

CHECKLIST

Large Red Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Large Ultramarine Blue Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Large Pink Fresco Block, 2003
5' x 5'

Large Yellow Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Large Orange Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Large Purple Fresco Block, 2003
5' x 5'

Large 2-tone Pink Fresco Block, 2003
5' x 5'

Large Sea Green Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Large Fuschia Pink Fresco Block, 2002
5' x 5'

Black Ripple Circle Fresco, 2002
3' 7" diam.

Red Pill with Neon Fresco, 2002
2' diam.

Jewel Green Fresco Block, 2003
3' x 3'

Ultramarine Fresco Block, 2003
3' x 3'

Rose Red Fresco Block, 2003
3' x 3'

Orange Amber Fresco Block, 2003
3' x 3'

Vertical Quindo Purple Lingham, 2002
2' x 1' diam.

Vertical Quindo Fuschia Lingham, 2002
2' x 1' diam.

Vertical Cadmium Red Lingham, 2002
2' x 1' diam.

Vertical Aureolin Yellow Lingham, 2002
2' x 1' diam.

Vertical Irgazine Orange Lingham, 2002
2' x 1' diam.

KJO Spectrum x 74 | Spectrum=74 bricks), 2002
6" x 6"

Lingham with markings (series of 8), 2001
1' x 6" diam.



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KATE DINEEN

RED IS THE COLOR | OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 29, 2003

RED IS THE COLOR

Kate Dineen's deceptively spare and simple sculptures straddle the traditional and the contemporary and embrace both Indian culture and Western art. Her large polished blocks of intense color, and her smooth, egg-shaped sculptures call to mind the formal concerns of an artist like Mark Rothko, as well as the cross-cultural and multi-media range of someone like Anish Kapoor. The complexities of Indian mythology also come to mind, but more than anything, there is the pure, intense, luminous color and an evocative tactile quality: you want to touch them, to run your hands along their smooth surfaces.

Dineen's initial interest in India was perhaps not so unusual for a young, adventurous Brit, but the country drew her back over and over, almost against her will. She first went, on her own, when she was 17. "It spooked the hell out of me," she says. "It was anarchy." But that anarchy, as it was manifested in the color and the quality of the light there, was intensely compelling to a young woman who was already interested in making art, and in the visual language of color. So



Large Purple Fresco Block | 5" x 5" | 2002

while that first trip was not an entirely pleasant one — it was overwhelming and difficult in lots of ways — she recalls it as "a bloody great Wellington boot up my backside. It was a wake up call," and she's been going back ever since.

Dineen graduated from the London College of Printing, where she studied graphic design, in 1984, then went on to attend the Royal College of Art, where she received an MA in textiles and illustration. In 1988, she received a British Council/Commonwealth Arts Scholarship to study "araash," a kind of fresco painting practiced in Gujerat, in Western India. The method, involving the application of several layers of marble powder, slaked lime, and pigment, is traditionally used by masons, essentially as a way of finishing off walls and floors and giving them a polished sheen. Dineen eventually earned a PhD from the Royal College of Art that focused on the process.

When she first discovered araash, what she saw was a method of working that could achieve the kind of rich, reverberating color she was after in her artwork. There is a huge marble quarry in Rajasthan, called Makrana, which produces a beautiful, pure white marble — and consequently a fine, pure white marble

dust. Lime is also indigenous to the area, says Dineen, and since "recycling is the name of the game there," someone figured out long ago a way to combine those raw materials to develop a process of fresco. For generations, the practitioners of araash have built up layers of marble dust and lime mix to create a fresco layer, which is then refined and polished to create very strong, very beautiful, surfaces on walls and floors. In 1987, Dineen met one of the last surviving practitioners of araash, Gyarsilal Verma, who was teaching at the University Art College in Gujarat, and arranged to be his apprentice for two years, from 1988 to 1990 — an unusual arrangement, to say the least, since the practice is generally one passed down from fathers to sons. She continued to go back and study with him for a couple of months at a time for the next decade (Verma died in 2000). Women are traditionally not practitioners of araash, and certainly not young white women traveling to Gujerat from London. Dineen and Verma didn't even speak a common language, so Verma's grandson acted as interpreter. Araash not only requires very specific tools (Verma ultimately gave his set to Dineen, a clear sign of his approval), but a delicate touch, and great manual strength and dexterity, since you literally beat the pigment in to the fresco. (The process involves 18 layers of marble dust and lime, into which the pigment is ground, but when it comes time to finish the last layer, the pigment is literally beaten into the damp



Large Ultramarine Blue Fresco Block | 5" x 5" | 2002



Vertical Aureolin Yellow Lingham | 2' x 1' diam. | 2002

surface with a burnishing tool that's like the backside of a large spoon.) Dineen calls it "a bummer of a process — it's incredibly labor intensive and it can go wrong so easily." The physical challenges, not to mention the time learning the technique, were well worth it, though. "I'm obsessed by color," she says. "I used to dye cloth when I studied textiles, but there's something about this — the idea that I could build a solid three-dimensional block of pure color. I liked the weight of it, the fact that it was not lightweight or ephemeral."

Dineen's work is anything but ephemeral, though it is about absence as well as presence. In her sculptures and installations, she has eliminated all superfluous detail, rendering each piece down to its most minimal and spare essence — the seemingly inevitable merging of shape and color. Still, she has given a form that could seem remote and conceptual a tactility and physicality — even an earthy quality — that draw the viewer in. Some of the square installations, about five-foot square, have a seam running down the middle where Dineen has joined one half to the other, suggesting a membrane, or skin, with a scar running down the center. And with their intense, luminous color, there is something nearly alive about these objects — they practically glow.

The sensual, egg-shaped sculptures are based on Shiva linghams, stones that turn up when riverbeds dry out. The stones, which have been tossed and turned in the river, have been marked and worn smooth by the water, and people pick them up and use them to worship Shiva, the Hindu god who represents masculine energy. "I've collected them for quite a while," says Dineen. "The markings on them are extraordinary — a stone with one tiny deep red dot, or stones with loads of lines and marks and colors. And they're all really polished from the water." The shape is phallic, clearly, but it might also be read as its opposite, an egg form suggesting feminine characteristics of birth and rebirth, sexuality and creation. The very idea of the lingham, of course, calls up its opposite, the (feminine) yoni, or the concavity into which the lingham fits, and there is always this sense of balance in Dineen's work. It is this balance, as well as the simplicity of the forms, which engenders a certain feeling of serenity as well, recalling Hindi chakras, abstract representations of gods and generally auspicious symbols.

The clean lines and simple, repetitive shapes also take much from the traditions of modern art, of course, but Dineen's installations, to a rare degree, burst with color, rich, lush, deep color — blood reds, lapis blues,



KJO Spectrum x 74 | 6" x 6" | 2002



Vertical Cadmium Red Lingham | 2' x 1' diam. | 2002

rich mustardy yellows, deep pinks. "I want people to be enveloped by color, to be swallowed by it," says Dineen, and her minimal, meditative sculptures do just that — enveloping you and drawing you into a state of contemplation.

Jean Dykstra
October 2003



Large Orange Fresco Block | 5" x 5" | 2002