

16-02-2016

Dhaka Art Summit

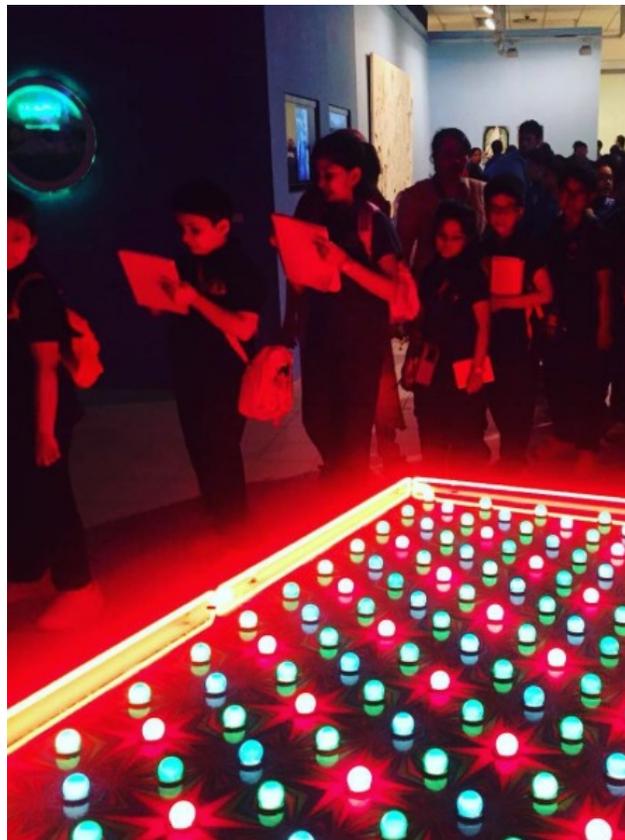
Earlier this month, our Senior Curator, Helen Pheby, represented YSP at the Dhaka Art Summit. Here, Helen tells us about her trip.

'Dhaka officially has the worst traffic in the world. It takes 90 minutes to do the 20k from airport to hotel and it's difficult to know for sure which is the right side of the road – the one with least traffic apparently. Investment is being made though, and it feels more polished than even just two years ago, and it was definitely worth the journey to attend the third edition of the Dhaka Art Summit.

Held in the Shilpakala Academy, the Summit is a four-day in-depth insight into past and present art from South East Asia initiated by the Samdani Art Foundation and their Artistic Director Diana Campbell Betancourt. The extensive exhibitions include solo projects curated by Campbell Betancourt by artists such as Lynda Benglis and Haroon Mirza; *Rewind* featuring historical works from Bangladeshi collections; and *Architecture in Bangladesh* curated by Aurélien Lemonier of the Pompidou Centre. Also curated by Campbell Betancourt, *Mining Warm Data* shares very interesting work by artists including Mariam Ghani, Amar Kanwar, and Neha Choksi, which consider human life beyond cold statistics and data; and *The Missing One*, curated by Nada Raza of Tate Modern took an 1896 Bangla science fiction work as inspiring point of inspiration. *Soul Searching* was a rare opportunity to experience a considered display of Bangladeshi modernism. A unique film programme curated by Shanay Jahaveri of the Met Museum, New York, runs throughout, as well as a rigorously curated series of talks, performances, workshops, activities for children and Safina Radio Project. New to this summit, the Critical Writing Ensemble was a great initiative to connect peers from across the world and extend the international art writing community.

The overall quality of the Summit is exceptional and brings together art and information that would normally take months, maybe even years, of researching into one fascinating event. We attended an excellent local dinner hosted by Aparajita Jain, in celebration of Sat Saath Arts, her farsighted Foundation that enables research visits to the region. The Samdani Art Award was presented to Rasel Chowdhury for *Railway Longings*, a 181km walk along the rail lines that connect Dhaka to his birthplace in Jamalpur – documented in beautiful photographs.

The summit concluded with a dinner at Golpo, the Samdani residence, and chance to enjoy their beautiful art collection. The couple are incredibly far sighted and generous – not only in their hospitality of international curators, which is of course much appreciated, but in staging the Summit for the benefit of their home city. It creates a platform for artists in the region, which will definitely lead to projects all over the world, but is also free entry for everyone and tens of thousands of people visited over the weekend.'



Images from top:
Diana Campbell Betancourt
at the Samdani Art Award dinner.
Photo Helen Pheby;

School children with Magic Carpet (2005)
by Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi.
Photo Nivriti Roddam;

Haroon Mirza, The National Pavilion
of Then and Now (2011).
Photo Diana Campbell Betancourt.