

**WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK**

**Group Exhibition of Masks**  
 Title: Mukh O Mukhosh-2  
 Venue: Galleri Kaya  
 Date: January 16-25  
 Time: 11am-8pm

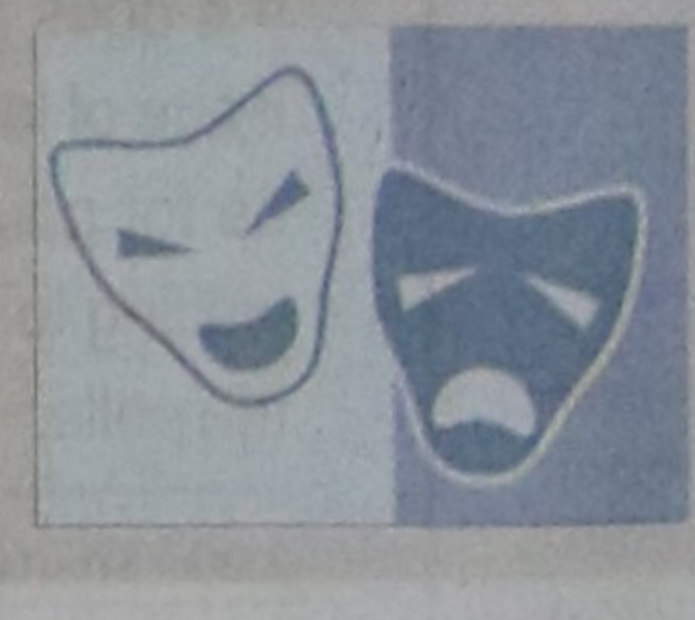


**MUKHOSH-2**

**Solo Ceramic Art Exhibition**  
 Title: Dissolved Past and Present  
 Artist: Debashish Pal  
 Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, 275/F, Rd 27 (old), Dhanmondi  
 Date: January 17-26  
 Time: 12pm-8pm



**Kochi Memorial Award**  
 31st anniversary of Padatik Natya Sangsad  
 Venue: Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA  
 Date: January 16  
 Time: 5pm



**Art Exhibition**  
 Artist: Steven Renald and Samina Nafies  
 Venue: Creative Destination, Shanto-Mariam University  
 Date: January 14-20  
 Time: 12pm-8pm



## 1st death anniversary of Selim Al Deen

# Shoker Padabali screened at Shilpakala Academy



The video screened at BSA featured clips of Dhaka Theatre's memorial musical programme (right) for Selim Al Deen, held last year.

JAMIL MAHMUD

On the first death anniversary of 'Natyacharya' Selim Al Deen, a five-day programme titled "Selim Al Deen Smaran Utsab" started at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) premises on January 14. In association with Selim Al Deen Pathshala, Dhaka Theatre and Bangladesh Gram Theatre have jointly organised the programme. ITI worldwide president and renowned theatre personality Ramendu Majumdar inaugurated the programme.

The first day's programme included screening of videos featuring Al Deen's songs on death at the Studio Theatre, BSA. Directed by theatre and TV personality Shahiduzzaman Selim, the songs were compiled and composed by renowned theatre actor-musician Shimul Yousuf.

Apart from Ramendu Majumdar, Nasiruddin Yousuff, president of Dhaka Theatre spoke at the inaugural programme.

Yousuff, a lifelong friend of Al Deen, spoke about their 36-year-long rapport.

He said, "Al Deen accomplished the most important task in the post-Liberation War theatre. He provided us with alternative visions; he moved away from Western influences and incorporated our rich indigenous elements in theatre. Al Deen was not among those who considered Gerasim Lebedev as the 'father of Bangla theatre'."

"Apart from the form, content and style, Al Deen also had another major innovation. He presented a thesaurus of Bangla theatre which is the first of its kind," Yousuff added.

In his speech Ramendu Majumdar went over Al Deen's professional life as teacher. He said, "Apart from being a theatre personality, Al Deen was equally popular as a teacher. He always inspired his students to travel throughout Bangladesh to develop a sound idea of our culture. I believe if researchers work on Al Deen's writings, they will find new elements."

After the inaugural session a video

titled "Shoker Padabali" was screened. The 72-minute-long video featured Al Deen's songs and dialogues on death.

Last year after Al Deen's death, Dhaka Theatre arranged a musical programme at the Mahila Samiti Auditorium as homage to the theatre icon. The programme featured songs and dialogues on death taken from Al Deen's plays. The video screened at BSA featured clips from that programme and several footages of Al Deen's funeral.

The songs and dialogues were taken from Al Deen's plays including "Binodini", "Keramat Mangal", "Hat Hada", "Chaka", "Nimajon", "Prachya", "Bano Pangshul" and "Jaibati Konyar Mon".

Today's programme is divided into two sessions. In the morning, a memorial lecture on Al Deen titled "Sangskritir Shekor Sangskritir Shangram" by Professor Anu Muhammad will be held at the Conference Centre of National Theatre Hall. In the evening "Jaibati Konyar Mon" will be staged at National Theatre Hall.



PHOTO: MUMIT M

Residents of the Shankharibazar area of Old Dhaka celebrated 'Poush Sangkranti' (a festival held at the end of the Bangla month Poush) with much gusto. Kites of various shapes and colours soared high in the afternoon. At night fireworks lit up the sky and fire-eaters dazzled everyone with their unusual skills of manipulating flames.

## 31st anniversary of Padatik Natya Sangsad

### Kochi Memorial Award to be announced today

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Theatre troupe Padatik Natya Sangsad celebrates its 31st anniversary this evening at the Experimental Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA). On the occasion the troupe will announce winners of this year's 'Kochi Memorial Award'.

The troupe initiated the award in 2006 named after one of its founding member, the late Abu Muhammad Murtaish Kochi. The award is given in two categories -- "culture" and "law and social welfare".

ITI worldwide president Ramendu Majumdar will be present as the chief guest in today's programme. Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam, director general, BSA and



Abu Muhammad Murtaish Kochi

M. Hamid, chairman, Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation will be present as special guests. Golam Kuddus, general secretary, Sammlita Sangskritir Jote and lawyer Md. Sirajul Islam Khan will also speak on the occasion.

The anniversary programme will also feature dance and mime performances.

Apart from being a theatre activist, Kochi was also a lawyer. He completed his masters in Law from Dhaka University. Kochi performed in several plays of Padatik including "Kabor", "Shojon Badiyar Ghat", "Tin Rustomer Goppo" and "Ballavpur Rupkatha". He was also the organising secretary of Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation. Kochi passed away in 2002.



# The thriving art scene in Dhaka

TAKIR HOSSAIN

In recent years Bangladeshi artists have demonstrated a distinct edge in the international art circuit. They now receive international exposure and participate at various competitions. Nowadays, the scope for pursuing fine arts in Bangladesh is much wider than ever before.

Even a decade ago, art galleries in Dhaka were few and far between, and the sale of paintings was poor. But that atmosphere has changed completely -- and for the better. In the last few years, new galleries have opened in different parts of the city and sales of artworks have picked up gradually.

Artists are becoming professional. Art connoisseurs show a great eagerness to collect new and innovative works. This trend is noticeable since the beginning of the 1980s.

The history of art galleries in our country does not date back a long way. Kolkata was the focal point in the art history of this subcontinent. Some talented and avant-garde artists have flourished in this region. Their artworks represented the local culture, heritage and native atmosphere. The formal art scene thrived in Kolkata in the second half of the nineteenth century through the establishment of art schools. No art gallery existed at that time. So far as we know, the first art gallery in the subcontinent opened in 1876. However only prominent artists got the chance to exhibit their works. Only a select few used to visit the gallery; it was inaccessible to commoners.

However, after the establishment of Art College in Dhaka in 1948, a new epoch began. Our artists got a new home for honing their creativity. East Pakistan Arts Council (now the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Art Gallery) was established in 1963. After launching the gallery, our artists got the opportunity to display their works in their homeland. During that time, Shilpakala was intensely involved with our contemporary art movement. After that, some painters and cultural activists set up a number of art galleries in Dhaka. Art Ensemble, Desh Gallery and La Gallerie were in this category.

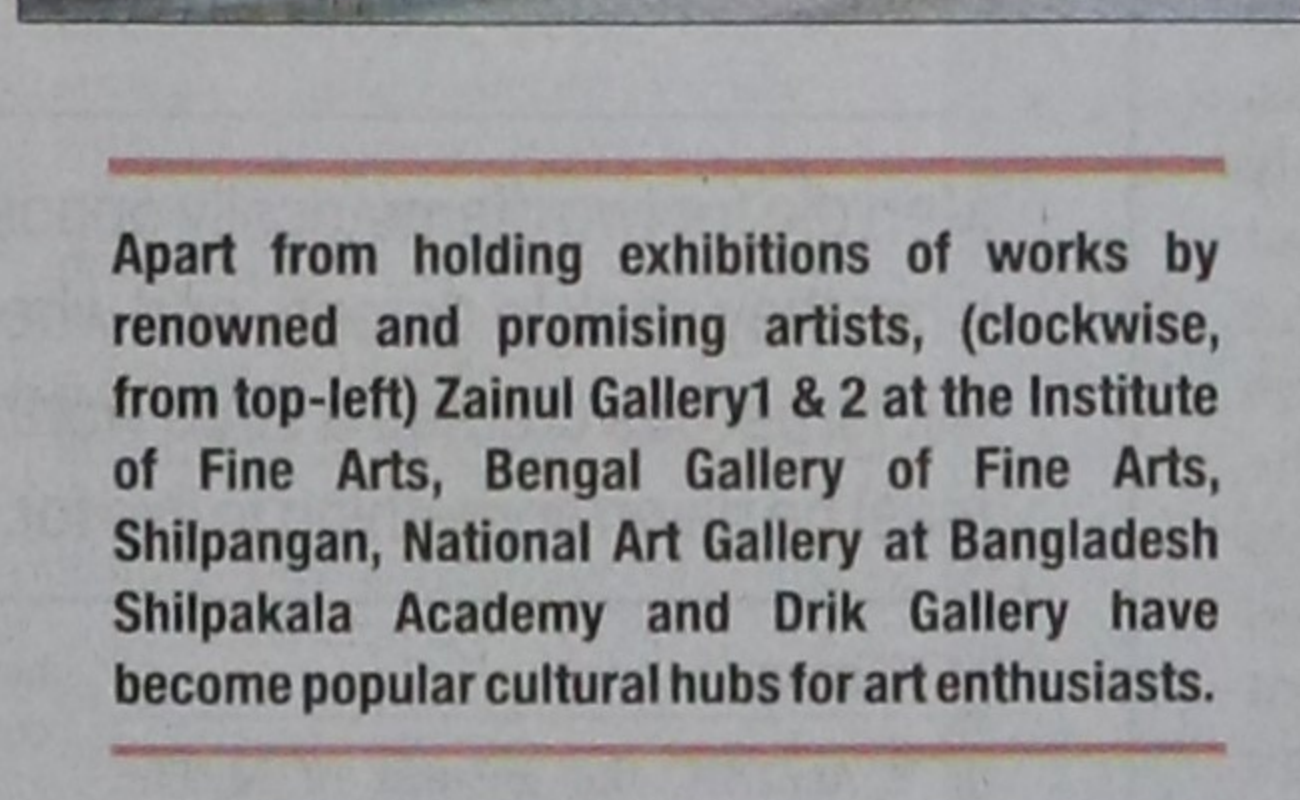
Sadeq Khan, one of the better-known art critics of the country, had a number of artist friends, through whom he met several senior artists. There used to be a kind of cold war between the young and senior artists. The senior artists were not appreciative of the younger ones. Besides that, the up and coming artists did not get enough exposure. So Sadeq Khan and some of his comrades decided to open up a gallery. The gallery was called Art Ensemble and it formally opened in 1962.

Two galleries named Desh Gallery and La Gallerie were established in the '70s, but they didn't survive long.

The first art exhibition in this part (the then East Pakistan) of the sub-continent was perhaps held in 1951 at Lytton Hall of Dhaka University. Dhaka Art Group organised that exhibition. The credit for organising the first gallery-based exhibition goes to Art Ensemble. Works of almost all the would-be great



artists of Bangladesh including Zainul Abedin, Aminul Islam, Hamidur Rahman, Murtaza Bashir, Abdul Baset, Abdur Razzaque, Qayyum Chowdhury, Debdas Chakrabarty were on display. The exhibition was held at the then Tourist Bureau office at Segunbagicha. The second part of the exhibition was however held at Art Ensemble's own gallery in June 1963.



After these galleries, Aftabuddin Ahmed opened Jirax Art Gallery at Shahbagh in Dhaka in 1970. This gallery helped both young and prominent artists sell their works.

At present there are a few other galleries in Gulshan and Banani that are more art shops than galleries. The biggest one of them is Saju Art Gallery. Saju has made notable contribu-

tions to the promotion of art, especially by means of attracting many foreign buyers. Its owner is Ramiz Ahmed Chowdhury Saju. The gallery was opened in 1974.

Saju Art Gallery, E-art Gallery and Haque Gallery are still in existence. Tivoli Art Gallery, which opened in the same decade and in the same area, has also made a name for itself. Tajuddin Ahmed, himself a recognised painter, is the proprietor of the gallery.

Generally, these art shops don't have not enough space for exhibitions. These galleries are in the Gulshan-Banani area. The area is home to the affluent, various diplomatic missions, embassies and other important offices. As a result, these galleries have had a successful run as commercial ventures. The '80s were a significant decade for these flourishing art galleries. At that time Gallery-21 was a popular joint in Dhanmondi. Subrana, herself a painter, was owner of the gallery. The gallery however, closed after a few years.

Beside these, a number of galleries were set up by the government such as Shishu Academy Gallery, Osmani Memorial Hall Gallery, National Museum Gallery, National Art Gallery (Shilpakala Academy). Several cultural centres of foreign diplomatic missions also provided space for art galleries after the mid '90s. Alliance Francaise de Dacca, Goethe Institut, Russian Centre of Science and Culture and Indian Cultural Centre are among them. After the establishment of these galleries, promising painters had the chance to exhibit their works. Besides holding exhibitions, these galleries also became a hub for art enthusiasts, critics and cultural activists. Other well-known galleries in the city are the Divine Art Gallery at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Cezanne Art Gallery and Zainul Gallery-1 & 2 at the Faculty of Fine Arts.

At present, there are many art galleries in Dhaka. The '90s saw a boom in the art gallery scene under private ownership. Shilpangan is one of the full-fledged galleries in Dhaka, which opened in January 1992. Faiz Ahmed, a veteran journalist and poet is the founder of the gallery.

Over the years a good number of art galleries have sprung up in Dhaka and there is always one or another art exhibition on. Gallery Shilparag is one of them; the owner is architect M Badrul Huda and it is located at Dhanmondi-27. Gallery Chitrag, another homely gallery, opened in 2000 at Dhanmondi-4. Dhanmondi has become a popular venue for art galleries. These galleries are doing well commercially too.

Among the more recent art galleries that have gained a reputation for becoming centres of art appreciation are Bengal Gallery, Drik Gallery, Gallerie Kaya, Art and Soul, Art Club and Samotot Art Gallery.

According to art enthusiasts, Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts is the most successful among these in promoting Bangladeshi art. The gallery was opened in 2000 by art enthusiast and industrialist Abul Khair Litu, and has evolved into a thriving cultural hub. It has featured about 300 artistes in solo and group exhibitions so far.