

Published Date:	23 Nov 2024	Publication:	The Telegraph [Kolkata]
Journalist:	Farah Khatoon	Page No:	17
MAV/CCM:	1,346,688/187.04	Circulation:	25,000

ART

RICHA AGARWAL LOOKS BACK AS KCC TURNS SIX AND TALKS ABOUT AMI ART FESTIVAL GROWING IN SIZE

AMI Arts Festival kicked off its fifth edition on November 21. It has come out of its single-venue boundary and is now making every corner of the city talk about art and culture like never before. The month-long festival has created a buzz in the city with a stellar line-up of musical and theatre performances, workshops, art exhibitions, a film festival and more. We sat down for a chat with Richa Agarwal, chairperson, Kolkata Centre for Creativity, to get more insights.

AMI Arts Festival is in its fifth year and it has grown manifold. How do you feel when you look back?

I am just so glad we took that first step! When we started, we genuinely didn't think this would be the scale. It was a simple weekend kind of an exercise to support and celebrate art, which can only be done by sharing it with everyone. After some time we realised that the scope of it is way more than what we had imagined. Little by little it has grown in size and now the festival is celebrated over a month and across venues in the city. I envision seeing it in more venues, having more programmes and being more inclusive where every member of the city comes and says I want to be a part of AMI Arts.

Last year the festival was centered in HIDCO in New Town and this year it is being celebrated across landmark venues in the city. What's the idea behind this move?

We have got back AMI Arts to its house — Kolkata Centre for Creativity. Having said that, being an inclusive programme, we are trying to involve as many people as possible and hence started the whole process of collaboration. So this year AMI Arts is happening at Victoria Memorial, Indian Museum, GD Birla Sabhagar, Techno India, and National Library.

We have music and dance performances, both classical and contemporary, then there are theatre performances, multiple exhibitions... The first exhibition that we are doing is actually of musical instruments. We are also doing something called 'My Kolkata in Kolkata', a photography exhibition, which is inclusive of people in the city and we have tied up with the Chennai Photo Biennale. Then we are doing Art Mela where one can buy



Richa Agarwal

art at a good price. Towards the end we are doing a film festival for children. We are also focusing on our membership plan that will make KCC more accessible for all, especially to students.

As a country, agriculture is our largest form of occupation and the second is the crafts industry. So somewhere we all are very empowered and feel very strongly that we need to be a part of that community not only to just support but also be involved in its growth. And that brings us to Karigari where we are getting a lot of artisans who can sell their products directly.

Kolkata Centre for Creativity also turns six. How has the journey been?

What a journey it has been! The whole concept of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity was by my father-in-law, R.S. Agarwal and I think Pinakin Patel actually breathed air into it. He has mentored me or has paved a way forward. All I have done is just taken their dreams forward and I think we really enjoy what we do.

A very important factor that I have noticed about KCC is that there is a balance of established and young and upcoming artists.

This is very important because big artists are already very well known, they have a set audience, they bring in audience but as an institution, it is our duty to make sure that younger talents (are highlighted). I am not even talking about the mid-career talents because they are already discovered, I am talking

about the younger talents which are being discovered today. As an institution, it is our responsibility to work alongside them to make sure that they can believe in their dreams as much as we believe in their dreams.

What are the emotions that dominate when you look back?

A lot of gratitude for getting such a good team which is working so hard and working continuously, passionately and tirelessly. I think just being able to head an institution like this is a humbling experience on its own because you learn so much; every day is a learning experience. There is a lot of excitement and there is a continuous curiosity which is actually what the driving force is.

KCC's schedule is packed as we near the end of this year. So what are your immediate plans?

To just get better every day in terms of learning, in terms of our execution, in terms of our understanding to create a more conducive ecosystem where more talent comes together. When we started, I was very worried if at all people will come to this part of the city and my husband used to only say one thing, 'Do a programme that will attract people who are genuinely interested' and that is what has happened. I thought my successors will see the success but I am so happy to be wrong.

Farah Khatoon
Pictures: B Halder