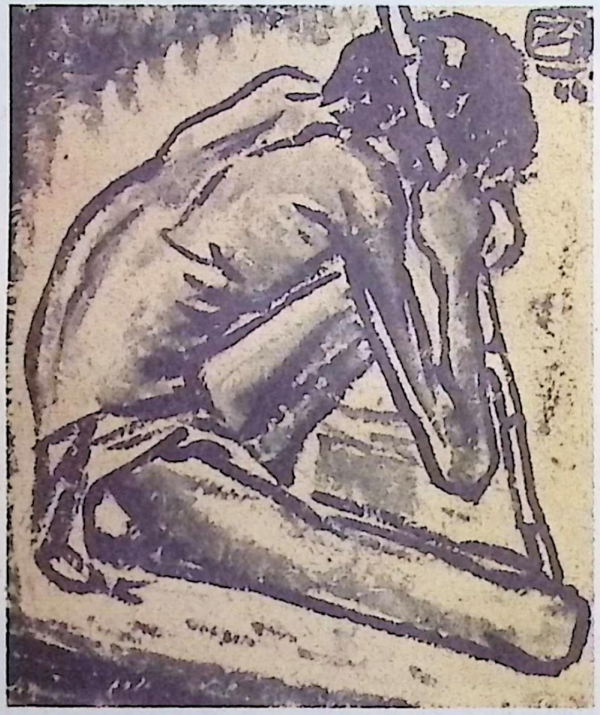
The Pathfinder

An exhibition at Bengal Gallery celebrates the magic of Zainul Abedin as well as a few of his students

FAYZA HAQ



Bride with a Mirror, acrylic on paper, 1972.



Farmine Sketch, watercolour, 1944.

Zainul Abedin's contribution to the modern art movement in Bangladesh is iconic. His childhood was spent in Mymensingh and it is from where his intense love for the countryside and the lifestyle it captured, began. He was famed for his remarkable artistic versatility as well as ability to guide other artists. For five years he studied the British standard of art in Kolkata getting the Governor's Gold Medal. This recognition brought him fame and he managed to develop the style that would one day make him one of the most loved artists in Bangladesh. He aimed at realism, but his craving for lines led to his unique interpretation of everyday life, such as a sunburnt Santal couple or a new bride, waiting with her mirror against a fence, all in red.

His fame came early when he used Chinese ink and packing paper to do the famed Famine Sketches through which he loudly protested against the struggle and strife of the common man on the street. Fond as he was of folk art, he realised its limitations. His work included the private moment of a village woman and powerful figures of men and women struggling in life. He also cared intensely about the preservation of folk heritage.

From the works provided by the Shishu Academy, we have the Shilpachrya's Zainul Abedin's famous famine pictures of the early forties, when undivided India was under colonial rule, and by which he became famous in the Subcontinent and beyond. These are to be seen at the Bengal Gallery,