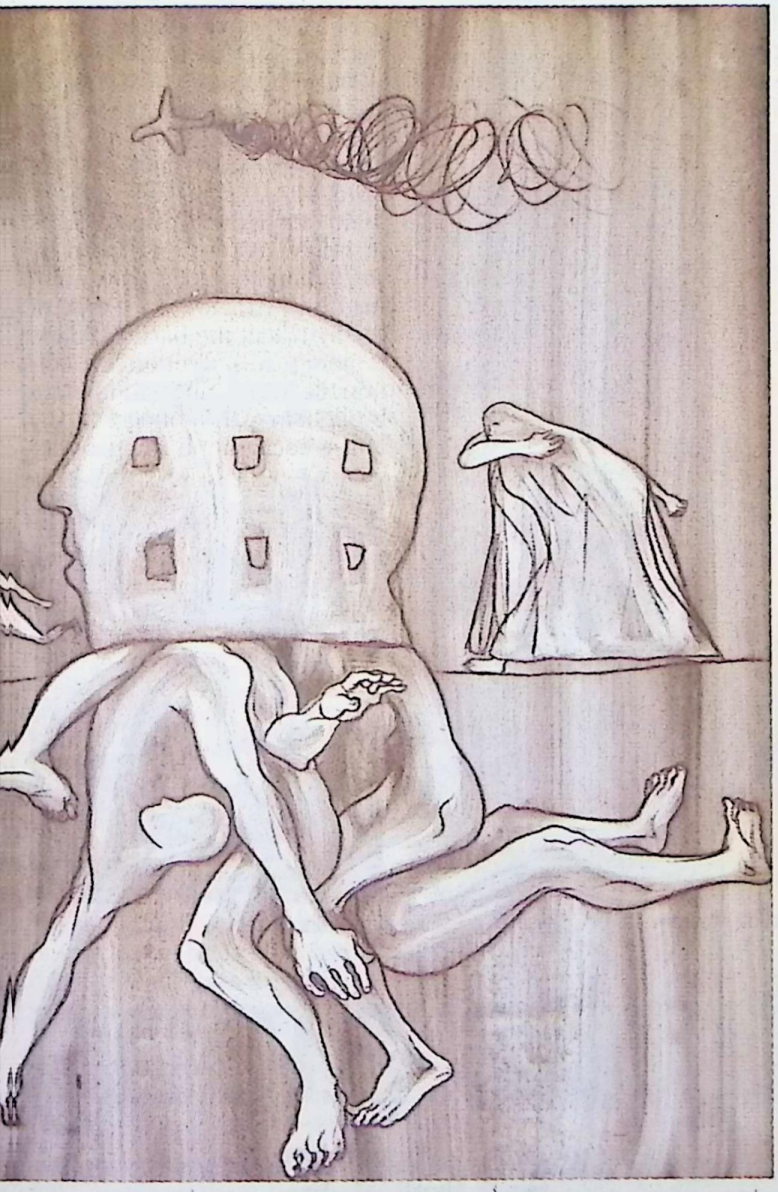


A Journey Interrupted by Big Constructive Ideas. Oil on paper, 2005

of human emotions have been subverted by the artist's own melancholy. The silver grey tinted, oil on papers, are large and dark while at the same time emitting a strange depth which feels awkward at first, and soothing later on. In A Journey Interrupted by Big Constructive Ideas he presents an oversized head with arms and legs jutting out. The arms are outstretched almost like someone would use them when walking unsurely through darkness. The legs are fragile, barely keeping the head in place and through it all the head is steadily looking forward without eyes. The windows on the side of the head allow us to peer into the constructive idea without telling us much. It stands tall as a socio-political statement against our culture of pseudo-intellectualism. An indictment of progress hindered by through and over thought.

Another oil on paper, Riding the Self of the Invading Mind is as linguistically challenging as it is intriguing. There a headless quadruped form rides what seems like a falling human form, a sort of Id taking over the Superego and showing us for who we really are. The invading mind, unlike invading armies are not all bad, in this case it seeks to release the animal within us, a social construct opposing all we know to be human and civilized. He is not an anarchist, but a social deconstructionist, unsurprisingly many choose not to differentiate between them. It is from this social deconstruction that he like Brecht intervenes in process of shaping society.

Zaman also forges his artistic identity with the clever use of installations and conceptual art. A hollow plastic footprint is filled with water and a single small fish, the piece is titled Fake Plastic Buddhism. His satire here remains biting, but truth be told attacks on consumer fetishism are about as easy to find as a McDonalds in North America. His major installation is entitled Oscar for the Masses, where he attaches the torso of a toy to the top of a hammer and paints it white. It is then rested on a worn out bicycle seat, possibly representing our everyman rickshaw pullers. From the outset the hammer symbolises the work (manual labour) that the masses must entail just to keep mind, body and soul together. The only award they get is the very hammer they work with. In real life there are no Slumdog Millionaires, just hammer Oscars and sickle Gloden Globes.

Zaman's use of large canvases is also interesting as his treatment of the space differs from painting to painting. In A Cultural Phenomenon in the Afterlife of the Cultured, Zaman uses many bodies that infiltrate and act around the great beard of Tagore. Poking fun at the very concept of what and who are cultured while also asking why. In the World Ends in Cup of Tea, outlines of human shapes are clustered together while the rest of the canvas breathes. On a Rural Trip Across the City large parts of the canvas are free yet even then are five dark holes of unimaginable depth, which take away that sense of openness the canvas initially offers.

Mustafa Zaman's exhibition, which runs till the 17th of March 2009 at the Bengal Gallery, is a treat for those who would like a peek into an intellectual artists third eye. In a short story he wrote a few years ago named Voting For Beginners, he ended it by saying, "I try hard to keep all my desires alive, I start working on them in my mind." One wonders how autobiographical that was, because in retrospect it seems more personal than fictional. It is obvious that he worked on this exhibition in his mind for many years before he put brush to canvas and hammer to seat. Only after his head was filled with ideas did they overflow into reality. For that very process of creation he had to take some time out of mind. Bob Dylan would be proud. ■