

Clip: 1 of 1



Mamata Banerjee and Shuvaprasanna at the inauguration of the exhibition of his works on Tuesday evening. Picture by Pabitra Das

Date with painting after politics

SUDESHNA BANERJEE

"Shuvada, *ei chhobigulo etodin kothay lukiye rekhechhilen* (Where had you hidden these paintings?)" She beamed as she surveyed canvas after canvas, oblivious to the crush of journalists behind her. Far from the whirligig of politics, chief minister Mamata Banerjee was enjoying her brush with art.

A while ago, the lady, who paints and sells her works for her party's cause, had inaugurated the exhibition of Shuvaprasanna's works displayed across two floors of Emami Tower off the Bypass.

The crowd on the street had started building up from around 6pm. The clock struck seven when the black Santro drove in. In strode Mamata, miffed at first at the sight of the waiting cameras, but recovering on seeing the guests. "Ami kintu boleichhilam ami saat-tay ashbo. (Mind you, I had said I'd come at 7pm)." That she had, warning her

host that she had a meeting with Union finance minister Pranab Mukherjee first.

When she got set to light the inaugural lamp, the crowd closed in. As the security guards scrambled to form a cordon around her, she reached out towards her party's former MP Krishna Bose. "Apni amar kachhe chole ashun (You come near me)," she said protectively, before putting her glasses on and focusing on her mobile screen. Was it to check updates from her MPs on the meeting with the Prime Minister in Delhi?

Later, the diminutive senior citizen would say affectionately: "She (Mamata) knows how scared I am of crowds. During rallies, she would simply walk right behind with her arms clasped around me."

Educationist Bharati Ray, who gifted Mamata her book *Panch Projonmer Itikatha*, was amazed at the chief minister's memory. "She had wanted to read the book and had told a

party man to collect a copy from me. The moment I gave it to her she asked if the man had not got in touch with me!"

At the inauguration, Mamata paid a glowing tribute to Shuvaprasanna, describing him as "an institute". "I understand very little of art. What I like I say on the spot." She went on to dedicate the exhibition to "Shipra boudi", the painter's wife.

Shuvaprasanna gave her a tour, starting from a painting of the bard she quotes so often and whose songs she has introduced at traffic signals. Another painting with a crow atop a Tagore statue drew an amused smile.

The cameras, thwarted for a while by the guards, were waiting for her parting comments. But their ranks were scattered by Mamata's hurricane march to the door.

As the car zoomed out, the host was heard exclaiming: "Thank god, my sculptures did not get smashed in the melee!"