

OBSERVER FEATURES, SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 1998

## Portraying Omani culture and heritage

**W**HEN Anil Kumar came to Oman in 1991, his modest ambition was to set up an art studio offering specialised services in portrait painting. The start was as planned, but fame soon followed the young artist, the word quickly spreading in and around Sohar where the studio was set up by Anil.

Initially, the clients were mostly individuals who wanted to keep alive the memories of their ancestors and establishments which preferred to have exclusive portraits of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos adorning their offices and shops rather than photographs of His Majesty the Sultan.

Anil believes in adopting artistic styles that come natural to him and are suitable for specific expressions such as portrait, landscape and life paintings. Having followed his individ-

By Ebby Chacko George

ualistic predilections, today Anil's paintings stand out in the Sultanate's leading art galleries. Currently, his 15 paintings are on display at the galleries in Al Araiimi and Al Harthy complexes.

Anil was naturally drawn to the culture and heritage of Oman and the medium he excels in is the rough style which does not focus on details, but succeeds in being highly expressive. One of Anil's captivating paintings created through the rough style portrays a folk music troupe in which the details of the musicians are not what matter, but the evocative spirit of the folk music which intensely comes alive.

Anil is sought after by many people and establishments for his expertise in portraits. Normally, portraits are done



FOLK musicians in an oil painting

from original photographs while some clients insist on doing live sessions.

Knife painting is another medium adopted by Anil to create stunning paintings. Instead of a brush, knife is used to apply paint on canvas. Artists employing the technique of knife painting must be very confident about the strokes they have in mind for a particular painting, Anil said. There is no scope for alteration once a stroke is applied by knife unlike the one given by brush, he added. A knife stroke cannot be reworked, especially as paint is thickly applied, he stressed.

Anil's artistic path was illuminated by two famous artists in the southern state of Kerala in India — S S Valiathan and Ravi Shankar. He started painting while at school and, prodded by the early recognition, went ahead and plunged into a career in art despite the meagre income. Persistence, however, has paid off in the long run and Anil's paintings now command anything between RO50 and RO700.

Omanis love all art forms, especially paintings, and they



ANIL Kumar

understand and appreciate art, Anil said. Even if all of them are not in a position to buy paintings, they value its worth, he added.

Anil markets his paintings himself and is all set to organise a solo exhibition. Among the paintings done by Anil, the favourites include the one depicting the folk music troupe. The idea of that painting germinated in his mind and remained there for some time before he started the actual work, Anil pointed out.

Framing is essential to pre-

serve paintings, especially water colour works, Anil said. Proper framing ensures long life stretching hundreds of years for paintings, he pointed out.

Anil did not have anyone as a role model in his house to take to painting. The talents he possesses are in-born, Anil said. Exuding an enigmatic confidence, Anil said he was not troubled by some of the difficulties faced by artists, which include finding the right mix of colours. Often, mixing turns problematic as the right shades are difficult to obtain, Anil pointed out adding that he somehow experienced a divine guidance while painting which helped him to work without difficulties.

The portraits and paintings done by Anil are well appreciated by art lovers. The price of a painting is decided by Anil, above which commissions are fixed by the art galleries, he pointed out.

Contemplating on one of his upcoming major works, Anil said that at the moment what was topmost in his mind was a theme depicting ancient Omani fortifications.



MOTHER and child in oil canvas