

EMAMI ART

# *the Bird that Sings Within*

An Exhibition of Textile  
by Ajit Kumar Das

Jan 10 - Feb 28, 2025  
1st Floor Gallery, KCC

\*Logistics costs encompass storage expenses, packaging expenses, handling charges, transportation fees

\*The dimensions below are for artwork only.



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## CURATORIAL NOTE

In his works, Ajit Kumar Das (b.1957) braids two strands of artistic practices: one, his profound artisanal knowledge and skills in traditional textile, which he acquired during his decades-long professional association with the Weavers' Service Centres (WSCs) as a master-craftsman, and the other, his ambition and aesthetic aspiration to use the traditional medium of textile for creative self-expression. The exhibition of his recent works, most of which the artist has not shown before, is centred around nature, which is understood both as the blameless beauty of natural worlds –birds, seasons and flowers – and the penchant for natural fabric and dyes in which his aesthetic choice for medium finds a deeper connection to the contemporary discourse of ecology and sustainability.

Ajit Kumar Das was born in Tripura to a humble traditional washerman family. He grew up surrounded by tubs of water and clothes, often naturally dyed in bright orange for the local Vaishnava people and mendicants. Natural colours' beauty and unique smells, which spurred his early interest in textiles, grew stronger over time, leading him to become one of India's finest artists working in natural dye. His works, which delight us with their simplicity and visual charm, strike a delicate balance between the honesty and delicacy of traditional art and the urge of an individual artist for experimentation and creative imagination. His hand-painted fabric works on display simultaneously enchant and assure us, making us feel at home in the rapidly changing, perilous world.

In the early 1970s, Das moved to Bengal from Tripura, joining a block printing factory at Srerampore, famous for its craft in Eastern India. In Srerampore and, later, in WSCs, where he worked for more than four decades in different provinces – Gujarat, Assam and Bengal – he immersed himself in the rich, re-rejuvenated world of Indian handmade textiles, learning the elaborate and intricate methods directly from the master artisans across the country. While in Ahmedabad, he excelled in Sodagori Block Printing and took in-depth lessons in Kalamkari under legendary J Gurappa Chetty and M Kailasham in Andhra Pradesh. Adapting artisan skills and knowledge to meet the modern urban demands in India and abroad was the trait of several post-independence government-run craft institutions, including the WSCs founded in 1957. Combining the earlier Swedeshi spirit of revivalism with the new modernist outlook of the Nehruvian era, the WSCs aimed to modernize Indian handloom and handmade textiles and give them a contemporary relevance. A vibrant institute for research, education and experimentation, it brought into its folds many influential cultural figures, from Pupul Jayakar and Mulk Raj Anand to KG Subramaniyan and Gautam Vaghela, opening up a fertile space for collaboration between the finest traditional artisans and art school-trained fine artists. The desire to create a living and modern textile art for India was infused into Das's artistic ambition early on, informing the aesthetics behind his work throughout his life.

Shy and soft-spoken but a keen listener and learner, Ajit Kumar Das has befriended many people across the art and craft worlds. Gautam Vaghela and legendary craft revivalist and textile conservator Martand Singh were amongst the first to recognize his artistic talents and encouraged him to pursue an independent career as a creative artist parallel to his regular job. Delighted to see the brilliance of his use of natural colours and the resonance of traditional textile art in his innovative textile works, Martand Singh showed his work at the historic *Vishwakarma* Exhibition in London in 1982. In 1985, he again chose his *Ambi* (Paisley) and Bird Motifs, done in collaboration with Tansukh Mahicha, who he called his Guru, for the Student's Festival in Sweden. During this time, the birds and the natural world began to dominate his pictorial imagination, relegating the decorative impulse of the traditional Kalamkari art to a corner. Besides this, his interactions with eminent artists like Haku Shah, KG Subramanyan, and Riten Mozumdar significantly influenced his artistic development. Instead of imitating the patterns and designs, their insistence on understanding traditional art forms' complex schemes, chromatic relation, and rationale helped him rediscover their potential, diffuse and transform them to create his own style.

By a large pond, which supplies ample water necessary to prepare naturally dyed textiles and hosts birds in its water and surrounding greenery, Ajit Kumar Das works in his studio in Birati, observing the beauty of nature. Although he observes nature closely, it does not appear as a factual, faithful representation in his works. Instead, it takes on an unworldly lyrical beauty, as if the whole work were the song of a bird. Nature does not exist only outside; the bird often sings within, in the ever-blooming trees of the mind.

## BIO

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Ajit Kumar Das was born in 1957 in Tripura to a traditional washerman family who worked for the royal family of Maharaja Udaymanikya. He came to West Bengal around 1972 and started his first job in a block printing unit in Srerampore. In 1980, he joined the Weavers' Service Centres (WSCs), where he worked as a master craftsman at WSC for many years in Ahmedabad, Guwahati, and Kolkata, until his retirement from his service in 2017.

He has been the subject of many solo exhibitions, including the one at Nandan Art Gallery (Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan, 1993); 'The Cloth is Canvas' at Eicher Art Gallery (New Delhi, 1997), 'Colours of Nature' at ICCR (Kolkata, 2014), and many more. During his WSC years, he participated in numerous group shows and major historical exhibitions, such as the Vishwakarma (London, 1982), Sweden Festival (1986), Animals (New Delhi, 1990s), all of them curated by legendary craft revivalist Martand Singh, and India Festival by Handicrafts & Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Limited (Gallery Lafayette, France, 1994).

He received many awards and honours, notably the Government of India's National Award in 1987 and the Kalamani Award in 1993. His works are part of significant international collections, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Sarabhai Foundation, India; Crafts Museum, India; The Museum of Fine Arts, Hutson and the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada.

Ajit Das lives and works in Birati, North 24 Pargana.

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Spring*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, night-flowering jasmine and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

73.6 x 43.7 in. (187 x 111 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3508





Detail of Spring

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Courting under a Chapma Tree*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

78.14 x 47.5 in. (198.5 x 120.7 cm.)

2020, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3509





*Detail of Courting under a Chapma Tree*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Spring in the Desert*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

73.6 x 37.5 in. (187 x 95.5 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3510







Detail of Spring in the Desert

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Meeting by the side of the pond*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

59.6 x 33.8 in. (151.4 x 86 cm.)

2022, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3511





Detail of Meeting by the side of the pond

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Flying Birds*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

74 x 38.58 in. (188 x 98 cm.)

2021, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3512





Detail of Flying Birds

Ajil Kumar 2023-21

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Memories of a Faraway Land*

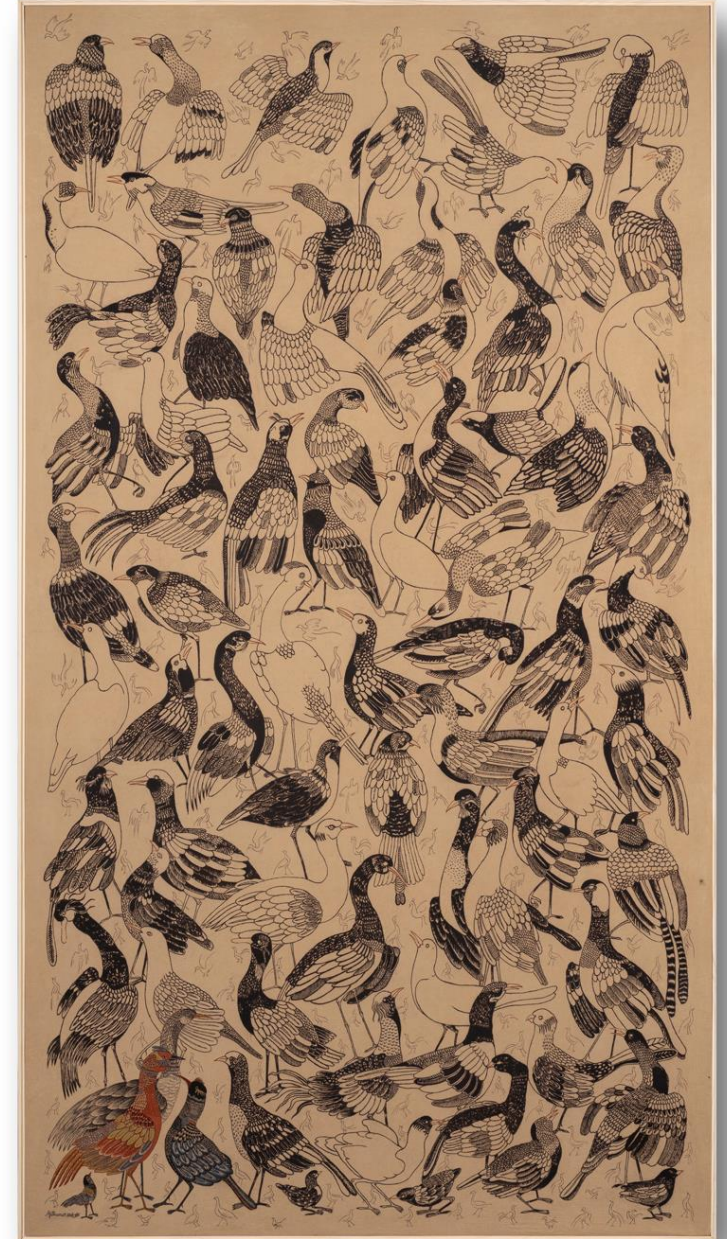
Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

72.6 x 40.55 in. (184.5 x 103 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3513





Detail of Memories of a Faraway Land

Ajitkumar Das, 2014

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Longing*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

63.89 x 39.56 in. (162.3 x 100.5 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3514







Detail of Longing

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Whisper of Early Spring*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from fermented iron solution, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

46.65 x 18.36 in. (118.5 x 80.8 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3515





*Detail of Whisper of Early Spring*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Lotus Pond*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

36.6 x 56.1 in. (93 x 142.5 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal  
Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3516





Detail of Lotus Pond

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Songs of Nature III*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

16.7 x 22.2 in. (42.5 x 56.5 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal  
Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3521





Detail of Songs of Nature III

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Songs of Nature I*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

27.16 x 19.68 in. (69 x 50 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3517







Hillman 2013

Detail of Songs of Nature I

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Humming Summer I*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

16.14 x 13.77 in. (41 x 35 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3518





Hjtkumar 00/23

Detail of Humming Summer I

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Humming Summer II*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

16.5 x 15.7 in. (42 x 40 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3519





Detail of *Humming Summer II*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Songs of Nature II*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

22.6 x 18.3 in. (57.5 x 46.5 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3520





*Detail of Songs of Nature II*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Unfurled lotuses in a pond*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

34.6 x 22 in. (88 x 56 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3522







Detail of Unfurled lotuses in a pond

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Songs of Nature IV*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from indigo, fermented iron solution, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

22.6 x 17.7 in. (57.5 x 45 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal  
Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3524





*Detail of Songs of Nature IV*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Songs of Nature V*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, fermented iron solution, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

20.07 x 14.76 in. (51 x 37.5 cm.)

2024, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower right)

AB3525





Detail of Songs of Nature V

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Humming Summer III*

Hand-painted textile using a bamboo pen, brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

23 x 18 in. (59 x 46 cm.)

2023, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3526





Detail of Humming Summer III

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Humming Summer IV*

Hand-painted textile using brush and natural dyes derived from pomegranate rind, turmeric, indigo, catechu, alizarin, and madder on cotton cloth. Alum is used as a mordant.

21.06 x 13.18 in. (53.5 x 33.5 cm.)

2020, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed and dated in English (lower left)

AB3527







*Detail of Humming Summer IV*

Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Pakshi Gosthi I*

Natural colour and mordant on cotton fabric

13.5 x 12 in. (34.2 x 30.4 cm.)

2016, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed in English (lower right)

AB2506



Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Pakshi Gosthi II*  
Natural colour and mordant on cotton fabric  
13.5 x 12 in. (34.2 x 30.4 cm.)  
2017, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal  
Signed in English (lower right)

AB2507





Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Pakshi Gosthi III*

Natural colour and mordant on cotton fabric

18 x 15 in. (46 x 38 cm.)

2016, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed in English (lower right)

AB2508



Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Pakshi Gosthi IV*

Natural colour and mordant on cotton fabric

17.3 x 14.5 in. (44 x 37 cm.)

2016, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed in English (lower right)

AB2509





Ajit Kumar Das (b. 1957)

*Bihagkul*

Natural colour and mordant on cotton fabric

17 x 14.2 in. (43 x 36 cm.)

2017, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Signed in English (lower left)

AB2510







Installation View

# EMAMI ART

KOLKATA, INDIA

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Emami Art, Kolkata, is a leading contemporary art gallery and space for cultural production. Based in Kolkata, India, the gallery focuses on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach. It is steadfast in advocating for emerging, mid-career and established artists and engaging with contemporary and historical material. The gallery also aims to create dynamic, wide-ranging registers of exhibition-making and viewing.

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- Santanu Debnath
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- Soma Das
- Suman Dey
- Ujjal Dey

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