



Listen to 'Milky Bath'

Mahsa Saloor
Paradise Sweat Licking Lungs

August 3—August 21, 2022

Paradise Sweat Licking Lungs explores the power of color to coalesce sensory experience with orgasmic spirituality. It is telling that Mahsa Saloor chose painting for this endeavor, color being hard to convey in its mechanical or digital reproduction. It is less a reaction to the apparent limits of a medium and more an appreciation of the luscious materiality and physical weight of color no photograph can reproduce. Take for instance, *Muddled Heartbeats* (2020); it is an experiment in color, a rehearsal in hue, a study of the unexpected vicinities between peachy and violet tones as well as of the diluted shades of pink that rise like ethereal clouds.

In the context of the exhibition series *The Bellermann Hypnotist*, which prescribes a red velvet chaise longue and a lamp in a hypnotist's parlor turned artist-run space, Mahsa has intervened by carpeting the space's floor and redressing the furniture in a subdued coral pink. The paintings' red tones become all the more present, as if blushing. Similar to the physical experience of reclining at the analyst's and looking up, the carpet guides our eyes towards the ceiling, where faded rose patches have been uncovered behind paint.

Color often stands for freedom of choice, and the infinite possibility of its mixtures and chemistry promises this. Yet, our freedoms can petrify and drive us insane. One need not be an artist or a philosopher or a mystic to give account of the paralyzing pressures of color; think of trying on clothes, or painting a wall, or eating food in a color deemed "unappetizing." The freedom of color is both a burden and a blessing.

A possible answer to this ambivalence can be found in forms of spirituality committed to transforming material reality through embodied experience. In *The Color of the Sacred* (2009) anthropologist Michael Taussig decouples color from vision, observing that experiences of color have "less a retinal and more a total bodily activity." This is a power attributed to color at least since etymologist Isidore of Seville posited in the 7th century the relation between *color* and *calor*, between light and heat, between vision and touch. Similarly, Sufi mystic Inayat Khan considers

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color inseparable from its sonic quality, linking vision and auditory perception. Color can become a transformative, multisensory experience that offers respite from its ambivalent promise. The paintings navigate this in their invitation to see inasmuch as to hear, smell, taste, and especially, touch color.

In *Milky Bath* (2022), the poem recorded for the exhibition, color becomes touch: “I kiss my pink roses/you lick my ass/I put my middle finger in yours/our knees touch.” Mahsa’s poetry conjoins color with the orgasmic (“I ejaculate lilac”), while lubricating the potential for the interiority of psychic life to be sensuous and pleasurable. The painting *Spit and Softness, Night* (2022) brings it to the point: Not the pejorative sense of spitting, but instead the spit of masturbation, or of a lover, from the mouth to the fingers to the insides of a body before orgasm. Another word to force onto the show, the artist says, would be squirting.

Paradise Sweat Licking Lungs pools the orgasmic and the divine together. Saloor is committed to experiencing the orgasmically divine and the divinely orgasmic, not in any form of afterlife, but in the now of flesh. Like the vase of flowers inviting viewers into the space, paradise is here, it’s heaven-on-earth, it is now, no more waiting—and this can be a spiritual experience accessible through the senses, some belief and through a couple of tricks of which color is neither the cheapest nor lightest. —José B. Segebre

List of Works (left to right)

Muddled Heartbeats, 2020

oil on linen
110 x 140cm

Bewilderment, 2020

ink and oil on linen
100 x 130 cm

Spit and Softness, Night, 2022

oil on canvas
100 x 120 cm

Rumbling Ghost, Moist Jasmine, 2021

oil on linen
100 x 130 cm

Spirit Tonics, Sweet Peas, 2022

oil on linen
60 x 80 cm