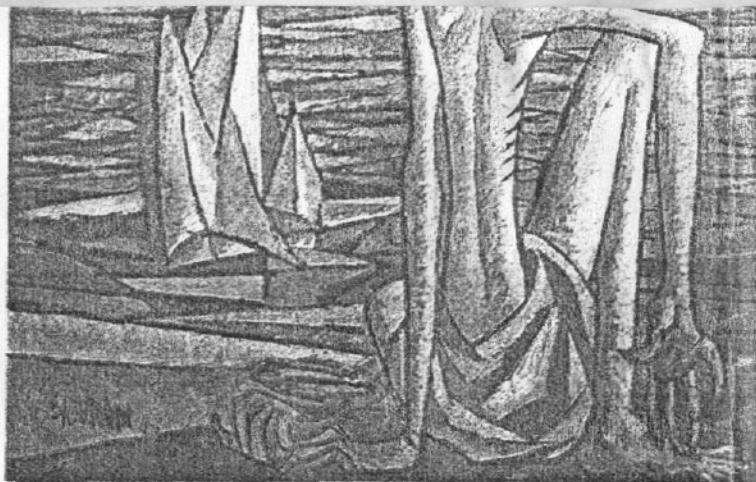


along with the Van Gogh inspired 'Hammal and Daughter' form the collection hanging in Rooms 1 and 2.

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, delving 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



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 current woman. This is one of the debates all those who knew Sadequain engage in at some point or the other, for if one follows the pattern of his subjects the female form has played a vital role post his return from Paris.

From Room 3 onwards in the exhibit, a feminine form emerges from the "Eternal Female" images and the dark lady hovers around extending her presence there onwards to "The Persuasive Mistress", one of his last pieces.

Sadequain was a prolific painter and much of his work is displayed in public places. His early mural, based on the dignity of labour is housed in the Mangla dam. Later, he accomplished the mammoth task of illustrating Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* (Being) on the ceiling of Lahore Museum. While working on the ceiling of Frere Hall, Karachi, the painter took ill and died leaving the work incomplete. However, the very work that gave him a large following did not get critical acclaim.

Hailing from a culture entrenched in Urdu verse and calligraphy, he was perhaps ideally suited to bridge the gap

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 flags of the Communist Party in 'The Rebel', part of a collection hung under the banner of 'Forbidden Colours'. Other masterpieces of the early 1960s are 'Judgement in Paris' and 'New York by Night'.

'Lost Horizons' (Room 4) contains four murals. The first 'Treasures in Time', which is from the collection of the State Bank of Pakistan, is divided into five groupings that celebrate the intellectual achievements starting from a potter and ending on Albert Einstein. Another work 'The Laboratory of the Natural Universe' delves into the depth of earth and beyond, examining the order of nature's ecological system and the 'aerodynamics of the skyscape'.

The National Council of the Arts, Islamabad has lent the exhibition a large number of paintings, including the illustrative narration of Diwan-e-Ghalib. The work goes beyond the flowery text of the surface, adding drama with bold brush strokes on a large canvas.

An element of humour is visible in 'The Artist and His Model', in which the Bengal influence seems to be jeering the authorities.

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.

The vast range of work addressed in the exhibition, from the calligraphic rendering of poetry or religious verses, to the infamous 'Black Tableau' focusing on pimps, provides a glimpse into the fascinating psyche of Fakir.

In 1947, Sadequain came to Pakistan from Amroha, India and settled in Karachi. Whether at tea shops in Karachi or Paris or elsewhere, he would be seen sketching on serviettes at times for a variety of admirers, from different schools of thought and aesthetic beliefs. A man who died addicted to liquor, yearning for desires that remained unfulfilled, he left an impact that is felt even today in a land where artists are more often forgotten than remembered.

Young visitors with no exposure to Sadequain's work — or indeed to art in general — have come away from the exhibition finding it variously "morbid", "disturbing" and "difficult". But considering that this is the first time an exhibition of this scale has been organised, this is a positive first step towards providing the ordinary public some exposure to Pakistan's art heritage — for just a hundred rupees.

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 to their credit some more achievements, if one goes looking for them — like by holding seminars and lectures, it has pursued its ideal of educating artists and citizens about art and cultural traditions.

Though the exhibition under review was by the Artists Association of Punjab, it did preclude artists from outside of Punjab. Artists from all over the country were eligible and it was rightly called a National Exhibition. Its scope had been broadened further as there was no limitation on the form or medium. As it is, these forms are now beginning to lose their purist identities. Much that is happening in the art scene is more in the nature of a hybrid expression as one form flows into another. The medium has nearly lost all distinction — it is almost mixed-media/multi-media and calls for the critical canons to go through a process of revision in the evaluation of a work of art.

But there were obviously many areas in the exhibition that could come in for adverse criticism. The one patent criticism was that they were not

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 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 preconditions 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 possibility exists of some exemption. But then it cannot be stretched too far, otherwise the exhibition would mean only a repeat performance, and cease to hold sufficient interest for the viewers to know what new work is being done in the field of art.

Holding of such exhibitions does not absolve the public sector organisations to be lax about their basic functions. If there is more rigorous selection process and the conditions are defined in narrower terms then there is a chance of maintaining a consistency in quality. If more exhibitions are held at the national level with this criteria in mind then the job of curating a show can attain some professional standard.

What the Artists Association of the Punjab has done within limited resources is quite commendable, and if it is supported at the same level by bigger public sector organisations, a more cohesive picture of Pakistani art can emerge. The private galleries which have mushroomed in all the cities are just not capable of undertaking the task of this magnitude all on their own.



Iqbal Husain



Gulgee

able to get the best works on display — that there was a great deal of inconsistency in the quality of the exhibition, for it was not unusual for a masterpiece by a famous artist to be placed by the side of work by a mere beginner.

This openness and loosening of the formal definitions made the task of the curator rather more difficult. If the terms were more defined, there could be a brighter possibility of quality being ensured, but when the canvas was as wide as this, it was also bound to be assessed on the basis of quantity. And there was no shortage on account of numbers. More than 130 artists had participated in the exhibition and from all provinces of the country which was indeed commendable in itself. Some of the biggest names like Jamil Naqsh, Ahmed Khan, Gulgee, Bashir Ahmed, Colin David, Akram Baloch and Sabah Hussain were part of the show. One other positive aspect was

artreview

By Shahzarea Husain

A-1 & Craft
The News
14-4-82



The master's art: Sadequain at Mohatta Palace.