



KEN HERMANN

Bloom with a view

WORDS BY GILLIAN ORR

FLOWERS ARE a hugely important part of Indian culture, used in everything from temple rituals to festivals and parties – and Malik Ghat flower market is the largest of its kind in India. Located in Calcutta, next to the Hooghly river, it attracts more than 2,000 sellers each day, who flock to peddle their blooms amid frantic scenes.

Commercial photographer Ken Hermann first visited Calcutta three years ago, when he was shooting coal miners, one of the three or four personal projects he tries to complete every year.

On that trip, the Dane, now 35, visited the flower market, and ever since held on to the idea of returning to take portraits of the sellers, their magnificent garlands

often appearing in stark contrast to their own dusty and sweat-soaked attire.

He returned two months ago, accompanied by a local interpreter, and approached various traders with a view to taking their picture.

“There were different reactions,” says Hermann. “Because the market is so busy, the main concern was that they would lose customers while they posed. I paid some of them; others were happy to do it in exchange for prints; some just wanted to be a part of the project.”

Although there are female sellers at the market, the women were reluctant to have their picture taken, so Hermann

decided to make the project a male preserve.

His main concern, however, was what to use as a background for his subjects. The market was so chaotic, he decided to take the men down to the Hooghly, which leads into the sacred Ganges, for a more neutral setting, allowing the colour of the seller’s wares to stand out all the more.

“Sometimes people think my images are almost like paintings,” says Hermann. “They don’t believe they’re real. I like that in-between thing. I didn’t go there with any big ideas; I just wanted to take some beautiful portraits.” •

Prints are available from Hermann’s website, kenhermann.dk/limited-edition-prints