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Flexing muscles for art

eyewitness



Earthcare Books and Resource Centre at 10 Middleton Street is holding an exhibition of black-and-white photographs by Thomas Patrick Kiernan of Ireland. Kiernan can look beyond Calcutta cliches of poverty and filth and has the patience to wait for the right moment to click the shutter.

Porters, bazaars, construction workers and the riverside appear in his photographs, but he is more interested in capturing the rhythm and beauty of labourers sweating it out, the jaunty angles their limbs create while at work or at rest and the beautiful and some funny images created on Calcutta streets by sheer accident, waiting to be caught on film.



A man runs across the shackles of the Hooghly jetty like a tightrope walker, a workman raises a giant hammer, another carries a huge wall clock dial on his shoulder, a little child tugs at the *lungi* of a beautiful young man.

When he shoots a rickshawpuller the focus is on the triangles of the arms between the two shafts. A girl stands before a huge bundle packed in newsprint. A man walks beneath a verandah, the railing turning gracefully.

(Top) Photograph by Thomas Patrick Kiernan and a work by Bari Kumar

Kiernan has included photographs taken in other locations, too. Significant among them is the image of old women climbing steps at Rajgir, and the sun glistening through a sari in Varanasi.

Bari Kumar, who lives in Los Angeles, plunders icons from the world's great storehouse of images. He appropriates medieval and Renaissance paintings, Tibetan *thankhas*, putto from churches, anatomical drawings, Indian miniatures and iconography to make his images on display at Bose Pacia gallery.

In this exhibition titled *Amar Prem*, Bari Kumar's images look familiar enough with occasional twists that make them look alien, even uncanny. A headless Adonis has four arms like a Hindu deity. A skull appears behind it, a grim throwback to an earlier artistic device, meant to remind people of their own mortality.

Bari Kumar throws in words from various languages (including the familiar F-word) to further muddle the cultural confusion. He is a highly skilled artist and this allows him to create servicable imitations of the cross-cultural images.

Of course, hybrids such as these have become the stock-in-trade of various artists in this country and abroad. Bari Kumar's are only more clearly thought out.

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