

SHRINE EMPIRE

AYESHA SINGH

IT WAS NEVER CONCRETE

CURATED BY ANUSHKA RAJENDRAN

Venue: Shrine Empire, D395, Defence Colony, New Delhi

Vernissage: 6 pm, 22nd August 2019

Exhibition continues till 28th September 2019

Shrine Empire is excited to present a solo exhibition of the artist Ayesha Singh. The exhibition, 'It was never concrete' presents new works made by the artist in response to the city of Delhi, where the artist currently lives and works. The series of works on view explore how the specific social, political and historical context of the city manifests in its architecture. Singh's works reveal the power structures embedded in the cityscape, and the aspirations and destiny that they embody.

Curatorial Statement by Anushka Rajendran:

"The shape-shifting force of history assembles and reassembles itself. And built architecture is perhaps an ostensible symptom of its ebb and flow, aggression and benevolence, knowledge and folly. In Delhi, an ancient city that has seen the rise and fall of empires, regimes that ran on megalomania and machismo have been malleable to similar narratives that have replaced it. Structures that emanate grandeur are not static, but destined for occupation, disuse and regeneration. Their domes and columns collide and adhere; embellishments drop into the abyss of verandahs that have lost their footing; stairways that dreamed of the stars become enveloped by the refuse of industrial dreams; institutions emerge to crumble. Ayesha Singh explores the fragility of "ornaments of authority¹", their transience, impermanence and inevitable shifts in the meanings that they embody.

¹From Ayesha Singh's collaborative text based work with Cat Blumke, *Capital Formation*, 2017-18.

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The architecture of our collective unconscious is stronger for its composite fragments, its hybridity. Global flows of trade, population, wisdom, and aesthetics informed sensibilities even prior to what we identify as the era of globalization. These diverse influences keep inscribing new affinities upon the city's framework, as do discourse and lived life. This amorphous continuity and the ways that it subliminally orders our cultural complex² are mirrored in Singh's psychogeographies³ of the city's skyline. They escape the essentialization of history and politics that we witness in media-driven, populist narratives and inscribe the varied guises of power in the same tenor.

In 'It was Never Concrete', the city's architecture emerges as a metaphor to critique lofty desires for enduring power and privilege. Singh reminds us that reinforced concrete is far from 'concrete', vulnerable to time. Just as the promise of late capitalism, and hype economies that rely on cyber infrastructure with its algorithmic contingency mimicking the logic of material imprints of power. While pirated architecture attempts to hijack the visible and invisible ordering of another's power, we appropriate towards similar ends — often without form or function — for our homes, public infrastructure, social media accounts and advertising imagery, unconsciously informed perhaps only by the hegemonic ideologies past and present.

Everything shall become fragments that integrate into our present. Time is an agent that allows both permanence and impermanence in Singh's collapse of history and contemporary into one moment. It is our ally, and our conscience."

Artist's Bio:

Ayesha Singh (New Delhi, India) completed her MFA in Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2018); BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art (2013); and Fine Art Diploma from Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, UK (2010). She has exhibited solo shows at the Mumbai Art Room (2017); Gujral Foundation, New Delhi, India (2017); Exhibit320, New Delhi, India (2016); and has participated in several group shows

²The collective function of all the cultural influences and impulses within a community, and informs their behavior as a composite.

³A term coined by Guy Debord in 1955 to unpack the confluence of psychology and urban architecture based on the premise that different spaces can make us think and feel differently.

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worldwide including The Sculpture Park Jaipur, Nahargarh Fort, Rajasthan, India (2018-19); Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China (2018); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK

(2017); Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai, India (2017); Hyde Park Art Centre, Chicago, USA (2017); IGNCA, New Delhi, India (2015); Casa de Dona Gisele, Curitiba, Brazil (2015); GallerySke, New Delhi, India (2014); and at the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK (2014). Singh is the recent winner of the "*Ellies Creator Award*" from the Art Centre/South Florida, USA; the "*Civil Society Institute Fellowship*" at Vermont Studio Centre, USA; and the "*Science & Culture Initiative Grant*" from the University of Chicago and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

About Shrine Empire:

Shrine Empire was created in December 2008 from a merger of two existing entities. Prior to this, both had worked together on exhibitions in India and Singapore separately, known then as The Shrine Gallery and Empire Art. Shrine Empire is based in New Delhi and its directors, Anahita Taneja and Shefali Somani have envisioned the gallery as a platform for presenting and promoting contemporary visual art practices. Since its inception, Shrine Empire has consistently focused on encouraging a dialogic approach with a range of emerging and eminent artists with sustained, innovative and engaging practices, and curators in order to produce exhibitions and special commissioned projects. The mission of Shrine Empire is to promote artists, curators and art-writers who are invested in redefining the boundaries of contemporary art practice. The various curatorial narratives that have emerged from the space over the years have made Shrine Empire known for its critical engagement with political and social concerns of the contemporary.

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