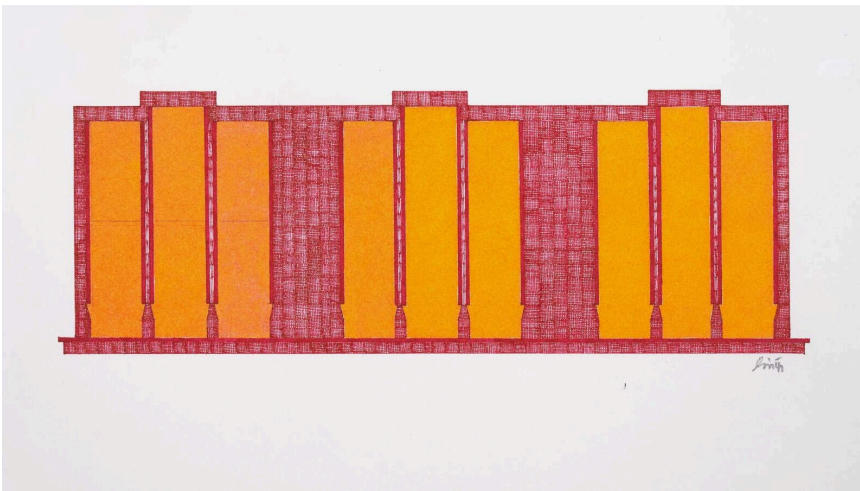


CULTURE

The Music of Buildings: Vishwa Shroff explores the streets of Basel through her art

Through a series of ink, watercolour, silverpoint and graphite drawings, Shroff documents her observations of architectural details in buildings and sites while walking around the city of Basel in Switzerland.

1 December 2022



“Vishwa Shroff’s drawings of architecture don’t duplicate what is there; they render what she sees,” writes Swiss visual artist and writer, Hannes Schüpbach, when describing Shroff’s latest series being showcased at Tarq, Mumbai titled “The Music of Buildings”. Made during her time as a guest of the Stiftung Laurenz-Haus in Basel from October 2021 to September 2022, these drawings display mosaic symbols of her observations and memories there. “For about 20 years, I have been living in and out of India, and every conversation, exhibition, performance and reading [has ended up in a] sketchbook full of notes. In Basel, it was my movement within spaces that became the starting point from which I developed both the form and structure of these drawings,” Shroff explains.

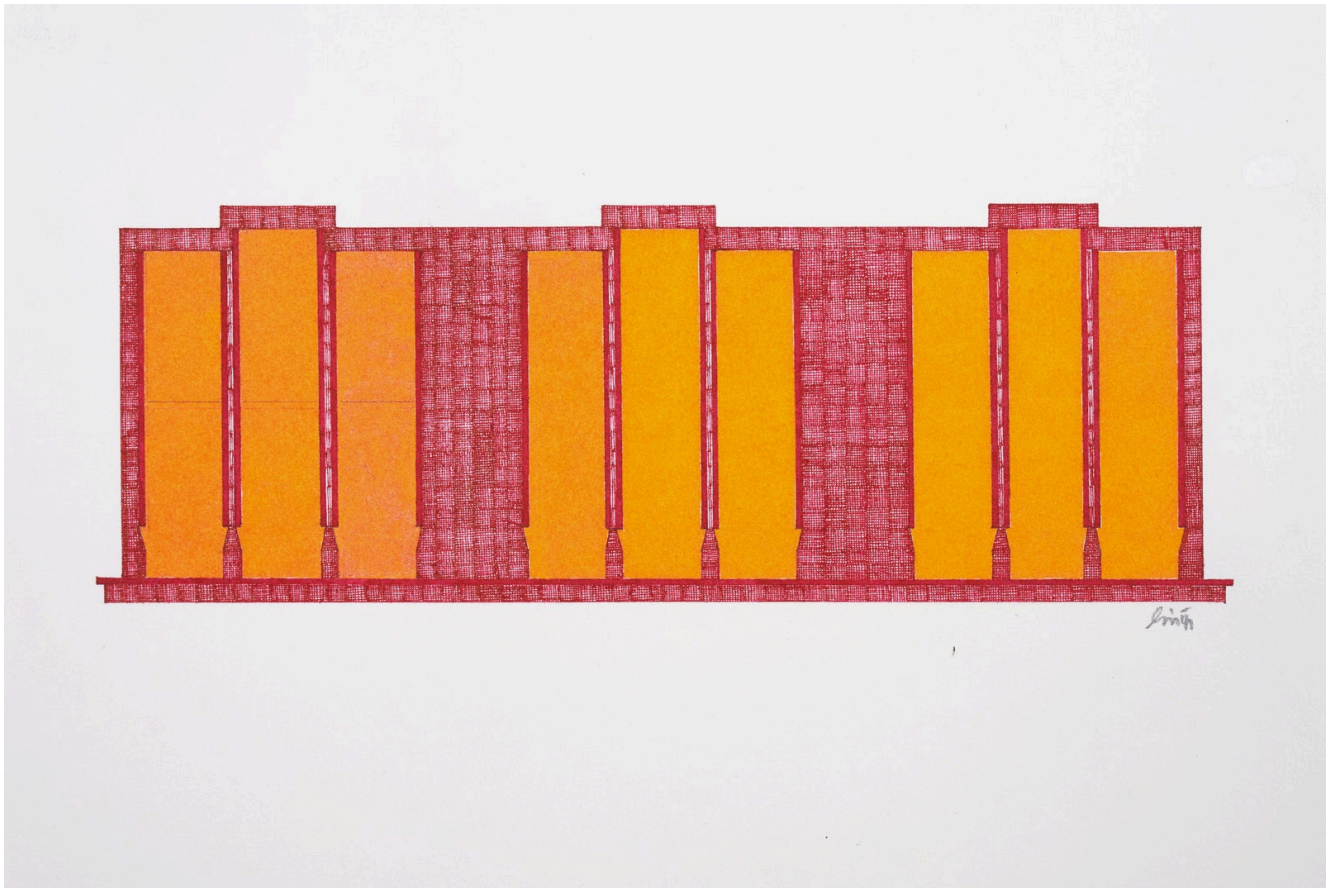
Also read: [*How Jogen Chowdhury's art mirrors the beauty in the banality of our everyday lives*](#)



Basel Project One (detail #1) (2022), ink on paper Ashish Chandra

She describes her creative process as “entirely about walking and observing, making a record of movement, thoughts and narratives that run through my mind while I am just moving about. Then, back in my studio, I extract and abstract these notes and photographs to make compositional sense of them.” Working within the framework of her long-standing interest in locating herself within the built environment, the drawings in this show are memories from buildings and sites—interior

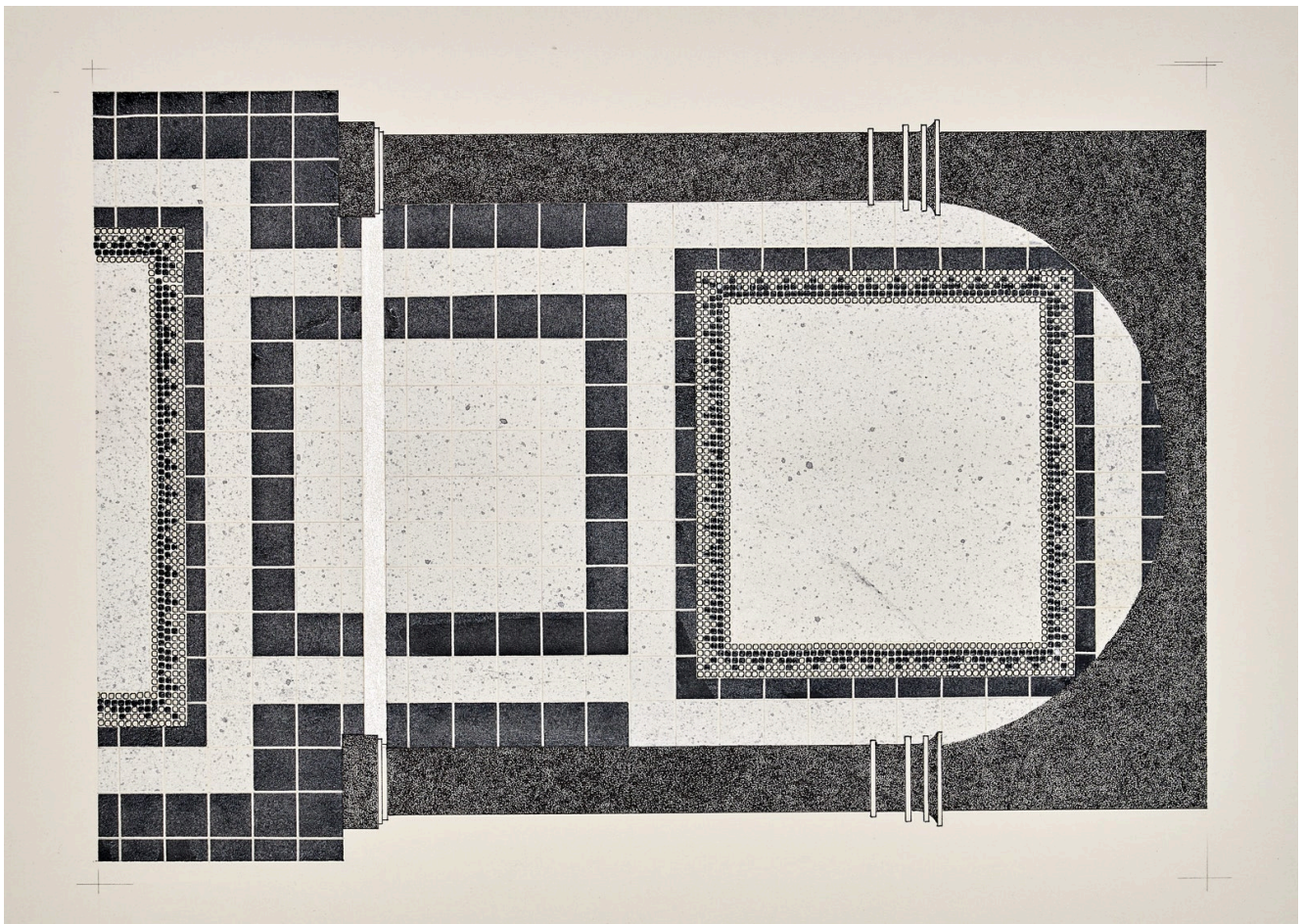
and exterior—that have been transformed into seemingly minimal, intricately geometric details. “This body of work is an ode to the ephemeral nature of my movement and presence within these sites, which I’ve incorporated in a nuanced yet uncanny way. I hope they obediently mirror the tactile quality of the construction materials being studied.”



Basel Project One (detail #2) (2022), ink on paper

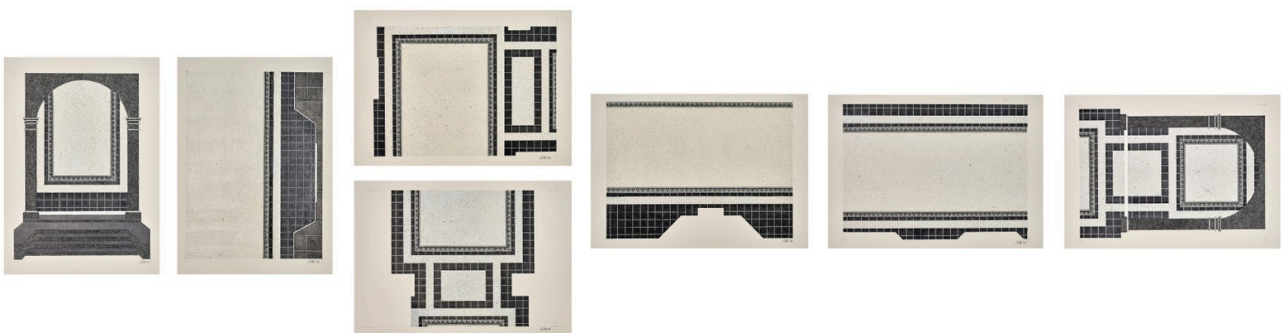
Schüpbach further elaborates in his essay, “There is a strong emphasis on objecthood in these drawings and their material realization. The ‘domestic’—that which relates to the house—in these depictions is not the life in the house but, in very concrete ways, the life of the house. Its liveliness in proportion and execution, but also in its historic persistence. A life in time over time, which Vishwa Shroff’s portraiture takes beyond time.”

Also read: [This show in Sharjah spotlights the exciting history of South Asian pop art](#)



Four steps (detail) (2022), watercolour and ink on paper

“I have always lived in built environments, and think of my drawings as observational notations rather than imaginative storytelling,” Shroff says. “Within this framework, my work explores spatial and narrative possibilities of urban and architectural scenarios. The subtle metamorphosis that denotes an in-between and a simultaneously specific moment in time are recorded through my art. This act of drawing the markings and physical manifestations of usage, the cracks and discolorations that appear as scars in these architectural spaces, are understood by me as durational dialogs between the building and those that have passed through them.”



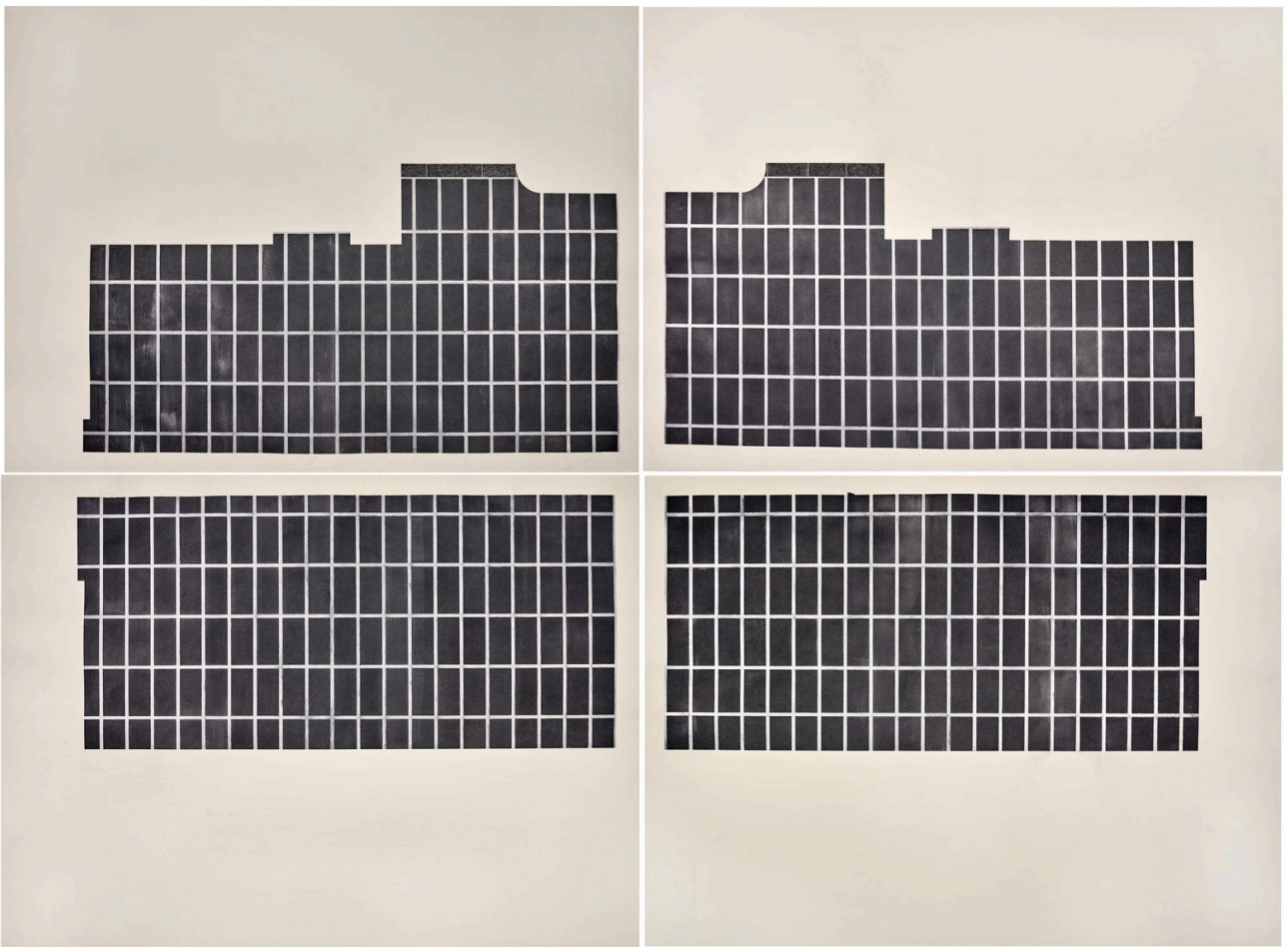
Four steps (2022), watercolour and ink on paper

For Shroff, the most intriguing part of her journey was having access to the Kunstmuseum’s Kupferstichkabinett (Department of Prints and Drawings) archives where she got to see many artworks in various materials created over a long historic period by multiple artists. “The museum houses Switzerland’s largest public collection of drawings, watercolours and prints. Perhaps my time spent here studying these drawings is beginning to show its impact. For example, I discovered two lithographs by Frank Stella—in one, he uses parallel bands drawn in black crayon as a means of firming up planar consistency; and in another, the rectangles signed by these structures deliberately align with the margins on the left and at the bottom and top of the sheet of paper. This leads to large blank areas on the right. In another drawing by him, two independent shapes are linked by an underlying grid. All these have led to experiments of using paper as a stage in ‘Memoria Manet’,” she says while pointing to her drawings.



Memoria Manet 6 (2022), watercolour and ink on paper

We can't help but wonder if Shroff—an Indian who observed architecture outside the country—found herself often making parallels, contemplating about or drawing comparisons to structures in her homeland. She agrees, thinking “if I was born or grew up anywhere else, my work would be very different from what it is today. I believe that my understanding and way of seeing is very much rooted in [the Indian] context, and it is through this lens that I tend to interpret the world around me... wherever that might be.”



Kunstfloor (2022), graphite and silverpoint on paper

“The Music of Buildings” by Vishwa Shroff is exhibited at Tarq, Mumbai between 24 November 2022 to 7 January 2023.

Also read: [Here are the top 5 highlights from the Delhi Art Week](#)