

Art of Bangladesh

An Art-letter by Jolrong.com

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International Art Camp in Kushtia
Page 1-2

From the artist's studio
Page 3-4

Art Events
Page 4-5

Jolrong News
Page 5-6



An artwork by Shahriar Shaon, CRAC International Art Camp in Kushtia 2009

Editorial

The concept of Art Camp has become very popular and renowned in Bangladesh. The art camp, which was organized by Centre for Research on Art and Cultural, is very important for various reasons. Shaswati Mazumder, a participant of the camp wrote a very important article on her experience and details of the art camp.

Farida Zaman is one of the eminent artists in Bangladesh. Farida Yesmin Ratna wrote an interesting piece on her gradual development in the field of art and its reflection on her mental changes.

In addition, 'Art Events' and 'Jolrong News' remains as regular section in this issue.

Warm wishes to all.

Shawon Akand
Editor

International Art Camp in Kushtia

by Shaswati Mazumder

Traditionally Kushtia is a place much influenced by Lalon. Rabindranath Tagore's presence is also felt here. Mohini Mill - one of the garments factories, which were established, at the first stage in Bangladesh, after being inspired by the essence of *Swadeshi* movement - is also here. In total there are a lot of provisions here to find out new ideas, elements and to create new maps of art. Recently an international art camp has been taken place in Kushtia, arranged by Centre for Research on Art and Culture. The art camp was organised at a hatchery, 'Smarn Mathsho Beej Khamar.' Situated by the Dhaka-Kushtia highway this hatchery is surrounded by a pond spread out on three sides, and has a farming land behind. It also ensured a working environment for the artists. So the artists worked here independently and satisfactorily.

Artist Rayhan Ahmed Rafi made a rickshaw by using different local elements like jute straws and dried-up branches. He named it 'Tarika'



'Tarika', by Artist Rayhan Ahmed Rafi

This art camp has a brief history. At first in 2007 an artist and researcher Shawon Akand and another artist Delwar Hossain put together their individual efforts to form this art camp. Though this camp has got an international form and recognition in the course of time, its basic structure is still that simple. With the earnest efforts of the organizers, it has its own course not being soiled by the corporate culture.

This art camp started on December 25, 2009. The camp was opened on the first day of the New Year 2010. Artists from different countries, theater workers, photographers, writers, poets, movie makers, researchers and creative persons from various fields of art participated in this camp. So these artworks became suggestive through sharing the ideas and thoughts of different countries, cultures and arts.

In different places at that hatchery, artists created their artworks by using local environment-friendly elements.



Artist A.S.M. Sayem presented Lalon's spiritual and humane consciousness through the infrastructures built on the basis of his original form. He named it 'Atma Anushandhan'.

'Atma Anushandhan', by Artist A.S.M. Sayem

The artists exposed their own creativity by going beyond the tradition, culture and their country, and gave expressions to political complexities, social conflicts and sometimes it was only an expression to child-like pleasures.

Indian artist Manas Acharya came to Bangladesh for the first time on the occasion of this art camp. Personally he does not believe in the political division of East Bengal and West Bengal. And that is why he is so worried about activities of the rising religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh. The customs and culture of Bengal do not support the religious extremities. Lalon Fakir's place is this East Bengal, especially Kushtia. The doctrines of Vishnu and Sufism are also practiced here. His arrival at

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Kushtia gave him the feel that this country was not a cultural desert. This area is blessed by the Vishnus, Bauls and Sufism. There is no place for the fundamentalists here. The artist gave expression to his idea in a new way. On a green field 'It is not a desert' was written with electric lamps.

Basically artist Polash Chowdhury is a bit emotional. Far from the maddening crowd he prefers the village simplicity. But he fears the coming city-infrastructures that will destroy this simplicity. Probably the transparent water of the hatchery and the green field will no longer be there. There may be a factory of mineral water. And that office will be decorated with some nice paintings of nature as the drawing rooms in other corporate offices are. Artist Polash created the eternal nature on his imaginative factory's wall, and named the artwork 'Pure Drinking Mineral Water Co.' This installation work points towards the city-life, nature and individuals' perpetual conflicts.

Shaon do not see the lotus that he used to see in his childhood. That nostalgia drove him to decorate the rippling water with paper-made lotuses from one bank to another.



'Duronto Shoishob', by Artis Shahriar Shaon

Another artist of West Bengal, Tapati Chowdhury, made two installation works. One is 'Arshi Jhula' and another is 'Chaya Jal/ Jaya Chal'. The pond's transparent water is reflected by the sunlight and that reflection spreads out on the surrounding trees. The artist tried to contain this reflection on the small pieces of glass. Tapati's another work is 'Chaya Jal/ Jaya Chal'. In this work she has shown that fishes in a pond cannot grow up liberally and they are doomed to be netted. She tried to make us understand that in this changing world human beings are also ensnared as she covered the entire hatchery with the fishing net.



Artist Polash created the eternal nature on his imaginative factory's wall.

'Pure Drinking Mineral Water Co.', by Artist Polash Chowdhury

Kushtia still cherishes the memory of Lalon. Here is his shrine, too. Artist Abdus Salam built his installation work 'Spiritual Land' with the help of the Shrine's basic shapes and also set them different places of the camp. His working elements were bamboos and sheets of coloured paper.

Man invented a lot of things for his necessity. Sometimes their passion becomes much more celebrated than the person himself or herself is. Artist Sheik Sabbir Alam made a gigantic cow on the wall with cow dung, the cow to whom human beings become smaller and helpless. Sabbir named it 'Inventor'.

Shahriar Shaon is basically a theater activist. Here he did a puppet show -'Chalak Puti'. He made puppets of fish, heron, snake, tortoise and chameleon with the help of local children. To make these puppets, he used some local elements like different leaves, jute sticks and dried branches. In his direction children performed the puppet show 'Chalak Puti' with these puppets. Shaon's another work is 'Duronto Shoishob'. Shaon do not see the lotus that he used to see in his childhood. That nostalgia drove him to decorate the rippling water with paper-made lotuses from one bank to another. He floated a boat made of banana's *Mochan*. The whole artistic image is bound to make one stand face to face with one's childhood memories now brought into his/her mind.

Every person has his/her own way of living. Artist Rayhan Ahmed Rafi made a rickshaw by using different local elements like jute straws and dried-up branches. He named it 'Tarika' as it is built as a vehicle on the life's way of going on.

They have different appearances on the surface and thoughts inside. Artist Joya Shahrin Haq took pictures of these people and enjoyed decorating the hatchery's round house with those pictures.



'Faces around the hatchery', by Artist Joya Shahrin Haq

Varieties of people came to the hatchery on the occasion of this art camp. They are artists, audiences, children, farmers, workers and Bauls. They have different appearances on the surface and thoughts inside. Artist Joya Shahrin Haq took pictures of these people and enjoyed decorating the hatchery's round house with those pictures. She also added self-portrait of different people what they have done.

Artist A.S.M. Sayem presented Lalon's spiritual and humane consciousness through the infrastructures built on the basis of his original form. He named it 'Atma Anushandhan' (Self Exploration). Andrew James Eagle is basically an Australian writer. Being highly impressed with the simple environment of Kushtia and the art-camp activities he wrote 'In Kushtia,' stating his own view towards Kushtia and the entire situation of the art camp. This writing was exhibited as an artwork on a tree linked to fishing net.



Artist Abdus Salam built his installation work 'Spiritual Land' with the help of the Shrine's basic shapes and also put them/set them different places of the camp.

'Spiritual Land', by Artist Abdus Salam

Artist Shawon Akand and Delwar Hossain together constructed the artwork 'Shadhu Sabdhan/Handle with Care'. It was placed on a raft made of banana trunks on a pond. The artists made different reflections by using multi-coloured water in crystal glasses. Water which is synonymous with life is sometimes life-taking, too. Besides these, some other notable works are Artist Tanzina Khanam's 'Shomoyer Kothon' (Tales of Time),

Maksuda Swapna's 'Amar Putul Ghar' (My Doll's House) and Kazi Sohel Ahmed's 'In the Lap of Nature,' etc. A great number of people from Dhaka, Kushtia and other districts enjoyed the artworks of this art camp.



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From the artist's studio

Farida Zaman

Innumerable books, showpieces of different shapes, the sudden stares of Tapa dolls, countless paintings, both small and big, hanging against walls and at a corner of this studio, the artist contemplates her art out there with much fervor. Colours, brushes and canvases are mingled together in crevices of her innermost artistic feelings. She is nothing but finely tuned with life's stimulating ecstasies, festively amorous adventures and intimate proximity. She is an extraordinary artist, and her name is Farida Zaman. On December 21, 2009, we arrived at her studio and talked about a great many things. Some selected parts of that intimate chat are presented down below.

In my thoughts and in my meditations always exists a particular query - Who am I? Where from? - these thoughts are constant since my birth.



'Human beings are for nature - I always believe this. And from this belief, my world of paintings came into being.' She continued, 'In my walks, in every crevice of my lived life and in every story I have of me, I kind of paint poems there. I can manage to hear nature's whispers, murmurings. I have a tremendous attraction towards nature, and my inspiration comes from the events of my childhood or of my adolescence, the events sometimes coloured white and black or sometimes sky-blue like clouds. In my thoughts and in my meditations always exists a particular query - Who am I? Where from? - these thoughts are constant since my birth. And these thoughts lead me to paint things deep inside of my mind.'



Sometimes I felt very sad because I couldn't go anywhere in the outdoor environment since I am female.

Farida Zaman has a sort of considerable fame for her water colour. About this, she said, 'In my student life, I worked more in water colours than in any medium and went on till fourth year in my studies. These days I have worked out some of the paintings by using water colours. Sometimes I felt very sad because I couldn't go anywhere in the

outdoor environment since I am female. Only for this unwanted shortcoming, I intently observed things on my way home and on my way to the institute, in fact, all the things in my known environment. I used to paint while on a journey by train. I used to do some figure drawings. I always looked deeper into the works by Nabi Sir and Hashem Sir. And in my mind, I used to prepare myself to paint in the future. This is the way I became an artist, so to speak. Not overnight but gradually.'

About subject-matters, she told us, 'Fish, nets, nature, crop-fields, figures, unknown birds, spaces, etc. - in fact, I worked with all these. In actuality, no one can be an artist without depending on natural things out in the open. Nature is who our teacher is, the guru as a matter of fact. When I studied at Baroda, I listened to lectures made by different teachers there and stored them deep inside. I don't paint anything out of my thinking overmuch. I always try to recapture on my canvases what I feel at any particular time. I like folk elements, in fact, love them all the more. Modernity and traditionalistic essentials - I like the combination of both. Recently I'm working with fishing nets, of course, leaving a lot of space out there. I did all the lines and dots from my traditional sources. Actually, the age-winning tradition attracts me all the more. In relation of this sheltering tradition, my artworks often come into being.'

I must wish that canvas paintings be not lost even in the positive muddle. This artistic practice is necessary.



She spoke about her own dreams concerning her paintings, 'Change is what must come into any artist's working field. I feel it. No one should get caught in a particular style. I want to do some big paintings on my canvases with fishing nets, and this is one of my big dreams. Perhaps I will do it at some point of time in the future. In fact, we face a lot of obstacles, and one always has to survive struggling against these obstacles to reach, and to live in, the world of one's artistic making in the end.'

She has had a lot of solo-exhibitions both home and abroad. She informed us, 'I did six solo-exhibitions of my paintings and artworks. Next year in 2010, I will arrange two of my solo-exhibitions in Kolkata. Essentially, I'm in favour of working everyday and art is a matter of everyday. I did some works with charcoals quite recently, from a particular impression I got out of my liking and loving things out there. Late at night, I work without any sleep, and really enjoy working in some sort of soundlessness possible at that time. I can't paint during the day time because of day-long activities outside, of loud noises and of my family responsibilities. Consequently, I have to paint at night. I always think of my paintings and those to come. I pray in the space of my studio. I have created this world of my paintings much against the society, family, in fact, against everything odd.'

She is optimistic about contemporary fine arts in Bangladesh. She informed us, 'The most positive side of our contemporary arts is that one artist can easily use any media to work in. No one is caught longer in any particular media. There are a lot of good works being done now. But I must wish that canvas paintings be not lost even in the positive muddle. This artistic practice is necessary. To appreciate and respect art practices is not that much in our country. But in recent times, a new culture has come into being, and is gradually developing, and it's really constructive.'



She is conscious of an artist's social commitment and echoes of that sort were heard in her talk, too. 'I believe any society develops through practicing arts. The artist presents a lot of social testimonials constructed as part of his/her mode of revealing things on canvases. Society, family and the country are very significant to me. An artist has a lot of commitments as well.'

Artist Farida Zaman feels a lot of urges to do in her artistic life. Perhaps a lot remain undone. But one day she hopes she will do all that and work out thing on her canvas. All the small stories we have of ourselves will be much bigger one day in the future, and spread out new branches. Does a story ever end? This is the continuous flow. Never will it end at all. We are optimistic and dream of a better tomorrow.

Interview and the Write-up: Farida Yasmin Ratna

Photography: Mohammad Asad

December 21, 2009, Dhaka

Art Events

'Joy Bangla' by Shahabuddin in Bengal Gallery

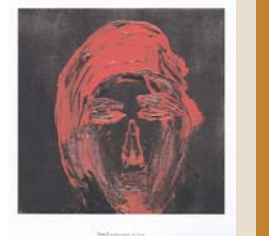


The exhibition of paintings titled 'Joy Bangla' by Shahabuddin Ahmed, an internationally acclaimed artist and a freedom fighter, was held at Bengal Gallery in Dhaka from September 27 to October 11, 2009. The exhibition was inaugurated by Shabana Azmi, an Indian film-actress, film personality and social activist.

Artist Shahabuddin has been living in France for a long time. But he quite often comes to Bangladesh and arranges the exhibition of his own paintings here. Once again he came to his own country with a bulk of his recent artworks. He is immensely a pro-life artist and at the same time a voyager in pursuit of a different imagination. The patient waiting for the ever-green and the ever-new and the crossing of one individual's limits repeatedly in his artworks, all these things are reflected in this special exhibition titled 'Joy Bangla', which was organized by Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts.

Quite discernible in the artistic bulk of the artist Shahabuddin are the primitive life and the organic one where aliveness, freshness, dynamics and fertility are recurrent. To him, life and paintings turn out to be a garland of flowers bound by one single thread. Moving forward means life to him and he is traveling resoundingly at the call of life with an indomitable desire for an indomitable journey. The terrifying war-drums could not bind him to the limited scope of his house and the yard. He felt an immense power deep inside of his heart during the darker periods of the Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971 and that power later transformed itself into a speed of a massive movement. During the golden time, terrifying as well, that speed of the mind ultimately made him victorious in the War, along with the whole country's win in the end. 'Joy Bangla' is a great achievement in this respect, simply not an ordinary slogan. In this part of Bengal, now Bangladesh, the heroic Bengalis rose and roared with a new flag in the wind and with drumming for a just war all around. The indomitable and euphoric excitement of these Bangalis at the ecstatic victory of that invincible and immortal freedom has found an existence of a new life by the dynamic brushwork of this artist Shahabuddin. The message of each and every canvas by Shahabuddin is a proven document of war-winning heroics out of the ordinary.

Friend of the Far Distant: A Solo-Exhibition by Artist Mustaque Ahmed at Gallery Chittrak



A solo-exhibition titled 'Sudurer Mita' (i. e. 'Friend of the Far Distant') by Artist Mustaque was held at Gallery Chittrak (October 2009)

The role of colours, the movement of the brush and control over the paintings are more accomplished by the heart than by the hand - this fact is clearly visible in Mustaque's paintings and the fact, which continues to make someone feel its presence in the artist's psychology at uninterrupted speed. The restraints of rules do not mean staying entangled in their labyrinthine nets, but the systematic violation of rules and their justified applications helped him achieve his paintings measured against the illusive net of reflections and anti-reflections.

Human beings and nature - the artist loves to play with both of these out of his artistic frenzy or drive. Man is the interpreter of God's immortal creations. Mustaque realized the different human facial expressions, be they unobserved, spiritual, sacred and much colder. His realization becomes a construct - a well-painted canvas. His creations come from the continuous and pure urges of the heart, the urges that keep the art connoisseurs mesmerized in the end.

Dhaka to Kolkata: Exhibition of Etchings and Sculptures by Farzana Ahmed and Tanni Dey



Recently there was, at the Zainul Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, a combined exhibition of etchings and sculptures by Farzana Ahmed Urmi - a student of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University and Tanni Dey - a student of the Department of Ceramics, Visva Bharati University. The renowned artist and Dean of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, Prof. Rafiqun Nabi inaugurated the exhibition.

Farzana Ahmed is a student of print making. She has worked out her things through wood engravings. There is a touch of softness, as of water colour paintings, quite discernible in the use of colours for her print making. Her artworks tend to be figurative. In general, any of her etchings is somewhat produced by focusing on a figure. On some of her works, there is a noticeable impact of the expressionist school. Even though there is an attempt to borrow some essence of painting in terms of colour-use, one can see the very characteristics of wood engravings in her work.

And the student coming from the Ceramics Department, Visva Bharati University, Tanni Dey's indomitable spirit of making sculptures drew a good number of artists and art-connoisseurs. The artist Tanni gave shapes to her artistic expressions by using different mediums such as metals, stones, etc. She loves to experiment with her works. The suggestive stimulus in the act of her looking deeper into things has made her artistic self a lot more experimentalist. And it's really helped her build an artistic world of her own.

Kantha Kahini: Fourth Solo-Exhibition of Paintings by Fahmida Enam Kakoli



"Kantha Kahini" - (Tales of the Embroidered Quilts) the solo-exhibition of paintings by Fahmida Enam Kakoli - started at La Gallerie of Alliance Française de Dacca from October 1 to October 14, 2009.

In rural areas of Bangladesh, women weave Kanthas or quilts of different sorts as part of the traditional legacy. Of these quilts, the embroidered quilts are much fabulously familiar. These quilts are unsurprisingly woven with long-used saris or old clothes. This weaving of quilts is a significant chapter in the lives of these rural women. Because of the long weaving and embroidering process, this quilt turns out to be not only just a thing for use, rather it becomes a fascinating tale of these rural women. Artist Fahmida Enam Kakoli wanted to present some stories by utilizing the techniques of those rural quilts through this solo-exhibition of her paintings in which the Kantha motif is prevailing as an important artistic element.

Artist Kakoli constructed this astonishing art out of our everyday life in association with her refined talent. She wanted to create an artistic language combining colours, soil and photographs with the paintings where the intricate designs taken from the Kantha tradition of using intensifying colours are the trademarks in her artworks. On her Kantha-style paintings are images of lonely women, of happy couples, sometimes of old-aged women and sometimes of innocent children - all these carry the suggestive innuendos of her talent.

Song of the Roots: Ceramic Exhibition of Chinmaye Sikder



Recently at the Zainul Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, a ceramic exhibition titled 'Bringing from Roots' started on October 25, 2009 and continued till October 30. Simple shapes of her ceramic artworks, refined conceptions of art and of precision have expanded the creative flow of thoughts of the artist Chinmaye Sikder, who always journeys in search of roots.

Our soil is pure as the compassionate mothers we have. Chinmaye has given the artistic feel, shapes, fine construction techniques and her special characteristics to this soil i. e. our roots. She instilled her artistic aliveness into our everyday life's commonplace utensils and other household materials. Her attachment with the soil is easily perceptible. This soil is what offers its closeness and makes us realize it no different from our souls. These lifeless and immobile earthen pots have become alive at Chinmaye's greatly festive exhilaration for art.

Jolrong News

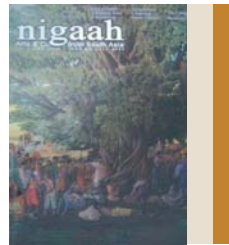
An Artist's 'Wish'



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Najib Tareque is a socially and politically conscious painter. He feels like contributing something to the help of wretched children. Jolrong.com has arranged an online charity show of his one hundred and one artworks under the title of 'Wish.' All the artworks shown in this exhibition date back to a certain period (1988-1996) in Najib Tareque's artistic life. The profit from the sale of these exhibited artworks will be given to the helpful assistance for the wretched children of 'Utshow Bangladesh.' In fact, a small portion of his innumerable artworks is being exhibited in this charity show. Najib Tareque has already informed that he will dedicate rest of his works at that time to the support of these helpless children. It is expected that this sort of charity from this artist will always be an example to follow in the future. Apart from this, the type of an online solo-exhibition of artworks and paintings is a rarity in our own country. Even in that respect, this exhibition is a significant one to watch. For more information, log in to www.jolrong.com/wish

Jolrong.com, Nigaah's Local Agent



Nigaah is one of the most significant art-magazines in this subcontinent. Jolrong.com is the Bangladesh agent of this Pakistani art-magazine. In the current issue (December 2009) of Nigaah, there is a long discussion of Bangladeshi artists among other artists of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the same issue, an interview with Najib Tareque, an artist from Bangladesh, is printed and so is the special critical report on the art-exhibition titled 'Joy Bangla' by an eminent artist Shahabuddin. There will be, in each issue, essays and articles regarding Bangladeshi arts apart from the art news of the rest of the world. From now on, this will be the magazine one can purchase regularly in Bangladesh. Those interested in it are requested to contact jolrong.com

Jolrong.com in the CRAC International Art-camp



Very recently (from December 25, 2009 to January 1, 2010) in Kustia, the Dhaka-based organization CRAC (Centre for Research on Art and Culture) organized an international art-camp 2009. In this art-camp, artists from India and Australia including those from Bangladesh participated. A group of four members from jolrong.com visited Kushtia to actively watch the activities of this art-camp, which was one out of the ordinary and organized with local supports. This group was led by Imrad Zulkarnine, Managing Director of jolrong.com

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