

The Douglas Hyde Gallery
April 1 - June 1, 2011

Gallery 1
Shiva Linga Paintings

Gallery 2
'Spiritual Voices'
(From the war diaries)
Alexander Sokurov

Gallery 1

Shiva Linga Paintings



Image:
Anonymous tantric painting, Shiva Linga, 1979, Jaipur
Unspecified paint on found paper
15 x 9.75"
Courtesy of Feature Inc., New York

Shiva Linga Paintings

'Tantra', an esoteric and complex branch of Hinduism, might be explained in simple terms as a path towards spiritual perfection and magical power.

These rare Tantric images by anonymous modern painters from Rajasthan in northwestern India were intended to further the practice of meditation; they are part of an unbroken tradition in which originality is not considered important. Nevertheless, as in many forms of traditional art and craft, there are subtle and beautiful differences between the touch and sensibility of the individual paintings.

Although the exhibition includes a few examples of other imagery from the Tantric canon, most of the paintings depict 'Shiva linga'. The Sanskrit word 'lingam', originally meaning 'mark' or 'sign', often refers to the phallus or symbol of male creative energy that is complementary to the 'yoni', which means both 'source' and 'female'. The term 'Shiva lingam', however, describes one of the forms of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and transformation and one of the trinity of deities that also includes Brahma and Vishnu. It shows him in his unborn and invisible state.

Unlike sculptural 'Shiva linga', which are commonly phallic in shape, the linga in these paintings are ovoid and accrue some of the symbolic associations of the 'egg-shaped cosmos', a concept that can be traced back to ancient Sanskrit scriptures such as the Brahmanda Purana. (The idea of the 'hiranyagarbha', the 'golden womb' or 'golden egg' that symbolizes the birth of the cosmos and the source of all energy, is another point of comparison). Each painting, an image of liminal space, depicts creation and dissolution.

Shiva, above all, is responsible for change. He causes both death and destruction and, more benignly, the elimination of the ego and false identification with form.

The Douglas Hyde Gallery gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Hudson, at Feature Inc., New York, from whom the paintings have been borrowed. A book, published by Feature Inc., accompanies the exhibition.

Talk

'The Liminal'

John Hutchinson will give a talk on the Shiva linga paintings, 'Spiritual Voices' by Alexander Sokurov, and 'Saunter', the Gallery's most recent publication, with particular reference to the idea of 'liminality'.

Wednesday, April 6, at 1:15pm

Gallery 2

'Spiritual Voices'
(From the war diaries)
Alexander Sokurov



Image:
Still from 'Spiritual Voices', Part 2
Alexander Sokurov
1995

'Spiritual Voices'

(From the war diaries)

Alexander Sokurov

Do you often pray?

What would I be without God?

But what does God do for you?

Nothing.

This beautiful documentary by the celebrated film-maker Alexander Sokurov is structured like a diary; the narrator records and comments on the lives of Russian soldiers guarding the frontier of Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 1994. It is bleak mountainous terrain, the source of some of the highest peaks in the world.

Despite the specific social and political context of the film, Sokurov draws the viewer's attention to the inner spiritual world that lies at its heart. Nothing violent appears on screen; the film's slow pace, which is both inexorable and gripping, reflects the boredom and anxiety that fill the lives of the soldiers. They are in limbo, with little to do but wait until they can go home to Russia. In every sense this is a film about borders and liminality; the soldiers live in no-man's-land, in the shadow of continual, if distant, awareness of death. It is not, however, a disheartening story; Sokurov's commentary is intimate, and the tone of the film is elegiac and dreamlike.

'Spiritual Voices' begins with a prolonged meditation on a melancholic snowy landscape, possibly in Russia, accompanied by murmured reflections on the discrepancy between the sublimity of Mozart's music and his physical disintegration at the end of a short life. It ends with brooding views of a dark mountain range on the Afghan border, the soldiers and the narrator preparing to return.

It's time to go back to Russia.

In Russia it's still cold. Snow and silence.

And not a soul.

1995 / Russian with English subtitles / Colour /
327 minutes in 5 parts (38 min., 33 min.,
87 min., 79 min., 90 min.)

The film will be screened from 12pm between
Monday and Friday; and from 11am on Saturdays.

Courtesy of Doc & Film International

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Opening Hours:
Monday - Friday, 11am-6pm
Thursday, 11am-7pm
Saturday, 11am-4:45pm

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