

Tsherin Sherpa

What Is It You See?

Jan 11 — Feb 17, 2024 | Paris, Turenne (Front Space)

Almine Rech Paris is pleased to present *What Is It You See*, Tsherin Sherpa's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from January 11 to February 17, 2024.

Tsherin Sherpa was born and raised in Kathmandu and from the age of thirteen studied Tibetan Buddhist scroll painting with his father. In his late twenties, he relocated to California, where he continued his traditional art practice before moving beyond its boundaries to establish his own, unique artistic expression.

Through distortion, deconstruction, rupture, and rearrangement, Sherpa stretches, bends, reconfigures, and repurposes elements from Tibetan art, merging them with modern imagery. Through these transformations, he contemplates the collisions of culture and identity negotiated by displaced people. Sherpa's creations celebrate Himalayan culture while simultaneously challenging its frequently romanticized representations.

Sherpa's art resists simple classification, delicately balancing binaries such as sacred and secular, traditional and modern, gravity and humor. His creations challenge the formal strictures of his artistic training while also signaling his insistence that meaning within his work should not, and cannot, be fixed. Like the forms themselves, meaning is open, fluid, and evolving, dependent on what each viewer projects onto them.

This exhibition's paintings represent the latest evolution in Sherpa's Protectors series. With them, the artist conveys the boundless energy of Tibetan Buddhism's wrathful deities by transforming their usually static portrayals into great masses of swirling color reminiscent of hurricanes viewed from space. Except in one work, where they completely envelope the canvas, these vibrant vortexes emerge from gleaming golden backgrounds, some figured with symbols from Tibetan Buddhism's often macabre iconography. But are these multihued maelstroms, their edges melting away in long drips, materializing from or instead dissolving into those luminous voids? With some of his playful titles, the artist appears to nod toward one of Buddhism's most profound philosophical principles: nonduality, the reality that form and formlessness are not so much opposites as both equally computations of the mind.

Sherpa's exploration of ambiguity—and with it his resolve to situate meaning in the beholder's eye—extends beyond Buddhist philosophy, to Western psychology and consumerism. An updated Protectors composition first presented at Brisbane's 2015 Asia Pacific Triennial bears the cheeky title "This is not a Rorschach Test." And the title of the exhibition's sole sculptural work—a three-dimensional outgrowth from his Gestures series—references the futility of materialism. An adaptation of a monumental bronze shown at the most recent Venice Biennale, the sculpture's grasping limbs, intertwined with serpents, are as much a phantasm as the objects of their attraction.

—John Henry Rice, curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and originator of the artist's recent retrospective exhibition and catalogue *Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits*