



Fifty Years of Art in Pakistan



THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST OF PAKISTAN IS HEIR TO A MULTI-LAYERED LEGACY OF TRADITIONS. THIS YOUNG COUNTRY HAS BEEN HOME TO NOT ONLY ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST AND LONGEST SURVIVING CIVILISATIONS, THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION, BUT ALSO BEEN WITNESS TO THE TIMELESS INTERMIXING OF RELIGION AND CULTURE. TRADITION HAS SELDOM BEEN CHALLENGED HERE, THE FOREIGN IS MERELY ABSORBED BY THE INDIGENOUS, FOREVER EVOLVING DYNAMIC AND DIVERSE SOCIAL PRACTICES. CONTEMPORARY PAKISTANI ART REFLECTS THIS DYNAMIC PROCESS SEEN IN THE WORKS OF CHUGHTAI, USTAD ALLAH BAKSH, SHAKIR ALI, SADEQUAIN AND MANY OTHER ARTISTS.

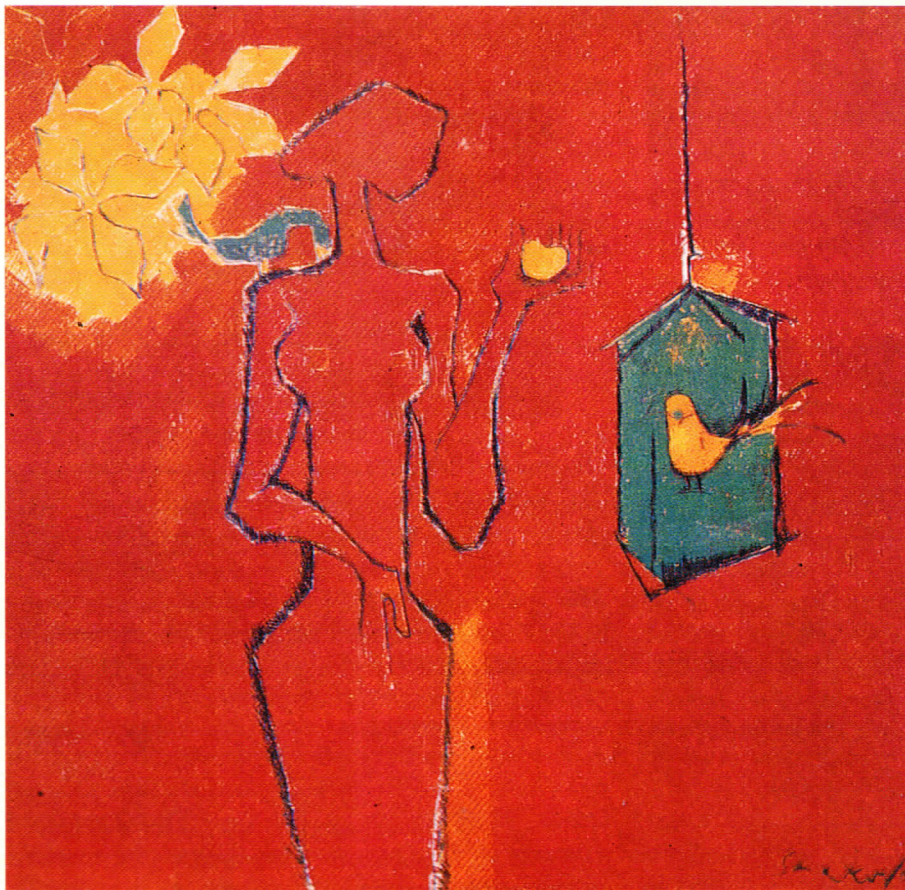
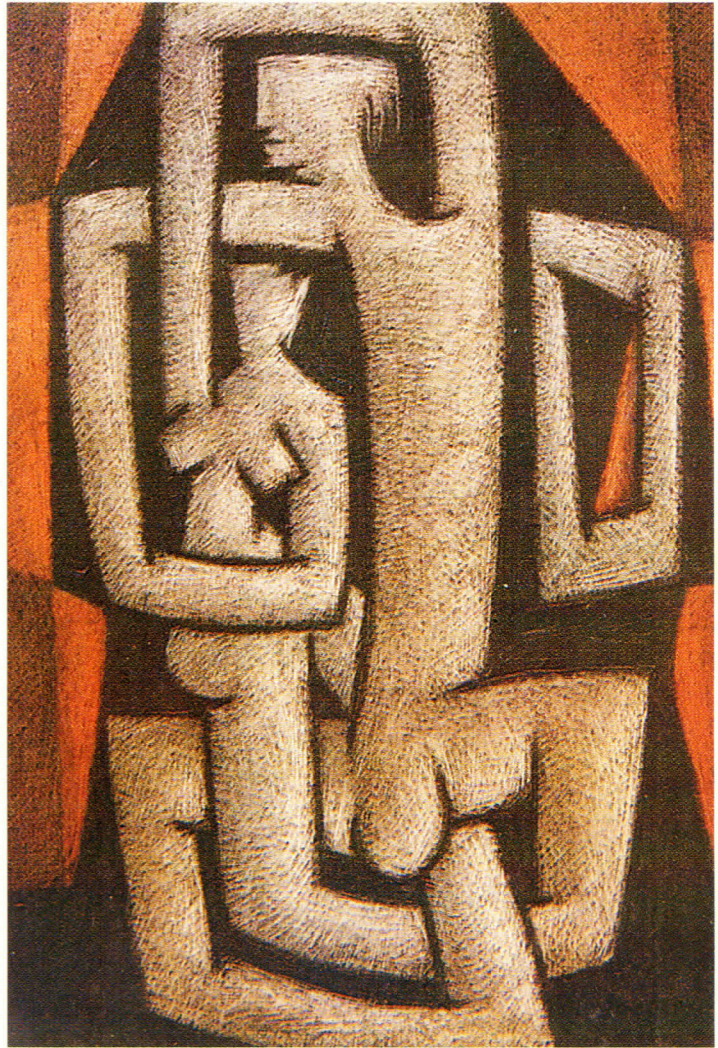
By Nilofur Farrukh

ORIGIN AND THE MAKING OF TRADITION **The beginnings**

It is believed that during the age of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa there emerged the first image of Shiva, one of the reigning deities of the Hindu Pantheon.

All the arts of this age focused on belief, func-

tion and entertainment. In the ancient centres of Mehargarh, Kot Diji, Mohenjo Daro and Harappa a pottery tradition flourished which has left behind striking votive and utilitarian vessels. At the peak of their production these pots embodied perfection which successfully concealed all signs of the techniques used in its creation. A unique, high temperature stoneware was



This pg (clockwise from top right showing works of): Sadequain - Elongated human forms were central to his imagery; Shakir Ali - pared down the human form to sharp angles; Zubeida Agha - the first artist to hold a solo Modern art exhibition in Pakistan. Opp. pg: (top) Chughtai - the leading painter of Lahore in 1947; (bottom) Meher Afroz - symbols of a secular past.

invented for chunky bangles which were worn as symbols of authority. Faience, the forerunner of ceramic glaze was invented for use on beads and figurines.

Symbolism with tribal messages inspired artists to decorate earthenware with linear patterns of stylised animals, fishes, birds, *pipal* leaf and interlinking circles. The Indus Valley sculptor was versatile, he used varied media and iconography over the centuries. The Mother Goddess, found in terra-cotta is primitive in its exaggerated human form while The Dancing Girl, cast from the lost-wax technique in bronze, alludes to naturalism.

Carved in limestone, the famed bust of the High Priest, with its detachable head-dress, if judged by its distinctive features, appears to be a portrait.

It is the remains of an artisan quarter with bead-making factories in Harappa that suggest a widespread export of jewellery made from carnelian, agate, gold, faience beads. The role of craft in the Indus Valley economy speaks well of the early development and exploitation of artistic skills of the people and the precedent of a creative tradition.

Buddhist influences

The Gandhara Art, dedicated to the ornamentation of the monuments that housed the relics of Lord Buddha, emerged from the foothills of the Himalayas in the North Western Frontier Province in the first century AD. It combined the skills of the local stonecarvers with the Greek Hellenistic imagery as interpreted by the Buddhist descendants of Alexander's legions, who settled in this area.

The most significant contribution of this art is the introduction of the image of Buddha which gradually replaced the symbols of the lotus and footprints, traditionally used to depict him in the earlier religious imagery.

The Buddhist canonical texts borrowed from the linear style of the frescos of Ajanta and Ellora. The horizontal format was dictated by the palm-leaf substrate. Written with the pressing action of a metal stylus, with ink and pigment brushed over it, the narrative illustrations were dominated by red, blue, orange, gold and black. This art progressed under the patronage of the Pala rulers of Bengal from the 7th to the 12th century. Gradually these manuscripts included Jain and Hindu scriptures and went into greater production all over India which led to a seminal influence on the later painting of the region.

Mughals & Miniatures

The Mughal Empire established itself in the subcontinent in 1526 and consolidated the Persian and Central Asian cultural influence introduced during the Sultanate Period. The Mughals founded the secular art of Mughal Miniature and under their distinguished patronage heralded a glorious period for the Arts.

It was Emperor Akbar who brought a wider vision to the paintings produced in his prolific ateliers. His reign saw the birth of a style crafted from the

combined talent of Hindu artists and Persian miniaturists. The manuscripts of this time moved away from the traditional Persian epics both in style and subject. A keen student of world religions, Akbar commissioned books on Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. An elaborate history of Islam to commemorate the first millennium since the Hijra, was also completed in his studios.

Akbar's personal interest in outstanding painters encouraged innovation. The European Renaissance prints and tapestries brought to him as gifts became the inspiration behind experimental works which brought a growing awareness of new perspective techniques used in Renaissance Europe.

Jehangir steered the Miniature towards greater realism and used it extensively as a tool for documentation. In portraits, authenticity was sought and an artist was even sent by him to the Persian court to get the likeness of the ruler for court paintings. Court personages were religiously portrayed with resemblance instead of labelled stock figures. Many miniatures are based on exquisitely painted flora and fauna by specialists of this popular genre. Compiled in *Muraqas* or personal albums these individual paintings are framed with elaborate borders bearing traditional arabesque motifs, sometimes even landscapes and scenes of daily life.

The personalised and charming character of the manuscripts in the reign of his father was replaced with a focus on stereotypical images of opulence and grandeur by Shah Jehan. The magnificent *Padshahnamah*, which has survived in its original state, is a chronicle of his time and is one of the few manuscripts produced under Shah Jehan. This was also a period when Miniature painting began to get patronage outside the regal court by the high officials of that time.

Miniature Painting under Aurangzeb, the last Mughal ruler gradually lost its vitality. An orthodox Muslim, there are few portraits of him as a young ruler. Most paintings show him in his old age and are based on record conquests, court ceremonies. The emperor is frequently shown in meetings with holy men or performing his prayers. As the Mughal Empire disintegrated into smaller kingdoms, its artists found new patrons in the smaller courts.

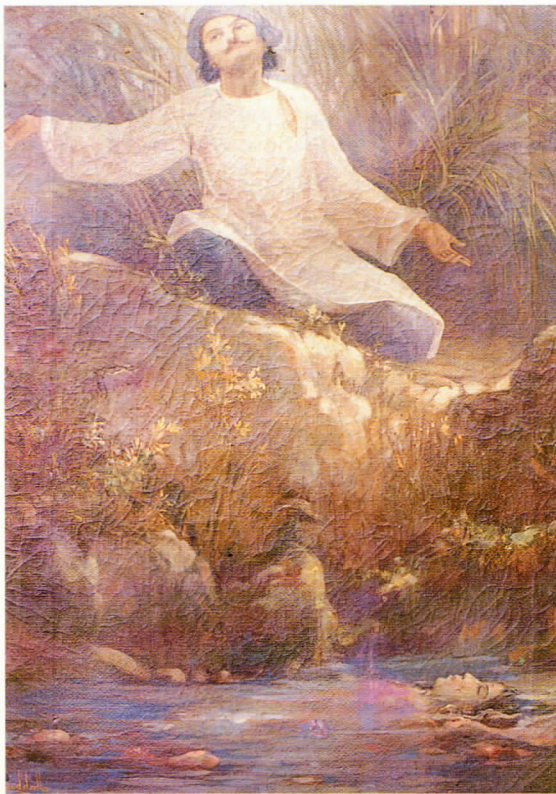
The artistic preferences of the ruler frequently led to changes that sometimes birthed a distinctive style. This resulted in various provincial schools of Miniature Painting which reflected the synthesis of the traditional genre with local cultural and religious influences.

The Sikh School of Art

In the Punjab, a Sikh School of Painting under the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh took root. This served to glorify the religious and political leadership of the Sikhs. Bright clear colours favoured by the community influenced the palette of the paintings and it was characterised by their physical features and costumes. In the later period, European realism crept into paintings as European portraitists were increasingly commissioned at the court.



Clockwise from top: Chughtai - his work had an ethereal ambience; Chughtai; Ustad Allah Baksh - a natural talent for painting landscapes, folk tales, and Hindu mythology.



The First Art Schools

With a shrinking patronage during the British colonial rule, the artists began to sell their work in the bazaar. During these years there was an influx of British officials and their families who were keen to collect pictures of exotic India and its people. The artists obliged them and a new niche for drawings and naturalistic aquarelles was created. The hybrid style that developed came to be known as the Company School of Painting.

This was a time of great social and cultural upheaval. As the colonial race consolidated its power, it also planned a strategy to use culture as a tool to es-

tablish their superiority. In 1853, Trevelyan said 'The only means at our disposal of preventing revolution is to set the natives on a process of European improvement.' Their aim was to train a group of individuals who would be, according to another Englishman Macaulay, "Indian in blood and colour but British in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect." To put this plan into action, a network of Victorian style craft schools and art academies were set up in the major cities of India under the British, from 1850 onwards. In Lahore, the Mayo School of Art was founded in 1875.

On the agenda was also a plan to disrupt the strong craft tradition in India and open this vast sub-continent for the industrial products of Great Britain. By attracting the sons of artists and artisans to these schools by offering them courses in jewellery making, carpet weaving, pottery, metal work etc. the craft went into decline and this was evident only 28 years after the first school was established, when India was invited

to participate in the 1878 Paris craft show.

The delinking of the craftsman from his community and source of raw material led to the neglect of ancestral practices. This critical interference in the cultural pattern of India led to a break with the traditional practice of the guild system patterned on the *ustad-shagird* relationship. Thus began professional art education in the class room. Both systems, at this stage were skill-based but polarised in their approach. The apprentice system emphasised a link with the community needs and a shared creative ethos while the new system was eurocentric and hegemonic, with stress on design for mass production.

Nationalist Movements in Art

The art school produced a new breed of artists, who in art historian WG Archer's words, '.... remained, in practice a pathetic outsider'. Two opposite schools of thought emerged from the alumni of these art schools that gained significance in the development of contemporary Pakistani Art.

From Calcutta, where the first art academy was set up, emerged a nationalist movement, The New Bengal School, in the late 19th century which denounced the eurocentricism of the prevalent Victorian Painting and the marginalisation of indigenous art. Based on the ideals of the Swadeshi Movement spearheaded by Rabindranath Tagore, The New Bengal School sought the revival of cultural and religious themes along with traditional art practices.

About half a century later in 1947, on the eve of independence, a group of students from the J. J. School of Art in Bombay, under Newton Francis Souza, formed The Progressive Artists Group. Their manifesto rejected the effete figurative art of the 1940's in favour of the dynamic abstraction inspired by the School of Paris. In their opinion the new idiom was more expressive of the new reality of India fighting for its Independence.

POST-INDEPENDENCE ART & ARTISTS

Tradition and modernity formed the two diverse streams inherited by the post-colonial artist.

Chughtai

Abdur Rehman Chughtai, a celebrated exponent of The New Bengal School, was among the leading painters of Lahore at the time of the Partition in 1947. Chughtai began his painting career in 1916 and got early recognition in various parts of India.

In keeping with the revivalist spirit of The New Bengal School he sought inspiration from the Mughal Miniature and the 'Naqsh' or patterns of the Islamic decorative arts. His themes borrowed from popular folklore, Hindu Mythology and Islamic epics.

Chughtai had a distinctive style of painting. The elongated elegant human figure is always central to his work which he portrayed in a linear iconography with a soft wash resulting in an ethereal ambience. In soft, clear tones emerged exquisite details of costume, jew-

ellery, architecture, landscape, flora and fauna.

Chughtai's work echoed the creative sensibilities of his people. In *Muraq-i-Chughtai* and *Amal-i-Chughtai*, his famous illustrations of the verses of Ghalib and Iqbal, he gave a contemporary interpretation to the tradition of the art of Persian manuscript.

Ustad Allah Baksh

The self-taught Ustad Allah Baksh had a natural talent for landscape painting. His early apprenticeship with a backdrop painter initiated him into this genre. During his association with the Court of Patiala, the *Ustad* had the opportunity to closely study the Raja's European Collection and it was perhaps this that influenced him to adopt this popular style of naturalism. Landscape, folk stories and Hindu mythology formed the content. In his prepartition period he had acquired considerable fame as a painter of Krishna themes in Lahore.

Talim-i-hoshruha, one of Ustad Allah Baksh's most memorable works assimilates high drama with the narrative, a quality informed by his long career in the world of theatre.

A stylisation crept into his landscapes and he used imaginative shapes in bold colours to depict anthropomorphic land formations in the later years. The genesis of the School of Landscape Painting that emerged from Lahore can be traced to his long distinguished career.

Anna Molka Ahmed

Another influential figure of that period was Anna Molka Ahmed. This painter of Polish and Russian descent accompanied her artist husband, Sheikh Ahmed to Lahore in the 1940's. Educated at St. Martin's School and The Royal College in London she had a bold expressionistic style.

Anna Molka Ahmed founded the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University, which began as an institution for women at the time of Partition and gradually admitted men. The artist had a great fascination for the landscape of Punjab which she painted in vibrant hues. She preferred to paint on location and accompanied her students to villages and venues in the city sites to capture the immediacy of the environment with quick impasto strokes. There is a turmoil in her work that reflects her angst filled personal life.

Besides landscapes and portraits Anna Molka painted memorial scenes of the 1965 war. Philosophical themes like death, 'kismet' and hell. Large murals were painted by her with great passionate energy, she is the only Pakistani woman painter to attempt murals on this scale.

In her long prolific career that spanned over half a century her most significant contribution was in the area of art education and is regarded as a mentor by an entire generation of painters.

Portrait painters - Rahamin & Askari

Portraiture was a popular genre among the patrons of arts. Its European style had taken root in the post-Mughal courts and was now popular among the new social elite. Fayzee Rahamin and S H Askari who set



Clockwise from top: works of Jamil Naqsh; Nagori; Rahamin - whose portraits had a translucent quality.



tled in Karachi after 1947, were both widely recognised portrait painters.

Rahamin was a student of John Singer Sargent and one of his best known works were the murals for the inner dome at the New Delhi Secretariat, painted around 1926. After mastering the western portrait painting techniques under Sargent, he gave it up, on the advise of his mentor to return to his roots and seek inspiration from traditional Indian art. His portrait of the Begum of Janjira is redolent of the Mughal court portraits and even includes a cartouche bearing her name on the top.

In his portraits the features of his subject are

treated with an ethereal translucent quality which became the hallmark of his work. In 1952 he gifted his art collection to the city of Karachi which is presently housed in the Fayzee Rahamin Gallery .

Syed Hasan Askari was an exponent of Academic Realism pioneered by Raja Ravi Varma in the 19th century. He can be called a modern day equivalent of the court portraitist as his oeuvre mainly consisted of commissioned works for the social and political elite of the country. His portraits have a ceremonial formality. Askari presented an idealised image often enhanced by the opulence of formal attire.

Miniaturists - Sharif & Shujallah.

Although miniature painting had disbursed to the regional courts and lost its popularity, its survival was eventually ensured by a dedicated few like Haji Mohammed Sharif and Ustad Shujallah.

Haji Mohammed Sharif belonged to a long line of miniaturists who had been in the employ of the Maharaja of Patiala. Following his exhibition in London in 1942, his talent was widely recognised and he was made the Member of the British Empire.

In 1945 he joined the Mayo School of Art where he taught for nearly two decades. In the true tradition of this purist art he reproduced many works of the old masters. His own contribution can be found in equestrian portraits which he made of various Mughal emperors and their consorts. According to art critic Syed Amjad Ali "....the procession scenes are the most noteworthy contribution of the late Ustad, and they show all the best characteristics of his work, his elaborate composition, his minute arabesque decoration and his superb drawing of horses in action"

Ustad Shujaullah as a young man had received training in Kangra, Rajput, Deccani and Mughal schools of miniature painting. His personal preference was for the Mughal style which he developed along with the skills of 'Naqqashi' or design making. His miniature paintings are characterised by elaborately designed borders. He was skilled in the preparation of the traditional paper, (*vasli*) pigments from vegetal matter and minerals sources, and fine brushes for miniature. This expertise he passed on to his students.

Modernists

Some of the modernists were already practising in Lahore which had progressed as an art centre since the Mughals turned it into their capital. In 1947 it could boast of two art institutions and an expanding artists' community. Karachi had very little post-Partition art activity which was expanded and enriched by the arrival of pioneering talent in the exodus of displaced Muslims from all over the sub-continent.

Zubeida Agha enjoys the position of the first artist to hold a solo Modern Art exhibition. Held in Karachi in 1949 it kicked up a storm of controversy



with its radical interpretation of perspective and space. A student of Sanyal and Mario Perlingieri, an Italian prisoner of war, Agha was initially drawn to Surrealism. Her later education took place at St. Martin's School of Art. On her return she settled in Rawalpindi, away from the art centres of Karachi and Lahore. Here she continued to paint and support the arts by setting up and running the Contemporary Arts Gallery. Her personal style of painting alluded to child-like simplicity of form and a preference for pure bright hues in the 1950s. Gradually her imagery became non-figurative with colours and forms evocative of emotions and moods.

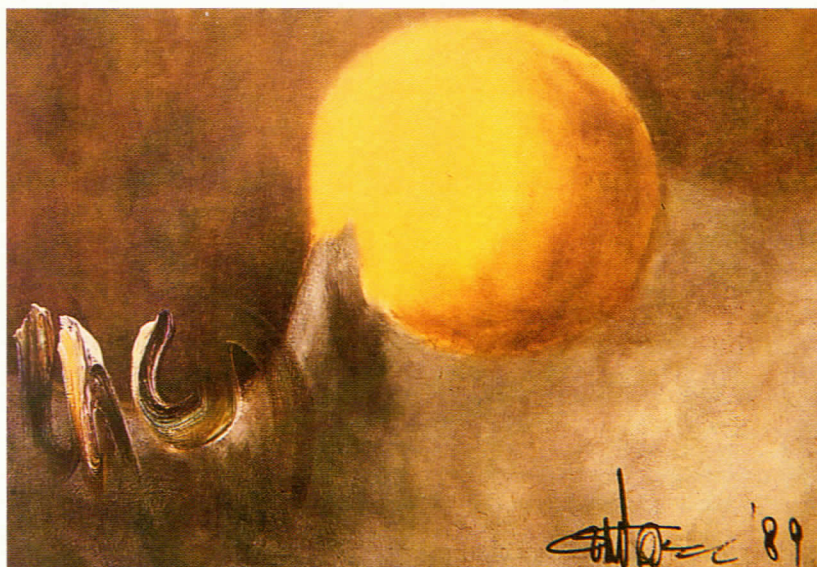
In the early 1950s The Lahore Group initiated experimentation in the Modern idiom and had a seminal influence on contemporary Pakistani art. Ahmed Parvez, Shemza, Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, Sheikh Safder and Qutub Sheikh were members of this informal group and like the Progressive Group of Artists were also inspired by the Paris School. These painters looked upon the new aesthetics of Modern Art as a manifestation of a technological and industrial progress leading to economic freedom, as it had brought to the west. Modern Art also seemed to be the chosen visual language that was compatible with the national poet Iqbal's philosophy of '*khudi*' or ego as a dynamo that would propel man towards personal success. In this milieu traditional art seemed inadequate to articulate the dreams and fears of a generation poised to enter a new era of freedom.

Those educated in the English medium schools with greater exposure to global changes, readily adopted the western idiom and recognised it as a vehicle of progress. The majority who were unread or received their education in the traditional *madrasas* or with Urdu as a medium of instruction developed a suspicion of western values and regarded them as vestiges of the colonial heritage and opposed to the spirit of Islam. Their path to progress lay through a revival of indigenous socio-political values.

These two polarised views led to two parallel streams of art in Pakistan. The traditionalists which included the miniaturists and exponents of classical realism contributed towards the popular painting style of the masses. Elements of traditional painting like the cypress trees, the arabesque, and court figures became the icons used in the theatre backdrops and the decorative arts. This art was a part of the '*jamaliati zouch*' or aesthetic taste which linked literature, music and the visual arts.

The art that emerged from the studios of the Modernists because of its economically advantaged status came to dominate the national art scene by the 1960s. The art of the East Pakistani (now Bangladesh) painters had a tremendous impact on their counterparts in Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar who had yet to reach that mature understanding of the discipline. Artists such as Zainul Abedin had already bridged the gulf between folk art and contemporary art.

Mansur Rahi, a student of Zainul Abedin became one of the pioneer teachers at Karachi School of Art



This pg: (clockwise from top) Guljee - incorporated calligraphy in his work; Ahmed Parvez - an uncompromising professional and a spiritual mentor to the younger generation; Bashir Mirza.

Opp pg: painting by Ahmed Parvez.



where his pedagogic influence on the young watercolorists heralded an aquarelle revival in the 1980's. Rahi became a faithful exponent of analytical cubism and developed his oeuvre under the influence of this style.

The Lahore Art Group were committed to modern art but before it could become a cohesive movement its activities were disrupted by political interference. After a gap when they returned to mainstream art activity, their will had been blunted and the spirit lost.

The 60s was also a time that saw American cultural propaganda flood the Pakistani urban centres. Films and publications were freely shown and distributed and media was widely used to promote United States' first art movement, Abstract Expression. Through visiting exhibitions and art historians, artists received considerable exposure to abstract styles from America.

Ali Imam

Among the Lahore Artists Group, Ali Imam became an important art educationist in Karachi. He was the architect of the modern curriculum of The Central Institute Of Arts And Crafts. In the 1970s he founded the Indus Gallery, to create a buyer's culture in the city where his student and peers could sell art and make it a viable career. With all these preoccupations Ali Imam's painting career took a back seat. Although he seldom paints, his work remains in great demand. His technique transforms a realistic form into an impressionistic image. Treated with outer layers of white pigment, an even tone of subdued colours defines the costumes and features. He prefers to paint groups of bulky humans in stiff postures.

Ahmed Parvez

Ahmed Parvez transferred his restless energy on the canvas with a burst of colour and exploding forms. His early figurative art turned abstract during the decade he spent in England from 1955 to 1964. There he became inspired by Alan Davie but developed his own distinct style. His exhibitions were well received in London. On the occasion of his show of abstract miniatures, the critic for the Guardian wrote "The mood is near Klee as it is to the jewelled ambience of an Eastern potentate" Ahmed Parvez influenced the Karachi art scene in the 1970's both with his personality and

art. An uncompromising professional, he was a spiritual mentor to the younger generation and a fierce critic of his peers. His volatile, impatient nature brought him tragedy in personal life which drove him to ill health and an early death. Ahmed Parvez continued to paint till the end and has left behind a large body of work. In 1978, a year before his death, he was recognised as one of the country's outstanding artists and awarded the Pride of Performance.

Anwar Jalal Shemza

A 1947 graduate of the Mayo School of Art, Anwar Jalal Shemza was also among the pioneer modernists. He settled in England but continued to hold regular exhibitions in Pakistan. Geometric patterns entwined with forms inspired from Arabic calligraphy in vibrant colours dominated his later work.



Opp pg: (from top to bottom, works of) Khalid Iqbal; Sheherezade Alam; Ather Jamal. This pg: Samina Mansuri.

Guljee

It was his exposure to Action Painting that motivated Guljee to turn to gestural painting. Over the years he incorporated Arabic calligraphy and textured his works with gold leaf and lapis. His latest most prestigious commission was for the Shah Faisal Mosque in Islamabad.

Sadequain

A rare visionary, Sadequain was able to bridge the gulf between the disparate groups in society. At the age of 31 his work won recognition at the 1961 Paris Biennale. Sadequain had a prolific career and much of his work is displayed in public places. Like Diego Rivera, he celebrated the role of the proletariat. His early mural, based on the dignity of labour is housed in the Mangla Dam, near Islamabad. Later he painted a mammoth ceiling for The Lahore Museum based on poet Iqbal's verses evoking the spirit of man to triumph over odds. While working on his second ceiling at the Frere Hall in Karachi, the painter took ill and died leaving the work incomplete. During his life Sadequain became a cult figure with a large following from all works of life.

Elongated human forms with bleeding pen-like fingers and nest-shaped head were central to his imagery. In the 70s he got nation-wide fame for his rendering of Quranic verses. Sadequain was one of the few artists who continuously received state support and was equally admired by the people. The very work that gave him a large following did not get critical acclaim. Despite the divided opinion, his influential position in art history cannot be denied. He came from a long line of master calligraphers and was perhaps ideally suited to bridge the gap between modernity and tradition. The content of his work has wider appeal, the early works addressed social evils and in the later decades Sadequain used the unifying spirit of calligraphy to appeal to the masses, who came in large numbers to see his exhibitions.

Shakir Ali

Shakir Ali held sway over the Pakistani modernists for two decades, both, with his work and his disposition. He was among the privileged few of his generation of painters who had first hand experience of Modern Art in Paris. After studying art at J. J. school of Art, he attended Slade School in London, then worked in Paris with Andre LHote before he went to Prague.

Shakir Ali began with a cubist preference and many of his themes borrowed from classical European myths like 'Europa and the Bull' and 'Leda and the Swan'. As his style evolved, he pared down the human form to sharp angles and took up red as a dominant colour. Many of his paintings feature birds which he looked upon as the symbol of personal freedom in a world of conventions. He did some pioneering work in Arabic calligraphy in the 60s, in which the alphabetic form is used as a linear design using colour and visual rhythm to lend it a modern interpretation.

Bashir Mirza

Bashir Mirza, a student of Shakir Ali made a name with his pen and ink series of portraits of the common folk of Pakistan. He was also responsible for setting up the first private gallery in Karachi.

His Lonely Girl series were completed and exhibited in the 70s and won him a permanent place in Pakistan's art history.

Bashir Mirza always treated drawing as a separate discipline which gave his painting and drawings a singular character. He became the only artist to turn into a diplomat when he was sent as a cultural attaché to Australia. Gifted with an intuitive sense of design and colour, central to his oeuvre is the female form with a colour field for a backdrop. At different periods of his career the style has varied. In the *Lonely Girl*, each smooth layer of colour blends into the other in gentle tones. In his Acrylic Series almost a textural violence takes place as bold expressionistic strokes clash and craft images.

Jamil Naqsh

Jamil Naqsh studied miniature at NCA but turned to modernism after his exposure to Shakir Ali's early cu-



appropriated images from ancient Indus Valley and Taxila. Before her accidental death in 1986, Shahzada had been working on a series of mountain landscapes which displayed a latent surreal quality.

Colin David

Op-Art served as a visual device in Colin David's paintings. The black and white background design with its linear optical illusion forms an ever-changing relationship with the form, which was either a nude or clothed figure. It is always the dynamic 'patterned' space rather than the form that holds the interest of the viewer. The nude became the painter's forte and in later series it was set against verdant landscapes.

bist paintings. Naqsh, a consummate draughtsman, began to paint nudes to which he added pigeons in subsequent years and this became the topic of his visual treatise. In the 70s his technique was redolent of pointillism, today he prefers to work with acrylics on paper with skilful washes creating images from multi-faceted planes.

Leila Shahzada

Primarily self taught, Leila Shahzada's oeuvre resonates with the surrealist. Her 'Driftmood Series' which introduced her as a serious talent were inspired by the shapes of driftwood found on the beaches of Karachi, which the painter's inner vision had turned into flame like shapes.

Later as her interest in the mysticism grew she



LANDSCAPE & PORTRAIT ARTISTS

The Landscape Painting of Punjab was making its presence felt in the late 60s and early 70s. It can be seen as a vital link with the rural sensibility of a people who relate strongly with their land. Among its distinguished exponents are included Khalid Iqbal, Saeed Akhtar, Ghulam Rasul, Zulqarnain Haider and Ijazul Hasan later joined by Zubeida Javed, Shahid Jalal, Nazir Ahmed and Pirzada Najamul Hasan.

The formalistic values of portrait paintings never gained their pre-independent significance and only a few painters adopted this genre. In the early years Nagi

and later Saeed Akhtar, Guljee, Eqbal Mehdi and Athar Jamal made a contribution.



*Sculptures by Shahid Sajjad.
Top: a bronze relief; right: wood
carving. Sajjad was inspired by the
years he spent with the hill tribes of
Bangladesh.*

ART & AWARENESS IN 80s

The formalism of modern art gave way to a voice for social change, as the pioneers passed the mantle on to the next generation. The artist of the late 70s and 80s was a citizen of a changed world. To assert their cultural identity they continued to establish indigenous references in their work, and at the same time gained validity as dynamic members of the world. International concerns, like the nuclear holocaust, the Vietnam war and social equality became their content. Nahid and Salima Hashmi used their canvases to express their concerns.

A growing awareness of an Islamic identity emerged after the Islamic Summit in Lahore in the early 1970s. Pan-Islamism made artists define Arabic calligraphy as an element of the common religious aesthetic link.

Artist Anwer Saeed frequently depicts mysticism in serene scenes of deep blue, which he feels can offer an escape from terrestrial troubles of materialism.

Zahoorul Akhlaq, whose talent was nurtured by none other than Shakir Ali who looked upon him as the son he never had, at his first major solo show at

the Karachi Arts Council in 1969, exhibited multi-dimensional images of a nuclear cloud encased in a mathematical grid. These paintings combined the best of both formal and global concerns. His later work was based on violence against women.

Widely travelled Akhlaque taught in Ankara where he investigated the aesthetic possibilities of Islamic motifs and patterns. Presently living in Canada, Zahoor continues to look at the Mughal art heritage in a contemporary context.

In Iqbal Hussain's realism 'the woman of the night' is not glamorised nor dehumanised but shown in her most unpretentious state, relaxing and chatting between clients. In revealing the human face of these women he seems to question their rejection by the majority.

In their subtle palette and images, the paintings and prints of Mehr Afroze address the modern citizens of her country, to remind them through symbols borrowed from their glorious secular past that they are not just a creature of this plastic age of consumerism, but heirs of a vibrant past with a powerful legacy of respect for humanity and environment.

As the artist found a new social space and moved beyond the concerns of self to the concerns of the collective, the role was changed from the chronicler of the 60s and 70s to an activist in the 80s. Their new found confidence made the artists push the established boundaries of art.

A Watercolour Painting revival was initiated by the alumni of The Karachi School of Art. The oldest art school of the city was founded by sculptor Rabia Zuberi and her sister, Hajra Mansur, Pakistan's only exponent of Chughtai style wash painting.

Athar Jamal, Ghalib Baqar, Najam Pirzada and Abdul Hayee were among the prolific aquarellists behind it. They have shown a preference for landscape of the urban and coastal scenes except Athar Jamal who has a special talent for portraits.

Qudsia Nisar, a student of Anna Molka Ahmed opted for the non-figurative genre and established her self as the pioneer abstract watercolorist of the country.

Experimental exploration of coloured earth as pigment by Riffat Alvi expanded the existing repertoire. Handmade paper embedded with plant material became Saba Hussain's substrate. She also incorporated Japanese calligraphic style strokes to depict classical musical 'ragas' and the dance movements.

Calligraphy was appropriated both as a cultural and religious icon. Modernists like Rashid Arshad,



Zahoorul Akhlaq and Jamil Naqsh, while making it central to their compositions, took away its meaning and exploited the design potential of the form. The widespread patronage of Arabic calligraphy however did turn out to be a watershed in the understanding and development of calligraphic styles.

ART IN THE 90s

The role of the artist in the 1990s is in a process of redefinition due to the fast changing reality. Realism has replaced idealism, in centres of education as well as in the work place. Pure knowledge is bartered for the functional. And the only dreams people dream are centred around consumerism fed through the electronic media. Nurtured in this environment the artist feels he has no popular commodity to trade unless he compromises himself to the popular creed of the day. With such feelings of conflict and alienation the artist becomes either a shaman of lost causes or trader of fads.

As formalism lost its hierarchy it became a tool to address real issues. Women painters like Samina Mansuri and Sumaya Durrani have made the complex gender issues their inspiration.

The canvases of Moeen Faruqi and Quddus Mirza are eloquent with symbolism. Shazia Sikander, Fasihullah Ahsan, while exploring the legacy of Miniature Painting have broken away from time honoured purism and vitalised this discipline by adding a new dimension.

Sabir Nazar paints folk tales in a colourful illustrative style to evoke popular art. Some artists in the wake of postmodernism have turned to Truck Art and Bazaar Art and explored its icons to bridge the gulf between high and low art.

While painting remained the most popular discipline, few artists have chosen to explore other art forms.

SCULPTORS

Shahid Sajjad is without doubt the leading sculptor of the country. His forte is wood carving but he has also created works in bronze. He has two bronze murals to his credit, the most recent one for the newly opened Maritime Museum in Karachi.

Sajjad celebrates the basic instincts of man in a primitive vocabulary with wood, inspired by the years he spent with the hill tribes of Bangladesh.

Trained in the school of classical realism, Asfar Madad Naqvi dominated the field of sculpture in the 60s with his mythological friezes and sculptures. He created countless portrait busts of literary, social and political leaders.

Anjum Ayaz emerged in the 70s as a modern non-figurative sculptor. He works in marble and stone and his forms sometimes are informed by the shape of traditional tools.

Amin Guljee is the only modern Pakistani sculptor who used uncut semi precious stones for the textural enhancement of his assemblages. Faces, limbs entwined with strange objects to become anthropomorphic creatures in three dimensional metal. On the cusp

of primitive and surrealistic, his art evokes mixed reactions.

More recently Durriya Kazi has explored popular art references in her metal pieces, borrowing from the iconography of popular soft plastic toys with their stereotypical forms.

Loyal to the vessel tradition, potter Shehrazade Alam in her work assimilates the modern and the traditional. While she employs the sophisticated techniques of production her forms allude to time honoured utilitarian ware of this region.

Mian Salahuddin's connection is more sculptural. He borrows the shapes of folk clay toys and casts them in a modern mould with exaggerated features. Objects from a folk potter's workshop fascinate him and he assembles them into murals in reliefs. Salahuddin's work is characterised by a rustic character with a gritty surface and organic coloured glazes.

Talat and Dabir, another husband and wife team, have also done experimental work in ceramic sculpture and pottery.

Modernism - a domain of the West?

In the early post 1947 decades the artist adopted Modernism not as perpetuation of the First World hegemony but as a metaphor for change and economic freedom. It has become clear that in reality modernism is not a global language or a global movement but the domain of the first world in the world art bazaar. Artists often see it used as a two-sided weapon to cut down to size any modern art of non-western origin in the global market.

Indian Art Historian Geeta Kapur, effectively argues in her writings *When was modernism in India/Third world*, "The formal logic, the stylistic dovetailing, and the contending ideologies of modernism were never systematically investigated in the sometimes fortuitous, sometime passionate syncretism of contemporary Indian art"

Souza, the founder of the Progressive Artists Group, himself confessed that it was the dynamism of the images of the work of the Paris School, which they saw in magazine reproductions, which attracted them before even being aware of the underlying ideologies. This reiterates the point that the modernism that emerged in this region is not a derivative art but a stylistic adaptation used to articulate the experiences of a society in flux and in need for a dynamic expression.

In Pakistan the painters frequently borrowed classicised images of miniature paintings like Picasso did from Greek art and synthesised it with the grammar of modernism. Even if they were inspired by a European painter, it remained as a point of departure.

It was the first generation, taught by the pioneer modernists, that initiated a break from the strait-jacket of formalism to deal with the reality of their lived experiences. The society was no longer being viewed in stereotypes or idealised images, but as an evolving nation faced with the challenges of transition, from a colony to a democracy. ■