

western standards, both in form and content. On the one hand, is the meticulous image of the Devi-the mother goddess representing hope and resurrection, and on the other, an angel traversing across Colaba. Stylistically too, her work incorporates certain nuances of the west (post-impressionistic as well as Expressionistic features) and again, it bears a cogent semblance to what is known as the idiom of the Baroda school. However, it ought to be conceded that both standards may be eventually incidental to a style which is prominently eclectic.

Rummana maintains admiration for Breugel, especially for the reflection of "the popular consciousness of his time" in his work. A similar patchwork of the socio-cultural ethos across a span of centuries is seen in Rummana's work as well. To this end, the motifs in the background of all the works of this artist, are not an arbitrary mishmash for filling space; all the details, whether figural, architectural or of different spaces, are constructs from a sensibility which absorbs life in its simultaneous dimension.

Moreover, her absorption in theatrical devices gives impetus to the structure of each painting. According to her, she uses "subsidiary figures" as images "with the intention of creating movement using either a circular or diagonal motion." Postures and situational rendering, support this further.

Just as the last point is not always of the least importance, it would be pertinent to mention here, Rummana's treatment of colour. She relies on pure colours in order to bring about an impassioned rendering of her vision. This, however, is a "conscious arrangement" with an "organised intensity," so that they neither destroy each other, nor imply a placid harmony." Tonalities of pigment, shadows and highlights are all dismembered segments from a brilliant assembly of pigments. Colours clash which systematic regularity so that they are enjoyed for their own sake, and enhance the overall picture-plane. There is an inherent attraction in this gaudy family emanating from Rummana Hussain's palette.

The watercolours are considered "preparatory" by the artist. A playful humour is observed in *Looking for Tales* in which exists an interrelated image of a woman splitting a fish's mouth as if to draw inspiration from thereof. This is a personal joke on the artist's imagery which often resorts to the depiction of fish. A *Dialogue* portrays a conceptual self-image, grabbing a fish like a microphone and confronting her earlier protagonist-the goat. What ensues from this incongruous watercolour is the prattle of a peculiar conversation. Alice in Artlandish.

Rummana Hussain's style turns full circle on its creator, now flippant, now intense. And there it was. Wrenched from the common flotsam of knowledge and experience, the miracle lies like the precious one, shying within its oyster.

A thinking painter

ART

Rummana Hussain's paintings are strong in their figurative impulse and rich in symbol and metaphor, says Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni

Rummana Hussain's first show in Bombay undoubtedly makes a stunning impact. After studying art and design in Britain between 1972 and 1974, she has held shows of her paintings in Calcutta and Delhi and has also been seen in a number of group exhibitions.

Hussain's paintings are strong in their figurative impulse and rich in symbol and metaphor. Around man, she sees the play of destructive social forces-violence, corruption, ritualism and exploitation, which cause the collapse of the social system. She focuses on these themes. It is worth considering her canvases one by one. *The Immersion* is a playful re-enactment of the immersion of Ganesh. The idol weighs down the figure of the man who is carrying it. Its proportions are typical of the slightly bizarre touch which Hussain gives to her supernatural creatures. In *The Dark Times*, Hope is lying dead on a rock, but there is an angel in the sea. Here, there is a detailed treatment of architecture in the painting.

One of her most notable works is *Parable of the Blind* with a Pied Piper-like flutist leading blind people and blind rats. The rats are falling into the water which occupies half the canvas and the goddess Kali rides a tiger in one corner. There are people crying up to heaven from the edge of a cliff with bats flying around. The painting is typical of Hussain's deceptively raw manner.

She uses warm, sometimes positively loud colours, but these are balanced by her intricate and original imagery and one feels she has a right to use this colour style.

Reclining figures and batlike creatures people her canvases. She admits to the influence of Brecht's poetry and the Flemish painter Breughel's works, but Chagall also seems to have influenced her. That her palette is entirely different from Breugel or Chagall gives her much credit.

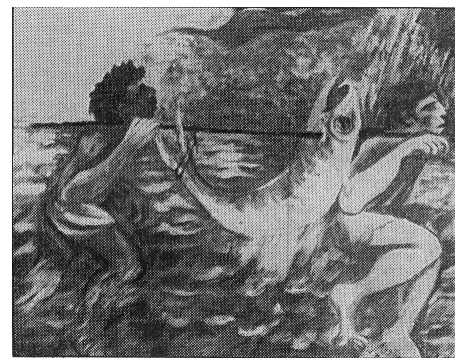
In many of her works fish assume monstrous proportions and strengthen the link with fantasy. One such work is *Big Fish Eat Little Fish*. This is painted in vivid greens and blues. There is a curved figure of a fisherman complemented by a reciprocally curved figure of a fish, completing a circle. The circle is cut diagonally by the line of the sea. Here, Hussain

gives us an aerial view of fishing boats-a touch of inspiration that enlarges conventional perspective.

One of her most expressive works is *The Angel and Colaba* (Colaba is where Hussain lives)-a dramatic juxtaposition of myth and reality. The figure of an angel carrying within it the figure of a woman occupies a large part of the top of the canvas.

Some of Hussain's works are literal-like, Fragmentation and Collapse-but on the whole her work conjures up shades of surrealism while remaining sturdily expressionistic.

Rummana Hussain will always be considered a thinking painter. If she had adopted a more sophisticated technique, she would have perhaps lost the great force and honesty that characterise her paintings.



The Pall Bearers by Rummana Hussain: strengthening the link with fantasy

**Rummana Hussain
Paintings
Jehangir art gallery
Till April 10**