

Douglas Sanderson
Arcane Image Series

The Arcane Image Series

Navjotika Kumar

The paintings in Douglas Sanderson's *Arcane Image Series* are inspired by his admiration for the meticulous workmanship, sumptuous palette, sensuous linearity, and studied gestures of Mughal miniatures. While apparently manifesting the same centralized motif set in relation to a decorative ground, each painting enmeshes the eye in its own uniquely structured matrix of intertwined leaf-like shapes or tiled squares. At once boldly startling and curiously sedate, the all-over compositions follow electric arabesques or variously shaded and shaped motifs that course from top to bottom and from side to side. Painstakingly constructed by the artist with a near-obsessive attention to the minutest details of color, shape, size, and proportion, each painting simultaneously mobilizes and arrests the gaze.

Painted on both the front and the reverse sides, they vibrate with saturated colors that hover over one another—creating the sensation of a visual push and pull, of a hallucinatory activation and relaxation of the eye. The gleefully charged yet coolly static fields evoke the conditions of viewing in spectacle culture where the eye is maddeningly driven to decipher minuscule differences and eventually to succumb to the sameness of difference.

However associable with the spectacular, these paintings are pledged neither to the optical sizzle of Op art nor to the seductions of pattern and decoration. Rather, through their repetitive permutations that seem mechanically generated by underlying grids, their serial production, and their potential to continue indefinitely, they recall aspects of Minimalism.

The vertical configuration formed from the carefully calibrated intersection of leaf-like curves at their centers more than accentuates the tensed play of figure and ground, contour and shape, form and color that pulsates through their pictorial fields. This configuration—broadly deemed by the artist as a visual analog of metaphysical and bodily energy in Vedic and Tantric drawings and scientific certitude, as well as rationality in the Renaissance ideal of the Vitruvian man—references the upright axis of the human body and its conception in terms of the binary opposition of spirit and matter.

Yet, although a sign of such age-old conceptions, this figure—depicted in constantly varying relationships to its ground—symbolically raises the question of how we might conceive of the body, of the human, under conditions of spectacle culture. Appearing in some paintings to clearly separate from and dominate

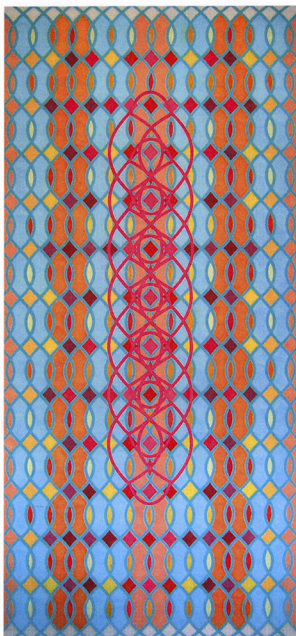
its patterned ground, in others to be partially entangled within it, and in some to be wholly consumed by it, this figure enacts the human struggle to define and preserve boundaries.

Whether depicted as rigorously intact or wholly breached, it alludes ultimately to hidden forces and energies. By manifesting both the necessity to maintain its gestalt, its identity, as well as the temptation to yield to and dissolve within its surrounding force-field, this figure—like each painting—encodes the primal tension between those most profound, mysterious and arcane of forces: the opposing drives of life and death.

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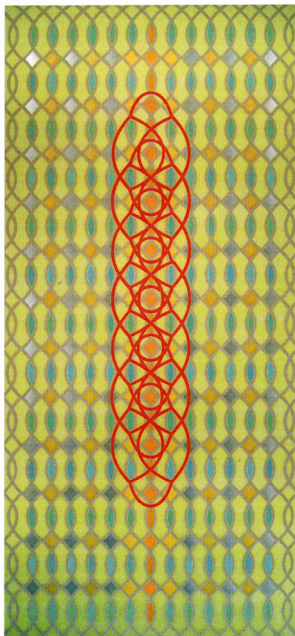
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Cover:
Arcane Image Series 052,
2007
alkyd oil, Acryla gouache,
acrylic on mylar;
67 in x 30 in.

Arcane Image Series 055,
2007
alkyd oil, Acryla gouache,
acrylic on mylar;
67 in x 30 in.



Arcane Image Series 060,
2007
alkyd oil, Acryla gouache,
acrylic on mylar;
67 in x 30 in.