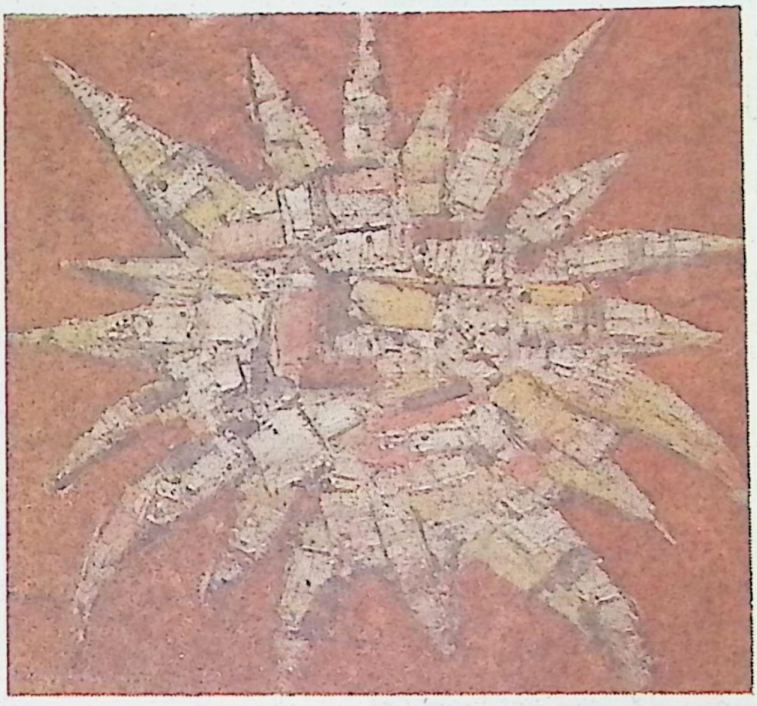
Losing Its Rhythm

ANIKA HOSSAIN



Two artworks from the series *Cityscape*.



Life in Dhaka is constantly changing and its inhabitants' lifestyles are evolving to suit each new change. Gone are the charming one-storey houses and in their place stand multipurpose skyscrapers, the residents of which barely register each others' existence. Renowned artist Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed has been observing these changes for quite a while and incorporating them into his work.

A long time resident of Old Dhaka, the artist had seen a different kind of society, one which had a sense of belonging, a strong sense of community, which was reflected by the town's very architecture. Homes were built so close together, the inhabitants could reach out of their windows and touch hands. The narrow alleys had doors and windows opening directly into them, creating a blur between what was one's private and social life. The townspeople even had their own dialect that distinguished them as Dhakaites.

Unfortunately, urbanisation and commercialisation eventually took over, and a new Dhaka, devoid of beautiful Mughal buildings from the 15th century, togetherness and bonding came into being. Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed is saddened by these changes, "I believe that the old Dhaka has much to offer especially in the advent of individualism that has wrought havoc in our society," he says.

With this in mind, the artist launched his 28th solo exhibition "City of Rhythm," on the 6th of December 2013 at the gallery of the Institute of Asian Creatives and co-sponsored by Shilpangan Gallery. The exhibits depict 38 abstract images of Dhaka, old and new, in bright eye-catching colours and medium. The paintings offer a birds-eye view of the Buriganga River, that flows by Old Dhaka and the numerous, distinctive markets, homes, mosques, boats and trees scattered around its ancient streets.

The choice of medium in this exhibition is mainly acrylic paint on paper, but in some, the artist chose to use canvases made of bamboo slats and painted thick, bold colours onto these. He also chose to use wood shavings in some of the paintings to create a unique and eye-catching texture to his work.

Of all exhibitions, both national and international, this was perhaps closest to his past and his heart. "My work is focused to reinvent the old city," he relates, "The interpretation I offer are attempts to portray from a treasure trove of memories, a way of life that if allowed to become extinct will leave us hallow and empty. The forms, composition, colours and structure are reflective of this central ideaology. It incorporates elements from my childhood memories, aspects of daily existence and is blended together to reflect the fantastic rhythm, music, smell and texture of the old city."

The exhibition ended on the 15th of December, 2013. The next phase of the exhibition begins at Shilpangan from December 20.