

Details of the renovated heritage buildings

Ministry of Culture under the direction of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is developing cultural spaces around iconic buildings in various metro cities in the country. To begin with the cities of Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Varanasi are being taken up under this project. In Kolkata, 4 iconic galleries, namely Old Currency, Belvedere House, Victoria Memorial Hall and Metcalfe House have been refurbished. New exhibitions have been set up & old galleries curated therein.

1. Old Currency Building - This beautiful triple-storeyed structure is built in the early nineteenth century (circa 1833 CE), designed in Italian style with Venetian windows, cast iron grates of florid design, portcullis and railings etc. The building was handed over to the Archaeological Survey of India in the year 2005. After protection of the monument, the main task was to save the building from further deterioration.

Conservation work carried out recently in Old Currency building includes removal of accretions in the first and second floor; removal of damaged lime/cement plaster on interior walls and re-plastering with rich lime plaster followed by lime punning; repairs/removal of multilayered paints on windows and doors of the entire west wing; repairs and polishing of three wooden staircases; re-fixing of window glasses wherever missing; re-laying/polishing of marble stone flooring general electrification in an organised manner; provision of tower ACs in the first and second floors; sensor glass doors to access open courtyard; restoration of floral designs as per original in the open courtyard; provision of toughen glass parapet on the ground floor roof as a safety measure and vulnerable to the visitor's access etc.

The restored Old Currency Building opens to the public as an ode to the art of Bengal, showcasing art across three centuries. Called "Ghare Baire – The Home, The World & Beyond", the design and curation of this exhibition provides a glimpse of the richness, diversity and depth of Bengal's art over the centuries. The exhibition is sectioned into 13 broad categories, showcasing nearly 500 artworks, of over 450 are from the DAG collection and 20 are from the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi.

2. Belvedere House – The Belvedere Estate consists of Belvedere House and the 30 acre grounds surrounding it with a beautiful garden. It is located in Alipore opposite the Zoological Gardens. Belvedere House was the former palace for the Viceroy of India and later the Governor of Bengal. The National Library of India is housed therein, since 1948.

Belvedere house has been renovated by CPWD, Govt of India at the cost of approx Rs. 10.00cr. Belvedere House was lying vacant since 2004 when entire collection of National Library of India were shifted to Bhasha Bhawan. On March 8, 2019, an exhibition was inaugurated by His Excellency, Governor of West Bengal, Shri Kishori Nath Tripathy on "Icons of Nationalism : from the Soils of Bengal" focussing on four iconic personalities i.e.

Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Dr. Shayama Prasad Mookerjee.

Now, Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts pays tribute to the Bengal renaissance and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore with a very special exhibition in Belvedere House showcasing the original works of the Hungarian mother-daughter duo Elizabeth Sass Brunner and Elizabeth Brunner. Their portrayal of Santiniketan and Gurudev's aura through their mystic visual oeuvre touches a cord. The exhibition also showcases portraits of people and places of India through the lens of four distinguished photographers: Raja Deen Dayal (1844-1905), Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), Shambhu Saha (1905-1988) and Sunil Janah (1918-2012) who captured some very mesmerizing photographs that are fascinating indicators of life and times in their era.

The section "Vignettes of Bengal by Foreign Travellers—early 19th to mid-20th Century" culled from the illustrations of rare books of IGNCA offers a kaleidoscope of cultural motifs, people, art and architecture of then Bengal.

3. Metcalfe House – Metcalfe House, located on the junction of Strand Road and Hare Street, is one of the torch-bearers of colonial architecture in Kolkata that perpetuates the memory of Lord Charles Metcalfe. The building was completed in 1844 to accommodate the Agri-Horticultural Society in the ground floor and the Calcutta Public Library on the floor above it. The two-storeyed building is situated on a solid basement and facing towards the Ganga river. The design is taken from the portico of the Temple of the Winds at Athens.

After taking over this majestic building, Archaeological Survey of India regularly monitored the day to day conservation works of the building and finally a major conservation work was carried out in 2018-19. These works included:

Roof treatment, repair of walls, doors + windows, removal of accretions, electrical works, Repairs to the existing drainage, Repairs to the wooden stair cases.

The Archaeological Survey of India, Kolkata Circle organized an exhibition on "Ami Kolkata – Its History and Culture" in the first floor of the Metcalfe Hall after execution of conservation work to the entire structure. In the ground floor an exhibition is now set up by National Museum, Delhi on "100 years of Bengali Cinema" in collaboration with Film Heritage Foundation.

4. Victoria Memorial Hall - The Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH), Kolkata, is undergoing a modernization and upgradation of its galleries and stores, with a sanctioned budget of Rs. 59.96 crore. This project involves both the conservation of this iconic heritage building, and a re-curation of the display in its galleries.

The building conservation has been done on such an extensive scale for the first time in VMH's 99-year history. The entire marble surface of the gigantic building has been cleaned

in an organic method, using *Multani mitti*, which has restored the marble's pristine grandeur and earned the VMH the accolade of the 'Cleanest Monument in India in 2015.

Seven of the renovated galleries are now ready for inauguration. Three of these on the ground floor – the Entrance, Royal and Portrait Galleries – showcase an exhibition on the transition from colonialism and nationalism, which display iconic oil paintings, including the *Jaipur Procession* of 1876, the world's second-largest oil painting, as well as iconic water colours of the Bengal nationalist school, like Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata* (1905), which inspired the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement. The Royal Gallery – displaying the visual representation of India before the advent of photography, is set to re-open to the public after a long gap of 25 years. The Portrait Gallery showcases the first glimpses of nationalism in art and culture.

In addition to North wing galleries, four interconnected renovated galleries of the first-floor gallery complex showcase a magnificent exhibition on loan from the National Museum, New Delhi. These galleries display iconic miniatures on three themes – *The Ramayana through Indian miniature painting*, *Shakti: the Feminine Power in Tantras*, and *Nala-Damayanti, a tale of love and passion*. In an adjacent gallery is displayed, another innovative exhibition on loan from the National Council of Science Museums, called Talking Devices. This is a unique example of the internal circulation of the treasures in the Ministry's museums, based on exchange and temporary loans.