

Press Release

Exhibition Title: **An Enduring Legacy: Lalit Mohan Sen**

Event: **Chennai Photo Biennale Edition 4 – CPB 4 Invited Projects**

Dates: **18 January - 15 February 2025**

Place: **Alliance Francaise of Madras, Chennai**

Overview

Besides being a painter and printmaker, for which he is better known today, Lalit Mohan Sen (1898-1954) was also a fine and prolific photographer. Although he perhaps started taking photographs in the early 1920s or even before, he took up photography professionally as a creative medium only after he went to England to study art at the Royal College of Art in 1925. He was a member of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, and one of his early photographs, "Homeward", was shown in the Society's exhibition. He produced many photographs and exhibited them widely in India and London exhibitions in the following two decades. Besides his photography practice, he significantly spread photography culture in northern India through his efforts, institutional fairs, and the UP Armature Photographic Association, founded in the early 1930s. Despite his immense contribution to creative photography as an artist and institution builder, his name is not heard in India's history of photographic modernism.

In 2023, we showed a small section of his vast photographic collection in Lalit Mohan Sen: An Enduring Legacy, a retrospective-scale exhibition at our gallery, Emami Art. However, the exhibition at the Chennai Photo Biennale in 2025 is the first major exhibition focusing entirely on LM Sen's photographic practices. It will include diverse genres of his photographic works, including photographs of posed models, landscape and ethnographic portraiture, produced in the last two decades of his life. As his photography was never an isolated practice but rather closely connected to the other spheres of his artistic practice, we will display his paintings, drawings, linocut illustrations and some archival materials, exploring the place of photography in his creative oeuvre based on the ethos of naturalism.

Overall, the exhibition is about LM Sen's photographs – a hitherto unexplored trajectory of his artistic practice – and the time and context in which he worked, and we see his work.

Biodata

Lalit Mohan Sen was born in 1898 in Shantipur, Nadia, to his parents, Jadumani Sen and Kunjabehari Sen. Growing up in a family associated with the famous traditional textile industries of Shantipur he enrolled in the Shantipur Municipal High School, but, due to the sudden outbreak of malaria, moved to Lucknow in 1909. Sen enrolled in the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow, established in 1911 under its first principal Nathaniel Herd. After graduating in 1917, he joined its Drawing for Reproduction Class as a teacher at age twenty. In 1925, on a government fellowship, Lalit Mohan Sen

went to London to study at the Royal College of Art under its Principal, renowned artist Sir William Rothenstein. He earned a Diploma in painting and a certificate in wood engraving from the RCA. A member of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, Lalit Mohan Sen, took training in various graphic art mediums under the guidance of the celebrated etcher Malcolm Osborne. After returning to India from England, he rejoined the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow, as Superintendent of Drawing Teacher's Training and continued to teach there. He became the School's Principal in 1945.

Success came to Lalit Mohan Sen early on. The renowned art historian Laurence Binyon commissioned him to copy the Bagh Cave paintings. He was one of the four artists the Government of India hired to decorate the newly built India House in London. His paintings, prints, posters and photographs were widely exhibited and praised in India and abroad. Queen Mary appreciated his tempera painting 'Potter Girl' in the Royal College of Art exhibition in 1930 and bought it for the royal collection. In the early-1920s, he was the only Indian artist whose woodcuts Victoria & Albert Museum had displayed in the Museum's print room as permanent exhibits. Sen's photographs were shown in the Royal Photographic Society's annual exhibition and published in the Society's journal. Besides these, he was a reputed book illustrator known for his commercial art. He won the Federation of British Industries Prize (London) for the best poster design.

A versatile artist and teacher, Lalit Mohan Sen passed away in Lucknow in 1954.

Quote by Richa Agarwal

"*An Enduring Legacy: Lalit Mohan Sen (1898–1954)* celebrates the life and work of a multifaceted artist—painter, printmaker, and photographer—whose practice reflects a profound synthesis of artistic disciplines. While his contributions to painting and printmaking have been duly acknowledged, his pioneering role in creative photography has remained largely overlooked in the narrative of India's photographic modernism.

At Emami Art, we are proud to have showcased his work in 2023 and to support the landmark exhibition at the Chennai Photo Biennale in 2025, which will be the first to comprehensively examine his photographic practice. This exhibition seeks to illuminate the full range of LM Sen's photographic works—from his evocative portraits and landscapes to his ethnographic studies—while contextualizing them within his broader artistic vision.

Lalit Mohan Sen's work resonates with the ethos of naturalism and exemplifies his extraordinary engagement with multiple mediums, underscoring his legacy as both an artist and an institution builder. By bringing his artistic journey to a wider audience, we aim to cement his rightful place in the history of Indian art, inspiring art lovers and scholars to explore his unparalleled contributions."

(Says Richa Agarwal, CEO of Emami Art)

About Emami Art

Emami Art is a prominent contemporary art gallery and cultural production space located on the ground floor of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity's Green Building. Established in 2017, it adopts a

forward-looking, multi-dimensional approach that reflects South Asia's history, socio-cultural, and geo-political narratives. Emami Art operates within an inclusive framework where profitability supports sustainable resource regeneration and public service.

The gallery features a dynamic program of curated exhibitions, ranging from large-scale presentations to more intimate displays. It actively participates in both national and international events and art fairs. Emami Art represents a wide spectrum of contemporary artists, including emerging, mid-career, and established talents, with a special emphasis on the East and North Eastern regions of India. Several of its artists' works are featured in prominent national and international collections, including public foundations and museums.

A key initiative is the annual Emami Art Experimental Film Festival, which provides a platform for alternative and experimental filmmaking, video art, and moving image practices. This festival brings together internationally acclaimed artists and filmmakers alongside recent critical productions from India.

Through short- and long-term projects, Emami Art supports the local and regional arts community by offering regular mentorship programs, workshops, residency opportunities, and innovative educational activities. These initiatives foster artistic development, build collaborative networks, and provide a supportive environment for emerging talent. The gallery also organizes regular talks, seminars, panel discussions, and conversations with artists, curators, and key partners, creating a space for critical engagement.

Committed to promoting a regional, national, and international agenda, Emami Art emphasizes community engagement, socially relevant initiatives, and institutional partnerships. With a multi-year vision for the future, it continues to be a catalyst for change, research, innovation, and inclusivity.

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Date: 16 December -2024

Place: Kolkata

