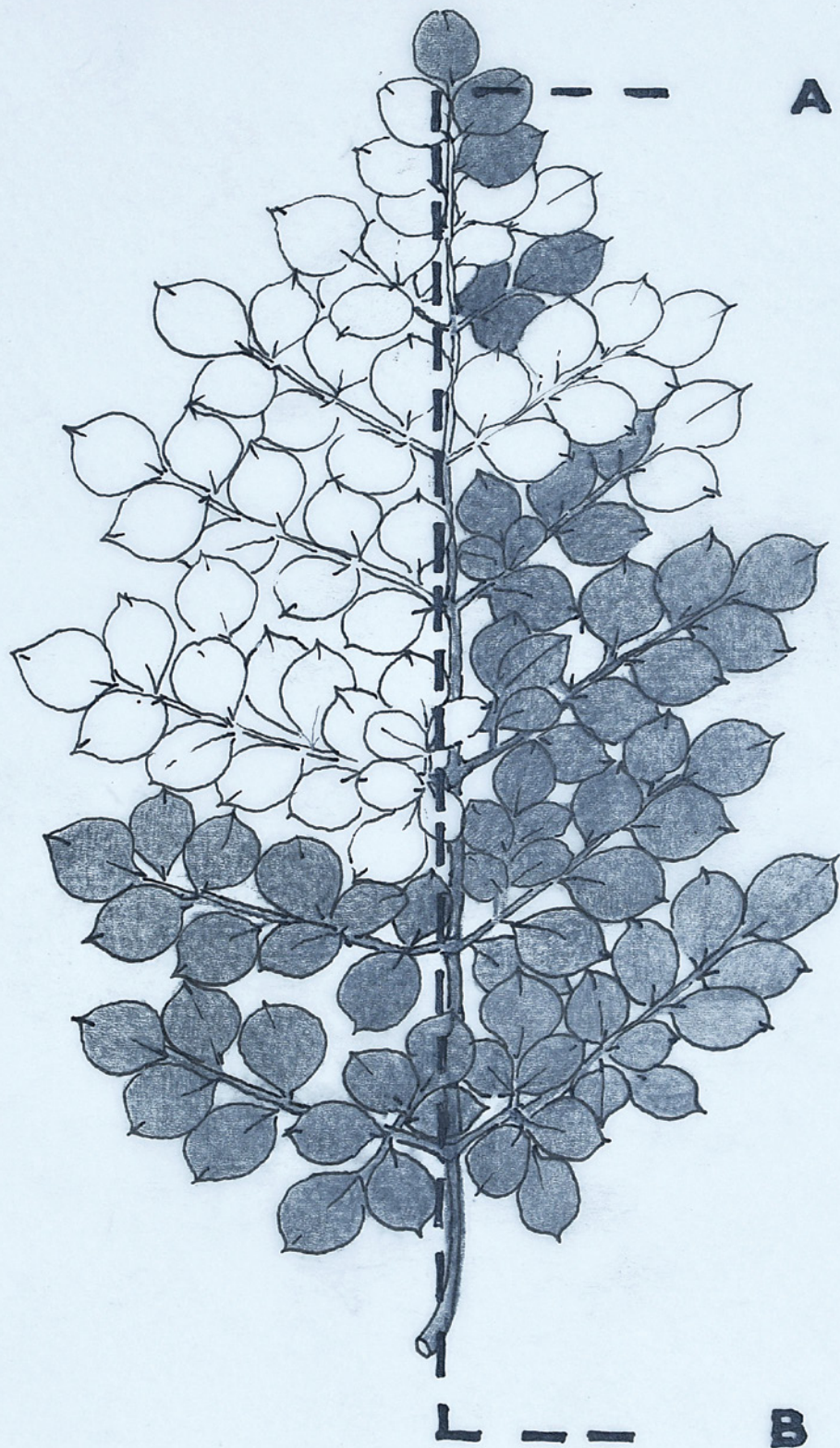




Prasanta Sahu

Prasanta Sahu

EMAMI ART

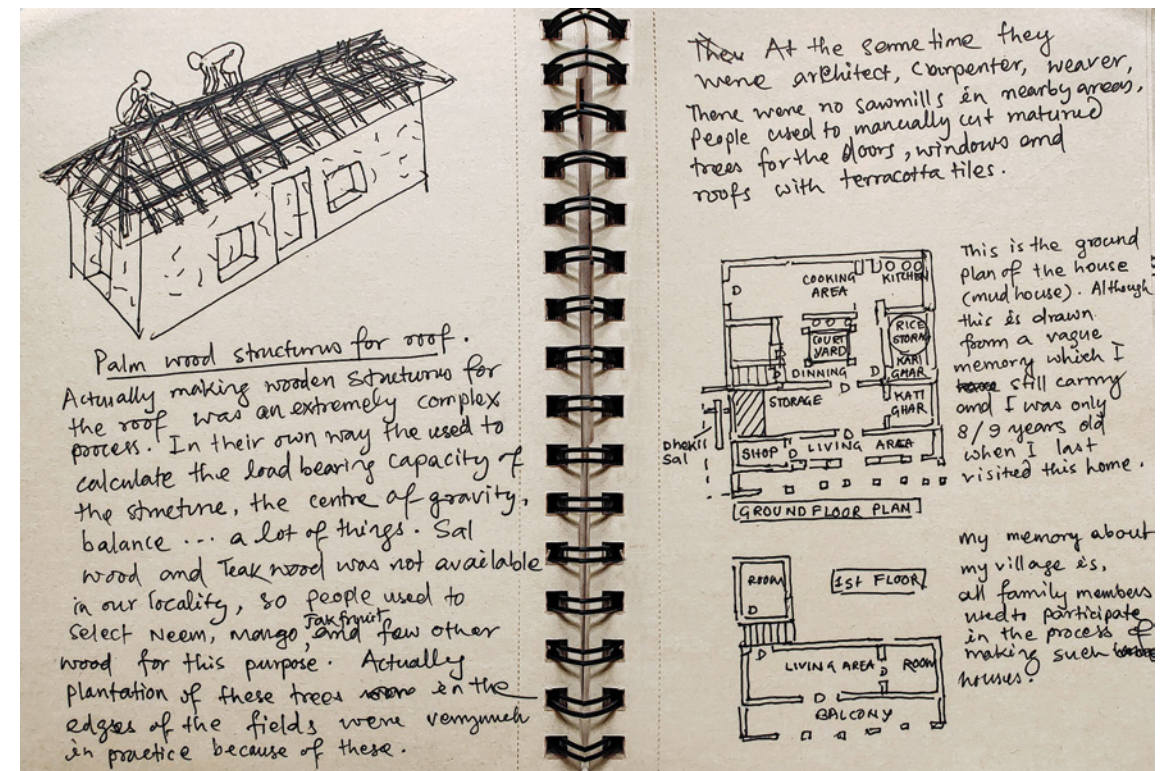


My Mother's Drumstick Tree
Detail

Prasanta Sahu's multi-dimensional practice straddles paintings, drawings, installations, sculptures and photography, asserting all the cross-cultural influences of his life, such as - a small town upbringing and love for his ancestral village, Chaughari, in Odisha, watching and assisting his father make survey maps along with the technical experience gained from initial training in electrical engineering (1983-88), followed by an experience of advertisement and hoarding paintings. The artistic skill and critical approach learned in his years studying in art school - five of which were spent in Santiniketan for a BFA degree in painting (1993-98) and the other two acquiring a master's degree from MSU Vadodara (1998-2000), as well as his experience as a pedagogue (Sahu has been teaching at his alma mater Kala Bhavana since 2001) combined with an 'insider-outsider' vision of a diasporic. Hence, these eclectic experiences remain essential in Sahu's practice, adding complex layers to a visual praxis rooted in documentation, research and personal ruminations.

Given such diverse experiences, how does someone negotiate their artistic language? In Sahu's case, the answer lies in his conscious repositioning of the self and the lens through which he views the world. Early in his creative career, Sahu started to imbibe the role of an investigator, surveyor and documenter, painstakingly recording the lives of people hailing from small towns and villages, whether in the context of relocation to urban spaces or with the idea of mapping changes experienced within the situational context of one's familiar space. His juxtaposing images from different areas of contrasting and reworked realities is a deliberate stand and a gateway to a multi-layered reading of his works. In a way, the artist re-constructs investigations of events; alongside collated data, he introduces experiential reinterpretations, moving from the real to the poetic. Some core areas of concern for him are rural-urban migration as evidence of transformation, oral retelling as memoirs of collective history and identity, diary entries as recollection drawings, photo/video documentation as speculative inquiry and painting and drawing as poetic exegesis.

Documentation for video
Tilling Lessons



Pages from
sketch-book 2023

Sahu's practice may be viewed as investigative, and his locus as his inspiration. Consequently, the two decades he has lived in Santiniketan, a small university town, its surrounding villages, populace and livelihood, etc., continue to feature in his practice. Rural life connects, on the one hand, to the persistent questions of planetary crises and ecology and, on the other, agriculture and production as a contested social space constituted by a series of links between local farmers and the broader network of the food economy. Yet, Sahu's works strongly propose farming as a way of life, finding an immense capacity for love and joy amidst suffering, capturing intimate, tender observations. While his drawings on paper study humdrum, symbiotic relationships between humans and non-humans, they also clearly outline Sahu's concern with ancestral knowledge and the ongoing ecological crisis. To quote him, 'The importance of living skills, nature awareness, primitive technology, survival in the wilderness, and the utilisation of fewer natural resources, keeping in mind the total ecology where humans, animals, plants, water bodies can stay healthy together was not developed overnight; these are collective achievements.'

In *Tilling Lessons*, a video installation, Sahu uses the interview format of newsreels interspersed with a recording of himself learning/unlearning/relearning how to till the soil. However, he creates a visual disturbance by placing the video behind half-open window blinds. Combined with the farmers' unrecognisable, slowed-down, distorted voices, the work counteracts the simple logic of documentary reality, highlighting the subaltern and the considerable absence of knowledge and sympathy that separates 'them' from 'us' who encounter the 'other' through mediated reality.

Installation view, *Tilling Lessons*,
Kochi 2022-23



Installation view, *Mapping Craters I*
Palazzo Madama, Torino, Italy, 2021

The sculptural installation *Mapping Craters*, shown at Palazzo Madama in Turin, Italy, in 2021 and at his solo at Kochi-Muziris Biennale invited Satellite show in 2022, is the result of a three-year relationship that Sahu has forged with Lakhi Ram Hansda, a landless tribal farmer from Amdahara, a village close to where Sahu resides. This work critically studies the present time and its changing relationship with nature. The striking work consists of a collection of sixty plaster moulds taken directly from the crops produced by the farmer throughout different seasons and his traditional farming tools, displayed on a rusty iron table resembling a tray of archaeological specimens in a museum. It is an insightful rumination of everyday rural life, objects, memories and desires intertwined with an undeniable bio-political matrix. The captivating presence of negative forms dominate the work. Although the impressions are of familiar farm produce we consume daily, the play of hollow and mass, presence and absence, tangible and intangible, make their symbolic recognition difficult. The unique method of documentation of taking moulds appears straightforward and uncomplicated. Nevertheless, their figurative familiarity soon gives way to a sense of spectral unreality and a suggestion of profound disquiet—each ghostly crater emphasising the emptiness of hunger for those who toil.

By connecting the personal and intimate to the political and immediate, Prasanta Sahu offers a complex, nuanced portrayal of the power relationship and interdependence between the neglected farming community and a modern, capitalist food economy. ■



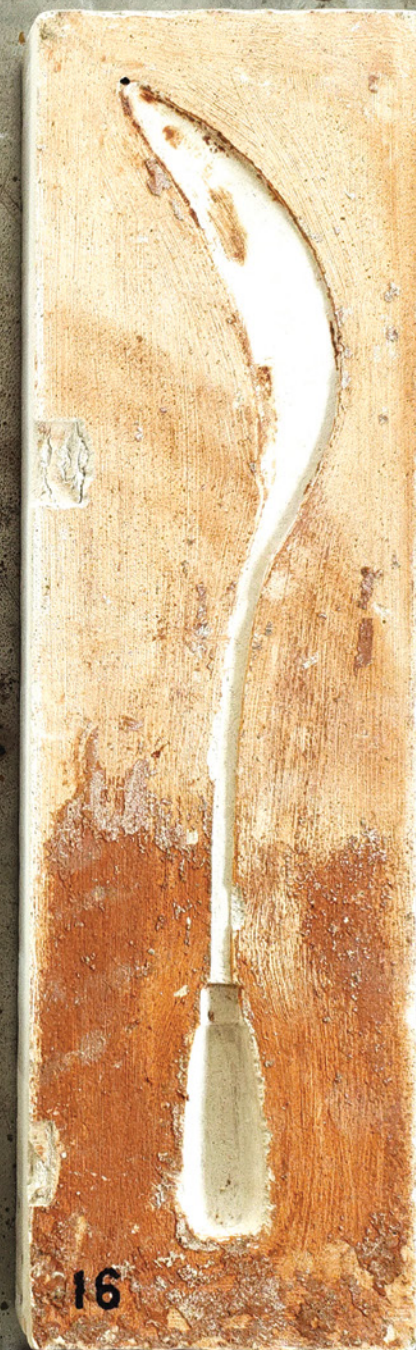
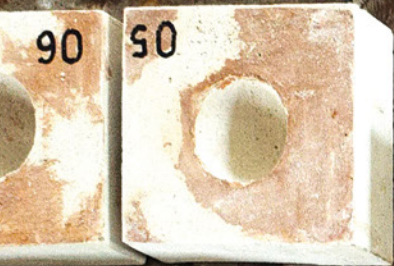
Installation view, *Anatomy of a Vegetable: Ruminations on Fragile Ecosystems*,
as part of invited satellite show, Kochi Muziris Biennale 2022-23

My Mother's Drumstick Tree
 Ink, watercolour, graphite, tracing paper
 on acid free paper
 8 x 6 inches each
 Found twig with text, wood shelf
 2022
 From the series
Drumstick Tree and Other Stories



The Drumstick Tree and Other Stories consists of a number of drawings on paper and found objects arranged carefully into a tableau of fragmented observations interacting and overlapping, creating a poignant yet powerful narrative of marginalised communities. Some examples include illustrations of green leafy vegetables foraged by the village women when they have nothing to eat but which they cook with care and love. The drawing that lends its name to this installation is that of a drumstick (*moringa*) tree carefully tended by the farmer's households because every part is edible.





Mapping Craters II,
2022-23

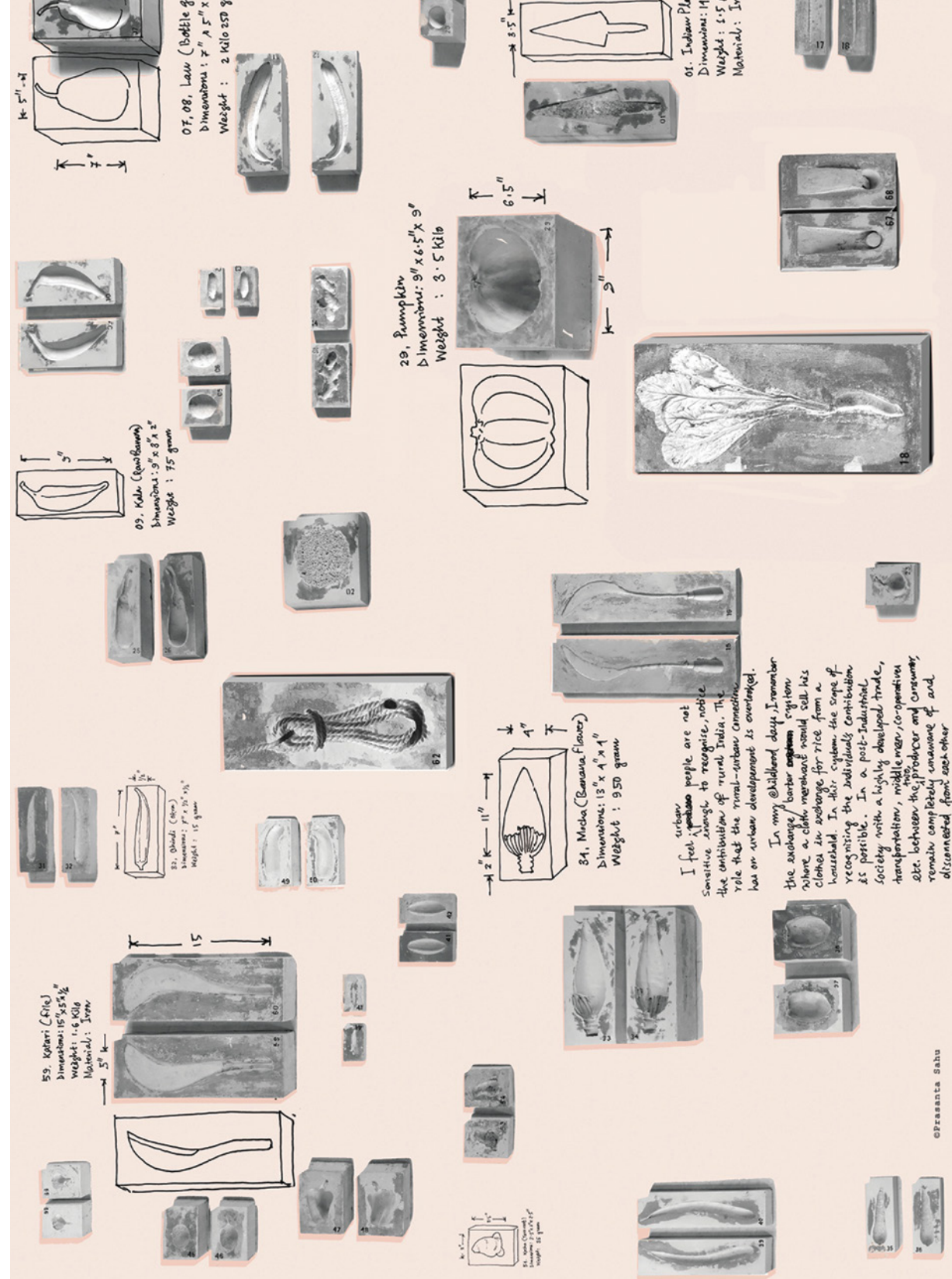
Excerpt from exhibition note
*Anatomy of a Vegetable:
Ruminations on Fragile
Ecosystems*
2022-2023

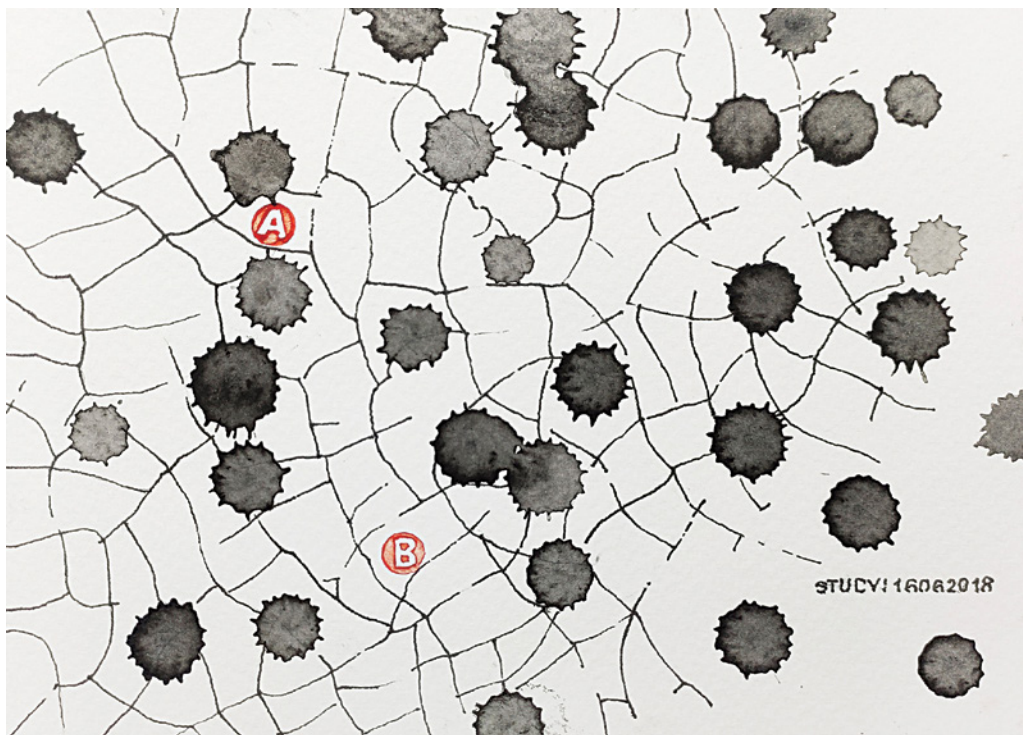
'Until the middle of the nineteenth century, archaeologists and antiquarians working in remote sites still favoured plaster and paper moulds suitable for documenting the sculptural motifs, inscriptions and architectural facades. They found the newly invented photographic methods unreliable and cumbersome and viewed sketching and copying on paper with suspicion as it was susceptible to individual subjectivities. The reason behind Sahu's preference for plaster mould is, however, not technical but aesthetic, concerned with the politics of representation. Immutable mobile objects, the moulds in Sahu's work are an end in itself (he does not remove the remnant of clays from the moulds) and not intended to be used for replication. The decentralized archival and documentary impulse in Mapping Craters also shapes Sahu's works on marginalized labourers and peasants.'



Exhibition view
*Anatomy of a Vegetable: Ruminations
on Fragile Ecosystems,*
Mocha Art Café, Kochi, 2022-23

Mapping Craters II,
Pamphlet, 2022-23
Detail





Study: 16062018
Ink and watercolour on paper
7 x 5 inches
2018
From the series
Drumstick Tree and Other Stories



Untitled
Watercolour on paper
8 x 6 inches
2022
From the series
Drumstick Tree and Other Stories



Detail of Installation

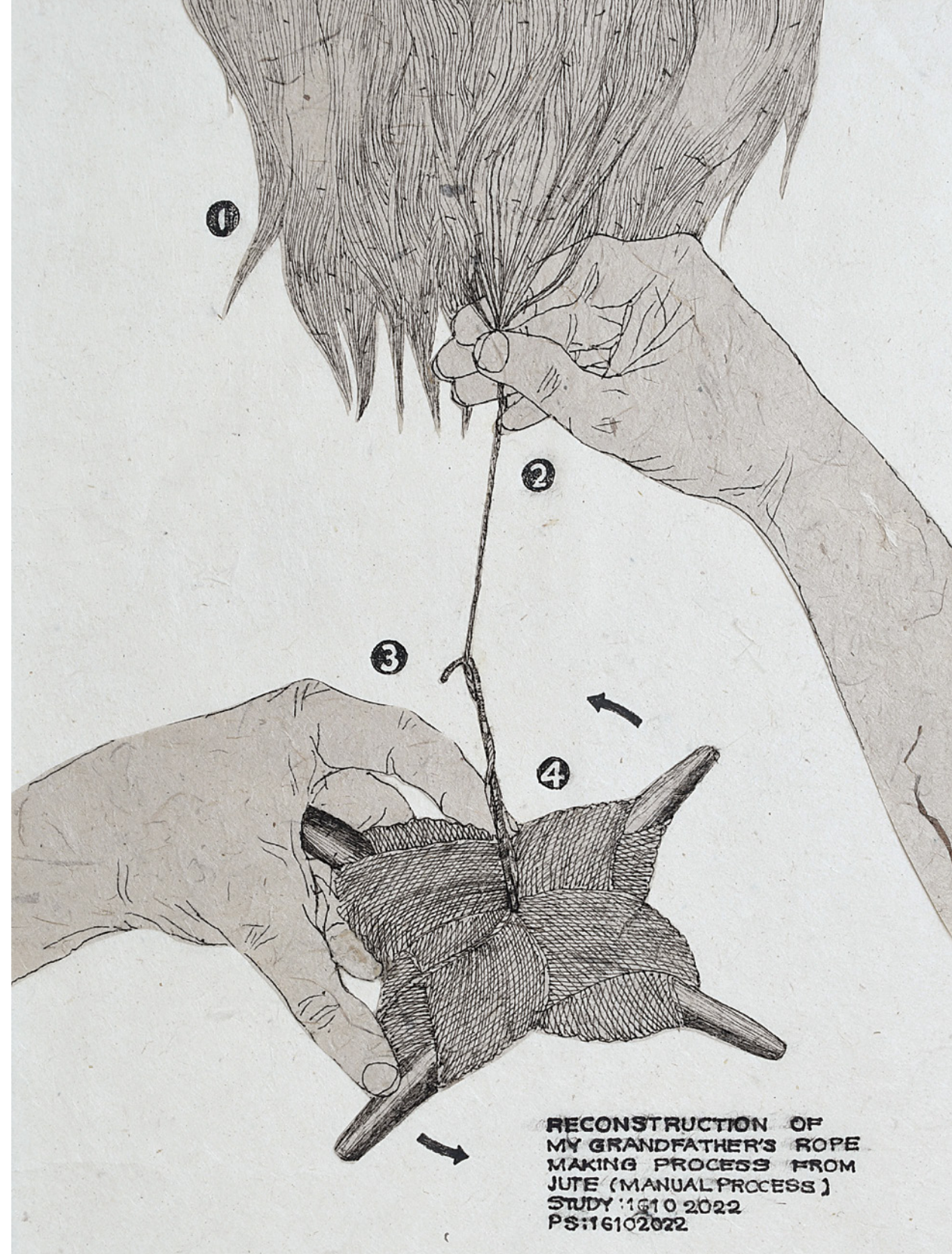
With William Kentridge

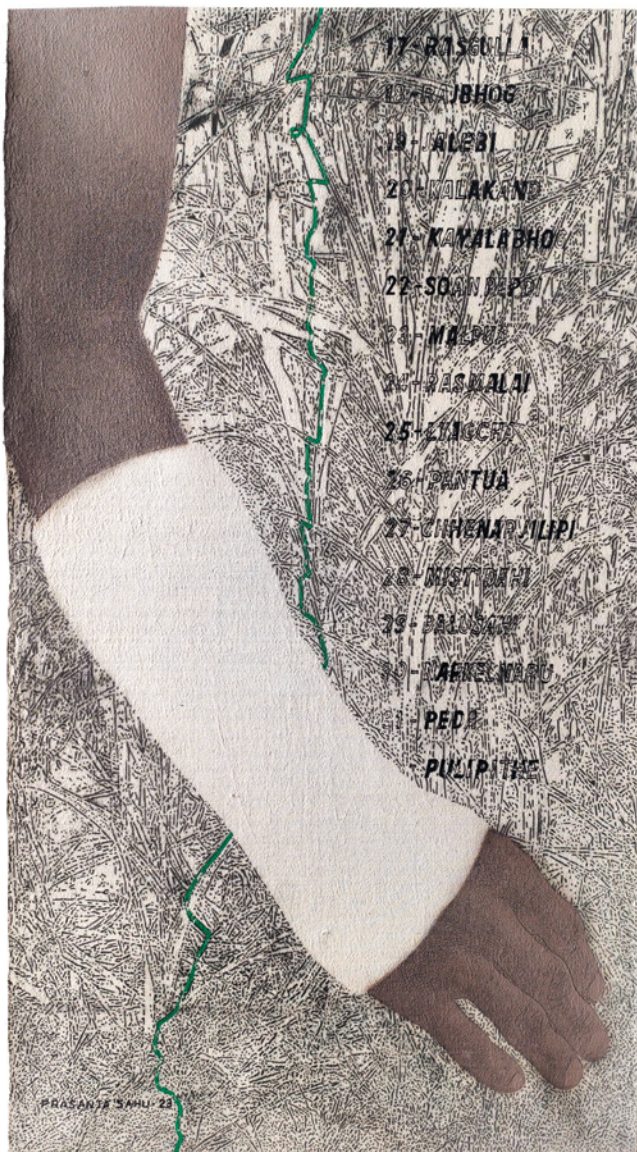


'Born into a rural household in Odisha, where my father still tills the land he was born in, as the eldest son, I have migrated to a semi-urban space to study, earn, and support my family- this system holds most Indian family structures together.

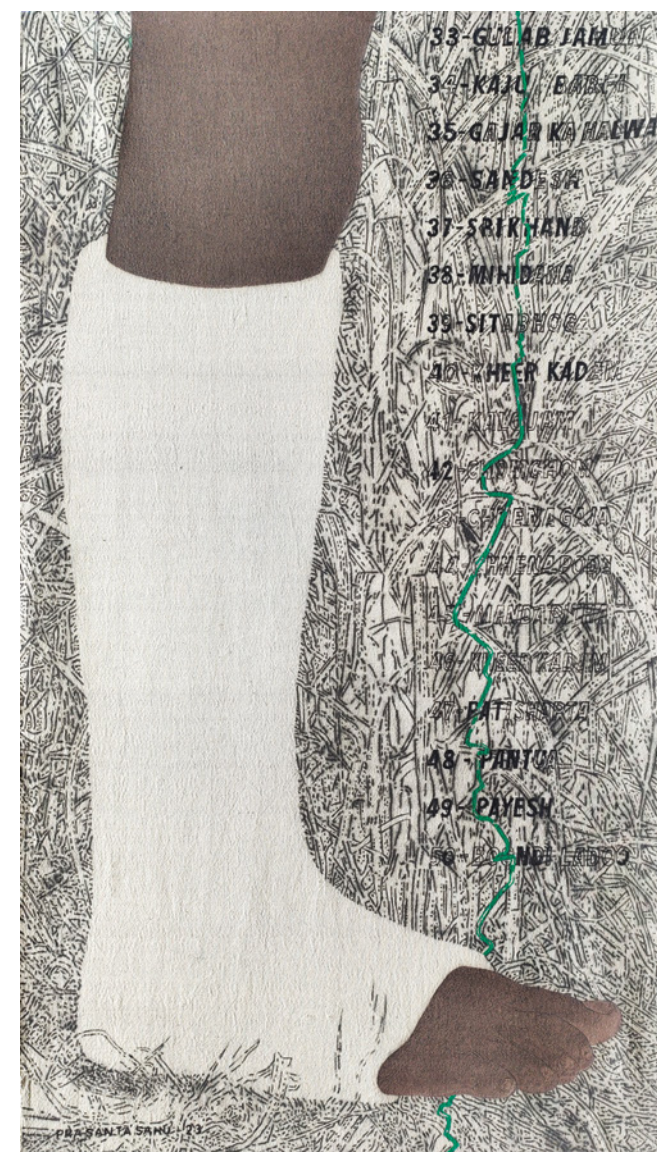
I am linked to my roots.
I am also uprooted from
my roots. What, then, is
my identity?
Identity, for me, is a
collective memory that
I carry within and add to.
It is also my way of
connecting to the other,
the neglected, the fringe
dweller. I find the struggles
of the lower middle class
as my anchor point, as
my link to the land of my
ancestors.'

Study: 16102022
Ink and Nepali paper on
Fabriano paper
11.5 x 8.5 inches
2022

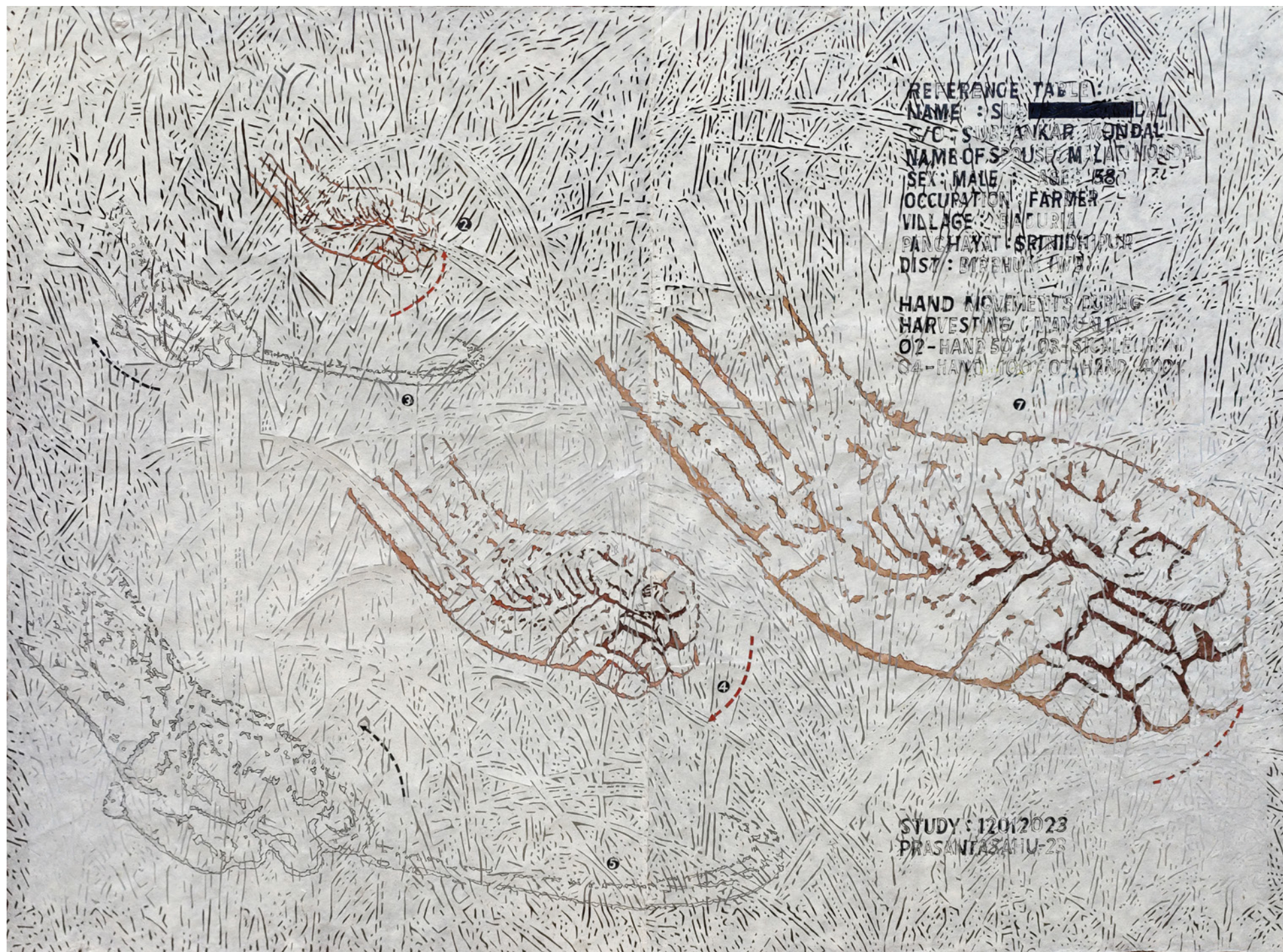




Not a Sweet Story I
Acrylic, graphite on locally woven, treated
natural handloom cotton
60 x 34 inches each
2023



Not a Sweet Story II
Acrylic, graphite on locally woven, treated
natural handloom cotton
60 x 34 inches each
2023



The Harvest Story - 1
 Acrylic and ink on hand-cut
 Nepali paper
 30 x 40 inches
 2023



Study of a Cyclone
Acrylic, ink and graphite on Fabriano paper
30 x 22 inches
2020

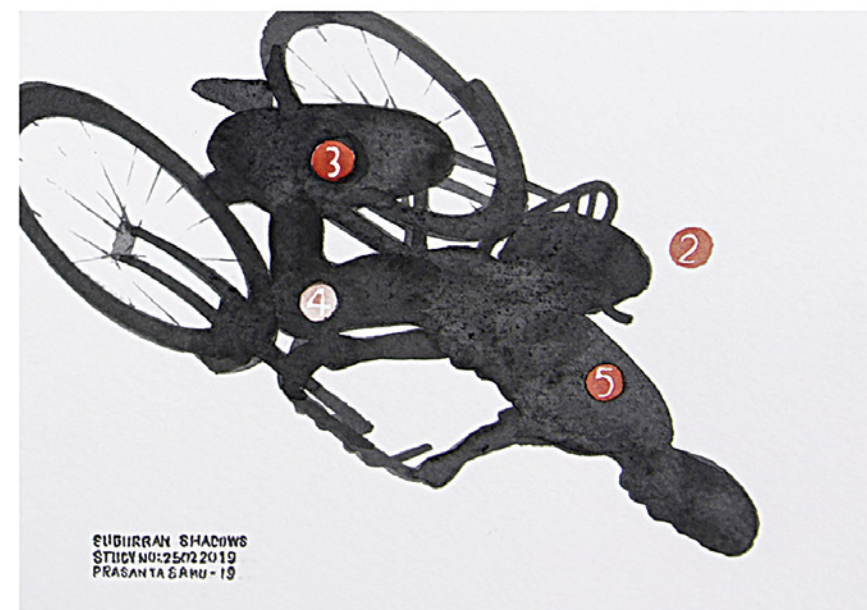
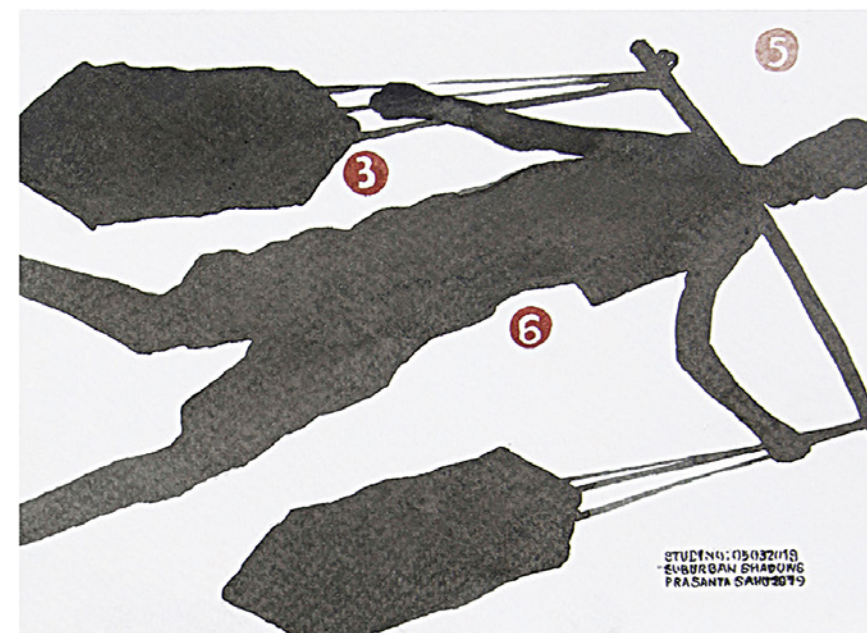


The Potato Farmer From Kasba
Acrylic and ink on Fabriano paper
30 x 22 inches
2020



Suburban Shadows
Ink on Fabriano paper
7 x 5 inches each
Suite of 16 works
2019

Suburban Shadows
Detail



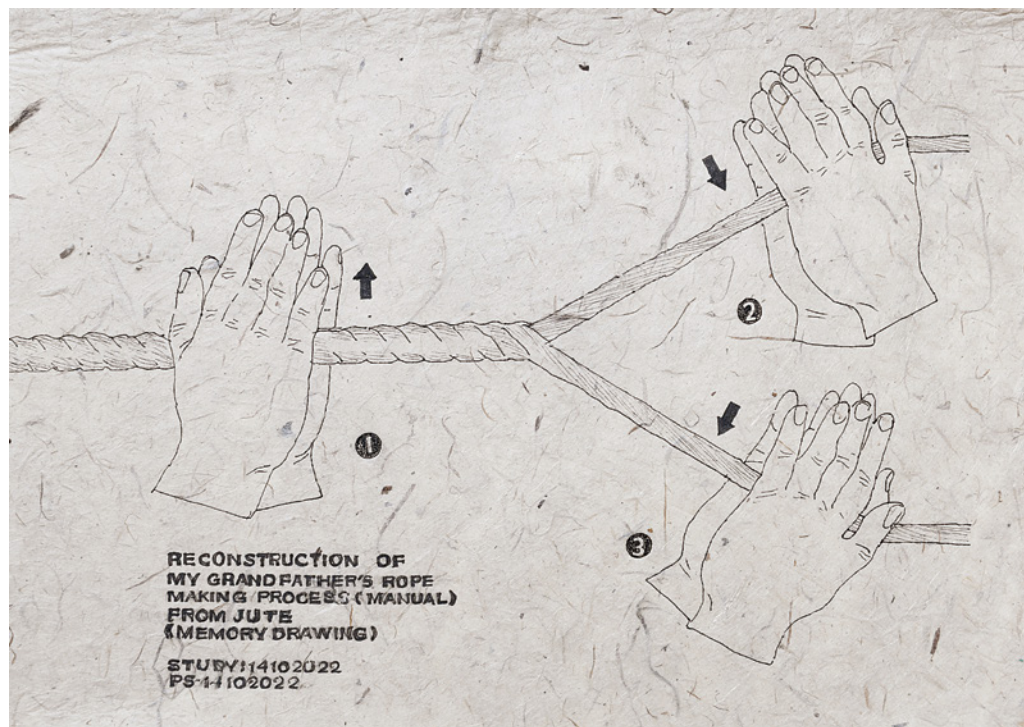
'I inscribe numbers for different elements or images and then note these down in a reference table like an architectural plan. I enjoy this diagram or user manual-like approach in my drawings and paintings. It is a nod towards a documentation methodology and analytical, empirical data collection. But these also highlight the ambiguous nature of knowledge, the politics of representation and truths hidden from mainstream discourse.'

Study 02102020
Acrylic, ink and graphite
on Fabriano paper
30 x 22 inches
2020



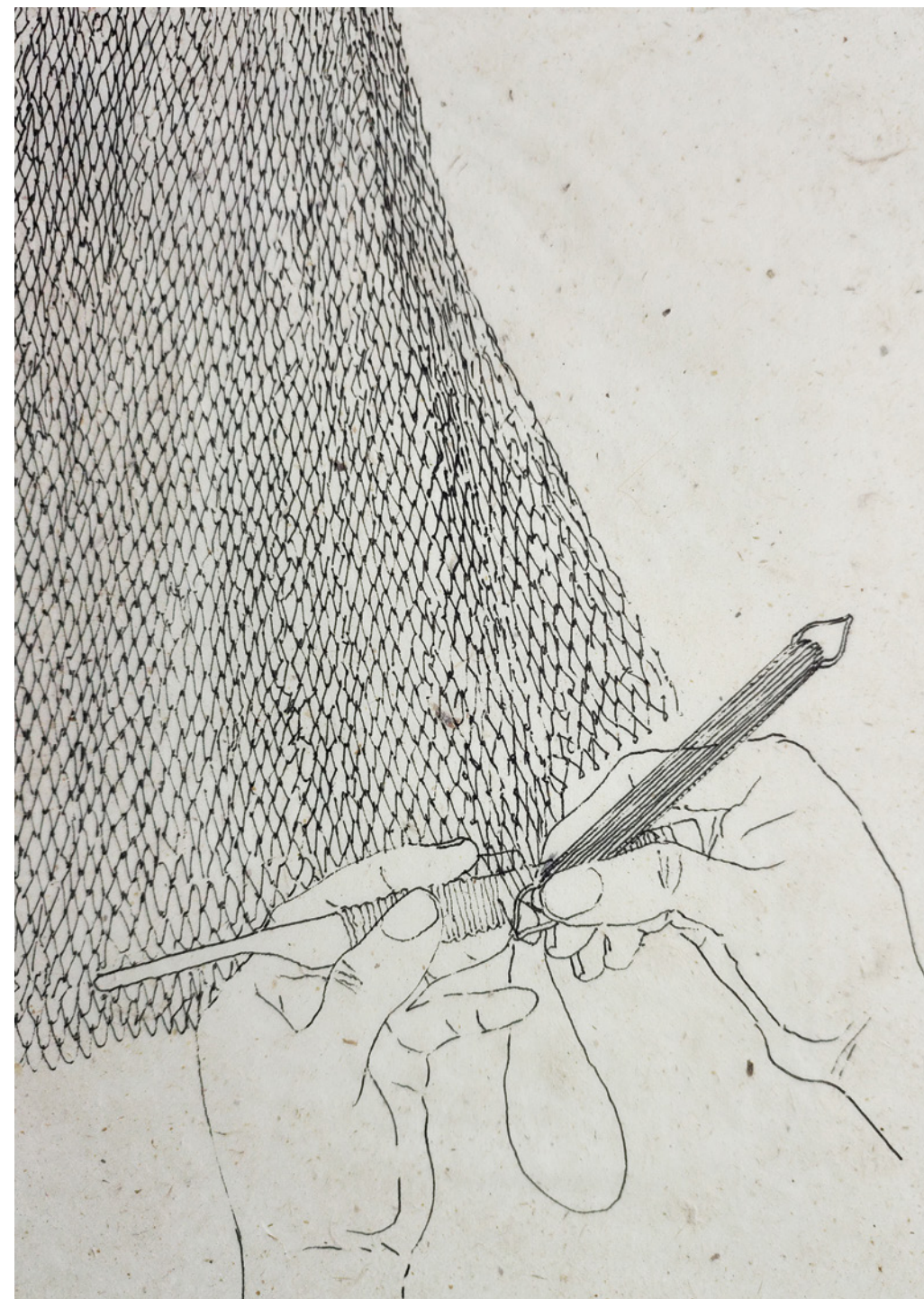


Study 13062022
 Watercolour, graphite and tracing paper
 11.5 x 8.5 inches
 2022



'These memory drawings reconstruct the process of remembering and visually documenting my ancestors' wisdom which I, too, may forget soon.'

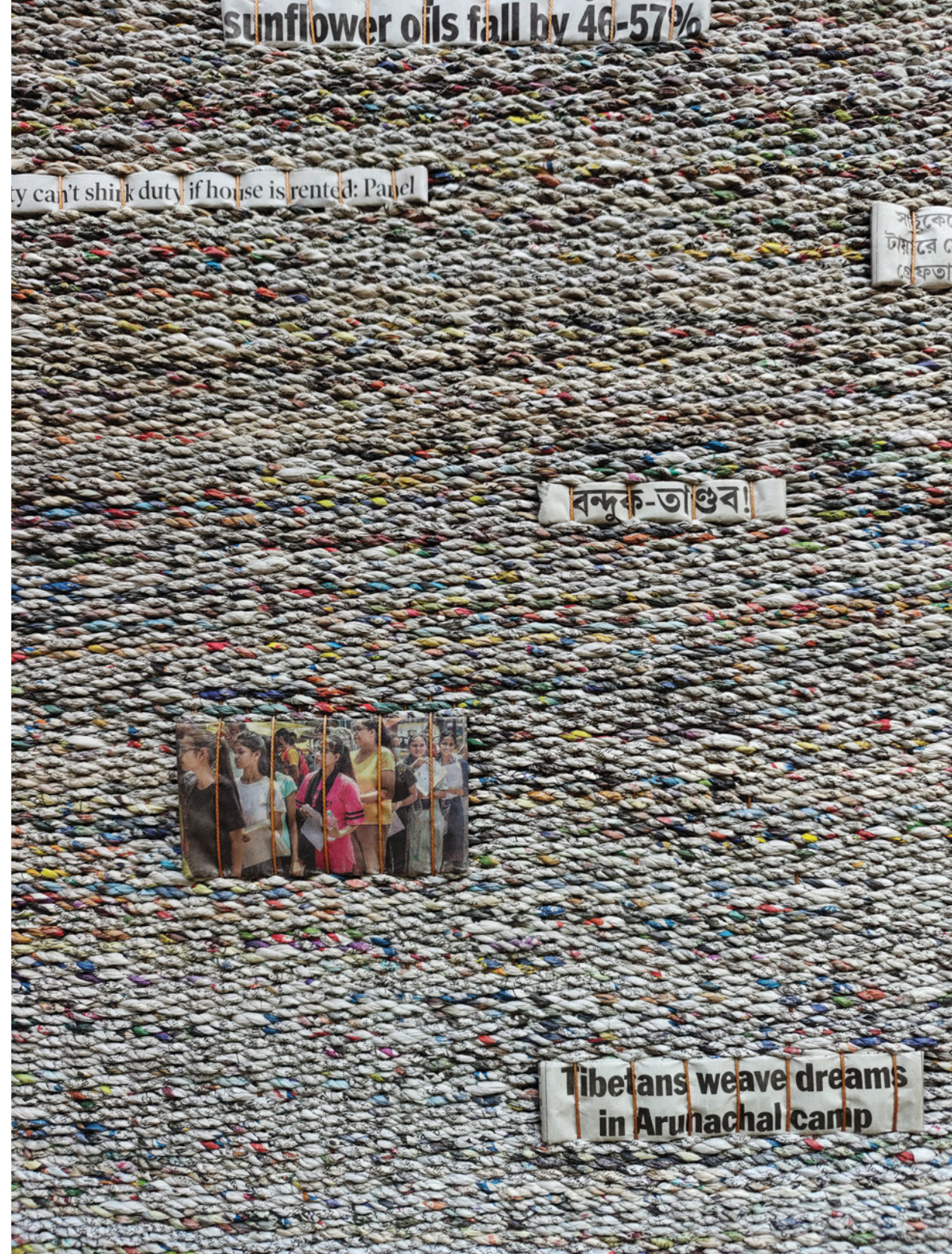
Study 14102022
Ink on Nepali paper
11.5 x 8.5 inches
2022



Knitting a Net
Ink on Nepali paper
11.5 x 8.5 inches
2022

‘In many of my drawings, I have focused on documenting my childhood memories with my grandfather. I was very close to him, and I remember him teaching me how to make threads from jute by hand. He would use these threads for so many different things. My paper-thread projects are rooted in this memory.’

*The 19th Week of 2023
(8th May to 14th May 2023)
Detail*





The 19th Week of 2023 (8th May to 14th May 2023)
 Hand woven tapestry made from 2-ply thread handmade from strips
 of newspapers, fish-net twine
 240 inches x 60 inches overall
 2023-24

Exhibition view,
All That is Hidden: Mapping Departures in Landscape, Terrains and Geographies,
 Emami Art, 2024

Study of a Multi-Layered Landscape
Gesso, acrylic, graphite and text on unprimed canvas
81 x 60 inches
2023-24

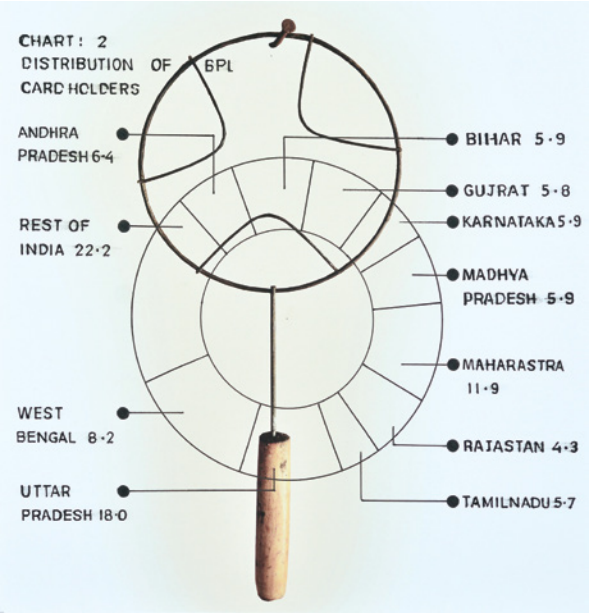
'The skin is the body's largest organ, containing millions of pores; even if most of these are invisible to the human eye, they differ from each other, like thumb impressions, are unique markings. The skin, hence, becomes an unidentifiable portrait. I trace/transfer and paint each mark. The meditative painting process here becomes an act of knowing and recording.'





Case Study No: 16092016.
Archival photograph and drawing on paper
10 x 10 inches each
2022
Exhibited at the Accademia Albertina, Turin, Italy

Delving into the life of a rural tea stall owner, Sahu's Case Study No: 16092016, which consists of a series of photographs and drawings on paper, is a portrait study in absence. The objective documentation and everyday poetics of life, memories and desires intertwine to open up a complex production of the local in a globalised world.





The Sawmill Worker From Goalpara I & II
 Digital print on archival paper
 Size variable
 2019



Artist's
Interview

Prasanta Sahu, born in 1968 in Odisha, India, completed his diploma in Electrical Engineering (1987) before enrolling to study art at Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. There he earned his BFA in painting (1998), followed by a Master's degree in painting from M.S. University, Baroda (2000), graduating summa cum laude from both universities.

Sahu's solo shows include 'Anatomy of a Vegetable: Ruminations on Fragile Ecosystems' as part of the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2022-23 Invited Satellite Programme at Mocha Art Café, Kochi; 'Suburban Shadows' at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2020, and 'Blueprint of a City' at Kalakriti Art Gallery, Hyderabad in 2016.

Sahu has shown widely both within and outside the country and participated in numerous workshops and residencies. Some select participations are: 'All That is Hidden-Mapping Departures in Landscape, Terrains and Geographies'- Emami Art, Kolkata -2024; 'The Politics of Paper' curated by Ushmita Sahu, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2022; 'Hub India-Maximum Minimum' Artissima International Art Fair of Contemporary Art, Jointly curated by Davide Quadrio and Myna Mukherjee, Torino, Italy, 2021; 'Disruptive Confluences' at Palazzo Madama, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, Torino and 'Multitudes and Assemblages' at Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti di Torino, A three part museum show jointly curated by Davide Quadrio and Myna Mukherjee, 2021; Asian Higher Fine Arts Education, hosted by Yunnan Provincial Department of Education, Organized by ASEAN-China Arts colleges alliance, Yunnan artists association and Yunnan arts university, 2020; 'Lockdown Diaries' CIMA art gallery, Kolkata, 2020; 'Art: Bengal Now', Bengal Contemporary artists, curated by Pranab Ranjan Ray, Jointly organized by Gandhara art Gallery, Kolkata and Dhoomimal art Gallery, New Delhi, New Delhi, 2020; 'Anthology of Anecdotes', Ganges Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2019; 'Kursi' a group show of sculptures, paintings and installations, Sarjan art Gallery, Baroda, curated by Sandhya Bordeweker, 2019;

'Blue India' Art Asia art Fair Korea, 2018; 'Constellations' Bihar Museum, Patna, 2018; 'Response' a new-media and installation show at Gem Cinema CIMA art gallery, Kolkata, 2018; 'Postcards' Busan International art Fair, Korea, 2017; 16 young contemporary artists, Karnataka Chithrakala Parisath, Bangalore, 2017; Daegu-India Korean Fine Arts Association South Korea, 2015-2017; 7th Biennial of contemporary Indian art, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, 2017; among many others.

Sahu has been invited as visiting faculty by several universities, including the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Burapha University, Thailand; University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; University of Hyderabad, Sarojini Naidu School of Fine Arts and Communication, Hyderabad. Among his other interests are writing poetry in his mother tongue, Oriya; he is a talented Hindustani classical violinist and an avid biker.

Since 2001, Sahu has been teaching in the Department of Painting at his alma mater, Kala Bhavana (Faculty of Fine Art), Visva Bharati University. Prasanta Sahu lives and works in Santiniketan, 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

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