

# Dhaka Day by Day

## Poignant Soul-searching Through Paints

by Fayza Haq

They say that one can read the soul by the eyes. The poignancy in everyday existence in the lives of thousands around us is captured with accuracy in the oil paintings by the Dutch artist Agnes de Zanger, as she dwells on rickshawpullers and vagrants like scavengers, snake charmers, cigarette vendors and street-walkers. Like many foreigners in Bangladesh, I am struck by the extreme poverty of the masses. I am not able to do anything for them but I hope that by presenting them in oil, I draw attention to their fate, and hope that those with means and authority will do something to remedy their lot," the artist says.

The details of the portraits in her show at La Galerie have a lot to say about the circumstances of the not so well-to-do in Dhaka. Roshia, with her red sari, sitting in one of the benches in Agnes's house, has been done with care to highlight the beauty of the average looking dark-skinned Bangladeshi. Her eyes are sunken, her lips pouted, while the texture of her skin and mode of her hair-style speak of a simple life of a rickshawpuller's wife, which is a little better than the rest of the hard-up characters in Agnes's collection.

Asha Khatoon, with drooping lips, half-opened weary eyes and dried-up skin, done in tones of blue and yellow as highlights of the basic brown, is a rubbish collector. The background of the portrait is completed in cheerful, pastel combinations of geometrical shapes.

The sensitive, high-strung street-walkers had to be finished in swift strokes within one and a half hours, as they were shy and self-conscious while one of them was particularly restless and quick-tempered. "They told the well-known story of being hounded by police and shadowed by pimps. The torment apparent in their gaze was heart-rending. They have something tough and resilient inside them to protect themselves from the harsh and humiliating life that they are compelled to lead," the artist comments. Their youth and bare bodies — used indiscriminately by men with money to spare — are depicted with deft strokes and translucent colours.

The snake-charmers' is the portrait of two gypsy women clad in flamboyant coloured garbs. "It was the hand movements and knee gestures that controlled the snakes rather than the music of the flute," Agnes explains. While the women are executed in a realistic manner the snakes in the background are brought in an impressionistic way. This particular mode of presentation — suggested by the artist's husband, who, Agnes says is a great source of encouragement for her work.

The drug addict is a sample of the hundreds of interesting people that Agnes once met during Durga Puja in Old Dhaka. His vacant look, bloated face and thin brown body speak of his questionable and dubious way of life. "He was selling cigarettes to make a living, and at least that is recommendable and acceptable," the painter adds.

In two more of her portraits of women, the artist has used a strip of rubber instead of a brush to get the effect of print-making technique.

Three other paintings, done in raw colours and mind-boggling combination of geometrical designs, are termed "Circus-1, 11 and 111" and here the imagination plays a strong part. The sketches of these experimental work have been done blind-folded.

In the 34 pieces, including four charcoal and pencil drawings, Agnes has proved that despite her lack of long years of formal training, she has achieved her aim of delineating the misery and hopelessness of the people in her environment. This is not to say that she is venturing forth in the world of paints without any instructions at all; she had several intensive art courses while at Soest and Utrecht (Holland). Having to bring up her two children, Laura (12) and Wyke (8), she was earlier busy otherwise. She combines her paintings with choreography. As a



Asha Khatoon

jazz dancer, she helped with the staging of "Midsummer Night's Dream"; two Christmas show dances at the American International School; the pantomime "Jane and the Magic Pumpkin"; and the co-ordinations of the movements in "Hamlet."

"While, paint the subjects, I get to know their lives even if this is done through the interpreter, my gardener. If I was only passing by them in the city, I would seldom know the details of their lives, which are certainly interesting," Agnes adds.

The problem arises when the models think that the artist can support their families indefinitely. I pay and feed them while they work but I cannot take the responsibility of their entire clans for months on end. The subjects earn more by modelling for an hour than by an entire day's normal labour. I photograph them too and give them a copy each and this pleases them intensely. Getting to meet them gives you a fascinating insight into life: there is no end to their 'sad story' but a lot of it is fact," are the artist's comments on her subjects.

Agnes's solo show will begin at "La Galerie" from today.



US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton exchanging views with the ladies involved in women development activities in Bangladesh at a tea party held at the residence of US Ambassador in Dhaka yesterday. — PID photo

### SRG to monitor Tongi polls

By Staff Correspondent

The Study and Research Group (SRG) has undertaken a voter motivation campaign and monitor the upcoming model elections of Tongi Pourashava, billed for April 10.

SRG, the study wing of a non-government organisation — Manabik Sahajya Sangstha (MSS) — will also organise a training course for non-partisan observers on April 7 where some 80 experts will participate.

Executive director of the SRG Tariqul Ghani said, the programme would help the voters know about balloting system as well as deter and detect fraud in the process.

### Teenage girl found hanging in Mirpur

By DMCH Correspondent

A teenage married girl was found hanged at her residence in the city's Mirpur area Sunday.

Mirpur police recovered the body of Aklima Akhter, 18, at about 8:00 am Sunday from her house at South Palkpara.

Aklima's husband, Soleman was not available after the incident.

Meanwhile, in another incident, a rickshaw-puller, Abul Kalam, allegedly stabbed his wife Kulsum at their residence near the Gulshan lake in the city yesterday.

### Bangla Academy to publish book on Murshed

The Bangla Academy will publish a book concentrating on the life and works of Chief Justice Syed Mahbub Murshed, in observance of his 16th death anniversary, reports UNB.

The book, being written by Syed Abul Maksud, Associated Chief Editor, BSS, will contain a brief pen-picture, but will highlight some of the works and achievements of the late Murshed.

Justice Murshed Memorial Committee marking the anniversary yesterday laid wreaths and held Quran Khani and offered *fateha* at the *mazar* of the late Justice.

### Weather

#### Dry weather likely

Weather is likely to remain dry throughout the country during the next 24 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Me Office said day temperature may rise by 1-2 degree Celsius across the country during the period.

Yesterday's highest temperature of the country was recorded 38 degree Celsius at Jessore and the lowest 16 degrees at Rangpur.

The sun sets today at 6:16 pm and rises tomorrow 5:45 am.

The maximum and minimum temperatures and humidities recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	37.7	23.6	49	19
Chittagong	34.6	25.1	88	54
Cox's Bazar	35.5	26.0	75	68
Sylhet	34.2	20.6	53	35
Rajshahi	37.0	17.1	40	26
Rangpur	35.0	16.0	47	53
Jessore	38.0	20.0	—	—
Barisal	35.5	24.0	77	49
Khulna	36.4	23.8	59	41

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