

Manjari Sharma



Darshan is a series of elaborately orchestrated photographic representations of 9 Hindu Deities. Hindu Gods and Goddesses have been historically painted and drawn, but rarely depicted through fine art photography. In 2013 Sharma completed the 9 photographic representations - Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, Lord Ganesha, Maa Laxmi, Maa Saraswati, Lord Hanuman, Lord Vishnu, Maa Durga, and Maa Kali. The complete *Darshan* debuted in New York in September of this year.

Darshan was created in India. Sparing no detail, the making of *Darshan* included exhaustive research and a team of 50-60 Indian craftsman to create props, sets, prosthetics, make up, costumes and jewelry.

The experience of viewing the art is an essential part of the art. The relationship of a viewer with a piece of art is unique and individualistic in nature. This is no different than the connection to a Hindu deity that a seeker experiences in a temple.

Born and raised in India, Sharma was immersed in her native Hindu culture. In her early 20's, Sharma moved to the U.S. to pursue her interest in photography. Habitual visits to the Hindu temples were soon gradually replaced with a frequent sojourn to a museum or art gallery with the same fervent dedication. Sharma was soon fully immersed in the world of contemporary art. *Darshan* bridges the gap of two vastly separate worlds that can so effortlessly stand in for each other in function.

This monumental project has captured the attention of CNN, LIFE Magazine, The New York Times, NPR, and countless blogs.

20 x 16 inches: image
 50.8 x 40.6 cm
 ed. of 6
\$5,000 unframed

36 x 24 inches: image
 91.4 x 61 cm
 ed. of 4
\$9,000 unframed

60 x 48 inches: image
 152.4 x 121.9 cm
 ed. of 2
\$17,000 unframed

Maa Laxmi, Goddess of Wealth

Maa Lakshmi, or mother Lakshmi is the giver of fortune and prosperity. She bestows riches and is known to bless the world for a well endowed and abundant life.

Also called Mahalakshmi, “Laksha” means an “aim”. Maa Laxmi is believed to protect her devotees from a life of misery. Lakshmi in Sanskrit is derived from its elemental form lakS, meaning “to perceive or observe”. This is synonymous with lakshya, meaning “aim” or “objective”.



□ **Manjari Sharma**, *Maa Laxmi*, 2012, chromogenic print

20 x 16 in, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, edition of 6, \$5,000 (unframed)

36 x 24 in, 91.4 x 61 cm, edition of 4, \$9,000 (unframed)

60 x 48 in, 152.4 x 121.9 cm, edition of 2, \$17,000 (unframed)

Lord Shiva

Shiva is seen as one of the Supreme Gods. He is the god of Destruction and Dance. Lord Shiva is usually worshipped in the abstract form of Shiva linga. He is represented as a handsome young man dancing the Tandava upon Apasmara, the demon of ignorance.

It is said that He looks like an eternal youth because of his authority over death, rebirth and immortality. He is also the father of Ganesha.

The Sanskrit word Shiva is an adjective meaning auspicious, kind, gracious.

□ **Manjari Sharma**, *Lord Shiva*, 2012, chromogenic print
20 x 16 in, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, edition of 6, \$5,000 (unframed)
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Lord Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles

Lord Ganesha's elephant head makes him particularly easy to identify. He is honored at the beginning of rituals and ceremonies and invoked as Patron of Letters during writing sessions. Ganesha is the son of Lord Shiva and Maa Parvati.

The name Ganesha is a Sanskrit compound, joining the words gana meaning a categorical system or elements and isha meaning lord. Ganesha's earliest name was Ekadanta (One Tusked), referring to his single whole tusk.



- Manjari Sharma, *Lord Ganesha*, 2012, chromogenic print
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Maa Durga, Invincible Goddess

Maa Durga's feminine power contains the combined energies of all the gods. Worshipped for her "Shakti" which means divine energy and power, she is supremely radiant, multi armed, and rides a tiger while maintaining a meditative smile.

The name is made of Sanskrit dur meaning "with difficulty".

The four day long Durga Puja is one of the biggest annual festivals and celebrated widely in India. The Durga Puja Festival, in its popularity, is observed in a variety of traditions throughout the Hindu culture.



□ **Manjari Sharma, *Maa Durga*, 2012, chromogenic print**
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Lord Hanuman

Lord Hanuman, The Monkey God is a devotee of Rama, an Avatar of Lord Shiva and worshipped for his physical strength, perseverance and devotion. He is son of Vayu or Marut, the wind god.

Lord Hanuman is known for his astounding ability to inspire. Tales of Lord Hanuman are ripe with Heroic acts of valor and wisdom.

Hanuman is known by many names as Anjaneya, Anjani Putra, Bajarangabali, Mahaveer, Maruti and Pavanputra. It is said that Vrihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, as Tara, and Pavana, the god of wind, was reborn as Hanuman, the wisest, swiftest and strongest of all apes.



□ **Manjari Sharma**, *Lord Hanuman*, 2012, chromogenic print
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Lord Brahma

In Hindu tradition, the creation of the cosmos is credited to Lord Brahma. Brahma's wife is Maa Saraswati.

According to the oldest scriptures, Brahma is self-born in the lotus flower. Unlike most other Hindu gods, Brahma holds no weapons. In one hand he holds a veda and in another he holds a string of prayer beads called the 'akṣamālā' (literally "garland of eyes"), which He uses to keep track of the Universe's time.

Brahma presides over 'Brahmaloka,' a universe that contains all the splendors of the earth and all other worlds.



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Lord Vishnu

Lord Vishnu is one who supports, preserves, sustains and governs the universe. Vishnu's consort is Maa Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. Vishnu is usually described as having the divine blue color of water-filled clouds and as having four arms.

In almost all Hindu denominations, Vishnu is either worshipped directly or in the form of his ten avatars, the most famous of whom are Rama and Krishna. Vishnu is also known as the granter of mukti or moksha to his devotees who deserve salvation from the material world.

The Trimurti is a concept in Hinduism which assigns the cosmic functions of creation, maintenance, and destruction to Lord Brahma as the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer or transformer.

- **Manjari Sharma**, *Lord Vishnu*, 2012, chromogenic print
20 x 16 in, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, edition of 6, \$5,000 (unframed)
\$5,250 (framed)
36 x 24 in, 91.4 x 61 cm, edition of 4, \$9,000 (unframed)
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Saraswati

Maa Saraswati is the Hindu Goddess of music, education and the arts. In Hinduism, Saraswati represents intelligence, consciousness, creativity, education, enlightenment and eloquence.

In India, it is customary that, out of respect, when a person's foot accidentally touches a book or any written material, which are considered a manifestation of Saraswati) it will be followed by an apology in the form of a single hand gesture with the right hand, where the offending person first touches the object with the fingertips and then the eyes, forehead and/or chest. This gesture is also known as Pranama.

Saraswati is strongly associated with flowing water in her role as a goddess of knowledge. She is depicted as a beautiful woman to embody the concept of knowledge as supremely alluring. She possesses four arms, and is usually shown wearing a spotless white sari. The white colour of the goddess signifies spotless character and an immaculate mind.

The goddess is playing an instrument called the Veena, this signifies harmony of all mental strings.



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Maa Kali

The name Kali comes from *kāla*, which means time in Sanskrit. Maa Kali (also known as **Kālika**) is the Hindu Goddess associated with empowerment as in Shakti. She is the fierce aspect of the goddess Durga.

As the legend goes, in a battle against evil, Kali was so possessed by her killing spree that she got carried away and began to destroy everything that lay in her path. To stop her Lord Shiva, her consort, threw himself under her feet. Shocked at this sight, Kali stuck out her tongue in astonishment, and put an end to her rampage. Hence the common image of Kali shows her with an enormous tongue stuck out.

Kali is represented with perhaps the fiercest features amongst all the world's deities. She has multi-armed, with a sword in one hand and the head of a demon in another. One hand blesses her worshippers while a string of skulls act as necklace and a girdle made of human hands become her clothing. These hands and heads signify liberation from the cycle of karma.

- **Manjari Sharma**, *Maa Kali*, 2012, chromogenic print
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TRANSCENDENT DEITIES *of* INDIATHE EVERYDAY OCCURRENCE *of* THE DIVINE

MAY 2 • SEPTEMBER 14



Manjari Sharma, *Lord Ganesha*, 2011, chromogenic print, 60 x 48 inches, Edition of 2

Lead by the experiential nature of the sanskrit term Darshan, this series explores the delicate relationship between photography and representation. It is imperative to consider what causes us to tell stories or what compels us to delve back into our subconscious searching for an exposed nerve. Having left a ritual driven community in India, my move to the U.S. precipitated an enormous cultural shift. It was this cultural paralysis that motivated me to use my one medium of worship—the camera—to study, construct and deconstruct the mythologies of my land.

The goal was to turn multidimensional memories of sculptures and ornamental paintings of Hindu Gods, into two dimensional photographs. What remained at the end of each exercise was a portrait staring back sometimes with quiet repose and other times with a familiar other worldliness. Every diorama created for each deity lead to an education of clues embedded within its iconography. The living world in India, as I have known it, has a preferred methodology for transcendental encounters in temples. For centuries, the way that we have experienced darshans (metaphysical connection established upon sight) is via laying gaze upon a moulded figure, a carved statue or an illustration that represents a likeness to avatars described in Hindu scripture. This series of images invites the viewer to consider a photograph as means of spiritual engagement.

Via my own journey I have recognized some parallels between the pursuit of the inner being and that of creating a carefully constructed photograph: both require observation, rehearsal, faith and adherence. Seeking is, in itself, an act of submission. It has been my discovery that what I set out to consume, consumes me. By bridging the gap between the significant ceremonies of my parents lives and my own mythology, this series has become my reason to immerse, question and push the boundaries of my faith, not only beyond my imagination, but beyond the very frame that surrounds the photograph.

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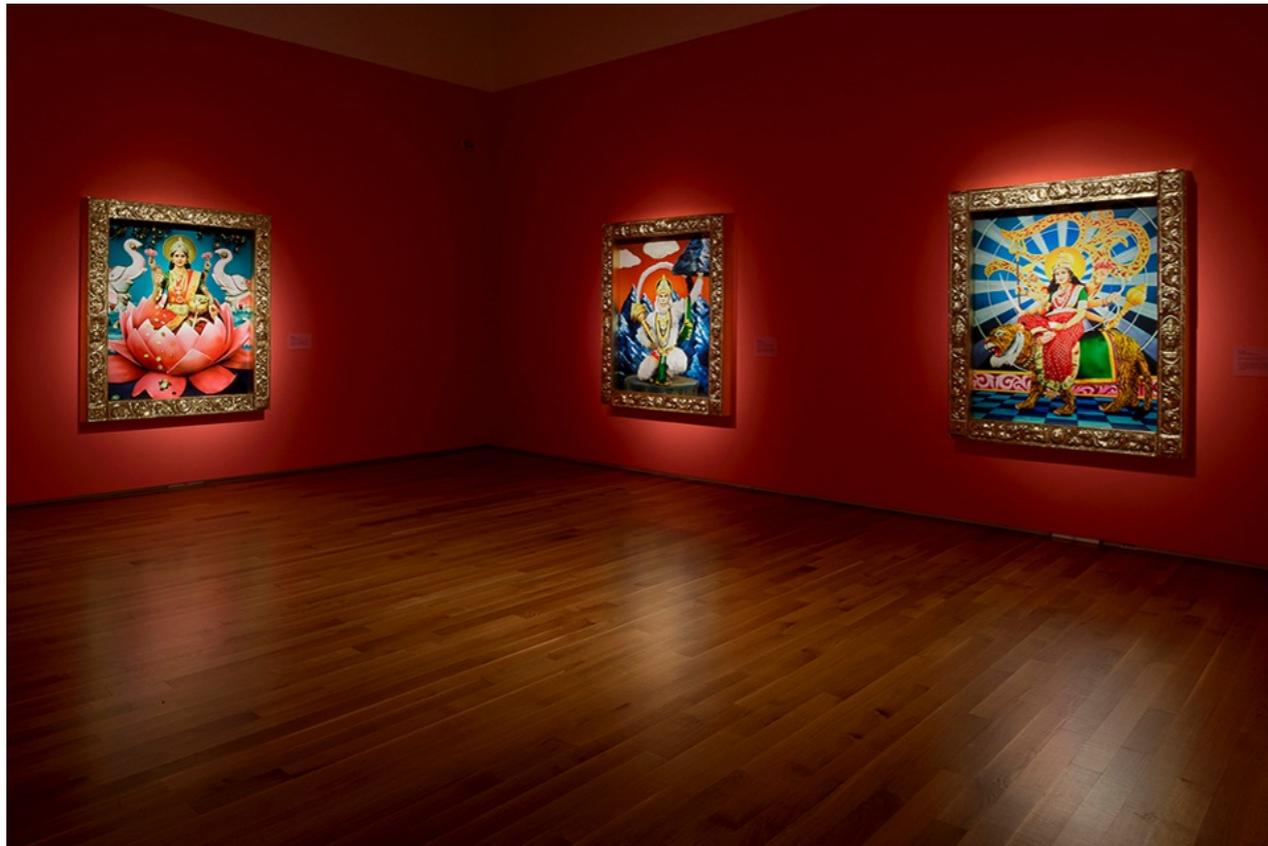
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Installation views of: *Lord Shiva* (2011), *Lord Brahma* (2013) and *Lord Vishnu* (2013) by Manjari Sharma, chromogenic prints, 60 x 48 inches each

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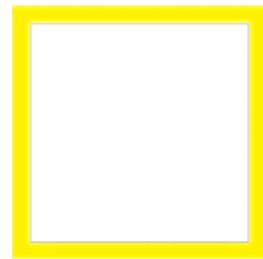
MAY 2 • SEPTEMBER 14



Installation views of: *Maa Laxmi* (2011), *Lord Hanuman* (2011), *Maa Durga* (2011), *Maa Saraswati* (2013) and *Maa Kali* (2013) by Manjari Sharma, chromogenic prints, 60 x 48 inches each



□ Manjari Sharma, India Forbes, December 2012



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