Debashish Paul

Portfolio

- Durational Performance: Videos & Photographs
- Drawings
- Wearable & Soft Sculptures
- Performative/Staged photography
- Observational Photography



Debashish Paul is an Indian multi-disciplinary artist known for his unique performance style. His multi-expressionist practice involves various mediums such as drawings andpaintings, sculpture, performance, video and photography that address questions of sexuality and identity. Alluring and haunting at the same time, through his work, Paul exploresthe possibilities for repair, reconciliation, and consolation with a profound sense of identity and spirituality that is devised through dialogues with the self, society and nature. Paulsituates personal freedom (which he finds elusive) at the heart of his practice, making it an excess for the sectarian, hierarchical and heteronormative society.

This synthesis of personal experiences and cultural influences underscores the intricate interplay between artistic expression and spiritual foundations in Paul's creative journey,emphasising the spiritual over the physical. His works reflect a strong emancipation of self, gender and sexuality. The social, sexual and emotional behaviour of a body is codifiedthrough generational conditioning and discipline; they are overloaded with the axioms of religion, faith and culture. Paul transcends his body beyond its barriers, creating a hypnotic,inclusive, and non-alienating space. Often reminiscent of ritualistic and shamanic practices, Paul's performances possess an enlightening essence, transforming his body into a locusof healing and solace. His performances, akin to elevated rituals, confer a temporal separation, briefly extricating both performer and audience from the mundane trappings ofeveryday life. This temporal disjunction creates an immersive space, offering a respite from the mundane and fostering a profound connection between the artist and the onlookers.

Varanasi, where Paul has been living for the last few years, is one of Hinduism's most important holy sites. The city's cultural milieu, the spiritual traditions, and familial ties tospirituality have moulded Paul's performance style and philosophical base. His deep admiration for his elder brother, a Hindu monk, contributes significantly to the spiritual layers ofhis artistic expressions.



A Birth of a Boneless Child
Ginny on Frederick
London, 2026

Debasish Paul's *A Birth of a Boneless Child* begins in Phulia, the village in Nadia, West Bengal, where he was raised and where, in the fifteenth century, the poet Krittibas Ojha composed the Krittivasi Ramayan, the retelling that became premodern Bengal's most widely read book. Its manuscripts survive in their thousands, overwhelmingly in Bengal, though empire carried some to London, into the collections of the British Library and SOAS.

From Krittibas, Paul draws a story the older Sanskrit epics never tell: two widowed queens conceive a child together. Because a father was thought to give a child its bones, the boy is born boneless, and Krittivasa makes his name a pun: Bhagiratha, born of two bhagas, two vulvas. The scholar Ruth Vanita, whose work first charted India's premodern queer archive, reads this as one of the rare early accounts of two women conceiving a child.

The politics sit inside the myth rather than on top of it. Here the union of two women is not transgression but the source of a child the sacred epic reveres. It is a reminder that queer life was indigenous to South Asia long before colonial rule criminalised it, and that the language of deviance arrived with the Victorians, not before.

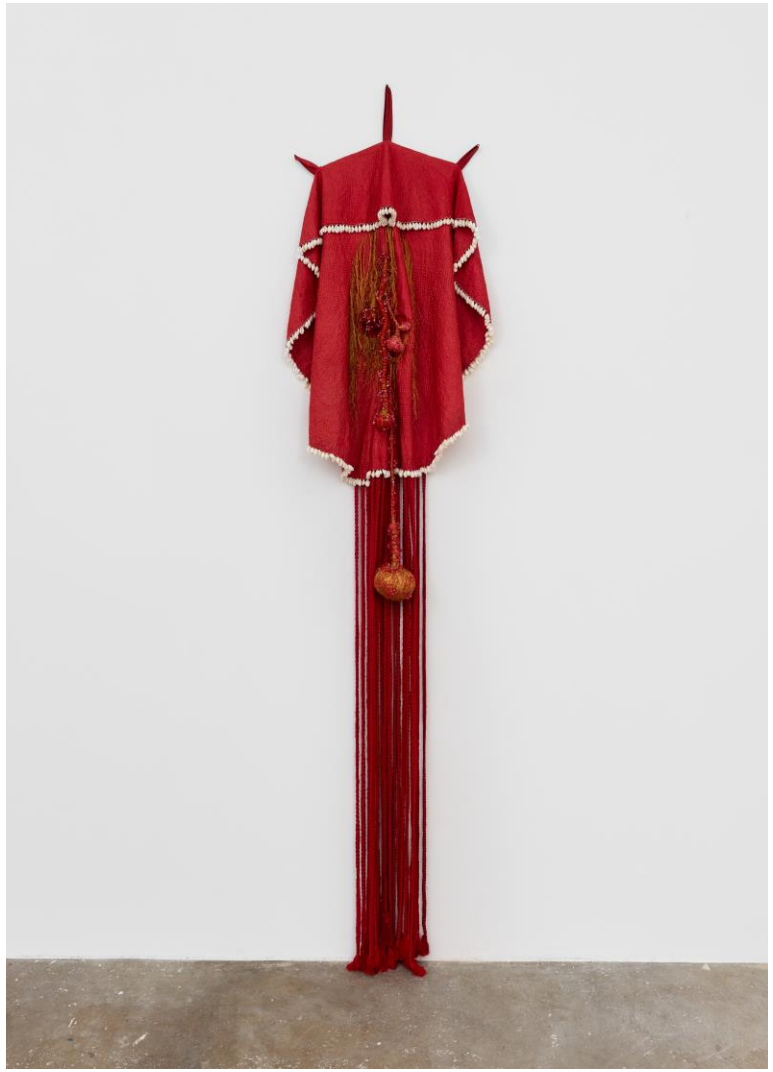


Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London

The boneless child becomes Paul's figure for the queer body: forever asked to bend and fit the narrow spaces made for it, yet, in its very want of fixed structure, free to take its own form. His textile sculptures give that body shape, evoking female reproductive organs as imagined vessels of fertility and transformation, and of family conceived beyond inherited ideas of reproduction and kinship.

He makes them with women from his village, in kantha (the running stitch embroidery of rural Bengal), alongside hand embroidery and beadwork. "I first learned my queerness from these women," Paul says: from their gestures and their craft, their care and their love, but also their pain and the restrictions laid on their bodies. Stitching becomes method and metaphor at once: the needle passing in and out, joining fragments; a stitch that can wound, hold, mend; a question about how gender is sewn into us, and how it might be unpicked and stitched otherwise.

Through myth, textile, and inherited memory, *A Birth of a Boneless Child* imagines a body that can bend without breaking, and make its own forms of love, kinship, and freedom.



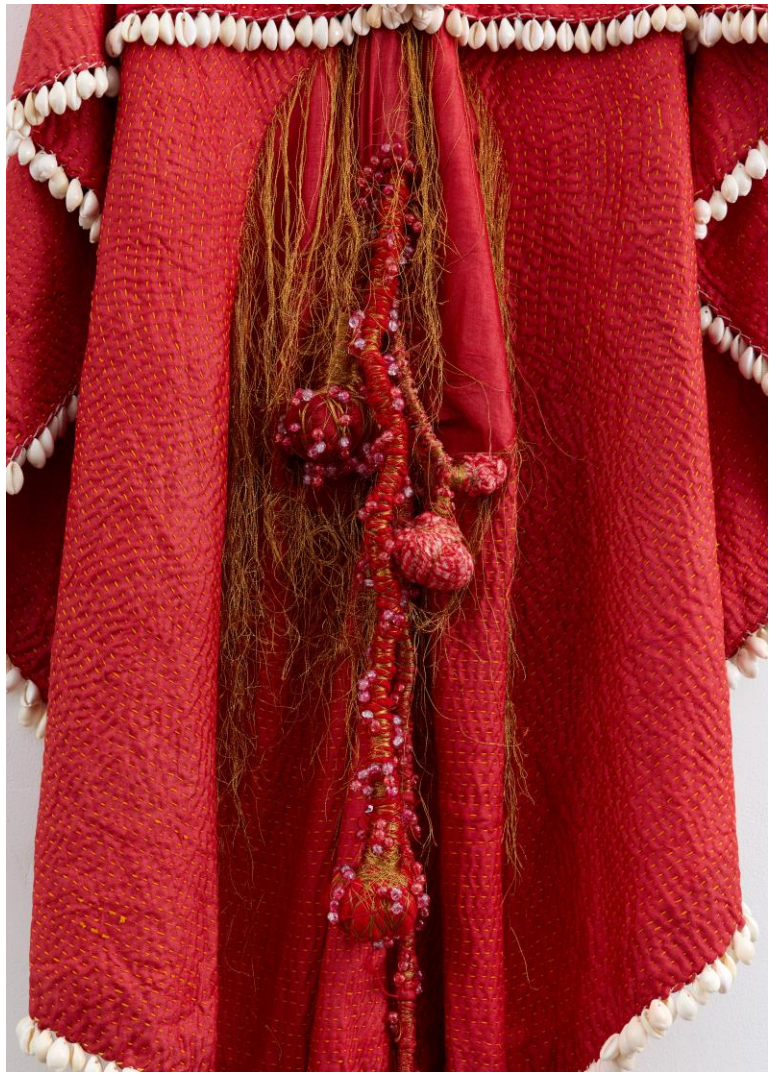


Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London

Untitled
Cotton fabric, and cowrie shells handstitched with cotton thread on tussar silk and matka silk
2026
Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London

Queer people are often asked to bend, adjust, and fit into the narrow spaces society creates for us. Yet "bonelessness" also suggests possibility – a body without a fixed structure, able to transform and create its own form. The works take forms that evoke female reproductive organs, becoming imagined bodies of fertility, birth, transformation, and the possibility of creating a family beyond conventional ideas of reproduction, gender, and kinship. This work has been developed with women from Phulia through kantha stitching, hand embroidery, beadwork, and local textile traditions







Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London



Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London





Photo credit: Ginny on Frederick, London

Nastanirh (The Broken Nest)
Painting , Sculpture, Textile, video, performance

Coventry Biennale 2025 -- *Obsessions, Possessions*
As part of the British Council Biennials Connect grant

"In Rabindranath Tagore's *Nastanirh (The Broken Nest)*, the home isrevealed not as a stable place of comfort but as a fragile structureshaped by desire, silence, and shifting emotional relationships.Through unspoken longing and the gradual unraveling of domesticlife, Tagore reminds us that ideas of home, intimacy, and belongingare never fixed; they are constantly negotiated, fractured, and reimagined.

I use Nastanirh as a contemporary lens through which to thinkabout the abandoned houses of Coventry. Once inhabited andclaimed as private spaces, these buildings now exist in a state oftransition, slowly reclaimed by vegetation, insects, weather, andtime. As human ownership recedes, nature quietly occupies thesespaces, dissolving the boundaries between architecture andlandscape. I understand this process of reclamation as a queer ecology. Itresists systems of control, permanence, and ownership, revealingalternative ways of inhabiting the world beyond human-centeredideas of property and order. The abandoned house becomesneither ruin nor monument, but a living site where decay gives riseto new forms of life and coexistence.

This project asks how we might rethink home not as a fixeddestination but as a fluid condition. Through performance, drawing,textiles, and moving image, I explore abandoned architecture as ametaphor for queer belonging—spaces that exist between absenceand presence, memory and transformation, where both bodies andlandscapes continuously negotiate new ways of living together."



The Twin Tides of Love and Death
Acrylic on canvas cloth hand stitched with beads, and threads
2025
Photo credit: Marcin Sz, Coventry Biennale

The Twin Tides of Love and Death explores the fragile space between love and loss. Two bodies drift through a landscape where flowers, water, and plants become extensions of the body, dissolving the boundary between human and nature. I painted this work after losing two members of my family. Their passing made me think of death not as an ending but as a journey. It brought me back to questions that have always stayed with me: Where do we come from? Where do we go?



Untitled
Acrylic on canvas cloth hand stitched with cowry shells and plastic beads,and stuffed with synthetic cotton
2025
Photo credit: Marcin Sz, Coventry Biennale



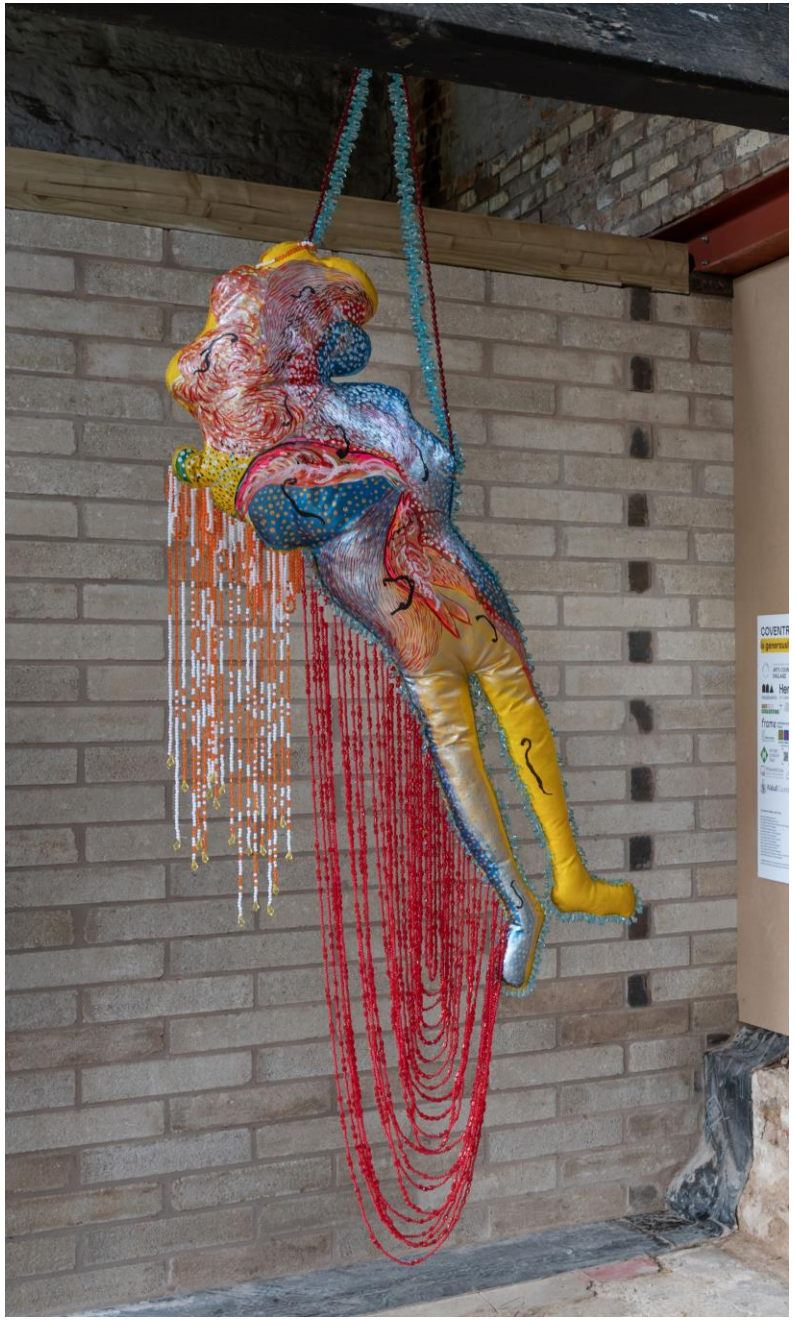
Untitled
Acrylic on canvas cloth and stitched with plastic beads, threads and stuffed with synthetic cotton
2025
Photo credit: Marcin Sz, Coventry Biennale



Untitled
Acrylic on canvas cloth hand stitched with cowry shells , threads and plastic beads, and stuffed with synthetic cotton
2025
Photo credit: Marcin Sz, Coventry Biennale



Untitled
Acrylic on canvas cloth hand stitched shells and plastic beads, and stuffed with synthetic cotton
2025
Photo credit: Marcin Sz, Coventry Biennale



BENGALURU KALA HUBBA 2026
Artistic director: Kamini Sawhney
Photography credit: Shankharupa Bose & Emami Art
Credit Line: The costume/sculptural dress for the performance Nastanirh 2026 were commissioned by Bengaluru Hubba 2026





Debashish Paul embodied his artwork at BLR Hubba on 16 January 2026 after which the costume remained on display at Panchavati as a solo exhibition *Nastanirh (The Broken Nest)* at Kala Hubba as part of BLR Hubba, Bengaluru, 2026

Installation view
Nastanirh (The Broken Nest) at Kala Hubba as part
of BLR Hubba, Bengaluru, 2026

In *Nastanirh*, Paul oscillates between unspoken desires and their reclamation in nature. Throughout his practice, he constantly returns to the relationship between queer bodies and societal structures. Paul references Rabindranath Tagore's *Nastanirh* (*The Broken Nes*t, later adapted as the movie *Charulata*) as he seeks answers in nature - perhaps the fluidity of the natural world can offer frameworks for understanding desire, kinship, affection, and intimacy. Broken Nest reimagines Tagore's Nastanirh through a queer lens, where love and longing are often silenced but continue to survive quietly like unseen vines. Tagore's description of nature as it "slowly takes hold of an old house" inspires Paul to find an analogy in queer desires that are forced into the shadows, gradually taking root in neglected inner spaces.

Panchavati the former home of C.V. Raman's in Malleshwaram, is surrounded by Bengaluru's native trees, where dense shadows gently wrap the building, filtering the sun's rays. These soft rays provide the illumination that young new plants are searching for.

Raman's studies on light, refraction, and hidden spectrums offer Paul a language to interpret how the body responds to light, colour, touch and sensation. Nature has carved its own pathways in Malleshwaram, and Paul allows it to guide him as he converses with the space in a performance that transforms his body into a breathing, fragile broken nest.



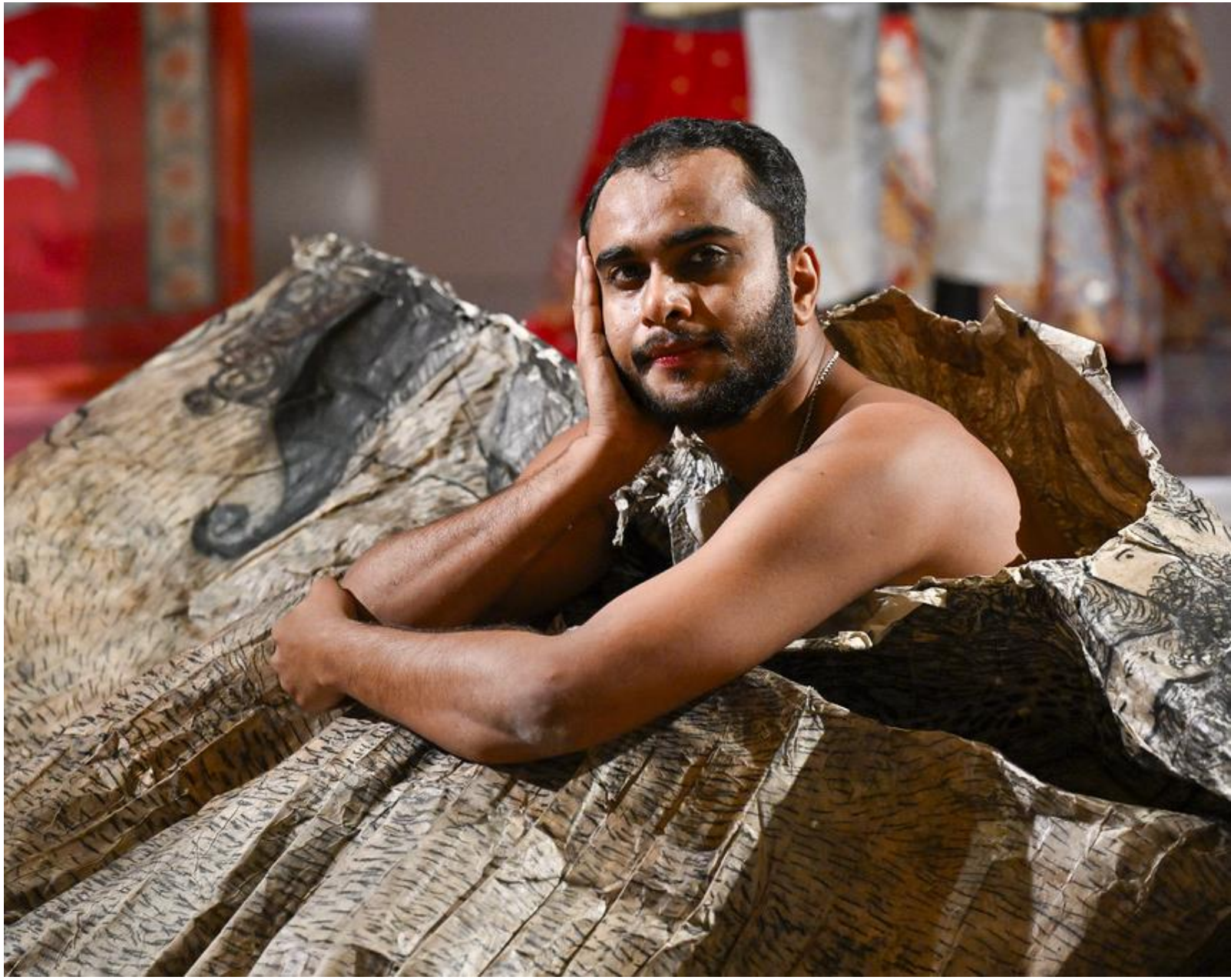
Installation view
Nastanirh (The Broken Nest) at Kala Hubba as part of BLR Hubba, Bengaluru, 2026



Installation view
Nastanirh (The Broken Nest) at Kala Hubba as part of BLR Hubba, Bengaluru, 2026



Debashish Paul performing at *Textile Matters: Woven Stories Between India and France* at the Mobiliernational, Paris, 2026
Photo credit: © Institut français / Thibaut Chapotot



Debashish Paul performed at the exhibition *Textile Matters: Woven Stories Between India and France* at the Mobilier national, Paris, organized by Manufactures nationales - Sèvres & Mobilier national, the Institut français and the French Embassy in India.

Announced during French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India in January2024, this event was a unique dialogue between two great textile traditions, those of India and France. The exhibition was presented under the artistic direction of Christian Louboutin, with Mayank Mansingh Kaul as curatorial advisor. It highlighted the richness of textile traditions and expertise through the works of several residents of Villa Swagatam as well as leading Indian and French designers.









Debashish Paul performing at the Mobilier national, Paris | Photo credit: © Institut français / Thibaut Chapotot

A Thousand Years of Dreaming
Is part of Paul's solo Curated by
Mario D'Souza
Date: September 6 – October 26, 2024
Emami Art: Gallery 2 & 3

Film, performance, Photo Performance, sculptural costume

Thousand Years Of Dreaming an excerpt
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nF4RHFZnMQ

"Thousand Years of Dreams is a performance-based film created and performed with my boyfriend, exploring the collective dreams of queer men in India across generations. Set in the sacred city of Varanasi, it reflects the longing for love, marriage, and societal acceptance, cherished by queer individuals for centuries. Through rituals, sculptural costumes, and surreal visuals, the film symbolizes a shared queer journey, blending themes of pain, identity, and liberation. The use of heavy masks and latex costumes highlights the burdens of societal norms, while the river Ganga becomes a metaphor for purification and rebirth, celebrating queer existence and unity."



A Thousand Years of Dreaming
Is part of my recent solo
Curated by **Mario D'Souza**
Date: September 6 – October 26, 2024
Emami Art: Gallery 2 & 3

Curator note- A Thousand Years of Dreaming - A Solo by Debashish Paul | 6 September - 26 October 2024 - Overview | Emami Art

Exhibition walkthrough by the curator - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcvCLe17ZIA



The Skin of Dreams 1
Latex rubber, plastic and
crystal beads, cotton,
threads, cowries shell, fabric,
and plastic helmet
75.1 x 31.8 x 19.2 in.
2024, Varanasi

Shells of Past Life 1
Latex rubber, plastic and crystal beads,
threads, and cowries shell
72 x 18.1 x 10 in.
2024, Varanasi

Courtesy: Emami Art









Live Performance by Debashish Paul *: **A Thousand Years of Dreaming*** A Solo by **Debashish Paul,** Curated by **Mario D'Souza,** September **6 – October 26, 2024 ,** Emami Art: Gallery 2 & 3

Courtesy: Emami Art







Remnants of the Dream Synthetic resin, fibre, plastic, thread, glass, silicone and metal 3.93 x 3.93 x 3.54 in. Set of 3 works 2024, Varanasi

Courtesy: Emami Art



Courtesy: Emami Art

Samudra Manthana or The Stir of the Milk Ocean

Durational performance, video, and photographs
Sculptural costume
Performance time: 45 min
In Live Arts Program POR ASALTO at TEA(Tenerife Espacio de las Artes), Cannery island, Spain
Curated by Javier Arozena
Year- 2024
Courtesy: Tenerife Espacio de las Artes

To view - https://youtu.be/EyCXdV7d0Rs

"In Samudra Manthana, I draw profound inspiration from the Mahabharata, particularly the mythological tale of the churning of the ocean. This performance encapsulates the cosmic struggle and the quest for eternal truths that lie beneath the surface of our existence. The Samudra Manthana, or the churning of the ocean, is a pivotal episode in Hindu mythology, narrated in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana. According to the legend, the Devas (gods) and the Asuras (demons) sought the elixir of immortality, Amrita, which was hidden in the depths of the cosmic ocean. To retrieve it, they decided to work together, using Mount Mandara as the churning rod and the serpent Vasuki as the rope. The Devas held the tail of the serpent, while the Asuras held its head. As they churned, various treasures and beings emerged from the ocean, including Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Dhanvantari, the divine physician carrying the pot of Amrita. The churning also brought forth numerous challenges, such as the deadly poison Halahala, which threatened to destroy all of creation. Lord Shiva consumed the poison, saving the world but turning his throat blue in the process, earning him the name Neelkanth."



Samudra Manthana or The Stir of the Milk Ocean

Durational performance, video, and photographs
Sculptural costume

"The performance highlights the struggle to balance opposing forces within oneself—creation and destruction, order and chaos, light and darkness. Through my elaborate costume and expressive movements, I embody the essence of this inner churning. The traditional motifs in my attire symbolize the ancient wisdom and cultural heritage, while the contemporary elements reflect the evolving nature of identity and self-discovery. My performance becomes a mirror to the audience's own experiences, encouraging them to confront their inner conflicts and seek harmony within themselves. "Samudra Manthana" ultimately serves as a reminder that the quest for truth and enlightenment is an ongoing journey. By embracing the turbulence within, we can uncover the hidden treasures of our soul and achieve a deeper understanding of our place in the universe. This performance not only brings to life the grandeur of ancient mythology but also resonates with the universal themes of identity, transformation, and the interconnectedness of all beings.

This performance idea came to me during my time in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, where the presence of the ocean is an ever-present force. Surrounded by the vast, ever-changing sea, I was inspired by the powerful natural beauty and the sense of profound connection to the cosmos. The endless rhythm of the waves against the shores of Tenerife provided a perfect metaphor for the continuous churning and transformation that "Samudra Manthana" seeks to embody. The island's unique blend of ancient and modern influences, coupled with its rich cultural tapestry, deeply influenced the visual and thematic elements of my performance, making it a true reflection of the eternal dance between the old and the new, the internal and the external."



Samudra Manthana or The Stir of the Milk Ocean

Durational performance, video, and photographs
Sculptural costume





Performance Workshop- Samudra Manthana In Live Arts Program POR ASALTO at TEA(Tenerife Espacio de las Artes), Cannery Island, Spain.

Inspired by the Mahabharata's tale of *Samudra Manthana*—the churning of the ocean—this performance workshop explored the profound cosmic struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, and the eternal quest for truth hidden beneath our existence. In mythology, the gods and demons churned the ocean using Mount Mandara as the rod and the serpent Vasuki as the rope to retrieve *Amrita*, the elixir of immortality. From this process emerged treasures, challenges, and lessons, symbolizing the dualities we navigate within our souls.
In the workshop, *Samudra Manthana* became a metaphor for the churning of the soul. Ritual music, traditional objects, and guided meditation were used to forge a deep connection between body and spirit. Participants from diverse backgrounds—dancers, musicians, scientists, mathematicians, and more—came together to transcend barriers of caste, gender, race, and body color, forming a unified landscape of shared humanity.





Courtesy: Tenerife Espacio de las Artes

Through meditation and sound exploration, participants attuned themselves to the internal ocean within, expressing how their "inner sea" responds. The workshop culminated in a collective creation of sound, each voice echoing the rhythm of the ocean and the soul’s journey. It was a transformative exchange of learning, breaking barriers and blending differences into harmony.

Courtesy: Tenerife Espacio de las Artes







Scent of the Celestial Garden
The performance Commissioned by Art Dubai , Curated by Emiliano Valdes, Dubai
Sculptural dress, durational performance
Performance Duration – Total 2 hours
Sculptural dress – Rice paper, cloth, charcoal, Dry Pastel, Acrylic, Acrylic Ink
2024
Sound design in collaboration with Haniya
Photo Courtesy: Art Dubai

"My live performance, *Scent of the Celestial Garden*, celebrates happiness and rejuvenation. To me, a garden is a speculative space where aspirations, hopes, and desires intertwine. The concept of scent reminds me that within the depths of my internal existence, there is a source of inspiration and a connection to something greater.

My internal landscape transforms with each passing season. As the grip of winter relinquishes its clasp, nature bursts into colors. Blossoming flowers, mingling with the earthy scent of freshly turned soil, orchestrate a grand overture to herald the arrival of spring. The appearance of spring is not just a change of season; it's a cosmic celebration. In this season of rebirth, amidst the chaos of life, nature reaches the zenith of its fecundity. The notion of a garden where no earthly pain exists, but is full of endless, divine love, is inspired by Nandan Kanan (the garden of heaven) from Indian mythology."







Scent of the Celestial Garden
The performance Commissioned by Art Dubai , Curated by Emiliano Valdes, Dubai
Sculptural dress, durational

"I picture a garden suspended between reality and dreams, a sanctuary where the flowers emit visual beauty and a scent that resonates with the divine. With each breath, I feel closer to a sense of tranquility and connection to the universe. In my dream world, this scent becomes a key to navigating the landscapes of my subconscious, the fragrance guiding me through meadows of imagination and orchards of inspiration—the olfactory manifestation of the boundless creativity and endless possibilities unfolding in the tapestry of my dreams."

"In *Scent of the Celestial Garden*, I wish to equate the walk on the circumambulatory pathway with a journey of love and empathy. Through the sculpturesque attire made of paper cloth and decorated with drawings, body movements, sounds, and scent (attar), I will channel the essence of spring, fertility, and prosperity, symbolizing the cyclical character of existence and nature. The headgear adorned with colorful balloons invokes a sense of joy."

Scent of the Celestial Garden
The performance Commissioned
by Art Dubai , Curated by
Emiliano Valdes, Dubai
Sculptural dress, durational

These symbolic images foster a collective aspiration for the higher realms of existence—utopic and ecstatic. Through the amalgamation of the natural and heavenly, and with my mastery of form and movement, Paul beckons his surroundings into a liminal space where the terrestrial and ethereal converge





"There's an Ocean Inside of Me"
Duration- 1 hour
Durational Performance
Place- HH Art Spaces, Goa
Year 2023

The performance part of howtolivetogether a live performances at HH Art Spaces, Aldona, Goa, supported by Prohelvetia's "To-gather" grant

"There's an Ocean Inside of Me" serves as a metaphor for the vast and complex ecosystem of my queer identity. Just as the ocean contains a multitude of life forms, each with its own unique essence and interconnectedness, my queer ecology encompasses diverse experiences, emotions, and relationships. Within this internal ocean, there exists a rich tapestry of fluidity, resilience, and interconnectedness, reflecting the dynamic nature of queer existence. Like the ebb and flow of the tides, my identity shifts and evolves, embracing the spectrum of gender, sexuality, and expression. Through this metaphor, Paul invites exploration and reverence for the depths of his queer ecology, celebrating the beauty and complexity of his inner seascape.

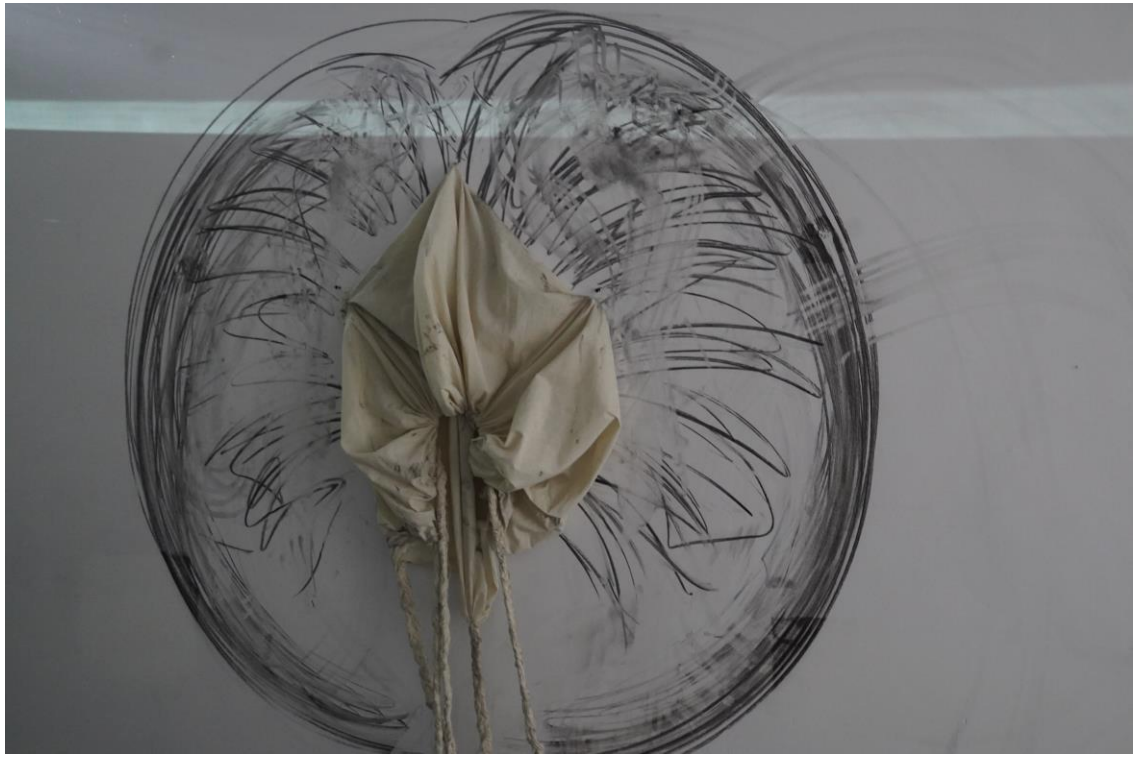


"There's an Ocean Inside of Me"
Duration- 1 hour
Durational Performance
Place- HH Art Spaces, Goa
Year 2023





"There's an Ocean Inside of Me"
Duration- 1 hour
Durational Performance
Place- HH Art Spaces, Goa
Year 2023





The Song for Peace
Durational Performance , Video , Photography
Duration - 03:40 minutes
Year - 2023
The performance part of howtolivetogether a live performances at HH Art Spaces, Aldona, Goa, supported by Prohelvetia's "To-gather" grant

To view- https://youtu.be/qtDgt6oisAM

"*The Song for Peace* calls for a world without borders, religions, or possessions, envisioning a peaceful coexistence. The meditation bowl song's message is powerful and continues to inspire generations to strive for peace and unity. And here, I perform in nature, with a meditation bowl just to see how we can live with nature with harmony. Creating a piece that harmonizes nature with the human experience can evoke a sense of interconnectedness and unity. Through the performance I want to depict a picture of the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the need for understanding, respect, and preservation. Imagery of the elements - earth, water, air, and fire are intertwined with human emotions and actions could be quite impactful. Musically, incorporating natural sounds like flowing water, rustling leaves, or bird songs into the melody further emphasizes on the theme of unity between humanity and the environment."



The Song for Peace
Durational Performance , Video , Photography
Duration - 03:40 minutes
Year - 2023





My Body Becomes You
A performance/exhibition designed around Debashish Paul's residency project - *'Kaś'— To Shine / Enlightenment'*, at the Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris.

Paul is winner of the PAIR Residency 2023 in collaboration with eth French Institute of India. He is in Paris from July 10 to October 4, 2023.

Open Studio:
Date: 20th September Wednesday
Time: 6 PM to 9 PM
Studio no: 8421, 4th floor main building
Performance: My Body Becomes You
40 minutes
Date: 20th September Wednesday
Time: 6.20 PM
At Annexe Courtyard.
Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris

Credits:
Photography: @alouliiii
Music score: @marhanlu

Copyright with artist



My Body Becomes You

"This is a new beginning, a part of my larger exploration 'Kaś' (to shine). Here, 'You' has a vast meaning like, You, are a field, a space, a realm, a space where My body exists, My body comes into being, a sense of aliveness.
You are a city. You are a river.
You are everything I imagine/experience, air, people, feelings, anticipations.
Sometimes You also exist inside Me, as something beyond physical, a state beyond the earthly body.

After arriving here, I have felt my internal body slowly changing, transforming through the impressions of my experiences in this city. My costume here is a bird, I used a mask that depicts the face of a bird, which I found in Paris, it is like flying from one city to another city, this is the furthest I have ever travelled, with my work, in terms of distance. This bird for me symbolizes my internal body, my inner world, it always wants to take flight, towards the light.

I brought some materials for my costume from India, and the first weeks of my stay in Paris, I started to roam the streets, till late into the night, I walked in the streets of the outskirts, and found many materials that inspired me and allowed me to imagine the being that is the transformation of my inner self. When I walk the streets the movement of the people and animals the dogs that accompany the people, the sound of the street, the trees the movement of the rivers, inspired me more and more and my internal body's movement was slowly changing, the colour of the dresses of people the colour of the space, the colour of the light, the changing colours of the leaves as we enter autumn, the markets, make up the ever changing hues of my inner body and in this way, the movement for my performances, were organically becoming. I started to draw on the surfaces of paper, leather and white cloth, all drawing comes very spontaneously, they reveal memories of the two cities which I am presently deeply influenced by. This costume, when worn out in public, it sometimes invokes strange reactions from people, perhaps they feel uncomfortable, this fearsome, strange form, this is the fear and the darkness that is a part of my inner landscape that I accept, and that I want to share with others, this is the first time I have stepped on a land other than mine. The problem of language and the fear of being misunderstood, made me feel fear and timidity and this fear is also mine, is another aspect of myself, that needs to be nurtured and creatively expressed out in the streets.

Day by day when I transform Myself to You the fear that I once experienced slowly dissolves.

After a few days of being in Paris, I soon realized that Cite des Arts is a small world without borders where people of different countries thrive in their art practice bringing stories, languages and dreams from different corners, these influences and expands my inner world greatly. For this project I invited my fellow resident of Cite des Arts. The Egyptian photographer Ali Zaray documented the process of my project on film and photography. For the soundtrack of my performance, Sri Lankan composer Hania Luthufi worked with musicians Dominic Rothlisberger, (Cello, Nyckleharpa) Peppe Formisano (Cretan lyra) and Rohit Gupta (mixing mastering) I am thankful for the sense of community of this very special place and for the wonderful support and contribution of my fellow artists.

I feel collecting memories and shaping new hybrid bodies helps me to interact with the spaces I walk through is a strong part of my art practice. In this period, my bodies are starting to change but I don't know what form it will take yet, it is a process of becoming, and with time these forms will unfold and reveal themselves them to me and I await to meet them with great anticipation."



PAIR Residency 2023 A Proposal by Debashish Paul
***'Kaś'* — To Shine / Enlightenment**

The basic premise of my proposal is based around two cities – Varanasi and Paris, two rivers – the Ganges and the Seine, and the concept of *Light*.

For some time, my practice has revolved around the search for my identity. The search for the gendered self is also a search for the truth of my internal body or self. I cannot split this search into physical or metaphysical. For me, both exist together, and exploring the inner body is the process of knowing myself in more profound ways. For three years, I have been living and working in Varanasi, and this space has been pivotal in my search for the answer to the essential question: *Who am I*? While here in Varanasi, I have felt my body being moulded into the city and its ancient pathways. I started my new series of work reflecting on my identity from here. The ancient city and its knowledge, rituals, and beliefs and the river Ganges help me to search for myself. The fluidity and freedom of the river Ganges grant me fluidity and inspire me to be free, something that I could not find in my previous life in my village.

Deeply inspired by philosophical reflections, my search for inner truth is guided by the idea of **enlightenment.** Historically Varanasi is considered the space for Hindu pilgrimage and ultimate salvation, with the belief that anyone who breathes their last in this city attains salvation and freedom from the cycle of life and rebirth, and the river Ganges is believed to wash away all mortal sin. Hence the city itself is considered a pathway to light. Kāshi, the ancient name of Varanasi, which even appears in the epic Mahabharata, is derived from the Sanskrit '***kaś'*** — to shine — and this city is metaphorically known as the city of light (enlightenment). The Sanskrit phrase *moksha-prakshika Kashi* means the city (Kashi) that lights the way to deliverance.

While researching my proposal for the PAIR 2023 Residency, I saw several points of connection. Paris is also known as the 'The City of Light'. Although this nickname for the city may have arisen from the measures to adopt street lighting as far back as the 17th century, the age of enlightenment and the French revolution made Paris the centre of education, thought, philosophy, poetry and the arts. It is also vital that Paris, like Varanasi, is also situated on the bank of a river, and both have rich cultural and philosophical heritage. Both cities can be linked to the ideas of freedom and **Enlightenment**. French philosophers

For me, the discovery of this connection is almost like a reflection of following the path of light. The internal body is a reflection of the soul's Light. The inner body is fluid, it has no specific shape or gender orientation, and it transforms according to space, feelings, emotions, and desires. The body has no limitations, and I feel my visual and imaginative worlds are part of my body (the whole universe is a part of my body). If granted the opportunity, during the residency period, I propose to explore Paris by connecting the past and the present between the two cities and the rivers. Furthermore, I want to trace the emotional bond between the cities with a series of questions I pose myself.

How does the body mould the new city?
How do memories of the Ganges interact with the presence of the Seine?
How does the body retain its ancient historical memory while engaging with the present body?

I hope to engage with Paris and make a series of sculptural costumes that will translate into a new site-specific performance, video, photo performances and drawings.



My Body Becomes You
A performance/exhibition designed around Debashish Paul's residency project - *'Kaś'— To Shine / Enlightenment*', at the Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris.

Video Duration: 06 min 02 sec
Year: 2023, Paris
Credits:
Photography: @alouliiii
Music score: @marhanlu

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2p2JYbbhJQ

Copyright with artist





My Body Becomes You
A performance/exhibition designed around Debashish Paul's residency project - *'Kaś'— To Shine / Enlightenment*', at the Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris.

Live performance Duration: 40 min
Credits:
Photography: Aniruddha Biswas
Music score: @marhanlu

Copyright with artist





Me with My Pets
Sculptural Dress, Sculptural Pet
Durational performance, video, and photographs
Project time : 2 months
Performance time: 2 days
Video Duration – Video editing in progress
Sculptural Dress human- - Nepali handmade paper, cloth, acrylic, charcoal, thread, synthetic hair.
Sculptural Dress non-human- Nepali handmade paper, cloth, charcoal, Ink, thread, wood
2022 November
Courtesy: Saurabh Singh, Suraj Gupta, Anil Kushwaha and Kumar Ashwani
for videography and photography

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJHfvjvWcuc&feature=youtu.be

Details of Photographs

Me with My Pet
Photograph of performance still
Size: Variable
Edition: 1/10
Artists Proof : 5
Year: 2022-23

Copyright with artist



Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Me with My Pets

"Metaphorically a pet or Imaginary friend is my memory whom I always carrying with me. In my lonely fantastic world, I am continually having conversations with them. In a way, pets are my other internal self. This Idea arises from the distance that is created in personal relationships. In this work, I want to understand how someone's memories internally create a form and love it like a pet, and a new story of life is created.

In this project, the sculptural dresses as well as free-standing sculptures, represent my internal body and various imagined non-human forms. The dresses were made in Varanasi and the durational live performance was executed in Khanta village in Sonbhadra district and Jargo village near Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, India. In the resulting video, I wished to create a cinematic and dramatic which represents the dreamlike imaginative space."



Details of Photo performance

Me with My Pets
Sculptural Dress, Sculptural Pet
Durational performance
India Art Fair 2023
Feb 2023

Copyright with artist





Details of Photo performance

Me with My Pets
Sculptural Dress, Sculptural Pet
Durational performance
French Institute of India, Delhi
Feb 2023

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Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

The River Meets the Sea

Sculptural dress, durational performance, video and photographs
Project duration: 25 days (26th Nov – 15th Dec 2022)
Performance Duration – Total 2 hours
(One hour each on 13th December + 15th December)
Sculptural dress – Rice paper, cloth, charcoal
2022
Sound design in collaboration with Sara Naqvi
Photo Courtesy: Saurabh Singh, Sayanth RS and Emami Art

This project was realised as part of the Residency & Performance Programme curated by Nikhil Chopra and HH Art Space Foundation in collaboration with Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2022-23, at the Dutch Warehouse, Kochi, India

Video excerpt
https://www.instagram.com/tv/CmHGfKnpZUR/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link



Day 1 (13th December 2022), Dutch Warehouse, Kochi

Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

The River Meets the Sea

Through his work, Debashish Paul navigates landscapes as he perceives them as queer ecologies. What he finds in himself around nature reflects the complexities that lie within, he describes them as conversational exchanges.
The river has been his companion since childhood, always forming the periphery of his home. Now based in Varanasi, the cultural significance and knowledge of the river Ganga has become very closely tied to his practice.
The artist believes that his body is not separate from this river and is carried within him on every journey he's undertaken.

On his arrival to Kochi, he found himself drawn to the water bodies surrounding the small island. A meeting of the river he holds within and the sea that has called for his presence. The vastness of this meeting, of river and sea, has spiritual ties. The artist draws parallels to the nature of our bodies, what we are capable of feeling, to the subliminal nature of the sea.

In this performance, Paul created two costumes representing the river and the sea. On each panel of these garments, he has intricately drawn out narratives that describe his personal experiences against the landscapes they are presented in. Debashish's stylistic visual language is influenced by his past and present, bound by his care for nature.



Day 1 (13th December 2022), Dutch Warehouse, Kochi

Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

The River Meets the Sea

Day 1 (13th December 2022), Dutch Warehouse, Kochi



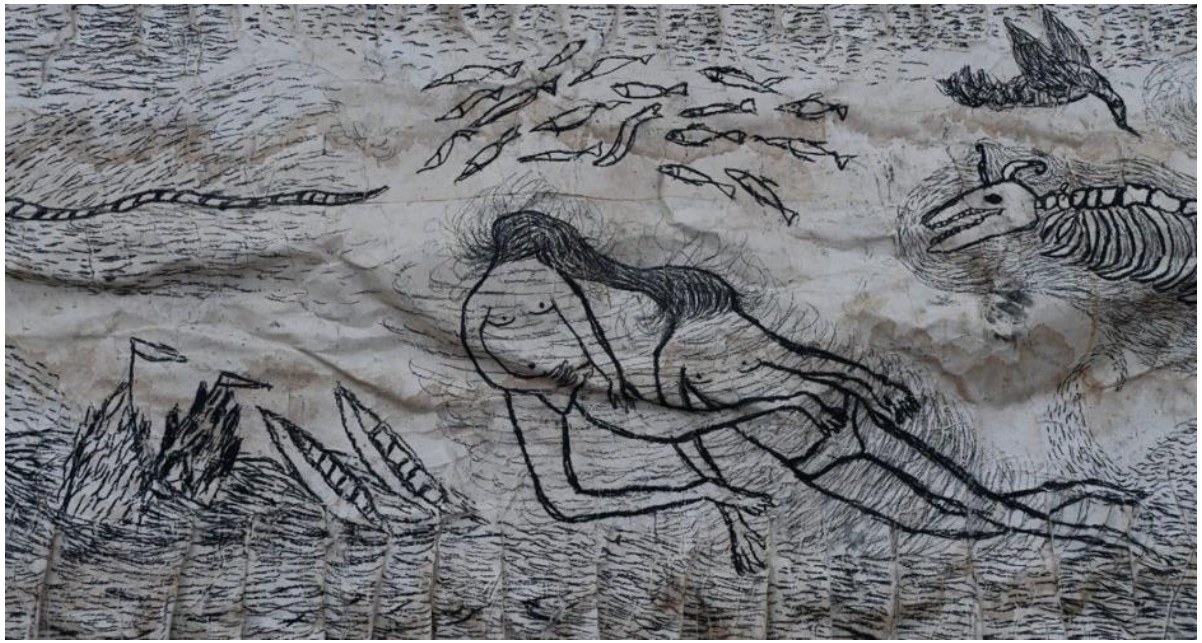


Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

The River Meets the Sea
Day 2 (15th December 2022), Dutch Warehouse, Kochi













Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

The River Meets the Sea
Display at Dutch Warehouse, Kochi





Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Body as a landscape;
Body in a Landscape
Medium- Sculptural dress, performance, photo documentation,
video Sculptural dress medium- Nepali handmade paper, charcoal, collected natural material
Performance duration: 45 days
Video duration- Video editing in progress
Courtesy to Saurabh Singh for videography and photography

To view excerpt https://youtu.be/Cvisw5b2DEM

Supported by Indian Artist Relief Fund-2021
(MAP in partnership with 1Shanthiroad Studio/Gallery)

"This project was a 45-day durational performance in Jārgo, a sparsely populated hilly area, isolated from the urban world located near Banaras. I went there to create a performance piece as a soliloquy with the self. To understand and relate to the space, I documented it every day through photos, videos, drawings, and collecting objects and materials that surrounded me in the landscape. Since I lived alone and nature was only my companion, I felt the landscape become a part of my body. I practiced performing to the sound of nature, my body reflecting and responding to its surroundings. I worked on the sculptural dress for about 40 days, I did not follow any fixed ideas or patterns while making the dress, rather it was a spontaneous interaction with the lived present and its everyday scenes and old memories. I wanted the dress to reflect the landscape and my personal hidden stories. My drawings on the sheets of paper encompassed the landscape around me, its flora & fauna, rivers, mountains, etc. I also added natural materials like flowers, roots, dry grass, and leaves that I collected from around me. This process is my way of negotiating with an understanding of how the human body tends to be molded by and within a space and its transformation into a new body. Most of the time my body, I felt, reacted like a fluid form and I did not wish to fix its shape. As the landscape changes with each season, the body also changes like a landscape with different emotions and feelings.

After making the dress, I performed with the dress for three days in the hilly landscape of Jārgo. The Video and photo documentation which is an intrinsic part of my process are done by my long-time collaborator Sourabh Singh. When I wear the dress like a second skin and perform with it, I become part of the landscape and I feel that I enfold the landscape within me. Having been alone here for 45 days and through my performances, I have realized that the body is always looking for proof of its existence or asserting its existence and always looking for a safe place (home) and its mate according to the laws of nature. As part of the work, I also made some house-like forms using Nepali handmade paper and hung them on a stick, and carried them around with me, like an itinerant mendicant, for the whole duration of the performance. Some of these houses fell down in the open at different points of the landscape. I did not retrieve them. In the end, I floated the remaining houses in the Jargo River. This act expresses the fragile emotion of distance in a relationship, shattered dreams, and the need to migrate again and again to build anew a home that one calls one's own."

Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Body as a landscape;
Body in a Landscape
Performance still



My speculative, genderless figures are in always in flux, undergoing emotional transformation within a given time and space. For me a work is never really finished, it simply undergoes a change of being.

Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Body as a landscape;
Body in a Landscape
Performance stills





Process

I collect materials physically and also visually which adding or pasting in my work. Visual materials add to my works sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously.

This process of collecting , pasting, cutting, and making many layers is the concept of the transforming process of the body. I treat it like an unfolding body, like landscape mood , the landscape makes curiosity I feel body also like this. And processing is like a big conversation , where I want to understand my body through this process.











Beyond The Body and Gender II
Sculptural Dress, Performance Based Video
Performance time: 3 months
Video Duration-6min 58sec
Sculptural Dress Medium- Woven shells
Year-2021

Courtesy to Saurabh Singh ,Amit Verma ,
Srabani Naskar for videography and photography

To view video **https://youtu.be/if9tJphd_E0**



*The costumes for **Beyond the Body and Gender II** were made from shells. One day, while walking along the banks of the river Ganges with my friends, I started collecting shells, which inspired me for this project. Their main aim is to protect the body, so I used them as a medium to create my costume, to protect my body from discomfort. In this work, I shaved my head after bathing in the river Ganges. It was an act inspired by the Hindu practice of sanyāās or renunciation (I witnessed my brother taking sanyāās in the past). Once you take sanyāās, according to Hindu tradition, it's like you're reborn, and your old life is dead. I tried to capture that in my performance. I was reborn and let go of my past life.*

Beyond The Body and Gender II
Performance still

The pain of my own identity or lack thereof is a constant motivation. I am also inspired by landscapes, rituals and Indian mythology. Art and other artistic practices also inspire me to search for deeper ways of connecting with the self.





Beyond The Body and Gender II
Performance still





Process

Over the period of a month or so, I collected thousands of shells and strung them together to make the dress. Collecting the shells from the riverbanks felt like gathering the fragmented parts of my own body together, and the process of weaving them felt like I was weaving my dreams to make my desired body.





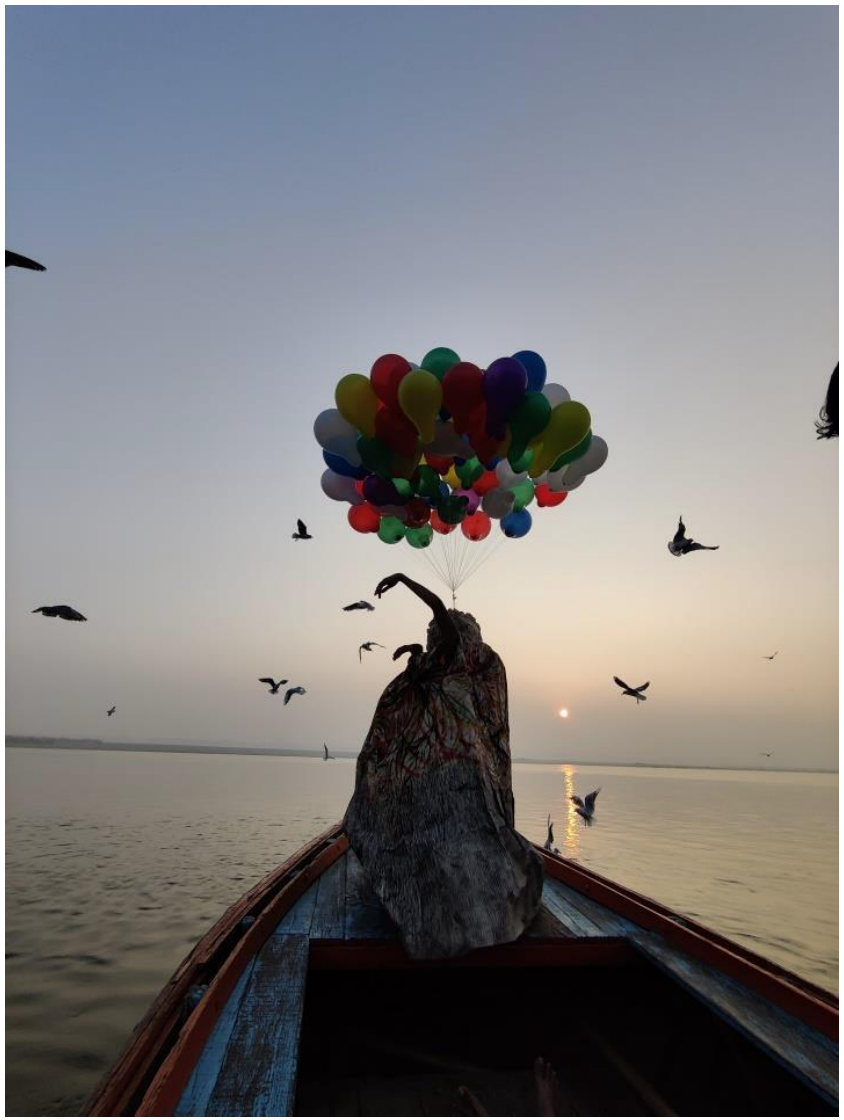


Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Beyond The Body and Gender I
Sculptural dress, durational performance, video and photographs
Performance time: 2 months
Video Duration – 6min 56sec
Sculptural dress - Nepali handmade paper, cloth, watercolor , charcoal
2021

Courtesy: Saurabh Singh and Suraj Gupta
for videography and photography

To view video **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sxcfPCzm_I**



*The costume for **Beyond the Body and Gender I** is the transformation of my inner body after a six-month stay in Banaras. It contains silent love, personal relationship experiences, fragmented emotion and visual experiences of the place. On my first evening in Banaras, I went to see the evening Ganga Aarti at Banaras Ghat (Banaras is a sacred and one of the oldest cities of the world, located on the banks of the holy river Ganges, where Gange Aarti is performed every evening by a group of priests at the Ghat.) There were seven young priests there, one of whom I liked very much. They are considered God's messengers or sages, so I felt guilty imagining him as my lover. But I sat in front of him every day for six months. I watched the Aarti, but I was afraid to talk to him. His spirituality, his movements during the Aarti, affected and overwhelmed me I copied his movements and felt like I was mingling with him, like my body was slowly transforming into his. His body movements reflect on my performance. a*

Durational Performance : Videos & Photography

Beyond The Body and Gender I
Performance still



My body is the core around which I weave alternate visions of the self, unbound by gender or identity. Varanasi, where I currently reside, its ghats, burning grounds, markets, sounds and smells of everyday life, and rituals that flow through me. This ancient city acts as a doorway to an ancient past and a speculative future

Wearable sculpture

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams - 2
Performative photograph and sculptural dress
Sculptural dress Medium – Nepali handmade paper , cloth, watercolor, ink, charcoal
Size – 3.8’ x 3’ x 2.5’
2020

I made this during the first lockdown when I returned home from Banaras. In my village there is a Radha Krishna temple where an unmarried handicapped woman sat every day wearing a frock. Every day I saw her, she was sitting very meditatively in front of Radha Krishna. I saw her every day and felt empathy for her, and could relate my internal loneliness with hers. This inspired me to create the form of a woman where my body transforms to feel another’s pain.







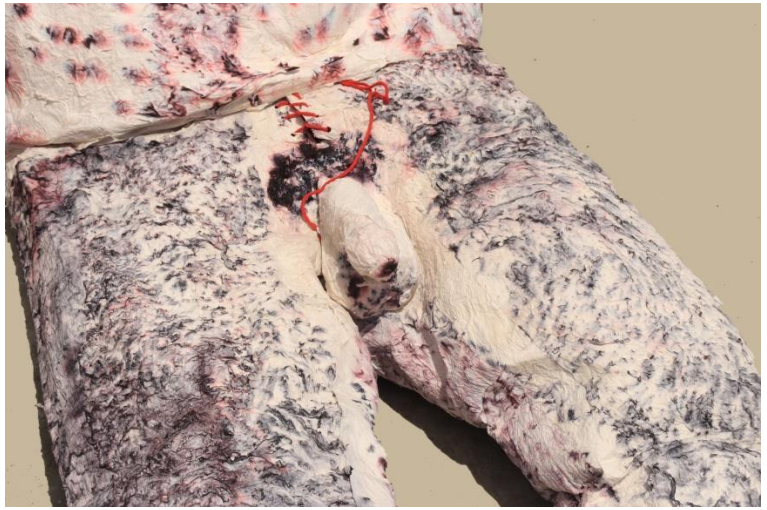
Wearable sculpture

Let me be no nearer in death's dream kingdom Let me also wear such deliberate disguises. Rat's coat
Performative photograph and sculptural dress
Sculptural dress – Tissue paper, Ink, twine
5.5 x 2 x 1 ft
2020

I made a sculptural dress of a male figure using many layers of tissue papers. The resulting dress is very lightweight and fragile. In the medical lab of Banaras Hindu University I had seen a dead, nude male figure. It was a horrible and traumatic experience. To me it appeared to be an empty shell.

From my childhood people in my village teased me calling me 'girlish', this made me copy masculine characteristics. So, when I made and wore the shell of a male body on my own living, warm and fluid body, it was a very painful experience for me. I felt my body's fragility and realised that this is not my own Identity.

The title for both the works are taken from lines of T S Eliot's poem The Hollow Men. The despair and hopelessness of the lines have always spoken to me.









Debashish Paul (b. 1994), based in Varanasi and Nadia, holds a BFA and an MFA in Sculpture from the Indian College of Art and Draftsmanship, Kolkata (2019) and Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi (2021) respectively.

His solo exhibitions include *Nastanirh (The Broken Nest)* at Kala Hubba as part of BLR Hubba, Bengaluru, 2026; and *A Thousand Years of Dreaming* curated by Mario D'Souza, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2024. Notable group exhibitions include Arte Laguna Prize | Finalists' Exhibition, Arsenale Nord, Venice, 2026 as one of the finalist artists at the 20th edition of Arte Laguna Prize; *Intersections: Site of Becoming*, Arthshila Delhi, 2026; *Memory Keepers*, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, 2026; *Disobedient Objects: The Biography of Clothes*, India Art Fair, New Delhi, 2026; *Obsessions, Possessions*, Coventry Biennale 2025, UK; *2570 Revolutions Around the Earth*, CREA OPEN 2025, Venice; *Between Fire and Flow*, MAC, Lima, 2025; *Samudra Manthan or The Stir of the Milk Ocean,* Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Spain, 2024; *The Magic of the Silver Swan*, Bowes Museum, UK, 2023-24; *Of Liminal Beings and Other Spaces*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; among many others. His works have been presented by The Arts Family at Photo London 2026 and by Emami Art at India Art Fair 2026 and 2023 where he was also an Artist in Residence; Art Mumbai 2025 and 2024; Art Dubai 2024 in the Bawwaba section as a solo project curated by Emiliano Valdez; and Art Dusseldorf 2023. Paul performed at the Jaipur Centre for Art as a part of the India Art Fair's Special Patrons Program in 2025. His performance and sculptural costume have been studied and discussed by Susan Marshall in her book *Insubordinate Costume: Inspiring Performance*, published in 2025.

Paul was awarded the BW Art Excellence Award 2025; Inlaks Fine Art Awards and Residency 2022; Kalanand Scholarship 2022-23 by the Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation; Seed Award 2022 by the Prince Claus Fund; Inlaks Fine Art Award 2022 by Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation; Allegro 1st prize by Contemporary LYNX, London, 2021; and the Indian Artist Relief Fund 2021 by MAP Bangalore x 1Shanthiroad. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam for a 2-year residency since January 2026, and divides his time between the Netherlands and India.