

Chano Devi's "The Ghosts of Raja Salhesh" (left)
and a detail of Jamuna Devi's "Tiger Hunting" (right).
Both paintings are now in the Museum's permanent collection.

Radford University Art Museum is pleased to announce the recent donation of twenty-four paintings from Mithila (Bihar, North India). The Berkeley-based Ethnic Arts Foundation (EAF) generously gifted twenty-two of these paintings as part of its ongoing support of the museum's two joint exhibitions:

"Raja Salhesh's Garden: Contemporary Dalit Art & Ancient Myths of Mithila, India"

to be guest curated by John H. Bowles

Thursday, October 13 - Saturday, December 3, 2022

&

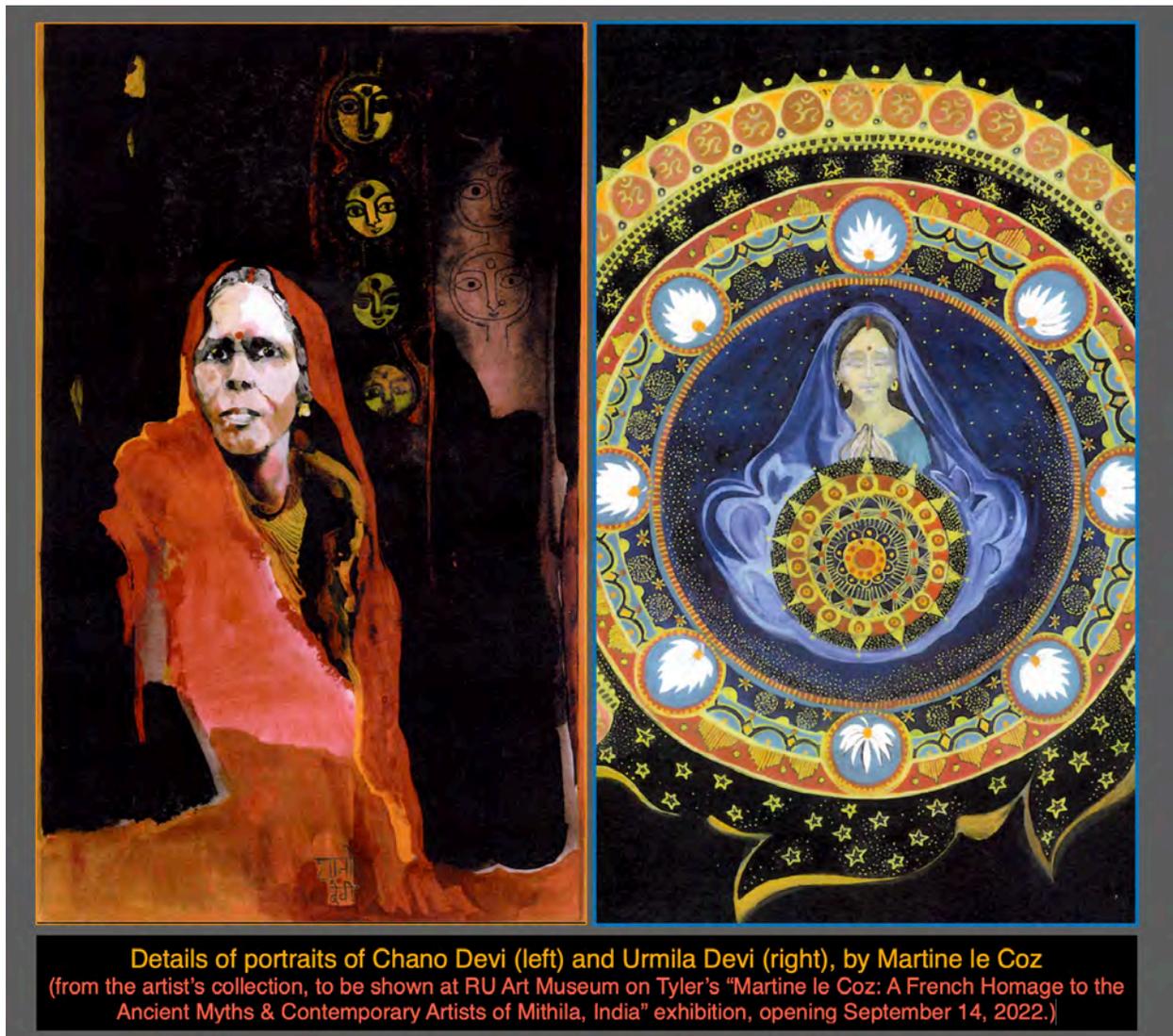
"Martine le Coz: A French Homage to the Ancient Myths & Contemporary Artists of Mithila, India"

to be guest curated by John H. Bowles and H el ene Fleury

Wednesday, September 14 - Saturday, December 3, 2022

These joint exhibitions will be the world's first to focus on the Dalit myths and artistry of Mithila, a region in northeast India and southeast Nepal famous for its ancient and contemporary traditional arts and culture. Dalit communities (formerly known as "Untouchables") total over two hundred million people (roughly 16% of India's population), yet their contemporary visual arts still remain virtually unknown. Starting in the 1970s, Mithila's Dalit artists began painting on paper in figurative styles based on traditional tattoos, murals and bas-relief clay sculpture. They specialized in depictions of daily life, nature, and their distinctive rituals and myths relating to the worship of their deities--especially their divine hero Raja Salhesh, about whom little has been documented or published until the 2019 release of Martine le Coz's 238-page book *LE ROI DE LA MONTAGNE: L'ÉPOPÉE DU ROI SALHESH (The King of the Mountain: The Epic of Raja Salhesh)*.

Inducted into France's Legion of Honour in 2019, Martine le Coz is cherished in France as the author of numerous novels and other publications. Since 2013, she has published four books inspired by Mithila art and culture—for which she has also created exquisite original illustrations that to date have never been exhibited. Some of the artists represented in the EAF's recent donation to RU Art Museum served as le Coz's inspiration, models and folkloric informants.



Details of portraits of Chano Devi (left) and Urmila Devi (right), by Martine le Coz (from the artist's collection, to be shown at RU Art Museum on Tyler's "Martine le Coz: A French Homage to the Ancient Myths & Contemporary Artists of Mithila, India" exhibition, opening September 14, 2022.)

RU Art Museum's two joint exhibitions will complement each other: the museum's Tyler Gallery will display Mme. le Coz's Mithila-inspired illustrations--including a selection of those accompanying her retelling of the Raja Salhesh epic, an elegant abecedary (i.e., an 'A-B-C book') illustrating India's Devanagiri alphabet, and her portraits of such Dalit artists as Chano Devi, Urmila Devi and Abhilasha Kumari. Over fifty examples of paintings by these and other master Dalit artists—including Jamuna Devi, Uttam Prasad Paswan, Lalita Devi, Naresh Paswan, Ranjit Paswan and Shrawan Paswan—will be simultaneously displayed in the museum's Covington Center gallery. Together, these two exhibitions will be the first ever to focus on Mithila's Dalit mythology and artists—as depicted in their own original paintings and in the illustrations of one of France's leading contemporary authors.

The exhibitions will be accompanied by an illustrated e-catalogue featuring scholarly essays (by David L. Szanton, Wendy Doniger, H el ene Fleury, Kaushik Kumar Jha and John H. Bowles), as well as an inaugural symposium honoring Mithila's Dalit painters along with the Ethnic Arts Foundation—which will then be celebrating its forty-second anniversary advancing the scholarly study and public appreciation of contemporary Mithila art.

As part of Radford University Art Museum's community outreach, a roughly concurrent satellite exhibition—titled "Mithila Medley: Contemporary Arts from an Ancient Culture in North India," co-curated by John H. Bowles and University of Connecticut Prof. of Art Kathryn Myers—will be shown at the Floyd Center for the Arts (exact dates to be announced).



In anticipation of the upcoming exhibitions, an additional donation has been made to the RU Art Museum—for the acquisition of a major work by one of Mithila's leading Dalit artists, Urmila Devi. This work has been described by Dr. David Szanton (the Berkeley-based anthropologist, and President of the Ethnic Arts Foundation) as "Urmila Devi's masterpiece." It was purchased through a donation, made in memory of Norma L. Bowles, from the Community Foundation of the New River Valley's Kolla-Landwehr Fund. (Here it appears flanked by RU Art Museum Dir. Steve Arbury, and Dean Margaret Devaney of RU's College of Visual and Performing Arts.)