

and Shishir Bhattachargee -- these illustrious artists were given a turf. We could not have the chance to meet Shishir *da* as he fell ill and joined the workshop the day after.

For artists like Talukder and his colleague in the RV Golam Faruq Babul, it has been a way to reemerge into the art scene of Dhaka. Talukder's biggest discovery has been the corrugated board. "I have been doing non-figurative works for the last few years, and as I have tried to base my compositions on landscape, the corrugated board has given it a new dimension," says Talukder. Media is not an important factor for this 40-plus artist.



With a new paint made out of charred rice, Dilara Begum Jolly is inspired to try out newer expressions.

"Now I have found the cheapest way to make art," boasts Talukder.

It is a pity that in Bangladesh, at every art institution, water-based colours are looked down upon. Oil -- the most expensive medium -- is taught in a way as if the value of a work depends on the medium.

Before Monir burst into the scene in the early 90s, here was this fixed notion that water colour could only be a vehicle of landscape and design. The culture of dabbling into visionary stuffs using water-based medium is a recent development. And the workshop at Fordnagar is a testimony to its rise in the rank among practising artists.

It is afternoon, the time to shift our mental gear from art to art connoisseurship. The roundtable is the foyer served as the venue of an informal press conference. Abul Khair Litu, Chairman of the Bengal Foundation, and Monir, the conductor of the workshop,

answer the queries of the newsmen. While Monir rules out any sudden burst of enthusiasm on the part of the buyers in Bangladesh to acquire art works, he thinks the present conditions are conducive to the art scene. Litu pledges to continue with his effort, which will see a gradual broadening of their network spreading to the far corners of Bangladesh. But what he feels is the most urgent need of the time is that more private foundations be built to promote art and artists. Luva sums up their recent activities that includes a show in Jessore in collaboration with Charupeeth, a local organisation for artists, which is scheduled to open on August 6.

During the conference, some of the journalists complain that art at the government level seems to be slipping out of sight. School level art training has become almost nonexistent which has contributed to the downgrading in artistic sensibilities among the masses.

From this populist concern, we are soon released. As the steamy white rice, the edible kind, is heaped up on several dishes, we know that we have to rush for the nearest wash basin with running water.

Lunch is a treat comprising of fried chicken, fish, vegetable and daal. As we are wiping our hands in our handkerchiefs ready to forage for tea, an announcement lets us know that the boat has arrived and at 4 pm, the bus will depart. So,

that is the end of a day at the workshop.

SOME days later, at an opening of an art exhibition, Monir is surrounded by a few of the younger participants. "We should go back one day to have a look at all the paintings to find out how they will look now," enthusiastically says Monir. The compulsion to do this moves all.

Bikash, who finished his tenth painting on the last day, says, "It was the last two days that I was most productive." Ronni Ahmed produced eight in all. However, it is not the number that they are enthusiastic about, but the urge to create that overwhelms them, and it is evident that this was an immensely enjoyable experience. A workshop is not only an occasion to pick up a few tips, it is a platform where creative minds may have the chance to get the stimulation that is in such short supply in everyday existence.