

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Amrita Dhillon 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities'

12 July – 9 August 2025

Preview: Friday 11 July, 5–8pm

Tanya Leighton is pleased to present 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', a solo exhibition by Berlin-based Indian artist Amrita Dhillon.

Working across materials such as velvet, suede, and canvas, Dhillon creates paintings that draw on cinematic imaginings of India, spanning the visual language of mid-century Indian cinema and the Orientalist fantasies of early twentieth-century Western film, to explore how women have been shaped and constrained by systems of image-making. The exhibition title, 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', references a short story by Delmore Schwartz, itself titled after the epitaph to W. B. Yeats's 1914 poem 'Responsibilities'. For Dhillon, the phrase speaks to the ethics of looking – how cinematic "dreams" shape not only desire but also systems of control.

Her figures often appear in states of partial presence: blurred, cropped, fragmented. Using slow, light-absorbing surfaces that resist clarity, Dhillon transforms moments of cinematic stillness into sites of tension and refusal. What emerges is a quiet but insistent challenge to how femininity has been aestheticised, consumed, and historicised. Rather than offering nostalgia or pastiche, Dhillon's work intervenes in the politics of representation. Her chosen film stills are often moments of rupture: a dancer frozen mid-gesture, a face dissolving into jewellery and light. These figures, historically staged as objects of devotion, desire, or moral judgement, are refigured through Dhillon's process into avatars of ambiguity.

Her materials reinforce this principle of refusal. Velvet and suede absorb oil paint unevenly, producing surfaces that shimmer and recede, as if the image were pulling itself apart. The result is an optical glitch rendered analogue – an aesthetic that echoes the logic of the glitch in feminist theory: a breakdown in representation that opens space for critique. In Dhillon's paintings, clarity is withheld not to obscure but to complicate – to challenge the viewer's expectations of recognition, narrative, and control.

Dhillon's work is fundamentally a confrontation with the archive, with the frame, and with the structures that have long scripted South Asian bodies into spectacle. In freezing these moments just before collapse, she opens a space of slippage between the seen and the withheld, the sacred and the punished, the performed and the private. The stills, whether drawn from Bollywood choreography or Western Orientalist fantasy, are not passive relics. They are charged scenes where spectacle and power converge. By pausing, cropping, and withholding, Dhillon resists the comfort of easy recognition. Instead, she asks what it means to watch – and what responsibilities that act might carry.

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Amrita Dhillon (born in New Delhi) lives and works in Berlin. She studied history at Bard College in New York and Berlin, followed by fine arts at the Universität der Künste Berlin in the class of Thilo Heinzmann.

Dhillon presented her first duo exhibition, 'Things Fall Apart', at the Dorothea Konwiarz Stiftung in Berlin, and her work was the subject of a public presentation at Passage, Berlin, both in 2024. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Buero Wolff Jordan, Berlin; Kunstverein Ulm; Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin; Werkhalle Wiesenburg, Berlin; and Kunsthaus Tacheles, Berlin.

For more information please contact info@tanyaleighton.com or telephone +49(0)30221607770.

The gallery is open Tuesday–Friday, 11am–6pm, Saturday 1–6pm, and by appointment.