

Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center in Orangeburg, SC, Features Works by Habibur and Shamsad Rahman

Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center in Orangeburg, SC, will present *The Rahmans: Design with Natural Elements*, featuring works in a variety of media by architect, Professor Habibur Rahman and his spouse, digital designer Shamsad Rahman, on view May 3 - July 28, 2023.

This is the first combined exhibition for the Rahmans, and this press release written by Art Historian and adjunct professor in the Department of Art at South Carolina State University, Dr. Frank Martin, offers these observations about their works as artists including quotes from the artists:

“Both trained in the study of architecture and visual design in their native Bangladesh, and the structural innovations of their art works underscore this foundational interest in both compositional arrangement and a layered, architectonic aesthetic awareness.

Habibur Rahman is an award-winning designer, skilled in graphic design and digital art as well as an architect and these interests are reflected in the innovative use of space in his compelling abstract compositions in varied paint media and in a variety of drawing media including charcoal, Prismacolor-pencil, and graphite. With works that show a strong predisposition for well-structured mark-making, Rahman’s diverse repertoire of abstracted forms provide intriguing insights into his responses to texture, depth, shape, and line.

Shamsad Rahman’s works stem, in part, from an inspiration, which evolved from traditional East Indian Mughal art. Her earliest works display deep aesthetic connections to ancient traditional Persian and Chinese decorative paintings, which in turn form the foundations of Mughal painting. From this refined visual basis, her imagery has led to works demonstrating visual affiliations derived from traditional themes, often created upon delicate, silk supports mounted with works on paper. To the traditional arts, Shamsad Rahman has added the rich complexity of layering digital photography, often of nature-based subject matter, incorporated into and over-painted by more tradition-inspired methods. The result is the synthesis of a compelling montage of techniques that combine the electronic media of the 21st century with the delicacy of awareness stemming from engagement with the 16th century Mughal imagery that has, in part, inspired her works.

“Habibur and Shamsad Rahman were both born and raised in Barisal, in Bangladesh. Their stories of evolving from architects to artists and their support of each other as artists is compelling and inspiring. Both would be influenced by the culture in their households. Habibur’s earliest memories are of loving to draw.”

My father was a surveyor. He had a beautiful instrument box. I was good at using the pencils. I think I started around five or four. That is my clear memory. And lines were my favorite thing to do.



Work by Shamsad Rahman

With his mother indulging him, using these pencils, he would draw on the walls of their home. However, his father did not see pursuing art as a viable career. To secure the best education possible for his son, his father enrolled him in the most reputable school in the capital city, Dhaka, where he was encouraged to begin his studies in architecture. It would also be his first encounter with an American faculty.

That school was new. The architecture school. Opened by USAID. With all US Faculty. I was in the USA! The works I produced were taken very well by them. They



Work by Habibur Rahman

were inspired and I was inspired.” Habibur graduated with honors and a degree and left Dhaka for England where he acquired a master’s degree in architecture from Newcastle upon Tyne. He returned home pursuing a career as an architect, designing extensively, and joining the faculty of Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology. There he would meet Shamsad, a 19-year-old applying student. Their parents condoned their friendship and approved the match and Shamsad would enter university as a married student.

Shamsad was brought to Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology by her father. He recognized her gifts in mathematics and supported furthering her education, an enlightened and unusual attitude for fathers towards their daughters at that time. She recalls, as a child, being encouraged to be self-confident and to enjoy her talents.

My parents allowed me to be very active during my childhood. We were free to do what interest us. I used to do a lot of singing, a lot of dancing, you know. Art things.” Studying architecture would further her interest in art. I’d gain some knowledge about design, composition, and colors, especially the colors. Professors from the art school would teach art in the architecture school.” Shamsad found sculpture more interesting than other art forms and its form and shapes would always fascinate her. A talent for color and design would remain dormant and unexplored for years.

As with Habibur, Shamsad and her family did not view art as a worthwhile career. Being a professional with marketable skills was encouraged instead. She, like her husband, would become qualified and employed as an architect. During the ensuing years when she worked in various capacities, Shamsad realized and accepted that her primary responsibilities were to support her husband’s burgeoning career, which would take them around the world, and to devote her time and energy to their three children. When Habibur accepted a faculty position in Saudi Arabia, where she could not work and where women were confined to their own circles, Shamsad was encouraged towards the arts and found a creative outlet.

“In Saudi Arabia the ladies had lot of time. They used to do group artwork. Whoever knew anything would teach the other women. My friend Ruma Gupta said do you want to do silk painting? I said yes. I would love to do it. It was something different.” Despite all their subsequent travels and moves, Shamsad still has one of her first efforts at painting on silk, though she says she gave most of her work away from that period thinking it had no value. Her work, years later, would evolve into an explosion of unique creativity from a technique taught to her by Gupta, an accomplished multi-talented artist. “Remember, I always liked to do something different. That something is breathtakingly euphoric and beautiful.”

If Shamsad’s work was a slow progression influenced by the possibilities of silk as a canvas as she discovered what she loved about the arts, including how her eye could capture fantastical images through photography, Habibur could pinpoint the people and places in his career that directed him to discovering who he is as an artist: His father prescient decision to take him to Dhaka. The new school of architecture

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funded by American aid. Pursuing a degree in England, where so much art and culture were everywhere and accessible. And as did Shamsad, forging a friendship and artistic partner in Saudi Arabia when a fellow Bangladeshi, Ali A. Chowdhury, who would encourage him to explore the perspective he might have as an artist.

“At that time, my sketches, my illustrations. I criticized my artwork very harshly.” Nevertheless, he remained proud of his extraordinarily rapid and gifted freehand in architectural drawings, the process used before the age of computers. “In Saudi Arabia, I had a friend, and he was a good artist, his work was amazing, and he taught me how to do coloring.” In the end Chowdhury was following Habibur’s coloring techniques in his illustrative works while Habibur ventured into and found a home in abstract painting, exploring composition, experimenting with color, what colors do next to each other.

The couple would move from Canada for Habibur Rahman to accept a position at Claflin University Art Department, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, reconnecting to Americans, his first influencers. Here he would use his acquired skills in graphic design, aware that computerized graphic design was an up-and-coming career. As head of the department, he would expand the curriculum to include digital design. In the ensuing years, his designs, especially his catalogues, would garner multiple awards. Habibur, at that point, considered himself transitioned from architect to artist; that is until his perception of himself was pointedly challenged. It was in 2006 and the next turning point, which he remembers vividly.

“One colleague said to me you are no artist. I said why do you think that? And he said well you never show your work. I said I don’t do that because my catalogues are distributed to so many places and that is all design. And he said no, no, you have to exhibit. That day, that changed my life. I started all these works, you know. So that is a big turning point for me. And that is also my life.”

Shamsad, once her children were no longer dependent, would hone her skills in digital design, acquire a master’s degree in business administration at Claflin University, while designing the school’s website. She would venture into web marketing, which was unsatisfactory, and as she did before, she would support her husband’s effort as he identified himself as an artist. That is until, like Habibur, she found her eureka moment. That would lead her back to exploring and innovating techniques using silk, surveying the world through photography and by delicately using her hands to create exquisite patterns.

“The first thing I do is take a photograph. Then I start playing with it. Turning it into something totally abstract using Photoshop. Using transfer paper, I copy and paste onto silk. The paint I use is a special paint for silk. There is a special kind of glue for silk and a special salt to do the texture. This is all my idea. This is all me.” Shamsad says silk will always be her medium and she takes her camera everywhere.



Work by Habibur Rahman

To understand the origins of Habibur’s work, think of his pencil moving in a straight line, his eye and hand in sync even if he is painting on board, preferably oak, in acrylic to create a richer texture. His work is primarily abstract. Abstract can be positioned or placed in almost any direction. He creates both geometric, linear, and organic patterns. Habibur regards his work with both satisfaction and humor. Three distinct styles? There is only one style and that is chaos.” If there is an element of chaos, it is orderly and structured celebrating color and enriching black and white.

Habibur says his black and white period lasted for 13 years. “This was my black and white period. I am so confident when I with black and white. Some works took months. This is when I was so pure. I thought that every line should be drawn, and it should be one pencil work all the way. All free hand lines. Shapes created by the intersection of lines.”

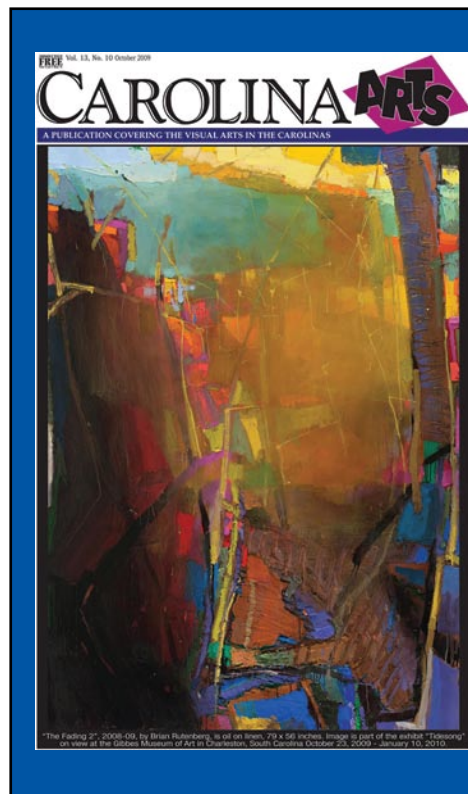
In the house Habibur designed as their dream home, they have spaces accommodating their separate studios where they spend their days frequently coming together to view and comment on the visions they pursue inspired by life, travel, and their talents. Their art is being sought after, shown in galleries and shows in North and South Carolina, including Charleston.

Architecture has been a discipline that both refined and confined their gifts, led them into the world of computerized composition, which then became the springboard to freeing them to embrace the creative joys found as children, their joint and separate experiences, from students to international travelers, drawing them literarily and figuratively into their places in the world of art.

Their artistic efforts were summarized and perceptively described this way: “The extraordinary combination of techniques is what becomes most aesthetically pleasing in the wide variety of images generated by both artists, whose international and highly cosmopolitan backgrounds bring a refreshing originality to their combined effort.”

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