

VIPEKSHA GUPTA

“Painting is a state of being. Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is.” – *Jackson Pollock*

One recognizes the fraught polemics of thrusting a proclamation by Jackson Pollock on any artist, let alone one born nearly a century later, in a context where notions of craft and cosmos are inherently intertwined and art historical mantles--both East and West--are ever present and intuitively enmeshed. But such is the reward of immersing oneself in the refracted color fields of Vipeksha Gupta.

Identifying the “pulse between the inward sanctuary and outer journey as the heart of her process,” Gupta’s mode of artmaking is less an epic struggle than it is a heightened state of consciousness, gradually forming and reforming towards new states of simultaneous being. By manipulating and maximizing the potential of charcoal and dry pigment on strategically indented paper, her works perform as portals, imparting upon the viewer the sensation of multiple planes of existence with the slightest disruption of the chromatic field. And so, as Gupta strides back and forth into various realms of color, she evokes in us a range of internal and external associations as well: the smell of freshly cut grass to an apocalyptic desert storm, the softness of human touch to the streaking heat of the night’s sky. Each work silences us into a moment of perception that is both cognitive and bodily, when color fuses into medium, experience, and a means of transformation.

Gupta’s emotive use of color is equally grounded in the principles of a geometric structure, slit, nipped and tucked as the “fold” emerges as one of her signature devices. Long considered a metric of artistic brilliance (in Hellenistic sculpture, for example, drapery was the means by which carving could convey movement, human presence, and *pathos*) Gupta arrived at the motif vis-a-vis her personal experience during the pandemic: for her, the hard-edge “peak” symbolized the triumph of light from the dark trap created by its very ascension. It was a realization that “there is no coming to consciousness without pain” that she has formulated a living paradigm of that recursively shapes her practice, harnessing renewed internal and external energies within each work. As one progresses through the exhibition, rectilinear compositions bend to the curvilinear, and in her recurring bisections, we likewise experience the inverse of the peak—an apparition of an imminent chasm.

While Vipeksha Gupta’s practice captures the elements of radiance and intimacy associated with the giants of abstract painting, one must bear in mind that transience is one of the key tenets of her oeuvre. Technically, her works are not paintings but drawings, conceived by high-pressure layering and arranging of dry pigment, graphite, charcoal, and pastel onto Fabriano paper, which, in turn is fused to an aluminum sheet save the crease forming an oblique pyramid across the page--the effect of which situates the work in the domain of sculpture. Further, as testament to the artist’s masterful apprehension of light, the ampoules of color form as if generated by a photo-chemical process (akin to early cyanotype photography), but then, we come back to the surface, only to revel in the mysterious tactility of the artist’s hand. Deftly subverting taxonomic assumptions, Gupta’s paintings are paintings in that they underscore the illusionism implicit in the vocabulary of painting itself.

Replete with moments of chance and metamorphosis, Vipeksha Gupta's 'Cadence' series embarks on a wide and deep analytical study on the silent rhythms embedded in gradients of color and light. With a practice that has long embraced the notion of cyclical consciousness—or as the artist puts it “the mind reconfiguring its own architecture” -- Gupta's most recent body of work invokes her grandest spatial arrangements to date. Associations oscillate between the landscape and architecture, modernist tropes to the shifting sublime, specters of futurism and the immediacy of flesh, all rooted in a quest for the “light in the dark.” For example, on the opposite spectrum of red, violet—the shortest wavelength visible to the human eye—emerges as if a densely layered sonic texture, a cosmic boom. While some colors interact in diffracted hovers, others do so via gesture, suggesting their afterlife at the work's very edge. It is these moments of confrontation with physical phenomena that silence us: she explains, “silence becomes color and color becomes a cycle in the reincarnation rhythm.” In this way, Gupta's practice pays as much homage to Rothko as it does the women who created the sacred lawon silks of South Sumatra, devising a method of materiality, space, and light that is decidedly her own.

–Pujan Gandhi

*Pujan Gandhi is an Independent Curator who bridges historic and contemporary art practices with a transnational perspective. From 2018-2024, he oversaw the South, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art Collections at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. There, he reinstalled its galleries, made acquisitions in the realm of Pahari Paintings, Himalayan Sculpture, and Javanese textiles, simultaneously realizing installations by Dayanita Singh, Zarina, and Monir Farmanfarmaian. He's published on a range of topics: Isabella Stewart Gardner's travel albums in India, strategies of 21st century museum display, and edited the multi-author monograph Anish Kapoor: Reverie & Rupture. Previously, he served as a consulting curator in the African Art Department at the High Museum, Atlanta; worked as an art advisor; and guest lectured at SOAS, University of London--where he earned his Post-Graduate Diploma and MA in the History of Art and Archaeology whilst cataloging at the British Museum. He was raised in Atlanta, Georgia and is a graduate of Middlebury College.*