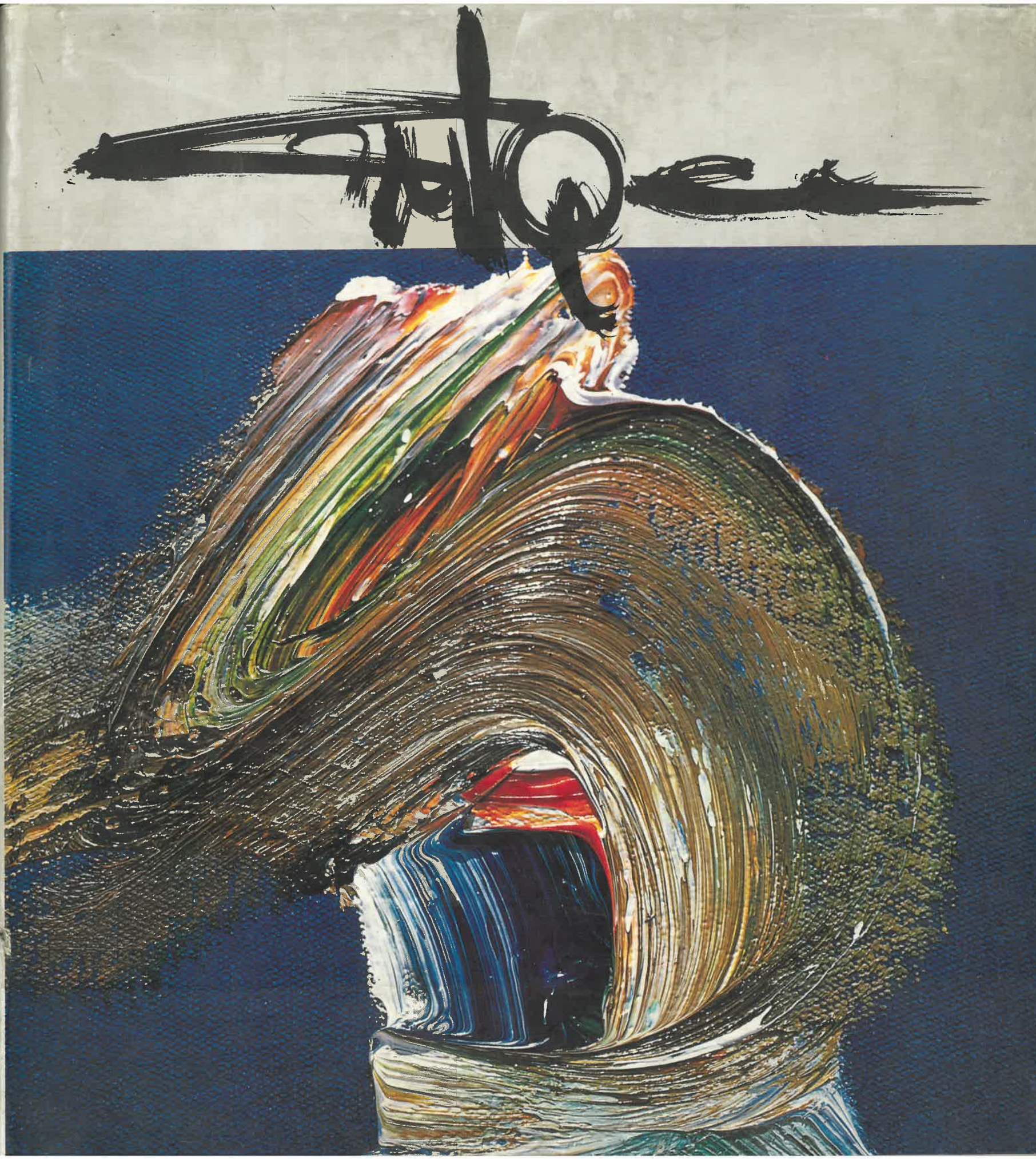

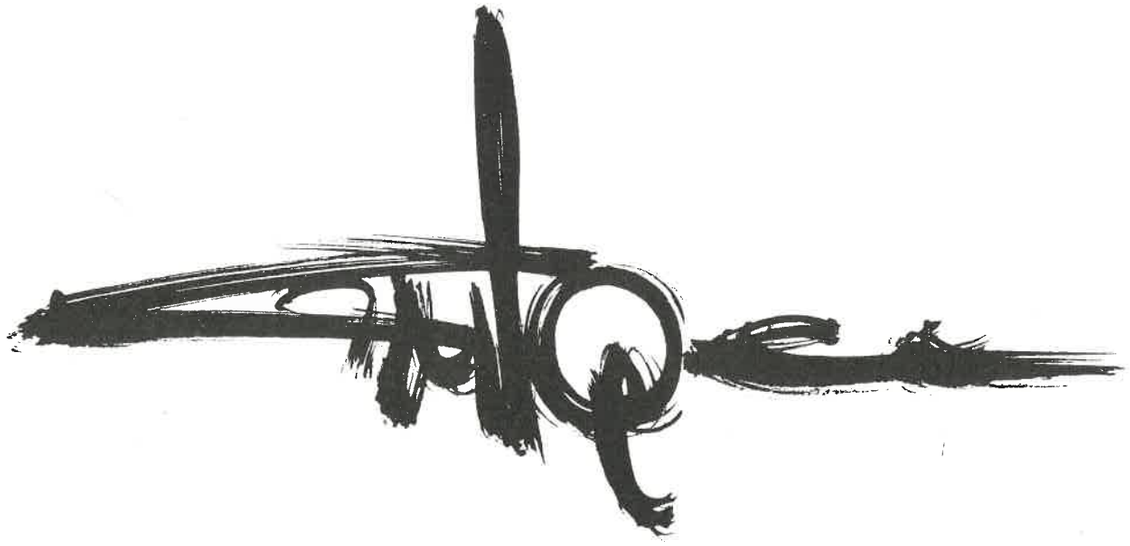

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# INTRODUCTION

Annemarie Schimmel

It was in the mid seventies that I met Gulgee for the first time, at that time the Goethe Institute, Karachi was arranging an exhibition of 'Calligraphic Paintings' or 'Painterly Calligraphy', in which some of the outstanding artists of Pakistan were to participate.

We visited Gulgee, and I at once felt attracted to his beautiful canvases, radiating with marvelous colors and shapes, some gold heightening the colors as though it were a bright shooting star.

My admiration increased when I learned more about his work. For the first time I saw three-dimensional calligraphic objects which still fascinate me today as they did the first moment I discovered them. Who would have imagined that an artist can create an amazing sculpture of a Koranic sura, a metal sculpture with every corner and every face inscribed with Koranic ayat in all the different calligraphic styles. In fact, one of the aspects of Gulgee's work that fascinated me most from the very beginning was his mastery of the different styles in Islamic calligraphy, from the stern and yet extremely elegant Kufi that was used from the late tenth to the early 13th centuries in the eastern lands of the caliphate to adorn not only precious copies of the Holy Writ but also to decorate objects in metal, faience, and on stone.

Gulgee's work in the various styles of classical calligraphy is amazing, and I never forget my joy when I was confronted for the first time with the mihrab in the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, that enormous prayer niche in the shape of an open book, made of marble, with Surah ar-Rahman written on its pages in powerful golden Eastern Kufi, and the pages bound together by a magnificent mirrored 'Allah' in lapis lazuli.

This brings me to another of Gulgee's work i.e. his uncanny talent of creating the most faithful portraits of the great personalities of our age in blue lapis lazuli. Seeing them from a distance you would think that you look at a big photograph in bluish-black, but at a closer look you discover that the picture is formed from thousands of minute pieces of lapis lazuli that are put together in such a way that

they are almost invisibly connected. Thus the picture made of dark blue stones with hundreds of different shades appears as whole as though it were a finely executed painting on canvas.

Gulgee visited us once at Harvard during one of his numerous journeys and he showed our art students how he executed the creation of such pictures, taking with him a big heap of lapis lazuli and putting the stones together according to shapes and shades until the intended picture was completed. We were speechless with admiration!

But again, there are other aspects to Gulgee's art. I think only few people who know his calligraphy and his miraculous lapis pictures are aware that he is a wonderful craftsman who can sketch a person or an event with his subtle pen-strokes most quickly, and can thus produce a likeness that reflects more of the portrayed person than a photograph ever could do; for Gulgee looks not only at the external appearance of a person or whatever he is sketching but is able to immediately seize the spiritual aspects of a scene, or a shape, or of a person. I feel that it is this seeing through the outward forms and veils that enables him to do his artistic work so beautifully, on all levels.

That brings me back to his calligraphy and his painting. There are paintings from the latest period of his life that exude a strongly mystical feeling, especially the *'nuqta'* series: a dot, a circle floating somewhere in a golden and silvery air – it might be the sun, it might be the full moon, symbol of the beloved's beauty; but the spectator who is familiar with mystical symbolism will sense that this might be an allusion to a representation of the 'Primordial Dot', the first thing that according to some mystics' thought, appeared on the empty tablet of creation out of the Absolute Unity of God. Out of this dot the line developed, and out of the line all the rest. This is exactly what the great master of Islamic calligraphy, Ibn Maqla (d. in 940) he, who gave Arabic script the measures and rules that are valid to this day, and what is being taught to the calligraphers even now: the script is measured according to the size and measure of the reed pen, and the dot produced by the pen destines the shape of the writing; then out of the dot the letter *alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet develops – the slim *alif*, with its numerical value of One, and at the same time the initial letter of the word Allah – the *alif* that points to God's Unity and Unicity and to the slender stature of the beautiful beloved! All these interpretations are found in classical calligraphy and classical poetry, and hark back to the primordial secret of creation. The second letter of the alphabet, the *b*, has the numerical value of 2; for which the very act of creation the pre-eternal unit split up into two, reflecting itself in God's Beauty, *Jamal*, and His Majesty, *Jalal*. And let us not forget that according to Shia tradition, Hazrat Ali claimed "I am the dot beneath the *b*" – a saying pondered upon by many Shia mystics.

I became so fascinated by thinking of the golden *'nuqta'* of Gulgee's late painting that I almost forgot to write more about his recent calligraphies – meditations about the Most Beautiful Names of God, those 99 mysterious Names by which

the Creator is called, or called Himself, in the Koran. These 99 Names have formed centers of spiritual concentration for more than a millenium, for each of them has a special sacred quality. They have been interpreted according to various schools of thought. Maulana Rumi, for instance, sees in them – as did Imam Ghazzali, – models for human behaviour as they intend to remind human beings of God's omnipresence. Thus Rumi says, "God called Himself AL-BASIR, the Seeing, so that you remember that whatever you do will be seen and observed by Him, and when He called Himself AS-SAMI, the Hearing, He wants to remind you of the fact that you cannot say anything without Him listening to it," and so on. Other mystics have regarded the Names as powerful means of meditation, and books written by the medieval Sufis in various parts of the world teach how to use them and explain under which circumstances a person is required, or allowed to repeat this or that name thousand of times. A certain Name may purify his or her soul; it may give strength to overcome enemies, may preserve man's spiritual purity or teach a person to practice patience – but there are also rules which tell you which Name may be taught to which people; for the spiritual guide has to know the Name that is fitting for his disciple – otherwise, the use of a wrong name may lead to disturbance both in the person's soul and body. Thus, the proper use of Names entails a great responsibility.

Let us not forget, in this connection, the importance of the human names connected with the Divine ones, that is, the custom to call a boy *'abd'* 'servant of' with one of the Divine Names, such as *Abd al-Karim,* 'servant of the Generous one' or *Abd al-Latif*, 'servant of the Subtle one', or in the case of girls *amat ar-Rahim*, 'maid-servant of the compassionate'. For people hope that the blessing inherent in one of these names will influence the young child's character and draw him or her towards the quality that is displayed in God's Name. Therefore it will be difficult if not impossible to encounter a person with a name like *abd al-Khafid,* 'servant of Him Who Lowers.'

Keeping in mind this power of the Divine Names we should not be surprised that in Gulgee's more recent paintings the power of the Names shows itself very clearly – the Name, as it were, inspired the artist to write it in one stroke without using the inter-media of intellect or rational thought. The characteristics of a certain Name descend upon him, forcing him, so to speak, to conceive of it in a novel way, to express it in an unusual style, and the spectator, then, is carried away by the power of a name, soaring with it into the heights of mystical experiences or else, by giving himself to the colours and shapes, entering into the depths of the 'ocean of the soul' in which he or she will find the innermost secret of being.

I could say much more about Gulgee's art, an art in which aspects of art that seem incompatible with each other, are brought together by a single artist. He is the master whose pen or pencil catches scenes of daily life or portrays his contemporaries with amazing beauty and truth according to the classical rules, and he is the artist whose pictures made of lapis lazuli have introduced a new medium – difficult to handle – into modern art; he is the calligrapher who is

capable of writing in the most perfect classical style, Kufi be it on – Thuluth –, and who at the same time is moved by mysterious spiritual forces to create scriptural representations of the Divine Names, representations which exude a fascinating spiritual power; and he is the artist who knows how to see and make others see, the mystery of the eternal *nuqta*, the Primordial Dot out of which everything once appeared to show itself in the shapes of man and animal, or mineral and plant. Thus he reminds us of Maulana Rumi's famous line of the ascending ladder of creation, which the great Persian mystic wrote in his 'Mathnavi':

"I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and became something in the animal kingdom....."

and so he leads the reader farther to the stage of man, and from there to the angelic world until the soul is reunited with its eternal source. the *'nuqta'* is the starting point for the Way, the way of the lover that longs for his or eternal Beloved, the way of the drop that wants to lose itself in the primordial ocean, or of the reed that longs for the pre-eternal reedbed. And thus, the mystery of the *'nuqta'* seems to be at the basis of Gulgee's painting; he is moved by that spiritual truth which is the beginning of everything created and calls back to eternity those who are able to listen to its call, the call of "Verily we belong to God, and to Him is our return."

Karachi, February 1998

# THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GULGEE

Oleg Grabar
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Every artist projects an image, of himself no doubt, but also of the world that he has seen or that he would like his viewers to see. And it is primarily to the vision or visions Gulgee has proposed over the years that I will devote this essay.

The person is well-known. Often exciting and flamboyant in conversation or in the act of shaping forms out of stones or covering canvases with paint, Gulgee, unlike Picasso and many other lesser artists, has not led a life out of which movies will be made. He was trained as an engineer and even practiced engineering for a while. He often recounts how the late Aga Khan thought that the world of emerging independent nations in South Asia needed engineers rather than artists, but, in the final analysis, did not oppose the fulfillment of his calling and would have been proud by now of his achievements. Whatever personal and emotional upheavals may lie behind some at least of his creativity, they do not come to the fore in his paintings and sculptures, they are not a primary force in his work. Gulgee's passion is his art and, even when it is clearly the result of official or private requests for the celebration of the rich and powerful rather than of personal inspiration, his passion for making works of art shines through his formal portraits of world celebrities and almost overwhelms the subjects. As I shall argue later, one of the major ways for the exercise of this passion lies, throughout Gulgee's work, in the tension between his topics and the techniques or media he utilizes. It is, perhaps, because of this particular tension that Gulgee has so often represented, in mosaics of lapis lazuli, horses at liberty, for horses, like works of art and perhaps like artists, are spectacular to watch in the expression of their freedom and, yet, can also be harnessed for pleasure or for work.

Before dealing any further with this particular tension, two other features, tensions as well, affecting Gulgee's work require some elaboration. One is the tension between representation and abstraction and the other one is the temptation of calligraphy.

Gulgee more or less invented the representation of personages of note in large panels of lapis lazuli and succeeded in modelling facial features and in evoking

light and shade in such ways that likeness is fully achieved, but then transformed, almost veiled, by the unreal film of the material's blue tones. As true and, one might say, very classical portraits, these works establish Gulgee in a well-known tradition of formal representations which, from the time of the first monumental sculptures of kings and queens in ancient Egypt until our own times, has sought to preserve in hard materials – marble, granite, metal – the physical appearance of men and women, so that, in an act of supreme vanity, all ages will recognize the actual looks of a Gudea, a Nefertiti, an Augustus, a Kanishka, or a Napoleon. Such images are striking, they are powerful and appealing, and, at least for a certain period of time, they are meaningful as immediately recognizable representations of living beings. Later on, they only remain if they became works of art, that is to say if the ways in which the representation is made transcends the significance of the originally represented subject. We cannot fathom today the reactions of the future, but, as I shall argue more fully later on, the difficulty of the technique used and the tonalities of lapis provides these portraits of contemporary leaders with a timelessness independent of their subjects.

The more curious point about these portraits in Gulgee's oeuvre is that they are the only works whose subject-matter is clear and recognizable (I am excepting sketches and the more complicated issue of calligraphy, to which I shall return). Most of his paintings fall into the broad category of abstract art and many of them are in fact even "untitled", as though there were no words or concepts or topics which a viewer was expected to recognize in them or the artist acknowledged as a source of inspiration for them. Powerful, at times even violent, brush strokes are carried across the canvas over mono or bichrome background surfaces with usually a more subdued application of paint. Sometimes a design moves from one side of the canvas to the other, heaving its way like the wave of a mighty ocean. At other times it stops somewhere, hanging in mid air, eternally ready to spread on an unsuspecting space. Quite frequently, an explosion of colors fills the center of the images, occasionally secured in a tight knot or in a ball of smouldering energy, more often spreading around like the lava of a volcano or like the gushing waters of a torrent. Forces of a raw nature seem to be unleashed on these canvases, but the sense of a "force" is greater than that of nature, since nothing gives even a hint of the artist's desire to "represent", not even to evoke, nature. The latter is a metaphor convenient to the viewer who tries to explain what he sees, but it is rarely acknowledged as a source of inspiration.

It is easy enough to relate the forms of these paintings to one of the pre-dominant currents of world painting in the twentieth century. Its main characteristic is the absence of overt subject-matter and, as a result, the performance of the artist is to be judged by two main criteria: his handling of the medium he uses and his composition of the surface of the painting. Gulgee has avoided the mixing of different materials as appear in so many collages or other arrangements of painting in western European and American art. His oil, paints are lavishly spread over his canvases and give to all of them a striking vibrancy, a pungency of presence, which

belongs to the most powerful effects associated with abstract expressionism. Also in line with this particular artistic movement, Gulgee avoids the dry precision of geometrical or other compositions in which every square inch has its place in a grand scheme of some sort, a sense of an orderly universe. Gulgee's paintings exhibit freedom of action and generosity of spirit. Everything visually exciting is ultimately possible and nothing has to be where it is and how it is, the artist's view is only one of the possibilities for the space it occupies and leaves the viewer free to imagine another one or many other ones. In the tension between the geometry of an abstract order and the exuberance of free and open expression, Gulgee has chosen the latter. It is more difficult to know whether the choice was a spontaneous one, the expression of a forceful vitality, but at times also of easy self-indulgence, in the impulses that propel him to work or a more profound decision to eschew the intellectual rigor, but also the potential for mechanical facility, of geometric order.

Within the world of abstraction both choices are possible, both are reasonable intellectually and sensually, and yet they are in so many ways incompatible for the belief in an order, whether expressed in geometry or in some other way, always implies the necessity for a judgement of a moral kind. It can affect the judgement, for instance, that disorder, however defined, is reprehensible and, therefore, should be forbidden. Apparent freedom of expression leads easily to the absence of standards for understanding and to a chaotic state in which nothing is valuable because everything is possible. On the other hand, it is only through the free expression of instinctive inspiration tamed by competency that an artist can find the ways to affect his viewers. The issue of the contrast between these two poles will never be resolved and will always remain the great crucible in which art is formed.

The issue of compatible and incompatible choices in the creation of works of art becomes even more dramatic when we turn to the calligraphy which has so exercised Gulgee over the past decades. The transformation of the humble art of writing into a beautiful vehicle of expression is a peculiar characteristic of the artistic ways which the Muslim world has shared with the Far East far more than with the European West. Manuals on how to write well exist in large numbers since the eleventh century of the common era and collectors have preserved, almost since that time, masses of examples of authentic or imitated samples of writing by great masters. Much has been written about the "calligraphy" of Arabic letters for the setting down of the holy text of the Qur'an and for the writing of Persian, Turkish, or Urdu poetry. Calligraphers were the only true artists recognized by the Muslim tradition, at least since the eleventh century, and, in the contemporary world, from Morocco to Indonesia, painters have been seeking ways of creating a "calligraphy" which would be contemporary in its visual features and in the esthetic impact it makes on its viewers and, at the same time, reflect somehow the grandeur and the qualities of the past.

Like so many of his contemporaries, Gulgee has indeed been fascinated with

calligraphy and he has dealt with it in his works in two separate ways. One consists in including letters or words, sometimes clearly legible, at other times less so, into his canvases, without necessarily making them the main subject of the work of art. As often happens with this particular practice, tried by many modern artists, of introducing legible signs into abstract patterns, the viewer remains perplexed, as he does not quite know whether the letter or the word are just ornaments, attractive forms made to please the eye, or whether they are meant to be read, that is to say, to lead to a meaning other than that of the painting on which they are found. The viewer who does not know Arabic characters is oblivious of such possible meaning, while the viewer familiar with the alphabet runs the risk of concentrating on interpreting the letters or the words rather than the painting, a problem which occurs as well with the iconographically rich ways of Christian art in Europe, when the holiness of the meaning does or does not overwhelm the quality of the work of art. The matter becomes even more complicated when the combination of letters form a word which otherwise occurs in the text of the Qur'an. Should one attribute a religious or pious meaning to the message of the image simply because of a coincidence of words? Or, should one seek and expect an additional pious intention on the part of the artist before agreeing to a pious meaning for the work itself?

Even though some of the paintings involved are rather successful works of art, they, like many others everywhere in the Muslim world, seem to me to pose a fundamental problem in the uses of writing, as it also exists in the uses of representations, which is that, as soon as formal values take precedence, the potential or actual meaning of the writing diminishes. How conscious have artists been in their uses of letters without words or of words without sentences or of sentences without acknowledged sources? Much discussion and much reflection are needed to answer these and most related questions. For, from the very beginning and throughout its historical development, what is known as calligraphy was often misunderstood. We have interpreted in terms of piety toward the holiness of the revealed text what was initially a bureaucratic invention of the Abbasid administration in Baghdad to ensure easier communications between the capital and the provinces by standardizing scribal procedures. The decision to develop a "proportioned script" *(khatt al-mansub)* was transformed over the centuries into many different ways of writing and into many different attitudes toward writing. Some of the ways acquired esoteric and symbolic meanings, as they are often frequently understood today. Yet the contrast always remained, inherent to the act of writing itself, between the meaning of what is written (and which lies outside of the painting or sculpture on which it is found) and the form in which it is done. Gulgee's work is one of many contemporary examples from Muslim lands caught between the desire, almost the need, to use motifs and ways peculiar to that tradition and the assertion of a late twentieth century art so often unable to decide what meaning it seeks to give to the forms gushing out of the artist's imagination.

On the whole, this tension between writing as meaning and writing as form is

a creative one, because it allows artists like Gulgee to investigate visually yet another aspect of the perennial artistic struggle between form and meaning, an aspect in which history and cultural ties add to the psychological and emotional burdens of the creator and in which the word and the image add to complexity of perception and of creation.

The third and last tension in Gulgee's work lies in the challenging originality of some of the techniques he uses. Much of his work consists in paintings done according to the usual ways of his time: large canvases covered with powerful brush strokes and occasionally toying with the relief given to paint. But he has also been attracted by two additional techniques. One, already mentioned, is that of presenting personages or horses in mosaics of lapis lazuli, whose various shades are explored in order to provide the light and shade needed for the naturalism required by the subjects. The technique is a difficult one and it requires considerable assistance in the preparation of the small cubes and in their division into various colors and shades. It also is a technique which requires an extraordinary eye to relate minute little cubes to an image of the finished product. It is, finally, a technique which, like most techniques using rare and expensive materials, gold for instance, leaves the viewer wondering whether the hardness and rarity of the material is not what primarily attracts the eye. Gulgee has succeeded in a walking a very tricky tight rope and to avoid the danger of glitter by subduing his subjects in the tonalities of his medium. The effects are, to my mind, quite extraordinary.

The other originality of Gulgee's work is his discovery or rediscovery of an art of sculpture which had, for practical purposes, disappeared from most Muslim lands. He transformed calligraphy into spectacular three-dimensional sculptures and discovered there again the problems of suggesting meanings which cannot be readily perceived, for, if you come too close to the sculpture, it "reads" like a painting and, if you are too far, you cannot see much of what it is supposed to represent. The problem was always present in sculpture since time immemorial, but Gulgee has seen that the art of sculpture could be developed in order to evoke, through the poser of its forms, some of the fundamental features of Muslim belief, for instance the ideas of Unity of God and unity of creation.

It seems clear to me that many of these sculptures are still tentative searches for a way to give sense to a particularly powerful medium of art. In doing these sculptures, Gulgee has thrown a challenge to all artists that goes much beyond his own work and his own country. The challenge is to find a way for sculpture, a public art quite different from the relatively private world of painting, to meet the esthetic and sensory needs of the twenty-first century without becoming, as it has in some countries, cheap publicity or political propaganda. A public art evoking thought, providing pleasure, and channelling behavior is needed everywhere. Gulgee has created a world of forms which leads the way for all men and women.

# JOURNEYS WITHIN

Eric Gibson
Executive Editor Art News, New York.

An exhibit at Meridian International Centre is an example of the continuing dialogue between Eastern and Western artistic traditions. The name of the show is "Journeys Within".

In his paintings the artist is attempting to fuse two traditions: Islamic calligraphy, in which writing both carries a religious text and decorates a page, and the Western style of Abstract Expressionism with its movemented brush strokes. These paintings combine the two traditions with grace and elegances and at the same time manage to transcend them.

The paintings stand as more than sum of their source.

Washington Times
November 1, 1993

# ARTIST EXTRAORDINARY

## Reginald Massey

*All perform their tragic play,*
*There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,*
*That's Ophelia, that Cordelia....*
*If worthy their prominent part in the play,*
*Do not break up their lines to weep....*
*Every discoloration of the stone,*
*Every accidental crack or dent,*
*Seems a water-course or an avalanche,*
*Or lofty slope where it still snows.*

Lapis Lazuli: W B Yeats

### *Gulgee: painter, sculptor, engineer and mosaic innovator*

Late at night at about this time last year there was loud knocking at the door of a big house in a fashionable district of Karachi. The owner – who looks like a fine cocktail of Pierre Trudeau and the late great French painter and intellectual, Cocteau – donned his silk kimono and went to see who was causing the disturbance. Three men in uniform entered and saluted. Their leader asked: "Are you the great Gulgee?" "I am Gulgee. Whether I'm great, that's for the world to decide," came the reply. "Well, Gulgee Sahib, we're from the telephone maintenance department and have been ordered to repair your connection immediately."

Gulgee was perplexed. His phone had been out of order for days and he'd reported the matter to the telephone engineers several times. How come they had decided to do their repairs at two in the morning? The men had no answer to that one but got down to the business of getting the telephone working again. After the job had finished they left in an army jeep. Now why should the telephone people be using an army vehicle? thought Gulgee, yawning, and making his way back to bed. As he was about to doze off the phone rang and – as is the nasty habit of this blessing of civilization – jolted him back to the realities of life. "Sorry to trouble you at this hour Gulgee Sahib. I'm the Chief Engineer of Karachi City telephones. I'm just checking out whether your phone is OK. The President Sahib has been trying to get in touch with you and told us to repair your connection immediately. Can you hear me clearly?" "Yes thank you, I can hear you very clearly," replied Gulgee. He sat up in bed and lit a Benson and Hedges. Well, well, the mystery of the sudden efficiency had now been unravelled. Sure enough, within fifteen minutes Islamabad was on the line. First the President's private secretary and then the General himself. He wanted Gulgee to take the seven o'clock flight to Peshawar and go into the refugee camps and sketch the miseries of the Afghans there.

Gulgee, well used to moving fast, collected his shaving gear and drawing materials and got to the airport at six. That afternoon Gulgee was sketching the 3 million Afghans who had poured across into Pakistan after Russia marched into Kabul.

**Renaissance:** Abdul Mohammad Ismaili – known as Gulgee, "respected flower" – is a man larger than life. In terms of art he is the nearest that one can get to the Renaissance ideal of the full man or the complete artist. He would have been at ease in the company of Leonardo de Vinci or Michelangelo or Dante. In the North American parlance of today he would be termed a polymath. Certainly within Asian parameters there is no artist alive today who can do the things that Gulgee does.

I called on him on a Sunday morning at his Kensington studio and was met by an extremely courteous man of fifty-seven who looks a decade younger and talks and behaves like any young enthusiatic artist. He is wealthy and known and respected by many of the world's topmost people. But that hasn't made his body or mind flabby. There is a fire in the man's eye and there is fire in his belly. He enthuses about his sketches, his sculptures and his oils. He still talks like a hungry fighter. But there is no meanness or bitterness about him. He is kindness itself and plies you with chilled grapefruit juice and salted almonds. He smokes incessantly, the hands and fingers urgent to do something. The top four buttons of the Jermyn Street shirt are unbuttoned and the feet are encased in snakeskin Italian sandals. Soon, however, the sandals are discarded and he moves about the luxuriant studio like a barefoot panther. He works barefoot – a habit he unknowingly shares with the Indian painter Husain whose work he admires – and executes an action abstract in half an hour. Unconsciously he reaches for the ultramarine first; though while talking as he works he says that he loves olive green. The finishing touch, or more correctly the *coup de grace,* is delicately applied in the form of pure beaten gold leaf that he had brought over from his atelier in Karachi where he has a gold beater whose sole job it is to keep him supplied with his vital ingredient for all, or most of, his abstracts.

Since Gulgee believes that the creative process is a sacred act, a kind of elevated worship, it follows that his work is not only labour intensive but also capital intensive. And so apart from gold, he uses diamonds, rubies and other gems. His canvases and paints are of the highest quality. He has singlehandedly resuscitated the Byzantine art of mosaic portraiture and he has taken the idiom many steps further: he has humanised the faces and invested them with 20th century sensibility and consciousness. So far as understanding his work from an India–Pakistan point of view is concerned, he is in the direct line of succession of the master craftsmen who inlaid the Taj Mahal and Itmad-ud-Doulah's mausoleum with precious metals and rare stones. His chosen material is lapis lazuli *(see footnote at the end of the chapter)* which, in spite of the present troubles, still finds its way down from Afghanistan to Pakistan. The pieces are cut, polished and laid out by stone cutters. Then Gulgee selects the piece he requires and has it cut out to the particular shape

that he specifies. His considerations are those of color, grade and feel. Finally the piece is fitted into the portrait and secured with a polyester adhesive.

After the portrait is completed it gets a last rubbing down with fine diamond powder. This brings out the intrinsic lustre of the lapis lazuli.

**Stone:** Why does the artist go to all this trouble just for making a portrait? After all, Gulgee is no mean dauber of paint on canvas. "Paint and canvas have a limited life and they are both man made. *The Last Supper,* that great work of Christian art is almost finished now. Look at the other masterpieces! They fade or fall apart but for the restorers. But stone has been lying in the bowels of the earth for millions and millions of years and will not disintegrate or fade. That is why I use stone. "It's almost everlasting," says Gulgee. Does he find lapis lazuli easy to work with? "No, it is not at all easy to work. But it is a challenge. I like to wrestle with the stone and make it bend to my will. That then is a victory. A portrait with paint, for example, is much easier to do for the simple reason that paint – being liquid material – can be manipulated with comparative ease." He recollects the problems he had with a mosaic portrait of His Highness Prince Abdullah al Faisal. But when the picture was done he was justly proud of it and took it to Riyadh. The Prince liked it very much and sent his secretary to Gulgee's hotel to hand over the agreed payment. When Gulgee opened the embossed envelope to put the money away the secretary asked him to count it. On the secretary's insistence Gulgee did, and discovered that there were $15,000 more than he had expected. The artist pointed out the discrepancy and asked the secretary to take back the excess money as there had quite obviously been some mistake. The secretary replied that he was ordered only to deliver the money, and should he venture to take back any it was more than likely that he would be reprimanded. Gulgee, however, asked for an audience with the Prince and explained to him that he had been overpaid. The Prince said that it was only a small token of his appreciation.

Later, as a token of thanks, Gulgee presented the Prince with another of his works.

This sort of appreciation and financial success was not easily won. In his early days he struggled along like any other artist in any part of the world. Indeed, his family and friends thought that he'd gone insane when he gave up a lucrative career as a high dam expert. His academic career in engineering was always brilliant: B.Sc. (Hons.) in Engineering (Aligarh) when he topped the university list; Masters Degree in Hydraulics (Columbia) when he secured A Grades in every course; Master of Science (Harvard University) in Soil Mechanics. At Aligarh he was the youngest Lecturer in Engineering that the university had ever appointed. At Harvard he started work on a Doctorate when he was appointed at the US Bureau of Reclamation. In 1950, the Swedish engineering company, Vatlenbygnadsbyroan, appointed him a consulting engineer at a fabulous salary. But Gulgee's heart was set on painting. Although he was a consultant on the Mangla and Warsak dams in Pakistan, even today he is proud of the work he did on these successful projects, his most fervent desire was to become a full time artist.

**Aga Khan:** During the end of 1951, the Aga Khan was wintering at Cannes and Gulgee was in Stockholm. The aspiring artist sent the Prince two dozen red roses and asked for an appointment. It was granted and Gulgee flew down from Stockholm. The Aga Khan reminded Gulgee that what Asia needed was more engineers and better engineers. But the Prince's advice fell on deaf ears. Gulgee threw up his job and embarked upon the artist's dicey and often impecunious existence.

The early years were spiced, however, with ironies of fate due largely to inexperience. When Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt visited Pakistan he was appointed an official photographer and he accompanied her entourage throughout her tour. He submitted his pictures to *Time* magazine and they used them. There were however no credits under Gulgee's pictures. When he wrote and asked why they had left out his name, they replied that there was no name stamp on the back of any of the pictures sent in by him. That was that. "And so," says Gulgee with an endearing smile, "I lost my claim to fame so far as *Time* is concerned."

But he is a very fine photographer. He could, if he felt like it, make a good living as a professional photographer. When we were photographing him he could not keep still. He kept fussing with the lights and was opening and shutting windows to ensure that there was enough light in the room. Then when his session was over he insisted on taking our pictures and his results were very good. He even suggested that we see him at work, and so in his crowded kitchen on an *ad hoc* easel he got to work in demonic fashion. "See, it moves! It moves!" he kept exclaiming.

Some critics prefer Gulgee's portraits and semi-abstract sculptures to his purely abstract work and yet corporate commissions for abstract murals come pouring in. The Wates head office in London has his mural as does the Pakistan branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank. His paintings can be seen scattered from Tokyo to Omaha in Nebraska. As an artist Gulgee strides the planet like a veritable colossus.

His country is not unmindful of the honour that he has brought to himself and to Pakistan. He was given the Pride of Performance Award long ago, and last year received the *Sitara-e-Imtiaz*, the highest honour ever bestowed on an artist in Pakistan. Also last year when President Zia visited the United States he took with him a mosaic portrait of President Reagan by Gulgee. This was Pakistan's official gift to the President of the USA. And the artist was present at the White House presentation.

**Commissions:** At the moment he is working on large commissions for the Ismaili Centre in London. One is a mosaic portrait of the present Aga Khan who has this year completed 25 years as head of the worldwide Ismaili sect. The second is a horizontal canvas depicting Koranic *ayats*. Then there are his *magnum opus* of seven massive sculptures, each on a particular section of the Koran. These emanate from a circular motif although decorated with sacred verses. Of these the sculpture on the Surah-e-Rehman ("Which of God's favours would you deny?") is a truly monumental piece.

"When these are completed," says Gulgee, "I will start on sculptures based on the Gita and the Granth Sahib. The world must be made aware of what we in Asia have to offer, not only in terms of artistic experience but also in terms of spiritual experience."

As one who has never been to art school he has had to work twice as hard to master the techniques of art. But discovering things for oneself can be exciting and enduring. Does he not miss having missed out on art school? "No. On the contrary, I have learnt from the Great Masters themselves. For hours on end I have gazed and gazed on the works of the great from East and West. There is no major museum in any part of the world where I have not learnt a lesson or two. I admire Rembrandt and Vermeer most of all. My painting techniques I have taken from Rembrandt. Just examine the way my strokes are laid on and how I handle the play of light on faces and facets. For this reason, I suppose, the Netherlands government is organising exhibitions of my work in Holland next year."

And his opinions on contemporary Western art? He believes that the lack of discipline has played havoc with artistic norms and that contemporary styles and fashions have outrun their course. They have lost vitality and must therefore remain stunted. He likes Rothko, nonetheless. For Warhol and his school he has no time.

Art that does not move – in both senses of the word – is academic and dead. ("See, it moves! It moves!") And so he loves to paint and sketch dancers. In the near future he hopes to visit India and there in the South he proposes to work with classical dancers. It is for this reason that he told me quietly, but with pride, that his daughter Zarmeen is learning Kathak dance in a Karachi high school. And his son Amin is at Yale studying architecture. His wife Zarine – his unfailing stay over the years – is a talented mosaic artist.

Yes, the man Gulgee moves. He moves.

Cover Story, Asian Post
London, July 16, 1983

# THE COMPLETE ARTIST

## A. A. – Cover Story, Gulf Weekly, 24–30 October, 1991

*Yet some there be that by due steps aspire*
*To lay their just hands on that golden key*
*That opes the palace of Eternity*

John Milton 1608 – 1674

His mysterious abstracts vie with his innovative portraits in mosaic. His startling strokes of calligraphic expression outpace the dynamism of his swiftly executed sketches. His perspective flies high, influences architectural arrangements. He works in oil. He uses crayons, brush and ink, onyx, lapis lazuli, copper and bronze.

He is craftsman, sculptor, painter. He is a builder of dams, a scientist, trained as an engineer. He is as close to the Renaissance ideal of the complete artist as exists in our times.

He is Gulgee.

Pakistan's most celebrated artist, Gulgee, who comes to the UAE and Oman with the first ever exhibition of his works this week, is a man of many talents.

An artist by inclination, but a scientist by training, Gulgee has managed not only to transcend the diversity of his callings but also and in so doing, to rise above the ordinary. His works harness the sublime and the simple, the spirit and the execution, the evocative and the practical.

Gulgee's creations span time, place and space. Inspired by a regional, Pakistani and Islamic theme, they are enriched by modern and innovative techniques and trends.

He is at once an abstract expressionist painter, a creator of modern murals, a calligraphist, a chiseller in canvas of marble and semi-precious stone, a realistic portrait painter in oils, a sketch artist who works with crayon, brush and ink, and an artist who has taken the idiom of Islamic art to new and dynamic international heights.

Any appreciation of Gulgee's work must take into account the diversity and evolution of his creative career. How he began as an artist is almost a cliche. As a child he used to watch his grandfather dabble in paint but there was no formal training and indeed, no encouragement from his family or his peers for him to become an artist.

Gulgee, born Mohammad Ismaili on October 25, 1926 in Peshawar and nicknamed "Gul-jee", which means flower, was, however, more than just a bright student; he was brilliant. He came first at every stage of his academic life. From Aligarh University, India, he got a first class first for his B.Sc. degree and then a scholarship to study at Columbia University where he earned his M.S. degree in

Hydraulics in 1947. He went on to Harvard University and earned another degree, an M.S. in Soil Mechanics in 1948.

Very few people took Gulgee's artistic inclination seriously. He recalls a meeting with the Aga Khan in the 50's when the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community to which Gulgee belongs told him, "An artist brings glory to himself, but what your country needs is engineers." Gulgee, who was at the time working in Stockholm as a design engineer, nevertheless held his first exhibition of paintings in the Swedish city soon after.

He was still concentrating on realistic portraits in oil when he moved to Pakistan to work as a builder of dams in various parts of the country. His first big break and a milestone in Gulgee's artistic evolution came at this time when King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan visited Pakistan and was so pleased by a portrait done by Gulgee that he invited him to Kabul.

Stone and marble and lapis lazuli were still some months away but in Kabul the artist began to produce prolifically and impressively a range of portraits and sketches that earned him the reputation of being one of Pakistan's most talented young artists. An exhibition of Gulgee's works, some 151 in all, was held in 1959 in Kabul. His portraits were realistic and strong and his abstracts were not completely bold but the free-flowing style was unmistakably his. And undoubtedly exceptionally good.

But more than an exhibition and much more than portraiture were to come his way in Afghanistan. On a trip to a marble factory with the minister of trade, Gulgee was fascinated by the rich variety of shades and colours found in a multicoloured marble called onyx. He offered to make a marble portrait of the king using pieces of onyx. The portrait was an extraordinary work of art; another work, of camels in mosaic, was presented by the Afghan king to President Eisenhower on the latter's visit to Kabul in 1959.

And the Gulgee art of "painting in stone" had begun.

"Stone has been lying in the bowels of the earth for millions and millions of years and will not disintegrate or fade," says Gulgee. "That is why I use stone. It's almost everlasting."

But it is also difficult, is it not, to work with lapis lazuli, to stone cut millions of tiny pieces and match the shades and shapes to fit the painting of a face, a horse or a place.

"No. It is not at all easy to work," agrees the artist. "But it is a challenge. I like to wrestle with the stone and make it bend to my will. That then is a victory. A portrait with paint, for example, is much easier to do for the simple reason that paint – being liquid material – can be manipulated with comparative ease."

Over the years, Gulgee has taken what began as a simple experiment at a marble factory more than 30 years ago, and ingeniously cultivated his paintings in stone technique into an art form both splendid and unique. Writes an art critic in *The Asian Post*: "He has singlehandedly resuscitated the Byzantine art of mosaic portraiture and has taken the idiom many steps further; he has humanised the faces and invested them with 20th century sensibility and consciousness."

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Gulgee's sketches are full of sheer movement, a sensibility which comes perhaps from his days as a photographer when, he recalls, he once even got his photographs of Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to Pakistan published in *Time* magazine. "But I forgot to write my name at the back of the pictures," he recalls. That was that. "I lost my claim to fame so far as *Time* is concerned," he adds.

But the loss has not been Gulgee's. Gulgee's portraits, in stone or oil or simple brush and ink, are diverse and many. His subjects include heads of state, personalities, kings and queens, as well as ordinary people at work or at play. Memorable amongst them are his portraits of the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, of Chinese leader Zhou En Lai, of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, of Queen Farah Diba of Iran. Each has a special strength and each is an essay in itself. An emotional, expressive and brilliant essay in colours and strokes.

Also brilliant are the other art forms which are executed by this artist. Gulgee's fame is built to a great extent on his work as an abstract artist – so strong and powerful are his free, abstract expressions on canvas. But in this medium too, Gulgee is continually growing and improving, using space and curvlinear strokes but hardly ever angular or static images. His lines are always sinuous and his application of colour emotional, passionate.

Awarded the Pride of Performance in Pakistan, as well as the *Sitara-e-Imtiaz,* the latter the highest honour ever bestowed on an artist in Pakistan, Gulgee has works of art around the world – at public exhibitions, private collections and art galleries.

One art form for which he is also very well known is his interpretation of calligraphy in an abstract but three-dimensional format. Taking the verses of the Holy Quran as his inspiration, Gulgee has created calligraphic history by casting these verses in copper. The effect is transcendental, evocative and unforgettable.

The craftsman-builder in the artist has come to the forefront in many diverse projects. Commissions have allowed him to create vast murals within hospitals and public buildings. Gulgee's genius has flowered on minarets, on mosques and on the walls of corporate buildings. His oils have become less frequent as he has worked more and more with calligraphy, with three-dimensional matter, with lapis lazuli and copper.

Talking about his own talent, Gulgee says that, "My portraits carry as little detail as possible. I concentrate on the eyes and other features to capture the personality of the subject." He does more. His quest seems to be movement, to capture the essence of energy and transmit it through a medium both evocative and long-lasting.

It is a quest this great artist, this innovator and giant amongst his peers, has attained with a sensitivity to feelings and application to laborious detail that is unmistakably his own. And unmistakably the work of a renaissance man; complete and yet ever-changing in the cause of art.

Cover Story, Gulf Weekly
24–30 October, 1991

# IMAGES OF INTUITIVE STRENGTH

P. N. Mago

It is said that a true work of art is born of 'the artist', which is truly a mysterious, mystical creation with its own autonomous life, a personality, an independent subject, animated by the breath of the spirit.

The 30 odd paintings by Gulgee, a renowned artist from Pakistan, on display at the Shridharani Gallery (sponsored by the ICCR), are images that emerge vigorously from the domain of his inner energy – a region where precise orientation is impossible. The power his images possess is from his intuitive strength. Everything ripe seems to push forward from the depth of his inner being through frenzied, rhythmic gestures of his brush and palette-knife, like the dance of a 'Darvesh'.

When an artist peels away the formal sheath from an image, he suddenly gains access to natural forces in all their rawness and purity. And this is what we sense in the rhythmic and forceful laying of the thick oil paint on the canvas by Gulgee. He creates images that exist without their being explicitly represented and yet at once despairing and lyrical, wild yet careful. They penetrate beneath the surface; they draw nearer to inherent forms, they are 'interior images' or 'interior landscapes', divorced completely from any exterior landscape or specific scenes.

Gulgee's works are of 'pure nature', they possess the distinction of being 'pure painting'. They constitute the very stuff of art and lead to the discovery of related rhythms and relationships manifest in wider nature, of which we are a part. He reveals this to us in the original language of art, in line, shape, colour, direction and in their rhythmic relationship.

In these forms of inner-rhythm, there is a supreme emphasis on aesthetic qualities of rich colour, its various harmonies, its complex tonal inflections and their grave rhythms. A thing of the mind, they emerge from some interior necessity. They are proper to him and proper to the time he lives in.

He often uses the calligraphic script as a starting point. But it is like emotional writing, composed of skeins, dashes, flourishes – creating a world all its own; a world of resonance of the sweeps and thrusts, of the curves and swirls. The themes

are born of matter itself. They are present in the thickness of paint, in the glow of colours he uses, they spring from lines, interlacings and tangles. The resultant effect is unforeseeable; it is laden with inspiration and involvement, with gesture and the significant sign.

As Kandinsky has said: "Anything is beautiful which proceeds from inner necessity of the soul. Anything is beautiful which is beautiful inside." Gulgee lets himself go deep, like a diver, and his hand restlessly paints all the rhythms and turbulence he feels inside him. His creative imagination, instinctively, arranges these visions in spontaneous gestures of dynamic, swirling brushwork. Everything seems to rhyme in his paintings – the skein and alternating play of its manifestation in multifarious rhythms – the intrinsic nature of things. Here is the genesis of his form of abstract art that is different from the abstract art of the West and over which he demonstrates an intuitive control.

Unlike the geometric form which is the result of an intellectual process, a product of reflection and premeditation, Gulgee's images are not preplanned; they assume their character and existence on the spur of the moment. They are harmonies created by the contrasting relationships and discords of free forms, expressed in a sheer rhythmic purity, in sweeps of impasto in vibrant colours ultramarine, cadmium, ruby pink, vermillion, emerald, olive – each hair of the brush participating in laying the paint onto the canvas, echoing the directional movement in a fibrous texture. These are, of course, some smooth jewels of luminous paint and of gold layed with the palette-knife that provides a textural contrast to the brush-marks. They harmonise with the textural richness of the pulsating diagonal rhythm in relief as against the thinly painted areas of silence, the back-drop of the void. The colours of his forms are orchestrated with great feeling and sensitivity.

In contrast to abstract paintings representing Gulgee's restless, creative personality, there are meticulously crafted portraits in mosaic. There is a remarkable sampling of this complex technique in his 'Polo', a mosaic executed with pieces of agate, jade and the most richly hued of all stones, the lapis lazuli. These fall into the category of more traditional works of art in a highly realistic idiom.

In his mosaics, Gulgee is assisted by master cutters. He outlines the shapes for every tonal or light/shade details, fitting into the sketched portrait. He creates all possible tonal gradations through a keen selection of the stones. His talented wife Zarine, who is accompanying him, helps him in these complex projects.

His love for calligraphy has manifested itself in the sculpture on display – a monumental work in bronze with silver plating, entitled "Surah-e-Rehman". It is a work of impressive design concept and craftsmanship based on calligraphic motif with etched and engraved quotes from the Quran.

Gulgee is known internationally for his abstraction inasmuch as for his portraits in mosaic, which are rendered in a masterly manner. There is a certain fluency in his paintings, his lapis lazuli portraits, his sculptures and his calligraphy, that lends a unique character to his works.

Patriot, New Delhi
May 23, 1989

# GULGEE: BRIDGING THE OCCIDENT AND THE ORIENT

Akbar Naqvi

Gulgee works in a large and very cluttered studio. Primed canvas, large and small, are stacked against the walls and against one another. A few pieces of sculpture in bronze are perilously perched on paint-grimed tables. Old painted canvas, some torn, while others smothered in the dust of rejection, add to the dishevelment of the studio Hundreds of used paint tubes, small empty bottles of turpentine and profusion of old brushes and palette knives litter the room. There are rags heavy with paint on the tables, scattered on the floor, thrown away after Gulgee has used them for cleaning his brushes and palette knives.

In a clearing in one corner of the studio is an upright easel on which Gulgee paints his very small and medium-sized canvas. Again against the wall and at a convenient height is a large panel showing a work in progress. On a big, rough and paint-encrusted table are a number of thick, greenish tinged glass sheets, their sharp edges and pointed corners filed to smoothness, on which Gulgee squeezes out his pigments, the whole spectrum of the rainbow as shades, but all others are in their primary states. They are thinned with turpentine according to the need before the work starts. In a receptacle or two are a clutch of different size brushes and palette knives. Gulgee dressed in a shirt and trousers, already bespattered with paint from his earlier encounters with painting, his hands coloured with paint, of which quite a few spots can be seen on his face also, is about to launch himself into his work.

First he uses a broad brush to apply paint on the surface of the canvas, and the action suggests that it is being massaged, on a beautiful body of divine curves and contours Once the canvas is anointed in this manner, Gulgee picks up another brush, charges it with more than one colour, walks up to the canvas as if possessed, pauses for an instant, his face from which all expression has drained off, leaving in place an hypnotic fix, as if a deep mystery is about to be initiated. Suddenly, without warning even to himself, he lunges at the canvas in sharp, swift motions so that the charged brush manned by the exploding body of the painter and the canvas on the easel or against the wall come into instantaneous contact

with one another. The moments of such contacts are the basic elements, the idioms and phrases, from which Gulgee creates his paintings. These actions could be a leap into the air; they could be sudden vertical, horizontal, diagonal or curving and looping moves of the hand, or, even a gentle, loving and curiously intimate touch and tap. In fact these gestures and movements could be of several characters when Gulgee is free of the terra firma and in the space.

They could even arise when he is firmly planted on the floor of his studio, and be seen as the movement of the hand from the shoulder, the elbow and even the wrist. But in every case it is the power of his body, agitated, pulsing for release which the canvas makes visible. Aglow with a fire, which is almost atavistic, Gulgee contacts the canvas again and again until a stage comes when he stops abruptly because, once again, without warning the work is finished. If he were to continue, there will have to be fresh textile surface for Gulgee to practice his yoga. Now we have in front of us the finished painting, what I would call the body painting of Gulgee. Not his body alone, but the body of man, an archetypal entity, charged with sightless force arising from the mother earth, which seeks light in colours and form in designs, it creates of the beautiful in the language of pure sensation of movements of points of restless and imploding rests.

Both in the light from the earth, and in return to it, it is the physical sensation of rise and fall, which Gulgee captures on his canvas. The hairs on his brush trace the sensation of speed of the pristine movements, and the sharp works of the knife the contours and the edges of physically felt space. In this process the brush and the knife also establish their distinctive identity and integrity and become interpretors of the force, which has the artist in its possession. The sensation of rise and fall in Gulgee's paintings, even though an end in itself, does often suggest wider meanings for the simple reason that we try to understand what is happening to us. Therefore we are reminded of the Greek story of Icarus who flew too close to the sun, as Gulgee and every colourist does, and which melted the wax-bound wings on his shoulders plunging him to his death. But Gulgee's magic world is innocent of pain, disappointment and tragedy. If at all his works could be seen as paradigms of the fall of the first man from heaven, who was rewarded for his fall with earthly heaven of great beauty and prodigality, Gulgee's paintings could be described as typical examples of our traditional aesthetics in which light, colour and ornamentation are used to create paradisiacal designs of great nostalgic value. The language of his paintings may be occidental, but in the hands of Gulgee it lends itself naturally for the delineation of his sensibility. There are differences of course, the principal one being that the designs of the traditional Islamic art are geometrical whereas Gulgees are not. However, common to both is the pleasure derived from sensations, which are of the body.

If Gulgee and his works have any message, it is a silent one in that they do not suggest words to us but invite us to become one with them in their movements. We are asked to feel the work of the brush and paint at a level, which is delectably physical. It is only later that we also let the heart and the mood shares our experi-

ence. Gulgee could be described a hedonist of paint and colours, of gestures and movements who has tendency towards profligacy in the use of these. His best works are those in which excesses of delight are touched with an inner control in design, in which the passion for the extravagant and the decorative is tempered with an equally pressing instinct for the pieties of the abstract. In the language of our traditional wisdom the same thought could be expressed by saying that Gulgee excels in those paintings in which dream of paradise is matched with the rigours of sacrifice. If calligraphy is movement, Gulgee is our finest calligraphic painter. If movement and its rhythm give rise to dance, Gulgee is a choreographer in painting and his works ballets of abstract movements. The most abstract among our abstract painters, the content of his work is pure physical sensation, and the act of painting for him is a rite of purification from inhibitions as to how to paint and what to paint. Work as he does is an act of renunciation, and as in yoga, it is only when he has emptied his mind of all thoughts and even feelings, when he has turned a deaf ear to the promptings of his heart, that he finds himself fit to commune with the canvas and the implements of his art. A painter who does not use eyes when in the act of painting, and lets the momentum of his body and limbs write the language which suits their expression, he paints pictures which require of us to get rid of our own inhibitions and prejudices so that we can establish true dialogue with them.

This is the essential Gulgee, the creative artist who captures the sensations of pure movement in colours, in whose works light is the face of beauty. His gestures are mature, and the designs of his works have acquired sophistication over the years without losing their raw power. But Gulgee paints as a child would without thought, with the same absorption and abandon. Both are still in touch with the primordial experiences of life. In Gulgee's paintings we see the innocence of the child, and his experience of pure physical sensation, maturing in age and strength.

We are still in Gulgee's studio from which we were never absent though lost in the spectacle of the artist at work, watching the painting as it emerged before our eyes. The impression we get is that the painting has painted itself with Gulgee as the facilitator. This realisation becomes stronger when Gulgee stops as suddenly as he began and we realise instinctively ourselves that the painting is complete.

The use of body language in Gulgee's paintings suggests affinity with Action Painting. While there are similarities, a family likeness, the designs and expressions which emerge from the works of painters like Jackson Pollock, Kline and others are very different. These are culture differences and differences of personalities and sensibilities.

There are differences in the way these painters work. For example Jackson Pollock puts his canvas on the floor and lets his paint drip and spalter on it to create designs. He also throws paint to add the touch of violence to his paintings. It is said that this novel way of applying paint was suggested to him by what he had learnt about Chinese painters using similar unconventional methods and the American Indians making pictures in the sand. Compared to Gulgee's paintings

Pollocks are linear, suggesting that they are much more like what Paul Klee called "psychic improvisations." Gulgee's paintings go beyond human psyche to the very basic movements and forces generated by a body in motion.

Again when Gulgee is compared with Kline, we see the same difference of design and form: Kline's are starker and bolder and more architectural than Gulgee's. The point being made here is that any comparison between the three would show their difference rather than the generic similarity suggested by the name of Action Painting, and to pursue it any further would be misleading.

Gulgee's unique contribution to Pakistani painting lies in the fact that he has developed a style of painting in which both his own personality as well as his cultural identity have found their natural expression. Like a rainbow he has bridged the occident and the orient, creating a mode of painting which is true to our modern sensibility and our cultural heritage. We tend to see in Gulgee's work the presence of European and American history of art because most of us are quite familiar with the aesthetics and philosophy of our own traditional art.

Magazine, The Muslim
Friday, April 15th 1988

# RENAISSANCE FROM THE ASHES OF ABSTRACTISM

Paolo Sabbatini
Art Critic and Artist
Paris

At the beginning, there was chaos, and God was flying over it. God blew his verb over the chaos. He separated the light from the tenebrae, and life emerged.

While observing the works of Gulgee, the scriptures immediately come to mind. Gulgee captures the very moment of the creation in his abstract paintings.

At the beginning of this century, it seemed that art would degenerate in chaos without hope. Thus in abstractism, through the examples of cubism and the fragmentation of the figure, centrifugal forces decomposed the nature into shadows and phantoms.

Towards the end of the same century, Gulgee resuscitates the 'Logos', the divine verb from the chaos. There is a renaissance from the ashes of the abstractism, and the logos is inspiring the vital force over the magma of a myriad of colors, firstly merged into a single brush stroke, and then flourishing into stems, curbs, spirals, which, in the latest Gulgee style, bear a distant souvenir of the origin: the *Alif* or the beginning, the names of God, the words of the Islamic alphabet, the splendid figurativism of the Islamic Calligraphy.

Gulgee's prodigious art works can be classified into two mainstreams: one belongs to the classical western art, of which he is a great exponent, easily comparable to the Italian masters of the XV and the XVI century. The second mainstreams is calligraphy.

Samples of magnificent calligraphic works date from the early Gulgee production (1960 to 1973) and gave him his international renown. There has been a progression, a development, in his calligraphic creation, following the mystical path towards God and the 'Absolute'.

In a transitional period (1973 to 1990) Gulgee paints the same words, especially the names of God, which evolve-in the same canvas-into shapes and representation of the 'Divine', in the skies of the deepest blue and the lightest turquoise, constellations with the name of God multiply and glitter through a gold foil, applied by Gulgee breathing his vital force from his mouth to the canvas.

Gulgee's latest creations (1996) go beyond the simple calligraphy, like the

wiseman who, after studying all the languages of the world, does not need to talk anymore. The 'Absolute' goes beyond the words. Nowadays, the pure creation is signified by celestial bodies, crowding huge canvasses, an endless theory of galaxies, resplendent with the tonalities and colours of a heavenly palette, and running after each other upon the sound of a supreme harmony.

These latest works are the transposition on visual art, of what Dante epytomized at the end of his 'Divine Comedy': it is love, that moves the Sun and the other Stars.

12th April, 1996

A-8574

# THE TALKING SHADES AND TONES

Ahmed Pervez
Artist

Once more The Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi takes the lead – this time in mounting a spectacular one-man exhibition of paintings by Pakistan's most celebrated, most fertile and powerful painter, Gulgee, whose work, both figurative and non-figurative, emphasise his considerable debt to our art world in which the manifestation of abstract and near abstract continues to increase, and with this particular exhibition the contemporary movement in this region attains an absolute maturity.

Gulgee's Abstract-Expressionistic calligraphy on view in particular reveals the artist more in harmony and, to my eyes, more accomplished. Short and long swirls of harsher, more turbulent colour gain an almost staccato effect of energy and vitality.

It perhaps admits of no debate that where his calligraphic work differs from others, that here the influences have been absorbed and transformed into something highly original and in places already decidedly mature. In the larger canvases Gulgee shows the results that are entirely free and satisfying with some of the extreme painterly refinement as seen in the works of great modern masters like Mark Toby, who once visited the Far East to study Oriental calligraphy and Henri Michaux – a somewhat esoteric master of calligraphic painting in Europe. Besides this eminent painterly quality, Gulgee shows a concern for the medium which is all the more commendable after the assiduously cultivated, anonymous and flat surfaces which so much pop-painting appears to hold dear these days. Gulgee's compositions become alive wholly through the use of point and through the contrasted use of knifed-on and brushed-on colour of thick paint and thin paint, and above all through his refined colour arrangements – arrangements that are reasoned and 'conscious' and at the same time intuitive, but not quite calculative and planned in the sense that they destroy and paralyse his directness and power.

I would like to draw the attention of art lovers to the black circular, a space appearing as blobs and blotches giving their grim presence in their extremely

subtle and sophisticated tonal relationship with sprinkled Sindh glass bits, standing out to determine and exploit the ultimate aesthetic refinement of the East....a point at which nothingness, a grim hollow black becomes a positive sense experience. Gulgee displays a remarkable understanding and feeling for textures, the qualities and effects which only few painters can derive from the clever juxtaposition of thick and thin paint, in gold and silver, or from shades and tones of the same hue.

The characteristic free flowing arabic script elements link Gulgee on one hand with 'Islamic' tendencies, and on the other hand his dialogue of marks and gestural signs are symbols, so very common to oriental calligraphy, linking him with the universalized painting the modern man of today breathing in our universal time and securing a unique place for himself in the art world.

Star, 1974

# *MEHRAB, MIMBER* AND CRESCENTS OF FAISAL MOSQUE

Howard K. Walker
Ambassador (Retd) of the United States of America 2000

I will never forget the day in 1988 when Gulgee gave me a personal tour of Islamabad's new, great mosque where I wanted to see his magnificent sculptures on display. I had the sensation of being guided around the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo. When we left the mosque, hundreds of school children on the square just outside ran toward him shouting "Gulgee! Gulgee!" wanting to touch him and get his autograph. I thought: "How wonderful that the children of Pakistan's capital have such admiration for one of their country's leading artists, in the way that pop stars are youth heros in some other places."

I understand their affection for this great artist. In the presence of his paintings, one has the multiple and complex impressions of sensual pleasures that emanate from incredible color and mysteriously energetic form, and of quiet, reflective, transcendental, spiritual wisdom. Those are the feelings I get when, alone late at night, I sit and look at his four paintings which have become part of my family, as have this gifted artist, wonderful human being and friend; his lovely wife and talented artist son.

# EXHIBITION AT KABUL, JUNE 1959

Henry A. Byroade
Ambassador of the United States of America, 1959

It gives me great pleasure to make the resources of the USIS in Kabul available to Gulgee, the young Pakistani painter who is so rapidly, and so deservedly, making a name for himself on three continents. His homeland, Pakistan, is at once a very old and a very new country; old in the sense of having behind it the great cultural heritage not only of Islam but of the Indian sub-continent also, and new in that it took its place among the community of nations barely a dozen years ago. There has, too, been an interpenetration of European culture through its past connection with the United Kingdom and its continuing association with the British Commonwealth. All these elements are, to my mind, fused in the rich compound of Gulgee's art. Tradition, both Asian and European, gives to his work authority and solidity; the dynamism of a young nation is reflected in the freshness and elan of his attack: every stroke in his portraits, every line in the drawings, crackles with the electric vitality one has come to associate with the emergent nations of the Middle East and Asia. Gulgee, viewed within this context, is both symbol and portent–and a very hopeful one at that.

With this movement, which the painting of Gulgee, it seems to me, subsumes, the United States have always been in sympathy, for we too are a young nation, we too are attempting to synthesize a distinct indigenous culture from the great traditions, drawn from three continents, that we have inherited and the yeast of a new social polity. I like to think that the years Gulgee spent in the United States (he studied at both Harvard and Columbia Universities and drew a great deal of profit from his visits to our great national Art Galleries) have added yet another strand to the rich fabric of his work. An exhibition such as this will serve to bring our countries yet closer together through the beneficent influence of a shared cultural experience. Art builds bridges, not only between men but between nations. Intangible they may be, but solid nonetheless. They endure.

# THE REVERED FLOWER: GULGEE

Nyla Daud

His speech is animated and his eyes lash out with fire as he talks about his work. "Today I see myself as working not through reason or the cerebral mind.... that would be illustration," says Abdul Mohammad Ismaili. "I create under the influence of a mystical power, the instrument of a vital force that resounds in my being. It gives me the power to reach out to the very edges of space and time, to create from the primordial residue, to become one with the entire cosmic feeling."

Gulgee, 'the revered flower', as he is popularly known, is one of Pakistan's most eminent artists. Proud of his Pakistani roots, Gulgee is a man larger than life. All seventy years of him have been spent in the pursuit of creativity. Excited and youthful, he enthuses like a teenager as he moves like a barefoot panther in his studio.... like MF Hussain, the Indian demi-god of art, Gulgee too works barefoot.

As early as age eight he had begun to send out vibes of a future in art. Grandfather Hakim Abu Ali saw to it that the child had access to colours and brushes. With an intelligence quotient well above brilliant, Gulgee has a right to declare, "I have a sharp, clear mind. Even today I can go back in time to talk about professional engineering, but it is art that is my life source."

It is in terms of his artistic creations that he gathers laurels. As the Renaissance ideal he is the complete man artist....the man who would have made the perfect contemporary to Dante, Michelangelo or Leonardo de Vinci. Closer to home he has done in art what no other claims to; portraits, abstracts, mosaic, calligraphy. Gulgee has made friends and slaves of each genre.

Deluged by commissions to draw famous personalities, Gulgee's early career was marred by cruel accusations of submitting to royal commands, even though his work was a marvel of realistic portraiture. From military dictators to revolutionary upholders of ideologies, to monarchs and elected heads of state, all have had their likeness done through his brush. The man who has sustained his art through the trials and turmoils of history remembers each experience. Standing

ovations and memorable statements make up his mind's diary and yet he prides himself for the portraits of unknown, common people. Men, women, children, horses, tattered and torn exposures of life done just to please himself. These he executes in a peculiar shorthand, rendering the subject with the fewest possible strokes and bare of middle tones. Yet the accuracy achieved through a slapdash treatment is engaging.

The sixties saw Gulgee working on abstracts; the medium had fascinated him earlier also. In time he became the pioneer of the genre in his native land. Picking up the strains from his Islamic background, he used it for a greater freedom of expression. "My abstract work is the result of my life's experiences, yet it never gives way to mere illustration. Whatever I have experienced transcends physical barriers to become a spiritual touchstone." And of course Gulgee the artist has the enviable sensitivity to temper his experiences with the shades of art. "In consequence I reflect my experiences as the summation of the total effect they have had on my person."

Effectively vocal in highlighting the traditions of Islamic art, Gulgee shies away from the hardline interpretation of religion. Nevertheless, the infusion of the Islamic spiritual connection into his paintings reveals one of art's most well versed sufis. Islamabad's Faisal Mosque stands monumental evidence of this twentieth century wonder's religious and intellectual acumen. Visitors to the mosque are greeted by the declarations of religious belief, artistic expertise and engineering feats put together on a panoramic view. Displaying his pride of art and God he spreads his arms and says in a frenzy, "I have no place for the practice of religion because it takes me away from God. My God is He whom I can hold in my arms. I am the sufi mystic who communicates on a higher plane. As I paint, I prostrate myself before the Omnipotent; this is religion for me."

Worshipping the Almighty with his own peculiar logic, Gulgee has created one of the modern world's most effective calligraphic inscriptions inside the Faisal Mosque. In his own words, "The Mosque is a house of love for me, so I visualised the mehrab as two gigantic arms translated into the pages of the Quran. In the centre, as in the centre of all creations and being is the name of Allah in Lapis."

"For me Allah is power and majesty and beauty on the ultimate scale." Testifying to this statement of the sufi artist is the overpowering effect of his executions of God's 99 names; calligraphic expressions that prompted Annemarie Schimmel to declare "this is the finest example of Moslem art."

For one who never trained formally in art, Gulgee has taken the medium to breathtaking heights. A single portrait may require anything from six to seven thousand polished and cut pieces of a variety of material. Through acute perception and nimble fingerwork Gulgee gives faces a realistic sensitivity beyond comparison.

"I have been well received and I am proud of the adulations showered on me. I have never had to beg for commissions." Gulgee is a proud man otherwise too, for though he reveals in the international identity he has built, he had carried the

laurels with grace. He believes he has been chosen to carry on traditions. But even as he speaks of his endeavours, the message reverberates in mid-air. Gulgee's journey into the treacherous pathways of creativity have taken their toll. His very being responds to perfection demanded by artistic labour. "The canvas puts me in perfect condition.... An artist cannot afford to toy with his destiny." And the pain follows too because there is always the fear that such intensity may hinder one from worthwhile capacity.

Gulgee confesses to hard labour; "I have had to work twice as hard, because for me carrying calligraphy along its fourteen hundred years journey right into the modern day has been a labour of love. The discoveries enroute have been the pleasures of life, balancing all the pains an artist can suffer. I have been constantly aware that as a calligraphist I have to portray a tradition which goes back in time and which is possibly the Muslim world's strongest contribution to art."

Libas International
Vol. 6, 1993

# THE DERVISH OF PAINT

Majorie Hussain

Just before *iftar*, it was unusually quiet in the Karachi home of the Gulgees. I found myself alone in an ambience of light and colour, free to examine and touch the large canvases reflecting light on textured areas of gold, orange, green and yellow, glowing from the walls or leaning casually against the furniture around the room. Obviously an artist's domain, and what an artist! Tiny fragments of mirror imbedded in paint sparkled in the light of unexpected angles, adding to the general air of enchantment.

Born in Peshawar in 1926, Gulgee is a phenomenon. Although he has not publicly exhibited his work in Pakistan in over a decade, apart from participating in major national art events, he is known throughout the country and has been honoured with numerous national awards.

His has been an unusual story. Recognition of his talents came early in the form of commissions. He has enjoyed celebrity and appreciation in Pakistan and in foreign countries, though it was not always of his own choosing. He trained as an engineer and has degrees from Columbia University and Harvard, but his real passion has always been focussed on his art. His was an inherent gift of capturing a moment in time, sensitive portraits sketched with elan; a legacy from his artist grandfather. Gulgee's own preferences were for the abstract work that thrilled him as the colours and curves emerged from his brush. Initially, his time and energies were given largely to commissioned portraits such as those painted for the Afghan royal family in the '50s. During his stay in Afghanistan, the artist visited a marble plant and observing the broken pieces of marble lying around, he conceived there and then, the innovation of creating portraits in mosaics. His method is first to draw his subject, then outline areas to be cut on each small piece which are then carefully placed to form the image. This work is an offspring of Gulgee's interest in early Islamic architecture, palaces and mosques embellished panels and murals. The artist's first mosaic portrait was of the King of Afghanistan rendered in wonderful mesh of onyx marble. Since then, Gulgee has been called upon to create mosaic portraits in lapis, onyx and jade of numerous heads

of state and members of royal families. I asked Gulgee if the American abstract expressionist artist, Elaine Hamilton, had influenced his work. In answer, Gulgee brought out an old brochure from his first exhibition in 1959. Mainly featuring the Afghan portraits, there were abstract compositions as well. " Here," said Gulgee, "is proof that I was into abstract art long before Elaine Hamilton showed up in Karachi. I admired Elaine's work tremendously, but influence? No."

We spoke of the public exhibition shared by Gulgee and a French artist in Karachi in the '60s, when both artists, taking their cue from pulsating music, splashed paint on canvas. "Fun," was how Gulgee described the experience, but not in accordance with his own painting ethos. In 1998, Gulgee completed a lapis mosaic portrait of the elegant princess Hussa Binte Khalid, a two-year project which, he vows, will be the last of its kind. Over the years, Gulgee has taken fewer and fewer portrait commissions. His precious time and vigour, he explains, is best devoted to the powerful calligraphic imagery that emerges from deep within his own psyche. His are the gestural, transcendent rhythms sung by Sufis. Gulgee delights in his work, elucidating for my benefit the great impasto swathes from the beginning to the end of the canvas, encouraging me to trace them with my fingers. He reads verses from the Holy Book out loud, visibly moved by their beauty. The artist's long years in his field are witness to his own concerns, engaged in a struggle to describe the words with appropriate beauty of his own making. It is often said of Gulgee that his work creates a continuous dialogue between the East and the West. Perhaps for this reason his work displayed at Sotheby's in 1998, far exceeded expectations. Animated and emotional, his arms and shoulders are muscled and broadened by years of painting with arms fully stretched across broad surfaces. While talking about his work Gulgee sheds the years and views the world with the wonder of a child.

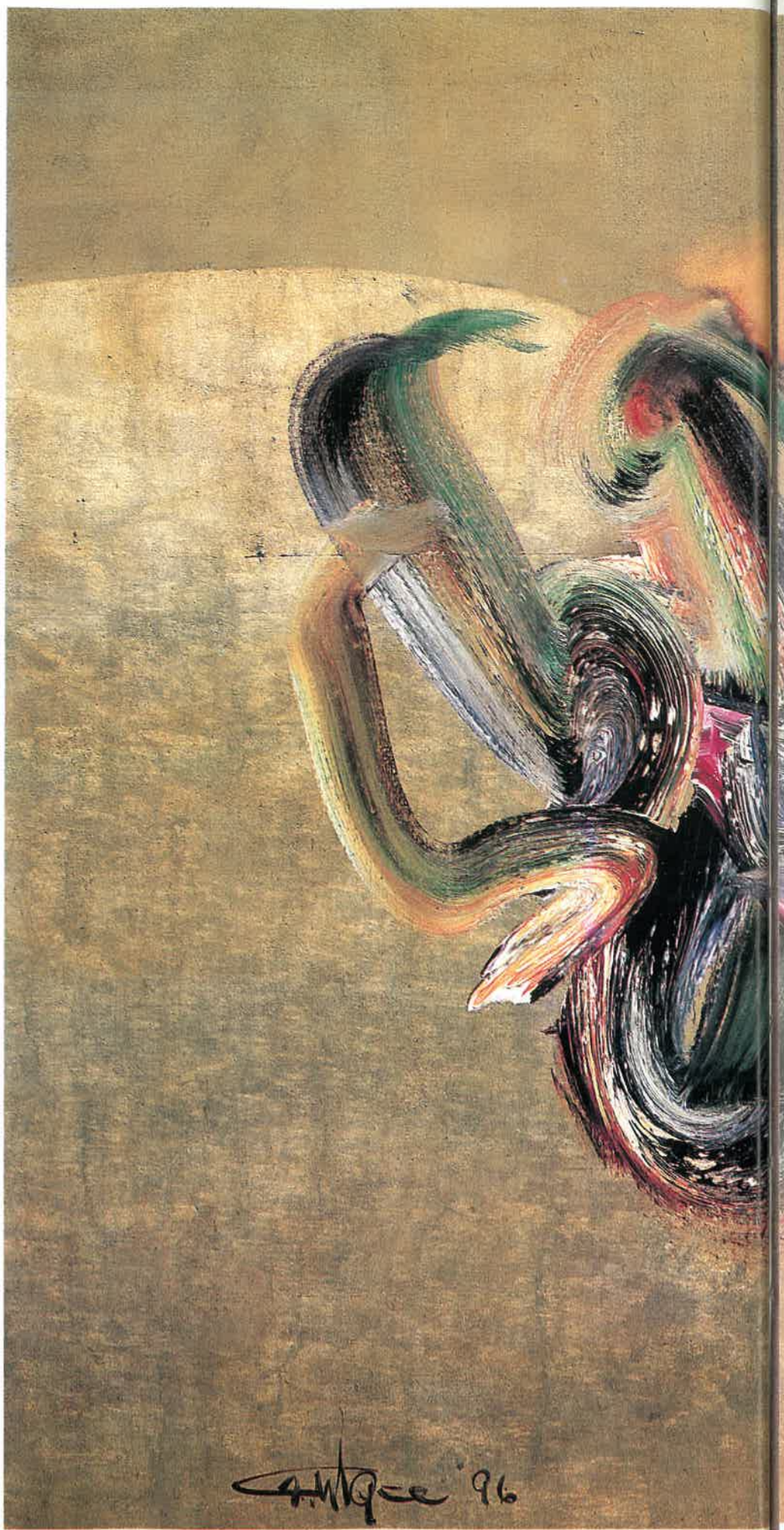
Watching Gulgee work is a wild experience. Using a heavy impasto of direct, pure colour, he paints intuitively, his entire being involved in the activity. He whirls, jumps and traverses the length of the canvas with dancing steps, turning flexible wrists that bear the weight of heavy brushes. It is time for me to leave. "Wait," says Gulgee, "this will only take a minute." He produced a large sheet of paper and with two markers held in his right hand, within seconds had completed an intricate verse with a hop, skip and a jump of his own. Supported by the great organiser, his wife Zaro, Gulgee is freed from the time- consuming phone calls, appointments, the logistics of travel and other arrangements that the artists find so irksome.

The Gulgees travel a lot. In summer there are months spent in Nathia Galli where Gulgee has a substantial studio. He loves to paint outdoors. Invariably, each year, there are exhibitions, lectures or seminars abroad to be attended. Answering my questions as to why he exhibits so infrequently in Pakistan, Gulgee explained that there is no venue with large enough hanging space for his work in Karachi. There is a superb example of Gulgee's work at the Defence Authority Library and at the Aga Khan Hospital, but generally he and Zaro welcome visi-

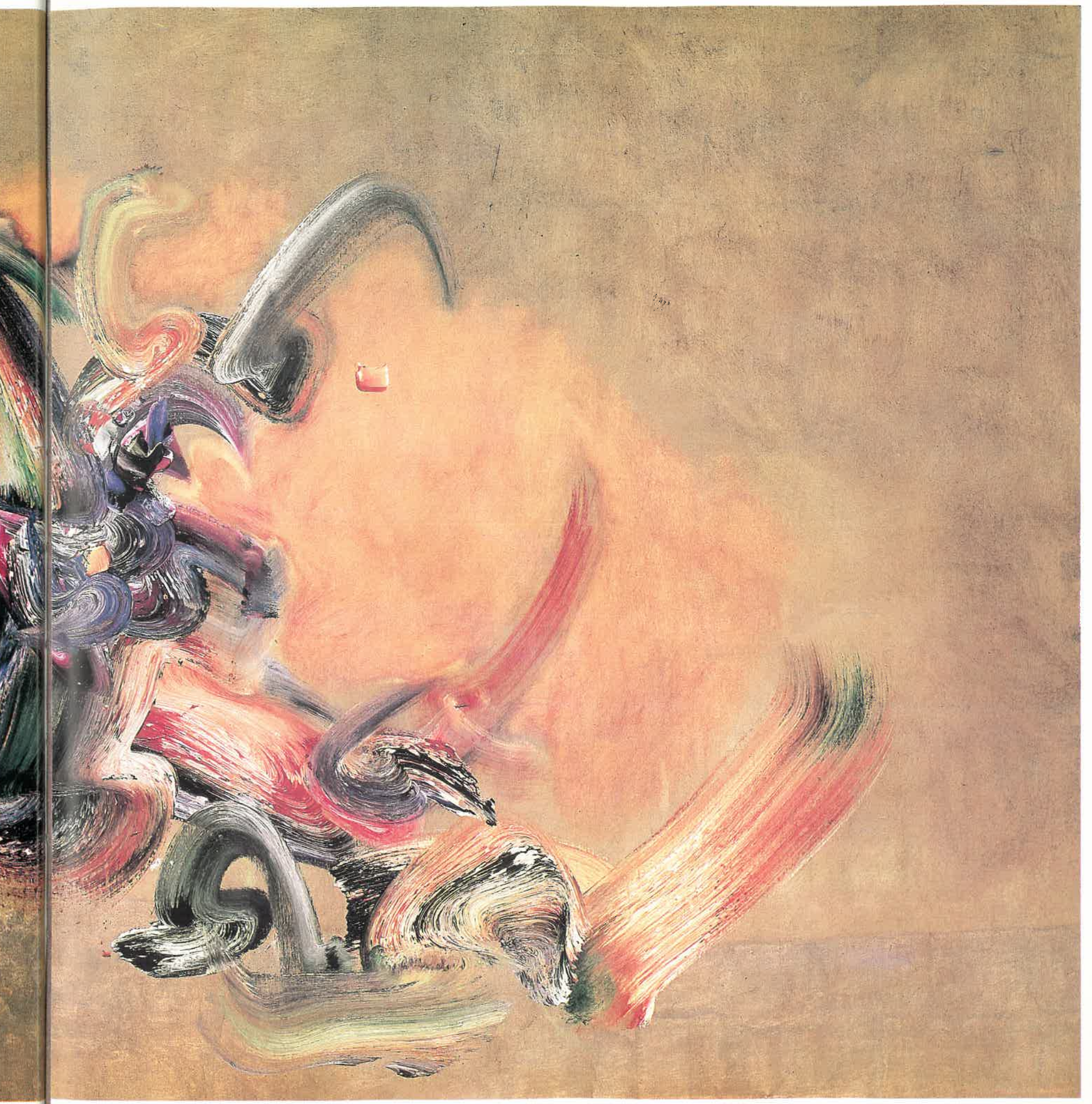
tors to their Karachi home, and apparently there is a steady stream. Gulgee has a disarming manner, treating students and veterans alike with courtesy and interest. At present, he is engaged in building a large gallery space in Clifton where his work will hang on permanent display. This project, expected to be complete in about six months time, is being monitored by his sculptor son Amin whose studies in the United States encompassed architecture and engineering. Exhibitions abroad have been numerous, traversing the globe from Kabul, Stockholm, Dacca, Bombay, Sri Lanka, London, Washington, New York, Japan, Iran and the Emirates. Several exhibitions have been in coordination with Amin who shares his distinguished father's spiritual affinities. In the past Gulgee created magnificent work in metals, a field he has now conceded to Amin. However, the large, gold crescents made by Gulgee to embellish the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad are witness to his expertise. On parting, I ask Gulgee what he considers his greatest achievement in life. He answers immediately and with great simplicity, " Being able to bring some recognition, albeit small, to my own country."

Cover story, Zameen, February/March 1999.

▲ *Abstract Oil on canvas 1998 Sotheby's Auction, London 17 June 1999 76 X 91 cm*

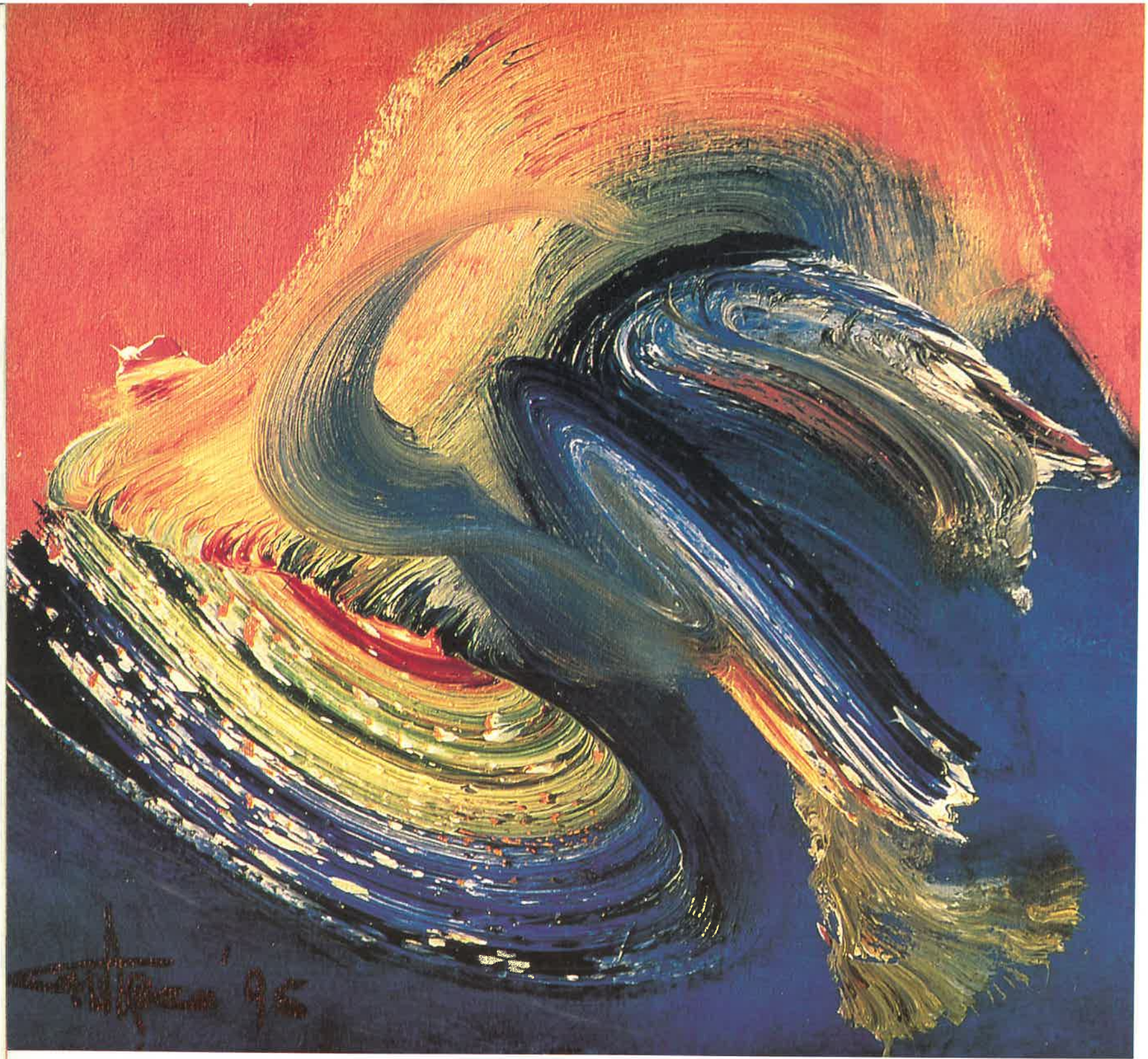



► *Calligraphy Oil on canvas 1996 152 X 218 cm*



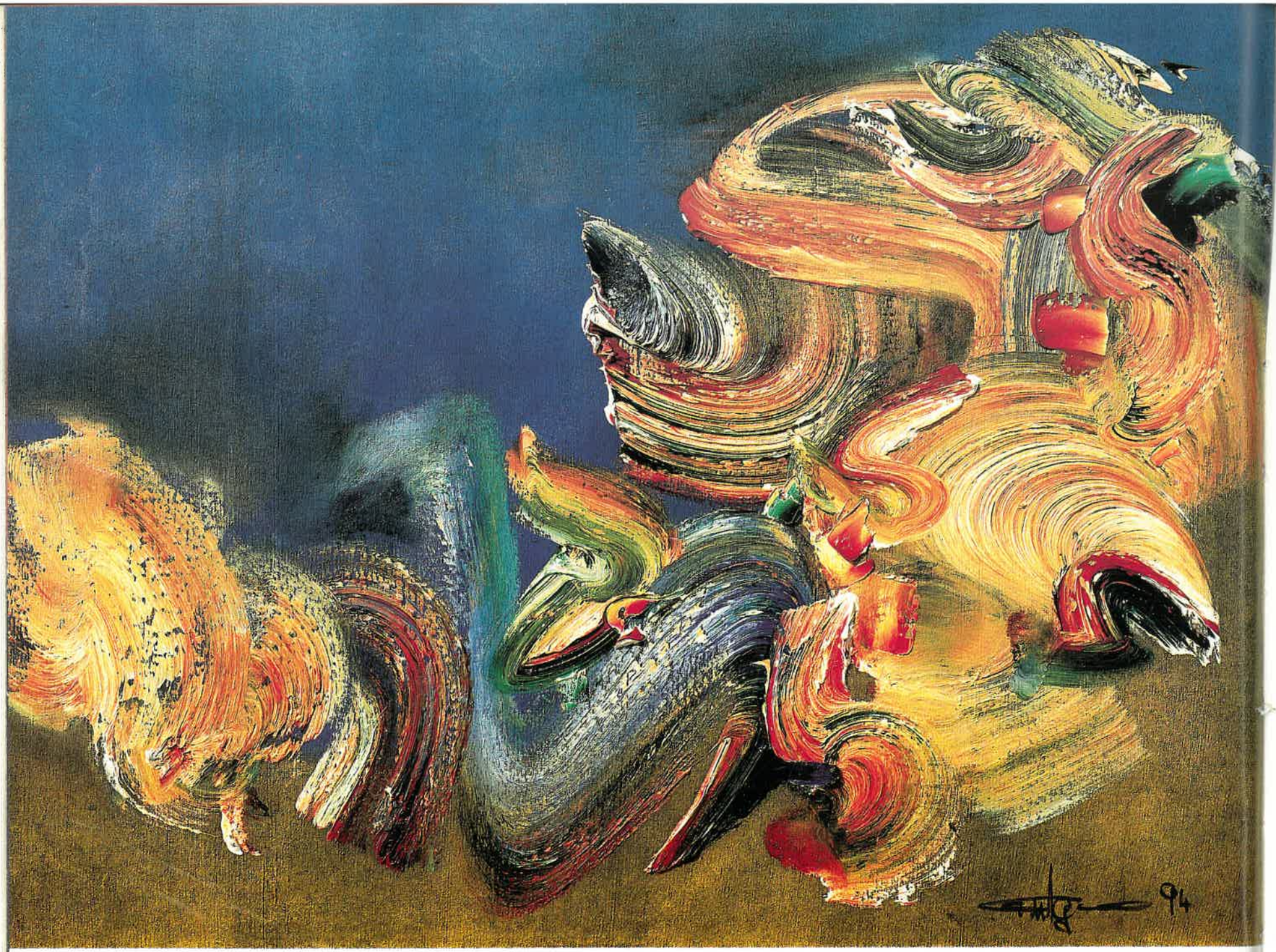
▲ *Oil on silver leaf and canvas 1998 91 X 122 cm*

◄ *Oil on silver leaf and canvas 1996 91 X 122 cm*



▲ *Oil on canvas.*

▲ ***The Wave*** *Oil on canvas.*

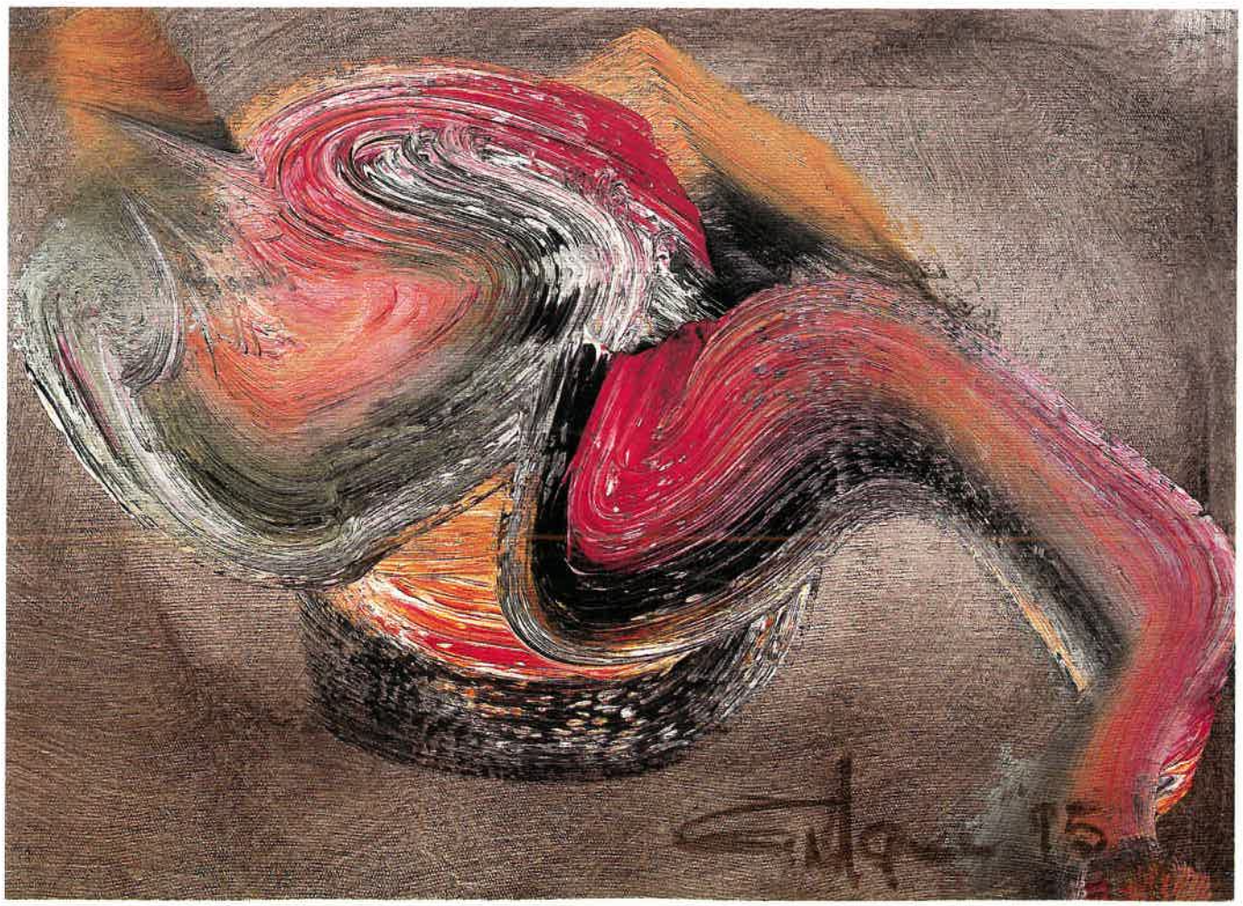


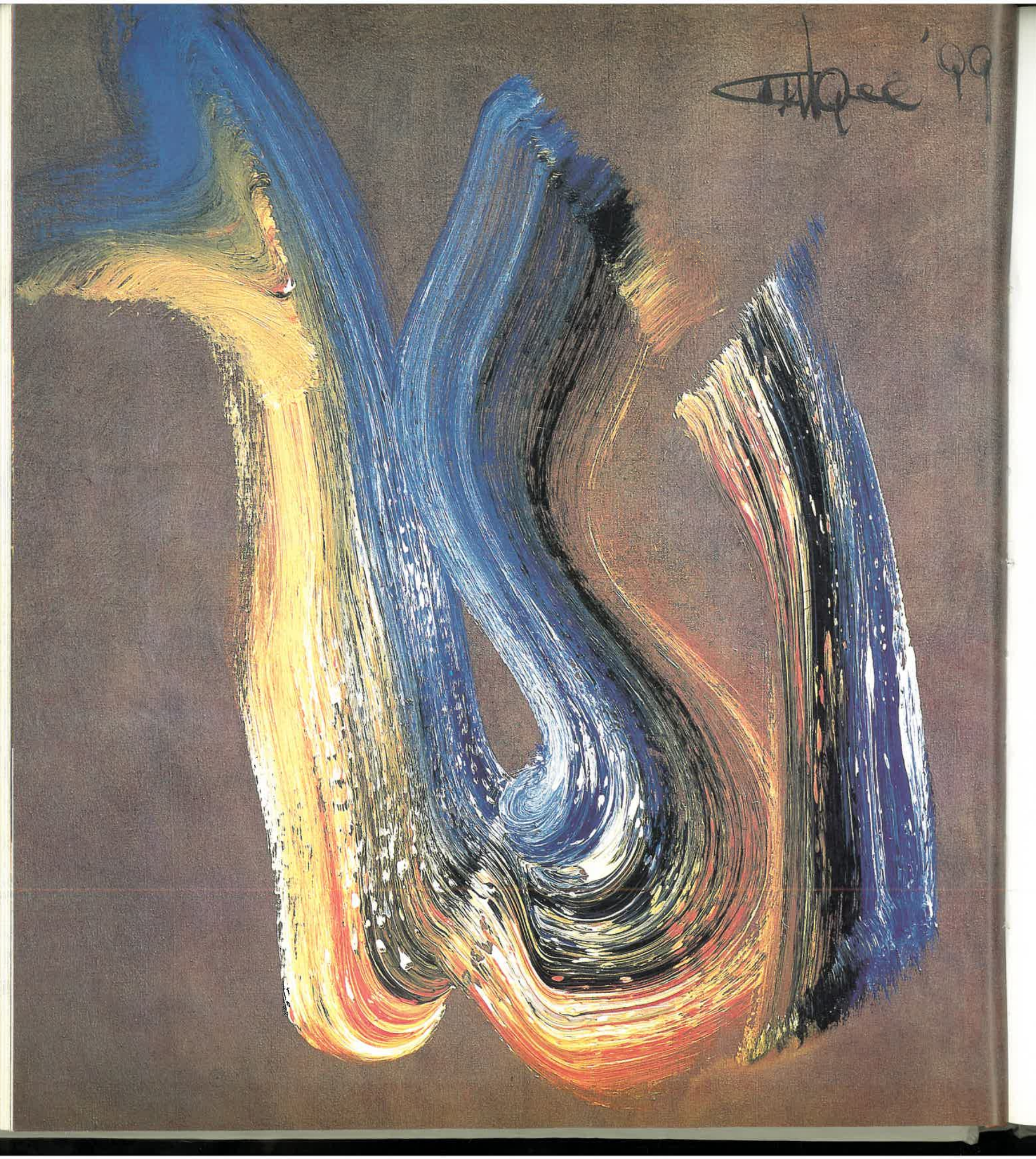

▲ ***The Wave*** *Oil on canvas 1994 115 X 122 cm*

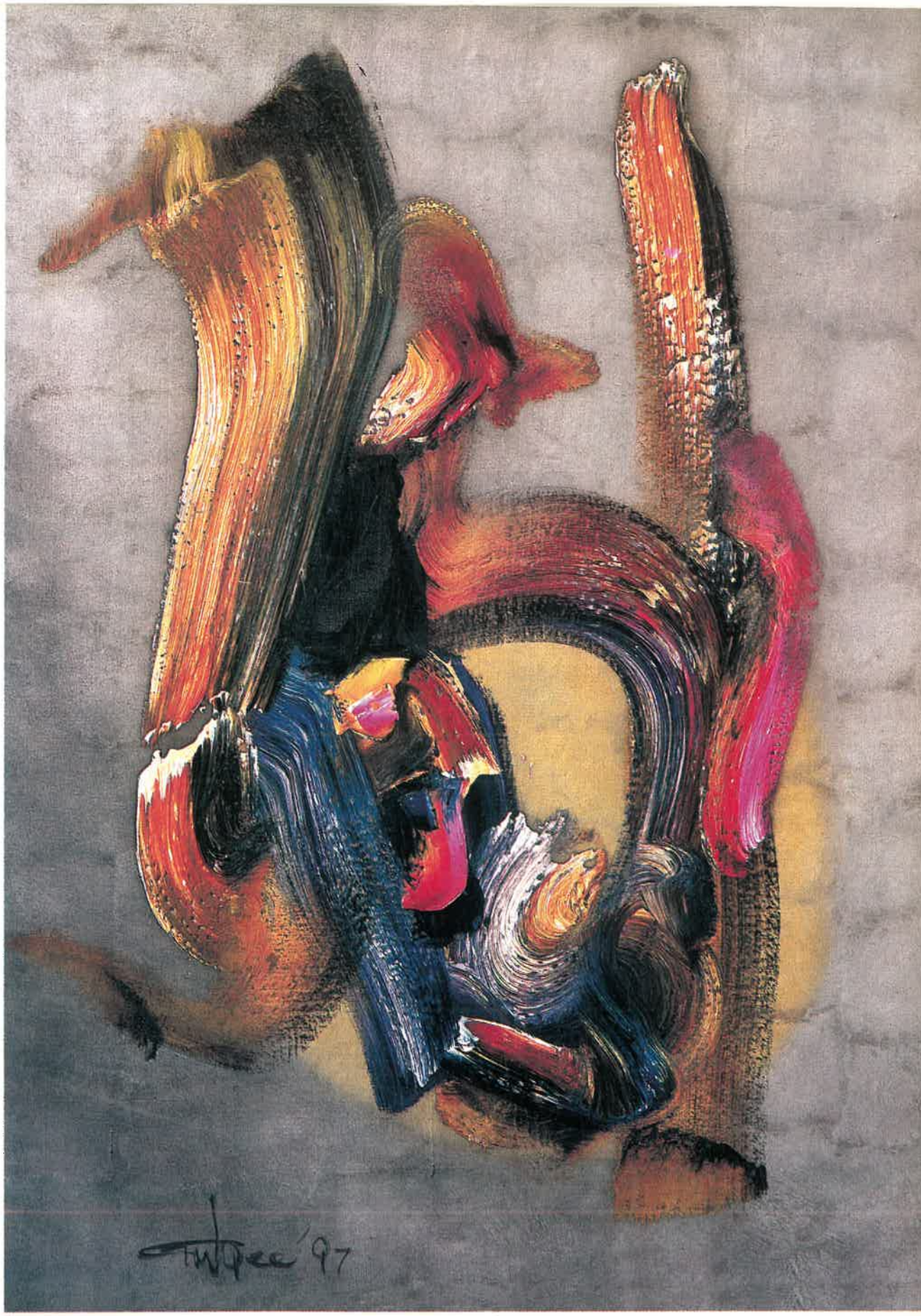
► *Top* ***Symbol*** *Oil on canvas 1994 115 X 122 cm*

► *Bottom* ***Unity*** *Oil on canvas 1995*

'94



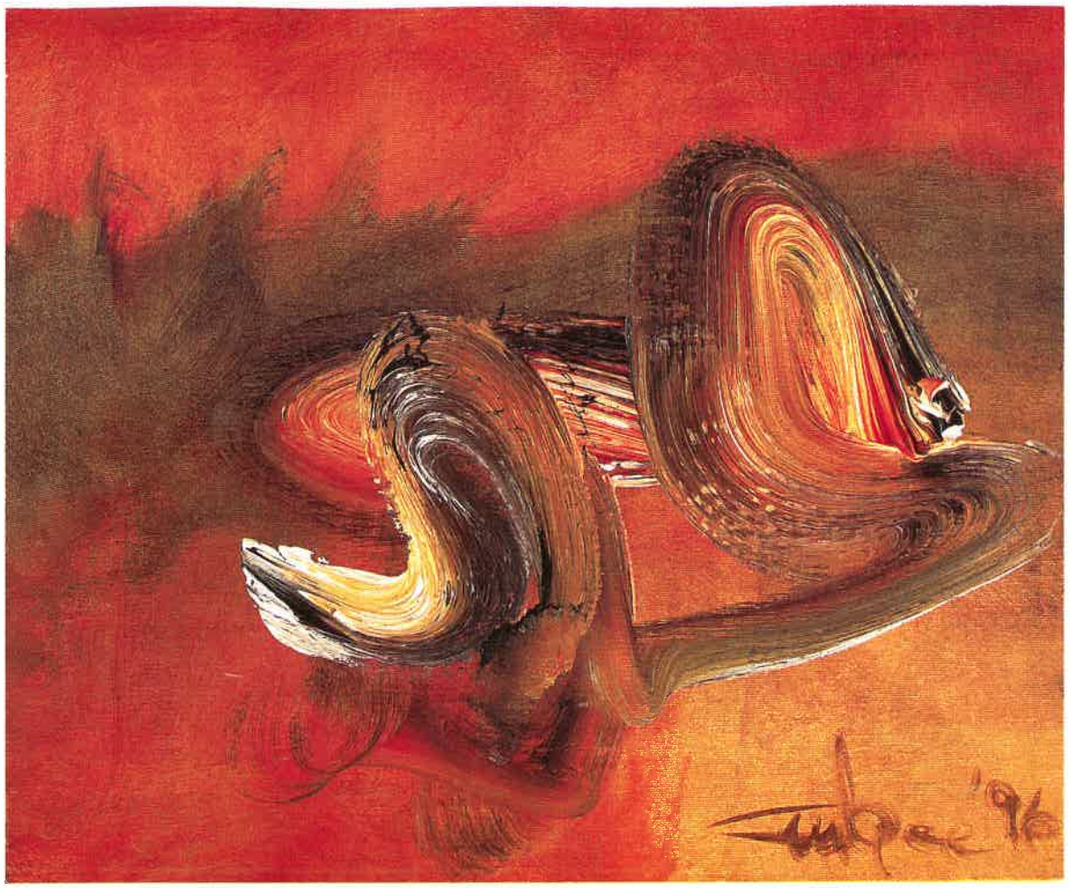




▲ *Calligraphy Oil on canvas 1997 Sotheby's Auction, London 17 June 1999 91 X 122 cm*

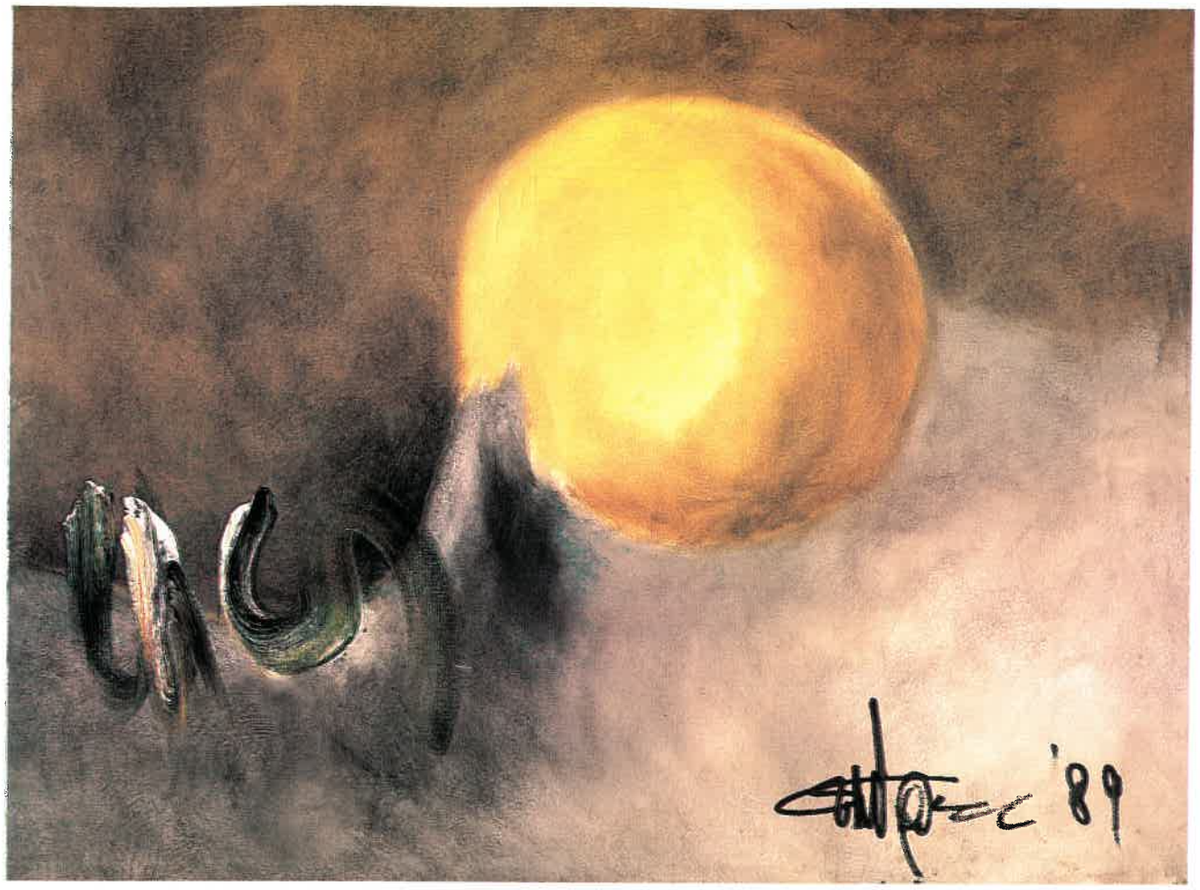
◄ ***Allah*** *Oil on silver leaf and canvas 1999 76 X 91 cm*

▲ ***The Wave*** *Oil on canvas 1995*



▲ *Calligraphy Oil on canvas 1996*

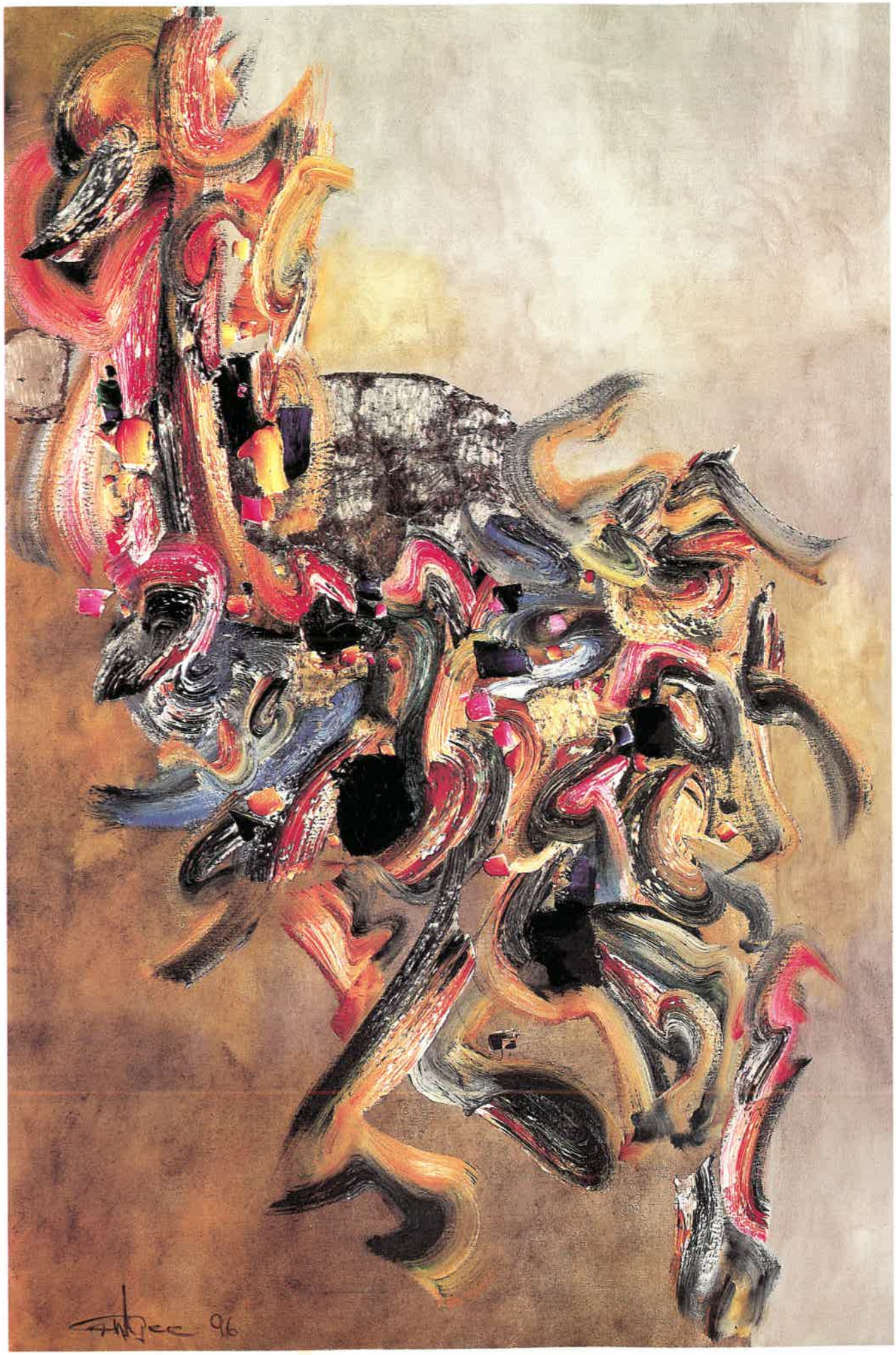
► *Abstract Oil on canvas 1996*



▲ *Oil on canvas 1998 91 X 122 cm*

► *Oil on canvas 1996 91 X 91 cm*

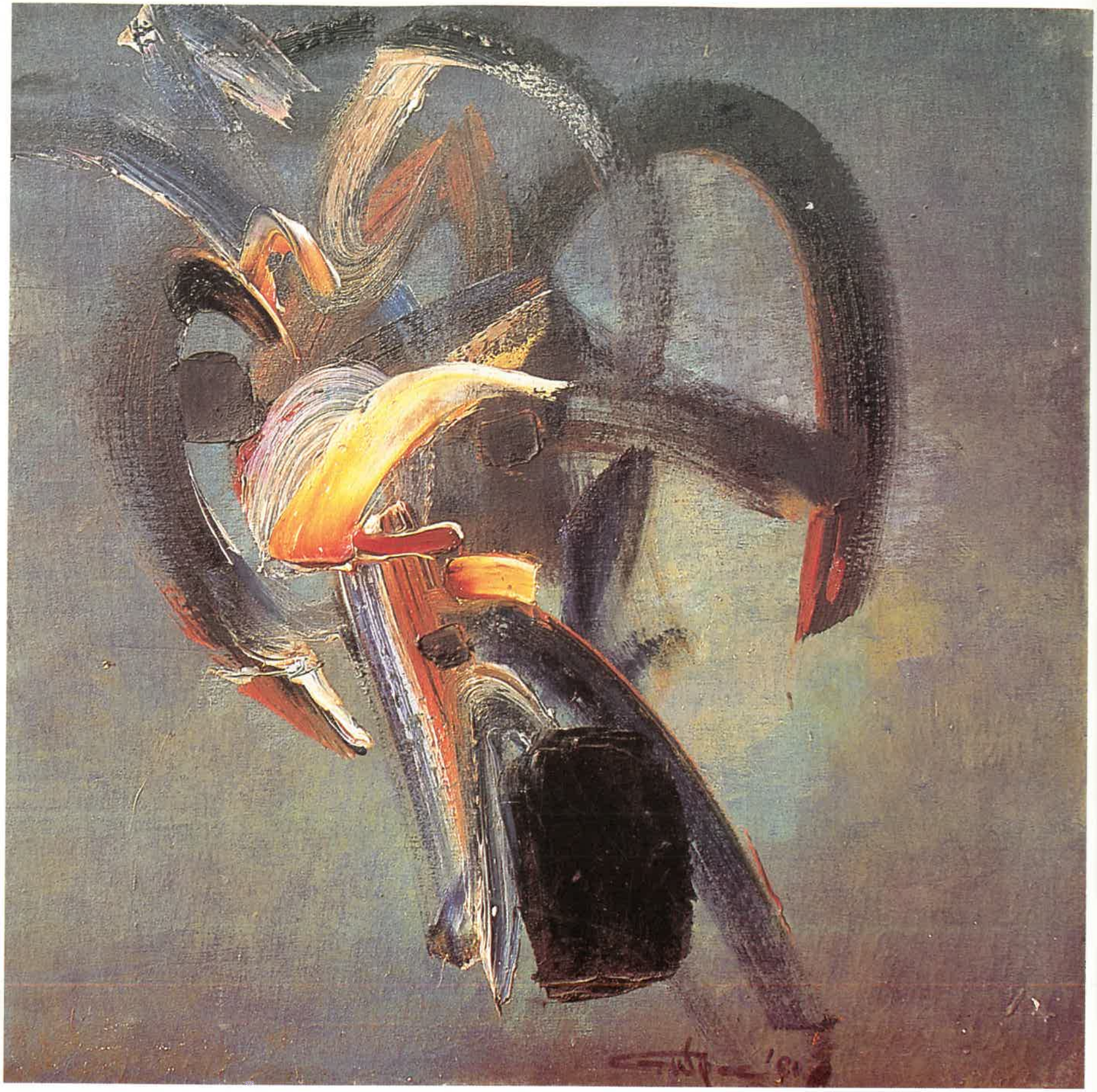
► *Opp. page – Oil on canvas 1996 152 X 213 cm*



▲ ***Unity*** *Oil and silver leaf on canvas 1993 122 X 273 cm*

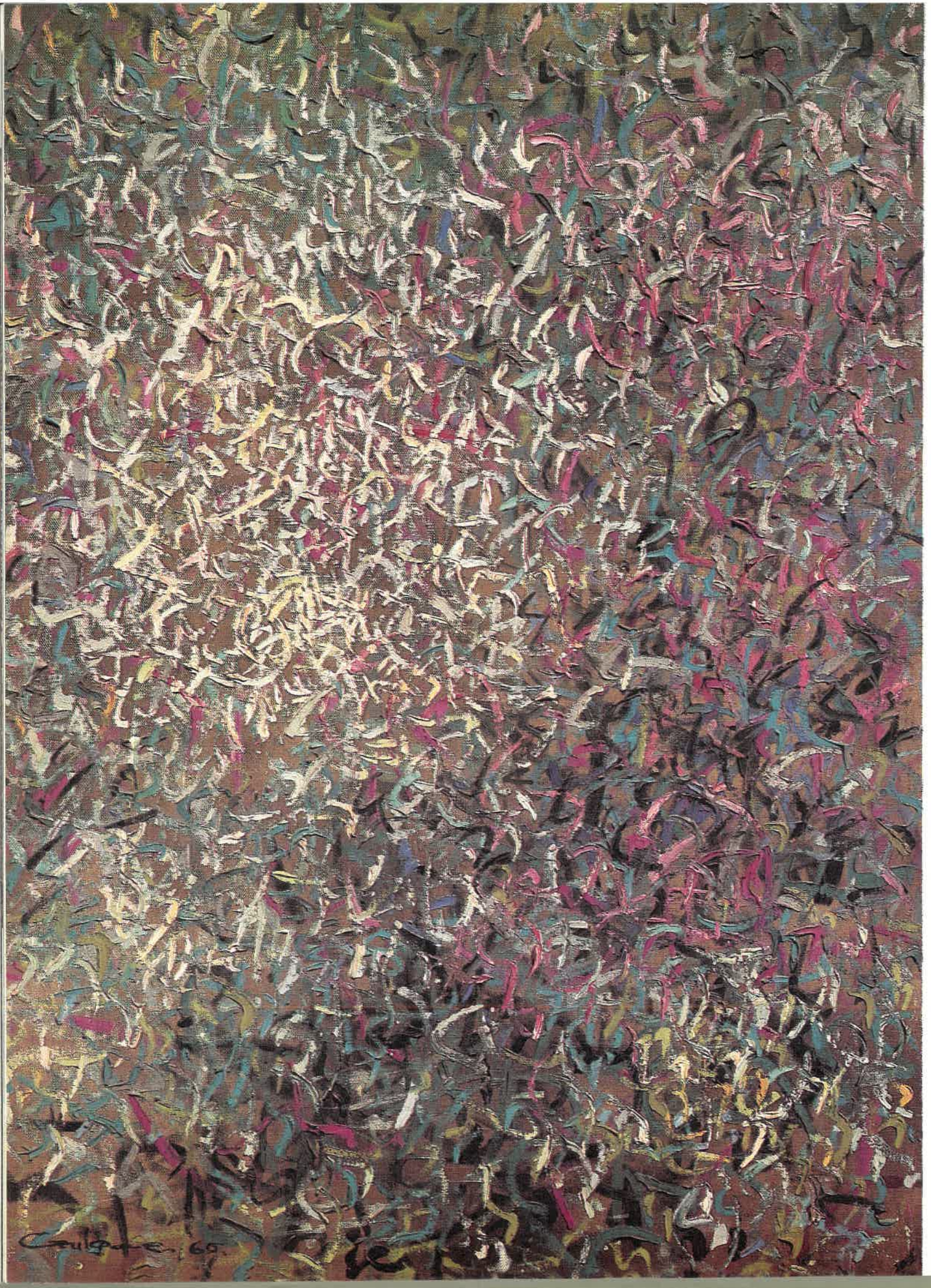
▲ *Oil on canvas 1996 125 X 125 cm*

▲ *Oil on canvas 1996 30 X 30 cm*



▲ *Oil on canvas 1989 122 X 122 cm*

◄ ***Sonic Memories*** *Oil on canvas 1981 77 X 77 cm*



▲ *Oil on canvas*

◄ ***Space*** *Oil on canvas 1960 84 X 115 cm Commonwealth Exhibition, London*

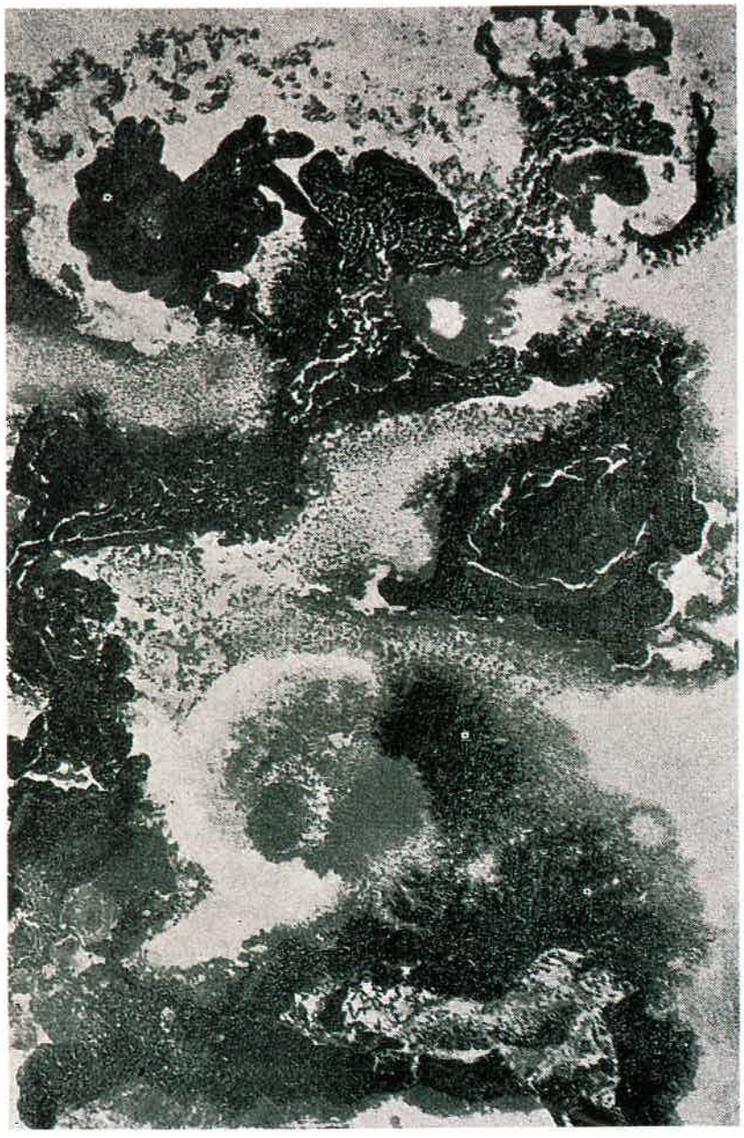
▲ ***Nukta*** *Oil on silver leaf and canvas 1996 91 X 91 cm*

◄ ***Nukta*** *Oil on canvas 1994 91 X 91 cm*

► *Oil, mirrors, gold and silver leaf on canvas 1999 122 X 152 cm*

▲ ***Unity*** *Oil and gold and silver leaf on canvas King Faisal Specialist Hospital, Riyadh 1974*

▲ ***Dance*** *Oil on canvas 1994 91 X 91 cm*



▲ *Left* ***Creation*** *Ink on paper (done mid 50s) Reprinted from the catalogue of the Kabul Exhibition June 4th 1959*

▲ *Right* ***Medley of Nature*** *Ink on paper (done in mid 50s) Reprinted from the catalogue of the Kabul Exhibition June 4th 1959*

▲ ***Umra*** *Oil, gold and silver leaf on canvas 1974 90 X 90 cm*

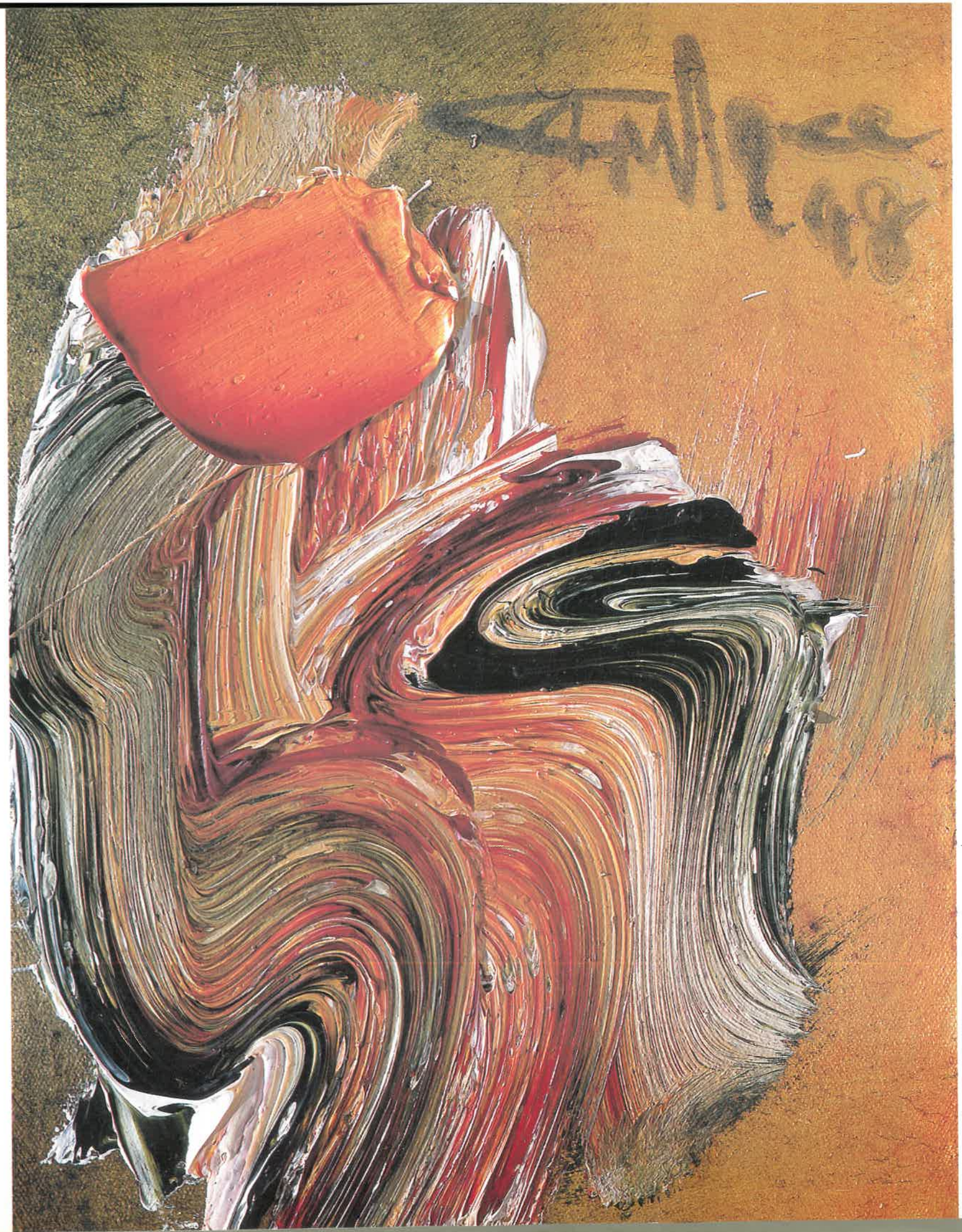
▲ ***Cosmos*** *Oil, gold and silver leaf on canvas 1970 Exhibited Expo 70 Tokyo 223 X 223 cm*

▲ ***Noor*** *Oil on canvas 1994*

► ***Nukta*** *Oil on silver leaf on canvas 1996*

▲ *Oil on canvas 1990*

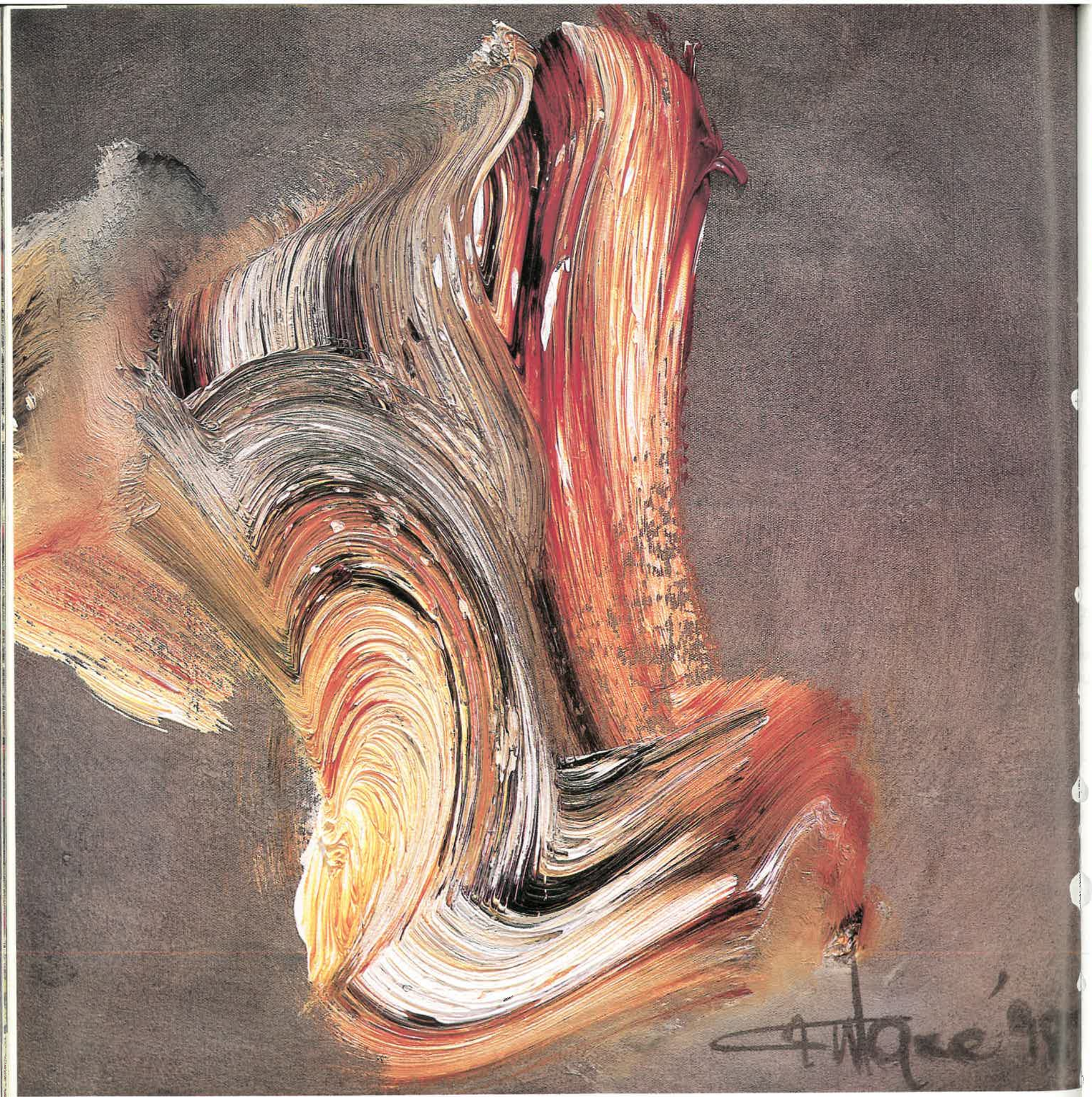
◄ *Oil on canvas*



◄ *Calligraphy oil on canvas 1998*

▲ *Oil on canvas 1996*

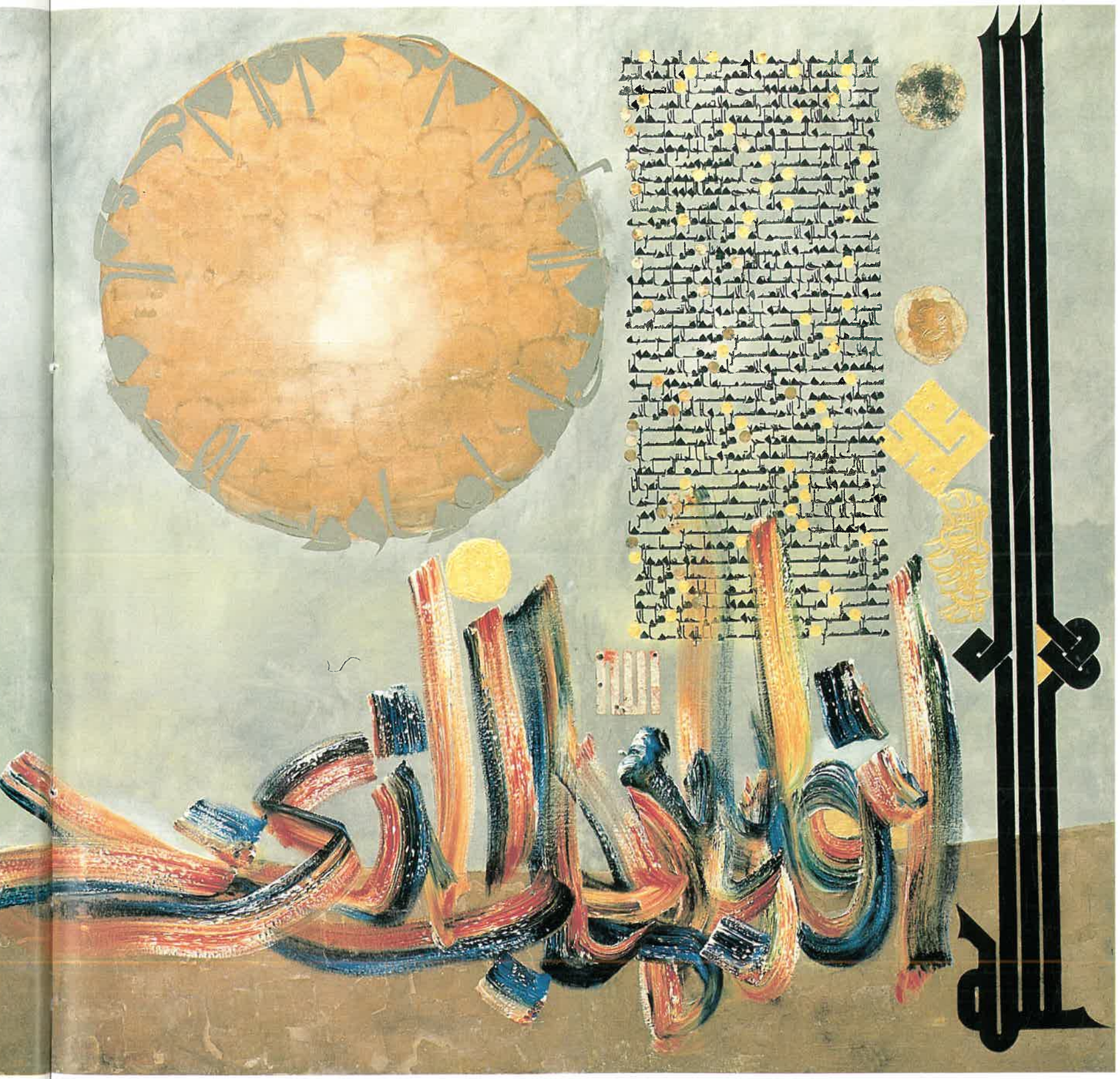
► *Oil on canvas 1995*



▲ ***Al Mussavir*** *Oil and silver leaf on canvas 1995 92 X 122 cm*

◄ *Abstract Oil on canvas 1998 91 X 91 cm*

▲ ***Iqra*** *Oil, silver and gold leaf on canvas - 305 X 610 cm Mural Defence Library Karachi. The main movement is the Iqra Ayat in gestural calligraphy. Other Ayats depicted in different styles of classical caligraphy.*



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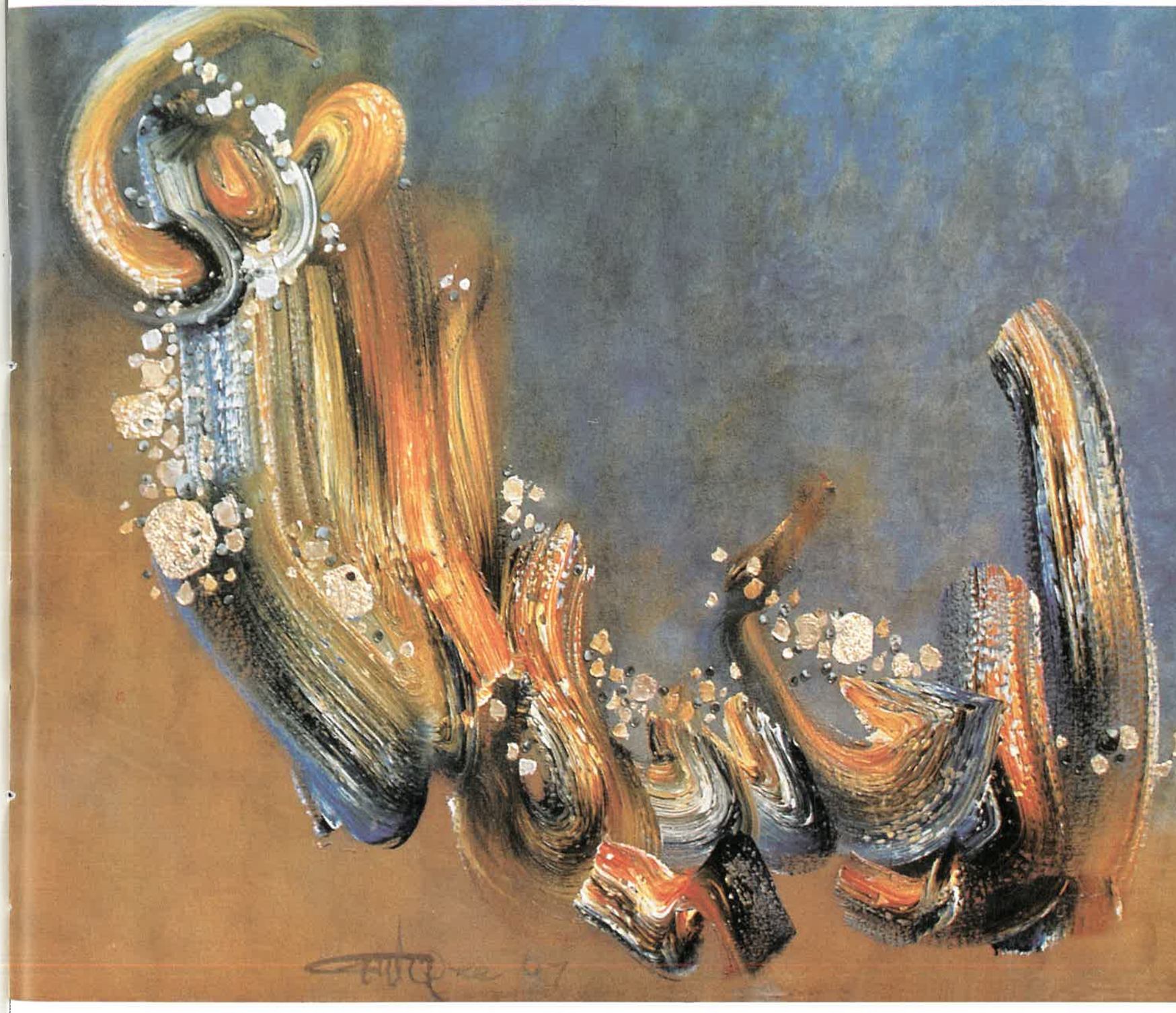


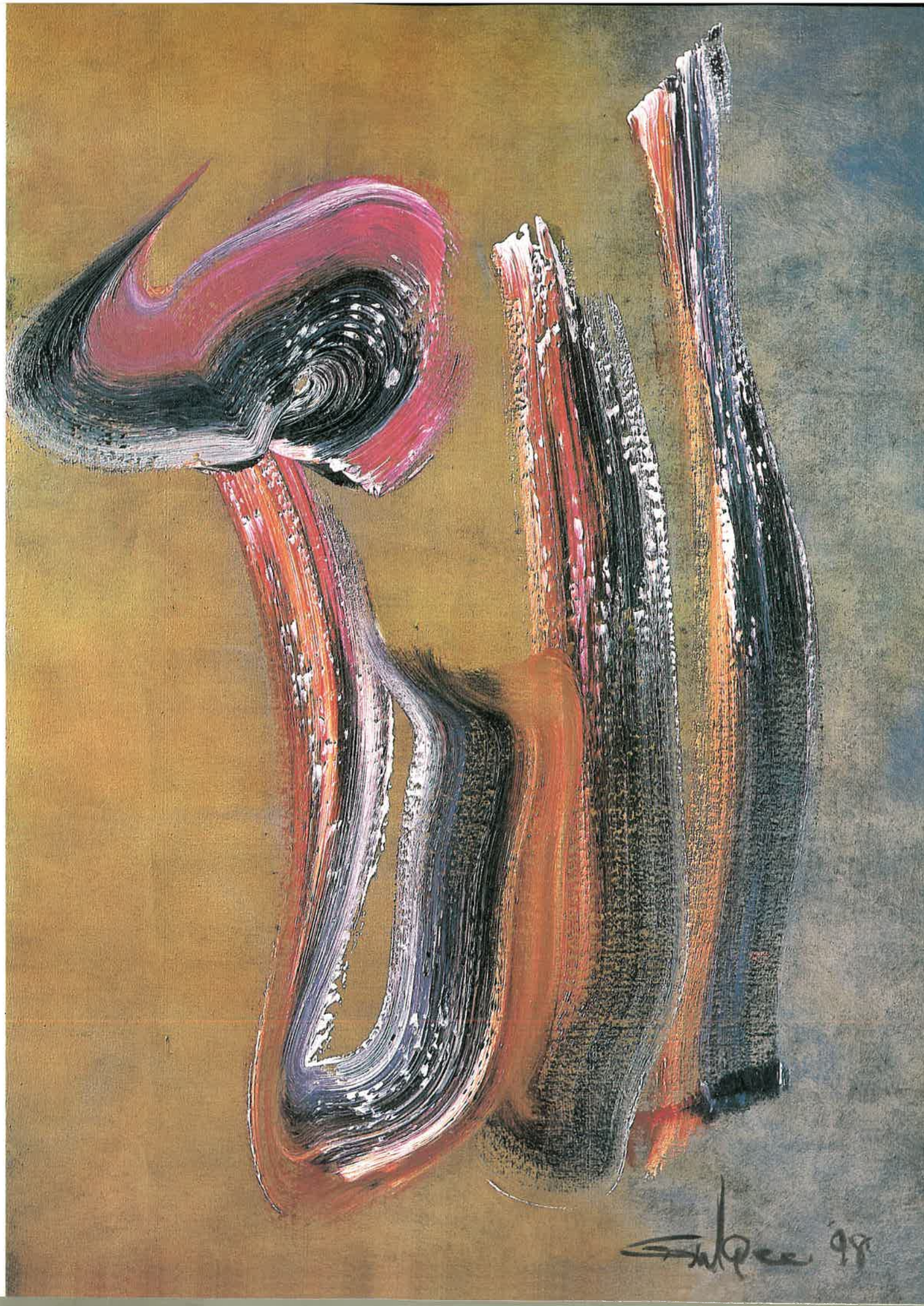
◄ ***Allah*** *Oil on silver leaf and canvas 1997 76 X 92 cm*

▲ ***Al Jalil and Allah Ho*** *Oil, gold, silver and mirror on canvas 1997 121 X 151 cm*

► *Overleaf left* ***Iqra*** *Oil and silver, gold and mirrors on canvas 1989 265 X 300 cm*

► *Right* ***Allah*** *Oil on silver and canvas 1998 92 X 122 cm*

'89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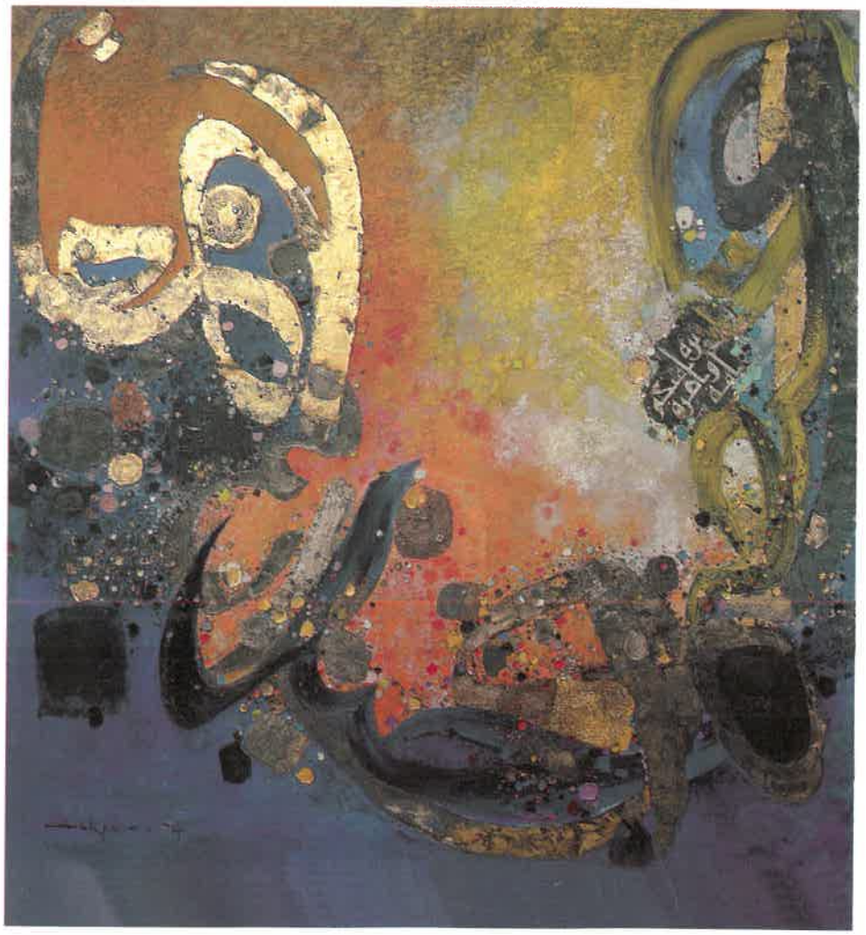
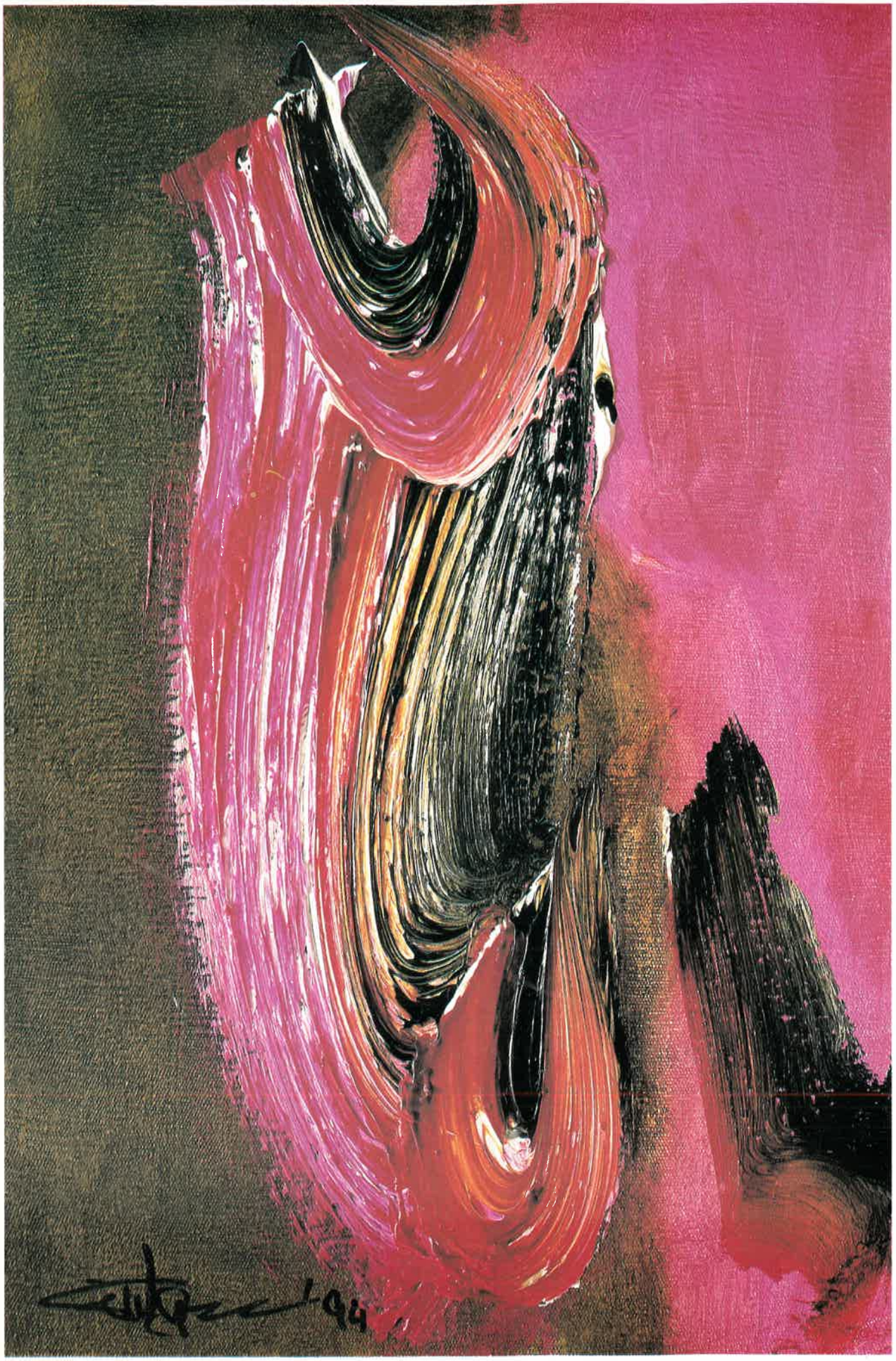


▲ ***Unity*** *Oil, gold and silver leaf on canvas. Aga Khan University Hospital Karachi 1994 472 X 274 cm*

◄ ***Unity*** *Oil, gold, silver leaf and mirrors 1974 Centre piece for Islamic Summit Lahore 1974 266 X 266 cm*
*Different ayats that relate to the theme of unity are depicted in different caligraphic styles.*



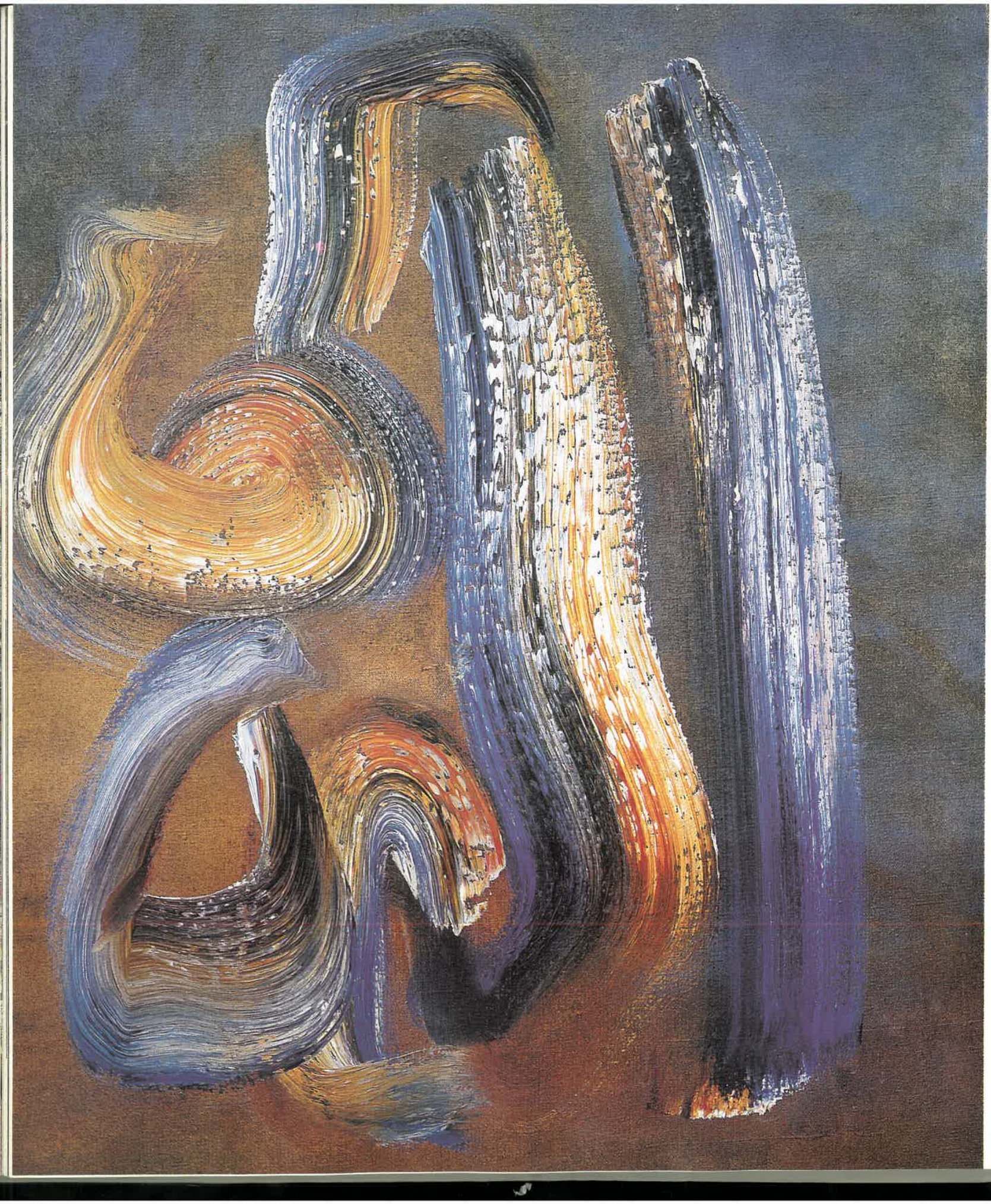
◄ ***Allah*** *Oil on canvas 1994 243 X 458 cm*

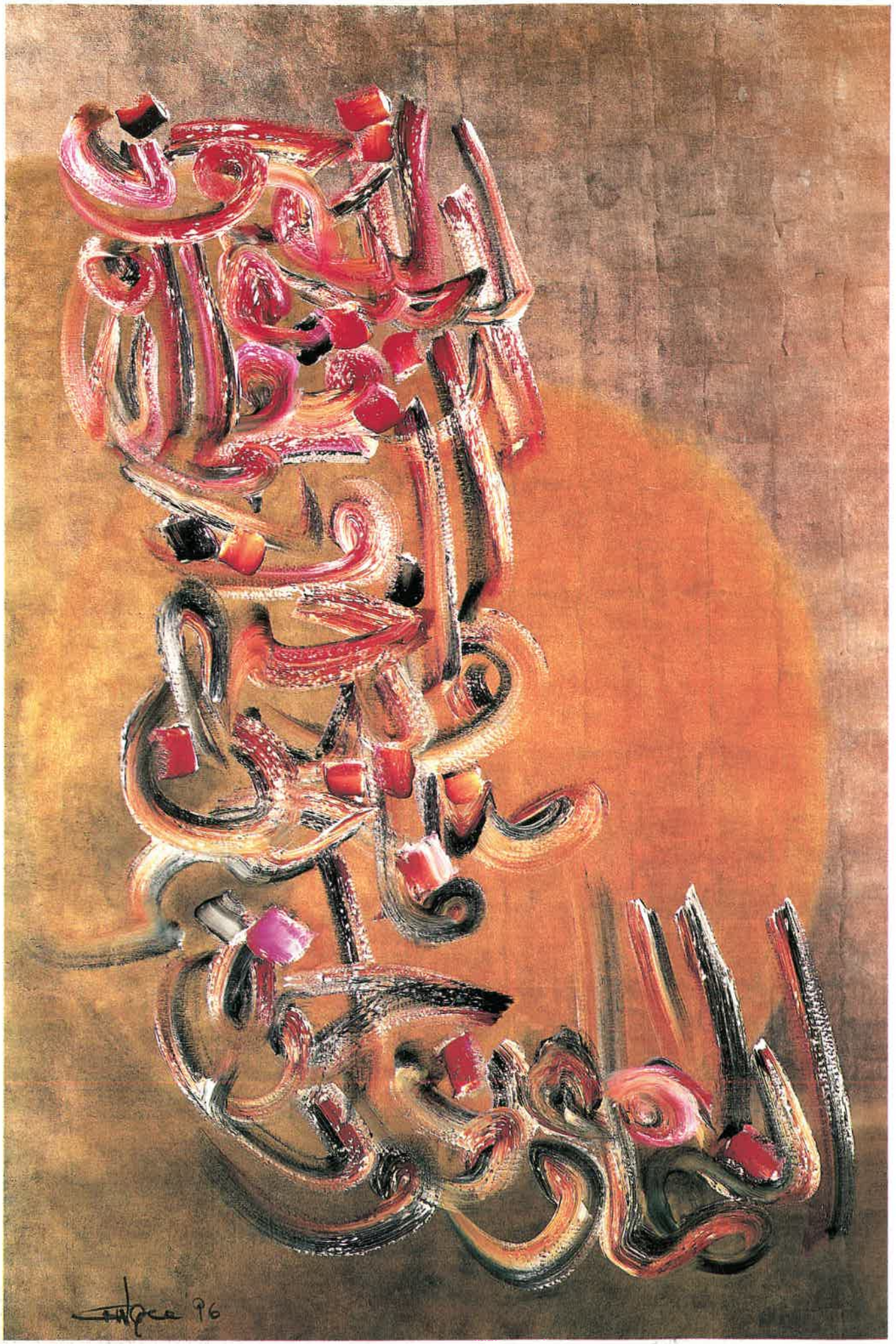
▲ ***Ayat Al Noor*** *Ismaili Centre, London*

► ***Muhammad*** *(pbuh)*

► *Overleaf left* ***Al Mussavir*** *Oil on canvas 1997*
*76 X 91 cm*

► *Overleaf Right* ***Ho Allah*** *Oil on canvas 1998*
*122 X 152 cm*



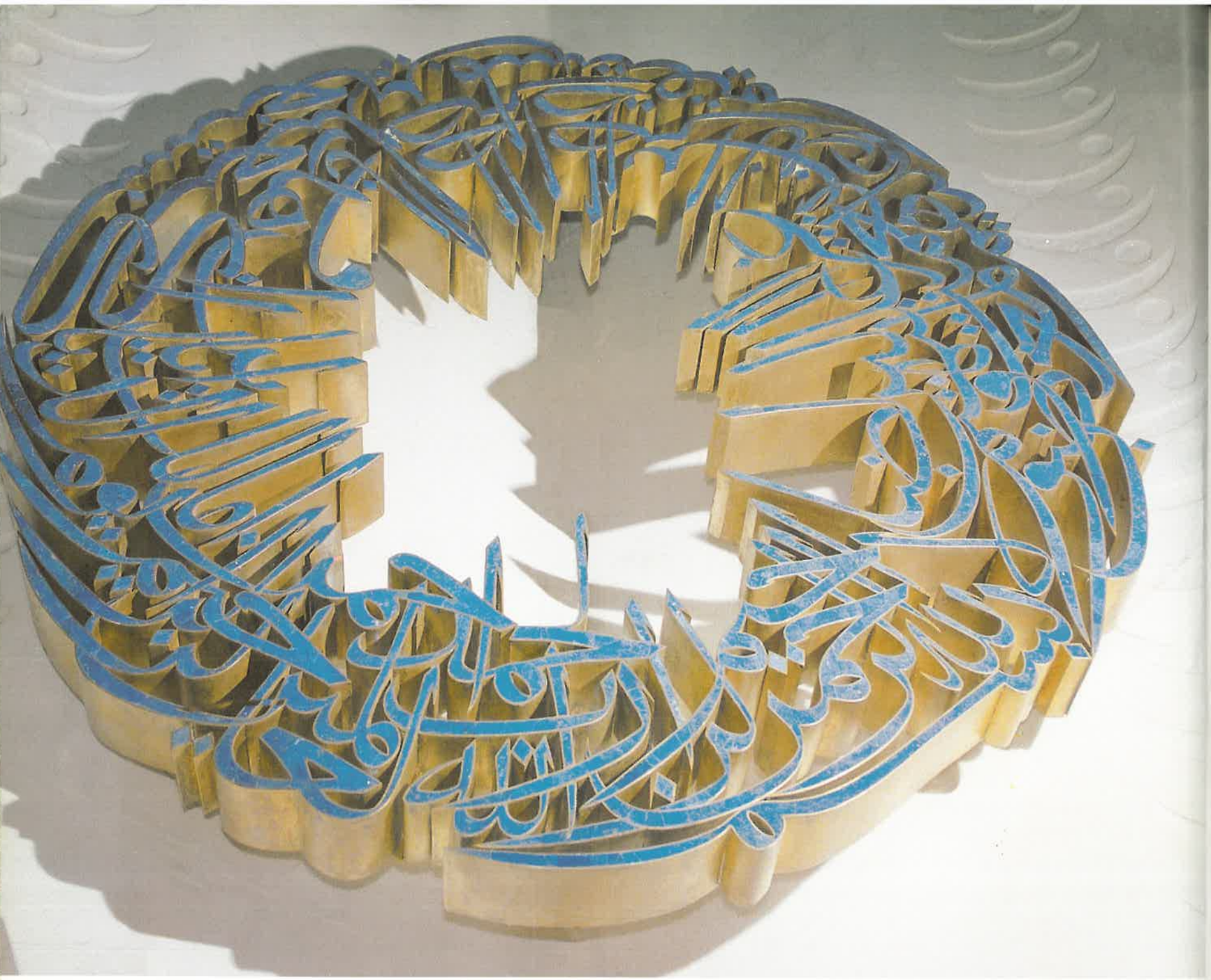


◄ *Calligraphy Oil on canvas 1996*

*226 X 151 cm*

▲ ***Mehrab*** *Shah Faisal Mosque Islamabad 1986*

▲ ***Mehrab*** *Shah Faisal Mosque Islamabad 1986*



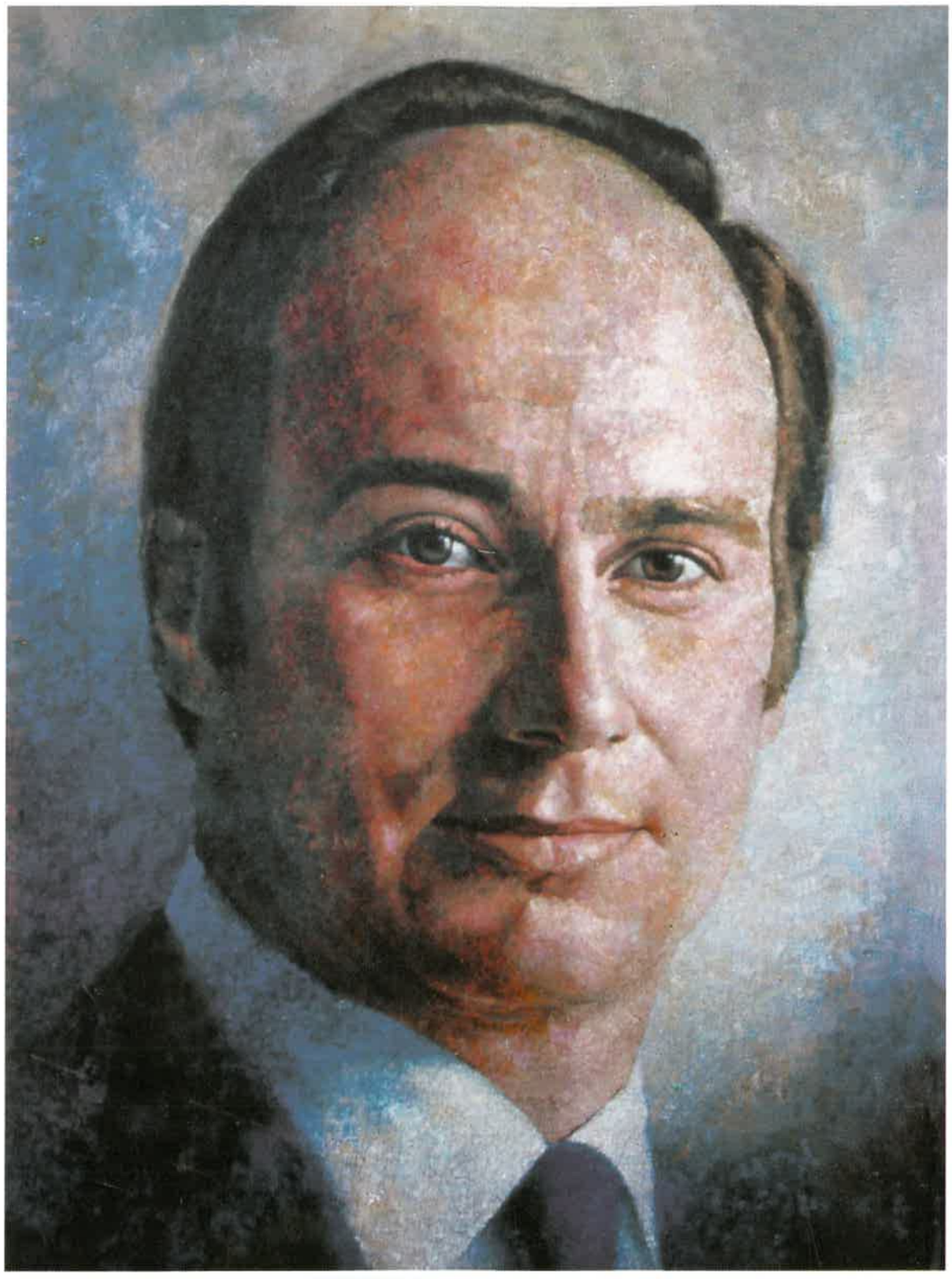
▲ ***Surah Fatiha*** *which is in the Faisal Mosque (Mimber) at Islamabad 1986.*

▲ *Bronze sculptor* ***Surah Rehman*** *in the classical Eastern Kufic. Ayats with different scripts representative of the styles of classical calligraphy developed 1973.*

▲ *"**Unity**" Ayat and Symbols suggestive of the theme 1974. **Unity** combining Quranic Ayats and symbols. At the centre is black tourmaline suggestive of Hajre Aswad. Next is Surah Rehaman in squared Kufic and the next Ayat is on Unity.*

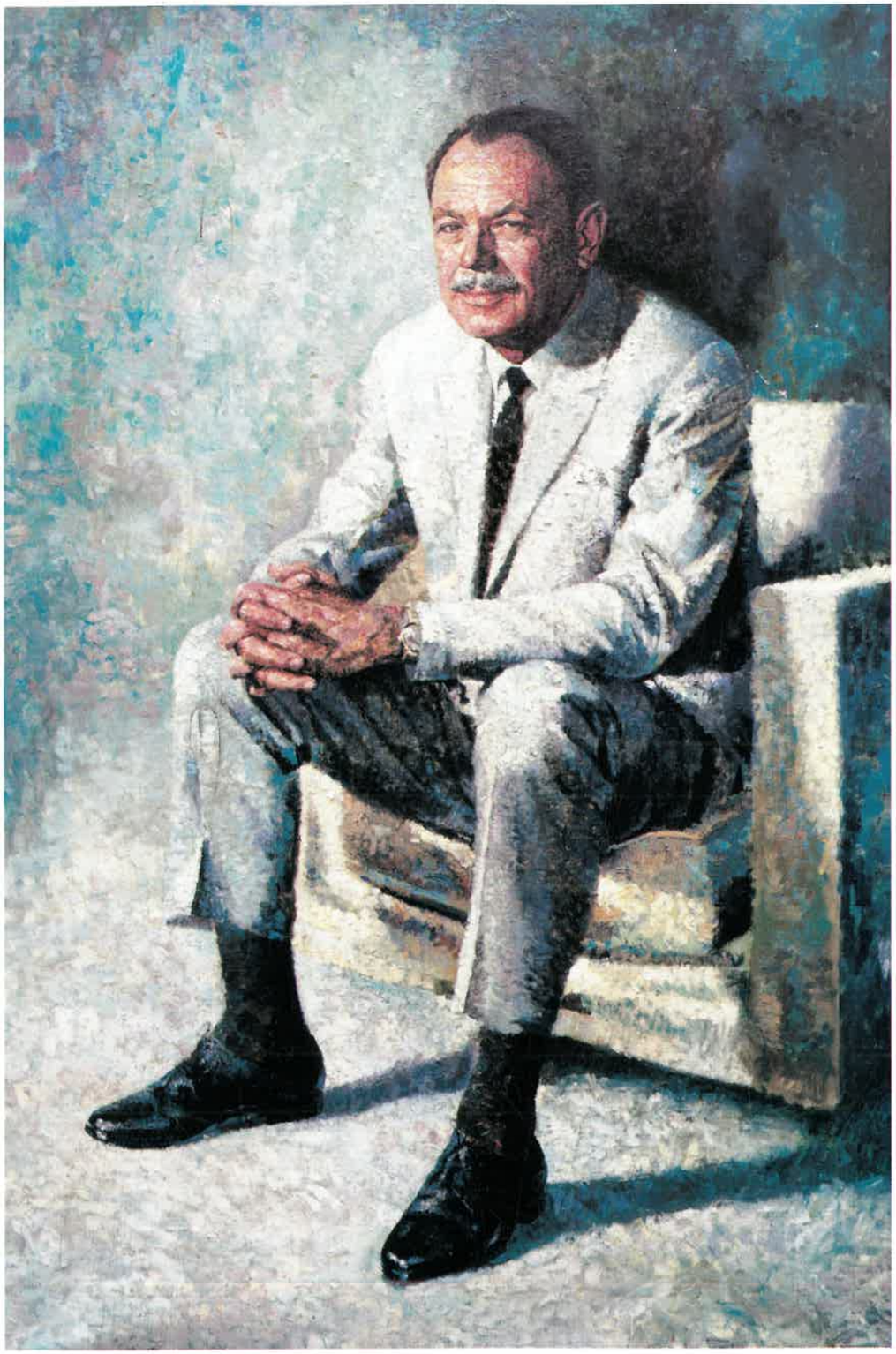
▲ ***Horses*** *Oil on canvas 1959 102 X 120 cm*

▲ ***Riffat*** *Oil on canvas*



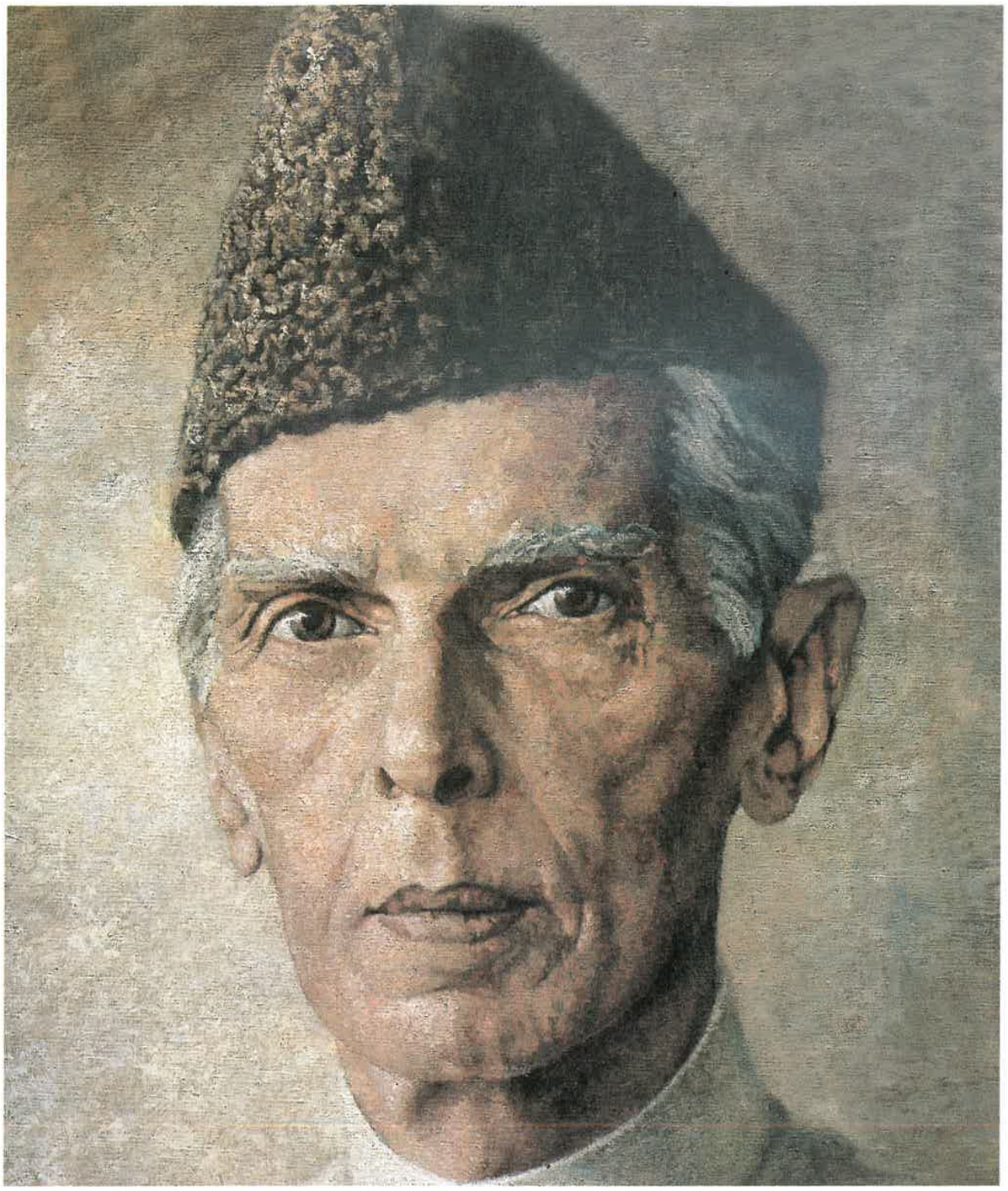
▲ ***Prince Karim Aga Khan*** *Oil on canvas Ismaili Cultural Centre, London*

Gulgec



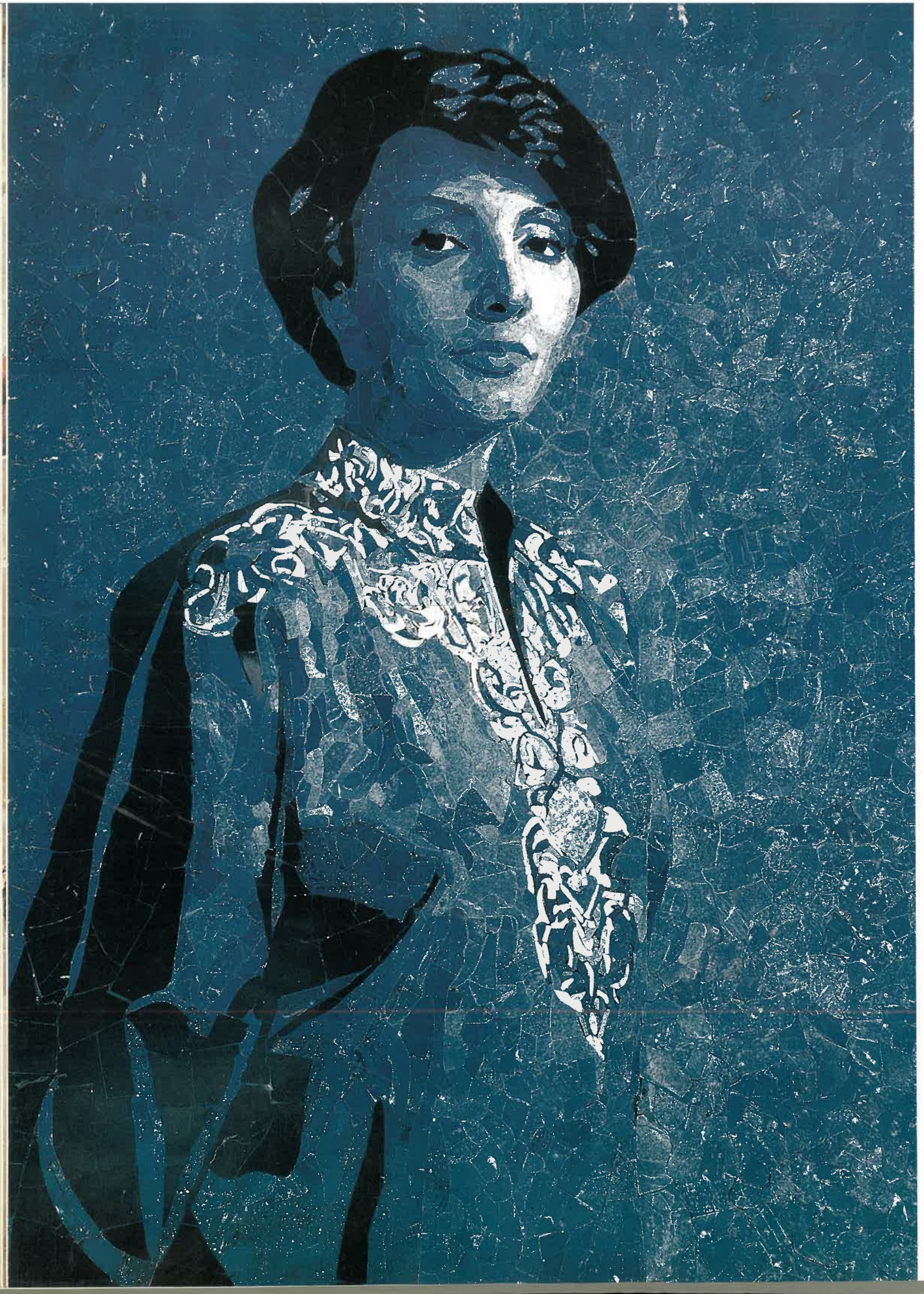
▲ ***Field Marshal Ayub Khan*** *Oil on canvas*

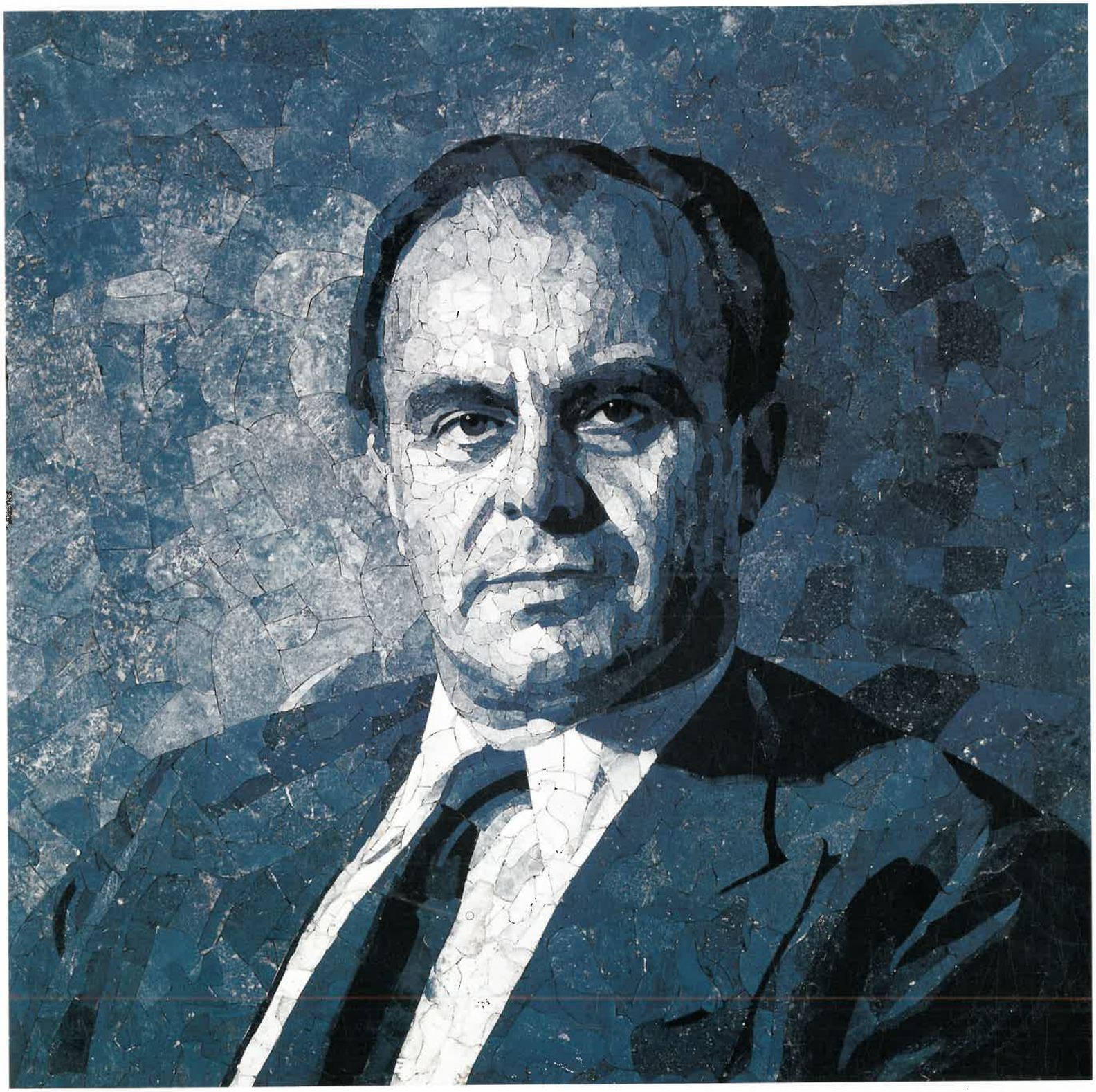
◄ ***Camels and Man*** *Oil on Canvas*



▲ ***Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah*** *Oil on canvas*

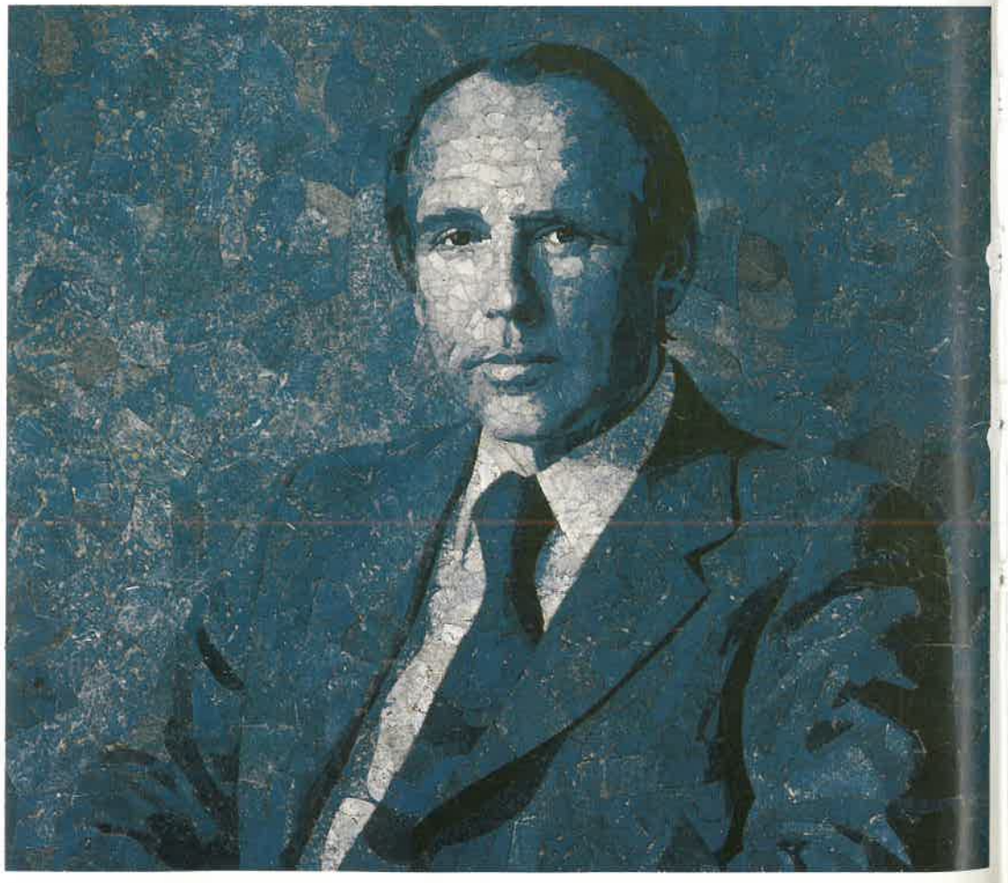
▲ ***Prince Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli 1990 based on sketches done during mid 50s. 74 X 69 cm*





▲ ***His Highness Prince Ali Khan*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*

◄ ***Princess Hussa bint Khalid*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli 1998*



▲ ***Poet Prince Abdullah bin Faisal*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*

◄ *Top left* ***King Fahad bin Abdul Aziz*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*
*Top right* ***King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*

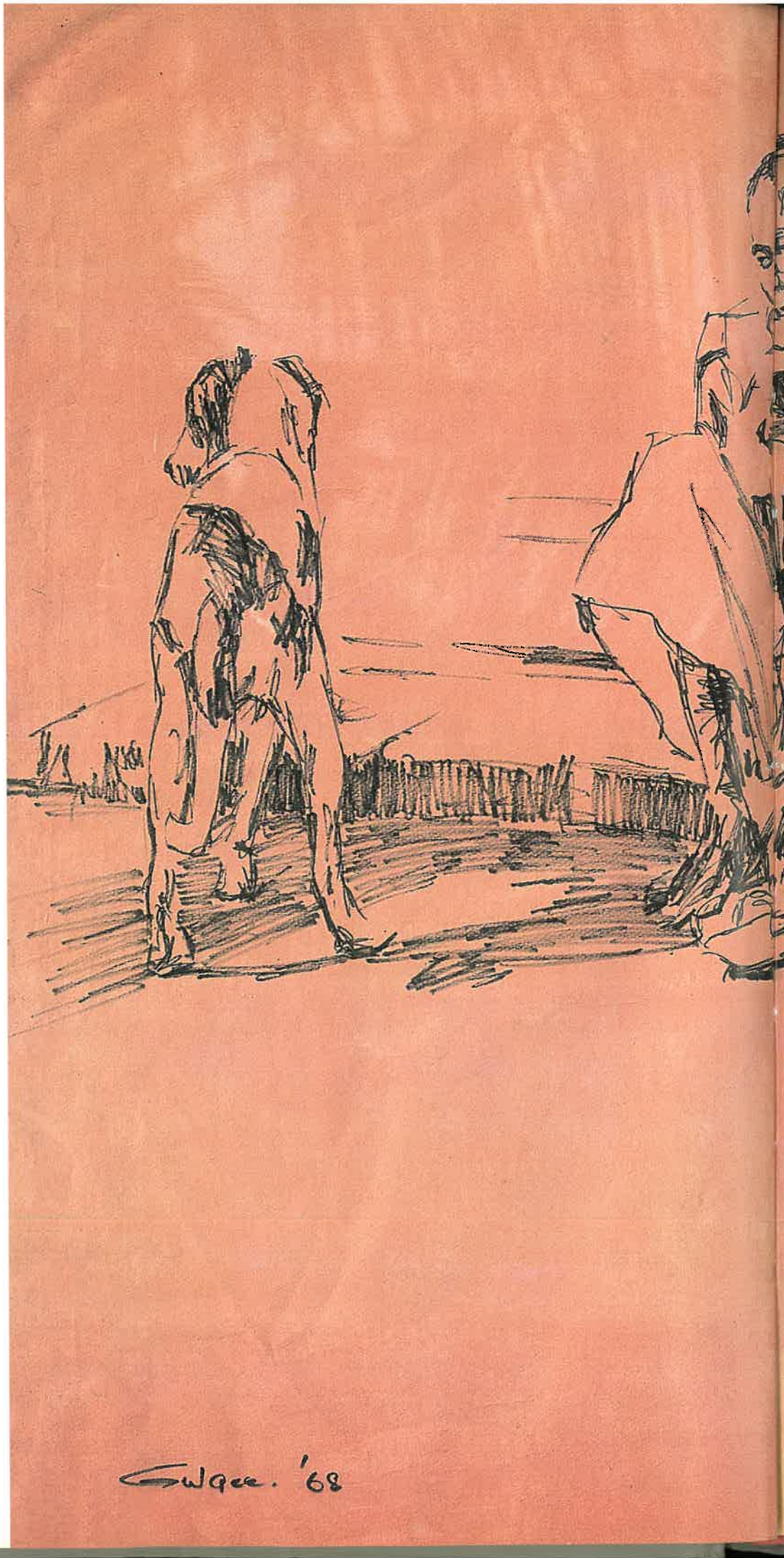
◄ *Bottom left* ***King Khalid bin Abdul Aziz*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*
*Bottom right* ***Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli*

▲ ***Polo*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli 85 X 109 cm*

▲ ***Polo*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli 1965 85 X 109 cm*

▲ ***Horses*** *Mosaic in Lapis lazuli 104 X 110 cm*

▲ ***Amin Gulgee*** *Pencil on paper 1983 33 X 33 cm*



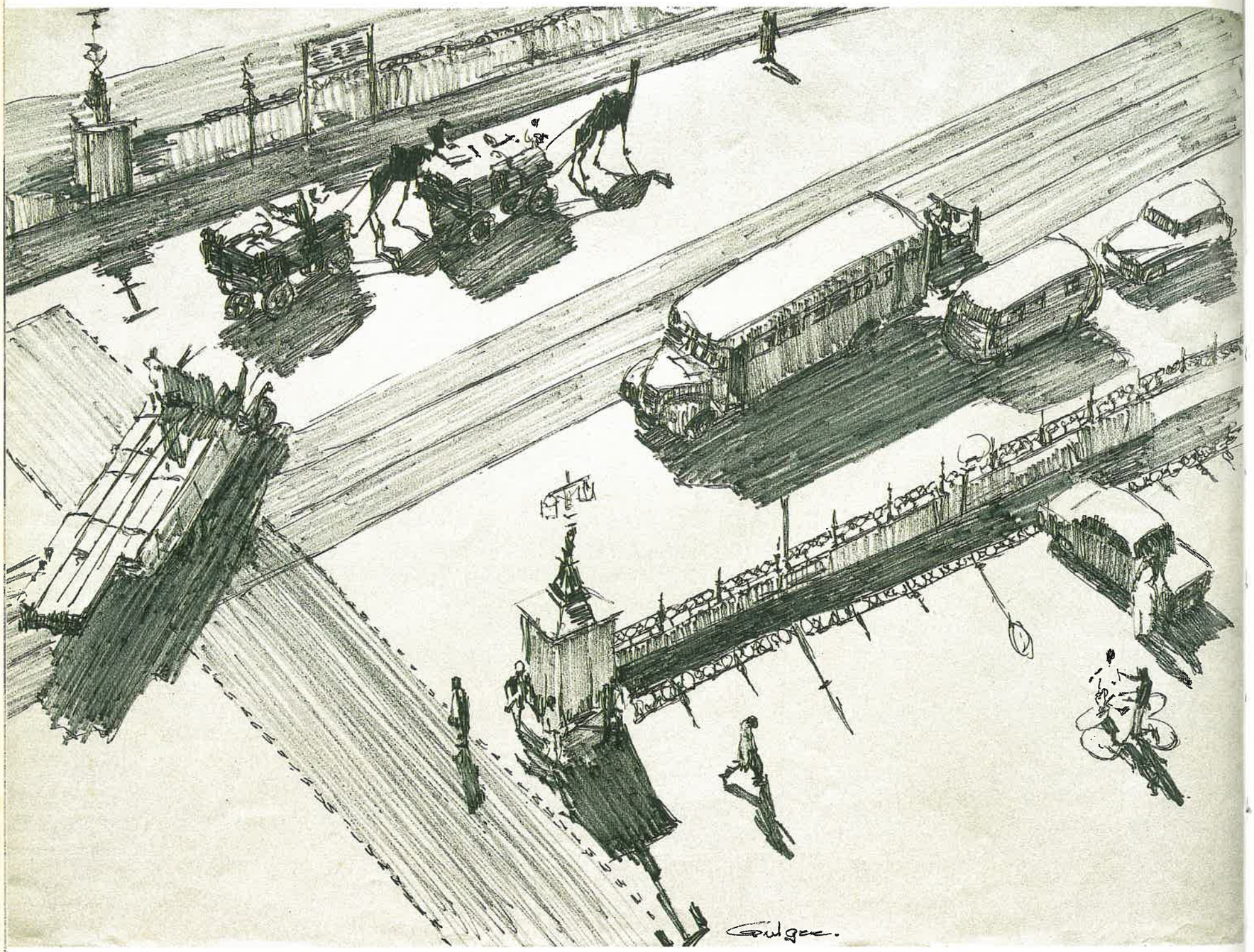

► ***My People*** *Marker on pastel paper 1978 75 X 110 cm*

◄ *Brush drawing on paper 1970*

Gil Dec. '68

▲ ***Polo*** *Pencil on paper 1991*

◄ ***Villagers*** *Marker on pastel paper 1962*



▲ ***Karachi*** *Pencil on paper*

► *Top Brush drawing on paper 1986*

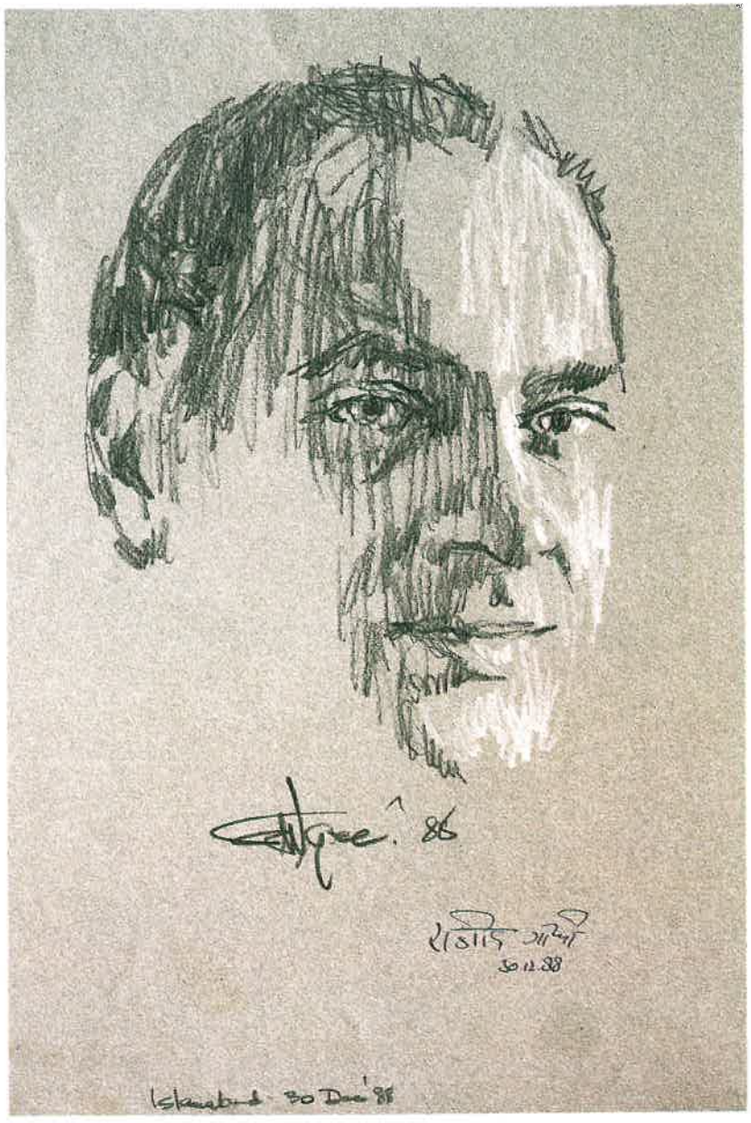
► *Bottom* ***Camel*** *Black ink mixed with silver powder on paper 1968*

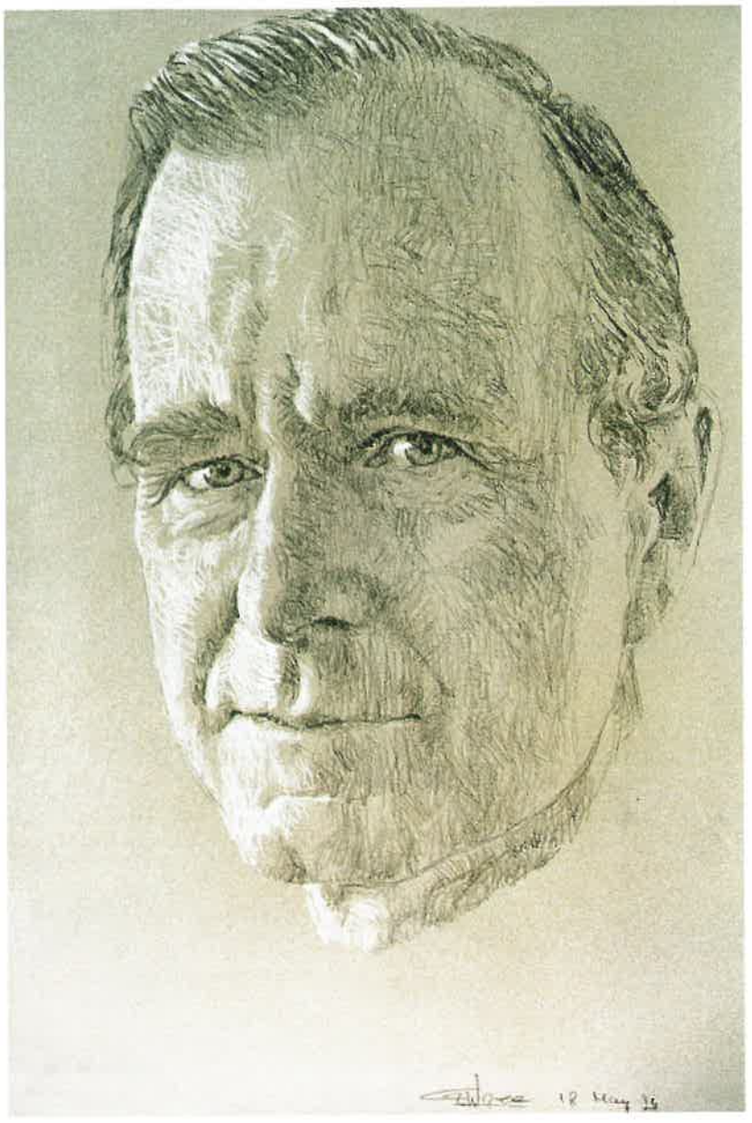
▲ ***Kabbadi*** *marker on paper*

◄ *Top* ***Pathans*** *Black & white pencil on pastel paper 1973*

◄ *Bottom* ***Dancer*** *Pencil on paper*

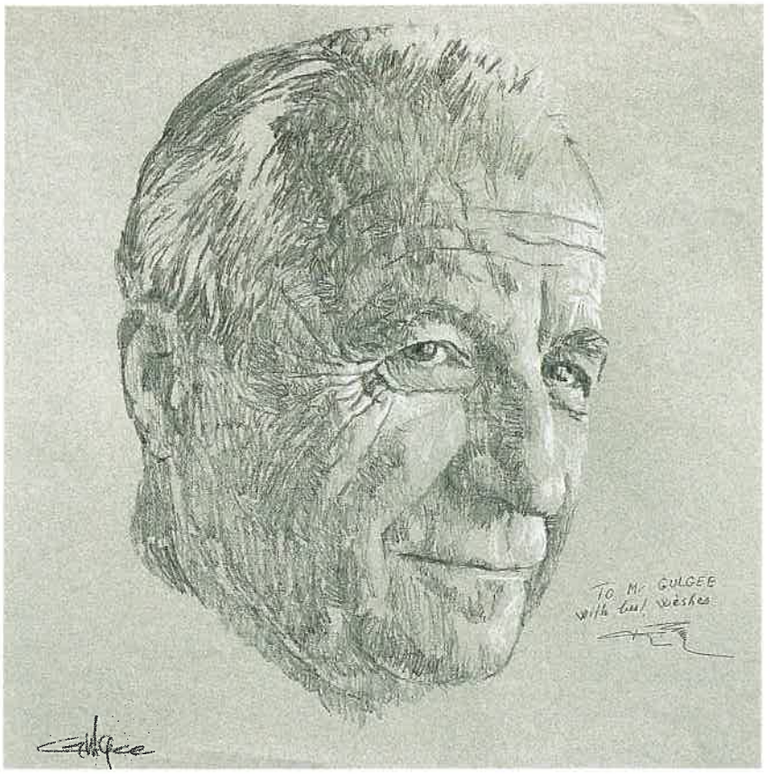
▲ ***George Bush** and **General Zia ul Haq** at Islamabad. Pencil on pastel board 1984*



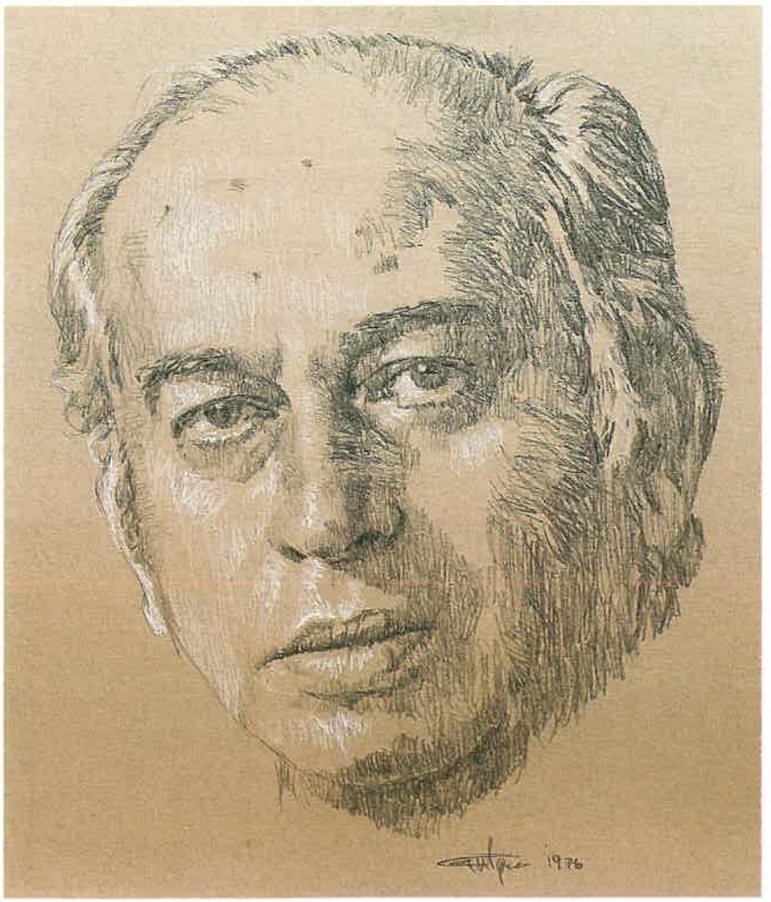


*Left to Right* ***Rajiv Gandhi*** *Pencil on pastel paper 1986 40 X 40 cm*
***George Bush*** *Pencil on pastel paper 80 X 101 cm*
***Richard Nixon*** *Marker and pencil on paper 50 X 80 cm*
***President Everon*** *Pencil on pastel paper 80 X 100 cm*
***Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto*** *Pencil on pastel paper 80 X 100 cm*
***Chou-en-Lai*** *Pencil on pastel paper 80 X 100 cm*

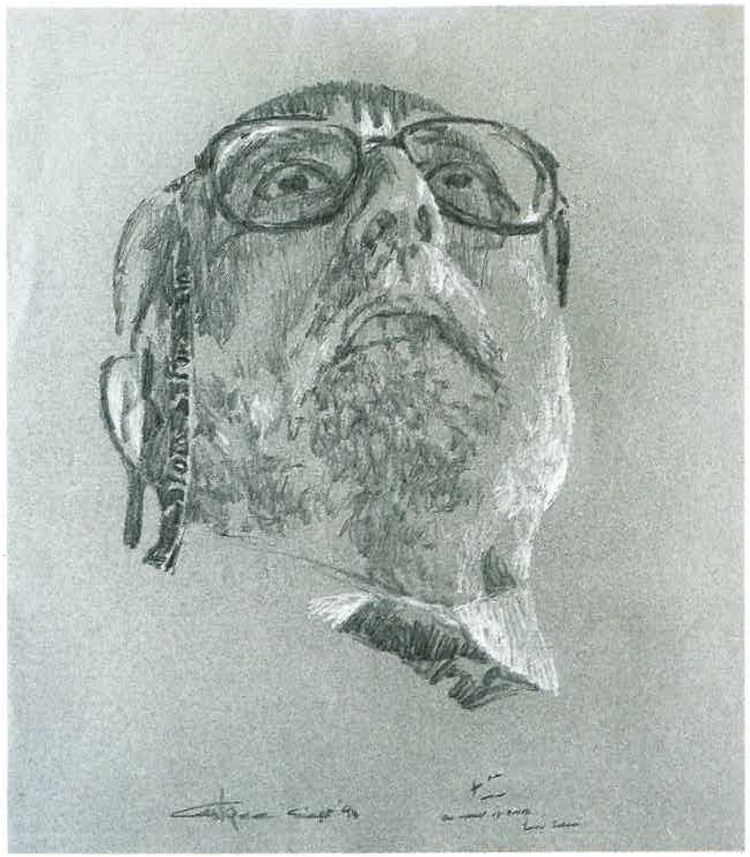
Gulgee
Calcutta 1st August 69


To Mr GULGEE
With kind wishes
Gulgee

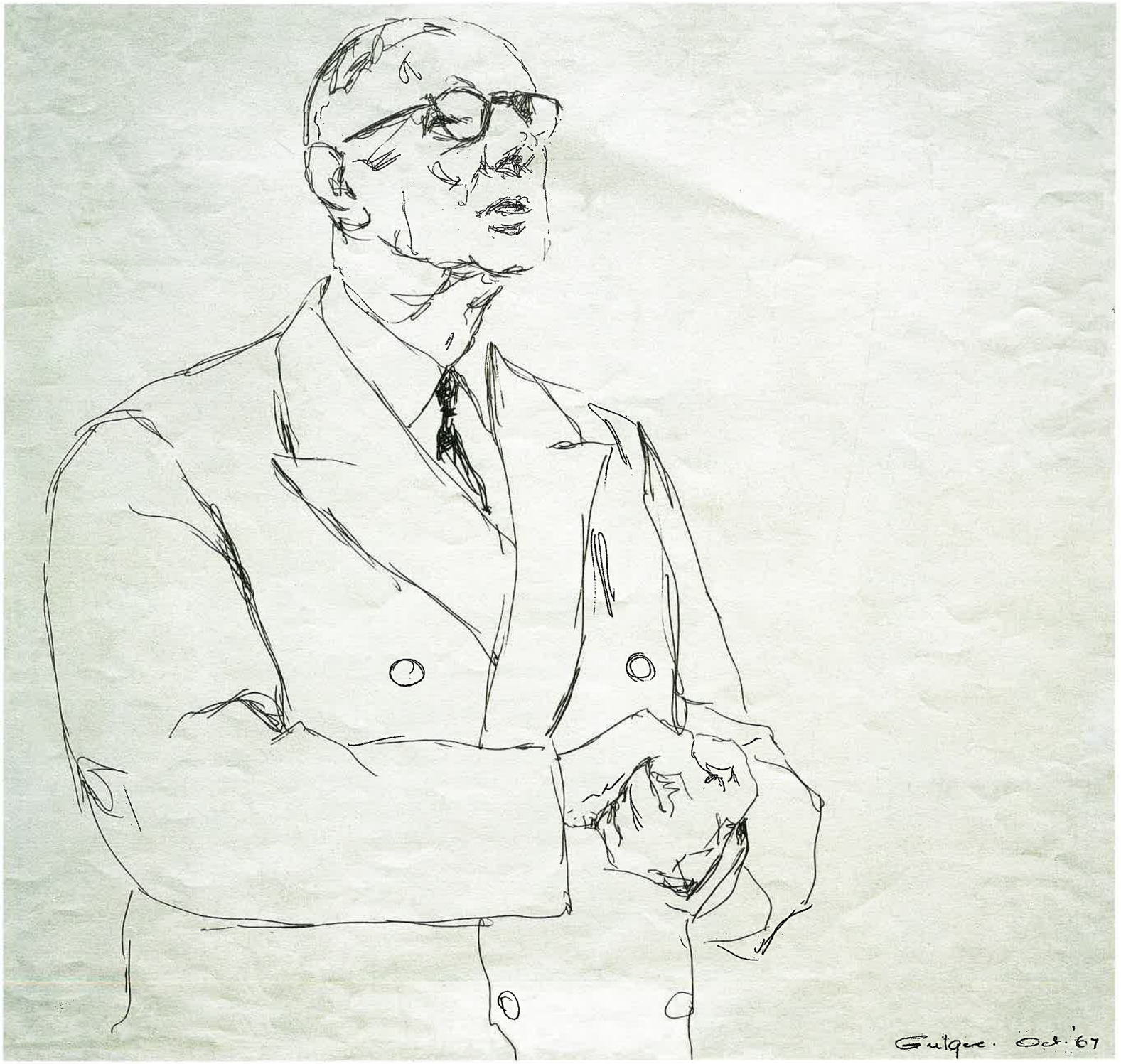
周恩来
一九七四年二月二十日


Gulgee 1976

▲ ***Editors of Time Magazine*** *Pencil on pastel paper 1982 75 X 110 cm*



*Top Left Nobel Laureate* ***Dr. Abdus Salam.*** *Pencil on paper*
*Top Right* ***Zarmeen Gulgee Thani***
*Bottom Left* ***Annemarie Schimmel***




▲ ***Charles de Gaulle*** *Marker on paper 1967 49 X 51 cm*

▲ ***Zaro Gulgee*** *Pencil on paper*

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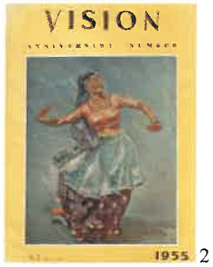

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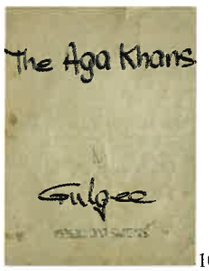

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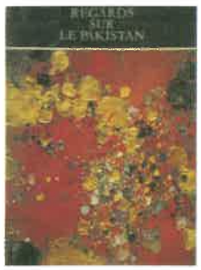

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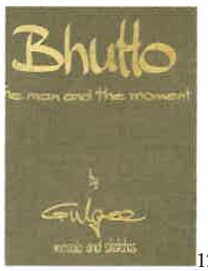

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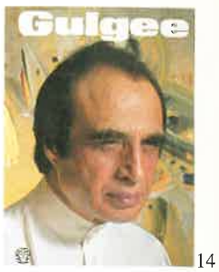

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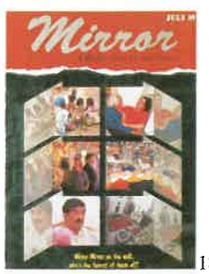

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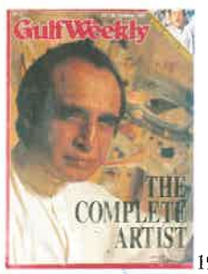

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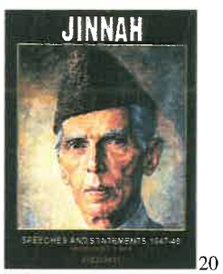

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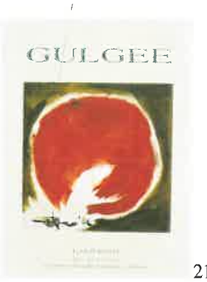

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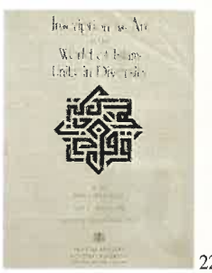
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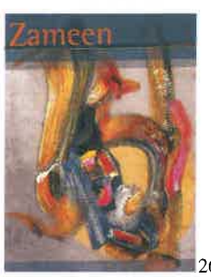

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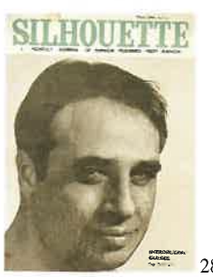

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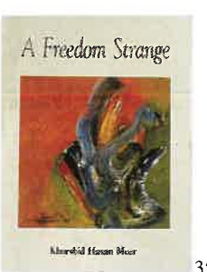

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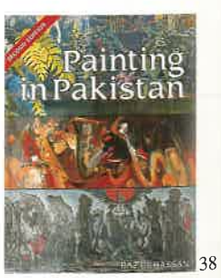

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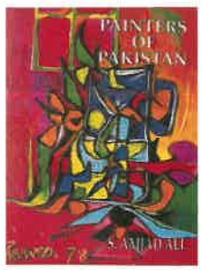

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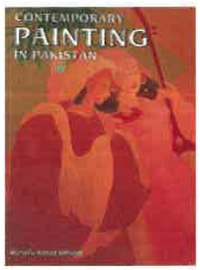

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# COVER STORIES, BOOKS, COVERS

1. Vision Jan, 1954.
2. Vision Anniversary Nov, 1955.
3. Vision Nov, 1959.
4. Peace & Friendship in Freedom, coverage of President Eisenhower's tour of Pakistan Dec, 1959 sketches.
5. Safeena 1960.
6. Woman's World March, 1960.
7. USOM. Pakistan All Mission Conference Feb, 1960.
8. Scintilla Art & Craft & Literature 1963.
9. The Illustrated Weekly of Pakistan Dec, 1967.
10. The Aga Khans by Gulgee Mosaic & Drawings 1972.
11. Regards Sur le Pakistan, Volume 3. Number 1. 1973.
12. Bhutto. The Man and the Moment 1976.
13. Asian Post. London July 16, 1983.
14. Gulgee, Versatile Artist by S. Amjad Ali. 1984.
15. London Exhibition of Pakistani Paintings 1987.
16. Contemporary Asian Prints 1989. Symbolic Visions in Contemporary Asian Life Fukouka Art Museum. Japan 1989.
17. Third Asian Art Show Fukouka, Japan 1989.
18. Mirror July, 1990.
19. Gulf Weekly Oct, 24–30, 1991.
20. Jinnah – Speeches and Statements 1947-48
21. Gulgee Commonwealth Institute London. Dec, 1994.
22. Inscriptions as Art in the World of Islam April - May 1996 Hofstra Museum, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.
23. The Teenager. Gulgee's Tribute to Pakistan Nobel Laureate Abdus Salam Dec, 1996.
24. 50 Anniversary Contributors 1997.
25. Gulgee Mosaic, Sculptures, Paintings Jan, 1999.
26. Zameen Feb-March, 1999.
27. From an Artist's Sketchbook. Gulgee Presents Highlights of Mr. Nixon's Visit.
28. Silhouette. Introducing Gulgee.
29. Tempo – A Tribute.
30. Gulgee – Friday, Nation.
31. Woman's World – Special Anniversary Number.
32. M. A. Jinnah – Ishphani Correspondence 1936–1948.
33. Exhibition of Works by Gulgee – Indian Council of Cultural Restoration.
34. Vision – Farah Deeba.
35. A Freedom Strange by Khurshid Hassan Mir.
36. Pima Magazine.
37. Berg-e-Zeest by Sheikh Siddique.
38. Painting in Pakistan by Ijaz-ul-Hasan.
39. Painters of Pakistan by S. Amjad Ali.
40. Contemporary Painting in Pakistan by Marcella Neesom.

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## EVENTS

1. At the Yakimour Palace, Cannes. 1951
2. Trudeau of Canada and Gulgee at the Faisal Mosque at Islamabad.
3. King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan sits for a portrait by Gulgee at the President House, Karachi.
4. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto introducing the artists Gulgee and Amin Gulgee at the exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute.
5. Private Exhibition at Kabul 1959 sponsored by Afghan Ladies.
6. Rajiv Gandhi and Mrs. Zareen Gulgee looking at drawings of Mr. Gandhi's election campaign.
7. Prince Karim Aga Khan visits Gulgee's Studio at Karachi.
8. Shah of Iran, President Bhutto and the Artist.
9. Gulgee doing a circular tugra of the **'Ayat on Unity'** during the inauguration of the Aga Khan University and Hospital.
10. President Everon of Turkey and the Artist sharing thoughts on art, artists and nations.
11. Gulgee presenting a sketch to the German Chancellor on his birthday. President Leghari and Mrs. Gulgee are on the side.
12. Exhibition at New Delhi 1989. Indian Artists and Mr. & Mrs. Gulgee, in the foreground is the bronze sculpture **'Surah-e-Rehman'.**
13. Prince Karim Aga Khan with Zareen, Zarmeen and Gulgee at the Gulgee Studio.
14. President Bhutto, Henry Kissinger and Gulgee with the sculpture for Kissinger on the events of his career.
15. Premier Zhou-en-Lai showing Gulgee portrait of himself after the sitting.
16. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and President of Turkmenistan at Gulgee's Exhibition at The National Assembly Building on 14 August.
17. Exhibition at the Ismailia Cultural Centre at London. Zaro, Amin and Gulgee with Dr. Annemarie Schimmel.
18. President George Bush and General Zia-ul-Haq with Gulgee and his sketches.
19. President of Romania, General Ayub Khan and Gulgee.
20. With President Nixon and President Yahya Khan at Lahore.
21. Ismaili Cultural Centre, London, standing ovation for Gulgee.
22. Gulgee's paintings with Zaro & Gulgee at the old Masters Exhibition at Bangalore.
23. A private showing at the Elysee Palace, Paris. Charles de Gaulle, President Ayub Khan and others looking at Gulgee's work.
24. Prince Karim Aga Khan and Mr. & Mrs. Gulgee during the Gulgee's wedding ceremony at Paris 1962.
25. Exhibition at Meridian Museum, International Centre, Washington DC. Ambassador Howard Walker introducing Gulgee.
26. Summit Conference at Tehran. Gulgee receiving the EC Award from the President of Turkey. Also present are the President of Pakistan and representatives from the Russian states.
27. Gulgee explaining monumental mural **Healing** to King Khalid bin Abdul Aziz and the Shah of Iran at Riyadh 1975.
28. Private showing of Gulgee's work. The Artist explaining his work to King Fahad, President Zia-ul-Haq and others.
29. Prince Karim Aga Khan with Mr. & Mrs. Gulgee at their wedding ceremony at Paris 1962.
30. Gulgee working on a portrait of Queen Farah Deeba of Iran during her visit to Karachi.
31. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto applauding Gulgee at his speech at the Commonwealth Exhibition at London Dec 1995.
32. Exhibition at Paris Dec 1994.
33. President of Romania and President Ayub Khan with the Artist.
34. Zaro and Gulgee before the **Mimber** of the Faisal Mosque at Islamabad 1986.
35. Gulgee during a course of lectures at Harvard University.
36. Prof. Oleg Graber with the Artist during a demonstration at Harvard University.
37. Gulgee working on a mural for Wates Ltd. in Nerbury, England.
38. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto presenting a Gulgee painting to Boutros Boutros - Ghali, Sec. General of United Nations at the Prime Minster House, Islamabad.
39. Madam Boutros Boutros - Ghali and Gulgee at the inauguration of Gulgee's and Amin Gulgee's exhibition at the United Nations, New York.
40. Gulgee at the White House.
41. Prince Amin during his visit to Faisal Mosque, Islamabad. In the background is the mehrab.
42. Prince Karim Aga Khan at Gulgee's Karachi Studio. Zaro, Amin and Zarmeen are in the background.

# GULGEE

1926 Born: Peshawar, 25 October.
1945 B.Sc.(Honours) Engineering, Aligarh University.
1946 Lecturer in Civil Engineering, Aligarh University.
1947 M.S. (Hydraulics), Columbia University.
1948 M.S. (Soil Mechanics) Havard University.
1949 Engineer, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, Denver.
1950 Design Engineer, Stockholm.
1951–53 Executive Engineer, United Nations Economic Development Team, Baluchistan, Pakistan.
1953-55 Deputy Director, Central Engineering Authority, Government of Pakistan, Karachi.
1955 Liaison Officer, Embassy of Pakistan, Ottawa.

**Solo Exhibitions**

1950 1st Solo Exhibition, Stockholm.
1954 Exhibition of Portraits, Warsak Club.
1955 Exhibition of Paintings, Ottawa.
1957 The "Afghans", Paintings Exhibition in Kabul.
1962 Private showing of sketches of President Eisenhower, President House, Karachi.
1965 Painting Exhibition, Tehran.
1971 Paintings and Mosaics, Export Promotion Bureau & P.I.A., Islamabad.
1973 Paintings Exhibition, Islamabad.
1974 Private showing of works at Islamic Summit held in Lahore.
1975 Murals, lapis portraits, King Faisal Medical City, Al-Riyadh.
1979 Paintings & Mosaics, Arts Council, Karachi.
1979 Paintings & Mosaics, Pakistan Embassy, Tokyo.
1981 Opening of the Aga Khan Centre Exhibition by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, London.

1988 Paintings & Sketches, Indus Gallery, Karachi.
1993 Paintings Exhibition, Meridian International Centre, Washington D.C.
1994 14th August Retrospective Exhibition at National Assembly, inaugurated by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.
1994 Exhibition at Pakistan's Headquarters for the United Nations, New York.
1994 Exhibition at Commonwealth Institute, inaugurated by Benazir Bhutto.
1995 Exhibition in Paris at Pakistan Embassy.
1997 Private showing on occasion of Islamic Summit at Convention Centre, Islamabad.
1997 Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, Aman, Jordan.
Exhibition at the Pakistan Embassy, New York. Inaugurated by Madame Boutrous–Boutrous Gali.
1998 Exhibition at the Ismaili Centre, Cromwell Road, London.
1998 Exhibition at Riyadh, sponsored by the Saudi Royal family.
1998 Exhibition at the Pakistan Embassy, Riyadh.
2000 Showing at the Ismaili Centre, Croydon, England.

**Group Exhibitions**

1960 Commonwealth Exhibition, London.
1965 Onyx Mosaic, World Fair, New York.
1969 Emblem in Bronze, Foreign Ministers Conference, Karachi.
1980 Contemporary Asian Art Show, Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan.
1981 3rd National Exhibition, Organized by Pakistan National Council of the Arts Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore.
1982 Paintings from Pakistan, Hirshom Museum, Washington D.C.
1983 4th National Exhibition, organized by P.N.C.A., Lahore.
1984 Exhibition at Fukuoka Museum, Japan.
"Contemporary Asian Prints", Fukuoka Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.
1985 5th National Exhibition, organized by P.N.C.A., Lahore.
1986 3rd Art Biennial, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka.
1987 Pakistani Paintings, West Germany.
1988 1st Art Biennial of Pakistan, Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore.
1991 Biennial Exhibition at Bangladesh, Exhibition at Sri Lanka.
1993 Old Masters Exhibition during SARC Conference at Museum of Contemporary Art in New Delhi.
1997 Exhibition of Calligraphy at Holstra Museum and Seminar on "Symbol as Art in the World of Islam" at Holstra University, New York.
1999 Calligraphy Exhibition at the Mohetta Palace Museum, Clifton, Karachi.

**Commissions**

1954 Portrait of H. H. Aga Khan III.
1957 King Zahir Shah-Afghanistan, portrait in mosaic and oil.
1960 Portraits of Shah of Iran and Queen Farah Pahalvi.
1961 Oil portraits of Prince Karim Aga Khan and Prince Sadaruddin Aga Khan.

1964 Murals at Wates Ltd. London.
1967 Mural at American Life Insurance Co.
1968 Bronze mural and paintings for Citibank.
1968 Portraits of Charles de Gaule and his ministers.
1969 Bronze mural and relief calligraphy for Habib Bank Plaza.
1970 Twelve murals for Leo A. Day Architects, Omaha, Nebraska.
1972 Paintings for Schneider, Zurich.
1972 Monument for P.I.A.
1974 Lapis mosaic of King Faisal. Seven murals and paintings for King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh.
1975 Lapis portrait of King Khalid and lapis mosaics for the palace.
1976 Monument for Henry Kissinger.
1976–80 Mosaics and lapis portraits for the Aga Khan's home and office at Iglamone, near Paris.
1976 Lapis portrait, lapis mosaics and murals for Prince Abdulla Faisal, Jeddah.
1982 Murals for Harper Group building, San Francisco.
1982 Portrait of President Reagan in lapis lazuli.
1983 Mosaic in lapis and emeralds and a monumental mural on unity and other work for the Aga Khan Centre, London.
1983 Official portrait of the Quaid-e-Azam, commissioned by the President of Pakistan, mosaic and murals for the Ismailia Centre, London.
1985 Mural on 'Unity' for National Assembly building in Islamabad.
1985 Portrait of President Everon of Turkey.
1986 Portrait of George Bush and his wife.
1986 Mehrab in lapis and gold for the Faisal Mosque, Islamabad.
1988 'Mimber' in lapis and gold for the Faisal Mosque, Islamabad.
1988 Portraits of Prime Minister Nakasoni and his cabinet, Japan.
1989–91 Lapis work and mural for Tariq Karim from Kuwait.
1989 Seven ton hand-beaten sculpture for the Faisal Mosque, Islamabad.
1992 200 Sq. ft. mural for Defence Library, Karachi.
1994 180 Sq. ft. mural "Unity" for National Assembly building, Islamabad.
1996 Mural for Defence College, Islamabad.
1998 Mural for Dr. Hanna, San Francisco.
2000 Mural for Ismaili Cultural Centre, Croydon, England.

**Awards**

1970 President's Medal for Pride of Performance
1979 Japan Foundation Award
1982 Sitara-e-Imtiaz
1988 Quaid-e-Azam Award
1988 Rotary Paul Harris Award and Gold Medal
1990 Sitara-e-Imtiaz (second time)
1992 ECO Award (present at the award ceremony were the Heads of State of Turkey, Iran and Pakistan).
1994 Hilal-e-Imtiaz, Pakistan Government's highest civilian award.

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