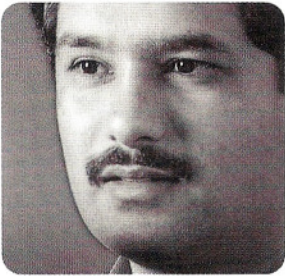


VIEW FROM THE GALLERY

Mohammed Arfan Asif on the UK's Royal Photographic Society

"THE RPS... IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST THE OLDEST CAMERA CLUB ON THE PLANET."



What is the oldest photography society in the world? An easy question, I guess. But the Royal Photographic Society formed in 1853—with the 'Royals' as its patrons—is much more than just the oldest camera club on the planet. It was Pam Roberts, curator at the RPS, who did a wonderful job in bringing out the Royal Photographic Society Collection, a publication celebrating the centenary of the Society.

This prestigious publication arrived along with the RPS Journal Vol.134 No.10 back in 1994, together revealing that the collection at RPS not only has recorded the history of the Society, but recorded the history of photography as well. Probably no collection anywhere can match that of the RPS. Today, photographic art—those rare gems that occasionally land up in auction—sell for huge sums (remember the Nicephore Niepce first recorded image recently). The RPS achieved the collection due to sheer foresightedness of Prince Albert, who was a patron to the Society, and due to the painstaking efforts of its first curator and early president, John Dudley Johnston (1868-1955). The unique fact is that the collection has been achieved with gifts and member contributions, those descendants who thought that the RPS is a better place to retain the legacy of their forefathers. And it contains not only images, but also equipment, books, journals, letters, research notes, catalogues and scrap books. Name it and everything connected with photography is present in this collection. William Henry Fox Talbot (who had declined the

presidentship of the Society), David Octavius Hill, Robert Adamson, Henry Peach Robinson, Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Julia Margaret Cameron, Samuel Bourne, Linnaeus Tripe, Peter Henry Emerson, Alvin Coburn, Roger Fenton, Steichen, Stieglitz, White, Weston, Karsh... and it continues.

It is well said that the appreciation of the present and future of photography can best be achieved with a better understanding of the past. And for those who cannot make it to the UK, just have a look at the splendid collection of Mr Mohammed Al Fahim at Crowne Plaza Shopping Mall on Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai. Those marvellous pieces of equipment, passionately collected with great taste and knowledge and permanently displayed in the lobby is an eye opener. A 1920 Zeiss, 1921 Vernak, 1924 Argus75, 1925 Ensign, 1928 Kodak Brownie, 1928 Goldy, 1930 Keystone, 1937 Agfa Clack, an 1890 bellows and several view cameras. Indeed a celebration of an evolution of fine craftsmanship in wood and metal. It is a must see. ■

The RPS is housed in The Octagon, Milsom Street, Bath BA1 1DN, England. Phone +44 1225 462841.

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