



PHOTOS: ARSHADUL HOQUE ROCKY

An afternoon spent with art

The National Fine Arts Exhibition 2023 is a must-see event this summer

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The National Fine Arts Exhibition 2023 at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy was an experience I enjoyed more than I thought I would. With the sun hiding behind the clouds and the soft sound of rain, it was a perfect day to visit an art exhibition.

The artwork and installations revolve around diverse topics ranging from climate issues, contemporary media, and mental health to the portrayal of menstrual health and motherhood. Produced by artists of various ages, starting from experienced virtuosos in the field to young artists born in the late 90s and early 2000s, the exhibition gives a good look into what Bangladeshi artists are doing these days.

I found "Tales of Inanimate River", a popular attraction of the exhibition, which is a Kinetic Sculpture by Promotesh Das, to be extremely unique. As the artist shares his concept of the project, he talks about growing up on the banks of the Surma river, and how he witnessed the death of a river for the first time after moving to Dhaka. The way rivers lose their ability to reflect light based on the amount of pollution they suffer from is a key highlight of the project, as the project revolves around a kinetic sculpture resembling the waves of a fresh river with small traces of light reflecting off of it.

I also found "Floating Island", an installation by artist Soma Surovi Jannat, incredibly captivating. The installation explores the idea of blending in with nature and experiencing life from the eyes of the mundane. The project is a drawing installation where the artist sees themselves as a floating island, repositioning themselves in different perspectives, sometimes a flying bee, sometimes a tree, sometimes like a bird, and sometimes like a mother, while unfolding their relationship with nature.

One of the installations that caught my eye was "Story of a Mason Jar", an installation by artist Fareha Zeba. The



exhibition is a giant broken mason jar that compares the similarities between a mason jar and a womb. The artist attempts to portray the dominant aspects of womanhood in an oversized mason jar that speaks of women's struggles, contributions, and more. The exhibition was crafted with diverse forms of media such as paper, jute threads, wires, etc., and is full of layers of imagery for the viewers to claw out.

The snake ludo board by Bangladesh Performance Art Group is a unique piece of performance art where the visitors are allowed to place themselves as players of the traditional snake ludo game while taking turns rolling the dice, which is a giant cushion cube the player kicks, to move to their next position. The exhibition is a floor painted with tiles from a traditional ludo board covered with snakes and ladders to recreate the original experience of

a traditional snake ludo game in real life.

Another project that drew my attention was the "Living in Water" sculpture by sculptor Bilas Mandal. The installation resembles pieces of land made of wood scattered across a room, hung by wires as if floating on a flooded water body, with people living on it. The installation speaks volumes about the ongoing climate crisis and the risks of the ocean levels rising while also expressing our desperation for clinging on to life, even in adversity.

A highlight of the event is an exhibition consisting of artist SM Sultan's revolutionary works. On the occasion of SM Sultan's 100th birth anniversary, the walls of the second floor are adorned by SM Sultan's paintings, while his personal belongings are placed gently under display cases made of glass. Sultan's work primarily revolved around life on Bangladeshi soil. His art showcases the mundan-

ity of village life with farmers working in the fields, women bathing their children, and much more.

Among his personal belongings, his used paintbrushes and palette were memories I enjoyed witnessing as Sultan exists luminously through his paintings. The influence he has left behind on the subcontinent and its contemporary artists, with his unique art style of exaggerated depictions of people engaged in the activities of their everyday lives, continues to grow.

The National Fine Arts Exhibition is set to end on July 15. The exhibition is open to visitors of all ages, which is a perfect place for people to go out, enjoy the rainy weather, and spend a pleasant afternoon.

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