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## Vivid colours

Pacita Abad, a 32 year old painter from Philippines, recently held her exhibition of 50 paintings delineating life in Bangladesh at her studio at 47 Dhanmandi. Pacita who had her formal art training in Washington DC and New York city has painted subjects like "A Rangamati village", "Sailboats at Narayanganj", "Old Dacca and "A Wedding". During her eight months in Bangladesh Pacita has felt free of academic constraints and the pace of the life of the country and its people has affected her brush to create colourful interpretations of the surrounding environment. She has travelled to different parts of the country by the local buses, trains, launch and car and her impression of the village and city life are reflected in her works. Most of Pacita's paintings are in oil on canvas out some of her works are done in oil pastel and charcoal. She says that she loves to experiment by mixing the media though it is not the conventional thing. The paintings are alive with vivid unmuted colours and often distort reality to express her personal emotions.

In Pacita's paintings one sees the naive child like vi-

sion so that people are represented by dashes and squiggles and objects like trees and trains are a big splash of brilliant colours. Greatly influenced by the style of Matisse and Chagall, Pacita has discarded photographic realism long ago. "I don't want my painting to be like a photograph. There are fifty ways of seeing and depicting a subject — so why not be different?" the artist comments. Her paintings break the conventional rules of the perspective. She does not

often care to blend her colours. She puts them raw and fresh on the canvas as they come to her brush. A house may be thick built in reality but on her canvas it will appear blue. The policeman in her painting will be gifted with six hands. She says that she is mainly concerned with depicting the different cultures. She observes that the lifestyle in

Bangladesh with the Krishnachura trees, black crows, on the roadside, people riding on the roof tops of trains and women with the draping sari, is different from that anywhere else in the world. She comments that although Bangladesh is a male dominated society what she has enjoyed best is painting the



LIFE STYLE IN BANGLADESH IS ALLURING: Pacita with an oil portrait of young woman of Bangladesh.

women. She says this is not because she is a feminist. She calls herself a liberal instead. Pacita says that she finds the way women drape their sari and the tie their hair is very seductive, sexy and alluring. Her exhibit included a room full of nudes. The artist says that she has practised doing nudes for years and she feels that it is the basis of all art. She finds the Bangladeshi women are shy and hesitant to model in the nude as this was something new and against their traditional values.

In her landscape painting Pacita had not cared so much for the subject as the play of colours and the movement of the subjects such as the movement of the coconut and the mango trees in the neighbouring gardens which she found so fascinating. Talking of mediums the artist says that she prefers oil as it is vivid and rich and she can control this medium better than any other.

One can best understand and appreciate Pacita's delineation of life in Bangladesh by going through her works individually. "Old Dacca" brought in well the noise, colour and hum of life in the heart of the city.

Overloaded buses were shown colliding with hurrying baby taxis and rickshaws. The road was depicted as spilling over with people, vehicles and wandering animals. The quaintness and

gaiety was shown to coexist with the poverty and dirt. The riot of loud, commercial posters of the movie houses added to delineating the character of the place. The canvas was crammed with people and objects, with little care for perspective, as one sees in a child's vision.

There was a refreshing freshness in the approach. In "After the northwester" the artist has depicted the effect of the fierce gales. The trees with their branches and blossoms looked worn out and askew, as leaves and branches piled on the ground below. Yet the blue, green and scarlet hues on the bright trees assured the viewer that life would go on. The strokes were bold. The selection of colours made the canvas appear like a vibrant vision pulsating with warm hues.

In another oil creation "On the road o Narayanganj" objects like boats, trees, river waves and the sky were reduced to simple strokes on the canvas. It was incredible how a few sweeps of blues and browns could have brought in an entire landscape with the details of the palm branches, mosque domes and tatted sail boats.

In "Durga Juja" one saw a sea of heads of richly dressed women. The display of coloured finery was captured with many minute details although the brush strokes were bold and broad. The composition of the seated women had subtle har-

mony and lyricism, seen in the wide strokes of oranges and yellows. The canvas "Tree planters in Sylhet" was another free and easy delineation of Bangladeshi life. The women at work could be seen as almost bright jewels set in an emerald sea of tea leaves. The brown faces of the women, their jewellery, their baskets on the head, the pathway, and the sheltering trees overhead, evoked the Sylhet atmosphere with definite strokes and precise unmuted colours.

Pacita, who has had her solo and group exhibitions in Washington DC and New York says that she finds the young painters in Bangladesh to be original and fresh and not just influenced by masters. However, she says that the artists cling

too much to tradition so that one sees the same theme and style again and again on different canvases. She also points out that if they had more materials and colours they could work better. What she admires greatly in the young painters is their boldness to break away from the Muslim tradition and to point the human figure. Pacita, who has been invited to lecture on Modern Art at the Shilpakala Academy Dacca, will be having her second Asian exhibition in Manila in February next year.

—FAYZA HAQ



Sylhet 1978: Oil on canvas