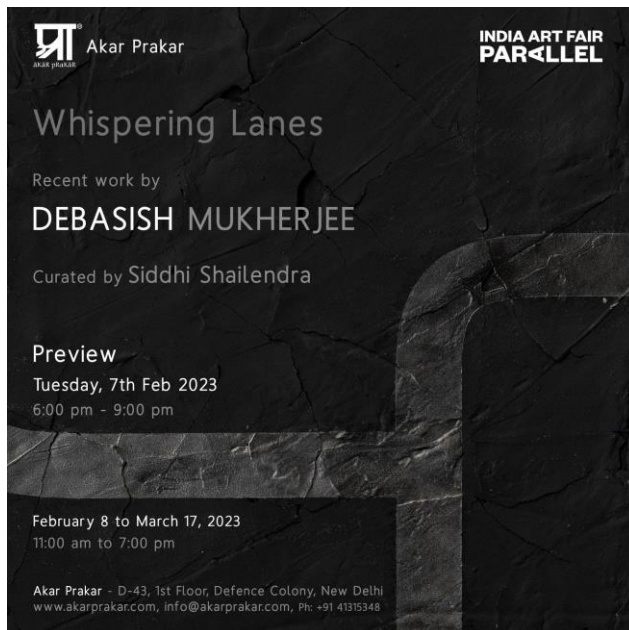




Debasish Mukherjee
Whispering Lanes
8th February – 17th March 2023
Akar Prakar, New Delhi

Curated by Siddhi Shailendra

Reception: Tuesday, 7th February 2023 | 6-9 PM



Curatorial Note

The concept of spaces is often defined by the lines and limitations placed in a three-dimensional area, but what these primary geometrical definitions neglect to take into consideration is our inhabitation of these spaces. The weight of our experiences and memories within the walls of one's home or the street crossed too often are woven into the fabric of the place. In his latest solo exhibition, artist Debasish Mukherjee makes use of these limitations, the elemental aspects of the spaces, the line, the architecture and the everyday objects to create visual metaphors in an effort to uncover the dormant stories of his past.

An aesthetic that combines the language of abstract expressionism and structural minimalism, Mukherjee experiments with the medium of sculptural installations, paintings, and textile-based works employing a purposefully limited colour palette. The silhouettes of the ghats, the lanes, the structures, and the steps take on the manifestation of the city of Benares, a place that is his muse and a mystery yet to be solved. Having spent years of his childhood at his maternal grandmother's house in Benares and then again as a student of painting at the Banaras Hindu University, he spent some of the most formative years of his life in the city.

A remembrance of the days gone by and the reality of its present, the essence of the city forms the premise of the suite of works displayed in this exhibition. With a history of countless cycles of destruction and revival at the centre of its past, the works like *Monsoon Fables* and *Pakka Mahal* are a reference to the recurring historical and current displacement and resettlement of the populace. The carved-out bricks and grids of sites and lands, within the motif of the almirah wide open and submerged, connotes the idea of unlocking our memories of the familiar places of the past.

An archive of the localities and *mohallas* of Benares is silk printed on the frames of rice paper and handmade paper in the work *1781*, the year these names were documented and many of these places continue to retain their names. These names similarly can be encountered upon closer observation of the pillar-like structure in the work *Persistence of memory* with a tree hollow at its centre. Mukherjee uses the contradictory nature of the medium of the two works to reinforce the intrinsic duality and contention that our history holds.

Mukherjee's practice is an investigation into the relationship between objects, architecture and our memories. Similar to how Gaston Bachelard contemplates in his text 'The Poetics of Space', Mukherjee uses the iconography of the shelter, closets, and drawers of a home to invoke areas of intimacy and secrets. What was once suppressed within the subconscious, is provoked and unravelled thus creating a space within one's mind for contemplation and confrontation of the most basic emotions of safety and play that we experienced in our childhood.

As the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney aptly describes in his introduction to Bachelard's text, "Imagination is at its best when it is incarnate, elemental, opening out into time and space, even when the space is elsewhere—before being, beneath being, beyond being, more than being."

- Siddhi Shailendra

Debasish Mukherjee

Debasish Mukherjee (b. 1973) was born in Chapra, a historically important town in Bihar. He grew up amidst open spaces and railway colonies, mixing freely with people from various social backgrounds. He graduated from the Banaras Hindu University with a specialization in Painting. Rooted in India, Mukherjee manifests his keen observations of India's built environment, social fabric and events from his day-to-day life into his art practice. Mukherjee's work tends to interrogate the way an object or memory is preserved, celebrated or neglected.

He has also conducted extensive research with weavers and artisans across India, especially within Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Gujarat. He has had solo exhibitions including Museum Within at Akar Prakar, New Delhi (2016) and River Song, at Akar Prakar, New Delhi (2019). He had also participated in numerous group shows including The Legacy of Loss: Perspective on the Partition of Bengal at Kolkata Centre for Creativity (2021); Multitudes & Assemblages for Hub India at Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti, Turin, Italy (2022); Inner Life of Things: Around Anatomies and Armatures curated by Roobina Karode at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Noida 2022); and Partition of India...1947 at National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi (2022) to name a few. The artist lives and works in New Delhi.