

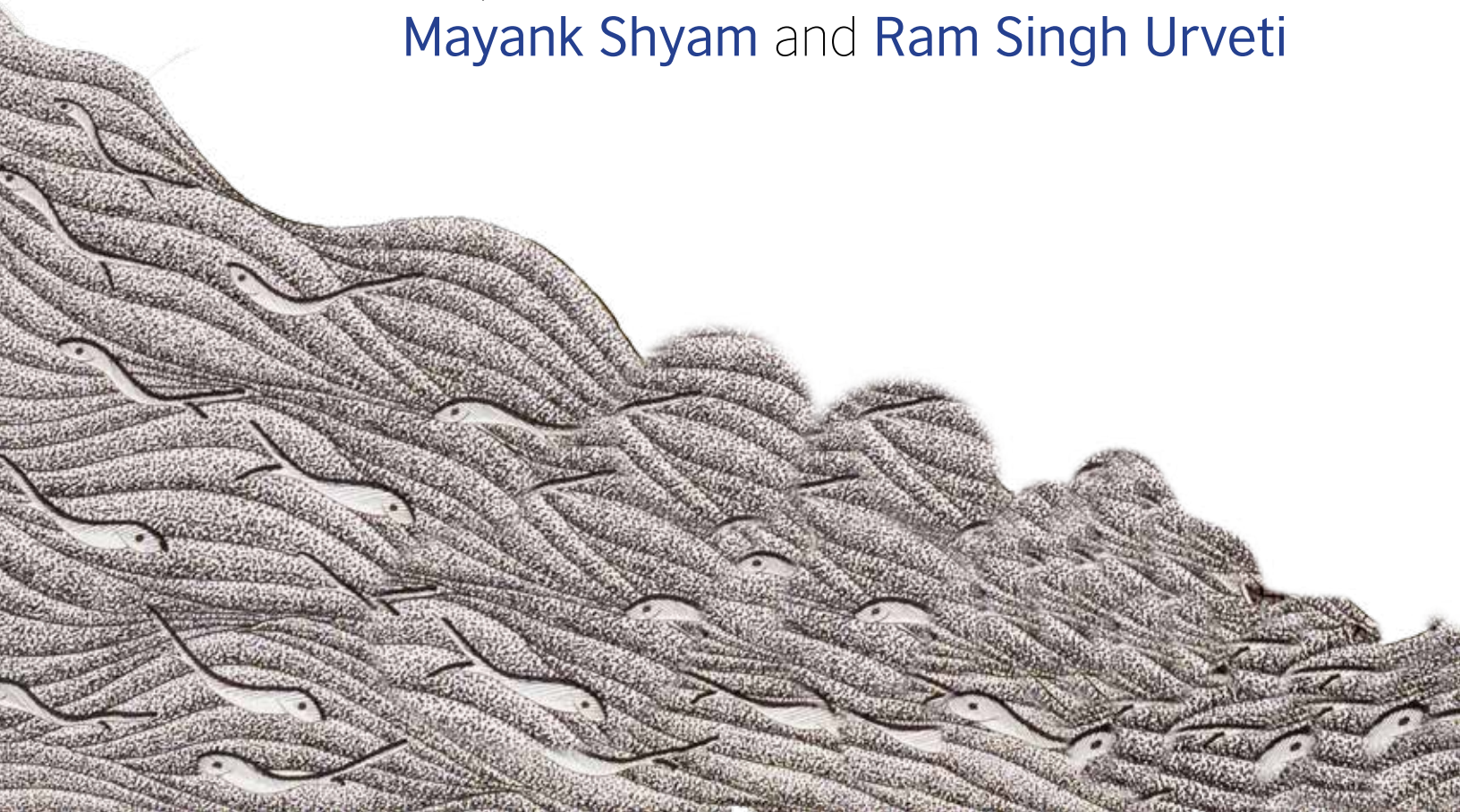


OJAS
ART

The Rain Within

Two-person show

Mayank Shyam and Ram Singh Urveti



OJAS is a Sanskrit word which may be best described as a potent embodiment of creative energy. Ojas Art has an innovative approach to Indian art and presents new ideas in the contemporary art space with a pronounced mission of presenting projects that are well researched and socially inclined.

Over the last decade, Ojas Art has been working in the Indian indigenous arts and aims to bridge the gap between the mainstream contemporary and indigenous arts.

Ojas Art is headed by Anubhav Nath.

A vocabulary of oral histories

What does it mean for an artist to be deeply connected with primordial truths of nature, to have access to knowledge that spans eons of the earth's evolution itself? What does it feel like to carry forward these stories, passed on carefully through oral histories, folklore, song and dance, rituals and customs? For artists from the Gond pardhan community, all this is part of their identity; their artworks are embedded with marks of their tribal heritage, along with a consciousness of their responsibility in communicating it to a larger audience. **Ram Singh Urveti** and **Mayank Shyam** are Gond artists from different generations, with varied and distinctive styles. They come from a lineage of story tellers who use visuals in a powerful way to speak of their way of life.

Mayank Shyam creates as vivid and poetic a picture with his words as with paint and a brush. He speaks passionately about the manner in which he engages with the numerous myths, legends and sayings from the Gond tradition, visualising each one through his personal approach to the world, in this present time and space.

One of Shyam's greatest inspirations is his father, the late Jangarh Singh Shyam, whom he lost when he was 14 years old. He explains how his father advised him to imagine and think independently, even as he learned the intricacies of drawing and colouring techniques under his tutelage. While deeply indebted to Jangarh's thought processes and style, besides the numerous other influences that he came across through his father's association with Indian modernists, the innate artist in Shyam learnt to rely on his intuitive creativity and ability to envision scenarios by the time he started showcasing his work in 2005.

In the *dighna-chowka* tradition of natural pigment painting (on the walls and floors), the numerous divine beings of the Adivasi pantheon had special places in the home and its surrounding. Jangarh Singh gave innovative forms to these abstract representations that then became a new visual language to tell the stories of the Gondi gods and

goddesses. Mayank Shyam inherited this innovative streak. Digging deep into the traditions and tales, and their meanings, he creates a world of interpretations both in colour and black-and-white. The paintings embody a living, pulsating world, peopled with a multitude of creatures that celebrate the symbiotic relationship all living beings have with each other and the universe.

Jal, dharti, aakash—water, earth, and the sky—these are the elements central to most of Shyam's explorations. Whether the complex and intriguing story of *Bada Dev*, the most prominent god of creation, or myths surrounding other cosmic beings and nature spirits, his picturisations are directed by what he refers to as his 'third eye', or his subconscious vision, that helps him translate his imagination into a painting. He uses a wonderful logic in representation—rather than making a direct connection between the ocean and the colour blue for example, he prefers to indicate the element through a living form, like that of a fish. Similarly, instead of painting brown earth, he symbolises it through the tree with its roots planted firmly in the ground. A bird then becomes the obvious indication of the sky and wind. Colours too, come into being on his canvases through metaphorical connections rather than direct observations.

In a recent work from 2022, Shyam creates a lyrical composition with a tree form, that appears as a symbol of our ovoid planet. While its branches reach out in the upper half of the painting, its roots echo a similar formation below the surface connecting water bodies in the core of the earth with the atmosphere that surrounds its branches. Fish inhabit the spaces between the overlapping root forms, while the central pivotal space is occupied by the Jal devi, or goddess of the sea.

Reiterating a similar composition, and reflecting Shyam's fluid control over pictorial space and balance, is another work from '22, that celebrates the theme of union. In this painting, a differently structured tree with expanding branches full of birds and blooms shelters not only a joyous couple dancing, but also a pair of mating peacocks camouflaged in the foliage.

Shyam firmly believes that the morals, as well as spiritual and life teachings from the various stories are as relevant today as in the ancient times. For him divinity and its worship must begin with humans respecting the environment they are surrounded by.

In the Gond tradition, there are elaborate and meaningful fables that provide reasoning for the existence of every creature and aspect of life, its form, its colour, as well as its behaviour. The laws of nature are paramount, and there is a balance between what is seen as vulnerable and what is strong and resilient – survival is explained with relevance and respect to the multiplicity of life. Ram Singh Urveti is one of the most well-known artists in the tradition, whose fluid style responds directly to this multiplicity.

In ‘*Ped aur pakshi*’ (Tree and birds), Urveti’s meticulous line work and fine balance of compositional elements are prominently visible. The birds appear in graceful motion, creating an upward movement while blending with the dynamic quality of the leaves and branches. The drawing is adapted to the shape of the picture plane, the lines and forms comfortably embracing the corners, verticality or horizontality of the space. “I work directly on the paper or canvas – I do not sketch,” he says. “My lines have become slightly less fine now with age, there was a time when people would try to scrutinise and even sniff at my work to confirm if it was printed and not drawn.” Looking at the expertise he demonstrates, it is hard to imagine any reduction in the quality of work, particularly in his largely black-and-white repertoire.

‘*Gilabri ka sapna*’ (Dream of the squirrel) is an interesting drawing from 2011. Having spent a week in thought at an international workshop, away from his home in Bhopal, it came upon him that he could present a story of what was around him. He observed the squirrels jumping around the trees, and devised a narrative that spoke of how each living being thinks its own life is the most problematic, and feels another creature’s life is better. But it is not so, there are an equal number of problems in each one’s situation. It provides an understanding that one should be happy with one’s lot in life.

In such philosophical articulations, artists like Urveti express themselves with a vocabulary that is fed by intensive knowledge from oral histories. They are also carriers of a legacy of song, dance and theatre prevalent in the region. Urveti remembers Jangarh (Singh Shyam) ‘*mama*’, or uncle with great fondness, and recalls acting alongside him in presentations of mythological scenes. Working with Jangarh and being associated with J. Swaminathan and the Indira

Gandhi Manav Sangrahalay opened up a whole world of creative possibilities, that also led to him receiving several awards and experimental projects like the book ‘*The Night Life of Trees*’ (by Tara Publishing) a collaborative volume of paintings with other Gond artists Bhajju Shyam and Durga Bai.

Urveti has been praised for his work with trees; particularly significant are the ‘seeing’ trees with leaves in the form of eyes. Stories of the Gondi Ramayana, and tales of the genesis of the five Rajas of Gond are subjects that currently interest him. The extensive histories behind some of the visuals mean that every viewer may not understand the narrative in full, for instance, in a complicated story with many episodes like that of ‘*Surbigaaye*’. However, the beauty and simplicity of these forms is such that there are many ways in which to interpret them.

While Urveti commonly works with black and white, he enjoys coloured painting too. ‘*Dudh, Dahi aur Mahi ka Ped*’ is a work that represents his comfort with the visual possibilities of colour. In the story, the Raja’s garden had trees, which he fondly named like his own children. When his daughter was ready for marriage, he invited suitors to guess the names of the trees, in return of which he would offer his daughter’s hand. When no one succeeded, the girl was discussing this at the river with her close friends; they wondered if she would remain a spinster. She told her friends the names of the trees, and listening silently nearby was a tiger. He then took human form and gave the names to the Raja, and thus married the princess. The shadowy form of the ‘*sber*’, tiger in the centre of vividly coloured trees, and the uniquely configured human figures wading in the blue waters bring life to the fantastical tale, and make it believable.

Looking back, Urveti realises that his village is no more surrounded by the thick impenetrable forest that he remembers from his childhood; the loss of a living environment is not only an urban phenomenon but a rural one too. The paintings and drawings have a larger role than we realise, they also revitalise a landscape that is now perhaps only in memory and imagination.

LINA VINCENT

April 2023

Art Historian & Curator

Mayank Shyam



MS2201
Dharti Roop, 2022
Acrylic & Ink on paper, 28 x 21 inch



MS2202
Rang biranga Mor Pakshi, 2021
Acrylic & Ink on paper, 28 x 20 Inch



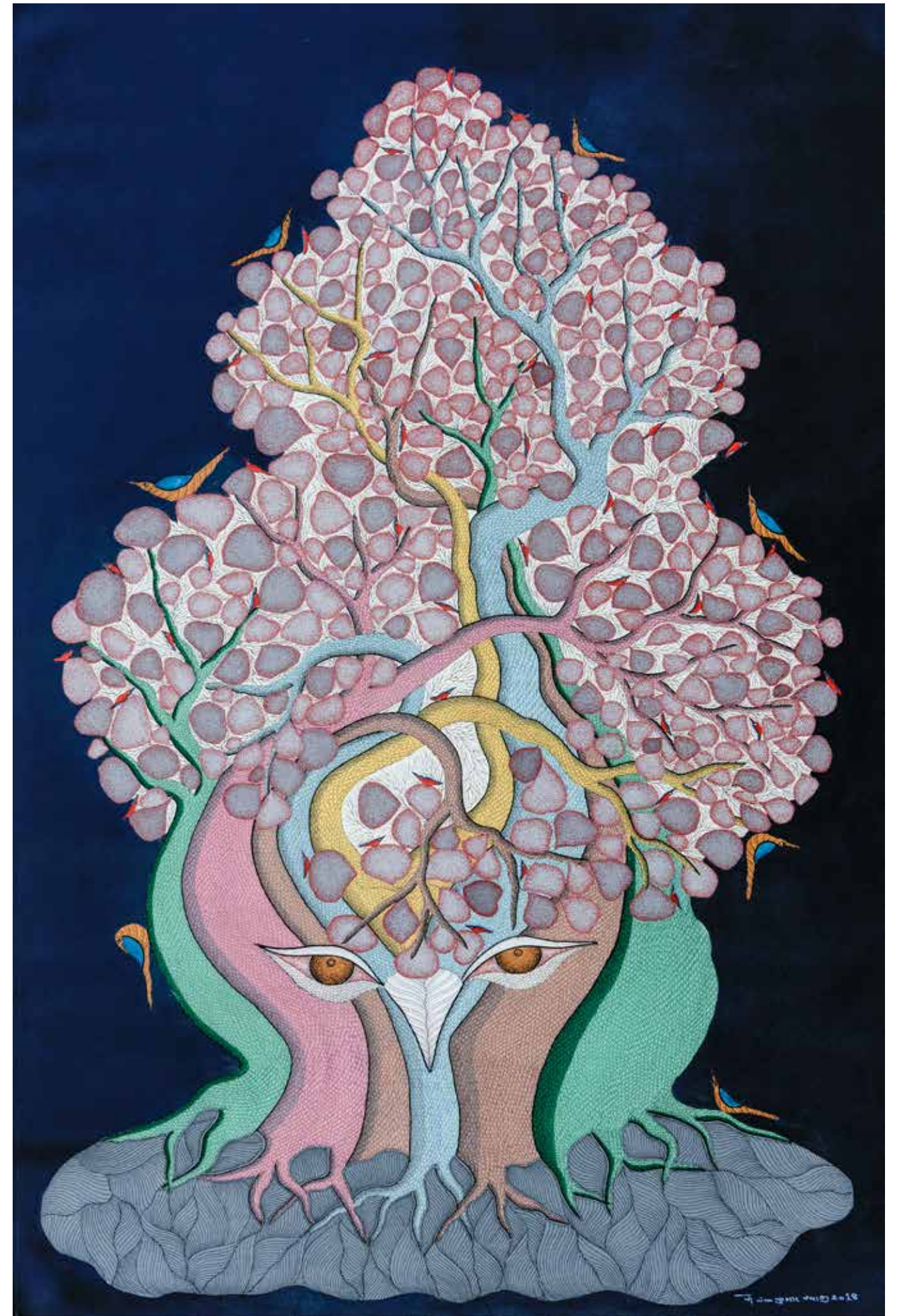
MS2207
Baagh Baana Dev, 2021
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 48 x 72 inch



MS2203
Hiran, 2021
Acrylic & Ink on paper, 28 x 21 inch



MS2209
Jal, Dharti, Akaash, 2021
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 48 x 72 inch



MS2208
Baikunth Taarini, 2018
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 48 x 72 Inch



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MS2206
Kakra Mal Chatri. Kaag Bhushan, 2022
Acrylic & Ink on paper, 28 x 19 inch



MS2210
Shubh Milan, 2022
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 48 x 72 inch



MS2211
Jal, Pataal, Dharti, Akaash, 2022
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 48 x 72 inch

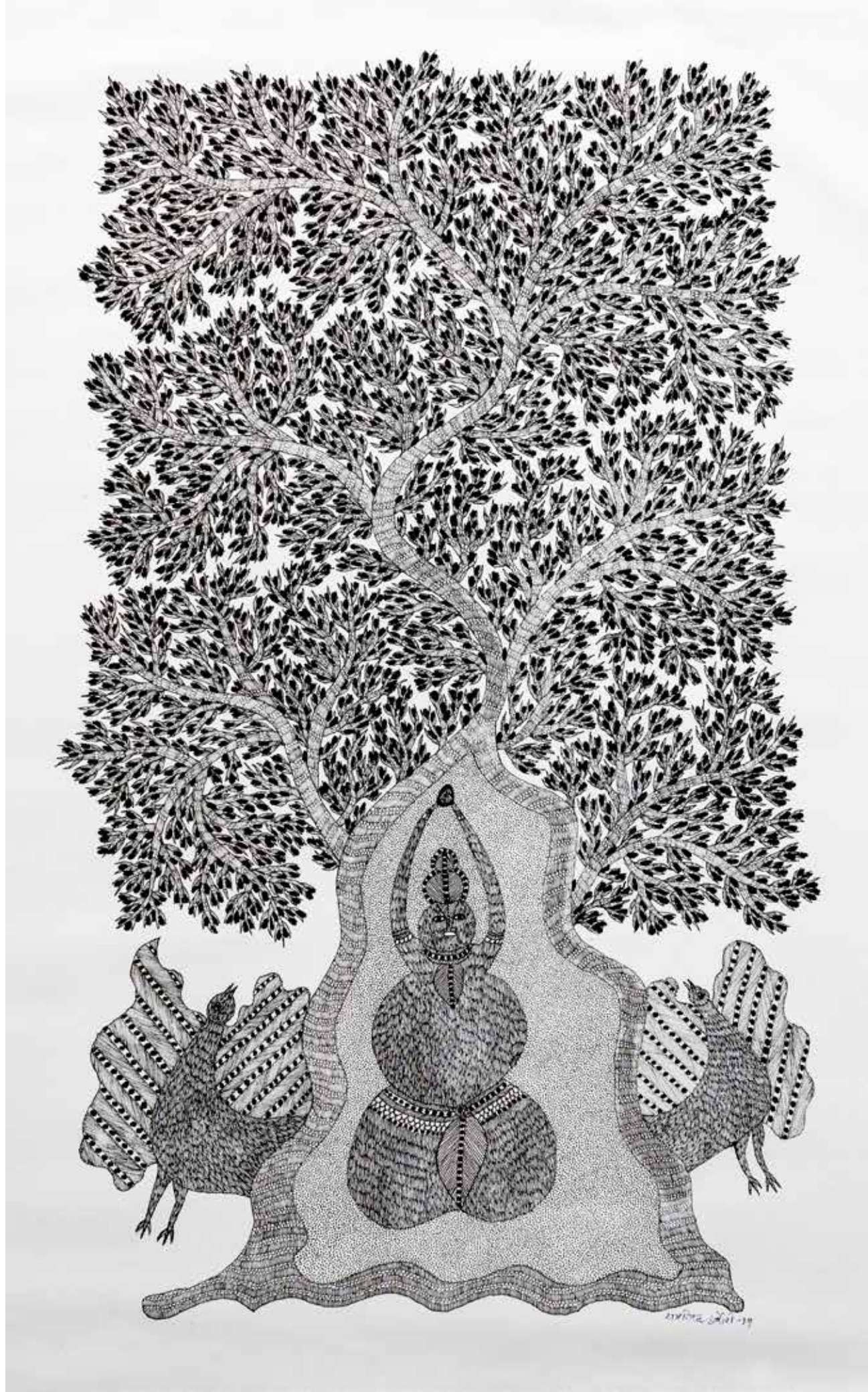


MS2301
Neer, 2021
Acrylic & Ink on canvas, 42 x 72 inch

Ram Singh Urveti



RSU01
Ped aur Pakshi, 2019
Ink on canvas, 30 x 20 inch



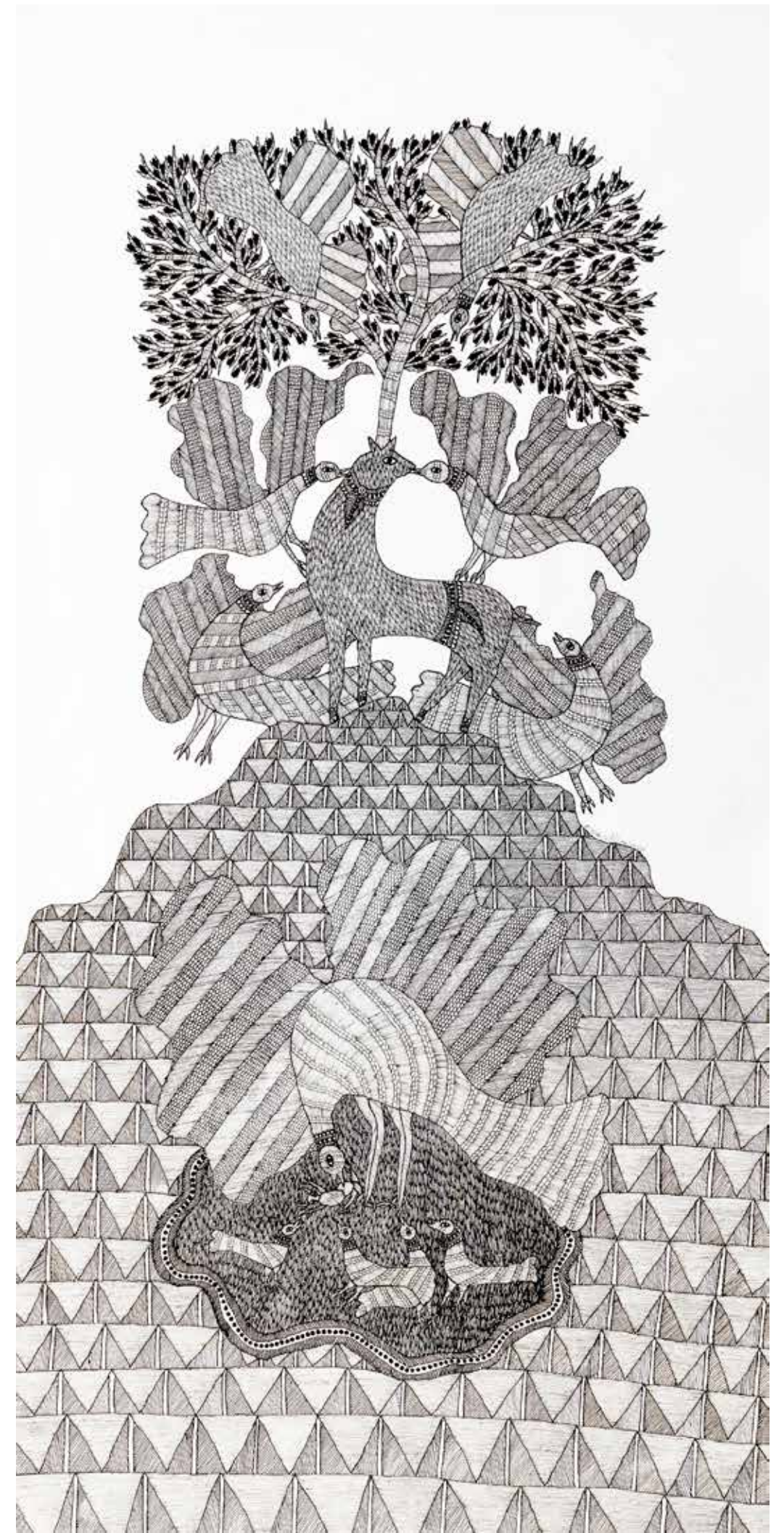
RSU02
Van Devi, 2019
Ink on canvas, 37 x 24 inch



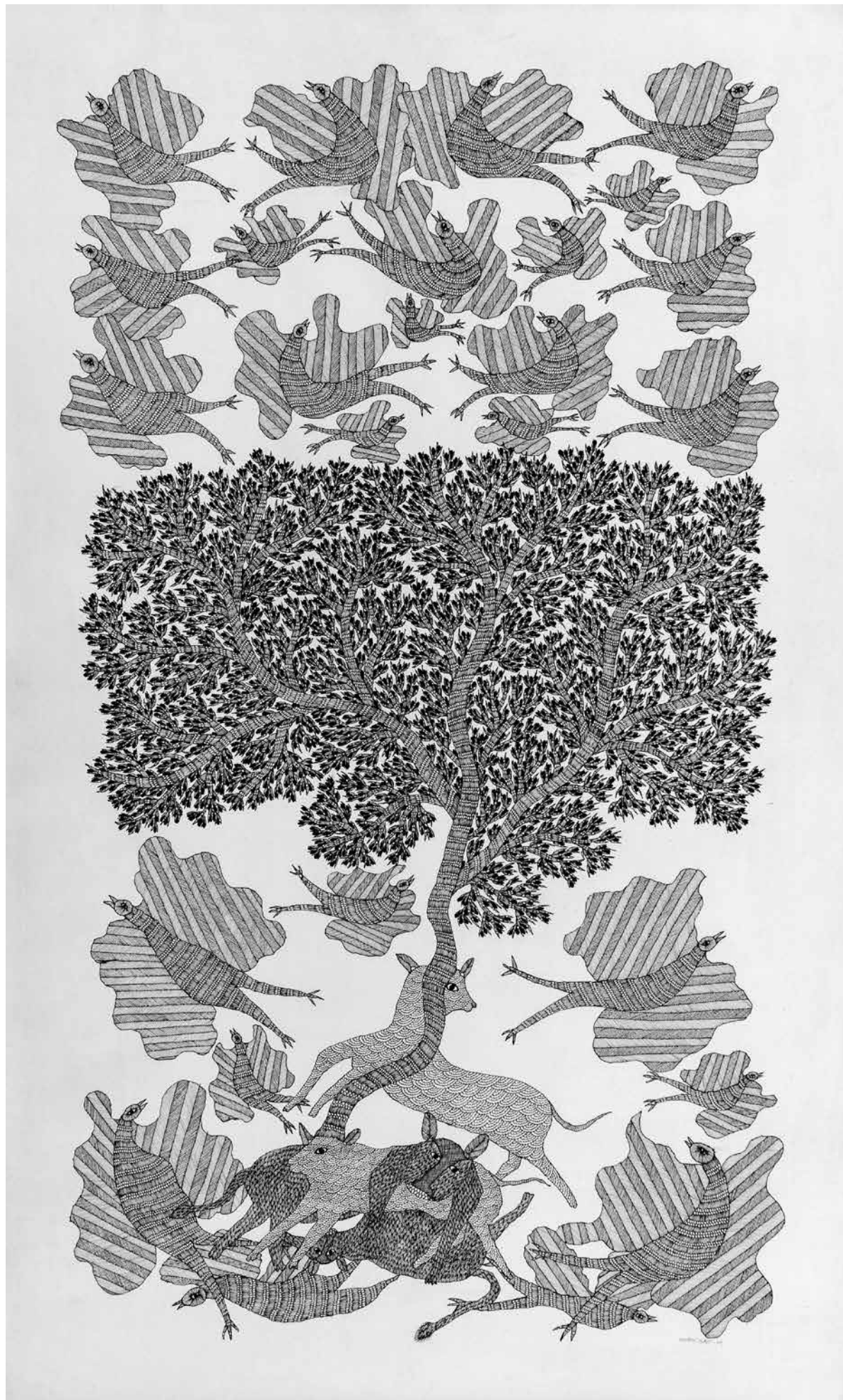
RSU03
Gilehri aur Mor Pakshi, 2020
Ink on canvas, 44 x 21 inch



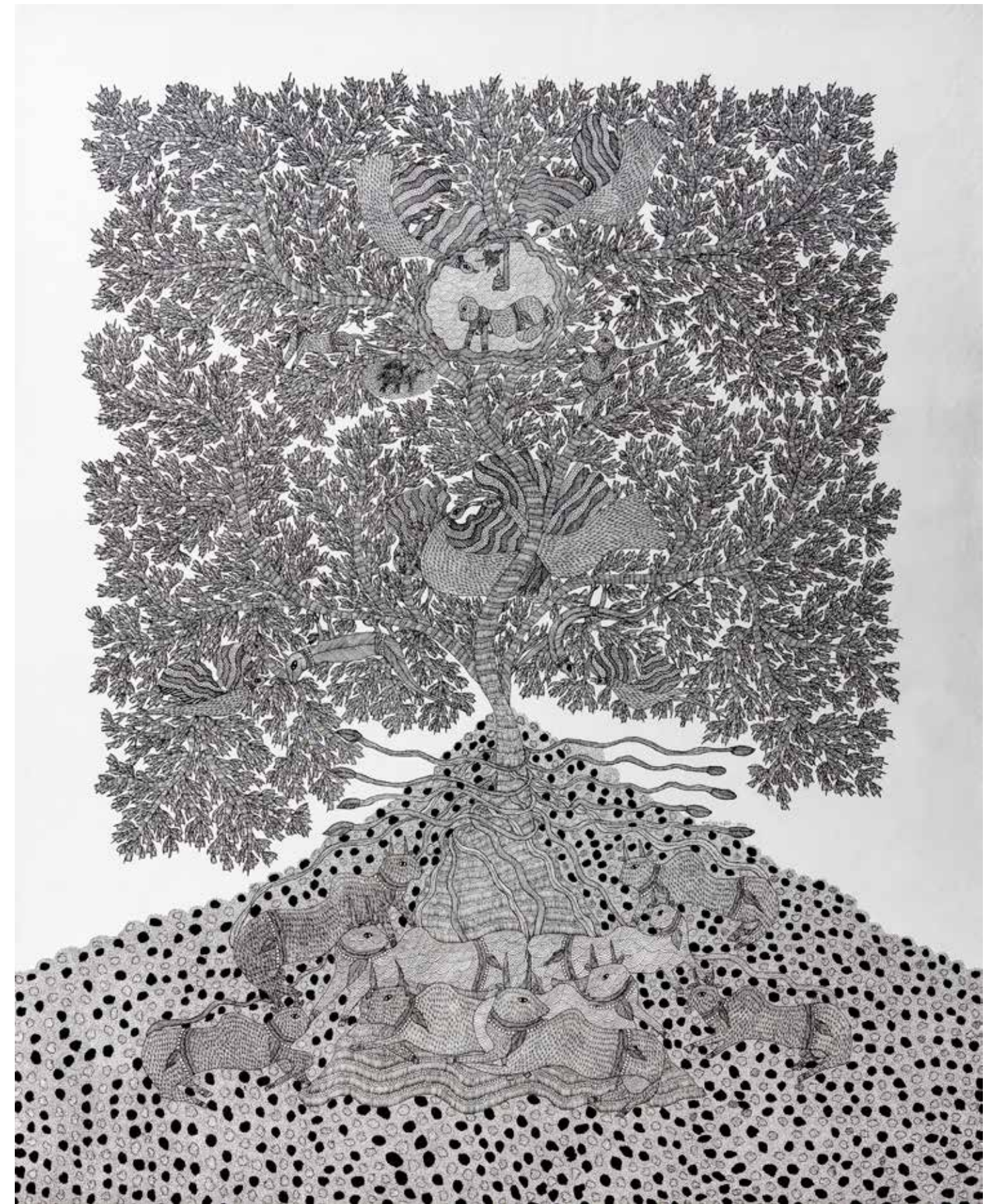
RSU04
Gilehri ka sapna, 2011
Ink on canvas, 42 x 18 inch



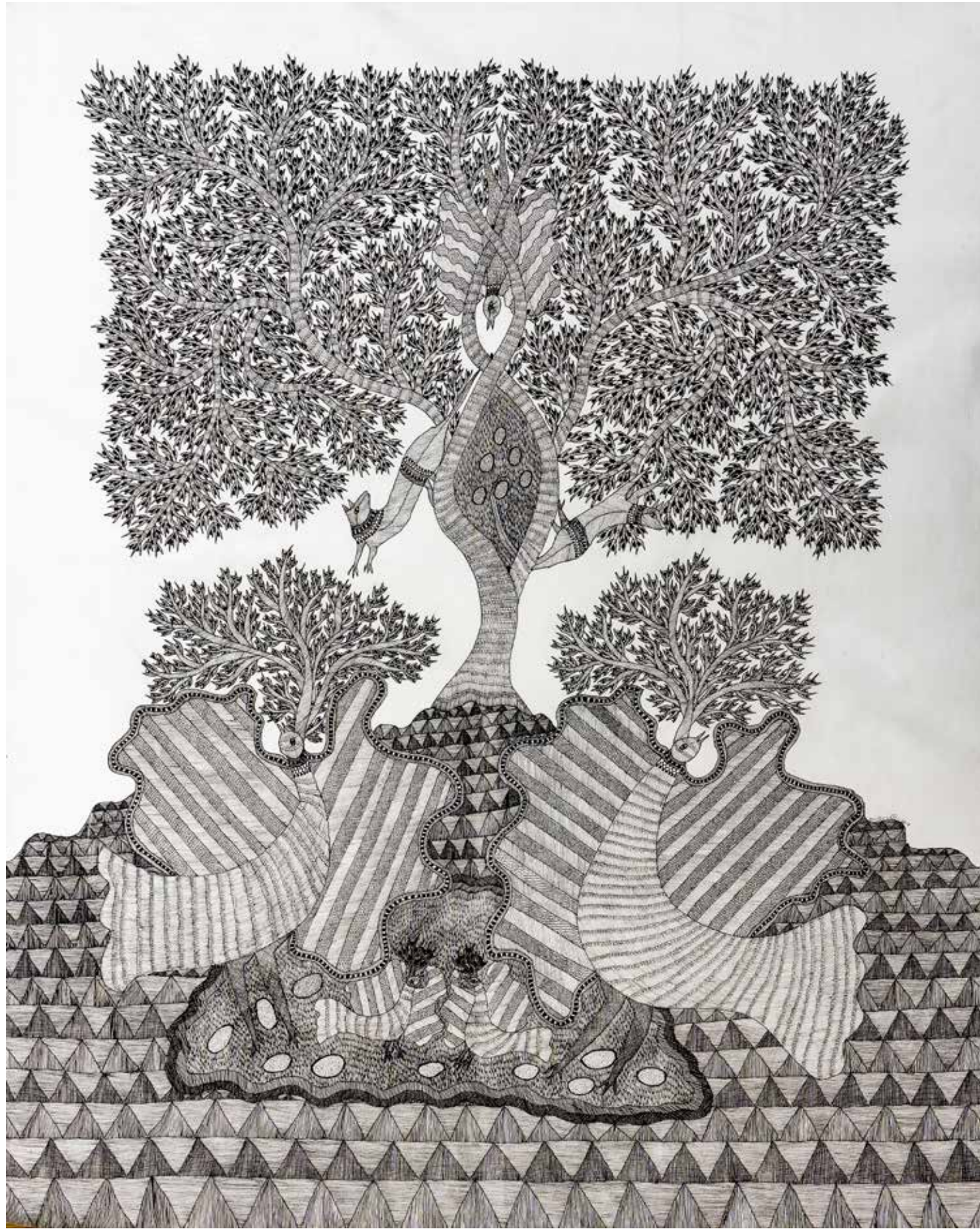
RSU05
Ped, Pakshi aur Ghosla, 2020
Ink on canvas, 44 x 21 inch



RSU08
Sher, Samar aur Ped - Pakshi, 2019
Ink on canvas, 55 x 32 inch



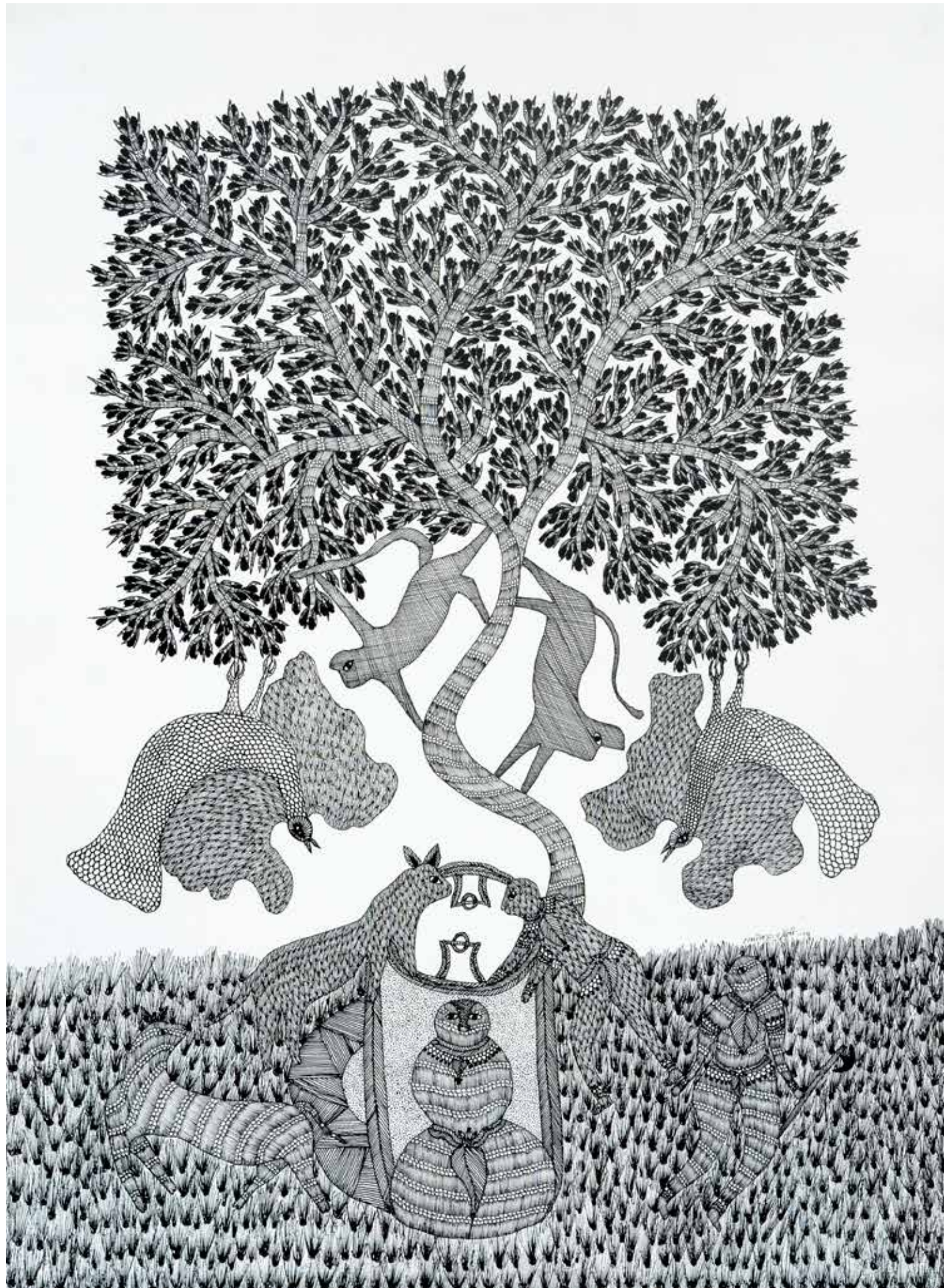
RSU010
Surhi Gaaye, 2019
Ink on canvas, 56 x 44 inch



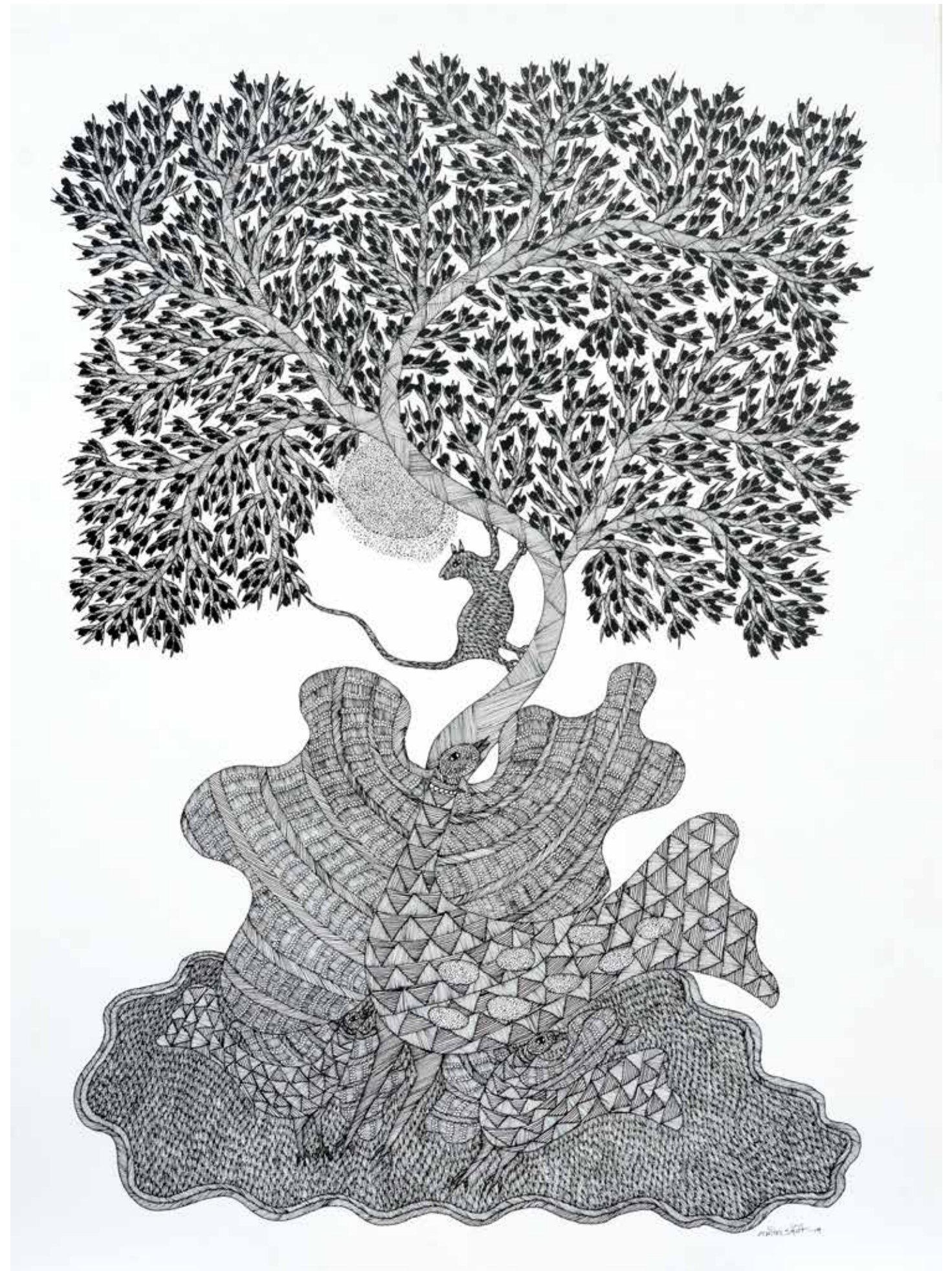
RSU09
Gilehri aur Mor, 2019
Ink on canvas, 56 x 44 inch



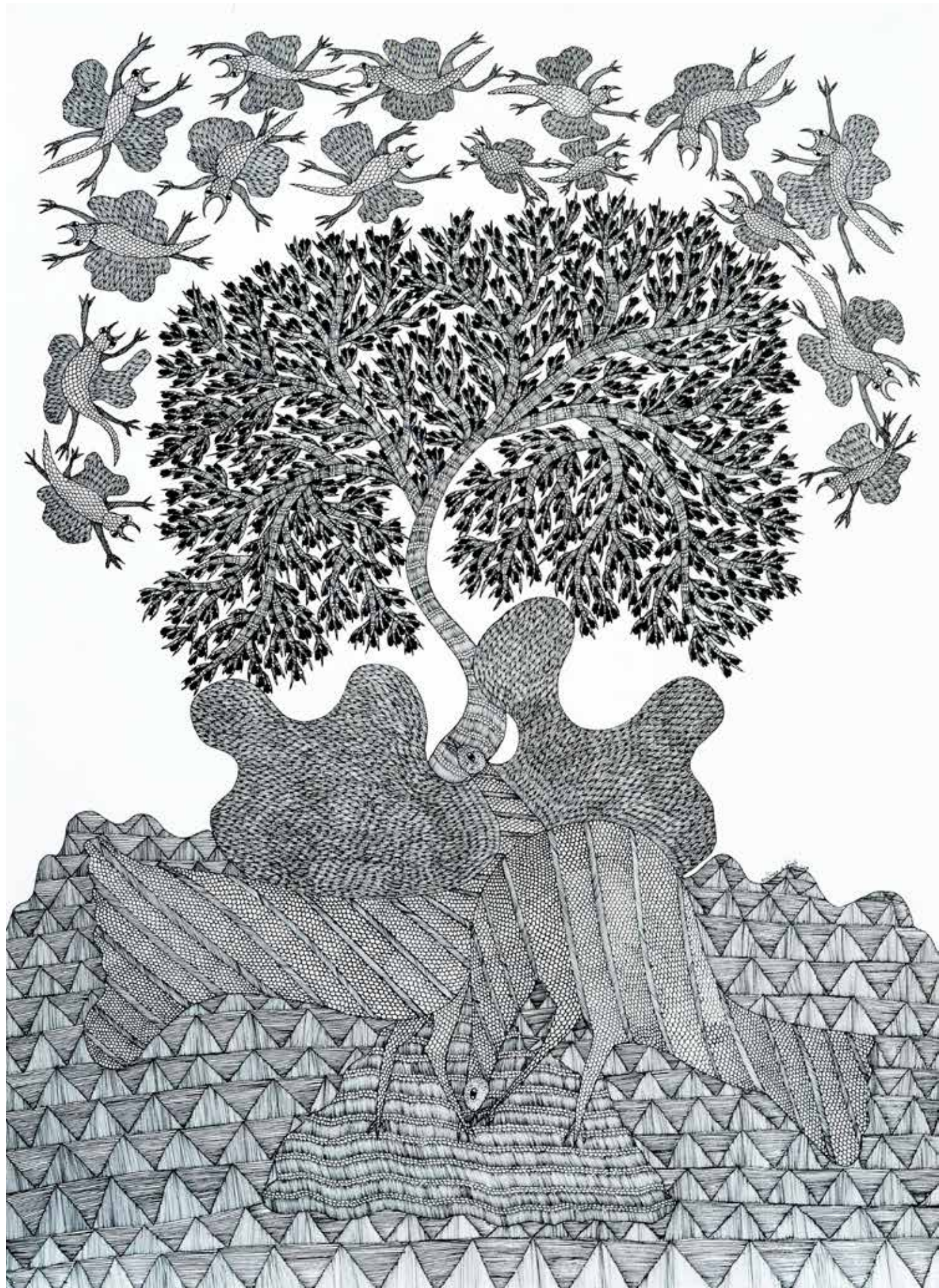
RSU1920
Vanaspati II, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Canvas, 56 x 43 inch



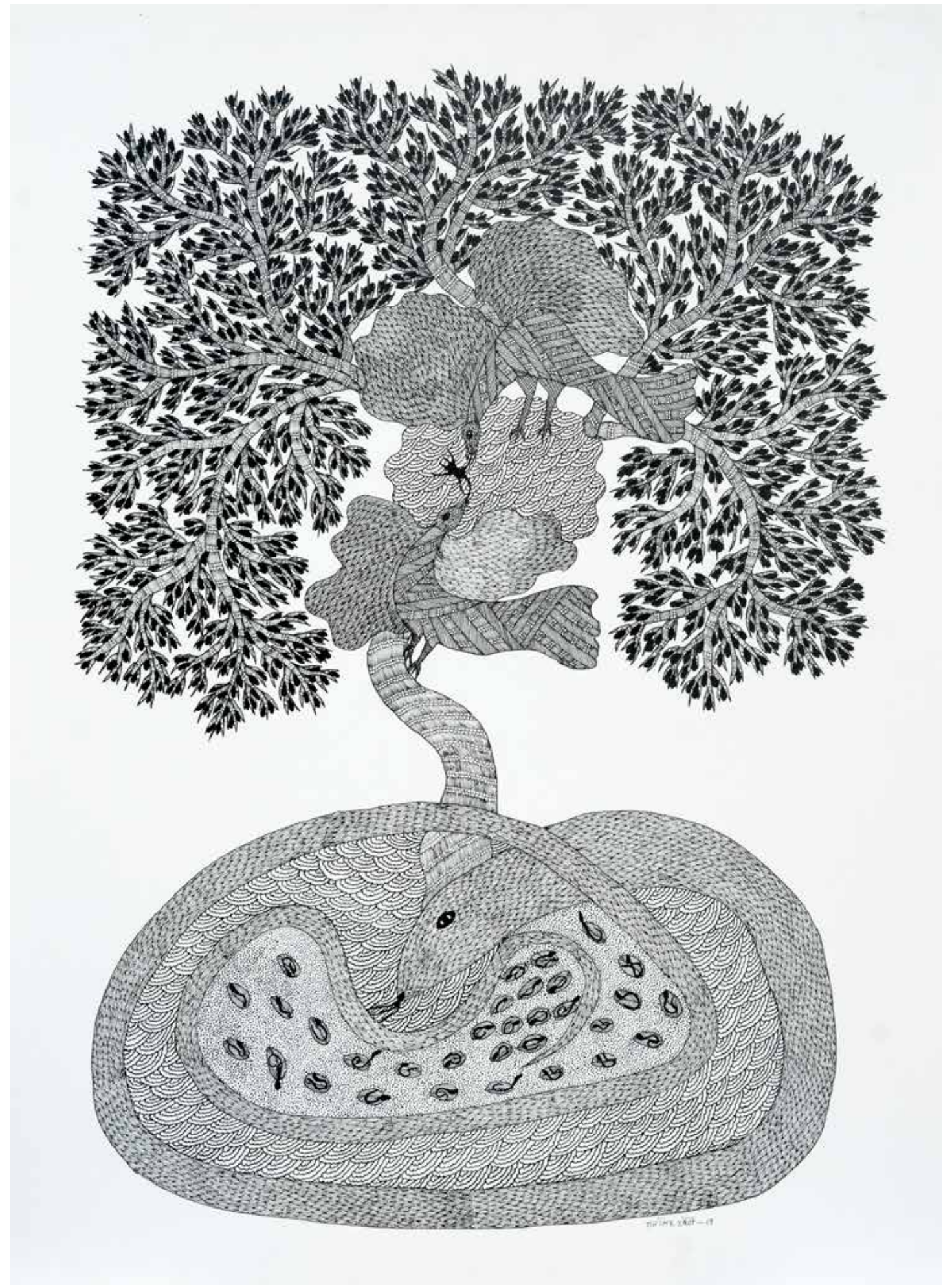
RSU1901
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Paper, 22 x 30 inch



RSU1903
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Paper, 22 x 30 inch



RSU1904
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Paper, 22 x 30 inch



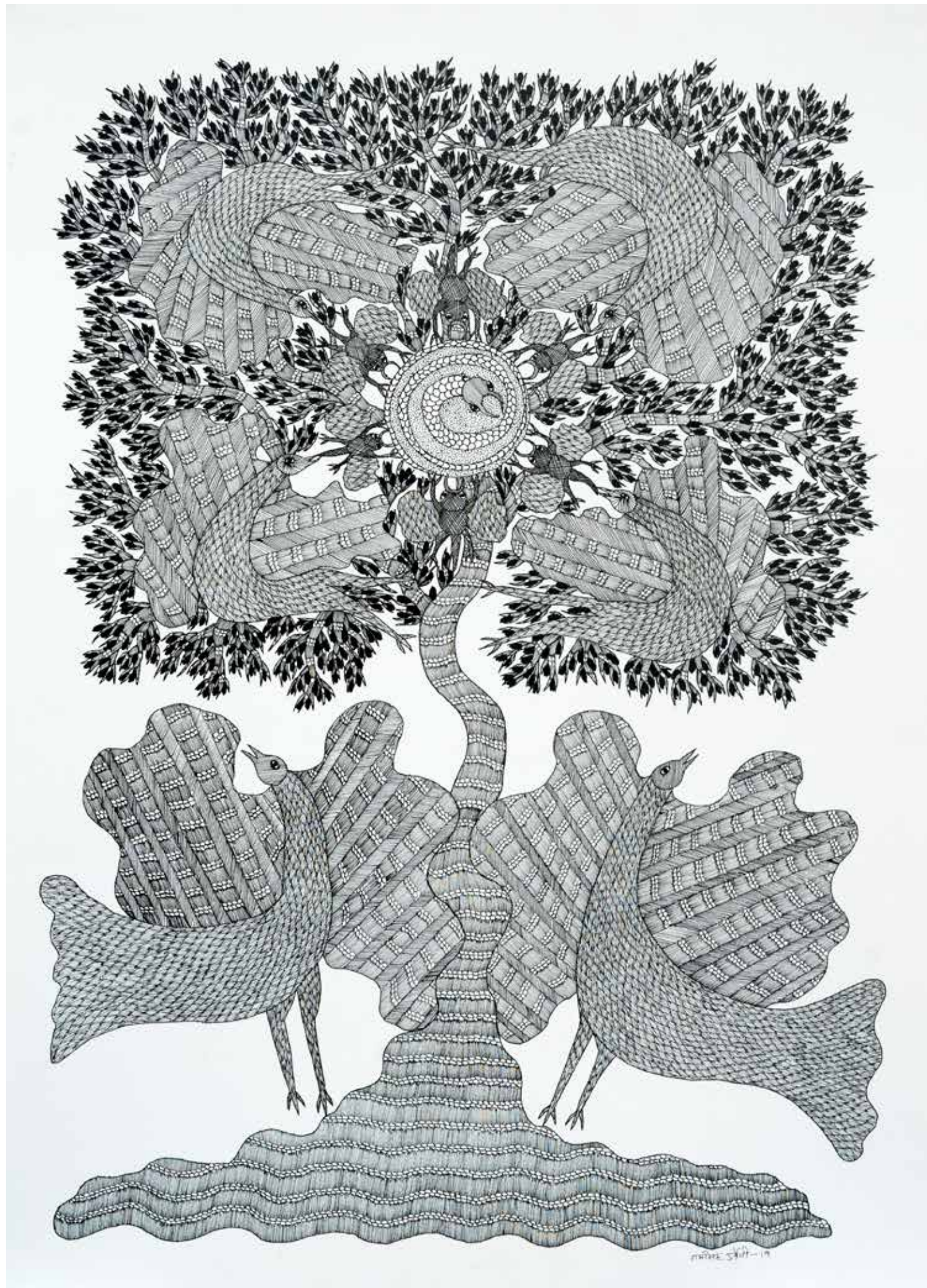
RSU1907
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Paper, 22 x 30 inch



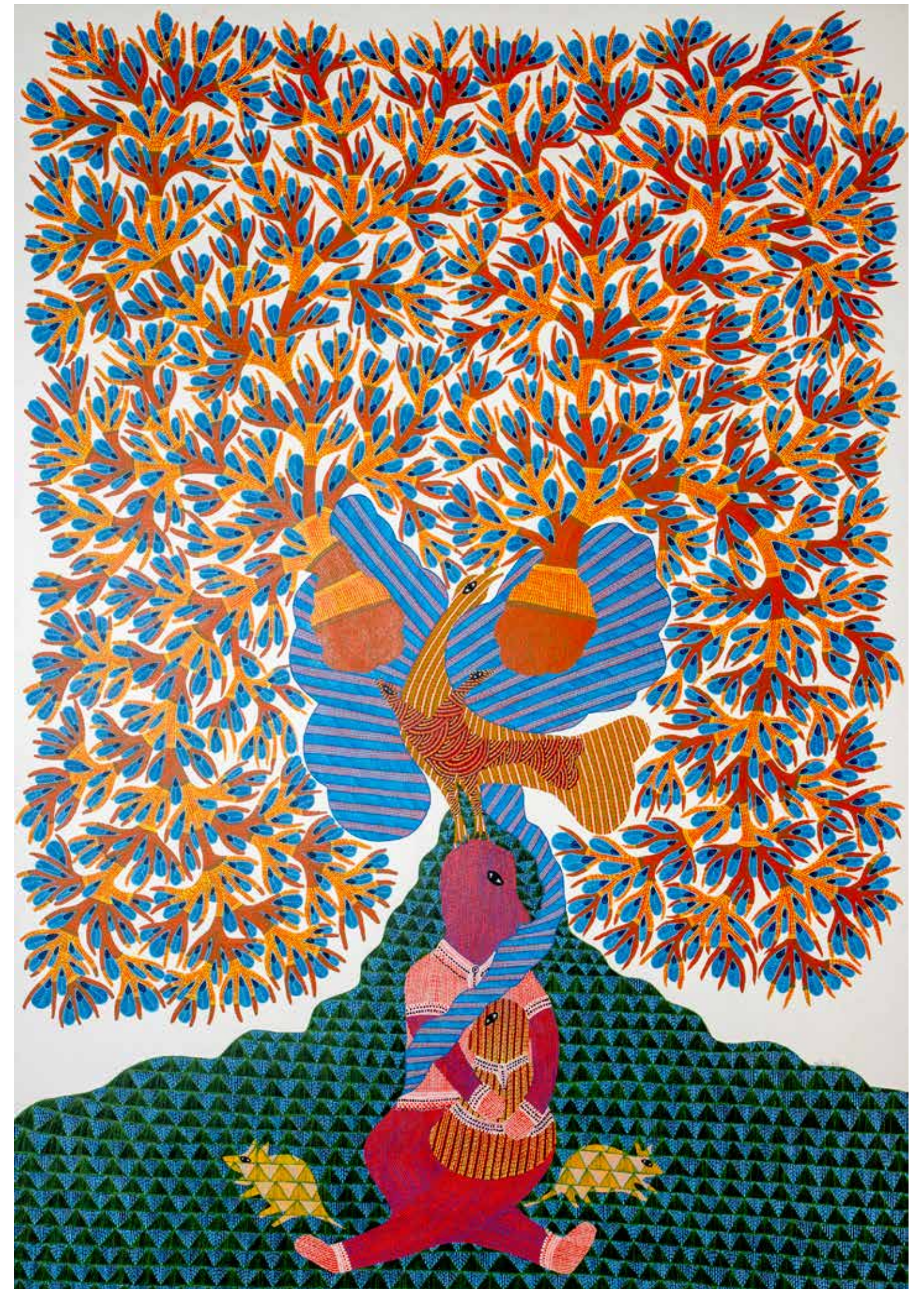
RSU07
Shiv Pariwar, 2013
Acrylic & ink on canvas, 78 x 21 inch



RSU06
Kasghar pakshi apne baccho ko udaane ki koshish, 2013
Acrylic & ink on canvas, 77 x 21 inch



RSU1911
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic and Ink on Paper, 22 x 30 inch



RSU1919
Prakritik Chitra II, 2019
Acrylic and on canvas, 77 x 54 inch



RSU1913
Dudh, Dahi aur Mahi ka Ped, 2019
Acrylic on Canvas, 77 x 54 inch

MAYANK SHYAM

Born in 1987 and is the son of legendary Gond artist Jangarh Singh Shyam. He created a space for himself with his signature style of artworks. He participated in his first group exhibition Primal Force at Kolkata's CIMA Gallery in 2006. His other group exhibitions include *Kolkata Freedom: Sixty years after Indian Independence*, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata and Museum Gallery, Mumbai (2008), *In search of context*, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata and Chemould Gallery, Mumbai (2009), *Yeh Image Mahan – India meets Bharat*, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata (2010).

In 2006 Mayank was conferred the State Award by the Hasta Shilpa Evam Hathkargha Vikas Nigam, Bhopal. At the age of 21 he was featured in the book *Freedom: Sixty Years after Indian Independence*, published by Art and Heritage Foundation. 2007.

He works and lives in Bhopal.

RAM SINGH URVETI

Ram Singh Urveti, is from Madhya Pradesh and along with Jangarh Singh Shyam, is known to be one of the eminent historical figures in contemporary Indian tribal art. Ram Singh Urveti has taken part in many exhibitions in India and overseas.

The exhibition *Freedom*, for the sixtieth anniversary of the Independence of India, alongside the greatest names in modern and contemporary Indian art (CIMA, Centre of International Modern Art, Calcutta, 2008). In August 2009, in the exhibition, *Now that the trees have spoken* organized by the contemporary art critic Ranjit Hoskote, where he was invited by the famous Pundole Art Gallery of Mumbai.

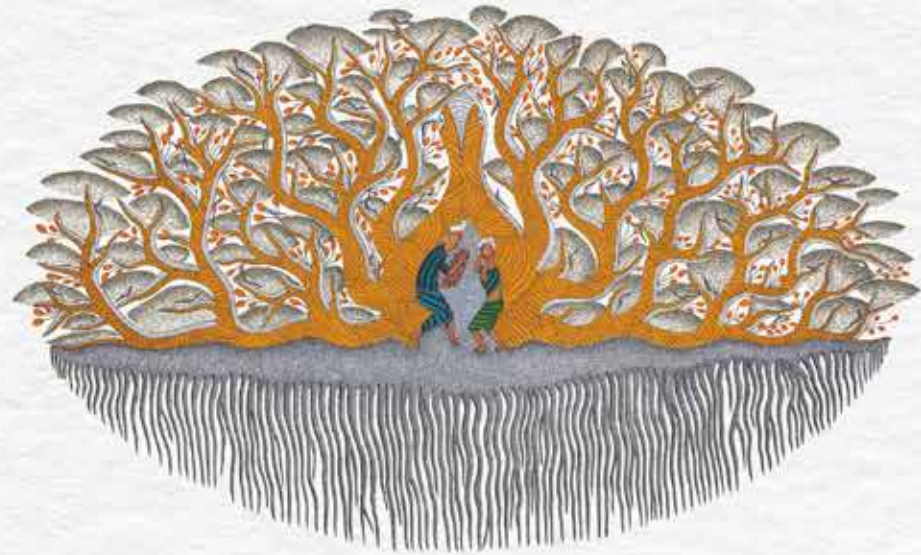
In 2010, in the exhibition *Non metropolitan, Five Contemporary Artists from India* held in the Rob Dean Art Gallery in Pasadena, California. On that occasion, the *New York Times* saluted the return of the great names in tribal art.

In *Art Contemporain Indien* par Hervé Perdriolle, 5 Continents Edition Milan 2012.

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