METAMORPHIC LANDSCAPES

PHANEENDRA NATH CHATURVEDI





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FOREWORD

Phaneendra Nath Chaturvedi's recent body of work unfolds a poetic dialogue between painting and embroidery, an exploration of transformation, texture, and hidden life. His canvases, densely layered with butterflies and ethereal figures of animals, pulse with both metamorphosis and memory. Rendered in silk thread that glimmers across painted ground, these works blur the boundary between illusion and tactility, imagination and instinct. Each embroidered form appears to emerge organically from the painterly landscape, each revealing and concealing the other, as if nature itself were stitching its secret narratives back into the fabric of the world.

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METAMORPHIC LANDSCAPES

Following my recent retrospective show, Metamorphosis: A Journey of Self-Discovery (2000–2024), I felt as though I had reached a threshold. That exhibition was not just a gathering of works from across years; it was a mirror in which I saw myself reflected through time — a life lived in lines, pigments, steel, and silence. But art is not an arrival; it is always a beginning again. When one body of work closes, another quietly opens like a bud in early dawn. This new series, in which I have brought together embroidered animals and painted butterflies, emerged out of two intimate experiences — my memories of Banaras and its woven worlds, and my encounter with the living forest of Jim Corbett.

Growing up in Banaras, weaving was not something external to me; it was the atmosphere I breathed. The Banarasi sari, with its dense, luminous threads, was not just cloth but a kind of scripture — a silent text written in silk and gold. I saw how each thread was stretched, tightened, and released, how countless hands carried a rhythm of patience, and how beauty appeared slowly, line by line, almost invisibly. Banaras was not only a city of ghats and chants, but also a city of woven air. And the voice of Kabir still hovered in its lanes. His dohas, whispered and sung, often compared life itself to a woven cloth:

"जिनि जिनि बिनी चदरिया, कौन ताना कौन भरनी?"

Who has woven this delicate cloth, with what warp, with what weft?

For Kabir, the human body was like a fragile, finely woven garment, lent to us by existence and destined to return to dust. I did not know then that these metaphors would seep deep into my art practice, that one day I too would weave, not with silk but with thread, pigment, and form. My embroidery is not craft; it is a way of acknowledging the delicate, interconnected cloth of life itself.

The second seed of this series was planted in April 2024, when I visited Jim Corbett National Park with my family. We stayed inside a forest guesthouse, surrounded by dense trees and deep silence. There was no mobile network, no intrusion of the outer world. We lived by the rhythm of the forest — waking at dawn, going on safari between 5 and 9 a.m., again in the evening from 3 to 7 p.m., returning each night to the chorus of insects and the weight of stars. It was not tourism; it was immersion.















There, I encountered the real families of the forest: tigers and elephants, deer and birds, creatures moving with their own dignity, their own silent laws. The forest was not an entertainment but a revelation. Its contradictions — silence and roar, beauty and danger, fragility and strength — were in balance. In the forest, I saw what the modern world often forgets: that nature is not background but centre, not resource but presence.

These two threads — the woven cloth of Banaras and the breathing silence of the forest — have come together in this body of work. I have created eleven animals and one anthropomorphic self: Tiger,





Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Deer, Cat, Dog, Horse, Zebra, Peacock, Rhinoceros, and finally, my own figure as a bridge between them. Each animal is embroidered in three dimensions, its body stitched like a living fabric, while the background is painted with butterflies in acrylic.

The butterfly has been with me throughout my practice, a constant symbol of metamorphosis. From bone marrow to butterfly, from human to hybrid being, from steel to pigment — it is always the butterfly that carries me across. In this series, too, the butterfly hovers, a reminder of transformation and of the delicate thread that connects all beings.

But why animals? Because in Indian thought, animals are not merely species; they are carriers of archetypes, symbols of inner energies, and companions of the divine. The tiger is not only the predator of the forest; it is also the vehicle of Durga, the embodiment of shakti, courage, and protection. The elephant is both the wild creature of the jungle and the form of Ganesha, remover of obstacles, keeper of wisdom. The lion roars not only in the savannah but also beneath the goddess, a throne of power and stability. The deer, restless and gentle, is evoked in the Upanishads as a symbol of the mind's ceaseless wandering. The horse, central to the Vedic ritual of Ashvamedha, stands for strength, sacrifice, and sovereignty. The peacock is the bird of Kartikeya, the warrior son of Shiva, whose feathers are iridescent like the cosmos. Even the ordinary cat and dog, often neglected in philosophy, are part of our intimate human lives, mirrors of affection, loyalty, play, and vulnerability. The rhinoceros, solitary and armored, carries its own metaphor of endurance in a fragile age.

Each of these animals, then, is not simply an embroidered form; it is an archetype stitched into being. By giving them thread and surface, I am acknowledging their presence in our inner landscapes. The anthropomorphic figure I include is not a separation but a bridge — the reminder that human and animal are not two distinct worlds but one continuum. My entire art practice, from the beginning, has been about anthropomorphic beings — hybrids that dissolve the rigid boundary between human and other. In truth, we are all woven from the same cloth.

When I stitch the tiger or the elephant, I am not imitating its skin; I am weaving its presence, its







dignity, its rhythm of breath. The thread becomes a metaphor for life itself — fragile yet resilient, breakable yet capable of infinite patterns. The embroidery rises in three dimensions, reminding us that these beings are not flat symbols but living presences. Behind them, the butterflies in acrylic spread colour, like souls hovering in the air, fragile yet eternal.

In Corbett, I often sat in silence, listening to the forest. There were moments when the sound of a distant animal's call, the rustle of leaves, the hum of insects, and the sudden stillness of the air all seemed like notes in a vast composition. It was not human music, but the music of existence. In those moments, I recalled Kabir again:

"सुनता है गुरु गगन का बाजा, सुनता है अनहद धुनिया।"

One hears the unstruck music of the sky, the infinite sound resounding within.

The forest is that unstruck music. My art, in its own way, tries to listen to it. The embroidered animals are my humble tribute to this listening — a small act of preservation, a way of carrying the memory of silence into thread and canvas.

At the same time, this series is also about the Anthropocene — the epoch we live in, where human actions shape the fate of the earth. But I do not approach the Anthropocene as an academic subject. For me, it is not a statistic but a lived contradiction: the same human who destroys forests is also capable of reverence, the same hands that pollute rivers are also capable of weaving

saris, painting butterflies, and protecting lives. My anthropomorphic figure in this series is precisely this tension — a being who is both human and animal, destroyer and preserver, fragile and responsible.

This is why I call the series The Metamorphic Landscapes. It is woven because life itself is a weaving — of human and non-human, of silence and sound, of violence and beauty, of past memory and future possibility. And it is the Metamorphic Landscapes because we cannot escape the fact that we are entangled with the fate of other beings. The tiger's roar is no longer only its own; it is also an echo of our decisions. The elephant's survival is not only the forest's concern but ours. The butterfly's fragile flight carries the weight of our choices.

Yet, I do not wish to make art as protest or propaganda. My language is different. I believe that when we encounter the stitched body of a tiger, when we see its dignity rendered in thread, something shifts inside us. We remember. We connect. Art does not shout; it whispers. And whispers can enter the deepest layers of the heart.



In a sense, this series is also my dialogue with time. The weaving of Banaras is centuries old; the forest of Corbett is timeless; the butterflies are as old as evolution itself. By stitching them into canvas, I am weaving memories with presence, tradition with contemporary, myth with personal experience. The tiger of Corbett meets the tiger of Durga; the thread of Banaras meets the pigment of butterflies; Kabir's chadariya meets the Anthropocene's contradictions.

I often feel that an artist is like a weaver of invisible cloth. We do not create life; we only rearrange its threads so that its patterns become visible. My anthropomorphic beings were always about this weaving — of body and spirit, human and animal, past and present. This animal series is not a departure but a continuation of that journey, another chapter in the same unfolding fabric.

When I look at the finished works, I do not see them as objects but as presences. The tiger embroidered on canvas is not a representation; it is an encounter. The peacock with butterflies is not a decoration; it is a meditation. The anthropomorphic figure is not my portrait; it is a question: Who am I, if not also them? Who are they, if not also me?

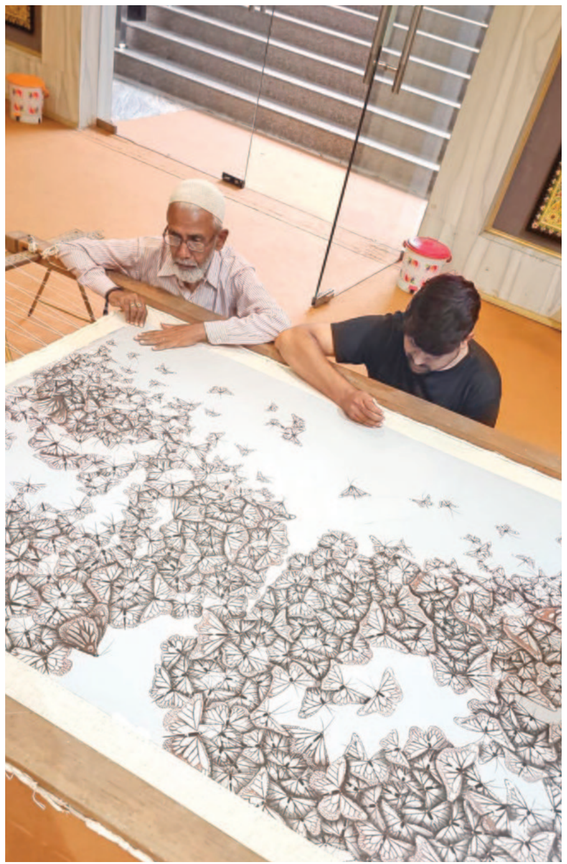
Kabir asked, "Who has woven this delicate cloth?" Perhaps that is the only question worth asking. Whether we are animals or humans, forests or cities, threads or butterflies, we are all part of that delicate, mysterious cloth. My art is my way of touching it, of holding it gently before it unravels.

This series is therefore a small tribute to Banaras and its woven wisdom, to the forest and its fragile majesty, to the animals and their silent dignity, to Kabir and his eternal metaphors, and above all, to the weaving of life itself. In thread and colour, in butterfly and beast, in anthropomorphic bridges, I try to say what words cannot: that we are all woven beings, fragile and luminous, bound together in the vast cloth of existence.

And so, The Metamorphic Landscapes is not only an exhibition or a book; it is a reminder. A reminder that art is not separate from life, that animals are not apart from us, that the butterfly's flight is our own, that the tiger's roar is also within us, that Kabir's chadariya still covers us all. A reminder that in every stitch, every colour, every form, we are weaving and being woven.

Phaneendra Nath Chaturvedi
October 2025





Threaded Majesty in a Bloom of Wings
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 48” x 72”

The Phoenix Flight
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 40” x 60”

A Solitude of Pink and Horn
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 54” x 66”



Where Stripes Meet the Swarm
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 40” x 60”

Equine in a Scarlet Field
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 54” x 66”

The Golden Watcher
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 48” x 48”

The Amethyst Gaze
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 48” x 36”





A Bound Through the Jade Flutter
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 30” x 40”

A Throne of a Thousand Wings
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 48” x 36”

The Weight of a Blue Dream
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 54” x 66”

Unravelling into Memory
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 40” x 60”

Predator in a Sun-Stitched World
Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 38” x 60”



PHANEENDRA NATH CHATURVEDI

Born in 1981 in Banaras, U. P., INDIA

PNC is a visual artist currently at the forefront of contemporary art in India. He creates art that confronts. His work dismantles the fragile facades of civility to expose the grotesque, mechanized reality of contemporary life. Through meticulously crafted anthropomorphic figures—skeletal yet impeccably dressed, often bound by wires and bolts—he creates powerful allegories for the conflicts of power, desire, and societal constraint. For Chaturvedi, art is not a decorative pursuit but a direct confrontation he describes as "provocative, stark, and brutally honest."

His significant position in Indian contemporary art was solidified in 2025 with a landmark mid-career retrospective at Bikaner House in New Delhi. This major exhibition, surveying his work from 2000 to 2024, was accompanied by the launch of two definitive monographs, Hybrid Beings and Bone Marrow to Butterfly (Aleph Book Company). This achievement builds on a distinguished career with major solo exhibitions in Lucknow (2003), New Delhi (2007), Hong Kong (2012), and Singapore (2023).

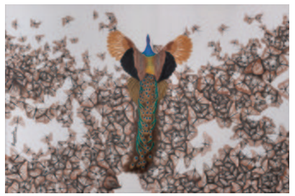
PNC's practice is multidisciplinary, spanning drawing, painting, and complex sculptures in fiberglass, wood, and stainless steel. While his anthropomorphic figures are central, he also explores themes of transformation and memory in a parallel series on butterflies, bougainvillea, wings and coins.

A graduate of the College of Art Craft, University of Lucknow (B.F.A. & M.F.A.), His work has been extensively showcased in various international exhibitions, as at Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice; Keumsan Gallery, Heyri Art Valley, Seoul; Hangaram Art Museum, Seoul; The Modern & Contemporary Art, Dallas; The Asian, American and European Modern & Contemporary Art, New York, and others. His artistic journey is also the subject of the acclaimed 2012 documentary, "The Metamorphosis." He based in New Delhi and a recipient of six awards, Phaneendra Nath Chaturvedi continues to be a vital, challenging force in art, creating work that demands we look beyond appearances and confront the fragile truths of our time.

PNC lives and works in New Delhi.



Threaded Majesty in a Bloom of Wings | Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 48 x 72 Inch | Signed 'Phaneendra' Lower Left | 2024



The Phoenix Flight | Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 40 x 60 Inches | Signed 'Phaneendra 2025' Lower Left | 2025



A Solitude of Pink and Horn | Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 54 x 66 Inches | Signed 'Phaneendra 2025' Lower Right | 2025



Where Stripes Meet the Swarm | Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 40 x 60 Inches | Signed 'Phaneendra 2025' Lower Right | 2025



Equine in a Scarlet Field | Acrylic and Silk Embroidery on Canvas | 54 x 66 Inches | Signed 'Phaneendra 2025' Lower Left | 2025



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ABOUT BLACK CUBE

Black Cube Gallery is a modern and contemporary art space that challenges conventional hierarchies by bringing together established and emerging artists in a shared dialogue. Founded on the belief that art should exist beyond structured divisions, Black Cube creates a space where different artistic languages interact, where tradition and experimentation coexist, and where critical discourse is extended to all artists, not just the historically recognized. The gallery remains committed to fostering meaningful engagement with contemporary art, offering exhibitions that challenge, provoke, and expand the way we experience visual culture. At its core, Black Cube is more than a gallery—it is a space of exchange, experimentation, and new possibilities for artistic thought and presentation.

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Black Cube Gallery |
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