

Santanu Debnath

Portfolio



Santanu Debnath is an emerging artist hailing from a small village in West Bengal. A recent graduate of the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, he works meticulously, showing the patience of a miniaturist. His works, revealing many shades of the everyday life of rural Bengal, include, besides the human beings, rustic nature and animals.

His recent series of watercolours reflect on the ways in which the village had changed during the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns. Drawing from real life, memories, and imaginations, Debnath's watercolours create intimate narratives around familiar themes – such as childhood, family life, farming or grazing cattle in a vast landscape. There are pauses and lingering moments of stillness that are characteristics of Santanu's watercolours, where anxiety and patience nestle together. His other works are also characterized by his preference for detailing and an insider's perception of rural life. Rooted in naturalism, the empiricism of his paintings is overlaid with his poetic vision, personal memory, desires and sense of humour.



Watch the artist discuss his practice





Many of Santanu Debnath's works meticulously document waterbodies across diurnal and seasonal cycles, revealing water as an essential meter of the rhythm of village life and ecological time. Often reminiscent of romantic and idyllic landscape paintings of the pre-modern style, a significant body of paintings contests this conventional style with subtle undertones of erosion and loss. Though visually stunning and executed with outstanding skill, the silent and ghostly presences of these waterbodies invoke a sense of slow decline in equilibrium and balance.

Fisherman's Tale by Santanu Debnath captures the magical essence of an evening in Satpota – a village in Nadia, West Bengal, where fishermen cast their nets into the canal.

Fisherman's Tale
Acrylic on canvas
24 1/4 x 36 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal





In *Whisper of the Water II*, the artist captures a serene moment by the canal that flows through a village in West Bengal. The fisherman's solitary form merges with the gentle flow of the canal, epitomising the beauty of rural life. His task underscores humanity's intrinsic bond with nature. As he navigates the canal, the boundaries between labour and landscape dissolve, revealing a symbiotic harmony. This fleeting moment, where human presence and natural world entwine, invites contemplation on the interconnectedness of existence.

Whisper of the Water II
Acrylic on canvas
24 1/4 x 36 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



Detail
The Buffalo Bathers
Acrylic on canvas
24 1/4 x 36 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

When golden sunlight falls on the blue of the water, it shows up as a bright, vibrant green. This scene, captured during Santanu Debnath's visit to Satpota – a village in Nadia, West Bengal – depicts a fisherman crossing the canal, dragging his boat. The moment evokes the atmospheric beauty of that particular point in time, establishing a profound relationship between man and nature, where the human becomes an element of the natural world.

Crossing the Canal
Acrylic on canvas
24 1/4 x 36 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal





***By the River's Bend*, Acrylic on canvas, 24 1/8 x 80 x 1 1/8 in., 2025, Betpukur, West Bengal**

Through this painting of a river, the artist has depicted a moment of inner calm, where nature's beauty soothes the soul. For Santanu Debnath, rivers are repositories of stories. They hold memories of the past, symbolising continuity and healing. In this painting, the river is depicted as a container of these memories.



Monsoon Lake evokes memories of rainy days when ponds and lakes overflow with water, revitalizing life. Many of Santanu Debnath's paintings evince the pure and incredible natural beauty of his village in West Bengal, where he lives and works. The artist captures the vibrant green lily pads and delicate pink buds, showcasing nature's awakening during the monsoon season. The cloudy sky, wet leaves, and serene water evoke a sense of calm and quietude. The painting celebrates the beauty that accompanies the rain – the gentle sounds, the lush growth, and the peaceful atmosphere.

Monsoon Lake
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 18 1/8 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

How We Protect
Acrylic on canvas
14 1/8 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal





In *Ripples of Water*, the artist captures a serene moment by the side of a pond in his village. Many of Santanu Debnath's paintings are inspired by the beauty of his village nature. Soft light, gently moving water, and palm leaves above converge to evoke a sense of peacefulness. The painting is rooted in memories of watching water ripple and form shapes, reflecting the beauty of simple moments. It invites the viewer to pause and appreciate the calmness of nature.

Ripples of Water
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

morphology
of water

Santanu Debnath



Installation view
*Morphology of Water: A
Project by Santanu Debnath*
Emami Art, Kolkata
2025

Santanu Debnath draws inspiration from the rural natural world of his village. The painting depicts a serene pond surrounded by coconut trees, its surface adorned with lily pads. The shimmering effect on the flowers creates a sense of wonder, capturing the beauty of nature. This artwork is a celebration of the natural world, evoking feelings of calmness and tranquility.

Shimmering Lily I
Watercolour on paper
11 3/4 x 16 1/2 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal





In this painting, the artist captures the layered essence of nature, where tall grass in the foreground partially conceals the water and trees, echoing the way memories or thoughts can feel half-hidden. Inspired by the natural beauty of his village, the artist depicts a real place where he often finds solace. The soft reflections in the water and the serene green surroundings evoke a sense of calm, inviting the viewer to experience the tranquillity of the scene.

Hiding Behind the Grass
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



Morphology of Water: A Project by Santanu Debnath' is a solo exhibition focusing on aqueous landscapes and their civilizational impacts and interconnectedness. Situated around the artist's village and waterbodies, Debnath explores the fate of natural ponds and other waterbodies and how they diminish from day-to-day life today. Santanu Debnath's practice is primarily inspired by the mundane scenes from his village and the ordinary lives of the people.

Returning to his village after formal art education from Kolkata, Debnath turns his gaze not toward the spectacular sceneries of the serene village, but towards various aspects that structured communal life. The natural reservoirs of water and ponds were among the first things that caught his attention. His practice excavates the quiet process of ecological erosion, framing these aqueous sites not as nostalgic relics but as contested terrains reflecting the slow change in social and communal life.

From mythical stories of origin to discourses on politico-geographical boundaries, water has been a fundamental and central element of imagination across ages. Specifically, within Indian religious and indigenous cosmologies, water is seen as something beyond a mere resource—an entity with a sacrosanct role and agency. This profound status, however, vanishes in some shared aquatic habitats.

While persisting as indispensable sites of ritualistic importance, these same waterbodies are also sites of collective neglect, discarded trash, and societal wastes. Debnath's works depict these contradictions through different vectors.

Many works meticulously document waterbodies across diurnal and seasonal cycles, revealing water as an essential meter of the rhythm of village life and ecological time. Often reminiscent of romantic and idyllic landscape paintings of the pre-modern style, a significant body of paintings contests this conventional style with subtle undertones of erosion and loss. Though visually stunning and executed with outstanding skill, the silent and ghostly presences of these waterbodies invoke a sense of slow decline in equilibrium and balance.

The intrusion and jarring presence of trash and disposed materials create a deeply disturbing effect that generates dissonance with the idyllic and sacred. In Debnath's work, these elements are not just signifiers of pollution and environmental erosion but mark a categorical departure from dependency and sacred presence. They either belong to human detritus or non-human living beings. Through this layered portrayal of waterbodies—as both vital and violated—Debnath's project ultimately presents a poignant reflection on memory, community, and the fragile equilibrium between nature and human life.

morphology of water

Santanu Debnath

Installation view
**Morphology of Water: A
Project by Santanu Debnath**
Emami Art, Kolkata
2025



Detail
Reflections of Seasonal Transformation II
Acrylic on wood
4 3/4 x 6 3/8 x 3/8 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



In *Lush Green*, the artist captures a tranquil forest scene, where gentle waters flow amidst lush foliage. Dominant green hues evoke a sense of calmness, inviting the viewer to step into the peaceful atmosphere.

Lush Green
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

Beneath the Tree Arch depicts a serene and secluded green oasis, where large trees form a natural arch and soft light infuses the space with calmness and peacefulness. However, upon closer inspection, the scene reveals a jarring contrast – plastic bottles and garbage scattered on the ground, highlighting the impact of human neglect on even the most beautiful natural settings.

Beneath the Tree Arch
Acrylic on canvas
14 1/8 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal





Memories of his village play a significant part in Santanu Debnath's natural imagination. *Nocturnal Trap* depicts a serene night scene where a fishing net lie suspended over calm waters, surrounded by floating plants. Drawing from memories of village nights, the artist captures the world in a state of quiet contemplation yet teeming with hidden life. The deep blues and purples evoke the mystery of the night, while the net becomes a poignant symbol of waiting and hope. In this painting, nature, work, and silence converge, creating a powerful and evocative scene.

Nocturnal Trap
Acrylic on canvas
14 1/8 x 18 1/8 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



Dusk captures the soft, golden light of the moments just before nightfall. The natural beauty of his village in West Bengal has a powerful impact of Santanu Debnath and his painting. The artist was inspired by the quiet beauty of evening, when the sun sets and everything slows down. The warm reflections on the river and the elongated tree shadows evoke a peaceful and dreamy atmosphere, encapsulating the fleeting moment when day transitions into night.

Dusk
Acrylic on canvas
14 1/4 x 18 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

Construction over Waterbodies
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 17 7/8 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



This series of eleven works captures the everyday beauty of nature in the artist's village, where the absence of human presence transforms the landscape into a purely visual entity, experienced in solitude. These visual studies of local lakes, ponds, and rivers offer intimate glimpses into the natural world, each sketch reflecting a moment of close observation.



Detail | ***Daily Drawings***, Graphite and watercolor on paper, 5 7/8 x 8 1/4 in. each, 2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



Daily Drawings
Graphite and watercolor on paper
5 7/8 x 8 1/4 in. each
Set of 10 works
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

Nature speaks through Santanu Debnath's works, which reflect the profound impact of his village's natural landscape on his memory. In 'Ephemeral Reflections', a series of paintings on wooden plaques, Debnath captures waterbodies with broken idol armatures, fishing nets, and natural vegetation. Through these works, he explores the intricate interplay between nature and human presence, highlighting how the natural world reclaims human remnants.



Ephemeral Reflections II
Acrylic on wood and iron nails
5 3/4 x 16 1/8 x 3/4 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal



Installation view
Morphology of Water: A
Project by Santanu Debnath
Emami Art, Kolkata
2025



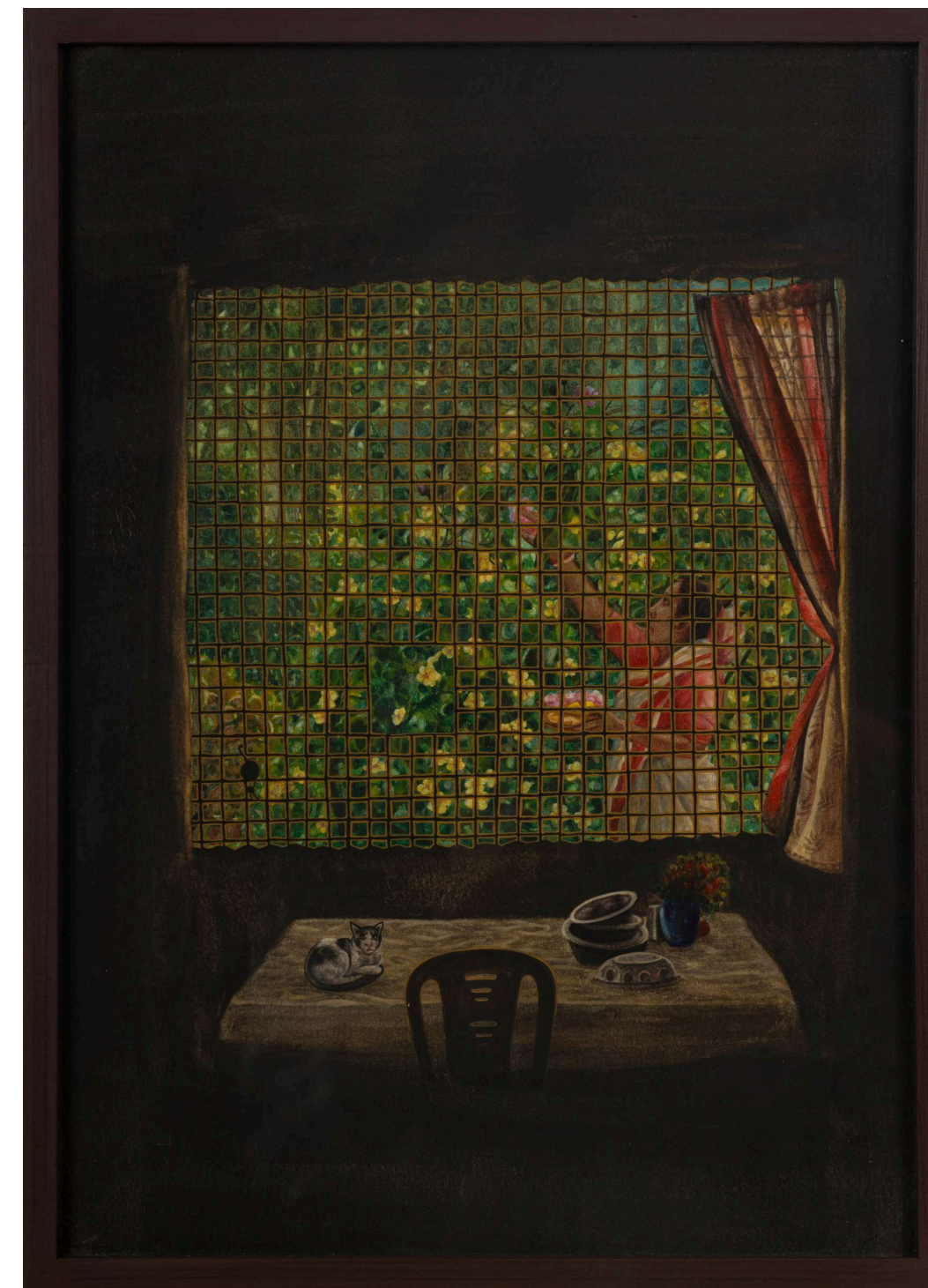
Ephemeral Reflections IV
Acrylic on wood and iron nails
6 5/8 x 17 3/8 x 1 1/8 in.
2025, Betpukur, West Bengal

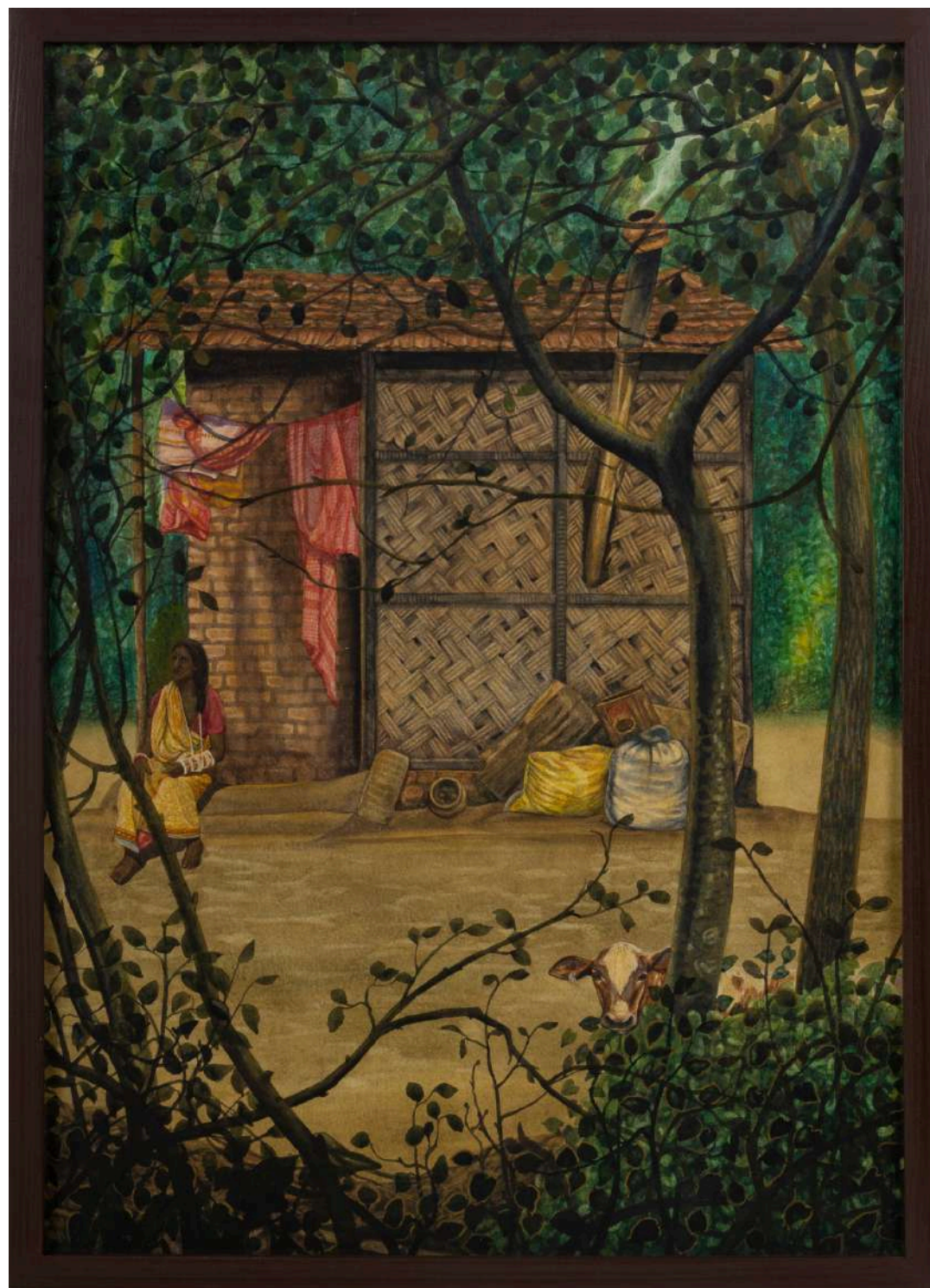


Whispers of the Water, Watercolour on paper, 9.88 x 21.65 in., 2024, Betpukur, West Bengal



Detail
Hues of Home-II
Watercolour on paper
16.45 x 11.65 in.
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal

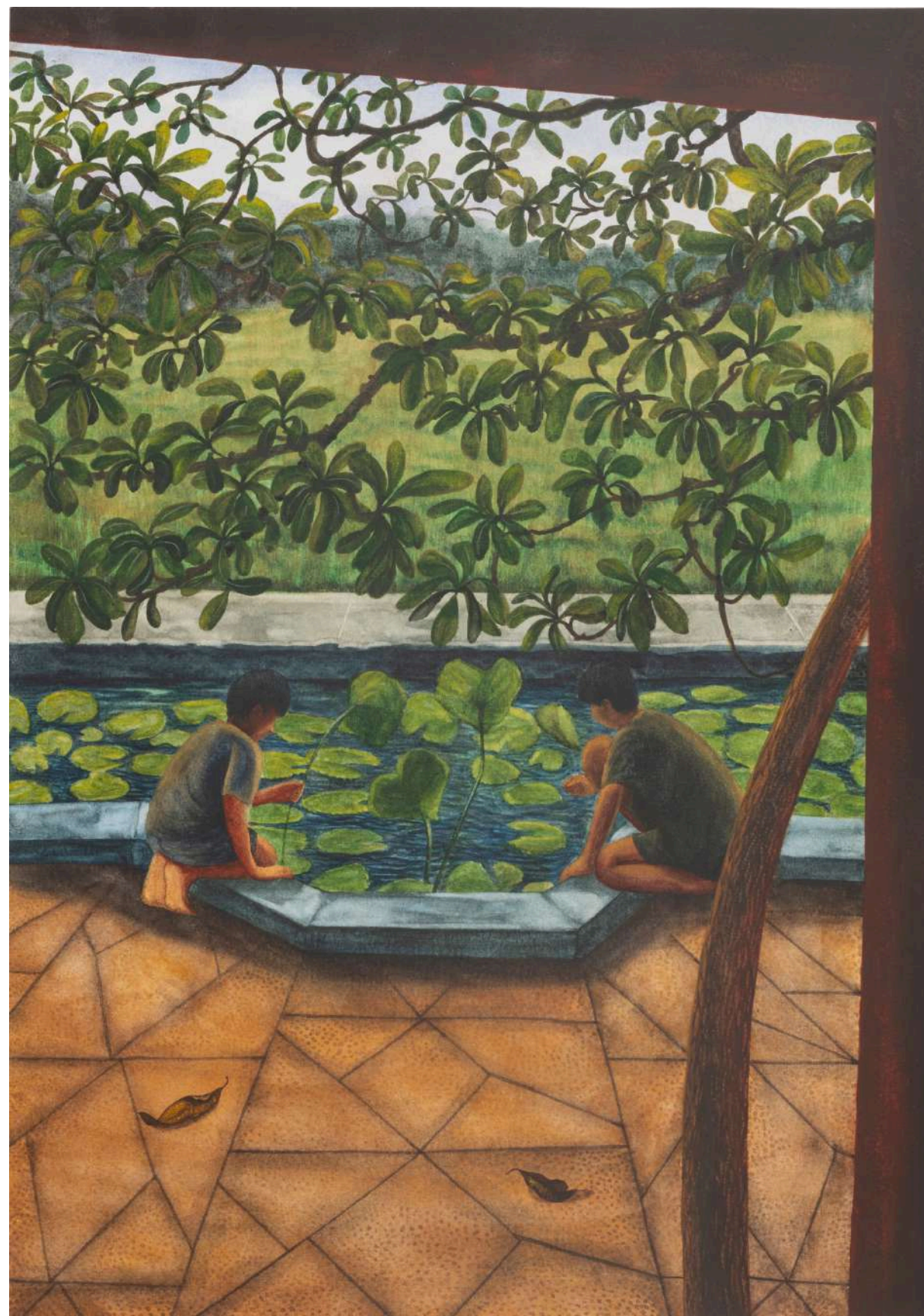
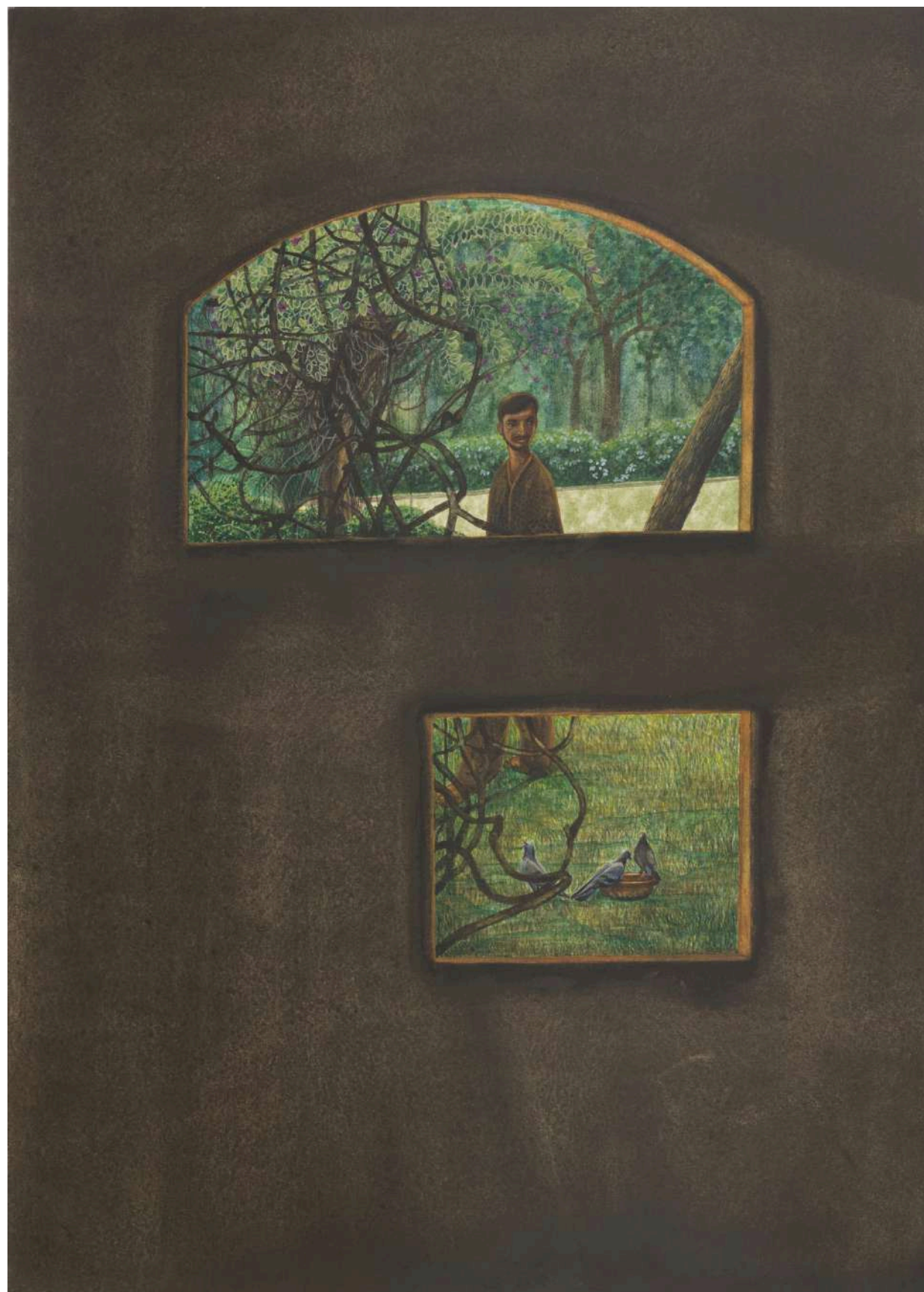




Hues of Home - I, Hues of Home - IV, Hues of Home - III
 Watercolour on paper, 16.45 x 11.65 in., 2024, Betpukur, West Bengal



Observing Thematic Activities
Watercolour on paper
29.5 x 41.1 in.
2024, Baroda



Santanu Debnath works in watercolour, representing nature as a site of imagination, memories and, at times, a natural environment struggling for its existence. He tries to connect his own idea of nature, which he grew up in a remote village in Bengal, to the nature that immediately surrounds him, exploring the discourse of beauty, painting, and contemporary discourses.

Windows of My Studio Premises - II
 Watercolour on paper
 16.49 x 11.65 in.
 2024, Baroda

Interesting Anecdote - II
 Watercolour on paper
 16.49 x 11.65 in.
 2024, Baroda

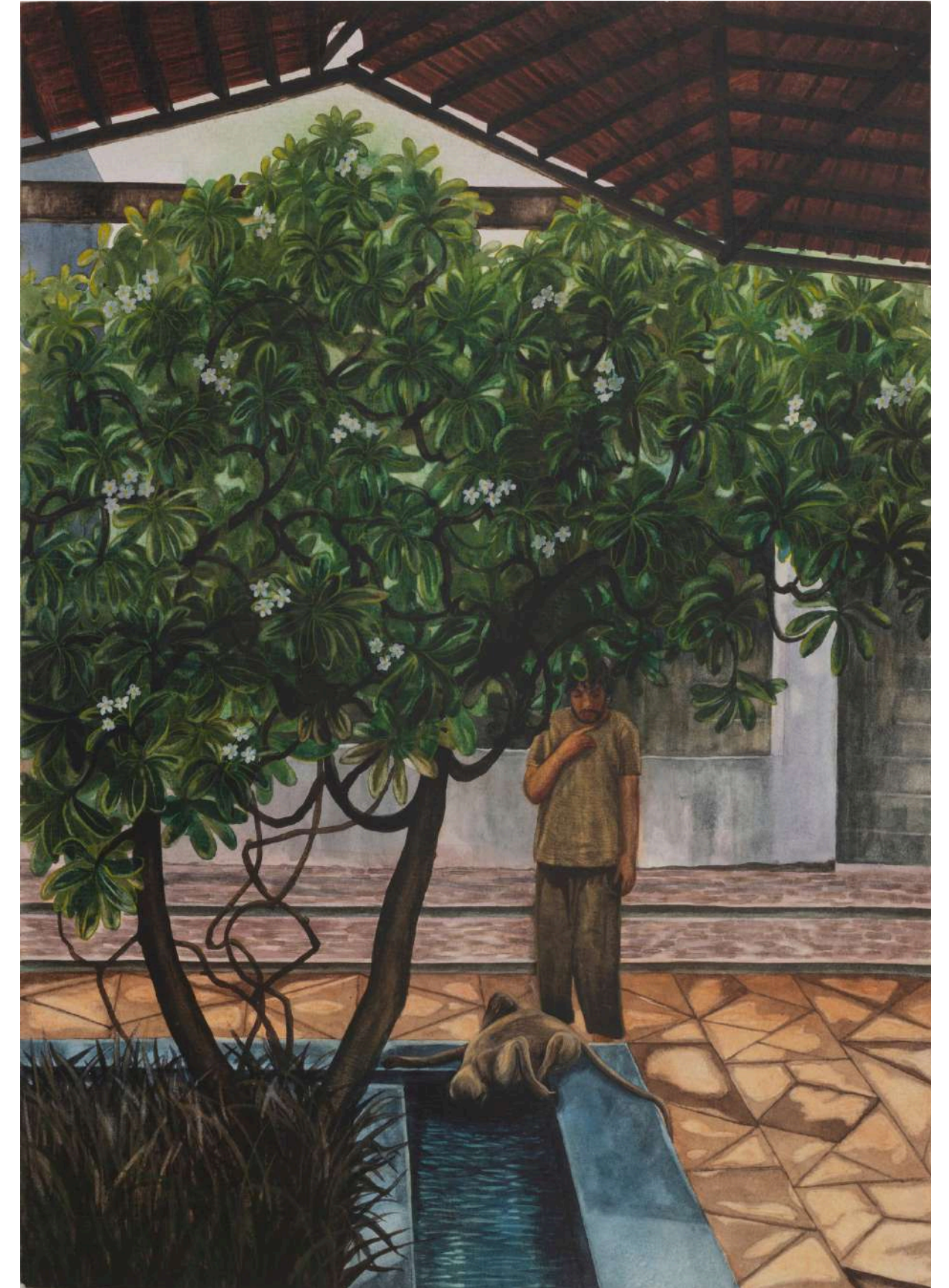
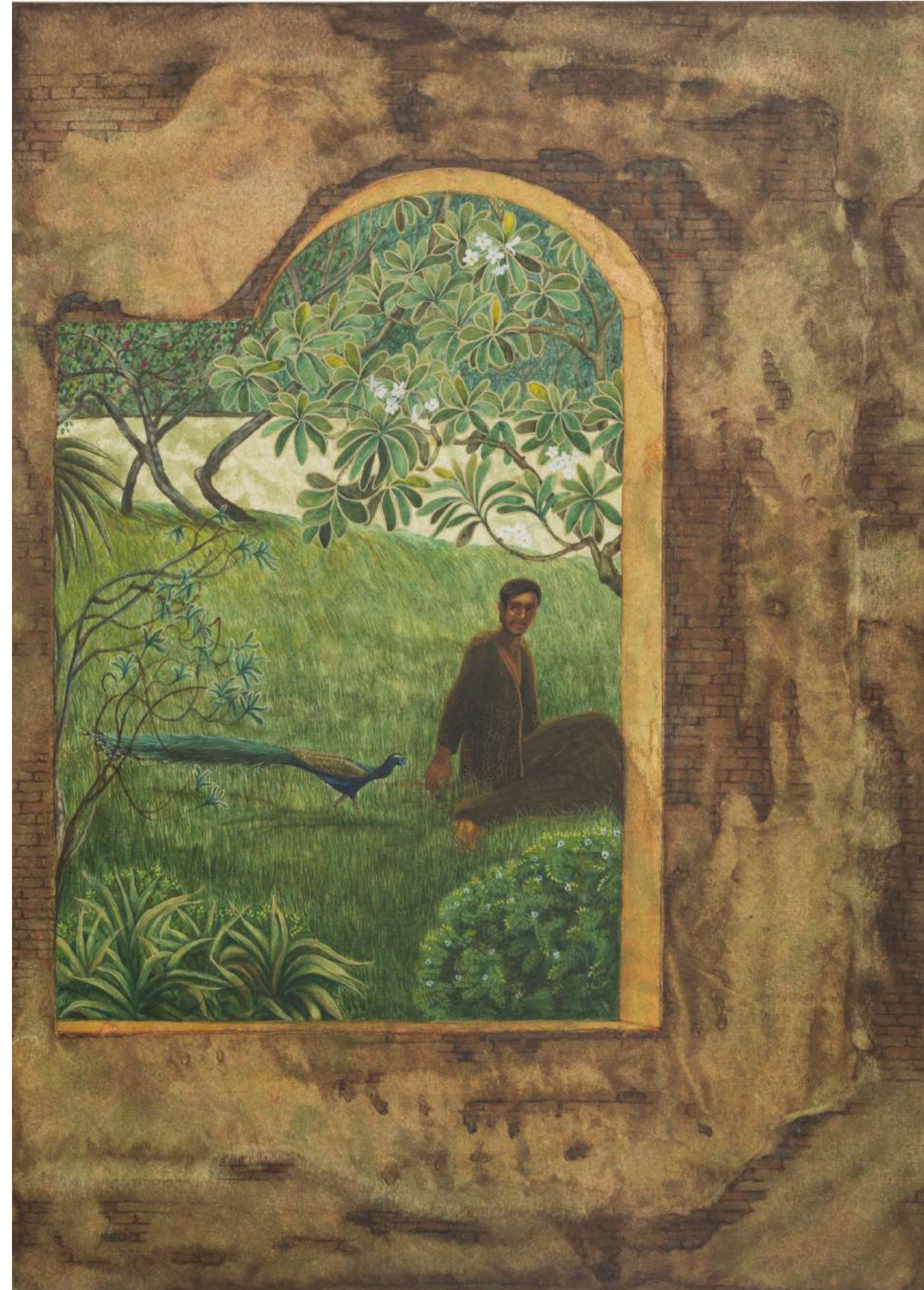
ARTIST'S STATEMENT
The artist's statement is a written text that provides insight into the artist's creative process, intentions, and the meaning behind their work. It is a key component of an art installation, helping viewers understand the context and significance of the artwork.



Installation view
Re: Figuring
Emami Art, Kolkata
2025

Windows of My Studio Premises-I
Watercolour on paper
16.49 x 11.65 in.
2024, Baroda

Interesting Anecdote-I
Watercolour on paper
16.49 x 11.65 in.
2024, Baroda

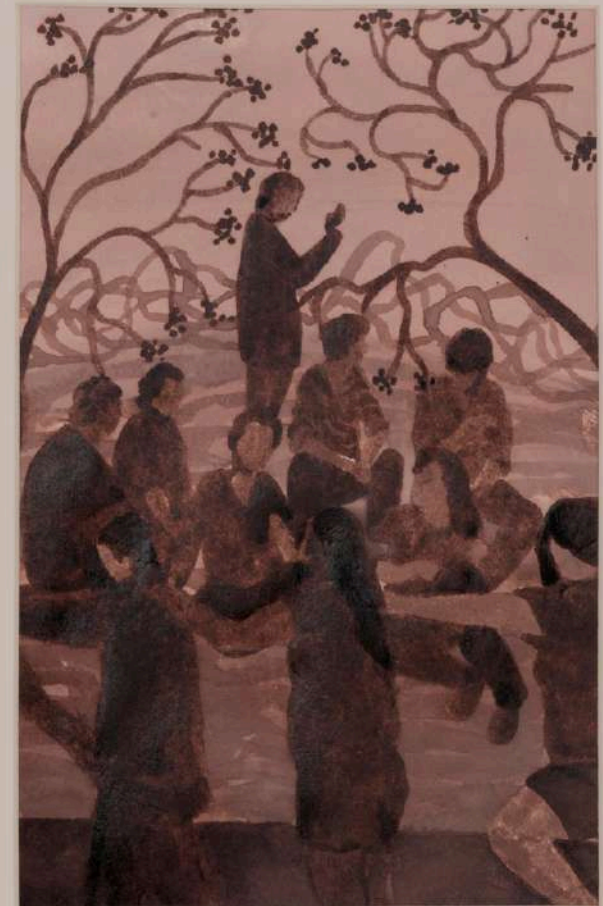


This work represents people, mostly plebians, capturing their lives in hardship. Using watercolour as a powerful medium of capturing emotion and mood, he looks into the life of the people, suffering and toils for whom are not situational or dramatic but historical, a perpetual weight of time.



The Act of Daily Drawing - III
Ink on paper
Overall dimension variable
2024, Baroda

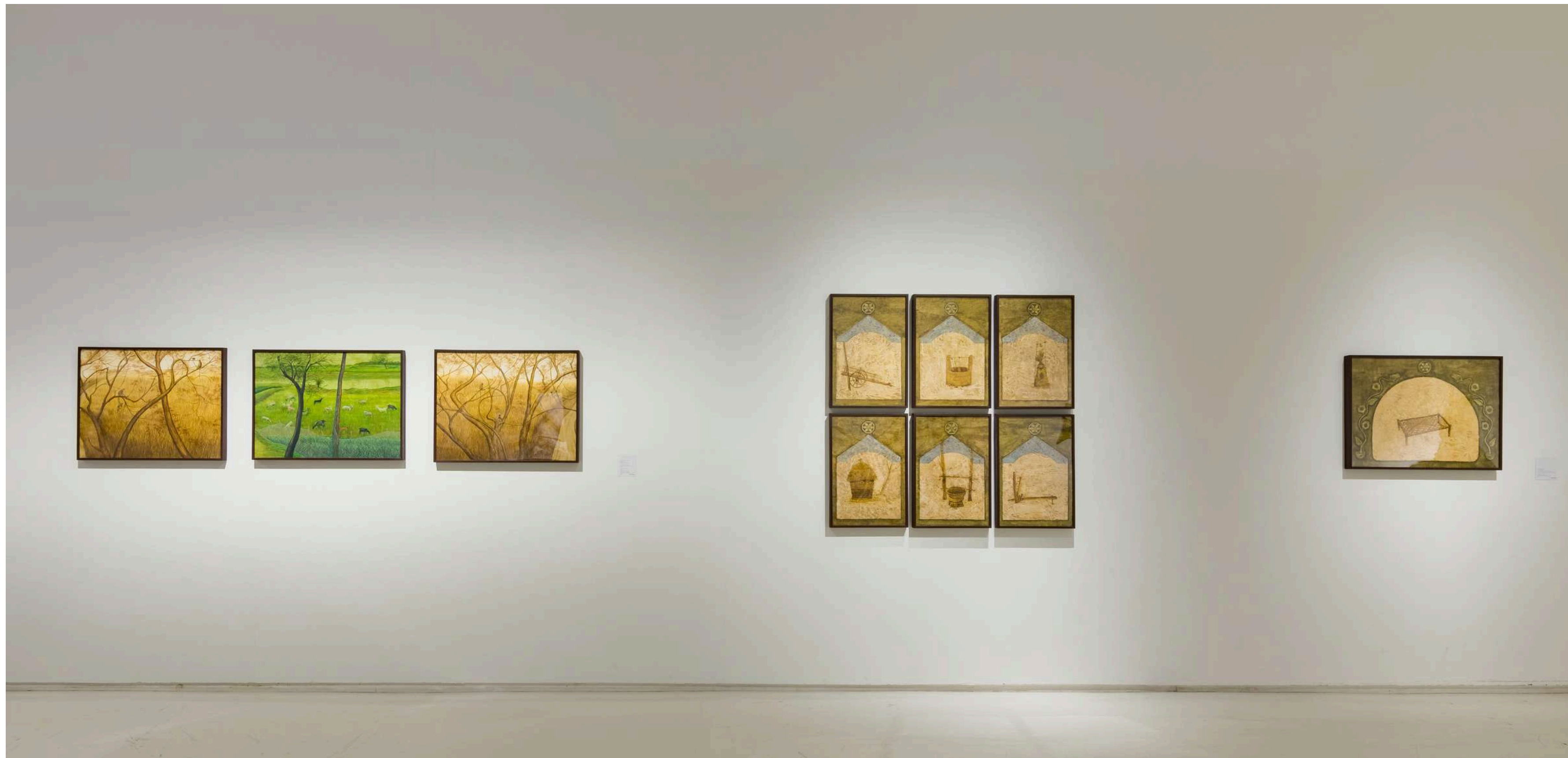




The Act of Daily Drawing - I, Ink on paper, 5.74 x 3.74 in. each, 2024, Baroda



Wall of Galudhi's Hut
Watercolour on paper
22.4 x 121.2 in. overall dimension
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal



Installation view | *There are Tides in the Body*, curated by Damian Christinger, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2024

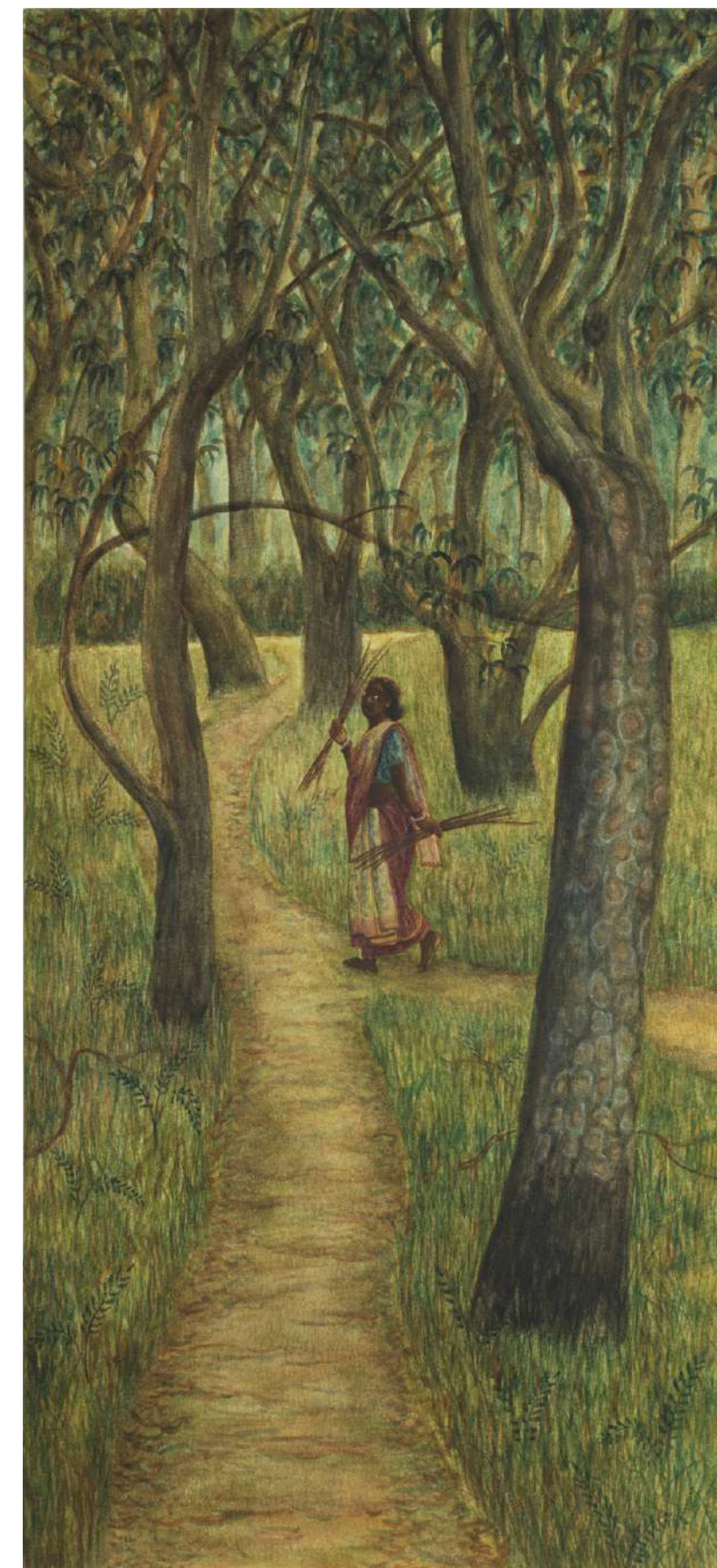
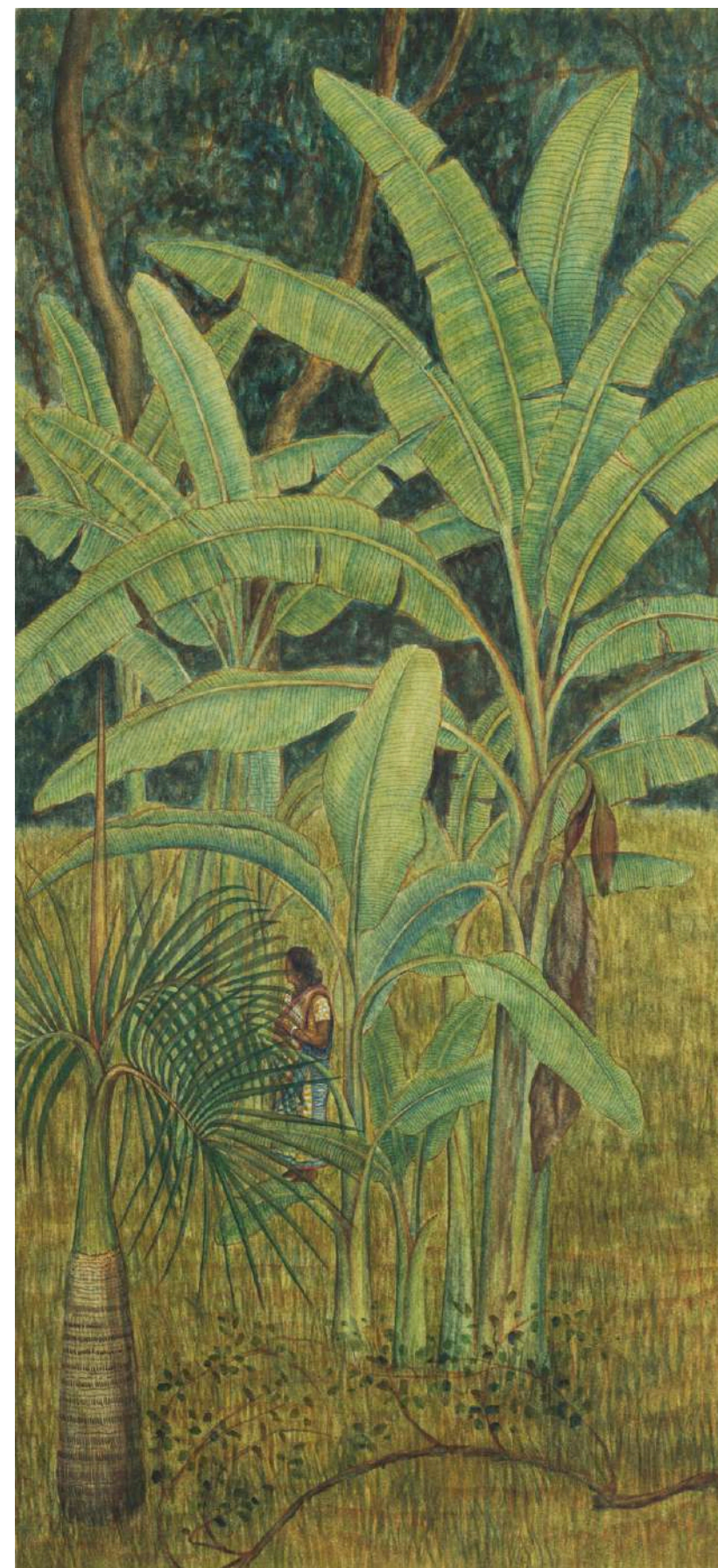


The village nature is central to Santanu Debnath's watercolours, which show the beauty of the green lands, trees, animals and waters and the life and culture of the people, their physicality, objects, stories, memories, and desires. For him, who grew up in a remote Bengal village, the nature that exists both inside and outside us is a site of overlapping visuals and narratives.

They Cultivate Crops of Love III
Watercolour on paper
21.5 x 29.5 in.
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal

Wandering in Nature
Watercolour on paper
21.5 x 9.8 in.
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal

Roaming in the Nature
Watercolour on paper
21.5 x 9.8 in.
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal





Details
Antaheen
Watercolour on paper
22 x 56.9 in. each
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal



Installation view
There are Tides in the Body
Curated by Damian Christinger
Emami Art, Kolkata
2024



Detail
Grazing
Watercolour on paper
21.5 x 29.5 in.
2024, Betpukur, West Bengal



Sonakuri-IV
Sonakuri-VI
Sonakuri-V
 Fabric paint on palm leaf
 10.4 x 8.3 in. each
 2023, West Bengal



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

New Couple
Watercolour on paper
29.5 x 43 in.
2022-23, Kolkata





Installation view
Garden of Infinite Desires
Emami Art, Kolkata
2023

Gajan
Watercolour on paper
29.5 X 43 in.
2022, Kolkata





Waiting for Boat
Watercolour on paper
22 X 29.5 in.
2022, Kolkata



Santanu Debnath, born in 1995 in Betpukur, a village in West Bengal, completed his BFA and MFA in Painting from the Rabindra Bharati University and Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, respectively.

His solo exhibitions include *Morphology of Water: A Project by Santanu Debnath*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2025); an online solo show *The Simple Life* by Emami Art, Kolkata (2020); and *After Cities Fall*, Nippon Gallery, Mumbai (2020). He has participated in several group shows including *The India We Imagine: Echoes of the Forgotten* at The India Conference, Harvard University, USA (2026); *Re: Figuring*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2025); *Views from Within*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2025); *There Are Tides in the Body: Indo-Swiss Group Exhibition* curated by Damian Christinger, Emami Art, Kolkata (2024); *All That is Hidden: Mapping Departures in Landscape, Terrains and Geographies*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2024); *100 Yuva Sumbhava*, Raza Foundation, Delhi, 2022; *IMAGINARIUM*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2021); GCAC Annual Exhibition (2019-21); KCC Art Fair 2019; West Bengal State Academy, Kolkata (2018-19); ICAD Annual Exhibition, Kolkata, (2015-18); Institute de Chandannagar, Hooghly (2017); among others. His works were presented by Emami Art, Kolkata at India Art Fair (2026 and 2025); and IAF EDI+IONS, Hyderabad (2025).

Debnath participated at a residency at Sunderbans Winter Field School organised by IIT Kharagpur, University of Waterloo, and University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (2026); and was an artist-in-residence at the three-month Open Studio Monsoon Residency 2024 at Space Studio, Vadodara. His work *An Elegy* (2021) was published in *Longform 2025: An Anthology of Graphic Narratives* published by Penguin Random House India.

He won the Gita Das Award at the GCAC Annual Exhibition in 2019 and a Certificate of Merit at the West Bengal State Academy Annual Exhibition 2018-19. He received the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant 2024 and the prestigious Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Scholarship 2020-21.

Santanu Debnath lives and works in Betpukur, West Bengal.

EMAMI ART

Emami Art is a prominent contemporary art gallery and cultural production space located on the ground floor of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity's Green Building. Established in 2017, it adopts a forward-looking, multi-dimensional approach that reflects South Asia's history, socio-cultural, and geo-political narratives. Emami Art operates within an inclusive framework where profitability supports sustainable resource regeneration and public service.

Committed to promoting a regional, national, and international agenda, Emami Art emphasizes community engagement, socially relevant initiatives, and institutional partnerships. With a multi-year vision for the future, it continues to be a catalyst for change, research, innovation, and inclusivity.

