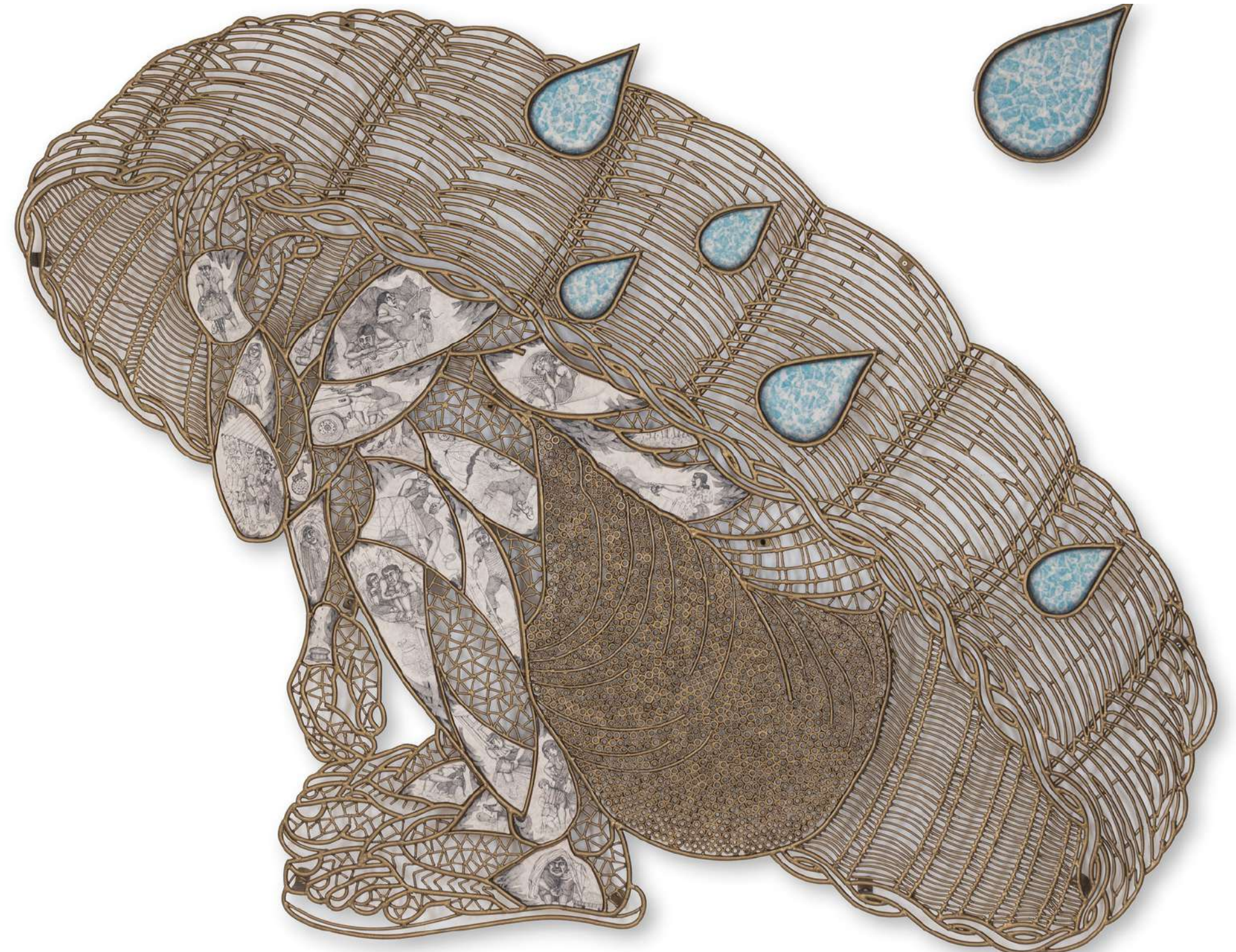


Anjan Modak

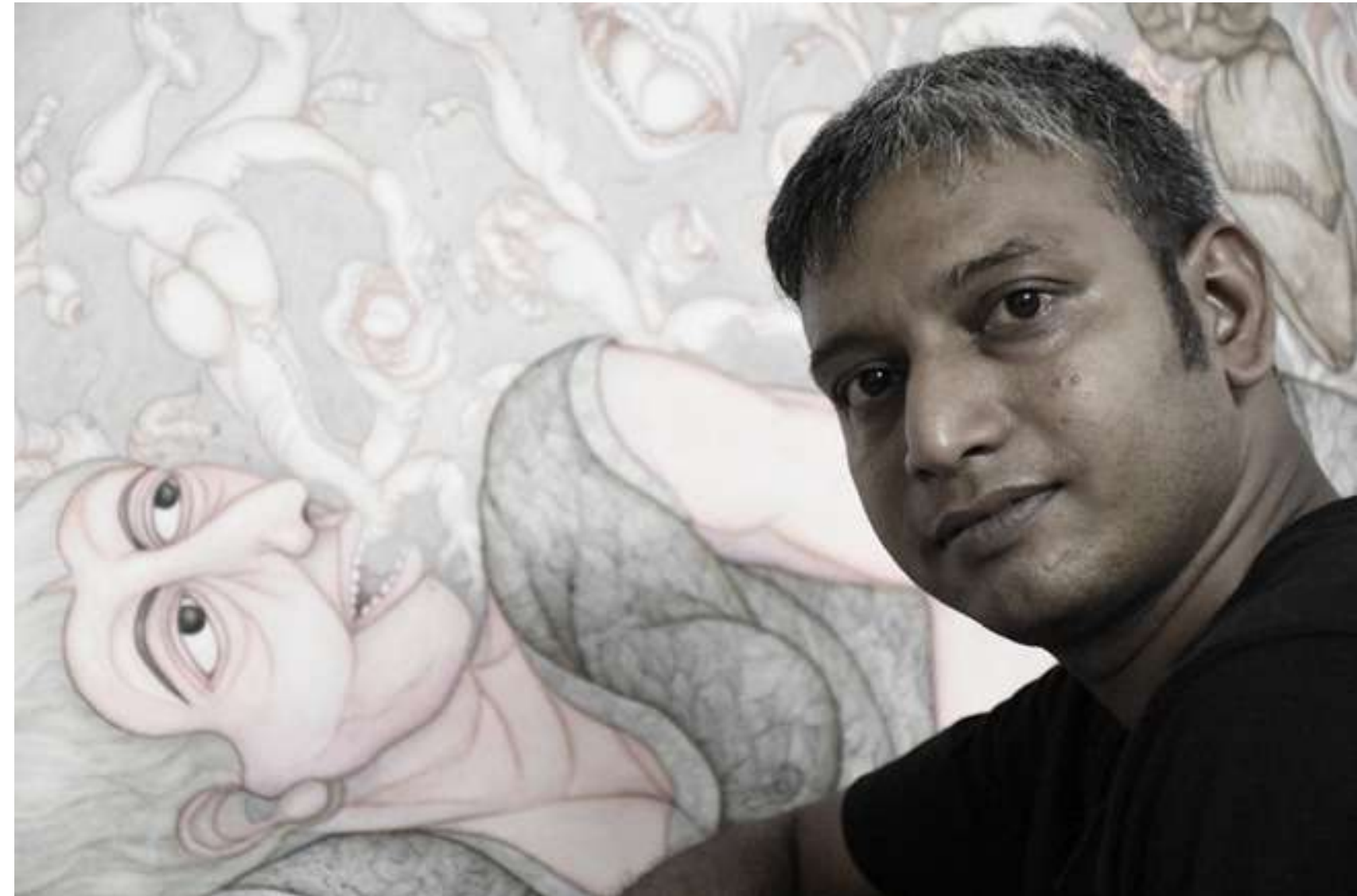
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Portfolio



Anjan Modak is a contemporary artist based in Kolkata, India. A graduate of Rabindra Bharati University, he has been working for over a decade on the life of manual workers, such as the migrant construction labourers in the big city. Without taking any fixed ideological position, he depicts their life in a highly metaphorical visual language, expressing their dreams, despairs, and struggles.

Modak's paintings show his mastery of drawing, minimal use of colours, and dense linear texture, which give them deep, sensual feelings. The paper's white background, which enhances the graphic quality of the works, also appears like a blank space occupied by those denied any place in history. Modak's preference for the life of the oppressed, working-class people as his paintings' sole subject matter has its roots in his childhood. Growing up in the migrant labourers' community in Delhi, he saw their life closely as an insider, gradually becoming aware of the complexity of the subaltern mentality. This complexity, not the mere empirical truth of their life, informs Modak's paintings.



Watch the artist discuss her practice



His innovative wall sculptures made of welded iron, plywood, and painted elements combine his artistic imagination with a masterful use of medium, rendering the tragic realities of life in a manner that is both poetic and poignant. He creates collaborative works with his mother-in-law Anita Das – ink and hand embroidery with cotton thread on polyethylene and on canvas. The powerful drawings and experimental modes of handling such diverse materials and medium make his work visually compelling and thought-provoking.



Drawing on elements from sources as diverse as art history, puppetry, and textbook illustrations, he has created a powerful language, blending realism with absurdity, the plain statement with irony and satire. What is significant about his work is that while capturing the broad emotional spectrum of the subaltern life, punctuated by injustice, insecurity and anomie, he does not turn victimhood into an identity, allowing power discourses to manifest themselves through the very physicality of their body and material culture.

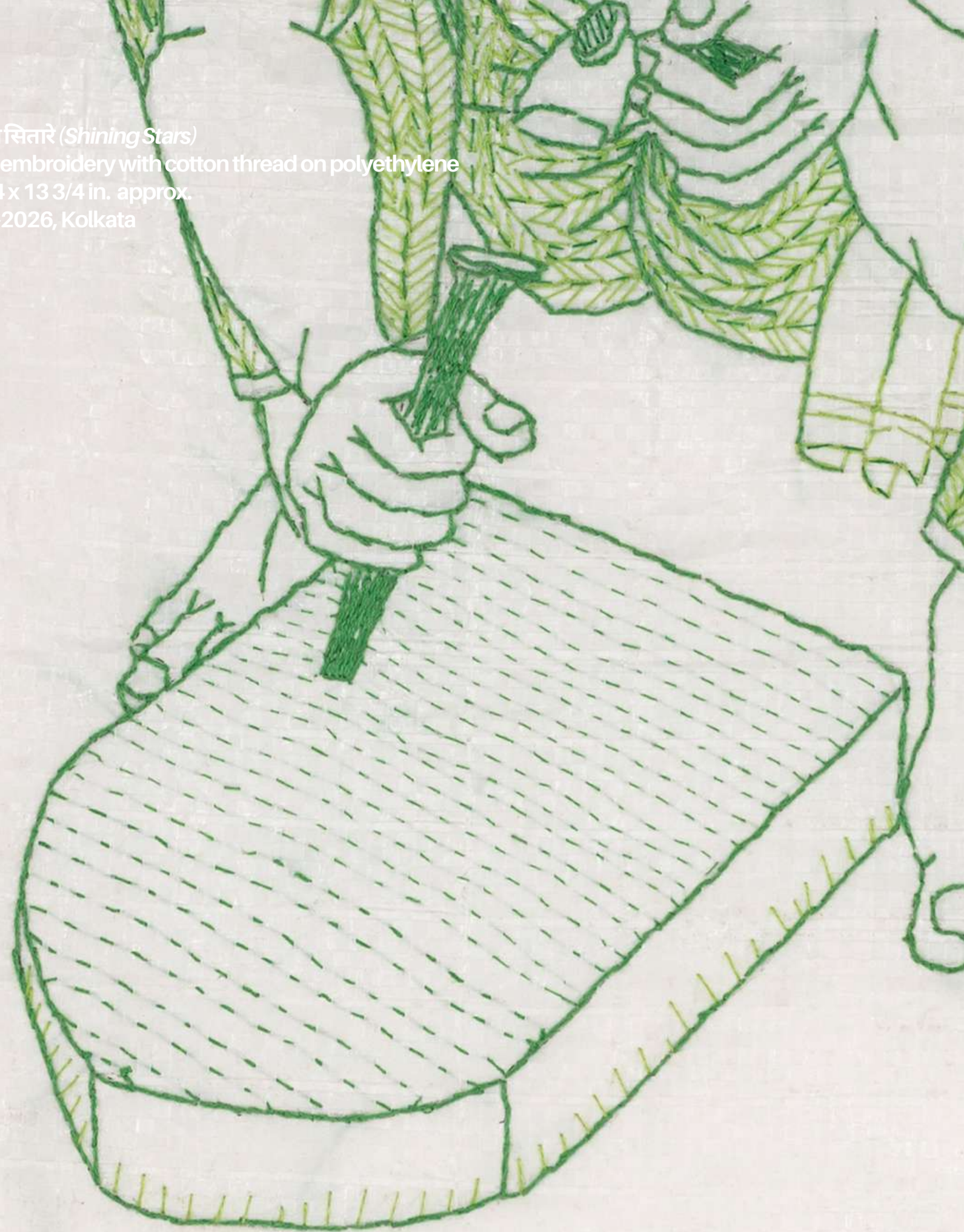


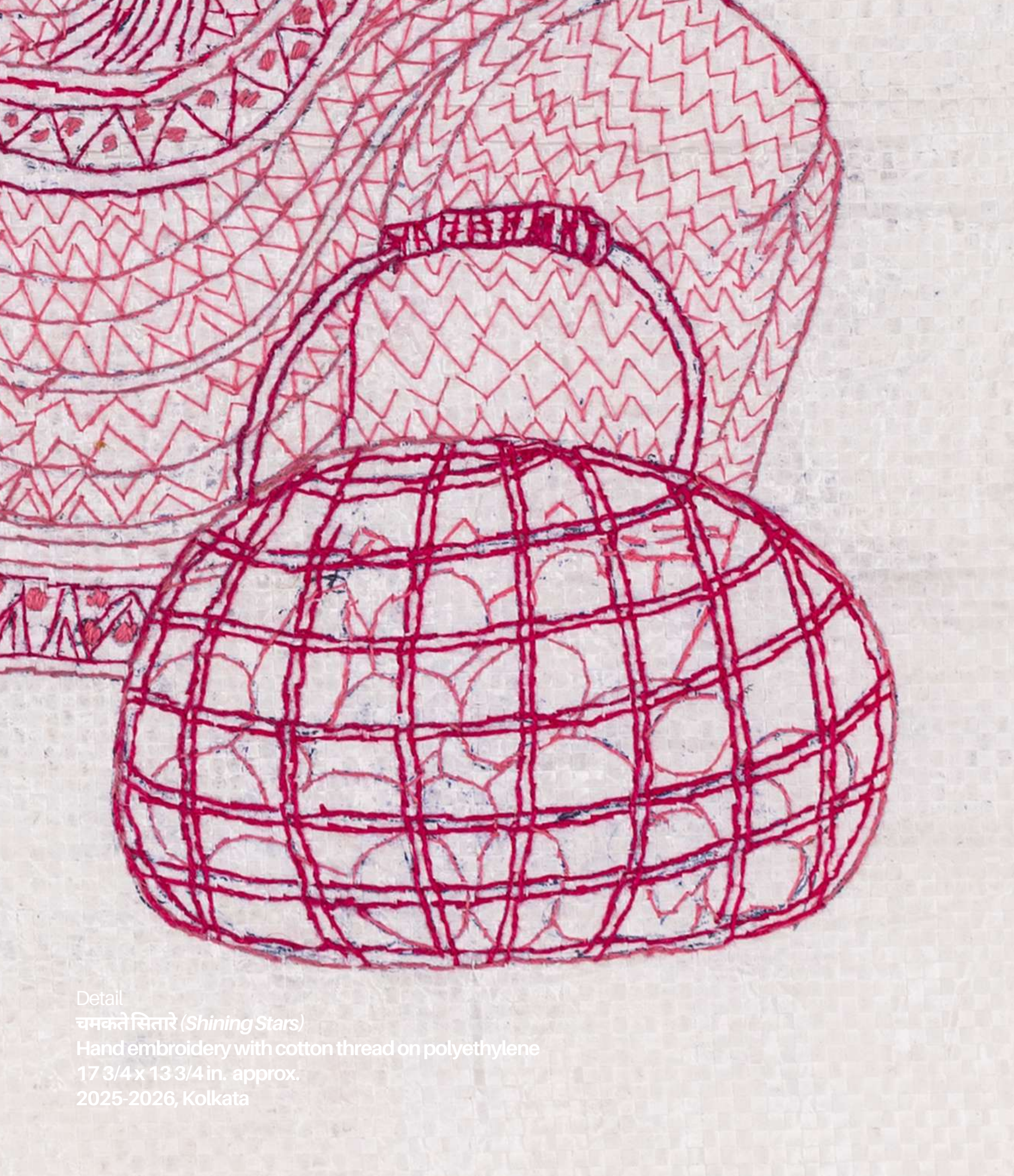
चमकते सितारे, drawn by Anjan Modak and hand-embroidered by his mother-in-law Anita Das in 6 vibrant colours, captures six workers in different professions – an egg seller, a fishmonger, greengrocers, and so on – people who usually set up temporary roadside stalls or travel from door to door to sell their wares. This set of works has been made by repurposing polyethylene sacks which are flexible, durable bags used for packaging. Such sacks are often used by these workers as a waterproof surface for sitting on the road, and the synthetic nature of the material makes them glint in the sunlight, providing an inspiration for the work's title. Anjan Modak's powerful drawings and experimental modes of handling the materials and medium – in this case, cotton thread on polyethylene, make his work visually compelling and thought-provoking.

**चमकते सितारे (*Shining Stars*)**  
**Hand embroidery with cotton thread on polyethylene**  
**17 3/4 x 13 3/4 in. each approx.**  
**Set of 6 works**  
**2025-2026, Kolkata**



Detail  
चमकते सितारे (Shining Stars)  
Hand embroidery with cotton thread on polyethylene  
17 3/4 x 13 3/4 in. approx.  
2025-2026, Kolkata





Detail  
चमकते सितारे (*Shining Stars*)  
Hand embroidery with cotton thread on polyethylene  
17 3/4 x 13 3/4 in. approx.  
2025-2026, Kolkata





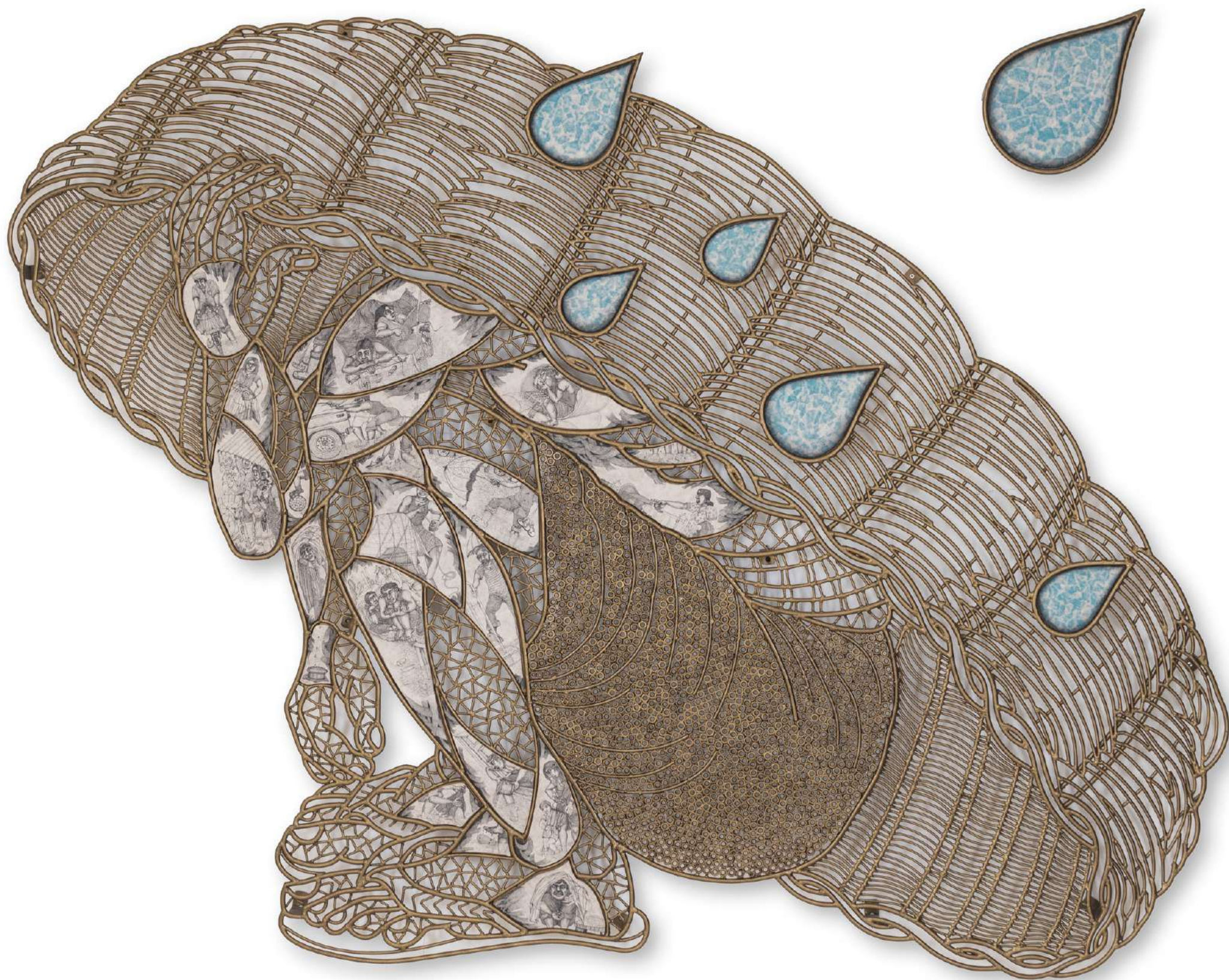
Detail

चमकते सितारे (Shining Stars)

Hand embroidery with cotton thread on polyethylene

17 3/4 x 13 3/4 in. approx.

2025-2026, Kolkata



This innovative sculptural work, composed of iron lines and painted elements, depicts a crouched man holding a traditional bamboo rain shield known as Jhanka or Knup, commonly used by poor workers for protection from rain. Reflecting Anjan Modak's bold figuration and close engagement with the lives of poor urban working people, the work speaks of their hopes, desires, and strategies of survival, delicately and humorously suggested through fragmented drawings placed between the well-defined muscles.

The traditional bamboo shield evokes the enduring connection between village and city, as it is widely used in rural eastern and north-eastern India. Despite the scene of hardship, the falling raindrops—rendered in bright blue—transform suffering into a symbol of optimism and hope for the future. The figure's face remains hidden behind the shield, emphasizing the social invisibility of these workers, whose identities often go unrecognized. The work combines the artist's imagination with a masterful use of medium, rendering the sad realities of life in a manner that is both poetic and poignant.

**ক্ষণস্থায়ী আশ্রয় II (Temporary Shelter II)**

**Enamel paint, iron, charcoal, lacquer, Acrylic, archival ink on**

**Lokta paper pasted on plywood**

**Overall dimension variable**

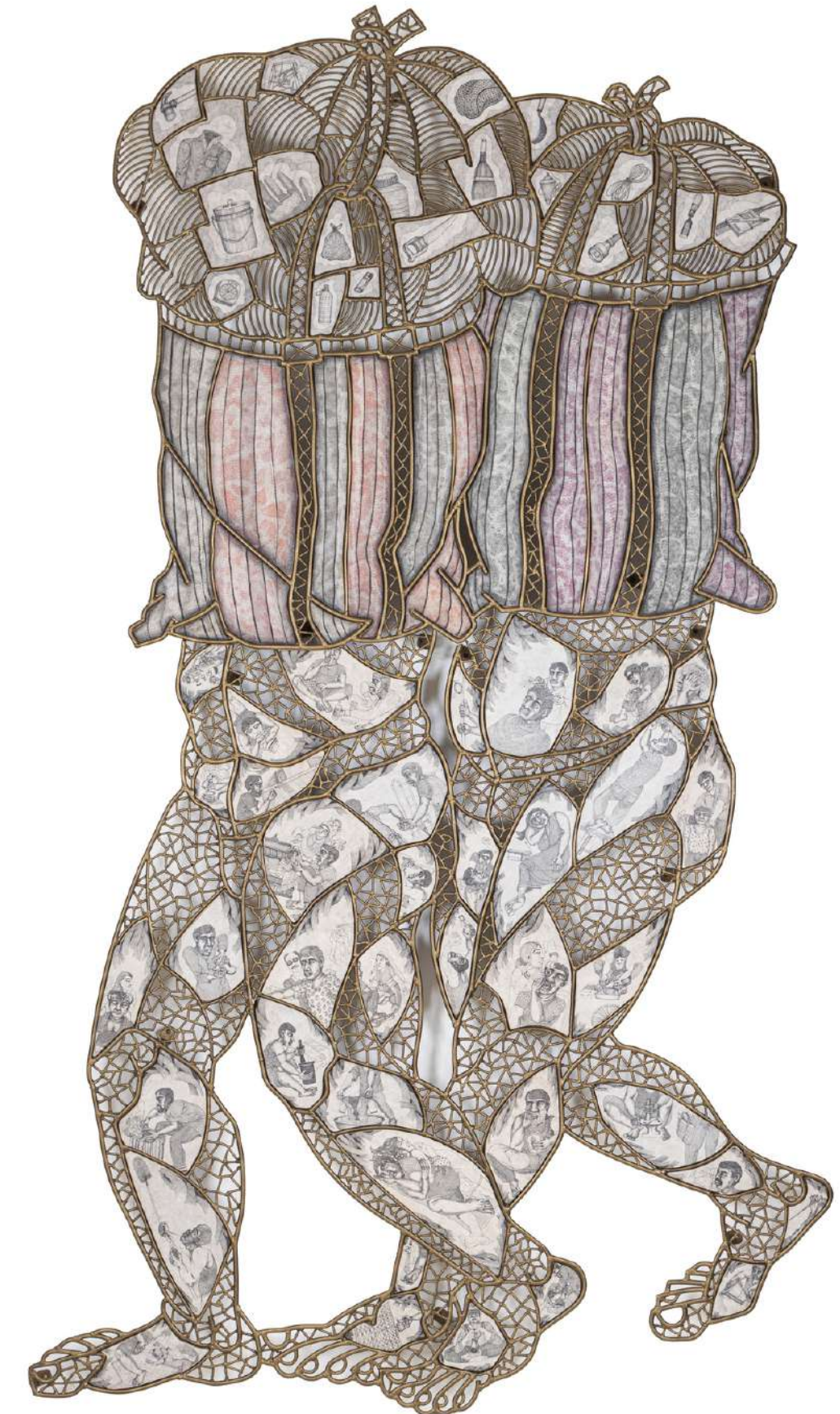
**Set of 2 works**

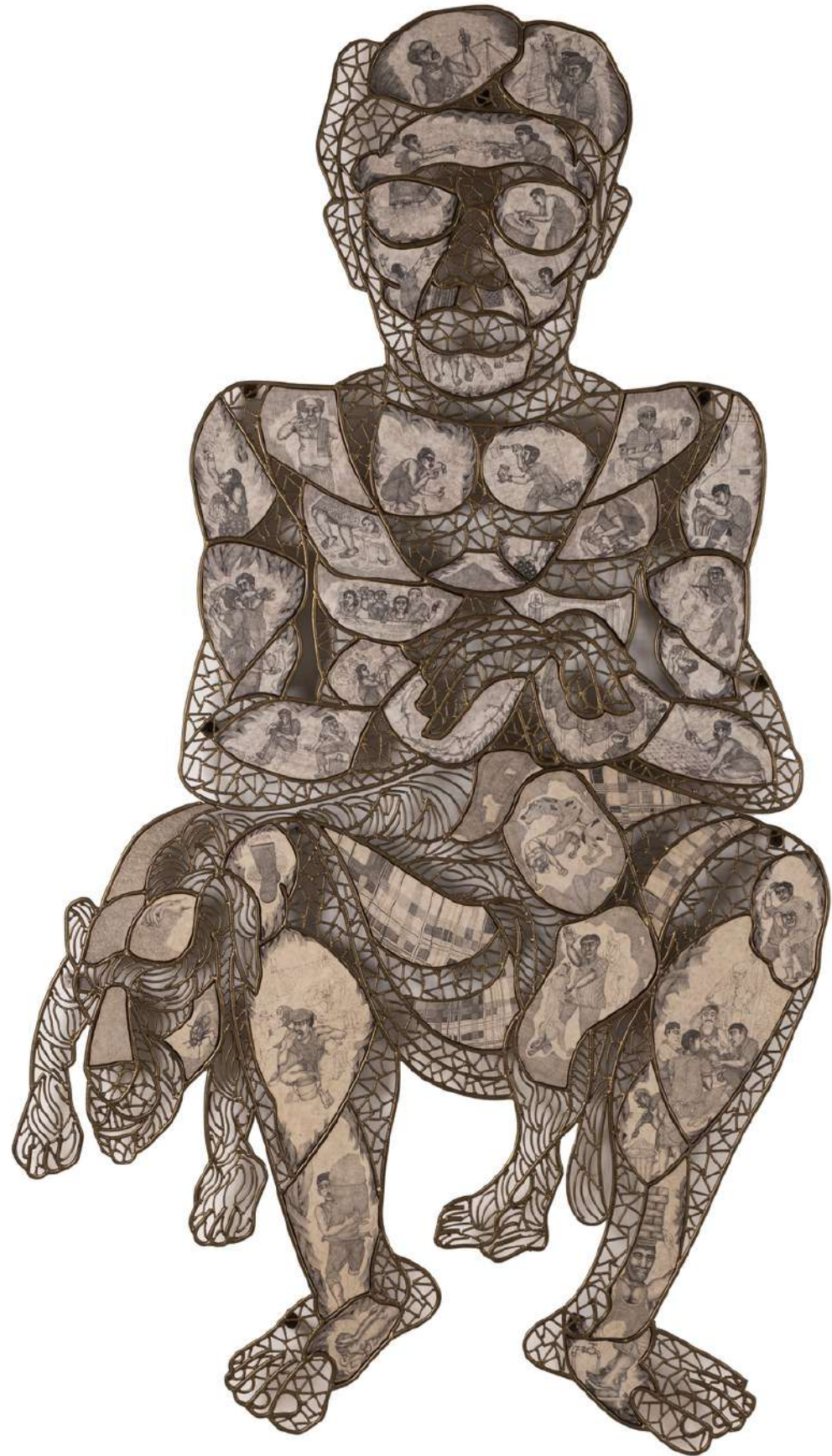
**2026, Kolkata**

This work, made of welded iron lines and painted elements, depicts two daily labourers returning home. Fragmented drawings in the upper section refer to the tools they carry—handsaw, chisel, and torch—contained in the bags at the centre of the composition. Below, between the defined muscles of their legs, the drawings evoke their everyday conversations, touching hopes, desires, and the mundane affairs of daily life.

Rooted in Modak's close engagement with migrant workers in the city, the work reflects their emotional, social, and political experiences through a blend of strong visual form and narrative fragments. The narrative drawings appear like broken shards of glass, reflecting realities of ordinary life and its stories. The use of heavy iron and craftsmanship echoes the industrial environment of factory labour, grounding the work in the physical reality of urban working-class life. The absence of faces or identity points to the fact that their work and presence in society is neither recognized nor respected.

বাড়ি ফেরার গল্প (*The Story of Returning Home*)  
Enamel paint, iron, acrylic, charcoal, lacquer and archival ink on  
Lokta paper pasted on plywood  
96 7/8 x 53 1/2 x 3 3/8 in.  
2025, Kolkata





*Gatekeeper* by Anjan Modak depicts the all too familiar figure of a gatekeeper usually found in Indian apartment complexes and office buildings. The gatekeeper is often a migrant worker, living away from home in a tiny space at the entrance of the building or under the stairs, with the most meagre of amenities, sometimes with only a domesticated dog to call his own. He spends his entire life in this space as he records the lives of other people who walk by. These scenes of ordinary people working and going through their daily lives are drawn in ink on the gatekeeper's body, marking him as a significant witness to what goes on in the metropolitan city.

***Gatekeeper***  
Iron, plywood, Lokta paper,  
enamel paint, and archival ink  
96 x 54 3/4 x 3 in. approx.  
2025, Kolkata



Detail  
*Gatekeeper*  
Iron, plywood, Lokta paper,  
enamel paint, and archival ink  
96 x 54 3/4 x 3 in. approx.  
2025, Kolkata



The artwork featuring a bust of a peddler carrying goods on his head draws inspiration from the daily lives of working-class people, particularly rural migrants, in the nearby factory areas by the artist's residence. These workers often rely on peddlers who visit the area, selling essential goods like soap, clothes, utensils, shoes, umbrellas, fans, and even water – which Anjan Modak has drawn in ink atop the figure's head. The artist, observing this scene from his balcony, brings the peddler to life with a unique blend of social realism and imaginative flair.

বাড়ি ফেরার গল্প (*The Story of Returning Home*)  
Enamel paint, iron, acrylic, charcoal, lacquer and archival ink on  
Lokta paper pasted on plywood  
96 7/8 x 53 1/2 x 3 3/8 in.  
2025, Kolkata



*Do Not Cross the Line*, Archival ink, graphite, water-soluble colour pencil on Lokta paper, 10 1/4 x 7 7/8 in. each, 2025, Kolkata



*Do Not Cross the Line* depicts 24 manual labourers of different professions doing their job while a narrow red and white line – one that is commonly used on roads to mark a site under construction – separates them from the rest of the world. It is a powerful commentary on working class people's access to social mobility and privilege. This stark demarcation line, drawn in colour and in a different medium than the black and white figures, sets the boundaries of their movement from one social status or stratum to another within a deeply classist and casteist society.



*Do Not Cross the Line*, Archival ink, graphite, water-soluble colour pencil on Lokta paper, 10 1/4 x 7 7/8 in. each, 2025, Kolkata



৯ বগি, drawn by Anjan Modak and hand-embroidered by his mother-in-law Amila Das, captures the regular experience of travelling in a local train in West Bengal, looking at ordinary men and workers as they jostle for space in various positions in a sea of people and goods. Each work has a protagonist clad in clothes that suggest what walk of life they hail from. Anjan Modak has long been working on the life of the subaltern in the metropolitan city, depicting their daily struggles, despairs, hopes, and desires in a complex contemporary language. His powerful drawings and experimental modes of handling the materials and medium – in this case, cotton thread on cloth, make his work visually compelling and thought-provoking.

৯ বগি (*Local Train with Nine Coaches*)  
 Ink and hand embroidery with cotton  
 thread on canvas  
 16 3/4 x 12 5/8 in. each  
 2024-2025, Kolkata



Detail  
৯বগি (Local Train with Nine Coaches)  
Ink and hand embroidery with cotton  
thread on canvas  
16 3/4 x 12 5/8 in.  
2024-2025, Kolkata



Detail  
৯বগি (Local Train with Nine Coaches)  
Ink and hand embroidery with cotton  
thread on canvas  
16 3/4 x 12 5/8 in.  
2024-2025, Kolkata

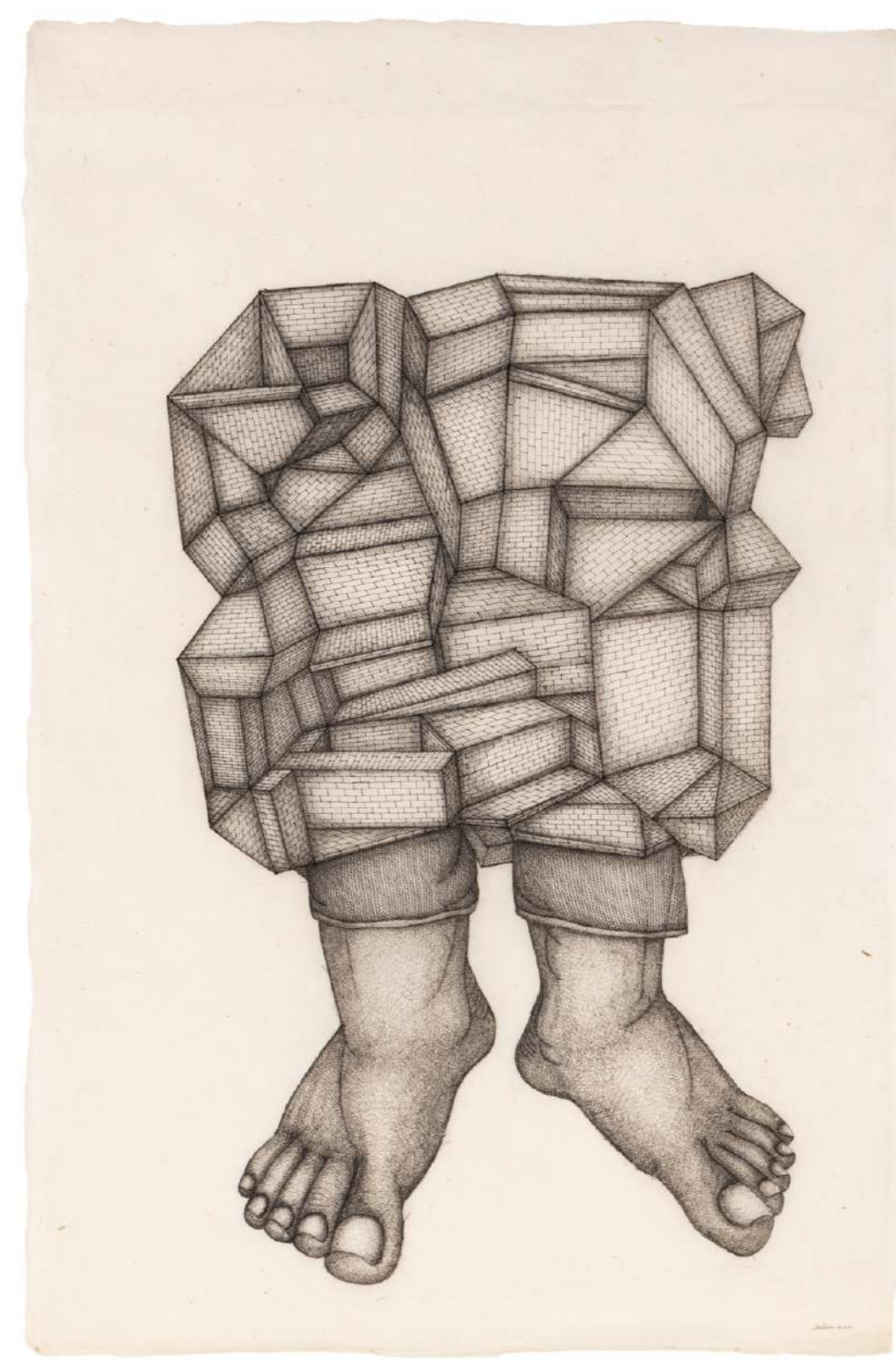
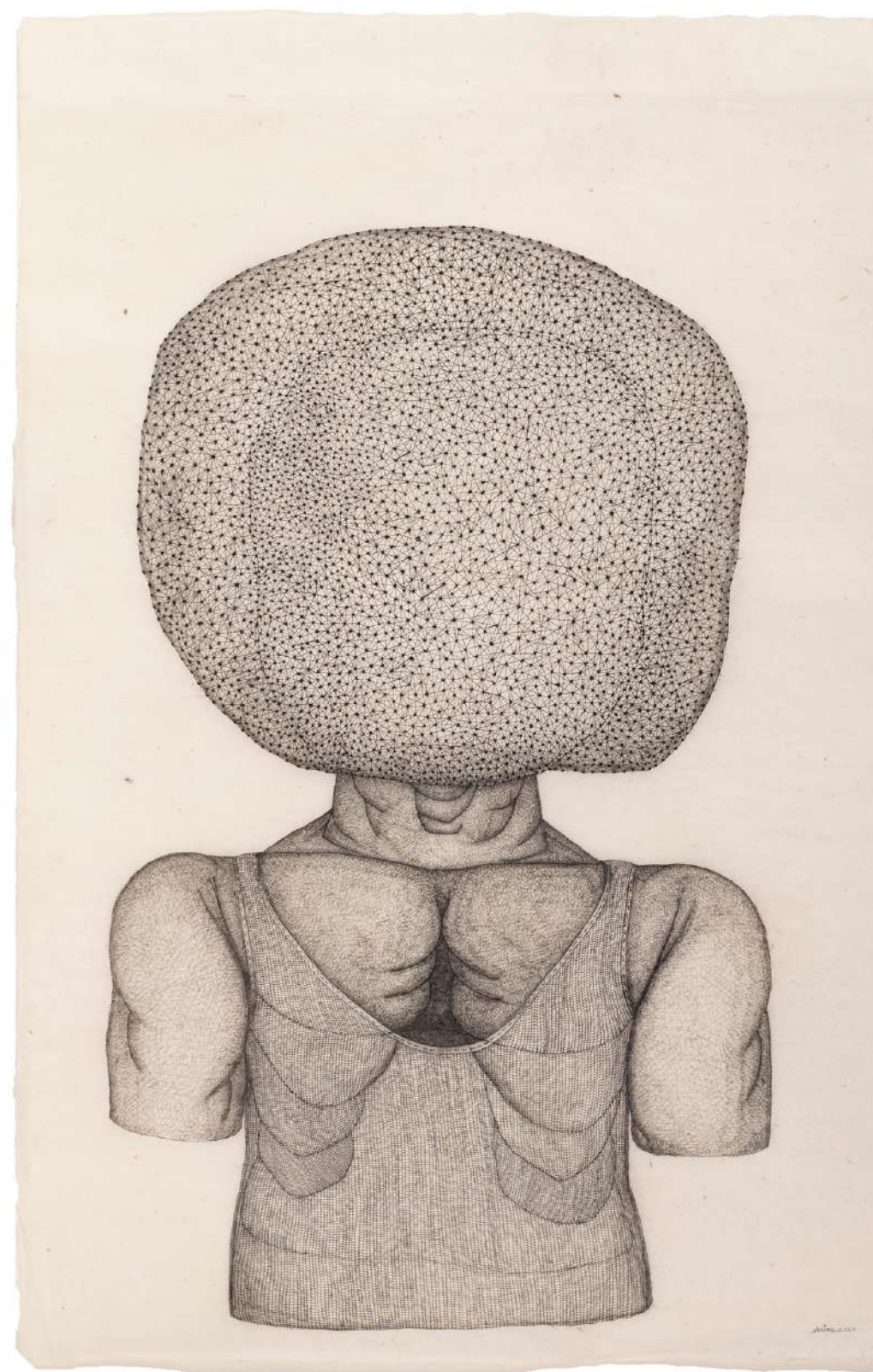
In this set of 32 works, Modak reimagines the shopkeepers of temporary roadside stalls in his locality as exhibitors. Each shopkeeper displays their wares – ordinary everyday items such as furniture, household electrical products, utensils, plastic containers, flowers, clothes, and so on – as if they are being showcased in a commercial exhibition where the viewer is also a potential buyer. They put their best foot forward and advertise their respective product in all kinds of insistent and expressive ways. The artist, observing this scene, brings these interactions to life in his own way.

***Exhibitors***  
Archival ink on acid-free paper  
5 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. each  
Set of 32 works  
2025, Kolkata





*Exhibitors*, Archival ink on acid-free paper, 5 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. each, 2025, Kolkata

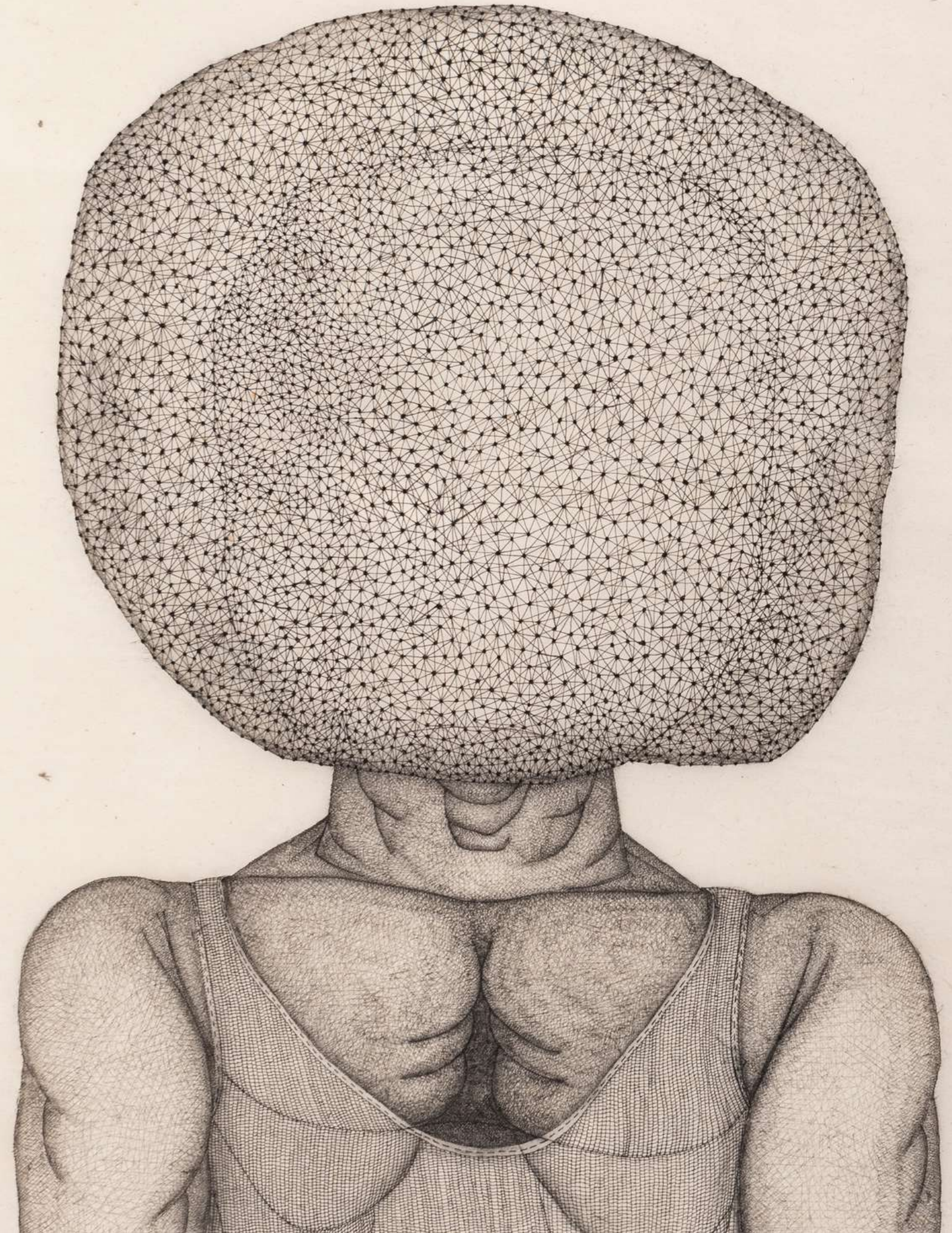


*Behind the Shape I, II, III*, Archival ink and charcoal on Lokta paper, 29 7/8 x 23 5/8 in., 2025, Kolkata

Each work in *Behind the Shape* integrates into the working-class body a particular geometric shape – square, circle, and triangle. This highlights their iconic presence in the fabric of everyday life.

*Behind the Shape I* builds on the image of a brick to merge the living body with a non-living item. *Behind the Shape II* builds on the image of a spherical load carried on one's head to merge the living body with a non-living item. *Behind the Shape III* builds on the image of a hanger used to hang clothes from to merge the living body with a non-living item.

Detail  
***Behind the Shape II***  
Archival ink and charcoal on Lokta paper  
29 7/8 x 23 5/8 in.  
2025, Kolkata





This work captures the regular experience of looking at the reflection of ordinary people and workers in the side mirror while in an auto rickshaw moving through the congested lanes of Kolkata.

*Life Is Closer Than It Appears*  
Mirror, fibreglass, plastic, rubber, iron and  
archival ink on Lokta paper  
7.08 x 4.7 in. (18 x 12 cm.) each  
2024, Kolkata



Detail  
*Life Is Closer Than It Appears*  
Mirror, fibreglass, plastic, rubber, iron and  
archival ink on Lokta paper  
7.08 x 4.7 in. (18 x 12 cm.) each  
2024, Kolkata



Detail  
*Between Seen and Unseen- III*  
 Plywood, Nepalese paper, acrylic colour, watercolour,  
 charcoal, archival ink, enamel paint and iron  
 57.48 x 38.58 x 1.96 in. approx.  
 2024, Kolkata



The sixteen frames represent the ordinary male and female workers' daily activities. But, unlike objective cultural documentation of people and occupation, the works, through the intricate expression, detailing and critical signs, reveal in a subtle and often humorous way the life of the people: their despair, resentment and dreams under the oppressive social and political conditions. The choice for a round embroidery frame speaks of the space of intimacy, craft, household and perhaps womanhood.

***See You on the Way 3***  
 Archival ink on Nepalese handmade paper stretched  
 on a wooden Tambour frame and iron nut  
 8.46 x 8.46 in. each approx.  
 2024, Kolkata



Detail | **See You on the Way 3**, Archival ink on Nepalese handmade paper stretched on a wooden Tambour frame and iron nut, 8.46 x 8.46 in. each approx., 2024, Kolkata

Detail | *See You on the Way 3*, Archival ink on Nepalese handmade paper stretched on a wooden Tambour frame and iron nut, 8.46 x 8.46 in. each approx., 2024, Kolkata





Detail  
***Behind the Screen***  
 Archival ink on acid-free paper  
 8.26 x 5.90 in. each  
 2024, Kolkata



Detail | *Behind the Screen*, Archival ink on acid-free paper, 8.26 x 5.90 in. each, 2024, Kolkata



This series of drawings show their various activities, revealing, besides the strained bodies and oppressive situation, the subtle, often emotional relationship between the workers and their objects. The blank background reminds us of the colonial gaze that looks at other people and their lives in an objective, documentary, de-historized context.



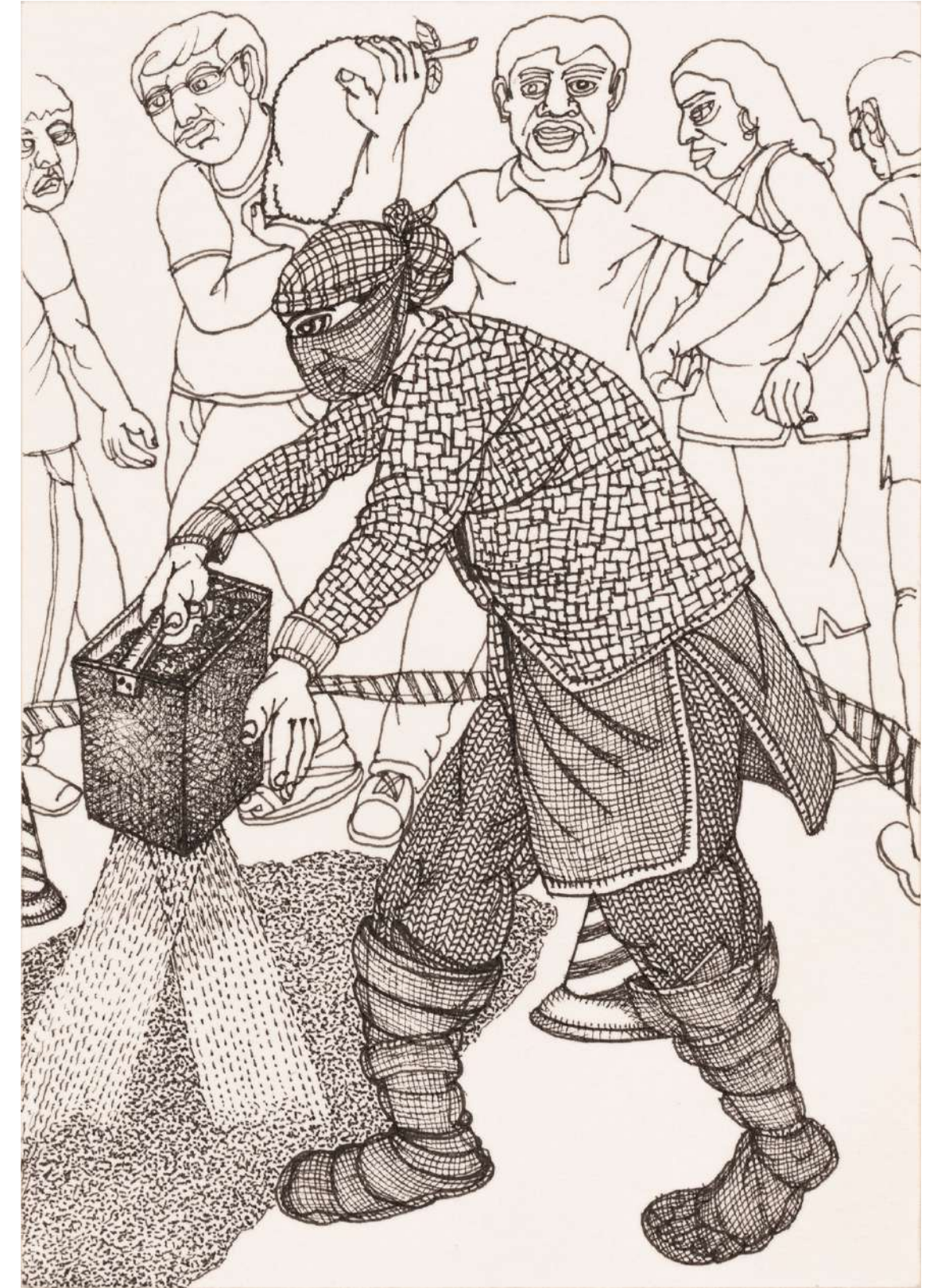
***Man with Objects***  
 Archival ink on Lokta paper  
 8.66 x 4.92 in. each approx.  
 2024, Kolkata



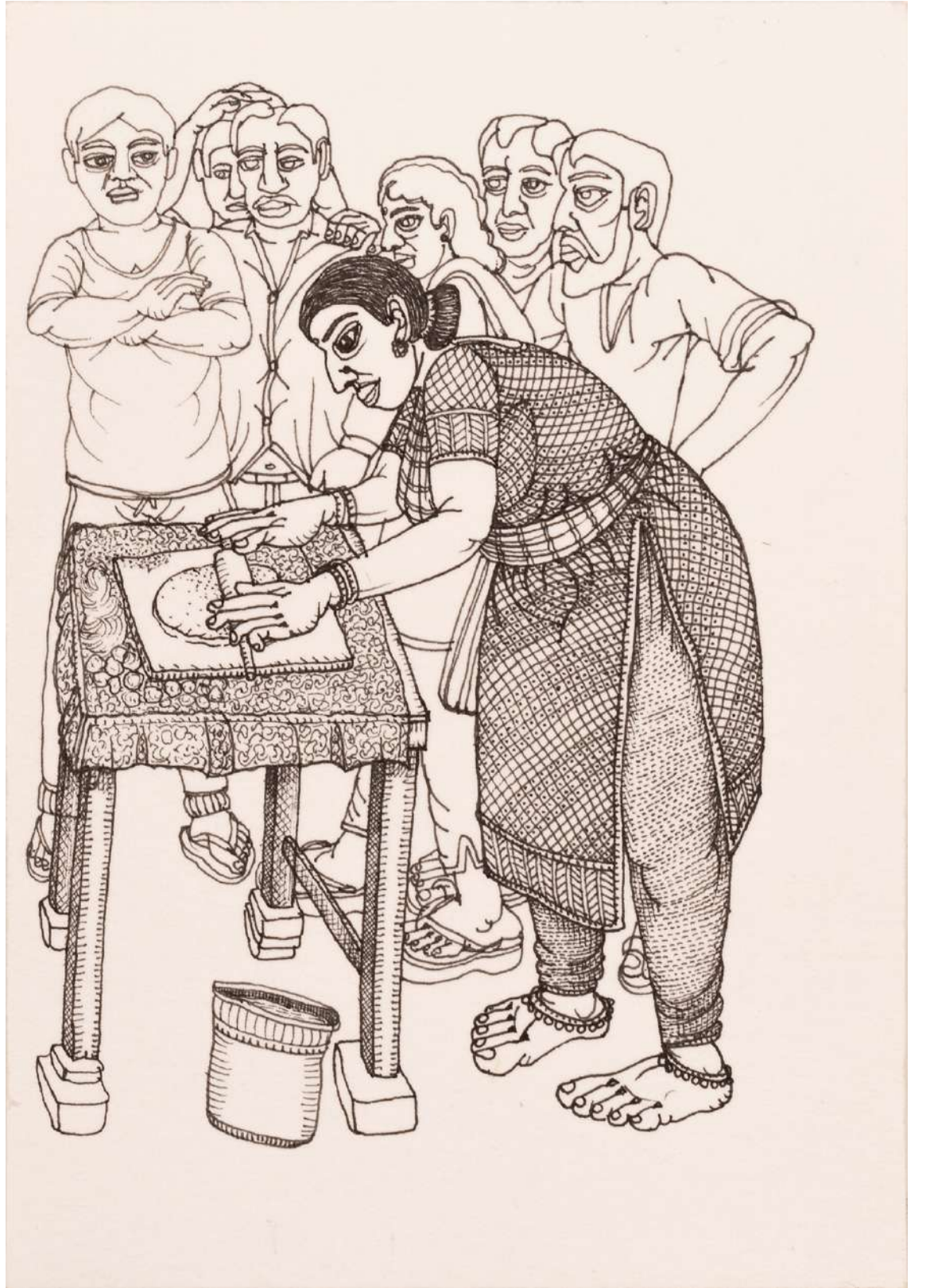
अनेकमेंएक (*One in Many*), Archival ink on acid-free paper 5 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. each, 2024, Kolkata



Each work in अनेक में एक features a manual worker working on the road under the public eye, and each job is different. The primary labourer is singled out and made prominent by adding more details in ink, setting them apart from the crowd that is watching, gesturing at, and commenting on them. This highlights their iconic presence and their indispensability in the fabric of everyday life. Modak depicts their life in a highly metaphorical visual language, drawing a unique interaction between an individual and the collective.



अनेकमेंएक (One in Many), Archival ink on acid-free paper 5 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. each, 2024, Kolkata



अनेकमेंएक (One in Many), Archival ink on acid-free paper 5 1/8 x 3 1/2 in. each, 2024, Kolkata

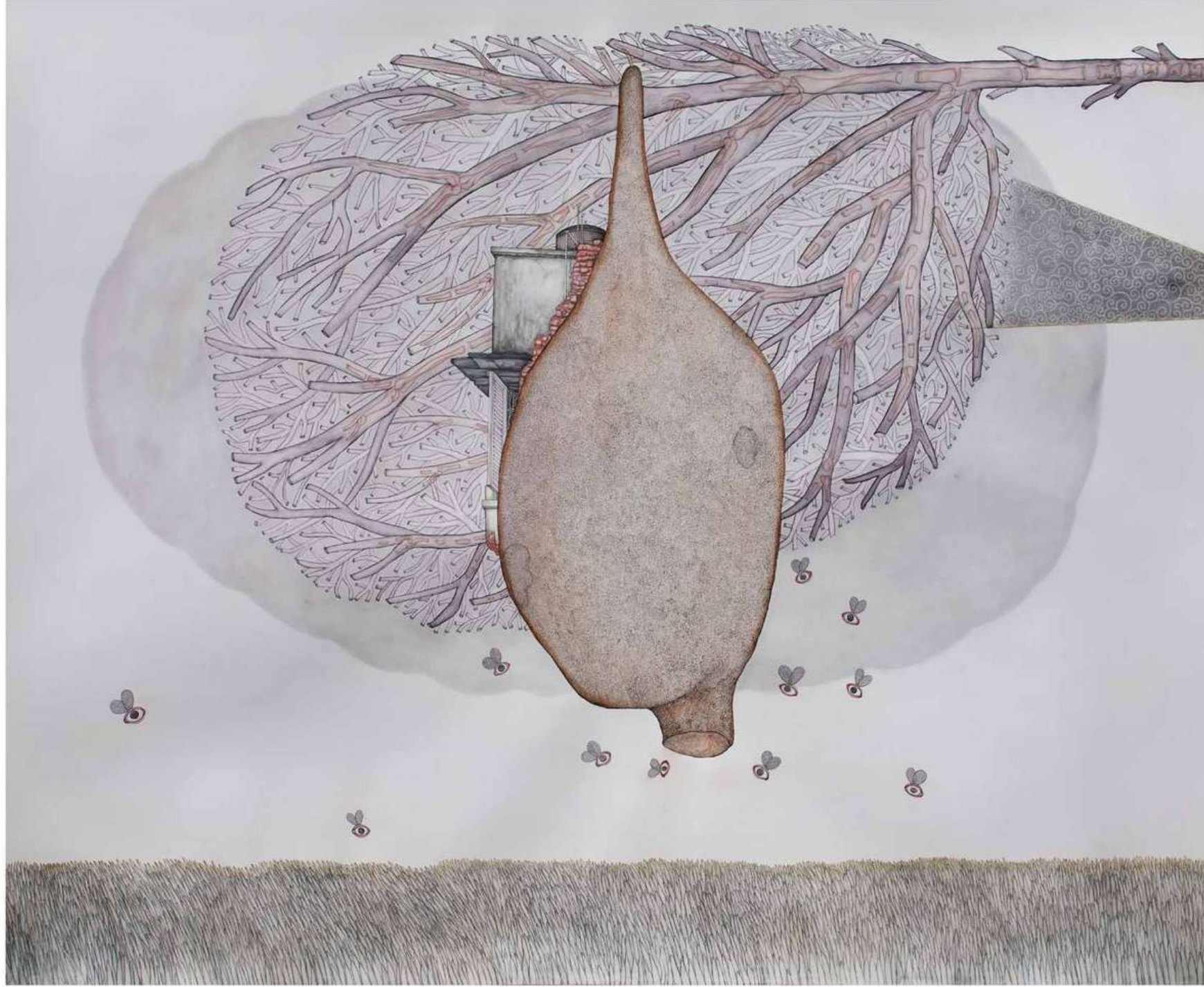


Detail  
*See You on the Way I*  
 Acrylic, watercolour, archival ink,  
 charcoal, and gouache on Nepali  
 paper pasted on plywood  
 40.79 X 29.13 in.  
 2023



*See You on the Way II*  
Acrylic, watercolour, archival ink,  
charcoal, and gouache on Nepali  
paper pasted on plywood  
41.97 X 28.35 in.  
2023





*Lakshya Veda*, Watercolour and graphite on paper, 47.8 x 59.8 in. each, 2021, Kolkata



***Life Under the Yellow Eye I, II, III*, Watercolour, charcoal and graphite and cotton fabric (gamchha) on paper, 29.52 x 21.65 in., 2021, Kolkata**



Detail  
*Exile in the City*  
 Watercolour and graphite  
 on paper  
 60.04 X 36.02 in.  
 2020





Installation view  
**Vichitra/विचित्र**  
Patna Museum, Patna  
2026



***The Bed of Nightmare***  
 Watercolour and graphite on paper  
 48 X 60 in.  
 2019, Kolkata

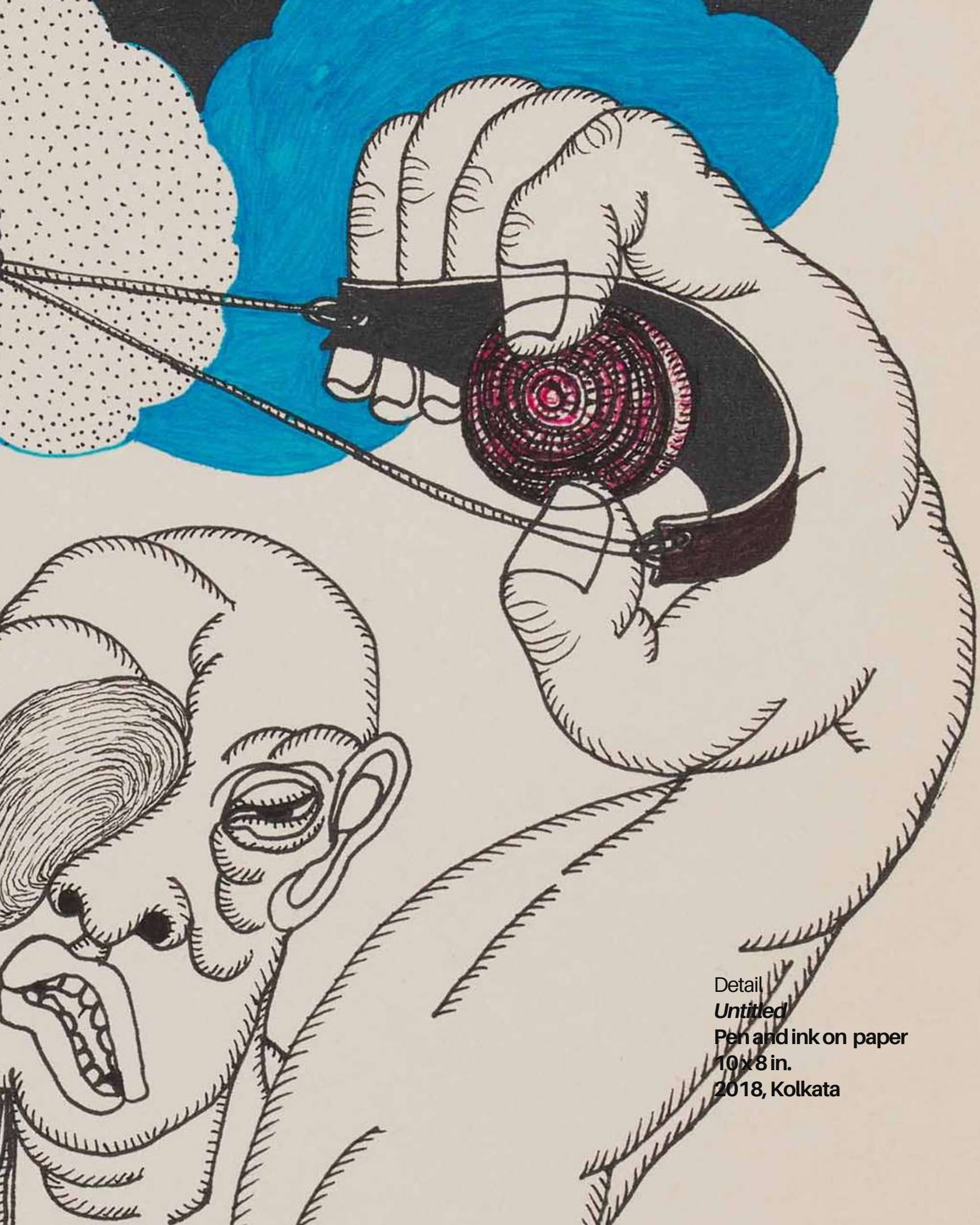
"Human figure that an artist considers as an object of interest is often a reflection of the self. The self extends itself on to others. A simultaneous acknowledgement of the passerby and recognition of the shadow of one's self falling on the other constitute the connection. The works of Soma Das and Anjan Modak centre around a sense of empathy that accounts for a search of the self in the pretext of watching numerous others situated around the artists. The relentlessness of recording figures in action, not only indicates the circumstances of the subjects, but also that of the artists who would take both the role of an insider and an outsider in looking at them. Thus the figures are marked with a sense of attachment and detachment at the same time."

- Adip Dutta

[an excerpt from the curatorial note of  
*Between the Self and Silhouettes*, Emami Art,  
 2022]

*Untitled*  
Pen and ink on paper  
10x8 in.  
2018, Kolkata



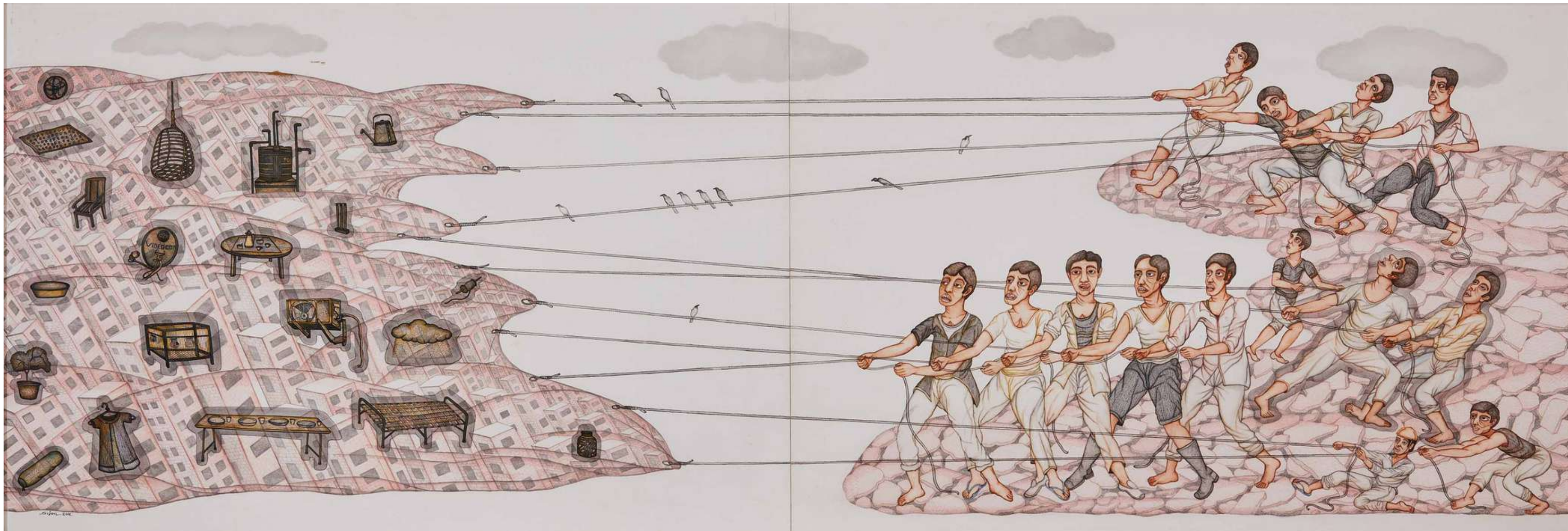


Detail  
*Untitled*  
Pen and ink on paper  
10 x 8 in.  
2018, Kolkata





*Still-Life V*  
Watercolour and  
graphite on paper  
9 X 12 in.  
2017, Kolkata



*Canopy Over The Geography*  
Watercolour, ink and graphite on paper  
29.50 X 86.50 in.  
2016, Kolkata

*Fencing with Tongue*  
Watercolour on paper  
29.5 x 22 in.  
2014, Kolkata





Installation view  
***Between the Self and Silhouettes***  
 Emami Art, Kolkata  
 2022



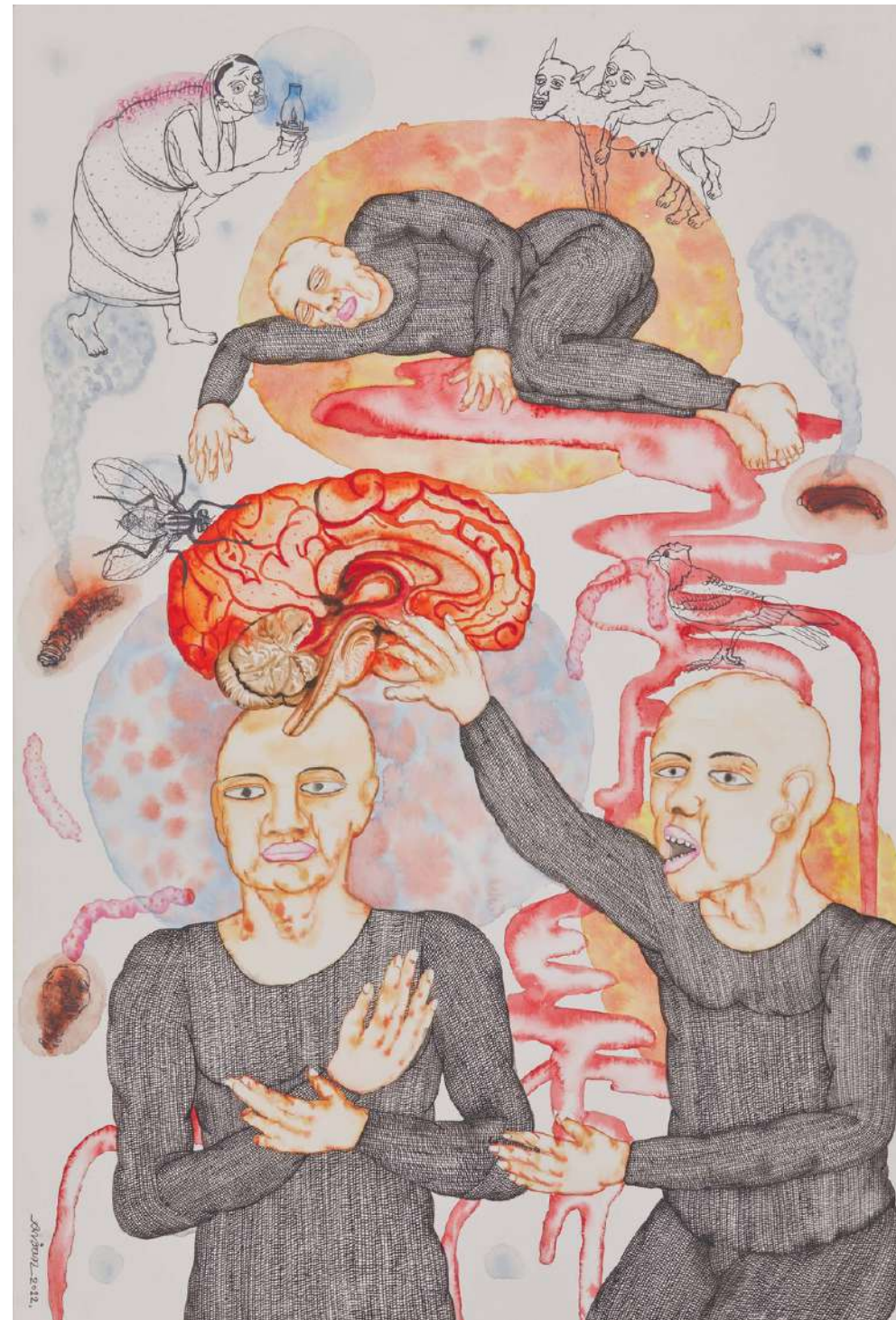
**Untitled**  
Archival ink on paper  
52 x 17 in. overall  
2013, Kolkata



Installation view  
***Between the Self and Silhouettes***  
Emami Art, Kolkata  
2022



***Floating Over the City***  
 Watercolour on paper  
 22 x 15 in.  
 2012, Kolkata



***Floating Over the City***  
 Watercolour on paper  
 22 x 15 in.  
 2012, Kolkata



***Tandav***  
 Watercolour on paper  
 22 x 15 in.  
 2012, Kolkata



Born in 1982 in West Bengal, India, Anjan Modak is a contemporary artist based in Kolkata. He graduated with a BVA and an MFA in Painting from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, in 2007 and 2009, respectively.

Modak's solo shows include *Fragmented Life*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2020; *The Common Man*, a solo project, presented by Emami Art at the India Art Fair, New Delhi, 2020; and *Black, White and More*, Emami Chisel Art, Kolkata, 2016. He was a part of the duo show *Between the Self and Silhouettes* at Emami Art in 2022.

Notable group exhibitions include *Vichitra/विचित्र* organised by Emami Art and Kolkata Centre for Creativity in collaboration with Bihar Museum, Patna, 2026; *Material as Metaphors: A Dialogue of Art Forms*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Kolkata, 2025; *Constellation*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; *Paint Our World*, organised by Agapi 2 at ITC Sonar, Kolkata, 2018; Ahuja Art Museum, Kolkata, 2017; CIMA Awards Show, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata, 2017 and 2019; *Fictive*, Gallery Range, Kolkata, 2016; *Assortment*, Emami Chisel Art Gallery, 2015; Abanindranath Tagore Gallery, ICCR, Kolkata, 2014; *Shublab*, Gallery Matrix, Kolkata, 2014; Annual Exhibition of Rajya Charukala Parishad, Kolkata, 2014 to 2017; the 86th Annual All India Art Exhibition, New Delhi, 2013; Weavers Studio Centre for the Arts in association with Sensorium, Kolkata, 2013; Annual Exhibition of Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, 2013 to 2016; and Time & Space Gallery, Bangalore, 2011.

Emami Art has presented Modak's work at several art fairs including Art Mumbai 2025, 2024, 2023; India Art Fair 2026, 2025, 2024, 2022, and 2020; Mumbai Art Fair and Jaipur Art Fair in 2016; and India Art Story, Kolkata, 2015 to 2017. In 2009, he was awarded the Rabindra Bharati University Present Creative Award, and his works are part of major private collections in India and abroad.

Anjan Modak lives and works in Kolkata.

# 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.

