



Aumia Khundkar visits a poetry and printmaking workshop

The American Center and Bengal Foundation jointly held a printmaking and poetry workshop at the Safiuddin Bengal Printmaking Studio in Bengal Centre. U.S. printmaker Andrew Saftel and poet Whitney Baker participated in the workshop, which took place in three intensive sessions, each lasting three days. One of the workshops which was also conducted in collaboration with the

University of Rajshahi saw the group visit said city. While the concept of combining art with poetry or prose is not novel, to have a workshop dedicated to this idea is quite fascinating. The workshop was divided into two separate groups where Saftel worked with local printmakers and Baker conducted poetry sessions with university students. The first session took place over three days with fifteen printmakers and fifteen

poets. The theme of the workshop was 'Urban Experience', an attempt to capture the chaos of city life through art and verse. As all of the participants in the workshop were from Dhaka and were familiar with our city's particular brand of chaos, they had plenty of inspiration to draw from. "I would definitely say that crowds were a recurrent motif among the artwork," said Saftel, "there were crowds of people and cars



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clogging streets in these prints.” While the participants were expected to create work that somehow reflected the experience of living in a city, Saftel himself never imposed any restrictions on the kind of work his students were making. “I’m not much of a regimented artist myself,” he admitted, “I believe that an artist shouldn’t have to do what he or she doesn’t want to do necessarily. I think this kind of approach is something new I’ve brought to this workshop.” While Saftel was working with local printmakers in the studio, Baker was busy on the second floor helping his students create poetry. Unlike Saftel, who was working with seasoned printmakers, the poetry workshop dealt with aspiring poets and as a result Baker’s role was more along the lines of a teacher. “On our first day, I wanted to see what my students were familiar with,” said Baker, “we read poems and collaborated on a single poem together, with each participant contributing a line. On the second day we focused on the poems they wanted to write and on the third we collaborated with the printmakers. This isn’t how



poets normally work when they’re in the community but I wanted to create a forum for communication between us and convey the basics of technique - what I think works and what doesn’t.”

The poetry workshop was aimed at producing work that could be combined with the prints. “The poets loved coming into the studio and seeing everyone work,” said Baker, “some of my students even chose to team up with the printmakers in order to compose something that would fit the art they were creating.” An exhibition

will be held at the end of the workshop to showcase the artists’ prints. But when Saftel and Baker realised that the poets wouldn’t be featured here, they decided to put up poems with the prints. Saftel and Baker have been to Bangladesh before as part of a previous workshop conducted by the American Center and Cosmos Gallery. “I feel so much more alive when I come here because of all the stimulus and the extremes,” said Saftel. The artist explained that he was more keen on trying to understand the culture and

the way that artists express themselves here, not about how different the process of printmaking is here compared to the United States. Similarly, Baker also enjoyed his past experiences in Bangladesh and was eager to return. “The land is beautiful. The people are beautiful. The entire environment of this country is more honest. The sound of the language is compelling to me.” The artworks created by these talented poets and printmakers is being exhibited at the Bengal Art Lounge until the 19th of July 2014. 