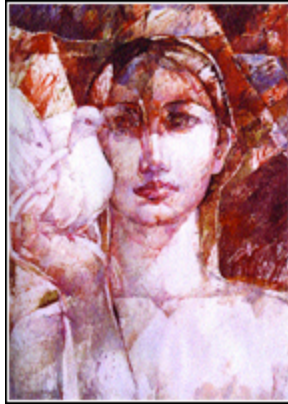


<http://www.dawn.com/weekly/gallery/archive/040327/gallery2.htm>



Crème de la crème

By Salwat Ali

Salwat Ali reviews in depth the *Jamil Naqsh Retrospective at the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi*

This is not just another art exhibition. It is a comprehensive show which, in the words of co-curator Nasreen Askari, “needs to be taken in and savoured — returned to if necessary — by those wishing to benefit from it.”

No great museum retrospective is just a matter of a definitive array of works or of critical intelligence applied to them, or of a deep curiosity about the artist’s life. It is a combination of all three, a vision of how these weave together. Once you have digested a show like this one, neither you nor the artist will be quite the same.

The 600 paintings arranged in chronological order capture five decades of the artist’s oeuvre. Culled from a vast array of hitherto unseen works, ensconced in private collections, Mohatta has laboriously pieced together a remarkable outpouring of protean talent. To see Naqsh’s representative oeuvre assembled en masse, in the midst of a period personified by fast art, experiment and ambiguity is to be reminded that “lucidity, deliberation, probity and calm are still the chief virtues of the art of painting.”

Today when art is moving out in several new directions young art students can learn much about patience, innovation and dedication from this retrospective.

With a lifetime devoted to art, Naqsh emerges as an extremely productive artist, and his entire body of work a heady ode to love. Possessing a keen feeling for the poetic moments of the human gesture, he eulogizes the sentiment in concept and in deed. In the

spectrum of the human figure, the female nude is his primary vehicle for expression, with the pigeon, horse and the child joining in as supporting cast during various phases of his growth as a painter.

Forging ahead with this limited cast and a singular theme, Naqsh, even after five decades, is still coming out with infinite variations in style, technique and posture. Is this a characteristic, an idiosyncrasy, in his work or just the fruits of enhanced skills and devotion to one's calling? The exhibition answers for itself.

When Jamil Naqsh enrolled at Lahore's Mayo School of Art (now NCA) in the late 1950s, premier modernist Shakir Ali had only just returned from his sojourn abroad to become mentor at large to a breed of young artists eager to adapt cubism to their emerging expression. Avidly absorbing this influence, Naqsh, however, opted to train as a miniature painter as Shagird (pupil) of Ustad Haji Sharif. Thus evolved the opposing strains of classicism and abstraction, which have appeared in his paintings in various guises, throughout his career.

By drawing on the holdings of the recently established Jamil Naqsh Museum and personal acquisitions of some fifty collectors, curators Nasreen Askari and Marjorie Husain have tried to retrieve the lost years. They have unearthed a considerable number of works pertaining to this period, which are now arranged in sequential order spread along fourteen galleries on the ground and first floors of the Mohatta Palace. The works are displayed under the titles of Pigeons, Woman and Pigeons, Mother and Child, Modern Manuscripts, Woman and Horse, Drawings, Woman, and Prajna and Paramita.

Exhibitions with a cerebral edge tantalize the mind and generate their own ripple effects. True, the Naqsh retrospective pulls at one's heartstrings, but it also seems to suffer a bit from paucity of ideas. At places, one feels that the trance of being seduced by an image wears off rather quickly if the engaging concepts do not fire the imagination or stir the soul.