

OJAS ART



sacred lines

Mayur & Tushar Vayeda

19 January to March 23, 2025, 11 am to 7 pm.

The Poets of the White and Earth

Scripting the Cultural Hive — A Sojourn of Warli through Vayeda Brothers

—Nikhil Purohit (Artist, Warli Researcher, Cultural Entrepreneur)

Warli, an indigenous cultural pictorial tradition, was introduced to the outer world through the agency of the legendary Warli writer Padmashree Jivya Soma Mashe, who embarked on a journey about six decades ago. We—admirers of the lively graphic forms of Warli writing—owe it to him. His dedication ensured the passage of the baton to younger generations, including Shantaram Gorkhana, Balu Dumada, and his sons Sadashiv and Balu Mashe. Today, Rajesh and Anil Vangad, Ramesh Hengadi, Hareshwar Vanga, to name a few, uphold the cultural integrity of this tribal mural form.

The two brothers, Tushar and Mayur Vayeda, were born within the renowned region of Ganjad's hamlet of Devgaon. Their family legacy begins with their grandfather holding the earliest village school since postcolonial times. The duo's mother has continued to affectionately serve as an educator, and their father, now a retired civil servant, has dedicated his time to active farming, promoting their agro-forestry. Under this premise and the urban formal education they received, it ushered a feeling that drew them back to their roots—the sentiment of harbouring their cultural ideas and promoting innovative adaptations into Warli. With an experience of about fifteen-odd years, the 'Vayeda Brothers' have evolved to comprehend the weight of the tradition they bear. They realise the need and means to sustain it amidst commodification and acculturation induced through contemporary art scenarios.

The intervention of Bhaskar Kulkarni in the 1970s, which introduced the idea of transferring murals into portable forms, revolutionized Warli art. This shift enabled Warli to transcend its ritualistic roots, transforming into a medium for cultural insignia, tribal pride, and a key tool for advocating sustainability on an international stage. Today, it is also a key tool used for international endeavours in reckoning for a sustainable future

based on ethnic roots. The Vayedas, too, have built their creative conscience through humble public participation since 2009, where they would fare the country, holding workshops for a variety of urban beneficiaries.

Museums across the world have been keen on collecting material of anthropological significance. Since the introduction of Jivya to the West and the famous collaborative art project with Richard Long, Warli canvases are an acclaimed collectible today. It is noteworthy that the Vayeda's contemporary interpretations are part of some respectable collections viz. The Art Institute of Chicago, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art.

The Awashima Residency, Japan (2018), and the Spore Collective's Germany year-long exhibition, *On Forests, Seeds, and Streams* (2024), are the two noteworthy projects that expand the Warli idiom. The methodology of community exchange and its semiotic implications radically embark on sensitising the cultural consumers within dissimilar cultural frameworks. The community school mural project at Awashima Island reflects their outlook toward cultural networking within Asia, building a dialogue through shared indigenous knowledge. The residency program's onsite stories highlight how every member of the island became a volunteer, despite their hierarchical status, in formulating a space for their children to admire and learn. Here, the duo are witnessed to embark not only on the material shift of using papier-mâché over the wall surface, contemplating the geological constraints of earthquakes and material limitations, but also collaborating with the local elders who made crocheted designs and engaging in painterly collaboration with Japanese artists in 'formally' interpolating the narrative for the locale. Perhaps this inherent agility of the native Warli in adapting to the changing cycles of nature enables the brothers to collaborate almost effortlessly.

The second project, an ongoing exhibition in Berlin (2024–2025), has further expanded their kunstwollen in adapting to newer technology in producing communicable forms of installation, video documentation, and virtual storytelling using VR systems. The impetus of the project lies in their gradually grown ideology of conserving and encouraging an ecologically sustainable community practice by rediscovering their ancestral methods of agroforestry, self-nourishing land-use methods, and the significant role of women in cherishing the agrarian system of the Warlis. As humans in general and artists in particular are known to grow deeper and wider with their ideas toward life with matured age, this juncture can be viewed as a seminal moment for the team of Tushar, Mayur, Vikas Bongya, Srushti, Mamata, and other community members who participate in materialising their cultural goals under the umbrella project Waral Prakalp while sustaining a studio practice.

The element of craft is core to any cultural practice. The use of white on red by the Warli, though fundamental, is uniquely employed and devised by each artisan from the tribe. With my observation of the brothers and other community artisans, the Vayedas have developed their idiom and craftsmanship, venturing into the similitude of Indian miniature styles, lest colours and frame patterns. Formally, the participatory and collaborative working method allows them to perform on the cloth surface simultaneously, resulting in their works being compositionally viewable from almost any side. Though devoid of a formal education in art, their characteristic flair of arranging plain spaces to emphasise a character or a pictorial unit versus pictorially drowning all the forms within a flux of textural motifs is an unparalleled approach. In recent years, they have embarked upon a personal pursuit of formulating iconic forms for the characters, deities, or mystical powers from the Warli belief system that are mostly heard of but not seen represented. This expedition deepens their commitment toward cultural conservation while innovating forms of mass communication. As an artist, I spot their inclination toward an intimate painterly approach with the use of the white pigment. The rendering of clouds, the filling of spaces—drawn with a tonal gradient, an outcome of using the brush dipped in the pigment till it is depleted—is a rather unusual practice.

The homogeneity of performing this is virtually a myriad act, reflecting a synergy of growth as people.

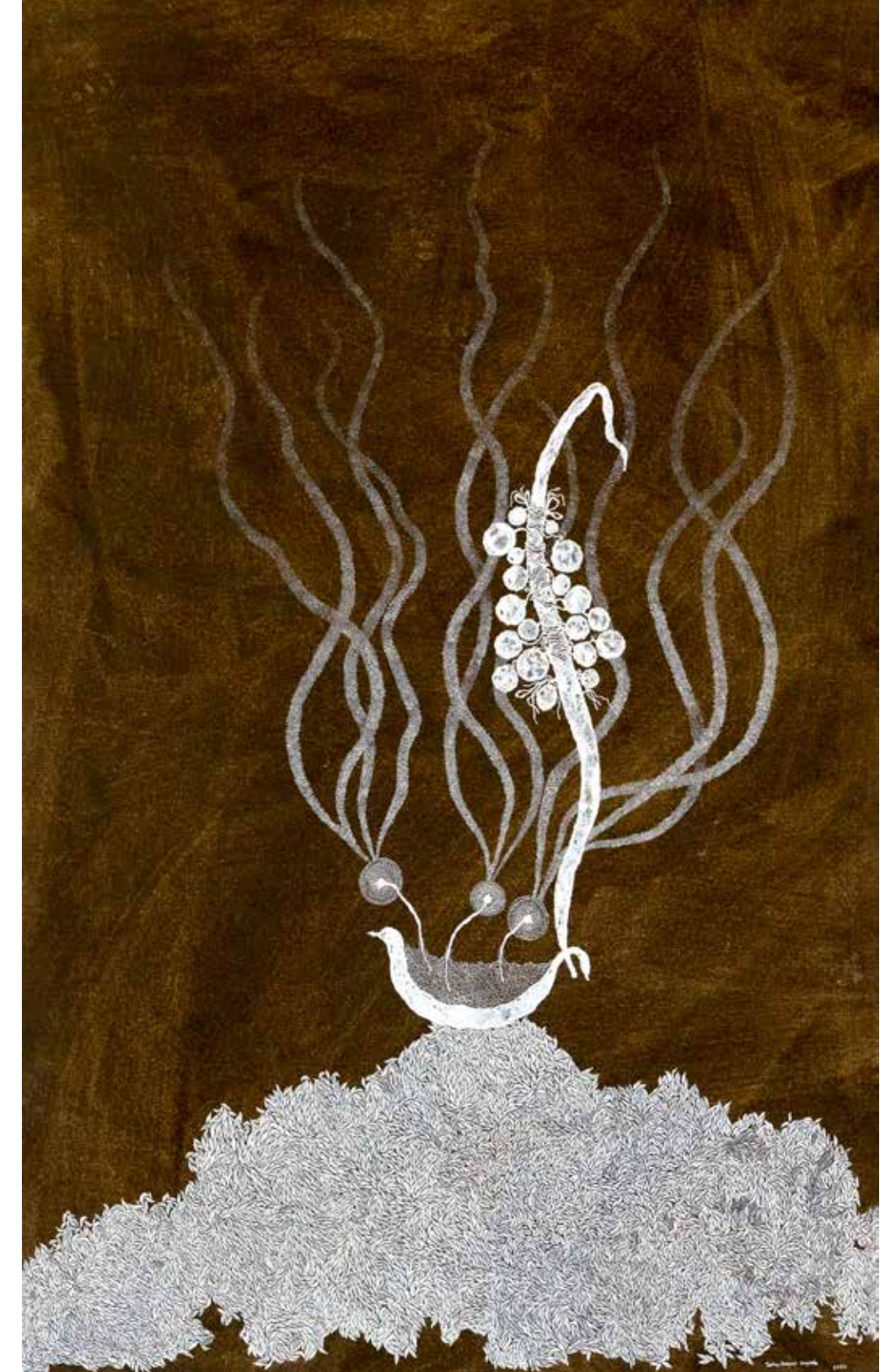
The books, adapted as reproducible yet handcrafted silk-screen pictorial publications, become a tool to educate the world about Warli and the natural diversity, mythology, and beliefs. *Seed*, *The Deep*, and *Tail Tale*, published by Tara Books, are a testimony to their commitment toward initiating the newer generations into the indigenous knowledge matrix.

Since the association of Ojas Art and the Vayeda happened in 2016, they have been closely working together in promoting the ethnic form at various platforms including museums and international events. The solo exhibition at the Ojas Art by the Vayedas summates their sojourns from the eclectic alleys of the global cultural affix.

The exhibition format explores the evolution and versatility of Warli art through three distinct sections. "Origin" delves into the foundational narratives of Warli culture, presenting artworks that depict the rituals and symbols of life's key transitions—birth, marriage, and death—on an expansive wall display. "Original" celebrates the signature style of the Vayeda Brothers, where traditional Warli painting is reimagined with minimalistic and contemporary aesthetics. A striking centerpiece features a set of three large scrolls displayed on a table, showcasing the innovation and authenticity that define their artistic identity. "Exploration" pushes the boundaries of tradition, incorporating new materials and methods such as projection mapping, wooden sculptures, and Warli-inspired textiles. Together, these sections offer a multidimensional experience that honors ancestral wisdom while embracing modern artistic expressions.

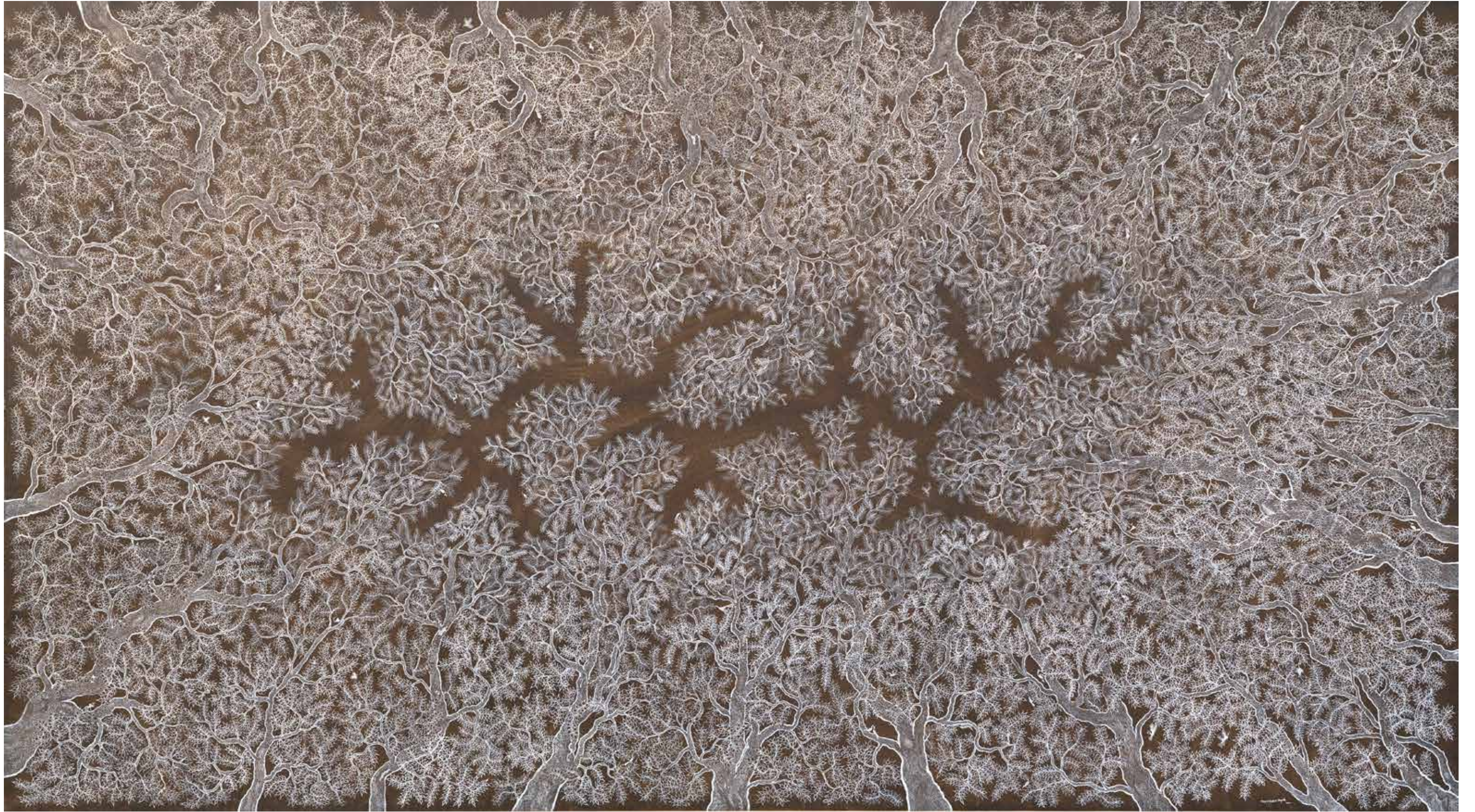


Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Blessings, 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 36 x 36 inch



Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
The Whispering Canopy, 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 33 x 20 inch

6 Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
The Unending Sprint, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional
methods, 96 x 54 inch



Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Bridging the Invisible, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 43 x 31 inch

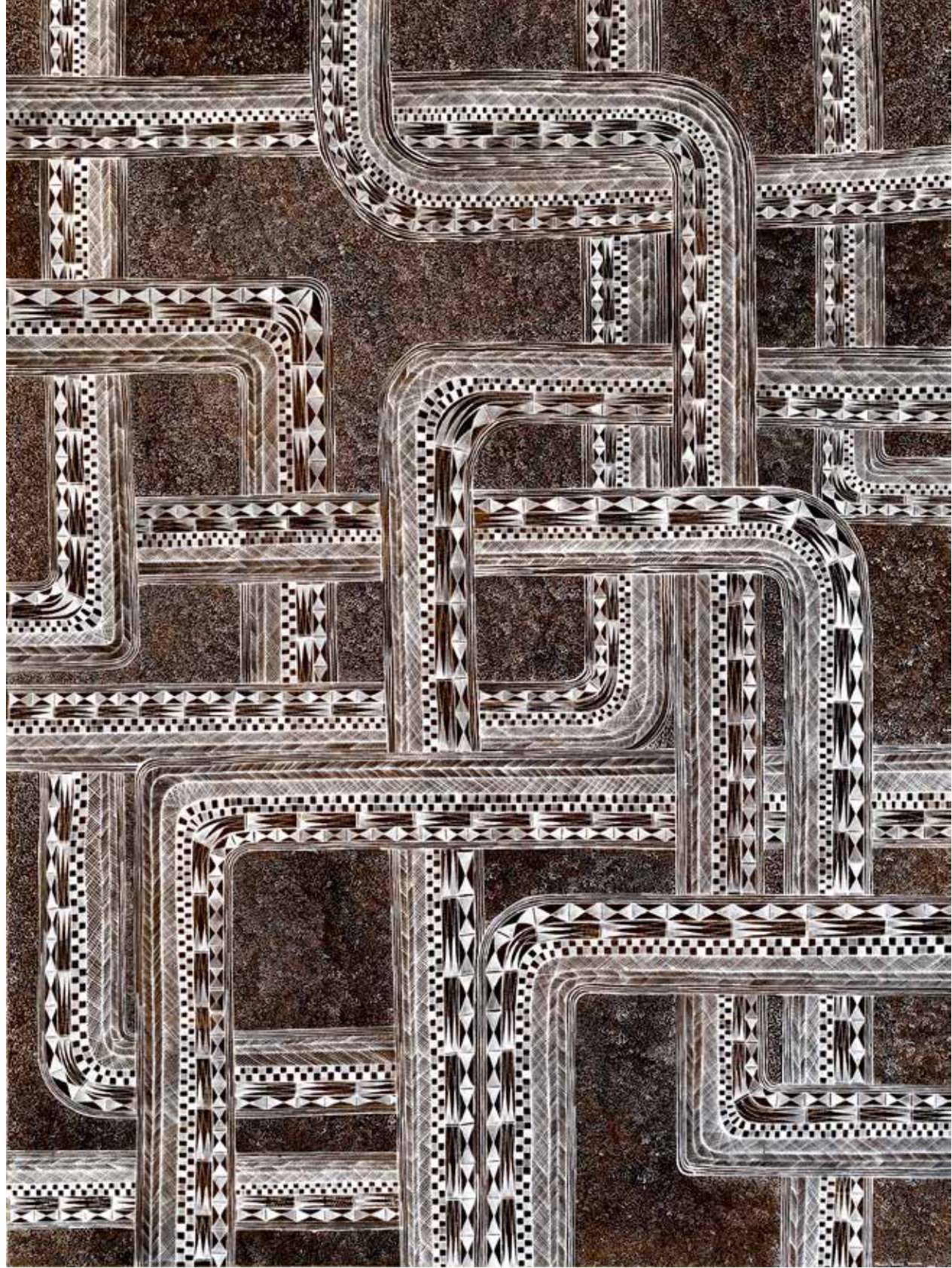


Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Flame of the Ancestors, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 60 x 36 inch



Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
'The Deep' II, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 48 x 36 inch

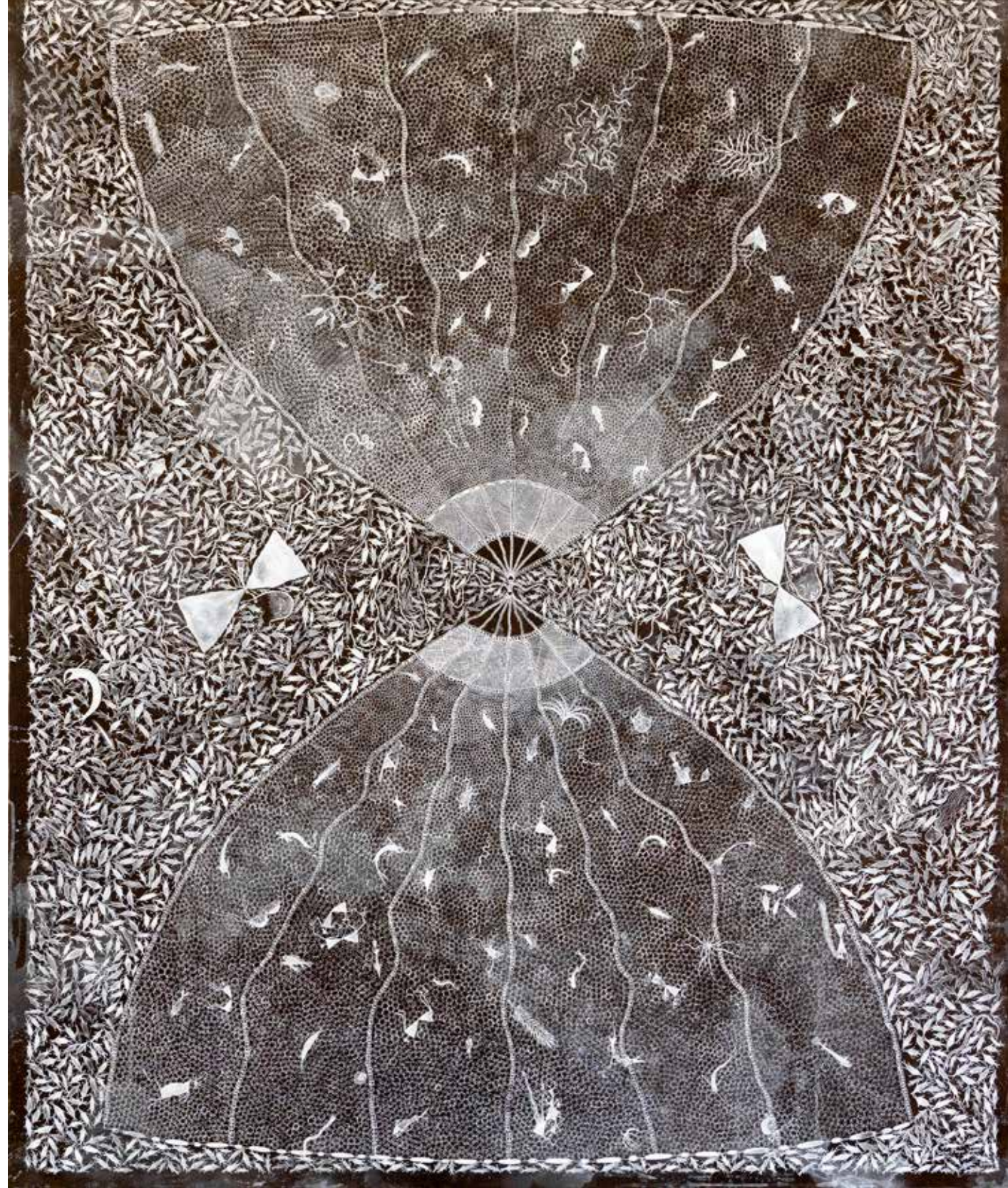




Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Sacred Lines, 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 45 x 33 inch



Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
'Veer - The Vertical Man', 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 56 x 32 inch



Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
The Deep, 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 60 x 72 inch



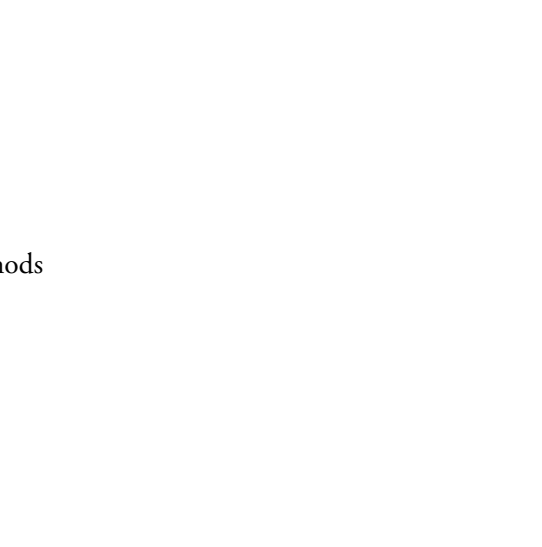
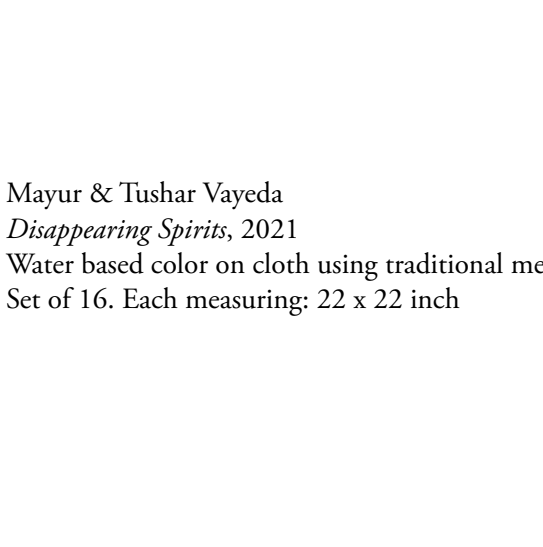
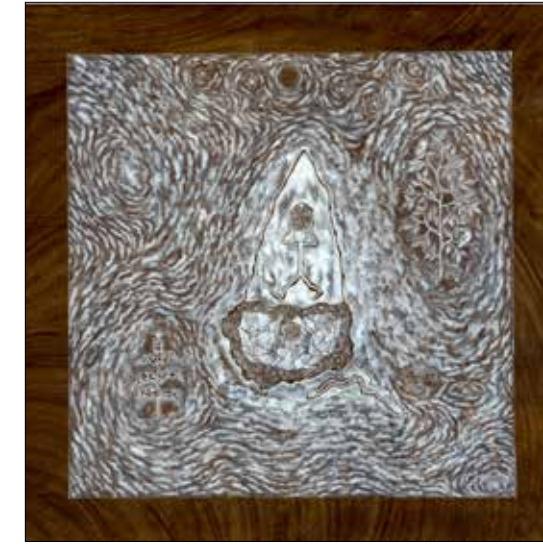
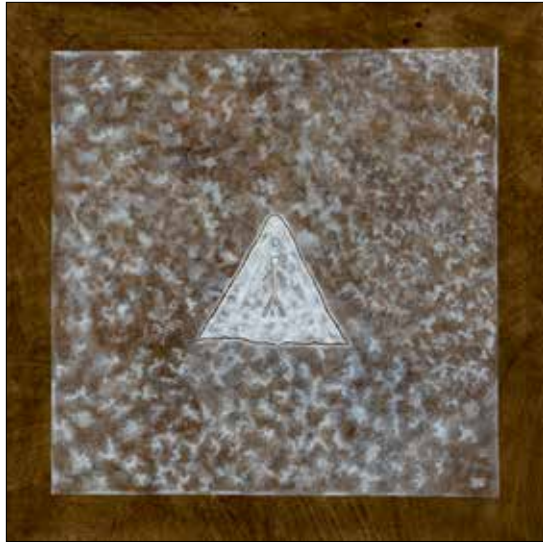
Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Protectors of Spirits, 2024
 Water based color on cloth using traditional methods, 45 x 34 inch

Urban Canopy, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional
methods, 90 x 52 inch



Hirwa, 2024
Water based color on cloth using traditional
methods, 68 x 44 inch





Mayur & Tushar Vayeda
Disappearing Spirits, 2021
Water based color on cloth using traditional methods
Set of 16. Each measuring: 22 x 22 inch

Sacred Lines

— Ravi Agarwal, Artist and Curator

“The Warlis don’t say paint, instead we say that we write pictures and paintings. We have our own language, Warli, but it does not have its own writing system. Instead of writing letters, we write pictures to save knowledge and pass it to the next generation.”¹

The centuries old figurative forms of the Warli Indigenous community, based in Ganjad village in Maharashtra, India, is the language of the brothers Mayur and Tushar Vevada. As artists, they are more than brothers, as their work is truly a common endeavor, and their paintings are done jointly. Often one could be picking off where the other left, or both could be working together across two ends of the painting. Though these truly extraordinary expressions are rooted in traditional forms and mediums, they also go far beyond past motifs. In terms of technique, the original paintings were done on red mud and with rice paste, whilst Vayeda brothers have extended that to mediums of cow dung (gobar) of different hues and shades depending on the season (and feed of the cattle) and white paint in place of rice paste. Importantly the nature culture stories they tell provide important clues about ways to emerge from the contemporary ecological crisis. This is why we urgently need to listen to them today.

Language can be thought of as an expression of a cultural and indeed ontological “self.” It is a portal into a world, which is hard to imagine for someone from other sets of beliefs. Hence even if one was to visit or enter their worlds physically, it may not be easy to relate to them or understand them. If the paintings are any clue, in those worlds, there is a co-existence and mutuality with the more-than-human. The beings in them have a sentience, an awareness, and are treated with respect. In Warli (from the word ‘waral,’ a place to store seeds underground) life is rooted in ecosystems of nature. What kind of values must one hold for such mutual relationships with the more-than-human worlds to be

establish? These works are then depictions of inner landscapes as they are of outside worlds.

To be contemporary, whilst being deeply rooted in traditional techniques and subject matter, needs not only a mastery of what that is, but to be able to address questions which matter today – as citizens of new worlds. Such a movement and expansion needs one to not only hold one’s ground, but simultaneously to converse with the social and political challenges of the times one lives in. Beginning by depicting local landscapes of agricultural fields, animals and forests as in traditional Warli paintings, the narratives the brother’s weave encompass stories of nuclear accidents like Fukushima, urban forests, mining or the destruction of nature at large. Depicting such an expanded world, beyond their abode, has become their new conceptual imagination and its ecological destruction their concern.

The origin of the Warli art form, is believed to be rooted back to 2500 BCE in Maharashtra. The Western Ghats then must have been thick forests and rife with beings of all size and shapes, a far cry from the extractions happening there today. This now well-known painting genre was depicted on walls using rice flour with bamboo brushes. They were celebrations of festivities like weddings and harvests. Even while the Warli paintings are on their own aesthetic expressions the Vayeda brothers add a much needed collective and contemporary experimental impulse to them.

The works in this exhibition, are worlds of new imaginations. They expand from a point of convergence into new cosmologies, transforming the material into the metaphysical and poetic. Their detailed renderings of plants, animals, fish and human, have the quality of miniature paintings. As one looks more closely, surprising figures come into view. Animals pop out, as extensions of plants, trees and clouds. Like in a birds eye view, they reveal

themselves as one zooms into them. They are painstakingly made, retaining ancient forms, but depicting new realities. “Sacred Lines” for example could be an aerial view of an urban highways, or “The Unending Spirit” alien markings on an earthly landscape. Each painting has its own story, but also hold many narratives, all at once.

Indigenous knowledge and ways of living, are a counter to the post-enlightenment ideas of conquest of nature and nature as being in the service of man. They reflect another posture – that of the humans in modes of respect and learning, leading to co-existence, rather than of conquest. This shift in notions of power of man, is foundational to be able to listen to, learn from and exist on equal terms with the world around us. It is a simple but essential ethical shift. The life which the Vayeda collective represents needs to be viewed from that position and posture. Adopting these could hold the secrets of the future of planetary sustainability and of survival in a world in the throes of an ecological crisis.

¹ Mayur Vayeda



Brothers by blood, Mayur and Tushar Vayeda work together as a collective. They graduated from the University of Mumbai and received the Ojas Art Award in 2019. They have authored multiple books with Tara Books.

In 2018, they got Awashima Residency and in 2019, they participated at the Setouchi Triennale, both in Japan. In 2022, they were apart of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) at the Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Australia. In 2024, the Berlin based Spore Initiative, hosted their year-long exhibition.

They have a number of public art projects to their credit in Hong Kong, Kagawa Island, Japan, Lodhi Art District, New Delhi and Sassoon Dock, Mumbai. Additionally, their artworks feature in permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Philadelphia Museum of Art and QAGOMA.

SACRED LINES

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OJAS ART

1AQ, Near Qutab Minar
Mehrauli, New Delhi 110 030
art@ojasart.com | +91 98738 59158

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