

PRESERVE WHAT REMAINS: AN AESTHETIC APPEARANCE THROUGH A CREATIVE VOYAGE

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Manuscript Info

Submission: 15-09-2019

Acceptance: 06-10-2019

Publication: 05-01-2020

Keywords

Ecology, Conservation, Restoration, Environmental Art

ABSTRACT

People are unconsciously possessed by the instinct to damage the world around them. Their unknowing actions have caused the destruction of nature and upset its delicate balance; it is difficult to be sure whether an individual can actually create any positive impact. People need to be especially careful with regards to deforestation, reducing the use of plastic and conservation of environment and wildlife reserves through individual care. An artist can, to a certain degree, create awareness in society through visually rendering such observations. It can certainly be achieved as there are millions of people who are concentrating on this issue and taking small steps to conserve the environment every day. Furthermore, visual art's capability to interconnect people and ideas in creative ways brings with it the probability of engaging the public's attention in issues that might otherwise not enter general consciousness. The issues could be associated with such visual artistic actions among those who are unaware of their participation in the destruction of their environment. The core desire of this study is to focus on the concern for growing one's own awareness in environmental ecosystems and ecological intolerance through creative presentation i.e. organizing exhibitions based on paintings that contain such forms, colors and textures that are intrinsically related to ecological damage. The methodology was split into three phases- applying innovative materials to create surface of canvas, exploring such forms to present thoughts inherently, and participating in many exhibitions countrywide. Consequently the outcomes exhibited and accepted by the audience contain the intention to increase consciousness to preserve what remains.

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh a large amount of deforestation is happening that is frequently the cause of changes in its environment and natural features. At the moment, the disadvantages of deforestation are that it emits a large amount of carbon dioxide which increases global warming. On top of this, deforestation creates water crises around the earth due to the increased moisture in the atmosphere and it also decreases the consistency of soil. As a result a variety of natural disasters happen on the earth. Generally 25% forestland is required to compensate for the ecological humiliation in a country, whereas Bangladesh has only 16% which poses danger to the next generation. It is essential to take initiatives for the safety of the next generation to make them aware of the drawbacks of deforestation. (Rahman, 2009). Furthermore, artists can organize such undertakings by their realization through their creations to display

visual action to raise awareness for longevity of Bangladesh's natural environment.

Visual Art inspires people to explore the creativity and imagination of an artist. It provides visual, tactile and sensory experiences and a distinct way of understanding and responding to the work in progress. It enables general people to connect what they see, feel and think through the use of color, texture, form, pattern and different elements and principles. People become involved in shaping their environments through art and creative activities. It is certain that artists have been continuously inspired by the charm and grace of nature and have applied components of the natural world in artistic ways in all eras. Currently, there has been a rising trend in contemporary art to consider the natural world not only as a source of encouragement or theme to characterize, but also as a realm to inspire directly a scope of action to convert it into visual form and advance it through artistic means (Brown, 2014, p.

06). Recently a development in painting that has been stimulated by a feature of the contemporary urban environment is working with images resulting from graffiti. Graffiti is a visual announcement and typically a personal appeal to question the border between imaginative and destructive impulses (Adams, 2011, p. 564). It could be the newest version of a mural; artists can utilize this to present such artwork that will help to prevent the damage happening in our surroundings and help careless people to be more cautious. Nowadays, artists have introduced variety of art forms in all over the world. Environmental art is one of them that has become popular in our society.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Generally speaking flora and fauna has persisted as a privileged subject of original art for centuries. It is clear that in the Paleolithic era cave paintings represented animals, human figures and other aspects of nature important as the subject in which environmental art has its roots. Contemporary instances of environmental art stem from landscape painting and depiction. In accordance with the Enlightenment, Western society started to move away from agricultural living, exchanging farms for the development of towns and cities. This kind of detachment from nature, combined with the growth of science and discovery, directed a reaction known as the Romantic Movement that turned into the Neo-Romantic movement alongside the Industrial Revolution. One of the most renowned representatives, English painter John Constable (11 June, 1776 – 31 March, 1837), is well known for landscapes (Martinique, 2016). The Environmental Art movement arose in the 1960s

and involved extensive artwork, both remote site-specific and immediate outside settings. However, this art form developed throughout a period of increased concern for the American environment (Kleiner, 2009, p. 1014). Therefore, in Bangladesh artists are also conscious about creating paintings that help Bangladeshis to be aware about the environment, which has been true from the very beginning of its art movement.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

ZainulAbedin (29 December, 1914 – 28 April, 1976), the inventor of the modern art movement in Bangladesh, was at the same time an artist of excellence, a passionate cultural organizer, and a man of great human qualities. Artists make persistent efforts in the expansion of the total environment which makes possible the unrestrained pursuit of important aesthetic work. Abedin established his paintings with the rural people and nature of Bangladesh, in particular, the susceptibility to natural disasters (Rosa Maria Flavo (Editor), 2012, p. 47). His renowned painting *Monpura 70* in (fig. 01) shows the shocking circumstances following the cyclon of 1970, depicting dead humans, animals and trees all laid in a way that gives the impression that thenatural disaster had just passed over them. In the right corner of the painting there is a man sitting with his head down in depression (Desk, 2016).When at the end of twentieth century the whole world is worried about the environment, S.M. Sultan (10 August, 1923 – 10 October, 1994), one of the pioneer artists of Modern Art in Bangladesh, gifted “The First Plantation” in (fig. 02) that projected in our mind. Adam coming down to the earth and planting the first seedling. At this point a brown skin man as Adam with huge



Figure 01: ZainulAbedin *Monpura 70*; Ink, wash, and wax on paper; (105×960) cm; 1973; Bangladesh National Museum collection

muscular body is found in this painting; the color of his skin is firmly bound to the earth that creates harmony with the earth (Khan, 2003, p. 24). This particular painting is a good example of environmental consciousness for Bangladeshi people. The basic theme of his paintings, straight inexpensive country landscapes, remains the environment and people of Bangladesh. Sultan said in an interview “Dogs are very fond of me. In fact all birds and beasts are. If you are friendly to them they become grateful and obedient to you.” (Hye, 2008, p. 254). Sultan concentrated his thoughts and his style approached the concept of modernism in his creation that symbolically represents the hopes of a new nation, he painted with natural color on raw jute made canvas and use the extract of local fruit (Gab) as gesso on the canvas. He remained very devoted to his philosophy (Kamol, 2018). The main motivation for Sultan’s creation is a spirituality that was directly associated with nature. In the mid-twentieth century one of the prominent artists, Qayyum Chowdhury (09 March, 1932 – 30 September, 2014), was on an eternal exploration, searching for the depth of art in Bangladesh. He felt an aesthetic questioning as well as moral one during his journey into the need for modern civilization to find a symmetry, to remain in it with nature or thyself; he merged preservation with contemporaneity (Hoque, 2003, p. 21). Recently, in Bangladesh, artists are focused on conceptual art where as people are struggling and affected by the negative impact of the environment. Artists should get the challenge through taking initiative to present such art activities related to the understanding of the audience. The foremost aim of this study is to expose individual feeling by creative works and awareness in choosing one’s own ideas, to explore the scope of versatile materials, tools and techniques, and to increase critical awareness of the roles and purposes of visual art in the environmental context in Bangladesh.

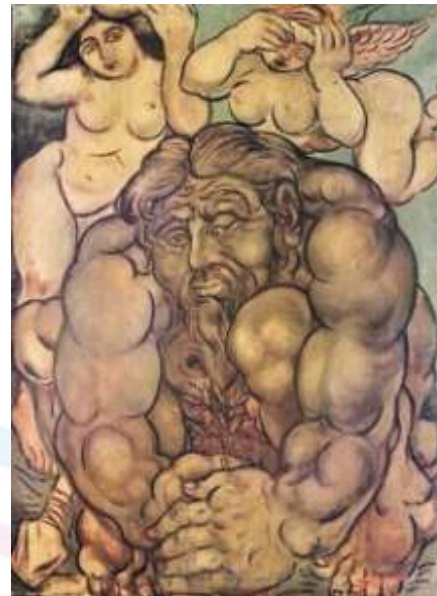


Figure 02: S.M. Sultan; First Plantation; Oil; (145×108) cm; 1975

Two main research questions were asked in this context: 1) How can an artist generate awareness in society through visually rendering such observations to extend what remains of our environment; 2) What can be achieved to conserve the environment every day?

VISION AND MISSION

“It’s very hard to argue that deforestation in reef catchments isn’t a problem because everybody knows that the reef is in crisis” said Jessica Panegyres (Cox, 2019). But for residents of the south-western region of Khulna Division, Bangladesh it was 2015 when the first realization of this came and resulted in a strong sense of responsibility for the issue; as an artist the realization can be expressed by depiction of the present scenario of the world largest mangrove forest Sundarban (140,000 hectares). It was declared as the Sundarban Reserve Forest in 1876 and as a Natural World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1997 to save its beauty (Abdul Aziz, 2015). This site is well-known for its extensive variety of fauna, with the 260 bird species, the Royal Bengal Tiger and other threatened species such as the estuarine crocodile and the Indian python (Baku, 2019). There are three major types of forest in Bangladesh, namely, Hill forests, Sal forests and Mangrove forests (Hasan, 2011). It has

been established by a research that almost 50,000 hectares of the Sundarbans have deforested by foreign exploitation in previous eras. The Soil Research Development Institute (SRDI) exposed an upsetting image that articulates that forest land has been mostly transformed into shrimp farms in the Sundarbans around Mongla and Bagerhat (Pinaki Roy, 2013). The Coastguard in Mongla siezes a large amount of logs in every year. It is very difficult to even imagine how much deforestation is occurring through the rest of our country, the Sundarbans face the same unfortunate situation as other forests in the country (EDITORIAL, 2017). Therefore, people of Bangladesh need to be made individually aware and consciously take responsibility to preserve the environment; preservation of environment is essential to a strong communal contribution and possession. Foresters, teachers and communicators have a big obligation for the industry segment. The Forestry Sector has established an aim to develop the idea of preservation in the community. The fourth aim among it has fixed is "to encourage all types of participatory forestry activities and creation of off-forest job opportunities to reduce dependence of forest-dependent communities on forests". (Agriconsulting Europe S.A., Brussels, Belgium, and Sodev Consult International Ltd., 2016). In accordance with the discussion it is clear that the visual arts community has a vital role to promote such communication among the public and increase awareness of deforestation. The main objective of this study is to present such creations that capture the existing scenario of our environment.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are-

- To present innovative ideas and concepts that contain original forms and texture that are related to our nature;
- To render substances in creative ways that are a significant part of the nature of

Bangladesh by means of the explored materials;

- To conserve the undamaged parts in our environment that have been ruined by the people of our country.

METHODOLOGY

The main idea of application of the above stated vision was followed in three phases: an initial focus on surface making, secondly, exploring colors and forms, and in the final stage, participating in many exhibitions countrywide.

FOCUS ON SURFACE MAKING

Applying original materials including a combination of organic things like sand and mud to create a surface on canvas with the help of adhesive. Keeping it in sunlight for 10 to 15 days to dry properly. After drying properly, making it a bit smoother with the help of sand-paper. The medium used is acrylic which is covered in a bold textured surface made by sand.

EXPLORING COLORS AND FORMS

Exploring such forms to present thoughts inherently; dry and rough colors; the colors used in the paintings are matt-blue, pale-brown, yellow-green, dull-yellow, greenish-grey and light-yellow. Blue signifies certainty, insight, dreamland, infinity, commitment, tranquillity, devotion and honesty. Brown is a friendly yet serious, down-to-earth color that relates to safety, defence, comfort, and material wealth. Yellow-green can point to sickness, cowardice, and discord. Dull yellow represents caution, decay, sickness, and jealousy. Light yellow is associated with intellect, freshness, and joy. With the help of these meaningful colors, the textured images create complicated forms to portray both the courageous and awful aspects of individuals. The composition of each painting followed the asymmetrical attitude.

PARTICIPATING IN MANY EXHIBITIONS COUNTRYWIDE

The created works focussing on the theme of conserving the environment have been exhibited in many exhibitions countrywide since 2015. The

innovative style was appreciated by critics and spectators alike. There have been various kinds of appreciation such as, winning awards, personal collection by art lovers, selection for the image on book covers, and public display to create awareness in the community.

OUTCOMES ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Normally it is found that the shade of green color in nature reinforces that the world is alive. Rationally, in dry seasons all around the realm of nature becomes rough and hard. The series of paintings *Conserve the Destruction* showed dry and hard colors to convey that the world seems like it will be dead in a short time; sometimes dreamy and optimistic colors were used to create hope and desire to grow our forest; the small spaces express that deforestation of those parts spreads emptiness amongst the upcoming generation.



Fig. 03: Conserve the Destruction 01; Acrylic; (121.92x121.92)cm; 2016



Fig. 04: Series Painting- Conserve the Destruction 02; Acrylic; (121.92x121.92) cm; 2016



Fig. 05: Series Painting- Conserve the Destruction 03; Acrylic; (121.92x121.92) cm; 2016

The painting *Conserve the Destruction 01* was exhibited in the 17th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh 2016, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Another series of paintings, *Conserve the Destruction 03*, was also exhibited in the 15th Art Exhibition and Competition, In Commemoration of Artist Rashed, Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Conserve the Destruction 02* (fig. 06) was purchased by IYYUN Publishing, Brooklyn, NY 11217 and applied as an image of a book cover named THE MONTH OF TEVES. The publishers used the image of this series of paintings as book cover expressively, and it is connected to the theme of the book.



Front Cover



Back Cover



Copyright Data

Fig. 06: Cover Image: 'Conserve the Destruction' by Abu Kalam Shamsuddin

The thought of this book is-

“Accordingly, every month has a slightly different climate and represents a particular stage in the 'story of the year' as expressed through the annual cycles of nature. The winter months call for practices and pursuits that are different than those of the summer months. Some months are filled with holidays and some have only one, or none. Each month therefore has its own natural and spiritual signature. According to the deeper levels of the Torah, each month's distinct qualities, opportunities and natural phenomena correspond to a certain set of seasonal and spiritual variables arranged within a twelve-part symbolic structure. ...The present volume will delve into the spiritual nature of the month of Teves according to these twelve categories.” (Pinson, 2018).



Fig. 07: *Individualism-01* and *Individualism-02*; Acrylic; (91.44×76.2) cm; 2017

It shows uniqueness but understandable intention to the people worldwide. On March 10-12, 2017 the English Discipline, Khulna University organized the International Conference on

Ibsen and the Freedom of Speech where a wassession conducted by the faculties of Fine Arts School. The series of paintings *Individualism-01* and *Individualism-02* (fig. 07) were one of the exhibited paintings. The series of paintings *An Enemy of the Peoples* as artistic point of departure that aims to portray individuals and thinkers who are oppressed by the majority. The understanding of the play inspired reflection on the canvas in the two paintings. The medium used is acrylic which is covered in a bold textured surface made with sand. The facial expressions reveal the struggle and achievement of individualism.



Fig. 08: *Illusion of Nature 02*; Acrylic; (152.4x91.44) cm; 2017

The colors used in the paintings represent caution, decay, sickness, and jealousy. With the help of these meaningful colors, the textured images create complicated organic intrinsic forms to portray both the courageous and awful aspects of individuals (Shamsuddin, 2017). Moreover, the Norwegian Ambassador (Sidsel Bleken) arranged another exhibition in 2017 in their embassy residence with the same title and the painting *Individualism-02* was procured by the embassy after completing the exhibition.



Fig. 09: *Illusion of Nature 03*; Acrylic; (152.4x91.44) cm; 2017

In 2017, at the 9th Kahal Art Fair organized by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, *Illusion of Nature 02* (fig. 08) was exhibited and achieved the Honorary Award. As well as this, Benjamin Thorpe, a multidisciplinary artist and writer whose practice deals with the hinges of representation and artistic gesture and Art and English Teacher/Mentor at Fusion Academy, USA, described the paintings *Illusion of Nature 02* and *Illusion of Nature 03* (fig. 08 and fig. 09) in an email. He shared his feelings about those paintings as noted below:

“The viewer’s eyes will follow the forms around the canvas – to meander. Anyone can discover new things each time they look. The lines are incredibly organic and playful; some of them seem to be withering. Life and death seem to be present at once. Some of the brownish-red color looks like dried blood. In this painting it looks like the green is about to enclose the red as if to form the Bangladeshi flag. It works as an abstraction too and it makes one also think more abstractly about the formation of Bangladesh as a process that takes time and is painful and somehow entangled with the natural world. One cannot define a country with a single line. If one stands back from the painting the smaller lines fade and the colors look more like nebulae in outer space. They are atmospheric, and slow.”



Fig. 00: *Conserve the Ruins 02*; Acrylic; (182.88×121.92) cm; 2018



Fig. 00: *Conserve the Ruins 02*; Acrylic; (152.4×91.44) cm; 2019

The *Conserve the Ruins 02* was exhibited recently in the 23rd National Art Exhibition-2019 arranged by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh. M.M. Masumuzzaman, Founder and General Secretary, Book Land Library and Farhana Hasna Tuli, Co-Founder, Basundhara R/A Mainroad 6/Kh, appreciated and procured the painting *Conserve the Ruins 02* for the library. The Founder of Book Land Library, Masumuzzaman thinks that this painting contains valuable forms and characters. He said, "The painting seems like a symbol of human character is trying to come out from repercussion of environment and the social crisis too" (Masumuzzaman, 2019). Also, Farhana Hasna Tuli, Co-Founder of Book Land Library, thinks it is an inspiring painting for all of us in twenty-first century. She wrote, "A representation of human figure who is attempting to relief from the polluted environment that created by unconscious people around us" (Tuli, 2019). This painting has been displayed at the library to generate connection with the mass

community to make them aware of the ruined environment that creates complexity in our lives.

All the above discussed evidences of the creation around the theme of environment show a successful voyage of an artist in his primary stages. The purposes underdevelopment by the artist since 2016 have become an inspiring example. This inspiration helped him to continue the journey of creation and think of more things that will connect powerfully with the community.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that this research was compiled using experience from the real life experience and funding across personal interest and ability. The tangible series of paintings evoke forms that oscillate between the microscopic and the cosmic. In exploring this abstract realm, the artist engages with the problems of painting itself. Each canvas tests the imagination's elasticity, the ability to create and break illusions of spatial depth, and the shifting effects of an unshifting image. This series of paintings embraces the slow process of painting - of chemical change and psychological response. Within the abstract revelry one finds signs, propositions, and memories of environmental identity. Extending the artist's concern for the place of Bangladesh's visual tradition within contemporary global art, the artist is involved in communal activities around environmental art.

The actual concept established from this study that could be extended in near future is to create awareness amongst people who are not presently concerned with the issues of the reduction of the natural world. At the end of this study, there is a proposal for such an ecological art project that could be organized in many places in Bangladesh with help of funding from the Government or private organizations.

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