



SARMAYA

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ART

ECHOES — OF THE — LAND

ART BEARS WITNESS TO A CHANGING PLANET

3-20 NOVEMBER, 2022

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Rhinos and bears. The oldest paintings in India are of wild animals. They are etched on the sandstone slopes of Bhimbetka's prehistoric rock shelters. These Stone Age figures speak of an abiding human fascination with the natural world, and the equally human compulsion to draw all about it.

When an artist imitates a natural form, they're capturing something fleeting. A split-second of sunlight hitting water, muscles tensing under skin, breeze rippling through grass. Even as it is being perceived, the vision has vanished. Its imminent extinction lends poignance to the art and leaves the beholder with a yearning to seek their own moment of serendipity out in the wild.

This yearning has acquired a sharper urgency in the current epoch of the Anthropocene, the age shaped by man. As our greed and hubris destroys precious ecologies around the world, art has turned advocate for an endangered planet. Nourished for millennia by the infinite variety of nature and its boundless capacity for renewal, artists urge us now to listen, while we still can, to the fading echoes of the land.

We can start where we are by simply acknowledging our place within the republic of the wild. As Mayank Shyam does in the Transport series. Travelling every summer in pursuit of kinder weather, cityfolk are not so different from birds and fishes following ancient migratory trails.

A **worshipful gaze** renders even the most commonplace interactions with nature as

spiritual practice. Ram Singh Urveti sees the creator of all the world, Bada Dev, in the green sanctuary of a saja tree.

KP Pradeepkumar regards with reverence a river flowing through the forests of Kerala. Its tranquil progress is a balm, a mirage in a country still wracked by memories of floods.

Deadly as nature's fury can be, its silence is far more chilling. Art gives voice to the nameless dread that seizes us at the sight of a great river reduced to a trickle, as with Zarina Hashmi's Yamuna. In Sumit Chitara's imagining of a bountiful Sabarmati flowing through the heart of Ahmedabad, we're shown **what once was** and will never now be.

A return to innocence is not possible, but new paths to redemption can be imagined. Tushar and Mayur Vayeda plant **kernels of hope** by invoking the Warli goddess of fertility, Kansari.

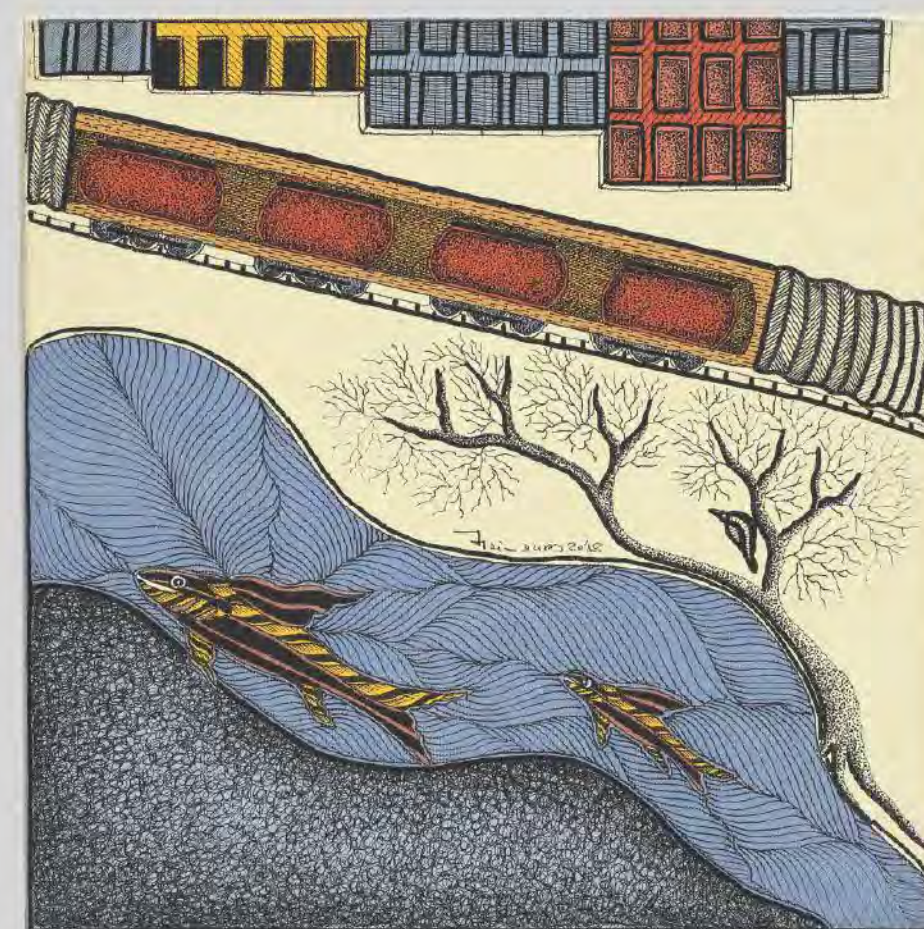
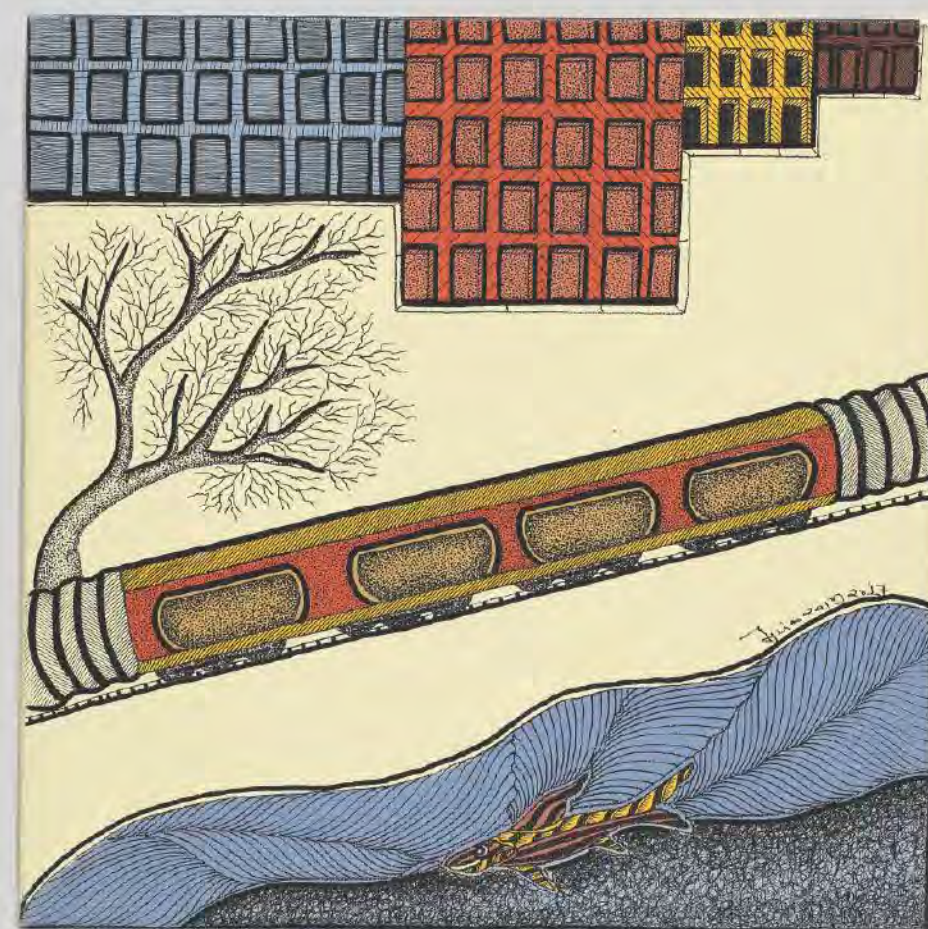
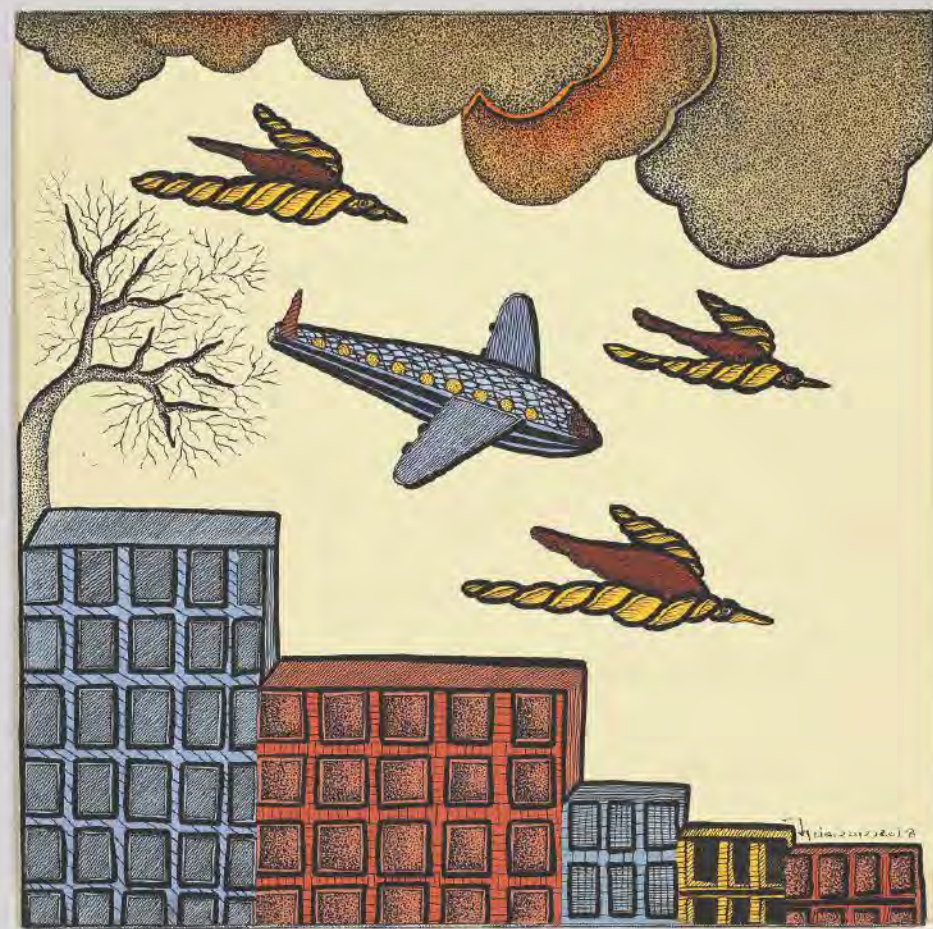
Like the seed she scatters, we too must strike roots once again in the soil. Come spring, green shoots will cover our careless tracks and any evidence at all that we once lived, promises Gopa Trivedi.

Indifferent to human plans, nature will endure. Then, if we've been listening to its echoes, we may get the chance to forge a different, more equal equation with the earth. One of gratitude, respect and grace. And a touch of that simple awe, which still radiates from a 30,000-year-old drawing of a rhino.

Mayank Shyam is from the Gond-Pradhan community in Madhya Pradesh. His art is never purely observational. Behind each painting is a philosophy, message or story. In the Transport series, he draws parallels between the seasonal migrations of animals and humans.

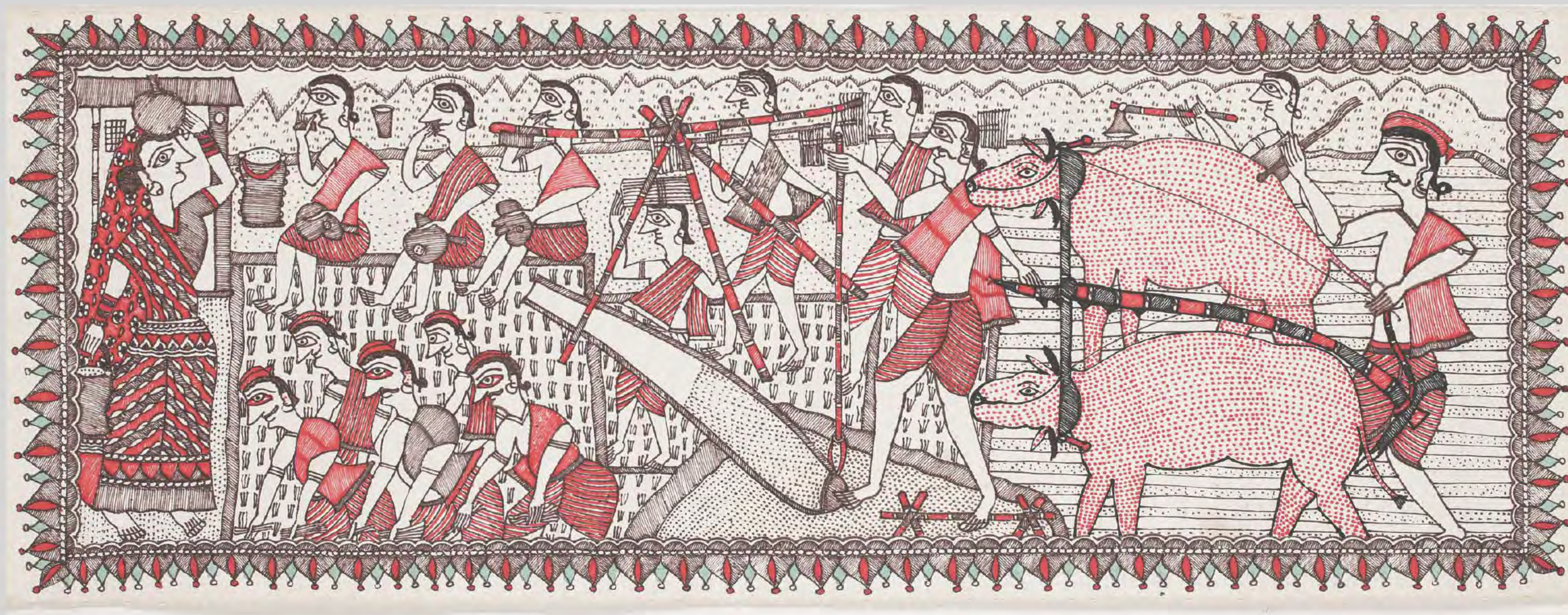
He says, “In my early years as an artist, I visited Mumbai and for the first time experienced a macro city—its crowds, tall buildings, and pace. I painted a canvas full of buildings, which tracks a very interesting behaviour of the cityfolk.

In Mumbai, I learned that many rich people leave the city when summer begins and come back only when it has cooled down. My painting showcases a plane and a bird alongside it to shed light on the many migrations taking place in the city. I found this similarity fascinating.”



Mayank Shyam (b. 1987)

Transport series (Plane I-V), 2018
Acrylic and ink on canvas



Mithila or Madhubani art originated in the Mithila region of eastern India. The art form often depicts landscapes teeming with a diversity of life.

In this work, Krishnanand Jha fills the canvas with details of each stage in the process of farming. Humans are shown driving cattle to plough fields, irrigating the land, and sowing saplings. Although nature is present here, the focus is on how humans transform the environment through labour.

Krishnanand Jha (1938-2018)

Farming, undated
Ink on paper



For the Bhil tribe of Madhya Pradesh, art is a device for marking events, preserving memories and capturing the community's deep connection with nature.

In Subhash Amliyar's composition, a figure reminiscent of Lord Ganesha is seen tilling a field aswirl with a diversity of life and colour. That and the distinctive dots bring a touch of the surreal to an otherwise unremarkable scene.

Subhash Amliyar (b.1985)

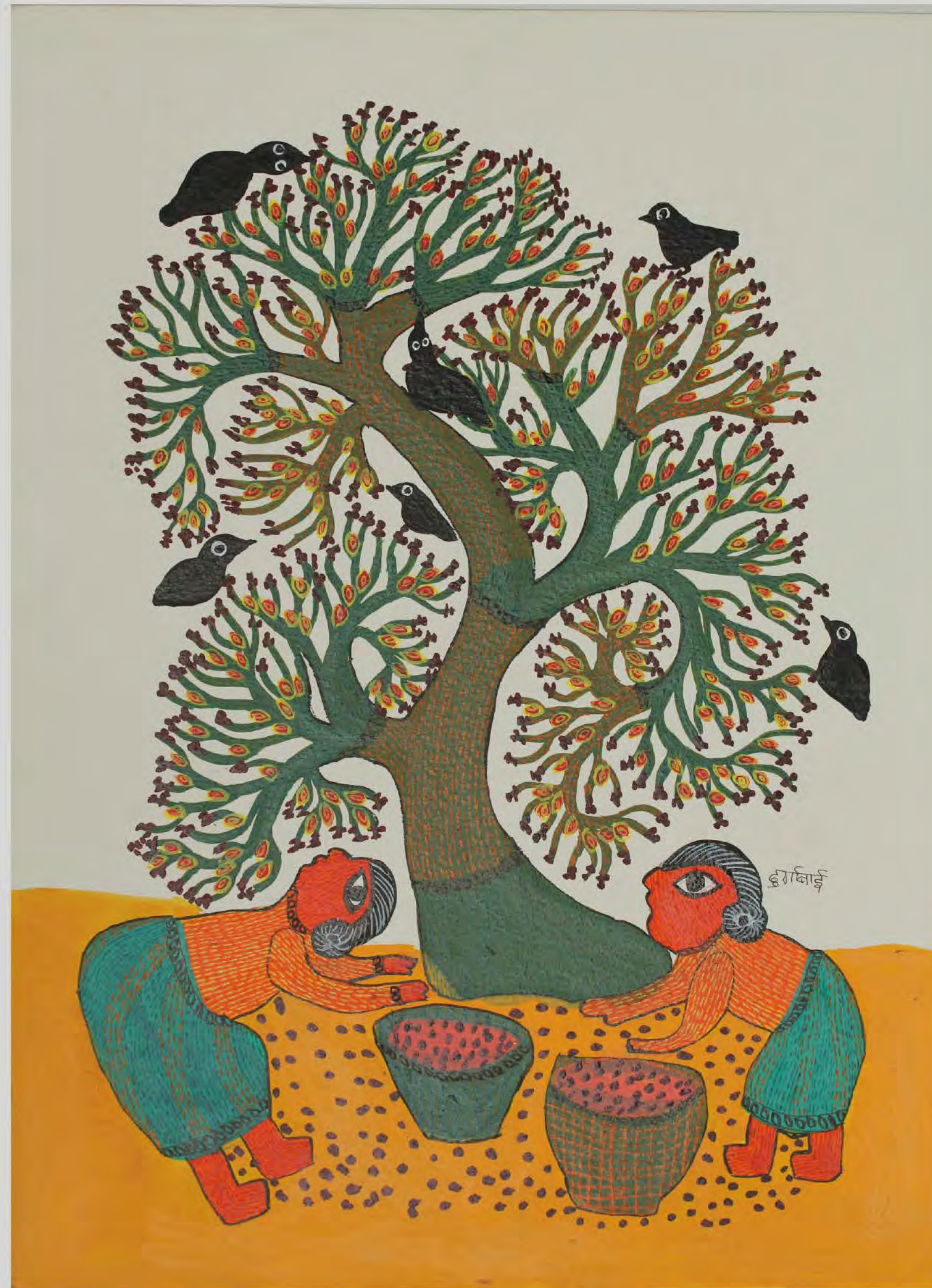
Ploughing (Hal Chalana), 2014
Acrylic on canvas



Bada Dev is the omnipresent creator of the Gond-Pradhan community in Madhya Pradesh. They believe he resides in the Saja tree, which grows abundantly in the forests surrounding their homes. Ram Singh Urveti invokes the deity in most of his paintings. Here, Bada Dev emerges from the centre of a Saja tree surrounded by the animals who feature in the Gond creation myth.

Ram Singh Urveti (b. 1970)

Bada Dev, 2019
Acrylic on canvas



The Mahua is considered the tree of life among the Gond-Pradhans of Madhya Pradesh. It plays a central role in the rituals and ceremonies of the community.

Durga Bai Vyam conveys this bond in her Untitled work. Using a repetitive pattern resembling grains of rice, she recreates an everyday scene that plays out each year during the early days of summer, when women gather fallen Mahua flowers to pickle, ferment and preserve.

Durgabai Vyam (b. 1972)

Untitled (Tree of Life), undated
Gouache and ink on paper



Manisha Gera Baswani captures the electric essence of a summer storm in Aandhi. The artist runs a multi-disciplinary practice informed by her fascination with Indian miniatures, and folk and wall painting traditions.

In this precise, miniature-like composition, she draws from recollections of childhood summers to show a tree lit by a copper halo, foreshadowing a storm.

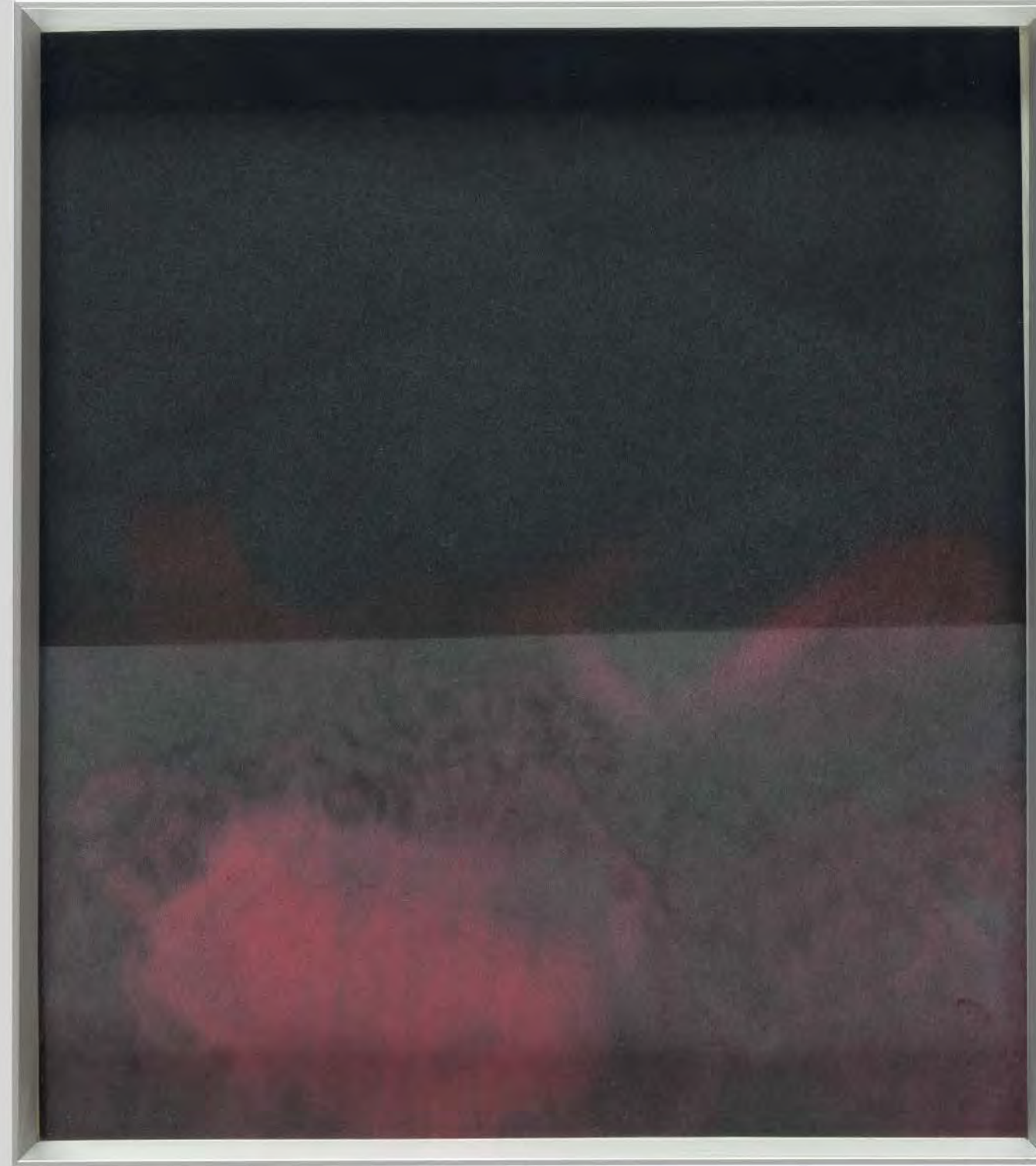
Manisha Gera Baswani (b. 1967)

Aandhi, 2017
Watercolour and gouache on
shikishi board



Aditi Singh (b. 1976)

Untitled (Horizon line, Turku), 2015
Ink on washi paper



Aditi Singh (b. 1976)

Untitled (Horizon line, New Delhi), 2016
Ink on kozo paper

Aditi Singh's horizons are meditative translations of her experiences walking through the landscapes of Turku (Finland) and New Delhi. She uses painting as a reflective process to connect to the rhythms of the natural world. Her art takes us deeper into wild spaces where we may revel in the slowness of life. Aditi's process involves the use of ink and charcoal in a repetitive, layered way.



What Pradeepkumar KP describes as an ‘obsession with nature’ is equally an assertion of his identity as a native of the Malabar coast. This work is a paradox: A tranquil river flows from the mountains and undulates across the countryside in Kerala. Beneath this stillness stir memories of the recent, disastrous floods that wracked the state. The artist weaves a narrative centred around the river, quietly drawing our attention to its power to nourish and destroy life.

Pradeepkumar KP (b. 1970)

The River Flows in me (Ennilekku Ozhukunna nadi),
undated, Mixed media



The Warlis are early inhabitants of the northern Sahyadri region of Maharashtra and southern Gujarat. Their belief system is shaped by their natural environment. The fundamental tenet of the Warli faith is to take from nature only what is necessary for the survival of the community. Sadashiv Mashe gives this form using a fishing metaphor; there's enough life left in the sea so the ecosystem can propagate itself for seasons to come. By following this principle, fisherfolk honour Giraah, the Warli spirit of the sea.

Sadashiv Jivya Mashe (b. 1960)

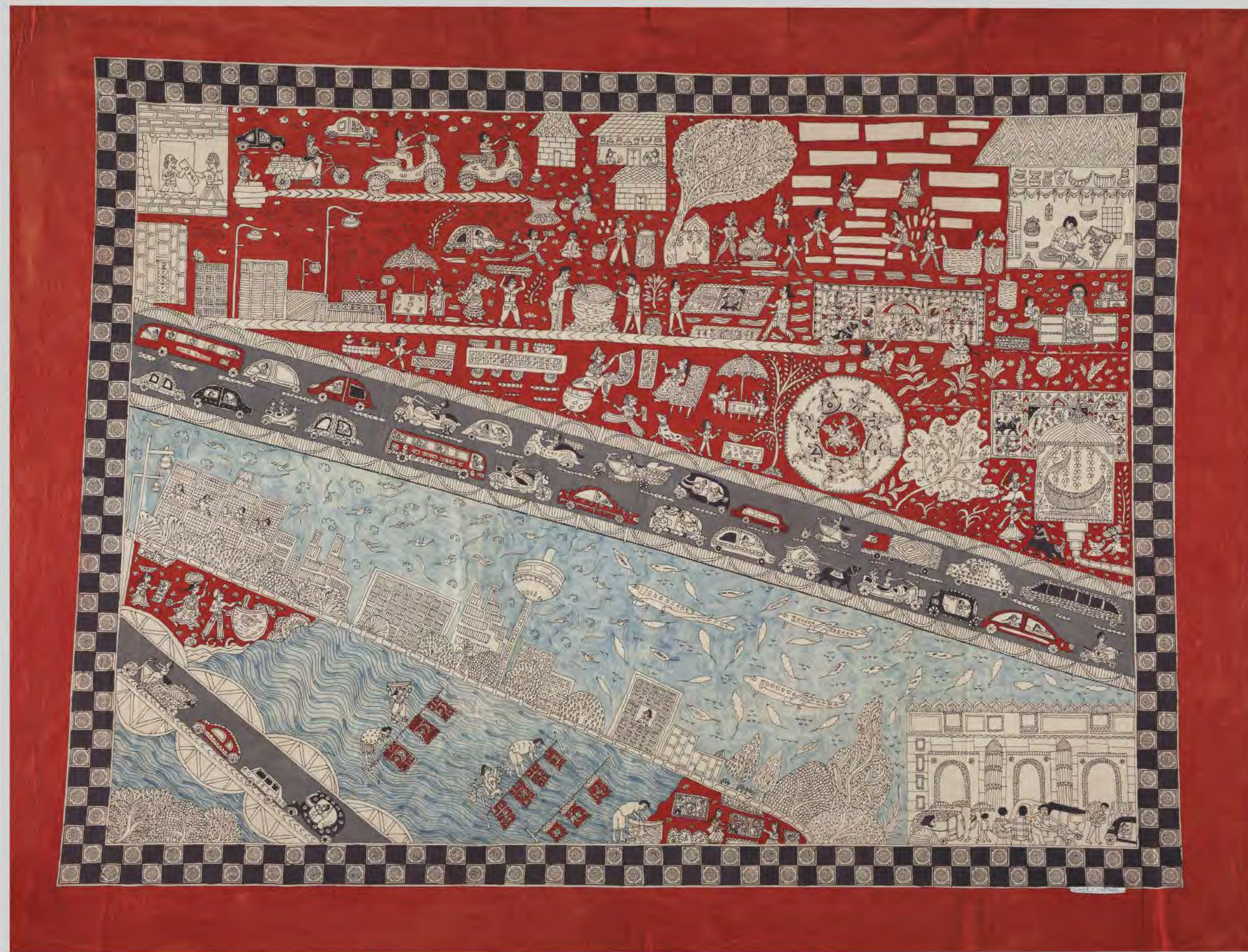
Fish Net (Paagir), undated
Poster colours painted on traditionally
treated cloth with bamboo stick



Delhi III is part of Zarina Hashmi's celebrated Delhi series. This striking woodcut shows the river Yamuna, a lifeline of her beloved city. The artist drew the river from memory, fashioning it as geographic border. Witness to the horrors of the India-Pakistan partition at age 10, Zarina dedicated her career to exploring the idea of home and belonging, and the pains of displacement. In her work, we see a once-mighty river that nurtured civilisations now reduced to a mere line on a map.

Zarina Hashmi (1937-2020)

Delhi III, 2000
Woodcut print with black ink on handmade paper
pasted on cartridge paper



Mata-ni-pachedi is an artistic tradition practised by the Vaghris of Gujarat. It was a drought that brought the community to Khanpur in Ahmedabad where the artform flourished on the banks of the Sabarmati. In Patang, Sumit Chitara moves away from the traditional imagery perfected by his forefathers to create a contemporary Mata-ni-Pachedi artist's view of Ahmedabad. The Sabarmati is a prominent presence here; artists are seen washing their canvases in the river. In recent decades, industrial pollution and the concretisation of its banks have endangered this ancient river and artform.

Sumit Chitara (b. 2004)

Patang, 2019
Alum, lamp black, natural colours on
cotton textile



The banks of River Sabarmati have been home to the Chitara family for over two centuries. Its waters have sustained the age-old textile art tradition of Mata-ni-Pachedi by deepening and fastening the colour of its natural dyes. The creation of a Mata textile begins and ends at the Sabarmati. The fabric is first washed, stretched, and beaten on the banks of the river. After it goes through a series of processes of dyeing, hand block-printing, painting, and colouring, the cloth is once again washed and dried by the Sabarmati.

In recent decades, however, the health of the Sabarmati has suffered because of human conflict and pollution. It has also dwindled in force due to the building of the riverfront project and embankments. These developments have damaged the Mata-ni-Pachedi artist's trade and threaten to sever a centuries-old bond between river and art.

Mata ni Pachedi (Video Installation)

Sanjay Chitara (b. 1978),
Footage © Sarmaya Arts Foundation

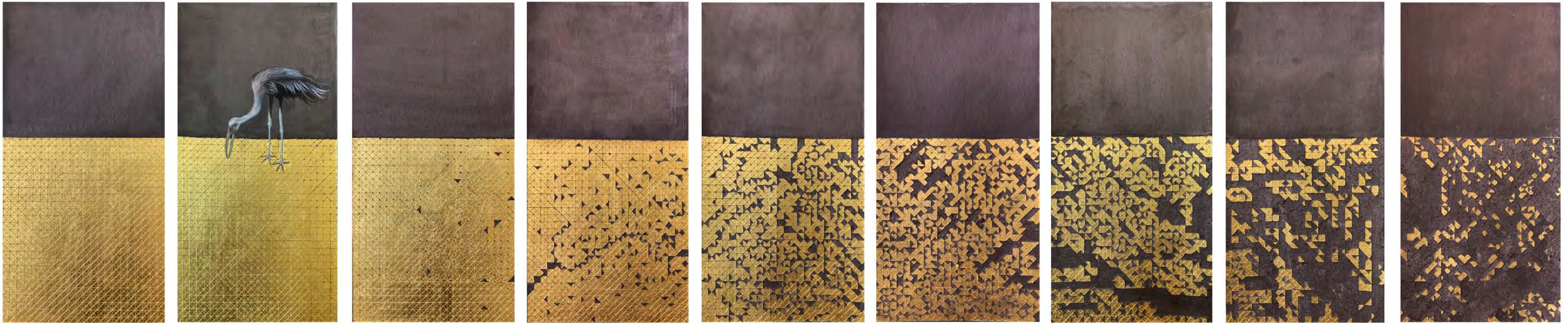


The desolation of Chandan Bez Baruah's landscape speaks volumes. It bears witness to an ecosystem brutalised by rampant urbanisation. To the artist, there's a close link between the collapsing of natural and political diversities in his homeland. Drawing on nostalgia, he returns to the forested hills of Assam and laments the permanent bruises left upon them by tarred roads, tea gardens and other signs of human encroachment.

Chandan Bez Baruah (b. 1979)

Somewhere in Northeast India Pt-I, 2020
Woodcut print

Gopa Trivedi's work illuminates our individual and collective anxieties about a slow degradation eating at the ground beneath our feet. The stork in this composition symbolises apathy. Gopa is inspired by Indian miniature painting traditions to create intricately wrought works that explore ideas of degeneration, contagion, and transformation.



Gopa Trivedi (b. 1987)

Untitled, undated
Gold and graphite on wasli



Created after the catastrophic 2018 Kerala floods, Dibin Thilakan's painting obscures boundaries between land and water. The floods caused widespread displacement and damage across the state. While he highlights the helplessness of the average citizen awaiting relief on rooftops, the artist also expresses hope that the event has built lasting solidarities within society.

Dibin K. Thilakan (b. 1989)

Untitled (Kerala Flood), 2018
Gouache on Japanese paper



Tushar and Mayur Vayeda retell another Warli legend in this work. There's a belief in the community that in each life cycle of the earth, waves of natural and man-made disasters will strike until eventually, all life is destroyed. From this devastation, a new world will be born. The artists employ this myth in a contemporary, pandemic-informed context to suggest that among the ruins lie the possibilities of regeneration.

Tushar and Mayur Vayeda (b. 1987 & b. 1992)

The Wave, 2021
Cow dung background on traditionally
treated cloth, white water colour

Soghra Khurasani's landscapes are an ode to the defiant resilience of life. Serene on the surface, her grassland vistas reveal tiny scratches and fissures on closer inspection. Repeated exploitation and state neglect have cut deep wounds on the land. But beneath the scars lies the perennial promise of spring.



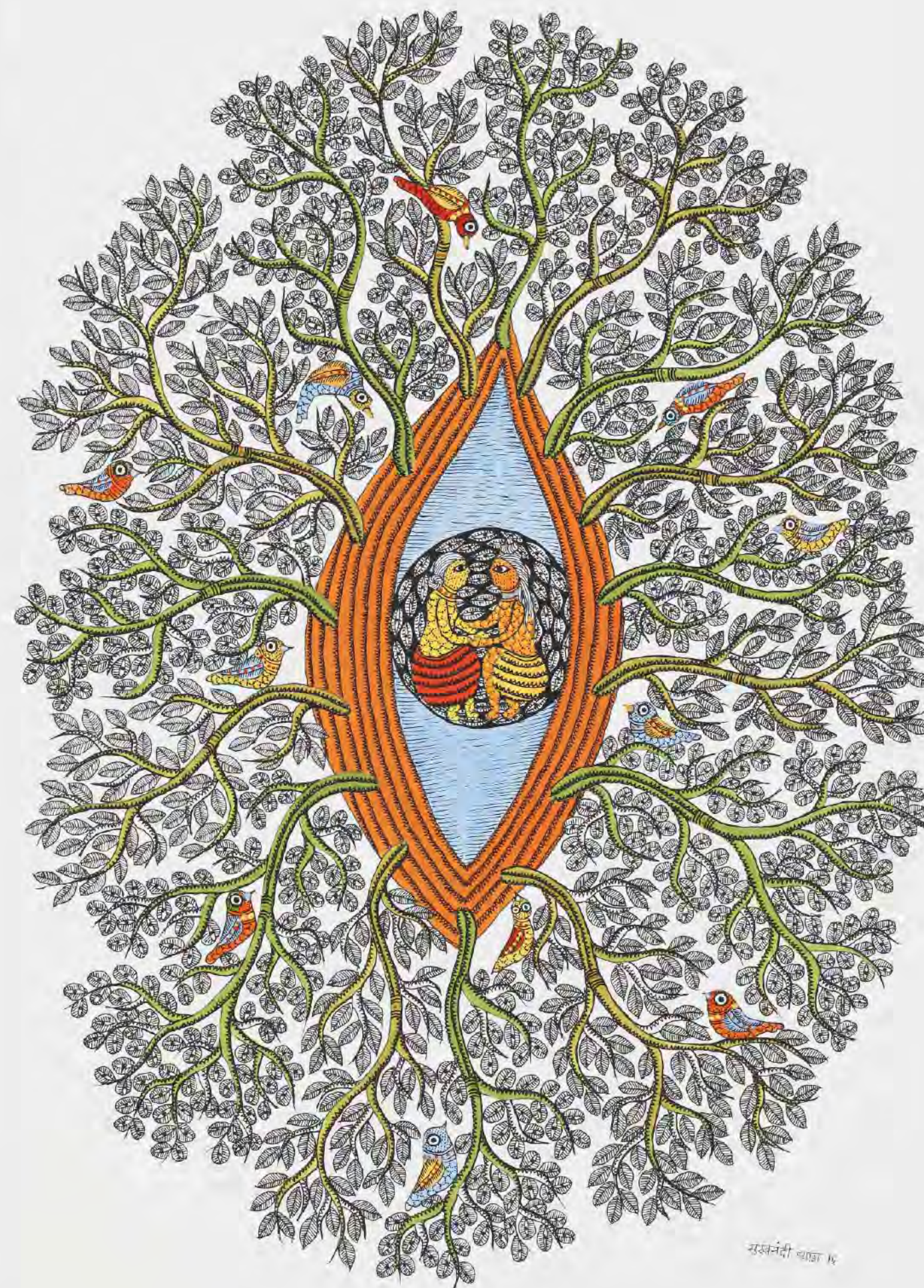
Soghra Khurasani (b. 1983)

Shadows under my sky - 4.
2021
Woodblock and woodcut print
on paper



Soghra Khurasani (b. 1983)

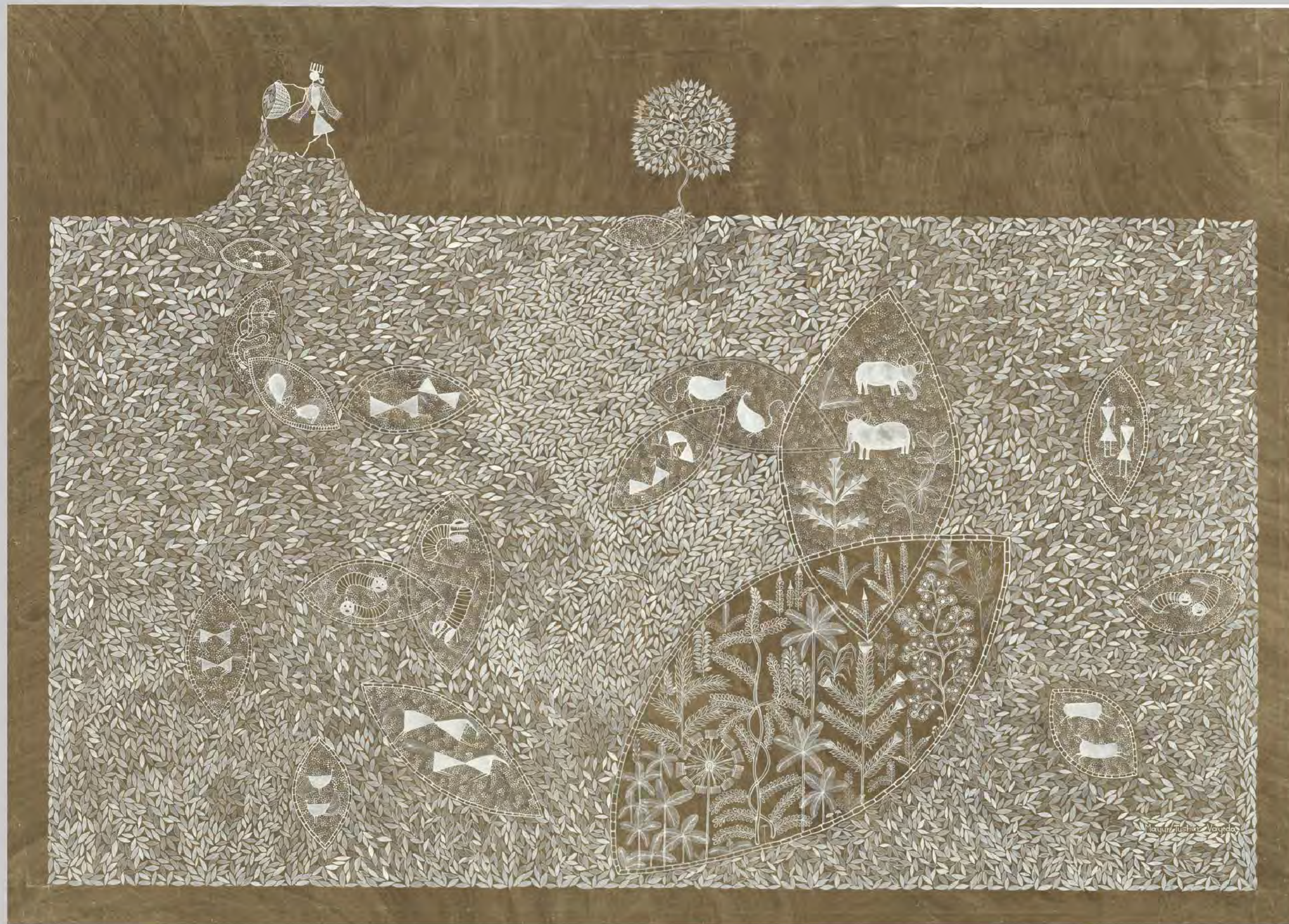
Shadows under my sky - 4.
2021
Woodblock



To see the world as it really is, our eyes must first be 'awakened' to enlightenment. Sukhnandi Vyam explores this idea using his signature motif of human eyes, which surround the omniscient third eye of Lord Shiva. In the centre are the figures of Shiva and his consort Parvati, watched by all creation.

Sukhnandi Vyam (b. 1983)

Untitled (Mahadev ka Netra),
2015
Acrylic on paper



The Warli way of life is the way of the forest. The spirits worshipped by the tribe are personifications of natural phenomena. One such spirit is the subject of Tushar and Mayur Vayeda's painting, Kansari, named for the goddess who sows the seeds that populate the earth with plants, animals and people. Her legend represents rebirth, renewal and the interconnectedness of all life.

Tushar and Mayur Vayeda (b. 1987 & b. 1992)

Kansari (Goddess of Seeds), 2021
Cow dung background on naturally treated cloth,
white water colour

Rithika Merchant roots her art-making - visually and materially - within the context of sustainability. She uses recycled paper and repurposed materials to create a language of consciousness to voice ecological concerns. In this work, she creates a utopian land of plenty to which human-like figures help themselves freely, without sparing a thought as to how this paradise might sustain itself.



Rithika Merchant (b.1986)

Harvest, A Land of Plenty, 2020
Mixed media collage with gouache,
ink and magazine cut-outs on
paper



Jethro Buck attempts to draw our attention away from ourselves and into a contemplation of treetops and the limitless space beyond. Through the canopy, we get a glimpse at the profound infinity of the universe. To the artist, the gold represents unity and the trees, diversity. He invites us to observe nature's timeless sentinels and consider how fleeting is our own existence.

Jethro Buck (b. 1986)

The Canopy, 2021
Walnut ink and gold leaf on
hemp paper

This work is inspired by a Hindi poem by Pash, the pen-name of Avtar Singh Sandhu. मैं घास हूँ (I am grass) is an anthem of dissent. In Gopa Trivedi's painting, the gradual progress of the grass to cover the whole canvas holds out hope for a fresh start. The poem in its original Hindi

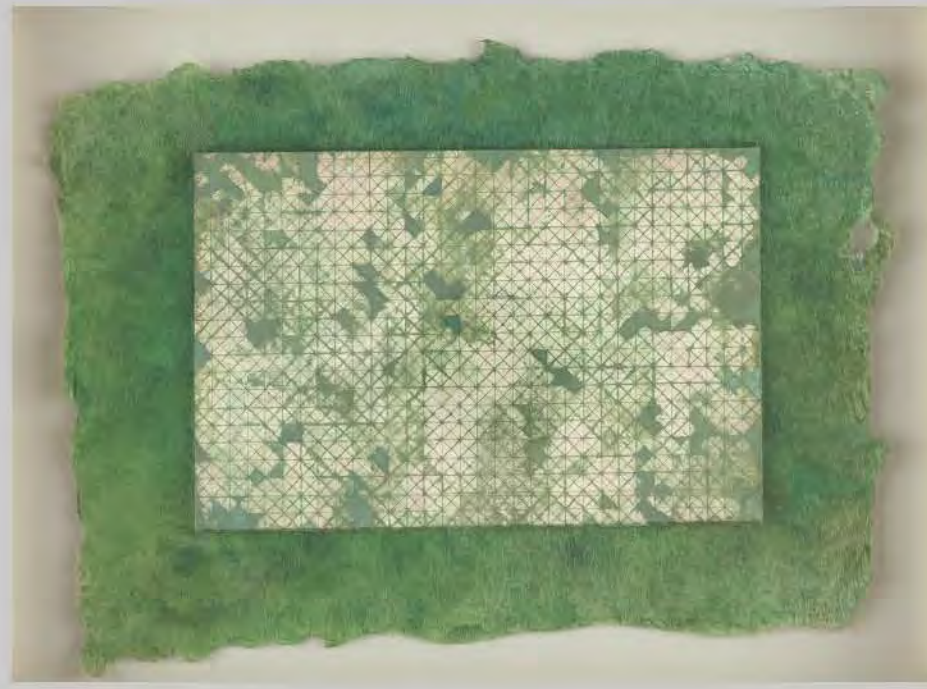
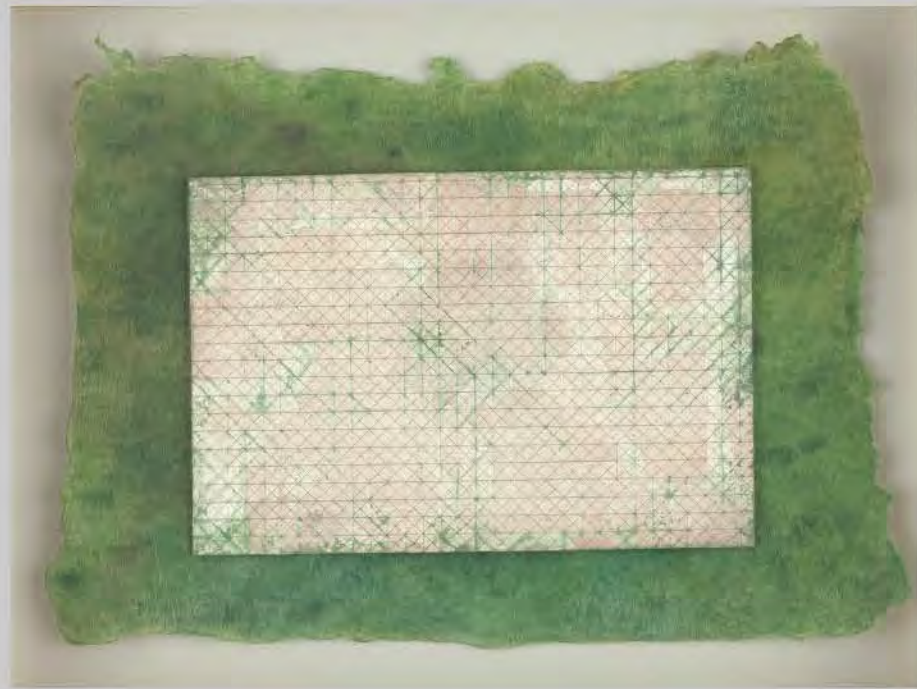
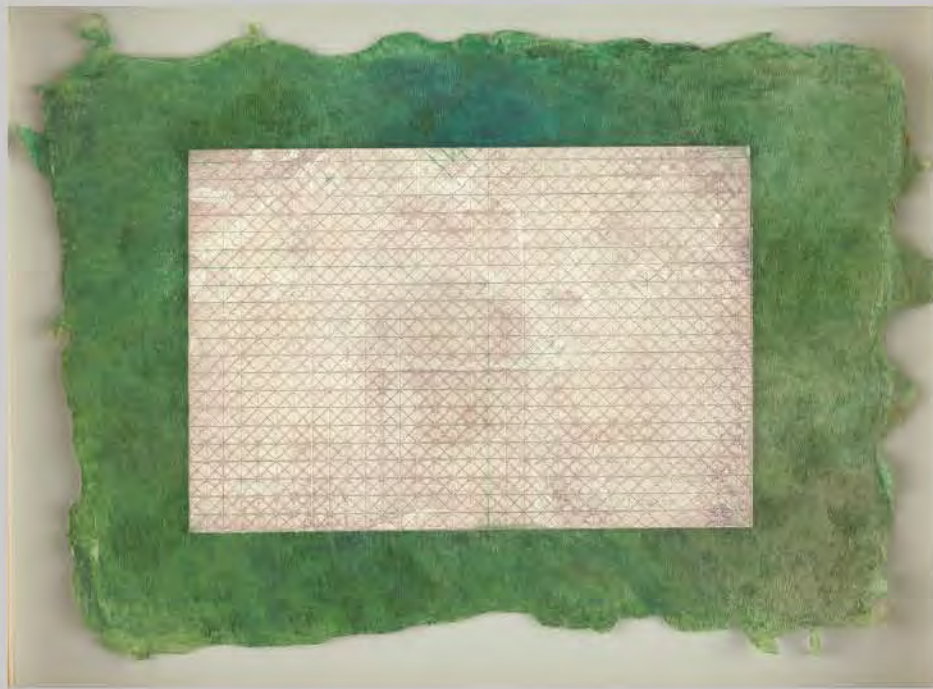
मैं घास हूँ
मैं आपके हर किए-धरे पर उग आऊँगा

बम फेंक दो चाहे विश्वविद्यालय पर
बना दो होस्टल को मलबे का ढेर
सुहागा फिरा दो भले ही हमारी झोपड़ियों पर

मेरा क्या करोगे
मैं तो घास हूँ हर चीज़ पर उग आऊँगा

बंगे को ढेर कर दो
संगरूर मिटा डालो
धूल में मिला दो लुधियाना ज़िला
मेरी हरियाली अपना काम करेगी...
दो साल... दस साल बाद
सवारियाँ फिर किसी कंडक्टर से पूछेंगी
यह कौन-सी जगह है
मुझे बरनाला उतार देना
जहाँ हरे घास का जंगल है

मैं घास हूँ, मैं अपना काम करूँगा
मैं आपके हर किए-धरे पर उग आऊँगा ।



Gopa Trivedi (b.1987)

Untitled, 2019
Gouache and silver foil on wasli



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