

# Dark worlds unearthed

## VISUAL ARTS

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The earth hides ceaseless wonders and horrors — often in plain sight — for those who care to look closely enough. *All that is Hidden* was revealed to viewers at a recent exhibition by the same name held at Emami Art by artists who were divided by age and artistic practices but united by their ability to look beyond the obvious. The show opened with Ghana Shyam Latua building a big picture out of hundreds of thousands of pin-pricks and minuscule etchings on paper to mimic the texture of the rough terrain of Santiniketan. Arindam Chatterjee unearthed primordial beings in his translucent watercolours and Debashish Paul achieved a similar effect in his video installation and photographs, while Vishal Kumar Gupta's thick, swirling layers of oil seemed to peer right into the molten, hot core of the earth (picture, left). Arindam Adhikary, too, presented a cross-section of sorts of the earth's crust in mesmerising patterns in ink and Shilpi Sharma caught Gaia in the throes of creation in her stoneware and natural pulp sculptures. Santanu Debnath foretold the apoca-



lypse in his landscapes on palm leaves done with fabric paint.

Bholanath Rudra's *Uninhabited Land*, where everything is bathed in a spectral glow, had the surreal aura that has come to be the artist's signature; equally surreal were Saibal Das's photographs of landscapes cloaked in mist. Ruma Choudhury's *Wrapped Bodies* out of *objet trouvé* was eerie and Janhavi Khemka's woodcut diorama of life in lockdown — the stillness of her miniature room was reminiscent of living in suspended animation during the pandemic — reminded



viewers that the line separating the real from the surreal can be quite thin.

It is not always the sinister and the surreal that attract the artistic eye. Lalit Mohan Sen's exquisite silver gelatin print captured the magical details in the mundane. Kartick Chandra Pyne painted worlds of fantasy à la Joan Miró whereas Ajit Kumar Das took inspiration from Mughal miniatures, while N.S. Bendre's watercolours revealed the depth of meaning that can be conveyed with the lightest of washes and a few minimalist brushstrokes. Ali Akbar PN traced the her-

itage of shared spaces in meticulously executed and minutely detailed paintings and Prasanta Sahu's intricate tapestry recorded the passing of a week in 2023 by weaving newspaper headlines into the fabric.

Just as Alice's journey in Wonderland got curiously and curiously, the path from one floor of Emami Art to another took viewers to a show where the hints of cataclysm found in *All that is Hidden* were sharpened into a manifold, plunging them into the dystopian and the discomfiting world of Arindam Chatterjee's *Not A Dream, Not Peace, Not Love*. Chatterjee captures the nightmarish reality we live in using a blend of watercolour, charcoal and ink on paper that gives these scenes an otherworldly feel. Writhing and contorted bodies inhabit a world, enslaved and treated worse than humans (picture, right). In fact, there is a deliberate attempt to make it impossible to distinguish between man and beast in this scathing criticism of the savagery of humans. The creatures are often caged in prisons of their own making in settings that could be embodiments of the works of Kafka and Dostoevsky. But by no means is Chatterjee's criticism and his vision devoid of empathy. There is a glimmer of hope even in this sphere, but its inhabitants are too filled with pain and hatred to be able to spot it.