

HypeArt



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Photographs and text By Keith Estiler exclusively for HypeArt.

On two recent trips, I found myself inside the cozy Brooklyn studio of the rising contemporary artist, Asif Hoque. The small yet inviting space was a sanctuary of creativity, filled with studies, sketches and books that traced the life and career of the young artist. Asif, a multifaceted artist whose work transcends boundaries and infuses life into the canvas, welcomed me with enthusiasm as we journeyed through his illuminating world of art.

As I stepped into Asif's studio, I was immediately struck by the vivid paintings that adorned the walls. The radiant colors and intricate details seemed to transport me to a realm where imagination and reality intertwined seamlessly. Each piece bore the distinctive mark of Asif's surrealist and conceptualist style, reflecting his deep connection to natural elements, personal experiences, and an unwavering passion for storytelling.

What struck me even more was how Asif harnessed his Bengali background, Rome upbringing and unique cultural heritage to subvert the compositions, much like Renaissance paintings. The fusion of his Western art education with the essence of Bengali culture was a visual treat for anyone who encountered his work. It was as if he had unearthed a bridge between the past and the present, crafting warm and inviting pieces that paid homage to classical art while reinventing it in a contemporary context.



Asif's artist evolution into transcendental art had been heavily influenced by the works of transcendentalist artist Agnes Pelton. Just as Pelton sought to capture the spiritual essence of nature and light, Asif's practice revolved around capturing light in its various forms. His goal was to immerse his viewers in a flood of light set against mythical elements when they gazed upon his art. Each stroke of his brush, each choice of color, and each meticulously crafted composition were part of a grand symphony, offering viewers an opportunity to connect with the sublime through the sheer brilliance of light.

As we began to converse, I couldn't help but notice the shared thread of our stories. Being similar in age and both children of immigrants, we often grappled with the feeling of imposter syndrome in an industry of contemporary art controlled by the elite. Yet, our unwavering determination to carve a place for ourselves within this complex and sometimes exclusionary world only seemed to grow stronger with each passing day.

Our backgrounds, brimming with rich cultural influences, only added to the vivid narratives in our conversation. Our own journeys of self-discovery, identity exploration, and the relentless pursuit of art world excellence resonated deeply with one another. In this casual yet insightful verbal exchange, Asif eloquently delves into the driving forces behind his light-filled art, showcasing a truly unique lens on the intersection of culture, identity, and the unshakable desire to make a significant mark on the contemporary art world.



I feel like many of us experience this imposter syndrome duality all the time, and those who experience it more can write and talk about it on a more human level.

I feel like parts of the art space have become very flat, mainly for commercial reasons. For me, I enjoy having conversations and diving into granular details.

So what are you working on right now?

The artworks I'm currently working on are like receipts of experiences, and they tie into a show called "Spiritual Light" that Mindy Solomon is curating. She has done a show with me in Chicago, focusing on Agnes Pelton and her relation to my work. Agnes Pelton was a transcendental artist who appreciated nature and light. She moved to New Mexico in the 1920s and 30s, leaving the hustle and bustle of New York City.

She was in the same realm as Georgia O'Keeffe. Southwest spaces like Arizona and New Mexico seem to call for transcendental artists. I've never been on a road trip like that, but I want to experience it. Have you ever ridden a motorcycle around?

I was thinking about going to the Atacama Desert in Chile and riding over there. It's still up in the air because of various factors, like work and other things around it.

True, everything surrounding work and art is important. But, you need to make those other moves to keep feeding your artistic side. There's a professionalism aspect to it, and it's a challenge to maintain the artistic essence in a congested and controlled environment.

After a show, you're physically drained, which people may not understand until they've experienced it themselves. Some artists can continue working on different projects, but the draining effect is real. Shows can become organized chaos. Sometimes you want to have an intimate experience, but things get caught up in the chaos.



You notice this in curating too. You either develop a way of summarizing things quickly or conveying the essence of the artwork. People want to see the soul of the work, but the rest is just packaging.

To keep feeding this, you have to make other moves and maintain professionalism, but it's a challenge. Art is never meant to be controlled, and we try to control it as much as possible. It's important to create a space in your work to make people feel something. My earlier shows were about giving myself an

introduction, and I still feel like I'm in that introductory phase. I've had many shows, but I haven't moved past that chapter. It's a beautiful thing, but it's also a challenge. I want people to understand my work and explain it, so that's the next chapter.

The imposter syndrome is something many people don't understand.

We think very conceptually, and when we start explaining our work, we put ourselves on the spot. You wonder if your words are important, and these experiences affect your work. There's an aspect of my work where I was 100% sure I would showcase it in the future. I was more confident back then than I am now. The deeper I get, the smaller I feel, and there's never enough time to process and explain everything.

I just want people to experience the subtle aspects of my work, as all of it is as positive as possible. I want to capture and reproduce light in my work, and light is the main theme. The more I paint about it, the more I appreciate it. I'm so deprived of it that I seek it out even more, and it becomes an obsession.

You've chosen certain things to anchor your work, and now it's all about light.

But in the future, it might be something else, and you want to combine all of these experiences to create a compound experience. It's about being alert in your life, as art is about creating a fantasy world that coincides with the real world. And in the end, we're just revolving around these massive, incomprehensible suns. We're so small and granular in the grand scheme of things.

How do you interpret your work to other people or connect to your audience?

For example, playing brown noise can transform the way I experience things. To be engulfed into my paintings, I've had friends come over right before my art openings, and we would chill and experience my paintings differently using brown noise. The sound is like a weighted blanket and gives you an easier way to digest the work. It helps my friends get into that space where they can dive deeper into my work.



So what inspired your Lover Boy and Golden Boy characters?

Lover Boy was my first character and really more about my individual identity and my personal emotions as well as relationships. Golden Boy is a more mature version of that where I add different subtle nuances to that original Lover Boy character. The element of gold is also a beautiful way to attach my South Asian roots to an element or concept that keeps returning to different stages of my life. It's not my experiences of having or not having wealth, but the cultural significances linked to my Bengali identity. It's also a great connector to the Transcendentalist motifs I'm working with that revolves around natural and spiritual essences. Golden Boy is all about positivity and light.

The Golden Boy character, it's me in a sense, but it's become something of its own. There's so much more I want to develop around that character. Single canvases can be limiting because they don't allow me to convey everything I want to. I need a whole show to explore it fully. Coming from a background in cartoons and anime, where you can develop a storyline around the main character, I want to push that concept in my art. I'm just using a different medium now, and I can't create 50 small squares or rectangles to tell a story. I want to use scale to convey more information and feeling.

That makes sense. You want to give your audience a richer experience.

Exactly. I hope my work exudes positive energy. It's validating when you understand that identity can be a constraint and an exploration. I feel valid talking about these things, especially as a person of color. It's essential to have conversations with people who share that identity.

You're also helping other artists, which is great.

This is a challenging space, and you need to be prepared. Once you're in the spotlight, there's a timer on your work. People make assumptions quickly. There's a lot of pressure to produce and make a lasting impression with your art. Your work and identity are constantly evolving. It's challenging to ignore that feeling, especially when you're in this hyperbolic time chamber. I believe in the power of community, connecting with other artists and having these kinds of conversations where we can all elevate each other's work.

So, how do you feel about your art and life experiences now?

My practice is a form of meditation that helps me stay present and connect with others. I'm in the zone.