



When social scientist and thinker Prof. Ashish Nandy visited Arts Acre, painter Shuvaprasanna's long cherished dream of creating a museum of Bengal Modern Art, he marvelled at the creation and remarked, "Shuvaprasanna has secured a place in the annals of history. This is a watershed in Indian Art."

Arts Acre, Museum of Bengal Modern Art, is perhaps the country's first private museum and art centre, largely funded by an Indian painter. Located in the Rajarhat Newtown area in Kolkata, this self-contained mini city for artists and art lovers is situated amidst over four and half acres of lush surroundings.

Lifelong passion

The Arts Acre project is the brainchild and lifelong passion of renowned painter, sculptor, educator, writer and art activist Shuvaprasanna. Shuvaprasanna or Shuva or Shuvada as he is fondly called, is one of India's foremost painters and the city, it's urban milieu, the agony and joys of the people who live here has featured prominently in his work. Keen on experimentation, he continues to engage with new themes, media and forms. The scrap-metal installation on Arts Acre campus featuring his favourite crows, a recurrent motif in his work, is a case in point.

Shuvaprasanna's spouse, Shipra Bhattacharya herself a well-known painter, has been an unflinching source of strength and support since the inception of this dream and has worked tirelessly to realise the long cherished goal of her husband.

Says Shuvaprasanna, "Paintings and sculptures are human resources. As compared to other countries, there is a huge apathy and ignorance in India about our



VISUAL APPEAL: (Clockwise from top left) A sculpture by Somnath Hore; the gallery; Shuvaprasanna; Ramkinkar Baij's untitled sculpture and Bhabesh Sanyal's *Famine*. PHOTOS COURTESY: KAMALENDU BHADRA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Exclusive edifice of Bengal art

ENTERPRISE Painter Shuvaprasanna dreamt of setting up a museum for Bengal art and the result is Arts Acre, Museum of Bengal Modern Art.

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fine arts. When I visited Europe for the first time in 1974, I saw museums at every nook and corner. They know how to preserve their arts. I aspired to do something similar here but did not know whom to approach and if at all anyone would be interested to help. So, I have invested my own savings and earnings to create this exclusive edifice on Bengal Art. Many friends too came along and con-

tributed. Anybody from the creative arts is most welcome to come and work here and I invite people from all walks of life to be part of this experience."

The centre comprises four galleries with permanent display of over 300 art works voluntarily contributed by more than 100 artists and private collectors, thus chronicling Bengal's rich and diverse art history. All the artists fea-

tured in the museum, were either born in Bengal or had worked/studied there at some point in their lives.

From English landscape painters, Thomas and William Daniell to several members of the Tagore family including the bard himself, from representative figures of the Bengal School to Kalighat and Bata painting and a plethora of big names of the contemporary arts

scene such as Jogen Chowdhury, Shakti Burman, Paresh Maity and Shuvaprasanna himself are part of the permanent display here.

Besides, Arts Acre is equipped with a Restoration centre, exhibition halls, workshop and studio spaces dedicated to various art practices such as sculpture, painting, graphics and ceramics, living quarters for artists, cafeteria, library and a state-of-the-art indoor

auditorium, which has already begun to attract artists across disciplines. The accommodation and gallery rental charges are nominal to enable young, up and coming artists and other creative groups to showcase their art.

Arts Acre was originally conceived as an institution for nurturing artists in the field of visual arts. On March 3, 1984, Pandit Ravi Shankar laid the foundation stone

for the initial Arts Acre site (in North Kolkata). Gradually, the campus became a shelter for budding artists and rendezvous address for intellectuals. Nobel laureate and Shuvaprasanna's long time friend, Gunter Grass visited the old Arts Acre campus in 1987 and held an exhibition of his drawings. Chintamani Kar, Mrinal Sen, Bhabesh Sanyal, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Ashok Mitra, Santos Kumar Ghosh, Arun Mitra, Mulraj Anand, Khushwant Singh, Sibnarayan Ray, N.S. Bendre, Annad Shankar Ray, Satish Gujral and Manjit Bawa visited the campus on many occasions to encourage the artists. Invitee artists from around the world came and worked here. Exchange of ideas and workshop became a regular affair.

An exchange programme with international artists eventually led to exhibitions by Arts Acre artists in London and Washington. The new Arts Acre village is an enhanced edition of that vision. Inaugurated on March 6, 2014, by Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee, the arts were adequately represented by stalwarts such as Pt. Birju Maharaj, Mahasweta Devi, Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. Balamuralikrishna and Anjolie El Menon.

Kolkata-based sculptor Sami Roy says, "I cannot even begin to tell you how grateful we are to Shuvaprasanna. This is a huge platform for all of us. Under one roof you can see the entire history of art in Bengal. Any collector, curator visiting Kolkata now has access to our work. This is immense exposure to all artists."

Independent curator Souna Chacraverti remarks, "This is actually a great moment not only for Kolkata but also India's cultural history. Paritosh Sen used to often tell me that Shuvaprasanna watched the sky one day. I think Shuvada has done that with Arts Acre."