

TALK

Art: Kishore Singh

TV: Nasri Atallah

NEW Humour: Eric Schulmiller

NEW Comic books: Prajna Desai

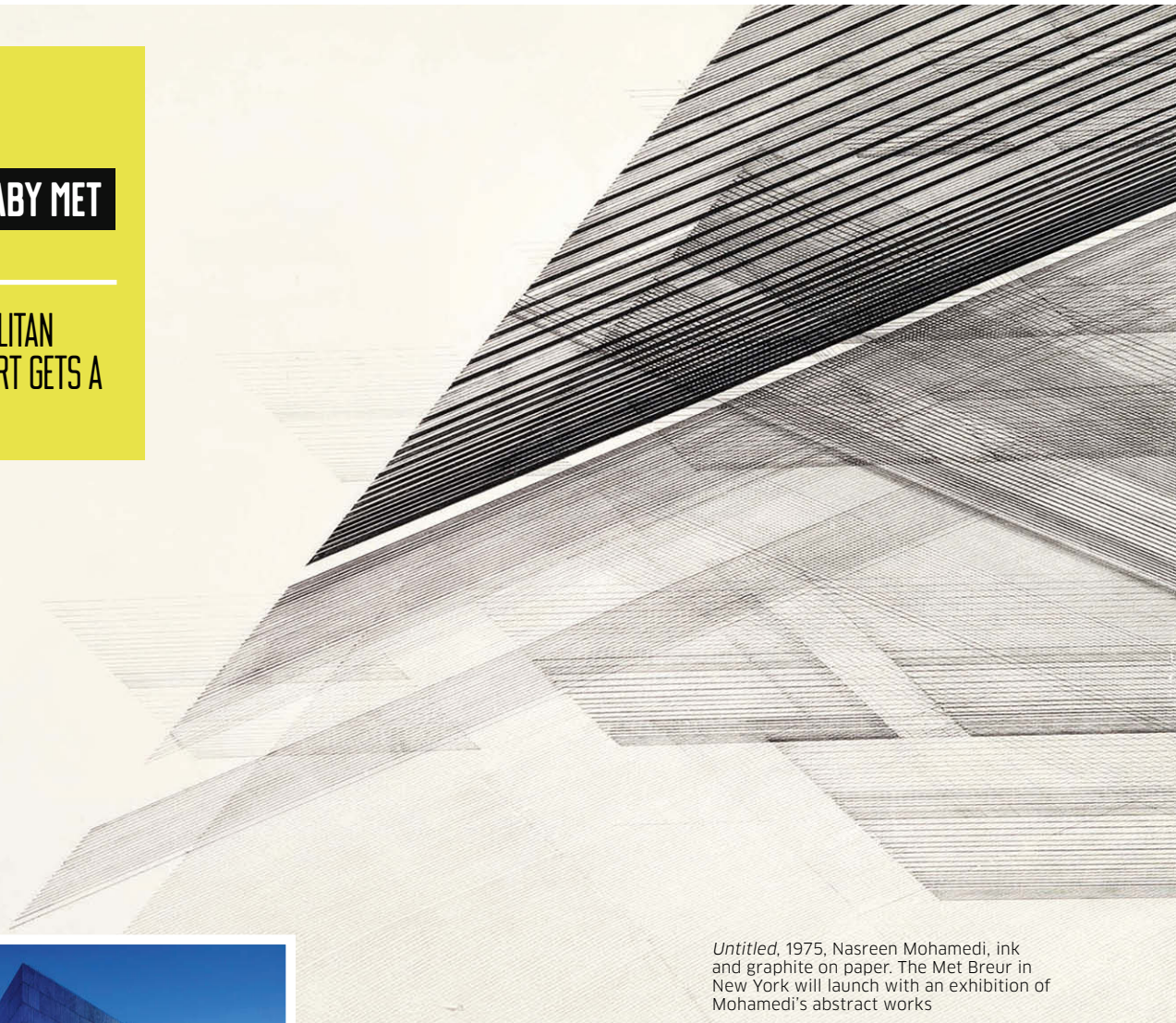
NEW Tech: Julian Sancton

179

NOW, A BABY MET

BY KISHORE SINGH

THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART GETS A
NEW ANNEXE



Untitled, 1975. Nasreen Mohamedi, ink and graphite on paper. The Met Breuer in New York will launch with an exhibition of Mohamedi's abstract works



The Met Breuer

It was a wet and blustery day last year when a friend and I walked around Manhattan in search of the Whitney Museum of American Art. The chill seeped through our clothes and a watery sun failed to provide warmth as we descended on Madison Avenue, trying to spot the iconic building with its asymmetrical windows. Find it we did, but the museum was shut “for renovation”. In fact, it was in the process of being relocated to a larger edifice between the High

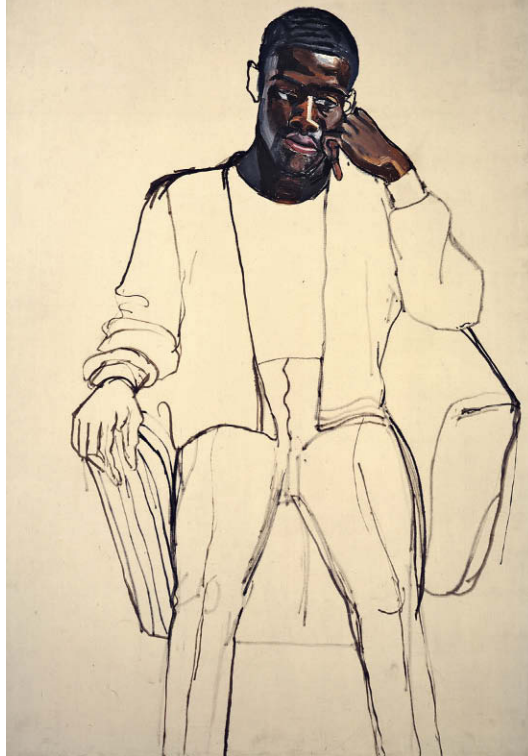
Line and the Hudson River. But the refurbishment of the original Whitney, now complete, will see the launch of another museum altogether: an extension of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is already several blocks huge and bursting at the seams with objects of interest from civilizations around the world.

The Met Breuer is named in memory of the Bauhaus architect of the building – the Hungary-born Marcel Breuer, known also as the →

inventor of tubular furniture when just 24, who took on the design of the “harsh but handsome” (according to *The New York Times*) Whitney between 1963-66, musing, “What should a museum look like, a museum in Manhattan?” For that matter, what should a museum look like in any place? There are many who feel that placing cultural objects on a pedestal is another form of ritualization that’s best avoided – thankfully, the ayes do have it, else what would we know of the great treasures of the world! The Sixties was a decade of churn in New York when television, advertising and changing lifestyles influenced its soaring architecture. What the Whitney achieved was the flexibility of open spaces that could be re-used, or re-imagined any way its curators chose. And now that the Whitney is the Met Breuer, it will offer at least some of that tractability to its curators.

The Met has had some great South Asian moments of late – its recent exhibition of Deccan treasures and the Al-Thani display of Mughal jewellery being significant highlights. And with the appointment of Shanay Jhaveri as assistant curator for modern and contemporary South Asian art, India seems likely to get an even greater fillip. Especially considering the growing interest in Indian art in the West: the Guggenheim hosted a retrospective on VS Gaitonde in 2014-15, while Bhupen Khakhar will be honoured with one at the Tate Britain from June to November of this year.

In that sense, the opening of the Met Breuer with an exhibition of Nasreen Mohamedi’s paintings – her largest to date – is one more piece of the jigsaw. Mohamedi’s paintings consist of an organic flow of delicate lines and grids, forming patterns inspired by the jaalis and silhouettes of Mughal architecture. Increasingly compared to American minimalism, her non-representational art combines austerity with rhythm and energy, almost as though the web of lines communicates a sense of music. Highly abstract, it is being recognized for that impossibility – the ability to capture and convey



James Hunter *Black Draftee*, 1965, Alice Neel, oil on canvas. Part of the Met Breuer’s exhibition *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*

PERSONAL FAVOURITES

After you’ve done the Met, Guggenheim and MoMA, where do you head?

- **FRICK COLLECTION:** The Frick family’s personal collection will blow you away with its European masterpieces
- **NICHOLAS ROERICH MUSEUM:** India’s own “national treasure”, known for his gorgeous paintings of the Himalayas, has a society and museum dedicated to his work
- **RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART:** For Himalayan art from India and its neighbouring countries
- **NEUE GALLERY:** A museum of early 20th century German and Austrian art, with some amazing Klimts on display
- **QUEENS MUSEUM:** In the South Asian neck of NYC, exhibits from the city world fairs and occasional Indian art

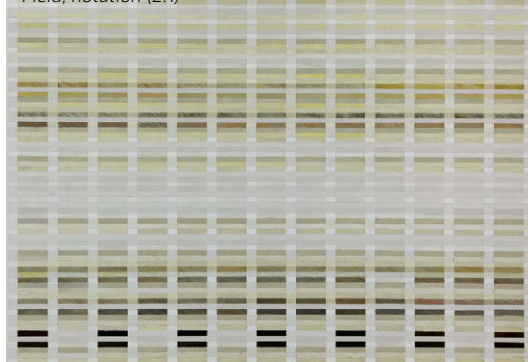
THE YOUNG COLLECTOR SERIES

If you’re taken by Mohamedi’s minimalism, check out Delhi-based artist Tanya Goel, whose structured grids replace Mohamedi’s clean lines. Her latest showing at Mumbai’s Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, *LEVEL*, is a series of wall-sized paintings that comment on the capital’s overwhelming transformation through fast-paced construction. Instead of paint, though, Goel has used fragments of building material from four construction sites in Delhi. Slivers of lead, limestone, concrete, brick, black rock and glass were pulverized to produce different coloured pigments, which were then applied to the canvas layer by layer.

The 30-year-old studied painting and drawing at MS University in Baroda and at the Art Institute of Chicago, before getting an MFA in Painting and Printmaking at Yale. Her work has already caught the eye of some A-list collectors, so if you like what you see, get in line now.

Buzzwords: #abstract #grid #emergingartist #art #delhi #minimalism #light #wall-sized

Field, notation (2:1)



emotion, a task never before set to an arrangement of straight lines. Little known in India, Mohamedi’s work has had outings in recent times at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi; the Tate in Liverpool; and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. The opening at the Met Breuer will cap the journey.

Interestingly, the accompanying exhibition, *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, examines the works of artists from the Renaissance to present day that have been left incomplete for a variety of reasons, allowing the viewer insights into the processes of masters such as Titian, Rembrandt, Turner or Cezanne, and contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg (not to be confused with Rorschach, after whom the inkblot test is named). It is an unusual curtain-raiser for the Met Breuer, which has tasked itself with showing a range of global 20th and 21st century art, different from the Met’s absorption in period interest.

Founded in 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has over two million works of art, and visitors can sometimes spend days in her halls and corridors without once retracing their steps or repeating a work of art. Its South Asian gallery (part of Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia) is, however, a recent addition, opening only in 2011. No wonder, then, the surge of interest in the Subcontinent. Nor is the Breuer its first offsite gallery – the Met’s Cloisters Museum and Gardens, devoted to the art and architecture of medieval Europe, opened in 1938 and is located at the far end of Manhattan, overlooking the Hudson.

Are we at an inflection point for Indian modern art? That’s difficult to say. But what is interesting is that the Met Breuer, with its wider, global interest, should occupy a space that was once the home of Americana. Nasreen Mohamedi would have enjoyed the irony. ☺

Kishore Singh is an art consultant and critic