

EMAMI ART

SINGED BUT NOT BURNT

Curated by Ina Puri



SHAHIDUL
ALAM

SINGED BUT NOT BURNT

Especially relevant at a time when freedom of speech and expression is being challenged the world over, Shahidul Alam's work is like a beacon of light and hope. From the epic horror of landscapes devastated by climate change to unflinching images of the ordinary man in the streets who has to struggle through poverty and social inequality to make ends meet to the intimate portraits of strangers who have become friends over time, Shahidul Alam's searing portraits bring alive a world that he has embraced as his own. The lens of the photographer remains unwaveringly focused on the under-represented and the minority, creating imagery that is at once protest, reportage and art. As committed as he is to his activism, the viewer cannot but conclude that Alam's eye is aware of the beauty in the moment, for the aesthete in him is never too far away. The series of works selected bear testimony to that, as well as to his belief in humanity.

In Shahidul Alam's words: 'As journalists, we need to feel the heat, to stand close to the fire, but then we also risk being burnt. If we were to take one step back, we become ineffective. The trick, therefore, is to get singed but not burnt'.

Selected meticulously from the photographer's vast archives in Dhaka, this exhibition provides the viewer a look at his early experiments in pictorialism and his later experimentations in exploring the political space by developing a new vocabulary. In a parallel narrative shot by his students and colleagues, we see Alam himself amidst protests, then his incarceration at Keraniganj. His release comes 101 days after he was taken into custody, this is due to the intervention of global intellectuals who demanded his unconditional release and allowed him to walk free – singed but not burnt. We also share an image of that jubilant moment with you.

During the period of his incarceration, I had been in close contact with Alam's partner Rahnuma Ahmed who brought us news from Keraniganj Jail. This retrospective exhibition would not have been possible without the support of Rahnuma Ahmad, Asm Rezaur Rahman, Tanzim Wahab, Munem Wasif, Parvez Ahmad Rony, Taslima Akhter and Saydia Gulrukh, amongst others, at Drik and Pathshala and I am grateful to each one for their support. I am also deeply grateful to Dr Shahidul Alam for giving me the privilege to present his retrospective exhibition in India.

- Ina Puri

SHAHIDUL ALAM

Photographer, writer



Time Magazine Person of the Year 2018 and National Geographic Explorer at Large, photographer, writer and curator Shahidul Alam has championed human rights throughout his career. Recipient of the Shilpakala Award, the highest national award given to Bangladeshi artists,

Alam obtained a PhD in chemistry before switching to photography. Returning to Dhaka in 1984, he began documenting the democratic struggle to remove General Ershad. A former president of the Bangladesh Photographic Society, Alam's work has been exhibited in leading galleries like MOMA, Centre Georges

Pompidou and Tate Modern. A speaker at Harvard, Stanford, UCLA, Oxford and Cambridge universities, Alam is a visiting professor of Sunderland University and RMIT and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. He has chaired the international jury of World Press Photo. He has also received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Arts London.

John Morris, the former picture editor of Life Magazine described his book "My journey as a witness" as "the most important book ever written by a photographer". His book "The Tide Will Turn" was on the New York Times list of "Best Art Books of 2020". Alam is the founder of the Drik Picture Library, the Pathshala Media Institute, the Majority World Agency and the Chobi Mela festival of photography. He is also a new media pioneer and introduced email to Bangladesh in the early nineties.

Considered a 'Prisoner of Conscience' he was arrested in 2018 for criticising his government and spent 107 days in jail but was released on bail following a massive international campaign for his release. In 2020 Alam won the International Press Freedom Award conferred by the Committee to Protect Journalists and in 2021, the inaugural CASE Award for Humanitarian of the Year. He is currently setting up a centre for investigative journalism in Bangladesh.

If you are not making some people uncomfortable with your work, you are probably doing something wrong.

SHAHIDUL ALAM



SWAN
1950
A black and white photograph of a swan on a pond, framed in a dark wood frame with a white mat. The swan is in the center, facing left, with its neck curved. The background shows a dense thicket of weeping willow trees along the water's edge.



SWAN
1950
A black and white photograph of a swan in flight, framed in a dark wood frame with a white mat. The swan is shown from a side profile, with its wings fully extended, flying over a dark, reflective surface.

Installation View

WHOEVER SITS ON THE THRONE



Installation View



Installation View



Pinch Light
1964
100 x 100 cm
Edition 1/100
Price: \$1,200 (T) + \$1,000 (P)
Shipping: \$100 (P)
Total: \$2,200 (T) + \$1,100 (P)

Pinch Light
1964
100 x 100 cm
Edition 1/100
Price: \$1,200 (T) + \$1,000 (P)
Shipping: \$100 (P)
Total: \$2,200 (T) + \$1,100 (P)

Installation View



Two small, dark rectangular informational cards with white text, positioned between the two smaller framed photographs.



Installation View



1930s
A woman in a hooded garment
sitting in a kitchen or shop
in a rural area.



1930s
A dirt path leading through
a rural landscape with trees
and a fence.

Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW



BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW

BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW

BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW

Installation View



WORKS

THE EARLY YEARS

I am self-taught, and my early photography was heavily influenced by photography magazines and camera club culture. I was taking pretty pictures, but my curiosity with the medium led me to experimentation. The Kodak 89B Opaque Infrared filter appears black, and using an SLR you effectively photograph blind. I tried to imagine how these leaves in Kew Garden in London, would look if photographed in infra-red. I hoped I'd gotten the composition right! Watching the wet negative in the darkroom was a delight. The "Floating Forest" won me the Harvey Harris Trophy in 1983, given by the Arts Council in Britain for the "Best Photographer of the Year". I was new to photography, and the award was a confidence booster.

- Shahidul Alam



Floating Forest

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 27 in. (101.6 x 68.58 cm.)

1983, UK

Edition: 1 of 3

AB210



Sinewy Snake

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
18 x 12 in. (45.72 x 30.48 cm.)

1982, UK

Edition: 1 of 3

AB212



Nude Couple

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
18 x 12 in. (45.72 x 30.48 cm.)

1982, UK

Edition: 1 of 3

AB214

BACK IN BANGLADESH

The pursuit of pictorialism continued once I was back in Bangladesh. It was advertising, industrial and fashion photography that paid the bills, but I would often take time out to create pretty pictures. The textures and form that I had been drawn to in the early days remained a leaning even as I moved towards more documentary work.

- Shahidul Alam



Raindrops on Drik Terrace

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm.)

1993, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB216



Major Zia, the 'King of the Pirates' in the Sunderbans
Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 20 in (76.2 x 50.8cm)
1992, Khulna

Edition: 1 of 3

AB219



Rural Kitchen

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 26.88 in. (101.6 x 68.27cm.)

1992, Bangladesh

Edition: 1 of 3

AB220



Santiniketan

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm.)

1995, India

Edition: 1 of 3

AB221

STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

The Fall of Ershad

I had left an independent Bangladesh, but returned to find my country in the grips of an autocratic general. It was in the streets, trying to bring down a tyrant, that I found my true calling. The paid work of assignments met the bills, but it was the energy in the streets amidst the teargas and the bullets, that fed my soul.

-Shahidul Alam



Motijheel Hartal

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 26.17 in. (101.6 x 66.47 cm.)

1987, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB224



Woman Wading in Flood

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 27 in. (101.6 x 68.58 cm.)

1988, Dhaka

Edition: 1 of 3

AB225



Wedding Guests

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 19.6 in. (76.2 x 49.78 cm.)

1988, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB227



Mural of Noor Hossain in Jahangir Nagar Campus

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 26.66 in. (101.6 x 67.71 cm.)

1987, Dhaka

Edition: 1 of 3

AB228



Bandorban Mother and Child

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 20 in (76.2 x 50.8cm)

1992, Chittagong

Edition: 1 of 3

AB229



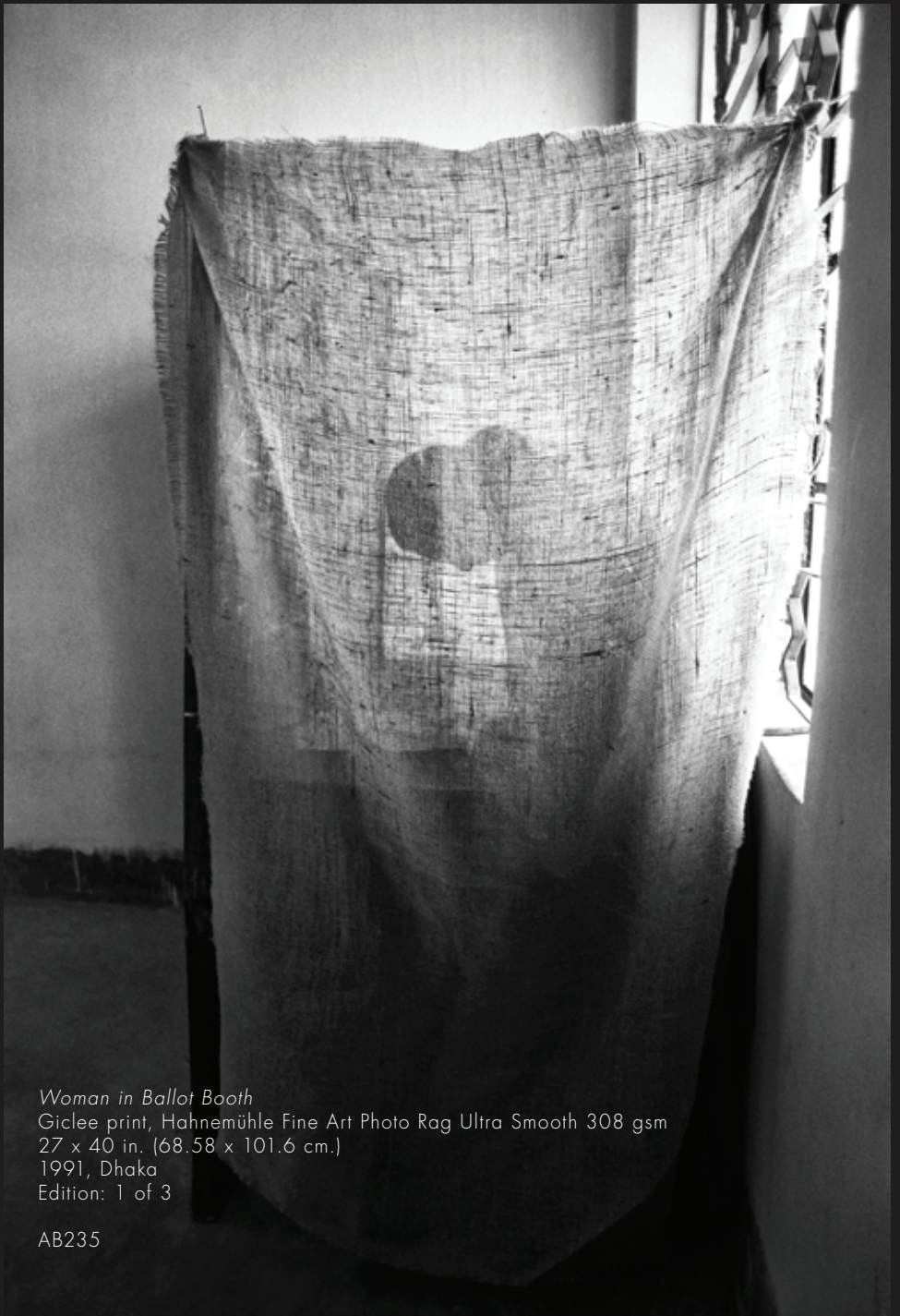
Bishsho Estemah

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 19.6 in. (76.2 x 49.78 cm.)

1988, Dhaka

Edition: 1 of 3

AB231



Woman in Ballot Booth

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
27 x 40 in. (68.58 x 101.6 cm.)

1991, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB235

UNSUNG HEROES

Bangladesh has been rightly lauded for its economic progress. However, the wealth has largely been generated by the cheap labour provided by its garment workers, migrant workers and others providing manual labour. These are the very people who have been exploited by garment owners, manpower agents, land grabbers and other syndicates.

- Shahidul Alam



Airport Prayers

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
40 x 26.43 in. (101.6 x 67.13 cm.)

1988, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB245



Last Goodbye

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
12 x 18 in. (30.48 x 45.72 cm.)

1996, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB246



Airport Wave

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
18 x 13.7 in. (45.72 x 33.95 cm.)

1996, Dhaka
Edition: 1 of 3

AB247



Moosa Bin Shamsher

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
20 x 13.5 in. (50.8 x 34.29 cm.)

1997, Dhaka

Edition: 1 of 3

AB249



Women with Pitchers

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm.)

1997, India

Edition: 1 of 3

AB250



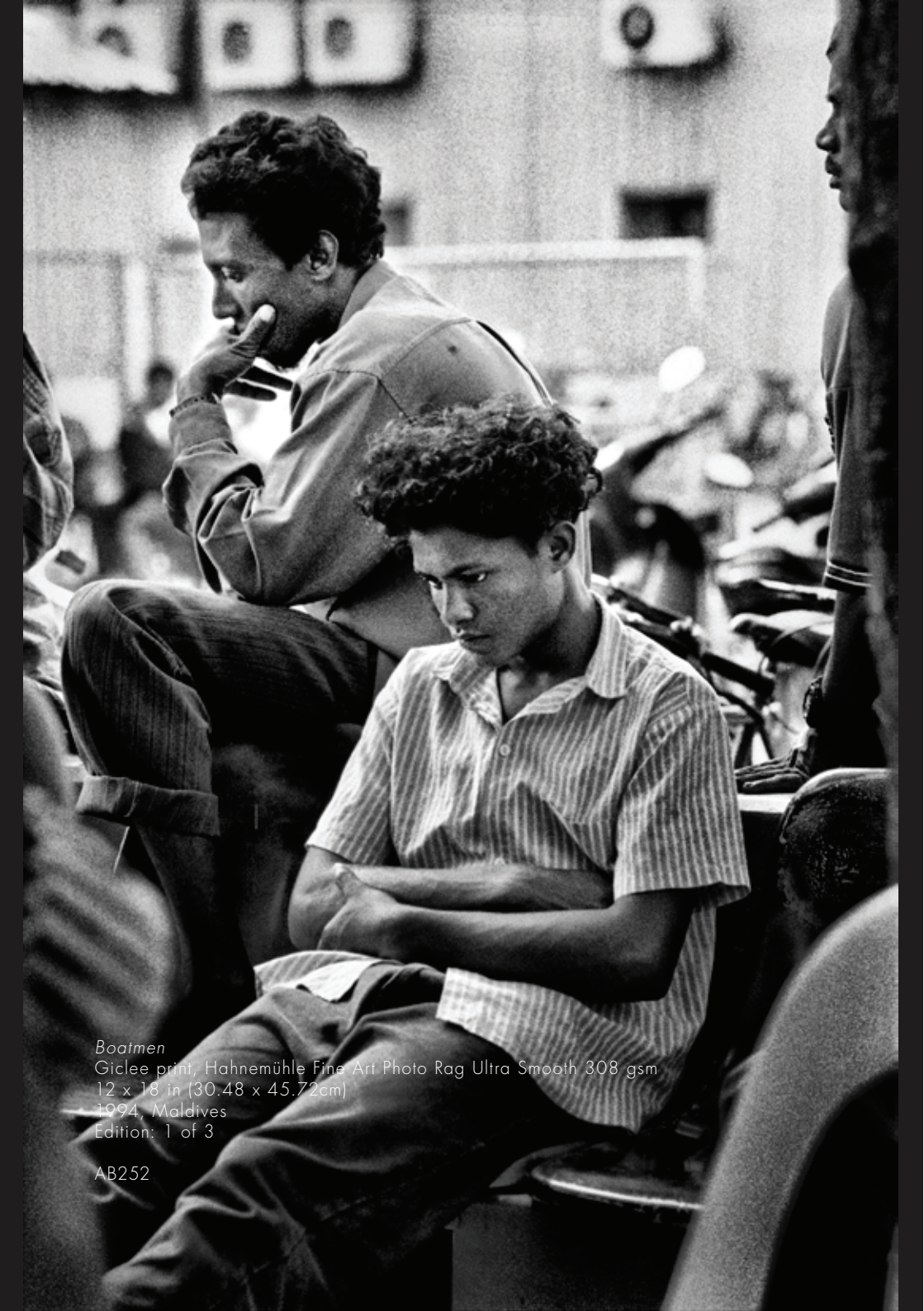
Lokman

Giclée print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm
30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm.)

1999, Singapore

Edition: 1 of 3

AB151



Boatmen

Giclee print, Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Ultra Smooth 308 gsm

12 x 18 in (30.48 x 45.72cm)

1994, Maldives

Edition: 1 of 3

AB252

INA PURI



Ina Puri is a writer, biographer, art curator and collector. She is the author of several books, including 'In Black & White' (a biography of Manjit Bawa), 'Readings Series, On Manjit Bawa' (Lalit Kala Academy), 'Faces of Indian Art' (iconic artists seen through the lens of Nemai Ghosh) and 'Journey with a Hundred String' (on the music and life of Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma). Later she was commissioned to write a pictorial memoir on Shiv Kumar Sharma titled 'The Man and his Music'. She edited 'Mythical Universe' on the artist Jayasri Burman and 'Drawn to Life' on Rini Dhumal.

Ina's lens has always remained on the city and she edited a comprehensive volume on Raj Bhavan, which was commissioned by the (then) Governor Shri Viren Shah. 'Calcutta's Raj Bhavan, Two Hundred Years of Glory' (Published by Penguin was released formally at the House of Lords, London). She edited 'Calcutta/Kolkata' by Raghu Rai and recently 'On Satyajit Ray' by Raghu Rai. She has regularly edited publications for Kolkata's art galleries and has been curating major exhibitions with several institutions /galleries.

Image Ina, her production company produced 'Meeting Manjit', a film on Bawa, which won the National Award in 2003. She later collaborated with Jabbar Patel on a biopic of Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, 'Antardhwani' that was also the recipient of the Rajat Kamal.

'The Portrait of an Artist in the World', on Paresh Maity and Nemai Ghosh is her most recent publication. Ina's three-decade-long engagement with the arts embraces tribal art and folk theatre to contemporary performing arts, visual arts and literature. In the pan Indian world of the arts, she has established herself as an art writer and curator, as an award-winning documentarian chronicling the lives of India's most distinguished art practitioners of contemporary times. She continues to advise museums/collectors of the city on their art collection. Belonging to a family that has produced stalwarts in the world of cinema, art and literature, she feels it is her duty to carry on the legacy.

About Emami Art

Emami Art, one of the most significant art institutions in the eastern part of India, is a key space for cultural production in the region. The organisation is focused on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach and steadfast in the advocacy of emerging, mid-career and established artists as well as an engagement with contemporary and historical material. The gallery aims to create dynamic, wide-ranging registers of exhibition-making and viewing.

In addition to hosting exhibitions, participating in art fairs and events of national and international import, Emami Art has a diverse parallel programming. With a focus on engagement with the region and beyond through continuous short and long-term projects, Emami Art has launched EA Locus in Focus, EA Co-labs (Collaborative Programme), EA Initiative (Public art endeavors) and EA Hybrid which integrates both the physical and virtual interfaces. Other programs include EA Incubator that comprises of mentorship programs, workshops, residency opportunities and innovative educational activities that facilitate artistic development, help build networks of collaboration and provide a supportive environment for emerging talent. As a centre of excellence, Emami Art wishes to be identified as a platform rather than just a facility.

Critical discourses, interactions, documentation and exchange are also essential to our agenda. Under the umbrella of EA Discourse, we are committed to developing and producing original writing, artist's books, monographs, periodicals and catalogues that will focus on artistic, creative and pedagogical materials. Furthermore, the EA Communicator lineup of talks, seminars, panel discussions and conversations with artists, curators and key partners provides a space for critical engagement as part of our knowledge-making and archiving process.

Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, emphasis on community and socially relevant engagements, institutional partnerships and more via a multi-year vision for the future, Emami Art is resolute to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity.

EMAMI ART

Kolkata Centre for Creativity

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