

Foreward

If I were to identify a single factor that turned into a catalyst for the Takhti Project, it would have to be the outrage felt at the senseless shooting of Zahoorul Akhlaq and his daughter Jehanara two years ago. The grief ran deep, even among those who did not know the two very well, many felt it was an assault against the entire art community and both Zahoor the friend, and Zahoor the artist were mourned all over the country and abroad.

In an attempt to come to terms with the irreplaceable loss, Sheherezade Alam on the first death anniversary of her husband and daughter launched efforts to conserve and document Zahoor's work and in this process the Zahoorul Akhlaq Collective Trust was formed.

During her visit to Karachi she sought members of the art community urging them to join hands with the Trust. The Takhti Project evolved out of several such meetings with Sheherezade in which a project was envisaged that would address issues of concern within the art community. It was felt that in the absence of national shows, top priority should be given to an exhibition that would showcase their work collectively. Bringing Pakistani artists from all over the country together. A catalogue on the occasion would provide much needed documentation of their work and if possible its scope would be widened through an outreach educational program for school children and seminar on the Art of Pakistan.

With not even seed money available from the Trust, this ambitious project seemed a distant dream, however a dream worth chasing. Realizing the need for such a venture to initiate a sharing of art and ideas, a small group of individuals from the Karachi decided to undertake this daunting task.

The Takhti format was selected for the paintings for the exhibition after much deliberation. The main reason was its link with Zahoor's oeuvre. The artist seemed to have enjoyed using the size and material of the wooden tablet. The Takhti's traditional place in Pakistan's cultural history was too strong to be ignored, for many citizens it forms the first bond with the genteel art of *kushkhatti*. The third more practical reason was the size that everyone felt would be easy to complete for the artist, within the given time.

Once the Takhti Paintings began to come in, we realized that the takhti shape also presented an aesthetic problem. The individualized way in which each artist assimilated it in the work has contributed to diversity within the collection and enriched it.

The Takhti Project has been a voluntary project with many individuals giving precious time from their busy professional lives, some even at the cost of temporarily neglecting their work when the project needed them more.

Like any other project it has had its share of skeptics. Over the last twelve months, the project became like a moving caravan, attracting people who were keen to make a contribution to the arts while others, who ran out of enthusiasm, left.

With no road map to follow, the Curatorial Committee became proud pioneers of a project faced with the logistical challenge of distributing takhties to almost 200 artists in all major cities of Pakistan, Dubai, Sharjah, Canada and the USA.

Sometimes to get them back in time turned out to be even more problematical. To accomplish all this on a shoe-string budget has made us realize that a will is more important than funds.

Today this exercise has given us a database and experience that the Takhti Committee will be happy to share with anyone wanting to undertake a similar project.

When urgent messages had to be sent we understood the true value of the telephone and the email. These were mostly sent out to our ever helpful out- of- station coordinators like Kaleem Khan in Quetta, Mobina Zuberi in Islamabad, Ayesha Noorani and Nazish Attaullah in Lahore and Sheherezade Alam in North America.

Looking at the year in retrospective, our faith in humanity has been reaffirmed more often than the times we have faced disappointment.

When we were low on funds Quratulain Ahmed designed our logo gratis, others helped out with Takhti shipping costs.

The Curatorial Committee has tried to be inclusive but financial constraints did not allow us to involve more than two hundred artists. The priority has been to cover a cross section of the art community from all over the country and the major art educational institutions of the country.

Our many thanks to the participating artists and other members of the community including gallery owners, writers, designers, sponsors, bureaucrats and all those who have bought the Takhti tickets. Each one has helped this project to reach its completion.

The Takhti Committee is particularly grateful to Mr. Jamil Hussain of FujiFilms Pakistan (Pvt) Ltd for his generosity in sponsoring this catalogue

We deeply appreciate, renowned architect Habib Fida Ali's magnanimous gesture in designing the Takhti Exhibition.

The Takhti Project is dedicated to devoted teachers of art, in small and big towns all over the country who courageously nurture the creative talent in this time of growing intolerance.

It is they who have played a vital role in making it possible for us to stand collectively and celebrate the Spirit of the Art of Pakistan.

Nilofur Farrukh

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2001- Karachi, Pakistan.