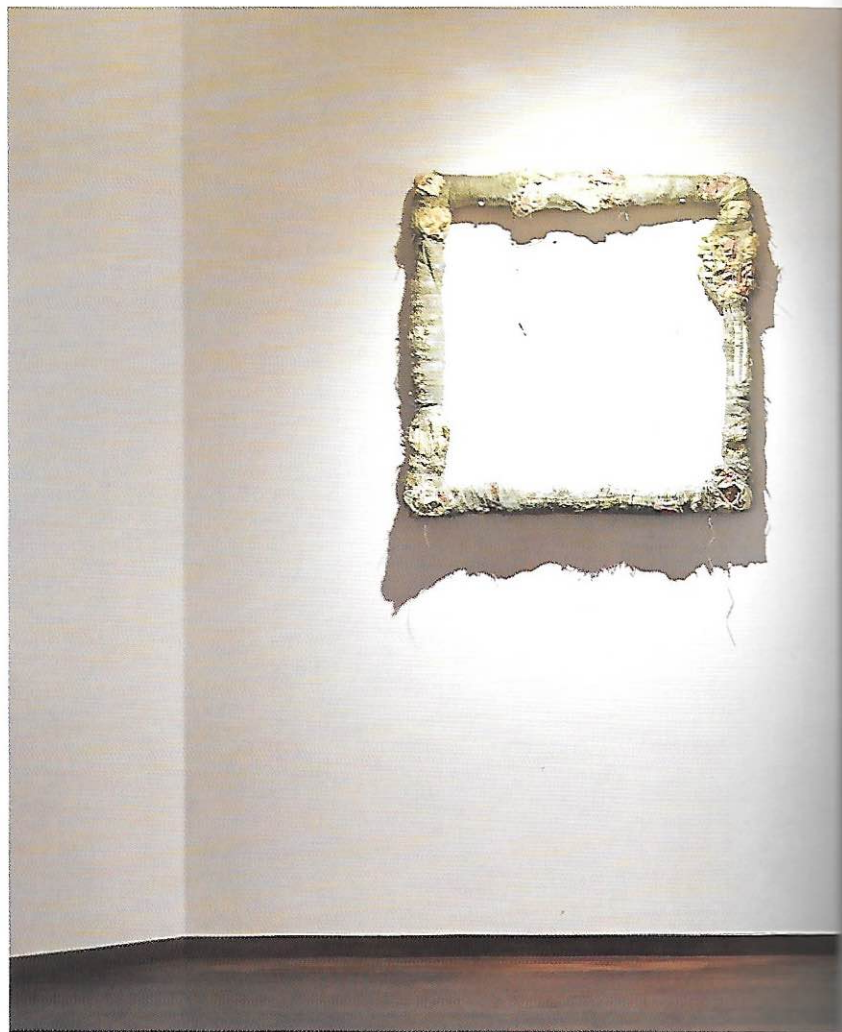


An Empty Canvas

Aaditi Joshi installs framescapes of a plastic-using world, finds **Neha Mitra**.

As you walk into Aaditi Joshi's show at Mumbai's Tarq from the 22nd of August to the 28th of September, it's easy to get taken in by the sense of calm, serenity and structure. But not for too long. A couple of steps closer to the works, a real sense of foreboding begins to weigh in.

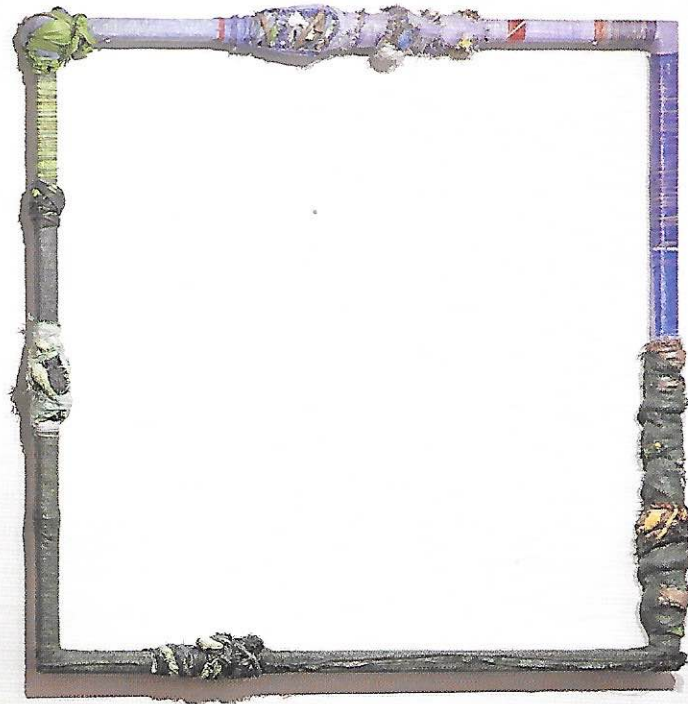
It's been 14 years since Joshi's first solo – *Zero Opacity* at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 2005. Her last solo was at Gallery Maskara in 2011-12. In the current show, Joshi uses polypropylene bags and sets the stage for a pressing dialogue on urbanization, about its discontents and detritus. The works are made of plastic and wood, they change form and tenor, and respond to the gallery's geography. The colours are calming, the language is controlled, and there is poetry in the execution. And yet these are stories of impending asphyxia, of that there is no doubt.



Polypropylene bags are used commonly to transport white cement. These coloured bags offer a ready palette but are prone to wear and fray. "I observe these used bags for a long time before working with them. If a bag has stitches, I want it to remain like that," says Joshi. White cement is what they are meant to carry and Joshi uses it to add a sculptural element to the works.

Many of the works are not painted in the conventional sense. The bags are woven and the warp and the weft offer a base for further painterly strokeplay. Cement is applied like paint. The bag with its original print is revealed in the cavities and holes of the work.

Bags used to carry fertilizers, sugar and grain, offer a different colour palette. While wrapping layers of polypropylene to a frame could simply be a process, the artist engages



with her material as she would with brush strokes. Prints, markings and text are used as part of the palette. Even transparent layers are treated as transparent colours; from this approach emerges the individual character of each canvas. There is some play in the new identity the bags assume. Wispy fibres float off structured, solid edges, casting shadows and reflecting light. The placement of the artworks maximizes their impact. Empty breathing spaces, constructed zones of darkness – all serve to accentuate the interplay between what one might call, a state of calm and a state of calamity.

A yard of plastic hungrily wraps itself around a frame in many works, sometimes bursting at the seams, and yet carries nothing within it – a lost picture. The artist first wrapped polythene around an armature

in 2012 at a site-specific installation at the Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair.

As you take the stairs in the gallery, you find an installation that resembles an elongated, nest-like structure moving from the ground to the first floor. It is delicate to the extent that it appears woven and centralises her exploration of plastic as form and material.

Joshi's art often engages with the altering environmental state of the planet; her current show extends the inquiry to implicate all of us in the disastrous future that awaits if we do not stop choking our seas with non-biodegradable waste. At the same time, the show questions the tyranny of formal definitions. The works seem to ask: When does a painting become a sculpture? And how does a plastic-wrapped frame create an empty canvas? /

Aaditi Joshi.

Installation view of two works.
Wood, polypropylene.
Image © Ashish Chandra.
© the artist and Tarq.