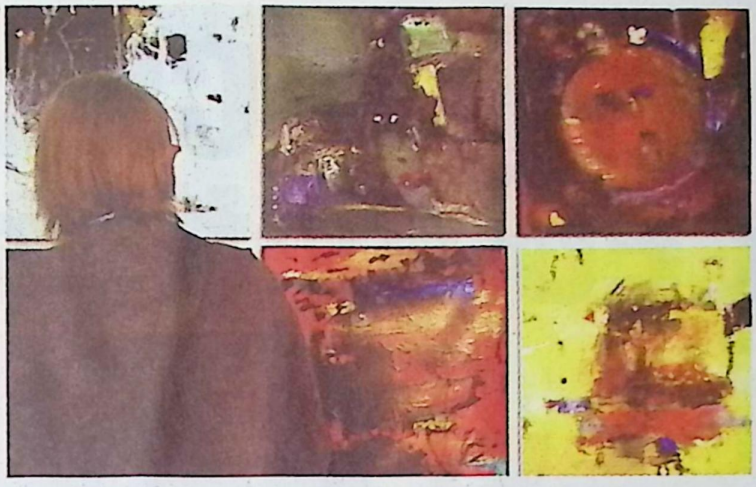


Works by Andaleeb Preema at Istanbul International Art Fair 2008.

Bold, Black and Beautiful

FAYZA HAQ

In her early thirties, Andaleeb Preema has gained remarkable prominence in the art scene both home and abroad. Her success as a painter is due to perhaps her ability to comprehend and go with the needs of the time. She is as much a feminist as many others today in Bangladesh and carries her message through symbolism and repeated use of motifs like women's eyes; rickshaws; the use of the veil, and bright eye-catching hues of silver, gold, vermilion, chrome - yellow and masses of black.

In her recent paintings Andaleeb blends eastern subjects with geometrical lines and vibrant splashes -- learnt from modern European painters. Her recent trips to Oslo, London and Istanbul provided her opportunities to project Bangladeshi talent overseas. Her previous success at Thailand and Sri Lanka, gave her confidence to face the task before her in three different countries within a short space of time. Fairly earlier on, she had success with her three solos at the galleries of Alliance Française and Drik.

Confident and uninhibited, Andaleeb recounts her experiences in the Norwegian, English and Turkish scenario. She describes the setup of the galleries, where she had her exhibits in vivid details, so that one gets a vicarious pleasure through her experiences in cooler foreign climates. She adjusts and blends with the circumstances and makes the best of her opportunities -- winning the hearts of the trendy art lovers, curators and patrons with ease.

In England, she participated in the "Curry Award Programme" which comprises of a test of restaurant owners, where, invariably, the winners are from Bangladesh. "I had a feeling of self-satisfaction. I painted two rickshaws-- one with a frontal view carrying two Bangladeshi women. Thus I brought in our roots. A rickshaw is a mobile painting by itself. Although abstraction is my genre, yet I had to depict our culture in an obvious way. I play with variation of textures. I worked on the canvas for a month. There was no hassle over my 'Hijab' series, when exhibited in Dhaka and Chiang Mai in 2004 and 2007. As 'hijab' is a controversial issue all over Europe, I had to alter my composition, and change the subject to the 'rickshaw', which is today well known also in the west. Gold and silver highlighted the folk motifs on the indigenous paintings of flowers and peacocks seen on the subject. Raw colours like shocking magenta, startling green and chromium yellow were used, which drew a crowd of 1200 art enthusiasts and the TV channels."

Earlier on, Andaleeb went on a students' managed programme to Oslo, Norway. "The contact was through the website , where the under-thirties group were fascinated by my projection of the 'Hijab' and used ten of my canvases" says Andaleeb. "Oslo is a small city but is vibrant with art enthusiasm and passion for all forms of culture. The Scandinavian belt has always known to be peace loving. The Oslo Centre has some art galleries whose chief purpose is to promote modern contemporary art. Here 'Gallery Platform' fascinated me the most," says Andaleeb.

The last leg of the trip included the 18th International Art Fair in Istanbul, in the last leg of her recent trips. This included performing artists, like experimental singers with their fusion music, and a book fair, along with the visual art. Hundred and thirty countries participated in this, including countries from Asia such as Japan and Korea, recounts Andaleeb. Most of the countries were those from Europe.

"Denizhan Ozer, the curator included me in his Corridor Artists' Pavilion. Here I brought in my favourite 'Hijab' images which signifies women's strength, Six of my canvases were included, using a lot of loud colours such as red, yellow and blue were used, presenting scattered images of women's eyes. Black and white dominated the compositions. The style varied from abstract to semi-abstract. In March 8th, 2009, I hope to launch my 'Hijab' series, called 'Staring women'. The expressions of the eyes tell all. I take photographs too as I plan to move into video making with the same subject," says Andaleeb. ■