



City Subconscious by Ananda Antaheen

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Ghartera Edition 0: Junkyard

AHMAD IBRAHIM "Unlearning is a long process". It's doubtful to me that if we were to assemble an ensemble of artists, curators, gallerists, collectors and everyone else who is engaged in the often self-valorising art circuits in Dhaka, that there would be many present who would have uttered the above statement on the eve of their exhibit's closing. To be sure, this is not meant as a slight or a claim to a moral high-ground (using the term 'art circuits' automatically invalidates such pronouncements, anyway). It's only usual to expect that an exhibition, or any other display of art for that matter, necessitates a parting message that speaks of a 'learning' rather than an 'unlearning'. After all, many months of meticulous planning, frantic coordination and somewhat frazzled nerves demands a kind of fulfilment that has come from the entire process. *What has this experience taught us? What have we felt looking at the objects/subjects under the sanitised white glare of the all-encompassing gallery?*

Art spaces and institutions that ascribe to the culturally consecrated practice of maintaining glaringly white, untouched displaying surfaces, have often found themselves at odds with housing art that is altogether jarring and fractured in its existence. At the end of the day, the emptiness of the white space demands meaning from the art and the artist, and compels them to state a coherent, cognizable and appropriately cryptic *raison d'être* which can fill the overpowering

unique circumstances under which this project began its journey and the curious way in which it came together in Gallery Dwip, at the bend of a Lalmatia alleyway. Perhaps much more than is possible in this writing. What can be said here, though, is that it is as ad-hoc and *un-institutionalised* as its name suggests. Being labelled *Ghartera* is to be marked out as deviant, as stubbornly rebellious, often in the face of overwhelming logic, and, as inherently disposable. The aptly titled edition, *Junkyard*, brought together a commune of artists and art works indulging in displays of the macabre, the unspeakable and the indecently queer, from which civility averts its gaze. The ensemble of artists themselves represented a smattering of rising, young practitioners, enthusiasts and new entrants into the world of fine arts and its many rituals. Emboldened by the concept of disposability, they chose to meditate on the slow decay of memories and the environment, the chimerical possibilities of the human form, the dissociation we experience as dwellers of this city. But above all, they brought with them works that were deeply political, inherently flawed and searing in their unashamed gaze at those who would come to visit.

In the process of bringing this exhibit together, the organisers themselves adopted their self-fulfilling tag of *Ghartera*. In a time of institutional hegemony over art and art funding, the exhibition went ahead completely self-funded, with a miniscule amount being raised via crowd funding. For this Herculean effort alone, the curator Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo, deserves enormous credit. By his own admission, the materials used for propping up the artworks were themselves fashioned out of disposed items and low-budget back-end padding. The artists themselves put up funds to exhibit their work. The space itself was



Mosfiquir Rahman Jahan's Sumi

sense of emptiness. And so I return to my first statement—it is unusual for an exhibition to end on a non-ending, on an acknowledgement of the many skins it has shed from its body and of the many more that are yet to be discarded. But that is exactly how the organisers of *Ghartera* chose to end what they are calling *Edition 0: Junkyard*.

Much needs to be said regarding the

a brave pro bono provision on behalf of the ownership at Gallery Dwip. I say brave because in facilitating a space to curate the diverse body of unsettled and unsettling compositions, Dwip also tacitly placed a bold statement in front of the celebrated galleries, their gallerists and their curators—not only can

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