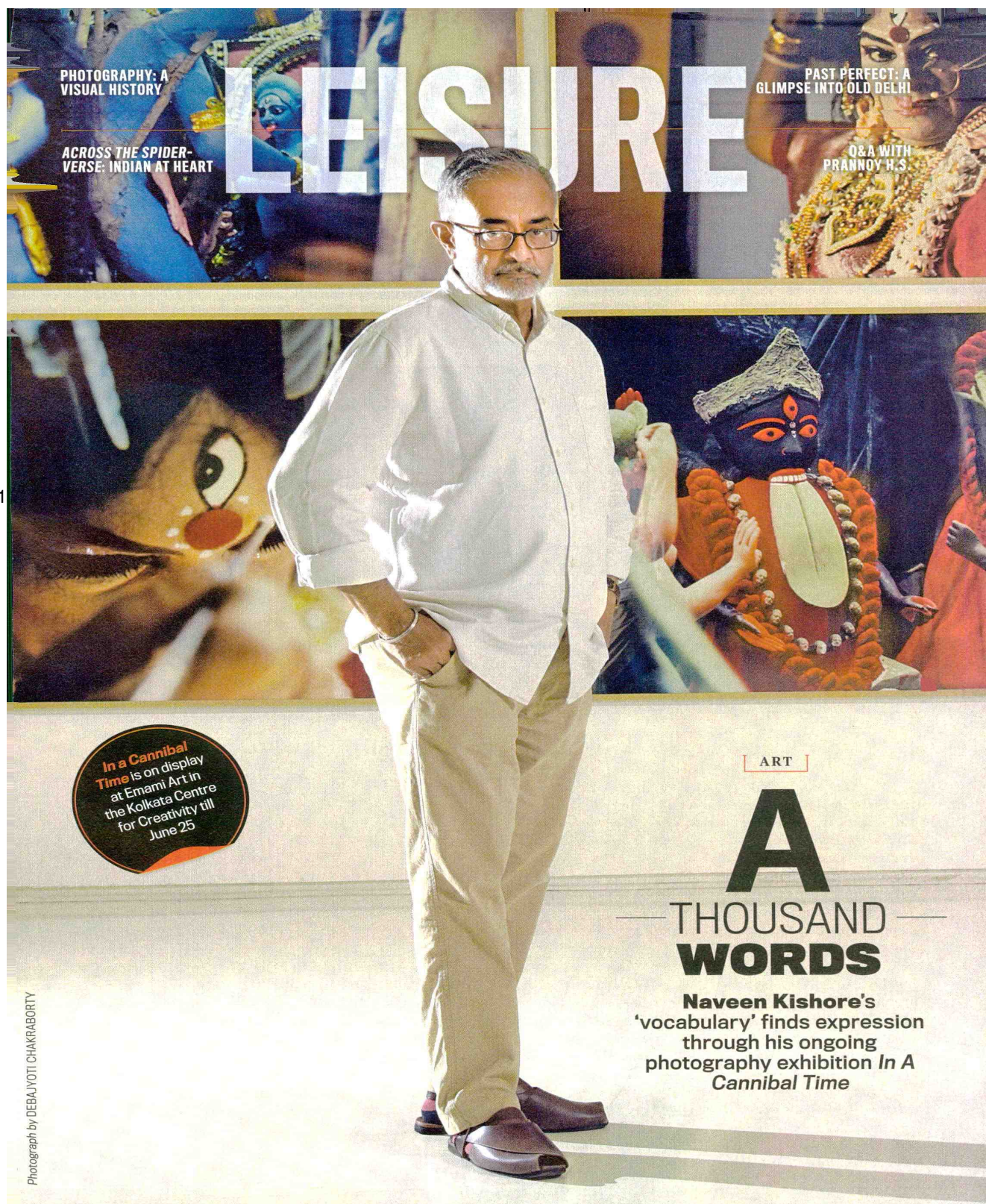


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PHOTOGRAPHY: A VISUAL HISTORY

ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE: INDIAN AT HEART

LEISURE

PAST PERFECT: A GLIMPSE INTO OLD DELHI

Q&A WITH PRANNOY H.S.

In a Cannibal Time is on display at Emami Art in the Kolkata Centre for Creativity till June 25

ART

A THOUSAND WORDS

Naveen Kishore's 'vocabulary' finds expression through his ongoing photography exhibition *In A Cannibal Time*

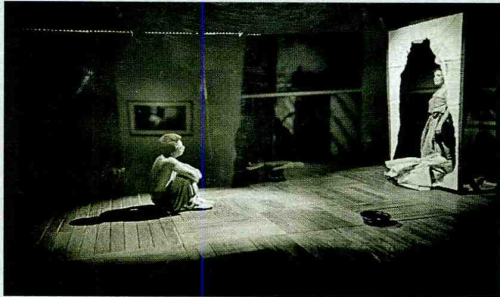
Photograph by DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

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LEISURE



SHADES OF LIFE...
In a *Cannibal Time* is a window into Kishore's way of expressing as well as documenting performing arts



Photographs by DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY



Poet, publisher (Seagull Books), photographer, and theatre person Naveen Kishore, 70, wears several hats. It's his photography hat that is currently on display at Emami Art in the Kolkata Centre for Creativity. The exhibition *In A Cannibal Time* is in collaboration with Chatterjee & Lal (who had taken Kishore's *Performing the Goddess* to the Cincinnati Art Museum) and is showing at the gallery till June 25. It includes four series: *Performing the Goddess*, *The Green Room of the Goddess*, *The Epic and the Elusive*, and *In a Cannibal Time*.

According to Kishore, his photographs are 'happy accidents'. This is particularly true for the photographs in *The Epic and the Elusive*. They were shot over 20 years ago as part of a series for Seagull Theatre Quarterly's issue on theatre in Manipur. "Most of them were experimental takes on Greek classics like *Antigone*, etc," says Kishore, explaining the 'epic' referred to in the series. What remains 'elusive' are blurred smoke-like figures captured "in a certain kind of motion" in the black and white series. "[The act of capturing the actors in motion] was the only thing I was certain of. Since I shoot analogue—it is all chance. I'm capturing her [points out an actor in a picture] in movement while everything else is static. And it resulted in these happy accidents—where one person looks like they are disappear-

Three of the four series by Naveen Kishore the exhibition showcases dwell on the feminine



ing into smoke, while another looks straight at you giving it a kind of documentary aspect," he explains. As the owner of the independent publishing house Seagull Books, Kishore refers to his bookmaking work as "midwifery", but his photography (like his poetry) is a more direct expression. In the case of photography, he says, "I'm engaging with the possibility of giving 'vocabulary' to that which I witness."

In the ongoing exhibition, what has attracted the most attention are the two 'Goddess' series: *Performing the Goddess* and *The Green Room of the Goddess*. Photographs from both are placed side by side deliberately by Seagull Books' chief editor and graphic designer Sunandini Banerjee. While *Performing the Goddess* studies jatra actor Chapal Bhaduri getting out of the costume of the goddess Sitala, shedding the layers that make the man a woman and a goddess, *The Green Room of the Goddess* features idols of Kali in various stages of adorning and enrobing. Kali is watched "almost voyeuristically as if caught unawares, almost unguarded." "Perhaps later, when the clay becomes the Goddess, the gaze would change into a more direct one," ponders Kishore. The contrast between the two series—where one sheds the myth of

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divinity and the other, where a clay inanimate object steps into it, is underlined by the photographer's gaze. Unlike the Kali series, "the Chapal Bhaduri images are complex because it is the woman inside the man, the actor, that gazes at us", says Kishore.

Three of the four series the exhibition showcases dwell on the feminine. At the exhibition, Kishore points to a photograph where Chapal Bhaduri is taking off a bindi, eyes downcast, exhaustion writ large on his/her face. It seems like a viscerally recognisable image of a womanly narrative. "You may see yourself, or your mother or another woman in this unguarded natural ritual. It is not just the tiredness of the day, perhaps also what you carry on your shoulders, what with domesticity, life, men and your own creativity," he says. But it is "intuitive, not deliberate or conscious". The universal nature of that artistic loneliness perhaps resonates with Kishore. "I think I relate to the resilience of the feminine," he says.

This rare sensitivity and empathy take on a different shade in the fourth series, *In a Cannibal Time*. Originally, it featured a fresco of the straw-and-clay figure dummies that are used by the artisans of Kumartuli to sculpt goddesses. Those figures were used on the façade of the Seagull Bookstore stall during the 2002 Calcutta Book Fair. "It was intended as a way of responding to the self-censorship on the internet that prevailed after 9/11," says Kishore. Later, those very figures were reused by the artist in an eerie installation that also incorporated smoke, light and projections and was titled 'In A Cannibal Time'. It was Kishore's way of "giving vocabulary" to the events that followed (the 2002 Gujarat riots). "What you see and define as an 'everyday atrocity' is not an easy task to bear witness, especially for artists who intuitively interpret the times even as they report, record and document through image and text. Photography is the evidence that makes it possible for future historians to explain the past," he says. ■

Malini Banerjee