

ArtSeen

# *Anonymous Tantra Paintings*

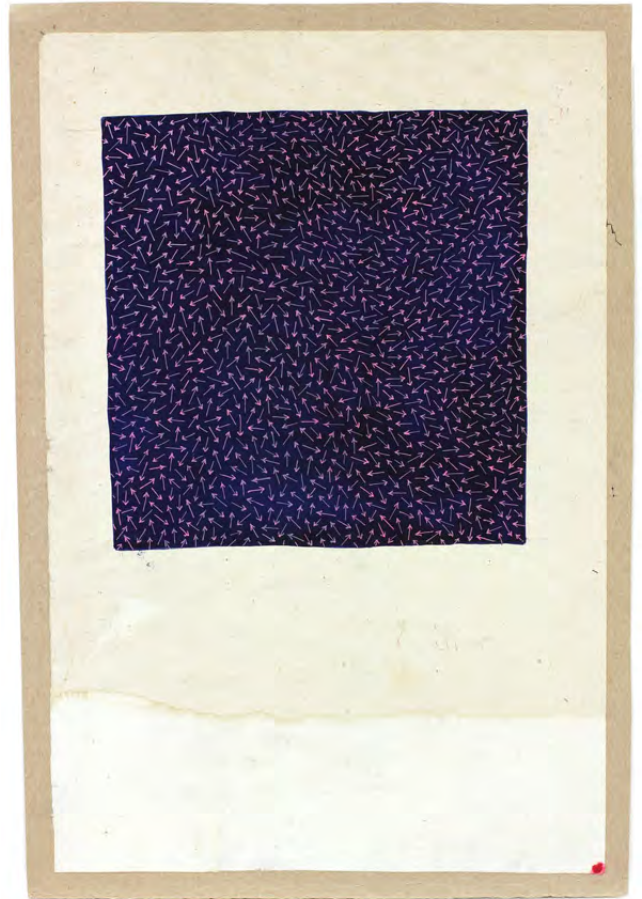
by Noah Dillon

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I'm confident that most people's understanding of India's medieval Tantric philosophy ends with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's recent exhibition of beautiful miniature paintings or with a fuzzy, titillated acknowledgment of the *Kama Sutra*. Including 39 works from Rajasthan, India, Feature Inc.'s *Anonymous Tantra Paintings* reveals some of the more abstract and esoteric visual components of the movement. The French poet Franck André Jamme has collected and sold such paintings since 1985, and he serves as the primary conduit by which the gallery has obtained them. They are made on humble slips of found paper, typically about 13 by 9 inches. Snippets of Hindi script on the versos of the sheets are barely visible through the thin parchment.

Each painting features iconic, centrally placed forms, frequently the ovoid *Shiva Linga*. The style is reminiscent of hard-edge abstraction but the works are palpably distant from Modernism. Indeed, having been concerned with the visualization of divinity rather than with aesthetics, the creators of these paintings might not have considered them art, per se—and hence the artists' anonymity. Yet the Tantric tradition values creativity, as is evident here: attention to gesture and the delicate balance between geometry and flaring swirls of dusty pigment bear witness to the adept's dexterous sensitivity. In some paintings, organic shapes are outlined with glowing edges. In others, underpainting is barely visible at the border after the artist covered the original blue or pink, using calm, meditative brushstrokes.

Feature Inc. has shown Tantra paintings since 1998. The present show is paired with *Connected*, an exhibition featuring five contemporary painters inspired by the Indian works included here.



**Anonymous. Tantric painting. "Legend: Dance of Energy. Jaipur, Rajasthan," 2001; unspecified paint on found paper; 13.875" x 9.5". Courtesy Feature Inc.**