



Fractured and Lensicular

Dr Mandakini Devi



Fractured and Lenticular

a solo exhibition of

Dr Mandakini Devi's Lens Based works

Light boxes, Lenticular Prints, Cyanotypes, Photo Books, Film

curated by
Jyoti A Kathpalia

13th – 27th November, 2024

Galerie Romain Rolland
Alliance Francaise de Delhi

FRACTURED AND LENSICULAR

“When I was a young man, being an artist was a lonely process. We had no collectors, no galleries, no critics, and no money... Yet it was a golden age, because we had nothing to lose but everything to gain.”

I found this quote from a documentary film during the preparation for this exhibition, on the artist Mark Rothko. His quote has a resonance with my work, because of my processes of understanding canonical modernism of the West and its iconography in the context of Indian art and aesthetics.

My colleagues and I were academically trained in Western art and theory but our reality was different. While our models during life study lessons were Indian – in feature, shape and colour – our palette was based on Western features and landscapes.

It took me consistent study and training to get comfortable with my practice, and of course there is always room for more learning. My process has been through an engagement with Indian and Western concepts and approaches towards ‘making and thinking’. I was creative during school but the craft of making I discovered only at the gates of the College of Art, or did the study of art find me?

From my very first lessons in painting, sitting outdoors and observing nature, I felt an inner calm, a voice saying this is what I want to do. Perhaps sit under a tree and think all day long. My only lament is that at this point I had little exposure to modern Indian art. Whatever I know now is because of the cultural ethos of my family members and the discourse we began while I was a student.

Being brought up and educated in India, there are times when I feel like an outsider even within the country. Many would agree with me, as Indian culture and society is complexly heterogeneous, consisting of many versions of ‘being Indian’.

With my equally formal education in the West somehow the roles reversed. I felt more of an insider, perhaps because of a practical knowledge of Western art history. Culturally I felt at home, because during my first experience as master’s student in the U.K, I came across people from various parts of the world. There was no cultural shock as personally it was a celebration of differences.¹

I began photographing my self, my immediate and personal surroundings during my undergraduate years. It was the early days of digital point and shoot cameras and to be honest, my friends and peers found it odd that I was not photographing formal landscapes or portraits the way other photographers did.

Even established photographers to whom I showed my images were dismissive in the harshest of ways, barring a few. Nevertheless, in my mind the disconnect that I felt between my palette and the figure in front of me was tamed by the photographic medium.

¹ The method of *différance* – a term coined by Jacques Derrida- is a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning. It is a way to analyze how signs (words, symbols, metaphors, etc) come to have meanings. The meaning of a sign changes over time, as new signs keep appearing and old signs keep disappearing. Past meanings leave “traces”, and possible future meanings “haunt”.

Neither was I motivated to create paintings from my photographs, by using them as an illustrative tool. These photographs even today and especially during my postdoctoral research found new a voice, once lost in the art college cacophony of ‘what is art?’.

The answer to this reminds me of another question asked by an artist and educator; do you want to be an artist or a technician in an art school? In finding answers, another question arises– does art have to have meaning or can it be transformative through its materiality? This idea of transformation that I am exploring through my practice is related to both practice and philosophy.

I am not a painter, nor a photographer or a filmmaker. I have borrowed the methods and methodologies from classical traditions while approaching the modern and postmodern. The body of work in this exhibition is based in Hindu mythological narratives of femininity; it’s physical and socio-cultural representations. In the spirit of *The Argumentative Indian*,² I chose to juxtapose images from my personal photographic history with themes from traditional Indian art and aesthetics.

The process of juxtaposing different media is my understanding of the process of the collage technique. It has become foundational to my methodology, both of making and thinking. When I approach the blank page or the drawing board as I enter my studio, what inspires me is the fact that I have had the opportunity to explore and remember my everyday experiences. These experiences are post cards from my past that still haunt me today. My work is evidence of commitment to my craft. It is neither an indulgence nor a passion, but something I wake up for day after day.

Like an infant, laughing and playing with the mirror as it recognizes itself, the works in this exhibition evidence my journey as artist. From a professional perspective, I perceive my stance as a bridge that connects the private to the public and strident enough to create dialogue and conversation across gender and culture instead of debates drawn from polarities.

Dr Mandakini Devi

November 2024

About the Artist

Dr Mandakini Devi is a practising visual artist who trained at the Delhi College of Art, New Delhi, Master’s from Nottingham Trent University, Diploma in Photography from the London College of Communication and her practice based Phd from the University of Gloucestershire.

² *The Argumentative Indian* is a book written by the Nobel Prize winning Indian economist Amartya Sen. In this collection of essays, Sen discusses India’s history and identity. The book elucidates traditions of public debate and intellectual pluralism.

FRACTURE AND LENS, IMAGES OF WANDERING, A FEMALE BODY REORIENTED...

Mandakini Devi's practice is one of layer and level. At once wayward and underpinned by intellectuality, it flits between social media posting of daily self-portraits, autobiographical footage, and a repurposing of female Hindu Deities as contemporary avatars. The latter, is of course, a circular reference, returning the current image to its source in the original meaning of the word, but also one that in Devi's case is driven by an equally circular understanding of material and technique. Photography returning to itself as drawing, the painterly possibilities in amplifying a photograph through lenticular printing, stills taken from videos where the blurred and moving lens is performing brush strokes, cyanotype as a proto form of photography with its own distinctive blue colouration, and finally the sense of traditional painterly possibilities being productively fractured by new technology.

Here, sources cannot be separated from the diversity of technique. Fracture, of the gaze, of the image the lens captures, of lenticular printing as an essentially somatic approach to looking, constructs a complex visual process through which we absorb the images that Devi has created. These images are also consciously plucking fragments of narrative from her own past, from late childhood and adolescence, from social encounters past and recent, from the chaotic milieu of her early PhD research work at University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham. The latter with all its contingent events and crises of thought and identity was, with hindsight, essential to the process of her research becoming coherent. Within the register of her PhD research, writing as the person who both witnessed, and as supervisor was a part of its struggles, I would argue profound sense of otherness was uncovered in Devi's practice, and in all of her apparently random actions. Devi's commitment to reframing female identity through art making emerged from this process as a dynamic and evolving presence.

Self-disruption, radical questioning, might seem little different from incoherence when seen from outside. However, when revisited as a body of artwork, placed in an exhibition context to be witnessed by others, fractures and disruptions within the image making process become a philosophical position based in attentiveness and sustained forms of looking. Here, the lyrical emerges from the half remembered, the blurted out, the reprisals of family film footage from before Devi was, in her own mind, a coherent artistic self. Just as the lenticular prints require us to move our bodies around in order to read the alternative viewpoints embedded within the image, the phased blending of photographs through computer software enables a picture to coalesce, in its own way and time, out of a sort of visual wandering. The energy at the heart of this process is distinctly that of the artist, but the artist who has allowed herself to become lost in the process of making.

The models Devi proposes have a strong legacy. London is currently hosting 'The Imaginary Institution of India, Art 1975 – 1998', a collaboration between The Barbican Centre and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art¹. Within this survey of Indian modernism, two things stand out to this writer. One is the persistent voice of female artists, often moving between living an or studying in Europe and India, the other is a quiet emergence of

¹ <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/the-imaginary-institution-of-india-art-1975-1998> (accessed 5 October 2024)

queerness within the artists' gaze. Not necessarily just the overtness Bhupen Khakhar's imagery, or the compassionate documentary photographs of Sunil Gupta, but as a sense of otherness for which sexual orientation is not the central subject, but integral to everything else that the artwork contains. Here, the lens-based work of artists such as Nalini Malani springs to mind. The female gaze, essentially opposing itself to the language of capture and shooting that is so automatically associated with the camera, makes its visual propositions slowly and without the need to normalise what it witnesses. This is root of Devi's artistic position, it combines with the schooling in western art education systems, and an aesthetic milieu founded in pioneering Indian Modernism, notably the anarchistic primitivism of Francis Newton Souza.

The Baroness as, Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven was known, was the proto disruptor, the hard-core disturbance at the heart of the New York Dada scene between 1913 and 1923, who also becomes a leitmotif for Devi's repurposed Hindu female deities. Her significance has been emphasised in recent research, notably the presentation of her work at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, as part of their Dada Anniversary celebrations in 2016² and prior to that the scholarship of writers such as Amelia Jones, Irene Gemmel and Suzanne Zelazo. In the word of Jones (2004)³

'“Deviat[ing]” from the “straight lines of personality,” my impersonation will (I hope) give the reader a sense of the fantastic, dislocated, irrational poetic voice of the Baroness, and glue this voice to an imagined wandering body; at the same time enacting a kind of overt art historical projection that wilfully refuses the claim of objectivity so central to the discipline of art history.'

'Irrational Modernism' also then becomes a cue for revisiting the contemporary with an understanding that its roots are more tangled and unpredictable than the conventional canon would have us assume. And here, the Baroness reigns supreme as a generator of body empathy, as a precursor to the queerness of everything, what Jones also describes as 'Phallic Woman':

'Ogling –
Wry –
Uncouth –
Shape –
Quiltbeggarskirt –
Near –
Pauperhome –
Upcountry –
Sitting –
Sheaf –
Smoking –
Surreptitious –
Cigarette –
This –
Chill –
Marcheve.'⁴ –

² <https://www.hauskonstruktiv.ch/ausstellungen/dada-anders>

³ P. 223 *Irrational Modernism, A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*, MIT, ISBN 0-262-10102-5

⁴ From 'PASTORAL (IMPROVED)' Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven (c1924) published in 'Body Sweats', MIT (2011) Edited by Irene Gemmel and Suzanne Zelazo, ISBN 078-0-262-01622-3

Modernisms, Feminisms, disruptions, the non-hierarchical - these can become a plurality of gods, a muse, in the sense of the collective noun for a group of goddesses.

For Devi, the adaption of Hindu female deities is also a way of placing her body outside of herself. This works as a phenomenological replacement of the objectifying gaze with one that connects religious and social forces to a current condition of the feminine. Sarah Ahmed (2006) writes;

‘It is the fact that what I am orientated towards is “not me” that allows me to do this or to do that. The otherness of things is what allows me to do things “with” them. What is other than me is also what allows me to extend the reach of my body. Rather than othering being simply a form of negation, it can also be described as a *force of extension*. The body extends its reach by taking in that which is “not” it, where the “not” involves the acquisition of new capacities and directions – becoming, in other words, “not” simply what I am “not” but what I can “have” and do.’ The “not me” is incorporated into the body, extending its reach.’⁵

In this chapter Ahmed begins with a quotation from Franz Fanon, going on to cite Edward Said and outline the relationship between orientation as in wayfinding and the orient as a western assumption concerning the ‘exotic’ east of the world. Devi’s goddesses run counter to such assumptions, directly facing an international world of contemporary art, carrying the myths and legends that, as part of the religious legacy of Hinduism, give great agency to the female and her active power within ground and firmament. For Devi, the deity she most enjoys is Dhumavati, known as the goddess of disappointment and associated with the Mahavidya. It is not accidental that Devi’s work makes these connections, but does so in a manner that is celebratory, joyful and subversive. Who is to be disappointed after all, The Gods? Male hegemonies? If we are to understand the baroness as a goddess, then Devi’s proposal is that we are all to have our expectations confounded, and that disappointment might become a celebration of otherness, an invitation to shift our frame of attention.

– Prof Andrew Bick, October 2024

About

Professor Andrew Bick, is research lead for the School of Creative Arts at the University of Gloucestershire. He is represented in collections including the British Museum, Haus Konstruktiv Zurich, Leeds Art Gallery, Roche Art Collection Basel, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, & Yale Center for British Art. A monograph on his work was published by Haus Konstruktiv/Hatze Canz (2020).

⁵ P135, ‘Queer Phenomenology’ – Ch 3 ‘The Orient and Other Others’. Duke University, 2006 ISBN 978-0-8223-3914-4



FRACTURED AND LENSICULAR: THE ART OF LAYERED REALITIES

– BY JYOTI A KATHPALIA

To see and create the world not only through the clarifying lens of optical verisimilitude or dominant narratives but also through its fractures and distortions—the fragmentation and coexistence of mythic and contemporary time, the angst and ecstasy of the self, and the myriad reflections and refractions—is the tremendous effort and achievement of Dr Mandakini Devi's solo exhibition, *Fractured and Lensicular*.

Dr Mandakini Devi takes digital and fine art beyond conventional optical processes and lenticular visions into a realm of self-reflexivity, multilayering and startling minutiae to denote the splits, the fractures that construe another realm of experience that is often hidden behind the perfectly constructed image and aesthetics. This approach, neologically termed "Lensicular," encapsulates an artistic practice that embraces both fragmentation and depth. The exhibition, *Fractured and Lensicular*, thus illuminates the intersections of fine art, digital lens art, play and the artist's existential angst. The fractured layering and simultaneity along with interplay between the self and the world, brilliantly encompass the past and present across diverse spaces conveying in an intuitive flash, that much as humankind seeks rational and consistent narratives, the reality is often arbitrary, multifaceted, complex and always through the lens of the self.

The exhibited body of work embodies a personal yet universal exploration of the self, engaging the ethos of mythic timelessness with the fractures of the contemporary lens, taking the play and irony of postmodernism into intense emotional self-expressions. In doing so, Dr Mandakini Devi seeks to re-envision the entire process of self-representation not as the putting forth of the perfect image, but its reverse i.e. by navigating through and projecting fragments, fractures and impressions. Through these dispersed pieces—words, memories both mythic and personal, and incidents—a re-assemblage of both self and world emerges, echoing a fractured consciousness that underscores the fragmented nature of identity and ultimately reflects the dissonance and discontinuity at the core of existence itself.

MYTHIC DIALOGUES AND THE FEMININE

Mandakini's subject matter is eclectic ranging from Indian traditions, art and architecture from ancient times, be it the bronze sculptures or the tantric traditions, or images from European Renaissance art and street art all become a part of the complex layers creating collage like effects hence establishing tantalising simultaneities and alternative narratives that challenge linearity. In the words of Dr Mandakini Devi, "Genealogies and the autobiographical seem to unconsciously emerge from my visual presentations be they paintings, lens-based or multimedia works...." Not surprising then that these Indian and Western art traditions combine with pop art and influences of beat poetry, psychedelic intensity and dark erotica in her artistic oeuvre. Spatially the images of Venice, Western art, the streets, and places that she has visited being an avid traveller, and her own sense of gendered dislocation are reinvented—sometimes in colours that are flagrant and at times more subtle but always with a signature flamboyance.

The *Dus Mahavidyas* are rendered as lenticular prints by Dr Mandakini Devi. The images are layered and prepared digitally and interlaced, and the image is finally printed onto the substrate which is then bonded with the lenticular lens. The precise alignment of the lenticular sheets with the interlaced digital art strips creates mesmerising three dimensional effects and the illusion of continual depth, motion and change. The choice of media in rendering the *Dus Mahavidyas* is extremely crucial, as the artist is attempting to enact a change from the static to an active personal engagement with the cultural images and iconography. The movement of her digital layering in the lenticular medium lends a dynamism allowing for an individual reinterpretation and fluidity as opposed to ossified fixity.

The *Dus Mahavidyas* or the "Ten Great Wisdoms" are a group of ten Hindu Goddesses revered in the tantric traditions and each standing for an aspect of the divine feminine energy. The set of *Dus Mahavidyas* reimagines and reworks the iconography, and the symbols associated with each: skulls garland (Kali), blue lotus (Tara), red lotus (Tripura Sundari), crown (Bhuvaneshvari), severed head (Chinnamasta) trident (Bhairavi) among others. What is fascinating is the sheer whimsicality with which Mandakini combines these symbols, sometimes with her own image or her digital doodling and drawings. Sculptural images from Khajuraho and the *Chausath Yoginis* appear tantalisingly at times in the background, always moving in and out of view, intermingling with diverse motifs. These sculptures are at times a shadowy presence—reminders of ancient art, juxtaposed with post-modern objects also made dynamically elusive through lenticular shifts. Seldom has an artist through the digital medium explored this simultaneity—sometimes a fracture but always a lensicularity that teases and also eases itself gently through the tectonic shifts in time, themes and motifs rendered by the interlacing of images through state-of-the-art lens-based technologies.

Since the effort of the artist is to look at the world through the lens of the self, at one important level her works—lenticulars and cyanotypes as well as her mixed media artworks are an attempt to rewrite and foreground a different perception of the self and feminine through breakages, fractures, layering and collage. The artwork titled *Saptamātṛkas* refers to the seven mothers in Indian tantric traditions representing *Shakti*. Like the *Shakti* in Hindu traditions the *Saptamātṛkas* embody both the fierce and nurturing and tender aspects. They represent the female energy and manifestation of the male deities. The digital artwork of the *Saptamātṛkas* once again reimagines the core of the *matrikas* in the self. The image is a self-representation, and the artwork is rendered in the red of feminine energy associated with fertility and blood. There is a lambent red glow with the body of the woman in red which is in the foreground. The head is missing which is again extremely significant as the artist highlights the materiality of the body. In French Feminist theory and *Écriture féminine*, blood is viewed as the creative and transformative energy, as a metaphor linked to identity, difference and femininity. It is transgressive, and symptomatic of the desire that is subversive and taboo, and also signifies female choice and agency. Interesting the artwork titled *Saptamātṛkas* focussing on the body and the red hue takes these connotations onto contemporary contexts of the *Écriture féminine* wherein the tremendous strength and energy of the feminine divine as a contemporary woman can be envisioned.

In her distinct style, Mandakini Devi's exploration of the self and its ramifications, using myths and metaphors, veers towards creating a counter visuality wherein the Indian philosophic traditions of the *Shakti* and the Feminine of the French Feminists intermingle in the arena of the self and the materiality of the female body. *The Womb* series is an interpretation of the above where Mandakini uses both her training as a fine artist, equally conversant with lens-based and digital technology to render drawings on female anatomy and then create layered digital images.

The artwork *Birth of Venus* is another visual statement. A feminist critique of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* highlights how the painting reflects and reinforces traditional ideals of female beauty, portraying Venus as passive, objectified, and primarily existing for the male gaze. This entails the eroticization of the female body and viewing Venus as a symbol of aesthetic perfection rather than a complex, empowered figure. In her painting Dr Mandakini Devi uses a strong anti-aesthetic to visualise the female figure. Here Venus is defaced with black lines and scribbles as they compulsively and convulsively distort the figure, in the backdrop is the artists own portrait. The overall effect is a revolt against the contrived masculine ideals of beauty foregrounding strongly the real body as opposed to the ideal. Once again, defacement and incompleteness are prominent aspects used as resistance to the dominance of ideological images catering to the male gaze.

These artworks, like others, are artistic explorations of *Écriture féminine*, creatively inspired by the French feminists. They present a visual experience that is playful, defying logical closure, authoritarian biases and linearity, their fluidity a testament to an open-ended perception. The playfulness and puns as well as the intermixing of the past, present in her bold emotionally suffused anti-aesthetic, are Dr Mandakini Devi's own attempts at revisualising the woman in her own unique identities.

The fissures and fractures that are an integral part of Dr Mandakini's art are not just an effort to deconstruct dominant perceptions but also embody the deep fissures, depth and complexity of the mind and consciousness as it moves beyond the obvious into uncharted terrains. The split is both an integral part of her work and irreconcilable, revealing a contrariness that peeps through and a fracture that is both postmodern and conveying a sense of angst. As noted by the artist, "The purity of digital photography and its software additions fascinates me. I enjoy the process of layering achieved through the digital. Somehow the complexity of my inner thoughts is reflected in the layers and collages that I create."

Interestingly this journey began with Mandakini's photobooks as they recorded her own perceptions, portraits and places. In the photobook *108 portraits I Me Myself*, the Indian sacred number 108 is evoked to offer portraits of herself. One of her photobooks is titled, *I am the Street* delineating how the artist sees the streets and the intersections as a point of self-examination.

INFRA-VISIONING THE CYANOTYPES

Dr Mandakini Devi uses the photographic printing process that gives a cyan blueprint known as the cyanotypes. Here the watercolour paper is coated with a chemical solution mostly ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide which is a light sensitive solution, and which produces the typical cyanotype blue. The digital negative of the images is placed on the coated sheet. Exposure to sunlight or UV light results in the change from yellow green to a dark blue with areas covered by objects remaining white and the exposed areas turning blue. After exposure the paper is rinsed and as it dries, the blue colour deepens. This blend of analogue and digital techniques creates a dialogue between old and new media, the very combination of the two in artistic medium effecting a layered, hybrid aesthetic. Hence in contemporary art, this medium facilitates the artists to reclaim their narratives by choosing what to capture, frame, and reveal. Mandakini Devi uses this distinct aesthetic as a technique as well as a means of self-representation and discovery. What is also significant is that the DIY nature of cyanotypes allows the artist to engage with the materiality of art while embracing imperfections as a form of self-expression. Also important is that the use of sunlight moves the artist away from the conventional studio setting into the outdoors.

Historically cyanotypes have been used to document marginalised subjects often bypassing mainstream artistic conventions. They became a part of alternative photographic techniques accessible to the people outside the elite circles. The cyanotypes were used from the mid nineteenth century as small photograms for botanical specimens by women or for industrial blueprints as a cost-effective method for producing copies of plans and drawings. Local milieus and subcultures which were not often the subject of high-end photography found expression and valuable archiving in cyanotypes. Broadening out, cyanotypes hold political and cultural significance as they offer a unique medium for exploring self-identity and resistance. The unique blue or cyan colour is evocative of nostalgia, personal memories and narratives in contemporary art practices a fact that becomes crucial in Mandakini Devi's work.

By leveraging the cyan blue aesthetic, the process becomes a metaphor for unveiling hidden layers of cultural memory and personal history, enabling a dialogue between past and present, something that is crucial to Dr Mandakini's artistic vision. Thus, the importance of found and alternative materials of which her work with cyanotypes is an example, enables the artist to script an alternative artistic vision one that is not the forcibly yoked perfection, but rather the fragments of the underside, of the deep recesses of the mind pointing to the multiple layers that inhere in the dialectic of the self and the world.

Mandakini devi's *Aṣṭanāyikā* series is once again an effort at self-representation and performance. Ashta Nayikas or the eight heroines are drawn from the classical Indian literature from Bharata's *Natya Shastra*. They embody the eight moods and emotions of the *nayika* in relation to the *nayak* or the hero. Mandakini Devi's *Aṣṭanāyikā* stand as independent self-depictions. These images are seen in a digitally created media with layering of motifs of nature, forests, flowers, leaves stencilled text and many other elements. Emotions of angst, despair, anger loss all peep through the layers and fractures in Mandakini's creations. Interestingly in these series there is an interesting intermixing of the process of analogue in the cyanotype, cohering with the digital image, and the final embellishments that the artist gives with oil pastels and drawing in the last stages of the artwork.

But underneath and as a common denominator of all of Mandakini's artworks is the fact that they are not the perfect, complete, aesthetically closed artworks. Rather their anti-aesthetic—achieved through almost gothic light effects, light boxes, the neon flames in the gargoyle like heads or *Nazar Battu*, Chinese masks along with Indian sculptures and motifs, as fractured images—all come together to impel the viewer to look beyond the perfect completion into the fissured, intermediate spaces in order to glimpse another order or disorder of things. Mandakini's art explores themes of rupture, city lives, digital angst and photography, and its intersections with culture and identity. The fracture within each of us, which we keep hidden, is brought out, split wide open in the set of artworks using various stylistic manoeuvres and distortions to give a glimpse of that which in one frame contains all, collapses all and questions the notion of sanitised art, a gesture and a viewing from which there can be no turning back and which cannot be unseen.

About the Curator

Jyoti A. Kathpalia is an Associate Professor, Art Critic and Curator. Specialising in the interface of art, text and theory, Jyoti has curated numerous significant exhibitions. She is the consulting editor of a leading art magazine and art bulletin in India. Jyoti has also been conducting dense research in gender and art and is committed to issues of representation of women in visual and digital media. Her papers have been published in prestigious national and international journals.



Dus Mahavidyas

or 'Ten Wisdom Goddesses'

काली तारा महाविद्या षोडशी भुवनेश्वरी। भैरवी छिन्नमस्ता च विद्या धूमावती तथा ॥
बगला सिद्ध विद्या च मातंगी कमलात्मिका। एता विद्या महेशानि महाविद्या प्रकीर्तिता ॥

Mahā, meaning great, **Vidyā**, meaning wisdom.

The ten goddesses emerge from the primordial energy the **Adi Parāśakti**.

The range of the forms of the *Dus Mahavidyas* are from the scary and the fearful to the stunningly beautiful. 'Scary and the fearful', which is the '*Ugra Roop*' and the 'stunningly beautiful', which is the '*Soumya Roop*'.

The ten *Mahavidyas* are a group of ten tantric goddesses who are considered to represent the universe. They are also part of the *Saivism*, *Vaishnavism*, *Vajrayāna Buddhism* which include *yogini* worship. The ten *mahavidyas* represent an important turning point in the history of *Shaktism* which mark the rise of the *bhatkti* aspect in *Shaktism*.

The ten energies are called the ten objects of transcendental knowledge. They are the source of the various aspects of the divine night. Their symbols present the picture of our destiny.

These ten forms of the eternal goddess are a guide to our spiritual awakening. Legend has that the *Dus Mahavidyas* made *Lord Shiva* aware of the eternal love which existed between him and his wife, the *Devi Parvati*.

The *Dus Mahavidyas* are shown in a particular sequence following goddesses:

- **Kali**
- **Tara**
- **Tripura Sundari**
- **Bhuvaneshvari**
- **Bhairavi**
- **Chinnamasta**
- **Dhumavati**
- **Bagalamukhi**
- **Matangi**
- **Kamala**

ARTIST OVERVIEW

I discovered the process of lenticular printing by chance. This medium is particularly used for commercial advertising. It is not actually a fine art medium. It is meant for mass production, commercial uses and especially for religious icons.

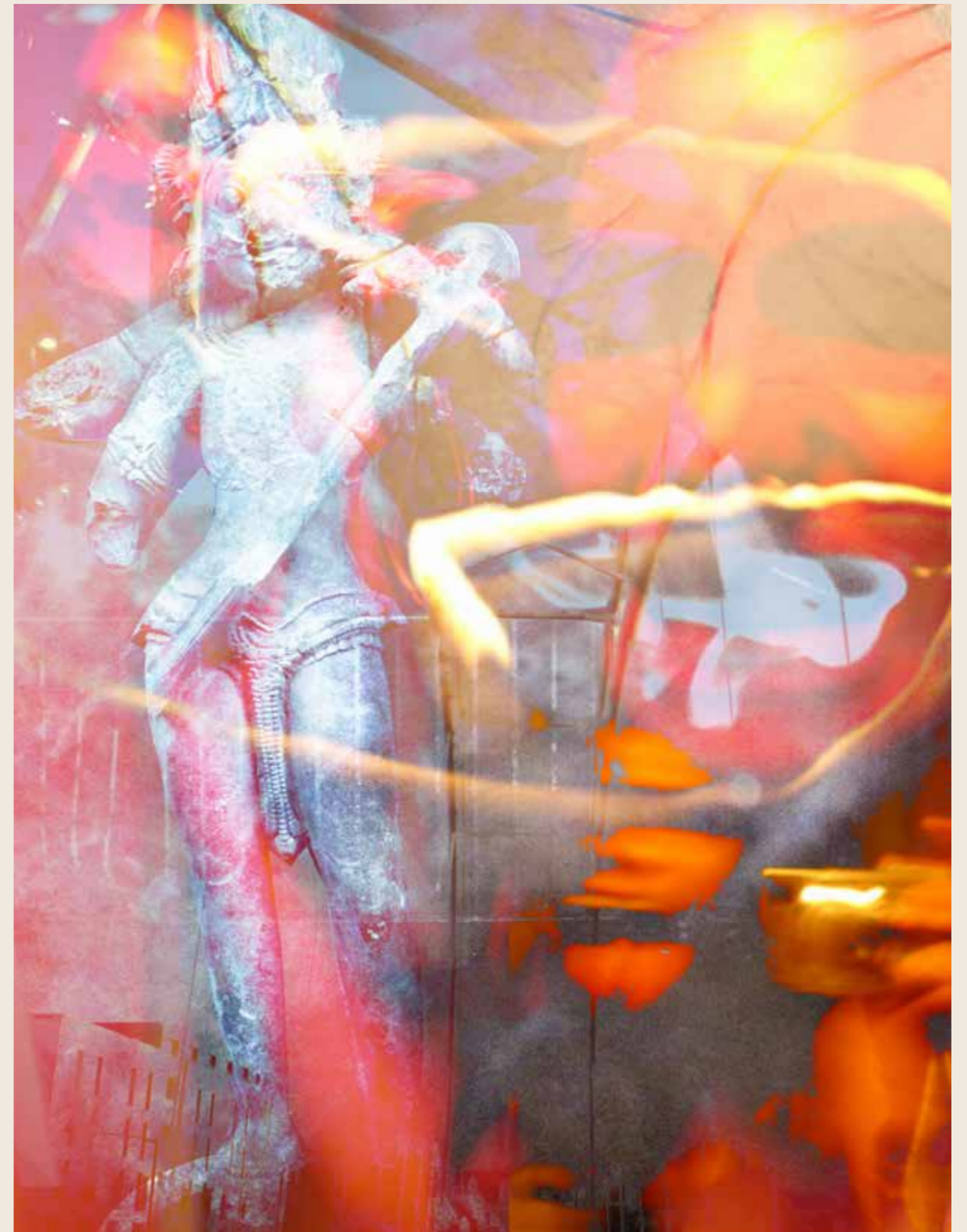
So when I found this medium thanks to Prof Angus Pryor, Head of School, Creative Arts, University of Gloucestershire. I chose to use the lenticular format because in a way it's my ode to television. As I'm of a generation that grew up not reading, where your imagination is let loose, but I grew up in a time where television told you how to think how to be. On television I see images and there is no sense of reality when you look at the T.V. It's what you are told – what to think, what to see.

I chose the lenticular print for the *Dus Mahavidyas* because they are very dynamic. The *Dus Mahavidyas* are tantric goddesses of wisdom. They have certain powers that whoever the worshiper is, will be bestowed with these powers. They are forceful and scary in a sense. When I started my research on the *Dus Mahavidyas*, I was taken to esoteric realms because these goddesses are not worshipped in the Hindu pantheon. They are versions of shakti, and they actually versions of the goddess Kali, who is very, very angry and she was brought in by the gods to help them to get rid of this eternal war between gods and demons. Kali (a form of Parvati) whose consort was Shiva and Shiva is considered to be the destroyer.

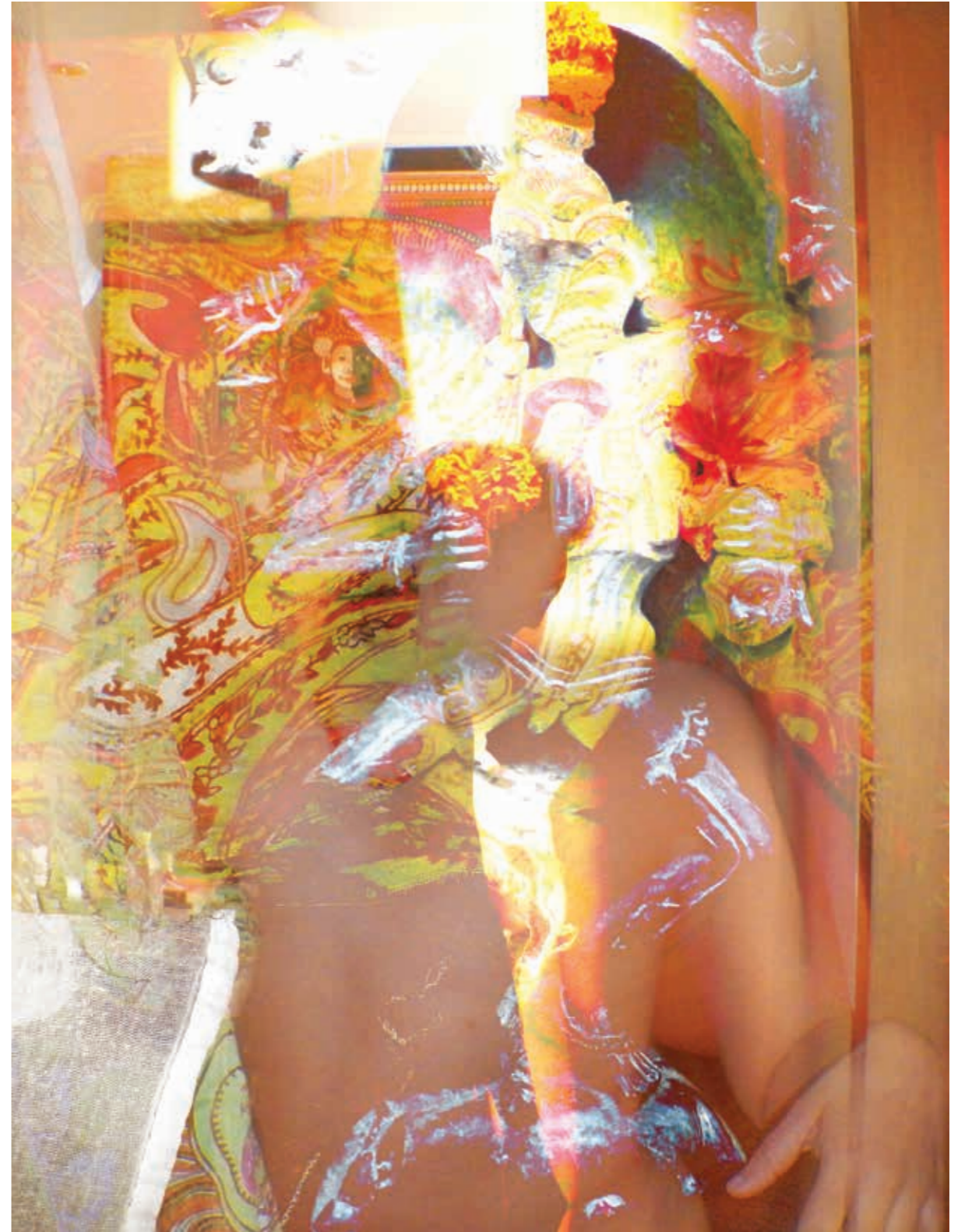
During my research when I tried to look for inspiration and practice, I reached again another dead end. The dead end was 'Mythology'. Whatever visually I could look at was very much codified, and to an untrained eye or to somebody who does not understand Hindu mythology, they would look all the same. Just as in Western art when painters have been inspired by Renaissance, for example, The Birth of Venus.

The idea of layering and collage is my own process of trying to understand when I was in Delhi College of Art, what does it mean to make a self-portrait? Therefore, in all of the work that you see in the exhibition, the recurring theme is a self-portrait. How am I re-interpreting it or understanding symbolism? The concept of symbolism and fine art practices exists across the board. But these goddesses are mythological, they are the incarnations. I am approaching it from the point of view of how is feminism understood in a very established patriarchal fact, because even these goddesses the *Dus Mahavidyas*, the *Saptamātrikas* and the *Aṣṭanāyikās* have been invoked by essentially male gender normative ideas within mythology. On the other hand, or the concept of collage is something which I find fascinating because it was done by the original surrealists, known as magical thinking, as opposed to wishful thinking.

For me, layering my images in the form of a collage, or with an image, music and text, is essential because I am investigating the very idea or the concept. Exploring what is fact and what is fiction, because at the end of the day, art is very subjective. My interpretation of these very canonical forms of the female goddesses in India is trying to understand, what does it mean to be a woman?



Kali | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024

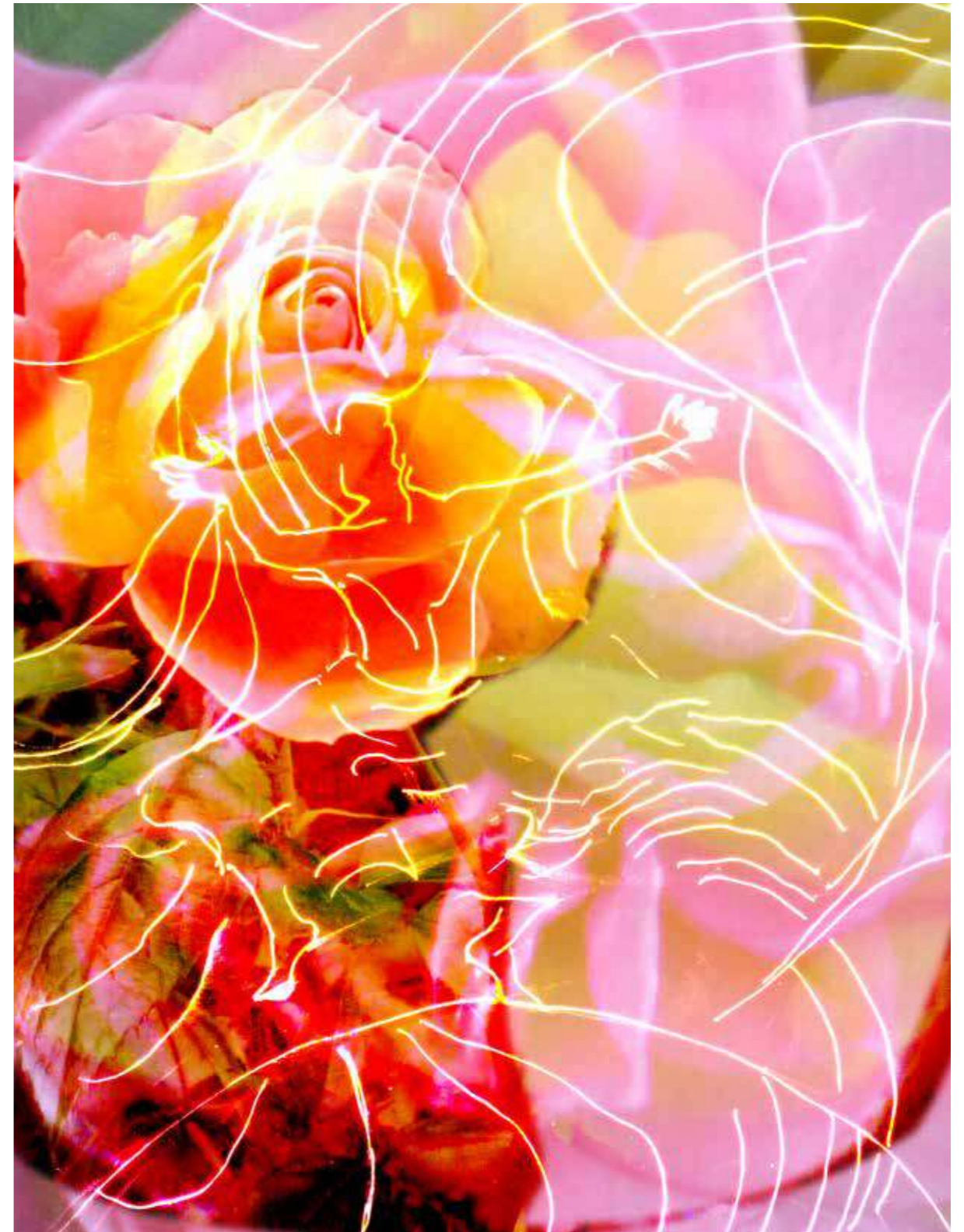


Chinnamasta | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024

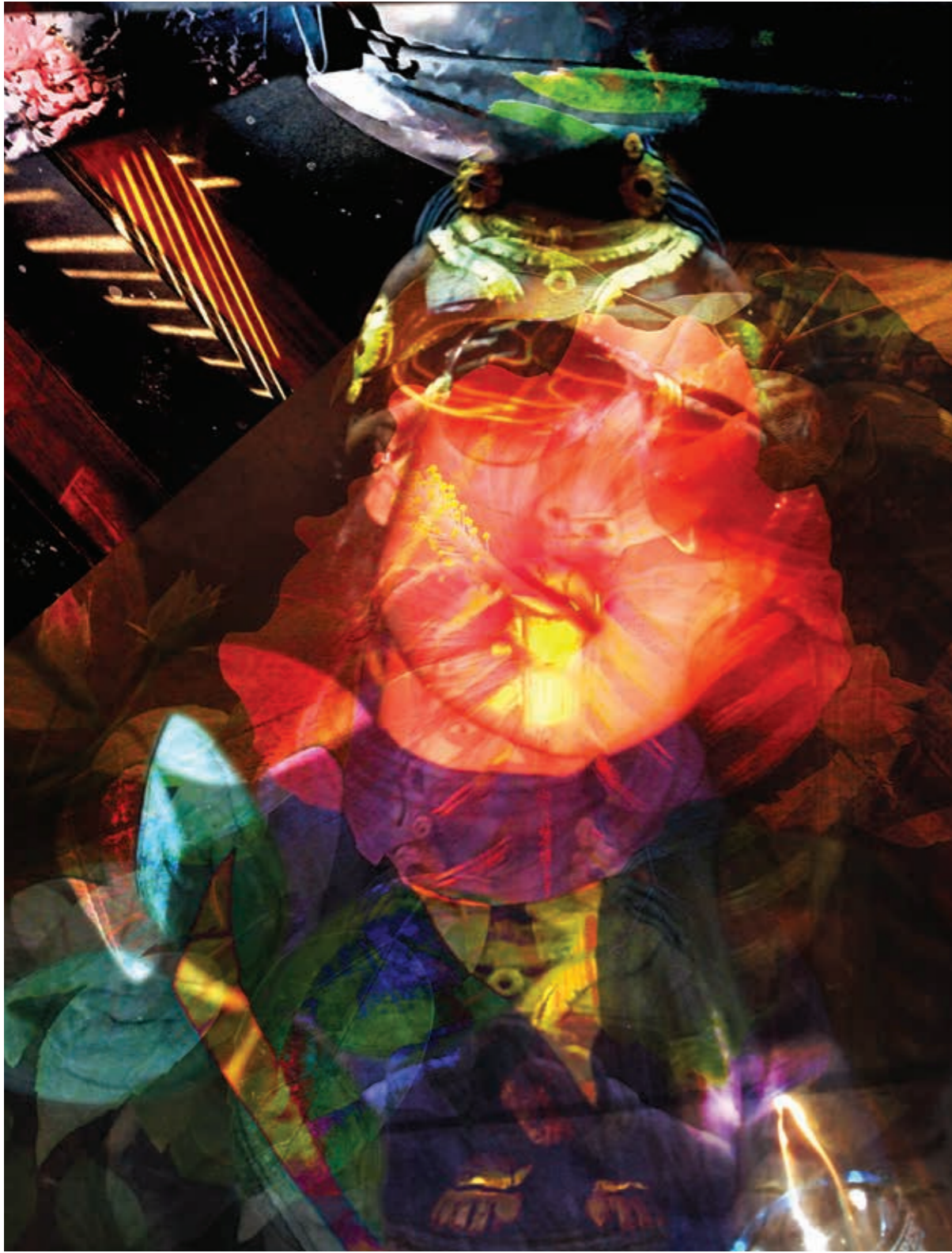
◀ Kamalatkika | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



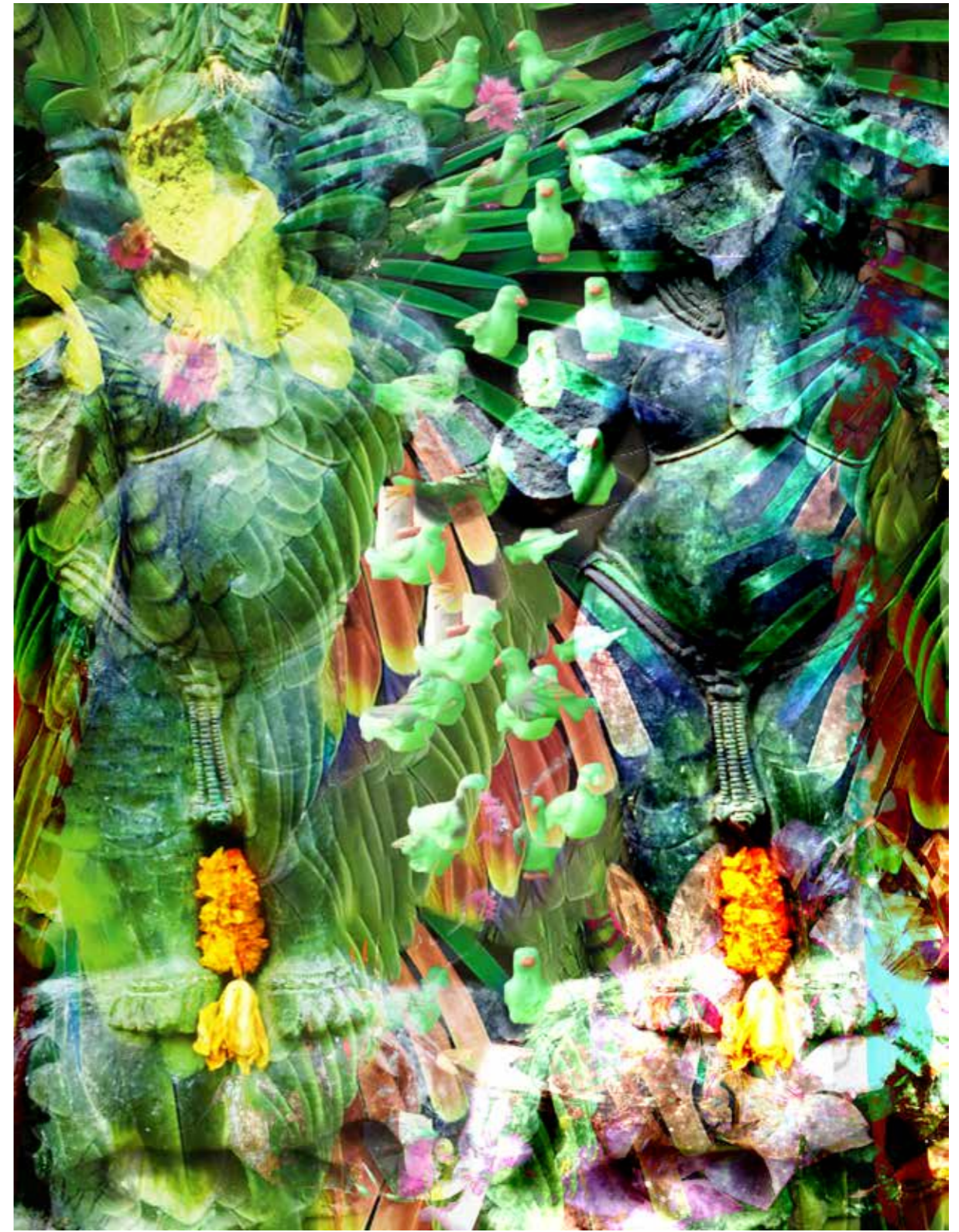
Bhairavi | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



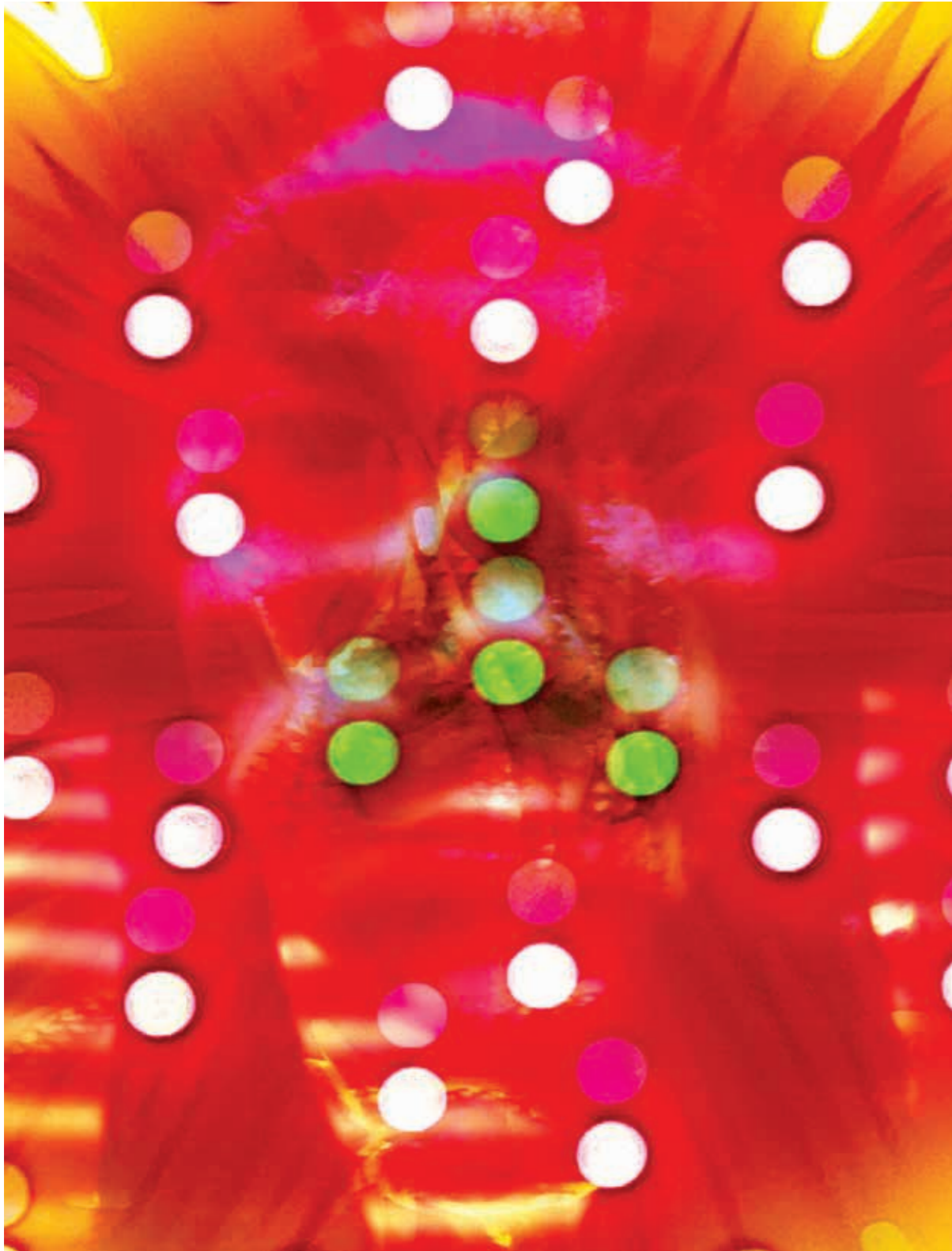
Tripura Sundari | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



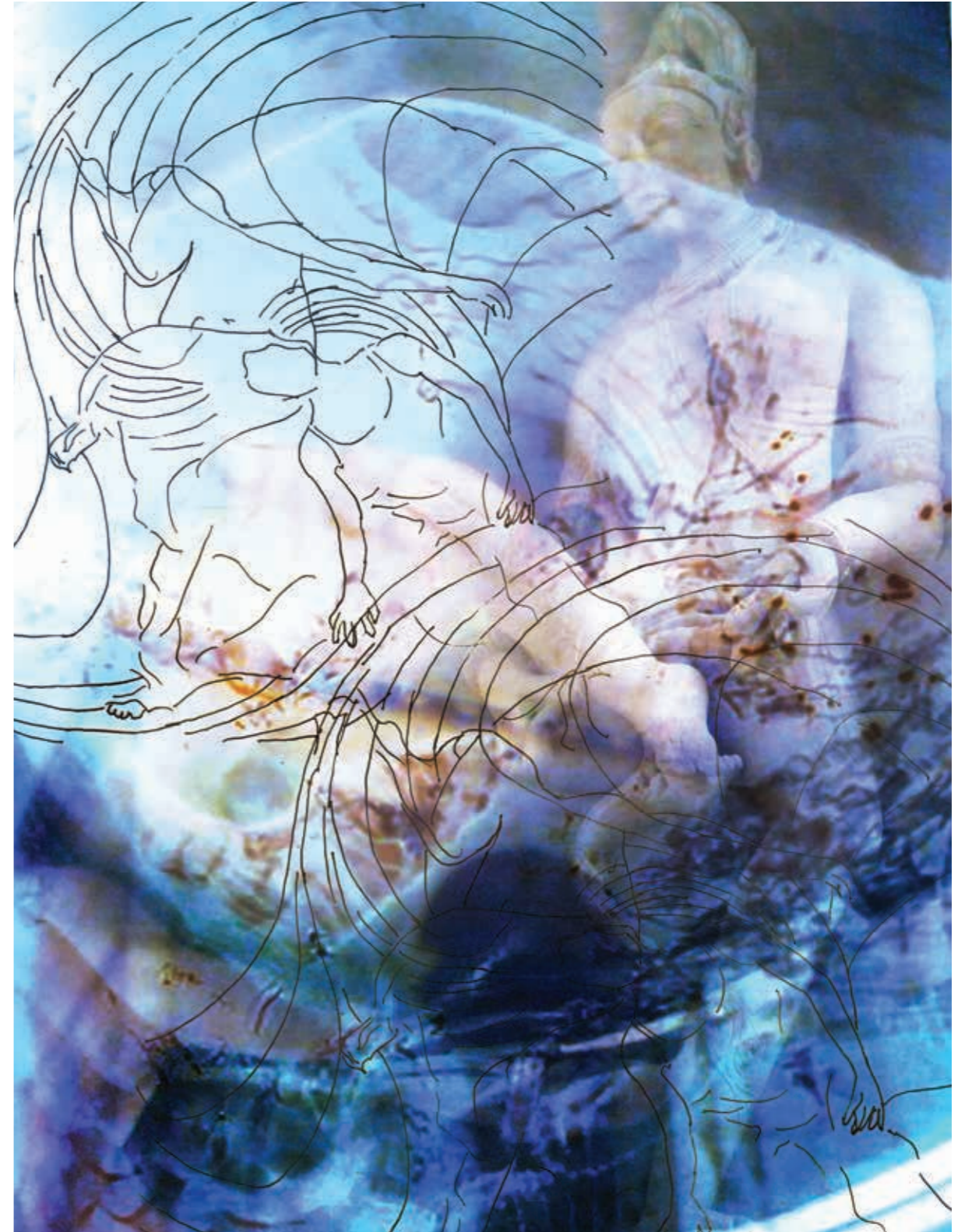
Dhumavati | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



Matangi | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



Bagalamukhi | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024



Bhuvaneshvari | Lenticular Print | 36 X 47 Inches | 2024

Saptamātrkas

प्रेतसंस्था तु चामुण्डा वाराही महिषासना । एन्द्री गजसमारुढा वैष्णवी गरुडासना ॥
माहेश्वरी वृषारुढा कौमारी शिखिवाहना । ब्राह्मी हंससमारुढा सर्वाभरणभूषिता ॥
इत्येता मातरः सर्वा सर्वयोगसमन्विताः ।

'I pay obeisance to the Matrikas, who are endowed with powers.
Devi Chamunda, who abides with ghosts and spirits,
Devi Varahi, who is seated on a buffalo,
Devi Aindri, who is mounted on an elephant,
Devi Vaishnavi, who is seated on Garuda,
Devi Maheshvari, who is mounted on a bull,
Devi Kaumari, who is mounted on her peacock,
Devi Brahmi, who is mounted on a swan and adorned with ornaments,
They all are mothers (Matrikas), who are endowed with powers.
—Devi Kavacham

The *Saptamātrkas* are a group of seven mother goddesses. The fierce and destructive *mātrkas* or mother goddesses have different stories depending on which text they are being interpreted from. In the iconic Devi Mahatmya, the *Saptamātrkas* are the feminine counterparts of the male gods and personify their shakti or energy. They are the power of the immense being.

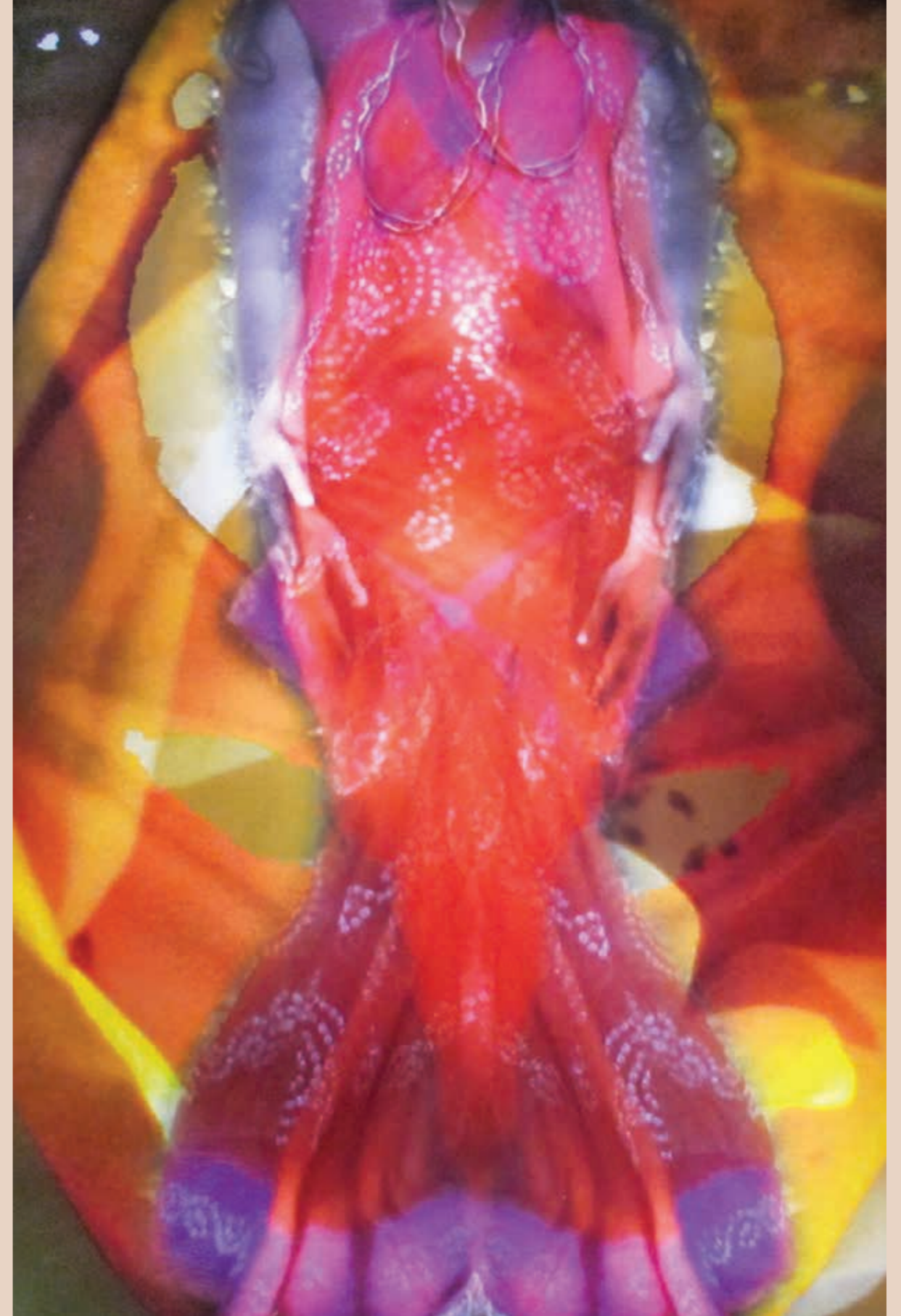
The '*Saptamātrkas*' represent the 'Shakti' or the energy or the female counterpart of the gods whose wives they are. The *Saptamātrkas* are revered goddesses in Hinduism and Tantrism, deeply embedded in goddess-centric practices

ARTIST OVERVIEW

'Sapta' means seven I turned the idea of the seven into one because the mythology is that they all gave birth to one child. Therefore, I chose to use the light box as a medium but also the fact that I did not want to again become illustrative. I discovered the mythology of the *Saptamātrkas* through Devdutt Pattanaik's book. There is no iconography found for them. That is just written. There is no image to it. The idea why I chose to use it as a light box, refers to the idea of rose windows, where it's illuminated. So when you put on the light, something manifests.

Now the kind of an experience what somebody has is subjective. I chose to use a particular kind of red, because it goes back to the fact that, you know, women have periods and it's the colour of blood and red. And it's not rouge's red, but it's a tomato red.

I matched it also the central image of the *Saptamātrkas* as me dressed in a saree. And I really enjoyed that image of mine, which was actually taken not in India, not for some, you know, formal religious occasion, but I just decided to wear it for a friend's wedding who happens to be from Europe. But there was something about that image the way I took, tied my saree, and I tied him by myself. I decided to use that as a central image.



Womb Series

The womb series is a point of departure from the *Saptamātrkas* the seven women who gave birth to a child. The smaller lightboxes in this series are the result of my conversations based on rhetoric of Simone de Beauvoir – “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” Womb Series is an assortment of images. My images are always layered. The idea of layering is also a bit more introspective. So when the light turns on, I can actually then see ... it's like the answer, almost like a confession.

– Dr. Mandakini Devi



Womb Series - 1 | Digital Print Mounted on light box | 27 x 36 inches | 2023



Womb Series - 2 | Digital Print Mounted on light box | 27 x 36 inches | 2023

Digital Collage Print Mounted on Light Box

The concept of a light box reminds me of the idea of rose windows, found in churches, made in glass when the light shines on, when the sun rises, the glass light illuminates the artwork. My light boxes are based on that idea so when you have to produce a light box, one must take into consideration that there will be light. It is about the idea of illuminated manuscripts causing a sense of realisation. The lightboxes in this exhibition are referencing the sacred. In the West like in India, art has been transformative. From rose windows to illuminated manuscripts. In Indian art as well, the classical forms of representation have been found in temples.

– Dr. Mandakini Devi



Forest of the Saints | Digital Collage Print Mounted on light box | 54 X 37 Inches | 2012



Lyre_Liar | Digital Collage Print Mounted on Light box | 54 X 37 Inches | 2012

Cyanotype

The cyanotype process predates fine art or photography in general. In fact, it predates computer aided design as it was used by architects to make their final drawings. This is a time before plotters or machine printing as we know it today. The distinctive blue is because of chemical reaction. This ink or dye is not carcinogenic unlike the regular analogue photography process. It has an appearance of the colour indigo. Indigo dye used in handicraft items has the same appearance. Indigo plantations have been part of imperial regimes. The cyanotype process is opposite. Therefore, it is considered as an alternate remedy to silver gelatin prints. My interest in cyanotypes is more from the idea that it is closest to reportage photography. It is a monochromatic medium. My digital negatives are how I would work with analogue black and white negatives.

– Dr. Mandakini Devi





Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



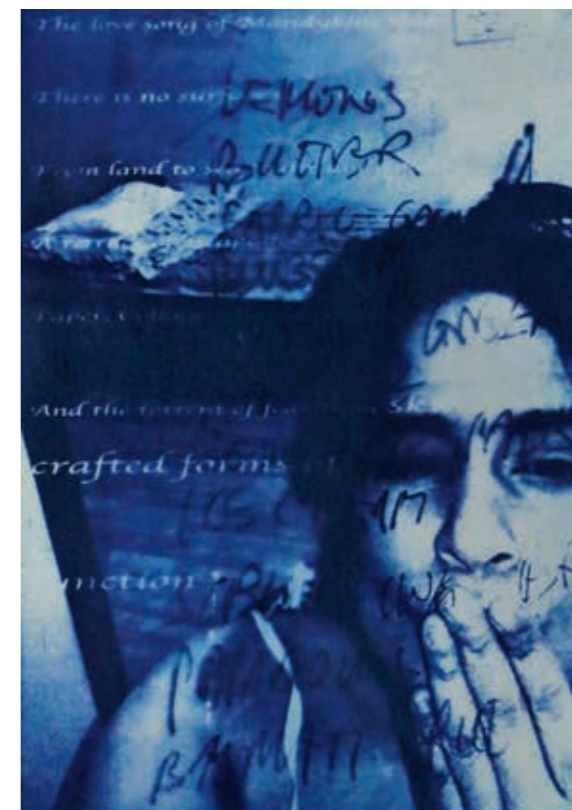
Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 14.5 x 11.5 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 36 x 48 inches | 2024



Untitled | Cyanotype | 36 x 48 inches | 2024

Aṣṭanāyikās

When I caught her tender lip by my teeth, she started shaking her face to escape from the love-bite. While doing so her dark and long hair got loose and spread on her face as black bees swarm charming lotus flowers attracted by its fragrance."

– *Gatha Saptashatī*

The *Aṣṭanāyikās* were first written by Bharat Muni in the 'Nāṭyaśāstra' chapter 2 and chapter 24. The *Aṣṭanāyikās*, or the eight heroines, are described in eight ways according to their different emotional states or moods. It is part of the *Nāyaka-Nāyikā* Bhed, the 'hero' and 'heroine', who are very much part of the visual language of miniature paintings and Indian classical dance forms. In fact, in the first classification, the heroines had three roles, Maiden, Wife or Hetaira.

Nāyikās are another embodiment of women in love. They are well discussed in Indian literature and depicted in both paintings and sculptures. Women in the role of *Mithunā* are well illustrated in Indian art. In most of the representations, they are depicted in close proximity with a seductive manner.

The *Aṣṭanāyikās* are:

- **Vāsakasajjā** (readily dressed up for union),
- **Virahokaṅṭhitā** (distressed due to separation),
- **Svādhīnabhartṛkā** (one who has her husband under her control),
- **Kalahāntarītā** (one estranged due to quarrel with the lover),
- **Khaṇḍītā** (one annoyed with her lover),
- **Vipralabdā** (one jilted by the lover),
- **Proṣitabhartṛkā** (one whose husband is abroad),
- **Abhisārikā** (one who approaches the husband or lover herself).

The *Nāyikās* were also divided by way of classification, like a Gazelle (*Mrgī*), Mare-like (*Vadavā*), or Elephant-like (*Hastinī*). They are they were also known as the Lotus (*Padminī*), Variegated (*Citrinī*), Conch (*Śankhinī*), and Elephant-woman (*Hastinī*). They have been written about in the *Ratirahasya*, *Anangaranga*, *Bhāṣā-bhūṣana*, *Rasikapriyā*, etc.

The enormous Sanskrit and regional literature from South India, particularly Tamil Nadu gives beautiful descriptions of the innumerable heroines in both prose and poetry. The *Citrasūtra* also places extra importance on *śṛṅgāra* and *alankāra* of women.

ARTIST OVERVIEW

The *Aṣṭanāyikās* is a point of departure from my series related to the *Dus Mahavidyas* with the hands of the *Saptamātṛkas* who are considered to be goddesses.

Now, when it comes to the cyanotype process why I chose particularly to develop the idea of the *Aṣṭanāyikās*, was because they are also part of India's mythological traditions, and they come from stories of Krishna, of Ram, of, I think from the tradition of Bhakti. When I start looking at the *Aṣṭanāyikās*, my primary resources were miniature paintings.

It breaks from the tradition of religiosity and it is more about the self. Therefore I used images from my own history and myself because at this point I am not trying to engage in this concept through mythology, but poetry.

It is all about poetry based around love, a husband, wife, or two lovers, and the churning that happens because of that. So I chose cyanotypes because it is a medium which comes from a purely photographic process that is layered and magical.

The cyanotypes are close enough to photography and I would I wanted to bring my own self-image back into the visual medium. I could have easily copy pasted miniature paintings, done some drawings on them. But instead, I began to look at them as this is what emotions are about, that people feel. So that my images are not formative but from my immediate personal background.



Nayika Vasakasajja | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Kalahantarita | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Virahotkanthita | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Svadhinabhartruka | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



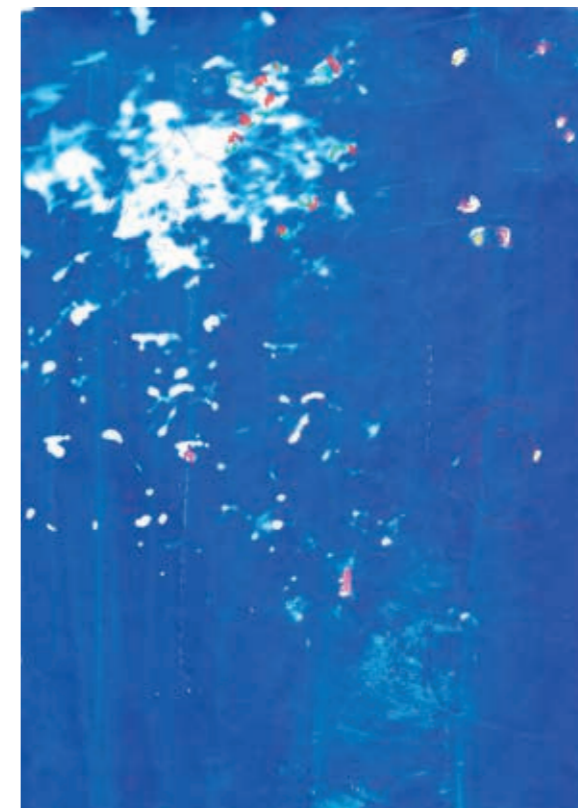
Nayika Khandita | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Proshitabhartruka | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Vipralabdha | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024



Nayika Abhisarika | Cynotype | 36 X 48 inches | 2024

Birth of Venus

The Birth of Venus by an iconic Italian Renaissance master, Sandro Botticelli. I discovered during my undergraduate days. The painting was part of the art history curriculum. The painting captured my imagination. The central figure is important, I see that as well in my works. It is not an abstraction but an allusion to the concept of figurative painting. The work are iterations of the painting by Botticelli.

– Dr. Mandakini Devi



Birth of Venus - 1 | Scroll | Archival Print on Canvas
78 x 41 inches | 2016



Birth of Venus - 2 | Scroll | Archival Print on Canvas
78 x 41 inches | 2016



Gilded Angels | Digital Collage with lenticular printing | 24 x 47 inches | 2024

Artist Profile

Dr Mandakini Devi is a practising visual artist who trained at the Delhi College of Art, New Delhi, Master's from Nottingham Trent University, Diploma in Photography from the London College of Communication and her practice based Phd from the University of Gloucestershire. Mandakini Devi is a multi-media artist who does lens-based work to express herself through her creative imagination. She uses diverse mediums through her photographic lens, cyanotypes, lenticular prints, light boxes, drawings photo books and film to express her personal spaces and issues of gender, identity, sexuality and mythology. Over the last ten years Mandakini has participated in a number of exhibitions in India and abroad.

Dr Mandakini Devi (b. 1984, Jalandhar, Punjab, India)

Dr Mandakini Devi is an artist based in New Delhi, India. Her practice is an engagement with aspects of portraiture, especially self-portraiture that is reflective of an expressive engagement with gender, identity and politics.

Educational qualifications:

2003-2007: College of Art, Tilak Marg, New Delhi, India, Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)

2007-2008: Post Graduate Diploma, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham.

2008-2009: Diploma in Photography, London College of Communication, London

2009-2010: MA in Fine Arts, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham

2013-2018: Ph.D. in Media, Art and Technology, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham.

Exhibitions and Projects (India):

2010: Participated in *Drifters 1 and 2*, Curated by Rahul Bhattacharya and presented by Gallery Art Konsult

2012: Regional Art and Performance Events (RAPE), Guwahati, Assam

Kolkata International Performance Art Festival (KIPAF)

2013: Participated in a residency at Barbil in Odisha

Part of the Project Plastic Propaganda

In which Dr Mandakini Devi participated in exhibitions between Amsterdam, (2013), London Covent Gardens (2015) and APT Galleries London (2016)

2017: Part of travelling exhibition of 'works on paper' started in Goa (India) based on the 'dreams', consisting of over 200 hundred artists from around the world.

2018: Participated in a group show organised by Art Konsult, curated by Rahul Bhattacharya titled *Extending the Contemporary*.

2022: Participated in a group show *Techne Disruptors* curated by Myna Mukherjee, supported by American Center and Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, in New Delhi and New York City



2022-2023: Participated in a group show *Love, Lights, Prufrock* curated by Jyoti A Kathpalia presented by Art Konsult

Participated in a group shown *One story is not enough* curated by Myna Mukherjee

2024: Participated in the Centre of International and Modern Art's 30th anniversary group show, *Fantastic Realities and Beyond*

Participated in a group show *The Art of India*, an initiative of the Times of India

3 works from the series *Dus Mahavidyas* exhibited at the British Council, Delhi

Employment:

2018-2020: Artist/consultant employed by Abaxial Design Pvt Ltd. As an employee for the firm, Dr Mandakini Devi created works of art for the firm in print and digital media.

2020-2022: Guest Lecturer in Critical Theory at the Indian Institute of Photography, Noida

Editor of *108 Photographs of India* (author – Dr Alka Pande)

Part of the visiting faculty at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication

Works in Private Collections (India)

Tapovan, Delhi

iiITD, Delhi NCR

AMD Pvt, Delhi

Singinawa Museum, Madhya Pradesh (India)

Dr Mandakini Devi's interests involve creative writing and developing more experimental skills that include working primarily with softwares such as Indesign, Photoshop, Adobe Premier Pro and Adobe After Effects.



Birth of Mandykins Galore | Mixed-media on Canvas | 21 x 30 inches | 2003

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