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MF HUSSAIN loves Dubai and shows it too. VEATHIKA JAIN met the nonagenarian artist during his recent exhibition in Dubai titled Imprints of India.

The Man and his muse



He has been in Dubai for a while. Cooling his heels, (or should that be his bare feet?) after the heat generated by his controversial paintings got a bit too much for him back home in Mumbai. At his recent exhibition, Imprints of India held in Dubai, the master painter, exhibited limited edition prints of 31 of his paintings. In an age when an original work of Hussain costs the earth, that makes a Hussain actually affordable! "It is an attempt to include art in everyone's life. With art becoming affordable, one can buy it and study it," points out the artist.

At 91, Maqbool Fida Hussain is one artist whose work goes under the hammer at international art auctions at unimaginable prices. But, the man himself makes an effort to bridge the gap between art and the common man. He's probably the only artist who has created museums for art lovers. "I have four museums in India and two in Dubai. These museums are not for selling art. My paintings are kept there for all art lovers to increase their knowledge of art." His works are housed at two museums in Dubai—in Emirates Hills and in Emaar Towers near Clock Tower in Deira. Good deeds have a way of coming back. In Hussain's case it was his paintings that found their way back to him. "In 1956, I had gone to the Czech Republic with

my exhibition of 80 paintings. The interpreter there took a keen interest in my work and we developed a liking for each other. Her interest in my work and our mutual liking for each other made me present the whole show to her. In the years to come I lost touch with her. But imagine my surprise after 40 years when I did meet her she gifted me all those paintings! I was shocked that she didn't sell a single painting of mine despite knowing the price they could have fetched. These are the paintings which I now keep in the museums in Dubai."

M F Hussain is a lover of not just art and culture, but heritage too. "India has a rich culture which dates back about 5000 years. It's a treasure for all of us to use and I want to add to this treasure!" says the artist whose association with paints started at quite another level. "I used to paint cinema hoardings in Bombay for a living not once did I think of giving it up. I knew I had substance and the conviction to carry on," says Hussain as he looks back at those early days.

His creative genius has never been in question. But he has often been accused of resorting to marketing gimmicks to garner attention. "In today's world, only if you market yourself will people notice who you are. It takes you and your work to a completely different level."



According to Hussain, marketing is an equal partner in every painting. "I used to feel really upset when Indian art was not given its due. I took up the matter in the 1980s to bring the price of Indian art at par with the rest of the world. And within eight years I had my mission accomplished and all this was possible only because of marketing." His paintings have fetched up to \$ 2 million at Christie's and he has a deal worth Rs100 crore up his sleeve. So what if the deals have been mired in controversy?

What does a man of 91 do with all that money one wonders? "My bank balance is always zero. I love to share, not hoard. You'll be surprised to know that I have no insurance on any my works. If it's gone, it's gone for ever," he says.

Painting may be his first love but he has other passions too. He loves cars and is the proud owner of a fleet of them. "I recently bought a Bentley and I intend to buy a Ferrari soon. I love the sound of the engine of these cars. It's so beautiful, its music to my ears. I used to drive barefoot just to feel the pedal! I love driving. I used to drive all around the world, but for the last five years I have stopped driving."

He has other loves too, he reveals. He loves to design his own clothes, though he does have some favourite



Despite his association with the glitterati and having actresses as his muse he says, "Not a single person in Bollywood knows anything about art and so I would rather call them acquaintances."

designers. "I love Armani. Aramis, too is exquisite and I own some of his creations."

The skeletons are fast tumbling out of his closet. "I love music. I have painted the Beatles." What about film making one might ask. "I love film making. Writing the script, designing sets, choosing the fabrics, each and every part of it makes me happy. Film making is sheer ecstasy." His Gajgami and Meenaxi - A tale of 3



weather is good and I can paint here. I believe it is the city of the future. But the summer I prefer to spend in London where I can go to concerts, theatre and meet people and have a stimulating conversation with them. Whenever I am in London, I go to this 150 year old café run by an Italian lady where I can be one of the crowd, observe the people and hear their point of view."

M F Hussain may have had a difficult early life but he is a happy and contented man today... happy not to die in abject poverty.

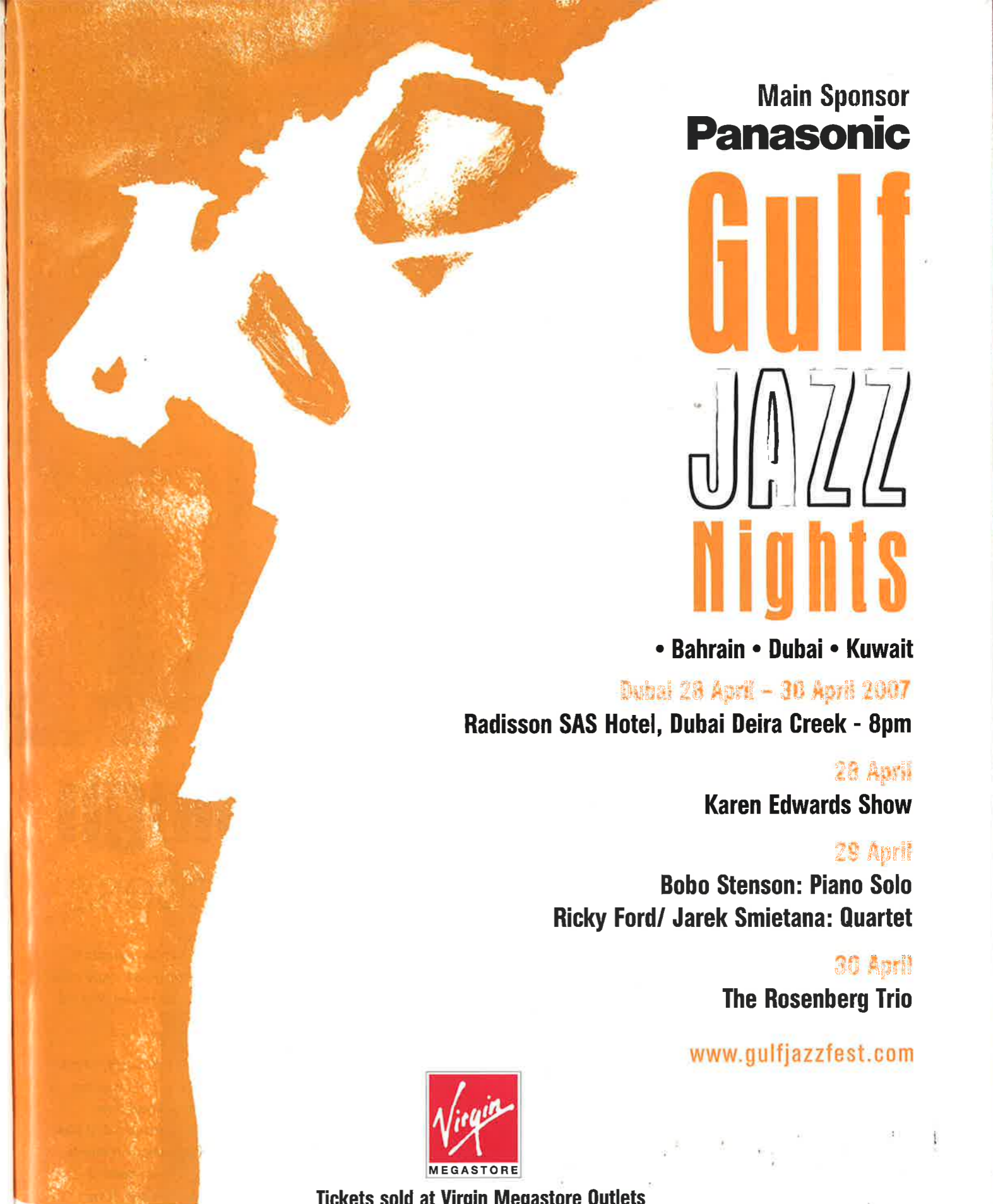
cities bombed at the box-office but that hasn't deterred him from contemplating yet another one. As a filmmaker, M F Hussain will start shooting his autobiographical film starring Shreyas Talpade sometime in the last quarter of 2007. But his heart is set on trying his hand at comedy. "I want to make a comedy film which will have the essence of Indian humour. Very few words but situation based wit is what I want to portray."

M F Hussain is man of many hues and passions. Even at this age he hasn't lost an eye for all things beautiful. His obsession with Madhuri Dixit which began during the making of Gajgami, followed by Tabu in Meenaxi- A tale of 3 cities is now replaced by the petite and fragile-looking Amrita Rao. "A woman is not an object of lust for me. I always see the sanctity of the woman. It's the image that I go for, like Madhuri Dixit has a classical image. In Amrita, I see the image of a small town girl." He will be painting Amrita Rao as a girl from

different parts of India and this set of paintings will be complete by the end of 2007. But there's one search he is sure that will never end. "I lost my mother when I was a year and a half and I have been looking to find that woman and I know it is going to be an everlasting search."

Despite his association with the glitterati and having actresses as his muse he says, "Not a single person in Bollywood knows anything about art and so I would rather call them acquaintances. I draw inspiration from people like Mother Teresa, who I have painted and whenever I used to look at her I would have tears in my eyes. The 20th century Mexican thinker Octavio Paz is another man I look up to."

M F Hussain has travelled all over the world but he is most at home in two cities. "I like Dubai in winter when the



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