

ARTslant

Monuments in Paper

by Natasha Baruah

Paper to Monument

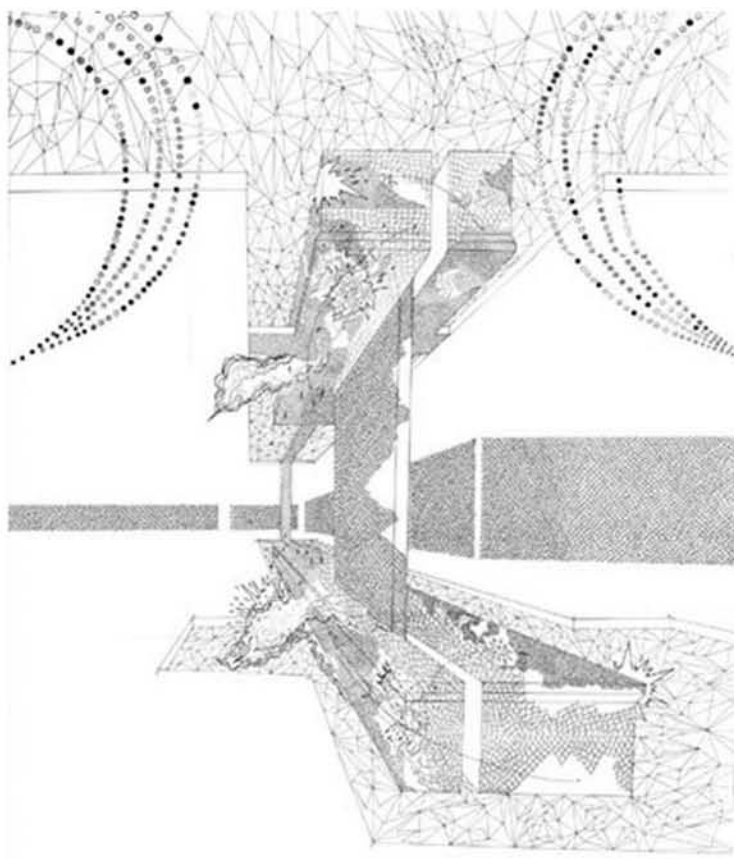
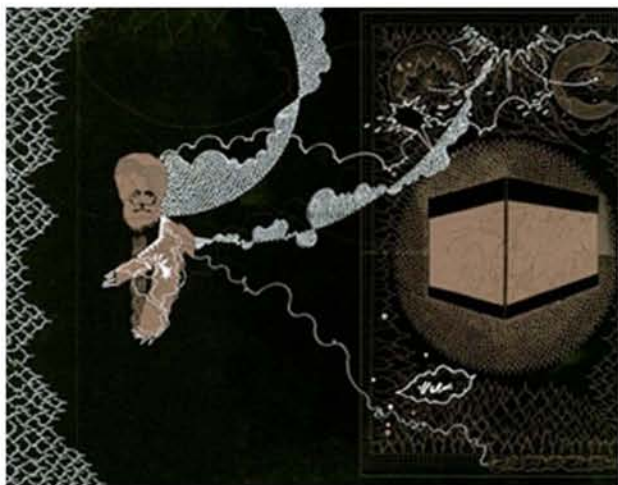
Nature Morte, New Delhi

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Paper acquires a monumental status in Scher Shah's works, both literally and metaphorically. In a series that explores the "many permutations of the personal and historic memory," the artist meticulously renders a space where architecture becomes an evocative expression of nationhood, and a repository for the various histories enacted both within and without its walls.

Drawing from the collective spatial memories of a colonized nation, Shah translates the subconscious into a powerfully rendered set of black and white drawings and monochromatic digital prints.



The works are a carefully constructed amalgamation of varied elements of "icons, symbols, spaces and historical eras," many of which are easily identifiable and form an associative content of the imagined (in an Anderson-ian sense) history of the post-colonized consciousness. Or, as in the case of the artist, a diasporic identity consciousness.

We are confronted by Sikh soldiers attired in the British Imperial Army's uniform stacked foot to shoulder to form a pyramid, in the tellingly titled work "Hierarchy." A recurring motif in Shah's work is the column, an essential element visible in the architectural history of almost all colonized nations. Columns often frame moments of historical action—soldiers march by and vast urban vistas often stretch out below. Shah doesn't shy away from naming her works, and each of the titles, such as "The Expansion of the First Great Ornamental Age: The Horned God," "Paper to Monument II," "The Expansion Complex I," extends and highlights the content of the work in question.

Shah also utilizes her training as an architect to compose drawings which dexterously display a confidence with geometry and extreme linear perspective. These drawings are painstakingly

detailed with delicate cross hatching— subtly invoking the imperial obsession with order and structural harmony.

A large body of work about a single persistent subject often runs the risk of turning didactic after a point. Yet this does not happen in Seher Shah's show. From the very first image the viewer is hooked, be it through the artist's expert draughtsmanship or the fact that rethinking the question of nationhood via its architectural monuments has never been this thought-provoking before.

-- **Natasha Baruah**

(Images, from top to bottom: *Monumental Fantasies*, *Untitled #3*, Seher Shah; *Object Form*, Seher Shah; *The Expansion of the First Great Ornamental Age: 3 Distances*, Seher Shah. All images courtesy of the Nature Morte and the artist.)

