

# A land of equal opportunity

A senior teacher from Lahore informed me that NCA has decided to boycott the still-born art biennial at Lahore because the panel of judges comprised names not acceptable to them. Hence the unannounced postponement of the scheduled October '87 opening of the biennial.

## Dazzled

In the past, the National Exhibition and awards have created a lot of controversy. One of my friends scored a hat-trick in securing first prizes for his well-received paintings of voluptuous Punjabi glamour and elite urban females. He is a competent and devoted painter, but the award-winning entries reminded one of the title covers of 'Esquire' magazine and calendars of pin-ups, local versions with traces of local dress, not disturbing the essential female anatomy.

Since art juries here comprise mostly of males, their eyes remain constantly glued to portraits of attractive girls. One wondered if it was the painting itself as a work of art which held their attention or if it was the sensuousness of the sitter, "la belle Punjabi," which captured their souls. The lone woman in the jury, confessed that she did not find anything worth notice in that particular prize winning entry — but later on an Islamabad daily charged that she had declared herself the winner for the highest award. One of the jurists, a friend of mine, confessed that he was dazzled by the 'irresistible juicy red of her lips.' On another National Awards occasion a senior critic justified awarding second prize for the composition of female figures, supposedly depicting the women of Heera Mandi, in this way: "the painter is from that class and he has put in lot of labour in his work."

Since my own opinion is indigenous, and generally not acceptable, I quote Whistler, the famous American painter, who is accepted in international art circles: "To say of a picture, as is often said, in its praise, that it shows great and

earnest labour, is to say that it is incomplete and unfit for view.

"Industry in art is a necessity — not a virtue — and any evidence of the same, in the production, is a blemish, not a quality, a proof, not of achievement, but of absolutely insufficient work, for work alone will efface the footsteps of work. The work of

verdict for the plaintiff and awarded him damages of one farthing. Extracts from Whistler's comments on the proceedings:

'Over and over again did the Attorney General cry out loud, "What is to become of painting if the critics withhold their leash?"

'It might well be asked what is to become of mathematics

who would do away with critics altogether."

'I agree with him,' wrote Whistler, 'and am of the irrationals he points at but let me be clearly understood — the art critic alone would extinguish. That writers should destroy writings to the benefit of writing is reasonable. Who but they should insist upon

no consequence. At the last National Exhibition, a General's wife was requested to be a Judge on the jury panel. Another Begum Sahiba, due to her own merits in public health, played a very important role in the cause of education in Fine Arts at Lahore (probably out of courtesy or at the request of a daugh-

ter) I dare not challenge her credentials for a Geologist friend of mine has even served as a Family Planning Officer. But this is nothing compared to the recent bombshell which appeared in the letters column of 'DAWN', saying that a Urologist was appointed as an Orthopedist in a major hospital and college of Karachi; the writer apprehended that the time had come to appoint a CSP as the Principal of that medical college. It is unbelievable that one of our very prominent and renowned (so-called) Urologists, minting millions in Karachi (without kalashnikovs) is not a qualified Urologist at all. His arrogance and incompetence has been personally witnessed by this writer.

All those with no conscience, have equal opportunity amongst the faithful, regardless of their trade tags. It seems this country was created to provide unlimited opportunities for rogues and thugs all in the name of religion. When a professional soldier, before his retirement,

## This land is one of unlimited opportunity — for those with no conscience. Let's start with art ...

by A.R. Nagori

benefit of literature and discard the demerits of their brother literatures? In their turn they will be destroyed by other writers, and the merry game goes on till truth prevails. Shall the painter then — I foresee the question, decide upon painting? Shall he be the critic and sole authority. Aggressive as this supposition is I fear that in the length of time, his assertion alone has established what even the gentlemen of the quill accept as the canons of art and recognised as the masterpieces of work.'

This lively and enlightened debate (on the expertise and value judgements of a particular specialised field) was possible in a civilised society a century ago.

## Expertise

In our case, at the threshold of the 21st century, we compel our hard pressed Generals and Brigadiers to represent us in the areas of art, culture and archaeology abroad and at home, preside over meetings deliberating art curricula taking them away from their duties at MCC HQ and the Qaddafi Stadium. Understandably they do not desire this nor have they any personal interest in educational matters of a mundane nature. But such assignments are thrust upon them by the civil and evil sycophants. On the non-availability of Generals and others of their ilk, their poor wives are troubled. Begums are dragged in to perform 'national services' of

esty, which cannot be condoned, especially since that imposter happens to be a teacher as well.

The incident also exposes the illiterate qualities of the jury — men with plenty of grey hair but devoid of grey matter. When this unethical and scandalous affair was brought to the notice of one of the Directors at PNCA, he came up with another bombshell and alleged that the imposter in question had acquired his higher degree by submitting a thesis written by another lady. Not only that, but he had received the coveted title of an educationist on the strength of stolen publications. Vive UGC rules! Readers should not visualize that man as some sort of a Punjabi 'Don Juan' or a Valentino with a velvet scarf round his neck. At least two ladies became his victims, not due to his charms, but because of the privileged office he holds.

The irony is that the UGC Chairman, in his ignorance, applauded the culprit. He asked me to follow such a shining example of scholarly pursuits and achievement and further to also convey this message to other junior colleagues of mine, aspiring to senior posts and promotions, "... they must produce work of the standard displayed by Mr X..." said the learned UGC Chairman.

One has to agree with Vai Ell when he quotes a road-side mechanic's wisdom on the country's unfortunates. Giving up hope for repair the mechanic says, "... It is a manufacturing defect".



the master reeks not of the sweat of the brow — suggests no effort — and is finished from the beginning."

Not to offend our critics for there are no Ruskins or Whistlers amongst us, I present the following incident which took place some hundred years ago when Whistler the artist and Ruskin the critic had an interesting exchange.

## Coxcomb

On July 2, 1887, John Ruskin wrote, "I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

In November 1878, Whistler sued Ruskin, onetime defender of the Pre-Raphaelites for libel. The jury brought in a

under similar circumstances, were it possible! I maintain that two and two added by the mathematician would continue to make four, in spite of the whine of the amateur for three, or the cry of the critic for five. We are told Mr Ruskin has devoted his long life to art and as a result Mr Ruskin is a "Slade Professor" at Oxford.'

A life-long devotion to the arts is, in Pakistan too, a common criteria for appointing experts. Whistler continues, "It suffices not, Messieurs; a life passed among pictures makes not a painter — else the policeman in the National Gallery might assert himself as well allege that he who lives in a library must needs die a poet."

On the occasion, the Attorney-General commented that "There are some people

