

Title: Play-Forms: Recent Works by Partha Pratim Deb

Dates: 27 June – 9 August, 2025

Place: Emami Art, Ground Floor

Overview

Emami Art's solo exhibition of Partha Pratim Deb (b. 1943, age 82) showcases his distinctive works created over the last two decades. The exhibition includes his vibrant paintings, expressive drawings, playful paper mesh and fabric objects that blur the line between toy and sculpture, demonstrating his genuine engagement with scale, forms, and spatial relationships.

Trained at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan, and MS University, Baroda, in the 1960s—two pivotal institutions in modern Indian art—Deb absorbed the essence of both environments and gradually forged his own highly experimental and unconventional path, diverging from the narrative-figurative and abstract art trends of his time. His artistic position within the Indian art historical canon is that of a bridge-builder and innovator, one who synthesized the philosophical approach of Santiniketan with the progressive experimentalism of Baroda.

As a dedicated pedagogue teaching from 1972 at Rabindra Bharati University, where he served as its Dean from 1998 to 2003 and retiring in 2005, Deb has profoundly shaped generations of artists through his teaching. His influence extends far beyond his own creative output, having mentored countless students such as Adip Dutta, Samindra Majumdar who have gone on to establish significant careers in contemporary Indian art. His pedagogical approach, much like his artistic practice, emphasized experimentation, conceptual rigor, and the courage to challenge conventional boundaries.

His work embodies a complex blend of criticality and creativity, reflecting on the ideology and meaning of art while embracing the magic and pleasure of creating it. This dual engagement—both intellectual and sensual—has been a hallmark of his practice and teaching philosophy, inspiring students to think deeply about art's role while never losing sight of its fundamental joy. With a career spanning over six decades, Partha Pratim Deb has produced a vast and diverse body of work. This exhibition presents his recent drawings, paintings, and, most significantly, his not-so-widely-shown fabric sculptures, representing his late style.

Richa Agarwal's Statement

Emami art is delighted to present *Play-Forms*, a solo exhibition by Partha Pratim Deb. Deb stands out uniquely in the contemporary art scene through his versatility and prolific output. Beyond his artistic practice, he is renowned as an accomplished pedagogue who has inspired generations of students through his teaching at Rabindra Bharati University's painting department. We first showcased his

distinctive style in a solo exhibition at our gallery in 2020. I am particularly fond of his unconventional works—drawn to his playful approach that seamlessly blends criticality with creativity, seriousness with whimsy, and meaning with ambiguity across his paintings and drawings. A main attraction of this exhibition is his rarely exhibited fabric sculptures, crafted playfully using unconventional materials and techniques.

This exhibition presents a curated selection of his recent works, demonstrating extraordinary maturity and creative freedom. Art enthusiasts and students alike will find this show exciting, thought-provoking, and worthy of critical discussion.

**Richa Agarwal,
CEO, Emami Art**

Biography of the Artist

Partha Pratim Deb was born in 1943 in Sylhet District, now in Bangladesh, to a mathematician father. The family migrated to Agartala, Tripura, in 1948, soon after the Partition – where he completed his school education. In Agartala, he received private training in painting from renowned artist Shailesh Chandra Deb Barma, a disciple of Nandalal Bose. Deb later studied fine arts at Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, and MS University, Baroda. As a distinguished teacher, he taught painting at Rabindra Bharati University for over three decades, retiring as the Dean of the Faculty of Visual Arts in 2005. Deb has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including *Gestures* at Emami Art Gallery, Kolkata (2020); *Aicon* Gallery, New York (2006); *Play for Joy of Seeing* at Aakriti Art Gallery, Kolkata (2006); Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata (1997); and Academy of Fine Arts (1974, 1976, 1978). His work has also been showcased in various duo and group exhibitions, such as *Leela* at Aakriti Art Gallery, Kolkata (2009), *Indian Surrealism, Diversified Fantasy, Endangered Earth* at Aakriti Art Gallery, Kolkata (2008); *Glimpses of Contemporary Bengal Art* at Birla Academy of Art and Culture (Kolkata, 2006); *Folk in Modern* at Aakriti Art Gallery (Kolkata, 2006); *Lines* at Birla Academy of Art & Culture (Kolkata, 2005); *New Wave in Bengal Art* at Akar Prakar (Kolkata, 2005); *Contemporary Art Exhibition* at Chitrakoot Art Gallery (Kolkata, 2002); and *Art of Bengal* at CIMA (Kolkata, 2000), among others. A member of Painter's Orchestra, an artists' group in Kolkata, Partha Pratim Deb lives and works in Kolkata.