

"Rupy C. Tut "The Eighth Color"

by Caroline Picard

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Rupy C. Tut, "Sweet Maple," 2025, handmade pigments on hemp paper, 14 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 1 1/2".

All images courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.

Continuing through December 20, 2025

Rupy C. Tut's exhibition of new work builds on the ornate legacy of Indian miniature painting in order to conceive expansive psychological landscapes that envision ecological balance and well-being. Tut attributes the show's title, "The Eighth Color," to the esteemed Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam (1913-2005), who described "the eighth color of love" as a "spiritual passion for the equality of humankind as a whole." In a world otherwise roiled by injustice and environmental devastation, Tut's work establishes the picture plane as a portal to interior spaces of rest, strength, and potential.

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The wall at the entrance to the gallery features five figurative landscape paintings on handmade paper. Each small work belongs to a family of proportion and subject evoking a sequence of dreams that, by way of juxtaposition, illustrates how consciousness can be in two places at once — in a state of repose and equally of movement. "Sweet Maple" is filled with a grand, mature Maple tree. Beneath its intricate network of colorful foliage, a monkey plays with a ball. A second monkey is mostly hidden behind the tree's trunk. On the other side of the tree, a young woman in a yellow leotard reclines, hand pressed upon loose pages. She rests on a blue and white striped blanket that evokes the pages of a book.

"They Live Across the Seven Seas" depicts the same yellow-clad figure, this time seated on billowy clouds over a body of water. Below the figure, fish plunge into and break the water's surface, suggesting layers of awareness, from the air to the earth to the impenetrable depths of the water. The figure is peaceful and alert, her loose dark hair whipped by the wind as she gazes down upon the patterned landscape.



Rupy C. Tut, "Sipping Nostalgia," handmade pigments on hemp paper, 14 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 1 1/2".

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In "Sipping Nostalgia" clouds recede and the same figure, this time on her knee, sits on a blanket tying her hair. Although she is solitary, a suitcase is set on the blanket by her side, along with teacups, a basket, and a purse-like satchel. Green trees and foliage populate one side of the picture, where nests a small dove-like bird. Deep umber hills extend into the distance behind the figure. Although the figure appears calm, at rest, everything she possesses suggests arrivals and departures, including the absence of a second tea-drinker whose cup rests on the blanket. Two additional works, "Sweet Mango" and "My Friendly Forest," feature the figure at rest beneath a tree or seated on a knee, drinking tea with cranes, and repeating the juxtaposition between the obscurity of sleep — where the young woman is all but concealed beneath a blanket — and the presence of consciousness.

The figure in those works is noticeably and consistently at ease in her environment, whether at rest, reading, or observing the movement of others. The landscape is rendered in patterns that contribute to an overall sense of cohesion and order, built from a palette of eight natural colors that Tut produced from zinc oxide, ground silver leaf, cinnabar, realgar, yellow lead oxide, verdigris, and indigo. Not only does this structure challenge the Western six-color scheme of primary and secondary colors, Tut's practice of preparing her own paint eschews modern modes of industrial pigment production. Each painting thus reifies a connection between earthly materials and the human body laboring to convert raw material into workable pigments.

Beyond this initial sequence are eight large-scale paintings (all 2025). In "The Blue Planet" five identical women in yellow leotards surround a flowering tree. Unlike previous figures, they wear or carry cummerbunds. One figure hangs upside down from a tree branch. Another peers from behind a tree trunk. Still another rests, eyes closed, by the tree's base near another reclining figure, eyes open, peering upwards. The fifth sits near a stick in the grassy ground. The figures do not make eye contact, nor do they gaze outward beyond the picture plane. They are immersed within the circumference of the tree's protection. That circle of energy is further bounded by its positioning within a sixteen-pointed band of blue and white-wave patterns, further situated in a golden field patterned with a light cream yellow and loosely-brushed wave forms. It is as though the psyche of our previously solitary figure has multiplied, describing a whole world and cosmology of identical women engaged in different tasks. An orange belt hangs from one branch of the tree, suggesting another figure that might be lingering somewhere out of view.

A theme of duality emerges in "Meet Me in the Mirror," in which two mountains feature two faces in profile. Other works distinguish the human figure from plants and animals. "Battle Ready" depicts the figure emerging from the landscape. The faces exposed in the peaks of two mountains, cast in cool colors as though backlit at sunset, gaze at one another with one chin tucked down, the other level, each with an expression of calm determination, a roiling cloud-patterned sky behind them. Further dualities appear in "Tune In," in which two figures in green leotards sit across from one another, hair windswept, each holding one end of a devotional cymbal strung together by a thin black rope. "States of Inner Conflict" is the most dynamically composed among the works, particularly where two figures press against one another, upright but wrestling, their bodies poised in tension and once again, one face concealed as the other looks up and elsewhere.

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Rupy C. Tut, "Meet Me in the Mirror," 2025, handmade pigments on linen, 60 x 80 x 1 1/4".

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The final work in the show, "Trade Offs of Love," depicts the same two figures, one in a lotus pond — an iconic religious site of spiritual transcendence — the other sitting on that pond. These two make eye contact, offering each other lotus blossoms in a blue wave-patterned and red lotus-patterned leotard. They are diminished in scale by the massive lotus leaves around them.

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In a sense, this exhibition is about interior reconciliation, portraying the impossible journeys one travels within oneself, even as the physical body remains at rest. It's about celebrating equilibrium when it occurs, celebrating it enough to carry it within oneself, and thereby retain the ability to reproduce it against all odds and in any capacity.



Rupy C. Tut, "Trade Offs of Love," 2025, handmade pigments on linen, 40 x 120 x 1 1/4".

When interviewed, Tut often mentions her own experience of the South Asian diaspora: "If something happened five years from now or ten years from now or even tomorrow, would it be this home that I missed or what's created within it? ... And it's definitely what's created within it. I don't know if that's a mechanism that developed as a grandchild of refugees or as an immigrant who had to say goodbye to her childhood home or as a human responding to modern society." Although "The Eighth Color" does not directly address that history, there is an uncanny stillness in each composition, a sense of anticipation, as though these frames are an exception, a meditative opportunity to gather the self through a geological time frame. Inherent in this is the suggestion that art, and being with art, is a method of articulating a bridge between the past and present.

In Tut's paintings, history looks back. The violent colonial enactment of the Radcliff Line, dividing India and Pakistan in 1947, now returns its gaze upon America in 2025, facing a softly rain-patterned San Francisco street in mid-autumn, shortly after our own government pivoted from deploying the National Guard on the city's streets. Given the disorder of our present moment and the xenophobic encroachment on civil liberties, "The Eighth Color" plants a countervailing conception that prompts the mind to gather strength, embrace multiplicities and triumph for the love and equity of humankind.

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