

<p><b>WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK</b></p>	<p><b>Solo Art Exhibition</b>  <b>Title:</b> Cosmic Unity &amp; An Unfit Citizen  <b>Artist:</b> Aminul Islam Soyel  <b>Venue:</b> Kaya Galleri, H-20, R-16, Sector-4, Uttara  <b>Date:</b> October 15-26  <b>Time:</b> 11am-8pm</p> 	<p><b>Exhibition</b>  <b>Paintings, Installations, Photography, Films, Literature and Architecture</b>  <b>Title:</b> Dhaka Safe and Sound  <b>Organiser:</b> Goethe-Institut Bangladesh  <b>Venue:</b> Goethe-Institut, Shilpangan Gallery and Dhaka Art Centre  <b>Date:</b> October 18-30  <b>Inauguration:</b> 6pm</p> 	<p><b>Group Art Exhibition</b>  <b>Title:</b> Life of a Vagabond  <b>Venue:</b> Tivoli Art Gallery, DIT Market, Gulshan-2  <b>Date:</b> October 11-20  <b>Time:</b> 10am-8pm</p> 	<p><b>Group Art Exhibition</b>  <b>Title:</b> Rooted Creativity-5  <b>Venue:</b> Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, 275/F, Rd 27 (old), Dhanmondi  <b>Date:</b> October 15-26  <b>Time:</b> 12pm-8pm</p> 
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## Contemporary Asian art: Towards an authenticity



SHAMSUL WARES

During the Renaissance, the centre of art and culture was Rome. Leonardo Da Vinci left Rome for Paris in a horse drawn cart, with his famous paintings of Mona Lisa and from that time Paris gradually became the centre of art and culture. Paris maintained this position gloriously until 1950, when the central focus shifted to New York, where a considerable number of experimental art movements such as abstract expressionism, Op art, Pop art, Minimal art, Conceptual art, Installation art, etc. evolved and became powerful.

Today there is no single centre for the production of fine arts, instead there are many centres around the world where diverse experimental art practices are gaining strength every day and this is happening mainly due to the rise of new contemporary art in Asia.

Work of art is primarily a cultural activity. The character and uniqueness of a people and their land are expressed through the art. Art expresses the custom and belief of a people as well as their aspirations and frustrations. Traditional art had always successfully captured the unique character and beauty of a people and their land. Asian traditional art is no exception.

But whereas traditional art is basically objective in nature, today contemporary art is primarily subjective and like modern poetry, rooted in the subconscious. And since in the contemporary world, particularly after 9/11, the metaphysical anxiety is a global condition of mankind, the question arises whether the existence of uniqueness of Asian people in the contemporary works of Asian art is at all possible. In other words, the question is where does the uniqueness of Asian art lie?

The question also remains about how to achieve a genuine Asianism in the contemporary art of Asia in a time when there is also a growing concern that the artist belongs to a country but the art does not.

Asian people in general, however, almost without exception have the oriental mentality which makes them discover everything in

Asia more or less from a western viewpoint not only in the aesthetic domains of fine arts but also in other aspects including thoughts and education.

If we Asians continue to adhere to this approach, however, we possibly can never get close to Asia. Merely looking for differences of Asia from the west will also not lead us to an organic link to Asia. Certainly we have always looked upto western models as universal standards but it is now increasingly recognised that the western painting is nothing more than one of many forms of art in the world. We must stand on a firm basis to look at Asia from inside Asia as fellow

since the first half of the 20th century. Reflecting these circumstances contemporary artists in Asia used all styles of expression of post-war western art ranging from the Informal of the 1950s to the Post-modern paintings of the 1980s.

Thus in sharp contrast to the internationalising tendency of contemporary western art in the 1980s, the situation of art in Asian countries presented a rather chaotic picture. Since the 1990s Asian contemporary art has grown exponentially due to a mushrooming of regional biennials and triennials (drawing attention to Asian cities as alternative art centres), develop-

major Asian contemporary artists live and work in these cities? Are there differences in the work of Asian artists living in the West to those living in Asia? And perhaps more importantly what underpins this new field of study? It is rather impossible to provide a comprehensive survey of contemporary art in Asia a region that is almost one third of the world's land mass and home of two-thirds of the world's population having a great range of languages.

We need to be aware of the fact that a great variety and diversity lie amongst the countries of Asia. Buddhist thought in India and Japan is never the same despite its

of an international Asian Art exhibition is to grasp this thread of uniqueness of art and what the individual Asian artists have to offer.

From the beginnings of the production of contemporary art in Asia, there was a sense of opposition between tradition and what is modern. But gradually by the end of 1980s new considerations have evolved in which tradition is positively recognised as something still living in the modern age and continue to stimulate us today and new concerns have developed about what can be done to vitalise traditional elements in the modern times. New thinking also has devel-

not mere compositions but are telling something.

The function of a symbolic work is to convey a meaningful message and is formed by iconography and religious or folk customs within a tradition developed over a long period and as such is likely to share the same origin with main iconographic symbols such as Mandala, Tantra or Purushuttam. Symbolic works in a broader sense not only include symbols precisely defined iconographically but also works embodying religious such as Islamic calligraphy, folklorish or social symbolic functions which we experience in our every day com-

with the spirit. Probably this is fundamentally different from the western rational mind and has something to do with the very essence of the uniqueness of the Asian culture. Symbolism has already earned a distinct identity for the contemporary Asian art.

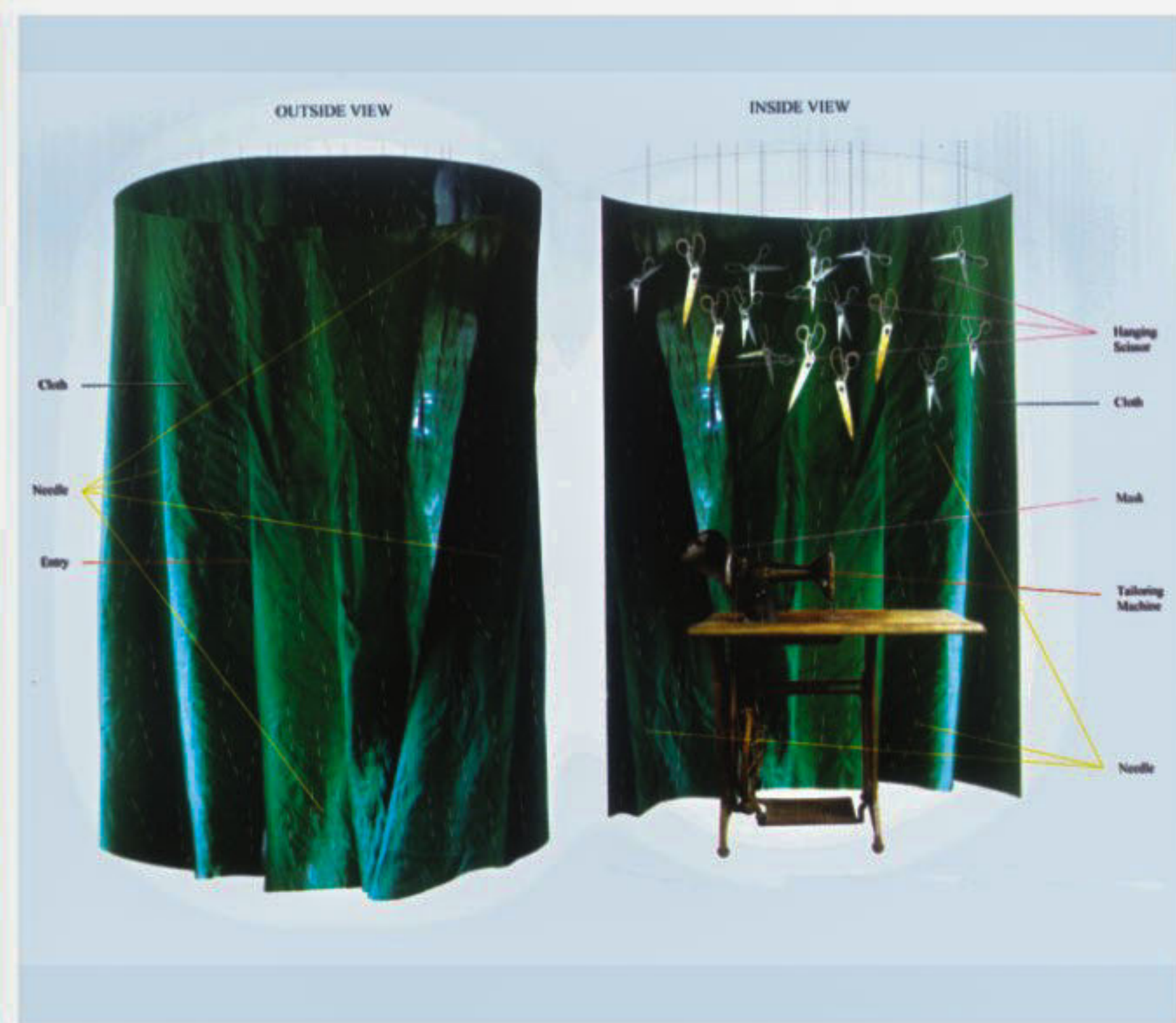
Today Asian artists are working with a great sense of enthusiasm and optimism. They are working in all conceivable media and in all areas, not only symbolic art but from tradition to modernism and from figurative to abstraction. Japanese as well as Korean artists have excelled in certain kinds of abstract painting that the western



Chaminda Gamage



Sri Lanka



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Life behind life

Bangladesh

Asians and place more emphasis on the intrinsic and unique characteristics of each Asian country.

The contemporary art movement in Asia had its genesis in the late 1940s and early 1950s after the end of Second World War. The circumstances of the contemporary art in Asian countries are multifarious in many aspects.

Every Asian country is multiple and heterogeneous in natural features, ethnic constitution, language and religion resulting in the co-existence of different spiritual climates. This indigenous multiplicity of soil on which art develops had moreover seen the vigorous influence of the West European art

ment of new contemporary art galleries and museums and international recognition and success of artists from certain Asian countries such as Japan, China, Korea and Thailand. Artists of other countries of Asia are also not sitting idle but putting up their efforts with even greater pace and resonance.

The sudden rise and popularity of Asian contemporary art in the international scene raises many questions for art historians, students and art critics. How, for instance, does one define Asian contemporary art? How does it differ from artwork produced in art centres like New York, London and Paris, particularly when several

seemingly similarities, neither is the socialism of North Korea and that of Kerala in India. Despite various differences we may also find a great number of common factors and similarities prevailing in the realities of the countries of Asia today, which may be collectively called the "Asian sensitivity" manifesting itself in the images and colours of Asia.

We need to look for something "uniquely Asian" inherent in the soil of Asia and viewed from inside Asia. Presumably this uniquely Asian factor would immensely benefit the artists of Asia in the pursuit of greater humanity and Asian integrity. The focal purpose

oped in which tradition or traditional elements are considered as specific matters readily understandable to the people. Thus, like in the modern western paintings in which such formative elements as shapes and colours are independent and self-sufficient in themselves are rarely found in the contemporary Asian art, instead the forms convey some meaning to the spectator, in other words, works pregnant with symbolic meaning are very common. Certainly their meaningful vision can not be fully conveyed to the viewers, differing in cultural background. But even so, many Asian art seem able to make viewers sense that they are

mon sense life. Symbolic works of art manifest symbolic meaning in everyday life, which has been revived today after having gone through the ordeal of modernization.

We Asians have a unique mental inclination towards what is metaphysical, as a result we find the mystic gods marvels of nature or a unique view of the cosmos in the environment of our everyday life. In other words our mental structure leads us to think that the daily and the symbolic are interlaced in such a manner that the things immediately around us directly mingle and become integrated

artists have lot to learn from. It is like India who had learned how to play cricket from England and now defeats the English national team. Each of the Asian countries is coming up and building her art from internal forces as well as from necessary international influences. That day is not far away when Asian art will achieve true Asian uniqueness and enrich world art and dialogue with the west in equal terms. Light towards that end is already visible.

The writer is Professor, Department of Architecture University of Asia Pacific

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