

Figurative Painters of Pakistan (1980's and 1990's)

“Art in Pakistan”

BFA-IV (Visual Arts)

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Figurative Painting in Pakistan (1980's and 1990's)

- ▶ Art in Pakistan has went through different phases of transformation. In the post-Independence period artists remained in search of their identity and represented their connection with the socio-cultural life of the land. Whereas, in the 60's and 70's art Institutions played important role in terms of widening the scope of art education in Pakistan. Few celebrated artists like Shakir Ali, Zubeida Agha, Anna Molka Ahmed and Khalid Iqbal were privileged to receive higher education from the west, their exposure broadens their vision. Being art educationists and practicing artists they played vital role in terms of influencing the coming generations of artists in Pakistan. Three schools of thought emerged in the subsequent years. Abstraction based on the principle of cubism under the influence of Shakir Ali, Expressionism under the influence of Anna Molka Ahmed and Realism under the influence of Khalid Iqbal.
- ▶ Figurative and Landscape paintings were mostly practiced by the younger generation of artists with freedom of expression. But the time period of Zia-ul-Haq's regime with focus on Islamization demonstrated unfavorable circumstances for art activities. Figurative art received censorious response from the Government, however Landscape painting, portrait paintings, calligraphic art progressed under strict policies applied by Zia-ul-Haq.
- ▶ Though, a number of artists worked in the genre of Figurative painting, but the Promising artists of the field who successfully established their individual style with focus on their own ideology includes Colin David, Saeed Akhtar and Iqbal Hussain mainly in the time period of 1980's and 1990's. These artists with command on their subject, technique, compositional understanding and expression left strong mark on the next generation of artists.

Colin David

(1937-2008)



Colin David (1937)

- ▶ President's Pride of Performance winning painter and art-educationist, Colin David was one of the most celebrated artist of Pakistan. Rather than getting himself involved in art politics or becoming the leader of some lobby, he always preferred to keep himself busy in teaching art classes and creating on canvas, landscape, cityscape, portrait or figurative paintings. As a result, people acknowledge his services for the promotion of art in Pakistan and recognize him as a dexterous master of art.
- ▶ Colin David became aware of his interest in art from his childhood. Interestingly, when he held his pencil for sketching any object, he found himself poor in drawing. As he puts it, "*while studying at Cathedral School, I was always punished by my art teachers*". Realizing that punishment was meant for his betterment, he started to concentrate on improving his knowledge of the subject. "*It was very shameful for me that I was weak in my favorite subject*", said Colin David recalling his school days.
- ▶ At the time of his education in Forman Christian College , he found himself greatly interested in learning painting techniques. "*In those days, film posters had much attraction for me. At leisure time, rather than taking part in games, I used to see those posters. Film stars were my favorite subject. I enjoyed in drawing and coloring them realistically according to my own aesthetic sense*". Besides doing this, he remained in search of some ustad.

Colin David (1937)

- ▶ Fortunately, Shakir Ali at that time was settled in Lahore and started teaching drawing classes at Mayo School of Art, engaged himself in art promotional activities and opened his studio's doors for serious learners of art. Colin David availed the opportunity of studying drawing there. And in only three months, his growing interest for the subject led him to acquire proper academic art education.
- ▶ In 1956, he got admission at the Department of Fine Arts at Punjab University set up by Anna Molka. He was amongst the first batch of boys who sought admission in the Fine Arts Department. He was then studying art under the guidance of Khalid Iqbal. In 1960, he was awarded M.A. Fine Arts Degree with a Gold Medal. The same year, he was taken as a Lecturer in the faculty of his alma mater. After achieving these goals he displayed his works along with the works of Sufi Waqar. At that time, he was expressing in the genres of cityscape, landscape, still life and portraiture. Mostly painted in realistic idiom, his works reflected his interest in highlighting socio-cultural life around him in Lahore.
- ▶ Khalid Iqbal's inspiration and Anna Molka Ahmed's guidance pushed him to seek admission at the Slade School of Art, London in 1961, where he would meet Sir William Coldstream, the father of Modern Realism in England.

Colin David (1937)

- ▶ During those years at London, he looked upon the golden age Spanish portraits by Diego Velasquez (1599-1660); the ballerina compositions of Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and the Surrealist ambiance of Salvador Dali (1904-1989); these aspects have been prevalent in his work, as unintentional inspiration, within his compositions of portraits and figures.
- ▶ From this vision-broadening trip, he came back in 1962 and resumed his teaching job at the University of the Punjab, Lahore.
- ▶ Even before going to London for higher education he painted realistically just closes to his later work, with his interest in composition being predominant. Paintings of Degas, Toulouse Lautrec and Ben Shahn alongside Japanese woodcuts also influenced him greatly. In art, Colin David had already demonstrated his expertise in drawing according to the conventional rules of art. At this stage he was keen to be known as a painter like Shakir Ali and Khalid Iqbal. To achieve this goal, he enthusiastically started his painting work in figurative forms of expression.
- ▶ Thematically, the principal subject matter of Colin's new work was the life of a young woman. For him she was the most beautiful creation of God on earth. The females characterized by him were all a proud part of the modern world. His work celebrated modernity.

Colin David (1937)

- ▶ Therefore, rather indulging in the politics of gender representations, he concentrated more on studying and painting her as she had appeared aesthetically in the realistic form, or, as she should naturally be according to his fame of conceptual understanding. Interestingly, she was shown as if she didn't know of her becoming phenomenal character of Colin's volume of pictorial fables/accounts, which discussed her age, personality, beauty, modesty, purity, chastity, mood and physical appeal in an artistically designed environment of visual sensations. He designed his compositions with unusual perspective which does not exist in nature.
- ▶ In 1965, Colin joined National College of Arts. His focus remained on the same subject, he was curious to know more truth about the female form and its realistic and surrealistic associations with other life and still-life forms or objects. In his created impressions every object on micro and macro levels was an essential part of the painterly designed visual whole. For instance, the bottle metaphorically speaks of many things in his evolving codification system. It was full of spirits or empty. It was labeled or unlabeled according to the dramatic situation and mood of other characters. On a geometrically well-conceived, constructed and decorated stage. Its mysterious optical appearance always had something of metaphorical importance. Particularly, like the illusionist black and white patterns in Colin's paintings (inspired by Op Art), the bottle had many interrelated things to reveal about the case of self-absorbed female figure which was shown moderately experiencing day's social drama and night's existential conditions.

Colin David (1937-2008)

- ▶ It was not only the bottle that talked this way, Colin's other objects too had what was subjectively desired while composing them together. For instance, in the romantic environment of a painting, objects and characters like the full moon, illuminated landscape, a barren tree, turned-face lonely lady or open book could be viewed and highlighted as metaphorical suggestions or fascinations of spatial, architectonic and humanistic interrelations.
- ▶ As far as the philosophy of colors is concerned he has been through different phases such as the black and white phase, grey phase, brown phase. In the words of Colin David:

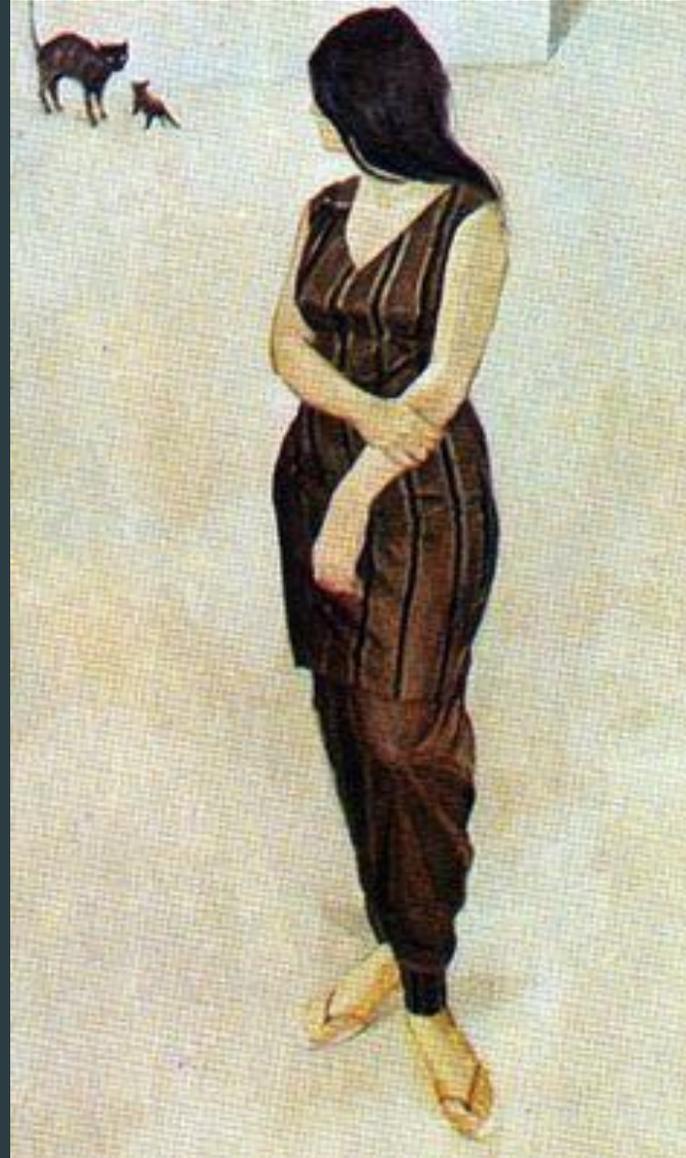
“In the 60's I went through more realistic colors. In the 70's I went through the black and white phase, the 80's saw me going through a brown phase, and in the 90's I was more liberal with greens, mauves and blacks”.

- ▶ With his focus on figures or objects, Colin David constructed compositions very effectively by dividing space in such a manner that large flat area left in the canvas, supports to the subject matter by developing interrelationship of the forms with each other.
- ▶ During the 1980s, under the Islamization ideology of Gen Zia, art and especially figurative art was brutally discouraged, compelling many bigwigs to adopt the genre of calligraphy, landscape and portrait painting. David did not compromise in these unfavorable circumstances and carried on painting in his unique figurative style, which often displayed the purity of nudes.

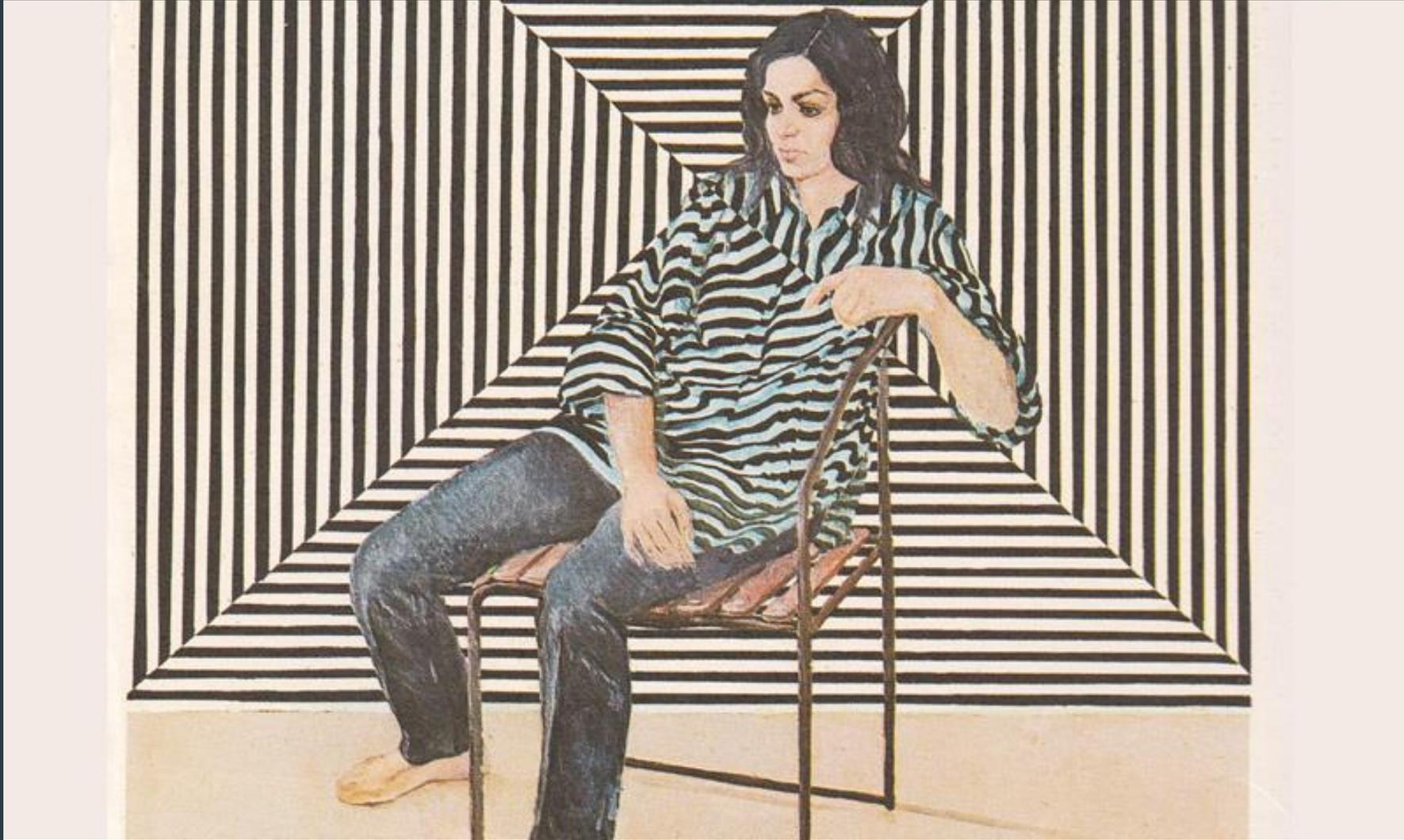
Conclusion

- ▶ He was respected for his straightforwardness in life, dedication to teaching and mastery over his work. His canvases not only reflected a skillful hand, but also suggested the presence of an intelligent mind that was able of transcribe reality with minimal means.
- ▶ In the words of Quddus Mirza: *“Like any other artist, Colin David’s work evolved in many phases, but a constant motif of his work was his focus on the female figure. In a hostile environment and unpleasant circumstances, he kept painting nudes, even though he could not always exhibit”*, he further adds during an interview, *“Colin David defined drawing, not as a method of copying nature, but a practice to develop mind and eye coordination. For him art making was a cognitive act. He practiced painting for self expression rather than making it into a lucrative business”*
- ▶ His natural flair to denote the contours of the body and the impact of space in small delicate variations of colors and tones was unmatched. At one stage of his life he used the elements of Op Art, but those were appropriated, assimilated and transformed in his later year’s works.
- ▶ His work brought fresh breeze of modernity into the art arena of Pakistan and provoked a new dimension of expression which left strong impression on the younger generation of artists.

Zara



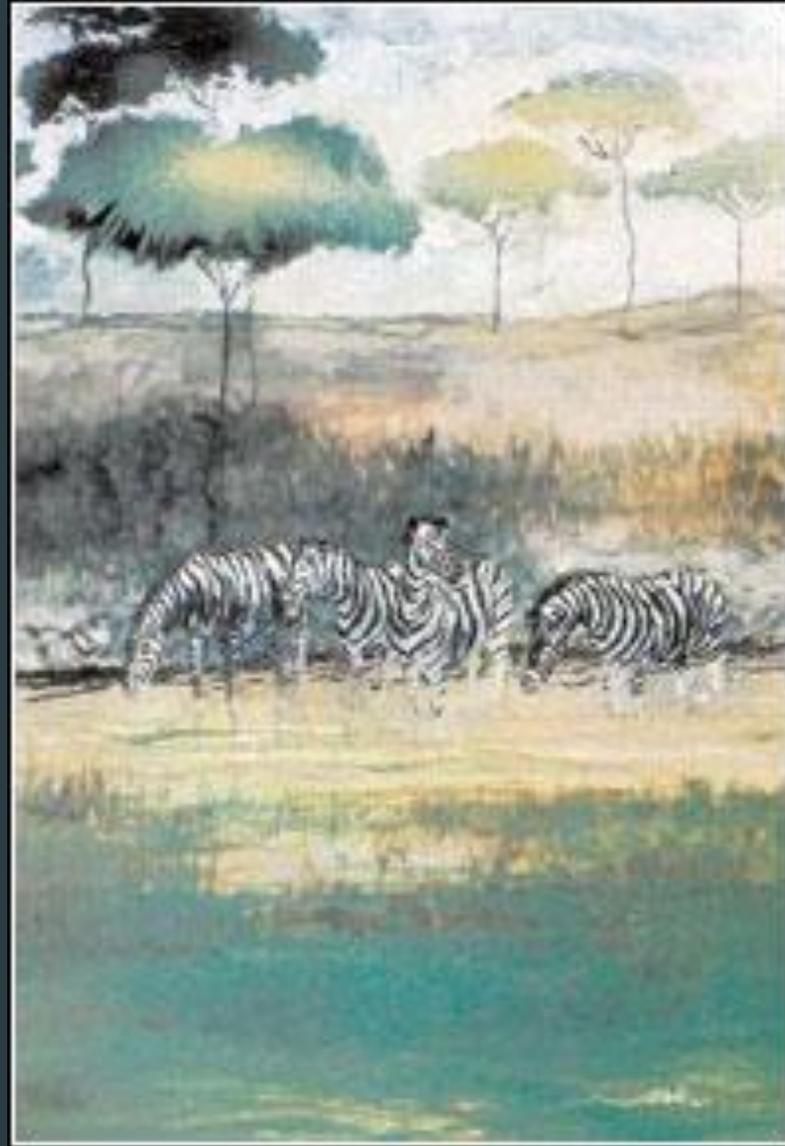
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Girl Reading



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Still Lives reflecting his sense of special compositions



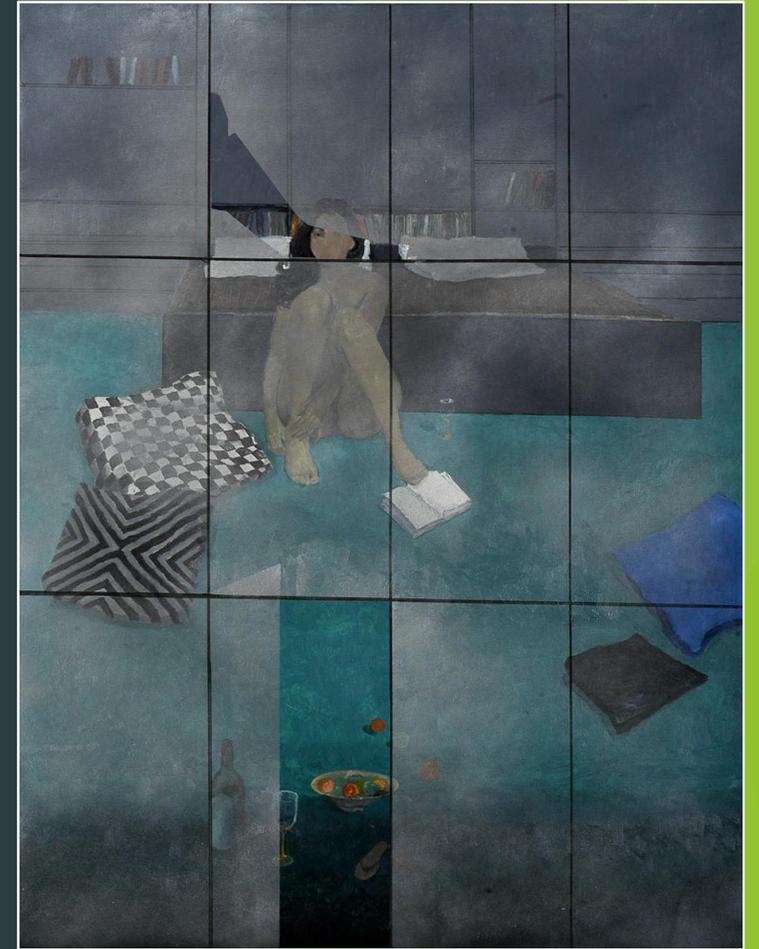
Figure with a Bottle



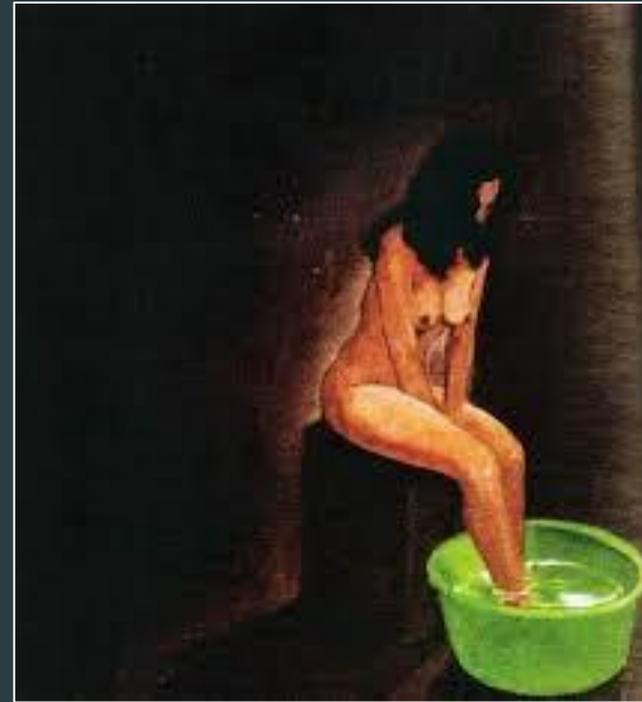
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Compositions with Nude Figures



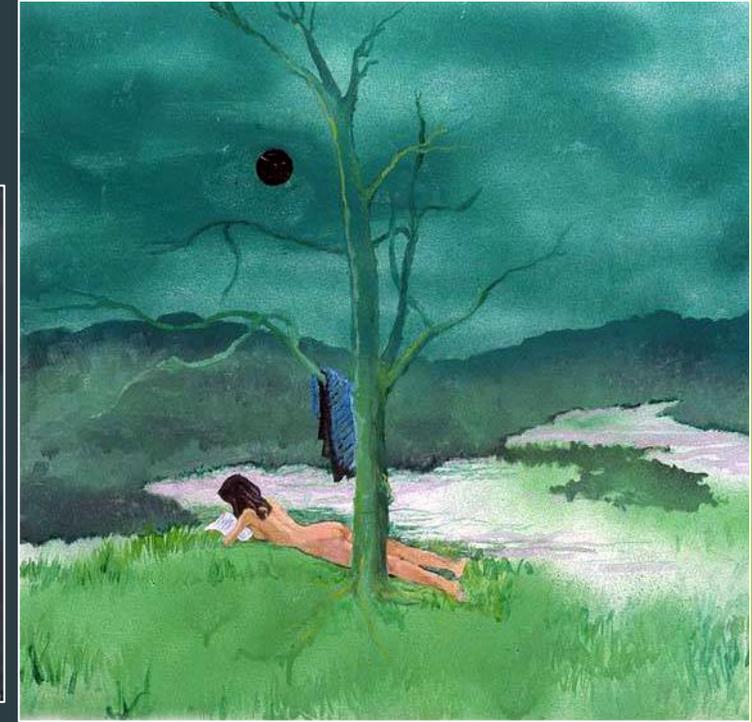
Compositions with Nude Figures



Rukhsana with Karen



Landscape with Nude figures



Landscape with Nude figures



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Saeed Akhtar

(b. 1938)



Saeed Akhtar (b.1938)

- ▶ Saeed Akhtar (b. 1938), is an accomplished portrait and figurative painter of Pakistan. This immensely skillful and creative artist in his artistic journey went through different phases of creative expressions stretching from commissioned to imaginative versions of his subject. A master craftsman and an innovator—Saeed Akhtar is to Pakistan what Michelangelo was to the Sistine Chapel. He imagines beautiful women and horses, gives them shape and texture and brings them to life on his canvas.
- ▶ He received Presidents' Award for Pride of Performance and Sitara-e-Imtiaz from the Government of Pakistan.
- ▶ His first encounter with art collection at the Command and Staff College Quetta inspired him to become an artist. The collection was comprised of portraits of senior officers of the army, war paintings and landscapes, but the painting of Quaid-e-Azam made by Hal Bevan Pitman caught his interest. He decided to enter the art world for formal learning, his maternal grandfather, a well-known calligrapher Yousaf Dehlavi advised him to join the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore (Now-a-days, National College of Arts).
- ▶ In 1960, he came to Lahore and got admission in the newly structured National College of Arts. He was lucky to be supervised by well-known and creative artists of the time including Late Ustad Bashir, Jamila Zaidi, Abbasi Abdi, Tauseef Ajaz and Muhammad Latif Chughtai. In 1964, he got a diploma from NCA.

Saeed Akhtar (b.1938)

- ▶ He is of the those artists who received commissioned projects from the Government. Shakir Ali initially recommended his name observing his innate creative abilities. One such example is Quaid-e-Azam's portrait commissioned for the building of National Assembly.
- ▶ On the bases of his artistic excellence, he was appointed as a Lecturer at National College of Arts, which gave him the opportunity to learn more. He was promoted as head of the Fine Arts Department in 1994 and Professor in 1995. Being an educationist, his vision broadens allowing him to experiment with liberation.
- ▶ His work reflects a creative genius inside him. His ethereal thoughts can be visualized through his artworks. The lively, expressive works reveal the inner feelings, influences, interests and his emotional state. He is an aspiring artist of diversified skills. Known as a figurative painter, his figures speaks the language of their own. Their body language and facial expressions are the basic unit of his works; he is a keen observer, who transforms the real images in his own way rendering them in a new manner in a specific style that is from real to surreal.
- ▶ He loves to exaggerate the contours of the body and facial expression of his subject and embellish them with more interesting details. The specific elements of light, colors, and textures in a particular atmosphere create a vision which then takes a form of drawing or painting. His artworks offered three dimensional as well as two dimensional forms in a skillfully detailed manner.

Saeed Akhtar (b. 1938)

- ▶ In the words of Saeed Akhtar *“Every human being is beautiful but what attracts me the most is the hair,”* says Akhtar. *“Hair is the most beautiful feature because the fluidity that it has no other feature of the human body can ever have”*. Besides being a painter of par- excellence, he also contributed immensely in the field of sculpture. He was an expert of sculpture before opting painting as a sole subject. As the conversation rolls, the importance of sculptures comes up. *“Most schools don’t teach sculpting anymore and unless you do not know how to make a sculpture you can’t learn how to paint portraits,”* says the artist.
- ▶ The energy with which his hand flows can be felt easily by viewing his artworks. The ordinary faces of men and women in his artworks are full of expressions. In his recent practice of the artist, smiling, alluring portraits of young women with high-bridged noses, big bright eyes and heavy ornaments reveal a new world of beauty but mostly in deep thought, making it a serious affair. Among the artworks one sees some turban wearing men with the stories of life on their faces.
- ▶ The importance of knowing anatomy is essential to him. It is very important for the artist to feel the dynamics of the face on clay and then translate them on the canvas. In the words of Saeed Akhtar. *“Paintings are all about creating an illusion but the sculpture is a reality. It is so real and tangible that people from different sects and religion have given it God-like reverence”*.

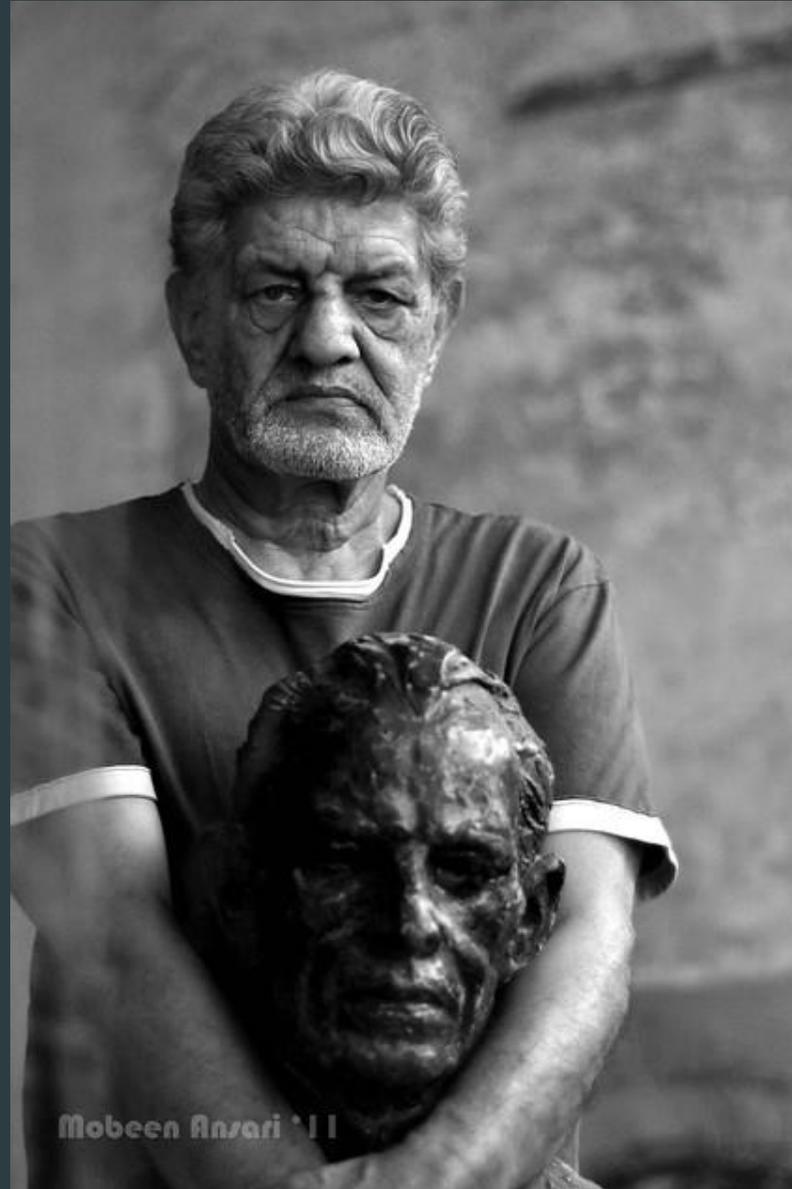
Saeed Akhtar (b. 1938)

- ▶ He says. “As I delved into the matter, I found out that the nose bone in Caucasians is a little higher than the bone in Africans and Far East Asians.” His observation solidified his belief that without knowing the anatomy properly, an artist can never paint accurately.
- ▶ However, while talking about his work Akhtar reveals, “The painting I am most proud of is a circular canvas and all I wanted to do was make two eyes in the center of it. I tried for three years to make something out of it but it wouldn’t work. Then one day, I started drawing lines and all of a sudden it turned out to be a man’s face concealed in a turban with only his eyes showing.”
- ▶ It is true that artists are very sensitive and fall in love easily. “We fall in love with beauty and our intentions are different,” continues Akhtar. “I have fallen in love with my own portrait.” There is a fine line between narcissism and benign admiration. As Akhtar fiercely flips through books to show his self-portraits, one realizes that there is nothing narcissistic about him. He is simply a man who is secure with himself and his environment.
- ▶ It is popularly known that Akhtar is color-blind and can’t see the colors red and green. It is remarkable for someone to not be able to see the two colors and yet create such beautiful blends and hues of the shade. “I may not be able to see the colors but I have learnt the theory of how they are made so whenever I want to use them. It’s very intuitive.”

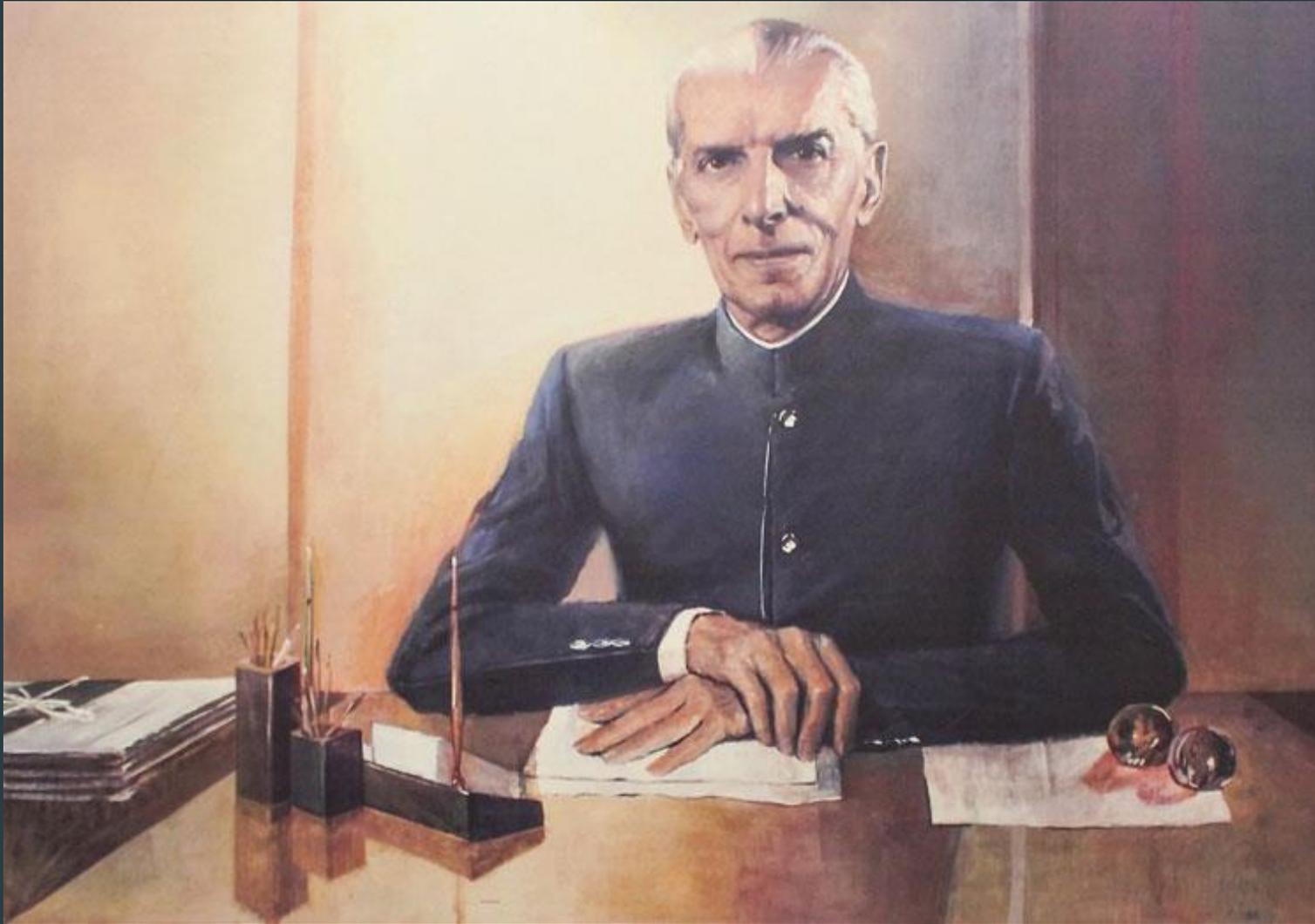
Saeed Akhtar (b. 1938)

- ▶ Akhtar remains cooped up his studio layering canvas after canvas with his creativity. “I love sketching. Even when I’m sitting all alone I start sketching just to see what all can I make.”
- ▶ His artworks are often exploratory with considerable emphasis on observation and composition. His line of work show energy, enthusiasm, and a sense of emotional appeal. He produces extremely subtle value that increases dynamic of his artworks resulting in high quality creations.
- ▶ Saeed has used a combination of dark and light shades of colors in each piece, which add texture and shapes and forms with shadows, and the shading bring depth in his work. His line work and shade help preserve the depth, texture and values that were seen in his drawings. The various shades used accurately depict the environment and more complex impressions. Other than colorful paintings the monochrome drawings have significant details that give extra dimensions to Saeed's work.

Saeed Akhtar with the sculpture of Quaid-e-Azam



Commissioned Portrait of Quaid-e-Azam



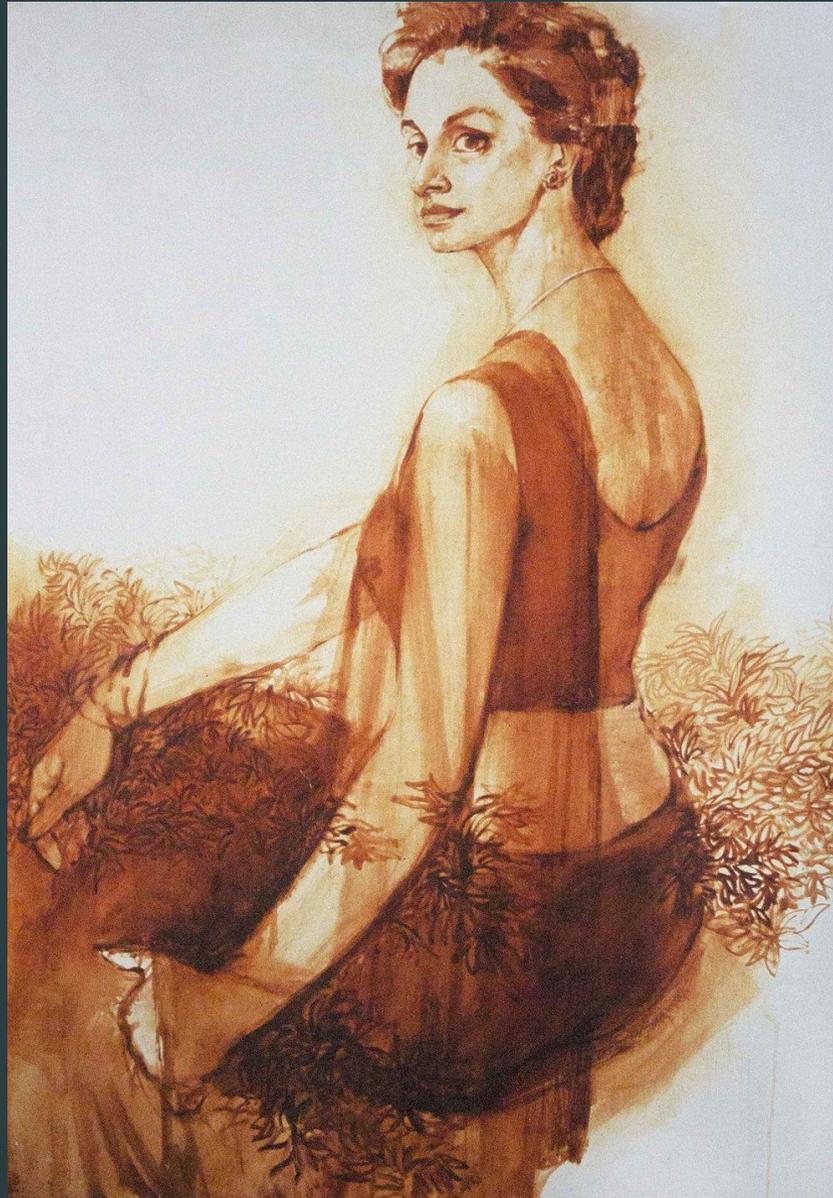
Commissioned Portraits



Commissioned Portraits



Commissioned Portraits



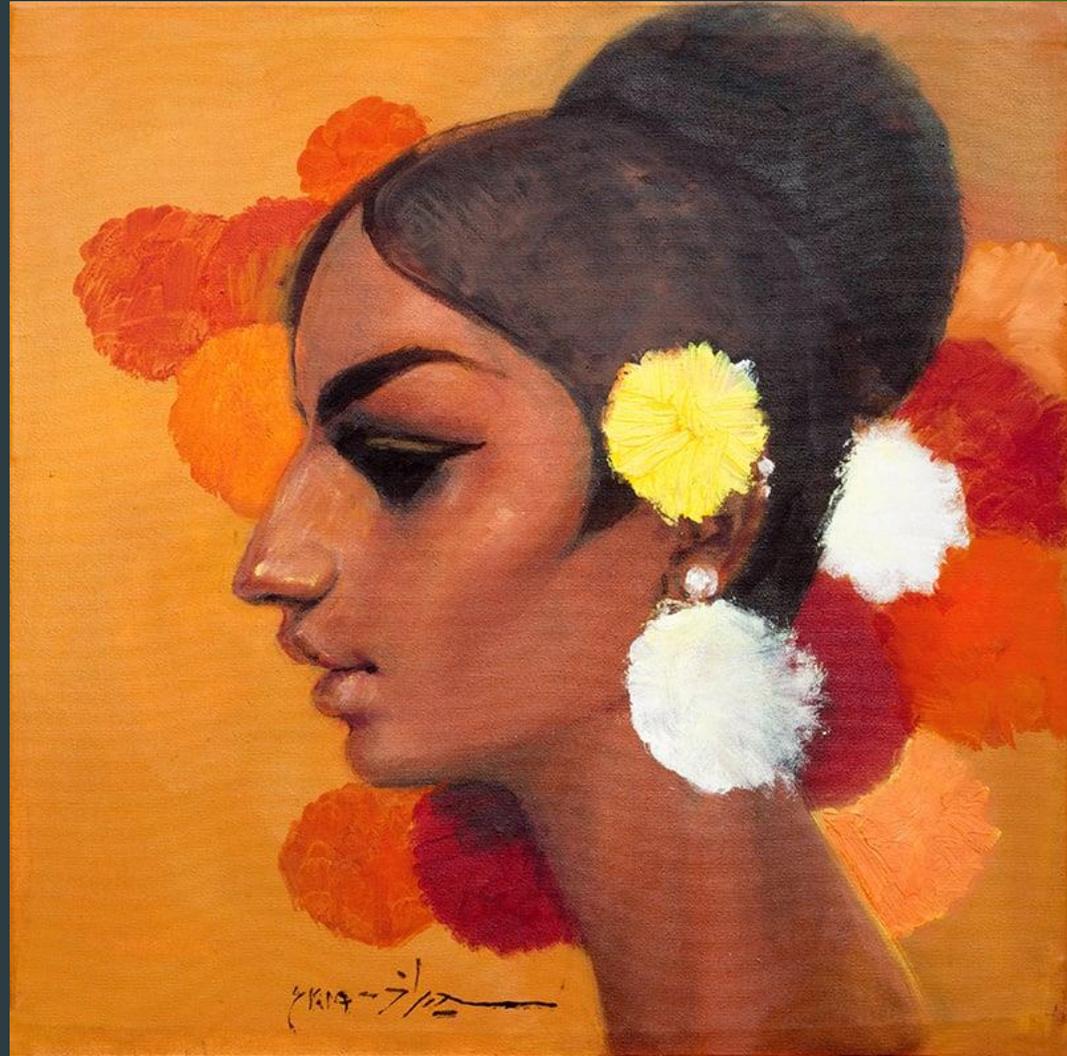
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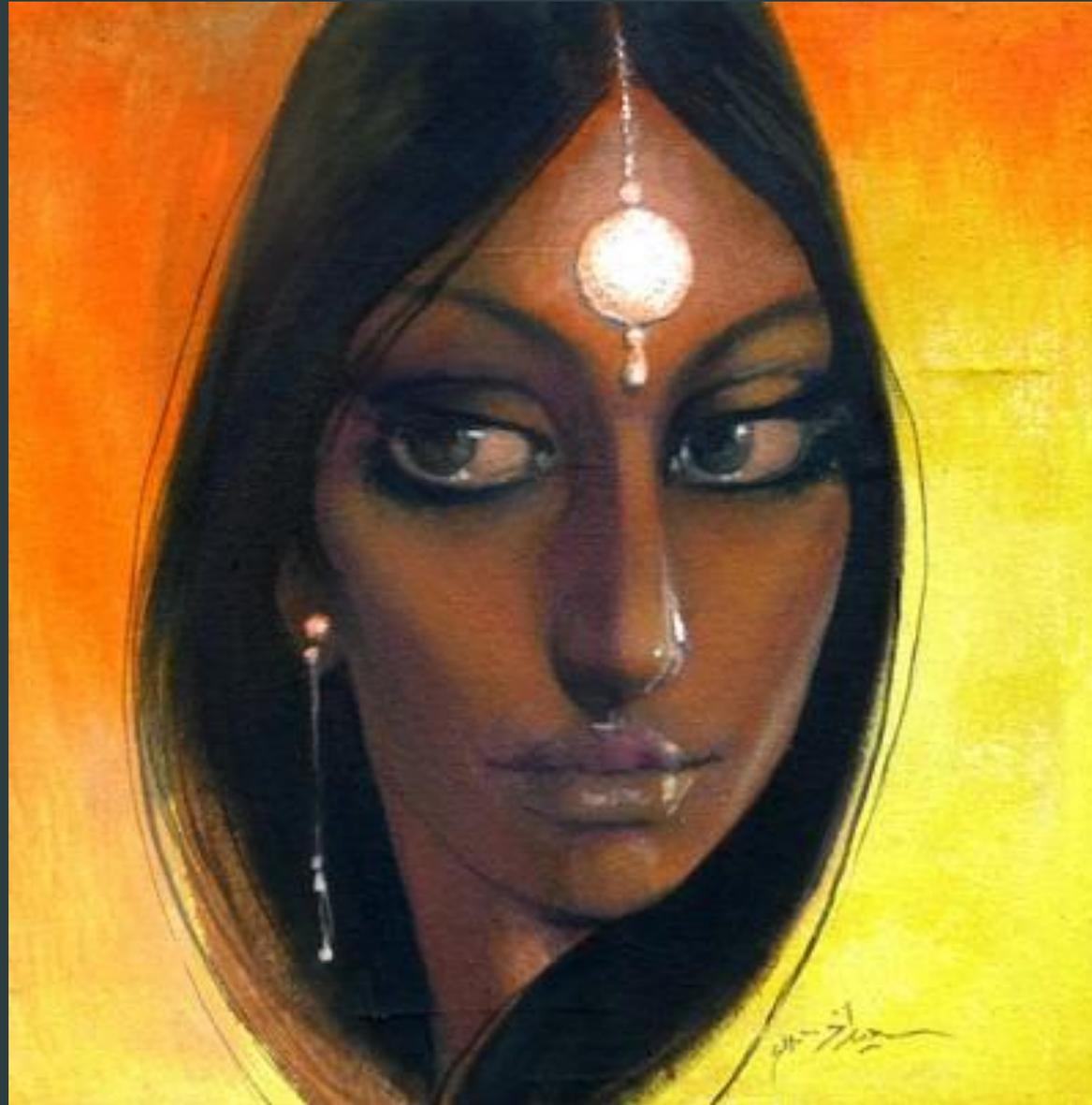
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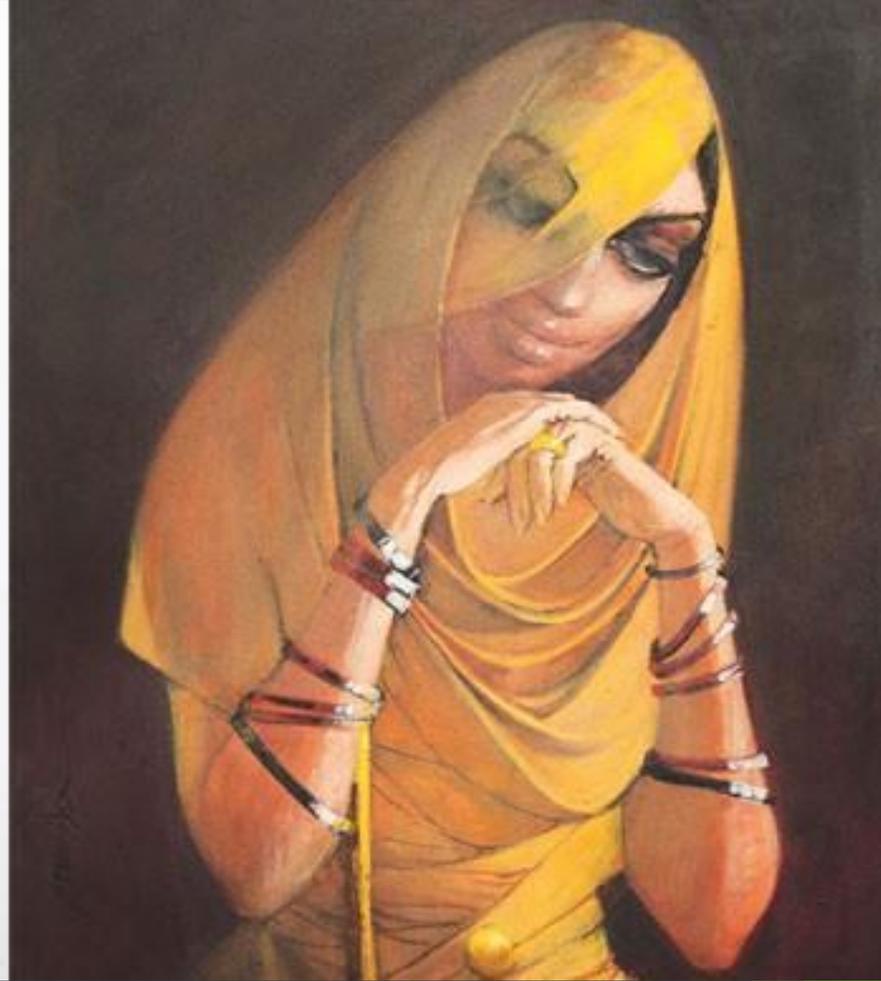
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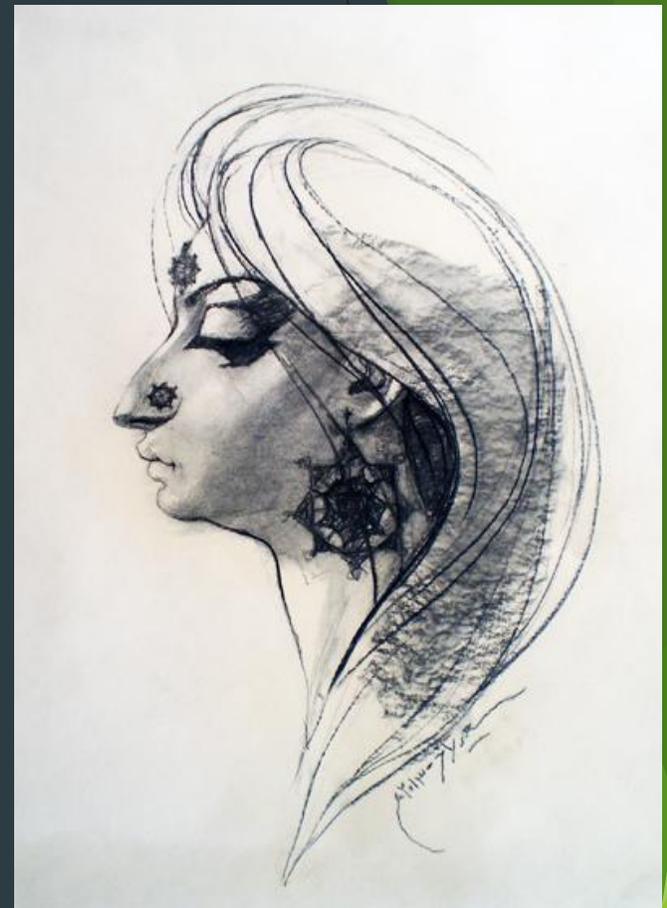
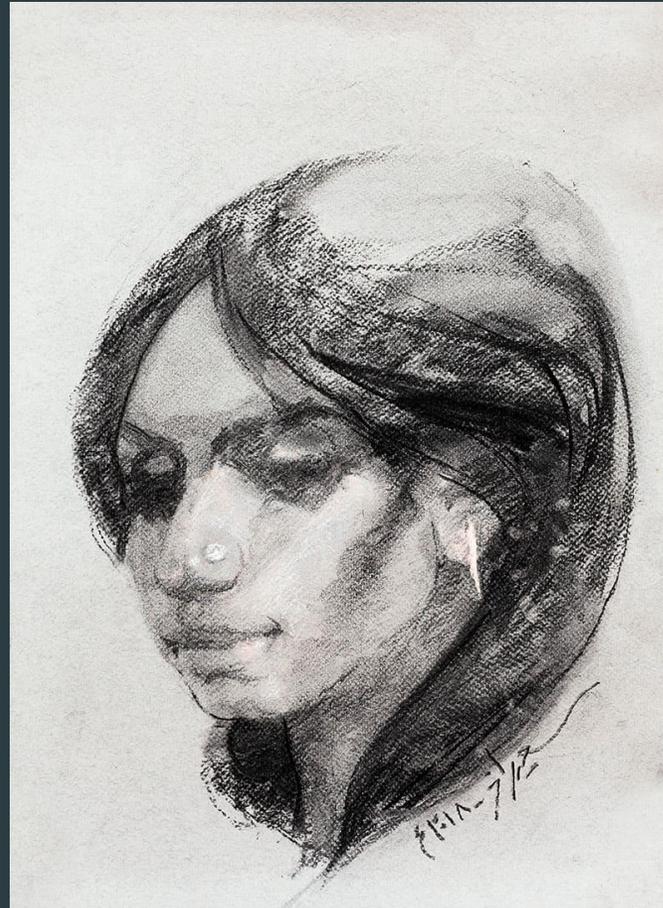
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Iqbal Hussain

(b. 1950)



Iqbal Hussain (b. 1950)

- ▶ Belonging to a family of courtesans, Hussain grew up in the winding lanes of Lahore's Red-Light area and challenged odds by studying at the National College of Arts (NCA). Iqbal Hussain remained significant in advocating the realities of the marginalized class of society. Painting portraits and domestic scenes of the women in his community, his work was realistic with direct connotations which was often branded immoral and too antagonistic for display. Undeterred, he continued painting life as he saw and felt it. He painted the courtesans and musicians of the Shahi Mohalla in Lahore, and each one of his paintings had a story to tell. His work portrays the hardcore reality of life, reflecting the banal pain and pleasure of the everyday people.
- ▶ Iqbal Hussain is one of the most important living Pakistani artists. More than half a century, he pursued a remarkable vocation with an adoration for painting and its inherent challenges. For Hussain, painting was an essential part of his struggle which associated itself with the forces of deliverance. Over the course of his five-decade career he dedicated himself to tackle the plight of Lahore's old walled city courtesans, dancers and musicians. Across his paintings, he looked beyond the glamour and glitter and focused on the darkness, misery and anguish that enveloped them.

Iqbal Hussain (b. 1950)

- ▶ His paintings of the dancing girls were not depicted as goddess-like, portraying immense beauty. Rather, the women in Iqbal's paintings vividly display the emptiness in the eyes of the dancing girls and their vacant facial expressions.
- ▶ His paintings were frequently criticized because the women he painted were too 'fat' or too ordinary looking. Iqbal's masterpieces are a chronological series which capture the reality of the red-light area. Many of his paintings were not permitted to be on display within Pakistan's museums because of their 'inappropriate' theme which went against both religious and cultural values.
- ▶ The women in Hussain's paintings are often portrayed from the cherished perception of the insider. The noticeable lack of objectification that would normally be present in the representation of a parallel premise fashions a very authentic conversation between the artist and a subject, in turn eradicating the typical detachment between the spectator and the subject, forming a moment of ardent understanding. This is heightened by Hussain's painterly brushstrokes and bold use of color. The moment being shared between Hussain, the subject and the viewer is a susceptible one. These women are displaying themselves in a manner that they are not used to, without their pretense.

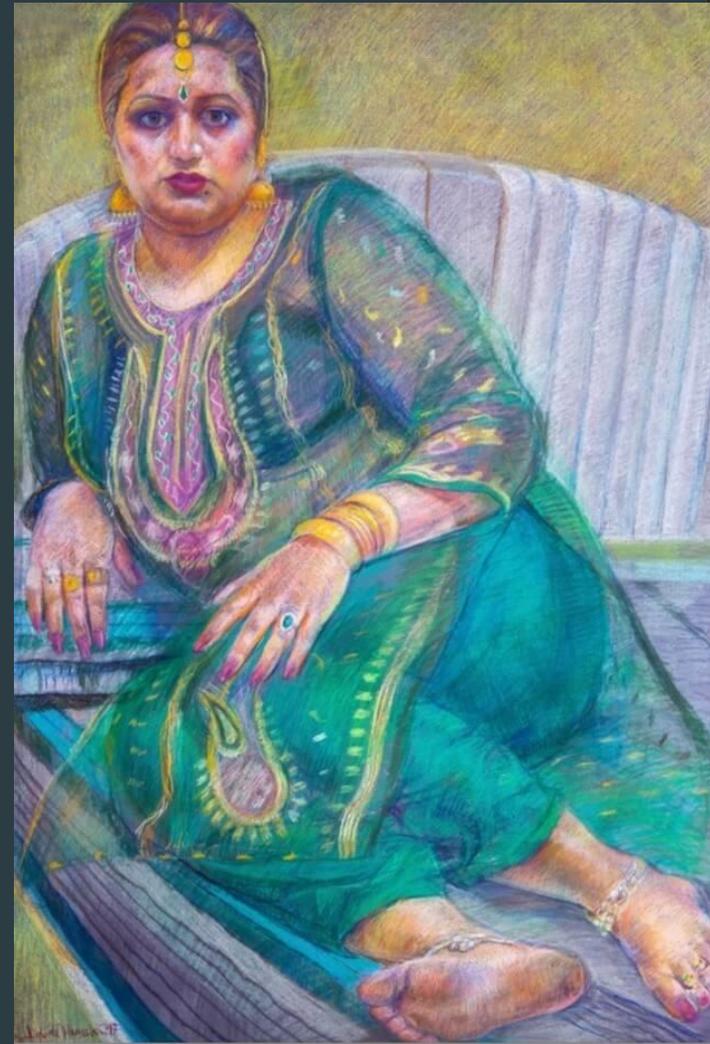
Paintings by Iqbal Hussain



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