

Olivia Fraser's Solo 'The Sacred Garden' at Sundaram Tagore Chelsea

BY BIBHU PATTNAIK | APRIL 15, 2016



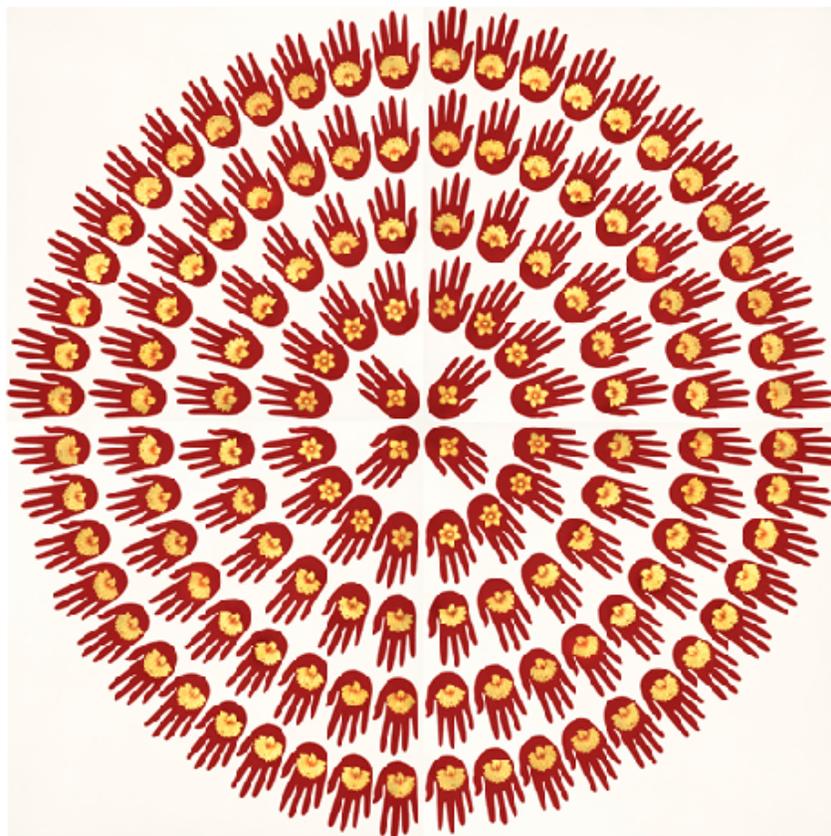
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Chakra, 2015, stone pigment, Arabic gum and gold leaf on handmade Sanganer paper, 72 x 72 inches/182 x 182 cm.
(Sundaram Tagore Gallery)

Delhi-based Scottish artist Olivia Fraser presents her first New York solo exhibition 'The Sacred Garden' at the Sundaram Tagore gallery Chelsea. The exhibition is on from April 7 to April 30. Olivia was born in London and raised in the Highlands of Scotland. She has lived and worked in India since 1989. Deeply

interested in the techniques and vocabulary of traditional Indian miniatures, She aesthetically merges old Indian technique of painting with a modern twist and gives it her own contemporary interpretation.

At the Sacred Garden show, Olivia presenting her 30 paintings which are rooted in her fascination with and practice of yoga and the ways in which yogic meditation involves visualizations of the garden, particularly the *sahasrara* or thousand-petaled lotus, which serves as a visual aid in reaching enlightenment. The title of the show alludes to a concept central to the artist's practice.

Over the years, Olivia has mastered her craft. Working in the manner of Indian miniature masters, Olivia sources most of her materials from Jaipur, including traditional wasli paper made with jute from Nepal and pigments hand-ground from stone, plants and earth, which she binds using Arabic gum. Her squirrel-bristle brushes that end in a singular curved hair allow for careful rendering of the most delicate spirals and lines.

“I fell in love with miniature painting when I first visited the National Museum in Delhi in 1989. I was thrilled by the gem-like colors, detailed brushwork, iterative patterning and burnished flat surfaces, but I was also attracted to the confidence of the iconography, the symbolism, the meanings behind the use of color, shape and infinitely fine line. Seeing Maharaja Man Singh's Jodhpuri paintings from the early nineteenth century inspired by the Nath yogic tradition exhibited in the Garden and the Cosmos (2008) at the Freer Sackler Galleries, I felt I was witnessing something profoundly relevant and eternal. Themes inspired by the scriptures have always been used throughout art history, but this was a particularly Indian vision painted with an Indian art vocabulary and yet it had universal resonance,” she says.

Talking about The Sacred Garden Olivia says, “The garden, an enclosed and cultivated area of landscape that's formalized and acted upon, is fundamental to my work. I take the vocabulary of landscape – trees, flowers, rivers, mountains and sky – and I deconstruct and reduce it to its essence. But I am concerned with inner landscapes rather than external ones, so the majority of my works are painted or enclosed within a square format reflecting the idea of a mandala with its associations of energized sacred space and meditation.”

Olivia is highly influenced by early nineteenth-century Jodhpuri paintings, her intricate, gem-colored works are infused with historical iconography and archetypal language. As with Blue Himalaya, the majority of her compositions are enclosed in a square format, which is similar to the mandala—a symbolic geometric form that denotes a sacred space. Additionally, as with Awakening, where seven hands run vertically and horizontally forming a grid-like pattern, Olivia often groups her subject matter in numbers of spiritual significance, drawing deeply on India's artistic and cultural history.

Olivia's work is included in public and private collections in Australia, France, India, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, the United Kingdom and in the Museum of Sacred Art, Septon, Belgium. Her work has been shown in solo exhibitions in India, China and the United Kingdom. Her work was most recently included in *Forms of Devotion: The Spiritual in Indian Art* at Lalit Kala Galleries, Rabindra Bhavan, in New Delhi, and in *Frontiers Reimagined*, a Collateral Event of the 56th Venice Biennale.

"I'm interested in reaching back to an archetypal language strongly rooted in India's artistic and cultural heritage that can breach borders and be relevant to my twin life between East and West – the same journey that yoga itself has made: something that was ancient and specifically Eastern which has become something universal and contemporary. As an outsider from Scotland, it was never an option for me to paint "traditional Indian miniatures." It seemed clear to me to try to bring the two traditions together in my paintings, fusing the aesthetic virtuosity and precision of one tradition with the imaginative expressiveness and explorations into movement and perception of the other," she adds.

The Sacred Garden by Olivia Fraser is on display at the at the Sundaram Tagore gallery Chelsea from April 7 to April 30.

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