

**People Painting / Lok Chitran**

Solo

**Dr Shiv Nath Ram**

**curated by Ananta Singh & Gaurav Phaterpekar**

June 7 - July 9 2021

**Exhibition catalogue**

art & soul



**'MY VILLAGE', 59cm X 60cm, Mix Media**

*'My Village' , 59 x 60 cm, Mixed Media , 2020*

A suite of 39 imperial size pencil drawings constitute the solo exhibition of Shiv Nath Ram (1951) at Gallery Art & Soul. The exhibition is a portrait of a Lokchitrakar or a People's Painter, who practices 'People Painting', it is a story of emancipatory aesthetics traversing India's modern history since it became a Republic in 1951. The artist is a retired professor of painting from the Banaras Hindu University. The works are mixed media presentations drawn on paper with pencil and at times watercolour. The exhibition was initiated at the insistence of his students who wanted to see him given the place he deserved in Art History. The works are paintings he did between 2019 and 2021 and a majority have been executed during India's long lockdown we have faced since commencement of the covid-19 pandemic. This is his first solo presentation in a commercial art gallery.

The depiction of people in their quotidian activities and surroundings has found subject in the repertoire of many artists. Kathe Kollwitz in the 'Peasant War' a series executed between 1902 and 1908 etched the lives and struggles of peasants in southern Germany where she gave an iconic representation of a mother searching for the corpse of her son among the many dead. Kollwitz was able to connect with this depiction not only from a political perspective but also one that had a deep personal connection, she came from the working classes. Later she goes upon to illustrate the lives of weavers from Silesia. Shiv Nath Ram a retired professor from Azamgarh in his third year of his bachelors in Fine Arts to support himself began working with the weavers of Benaras, making designs for Benarasi Sarees. Sarees that are embroidered in gold and are to be sold at high prices without the profits ever reaching the weavers or those who authored the design, rather the profits were to be appropriated by the middle men and owners of showrooms across the world. Shiv Nath Ram chose a medium that would represent his personal history, allow him to be the People's Painter. For hours he would fill imperial size drawing sheets, making blunt many pencils, with depictions of his people, his past and his present. *' I come from a place where travesties and troubles of life do not allow me to paint a rose, my works depicts the very people to whom I belong.'* - Shiv Nath Ram.



'COVID-19', 55cm X 74cm, Mix Media

'Covid 19 ' , 55 x 74 cm ' , Mixed Media , 2020.

Born in 1951, we are not sure of the date , as birth records were not kept in most of rural India in those decades , we use the date summed up for his school record. Born in Khursoon, P. O. - Narsinghpur, Tahsi - Lalganj, Azamgarh, U. P. in a family of landless farmers, Shiv Nath Ram is one of the success stories Dr. BR Ambedkar's revolution with his Constitution for the Republic of India allowed after it was ratified in 1950 by the parliament to lead a newly independent post Colonial subcontinent as a nascent state. His art practice became a visual marker and representative of the living revolution. Ambedkar had envisioned an India where the binds of caste and the apartheid against those seen outside the caste system, whom he had organised as the Dalits, would find equity in democracy through equal opportunities in education, vocation, politics and society. A cultural change was urgent to dismantle a system that had survived more than a millennia. Despite being a landless labourer Shiv Nath Ram's father insisted in educating his children so that they would emerge from the shackles of poverty and caste and lead urban lives in an industrial modern society that was envisioned by Ambedkar. Shiv Nath Ram was interested in science and it is while studying at the SKGN Inter College at Lalgang his high school art teacher Shyam Narayan Singh saw his capabilities at

drawing and encouraged him to pursue the skill. A few years later a senior from his school Ram Shabd Singh who was studying at the Faculty of Visual Arts, at the Benaras Hindu University guided Shiv Nath Ram into enrolling for the foundation course at the university.

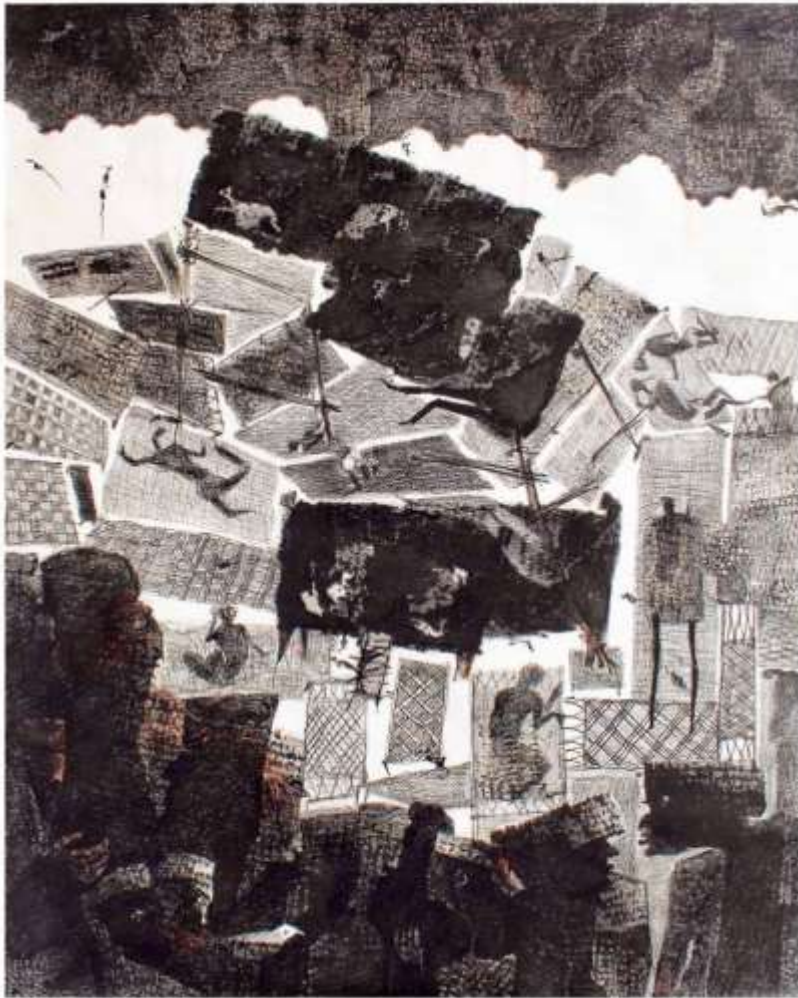


Title - Harmony Medium - Mixed Media December -2020 Size -96 x 148 cms.

' Harmony ' 96 x148 cms , Mixed Media , December 2020

The Banaras Hindu University was established by Madan Mohan Malviya in 1916 as a vehicle to help alleviate India from its poverty through the use of science, scientific temper and technology within the realm of an Indic culture and understanding. The university was to be a symbol of Indian self-determination and was established through public subscription. Its visual arts faculty had followed the traditions of Rabindranath Tagore's Vishwabharati University at Shantiniketan with tempera and wash techniques that were characteristic of the Bengal Renaissance as the prevailing format of painting at the school. But in 1971 when Shiv Nath enrolled into the faculty, Professor KS Kulkarni was at the helm of the institution along with Dilip Das Gupta. They singularly chartered its course to a peculiar modernism which today defines the practices of Benaras.





'DEC-20', Shiv Nath Ram, Mixed Media

*December 2020 , 56 x 74 cm, Mixed Media , 2020*

Kulkarni was a classical modernist from the Sir JJ School of Art , Bombay and sought to create strong modern lines with references to classical Indian art particularly the frescoes from Ajanta. Dilip Das Gupta on the other hand had a lyrical approach towards aesthetics and that too particularly in watercolours . He was a naturalist who drew life drawings of landscape and particularly the ghats of Benaras that stepped into the River Ganges at dawn, at dusk and at times of cremation , capturing light in different emotions of hope, contentment and despair. The two styles became representative of the Benaras Art School. An earlier style of 'Company Painting' - a miniature format of painting from the colonial times was eclipsed and the tempera as well as wash from Bengal transformed into a new Aesthetic paradigm of decorative modernism.

Shiv Nath Ram responded mostly to the works of Gokul Prasad , an assistant professor who shared the same background as Ram and

made figurative works that held a narrative. Gokul Prasad was a student of JM Ahivasi an artist who had rejected colonial forms of painting rather finding his language in the bright flat colours of miniature painting , preferring watercolour and drawing over mediums that were associated with a modernism that was authored in the west. Jaganath Ahivasi was the head of the painting department at the Sir JJ School of Arts, Bombay. At that time at BHU most art works happened in oil and canvas and it was considered a medium of the 'High Arts'. Shiv Nath Ram came to school when his eldest brother a coal miner in Asansol had just seen the mines shutting down and his other brother a textile worker in Bombay's famed mills was a victim to the job losses due to the strikes. Money for him was very scarce but it inspired a material revolution in his practice, rejecting an expensive medium , Shiv Nath chose the pencil over the paint and paper over canvas as his primary format to express himself. *' How would the children of the poor paint? If the forms of painting are to be only oil and canvas , it inherently becomes a medium for the elite . It requires you to be in a studio , have the leisure of funding , access and space . '* - Shiv Nath Ram .

Shiv Nath Ram would now carry his sketchbook to the train , to the bus, the stations and the ghats. Those he represented mirrored himself. He was growing through socialist India . From 1976 he became a textile designer for many Benarasi Saree producers and when he graduated in 1978 with a masters in fine arts from the BHU he went to work for two years for a planned parenthood initiative in the villages surrounding the university funded by an association in London. Travelling as an artist through the realms of Uttar Pradesh marked by poverty and feudalism , images began to be captured in his mind and sketchbook. In 1981 he joined the Madhya Pradesh Textile Corporation as the head of the design cell where he incorporated indigenous forms into the abstracts weaves of the celebrated 'Maheshwar Sarees'. In 1982 he assisted Pupul Jayakar and produced the show for the Festival of India at the Royal College of Arts in London. In 1987 he became the staff artist at the Security Press in Nashik where he worked as a designer for India's currency 'the Rupee' and other financial instruments. He returned to the Banaras Hindu University in 1993 as a lecturer and subsequently after a PHD in 2006 retired as a senior professor in the department of painting in 2016. Unlike other artists he adjusted his practice to compliment the time constraints at the job but also one that was to be informed by the experiences he gathered across India and with the people he encountered. The Banaras Hindu University was riddled with casteism something representative of the country as a whole, people resented affirmative action but they resented more a meritorious subaltern painter. He was teacher who rejected the exploitative relationship often formed as part

of the Guru-Shishya tradition where students have to follow their teacher in voice and form. He would advise students to not shy away from working hard and by spending hours drawing amongst their midst rather in a studio he set an example to draw one's own vocabulary. If he saw that his vocabulary of visual forms began to be seen in the forms of his students he would warn them to re-chart their practice. Ambedkar found support amongst his teachers his own surname was a gift to circumvent the barriers of caste from his school teacher, Shiv Nath Ram an Ambedkarite himself sought inspiration in the life of Ambedkar and refused to get embroiled in the petty politics of the school allowing himself to be the conscience of his works which he called 'Parivesh'.



'MEMORY', 56cm X 74cm, Mix Media

*'Memory 56 x 74 cm , Mixed Media, 2020*

'Parivesh' is a commonly used Hindi word in Uttar Pradesh. Translated it means 'Environment' but it can also be used to describe one's context, society and situation. Uttar Pradesh is home to 200 million people in an area of 240,000 square metres. It is the cradle of the Gangetic valley civilisation and is more populous than France, Germany or the United Kingdom. Its politics is riddled with

communalism, poverty , violence and a low rate of industrialisation and outward migration to other states. Successive governments have failed in providing for a state that elects the most number of members to the Indian Parliament. The key to power in Delhi sits here. But it is a state that in terms of art infrastructure has no contemporary art gallery both commercial and public except for a few in a district that is on the periphery of Delhi, that serve an internationalism far beyond the imaginations of artists studying on its eastern end in Benaras. There is no major art movement or practices that can be distinctive in their representation of the state. The fault lies in the consciousness of a society that is divided on caste and aspiration is limited to escaping the clutches of poverty that is endemic. People find solace in religion when all fails to support them from the travesties of life. This is the ' Parivesh' of Shiv Nath Ram , it is his subject.

Shiv Nath comes from a family that belonged to the one of the many indigenous groups that were ostracised by the caste system over many thousand years. These groups had sophisticated forms of visual culture that were part of ritual and decoration. These rituals were drawn from rural animism and the need to decorate village architecture. Homes in this region until recently due to being situated in river flood plains and the lack of resources were built using a mesh of split bamboos, river-reeds , straw and then bound together using a mixture of clay, cow-dung and some pulses as binders. During the process of building these homes people would craft bas-reliefs into the clay depicting gods and goddesses. 'Alpana' which means to 'plaster' in Sanskrit is a form where they use rice powder dissolved in water to make motifs, forms of fauna and flora on the walls of homes to usher fertility , prosperity and ward off evil. Shiv Nath Ram was popular in his village and was often beckoned to make these forms on the walls of homes during marriages and festivals. During marriages across Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Nepal a fertility painting called a 'Kohbar' is drawn in the marital chambers of a newly married couple. Round circular forms with abstracted symbols usher in a conjugal life. In orchards outside the village there are forest and village gods, served by the shaman and these altars have similar forms found in the 'Kohbar' paintings, these are shrines in clay and unbaked pottery to Raja Salhes , Raja Chauharmal and other folk heroes. The style of painting is called 'Godna' or 'Tattoo' drawn from similar designs of tattoos in the region. Shiv Nath Ram enjoyed making Kohbar's and watching his father make low tables and seating called 'morhas' from hay as well as cots out of strings called charpois. Shiv Nath Ram was keen to learn these techniques from his father but his father dissuaded him from following these folk traditions of art rather asking him to escape his poverty through



education. But these forms would have visual resonance later. It is unfortunate in a societal system where vocation follows caste, when art is assigned to a caste, its practice is associated with exploitation. Traditions are lost as one begins to aspire and breaks those very shackles and traditional visual forms become associated with a tragic past.

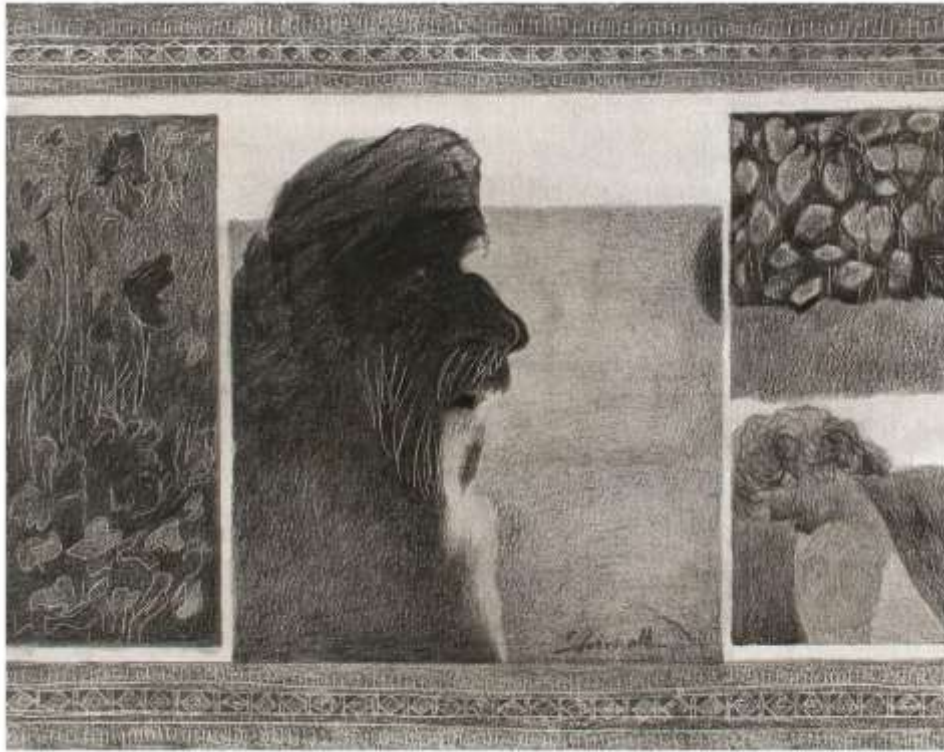


'VERLI KALA', 55cm X 74cm, Mix Media

*'Verli Kala' 56 x 74 cm , Mixed Media , 2021*

Shiv Nath Ram recognised the need to represent his ' Parivesh' that belonged to the feudal fertile lands of Uttar Pradesh where caste exploitation, untouchability and poverty were endemic. He used a simple pencil and a full sheet of paper to draw a mesh akin to the mesh that stands behind the clay homes in his village. Drawing people, their times, tribulations and festivals in the Gangetic plains his practice maps half a century of history of the subaltern from 1971. We recognise the flat colours in ' My Village 'that has resonance with similar painting practices from contemporary Africa but actually they draw from the lessons taught to him by Gokul Prasad at BHU and represent JM Ahivasi's attempts of aesthetic decolonisation by adopting the bright colours of Indian miniature painting. In ' Verli Kala', a title is drawn from 'Warli painting' a tradition of wall painting from Maharashtra by an indigenous tribe called the Warlis and popularised by the exhibition ' Magiciens de La Terre'

1989 , at the Centre Pompidou , Paris - which had the participation of the celebrated Warli artist Jivya Soma Mashe. But Shiv Nath's 'Verli' paintings does not draw on forms from the tradition of Warli painting but rather the forms follow the flora and fauna depicted in the 'Alpana' paintings of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. What is interesting is the perspective of one's gaze in his painting, the narrative here follows the forms of the alpana , for examples in works such as 'Memory ' , ' Covid -19' and 'December 2020' we see a landscape which is an aerial perspective of a village crowded at the edges with trees, homes and fields and inhabited in middle with humans and animals. ' Ignorance' is a side portrait of a villager in a turban or a 'God-man' framed by flowers and plants, Ambedkar saw villages as places of small mindedness, superstition and caste whilst urging Dalits to migrate to cities where they could benefit from education, industrialisation and cosmopolitanism. Though Shiv Nath's drawing ' Harmony'. presents an idyllic village scenario of vocational interdependencies between Hindus and Muslims who live happily as neighbours in the microcosm of the village unaware of the communal environments of the city. Shiv Nath Ram depicts the ' Covid 19' pandemic by building visual monuments to labourers forced to walk home after India went into lockdown in March 2020. Many of those who walked home from cities such as Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta came from the same subaltern communities he presents in his work. A particular work ' Kisan Andolan-2'. depicts the portrait of an emaciated farmer who is in the sub-terrain below the ground he ploughs.



'IGNORANCE', Shiv Nath Ram, Mixed Media, 2021

We see the works of Shiv Nath Ram are not descriptive in their form of figuration like Kathe Kollwitz or the artists from the traditions of Social Realism. His work sits well in a deep aesthetic that represents his school, the traditions of textile and folk painting that represent his origins. The work does not refer to art history or poster painting to develop a form of people painting. It is not referenced nor is it attributed to a theoretical proposition of political art. It is rather accessible in its form, poetic and deeply symbolic. He paints his people and paints for them. The work originates from an honesty, it is a clear celebration of overcoming the travesties of caste, exploitation and determination. The works propose deep hope, happiness and emancipation. The aesthetic language is not arrogant rather a grassroots based 'De-colonial Practice' that does not find solace in Marxist aesthetics, it finds its sources from its own surroundings or 'Parivesh'. Thus presenting a credible argument for change. Shiv Nath Ram's students have become famous political artists and abstractionists in New Delhi, Ram does not see himself as one. Conceptually he puts forth a strong argument that contests 'Conceptual Art' and its inaccessibility, its meandering language and the costs of producing conceptual work that allows it only to be the refuge of the elite like 'Oil & Canvas' had done during Shiv Nath's days in art school. Artists from rural backgrounds who do not have access to English, expensive art schools or the means to practice in video & installation often come from underprivileged backgrounds and fail to find

their foothold in the art scene. They find opportunities in the decorative commercial scene once they have exhausted their means to circumvent the walls of contemporary art. Contemporary Art is often technique and medium obsessed following global trends in art. Thus, Shiv Nath Ram becomes an important figure in subaltern art history, a practice that can be looked upto and followed. He is the People's Painter or ' Lokchitrakar 'practicing ' People Painting' or 'Lok Chitran. '

Art & Soul Editorial, 2021





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Year Ago

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | December 20

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 63 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.50 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Ignorance III

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Ignorance II

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Memory

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Entry

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Impression - 20

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Impression 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Image 1920

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 56 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Yesterday

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 61 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.5 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | An Yesterday

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 74 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 4 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Search 019

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 62 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.50 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Space

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 110 x 148 Centimeters

Price | INR 12.25 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Effort

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 66 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.75 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Identity

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 55 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Covid 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 55 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | My Village

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 59 x 60 Centimeters

Price | INR 2.75 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Dabang 19-20

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 59 x 60 Centimeters

Price | INR 2.75 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Verli Kala

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 55 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Shelter

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 122 x 144 Centimeters

Price | INR 13.25 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | The Attempt

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 76 x 115 Centimeters

Price | INR 6.50 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Space 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 96 x 143 Centimeters

Price | INR 10.25 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Mauricio Pochettino 2020

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 61 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.50 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Harmony

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 55 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 3.00 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | December 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 37 x 37 Centimeters

Price | INR 1. Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Effort 2020

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 37 x 37 Centimeters

Price | INR 1. Lacs





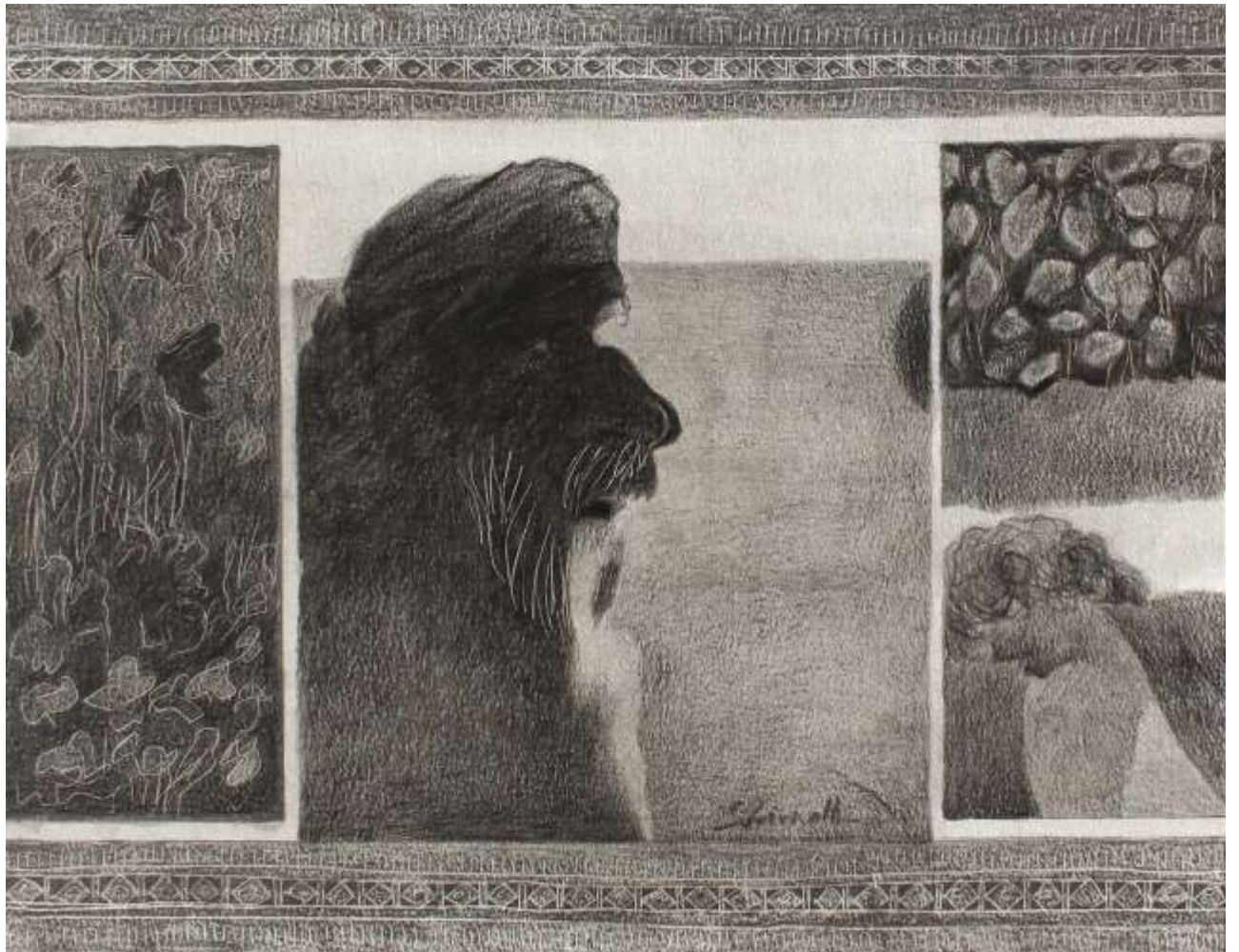
Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Glory

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 37 x 47 Centimeters

Price | INR 1.25 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Ignorance

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 30 x 38 Centimeters

Price | INR 1.00 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Search 2020

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 29 x 35 Centimeters

Price | INR 0.75 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Affection

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 55 x 35 Centimeters

Price | INR 1.50 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Effort 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 29 x 35 Centimeters

Price | INR 0.75 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | My Identity

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 71 x 74 Centimeters

Price | INR 4 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Search 19

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 29 x 35 Centimeters

Price | INR 0.75 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Hard Worker

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 24 x 35 Centimeters

Price | INR 0.75 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Boat Man

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 39 x 46 Centimeters

Price | INR 1.50 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Autolatry

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 76 x 74 Centimetres

Price | INR 4.25 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

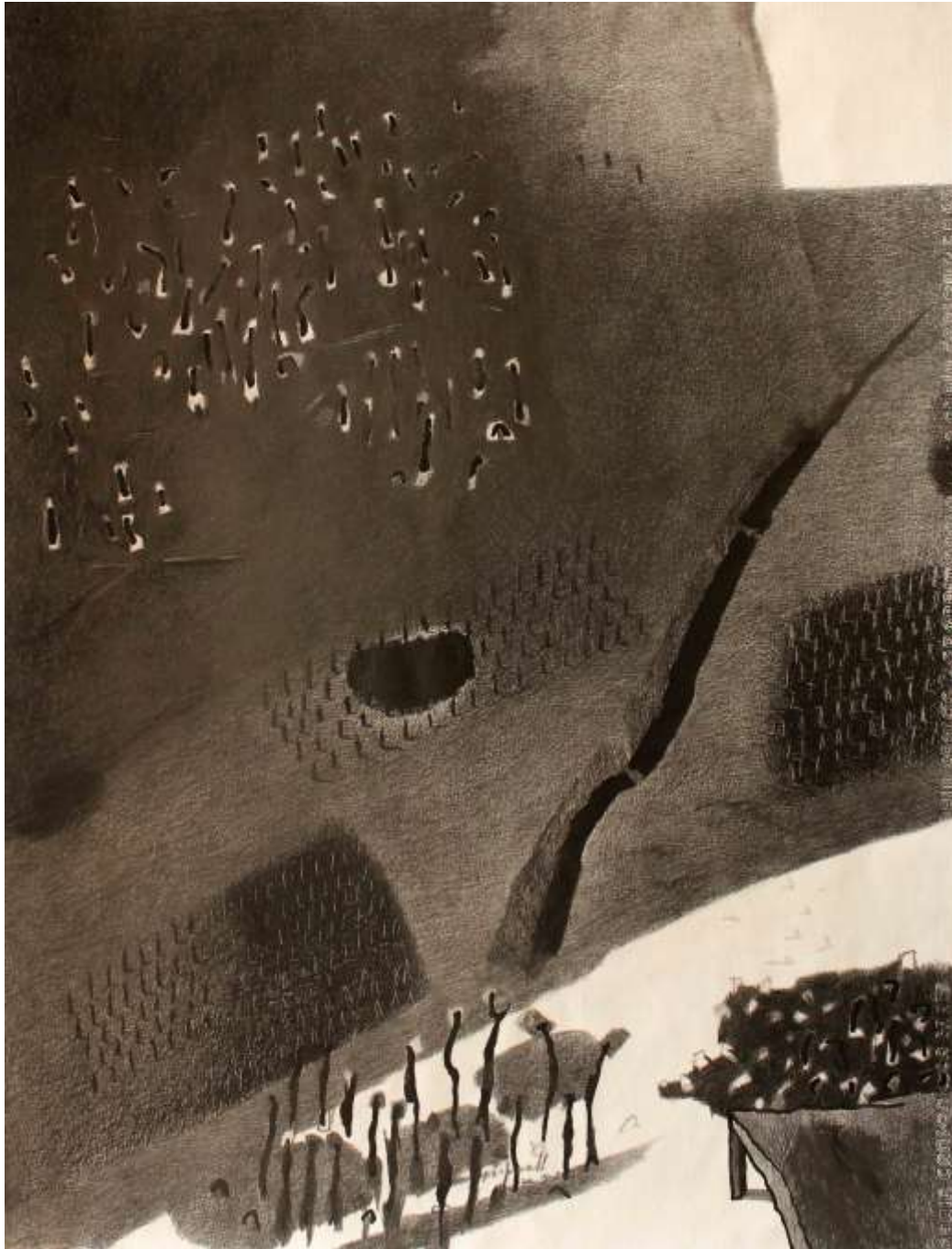
Title | Impression 21

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 68 x 74 Centimetres

Price | INR 4. Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Kisan Andolan I

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 65 x 50 Centimetres

Price | INR 2.50 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Kisan Andolan II

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 75 x 55 Centimetres

Price | INR 3 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Kisan Andolan III

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 65 x 50 Centimetres

Price | INR 2.50 Lacs



Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Kisan Andolan IV

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 65 x 50 Centimetres

Price | INR 2.50 Lacs





Artist | Shiv Nath

Title | Harmony

Medium | Mixed media

Size | 96 x 148 Centimetres

Price | INR 11. Lacs

**Professor Dr. Shiv Nath Ram (1951)**, Khursoon , Tehsil Lalganj , born in a family of landless farmers in the Azamgarh district of the state of Uttar Pradesh , India , is a retired professor of painting from the Banaras Hindu University. His work is characterised by large pencil drawings that are predominantly black with splashes of watercolour at times. He portrays common people he encounters in his village, on bus & train journeys, through his professional life and those who form the quotidian life of India. He graduated with an MFA in Painting from BHU in 1978, a BFA in 1976 and Doctorate in Painting in 2006. He has worked as a textile designer for the weavers of Benaras , headed the design cell of the Madhya Pradesh State Textile Corporation from 1981 - 87, he produced Pupul Jayakar's Festival of India in 1982 at the Royal College of Arts, London and was the Staff Artist at the India Security Press at Nashik from 1987 to 1993. In 1993 he joined as a lecturer in painting at the Banaras Hindu University where he retired as a senior Professor of Painting in 2016. He is a practising artist based in Varanasi or Benaras. He is in the collections of the Lalit Kala Akademi , Delhi, Uttar Pradesh Lalit Kala Akademi , Lucknow , BP Koirala Foundation, Kathmandu, Nepal and Birla Academy of Fine Arts , Kolkata. He has had solo shows at the National Academy of Arts, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, 2006, Drawing Exhibition at Indus Art and Craft Society, Sarnath, 2000, Water Colour Exhibition at the Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy, Jaipur, 1995 and Water Colour Exhibition at the Faculty of Visual Arts, B.H.U, 1974. He was the 1976-78: Merit Scholar for standing first in MFA, Faculty Of Visual Arts, B.H.U and held the B.H.U Gold medal for standing first in BFA, Faculty of Visual Arts, B.H.U. in 1976. In 2006 he participated in the 12th International Biennial Print and Drawing Exhibition, Council for the Cultural Affairs, R.O.C. Taiwan. 'People Painting / Lok Chitran '2021 at Gallery Art & Soul is first solo presentation in a commercial art gallery.

**People Painting / Lok Chitran - In Conversations with Shiv Nath :**

<https://youtu.be/CVPO9ItTQMI>



## Gallery Art & Soul

Gallery Art & Soul, established in 2003 is a gallery of Indian modern, contemporary and decorative arts in the heart of Bombay. Founded by Dr. Tarana Kubhchandani as an extension of her activities at the Art & Soul Cancer Foundation, the gallery has pursued a discourse both within India and internationally of aesthetic syncretism producing exhibitions that are varied in genre, materiality and conceptual though across art historical timelines.

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Catalogue Raisonné compiled by Gaurav Phaterpekar for Gallery Art & Soul, Bombay, June 2021



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