

The 'Rebel Angel' remembered

Thursday, 26 May 2011 13:38 - Last Updated Thursday, 26 May 2011 13:42



By **Meena Ahmed**

To acknowledge the contributions of Asim Butt, a renowned young artist whose death has left a great void in the art scene, the Mohatta Palace Museum has released a catalogue in his honour.

Originally published by [Pak Tea House](#)

“I paint as a political act: to express my power larger than myself. I paint to create what it is I want to see, to fill an absence in the world,” read an excerpt from the 60-page catalogue entitled ‘Rebel Angel’.

The catalogue aims to reflect the true nature of this artist, who was considered by many as a revolutionary and was never afraid to raise a voice against tyranny through his art. "Asim clearly drew the lines between the oppressed and the oppressor through his public work, which he produced as a protest against injustice," recalled Sheherbano Husain, a confidant of Butt. Even though he was detained several times for his public art, he continued to paint on.

The catalogue was officially released as part of the 'Rebel Angel: Asim Butt 1978-2010' exhibition which will be showcased till July 31 at the Mohatta Palace Museum as a tribute to the late artist.

"His fearless forays into uncharted territory separated him from his peers and made him an innovator," said Director Mohatta Palace Museum Nasreen Askari through the preface written in the catalogue.

The 60-page catalogue brings together a wide variety of Butt's artwork and was compiled with the help of the artist's family and friends, who now own the collection of his work.

The piece chosen for the cover of this catalogue was a self-portrait that had been created by the artist in 2006. The catalogue not only shares images of Butt's work on oil on canvas, chalk and charcoal on board, oil on wood, oil on board, but also some images of his graffiti done with

stencil and spray paint on the walls of the city. Spray painting was his way of protesting against several issues that concerned him.

“It was towards his larger view that he painted his murals and snuck out in the quiet of the night to scrawl subversive messages on walls, risking life and limb in the process,” read more lines from the catalogue, which also contains a chapter focused on the private memories of the Karachi-born artist.

Noted art historian and social commentator Nazish Attaullah also paid tribute Butt's artwork in which he addressed a number of pressing issues.

“Asim's greatest contribution to the art world of Pakistan was his public art in which he tackled socio-political issues, an exercise not undertaken by any other artist and, had he lived, would have surely become one of the country's foremost pioneers and proponents in the field,” she said.

An image of 'Five ways to kill a man', one of his most famous creations painted on the wall just opposite Adbullah Shah Ghazi's shrine, was also added to the catalogue. The original dimensions of this masterpiece inspired by Edwin Brock's poem of the same name were 8 metres by 2.1 metres.

The catalogue also shares the image of another Mural which Butt had created for T2F (The Second Floor) on the request of the owner, Sabeen Mahmud, who was a close friend of the late artist.

I shared the idea of T2F with Asim and discussed the type of art work we wanted. He rejoiced after visiting the sight and engrossed himself into the project. Although he requested for more time to work on the project, he effectively finished it before the launch of the place since we, too had limited time," recalled Mahmud.

He was an artist and social commentator, who in a short span of time produced much work for the public. "In a very small time he crafted a niche for himself," remarked Raza Rumi, a well-known writer.

Regarding the untimely departure of the artist Rumi said "During the on-going sorry situation of Pakistan, we have lost such an artist who was much need at this point in time." The artist committed suicide last year for a reason that remains unknown.