

## Interview

## Glorifying the human body

Shahid Kabir talks about his exhibition at Gallery "Chitrak"

FAYZA HAQ

**T**ALKING about how his present exhibition at Gallery Chitrak is different from that held at Dhaka earlier, Shahid says, "Nearly ninety per cent of my work deals with human figures. I did them sitting at Dhaka for two months, but I have been doing the same sort of work at Madrid too for 18 months. As I had little time, the number of paintings are not as large as I would have like it. My models were the ones that Jamal Ahmed uses himself, including the

the place where I live and earn my living. I am not a banker or broker. As such, I live with people and portray them in my work. If I don't love those dwelling around me I can't work contentedly. At times I do landscapes, nature and still life around me such as bullfights."

There is a remarkable amount of influence of Bangladesh in his recent works. About this phenomenon, Shahid says, "Most of my subjects are Bangladeshi people, the seaside, boats and the fruits that you find here like pomegranate, a bowl of stale 'daal' (lentil soup). Had I been in Spain, I might have drawn a bowl of soup."

Talking about why he likes dark colours and as to which artists had influenced him, Shahid says, "As a student my teachers always commented that I used 'dirty' colours and yet my works appealed to the viewers. This is because we ourselves are basically dark and in darkness we find infinite mystery. It is believed that mankind's emotions and ideas usually see a peak at night. I believe that black is the king of colours. Other shades like brown, red and yellow ochre intersperse my colours to bring in highlights and variations. Toning and texture are created by the other colours. With texture, nature's light plays on the works. I feel the warmth of the earth when I create the up and down sweeps of textures. I use anything that is near my hand to produce the textures and these include comb, palette knife, pieces of sticks and sometimes my own fingers."

"The first person to influence my work in Bangladesh are Rafiqun Nabi, when I joined the Fine Arts Institute, Dhaka. Mohammed Kibria is also my 'guru'. I learnt about the philosophies of life through him and not just painting. When I went to Spain, I was influenced naturally by Picasso, the works of Van Gogh, Oscar Cossca, and young painters like Miguel Barcelo and Anselm Kiefer, who is a German. In their work I have found something of myself. There is a saying 'Bin guru gan kahan sey pa' which means that without a 'guru' you cannot learn much. Some artists admit to their sources of influence and some do not. There is nothing like being 'self-taught'. A person has either learnt from nature around him, from

other paintings or pictures in books, from parents or teachers. His environment also teaches him."

Talking about how he became an artist, Shahid says, "An artist is not something which you can will yourself to be out of the thin air. A man is influenced by his sentiments and his

impact. There must be an involvement with the subjects. An artist works with just colours and paper or canvas and out of these simple things he has to create wonders into which he pours his sentiments and feelings along with the ecstasy and agony of the lives of others. He

actor, painter or any form of 'shilpi' can be working in the studio or at home but he/she should not forget what is there beside the river, under the sky, or how it is with people around him. He/she should be able to share the joys and sufferings of mankind. I feel that that the works of

instance the sketch of the crows and the starving people during the Bengal Famine by Zainul Abedin. It is on par with the work of any contemporary western artist of the time. It was no copy but his own impression of what he saw in the streets—how the people were suffering and dying. The impression that the sketches make on the mind surpasses anything else in the Subcontinent. Take Mohammed Kibria, Aminul Islam, Rashid Chowdhury, and the younger artists like Jamal Ahmed, Rokeya Sultan, Kanakchampa Chakma, Nazlee and Annie are all remarkable. After our Liberation, we are more bold. We have nothing to lose and so we experiment in a brave, new way. They say 'Jader nai tader hanor bohoei nai'. They reach out to their viewers in a more direct manner and have no so-called 'poetic' hang-ups.

I feel that the young artists getting out of the Fine Arts Institute have a tremendous amount of possibilities, although undoubtedly, they are sometimes confused as to what type of painting they should go in for at the outset.

"Sure the young artists in particular are out to sell their paintings as one of their first priorities but one must make a living and should be able to survive as human beings and buy more paints and canvas for their work. They should be able to exist in a decent way although do not encourage the greedy pursuit of making money. If you are after money alone why not turn into a clever businessman? Sometimes, again, having graduated the young artists feel that they should have something bizarre in their work or they are not creative enough and I do not agree with this. Meanwhile, there are few examples among the senior painters, apart from Mohammed Kibria, who are among the living artists, who can be followed."

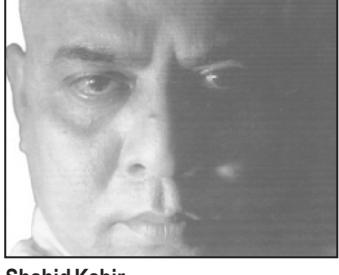
Discussing the matter of whether some of our artists are forgetting their roots, Shahid says, "Nobody can forget their roots, if they have any roots at all. Even when doing abstracts or living abroad, or reading in magazines about what is happening overseas, one must remember what Abanindranath

Takhar said 'Plant your flowers abroad, and bring the flowers from far away lands to grow in your own garden'. You should know what is happening around in your own country and not be cut off from the reality of existence. We all know that in Islam it is said 'Go to China for your knowledge.' In Europe today the work is minimised such as presenting a simple bowl of soup done by Miguel Barcelo. Painting, I will stress, should be about the simple things in our everyday life."

Asked how he went about his work, Shahid says, "I work in my



mixed media (a vagabond)



Shahid Kabir

kitchen assistant, Nurul Huq. In fact I developed a friendship with this teenager and modelled for me with alacrity."

Asked why he had changed to figure painting, Shahid says, "No one makes a pre-planned change in one's painting because a change comes from within you. For a long time I have longed to work with the human body. I am a human being and I find human figures so appealing that I have to try my hand at it. I am not copying as in photography. I am presenting my interpretations of what I see. If you do not have a proper communication with your subject your work is complete. It takes a while to put your model at ease--at least a couple of days."

Dwelling on the influence of his stay in Spain in his works, Shahid says, "Of course. It is normal that if I have stayed in a country for 20 years, the influences of the environment will creep into my paintings. Spain to me is my second home. Living in Madrid and travelling to different parts of Spain, I am greatly influenced by the gypsies and flamenco singers, who I believe are close to the earth. I have at the same time my right and my duty to portray



mixed media (frontal pose)



mixed media (back angle)



mixed media (side pose)

emotions and wants to express himself in colours when he eventually emerges as a painter. He then finds a way to best find his goals."

Asked to say a few words about what makes a good artist, Shahid says, "For me what is most important for an artist is that when he paints he should have tremendous love for his subjects. This does not mean a romantic attachment between two people. The artist must learn to love trees, birds, skies, rivers, and human beings and their ways before he can paint with and

should have faith in himself, without which he cannot express himself fully an will not impress the viewer, and must also persevere. A good artist could be doing abstract or impressionistic or surrealistic or even realistic art. His choice of 'ism' does not matter. However, he must not lose touch with his surroundings as nothing pops down from nowhere."

Dwelling on the standard of art in Bangladesh vis-à-vis that of the rest of the Subcontinent, Shahid says, "I feel that any singer, writer,

the Indians are still based on their gods and goddesses and the images like in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora. They are still preoccupied with their past. They have not been able to come out of that preoccupation with their history. They need to be more forward looking. As for the Pakistanis, apart from Sadequain and Gulgee, nobody moves me. I feel that we are in no way behind the other countries in the Subcontinent.

"Our artists, both young and old, have a positive future. Take for

studio most of the time, because I cannot work outside with the sun, rain and wind. There is also the traffic and the crowds of people. Most of my work depends on my mood. It is as important for me to paint as it is for me to eat and sleep. I also feel that I am doing something creative and feel content with that. During my work, I have Bangla folk music such as that of Kangalini Sufia or Abdur Rahman Bayati or even Tina Turner. I like listening to flamenco music too. The beats of that type of music appears earthy to me. Even here at Dhaka, I have heard the same type of music during my work."

Shahid Kabir has had eight solo exhibitions at Spain, Holland and Bangladesh. He has taken part in nearly 30 joint exhibits at USA, Norway, France, England, Ireland, Tokyo, Spain, India and Bangladesh. He has had three awards from the Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka and from the Carmen Arzomena, Spain.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



## Photography

A photography exhibition by Dirk R Frans is being held at the Dirk Gallery.

## Contemporary European Film Festival

On the occasion of their 15th founding anniversary (16 May, 1986-16 May, 2001) Zahir Rahan Film Society has organised a Contemporary European Film Festival, which is being held at the German Cultural Centre, Road # 9, Dhamondi.

## Contemporary Indian Bengali Films

Arganta Film Society in association with the High Commission of India has arranged a 8 daylong film session on 'Contemporary Indian Bengali Films' in connection with the celebration of Arganta Film Society's 25th anniversary, being held at the Indian High Commission Auditorium.

## Comics

A comics exhibition titled *La bande dessinée contemporaine en France* (Contemporary comic strip in France) is being held at the La Galerie de l'Alliance Française de Dhaka. The exhibition will be open to the public till May 27.

## Satyajit Ray Retrospective

Satyajit Ray Retrospective organised by Zahir Rahan Film Society is now being held at the auditorium of the High Commission of India at Road No. 2, Dhamondi. Screening schedule: Shatranj Ke Khilari (The Chess Players) and Ganashatru (An Enmity of the People) on May 25 at 3:00 & 6:00 p.m. respectively.

## TV GUIDE



## PICK OF THE DAY

## The Seventh Sign

On HBO at 10:00 tonight. The world coming to an end and only Abby Quinn and her unborn child can save it from Apocalypse. The finale takes us on an ominous, unforgettable odyssey to the edge of life and death.

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

**EKUSHEY:** 7:00 p.m. *Toyota World of Wildlife*. Water and Rain: Water, the other name of life. Human beings even worship god to get water. This episode of Toyota World of Wildlife also features on the Rain Forests of the mid America.

**EKUSHEY:** 8:00 p.m. *Bandhan*. Episode 6: Sadia does not get out of house after been slapped. On the other hand mother does not return home even after the dust. Family members become anxious for her.

**STAR WORLD:** 8:00 p.m. *Sabrina The Teenage Witch*. Witch Trash: Harvey and Valerie pick up Sabrina for an outing, but they end up under house arrest instead!

8:00 Late Show With David Letterman

9:00 Three's Company

9:30 Here's Lucy

10:00 Dave's World

10:30 The West Wing

11:30 Full House

12:00 Capitol

12:30 All My Children

1:30 Dave's World

2:00 Three's Company

2:30 Friends

3:00 Jesse

3:30 Fresh Prince of Bel Air

4:00 Royal Canadian Air Force

4:30 Here's Lucy

5:00 Three's Company

5:30 Heartbreak High

6:30 Jesse

7:00 Full House

7:30 The West Wing

8:30 Friends

9:00 Fresh Prince of Bel Air

9:30 Late Show With David Letterman

10:00 The Sopranos

11:30 Friends

12:00 Fresh Prince of Bel Air

12:30 Full House

1:00 Late Show With David Letterman

2:35 Just Jammin

3:05 Tararum

4:00 Hit Pe Hit

4:30 The sopranos

5:00 Hit Pe Hit

5:30 Friends

6:00 Jai Baba Amarnath

5:30 Half Chocolate/Disney

6:00 Alpha Khabar

6:25 Jhankar

6:30 Foot Ball

7:00 Swapnoeel

7:25 Jhankar

7:30 Kichu Smriti Kichu Gaan

7:55 Jhankar

8:00 Nayantara

10:00 Ek Akasher Niche

10:15 New Bulletin

10:20 Inget

10:40 Ek Palake

10:45 Foot Ball

11:20 Alpha Khabar

11:45 Ek Palake

11:50 Jemon Boiben

12:15 Surj E Jharna Dhara

12:30 Googly

1:00 Bharat Bhromon

1:30 Bengali Feature Film

4:00 Ek Akasher Niche

4:30 Nayantara

5:00 Ingit

5:30 Foot Ball

6:00 Sur Taal

6:15 Zee Music Box

7:30 Tararum

8:00 Hit Pe Hit

8:30 Music Zone

9:00 Morning Zee