

Interview

Through western eyes

Dirk A. Frans talks about his exhibition of photographs at Drik

FAIZA HAQ

DIRK A. Frans, speaking about what brought him into photography, which he put together in his exhibition, "Images and Impressions" recently at Drik, says, "Basically I had the privilege of seeing many beautiful scenes in the world and I wanted to show those scenes to others. As a child I was lucky enough to travel a



Dirk A. Frans

lot and also, while working in Bangladesh, I had the opportunity to travel once again a lot and I've seen many things that others haven't. My father used to work for 'Shell' and I had lived in Trinidad, Nigeria, Oman, Gabon etc. As an adult I've worked in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Rwanda and Nepal, apart from Bangladesh. I took photographs of all these places and in particular of Rwanda. I found a sad situation when I went there as a part of relief organization in the 1994 war. I had many awful pictures of skulls and dead people. This is my first exhibition and I did not have one earlier as I felt that I was one of the many photographers and if I do an exhibition there is nothing unusual about my work. But here a number of people encouraged me, including Dr Shahidul Alam from Drik gallery and some of my foreign friends like Dr Sarah Bennett from USA, who advised me, 'just go ahead and see'.

Talking about how different his photographs are from landscape painting, Frans says, "I don't particularly focus on landscapes although they are included in my pictures. I focus on people and development issues which is not often related to landscape. I am a sociologist and I work in participatory development,

and I am particularly interested in seeing how people develop their lives and become more secure in their living and how they can be better able to feed their families."

Speaking about his job in Bangladesh, Frans says, "I first came here working for an NGO, HEED (Health, Education, Economic Development) Bangladesh, and there they had a policy that all foreigners should learn Bangla. At that time I thought the idea was stupid because I felt 'Why waste time on learning a language?' However, after three months I realized, how important it was to know the language and having learnt it, I realize that it has benefited me ever afterwards. Now it is far easier for me to go to work in Bangladesh and I don't need an interpreter. I can now talk to people themselves and get from them what they think. I studied for three months at the beginning, went back to Netherlands, and on returning studied for nine months more. I am still learning Bangla by actually using it and I've been here for 16 years off and on.

"My wife and I came here first 25 years ago. I now work as a consultant for Government Engineering Dept. as a participatory development. I took photographs everywhere I went for work. I took photos both for work and for my private collection. Many of the pictures in my report are also from my private collection. I would say that I have taken over 20,000 shots of Bangladesh. This was a very expensive pursuit. The way I got into this on a more or less professional basis is related to the expense. When I first worked here as a volunteer, I had a camera that was given to me by my father and within two years, due to humidity and the general muggy weather, fungus developed and it went bad. I wanted to buy a new camera in Bangladesh. And this was 25 years ago. However, as a volunteer I had no money and so bought a good second-hand Nikon camera. The first time I used it when I went to the closure of a river at Feni by six thousand laborers for irrigation, it didn't work. This was, photographically an excellent opportunity. I had taken pictures all day but when I had them developed there were only three pictures that were

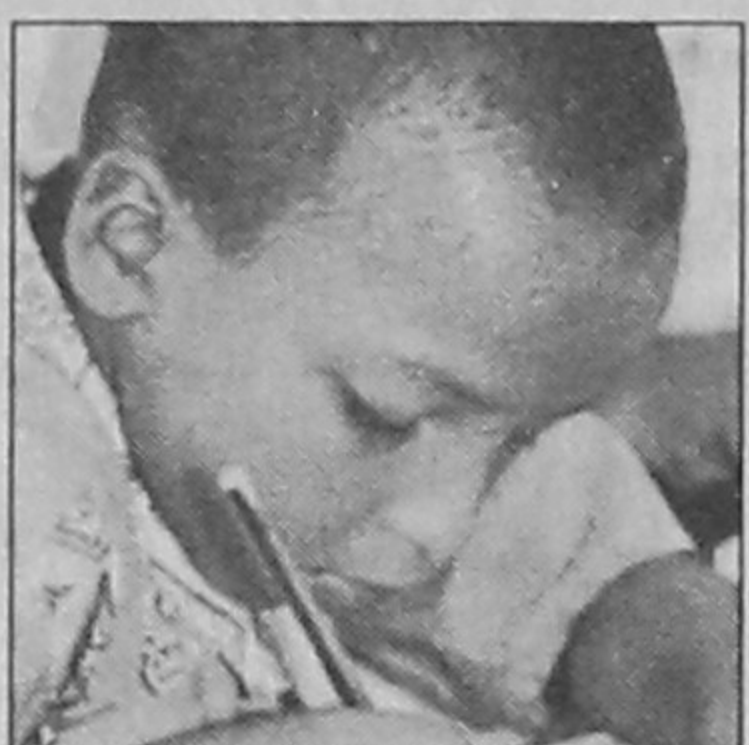


OKin seven rolls".

Frans adds, "I later saw an article in the 'National Geographic' and I'm pretty sure that if my pictures had been better than the ones in 'National Geographic'. My problem was that I didn't have money for a good camera. I realized that I had spoiled a great opportunity because I hadn't the right equipment. As a consequence I

magazines, text books for schools etc."

Asked as to which places of Bangladesh he had taken pictures of most, Frans says, "That would be most probably Dhaka as I spent most of my time here. However, I have visited and worked at all but two of the districts of Bangladesh i.e. Kishoreganj and Netrokona, sometimes being there for as long as even



went and borrowed money to buy a new Nikon camera. As I had to repay the loan, I started selling pictures and this was mostly overseas to an agent in Holland, and he sold them to development journals, monthly



a year, and I've taken pictures all along, taking my camera wherever I go. Here, at the exhibition I have presented numerous places like Cox's Bazaar, Narayanganj, Bhola, Barisal etc. Almost all the districts

are basically represented."

Speaking about his experiences while taking the photographs, Frans says, "I usually don't start taking pictures without speaking to the people. I'm pretty sure that the people don't mind me taking the pictures. Only very occasionally they say that they don't want the pictures and then I don't take those particular subjects."

Talking about the photographers that he admires, Frans says, "I am not particular on to the photographic scene. I have a lot of respect for the different photographers at 'Drik', Dr Shahidul Alam in particular. I really admire the young photographers, the 'out of focus' group, the working class boys and girls who are getting into photography."

"In comparison, I myself come from a very privileged background and there was money to develop and print my photos which I took with my father's camera. As an adult, basically I can do whatever I want. These working class boys and girls don't have my experience as a youth of travelling all over the world and yet they are getting on with their photography and they are doing a good job. One of the aspects of this exhibition is that through the sale of the display, my book and my other pictures I will be helping these 'out of focus' photographers to get better equipment in order to take better pictures. Fortunately, the Dutch



and girls are being trained for the last six to seven years and they use simple equipment like a fixed lens camera. These youths are being trained in photography and other skills so that they are now making a living. The wonderful thing is that these people come from a different background. As a middle class western male, I have a particular view of society. Since I cannot easily take pictures of women, certainly not inside the house, these working class girls can go in and take remarkable pictures. I am interested in those kinds of photographers and not particularly the big names but those who do innovative work, and who will probably be the big names in future."

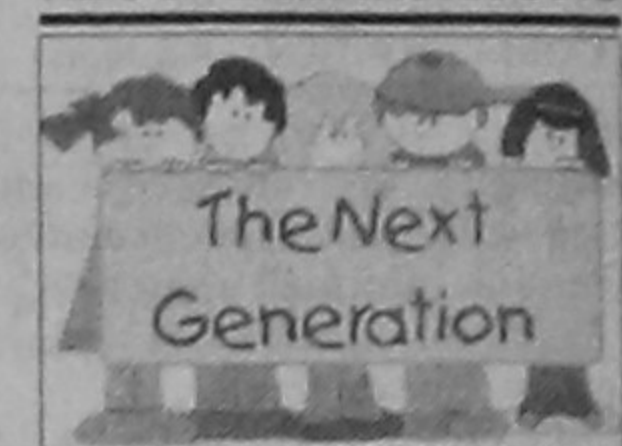
Asked what made a good photograph, Frans says, "This is difficult to say. In many ways, when you see a picture and say 'wow!' then it is a good photograph. Sometimes you take images to pass on a message, to say something about a country or the people, a site or a project. A lot depends on what you want to communicate. A good photograph is one that people will remember."

Dwelling why he had gone in for colour photography, Frans says, "I feel that a photographer has to develop his own style and I've con-

centrated on colour pictures because I think it expresses more than black and white does."

Dr Shahidul Alam of Drik comments that the work in the exhibition, which spans two decades, is both professional and personal and covers a wide range of images that include a vast breadth of activities and location. Frans, he says, has not avoided presenting the daily scenes on the streets, which includes rallies and "hartsals", a part of the emerging democracy. He continues, that while the pictures are images of a foreign tourist and pictures of his family, he has not documented his own people, "the donor circuit". He adds that Frans is a "part time" photographer which implies a certain amateur characteristic. "The 'amateur' medium is not so bad for I love of the medium is what drives the amateur, then there is no lacking here. He continues to say, "All perceptions are subjective. While we may rightly question the validity of the representation of our cultures by visiting photographers out to fulfill a distant editor's definition of our country, our own perceptions, bound by class, gender, race and a familiarity that often prevents us from questioning, also need to be examined...this is no fly-by-night photographer."

RECOMMENDATIONS



The Next Generation

American International School - Dhaka (AIS/D) will hold the elementary school play 'The Next Generation' - a musical about the twelve rights of children on May 24 (7.00 p.m.), May 25-26 (2.00 p.m.) at the AIS/D auditorium at 12, United Nations Road, Bandhara. Tickets are available at the AIS/D elementary school office.

Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends

Organised by the High Commission of India, a ten day long exhibition titled 'Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends' will start at the High Commission of India Cultural Centre on May 24 at 6:00 p.m. The exhibition features works by fourteen prominent artists of Bangladesh and also marks the inauguration of the newly renovated Art Gallery of the High Commission.

The exhibition will remain open from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. till June 2.

Bonsai Exhibition

The 4th solo exhibition of Bonsai by Arham-ul-Hug Chowdhury will start at the Bengal Gallery (Bengal Shilpalaya, 275/F, Road 27 old, Dharmamandi) on May 24 at 5:00 p.m. The exhibition will remain open to all from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. everyday till May 31.



Paintings for the Liberation War Museum

A painting exhibition by Kanak Chandra Chakma and Khalid Mahmood Mithu will start at the Sajai Art Gallery in Gulshan on May 25 at 5:30 p.m. The artists donated all these artworks for Liberation War Museum's fund raising.

The exhibition will remain open to all from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. till May 31.

TV GUIDE

EKUSHEY

- 12:00 Ekushey Midday
- 12:20 Bangla Film: Shukhe Thako
- 2:40 Drishti
- 3:00 Ekushey Headlines
- 3:05 Drama: Dipannita
- 3:30 Drama: Jononi
- 4:00 Chat Show Ek Cup Cha
- 4:30 Expedition to the Animal Kingdom
- 5:00 Circus Circus
- 5:30 Drishti
- 5:50 Aker Potrikay
- 6:00 Ekushey Headlines
- 6:05 Classic Cartoons
- 6:30 Chandike
- 7:00 Bolle Chai
- 7:30 Ekushey News
- 9:00 Drama Serial: Bondhon
- 8:30 Drama
- 9:30 Shorashori
- 10:30 BTV News
- 11:00 Ekushey Nightly News

CHANNEL-I

- 6:15 Drama: Ditrro Satta
- 7:40 Sai Teke Suru
- 8:00 Din Protidin
- 8:25 Business Show
- 9:00 Drama: Eka
- 10:10 Addar Table
- 10:40 I Focus
- 11:15 Drama: Ditrro Satta
- 12:40 Sai Teke Suru
- 1:15 Business Show
- 2:00 Drama: Eka
- 3:00 Bangla Cinema: Harano Sur

PM

- 6:00 Reciting from Holy Quran
- 6:10 Suvo Sandha
- 6:40 Artho O Nithi
- 7:15 Drama: Ankur
- 8:30 I Tele Quise
- 8:40 Music Circle
- 9:15 Drama: Nepotho Kahini
- 9:30 I Tele Quise
- 10:00 Musical Programme
- 11:00 Bangla Cinema: Ful Or Kata

ATN

- 5:30 Islamic Program
- 7:00 Musical Prog. "ATN Music"
- 7:35 Dance Prog. "Dance Dance"
- 8:05 Drama Serial: "Uttaran"
- 8:40 Drama Serial: "Jibon Jekane Sesh"
- 9:15 Special Prog. Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in LDC Seminar
- 9:50 Musical prog: Ganer Prohor
- 10:25 Megaserial: Vidroh
- 11:00 Bengali Film: Bondini
- 6:32 Health care Prog: Sustha Thakun
- 7:10 Film Song's Prog: Surchobi
- 7:50 Drama Serial: Lokeshor Loknath
- 8:25 Film Magazine: Dalwood Bichitra
- 9:00 Discussion prog: Ekhaaer sonic
- 9:35 Priyo Shilpi Priyo Gan
- 10:10 Drama: "Tumi Robay Nirobay"
- 11:15 Bengali Feature Film: Shadona

STAR MOVIES

- 6:30 Actin: Chance 85
- 8:30 Action Raw Deal 101
- 10:15 Comedy: Bill And Ted's excellent Adventure 86
- 12:00 Thriller: Brokendown Palace 97
- 1:45 Action Resurrection Man 104
- 3:30 Drama Seeds of Iragedy 92
- 5:15 Action Deadly Bet 88
- 7:00 Hollywood Action Night Without Malice 92
- 8:45 Action Belly 92
- 10:30 Action Raw Deal 101
- 12:30 Thriller: Hand that Rocks The Cradle 110
- 2:30 Action deadly Bet 88
- 4:30 Action Cahymes 85

HBO

- 6:30 Excalibur
- 9:30 A Few Good Men
- 12:15 Stepmom
- 2:45 Losing Isaiah
- 5:00 You've Got Mail
- 7:30 Little Women
- 10:00 Congo
- 12:15 Meet Joe Black
- 3:45 A Few Good Men
- 10:30 Woodland Bollywood News
- 11:00 Geet Bahar
- 11:30 Milap (Dev Anand, Geeta Bai)
- 3:00 Woodland Bollywood News
- 3:30 Dil Ki Rani (Raj Kapoor, Madhubala)
- 8:30 Geet Bahar
- 7:30 Rang
- 11:30 Birang/Vishwasghaat (Sanjeev Kumar, Shabana Azmi)
- 11:30 Woodland Bollywood News
- 12:00 Jyoti (Jeetendra, Hema Malini)
- 12:30 Jyoti (Contd...)
- 3:00 Geet Bahar
- 3:30 Hamlet (Hiralal)
- 6:30 Hum Farishte Nahin (Raj Babbar, Poonam)

BBC WORLD

- 6:30 World Business Report
- 7:30 Asia Today Inc Asia Business Report
- 8:30 Asia Today/Reporters
- 9:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report
- 10:30 Talking Movies
- 11:30 Earth Report
- 12:30 Hardtalk
- 1:30 Holiday
- 2:30 Reporters
- 3:30 Hardtalk
- 4:30 Predictions
- 5:30 Reporters

Wheels

- 7:15 World Business Report
- 7:30 Click Online
- 8:30 Reporters
- 9:30 Asia Today
- 10:00 BBC News/World Business Report
- 10:30 Face to Face
- 11:30 World Business Report/World Sport
- 12:30 Hardtalk
- 1:30 Top Gear
- 3:30 PANI
- 4:30 Asia Business Report/Asia Today
- 5:30 Asia Business Report/Asia Today

STAR PLUS (INDIA)

- 6:30 Star Geetmala
- 7:30 I Love My India
- 8:00 Hit Ya Fit
- 8:30 Good Morning India
- 9:30 Star Morning Show: Raaz Ki Baat (Simi Garewal, Sujit Kumar)
- 12:30 Hit Ya Fit
- 1:00 TSN
- 1:30 Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki
- 2:00 Sanskruti-11
- 2:30 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
- 3:00 Shagun
- 3:30 Shanti
- 4:00 Meri Saheli
- 4:30 Kaalhin Kissii Roz
- 5:00 Hit Ya Fit
- 5:30 Sewalal Mewawala
- 6:00 Small Wonder
- 6:30 Fox Kids Daily
- 7:30 Sanskruti
- 8:00 Tu Tu Main Main
- 8:30 Sonpari
- 9:00 Kahlin Kissii Roz
- 9:30 Kaun Banega Crorepati
- 10:30 Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki
- 11:00 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
- 11:30 Aaj Ki Baat
- 12:00 The Practice
- 1:00 The Drew Carey Show
- 1:30 Whose Line Is It Anyway?
- 2:00 Ally McBeal
- 3:00 Creflo Dollar Daily
- 3:30 Kenneth Copeland Ministries
- 4:00 Life In The Word With Joyce Meyer
- 4:30 World News
- 5:00 Fashion TV
- 5:30 Mork & Mindy

STAR WORLD

- 6:00 Murder Call
- 7:00 The Oprah Winfrey Show
- 8:00 Home Improvement
- 8:30 Happy Days
- 9:00 JAG
- 10:00 The Pretender
- 11:00 The Oprah Winfrey Show
- 12:00 Law and Order: Special Victims Unit

PICK OF THE DAY



Congo

On HBO at 10 tonight An ill assorted band of scientists, mercenaries, try to find the treasure lying in Africa. Guarded by a vicious tribe of killer apes little do they know that once they enter Zinj, they'll become the endangered species.

- 1:00 Things People Do
- 1:30 The Bold and the Beautiful
- 2:00 Mork & Mindy
- 2:30 Happy Days
- 3:00 Baywatch
- 4:00 The Simpsons
- 4:30 Home Improvement
- 5:00 Star News Asia
- 5:30 Friends
- 6:00 The Drew Carey Show
- 6:30 Whose Line Is It Anyway?
- 6:55 Star News Asia (5 mins)
- 7:00 Ally McBeal
- 8:00 The Practice
- 9:00 Friends
- 9:30 Star News
- 10:30 The Drew Carey Show
- 10:30 Whose Line Is It Anyway?
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AXN

- 6:30 Grander Musashi/Starship Troopers
- 7:30 El Hazard - The Alternative World/Curious Play
- 8:30 Big Sky II/Dark Horse
- 9:30 Exploring the Unknown
- 10:30 Grander Musashi RV/Starship Troopers
- 11:30 El Hazard - The Alternative World/Curious Play
- 12:30 Football Focus
- 12:30 UEFA Champions League 2000/01 UEFA Champions League
- 1:00 Bikes, Blades and Boards B3 Stop 2 Bikes Louisville, Ky USA
- 1:30 ECB International Cricket The Npower Test Series London, England Pakistan @ England 1st Test Day 1 Highlights
- 2:00 Sportscenter
- 3:00 Bowling World Tenpin Masters 2001
- 4:00 Motorsport Asia
- 4:30 Premier Snooker League Premier Snooker League 2001
- 6:30 ECB International Cricket The Npower Test Series London, England Pakistan @ England 1st Test Day 1 Highlights
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