

ART

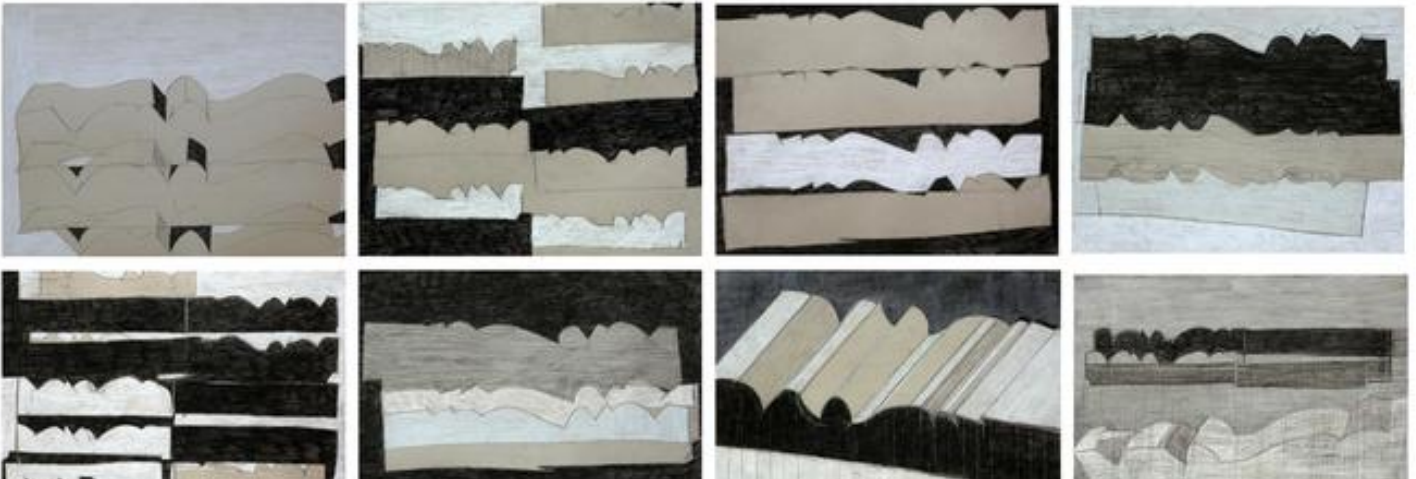
Artist Shruti Mahajan's abstractions on home, spaces and the city

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Hyderabad-based artist Shruti Mahajan's new series, *Between Brackets*, touches upon conservation architecture and changing spaces in cities



Artist Shruti Mahajan has lived in different cities in India – Mumbai, Maheshwar, Baramulla, Sri Ganganagar and Secunderabad. Her idea of home is fragmented, transient and a recurring theme in her art. Her new series titled *Between Brackets*, showcased by Shrine Empire art gallery, New Delhi, on Art in Touch (artintouch.in), extends her artistic discussion on cities and dwellings. Shruti explains that the series, while referring to how brackets hold together architectural structures, is also a metaphor for her love for language: “What is said between brackets or parentheses adds value to a sentence. Similarly, I like my art to have subtexts.”

Between Brackets also draws from two of her earlier series – *Spatial Dialogues* and *Continuity of Construction*, in its focus on spaces and heritage of a city. For *Spatial Dialogues* (2021), she had collaborated with conservation architect Ravindra Gundu Rao whom she had known since her student days at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Rao was involved in the conservation of Maheshwar's Ahilya Fort, which is now a heritage hotel.



When Shruti was working on her graduation project in 2003, she had stayed at Ahilya. There, she observed the heritage architecture of Maheshwar and the weavers of Sally Holkar's Rehwa Society working on their looms on the banks of Narmada. The flight of stairs from the river to the fort, for instance, was the subject of one of her recent artworks. Shruti is also a trained textile designer and fascinated by the warp and weft; she included sketches of the looms.

In her new series, she sketches brackets, at times in abstraction, to underline how they are integral to architectural forms. Her choice of media varies from wood to charcoal on paper to charcoal on mount board. She reminisces, "I would constantly hear the sound of the staff working on wood at Poshak Wada (the central courtyard of Ahilya fort)." The sketches that make up *Between Brackets* is an ode to the fort's conservation and her way of reiterating the importance of conserving heritage structures in different cities.

From *Between Brackets* by Shruti Mahajan

Talking about her recurring themes of spaces, cities and home, she says, “I am constantly longing for a place where I feel that I belong. My memory of a place I can call home is fragmented – I remember the verandah of one home, a window view of another, a courtyard of another... For any thematic work, I begin with drawings and sketches and then build it up. I have found myself moving between textile and paper as media.”

Paper as a medium, she points out, works for its tactile quality as well as being portable as she moves between cities and homes, with her studio. Shruti lived in Hyderabad in the mid-2000s before work took her to other cities and she returned in 2017.

(Between Brackets is on view at artintouch.in till April 30)

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