

**S**HILPANGAN'S exhibition was not the first occasion to blatantly put on display works of spurious origin of a renowned artist. In the absence of experts the Dhaka art scene is gradually being diluted by forgeries and fakes. In an exhibition titled "Works of Three Bengali Pioneers" in 2002 the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts produced a famine sketch of Zainul that many suspected did not display the magical mastery over the human form, which was the hallmark of the master.

How did all these forgeries and fakes end up in major galleries of Dhaka? Those who planned to infiltrate the Dhaka art scene with fakes had been active even before the major galleries fell for such works. "In the year 1999 or 2000, I was summoned by the executive director of the National Museum. Qayyum Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi and Abdur Razzaq were also there. We were to authenticate a bulk of works by SM Sultan that the museum was about to buy for its permanent collection. To our astonishment we found that most of the sketches by Sultan were fakes," recalls Khan. Not a single painting was bought by the National Museum, as there were doubts about their authenticity.

Md Muniruzzaman, the executive director of the Gallery Chitrak, also have similar stories to tell about a bulk of works by Zainul that were brought from across the border. "It was most probably in 1996 that a woman named Dipaly Bhattacharya, an artist based in Kolkata, came to Dhaka with a consignment of works by Zainul. Though she claimed that the works were obtained from a reliable source, most of the paintings

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looked spurious," recalls Muniruzzaman, who was then the gallery executive of Shilpangan.

The works were shown to artists who as students of Zainul grew up familiarising themselves with their teacher's techniques. They were unanimous that the works were fakes. Although Shilpangan rejected the bulk of paintings brought by the Indian artist Dipaly, later, as Muniruzzaman claims, some of the works resurfaced in the grand solo show of Zainul in 2004, organised by Bengal Gallery with collaboration of Shilpakala Academy, National Museum and the Institute of Fine Arts.

Hashem Khan also knows of an incident when the former director general of the National Museum, Shamsuzzaman Khan, rejected a number of works by Zainul on the account that the source of origin was doubtful. "Shamsuzzaman was not ready to buy the works about which there was little information," recalls Hashem Khan, who believes that in the grand show of Zainul organised by Bengal Gallery a number of fakes of Zainul were put on display.



**TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW:** The spontaneous brush strokes and lines of Kamrul are the signatures that are difficult to replicate.