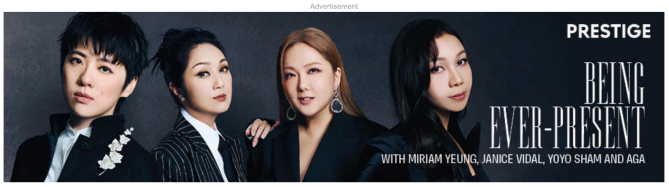
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Inside Art Intelligence Global's Significant Form

BY CHARLENE CO

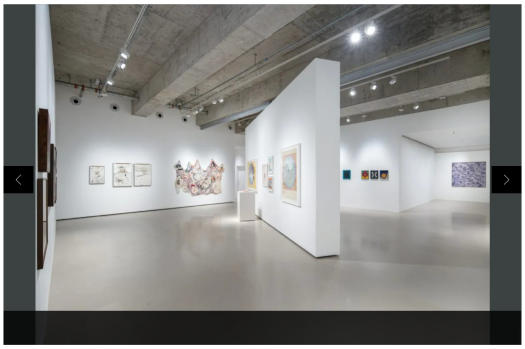
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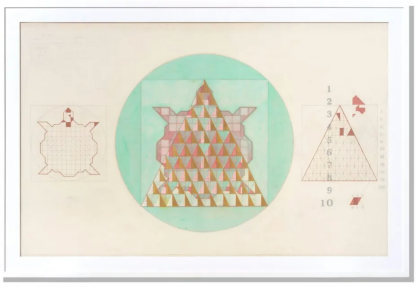
Eleven artists from South Asia and its diaspora revisit the histories behind modern art at Art Intelligence Global's *Significant Form*.

South Asian modernism remains less familiar to many Hong Kong art audiences than its European and American counterparts. *Significant Form*, an exhibition at Art Intelligence Global (AIG), hopes to change that, bringing together 11 artists from the region whose work spans the decades since Indian Independence, touching on Partition, migration and the exchange of ideas across cultures.



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Co-curated by Adeline Ooi, formerly Art Basel's Director Asia, and presented in collaboration with three Mumbai galleries, Chemould Prescott Road, Jhaveri Contemporary and TARQ, the exhibition assembles artists from different generations. Their approaches vary widely, from Nasreen Mohamedi's precise photographic compositions to Anwar Jalal Shemza's geometric abstractions and contemporary explorations of textiles, printmaking, architecture and language. AIG founder Yuki Terase shares that the idea took root during a visit to Mumbai with Ooi. "I said, why can't we just bring it to show to an audience in Hong Kong?" Terase says. And so they do.



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Desmond Lazaro,
Fire Altar "Kurma" Brick Geometry Study I (*2026*)

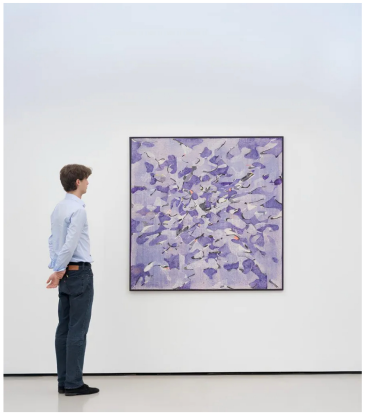
The historical starting point in the exhibition's curation is Partition in 1947, when British India was divided into India and Pakistan, prompting mass displacement and widespread violence. More than 15 million people are thought to have crossed the newly drawn borders in the months around August 1947. For artists including Mohamedi, Shemza and Zarina, the consequences of this rupture deeply influenced their lives and artistic inclinations. Rather than reconstructing historical events, their work often approaches memory through structure, repetition and the physical properties of materials.



Yuki Terase

A rare set of 26 photographs by Mohamedi is among the exhibition's highlights. Taken during her travels between countries and cultures, the photographs reveal the same precision of line and structure found in her drawings. Her camera often turns towards patterns in the built environment, shadows and expanses of sand, allowing familiar subjects to give way to geometric forms. During the tour, Alexander Gardiner, an Associate at AIG, drew attention to the relationship between her formal investigations and her interest in cultural commonality and spirituality. He explains: "Within her search for structure and form, there's also a search for inner commonality and cultural synthesis across different regions, ethnicities and identities." I found it fascinating that it was of little importance where the photographs were taken, or even when.

You'll find a similar complexity in Shemza's *City of Light*. Having moved from Lahore to London in 1956, the artist encountered European modernism while remaining closely connected to the visual traditions of his upbringing. The painting's abstract forms recall the colours, tiling and architectural patterns of Lahore without depicting the city literally. Shemza had studied at the Mayo School of Art in Lahore and was a founding member of the Lahore Art Circle before moving to Britain. His later work brought Islamic architecture and calligraphic forms into contact with Western abstraction. Gardiner describes him
as "negotiating between his inherited visual culture and the expectations of Western audiences."



Balraj Khan, Purple Plain *(1970)*

These artists were not simply borrowing from European modernism but developing their own approaches to abstraction through encounters between different artistic and cultural traditions. Despite developing a distinctive style in Britain, Shemza initially faced resistance from teachers and critics. For Terase, his experience underscores the need to consider South Asian modernis within the wider history of modern art. *Significant Form* brings these artists into that conversation, showing how their work draws on multiple visual traditions.

Mixed media artist Balraj Khanna, for instance, who moved to Britain in 1962, developed an approach to abstraction influenced by landscape, natural rhythms and memories of a peripatetic childhood. His paintings are filled with vivid forms that gather and disperse across the canvas, offering a different approach to abstraction from Shemza's more measured geometry. Meanwhile Lubna Chowdhary, born in Tanzania to Pakistani parents and based in Britain, works across ceramics, sculpture and painting. Her geometric tiles draw on architecture, craft and modernist design, bringing different visual traditions into the same space. The patterns may initially seem familiar, but their combinations resist easy categorisation. Cultural inheritance becomes something to handle and reconsider, rather than a fixed identity.

In Zarina's paper collages, cut and joined fragments recall the artist's comparison of

paper to skin, which can be punctured and scarred, yet repaired. The works bear the marks of damage and the effort to mend them. For an artist whose life involved repeated movement between countries, paper became a way to consider displacement and the loss of home.



Installation views showing work by Lubna Chowdhary and farther right by Anwar Jalal Shemza

Conceptual artist Mithu Sen, too, explores exclusion through an invented, unreadable script, challenging the expectation that writing must communicate clearly. Her work also points to language as a tool of colonial assimilation. Needles puncture the paper, giving this exclusion a physical presence.

Soghra Khurasani's carved woodblocks evoke landscapes marked by migration and The Partition of India in 1947. Displayed alongside the prints, the blocks reveal the incisions and residual ink left by the printing process. They stand as works in their own right, bearing the marks of the artist's labour. Khurasani's experience as an Indian Muslim informs a practice concerned with landscape, memory and belonging. The cuts are both marks made by the artist and spaces from which ink has been removed.



Desmond Lazaro,
Study for Shri yantra painting with gometric analysis *(2026)*

Other artists turn their attention to the built environment. Vishwa Shroff 's drawings isolate details of Mumbai's architecture, including features inherited from the city's colonial past. By focusing on fragments rather than presenting buildings as complete structures, she asks viewers to look again at familiar streets and the histories held in their surfaces. Jitish Kallat also uses materials including tarmac and thermochromic pigment, allowing environmental conditions to affect the work's surface. Their practices approach the city and landscape differently, but both draw attention to the forces that leave their mark.



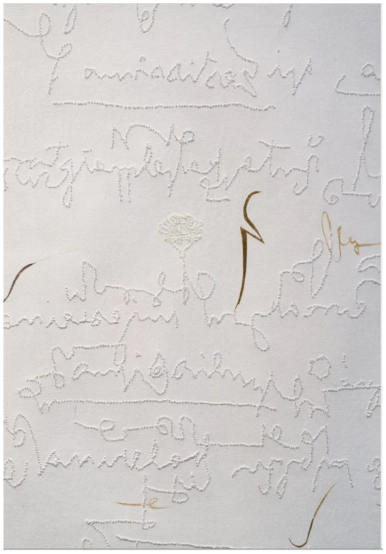
Alexander Gardiner

Other practices consider how knowledge survives through materials and inherited techniques. Boshudhara Mukherjee reworks discarded saris and cloth using weaving

and crochet skills she learnt from her mother and grandmother. The textiles carry traces of previous use, while unpicking and reworking them gives the material a new purpose. Desmond Lazaro draws on Pichhvai painting, a traditional Indian painting practice associated with Rajasthan. Trained in the technique under a master painter, he develops intricate compositions informed by mythology, cosmology and astrology.

From Mohamedi's photographs to Mukherjee's reworked textiles, *Significant Form,* ultimately brings together markedly different ways of "seeing and making". The works leave room for their histories to emerge without reducing them to those histories and resist a single definition of South Asian modernism.

This relationship between making and meaning is one of the exhibition's defining qualities. The works may emerge from particular histories, but their concerns can resonate far beyond them. Terase recalls a Japanese visitor recognising his own experience of linguistic exclusion in Sen's work, despite coming from a different cultural background; the connection was personal and immediate.



Mithu Sen,
Shadows: One Yet Separate, *one of four parts (2024)*

The show's ability to speak to wider human concerns while retaining the specificity of each artist's perspective gives *Significant Form* its cultural weight. The city has longstanding South Asian communities and extensive international connections, yet its gallery landscape has been conspicuously lacking a multi-generational presentation of this kind. As an introduction, the exhibition offers a generous sampler of the depth, range and diversity of South Asian contemporary art.

Significant Form runs at Art Intelligence Global (AIG) until December 11, 2026.

Note:
The information in this article is accurate as of the date of publication.

TAGS

Art Exhibition | Hong Kong | Significant Form

WRITTEN BY



Charlene Co

Charlene Co (affectionately known as Charlie) is a journalist and editor born in Manila and has lived in Hong Kong for over 15 years, writing for English lifestyle print and digital publications. She delights ..**Read More**

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