



Sumaya Durrani, Barefoot 1995. Mixed media on paper 43.18 X 63.5 cm

TO BE AN ARTIST IS AN ACT OF FAITH

Marjorie Husain, 1989

Lahore has traditionally been the cradle of many fine artists. The National College of Art and Punjab University having played enormously important roles in the art movement of the country. It has been opined that after the 1970s the momentum has slowed down, that the genius of earlier painters had not been succeeded.

Now with the first solo exhibition in Karachi of Sumaya Durrani, entitled 'To Be an Artist is an Act of Faith', at the Chawkandi Gallery, (followed by two earlier solos in Lahore in 1986 and 1987), one is assured that the great tradition is alive and well.

Sumaya Durrani is an artist of rare quality and undoubted ability. Her talent and her panache belie her youth. The paintings displayed, cover three periods, from 1987 to 1989. They are worked in acrylic paint, pastels, with areas of luminous oil paint. Untitled, the intensely introspective visuals deal with the artists striving to symbolise in conceptual form, the experiences creating the 'inscapes', landscapes of the mind; there is a parallel theme of 'reconstruction', fragments put together. The vitality of the paintings is derived from the power of the artist's expression and the richness of her colouring. Sumaya's genre is brilliantly executed; she builds up the layers of paint on her surface one colour over another, gradually building up an environment and developing a history. By this process, areas of masterly texture and unexpected spheres of colour emerge. The earlier work contains a subjective quality, darker tones, particles of complex unrest, shifting recollections. There are also undertones of humorous irony. Decorated hands appear from surging discordant festive colours, echoing a theme of poet Stevie Smith, 'Not waving, Drowning!' In later paintings the artist makes a conscious effort to include an image in the painting, successfully articulating the figure with the ground. The directly etched images create subtle relationships. In totality they are images but without configuration or intricate detail. The paintings contain suggestions of diffused energy but from an un-divulged source, permeating the pictures. Collage is used, portraying the 'reconstruction' theme and larger works consist of paper sheets joined to show an armature. An element of the third dimension is added in the sculptured wooden frames, through which the observer looks inside as though from an open door.

The works completed in Karachi consist of a series of six paintings in which can be found fragments of a cubic shape suspended in space; the beginning of a repository, a memory box, in which to place the artists relics and images. It is a transcendence; a process of exploration and growth.

Sumaya Durrani is an exciting, dynamic painter of dazzling talent. An artist to watch with keen interest, certainly she is the most significant artist to have appeared from her generation. The venerable masters may rest easy, the torch they lit burns bright.



Marjorie Husain¹

Marjorie Husain is an art critic, curator, and writer. She is the author of innumerable art reviews, books and monographs on art and artists of Pakistan. She is the author of 'Art Views' and Pakistan's first art education textbook, 'Aspects of Art'. She has documented the development of art in Karachi under the Oxford University Press title: 'Karachi, Megacity'. She has written biographies of many important artists of Pakistan, including Anna Molka Ahmed, Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, Bashir Mirza, Iqbal Hussain, and Colin David. She has curated exhibitions in Pakistan, the UK, Germany, and India. She has lectured extensively on Pakistani Art. She was the founding member of Pakistan's first (private) art gallery established by the artist Bashir Mirza. She was closely associated with the art fraternity, including Sadequain, Shakir Ali, Ali Imam, Bashir Mirza, Anna Molka Ahmed, Ahmed Parvez, Laila Shahzada, Colin David, A.R. Nagori, Gulgee, Saeed Akhtar, Iqbal Hussain, Jamil Naqsh, Ustad Bashir, Mian Ijazul Hassan, Masood Kohari, Nahid Raza, Riffat Alvi, Rabia Zuberi, Jimmy Engineer, and Wahab Jaffer. She is the recipient of the Fatima Jinnah Award for services to art in 2004.

¹ Source: Karachi Art Directory