

# Many Visions, Many Versions

Art from Indigenous Communities in India

Aurogeeta Das  
Wendy Doniger  
Umesh Gaur  
Frank Korom  
B.R. Mani  
David Szanton

# Credits

## CATALOGUE PUBLISHED BY

International Arts & Artists  
9 Hillyer Court NW  
Washington, DC 20008 USA  
www.artsandartists.org  
See page 126 for more information.

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ISBN-10: 0-9883497-6-0

ISBN-13: 978-0-9883497-6-6

LOC: 2017956946

Printed in China by  
Four Colour Print Group  
Louisville, Kentucky

With significant support from the  
E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.  
Additional support from the Elizabeth Firestone  
Graham Foundation, and others.

## Front cover

Jangarh Singh Shyam, *Tree and Panther*, 1988,  
Gouache on paper, 60" x 84" (plate 29)

## End paper

Swarna Chitrakar, *HIV/AIDS*, 2015, Fabric paint  
on canvas, 51" x 93"

Swarna Chitrakar, *Tsunami*, 2005, Fabric paint  
on canvas, 49" x 94"

## EXHIBITION TOUR DATES

**The Falconer Gallery at Grinnell College**  
Grinnell, IA  
September 22, 2017–December 10, 2017

**Surrey Art Gallery**  
Surrey, BC  
January 20, 2018–March 25, 2018

**The Frost Art Museum at  
Florida International University**  
Miami, FL  
June 9, 2018–September 9, 2018

**Weisman Art Museum**  
Minneapolis, MN  
October 6, 2018–January 6, 2019

**McClung Museum of Natural History  
& Culture at the University of Tennessee**  
Knoxville, TN  
February 1, 2019–May 19, 2019

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Installation of *Many Visions, Many Versions:*  
*Art from Indigenous Communities in India*  
The Falconer Gallery at Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA  
Photo: The Falconer Gallery

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Throughout this publication  
tribal and regional traditions,  
and the artists associated with  
each, are identified with the  
following color key:

TRADITION KEY	
	MITHILA
	WARLI
	GOND
	CHITRAKARS

## Introduction & Acknowledgements

For those open to the beauty and complexities of Indian art, this book may serve as both entry and guide to an extraordinary new world—as well as a vivid documentation of a groundbreaking exhibition. Not only is this the first extensive presentation of indigenous art from India to be shown across North America, it is also the first time the US and Canadian general public has been introduced to the depth and breadth of this incredible array of Indian traditions. The work of these artists reverberates with a crispness of image and a clarity of vision that resonates to us across their many regions, subcultures, and tribal groups. For North Americans unfamiliar with the intricacies of Indian society, these paintings open a small but illuminating vista into a wide range of Indian traditions, religions, and societal norms. Within these essays, one can experience the insights and observations of the strongest, most passionate advocates for these artists and the traditions from which their work evolved. While tied to very specific regional Indian traditions, the work is universal.

Dr. B.R. Mani, director general of the National Museum of India, honors us by providing an insightful preface that contextualizes these “folk” artists in relation to the vast spectrum of Indian cultures, yet beckons us to consider the universality of their motivations and themes.

Before all others, the impetus for this exhibition and catalog stems from the unceasing enthusiasm of Dr. Umesh Gaur, who, along with his equally discerning wife and collaborator Dr. Sunanda Gaur, have devoted their time and resources unceasingly to bringing Indian art to North American audiences. Dr. Gaur’s essay, with its historical overview of the emergence of Indian indigenous art into 21st century consciousness, provides the context through which we can understand how and why this work has reached us.

We thank Dr. David Szanton and Dr. Aurogeeta Das for their most knowledgeable contributions to this effort, both as curatorial advisors to the development of the exhibition and as essayists in this volume. They too are passionate and

devoted proponents of these artists and their communities. Careful in their language to place these artists beyond the anonymity of folk and tribal traditions, they describe lucidly the four traditional ethnic groups addressed in *Many Visions, Many Versions*, as well as the thematic concepts that cut across ethnic lines. In their second essay, Drs. Das and Szanton address how these artists—some of whose traditions may go back to prehistoric times—have brought contemporary culture, recent events, and current issues into their work.

We are also very pleased to have the insight of two other eminent scholars, Dr. Wendy Doniger and Dr. Frank Korom. Dr. Doniger, who is internationally known for her writing—most particularly on Hinduism—looks at the work of these artists through the different lenses of religion, caste, and oral tradition, comparing tribal legends to those from religious texts and tracing the works’ rich lineage, some of it from unexpected sources. Lastly, as a well-recognized expert on the Patuas, Dr. Korom offers a particularly perceptive and informed view into the modern-day dilemma of the West Bengali Chitrakars, a caste traditionally devoted to singing narrative verse and painting narrative scrolls.

In sum, herein is a starting point for a longtime fascination with a range of visual culture teeming with unique and dramatic stories, all of which beckon to be explored.

We greatly appreciate the continued encouragement and support of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, which has generously helped to underwrite the scholarship and production of this catalog. We are also pleased to receive additional support from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and other funders who believe, as we do, in the power of the arts to create better understanding across borders.

We also greatly appreciate our museum partners: The Falconer Gallery at Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa; The Surrey Art Gallery and the City of Surrey, British Columbia; The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International

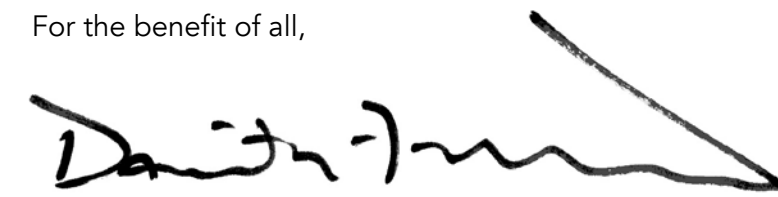
University, Miami, Florida; The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and The McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee—among the nine museums that are presenting the exhibition.

The exhibition is organized in cooperation with BINDU modern, whose mission since 2001 is to promote modern and contemporary Indian art through collaboration with museums. We also thank Jeffrey Wechsler, who is a valuable resource to BINDU modern and serves as its curatorial consultant.

At International Arts & Artists, we are grateful for the care shown by our Traveling Exhibition Service staff, its director Anne Timpano, and its assistant director and chief registrar Elizabeth Wilson; as well as by exhibition managers Olivia Desjardins and Yixue Shao, and registrarial staff Christina Johnston Brownlee and Chase Carter. IA&A’s design and editorial staff created this catalog, led by Deanna Luu, our talented lead designer and director of IA&A’s Design Studio, with copy editor David Walker and designer Magali Lebon.

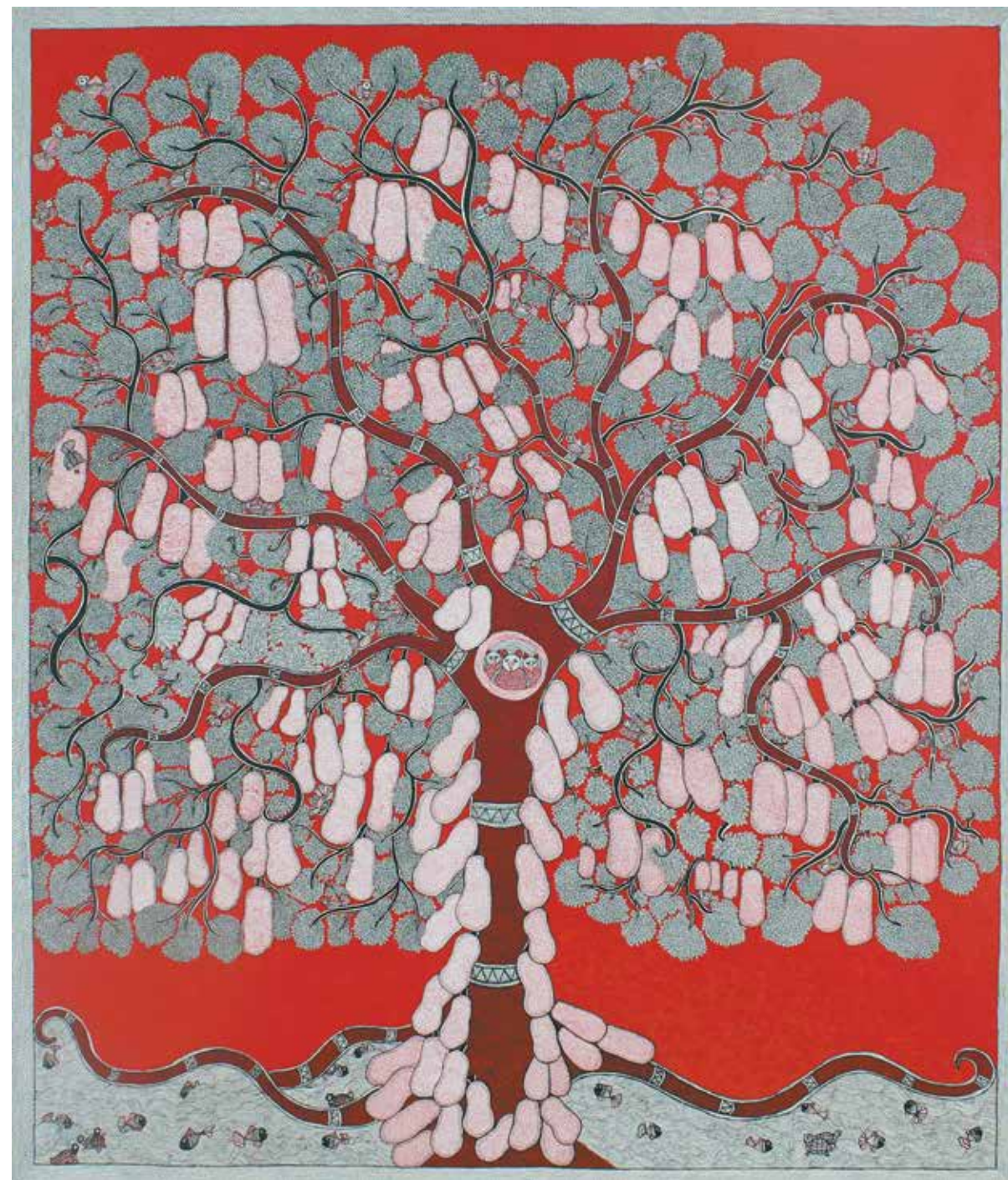
As always, our heartfelt appreciation goes to the lenders who allowed these works to make the exhibition and this book possible and—most deeply—to the incredible artists presented here for sharing their traditions and vision with us.

For the benefit of all,



David Furchgott, President  
International Arts & Artists





Manisha Jha, *The Jackfruit Tree*  
 (Tree of Life series), 2012  
 Acrylic and ink on canvas, 69" x 60"

## Preface

B.R. Mani  
 Director General, National Museum  
 Vice Chancellor, National Museum Institute  
 New Delhi

India is that rare land where prehistoric traditions—some of them fifteen thousand years old—still survive in its indigenous communities and can be seen today in non-classical art forms from its folk and tribal societies. In India's prehistoric art, we can trace the ancient forms and styles that still lend such evocative power to its indigenous paintings, and see how they have developed. From rough groundlines on cave walls and the primitive finger-tracings known as "macaronis," we now have the complex landscapes of indigenous art; coherent scenes and narratives, rather than randomly juxtaposed figures; human and animal figures rendered from all angles, rather than only in profile; and (mostly) generalized depictions, rather than "ethnic markers." These shared ancient roots—and the ways in which their forms have diverged—are part of what makes them so fascinating. Indian folk and tribal art, in all its vivid forms throughout its disparate and far-flung communities, has a wide range of stories to tell, all of which require careful study if we are to fathom the rich implications of its content and context; its execution, locations, and associations.

A panoramic sampling of artworks from different regions and by different artists might, to some, suggest a cacophony of differing styles and dissonant messages; preferential subjects, however, consistently recur in these artistic expressions. It is therefore undeniable that the associative and metaphoric system did not cease to be a basic means of expression. A closer look at the paintings in the exhibition *Many Visions, Many Versions* invariably brings out the common themes that inspired these artists. Once we identify the specific methodological and conceptual approaches of each work, its central object reveals itself to be an ideogram with a richly metaphoric meaning. We can thus argue that analogous cognitive processes have led different artists living in wildly different regions to similar visual apotheoses. Hence, the structure of art apparently reflects the structure of mind. The paintings explored in this exhibition may therefore be of interest to psychologists and sociologists, as well as to philosophers and anthropologists. The technical preferential methods used in creating these paintings are of course various; but in every case their essence is a result of a certain technological level, or lifestyle, or way of thinking—or all of these combined—reflecting the process of acculturation or diffusion, which is the hallmark of Indian cultural heritage, whether classical or non-classical.

# THE EMERGENCE OF INDIAN INDIGENOUS ART ON THE WORLD STAGE

by Umesh Gaur

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**Dr. Umesh Gaur** is a New Jersey-based scholar and collector of modern and contemporary Indian art. Works from his collection have been included in exhibitions at the Peabody Essex Museum, Rubin Museum of Art, and the Georgia Museum of Art. Dr. Gaur has also served on museum advisory committees and boards, and is a frequent lecturer on collecting Indian art. He is currently a member of the South Asian Art Advisory Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In 1968, the Philadelphia Museum of Art mounted a large-scale exhibition entitled *Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*. It brought together almost five hundred objects dated from 300 B.C. to the present, from both private and institutional collections from around the world. This landmark exhibition highlighted for the first time the huge range of Indian art not patronized by royalty or (for the most part) by temples, bringing this long-neglected body of work into the elite galleries of a US fine arts museum. Such a significant endeavor was possible in part thanks to the keen interest of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, then prime minister of India, and her cousin B. K. Nehru, who happened to be India's ambassador to the United States at that time. The exhibition was the brainchild of Dr. Stella Kramrisch, the museum's legendary curator of Indian art, in collaboration with Ahmedabad-based artist-scholar Haku Shah. Kramrisch had taught in the Calcutta region from 1921 to 1950, during which time she traveled widely in the subcontinent to study, while collecting a huge variety of art. After officially joining the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1954 (a role she continued as Curator Emeritus from 1972 until her death in 1993), she helped develop the institution's holdings in Indian and Himalayan art—not only through purchases and gift solicitations, but also by donating over a thousand works of art from her personal collection. Among these were a trove of Indian folk objects (especially metalwork, scrolls, and textiles), most of which Kramrisch had collected during her years in India. Her personal collection and the pieces she had already given to the museum formed the basis for *Unknown India*. To date, this exhibition remains the most extensive and comprehensive presentation of India's non-mainstream artwork ever mounted, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art continues to be the largest institutional collector of such materials outside of South Asia.

While there have been several small exhibitions<sup>1</sup> in the United States of Indian indigenous art, *Many Visions, Many Versions: Art from Indigenous Communities in India* is the first large-scale exhibition of non-mainstream Indian art in the US since the Kramrisch exhibition. *Many Visions, Many Versions* is focused on the paintings of contemporary artists from four major indigenous artistic traditions in India; it includes art from the Gond and Warli tribal communities of central India, art from the Mithila region of Bihar, and the narrative scroll painters of West Bengal.

At the time of the Kramrisch exhibition, makers of non-mainstream artworks were rarely identified as the “artists” of their work. They were usually referred to as “craftsmen” or as makers of “handicrafts.” They worked in self-contained communities, and the objects they produced were viewed and consumed as tourist art or as decorative objects. In accordance with the museum practice

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1. *India: Village Tribal, Ritual Art*, Mengei International Museum of International Folk Arts, La Jolla, CA (1981); *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*, Museum of Craft and Folk Art, San Francisco, CA (2005); *Village of Painters: Narrative Scrolls from West Bengal*, Museum of New Mexico, Sante Fe, NM; *Painted Songs and Stories: Pradhan Gond Art from India*, Davis Museum, Wellesley, MA (2010); *Birth of the Painted World*, HUB-Robeson Galleries, University Park, PA (2015)



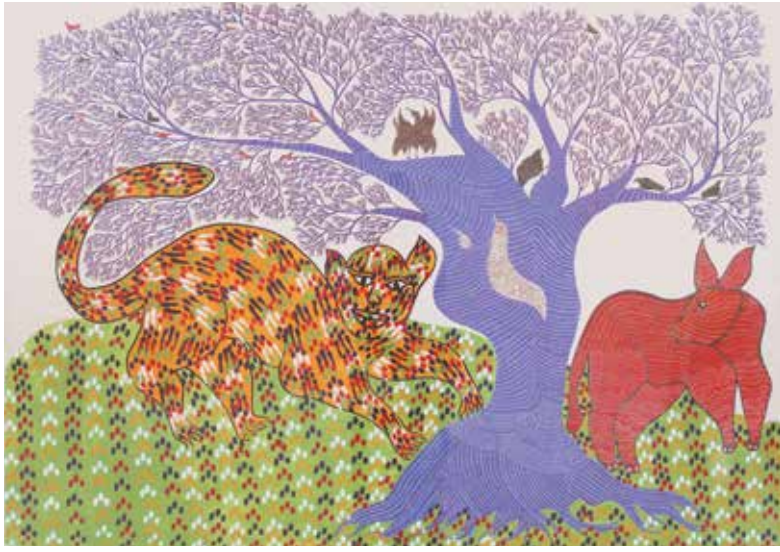


fig. 1 | Jangarh Singh Shyam, *Tree and Panther*, 1988, Gouache on paper, 60" x 84" (plate 29) Exhibited: *Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (1989)



fig. 2 | Jagdish Swaminathan, *Text Decoded II*, 1993, oil on canvas, 44" x 68". Photo: Jack Abraham (not included in the exhibition)

prevalent at the time, objects shown in the *Unknown India* exhibition, including the objects Kramrisch acquired directly from the artists during her field work, did not have the names of the artists associated with them. In sharp contrast to the Kramrisch exhibition, all the artists in *Many Visions, Many Versions* are well-established artists who have been shown in many international exhibitions—despite the fact that most of them still reside and practice in their own indigenous communities.

This process of indigenous artist recognition by name has happened gradually over the last few decades, owing to changes in the sensibilities of institutions worldwide.

In 1984, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a massive exhibition entitled "*Primitivism*" in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, which juxtaposed works of famous Western artists with tribal objects such as masks, headdresses, paintings, carvings, or textiles, to show how the tribal object may have inspired the work of the Western artist. But while the Western artworks were identified with their artists' names, as per conventional museum practices, the tribal objects were identified merely by the area of the world where they originated. In consequence of his famous written reaction to the exhibition, the critic Thomas McEvilley is perhaps the commentator most responsible for artists in indigenous communities finally being recognized for who they are, rather than just being associated with their communities. McEvilley took the issue to heart, severely criticizing the exhibition for treating tribal artworks simply as source material for Western modernists. Responses and back-and-forth rebuttals by the museum and McEvilley followed. In the end, however, McEvilley prevailed, having convinced the art world that the time had come to think of makers of indigenous art objects as "artists."

It was not until 1989 that a major international institution attempted to redress these hierarchies by according the indigenous artists the same status as their Western counterparts. A landmark exhibition at Centre Pompidou in Paris, *Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)*, showed works of one hundred artists who the organizers believed to be the most influential contemporary artists of the time. About half were indigenous artists, and most had never before had their work presented in a fine arts museum. This exhibition, considered by many to be one of the greatest art exhibitions ever mounted, made overnight sensations of many contemporary indigenous artists, and sent collectors scrambling to acquire their works.

*Magiciens* included, among many others, Jangarh Singh Shyam from the Gond community (fig. 1), Jivya Soma Mashe from the Warli community, and Baua Devi, a Mithila painter from Bihar. But while these artists enjoyed some international exposure from the exhibition, they still had little following among collectors and galleries in India.

In 1982, Roopankar Art Museum in Madhya Pradesh initiated the first repository in India of Indian indigenous paintings. The museum had been established by Indian modernist painter and visionary Jagdish Swaminathan, who had incor-

porated indigenous motifs into his own paintings (fig. 2) (not included in the exhibition). Since Madhya Pradesh was the home of the largest tribal population in India, Swaminathan sent out talent scouts to the Gond and Bhil regions, which led to the discovery of Jangarh Singh Shyam, one of the artists featured in *Magiciens*. Under his mentorship, Jangarh—and eventually other artists from Gond areas, as well as from neighboring regions—began their careers. Works produced by these artists during their stay at the museum formed the foundation of the museum's outstanding collection of indigenous paintings.

It is interesting to note that at virtually the same time, the Mithila Museum opened its doors (in May 1982) in a remote location in Oike, Japan. The museum was founded by Tokio Hasegawa, who had visited India many times and was fascinated by the rich spirituality of Mithila paintings. Over the years, his collection has expanded to more than 2000 paintings, not only from the Mithila region but also from other traditions, including Gond paintings. Many of the paintings in his collection were created during his three-to-nine month artist-in-residence program, which was attended by artists such as Shanti Devi and Jangarh Singh Shyam.

Also in the 1980s, the Craft Museum in New Delhi began collecting and displaying Mithila paintings. Government-funded, the Craft Museum also sent some of these artists to represent Indian crafts at Indian festivals and fairs worldwide. Under the leadership of Dr. Jyotindra Jain, the Craft Museum collection soon expanded to include indigenous paintings from traditions other than Mithila, and in 1998 mounted the landmark exhibition of indigenous paintings *Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India*, which treated the artists as individuals rather than as mere representatives of their communities.

American anthropologist Raymond Owens started his field work in the Mithila region in 1977; arriving in Madhubani, he was immediately entranced by the beauty of Mithila painting, but also horrified by the ruthlessness with which these painters were exploited by local and Delhi-based dealers, who demanded 40 to 50 copies of the same painting for miniscule amounts of money. Aside from the scandal of this miserly compensation, he saw that such mass-production would have a coarsening effect on the artists' work. Residing in the villages of Jitwarpur and Ranti, he actively encouraged artists to take their time, do their best work, and paint subjects they genuinely cared about. Most importantly, Owens bought these paintings from the artists for what he thought should be the prevailing market prices (which was several times more than what the dealers were paying the artists). Upon returning to the US, Owens formed the Ethnic Arts Foundation (EAF) to continue his mission with the help of Parmeshwar Jha (an economist at Rutgers originally from Madhubani), David Szanton (an anthropologist in New York), and Joseph Elder (a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin). After Owens' death in 2000, the Ethnic Arts Foundation, with the help of his bequest, has continued to flourish under the leadership of David Szanton. Since the 1980s, EAF has bought thousands of Mithila paintings and mounted more than fifty exhibitions and sales of Mithila paintings in the US, India, and elsewhere. EAF has been able to place some of the finest specimens of Mithila paintings in private and institutional collections in the US, notably the



fig. 3 | Gopal Saha, *Untitled*, 2003, acrylic on paper, 22" x 30". From left to right: Gopal Saha's wife, Gopal Saha, David Szanton, Santosh Kumar Das, Parmeshwar Jha and Professor Joe Elder when they met in 2002. Photo: David Szanton (not included in the exhibition)

collection of Mr. Gursharan Siddhu in Seattle, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and the Berkeley Art Museum in Berkeley, CA.

It should also be noted that, due to the encouragement and guidance of EAF, Mithila painters are now the most prolific group of indigenous painters to have adapted their unique style of painting to incorporate contemporary global themes. (This clearly enhances their marketability to global collectors.) Two artists, Manisha Jha and Pushpa Kumari, have had so much success in this vein that many collectors now regard them as mainstream contemporary artists, rather than as Mithila artists.

In 1996, French curator, collector, and dealer Hervé Perdrille moved to India to explore what was happening in the field of contemporary art. During his stay, he became close to Jivya Soma Mashe, and helped to promote him in European museums and collections. In collaboration with Jean-Hubert Martin, who had become fascinated with the work of Mashe while curating the *Magiciens* exhibition, Perdrille organized a joint exhibition of Mashe with the British land artist Richard Long. *Dialog: Richard Long–Jivya Soma Mashe*, shown at the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, in 2003, included enormous installations by Long juxtaposed with paintings by Mashe, and was a huge success. Since returning to France in 1999, Perdrille continues to collect and promote not just Warli art but indigenous works from other regions as well.





fig. 4 | *Dialog: Richard Long – Jivya Soma Mashe*, shown at the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, in 2003. Photo: Hervé Perdriolle

In 1998, the American art historian and scholar John Bowles developed an interest in Gond paintings after seeing a booth set up by artist Ram Singh Urveti at an arts and crafts fair in Allahabad. Since then, he has made a passionate study of the lives and art of the Gond people, which culminated in the exhibition *Painted Songs & Stories: The Hybrid Flowerings of Contemporary Pardhan Gond Art* at the Wellesley College's Davis Museum in 2010. This was the first exhibition of Gond art in the US, and a symposium on the subject was held in conjunction with the exhibition. In the accompanying catalog, Bowles resisted interpreting the works, seeking instead to bring out the voices of the artists by presenting verbatim translations of the artists' descriptions of their works.

Frank Korom first became interested in Patua scrolls as a graduate student in 1982. This interest only deepened during his curatorship at the Museum of International Folk Art from 1993 to 1998 and his subsequent work as the invited guest curator of the exhibition *Village of Painters* in 2006 at the same museum. That exhibition was based on field work undertaken by Korom from 2001 to 2006, during which he acquired several hundred scrolls. This collection now resides in the Museum of International Folk Art, making it perhaps the largest collection of contemporary Patua scroll paintings outside of India.

In view of the evolution of Indian indigenous paintings through the 1980s and 1990s, it is abundantly clear that, with the exception of the efforts of the government-supported Roopankar Museum in Bhopal and the Craft Museum in Delhi, the bulk of the encouragement, appreciation, scholarship, and patronage enjoyed by the painters in these communities came from a handful of foreigners, whose passion for art was directed towards these communities over an extended period of time.<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the millennium, in spite of their growing international reputation (and a major exhibit at the Craft Museum in 1998), there were still virtually no significant private collections of these artists' work in India. Soon to come, however, was India's emergence as a leading Asian player on the global scene, and the world's first notice of "Asia's sleeping giant"; concurrent with these developments, which brought a lot of wealth into India, the market for modern Indian art gathered unprecedented momentum. Sotheby's and Christie's began to have full catalog sales in 1995, and prices of modern Indian paintings soared. Today—a mere twenty years later—paintings by some of the modernists, which in 1995 could be acquired for a few thousand dollars, are selling for millions. On the heels of this resurgence of interest in modern Indian art, indigenous paintings have also achieved significant penetration among collectors in India, and interest among institutions continues to rise; just recently, two new museums focused solely on indigenous art opened.

The Academy of Fine Arts and Literature in New Delhi was founded in 1975 by the eminent writer Ajeet Cour. Serving as a center for literature, arts, and cultural activities in Delhi, the academy also runs three museums, including the Museum of Folk and Tribal Art, which opened about fifteen years ago. Cour's interest in indigenous art stems from that of her daughter, Arpana Caur, a Delhi-based modernist painter who has included tribal motifs in her paintings (fig. 5) and has

collaborated frequently with indigenous artists. The museum's wide-ranging collection of paintings, sculptures, and textiles includes works from all major folk art styles—including art from Madhubani, Godana, and Midanpur—as well as paintings from most tribal communities, including the Sauras, Gond, and Hazaribagh tribes. It also has notable holdings of international indigenous art from sixteen other countries, including Nepal, Taiwan, and Turkey.

Situated in Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, the Museum of Life and Art opened its doors in 2016; its collection includes paintings, sculptures, jewelry, and everyday items from the Baiga and Gond tribes of Madhya Pradesh. (The inaugural exhibition of the museum was guest-curated by Alka Pande, curator of the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi.) The museum's founder, Tulika Kedia, in 2010 also created the Must Art Gallery in Delhi, the only gallery in India at the time to be dedicated solely to indigenous art. Kedia's family has long-standing ties with Madhya Pradesh, and opening the Museum of Life and Art there—rather than in a metropolitan city—was her way of bringing pride to the indigenous community where the art is actually created.

As interest in indigenous art continues to grow in India, the most noteworthy event of the last few years would have to be the ambitious two-part sequential exhibition *Vernacular, in the contemporary – Part One: Working, and Part Two: Working Consciously and Working Reflectively*, mounted by Devi Arts Foundation (DAF) in their gallery in Gurgaon in 2010-2011. Over the past decade, DAF has built a reputation for presenting lavish contemporary art exhibitions, and this one was certainly no exception. Curated by Annapurna Garimella from the foundation's collection, in addition to some newly commissioned, elaborate works, the exhibition showcased more than four hundred paintings and drawings—along with several dozen sculptures and a few installations—by more than fifty indigenous artists. Accompanied by a scholarly catalog with contributions by fifteen scholars from around the country, the exhibition sought to show how indigenous artists are refocusing and translating works in the globalized art world to make them contemporary as well as vernacular.

Such ambitious institutional undertakings suggest that Indian indigenous art has indeed emerged on the world stage. It is hoped that the traveling exhibition *Many Visions, Many Versions: Recent Indigenous Art of India* will further promote awareness, scholarship, and appreciation of Indian indigenous paintings—not only in the United States and Canada but around the world.

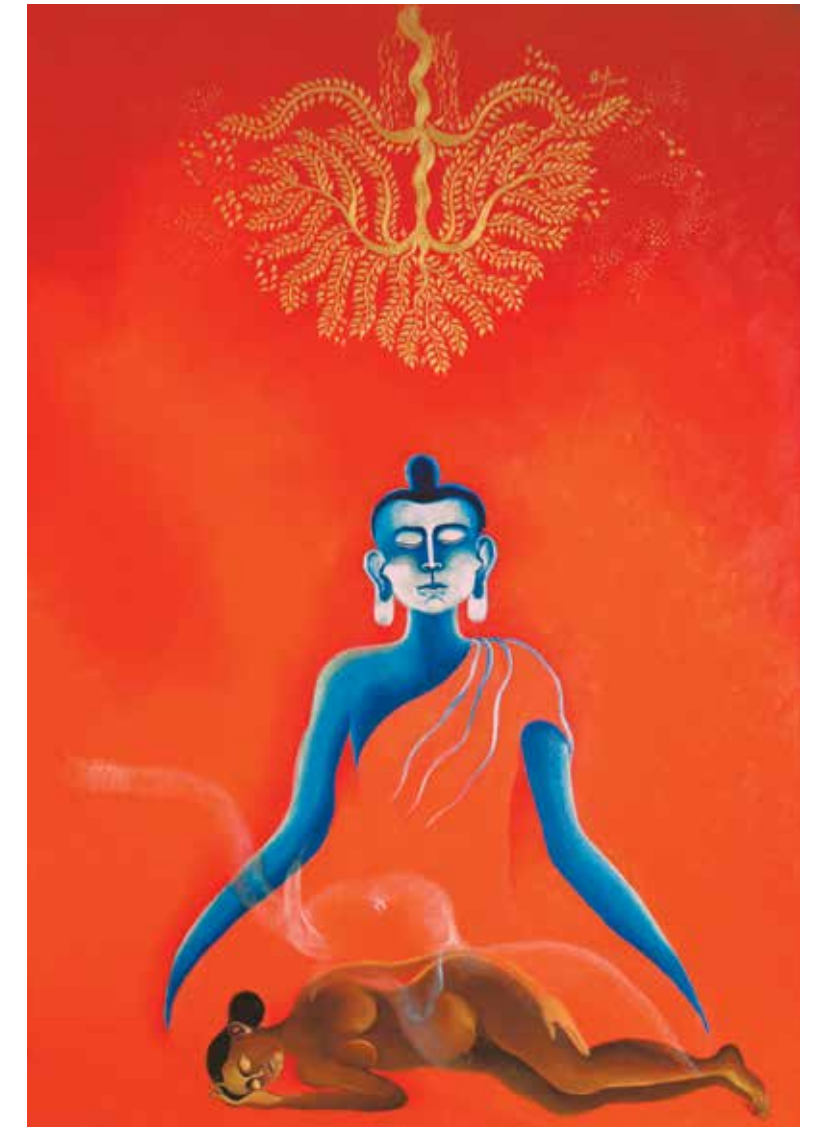


fig. 5 | Arpana Caur, *Maya's Dream*, 2004, oil on canvas, 67" x 53"; note the Bodhi tree painted at the top in the Gond style. Photo: Jack Abraham (not included in the exhibition)

2. This has actually happened before in Indian art. Modernism in Indian art first took hold in 1947, when three artists, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, and F. N. Souza, founded in Bombay what is now known as the Progressive Artists Group. While their radical nonrepresentational art made all three of them pillars of modern Indian art, their careers in 1947 really took off due to the help of three Austrian Jewish emigrés—Walter Langhammer, a former art teacher in Austria and art critic of the *Times of India*; Rudolf von Leyden, a businessman who became their advisor; and Emmanuel Schlesinger, who became their patron.



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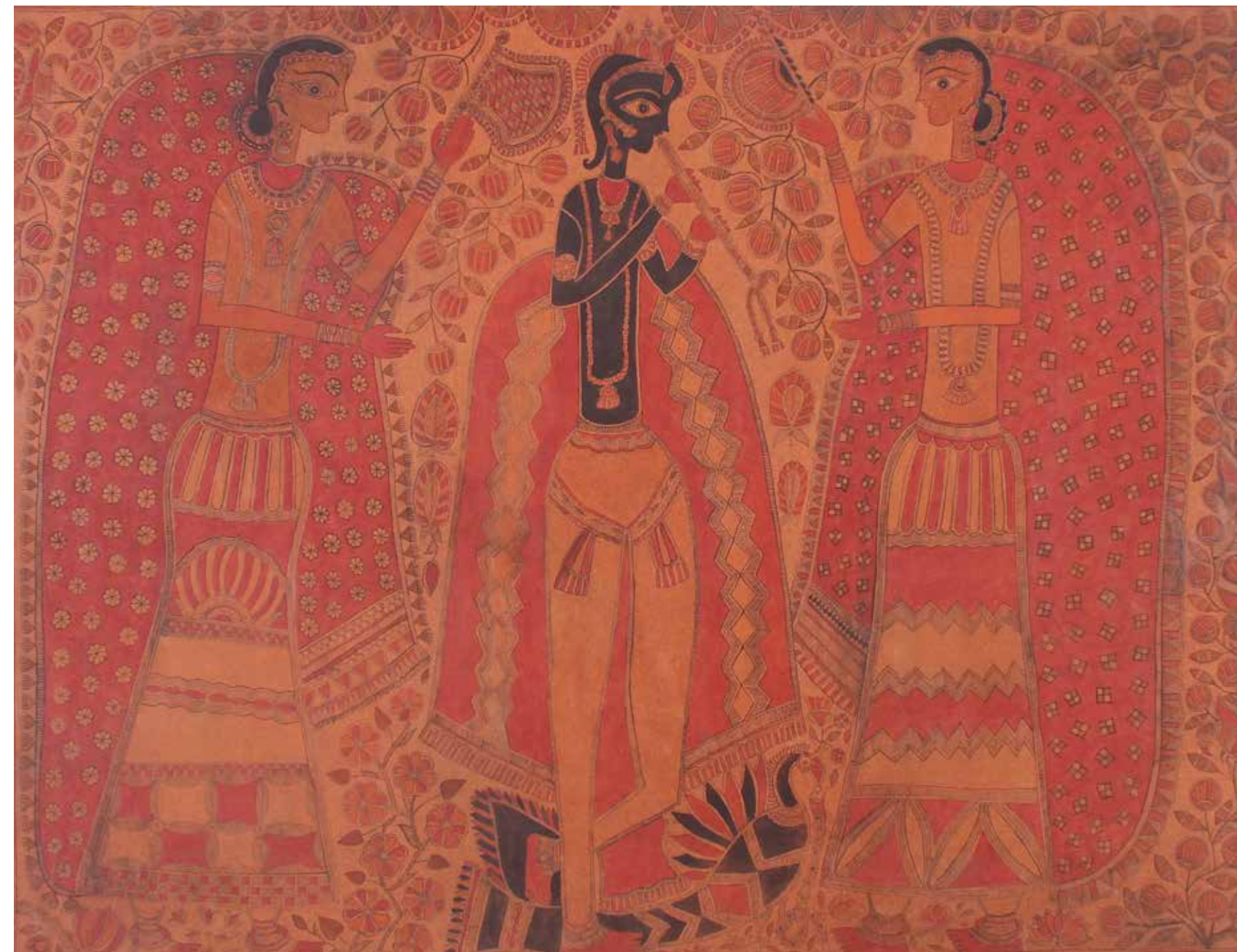
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CONTEMPORARY  
EXPLORATIONS

TRADITION KEY

-  MITHILA
-  WARLI
-  GOND
-  CHITRAKARS

# MYTH AND COSMOLOGY



01

## Sita Devi, *Krishna*, c. 1970s

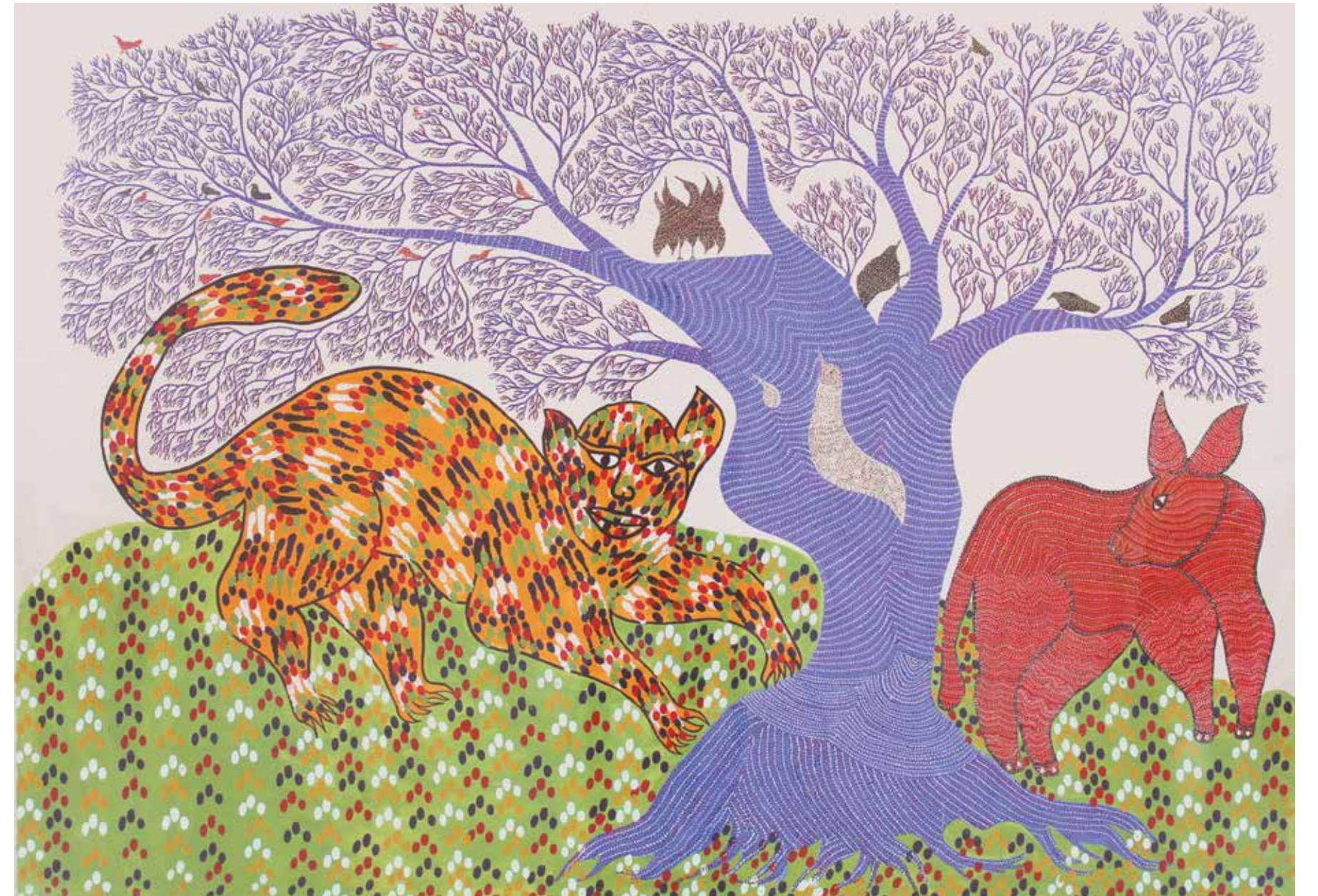
Mud, oxide colors on particle board, 73" x 97"

Sita Devi was one of the pioneers of Mithila painting on paper in the late 1960s and 1970s. Her colorful paintings of elegant, elongated gods and goddesses surrounded by lush vegetation were initially done with natural pigments, and while those early paintings have inevitably faded, they continue to delight. Sent to represent India in cultural festivals in Europe and the United States, Sita Devi's success

and distinctive style became an inspiration for many other women. This painting depicts the Hindu god Krishna flanked by two of his adoring *gopis* (cowherd women), who fan him as he plays his flute. This instrument identifies him as Krishna, as does his dark skin, his yellow dhoti (draped lower garment) and his mount—a peacock with a snake in its beak.



# NATURE: REAL AND IMAGINED



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**Jangarh Singh Shyam, *Tree and Panther*, 1988**

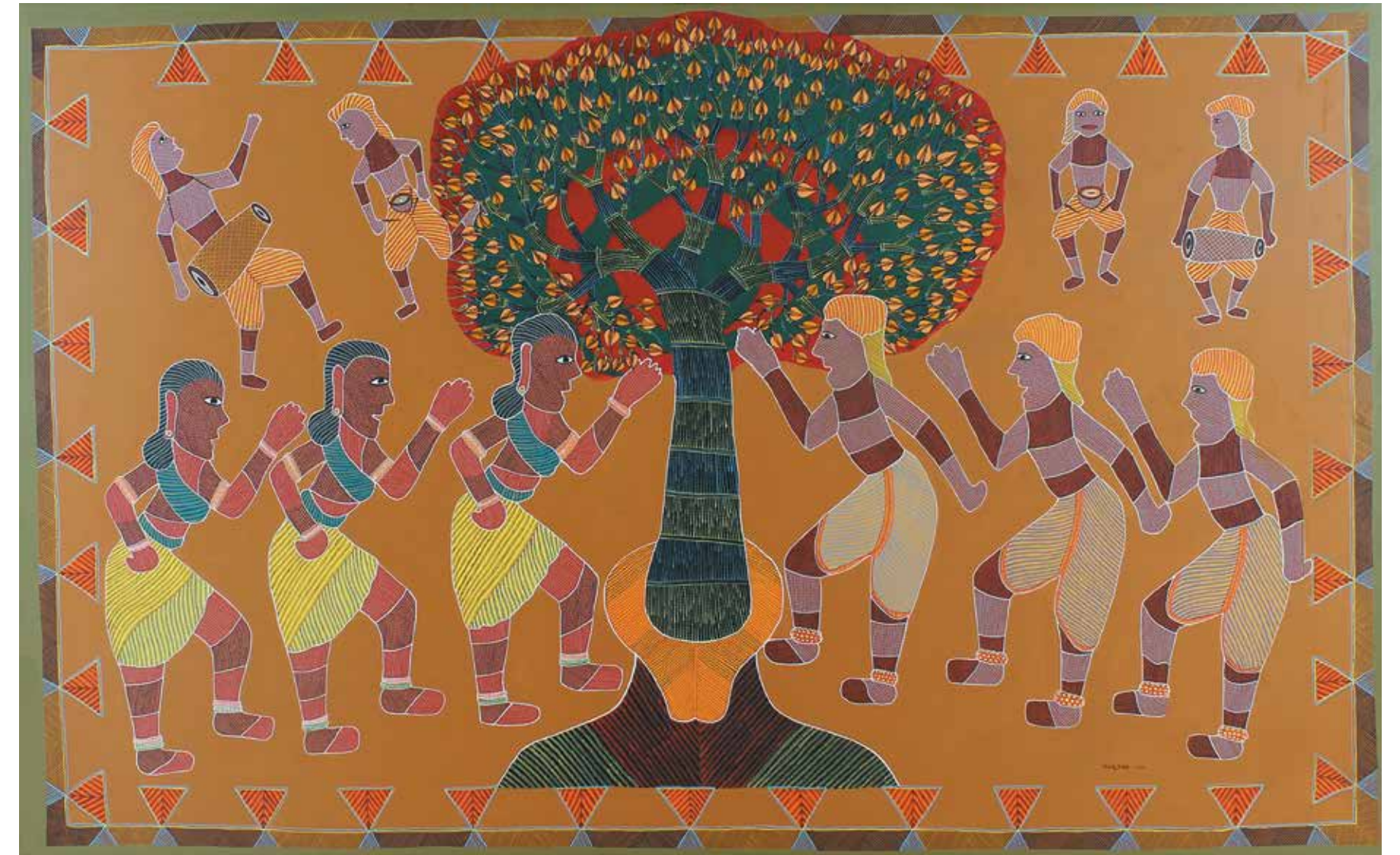
Gouache on paper, 60" x 84"

Of the myriad themes Jangarh explored—the Gond pantheon; flora, fauna, and avifauna; and even aspirational symbols like airplanes—perhaps his most endearing works express nature’s mysterious beauty, wherein anthropomorphic animals and birds reveal Jangarh’s animism. In this jungle scene, a deer and a panther with an anthropoid face rest on grass, which sports motifs resembling a big cat’s pawprints (probably applied by the artist with his middle three fingers). Of several birds in the tree’s foliage, one on the tree trunk is monochrome.

(Some of Jangarh’s early works reveal that he sometimes experimented with leaving parts of an otherwise richly colored work monochrome.) His skill as a colorist is evident in juxtaposed planes of base colors applied flat; each “base” is then superimposed with distinct patterns composed variously of multicolor arcs, waves, and lines. This work was exhibited in Centre Pompidou’s seminal exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989).



# VILLAGE LIFE



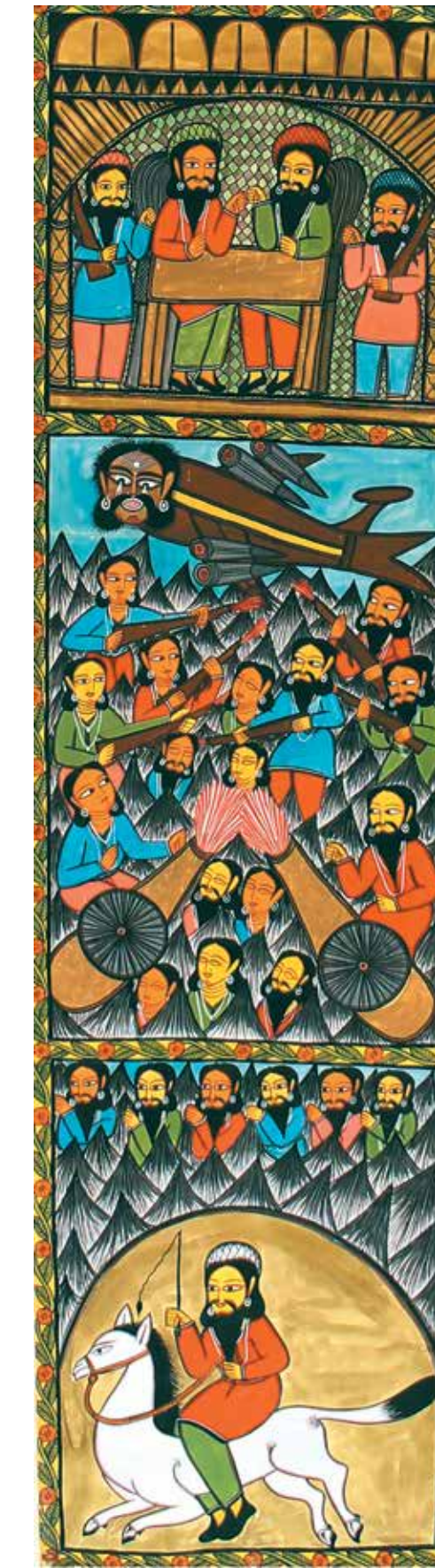
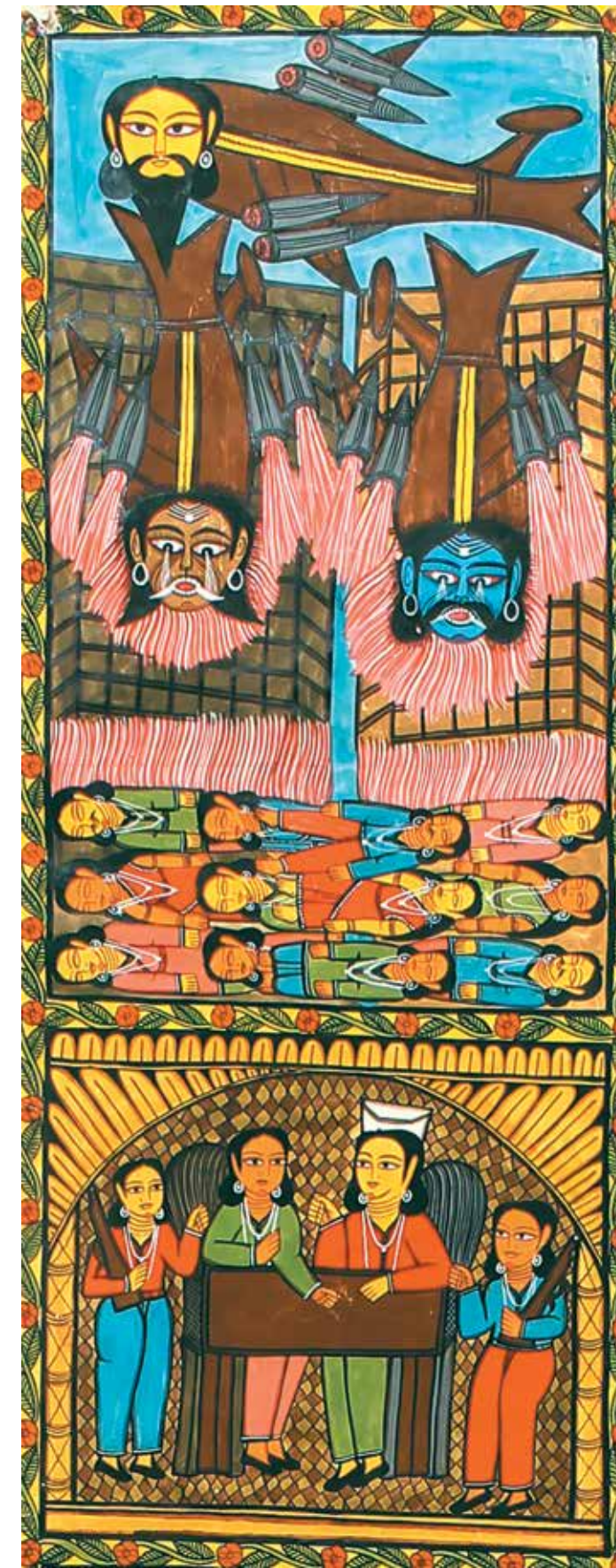
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**Bhajju Shyam**  
*Tribal Dance, 1997*  
Acrylic on canvas, 56" x 89"

The Gond are extremely fond of dancing, which they believe was first learned from peacocks. Bhajju favors symmetric compositions; here the tree is flanked by musicians and male-female dance partners on either side. The tree is smeared with a red powder (*kumkum* or *sindoor*), as if worshipped as a goddess, the color red being associated with sanctity. The concentric, undulating red waves in the foliage emphasize the energy created by the dancers' rhythms. The border consists of a *digna* design, a pattern that Gond women commonly create on the walls and floors of their homes.



# CONTEMPORARY EXPLORATIONS



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**Montu Chitrakar, *Osama*, 2010**  
Natural dyes on paper glued to fabric, 137" x 22"

The Chitrakars have long depicted topical events, whether local, regional, national or—especially after TV sets became common in rural Bengali households—international events, through an often mediated lens. In this painting, Montu Chitrakar depicts the World Trade Center attacks and terrorism, specifically the propaganda tactics of Islamic terrorism (in the middle frames); the US war on terror that 9/11 occasioned (in the frames portraying warfare); and lastly, an apparently victorious Osama bin Laden riding a horse (bottom frame)—as this was painted a year prior to bin Laden's reported death in 2011. The ochre coloring in several of the frames, along with the predominance of browns, suggests the topography of mountainous, landlocked Afghanistan, with its partially arid plateaus and desert. Three of the four heads on the aircraft (in the first two instances indicating terrorist-piloted planes) are given the facial characteristics of mythological *rakshasas* (large demons): unkempt hair, ferocious eyes, large moustaches, and protruding, dagger-like teeth. As with much other Chitrakar art, this reveals the blend of contemporary reportage-style paintings, which are mythologized into the popular imaginary.





Top left: Swarna Chitrakar  
 Top right: Manisha Jha  
 Bottom left: Jivya Soma Mashe  
 Bottom right: Santosh Kumar Das

## Artist Biographies

### WARLI

#### Balu Jivya Mashe (born 1963)

Balu Jivya Mashe is the son of the renowned Warli artist Jivya Soma Mashe. His pictorial style is rooted in the tradition of the Warli, with rhythmic, simplified forms representing the complexities of the world around him. His paintings were exhibited along with his father's work at Chemould Gallery in 1976—breaking new ground for the display of contemporary indigenous art. Balu lives and works in Kalambipada, in the Palghar district of Maharashtra

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*The Warlis - Tribal Paintings and Legends*, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, India (2007)  
*Warli Paintings*, Grosvenor Gallery, London, UK (2013)  
*Birth of the Painted World: Jivya Mashe and the Warli Tradition of India*, Penn State University - Robeson Gallery, University Park, PA (2015)

#### Jivya Soma Mashe (born 1934)

Jivya Soma Mashe is the most prominent Warli artist. Born in Dhamangaon village in Maharashtra, the shock of losing his mother at age seven rendered him mute for several years, during which time he communicated

only by drawing pictures on the floor. His talents were discovered by government officials in charge of preserving and documenting rural arts. Jivya demonstrated a rare sensitivity and an unusually powerful imagination, which seem to be the legacy of his early introspective period. Jivya Soma Mashe was the first to step beyond ritualistic paintings, not just by painting everyday life in a village but also by painting on canvas. In 1976, he received the National Award for Tribal Art, and in 2011 was awarded the Padma Shri by the government of India. Jivya lives and works in Kalambipada.

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (1989)  
*Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India*, Crafts Museum, New Delhi, India (1998)  
*Dialog: Richard Long-Jivya S. Mashe*, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, Germany (2003)  
*The Other masters: Popular arts in India*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (2010)  
*The Tales we Tell*, Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood, London, UK (2015)  
*Birth of the Painted World: Jivya Mashe and the Warli Tradition of India*, Penn State

University - Robeson Gallery, University Park, PA (2015)

#### Kishore Sadashiv Mashe (born 1984)

Born in Ganjad village in Maharashtra, Kishore Sadashiv Mashe is the grandson of legendary Warli master Jivya Soma Mashe. Inspired by folklore, tribal deities, rituals, and celebrations, his work incorporates intricate geometric patterns, stick figures, and line work marked by its sobriety. Kishore lives with his extended family in his village. Rather than display his work at exhibitions, Kishore prefers to participate in workshops and artist residencies.

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*Autres Maîtres de l'Inde (Other Masters of India)*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (2010)  
*Feito por Brasileiros*, Cidade Matarazzo - São Paulo, Brazil (2014)

### MITHILA

#### Baua Devi (born 1944)

Baua Devi was one of the younger generation of women who began transferring their wall paintings to paper in the late 1960s. With a bright palette, clear and elegant figures—usually surrounded with

a wavelike border—her distinctive paintings of Hindu deities, the sun, moon, and snakes gained her immediate recognition, appreciation, and many followers. She is the first Mithila artist to receive international recognition, after her paintings were selected to be shown at Centre Pompidou in 1989. She received the National Award in 1984. She lives and works in New Delhi.

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)*, Pompidou Centre, Paris, France (1989)  
*Baua Devi and the Art of Mithila*, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA (1997)  
*Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*, Museum of Craft and Folk Art, San Francisco, CA (2005)  
*Vernacular, in the Contemporary—Part II*, Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, India (2011)  
*Women's Paintings from the Land of Sita*, Seattle Asian Art Museum, Seattle, WA (2012)

#### Chano Devi (1938–2010)

Chano Devi was born in the Jitawar Village and was one of the pioneering Dusadh women who developed the *gondhana* (tattoos) style of painting, which is largely composed of lines, concentric circles, and circles filled with motifs



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