

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

ASIAN ART BIENNALE

A Feast of Colours, Images and Ideas

by Fayza Haq

THE Asian Art Biennale of Bangladesh is here again, and it has culled together a galaxy of contemporary artists from different countries. It not only displays individual talents but brings into focus the styles and traditions of varied places. From China come the beautiful lacquer paintings, which are a unique artistic expres-

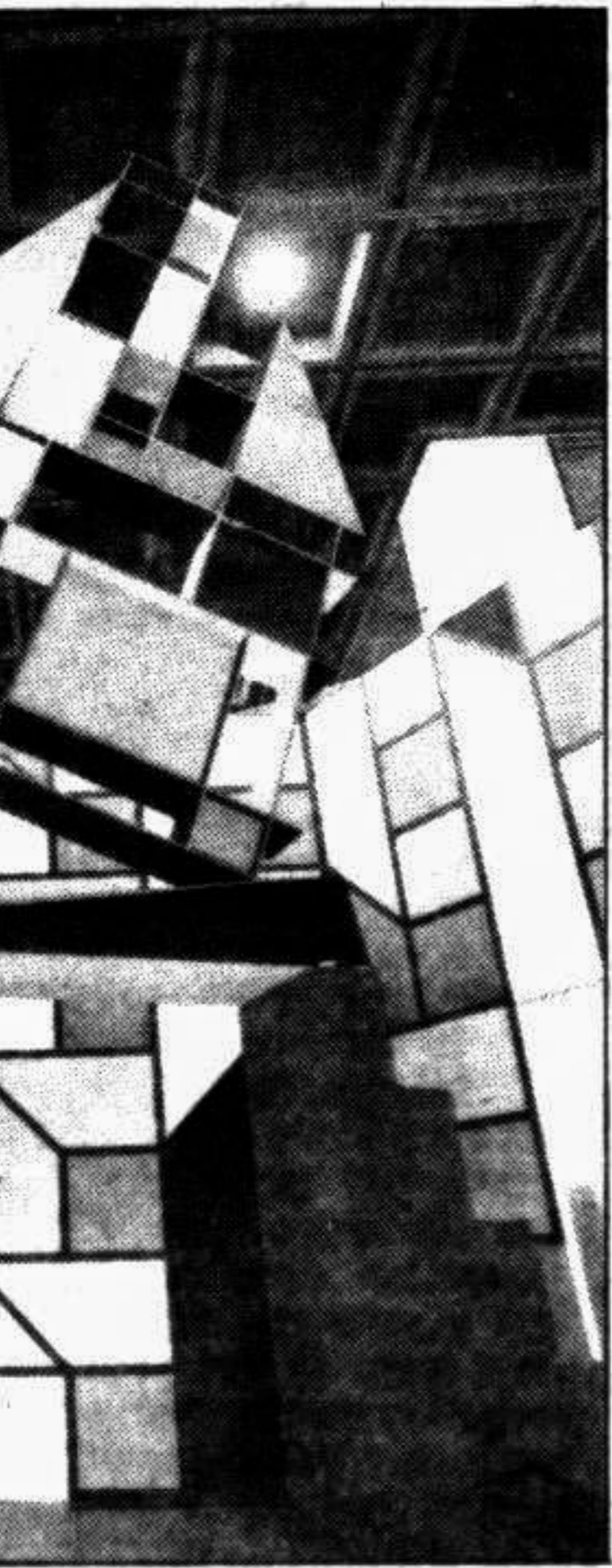
"Meditation" are splendid modern sculpture pieces. A country that can boast of an art tradition that goes back to 5000 years, Pakistan has had Chughtai, Allah Buksh, Zubaida Agha and Shakir Ali to lead the way to the present art scene. They have selected Gulgee, Jamal Shah and Nasruddin Mohammed to represent the country. Gulgee,

Egypt, Iraq and Syria yet European influences are marked. It is said that the works of Picasso and Gertrude Stein have affected the Arab world. Salman Al Malik's "New Vision" brings in human figures in abstractions with vast sand dunes at the backdrop. Faraj Deham's "Dears" is as much non-figurative as Ali Hassan Al Jaber's "One Thousand And One Night" with its bewildering array of calligraphy.

In the Republic of Korea today one finds both a conservative movement as well as progressive artists. The young are naturally attracted to the western values and identities. Shin Je Nam's "Life" is a serene symbolic and surrealistic creation using white and brown with tremendous economy. Ahn Pil-Yun's "Passage Of The Soul" is even more abstract and thought provoking. Koo Jee-Yeon's "Little Dream" is a heart-warming one with flowers and plenty of bright colours. "Solitary Time Travel" by Park Sil remains enigmatic with an obese figure lying prone with accompanying wriggling lumps to denote adventure.

The art, ideology and culture of Saudi Arabia have been well delineated by the entries from this country. Saoud Al-Kahtani's "From The Prophet's City" is an interesting view of landscape and buildings. Mefarch Ascri's "Composition", in the same theme, is also fascinating. Abdullah Nawawi's "Folklore" is an intriguing way of delineating human figures so that they look like fragments of calligraphy. Saoud Al-Kahtani's "Clouds" is a dream-like creation of layers of swirls and loops.

New conceptions have come in from the Soviet Union. The outstanding artist here is Saripov Annamuhamed with his haunting surrealistic creations as seen in "Our Life", "Parity" and "Road of Life". There are other more decorative and lifelike creations such as Shmandurov Narcis' dream-like "On The Balcony", Bondarenco's fiery "Sunflowers" and Shabalin Victor's haunting "Harlequin".



Untitled. Keita Egami. Japan.

son, which in turn has branched out into a new brand of painting. Of course, the importance of the art comes first and the technique later.

In Li Yixin's "Line" we see a delightful pattern made from portraits of women and birds. Zhu Yan's "Sheep" is lyrical and romantic. Luo Jinwen's is similarly out of some fairytale. Wang Shanying's "Courtly" is throbbing with life and colour while Chen Rui's "Cat and table" is quaint with its array of birds, animals and flowers.

who has been experimenting with calligraphy for years, has the canvas pulsating with gorgeous pinks and dramatic browns. Nasruddin Mohammed's "Waiting For" and "Untitled" are vigorous portraits of tribal men. Jamal Shah tends to be more realistic although he too harbours on Impressionism.

From Qatar we see a blending of the artistic world of the east and west. While there is the link with the art from



Sheep. Zhu Yan. China.

The selection in Japan has given importance to freshness where the artists have been chosen for their youth. They have also gone in for abstractions to depict a new world. While the selection has gone in for modernism yet "clarity" is stressed on. Keita Egami's Cubistic creation with its bold colours and patterns is contemporary indeed if anything. Takamasa Kunityas' "Return To Self" is a bewildering mass of logs and bricks.

Nepal, which has a fine legacy of art and architecture, has also gone in for the non-figurative and the surrealistic. The young artists who have studied at the various institutions of India have begun a strong campaign of contemporary compositions. Raj Mamamdar's "White Leaf" is a symphony in gold and red. "Winter", by Surendre Man Shrestha is a dramatic composition with Cubism in mind. Ramkrishna Bhandari's "Honour For The Martyr" and Shyam Prashad Ghimre's

From Philippines come more surrealistic work such as Fil Dela Cruz's "Thenatopsis" and Resty's "Waste Picker". Both of them are replete with figures. Indonesia has sent in pure eastern styles. Whereas in ancient Indonesian art there was a total submission to religious and social life, today there is a stress on the artist's individuality. We find Hestia



Life Notwithstanding-II. Nasreen Begum. Bangladesh.

Soemakno's "Parrot" and Tana Lot's "Temple In Bali" — both of which are welcome realistic pieces in time of a deluge of abstractions. Malaysia which is well-known for its woodcut, silkscreen, collagraph and photoliths screens like Scintillating entries like Shuib Mustafa's "Kemuliaan 11" and Loo Foh Sang's "Late Winter's Wind in North".

While the foreign artists have been accommodated in Osmania Memorial Hall, there is an extravaganza of 169 pieces by 129 Bangladeshi artists at the Shilpakala Academy.

Among the remarkable items by our local contemporary painters, printmakers and sculptors is "Image Of Holy Symbol" by Kalidas Karmakar, which is abstract and symbolic. "Social Unrest" is another mind-boggling abstract piece. Chandra Shekhar Dey's "Bird With Three Beaks" is an imaginative in tree with its surrealistic images on a scarlet and yellow background. Kazi Rakib's "Lady Against The Light" is an idyllic, Impressionistic item. The haunting images in G.S. Kabir's "King Of Kings" present another symbolic creation with figures in shades of grey and mysterious yellow.

Young Nilofer Chaman's

"After Cutting The Trees" has figures taken from a frightening dream but they symbolise the existing reality among the country's peasants and the masses. The vision is an angry one. Jan-1 Ahmed's "Colour Composition" is a delightful creation in warm hues. "Remembrance-11" by Hashi Chakraborty is a subtle combination of images and colours.

1891: What will the 20th Century be Like?

With industrial pollution, immigration, financial scandals and epidemics, the world a hundred years ago was very similar to today's. However, with the proliferation of important inventions (motorcars, electricity, etc.) people wondered what life would be like in the 20th century.

FROM the point of view of the weather, 1891 got off to a bad start. From the middle of December bitter cold, coming from the Pole, swept across Europe from the Urals to North Africa. To the greatest delight of ice-skaters, the lake in Bois de Boulogne wood froze but, with temperatures between -10° and -20°, the rivers froze too and it was possible to walk across the River Seine in Paris. River transport, which was still extremely important at the time, was interrupted which made it difficult to bring supplies. Even the entrances to seaports were blocked and had to be opened up using explosives. The poor were not the only ones to suffer from the cold and there were numerous deaths including that of the musician Leo Delibes, the famous painter Meissonnier who, in his lifetime, was the most expensive painter in the world, the writer Theodore de Banville, the crown prince of Belgium Baudouin, Prince Jerome Napoleon, Marshal Von Moltke, and many others.

Apart from that, things continued on their way: ministerial crises and fights in parliament followed on one another while unrest among the workers became more acute with strikes, demonstrations and even bloodshed in the mines in the North and on 1st May. Almost everywhere in Europe, "socialism" was gaining ground not without sometimes violent clashes. If the revolution in Argentina was practically over, another was taking place in Chile, while there were problems in Haiti and nationalist agitation continued in Ireland.

The season began early on the French Riviera with the arrival of Queen Victoria, soon followed by numerous European personalities and, in particular, a host of Russian Grand dukes after a highly successful French exhibition in Moscow. And then there was everyday life. The year before, the State had introduced the tote system of betting on horse races and made a large profit from it. Private betting was banned leading to great discontent among punters and bookmakers to such an extent that the troops had to be called out. At the time, it was not drugs that were found outside schools but "loose" women. The police had to keep watch there. Line fishermen were dismayed at the declining number of fish in rivers. People did not yet speak of industrial pollution and the Prefect of the Seine department attended an official ceremony of restocking the river with fish.

Since the 1889 World Fair, the French had shown interest in the civilisations of the Far East and the first Buddhist service in Paris attracted on-lookers while the inauguration of the Sacre Coeur Basilica in Montmartre drew crowds.

The French were still fond of Egypt and they recently carried out excavations on the site of Deir-el-Bahari, a royal burial place which they had discovered. The first publications on this forgotten civilisation gave rise to much enthusiasm and admiration. At the same time, excavations at Susa made it possible to reconstitute the palace of Artaxerxes which was presented at the Louvre.

Concerning sport, the bicycle was still much in vogue.

future 20th century. In the meantime, an achievement hit the headlines. A certain S Durmon, a shepherd in the Landes region (south-west), won a bet to go to Moscow on his stilts.

The great Ferdinand de Lesseps, fortunately half-gaga, attended his own trial at which all those who ignobly and completely unscrupulously took advantage of his undertaking of the Panama Canal, outdid one another to

Le Vingtième Siècle

LA

VIE ELECTRIQUE

TEXTE ET DESSINS

A. ROBIDA

PARIS

A LA LIBRAIRIE ILLUSTREE

8, RUE SAINT-JOSEPH, 8

Tous droits réservés.

There had been the Bicycle Show with, still relegated to obscure corners, those funny machines called "automobiles", which were said to have no future. However, the Panhard brothers had managed a long-distance rally of 17 kilometres without a breakdown with a petrol-driven vehicle. Bollees were also being talked about, with their big steam engines as well as a certain Jeantaud who believed in electricity.

On 20th June 1891, a journalist published an article with a drawing, in "L'Illustration", about a machine, heavier than air, called "Eole", which its builder, a well-known telephone engineer, Mr Ader, was trying to fly. Nobody believed in it. On the other hand, people were beginning to seriously believe in electricity and its applications. The most imaginative journalists began to speak of the wildest dreams coming true, such as being able to listen to a play or a concert in one's home. And people started to think that perhaps there was some truth to Robida's lucubrations on the

accuse him: shady politicians, ignominious businessmen and other wheeler-dealers were all at it. A sad end for such a great man.

Finally, there were some horrific medical experiments. As the goal appeared to be immune to the bacterium discovered the previous year by Koch (causing tuberculosis) and at a time when nothing was known about immunology, genetics or even the simple blood groups, a few doctors had the idea of giving patients direct transfusions of this animal's blood. There had not even been any experiments in transfusing blood between animals of different species. The only excuse was "consumption" as it was then called or tuberculosis of the lung which was a terrifying scourge against which nothing could be done and one which affected millions of people. It was even more dreadful than our present-day AIDS. However, the sudden deaths which followed on one another put a stop to this experiment.

— Jean Chabrier

LOCKED away in a cupboard in the British Natural History Museum lies a precious bit of African and world history, and Zambia wants it back.

Zambia Wants Famous Fossil Back from Britain

The prehistoric Broken Hill Man Skull was discovered in a zinc mine in present-day Zambia when the region was still considered a colonial British mining company protectorate. It was taken to Britain in 1921. More than 40 years later one of the first acts of newly-independent Zambia was to demand the return of the skull, said to be one of the world's most important fossils. The museum's answer then, as now: "No. We own it." Gemini News Service reports on the campaign for return of the 200,000-year-old cranium. by Fred Chela

"Things would be different now of course. But in 1921 the mining company had the right to do that," he said. "That does not mean we are not sympathetic to why the Zambians would want the fossil back. But it is not just a Zambian fossil — it is an international fossil."

Stringer's superior at the museum, Dr Robin Cocks, Keeper of Paleontology, is more blunt: "The narrow legal thing is quite simple — we own it." Despite the resolve of British Museum officials, the

man spearheading the Zambian campaign for fossil's return — Nicholas Katanekwa, director of the National Heritage Commission — says his fight for the fossil is far from over.

"This is not a dead issue. It is important for us to have the skull returned to Zambia and we are trying other avenues," Katanekwa said. "It should be in Zambia where it was first discovered."

The campaign intensified after Zambia opened its first local museum in Livingstone, a city named for the famous Scottish explorer Dr David Livingstone.

The Zambians say British officials are refusing to return the skull in the belief that Zambia does not have proper facilities to preserve it. But Francis Musonda, deputy director of the Livingstone Museum, says that rationale does not make sense since his facility is well cared for. The British, he says, want to keep

the skull simply because it has generated a lot of income from tourists visiting the museum.

For their part, the British say the skull, which is not on public display, is part of an important international collection which cannot be broken up. The issue is not one of security, or of which institution is best equipped to keep the skull, says Cocks. The museum's massive collection (running to 63 million objects) is truly international in scope. Says Cocks: "It would be a wrong thing to do from a scientific point of view to split this thing up."

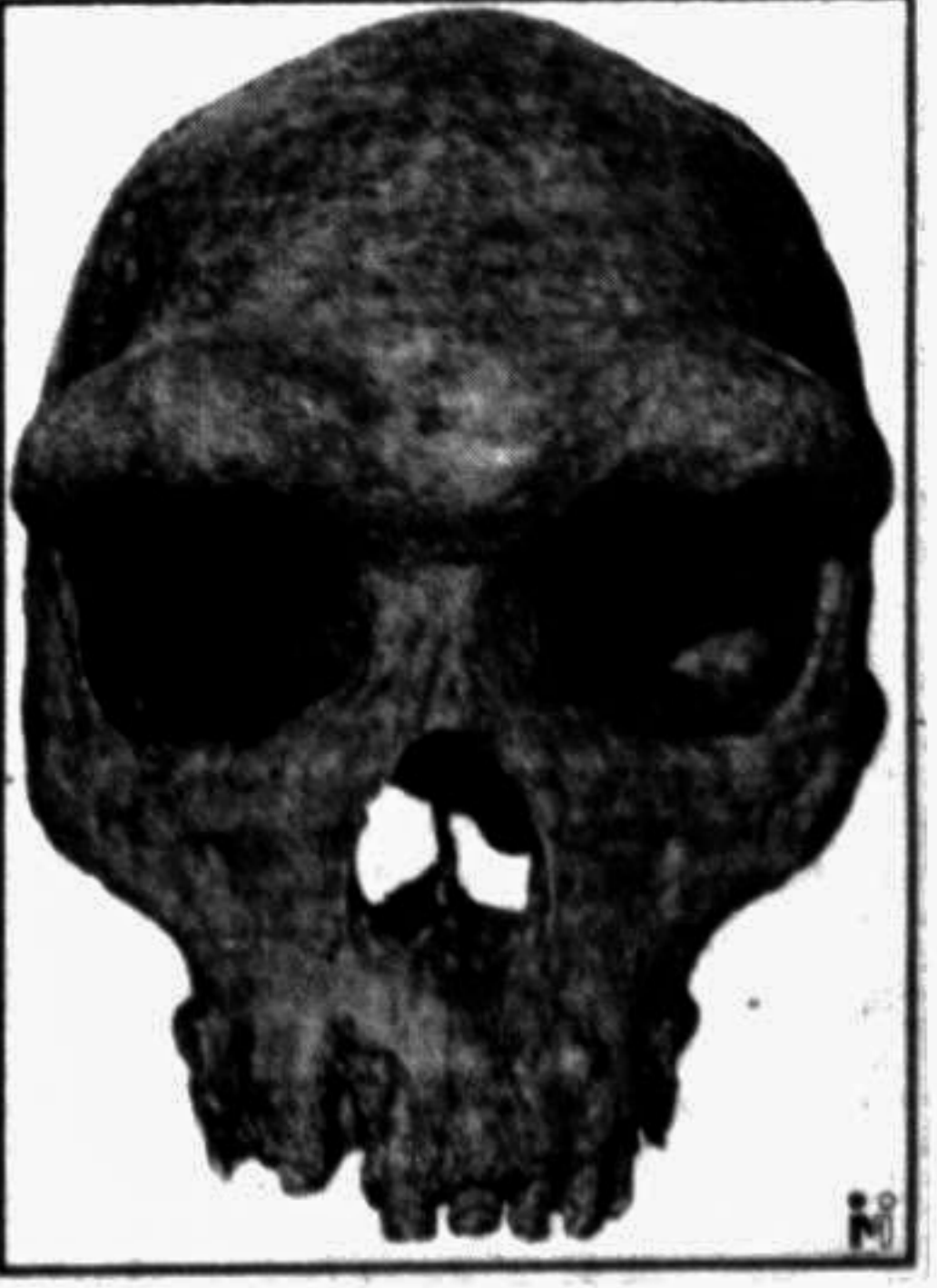
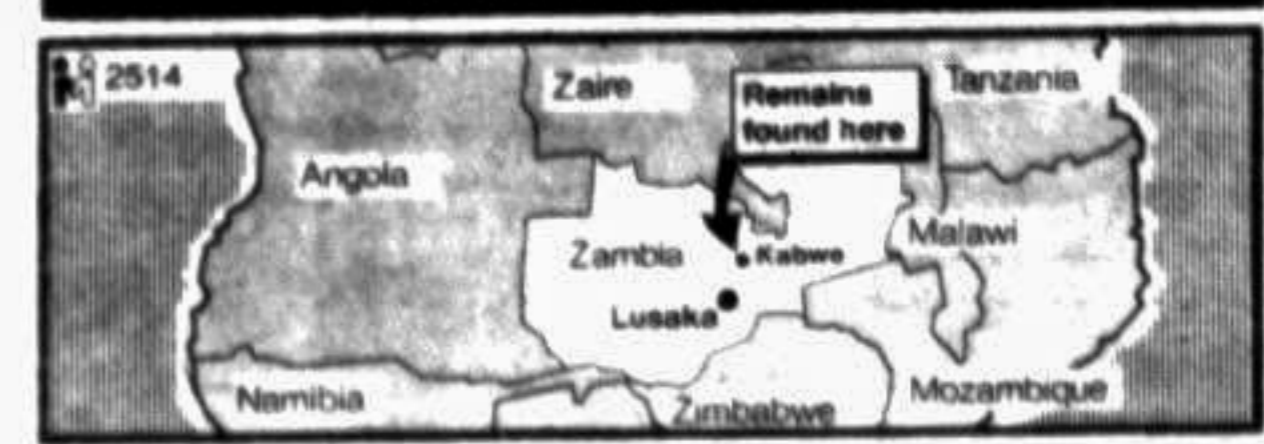
Still, Musonda says Zambia's ministry of legal affairs is keen on pursuing the affair: "We even suggested once that President Kenneth Kuanda meet the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to formally request the return of the skull."

Zambian officials have also sought help from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which has already successfully negotiated with Britain for the release of valu-

Who owns it?



Broken Hill Man Skull



able marble stones from Greece. Although Zambia has ratified an international agreement on the return of cultural relics and belongs to an international committee which works in the area, there

is little UNESCO can do to secure the skull from Britain through diplomatic channels. Zambia has taken its case to the newly-formed regional museums organisation known as the Southern African Deve-

lopment Co-ordination Conference Association of Museums. But at the rate things are going, the famous fossil will be even more ancient before it ever sees Africa again.

— GEMINI NEWS