



Another Documentation

Avantika Bawa
Gallery Maskara

Warehouse on 3rd Pasta (b/w Dena Bank ATM and Sanghvi Exports) 6/7, 3rd Pasta Lane, Colaba, Mumbai, India

August 9, 2012 - September 13, 2012

Pipe Dreams and Drawings

by Deepika Sorabjee

In an essay, social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai described the frenzy of building works in post-war Iraq as “weapons of mass construction.” This could well describe the current situation in India. Artist Avantika Bawa uses the arsenal of evidence present in construction sites in Mumbai and Delhi, and brings the frenzy into the gallery. In her minimal gestures within the gallery, the frenzy is organised; soaring to Gallery Maskara’s warehouse heights or just skimming the poured concrete floors.

In ‘Mathesis: dub dub dub’, her solo show at the gallery in 2009, Bawa responded to the architecture of the locality the gallery was situated in. Clutching, seeking order in the mayhem of streets just outside the

gallery, old crates were piled in varying heights in a grid. Painted a monochrome grey, a flash of color was an orange streak that swept across the long wall of the gallery, seemingly bringing in the city’s horizon.

In ‘Another Documentation’, Bawa continues to engage with the city – this time in a larger context. Going from construction site to construction site, she posits her pastel, sharply delineated drawings against found material within the site. They are all devoid of people, yet the human hand in the drawings intervene – this landscape is man-made. Propped up on grey metal easels, the drawings could be architectural plans of the site, but then again, maybe not. The minimal, grey pastel on white, large drawings are photographed in varying scale against the construction going on at the back, the raw industrial design and bright reds and yellows of concrete grinders and metal containers contrast with the overall greyness. The series of photographs displayed have a common thread in form, yet break the vision line as the artist scales the drawings differently against the rawness of the backdrop.

The bright orange scaffolding towers take center-stage, and form a link with Bawa’s first show. Soaring to different heights, reflecting the competing ambitions of tower blocks being built in the city, they don’t wrap around a structure but are the structure itself. In the absence of the central object, nevertheless, Bawa draws attention to people, who, unseen here, are the ones who inhabit the jointed pipes fitted with platforms that await them. Again, things are not quite on the grid, but askew. Lines converging slightly, a plank curves subtly: details one notices in Bawa’s ordered, reductive forms and are inherent in the ad hoc scaffolding seen around the city.



Two long graphite drawings hang like reams of cloth, from a thirty-foot height, seemingly spat out by a gigantic printer. Tapering slender lines are all that run through. From the foot of these rolls, a tapering metal track filled with black sea sand (alluding to the adulteration of river sand at construction sites?) skims the floor, to a corner across where two charcoal metal flat rods are propped against the wall. Further down two square six-inch by six-inch blocks seem to imply full stops. These black blocks dot the gallery and the scaffolding, effectively drawing the eye to empty spaces.

As these lines, angles and blocks draw one's eye, the architecture of the gallery is revealed; a former cotton warehouse, the one, large expansive space soars and stretches in one commodious whole. Bawa does well to deploy these large yet subtle drawing gestures to highlight the architecture within the gallery itself.

In a partitioned unlit space, Bawa uses corrugated metal sheets, awaiting use on the gallery's roof, sculpturally – stacks them on a diagonal, binds them with a singular orange tape, and in the darkness behind them with only radio static to be heard, one can imagine workers resting.



Bawa's practice revolves around drawings, architecture and sculpture that is non-object based. Based in the U.S. and visiting India frequently she responds to the geographical influences of her surroundings. Here she achieves a narrative of the Indian city successfully using a very formal practice that in its reductive manner is not severe but as the artist statement says has "unexpected levels of candor." The assemblages document the construction site, with pipe dreams and playful blocks, the drawings continue the documentation with tapering lines and color-blocked photographs.

There's an eerie quiet in the pictures and in the installations, yet one comes away with feeling presence in the absences. The chaos of the outside is distilled with humaneness inside, never forgetting the worker, the monumentality of the central work almost an anti-monument to the builder. The lightness of graphite stretched, keeping the human forever in the scale.

—[Deepika Sorabjee](#)

(All images: [Avantika Bawa](#), *Another Documentation*, Installation shot, *Site-responsive installation*, 2012, Metal scaffolding, black sand, metal, wood; Graphite on paper and Digital prints on archival paper; Courtesy of Gallery Maskara and the artist.)

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