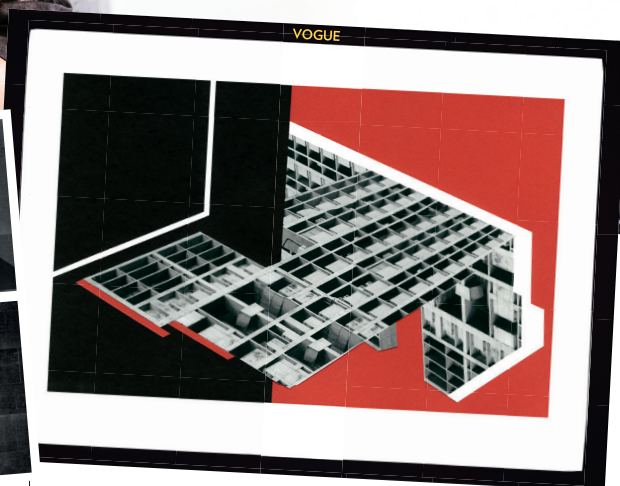


Line theory

The angles and curves of geometric art can seem dry. But a closer look brings the compositions to life—shapes dance on canvas, sculptures tell spatial stories and colour lends depth and nuance. ANINDITA GHOSE draws focus on three artists whose work calls for a reading between the lines

Clockwise from right: Shah in her Delhi studio; Capitol Complex (red fold, 2014); Crossing The Rubicon (2007)



An architect who has influenced your work?

"I have recently been looking at Kengo Kuma's work and reading on his thoughts on materiality and the anti-object"

Practising in Moscow at the turn of the 20th century, the Russian painter Kazimir Malevich, the forefather of geometric abstraction, had declared early on that his intention was to use geometry to convey "the primacy of pure feeling in creative art."

In the Indian contemporary art scene today, there is a rising interest in art that navigates lines and shapes, and plays with colour, form, space and perspective. This was evident at the recent edition of the India Art Fair (January 28-31)—from Seher Shah's *Flatlands* series exhibited by Nature Morte Gallery to Ayesha Sultana and Julien Segard's works at Gallery Experimenter's booth. Even Edel Assanti, the chic young London gallery, presented a solo exhibition of the French artist Noémie Goudal's real-meets-imaginary photographic work—Goudal

creates surreal architectural shapes using the technique of photocollage.

Across Delhi, Dhaka and London, here's profiling three artists who are giving geometric abstraction new directions.

SEHER SHAH, 41

DELHI

Seher Shah's delicate graphite and gouache works on paper have architectural façades superimposed—a single drawing or collage may take two to three months to complete.

Born in Karachi, Pakistan, and educated both as an artist and an architect at the Rhode Island School of Design, Shah started her career at an architectural firm that specialised in large-scale urban projects. Her grounding in the field sowed a deep interest in architectural history. "Drawing methods, such as the perspective, allow a certain freedom of >



Begum's No.615 (2015) is made with painted aluminium and raw mild steel

Clockwise from left: Begum in her London studio; No.579 (2015); No.650 (2015)

What does symmetry mean to you? "Balance, calm, a moment of alignment"

representation and for external and internal references to inhabit the same paper space," elaborates Shah. Her work explores the materiality of drawing, employing various mediums and processes to convey the multiple experiences of architectural space.

Asked when she was first drawn to the concerns of geometry and space, Shah recounts the luxury of having parents who travelled extensively across Pakistan and Europe.

Shah's approach to her work has shifted over time. Whereas her earlier work related to autobiographical variables of place and memory, now it has more to do with drawing as a translation of attitudes of the external landscape. "I feel my practice also helps me think about space in a more experiential way," she says.

Where to see her next: Shah's solo show, *The Lightness of Mass*, is ongoing at Dubai's Green Art Gallery till May 9.

RANA BEGUM, 39 LONDON

Even Rana Begum's Instagram account, @ranabegumstudio, conveys a poetry of lines. There are symmetrical parcels of paddy fields and criss-cross shadows cast by wrought-iron gates. There is an abundance of striped tarpaulin and wrapping paper.

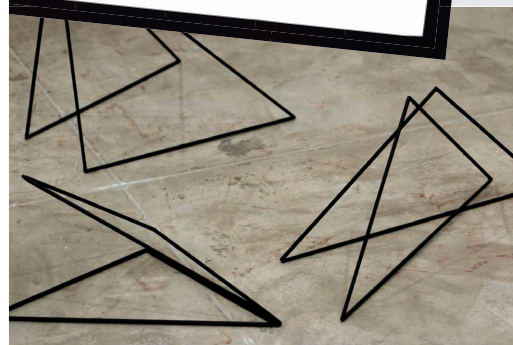
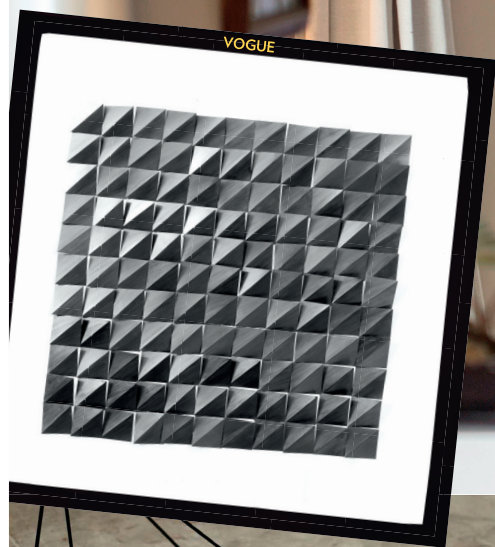
Though triangles ("the most honest and pure of shapes") were the subject of focus in her recent solo exhibition, *Towards An Infinite Geometry* (October 21-November 28, 2015) at Mumbai's Jhaveri Contemporary Gallery, lines are her métier and primary material. One of her early shows at the New York gallery Pablo's Birthday in 2007 was even titled *Lines*.

Born in Bangladesh and having lived in London since she was a child, Begum credits artists Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin as her chief influences. She had her epiphany as a student. "I was already using lines to describe form but at that point I realised that I was not interested in the representational. The only way for me to embody qualities such as change and movement was to strip back and start from the basic," she says. A visit to Bangladesh, where she encountered the architecture of Louis Khan, cemented this. "It was inspiring to see his relationship with line, geometry, space and light and how it resonated with what I was exploring in my work," she recalls. >

RACHEL MARSDEN

Sultana in her Dhaka studio; *Outside The Field Of View-VI* (2014), graphite on paper, mounted on dibond

When were you drawn to geometry? "It was when I was exposed to perspective in Western paintings: Giotto, Piero della Francesca and 14th-century Flemish painters"



A Study In Movement (2015). Above: Teak (2015)

Begum's work is firmly rooted in Islamic art and architecture. It is a reminder that geometric abstraction cannot be seen only as an invention of 20th-century avant garde artists; it has been prevalent throughout history and particularly in Islamic art. "Many richly

elaborate Islamic patterns are composed through the reiteration of simple motifs. I work in a systematic way using simple units and repetition, which naturally give rise to grid patterns and overlaps," she says.

Begum is currently preparing for a retrospective in Parasol unit in London. In the process of collating her work from the past 15 years, a preoccupation with light, colour and geometry has emerged as a common thread. However, it is the use of materials that has most tangibly evolved. "In my earliest works, I was dealing with the idea of light and the infinite through the repetition of form and line. Later on, I used coloured tape and resin to explore how lines of colour react with one another. Since then, I have moved on to working with extruded aluminium, steel mesh, woven baskets and wood," she adds.

Where to see her next: Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art in London in June

AYESHA SULTANA, 30 DHAKA

At an exhibition titled *Immateriality In Residue* (November 9-December 26, 2015) at Kolkata's Gallery Experimenter, columns of teak resting against a wall, wryly titled *Teak* (2015), captured the essence of Ayesha Sultana's work at its tacit best.

Fresh from the success of her standout exhibition at the Dhaka Art Summit in February 2016, Sultana is blazing the South Asian art landscape. Her already-iconic graphite-on-paper works look like heavy steel sculptures at first, but on closer view they surprise with their curious delicateness. Always divided into symmetrical shapes, her work presents widely disparate configurations of geometry, conveying her interest in the visual understanding of continuation and infinity. Having discarded narrative, and moving on from oils and watercolours, she uses various iterations of 'doing', whether it is cutting, folding, piercing, layering, tracing, removing or scratching. Her practice over the last few years attempts to push our understanding of architectural form and landscape.

Where to see her work next: Sultana is presently an artist-in-residence at Iaspis (Swedish Arts Grants Committee) in Stockholm. ■