



Shahabuddin's technique may seem nonreplicable, but there are works in the market that are falsely being attributed to this living legend.

**I**T is a fact that there are some works that Zainul left behind in Kolkata before setting off to Dhaka in 1947. "It was in 1973 that I accompanied Zainul Abedin to Kolkata on the occasion of a show titled contemporary arts of Bangladesh. One day, he asked me to tag along as he set out on a mission to retrieve the two sketchbooks that he had left behind, -- one was a pencil sketchbook and the other was a watercolour study book. We went from one place to another, but Zainul's sketchbooks could not be found with the people Zainul had entrusted them with," recalls Khan. He believes that it is on the basis of this information - that Zainul had left a bulk of works in Kolkata before finally leaving for Dhaka, a certain quarter is producing fakes that are evidently no match for Zainul's mastery over human forms and contour line. Khan is not only worried that "many of the fakes of Zainul are coming from across the border" but also that they are finding buyers in Bangladesh.

When the buyers are being easily fooled the incidents of dealing in fakes is bound to go up. And Kolkata is not the only source of fakes of the master painter. The desperation to find original works of Zainul has reached such heights that one of Monirul Islam's study work, which was done in the vein of Zainul was recently put on sale in one of the oldest gallery of Dhaka -- namely Saju Art Gallery. "It was a work that Monirul did when he and I went on a tour to Rangamati back in 1963. I remember the sketch vividly as Monirul declared before setting out to produce the watercolour landscape that he would do it in the vein of Zainul," recounts Khan who confronted the gallery owner and asked him to remove it from the exhibition of which it was one of the major attractions. Luckily, Monirul Islam came to Dhaka on a visit, and recognised his own work and asked the gallery authority to remove the picture from their display. According to Islam, the lower part of the painting had been

shorn off to do away with the signature of the artist and a fake signature of Zainul was added to give credence to the fact that it was a Zainul piece.

"The work of Monirul Islam that has been transformed into a Zainul piece came from the artist's family collection," testifies artist Nisar Hossain, who feels that it is the lack of awareness among buyers that is contributing to the thriving business in fake art. "With unaccounted for money there would only be the possibility of getting spurious art work," says Hossain.

It is true that there has been a rise in the number of buyers who are willing to get their hands on anything that bears the sign of the major painters of Bangladesh. They simply cannot differentiate between a masterpiece and a poorly done sketch. "For many buyers the equation boils down to numbers. I've seen collectors who are boasting that they have so and so number of Zainul or Kamrul. It should've been otherwise; a collector could boast of how many good works of a particular painter he has in collection. In that way quality would have been the main concern of a buyer," says Hossain. "There are buyers who haven't had the chance to look at five to six paintings displayed in a row, of a certain painter, but he is eager to lay his hands on any work by a famous name," says Muniruzzaman.

Going for a signature rather than buying art works that one perceives as the representative of the mastery of a certain artist, has left its odd mark on Dhaka's art-collecting scene. In many an exhibition shoddy works of the late masters are being displayed. "If you differentiate between the good and the shoddy works of the major painters of Bangladesh, you can also start to realise the difference between a genuine piece and a spurious one," believes Nisar Hossain. It is evident that in Bangladesh the incident of renowned masterpieces being copied is not as high as