

# whitewall

"Rupy C. Tut Explores Eco-Feminism, Diaspora, and Love Beyond Borders"

By Katy Donoghue

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Portrait courtesy of Rupy C. Tut, 2025, photo by Em Monforte.

In her luminous new exhibition at Jessica Silverman, Rupy C. Tut weaves ancestral memory, feminist agency, and ecological care into dreamlike paintings rooted in traditional Indian techniques.

At **Jessica Silverman**, "The Eighth Color" marks a resonant new chapter for **Rupy C. Tut**, whose intricately painted worlds bring together eco-feminism, migration, and spiritual introspection. The exhibition—her second with the gallery and first in its main space—unfolds across paintings on linen and handmade paper, each shaped by Tut's mastery of traditional Indian painting and her commitment to storytelling that centers women, land, and collective humanity.

Born in Chandigarh and raised in the U.S. after migrating at age 12, Rupy C. Tut draws deeply from the psychology of diaspora. A polyglot and environmentalist, she approaches place as something earned and cared for, never assumed. Her lush **landscapes**—populated by feminine figures, arboreal ancestors, water, and mountains—suggest both refuge and reckoning, evoking idyllic harmony alongside anxieties of climate disaster and gendered constraint.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

The exhibition's title nods to poet **Amrita Pritam's** notion of "the eighth color of love," understood as a spiritual passion for human equality. For Rupy C. Tut, this idea becomes a **painterly** ethic. Using handmade pigments and a deliberately limited palette, she questions inherited hierarchies while preserving time-honored practices—telling stories that were long absent from the canon, and imagining new myths rooted in care, reflection, and shared responsibility.

**WHITEWALL: What was the starting point for "The Eighth Color"?**

**RUPY C. TUT:** The conceptual framework for the show begins with my core practices: self-reflection and self-awareness, in both my personal and professional spheres of existence. At the beginning and end of every day, I mentally note what I intend to do with this opportunity to be painting and to be alive each day. It is a way to explore our individual imperfections and unique qualities. Understanding my own imperfections as an individual makes me empathetic to those of others. Self-reflection is a pathway to love, for ourselves and for our communities.

"Self-reflection is a pathway to love, for ourselves and for our communities,"  
Rupy C. Tut

This pathway to love, presented as an **exhibition** of 8 large paintings and 5 small works on paper, is the world of *The Eighth Color*. Due to both of these practices, the show was designed around the Self as the central character. *The Eighth Color* begins with the work of understanding the Self as a marker, a guide, and evidence of humanity. Each painting in the show was built around the existence of duality and at least two sides of a self-reflective moment. Sometimes the moment or painting hones in on the act of looking and turning inward and in another moment, it is about the nature of an inner conflict that keeps us awake at night. With these works, as with many of my works, the environment shows up as a supporter of, and a witness to, the difficult task of self-reflection and self-awareness.

Amrita Pritam and the Eighth Color of Love

**WW: How did you connect with Amrit Pritam and the idea of "the eighth color of love"?**

**RCT:** Amrita Pritam was the feminist hero I wanted and needed during my early 20s when my own ideas of boundaries, space, and gender were solidifying. Her poetry and her way of life received almost contradicting treatment—her poetry was praised and her life choices criticized. Her choices contradicting what people expected from her was what excited me about her persona. Her poetry, specifically the poem from which I borrow the show's title, stirred questions about womanhood, patriarchy, love, and humanity. I was intrigued to hear a Punjabi feminist voice, similar to my grandmother and mother, question and guide the way one can have love for country and how it can be achieved. It highlights the role women can also play in shaping a country's future. With the current directions and changes in our own country, this poem and titles pose an intention of making this place a home for all through the acts of self-reflection, self-awareness, and love.

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Installation view of Rupy C. Tut: "The Eighth Color," 2025, photo by Phillip Maisel, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

## Color as Meaning and Destiny



Rupy C. Tut, "Meet Me in the Mirror," 2025, Handmade pigments on linen; Diptych Overall: 60 x 80 x 1 1/4 inches / 152.4 x 203.2 x 3.175 cm, Linen (each): 60 x 40 x 1 1/4 inches / 152.4 x 101.6 x 3.175 cm, (RCT00070PNT); Photo by Phillip Maisel, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

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**WW:** You stick to eight colors in your palette for this show. Why?

**RCT:** I assign each pigment color that I mix a lineage of emotions and reasons. Yellow lead oxide predominantly signals a place or moment of struggle for my characters, whereas Cinnabar red deepens the earthiness of the conversation in the painting by rooting the story in blood and earth. While I did not intend to limit myself to only seven colors in this show, I believe each show and painting has a destiny it fulfills on its own.

"I assign each pigment color that I mix a lineage of emotions and reasons,"

Rupy C. Tut

The title was chosen after the **painting** was finished, and coincidentally, only seven pigments were the foundation of all of this work. While this was a beautiful emotional coincidence, I do limit the colors I mix to maintain a thoughtful etymology of color as a conceptual building block of my work. As someone who seeks to make sense of our existence and purpose through my work, limiting my pigments to certain colors is to slowly build in layers a world full of meaning, purpose, and intention in my works.

Ancestral Presences: Water, Mountains, Trees



Rupy C. Tut,

"The Six Grandmothers and the Falcon," 2025, Handmade pigments on linen, 60 x 108 inches / 152.4 x 274.3 cm, (RCT00079PNT); Photo by Phillip Maisel, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

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**WW:** Can you tell us about your use of pattern and repetition in your painting? Are there motifs you like to return to?

**RCT:** Water, mountains, and trees are ancestral presences in my work. Water symbolizes the fluidity of the world I navigate as a woman and as an immigrant. At the same time, lines that simulate water-like movements, like the presence of water or wind, mark the passing of time against the ephemeral nature of life. Are we using our time here to improve the world around us? Are we making use of our time here on Earth? These questions are posed by linework that is rendered using a small squirrel hair brush, which has about 3 to 4 hairs. The painting of these lines and their symbolism both speak to the passing of time intentionally in life and in the studio.

Mountains and their grand presence are symbolic of the way I view the presence of my ancestors, specifically their values and teachings, in my own life and practice. The landscapes around me and in my work become home if I can embody the stories and essence of my ancestors within them. I see land as an ancestor because for me, it is a vessel for the stories of my people. I create works with mountains comfortably holding ancestral figures as a way of marking history to include their stories and mine.

I often say to sit under a tree is to sit under a tree, no matter where the tree is growing. Trees as arboreal ancestors support the protagonists as they explore new terrain and nourish themselves for the challenges ahead. *Sweet Mango* (2025), as an arboreal ancestor, allows room and inspiration for play, reflection, rest, and even restraint as these many versions of Self exist under it (*The Blue Planet*). With each mark and each leaf, the trees build slowly into important figures in the paintings. They sway the emotion of the story depending on whether I choose to make them bright, flowering, or reaching down towards the earth.

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