

| **ENDEAVOUR** |

Abinta Kabir was one of the 22 hostages killed at the terrorist attack at Holey Artisan Bakery, two years ago now. Only 19 years old and an undergraduate student in the US, she wanted to return to Bangladesh to open an NGO for those less fortunate than her, according to her family. While her life was cut short, her family have carried forward her unrealised aspirations through establishing the Abinta Kabir Foundation. “I believe I have responsibility towards those who are less fortunate and don’t have the same luxuries as I am grateful to have. Those who are fortunate enough in life should help those in need in order to make their lives better,” she is quoted as saying.

The Abinta Kabir Foundation started a school in Vatara, Dhaka. Started last year, the 64 students of the all-girls school are largely from underprivileged families living in the nearby slums. They study in small classes of 16. For now, the school has four classes—from pre-kindergarten to the second grade. The ambience and internal infrastructure resemble that of an IB-standard school, says manager at the Abinta Foundation, Shariful Islam. “It was Abinta’s dream that girls from underprivileged families get the opportunity to attend the kind of school she grew up in to develop their potential.”

In the short time the school has been in operation, it has become a home to most of its students. Husna Akter, one of the first students of the school, has a special place in her heart for the school which was not just a place of learning for her. A year into her time at the school, Husna’s father, Muhammad Kashem, took the decision to move the family back to their village in Netrakona. Husna was devastated by the news that she might have to drop out of the school.

The school tried to convince Husna’s parents but to no avail. “We have around 95 percent attendance,”

says Islam, and “she would have been the first one to drop out of the school.” But Husna could not adjust back in her village and did not like the local school. After much pleading with her parents to send her back to her school in Dhaka, Husna’s father gave in and sent her back to the city where she could stay with her older sister and continue on at the Abinta Kabir Foundation School.

— *Star Weekend Desk*

MORE THAN A PLACE OF LEARNING

| **INTERVIEW** |

CATHERINE ASHER

After page 7

Could you tell us about your new book on the Qutb complex?

My book on the Qutb complex is a bridge between popular literature on the site available to the public and dense scholarly material that is inaccessible to most educated readers. It engages material published by F Flood, Sunil Kumar, and others on the early Delhi

Sultanate, but of course, adds more to this material. The book concerns not only the traditional Qutb complex—the mosque, its minaret, and all the additions made into the early 14th century—but it also covers the periods between the Khaljis and the present which are rarely considered. The Qutb complex is just part of what is today called Mehrauli, for it had a palace, enclosure walls, and a major dargah, that of the Chishti Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, also known as Qutb

Sahib. During the 15th through early 17th centuries, this dargah was favoured by Afghan descended forces, especially the Lodis and Surs. Over time much was added to this shrine and others flourished here as well, including ones established by followers of other orders, especially the Suhrawardi. The early Mughals paid homage at these shrines, but it wasn’t until the 18th and 19th centuries that extensive Mughal patronage is found in this area. The last

chapters cover developments in the late colonial and post-independence periods including the construction of temples—Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain—as well as Gurdwaras, churches, and secular structures. In all of this, I address issues of interreligious relations, the political and personal religious concerns of patrons, as well as how this complex built by Muslim rulers, initially from reused temples, is viewed by Indians today. ■

| **ENVIRONMENT** |

CAN WE DEFEAT THE SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION?

After page 11

Over the last two centuries, humans have caused irreparable damage to the environment. Forests, rivers, hills, and seas have turned upside down and species displaced for food and shelter.

In the last 50 years, humans have done so much damage to the environment that it might be impossible to make any tangible recovery, according to a report, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), published by the UN.

Currently the rate of extinction of both plants and animals is much higher than normal. Although extinction of one species in a million per year is considered normal, conservation ecologist from Duke University, Dr Stuart Pimm, and curator of

palaeontology department of American Museum of Natural History, Dr Michael Novak, believe the rate of extinction of different species will be 1000 times the natural rate within the next few decades; and 50 percent of the world’s species will be lost forever within the next century. This cannot be considered normal.

Many biologists suspect we are living through the sixth mass extinction. We have witnessed five mass extinctions before, where more than 75 percent of all species disappeared. The first mass extinction happened due to a severe ice age, the second mass extinction due to algal bloom in the sea, which sucked oxygen out of the water and the third mass extinction also known as “The Great Dying” happened due to a cataclysmic eruption near Siberia which blasted CO2 in the atmosphere. Consecutively, the fourth was caused by a meteor shower while the fifth mass extinction was caused by natural climate events. All the above mass

extinctions took place due to natural reasons. However, scientists believe, we are now going through the sixth mass extinction and it is happening due to human activities at a rate much faster than all the previous ones.

Below, we take a look at some of the possible causes behind the sixth mass extinction.

Forest cover loss

Rampant urbanisation has resulted in the destruction of forests and habitats of thousands of animals, birds, butterflies, and bees. For example, owing to habitat losses, orangutans and honey bees are both facing extinction threats. Both species are responsible for fruit seed dispersal and pollination respectively. Now if both disappear, the world will face immense food shortage and eventually famine.

| **EXHIBITION** |

The walls of artist-run space, Kalakendra, host artist Nisar Hossain’s drawings and prints this month. Part of the third instalment of the gallery’s “Drawing and Thinking” series, *Bikargrotho Shomoyer Roikhik Boyan* (Linear Text of a Delirious Time), curated by Wakilur Rahman, opened on June 30, 2018 in the presence of special guest, artist Rafikun Nabi. Notable artists such as Sheikh Afzal, Abul Barq Alvi, Shishir Bhattacharjee, and Rashid Amin were also present at the event.

The series is meant to explore drawing as a form: how does the ritual of drawing manifest in the fine arts? What is the functionality of drawing? How does drawing progress from its primary stage to any sense of completeness? And how will Nisar Hossain’s works address these concerns?

To me, it seems that in this particular exhibition, drawing manifests as a folk expression of resistance at the face of lawlessness. Nisar Hossain’s work reflects



Fear of Darkness

the political and social structures under which the artist functions and how the artist perceives these as dehumanised planes. The images are a carnival of grotesque figures. At the same time, the mediums incorporated in his work, such as palm leaf drawing and relief printing, is deeply rooted in traditional art practices of the region. The form of drawing, too, is a fundamental artistic tradition.

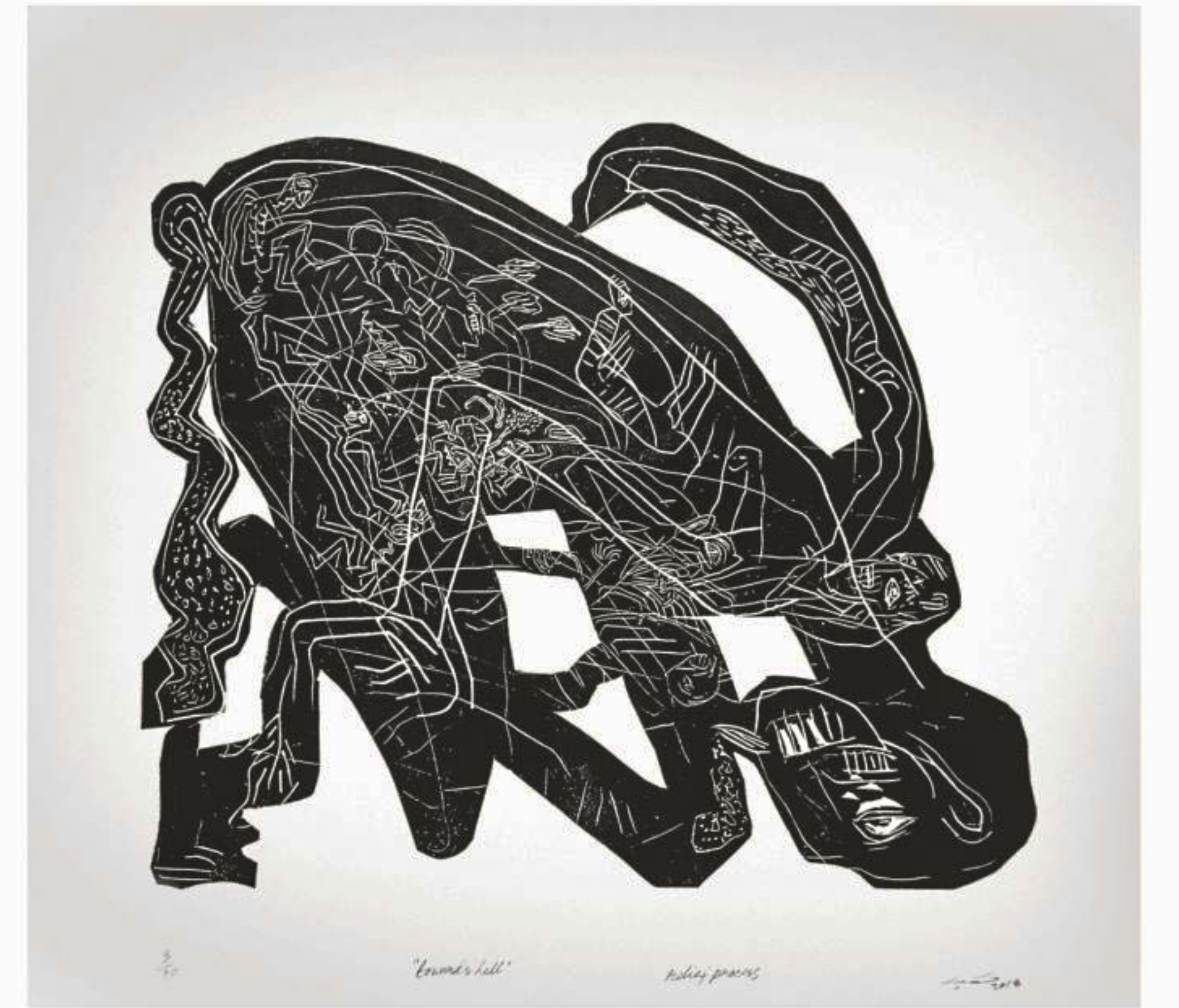
The artworks are compartmentalised into two sections along Kalakendra’s semi-partitioned gallery wings.

One section is entirely penned drawings. Scenes of anarchy adorn various sized canvases. Jagged outlines solidify a frenzy of chaos inside those frames. What is happening in any one picture is, at best, unclear, and intentionally so. But there is no debate whatsoever in the overwhelming theme. It’s a mood board for the restless, the anxious. In miniature portraits, a man appears helpless, his head in his hands; another depicts a man in the shower, genitals exposed and fragmented. It is as if the times have disappointed the existence of man—or perhaps it’s the other way around. And as such, visions of the man in states of panic and mania continues in several tiny frames.

But what of the mania? To which extent does man remain the societal man? Nisar Hossain’s drawings on palm leaves take this musing to new heights. Drawing on palm leaves was prevalent at one time in Bengal but is now more commonly practiced in the region of Odisha. The artist researched this method during his

2016 art camp visit to the region. The palm leaf drawings exhibit a dialectical tension between civil and uncivil (barbaric) in images of animals and non-animals, humans and non-humans. The mesh of species and organisms is shocking to the beholder. And to top it all, the palm leaves are bordered with perfectly organised and neat, floral and geometrical patterns—as if just at the brink of calamity, there lies the calm.

The images violate our self-prescribed superiority as a species. Humans repeatedly take pride in their organised behaviour, in their ability to think, to cultivate, to yearn for an existence beyond our primitive wants. But how much of that is real and how much of it is farce? And what happens to that composure when reality continuously becomes strained and stressful? Nisar Hossain’s drawings particularly disturbs this realm of speciated identity where the human and non-human are constructed with blurred lines.



Towards Hell

CARNIVAL OF GROTESQUE

Nisar Hossain’s solo exhibition manifests chaos through relief printing

SARAH NAFISA SHAHID

Overheard chatter of the gallery visitors during opening night provides interesting insights: “Is that an umbilical cord?” “Are these drawings all about sex?” “What does that dragon refer to?” “I think that’s a demon dog, actually.”

For me, the content of the artwork is all of those questions and more.

The second section of the exhibition contains relief prints either signed as “coal images” or “relief process”. These images are dark. Dark as in the colour, and also dark, as in the feeling. These images are not outlined; instead, they emerge out of the blackness. Relief prints are created through etching on a plate and then translated onto paper as a print image. Exploring drawing through relief process is unique due to its exhaustive methodology—a combination of drawing, etching, and then printing, drying, framing. Many of the displayed prints still hold strong resemblance to traditional etchings.

However, the modernity of these images is distinct due to its unabashed linearity, by which I mean the jagged and raw lines which form the deformed figures in the painting. In works such as *Fear of Darkness* or *Towards Hell*, strong lines provide a sense of structure. Yet, it is hard to tell where any line begins or ends, adding a level of circularity to such constriction. These images often emit aggressive masculinity in its commitment to violence. Yet traces of rejected femininity appear in the birthing men. Little babies are seen to be inside



Linear Text of a Delirious Time

naked men, and sometimes exposed genitals give way to more babies. Men crying, men killing, men attacked, men naked, men into animals, animals into men—all of that in repeated frames.

The images of this exhibition are a violent testament of, and response to, modernity—whatever we think of modernity anyway. It talks of a time which is constrained to the extent that all around seems chaotic. *Bikargrotho Shomoyer Roikhik Boyan* (Linear Text of a

Delirious Time) is an imagination of the Bengali proverb *Moger Mulluk* (an anarchic state). It is provocative, disturbing, and shocking.

Bikargrotho Shomoyer Roikhik Boyan (Linear Text of a Delirious Time) runs from June 30, 2018 to July 25, 2018 at Kalakendra, (fourth floor) 1/11 Iqbal Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

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