

# Portrait of an Artist

*A book titled 'Guru' celebrates the bohemian painter SM Sultan through Nasir Ali Mamun's chiaroscuro-laden photographs*

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**N**ASIR Ali Mamun's 'Guru', a huge photo album, is dedicated to the maverick painter SM Sultan. Mamun calls Sultan the "guru" and emphasises the fact that he had an unparalleled personality, of the kind which was unique among most other artists of the subcontinent. "He was a towering, lone figure at the beginning and he remained the same in his death. His lifestyle as well as his thoughts had set him far apart from his other contemporaries," points out Mamun who developed a passionate relationship with the artist.

"I would call it a sentimental attachment. As I had felt a deep affinity with the maestro in person, I was allowed to take photographs of him as he was going about his own daily drudgeries and artistic activities," says Mamun. He never asked the artist to pose for him, he just snapped when he felt the need to freeze a particular moment in the life of Sultan.



Mamun met his famous model way back in 1977. And since that year he kept going back to Norail, where the maestro remained resident till he breathed his last in 1996, to take his photographs. He continued his effort for the next ten years. The result was more than six hundred photographs; most of which were in black and white.

In 1987 Mamun left the country and his documentation spree was broken. However, after coming back from abroad, he again went back to his subject in 1992. Although he did take some pictures in the nineties, none of them are included in the present show that brings together 50 chosen photographs of Sultan. And the book too has been planned around the pictures taken in between 1977 and 1987. During that time only one colour reel was used. "A single colour slide was used either in the year 1978 or 1979," remembers Mamun. From that particular reel, nine of the colour photographs ended up on the walls of the Drik Gallery, where a five-day-long solo exhibition was launched on January



Unfinished..., Dhaka, 1982.



The kingdom of a Man, Masimdia, Narail, 1979.