

# ature

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Guernica 1937 Pablo Picasso

## Trading Horses for Art

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selling all other engagements.

Instead of the best of F. M. Husain, his much trumpeted maiden shows in Pakistan exhibited picture post cards of his earlier originals or photo-reproductions, sold out overnight at prices beyond the wildest imagination of any Pakistani painter. Or he dished out his trough washes, tactfully draped in religious garb through sacred titles and subjects in order to stall critical comments in view of the already charged sectarian atmosphere.

It is strange that F.M. Husain has been fairly secular in India (Gota Kapoor has enlisted him amongst the progressive Indian artists). He has painted Hindu pantheons with such devotion that Bal Thakre and Advani would have to re-think their anti-Muslim sentiments and exclaim "Hare Hussain-Bhai". However, the moment Hussain Bhai lands in the Land of the Pure, he catches endemic Islamic convulsions and chooses to paint religiosity.

Brechtian consciousness and integrity would have rendered his religious imagery relevant to prevalent brutalities and injustices perpetrated against humanity everywhere on the globe. Nevertheless, the vindication of such an onerous responsibility necessitates that one steps beyond the relatively safe clime of interpreting the existing situation and strives for the transformation thereof. Incidentally, Hussain has always deemed it judicious to remain on the right side of the ruling elite, be that of India or Pakistan.

Michael Angelo, when asked to comment on the paintings of Flanders, said, "That Flemish painter pleases the devout and specially the very old women and certain noblemen who have no sense of true harmony...he paints such subjects one dare not speak ill of." This scribe finds himself faced with the similar situation apart from the additional fear of being branded as a jealous artist.

His over-zealous hosts in Karachi enviously guarded and kept Hussain away from me. So I speak to him through this column. Hussain Bhaijee, in your recent Karachi exhibitions what better variations of Gurnica you have succeeded with! (despite your diversion "Klee influenced me not Picasso"). Picasso's pedigree horse and off springs splashed with trough washes conformably paddled down to glittering stables of nouveau riche at Clifton/Defence with just token Hadeya of Rs 60,000/- a colt on paper of 12 inches by 15 inches in water colour with added dose of religio- sentimental subject /title, of which we had enough indigenous exploiters. Perhaps Hussain Bhai rightly diagnosed the IQ of this country's buyers.

I don't think Gurnican studs, hatched within mule surrogate-mother bred-well. Instead any incubator, test-tube fertilization / variation might have proved productive. Personally, I believe, it is blasphemy to play with... and it is sacrilegious to defame someone master-pieces under the guise of "variations" or paint horses san "Einfuflung" (empathy) after Fran Marc led Der Blue Reiter. Mona Lisa san lips: what a vulgar and repulsive visual, presented by some advertiser. "Variation" of course.

The painters have indulged in recreations. The only painter, besides Dali's occasional eccentricity, standing out with variations, on Tition's Pope X, is surprisingly a Briton, and Hussain is too late to catch a truck with Francis Bacon. The sooner he leaves the country, and the company, better are the chances of his retaining the crown he has earned in sub-continent. (I value his work of 60s san portraits of royal Brahmins)

Let Hussain Know, there are people in Pakistan, whose pockets may be empty, but not heads vis a vis prospective buyers who carry bags full of money for ransom and galleries, san gray matters, with whom his exclusive introduction soirs were arranged, understandably.

I have avoided critical analysis of his work. It is not to my good taste or ethics to let down fellow painter's work, but Hussain's calligraphy dabbling left me aghast. We have had enough of it, here perhaps. He was not bribed by his business managers, that we, the painters in Pakistan, have hardly recovered from the euphoria, if not diarrhoea.



Hussain's "variation"

Before Fukeyama announced the end of history, it was Picasso who had already announced similar unpleasant but inevitable tiding (in the context of contemporary modern art). He said, "Tragedy of modern contemporary art is that there is no challenge any more... and in such situation the end of art becomes a foregone conclusion. All great movements of art are results of challenges. Now such harbingers of the continuity of art have ceased to exist.

One can throw a bucket from the trough on news print paper and is acceptable as innovation or variation and with the right kind of media support, one can mint millions.

Having been associated with art education, one feels the moral obligation to comment on the trends of our art consumers and the low-brow idiosyncrasies to buy anything foreign regardless of its artistic worth. One has witnessed, not without a certain uneasiness, Souza's torn page from Playboy Magazine, duly signed by the art broker and sold at exorbitant price to our people's senator who seems to have been born with silver spoon in mouth but a grain of gold in head.

There is little doubt regarding Souza's stature as a leading Indian painter but it is lamentable that his best work is meant for elsewhere and the junk is directed towards the nouveau riche of this country. In his last exhibition, he sold the fakes copies of his own earlier work of 60s and received cash in dollars and that in advance too. The works which neither Souza nor Hussain would have ever dared to display even on pub-side foot paths of London, are booked in the