

The show at Mohatta Palace brings together masterpieces from private collections that may have remained inaccessible to public

By Shahzareah Husain

artreview

*Art & Craft
The News
14/4/02*



Sadequain's work on display at the Mohatta Palace, Karachi (Feb 27-June 30, 2002) is a treat for art lovers. The exhibition, curated by Hameed Haroon and Salima Hashmi, brings together the master's work in an unprecedented way, showcasing work that would otherwise have remained inaccessible to the public.

The paintings hanging against the backdrop of walls painted in vibrant colours unfold many dimensions of Sadequain's art before the viewer in chronological order, displayed in over 16 rooms (named and numbered), best viewed by following the brochure route.

Sadequain, a self-taught artist, came into his own after his transitory affairs with the styles of Picasso as seen in his pieces like 'Love Trysts' which along with the Van Gogh inspired 'Hammal and Daughter' form the collection hanging in Rooms 1 and 2.

A constant feature in his work is the humble cactus, a reminder of his trip to the Gadani beach near Karachi. Apparently in the late 1950s, in need of rest and solitude, Sadequain headed for Gadani where a friend offered him a simple hut. Here the cactus bushes bathed in moonlight fascinated him. The kitchen wall became a convenient canvas. It

was here that he synthesised his love for calligraphy

and penchant for harsh landscapes, diving further into the concept of life as a struggle.

He once said: "I only painted cactus in black, dark red and grey. I painted them without any intention of painting them. At last, in the anatomy of these gigantic plants, I found the essence of calligraphy. Everything I have painted since

The many faces of Sadequain



then... has been based on calligraphy, which in itself issues from the structure of cactus."

The 'Lady Amidst Mountain Cacti' (circa 1957) is one of the earliest cacti references in the exhibit.

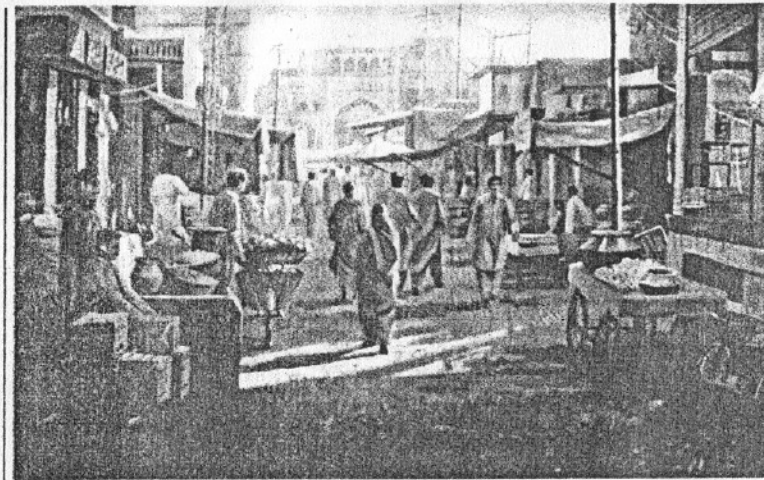
The female form described only as the 'Dark Lady' is a permanent fixture in his works done between the 1950s and late 1980s. It is suggested through hearsay and the work on display in Room 16 of the exhibition, dated towards his twilight years, that her persona caused him to eventually crave a family — a child that perhaps symbolises self-preservation and the constant companionship of the then

between modernity and tradition. The content of his work had wider appeal and his early works addressed social evils, elongated human forms with bleeding pen-like fingers and nest-shaped heads were central to his imagery. However in the 1970s, he added the element of calligraphy, and his lyrical rendering of Quranic verses led him to enjoy state patronage and the status of a 'national artist'.

Like many artists, Sadequain's early works includes more realistic portraits, for example that of his mother. The blues and ochres of this period (typified in 'Making Love', Room 2) are taken over by the red

However, most of his work also gravitates towards introspection, which reflects everything happening around him. From Iqbal's verses to the evil existing within 'Artist Crowned With Crow's Nest', the collection that has inspired most interest is perhaps the erotica of the early sixties titled 'Flesh'.

From the depiction of the folktale of 'The Humiliation of Aristotle by Alexander's Concubine' to his fascination with body hair (Pubis 1-4), this part of the exhibit is accessible to serious art researchers and students with special permission.



To define the parameters

If the conditions are set out in narrower terms then there is a chance of maintaining consistent quality. A review of the National Exhibition in Lahore

By Sarwat Ali

Artists Association of Punjab was formed 17 years ago for the overt purpose of promoting the visual arts in the area. An extra poignancy was added to its formation as the other forums, some of them in the public sector, were not able to deliver according to the requirements of their charter.

The promotion of the arts is a multifaceted phenomenon, but the lackluster performance of the public sector organisations left a big enough gap that needed to be filled — even the annual exhibitions were not regularly held, especially at the national level. In these 17 years, by ensuring an exhibition a year, the Association has at least this feather of consistency in its cap. But they have



Iqbal Husain



that there was also a great deal of representation of the younger artists and this gave them a platform to exhibit their work at the national level and be exposed to critical viewing. This will be all a learning experience for them and they can come out of the exhibition with a much greater understanding of their own work.

Obviously there were some notable omissions to and it would have been an even more representative a show if many of the prominent painters were also included in the show.

About the uneven quality of the show, there was ample justification in the criticism because in any case it is not easy to curate a show. In Pakistan, where exhibitions are held either of one artist or of a group — the first defines itself but the second, a thematic stringing of the show is nearly impossible where putting an exhibition together itself becomes a task. If more pre-conditions were enforced the task of putting up of an exhibition would become that much more difficult.

The other criticism that latest works of the artists were not always put on display was quite valid too. A Painting once displayed or on many previous exhibitions resurfaces yet again, and it has also happened that an exhibit has appeared in successive exhibitions. There should be greater application of the principle that the work should be new and not often displayed. Perhaps in the case of very established artists the