

exhibition

Uttam Karmakar - For Life, for Love

By Ekram Kabir

ART is "life" to a painter, like love is to a lover. They both keep hoping for the grandiose aspects in everything. And it, most of the times, hurts. The latter wakes up from a slumber only to discover that everything that has been wanted, to be, was only a never-never yearning of the dreams dreamt. Everything seems so impaired, so pain-painted that life becomes a cargo, which needs to be carried to the other end of it. Then again, the faith keeps everything going...life, then, is not just a weight. It ends as a dream.

Similarly, the artist occupies a perilous place in life, for s/he is the most expendable of humans. Really, the artist hasn't a place in life, but spends most of his/her time in a nook. He/she is brought out occasionally, shy, but hopeful, to exhibit a picture or two, a figure on a stand, gets a pat on the back, and then coldly shouldered into the hidden nook again. But the artist never gives up...

If Uttam Karmakar, who had his first-ever solo exhibition in Bangladesh at Gallery 21 from October 11-19, by

Karmakar is a happy and successful user of colours, as he does with his all the forty-six pieces, especially the ones done in water colour (it's wonderful to see some paintings in water colour) depicting beautiful Italian monuments and statues which themselves are magnificent specimens of sculpture. But he has treated these casually, to an extent. He should be more sensitive while working with water colour, because water colour is more delicate...one masterpiece of water colour, and you've done it.

any indicator, has certain amount of such fire in him, then some day, the entire world would be his stage. All he has to remember is that the most powerful effect of art on human heart has always been a moral effect. And this effect, rightly appreciated, is what gives art its unique value.

There's, however, the eye-factor. And that also Karmakar, tutored in Dhaka and Rome, accomplishes on his canvases quite successfully.

For example, at least nineteen female figures, on paper drawn with charcoal and crayon, typically Italian, gave a clear indication about how the mindset, socially, is still inactive, and most of the times hostile, towards the womenfolk.

Every piece, every figure, has been sketched with huge amount of attention. They all spoke volumes on human beauty, but never for a second let the onlookers feel the sparks that female curves are able to evoke. On the other hand, shapes, particularly faces, that Uttam draws were all examples of suppression, of loneliness and of dejection that women, in every country, always experience throughout their lives.

Karmakar, after traveling all over Europe, takes interest in the unrefined realities of life. That too of the differences between developed and developing geographies around the world.

"It has been, painfully, my realisation that it's wealth that propels everything. The lack of wealth is tormenting for us — yes, the lack of it makes us leave our own countries, it keeps us hoping for a better life in an alien land, work down to dusk every day; on the other hand, people of richer nations are absolutely ignorant about what it means to be poor, they don't know what wretchedness is..." says the young artist, now living in Italian capital.

He describes, with sadness, on his canvases and verbally, how strenuous is living for those who cross the oceans for a little improvement in life. It indeed is, as his *Survival Fight, Extra Community* series depicted. Painted in early this year, Karmakar's life and education in Italy were quite telling on these pieces. He also admits that his works



Drawing (Charcoal on Paper) 100cm x 76cm

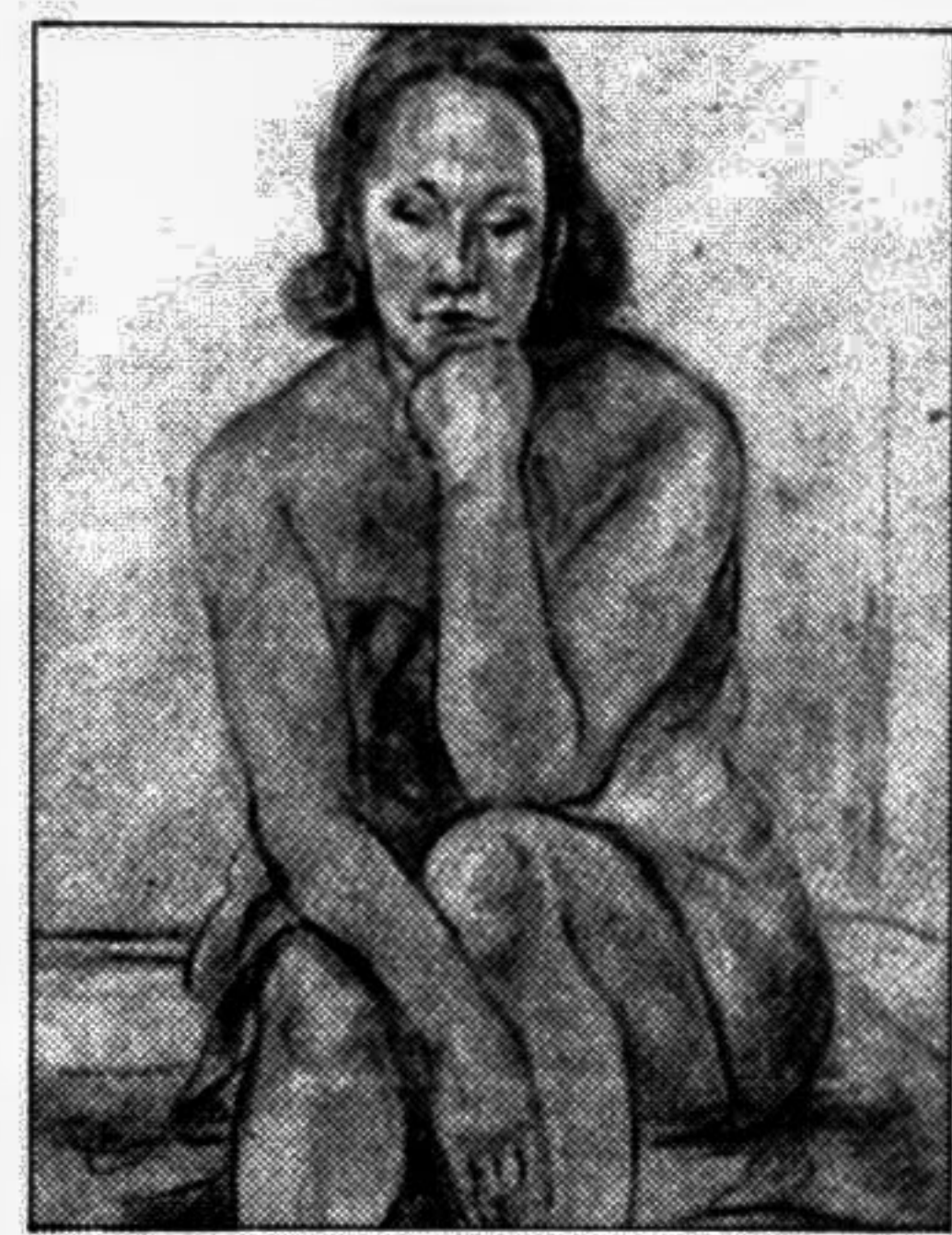
have been influenced, both in terms of colour and style of shades, by European forerunners who made Rome basking with fame. But Karmakar's humans are all representatives of South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Well, these are the places from where people crowd in rich countries, doing all the odd jobs one can find for survival. One among the *Survival* pieces, a 150cmX120cm oil on canvas, tells a story of hardship in a rainy autumn evening. A man, selling umbrellas on the street, is protecting



Birth-under water (Oil on Canvas) 150cm x 100cm

himself with another umbrella, to a couple who are busy adoring "themselves". Quite contrarily to the couple, there's no such time and possibility for the vendor. Unmistakable irony.

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safely term me as an artist specialised in one stream with one character," Karmakar said, more confident than usual.

He has to go back to his studio, via dei Colombi, in Rome. The Gallery 21 experience has been a boost in Karmakar's spirits, with which he paints Nature with joy, human ordeals with gloomy heart and death with grief. He promises to come back to his Dhaka accompanying more to portray in a year's time.



Struggle for life (Oil on Canvas) 80cm x 150cm

art

Ashok Hazra Who Loves to Experiment

by Sanjay Singh Badnor

"ALL artistic attempts are individual expressions of one's fantasies. Changes in forms and themes remain a part of the process, but the underlying note or mood in all my works is the feel for everything India," reflects Ashok Hazra, the Ajmer-based artist whose series on the 'clown' theme has won him many an accolade. Beginning his career with the 'Fantasy' series in which he tired to give form to his own childhood fantasies, and then going on to the ever popular series on the elephant headed god, Ganesha, and then to Krishna series in which, in his own subtle way, he paid tribute to the dark complexioned god. Hazra today has truly reached a mature level of understanding his expression, form and media.

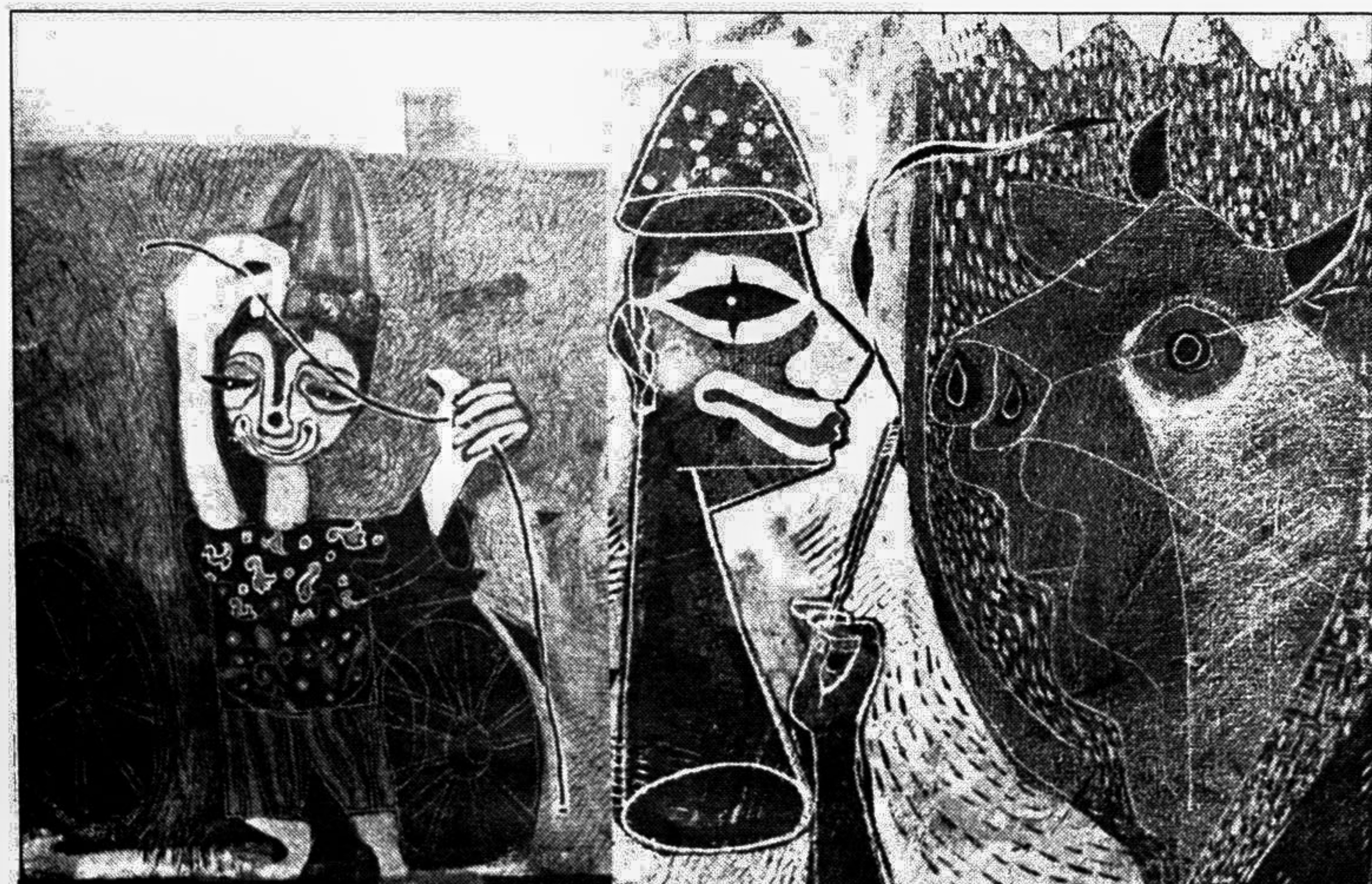
Following no particular style or any one medium, Hazra loves to experiment and explore pictorial possibilities of surface, texture and media fusion. "I am

a very impulsive painter" he says. "As I paint, my mind races ahead but the basic elements of composition, colour, texture and space are always foremost in my mind. However, no particular style can be attributed to my paintings. I have experimented with many mediums like pencil, water colours, oils, water-proof inks and acrylics," he further adds. Hazra is one of the few artists to have undertaken the onerous challenge of using watercolour on canvas. In fact, in the 'Krishna' series which really came about after a visit to Nathdwara, Hazra, by incorporating the use of mixed media has imparted a strong individualistic flavour to his canvas.

Born in 1946 at Midnapore in West Bengal, Ashok Hazra's childhood was literally spent in the cradle of nature. Traditional rural Bengal and later life in Calcutta still bears a strong impression on this Bengali artist who now teaches art to the students of Mayo Col-

lege in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Hazra took to art at the tender age of four years, when he painted his first drawing of village life in water colour. He was constantly encouraged by his father and brother. His inspiration of course was the verdant landscape of rural Bengal. Graduating in Fine Arts from the College of Art, Delhi in 1974, Hazra has won many an award which include award for the annual exhibition at College of Art, Delhi, and Rajasthan Lalit Kala Akademi, Jaipur's State Award in 1986 and then again in 1989. "It was a matter of utmost pride when at 20, one of my watercolour landscape was chosen for the Sahitya Kala Parishad Exhibition in New Delhi," says Hazra. He was also commissioned to do a mural painting in oil on wildlife and pre-historic theme under Karmakar for the Museum of Natural History in New Delhi.

The author is a freelance photographer/writer.



Clowns, Mixed media on Canvas

literary news

A Festival to Encourage Reading

by Inès Somarriba

READING is an essentially solitary activity. An event such as the reading festival "Lire en Fête", whose purpose is to have people share it, is an important undertaking. "It aims to put reading within everybody's reach. Indeed, it is essential to democratise access to books. Everybody should be able to have access to reading and thus cross the threshold of this sanctuary", Jean Metellus, the Haitian author writing in French, reminds us.

On the occasion of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery, literature from the Caribbean is one of the highlights of this event. Writers from all over France and the West Indies will take part in a tour of meetings and events throughout France. The voices of Frankétienne, René Depestre, Maryse Condé and Raphaël Confiant combine with that of Jean Metellus to describe all the facets and enrichment of the French language thanks, in particular, to borrowings from Creole. With this poet, the Creole language, linked to childhood, reappears in expressions relating to practices and beliefs.

Thus, "water standing in sugar cane" is assimilated to the sap in sugar cane. "Oau pipirite chantant" (the title of one of these collections of poems) is presented as an ode to the crowing of a cock which, before daybreak, wakes the poet and summons him to glance at the page. The words Jean Metellus uses are inspired by the melody of Creole and also refer to the concept of negritude as defined by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire. Although, for Jean Metellus, who is also a neurologist in Paris specialised in speech difficulties, the aim of any government is to care for its people, the main urgency is to teach it to read so that it can "stand upright in the world". This crusade today in favour of reading for access to dignity is deeply rooted in the history of the Haitian people, "the first to have insolently won its independence in full view of the world by freeing itself from the yoke of slavery".

The mingling of cultures and also the political scope of some of the writing are illustrated in many of the events. An exhibition on French West Indian literature is presented in Fort de France, the capital of Martinique, a



French overseas department, before travelling throughout the Caribbean. In the Languedoc-Roussillon region, libraries in ten towns extend the area of "Reading in the Caribbean" to authors writing in English and Spanish through meetings with the public.

But the "Lire en Fête" festival also includes national operations such as "Reading in hospital" which, by certain aspects, links up with "Reading in the Caribbean". For instance, at the Dieppe-Château hospital (in Normandy), one of the exhibitions deals with the theme of Human Rights in the works of Victor Hugo and in the Besancon Hospital library, a place has been set apart where visitors can declaim previously chosen poems, as the French 19th century writer Flaubert sued to do to see what

they sounded like aloud.

Thanks to these events, voiced worlds resound from town to town in metropolitan France and in her overseas departments but also abroad. The former primary-school teacher Marc Roger has taken the idea literally. This troubadour of modern times is presenting tales and photos of his tour of France, which he started a year earlier, in books, on foot and aloud. His tour of France led him to share his bag full of books with the people he happened to meet. It is a symbolical image and, in a way, a mirror of this year's festival of books and reading which are concerned with travelling, opening up to others and cultural diversity.

— Actualité en France