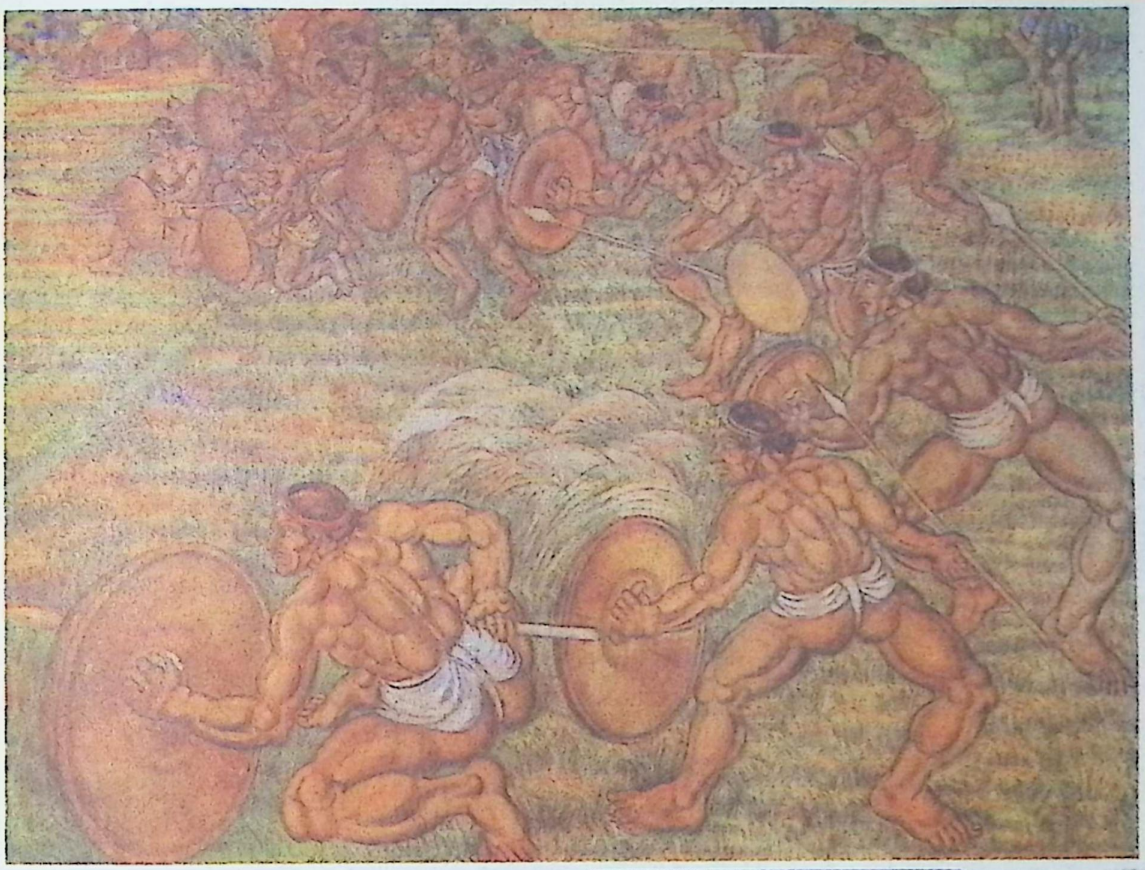


SM Sultan, *Farmers in Confrontation*, oil on canvas.

the natural scene to mere backdrop status,[4] Bimanesh does not agree. To him, Sultan was demonstrating nature-mankind interconnectedness.

Bimanesh recalls his first meeting with the great artist. His father, Sultan's former classmate, had taken him to Sultan's house when he was nine years old. "When I saw Sultan's hands drawing, it was like magic," he says. Bimanesh became Sultan's student in the late 1950s.

He was impressed by Sultan's devotion to Narail and the villages, the life his Guru chose over pursuing more materialistic success as an artist in Dhaka. It wasn't easy to access paint materials in Narail, and Sultan often made his own paints from local pigments and used jute canvases. For varnish he used gaber gam, the resin of a local type of fruit tree. "You will notice that many of his paintings use only few colours, maybe two or three," Bimanesh remarks, "and Sultan often did not fully finish a painting before moving on to the next."

Bimanesh showed artistic promise. In 1975 Sultan took him to Dhaka to admit him into the Fine Arts Institute – the first of Sultan's students to follow that path. Bimanesh did well and upon graduation was offered a job as a designer with the shoe company Bata, for a then-lucrative salary of 15,000 taka. They promised to send him to Europe to study shoe design. Bimanesh consulted his Guru.



PHOTO: ANDREW EAGLE

SM Sultan's boat outside the SM Sultan Memorial Gallery in Narail, and beside the Chitra River where he used it.

"For the whole of your life you will design only shoes? You will not make your sons?" said Sultan. He encouraged Bimanesh to join the teaching staff at Khulna Fine Arts Institute, which set the course of his career. He wanted Bimanesh to make artists not footwear.