

Dhaka Day by Day

The Sweetness of Simple Things

by Fayza Haq

Mary Czechan Coldren's crows may not be on par with that of Zairul Abedine's. She may not have the same passion and drive. But she too has made an impact on the Dhaka art scene with her exquisite etchings and water colours, depicting life in Bangladesh.

Mary is pre-occupied with the simple things in life and has built a fascinating collection of prints and paintings of what she has seen around her in the city. She does not confine herself to the golden ghetto, but ventures to Old Dhaka and the city life, beyond the safe confines of Gulshan or Baridhara.

Despite being a foreigner, with financial means at her command, like most artists in Dhaka, she too has had her share of difficulties in finding adequate materials to do satisfactory work. The paper she uses is sometimes too big for the diplomatic 'bag', and so she has to resort to the whatever is available. Mary often uses the paper she obtains from the Mennonite community. It is made of jute, water hyacinths and various other local products. She is limited to the size of her prints as she cannot get larger metal sheets.

Fortunately she has a light press of her own at home, which a Scandinavian has constructed for her from parts of the Lear jet. It weighs 200 lbs compared to the 3000 lbs of the traditional machine, she informs me. Her husband also lends her a hand with the photography

from which she finally makes her prints and paintings.

What are the subjects the artist normally puts her heart into, and converts into ecstasies on paper? "I am going mostly for landscape and still life. I like the combination of forms. I'm fond of horns as my father was a hunter, and we always had horns around the house. I didn't like them particularly when I was growing up, but in the last few years I see them everywhere. It has become a strong image with me," she explains.

Mary continues, "I came to Dhaka from Indonesia where the horn is a very powerful symbol. So I kept drawing it. It occurred in Pakistan. Here too, in Dhaka, there are the street crows that fascinate me. So you may well comprehend the recurrent theme."

She has brought in the subject of crows in various etchings. What made her inspired with them — ugly and dirty as they may appear to many city dwellers? "You do what you see," the artist replies, "I see them everywhere. They gawk at us and surround us all the time. The reason I have done them in miniatures is because I have only little plates to work on. I would like to do them on a larger scale. I brought the first thing that is available. I brought some plates and I'm using them."

She continues, "I found them funny. I took photographs of them in various angles. I got them in different positions so that this is the product of work created from several photographs and pieced together and presented. I have tried to depict them as if they were conversing with each other." In the case of the etchings of the crows Mary took a lot of photographs too. Similarly the pictures of the goats, which she got from Old Dhaka were worked upon after collecting the relevant photographs.

As for the etching of the moon, she explains that every time she took her little son to school, she saw it. She added the morning glory and the dragon-fly for the composition. "The moon is so pale and ethereal that it stirs my heart," she comments.

The pencil sketch with Pari Bibi's mosque is another favourite of hers. Part of it is etched and a section of it is drawn. As regards some of her other landscapes with trees and clouds, once again she tried to capture nature and what she was surrounded by.

What was her impression of the Asian Biennale? "I was so impressed by the Bangladeshi section. There were a lot of paintings of artists that I saw for the first time although I have visited the galleries in Gulshan and know some of the artists from the College of Arts and Crafts. The colours and images were astounding. There was everything — there was realism, abstraction, every kind of work. There was, in fact, a burst of colours and energy."

She continues, "In a way I was disappointed with the Chinese and Korean sections. I got the impression that I could get only a small view of the rest of the Asian scene, though I do not question the selection of the pieces. I found the sculpture pieces there more interesting than the paintings, although some of the individual pieces were very nice."

What is her impression of the state of art in Bangladesh? "When I go around the galleries in DIT 2 — there is a little bit of everything. You find etchings, drawings and paintings which has covered every subject matter and technique. I am also interested in looking at more. The work of Jamal Ahmed, for instance, fascinates me," she says.

As regards the crafts in Bangladesh, Mary comments, "I like the textiles most, such as the hill tract weavings that I have collected in Indonesia, which are batik and 'ikats'. The pattern comes as you weave. It is an old process and I have seen a lot of it done in Bali. I have seen 'saris' which, I believe have been done in the same process. I find the 'jamandane' wonderful. All I have is one piece. I propose to make something out of it."

It is amazing how Mary brings up four children, pampers her husband, and still finds time to capture scenes around her with such feminine finesse.



Mary Czechan Coldren: the moon is so pale and ethereal



Bangladesh Nationalist Party BNP (top) and Awami League (above) brought out Victory Day processions in the city on Monday. — Star photo

Commemorative coin on Victory Day

President Abdur Rahman Biswas was presented with a set of one-Taka commemorative coins by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman at Bangabhaban on Monday, reports BSS. The commemorative coin is the first ever to be released in celebration of the Victory Day in 20 years' independence.

A set of commemorative one-Taka silver coins minted and issued Monday to mark the 21st Victory Day was presented to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her Sugandha office in the evening by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman.

The coin bears portraits of seven martyred Bir Shreshthas on the obverse and the National Mausoleum for the martyrs on the reverse.

The government had decided, at the directive of the Prime Minister, to mint and issue these coins to show respects to the martyred freedom fighters as well as to project the spirit and values of the War of Independence at home and abroad.

This is for the first time in the 20 years of independence of the country that such coins have been issued to preserve the ideals, spirit and values of the nation's struggle for independence.

The coins will be marketed world-wide at four dollars apiece.

Begum Zia thanked the Finance Ministry for issuing the coins with the assistance of Bangladesh Bank.

Principal Finance Secretary, Governor of Bangladesh Bank and high officials of the Finance Ministry were present on the occasion.

Businessman assaulted

Mohammad Ibrahim Khan alias Swapan, a young businessman, was seriously injured when a group of mastans assaulted him with lethal weapons at Munshiganj, reports BSS.

The miscreants also damaged a brand new motor cycle of Swapan and snatched away money and other belongings from him.

According to police sources, Swapan who resides at Dhaka went to his village home at Munshiganj to celebrate the Victory Day. One of the mastans invited Swapan from Munshiganj Stadium where he was witnessing Victory Day rally and started beating him up with iron rods, hockey sticks and wooden rollers.

Local people and passersby rescued Swapan and rushed him to Munshiganj modern hospital.

Biswas, Khaleda greet King Wangchuk

President Abdur Rahman Biswas and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in separate messages on Monday greeted King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan on the occasion of the National Day of that country, reports BSS.

They wished good health, happiness and long life of the King and continued peace, progress and prosperity of the Bhutanese people.

The President and the Prime Minister also expressed their firm conviction that the traditional bonds of close friendship, understanding and cooperation that existed between the two friendly countries would further grow and develop in the years to come to the mutual benefit of the people of both the countries.

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Suggestions on structure of local govt invited

The newly-formed commission to review the country's local government structure has invited positive suggestions and recommendations from conscious citizens and organisations with a view to identifying an appropriate and suitable local government structure for the future, reports BSS.

The high-powered 14-member commission has recently been formed by government with Information Minister Nazmul Huda as its Chairman. The commission would frame recommendations for restructuring of the country's local government bodies in the light of national aspirations.

Interested individuals and organisations have been requested to send their suggestions and recommendations along with their own addresses to the Member-Secretary, Review Commission for Local Government Structures, Bhaban-7, Room 609, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka (phone-831217). Persons interested to face the commission may also seek interviews by writing to the Member-Secretary.

Weather

Dry weather to prevail

By Staff Correspondent. Rajshahi and Srirangal experienced the season's lowest temperature on Tuesday where mercury dropped to 9.2 degree. The temperature in these two places fell by 3 degree Celsius than the previous two days, Met office said. It said that night temperature might fall by 1-2 degree Celsius during the next 36 hours commencing 6 pm Tuesday. Temperature would remain nearly unchanged elsewhere over the country. Dry weather will prevail during the period, Met office also said. Temperature and humidity recorded at four major cities of the country on Tuesday were:

Table with 4 columns: Cities, Temperature in degree Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (9 am, 6 pm). Rows: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna.

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