

Digital Catalogue for *Archival Dialogues*

Curated by **Pronoy Chakraborty**

For **Priyasri Art Gallery** in collaboration with **James Ferreira**

Concept Note

The exhibition titled *Archival Dialogues* seeks to bring together a group of young artists from MSU Baroda whose practice responds to the manifold ruptures in political, social, ecological and personal spaces, looking through the lens of critical discourses on Archivization and Museumization. To be housed at Ferreira House, *Khotachi Wadi*, Mumbai, the exhibition seeks to primarily foreground a dialogue between the archival trend in contemporary art theory and praxis, and a largely forgotten fragment of colonial history trapped in this hamlet at the very heart of urban South Mumbai.

The houses with colonial Portuguese architecture hearken back to an era when the race to colonization swept over the seas of this port-city. The East Indian Catholic community have spent over five-generations in the archaic bungalows at *Khotachi Wadi*, named after *Khota*, a local Maharashtrian Hindu from whom the plot of land was bought. One such bungalow, now belonging to designer James Ferreira, is the site for our exhibition.

The selection of artists is based on the notion of an archival performative approach adopted by them to different ends to produce art-works for aesthetic consumption. For each of these artists, the relationship between 'fine-art' and craftsmanship becomes extremely important in understanding their diverse methods to a quasi-scientific museum display. In a post-modern rhizomatic, the multiplicities of re-interpretation, re-iteration and re-presentation are sought to be explored in a dialectical engagement with the bungalow's ornate interiors and the private collection of curios, thereby re-addressing the community's long historical presence in a cosmopolitan locale.



Avni Bansal



Working as a print-maker and sculptor, Avni probes the lines of separation between 'high-art' and 'craft-forms' through the visual tool of design. Having interned at a workshop of a traditional stone-carver, and worked for a year at a textile company, Avni tries to understand this crucial relationship by re-looking at the Art and Crafts Movement in London initiated by William Morris and John Ruskin. Using wit and humour, she weaves her quest for abstraction through critical theoretical frameworks of mass/popular culture and the phenomena of folk and tribal by appropriation and re-contextualization of motifs and forms. In her dissertation, Avni has tried to elucidate on the close encounter of traditional crafts and fine-arts in the contemporary post-modern age, thus extending a theoretical premise for her own practice. The reception of craft idioms in post-colonial art-institutions by exemplary pedagogues like K.G. Subramanyan and Jyoti Bhatt has created further scope for this dialogue in the Portuguese colonial bungalow at Khotachi Wadi.

Avni's works speak about the creation and interpretation of forms, how a structure evolves its existence through artistic vision and the subsequent interpretation by viewers based on one's own subjective world-view and knowledge. The very initiation for Avni's visuals is her immediate surroundings but she manages to break the semblances to rise a question about the identity of the object, thus capturing a sense of the known, within the unknown. Avni's works may seem purely abstract but they do have a structure known to the human mind. Arrangement and treatment play vital roles in her work; the words or titles she writes along the works are significant semiotic pointers for interpretation of the forms. As a native of India, one may see a lot of influence of Indian tribal arts in her imagery, which is not a conscious deliberate attempt, but arises from her deep interest in understanding the large plethora of traditional arts of India.



Title: Akar Prakar

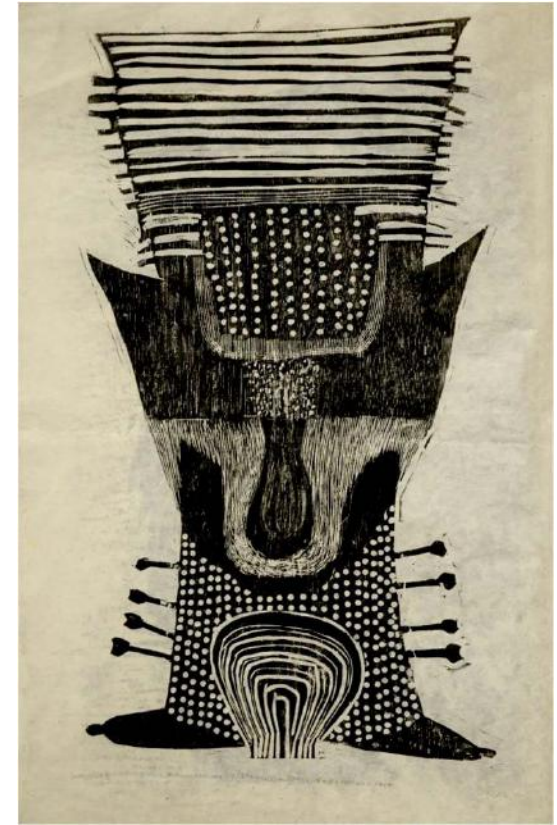
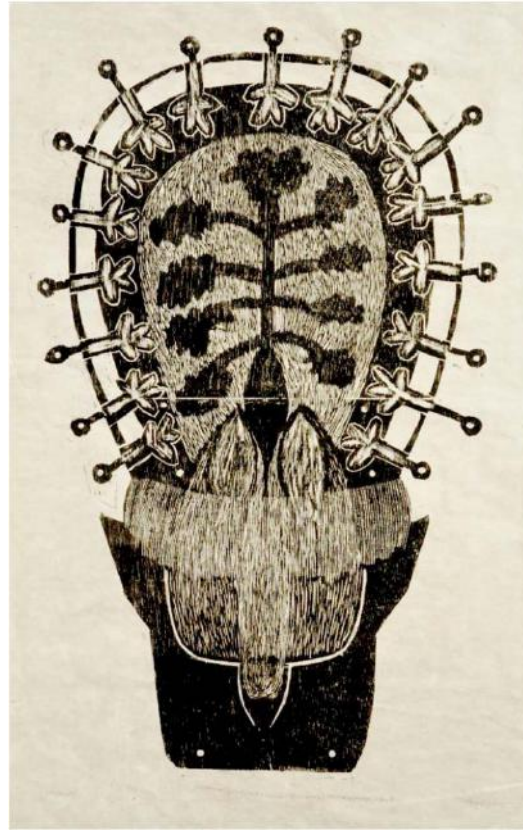
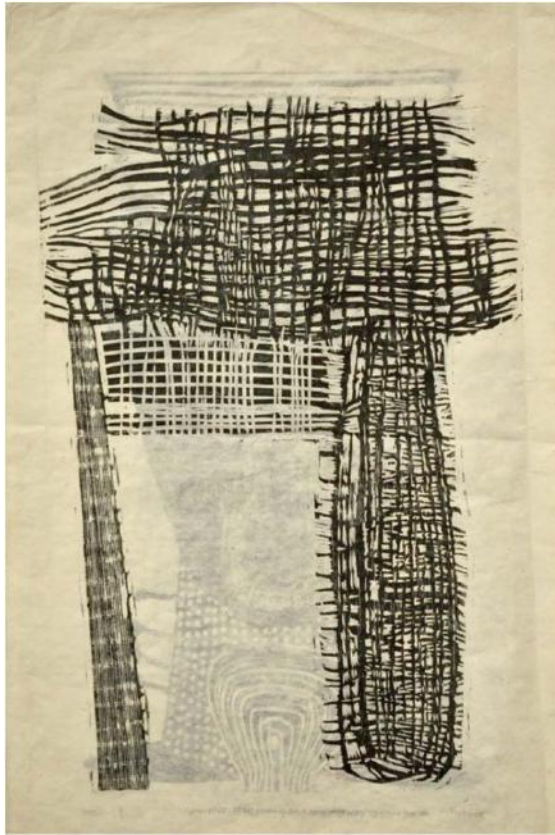
Size: 10" x7" Inch Each

Medium: Collograph

Year: 2016

Set of 10 can be sold individually





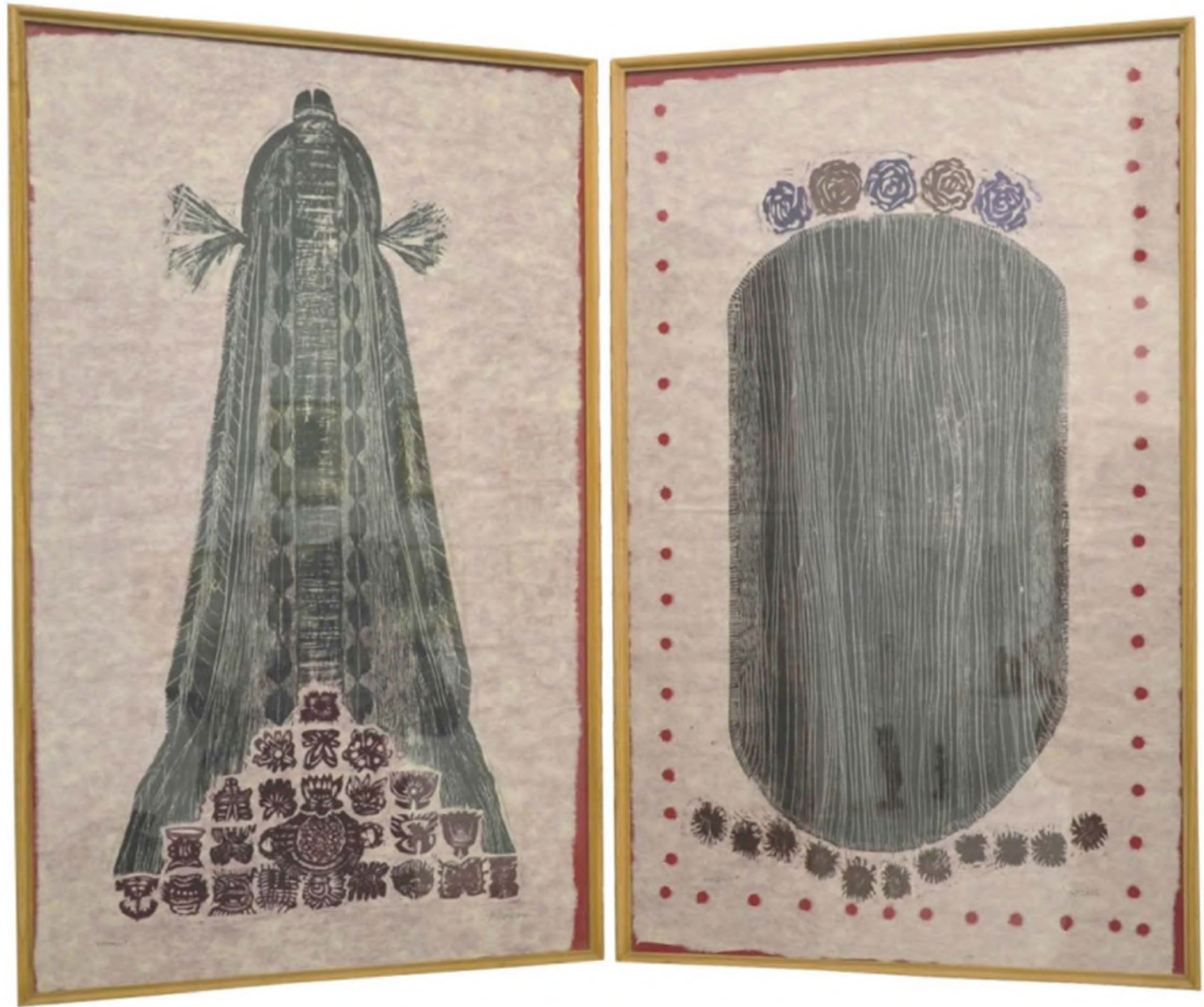
Title: Anonymous

Medium: Woodcut

Size: 22"x15" each

Year:2015

Set of 6 can be sold individually



Title: Anonymous
Medium: Woodcut
Size: 24"x16" each
Year:2016

Set of 2 can be sold individually



Title: Anonymous

Medium: Soft stone

Size: 3inch, 4inch, 8inch

Year:2016

Set of 7 can be sold individually



Title: Dhabba

Size: 15"x15" each

Year: 2015

Set of 2 can be sold individual

Dinar Sultana

In an age of rapid urbanization and modernization, Dinar can be seen to take a revisionist stand, romanticizing the loss of nature. Her recent body of abstract paintings are embodiments of an extended process of preparing natural pigments. The artistic choice to engage in this exercise when mechanically prepared pigments in ready-to-use tubes are available, is a mark of Dinar's commitment to the notion of revival in the contemporary post-modern context. Here *Archivization* becomes a key denotator in understanding the praxis as she tries to blend art and aesthetics with the science of taxonomy and biological classification.

Dinar's chief interest lies in preparation of pigments from organic substances and their application in largely abstract paintings. In the long process, she adopts an archival methodology of categorization and documentation of the colour-shades obtained from the base of various organic materials in a quasi-scientific manner. Simultaneously she archives the process and the source substances, nicely packaged in transparent sachets, along-with the prepared colour-shades. Taking inspiration from the great modern masters: Nandalal Bose, Binode Behari Mukherjee and Jamini Roy, Dinar's efforts liberate the general pejorative sense attached to revival of ancient and medieval techniques, by giving it a scientific context.

Largely abstract in nature, her paintings allude to the magic of making in constant conversation with the process. Culling from personal experiences and emotions, the final visuality of the paintings provokes entry into the domain of pure abstraction, aided by bold colouration. Further, Dinar's commitment to painting with an intellectual quest for understanding materiality in contemporary discourses leads her to engage in a play of surface-texture using cotton-pulp and even human-hair. At another level, the paintings resonate with nature and its constant flow of biological cycles, impregnated by a strong undercurrent of eroticism, sexuality and the politics of the female body. Over the years, Dinar has shown a complete transformation from earlier figurative works to painterly abstraction, keeping alive the sensitivity and a deep sensorial quality.





Medium: Set of colour-patches obtained from 26 vegetable sources

Size: 6"x 6" each

Year: 2016





Title: The Dryness

Size: 14" x 10" each

Medium: Watercolour on flower-pulp

Year: 2017

Set of 4 can be sold individually



Title: The Dryness

Size: 14" x 10"

Medium: Watercolour on flower-pulp

Year: 2017



Title: Untitled
Medium: Natural Pigments, clay, cotton,
human hair on paper,
Size: 24x30 inch
Year: 2016

Title: Untitled
Medium: Natural Pigments, clay, cotton,
human hair on paper,
Size: 24x30 inch
Year: 2016





Title: Untitled
Medium: Natural Pigments, clay, cotton,
human hair on paper,
Size: 24x30 inch
Year: 2016



Title: Transformation | Size: 84" x 60" | Medium: Cotton, clay on paper | Year: 2016

Mithra Kamalam

Mithra interprets art as an activity which gives her clarity by helping address herself and her immediate surroundings. As a language, she is adopting various elements from traditional and folk idioms- Persian, Arabic, Byzantine, Egyptian and especially Mughal miniatures, in admiration of the lyrical quality of their narration and the flat pictorial sensibility. After the likes of many inspirational models, Mithra seems to trace an artistic lineage of modern and post-modern painters working on self-centred narratives which open forth universal concerns of one's age.



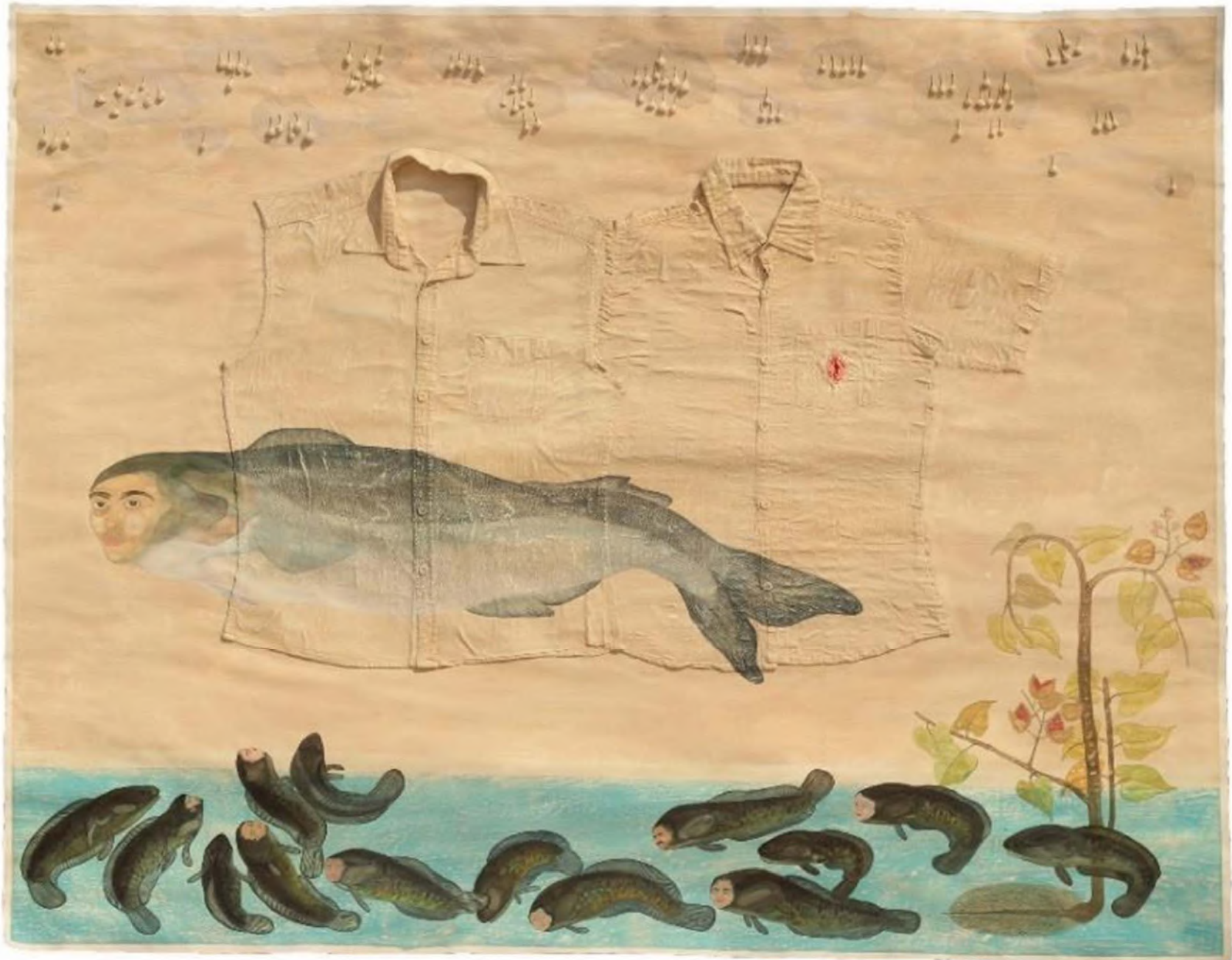
Mithra's works can be read as autobiographical narratives where she takes characters from her own life, most of them being studies of friends and relationships. With a personal calling towards nature, she uses elements of local flora and fauna in her paintings; sometimes as decorative patterns or even at-times over-powering the figuration, in scale and detail. Her love for theatre and traditional performances in native Kerala such as *Kathakali*, *Thira* and *Thaiyam*, helps appropriate these theatrical elements to intensify the emotional drama in her paintings.

The exquisitely painted self-portraits with a distinct uni-brow and facial hair rejoice her personal choices of subverting the normative standards of feminine beauty. In a way, she archives her own body and associated reality, not in the mechanical medium of photography but rooted in the skill and craft of painting. Taking theatrical cues, she posits herself in several anthropomorphic personae of animals allowing the viewer a humorous point of entry into the painting; one then enters her world of imagination, of performing fairies and hybrid creatures.

Yet it is not a world of naïve simplicity and playfulness, but visuals potent with latent connotations of the politics of identity, gender and body; probing the private domain of human relationships. Mithra also shares with tradition an interesting dialectic- trying to radically transform the classical images by incorporating contemporary popular visuals and texts. This way, she takes the vital essence of the past and tries to breathe it into her mundane existence; the rawness of her preparatory sketches and individual drawings give way to an exquisite finish in the final paintings. *Humour* in Mithra's work creates the scope for satire, thereby problematizing the apparent visible beauty; constantly dislocating and re-locating the traditional context.



Two performers and me as Cinderella | 60 inches x 45 inches | Watercolour, khadi and paper pulp on paper | 2016



When We All Tried To Get That Slippery | 72 Inches X 63 Inches | Watercolour, Khadi And Mixed Media On Paper | 2016



Title: Page from album

Medium: Mixed Media

Size: 30x25 cm

Year: 2016

Set of 4 can be sold individually

Priyanka D'Souza

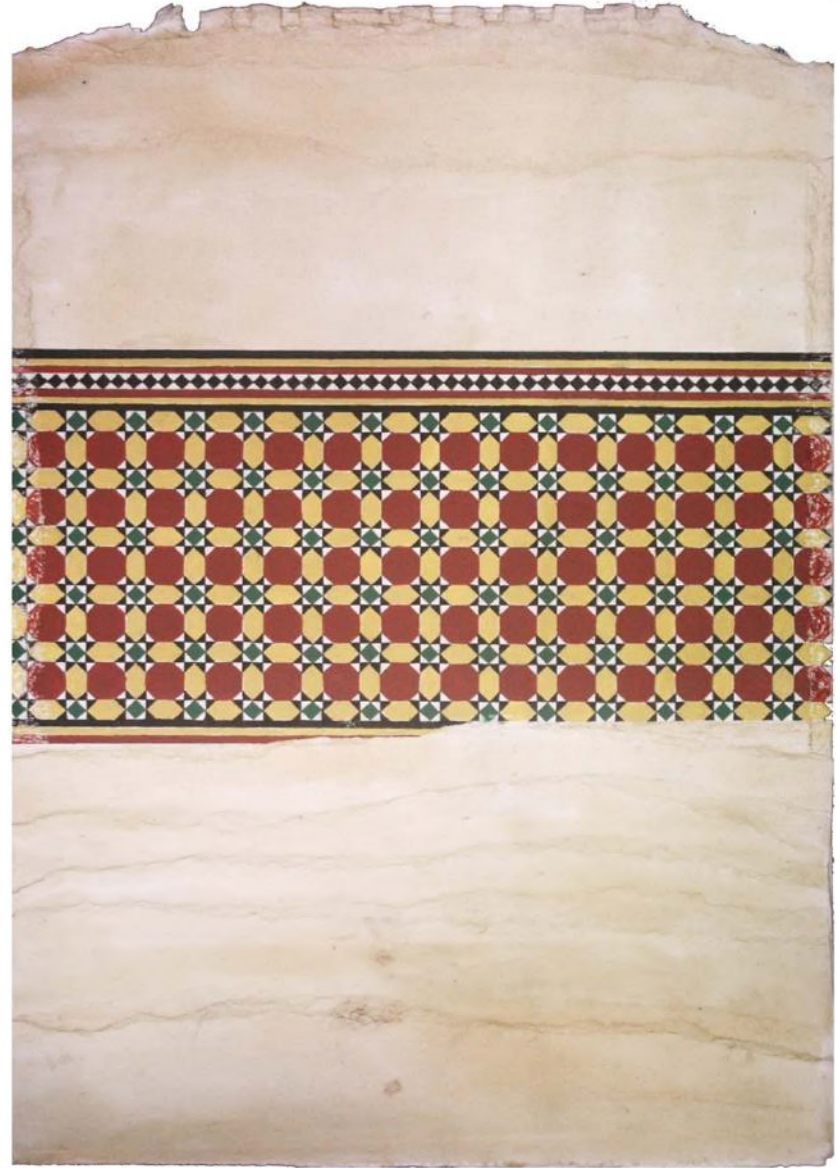
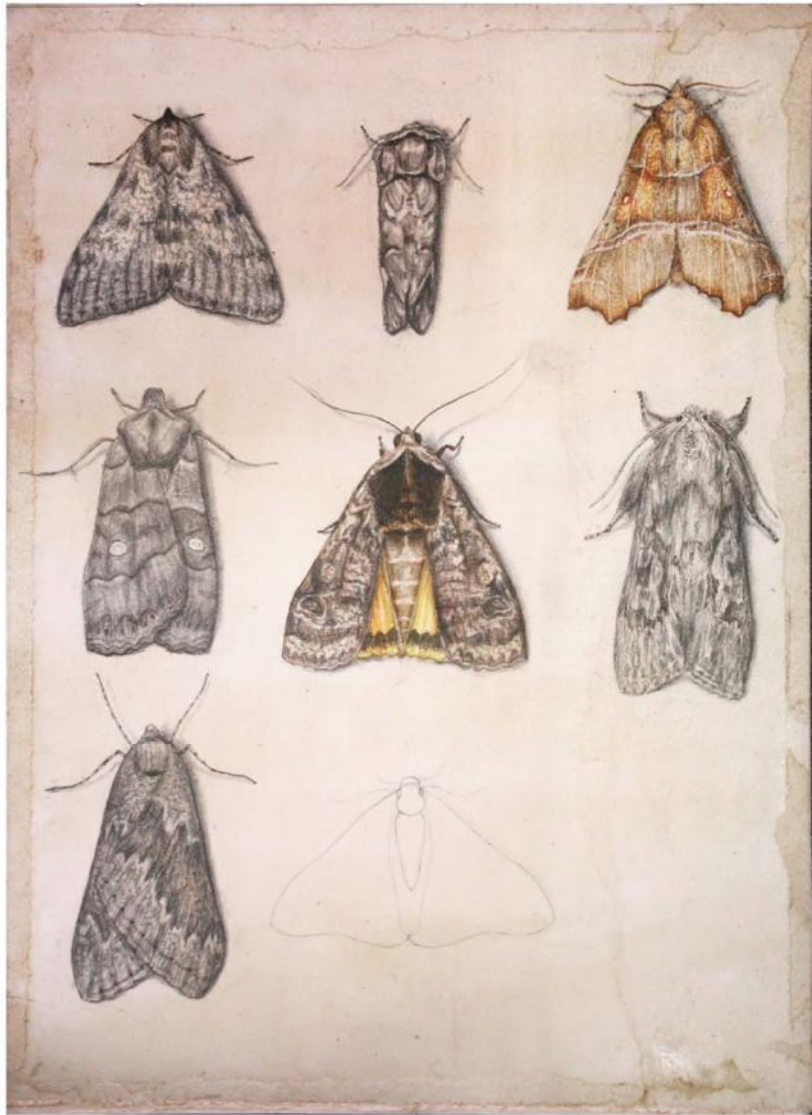
Priyanka works primarily in the tradition of Islamic miniature– an idiom that best expresses her love for literature, political inclinations and visual sensibilities. As she explores traditional patterns and the surface qualities of the various materials and found objects, certain abstractions creep in, in keeping with the sensuousness of the fine brushwork or *pardaz* in her more figurative work.

Miniature has traditionally been an imperial practice of the courts, a language of the elite or an esoteric expression of religious and ritualistic nature, to record certain histories and narratives. The miniature folios were far removed from the public gaze and were only accessible to the royal, the noble and the rich. In today's visual culture, Priyanka questions the relevance of the format and idiom of miniature painting and its 'secularised' functioning in the white-cube gallery space.

Priyanka's work therefore has a strong fictional element with political underpinnings. In content, what started out as an understanding of Mughal architecture used by the emperors to further political ends, developed into the metaphor of the wall as scripture and most recently, has evolved into the analysis and documentation of natural history that deals with the idea of citizenship while more subtly questioning the schism between science and myth. A tinge of contemporary politics seems to enliven the literary sources where Priyanka constantly derives narrative influences from.

Priyanka's appropriation of the miniature language to embellish insects draws on the Kafkaesque ideas of provisional freedom within structures of authority., thus engaging with socio-political nuances in narrative structures dealing with fantasy or the bizarre in her use of fairy tales, folklore and literary magic realism. Also, her process alludes to the scientific process of preserving insects adopted by archivists and librarians. The miniature language refers to the use of beetle-wings for ornamentation in Basohli school of traditional miniature painting.





Title: It was then that Gregor decided with a firmness that only comes from experience, that he really did not like cockroaches | Medium: Gouache and pencil on Wasli | Size: 11.5 x 16.5"



Title: It was then that Gregor decided with a firmness that only comes from experience, that he really did not like cockroaches | Medium: Gouache and pencil on Wasli | Size: 7.5 x 24 inch



Title: It was then that Gregor decided with a firmness that only comes from experience, that he really did not like cockroaches | Medium: Gouache and pencil on Wasli | Size: 11.5 x 16.5"



Title: It was then that Gregor decided with a firmness that only comes from experience, that he really did not like cockroaches.

Medium: Gouache and pencil on Wasli

Size: 11.5 x 16.5"

11.5 x 16.5"

7.5 x 24

Set of 3 can't be sold individual



Sarasija Subramanian



Sarasija's work thrives directly on the trope of archive, with each connotation of the word becoming points of departures. In the artist's own words, her practice is "part process, part performance and part-installation", following the cue of a list of post-modernist artists who she explores critically in her dissertation. As an artist engaged in the act of archiving she not only preserves but deterritorializes information that would otherwise be lost, misplaced or forgotten, adopting photography and printing techniques as tools to produce an image potent with multiple connotations and implications. The artist's act of embellishment of found natural objects, otherwise left to decay, lend them a renewed life of an art-object. Sarasija's appropriation of archival techniques of image-description results in a "writing and reading" of the image contesting traditional modes of art-historical analysis. "With a matrix of citation and juxtaposition" in the words of Hal Foster, Sarasija presents her works "in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects (again, platforms, stations and kiosks)." The materiality of the object and manipulations of image and form have always been a forerunner in Sarasija's work. The use of alternative photography, light projections and casts/recasts of objects into materials give her both physical control over the outcome as well as lend the work a sense of (forced) displacement and manipulation.

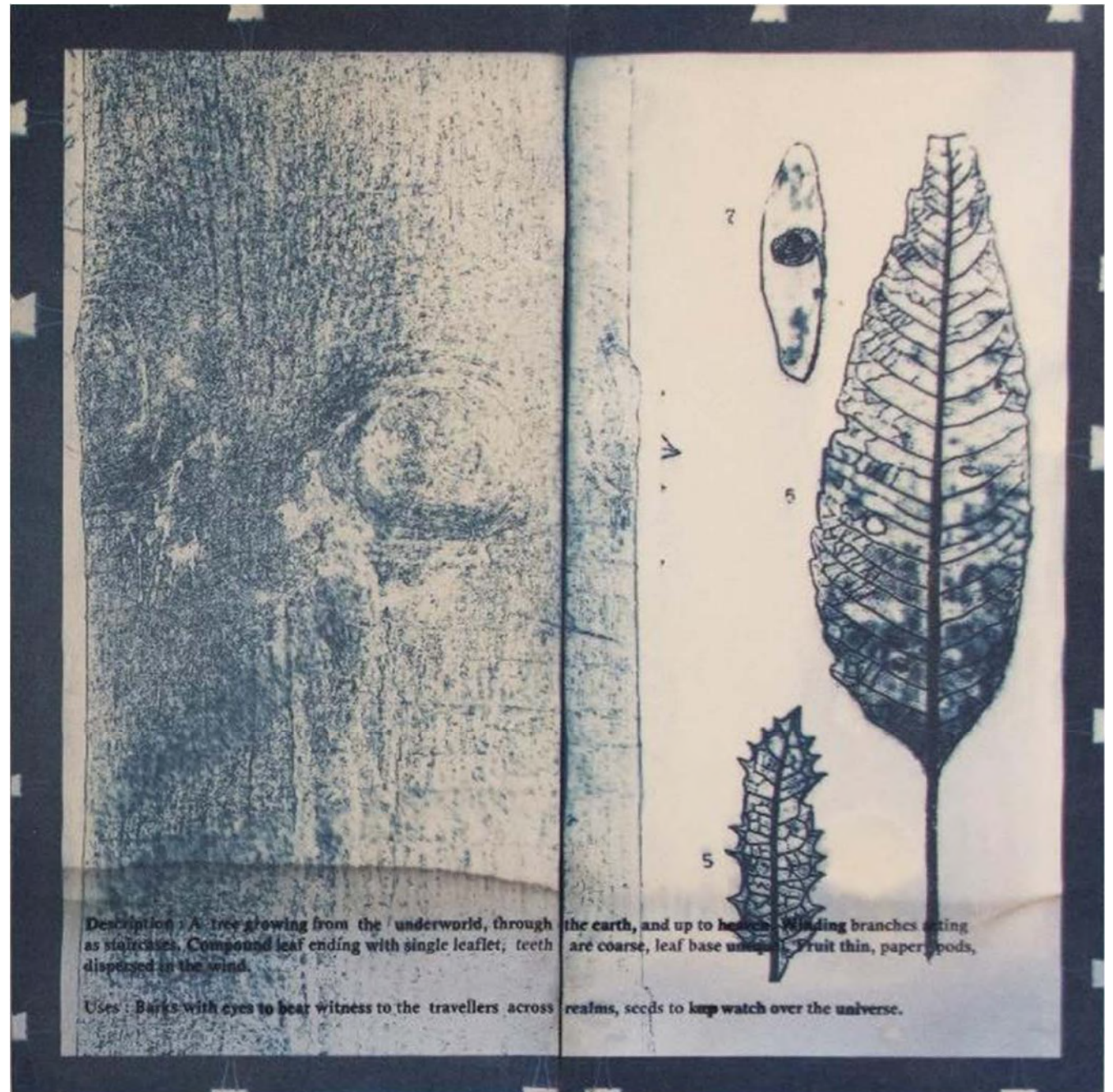
Over the past few years, Sarasija's theoretical and visual research has addressed our interactions with nature; how each human action has played its role in history, and the human attempt to understand, analyse, tame and control what we deem as entities 'other' than us. This premise when extended to other inter-personal and inter-political relationships becomes one that has a potential to bring about dialogue. There emerges a strong desire to visualize and present ideas of 'protection', 'immortalization' and 'embellishment' in dialogue with those of colonization, taming of the 'other', 'wildness' and violence. The potency of the word taming is one that intrigues Sarasija, as it can be defined as an agreement that momentarily allows for a relationship between one and the 'other' – bringing both sides to their most vulnerable.

Title: Alianthus Excelsa

Size: 48" x 48"

Medium: Cyanotype,
pen and ink on fabric

Year: 2016



Description: Burnt timber in colour, a single yellow ochre stem with dots of sorts. Leaf shaped solid forms attached to the stem. Small stems present as well. The leaf shaped stems are bigger than my palm, and then the stem protrudes below.

Uses: Wands used by medicine men, flower used to mark the source of evil in an individual, and seeds to extract poison for arrows.



*Title: Spathodea
Campanulata*
Size: 48" x 48"
Medium: Cyanotype,
pen and ink on fabric
Year: 2016





Title: Only where my
childhood was unspent,
Medium: Found objects,
thread, gouache, gold pigment,
digital prints and drawing,
Size: 6x4 feet,
Year: 2016
Can be sold individually



Title: Only where my childhood was unspent,
Medium: Found objects, thread, gouache, gold
pigment, digital prints and drawing,
Size: 6x4 feet,
Year: 2016

Shreya Shukla

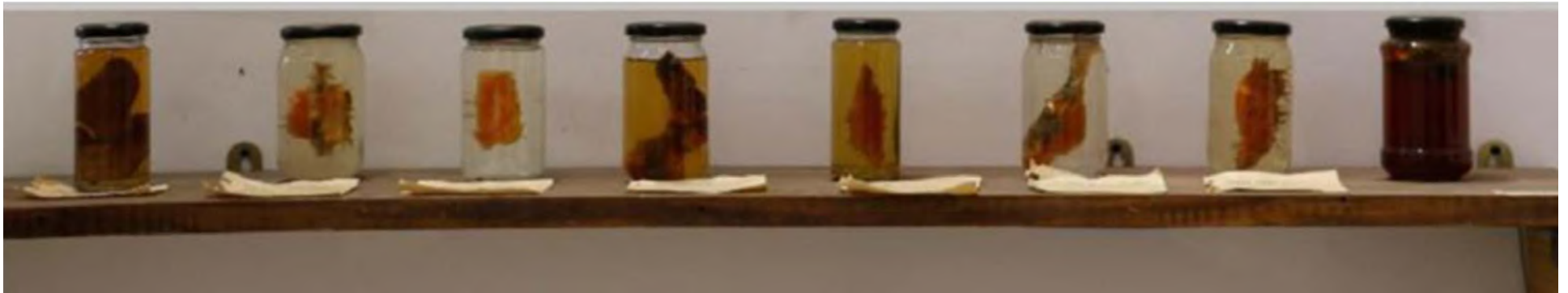
Shreya's painterly temperament extends to a fascination of the morbid, engaging with the Freudian notion of the Death Drive and the perception of museums as cemeteries. Deeply informed by studies in a morgue, Shreya has worked with self-centred narratives romanticizing the transgressive drive. Her recent body of works take on pathological objects like foiled medicine pills and surgical gloves, states of physical and mental disorder further enquiring into the workings of the Death Drive.

Keeping alive the traditional format of oil-painting on canvas, Shreya breaks new grounds with her painterly instinct coupled with a fascination for the dead, the crematorium, psychoanalysis and psychological disorders. Her typical handling of the human flesh gives an enigmatic presence to the painted personal narratives, opening forth a multitude of readings. There is however a grave and cynical undercurrent flowing in her works that hint at understanding the museum space as a cemetery as propounded by Boris Groys in *Art in the Age of Bio-politics*.

The repetition of short aggressive brush-marks in a sombre tonal range lead to a haunting visuality sharply recalling the potency inherent in humans to "lead organic life back to the inanimate state". The *Death Drive* also brings into folds colonial archives driven by the need and desire to 'know', establish power through knowledge and consequently control, typically manifesting the relationship theorized by Foucault-between archives and authority.

Shreya's prolonged engagement with the morbid, started with anatomy drawing sessions at a morgue while she was in her BVA. The studies were so impactful, that her practice ever since has revolved around the thematic of death, of grotesque atrocities in newspaper columns and unstable mental states in fiction like *Metamorphosis* of Franz Kafka. The paintings are completed over a long duration of time, at times being abandoned for months. Through this slow and laborious process of working in small patches of oil-paint, she brings to life the uncanniness of death and the fear related to it. In Shreya, one can read the urge to destabilize ideal beauty by creating apparently gruesome visuals, but at the same time capturing one's attention by the poetics of painting. The series of formaldehyde jars with dissected and transmuted dried flowers is another manifestation of the macabre.





Title: Untitled 12

Medium: Organic Substance Dipped In
Formaldehyde

Size: Dimensions Variable

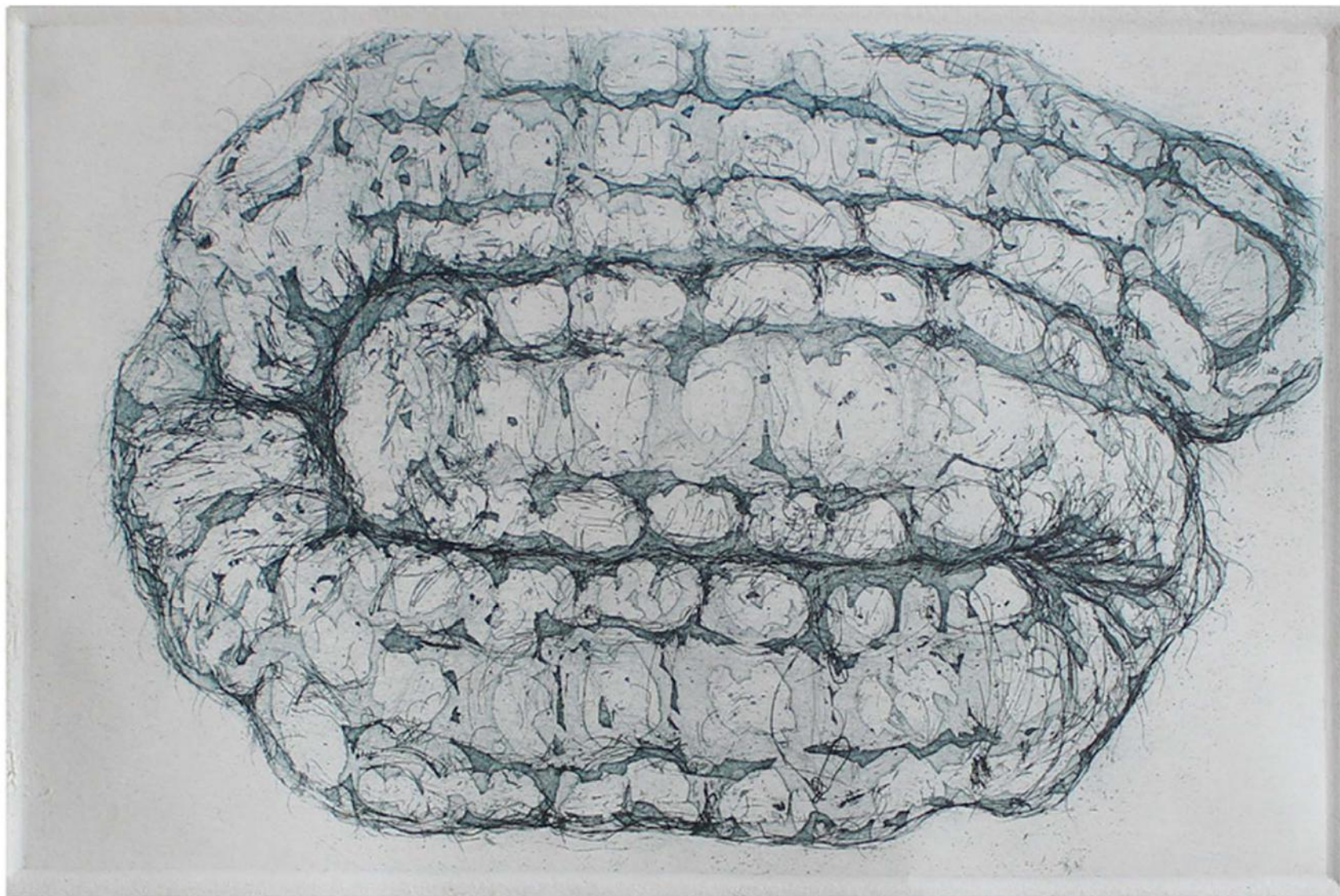
Year: 2016



Title: Untitled,
Medium: Oil on paper,
Size: 52x37 cm,
Year: 2016



Title: Untitled
Medium: Oil on paper
Size: 75x51 cm
Year: 2015



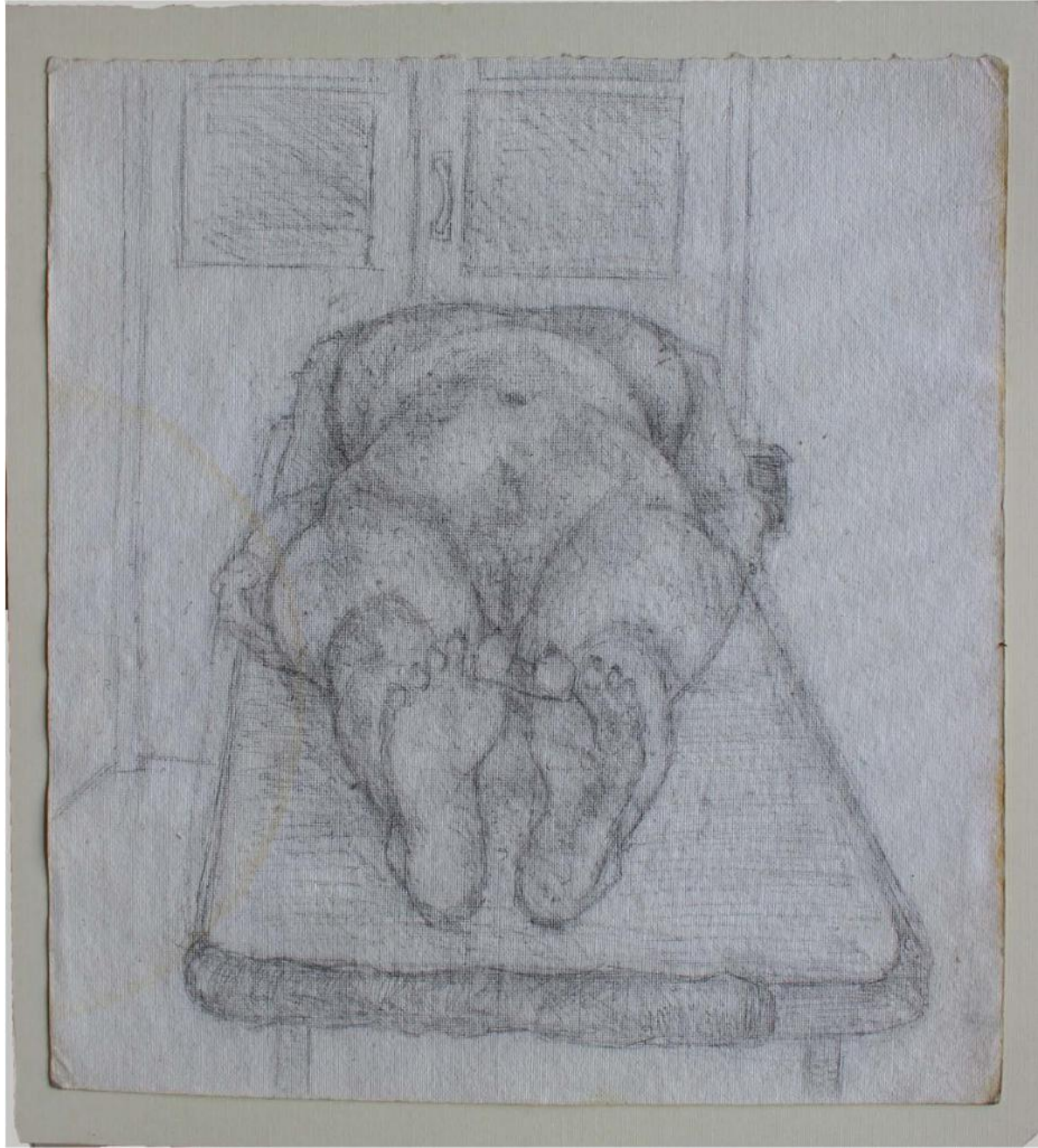
Title: Untitled 9
Medium: Etching on paper,
Size: 25x30 cm,
Year: 2016



Untitled 1 | Etching on paper | 28x25 cm | 2016



Untitled 2 | Etching on paper | 28x25 cm | 2016



Untitled 3 | Etching on paper | 28x25 cm | 2016



Untitled 4 | Etching on paper | 28x25 cm | 2016



Untitled 5 | Etching on paper | 28x25 cm | 2016

Title: Untitled 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Medium: Etching on paper,
Size: 25x30 cm each
Year: 2016
Set of 5 can be sold individually

