

'Surrounding - Sinta Tantra: Installation and Immersion',  
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INCREASING THE RANGE OF ART

# TREBUCHET

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ECOLOGY

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# SURROUNDING

**SINTA TANTRA: INSTALLATION AND IMMERSION**

Mind the gap... Between the shown and the known, we paint our landscapes as people and people as landscapes. We read the world in a face and get to know the world as personal. Whether in art or commerce, how we impose a reality upon the world clashes with the knowledge that the world exists outside our complete control.

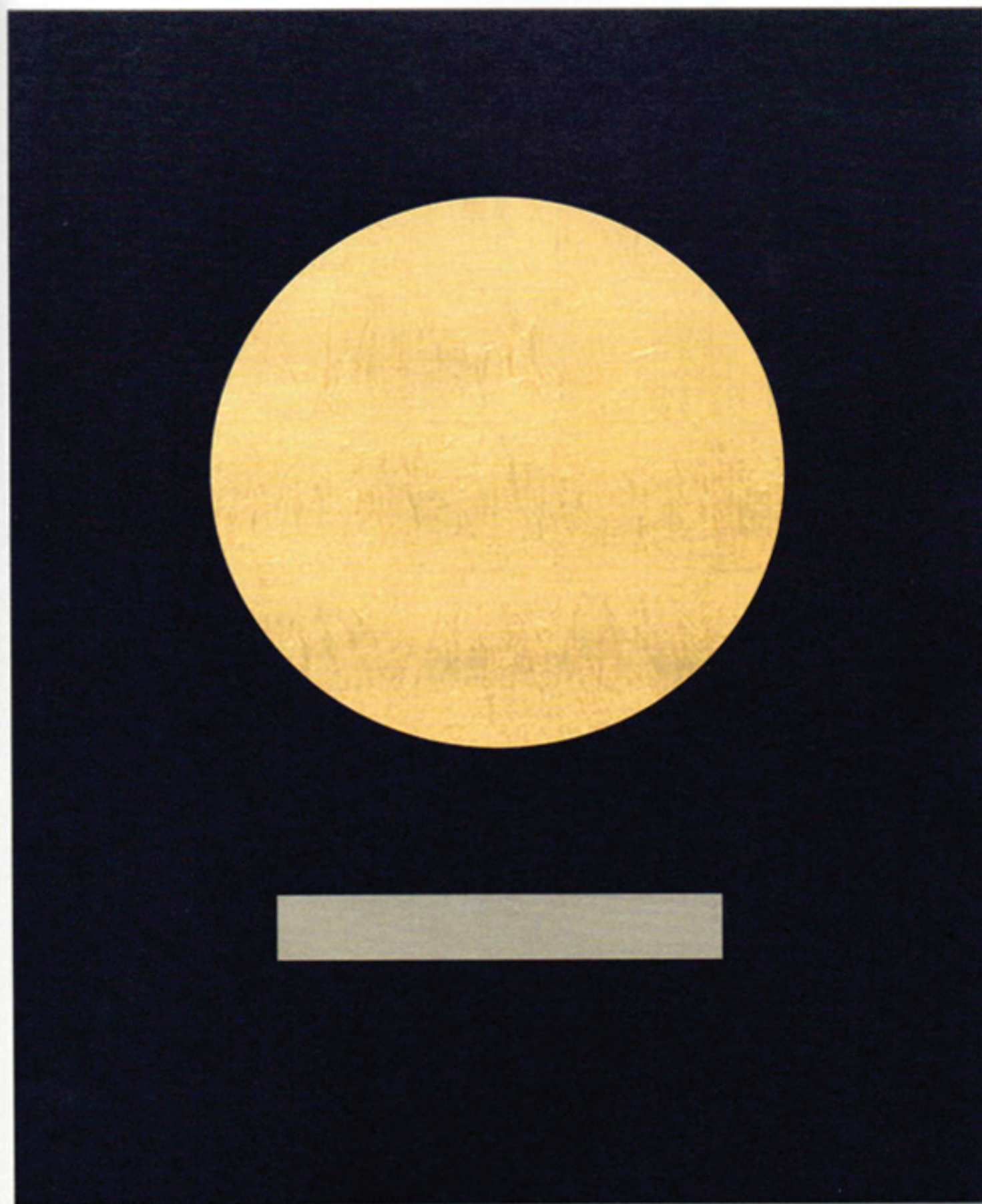
The conceit of art is that we can change it, and perhaps art makes the best of a bad hand, a feint that tells us that if we hold our nerve we can alter the trajectory of events. In her public and private work, artist Sinta Tantra addresses the world from both a physical and cosmological standpoint. Her public work *A Beautiful Sunset Mistaken for a Dawn* (Canary Wharf, 2012) made a place where big and small ideas intersect through a neat language of bold geometric symbols, tracing smoke trails of imagined presences and creating mysterious corners for the viewer to explore. Where do we sit in it all? With reference to her work at Canary Wharf, Sinta explains:

"It's a balance of inserting my identity and my artwork, something that looks out into a sense of formal architectural scale and feeling and the relationship between body and something that's framed as art. [With public art] I take into consideration a bit of the history but more about the movement and flow of how people walk around. So the bridge is quite an interesting one, because you have movements in all aspects. You have movement on the top of the bridge, which is super exciting, because you've got a train going through it. It presents itself to you as you come out of the tube station. You could be on the bus or you could see it when you swim in Canary Wharf."

In working towards a concept of the 'socioecological', Debbie Kaspar, in her essay 'Ecological Habitus: Toward a Better Understanding of Socioecological Relations' (Kaspar 2009), suggests that we should consider the concept of ecology as a nexus of relations existing within a specific social, biophysical and historical context. Knowingly or not, we create and are created by the idea of where we are and the implications of that environment. For example, while different people will have different ideas of what Canary Wharf (a high-rise financial district in London) means, there is a concept of Canary Wharf that people have emphasised by building and maintaining it in a certain way. The ideas which thrive reveal a power to manifest a concept of place in an architectural and commercial context. However, it is the people in themselves who bolster these ideas (or not). Different branches of people demonstrate a variety of ironic, adjacent or resistant stances towards the concepts of power,

**A SPIRITUAL SENSE OF  
PHYSICALITY MEANS THAT  
YOU'RE CONTRIBUTING  
SOCIALY, PHYSICALLY TO  
THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

*Full Moon, 2023*





**VECTORS IN HER  
WORK, TOUCHING ON  
COLONIAL HISTORY AND  
TROPICALISM**

capital and corporate entities that Canary Wharf, for example, is seen to epitomise. Moreover, changes in time, light, water or temperature alter the physical effect of the place on the individual, casting symbolic shadows over the grand stories written skyward.

"For research, I watched [the bridge] for 24 hours. I wanted to understand the flow of how people walked around and how the space was activated. There's always people there because 'Money Never Sleeps', so there's always people working on particular floors. And so there's always a bit of activity. And then armies of people coming from eight to six, seven, the rush hour period. So it was interesting studying the flow of people, and you put yourself against the flow of the tide, how the time of day and how the sun rose and sunsets.

"For me it's about understanding the concept of time when I look into a project, a space, and it's absorbing that energy and creating something afterwards. So it goes through some filter. I don't know how to describe it, but it's how I base a lot of my work. I'm not interested in portraying a particular story or narrative, it's the narrative or story you [the viewer] bring as well. With a lot of abstract work, the story that you bring into the work comes from understanding time and space in that particular location, filtered through a creative process.

"I'm interested in the immersive journey the viewer is taking, where the journey starts and finishes and how I want them to navigate around the space, and creating areas which punctuate and recede. I often describe myself as a painter / public artist but actually the roots of my work come from installation. And even when I do a straightforward painting show, the importance of creating an immersive experience is actually the priority."

A number of motifs - lines, circles and Matisse- or Miró-like organic shapes - recur in Tantra's work. Her use of deep universal symbols creates a dreamlike atmosphere. However, the concrete nature of these shapes gives it a lucidity and strong sense of intention. When abstract work fails it feels stylistically glib, flatly contrived or clichéd, and yet there is a power that continues to call people to explore it as a vehicle for a creative vision. Tantra's work, aware of its internal space (in her private works) or how it works with its environment (in public works), manages to encapsulate or enhance an immanence, the presence of place. But this isn't a didactic description of place; it's open, inhabitable, and contains anchors to pique experience, terrains of meaning to discover. One of the common shifting elements in her work is the circle:

Goddess, 2023

"No one's actually asked me about the circle. When I started circles a few years ago it was different from what I'm thinking now. Circles now are probably more about nature and relationships to the cosmic. Not necessarily planets either, but something - well - a lot of my work is about universality.

Take gold. Throughout the ages it's always been a fascinating material. People are drawn to it. And it's the same with circles. Recently I was in Norway and I saw cave paintings and there was a circle-shaped thing. There's something beyond the present that connects us, maybe ancestrally, or from generations or civilizations ago from different periods. So I love the universal, how the shape has presented itself, throughout the ages, throughout different languages from whatever time that gives connection. The people in the street might find abstract work quite difficult to comprehend. But they can read simple things; a circle, a line, even if they might not necessarily know what it represents.

When you reduce the work to a few elements (gold, circles, lines), when it is a lot more minimal or reduced, in a way you focus on the balance of things that are known. Perhaps they have even existed in different times and civilizations and centuries. And you could read into that however you want as a visual artist, or you also have things that come from the artist's hand. I use particular shapes that come from my drawing. I love that combination of having something known and unknown because it gives a prompt for the viewer to read an abstract work."

This idea of a totality of effect, rather than a reductionist logic of interpretation is perhaps an optimistic signpost for contemporary art. After the bombastic, publicity-hungry era of the YBAs, this meditative approach offers an answer to the question 'why is art meaningful now?' The psychological background to 2023 is a self-conscious society of productised social responsibility and output-oriented personal development (see mind hacks, the 4hr-work week, increase focus and avoid daydreaming). As a result, surface-level, pop-influenced art such as KAWS, Hirst and Banksy are read at least in an immediate or unreflective way. They are social footnotes to a capital culture that often rejects intangibility or nuance for column inches on shock and a price tag. They are the sugary flavours that titillate, but also heighten our hunger for more substantial fare, a land of our own amongst satisfaction and distraction, a pilgrimage to what we hope is a solidity of self.

Over the past five years questions of identity have often been conflated with an historical narrative defined by post-

Ecology  
Sinta Tantra

**THE BRIDGE IS QUITE  
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MOVEMENTS IN  
ALL ASPECTS**

*A Beautiful Sunset Mistaken For A Dawn, Canary Wharf London, 2012*





#### References

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capitalist or post-colonialist contexts. Such contexts are relevant in that they allude to both 'how we got here' and 'what it means to be here', but are limited in that they often do not show a positive way forward. Tantra tacitly summons these vectors in her work, touching on colonial history and tropicalism in places, and yet the central work is to synthesise these connections with a change in perspective. Juxtaposing the day-to-day traffic of financial transactions in Canary Wharf with lunar perspectives and tidal motions links our realities forward and back. Ecologies must be considered as sites in dynamic flux. We live in active repose amongst drifting symbolic galaxies, analogous to quantum superposition where we exist in multiple states at any one time.

"[My sense of ecology] comes from my fascination [with the world] and probably developed from working in the public realm. Ideas around scale and how we could be this small - we're really *small* - but actually in our heads we feel big because I suppose there's the ego involved. If you're Balinese, you have this awareness of the universe and your ancestors. And it's that scale of going from big to small you feel it even in a city, when you're listening to podcasts on your earphones and you're thinking about this realm, but then you're activating the city. And whether it's somewhere in Bali with its religious festivals and family life, or you're in a city or alone and you're running, getting the tube, getting Ubers, whatever, this idea of the massive in a spiritual sense of physicality means that you're contributing socially, physically to the wider community that you belong to."

A socioecological perspective offers the viewer a deeper appreciation of public works that exist in a particular place, and also abstract works in general. Artworks by their nature encourage us to include our own cultural position into their appreciation. What we see and recognise in a work has a lot to do with who we are, and better works separate themselves from the lesser by revealing the patterns and dynamic relations that tie us to place and unite us.