

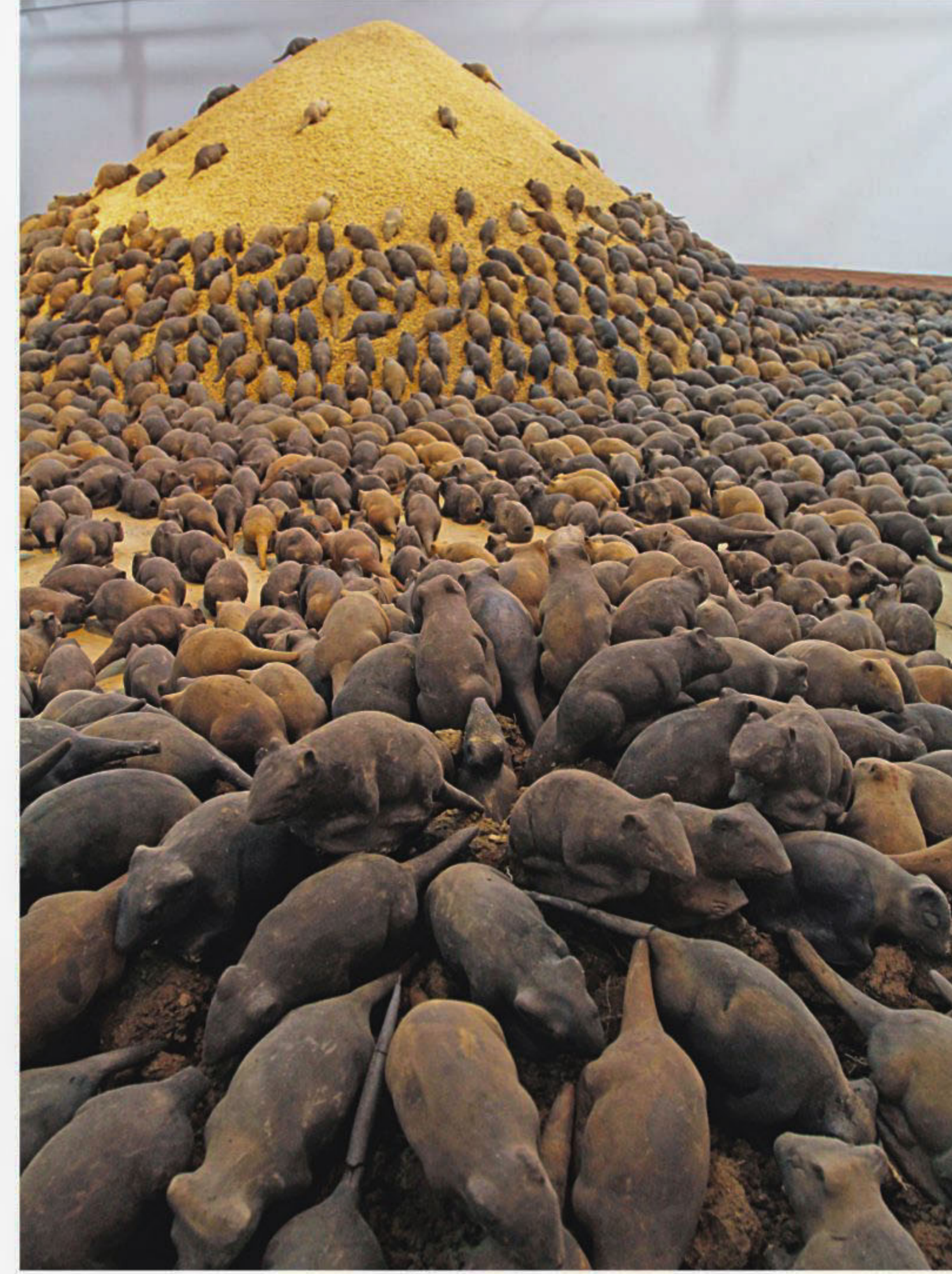
ROOTED IN OUR SOUL AND SOIL

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PHOTOS: SALMA JAMAL MOUSHUM

An indigenous community called Santal lives in the northern districts of Bangladesh. For thousands of years, these people have been eking out their livelihood by hunting and foraging in the Sal forests. Different kinds of rodents especially the rats, is one of their main sources of protein. However, with the advent of hybrid crops, pesticides, technologies and increasing deforestation, this community of skilled archers have almost forgotten their ancestral profession of hunting. Many of them have abandoned their indigenous culture,

thousands of earthen rats trying to climb on it. Rice is our staple food. This important feature of my installation says that if we continuously defy our dependency on nature, the natural disaster will affect our very essential need. And, one day the rats will climb on the mound that is we will be overwhelmed by the disasters and ultimately we shall perish," he adds.
In fact, Shadhin with his installation marvellously depicted the importance of biodiversity and ecological conservation with his artistic ethos and his deep



religion due to the Christian missionaries and now this large, culturally enriched people have been suffering from an identity crisis.

On the other hand, as they have lost the heritage of their traditional lifestyle, the entire ecosystem of their locale has started to perish. A sign of this ecological disaster is the explosion of rat population that has started to destroy their agricultural produces, invade their homesteads in millions. Nowadays Santals, the once hunters, have become hunted by their former prays.

Kamruzzaman Shadhin, a gifted artist who has been living alongside Santal village of Mollanipara since his childhood sees it as the eternal struggle of human versus nature. Through his solo installation art exhibition titled "Rooted in Soil" at Alliance Française de Dhaka, Shadhin depicted how Santal community's crisis resulted from their forced disintegration with nature has endangered their existence. He also portrayed that likewise the Santals, humanity as a whole too becomes jeopardised when it defies its relationship with nature.

"I didn't want to say that Santal community is dying out. I have taken them as the representative of the entire human race. On the other hand, I have taken rats as the symbol of calamity that Mother Nature can inflict upon us," says Shadhin.

"At the heart of my installation, you can see a big mound of rice and there are



Asaduzzaman Nur, Minister for Cultural Affairs speaking at the inaugural ceremony of Rooted in Soil.

knowledge on Santal culture. The entrance to his installation was marked by a set of arrows pinned to the ground which is the Santalic symbol of surrender. However, with this emblem of submission, Shadhin recognised the fact that human's fight to conquer nature is over. Now it is time for the nature to reclaim its place.

Shadhin depicted the vengeance of nature by intelligently assembling thousands of earthen rats all over the

gallery. With optical effects, the rats were presented in such a way that audiences would feel thousands of rats were running to and fro all over the place. "In the history of human civilisation rats are considered as the carrier of plague and an omen of famine. Here, rats are capturing the rice mound, our food source. The message of environmental conservation has been conveyed very clearly, artistically," says Ashrafal Huq, a student



Kamruzzaman Shadhin

of Dhaka University visiting the artwork of Shadhin.

"Besides, we have gotten to know a lot of unknown facts about rich cultural heritages of the Santals, one of our largest indigenous communities. It is really a mind-blowing artwork", he adds.

Kamruzzaman Shadhin has been working for fifteen years with the Santals on this installation art project. He is also the founder of Gidree Bawlee Foundation of Arts, an art movement that has been creating a common working space for the indigenous, folk and urban artists. His artworks and initiative focus on the most important issue of the current world that is sustainable coexistence of nature and humans for the sake of humanity. ■

EXHIBITION



AFFFP, Dhaka

In a glitzy affair in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, The prestigious GAG (Greatest Award Getter) will be bestowed upon the Bangladesh Agency of Intelligence, Misinformation And Nincompoops (BAIMAN), the group that uncovered one of the most International of all conspiracies in the history of time. The BAIMAN, an elite security-apparatus formed in the year 2008 to combat whoever the bad guy is according to the Party Line, recently unmasked a ploy where Myanmarese drug manufacturers were using the areas of India to manufacture drugs made from chemicals exported from Pakistan, funded by a cabal of American and Mexican drug pins who gained power using Russian-made arms.

In an unprecedented move, eight of nine nuclear armed countries agreed for only the second time in history- all nine had previously agreed once before when they opposed UN's latest attempt at a

BANGLADESHI-ORIGIN AGENCY WINS GAG PRIZE

nuclear weapons ban- to firmly acknowledge BAIMAN as thoroughly deserving of the GAG. "The GAG is one of the most prestigious and obviously the best award which recognises both the individual and collective will of everyday people to overcome insurmountable obstacles and become CHANGEMAKERS, the latest buzz word," Frank Lee Schtupid, the secretary of GAG said. He said it was in this spirit, along with their shared love for the nukes, that brought all these countries together.

While the agency has kept mum on the award so far, there have been plans to recreate the magic of Bob Dylan's, "I was speechless for almost two weeks," speech. "We are not sure whether to accept this award or not. If we do it too soon people will call us the puppet of those who actually fund things like GAG and if we don't, we may lose face on an international stage. Our agents are thoroughly used to being nationally shamed for our general ineffectiveness but

to be humiliated globally is a whole different thing," a spokesperson for BAIMAN said under the condition of anonymity.

This year, like all others, the GAG has not been without further controversies. The decision to fly in representatives from all of the nine powerful nations who matter the most in Pink fighter jets has already been met with ridicule. The fact that Israel are supplying the jets in a show of support for breast cancer awareness has been ridiculed with detractors pointing to the irony of this same nation denying cancer patients treatment in Gaza. "Breast Cancer kills women and we need people to be aware of this everyday. Fighter Jets don't kill...oh, never mind," a flustered Israeli spokesperson said, leaving the press conference by unendingly calling everyone an anti-Semite.

Furthermore, the notable absence of a Pakistani representative has also not been well-received. "They steal the jobs of our talentless and less-attractive looking

actors," an Indian spokesperson said, explaining the reason behind their omission. The last chunk of controversy fell on the Bangladeshi government who had picked Korail, one of the largest slums in the country, for hosting the gala event. "These people here? We even took their boats. Now we will surround them with the naval force. That is the only way we can assure everyone's security without having to shut the country down," an organiser of the event said. "It's fine. We are basically a test lab for NGOs who start all their silly pilot projects here. We pretend it works, say a few sentences in English and they let us be. This can't be worse than having to do that every other day," a resident of Korail told this correspondent.

While the outcome of the GAG is assured, whether all will go well is still in doubts. After last year's GAG recipient Hillary Clinton, who won on the basis of having an "honestly better than Trump and more experience" as her only success being proven to be a farce, was stripped of her title, the GAG committee hopes no such thing happens this year. "I plead guilty to being a slightly liberal with a hint of conservative and a little right and left leaning but that doesn't make me a failure or a liar. I am a woman, first and foremost!" Hillary said but only the FBI seem to be paying any attention to her these days. The success of the awards remains to be seen but Bangladesh's glory has certainly increased in valuation. ■

