

Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri



A weaver, painter, printmaker and designer, Karchaudhuri (born in 1944) studied at the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, from where he graduated in 1966 in applied arts. Karchaudhuri, however, loved painting in his spare time, and unlike most artists in the 1960s Bengal, who favoured figurative art, he was attracted to a non-figurative fluid approach. After completing his studies, he started working at the Calico Mill in Ahmedabad.

1968 was a pivotal year in his life when several young designers from the mill were sent for training in the newly established textile and fibre arts department at the National Institute of Design under the guidance of renowned weaver and textile designer Nelly Sethna and the influential Finnish textile designer Helena Perheentupa who joined as faculty. The institution's vibrant cultural atmosphere and Perheentupa's eclectic modernist outlook and experimental approach to teaching and making had a lasting impact on him. Karchaudhuri's inclination towards abstraction was redefined at NID, and his work started imbibing elements from Indian and European design and tapestry traditions. Looking back, black-and-white drawing exercises in Perheentupa's classes, his interactions with her and NID's radical new method of teaching informed his understanding of design and textile weaving techniques. He also had the opportunity to learn about loom weaving from Nelly Sethna.

From NID, he went on to work as an art designer in the Weavers Service Center in 1969, where he worked with professional weavers for two decades, moving over the years between Varanasi, Bhagalpur and Kolkata. The WSCs, founded by Pupul Jayakar, aimed to create a symbiotic relationship of learning and facilitation between artisans and artists employed at the various centres to help develop and modify designs. Karchaudhuri started imbibing lessons he learnt from the artisans in his experiments, creating massive tapestries. Although, for him, the mass production and commercial aspects were secondary to the artistic and craft aspects of making, like many of the painters and sculptors employed by the WSC, the artisanal and creative collaboration was reflected in his work.



Exhibition view, *The Dream of an Idiot*,
Emami Art, Kolkata, 2023



In the mid-1980s, he joined as a regular faculty member at NID's Department of Textile Design, teaching there for almost a year before he moved to California, where he took up printmaking under Geoffrey Bowman at San Jose University. All these diverse learning experiences enabled him to understand the essential roles of form and colour, as well as crafts and material, in creating artwork without extraneous content.

He returned to India and worked once more at the WSC before moving on to the next critical chapter of his life in the 1990s when he joined the design department at Kala Bhavana. A perceptive teacher and pedagogue, he contributed to revamping the department, particularly its creative design section, based on an extensive syllabus made by KG Subramanyan. The KG syllabus explored functional designs, as taught historically in the institution, and expressional design, which aimed to connect the curriculum to global modernist trends and art practice. In his teaching, Karchaudhuri emphasised the expressional, introducing exercises with the design source material. This period also defines his engagement with the frame loom as a tool for creative expression.

This kind of loom is a basic square frame that allows the warp yarns, held at tension, to be hand knotted/interlaced with weft yarns, allowing textured pile heights or tufts of organic fibre with a three-dimensional effect to be left undisturbed on the surface. Karchaudhuri's body of wall hangings is characterised by diligent craftsmanship, simplicity of form, and an organic approach. These evocative tapestries made of hemp, cotton, wool and other natural fibres form a significant part of his variegated oeuvre.

In an essay for Karchaudhuri's solo exhibition, KG Subramanyan wrote, *'Shiva Prasad's tapestries are delightfully ambivalent. At one look, they are abstract fields where broken lines, zig-zags and patches of colour waltz around; at another, they evoke a landscape or scene with various atmospheric nuances, though he is abstemious, even austere, in his use of colour and other devices. But it is this halfway house, this see-sawing between design and description, that is their unique attraction. It provokes the viewer's interest and sustains it through a play of hide and seek.'*





Installation view, *The Dream of an Idiot*,
Emami Art, Kolkata, 2023



Karchaudhuri's work, motifs and colours have always been impacted by where he lives and works and its physical environs, and one can see that his style has changed with the change of location – from Kolkata to Bhagalpur to Santiniketan. An oft-repeated motif - the triangle, inverted or upright, has traces to the local tribal community as well as traditional Indian temple weaving motifs. Indeed, as evident in the works on view, Karchaudhuri views these abstract forms and motifs not as opposed to realism but as linked to the idea of the origin of life and expression itself and open to interpretation. The artist has always tried to inform his drawings and paintings with a similar fluidity; hence, these, too, have a distinctive visual and pictorial quality reminiscent of the woven element. ■



Sun and Moon with Dotted Space - 1
Cotton, wool and hemp fiber
35 x 32 inches
Undated



Sun and Moon with Green Space
Cotton, wool and hemp fiber
65.2 x 40 inches
Early to mid 1990s

‘My tapestries have geometric abstractions, mostly non-figurative ones. Abstraction is inherent in my nature; I can’t avoid it in any way. Even my first exhibition was completely non-figurative. I belong to the non-figurative world.

But that does not mean my work has no place for human form. Human forms peep in my creations quite often. Human forms are also expressed in abstraction in my work. I like working with forms. There is always a basic form in my work – be it a human form or a geometric one. I could not rise above basic forms. I didn’t want to. Because my expression didn’t reach till there, you can say.’



Rising Upward
Cotton, wool and hemp fiber
72 x 40 inches
Circa late 1990s to early 2000s



Steps in Colour
Cotton, wool and hemp fiber
52.5 x 39.5 inches
Circa late 1990s to early 2000s



The Diamonds - I
Cotton, wool and hemp fiber
39 x 32.8 inches
Circa late 1990s to early 2000s



The Dream of an Idiot
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 84 inches overall
Diptych
2009



The Dream of an Idiot - 2
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 84.4 inches overall
Diptych
2023



The Dream of an Idiot - 3
Acrylic on canvas
59.8 x 84.4 inches overall
Diptych
2023







Untitled
Acrylic on canvas
42 x 48 inches
2009



Untitled
Acrylic on paper
21 x 29 inches
2010



Untitled
Acrylic on paper
21.5 x 29.5 in. (54.6 x 74.9 cm.)
2013



The Twin Figures 1
Ink, acrylic and graphite on paper
10 x 14 inches
Diptych
2022



The Nymph 8
Ink, acrylic and graphite on paper
14 x 11 inches
2022



*Man and a Hanging Bird Near a
Distant River*
Detail

Man and a Hanging Bird Near a Distant River
Oil on canvas
33 x 34 inches
1977



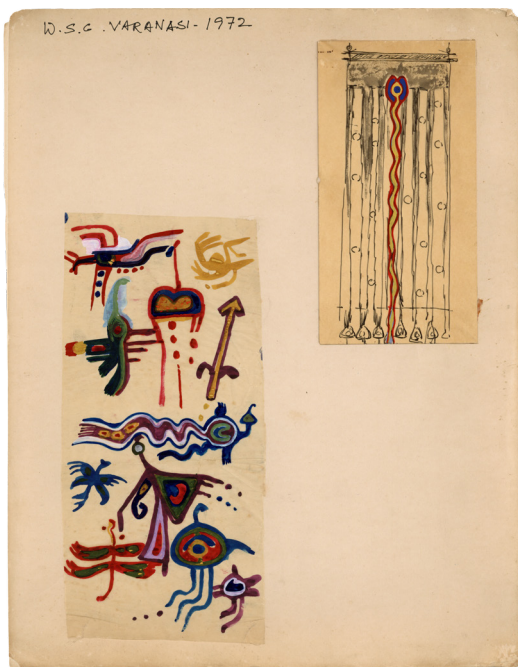




Untitled
Ink on paper
22 x 29 inches
1980

Untitled
Watercolour, ink and dry pastel on paper
21.5 x 29.5 inches
1982

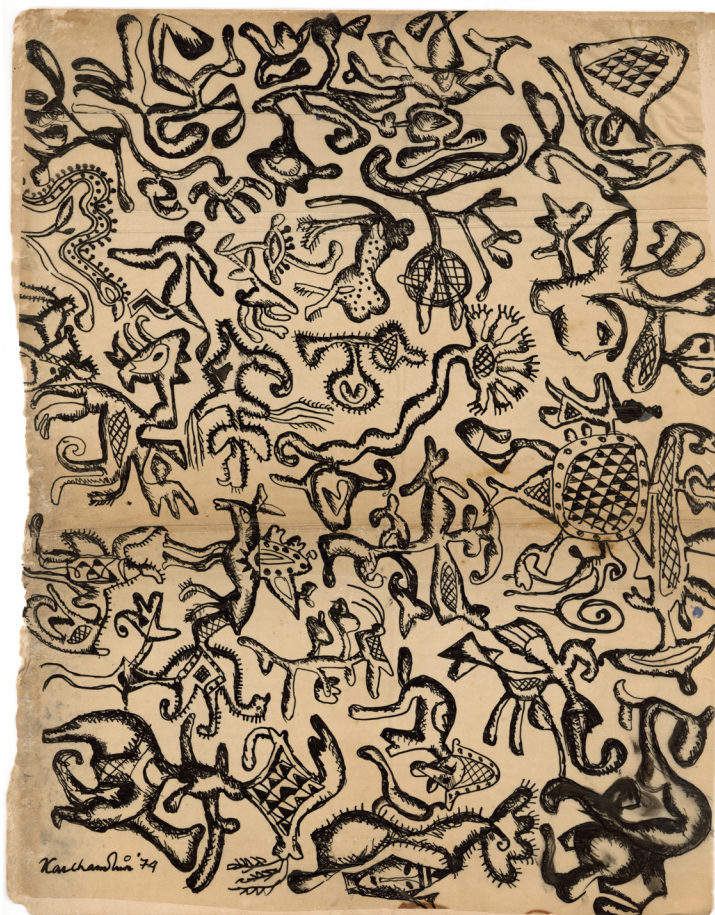




Design Sketches from Weavers'
Service Centre, Varanasi
1972



Weavers' Service Centre, Kolkata
1974-79

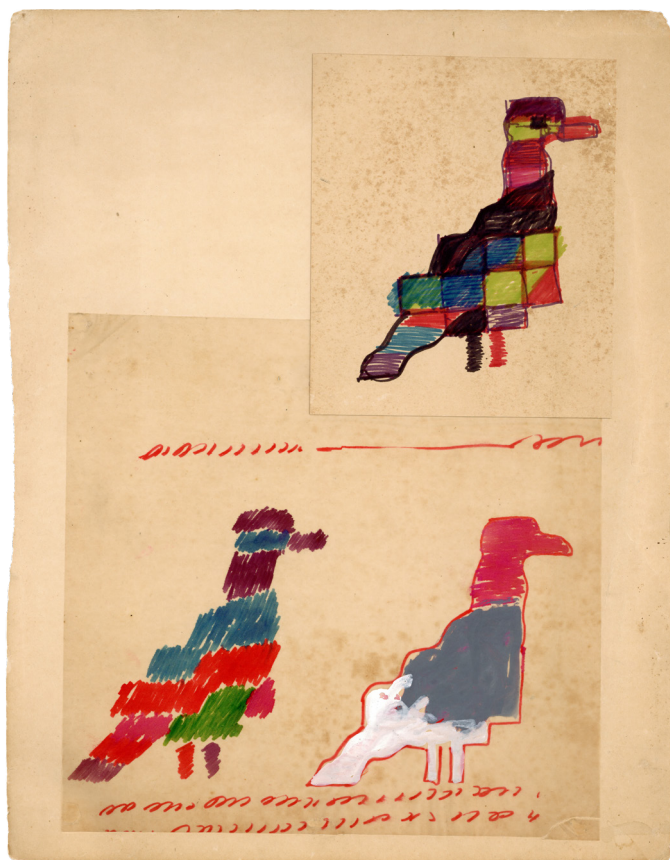


Preliminary drawings for
textile printing & painting,
Weavers' Service Centre, Varanasi
1974



Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri with the Bird Tapestry
Weavers' Service Centre, Bhagalpur
1986

Design Sketches from Weavers'
Service Centre, Bhagalpur
1986



'The time, the environment and the state of mind significantly impacted my art practice, choice of materials and recreating forms and figures. In my art journey, I had to pass through many gateways of styles and shapes mixed with the nuances of primitivism.

My works revolve in an elliptic orbit centring around the primary forms and figures of the primeval days, sometimes very near to it and sometimes far away. I wanted to stretch myself out to this area of unknown mystery, to another reality.'

Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri



Figure in Column Shape
Oil on canvas
71 x 47 inches
1988





Untitled
Ink on paper
21 x 28 inches
1981



Dialogue
Etching aquatint
7.7 x 8.8 inches
1984

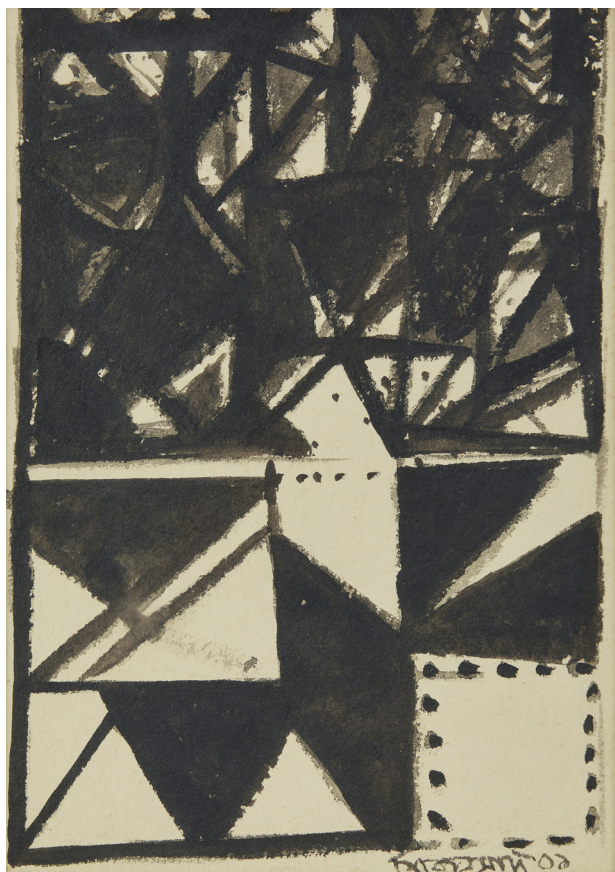
Woman 2
Etching Aquatint
16.3 x 13.5 inches
1985



Woman 2

A/P. USA.

Kanchandhuri '85



Untitled
Acrylic on paper
10 x 7 inches
2001



Basic Elements
Acrylic on canvas
12 x 12 inches
2002



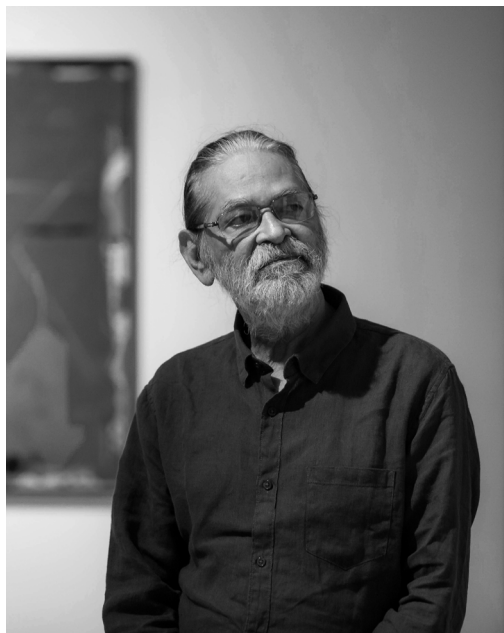
Untitled
 Acrylic on canvas
 15 x 13 inches
 2015



Untitled
Watercolour on paper
10 x 7 inches
2001



Untitled
Watercolour on paper
10 x 7 inches
2001



Born in 1944 in West Bengal, Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri studied Applied Arts at the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta, graduating in 1966.

He took training in design under Helena Perheentupa, a Finnish Designer at NID, Ahmedabad, from 1968-69 and Graphic Art under Geoffrey Bowman at San Jose State University, California, from 1984-85. He taught at the textile design department at NID from 1981-82 and later at Kala Bhavana Visva Bharati University Santiniketan from 1990 to 2009. Karchaudhuri worked for two decades at the Weavers Service Centres in Varanasi, Bhagalpur and Kolkata between 1969 and 1989.

He has been the subject of several solo shows at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata (1968, 1973). San Jose State University Gallery, California, USA (1985); Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay (1998); Shajahan Art Gallery, New Delhi (1998); 'Tapestry, Drawing and Painting', at Nandan, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan (2016) and 'Nymphs and Other Ethereal Images' at Gallery Charubasona, Kolkata (2023). His last major solo exhibition, 'The Dream of an Idiot', was at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2023.

His work has featured in several group exhibitions, including 'Fragments of Our Time', curated by Uthra Rajgopal at the British Textile Biennial in 2023; Four Artists Group Show, sponsored by American University Centre (1974); Five Artists Group Show at Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata (1978); 'Selected painters of Kolkata', organized by TATA centre, Kolkata (1979), Sixth Bharat Bhavana Biennial of

Contemporary Indian Art, Bhopal, M.P. (1997); 'Artists from Santiniketan' organized by La-Maier Art Gallery, Kolkata (1998), Selected Teachers works of Four Major Art Colleges of Bengal organized by Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata/Delhi (2001), 'Art of Santiniketan Masters and Emerging Artists', presented by S.A. Fine Arts, London (2002), 'The Art of Santiniketan: Masters and Emerging Artists at the Royal College of Art', London (2008), 43rd Annual Exhibition, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata (2010) and many more.

Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri 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

©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, Arkaprava Bose**

Publication Design:
Rajarshi Dutta

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

Printed at:
CDC Printers Pvt. Ltd.

Printed on:
January 2024