



A Mustard Field of the Mind

The Art of Tiffany Singh

TESSA LAIRD

Tiffany Singh's installations are multi-sensory evocations of energy or spirit, manifested on the material plane. Gods and goddesses cast in beeswax traverse the colour spectrum, sprouting out of the salt of the earth (*What Colour Is the Sacred?*, 2010). White origami packages of spices and dried flowers explode over a ground of white salt like colours in the Holi festival—which is a celebration of the love play between Radha and Krishna (*Newton and the Piece Bomb*, 2010, spectacularly reworked in 2011 for the Taiwan Biennale). For Singh, as for the Indian minds that birthed the *Kama Sutra*, there is no contradiction between eroticism and spirituality, for all desire leads to transcendence, and Singh's work is sensate in the extreme.

Repetition and the agglomeration of materials on a mass scale turn Singh's elegantly simple ideas into epic celebrations. Her 2011 *Knock on the Sky Listen to the Sound* involved two separate installations of 800 and 1000 bamboo wind chimes for the Biennale of Sydney, while, two years later, *Fly Me Up to Where You Are* featured literally thousands of coloured flags painted with the individual hopes and dreams of Auckland schoolchildren. This project, destined to be repeated in various cities, is made by many hands, and, to echo the title of a Mike Kelley work, 'more

love hours than can ever be repaid'. The fluttering flags resemble a Buddhist pilgrimage site and their high-key colour, symbols and words radiate youthful sincerity.

Colour is foremost in Singh's sensory arsenal, particularly the spectral sequence, which, in addition to Newton's prismatic rainbow, is also the sequence of colours in the ancient Hindu chakra system. Chakras are energy centres in the body and each centre is represented by a different colour and musical tone. This innate synaesthesia is reflected in Singh's material concerns; more than stunningly visual, her works often smell of beeswax, spices, flowers and incense. Sound is equally important: the wind chime works—including a more recent iteration for Art in the Dark, *Gently Through The Veil I Heard You Call*, or *Drums Between the Bells* (both 2012), a tree full of thousands of tiny silver bells in Melbourne—are about listening for messages from other dimensions.

For Singh, the veil between this world and the next is as thin as a sari; as thin as the air she breathed in the monasteries of Ladakh, Manali and Rishikesh as well as Nepal, where she studied Buddhism and took meditation retreats. Voices and guidance come in dreams or hallucinogenic encounters with ancestors and deities.

Singh's own ancestry holds the key to this unabashed spiritual questing: her father is half

