

Celebrating Rembrandt

Exhibition at Art & Soul Gallery

KARIM WAHEED

REMBRANDT Harmenszoon van Rijn (July 15, 1606 - October 4, 1669) is considered one of the greatest painters and printmakers in European art history and the most important in Dutch history. But Rembrandt's legacy lives on beyond the borders of his native country. To artists and art enthusiasts Rembrandt is an essence, an inspiration.

To celebrate the master painter's 400th birth anniversary, The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangladesh in association with Society for Promotion of Bangladesh Art (SPBA) has organised an art exhibition. The exhibition titled *Rembrandt 400* was inaugurated by Fritz Meijndert, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Netherlands at Art & Soul Gallery in Gulshan on December 6. Among other distinguished guests were Anjan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Consumer Products and a member of SPBA.

Chairman of SPBA, Eltham B

Kabir said, "Besides the exhibition, as part of the 'Rembrandt 400' celebration, workshops for both senior Bangladeshi artists and students of Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) and lectures were held." The lectures were conducted by René Klarenbeek, artist and initiator of the 'Rembrandt Pupil Project'.

Five notable works by students of IFA -- MM Maizuddin, Ishrat Zahan, Shamir Ahmed Hemel, Sadek Ahmed and Md Zakir-Ul-Salam -- were awarded at the inauguration.

The young artists shared what Rembrandt means to them. According to them, Rembrandt, often called the 'father of impressionism', created a legacy of personal interpretations with his use of chiaroscuro (the theatrical employment of light and shadow derived from Caravaggio) and experimented with many techniques that formed the basic ideas of modern art. To these artists, Rembrandt's oil paintings and etchings remain an inspiration and that is evident in their work. Also on display are works by their fellow IFA students.

Paintings by noted artists who also



Works by Abdus Shakoor Shah (L) and Ahmed Shamsuddoha

PHOTO: STAR

participated in a workshop, are included at the exhibition. Muhammad Kibria, Hashem Khan, Murtagia Baseer, Abdus Shakoor Shah, Chandra Shekhar, Ranjit Das, Naima Haque, Farida Zaman, Rokeya Sultana and others have created artworks with the celebration in mind.

René Klarenbeek shared his views on the workshops, lectures and exhibition. Klarenbeek wants to reinstate the tradition of self-study by thoroughly studying and copying the works and working techniques of the master-of-choice. Through his lectures he demonstrated old methods, use of original materials and the spirit of Rembrandt's artistic production.

About the unique Bangladeshi style, Klarenbeek says, "It's quite profound. Some paintings naturally differ from what's known as traditional European art. However, some works feature universal elements or styles." Regarding his experience in Bangladesh, he says, "I didn't know what to expect. So, the experience was pleasantly surprising. I'm impressed with the personal and artistic language of the local artists."

With an impressive collection of new and traditional ideas, luminous and subdued paintings the exhibition seems to be a rousing event.

The exhibition will continue till December 12.



Award-winning paintings (top 3) by students of IFA

'Wanna': A festival of the Mandi people

AHSAN HABIB

The Mandi traditional festival *Wanna* was observed recently with great enthusiasm in the village of Chunia in Madhupur, Tangail. Music, mirth and merriment occupy a good part of *Wanna*.

Celebrated since ancient times, the festival has been an annual feature in most of the Mandi villages, but the time and date vary from one locality to another. Only a few years ago, the impact of modern civilisation and interventions by other socio-political forces threatened the cultural identity of the Mandis. But in 2003 some *Sangsarek* (members of the community upholding the traditional Mandi belief) felt the

need to preserve and promote the heritage of the community and decided to arrange the festival.

The festival was held at the house of Jonik Nokrek, a 97-year-old revered Mandi who spearheads the cultural revitalisation effort. A thanksgiving festival to the Mandi deities *Misi-Sajjong*, it ran for three days. During the festival many traditional Mandi rituals were performed.

The festival began with *Rakkashi amua*. *Rakkashi* is the goddess of meteors. A structure is made of bamboo for the ritual. This ritual is performed to appease the goddess so she does not destroy crops. Performing rituals such as *Rugala* keeps people safe from danger. *Khamal* (the priest) performs the rituals. After

Rugala is performed at the house of the chief, the devotees go from one house to another, performing songs and dance throughout the night. People are treated with *Chu* (rice beer). Before dawn, the symbolic house of *Jamm* (grim reaper) is burnt in *Delangshua*. *Wanchokka*, a ritual is performed where newly harvested rice is put on banana leaves. Only after the ritual can the Mandis start using the rice. In this ritual the *Khamal* perform a war dance known as *Greeka*.

During the second day *Rong dik do dasatta* is performed. Blood and feathers of chicken are put in the granaries. In *Jolana*, a group dance is performed and *Rangs* (musical instruments) are collected. Locally brewed rice beer flows

freely. Mandis perform a dance called *Gorura* accompanying *ajla* (songs) to invoke the deities for the next festival.

On the last day all Mandis along with guests from other communities perform *Greeka*, dance of joy, war and victory. *Bishiri watta* is the farewell ceremony for the gods and goddesses who return to their homeland after the harvesting season. The festival ends with *Katigala* by playing all the musical instruments.

Like other diversified cultural practices of Mandi, *Wanna* is linked with their traditional *jum* cultivation. As the woods are the womb of Mandi culture, essentially the festival reflects the beauty and diversity of forest life.



Mandis of all ages actively take part in the festival



PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV

Tête-à-tête

Optimistic 'Closeup 1' finalists

KHALID-BIN-HABIB

As the *Closeup 1-Tomakei Khujchche Bangladesh '06* talent hunt approaches its grand finale, the five remaining finalists -- Kishor Das, KM Abdullah Al Mortuza (Muhin), Salma Akhter, Nishita Barua and Ronty Das -- are upbeat about their chances of winning the coveted title.

The competition will heat up tonight at 9:25 on ntv. A conversation with the participants reveals their hopes and aspirations.

Salma Akhter:

Salma a folk singer from Kushtia is the youngest of all finalists. "I am comfortable singing folk songs especially Lalon songs. But I have also performed *adhunik* and pop songs at the competition. Since I had no experience in singing with drums and other western instru-



(L-R) Kishor, Ronty, Salma, Nishita and Muhin

ments, the band music round was tough for me," she says. Salma received the highest number of

public votes in the last round.

Kishor Das:

Currently Das is pursuing Bache-

lors in Business Administration at a private university in Chittagong. About the show he says, "I want to take up singing as a career so my studies are not that important at the moment. But being confident isn't enough. I also need public support. However, if I don't win the title, I won't lose confidence. Through the show people will know me and this familiarity will help me to move forward."

Nishita Barua:

Nishita is currently studying at Chittagong College. Sharing a memorable incident in the show, she says, "During the competition in the selection round I was in the waiting list. But later I got the opportunity to compete in the finals. The feeling of being in the top five is beyond words. My aim is to be a playback singer."

Ronty Das:

Ronty has already made a great

impression on the judges. She was one of the top 40 participants in last year's *Closeup 1* competition and is participating again this year with full confidence. On her hopes and aspirations, she says, "I think this year I will be able to overcome my earlier drawbacks and move forward from where I stopped last year. I don't fancy fame or money and just want to perform to the best of my abilities."

KM Abdullah Al Mortuza (Muhin):

Muhin grew up in Rajshahi and is currently studying in Business Administration. He was eliminated from the selection round in the last year's *Closeup 1* competition. Asked about his experience at the competition, he says, "I'm only thinking of my singing and how to do my best. I never thought I would be singing for millions, including some of the biggest musicians and stars. It is a dream comes true."

Jobra to Oslo

A musical tribute to Dr Yunus

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Fakir Alamgir has earned popularity as a singer of the masses (Gono Sangeet) and also for producing songs based on leaders and visionaries such as Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and John Henry. Recently he produced a song *Hey bir chiro nirbhik*, based on the achievements of Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus. The song is composed by Fuad Naser Babu.

Alamgir first performed the song at a mass reception by Nagarik Samaj on October 16 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. Later he presented the same song at a reception by the Ambassador of Norway in Dhaka, Ingebjorg Stofring celebrating the Nobel Peace Prize 2006 and wishing bon voyage to Professor Muhammad Yunus and his delegation.

Alamgir said, "The song was written spontaneously in a very short span of time."

Inspired by the Norwegian Embassy, Alamgir has produced a short video documentary, *Jobra to Oslo*. The film will be aired on small screen from December 10, the auspicious day when Yunus will officially receive his prize at a grand ceremony. The documentary might be projected at the award giving ceremony, says Alamgir.



Fakir Alamgir with Dr Yunus

TV Watch

'Priyo Parveen': A love story in 1971



A scene from the play

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

A single episode TV play titled *Priyo Parveen*, written and directed by Shoraf Ahmed Jibon, will be telecast on Channel i tonight at 7:50 pm.

The TV play follows an uncomplicated young man named Faruk who becomes a freedom fighter. He loves Parveen deeply but she is unaware of Faruk's infatuation as he never expresses his feelings to her. One day when he goes to tell her how much he cares, he is caught red handed by her father. Her father forces Faruk to leave the village. Meanwhile the Liberation War breaks out and people flee the village. Faruk joins the war. He sends a letter to Parveen to let her know about his feelings. Thus unfolds the story.

The cast of the play includes Mosharraf Karim, Sheeti, Rifat Chowdhury, Sohel Khan, Monira Akhter Mithu, Shanta and others.

'Shopother Gaan': TV show on Liberation War

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Shopother Gaan, a documentary programme based on the Liberation War, is currently running on Channel i everyday. Divided into several segments, the show is aired everyday at 5:30pm. The programme features inspiring solo and chorus songs, dances, interviews with renowned personalities of the country and poem recitation.

The musical segment features performances by noted singer Abdul Jabbar, Shahin Samad, Kalyani Ghosh, Bipul Chakraborti, Moley Kumar Ganguli, Indramohon Rajbongshi, Nomita Ghosh, Shujee Shyam and other artists of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kedra.

Hosted by singer Fakir Alamgir, the show will be telecast till December 15.



(L-R) Indramohon Rajbongshi, Kalyani Ghosh, Shahin Samad and Abdul Jabbar in the TV show

Movie Review

'Divine Intervention': A depiction of Palestinian-Israeli conflict

ALI AHMED

The interest in Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine is ever increasing. Yet the world community has little, if any, cultural exposure to the embattled nation. The Palestinian movie *Divine Intervention* directed by Elia Suleiman, which won the grand jury prize at Cannes Film Festival in 2002, created a buzz among cine-enthusiasts all over the world.

Talented filmmaker, Elia

ans and also car-riders going in the opposite direction with unutterable curses under his breath. Or two elderly men sitting side by side on the roof of a one-storey building doing nothing whatsoever, not even talking or gesturing between themselves.

All these and many other irrational actions take place in an apparently ghost-town of narrow streets with thick, high walls all along, signifying not only an impenetrably

reth and Khaderi is from Ramallah. The Israeli soldiers have put up a roadblock and ES cannot cross and go over to Ramallah and meet his fiancé. But they are again shown together in the same car endlessly waiting at the checkpoint parking lot holding hands, and caressing each other's fingers. But this is probably done in imagination and not in reality.

The couple (ES and Manal Khaderi) is forced to wait at the parking lot at the Israeli check post; ES blows a balloon with Yasser Arafat's sketch on it and lets it go through the window of his car. The balloon, rising higher and higher, crosses the Israeli check post and, finally, gets stuck at the steeple of the Dome of the Rock.

All these are no meaningless fantasies, but symbolism utilised by the filmmaker to drive home the nature of reality in Palestine today. However weak and disorganised may the Palestinian resistance be, the spirit of the people is indestructible, and has ultimately to be acknowledged for the welfare of both the nations. Suleiman does show all these very masterfully and poignantly without ever taking recourse to any hate campaign in the slightest measure. That, above everything else, distinguishes him as a true artiste and a great filmmaker.

The writer is a member of the Federation of International Film Critics' Association, Munich, Germany



Elia Suleiman (R) and Manal Khaderi in the film

Suleiman has crafted an avant-garde movie based on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, without taking recourse to a traditional storyline. Suleiman has put together a few absurd and apparently unconnected shots to transport the viewer to an eerie world of glum-faced men doing things that defy any reasonable explanation. Thus, as we watch in the opening scene, an elderly man rides his car, responding to lifeless waving of hands of pedestri-

divided city, but also a divided nation, or two nations, destined to live side by side, but irreconcilably at odds. But this divided city, or the country, is not all that lifeless. There's the occasional bomb-blast or spraying of bullets from speeding cars.

Against this backdrop is a love affair of the protagonist, ES (played by Elia Suleiman) and a beautiful Palestinian woman played by Manal Khaderi. ES is a resident of Naza-