

LOUD AND VIBRANT

M H HAIDER
PHOTOS: COURTESY

It is an unique genre in the art world, a distinctive niche of its own. Meanwhile, it may be deemed as "the common man's art", if you will. And it is reflective of our country, depicting a myriad range of things that interest and influence us - from folklore to film stars.

Rickshaw art is a fascinating field indeed. The paintings at the rear of the rickshaw commands rapt attention when looked through a pair of keen eyes. And rapt attention does the works of the current rickshaw art exhibition demand. Titled 'Summer in Colour', it is the third solo exhibition of veteran rickshaw painting artist Nobo Kumar Bhadra. Being held at Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, the exhibition was inaugurated on 29 April, 2016. From 'Dhallywood' film banners to anthropomorphic animals, Bhadra, backed by decades of experience in this field, shows his skills and passion for rickshaw art through his exhibits.

Rickshaw art is marked by bold use of colours, and you would see plenty of that in the exhibition. "The face of this actor is green, and the lips of this man here is bright red, much like as it be if he applied lipstick," Bhadra said, discussing one of the movie banners. "This unusual and eccentric use of colours gives me a lot of pleasure as an artist, and it is this radiance of bright colours that attract art lovers too."

The movie posters depict the Dhallywood scene in and around 1980s. The glamour. The intensity. The valour of the hero. The luscious beauty of the heroine.

Of course, film banners are not the only subject of this exhibition and rickshaw art at large. Anthropomorphic animals (creatures having human characteristics) make an appearance too. Be it tiger ('bagh mama') or fox ('sheyal pandit'), the paintings have about them a strong feel of Bengali folklores, fables and myths. And add to that the imagination of the artist. "The fox is fleeing away on a boat with the chickens he stole", Bhadra described a work he calls 'Sheyal Pandit Dhora'. "But their mother has come aboard, standing with a dagger in her hand, ready to rescue her children." This particular work is a sketch. The artist has tried out different mediums and ways of representing rickshaw art. Sketch is one of them. Painting rickshaw art motifs and designs on clay pots and mirror frames show that an artist finds a canvas in things we see or use every day. But of



course, there're also tin plates in the exhibition, which is a traditional canvas of this genre of art.

Other than the few sketches, the rest of the exhibits are a burst of colours. With enamel paint, the liberal and generous application of very bright colours and the fact that the artworks reflect many pastoral, cinematic and cultural elements of our country, rickshaw art is indeed an important and a fascinating genre. And this exhibition indeed allows you to see and appreciate the various subjects and types of rickshaw painting.

This ongoing exhibition at Galerie Zoom, Alliance Francaise de Dhaka is going to run till 17 May, 2016 (after which it may or may not be extended). Visiting hours are between 3pm and 9pm from Monday to Thursday; 9am to 12pm and 5pm to 8pm on Friday and Saturday. ■



EXHIBITION

HERITAGE

The Bhawal estate is considered to be one of the largest zamindar estates of Bengal. The estate is spread over 1,500 kilometers which included 2,274 villages and a population of 5,5000 villagers. Over time, the estate has transformed into a developing town which we all know as Gazipur. Though we have left the zamindars far behind in time, their establishments can still be found in this

was reported to have died there at the age of 25. His body was supposedly cremated in Darjeeling the next day and customary funerary rites were performed. "I heard from my father that there was a lot of talk about this cremation," says Taposh Pal. It is said that Ramendra Narayan's body disappeared right before the cremation and it was never found. The second part of the tale extends to the famous Indian court case – the Bhawal Case. A decade later, a *sannyasi* (ascetic)



THE HAUNTED ESTATE

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



appeared in Buckland Bund in Dhaka covered in ashes. It was rumored that this man was the second *kumar* and he had returned to take over his inherited property. A lot of people weren't convinced and a case was filed to insure the *sannyasi's* true identity. He later won the trial but died just two days after the verdict.

Rumor has it that the spirit of the *sannyasi*, prince or not, still roams around the temple. A lot of villagers have reported that they have seen a shadowy figure roam around the cremating around night time. "I have never seen such thing, but have heard a lot of complains about it," says Taposh Pal.



town. The Bhawal's biggest establishment is the Bhawal Rajbari, which is now used as a government office. A little south of the palace remains the mysterious Bhawal temple and *Shoshan Chaat* (cremating area).

Located in Joydebpur, the temple was built by Kalinarayan, also known as the Bhawal Raja. The temple was first built to serve only the royal family. After their deaths, it was open to the public. Though the temple is in ruins, locals consider this place as one of the prominent haunted places of Gazipur. The tale revolves around the second *Kumar* (Prince), Ramendra Narayan Roy.

"The second *Kumar* of Bhawal was known for spending most of his time hunting, in festivities, and with women, having several mistresses," says Taposh Pal, one of the priests of the temple. In 1905 he had contracted syphilis, and went to Darjeeling to seek treatment but



Haunted or not, this temple gives an amazing glimpse of how grand architecture was in those days.

The design on the red stone building makes one marvel at the creative genius of the architects that built it. "A lot of people come to visit this historical place, but there is no one to maintain," says Taposh.

A lot of bricks were stolen from the temple. What is left is not maintained, and if this persists, we may be losing one of our oldest haunted places and a fascinating piece of Bengal's History. ■