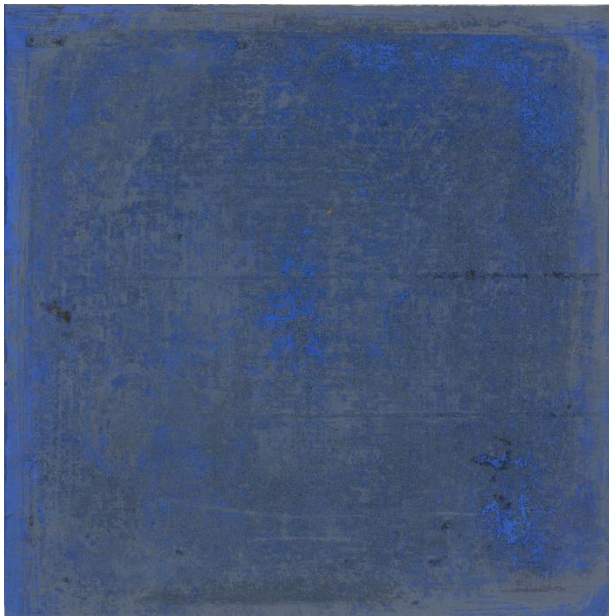


## Sheetal Gattani *Unmaking Space*

Aicon Gallery Exhibition: November 1 - 30, 2019

Press Preview & V.I.P Reception: Friday, November 1, 2019, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012



Sheetal Gattani, *Untitled*, 1999,  
Watercolor on black paper, 11 x 11 in.

We are delighted to present *Unmaking Space*, Aicon Art's debut solo exhibition of Mumbai-based abstractionist **Sheetal Gattani**.

The exhibition, a mid-career retrospective, is comprised of three distinct bodies of work that exemplify Gattani's process-based approach to 'unmaking space.' A suite of 10 sumptuous abstracts - created by weathering out black paper using several layers of watercolor – form the earliest body of work. Reminiscent of the poetic decay of urban surfaces in the artist's native Mumbai, the works set the tone for the artist's later experiments with canvas, collage and charcoal. Of the black paper series, the late artist **Mehlli Gobhai** has said,

*'Layer over layer is worked on and the black is transformed into a sepulchral lightness. The complex layering gives the work a sense of time that I have always strongly felt in all her work and which makes it so unique.'*

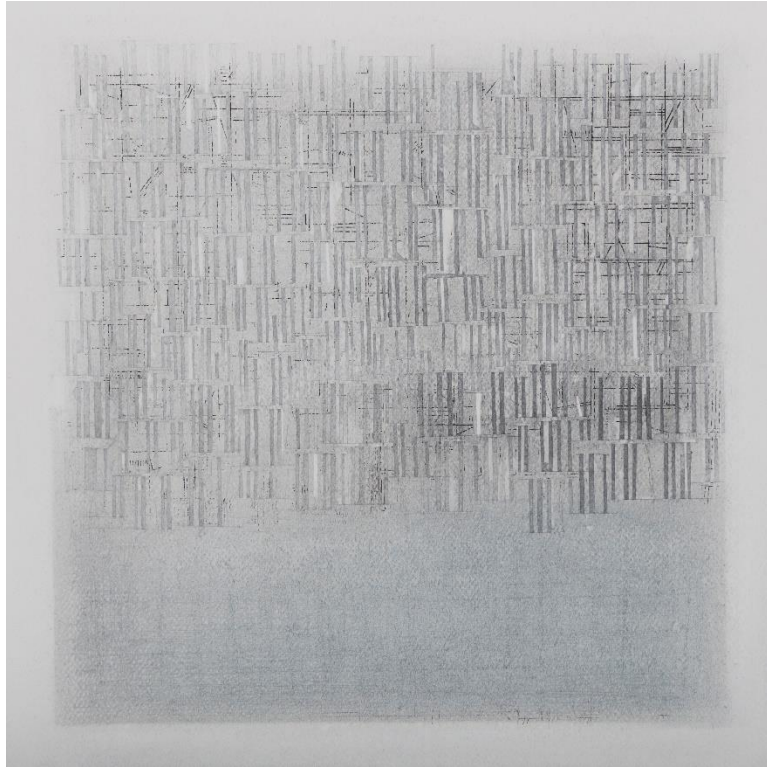
Having trained at the Sir JJ School of Art in Mumbai, Gattani poured her methodical strategies into evocative watercolors before moving on to explore her idiom in other mediums. The artist continues to maintain her studio in a bustling commercial pocket of Mumbai and the resultant studio practice takes on the qualities of a kind of meditation and disassociation from self. In a metropolis with overwhelming visual and aural stimuli, the works offer a liminal space from which one might glean a fragile sense of empathy and solitude. Gobhai was undoubtedly referring to this function when he said,

*'Surprisingly, with it's highly reduced vocabulary and total rejection of any recognizable form, I still find myself left with a sense of this work being strongly connected to nature or rather, to the process of natural growth. Nature stripped of its non-essentials, down to its rigorously distilled and resonant pulse.'*

Like her works on paper, Gattani's canvases are painted over and over in multiple layers. While the canvases fit neatly into the vocabulary of process-based abstraction there is more than meets the eye in one's experience of them. The subtle architectural conceits – achieved by pasting canvas to articulated

board – and complete absence of gesture make the works feel enigmatic and almost inevitable. Her experimentations with collage to achieve the desired effects of line, light and shadow are a hark back to her first works, revealing a steadfast progression since. Texture takes the place of gesture in Gattani's abstraction, indicative of the artist's concerns with time, memory and the subconscious. Encouraging free form engagement with her work, the artist says,

*'Abstraction is in its deepest sense, based on realism, as in, reality – reality of the present moment, free from any thoughts, memory-conditioning...only that pure present moment existing. So painting is a 'time-manifested' process and I become only a means...'*



Sheetal Gattani, *Untitled*, 2019  
Charcoal and dry pastel on archival paper, 14 x 14 in.

The final body of work on display in the present exhibition are 'drawings' that point to the artist's innovative approach to excavating surfaces. Created through a process of addition (by way of charcoal and dry pastel) and subtraction (through measured cut-outs from the paper's surface) the works attain a feeling of stasis much like the black paper works from the 1990s. The drawings also articulate the artist's ongoing inquiry into the square format, a permutation that perhaps begets more structure and predictability, allowing the artist to get on with the task of painting without laboring on the dynamics of perspective that a rectangular format might have posed. She has however negotiated other formats since, still retaining the quality of autonomous containment, the paintings are now more expansive, implying larger forms, uncharted space beyond the edges which are often jagged – a potent metaphor.

Sheetal Gattani (b.1968) completed her Diploma in Art Education (1990) and MFA (1993) from the J. J. School of Art, Mumbai, and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Indian Aesthetics in Mumbai (2002). She has showcased her artworks through extensive participation in a number of solo and group shows. Prominent solo exhibitions include those at Chemould Prescott Road (Mumbai, 2016), Bodhi Art Gallery (Singapore, 2007), Gallery Espace (Delhi, 2007) and with Gallery Sumukha (Chennai & Bangalore, 2008). In 2009 she received an award for excellence from the Raza Foundation and her work has formed of a few major group exhibitions including "Soft Spoken" (NCPA, Mumbai, 2007); "Reduced to Essentials" (with Zarina Hashmi at Bombay Art Gallery, Mumbai, 2007); "Panchatantra" (Kashi Art Gallery, Kochi, 2007); "Anonymously Yours," organized by Lakeeren Gallery (British Council, Mumbai, 2000); "Festival of Contemporary Art" (with Sohan Qadri at Gallery 7, Mumbai, 1999) and "50 Years of Independence" (NGMA, Mumbai, 1997). Sheetal Gattani lives and works in Mumbai.

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