

NASREEN MOHAMEDI: THE VASTNESS, AGAIN & AGAIN

Curated by Puja Vaish

"In this utter chaos a thread of discipline - a cobweb"

-Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-1990)

A magic occurs while observing Nasreen Mohamedi's work, as the flat paper surface opens out shifting dimensions. Patterns emerge from light gradations and soft shadows, from the *"filigree in water"* - designs in water and sand moulded by the sea, the traces of miniscule patterns by scurrying crabs, the slow dissolution of ice, or how the geometry of a spider's web catches the light and reveals itself.

The infinite fleeting configurations of nature captured Mohamedi's imagination. Her receptivity to the mysticism of nature and its changing realities aligns to Zen Buddhist philosophy, Sufism and Taosim.

While cultural specificities of place and time are effaced in her work, Mohamedi had a unique way of drawing from her surroundings. Her work philosophises the contemplative landscapes of the desert and the sea. Her notes and photographs from travels to Turkey, Iran, Bahrain, Fatehpur Sikri and Corbusier's Chandigarh speak of the essences of design and space in architecture and landscape.

Concepts of the secular and a troubled religious co-existence held in delicate balance have characterised post-Partition India. Perhaps, the unique detachment in Mohamedi's work and her interest in Sufism and existentialist thought, especially in the writings of Albert Camus, maybe read alongside these realities. Mohamedi's diary entries read, *"A spectacular virtue that leads to deny one's passions. A higher virtue that leads to balancing them. Camus notebooks, 1951. I watch the world around me with greater clarity, detachment and understanding of the inner balance"*; *"War continues - I sit here and try and find a unity - not between religions but between people and people"*.

The exhibition aims to conjure Nasreen Mohamedi's legacy by setting up conversations within her own works and with the important art centres of Bombay and Baroda through artworks by some of her peers. Letters and photographs display the camaraderie she shared with colleagues and students which precipitated a mutual exchange of thoughts and concepts.

Monochromatic, meticulous and minimal, Mohamedi's works insist on a pause, a slowness that derives from observing the dynamic phenomena of the perceived world.

There was an authenticity in how Mohamedi merged life and art. The practice of the everyday - *riyaaz*, repetition and dedication, is seen in her sequential line drawings and in the ascetic way that she organized her space.

In the last decade of her shortened life, despite failing health due to a neuro-muscular disease, Mohamedi trained her hand to conquer the bodily tremors, by working on a drafting table with a scale, pen and ink in her sparse and immaculate studio.

Most of Mohamedi's works were found undated and untitled and were pieced together to survey her practice after she passed away. Her recent rise to prominence among the studies of Western and Indian abstraction provides an opportunity to question art historical categorization and encourage new ways of perceiving art.