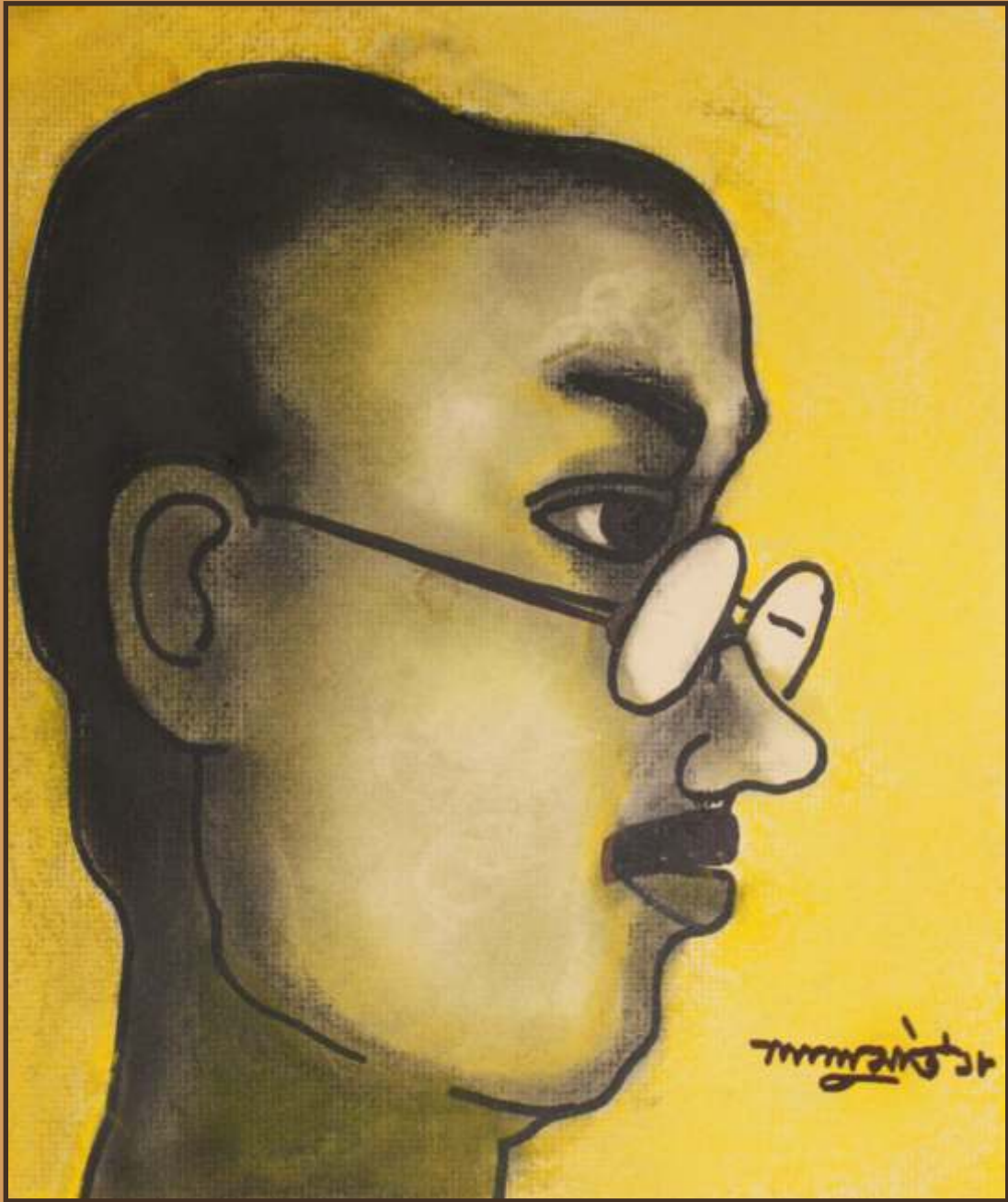




art Exposure



## The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Selected Works by **Lalu Prasad Shaw**



Cover: Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 14 inches, 2018

Back Cover: Babu & Bibi  
tempera on board, 20.5 x 15 inches, 2017

# The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Selected Works by **Lalu Prasad Shaw**

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Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 14 inches, 2018

Lalu Prasad Shaw's creative journey as an artist gets reflected through his artistic sensibilities which gets transferred on to the surface in the form of fine and bold lines and through opaque colour formats. It symbolizes the intricacy and depth with which



the artist carries out his way of life. Laluda, as he is fondly called, is one of those artists in India who uses tempera as a medium of expression. His precise brushstrokes, carefully filled flat spaces, and subtle colors complement each other to create distinctive visuals. There is a sense of stillness in his paintings. He uses combination of thin and thick lines to give a dimension to the flat surface.

Being a part of the creative world for more than a decade, I consider myself privileged to have the opportunity to work with some of the stalwarts of Indian contemporary art, and astounded at seeing Laluda's sense of proportion. Each and every stroke delineates his hardship through which the artist channelizes himself in order to reach his desired tranquility.

“The Stories We Tell Ourselves”, the solo exhibition of Lalu Prasad Shaw at Art Exposure will give the cognoscenti an opportunity to view his recent drawings and paintings. From the name itself, one can get an insight into the exhibition. It deals with different elements that revolve our surroundings in a totally new version and form.



I take great pleasure in showcasing his present body of work.

**Uma Mitra**

Art Exposure



Bibi  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2018

## The Stories We Tell Ourselves:

Lalu Prasad Shaw's temperas are a revelation, utterances of mind and soul, compositions given the scrutiny have been subjected to contexts in which they have been used, we know much about its origins, or better, the occasion that gave rise to it, the history of its appearance. The best and most compelling of his works here- 'The Stories We Tell Ourselves' at Art Exposure (Jan 11- Feb 5, 2019), that approach to an eclectic realm that leans heavily on his insights. His temperas are joyful but his viewers may find this an intolerably whimsical statement. It does have moments of joy, but they are only fragments, the rest is philosophical enquiry into our existence but this exhibition is sheer pleasure in another sense- in its energy and curiosity, in its formal inventiveness, in the mastery of painting. And therefore finally in its vision. In spite of his enormous erudition and sense of form and texture in his 'Babu' and 'Bibi' series, he puts the present together. There is a lot of truth in the traditionally held view of Shaw as a bridge figure between avant garde and the emergent radical Indian Contemporary art of the 60s and the following decades, but it is also an oversimplification. Despite Lalu Prasad Shaw's (born 1937) vast contribution in the making of a language that marks the emergence of an Indian contemporary art in the sixties and seventies, his was one of the legacies to younger Indian artists who had looked at his art and then moved from it along very different paths carrying with them the bits of poetic explosion of his work

The present series can variously be interpreted as referring to psychological alienation as if he developed these ideas in isolation, and far from excluding content, the works are intended to provide a screen on to which the viewer projects his own experience provoked by the Master. The bareness of the image forces the viewer to consider the idea behind the non- event of the painted space. From the late 50s to the present his personality expressed through his etchings, paintings,



and sculptures has presented a challenging half-mocking conundrum to the viewer. The drawings of self location, and the vessels of colour he painted here is minimalist in its mode. This painted ground, this rhythmic unity of senses can be discovered only by going beyond that gives his work in this exhibition, an eclectic fervour.: Again the smoking souvenir, Bleeding eidolon!) and yet again. Until the bright logic is won. Unwhispering as a mirror. Is believed." (-Hart Crane) It is associated with living, living more ascertaining to life unto the point of an act. In these entire works, one can see elegance and joyfulness as means of revolt, not an exercise of power but a

tumultuous upheaval of limitation. Seductive yet austere paintings float weightlessly unconstrained by necessity yet no less connected to material realm of natural demonstrating an element of disdain and sardonic charm; schematically his imagery seen with a linear gaze acts as a map of elegant fantasies – an attempt to set up a dialogue between our obsessions and private associations and can be read as an allegory. They depict a meaningless loss, transcending the development of means - an escape in his antiquated world. However, escape is toward the impossible world whose extreme limit assumes laughter, irony, ecstasy, terrified

approach towards the end.

His composition is eloquent. The couple is lost in search of lost time "Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind. But its struggles are too far off, too much confused; scarcely can I perceive the colourless reflection in which are blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant hues, and I cannot distinguish its form, cannot invite it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate to me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable paramour; cannot ask it to inform me what special circumstance is in question, of what period in my past life. Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depths of my being? I cannot tell. Now that I feel nothing, it has stopped, has perhaps gone down again into its darkness, from which who can say whether it will ever rise? Ten times over I must essay the task, must lean down over the abyss. And each time the natural laziness which deters us from every difficult enterprise, every work of importance, has urged me to leave the thing alone, to drink my tea and to think merely of the worries of to-day and of my hopes for to-morrow, which let themselves be pondered over without effort or distress of mind." (Marcel Proust, *In Search Of Lost Time*). One senses a working out of pictorial conventions; of attitudes and of free associations that swivel between dream and Proustian reality swinging between distance and intimacy his works done in tempera deal with his own reassembly of an idea on a previously unseen realism he always aspired. In other terms, in another language, this would translate as the minimal hypothesis of logic of the subconscious, that our psychic symptoms have causes, origins even that the dreams do not subvert the metaphor, and so it pays to be meticulous and rigorous.



Shaw reveals through all its mediation as an intellectual voice which is self referential, his career as an artist and educationist spanned over some four decades brings to mind that what is it about the contemporary field of discourse in which it has become prevalent for people to speak in the name of



large, undesirably vague labels like the West, Japanese, or Slavic or Indian culture, labels that collapse religions, race, and ethnicities into unpleasant ideologies? The present body exactly questions the rhetoric of identity that speak for our vanishing world and its readings and contemplations and surely makes way into our present discourse of art practice surreptitiously and of the art of the moment steeped in personal vision and clarity of thought that is intimate and preoccupied with explorations of form, space and myth. He puts his lines, an exhilaration generated by a cerebral mind together with a calm detachment subverting tradition from the inside, deliberately



showing up the limitations of the materials and procedures he has inherited, various mediums he used in which a clear structure combines intimately with an expressiveness to achieve a paradoxical visual image to create scenes of artifice and makes him one those rare painters. But these artifices do not by any means resist our emotional identification or intellectual response.

Let us examine the socio-political scene before Lalu Prasad Shaw emerged into the visual space. It will help us to understand the making of his language and practice. The Forties and Fifties were an effervescent period in Calcutta. These were the years between Second World War and the Partition of India. Negating tradition, they felt what had become sterile and flat, artists such as Rathin Moitra, Gopal Ghosh, Subho Tagore, Nirode Mazumdar, Paritosh Sen and Prodosh Dasgupta attempted a change in 1943, which should be anti-nostalgic, anti-sentimental and subversive of hierarchies. This group known as "Calcutta Group" initiated the first international modern art movement in the country. The group operated without precedents, lacking the artistic tradition of modernism that would set a premise for the artists



who emerged later. Their immediate point of reference was the presence of hundreds of thousands of Allied Forces who brought with them the books on Western Art. The city was a cultural entrepot with large number of British and other Europeans, Americans thronging the bars, restaurants and streets until the early hours of morning. Jazz had already appeared a few years earlier which codified practically all the nuances of the new movement and the sounds echoed in many forms of artistic perception. The Calcutta group declared, "Paris of Sartre, Stravinsky and Picasso is the centre of our days..." There was also a social and political

orientation by a large number of artists shocked at the devastation wrought by famine and war. The response to the human suffering was manifold; some merged with contemporary reaction to fascism, some looked from a humanist position and some had a Marxian viewpoint resulting in a varied and disparate style and aesthetics. Whereas artists like Chittaprasad, Zainul Abedin, and Ramkinkar employed folk, academic and modern formal devices, the artists of Calcutta Group like Prankrishna Pal and Paritosh Sen also responded to the famine in particular and to the social realities around them. Later, Paritosh Sen carried it forward a expressionistic, witty and sardonic view of society. The prominent among the artists with overtly political commitment was certainly Somnath Hore. The images of famine in 1943 and the war had left a scar on his psyche resulting in an obsessive force on his oeuvre.

The artists expressed such human concerns or ideological commitment but at the same time unwittingly make a political archive of their romantic legacy only in their process of their involvement in actual political struggles. Otherwise, the legacy is simply there, as printed word, as aesthetics, as historical monuments to Bengali

romanticism, once alive but now cold and dead. In this mode, they can only be revived as merely as one artist's personal sentiments. To proclaim an individual sentiment as something political would indeed be sentimentalism. It is only during "mass" struggles –be it Swadeshi or the freedom struggle in Bangladesh or the Naxalite movement later in the late Sixties or early Seventies that desired but failed to mobilize the masses- that the legacy of the romantic moment of our fraught nationalism, mediated by a long line of painters, may come back to haunt our own political sentiments. When such haunting happens our being-political can no longer be reduced to any one understanding of what it means to be political. Both romantic and social-science imaginations jostle in the space and we may not term them as mere sentimentalism.

Just at the turn of the decade, Society of Contemporary Artists was formed, in 1960 at 7A, Mysore Road at the home of Anilbaran Saha and then moved to a small spartan surrounding at 157B Lenin Sarani, a busy street in the commercial district of central Calcutta that continued its hub of activity till it moved to its present address on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass. Lenin Sarani was a curiously busy thoroughfare; it opens out midway to tram tracks. On one side, sprawled line of narrow doorways with dark, dank little shops and kiosks, cramped windows; the smells candied fruit, repair shops, engine exhaust, the cry of street urchins, the test-roar of state buses, a caterwaul from a court. The room had a small etching press and also had a group show of its members in 1962 interspersed with some solo exhibitions around the same time. Four years later another important group "Calcutta Painters' came up. Both remaining till date the most articulate and two meaningful groups of artists working against a backdrop of predecessors constantly defining and redefining tradition and creating with their works a fruitful discourse between the contemporary and the foregoing. Lalu Prasad Shaw joined SCA in 1969.



While viewing the present body of work we become aware of the enactment of the specific moment, the direct references as well as textual clues point quite unambiguously to the strife and cultural moments in our lives heightening the contradictions. Elegiac, almost melancholy, the mood of his work imbues not only this theme, but great deal of his language as if it's a courtyard of memories. Works are never cataclysmic and for the most part there is predictability and containment in the form of his core images held within carefully balanced compositions. There's a simultaneous involvement evident from which new things shall grow but an ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination. These, in fact, are the cues that situate the work within the field of the historical. His explorations offer accounts of their 'return' to those spaces of transcendence which once constituted the very domain of our everyday life. For all formal rigour and invention this body of work is within a variety of formats and media, and rarely in traditional modes of artistic expression that come into view. A sort of overreaching maximalism in these untitled works. His fondness for banal stopped being an embarrassment and became instead his core achievement. He emerged as a far more sophisticated artist: the works, tuneful enough to invigorate

the viewer also difficult and ambiguous enough to absorb the pundits. Often these works are evanescent in nature, and can sometimes to be understood as events as the artist in him connect that are playful, metaphorical and times robust that lead to a kind of enquiry which comes from a desire for a language to shake up our everyday lives, rituals, and social constrictions and work not devoid of political import. He is the analyst of his own identity here; neither his aspirations are to make a meditated simulacrum of the politics of desire but to approach as near to the reality of that desire as possible, to be in a complex and full way through these works that arrest the viewer with verve and felicity. His work is often pervaded with nuances of myth, transfiguration laced with acerbic wit and charm.

## II

“And suddenly the memory returns... perhaps because of those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered; the forms of things, including that of the little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds, were either obliterated or had been so long dormant as to have lost the power of expansion which would have allowed them to resume their place in my consciousness. But when from a longdistant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.” (-Marcel Proust, Remembrance Of Things Past).

In fact, what these paintings do is affirm the relative unimportance of historically-derived meaning in favour of a compelling physicality and emotional presence. They are distinguished by an absence of the moat of theory surrounding much contemporary and conceptual art and recite to us the entire dramatic scale of his passions and appetites, and breathe it. But the historical ancestry is of less significance than an understanding of how it asserts itself within the present. In the recent works by what is also important for us that works presented here to the public at the fair need to be seen in the context of its current concerns, practices and expectations provide a sort of crucible of the art of the moment. His tool rejoins humanity at grips with something else in an embalmed gesture. Here the matrix of the human face or a lost world is not of an ethical order; it consists not of a



community of intentions, an identity within a class, size, wrinkles, veins, the very order of biology separates the patrician caste from the functional substance and imprisons it within its own authority -the grouping dark and light masses; darkness modeling from across the canvas, but there is also a use of light-accent to pick out sequences of movement. Space traversed, in these works through a mind's aperture of stop and go, clearly stands as a metonym of archive and keeps, both contiguous and pervasive. Equally it functions as a field where objects of memory are dispersed. His gaze is without adjectives. The various constituents are overtly acknowledged accompanied with a cool literalism. The components here are distilled

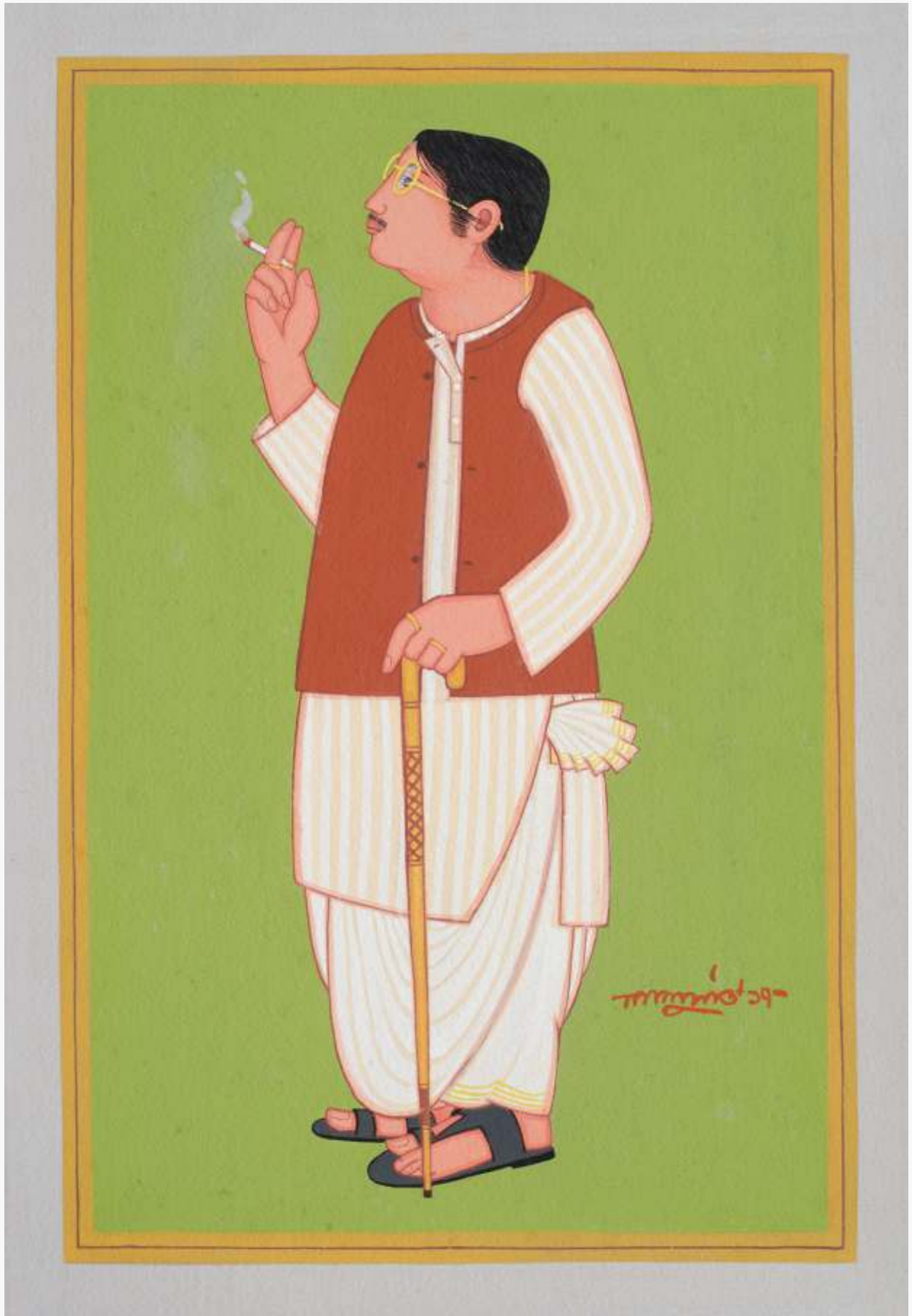
and then examined as all these fascinate. The focus is on the pivot, the point of transformation and the potential for revelation implicit in its consciousness that is intimate and preoccupied with explorations of form, space and myth expressing in terms of the wavering between transcendence and materiality, pain and somberness, "we are healed from suffering only by experiencing it to the full" (-Marcel Proust)- a hint of a different perspective and dramatic gaze.

The experience that we carry with his past work that it allows us to have a new relationship with the new milestones of their oeuvre with their surroundings to experience the confrontation between the paintings and to display the experiments; the appearances, the renunciations, the abiding signs and themes. As we look back we are able to see as clearly as how a work has developed, nourished and continually restored from its own fundamental resources, from its own gestures, designed for a purpose, work speaks calmly in virtue of a different stance, an authentic attitude. In his recent work a greater complexity is evident, as the fragmentation between image and means becomes less intrusive, through a more supple and fluid handling, the more intricate spatial structure, the inscriptions and



the more subtle use of light. His feelings, from time to time in the space there are moments of peace, discontent and stillness, a sense of work done. Unconsciously as it could be, the practitioner's sense of humanistic spirit is something that could encompass extensively various modes of expression, depending on varied contexts. "...by time and the elements; but there is a line. You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it" (-Hart Crane). The dilemma is resolved theoretically but only when feelings persuade of the rightness of adopting his particular style. These two aspects juxtaposed.

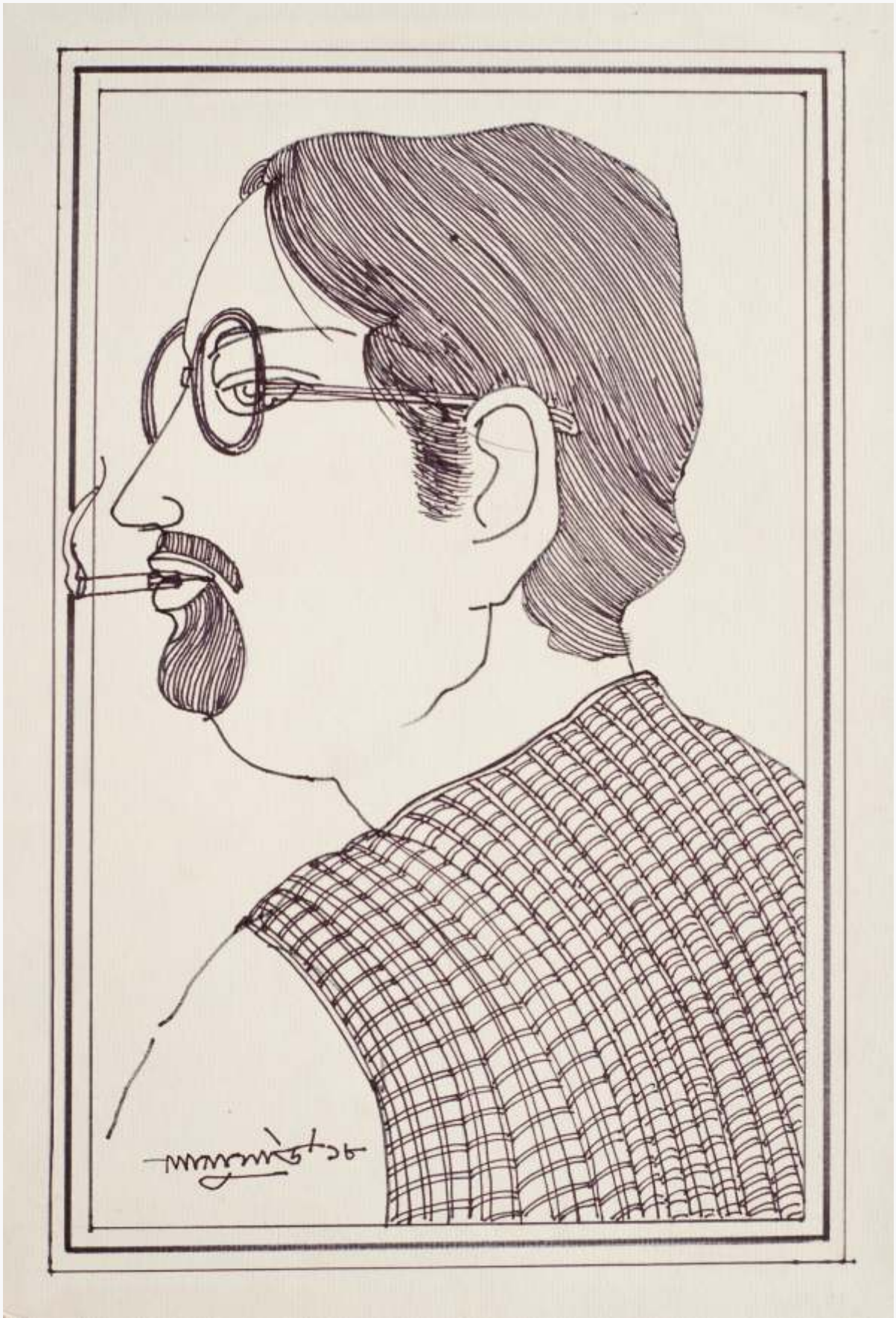
**Nanak Ganguly**



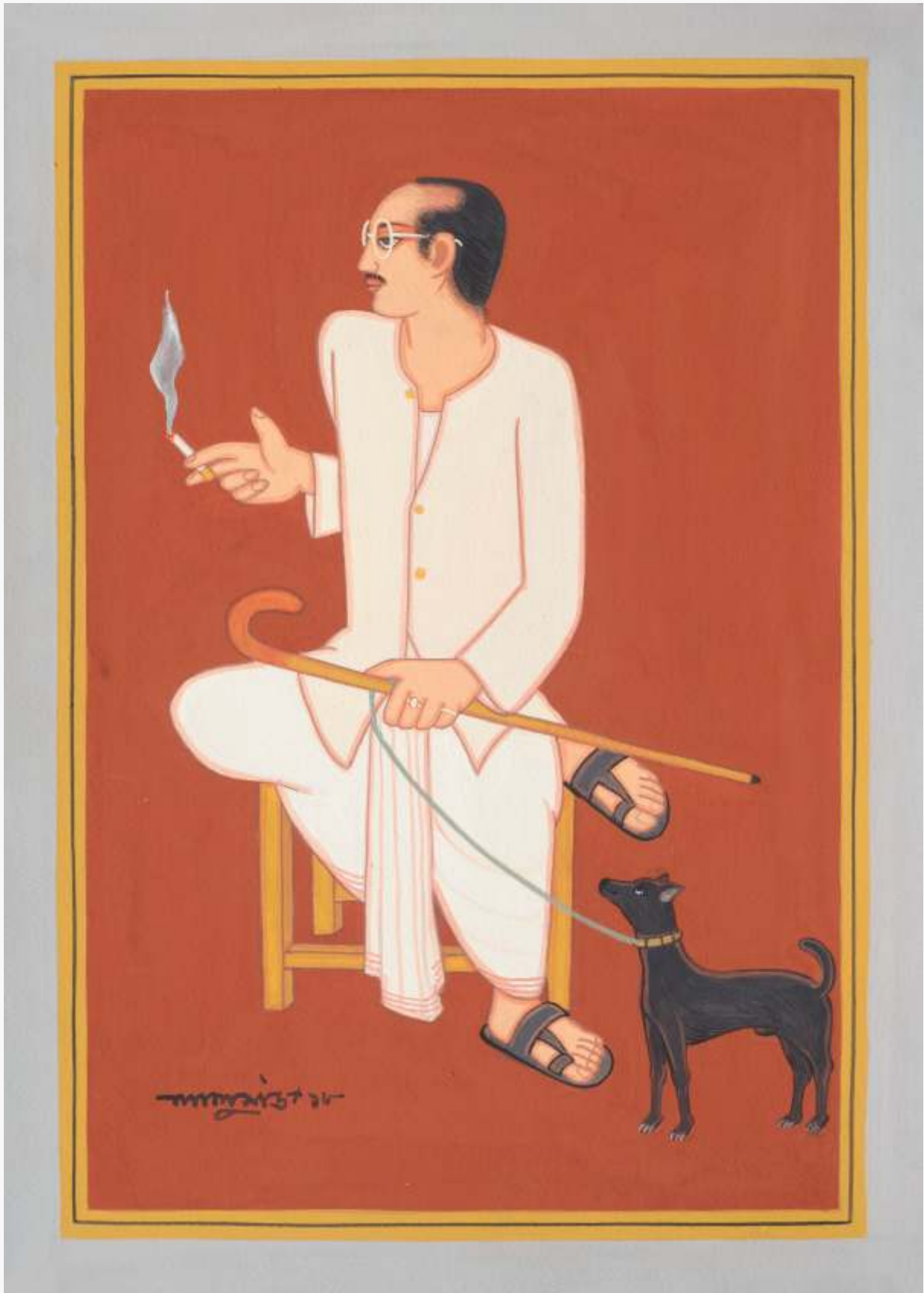
Babu  
tempera on board, 22 x 15 inches, 2017



Still Life  
mixed media on board, 20.5 x 15 inches, 2018

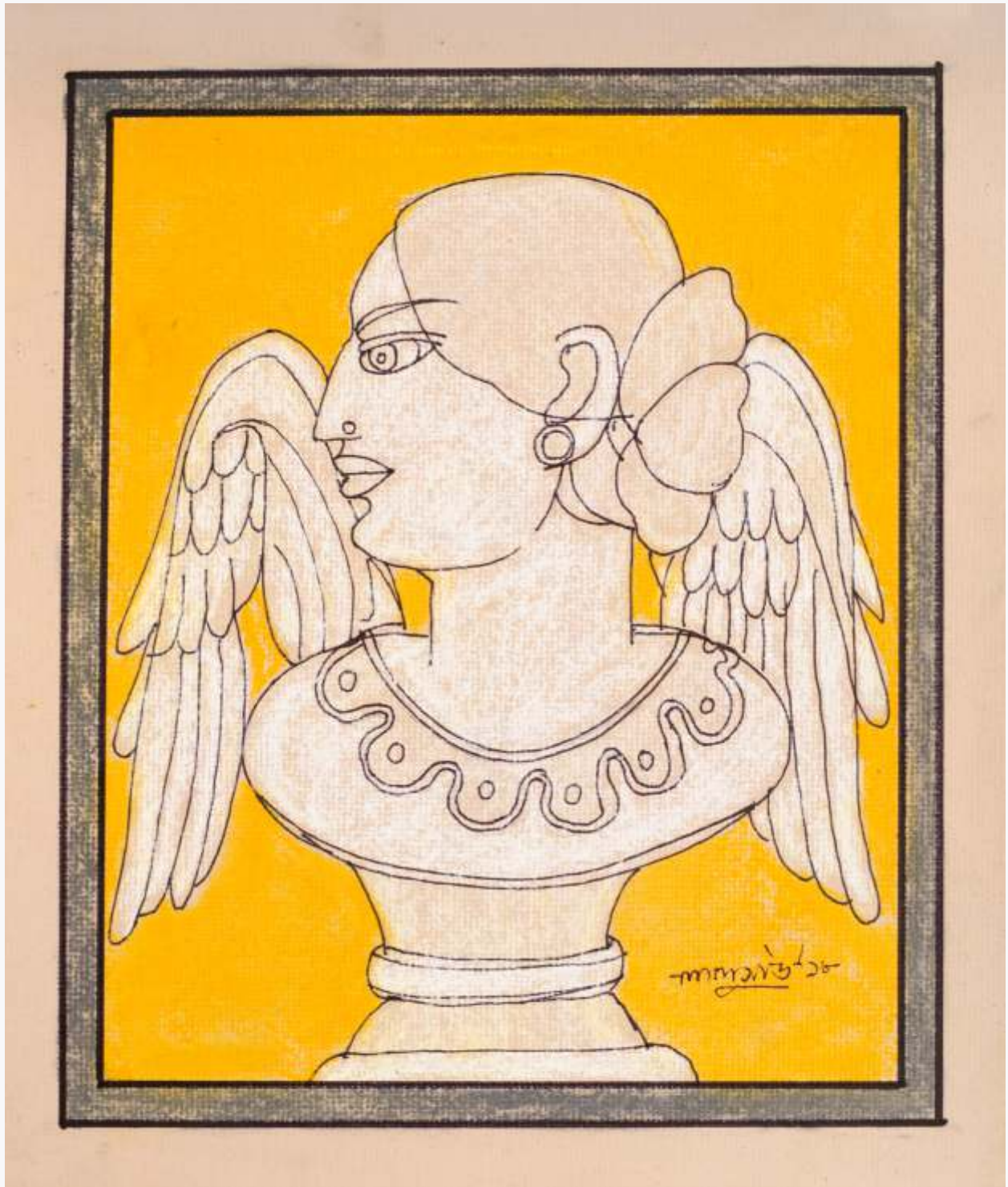


Babu  
marker on board, 16 x 11 inches, 2018



Babu  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2018

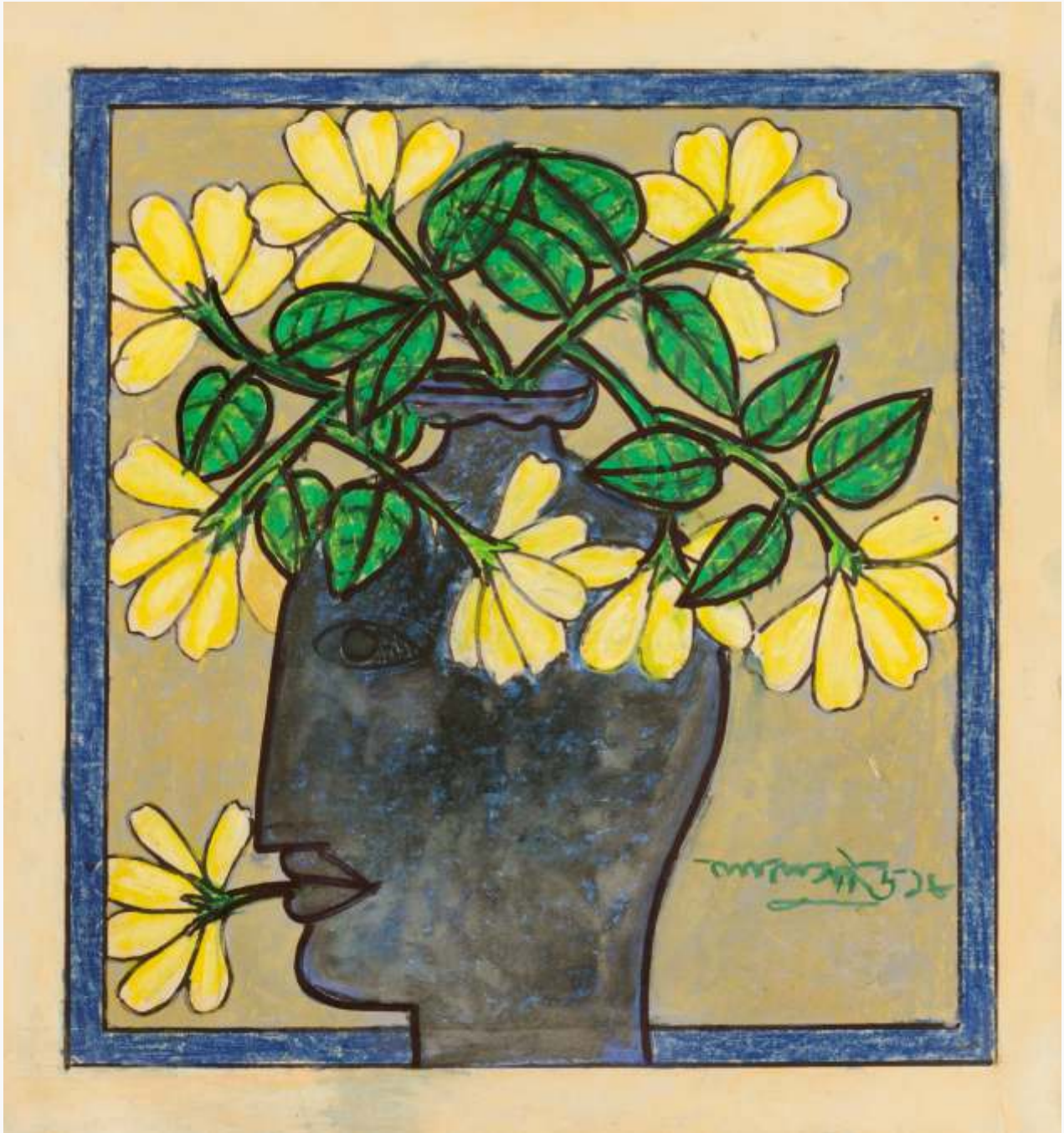




Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 13.5 inches, 2018



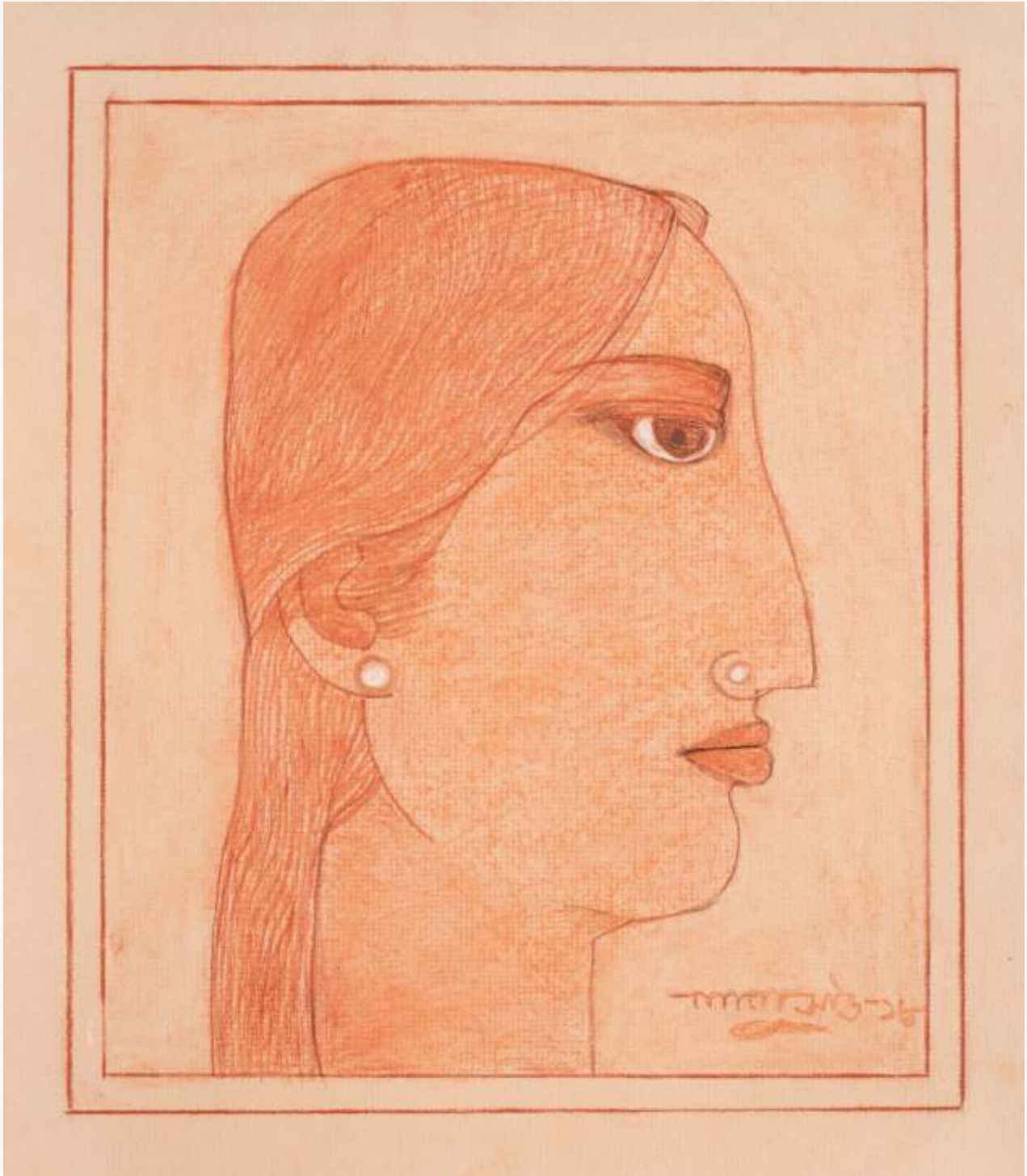
Untitled  
mixed media on board, 15.25 x 14.25 inches, 2018



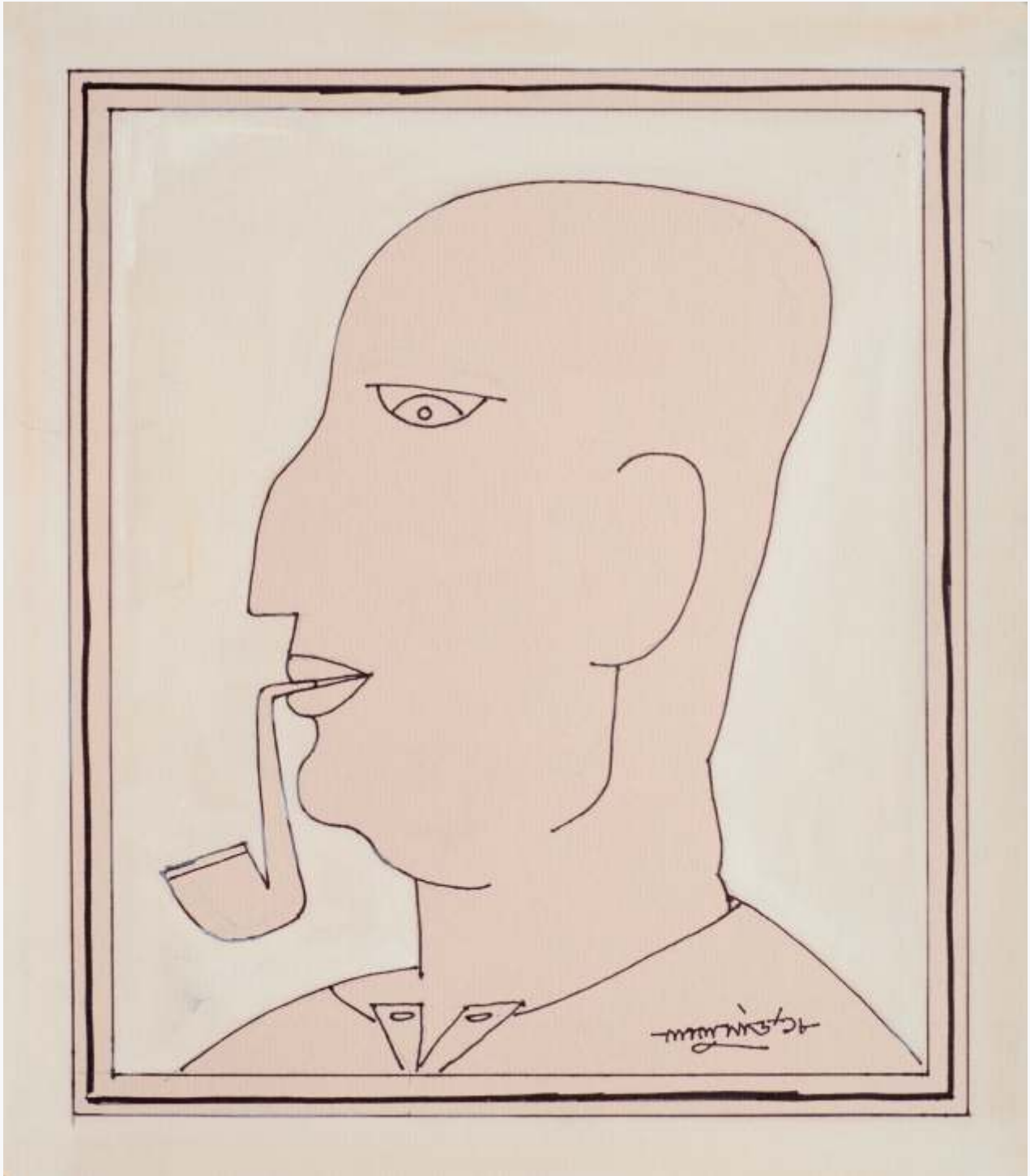
Untitled  
mixed media on board, 15.25 x 14.25 inches, 2018



Bibi  
tempera on board, 22 x 15 inches, 2018



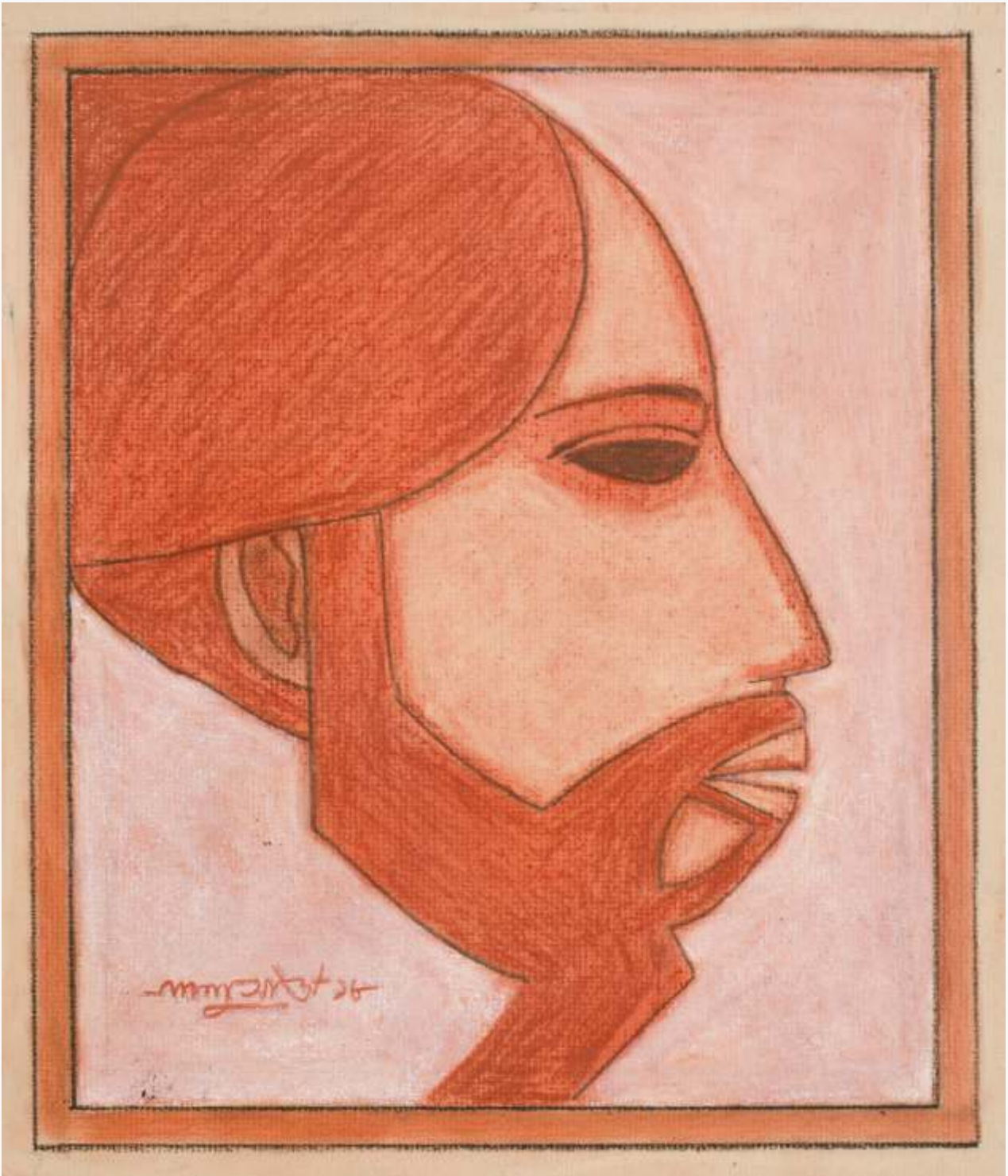
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Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 14 inches, 2018



Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x14 inches, 2018

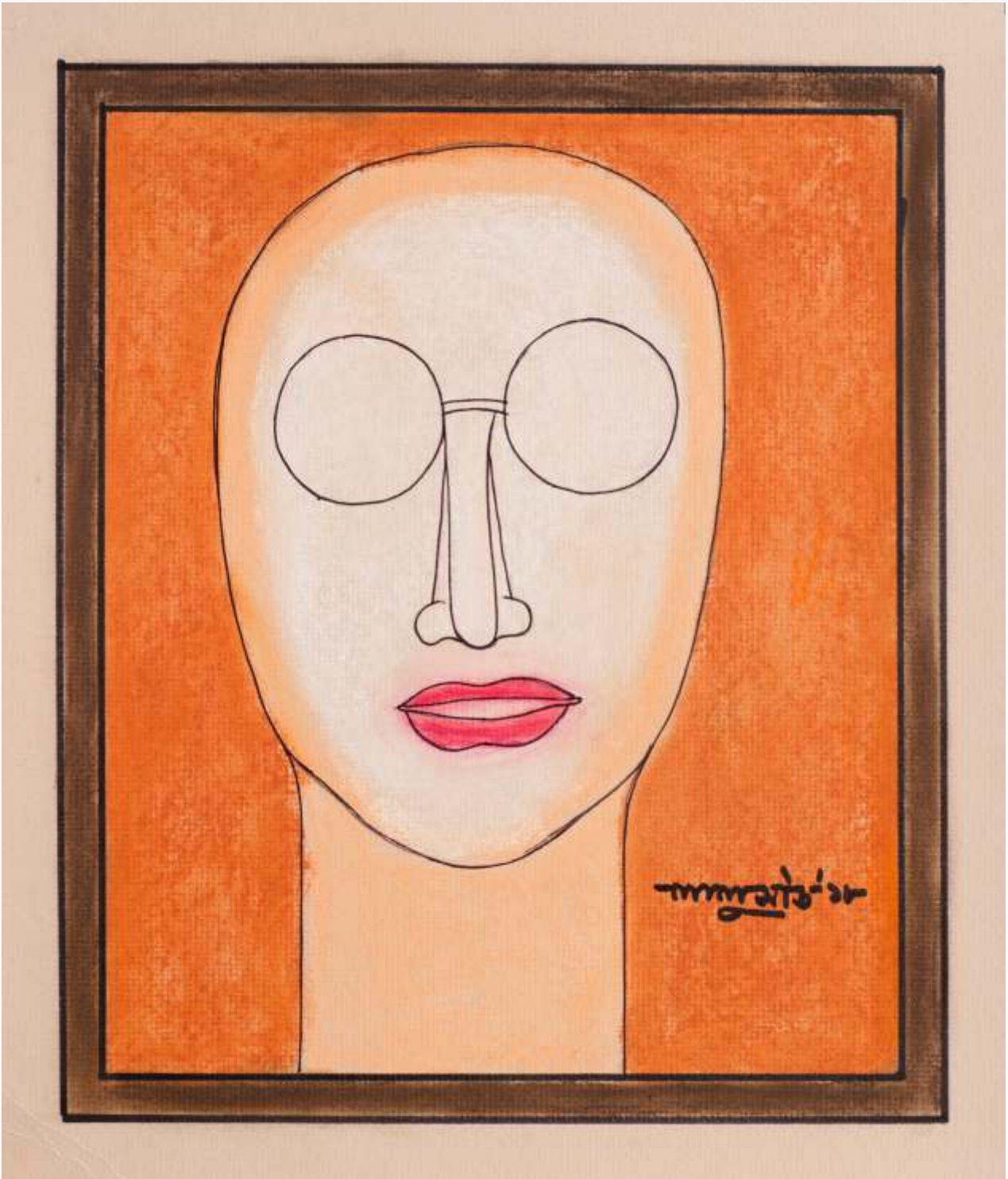


Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x14 inches, 2018

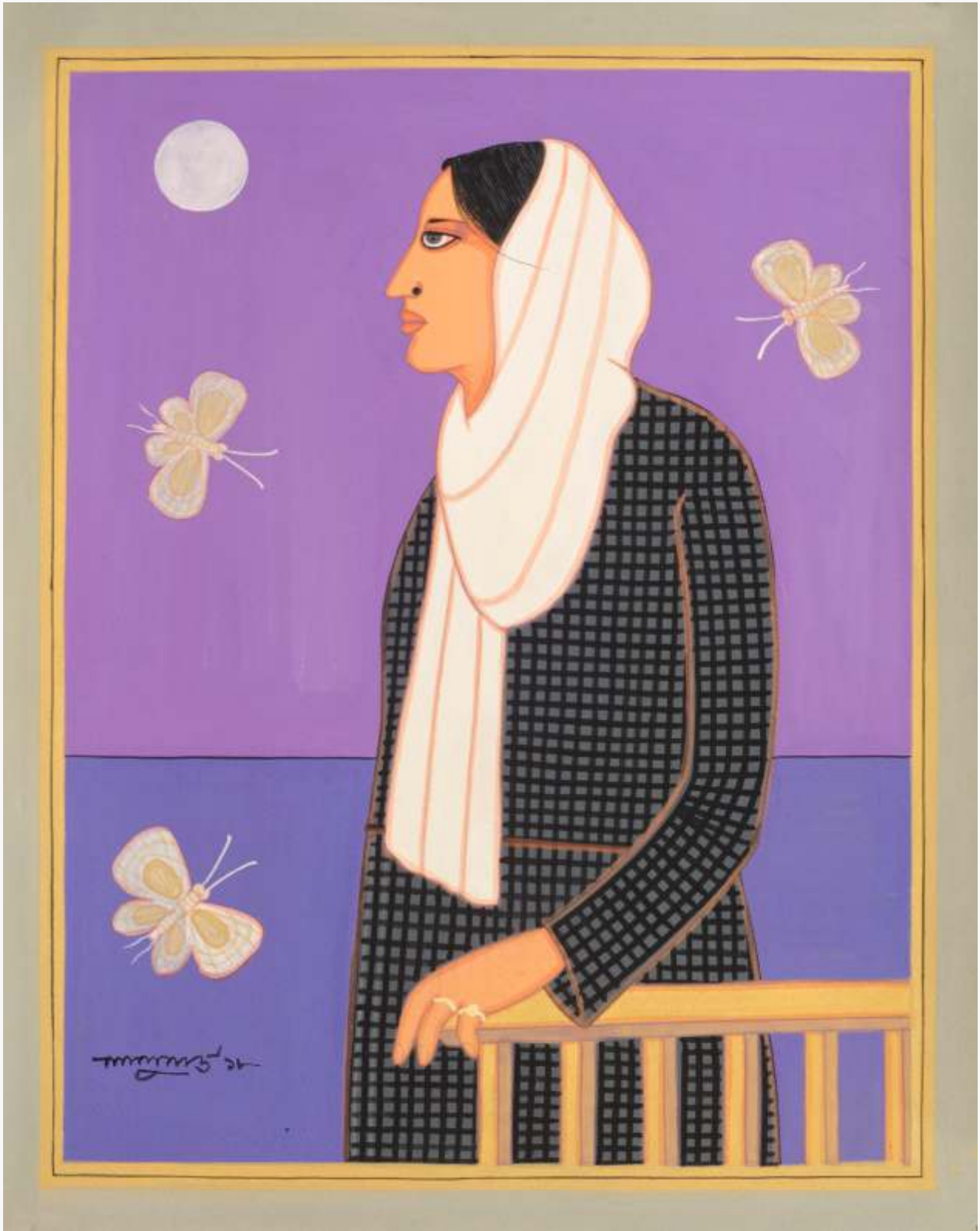




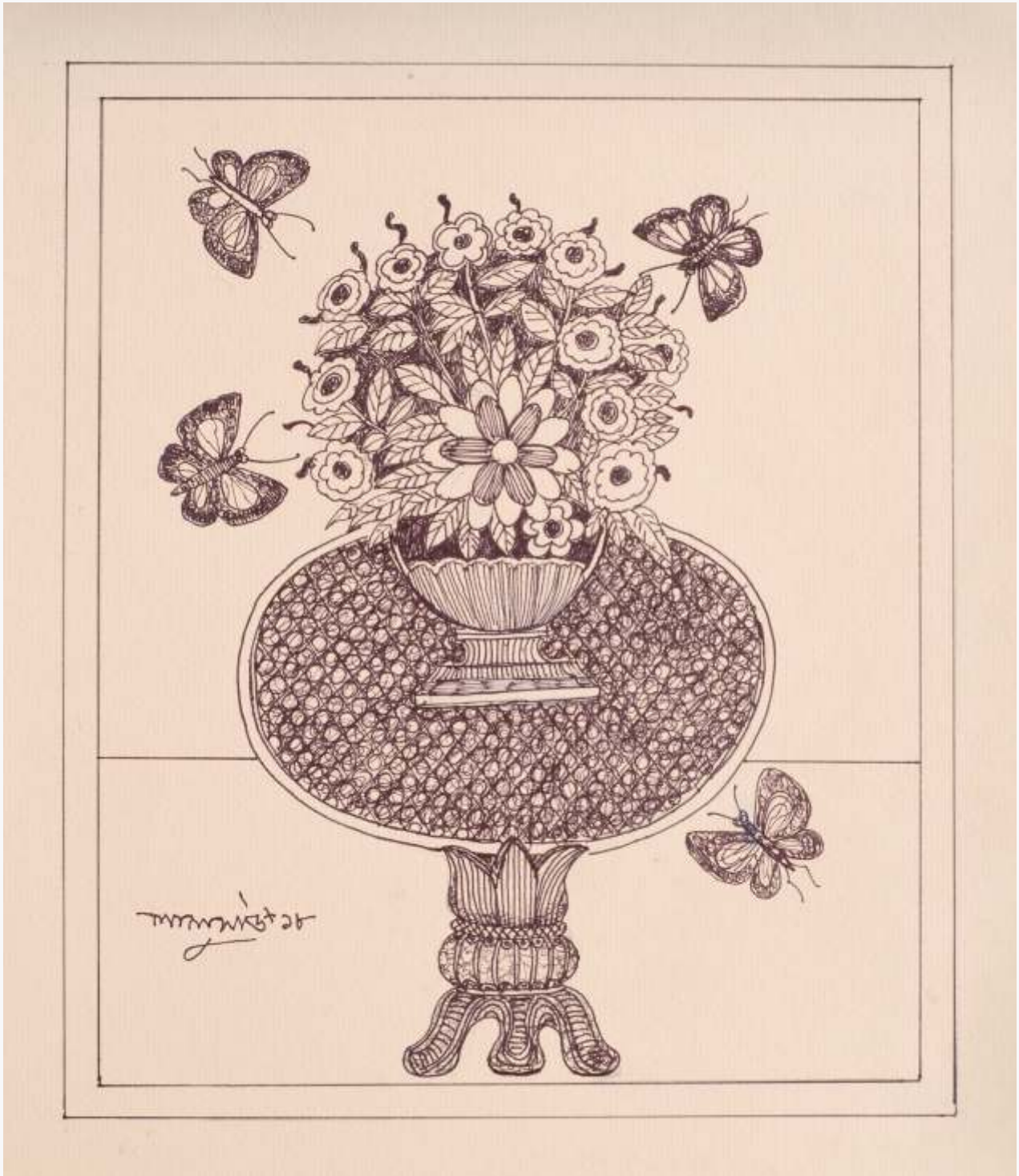
Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x14 inches, 2018



Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x14 inches, 2018



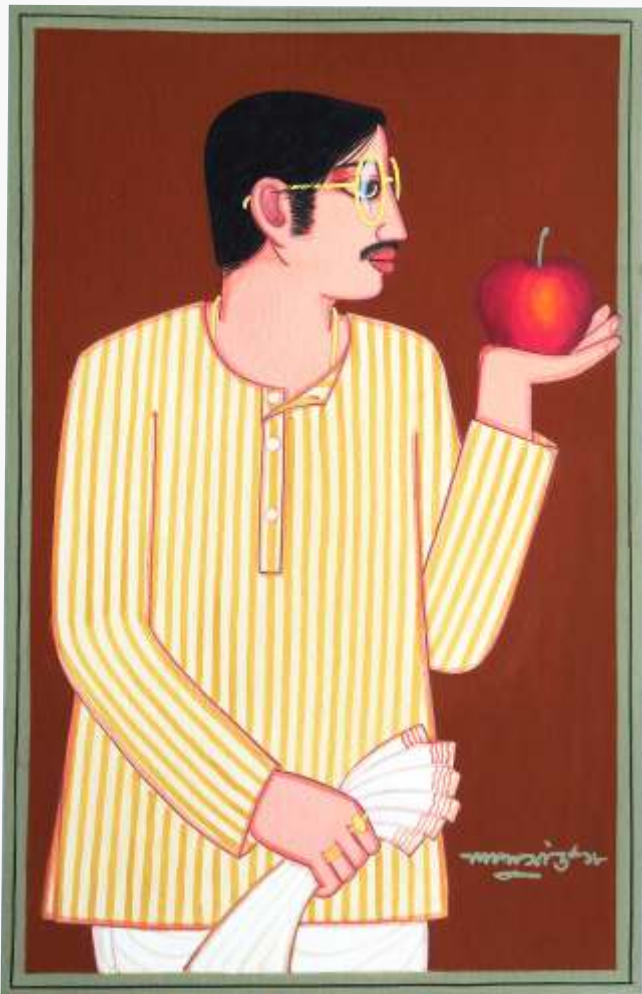
Bibi  
tempera on board, 25 x 20 inches, 2018



Untitled  
marker on board, 16 x 13.5 inches, 2018



Untitled  
mixed media on board, 15 x 10.5 inches, 2018



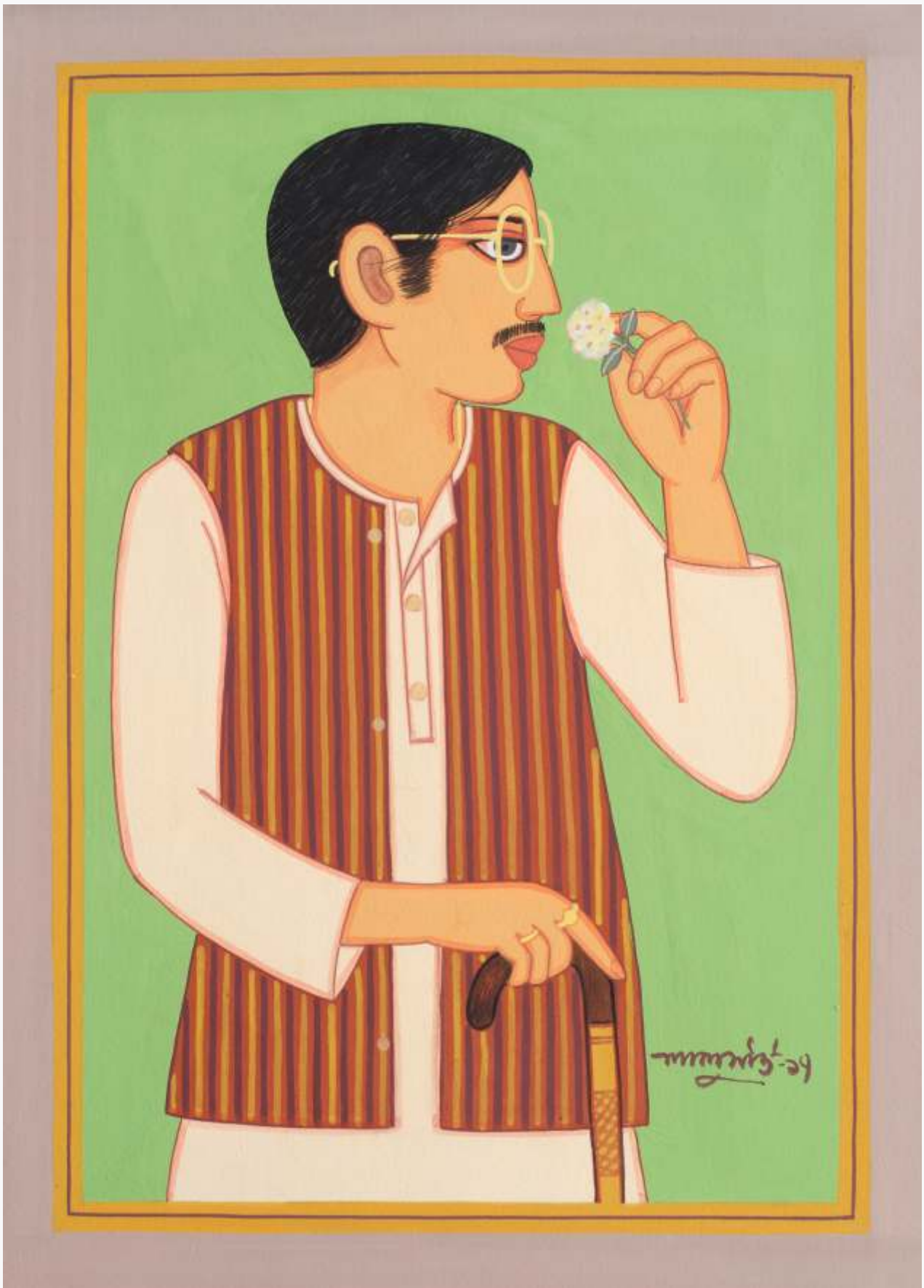
(a)



(b)

a. Babu, tempera on board, 22 x 15 inches, 2018

b. Bibi, tempera on board, 22 x 15 inches, 2018



Babu  
tempera on board, 20.5 x 14.75 inches, 2017



Bibi  
tempera on board, 20.5 x 15 inches, 2017

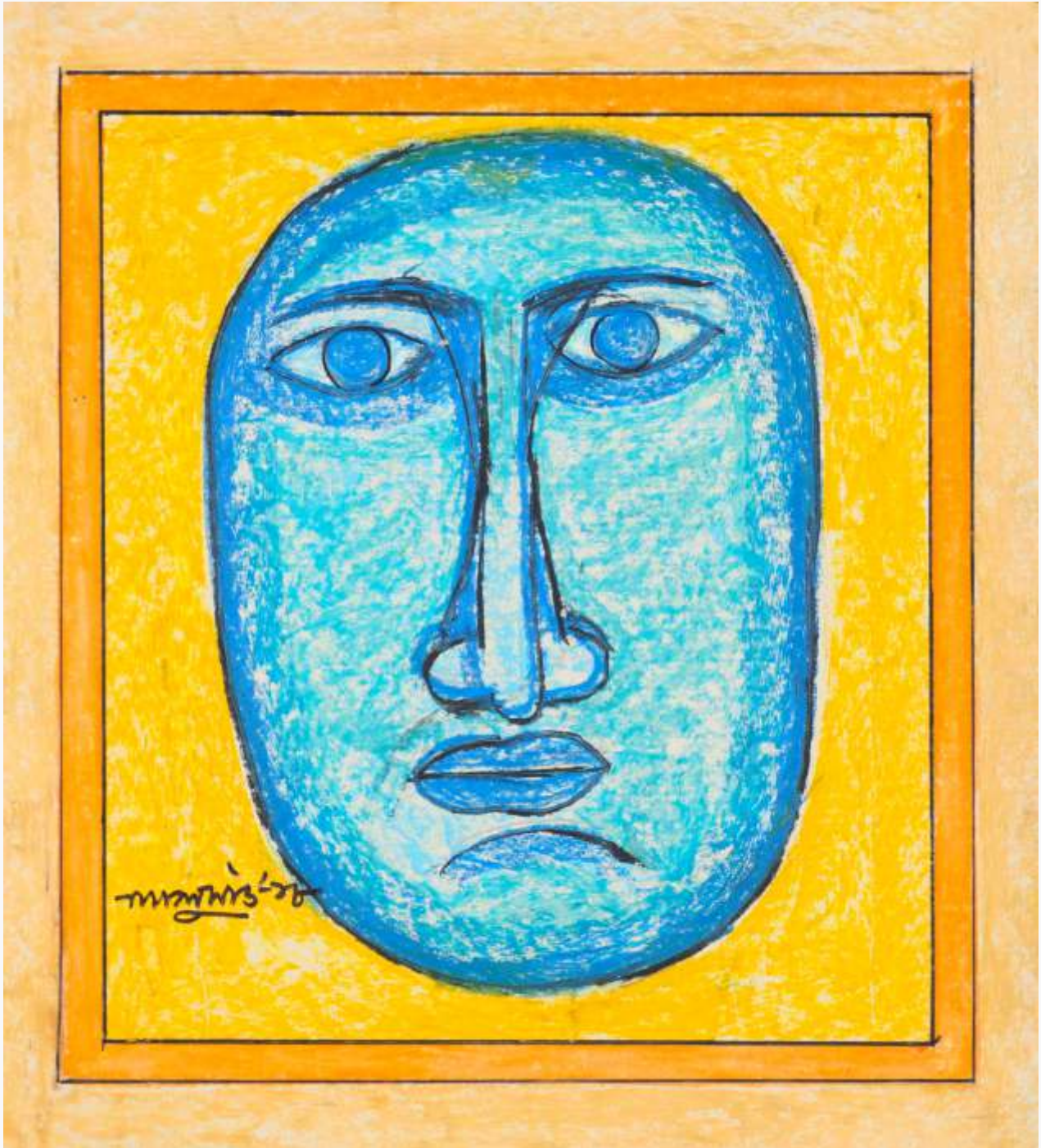




Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 13.5 inches, 2018



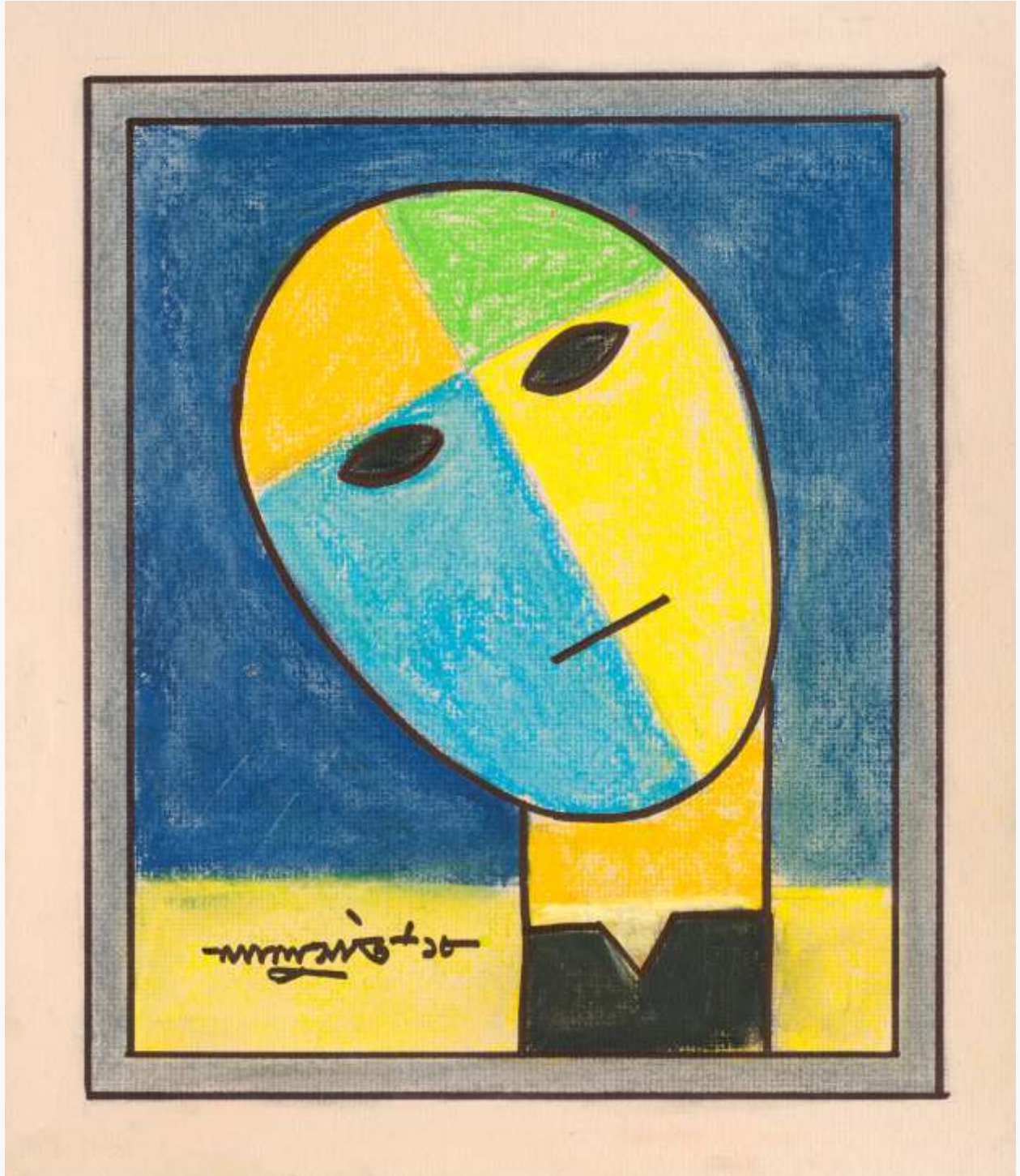
Babu  
tempera on board, 21.25 x 15 inches, 2018



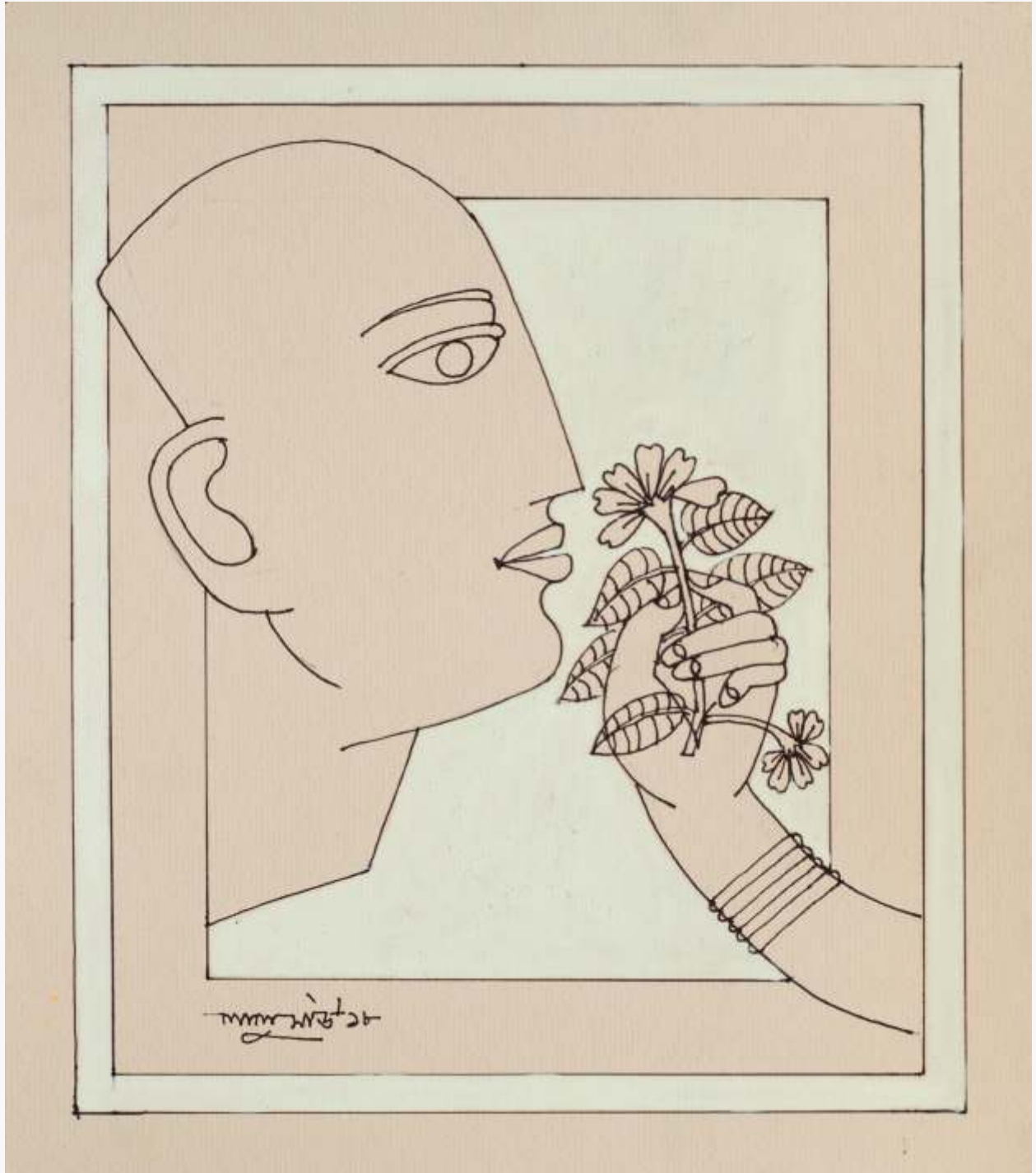
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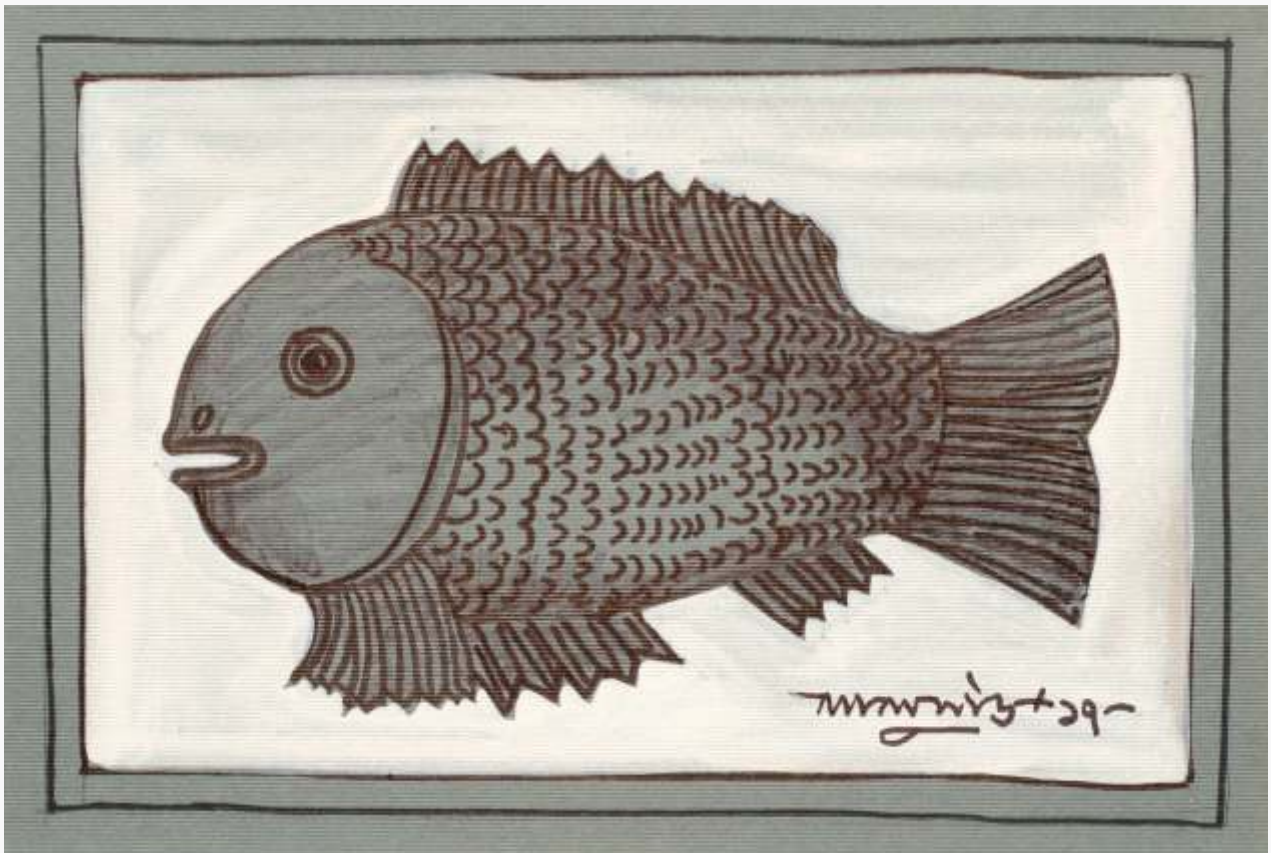
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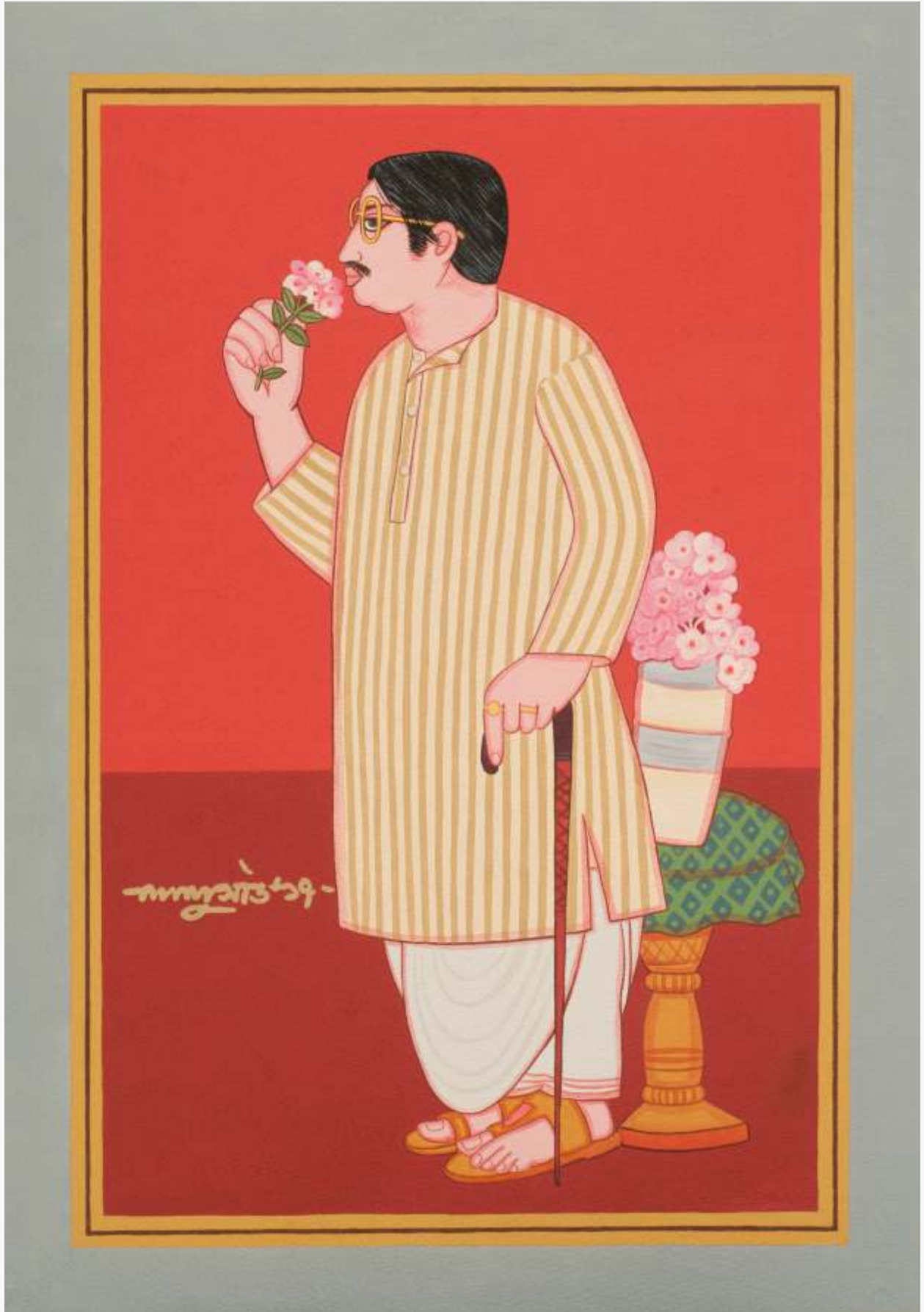
Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 14 inches, 2018



Untitled  
mixed media on board, 16 x 14 inches, 2018



Untitled  
mixed media on board, 15 x 10 inches, 2017



Babu  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2017





Bibi  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2016



Bibi  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2017



Bibi  
tempera on board, 21 x 15 inches, 2018



Lalu Prasad Shaw was born in 1937 in Suri, West Bengal.

In 1959, he received his diploma in painting from Government College of Art and Craft in Kolkata.

Shaw had several solo exhibitions in India: In 1965, 1967, 1990, 2008, and 2011 – 2012, he exhibited in Kolkata and had a duo exhibition at Gallery Art Exposure Kolkata in 2018. In 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1990 he exhibited in New Delhi. In 1976 he had a solo exhibition in Chennai. In 1980, he exhibited a solo show in Udipi, Bangalore. In 2017, Shaw's first-ever exhibition of bronze sculptures as part of Babu and Bibi series took place at Gallery 7, Mumbai in 2017. His forthcoming solo exhibition at Gallery Art Exposure, Kolkata will take place in January-February, 2019.

Shaw participated in several group shows in India and abroad. In 1959, Shaw received the West Bengal Lalit Kala Academy award (Graphic Art). In 1956 he participated in World Youth Festival Art exhibition in Prague. In 1970, he participated in Society of Contemporary Artists, Kolkata Mumbai and New Delhi. In 1971, he participated in 2nd British Biennale in London and VII Paris Biennale, Paris. In 1971, he received the National Award (Graphic Art). In 1976, he won the Birla Academy Award (Graphic Art). In 1973 he participated in 10th Ljubljana Biennale, Yugoslavia and Contemporary Indian Prints Exhibition, Germany. In 1971, he participated in "Expo- 70", touring exhibition, Japan. In 1971, he took part in group shows, New Delhi, Texas and Poland. In 1973, he exhibited in group shows in Dhaka & Bangladesh. In 1973, he participated in Prime Internagionale Biella, Italy. In 1974, he participated in International exhibition of Graphic Art, Prechem. In 1976, he participated in International Exhibition, Berlin. In 1974 he participated in 4th international exhibition of Original Drawing, Rijeka, Yugoslavia and participated in the 2nd Norwegian Prints Biennale, Norway. In 1977, he took part in an exhibition Graphic Art from Asian Countries in Germany. In 1981, he exhibited in All India Graphic and Drawing Exhibition, Chandigarh. In 1980, he participated in 3rd World Biennale of Graphic Art in Baghdad and London. In 1982 he participated in Exhibition of Indian Graphic in Havana, Cuba. In 1984 he took part in 2nd Asian Biennale, Bangladesh. In 1985, he participated in "Indian Graphic in Indian Fair" in USA and he participated in Indian Printmaking Today in Bonn, Germany and in Helsinki, Finland. In 1986, he participated in 2nd biennale in Havana. In 2000, he participated in a group show in Hongkong. In 2002 he took part in a group show in London. In 2004, he participated in "Call of the Real" in Colombo. In 2005, Shaw took part in group shows in New Delhi, Mumbai & Kolkata. In 2006 he participated in a group show in Dubai. In 2007 – 2008, he took part in "From Everyday to the Imagine: Modern Indian Art" at Singapore Art Museum and Museum of Art, Seoul National University in Seoul. In 2007 he took part in group shows, New Delhi, Kolkata and Baroda. In 2008 and 2009 he took part in group shows, Kolkata, Bangalore and Mumbai. In 2010, 2011 and 2013 – 2014 he participated in various group shows in Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata.

Artist lives and works in Kolkata.

# **The Stories We Tell Ourselves**

Selected Works by **Lalu Prasad Shaw**

Curated by

**Nanak Ganguly**

## **Art Exposure**

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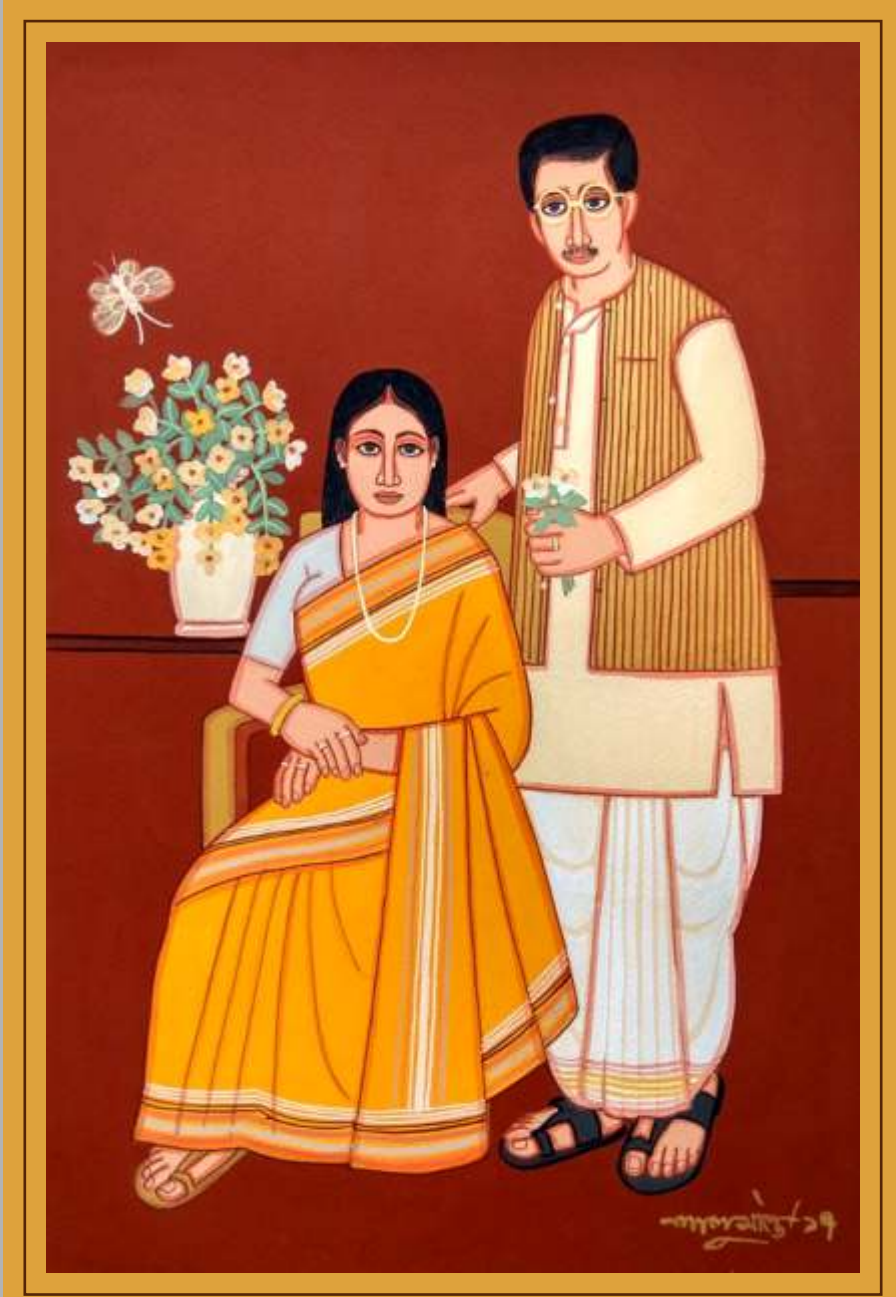
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