

exhibition

Through Women's Eyes

BY FAYZA HAQ

Three women from three different countries, Ilse Hilpert (Germany), Alka Mathur (India) and Rokeya Sultan (Bangladesh) presented their notions and conceptions of Bangladesh in their exhibition "Through different eyes: Bangladesh" at the Divine Art Gallery. They brought out the colours, moods and spirits of the country around them in the hope of preserving the beauty and the soulful element of the Bangladeshi countryside. The buoyant blues, yellows and greens that one found in their work was a true delineation of the place, whether seen as an aerial view or as bits and pieces when passing by a train.

Ilse Hilpert, talking about why she has changed from her earlier paintings to the present installations says, "It has to do with what is being done in Germany now and this is my place of origin, which I have visited from time to time in the recent past. The interesting types of papers that are available here also influenced me. However there are some work painted into the installations that recall.

Asked about the artists that she likes, Ilse says, "There are many that I like such as Polke who is a German artist and also Basaitz and Backman." Talking about whether it is easy for a woman to make a living as an artist, she says, "It is certainly difficult as you have to wait for your works to be sold and you don't always paint for the viewers as much as for expressing yourself and this may not go down well. However, I've wanted to be an artist since I was a child and I don't regret this.

I also learn and am influenced by the art work of the places I've been to. I've been to Saudi



Hilpert (Germany)

Arabia, Rowanda, Indonesia and the Philippines. Thus my style changed from time to time as I learnt of different cultures and styles of art moving from place to place and making friends like Rokeya. I'm sure that when I return to Germany my style will change. I feel that my work has enriched with my travels and exposure to different cultures.

Talking about how she works, Ilse says, "I have a room for this in my house and normally I work in the afternoon, playing music like the Indian ragas, the western classics and some favourite film theme songs. I do this placing my work on the ground. As for my hobbies, I like reading and watching plays and ballets.

One of the installations has feathers on in black and gray which is covered by a paper with a yellow varnished paper. Some of the feathers are painted while the others are real one. The artist has put layers of paper in her work for she believes that we cannot directly see all that we want to see.

In another one "Vendor of joys" has the face of a somewhat unhappy looking man with moustache below is a picture of bal-

loons and other toys sold in a "mela". He gives pleasure to the people but he is tied to his work and cannot move on to a more profitable one and that is why one sees the firm stitches of thick chord at the sides of the work. This is placed on thick red and green papers symbolising the joys and pains in the life of mankind. Two bamboo pieces painted with polka dots and tied with coloured threads also frame the work.

The next one with birds shown on two pieces of paper while the background is green, blue, gray, with the black birds standing out. There are some crows pasted to the frame of the main work and some on the sides of the installation. There are two bars framing the work. In this piece I wanted to catch the atmosphere of Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh where you see crows both in the morning and in the evening." This painting is called "Crows".

Umbrellas are shown and below them stone breakers presented as if some flowers in a thicket. The stones are white while black lines dots and curv-

es have a strip of netting on top to symbolize the pollution. People, shops, and vehicles are all brought into this in two separate depictions on cardboard. The gray piece stands for night and the yellow one for the daytime.

Ilse has exhibited in Germany, USA, Philippines and Indonesia apart from Bangladesh. She has a masters degree in Art and has studied screen printing and photography. She has done a course in cultural management from Fern University, Germany. She has a daughter who studies archeology.

Alka Mathur says, "Painting has been an instinctive part of my life since I was a child. Our house was a centre of gathering of friends with their paints. My uncle used to paint and my mother was very artistic. My sister is an artist plus an architect. When we went for holidays as children, we always took our painting materials with us and we sat and sketch wherever we went. As a child, I admired Van Gogh like most other people his dauntless spirit and spontaneity. Today I like Niraq Guswami from Delhi.

"What you see today is an evolution of the work that I have been doing over the years. I loved the earth and always wanted to paint the people of the earth. I have done a lot of depiction of the Rajasthani village people. Women were central to these paintings. Today I deal with the earth mother and the pieces you see are the aerial view of what you come upon when you land in Bangladesh. You see water pockets and misty lands if it has been raining. I have given a few details but dealt with the spiritual aspect of it. I now deal with clouds, rivers and land masses. In between you see some miniature forms like two angels, a boat. Sometimes you see sequins or 'kantha' stitches which adds to the texture."

You see green, gold, blue, brown that presents topography in most of the creations. In one you have two brown masses, one representing man and the other woman and they are held together delicately with a brown wire piece. "What I paint is not abstract because I am bringing in nature in the form that I see around myself such as the lightning and the rivers. When you see on paper it is not the photographic aspect of what I see. When I add gold and bronze to the pieces it is to lend a magical quality to it. The use of gold in the Indian miniatures might have influenced me in this aspect. The material is cork sheet and I have used some chemical to add texture. The painting has been done with acrylic, pastel and gold paint.

"My figure work has not gone for if it comes naturally you will see it in these works too. My message is that this nature is a woman if you look after it will remain beautiful. I use materials that you will probably throw away into the dustbin and give it a gorgeous and irresistible look. I work in between my household

chores in my small studio at home."

Alka has had solo and group exhibitions at New Delhi, Jaipur, Calcutta, Ahmedabad and Dhaka. Alka is happy to be in Bangladesh which she finds very similar to India in living and thinking habits. Alka has a son and a daughter.

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