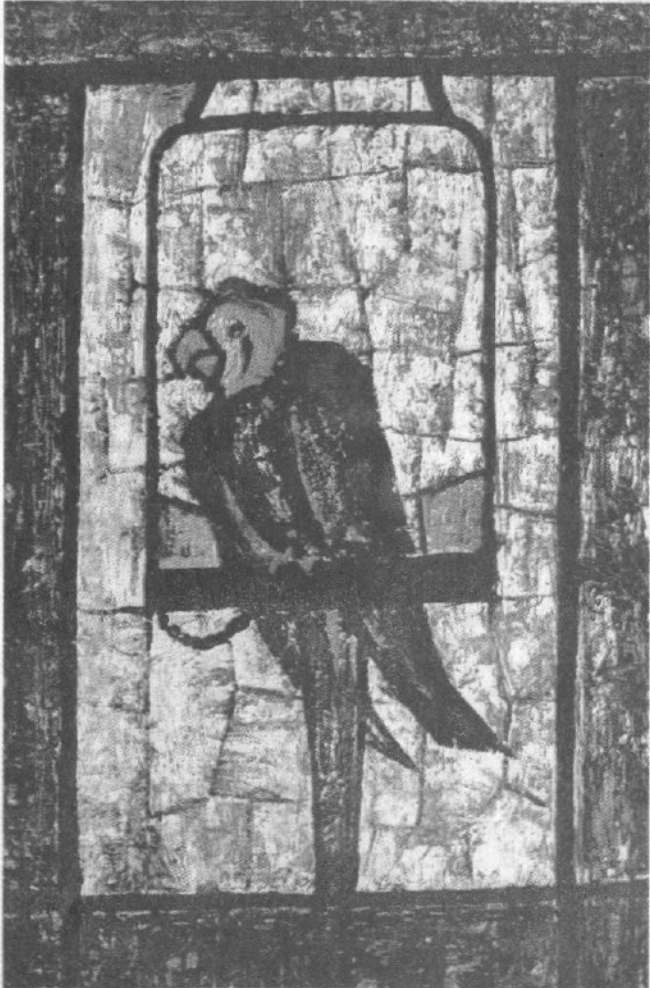


Portrait of Ali Imam

Marjorie Husain in 'Ali Imam: Man of the Arts' captures the true character of the artist whose contribution to the realm of Pakistani art cannot be fathomed



By Quddus Mirza

Anyone who has ever met Ali Imam, would never forget the painter, especially in one of his lucid moods — enthusiastically talking about Pakistani art and artists. Despite his frail health and heart problem, each day he used to spend a couple of hours expressing his candid and clear opinion upon the works of the artists around him.

The newly published book 'Ali Imam: Man of the Arts' by Marjorie Husain presents him like that — alive, full of vitality and with shocking comments. Published in May 2003 to mark the first death anniversary of the artist, the book is first in the series of artists' monographs planned by Fomma (Foundation for Museum of Modern Art) Karachi.

'Ali Imam: Man of the Arts' also contains reproductions of Ali Imam's work and his pictures from different periods. In many places the transcripts from a long interview of the artist recorded by Lutfullah Khan are included. The style of writing, quality of printing and a crisp layout puts this book at par with any interna-

Ali Imam: Man of the Arts

By Marjorie Husain

Published by the

Foundation for Museum
of Modern Art (Fomma),
Karachi

96 pages

Rs. 750, (paperback Rs. 650)

tional publication. Besides the author, Jalaluddin Ahmed and Imran Mir, who were involved with its initial concept and final execution, must be congratulated on this endeavour.

It is basically the text written by Marjorie Husain which recreates the larger than life figure of Ali Imam. In a simple, lively and engaging tone, her words formulate the personality of the painter who held multiple positions and had diverse roles in the realm of Pakistani art. In the early years of his life, he was an active painter and was associated with Lahore Art Circle. Besides running his gallery and writing on art, he also taught art. All of these activities are mentioned in the book but more importantly it focuses on the personal life and thoughts of the painter by relying on his documented

monologues. It includes his family history, a background of his early training and details of his life as a Marxist.

Imam was a Marxist before he adopted art as a career. This phase is of special interest as it reminds us of the old and usually forgotten image of the artist being a romantic revolutionary. This section of the book illustrates his political struggle among labour unions near Rawalpindi region when he was a member of the Communist Party of Pakistan. It significantly shaped his later life. The young Imam, in contrast to the old self-indulgent artists, always keenly enlightened public with his words and deeds. This practice continued till the last years of his life, when just a few months before his death, he travelled to Islamabad and Lahore to deliver lectures for 'Dialogue on Art' arranged by PNCA.

The book portrays him as someone with strong ideas and an intellectual mind. The analysis of his own work and of his contemporaries is clear, unbiased and honest. While talking about some celebrated painters he says: "Unfortunately painters like Hussain, Souza, Sadequain, Shamza, Shakir Ali are derivatives. Since these people are highly intelligent, highly capable and in some cases imaginative, they have done some work of significance; but they have never been able to shake the influence of the great masters." (p-67)

On many occasions Ali Imam expressed similar views on local art, but always wished that these must not appear in print during his lifetime. He

July 13

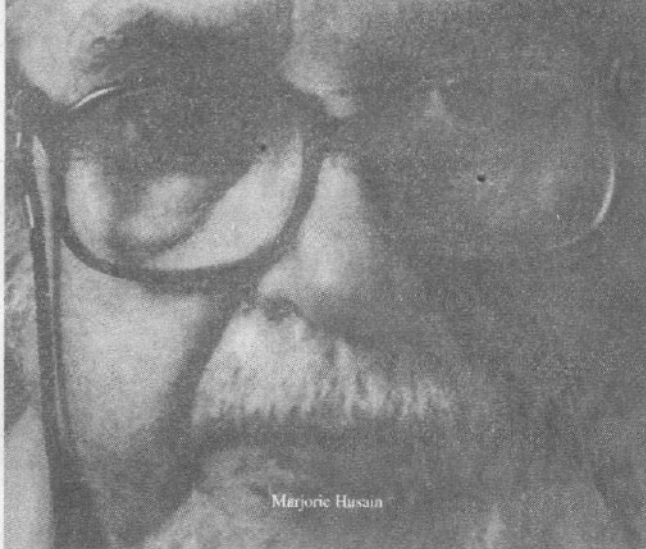
Marjorie
Husain

Art

recreates the larger than life figure of Ali Imam. In a simple, lively and engaging tone, her words formulate the personality of the painter.

ali imam

Man of the Arts



Marjorie Husain

confessed that his analytical mind and quest for knowledge were the main factors which stopped him from producing artworks of higher aesthetic value. "Somehow or other I got lost in the muses of the creativity of others, and in the process of collecting other people's knowledge I became so overawed and influenced by them that my own process of creativity could not flower as it should have." (p-55).

He realised his skills as a painter and moved on to other fields — education and organisation of art. Yet looking at a number of his paintings reproduced in the book, it is felt that his stature as a genuine and original painter is some-

how overlooked or overshadowed by his other activities.

As early as in 1962, he had developed a distinct personal style, that was marked with its lyricism, tactile surfaces and minimal hues. Although in a few works painted later in life the artist's urge to recreate the sensitivity found in his earlier work was sadly lacking.

He compensated for the absence of a maker of visual objects in him by promoting art and artists. Several leading painters of the country were introduced by his Indus Gallery in Karachi. Any visitor could enter, look at the displayed paintings and discuss art with Imam at the gallery.

The old master of Pakistani art was frank, open and eager in sharing his ideas with students, young artists and other viewers.

The book captures that energy and the tone in which it was passed on to art lovers, his capability of taking the visual matters into the intellectual arena. The author has successfully managed to capture Imam's thinking. While reading one feels as if one is in conversation with the artist. A task that requires experience, passion and insight. Marjorie Husain has successfully reconstructed Ali Imam — her life long friend and a source of inspiration to many other creative personalities.