

Thesis: Shreya Mehta's most recent series confronts the intersection between universality and individuality in non-objective works that continue to confront elemental aspects of the human experience

- I. Account of the work and its subject matter
 - a. Description of works, general analysis of the relationship between Atman and Maya, karma etc.
 - b. Shreya's sadhana
 - i. The artist contemplates how spiritual forces inscribe themselves onto her, but simultaneously posits how they might be overcome. The rhythmic back and forth she uses to depict the relationship between soul and illusion reveals how revelation about one's identity can only come from an acceptance of how both of these elements affect our being in the world.
 - ii. *Something about the smaller process oriented pieces*
 - iii. Layers of Maya (sindoor) shroud the Atman (gold). Nevertheless, the Atman's radiant materiality evokes the potential of the soul to transcend Maya and cleanse itself of karmic dirt
 - iv. The vibratory discourse begins, allowing the viewer to experience a fleeting moment of universal truth.
- II. Mehta's work can be understood as a development in the tradition of "metaphysical" abstraction. Like her predecessors, she employs primary colors and pure pigment to grant the viewer access to an elemental plane of consciousness. Her chief innovation in spiritual abstraction emerges from her deeply intentional choice of materials; such intentionality allows the artist to introduce historical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions to her paintings, which allows us to experience the inevitable strife between Maya and Atman in all of its complexities.
 - a. Primary color (Piet Mondrian – Alejandro Otero)
 - i. Representations of reality are disregarded in service of a spiritual truth
 - ii. Primary colors facilitate a powerful visual experience in such cases. Red, yellow and blue are the origin from which all colors come into existence, and the oeuvres of both Otero and Mondrian use them to showcase the genesis of painting
 - b. Pure pigment artists (Yves Klein-Anish Kapoor)
 - i. While paint holds color in a suspension of oil or acrylic, pigment is color in itself. Whether it is seen in the cave paintings of Lascaux or in a mound of powder, the use of pigments invites the viewer to consider the essence of pure color and how it manifests throughout the world.
 - ii. A pigment's materiality is highly tactile. It draws the viewer in, creating a desire to commune with the work that must be repressed.
 - iii. Klein and Kapoor believe that the sensations created by unadulterated color closely resemble the spiritual experience

- c. Mehta's curated range of pigments allow her to incorporate her cultural heritage and spiritual into the series. Each pigment is associated with its own cosmic force, a choice that Mehta makes based on the pigment's personal significance to her as well as its cultural context outside of art
 - 1. Sindoor as Maya
 - a. The illusory veil of Maya is defined by the impermanence of our external perception and internal perspective. Maya is why our experience of an object is in constant flux, manifesting numerous contradictions that reveal the precarious nature of our illusory lived experience.
 - b. Sindoor is an apt material to signify Maya as a result of the contradictions that emerge from its use in Indian culture
 - i. Sindoor following marriage
 - 1. On the one hand, it signifies the maturity and personal development that comes from marriage. Additionally, the application sindoor heralds a wife's becoming a distinct member of a household/family unit.
 - 2. On the other hand, it is worn by a woman— at times coercively—as a gesture of pure devotion towards her husband. In this sense, the womanhood symbolized by sindoor comes from a process by which a woman becomes an extension of her husband. The subservience implicit in this conception of womanhood turns her into an object
 - ii. Sindoor as a material in itself
 - 1. Sindoor is traditionally made in the home with an organic mixture of pigments extracted from minerals and spices. Beyond its marital significance, it is believed to stimulate the brain, improving focus and regulating circulation
 - 2. Modernization in India has led to the mass production of sindoor. This mass produced "vermillion" often times has toxic levels of lead and mercury, which when absorbed through the skin can lead to significant brain damage.
 - iii. Vermillion red and its spiritual meaning
 - 1. It is the color typically ascribed to the root chakra. This chakra is understood as a foundation for the self, defining its basic

bodily functions and its essential psychological drives.

2. Nevertheless, sindoor is traditionally applied to the guru chakra, which is associated with higher knowledge and wisdom (developed thought)
2. Making sense of these seemingly irreconcilable contradictions is the essence of overcoming Maya. If Maya is like a strong current in a river, then the Atman's process of transcending it can be understood pushing against this unceasing flow. In Mehta's work it takes on the form of a continuous vibration facilitated by the interaction between gold and sindoor. The Maya (vermillion) exerts its weight on the Atman (gold), seemingly repressing it. The luminescence of the gold, however, allows the Atman to assert itself against Maya once again.
 - a. Mehta clearly discovers optimism in this painful process, recognizing the innate potential of the soul to move through and eventually overcome the deceit of Maya.
 - b. Perhaps this optimism comes from the fact that art itself is her sadhana. We bear witness to her journey to enlightenment in these works and her canvases simultaneously invite us to contend with our own voyage. As we feel the aesthetic purity that has come to define modern and contemporary painting, we discover in Mehta's paintings a reality beyond language that may perhaps guide us to truly understand who we really are.