

LS PICK

# Canvas of rickshaw art

**T**HE three-wheeler carriage, or rickshaw, binds the culture of Bangladesh with the everyday life of people. Being the most common commute for short distances in the country having the largest number of rickshaws, we have managed to take it for granted. But what has remained outstanding and is growing more popular with time is the appreciation for the inexpensive art used in rickshaws.

A blaze of vibrant colours on the busy, grey streets of Bangladesh, rickshaw art has added aesthetic values to the streets, turning them into moving museums. The enamel paintings of rickshaw use lively and bold colours with images ranging from the animal kingdom to nature to cinema.

The artistic expression of this commercial art adds aesthetic beauty to your home décor, and due to its popularity in the international market, Jatra, Aarong and Bibiyana have a versatile collection of rickshaw printed products and rickshaw showpieces, which are also highly popular among the non-residents and tourists of Bangladesh.

**Versatility:** Jatra started its journey towards craft and colour in the year 2000, and what can be more colourful than rickshaw art? They showcase a diverse collection of artistic crafts

and revive the mood of home décor with rickshaw paint on almost every household item available. At the entrance of the Dhanmondi outlet, a boundary wall with rickshaw art welcomes you inside as you enter the multi-coloured, aesthetic dissemination of this form of art from the walls to the products inside. Products ranging from furniture like low coffee tables, dining tables, chairs and sofas to bed linen, curtains, trays, bags, mirrors are all splashed with the hues of this art and can be found at all Jatra outlets.

Over the course of time, our love for rickshaw art has transcended its most popular medium and seeped into our wardrobes just as seamlessly as our modes of transport. Local fashion houses such as Jatra and Bibiyana have popularised rickshaw art among the youth by rebranding it to create edgy, neo-chic looks that are steeped in our culture. Pair a monochrome top with a vibrant rickshaw art skirt or team a bold rickshaw themed kurta with a pair of jeans or leggings for a look that is both fun and makes a statement.

Alternatively, play your outfit safe but add a dash of colour with a rickshaw art scarf that carries a subtle repre-

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sentation of your heritage within you.

**Themes:** Prevalent motifs in rickshaw art are generally images of birds, animal, rural landscapes, floral images or scenes from cinema. The familiar image of a white peacock or a peacock's tail with minute detailing can be seen commonly to convey a message of peace. Another popular theme is that of cinema posters, where actors and actresses are portrayed. This, however, faced the stigma of class discrimination, but persistent use over time has led to its acceptance, and now even cinema poster print bed sheets are available at stores.

**Men at work:** Artists are less inclined to learn this art form due to its inexpensive price tag. But some artisans who took it as a passion have given a new dynamic to this art form and with their dexterity they have proved to the international market their true value. One such

artist is Bikram Sur, one of the artisans of Jatra, who has been with them for over a decade. Bikram suggested that as this art form has received international appreciation and acclaim, it is our duty to uphold its legacy. He uses enamel colours and water colours to paint on wooden and fabric surfaces.

**In love with paintings:** Anika Shama, a customer browsing the Jatra outlet said "I love colours. Colours keep me sane and they enliven my house, so I try to maximise the artistic outlook of my interior by using rickshaw painted seats and CD stands etc. Away from the monotonous and the common, it adds a different look to my home.

Another lover of rickshaw art, Tazrian Haque, asserted that she usually shops from Aarong and Jatra when she has to give a farewell gift to a friend or relative living abroad. It's like giving them a touch of our culture and allows them to take a little piece of Bangladesh with them.

**By Sonya Soheli**

**Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel**

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**Wardrobe: Chondon**

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