



Emami Art

Presents

Shahidul Alam: 'Singed But Not Burnt'

Curated by Ina Puri

Kolkata, 18th June 2022: Emami Art is honoured to host the exhibition Shahidul Alam: 'Singed But Not Burnt'. The retrospective exhibition of this renowned photographer, provides the viewer with a comprehensive look at his four-decade-long practice. The collection features portraits, landscapes of climate disasters, and images of ordinary people, their daily strife and trials from an intense humanitarian perspective. Apart from Alam's own photographs, the show will also present vignettes from his life with rare insights into his thoughts and artistic practice. The exhibition will be on view from 19th June – 20th August 2022, from 11:00 am – 6:00 pm on the fifth floor at Emami Art. The show will be open to all.

“Opening on the 18th of June, the retrospective exhibition spanning the four-decade-long career of the renowned photographer who is also a writer, an activist and an institution-builder will be on view for a month before traveling to other Indian cities. The panorama of photographs exhibited will give the viewer an idea of Shahidul Alam’s engagement with issues relating to equality for all as well as his lifelong mission to make visual literacy accessible to everyone through images he has shot during his brilliant career as a photo-journalist and documentarian. ‘Singed but not Burnt’ will have over 80 significant photographs right back from his early archives to his most recent work, sometimes shot urgently with his mobile phone, on the streets while covering a raging riot. Apart from Alam’s own photographs, the exhibition will present vignettes from his life and show among other rare visuals, models created by his niece Sofia Karim of the layout of Keraniganj Jail where he spent 101 days some years ago while engaging in the student’s protest movement.

Especially relevant at a time when freedom of speech and expression is being challenged the world over, the powerful work of Shahidul Alam is like a beacon of light and hope that gives the common man long denied his and her rights, a voice to protest against this grave injustice. Featuring portraits, landscapes devastated by climate change, images of the daily strife and rigor of the ordinary man in the streets who has to struggle through poverty and social inequality to make ends meet, Shahidul Alam’s searing images bring alive issues that sometimes go unreported. The lens of the photographer remains focussed on the under-represented minority and never wavers, creating visual imageries that will linger forever in one’s consciousness. The title is drawn from Shahidul Alam’s statement: ‘As journalists we need to feel the heat, to stand close to the fire, but then we also risk being burnt. If we were to take one step back, we become ineffective. The trick, therefore, is to get singed but not burnt’.

Selected meticulously from the photographer’s vast archives in Dhaka this exhibition provides the viewer a look at his early experiments in pictorialism and his later experimentations in exploring the political space by developing a new vocabulary. In a parallel narrative shot by his students and colleagues we see Alam himself amidst protests, then his incarceration at Keraniganj. The triumphant moment arrives after huge international intervention from global intellectuals and leaders who demand his unconditional release and the government finally allows him to walk free. We share an image of that moment with you. I had first exhibited Shahidul Alam in Delhi in 2016 with Kalpana’s



Warriors' and since then have worked closely with the photo-journalist on projects making regular visits to Dhaka to see his work & his curatorial presentations at Chobi Mela Festival. During the period of his incarceration, I was in close contact with Alam's partner Rahnuma Ahmed who brought me news from Keraniganj Jail. It is the collaboration of Alam and Rahnuma Ahmad that made this major event possible, with the cooperation of Asm Rezaur Rahman, Tanzim Waha, Munem Wasif, Taslima Akhter and Saydia Gulrukh amongst others at Drik and Pathshala. We gratefully acknowledge their contribution", **says Writer, documentarian, art curator & collector Ina Puri.**

"It is a matter of great honour for us to present Singed but Not Burnt, the retrospective exhibition of renowned photographer Shahidul Alam. Through this exhibition, we intend to highlight a substantial body of his works, which have been chosen carefully from his long, productive career. At Emami Art, we have always tried to bring out the best of Southasian Art and this show is undoubtedly a prominent highlight on the gallery's calendar. Curated by well-known writer and columnist Ina Puri, the exhibition will be an excellent opportunity for the audience to see the gripping visuals in Shahidul Alam's photographs and to rethink art in a whole new manner" **says Richa Agarwal, CEO, Emami Art.**

About Ina Puri:

Ina Puri is a writer, biographer, art curator and collector. She is the author of several books, including *'In Black & White'* (a biography of Manjit Bawa), *'Readings Series, On Manjit Bawa'* (Lalit Kala Academy), *'Faces of Indian Art'* (iconic artists seen through the lens of Nemaï Ghosh) and *'Journey with a Hundred String'* (on the music and life of Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma). Later she was commissioned to write a pictorial memoir on Shiv Kumar Sharma titled *'The Man and his Music'*. She edited *'Mythical Universe'* on the artist Jayasri Burman and *'Drawn to Life'* on Rini Dhumal.

Ina's lens has always remained on the city and she edited a comprehensive volume on Raj Bhavan, which was commissioned by the (then) Governor Shri Viren Shah. *'Calcutta's Raj Bhavan, Two Hundred Years of Glory'* (Published by Penguin was released formally at the House of Lords, London). She edited *'Calcutta/Kolkata'* by Raghu Rai and recently *'On Satyajit Ray'* by Raghu Rai. She has regularly edited publications for Kolkata's art galleries and has been curating major exhibitions with several institutions /galleries.

Image Ina, her production company produced *'Meeting Manjit'*, a film on Bawa, which won the National Award in 2003. She later collaborated with Jabbar Patel on a biopic of Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, *'Antardhwani'* that was also the recipient of the Rajat Kamal.

'The Portrait of an Artist in the World', on Paresh Maity and Nemaï Ghosh is her most recent publication. Ina's three-decade-long engagement with the arts embraces tribal art and folk theatre to contemporary performing arts, visual arts and literature. In the pan Indian world of the arts, she has established herself as an art writer and curator, as an award-winning documentarian chronicling the lives of India's most distinguished art practitioners of contemporary times. She continues to advise museums/collectors of the city on their art collection. Belonging to a family that has produced stalwarts in the world of cinema, art and literature, she feels it is her duty to carry on the legacy.



About Shahidul Alam:

Time Magazine Person of the Year 2018 and National Geographic Explorer at Large, photographer, writer and curator Shahidul Alam has championed human rights throughout his career. Recipient of the Shilpakala Award, the highest national award given to Bangladeshi artists,

Alam obtained a PhD in chemistry before switching to photography. Returning to Dhaka in 1984, he began documenting the democratic struggle to remove General Ershad. A former president of the Bangladesh Photographic Society, Alam's work has been exhibited in leading galleries like MOMA, Centre Georges Pompidou and Tate Modern. A speaker at Harvard, Stanford, UCLA, Oxford and Cambridge universities, Alam is a visiting professor of Sunderland University and RMIT and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. He has chaired the international jury of World Press Photo. He has also received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Arts London.

John Morris, the former picture editor of Life Magazine described his book "My journey as a witness" as "the most important book ever written by a photographer". His book "The Tide Will Turn" was on the New York Times list of "Best Art Books of 2020". Alam is the founder of the Drik Picture Library, the Pathshala Media Institute, the Majority World Agency and the Chobi Mela festival of photography. He is also a new media pioneer and introduced email to Bangladesh in the early nineties.

Considered a 'Prisoner of Conscience' he was arrested in 2018 for criticising his government and spent 107 days in jail but was released on bail following a massive international campaign for his release. In 2020 Alam won the International Press Freedom Award conferred by the Committee to Protect Journalists and in 2021, the inaugural CASE Award for Humanitarian of the Year. He is currently setting up a centre for investigative journalism in Bangladesh.

About Emami Art:

Emami Art, one of the most significant art institutions in the eastern part of India, is a key space for cultural production in the region. The organisation is focused on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach and steadfast in the advocacy of emerging, mid-career and established artists as well as an engagement with contemporary and historical material. The gallery aims to create dynamic, wide-ranging registers of exhibition-making and viewing. Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, emphasis on community and socially relevant engagements, institutional partnerships and more via a multi-year vision for the future, Emami Art is resolute to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity. Emami Art, Kolkata Centre for Creativity 777 Anandapur off EM Bypass.

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