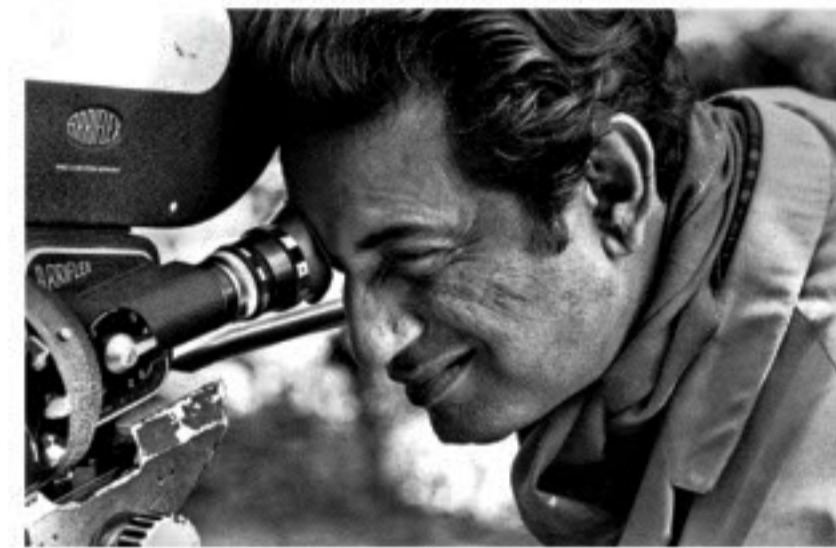


It was the end of the Second World War. Benito Mussolini's government collapsed in 1943 and with it fell down the glorious Italian film industry. What was once called the city of cinema, with its lavish set designs, conservative values, and respect for authority came to its end. This crisis however gave birth to a new film movement named 'Neo Realism'. It was set amongst the poor and the working class, was filmed on location rather than film sets and frequently used non professional actors. The aim was to portray the post-war Italian psyche and conditions of everyday life including poverty, oppression, injustice, and desperation. One of the front liners of this movement was Vittorio De Sica. Born in poverty, this Italian filmmaker and actor decided to tell the tales of reality. After his controversial film *Shoeshine*, De Sica wanted to, as he once said, "Uncover the drama of everyday life." This resulted in the making of the film *'The Bicycle Thieves'*—credited as the best work of Italian neo realism.



Now at this point one might ask why we are talking about a film which was made a long time ago and had nothing in common with our reality. The fact is *Bicycle Thieves* was an inspiration to a lot of film makers. It showed a new treatment of cinema. Two very popular Bengali film makers were also inspired by this film. The shape that was given to Bengali cinema by both Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak were very much inspired by the realistic approach of *The Bicycle Thieves*.

Ray and Ghatak both encountered this film in different situations. Nonetheless it affected both of them quite the same way. The approach of showing reality rather than a dream world, which the then cinemas projected, was very intriguing to them.

Ghatak who always worked for the people, joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) to tell the tales of everyday struggles of Bengali men and women through playwright. The stage was his first encounter with the art world. His engagement with IPTA was not only just as a playwright, actor and director but also as a cultural theorist. We are talking about a person who never accepted the

BEGINNING OF REALITY

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTOS: INTERNET

partition of India which divided Bengal into two countries. Almost every one of his films dealt with this crisis. He came into film making not for the sake of the art of films but to make a statement. In his opinion it was the best platform for expressing his anger at the sorrows and sufferings of his people. Now, his encounter with *Bicycle Thieves* was quite

skeptical at first. Ghatak, who was a Marxist, thought the film was a practice of foreign intellectual propaganda. After he saw the film, he immediately changed his mind and grabbed the pen. In his article he quoted the film as a 'per diem poem'. The film's way of staying true to the society mesmerised him as it portrayed the kind of films he himself wanted to make. He thought the film brought out anger at the oppression rather than sorrow.

Now let's come to Satyajit Ray. A person who was in love with the art of

cinema makes his debut with *Pather Panchali*—an adaptation Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's famous novel. His encounter with the Italian film happened in London. Working in an advertisement agency, Ray was sent to London at the head office. There the first film he watched was *Bicycle Thieves*. In his memoir *Apur Panchali*, he said after watching the cinema he finally came to the decision to make *Pather Panchali*. Like the Italian film, Ray decided to work with non stars and bring up ordinary actors who can portray reality as it is. *Pather Panchali* also came out of the practice of film studios and was shot in real locations. Needless to say, the film beautifully portrayed the ups and downs of a rural Bengali family.

The inspiration of *Bicycle Thieves* was not just bestowed upon Ray and Ghatak. Bimal Ray's *'Do Bigha Jamin'*, which was the first neo-realistic cinema of the Indian sub continent, also portrays the influence of the De Sica's film. Famous Bangladeshi film maker Zahir Raihan is also said to be influenced by De Sica's neo realism approach. Now the question rises as to why a film made thousands of miles away affected our directors. To understand this, we have to look at the film itself. The story of *Bicycle Thieves* was a very simple one—a father (Antonio) and son (Bruno) duo searching for their stolen bicycle. Yet this film portrayed the struggle of poverty which the people of Italy came across after the war. The film portrayed some harsh realities of life through a very simple tale— which was just what Bengal needed to pen their version of reality. The *Apu Trilogy* was just a three part tale of a boy growing up, but it portrayed every crisis the Bengalis faced at that time through the story. As we see, this movement had changed the mere conception of cinema. What was once just a medium of entertainment became a platform to showcase the state of reality.

History marks this period as the golden age of Italian cinema. However, this also began the golden age of Bengali cinema. The practice which Ghatak and Ray started can be credited as the best form of cinema. For this practice the world finally saw the birth of reality on-screen. ■

OPINION

ART

Right after I arrived in Berlin, on my way to the hotel, I asked my vivacious guide Nihan Sivridag, "Describe Berlin in a sentence." In response, Nihan quoted Klaus Wowereit, former Mayor of Berlin: "Berlin is poor but sexy." ["Poor", according to European standards, of course.] Over the next few days, I tried to understand what she meant.

our respective countries. Over an elaborate lunch at the Federal Foreign Office, Dirk Schulz, Deputy Head of the Division for Goethe-Institut, Supreregional Cultural Projects, Literature and Film Promotion and the Arts, shared his views on the importance of cultural exchange. Ariane Beyn, Head of the Visual Arts Department, DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service, explained artist residencies and

BERLIN – ART PARADISE

KARIM WAHEED

PHOTOS: COURTESY



(from left) Dirk Schulz, Deputy Head of the Division for Goethe-Institut, Supreregional Cultural Projects, Literature and Film Promotion and the Arts, with the group of visitors at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

The Trip

As part of the Visitors Programme, the Goethe-Institut organised this information tour on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office for artists, art experts and journalists. Twenty individuals – from as many countries [all continents except Antarctica represented] – were invited by the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. The focus of the tour was Berlin Art Week 2016 [September 13-18].

The Berlin Experience

With an estimated 400 galleries plus 100 project spaces, 175 museums and 140 theatres, Berlin has art in its nooks and crannies and alleys. It's no London, or Paris, or New York – the allure is more about an understated brilliance and less razzle-dazzle. Berlin's artistic soul is not unapproachable; it draws you in and encourages you to interact. Our accommodation in the Mitte area [literally "centre" in German] made the whole experience even more immersive.

The itinerary was naturally packed with appointments, meticulously arranged for us by our hosts; special thanks to our wonderful guides Ariane Pauls, Nihan Sivridag, Natalija Yefimkina, Stefano Sciuilli, and Sophia Grigull from Goethe-Institut Visitors Programme.

At Kulturprojekte Berlin, the visitors learnt more about each other – who we are, what we do, how our work makes an impact on the contemporary art scene in

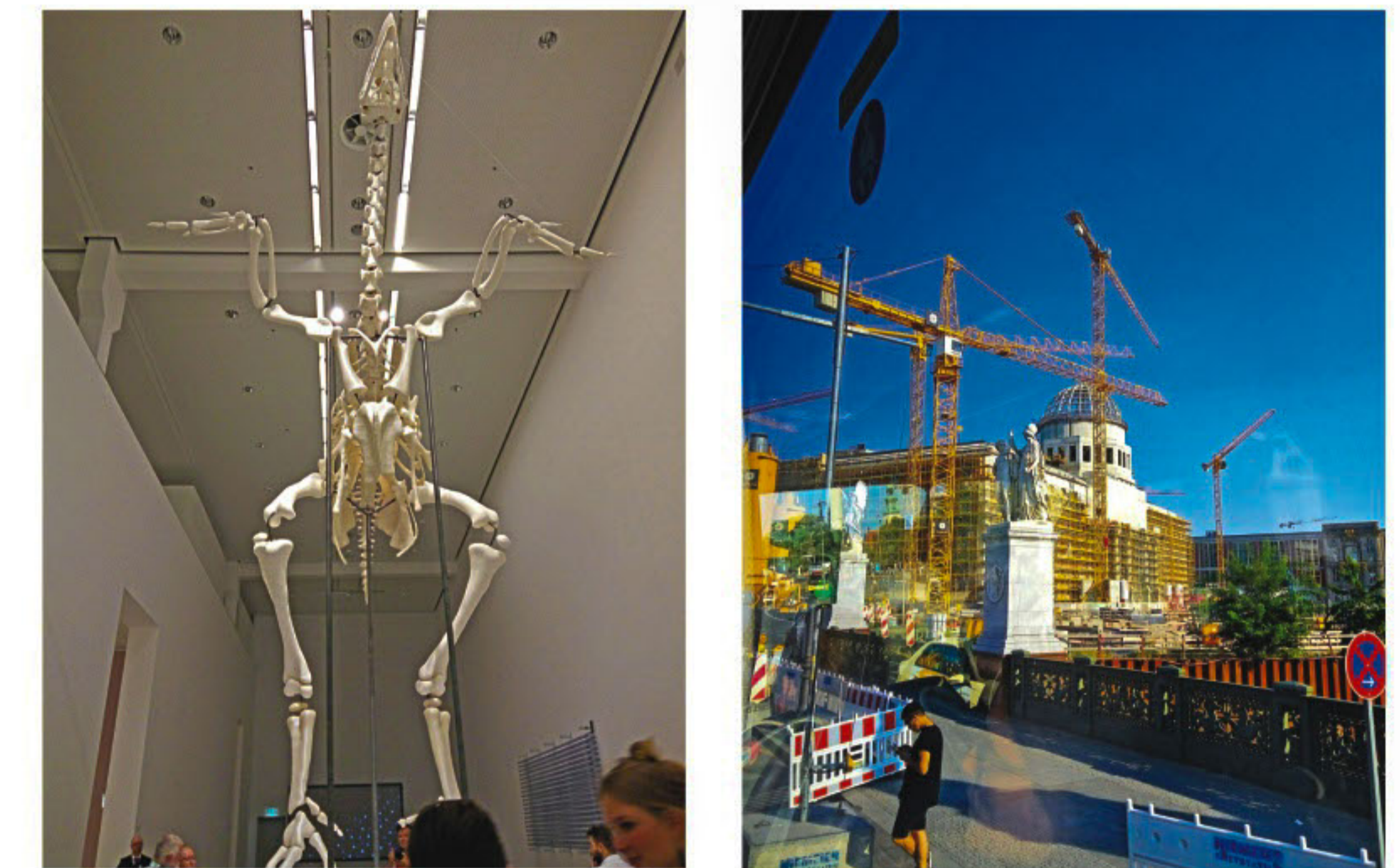
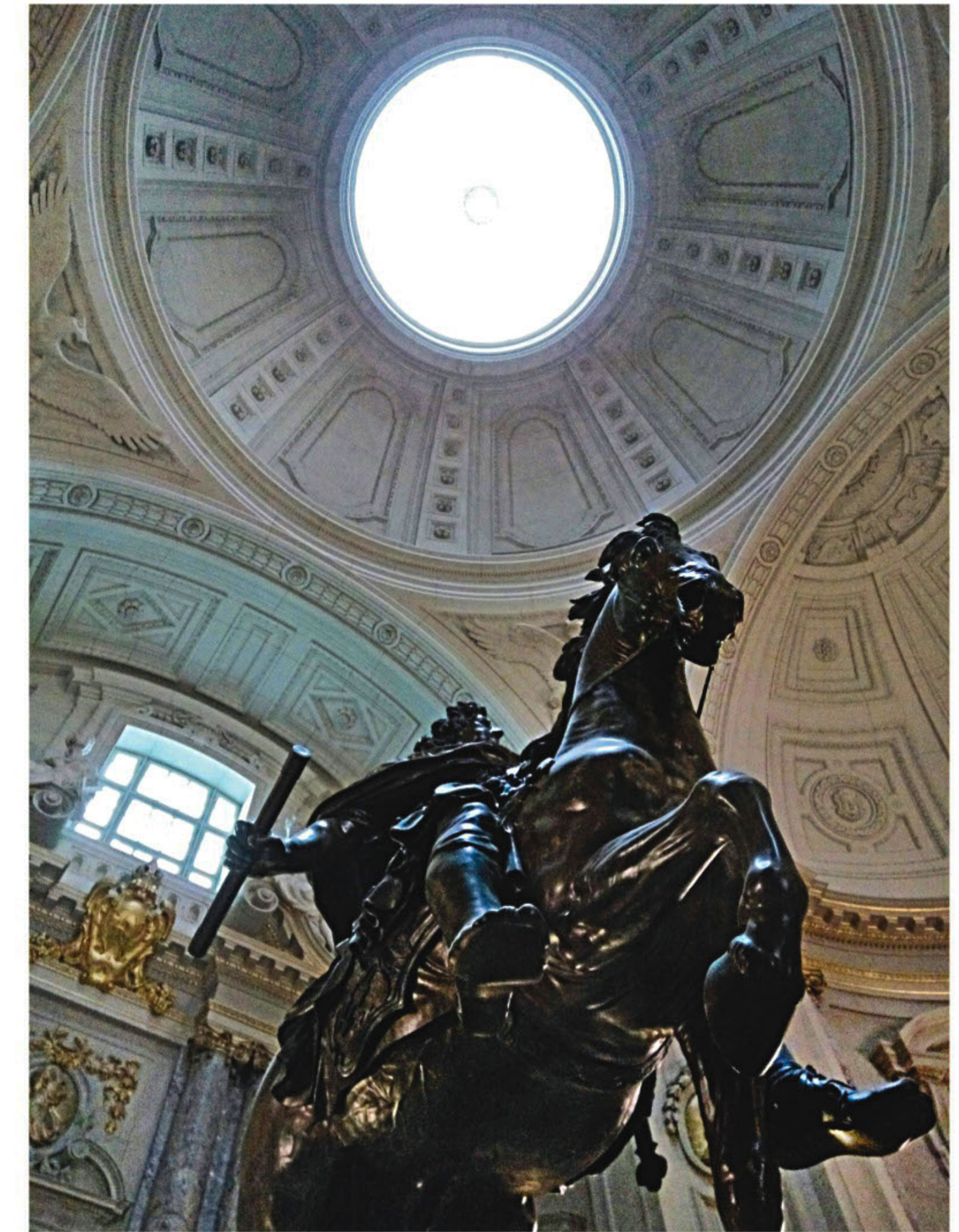
the opportunities for artists from all over the world to showcase their work in Berlin.

Dr. Thomas Köhler, Director of the Berlinische Galerie, gave us a tour of the current exhibitions. We visited the studio of artist Andreas Greiner whose ginormous dinosaur-inspired skeleton [made with a 3D printer] of a broiler chicken at the Berlinische had generated much buzz. We had the opportunity to understand, first-hand, how international contemporary artists work at Künstlerhaus Bethanien [a studio programme, and platform for artistic and curatorial projects]. We explored the Art Fair at abc – art berlin contemporary, and Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art at Kunst-Werke Institute.

So much to see, to perceive in such limited time. This was an overwhelming assault on our senses, in the most positive way. Our trip wrapped up with a bang: a performance titled "Gala". This unusual project by choreographer Jérôme Bel can best be described as a "collective art form", bringing together professional dancers and amateurs of diverse backgrounds, and compelling us with its light-hearted approach to shed the need to judge and be at one with the performers who seemed to be having a great time.

A Global Network

For us, the team of visitors, this tour became more than just about Berlin Art



Week and the various official visits. Over breakfasts and lunches and dinners, friendships were formed and we realised that our association doesn't have to end with the tour. This tour and our hosts facilitated in creating a global network of professionals from various sectors of the creative industry, who can accomplish a symbiosis.

Auf Wiedersehen

So, what's my impression of Berlin? Berlin may be poor compared to the other major German cities, but it is oh-so-sexy. Where

else can haven't-made-it-big-yet artists from all over the world come and avail the opportunity to showcase their work to a global audience because space is still affordable?

Berlin is so many things to so many people, and it will continue to be exciting because it's a constant work in progress; nowhere else have I seen the stark contrast of old buildings boasting classical architecture and ongoing construction work side by side.

The writer is Editor, Shout, The Daily Star.

ABOUT TOWN

Technology Entrepreneurship
Are you ready for a Start-Up ???

TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEURSHIP
October 15, 8.30 am - 1.30 pm
Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, Dhaka
Hosted by: Durbin
For more information, visit-
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1802431666670604/>

youth Tourism Fair 2016
16-19 October, 2016
Drik Gallery, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

YOUTH TOURISM FAIR-2016
October 16-10, 12 pm - 8 pm
Drik Gallery, Dhanmondi, Dhaka
Hosted by: Jatraa.Com and Jatraa Travels
For Query, visit-
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1818753158357361/>

4th Youth Mock Parliament on Right to Work
16 October 2016, Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Shaban, University of Dhaka

4TH YOUTH MOCK PARLIAMENT ON RIGHT TO WORK
October 16, 9 am - 2 pm
Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Building, University of Dhaka
Hosted By-Youth against Hunger Bangladesh
For more information, visit-
<https://www.facebook.com/events/528809633980534/>