

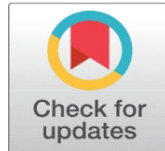


# MAPPING THE POETIC METAPHORS IN THE ABSTRACT VISUAL ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

This swift study examines poetic metaphors in the visual arts, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between abstraction and context. To convey their abstract sentiments, artists employ a variety of techniques, fusing visual suggestion and symbolism to bridge the gap between the material and the immaterial. Interpreting these analogies requires consideration of cultural, historical, and individual factors. In the end, this study highlights how context and reference aid in revealing the hidden levels of meaning in abstract visual compositions.

**Keywords:** Abstract Poetic Metaphors, Visual Arts, Symbolic Imagery, Abstract Forms, Communication, Literal Interpretation, Context, Cultural Reference, Personal Expression, Aesthetic Study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A new language that relies on colors, textures, lines, and forms rather than words is created when poetry and abstract visual arts collide. Through the use of visual elements, this combination produces a multi-layered story that allows viewers to experience concepts and emotions. By using brushes rather of pens and forms rather than rhymes to create rhythm, the artist transforms into a silent poet.

The flexibility to transcend literal representation is provided by abstract art. For the artist, it becomes a deeply interpretive trip, and for the audience, it becomes a personal and frequently spiritual one. In order to help artists and viewers alike reach deeper meanings, this study aims to investigate how poetic metaphors are incorporated into abstract visual arts.

1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- The main objective of this research is to study how poetic metaphors are used in abstract visual arts. It aims to:
- Understand how abstract elements like color, texture, and form carry metaphorical meanings.
- Explore the relationship between poetic language and visual abstraction.
- Examine the role of context—cultural, historical, and personal—in interpreting visual metaphors.
- Highlight examples from Indian and global art traditions to understand this phenomenon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 1

Table 1 Mapping Poetic Metaphors in Abstract Visual Arts - Philosophical and Cultural Frameworks			
Scholar/Author	Work (APA Citation)	Core Idea	Relevance to Abstract Visual Art
Rudolf Arnheim	Arnheim, R. (1974). <i>Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye</i> . University of California Press.	Perception as an active process that shapes meaning; visual elements are not neutral but expressive.	Explains how abstract forms and colors can serve as metaphors depending on perceptual decoding by the viewer.
Arthur Danto	Danto, A. (1981). <i>The transfiguration of the commonplace: A philosophy of art</i> . Harvard University Press.	Objects gain metaphorical meaning through artistic framing and context.	Justifies how everyday shapes or colors become metaphors in abstraction through cultural, symbolic, and intentional shifts.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty	Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). <i>The primacy of perception</i> . Northwestern University Press.	Embodiment and sensory experience are central to understanding art.	Abstract works evoke meaning through tactile, bodily engagement—not just intellectual reading.
James Elkins	Elkins, J. (1996). <i>The object stares back: On the nature of seeing</i> . Harcourt.	Viewing art is a subjective and subconscious process; metaphor arises from personal projection.	Highlights how metaphors are co-created by the artist and the viewer through affective resonance.
Griselda Pollock	Pollock, G. (1999). <i>Differencing the canon: Feminist desire and the writing of art's histories</i> . Routledge.	Feminist theory reframes how we see and interpret metaphors, especially in terms of identity, gender, and voice.	Opens space for alternative, plural readings of abstract metaphor, including subaltern, feminine, and cultural interpretations.
Irving Sandler	Sandler, I. (1970). <i>The triumph of</i>	Abstract expressionism	Contextualizes how metaphors in abstraction can emerge from

	<i>American painting: A history of abstract expressionism.</i> Harper & Row.	evolved in dialogue with socio-political trauma and cultural shifts.	historical crisis and cultural reinvention.
Kapila Vatsyayan	Vatsyayan, K. (1997). <i>The square and the circle of the Indian arts.</i> Abhinav Publications.	Indian art is based on metaphysical and symbolic structures—yantra, mandala, and rasa-based systems.	Supports Indian abstraction as inherently metaphorical, with cosmological and spiritual dimensions shaping form.
Coomaraswamy, Ananda K.	Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1956). <i>The transformation of nature in art.</i> Harvard University Press.	Indian art does not imitate but transmutes nature into symbolic and metaphysical forms.	Offers philosophical ground for abstraction as spiritual metaphor, not mere stylistic deviation.
Mulk Raj Anand	Anand, M. R. (1989). <i>The vision of India: Indian art and modern expression.</i> Marg Publications.	Modern Indian artists fused indigenous spiritual and folk traditions with global abstraction.	Traces metaphors from traditional visual culture into modern abstract practices.
Geeta Kapur	Kapur, G. (2000). <i>When was modernism: Essays on contemporary cultural practice in India.</i> Tulika Books.	Modernism in India carried spiritual and political metaphors, distinct from Western modernism.	Key for understanding Indian abstraction as metaphorically charged with nationalism, spirituality, and identity politics.
Partha Mitter	Mitter, P. (2007). <i>The triumph of modernism: India's artists and the avant-garde, 1922–1947.</i> Oxford University Press.	Indian modern art carried encoded metaphors of resistance, identity, and cosmopolitanism.	Reinforces metaphor as cultural strategy in Indian abstraction during colonial/postcolonial periods.
B. N. Goswamy	Goswamy, B. N. (2010). <i>The spirit of Indian painting: Close encounters with 101 great works 1100–1900.</i> Penguin.	Traditional Indian paintings are layered with symbolic metaphor, poetic imagination, and spiritual presence.	Demonstrates the continuity of metaphorical expression from miniature art to abstraction.
Stella Kramrisch	Kramrisch, S. (1981). <i>The presence of Śiva.</i> Princeton University Press.	Sacred imagery in Indian art reflects philosophical abstraction and symbolic layering.	Source for understanding abstraction and metaphor in Tantra-inspired modern and contemporary art.

### 3. SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The aforementioned paradigm demonstrates that metaphor in abstract visual art is epistemic, embodied, and culturally distinctive in addition to being purely aesthetic. Indian scholars ground abstraction in spiritual experience, symbolic tradition, and metaphysical geometry, whereas Western theorists place more emphasis on observation, context, and subjective interaction. A poetic concept of abstraction is made possible by the meeting of these streams, in which form, color, and quiet are metaphors for the sacred, the remembered, and the invisible rather than empty spaces.

### 4. MAPPING POETIC METAPHORS IN ABSTRACT VISUAL ARTS

In the Indian setting, abstraction is an extension and continuation of the nation's long-standing aesthetic sensitivities and philosophical questions rather than a borrowed perspective or a contemporary break from tradition. The invisible, intangible, and ineffable were already accepted in Indian artistic expression even before abstraction was formalized as a trend in Western modernism. Abstraction can be seen not just on the canvas but also in the resonant tones of Dhrupad, where sound becomes a meditation vessel and separates from semantic meaning—pure vibration, aural sculpture. Invoking *rasa* through texture and tone rather than narrative, the voice veers through microtonal modulations. This is where abstraction starts, in feeling rather than form.

Myth and the oral and symbolic traditions that have influenced Indian imaginations are also infused with this sensibility. Deeper truths are rarely expressed clearly in the Puranic stories or the Upanishads' multi-layered metaphors. Rather, they emerge through silence, metaphor, and paradox. The divine is indicated rather than described; the formless (*nirguna*) is reached by gesture, rhythm, and suggestion rather than by portrayal. This tradition is carried on by Indian abstraction in the visual arts, not as a choice of style but rather as a philosophical foundation. Unlike the Western trajectory where abstraction often emerges as a negation of representational realism—as a rebellion, a break—Indian abstraction is more often a continuity, a flowing river with many tributaries: Tantra, Vedanta, Bhakti, folk traditions, and personal memory. The formless is not an absence but a presence—a fullness that escapes containment. When V.S. Gaitonde said, “A painting is not a message, it is a presence,” he echoed this deeper spiritual sensibility. His luminous canvases do not represent the world; they breathe with it, becoming visual mantras, meditative surfaces where silence acquires form.

According to this belief, color is an emanation, a vibration, rather than just pigment. For example, in S.H. Raza's writings, blue represents the infinite, the meditative vacuum, while crimson may pulsate with *shakti*, or life energy. Drawing on Tantric yantras as well as his own recollections—his early moments of peering into a river's navel or at temple walls—his recurrent motif of the Bindu is more than just a dot; it is the germ of all becoming, the axis of being and non-being. It is intimate as well as cosmological. In this way, abstraction turns into a visual upanishad, a map of the inner world.

J. Swaminathan also used tribal patterns and indigenous symbols, but not to exoticize them; rather, he did so in an effort to reclaim a primitive language, a truth that existed before words. Seeing a continuity with the metaphysical in the tribal and folk expressions, where a mountain was not just a shape but a presence, a silent god, he rejected the dichotomy of the modern and the old. His unblended, elemental

hues communicate immediately, evoking a feeling of story, cosmology, and place that transcends personal experience.

In many of these works, the line between the visual and the poetic dissolves. Just as a metaphor in poetry distills an emotion or insight into a echoing image, the abstract visual gesture performs a similar function—coiling memory, history, and longing into a single curve or stroke. The circle, the spiral, the floating block of color—they speak, not in the language of names, but of essences. These are not aesthetic decisions alone, but philosophical ones.

The Tantric notion that the universe is a play of energies—shunya and spanda, nothingness and pulse—is frequently referenced in Indian art's spiritual abstraction. Form returns to formlessness and emerges from it in such a cosmos. Such concepts were directly envisioned by artists such as G.R. Santosh, who produced geometrical mandalas and hallowed constructions that throb with the vitality of inner vision. Similar to this, Shobha Broota's surfaces that resemble textiles invite introspection and silence—threads that are woven not just in fabric but also in time and mind. Her sparse vocabulary conveys the discipline of Zen and the devotion of Bhakti, implying that genuine vision is found in distillation rather than accretion.

Even artists shaped by urban chaos and political rupture have used abstraction to process the unspeakable. Prabhakar Kolte's covered surfaces can be read as visual palimpsests—walls of a city peeling with history, or minds imprinted with moments of loss and survival. The trauma of Partition, the aspirations of Independence, the confusion of postcolonial modernity, and the flux of globalization—all these have found their way into abstraction, not always directly, but metaphorically, residually. A crack in the surface may echo a fracture in history; a hovering color-field may suggest a suspended dream of nationhood or exile.

Therefore, abstraction in Indian art is a re-mapping of reality rather than an escape from it; it is a new way of perceiving that values presence over assertion, silence over speech, and intuition over reasoning. Abstraction becomes genuinely lyrical in this transitional area between the visible and the unseen, the gesture and the phrase. It turns into a language that transforms the world rather than translating it.



## 5. THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION

Globally, artists like Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee used abstraction as a visual language of the soul. Kandinsky believed colors had spiritual vibrations. Klee wrote about taking a line for a walk—a poetic metaphor for spontaneous creation.

While the Western trajectory of abstraction has focused more on formal innovation, the Indian trajectory is deeply philosophical. Yet, the two intersect, especially in the post-independence period when Indian artists engaged with global art movements.

The Bauhaus influence reached Indian art schools, but artists didn't merely imitate. They absorbed, transformed, and re-rooted these influences in Indian soil. That's why Indian abstract art stands as local and global, personal and universal.

## **6. INTERPRETATION AND VIEWER ENGAGEMENT**

The meaning in abstract art is not fixed. It grows in the space between the artwork and the viewer. Poetic metaphors invite active interpretation. The viewer becomes a co-creator of meaning, reading symbols through their own lenses.

This openness is essential. It allows artworks to remain relevant, to speak to different generations, and to evolve in meaning. In this sense, abstract visual art is like poetry—timeless, fluid, and deeply human.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Mapping poetic metaphors in abstract visual arts reveals how closely tied visual creativity is to language, memory, and feeling. Through color, form, and symbolic gesture, artists create silent poems that resonate across time and culture. In the Indian context, abstraction is both ancient and modern, both spiritual and aesthetic.

By understanding the metaphors embedded in abstract compositions, we deepen our engagement with art. We also realize that art, like poetry, is not only about what is shown, but also about what is suggested—a whisper in color, a gesture in line, a metaphor in space.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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