



GOND ART & NARRATIVES

PROJECT -1

PRESENTATION

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DECLARATION

I Tanushree Paul hereby declare that the project report entitled “Gond Art and Narratives” is an original and honest work done by me during my summer internship 2013 for IDC,IIT Bombay.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost I would like to thank my mentor Mr. Venkat Raman Singh Shyam whose valuable guidance and support strengthen my spirits and helped me familiarise with the Gond Tribal art.

I deem it a great privilege to thank Mr. Udayan Vajpayee whose intellectual insights motivated me throughout the research.

Finally honourable mention goes to my family and friends who helped and supported me in every possible way to complete my project.

Tanushree Paul



ABSTRACT

The purpose of my summer internship project was to have a precise insight on what is Gond Tribal Art, their social structures and what led to the break of an old art form to a newer one. This report represents a primary research on the cultural past, narratives and ideologies which shaped their present as Pardhan Gond Painters. I made an effort to study the characteristics and themes of their paintings and got involved in practising the identical forms of Flora-Fauna, Gods-Goddesses and human beings, which further serves as a base to establish the majestic art form.



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INTRODUCTION

What is Tribal Art? This question which doesn't only covered the kingdom of Arts but how this form emerged, who are the people involved and what are their belief systems, How a culture prolong its roots for its existence.

My summer internship focused on the Pardhan Gond Art and tribal narratives, and I ended up with a primary research of a vast culture of a Tribal community. Through research and interviews I got to know about Gond History , the storytellers ,their societal structures, their stories which provided a better understanding for the visual arts they practise. Secondly, I explored the forms of those elements which comprise a tribal painting. The exploration hence done, were through drawings, from where I evolved new forms (Flora-fauna, Human beings) and patterns identically used in Gond paintings.



BACKGROUND

Pardhan Gond Art or Jangarh Kalam can be considered as tribal contemporary art which emerged in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh in late 20th century by indigenous Gond tribes of the respective state. Though this tribal art is relatively new in comparison to other tribal or folk arts of India, its soul (stories) dates back to the ancient times. Only few ethnographic studies had been done on the Gond tribal culture and hardly on the riches their stories carry.

Venkat Raman Singh Shyam is one of the most celebrated painter of this legacy, who is also actively working on the documentation of Pardhan Gond art and mentored me for my summer internship.





CHAPTER 1

THE CREATORS- PARDHAN GONDS

Gond art is an expanded form of storytelling, practised by Pardhan Gonds, who were known as the priest, scholars, storytellers or singers of the Gond Community. Out of the seven Gond clans, Pardhan is considered as the youngest to whom God has bestowed the duty of education/recitation. Their status was equal to what we know of the Brahmins in Hindu societal system. Pardhan's work of reciting stories serves three purposes:

✿ Being genealogist, they are the carriers of collective memory of society. Recitations included heroic tales and songs of Gond warriors, which serves as a source of inspiration and strengthen their communities. Without a collective/base memory, society can't evolve. This had been a very traditional way of preserving memory as well as culture.

✿ Though Pardhans are priests of Gonds they offers songs to their gods, to awake them. Such rituals followed by several



other practices are performed in every Gond house in a duration of 3 years.

✧ The normal pourpuoi stories which explains the *why and how* of things around, or stories with morals are passed down orally to their next generation.

From ancient times it has been the responsibility of other Gond clans to endow them living, in return the pardhans use to sing devotional songs, accompanying **Bana** (the foremost string musical instrument) to awaken **Bada Dev** (the supreme God of Gonds) who resides in Saja tree. Performing songs was a holy ritual, practiced in every three years duration, but more than that these songs were relics, which bind the whole community, and made them ponder of their glorious past.

Gonds weaved such a societal structure, where other gonds except Pardhans were responsible to bestow a living to Pardhan, so that they can solely concentrate on their creative practices, out of any disturbances. Such societal grounds which provides a system of patronizing art ensures that their culture flourishes and that too without any pressure by the patrons upon their creations.



The word Pardhan is composed of two different words:

Par + *Dhan* = Pardhan

Where par means others and dhan means fund. Hence Pardhan are those priests who are funded by other gond tribes for their ritual practices and other scholarly works.



CHAPTER -2

GOND PANTHEON

“हिंदुआ जीवे नेम के बल में, आदिवासी जीवे देव के बल में।”

“Hindus live under the verve of rules and adivasi (tribes) live under the base of Dev.”

For gonds god is a supreme being, the derivation of songs can be linked to their beliefs that emerged as concepts and subsequently songs. One can find a great difference between Hindu and Gond divine bodies. They maintain a relation of fear and respect towards them, who are omnipresent in all natural beings, even in man made things. The presence of their heavenly bodies can extend the limits of tangible realities.

This Devlok or the divine pantheon, which has emerged from the nonduality of the nature and human beings has not yet become “Mythical or Puranas”, because it is an actual expansion of the power of being. Here, time is not fragmented in human consciousness.



It is this devlok which occupies their narratives. One can find images and reflections of several periods throbbing in the folklores. Their primitive souls and attachment reside in Gond devlok.

It is a matter of fact that the Gods worshipped by hindus are absent in their Pantheon. If we find hindu deities occupying their canvas that would solely be the effect of market, as their new patrons are the urban middle class. Somehow we can find quiet few resemblance of hindu deities in Gond Devlok for an instance, Bada Dev ,who resides in Saja (holy tree) is the creator, protector and destructor, travels in a buffalo, has close uniformity with characteristics and fundamentals of Hindu god Shiva.

Gond Devlok works as effect and cause and occupies whole vocal tradition of Pardhan Gond art. Understanding the pantheon provided a sound base for me to explore other cultural aspects and major transformation of orality into visual reality.



CHAPTER – 3

TRANSFORMATION OF ORALITY INTO VISUAL REALITY

Word is believed to be a form of physical energy. However, at a very refined level, when we look at the entire spectrum of what lies within the range of oral tradition, we realise, that it is word which gets expressed in multiple forms of dance , music ,sculpture, painting, in literature, rituals, in all its physicality.

Journey : Primeval thoughts of human beings took a long duration to discover something tangible as Words and words leave its physical existence when it shapes poetry,divine spells or symbols.The enunciation of words shaped dialects and with prior modifications words got transformed into songs.Hence a special way of reading words/ sentences carved modulations and rhythms.I found it interesting to mention a verse in hindi :

‘संगीत’ का रूप में अंतरण



Transformation of 'song' in 'form', as was explained to me by Udayan Vajpayee. Words have travelled generations now to communicate the stories visually through paintings.

Though art is an independent entity ,an art work is itself created by the interdependence of different art forms,specially in India Vishnudharmottar purana stands a witness which mentions that one can have Rasanubhuti (tastes) of different arts superimposed onto a single art work.In case of Pardhan Gond art similar affair takes place. A God painting carries numerous songs weaved upon a long period of time which smells like wet mud in rains.

Pardhan painting unguents the grief of Pardhans whose stupendous history of storytelling has been totally diminished. A matter of fact that these tribes sorted out a novel way for telling their ancestral stories as painted strokes.This stands as one of the magnificent live example of how a civilization prepares new cultural and societal structures.

Another aspect which dealt a greater problem is the end of a language.When a language ends a civilization dies, a world collapses.Pardhan Gond art is an



effort to protect their identity, ideologies and revive what they have lost in time.



CHAPTER-4

PAINTING THEMES

Gond Paintings are extended art forms of the centuries old storytelling tradition of Gond tribes. Hence, it is an honest transformation of the wealth which was on the verge of extinction. Gond paintings generally depict their reality. Their reality is different from that of urban India, and hence may seem a bit mysterious.

For a conventional tribe there are several options to opt for, truth is not the only way out. In their realm they create their own truths which they may or may not abide by. Thus we can experience different versions of a similar story which occupy their canvas. Subject comprises of :

- ✧ **Flora-Fauna**
- ✧ **Pourquoi stories**(how and why stories)
- ✧ **Ritual songs**
- ✧ **Mythological contexts**
- ✧ **Paintings related to Gond kings**



4.1 Presence of Trees

In gond paintings Trees stand as dominating element. Gonds are inhabitants of forests and trees are part and parcel of their life, the respect they shower over trees in real life sustains even in their canvas.

Usually they juxtapose other animals and birds even human beings with trees for instance horn of stags are drawn as branches of trees or feather of peacock are shown as dancing branches full of leaves. There are few trees which are considered as gods and such trees are depicted as deities in human forms.

These paintings celebrate life, humans, trees, birds, Gods all exist together in one frame seldom the context are highly metaphorical.



CHAPTER-5

CHARACTERISTICS OF PAINTINGS

Gond Paintings have their identical structures similar to any other tribal arts. Structure of gond painting was established by Jangarh Singh Shyam, thus one can denote it as **Jangarh Kalam** too. The drawings are rhythmic in nature and each artist can be distinguished by their use of form and patterns, which serve as their signatures.

5.1 Forms

Forms of the elements (trees, birds, animals, human, environment) or the drawings are closely related to an amateur's way of representing a figure but they are honest replicas of environment, which are simplified from tip to toe. A single fig tree can have thousand versions of it because each and every artist maintain a form which represent their signature.



5.2 Patterns

Patterns implied within the drawings usually misinterpret viewers that these paintings are only for decorative purpose. Every artist pursue three or four patterns which they continue using in their creation. These patterns are more crucial than the forms as signatures. Each pattern is derived out of some inspiration for instance Rajendra Shyam draws twisted lines which he says got inspired from rope. He uses this pattern in each of his paintings.

Indian Folk/Tribal paintings are known for its two dimensional flatness ,which is seen in Gond paintings too. Bright colours captivates viewers and paintings are painted using water based colours.



CHAPTER – 6

STORIES AND NARRATIVES

Tribal stories are basically oral in nature. These stories usually stay unpublished and uncollected but due to the current global scenario and negative effects on their living conditions these interesting community traditions are facing threat of extinction. Very few people now show interest for group gatherings where these stories were created or improvised and were transferred to next generations. Tribal stories are open ended and can be improvised, appended and modified according to the environment. Now these stories are getting documented , but are loosing its beauty which lays in live presentations and spiced through the regional dialects, characters and songs too.

Creators of Tribal stories are mostly anonymous ,they can be verified my certain regions though through their feel, and being the fact that no one knows their creator they remain impersonal and open to everyone. No institution hold any right to formulate rules and regulations over their stories. This is the only rule that it posses no rule.



We may include Tribal stories under “Tribal/Folk narratives,” means there are more than one version of a particular story and these narratives have endured the test of time and become deeply embedded in culture.

Types of Stories

- ✧ **Legendary Tales**
- ✧ **Pourquoi stories**(how and why stories)
- ✧ **Tales of talking animals**
- ✧ **Tales showering morals**
- ✧ **Mythological stories or ritual songs**

Tribes has stories related to every thing around them, how they came in existence,how sun and moon were created, how was earth and its evolution stories,something which fascinated me was the animals capability to think and suggest ,in such stories its full of words like : **फिर उसने सोचा** (then he thought).



One of the Gond story being presented in two different versions:

Version 1 : The story of earth

In beginning earth was full of water. In a lotus leaf Baski Mata was born. The Gods peeped down to earth from clouds and founded that tidal waves are impelling her. They thought what to do now? Suddenly Baski mata shouted to gods saying "Parihar is Boram Boodha's son. Kill him, a new world will be created from his blood and bones." After listening this every God visited Dharam Devta's place and informed him about the incidence on which Dharam Devta replied "Booram Boodha is my son. I cant help you. You yourself work out for this problem" All Gods gathered together and proceeded to Booram Boodha's place and founded out his son, but soon Gods were again in dilemma as they didn't had any weapon to kill him. They again visited Dharam Devta and mentioned their problem. Now Dharam devta rubbed his body and from the mud extracted, he created a red tiger and ordered him that when Parihar goes to drink water in well, you'll hunt him. The tiger followed the order and positioned himself near the well as said. The moment which he awaited arrived, when Parihar started fetching water from the well, Tiger waited for none and attacked him. Parihar screamed on which Gods gathered around to know the matter and discovered that Parihar has died!

On his death, gods lifted up his body and whirled it in air, due to which blood started scattering in the surroundings. Wherever blood drops merged with water there land surfaced out. Wherever his bones dropped there emerged 7 mountains. His hair began growing as trees.



After the creation of earth she submerged into the sea and fall headlong. Her head rested upon a lotus and through her legs she supported the earth from within. It is said that when she gets tired and switches her leg, earth trembles and that's how earthquakes arrive.

Version 2: The story of earth

Earth was 14% water and 7% mud in the beginning, which were mixed up as a pile. One day Dharam Devta came out of water and rubbed his left and right hands and extracted mud from which he created a boy and a girl, who were initially brother and sister. Dharam Devta separated the two and covered them with pox. After a long time they met each other and were unable to recognise each other, hence they married. The woman gave birth to a son named Parihar.

Gods on their visit to earth saw that earth is a pile of mud and water and wanted to reconstruct the earth which was only possible through killing Parihar. They sent a tiger to kill Parihar. One fine day Parihar went to forest to hunt carrying his weapons arrow and bow. On his way he felt tired and rested under a tree. The tiger approached towards Parihar and kept his paws over Parihar's chest and suddenly got shocked when he discovered that he was armoured with weapons and he ran away. Parihar got up, and was amazed to see the the mark of paws on his chest. He decided to kill the tiger and went for his search. Soon he reached the place where tiger was resting. Parihar took out his sword and was just about to kill him, but he was so scared that he left the sword against the tiger and ran off. Tiger woke up and was amazed to find the sword near him, and thankfully prayed "Oh god! I am alive."



Gods were watching this incidence and then discussed “What can we do now? Both of these creatures fear each other.”They went to the tiger and suggested him to wait till Parihar goes to bath leaving all his weapon behind.The next day Parihar went to the river for a bath.As soon as he left his weapons behind the tiger waited for none and attacked him.Parihar fell on the ground and died.Places from where his blood past by there the land became hard.From his legs evolved big trees and from his hands emerged herbs and shrubs.His hairs transformed into grasses and his bones served as Rocks and Mountains.His head became Sun and his Chest (with the mark of Tiger’s paw) became moon.

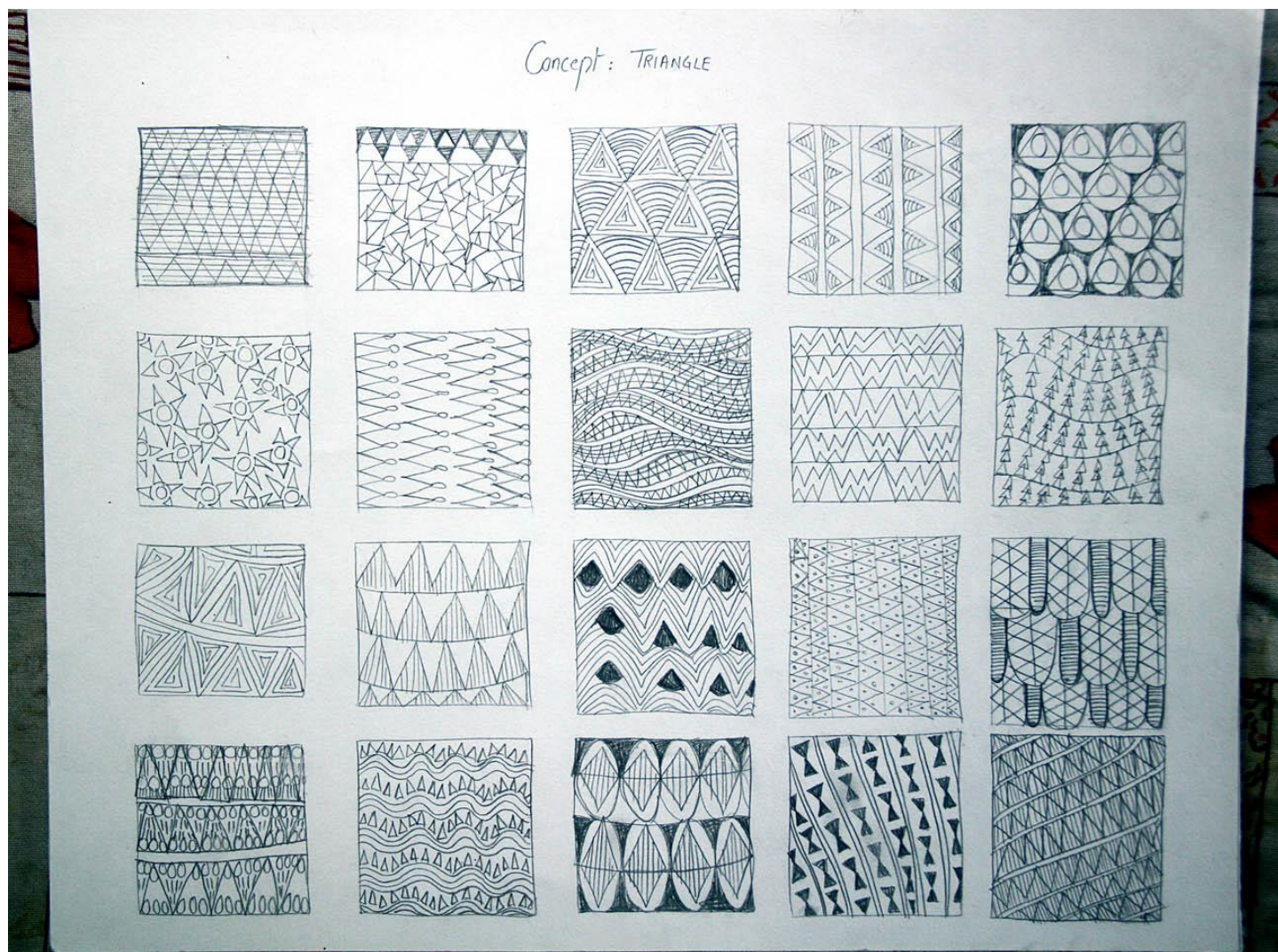
Boram cried on his son’s death,on which Dharam Devta condoled him saying “Don’t worry I’ll bestow upon you a big Family.”And then the couple gave birth to seven girls and seven boys.They all were Bhuiyas(tribes of West Bengal).

The above two stories were almost same,both had tiger whose sole motive was to kill Parihar so that earth can be reformed,but their ends had varying explanations of how earthquake arrives and how the Bhumia tribe was born.

One usually cant figure out what these stories had to offer and mostly don’t provide a logical setup of happenings,but there souls reside in its imperfections and that’s how it invites every one to participate as storytellers.

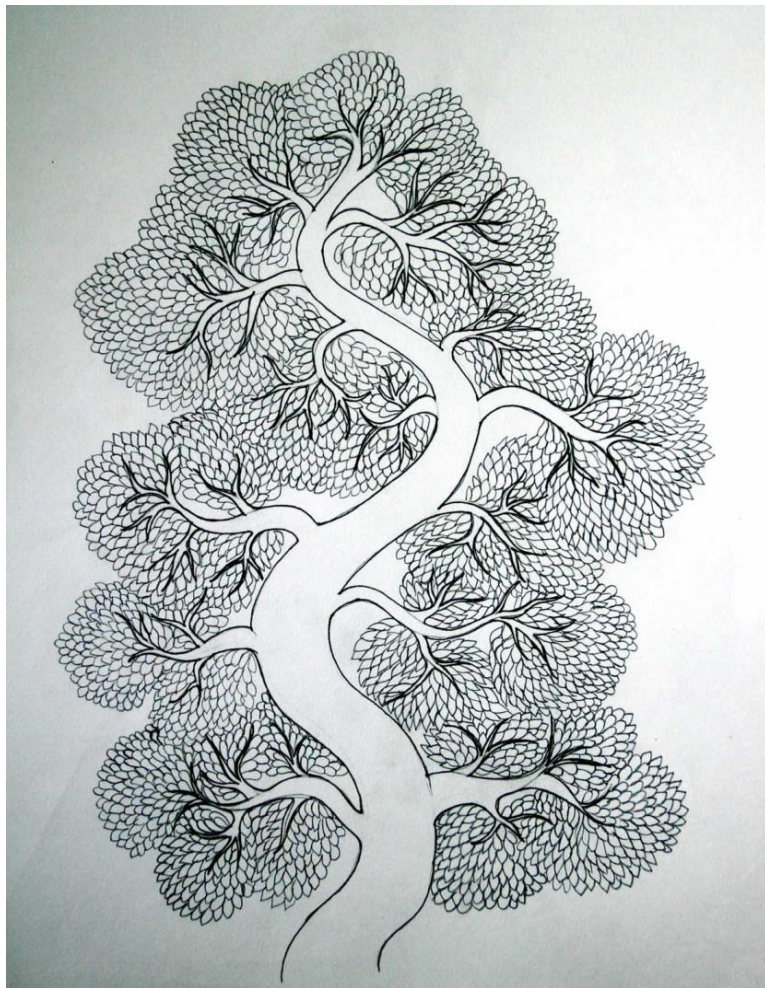


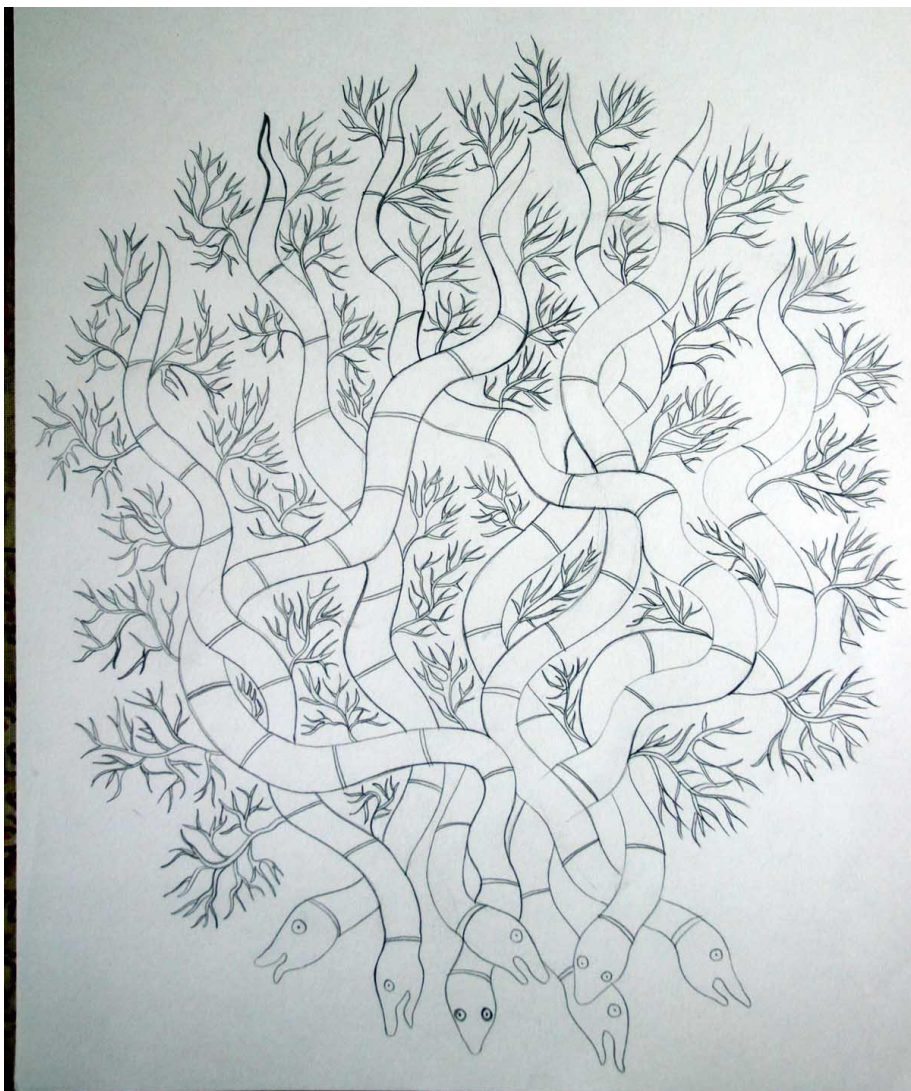
STUDY OF PATTERNS

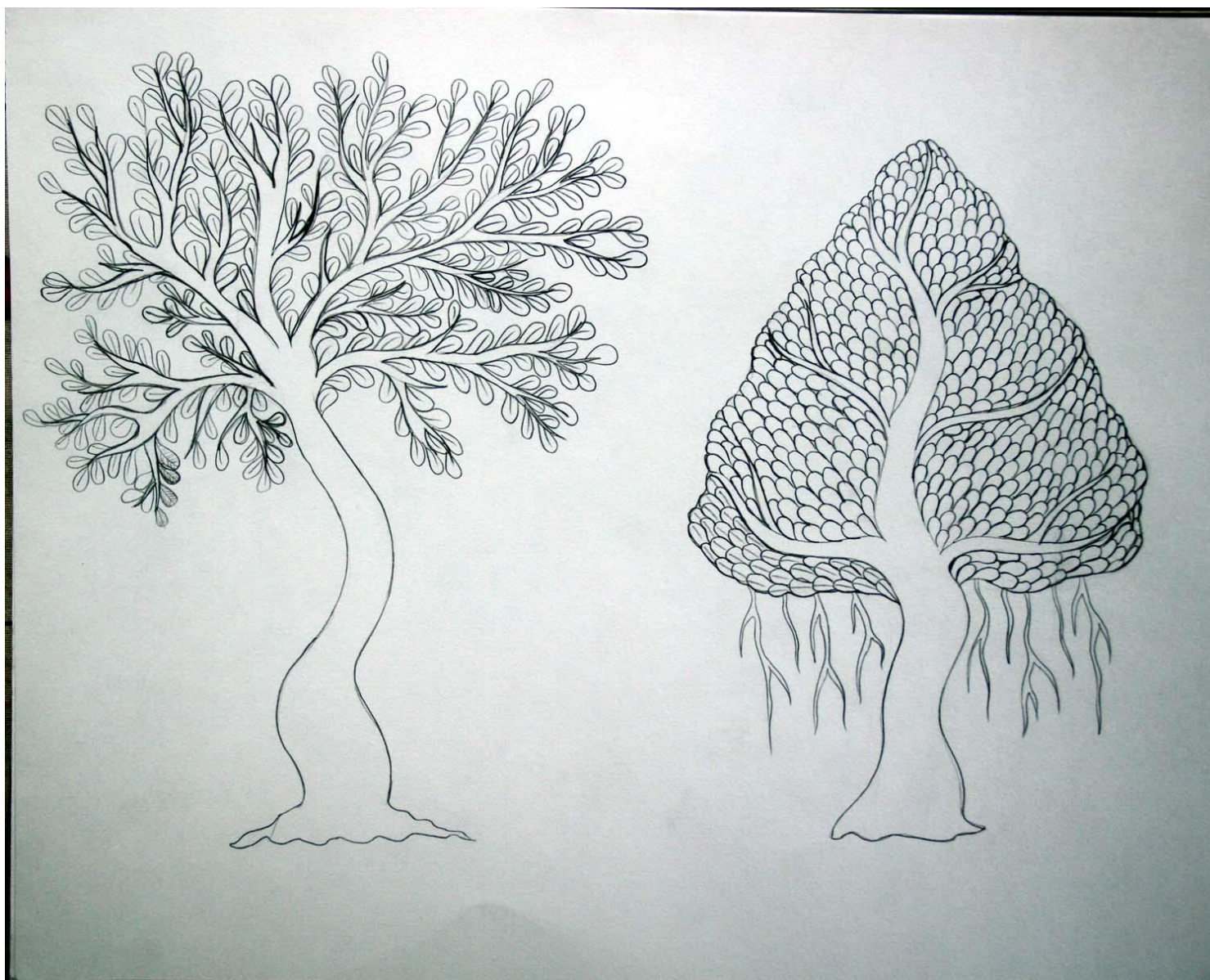


STUDY OF FORMS

TREES

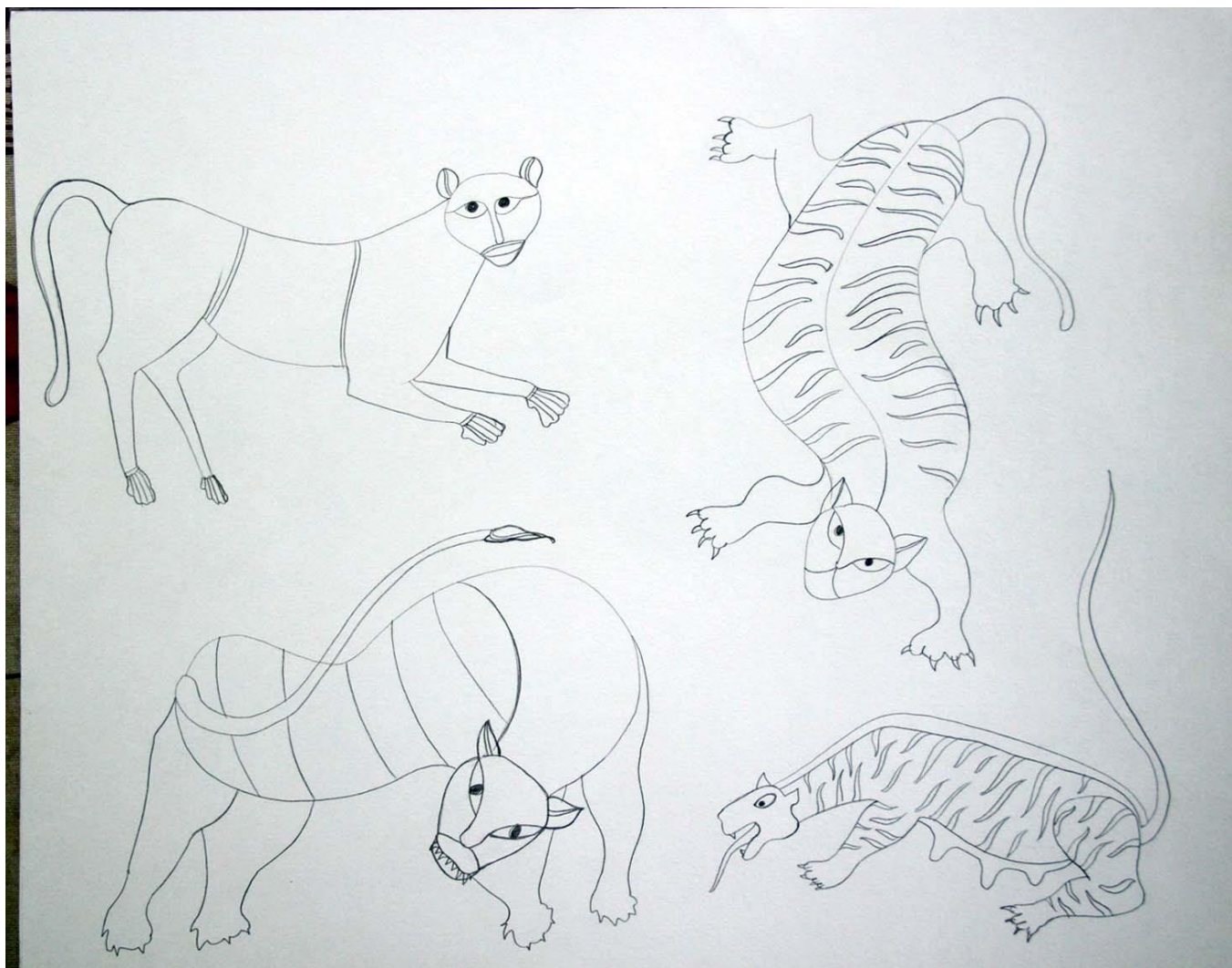


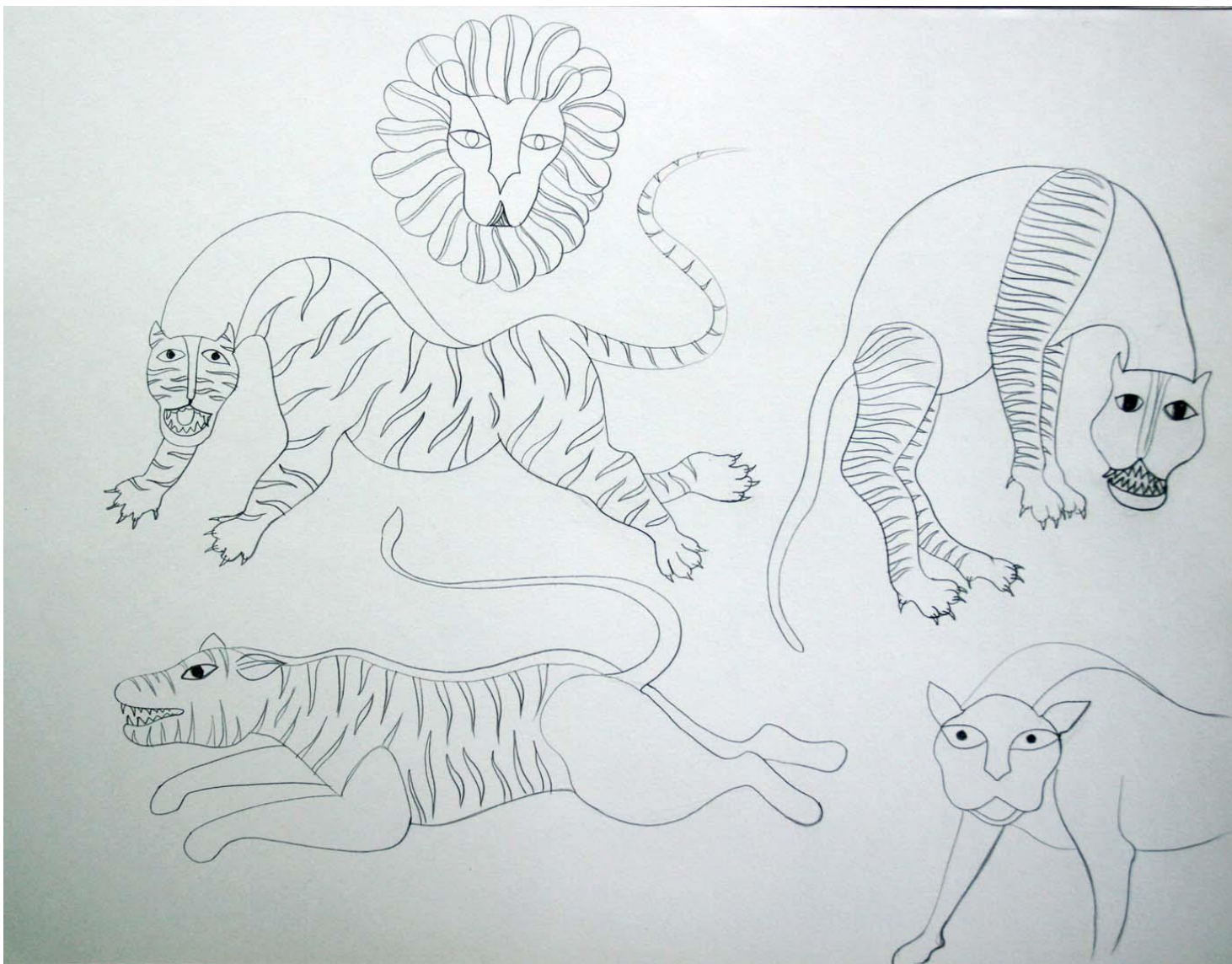






ANIMALS : TIGER

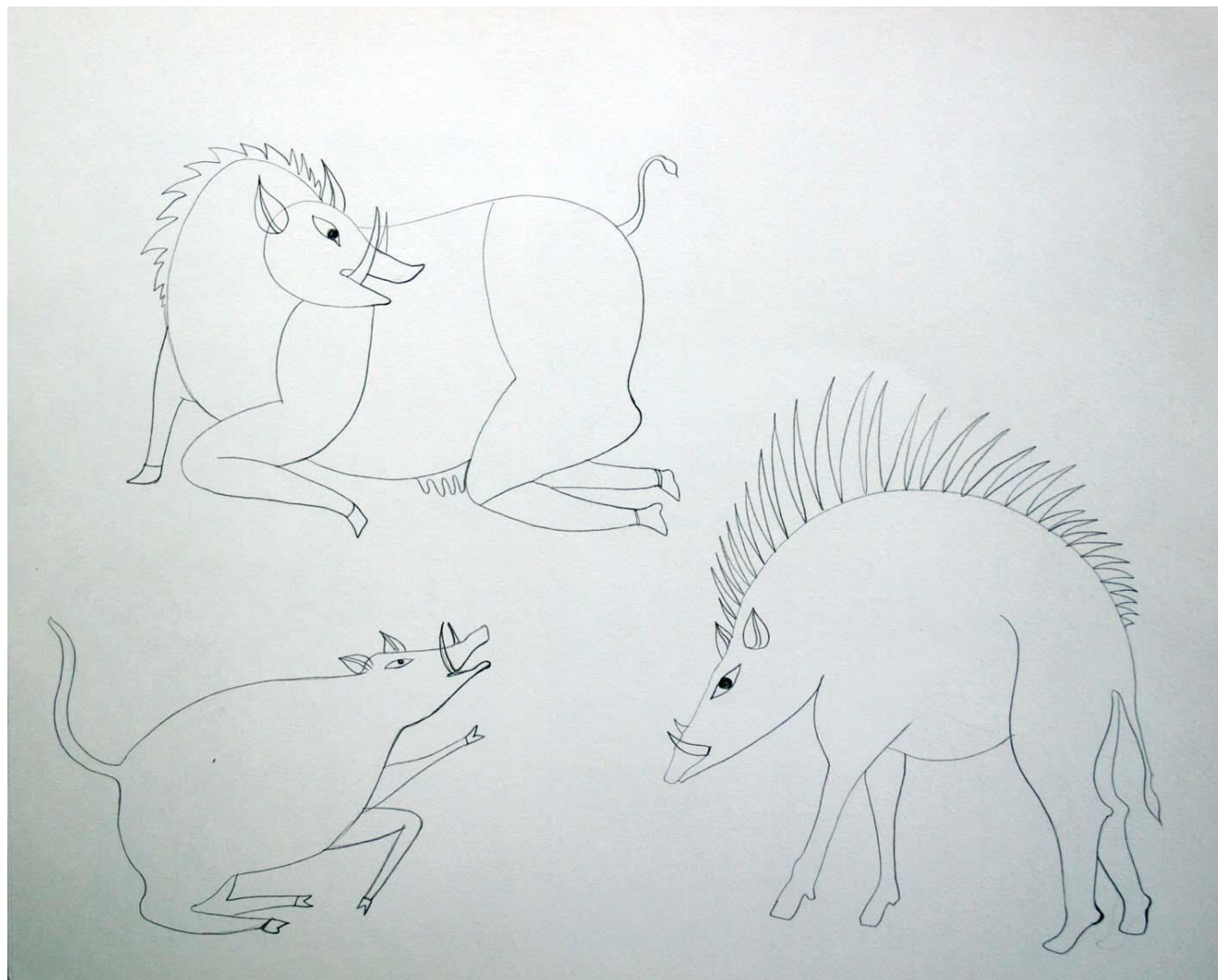




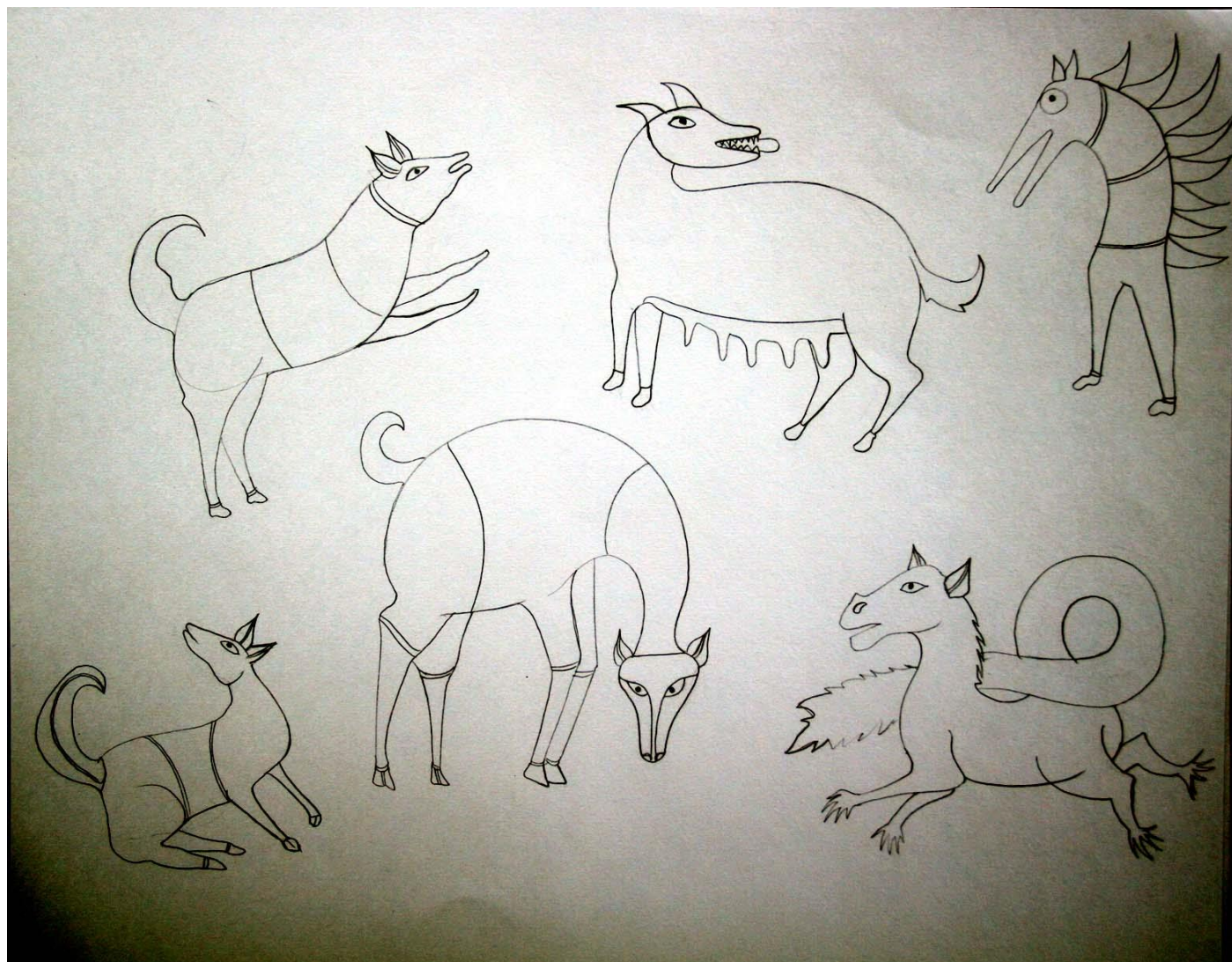
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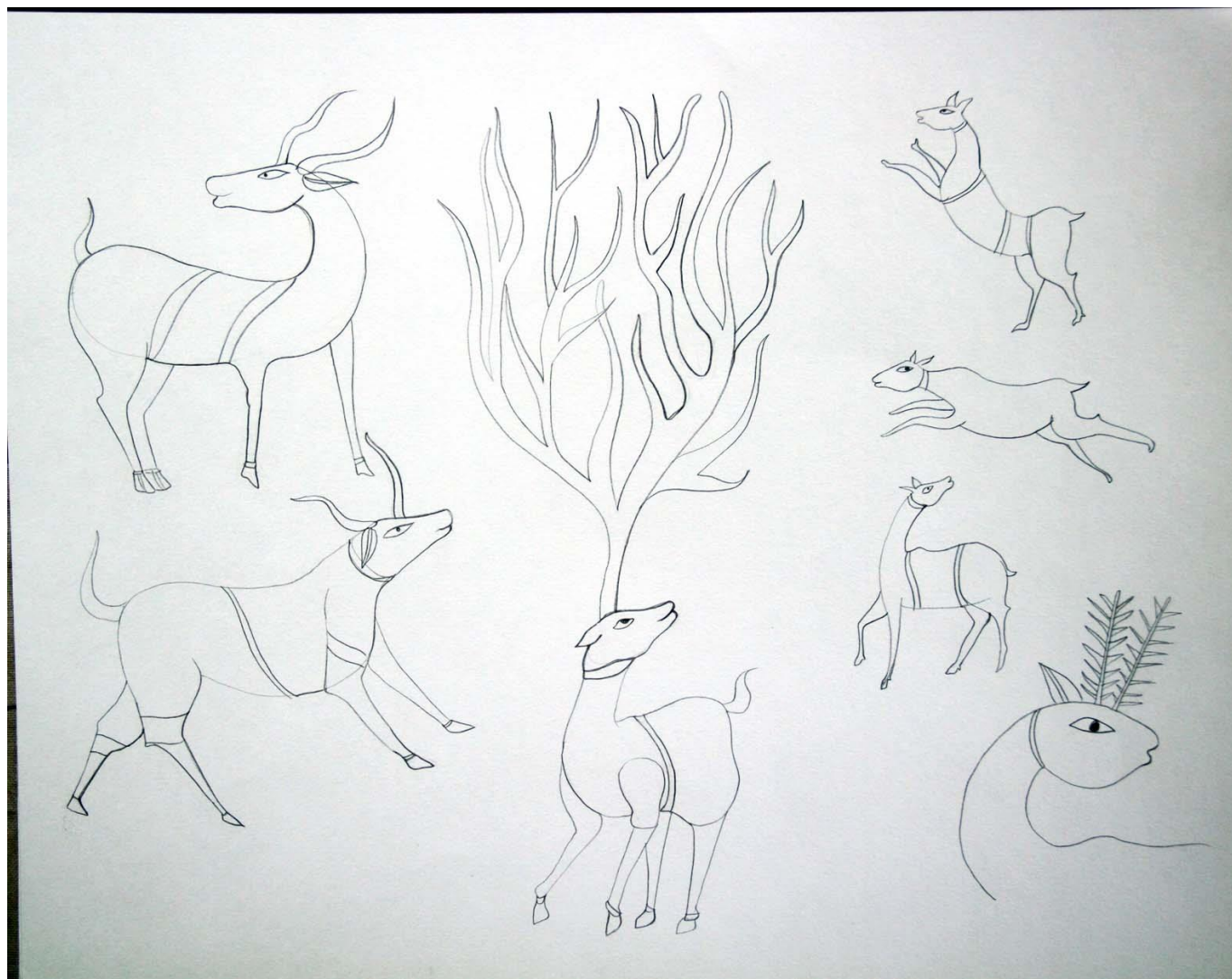
WILD BOAR

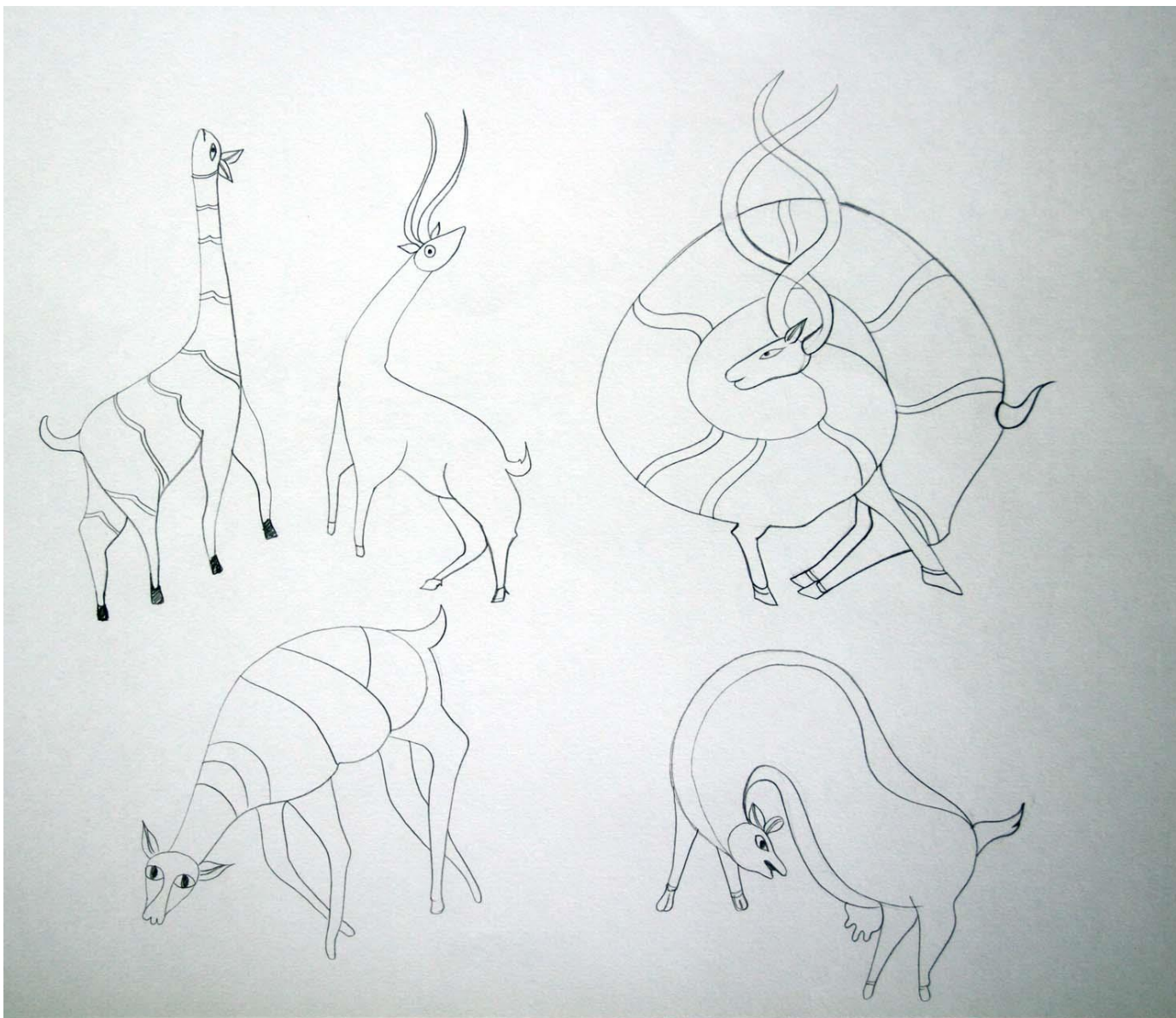


FOX AND DOG

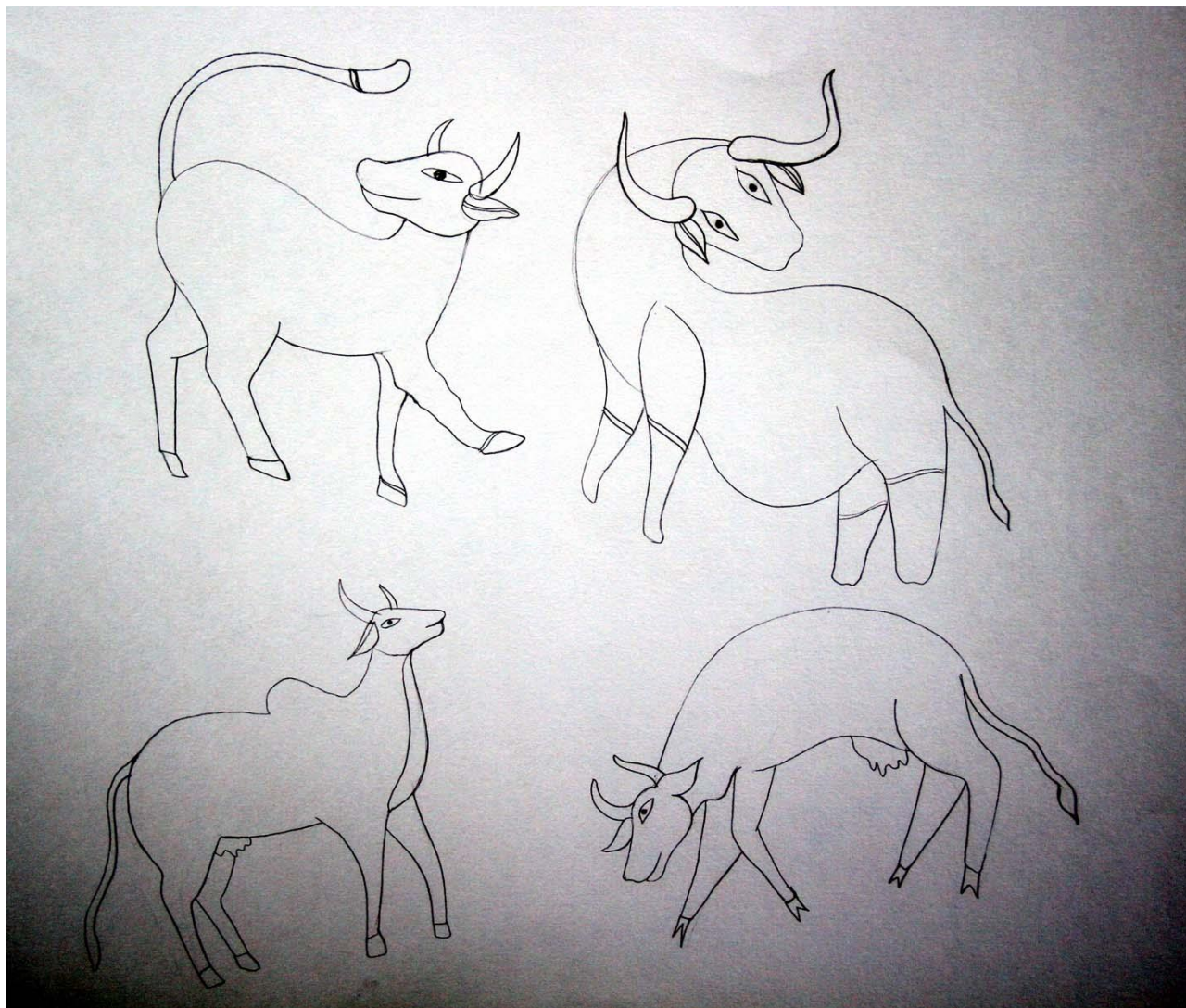


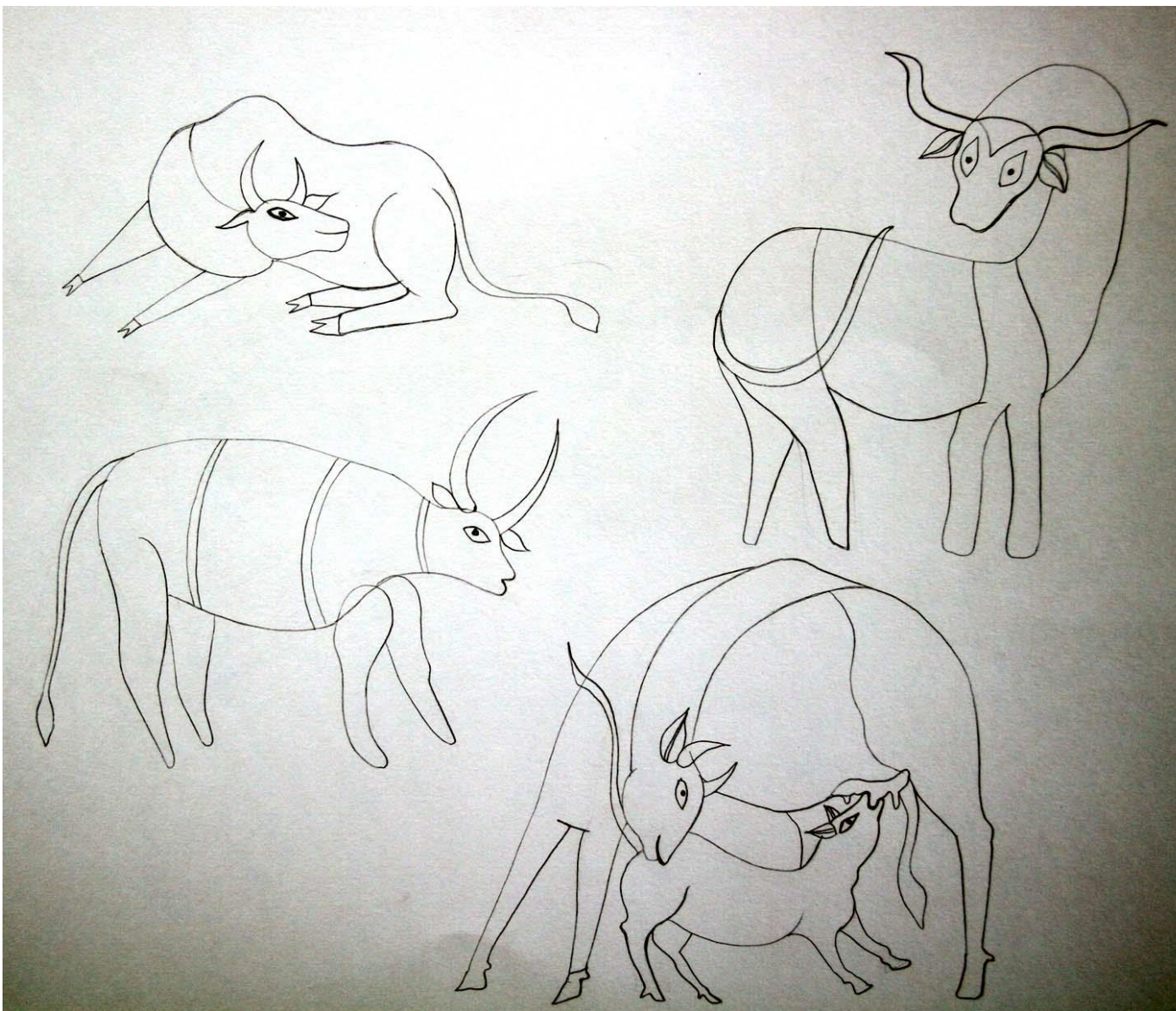
ANTELOPES AND STAG





Cow

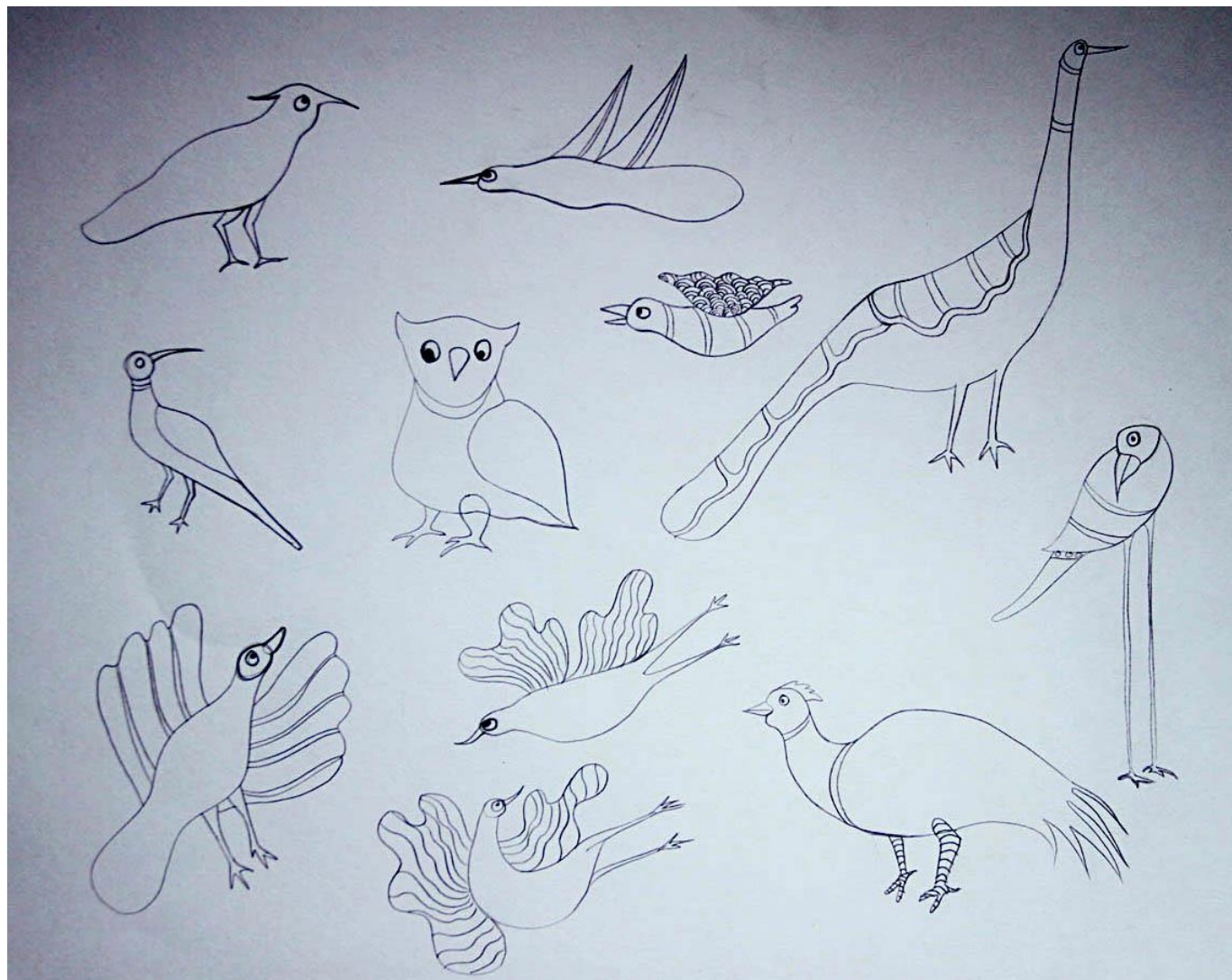




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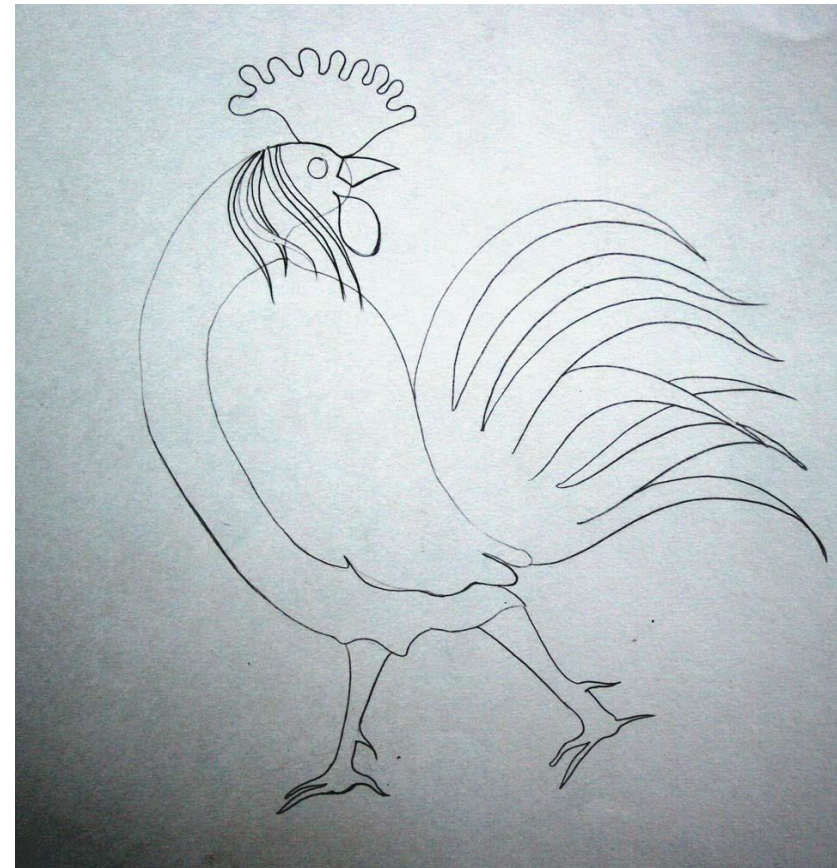
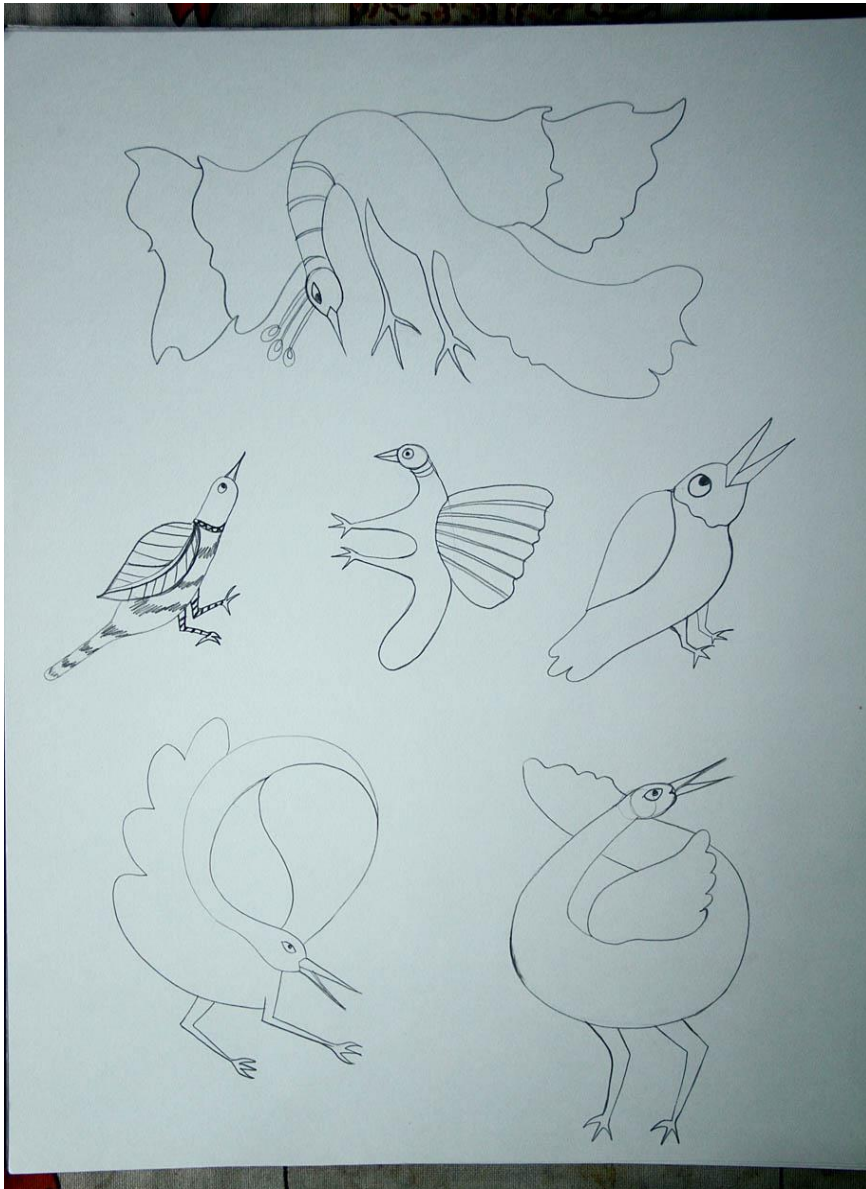


BIRDS



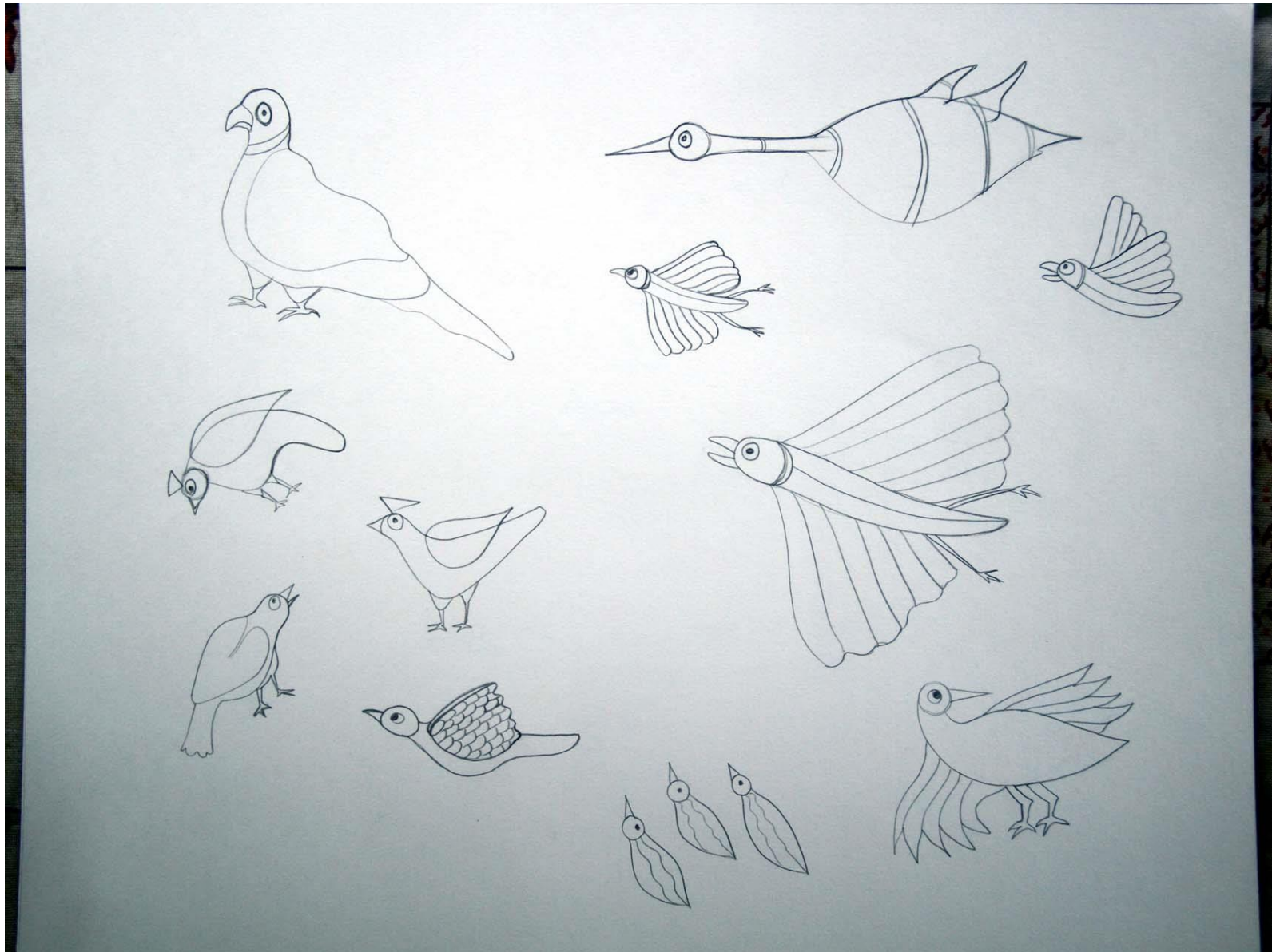
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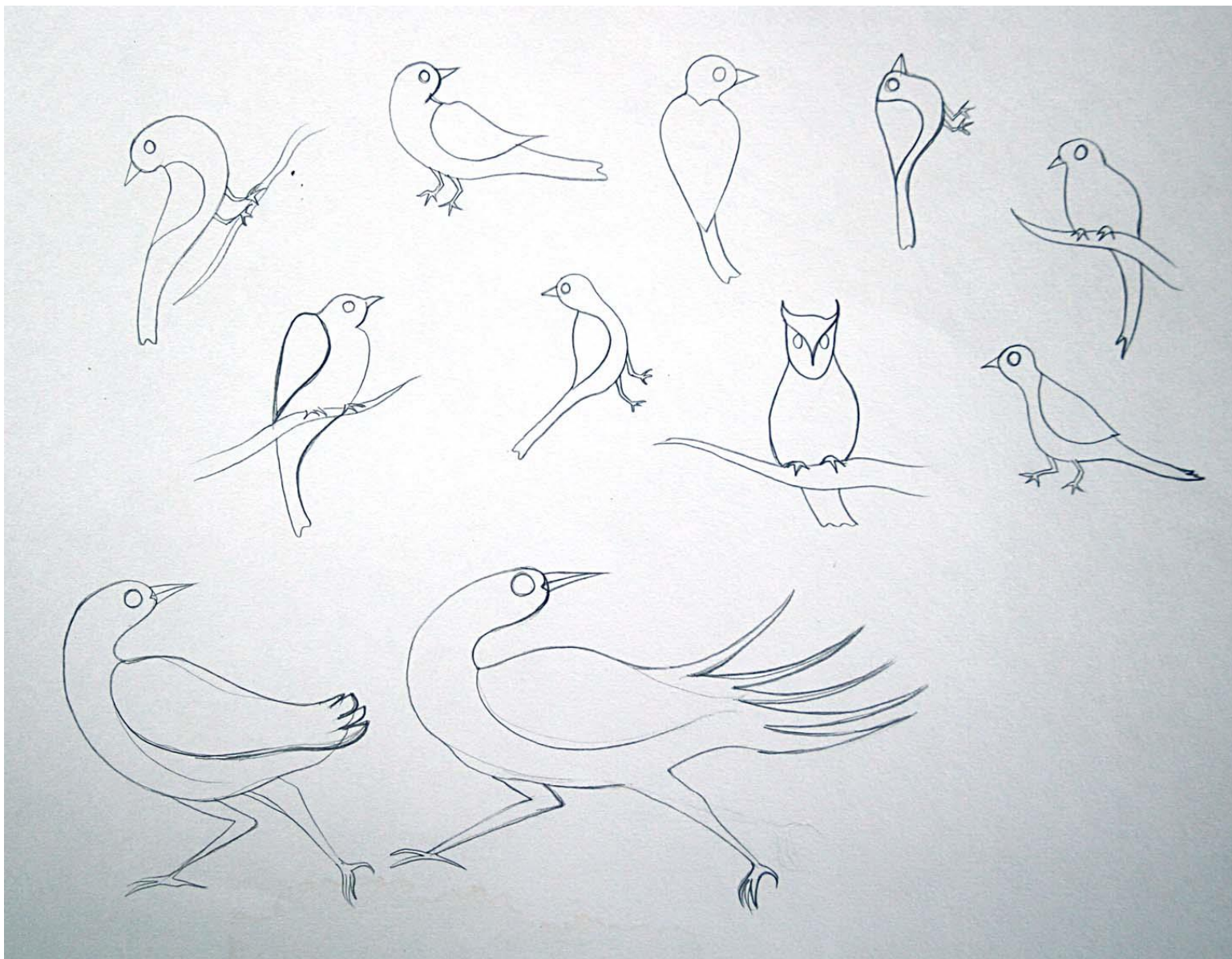
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