

Opening ceremony will be held at 12 pm. After a whole day's work participating artists will savour a play, Shongkranti, staged by theatre group Aranyak.

The day's proceeding begins after breakfast and concludes with a dance performance by Nrityadhara.

The artists will pick up from where they have left the previous day and a musical evening performed by the leading band of the country the Renaissance will refreshingly conclude the day

On the concluding day of the workshop artists will give finishing touches to their work developed and conceived during the workshop. The grand finale will be an Odissi dance recital by Sharon Lowen.

Crossing of imaginations

A four-day Contemporary Asian Art Workshop, organised by the Bengal Foundation begins today at BRAC Centre at Rjendrapur bringing together leading artists from Asia and the Pacific, writes Ziaul Karim

THE political identity of Bangladesh is rather short. Imagination of a nation for a Bengali-speaking Muslims was translated into a reality only in the 1970s. However, the production and management of culture in this geographical terrain dates as far back as the pre-Christian era.

Characteristically open-ended, Bangladeshi art in a remarkably short span of time catapulted itself into the main stream art world. The long overdue desire for liberating itself as a nation and the passion to construct its own aesthetic discourse nursed by the collected psyche have helped Bangladeshi artists to look outward without inhibition for external resources. And then they have looked inward for tapping traditional cultural contents that equipped them to make their presence felt in the world art map. The holding of Asian Art Biennales regularly has also established Bangladesh as one of the major art capitals of South-East Asia.

While Asian Art Biennales have been providing the platform for cultural dialogues and exchanges involving the neighbouring countries and bridging gaps that seemed unbridgeable even a decade or two ago, the need for intimate and closer interactions among the artists was always deeply felt. Bengal Foundation, a leading patron of music and art in the country, responded to the need with the creation of a space by organising an art workshop where the creative interaction would take place and artistic imaginations engage in constructive dialogues.

The first art workshop held in Dhaka in February 1999, which brought together artists and art critics from West Bengal and Bangladesh, was a great occasion for the participating artists and critics to share experiences and compare drafts and notes, understand the commonalities and differences and appreciate intricacies and aesthetics of art language of the region. The second one titled Contemporary Asian Art Workshop, opens today, January 14, at BRAC Centre at Rjendrapur, involving 87 artists and critics from across Asia and the Pacific has expanded its canvas and become truly international in scope and spirit.

A workshop is meant for inspiring artists to contemplate and visualise the composition as the way he/she



Memories of the past workshop: (from L to R) Top-ranking Indian artist Sanat Kar engrossed in his work while chairman of the Bengal Foundation looks on, Abu Taher applies colour with his paintbrush, Abdus Satter at work



wants to be. A workshop can rekindle the artistic imagination of an artist or inspire new expressions.

This time the workshop will witness front-ranking artists from India such as Jatin Das, Arpana Caur, Niren Sen Gupta, Umesh Verma, Paresh Maity, Sunil Das, and Bijan Chowdhury and leading artists from Bangladesh like Saifuddin Ahmed, Mohammad Kibria, Aminul Islam, Abu Taher, Samorjit Roy Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi, and Mahmudul Haq sharing experiences and exchanging dialogues to enhance the understanding of the commonalities and differences. They will also be joined by artists from Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Oman, Russia, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Here is a short bio of the participating artists.

Jatin Das: Born in 1941, Mayurbhanj, Orissa. He obtained Diploma in Fine Arts from Sir JJ School of Art, Bombay. He has had over 47 one-person shows in India and abroad. Das participated in numerous exhibitions in India and abroad. Awards and fellowships include Bhopal IV Biennale, Bharat Bhaban and Senior Fellowship Department of Culture, Government of India 1989-90. He has participated in numerous art camps and workshops. His works can be seen in private and national collection in India and abroad. Jatin Das is a resident of Delhi.

Arpana Caur: Born in 1954 in Delhi. She has had 26 one-person shows, numerous group shows and exhibitions. She is recipient of many awards and honors including certificate in Algiers Biennale, VI Biennale India, Gold Medal in Painting and nomination as Eminent Artist by Lalitkala Academy. Her works figure

in many public and private collections. Arpana Caur is founder member and Secretary General of the Academy of Fine Arts & Literature. She is a resident of Delhi.

Jagdish Chandra: Born in 1954, Haryana. He obtained a BFA degree in painting from the College of Arts, New Delhi. Jagdish is a research scholar in the Department of Fine Arts, University of Tsukuba, Japan. He has had many solo and group shows in India and abroad. He is recipient of many awards including Sanskriti Award, for contribution in the field of fine arts, given by Sanskriti Pratishthan, Delhi. He has also received the Lalitkala National Award in Painting. His works reside in collections at home and abroad.

Niren Sen Gupta: Born in 1940, in Jamalpur, Bangladesh. He is ex-Principal of the College of Arts, Delhi. He graduated from the government College of Arts and Crafts, Kolkata, in 1965. He has had several one-person and group shows in India and abroad. His awards include Senior Fellowship in the Department of Culture, Government of India. Niren Sen has been curator of two major important exhibitions. He resides in Delhi.

Naresh Kapuria: Born in 1954, New Delhi, known as trendsetter in installations in garden, stage as well as painting and graphics. He has had several one-person shows in India and abroad in London, Turkmenistan, Bangladesh, Singapore and Austria. Group shows include ones in Cuba, USSR (former), Dubai and Holland. He is recipient of VIII Triennale in India and has participated in the Asian Art Biennale in Bangladesh. Naresh was awarded the best environmental artist in the 12 Surajkund Craft

Mela, Haryana. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has awarded him Senior Fellowship. His works are retained in collections at home and abroad. He is a resident of Delhi.

Umesh Verma: Born in 1935 in Banda, Uttar Pradesh. He holds a National Diploma in Painting from the Delhi Polytechnic (1963). He has been exhibiting regularly since 1961 and has participated in more than 65 important group shows including the Delhi Lalitkala Academy National Exhibition. He is a post-graduate research Fellow at Mombusha, Japan. Verma has had many one-person shows in India and Kyoto, Japan. His works lie in several public and private collections at home and abroad.

Sanjay Bhattacharya: Graduated in Fine Arts from the Government College of Fine Arts, Kolkata in 1982. He has had several one-person and group shows in India and abroad. Sanjay Bhattacharya is an internationally renowned water-color painter. He is a resident of Delhi.

Madhur Kapoor: Born in 1947 in India. An internationally renowned painter, she has had several one-person shows and group shows in India and abroad including Singapore, Hong Kong and the United States. She is recipient of several awards and resides in Delhi.

Paresh Maity: Born in 1965 in West Bengal. He graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Kolkata and obtained a Post-graduate degree from the College of Arts, Delhi. He has had several one-person and group shows at home and abroad including Paris, Switzerland and Transylvania. He has received many awards such as the British Council Visiting Artist, AIFACS

etc. Paresh Maity is a well-known water color painter. He is a resident of Delhi.

Santo Dutta: Born in Bangladesh. He is a well-known columnist and wash painter as well as an internationally acclaimed art critic. He has participated in various group shows in India and abroad. 'Santo Dutta has published several books on contemporary art and is recipient of several honors. He is a resident of Delhi.

Sujata: Born in Delhi. She is well known for Black and White drawings, especially of horses. She has received several honors.

Sunil Das: Born in 1939. He graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Kolkata. He did higher studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris. He did research in fresco and mosaic with Monsieur Shapple Midie and Anjum, Paris.

Bijan Chowdhury: Born in 1931, Faridpur. Graduated from the Government College of Arts & Crafts, Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1953.

Amal Ghosh: Born in Kolkata in 1933. He graduated from the Government College of Arts & Crafts, Kolkata and did Post-graduate studies in the Central School of Art and Design, London and Hertfordshire College Art, St. Alban's, England.

Dipali Bhattacharya: Born in 1955 in Kolkata. She graduated from Calcutta University in 1972 and the Government College of Arts & Crafts, Kolkata, in 1974. She has had several one-person and group shows in India and abroad.

Ashok Bhowmik: Born in 1953 in Kolkata. He graduated from the Government College of Arts & Crafts, Kolkata, in 1975.

Vidisha Roy: Born in India. Well

known film-maker. She will make a film on Bangladesh and Indian artists. She is recipient of numerous awards in Television. Vidisha resides in Delhi.

Vanita Faridi: Born in India. She is a well-known columnist in India's leading daily the 'Hindustan Times'. She will cover the ongoing Asian Art Biennale and the Workshop on Contemporary Asian Art in a bid to build goodwill between Bangladesh and India.

Saifuddin Ahmed: Born in 1922, Birbhum, India. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Government School of Arts, Kolkata in 1942. He obtained a Diploma in etching and engraving from the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, in 1958.

Mohammad Kibria: Born in 1929 in Birbhum, India. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Government School of Arts, Kolkata in 1950. He did higher studies at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts, Japan from 1956 to 62.

Aminul Islam: Born in 1931, in Dhaka. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Government Institute of Arts, Dhaka in 1953. He did higher studies at the Academia de Belle Art, Florence, from 1953-56.

Abu Taher: Born in 1936 at Comilla, Bangladesh. He obtained Bachelor in Arts from Dhaka University in 1959 and graduated in Fine Arts from the Government Institute of Arts, Dhaka in 1963.

Samorjit Roy Chowdhury: Born in 1937 in Comilla, Bangladesh. He graduated in Graphic Design from the Government Institute of Arts, Dhaka in 1960.

Hashem Khan: Born in 1941 in Chandpur, Bangladesh. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Government Institute of Arts, Dhaka in 1961 and was a Research Scholar in

Ceramics from 1961 to '63. He received special training in book illustration from Tokyo, Japan in 1979.

Rafiqun Nabi: Born in 1943 in Chapainawabganj, Bangladesh. He graduated in Fine Arts from the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1964 and received post-graduate training in Graphic Print from the Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece, from 1973 to '76.

Mahmudul Haq: Born in 1945, in Bagerhat, Bangladesh. He graduated in Fine Arts from the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1968 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Tsukuba, Japan in 1984.

Abdus Shakoor Shah: Born in Bogra in 1947. He graduated in Fine Arts from the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1970 and did a post-graduate Diploma from the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Barods, India, in 1978.

Abdus Satter: Born in 1948 in Natore, Bangladesh. He graduated in Fine Arts from the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1971 and did post-graduate studies (Painting and Printmaking) at Vishwabharati, India, in 1975. He did Masters in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1980. He also did Masters in Fine Arts (Printmaking) from the Pratt Institute, USA, in 1987.

Abul Bareaq Alvi: Born in 1949 in Pabna. He graduated in Fine Arts from the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1968 and did post-graduate research in Fine Arts from the University of Tsukuba, Japan in 1983-84.

K.M.A. Qayyum: Born in 1950 in Comilla. He graduated in Fine Arts

from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1973 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Chittagong, in 1975.

Monsoor Ul Karim: Born in 1950 in Rajbari, Bangladesh. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1972 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Chittagong, in 1974.

Mohammad Eunus: Born in Thakurgaon in 1954. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1978 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the Tama Art University, Tokyo, Japan in 1976.

Jamal Ahmed: Born in 1955 in Dhaka. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1978 and did higher studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, Poland, 1980-81. He also did Masters in Fine Arts from the Tsukuba University, Japan in 1986.

Alka Mathur: Born in 1956 in Bombay. She graduated in Fine Arts from the Sir J.J. School of Arts Bombay.

Nasreen Begum: Born in 1956 in Rajshahi. She graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1978 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Barods, India, in 1983.

Ranjit Das: Born in 1956 in Tangail. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1975 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Barods, India in 1981.

Rokeya Sultana: Born in 1958 in Chittagong. She graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1979 and did Masters in Fine Arts from Vishwabharati, Shantiniketan, in 1983.

Sheikh Afzal: Born in 1960 in Jhenidah. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1981 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the Institute of Fine Arts, in 1984 and also from the Tsukuba University in Japan in 1993.

Shishir Bhattacharjee: Born in 1960 in Thakurgaon. He graduated in Fine Arts from the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in 1983 and did Masters in Fine Arts from the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Barods, India in 1981.

A platform for creative interaction

Most of the artists were outspoken in their views, whether social, political or aesthetic, and gave their opinions about the camp and their co-artist sans inhibition. This was the first such opportunity to parley with each other sitting in Dhaka. One hopes that such exchange of views will escalate suave visions among painters, connoisseurs and art enthusiasts, **Fayza Haq** had this impression after interviewing some of the participants of the first art workshop organised by the Bengal Foundation in February 1999. Excerpts from the interviews:

An artist camp was held at Gulshan recently (February 4-10, 1999), bringing in senior and established artists from West Bengal to meet their contemporaries in Bangladesh. Sitting in an idyllic setting, they worked, exchanged views, and visited Saver all within three days. But even the three day 'hartal' (strike) which made them on edge and spoilt their enthusiasm as the time span was condensed by two days, could not mar their ecstasy and nonpareil joy to be with one another and work side by side. Most of the artists were outspoken in their views, whether social, political or aesthetic, and gave their opinions about the camp and their co-artist sans inhibition. This was the first such opportunity to parley with each other sitting in Dhaka. One hopes that such exchange of views will escalate suave visions among painters, connoisseurs and art enthusiasts. One found a sprinkling of young students from the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, too, who somehow entered the heavily guarded magnificent bungalow that was the setting for the camp. Yes, it took place in the 'golden ghetto' but it surely achieved a tremendous measure of affinity between the artists of 'Dui Bangla'. This camp with its subtle political undercurrents detected in the interviews are worth a second thought, was organized by the Bengal Foundation.

Dipali Bhattacharya has repeatedly said that there was little difference between the work of the artists from Dui Bangla. However, some like Amal Ghosh, commented that in the Bangladeshi works that he had examined, there had been nothing to marvel at. However, those like Rafiqun Nabi, Ex-head of the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, and Ranjit Das, who won a coveted award from the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, reiterated that Bangladeshi artists did not lag behind those of India, especially not of West Bengal. They pointed out that being an independent country with fewer artists to compete with, they won scholarships, and as a consequence younger Bangladeshi artists had more exposure to post-modern fine-arts. The older generation of artists, having studied originally in India had continued with their abstraction with zest sans interference.

DS: Do you feel that there are decisive differences between the artists of Dui Bangla and what have you gained from this experience?

Hashem Khan has been painting professionally for decades and has indulged in various media and styles. He began with water colour and progressed to acrylic.

Hashim Khan: As the others must have pointed out to you earlier, and if you look deeply, the artists of West Bengal are definitely different from us, being figurative, basically, whereas we are abstract. A second factor is, that they have an older tradition of culture and fine arts, I



A canvas of friendship: Participating artists of the first workshop paint their signature on a large canvas on the opening day as a symbolic gesture of interactive dialogue that commences with the opening of the workshop

believe. Due to our political upheavals, we have had consequential endless vicissitudes of different nature, and unconsciously these have left indelible marks on our minds and works. In other words, we have had many more impediments than they. Yes, political upheavals are destructive and pessimistic on one hand, but also inspiring on the other. Our techniques, styles and ideologies do differ. However, in this

camp there is a lot of mixing and mingling of minds and thoughts and so we have influenced each other consciously or unconsciously. What I have personally experienced from this exposure is that it has given me the confidence to step ahead. If I have had some hesitations earlier, those have been removed. Sometimes we do lack 'guts' for one reason or another. At other times we are preoccupied with our viewers or our

connoisseurs. We all have our own hang-ups. I have had similar experience in Czechoslovakia and Japan, and have had three such experiences arranged by the Bangladesh High Commission in India earlier on, and incidentally, Sunil Das and Poritosh Sen had been there. Such coming together of artists naturally gives you more understanding of culture especially of fine arts.

Ranjit Das, winner of the grand award at the 7 Asian Biennial

DS: What have you gained from this exposure?

Ranjit Das: We are examining the techniques and styles of 22 artists at leisure and surely this is something to marvel at. There are some artists who do not allow other artists to come to their studios, for instance. This is like a holiday resort for all to come and work in harmony and tranquility. We, in Bangladesh are

moving towards abstraction, which I consider to be a controversial matter. As you examine and comprehend our work, our move towards abstraction is not something that the viewer has to be overwrought with. The artists from West Bengal consider figures a primary consideration. They depict their culture with clear images and take enormous pride in their play with imagery.

DS: What is your impression of this camp?

Ranjit Das: In my particular work, for instance, I bring in the activities of my environment and if you care to examine it, I have done a satisfactory job. Due to our exposure overseas and the regular Biennials held by the Shilpakala Academy, we have enough know-how of what is going on around the world. We are just not big fishes in a small pond, so to say, I believe that abstraction comprises everything in culture. It is not just a post modern nouveau vision that you can shrug off or which the artists of West Bengal can denigrate. This particular slant in our style is undoubtedly laudable. Delineating life in this manner, an artist like myself, can spend his whole life. Therefore, our work is not so abstract that the average art lovers of our country cannot comprehend it.

When I paint, I satisfy myself first, but I do keep my viewers in mind. Of course, I do not expect the villagers from the far-flung districts of Bangladesh to come and admire. That would be naive. It would obviously take more time for our farmers to

comprehend, say, SM Sultan's works than those of ours.

As regards the young artists from West Bengal, we have seen them before and appreciated them. I do not believe that they are better than we in any way. They have their personal vision just as we have ours. It is not possible to admire each other's work necessarily. There are bound to be controversies. Although they have an older culture, and have more patronage, we believe we are certainly at par with them.

Sure, we have not had the time to sit down and critically analyze each other's works at leisure, due to circumstances. Each one was rapt in his own work. It was like a do or die endeavor due to the impending hartal, which naturally kept everyone on edge. There was no opportunity to pause, talk to each other at leisure, or even have an outing with them, despite the offered Savar trip, which was tiring, more than anything else, due to circumstances. We all had our aims to render at least four paintings or do as many pieces of sculpture. Each and everyone expected to gain some self-satisfaction. Every painter has his moods, as do all creative individuals, and we did not wish to disturb each other. Undoubtedly it was less restive than working in our own studios, as our wives and families had to be put aside for this camp. Nevertheless, there is still time, some time in the future, hopefully, to sit down and examine each other's works in a calmer mood.