

Art of Bangladesh Series 1

Zaimul Abedin

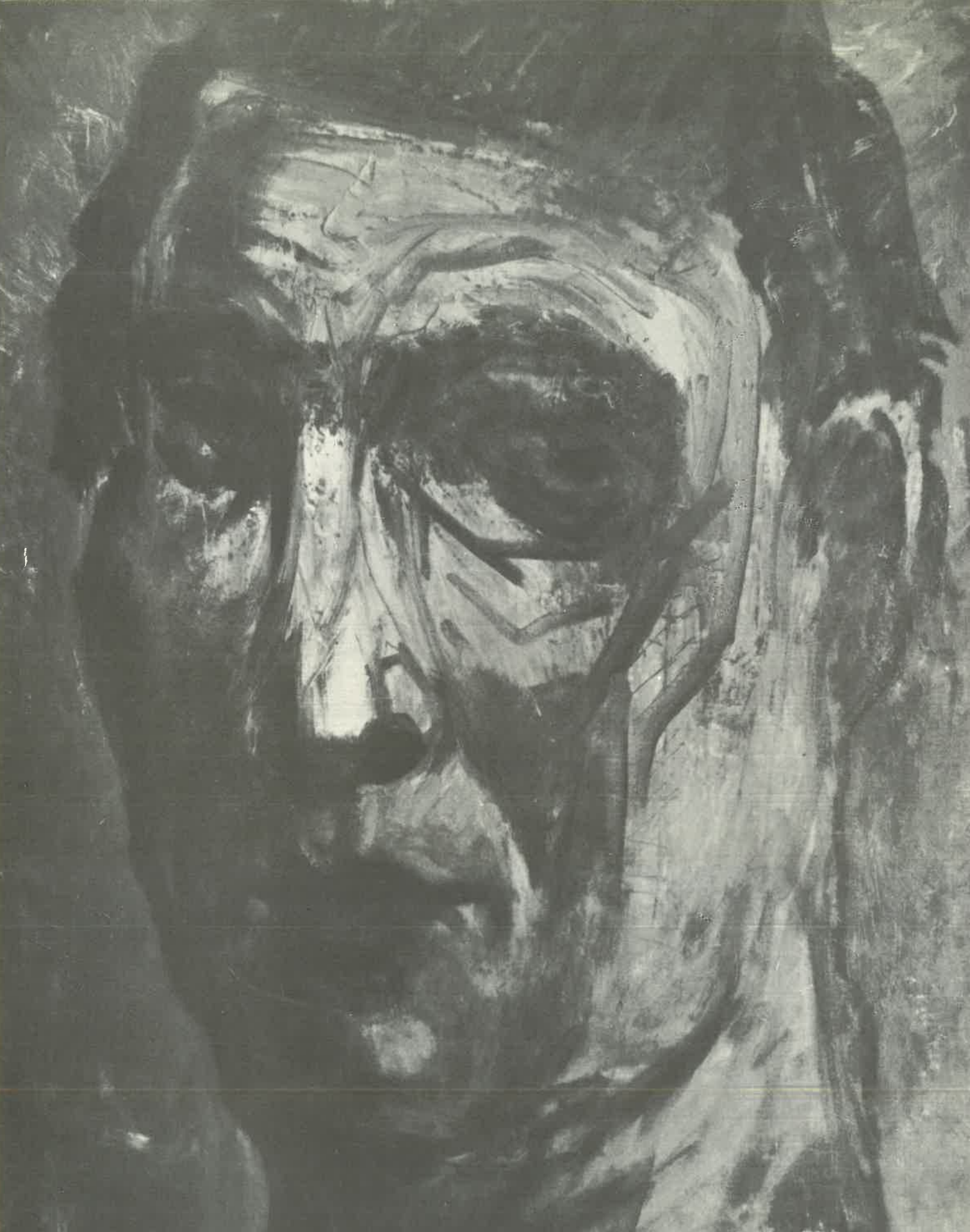


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ZAINUL ABEDIN



F. PORTAIT 1974 (unfinished). Oil on Canvas. 180x274

Art of Bangladesh Series 1

ZAINUL ABEDIN

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Introduction

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FOREWORD

If culture is the root mover of all movements of all times and of all groups of people however tied together, Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin must be regarded as the prime mover of the cultural revolution in his own world and environment culminating in what is called Art in Bangladesh to-day. Humanistic in attitude, academic in approach and realistic in treatment, master-painter Zainul Abedin's heart and soul was unbelievably deep-rooted into the soil of his origin. Born in a typical village of Bangladesh, Zainul Abedin felt always overwhelmed with the scenic beauty of the countryside and he continued to drink deep therefrom until he breathed his last. He drew, therefore, his inspirations from the genre life of the rural people for whom he had a sense of belonging together. Zainul's heart would bleed at the sorrows and sufferings, pangs and agonies of the tens of thousands of the toiling masses whom he owned as his own. No wonder that his 'famine sketches' of 1943 proved but immortal creations where he took to minimum possible details and used barest possible strokes but achieved greatest possible success. Wedded to the age-old art traditions of Bengal, often he appeared as a revivalist. But, nevertheless, he was very modern and quite up-to-date in technique, at times experimenting with the latest abstract. And, there he evolved a style of his own.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy takes pride in presenting this humble publication as a homage to the memories of the great artist within months of his sad demise. No word is sufficient to acknowledge our gratitude to Mrs. Jahanara Abedin but for whose ungrudging help and co-operation the venture would have remained an impossibility. Our grateful thanks are also due to Dr. Noazesh Ahmed who is responsible not only for the reproductions but also for visualising and seeing the entire publication work through. We must also acknowledge our indebtedness to Mr. Nazrul Islam, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Dacca, for kindly writing the introduction. We should like to record our grateful appreciation to the authorities of the Zainul Abedin Sangrahasala (Art Gallery), Mymensingh, for permitting us to use the works in their collection and also to Messrs. Eastern Regal Industries Limited for having treated this printing work absolutely on non-commercial basis. Last but not the least, Mr. Subir Choudhury, Assistant Director, Department of Fine Arts in the Academy, should be mentioned for his untiring services towards this rather hasty publication.

While we welcome our readers to our Art of Bangladesh Series opening with Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin our apologies are due to them for the possible lapses and shortcomings which we promise to improve upon in our future endeavours.

January 1977
Dacca, Bangladesh

Muhammad Sirajul Islam
Director General
Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy



BENGAL FAMINE, 1943. Dry Point, 19×25.4

INTRODUCTION

The significance of Zainul Abedin in Bangladesh lies not just in the value of his art but also in his pioneer role in the development of modern art in this country. He is also important for his human qualities. A sensitive artist of enormous power, Abedin had never considered art to be anything outside the domain of ordinary life. He did not believe in the theory of art for art's sake nor did he support the philosophy of propaganda art. Art must be completely integrated into life. To him, art was only an expression of life and its purpose was to make human society rich and beautiful. The establishment of beauty in society must be preceded by the complete eradication of ugliness of all varieties—economic, social, as well as visual. Throughout the four decades of his artistic career, Abedin had made relentless efforts in the development of that total environment which makes possible the unrestrained pursuit of significant aesthetic arts. His art has always served the common people, from whom he himself had come, by faithfully depicting their land, their life, their continuing and almost unending struggles, their hopes and their aspirations. The rural proletariat and the nature of Bangladesh have been his most favourite subjects.

Zainul Abedin was born in 1914 in a lower middle class Muslim family of Mymensingh in Bangladesh. He was raised in the most idyllic and romantic floodplains of the majestic Brahmaputra River. Nature's grandeur was the only affluence he had known in his childhood and for many years beyond. Nature worked in the development of his artistic temperament. 'The river', he had said many a time, 'has been my greatest teacher'. He had shown his talents quite early during his school days in Mymensingh. But Abedin was not satisfied until he could go to far away Calcutta to embark on a long and arduous career of an art student. He attended the Government School of Arts in Calcutta between 1933 and 1938.

Deeply impressed by nature in his childhood and trained to paint in the European academic realistic manner as a young art student, Abedin turned into a fine painter of the rural landscape. Even within the framework of academic limitations, Abedin had made many memorable sketches and water colours of the Santhal Parganas in Bihar and the landscape in Mymensingh. When in 1938 he was awarded the much coveted Governor's Gold Medal of the Academy of Fine Arts in the All India Art Exhibition, it was also for a group of water colour paintings he had done on the River Brahmaputra in an impressionistic manner.

For a few more years Abedin remained the romantic interpreter of the natural environment. Abedin was a non-political individual, a mere artist of nature. But the Bengal Famine of 1943, a case of terrible human exploitation and degradation, transformed the peace-loving romantic young landscape painter from East Bengal into a rebel and an agitating protestor for the rest of his life. Soon after the Famine had broken out, Zainul went to his home in Mymensingh. The ghastly scenes almost paralysed him and he returned to Calcutta. But the destitutes came with him. In Calcutta in 1943, humanity was at its most ignominious condition competing with dogs in their hunt for a meal out of the garbage tins on pavements. Zainul, then 29, was severely shocked but he tried to control his emotions and began to sketch the nightmarish scenes.

A young art teacher of small earnings, it had become very difficult for him to procure quality art materials which was then scarce and dear. So he made drawings in black ink with dry brush on the cheapest kind of paper, usually wrapping paper, slightly tinted with yellow or pink. He also used a few grey packaging boards. But the art he created with these cheap materials turned out to be invaluable. He recorded the tragic scenes with a documentary objectivity and an artistic power the like of which was unknown in the Sub-continent. After viewing Zainul's Famine Sketches, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, 'the Nightingale of India' had said, 'They are more eloquent in their poignant appeal than the most eloquent and impassioned words'. A very distinguished Bengali art critic of the time, Mr. O.C. Ganguly, had written in 1944, about these drawings thus: 'In the daring bravado of his pitiless strokes there is a spontaneity, sincerity, and an uncompromising realism which is rare among modern artists of Bengal. He has, indeed, opened a new page in modern painting by his distinguished contributions. As truthful records of the history of Bengal in 1943, Abedin's drawings are invaluable documents. As a worshipper of beauty in the terrible phases of human life—le beau dans l'horrible—this artist has raised pictorial art to dizzy heights from the low level of silly sentimentalism, hitherto current in Bengal'. The Famine Sketches of Abedin are significant not only as a social commentary, but also because of their artistic excellence. To the objective assessment of Ganguly one can add Sir Eric Newton's comments of 1952: 'They are brilliant drawings...Here one can see the combination, which one had thought almost impossible, of Orient and Occident'.

With his Famine Sketches, Zainul Abedin became the first important Bengali artist of social realism and an artist of the down-trodden. It is a remarkable coincidence that another contemporary Bengali Muslim, Kazi Nazrul Islam, had emerged as the voice of the exploited people, two decades earlier, with his famous poem, 'The Rebel'. The two Bengali Muslims had many things in common although in many other ways they were quite different personalities. Both of them came from very ordinary rural background, both failed to complete their general school education, both spent part of their early life in the East Bengal district of Mymensingh and both died in the same hospital in Dacca in the same year, in 1976, and after death they were both buried within the same grounds. Nazrul Islam was a rebel politically and poetically. He raised his voice against the British Raj and had also broken through the powerful Tagore School of poetry. Zainul Abedin, too had deliberately stayed away from the Indian Neo-Classical painting, then much in vogue, whose beginnings were made by yet another Tagore, Rabindranath's nephew, Abanindranath. Zainul's initial preference for Western realistic art over the cool and highly stylized Neo-Classicism or over Jamini Roy's Bengal School, probably made possible the creation of the powerful and realistic Famine Sketches.

Like the Rebel Poet, Zainul Abedin had also worked for the cause of humanism and socialism. It was not without some commitment that Zainul participated with his *Famine Sketches* in an Art Exhibition organized on the 1943 Famine. The issue of 21st January, 1945, of the Communist Party paper *The People's War* of Calcutta carried a story on Zainul, introducing him as a 'young Bengali Muslim' along with his photograph and three of his *Famine Sketches*. The paper wrote : 'Zainul is a member of the Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association of Bengal, the organization of all Bengal's artists and writers who believe that their foremost duty is to serve their people in the crisis facing them today. And there is no doubt that he will always be one of the foremost of them'. The paper's assessment of Abedin has proved absolutely correct.

When in 1947 two independent states were created in the Sub-continent, Abedin came to Dacca which had become the capital of East Bengal, a province of the new Muslim majority state of Pakistan. He had left his teaching position in the Calcutta Art School to become a drawing teacher in the Normal School in Dacca but soon he set himself to the task of organizing an art movement. This in itself was a revolutionary idea in the context of the socio-political realities of the time. His reputation as an artist, his exceptional organizational abilities, the co-operation of his artist colleagues and active help from some Bengali officials, all went into the establishment of the pioneer art school of Bangladesh in 1948. Abedin took upon himself the onerous task of organizing the Government Institute of Arts, as it was then called, as its first Principal. In 1956, the two-roomed Institute was transformed by him into the large, spacious and thoroughly modern campus of the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts of today. In designing the College Campus, Abedin preferred to engage the best Bengali architect and set an aesthetic standard for campus architecture that still remains the hallmark in this country.

Meanwhile, in 1951-'52, Zainul Abedin had visited England with a year's scholarship from the Government. There he visited art institutes and also exhibited his own works which received almost unqualified appreciation. In addition to introducing Abedin to the Western world, this trip had helped in broadening his visions and because of this, Bangladesh painting took a dynamic modern character from the very beginning. The European trip also made Abedin particularly conscious of the value of the rich folk arts of Bengal. Although in his student years he had turned away from Abanindranath's Neo-Classicism or Jamini Roy's Bengali Folk Revivalism, now more mature and thrown into a different socio-political set-up characterised by alien (West Pakistani) domination over Bengali culture, Abedin thought it better to synthesize the local traditions with modern international techniques and developments in art. He started to speak in very strong terms in favour of a Bengali-Modernism in painting. In his own work this attitude resulted in the development of a magnificent style as seen in the works dating from 1951. In the initial phase of the style, Abedin captured typical but quite symbolic scenes from rural Bangladesh life. The dynamic flow and power of his 1943 ink brush was there with even greater vitality, the colours were extremely subdued in nature, the drawing western-realistic but the treatment of space superbly economic in the oriental tradition and the results were a fascinating combination of the West with the East. 'The Storm' is a remarkable work and captures the suddenness and the fury of an April Nor'wester in Bangladesh. The composition is beautiful for its minimality. Equally charming is the water colour, 'Levelling Ploughed Field'. But the most significant work seems to be the medium-sized water colour symbolically

called 'The Rebel Cow'. The sweeping lines and strokes rightly capture the mood of the moment and even in this minimized work the details are surprising, such as those in the cow's hoofs and in the rope. In this style Zainul also painted the common people, particularly the colourful and strongly built tribal Santhals. In the later phase, around 1952 and 1953, Zainul evolved a Bengali-Modern style partly resembling Jamini Roy's paintings, and heavily influenced by the motifs in Bangladesh folk arts. Done within a few years of his marriage in 1946, the style is also rather romantic. The pictures in this phase are almost all figurative but the figures are highly stylized and organized within a geometric, semi-abstract formal design. They are often broken into several planes but each plane is more or less flat and often without perspective. Generally the colours, whether water, gouache or oil, are of primary nature. The compositions are either small or medium in size. Some of the finest works of the period include 'Pulling Boat', 'Village Maiden', 'Bride', 'Alone in the Woods', 'Two Gypsy Women' and 'Women Dressing Hair'.

Viewing these works, a British critic, Richard Wilson, had written in 1955: 'In a sense his latest pictures mark the coming of age of Indo-Pakistani Art in the modern world. He is the first artist of India and Pakistan to successfully assimilate abstract technique into local tradition without relying on mere imitation'.

Abedin, however, did not pursue this style for long. Since the late fifties he went back to his earlier realistic styles characterized by force and movement. Although he also tried, his hand, rather casually for some time, on abstract expressionist painting in oil, he was mostly engaged in depicting the life and struggles of the toiling mass of Bangladesh. The large oil composition done in 1959 and entitled 'Struggle', shows an ox-cart, stuck in mud, being pushed by the cart driver. His struggle, symbolically, is a lonely and an almost Sysiphan one. With the Mass Movement in 1969, political activities were seriously resumed and dictatorial rule, imposed in 1958, was challenged. In Bangladesh (then still East Pakistan) there was a strong demand for political and cultural emancipation of the Bengalis. At that time the painters of the country united under the leadership of Zainul Abedin who symbolically launched the 'Nabanna' (Harvest) exhibition in February of 1970. A devout nationalist, Abedin actively participated in the struggles for emancipation of the culture and political rights of the people of Bangladesh. He painted banners for the Shahid Minar (Memorial for the Martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement), illustrated souvenirs and wrote in little magazines for 21st February, the Shahid Day, and, of course, participated in the protest marches. He even addressed public meetings including the one called in February, 1971, in Mymensingh, by the people's leader, Maulana Bhashani. Thus Abedin was in every word the ideal revolutionary-socialist-artist described by his great Mexican contemporary painter David Siqueiros whom he had met in Mexico during a year long trip around the world in 1956-57.

In the Nabanna Exhibition of 1970, Zainul Abedin contributed a 65 feet long scroll very touchingly depicting the story of rural Bangladesh, specially painted for the show. Done with wax, black ink, and water colour on 48 inches wide paper, the scroll depicted Bangladesh through its phases of abundance of *Sonar Bangla* and the accompanying happiness and peace, through gradual impoverishment under colonialism to the stage of a pitiable poverty, finally resulting in the outward migration of the rural proletariat. Thousands of people saw this scroll during the Nabanna Exhibition and later, at his residence which, in other words, was a studio open to all. The viewers were encouraged

by the artist himself to put their signatures on the scroll thus directly involving the people in his art. Signatories included great men from around the world as well as the common people of Bangladesh.

Zainul Abedin had always loved freedom and his heart went for those who struggled for liberation and justice. In 1970, at the age of 56, he went to the Middle East at the invitation of the Arab League and moved with the al-Fatah Guerrillas to the battle fronts. There he sketched the life of the freedom fighters and exhibited his works in several Arab countries to encourage the young defenders of their homeland. Soon after his return, Abedin's own country was severely battered by an unprecedented cyclonic storm and tidal wave which took more than three hundred thousand lives in coastal Bangladesh. Terribly disturbed, Abedin rushed to the area with a relief team to share the sufferings of the affected people. Later, he also recorded the impact of the event in a 30 feet long scroll, significant both as a document and as a piece of art, done in black ink over wax outlines. The scroll depicts dead bodies all heaped together. 'We Bengalis unite only in death', he had said sadly about this picture. At one end of the scroll, there is the picture of a strongly built man, still alive and sitting with his head down, symbolising a possible resurrection of the people.

Before the wound of the 1970 cyclone could heal up began the War of Liberation of Bangladesh. Like millions of Bengalis, Zainul Abedin was a helpless captive at home, hiding from place to place but always holding his great Famine Sketches close to his bosom.

The War of Liberation year took heavy tolls on Abedin's psyche but Liberation brought new energy and he set himself to the task of development of the arts, this time particularly the folk arts. Immediately after Liberation, Abedin was invited by the Government to design the pages of the Constitution of Bangladesh, which he did with great earnestness with the assistance of other artists. However, his enthusiasm was greatly marred by the crisis of Bangladesh in the following years. Much worried, his health started breaking down, although, the tall, well-built and handsome Abedin had so far maintained excellent health. Realizing that his days were getting numbered, he rushed with his life-long plan to set up a Folk Art Museum to preserve the rich but dying folk arts of Bangladesh for posterity. He had also wanted to establish a gallery of his own works. The Government of Bangladesh obliged him by releasing necessary funds. Working hard, in spite of his broken health, Abedin completed the foundation of both the institutions before his death on May 28th, 1976. He died of lung cancer which the doctors had identified only six months earlier. The Government had arranged for the best treatment of the greatest artist of the country but life came to an end for Zainul Abedin at 62. Abedin created art to the very end. His last work was a brush sketch of two faces done in the hospital only days before his death.

The Folk Art Museum was set up at Sonargaon for historical reasons. Located less than 20 miles southeast of Dacca, Sonargaon was the capital of medieval Bengal and the area was also the centre of weaving of the famous *Muslin* fabric. The region is still producing some fine crafts and handlooms. And it was only natural that Zainul Abedin chose to establish his Gallery on the bank of his favourite Brahmaputra River in Mymensingh, his home district, whose nature had curved Abedin's artistic temperament and whose District Board had offered him the most essential financial support

during his art student days in Calcutta. His poor mother had sold her only gold necklace to send her son to study art in the far away strange city while his father, a small police officer of limited means and a large family, could only support his son with an allowance of ten rupees a month. It was indeed a paltry sum even in the early thirties. The Mymensingh District Board finally came to his assistance. At the strong recommendation of his Principal, artist Mukul De, the young student was awarded a fifteen rupees a month scholarship by the Board. This made the hard journey of five years of art education somewhat comforting.

Zainul Abedin had tried to reciprocate whenever the opportunity came. He started to support his father's family when he was only a third year student, through his little earnings from illustration works. To his mother he could only offer love. To Mymensingh, Zainul gave a Gallery of his art and to the people of Bangladesh he had offered to donate his life's works, including the invaluable Famine Sketches, about twenty of them, his dearest possessions. The Government of Bangladesh, fully aware of his importance, has constituted a special committee to preserve his works for the nation.

Born in a simple family, Zainul Abedin had always lived a very simple and unassuming Bengali life. Uncomplicated but self-confident, he used to move with the same ease and grace with the powerfuls and the peasants and this relationship was usually reciprocal. A wonderful conversationist with an unimitable style of his own, he was extremely witty, jovial and a lover of children and of good food, particularly rural Bengali delicacies. He had always been a chain-smoker and a tea addict. A great lover of everything in nature, he hated the crow, which, ironically, he had painted so well and so often. To him, the crow symbolized 'the mean opportunist'.

Zainul Abedin, who had left school without even taking the Matriculation Examination, was awarded an Honorary D. Litt. degree by the University of Delhi in India in 1974. He was also a Visiting Professor of Fine Arts at two universities, Peshawar (1965) in Pakistan and Dacca (1973) in Bangladesh and was appointed a National Professor of Bangladesh, in 1974. Always a people's artist and a people's man, Abedin was also held in the highest esteem by statesmen and intellectuals, both at home and abroad. His artistic genius and his great human qualities brought him many awards and honours from various governments and the people. He had also visited many important countries on State invitations.

The role of Zainul Abedin in the development of the fine arts in Bangladesh, however, has been best expressed by the title of *Shilpacharya*—the Great Master of the Arts—which his admiring people bestowed upon him.

Biographical Notes

- 1914 Zainul Abedin was born on 29 December 1914 at Kishoreganj, in Mymensingh District, Bangladesh. Second child and eldest son of an assistant sub-inspector of police, Tamizuddin Ahmed and his wife Zainabunnessa. (Date of birth in office records, however, is given as 18 November, 1914).
- 1930 Escaped from home and made a trip to Calcutta with friends to visit the Government School of Arts.
- 1933 Gave up general school studies before Matriculation Examination, went to Calcutta and got himself admitted into the Government School of Arts. In Calcutta, first he stayed with an uncle for about a month but left his place due to differences, spent a couple of nights in a mosque and then took a bed in a cheap boarding house at 31 Wellesley Lane.
- 1933-38 Attended the Government School of Arts, Calcutta. Drawings, water colours, oil paintings and graphic works, in Western academic style. Landscapes of Dumka, Bihar and Mymensingh, Bengal (then).
- 1938 Graduation in Fine Arts from the Government School of Arts, Calcutta, with First Position in First Class. Received Governor's Gold Medal of the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, in the All India Art Exhibition, for a group of water colour landscapes.
- Appointed teacher of the Art School while still a student there. Took a room at 14 Circus Row.
- 1943 Bengal Rice Famine. Abedin made his famous sketches of famine scenes in Calcutta, 18 of which are now owned by the artist's family. All works are brush drawings in black ink on paper.
- 1944 Participated in the Exhibition on 1943 Famine, held in Calcutta.
- 1946 Married Jahanara Begum, third daughter of Tayabuddin Ahmed of Dacca. Took a flat in Ahmed Court on Tarak Dutta Road, Calcutta.
- Participated in the Exhibition of Muslim Artists held at Islamiah College, Calcutta. Participated in an Exhibition of Arts of India held at Burlington House, London.
- 1947 Migrated to Dacca, the capital of East Bengal, then a province of Pakistan. Joined the Normal School at Armenitola, Dacca, as an Art Teacher. Stayed with his in-laws at 12 Abdul Hadi Lane, Dacca.
- 1948 Finalized plans for the establishment of Government Institute of Arts in Dacca, the first art school of the province, and was made the First Principal-designate of the Institute. On 3rd August, left for Karachi, the capital of Pakistan, to join as the Chief Designer in the Information and Publication Division of the Government of Pakistan. Water colours, "On way to the Quaid's Mazar".
- In November classes started at the Government Institute of Arts in two rooms of the National Medical School on Johnson Road, Dacca, with Anwarul Huq as the acting Principal.
- 1949 Returned to Dacca from Karachi on 28th February and joined the Institute as the first permanent Principal on 1st March.

- 1951 The Institute of Arts moved to Segun Bagicha in the buildings of the present Music College.
- 1951-52 Bought a small one-storied home at Shantinagar in Dacca. Visited England, Europe and Middle East with a Government of Pakistan Scholarship. Attended the Slade School of Arts, London. Held an Exhibition of Paintings and Brush Drawings at the Imperial Institute (December 3-8, 1951), sponsored by the Royal India Pakistan and Ceylon Society. Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings at the Berkeley Galleries, London (January 14-26, 1952) sponsored by the High Commission of Pakistan in London. Appreciations by Eric Newton and others. Travelling Exhibitions in Belgium, Paris, Ankara, Istanbul. Attended the First Art Conference held in Venice under the sponsorship of UNESCO. Started the series of paintings in the Bengali Modern style. Water colours, gouache and oil on paper. "The Storm", "Rebel Cow", "Village Maiden", etc.
- 1953 Exhibition at Alhambra, Lahore, Pakistan. (September 14-21). organized by Mayo School of Art and Pakistan Art Council, Lahore. Foundation stone of the buildings of the Government Institute of Arts laid at Shahbag, Dacca. Series of water colours on the life of the tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- 1955 Exhibition of Paintings at Karachi, organized by the Pakistan Arts Council, Karachi. Week long exhibition (October) in Tokyo, Japan, at the Damaru Galleries, organized by Japanese Industries Corporation and Mainichi Publications.
- 1956 The Government Institute of Arts moved finally to its own (present) campus at Shahbag. Campus and buildings designed by Architect Mazharul Islam. Abedin himself supervised the constructions.
- 1956-57 Took a round the World 12-month trip sponsored by Rockefeller Foundation and visited Japan, USA, Canada, Mexico and Europe. Exhibition of 52 works at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (April 8-29, 1957).
- 1958 Awarded Life Membership of Fazlul Haq Hall, University of Dacca.
- 1959 Awarded Pride of Performance, the highest award for creative artists, by the President of Pakistan. Awarded the civilian title of Hilal-e-Imtiaz, Pakistan. Painted "The Struggle".
- 1961 Visited USSR at the invitation of the Soviet Government and decorated with a Gold Medal.
- 1963 The Government Institute of Arts became the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, offering a B.F.A Degree Programme.
- 1965 Went to Peshawar, Pakistan, at the invitation of the University of Peshawar to build up the Department of Fine Arts. Stayed there 7 months and organised the Department.
- 1966 Appointed a Judge of the Biennial Exhibition of Paintings of RCD countries held in Tehran.
- 1967 In March, retired as Principal of the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) College of Arts and Crafts and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dacca.

- 1968 *Publication of Pakistan Art Folios: Zainul Abedin*
(18 colour reproductions of paintings and drawings published by Art Publications Foundation, Karachi, Pakistan).
- 1970 Organized the "Nabanna" (Harvest) Exhibition of Bengali Artists in Dacca in February, painted and exhibited his 65-feet long scroll. Visited the Middle East at the invitation of the Arab League and went to the fronts with al-Fatah Guerrillas. Exhibited his works on the Guerrilla War in Arab cities to encourage the freedom fighters.
Cyclonic storm and tidal wave struck southern Bangladesh on 12th November and killed over 300,000 people. Abedin visited the spots and later made a 30-feet long scroll, depicting the impact of the cyclone.
- 1971 Gave a speech at a public meeting in Mymensingh in February, organized by the people's leader, Moulana Bhashani. Denounced the title of Hilal-e-Imtiaz in support of the Bengali non-cooperation movement against the Military Government of General Yahya Khan. War of Liberation of Bangladesh (March 25—December 16). Abedin remained in hiding in the country.
- 1972 Appointed Honorary President of the Bangla Academy. He held the position until 1974. Paralytic stroke, facial paralysis, sent by the Government to London for treatment and healed. Took an exhibition of art of the children of Bangladesh to England during the same trip.
- 1973 Appointed Visiting Professor of Fine Arts, University of Dacca. Led the Bangladesh Artists' Delegation to India with an Art Exhibition.
- 1974 Appointed an advisory member of the Bangladesh Shilpakala (Fine Arts) Academy. Elected Member of the Congress for World Unity with its headquarters in Philadelphia, USA. Visited India as the guest of the Government of India. Appointed National Professor of Bangladesh. Awarded Honorary D.Litt. by the University of Delhi, India.
- 1975 Visited the USSR as a state guest. Founded the Folk Art Museum at Sonargaon, Dacca (Bill passed in June, 1975).
Founded the Zainul Abedin Shangrahashala (Gallery) in Mymensingh.
- 1976 Attack of lung cancer, sent for treatment by the government to London and returned temporarily improved. Died of lung cancer on May 28, at the Post-Graduate Hospital, Shahbag, Dacca, aged 62. Buried in the campus of Dacca University with access from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts which he had founded.

At death Abedin was survived by his mother, a sister, three brothers, his wife, three sons, and a daughter-in-law and others. His eldest son, Saiful Abedin, married to an American, is an architect now working in California, USA, second son, Khairul Abedin, took his Masters in Geography from Dacca University in 1976 and the youngest son, Mainul Abedin, is finishing a B. Sc. in water resources engineering at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Dacca.

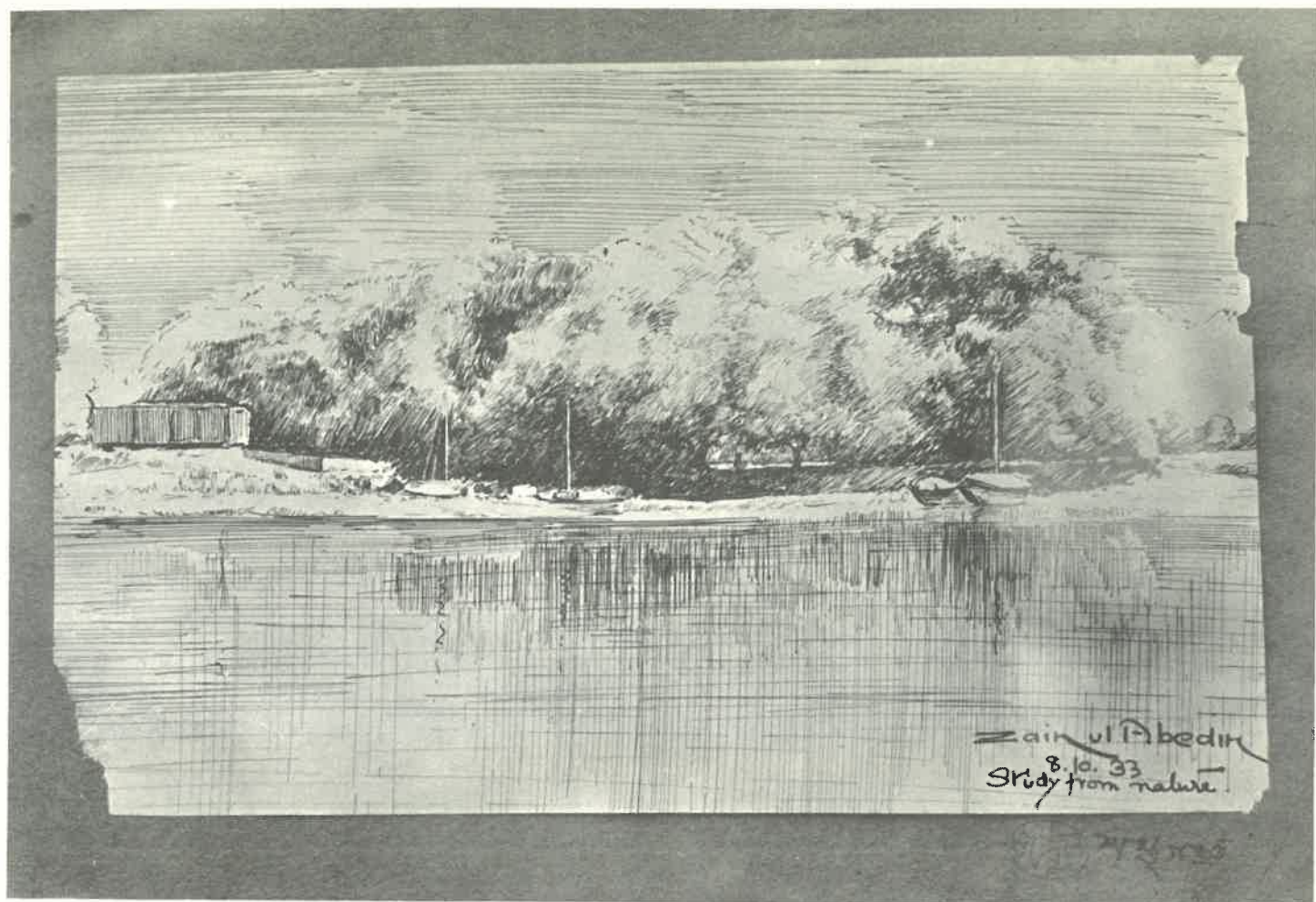
Notes on the Plates

- 1 A THE BRAHMAPUTRA NEAR SHAMBHUGANJ, MYMENSINGH, 1933.
Pen & Ink Sketch, 29.2×45.7, done when he was a student of the Government School of Arts, Calcutta. A great lover of the landscape, Zainul Abedin had made many memorable sketches of the nature in Mymensingh and Bihar.
- 1 B PORTRAIT OF ARTIST ANWARUL HUQ, 1942. Pen & Ink Drawing, 45.7 × 50.8. It is one of the very few portrait studies, whether sketch or painting, done by Abedin. He usually painted anonymous people in a stylized manner.
- 3 GIRL READING IN A CHAIR, 1948 (?). Oil on Card Board, 27×19.5. Treatment of light in Impressionistic manner.
- 2 THE STRUGGLE, 1959. Oil and Tempera on Masonite Board, 155×627. The artist made a copy of this painting in oil on canvas a few weeks before his death in May, 1976.
- 4 PORTRAIT OF A MEXICAN : CHILA HOMBERTO, 1956. Marking Pen, 86×127. Done during a trip of Mexico.
- 5 WAITING FOR FERRY ACROSS THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER, 1951, Water Colour on board paper, 130×84.
- 6-21 FAMINE SKETCHES, 1943. Brush Drawings with India Ink on tinted paper. All sketches are signed and dated. Nearly all are 40.6×58.4 and some 43.2×55.9.
Abedin mostly made brush drawings on the Famine and never sold any. However, he also executed a dry point, a linoleum cut and an oil painting. The oil is now at the Lahore Museum, Pakistan.
- 22 WOMAN WITH THE PITCHER, 1951. Water Colour, 104×140.
- 23 TWO BATHING WOMEN, 1951. Gouache, 107×178.
- 24 TWO WOMEN GOING TO FETCH WATER, 1951. Gouache, 104×136.
- 25 BRIDE WITH A MIRROR, 1953. Oil on paper, 71×96.5.
- 26 ALONE IN THE WOODS, 1953. Mixed Media-Water Colour and Oil, 71×119.

- 27 MOTHER AND CHILD, 1951. Water Colour, 91.5×137
- 28 THREE VILLAGE WOMEN AT REST, 1953. Oil on paper. 71 ×96.5
- 29 FOUR FACES, 1960 (?) undated. Oil on Board
- 30 PULLING BOAT, 1953. Gouache, 50.8×63.5
- 31 LEVELLING THE PLOUGHED FIELD, 1941. Water Colour, 76.2×58.4
- 32 THE REBEL COW, 1951. Water Colour, 76.2×58.4
- 33 SANTHAL MAN AND WOMAN, 1951. Water Colour, 58.4×73.7
- 34 TWO SANTHAL WOMEN, 1951. Water Colour, 58.4×73.7
- 35 VILLAGE MAIDEN, 1953. Gouache, 23×32. The artist also used to call this painting. Panyar Ma', (Mother of Panya).
- 36 TWO WOMEN, 1953. Gouache, 20×25
- 37 WOMEN DRESSING HAIR, 1953. Oil on Paper, 36×51
- 38 THE EMBRACE, 1972(?) undated. Oil on Canvas, 216×257
- 39 BATHING WOMEN, 1976. unfinished, Oil on Canvas
- 40 PALESTINE WAR REFUGEES, 1970. Brush Drawing, 86×127
Done during a trip of Jordan.
- 41 LIFE IN BANGLADESH, 1970. Wax, Black Ink and Water Colour on Paper 1.2×19.8m
(4'×65').
A paper scroll depicting life in Bangladesh through time. Painted specially for the
"Nabanna" (Harvest) Group Exhibition of Bengali artists organised by Zainul Abedin and
held in Dacca in February, 1970.
- 42 A Detail—1 of Life in Bangladesh, Harvesting Rice.
- 42 B Detail—2 of Life in Bangladesh, A bride returning to her parent's home.
- 43 Detail—3 of Life in Bangladesh, Husking Rice.
- 44 TWO FACES, 1976. Brush Drawing
This is Abedin's last work, done in the hospital on 7.5.76, only few days before his death.

● All measurements are in centimeters unless otherwise specified.

THE PLATES



IA

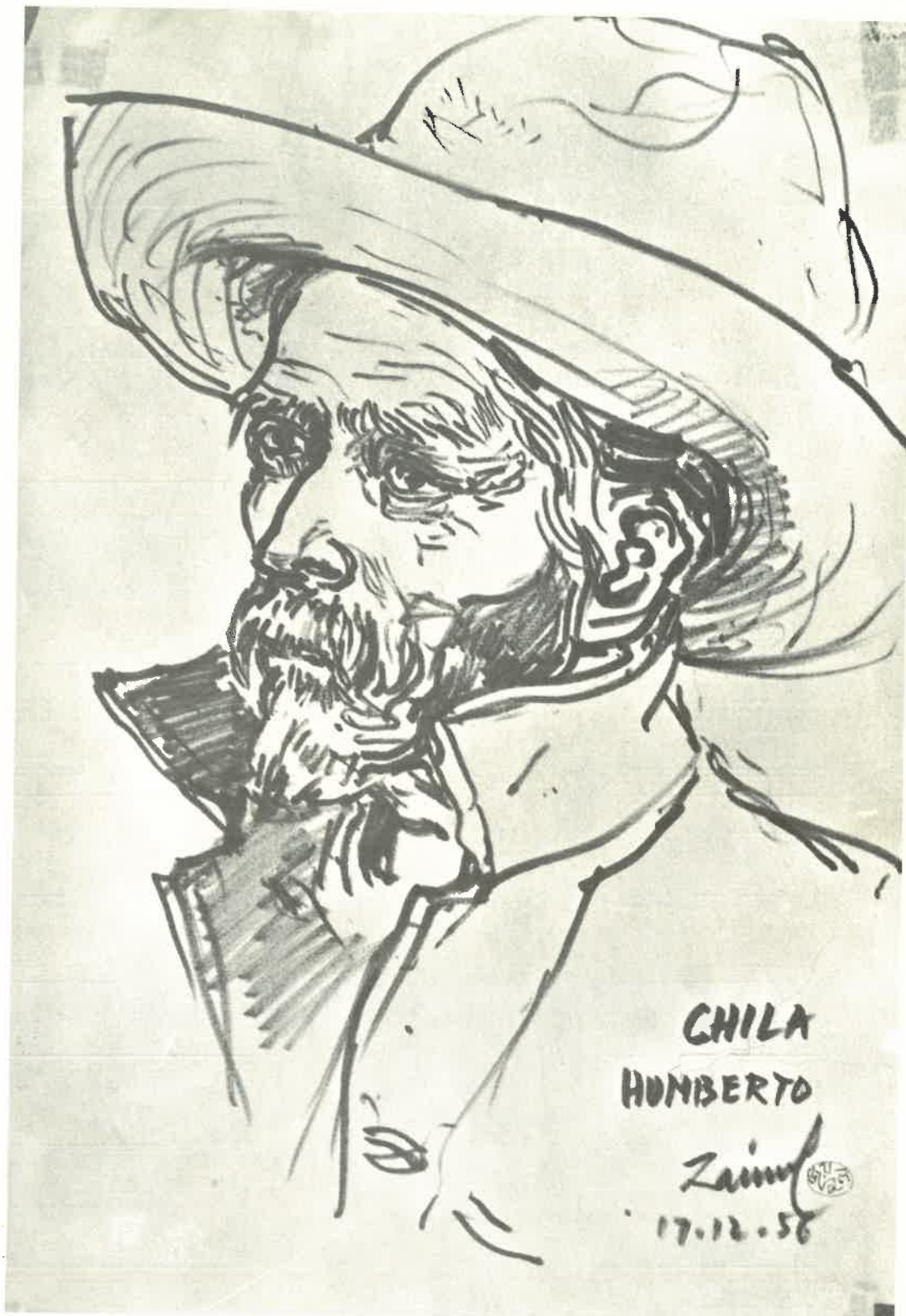


IB



















Zaimul Abedin
1943.















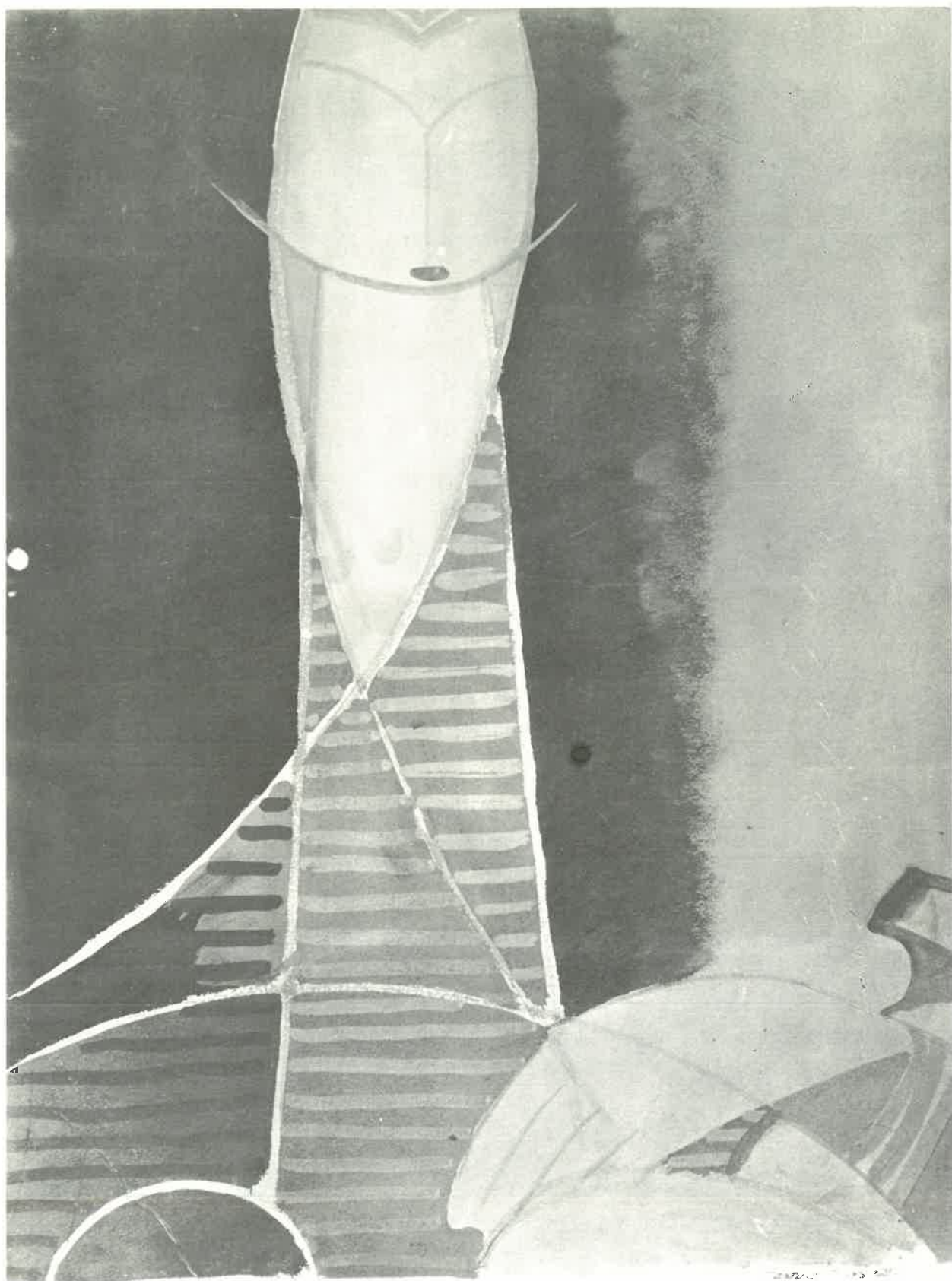
Zaimulabudiy
1943



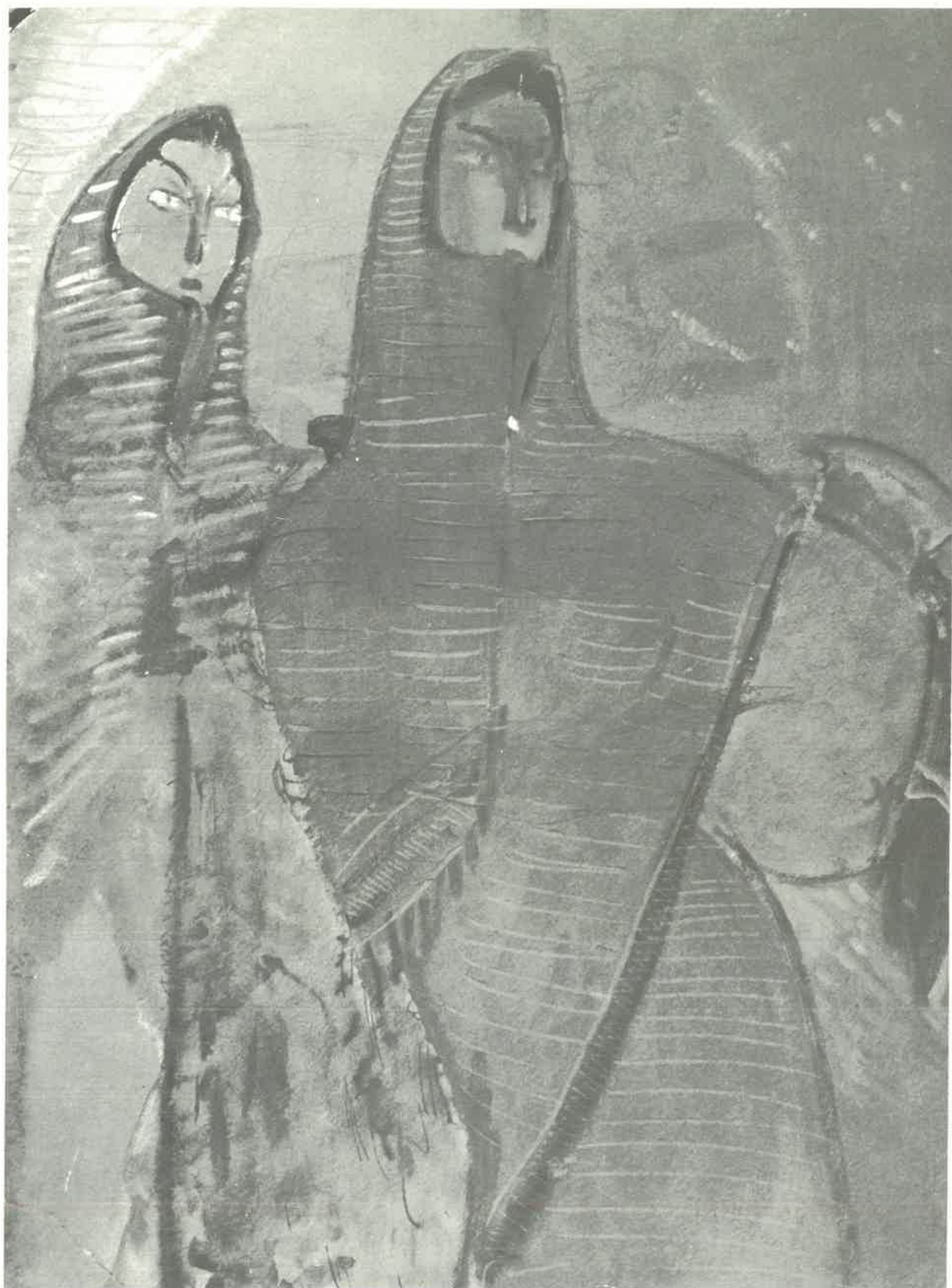


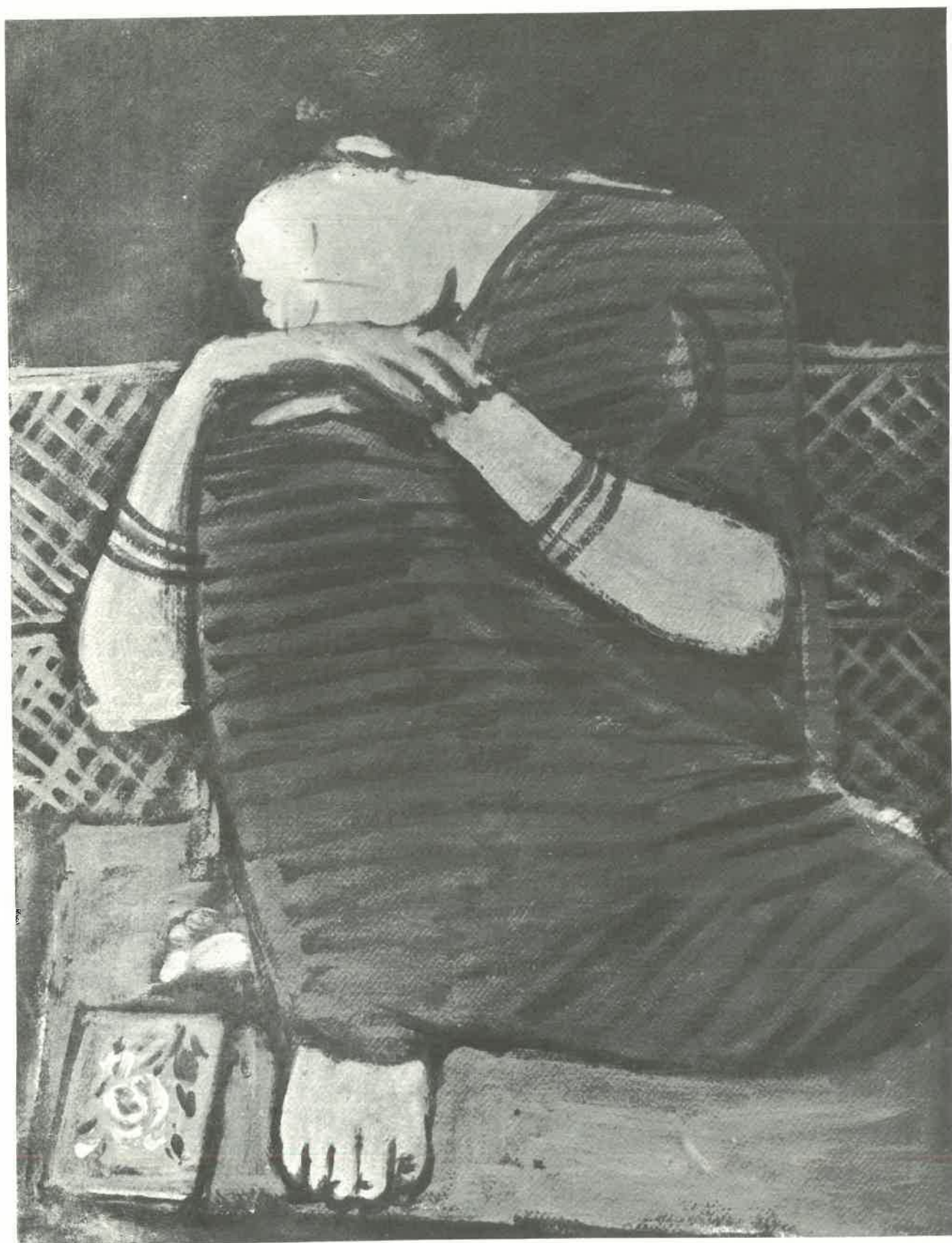
Kamoharui
1943



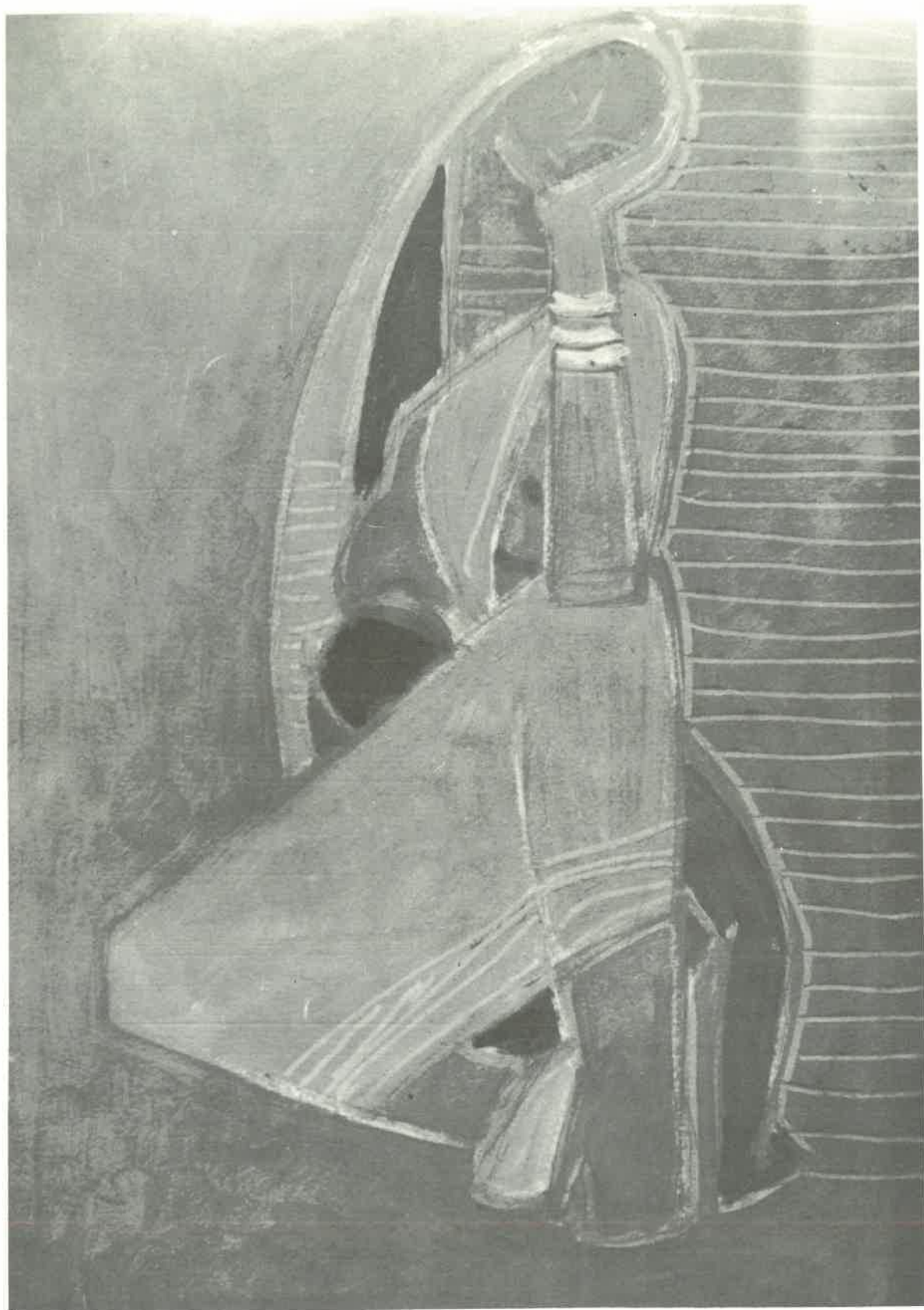


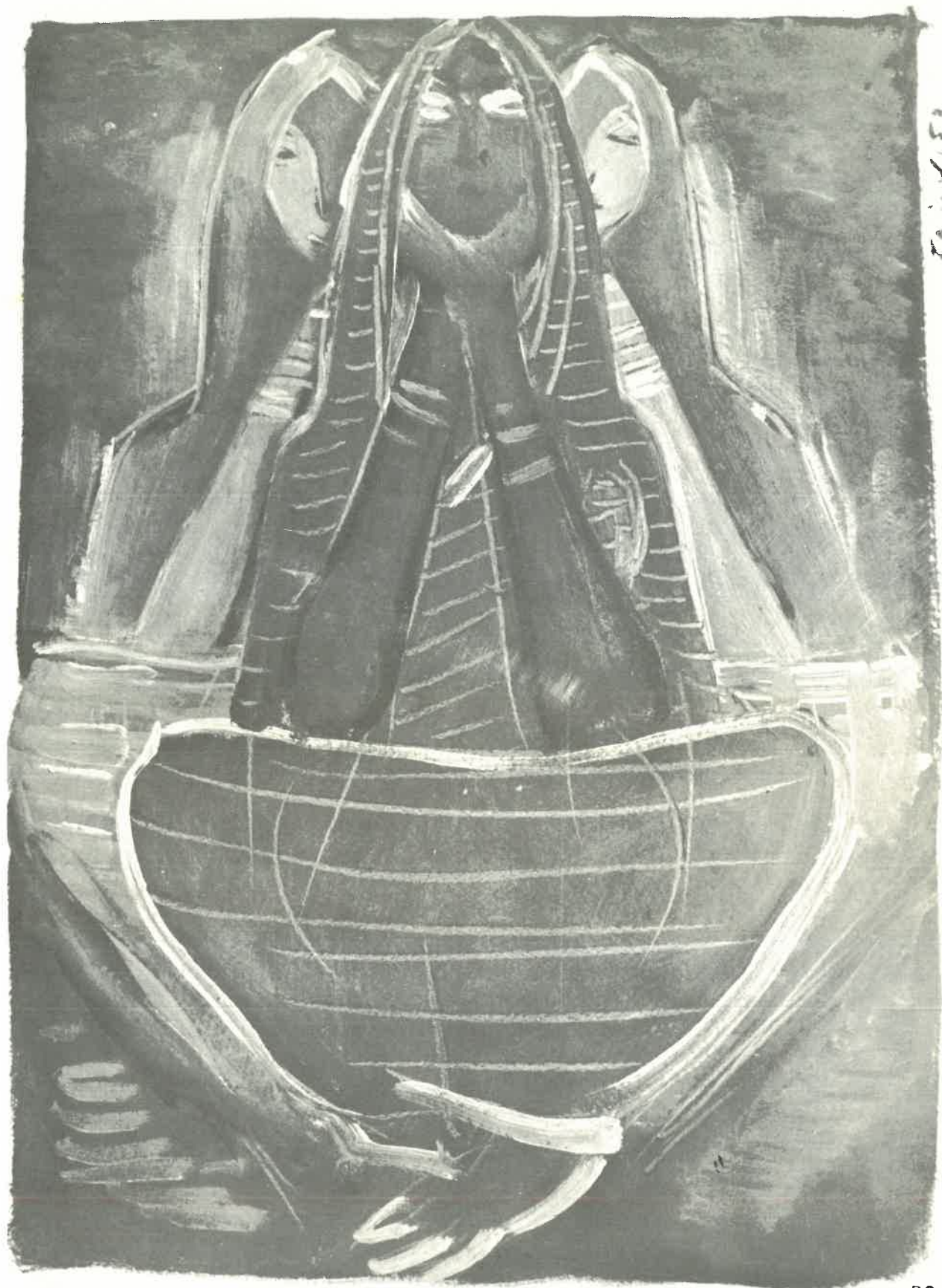












Paint 1/53



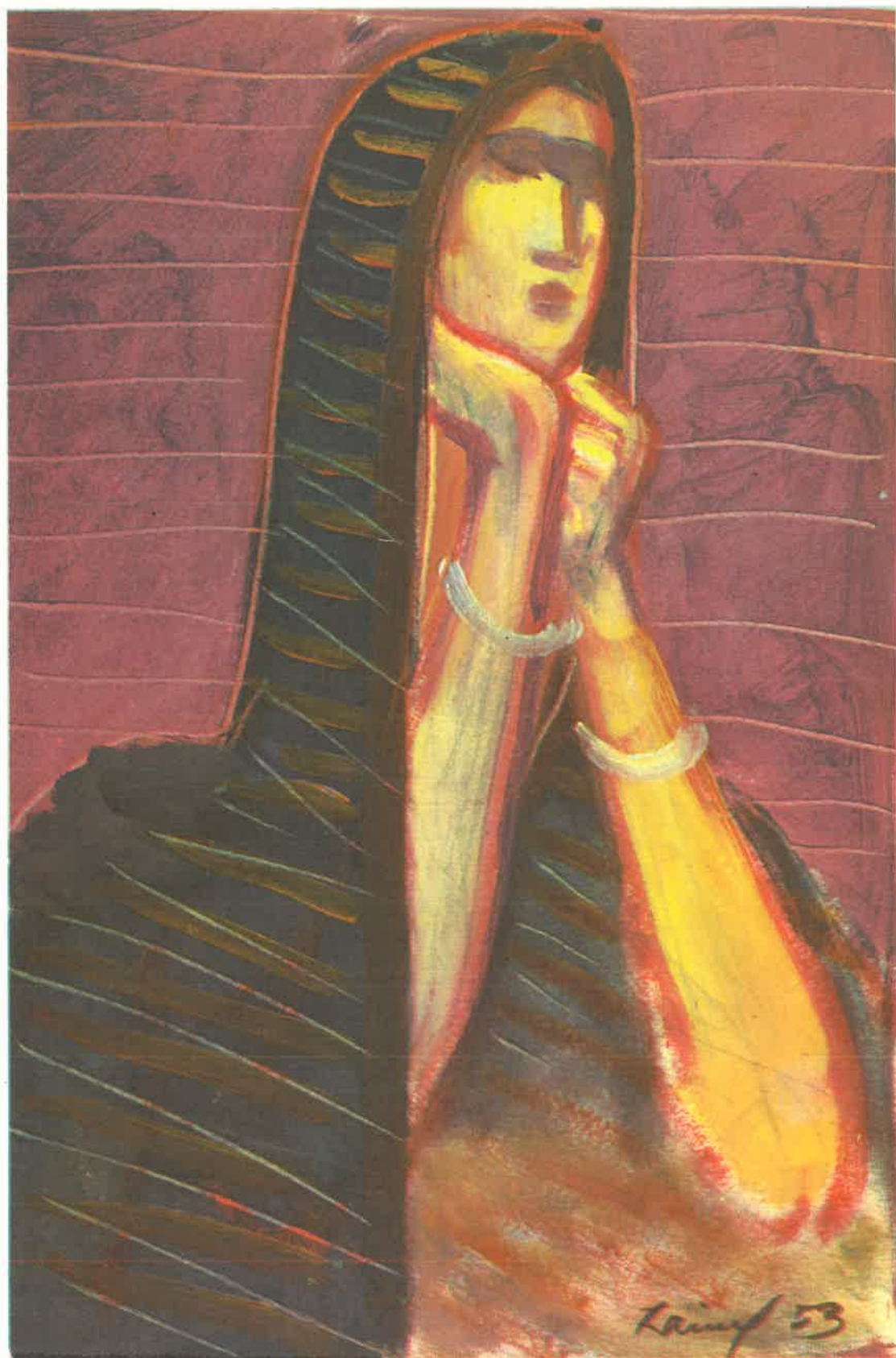


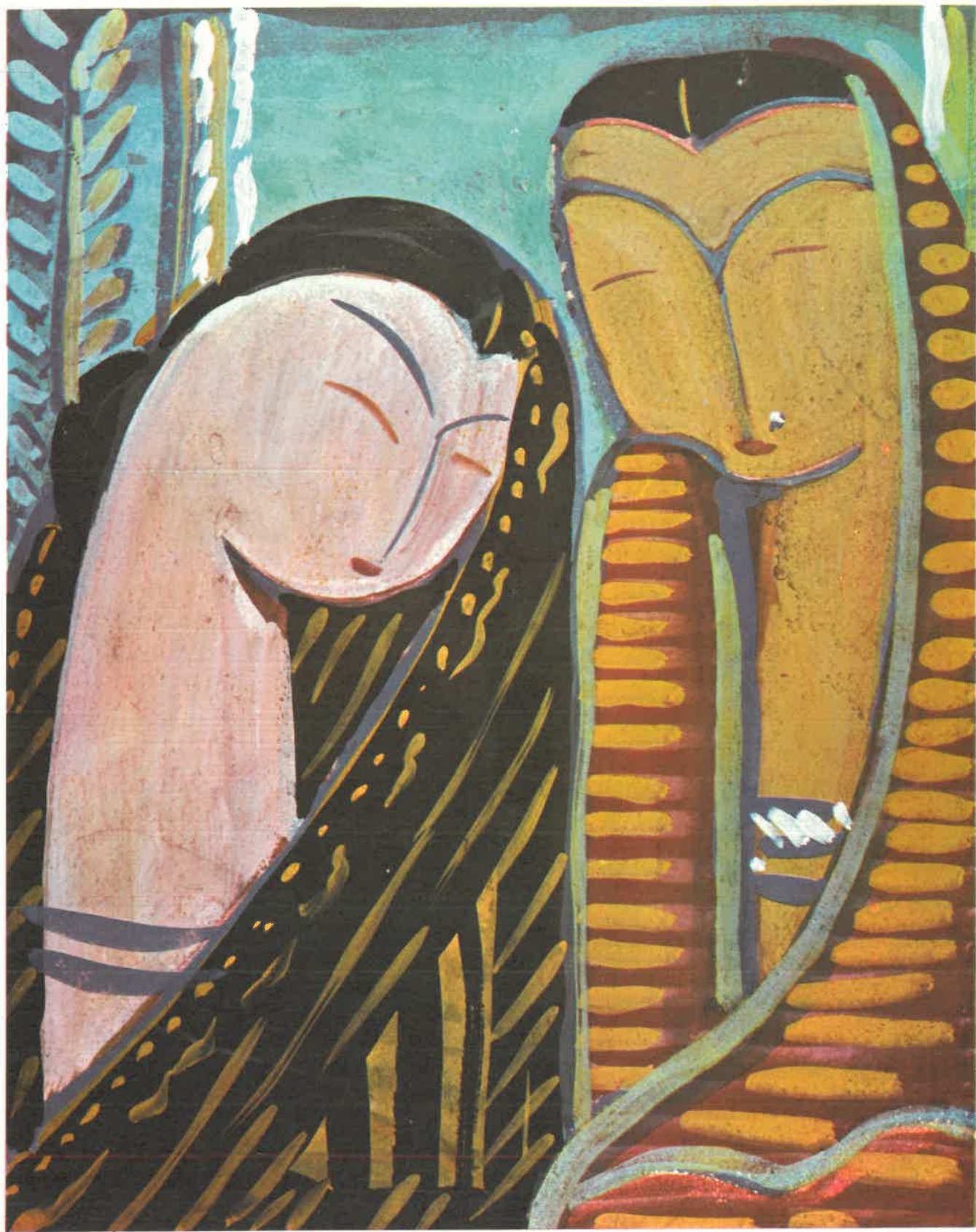


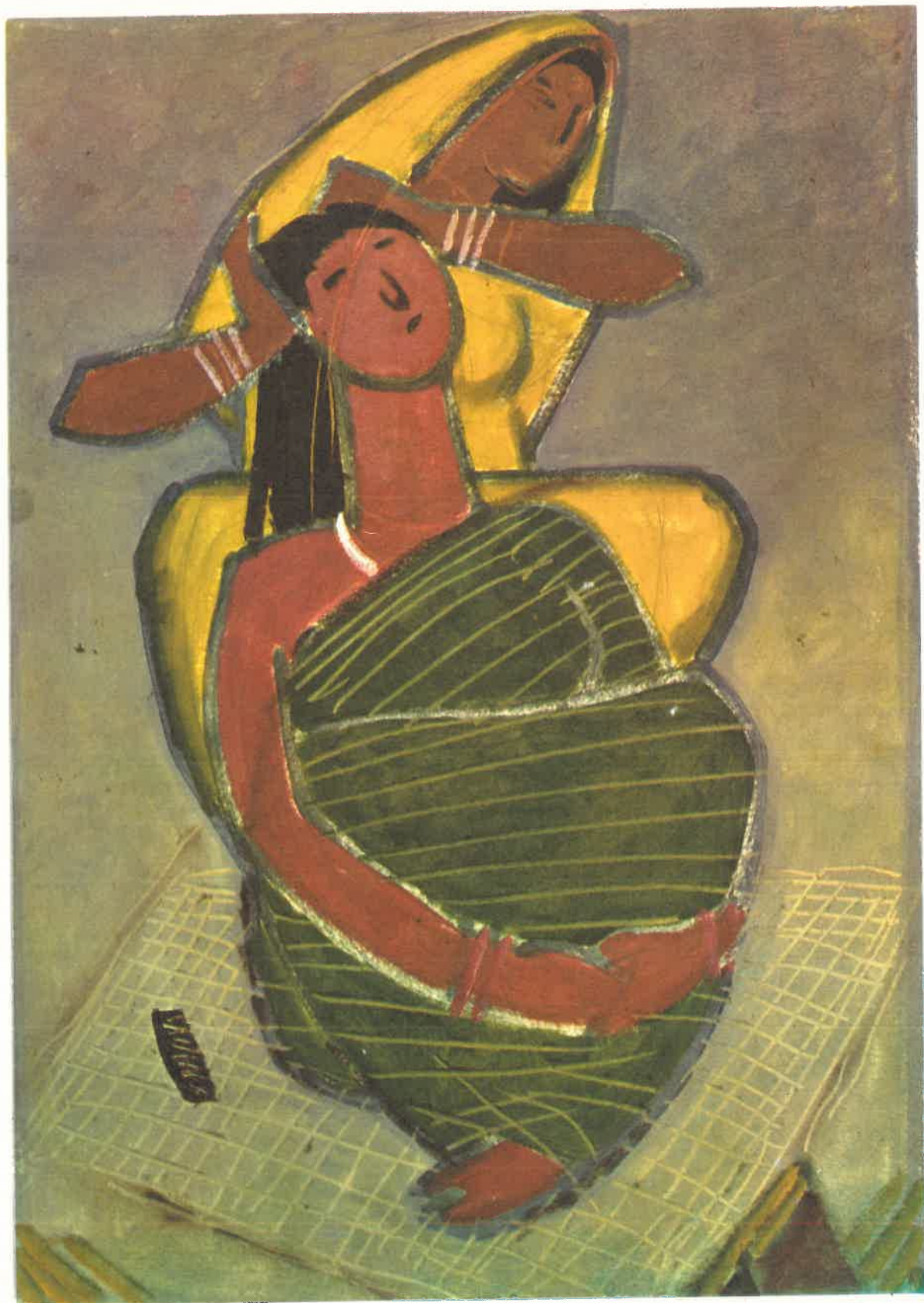


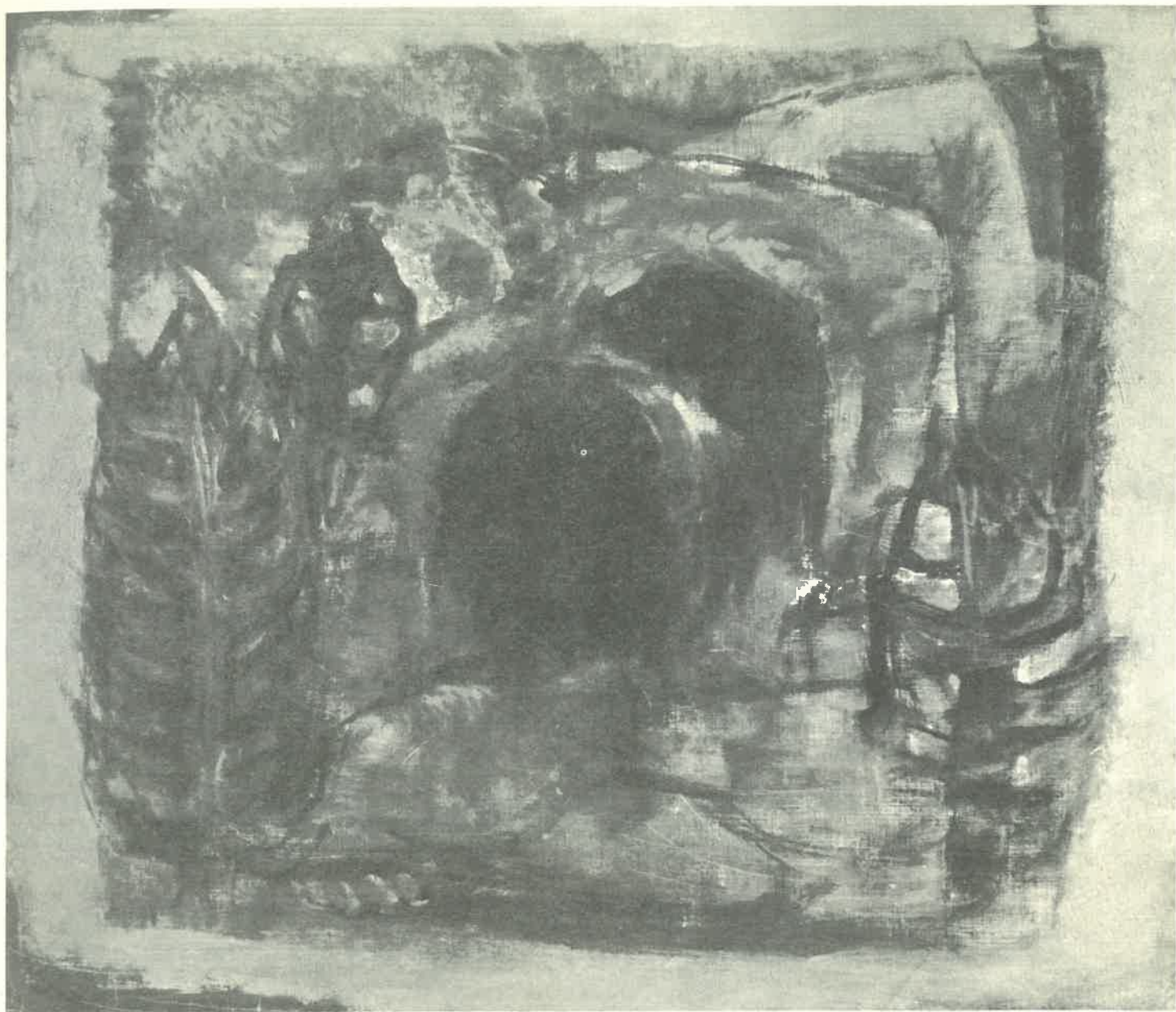


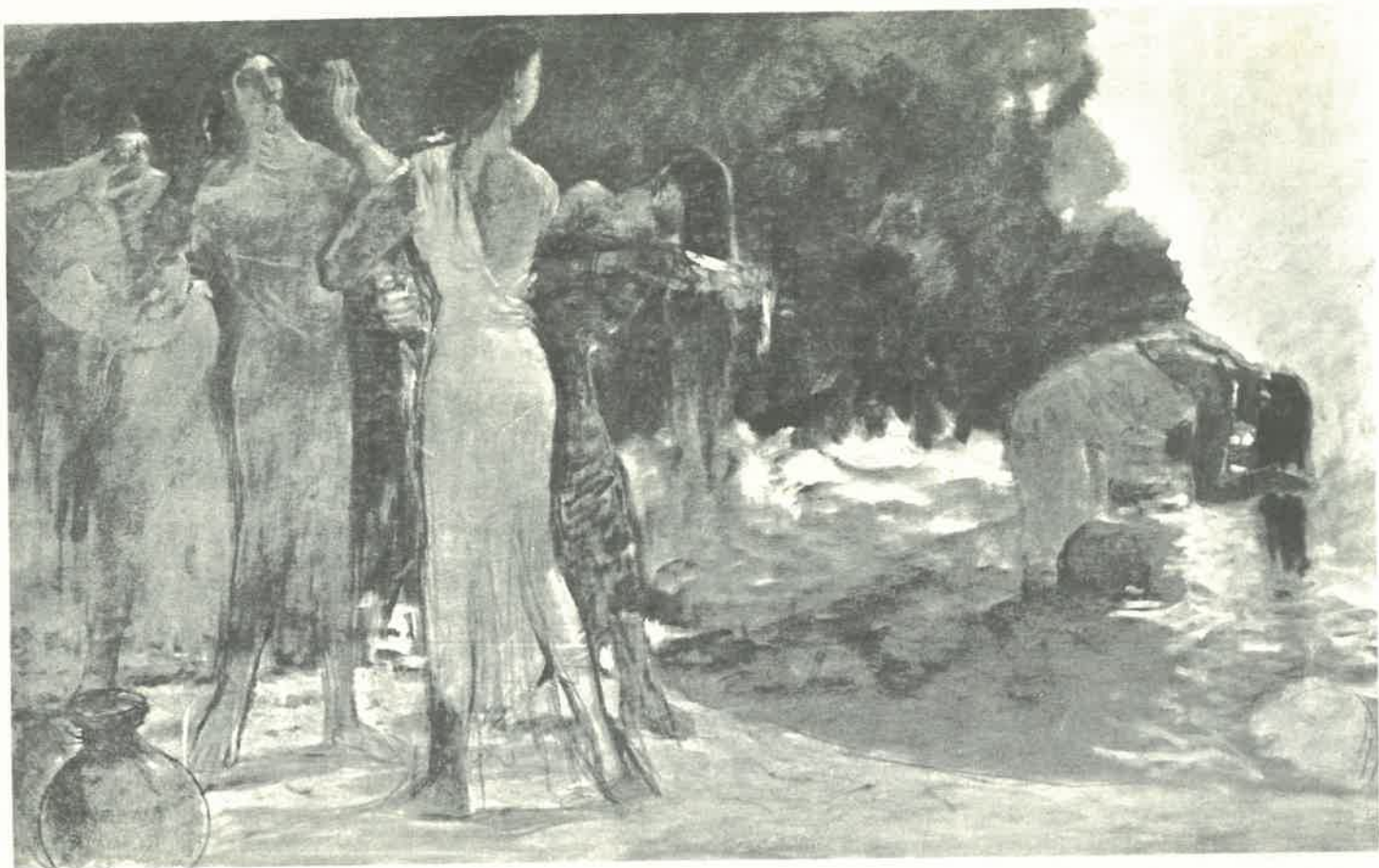




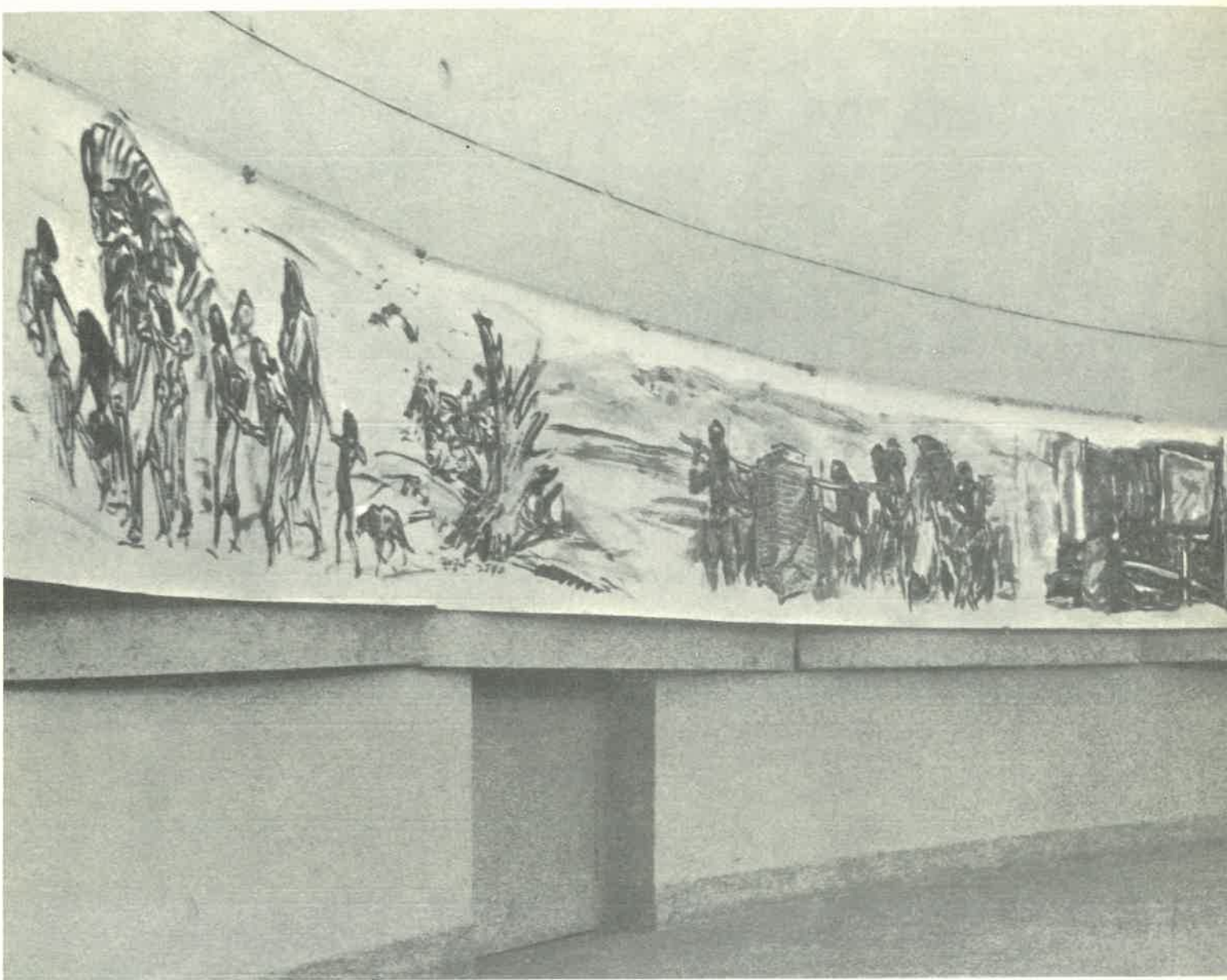


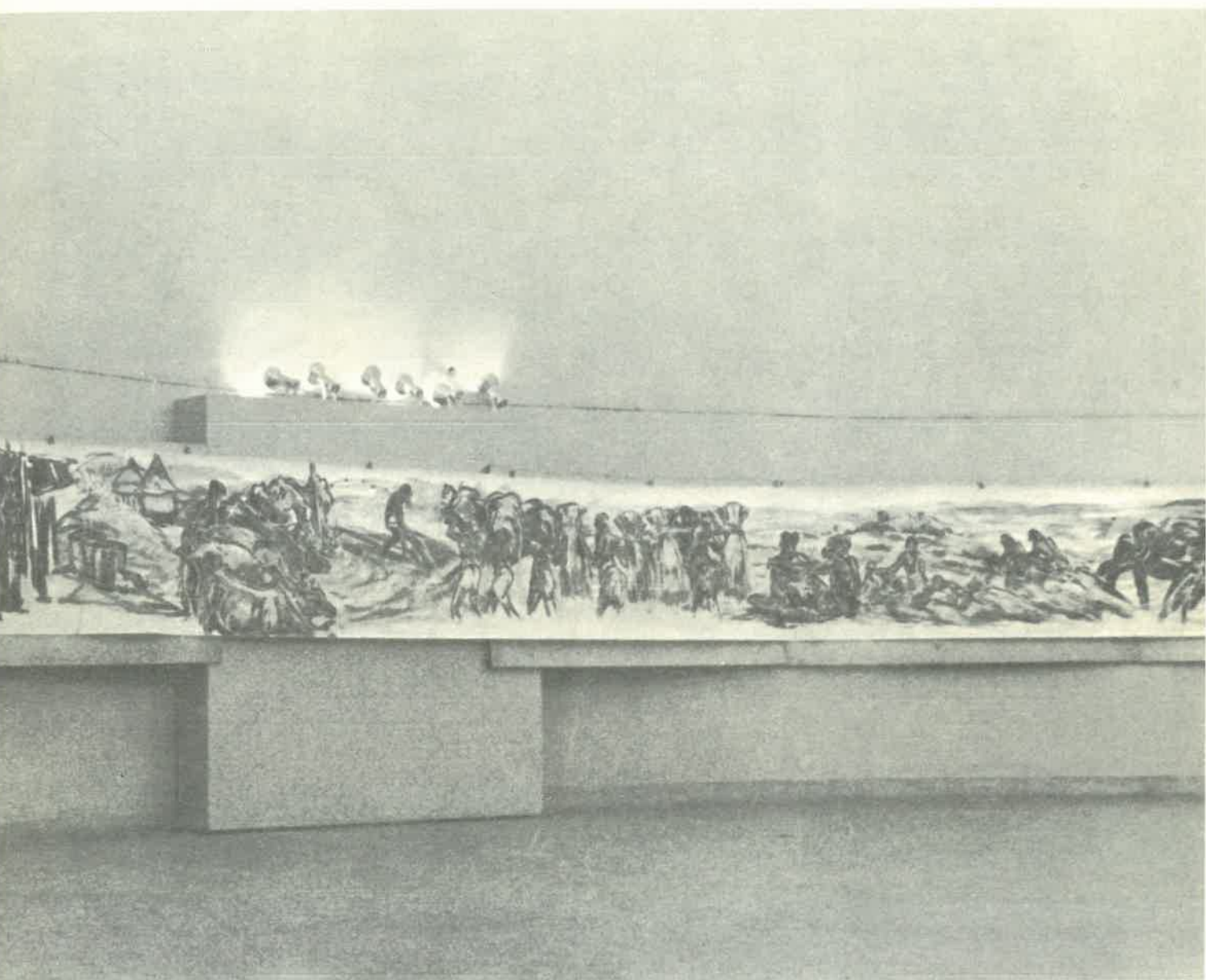






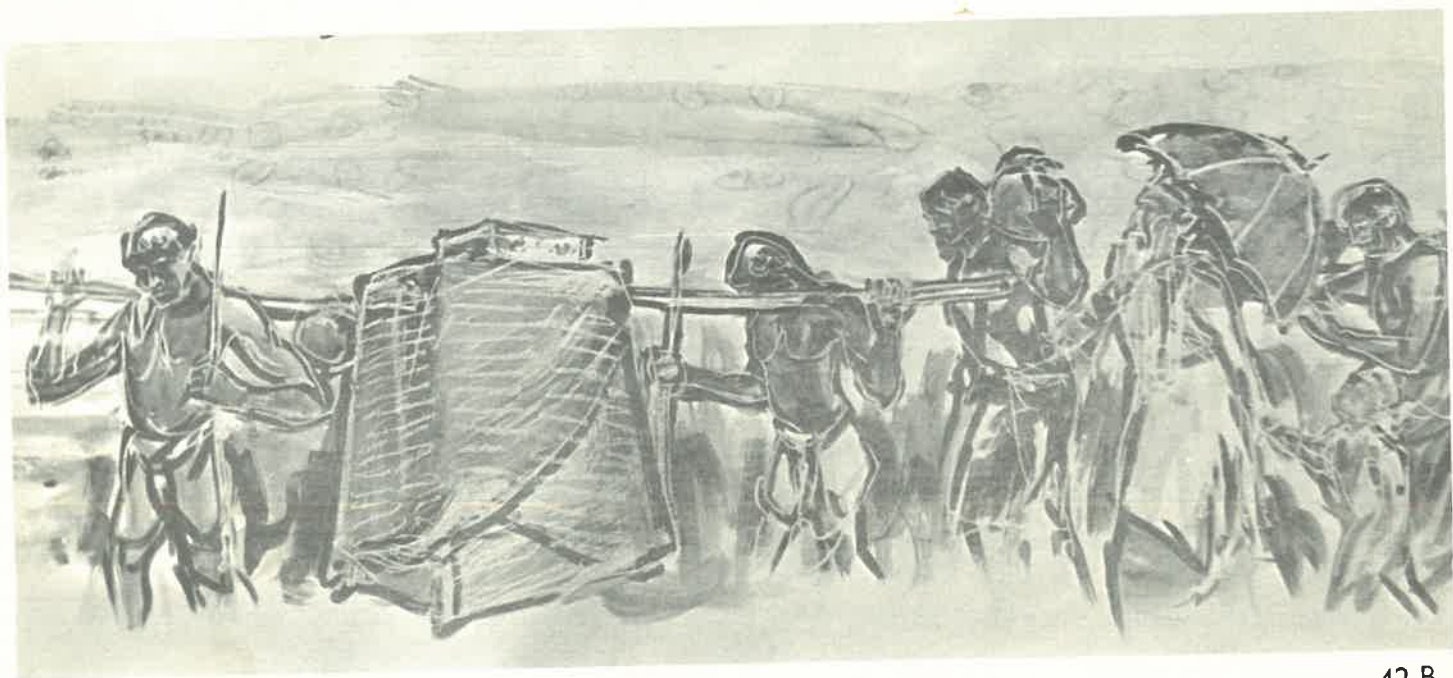








42 A

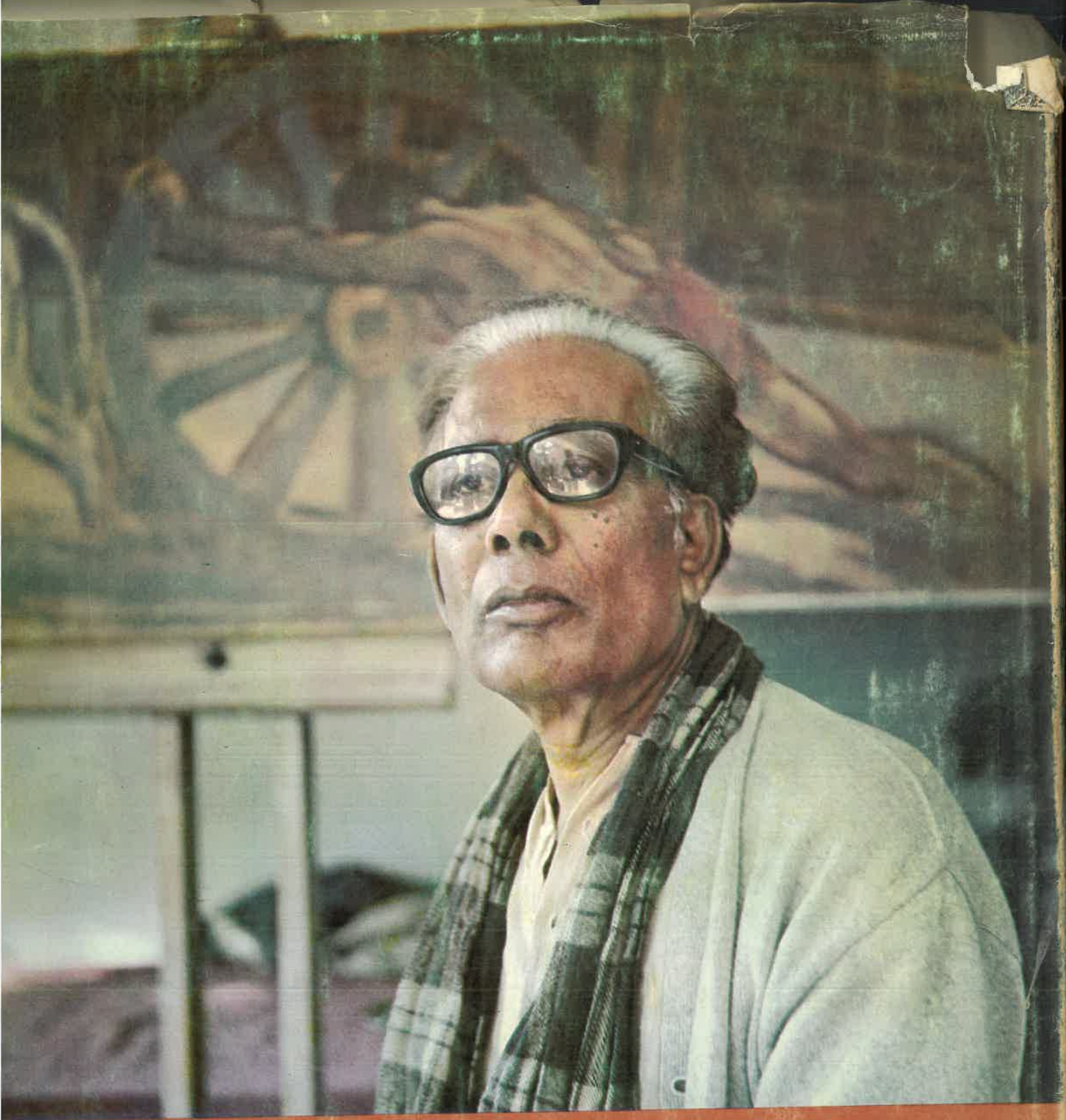


42 B





62-7 1/6/95



Zaimul Chaudhry