



#ART & CULTURE

# THE CHANGING NARRATIVES OF KORAIL

Whenever “Korail” comes to mind, the word that follows next is “bosti” (urban slum). Housing about 80,000 people from various districts, the community is one of the largest low-income settlements in Bangladesh and home to residents who work as domestic helpers, office assistants, businessmen, drivers, rickshaw pullers, security guards, janitors, and vendors. Recently, an exhibition was arranged to provide an alternative narrative to the Korail story.

The show was unveiled on 24 May and continued until 7 June at the Shala Gallery at Aloki.

Paraa is a research-based design and architecture studio, focusing on enhancing lives and spaces within the communities in Bangladesh and beyond through multi-disciplinary practice. Their experiential exhibition, “Hoichoi: Engage, Interact, Play” captured the life and the culture of Korail, created and curated by the students of CADSE (Critical Architecture Design Sustainable Environments), the 2024 Winter School developed by Paraa.

Every installation and artwork at the show encapsulated how the neighbourhood operated and how it shaped the lives of the people. From birds chirping, people clamouring, or tins clanking, as captured in the “Korail Kechal” audio clip to the “Cha er Tong” with its television airing a PSA on gender-based violence, the exhibition engaged the senses to make us feel as if we are standing right there.



They also weaved in some humour to simpler aspects of life, for instance, installations like the ‘Shobji Shomachar’ narrated the internal monologues of the popular home-grown vegetables sold at the markets of Korail.

This year, the school focused on “Korail — City of Culture”, a project by Paraa and Goethe-Institut, Bangladesh, working on building an inclusive play space and cultural hub for the people of Korail, by the people of Korail!



Korail — City of Culture was an initiative in sustainable urban development, supported by the Creative Economy Programme of the Federal Foreign Office (Germany), in conjunction with the Goethe-Institut Bangladesh, Paraa, and German partner, Floating University Berlin.

The project worked closely with young people, a mix of young men and women, along with elders from the community leadership to train, develop, and build a publicly accessible place using the Ershad Maath.

The young people were being taught to research, document and lead, and develop a network that could sustain the place after it was built. The overall idea was to build a new cultural space in the heart of Korail and produce a cultural festival that will focus on design collaborations, within the community, with the city, and with international design partners.

By Rubab Nayeem Khan  
Photo: Courtesy

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