The eyes of Sheikh Mohammad Sultan had seen much by the mid 1970s. Born the son of a mason in 1923 they'd seen poverty. In Kolkata and later in Karachi they'd seen periods of mingling with the elite, where appreciation of Sultan's artistic skills had opened doors. In the Second World War years SM Sultan's eyes had learnt the barrage of visual surprises in store for any wanderer, including one selling cheap portraits to British soldiers through North India. They'd seen exhibition tours to America and Europe; and Kashmir's beauty.[2]

But the scenery that captivated the most, the place that endured was Narail. Affectionately called Lal Mia in the town, he was known to wander the Chitra's banks with his flute melodies, to stay out all night and sleep at the Shiva temple. He was a skilled dancer, a Bohemian and a vagrant.

True to his words SM Sultan found value in all he saw. As a child, a piece of charcoal was an invitation to draw upon the walls. Through India and Kashmir dreamy landscapes found their way onto canvas in water-



PHOTOS: ANDREW EAGLE

Children's art competition at the SM Sultan Memorial Gallery, organised by Shilpakala Academy for SM Sultan Utsob 2014.



SM Sultan's equipment as displayed at the SM Sultan Memorial Gallery, Narail.

colour and in oil. But it was in Narail he found his most distinctive style – those iconic rural scenes where the figures have exaggerated muscles in place of the thin, bony reality of the peasant farmer.

Sultan had training: at the Kolkata Art College; and he named one Rongolal, a village artist from Kalia Upazila in Narail who'd instructed him from a small age, as his master.

Yet perhaps Sultan's own paintings are properly understood as temporary outbursts of creativity – an act of painting that was an end in itself. Sultan took little care of his finished works and many are lost. He was unconcerned about using materials that would preserve. Sultan's song was never about a legacy of artwork, but of ideas.