

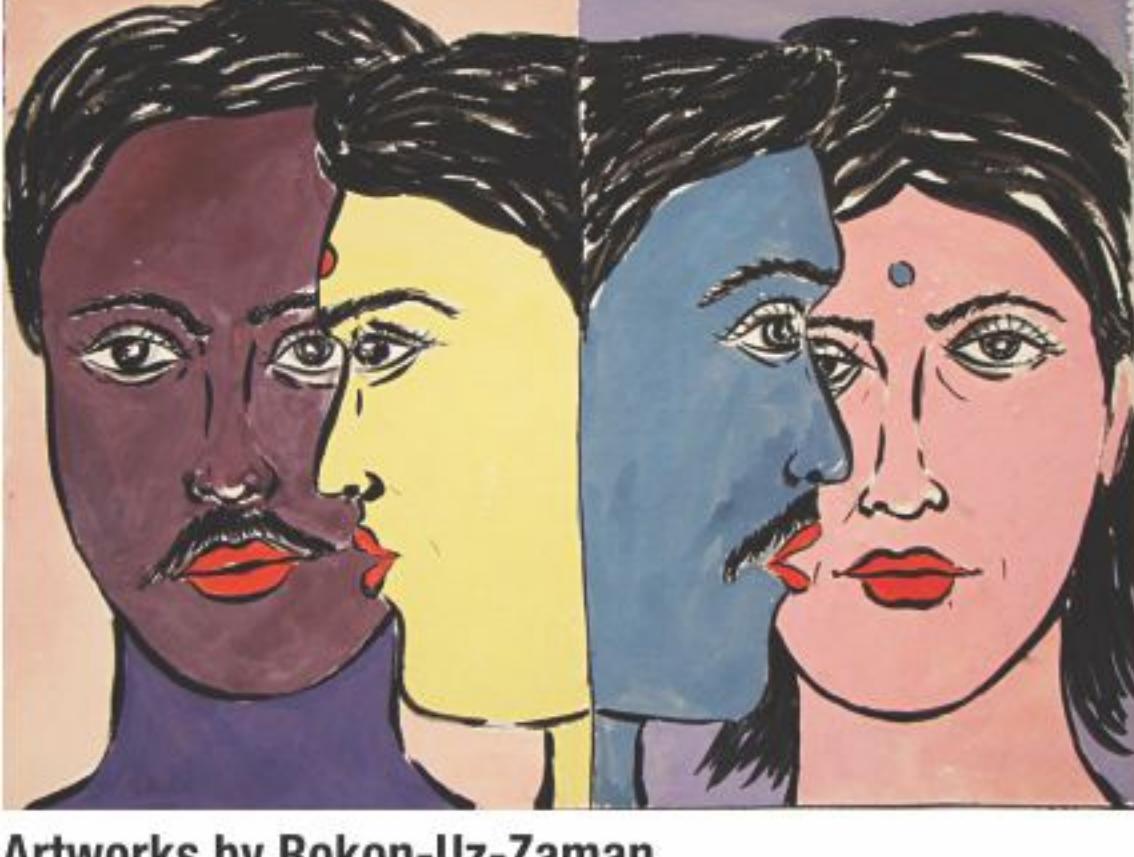


# Highlighting rickshaw art

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Creative and artistic designs were used in wooden doors, rectilinear door frames, rectangular and vertical patterns, windows, home decoration, furniture and more. Birds, animal forms, foliage and different parts of nature were used on the timber in the past. The tradition had been on the wane for some time and by now it has become quite hard to find the existence of such craftsmen. It is widely known that woodcarving is a time consuming and labour intensive work. The medium has been practised in the Craft Department of Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. But the genre of art did not acquire the spirit it was expected to.

Fortunately, a few enthusiastic artists are now trying to rejuvenate the medium. ABM Rokon-Uz-Zaman Sohel is one of them. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. He has learned many delicate methods and techniques of woodcarving from



Artworks by Rokon-Uz-Zaman.

some of his dedicated teachers like Abdus Shakoor Shah and Faruk Ahmed Mollah.

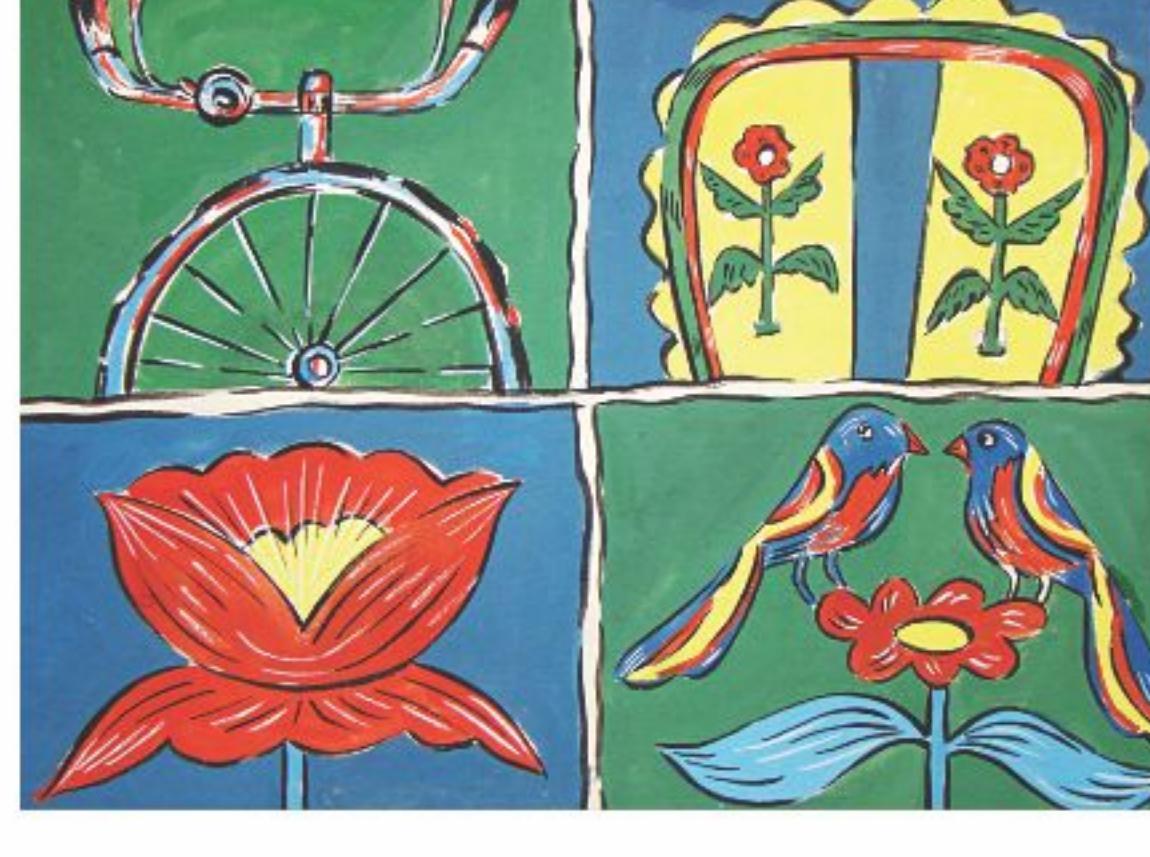
Sohel's solo art exhibition titled "Journey by Rickshaw" is now on at Zainul Gallery, Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA), University of Dhaka. The exhibition was inaugurated on October 4. Professor Shahid Akhter Hossain, Pro Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University was present as chief guest. Professor Matlub Ali, Dean of FFA, presided over the programme. Professor Abdus Shakoor Shah, former chairman, Department of Crafts, FFA; Nazib Mohammad, associate professor and Faruk Ahmed Mollah, assistant professor of the Crafts Department, among others, were present at the inaugural session.

It is significant that there was no strong theme in customary woodcarving before in our country. Since the '90s, the panoramic beauty of rural Bengal and young couples became significantly noticeable in woodcarving. The woodcarvers raced to the contest of the painters, who work in two dimensions. Nowadays,

woodcarvings have taken a prestigious place beside paintings. Woodcarvings also decorate doors and walls in a very artistic way. Art galleries and art shops have successfully made an impact on collectors' tastes with their collection of woodcarvings. Against a background of such reality, Sohel has practiced this medium. His woodworks are a testimony to the fact that even after the trees have died, there is a possibility of the renewal of life.

Sohel gives an artistic life to his creation. Observing trees, the artist easily comprehends how the branches can be used through his works. The texture of wood creates an eye-catching quality. His works replete with semi-urban people, birds, beads, peacocks, blossoming flowers and foliage, speak of rural and pastoral Bengal. Human forms are often merged with urban and semi-urban setting. The artist has been trying to acquire skills in sketching. His colours and forms keep telling us about Bangladesh and its varied traditional aspects.

It is very important that the artist has been greatly



influenced by rickshaw painting. Rickshaw painting is one of the indigenous forms of art that is unique to this region. His lines are influenced by folk culture, but he has a distinct style of his own unlike other traditional craftsman. Sohel's subjects range from movie stars to depictions of village life and colourful cityscapes to pictorial interpretations of social issues to flora, fauna and animals.

Sohel has a fondness for making masks and he has tried to make a personal hallmark through the genre of art practice. Masks have been used since ancient times for both ritualistic and everyday purposes. A mask reveals many aspects of a society. The masks at the exhibition have been fashioned only out of wood. The styles are primitive, tribal, modern, ancient African, Asiatic and at times, unfamiliar. They are not identical and each expresses a unique look. The masks on display express longing, bliss, woes and jubilation.

The exhibition ends on October 10.