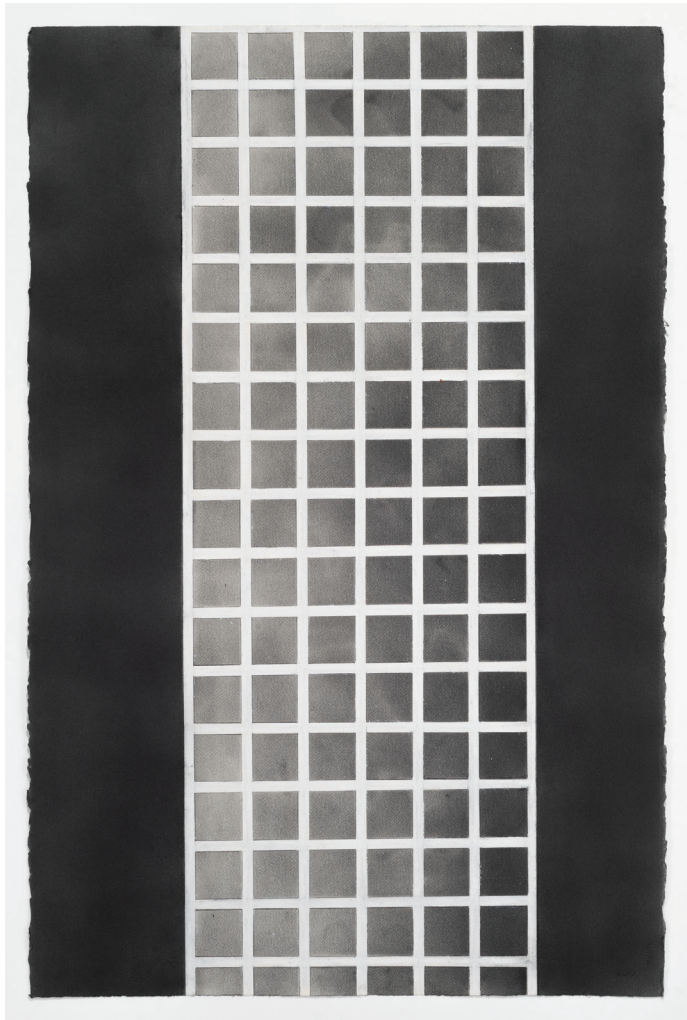
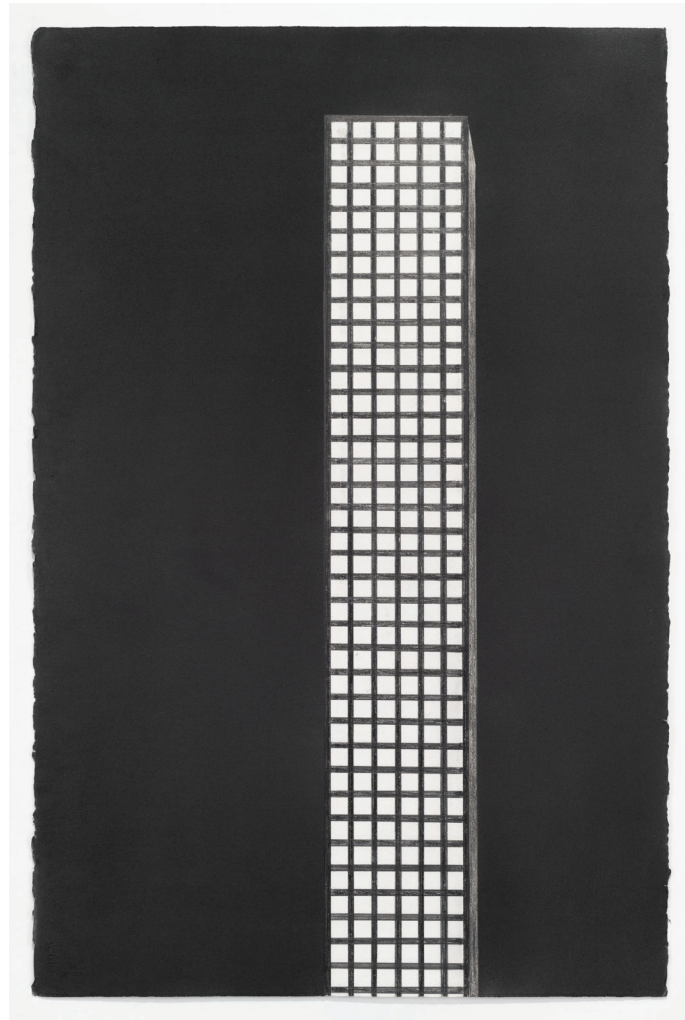


AVANTIKA BAWA





432 Composition 2, 2019
Graphite, oil pastel, charcoal on paper
40 x 27 in
Photo: Mario Gallucci



432 Composition 1, 2019
Graphite on paper
40 x 27 in
Photo: Mario Gallucci



Pink Scaffold in the Rann of Kutch, 2019
Installation view
Painted scaffolds
Dimensions variable
Photo: Arpan Films

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Pink Scaffold in the Rann of Kutch, 2019
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Dimensions variable
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SPACE AND PSYCHE:
An Encounter with Avantika Bawa

by Richard Speer

The relationships between structure and viewer, locality and universality, form, color, and cultural context—these are among the enduring obsessions of artist Avantika Bawa. In site-specific installations around the world she integrates architectonic constructions into the built environment or landscape, activating not only space itself but also the viewer’s imagination and participation. In her ongoing drawing practice she renders the contours of iconic buildings with a mixture of precision, historical awareness, and an appreciation that verges on affection. In her curatorial projects (through aquaspace, the nonprofit she founded in 2000), publishing ventures (she is co-founder of *Drain: A Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture*), and academic career (she is associate professor of fine arts at Washington State University), she is committed to collaboration, interactivity, and a sense of play that informs even her most rigorous endeavors.

Bawa’s fascination with the ordering and aestheticization of space began in her peripatetic childhood (her father was a naval officer) as she traveled within her native India as well as the Soviet Union. When she moved to the United States in 1996 to earn her graduate degree at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she was immediately struck by the city’s gridded layout, which was so different from the chaotic streetscapes common in India. Soaking up the city’s storied architectural legacy, she was particularly drawn to the International Style and Mies van der Rohe, who designed an impressive 14 buildings in Chicago. After graduation she moved to Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia, where—surrounded not only by historic antebellum and Victorian buildings, but also by strip malls and blandly modular suburbs—she marveled at the functional and social plasticity of architecture itself. She began addressing these phenomena in boundary-pushing artworks, which have been documented and reviewed in publications such as *The New York Times*, *Art Papers*, and *Art Slant*.

While her multivalent practice has been so eclectic and ambitious as to exceed the scope of a short essay, her overarching path has centered around the potentialities of site-specific installation and drawing. In these pursuits she has worked with preeminent curators and collaborators and participated in prestigious residencies around the globe. Often she creates installations in culturally complex or geographically extreme areas, such as her 2019 project, *Pink Scaffold in the Rann* in the Rann of Kutch, a salt marsh in the Gujarat region of west-central India. In many ways this endeavor was archetypal for the artist. On a stunning site approximately thirty miles

south of the Pakistani border, she and her crew erected a towering metal scaffold rising 38 feet above the flat earth like a cathedral façade shot through with squares of open air. It was simultaneously one with, and apart from, its surroundings. Once seen, it became difficult to imagine the site without it. The scaffold’s coating of hand-painted pink enamel, matching the desert’s spectacular sunrises, harmonized with the landscape and lent the minimalist, Sol LeWitt-like geometries a welcome touch of bonhomie and whimsy.

Perhaps even more significantly, the installation energized the crew members and local residents, as well as those who came from far and wide to behold it. Bawa had created not just an object but an *encounter* in the mode of the Japanese Mono-ha movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Those artists, led by theorist Lee Ufan, envisioned art’s impact not as limited to a discrete environment, but as *yohaku*, an encompassing relationship rippling outward like soundwaves from a pealing bell, affecting everyone for miles around. Video documentation of *Pink Scaffold*... gives a sense of the infectious good spirits of that encounter: art-lovers who made an afternoon of it, families who came for a picnic, children climbing on it as if on some sort of high-art jungle gym. This was not some antiseptic, cordoned-off vitrine, this was a destination, a selfie magnet, a temporary community. (Her upcoming fifth iteration of the series, curated by Peter Nagy, will see a new scaffold rise in The Sculpture Park in Jaipur, where there is concern about monkeys scurrying onto the structure.)

This sense of myriad levels of engagement informs Bawa’s drawings as well. Deceptively simple in their pared-down syntax, they engage the viewer on levels far beyond the formalist. Her *Coliseum* drawings and prints, showcased in the Portland Art Museum in 2018–19, celebrated the striking architecture of the city’s Veterans Memorial Coliseum while acknowledging the nostalgia associated with it by viewers who know it as the erstwhile home of the Portland Trail Blazers basketball team. Likewise, her current drawings of *432 Park Avenue*, Rafael Viñoly’s suave, thin cigarette of a skyscraper in midtown Manhattan, not only depict that building’s eye-catching contours, but also capture the glamour and psychological resonance that an iconic structure exerts on an urban landscape and its habitués from the moment of its completion.

Across the breadth of her work, Bawa demonstrates that the building blocks of drawing, design, and color can be deployed and reimaged in limitless permutations. She does not recognize arbitrary boundaries between formalist concern and holistic experience that galvanizes the viewer’s psyche. She lays bare the bones that underlie utilitarian and aesthetic objects in a spatial context, allowing us to glimpse the complexity and beauty that resides within them.

Coliseum 29, 2018
Graphite on paper
60 x 40 in
Photo: Mario Gallucci





AVANTIKA BAWA

*b. 1973. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington
2018 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Avantika Bawa is an artist and educator based in Portland, who spends much time in her hometown of New Delhi, India. Bawa has a Master of Fine Arts in Painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the same from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. She has participated in the Skowhegan, UCross, MacDowell, Kochi Biennial Foundation and Djerassi residencies among others. Noteworthy solo exhibits include the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon; Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, Oregon; Suyama Space, Seattle, Washington; The Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia; Saltworks Gallery and the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Nature Morte and Gallery Maskara in India. In April 2004, she was part of a team that launched *Drain – Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture*.

Mineral Spirits, 2016
Installation view
Painted scaffolds, stage light, looped audio
68 x 43 x 23 ft
Photo: Roger Dorband

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch

President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



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432 Composition 2, 432 Composition 1,
Coliseum 29: Courtesy the artist

Mineral Spirits: Courtesy Disjecta
Contemporary Art Center, Portland, OR

Pink Scaffold in the Rann of Kutch: Courtesy
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