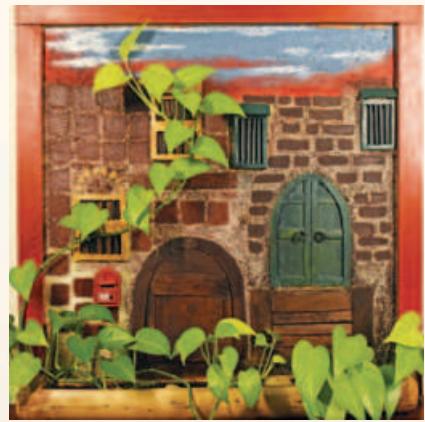


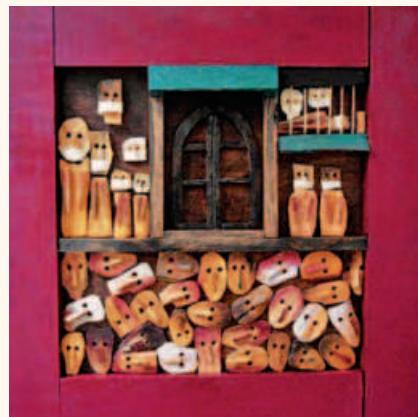
Rasha's Story: History and Nature Through Sculptures

Akhtar Ahmed Rasha, an expatriate Bangladeshi artist living in New Jersey, New York, sees art in the most unlikely places. Unlike most artists, he does not start off with a subject in mind, but patiently walks through nature and waits for his subject to call out to him amongst the greenery. Coming from a literature background, Rasha is living out his passion for sculpting and combining his work with Bengali history to highlight the Bengali culture in a western society.

In 2001, Rasha was inspired by freedom fighter, sculptor Ferdousi Priyabhashini who used materials from



nature and other waste materials found all around us in her sculpting. It was Priyabhashini's ability to artfully and skilfully turn such disposable objects into mesmerising artwork that caught Rasha's eye. She used old tree branches, dead twigs, tree trunks, simple bamboo, fallen leaves, and discarded clothes to make beautiful sculptures — something which captivated Rasha and began his artistic journey. Although he had an artistic eye and talent from his schooldays, it was not until he had visited one of Priyabhashini's exhibitions that he began thinking about pursuing



sculpting. In 2006, after months of mentally preparing himself, acquiring the necessary resources to get started, Rasha began producing sculptures which were quickly recognised by his community in New Jersey.

Similar to Priyabhashini, Rasha is an artist who uses a medium unacknowledged by the majority of sculptors. As a nature lover, he works with driftwood, bark, roots, and trunks — all collected from nature. Each piece of wood has a distinct texture, and in Rasha's hands, it takes

on a life of its own.

With four solo exhibitions and one group exhibition, Rasha has gained popularity in highlighting the historical trademarks of Bangladesh. One of his most prominent works 'Jessore Road' gives a visual form to the moments of 1971 captured in American poet Allen Ginsberg's "September on Jessore Road." His first exhibition, 'The Sense of a Moment' was in August 2015 where 50 percent of his work were sold. With such initial success, the only way for Rasha was up. Having worked with distinguished maestros, sculpting iconic figures and creating sculptures based on their work, Rasha has taken Bangladesh to America. Using mixtures of sawdust, cement, glue and other materials found in nature, Rasha has worked inspired by Selim Aldin, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Allen Ginsberg, Pablo Neruda and many more.

His process is unlike many in that he combines what is considered as waste objects with his imagination to capture the personality of the persona.

Rasha says, "When I walk through the forest or by the lake, I'll see a piece of wood or trunk and I see the face of someone like Rabindranath Tagore. I take that wood piece and try to tweak it accordingly so that my audience can see what I see."

In this process, unless he finds the right materials, is quite time consuming, but a thoughtful and meditative process nevertheless.

His inspiration along with nature and culture, is further motivated by his family and their support. As an artist, Rasha says that he comes from a different background and having gained some institutional knowledge, he considers himself lucky to be working with art and doing what he loves. Furthermore, he appreciates that in a commercial and capitalist world, he has received such heart-warming acknowledgement and support from his family and community.

His biggest challenge has been believing himself as an artist. Having a separate career, he is still able to invest time in his art, and in the future, plans to try more experimental methods of sculpting. His advice to a generation focused on following traditional career paths is that art should be valued and artists should be supported. If anyone has an inherent talent, which is necessary for any art form, they should explore it with passion.

Rasha is paving a path for future artists hailing from any educational background, to tap into their passion and potential, and to create art and represent themselves and their identity. His ability of bringing art, and nature and culture together is truly monumental and unique, and a stepping stone for the entire art community.

By Puja Sarkar
Photo: Akhtar Ahmed Rasha

