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Tantra Song: Tantric Painting From Rajasthan



Synopsis

This collection of rare, abstract Tantra drawings was conceived when the French poet Franck André Jamme stumbled on a small catalogue of Tantric art at a Paris bookseller's stall. The volume included writings by Octavio Paz and Henri Michaux, and Jamme became fascinated by the images' affinity with modern art and poetry. He read voraciously and even journeyed to India, searching in vain for Tantric practitioners, until a bus accident on the road to Jaipur sent him home to France with serious injuries. When he returned a few years later, he met a soothsayer who proclaimed that Jamme had now paid sufficient tribute to the goddess Shakti and required him to take a vow: he must visit the tantrikas alone or only in the company of a loved one. Since then, Jamme has gained extraordinary access to very private communities of adepts and their intensely beautiful works. These contemporary, anonymous drawings from Rajasthan are unlike the more familiar strands of Tantric art--the geometric yantras, or erotic illustrations of the Kama Sutra. The progeny of seventeenth-century illustrated religious treatises, these drawings have evolved into a distinct visual lexicon designed to awaken heightened states of consciousness and are imbued with specific spiritual meanings (e.g. spirals and arrows for energy, an inverted triangle for Shakti). A revelatory volume on this occluded genre of Indian art, *Tantra Song* is a convergence of east and west, the spiritual and the aesthetic, the ancient and the modern. Franck André Jamme is the author of more than a dozen volumes of poetry. His translated works (by John Ashbery, Charles Borkuis, David Kelley and others) include *New Exercises*, *Another Silent Attack*, *The Recitation of Forgetting* and *Extracts of the Life of a Beetle*. He has collaborated on books with a number of artists including Philippe Favier, Suzan Frecon, Acharya Vyakul and Hanns Schimansk. A specialist in Art Brut, Tantric and tribal art of India, he has participated in exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Beaux-Art de Paris and The Drawing Center, among others.

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Customer Reviews

It could be a cult classic: the debut edition of Siglio Press's *Tantra Song*—one of the only books to survey the elusive tradition of abstract Tantric painting from Rajasthan, India—sold out in a swift six weeks. Rendered by hand on found pieces of paper and used primarily for meditation, the works depict deities as geometric, vividly hued shapes and mark a clear departure from Tantric art's better-known figurative styles. They also resonate uncannily with lineages of twentieth-century art—from the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism to Minimalism—as well as with much painting today. Rarely have the ancient and the modern come together so fluidly. In *Tantra Song*, Jamme assembles some of the most pulsating works he's acquired, while unpacking his experiential knowledge of Tantra's cosmology. (Lauren O'Neil-Butler *The Paris Review*) The paintings Jamme found, bought and is now showing to the world are full of color and power, contemplative but not always serene, and above all enigmatic—at least to those, Western and Indian alike, who are not initiates of Tantra. Circles, squares, triangles and ovals (the latter a reference to the "Shiva linga," the ancient Indian phallic emblem) interact and sometimes even seem to leap from the paper, animated by contrasts of complimentary colors and by the arrows, dots and spirals that swirl about inside them. (John Dorfman *Art & Antiques*) The stunning images abstract key symbols of Tantric metaphysics and cosmogony, from the bindu, a dot symbolizing the undifferentiated absolute, to the negative space of the shunya, the absolute void of the supreme deity. But what makes these works extraordinary is the poetic contrast between the seeming simplicity of their minimalist geometric forms and the complex, textured humanity of their handmade paper, water stains, and imperfect text—two opposing currents, which ebb and flow in a delicate osmotic balance that could never be achieved digitally, on a sterile screen. Aesthetically breathtaking and framed in a powerful story about curiosity, creative restlessness, and obsession, *Tantra Song* is a singular convergence of East and West, bound to mesmerize. (Maria Popova *Brain Pickings*) The abstract paintings shown here are not by Kazimir Malevich or Paul Klee but by Hindu tantra devotees—the anonymous heirs to a pictorial tradition that dates to the 1600s. Painted on salvaged paper and rarely measuring more than a foot high, the images possess a strange kinship with 20th-century art. And their agelessness cast a spell over Franck André Jamme, a French poet who nearly got himself killed

tracking down these works across the deserts of Rajasthan. (Stephen Heyman The New York Times: T Magazine) It is an evocation of the image as a threshold leading to new dimensions of meaning, a revelatory understanding that some images are more than mere data; they are instead vital seeds, living carriers of possibility. Born of 25 years worth of research, travel, and involvement, this book offers a selection of rare, abstract Hindu tantric paintings culled from Jamme's personal collection. It's an exceptional example of beautiful obsession by a self-proclaimed passionate amateur (Jamme, one of France's leading contemporary poets and the author of more than a dozen books, clearly states in the text that he is not an expert on these mysterious paintings). (Craig Olson The Brooklyn Rail)

What a wonderful surprise to stumble on...incredible attention to printing these exquisite paintings. The commentary is also inspiring and insightful. Opens many doors of perception when these are used as meditation tools as Jamme suggests.

These private devotional artworks are stunning in their power. The reproductions do an excellent job of capturing the delicate and subtle details. I wish I could see these in person!

The images in this catalogue are very well documented, as is the relationship the collector had with them. The type of painting is unusual for various reasons which are outlined in the book, and their significance to the collector and curators seems respectful of the individuals and culture they are coming from.

Tantra Song is one of the most precious books I own. It has been a revelation to me. I open it and drop into a meditative state...remarkable work.

Beautifully written, plates are marvellously done. Gave it as a gift to my dearest friend, not a bad recommendation.

Gorgeous book on Tantric works.

Absolutely beautiful paintings and an intelligent well-done book. 2nd printing. The first printing sold out almost instantly. A good deal.

This book is breathtaking because the art is, I refer back to it every so often simply for aesthetic inspiration.

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