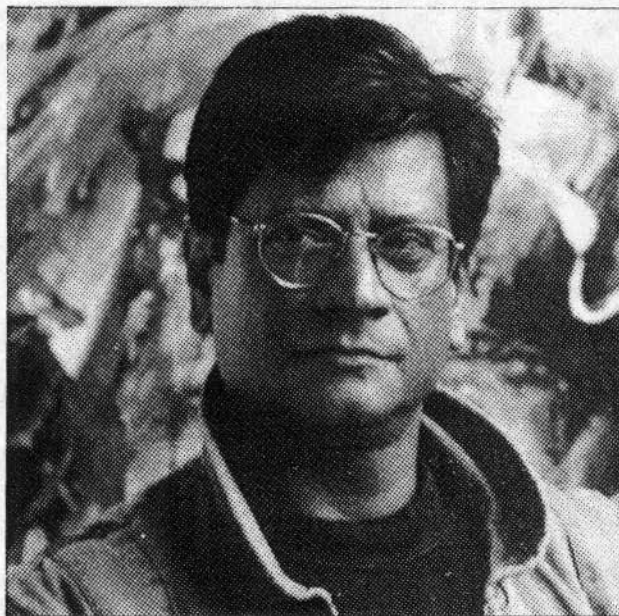


A Painter with a Soulful Inner Harmony



What made Maruf go into painting? Maruf explains, "I got maximum marks in art at school. Then I did my BFA. At that time my goal was not necessarily to become a painter. I was into radio, TV, the theatre and films. All the time I had a voice within me saying 'Maruf you're supposed to do something'. I had something in my mind but I didn't know what it was. When I went to Europe and saw the paintings which back home I saw in a small catalogues I realised that this was what I wanted to do.

For 21 years since then I am doing nothing but painting."

Maruf uses some symbolism in his work. "Symbolism is something I see around my environment," he says. "I have been to a lot of places like Tunisia, Egypt, Canary Islands, North America, the whole of Europe. I see and feel a lot of things. All these things come out in my paintings. I am not a philosopher or a priest. I don't want to give people a message. The symbols in my paintings are the colours. It was hard at first for the Europeans to accept my bright colours for they are used to greys and browns. The greens, reds and yellows that I have used origin from Bangladesh, my home."

At first Maruf was inspired by the impressionists but later he turned to the Expressionists. The artists who are dear to his heart are Anselm Kieffer and Gerhard Richter (both from

By Fayza Haq

MARUF Ahmed, who is now settled in Germany for 21 years, is an artist who is continually making and remaking himself in his attempt to reach a profound aesthetic truth. Talking about how he expected the average art lover to understand his abstract paintings, Maruf, who is holding his exhibition at the Shilpakala Academy says, "Painting is a development of any artist who starts with realism. My painting is not realistic but the basis is realistic. Landscapes, human figures and still life all come into it. Painting is like music. When one goes to a *sitar* or *shehnai* concert one says that one liked it. No one talks about how much they understood. If one sees and finds something in non realistic work it is the success of the artist. Kandinsky, in the beginning of the twentieth century, protested against the word 'abstract' which means nothing. In the beginning I have done academic work in landscape, portraits and still life. Even an artist like Picasso began with paintings that looked like photography. Then his style changed. I cannot sit and paint in the same style throughout my whole life. Similarly a writer's style varies as he grows older and a musician's playing varies as he gains more maturity.



Shape-2 Mixed Media



Untitled-19 Oil 1996

Germany) and William D'Kooning and Jasper Johns (both from USA).

Maruf works in his studio which is 34 kilometres from Bonn. He lives in Bonn while his working place is in Cologne. He explains about Cologne, "It has a name as a world city of art. My studio is about 150 sq metre. I begin work about noon and I work till 8 pm. I like listening to piano music while at work, and this includes Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Tchykovsky. I paint with my hand as I want direct touch with my work. I apply the tube directly on the canvas which serves as a palette itself. In my paintings I involve my emotions rather than my understanding. I use acrylic and oil. At one time I used to use powder colour. I use pastel and charcoal for my paper works."

How is life as an artist in Europe? Maruf says, "You have to have talent and you have to work hard. Your work has to talk for you. The art critics in Europe don't criticise as such. They present the work of an artist as an art appreciation and they will say 'this is what I find in his painting' and not 'this is what his painting is.' I believe painting is something where people don't have the right to say 'this is bad and that is good'. I began my life in Germany at the age of 24. I don't want to be a rolling stone. Of course there is discrimination as that is a global problem. However, I want to see the world in a very optimistic way. That is one of the reasons why I always

try to include bright colours. The crimes, wars, discriminations and problems are there. The TV, radio and newspapers are full of it. But people have not stopped dreaming of happiness, contentment and peace. I want to

see the world in a positive way. This is the story behind my buoyant colours."

Talking about the present generation of Bangladeshi artists, Maruf says, "They now have plenty of opportunity to study abroad and get their master's degree from overseas. They also have facilities to hold their exhibitions which were not there in my time. Also there are more people flocking to see exhibitions now."

Maruf's style has rhythm despite the haphazard placing of lines, forms and colours. He is fascinated by what their interplay can produce. Unless one sees Maruf's earlier figurative and line work one cannot fully sympathize with the present evolution of his work. The present exhibition at the Shilpakala Academy deals with a decade of his work so that one can understand the artist completely. Some works such as "The Figure" series of the late '80s show the connection between the swirling scattered forms. Energy is vibrated from the bright reds, yellows and greens. The lines hold the forms while the colours spread out in masses of energy. In the artist's works one discovers familiar shapes such as a figure of a pigeon, a house, a tree, leaves and a book.

His "paintings.... are basically positive which is reflected by the colours.

Ideas are transferred in to the visible structure specially by the colours. Places of silence and meditation grow on the one hand, structures of expressive agitation on the other hand. This contrast can be considered philosophically as a contrast between positive-negative, life-death, concentrated and sculptured chaos which contains and

expresses 'ratio and irratio' and at the same time produces a certain tension. The whole work with its expressive elements also shows an inner harmony" — Prof M H Wolff.

Forty-seven year old Maruf came to Germany with a German Academic Exchange Service in 76. In '78 he got a scholarship from the Goethe Institut, Germany. He then did his higher studies from the Cologne Technical School of Art and Design, under Professor Werner Schriefers '81-'87. Maruf has exhibited in Barcelona (Spain), Oxford (England), Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary), Bonn, Berlin, and Dhaka ■



Landscape-5 Oil 1988