

CIMA

Playing Patron

The new gallery opens with ambitious plans

THE winds of liberalisation may blow hot and cold over the economic landscape of the country. But they hesitate less in the domain of art. Over the years, private galleries have been nibbling into the traditional preserves. Now they are biting off larger chunks, and playing patron.

It's the private art galleries which are doing such things as conducting art workshops, holding lectures, publishing impressive catalogues, organising touring shows and even exporting exhibitions.

The Centre for International Modern Art (CIMA) which opened last fortnight in Calcutta, is among the more ambitious. The gallery, included under the umbrella of the Ananda Bazar Patrika group of publications, sprawls over 11,000 sq ft of low-ceilinged space divided into intimate areas with interestingly coloured walls. But what will make CIMA more than just walls with paintings is the art resource and documentation centre. Director Rakhi Sarkar explains that CIMA is collecting computerised data on contemporary art for its library. Researchers will be able to call up not only information about particular artists but also colour images of their significant works.

In its quest to attain international standards within two years, CIMA has a large storage area with humidity and temperature control equipment. Emphasis is being laid on infrastructural details because CIMA intends to take shows of Indian artists abroad as well as bring international exhibitions to India.

If CIMA's inaugural exhibition, Trends and Images, is a sign of the times to come, then it is on to a head-start. All the works of the 40 artists which are on display were done this year. Most reflect the trends which have flowered over the past few decades—from the lyrical abstract, narrative, 'interpretative realism', conceptual art, folk art deconstructs to fantasy and wit. And, of course, experi-



SAIBAL DAS



(Clockwise from top) The works of Rimzon; Ghosh; and Subramanyam

mentation with diverse materials.

The show also spans a wide arc from doyen K.G. Subramanyam—all his wits intact on his superb reverse paintings—to young artists not yet on the exhibition roller-coaster, such as the imagination-hued landscapes of 24-year-old Asis Ghosh and the works of the sculptor Rimzon.

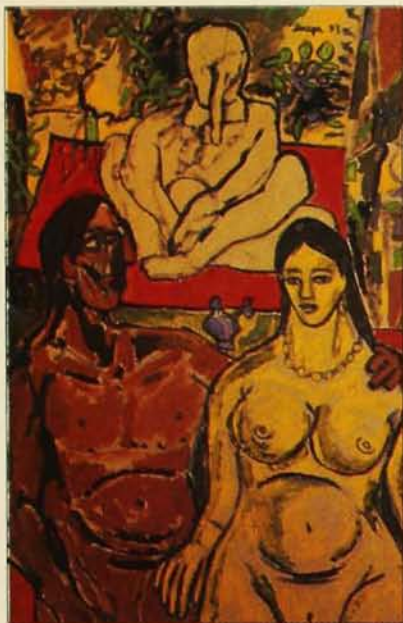
It would have been very easy for a hold-all show of this kind to have become a bit of a *khichdi*. But the quality of most works is the unifying factor in an exhibition that affirms a growing individualism in contemporary Indian art.

There is also, largely, a concern with the daily humdrum of life, of middle class reality, as Calcutta critic Arun Ghosh points out in the catalogue. The middle class in Sudhir Patwardhan's canvas,

who stand knee-deep in their flooded abode, and seem more in a dilemma about which of their possessions to take than any fear for their lives, is one example. Arun Ghosh considers the works of Dharmanarayan Dasgupta, Jai Zharotia, Anupam Sud and Arpita Singh, among others, as illustrative of interpretative realism.

While the venerables don't appear to have lost their lustre, the generation after them is unfolding other possibilities—from a vibrant G.R. Santosh to a very assured Prabhakar Barve, Vishwanadhan, K. Khosa and Rameshwar Broota.

Hopefully, CIMA will live up to the title of its first exhibition and perceptively explore trends and images. And document the rapidly-changing art-scape of the country. —MADHU JAIN



F.N. SOUZA

Muted Passion

But the older works still dazzle

FRANCIS Newton Souza has always been all fury and sound bite—his words are an interviewer's delight. But as the Dhoomimal Art Gallery exhibition in Delhi, which spans half a century and has over a hundred canvases reveals, some of that cyclonic spirit is missing in his work. Passion not quite spent, but in hiding.

The Bombay and Goa cityscapes are exuberantly coloured, lyrical almost, the heavy dark lines containing the explosion of oranges, yellows and greens. But they seem more confected to current interior decorative inclinations than to painterly manifestations of that magnificent rage and insatiable mind many people associate with this ever-young *enfant terrible* who's now approaching 70.

The journey down his various phases is exhilarating, even though some of the more significant works of the New York-based painter are missing. For instance, Souza's earlier, more geometric, versions of the *Last Supper*, his figures of Christ, or still lifes. And, of course, the early nudes. Women, as Souza, has often claimed, have been his obsession and the younger the better. But his later montages and studies of nudes appear more mechanical and less erotic.

Souza's early work may have called in the muses of Picasso and Matisse and been swamped by them. But he was able



A recent nude study (left); a powerful self-portrait from his earlier period

to absorb the influences and continue in his chosen direction.

Moving to New York in 1949, and living there intermittently since, Souza has been able to make the western tradition of art and literature his own as well. And the West, too, finds a resonance. The Methodist Church of England, which already has some works of his, has just asked the gallery for more of Souza's Christ figures for its collection of 20th century Christian art. The Victoria and Albert Museum also has several of his works.

As for the man himself, he continues to play the devil's advocate. Having spent months in India this year, he took French leave and went to Paris instead of attending his own show.

BIMAL DASGUPTA

Mindscales

Good show but lacks variety

HE says it's his last picture show. But then these could just be his famous last words. Veteran painter Bimal Dasgupta is past 77. The eyesight may be a little less than perfect, the back a bit stiff, and he himself despondent and disappointed with the "highly commercialised" art scene but he's a quick-draw-McGraw when it comes to putting paint on paper and more lately, acrylic on canvas. Even on a bad day, it takes the soft-spoken Delhi-based painter half an hour to do a water colour. The nearly 50 water colours and acrylics on show at the

AIFCAS in New Delhi were all done this year itself. And since his itchy fingers can't put down the brush, it's highly unlikely that he will keep his word.

Happily. His abstract rockscapes, landscapes, subterranean-scapes, which may not have changed dramatically over the last decade, are like meditations in paint. Nature, not raw but cerebral, filtered through his mind, and aspired in acrylic. "Images and colours crowd my mind at night when I start thinking about what I will paint. I let my subconscious take it in. The next morning I start scribbling and then the forms start to change."

For decades, it was nature without the human figure which formed the hunting ground for his imagination: the islands of Lakshadweep, the sand dunes of Rajasthan, the world underwater, rocks, fossils. But more recently, the human form or face has begun to make a hesitant appearance. There and not quite there: "It just happened, by chance *ho gaya*."

It was chance throughout. Considered one of the masters of water colours in India, the choice of medium was not his. "I had no money for oils." But those years of work with water colours gave him the discipline of speed and

Abstract work: controlled strokes



control: you can't dither with water colours. The painter turned to oils much later. But three years ago an allergy to oils brought him back to water colours.

Not very happy with the way the galleries function these days, Dasgupta is particularly worried about the eclipse of important modern Indian painters. "Some of the great Indian painters will die unknown, unhonoured. That's why one of my new works is *Cry Unheard*."

—MADHU JAIN