

# Excellent exhibition of Husain's works

By Our Art Critic

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**K**UDOS to the dynamos of energy, the Alkazis and their Art Heritage Gallery for arranging the grandest banquet of art ever held in the Capital in recent years—a retrospective and representative exhibition of the paintings of the celebrated painter, M. F. Husain who strides over our art scene like a Colossus—on the occasion of his being elected as a Fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi, at the Rabin-dra Bhavan Galleries.

Seeing so many works of Husain all gathered in one place is a real experience. One watches the evolution of his art from the stylised, figurative paintings in the realistic manner under the influences of Amrita Sher Gil and George Keyt done in the period from 1947—1954 (for instance, "Kumhar", "Kisan", "At the Well" and "Padmini, Mohini and Shankhani") to the near—abstractions of the latest period from 1970-1978 (for instance, "The Portrait of an Umbrella" series) done in the idiom of modern art.

## GENERAL ASPECTS

In between are the various phases—say, of expressionistic distortion of forms and figures, the panel period with mural treatment, the resort to symbols and objects for expressive purposes, and the story-telling and illustrative works. The present exhibition includes many well-known paintings,—such as "Second Act", "Prophet", "Shadow" Series, Autobiography Series, "Nag" Series, "Hanuman" Series Pavan Kumar, "Theoram of a Landscape," "Cage" Series, and "Cyclonic Silence" Series."

Considering that it is a retrospective exhibition, it is not possible to detail the particular meritorious paintings. One can only point out certain general aspects. As is well known, Picasso revolutionised Husain's outlook, and made him take to modern art. Under that impact, his canvases

went bigger and bigger (the exhibit, "Autobiography-I" is as big as 68 x 495 cm). He took to concentrating on compact formal organisation. He began to use paint and colours in the intense and textural manner. Later, he adopted Picasso's penchant for story content, and incorporated symbols such as horse, lamp, spider etc. In this regard, he even went illustrative. As a matter of fact, Husain may be said to have introduced the Picasso trend in our country by presenting Indian subjects in the French maestro's idiom and style.

This retrospective exhibition gives a clear answer to the often-asked question: wherein lies Husain's real achievement? Marvelous, indeed, is the way he lays his paint, either thick and textural, or flat and smooth. Then, in most of his paintings, he makes use of every inch of the surface of his canvases, creating a quality of compactness and tightness. Whatever forms and figures he incorporates into the compositions are integrated and absorbed into the overall design. Above all, Husain has another superb capacity. His colours — particularly, the reds, oranges, browns, yellows, blacks, whites and blues—emanate intensities and vibrations in the tonal gradations and variations. As a result, his paintings, with all their inclusion of the story element, figurative work, and various other forms, create the impact of abstract art.

Another thing that emerges from this retrospective exhibition is that the period 1970-78 is Husain's best period. In these years, he moves away from the story-telling and illustrative works to a great extent, and his figures and forms are transformed into patterns of design and colours in the compositional structure. For proof, there are his latest paintings, "The Portrait of an Umbrella" Series.

(Open up to December 17 daily: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.)