

art When Overseas Accolades Spurs One on

by Fayza Haq

TWENTY-four year old Feroz Mahmud, who won coveted awards at UK, Canada, Japan and Bangladesh, does not bask in his glory but contemplates on how to improve his work. He has struggled hard enough — living, studying and working on his own, while being still a student of Fine Arts.

Asked to explain about his foreign awards, Feroz comments, "I felt 'top of the pops' winning the prizes so early in life. My class teachers Shishir Bhatyacharjee and Rafiqun Nabi are responsible for my success. The great masters who have influenced my style and technique are John Singer Sargent, Picasso, Van Gogh and Rembrandt. What urges me to paint is to create something new for my viewers. I combine realism with expressionism in my work, and try to bring in the effect of the depth of oil painting in my transparent water-colours. With my experimentations I long to teach the world and give them a true picture of our country to whom they can rush to the rescue. I don't want to create picturesque images for the salon alone. I definitely keep the viewer in mind, and am glad of my sale from my attic near New Market. Here foreign art lovers and local intellectuals come and make their pick. At times the patrons contact me even at the Fine Arts Department DU.

"I earn from Tk 5,000 to 10,000 for my acrylic, water-colours and oil work. My portraits fetch the most, usually. My experimental mixed-media figurative water-colours and oils painting in London got £500 to £1,000. I have not always focused on the poor, because at times I have done portraits of the fairly well-to-do too. Yes, my pigsty or the butcher's shop or the fish vendor's bowls and the vagrants on the streets from the slum areas of Dhaka have won me recognition, but I do not always confine myself to those subjects as I have to make a living. There is no loyalty to serve as my patrons in Bangladesh. My models are poor people like 'chowkidars', and 'rickshawallas', and generally ragamuffins sleeping on the side walk near Dhaka slums. I also enjoy experimenting with the play of light and shade as well as texture in oil and acrylic. My oils remain ambitious and large," Feroz explains.

Dwelling on whom he is reaching out to, Feroz elaborates, "I aim at average art lovers and intellectuals who are both of local and foreign origin. They have the aesthetic sensibility to part with their savings. At present, in Bangladesh, there is not enough art appreciation as one would hope for, as the standard of painting, even by young experimentalists in Bangladesh, is quite laudable. This is so even if we compare their work with the rest of the Subcontinent, the west and technically advanced places like Japan in the east.



Water Color, Image I

With opportunities and appreciation, we can work harder. One does not strive for money alone, although that too is essential to keep one going. Our galleries are limited and viewers do not make efforts to comprehend the works of art, unless there are established names under the painting. The mentality to rove about at art exhibitions, which is common in the west, as a leisure time pursuit, is not prevalent enough in Bangladesh. I do book illustrations for a local environmental organisation (Bangladesh Environmental Development Organisation), and make portraits to get by, because my experimental works cannot keep my body and soul together. This is even though we get paints and equipments from the Fine Arts Institute DU, and my family is very supportive about my career as an artist. Fortunately, they do not take me for a maverick as some families of other painters do. I have been a professional artist since the age of sixteen. When I went to London, fortune once again smiled on me, and my ticket and board-

ing was paid for, and I managed to see a number of art galleries and museums, both in England and Scotland and learnt deeply from that experience."

In the Countess Enid Driscoll-Spalletti award from Royal Overseas League, London in the 15th annual international exhibition in '98, Feroz was the first Bangladeshi artist to win a prize. The prize was given by the Director of British Council, London. In this painting, which has been done over seven days, with the artist visiting New Market daily from 7am to 8am, we have a transparent water colour, which depicts a severed head of a goat on a wooden block, with a bloody knife next to it. The blood oozes out of the dark head. The butcher's other knife is on the other wooden block, which is originally a stump of a tree, on which we find the second blood stained knife. A second goat head is seen at the side with yet another knife and more smeared blood. The realism of the scene is as visually penetrating as a photograph and



Folk Singer, Oil on Canvas

strokes of a painter. At the back are the carcasses of the ripped apart goats. These have been exaggerated somewhat in size to lend romanticism. In the backdrop of the dust, once again one finds simplification and poetry. These objects are translucent and done in an impressionistic manner to lend aesthetic beauty and variation in style. The composition is a combination of realism and semi-abstractness. It is in pink and red, and touched with black, white and beige. The effect is so dramatic and effective that one's head nearly swims to see the scene. The name of the piece is "Bloody but Fresh". In London artists from Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, S Africa, the Subcontinent and other countries, 22 in all, sent one entry each.

"Slipping into a Coma", which was one of the pieces which helped Feroz win the Canadian award (Fege Grants Awards, Quebec), depicts an old bedraggled man, lying on the footpath, which is sketched on a beige underlying foreground. His clothes are done with more

masses of pen sketch lines. The man's face is almost lost in deep hues. This was one of the eight entries in Feroz's contribution at the exhibit. The beauty is that with mere sketches, the artist brings in the pain of existence, the abject poverty and the loneliness and haplessness of the aged poor in Bangladesh.

"Slum Dweller" brings in a healthy child, done in minimal lines, depicting a fairly healthy baby shown sleeping on a ragged thin pillow, with his legs bent, his fore limbs extended, and his baby-belly bulging out slightly on a grey pavement. The child has on only a pantaloons. He has no one to sing him lullabies, rock him in their arms, or even keep an eye on him. The innocence of the helpless sleeping child with his curly hair is touching. Once again, one is reminded of the fate of the deprived millions of our country. The beauty of the lines of the sketches catches one's eye as does the earlier piece. There is outlining, darkness and shade and this certainly deserves praise.

The other entree for Canada is a pencil sketch of a "rickshaw"-puller, wearing a white "lungi," tied around his loins and waist, flaunting a cheap watch. The rippling muscles on his lean body, his dark complexion, the firm chin and bold eyes, along with the sweep of his combed hair tell one, that this hard working poor man takes pride in his work. Nature has been subtly and carefully brought in as the form of bushes and the sky. The pose of the seated figure, placing his second leg on a cheap bench is dramatic and flamboyant. This model had posed for Feroz for days, and had been given a small transistor and Tk 40 as payment. This is undoubtedly a good portrait study of toil and tribulation because of the depth of realism brought in by pencil strokes alone apart from the lively presentation.

The concern for the future, the fretting over making a livelihood and action plus portraiture is brought into another water colour, which too was an entree for Canada. Here we see a "rickshaw"-puller having an accident and about to stumble sideways, with his extended hands. Only a fraction of the second colliding rickshaw's wheel is included in the forefront. Behind, we see a glimpse of the hoods of an interminable line of rickshaws. Buildings and people, along with trees, are deftly sketched in to the left in miniature form. More interesting than the dramatic departure of the accident is the freeze-like portraits of the "rickshaw"-puller's wife and family, done in economic but powerful strokes. "When the rickshaw puller has the accident, he does not think of himself but his family who depend on him," Feroz explains.

The Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Gold medal (all best media) from Shilpakala Academy, won in '95, has much the beauty of Dutch masters. Here Feroz had visited the "methorpatti" of old Dhaka and studied the movements of pigs in action. He had also scrutinised the piglets, fowls and houses, along with the human inmates. He had made repeated sketches and drawings before the final execution, wearing Wellingtons and carrying his easel and brushes. Once again, this is not only pleasing to the eye but taken from actual life, which many in Dhaka choose to forget. Here Feroz has combined beaten gold and burnished bronze and added shades of green to capture the stirring scene where one finds beauty in ugliness.

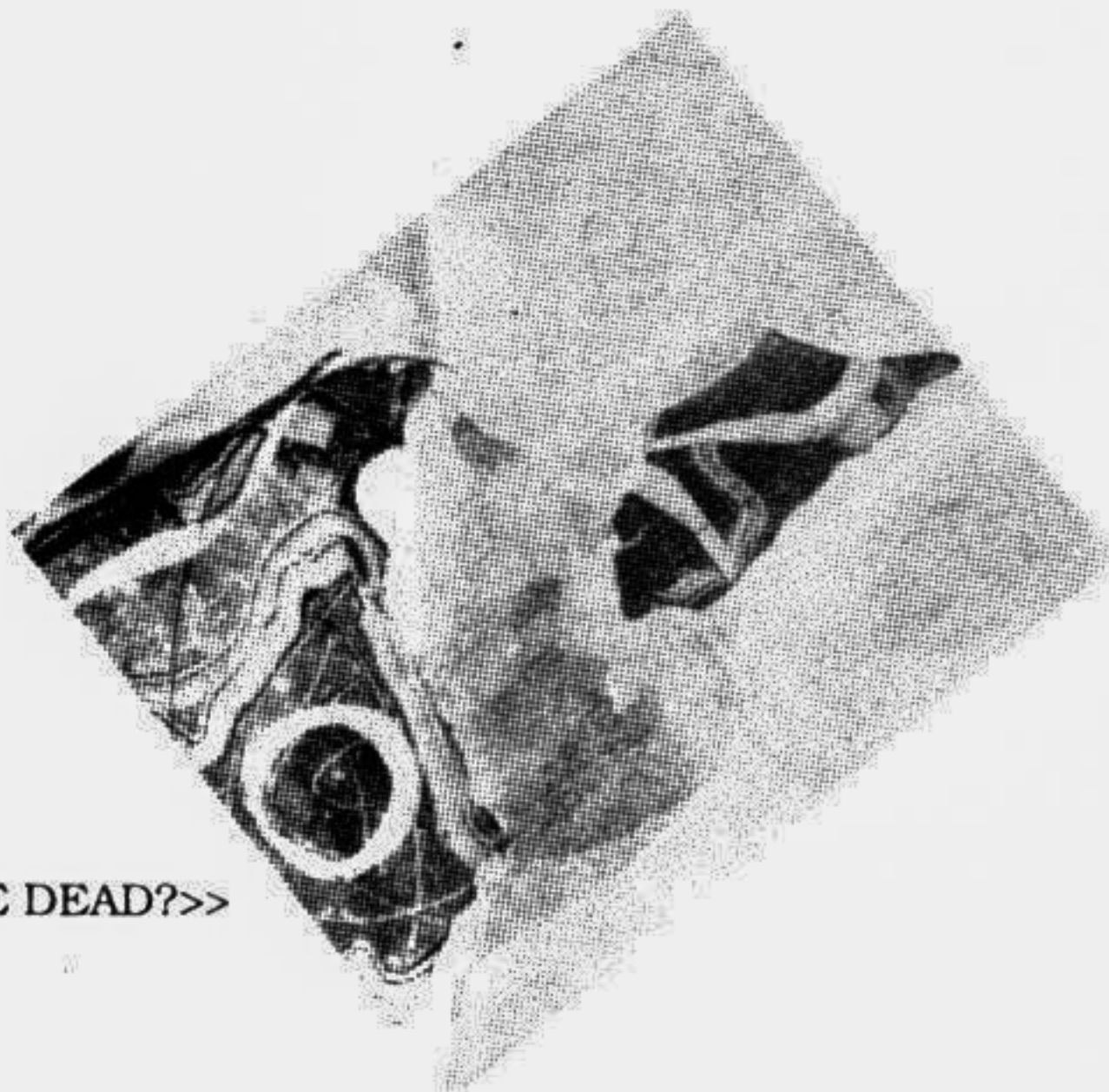
Feroz believes that it is not enough to practice to get perfection. He insists that one should visit art galleries, study art books and continue to endeavour, despite all odds to achieve anything unusual in the art world. He opines that the artist must be patient too. It is admirable how success has not gone to the artist's head and he still feels that he has a long way to go.

poems

Untitled

by Ekram Kabir

"It was not Jug Jug for me,
I didn't go to Carthage,
It's Mecca -- I a pilgrim for.
How could I be Prosepero
To my coy mistress? Or was I
The Moor, or the Jew
From Venice? No, no
I wasn't Torvald for Nora.
<<I AM THE PRINCE FROM ELSINORE.>>
Ya ho! I could have killed
Young Cassio but didn't give ear
To Iago...My fair Ophelia did so,
And made me bleed.
Can't you Tiresias see:
<<ROGENCRANTZ AND GUILDERSTEIN WILL BE DEAD?>>
There cannot be Shanthi if THEY live.
Only HE can make it reconciled,
Oh God! come, come to your
Created creature's help --
Help him to diminish the
<<FIRE OF THIS MELODRAMA.>>



The secret bleeding didn't stop with Dawn
He saw the Ocean taking care of sharks and whales.
Before flying away.
The Eagle looked at the mauve Sun —
His eyes shimmering...

(Indebted to Arifa Ghani)



Who Can Escape A Canon?

by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

There's a fly
with innumerable eyes
unaccountable tastes
It is uncivil, wander-lusty, unworthy,
it posts its irresponsible legs
anywhere it chooses
and stuns itself (unapolgetically)
with stuff it reads
with its sully little eyes.

Every so often a great big fly-swatter
comes along chasing
in full canonical speed
it swooshes through the air
and zooms to ... why? you say...?
because the fly is annoying, it
really knows to exasperate.
Also bashing it soundly
(with astounding authority)
would just make the swatter's day!

So, the fly is still whizzing here?
Yes, because it is not contrite



And the swatter's always there
too, to scare a fly's living daylight,

So, here is the tale of a funny collusion,
a tormented affair
between
a despicable fly and a resolute canon.

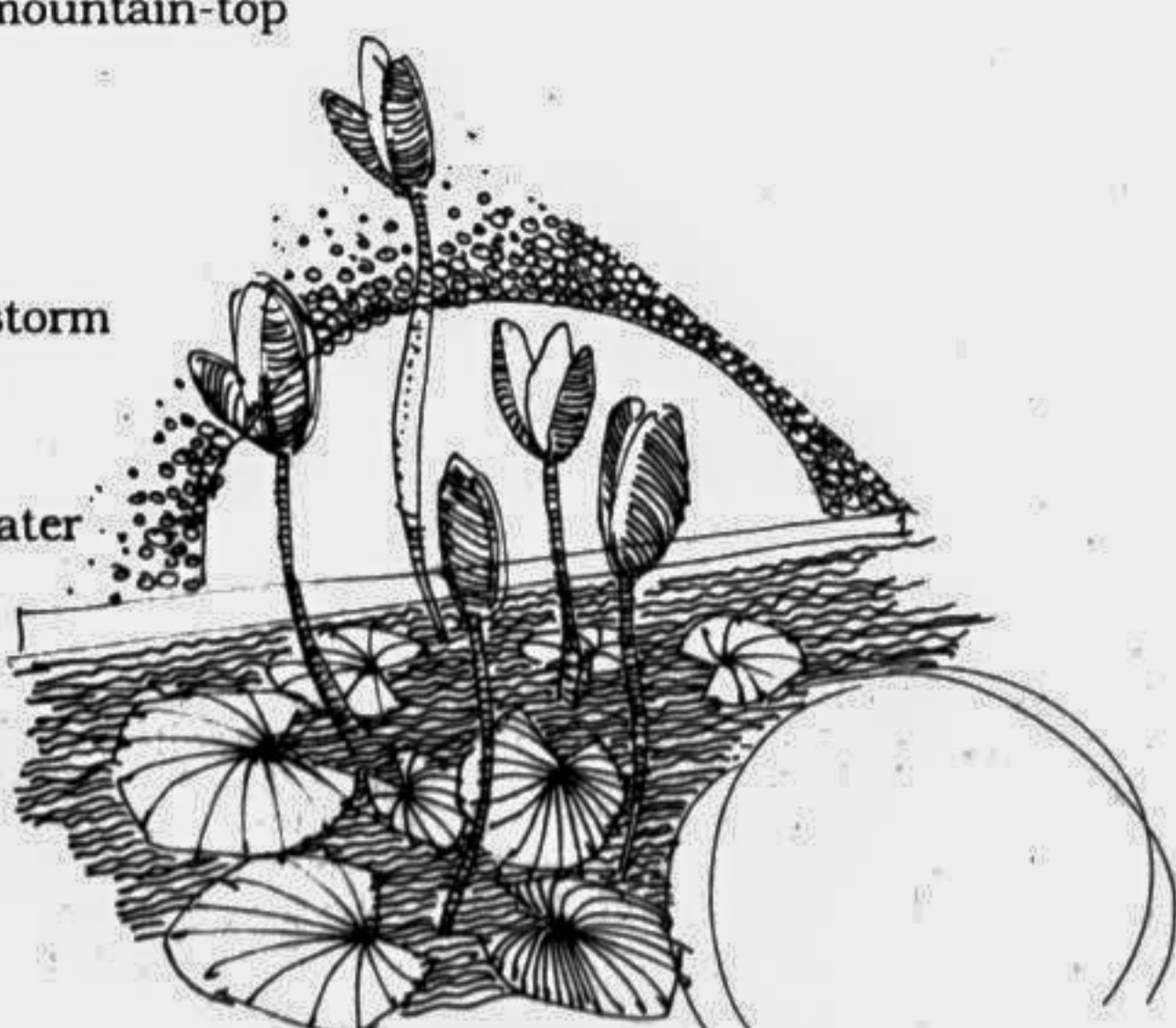
Frayed Sleep

Phone beeps begin to weep.
Mutinously
Sleep reaches out
and then decides — not.
Sleep rustles back to sleep.
The beeps stay — little mercies
like shreds of orange in
a sea of Marmalade.
Houses neigh, or is it the neighbours?
Nurses tidy trays, babies
mouth smell of
food, growing teeth,
dependence and decay.
Sleep can't remember
which image
it was sleeping on
before the invasion
of the beeps came: so it slips back
to the road washed
with a burst pipe, a bottomless
stretch of a search, to the
visit of a hot dusty voice
travelling through the slit
of an open vacation bag,
to a honking sentence, a private...
The beep seeps through, swirls
Swoop, sweep — clear away, Sleep is gone.
Sleep gives up — might as well turn on
its image box.
Someone says something kind,
says it is safe —
what — what is safe,
exactly? Bleeps flicker, they don't say.
Sleep gnashes its teeth. Poof, the power dies.
Sleep and its image box turn
into a rectangle of dark,
a speechless slice of night.



The Ocean Is Busy

After the ancient tempest was over, the Eagle sat on the mountain-top
He looked upon the Sisyphian Ocean
So dramatically appropriate,
The ashen water was scarlet and lulling
It brushed his soul —
More rippling than his own feather
The lonesome Eagle realised there was no rain with the storm
He felt painfully thirsty, craving to liquidate the iceberg,
But remembered the Delphic line drawn
Between He and the Ocean
Yet, and yet, he let a feather fall from his wing into the water
Oh! the Wind was cruel,
It took it to the shore —
A lassie liked its colours and she pinned it into her hair
The Eagle cursed the Wind beneath his wings.



The night fell... and it was Moonless...
He waited, sleepless and long, long enough to be history
Waves were making uninvited sounds,
That pierced him with a battery of elegiac arrows