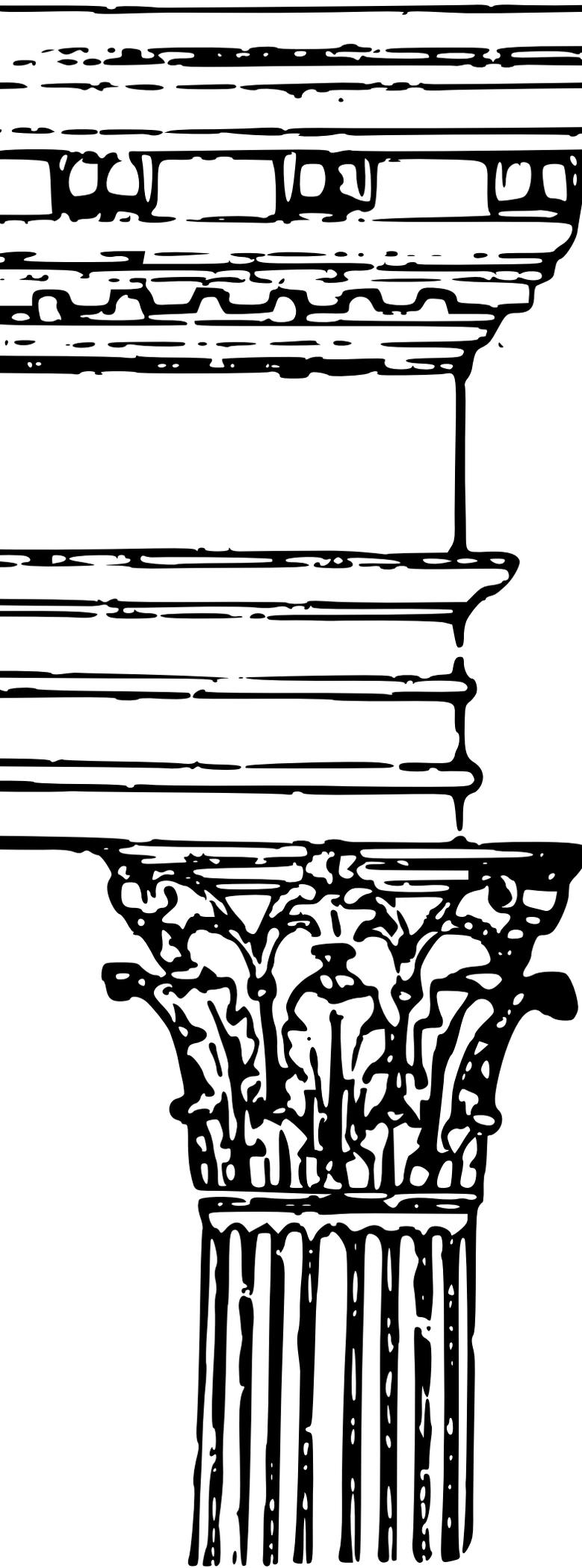


MONOGRAPH

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MONOGRAPH

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Editor's Note



The rains disappeared almost as quickly as they'd come, and here we are, in the midst of hot and humid June, working to make Monograph better with each and every issue.

June also marks the beginning of Pride Month, and it is my ardent pleasure to wish all our readers a very happy and joyful Pride on behalf of the entire Monograph team.

Finally, thank you for your support. We are inching closer to year 4 with every passing day, and it would not have been possible without your support.

Anuraag Das Sarma

Editor-In-Chief

Monograph





Art Deco. South Calcutta & Its environs



RUSHALI MUKHERJEE

The Art Deco Movement or le style moderne found its roots in 19th century France, quickly spreading throughout Europe and subsequently the United States due to their embracing of modernity with the appearance of grand luxury and splendour- a marker of one's wealth through a symbolic straying from what is considered traditional. However, the version of modernity that the Art Deco Movement adopted, on one hand, did consist of new scientific and technological advances both in the style and the material used in its production, but on the other hand, also appropriated styles from the so-called traditional, previously colonised Orient, particularly China and Japan, as well as countries like Egypt and Native America. Keeping in mind this contradiction, I will be focusing on the translation of the Art Deco Movement in the city of Kolkata in the form of architecture and what it means for a predominantly European art movement to be taken up by a formerly colonised space. If the results of the appropriation done by the movement is "more sophisticated than any primitive peoples have ever been able to produce," then what are the connotations for the middle-class of Kolkata using the Art Deco style in their residential spaces as a representation of their class status?

Kolkata, the erstwhile capital of India was then in a period of growth- absorbing several hamlets and marshy forest lands into the city, building on it to house the nouveau riche. During the Bengal Partition, there was an influx of people coming in from present-day Bangladesh as well as North Kolkata, causing a boom in the population of south Kolkata, leading to a boom in residential houses. With not enough wealth in their hands to build the large rajbari or palatial style houses that

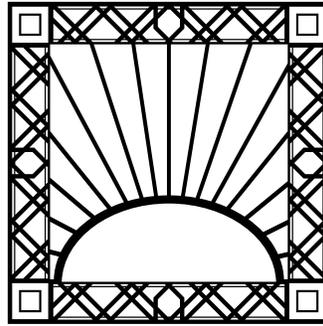
was common in the North, but still hoping for their residential buildings to hold some character, they incorporated the Art Deco style into their houses. Thus emerged the “modernised” southern neighbourhoods of Golpark, Southern Avenue, Purna Das Road, and such, which became one of the best preserved clusters of Art Deco architecture, which although intimately familiar with the residents of Kolkata, but not distinctly recognised as the Art Deco style. Kolkata as a city has always been an assimilation of different styles, thoughts, and forms- a melting pot of cultures, and Art Deco, in a similar vein, found itself transformed as the big skyscrapers of Chicago were turned into three-storied private houses. There are three distinct types of art deco buildings in Kolkata- namely offices, private residential houses, and communal residential spaces. Based on the type of building, the architectural style varied in a significant fashion. Single-screen cinema halls, which were modern buildings at the time, came to embrace the art deco style. Resembling the European branch closely, theatres like Indira Cinema, and Metro, became hallmarks of the rapidly progressing city. The Metro Cinema in particular, with its distinct waterfall-style columns and its tapering ziggurat style top, inspired almost all the buildings that came up in South Kolkata to incorporate the Art Deco Style in their houses. Popularly known as “metro-style badis,” the residential spaces were where we saw deviation in terms of the typical Art Deco style of the West, and while their architectural importance cannot be overstated, they are often overlooked by the population at large. The main reason behind my separation of private residential houses, and communal residential spaces is that they exhibit several different characteristics. A marked distinction between the two, for example, is the presence of courtyards in the communal houses as a shared space. The communal spaces depended on a shared courtyard to spend their leisure time, and these spaces became hubs of social activity, some going as far as even hosting ceremonies there on a yearly basis. The private residences, belonging to those who were comparatively better off financially, instead chose to have large open verandahs, complete with arm chairs, and patio sets. These houses were built for smaller nuclear families, and the courtyards were deemed non-essential. Balconies and verandahs, however, in the tropical swampy climate of Bengal, came to play a huge role, both functionally and visually. In accordance to the historically Victorian idea of leisure linked to class privilege, this idea also trickled down to the Bengalis, who

in most cases, have a certain affinity for leisure, which could be seen as a colonial remnant in many senses, and this shows in their attention to detail to the architectural choices of courtyards and balconies. The Art Deco Movement that materialised in the West, wanted to mirror the scientific developments of its time even in the material and colour they used in their architecture and decorative art. While monochromatic colours such as white, black and grey-scale were the most commonly used shades for the architecture- especially white as it represented a “clean slate,” the interiors such as the kitchens and bathrooms were predominantly done up in apple green and vermilion. In contrast, the colour schemes of the Art Deco style houses in Kolkata portrayed distinct shades of red, yellow, blue, and lime-green, the choice of paint used for these modern residences being articulated in a chaotic yet pleasing way. Therefore, no two houses in Kolkata are the same, especially the Art Deco style buildings of South Kolkata. Even houses on the same lane, built in the same style, sometimes by the same contractor, differ wildly from each other. The bright colours used to paint the houses in Kolkata work as dialogue against the preferred neutral colours of the West, which create a eurocentric hegemony of the aesthetics- where the “loud” colours used by India at large, in almost every aspect of their life, especially in the area of architecture and decor in this case, has been considered to be too gaudy, ostentatious and effeminate by their colonisers, which was the case even at the time that the Art Deco Movement came up. For the residents of Kolkata to adopt the Western Art Deco style and then making it their own by integrating the colourful elements of their culture into it, stands as an important instance of what happens when an art movement moves away from its place of origin- Kolkata standing out as an even more example due to the existing dichotomy between the coloniser and the colonised.

Other than the balconies and courtyards, the cast-iron railings have been a permanent fixture in the houses of Kolkata, tracing its history back to the zamindar baris of rural Bengal. However, the Art Deco style is often superimposed on the shape of the railings, along with the existing material that happens to coincide with the preferences of the movement, while ditching the Victorian floral patterns often found in the rajbaris of North Calcutta. They are replaced by basic lines and shapes that intersect to form strong symbols, conveying a sense of minimal grandeur that

reflects contemporary thought- the ziggurat, sunburst, darts and vertical lines being the most prominent motifs. The Art Deco neighbourhoods of Kolkata, it is interesting to note, as a whole, also offer an extremely different sense of aesthetic when compared to their European counterparts. Led by a sense of architectural superiority, especially in America, in most cases, they were built by, and conveyed, a sense of pride and unimaginable wealth- existing to showcase the contemporary thoughts of the architects in their quest to reach the sky. In a sense, they were led by a sense of traditional Puritanism - contemporary yet guided by the same principles that had enamoured the architects who possessed traditional sensibilities. Kolkata's art deco remains extremely different. The buildings are more open, less pompous and much friendlier to the "laid-back Bengalis," mostly men, who choose to spend their mornings walking around the city. While a walk down the Art Deco neighbourhoods of Europe or America would be sure to impress upon you the talents of the architect and the grandiosity of the buildings that seem to touch the skies, a walk down Purna Das Road would feel like home. It feels more natural, and grounded while still firmly established in contemporary society, straying away from the alienating dominance of the west, instead choosing to feel warm and open with its colourful façades, and its open balconies.

As mentioned before, the South Kolkata houses not only differed from the Art Deco style that developed in the West, but it also differed from one another. The residents got the contractors to build the houses as per their unique personal taste, which implied that they did not blindly copy the exact designs of the Art Deco buildings of the West, but rather, picked up various Art Deco elements from their Western counterparts that was portrayed to them through magazines or catalogues, or any other form of media that they could access during the the late nineties. Due to the same reason, it is also difficult to apply the specific Art Deco architectural styles while studying the Art Deco buildings of Kolkata, like that of "Jazz Moderne" or "Zigzag Moderne" as the residential spaces present themselves as a harmonic mish-mash of various coinciding styles. By adhering to the Art Deco style as a marker of their modern way of thinking and accentuating specific important parts of their houses, such as the windows, railings or balconies, in distinct Art Deco patterns and styles, they embodied Gells's conception of the decorative fulfilling the dichotomy

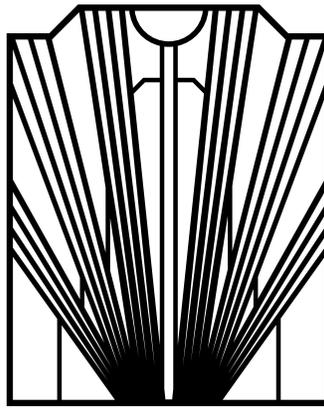


of form and function.

Following the same line of thought, Bordieu's idea of distinction becomes important in this case. While Bordieu's study is specific to France, his theories can be carried forward to Kolkata and used to understand their fascination with the Art Deco architecture. Bordieu

The Bengali middle class used the elements of the Art Deco Movement as a marker of their wealth in some cases, but in most instances as a modern way of thought, in a way each family's distinctive personality, in their eyes modern being the idea that they could adopt from the West, the so-called blueprint. However, considering the appropriation of motifs and patterns from colonised spaces done by the original branch of this Movement, the implications of the residents of Kolkata borrowing from the Art Deco style somewhat create an instance of reclamation- perhaps not through the intricacies of the specific styles and their colonised origins (China, Egypt, etc.) that had been previously appropriated by the West being taken up by the residents of Kolkata, but through the broader narrative of the colonised taking back from the coloniser in a symbolic manner.

Unfortunately, much like the movement itself, the fascination with building and owning these houses is dying out. With the present-day generations moving out of their family homes, or leaving the state or the country altogether, along with the homeowners not having the means to maintain these residential buildings, due to the economic stagnation in India, these houses are slowly falling prey to the elements of ruin. The South Kolkata Art Deco neighbourhoods are at a risk of completely disappearing and being replaced by flats and gated colonies if not preserved as an area of a non-heritage architecture. Although there has been



extensive work going on to preserve and use these spaces, mostly in the form of cafes or galleries, while preserving the original architecture, more attempts should be made to appreciate the houses for what they are, and the illustrious history that they hold.

Kolkata's Art Deco houses, standing as one of the most remarkable renditions of the movement in India, are hardly mentioned in popular lists, as the city remains preoccupied with its colonial past. However, beyond the boundaries of North Kolkata is a wonderful culture of Art Deco that everyday commuters seem to take for granted. These are houses born out of a need to be modern, while sustaining their own culture- a need to prove that their contemporary sensibilities could rival those of the Europeans who portrayed themselves as superior.





Khushwant Singh's Ode to His Beloved Delhi



ANWESHA GANGULY

*'I return to Delhi as I return to
my mistress Bhagmati when I
have had my fill of whoring in
foreign lands',*



thus begins the tale of the beautiful city, Delhi, as lived, imagined and admired by Khushwant Singh. Delhi is a land with footsteps of many kings, queens, bloodshed, poetry, beauty and history. A city which has seen many storms, many coups, more betrayals and many failed attempts at renaming— yet, Delhi has remained intact; albeit in ruins, but not desecrated to nothingness or divulged of its charm.

Published in 1990, *Delhi, A Novel* is a prolific work by Khushwant Singh who has attempted to document the life and struggles of his beloved city; a city which he came to understand as his own extension over the years. The novel is at the base of the curious case that Delhi is— quietly documenting every major turn of history that the subcontinent has had to bear. Apart from being the home to many forts, many gardens, many stories at every nook and corner, it is a story of many crushed aspirations, lost loves and the slow decay of a once great spectacle.

Native to Delhi is Khushwant Singh's apis historicus *Delhiana*, 'noted for its attachment to the past,' a bee that stings visitors of Delhi's old monuments placed every few kilometers. Singh is stung by the bee several times throughout the novel, revealing before him (and us) the times of the rulers and remnants of their egos through the forts they erected. Then come to life the very kings, countrymen and poets!



Singh is an unnamed Sikh man in the novel, with a passion for Delhi, which he calls his home and destiny, and his lover– Bhagmati. Bhagmati is a trans woman, or *hijda*, sex worker and the host of immeasurable comfort, for the narrator to retire to in a life of chaos.

India is a complex country with many surprising contrasts; Singh used the identity of a hermaphrodite or '*hijda*' as the many shades that India simultaneously upholds. Occasionally disloyal to his lover, the narrator is on a constantly presented with ghosts of the past, taking him to bloody battles of succession, loot and plunder of invaders, public beheadings of 'seditious' figures (as considered by the then kings) and mass migration during partition. Throughout the novel, the expression of *hijda* (in the form of Bhagmati) is used as a metaphor to portray the duality of Indian social fabric. Bhagmati offers herself as a man and a woman to her patrons, and exclaims 'Hai Ramji!' and 'Ya Allah!' in the same breath. And, since she is making love to a Sikh man, she says, she is a Sikh too. Reading 'Delhi– A Novel' as a queer text, reveals intricate details about love, passion and how two people, fluid in their sexual preferences– one belonging to a religious minority (Sikh, the author and narrator) and the other to a sexual minority, portray the promise of freedom in independent India. A strong element of dissent against the puritans, claiming homosexuality and secularism being a western concept and foreign to Indian culture, Khushwant Singh maps the history of many kings and princes, and their trysts with fluidity in their sexual adventures. As a result, the novel reads as an erotica. Singh unabashedly indulges in the sexual intricacies of the narrator, past rulers and their fascinations– but in its truest sense it is an epic love letter. It is a story of loving Delhi, which simultaneously attracts lovers of power, poetry, prospects and aspirations that Delhi promises.

Budding with love and passion, Khushwant Singh's novel is also a study in unadulterated love. Amidst the erotic tales of carnal passions, also lies a love that knows no boundaries. Nizamuddin Auliya and Sarmad's love for the enormity projected by the Maker, beyond religious conformations, triumphs in the context of a very divisive world. The lanes of Delhi also quiver at the silent sighs of poets like Meer and Ghalib.

The narrator is not at all a man without vices. He blames everything and everyone for a minor inconvenience caused to him. He finds joy at bargaining, offering a shockingly low price, disdain for order and affiliation to imported goodies. He is a silent, meek, misogynistic man— encompassing Khushwant Singh's personalised, deep understanding of the middle aged desi man.

While embodying any character in the novel, Singh fits the part like a glove. He writes of characters from different eras of history, like the Sultanate, the Mughals, invaders and protesters, all of whom write of their spoils, committing despicable or unholy acts (Singh writes the entire novel in first person) but consider themselves harmless and absolutely innocent, blaming the circumstances or their duties.

The novel unfolds on two tangents— the glorious past of Delhi's successive rulers, studded with instances of gory bloodbaths, and an inevitable slow decay, and the present dilapidated fossil of Delhi in the author's present times. Singh maps the history of the city by embodying sometimes a subject under a regime, and sometimes as the ruler himself. The true nature of the novel is the essence of biography, with chapters written in first person by Singh, all carefully constructed into the author. Readers, as a result, can very well forget if it's Singh revealing the city through the pages or Delhi letting in on its people's lives, courtyards and bedrooms one character at a time.

Khushwant Singh highlights us Indians' generic disobedience for rules, and preservation masterfully while also critiquing the subsequent governments of independent India. The distinction between rural and urban, the shocking coexistence of two completely different landscapes, in terms of collective conscience of the people, the technological gap and socio-economic well-being.

The largest democracy, and a country with multiple feathers of excellent scientific advances on her hat, also has people excreting on streets and looking down on the ones who don't look or pray like one's own. Our admiration of imported goods, rebated prices, development with a tinge of nostalgia and no accord for preservation– Singh weaves a beautiful string of typical characteristic features, satirically, in his own wicked, humorous style, to portray us Indians.

Yet, he beams of hope.

Just like past regimes of pre-modern India saw ludicrous crimes being committed on streets, like massacres ordered by Timurlane and Nadir Shah, public beheading of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Sarmad, or public hangings of princes and common people alike during the tumultuous times of 1857– the national capital of modern India of 1984, saw a pogrom. The city stood aghast and speechless at the merciless killings of Sikh people at the heart of the national capital. Bhagmati, with her life cusped in her palms, returns amidst the carnage, to the narrator, her yesteryear lover, to check on his well-being, and extend her solidarity.

Khushwant Singh once famously wrote of India, nearly 50 years ago, for Illustrated Weekly- 'Are you an Indian first and a Punjabi or Sikh second? Or is it the other way round? I don't like the way those questions are framed. I am all three at the same time. If I was denied my Punjabiness or my community tradition, I would refuse to call myself Indian. I am Indian, Punjabi and Sikh. And even so I have a patriotic kinship who says I am 'Indian, Hindu and Haryanvi' or 'I am Indian, Moplah Muslim and Malayali' or 'I am Indian, Christian and Assamese'. I want to retain my religious and linguistic identity without in any way making them exclusive. I am convinced that our guaranteed diversity is our strength as a nation. As soon as you try to obliterate regional languages in favour of one 'national' language or religion, in the name of some one Indian credo, you will destroy the unity of the country.'

The rulers who have ruled Delhi in the past, have also attempted to rename Delhi, like Siri, Mehrauli, Jahanpanah, Tughlaqabad, Shahjanabad– but 'Delhi' triumphed, and thrived. Just as the renaming failed to work wonders, Dehi, the city, has emerged victorious, despite such ferocious storms, so often in the past.

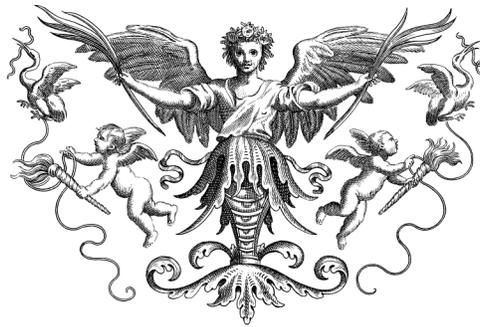


Fashion: #01



SNIDHI DHAR

In the age of disposable trends designed to add to the algorithm for an endless scroll, we tend to overlook what lies beyond fast fashion and brands which already have decades worth of a legacy. Months of a creative process and the calloused fingers of lesser known artists are often reduced to a quick like and sometimes, a share. So, let us look at three brands we may have passively come across on social media or on some of our favorite celebrities and get to know them a little better.



FANCÌ Club

Vietnam-based brand Fancì Club, is an ode to young women in love and what is colloquially referred to as the honeymoon phase of a relationship. “I wanted to create a line which spoke to romance and the early stages of dating,” said the now 24 year-old designer Duy Tran, in a 2022 interview with British Vogue. Tran founded Fancì Club in 2018 as an e-commerce label, after dropping out of fashion school and though it was first conceived as a medium for thrifting; the brand soon started being molded into how we know it today; as the second hand clothes began being upcycled into new pieces. Known for its Fancì Club features organza dresses in spring pastels, ribboned corsets and an assortment of sheer garments which utilize mesh, nylon and spandex.

Tran draws his inspiration from John Galliano, Jean Paul Gaultier and Vivienne Westwood among others and the chemistry between coquettish femininity and a seductive, semi-nude silhouette; is what has gained his brand most traction. Labeled The Brand Taking The Naked Dress To New Extremes by Eni Suber, we have seen some of our favorite pop sensations and models being adorned by Tran's clothing; such as Doja Cat, Gabbriette, Kali Uchis, Olivia Rodrigo, Bella Hadid, Kim Jisoo of BLACKPINK and Im Nayeon of TWICE.

URTE KAT

Born of the Lithuanian designer Urte Katiliute in 2019, Utre Kat is a contemporary fashion brand which celebrates local craftsmanship and Lithuanian folklore. For instance, the jewelry which is seen in the brand's Spring/Summer 2023 collection, originally designed by Elza White in London; is now produced in Lithuania by jewelers who make Baltic jewelry inspired by archaeological finds and traditional Baltic symbols. Katiliute defines it as a cross-disciplinary collaboration where every piece purchased, is made to order to keep production to a minimum. What makes Urte Kat stand out, is their skilful concoction of the traditional with the futuristic and of course, the recurrent spiral motif which stems from Katiliute's interest in Maria Gimbutiene's study of feminine symbols in archaeology. Urte Kat weaves together a number of fashion favorites such as crochet, knitwear, deconstruction, layered sets, subversive formalwear and futuristic patterns to create a very diverse range of apparel. The 'Emotional' print Satin Ties (Spring/Summer '22) are a personal favorite, being their first work to draw me in to learn more.

TROPICEYE

At the confluence of Chinese subcultures, vintage silhouettes and inclusive fashion, stands Lisha Kim's brainchild TROPICEYE. The Shanghainese brand first took form in 2016, initially designing clothes intended for the petite Asian physique but over the course of their activity, this changed to a great extent. With a focus on creating outfits customized for most body types, TROPICEYE's design philosophy, as phrased by them, is to celebrate self expression through quality clothing designed for any body type.

Nature and her elements are among the primary stimulants when it comes to TROPICEYE's designs. Complementary to this, the brand's color scheme predominantly comprises earth-tones as seen in their maxi and mini skirts, printed shirts and tops, tights, co-ords, trousers and dresses. In making designer clothes more accessible to a larger audience, TROPICEYE supports the local and strives to be a sustainable brand which uses eco-friendly packaging to the extent they can afford to. Their models, in this connection, are either friends and customers or people they have come across on the street. Bold and conscious, TROPICEYE captures the unadulterated beauty of Chinese art and youth culture with its visual voice.





The Abandoned Houses, North London



CHRISTIAN WARD



Glimpsed before they were salted with dusk,
each is like a deserted scene from Chernobyl
or Three-Mile Island: breakfast tables
abandoned, family photos left behind,
jackets still hanging on the backs of chairs.

Unopened letters spotty from a psoriasis
of mildew. Cutlery slowly fossilising, turning
the colour of anchovies. Their undissolvable
memories chirp like Geiger counters
when the street is silent, unspooling household
wiring, making the floorboards curl like butter.
Sometimes you might see patches of dandelions
in the front gardens bend, as if in the presence of breath.





Soñadora (Daydreaming in Spanish)



SHREYA SINGH

What song do I sing to you?
A hymn, a lament or a serenade;
Melodies dripping from the willow tree,
Beneath which the lovers bind promises to keep.

I will bloom sunflowers under moonlight,
and kiss you under every star (a church rite).
Scarlet roses and lilac lilies will bode in our hell,
Oh, how I will wish for you in every time's swell.

We will dance in hidden spots,
Where the sun and moon would knot.
I profess to wash your body with my sacred sight,
Drinking the elixir that seeps from the deep,
Kissing you with tender delight.

Naked bodies interlaced;
Mortals quiver, deities grimace.
A tainted stain on the white walls,
Sappho stitches a tapestry to cover the blight of it all.

She weaves tales of those who could, and those who did,
Living vicariously, through the little laugh and the little kiss.
The poets will write false folklores about an Elisa and her love –
Alas ! She will know when the lovers will return to their home, above.





my phoenix



SIVA WRIGHT

no hands
to hold mine
but bones
and skeletons
a throne of which i sit
trembling
aching
breathless

who else is there?

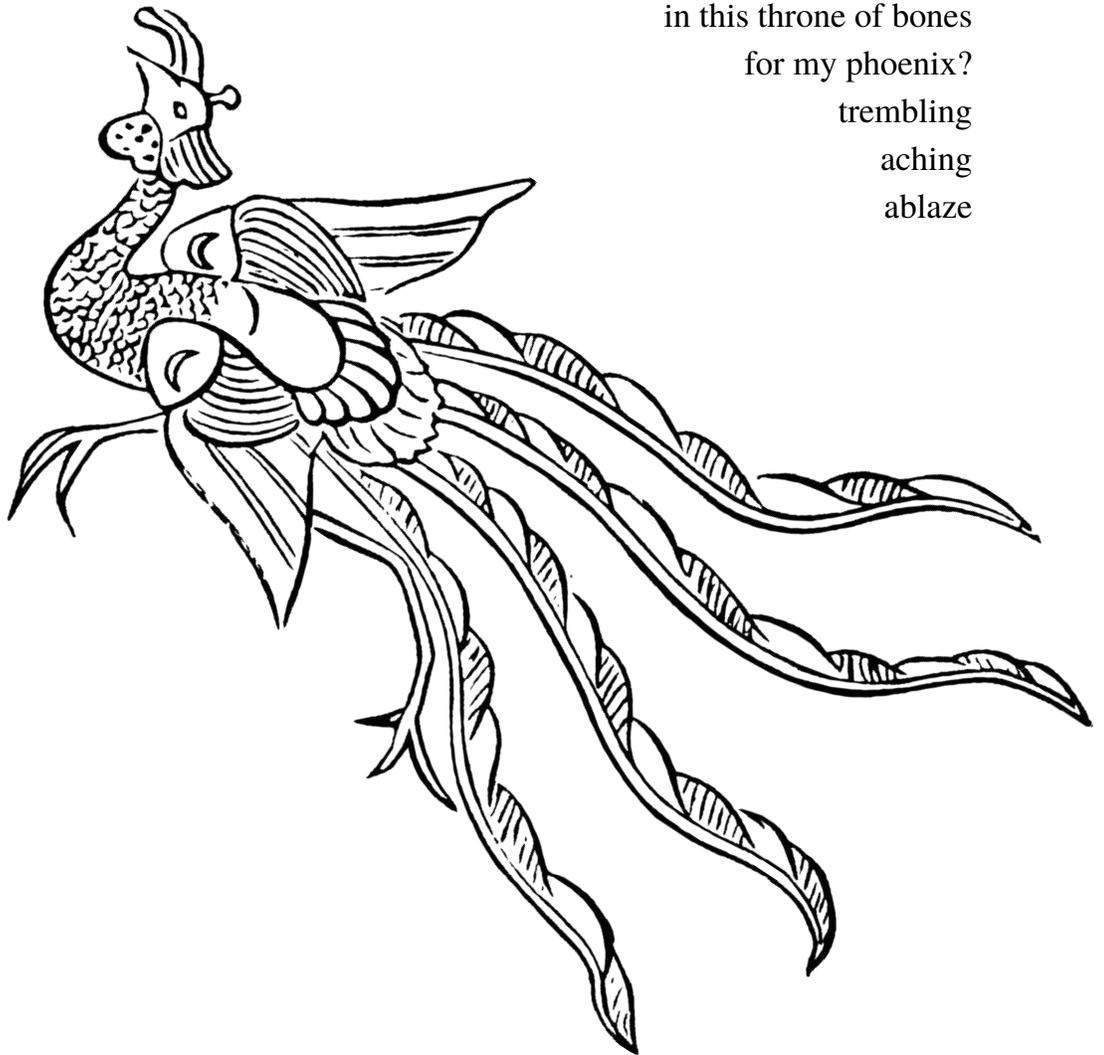
who else is there
to turn to ashes
in the fiery breath
of my passion?

who else is there
foolish enough
passionate enough
to hold me
in a fiery embrace?

who else is there
to be gone
in a flash of flames?

how long shall i wait?

how long shall i wait
in this throne of bones
for my phoenix?
trembling
aching
ablaze



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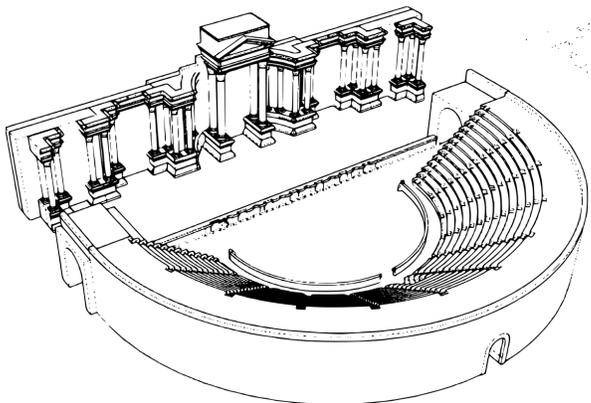
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