



MURTAJA BASEER

ART

MURTAJA BASEER, considered one of the foremost painters of Bangladesh, has established his individual style in art over the years. Throughout his illustrious career, Baseer has gradually transformed his working style from realism and semi-realism to abstract realism.

Born on August 17 in 1932, Murtaja Baseer joined Dacca Art College (now the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka) as a student in 1949. In 1954, he graduated from the Government Institute of Arts in Dhaka, and in 1956-58, he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and then in Paris, where he studied mosaic and etching at Beaux Arts. On his return to Bangladesh, Baseer joined Chittagong University as an Assistant Professor. He finally retired from teaching in 1998.

Since 1954, Baseer has been featured in many art exhibitions in Bangladesh, America, Europe, and the Soviet Union. He has created a place of his own among Bangladeshi artists. His careful portraiture, with detailed lines and balanced colours, expresses his critical commentary on society. His depiction of Bangladeshi women, in particular, reflects their individuality, strong personality and angst.

Peace is a recurring theme in Baseer's work. In his collage titled, *No More War*, he depicts the pillage of the Iraq War and highlights the futility of war. The collage "Statue of Liberty" portrays the fleeing women and children leaving behind their precious assets.

A folk-themed watercolour portrait by Murtaja Baseer has been displayed in Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

The painter is still actively exploring the diverse world of art. He has done a series of work articulating the complexities of contemporary life.

Murtaja Baseer is also a poet, short story writer, novelist, researcher, numismatist and filmmaker. He has

written novels and was acclaimed for his meticulous style and unique choice of themes.

Baseer has also worked as a screenplay writer, art director and chief assistant director for the Bangla film *Nodi O Nari* in 1964, and as an art director for the Urdu film *Kaise Kahoon* in 1965.

In 1987, he received a fellowship from British Council to carry out research on the folk and traditional art of Bangladesh. He is also a philatelist -- a lesser known fact about him.



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In 1988, he visited several museums in Delhi, Calcutta, Banaras and 3,000 villages under nine districts of West Bengal, under the fellowship of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). His work *Mudra O Shilalipir Alope Banglar Habshi Sultan O Tothkalin Samaj* was published in 2004. Several articles by Baseer have been published in the Journal of the Numismatic Society of India, a prestigious publication.



MUSTAFA MONWAR

PERFORMING ARTS

MUSTAFA MONWAR is an eminent Bangladeshi artist, painter, sculptor, puppeteer, TV and radio programme director, producer, performer, and a professor of the Department of Drawing and Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. He is currently the chairman of Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

Born on September 1, 1935, Monwar is the son of poet Golam Mustafa. He passed his matriculation exam from Narayanganj Government High School and was initially admitted to the Scottish Church College of the University of Calcutta where he studied Science. Following the advice of author, Syed Mujtaba Ali, he transferred to the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, from where he graduated after obtaining best results in his class.

Monwar started his career as a lecturer at the East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts. Later, he joined Bangladesh Television as its director general. He served as the director general of the Shilpakala Academy, and the National Media Institute. He also served as a managing director of the FDC.

During the Liberation War, he organised puppet shows at the refugee camps in West Bengal to boost the morale of refugees who had fled the conflict, and to bring back laughter in their lives. He continued to touch people's hearts with his puppet plays like *Agachha*, *Rakhash* and *A brave farmer*. His most popular play, *Agachha*, draws a parallel between unwanted weed and the Pakistani oppressors.

Known as the 'Puppet Man of Bangladesh', Mustafa Monwar has always believed that this medium could be an ideal one to spread social messages in the country. Instead of focusing on show and pomp, he has always depended on simple designs as his puppets are made with wood, clay



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and cloth.

Such was the popularity of his puppet shows that American documentary filmmaker Lear Levin visited Bangladesh to make a film on his puppets. These scenes were later added to director Tareque Masud's noted film *Muktir Gaan*.

His teleplays include the *Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare and *Raktokorobi* by Rabindranath Tagore. The noted Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray lauded Monwar for his crafty use of stage design and the atmospheric aspect of his television productions.

Mustafa Monwar is also working towards reviving folk stories and children's tales through puppetry. He has already showcased his own interpretations of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Nightingale*, and *The Ugly Duckling*.

The beloved puppeteer's fame has spread outside the country; he is the Bangladesh representative of the Denmark-based International Puppet Development Centre. He has received national and international awards, including one for graphic design in an All India Fine Arts competition in 1957. He received the Joinul Abedin Gold Medal for "his outstanding contribution to painting", and was awarded the Ekushey Padak in 2004.