

# ArtReview Asia



Acknowledgement for octogenarian Rasheed Araeen's contribution to Minimalism is long overdue. Marginalised and overshadowed for the most part by American stalwarts such as Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre and Donald Judd, the pioneers of the movement during the 1960s, Araeen's institutional recognition has only been recent: his solo exhibition *Zero to Infinity* (2012), at Tate Modern in London, was followed by his inclusion in the group exhibition *Other Primary Structures* (2014), at the Jewish Museum, New York.

In his first solo gallery exhibition in New York, the artist's obsession with symmetry (which stems from his training in engineering) is visible in a selection of early drawings executed in Karachi. Smooth and pliant zigzag lines and a mat of squiggles drawn with felt-tip pens fill the page in *Series A* (1961) and *Series B* (1962). The fluidity that will become his work's most distinguishing characteristic takes shape. On relocating permanently to London in 1964, Araeen's work morphs into major multicoloured sculptures after his exposure to British modernist Anthony Caro. From his sketches of three-dimensional structures made between 1965 and 68, hung in the vestibule of the gallery, Araeen's trademark cubes and vertical structures are born.

When asked about the resemblance between his work and LeWitt's, Araeen pointed out

the demarcation between him and his famous American counterpart: unlike LeWitt's constructions of strictly vertical and horizontal grids, continuing Piet Mondrian's dedication to similar geometric strictures during the 1920s, Araeen's frequently deploy a diagonal line. In *Chaar Neelay Heeray (Four Blue Diamonds)* (1971/2014) an elaborate latticework of criss-crossed wooden pieces assembled at perfectly measured intervals transforms the rectangular structure into a woven tapestry. While most minimalist work is admired for its industrial forms and meticulous linearity, Araeen's painstaking creation of four large diamonds within a backdrop of countless smaller ones converts the artwork from a static sculpture to a refreshingly dynamic object. His inclusion of diagonal lines creates the illusion of mobility such that the three-dimensional diamonds become two-dimensional, and vice versa, as one walks across the sculpture.

Araeen's single-minded, viewer-engaging focus on fluidity and symmetry is paramount in his practice. His mostly 180cm vertical sculptures are encountered at eye level and experienced spatially. Placed on the floor at the far end of the gallery, *Rang Baranga II* (1969/2014) allows one to admire the mathematical precision of woven patterns that hardly stay still. A vibrant

palette of red, blue, green and yellow structures are knitted such that they form a continuous spectrum of colour. Araeen's use of primary colours also brings cheer and an element of playfulness to his vivacious constructions.

Cubes play an equally important role in Araeen's oeuvre. Displayed in a large group in a smaller room, 45cm multicoloured wooden blocks fitted with diagonal lines can be rearranged as visitors see fit. As images of his early performative work *Springtime in Euston Square Gardens* (1970), in which cubes were placed in a public square in London and hoisted onto trees, propose, Araeen continues in a belief that began when he experimented with the idea that the body and empirical experience might be the primary site of knowing and understanding his work.

Perhaps the most engaging works from that period are his *Triangles* (1970). Wooden triangles shaped such that the hypotenuse forms a semi-circle are arranged on the floor in the gallery to make a perfect square. This work was originally conceived so that viewers could drop the works in water. Archival documentary images in the gallery showcase the floating wooden triangles forming their own patterns, reinforcing Araeen's conviction in perceiving the world through one's body. *Bansie Vasvani*



*Chaar Yaar II (Four Friends)*, 1968,  
wood and paint, 61 × 122 × 122 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery, New York & London