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Uncover the missing ones

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Contemporary art meets Bengali sci-fi and spirituality in spectacular exhibition

"The Missing One" is an art exhibit inspired by one of the first Bengali science fiction stories of the same name. It is curated by Nada Raza, Assistant Curator of South Asia, Modern and Contemporary Art at Tate Modern in London. The exhibition, showcasing the work of more than 20 artists, will be sprawling across the first floor of the Shilpakala Academy as part of the Dhaka Art Summit from February 5-8.

"Nada is one of the main researchers at the Tate, and I was first drawn to the extent of her knowledge in the region," Nadia Samdani, director of the Dhaka Art Summit and the Samdani Art Foundation, told the Dhaka Tribune.

Raza specialises in modern and contemporary art from the Middle East and South Asia and its diaspora. She travels regularly within South Asia for historical research and keeps up to date with contemporary artistic production.

"Having observed her work practice more closely, I was impressed by her highly intelligent approach and the depth in her research. I felt that specifically supporting her research for this exhibition would bring an enlightened and deeply informed exhibition to the Bangladeshi public."

The thematic device in this exhibition is the searching or gesture of looking toward the sky, moving from a celestial modernist watercolour by Gaganendranath Tagore to cosmological enquiry and speculative visual exploration from the turn of the 21st century through the works of various artists.

Bengal Renaissance

At the turn of the 20th century, the encounter with modernity and scientific progress was generating lively intellectual debate in South Asia. Its influence sparked radical ideas and encouraged fresh approaches to religion and culture, particularly in the Bengal region even as the ideas of freedom and independence began to take hold.

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Nirrudesh Kahani or "The Story of The Missing One" was written in 1896 by Jagadish Chandra Bose and is considered to be one of the first tales in the sci-fi genre written in Bengali. Bose, a pioneering inventor of instruments for wireless technology and the study of nature, was close to the Tagore family, who were the central figures in what is known as the Bengal Renaissance -- a movement that generated new ideas and approaches for art, music, and literature. Gaganendranath Tagore painted a portrait of Bose that now hangs at the Bose Institute in Calcutta.

It would have been against this backdrop that Tagore painted *Resurrection*, around the early 1920s (see page 15). It is an ethereal painting, with a circular vortex of clouds with rays of light circulating around a raised central formation, as if the viewer is staring up at the heavens. At the center of this futuristic work is a religious icon -- a celestial cross clearly visible within an arch, and a saintly glowing figure, refracting the light. Tagore's vision confronts us from almost a century ago and presents modern progress and religious faith in cerulean blue harmony.

Modern interpretations

"The Missing One" exhibition time-travels a hundred or so years to the turn of the millennium in South Asia, from the late 1990s to the present, to see how the experiences of artists who benefited from the advancements of the modern age might respond to the themes of science and spirituality.

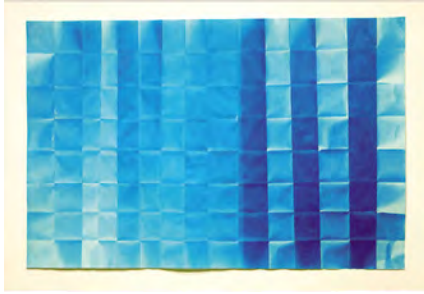
The artists include Ronni Ahmmed, David Alesworth, Shishir Bhattacharjee, Fahd Burki, Neha Choksi, Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi, Rohini Devasher, and many more.

The exhibition is arranged in three broad movements, united by the visual metaphor of looking up at the sky. The first movement, "Staring up at the sky," is about enchantment, and takes the Tagore painting as a formal point of departure.

The second movement "Alienation," is about the complex feelings that can be evoked by contemplating our place in the universe. The third movement "Light Blindness" is about dystopia and the possibility of redemption.

It follows, in some loose sense, the plot of a generic science fiction novel or film -- first a happy, innocent world that is then interrupted by the hostile appearance of a foreign or extraterrestrial being; and finally, at the climax, an apocalyptic threat emerges with the potential for salvation through faith and human will. The Missing One is a unique experience for those who witness it, taking the viewer on a journey across time.

It is just one of many fascinating exhibits that audiences can look forward to when they visit this year's Dhaka Art Summit. With nearly 300 leading artists, curators, and writers from across South Asia and the world coming together under one roof, there will be no shortage of inspiration over the four days of this spectacular event. This is the third edition of the biennial event.



(http://archive.dhakatribune.com/sites/all/files/ckutils/2016/01/1_Neha-Choksi-Skyfold.jpg)

Movement 1

“Staring up at the sky”

Neha Choksi, Skyfold 8, 2013

This series picks up the infinite variations of sky blue. These are cyanograms, referring to early scientific experiments with light and representation. Whether sculpture, video, photography or performance, Choksi's art embraces emotion and process. She is a Bombay and Los Angeles based artist who has participated in numerous live performance, solo and group exhibitions.



(<http://archive.dhakatribune.com/sites/all/files/ckutils/2016/01/Firoz-Mahmud---soaked-dreams.jpg>)

Movement 3

“Light blindness”

Firoz Mahmud, Soaked Dream and Future Families, 2012

This ongoing series is collaborative portraits of families. Together artist and subjects construct eyeglasses from everyday materials, painted acid green. A Bangladeshi artist, Firoz Mahmud experiments with a wide range of media and materials to address contemporary concerns.



(<http://archive.dhakatribune.com/sites/all/files/ckutils/2016/01/Saskia-Pintelon---Book-22.jpg>)

Movement 2

"Alienation"

Saskia Pintelon, Book 22 - 'etre', 2013

Saskia Pintelon, a Sri Lanka based artist, makes collaged accordion books alongside her painting practice. Drawn portraits are obscured and transformed into freakish cyborgs and aliens, culling from the relentless image production that has accompanied technological advancement and voracious consumption.

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