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Showcasing indigenous genius at the upcoming Gond exhibition

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

The current solo show by Gond artist Bhajju Shyam's *Maa Matre* has more than 40 works on display. The artworks revolve around nature, a subject closest to Bhajju's heart. He portrays nature at its best — fruit-laden trees, a host of animals and birds, deer with multiple horns, detailed single color and single color ink works in black and a special series of works in grey, something that he has attempted for the first time.

In all his works, his captivating visuals and easy storytelling style fuse his perceptions of the modern world with his tribe's unique visual language. Perhaps the most versatile artist of the Gond art tradition, Bhajju uses inherited forms in very current and expressive ways, while experimenting with innovative subjects and new ideas.

"I never set out to be an artist and would paint on the walls, as per the Gond tradition. I almost became a watchman, but little that I know that my chacha Jangarh Singh Shyamji's influence on me would be so strong that I would become an artist. I wanted to dedicate my first solo show to my mother. Thus, the title of the show is her name — Matre. I have made many books, and my works have been shown in museums and institutions in India and abroad, but a first solo show in India is special," shares Bhajju Syam.

Anubhav Nath, curatorial director of OJAS Art, says, "This is Bhajju's first solo show in India, hence truly special for all of us. This solo



An artwork by Bhajju Shyam.

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show is a part of our commitment to the tribal and traditional arts and the next step of the Ojas Art Award, which is held annually in collaboration with the Jaipur Literature Festival. We hope to organize more such solo shows in the future. The best works of these artists must be shown extensively in India and newer audiences must be generated."

Bhajju Shyam was born in Pattangarh, in Madhya Pradesh in Central India in 1971. Sixteen year-old Bhajju left his village and came to Bhopal in search of work. He found work as a night watchman, until his uncle Jangarh Singh Shyam, the

most brilliant Gond artist of the time, and the one who brought Gond art from the walls of the village into the public eye asked him to become his apprentice. As Bhajju's talent became apparent, Jangarh encouraged Bhajju to strike out on his own.

Bhajju's work soon became known throughout India, and his first international exposure came in 1998 when he was part of a group exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Since then his work has been shown in the UK, Germany, Holland and Russia. In 2001, he received a state award for Best Indig-

enous Artist.

He has ten books to his credit and his best-known work, *The London Jungle Book*, is a visual travelogue of his 2002 visit to London, where he went to paint the interior of an up-market Indian restaurant. The book, published by Tara Books and the Museum of London, was released in November 2004, along with a three-month exhibition at the Museum.

Bhajju has received many awards: In 2001, he received a state award for Best Indigenous Artist (Madhya Pradesh), *CRESCER Magazine* 30 Best Children's Book Award Brazil in 2011 and the Ojas Art Award in 2015.

Cumulatively, his books have sold nearly a 100,000 copies, worldwide and have been made available in multiple languages.

Maa Matre will be on display at OJAS Art, New Delhi from 17 November to 11 December