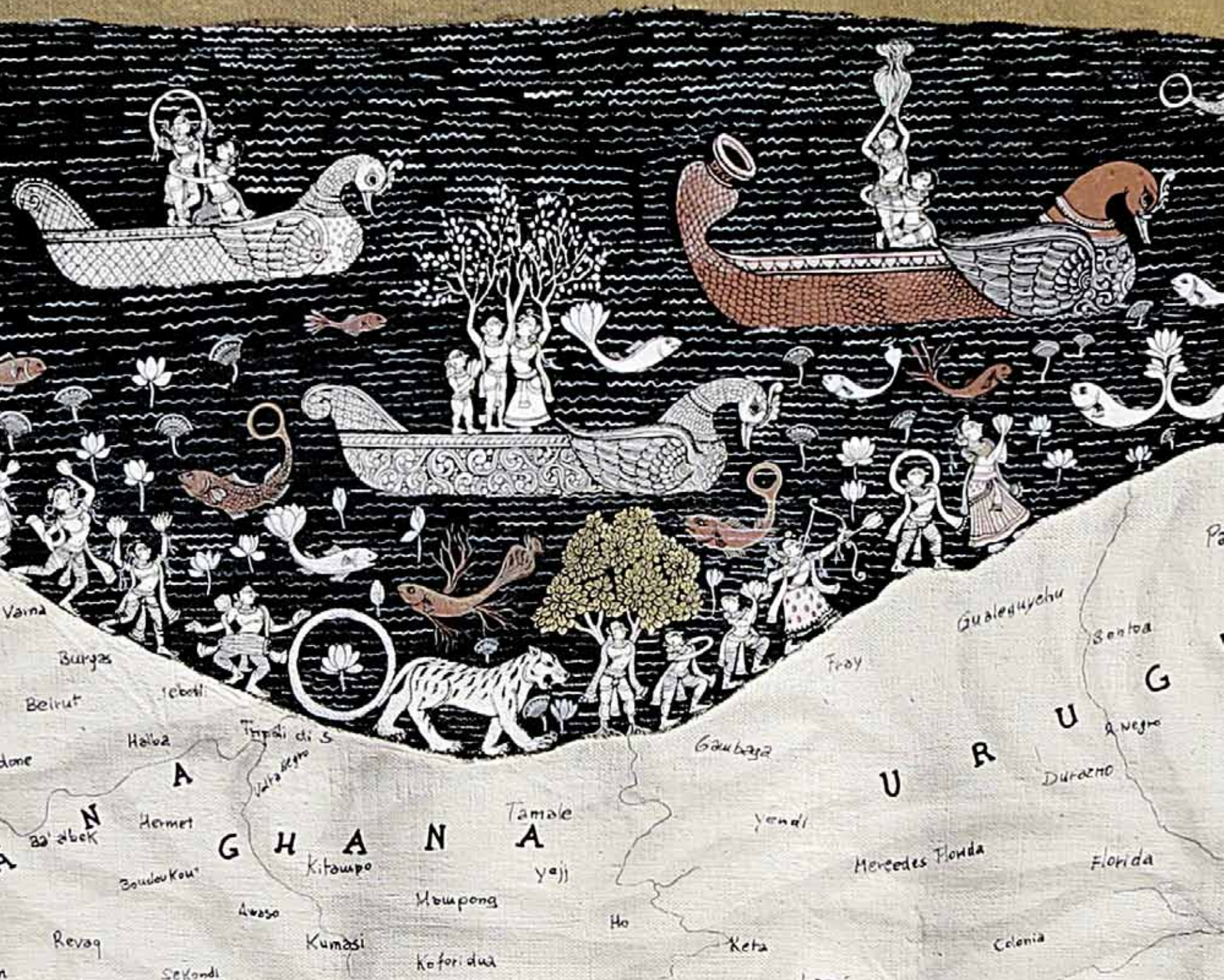


TARSHITO

FALLS IN LOVE WITH INDIA





Cover/ Back Cover Detail:

WALKING IN ORISSA, 397,7 x 23,6 inches

Mixed media on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao, Puri, Orissa, India.

Collaboration: Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy

Text: Roma Chatterji

Design and Production: Prashanta Seal

Photography: Luca Desiderato, Ryan Arvee Laluz, Bari, Italy. Elena Parisi, Milan, Italy

Co-ordination: Upasana Bhattacharya, Indira Laksmi Prasad, India, Maria Sciannimanico, Speciale Tarshito, Bari, Italy

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ART KONSULT
ART GALLERY FOR CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

Presents

TARSHITO

FALLS IN LOVE WITH INDIA



28TH FEBRUARY - 25TH MARCH 2018

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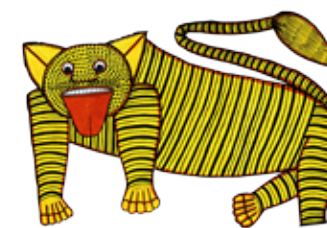


THE ARTIST AS WAYFARER

ROMA CHATTERJI, *Department of Sociology, University of Delhi*

Since July 2017, I have been travelling around the world while completing a 10.8 meter long rolled canvas titled “The Path of the Wayfarer in Love”. As well as being a work of art, I believe this project is an artistic pilgrimage, and a real performance of respect for humanity... I look for people who can understand the meaning of my project. I look for artists and artisans who feel an intimate relationship between my artistic intuition and their own traditions (not only in artistic terms but also in terms of celebrating life as a precious gift from God. I actively look for timeless, priceless knowledge which I put into my work, which evokes this sense of rituality.)

- Email communication from Tarshito to the author



^ *Tarshito's first meeting with the Gond artists and Ms.Katie Lazarowicz, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, Photograph by: Luca Desiderato, Bari, Italy(Right Page)*

< *Portrait of Tarshito by Elena Parsi, Milan, Italy (Left Page)*



Bright yellow tigers with upturned vases stuck to their paws; a turtle floating above a teeming multitude of humans and animals, its shell delicately enameled and adorned with miniature figures elaborately decorated, sporting the same vase on its back; solid looking buildings bursting into bloom; cartographical maps depicting vast land masses slowly unraveling to form rivers and pathways for pilgrims – these were my first experience of Tarshito's work. I saw playfulness even in what appeared to be whimsical images laid out in neat rows on the floor of the gallery 'Arts of the Earth' in preparation for the exhibition. As a sociologist with a particular interest in Indian folk art I could place some of the images – the regional styles and in some cases even the individual artist. But what about the compositions themselves? What were the stories that they were telling? Or is this what Tarshito meant when he talked about traversing the world?

The four regional styles that have come together in this exhibition, viz. Rajsthani miniatures, Patachitra from Orissa, Gond painting and Bengal Patas are all embedded in narrative traditions so that each image alludes to a larger mythological universe. In the 'folk imagination' an abstract geometrical form like the triangle is polysemic with multiple and often contradictory referents that can range from the vulva of a local fertility goddess to the axis mundi – Mount Meru. Mount Meru in turn can become the humble churning stick used to churn the cosmic ocean and the turtle an avatar of Lord Vishnu himself, a thought conveyed so aptly and even playfully by Tarshito's elongated vase supported by the turtle painted in Patachitra style. It is the potential that all living symbols have of addressing multiple registers, the mundane everyday as well as the sublime and transcendent that allows artists of such different worlds to come together in this collaborative exercise. It is the reference to the transcendental register that allows Tarshito to posit a framework within which religious symbols from different traditions can be juxtaposed without reducing their gravity or the resonance with the sacred.

Can the transcendent be depicted in tangible form especially when there is no established or inherited religious iconology and context to express it or give it recognizable meaning? Or is it the very lack of tangible context that serves as a marker of transcendence? Thus it may be said that it is the use of abstraction in folk art that allows it to refer to the everyday world that the folk artists inhabit while at

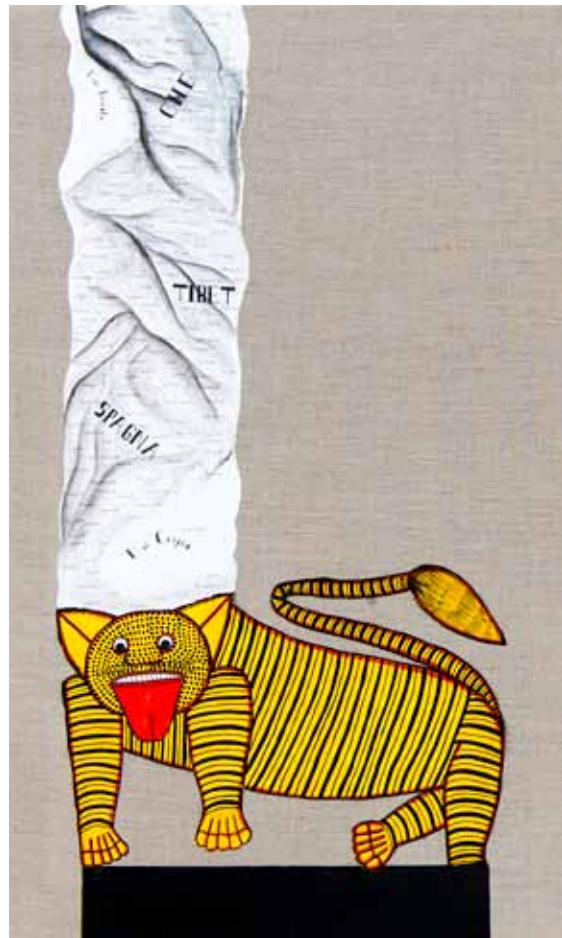


< Patua painters who collaborated with Tarshito in Naya village, West Bengal, India

the same time transcending it. A closer look at the paintings will help us understand this in more detail.

There are four sets of paintings grouped by regional style and also by a theme that unites them. Let us begin with the Rajasthani miniatures. Tarshito abstracts an archetypal figure – the Nayika playing her instrument or a soldier standing guard with his long spear, from the traditional setting in which it is normally seen and places it against a bare background. He does this with a set of figures, similar but also slightly different to form a series. Each composition consists of consecutive panels – a sequence of figures, above which one sees the earth from a bird’s eye view crowned with a row of decorative clouds in the style of miniature painting. The figures themselves are surreal, limbs morphing into long stemmed blooms – human-plant hybrids. As the eye travels from one figure to the next in the series one realizes that these figures are now part of a new story – a story about Tarshito’s travels across the globe, his spiritual journey.

Maps appear more centrally in the Bengal Pata set with the tiger motif that is conventionally associated with the story of Satya Pir, the syncretic figure of spiritual healing in rural Bengal, standing on a section of the map. It is here through the conjunction of the vase and the map that Tarshito’s artistic message is most clearly expressed; the artist as the empty vessel, travelling the globe, gathering inspiration from civilizations that at first sight seem to be completely alien to each other. But what about the vase on the back of the cosmic turtle, or the vase transformed into a shaft of light emerging from Satya Pir’s tiger mount? Here we see not Tarshito the man but the quest itself, the transcendent context unifying different cultures and civilizations. Maps unravel to become tracks or pathways on which the folk stories seem to travel as is depicted so evocatively in a painting in the Gond style where all the figures in their stories seem to emerge from the narratives and go walking on the globe which seems to have been transformed from its customary ball like shape to become a pathway on which the stories can now travel to distant shores. Maps are also redrawn to connect disparate parts of the globe, India, trailing Italy like a comet with its blazing tail is one of the whimsical images in the collection, though here the tail of the comet ends in a boot about to kick another landmass – Sicily – a reference to the common love of football



^ HOLY VIRTUES, 76.5 x 48.5 inches, Acrylic on canvas, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.

< VIRTUE OF JUSTICE, 52 x 28 inches, Acrylic on canvas, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.



in both countries perhaps! Through the playfully transgressive redrawing of these graphic representations of bounded geo-political spaces Tarshito seems to be saying that countries too need to open their borders and that perhaps walking, singing and painting may be the way in which this can happen.

This brings me to another theme that figures repeatedly in the present exhibition; the path or river as a continuous flowing line. Sometimes these lines converge as in the Gond inspired paintings of the seven rivers coming together, flowing around the aquatic creatures that inhabit them. Interestingly in the artistic vocabulary of Gond painters, rivers, pathways and tree roots are often interchangeable, connecting the surface of the earth with its subterranean depths so that the latter becomes another plane or surface parallel to the former which are connected and can be traversed by the privileged adventurers that inhabit their mythology and folklore.

Apart from Satya Pir’s tiger mount the Patua (scroll) painters of Bengal are present through a set of long canvases that depict narratives. Some of these narratives are based on the joys and sorrows of everyday life while others tell us myth stories about the goddess Chandi or the snake goddess Manasa. These myths are based on medieval Bengali texts called Mangal Kavya (auspicious) and were composed at a time in Bengal’s history when Hinduism was expanding to include folk gods and goddesses into its pantheon. This is also the time when high gods like Shiv, Durga and Kali take on the features of local level agricultural deities and acquire a folk or popular aspect. It is interesting feature of the interaction between the great and little traditions in India that the movement between the two is never linear or unidirectional. Thus as we see the regional traditions are incorporated into the classical forms of Hinduism only to return to the folk through their painters and storytellers such as the Chitrakar, the painter story tellers of rural Bengal. Another feature of interest that may be mentioned here is that neither the Chitrakar who are Muslim nor the Gond who are adivasi belong to the mainstream of Hindu religion and yet they are the keepers of a narrative heritage that transcends the narrow boundaries of denominational identity reminding us that in India at least living faith tends to be pantheistic in spirit – aptly expressed in the word ‘lila’ – the play of the gods.

This divine play takes place on a surface – a thin line that separates this world from another beneath it, an inverse world in black and white where everything seems to be upside down, a silent world of shadows, a plant world without the living presence of sentient beings. This is world that was painted by Tarshito and his collaborators in Italy and the right-side-up world teaming with humans, animals and gods by the Indian folk artists. What does this tell us about the collaborative process – that Tarshito is willing to let go of his identity and his art to become the shadow self or mirrored reflection of these folk artists and their mythic traditions? Or is there something more profound being expressed here? In Indian philosophy the mirror is the metaphor that symbolizes the relationship between the Atman, the inner self and the worldly or embodied self. Just the way in which Brahman, cosmic being is present as a reflection in the world in which we live so is the Atman present through its reflection in the face, mirrored through the eye. True images such as the one's shadow or reverse images such as mirror images are metaphoric representations of the ways in which the inner and outer selves are related to the world of appearance and to cosmic and spiritual truth. A mythic image from the opposite end of the globe expresses this in terms of a musical metaphor. Thus for the first inhabitants of Australia the totemic ancestors created the world as they know it by walking and singing, producing the familiar landscape that they inhabit. This is called the dream time. To keep the world from collapsing back into primordial chaos humans through the mediation of their storytellers must reconstitute repeatedly through their myths – myths that are sung to retrace the journey of the ancestors. Tarshito's paintings made in collaboration with the Patuas seem to echo the dream time in the black and white panels painted by Tarshito on which the colorful figures from the Patua stories traverse. I am not sure if this was intentional but the compositions seem to echo the structure of these forms of musical storytelling – the story, like a river, flowing between two banks – one representing the register of the imaginary dream time (and don't most of us dream in black and white?) and the other the register of the wide awake sensory world.

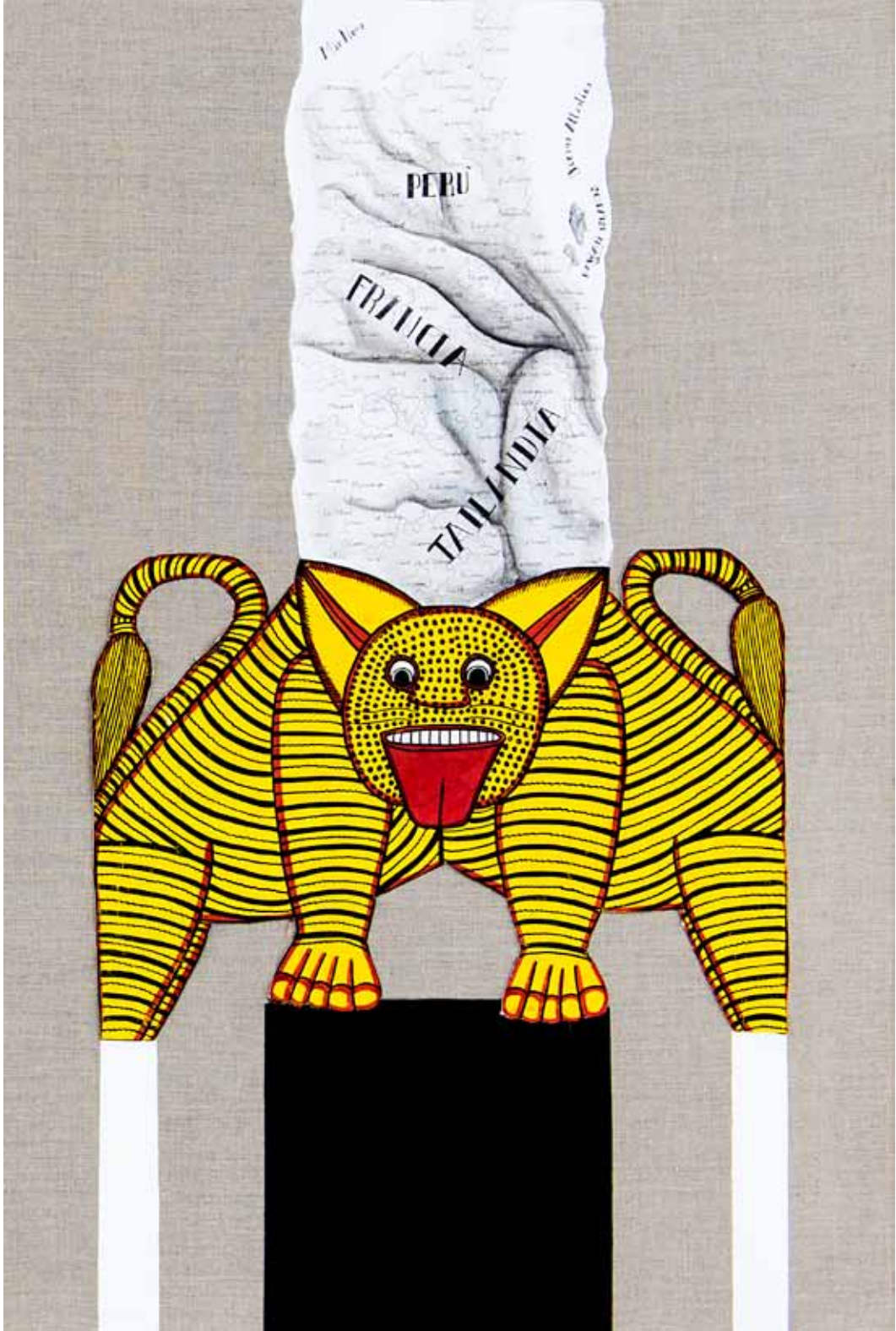
Finally, as a sociologist, there is the question of institutional authority that comes to mind especially in the context of a collaborative project that involves artists from such widely different social contexts and unequal class positions – is it possible to have a truly participatory relationship under these conditions or are there hidden power relationships that allow one kind of aesthetic voice to dominate the others? How comfortable are the folk artists in the global art worlds in which they are increasingly been drawn in? Let me address these questions from my own fieldwork experience with some of these artists. Even though each of the art styles represented here has been given visibility through government patronage, the specific histories of their development in modern India have been quite disparate. Thus, for instance the Gond style is a very recent folk art form that developed under the auspices of Bharat Bhawan, an institute of art and culture set up by the government of Madhya Pradesh in Bhopal. The Gond had a tradition of singing and a vast repertoire of epic narratives set to music which often inspires their painting, even though they rarely choose to tell stories through them. Precisely because the first generation of Gond painters was exposed to contemporary art they were able to conceive of their work as an art rather than a craft. By contrast the Patuas have a very old tradition of painting and performance of both religious and secular themes. But they have been less successful in projecting themselves as professional artists within the modern institutions of the art world perhaps because they find it difficult to transcend the narrative context in which their art is rooted. Yet Patua artists are excited by new stories which enable them to extend their traditional repertoire and even more by new modes of storytelling such as graphic novels that allow for a co-presence of words and image much like their own form but in a different medium. “This is the way that we can build our voices into our paintings” a Patua artist told me at a workshop where alternate vocabularies for Indian graphic novels were being explored. As living traditions the folk arts in India have always responded creatively to new ideas. If contemporary artists reach out to them, collaborate with them to evolve new modes of expression as Tarshito has done, the results are bound to enliven the Indian art scene.

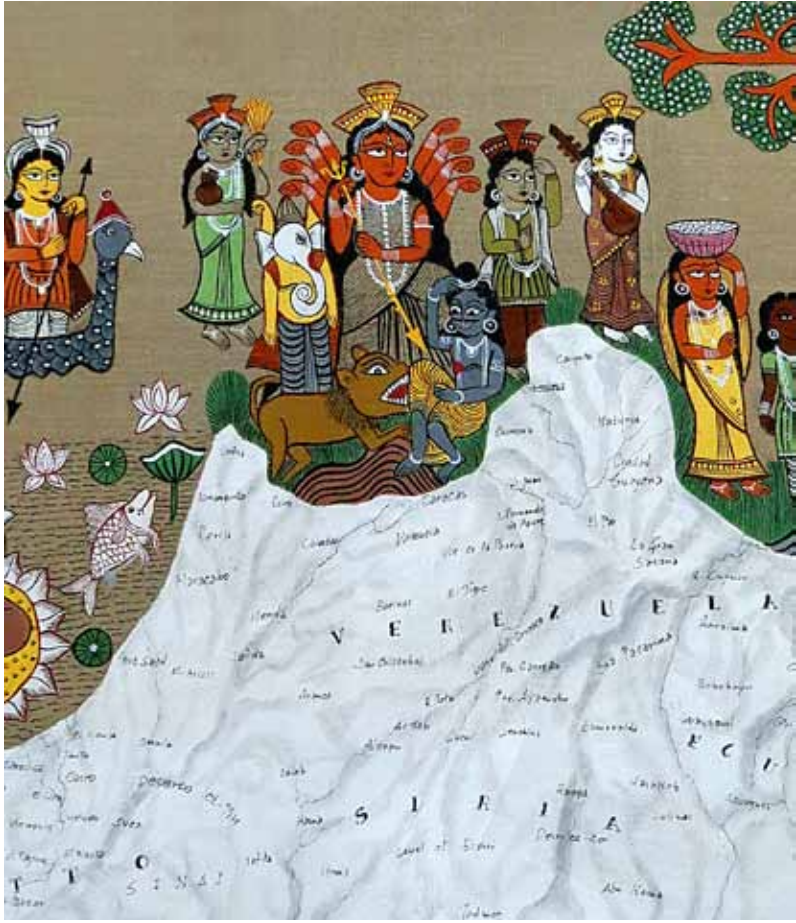


VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE, 52 x 28 inches, Acrylic on canvas, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy .



VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE, 52 x 28 inches, Acrylic on canvas, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.





WALKING IN BENGAL (Detail)



WALKING IN BENGAL, 262.9 x 31.8 inches, Acrylic on canvas, Tarshito with Prabir, Mantu, Sonyia, Tagar, Layla, Suman, Mamoni Chitrakar, Naya Village, Midnapur, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.





*THE WEDDING AND THE NATURE, 137.7 x 23.6 inches,
Acrylic paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Tagar Chitrakar
Naya Village, West Bengal, India.
Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.*



*RURAL LIFE, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic paint on patachitra,
Tarshito with Suman Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal,
India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.*



*DURGA MANGAL, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic
paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Mamoni Chitrakar
Naya Village, West Bengal, India.
Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.*





THE ANIMALS AND THE TREES, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.

THE DANCE, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Prabir Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.



TRIBAL LIFE, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Layla Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.

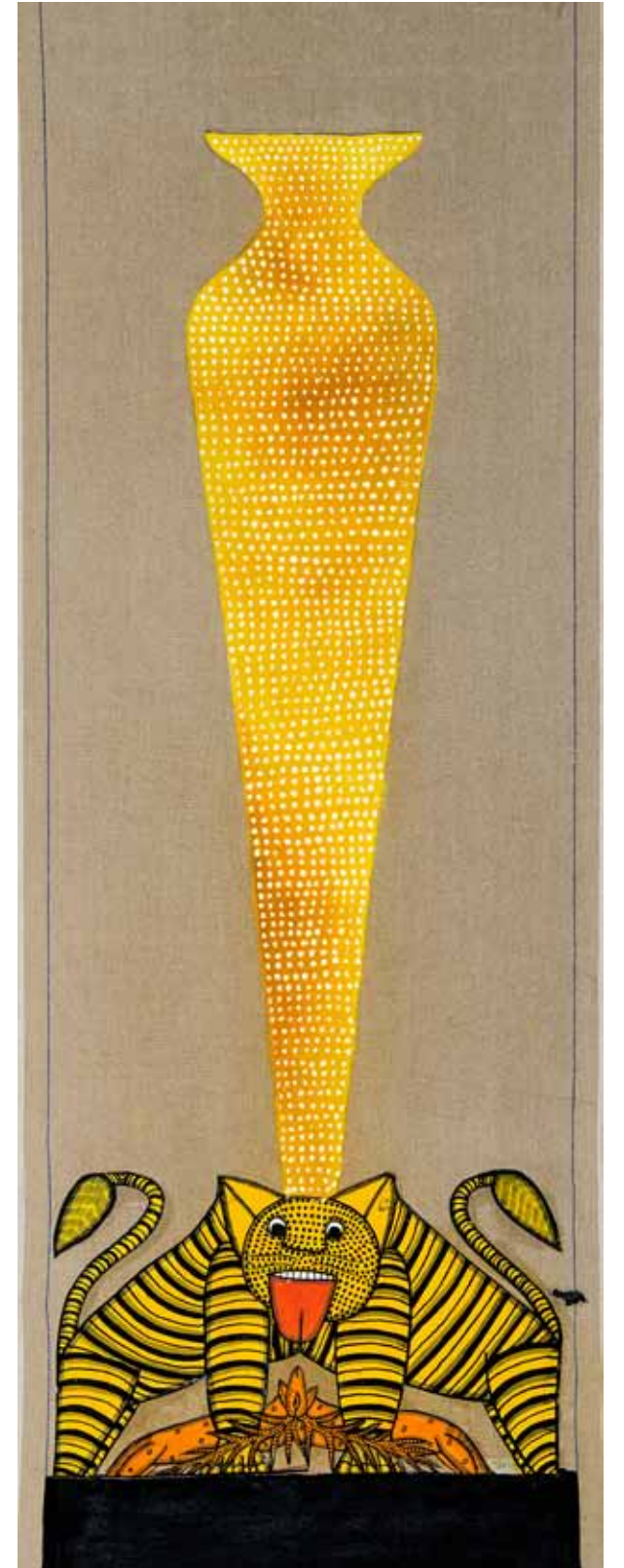
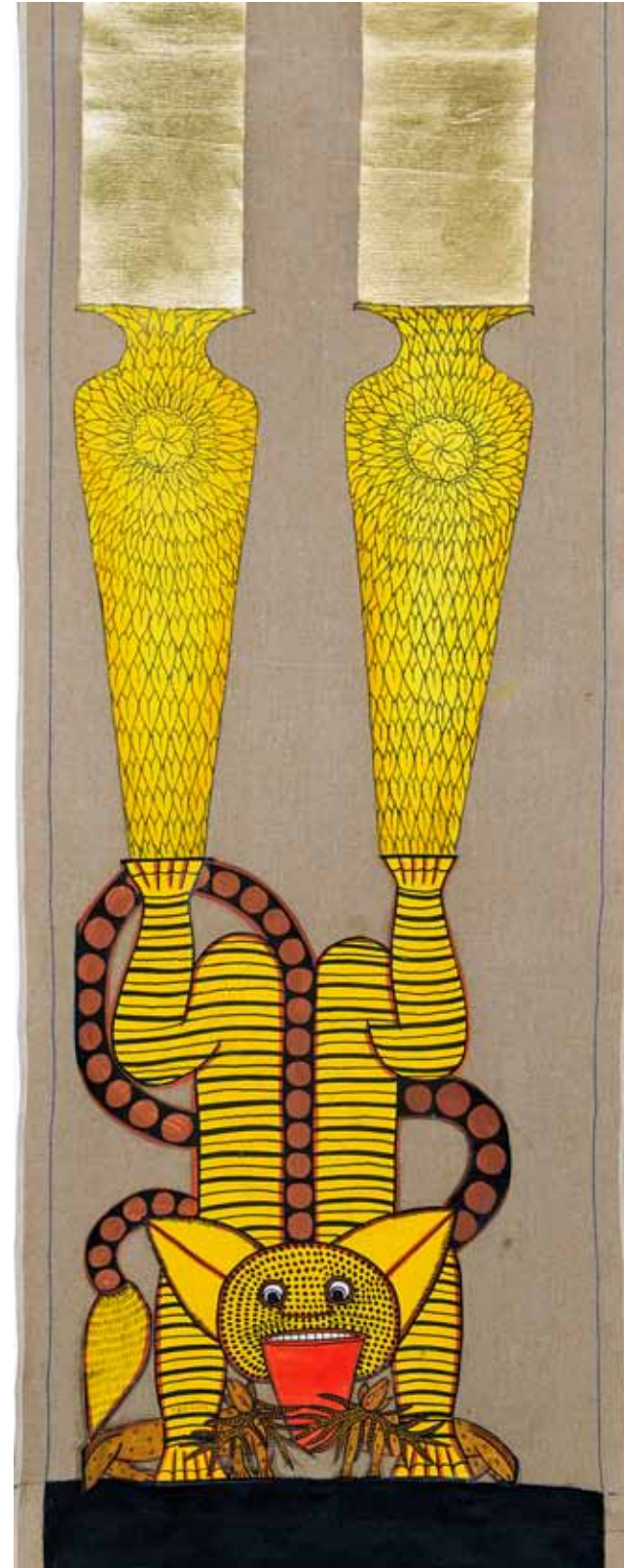




SUFI UTSAB, 137.7 x 23.6 inches, Acrylic paint on patachitra, Tarshito with Sonyia Chitrakar, Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Alessandra Disanto, Bari, Italy.

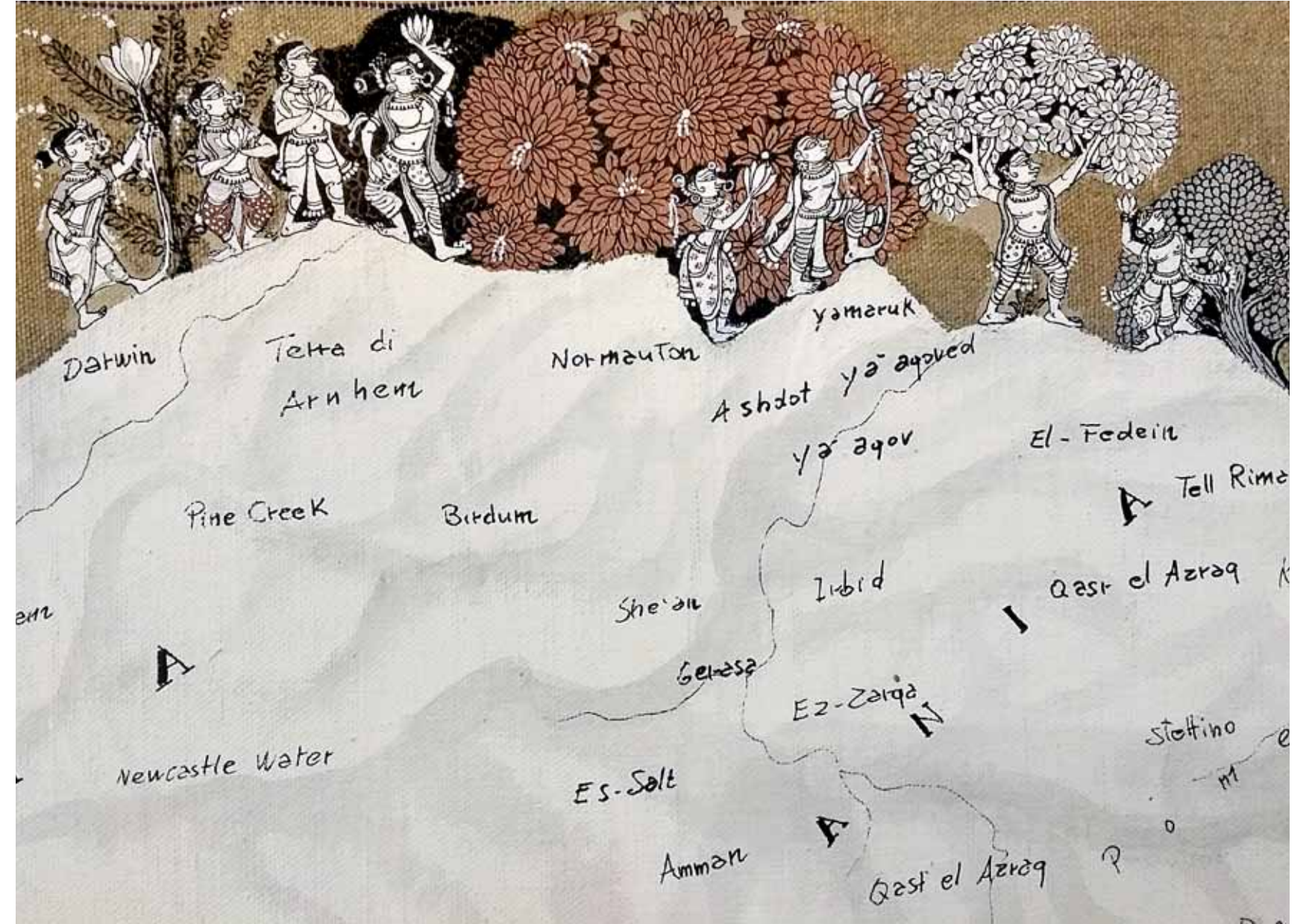


TIGER VASE, 23.6 x 61.4 inches (each), Acrylic paint and gold leaf on canvas, Tarshito with Mantu Chitrakar Naya Village, West Bengal, India. Collaboration: Francesca Russano - Academy of fine Arts of Bari, Italy.





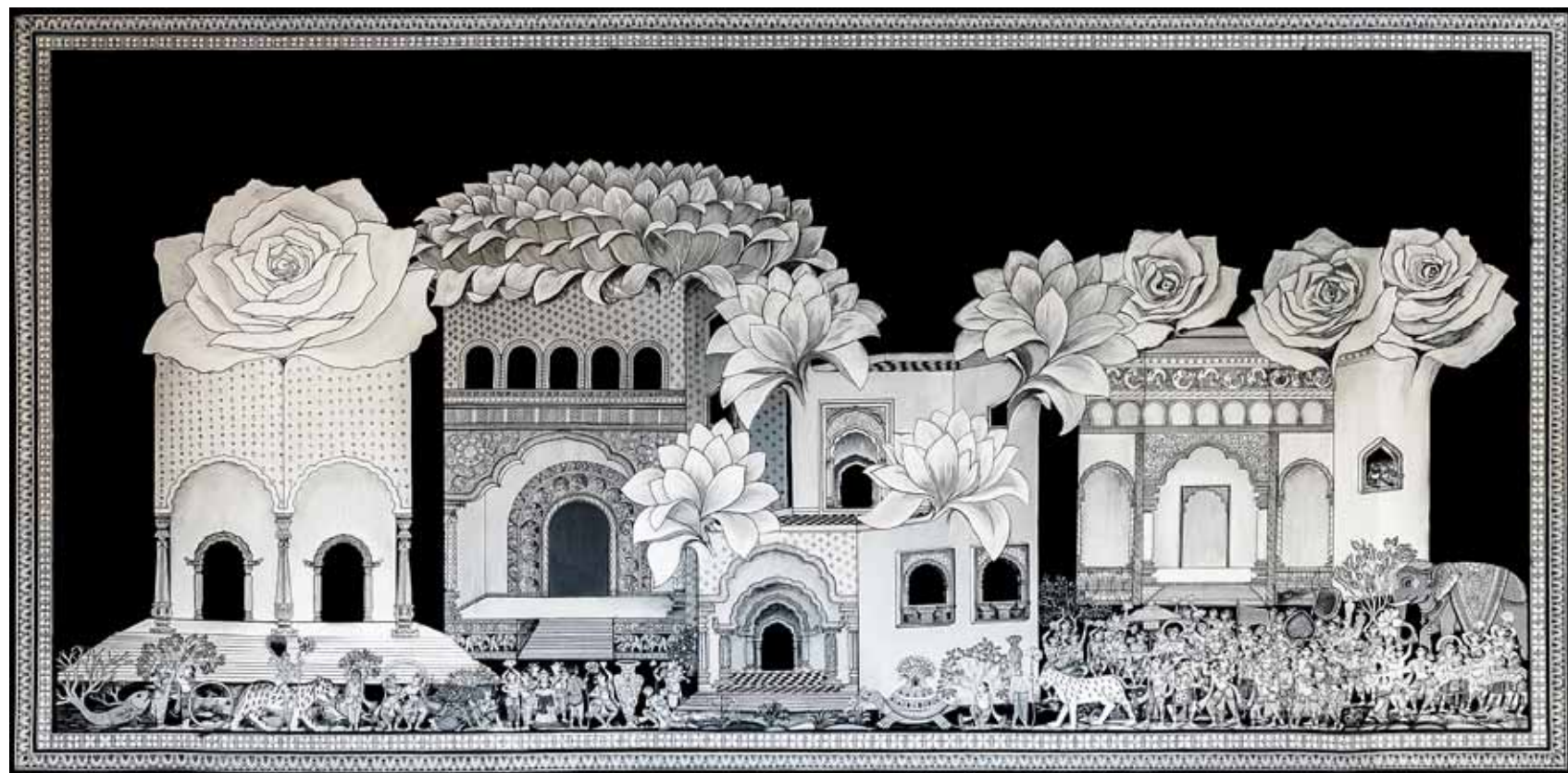
WALKING IN ORISSA (Detail)



WALKING IN ORISSA (Detail)



WALKING IN ORISSA, 397.7 x 23.6 inches,
Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao,
Puri, Orissa, India. Collaboration: Francesco
Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy



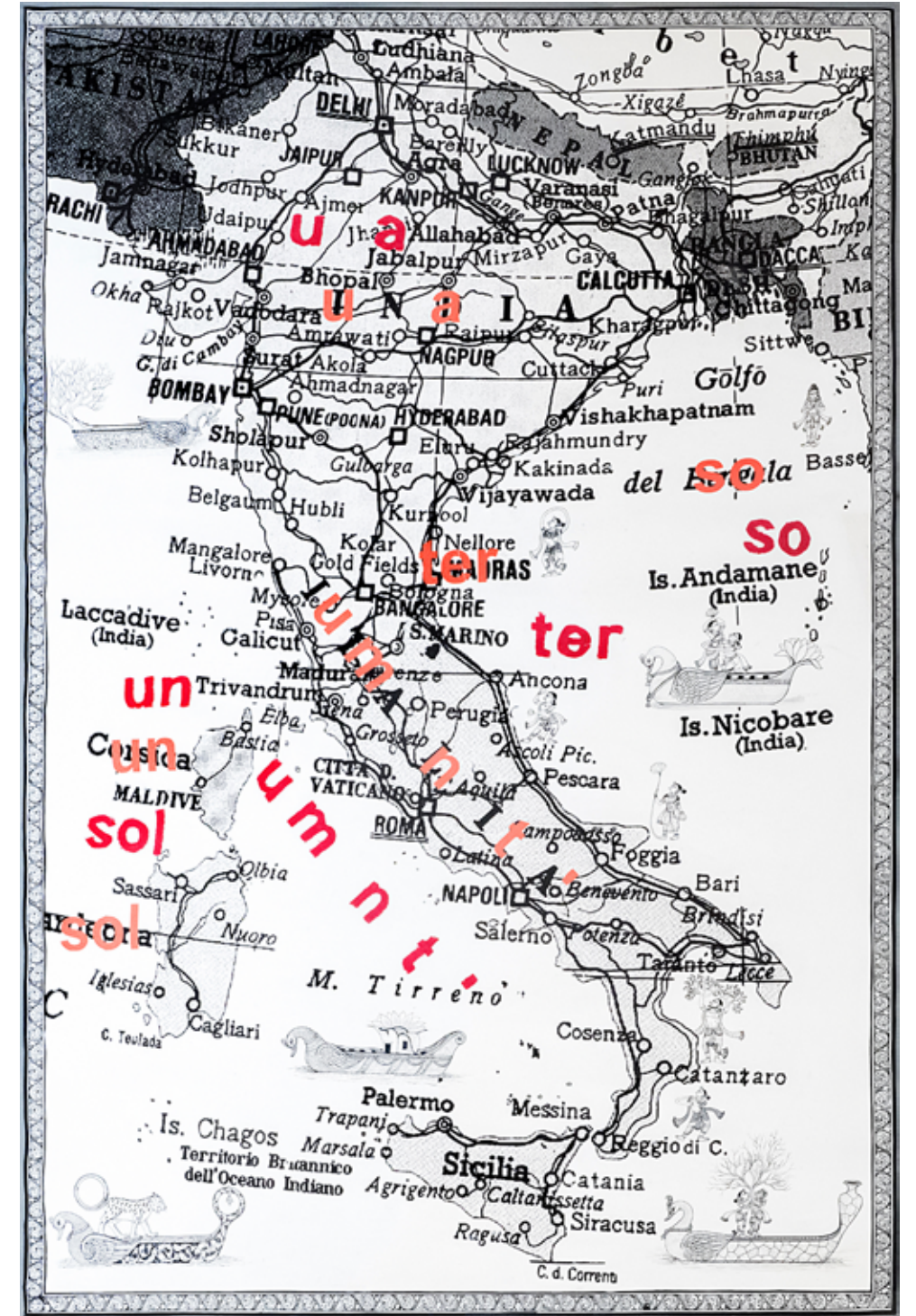
HOLY CITY, 97.2 x 48.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao, Puri, Orissa, India.



HOLY TEMPLES, 96.4 x 48.8 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao, Puri, Orissa, India.



THE TEMPLE VASE, 26.3 x 32 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao, Puri, Orissa, India.



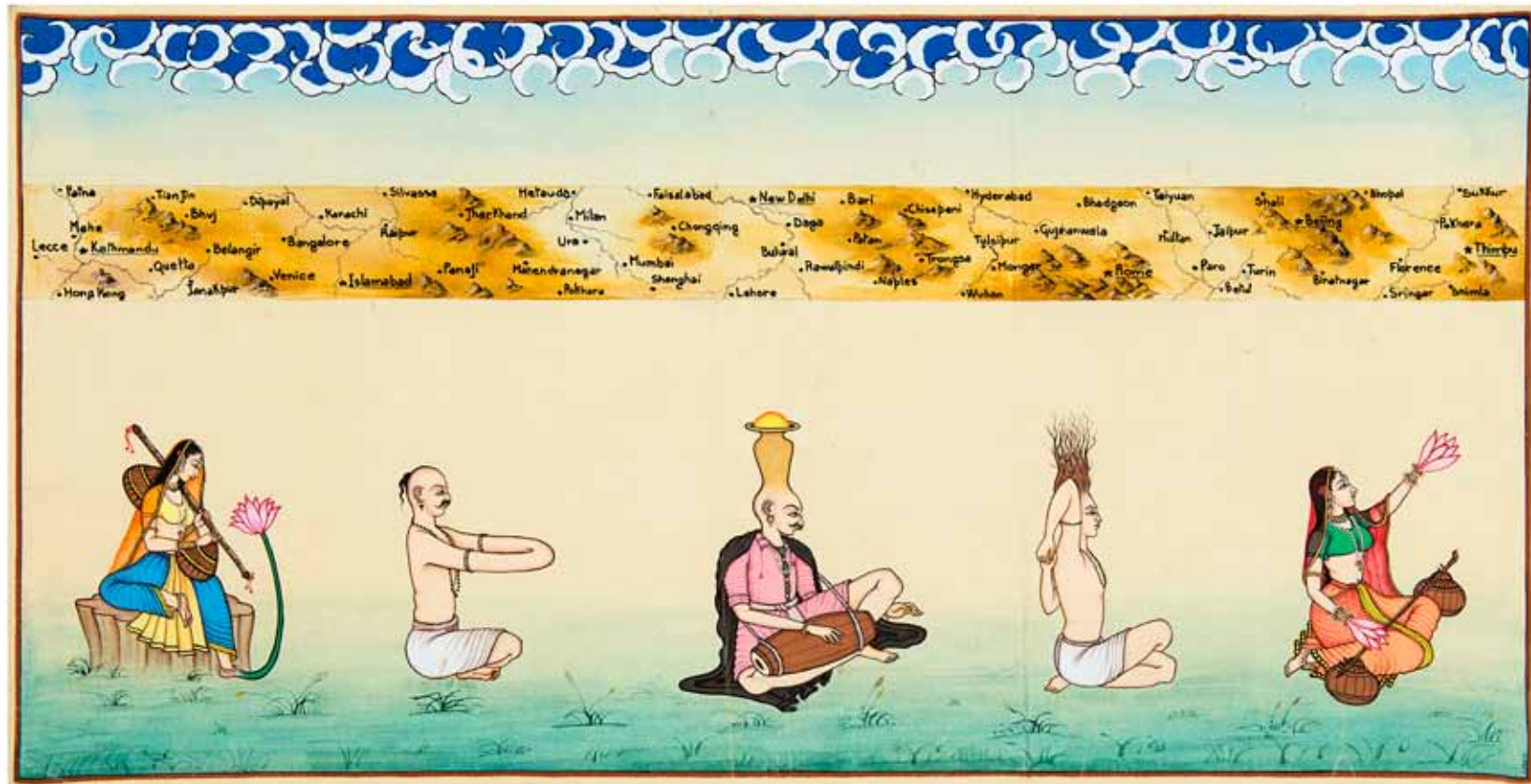
INDITALY, 37.4 x 55 inches, Digital printing and inks on canvas, Tarshito with Puspa Rao, Puri, Orissa, India.



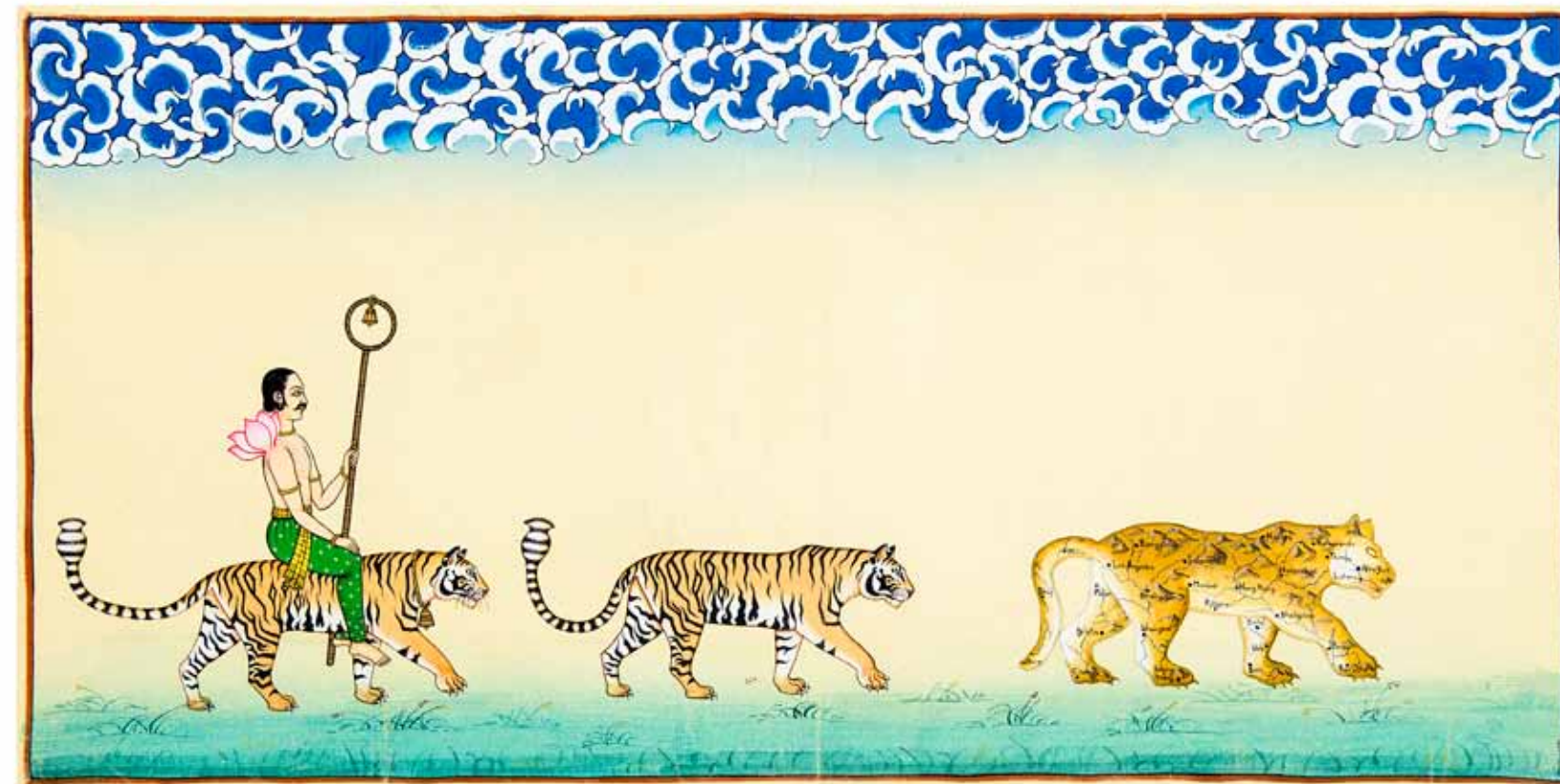
WALKING IN BIKANER (Detail)



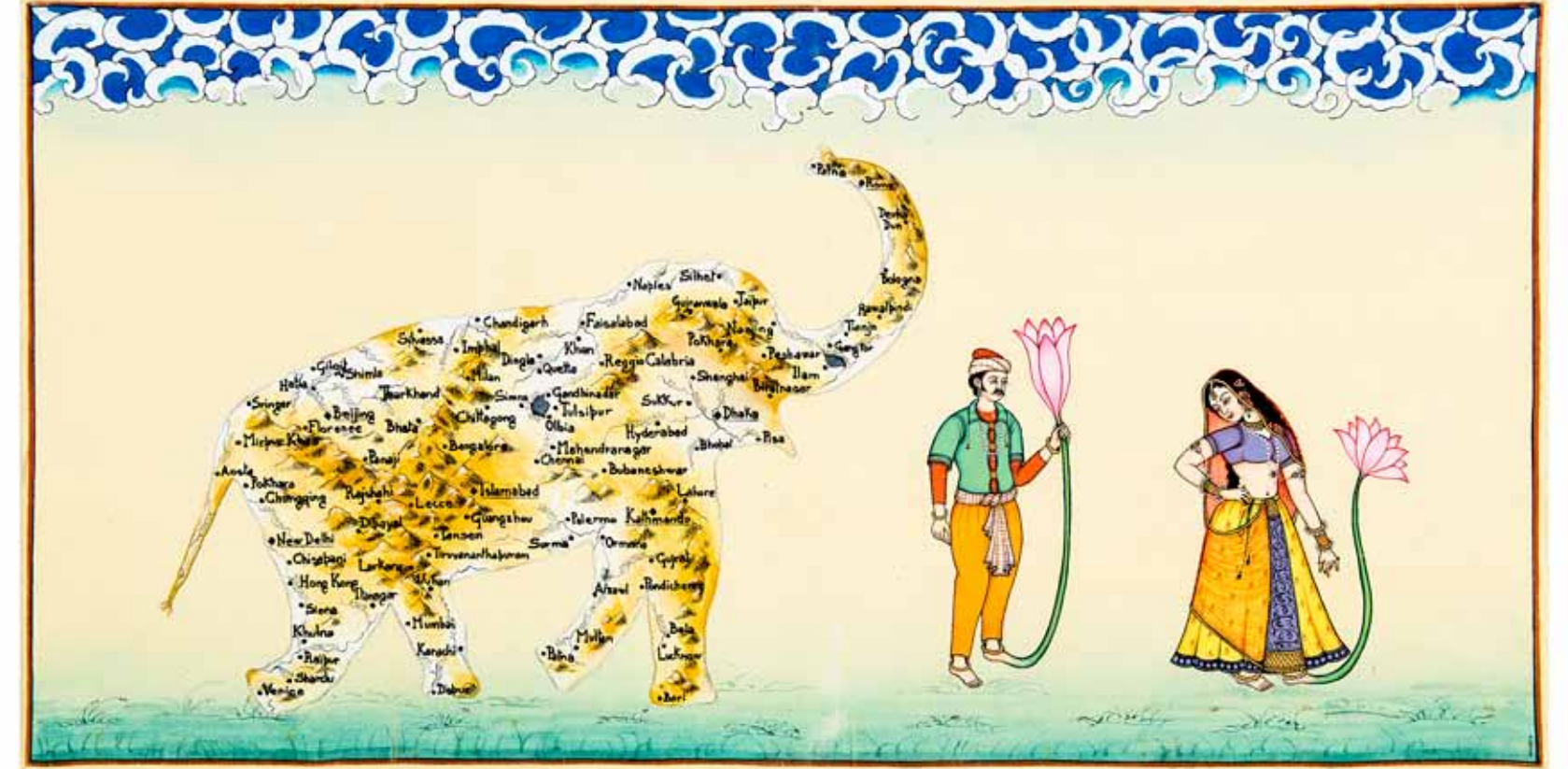
WALKING IN BIKANER, 137x 23 inches, Acrylic paint and miniatures on canvas, with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.



WARRIORS OF LOVE, 43.3 x 21.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy.



THE WARRIOR, THE TIGERS AND THE UNITY, 43.3 x 21.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy.



WARRIORS OF LOVE, 43.3 x 21.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy.

THE TURTLE, THE TREE AND THE UNITY, 43.3 x 21.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy.



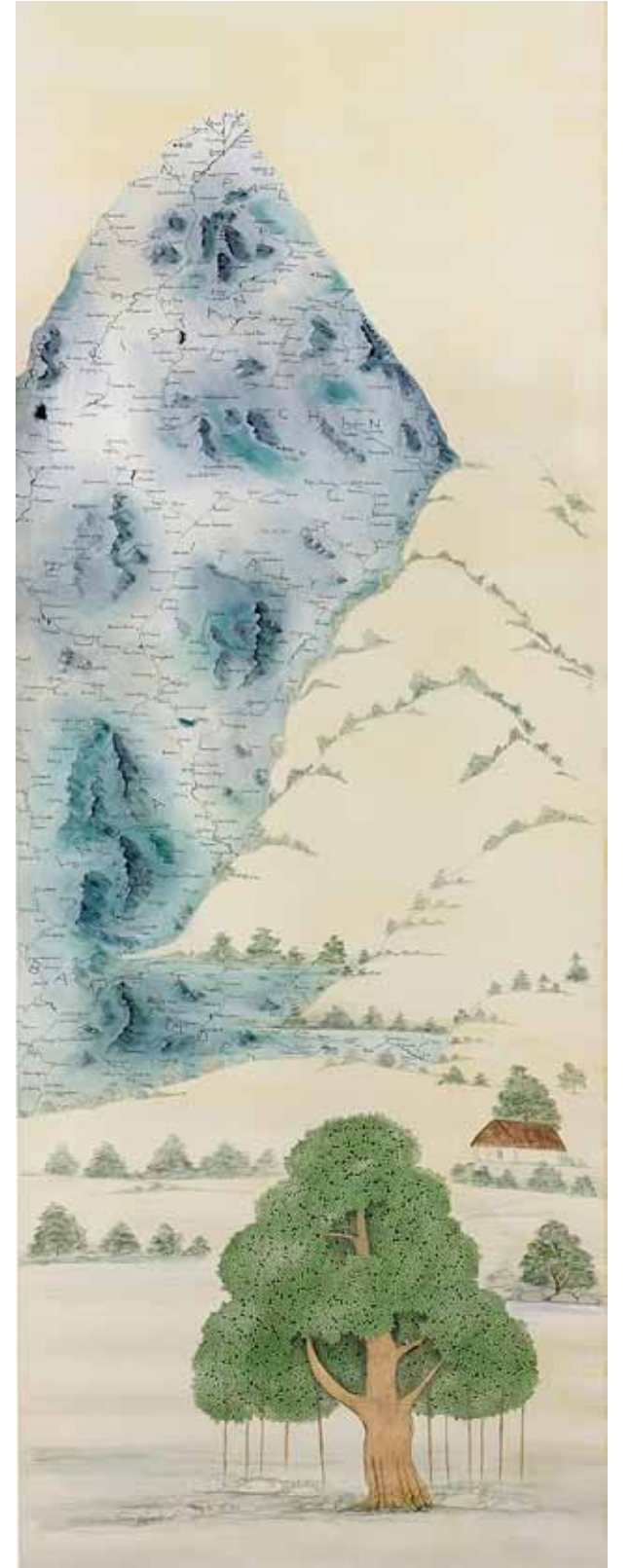
THE COUPLE AND THE UNITY, 43.3 x 21.6 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy.



WARRIOR OF LOVE, 32 x 68 inches, Natural and acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India.



HOLY MOUNTAIN, 36 x 108 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Raju and Mukesh Swami, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Collaboration: Rossana Tomasi, Bologna, Italy





WALKING ACROSS MALWA PLATEAU, 114.3 x 27.5 inches,
Acrylic Paint on fabric, Tarshito with Saroj Venkat Shyam, Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh, India.
Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.



THE PATH OF THE WAYFARER IN LOVE, 397.7 x 23.6 inches,
Mixed media on canvas, Tarshito with Saul Eleuterio Carrillo.
Guadalupe Ocotàn, Mexico, Venkat Raman Singh Shyam, Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh, India, Lastenia Canayo, Lima, Perú. Collaboration:
Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy. (work in progress)



NARMADA RIVER - GIVER OF PEACE, 76,77 X 42,52 inches,
Acrylic paint on fabric, Tarshito with Kala Baj Shyam, Bhopal, Madhya
Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.





GODAVARI RIVER - SACRED SWEETNESS, 76.77 x 42.52 inches,
Acrylic paint on fabric, Tarshito with Premi Baj, Bhopal, Madhya
Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.

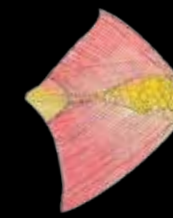


INDO RIVER - SOURCE OF LOVE ,77 x 42,52 inches,
Acrylic paint on fabric, Tarshito with Anand Kumar Shyam, Bhopal, Madhya
Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Frank Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.

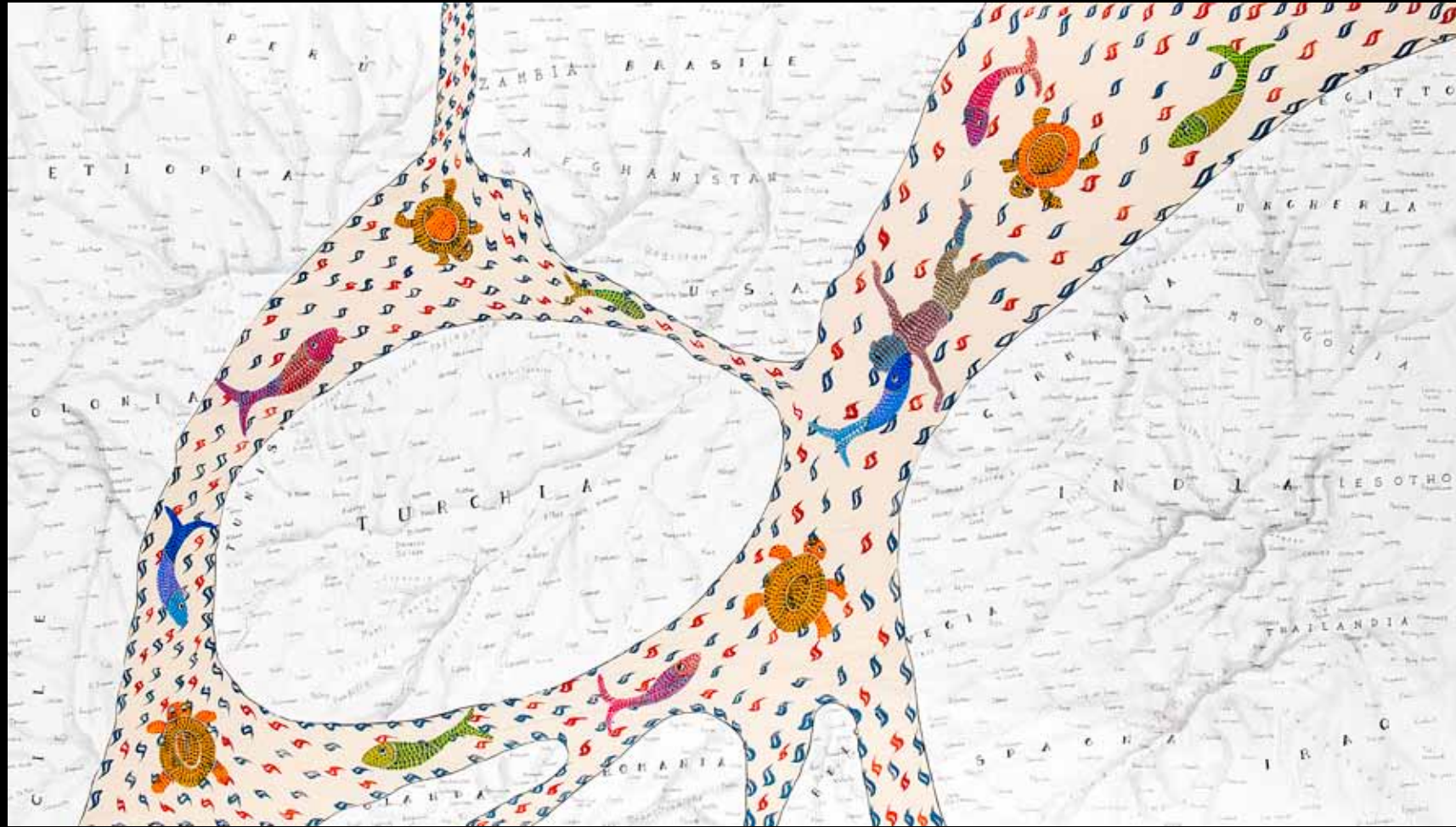




KAVERI RIVER - GANGA OF SOUTH, 76,77 X 42,52 inches, Acrylic paint on fabric, Tarshito with Lilesh Kumar Urweti, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Frank Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.



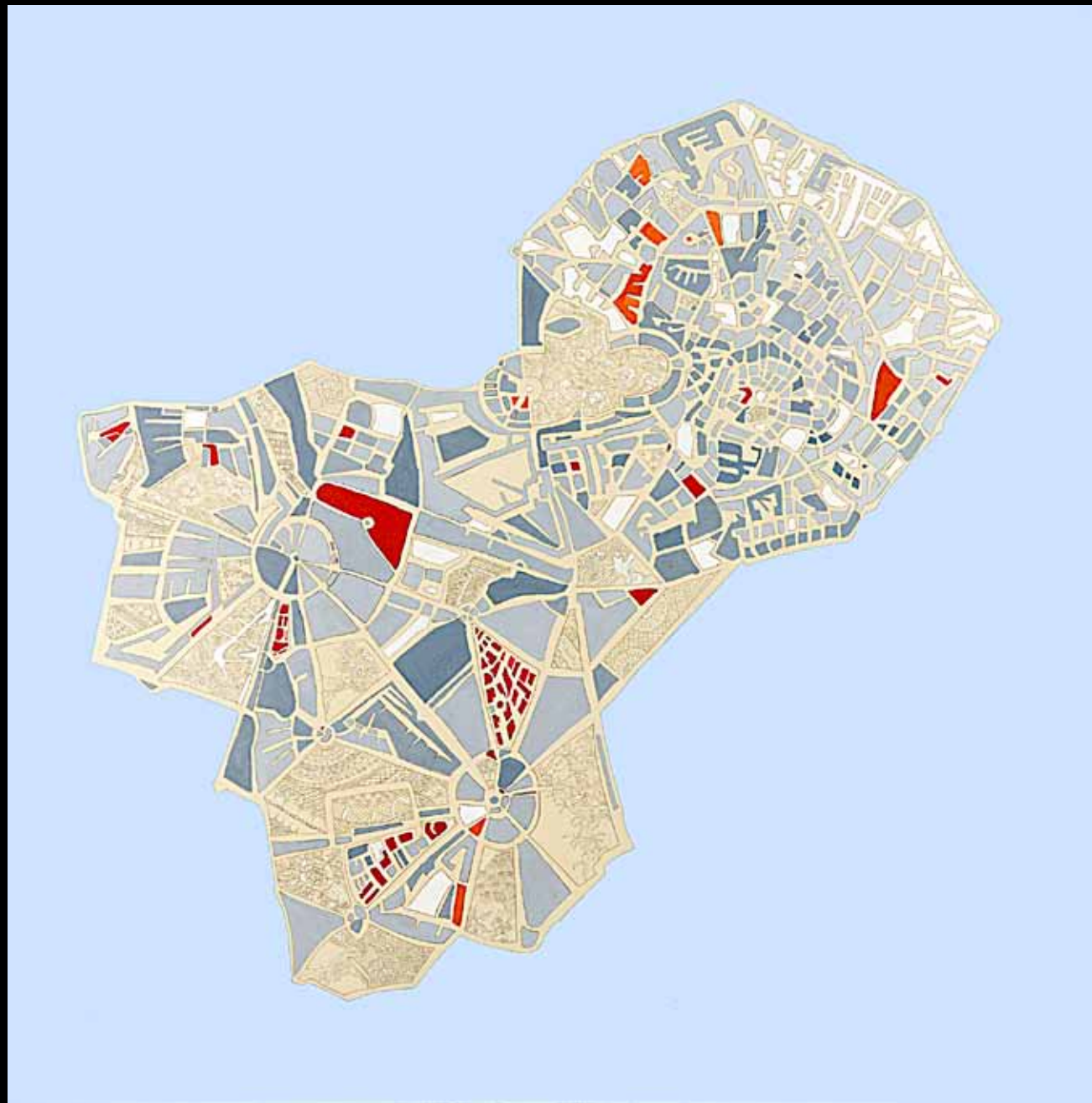
SARASWATI RIVER - HINNER MERCY, 42,52 X 76,77 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas, Tarshito with Venkat Raman Singh Shyam, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Veronica Condello, Bari, Italy.



GANGA RIVER - HOLY MOTHER, 76,77 X 42,52 inches, Acrylic paint on fabric, arshito with Gariba Singh Tekam, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Frank Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.



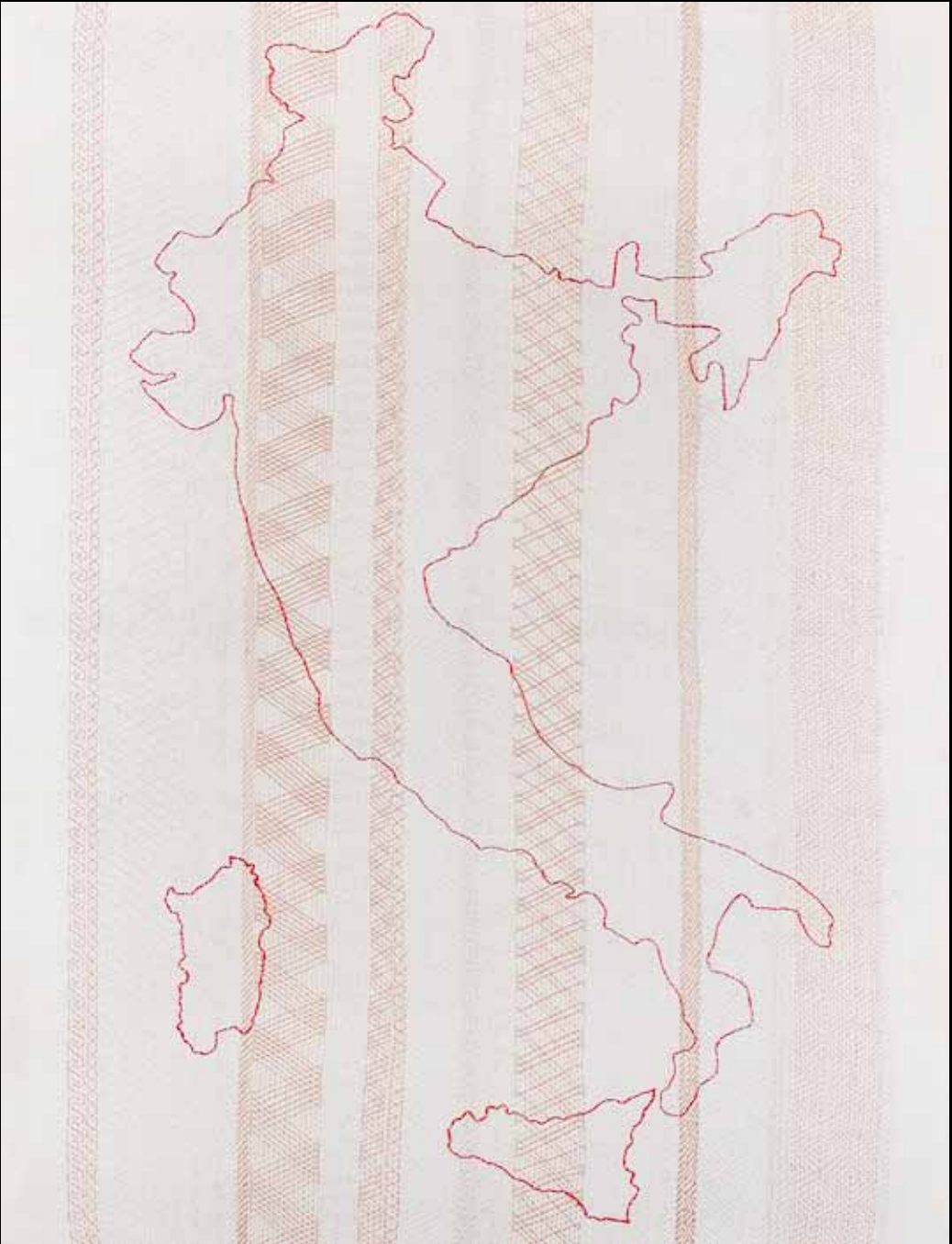
YAMUNA RIVER - LIQUID LOVE, 76,77 X 42,52 inches, Acrylic paint on fabric, Tarshito with Kaushel Prasad, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Collaboration: Francesco Ventura, Corato, Bari, Italy.



DELHIMILAN, 47 x 47 inches, Acrylic paint on canvas,
Tarshito Studio: Alessandra Disanto, Bari, Italy.



DELHILONDON, 42.5 x 42.5 inches, Acrylic paint on
canvas, Tarshito Studio: Alessandra Disanto, Bari, Italy.



INDITALY, 51 x 67 inches, Kantha stitch and red thread on fabric, Tarshito Studio: Alessandra Disanto, Bari, Italy and the embroiderers of Hosto Shilpo, Jessore, Bangladesh



SPECIALE ATLANTE-INDIA (Detail)



SPECIALE ATLANTE-INDIA, 209 x 23.6 inches, Digital printing, Tarshito with Luca Desiderato.

LIST OF PATUA PAINTERS WHO COLLABORATED WITH TARSHITO IN NAYA VILLAGE, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Layla Chitrakar



Mamoni Chitrakar



Mantu Chitrakar



Prabir Chitrakar



Sonyia Chitrakar



Suman Chitrakar



Tagar Chitrakar

Photography by Tarshito, 2015

THE PATACHITRA ARTIST WHO COLLABORATED WITH TARSHITO IN PURI, ORISSA

Puspa Rao



Photograph by Elena Parisi, Milan, Italy.

LIST OF GOND ARTISTS WHO COLLABORATED WITH TARSHITO IN BHOPAL, MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA

Koushal Prasad Tekam



Premi Baj Tekam



Saroj Venkat Shyam



Venkat Raman Singh Shyam



Anand Kumar Shyam



Gariba Singh Tekam



Kala Bai Shyam



Lilesh Kumar Urveti

Photography by Luca Desiderato, Bari, Italy.

LIST OF MINIATURISTS WHO COLLABORATED WITH TARSHITO IN BIKANER, RAJASTHAN , INDIA

Mukesh Swami



Raju Swami



Photograph by Elena Parisi, Milan, Italy.

TARSHITO (B. 1952)

“Since his first time in India, in 1979, Tarshito peregrinates across the World, each time feeling the gladness of meeting other cultures.

His works express the importance of traveling inside and outside the space-time limits of reality to overcome any kind of closures.

His Art is the result of a never ending research across the living traditions of the planet. In every piece, there is a multitude of styles and techniques mixed together in a harmonious unity,

Tarshito's artistic production is a Festival of Rituals and Arts that become every time a process of continuous transfer, his artwork highlights the relationship between ancient and contemporary aspects of life, between people, between cultures.

Tarshito's artworks have been shown in galleries and museums around the world, he also participated at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and his art pieces are in private and public collections in India, Bangladesh (Bengal Art Foundation), Belgium (Museum of Sacred Art) and also Mexico.”



Portrait of Tarshito by Elena Parsi >





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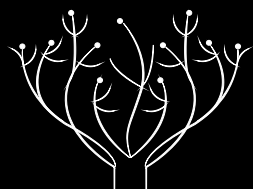
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