



Wrightwood 659 Presents
Shahidul Alam: We Shall Defy

*Exhibition Features New Work by Shahidul Alam, Renowned Bangladeshi
Photojournalist, Writer, Human-Rights Activist, and Institution Builder*

Opens October 8, 2021; Open Ended

WHAT	<i>Shahidul Alam: We Shall Defy</i>
WHERE	Wrightwood 659, 659 W. Wrightwood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614
WHEN	Fridays and Saturdays, beginning October 8

(CHICAGO, IL – September 22, 2021)—In keeping with its commitment to providing a platform for art that engages the critical issues of our time, Wrightwood 659 presents ***Shahidul Alam: We Shall Defy***, an important exhibition of images and texts that illuminate the life and work of the renowned Bangladeshi photojournalist, teacher, writer, institution-builder, and activist Shahidul Alam, whose efforts on behalf of human rights have provoked both accolades and imprisonment.

Shahidul Alam: We Shall Defy is made possible by the Alphawood Foundation Chicago.

Shahidul Alam

Photographer, writer, and human rights activist Shahidul Alam has been a long-time campaigner for social justice and has also challenged the global dominance of white western media. Alam's resistance has been through his art and his activism, but also through the institutions he has built. This has often led to confrontation with the powerful elite of his native Bangladesh. Over the last three decades, he has had a loaded gun pointed at his head and been stabbed. On 5th August 2018, after a critical interview on Al Jazeera, he was picked up by Bangladeshi security forces, blindfolded, handcuffed and tortured and eventually spent 107 days in incarceration. After a global campaign for his release by more than a dozen Nobel laureates and world personalities, he was released on bail but still faces up to 14 years of imprisonment if convicted. He continues to resist.

Exhibition Overview

We Shall Defy includes photographs by Alam and his community of artists and activists, as well as illustrations, verse, and more by three additional artists: Amal Akash, a singer-songwriter and visual and performance artist based in Dhaka; Alam's niece Sofia Karim, an architect and visual artist in London; and New York-based filmmaker, writer, photographer, and installation artist Naeem Mohaiemen and the King Kortobbo team. Together, their work explores the turbulent path that Alam and his team have navigated in their struggle to achieve justice and equity.

The primary focus of the exhibition is a series of 9 large banners that are inspired by an ancient form of Bangla art—*Patachitara*, cloth scrolls containing detailed depictions of mythical narratives. The banners in the exhibition are printed with photographs by Alam and 14 artists, thereby integrating the contemporary and ancient methods of storytelling while expanding on the turbulent experiences of the Bangladeshi people. Panels containing verse with illustrations by Amal Akash and texts by Alam bring context to each banner.

Occupying about 80 feet of wall space, the banners will shed light on a variety of subjects, from migration, to sex workers (with an image of a former sex worker who used her savings to establish an orphanage for children of other sex workers), to the lives of indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the disappearance of indigenous leader Kalpana Chakma, effectuated by the Bangladesh military, and the photography-based institutions that Alam has created, among other topics.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, a 23-foot wall contains an illustration board with texts and sketches by Sofia Karim that represent Alam's life in the Keraniganj jail, and a multi-media timeline by Naeem Mohaiemen and the King Kortobbo team that elaborates on the history of photography as a tool for activism.

About Wrightwood 659

Wrightwood 659 is a private, non-collecting institution devoted to socially engaged art and to architecture. Located at 659 W. Wrightwood Avenue, in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, the intimate space officially opened on October 10, 2018, and presents two public exhibitions annually. Wrightwood 659 was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando, who transformed the interior of a 1920s building with his signature concrete forms and poetic treatment of natural light. Since its inauguration, Wrightwood 659 has presented a wide range of exhibitions including: *Yannis Tsarouchis: Dancing in Real Life*, May 7-August 7, 2021; *Balkrishna Doshi: Architecture for the People*, September 10-December 12, 2020; *The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China*, February 6-May 2, 2020; *Tetsuya Ishida: Self-Portrait of Other*, October 3-December 14, 2019; *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art*, May 22-August 10, 2019; *Dimensions of Citizenship: Architecture and Belonging from the Body to the Cosmos*, February 28-April 27, 2019, and *Ando and Le Corbusier: Masters of Architecture*, October 12-December 15, 2018.

Also on View at Wrightwood 659

Running concurrently with *Shahidul Alam: We Shall Defy*, Wrightwood 659 presents *Romanticism to Ruin: Two Lost Works of Sullivan and Wright*, a dual exhibition that explores two of these architects' long-demolished masterpieces: Louis H. Sullivan's innovative Garrick Theater, in Chicago, which stood for only sixty-nine years, and Frank Lloyd Wright's unprecedented Larkin Building, in Buffalo, NY, which stood for just forty-four.

Hours of Operation

Fridays, 12noon - 7:00pm
Saturdays, 10am - 5:00pm

Tickets

Tickets for the exhibition are \$15 and available online only, through November 27, at tickets.wrightwood659.org/events. **Please note, admission is by advance ticket only. Walk-ups are not permitted.**



COVID-19 Response

For this exhibition, Wrightwood 659 will reduce gallery admission and capacity from pre-pandemic levels. Among other remedies and precautions, we will stagger guest entry times and will continue to regularly sanitize public spaces. Out of an abundance of care for all, Wrightwood 659 plans to continue to require visitors and staff to wear masks while inside the building.

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For additional information: <https://wrightwood659.org>

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