Sadequain : the young artist

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An unknown or little known, young artist is always a difficult subject to write about, primarily, because of the shortness of his artistic career. What he seems to lack is a distance one requires, for instance, to appreciate a certain type of painting. (One has to stand away from such painting to understand them fully.) What, however, actually troubles one attempting to assess the value of such an unlabelled unjudged young artist, is the lack of standard which an accepted and established artist finally creates for himself. For, an artist belonging to the latter group is not only judged against the generally accepted art principles but also against his own standard developed through the gradual process of his artistic growth.

~~Chughtai has over decades of his artistic life, set for himself artistic principles peculiar to his own genius. These principles are keys to the appreciation of his artistic merits which are separate from those accepted about art in general.~~

But I feel one can afford to be less hesitant about giving commentary on such a young artist, in Pakistan. One good reason is that we have very few artists. Another is that the general lack of interest in art which positively stands in the way of any artistic manifestation has to be fought consciously, and while doing so, every artistic potentiality has to be exploited to a much greater extent than would have been considered right under normal conditions. There is yet another consideration that must be taken into account in an artistically dormant country like ours. For us art in general is more important than art personalities. A minimum quantitative force is necessary to break the present inertia: our first aim is to gain that minimum artistic quantity. We have yet to reach that stage when we will be justified in being extremely critical in our appreciation of

individual art.

In the case of artist Sadequain, briefly discussed in this article, these considerations receive weight from the fact that the artist, though young and practically unknown, seems to possess gifts that force one's attention. Entirely untutored, the artist has been brought up under what may be called erratic influences which seem neither stable nor pronounced. He has not been taught; he has taught himself. While teaching himself, he has not followed a set course. He has readily discarded what he did not like and accepted what he has liked. The drudgery of formal teaching which sometimes weighs heavily on many a naturally gifted artist, has not, therefore, bothered him. He has also followed a short cut. Whether this is good for him or not is a question which can be judged later as it entirely depends on the lasting value of his intrinsic qualities.

Left entirely to his own devices, he found his artistic energy unfettered and unbounded. (I was considerably amused to see some pencil sketches that he had done on his table-cloth and pillow cases despite the fact that heaps of drawing papers were available at hand). He is a keen painter: keen to express himself not hurriedly but in a composed manner that is unusual for the phase of uncertainty he is obviously passing through. But his problem is the same as any young artist must face in this country which is lack of direction both appreciative and artistic. No wonder, therefore, that after showing a great deal of invisualism in style he suddenly replaces into diligent painting of grand scale in which he combines what he feels is commonly accepted as modern art even with a bit of cheap psychology thrown in.

An example of this is "Toilet". The Feeling ~~that~~ that an artist must, to survive, occasionally produce something which people like or which has commercial value, could be dangerous when the artist, suppressing the dictates of his own mind, falls a prey to the public demand. This public demand can be overbearing when it tolerates nothing else but what it wants. An artist must have some support somewhere, however, small, to withstand its pressure.

What Sadequain does for his pleasure and for the expression of his artistic impulse of the moment (like the few good water colours done with surprising negligence on newspaper sheets) is definitely superior than those big canvases painstakingly done for public admiration. However, these are few in number and could be taken as lightly as the young artist's opinion of what "they" like. There is no harm in doing an occasional stunt picture like the triangular one which reveals, seen from different angles, three different subjects (turbaned head, two women and vegetables) as long as they are not rated higher than mere products of lighter moods.

Sadequain has a strong sense of design and plans as is revealed in his "The Ballet of Jugs". The wholesomeness of the overall conception is not so much due to proportional strength of the component designs forming one single pattern as the understanding, effectively transmitted, of the spatial value of each component. This is purely a matter of gifted artistic instinct. And since the artist is entirely self-taught, this is perhaps one of the points that forces one to pay serious attention to him as an artist. It is his immaturity that is to be blamed for his interest in the ~~because of his immaturity, is more bent on accepting the natural~~ simple rhythms rather than in the exploration of the spatial value of forms, solid or otherwise.

His interest in the former makes him indulge in the pleasure of showing how the sea-waves roll, sometimes taking a human form, and how the objects in the hands of the sweeper woman conform to the lines of their bodies ("Two sweeper woman"). With more experience and knowledge, he would certainly be able to overcome his present tendency to indulge in these elementary practices.

What, however, comes as a surprise are his pen-and-ink sketches (Men and Camels) where is revealed his good foundation as an artist. In these sketches he is all serious, because this medium is the door through which every artist must enter the art world. Here his allegiance is solely to the art he had admired and worshipped as a child. It is here, therefore, that one trying to assess his artistic potentialities, must look about modern artists who, according the laymen, paint all unintelligible rubbish, there is a common belief that they do not require this basic ground work. Needless to say this is an entirely unfounded notion. There is no great modern artist who has not shown extraordinary brillance in this ground work. Should an artist neglect this in the early part of his artistic carrier, he cannot go far. Whatever may be the future line of his development, an artist must master these fundamentals of art.

Though uncouched in the ordinary sense of the term, Sedequain, therefore, seem to have learnt art with care and diligence enjoying all the benefits of his home-made education, suffering at the same time from its drawbacks. His sense of form and colour shows promise. With careful study and gathering of experience, he can become one of our top-ranking artists in future provided the atmosphere of work is free from the overwhelming dictates of the surrounding society. //