

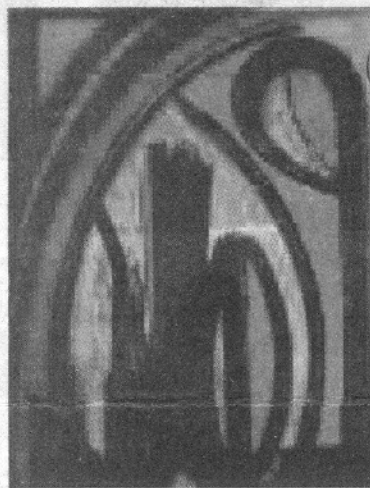
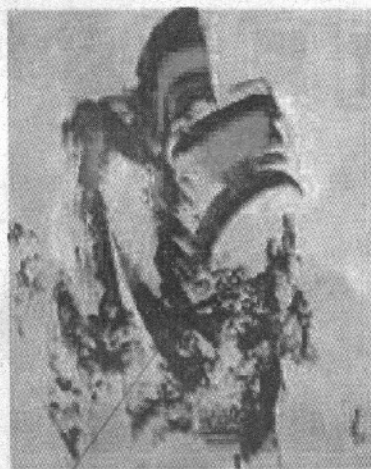
by SHAMIM AKHTER

An exhibition of abstract paintings by the late Rafe-uz-Zaman opened at V. M. Art Gallery on July 23 and will continue till August 12, 2003.

Rafe had different ideas about painting and its understanding. He thought it the luxury of the elite because there was a certain amount of sophistication in artists' work that was beyond comprehension of the common people. When he said so, perhaps, Rafe meant the abstract art. It is not hard for the common people to understand recognizable objects on canvas and appreciate composition and colour combinations, but abstract art, which is certainly not merely reassuring, pretty or entertaining, is anti-conventional and charged with a counter rhetoric of obscurity. Yet like any modern artist, Rafe was concerned with making himself understood. Apparently a silent man, he was steaming with inner turmoil of thesis and antithesis, a clash of his expectations and ground realities. He also suffered from an encounter of what he wanted to do and was doing. These expressions are visible on his canvases today in the shape of playful and forceful lines and forms. Moreover, Rafe hoped through his abstract art to surmount barriers of understanding associated with levels of education and cultural differences. He could feel this need more than anyone else as he spent his initial six years of upbringing with German grandparents and later with a thorough bred Alligarhian, Lucknow born father and

Abstract messages

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German mother.

He wanted to address all mankind through a common language of form and colour. What it demanded was a kind of attention, an unguarded listening with one's eyes, that

relatively few people can afford at present. The exhibition has been titled as *Silent Voices*. It was so titled because works of art are often judged at a glance. To me abstract art is like classical music. Neither music nor abstract art are contentless. The themes of abstract art have been of wide significance and appeal. Verbal definitions make them meaner and more remote than they are and one hesitates to attempt them. An ordinary mind tries to associate Rafe's statements with known forms and says that well here he is calligraphing in the style of Shamza, or he seems inspired by Shakir Ali or well that looks like a dancing girl.

Rafe was a born artist who was driven away by his passion against his will, yet he stole time to do what he wanted

to do. Even his teachers could sense the artist in him. In a letter of recommendation written in 1946, when Rafe was 22, his Professor of Philosophy, S. K. Sen remarked: "Rafe-uz-Zaman has an eye and hand for art painting and, if I may be allowed to express an opinion in this sphere, he is more than a dilettante, even though he may still be in an interesting stage of finding himself."

Rafe's multi dimensional personality was an outcome of his multi-media education, upbringing and varied environment. His initial years under the patronage of his grandparents had a great impact on almost every aspect of his life. They inculcated a sensibility for music and painting in him.

Throughout his career he remained linked with education, information, journalism and electronic media. Though he had to work a lot, Rafe never abandoned painting and sculpting. Soon after his engagement to Rabia, a suave lady and educationist in her own right, Rafe had to leave for Paris.

From there he wrote to his fiancée that soon he would leave his routine job and take to his passion - painting. Those were unfortunate days for fine arts when higher pursuits of intellect meant nothing to a people who were deprived of basic amenities of life. A man who was a painter, philosopher, educationist and intellectual, must have had gone through an inner disturbance. It is sad that he is no more with us today (died on 15 January 2000). It is through his elegant wife Rabia that we can know today what the intellectual felt and expressed through his paintings and sculpture. In every letter to Rabia and his

parents, he made a mention of his work. At times he complained to his father, Dr. Salimuz-Zaman who had a taste for music and painting as to why did he discourage him to study fine arts while he encouraged everyone else to go for it.

It is strange that a man with passion for painting, who kept painting and sculpting despite professional restraints, never cared to exhibit his works. It was only in Kuala Lumpur where he was posted as Assistant Director UNESCO-IAU Joint Study on the Role of Higher Education in the Development of Countries in Southeast Asia in 1964- 66 that UNESCO held an exhibition of painting on a very large scale. Rabia, without informing him, took one of Rafe's paintings for the show. His painting received an honourable mention in the show.

The output of his paintings was enhanced when he returned to Pakistan in 1968 after a twenty years stay abroad, mainly Geneva and Paris. In 1994 when he retired from work with ILO, he devoted all his time to his passion to paint until his death. He sculpted with clay only; but chose a variety of mediums for painting and drawing using oils, crayons, watercolour and lead pencil.

From 1960 onwards he added pastels and Chinese ink to his palette and continued to use them for thirty years. Rafe was a philosopher with an acute analytical mind, an intellectual and a scholar. A humanitarian to the core, but nevertheless a very private person. His letters to his parents and his wife are the main source of knowing his aspirations, feelings and ideology. ■

Devotee of the Punjab Landscape School

by SAJID ABBAS

Although most of the art galleries around have yet to announce their plans to hold exhibitions, one finds a number of artists preparing for the coming season and would find them in every possible place busy in their vocation. All one has to do is to know their favourite haunts and reach it. One can, in a way, participate in the artists experience or his existence amongst colours that one sees spread all over, colours of varying intensity and tint everywhere. These artists have a singular attachment to painting, though, each one of them has his or her own peculiar style, some seemingly more restless and inquisitive than the others.

The work of the artists seems

to be of varying nature. While some of them are busy in seeing the necessity of separating light from the dark and getting involved in such as calligraphic or ornamental, others are inspired by the Creator, the Lord and are spending their time and life and its various aspects as seen or experienced by them. One finds that artists engaged in a whole range of tints and hues, do otherwise, perhaps show the real life of the country or their surroundings in a different look that they persist on realism as and seem to be n

successful landscape painters of this land, for he is imbued with single minded devotion to the land and people of this part of the world. His work is focused more on environment and rural surroundings. Misbahuddin Qazi's work has been on display at various places of the country. His work displays the working of the mind of the artist, his expression of the relationship between him and his surroundings.

Misbahuddin, apparently a devotee of the Punjab Landscape School, works in a direct and down-to-earth manner, his work seems to be devoid of the so-called 'refinement' that some others may try to add to their work. He seems to have a built-in fondness for the Nature that he sees around himself and seems to feel. That quality appears to cancel all kinds of artificiality and artfulness that may otherwise creep in. ■

Art

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*Art. Nations
July 28*

Although most of the art galleries around have yet to announce their plans to hold exhibitions, one finds a number of artists preparing for the coming season and would find them in every possible place busy in their vocation. All one has to do is to know their favourite haunts and reach it. One can, in a way, participate in the artists experience or his existence amongst colours that one sees spread all over, colours of varying intensity and tint everywhere. These artists have a singular attachment to painting, though, each one of them has his or her own peculiar style, some seemingly more restless and inquisitive than the others.

The work of the artists seems

to be of varying nature. While some of them remain busy in seeing the possibility of separating the light from the dark and even getting involved in things such as calligraphy, plain or ornamental, others are truly inspired by the Creation of the Lord and are drawn to spend their time portraying life and its various social aspects as seen or experienced by them. Gradually one finds that artists engaged in a whole range of tints and hues, delicate or otherwise, perhaps, tend to show the real life of the country or their surroundings in a different manner. It looks that they place emphasis on realism as a whole and seem to be more alert of



their surroundings. Their expressions, therefore, are of considerable interest.

The other day this scribe came



across the work of one such artist. Perhaps, not one of the type known in most households, but certainly one of the

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