

PRESS RELEASE

**Emami Art Hosts
'EXO-Stential - AI Musings On The Posthuman'
Harshit Agrawal's Solo Exhibition Curated By Myna Mukherjee**

Kolkata, 11th September, 2021: Emami Art, one of India's leading contemporary art galleries based in Kolkata opened its door to India's first solo exhibition of AI Art featuring works by pioneering artist Harshit Agrawal and curated by Myna Mukherjee. The project has been manifested by Engendered, a transnational arts and human rights organization and is in collaboration with 64/1. The inauguration ceremony was graced by eminent personalities - Rituparna Sengupta, National Award winning Actor and Producer; Ranjan K Ghosh, Filmmaker; Anand Gandhi, National Award Winning Filmmaker and Karthik Kalyanaraman, Artist, Writer and Econometrics Scholar.

Is AI (Artificial Intelligence) art any good? Is it truly the future of Contemporary art? Does AI re-conceive the human imagination or ready us for its end? Is AI competition or collaborator? Does AI blur the definition of the 'artist'? **EXO-stential – AI Musings on the Post-human**, offers a deep dive and contemplation of this emergent ontology.

Harshit Agrawal is a pioneer in the developing genre of AI Art. He has worked with AI art since its inception in 2015; his work has been nominated twice for the top tech art prize, the 'Lumen', and he was the only Indian artist at the first global group exhibition of AI Art at a contemporary gallery in 2018. Initial examples of AI Art mainly revelled in its ability to create hauntingly familiar yet alien forms. The field in the last 5 years has deepened considerably and Harshit's work is a testimony to that inquiry. In this, his first solo show, Emami Art presents the enlarged practice and diversity of AI art with experiments in media (painting, sculpture, text, video, interactive media), aesthetic approach (conceptual, sociological, the painterly), process (varying degrees of human involvement), datasets (from European to Indian) and themes.

One constant note sounded throughout the show will be the human experience of both loss of control over creative production when working with AI and the consequent liberation. AI Art has, after all, both continuities and ruptures with art tradition: it is on one hand part of the long 20th century endeavour of problematizing 'Artistic Creativity' and yet on the other is far more radical in its embrace of the machine as a co-creator of aesthetic newness. Today when the rise of AI is one of most pressing long-term social issues we face, perhaps contemplation of these works, co-created by both the human and the machine, is one way to evade dystopian or utopian fantasies we are all prone to when we think of AI, and to imagine ourselves concretely into a realistic post-human future!

Artist Harshit Agrawal says, *"By working extensively with AI algorithms and datasets, and often creating them as an essential part of my practice, I want to consciously engage with our inevitable techno-centric reality, than being simply sucked into it. AI's usage in art elevates it from being simply a tool for execution – it influences the outputs more heavily by its estrangement of the dataset it learns from (under the direction and instrumentation of the human artist). I find this space of engagement with the machine fascinating to work with."*

Another trajectory for this show will be an unflinching look into the state of Artificial Intelligence today and the uncomfortable yet terribly relevant issues it confronts in today's world.

Says Myna Mukherjee, Curator and Director, Engendered, *“As a curator what strikes me most about Harshit’s work is that it consciously engages with this inevitable techno-centric reality we live in, rather than being simply sucked into it. AI’s usage in art elevates it from being a tool of utility and function to being a conspirator in the artist’s imagination, and the pursuit of aesthetic ideas. It allows us to witness how humans can work with machines to enhance their creativity, rather than allow their creativity to be replaced by mechanic labour. We are left to ponder while looking at Harshit’s works how AI can ‘help’ us stay sensitive to the relations of power that exist in the real global world. For example one of the work uses AI facial recognition technology that is typically used for profiling and identifying associated probabilities of criminal possibility, often leading to AI determined inhumane surveillance. Agrawal uses the same underlying technology to create a conceptual art piece that instead builds empathy and reflection towards deep rooted social inequalities in the Indian tradition.”*

“Emami Art, through its programming, is challenging art viewership. By constantly evolving with cutting edge technologies, we are positioned at the forefront of the changing face of contemporary art in India. By doing an exhibition on Artificial Intelligence, we are also tapping into the future. As the world changes and adapts to new frontiers, it becomes imperative to embrace change. I am incredibly excited to present the first of its kind exhibition in India. The works by Harshit Agrawal are not only edgy futuristic but are also philosophical and make us rethink our humanity,” said Richa Agarwal, CEO Emami Art.

The exhibition will be on September 11th to September 30th, 2021 | 11 am to 6 pm. You can visit www.emamiart.com for more details.

About Emami Art:

Emami Art, one of the most significant art institutions in the eastern part of India, is a key space for cultural production in the region. The organisation is focused on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach and steadfast in the advocacy of emerging, mid-career and established artists as well as an engagement with contemporary and historical material. The gallery aims to create dynamic, wide-ranging registers of exhibition-making and viewing. Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, emphasis on community and socially relevant engagements, institutional partnerships and more via a multi-year vision for the future, Emami Art is resolute to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity. Emami Art, Kolkata Centre for Creativity 777 Anandapur off EM Bypass. www.emamiart.com

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