Lines of Dissent

Shishir Bhattacharjee's fourth solo exhibition 'Daag- Tamasha' at Dhaka Art Centre once again presents the anomalies of the society in thick bold lines

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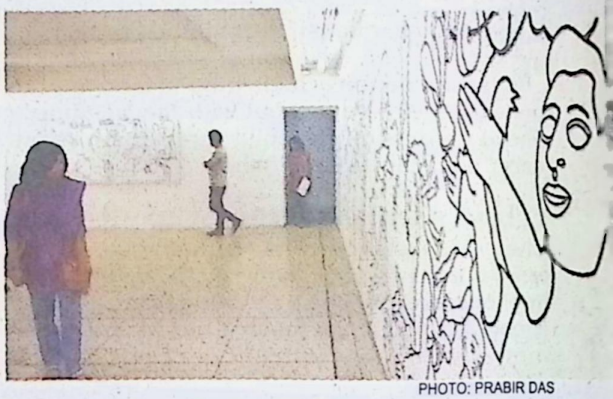


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



***Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 2012.**

The shocking figures against the white backdrop do not give your eyes a rest. They are spread all over the canvas — one embedded into another or transforming into something else or just severed parts of a body. From a distance the pictures depict chaos but as you move closer it becomes meaningful — as if it is an unedited reel of a silent film. That is Shishir Bhattacharjee's way of telling the story of our society. While sipping tea on the ground floor of the Dhaka Art Centre, the artist, activist and renowned cartoonist explains why he calls his fourth solo exhibition Daag- Tamasha (Farcical Lines).

"I felt strongly about the disorder, unevenness, cruelty and violence of the society. I felt that reality is more than cartoon. Anything can happen in reality; even incidents that are beyond our imagination. When you try to portray that it appears very shocking," he says, admitting that his frustration of not being able to do something positive to counter this decadence is also manifested in his art.

The presence of animals in quite unnatural state is very visible in Bhattacharjee's Daag-Tamasha. "Human being is a composition of both animalistic and rationality. The animal instinct in humans reign supreme where rationality ends," he opines adding that the animal instinct in human being is wilder than animals. He says that at one point people become apathetic to the anomalies of the society and carry on with their usual tasks, as if nothing is wrong. "The society is too loud. All the characteristics of an urban society are present amongst this chaos. All these appear to be a world of fantasy to me. The word 'Tamasha' is derived from that fantasy," he explains.

Bhattacharjee who has established political cartoon as a necessary item on the front pages of Bangladeshi newspaper says, "Fantasy, humour and satire always prevailed in my work. But when I cannot do anything other than being a spectator of this 'Tamasha', it deliberately comes out in my work." He refers to another of his series — 'khela dekhe jaan babu' (Come and see the game) done in the 90s.

The activist in Bhattacharjee is a result of the social consciousness that has developed in his childhood through books and the cultural environment of his home town at Thakurgaon. During his student years in the Institute of Fine Arts more commonly known as Charukala, Bhattacharjee with a couple of like minded friends started the 'Shomoy' movement in the `80s. "We wanted to do something new in art," he says. They were not satisfied with the way Bangladesh's culture and tradition as an independent nation was being portrayed through arts. They felt that the visual world did not properly present the socio-political reality of Bangladesh. Thus they advocated for conscious art work through their exhibition.

Bhattacharjee says that most artists avoided depicting the suppression of the autocratic regime of the '80s, with an excuse that art is something else; a decoration piece for the drawing room. The 'Shomoy' activists took a different stance from this school and started bringing in the socio-political reality of the society consciously. "We had Zainul