

FRESTONIAN GALLERY

FORM / SYMBOL

SONIA DELAUNAY / AUSTIN EDDY / SAGARIKA SUNDARAM

Private View: Wednesday 16th March, 6-9pm

Exhibition: 17th March – 23rd April 2022

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The exhibition Form / Symbol presents three artists whose practices engage with precepts of colour theory, physical craft and ever-evolving symbology. Spread across different mediums and generations, the works of Delaunay, Eddy and Sundaram typify a love of making and interaction with material as both a celebration of surface aesthetics and a window into much deeper notions of – variously – narrative, philosophy & tradition.

Sonia Delaunay's practice spanned over six decades and encapsulated all the elements above at one time or another, as her early development (alongside her husband Robert Delaunay) of 'Orphist' art combined a generalised sense of narrative through its initial grounding in architectural imagery, but swiftly moved beyond the representational and into the realm of celebration of pure colour and movement – casting behind it the more muted and overwrought compositions of the early Cubists and Vorticists. By the late sixties and early seventies (the period from which the gouaches, fabric works and prints in this exhibition arise) Delaunay had further refined her style into an intensely individual and recognisable graphic language, that she applied to a dizzying array of media. From her early engagement with design beyond painting – beginning as far back as 1918 when commissioned by her friend Sergei Diaghilev to create costumes for the Ballets Russes – Delaunay would create endless and seemingly intuitive compositions that somehow also always hint at a certain hidden order. The interaction of colour planes, textures and divisions that tell, as can be found in music or dance, a story that is without content yet utterly compelling.

The notion of a 'hidden language', of an implied meaning, is strong too in the fantastically intricate textile works of **Sagarika Sundaram**. The phrase 'multi-layered' is employed far too often (and too lazily) with regard to art in all manner of forms – but in Sundaram's extraordinary felted tapestries it applies in the most literal and powerful sense. Through her use of traditional techniques and materials, Sundaram's narrative is one passing back through time, though concerned far more with the connection of the present than any sense of nostalgia. She writes in 2021:

I treat textiles like a body – rupturing the flat surface, revealing what lies beneath layers – the sexual, painful, ugly, beautiful – interrogating what it means to be both of and alien to this world. I use abstraction to reinterpret textile as mutant, botanical, and psychedelic forms. By estranging what is familiar, I create work that possesses its own unique life. My material, my way of making, traces a lineage of makers spanning 15,000 years. Through my work I'm looking for our shared fingerprint.

Through this highly involved and labour-intensive practice Sundaram forms the conditions for works of rare confidence and impact. Densely saturating her works with uncompromising colour and patternation – Sundaram draws on a wide variety of sources in both the eastern and western canons of modern art and antiquity. It is however in the intuitive building – as Delaunay built before her – of her own language that these works may best be read.

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For every language – split as we are into a thousand tongues – there must be the possibility of translation, and in the practice of **Austin Eddy** we find a sublime process of the translation of the autobiographical and the poetic into variously joyous, haunting and often tantalisingly ambiguous painting. In common with Delaunay and Sundaram, Eddy creates work across a variety of media – incorporating drawing, sculpture and poetry – but it is perhaps in his painting that we find the purest expression of a talent for both composition and veiled storytelling. The bird motifs in this recent series can be seen as totemic ‘stand-ins’ for Eddy’s own internal emotional landscape, as well as the events playing out in his life and of those surrounding him. The use of colour theory in his work can be read both emotively and in the context of his own grounding in art history – in particular the influence of the Fauves and the the Colour-Field movement that emerged in the 1940’s in New York, his adopted hometown.

The impassivity of the central figures is offset by their surroundings, and the colour combinations that hint at varying emotional states. The suite of paintings in ‘Form / Symbol’ was created during the latter stages of the pandemic lockdowns in New York, and thus at a time that personal freedoms were curtailed, which may account for the stillness of the compositions, as may the incidence of loss to the artist during that time. These melancholic notes are balanced, however, by the sheer charm and edge of optimism in the work. Eddy’s is a language, too, of celebration.

NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

Sonia Delaunay was born in Gradižsk, Ukraine in 1885. She was a painter and designer who, along with her husband Robert Delaunay and other artists, founded the Orphism art movement. After moving first to Russia then Germany, Delaunay studied drawing at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe between 1903 and 1905, before moving to Paris, where she attended the Académie de la Palette and was inspired by the works of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and the Fauves. Through the development of her work in painting, textiles and printmaking throughout the following six decades she established herself as one of the key figures in first the French Avant-Garde movement, and latterly as one of the foremost European abstract artists of the twentieth century. In 1964 she was the first female artist to be granted a retrospective at the Louvre, and in 1975 was awarded the Légion d’Honneur. She died in Paris in 1979, at the age of 94.

Austin Eddy was born in 1986 in Boston, MA, US, currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, US. He earned his BFA in Painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010. Recent exhibitions include *Seeuferweg* at Livie Fine Art, Zurich, CH (2021); *Light Reflecting Distance* at The Pit, Los Angeles, CA, US (2021); *Birds At Night* at Althuis Hofland Fine Arts, Amsterdam, NL (2020); *Cold On The 4th Of July* at Institute 193 B, New York, NY, US (2020); and *The Poet And The Muse* at Knust Kunz, Munich, DE (2020). In the coming year, a monograph of the artist’s practice will be published in conjunction with Knust Kunz, Munich.

Sagarika Sundaram (b. Kolkata) lives and works in New York. In 2022 she was awarded The Hopper Prize, a Bronx Museum AIM Fellowship and a residency at Art Omi. In 2020 she received the Tishman Award for Excellence in Climate, Environmental Justice & Sustainability and the Michael Kalil Endowment for Smart Design. She is Visiting Assistant Professor at the Pratt Institute. Her work has recently been exhibited at Frieze New York (2021, with Jhaveri Contemporary) and Nature Morte, New Delhi. Sundaram graduated with an MFA in Textiles from Parsons / The New School, NY and previously studied at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad & at MICA in Baltimore.