



**Suman Dey**

**Suman  
Dey**

EMAMI ART



*Unexpected Storms - I*  
Detail

Suman Dey's art practice is a nuanced exploration of abstraction and memory, intricately woven with personal experiences and his journey as a self-taught artist. With no formal education in art institutions, Dey navigated odd jobs, including working at his father's *paan* shop, a block printing workshop, and homoeopathy stores. These diverse experiences became integral to his artistic narrative, influencing his thoughts and finding resonance in his work.

Dey's self-education in art extended beyond practical experiences, involving a dedicated study of art books, gallery visits, and conversations with senior artists. Around 2014, transitioning from mythological paintings in the Bengal School style to abstraction marked a significant shift in his artistic journey. Although inspired by the non-representational paintings of Prabhakar Kolte and Ganesh Haloi, he, instead of using the bright chromatic palette like them, explores the abstract shapes painted in dark, greyish monochrome, which adds solidity to the shapes. He follows a slow and contemplative method, distilling the visible forms – be it a butterfly or a handbag – into abstract motifs and colours. However, he does not simply exclude the references of the external world to attain the pure forms, cutting at the root of the idea of artistic imitation; rather,

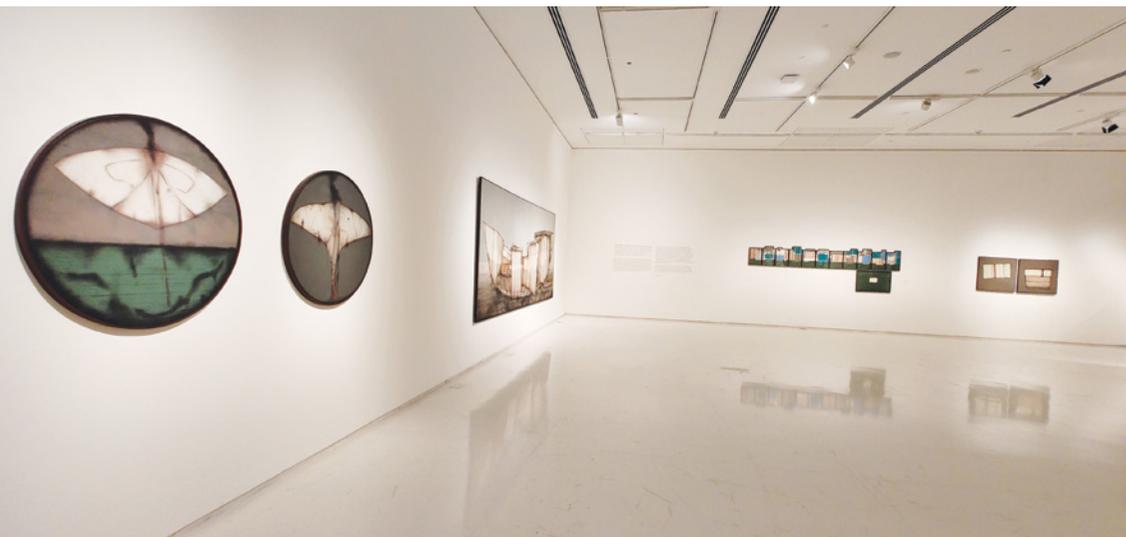
he wishes to create an entirely imaginative equivalent of the moods and memories provoked by the world. In other words, Suman Dey explores the state of mind without going beyond it. His early semi-abstract paintings represent the formative stage of his artistic process. Later, he disengages painting from the visible world, building compositions based on the traces that the world has left in the mind. An intense preoccupation with large and bold shapes concerning the play of imagination and the subconscious mind characterizes his more recent works. Mixing formal approaches with elements of surrealism, he creates an expressive, non-representational language to capture a wide range of thoughts, sentiments, and values. The dilapidated structures and stains on the abstract shapes in the paintings indicate our polluted and toxic environment, speaking of the apocalypse of our modern civilization in the age of global warming.

Around 2019, Suman Dey started his notable *Journey and Butterfly* series, stimulated by surrealistic ideas. However, unlike the surrealists, who establish congruity between the phantasmagoria of the unconscious and the object of everyday life, he shows deep attachment to the phenomenal things and the anecdotes associated with them, giving visual existence to many imaginary spaces and tempi.



Exhibition view, *Fluid Boundaries*,  
Emami Art, 2020

Exhibition view, *The Lost Fragrance of Memory*,  
Emami Art, 2023



The limitation of any particular experience does not constrain him. Memory and desire are dissociated from everyday life's immediate, trivialized space; they are uncoupled and then cobbled back together in his long and meticulous art practice. Freed from the need to describe a particular thing, person or idea, the possibilities are endless. In undermining immediacy and the power of the present tense, Suman Dey uses the whole of human experience as his model, swinging between proximity and distance, between the empirical and universal. His *Memory Series* delves into personal and collective memories, encapsulating lived experiences. Dey draws inspiration from his past, recalling moments like putting khayer on betel leaves at his father's *paan* shop, infusing his works with colours and textures reminiscent of the same. A distinctive feature of Dey's palette is the deliberate reduction of the brightness of colours, with a preference for white, black, brown, and his self-proclaimed favourite, grey. This restrained colour palette serves as a deliberate choice, emphasizing a subdued and contemplative aesthetic that characterizes his artworks.

The absence of a representational base in his works underscores his commitment to abstraction as the most accessible and compelling language for expressing his thoughts and the inherent contradictions within his artistic explorations. Suman Dey's art practice emerges as a profoundly personal and evolving exploration of memory, experience, and the transformative power of abstraction, usually involving a parallel creation of layouts and smaller works—an intensive practice that spans several months. Revisiting these layouts often leads to their transformation into larger works, marking a dynamic engagement with the artistic process. As he immerses himself in the work, both physically and mentally, the initial layout becomes a fragment in the broader development, reflecting the evolving nature of his artistic expressions. ■

Exhibition view, *The Lost Fragrance of Memory*,  
Emami Art, 2023

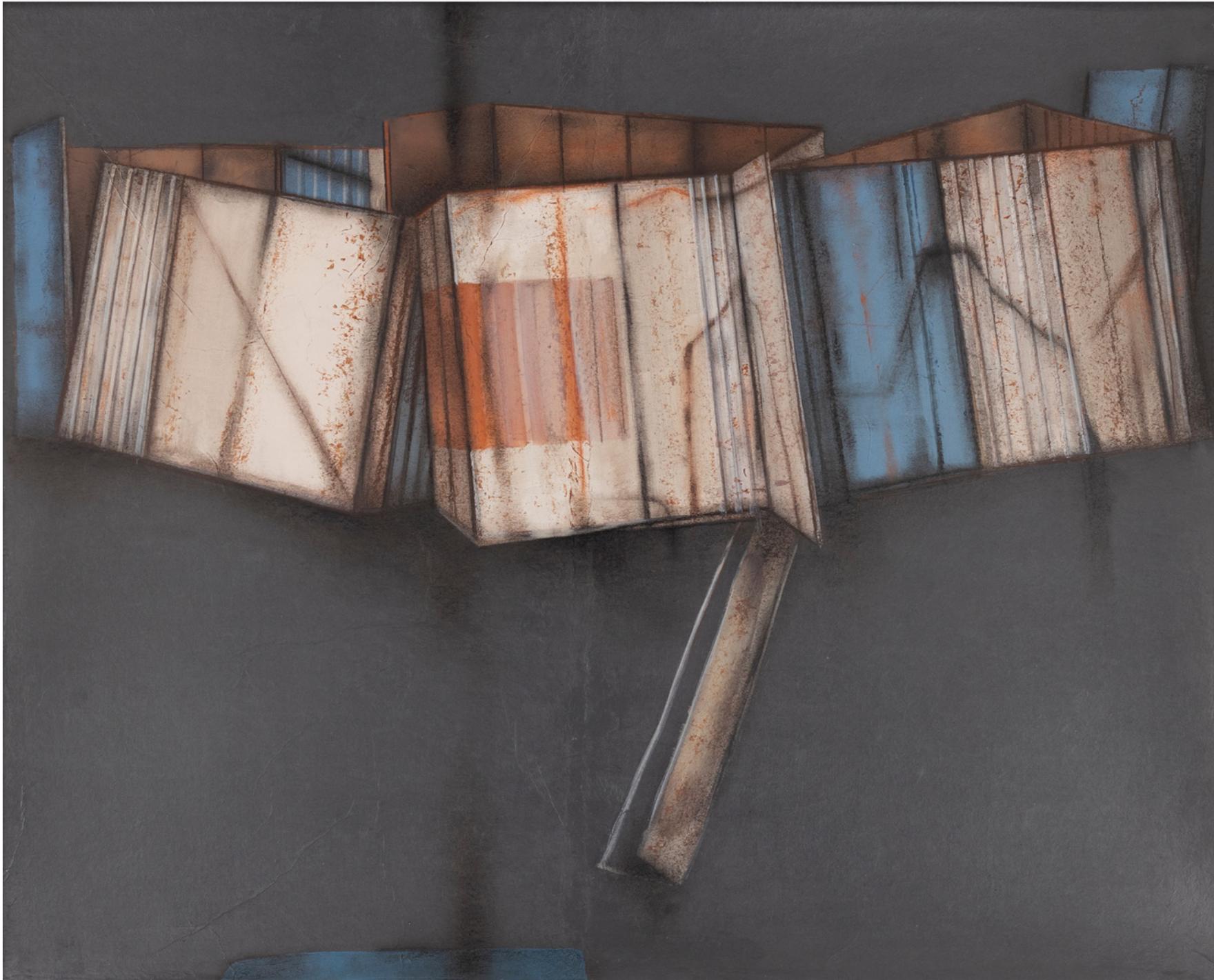


*Form 3*  
Acrylic, charcoal and pencil on Nepali  
handmade paper pasted on board  
24.6 x 24.6 inches  
2021



*Decay II and Decay III*  
Acrylic, charcoal and pencil on canvas  
36 x 36 inches each  
2023

Suman Dey's unique spatial imagination, a mellowed world of lines, shapes and colours repudiates the use of familiar objects and their material existence, but, unlike the abstract artists striving for the absolute and pure forms, he adheres to the essential reality of things and their substance, enmeshed with the insubstantiality of dreams and memory.



*Form I*  
Acrylic, charcoal, graphite and  
Nepali handmade paper pasted  
on paper  
30 x 36.8 inches  
2023



*Form I (left) and Form II (right)*  
Acrylic, charcoal and dry pastel on canvas  
30 x 30 inches each  
2019



*Ups and Downs*  
Acrylic, charcoal and pencil on canvas  
33.5 x 39.5 inches  
2023



*Untitled*  
Acrylic on Nepali handmade paper pasted on board  
40.3 x 30 inches  
2021



*Remains*  
Acrylic, charcoal and graphite on canvas  
30 x 102.3 inches overall  
Diptych  
2022

Many of Dey's works throw light on the artist's concern regarding the environmental crisis in a poetic manner. While he is the witness, his language remains seeped in symbolism, that are seeped with a notion of nostalgia and decay.

**‘There is hardly any bright colour used in my work. I reduce the colours’ brightness using white or other methods. White, black, and brown are the main colours. There’s also grey. I’d say grey is my colour.’**

Suman Dey

*Unexpected Storms - I*  
Acrylic, charcoal and  
pencil on canvas  
48 x 48 inches  
2023





*Form*  
Acrylic, charcoal, graphite, printed paper and Nepali  
handmade paper pasted on board  
20 x 20 inches each  
2022

In recent works, Dey occasionally steps out of the subdued, sombre tones he is known for. There is a rupture. Bright patches of blue, green, red or ochre suddenly make appearances in the comfort of his familiar palette. These lively hues perform seemingly contradictory roles, accentuating decay and simultaneously breathing vitality into the prevailing atmosphere.



*The Lost Fragrance*  
Acrylic, dry pastel, graphite  
and charcoal on paper  
39 x 128.2 inches  
Suite of 12 works  
2022



Known for his compelling forms and rich tonality with a unique pictorial style and treatment, Dey has succeeded in developing a highly refined and evocative language of abstraction.



*Reminiscence I*  
Acrylic colour and charcoal on board  
16 x 15 inches each  
2020



*Dupurer Feriwala (Hawkers in the Afternoon)*  
Gouache on Nepali paper pasted on canvas  
69 X 41 inches  
2021

‘There is, as such, no representational base in my works; there is only abstraction. I find abstraction the easiest and most effective language to express my thoughts and its contradictions in the work.’

Suman Dey



*Unexpected Storms - II*  
Acrylic, charcoal and pencil on canvas  
102 x 78 inches  
2023



Though fundamentally abstract, Dey's work reveals forms that resonate with recognisable shapes and their inherent associations. In canvases such as this, a sequential composition introduces a discernible movement in the foreground, elucidating what endures and what propels forward. This dynamic interplay of elements unfolds possibilities for narrative interpretations, inviting viewers into a realm of diverse readings.

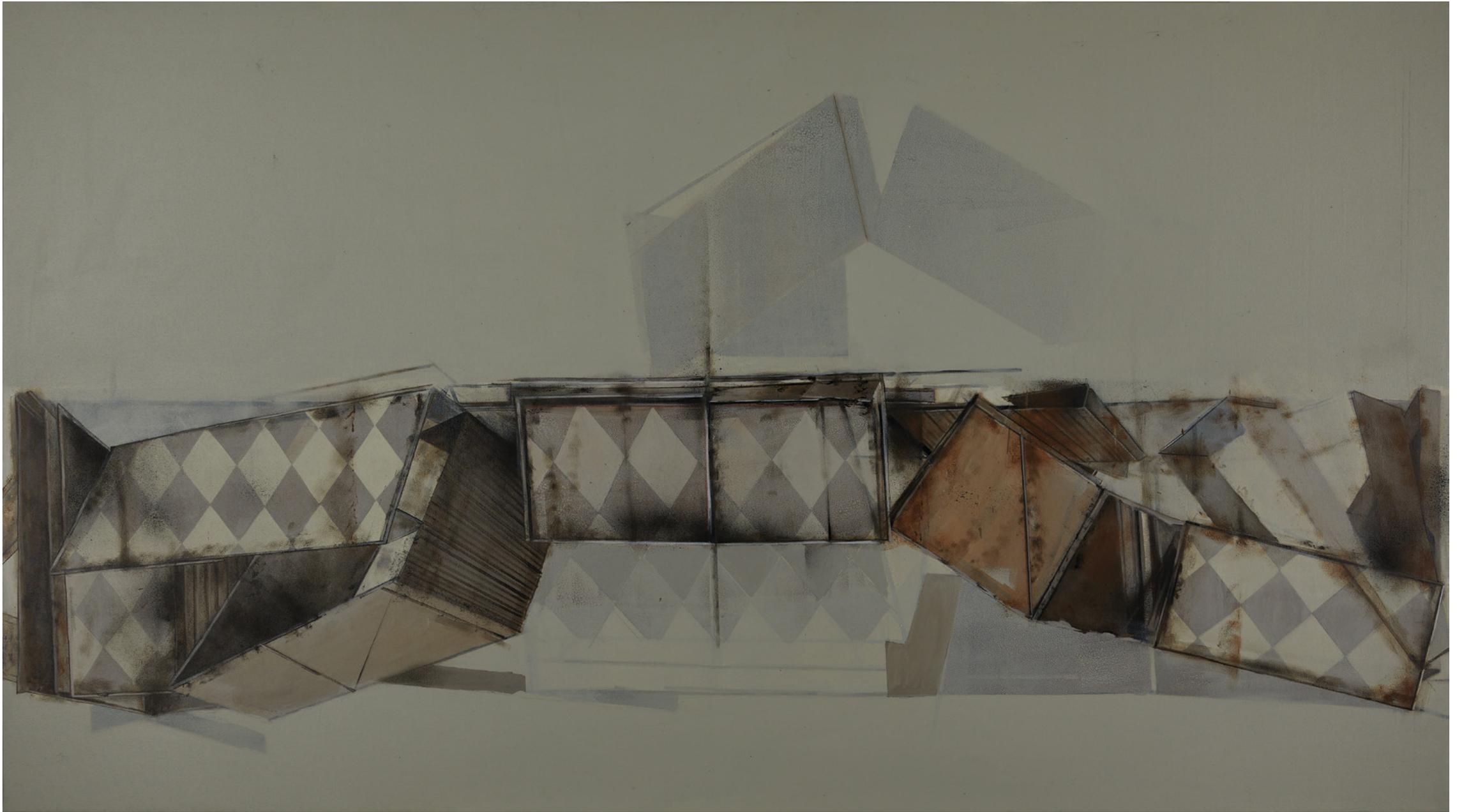
*Journey II*  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas  
72 x 114 inches  
2020



*Synthetic Faith*  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas  
78 x 60 inches  
2021



*Untitled*  
Acrylic, charcoal, dry pastel on canvas  
48 x 48 inches  
2022

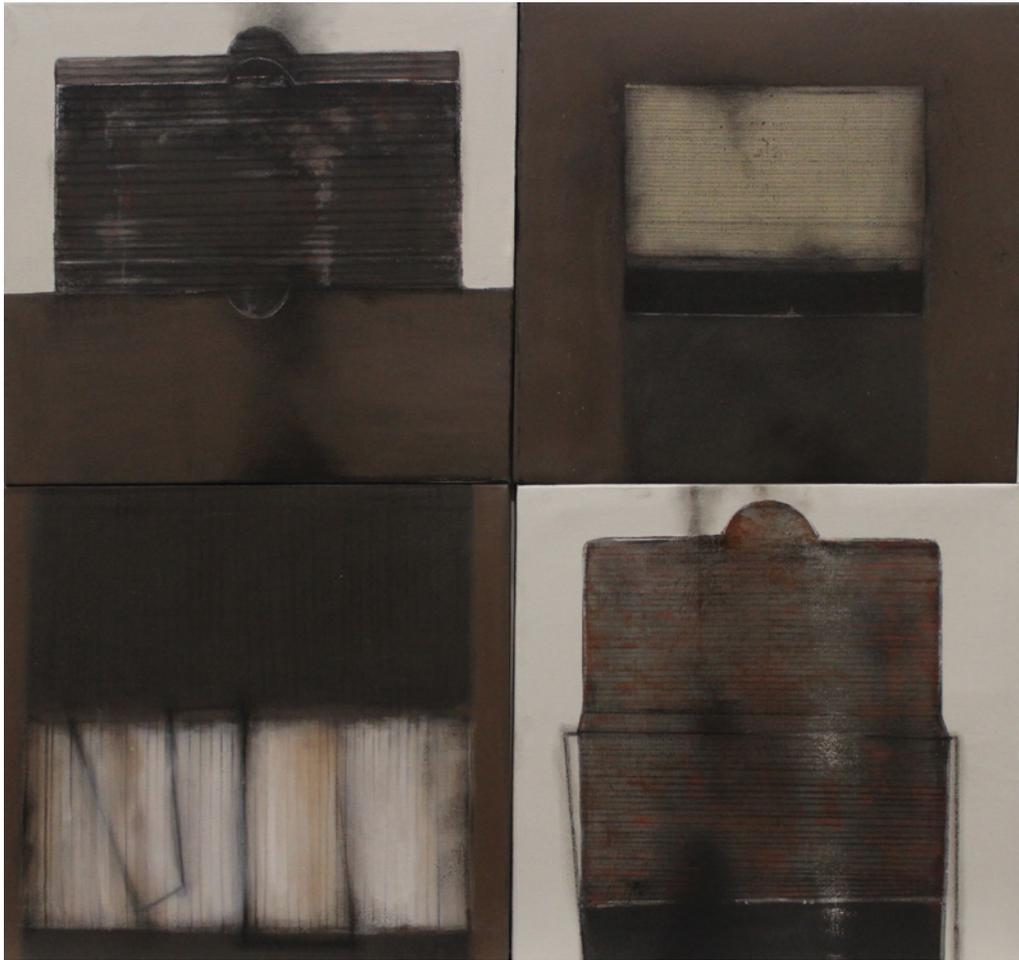


*At the End*  
Acrylic on Canvas  
48.03 x 84.25 inches  
2022



*At the end*  
Acrylic on Nepali handmade  
paper pasted on board  
40 x 30 inches  
2021

*Untitled*  
Acrylic and dry pastel on canvas  
72 x 72 inches  
2019



*Reminiscence*  
 Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on canvas  
 18 x 18 inches  
 2020



*Form*  
 Acrylic, charcoal, pencil, Nepali  
 handmade paper pasted on board  
 128 x 60 inches overall  
 2022

‘I would put *khayer* (catechu) on the betel leaf when I sold *pāān* at my father’s shop. One can find their colours and texture in my works. Sometimes, my works also have the texture of peeling plaster off walls. The old memories tend to keep coming back. This is how I proceed in my work.’

Suman Dey



*Composition*  
Acrylic and dry pastel on canvas  
72.00 x 72.00 inches  
2019



*Landscape II*  
Acrylic, pastel and charcoal on board  
24 x 40 inches  
2018



Born in 1981, **Suman Dey** is a self-taught artist, who works in the language of abstract art. Dey has exhibited widely in India.

His recent solo show 'The Lost Fragrance of Memory' was at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2023. His prior solo shows include Taj Bengal, Kolkata, 2011 and 2014; Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, 2014; ECA Art Walk, Kolkata, 2011; and Chemould Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2008. His duo exhibitions include Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, 2009 and 2015, Silpi Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2008.

He has participated in numerous group exhibitions including The Annual Exhibition at Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, 2022, 2018, 2017, and 2016; India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, 2018; State Gallery of Art, Hyderabad, 2017; Lalit Kala Academy, Bhubaneswar, 2016 and 2017; Annual Exhibition at Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, 2016 and 2017; Emami Chisel Art All India Exhibition, Kolkata, 2016 and 2017; Annual Exhibition organised by the Rajya Charukala Parshad, 2016 and 2017.

Dey was awarded the Jury's Special Mention Award by Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata in 2022 and the Certificate of Merit by Emami Chisel Art, Kolkata in 2017.

Suman Dey lives and works in Kolkata, India.

Emami Art is a leading Indian contemporary art gallery and a platform for cultural production. Established in 2017 in Kolkata, Emami Art represents emerging, mid-career and established artists and organises a dynamic programme of exhibitions and public seminars. Since its inception, the gallery has curated and hosted intimate and large-scale exhibitions and regularly participates in national and international art fairs and conferences.

With a focus on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach that echoes South Asian history, the programme explores socio-cultural and geo-political narratives in relation to visual art practices today. As part of its knowledge-sharing and archiving activities, Emami Art regularly hosts talks, seminars, panel discussions and conversations between artists, curators and audiences to create a safe space for critical engagement.

Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, the gallery places emphasis on knowledge production and socially conscious themes. Emami Art aspires to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity and welcomes all sections of society.

## EMAMI ART

©Emami Art, 2023  
www.emamiart.com

*All rights reserved.  
No part of the text or photographs  
may be produced without permission  
of the copyright holders.*

Published by  
**Emami Art**  
Kolkata Centre for Creativity  
777, Anandapur, E.M. Bypass  
Kolkata 700107

Image Courtesy:  
**Artist and Emami Art**

Design Consultancy:  
**Ushmita Sahu**

Texts & Editing:  
**Ushmita Sahu, Sayanth R.S,  
Sriza Ray, Siddharth Sivakumar,  
Arkaprava Bose, Avery Banerjee**

Publication Design:  
**Rajarshi Dutta**

Paper Specification:  
**Munken Pure, 100 GSM  
SONA Cordenons**

Printed at:  
**CDC Printers Pvt. Ltd.**

Printed on:  
**January 2024**

# EMAMI ART

Kolkata Centre for Creativity,  
777 Anandapur, E.M. Bypass, Kolkata 700107, West Bengal, India  
+91 7003635905 – +9133 6623 2300 – [www.emamiart.com](http://www.emamiart.com)

