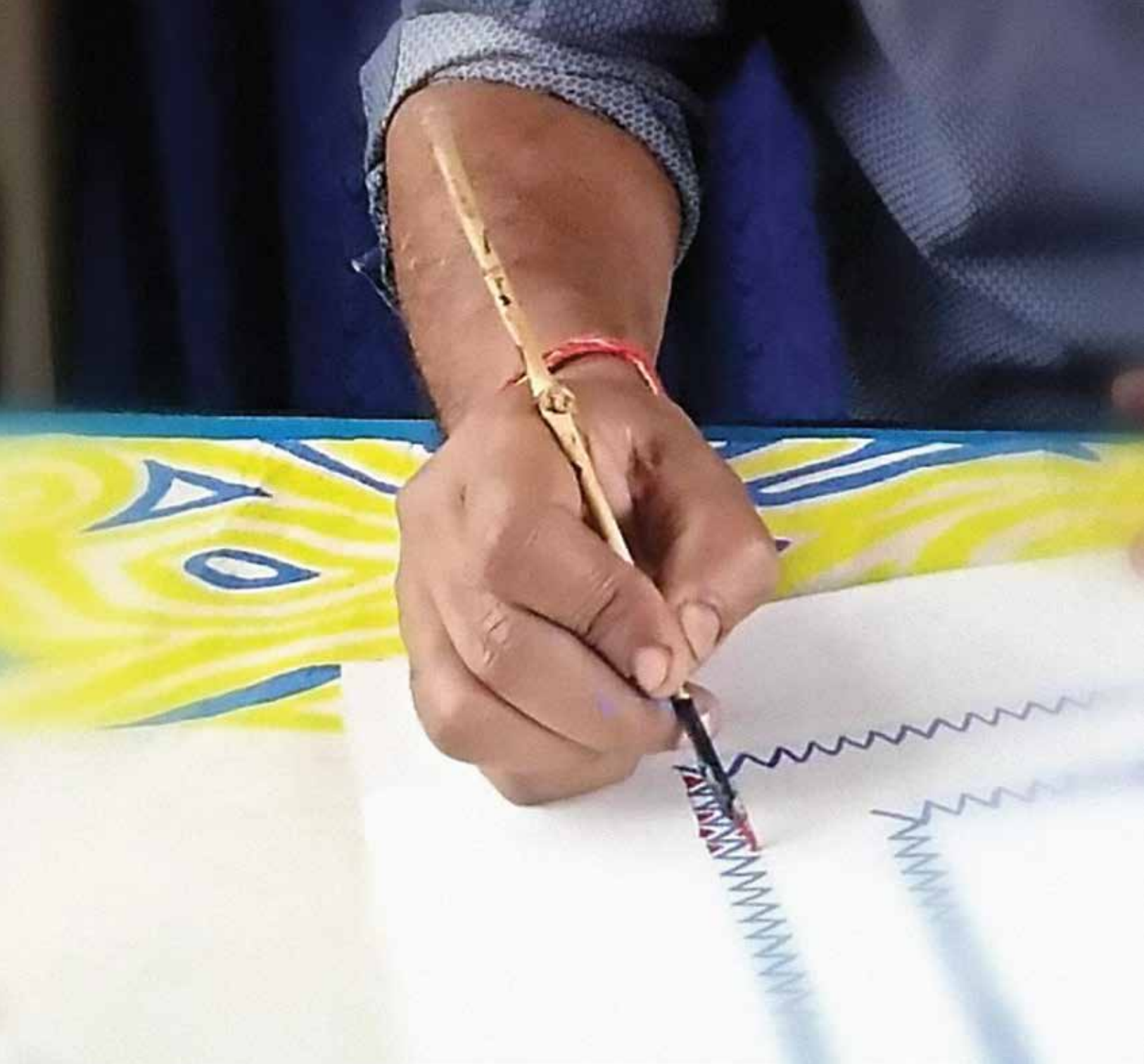


MITHILA COSMOS
THE CYCLES
OF TIME
by SC Suman

Dec 10th, 2021 - Jan 15th, 2022



S.C. Suman ..

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Since the beginning of my work in the field of Mithila painting, I have juxtaposed contemporary issues with the traditional form, natural colors, and spiritual aesthetics of my native land.

My goal has always been to become a link between the long heritage of Mithila art and the contemporary social semiotics of the international art community. Ever since I first started painting, I have sought to give Mithila art the recognition it deserves by preserving the techniques, tools, and outlines specific to this art form, which sadly was on the verge of extinction.

I have come a long way as an artist. And even after all these years, my grandmother remains my sole source of inspiration for what I do. I have received no formal training for my art. Almost all of my work is a result of the culture and traditions passed down to me by my family through the generations.

My grandmother and the women from my community painted mud walls during festivals. Though painting walls and floors during these celebrations were traditionally and primarily thought to be the job of the female members of the family, I was enchanted by these raw drawings from my childhood; particularly because of their unique indigenous visual forms. For instance, they made Kohbar paintings on the walls for newlywed couples during their wedding night. Aripān—floor painting—was drawn with rice paste on mud floors in the house during Deepawali – the festival of light, which celebrates the return of Lord Rama from a fourteen-year-long exile.

Taking all the skills I've learned from them, I've fused them with the present context to create art that not only pays homage to Mithila art but also brings forth ideas of social change. Lastly, I feel that by preserving the practice of Mithila art, I am also preserving the memories of my grandmother.



Kohabar
65x70cm | Acrylic on art paper | 2020

MITHILA COSMOS: THE STORY OF CYCLICAL TIME

Sangeeta Thapa

The ancient and vast Mithila Kingdom was surrounded by the Ganges River to the South, the Himalayas to the North, and the now non-existent Koshi and Gandaki Rivers to the East and West, whose territory extends to present-day Bihar, India. The Nepali city Janakpur was the capital of this ancient Kingdom. The epic Ramayana makes mention of this area as King Janak and his daughter Sita the consort of Lord Rama, hailed from this great kingdom. Today Janakpur is still the epicenter of Maithili culture in Nepal.

For over three thousand years, the genre of Mithila painting has remained within the bastion of its womenfolk, who inherited their traditions, skills, technical knowledge, and expertise from their mothers or grandmothers. Their art was an integral part of their domestic day-to-day ritual. Mithila women have drawn on the walls of their humble abodes and on their mud floors to avert natural disasters, protect their crops, and pray for the well-being of their husbands and children. Housewives fashioned images out of clay, mud, and cow dung of Hindu Gods for worship on diverse occasions, when they observed fasts for the prosperity and longevity of their family members. Dr. Ram Dayal Rakesh, a Nepali expert on Mithila Art of Nepal writes that Mithila art is inseparable from religion and that the Mithila artist still 'dedicates her talent and skill to God, meditating long before transforming a spiritual aesthetic vision onto a mud wall'. However, these wall paintings have always been impermanent, as the annual monsoon torpor destroys the painted images and a fresh mixture of mud and cow dung is applied over the old images to provide a fresh surface for new paintings, which are in keeping with the festivities.

The Great Earthquake of Bihar in 1934 caused much destruction in both India and Nepal. Interestingly the destruction in India brought Maithili art to the public gaze for the very first time. Today the winds of change have brought about a transformation

in the lifestyle of rural and indigenous folk in both India and Nepal. This change has challenged the artistic and cultural moorings of the Mithila cosmos. However, it is interesting to note that the mud walls, courtyards, textiles, household objects, paintings, and handicrafts, still rest upon the age-old repertoire for ornamental patterns and designs, motifs, symbols, and themes.

In Nepal, the practice of painting on paper is a recent phenomenon, which was introduced by Claire Burkert who established the Janakpur Women's Development Center (JWDC) in 1990. From this historic moment, the artistic motifs used by Mithila women were transferred onto a new medium – paper. The Janakpur Women's Development Center was established to promote the inherent skills of these women, uplift their lives through the sales of their beautiful artworks, and introduce Mithila expression to the rest of the world. Today Mithila art in Nepal has taken a direction of its own and is a source of inspiration for national and international artists.

Traditionally three castes are associated with Mithila art: *Brahmin*, *Kayastha*, and *Dusadha*. Though Mithila art forms vary from caste to caste, the art forms that emanate from this region are associated with religious ceremonies and local rituals. The artist SC Suman, who hails from Siraha, is a Kayastha. The Kayastha women of the Mithila region have traditionally been engaged with this art form since time immemorial. SC Suman learnt to make ritual *aripans* for the various festivals and pujas from his grandmother in their family home. Suman recalls that his grandmother would grind rice with some water into a paste called *pithar* and use this mixture to make the delicate patterns on the mud floor and in the *goshai ghar* or prayer room each day. These intricate ornamental but profoundly symbolic patterns would be incomplete without adding the final touches with *abir*, *sindoor*, and *kesari* powder. Suman also remembers

helping his grandmother make wall paintings or *Bhitti Chitras* and waiting for the right season to gather flowers, creepers, herbs, and leaves that would be ground and distilled to make the natural pigments for the paintings. The stem of the *parijat* flower, bougainvillea, pulp of the bel fruit, oil, milk, and turmeric would be used to make organic pigments. Mud, cow dung, and certain grasses were used as earth tones for the paintings. *Kajol* and soot would be coated onto fine hand-hewn bamboo sticks with which his grandmother would draw the fine images of their spiritual and natural cosmos. No other art form in Nepal shares such a close affinity to nature and celebrates the holistic involvement of all the senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

Inspired by the artworks created at the Jankapur Women's Development Center, the fine *Madhubani* paintings of Bihar, the *Worli* paintings of Madhya Pradesh along with the local *Tharu* and Rajbanshi imagery, SC Suman is both an oddity and an icon, as he has gone against the tide and established his name as one of the finest painters in this genre. Though he trained as a textile designer in Bombay, he returned to his roots and began to paint in the Mithila tradition, stating that he did not believe that the issue of gender should restrict the innate creativity of an artist. SC Suman crafts his own painting tools and prepares his own colors. He also uses acrylic and oils with equipoise on Nepali paper, linen, and silk. In 1991, he was the first artist to exhibit his Mithila paintings and that too in his hometown Biratnagar.

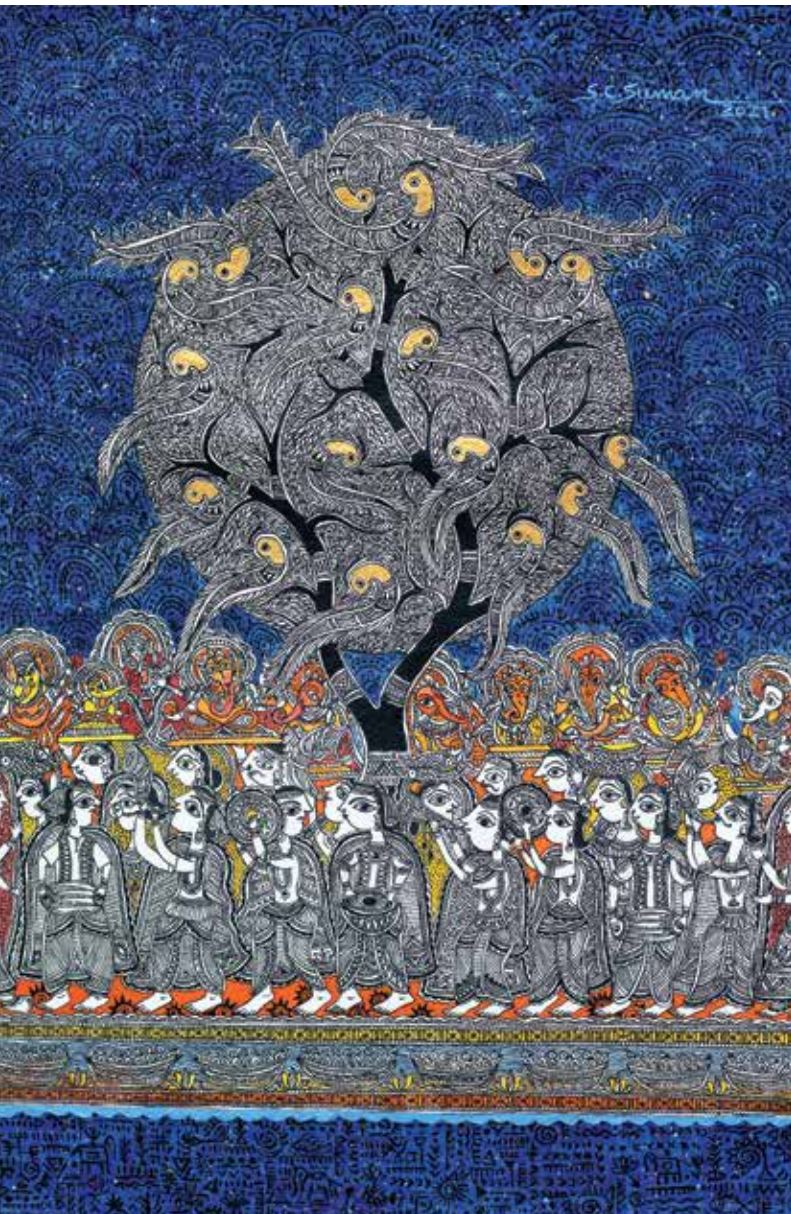
In 2007, SC Suman held a successful exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. *Entitled Mithila Cosmos*, this exhibition brought attention to the enduring iconography of the Mithila Kingdom. In 2011, his exhibition *Mithila Cosmos II- New Narratives*, included both traditional forms and a body of work that was socio-political in content, thus demonstrating how the Mithila gaze reads



Gauri Puja in the Ramayan
90x140cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

the world today. Suman believes that traditional art can become dynamic and robust when it embraces contemporary issues. His exhibition *Mithila Cosmos–Circumbulating the Tree of Life in 2014–* was inspired by nature and the symbolism of the tree which is a recurring motif in Mithila art, poetry, and folk songs. Even a 700-year-old folk song written by celebrated Mithila poet Kokilkavi Vidyapati which is sung at weddings elucidates this deep connection to nature and ecology.

The Tree of Life concept is sacred to most cultures. Jasleen Dhamija, an Indian writer and expert on the arts and crafts of India elaborates that the significance of the tree of life “transcends conscious reality, touching the subconscious and beyond. Even if the original meaning is obscured, the symbol retains an unconscious link with our primeval memory and becomes a source of strength. Its roots plunge deep into the three worlds: its branches reach upwards towards heaven and support it. The



trunk is the means of ascending upwards and reaching beyond, thereby connecting three worlds. The presence of a tree signifies water, growth, and fecundity. Specific trees and flowers are objects of worship and are sacred: *kadamaba*, *pipal*, *bar*, *banyan*, *sandalwood*, *rudrakshya*, *parijat*, *mango*, and *mahua* tree and it is taboo to cut these trees, as their very being is associated with myths and gods; hence the custom of offering libations to them". Even today young men and women from the Mithila culture get married to both the mango-mahua tree before they are formally married to their betrothed. It is interesting to note that these species of trees were and are still regarded as *Kalpavrikshya* or sacred wish-granting trees. In 2016, this wish-granting tree became the focus of Suman's narrative. The Artist paid tribute to nature with his work as these trees, flowers, and fruits were traditionally awarded a special status due to the beauty and fragrance of their blossoms which were offered during ritual ceremonies. There is also no doubt that the medicinal, nutritional, and ecological value of these trees and plants was understood.

To understand Suman's work it is important to contextualize the cultural, artistic, and literary tradition of the Mithila genre which is deeply rooted in nature. Verses from the sacred *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* are replete with texts that pay homage to sacred trees, plants, flowers, and nature. Taking its cue from these sacred texts Mithila imagery captures the exile of Sita and Ram in exile in the forest, Sita sitting under the Ashoka tree, Radha and Krishna exchanging garlands with a *Kadamba* tree in the backdrop, the *cheer haran* story where a gleeful Krishna sits on a sturdy branch of the *Kadamba* tree overlooking a pond where 108 *gopinis* are bathing oblivious to the fact that the mischievous Krishna has taken away their clothes

Ganesh Puja Festival
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2020

and hung it on the branches of the tree. Even today married women conduct the *Batasavitri puja*, or the *tulsi hom* as it is believed that these pujas add longevity to the lives of their husbands.

Rural art forms are an indelible link between the artistic output and nature. Suman's paintings reflect images of a myriad of plants and life forms of the Terai which encapsulate a host of meanings: lotus (seat of the unblemished and pure feminine form), bamboo (lineage, roots, male form), *kadamba* tree (love) fishes and crocodiles (fertility), turtles (lover's reunion and stability), parrots (teacher, intelligence), peacocks (beauty), elephants (wealth and prosperity), tigers (power associated with the Goddess), snakes (associated with Shiva for protection and the ultimate union), fishes and crocodiles (fertility), sun, moon and the nine planets (power of nature). Ravindra Kumar and Anupama Sirivastav write that Mithila women believed the Sun had the power to "fertilize and impregnate, while the Moon was regarded as the heavenly source of *amrit* or nectar, thus symbolizing life and giving qualities".

In the series *Kalpavriksha*, Suman drew inspiration from an artistic and literary theme common to the Hindu *Bhagavatas*, the *Jains*, and the *Buddhists*. His paintings are a therefore a continuous exploration of a deeply rooted relationship with nature. Suman's intricate and detailed trees are heavy with luscious ripe mangoes, symbolic of sexual yearning and fulfillment, some bear imaginary medallions of desire. Suman painted birds perched on a tree, partaking in its abundance and seeking refuge in its leafy bower. He drew beasts such as the elephants and deer that come to these trees for sustenance and for shelter. He painted wedding processions, men and women celebrating *Chhat*, and a multitude of festivals in which the *Kalpavriksha* tree is a focal point of an intricate Mithila *aripan* or cosmos. In some paintings, a lascivious sun looks on at women

bathing from above the tree tops, while in others the fleeting desires of man, animal, and bird are nurtured in Suman's forests, glades, and groves.

In his 2016 exhibition, SC Suman incorporated images from *Mushahar*, *Jhaangar*, *Dhimal*, *Sataar*, and *Tharu* indigenous communities of the *Tarai* into his paintings. The *Bhitti Chitra* or *Mokha* (*mul-dwaar* or main gate) paintings that embellish the façade of a *Tharu* home with decorative elements around the main gate and windows also find expression in this series. *Salahesh Lok-katha* is another example of how the artist has deftly used *Dusadha* elements in his recent work.

The pantheon of the Hindu Gods: *Krishna* and *Durga* were also depicted in SC Suman's new series. Apart from these sacrosanct visual narratives, the cycle of the seasons, fairs and dances, fertility rites, folk and tribal lore, marriage, other ritual ceremonies, and cultural activities associated with the annual festivals based on the cycles of the moon and sun are themes that Mithila women immortalized in their paintings. Some of the enduring images of Mithila art include agrarian village scenes and village activities. Suman is well versed in these visual narratives. The artist also pays attention to the jewelry of the women, the tattoos that Mithila women receive on their bodies, in some instances the embroidered motifs, fine needlework, and quilting stitches that are used to make blankets become an integral motif embodying the Mithila narrative.

The Great Earthquake of 2015 that devastated Nepal, also found expression in this series. Titled *Rebuild Nepal*, the triptych expresses the pain felt by the artist and the people of Madhesh over the death and destruction caused by the earthquake. His works mourn the loss of an ancient heritage that drew Mithila sages and pilgrims to the Valley. Suman also portrays the humanitarian relief provided by Madhesh to those affected by the earthquake.

Kalpavriksha – the Wish Granting Tree – drew home the point that the very passage of life in the Mithila Cosmos is very deeply rooted in rituals that pay obeisance to nature. This reverence can be interpreted as the collective wisdom of the Mithila people who understood the importance of establishing and maintaining an ecological balance and harmony in their very cosmos or world. This ecological balance is a source of inspiration for Mithila and traditional Paubha artists. The paintings in this exhibition are marked by imaginative use of space, lucid lines, a naïve sense of anatomy, dynamism, and the intuitive use of color. It is this ‘untutored’ aspect of Mithila painting that gives it a distinctive edge and indescribable charm.

In 2015, Suman participated in the Kathmandu Triennale with triptychs that celebrated his interface with the city of Kathmandu. The temples and stupas, the chaotic urban life of the Valley so vastly different from the tranquility of the Mithila cosmos, become central to his work. His series “Song of Innocence and Experience” in 2018 marked his 5th solo oeuvre at the Siddhartha Art Galley, expresses the artist’s desire to narrate his stories about his experience in Kathmandu- a city where the Newar Malla Kings invited Maithali artistes to devote hymns to Lord Shiva at Pashupatinath Temple, a city where pilgrims from the Terai plains flocked to the Valley for Shivaratri and were provided sustenance by the State and then forcibly ousted from the valley once Shivaratri was over, a city where the fear of the other draws us inward, a city that continues to draw pilgrims from multiple faiths, artists, students, lovers, politicians from across the land and beyond, a city where cultures overlap, intermingle and fuse together, a city and the microcosm of hill undergoing rapid change due to urban pressure – Kirtipur hill thus transformed and marked by Amrit Karki’s artistic intervention with a red rectangle for the Kathmandu Triennale.

The exhibition “Songs of Innocence and Experience” was a seamless continuation of Suman’s exploration of his earlier themes and of nature and the environment – the balance of which is now in peril due to human encroachment and greed in the name of economic development. The recent proposition to construct the Neejgadh airport in the Terai after felling 24 lakh trees has resulted in a raging divide between environmentalists and development experts. Suman uses his own subtle auratic visual language to address the impending environmental disaster that such a project will bring on through his paintings and installation. Using grains and cereals of seven different hues the artist created a Neejgadh Aripa, nine terracotta pots painted by children from the SOS village with animals from this forest area, were placed in all the cardinal directions and in the center of this aripa or mandala to articulate the existing harmony in the forest which is now on the brink of destruction and catastrophe.

“Songs of Innocence and Experience” took on a deeply pensive note as the artist reflected on death and life. Paintings of the ghats at Pashupatinath and Vishnumati were juxtaposed against works that celebrate creation and romance. His piety is once again reflected in his paintings of the Goddess Saraswati, Gautam Buddha, Radha Krishna, and in his portrayal of the Valley as a temple-city. Suman quotes the folk song penned by celebrated Maithili poet Kokil Kabi Vidhyapati seven hundred years ago: *Kakhan harab dukh mor- Hey Bholay Nath (when will you soothe my pain -Oh Lord) / Dukhi Janam vel, Dukhi gaman (I was born in pain and persistent suffering) / Sukh Sapana hu nahi vel-Hey Bholay Nath (I have never dreamt of comfort - Oh Lord)/ Achat chanan, abir, ganga jal, bel pat tohi devo- Hey Bholaynath (I offer all your favorite items- vermilion powder, water from the holy Ganga and sacred bel leaves - Oh Lord)/ Yahi vav Sagar thah Katahu nahi*



(there is no charm in this sorrow, please come to me- Oh Lord). The innocence and piety of these words run through the artist's narratives like an ethereal binding thread. The philosophy of Karma –cause and effect – is central to the Artist's belief – and expressed in a unique work "Journey of the Soul" which is included in this series. Is the Artist cajoling us to reflect on the fact, that what we do in this lifetime, within and beyond our physical, emotional, and spiritual space has karmic ramifications for the journey of our soul?

Suman's latest oeuvre Mithila Cosmos: The Story of Cyclical Time in 2021, explores the story of creation and the flux of human destiny viewed through the mythological Hindu time frame. Suman leads us to a time when the universe itself was in flux - when the Gods (*devas*) and the Demons (*asuras*) coexisted in a great cosmic balance are now at war with each other and threaten the position of the Gods. The final battle between these forces of good represented by the *Devas* and evil represented the *Asuras* was a competition to gain the elixir of immortality or *amrit* by churning the ocean's milky waters with *Mount Mandara* as the churning rod and *Vasuki Naga* (the serpent that coils around *Shiva's* neck), as a rope. Though the battle was tough, the Gods emerge victorious in the end. The churning of the oceans also resulted in many treasures being borne from its very waters: Goddess *Lakshmi*, the *Kamdhenu* Cow, and the *Kalpavriksha*.

Suman presents us with a familiar image of Goddess *Laxmi* at the feet of Lord *Vishnu* – afloat on the ocean, seated on a bed of coiled serpents that raise their multiple reptilian heads to provide protection to this divine couple as *Brahma* (the Creator within the *Trimurti* that includes *Vishnu* and *Shiva*) looks on. This cosmic

Kamdhenu
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

ocean is after all the source from where all life emanates and the artist turns to the ancient Hindu texts to explore and interpret the story of creation which begins when *Shakti* (female energy) first separates from *Shiva* (male energy) in a state of differentiated potential and then merges in a sexual union that gives birth to life. The artist reminds us that *Shakti* has many benign avatars but when she manifests as *Kali* – she represents the wrathful and bloodthirsty side of the Goddess *Devi* who wields power to destroy the evils of the world. Out of destruction comes creation which is the intrinsic cyclical reality of nature itself.

The artist creates his own visual interpretation of the four cyclical yugas or ages (*satya yuga*, *treta yuga*, *dvapara yuga*, and *kali yuga*) which are described in great detail in Hindu cosmology. These predetermined periods specify the fate of *dharma*, how the greed of mankind in each of these great cycles creates monumental ruptures that affect the balance of nature, the ecology, the socio-political state of the world, and humanity itself. The last period in this cycle is *Kaliyuga* which represents the total degeneration of dharma and mankind. To escape this cycle of depravity and degeneration, divine intervention is required and the Gods need to manifest themselves in different avatars to defeat the forces of evil and restore balance in the world. In this dark period of bloodletting and war, *Kali* descends down on earth with her divine weapons of war, wearing a necklace of severed heads to vanquish the opponents of the dharma. At this time *Kalki*, the tenth avatar of Vishnu swoops down across the universe on a white horse to redeem mankind and usher in an age of enlightenment and truth. Suman's textured narratives highlight the essence of each of these pre-determined periods where mankind is destined to err.

In Hindu mythology, each of these yugas calls for a specific avatar to redeem the situation. SC Suman's rendition of

Dashavatar, portrays the ten incarnations or avatars whose divine interventions save the world in each of the *yugas*. An additional narrative is woven around the four cyclical yugas. These paintings focus on the joy and harmony of nature, where even the tiny ladybirds rejoice. The artist also addresses the repercussions of human greed at all levels and portrays an abysmal situation where wildlife and their habitat are destroyed, forests are felled in the name of development, COVID prevails and bats are blamed for the rise of the pandemic. In this age of the anthropocene, will we ever learn from our mistakes and be freed from the great web of *maya* or illusion that entraps us all?

But not all is doom and gloom – Suman's narratives also focus on the coming of age, awareness, erotic desire, love, and the harmony of nature. In this world – women frolic in the pond, swing in the mango orchard, and where luscious fruits are ripe for the picking and desires are unsheathed. Here male-female energies are intoxicated with each other and this union gives birth to the continuum of life and hope. Suman paints the Mithila community coming together to celebrate their age-old cultural festivals: women gather to paint the nuptial chambers or Kobhar Ghar for newlywed couples, the Chhath festival, the Dashami festival, Ganesh Puja, Gauri Puja, and the story of Salahesh.

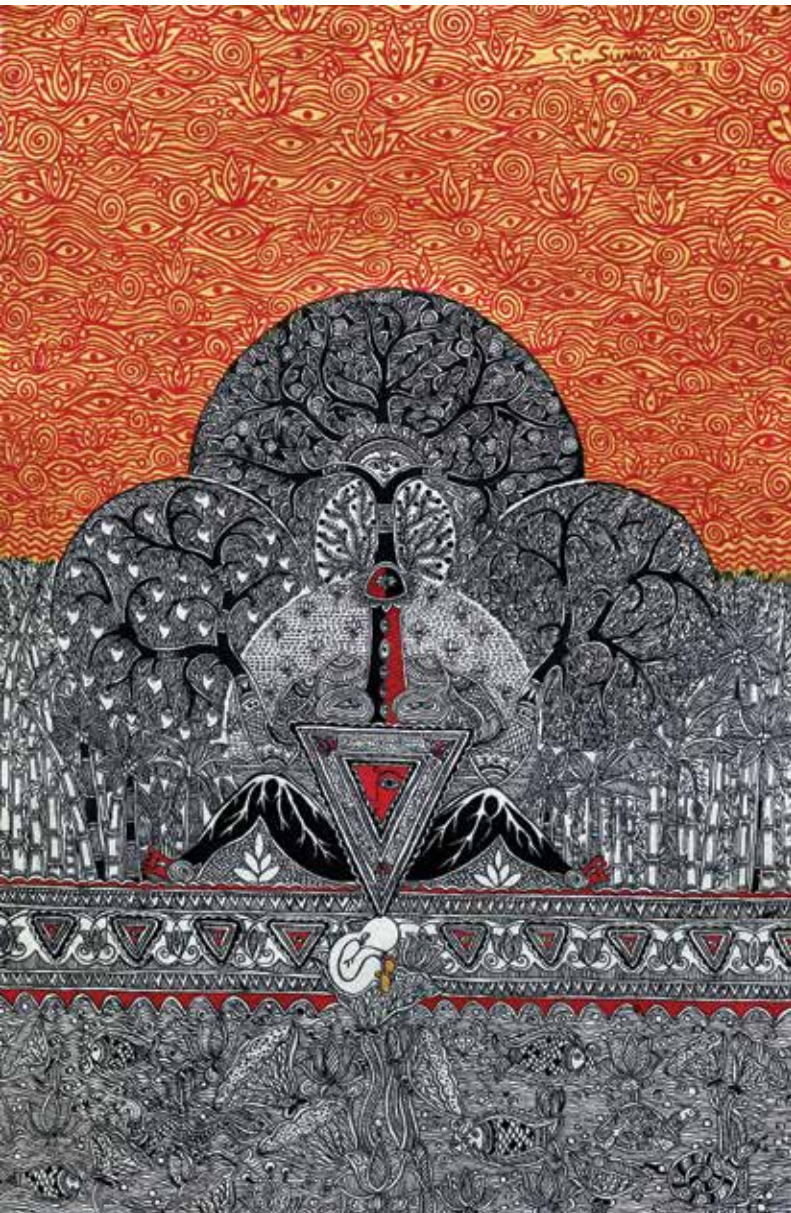
Suman's works are not only steeped in the great cultural traditions of the Mithila world and in the great legends gleaned from Hindu mythology but in the present trials and tribulations of mankind which he renders with the vibrancy of master artist.

Sangeeta Thapa

Founder Director | Siddhartha Art Gallery

Founder Director | Siddhartha Arts Foundation

Founder Chair | Kathmandu Triennale



MITHILA COSMOS: THE CYCLES OF TIME

Beerendra Pandey

Male-Female Union and Creation

Creation begins when *Shakti* (female energy) first separates from *Shiva* (male energy) in a state of differentiated potential and merges into a sexual union. The union is symbolized in the artwork by means of an enlarged yoni and the repletion of its icon—*Devi yantra*—at the border. The coming together of the *yonis* (in pink) and the *lingam* (in black) is helped by the upwelling of the *Panchabhuta* (five elements) in the yoni indicated by the five dots. The union, thus, culminates into the birth of a baby and other life forms.

Male female union and creation
50 x 75 cm | Acrylic on Nepali Paper | 2021



Creation and Destruction

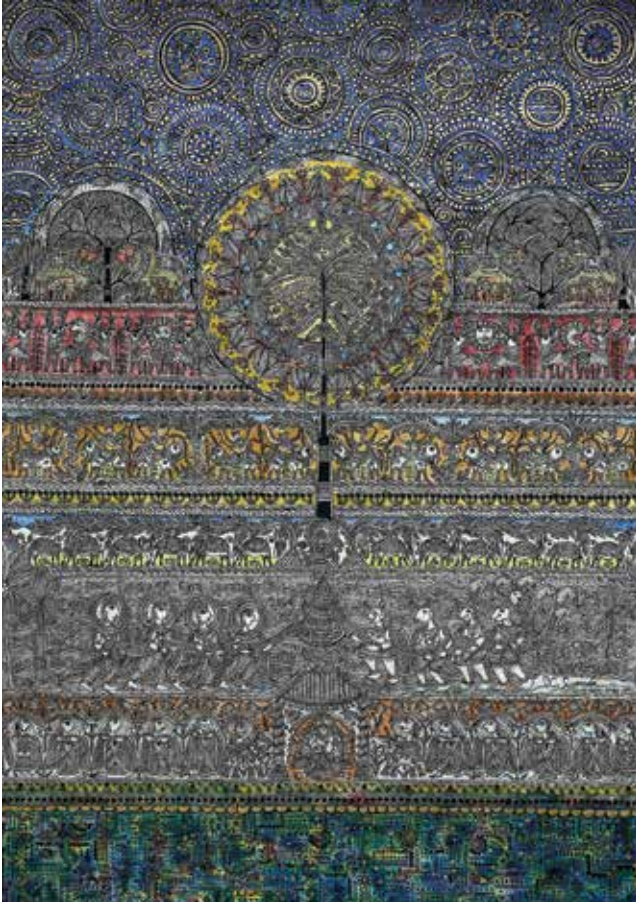
Shakti becomes *Kali* as time gives rise to the past, present, and future. The hoary and bloodthirsty side of the *Devi* destroys the past to summon the future. Creation that begins with time and which is then sustained through death is propounded in the painting through the repetition of creation motifs in the work 'Male and Female Union and Creation'. The creation motifs are balanced with the motif of destruction—without which there is room neither for the newness of the present, nor the freshness of the future. The destructive aspects have been depicted through *Kali* holding a *Kharag* and a necklace of severed heads while her lower right hand is in *Abhay Mudra*, which in contrast, portrays her as a mother who protects her children.

Devi as a Great Balancer

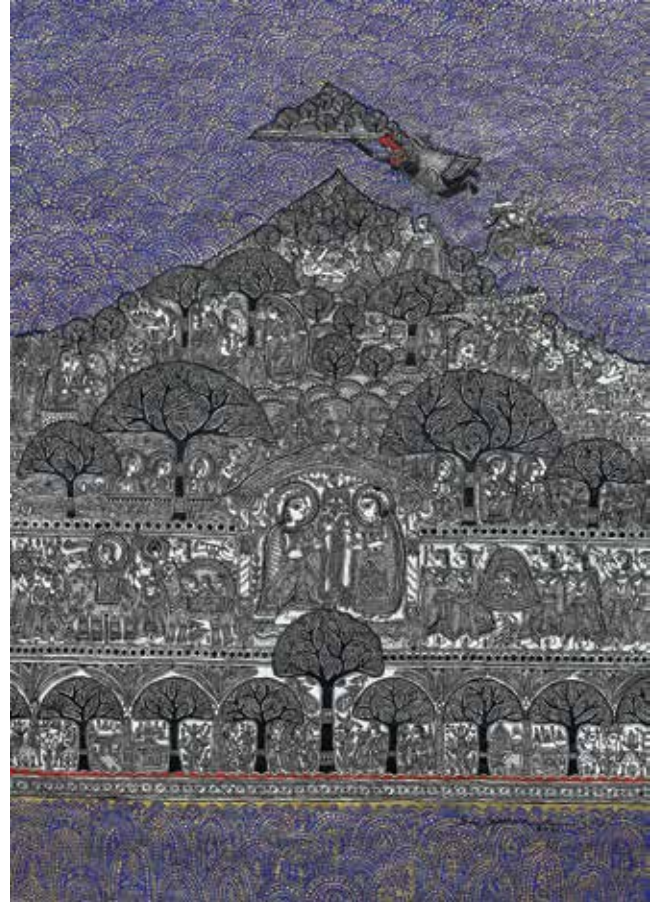
This painting shows *Devi* as the divine force at work and as the one who nurtures the ecological balance in nature. She is also portrayed as a supreme nurturer, taker of all life, and the source of all ecological wisdom. She is the one who creates life and gathers it back into herself. Along with her fierceness which is emphasized through her bounty of human skulls, there is also an abundance of life forms around her. The *Devi* gazes at us with her three eyes—the gaze through which she makes life happen.

Devi as a Great Balancer

50x75 cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021



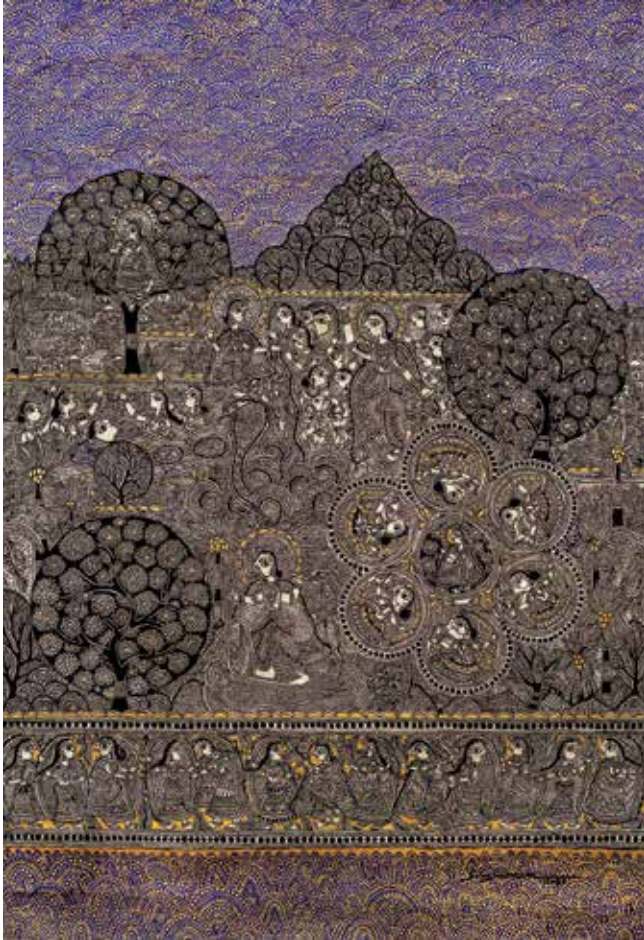
Satya Yuga
75x110cm | Mixed Media on Nepali paper | 2021



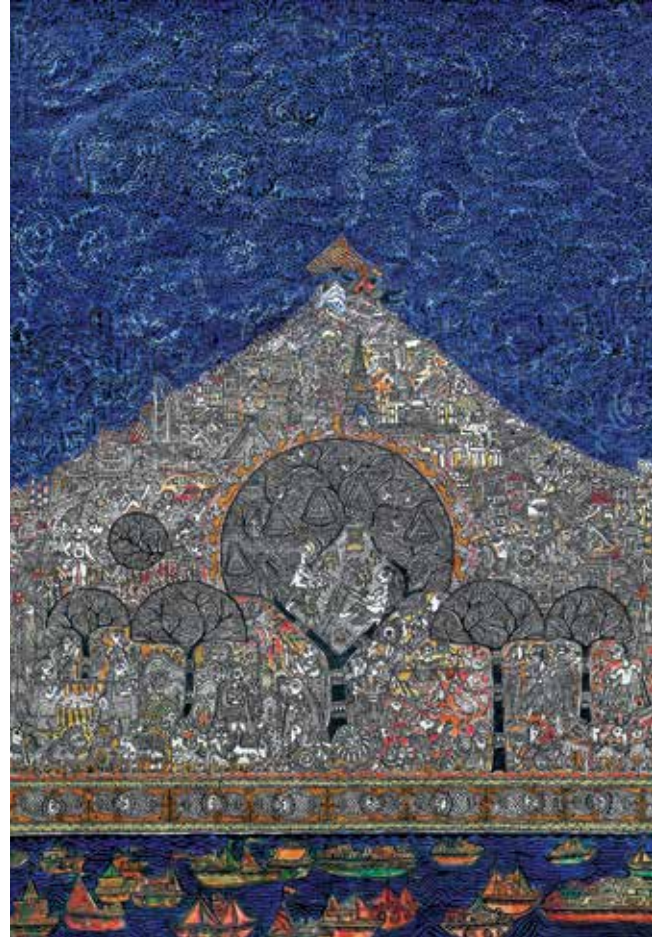
Tretā Yuga
75x110cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

Satya Yuga

Maithils believe that a yuga which indicates the age of time also describes the cycle of creation and destruction. The first of the world ages is *Satya Yuga* which lasted 1,728,000 years. The reigning deity of this age of truth is Lord *Vishnu*, shown in his tortoise incarnation. The painting also shows the churning of the ocean when the gods and asuras worked together and all living things lived in harmony. The icon of *Lord Ganesh* shines at the bottom to show that there was prosperity, affluence, and well-being everywhere. *Satya Yuga* was both literally and metaphorically a golden age— the idea is reinforced by the warm golden hues in the artwork.



Dvapara Yuga
75x110cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021



Kali Yuga
75x110cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

Tretā Yuga

The second yuga for the Maithils is the *Treta Yuga* which lasted for 1,296,000 years. The artwork depicts this world with the rendition of the story of the *Ramayana*, an epic that narrates the story of the seventh incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* as *Ram* who personifies, through his actions, the importance of norms and rules to keep the society, which now has slightly degenerated, under control. Lord *Hanuman* is seen flying atop carrying mountain *Dronagiri*.

Dvapara Yuga

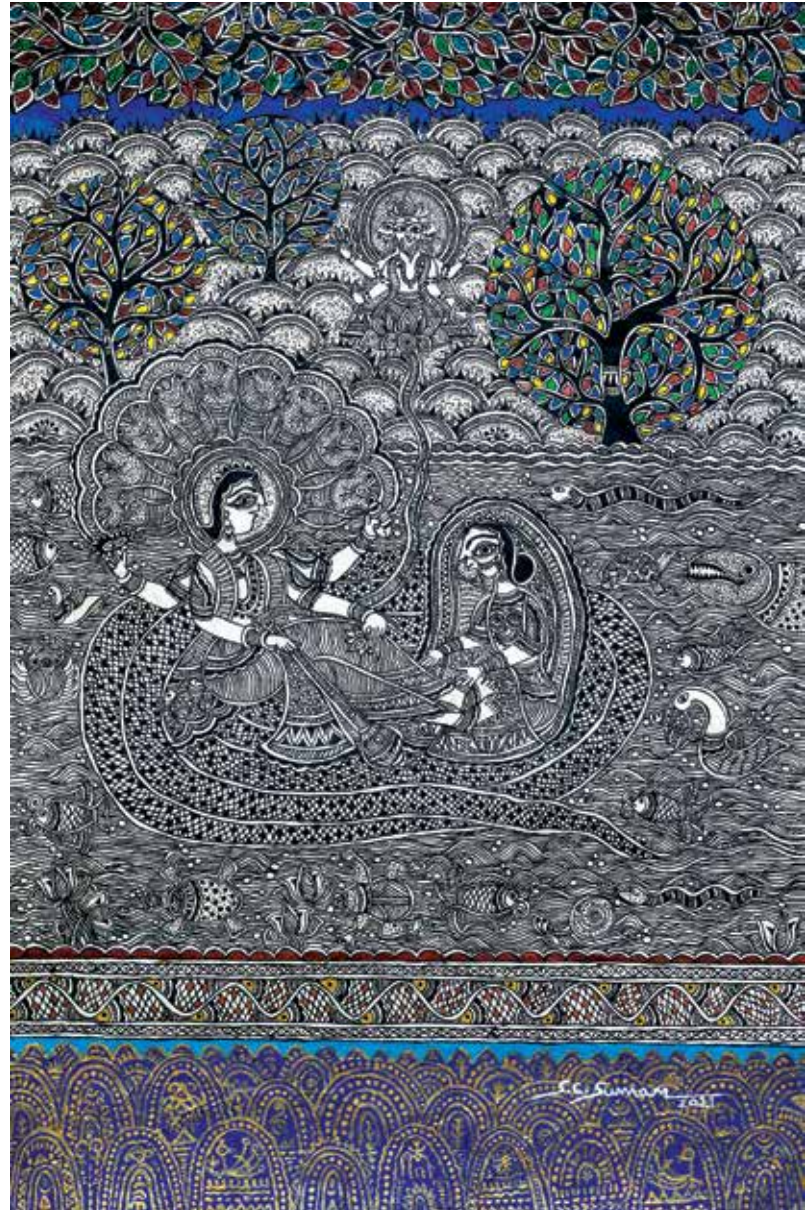
The next yuga for the Maithils is the *Dvapara Yuga* which lasted for 864,000 years. This is the age of Lord *Krishna*—the eighth avatar of Lord *Vishnu*—known for his charm and wit. The painting depicts the age through the icons of *Krishna Lila*.

Kali Yuga

The fourth and the last of the yugas is the most degenerate one—as it is implied that the world becomes more impure as the yugas pass. For the Maithils, the *Kali Yuga* is the present age, which began in 3102 BCE and will last 432,000 years. The chaos and impurity of this yuga are shown in the painting through the icons of indiscriminate dominations and killings of the powerless by the powerful as well as the decimations of plant and animal life. The *Kali Yuga* is bound to end with total destruction of the world and time itself.

Vishnu, Laxmi and the Cosmic Ocean

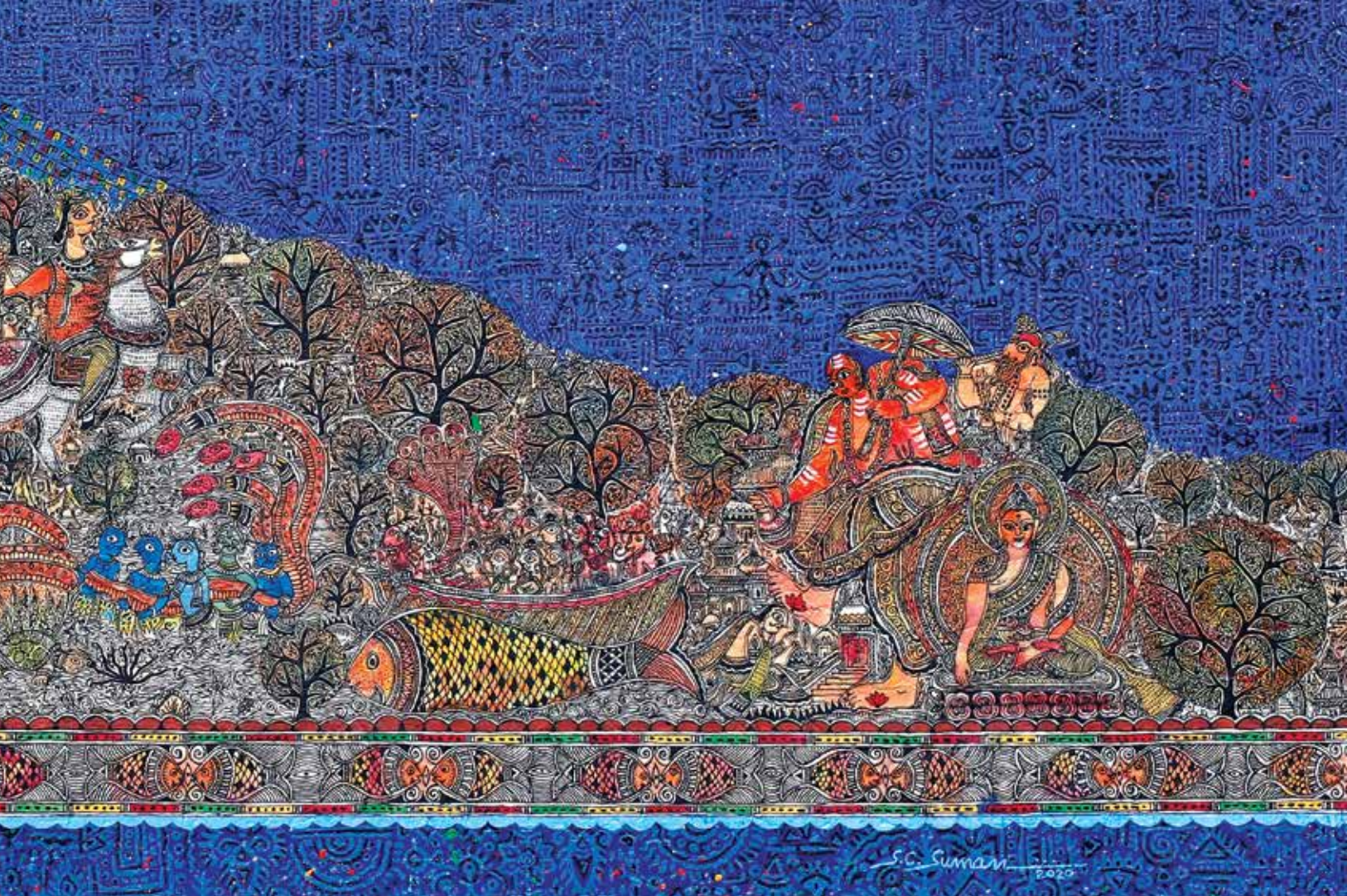
Suman presents us with a familiar image of Goddess *Laxmi* at the feet of Lord *Vishnu* – afloat on the ocean, seated on a bed of coiled serpents that raise their multiple reptilian heads to provide protection to this divine couple as *Brahma* (the Creator within the *Trimurti* that includes *Vishnu* and *Shiva*) looks on.



Vishnu, Laxmi and the Cosmic Ocean
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021



Dashavtar
200x70cm | Mixed Media on Nepali paper | 2021

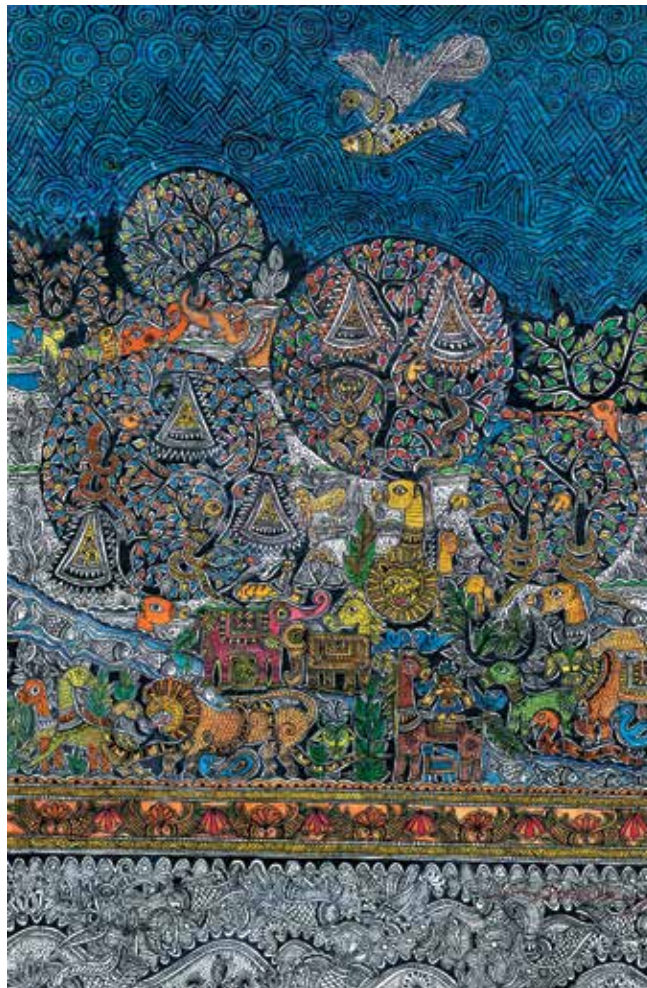


Dashavtar

This Mithila artwork sums up the story of the four cycles of world time through a continuum of the *Dashavatara* (Ten Incarnations of Lord Vishnu). A new *Kalpa* (world cycle) begins when the old one faces dissolution due to *adharma* (evil conduct) on the part of human beings. The artwork dramatizes Lord Vishnu's cosmic administration, where each beginning culminates into an end, and each end heralds a new beginning. It also implies that whenever the rules are upheld only in ceremony and not in spirit, Lord Vishnu, as Krishna-incarnate, comes forward to protect *dharma* (righteous conduct) and restore a natural balance.



Ecological Balance
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2020



Wildlife in Natural Balance
50x70cm | Acrylic on nepali paper | 2020

Ecological Balance

In this series, artist S C Suman looks at natural balance gone astray in *Kali Yuga*. Through this section, he emphasizes the need to maintain ecological balance so that the current era of *Kali Yuga* does not culminate into a total environmental disaster. The interdependence of the snake and the bird for sustenance is a metaphor for the need for stability in the ecosystem.

Wildlife and Natural Balance

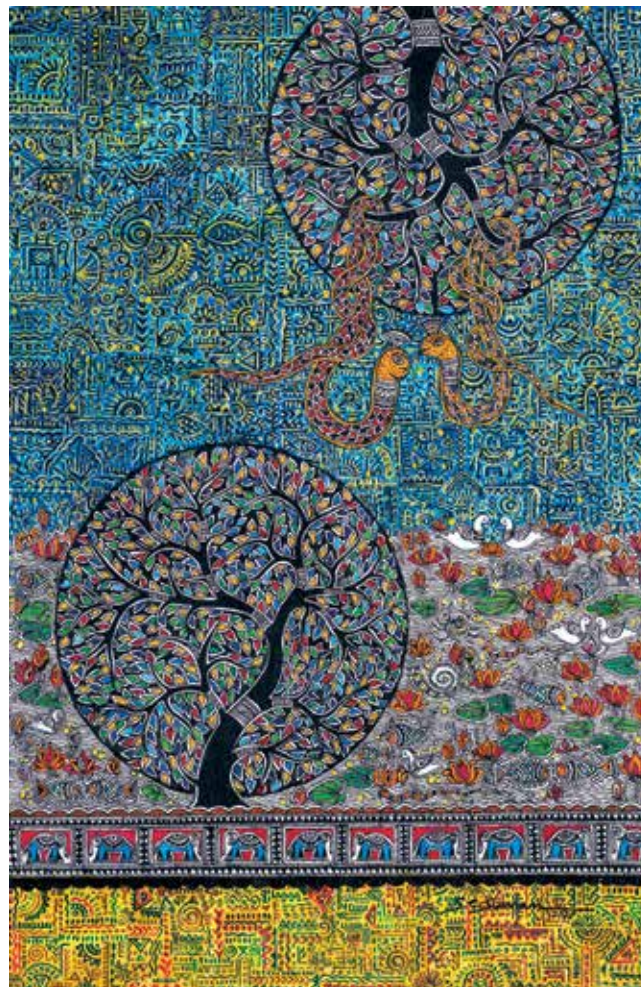
This painting, like *Ecological Balance*, depicts the ecological equilibrium of nature and highlights the vibrant wildlife in the forest. The natural cycle of the food chain – where animals prey on each other– leads to a balance in their numbers which, in turn, keeps the forest vegetation in a stable state.

Aesthetic Sentiments in Nature

The painting portrays a romantic atmosphere amidst nature where *Shiva and Shakti*—the male and female energies—love and revel in each other's company. It portrays the symbiotic relationship between love and beauty— what we love becomes beautiful in our eyes and we love what is physically and intrinsically beautiful. For Suman, love and beauty are manifestations of the divinity of creation and that the aesthetics of creation exists in those moments when *Shiva and Shakti*, decided to play a game of separation and union

The Love Rasa in Nature

Like *Aesthetic Sentiments in Nature*, this painting places the spotlight on the romantic atmosphere that pervades nature. Through the depiction of a pair of deer—a doe and a buck— the artist implies that lovers create a harmonious universe of their own. Their union is complemented by a pleasant breeze. Mutual love indicates the harmonization of each other's egos, which results in a healthy balance of male and female energies, and attachments.



The Love Rasa in Nature
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2020

Women and Water

Suman depicts a bathing game where women pluck the lotus flower from the river. The waves of the water are juxtaposed against the waves of the wind to suggest the adolescent vivacity and beauty of women.

The Swing in a Mango Orchard

This artwork represents the feminine musings of pubescent Maithil girls. In the early monsoon, young girls go to their orchards to guard the ripening mangoes. The succulent mangoes are symbolic of their puberty and growing desires. The artwork reinforces the themes of expectation, love, and fertility which are mirrored in the iconic trees blossoming with flowers and green leaves on the border. It also marks the beginning of the rainy season where the earth's fecundity provides fresh grass as fodder to the goatherds.

Naturally Intoxicated for Each Other

The artwork shows a pond brimming with water and with thriving life forms. The lotus flower, a symbol of feminine beauty and yoni, studs the center of the pond. Along with the lotus, other flowers, pairs of swans, fish, and snakes, all evocative of love appear entwined, as they rest on the surging water.

Kohbar Painting

Kohbar Ghar (nuptial chamber) are special paintings made by women for nuptial chambers that celebrate love and provide sexual instruction to a newly married couple. It marks a bride's first union with her groom-to-be. Suman recreates the traditional *Kobhar* painting by composing the artwork inside a circle, accurately interspersing it with images of *Navagraha*, *Panchdevata*, parrots, and peacocks in pairs. In the center, he meticulously draws the image of a continuum of lotus leaves connected to the root, thereby wishing for the bride's blissful propagation in the conjugal life. Along with emphasizing the possibility of fertility by depicting

different creatures in a union, one can also see the bride and the bridegroom in sexual union.

Ganesh Puja Festival

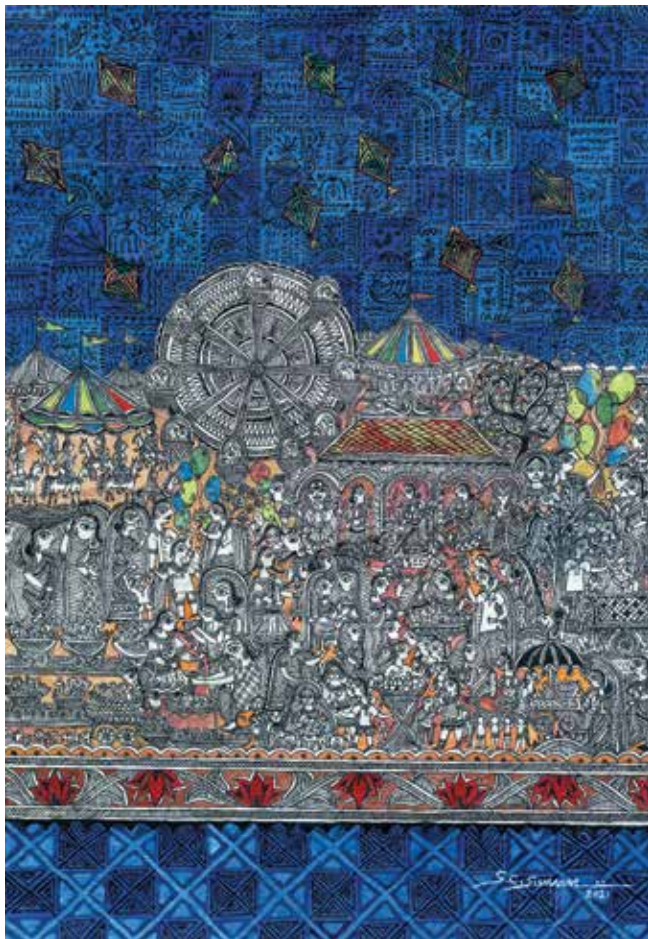
This artwork captures the celebratory aura of the *Ganesh Puja* festival also known as *Ganesh Chaturthi*. This festival observes the arrival of Lord Ganesh to earth from *Kailash Parvat* with his mother *Goddess Gauri*. People of Mithila are seen placing Lord *Ganesh's* clay *murtis* privately in homes as well as in public places. They also float flowers baskets on the river on *Visarjan* day, while chanting *Ganesh's* name amidst the tunes of local musical ensemble.

Dashami Mela

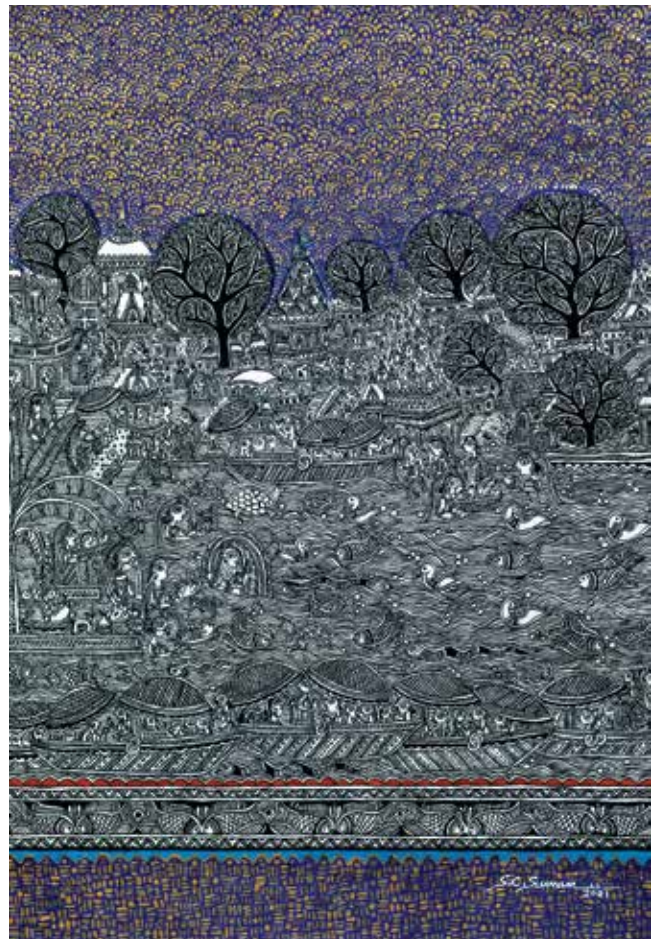
The painting is an artistic panorama of the *Dashami Mela* in Mithila—a grand village fair that culminates into the *Visarjan* of the clay idol of Mother *Durga*. It is a festival celebrating the victory of *Goddess Durga* over the buffalo demon *Mahishasura*.

Chhath Puja

The artwork captures the celebration of *Chhath* on the banks of the *Ganga* in *Varanasi, India*. *Chhath* is a festival that is dedicated to the solar deity, *Surya*, and his sister *Chhathi Maiya*. Along with the razzmatazz of the decorated river banks, the painting also focuses on the life of the river. It beautifully encapsulates the aim of the festival, which is to show gratitude to the divine for bestowing the bounties of life on earth, as well as to pray for the granting of certain wishes.



Dashami Mela
50x75cm | Mixed Media on Nepali paper | 2021



Chhath Puja
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

Illusion

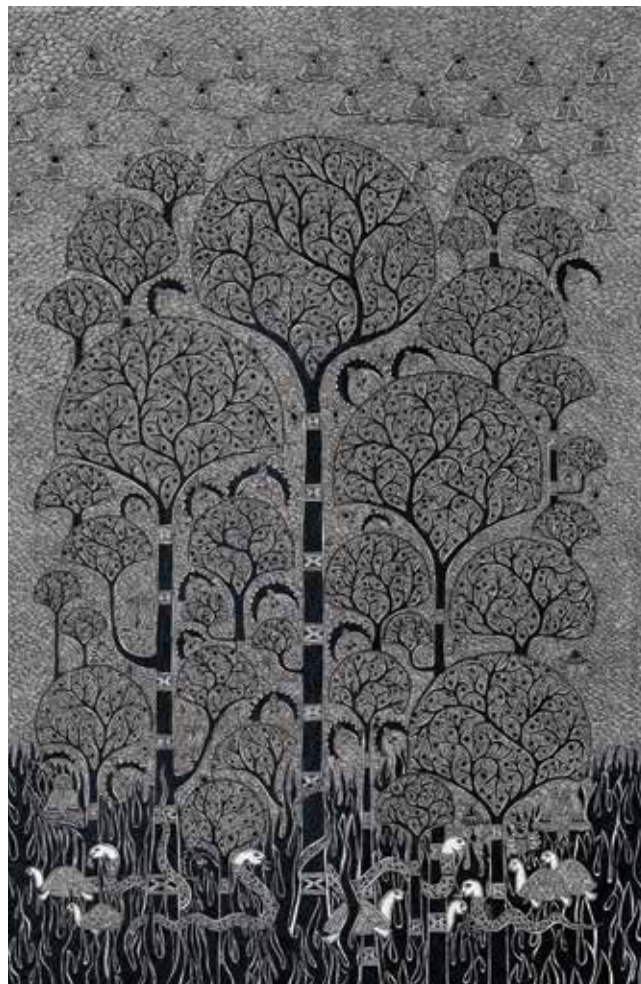
In ancient Vedic times, the *Rishis* referred to illusion as *Maya* or that which is not. However, this is often misunderstood and thought to mean that this world you live in doesn't exist. Maya is the contraction of a consciousness that should be fully expanded, all-knowing. It's when you look around and experience all the thousands of individual objects, but miss their true essence or pure consciousness that connects them all as part of the eternal wholeness. Inspired by the Gita, Suman seeks to highlight that one's spiritual journey is to move towards the light, step out of the boundaries, and enjoy the unlimited freedom of the world without getting entrapped by attachment.

Insatiable Desire

SC Suman emphasizes the sacrality of the forest through his painting of the banyan tree which symbolizes trinity in the Hindu pantheon— *Lord Vishnu* is believed to be the bark, *Lord Brahma* the roots, and *Lord Shiva* the branches. The tree also signifies eternal life as it supports the eternal canopy by growing special roots from its branches. The way the tree shelters the birds and snakes with its abundant fruits gives it the essence of a *kalpavriksha*, it has the quality of fructifying wishes for the provision and gains in ecological harmony.

Scapegoating Bats for the Pandemic

Bats—despite their recent scrutiny—are incredibly important for the balance of our ecology. Though bats have been central for the maintenance of the flora and fauna of Mithila, bats have rarely been featured as a motif in Mithila painting. In this artwork, Suman has featured bats as the primary motif to exemplify that bats can't be fully blamed for the pandemic (whether the COVID-19 variant came from bats is still under debate)—and how issues like habitat destruction, overpopulation, etc are also at play.



Scapegoating Bat for Covid Pandemic
90x140cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021

Lockdown Blues I

This artwork shows the entire humanity groaning under the tangential stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. People are seen cooped up in closed spaces, locked away from the world outside. Their faces are veiled by masks and a ghastly gloom looms over the entire work. Suman has also drawn an inverted tree of life rooted in the sky that dispenses wisdom and creative energy through its branches which are turned towards the earth. He implies that with this tree and its spiritual powers, the devilish virus will be controlled, thereby putting an end to the life of inactivity, fear, and uncertainty.

Covid Lessons

This artwork showcases the reflections we must glean from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this artwork, we see large elaborate *kalpavrikshyas*, which in the past were capable of providing life and air, struggling and asking to be saved. The umbrellas that hover over the trees symbolize how in this age of destruction, they are being felled due to the needs of the contemporary world. As trees are cut, humans are forced to bring oxygen from airplanes in cylinders, destroying the natural relationship between trees and people.



Covid lessons
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2021



Lady Bug
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2020

Ladybugs

Ladybugs symbolize the beauty and purity of nature. In the artwork, the ladybugs are seen nibbling on leaves, thriving in an environment that is natural. Suman seeks to point out that the leaves ladybugs eat are safe for us as well. However, if unnatural chemicals and pesticides are used to kill ladybugs and other pests, it is only a matter of time that the chemicals will also start affecting us too. Suman concludes that as long as the ladybugs are healthy, humans will also be healthy.

Lockdown Blues II

Though most of his artworks feature people in different dimensions, this particular artwork is devoid of people and an eerie atmosphere of silence permeates this work. Suman has shown how the lockdowns under COVID-19, left the temples, buildings, streets empty - bereft of human activity. The pandemic has walled us inside our homes, prohibiting us from enjoying nature and beauty.

Kamadhenu

The churning of the oceans, during the conflict between the *Devas* and *Asuras*—resulted in many treasures being borne from its very waters like Goddess Lakshmi, the *Kalpavriksha*, and the *Kamadhenu* Cow who is the central figure of this artwork. *Kamadhenu* is the personification of mother nature who keeps on giving without asking for anything in return. Like nature, *Kamadhenu* provides milk endlessly, fully nourishing those who rely on her.

Gauri Puja In The Ramayan

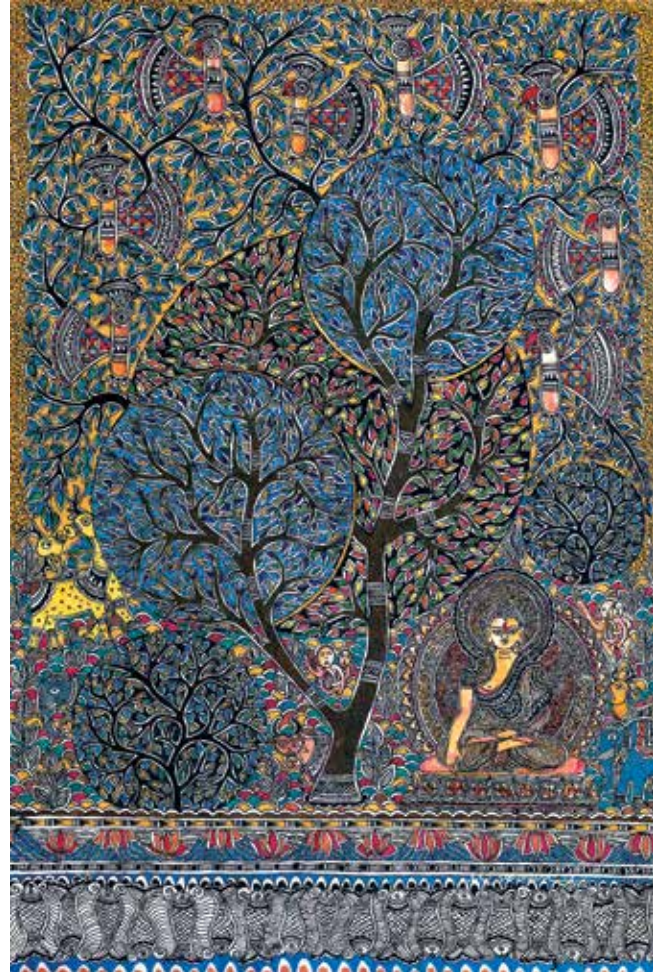
Gauri, also known as *Girja* is another name of *Parvati*, goddess of power and energy. In the *Ramayan*, Sita prays to goddess Parvati to facilitate her marriage with Lord Ram by empowering him with the strength to lift and break King Janak's mighty bow. Goddess Gauri granted Sita's wish, which led to the successful union of Sita and Rama.

Gautam Buddha

This painting recounts Gautam Buddha seated under the *Bodhi vriskshya* in a meditative stance. Under this very tree, after meditating for 49 days, Gautam Buddha attained *nirvana* (enlightenment). In the *vaishnavite* effect of Hinduism, Gautama Buddha is regarded as the ninth avatar among the ten major avatars of the Lord *Vishnu*.

The Tale of Salاهش

Suman has depicted the popular folklore of King Salاهش. The artwork depicts the Salاهش fulbari, which boasts a special orchid that is said to bloom only once a year. The garden is located in Siraha, Suman's hometown. With this painting, he pays homage to his roots and recounts a revered folklore.



Gautam Buddha
50x75cm | Acrylic on Nepali paper | 2020

Dr. Prof. Beerendra Pandey
Professor of English & Managerial Communication
Fullbright PhD from State University of New York
at Stony Brook



SUBODH CHANDRA DAS (SC SUMAN)

Former Council Member

Head, Department of Folk Arts

Nepal Academy of Fine Arts Sitabhawan

Naxal, Kathmandu.

CO-CURATOR:

2nd Karnaphuli Folk Triennial 2018, Chittagong, Bangladesh.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS :

- 2021 : Mithila Cosmos : The Story of Cyclical Time, ..Siddarth Art Gallery, Kathamandu, Nepal.
- 2021 : "Art for Hope" - Kathmandu Art House. Kathamadu, Nepal.
- 2018 : Mithila Cosmos : Songs of Innocence and Experience, Siddharth Art Gallery, kathamandu, Nepal.
- 2016 : Mithila Cosmos: Kalpavriksha, Siddharth Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2013 : Mithila Cosmos : Circumambulating the Tree of Life, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2012 : S. C. Suman: Microcosm: A Moment of Delight in Contentment, Maithili Sewa Samiti, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2011 : Know Thyself: Maithili Sewa Samiti, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2011 : Mithila Cosmos : New Narratives, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2007 : The Mithila Cosmos: Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2007 : Mithila Art Exhibition, Everest Souvenir Adelaide, Australia.
- 2006 : Mithila Paintings – A view, Mithila MahotsavJanakpur, Nepal.
- 2004 : Image of Terai, Indigo Gallery, Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2002 : Synthesis of Terai, Indigo Gallery, Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2002 : Tradition and Expression of Mithila Painting, Mithila MahotsavJanakpur, Nepal.
- 1998 : Maithili Art, Indigo Gallery, Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 1998 : Mithila Art Exhibition, Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association, Netherland.
- 1997 : Mithila Art : A Living Tradition, Koshi Mahotsav, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 1991 : Maithili Art Exhibition, All Nepal Medical Conference of Nepal Medical Association in Nepal

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2021 : Asian & African and mediterranean International Art Exhibition (AAMA), China.
- 2021 : Looking Forward to the Future: Modernism in Nepali Art"-during the 14th Annual Conference of South Asian Studies Association (SASA) Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, USA.
- 2020 : "MASK-ART Creativity under lockdown - UNESCO & MEADOWS artist against COVID 19", UNESCO, Beirut.
- 2020 : "Our Home-The Belt and Road Nation's Art Exhibition" organized by China Artists Association and Shanghai Art Museum, China.
- 2020 : Transgential Stress, MONA Museum of Nepali Art, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2019 : AMALAGAM - 2019, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2019 : A Colourful world and share future- 8"th Beijing international Art Biennale Beijing China .
- 2018 : 2nd Karnaphuli Folk Triennial- Chittagong, Bangladesh.

- 2018 : 1st South Asian Art Festival- organized by Nepal Academy of fine arts.
- 2018 : 4th International Art festival Love and Inspiration in Korea, organized by Costanza Foundation
- 2018 : Nepal Art Fair, Bangladesh- Organized by Nepal Academy of fine Arts and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.
- 2017 : The Maritime Silk Road International Art Festival, Department of Culture of Fujian Province. Municipal People's Government. of Quanzhou China.
- 2017 : Celebration on the Silk Road- 7th Beijing international Art Biennale Beijing China.
- 2017 : Below the Clouds Exhibition of Contemporary, Nepalese Art Organized by Coome Gallery, UK
- 2017 : SAARC Artists camp & Exhibition of Paintings, Nepal, organized by Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Govt. of Nepal and SAARC Culture Center of Sri Lanka .
- 2017 : Kathmandu Triennale - 2017 S.M.A.K.Museum of Contemporary Art. Ghent and Siddhartha Arts Foundation.
- 2016 : International Water Colour Festival 2016, International Watercolor Society, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, Nepal
- 2016 : Satrangi, Mithila Madhubani Art Exhibition, Ojas Art Gallery, New Delhi, India 2016 : Santi Ra Sadhabhav, Himalayan Arts & Culture Foundation, Nepal .
- 2015 : Exhibition of Prints and Paintings on the occasion of Valentine Day, Artist Proof Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2015 : 1st Karnaphuli Folk Triennial, Chittagong, Bangladesh.
- 2014 : Under Standing Gender (pariwartan socha ma), Artist Proof Gallery & Image Gallery. Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2014 : Search of Ethics (Naitikta ko khoji), Women Artist Group of Nepal (WAGON) at Artist Proof, Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2009 : Separating Myth from Reality: Status of Women, Kathmandu International Art Festival, Organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2009 : Stop Violence Against Women - An Art Exhibition, OHCHER - Nepal (Eastern Regional Office, Biratnagar and Lalitkala Sangam, Biratnagar, Nepal).
- 2008 : AMALAGAM - 2008, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2008 : Mithila Group Art Exhibition, Mithila Artist Society, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2005 : Art Exhibition in Nagoya, Japan, Organized by Artist Association (wind) Japan.
- 1998- 2004 : 29th- 35th "National Art & Craft Exhibition, Nepal Association of Fine Art, (NAFA), Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2000 : Art Exhibition in France, Asian Artist Agromax - French Cultural Association, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 1998 : Group of Exhibition, All Nepal Commercial Artist Association, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 1996 : Mithila Art Exhibition, Birgunj Jaycess, Nepal. Work Shop & Exhibition:
- 2021 : 1st Annual MoNA Art Festival - exhibited in the Karna Annex Lobby, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2017 : 1st International Natural Art Festival Nawalparasi Nepal- 2017, Kalawari Art Council, Nawalparasi Nepal
- 2016 : Janakpur Literature - Art festivals: Organized by Janakpur vikas kosha, Jankpurdham, Nepal.
- 2016 : Ramayan Circuit - Art Workshop & Exhibitions, BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation.
- 2014 : Birat Biseswar Bimarsha - Art Workshop & Exhibitions, Gurasha Library Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2013 : Paintings On Nepali Story Art Workshop & Exhibitions, Kalrab and Yumma Fine Art Academy, Dharan, Nepal.
- 2012 : Workshop, Demonstration & Exhibitions of Paintings in Tharu Community at Hathimuda Village, Morang Organized by Chetana Sanrakchhan Pratisthan, Nepal.
- 2012 : Naitikta Ko Khoji National Art Workshop & Exhibitions, (WAGON), Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2011 : National Art Workshop & Exhibitions, Arohan, Gurukul, Biratnagar Nepal.
- 2002 : National Art Workshop & Exhibitions, Lalit Kala Sangam & Rotary Club, Biratnagar, Nepal.

AWARDS & CERTIFICATES:

- 2021 : Certificate of Honour - Mithila Natya Kala Parishad, Janakpurdham, Nepal
- 2019 : Certificate of Honour by Dehi Art during Art- Lit Fest, Kakervitta, Jhapa, Nepal.
- 2018 : Certificate of Honour, 'Hanumandhoka Durbar Square World Heritage to Swoyambhu World Heritage walk', Kathmandu Municipality, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2016 : Certificate of Appreciation, Janakpur Vikash kosh, Janakpurdham, Nepal.
- 2016 : Appreciation Letter, Embassy of India, BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundaton.
- 2014 : Certificate of Appreciation, Purwanchal Chetriya Mahila Samajik Manch, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2013 : Certificate of Appreciation, Women Artist Group of Nepal (WAGON).
- 2013 : Subhash Baral Smriti Bani Smman, BaniPrakashanBiratnagar.
- 2013 : Certificates of Excellence by KU & American Embassy Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 2012 : Samman by Kalrab and Yumma Fine Art Academy Dharan, Nepal.
- 2011 : Samman (Certificates of Honor) by Maithili BikashAbhiyan, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2011 : Samman (Certificates of Excellence) by Maithili SewaSamiti, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 2008 : Rastriya Pratibha (National Talent) Puraskar By Nepal Government.
- 2004 : Special National Award in the 35th National Art & Craft Exhibition, Organized by Nepal. Aassociation of Fine Art (NAFA), Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 1999 : National Award – Second Prize in 30th National Art & Craft Exhibition Organized by Nepal. Association of Fine Art (NAFA), Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 1998 : National Award in the 29th National Art & Craft Exhibition Organized by Nepal Association of Fine Art (NAFA), Kathmandu, Nepal.
- 1997 : Special Consolation Prize in KoshiMahotsav, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- 1994 : Consolation Prize in Greetings Card Design Content, Bhaktapur, Nepal. Travel : France, Dubai, Germany, India, Bangladesh, China. "Mithila Yatra" (Village of Mithila in Nepal, India Visit & Study of Mithila Paintings).

MEMBERSHIP:

- Siddharta Art Foundation, Nepal
- Lalit Kala Sangam, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- Chitransh, Sewa Parishad.
- Chetana Sanrakchhan Pratisthan Nepal,
- Rita Memorial Trust, Rajbiraj, Nepal.
- Siddharth Art Foundation
- Sivata Love Foundation Nepal

ADVISER:

- Mithila Kalakar Samaj, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Maithili Sewa Samiti, Biratnagar, Nepal.
- Birat Mithila Natya Kala Parishad, Biratnagar, Nepal.

COLLECTION:

- MONA Museum of Nepali Art
- Bangladesh Shilpkal academy.
- 7th and 8th Beijing International Art Biennale organizing committee.
- S.M.A.K Museum Belgium,
- J.K. Museum, Pokhara, Nepal
- Kalawati Art Council, Nawalparasi Nepal.
- Nepal, India, USA, UK, Japan, Denmark, Canada, Netherlands, France, Kenya,
- Switzerland, Italy, Russia, Egypt, South Korea, Mexico, Australia.

MEDIA COVERAGE:

- Articles, Interviews, Published and aired through various mainstream print and electronic media on the issue of Mithila Art, Culture & Paintings.

AS A WRITER:

- Articles on Fine Arts and Culture published in National Daily Papers, Weekly and Monthly. Magazines.
- Aesthetics of Mithila Art, Siddhartha Art Foundation Education Initiative

PAPER PRESENTATIONS:

- 2020 : Reporting of Nepali Handicraft.
- 2020 : How to read and write paintings.
- 2019 : Abadhi folk art past and present .
- 2018 : Master Artist of Mithila.
- 2018 : History of Mithila Art.
- 2017 : An Ancient tribal Arts Depicts Modern Contemporary Art.
- 2017 : An Ancient Mithila Art Depicts Modern Contemporary Art.
- 2016 : Innovation in Mithila Traditions.
- 2015 : Aesthetics of Mithila Art.
- 2015 : Reporting Culture.
- 2014 : Mithila Art – Past & Present

IN GENERAL:

- Actively working in the organizations for the development of Art, Artists' and Artists' Association for more than 30 years.
- Organized Group Exhibitions of Paintings time to time and created interest among people towards Fine Arts. -Organized many National & International Art Camp.
- Helped different institutions as a "Chief Judge" during different art competitions held by those institutions.
- Actively participation in organizing and making tremendous success a national level Art Workshop in Biratnagar in 2002.
- Also, conferred honorary Pvt. Tuition of Art and helped many promising Artists.



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