



Eminent photographer and social activist Shahidul Alam is the Festival Director of Chobi Mela, which he founded 18 years ago. In 1989, he also set up Drik picture library and in 1998, Pathshala: South Asian Institute of Photography.

One of the best parts of Chobi Mela is how the exhibits are spread out all over Dhaka. While most of the exhibits are being held at the central venue, which is the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the Education Venue is Pathshala South Asian Media Institute. The best part however, is that some of the old heritage sites and halls in the older part of town are also participating in the festival.

Beauty Boarding, located on Shris Das Lane, near Bangla Bazaar is a favourite amongst many a Chobi Mela fan. Not only do the ancient walls, faded paint and the brick walls accentuate the story of the exhibited photographs, the audience make sure not to miss the famous Beauty Lassi at the cafeteria located inside the vicinity.

The Bulbul Lalitakala Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA) itself is filled with art forms created decades ago. Starting from the hand carvings on the staircase railings to the high walls, the musty smell and the high ceilings speak of years of creativity moulded and mentored. Because of the large halls, the exhibits held here are structured and follow a certain theme. The viewers find it easy to follow the instructions here and move around freely, after which they like to check out the Buriganga River from the BAFA balcony.

Lal Kuthi or the Northbrook Hall is something out of an old British TV series. Built in the 1800s, the hall had been home to many a famous theatre artist during the British era. The hall is complete with a box seat, built for the viceroys and possible for the Queen herself back then, and can still be seen today. Dark tinges of brown and maroon, blended with some brilliant lighting fill the space, especially today as one of the Chobi Mela exhibits take place there.

History buffs and photography lovers can attend a special Gallery Visit to all the mentioned venues located in Old Dhaka on February 4, that is tomorrow. The Chobi Mela team will take you on an extraordinary guided tour from one venue to the other. The tour dedicated to Old

Dhaka will begin at 3:00 pm from Beauty Boarding and will end at Ahsan Manzil at 6:00 pm, showcasing a curated slideshow by Sarker Protick and Munem Wasif, titled 'Bengal Divided.'

Munem Wasif, one of the curators feels that it is simply amazing for people from all walks of life to be able to experience such excellence. "If the Chobi Mela had not begun 18 years ago, only a handful would have been experiencing such great works of arts sent from all over the world, maybe somewhere in Paris or one of the other art capitals," he says. The team of



curators also includes ASM Rezaur Rahman, Mahbubur Rahman, Tanzim Wahab, along with Salahuddin Ahmed and Alexander Supartono.

For the very first time this year, Chobi Mela IX is partly commissioning ten Bangladeshi artists as Fellows to produce site-specific artworks for the festival -- namely Abir Shome, Najmun Nahar Keya, Sarker Protick, Reetu Sattar, Salma Abedin Prithi, Molla Sagar, Arfun Ahmed, Minhaz

Marzu, Golam Moshir Rahman Choudhury and Suvra Kanti Das. Through this initiative, Chobi Mela aims to support new media artists in Bangladesh.

Along with photography exhibitions, Chobi Mela regularly organises exciting workshops. This year also, a number of workshops, masterclasses and talks will be taking place in Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Pathshala. Check out www.chobimela.org for workshop

schedules and details.

As we try to survive the every day obstacles in Dhaka city, the Chobi Mela IX is much more than a breath of fresh air for, not only the residents of Dhaka but for individuals thirsty for creativity and art all over Bangladesh. The festival, one may say, is much more than mere exhibitions of photography; rather be described as a slice of life, celebrations and happiness.



SPOTLIGHT

"The global photography spotlight is on Bangladesh. The stars are arriving at our doorstep. It is now up to Bangladeshis to step up the podium. The world of photography beckons." – Shahidul Alam

