

Pankaj Sarma

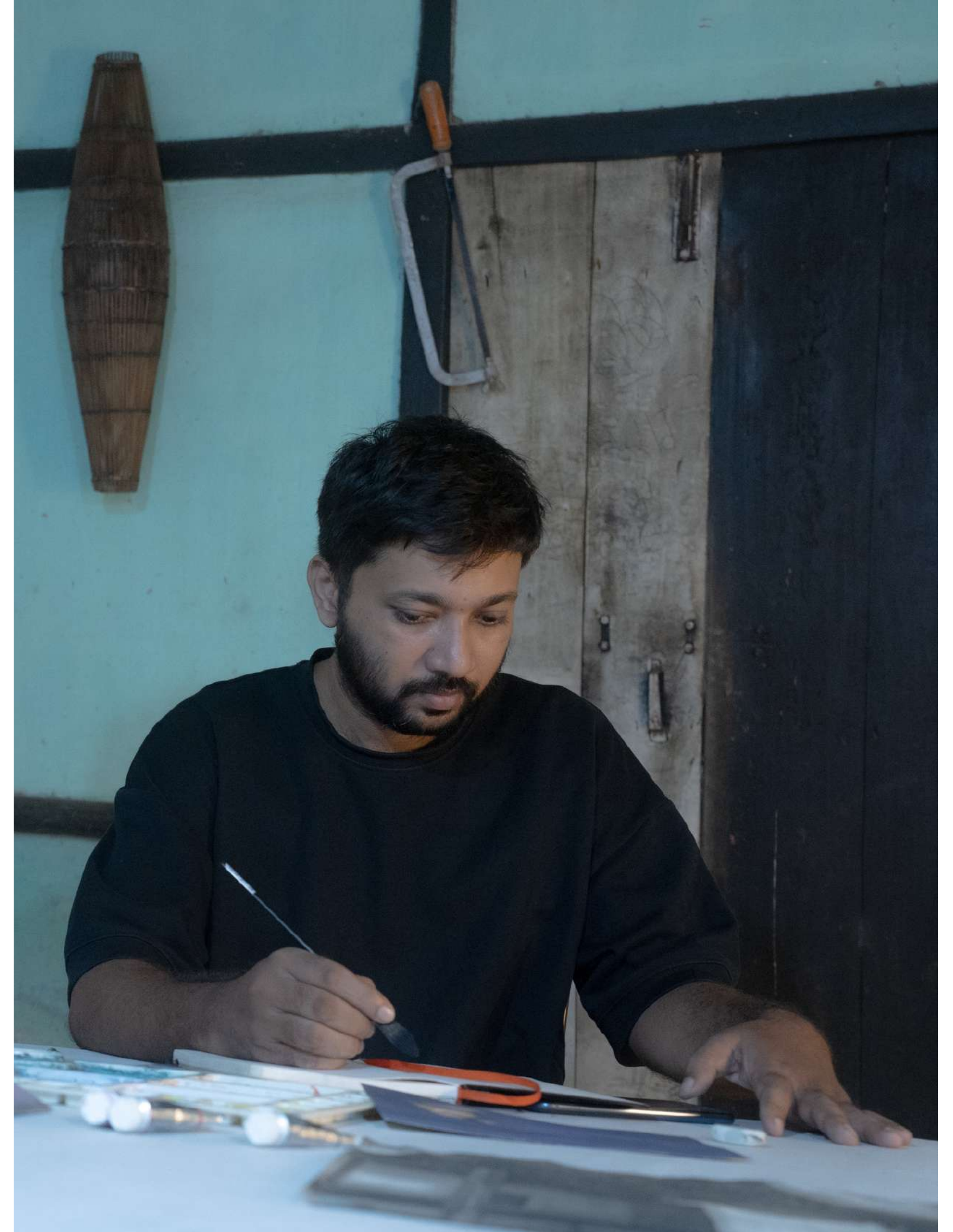
Portfolio



Pankaj Sarma is a contemporary artist based in Assam, whose work broadly explores ecology, landscape, memory, sustainability and human-animal conflict. Rooted in the fluvial landscapes of Assam and the riverine social and ecological shifts, his work critically explores the transformation of these terrains, their temporality and the spatial erosion within the paradigms of the Anthropocene. Central to his practice is how altered topographies impact the collective memory of a space, with a specific focus on the profound psychological distress, or solastalgia, engendered by the radical ecological shifts.

Having grown up in a riverine village, the Kaldiya river occupies a central position in Sarma's mnemonic geography, standing as a witness to gradual, often imperceptible erosions. A formative period of return to his village after formal education, with extensive travel through the Brahmaputra Valley, profoundly shaped his methodological and material exploration. This facilitated an engagement not only with the geographical and ecological strata of the region but also with its complex social and temporal layers.

Watch the artist discuss his practice





The deeper engagements with the geographical space and communities influenced in making his practice expansive. Initially trained in painting, he recently started adopting site-specific and traditional materials to create immersive multimedia installations.

In recent projects, the artist documents the multifaceted changes within Assam's riverine landscapes as they correlate to conceptions of home and belonging. The work highlights how diverse riverine communities confront the loss of domicile and livelihood due to catastrophic flooding, erratic weather patterns, and state-led development projects such as large dams and embankments.

This untitled series is part of Pankaj Sarma's long-term project on the shifting ecologies of Assam's riverine landscapes, reflecting on terrains continually reshaped by floods, erosion, drought, and human intervention.

Rooted in the idea of solastalgia, the grief of environmental loss, the works explore how home and memory fracture when the land transforms. The images carry this sense of dislocation: a body lying on a dry riverbed awaiting rain, the skeletal presence of a tree, a fisherman with his trap, a broken boat once tied to livelihood, and fragile houses beside drying streams or in puddles left by vanished rivers. Rendered in the fluid medium of gouache, these scenes embody the instability of water, echoing both impermanence and resilience.

Installation view
IMAGINARIUM 5.0
Emami Art
2025, Kolkata





The series is both testimony and resistance: fragments that mourn imperiled landscapes yet affirm the resilience of those who remain tethered to them, continually rebuilding amid climate uncertainty and loss.

Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam

Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam





Sarma draws from Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence: forms of ecological harm that unfold gradually – erosion, attrition, scarcity- often out of sight, but with deep consequences. In Assam, this slow violence manifests in the everyday loss of land, the invisible recalibration of sustenance, and the psychic toll on marginal communities.

Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam

Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam





"My main interest is the temporality of a landscape and how it affects our collective memory of a space due to a deep emotional distress caused by the environmental changes."

Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam

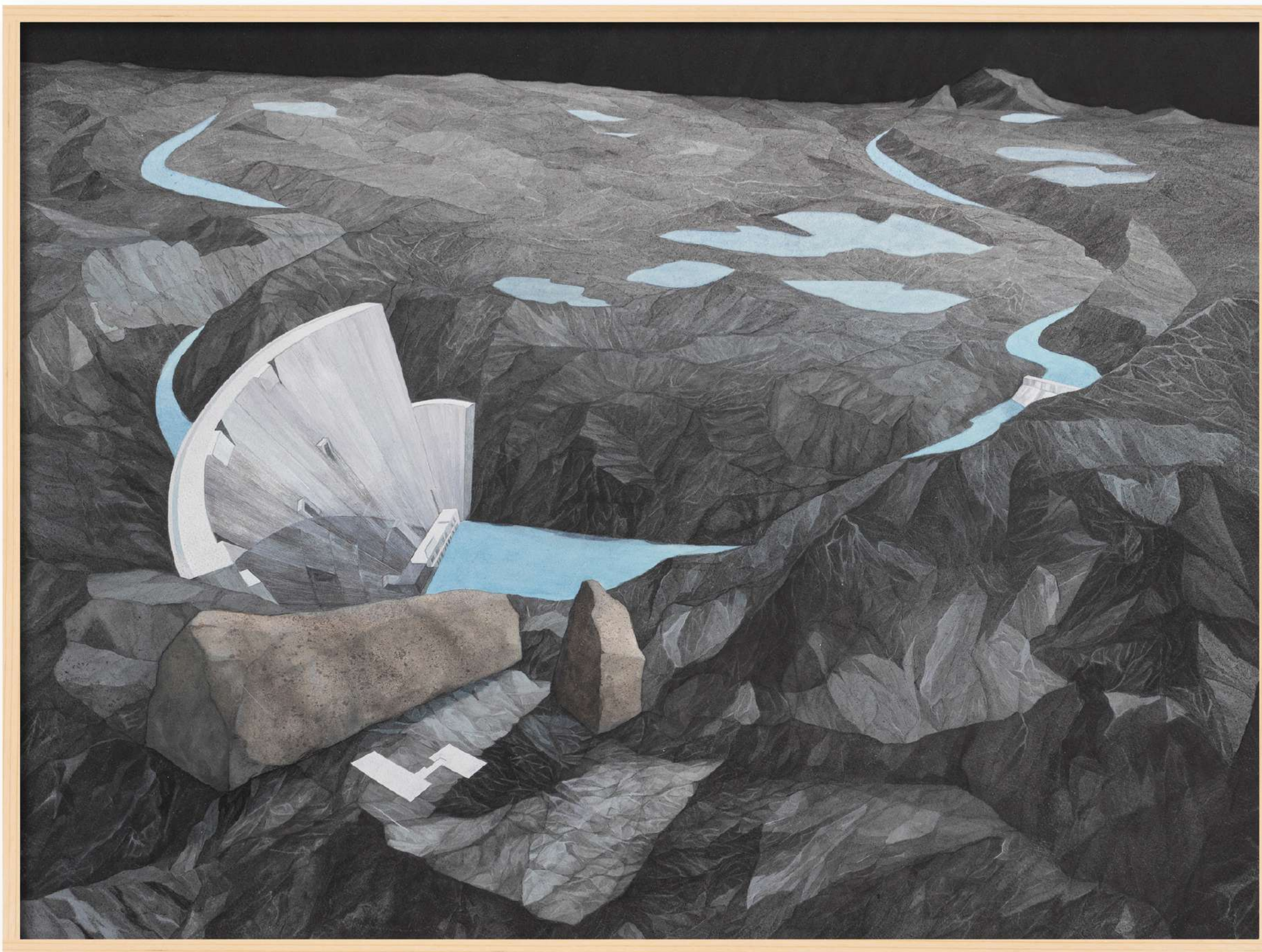
Untitled
Gouache on paper
15 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam





"My goal is to construct a sensory space-place where viewers can enter, navigate, and feel fragmented memories, vulnerability, and loss embedded in the landscape I depict. It is important for me to engage with the space and understand it, which allows me to respond to the space during the development of the artistic process."

Untitled
Gouache on paper
17 7/8 x 15 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam



This work follows an apocalyptic bird's-eye view of a riverine landscape transformed by human intervention. Taking reference from satellite imagery, the painting centres on a massive dam structure, symbolising the anthropogenic imprint and domination over vital waterbodies. A muted palette and fractured forms convey the stark aftermath of such intervention. The work invites viewers to reflect on the lasting consequences of altering nature and the fragile balance between advancement and ecological survival. The river emerges as a site of contested futures, its winding course a reminder of both resilience and vulnerability in the face of monumental change.

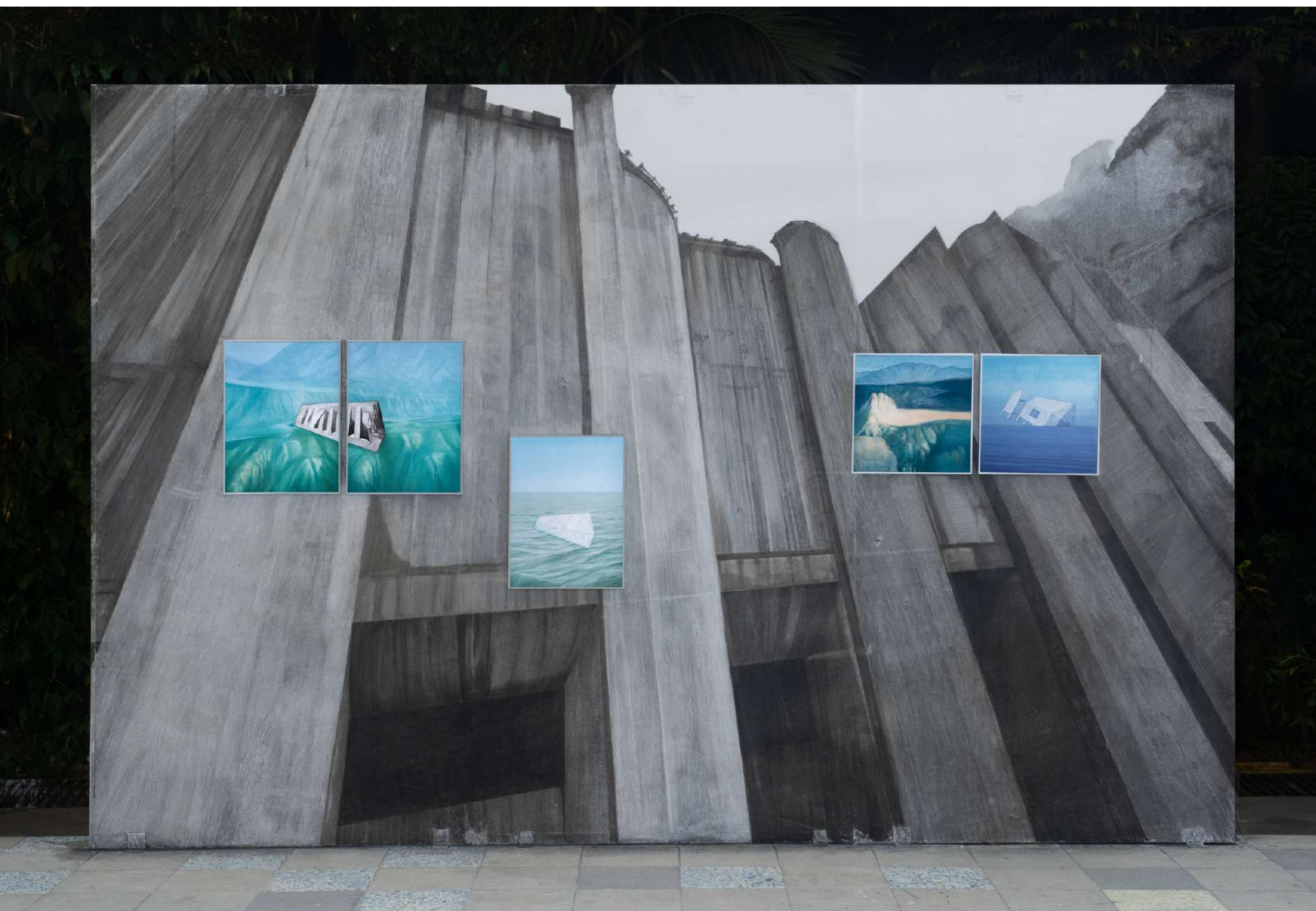
Untitled
Gouache on paper
22 x 29 1/2 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam



Detail
Untitled
Gouache on paper
22 x 29 1/2 in.
2025, Patacharkuchi, Assam



Installation view
सचकहेँतो - *To Tell the Truth*
Somaia Vidyavihar University
2025, Mumbai



This site-specific, large-scale charcoal drawing of a landscape (of a river dam) displayed at the group exhibition सच कहें तो – *To Tell the Truth* incorporates multiple watercolour paintings. Here, the perspective is such that the viewers feel the vastness of the dam's landscape in front of them and relocate themselves within it. Sarma draws reference from one of India's most significant and largest river dams ever, which is being built on the Subansiri River on the Assam-Arunachal border.

Here, Pankaj Sarma recalls the philosopher Timothy Morton, who proposed the concept of Hyperobjects. The Hyperobject itself is so vast in time and space that it goes beyond human perception and control. These objects exist on scales beyond our immediate experience but have effects that stretch across space and time. The big dam is also a Hyperobject where the effects are not seen only at the time of its establishment but also after generations, spreading across the river, the forests, and the whole locality.

Installation view
 सच कहें तो - *To Tell the Truth*
 Somaiya Vidyavihar University
 2025, Mumbai



a river forgot its way
 Charcoal and watercolour on paper
 144 × 96 in.
 2025, Mumbai

In this installation, Pankaj Sarma engages with the site using charcoal as a medium and constructs the space by drawing on the wall that will slowly vanish with time. He tries to understand the temporality of landscape and how it leaves its residue with time, memory, and space. The fragmented realities in the watercolor paintings show the vulnerability or temporality of the space where we are living.





Pankaj Sarma contributed to আরতৰীয়া বতাহ (*Unseasonal Wind*) by Anga Art Collective displayed at Sharjah Biennial 16 in 2025.

Curated by Alia Swastika, Amal Khalaf, Megan Tamati-Quennell, Natasha Ginwala and Zeynep Öz, the Sharjah Biennial 16 title, to carry, was a multivocal and open-ended proposition. The ever-expanding list of what to carry, and how to carry it, is an invitation to encounter the different formations and positions of the five curators as well as the constellation of resonances they have gathered.

Installation view
আরতৰীয়া বতাহ (*Unseasonal Wind*)
2025, Emirate of Sharjah



This installation by Pankaj Sarma centers on a painting on hand-woven fabric by his grandmother, Bhanu Devi. It depicts an unidentified fisherman holding his net, standing before a drying riverine landscape that reflects both an uncertain future and a quiet erosion of identity. The work is accompanied by traditional fishing tools such as the Baldha and Juluki, incorporating photographs transferred onto the surface of the Baldha. These materials, fabric, and tools are deeply connected to Assam's agrarian and fishing heritage.

Once predictable, the monsoon has now become erratic, disrupting long-established farming and fishing practices. As rivers and wetlands dry up and fish populations dwindle, local fishing communities find themselves facing an uncertain future amid the realities of a changing climate.

In this installation, the painting hangs like a curtain, with one fishing tool suspended beside it, while others are arranged on the floor, appearing to converse with one another.

This work was part of Anga Art Collective's project আবতৰীয়া বতাহ (*Unseasonal Wind*) at Sharjah Biennial 16, To Carry (2025).

Where the Clouds No Longer Return

Gouache on hand-woven fabric

96 × 90 in.

2025

"In my land, the earth and the loom once moved in harmony with the seasons; this rhythm is older than memory. But now, the river shrinks, the soil turns to dust, and even the threads of our handloom tremble with uncertainty.

What happens when the land forgets its people? When the river leaves them thirsty?

The river is not what it once was. Its waters no longer carry the weight of our ancestral stories, our songs, dissolving into silence. A fossil of a small fish remains, a relic of a time when the river was still remembered.

This place is filled with quiet grief, woven into handwoven fabric; every thread carries the weight of memory. My grandmother wove this cloth, her hands tracing a vanishing time. Balen Da helped me create the Baldha, once a lifeline, now a relic. Everything we know is fading, and the silence grows heavier than ever before."

Installation view

Where the Clouds No Longer Return

Gouache on hand-woven fabric

96 × 90 in.

2025





Installation view
আরতরীয়া বতাহ (*Unseasonal Wind*)
2025, Emirate of Sharjah



Sarma also contributed to the installation *Khaal Gaaon* (2022-2023) by Anga Art Collective, first displayed at Dhaka Art Summit (2023).

This project is derived from two Assamese words: Khaal, meaning low land or a small water body in and around a village settlement, and Gaaon, meaning village. Since the 1970s, regular floods and river erosion in the Rahmariya region of upper Assam (located in what is now India) have gradually erased water bodies, fertile fields, wetlands, vegetation, and a cluster of 35 villages, leading to villagers' displacement and resettlement in distant villages. Submerged under the endless flow of the river Brahmaputra, Khaal Gaaon disappeared from the physical geography and settled into the oral history of its people and their descendants. The Khaal Gaaon is now only present in stories of the elderly generation who once inhabited the land as young adults.

Installation view
Khaal Gaaon
Dhaka Art Summit 2023

In this work, Pankaj Sarma used a black-and-white photograph of his mother, taken during the flood. She stands on the remains of their old home, a structure that still bears witness to the long and ever-changing history of the riverine landscape around our locality.

The temporal drawing of hands by soil attempts to recall vanishing moments, traces of time that fade away. The ghost-like, blurred black-and-white image speaks of uncertainty, ephemerality, and the act of remembering a place that is changing rapidly.

This work was part of Anga Art Collective's installation *Khaal Gaon* at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), 2023.

Untitled

Photograph print on canvas,
bamboo and drawing by raw soil
2023





Installation view
Untitled
Photograph print on canvas,
bamboo and drawing by raw soil
2023

Khaal Gaaon, further evolved from its first occurrence at Dhaka Art Summit 2023, was later part of the exhibition *Very Small Feelings* at KNMA, Saket.

The project was commissioned by Samdani Art Foundation and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art with additional support from the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation.

Installation view
Very Small Feelings
2023, Kiran Nadar Museum of
Art (KNMA), New Delhi
Photo credit: KNMA



This video installation by Pankaj Sarma, a work in progress, draws from his childhood memories of home and the Kaldiya River, tracing a landscape shaped by floods and erosion. Weaving together personal and collective experiences, it reflects on how the river carries memories of place, loss, and belonging. Through the lens of solastalgia, the work becomes both an archive of a changing landscape and an invitation to pause, remember, and reconnect with the fragile geographies that shape our sense of home.

(work in progress, approx duration: 10-15 min)





Excerpt from the video installation



Still from a possible scene, *Joraxal* (2023 - present)

Pankaj Sarma is currently working on *Joraxal* (2023 - present), a short docufictional film in collaboration with Kartik Lahkar. This project is supported by Generator Cooperative Art Production Fund, 2024, created by Experimenter.



This project began after a year of regular visits to the Rani Reserve Forest, located on the Assam-Meghalaya border near Guwahati. Initially, the artists documented the human-elephant conflict and coexistence in the region. However, as their work progressed, Sarma became more interested in creating a docu-fictional film that captures the essence of time and space, inspired by the villagers' stories, experiences, and folktales about the elephants.

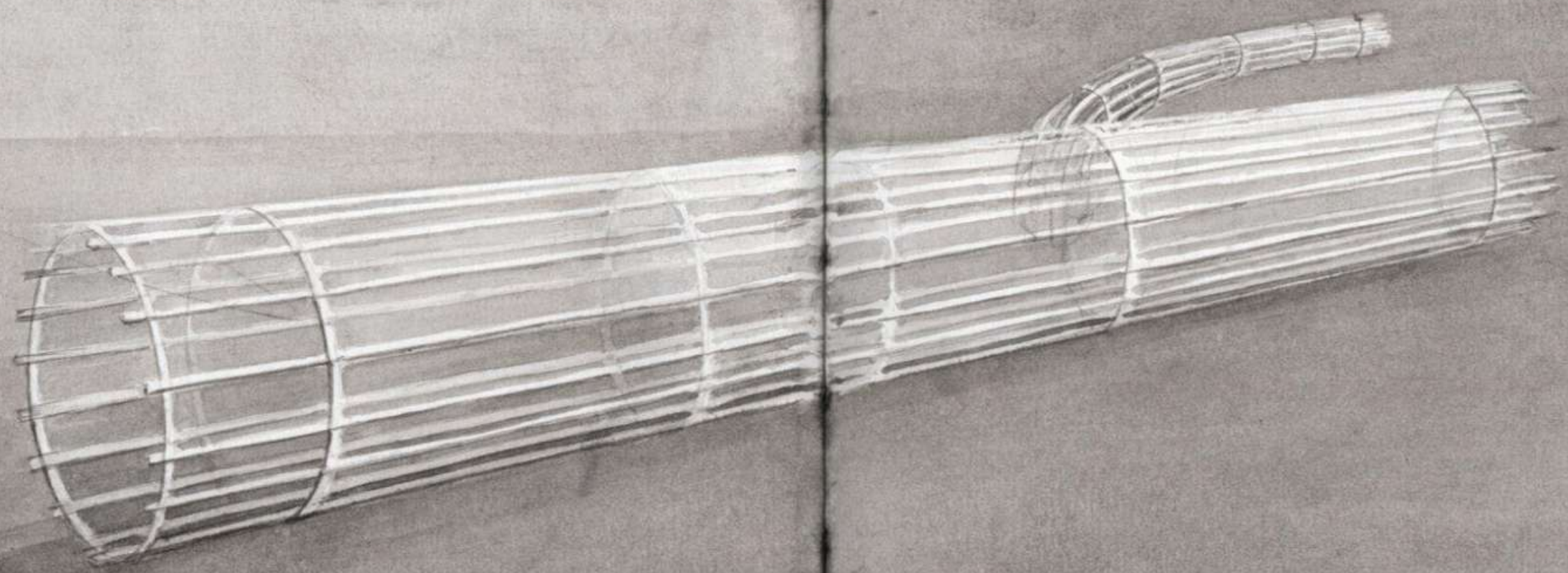
Joraxal is a monocultural forest of sal trees (*Shorea robusta*), that is also a lifeline for various animal species, including elephants and monkeys, and the local Rabha community. The Rabha have numerous stories, songs, and beliefs about the forest and the elephants, reflecting their mixed emotions. They recount sleepless nights at Tongi Ghar during cultivation and the joy after harvest, despite the troubles caused by elephants.

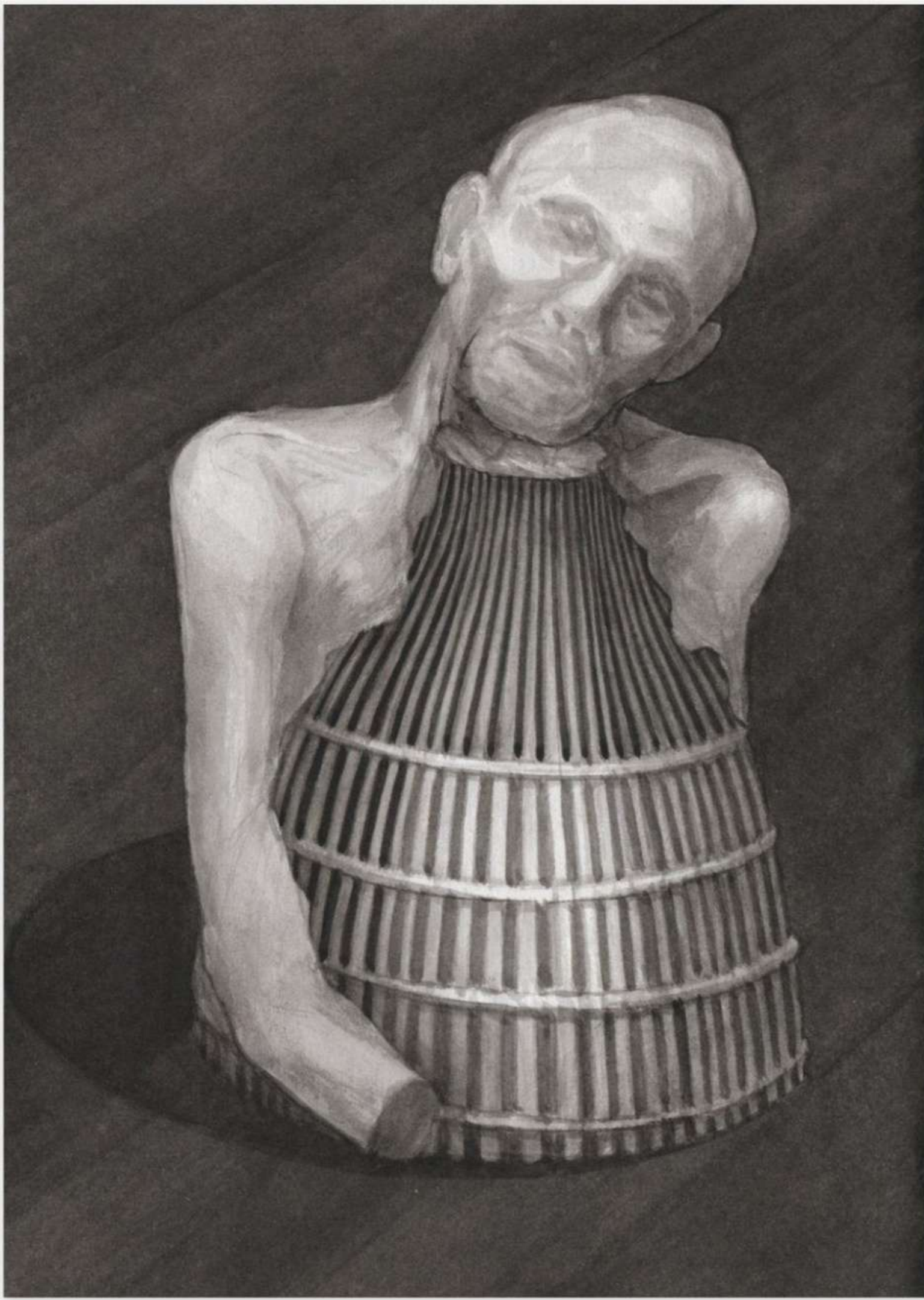


The film's conceptual backdrop focuses on the geographical and ecological landscape, the evolving dynamics of human and non-human interactions, and the aesthetic and performative possibilities of the site. Pankaj Sarma's aim is to explore the complex relationship between humans and the forest, the characteristics of elephant habitats and human settlements, food and forest, elephant corridors and highways, and the shifting behaviour of elephants, which sometimes results in accidents and destruction in the villages. Additionally, he seeks to understand the villagers' psyche and their affectionate love for elephants, despite the hardships they endure.

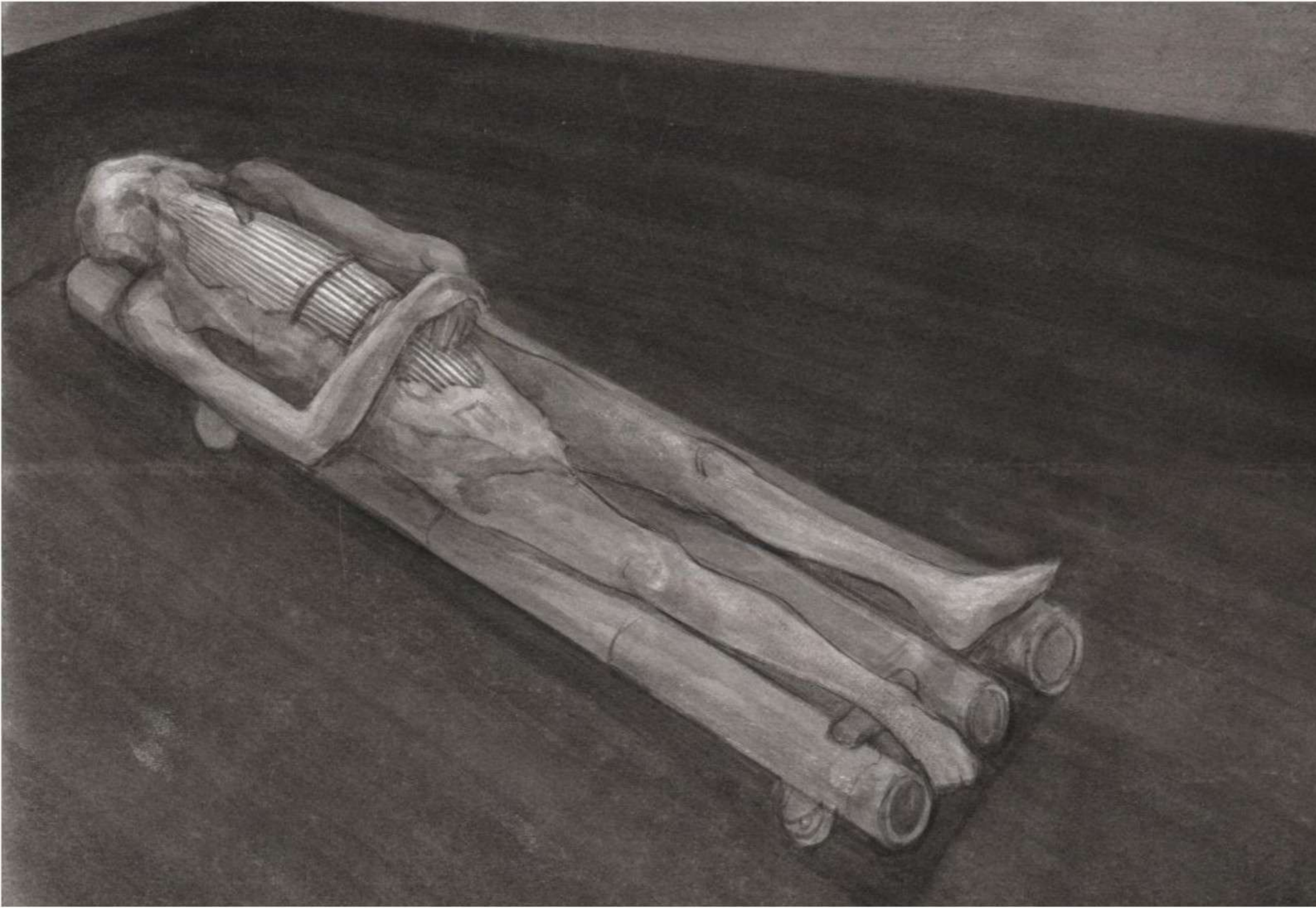
Sarma's artistic engagement in this project involves collaborating with local tribal folk artists and children, aiming to present a nuanced perspective on these interconnected themes.

greenwashing?
human Amara
pink washing

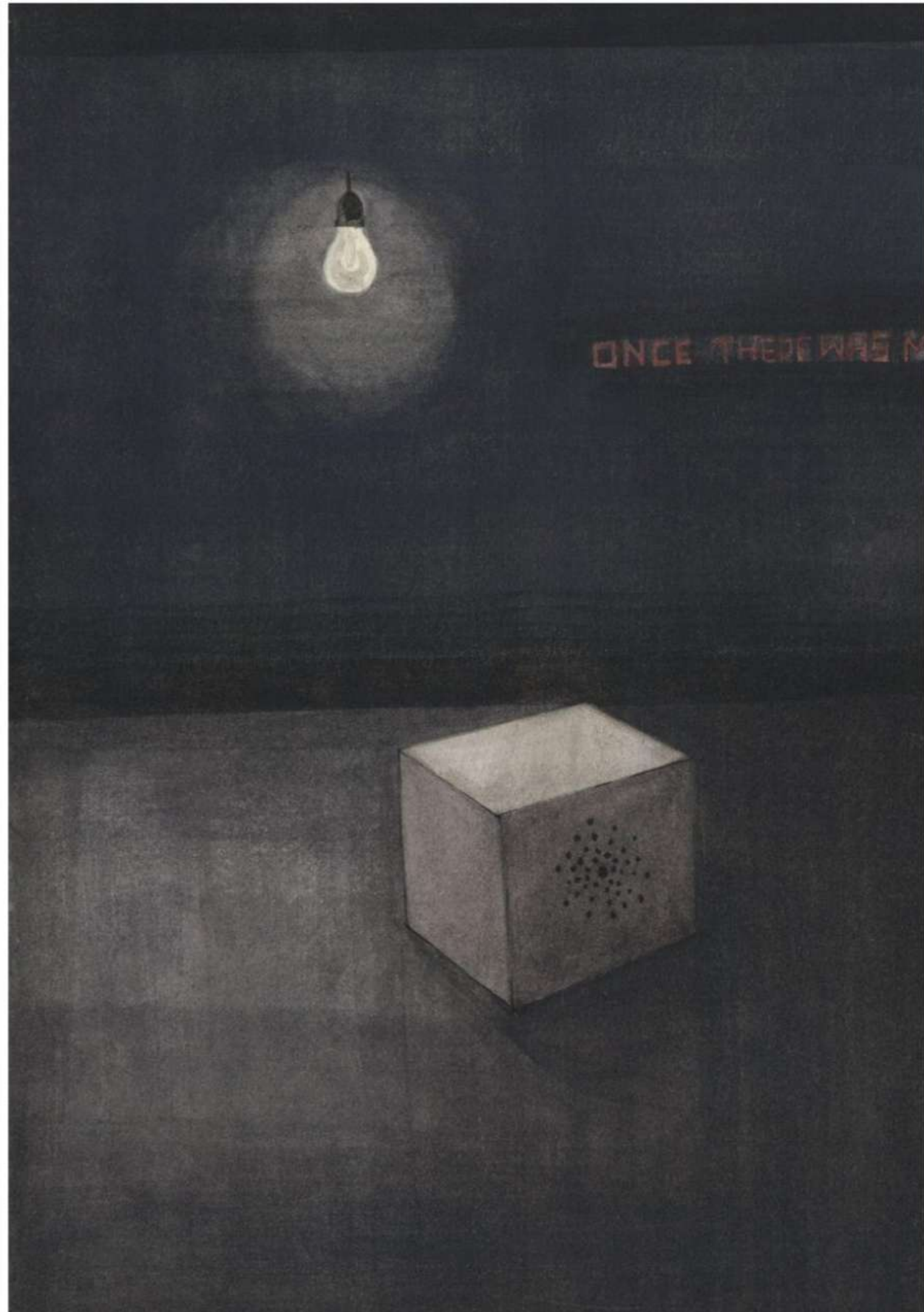




Pages from Pankaj
Sarma's sketchbook



A sketch from Pankaj
Sarma's sketchbook



Sketches from
Pankaj Sarma's
sketchbook



In this work, Sarma worked towards realising a clinical space. It was a constructed space with medical objects/ still life. Through these objects/ still life, he tried to create a narrative along with text. The objects of these still lives come from his personal psychological space, mainly from the memories of his past.

The narrative building of this work is inspired by Chris Marker's experimental short film *La Jetée* (1962), where the entire narrative unfolds through a series of still images.

With the incorporation of images, text, and objects, he tried to form a physical as well as psychological space. This gives it a sense of isolation, alienation, and silence. It also creates a melancholic environment within the space. Thus, in viewing the work, one feels a strangeness of isolation/alienation, or a sense of loneliness and helplessness. This absence of something or someone remains a distinct aspect of Sarma's work.

Installation view
***of these days, child of this
story would remember
the frozen sun...***
2019, Faculty of Fine Arts,
M. S. U. Baroda



is it coming from my frozen mind?

Untitled
Gouache on paper
12 x 16 in.
2018, Baroda



Installation view
*of these days, child of this
story would remember
the frozen sun...*
2019, Faculty of Fine Arts,
M. S. U. Baroda



Pankaj Sarma (b. 1993) is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, sculpture, design, photography, and multimedia installations. He holds a BVA (2019) and an MVA (2021) from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, where he was awarded the Late Milind Madhukar Bhade Gold Medal for Painting.

He has exhibited widely in India and internationally. Notable group exhibitions include *IMAGINARIUM 5.0*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2025); सच कहें तो – *To Tell the Truth*, IMMERSE 4.0, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai (2025); *Zero to Hundred*, HH Art Spaces, Goa (2023); *Surface Encounters & Strange Beings*, HH Art Spaces (2022); *The Flying Goat Show*, The Flying Goat, Goa (2022); *Untitled IX*, Priyasri Art Gallery, Baroda–Mumbai (2021); *States of Disarray: Practice as Restitution*, Kochi-Muziris Students' Biennale 2021; and *Notes, Documents & Processes: Impressions from a School*, Hyderabad Literary Festival (2021), among others. Recent presentations include Peers Share 2025, Khoj Studios, New Delhi, supported by the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation and Tarana Sawhney.

Sarma has contributed significantly to multiple projects and installations including আরতর্ষীয়া বতাহ (*Unseasonal Wind*) by Anga Art Collective as part of Sharjah Biennial 16 – *To Carry* (2025); *Khaal Gaon* (2022-23) by Anga Art Collective, commissioned by Samdani Art Foundation and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art with additional support from the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation, exhibited at the Dhaka Art Summit 2023; and *Granary* (2022-24) by Anga Art Collective that received the SSAF Installation Art Grant 2022.

His work has received multiple recognitions including the First Award at IMAGINARIUM 5.0, Emami Art All India Open Call (2025); the IMMERSE 4.0 Artists Fellowship at Somaiya Vidyavihar University (2024); support from the Generator Co-Operative Art Production Fund (2024); and the Kalpana Reddy Memorial Award, Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda (2019).

As a long-time member of Anga Art Collective, Pankaj Sarma contributes to collaborative projects engaging with site, ecology, and community. He currently lives and works in Patacharkuchi, Assam.

EMAMI ART

Emami Art is a prominent contemporary art gallery and cultural production space located on the ground floor of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity's Green Building. Established in 2017, it adopts a forward-looking, multi-dimensional approach that reflects South Asia's history, socio-cultural, and geo-political narratives. Emami Art operates within an inclusive framework where profitability supports sustainable resource regeneration and public service.

Committed to promoting a regional, national, and international agenda, Emami Art emphasizes community engagement, socially relevant initiatives, and institutional partnerships. With a multi-year vision for the future, it continues to be a catalyst for change, research, innovation, and inclusivity.

