

SWM: *Many may say that art can never be judged by the age of the artists who produced it, so why do you still support a show exclusively for the young artists?*

SC: The show encourages artists; the prizes also drive them. There are a myriad of young artists who may not produce any work had it not been for this show. How many artists do we have in Bangladesh who are able work regularly? This show is an occasion to pick up the paint and brush or the tools and to get some exposure on a national level.

SWM: *Do you think that it's worth it? Do you think that an event like this still has the same impact on the art scene?*

SC: I think the show works as a catalyst for the young artist to go on working. Many often complain that it is unnecessary to have a show only for the young artists as they have the chance to show their works in every other exhibition. However, our contention is that, as it is exclusively for young people under 35 years of age, a lot of them who would not have made it in other occasions, have the chance to get their works accepted in this show. And it has become a tradition that many artists work with this show in mind, it certainly has a positive influence on them. I believe there should be more shows, as it might mean many artists having a chance to display their works on a national level.

SWM: *How much hard work does it take to put together a show like this?*

SC: We have been doing it for so long that most of the work has become a routine of sorts. However, printing a catalogue is still the hardest part of putting a show like this together. As we publish it both in Bangla and English, we ask the artist to provide all the information -- even the titles of the works in two languages, which many fail to give. And often the translation of the Bangla titles are not satisfactory. Therefore, it is the text of the catalogue that always keeps us on our toes.

SWM: *In a juried show like this, Shilpakala Academy is dependent on the expertise of the art institutions -- especially the two in Dhaka and Chittagong. Is there a way out of this dependence on the academics?*

SC: Well, we basically want to select artists with outstanding background, we don't choose them on the basis of the kind of job they have or the institution they are attached to. Most of the artists of considerable repute also happen to be teachers of these institutions, so you can never really have a jury board without teachers in it. Yet, in our effort to involve people from a wider spectrum, we have started to invite art critics and writers in the last few years. The most important thing is that we needed to set a criterion, and we settled for artists with outstanding careers.

SWM: *There had been a lot of debate and controversy over prize selection, perhaps if steps are taken to develop your own*

experts, it maybe avoided.

SC: Basically the Academy cannot operate like that. We cannot provide juries for our own show.

SWM: *Do you have any plan to start a programme that will help nurture a culture of criticism.*

SC: No, not for the time being. And I don't see anyone who would be interested in that. We have been running art history and appreciation courses, where we teach participants basics in these subjects.

SWM: *That's pretty elementary. Can't the Academy take up a programme that would teach criticism and history on a professional level?*

SC: Who do we recruit as teachers? There is an acute shortage of experts in these fields in Bangladesh. Even the universities don't teach these subjects. It is only recently that the Institute of Fine Arts in Dhaka has started a course in art history, from where we hope to get our theoreticians and proper critics of the future.

SWM: *A subject like conservation was unknown to us and Shilpakala Academy has arranged for a basic course on that. So, why can't you do the same in other areas?*

SC: It was a nine-month long project where eight participants were given training. Now four of them will be sent abroad where they will receive further training. Two will go to England and the other two to India. They will return with their expertise and be employed by the academy where a bulk of painting awaits restoration. Now that we are having a permanent gallery of our own, we need restorers. But the academy has no recent plan to go for courses that would train critics.

SWM: *Now you have the building you always desired. How is it helping to get things done properly?*

SC: It is meant to be a six-storied building and only two have been completed. Shilpakala was established in 1974, and it took 30 years to have our own national gallery. It is the effort of the last ten years on our part that has materialised into this new building. Once it is complete, this will house everything from the sales centre to the training centre, gallery halls and offices.

SWM: *Is the National Gallery that will display your permanent collection yet to be built?*

SC: It is not until the construction of the second and third floor that we will be having the National Gallery. We have around 500/600 art works in our possession. It is our permanent collection and it includes works of major artists.

SWM: *Hope you would not have to wait too long for that.*

SC: Me too. ■

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