



A Visual (Af)fair

Since its inception Chobi Mela has not just set a milestone for photography it has changed the way of seeing it.

ANANTA YUSUF

Chobimela, the biggest festival celebrating photography in the country, has had an enormous impact on the photography movement of Bangladesh since its inception in 2000. The event has not just set a milestone for photography in the country but is considered the first and the biggest festival for photography in Asia, hailed worldwide for providing a platform for young photographers to showcase their body of work to a larger audience.

"Before Chobi Mela," says Shahidul Alam, renowned photographer and managing director of Drik, "Bangladeshi photographers had little scope to

exhibit their works in international festivals." This festival, thus, began as a dream, a dream that quickly turned into reality for the talented, skilled photographers of the country. In 1995, Shahidul Alam planned to start Chobi Mela on a small scale. Unfortunately, a week-long hartal was called by the then opposition party, halting the event for an indefinite period. Remembering that moment, Alam says, "We had made all the arrangements to hold the festival but could not do so for political unrest." It took another five years for Alam to realise his dream project.

The first season of Chobi Mela "The War We

Forgot" kicked off the now widely celebrated event in 2000. The theme is self-explanatory; the event hoped to highlight the Liberation War of Bangladesh, a struggle that was and still is unseen by most of the world. Alam felt that organising a photography exhibition focusing on the liberation war would mobilise people locally and internationally. Organisers, therefore, put together a massive archive of photographic works on 1971, which up to that point was never attempted before. The first Chobi Mela led the audience to a winding journey capturing the tumultuous moments of war and the horrific experience of the reality of the long struggle to freedom.

During the war some of the finest photographers of the world, namely Don McCullin, Raymond Depardon, Marc Riboud, Mary Ellen Mark, David Burnett, Raghu Rai, Marilyn Silverstone, Abbas,



I'll Die For You: Exploring the Intimate Bond Between Man & Land by Laura-El-Tantawy, Egypt.



The Annunciation by Luis Gonzalez Palma, Guatemala.

Rashid Talukder and Kishore Parekh's works were exhibited. Before the exhibition one could say that there wasn't any collective photographic representation of the Liberation War of 1971. The exhibition aimed to stimulate an international discussion on genocide and the role of photography in rethinking history. As Alam says, "We contacted photographers from all over the world. We went through over