

# Renowned painter Gulgee remembered in Canada

By Dilnoor Panjwani

MISSISSAUGA – Artists, art lovers, friends and relatives gathered at the Gallery Streetsville last Sunday to pay their homage to Gulgee, one of Pakistan's most celebrated and creative artists of international repute.

The special event was hosted by Parveen Sultana and Ali Marker (Founding Directors-Artibute Multimedia); Atiya Ahsan (Director/Owner) and Afshaan



Gulgee

Kizilbash (Manager) of Gallery Streetsville; and Moazzam Khan (Grandson of Maulana Mohammed Ali Jauhar). Some of Gulgee's art work collections by Samir Dossal (President, Rotary Club of Richmond Hill) were also displayed at the gallery.

Samir Dossal, Noor Allibhai

(Gulgee's niece), Dr. Dilkhush Panjwani (Psychiatrist, Trillium Health Centre), Ashfaq Hussain, a known Urdu poet and writer, Latafat Ali Siddiqui (Editor/Publisher-Canadian Asian News), Ali Adil Khan (Owner-South Asian Gallery of Art), Mrs. Nasreen Munir (art lover and collector), and Munir Sami, a poet and writer, offered tributes to

Gulgee, fondly referring to him as a "Sufi" and a "Rembrandt" of Pakistan.

During Gulgee's last visit to Toronto, Canadian Asian News seized the opportunity for an exclusive interview with this great man who revolutionized art with

an innovative and bold style. Gulgee believed that "vitality in Islamic art manifests the vitality in Islam." He was blessed with a free spirit, a magnanimous heart and a mind that was non-conformist in nature.

Born in Peshawar on October 25, 1926, Gulgee studied at Peshawar Convent School and then completed his high school at Lawrence College in Ghora Galli near the hill station of Murree. He earned a scholarship to pursue higher studies in Mathematics and Engineering at Aligarh Muslim University, India. He was awarded an Aga Khan scholarship to study Engineering at Columbia University. Gulgee devoted many years of his life working with the Central Engineering Authority Pakistan on the Warsak Dam and other dam projects in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Despite his academic achievements, Gulgee nurtured his passion for painting as he was "madly in love with painting". Gulgee had stated that "I was a painter right from the day I was born". Gulgee dedicated his life to painting, after satisfying a personal commitment of practicing as an engineer.

Gulgee's murals of Islamic calligraphy have added another dimension to spirituality. His luminous artistic creations emit spiritual energy, generating a Sufic mystical experience in the



Munir Sami with Atiya Ahsan

minds of those who seek the truth. He considered his work as "the externalization of my inner journey". He stated, "Art is expression of faith and feelings... important to Muslims." His work has a flavor of "post abstract-expressionism" as it



Artists, journalists, poets and friends gathered at Gallery Streetsville to pay homage to Gulgee a renowned artist.

transcends the work of the abstract-expressionist. It manifests as a confluence of Islamic calligraphy and abstract expressionism, exuding "grace and elegance...more than the total of resources." Gulgee's portraits of famous personalities pulsate with life.

He has immortalized many world dignitaries in lapis lazuli, oil paint and pencil.

In a style that is mature and unique, Gulgee captured on canvas or in mosaics of semi-precious stones, the life-like features of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, Sir Sultan Mohammed Shah Aga Khan, King Faisal and King Khalid of Saudi Arabia, Queen Farah Diba of Iran, King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan, President Charles de Gaulle of France, Presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Bush of United States of America, Rajiv Gandhi of India, and many other dignitaries.

Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's official portrait, commissioned by the President of Pakistan in 1984, is one of the masterpieces of Gulgee's artistic skills. Gulgee's murals at the National Assembly Building and Defense College in Islamabad, Defense Library and Habib Bank Plaza in Karachi, as well as the Mehrab and Mimer in lapis and gold at the Shah Faisal Mosque in Islamabad are legacies to, and pride of Pakistan. The Ismaili Center in London, England, showcases some of his talent and genius.

Years did not dampen Gulgee's enthusiasm and energy, as he injected "more passion in my work than ever before....I am



very pleased with the way it is going." Gulgee had aspirations of being an artist since his childhood. His perseverance of purpose and faith in himself made him reach the pinnacles of success. Gulgee was inspired by

and frenzied. Gulgee's personal tribute to all artists is captured in his own words, "My biggest wish was that in my country, a time would come when people start having respect for artists. That hasn't happened. Artists are



Ashfaq Hussain with Samir Dossal and Dr Panjwani

Rembrandt and Persian miniatures masters, thus, his work reflects a blend of the East and the West, yet remains distinctively original. The strokes of his brush transcend the conventional form to reveal the inner consciousness - peaceful and harmonious, yet at once earthly

so vulnerable. Their profession is so difficult. How much have they sacrificed to be an artist? Except for respect, there is nothing else they can get." Many of Gulgee's admirers who gathered to celebrate the life and work of this great son of Pakistan believe that Gulgee's tragic passing has

created a void in the world of art. He leaves behind his son, Amin Gulgee who is recognized in Pakistan as a sculptor and may fill the void left by his father. But for Gulgee, life was art and art gave life to his very existence. His art has immortalized him.

## MSPC GRIEVES AT THE TRAGIC LOSS OF BENAZIR BHUTTO

Multicultural Society of Pakistani Canadians is deeply grieved at the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhuto.

It is not only a loss to the family but a national loss.

Our heartfelt condolences to the family, all Pakistanis and members of Pakistan People's Party.

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