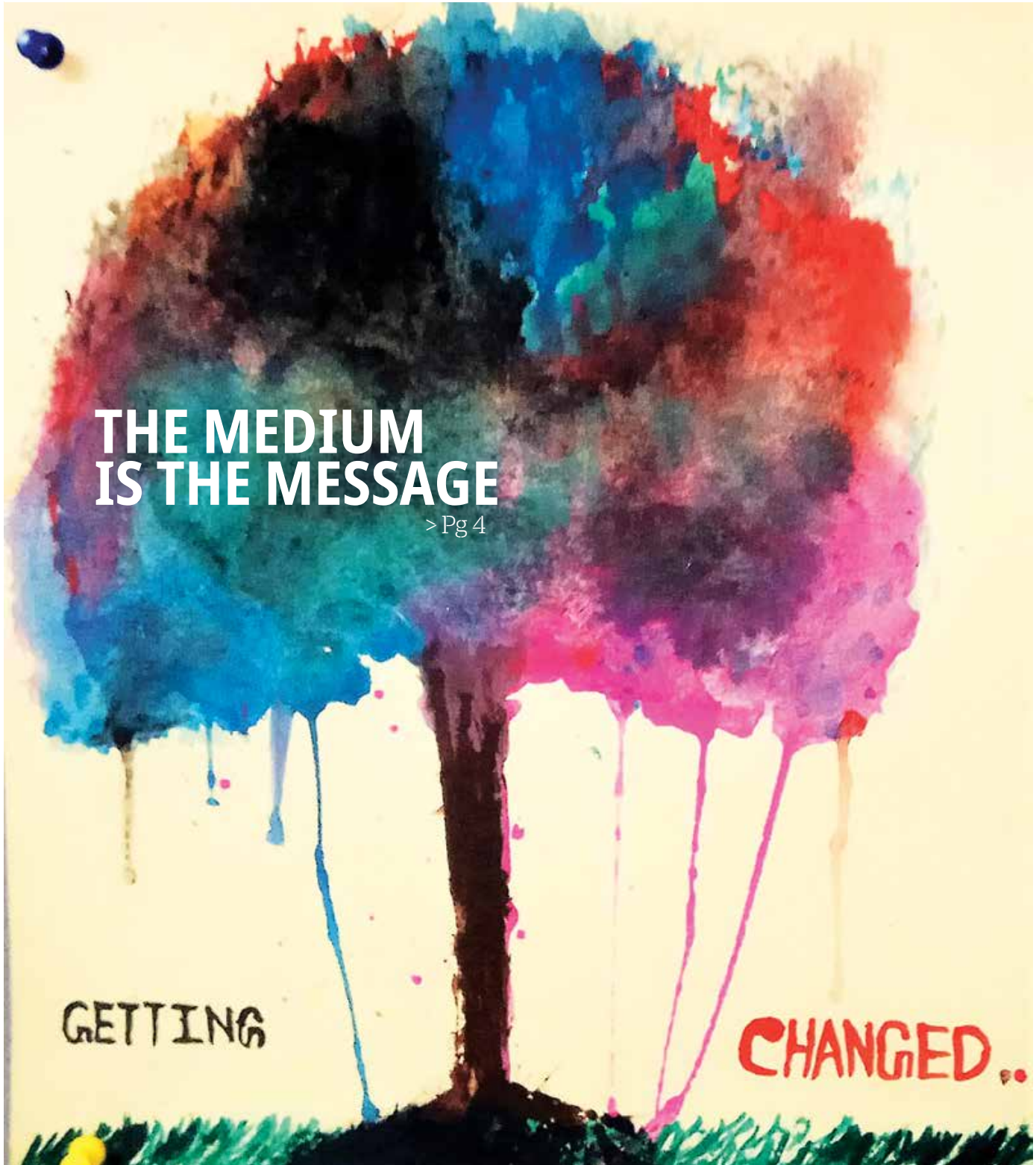


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Climate **Tribune**



**THE MEDIUM
IS THE MESSAGE**

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GETTING

CHANGED..

EXHIBITIONS

A PICTURE, A SARI AND A SONG



"Weather the Storm" on display at Civilian Art Projects in Washington DC. Bose places her art in the service of combating climate change

KOLI BENNETT-BOSE

MONICA JAHAN BOSE IS RAISING AWARENESS AT THE INTERSECTION OF ACTIVISM AND ART

Meraz Mostafa

Entering the gallery, you must walk through a screen of blue and white hanging cotton saris, covered with images of waves, rising water, solar panels, Ilish fish and handwritten climate pledges. Bangladeshi-American artist and environmental activist Monica Jahan Bose currently has an exhibition in Washington, DC, curated by Jayme McLellan at a gallery called Civilian Art Projects. The show is called Weather the Storm, and includes paintings, video, prints, and saris. Monica is the creator of the ongoing Storytelling with Saris art and advocacy project and had exhibitions in Dhaka in 2014 (EMK Centre) and 2015 (Bangladesh National Museum).

Weather the Storm is the culmination of numerous performances and climate art actions that Monica has led since the US elections in November 2016. The title of the

exhibition derives from a Bengali song that the artist has been singing in her performances, lines from which appear in her paintings. She has taken Tagore's "Kharobayu Boye Bege (Storm Winds Are Blowing)" and replaced "O boatman" with "O Woman" to create a feminist song about working together to row a boat to shore during a storm. Monica says the song is a perfect anthem for climate resilience and women working together to address climate change, even during difficult political times and lack of US federal leadership on the issue.

Over several years, she has collaborated with homeless women from Calvary Women's Services in Washington, DC as well as women from One Billion Rising, a global platform to end violence against women, and the women of her ancestral village, Katakhal Village on Barobaisdia Island, Patuakhali District. Storytelling with Saris highlights the Katakhal women's stories to give a voice and face to climate change and tries to inspire Americans and Europeans to take personal responsibility for climate change. Storytelling with Saris uses performance art actions and film to engage and inspire community and

individual commitments to reduce use of fossil fuels. Performances, art actions, and engagements have taken place in multiple localities in the US (Hawai'i, Iowa, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, DC, and Wisconsin) and Bangladesh (Dhaka and Katakhalī Village) and Europe (Paris in 2017 and Athens, upcoming in July 2018).

Monica has been organising sari climate pledge workshops, where Americans and Europeans learn about and discuss climate change while they create a sari with woodblock printing, painting, drawing, and writing. Each person makes a pledge on the sari, committing to take a specific step to reduce their carbon footprint — such as biking and walking instead of driving, reducing use of air conditioning, eating less beef, or switching to solar energy. These pledge saris are later given to the women of Katakhalī to be worn as garments. Some of these saris are in the Washington exhibition.

Monica has also led a series of workshops to share knowledge with the people of Katakhalī and provide them with tools to advocate for their own rights. In 2015, she organized a climate knowledge-sharing workshop in Katakhalī in collaboration with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development. Over 200



Sari art depicting a flood

MONICA BOSE WITH SIMA AND HAWA

“Storytelling with Saris tries to inspire Americans and Europeans to take personal responsibility for climate change”

women and men and at least 80 children attended that gathering from all over Barobaishdia Island, which was facilitated by Sarder Shafiqul Alam. After the workshop, the community decided to plant more coconut trees as a climate adaptation measure. Coconut trees reduce erosion and storm surge. In January 2018, Monica led a writing workshop where Katakhalī women learned how to write letters to their government representatives about recent losses they suffered from untimely rains in December 2017. One of those letters, from Sima, is framed and displayed on the gallery wall in *Weather the Storm*.

The exhibition also includes paintings and videos of these climate art actions, from Miami to Katakhalī to Washington, which feature the coconut as a symbol of resilience. Monica translated the words to Kharobayu Boy Bege and wrote them on the gallery walls. A song from Katakhalī about coconut trees, “Narkel Gach”, has also been translated by Monica onto the gallery walls. As part of her work, Monica is transcribing and translating the village women’s oral tradition songs, an important part of the cultural heritage of these at-risk coastal regions of Bangladesh.

Curator Jayme McLellan says: “Monica’s story with her heroic women collaborators in Katakhalī is one of an imperative need to act but it is also a story of empowerment. She is working as an example of what can happen when one person takes action and loops in an entire and growing network toward a common goal. As with all important things, this work started small with a large determination. Its potential and impact built upon itself. The good she is doing has a ripple effect throughout the world.” ■

Meraz Mostafa is a research officer at ICCCAD, IUB. For two years, he has been researching climate change in Bangladesh and is currently focused on how culture and the arts can be used to aid people to gain a better perspective on environmental issues.