

**Press Release*****A Thousand Years of Dreaming***A Solo Exhibition by **Debashish Paul**Curated by **Mario D'Souza**Preview on **September 6**, at 4 pm | Curatorial Walkthrough followed by Live performance at 6 pm.**Exhibition Dates: September 7 – October 26, 2024****Venue: Emami Art: Gallery 2 & 3, Ground Floor**[Exhibition Webpage.](#)

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**Overview**

Emami Art presents ***A Thousand Years of Dreaming***, contemporary artist Debashish Paul's first solo at the gallery. Centered around the film *Hazaro Saalon ka Sapna*, the body of work includes performance stills, drawings and sculptures. The exhibition examines queer desires against the backdrop of small-town socio-politics, marginalisation and stigma examined through the autobiographical-fantastical lens of the artist's own romantic relationship. Herein mask and costume along with ritual and play become devices of coming to terms with the complexity of leading double lives as queer men, concealing their identities from their families and society.

An excerpt from the curatorial essay reads, "Set in Benares, the artist and his lover meet on the banks of the Ganges in a two-segment film. The first is an enactment of a distant, seemingly impossible ritual akin to a marriage between two men, stemming from the societal and familial pressure faced by queer men in smaller towns and cities to marry women. Complete with a wedding band and a white horse, the barely dressed protagonists are adorned in flowers – their bare bodies in intimate proximity. The second segment follows the process of masking and shedding, washing and soaking, frustration and exhaustion amongst other states resulting from this concealment of sexual identities and constant posturing. The metaphors are sometimes direct, like that of cleaning oneself because of a sensation of impurity or gasping for breath under a false, thick-skinned mask-body.

Paul's drawings abstract the body and its concealing garments into stretched, fantastical bodies that are man, animal, limb and cloth. Using material used in devotional sculptures and as adornment, Paul's repositions and codes these pariah beings as the sacred"

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**About the Artist**

**Debashish Paul**, a multidisciplinary artist born in 1994 in the Nadia district of West Bengal, explores the problems of queer identity in a society dominated by heterosexual norms. Paul graduated with a B.F.A. in Sculpture from the Indian College of Art and Draftsmanship Kolkata, and an M.F.A. in Sculpture from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

Paul has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally including '*Samudra Manthan* or The Stir of the Milk Ocean' at Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Tenerife, Spain, 2024 as part of a residency; '*The Magic of the Silver Swan*' curated by Kinnari Sariya, Bowes Museum, Bernard Castle, UK, 2023-24; Prince Claus Fund Biennial Symposium in Sri Lanka, 2023; Performance program with HH Art Space, supported by Pro Helvetia's "To-gather" International Collaboration, 2023; Cite internationale des arts, Institut Francais Paris Residency

supported by Prameya Art Foundation, and the French Institute in India in 2023; Kochi-Muziris Biennale Performance Residency in collaboration with HH Art Space and Nikhil Chopra, 2022-2023; The Students' Biennale in Kochi, 2021; 'Of Liminal Beings and Other Spaces' at Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; 'Beyond Binaries: Sensing Art through Queer Lensing' at KCC, Kolkata, 2021; and 'Emami Art Open Call Exhibition' at Emami Art, Kolkata in 2020.

Emami Art has shown his works at various art fairs, including Art Dubai 2024 in the 'Bawwaba' section as a solo project curated by Emiliano Valdez; India Art Fair 2023 in New Delhi, where he was also the India Art Fair Artist in Residence; and Art Dusseldorf, Germany, in 2023.

Paul has several awards to his credit, including the Inlaks Fine Art Awards and Residency at 1 Shanthi Road Studio/Gallery, Bengaluru in 2022. He has participated in the Kala Sakshi Workshop in 2021. Paul was awarded the Kalanad Scholarship 2022-23 by the Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation; the Seed Award by the Prince Claus Fund in 2022; the Inlaks Fine Art Award by Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation in 2022; the Allegro 1st prize by Contemporary LYNX, London in 2021 and the Indian Artist Relief Fund 2021 by Museum of Art and Photography in partnership with 1Shanthiroad Studio/Gallery.

Debashish Paul lives and works in Varanasi and Nadia, West Bengal.

### **Quote by the Artist**

'Over the past few years, I have connected with queer individuals from rural areas who come to the city for education while concealing their sexual identities. Interviews with them reveal a deep fear of coming out due to societal pressures. Many feel trapped, planning to marry women to satisfy family expectations, reflecting the strong family bonds in India. Through my work, I aim to highlight these personal and societal struggles, drawing from my experiences to advocate for a more fluid and inclusive society, while respecting cultural and ritualistic contexts. By engaging with history and mythology, particularly through the lens of Banaras, I envision a future where my personal relationships and artistic expressions reveal the hidden aspects of my true self, blending love, sorrow, pain, dreams, and imagination.'

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### **About the Curator**

**Mario D'Souza** is a curator and writer based between Goa, Kochi, and New Delhi, India. He is on the curatorial team for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and is Director of Programmes and Exhibitions at the Kochi Biennale Foundation. He is also co-artistic Director and Resident Curator at HH Art Spaces, India. His research interests include Indian Ocean and Silk Road imaginaries, non-alignment and the nation-building project, performance cultures and aesthetics of dissent; legal and extra-legal systems, evidence, and truth modalities.

Mario D'Souza has curated exhibitions at Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India; Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational, United Kingdom; and Fondazione Elpis, Italy, among others.

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### **Quote by Richa Agarwal, CEO of Emami Art**

"Debashish Paul is one of the most promising contemporary artists we work with. We have shown his exceptional works at many art fairs and exhibitions in India and abroad. This is his first solo show which is curated by Mario D'Souza, showcasing his recent works, including a performance film, drawings, sculptural dress, objects and photographs. Centred around his deeply personal thoughts and engagements, the exhibition explores some of the significant issues and concerns relevant to our contemporary time. I have seen Debashish Paul's works since his early career, and he has grown up to be one of the strong contemporary voices of performance art in India. He is an inspiration for many young and emerging artists, and this will be a

great opportunity to get a closer and elaborate engagement with his artistic practice and to know the artist more. I thank Mario D'Souza and my team for bringing such a beautiful and engaging show to the public"

(Says Richa Agarwal, CEO of Emami Art)

**Quote by Ushmita Sahu, Director & Head Curator of Emami Art**

"Working with Debashish Paul since 2020 has been an incredibly rewarding experience, as I've watched him evolve into an artist of remarkable depth and talent. His first solo exhibition, '**A Thousand Years of Dreaming**,' is a profound exploration of queer identity within a heteronormative society. Debashish's work delves into the complexities of love, identity, and societal expectations, blending performance, film, photography, drawing, and sculpture to create a narrative that is both deeply personal and universally resonant. The tension he captures between the need to conceal and the desire to express is truly powerful. This exhibition is not just a showcase of his artistic abilities but also a compelling statement on the human condition. I couldn't be prouder to see him reach this milestone, and I am certain this is just the beginning of a significant career".

(Says Ushmita Sahu, Director & Head Curator of Emami Art)

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**About Emami Art**

Emami Art is a leading contemporary art gallery and space for cultural production. Established in 2017 with a focus on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach that echoes South Asia's history, socio-cultural and geo-political narratives, Emami Art has an inclusive, symbiotic framework where profitability supports sustainable resource regeneration and public service. The gallery is a green building and strictly maintains free access to all policies.

Emami Art represents emerging, mid-career and established contemporary artists. The gallery also has a dynamic programme of wide-ranging registers of exhibitions. Since its inception, Emami Art has curated and hosted large-scale to intimate shows and participated in national and international events and fairs. Our artists' works are also part of prominent national and international collections, including public foundations and museums.

Amongst the other regular programming, the gallery's Locus in Focus provides a platform to local and regional communities through short and long-term projects. EA Learning integrates both physical and virtual interfaces. It helps the arts community free access to regular mentorship programs, workshops, residency opportunities and innovative educational activities that facilitate artistic development, help build collaborative networks and provides a supportive environment for emerging talent. Critical discourses, interactions, documentation and exchange are also essential to our mandate. Under the umbrella of EA Discourse, the gallery publishes artistic, creative and pedagogical materials. As part of our knowledge-making and archiving process, Emami Art regularly holds talks, seminars, panel discussions and conversations with artists, curators and key partners to establish a space for critical engagement.

Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, emphasis on community and socially relevant engagements, institutional partnerships and more via a multi-year vision for the future, Emami Art is a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity.

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