

PRASANTA SAHU (B. 1968)

Prasanta Sahu is a contemporary Indian artist whose work explores the meaning and significance of the quotidian. Working across mediums, he is recognized for engaging subjects – the manual workers in the city and suburb and small village farmers – who provide essential services to society but remain underrepresented. An electrical engineer and artist who studied fine arts in Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and MS University, Baroda, Prasanta Sahu's works are unabashed in acknowledging the influence of diverse disciplines and discourses on it. Drawing on methods, tools and signs derived from sciences, art and even ethnographic disciplines, he sees himself more as a compiler than an original creator who reconstructs the reality, conferring a socio-political status.

His recent series of works on paper, *Suburban Shadows* (2020), make visual the problem of the modern food economy and the invisibility of manual workers. Reducing the body of the workers and farmers to their bare silhouette, Sahu highlights the economy of physical gestures and underlines the non-figurative quality of his works, which are documents, as opposed to portraits or descriptive representations. In many significant exhibitions in India and abroad, the audiences have critically received his approaches to representing the marginalized community. His major installation, *Mapping Craters* (2021) – a collection of sixty moulds taken from locally produced crops like ridged gourd and drumsticks and traditional farming tools displayed on the table – was first shown in Torino, Italy. While the moulds may initially appear straightforward and uncomplicated, their figurative familiarity soon gives way to a sense of spectral unreality of hollows and curves and a suggestion of profound disquiet.

Over five years, Sahu's practices show his deep engagement with the land and people of the villages around Santiniketan, where he lives and works.

Over the last twenty years, Sahu has worked across mediums, including painting and drawings, sculpture, installation, photography. His works find meaning in revealing details hidden within the quotidian. His rural upbringing and agrarian background offers an empathetic, insider view of the plight of small-scale farmers and migrant labourers who inhabit his works. Sahu's process of studying and representing these 'unknown and faceless' essential service providers, is rooted in reality. The artist takes an investigative approach in documenting his subjects through in-depth interviews. Subsequently by introducing parts of this collated data along with personal ruminations and experiential reinterpretation of evidential material, Sahu flawlessly melds the fictive and real in a move towards poetic exegesis.