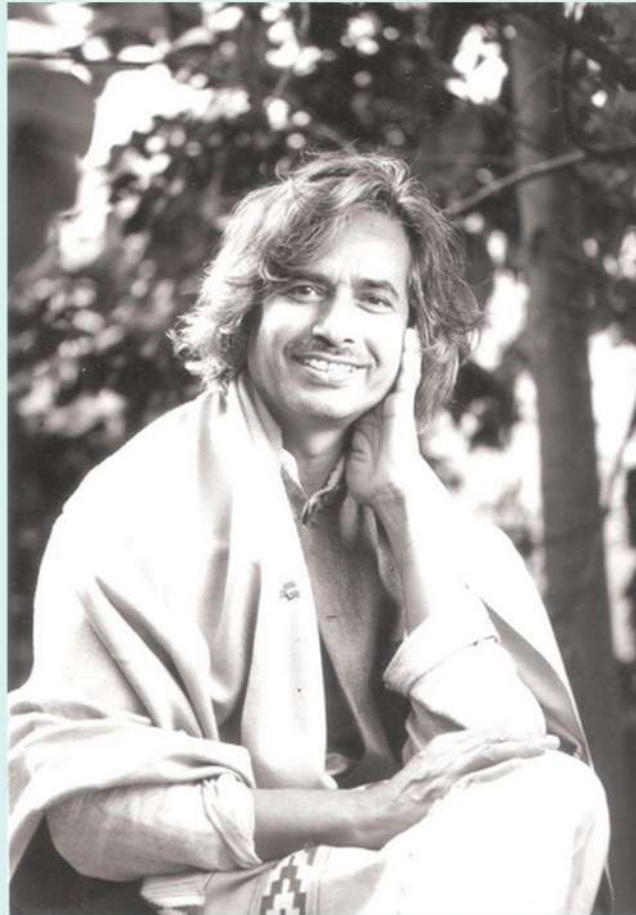


SOLO EXHIBITION OF
JOGEN CHOWDHURY



BIRLA ACADEMY OF ART AND CULTURE
21 MAY TO 26 MAY 2024



Jogen Chowdhury

Born 15 February 1939.

Educated at the Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta and subsequently at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, Jogen is one painter who has inspired young artists of contemporary India, in a significant way. R. Siva Kumar, the reputed art historian, has lucidly described Jogen's works in the following excerpt.

The pulse and rhythm of Jogen Chowdhury's art comes from a filial affinity to nature and milieu. In Chowdhury's more recent works the sensory experiences of cloth, bolsters, sofas and the human body are cross-projected to produce an uncanny world of tran-substantiated tumescence and flaccidness. Mnemic displacements and personal associations add to the symbolic ambivalence of his motifs, making his images come closer to inexplicable experiences than to explicit signs. In the postures of some figures we feel an animal sentience, in the ripe anatomy of others we savour a fruity succulence. The figures are wrought by a combination of decorative willfulness and expressive distortion and are imbued with an effusive sensuality. Chowdhury's art is rich in suggestions; it is to be apprehended without bracketing our fund of knowledge, experience or memories, but also cannot be narrativised without trivializing it, without depleting its sensory particularities.

Jogen Chowdhury has been widely acknowledged to be, the master of the unbroken line. Like Leger, Chowdhury has been stirred by the linear Kalighat pat tradition, but his lines are emotive and used to express and suggest the character of a person. This is done by, distorting the form without breaking the line and in the world of young, contemporary art, distortion has been Jogen Chowdhury's most significant impact. Perhaps, because of this, a common observation of his work is that his "people" are caricatures. The person feels familiar to the viewer but it is far more individualised - the face is imaginary but the psyche or characteristics are real. The power and beauty of his technique and line is this play between the known and unknown. In Jogen Chowdhury's work, the figure is always in the foreground, it is primary, it conveys everything. He uses colour to give volume to his figures and the fluidity of his lines bring a sensual aspect to his forms.

Chowdhury is fascinated by history. Having experienced the traumatic effects of the Partition, dislocation and a sense of isolation, his figures reflect an intractable solitude. Even when he paints a couple, the two are detached and distant from each other. His individual figures are usually more sensuous - the woman caressing herself, if a man, then curled in pain with raw wounds on his body. His imagery is organic and emerge as protuberances or growths from within. Chowdhury's works are also social and political comments; he either protests or sublimates the injuries to or of the human condition. Jogen Chowdhury's ability to juxtapose contrary emotions, the real and imaginary and the known and unknown, make his art not only a form of self expression but a reflection, of a collective and subjective consciousness.



Jogen Chowdhury: The lyricist who draws from the intense captivating life

Soumik Nandy Majumdar

Jogen Chowdhury, with seven decades of a commendable career, is one of the most sought-after Indian artists today. A hugely prolific artist with critical acclamations from all over the world, Jogen is also a reputed mentor, teacher and a cultural activist who refuses to live and work from an ivory tower. He soils his feet, treads the uneven ground, and lets the scorching sun burn his skin. The discomfort is his zone, to respond to the need of the hour is his commitment. He is truly an artist of our time.

The manifold truth manifests itself in an artist's vast range of artworks throughout his life. Jogen Chowdhury is one such artist whose numerous drawings and paintings have been done since his journey as an artist, seeking the layered truth of life combined with a quest for an appropriate visual language. The prominent presence of a linear idiom, powered by an instinctual drive and a lyrical quality, circumventing the academic realism (which he acquired with so much skill from his art college training) makes his art distinctive in character and content. Consequently, it lends to some outstanding images hitherto unseen in modern Indian art. Be it a painting or a drawing, a line – empowered by a sensitive response to the visual world – thus becomes his forte, signature style, and characteristic visual mode to captivate the life experience within a visual experience.

As evident from his several works, drawing is Jogen Chowdhury's most prized shelter. Drawing is his most reliable tool for negotiating life and his most trusted way of initiating a dialogue with the visual facts out there or inside one's psyche. Jogen Chowdhury is an atypical artist who has never made any distinction between a drawing and a painting in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, he chooses to take a highly personalized approach in style and technique and has developed an idiom over the years which outwits this difference once and for all. Jogen embraces this ambivalence like a sincere modernist. The personal style we talk about is evident in all his works but not without a remarkable range of visual accents brought about by most unsuspecting mediums like ink and pastel. To a certain extent, the charm in engaging oneself with Jogen Chowdhury's art lies in enjoying his deftness of handling any medium lucidly and effortlessly and responding to his often bizarre, banal, yet captivating and engaging images. As mentioned earlier, the simplicity that characterizes his techniques and imagery is compelling, ambiguous, and deceptive. In some sense, this apparent simplicity often camouflages the highly complex coordination between

hand, skill, mind, vision and memory. They are simple in appearance but intricate in terms of their poignant expressions and the iconic presence of the images.

Born in 1939 in an East Bengal village, now in Bangladesh, Jogen Chowdhury, right from childhood, experienced a life troubled with the aftermath of Partition, displacement from a comfortable homeland and a difficult upbringing in a Kolkata refugee settlement. He lived and experienced the most transformative phase of modern Indian history, i.e. the 1940s, and passing through the trauma and significant social changes, he worked his way, along with others, through the following decades to reshape the history of modern Indian art in remarkable ways. Artistically gifted and determined, he completed his art education at the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, in 1960 with the highest credits. He went to Paris on a Cultural Exchange Scholarship for higher education at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and the Atelier-17 in 1965. He worked as a textile designer with the Weavers' Service Centre, Chennai (1968 - 1972) and then as a Curator of the Art Collection of Rashtrapati Bhavana, New Delhi (1972 - 1987). Finally, he moved to Santiniketan as a teacher in the Painting Department, Kala Bhavana (1987). He formally retired as the Professor and Principal of Kala Bhavana in (1999) to devote full time to art and related activities to ensure that art practice rediscovers itself in the broader social landscape and collective atmosphere.

Early in his career and more specifically after his return from France in the late 60s, Jogen Chowdhury developed his individual style. In the context of the emergence of a new phase of modern Indian art in the 60s, when the likes of Hussain, Souza and Raza have already set a standard in their individual ways in the post-40s Indian art scenario, Jogen is an atypical artist who preferred to work primarily in pastels, watercolour and ink instead of oil-painting and strove to develop a visual idiom rooted in Indian soil without taking either any revivalist refuge or sentimental posture. He consciously avoided deriving his art from any obvious model of Western modern art either. During his stay in Paris, he responded to the prevalent trends of modern art, studied them carefully and even tried out a few works bordering on abstract expressionism in their tenor. In fact, by virtue of his highly laudable proficiency in academic realistic idiom acquired during his college days in Calcutta, he could extend, alter and turn the skill upside down to explore newer avenues with great élan. Several drawings, sketches and paintings were done during their college days, the Paris phase and in between are brilliant testimonies to his penchant for personalizing a representational language that had otherwise gone stereotypical and hackneyed. Even in his classroom studies and

academic exercises, he made it possible by privileging subjectivity and emotional attachment over objective observation and dispassionate articulation, respectively. A retrospective view of his works confirms that the foundation for his unique stylistic tendencies was laid quietly early in his career, and a conscious search later paved the way further. As he wrote in one of his autobiographical essays – *'We fell back on our cultural affiliations, scattered readings about the arts and studied art books and albums, driven by the intensity of our creative will, to pursue painting in the middle of all possible difficulties. We began to think seriously about painting when we left Art College. What should we paint? And how? Why should we paint?'* He continues, *'I started painting along my own ideas once I left college. Meanwhile, I had done so many drawings that their influence surfaced quite prominently in my paintings. I used black ink and a lot of crisscrossing on cheap paper to produce drawings and paintings from my imagination, reflecting on the social and political upheavals of Kolkata and the melancholy and complexities that were a part of my own life. Financial strains forced me to draw on cheap newsprint and in oils on coated pasteboard, but all charged by new ideas.'*

This was also the time when most of the modern artists of India were pursuing an individual style. The quest for a socially authentic personal style of expression rooted in the time was evident in the artists who were born around the 1940s. The personal style is of course evident in Jogen Chowdhury's works but not without a remarkable range of visual accents brought about by most unsuspecting mediums like ink and pastel. To a certain extent, the charm in engaging oneself with Jogen's art lies in his deftness of handling any medium lucidly and effortlessly. The simplicity that characterizes both his technique and imageries is compelling and also ambiguous. They are simple in appearance but complex in terms of their poignant expressions and the iconic and inescapable presence of the images.

Jogen Chowdhury's personal style can be understood as a natural consequence of his affinity with the organic energies of life manifested in nature and an incisive observation of life around. Even the pitch-dark background or the sagging people with distinctive facial features or female figures with disturbing scars on their bodies have direct or oblique references to his own traumatic experiences in life around. These references make his works edgy and expressionistic, often bordering on social and political satire. Through the caricature-like look of many of his figures, Jogen ridicules the corrupt and fraudulent characters he encounters in various social circuits. It is from the same stylistic mode that he can endow his images with erotic underpinnings as well. The apparent charm in his drawings and the linear insinuations indeed lead to a quality of elegance; at the same time,

it also leads to a sense of anguish and discomposure, superseding the comeliness and visual enchantment. Sooner or later, the viewer realizes that what one is discreetly drawn to is a certain kind of enigma, a deep-seated agony built into the process of his work. The intensity with which Jogen works it out is directly connected to his personal engagement with life and his quest for a viable mode of expression. The anxiety was embedded in this very quest as an artist, as a modernist whose life experience would never allow him to *choose* between hope and promise on the one hand and despair and edginess on the other. The anxiety is embedded in his very mission as an artist, as a modernist whose life experience would never allow him to make a particular *choice* between hope and despair or between harmony and edginess. The ambiguity is the strength of his drawings. He gets rid of the superfluous and concentrates on what is essential to build up the intensity of his images. This extraordinary intensity is the hallmark of his art.

Simultaneously, nature's organic quality, design value, and rhythmic construction stimulate him profoundly. Be it an agonized body or a languishing figure, a menacing predator or a primordial bird, an ornate raptor or primaeval blossom, wretched faces or a piece of foreboding nature – the decorative quality inherent in his idiom provides a new allegory to him – allegory of love and renewal of life amidst decay and violence. This particular inclination, so evident in his drawings, is also a strategy of unlearning for him. Highly inspired by the folk art of rural Bengal and other non-Western art traditions, Jogen Chowdhury, early in his life, breaks away from the constraints of European academic training, which he had acquired with great élan and gradually sets the lines free, as it were, to enable them to have a life of their own. His drawings are testimony to that process of unlearning and discovering.

Jogen Chowdhury has thus evolved a remarkable way of connecting his art with the human condition. As he says, *'Man and life, their complex co-existence, are the central concerns'* of his art. Simultaneously, nature's organic quality, design value, and rhythmic construction stimulate him. His associations with the Handloom House and Indian design in general and his fascination for *Alpona* (traditional floor designs of Bengal) are discernible in his ability to render his forms with a unique sense of rhythm which bequeaths the forms with an irresistible decorative appeal. This decorative quality provided a new allegory to him – an allegory of love and renewal of life. Jogen Chowdhury's deep faith in the incessant flow of life despite death and violence or the other way around creates the necessary

ambivalence that sustains his restive, edgy quality of line that is partly instinctual as much as it reflects the organicity of nature and the sensuality of life.

In many of his later works, one finds explicit references to specific incidents or moments that surpass all cruelty unleashed by human greed and inanity. Eschewing any narrative trappings, these works, however, are rich in allusions and shorn of any decorative cryptograms. Consequently, his figures now writhe in pain; their bodies (if not the face so much) scream, howl and bellow in torment. Significantly, in these images, the suffering is primarily a physical one. His sublime bodies have become the sites and targets of mindless violence. Earlier, if he was drawing his forms like *'crocheting apparels'* and knitting them *'into shape – squiggle by squiggle'*, now it is no longer a needle; he has a sharper tool. He does not mind if the knife makes a screechy noise. He even makes the works hold on to that din, relinquishing the safety of silence.

Space, whether constricted or open-ended, mimetic or non-representational, often implies time. And time, in Jogen Chowdhury's art, is usually slowed down. Time assumes a lingering character, ticking away slowly like a predicament. This experience is heightened when we respond to the 'waiting', 'anticipating', and 'yearning' quality of the relationship between the figures themselves, between the figures and the surrounding space and even between the inanimate objects and produces of nature. Life's eventuality is translated into an intangible experience.

Images in the present folio of Jogen Chowdhury's artworks in photographs comprise a selective range of subjects executed in his quintessential style and with an inimitable dexterity. Nameless and often faceless agonized bodies; couples whose relationship seems to be tuned to a tensed and ambivalent note of drudgery and sensuality, by turn; image of a singular man with a menacing gesture or an ageing older man slumped on a couch; a fleshy Ganesha; a proud primordial bird amidst natural elements like a wildflower; a bird and a woman in a destined encounter; the wounded man from the back – the apparent simplicity of these images soon lead us, on the contrary, to a complex world of human psychology and the deeply tormented life. However, Jogen Chowdhury, even in the darkest realm of his psyche, never forgets to rediscover the music and poetry of life with which his art is continuously infused. Thus, the topical becomes organic, and the dark becomes rhythmic. The artist himself remains an enigma for all.



Title: Couple 2 Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch

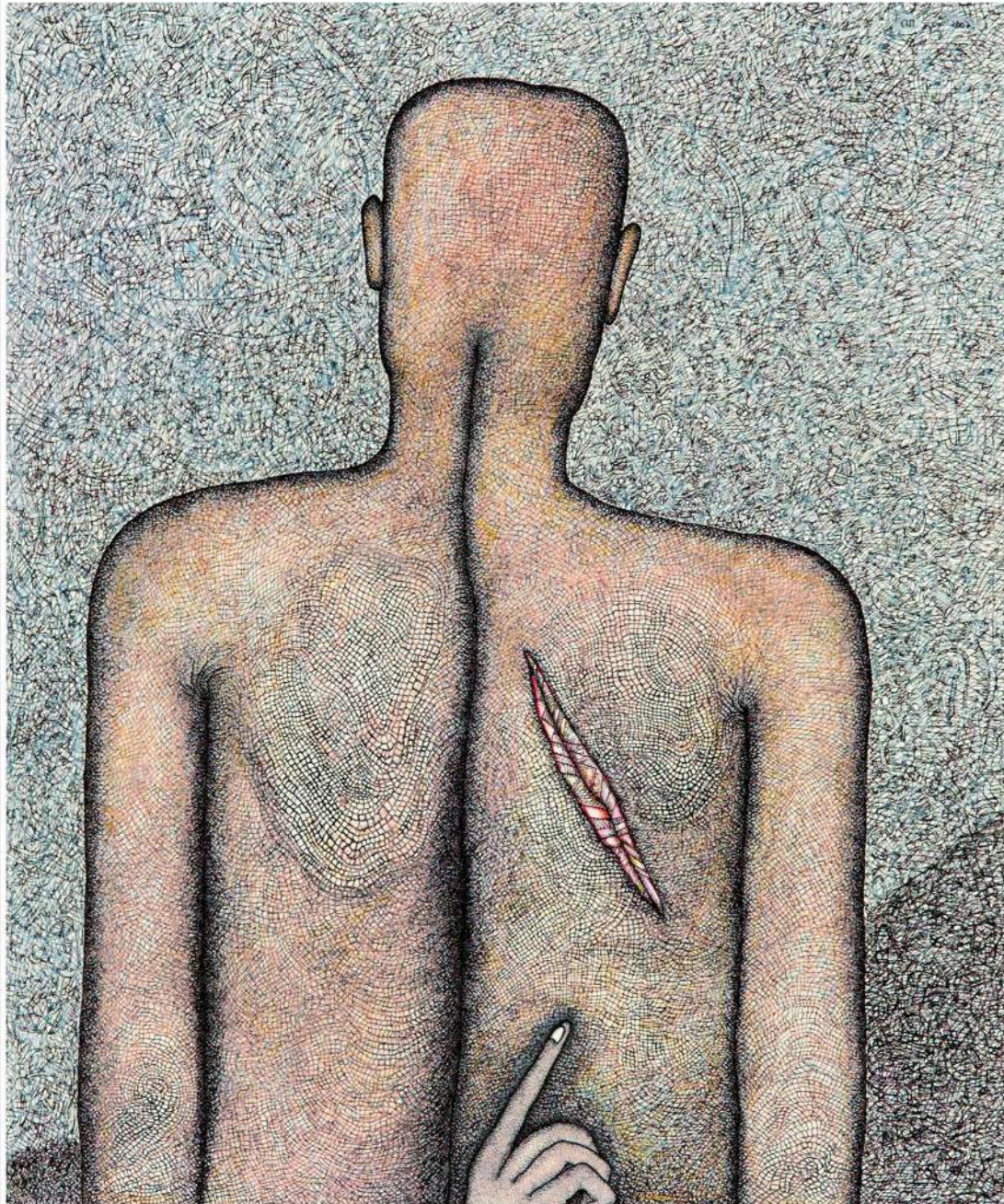
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



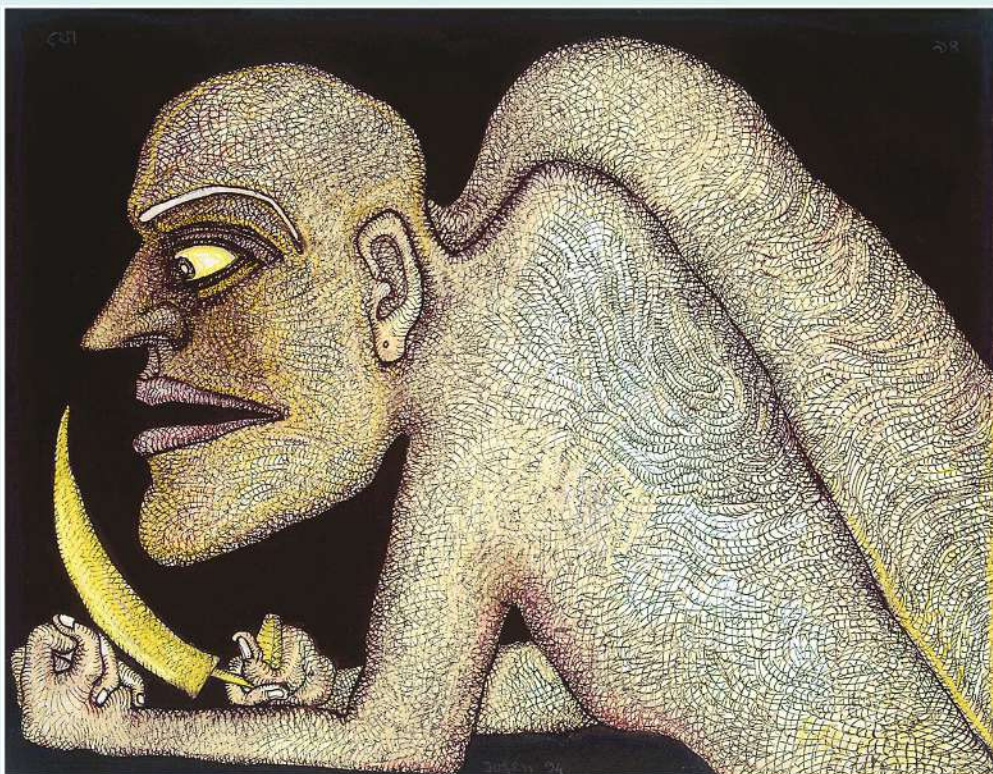
Title: Leader and a rainbow sofa
 Paper Size: 14 x 11 inch
 Print Size: 12.5 x 9 inch
 Media: Giclée on
 Hahnemühle German
 Etching paper



Title: Lovers
 Paper Size: 14 x 11 inch
 Print Size: 12.5 x 9 inch
 Media: Giclée on
 Hahnemühle German
 Etching paper



Title: Wound Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



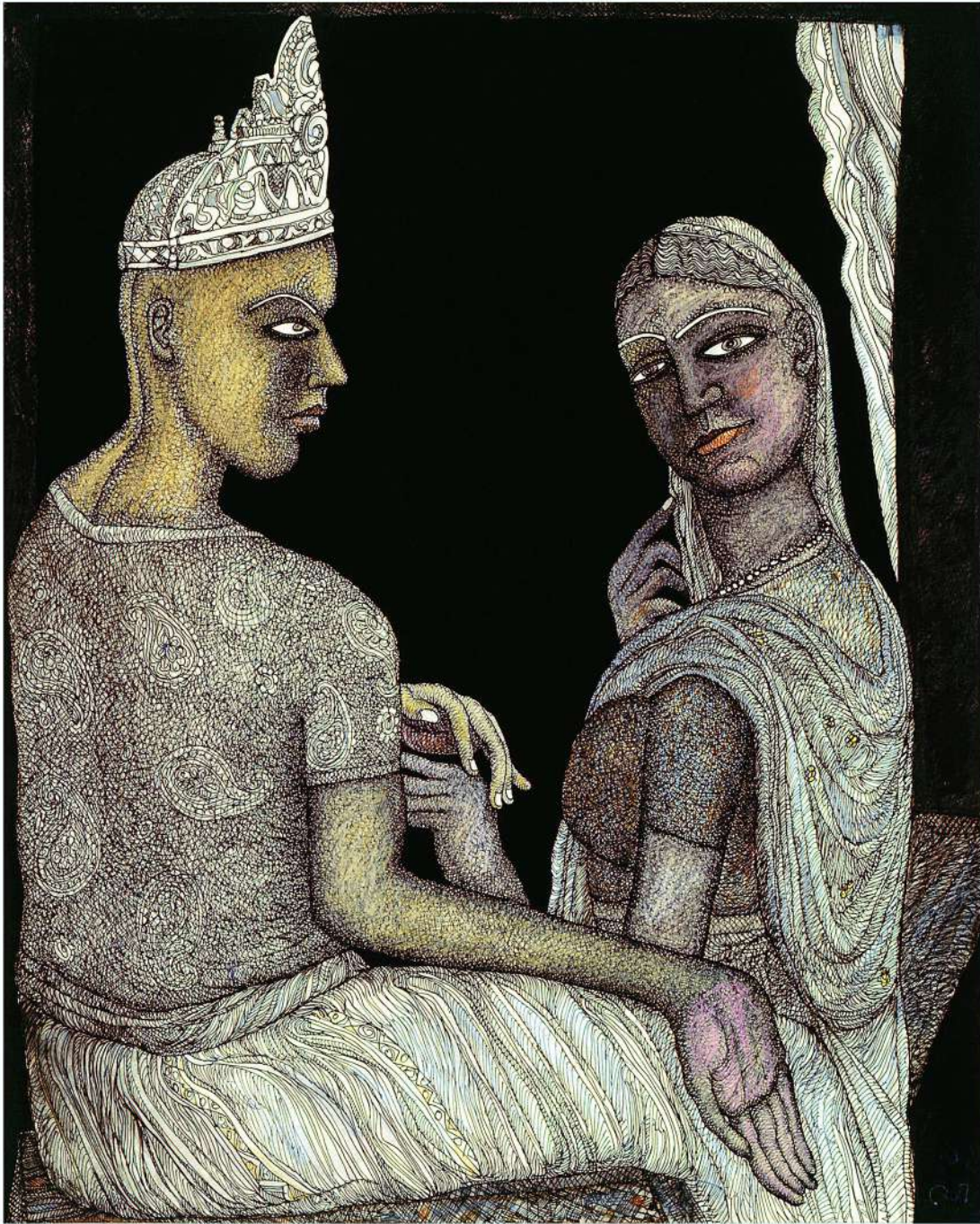
Title: Yellow Knife
 Paper Size: 14 x 11 inch
 Print Size: 12.5 x 9 inch
 Media: Giclée on
 Hahnemühle German
 Etching paper



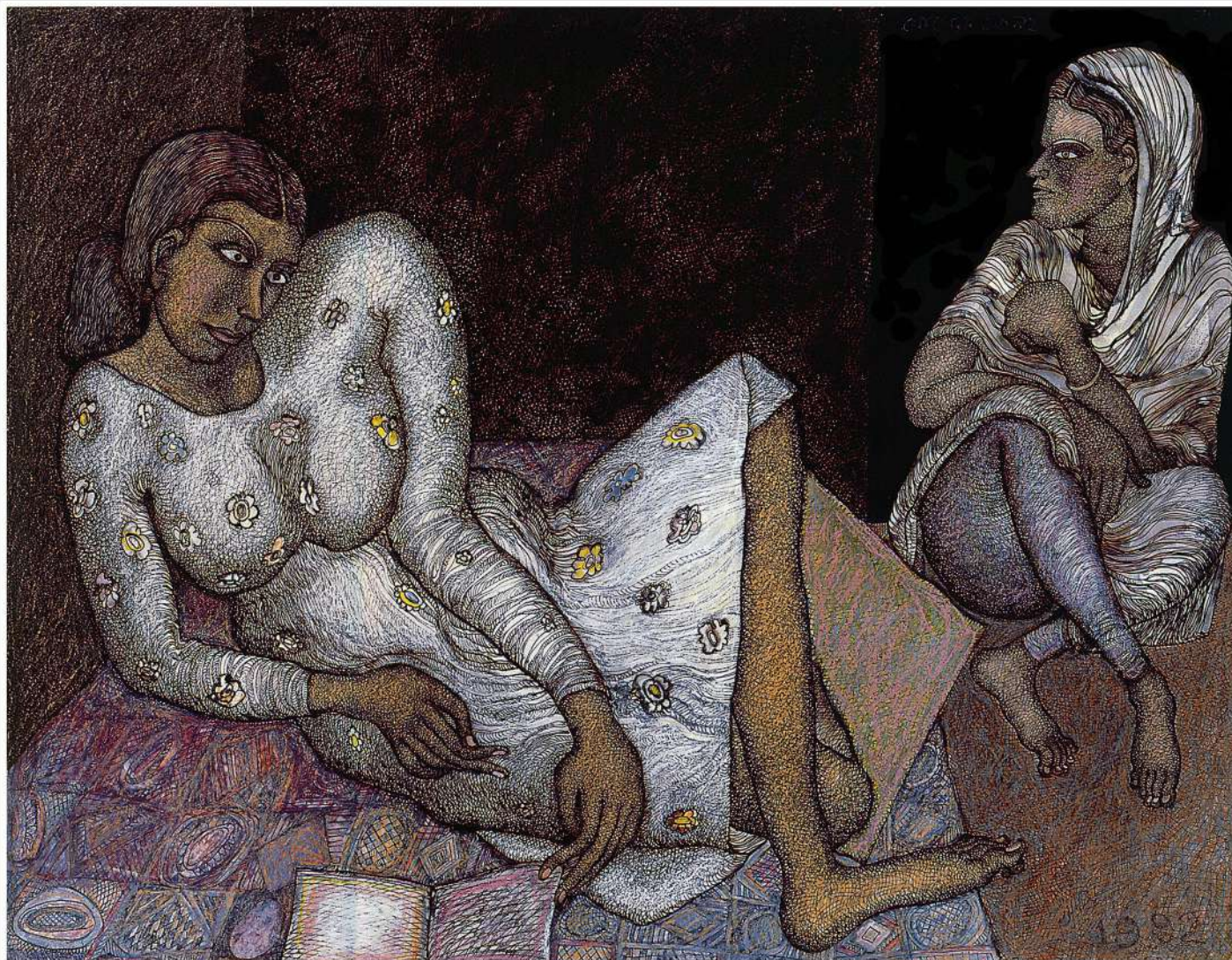
Title: Swan and lotus love
 Paper Size: 14 x 11 inch
 Print Size: 12.5 x 9 inch
 Media: Giclée on
 Hahnemühle German
 Etching paper



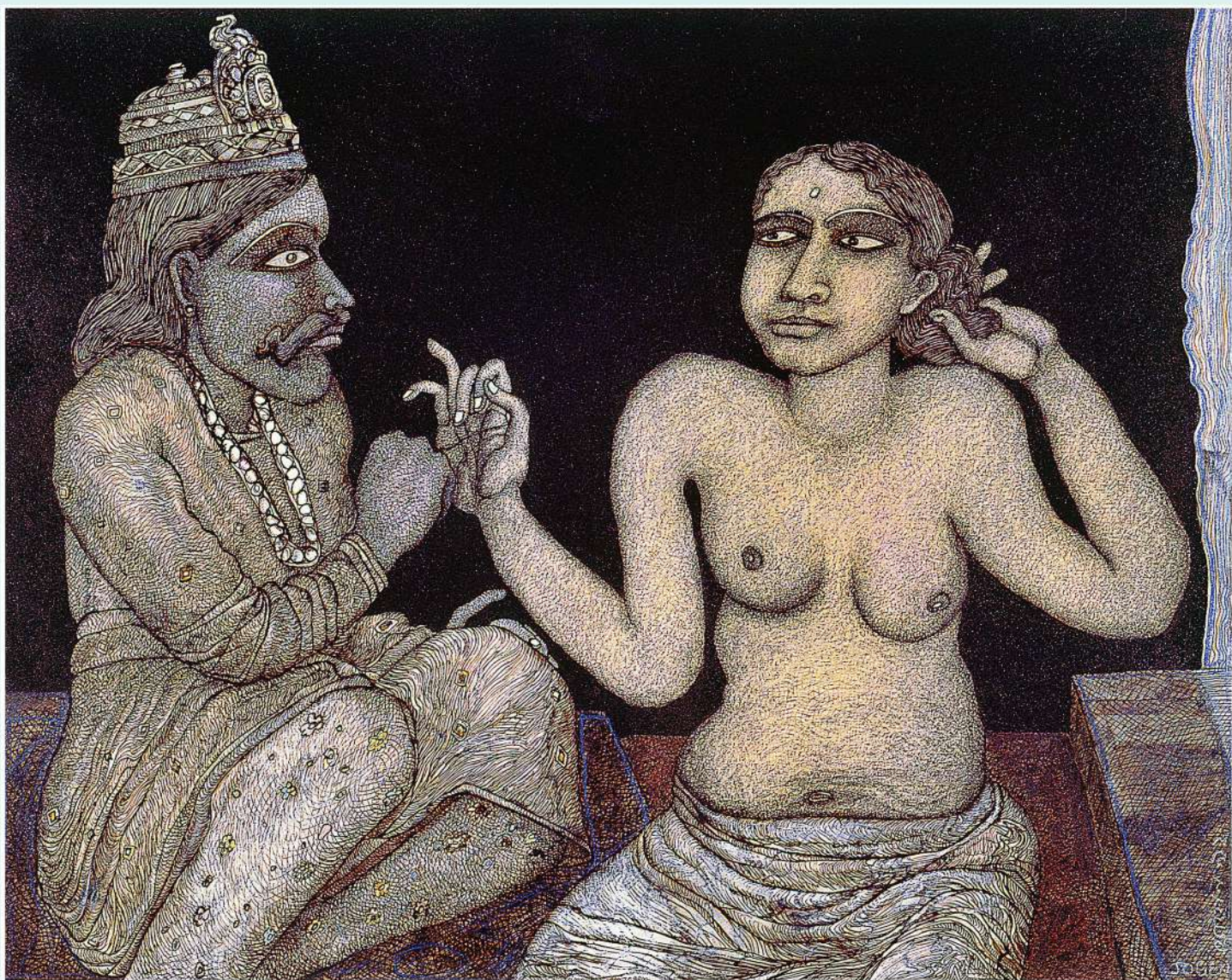
Title: Vinayaka Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



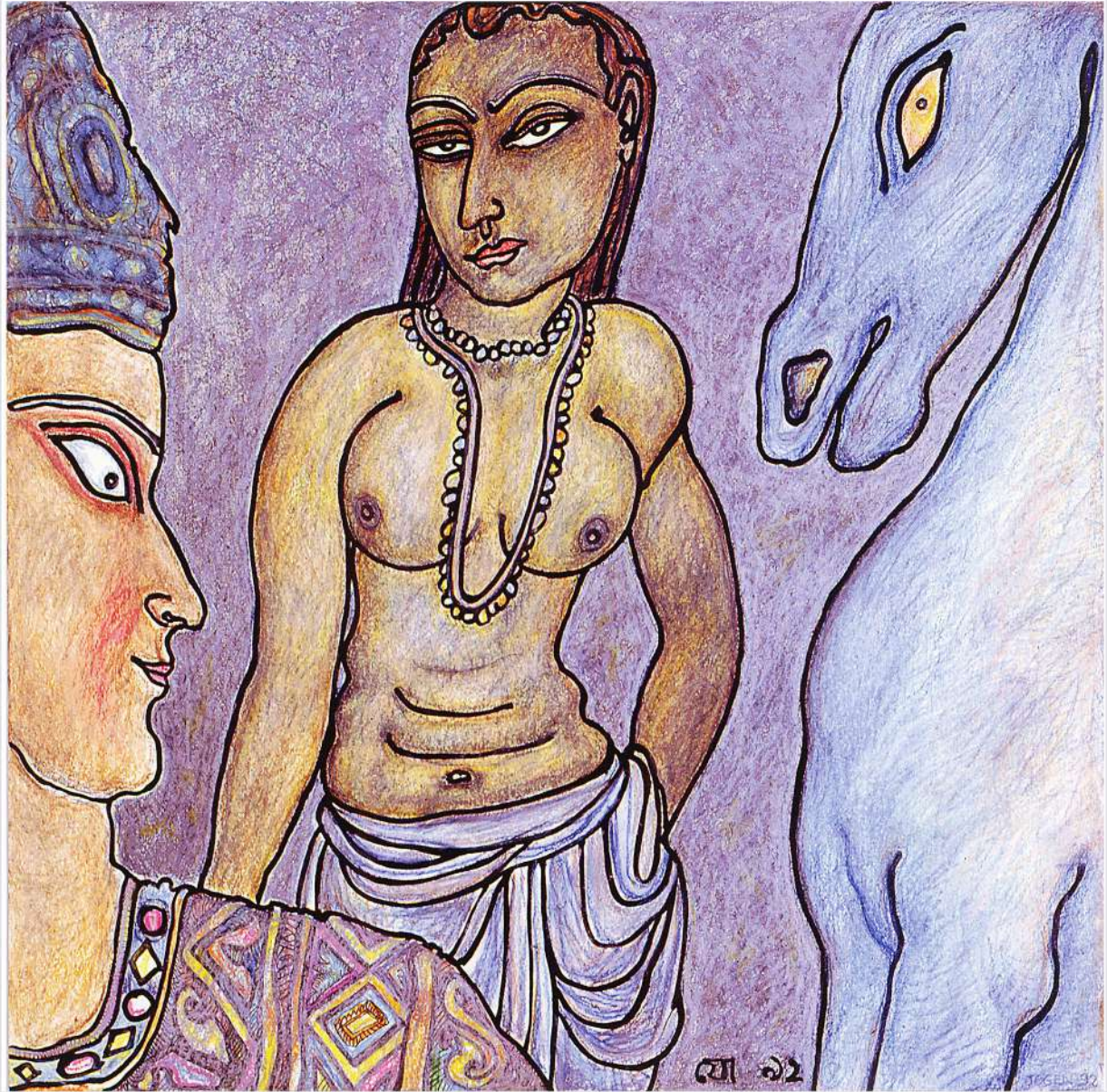
Title: Every one of us is a king Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch
Print Size: 19 x 24.6 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



Title: Vinayaka Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



Title: The invisible king Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper



Title: King and queen with their horse Paper Size: 23 x 22 inch
Print Size: 19 x 19.4 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper

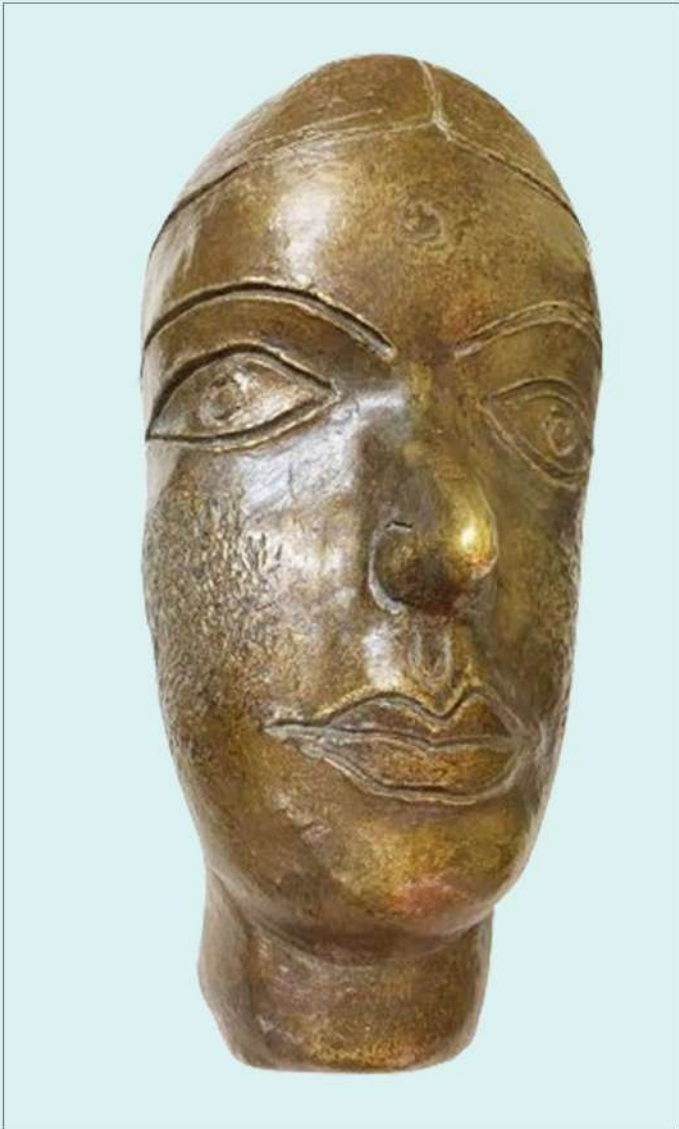


Title: White peacock and queen Paper Size: 28 x 22 inch Print Size: 26 x 18.7 inch
Media: Giclée on Hahnemühle German Etching paper

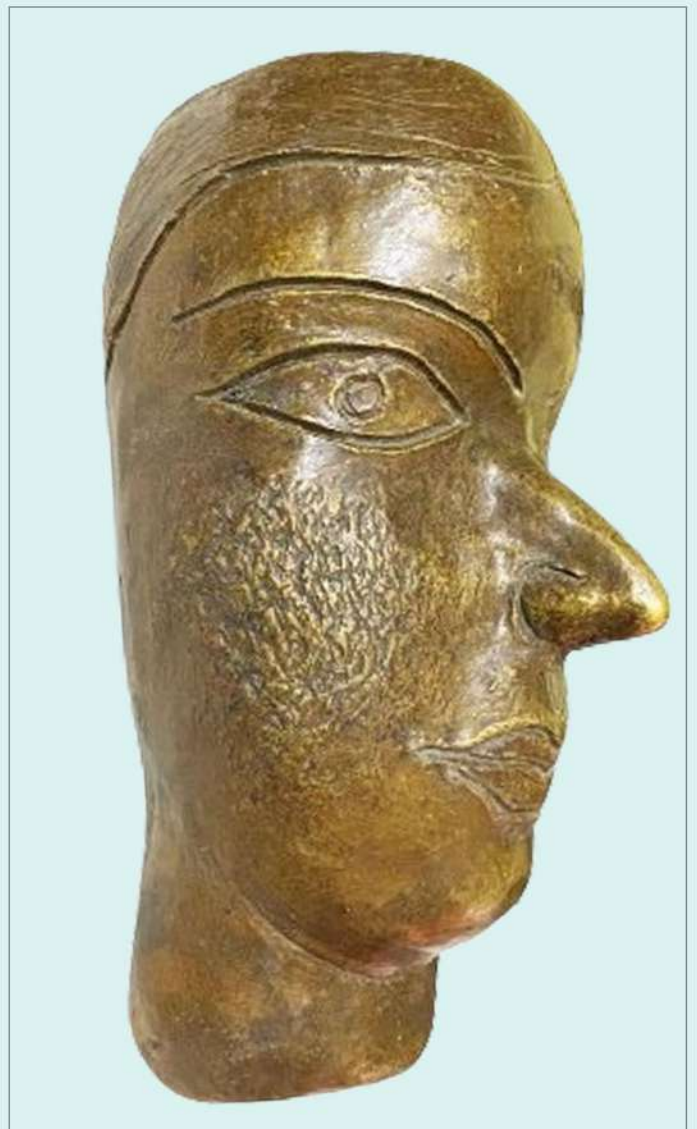


Title: Face Size: 12 x 8 inch
Media: Bronze Year: 2022





Title: Face Size: 12 x 8 inch
Media: Bronze Year: 2022





Title: Women

Size: 22 x 30 inch

Medium: Dry Pastel on paper



Size: 19.5 x 27.5 inch Medium: Dry Pastel on paper



Title: Wounded

Size: 20 x 30 inch

Medium: Watercolour on paper



Size: 19.7 x 27.5 inch

Medium: Dry Pastel on paper



Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

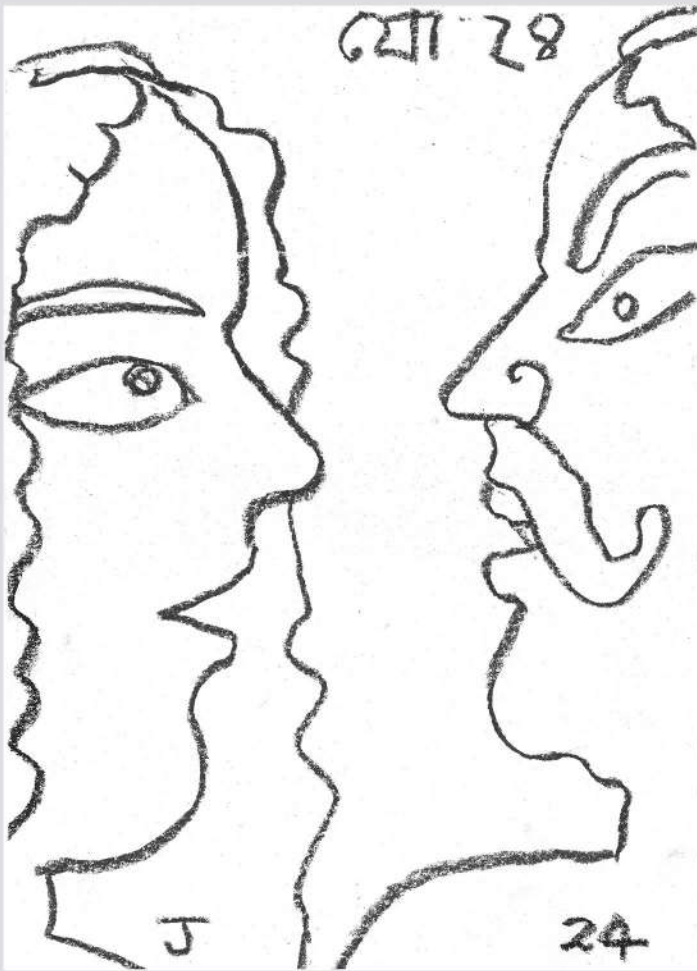




Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper





Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

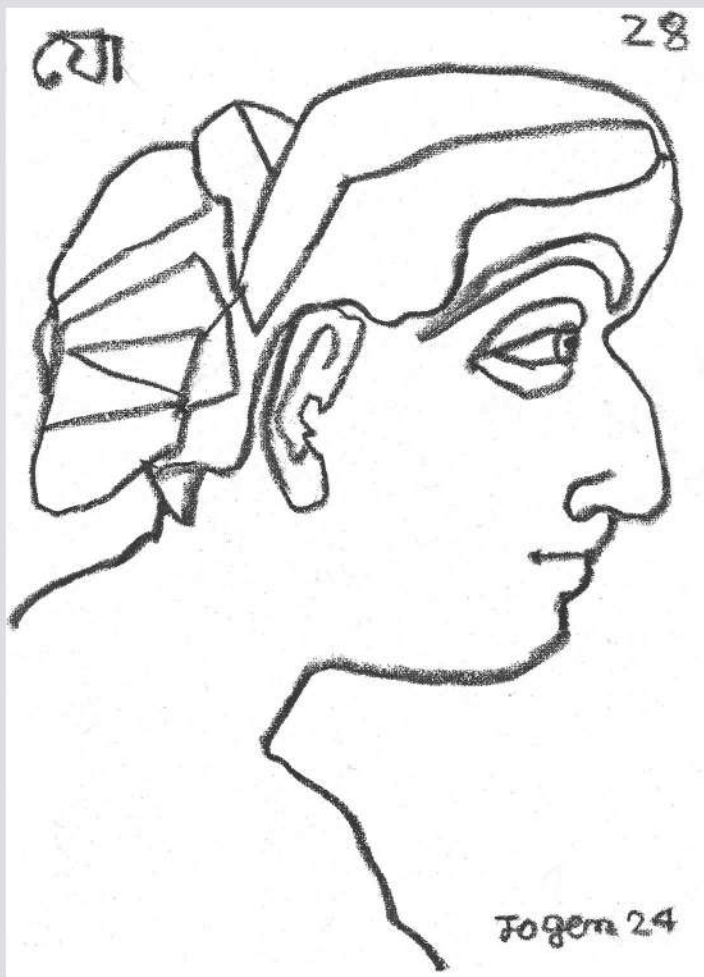




Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper





Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper

Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch
Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper





Size: 11.2 x 13.7 inch Medium: Dry Oil Pastel on paper



Size: 10.5 x 14.5 inch Medium: Ink & Pastel on paper



Size: 11 x 12 x 9.5 inch

Medium: Bronze



Size: 5.5 x 12 x 10 inch

Medium: Bronze



Size: 19.5 x 27.5 inch Medium: Pastel on paper



Size: 11 x 15 inch
Medium: Pen & Ink on paper



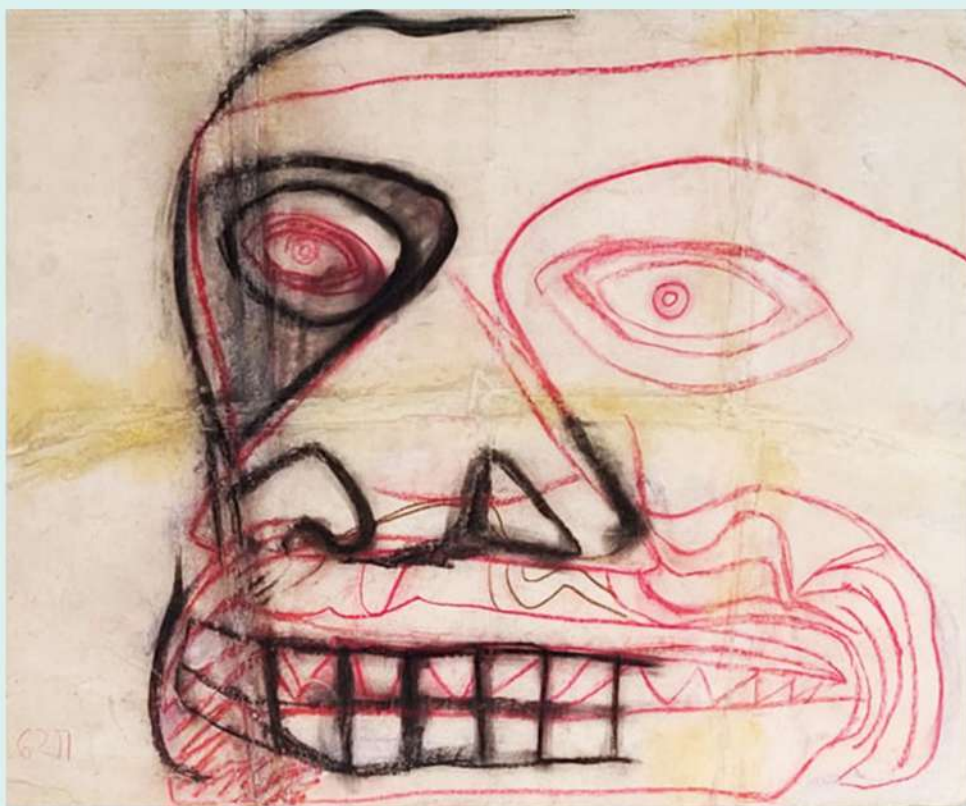
Size: 10 x 11 inch

Medium: Cross Hatch Ink & Pastel on paper



Size: 11 x 7.75 inch
Medium: Pastel on paper

Size: 17.5 x 23 inch
Medium: Dry Pastel on paper



WWW.JOGENCHOWDHURY.NET



EYE WITHIN ART PRIVATE LIMITED
34, SOUTHERN AVENUE KOLKATA 700029
9162380505

WWW.INDIANMASTERPAINTERS.COM