



Soma Das

Soma Das



Stupa - II
Gouache on Nepali paper
pasted on canvas
29 x 23 inches
2020

Soma Das is a contemporary Indian artist based in Kolkata. Her paintings delve into the everyday life of working-class individuals, primarily housemaids from low-income suburbs, through a rather unique and feminine perspective. The subjects of her paintings are seen against a spread-out, usually monochromatic, background offering one a focused gaze into the subject(s) who are engrossed in the business of living. This often includes the most mundane elements of everyday existence ranging from a woman helping her child with daily activities, brushing her own hair, preparing paan during a leisurely time to bashing a cockroach with a broom. Born into a conservative, lower middle-class family, Soma Das spent most of her time with women. Her childhood experiences surrounded by these women and observing their day-to-day activities contributed heavily to shaping Das' worldview as an artist. Her paintings that speak of the life of ordinary people are rendered in the language of miniature paintings.

The use of aerial view, multiple perspectives, realistic detailing, ornamentation, and vibrant colours reveal her strong grasp over the style. Despite following the courtly tradition, she has established a personal style that is easily identifiable, serving as a testament to her artistic skills.

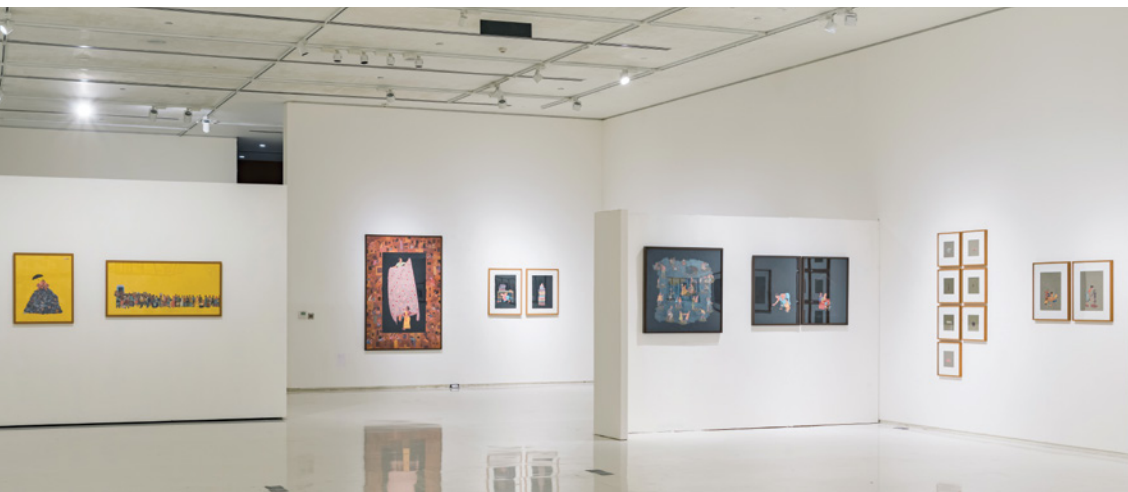
Das' detailed paintings reveal her keen sense of observation. She carefully studies the gestures and appearances of ordinary people, while trying to gauge their emotions, dreams and desires. A poignant poetic mood pervades her extensive body of work. However, instead of magnifying and elevating it to a tragic status, she situates it in the mundane context of everyday life as an undercurrent, making us aware of the life of the ordinary, both exclusive and integral to the lives we lead.

Her paintings, such as 'The Pond 2' and 'The Courtyard' often juxtapose items of affluent households and solitary lifestyles with a close-knit community life of the working-class people, shedding light on the contrast between the two and provoking deeper contemplation about the quality of life of these two end-of-spectrum socio-economic classes.

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



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



Besides exploring the domestic and community spaces, Das made a series of drawings and paintings during the Covid-19-induced lockdowns that are a significant part of her artistic oeuvre. In 'Towards Destination III', the artist illustrates one of the most tragic points of the prolonged lockdown that impacted numerous lives. Migrant workers from all over the country queued up in front of the entrance to the railway station in a frenzied attempt to reach home have been depicted against a rich yellow background dominating the compositional space and taking the subject(s) out of the immediate context. Their migratory lives can be glimpsed through the items they carry including a table fan, pointing towards the packing up of their entire life as they head home. ■

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



Dupurer Feriwala
(Hawkers in the Afternoon)
Detail





The Roof Top Party
Gouache on Nepali paper pasted on canvas
36 x 30 inches
2021

The Roof Top Party is a scene of communal celebration, a theme recurring in Das's works. The composition is centred around a larger than life pot of Biryani that adds a sense of humour to its symbolic presence as the common food source shared by the community.



Untitled
Gouache and clay on Nepali paper
pasted on board
11 x 8 inches each
2020



Towards Destination III
 Gouache on Nepali paper
 pasted on canvas
 23 x 49 inches
 2020

In this work, the artist illustrates one of the common hazards of the prolonged lockdown that impacted numerous lives, specially of migrated labourers. Against the rich yellow background dominating the compositional space, the long line of people struggling to make their way to the train entrance, depicted through an empathetic yet ironical gaze.

The Pond - 2
Detail



Das's study of everyday objects attempt to reveal their concealed history reflecting on the way of life they belong to. Here simple objects become a symbolism for the cultural nuances of the community they represent.



The Pond - 2
Gouache on Nepali paper pasted on canvas
48 x 47.5 inches
2020



Couple II
Gouache on acid free paper
21.25 X 29.92 inches
2020

Social Distance II
Gouache on acid free paper
21.25 X 29.13 inches
2020



Artist Soma Das would patiently wait like a wildlife photographer for that moment of a glance amidst the commonplace. A regimented practice of drawing anything that grabs her attention is not only a continuous process to engage with the surroundings, but also to record time and the memory of a day.

Swimming across almost an ocean of such recorded memories, Soma Das would reach a point that becomes a moment in itself. This would simultaneously hold the epitome of the usual and the strange. The routine and the divergent are woven together to make the frame emerge. The frame that mostly celebrates daily chores of women, tends to magnify the content to the extent of making it appear almost like a performance.

Adip Dutta
Artist & Curator



Household Chores IV
Gouache on Nepali paper
17 x 13 inches
2021



Untitled
Gouache on silk fabric pasted on board
11 x 8 inches
2019



Untitled
Gouache on embroidered silk fabric pasted on board
10 x 8 inches
2019



Household Chores III
Gouache on Nepali paper
17 x 13 inches
2021

Untitled
Gouache on Nepali paper and printed fabric
pasted on board
8 x 10 inches
2018

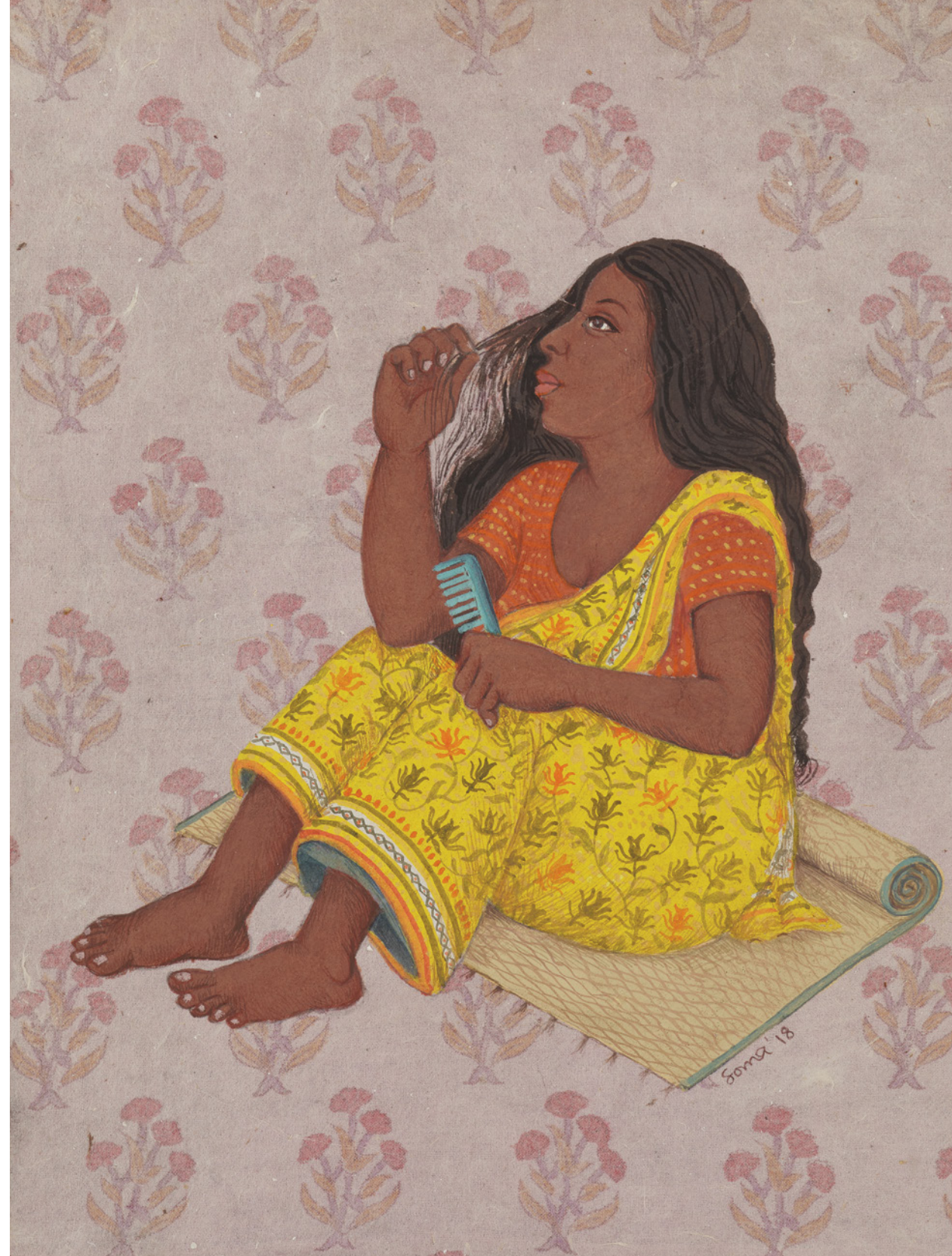


A keen observer, Das studies daily life with a microscopic vision. In this painting, the subject is painted during the performance of a mundane task. Through the extreme centralisation of her subjects standing in alienation, Das turns the common woman to a protagonist through her works.

‘As a college student, I used to travel by train. I travelled in the ladies’ compartment. I was attracted to the woman passengers – their different characteristics, conversations, and the motifs in their sarees. I use these in my work. I show the life of ordinary people. Those people whom I meet every day in the street.’

Soma Das

Untitled
Gouache on Nepali paper and
printed fabric pasted on board
11 x 8 inches
2018



While the elaborate sofa here is associated with the economically affluent, for the underprivileged, the courtyard is a communion shared by many. By collapsing these disparate images into one frame, Das creates a playful critique of middle-class life.



The Courtyard
Gouache and natural clay on Nepali
paper pasted on canvas
35 x 49 inches
2020



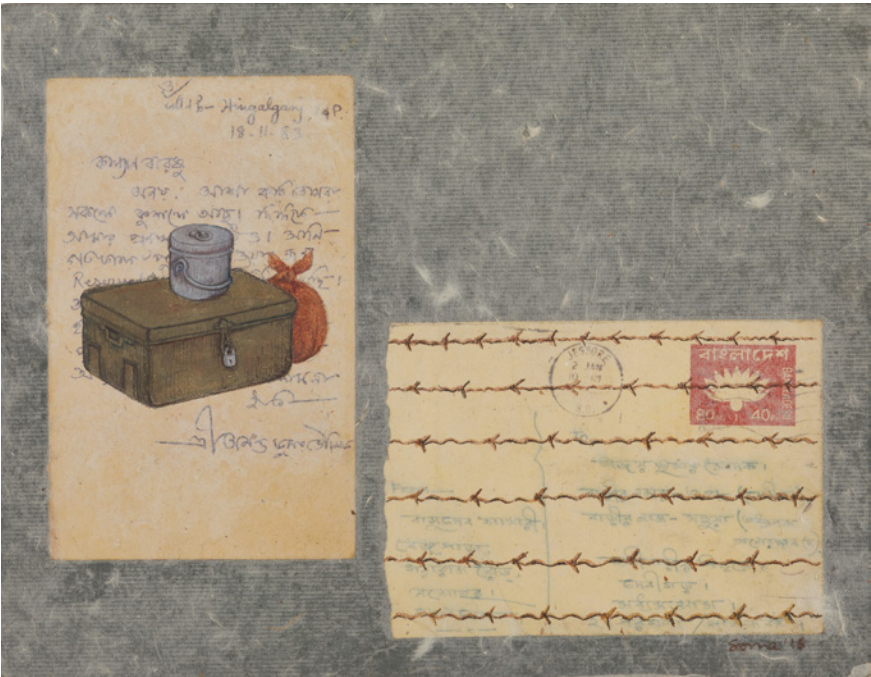
From Roof at Morning
Gouache on nepali paper
pasted on canvas
24 X 30 inches
2016

Dominated by a cream coloured sky, the painting depicts a human and a flying plane against each other. From an unlikely perspectival point, we see a woman possibly getting some exercise and we also see the large underbelly of an aeroplane. Here, the artist splits the two dimensional pictorial space in multiple viewpoints effortlessly merging with each other.

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



Untitled
Gouache and Nepali paper on
postcard pasted on board
8 x 10 inches
2016



Untitled
Gouache and clay on Nepali paper
pasted on board
7 x 7 inches each
2019

A keen observer, Das's study of everyday objects attempt to reveal their concealed history reflecting on the way of life they belong to. Here, simple objects become a symbolism for the cultural nuances of the community they represent.



Made for Each Other
Gouache, cotton thread, paper
cutting, stitched on acid free paper
26.50 x 8.50 inches each
2020

A Food Loving Couple
Gouache on paper
29.50 x 21.50 inches
2019



Mid-Day in the Summer
Gouache on Nepali paper pasted
on canvas
41 x 23.80 inches
2016



Enjoyment in Confined Life II
Gouache on paper
21.5 x 14.5 inches
2020



Privacy II
Gouache on paper
21.5 x 15 inches
2020



Untitled 6
Ink, natural colour, gouache and colour pencil on paper
12 x 8 inches each
Suite of 14 works
2020 - 2021

"Her meticulously observed works in a variety of media may remind one of Sondheim's glorious *Pretty Women*, although these homebodies with sagging frames and flabby stomachs encased in saris and nighties are most anti-glam. But what they do possess is a certain freedom of spirit that liberates them from their workaday realities. They are engaged in household chores but their minds seem to have escaped elsewhere, far from the sordid surroundings of slums and cramped flats."

Soumitra Das
Art Critic
(*Keep it Simple*, Art Review in
The Telegraph, Published: 09.07.22)

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





Untitled
Ink and colour pencil on board
12 x 8 inches each
2016



Untitled
Ink on paper
12 x 8 inches each
2021



Untitled
Ink on paper
10 x 14 inches
2020



A morning in my neighbour's garden
Gouache on Nepali paper pasted on canvas
24.4 x 24 inches
2021

‘Even though I haven’t been trained in the exact techniques of miniature painting, by studying the ancient folios and plates, reading and researching in museums and galleries, I have found my own language and interpretation’

Soma Das
(*The Mob Miniaturist*, Article by Sneha Bhura
The Week, Issue Date: 14.06.2020)



Born in 1979 in Kolkata, West Bengal, **Soma Das** is a contemporary Indian artist who graduated with a First Class in her B.V.A. and M.F.A. in Painting from Rabindra Bharati University in 2007 and 2009 respectively.

Das' major shows include, a duo show 'Between Selves and Silhouettes' featuring her work and curated by Adip Dutta was held at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2022 and 'Different Facets of Life' at Gallery Nakshatra, Kolkata, 2010.

Some of her group participations include 'Bengal-Nama' curated by Ina Puri at Bikaner House, New Delhi and presented by Gallery Art Positive, 2022; CIMA Awards Show at CIMA Gallery, Kolkata, 2015 and 2017; Summer Show CIMA Gallery, Kolkata in 2015 and 2017; Lalit Kala Academy, Kolkata 2015; Emami Chisel Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2015; Annual Exhibition Rajya Charukala Parshad, Kolkata 2014 - 2017; Annual Art Exhibition, Emami Chisel Art Gallery, Kolkata 2014 -2017; Group show organised by Sensorium at Abanindranath Tagore Gallery ICCR, Kolkata, 2014 and 2015; Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre, Kolkata, 2015 and 2016; A group show organised by CRY, 2014, Annual Exhibition, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, 2010, 2013, and 2015, among several others.

She has participated in multiple art fairs throughout India including Arts Acre Art Fair by Sensorium, Kolkata, 2017; Mumbai Art Fair, 2016 and 2018; CIMA Art Fair, Kolkata, 2015; India Art Fair, New Delhi, 2015 and 2020; Art Fair, Chemould Art Gallery, Kolkata in 2015; Art Fair, Aakriti Art Gallery, Kolkata in 2014 and 2015; Art Fair organised by Emami Chisel Art, Kolkata, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015, and 2016; and Kala Mela at Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata in 2009, among others.

Das has participated in the International Artists' Residency Program at Kira A. Princess of Prussia Foundation (Germany, Italy), in collaboration with Emami Art, 2022. She was awarded a Certificate of Merit by Academy of Fine Arts in 2009 and the State Academy Award in 2008.

Soma Das lives and works in Kolkata.

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

