



Emami Art hosts 'Kāru'

An exhibition on Folk & Tribal art in Contemporary India

Kolkata, 04 September, 2021 : Emami Art, one of India's leading contemporary art galleries based in Kolkata is delighted to present Kāru an exhibition of contemporary miniature, tribal and folk art of India. The exhibition features the representative work of the six well-known living masters – Bhuri Bai, Nand Kishor Sharma, Ram Soni, Pavan Mohan Prajapati, Akshay Kumar Bariki and Kalyanmal Sahu - and the skilled artisans working at SHE Kantha , showing innovations in the rich traditions of visual art.

Karu, originated from the Bengali word *Karu Kala*, means craft or functional art, mostly traditional ones, as opposed to *Charu Kala* or Fine Art. It refers to the rich indigenous visual traditions for which India has been known for centuries. Each of the artworks featured side by side in the exhibition shows the power of traditional imagery, delicacy of mediums, forms and expressions. Tradition is not a static thing of the past, but something living and connected to the present we live. The terms "folk" and "tribal" art used in the title is simply descriptive and not canonical since we are aware that such categories pigeonhole the artists and prevent them from getting the respect they deserve. In addition to showcasing the artists, the exhibition also aims to raise exciting debates.

The intricate dotted lines and brilliant hues in Bhuri Bai's paintings bring to the fore not the local fables of the Bhil community depicted through them but also a wave of emotions. The large Pata paintings based on Vaishnava and Jagannath themes by Akshaya Bariki, born to a family of traditional painters in Ragurajpur, Odisha, and the tales of Krishna depicted in the Pichwai paintings by Kalyan Mal Sahu, a largely self-taught artist, enchant our eyes. One can find similar delicacy in showing the devotional contents in Nand Kishor Sharma's Phad painting and Ram Soni's fine paper cutting of Sanjhi Art, two unique traditional art forms of Rajasthan and North India. The refined treatments in Mohan Prajapati's Mughal and Rajasthani styles of miniature paintings contrast the playful, unsophisticated quilt embroideries done by the skilled women artisans of Bengal. In all these diverse artworks on display, the creative energy of India – the distant sound of the earthen drum – reverberates in widely different forms.

"I am delighted to present Karu, an exhibition of contemporary tribal and folk art and miniature paintings of India. Done by the widely recognized artists, the large body of diverse indigenous art from different parts of the country shows the ingenuity of the pre-modern art forms and imaginations, giving us a sense of reassurance in our troubled present. Working within the framework of tradition, the artists are faithful to the heritage but do not imitate the past blindly. In the exhibition, what attracts us are their inventiveness and self-developed ingenuity, which, unlike modern art, are defused and do not dissociate them from the shared traditions. Karu is an astonishment. It is a space for enjoyment, enchantment, and ethical and emotional investment in promoting India's unique indigenous visual arts." said Ms. Richa Agarwal, CEO Emami Art.

The exhibition is on view from 4th September to 30th October, 2021 at Emami Art 777 Anandapur, E.M. Bypass , Kolkata 700107 and can be also be viewed at www.emamiart.com



Akshaya Kumar Bariki

Akshaya Kumar Bariki, born in 1981, is celebrated for traditional Pattachitra Painting and Palm Leaf engravings of Odisha. His family, hailing from Raghurajpur, has practised the traditional arts for several generations.

Painted on cotton fabric with earthen hues and bold brushstrokes, Pattachitra is iconic and devotional. The primary themes of these paintings include the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and tales of Jagannath. Besides Pattachitra, Bariki also excelled in the art of Talpattra, or Palm-leaf engraving that has originated from the illustrated manuscript or Chitrapothi of Orissa.

Recipient of the National Merit Award in 2011, Bariki won the gold medal from Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation in 2017 and the UNESCO award in 2014. He has exhibited his work in various exhibitions, fairs and events, including Dilli Haat, Crafts Museum, NIFT, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, Surajkund Craft Mela, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad, Lalit Kala Academy and Kalakshetra Foundation, among others. Besides this, he held several workshops in National Science Centre, New Delhi, Baroda Uttarayani Art Foundation and Chennai IIT.

Akshaya Bariki lives and works in Raghurajpur, Odisha.

Bhuri Bai

Bhuri Bai, born in Pitol village, Madhya Pradesh, in the mid-1960s, is the first Bhil woman to take up painting as a profession, translating the indigenous art of Pithora paintings to a contemporary folk idiom. She was also the first artist from her community to paint on paper and canvas, using a brush and synthetic colours.

The traditional Pithora painting is integral to the worship of Dev Pithora, the Bhil deity. Making colour from soil and plants to paint mud walls is part of the rituals and prayers that bring good fortune to the tribe. In her work, Bhuri Bai refers to her culture and heritage while incorporating urban imagery, creating a syncretic, magical vision.

A recipient of the Padma Shri Award from the Government of India in 2021, she has received many awards, including Shikhar Samman from the Government of Madhya Pradesh in 1986, Ahilya Samman in 1988 and the Rani Durgavati award. Bhuri Bai presently works as an artist with Adivasi Lok Kala Academy in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. In 2019, she wrote an autobiographical book called Dotted Lines, collaborating with Debjani Mukherjee, a research scholar from IIT Bombay.

Kalyan Mal Sahu

Born in 1957, Kalyan Mal Sahu has been practising Pichwai painting for a very long time. Based in Ajmer, Rajasthan, he is keen on reviving the traditional Pichwai in the country.

Commonly practised by the Pushti Marg sect founded by Vallabhacharya, Pichwai is used to adorn temples and narrate the tales of Srinathji, the child avatar of Lord Krishna. In the vernacular, 'pich' means behind, and 'wai' means painting. So, in essence, Pichwai is a painted textile that hung behind the idol of Srinathji in the temple. The images are primarily devotional, illustrating stories from the life of Krishna, especially those from early childhood and seasons with different flowers and



environments. The fine lines and dense organic pigments enrich the cotton fabric of the paintings with gold, silver, or sparkling stones like Kundan.

Kalyan Mal Sahu received a National Award in Pichwai Painting from the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, in 2011. In addition, he has been the recipient of several other prestigious awards, including Rajasthan State Gold Award for Folk Art, 2016 by Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation, All India Silver Medal Award for Folk Art in Kalanand Art Contest, 2017, Paramparagat Award in Pichwai by Surajkund International Crafts Mela Authority, Best Artisan Award in the Handicrafts Expo "Sargoslav 2014" in Kerala, among others.

Mohan Prajapati

Mohan Prajapati, born in 1974 in Rajasthan, is known for miniature paintings. Belonging to a family practising this art for generations, Prajapati was trained by his father in Mughal and Kishangarh Miniature style.

Miniature paintings, rich in natural colours and hairline brushwork, has been part of Indian tradition for over a thousand years. Multiple schools, styles, and genres of miniatures have evolved in different regions, and Mohan Prajapati has also learnt Mysore and Tanjore style of painting, Ivory carving and realistic academic paintings on his own. While most of his work depicts scenes from Hindu mythology, deities, and tales from history and epic, he is attentive to the minute elements in his painting, like the details of a bird's feathers or a child's eyelashes. His intricate brushwork needs a single-hair brush and is only visible under the magnifying glass.

Recipient of the State Award in 2004-05, Mohan Prajapati is keen on raising awareness and appreciation for Miniature painting. Concerned with the fading nature of his craft, he started conducting workshops throughout the country, including Bengaluru, Kochi, Delhi and Madurai. He has demonstrated his art in the Craft Museum, Delhi in 2008, China in 2014, Craft Council of Tamil Nadu in 2016, FMG Institute, Noida in 2012, 2013, 2014, and NIFT Bangalore in 2016 and 2017.

Mohan Prajapati lives and works in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

Nand Kishor Sharma

Nand Kishor Sharma, born in 1976 at Bhilwara, Rajasthan, is a renowned Phad artist. A former student of Computer Science, Sharma is keen on reviving the art of Phad.

Phad is a narrative scroll painting that originated about four hundred years ago in Rajasthan. 'Phad' means to fold or to read. Earlier, epics were painted on Phad scrolls by the Brahmins of the village. Then, the Bhopa would carry it to places, sing and dance to illustrate the painting illuminated by the Bhopi with a burning torch. Finally, in the interactive performance, the audience would sing along and join in riddles. Currently, Phad scrolls depict regional folktales and epics alike.

Largely self-taught, Sharma has been practising the art of Phad painting for more than fifteen years. His experiments integrate traditional Phad art with various modern and contemporary techniques.



Recipient of the UNESCO award in 2018, Nand Kishor Sharma won the All India Bronze Medal Award by Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation in 2017, Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy Award in 2014, and Kalamani Award by the Haryana government in 2019.

Sharma lives and works in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Ram Soni

Born in 1972, Ram Soni is an eminent Sanjhi artist pushing the boundaries of tradition to create a new language. Based in Alwar, Rajasthan, he has been practising the art of paper cuts for a very long time.

'Sanjhi' comes from the word 'Sanjh', or dusk. Originated about four hundred years ago, Sanjhi was painted with coloured dust to adorn the temple for the evening rituals. These multicoloured paintings required precise papercut stencils, called Khakha. With time and intervention, these papercuts have earned the name of Sanjhi art on their merit. Using a pair of scissors invented and uniquely designed for Sanjhi art by his predecessors, Soni's intricate and delicate cuts resemble brushstrokes. His works tend to reflect the seasons with the presence of flowers or plants typical to it. Since 2008, Ram Soni has been collaborating with Delhi Craft Council, experimenting with the process, material, and display modes in close connection with the modern market.

A National Award winner of 2002, Soni has received international acclaim, including the UNESCO award in 2012, Shilp Shiromani Award, Delhi in 2008, Shilp Alankrit Award, Jaipur, 2007. In addition, he participated in exhibitions globally, including Indian Heritage Centre, Singapore, 2018, Bahrain Festival, 2017, China Gonjo 2015, Indian Festival Argentina, 2010, Nehru Centre, London, 2000, India Festival, Craft Council India and Zurich, Switzerland, 2008.

She Kantha

She Kantha an organisation based in Kolkata, West Bengal, is patronising and promoting the art of Kantha, made by women artists from rural Bengal, to the international market.

Nakshi Kantha, a unique tradition of needlecraft, had a rather humble origin. As rural women stitched old cotton fabrics to make warm quilts for children, they embroidered fables, epics or tales of deities in what would become a family heirloom. In simple running stitch, a folk imagination created a prolific visual language.

She Kantha is committed to revive and elevate the craft's stature by enabling the artisans to explore a wider audience. With minimal interference, the organisation facilitates the artisans to design, create, and compose their work while continuing the practice of working as a community. The old quilts have given way to fashion and interior accessories. Often using locally sourced Tussar Silks as base material, the designers draw on their lifelong artisanal experience. She Kantha is promoting over a thousand such artists to a global clientele. Many in the community have started marketing their textiles in several cities in India and beyond, including London, New York, and Greece.