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FIRST PUBLISHED: SAT, DEC 21 2013. 12 12 AM IST

Falling in line

Drawing and architecture come together in Seher Shah's drawings and photographs

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Shah with the work '30|60|90' at the gallery. Photo: Abhijit Bhatlekar/Mint

Seher Shah's solo show at Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai, her first in the city, seems like a mini retrospective of her work: It's a thorough introduction—drawings, photographs (*Mammoth*, *Body Weight*) and objects (*Landscape Object Vista 1*). Immersed in a drawing practice and trained in architecture, Shah works with time and scale, drawing you into detail, pushing you out with the monumental and trapping you in time. A temporality emerges in the space that she constantly negotiates and renegotiates.

This temporality and the practice of drawing come together in her most recent work *30|60|90*. Using a "contraption" that involves a mechanized delivery of carbon ink from an air brush, "she sets up a drawing exercise", setting the variables to fixed parameters (time, distance, output) for each exercise. The process of the gesture, between the delivery and the marking of the paper, "where all possibilities can happen", is what interests her: "the inbetween space" between ink and laying down of that ink. The result is a suite of 30 drawings, where she has added lines spaced deliberately corresponding to the drawing. This is no random shooting range, but the seemingly random circular smudges that appear to have an order in the rectangular cosmos she pulls together.

A controlled approach to drawing is apparent also in Shah's earlier works, displayed in this show. From the small drawings to the large work in the last room, they share a commonality, apart from their graphite renderings, in being fantastical in their laying out of architectural forms. Drawing from archival pictures, from Brutalist buildings to photographs of the Delhi Durbar in past works, Shah's repositioning opens up a parallel world of dreamscapes.

In some, intricate drawings have a black solid geometric form either

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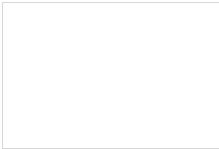


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centrally placed or skewed—she often speaks of it as something removed rather than inserted. In either case, this stasis in the middle of ornament, besides being a dense contrast to the delicate graphite detailing, adds perspective and volume, a three-dimensional effect that suggests movement around it. It's a play on geometry and shadow, honing back to her training as an architect.

Does space sometimes seem over-negotiated in Shah's work? Searching for the "inbetweenness" she seeks, does the detailed patterning deliver us somewhere rather than keeping us from arriving? In contrast, Zarina Hashmi's evocations in *Home Is a Foreign Place* have more architectural presence. The affective longing in Zarina's grid-like prints allows us to imagine, the repetition in the series, to remember, and the scale to help commit to memory.

Shah carries an architect's blueprint forward into her artist practice. In *Paper to Monument*, (her solo at Nature Morte in 2009), an individual negotiation of the spectacle of public monuments, there is precision even as she plays with scale: Objects and landscape are juxtaposed out of whack. It disorients but not in quite the same way Yamini Nayar's careful constructed architectural spaces are dealt with—the models Nayar constructs are destroyed once photographed, the images sometimes painted on. There is no comparison of different objects aligned to puzzle scale, just the formal arrangement of colour and line that displaces the viewer.

In Shah's *Grid Corridor* the macro scale of the drawing matches the viewer standing in front of it, you are part of it; the "hierarchy of spectacle and spectator is removed in the drawing", says Shah. From a hollow space, a relic of a modernist building perhaps, rectangular forms (like basic Corbusier-inspired modules) float out as if being prepared to be realigned into something new. The abstraction that is aimed for in deconstruction is distracted by the sometimes over-detailed drawing, (stylized clouds, arcs that cut across as anchoring horizontals), but the exactitude in draughtsmanship is admirable. Ironically, the passion for the line comes out more in her most minimalistic work *30|60|90*, aptly the title of the show, and it perhaps foretells a new direction in her oeuvre.

30|60|90 is on till 1 February, 11am-6pm (Sundays and Mondays closed), at Jhavery Contemporary, 2, Krishna Niwas, 58A, Walkeshwar Road, Mumbai.

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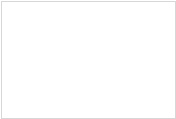
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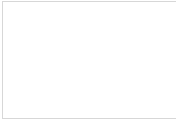
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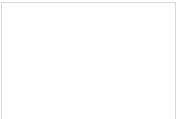
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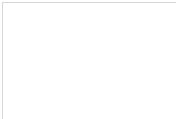
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