



AWDB SPOTLIGHT: Interview with Sinta Tantra

AWDB speaks with Sinta Tantra about the inspirations behind the eclectic shapes in her [paintings](#) and her solo exhibition 'Shrines of Gaiety', showing at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (Tower Bridge) in London until 20 December 2023.

Inspired by her Balinese heritage, 'Shrines of Gaiety' is an exploration of Sinta's unique upbringing. Immersing the atmosphere with incense and Hindu chants from her home in Ubud, Bali, with a Balinese postcard from the 1930s, the exhibition touches on the past, depicting a pre-colonial Bali before its bustling tourism. Sinta's [paintings](#) of abstract floating shapes, with a colour scheme of shimmering gold and midnight blue, reflect the balance of light and dark, another central aspect of her [artistic practice](#).

We visited Sinta in her London studio and spoke to her about the influence of her identity and how it translates through her [paintings](#) and [installations](#).

Growing up between Bali, the US and UK, how has your upbringing informed your [artistic practice](#)?

I think it's something about being both an insider and outsider. So when I'm in London, I feel very much like a Londoner. I can speak like a Londoner, I could order drinks in a pub like a Londoner, I know how to use the bus, or the tube. But you're of colour, so once you go outside of London, it doesn't feel like neutral territory anymore. Then when I go to Bali, I have both insider and outsider status. My parents are very Balinese, but I was brought up in London so I am aware of the traditions, but I don't [practice](#) them everyday. I also feel like we didn't have to be so religious in London, so I think having both an insider and outsider status gives you a sort of superpower into your work as an artist.

Most artists do often feel like they're different, and I think it's a way of surviving. Through that difficulty, you find a connection with making work and that's how you use it as a sort of inspiration.

Out of the places you have lived in, which location has significantly influenced your [artistic practice](#), and how so?

I'm going to be quite greedy and say both London and Bali. I can mention lots of places I haven't lived in, but maybe Rome as well. I chose London because of the academic rigor you get through art schools, institutions, universities and museums in general, which I really love. Also, the respect that contemporary arts, but also historical art and artifacts, are treated here. With Bali, I think for the spirit and the soul, and Italy for their passion for life, which sounds very stereotypical and very 'Eat Pray Love'.

Overall, no one country and no one place is the best place. I think it's all about context; it's all about combining different cultures to form. For me anyway, it is to become inspired and get energy from these places.

What inspires the unique shapes often found in your artworks?

With this particular series, 'Shrines of Gaiety' was inspired by wanting to incorporate some landscape features, such as floral and organic shapes into the work. My previous works are quite rectilinear; lots of straight lines and straight edges. I think if I went down that pure, geometric route, the work would've ended up being reduced to a square or one triangle. For me, 'Shrines of Gaiety' was a way of breaking from that, looking at artists like Matisse, Jean Arp and other modernist artists that enabled me to capture some of those organic shapes into the work.

The sketches were drawn from my parent's' house in Ubud, Bali, overlooking a valley, and then between the drawings and through memory, I started developing these shapes. They are then further developed on the computer, to be transferred onto the canvas.



Sinta Tantra's Studio, 2023. Image courtesy of Art World Database

I see a lot of your works incorporate a darker colour palette, meanwhile the brighter, golden colour takes centre stage in 'Shrines of Gaiety'. Is there a symbolism/reason for that contrast to your older work?

For 'Shrines of Gaiety', I was inspired by a particular short novel written by Paul Scheerbart, 'The Light Club of Batavia' (1912). Batavia is the old word for Jakarta, or the colonial word for Jakarta, and it's set around a dinner party and it's these rich German people. There's also an architect, and people that are so wealthy they don't need to earn a living. But they decide to build a spa somewhere in Batavia, or somewhere in Indonesia, and not of water, but of light. They want to build it in a coal mine, and I thought it was an interesting idea between light and dark, because you can't get any darker than a coal mine.

And then the idea of introducing or filling the coal mine with light. In the novel, they talk about Tiffany lampshades and coloured glass but I thought of this contrast between the gold and the Prussian blue, which is quite absorbent. So, not only do you have the light and dark with the colours, but light and dark with materials. You have the Prussian blue which is tempera paint that absorbs the light, and then the gold that reflects the light. At nighttime, they look completely different than in the daytime; they are fresher and brighter and more like the sun. I think the gold really reflects the surroundings and the light, then the blue paint absorbs the light.



Sinta Tantra's Studio, 2023. Image courtesy of Art World Database

Does this exhibition stray from the stereotypical image people from the west usually have about Bali, and if yes, how?

Yeah! When you think of Bali today, you think of digital nomads living in Canggu. You think it's like paradise, you could live really cheaply there. It's a place of escapism, and I think my exhibition tries to show both, although I wouldn't say the darker side of paradise. With my paintings, I'm interested in what happens on the surface, but I'm also interested in what makes the painting. There's always exposed linen symbolising not just the surface or what it represents, but also what makes the painting, which is the cloth, the weave, and the individual threads.

Coming from somewhere in Bali is quite weird, because there's a sort of reality of what it means to be a Balinese woman in a Balinese household, a Balinese family, and a Balinese house. Then you layer that with the western stereotypes of what they think Bali is, which is spirituality and yoga. I think I'm interested in those two overlaps of what is real and what is fiction.

Previously, things were also sort of seen as more binary. For example: self and other, east and west, male and female, right or wrong. I think we're at a time where these binary structures don't quite work, and there are people who are trying to push against them. It's all about the overlaps, and the movements between the two overlaps that makes us human. Something to do with systems and structures, you think of coloniser and colonised. I think it's interesting in contemporary life where one can construct their own reality of what it means to be wherever you're from.

'Shrines of Gaiety' is showing at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (Tower Bridge) in London until 20 December 2023.

INTERVIEW COURTESY OF SINTA TANTRA AND ART WORLD DATABASE, DECEMBER 2023.