

Sadequain | *Exaltations* Featuring works from *The Lost Exhibition*

June 17th, 2014– July 18th, 2015

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 17th 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Aicon Gallery is proud to present the second major exhibition held in New York of the work of **Sadequain**, Pakistan's most renowned and celebrated modernist painter. The exhibition includes rare works painted and left behind by the artist in Paris during the late 1960s. This body of work, now known as *The Lost Exhibition*, evinces Sadequain's radically innovative calligraphic style of the period, while the individual works stand as some of the most formally commanding and revolutionary paintings of the artist's long and prolific career.



Sadequain, *Sun on the City*, Oil on canvas 35 x 49 in.

Though Sadequain's oeuvre is by no means limited to his calligraphic works, these paintings represent the pinnacle of his uniquely innovative approach, which allowed for calligraphy to be adapted into South Asian Modern art practices. Kufic, the oldest-known script in Arabic is characterized by angular strokes punctuated by dots and accents. The letters and words that sweep across Sadequain's calligraphic canvases embody a richness of form and color that swirl together in majestic embrace. Sadequain explained how each letter in his calligraphic style exemplifies its own personality, mood, and character. Some are playful and radiant while others are thoughtful and dark. There is an intimate relationship between artist and artwork. Sadequain took the role of both painter and poet, fusing the two arts into a single, harmonious masterpiece.

“My paintings recite the poems that flow within them. Now I compose poetry to compliment my painting.”

In these paintings, Sadequain explored these new calligraphic forms, while maintaining their scriptural origins. In Islamic culture, calligraphy is seen to be the most dignified and representative element of the visual arts. To capture its intellectual beauty, Sadequain portrayed verses in varied shades and forms. Bold spectrums of color convey the mood and time of day, manipulating the imagery via an activated texture. This body of work represents both a spiritual and mystical artistic endeavor. If art imitates life, then its relationship with society defines the quintessential forms of our human existence. It was this belief through which Sadequain strove to explore and define the dichotomy between academic ideals and implicit realities throughout his career. To him, art was innovation and expression of truth, not merely a craft.

The same radical blending of tradition and innovation runs throughout the entirety of this exhibition, which centers around a unique thirty one-piece calligraphic series titled *Sura-e-Rehman* (Praise of the Lord). This iconic set of canvases represents the artist's rendition of the sacred Quranic verse in which the Creator reminds mankind of the bountiful world that he has provided. Kufic inscriptions of the past were



Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman III*, 1969, Oil on canvas 20 x 24 in.

not just meant to be read but were used to preserve the mysticism and power of the letters. Sadequain's paintings allow these surreal expressions to transcend the canvas and bring us to an exalted state. Many of the paintings in the exhibit pre-date the Parisian period, as well as a host of the artist's drawings. However, the Parisian works on view remain the most elusive, due to the artist's sudden departure from France in early spring of 1967, having promised to return in a few days' time. Sadequain never returned to Paris, nor did he retrieve his belongings amongst which stood these magnificent paintings. The majority of work from this era remained locked in the attics and basements of Parisian galleries and private residences, and has only begun to emerge in recent years due to the

collecting and cataloging efforts of the Sadequain Foundation, with whom Aicon is jointly sponsoring the current exhibition, providing for a rare showing of these works in New York.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.

SADEQUAIN

Born 1930, Amroha, India
Died 1987, Karachi, Pakistan

B.A. in Art History and Geography, Agra University (1948)

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi was one of the first Pakistani artists to gain international recognition, embarking on his notable career with an award from the Biennale de Paris in 1961. The artist was born in Amroha, India, descending from a family of Qur'an scribes and is recognized as the foremost calligrapher and painter of Pakistan, responsible for the renaissance of Islamic calligraphy in the country since the late 1960s and bringing the art form into the mainstream. In the late 1940s, Sadequain joined the Progressive Writers and Artists Movement and through his career, produced works of thematic content reflected by his commitment to social justice, and the progressive ideals of his peers of writers and poets. On the eve of Partition, Sadequain painted anti-British, nationalistic slogans in Dehli and such politically charged works gained the artist a wider, responsive audience both abroad and in Pakistan among the 1960s intelligentsia.

Sadequain's unique visual vocabulary stemmed from the complex merging of Eastern (calligraphy) and Western (figurative) traditions in art, alongside Hindu and Muslim ideology. Sweeps of a calligraphic brush are echoed in the artist's flamboyant approach to painting figures but his forms and themes are mostly biographical. Contortions to figurative style arose from his observation of wild, defiant cacti growing against the odds in the deserts of Gadani (Karachi) which left an indelible impression on the artist and his work. Colors used are simplistic, yet provide strong structural elements through Sadequain's contrast of etched strokes.

In terms of Sadequain's work in calligraphy, outside of Quranic verses, the artist's affinity to literature resulted in works illustrating the classical poetry of Iqbal, Ghalib and Faiz. With the support of state patronage, Sadequain completed many celebrated commissions, notably the ceiling of Lahore Museum and the ambitious mural "The Treasures of Time" for the State Bank of Pakistan, depicting the evolution of mankind and tracing the history of great intellectuals. Other commissions include The Power House at the Mangla Dam, Geological Institute of India, Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University. In 2003, a retrospective entitled "The Holy Sinner: Sadequain" was exhibited at the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi.

Sadequain died on February 10, 1987 in Karachi at the age of 57.

Select Solo Exhibitions

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| 2014 | “Sadequain A Retrospective: Including Works from The Lost Exhibition” at Aicon Gallery, New York |
| 1981 | International Trade Fair, New Delhi Indian Council for Cultural Relations at State Lalit Kala Academy, Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi |
| 1971-72 | Exposition of calligraphies that lasted eight months at Lahore Museum Exposition of paintings based on Ghalib’s poetry at Lahore Museum |
| 1970 | Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Liaquat Memorial Hall, Rawalpindi |
| 1966 | Retrospective Exhibition of 300 paintings at the Banking Hall of the State Bank Headquarters, Karachi Exhibition on Lloyd Triestino’s ship “Victoria” while crossing the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Adriatic Sea Exhibition of drawings at Hotel Intercontinental Karachi. |
| 1963 | Henry Gallery, Washington |
| 1962 | Galerie Lambert, Paris Karachi at Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy’s residence in Clifton Exhibition at the Town Hall in Quetta Held numerous one-man exhibitions at Quetta Residency |

SADEQUAIN



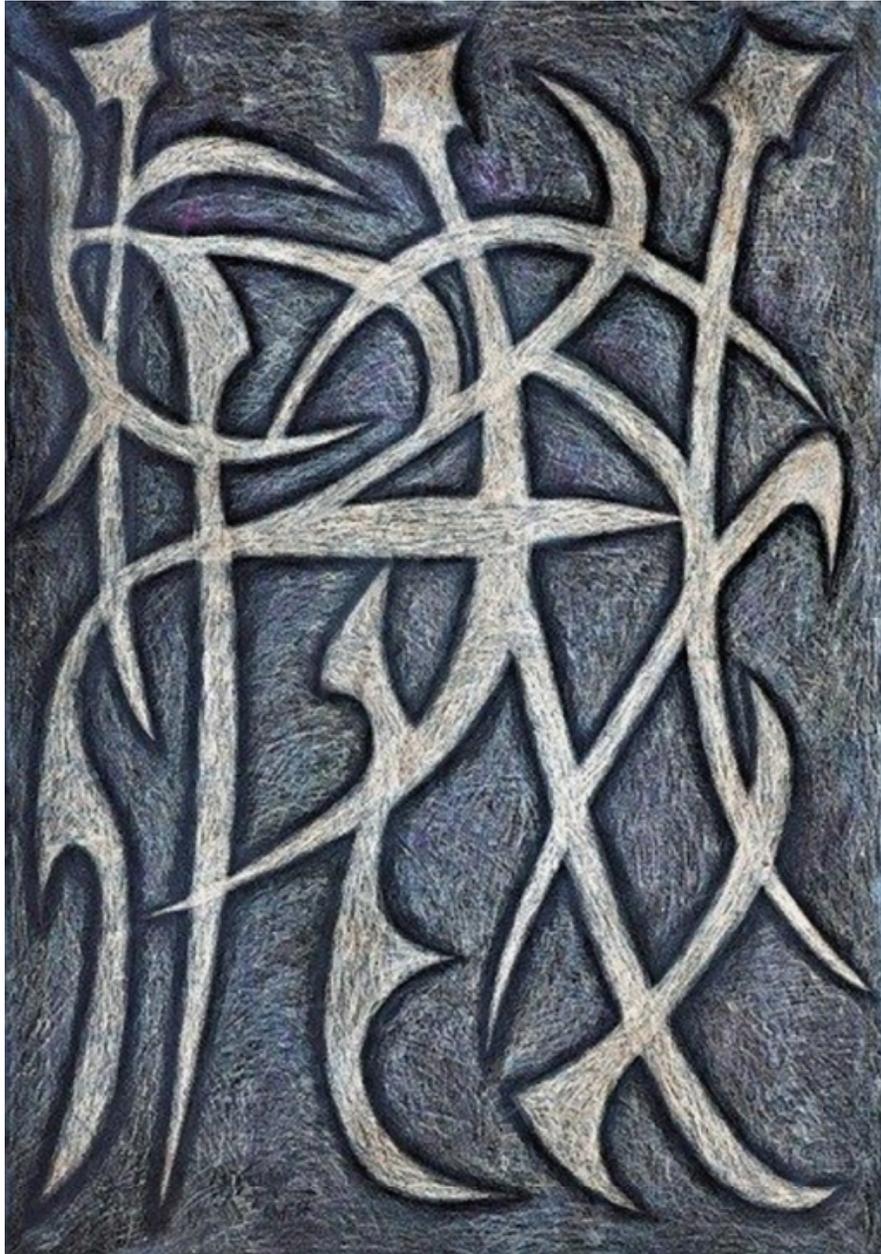
Sadequain, *Untitled*, 1966-67, Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in.

SADEQUAIN



Sadequain, *Acrobats (Blue)*, 1966-67, Oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

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Sadequain, *Walking in Paris (B;ue)*, 1967, Oil on canvas, 84 x 60 in.

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Sadequain, *Dancing in Paris*, 1967, Oil on canvas, 84 x 60 in.

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Sadequain, *Sun on the City*, Oil on canvas, 35 x 49 in.

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Sadequain, *Sunrise to Sunset*, Oil on canvas, 40 x 68 in.

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Sadequain, *Sacrifice*, 1968, Oil on board, 72 x 48 in.

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Sadequain, *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 24 x 48 in.

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Sadequain, *Untitled (Fifteen Heads)*, 1986, Oil and pastel on board, 25 x 37.5 in.

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Sadequain, *Untitled (Five Women)*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 33 in.

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Sadequain, *Untitled (Woman with Vanity Mirror)*, 1981, Watercolor and pen on paper, 27.5 x 21.5 in.

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Sadequain, *Untitled (Headless Self-Portrait)*, 1967, Ink on paper, 28 x 20in.

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Sadegh Qaïn, *Woman with Lotus and Mirror*, 1967, Ink on paper, 28.5 x 20in.

SADEQUAIN – Painter, Calligrapher, and Sura-e-Rehman

SADEQUAIN – The Painter

Sadequain by all accounts, national or international, was considered a natural born artist. A rule breaker and an innovator, he painted from 1951 to 1987 and produced an enormous body of modern art and painterly calligraphies. To him, art had to be innovative otherwise he relegated it to the category of craft.

During the decade of the 1960s, while living in Paris, Sadequain was well-established in French art circles. He kept busy with round-the-year exhibitions, sometimes holding simultaneous exhibitions in separate galleries and often in different countries. His talent was compared to that of Picasso by French art critics, a tribute of great significance by any measure. He was the recipient of the prestigious title, Laureate Biennale de Paris for his painting, *Last Supper*, and was selected by a jury to illustrate the novel, *The Stranger* by noble laureate Albert Camus — a significant achievement for an artist by any standard.

It was during this same period that he introduced Pakistan to the mural art and later produced more than forty gigantic murals that are now on display in Pakistan, India, Middle East, Europe, and North America.

SADEQUAIN – The Calligrapher

In 1968, searching for new expressions after returning to Pakistan from Paris, Sadequain diverted his attention to the traditional art of Arabic calligraphy. An epiphany lead Sadequain on the holy grail of reinventing the traditional art form, which in turn brought him closer to the masses and overnight transformed him into a legend and larger than life figure.

In the process he set aside the old traditions of the established calligraphic scripts and invented his own distinctive iconography, which he referred to as *Khatt-e-Sadequaini* (Sadequain's font). This new Sadequain's font was later defined in geometric terms by the experts in the field of calligraphic art and is now part of curriculum in art schools in Pakistan. Sadequain and calligraphy are considered

synonymous in Pakistan and upon the mere mention of the name Sadequain, the response would invariably be: “You mean the calligrapher.”

In a short period of time in the 1970s, Sadequain turned the calligraphic world upside-down and ushered in a calligraphic revolution in the country that created a wave of aspiring calligraphers who are now engaged in new experiments and thus redefining the centuries-old art form. What is most unusual to comprehend in this materialistic age is that he gave all of his calligraphic and other works including gigantic murals to institutions and individuals without compensation.

In a manner similar to his figurative paintings, Sadequain followed the same principles in his calligraphic art. His calligraphies represent the most radical departure from the established norms which had been in place for hundreds of years. The centuries-old guarded traditions, watchful eyes of the religious police, or pitfalls of the uncharted waters did not deter him from going where not many had ventured before. Undeterred, he produced a dizzying array of calligraphic marvels at such large scales that had not been witnessed in recent history. He brought the calligraphic art on an even level with other art forms that were at the time practiced in Pakistan. His art became the most effective ambassador for Pakistan in foreign lands and his impact was so profound, that on a number of occasions, Pakistan was represented in international art forums only by Sadequain’s masterpieces.

During an exhibition tour of the Middle East in June 1980, newspaper *Khaleej Times* of UAE wrote, “Renaissance of Islamic Calligraphy. A mystic artist from Pakistan who has become a legend in his own time. The remarkable story of Sadequain, who did not seek but was endowed with divine inspiration.” In his lifetime he exhibited on all five continents, Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.

Sadequain’s calligraphic style is so unique that anyone familiar with it can recognize it without hesitation. One distinctive feature of his style is writing of one letter within another letter, a latent feature that Arabic alphabets can beautifully accommodate. He extended horizontal strokes of the letters to extremities and used the circles or semi circles of other letters to form clockwise or anticlockwise spirals, thus imparting a sense of movement and vigor. He filled the empty space around the words with variety of terrestrial or extraterrestrial designs and ingenious landscapes all relevant to the meaning and subject of the corresponding verses. In the process he fused two Islamic artistic traditions of calligraphy and arabesque.

In her essay titled *Thoughts About Sadequain's Calligraphy*, German scholar Annemarie Schimmel wrote, "The most haunting calligraphy and the one which, to my personal feeling, reveals the spirit of Islam, as I a foreigner understand, at its best, is Sadequain's interpretation of the "Kun Fa-ya-Kun," (Be, and it Becomes). The letters of the words form a spiral nebula, the form out of which new galaxies and suns could slowly develop. The two ends of the letter "nun" lead us into the unfathomable abysses of Divine creativity, pointing to both the unique act of creation and the continuous flow of energy into the world."

Sura-e-Rehman (Holy Verse on thirty one panels)

One of Sadequain's masterpiece creations is the rendition of the holy verse *Sura-e-Rehman* in which the Creator of the universe reminds the mankind of the bounties he has bestowed upon it to relish. The verse identifies thirty one different attributes of the world and uses the refrain, "Which is it of the favors of your Lord that ye will deny." Sadequain painted the thirty one attributes on 31 panels, with the recurring refrain, each panel with bold and compact imagery but different design and pictorial illustration of the relevant words of the respective verse, such as trees laden with fruit, lush gardens, seas with large ships, or sky studded with stars.

The iconic set of thirty one calligraphic panels of *Sura-e-Rehman* is a celebration of the most intriguing and innovative work of a great artist, who crossed the traditional and predefined boundaries of artistic forms, norms, subjects, and every other confinement that he deemed as an obstruction. It is the most magnificent collections of artwork by any measure, rich in content, diverse in nature, grand in scale, and large in numbers.

Sadequain noted in one of his books that he painted the thirty one panels of *Sura-e-Rehman* at his home, Sibtain Manzil in Karachi Pakistan, during a two week period. Each panel was dated and signed by Sadequain; dates annotated in Lunar calendar as was customary for him on his calligraphic works. The lunar dates correspond to 1969.

All thirty one panels have been in the collection of Sadequain's family. They have been exhibited in Pakistan (1969) and Washington DC (2007). They have been widely documented in newspapers and books.

Sura-e-Rehman Series Selected Works



Sadequain, Sura-e-Rehman Series 1, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 2*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 3*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 6*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 7*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 13*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 14*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 15*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 18*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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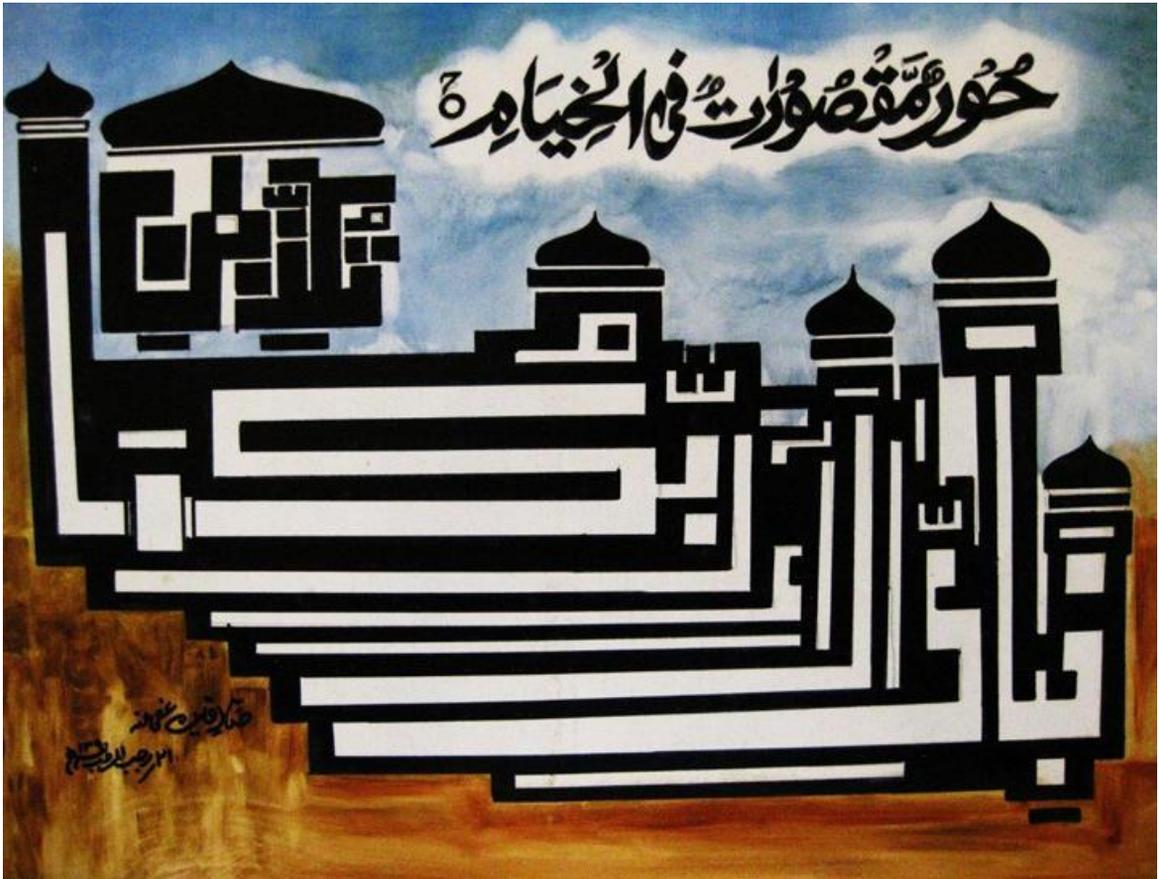
Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 24*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 27*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 30*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Sadequain, *Sura-e-Rehman Series 31*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

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Select Group Exhibitions

- 1986 Exhibition of calligraphies at Frere Hall
1985 Anjuman-e-Sadaat-e-Amroha in Karachi, Pakistan
Exhibition of calligraphies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1982 Kennedy Hall, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
Urdu Ghar, Hyderabad
Exhibition of calligraphies and drawings, State Lalit Kala Academy, Lucknow, India
Exhibition of calligraphies at Ghalib Academy, New Delhi
1974 Lahore Museum; Islamabad at PNCA; Karachi Arts Council; Municipal Library Hall,
Dubai; Main Hall, Hilton Hotel, Abu Dhabi; Markazul Funoon, Jeddah, Saudi
Arabia; National Museum of Damascus, Syria; Hall of Jordan Intercontinental,
Amman, Jordan; Art Gallery of Kuwait City, Kuwait; Museum of Modern Art,
Baghdad
1969 Arts Council Building, Karachi
1966 Exhibition sponsored by Automobile Club of France, Place de la Concorde, Paris
1965 Several exhibitions in France including Nouran Havre, Palais de la Mediterranee,
Chateau-Musee Annecy, Musee Casino Dieppe, Casino de Charbonnieres, and
Musee Macon
Arts Council Gallery, Karachi; Alhamra, Lahore
1964 Galerie Presboug, Paris
1963 Commonwealth Institute Galleries, London
N.V.C. Gallery, London
5th Salon of the "Young and Great Artists," Museum of Modern Art, Paris

Awards

- 1982 International Gold Mercury Award
1980 Government of Pakistan, Sitara-e-Imtiaz
1975 Government of Australia, Cultural Award
1962 President of Pakistan, President's Medal of Honor for Pride of Performance
1961 Government of France, Biennale de Paris
1960 Government of Pakistan, Tamgha-e-Imtiaz and First Prize in the All Pakistan
National Exhibition of Paintings

Commissions & Murals

- 1982 Designed calligraphy of Aligarh Muslim University's logo for Moulana Azad Library
Executed a mural, "Quest for Reality," for Banaras Hindu University
Executed five-story circular calligraphy based on "Asma-e-Husna" for Indian
Institute of Islamic Studies, New Delhi
1981 Inauguration of Galerie Sadequain in Islamabad
1978-9 Published book of poetry with illustrations, working mostly on calligraphic work
1972 Executed "Sura-e-Yasin," 260 feet long on wooden panels for the Islamic Gallery in
Lahore Museum and donated it to the museum
1970 Published privately First Edition of the Rubaiyyat-e-Sadequain Naqqash
1968 Executed the mural "Quest for Knowledge II" for the library of the Punjab University
Executed two murals for Auditorium of Punjab Univ., "Confrontation" & "Triumph"
1967 Executed a mural "Saga of Labor" at Mangla Dam Power House
Executed a Mural "Light of the Book" in the Punjab Public Library
1966 Executed a mural in Lausanne, Switzerland entitled "Pakistan" in the Pakistan
Pavilion in the Swiss Fair - later exhibited in New York, Tokyo and Toronto, Canada
Executed a mural "Flight" in the PIA Office at Paris
1965 Executed a mural "War and Peace" at Karachi
1964 Selected to do color lithographs for a special publication of the novel by Albert
Camus, "L'Étranger (The Stranger)" published by the Automobile Club of France.
1962 Permanent display at Galerie Mona Lisa, Paris
1959 Executed a mural "Quest for Knowledge" at the Services Club in Karachi
Executed a mural for the Committee Room at Mangla Dam on Dignity of Labor
1955 Executed two murals in Jinnah Central Hospital Karachi War #5