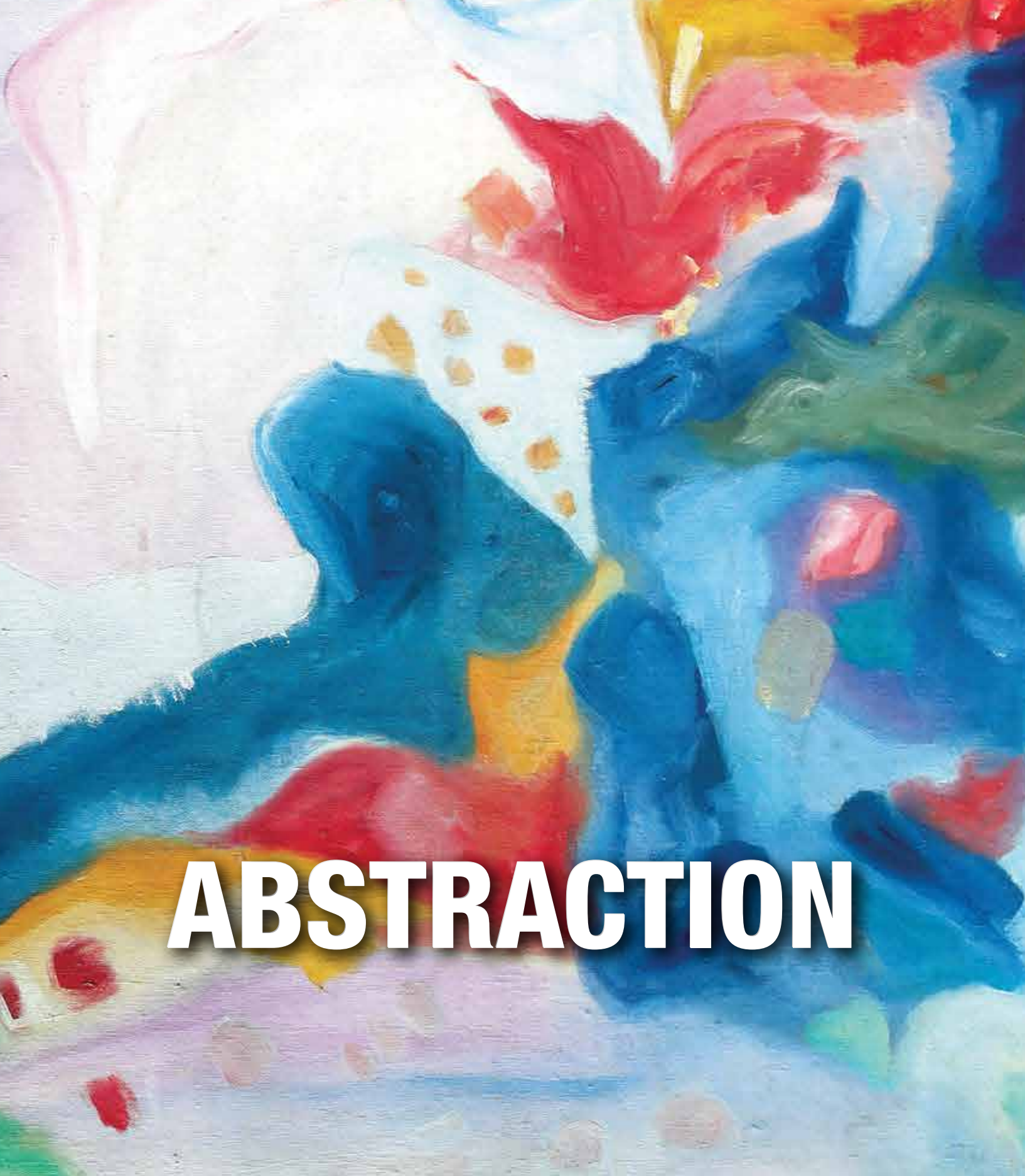


An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes in a variety of colors. Large, dark blue shapes dominate the lower half, with a bright red shape nestled between them. Above, a vibrant red shape resembling a flower or flame is set against a pale, pinkish-white background. Yellow and green accents are scattered throughout, adding to the dynamic composition. The overall style is gestural and non-representational.

**ABSTRACTION**

# ABSTRACTION

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Exhibition sponsor



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*Printed in Bangladesh.*

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Safiuddin Ahmed         | 1922-2012 |
| Mohammad Kibria         | 1929-2011 |
| Aminul Islam            | 1931-2011 |
| Murtaja Baseer          | 1932-2020 |
| Debdas Chakraborty      | 1933-2008 |
| Syed Jahangir           | 1935-2018 |
| Kazi Abdul Baset        | 1935-2002 |
| Nitun Kundu             | 1935-2006 |
| Abu Taher               | 1936-2020 |
| Samarjit Roy Choudhury  | 1937-2022 |
| Hashem Khan             | 1941      |
| Mahmudul Haque          | 1945-2022 |
| Syed Abdullah Khalid    | 1945-2017 |
| Hamiduzzaman Khan       | 1946      |
| Kalidas Karmakar        | 1946-2019 |
| Abul Barq Alvi          | 1949      |
| Mohammad Eunus          | 1954      |
| Ratan Mojumder          | 1954      |
| Tajuddin Ahmed          | 1955      |
| Rezaun Nabi             | 1957      |
| Ivy Zaman               | 1958      |
| Rashedul Huda           | 1964      |
| Rafi Haque              | 1965      |
| Anukul Chandra Mojumder | 1974      |
| Maksuda Iqbal Nipa      | 1975      |
| Md. Tokon               | 1978      |

# The realm of abstract art and its expansion in Bangladesh

Takir Hossain

Abstract art often poses a challenge for many viewers due to its lack of connection to the physical world. Like other modernist art forms, it raises questions about how we understand and appreciate art, leading to a reconsideration of the very nature of art itself. Abstract art takes on many different forms and levels, with some pieces starting from nature and then being simplified and stylised to the point of being unrecognisable. This approach to art has been seen in various cultures throughout history. The interpretation of abstract art varies from person to person. In this type of art, artists focus on textures, forms, tones, and technical aspects. Those who create abstract art often emphasise the richness of color, the intensity of texture, and the range of tones.

In the mid-1950s, abstract art made its way into our country as a result of several painters pursuing higher education abroad in their respective fields. During their academic pursuits, they had the opportunity to explore many European museums and gain insights into modern art. Upon completing their studies, these artists returned home and began experimenting with new and innovative themes and styles. Notable painters such as Mohammad Kibria, Kazi Abdul Baset, Aminul Islam, Murtaja Baseer, Debdas Chakraborty, Rashid Chowdhury, and others were part of this movement and they are also known as the first-generation artists in Bangladesh. Influenced by abstract expressionism, lyrical abstraction, pure abstraction, and non-figuration, these artists delved into emotions and intellects in their works. Over time, forms and compositions became central to their artistic endeavours. The forms and symbols they used conveyed various messages closely tied to political unrest, economic challenges, and social inequalities. In this article, I have tried to focus on the artists who first introduced abstract art in our country and their styles as well as the artists who have been greatly influenced by abstract expressionism.

Mohammad Kibria is considered an iconic figure in contemporary art, as he introduced abstract paintings where compositions, colours and forms are major features. He joined Dhaka Art College in 1954. Afterwards, he studied at the Tokyo University of the Arts in 1959. He was exposed to international museums where he got the chance to watch works of modern masters and received trainings under world-famous contemporary abstractionists. Due to the

influence of his Japanese guru Hideo Hagiwara (in printmaking), Kibria's etchings and lithographs reflect elements of Japanese subtlety and techniques. He meticulously blended the essential elements of his paintings. His mode of expression (in paintings) had been changed a number of times, but the painter successfully established his personal trademark through all his creations.

Kazi Abdul Baset commenced his professional journey as a lecturer at the Art Institute in 1957. At first, he adopted the approach of realism in his artworks, but subsequently integrated aspects of impressionism and cubism. He had received a Fulbright Fellowship to improve his painting skills at the Art Institute of Chicago University, where he was exposed to the abstract expressionism movement. Upon his homecoming, his artistic creations thrived, making use of diverse mediums.

Aminul Islam grew primarily as a non-figurative painter and started his career by experimenting with different mediums and art forms. Following the completion of his BFA in Dhaka, he traveled to Florence in 1953 to further his art studies. Upon returning to Dhaka, his artistic style underwent a significant transformation, with a newfound emphasis on lines, colors, and space in his paintings. Over time, the artist became more attuned to the distinct characteristics of lines created by pen, pencil, brush, bamboo, discarded brush, and other objects. His compelling drawings showcase his expertise in lines and exceptional compositional capabilities.

Murtaja Baseer, a painter with a strong political and social awareness, was actively engaged in left-leaning politics during his student years. His political ideology led to multiple incarcerations in the 1950s. Baseer's artistic career took a significant turn when he pursued higher education in art in Italy in 1956, after being influenced by the paintings of the Byzantine and Early-Renaissance periods. Upon his return to Dhaka, his style underwent a notable transformation. Over the course of his distinguished career, Baseer gradually evolved his artistic style into abstract realism. Rashid Chowdhury is widely regarded as the trailblazer of tapestry in the country and unquestionably the most accomplished Bangladeshi artist in this specific genre thus far. Following his graduation in Dhaka, he was awarded a scholarship to study in Spain in 1956. Subsequently, in 1960, he pursued further education in Fresco and Tapestry in Paris. His works are characterised by the seamless integration of our traditional art with modern abstract influences. The artist has carved out a distinct niche for himself, particularly in terms of design and colour composition. The richness of colours, geometric arrangements, and aesthetic appeal set his works apart.

Debdas Chakraborty captured the essence of nature and its enigmatic transformations through his unique perspective, personal experiences, and thought process. His paintings are a testament to his deep emotions and profound observations of his environment, life, and memories. The artist underwent advanced training in printmaking in Warsaw, Poland, through the Polish Government Scholarship Programme in 1976. Upon completing his studies,

Debdas employed broad and occasionally refined strokes to symbolically represent a variety of subjects. His techniques and forms are both organic and capable of generating a visual language that feels unfamiliar to the viewer. A significant number of his works are centered around composition and form, featuring shapes of various sizes—rectangular, vertical, horizontal, half-curved, and full-curved. The artist incorporated numerous symbols into his artwork. The division of space within his compositions is striking, with expansive areas remaining flat while smaller sections are adorned with intricate patterns. It is evident that the artist dedicated substantial time to crafting the illusion of depth.

After the mid-1960s, a group of painters began to concentrate on nationalism in their art. Most of these artists are considered to be experimental painters. They consistently explored space, form, and composition. Although the art movement of the sixties in the democratic bloc was heavily dominated by a few renowned American abstract expressionists like Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline, and Adolph Gottlieb, it paved the way for liberal approaches globally. As a result, the current successes in Bangladesh's art community can be traced back to this liberalisation. Painters like Samarjit Roy Chowdhury, Nitun Kundu, Monirul Islam, Hamiduzzaman Khan, Mahmudul Haque, Syed Abdullah Khalid, Kalidas Karmakar, Abul Barq Alvi and others followed the footsteps of the first generation painters.

Samarjit Roy Chowdhury incorporates tiny fish, cats, snakes, birds, and animals into his canvas. The lines on his artwork crisscross each other. Scribbles and thick lines intersect throughout his paintings. Male and female figures are portrayed intimately in his creations. His pure geometric patterns and delicate spatial arrangements symbolise fantasy, reality, and nostalgia. Monirul Islam's artistic creations are distinctively identifiable due to his ability to convey various aspects of life through his unique style, methods, and original ideas, resulting in captivating pieces where muted hues, poetic strokes, delicate textures, and shapes come together seamlessly. He demonstrates a high level of expertise in handling his chosen medium and techniques. Syed Abdullah Khalid, an abstract expressionist, concentrated on the exploration of colour and its diverse aspects. He also explored unstructured forms and ambiguous compositions, which are meticulously incorporated into his artwork. The artist has directly applied colours, layering thick and sometimes thin coats on the canvas, resulting in bold and dynamic images.

Kalidas Karmakar had the ability to closely analyse the changing socio-political and economic landscape of society. Through his artwork, he portrays emotions such as anger, frustration, suffering, death, and destruction. His subjects vividly capture the hardships faced by ordinary Bangladeshis during times of war, floods, cyclones, famines, and political and economic instabilities. Mahmudul Haque was deeply intrigued by compositions and forms. His pieces in various mediums can be distinguished by the incorporation of solid forms and compositions. He is passionately enthusiastic about experimenting and testing out innovative shapes and

techniques. The shift is primarily technical, and at times, it appears that he is more mindful of the space and compositions.

Hamiduzzaman Khan derives solace from his artistic endeavours, whether it be sculpting, painting and watercolour. His inspired artworks reflect a harmonious connection with the natural world, blending landscapes with visionary perspectives that make use of nature's exquisite colour palette and vistas to his advantage. Following the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there was a resurgence in the art scene with a commitment to portraying the hopes and dreams of the new nation through various artistic expressions. Many artists chose to focus on the Liberation War as the central theme of their creations, with some even directly involved in the war. After the war, these artists translated their experiences into their artwork. Additionally, there was a renewed interest in exploring tradition and heritage, leading to a revival of figurative art. The artists of the 1970s began experimenting with a wide range of materials and styles. During the 1980s, a number of earnest painters have come to the light with great zeal and zest. There is no doubt that Bangladeshi art has enriched in touch of them. Their working styles are bold, thought-provoking and their themes are clearly visualized our political, social and cultural arena. Some of those painters articulated their mode of expressions with pure realism while some others with pure abstraction, semi-abstraction and surrealism. Mohammad Eunos, Tajuddin Ahmed, GS Kabir, Ratan Majumder, and some others names come to the list whose mode of expressions are pure-abstraction.

Mohammad Eunos' artwork resonates with me as a powerful expression of truth and revelation. His paintings depict romantic landscapes, nostalgia, and social turmoil in a symbolic manner, incorporating primeval mythological motifs. Eunos applies paint to his canvases by throwing, flicking, and dripping it, before refining the amorphous forms and shapes to achieve a balanced aesthetic.

Tajuddin Ahmed's personal style can be recognised by examining his current artistic approach within the framework of the abstract movement that emerged in the early 1960s. What sets him apart from other first-generation abstractionists is his utilization of layers. By continuously adding layers of drawings until he is satisfied, his artworks often convey a unique connection to urban environments. His unique methods of organising colors, textures, and space infuse his works with a dynamism that readily captivates art enthusiasts.

Ratan Mazumdar, a freelance artist, has consistently pursued his artistic endeavors throughout his life. Instead of pursuing a traditional job, he has dedicated himself to the practice of art. Transitioning from a ceramic artist to a printmaker, his artistic growth has been gradual yet consistent. His work often explores the theme of urban alienation, utilizing intricate lines and the simplicity of black and white woodcut prints. Despite his talent, he maintains a humble demeanor and is regarded as one of the most sincere painters in the Dhaka art scene. His distinctive style effectively evokes feelings of nostalgia and yearning. GS Kabir was a creative

individual known for his innovative approach to art. He was highly productive and achieved great success throughout his career, earning multiple awards. His distinctive style involved creating large, square paintings on PVC sheets that combined elements of technology and art. However, after receiving the Monbushu scholarship in Japan, his artistic direction took a new turn. Over the course of his career, Kabir has evolved significantly from his initial works featuring distorted figures and screen-printed images that became his trademark.

In the mid-1990s, a big change took place in Dhaka's art circuit when a number of cerebral painters started looking for new language and new techniques. Installation, animated photography and videography were introduced largely at the time. I think this was the time when the artists of younger generation started thinking differently about their artistic visions and imaginations. During that time, another feature had been added to our art scene. Painters started to extensively exhibit their works abroad and many foreign painters came here for exhibition. The foreign artists exchanged their experiences and thinking process with Bangladeshi painters. And this is the time when painters again got the chance to explore themselves. As a result, a good number of young artists have been displaying a keen sense of consciousness and are working on issues like identity and tradition with a more objective understanding. They are attempting to address relevant national and international issues like globalisation, communalism, feminism, environment and economic and social discrimination in a language which is at the same time both contemporaneous and markedly distinctive.

In the late 1990s, a number of painters were deemed remarkable for their outstanding works. Their modes of expressions are abstract expressionism. Among the artists, Maksuda Iqbal Nipa, a dedicated painter of the late 1990s, consistently maintains a low profile. She is deeply committed to her creative endeavours and has developed a unique artistic language through her distinctive style. The rich layers of colours in her canvases create a one-of-a-kind texture, giving her works a distinct signature. Her paintings convey the essence and true meaning of different colours, reflecting a technique that is both rich and labourious, demanding immense effort and dedication. Her pursuit of beauty and her contemplation on human insights and the overlooked aspects of nature have inspired her to capture these images through her art.

Anukul Majumdar's art explores themes of motherhood, childhood, and the rustic countryside. His paintings are characterised by curved and twisted lines, often depicting bold, brutal, and unsettling scenes. His figures are often portrayed as unattractive, obese, with languid eyes and unshapely forms. Majumdar's works are rich in substance, conveying a profound essence of life, love, and the essence of being. His brushstrokes are rough, filled with curves and twisted lines. He draws inspiration from the life force and power found in abstract forms. Majumdar's desires, emotions, hopes, and aspirations are deeply connected to the people of his country. He aims to highlight the strengths, dreams, and patriotism of the masses.

Bangladeshi expatriate artist Md Tokon is profoundly engaged in the realm of abstract expres-

sionism. He has developed a heightened awareness of his manipulation of space and the use of tinted canvases. Throughout his artistic journey, he has explored the works of prominent American Abstract Expressionists, which has prompted him to critically reassess his own creations. Tokon typically employs flat colours, skillfully crafting various textures and forms on the canvas. The presence of vibrant colours and amorphous shapes are defining characteristics of his artwork. His compositions show a rugged texture and a sensuous arrangement of space. The artist primarily focuses on spatial dynamics, resulting in compositions that are often unstructured and occasionally feature a patchy texture. In his colour palette, he demonstrates a romantic inclination towards vibrant, lively tones and a soulful texture.

It is widely recognised that modern abstract art resonates with the essence of the contemporary spirit. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the shapes and forms of abstract art differ from one artist to another, each conveying their distinct inner perspectives. Abstract art manifests in various ways, including abstract art, non-figurative art, non-objective art, and non-representational art, all of which are interconnected terms. While they share similarities, their meanings may not be entirely synonymous.

*The writer is an art critic and cultural curator.*



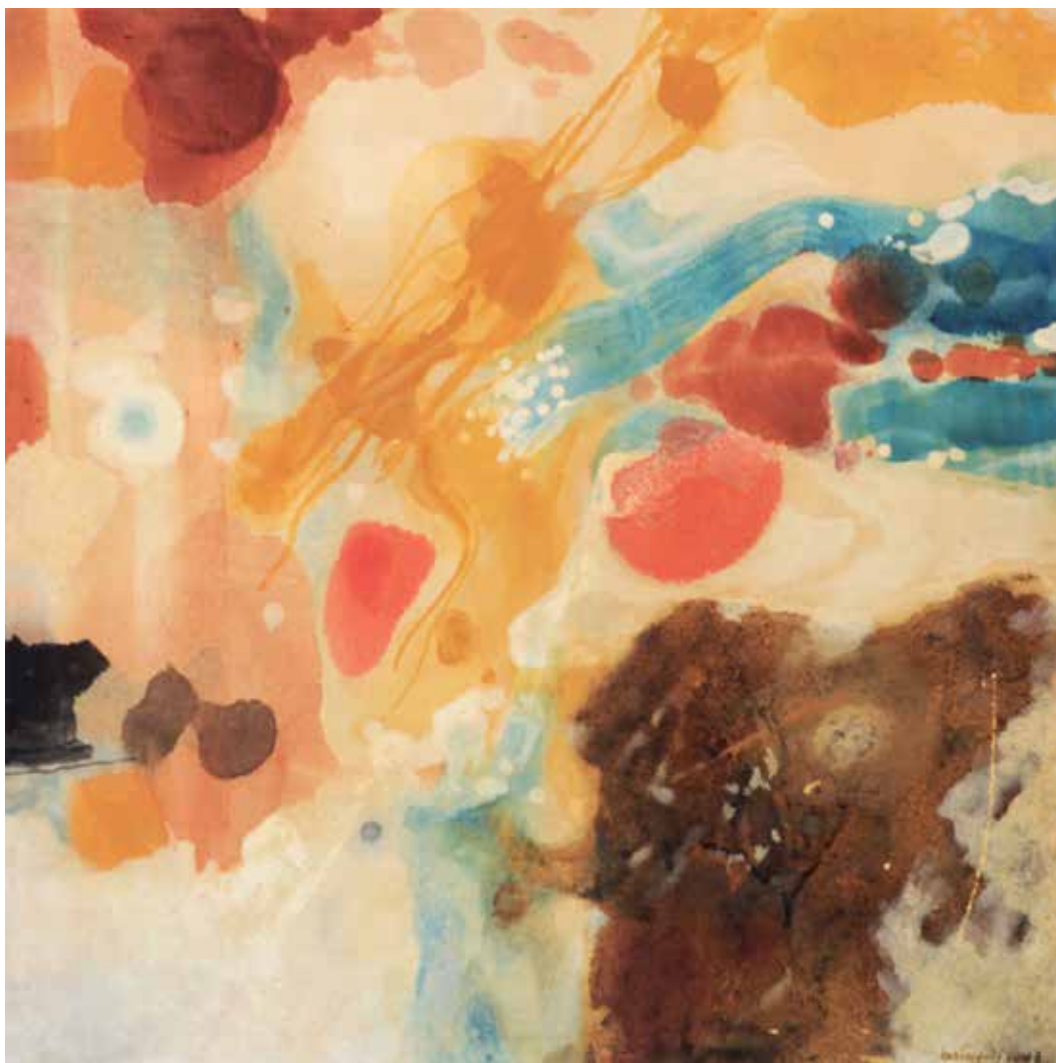
**Safiuddin Ahmed** (1922-2012)  
Drawing Pencil on paper 42 x 35cm (16.5x14in) 1998



**Mohammad Kibria** (1929-2011)  
Untitled Intaglio 26 x 39cm (10x15in) 1975

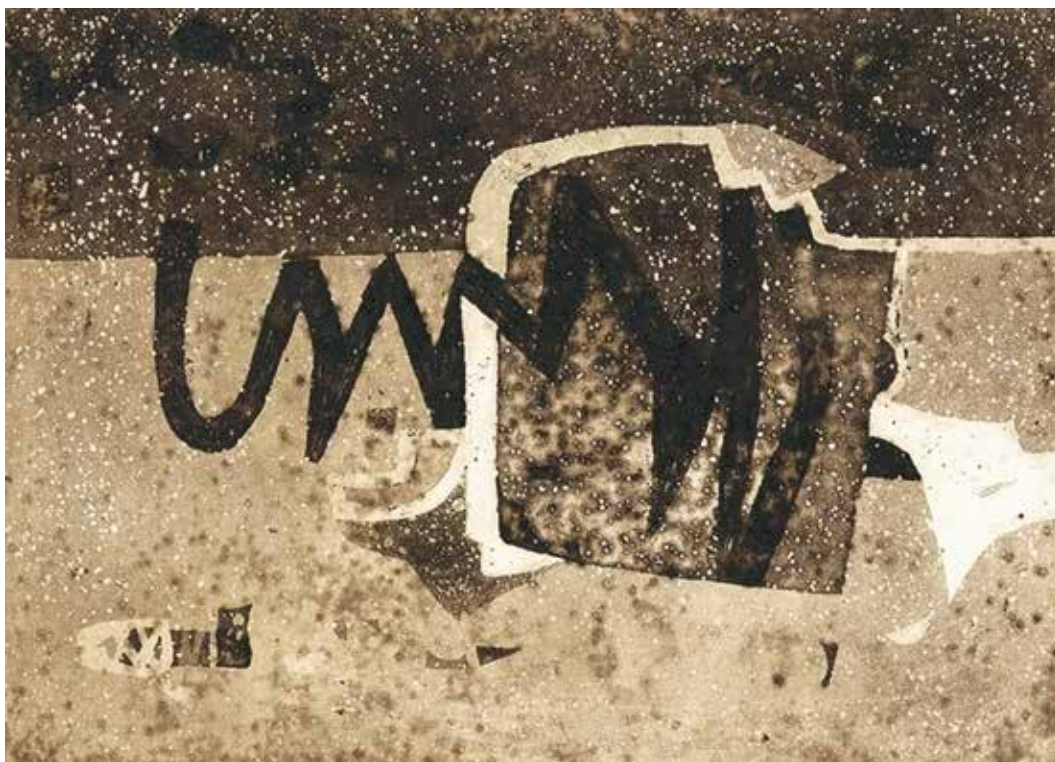


**Aminul Islam** (1931-2011)  
Drawing Pastel on paper 36 x 29cm (14x11in) 1957



**Aminul Islam** (1931-2011)

Untitled Oil & octane on canvas 91 x 91cm (36x36in) 1994



**Murtaja Baseer** (1932-2020)  
Image-16 Aquatint 32.75 x 23.5cm (13x9in ) 1973



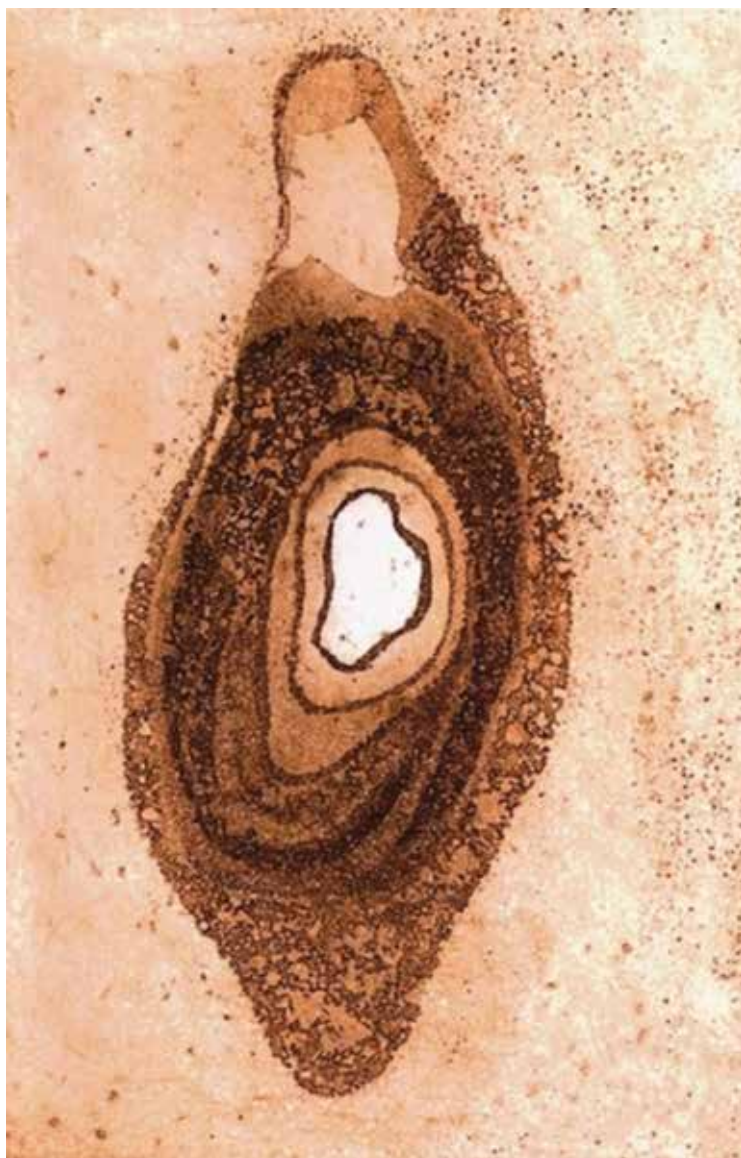
Epitaph-1 Aquatint 24 x 29.25cm (9.5x12in ) 1979



Image-13 Aquatint 21.75 x 15.75cm (8.5x6.5in ) 1973



Image-14 Aquatint 32.75 x 23.5cm (13x9in ) 1973



Epitaph-2 Aquatint 18.25 x 12cm (7.5x5in ) 1979



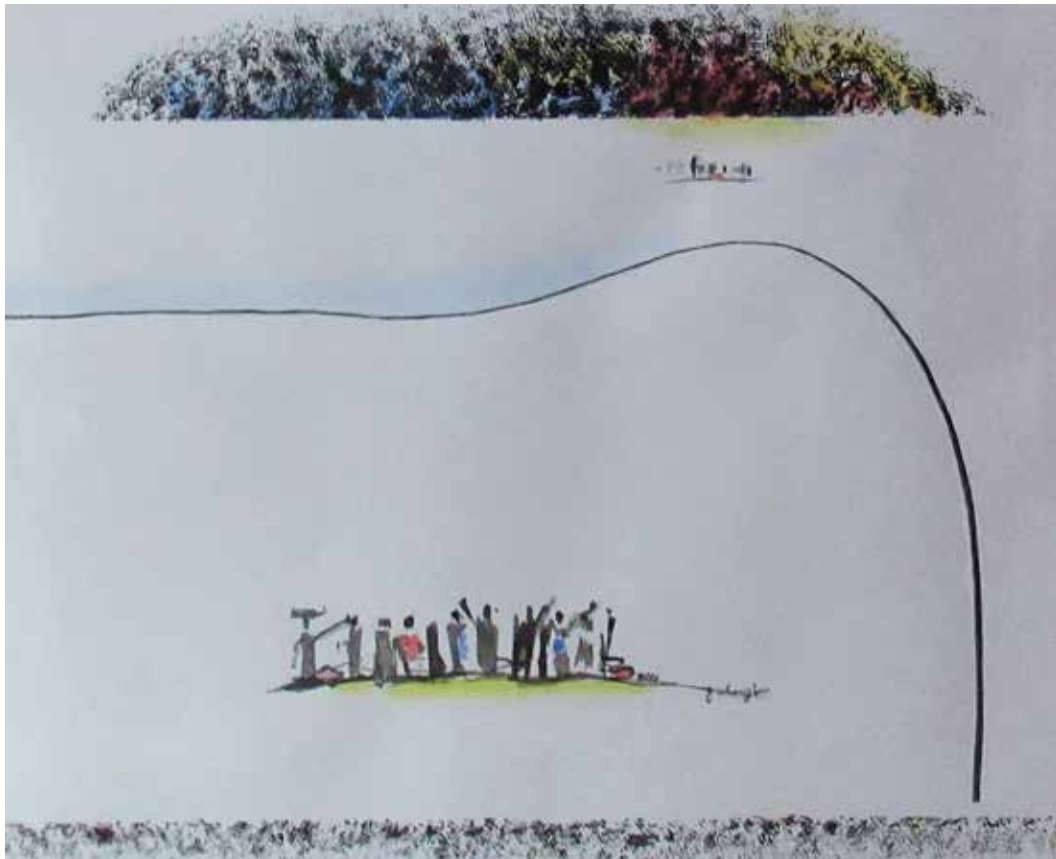
The Wing Oil on canvas 53 x 79cm (21 x31in) 2005



**Debdas Chakraborty** (1933-2008)  
Autumn Oil on canvas 219 x 105cm (86x41in) Unsigned, 1989



**Syed Jahangir** (1935-2018)  
Moonlit high tide Acrylic on canvas 77 x 77cm (30x30in) 2017



Unnamed (People on the raft) Sketch & watercolor on paper 69 x 54cm (27 x 21in) 2018



**Kazi Abdul Baset** (1935-2002)  
Untitled Oil on canvas 76 x 109cm (30x43in) 1982



**Nitun Kundu** (1935-2006)  
Harmony in nature Oil on canvas 92 x 92cm (36x36in) 2003



**Abu Taher** (1936-2020)  
The flood victim family Oil on canvas 91 x 91cm (36x36in) 2004



**Samarjit Roy Choudhury** (1937-2022)  
'Harmony on Earth' Acrylic on canvas 92 x 92cm (36x36in) 2012



Lily with bird Acrylic on canvas 92 x 92cm (36x36in) 2012



**Hashem Khan** (B. 1941)  
Music in green Acrylic on canvas 85 x113cm (33.5x44.5in) 2023



Untitled-1 Acrylic on paper 43 x 30cm (17x12in) 2021



Untitled-2 Acrylic on paper 43 x 30cm (17x12in) 2021



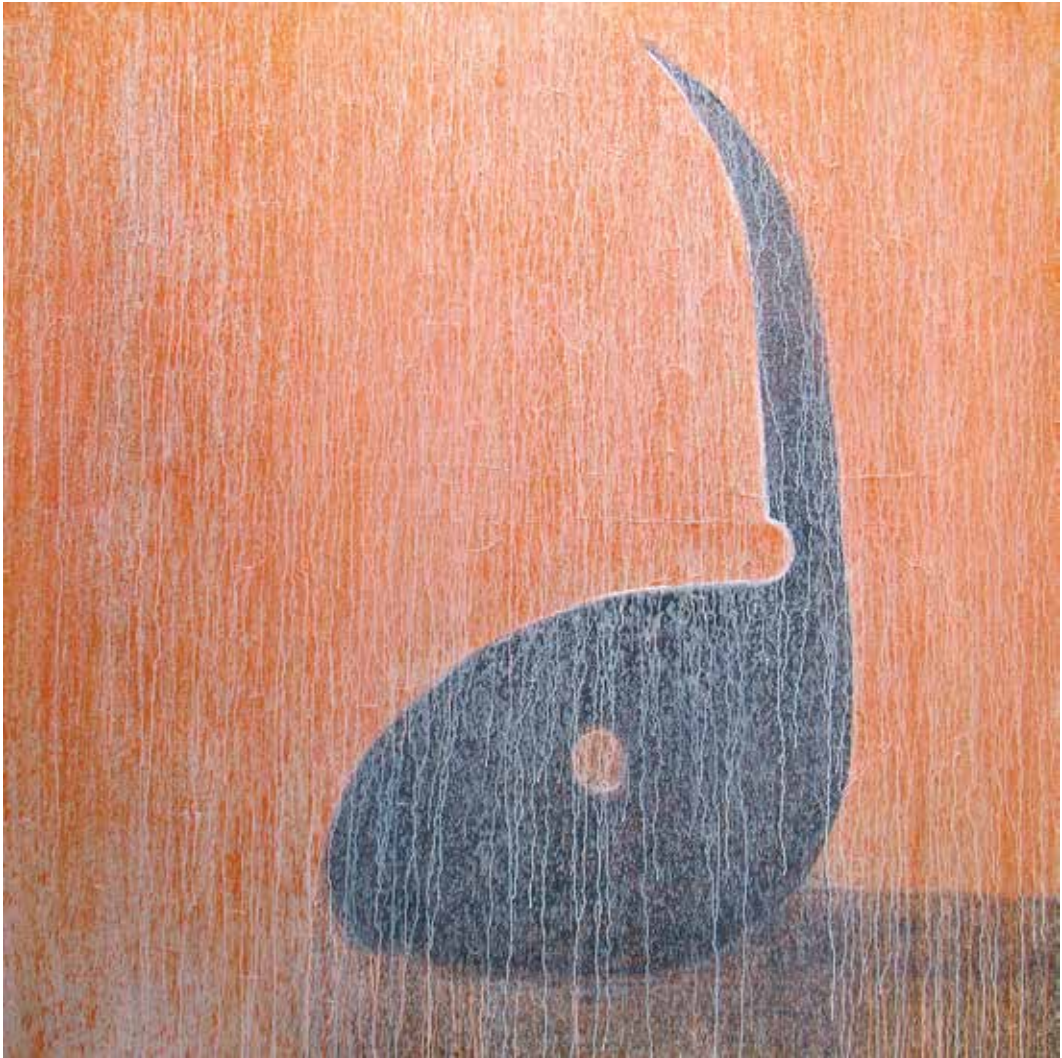
**Mahmudul Haque** (1945-2022)  
Untitled Oil on canvas 74 x 97cm (29x38in) 2017



**Syed Abdullah Khalid** (1945-2017)  
Untitled-1 Acrylic on paper 45 x 60cm (17.5x23.5in) 1997



Untitled-2 Oil on canvas 39 x 54cm (15x21in) 1997



Formation Acrylic on canvas 198 x 198cm (78x78in) 2024



Untitled-4 Acrylic on canvas 107 x 76cm (42x30in) 2015



**Hamiduzzaman Khan** (B. 1946)

Untitled-1 Watercolor on paper 38 x 55cm (15x21.5in) 2018



Untitled-2 Watercolor on paper 55 x 38cm (21.5x15in) 2018



Untitled-3 Charcoal on paper 70 x 50cm (27.5x20in) 2018



Composition-1 Metal 8 x 36cm (7x14in) 2024



Composition-2 Metal 16 x 40cm (6.5x16in) 2024



Composition-3 Metal 15 x 40cm (6x16in) 2024



Composition-4 Metal 6 x 35cm (2.5x14in) 2024



**Kalidas Karmakar** (1946-2019)

Untitled Acrylic on canvas 135 x 112cm (53x44in) 2014

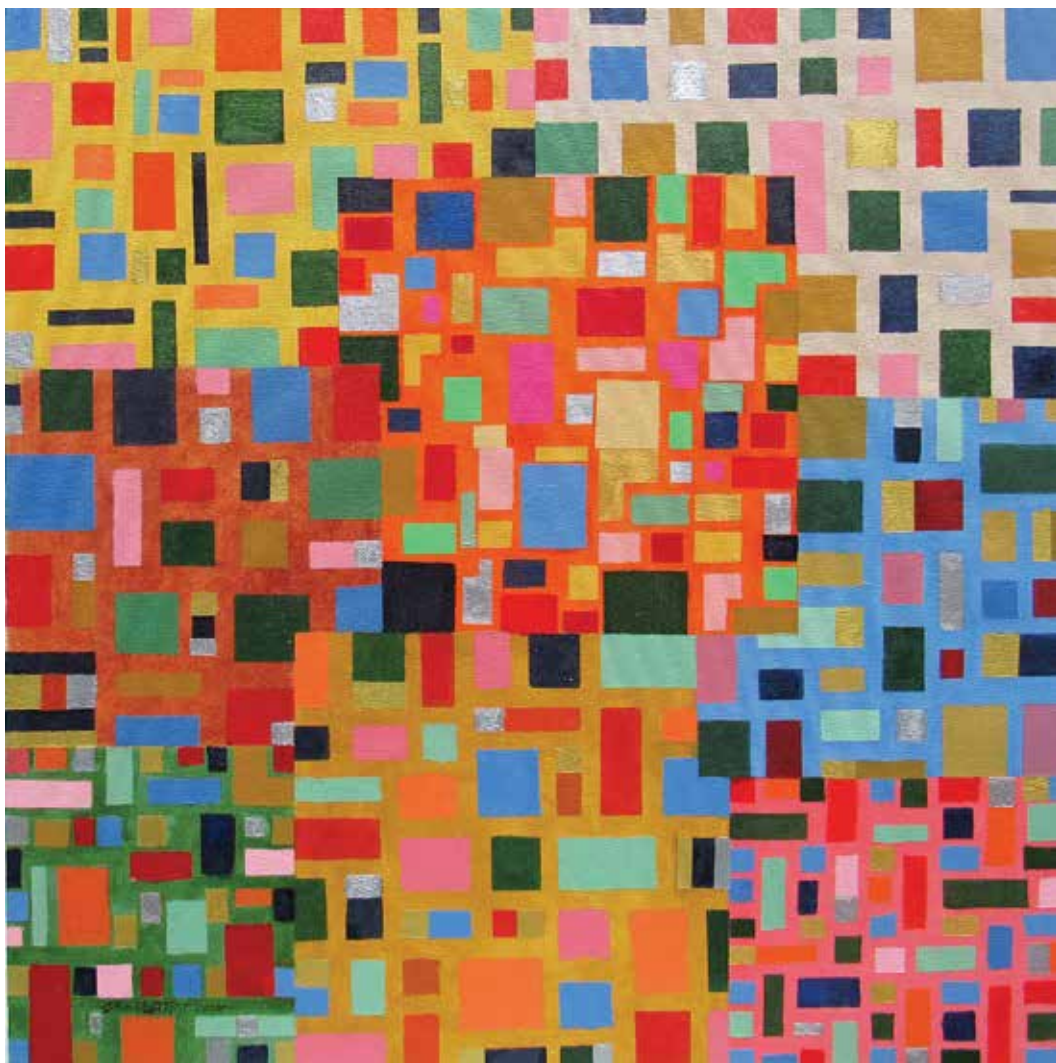


**Abul Barq Alvi** (B. 1949)  
Untitled Acrylic on canvas 61 x 76cm (24x30in) 2024

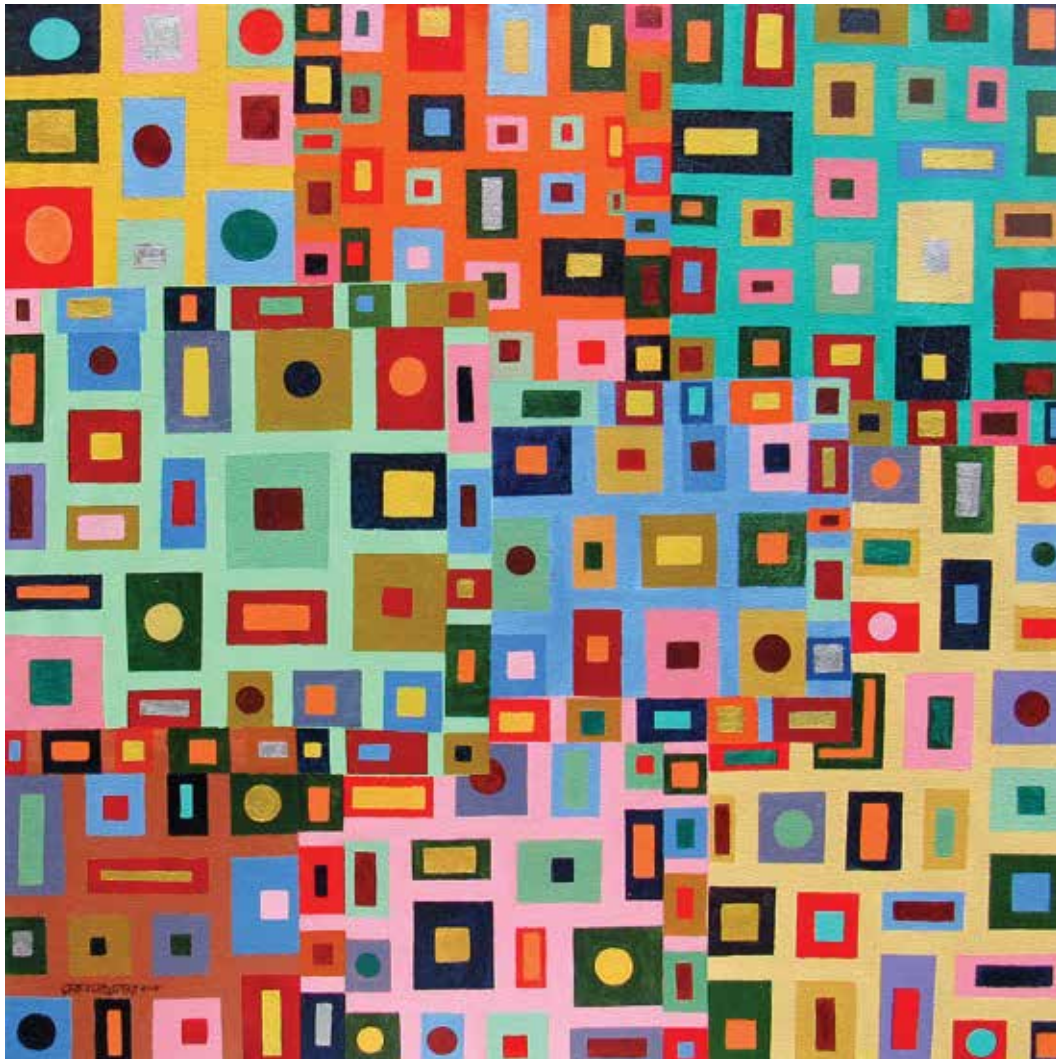


**Mohammad Eunus** (B. 1954)

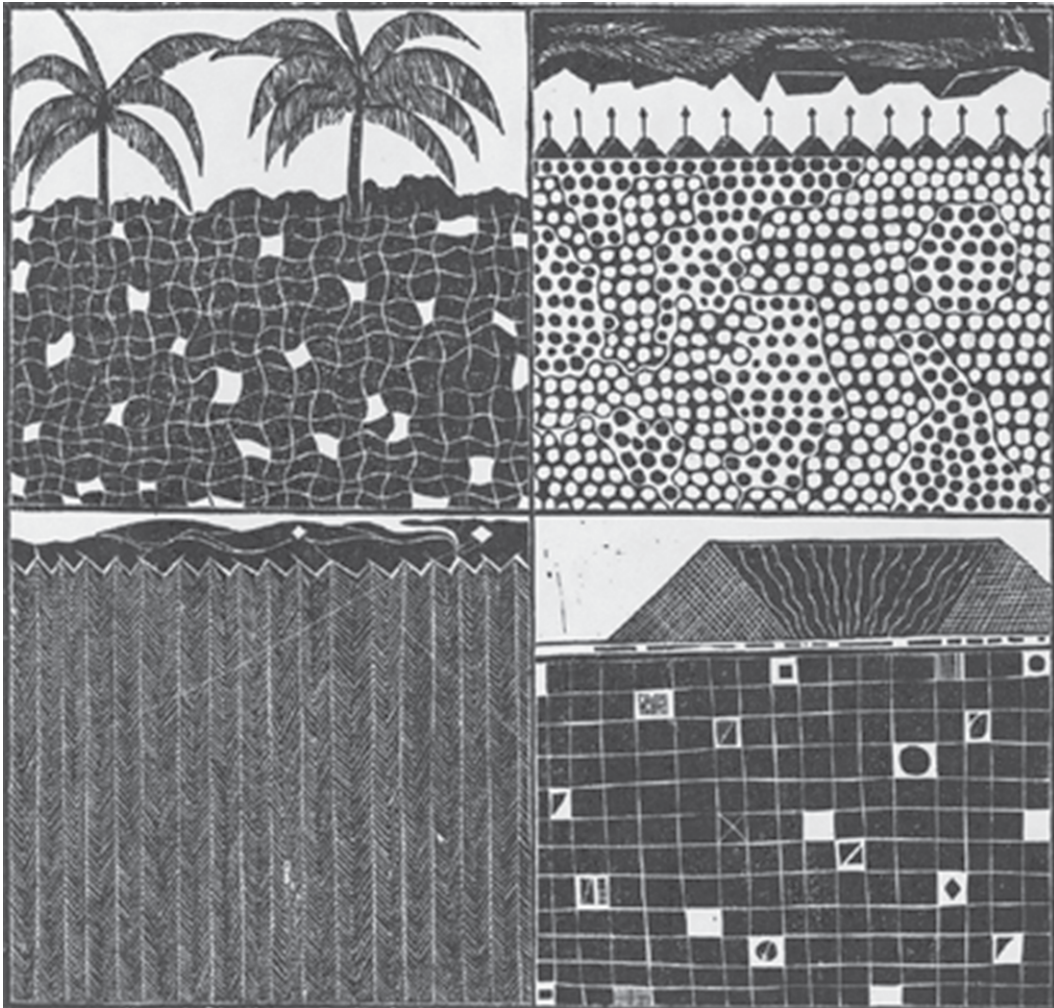
Composition-12 Oil on canvas 92 x 92cm (36x36in) 2024



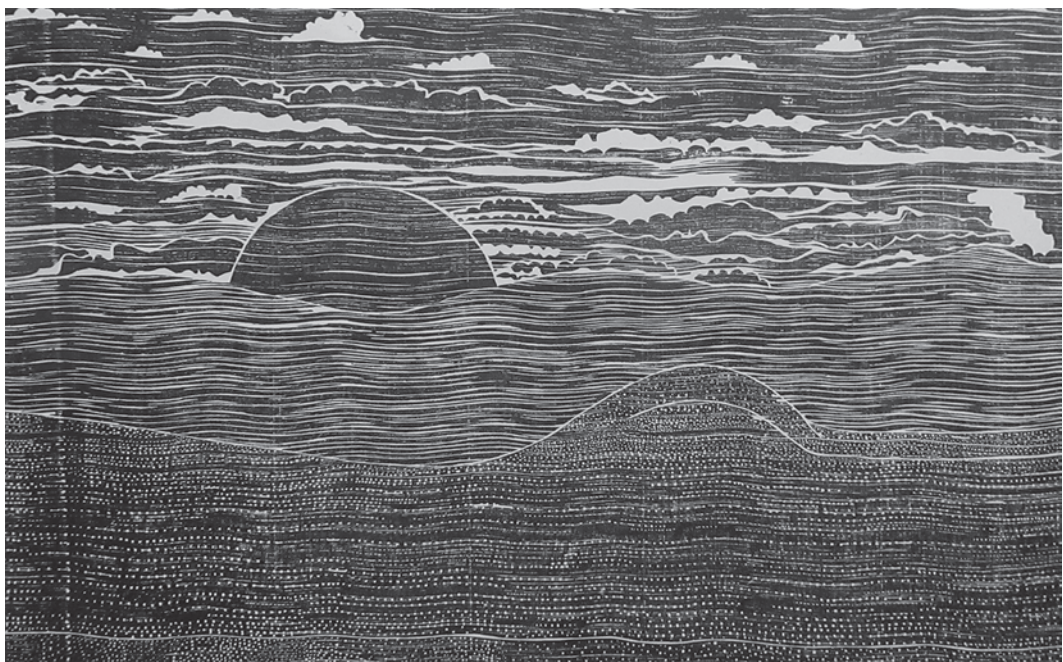
**Ratan Mojumder** (B. 1954)  
Composition-1 Acrylic on canvas 61 x 61cm (24x24in) 2018



Composition-1 Acrylic on canvas 61 x 61cm (24x24in) 2018



Partition-2 Woodcut print 32.2 x 30.7cm (13x12in) 1983



Nisorgo Woodcut print 48 x 30cm (19x12in) 2018



**Tajuddin Ahmed** (B. 1955)

Untitled-1 Acrylic on canvas 75 x 75cm (29.5x29.5in) 2019



Untitled-2 Acrylic on canvas 75 x 75cm (29.5x29.5in) 2019



**Rezaun Nabi** (B. 1957)  
Silence Acrylic on canvas 92 x 76cm (36x30in) 2024



**Ivy Zaman** (B. 1958)  
Image of Buddha Bronze 24 x 19.5cm (9.5x7.5in) 2024



Thinker Bronze 9 x 14cm (3.5x5.5in) 2024



Composition-1 Metal 30x40cm (12x16in) 2024



Composition-2 Metal 30x40cm (12x16in) 2024



**Rashedul Huda** (B. 1964)  
Abstraction of horizon Acrylic on paper 36 x 33cm (14x13in) 2024



**Rashedul Huda** (B. 1964)  
Existence of abstraction Acrylic on paper 36 x 33cm (14x13in) 2024



**Rafi Haque** (B. 1965)  
Green and gray Oil on paper 68.5 x 88.5cm (27x35in) 2014



Red and brown Oil on paper 68.5 x 88.5cm (27x35in) 2014



**Anukul Chandra Mojumder** (B. 1974)  
Story of river Chitra Acrylic & charcoal on paper 74 x 58cm (29x23in) 2024



**Maksuda Iqbal Nipa** (B. 1975)  
Fiery Obscurity Oil on canvas 116 x 116cm (45.5x45.5in) 2023



**Md. Tokon** (B. 1978)  
Not dark yet Acrylic on canvas 120 x 120cm (47x47in) 2016

