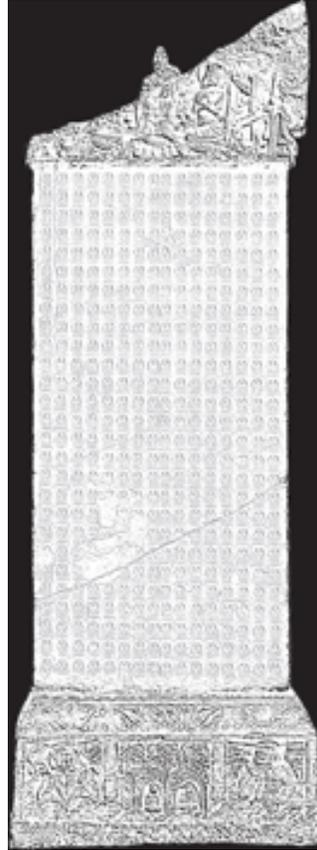


Suran Song: Artist's Statement for *Market Mixers: When Social and Market Norms Collide*

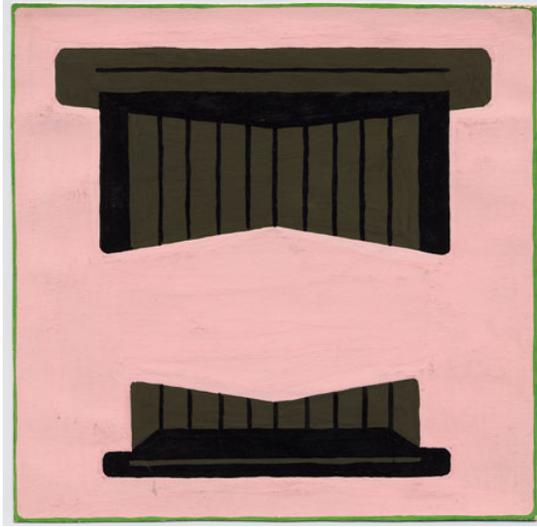


China. (534–550). *Stele commissioned by a Devotional Society of Five Hundred People*. Limestone. 121.25 x 44.25 x 12 inches.

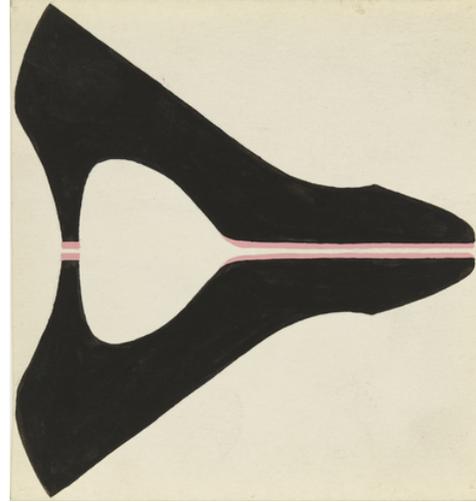
My submission for *Market Mixers: When Social and Market Norms Collide* is entitled, *Canvas-stele Seva-transmit*. Seva (Say-vah) is Sanskrit, the ancient sacred language of India, and comes down to us in the word “service”. The word presents an intense idea that work is rendered as a gift wholeheartedly without any expectation of return or payment. The flipside is that Seva is also the act of accepting any gift no matter what it is with wholehearted reverence. This canvas is an invitation to create community through commentary and sketches about Seva. You are free to choose where on the raw canvas to place your chops – middle or margin ground, foreground or horizon!

The canvas abstraction is based on the Chinese Eastern Wei dynasty stele engraved with the portraits of 500 devotees to the Buddha, a Hindu prince of yogic lore who renounced the social and market norms of his own Brahmin class. The stele is an ancient format often used to proclaim a

congregation, or an entrance gate into a village. Engraved with text or portrait images, steles identify communities and prominent members.



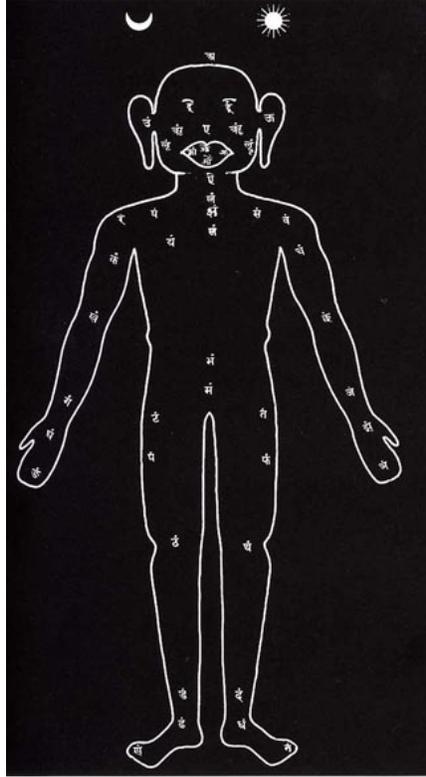
Jo Baer, 1960. *Radical Column*. Gouache on paper. 6 x 6 inches



Glass Slippers. Gouache on paper. 5 x 4 inches

Inspired by American painter, Jo Baer, the Chinese artifact's footstone and top stone become abstracted silhouettes for *Canvas-stele Seva-transmit*. Baer invented the mode of expression she also termed "radical figuration." Her work fused together the constitutional ingredients of images, symbols, and titles to create amalgams of thought-forms. For *Market Mixers*, this strategy is utilized too. The Chinese stele, the Sanskrit alphabet, the Minimalist black shapes, and your thoughtful written and drawn sketches create a fusion, maybe collision, across time.

Baer's radical figuration is fusion and collision, exchange and reflection of different modes of communication. It can also be found within the Sanskrit alphabet itself. The seed syllable "sah" is connected to the idea of equanimity. As the syllable travels forward, in effect aging through the mouth positions of soft palette to hard palette, and spreads out to intensify into the syllable "say", the idea of selflessness is connoted. This outward spread is just like the growth of our bodies. We spread out as we age (esp. the belly and thighs!) Equanimity matures into selfless-service. "Vah" is associated with pleasure in one's own nature. "Say-vah" is the fulfillment of our intrinsic capacity for joy through expanding the practice of equanimity into the practice of selfless service.



Sanskrit alphabet as human flesh, bone, thought, action. Khanna, Madhu and Mookerjee, Aljit. Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2003. Illustration pg. 35

Instinctually we know sustainable trade is based in customary trust (“In God We Trust” on our U.S. tender). Seva is a social practice that produces the trustworthiness needed for sustainable civilization. Arguably, Seva is an aberration in an Ayn Rand-Milton Friedman outlook; the participants in the *Canvas-stele* are a kind of litmus for the presence of Seva in present social currency. In mindfulness portraiture, even if no one chooses to write upon the canvas, that is a form of completion too, completion by inaction.

To place Sanskrit within a Buddhist stele radicalizes the figuration between the social norms of caste, and of the dissent from such an order. Buddha denied the caste system so vehemently that he abandoned his caste’s priestly language to teach his sermons in Pali. He came from the highest 1% of Brahmins. Sanskrit and its social-market structure had parented him. Pali was an uncliostered, common language, the language of the marketplace, and perhaps his necessity to acquire a congregation without the captured market of caste caused the switch too. Shaping norms toward disbelief in soul or God(s) and caste, cleaved Buddhists from Brahmins. Yet parallel class stratifications resulted with similar economic realities. Some Hindu conventions stem from belief in the existence of caste *as* soul, and accumulate wealth and power only for elite Brahmins. Some

Buddhist conventions entail heartlessly abandoning those who believe in soul or God(s) as fools deserving to be left behind economically. The Suttas of the Dhammapada read that companionship with such fools prevents the attainment of Nirvana. Of course, association with his sages, who must be fully supported by the community for good karma, is key to evolution. Why does Dissent often transform social norms, and market norms hardly at all? What is it that we can't seem to let go of that keeps us locked into destructive, unsustainable, or cruel market norms?

Seva has the potential for actual social and market transformation. How? Wouldn't it be practiced profanely by a ruling class to condition labor to slavery? Wouldn't it be abused by an underclass to perpetuate generations of welfare moms in a Life of Riley? The flip side of Seva is that you must receive whatever is offered with deep reverence and grace. Generosity enacts the quality of non-greed, and triggers tremendous life force and maturation because Seva is the natural joy of letting go. If Seva is sincerely experienced as a social norm, and practiced by the 99%, elites too will have to metabolize the act. Market norms change when all classes know and practice Seva. How do you grow generosity? How do you grow gratitude? *Market Mixers: When Social and Market Norms Collide* is a crossroads to complete this canvas content in a participatory experience of the community stele. By inscribing your own experiences of Seva, you are making a fresh consensus of a fledgling ancient body.

Ms. Song earned a BFA from University of The Arts in 1990, International Teacher's Certification in Himalayan Yoga, and an MFA from Parsons School of Design. She is a student of Sanskrit, and yoga instructor.

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