

Pratap Morey's new solo tries to decode Mumbai's ever-changing cityscape

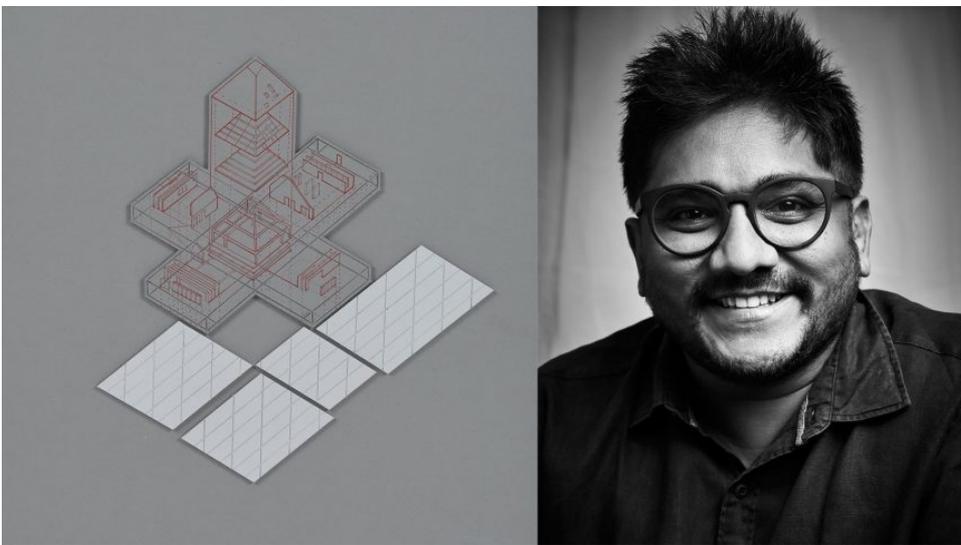
In 'Concrete Ciphers', the artist turns to themes instantly familiar to Mumbaikars, leading to imaginative and engaging art pieces

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In Concrete Ciphers, Pratap Morey moves away from digital photography and superimposition to focus on maze-like drawings and engravings | Tarq Gallery, Mumbai

The title of Pratap Morey's recently opened 'Concrete Ciphers,' tells you everything you need to know about his second solo with Tarq gallery, located in Mumbai's art district of Colaba. The 'concrete' part refers to the Dahisar-based artist's preoccupation with the architecture of the shiny new brick-and-mortar Mumbai, while the 'ciphers' part is a perfect allusion to his board games-inspired artworks that contain within its fold many clues and secrets to the ever-evolving geography of urban spaces. Using a mixture of archival ink, drawings, engravings, cuts on museum boards and synthetic paints, the exhibition sees Morey return to his stomping ground – an exploration of

Mumbai's notorious lack of spaces, the haphazard and rapid gentrification in the last few decades and the mechanical and industrial processes of glass-fronted corporate buildings. Most Mumbaikars will instantly identify with Morey's pet themes – or “pet peeves”, given how millions of commuters struggle with the city's hostile infrastructure every day.



Talking to artist Pratap Morey at his Dahisar studio in north Mumbai, it isn't surprising to learn that growing up, he aspired to be an architect | Installation view at Tarq, Mumbai

Mega City Mumbai

What's interesting about Morey's work, as Hena Kapadia, founder-director of Tarq, puts it, is that they are more like “puzzles created in an effort to decode a city.” Morey's approach to mega-city Mumbai and the way he juxtaposes the personal with public makes his works relatable. “Where you see the structure of a building, you can also see that the clothes line and window grills are as much a part of the architecture as the beams,” says Kapadia. One of the artworks on display, ‘De/Re Construction site’ is symbolic of a Mumbaikar's relationship to architecture. “The usage of clothes hanging for drying and other personal objects in full public view points to how we make a city our own despite the constant struggle for space,” says Kapadia, explaining the human connection in Morey's art. ‘Conjoined-twisted’ is another work that invokes the

confusion that engulfs the city. In a continuing nod to his fixation with games and puzzles, the work is in the shape of a twisted Rubik's cube



Metro constructions, skywalks, corporate towers, redevelopment of chawls, encroachment and displacement – Mumbaikars can expect to find all these motifs in artist Pratap Morey's work | Installation view at Tarq, Mumbai

Silent Bombardment

In this show, Morey moves away from digital photography and superimposition to focus on maze-like drawings and engravings. At first glance, they resemble an architectural blueprint, a leaf out of an architect's diary. Talking to Morey at his Dahisar studio, it isn't surprising to learn that, growing up, he aspired to be an architect. Metro constructions, skywalks, corporate towers, redevelopment of chawls, encroachment and displacement – Mumbaikars can expect to find all these motifs in his work. Architectural and design flaws in metro bridge constructions, flyovers and skywalks amuse him no end.

“How can intrusion be architecture?” is a question he often finds himself asking. “If you look at the metro bridge, they actually build the columns and other parts outside of an industrial factory and sneak them into the city at night while the residents are fast asleep. When people wake up the next morning, they don't immediately realise it but the geography has changed overnight. Their sky space has

suddenly gone,” explains Morey. “I call it silent bombardment. It’s silent and very lethal,” he laughs.



Mumbai-based artist Pratap Morey, who finds absurdity in assembly-line construction that’s changing the face of the city, cites board games like Lego, Tangram and Tetris as his inspiration | Installation view at Tarq, Mumbai

Jigsaw Puzzle

Morey, who finds absurdity in such assembly-line construction that’s changing the face of urban Mumbai, cites board games like Lego, Tangram and Tetris as his inspiration. “Tetris, in particular, has these shapes and you have limited time to align them. I am trying to draw a parallel to what’s happening in the city right now. The way they are constructing these bridges, it’s almost like a jigsaw puzzle.” Meera Menezes’ essay accompanying ‘Concrete Ciphers’ notes, “Elevating these humdrum, banal, serial, and seemingly soulless creatures of mechanical production, Morey gestures at the roles they could possibly play in creating alternate, utopian worlds.”

Along with architecture, displacement forms a key element of Morey’s body of work. This topic resonates the most with Morey who, like many living in Mumbai, hopped from flat to flat in the initial years. “When we first moved here from Amravati, my father had brought a flat in Bhayander. The building was built on a marshland and it was tilted.