



Depicting the fear and pain of our times

Art

Nagori's colourful protest

By Sultan Ahmed

In the expanding Pakistan art world of perfer-vid calligraphers and mindless abstractionists, A.R. Nagori, as a painter, is something vastly different or even unique. He is a consistent painter of protest who reacts strongly to the injustices and horrors all around and expresses himself forthrightly, which makes many painters blush.

The painter who was educated at the Fine Arts Department of Punjab

University, says he was essentially a decorative painter. While he was in Lahore he used to paint flowers and floral landscapes amidst the profusion of beauty there, but as an art teacher in the Sindh University at Jamshoro he sees only terror and exploding horror all around, humiliation of the human beings and deep fear and pain in the eyes of the common man and woman.

"It is unsafe to come to the National Highway after 5 p.m. and in the rural areas after 3 p.m. What a way to live?" he asks with as much pain as anger.

But, as his current exhibition with 40 canvases at the Indus Gallery shows, when he paints the horror and humiliation of women and exploitation of the peasants by the mighty in the interior of Sindh, he does not opt for grim colours. He does not use strong black or explosive red but uses a variety of pleas-

ing colours with green, red, blue and yellow dominating them. "That is the artist in me who loves colours," he explains.

It is indeed remarkable that he remains an "angry young man" although he had his first exhibition in 1958 and is now chairman of the Fine Arts Department of the Sindh University. Neither office nor age has tamed him.

If the Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers all around him have made him a painter of the macabre in bright colours, he protests against injustices around the world as well. A recent exhibition at the Karachi Press Club was against the Israeli and US inhumanity to the Palestinians.

"If Picasso can paint Guernica to protest against the horrors of war, why can't I paint or protest against the everlasting terror and abuses in our midst?" he asks. And he wants to express himself on so many themes that he opts for small paintings, "although when I began I wanted to be a muralist", and the exhibition at the Indus Gallery has a few paintings meant to be developed into murals. And his prices are low.

Women as victims of rape and other abuses too figure in his paintings, like the one in which a *kohli* girl was the victim. If the horrors of life in Sindh grip him, his brush has not spared the erotic follies of the powerful in Islamabad, as the "Odalisque" testifies.

Each artist chooses his medium to protest against the cascading evils in our midst and Nagori has opted to use his paints. Some may question the artistic merit of some of his paintings and argue he is letting his anger get the better of his creative capabilities, but none can dispute the intensity of his feelings against the exploding horror all around us. ■