

# Being White

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Exhibition Booklet



## Acknowledgements

This exhibit is dedicated to the diverse possibilities of perceiving white.

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## **Contents**

### **6. I prepare for white**

Interactive performance and installation

### **7. White is Mumbai, Mumbai is White**

Multi sensory Installation

### **8. White shadows, sea, sugar salt, cold- Can you hear the snow?**

Installation

### **9. Can white be folded into language?**

Multi sensory installation

### **10. Is white silence or silencing?**

Audio Installation

## Introduction

In all honesty it is surprising that I have dedicated an exhibit to perceiving white. Throughout my childhood I never really cared too much for white, except that it was a part of my uniform and a whole of my sport shoes. I would have to paint my shoes white every week; an exercise I initially enjoyed, but in my teens, I would hastily apply chalk before my PE class to make them look presentable. Once you possess white there is a pressure of keeping it perfect. White shoes symbolized discipline, order and uniformity. Restoring its whiteness was a gesture of conformity to these ideals it represented. Perhaps this is the reason I unknowingly avoided it.

Otherwise why paint a sport shoe white repeatedly? Let it show off the miles it has run, the roads it has tread, its chance encounters and the bruises nearing healing. Let it be white and accept that it will be embossed with life and in this acceptance, let it come to life.

In my exhibit "*Being White*" I have attempted to reimagine white by dissociating its visuals from its memories- in the pursuit of separating white from its cultural, historical and emotional memories. Instead of defining it as a colour or a non-colour, white has been reinterpreted as experiences translated into gestures, words, taste, sound and smell. The hope is that by acknowledging the existence of different kinds of white, we acknowledge the existence of different ways of perceiving it.

The exhibit features five projects, each exploring a unique question or experience related to the concept of "being white." It is a multi-sensory collage of a food performance and four installations that challenge the traditional understanding of white. Most of my installations are multimodal that can be perceived with sound, touch, taste or vision. In creating these works, I've consciously minimized visual dependence, trying to integrate non-visual thought processes by incorporating conceptual and sensory approaches relating to white. These approaches evoke meanings of white beyond sight – an essential step toward deeper research.

## I prepare for white

*"I prepare for white"* is not only a participatory performance, but it is also a collection of personal memories associated with white, in no particular order. Rather than being understood or explored as a color or a non-color, it attempts to investigate the possibility of its concept being associated non-visually, especially for those who perceive primarily through sight.

Will it be necessary for me always, to translate visual perception into alternate senses? Or will there be a moment when being white embodies being sweet, unburdened by its association with pristine sugar cubes?

Sugar, salt, clean, soap, brush, scrub, iron, mom making frosting, colonial, elite, whitewash, silence, what is beauty? Literacy, gestures, hands, palms, sacred, white paper, black ink, blank, thoughts, intervals, technology, soundscapes, Artificial intelligence, translation, grandmother's alter, camphor, incense stick, white smoke, glass, yogurt, flattened rice, roasted peanuts precious, fresh acetone, sizzling ghee, green chilies, hot, not cool, sandalwood, why? Complete belief, open palms, pristine sheets, edit in no particular order- can be more or a lot less.

## White is Mumbai, Mumbai is White

What makes Mumbai, Mumbai? Non-visually. Inspired by a collaborative exploration of Mumbai this project is an interactive sound installation re-imagining the city as embodying white—a threshold of potential and endless possibilities. The installation draws inspiration from the transformation of Mumbai's street vendors, mirroring their evolution from physical to digital modes of exchange. Immersive soundscapes invite viewers to explore the city's auditory landscape.

Is it possible to perceive colours beyond vision? This question has been on my mind ever since I began my Master's project in Lucerne and approached Jacqueline Egger. She lost her eyesight several years ago. Her perception is perpetually oscillating in-between her past where she had the sense of sight and her present without it. Unlike me she perceives the world based on her sense of smell, hearing and intuition. We sketched together, cooked, and performed together. We were keen to continue our artistic research but I suffered from acute tinnitus and hence had to return to Mumbai. This did not deter us from our collaboration. We started documenting our daily lives; she in Switzerland and I in Mumbai and exchanging these as a part of our communication. She visited me in Mumbai, India in March 2023. We explored Mumbai together and started documenting our experiences in the form of textures, taste, smell and sound.

The city's hum is inescapable, a constant rhythm beneath all moments. During festivals, while going to office, weaving through the vegetable markets, buzzing in trains, and whispering on the beach. It joins our footsteps on evening walks, and even seeps into our dreams. I grew up with these sounds and they were an intrinsic part of my unconscious existence of Mumbai. Re-exploring the city with Jacqueline Egger made me aware of this hum.

Personally, Mumbai embodies the essence of white, a concept deeply explored in my artworks. White is a liminal entity, a threshold—a blank canvas brimming with the promise of all colors and none at once. It is a place of beginnings, filled with potential and endless possibilities just like the city.

## **White shadows, sea, sugar, salt, cold- Can you hear the snow?**

Is white merely an empty space? But emptiness doesn't mean nothingness-thoughts, objects, memories, imagination, and words-ever changing, like fading sounds and dissociative memories. This installation captures fleeting, dreamlike impressions of white through tactile and visual elements. The hope is to create transient fragile tactile patterns, which will disintegrate over a period of time.

It consists of illustrations inspired by shadows, dreams and fleeting memories of white. The illustrations are laser cut using translucent sheets and then placed on the white walls like ghostly echoes. These intricate designs, etched on translucent paper, become layered patterns that spill onto the floor where, spectators will be encouraged to walk on them.

The installation on the ground also reminds us of the ephemeral quality of white-easily soiled and walking on it is a reminder of walking on snow- leaving traces of the past as it fades.

When white burns what secrets does its smoke guard?



## Can white be folded into language?

Can language capture the full depth of a colour experience? Isn't it limited by vocabulary, subjective memories, culture, and context? For example, in English, "White House" has layered meanings, while its Marathi (my mother tongue) equivalent, "Pandhra Ghar," is literal. In this installation, scripts are swapped: Marathi words appear in the Latin alphabet. Do these letters lose their ability to convey semantics? The installation features Chikwadi, a traditional white fritter, inviting spectators to taste its cultural meaning.

(Disclaimer: Contains dried sago pearls, groundnut oil, salt and cumin seeds. Please check for allergies)

## **Is white silence or silencing?**

This sound installation emerges from my personal encounter with tinnitus in April 2021 during my stay in Switzerland. I often used white noise, like a waterfall's sound, to drown out the ringing in my ears. The installation includes a looped recording of drain sounds heard during a solitary walk at Meggenhorn Castle, played through headphones.



