



Debashish Paul

**Debashish
Paul**

EMAMI ART



Body as a landscape;
Body in a Landscape
Detail

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

Although there is no direct resemblance to any rituals, Paul's performances have a distinctive ritualistic aspect that draws from mythology and traditions to create a safe space for himself. Varanasi, where Paul has lived for the last few years, is one of Hinduism's most important holy sites. The city's cultural milieu, entrenched spiritual traditions, and familial ties to spirituality have moulded Paul's performance style and philosophical outlook. Moreover, his deep admiration for his elder brother, a Hindu monk, contributes significantly to the spiritual underpinnings of his artistic expressions. Paul also cites the example of Shiva as the Ardhanarishvara as one of his primary sources of addressing his identity.



Working on sculptural dress for
The River Meets the Sea,
Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2022

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 codified through generational conditioning and discipline; they are overloaded with the axioms of religion, faith and culture. Paul transcends his body beyond its barriers and creates 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 locus of healing and solace. His performances, akin to elevated rituals, confer a temporal separation, briefly extricating both performer and audience from the mundane trappings of everyday life. This temporal disjunction creates an immersive experience, offering a respite from the mundane and fostering a profound connection between the artist and the onlookers. The challenge lies in the artistic endeavour to unify the spectators, attuning to a collective corporeal identity transcending individual boundaries. Navigating through

the body with a conscious and internalised understanding serves as an act of reconciliation and affirmation of self, dismantling the barriers and burdens imposed through the logic of binaries and exclusion.

Paul's site-specific performances and videos, where landscapes and rivers are integral to the narrative, express complex emotions and symbolic connections. However, the landscape is a setting of enlightenment. The body and landscape in his videos blend in, resonating with each other. Water bodies, especially rivers, reflect the fluidity of the inner self and the body sedimented with memories and time. Paul writes, 'As an artist, I don't want to define myself with a particular gender or a particular type of body. My internal body has no boundaries; it transcends gender. My speculative, genderless figures are always in flux, undergoing emotional transformation within time and space. For me, a work is never really finished; it simply undergoes a change of being.' Rivers frequently manifests as a thematic element, serving as a



My Body Becomes You
Cite' Internationales Arts,
Paris. 2023

symbolic and literal locus intricately aligning with his conception of the fluid and nonconformist essence of gender, desire and psyche. Similarly, in Paul's recent works, rivers organically merge into the fabric of his creations, holding a noteworthy position. Much like the historical and cultural importance of rivers in shaping urban landscapes over epochs and diverse locales, these water bodies in his works become reflective surfaces, mirroring aspects ranging from the intricacies of the human psyche to broader influences of geography and climate.

Drawings are an essential element of his practice, whether independently or as part of his sculptural dresses that are often made from paper pasted on fabric with drawings that carry visual lexicons of his memories, self, stories and imaginations of body and intimate things. The elaborately designed attire made of paper pasted on cloth and filled with drawings intimately connected to personal memories, these enormous sculptural attires reveal and conceal the body's movements inside it, addressing the diversity of form and meaning beyond the standard codes of social behaviour.

Sculptural dress for *The River Meets the Sea*, displayed at Dutch Warehouse, Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2022-2023



There's an ocean inside of me, HH Art Space Goa, 2023



Me with My Pets
India Art Fair
Delhi, 2023



Body as a Landscape; Body in a Landscape
After living a completely isolated life for forty-five days, Paul says he realised that the body is always looking for proof of its existence and asserting it while always looking for a safe place (home) and a mate – indicated by the house-like forms that Paul hung on a stick and carried around like an itinerant mendicant. When some of these houses fell in the open at different landscape points, he did not retrieve them. In the end, he floated the remaining homes in the Jargo River. This act expresses the fragile emotion of distance in a relationship, shattered dreams, and the need to build a refuge one can call one's own. ■

Overleaf
The Song for Peace
Performance still
2023





The Song for Peace
 Sculptural mask, fabric
 Performance duration: 6 hours
 Video duration-3:40 minutes
 2023
 Video and photo courtesy: Anil Kushwaha, Suraj Gupta
 Copyright: Debashish Paul



Scan to
 see the video

The Song for Peace calls for a world without borders, religions, or possessions, envisioning a peaceful coexistence among people. By performing in nature, Paul wishes to evoke a sense of interconnectedness and unity between humans and nature, highlighting the need for understanding, respect, and preservation. Musically incorporating natural sounds like flowing water, rustling leaves, or bird songs into the performance further emphasizes the theme of union.



My Body Becomes You
Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris.
2023, Paris
Photography: @alouliiii
Copyright: Debashish Paul

My Body Becomes You is a project developed during a residency at the at the Cite' Internationale des Arts, Paris in 2023. Exploring the esoteric concept of enlightenment Paul posits that the inner body is fluid, has no specific shape or gender orientation, and it transforms according to space, feelings, emotions, and desires. The body has no limitations, and he feels his visual and imaginative worlds are part of his body (the whole universe is a part of his body).





Installation view of photographs, drawing books and video



Drawing on leather



Drawing on paper



The River Meets the Sea
 Durational performance, video and photographs
 Sculptural dress: Rice paper, cloth, charcoal
 Project duration: 25 days (26th Nov – 15th Dec 2022)
 2022-2023
 Sound design in collaboration with Sara Naqvi
 Photo Courtesy: Saurabh Singh, Sayanth RS and Emami Art



Scan to
 see the video

This project was realised as part of the Residency and 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

‘Drawing is a very meditative process. When I draw on my sculptural dresses it is like writing in a diary. I look at the paper surface like a second skin.

I draw figures like they’re boneless, it shows an internal fragmentation. And yes, those are half hidden because I feel very uncomfortable revealing my emotions, desires and personal story. But, I must add that I enjoy this hide and seek.’

Debashish Paul





Untitled
Watercolour and ink
on paper
11.6 x 8.27 inches
2022

The Mind is Full of Desire
Watercolour, charcoal, dry pastel on
handmade paper
24.4 x 16.3 inches
2021



Overleaf
Me with My Pets
Performance Still
2022





'An imaginary friend is something that I always carry with me in my lonely existence, continually having conversations with them. Perhaps these pets are my other selves, accrued inside me, forming fantastical recollections.'



Me with My Pets

Sculptural Dress (human); Nepali handmade paper, cloth, acrylic, charcoal, thread, synthetic hair.
Sculptural Dress (non-human); Nepali handmade paper, cloth, charcoal, Ink, thread, wood
Durational performance, video, and photographs
Project time: 2 months
Performance time: 2 days
Video and photo courtesy: Saurabh Singh, Suraj Gupta, Anil Kushwaha and Kumar Ashwani
Copyright: Debashish Paul

Overleaf
*Body as a
landscape; Body
in a Landscape*
Performance still
2022





Body as a landscape; Body in a Landscape
Performance, photo documentation, video
Sculptural dress: Nepali handmade paper,
charcoal, found natural materials
Performance duration: 45 days
Video and photo courtesy: Saurabh Singh



Scan to
view excerpt



This 45-day durational performance in Jārgo, a sparsely populated hilly area isolated from the urban world near Varanasi, was Paul's monologue with the self. He documented the land daily through photos, videos, drawings, and by collecting objects and materials. Since he lived alone with nature as his companion, Paul says he felt the landscape become a part of his body. The sculptural dress, an integral part of the piece, is densely marked with secret stories, flora and fauna, rivers, mountains, and natural materials like flowers, roots, dry grass, and leaves. While performing, wearing it is like a second skin, and the artist becomes part of the landscape and feels the landscape enfold him.



The artist considers the process of foraging, cutting, pasting, making multiple layers in the sculptural dresses as part of the transformation process of the body, treating it like an unfolding within the landscape that inspires the conceptual framework.

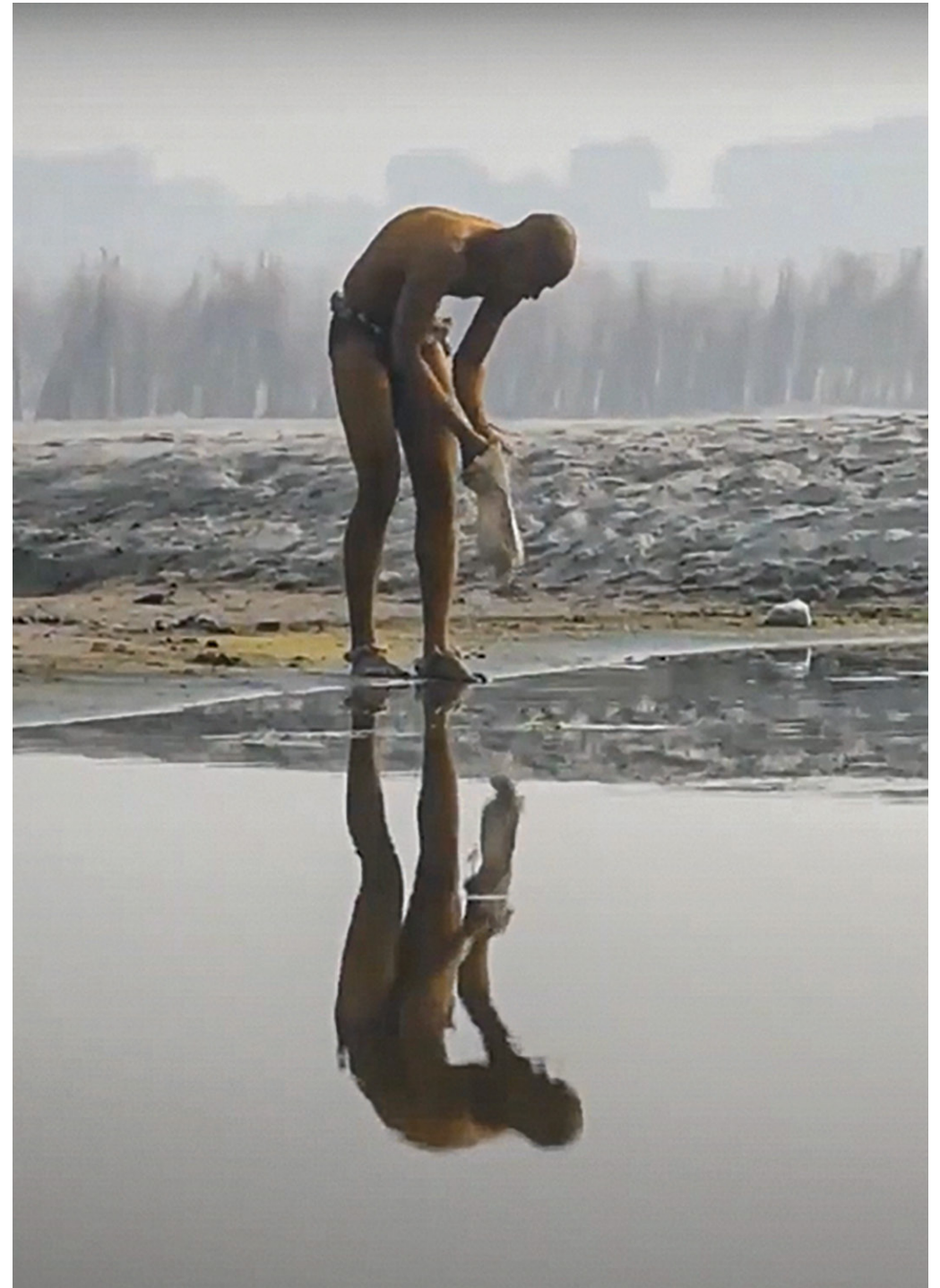


Body as a landscape; Body in a Landscape
Performance still
2022

‘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; exploring the body is the process of knowing myself in more profound ways. I have been living and working in Varanasi for more than three years now, and it has been pivotal in my search for the answer to the essential question: *Who am I?*

I have felt my body being moulded into the city and its ancient pathways. The ancient city and its knowledge, rituals, and beliefs and the river Ganges help me to search for myself. The fluidity and freedom of Ganges grants me fluidity and inspires me to be free, something that I could not find in my previous life in my village.’

From *Beyond The Body and Gender II* performance video





Beyond The Body and Gender II
Sculptural Dress, Performance Based Video
Performance time: 3 months
Video Duration: 6min 58sec
Sculptural Dress Medium: Woven shells
2021
Photo and video courtesy:
Saurabh Singh, Amit Verma,
Srabani Naskar

Beyond the Body and Gender II is inspired by the artist witnessing his brother's worldly renunciation (*sanyāās*). Once you become a *sanyāāsi*, your old way of life is considered dead, and you are reborn. Paul shaved his head after bathing in the Ganges River in an act of self-renunciation and healing. The costume for the performance is made from shells collected by the artist from the banks of the Ganges. In Hinduism, shells have a spiritual connotation; however, these shells, which Paul equates with protection, are also sharp and cut the body that wears them.



Scan to
see the video



Making the shell dress

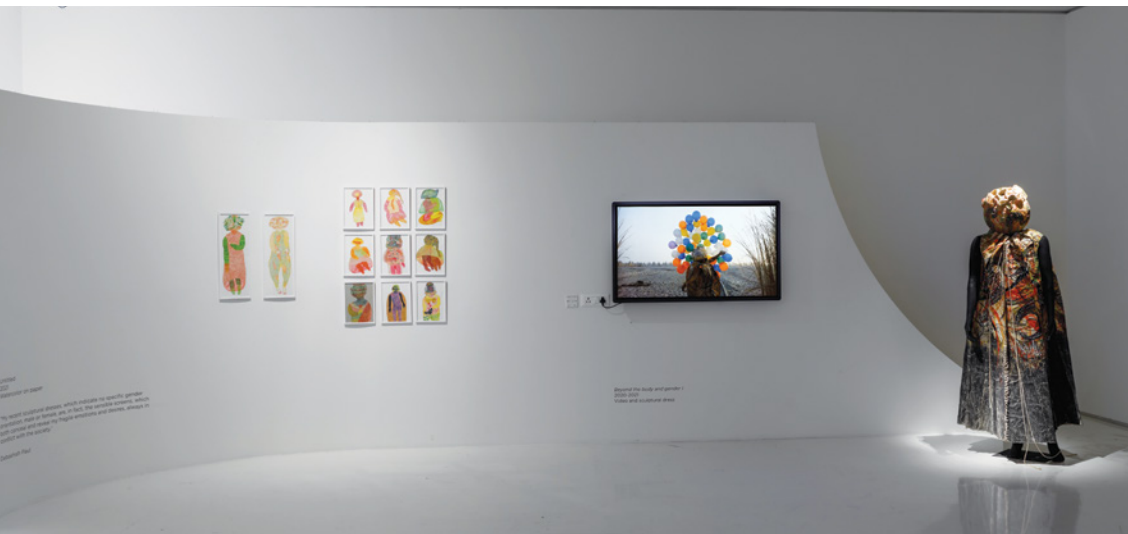


Overleaf
Beyond The Body and Gender I
Performance still
2021





Beyond The Body and Gender I
 Durational performance, video and photographs
 Sculptural dress: Nepali handmade paper, cloth, watercolor, charcoal
 Performance time: 2 months
 Video Duration: 6min 56sec
 2021
 Video and photo courtesy: Saurabh Singh and Suraj Gupta
 Copyright: Debashish Paul



Installation/ Performance, *Of Liminal Beings and Other Spaces*
 curated by Ushmita Sahu, 2021, Emami Art



Scan to see
 the video



Soul Colours Reflect on the Body
 Watercolour on Canson Paper
 8.3 x 11.7 inches each
 2021



Untitled
Dry pastel, charcoal, watercolour
on Nepali handmade paper
55.9 x 20.9 inches each
2023



Untitled
Dry pastel, charcoal and watercolour on
Nepali handmade paper
27.9 x 22.05 inches
2022

'You, are a field, a space, a realm, a space where my body exists and comes into being. You are a city. You are the river and the ocean. You are in the air I breathe, in people, in feelings and anticipations. You are everything I imagine and experience. You also exist inside me, as something beyond this earthly body.'

There's an ocean inside of me
Durational Performance,
Video with sound and costume
Duration: 40 minutes
2023
Photo credit: HH Art Space
Copyright: Debashish Paul





Debashish Paul, a multidisciplinary artist born in 1994 in the Nadia district of West Bengal. Paul graduated with a B.F.A. in Sculpture from The Indian college of Art and Draftsmanship Kolkata, and an M.F.A. in Sculpture from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

Paul has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally including *2570 Revolutions Around the Earth*, CREA OPEN 2025, Venice, 2025; Chennai Photo Biennale Open Call Exhibition, 2025; *Samudra Manthan or The Stir of the Milk Ocean* at Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Ternife, Spain, 2024 as part of the residency; *The Magic of the Silver Swan* curated by Kinnari Sariya, Bowes Museum, Bernard Castle, UK, 2023-24; Prince Claus Fund Biennial Symposium in Sri Lanka, 2023; Performance program with HH Art Space, supported by Pro Helvetia's To-gather International Collaboration, 2023; Cite internationale des arts, Institut Francais Paris Residency supported by Prameya Art Foundation, and the French Institute in India in 2023; Kochi-Muziris Biennale Performance Residency in collaboration with HH Art Space and Nikhil Chopra, 2022-2023; The Students' Biennale in Kochi, 2021; *Of Liminal Beings and Other Spaces* at Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; *Beyond Binaries: Sensing Art through Queer Lensing* at KCC, Kolkata, 2021; and Emami Art Open Call Exhibition at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2020.

Emami Art has shown his works at various Art Fairs and Biennales including, Art Dubai 2024 in the *Bawwaba* section as a solo project curated by Emiliano Valdez; India Art Fair 2023 in New Delhi, where he was also the India Art Fair Artist in Residence and Art Dusseldorf, Germany, in 2023. His recent solo exhibition, *A Thousand Years of Dreaming*, curated by Mario D'Souza, was held at Emami Art in 2024. Paul has recently 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 has several awards and scholarships to his credit, including the BW Art Excellence Award 2025; Inlaks Fine Art Awards and Residency at 1 Shanthi Road Studio/Gallery, Bengaluru in 2022; Kalanad Scholarship 2022-23 by the Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation; Seed Award by the Prince Claus Fund in 2022; Inlaks Fine Art Award by Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation in 2022; Allegro 1st prize by Contemporary LYNX, London in 2021 and the Indian Artist Relief Fund 2021 by Museum of Art and Photography in partnership with 1Shanthiroad Studio/Gallery. He was selected for the Kala Sakshi Workshop in 2021.

Debashish Paul lives and works between Varanasi and Nadia district in West Bengal.

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

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