

## Pare, Blur and Vibrate

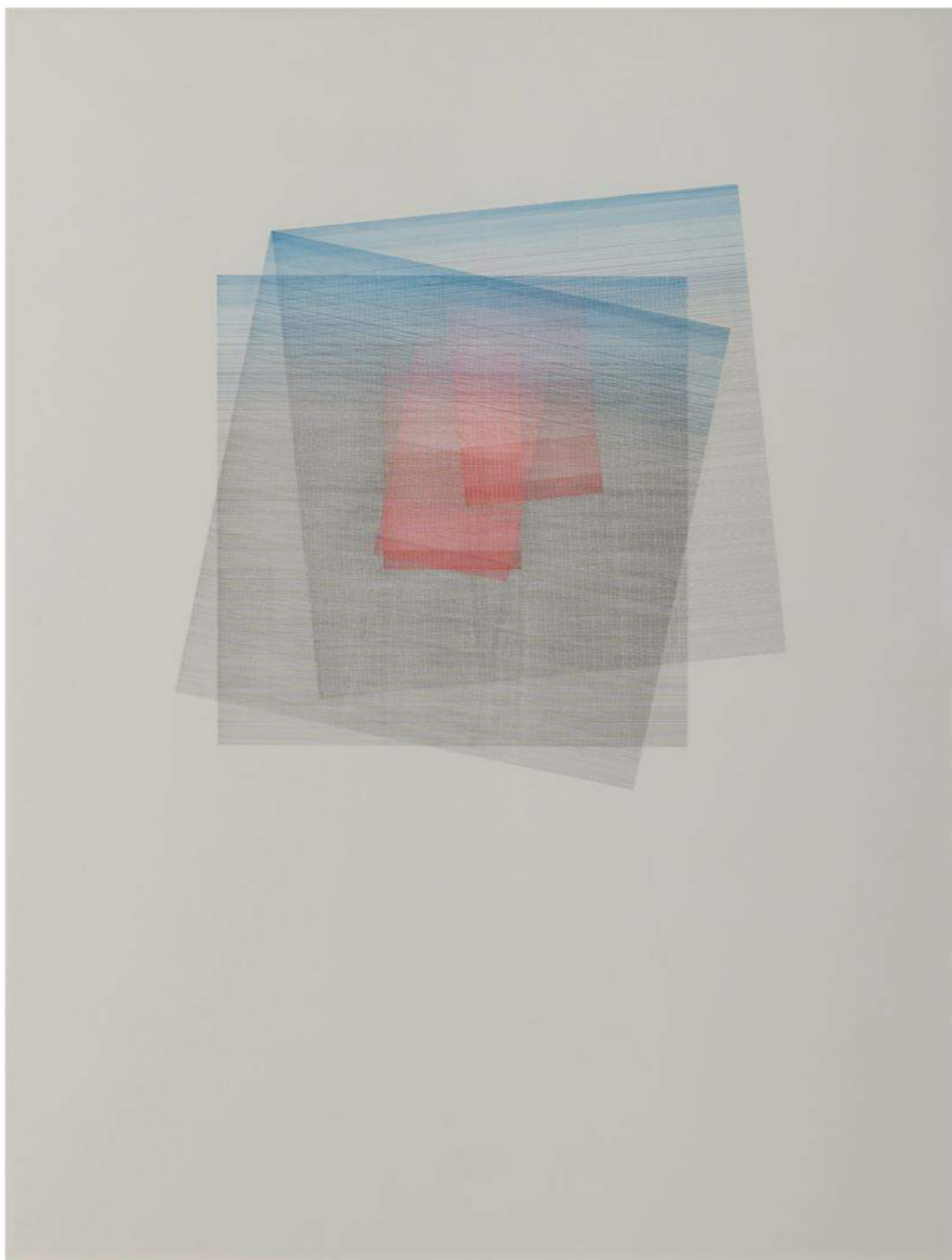
Parul Gupta squares the square to create layered geometrical experiences, reveals **Meera Menezes**.

"I think *through* black," Parul Gupta tells me emphatically. And it shows. In her exhibition *Still, on the verge...* at Nature Morte's new space at the Dhan Mill Complex from the 27<sup>th</sup> of March till the 25<sup>th</sup> of July in Delhi, one is struck by the colour's predominant presence in the works. Brighter colours, more often than not, have a secondary role to play. Take, for instance, a series of ethereal works along one of the expansive walls of the central gallery space. Labelled #90 through #100, these complex ink on archival paper works executed in 2020 present overlapping squares. The meticulously rendered fine black lines within them create a dense but blurry weave, lending these geometrical forms a sense of movement and three-dimensionality. In her quest to heighten their vibratory feel and impart more texture to the works, Gupta has injected shades of blue and red into the mix. However, the most striking work in this series, #101, is one in which Gupta shuns primary colours focusing instead on the gradations achieved by black, reinforcing the feeling that the artist is in her element when she pares down colour to a minimum.

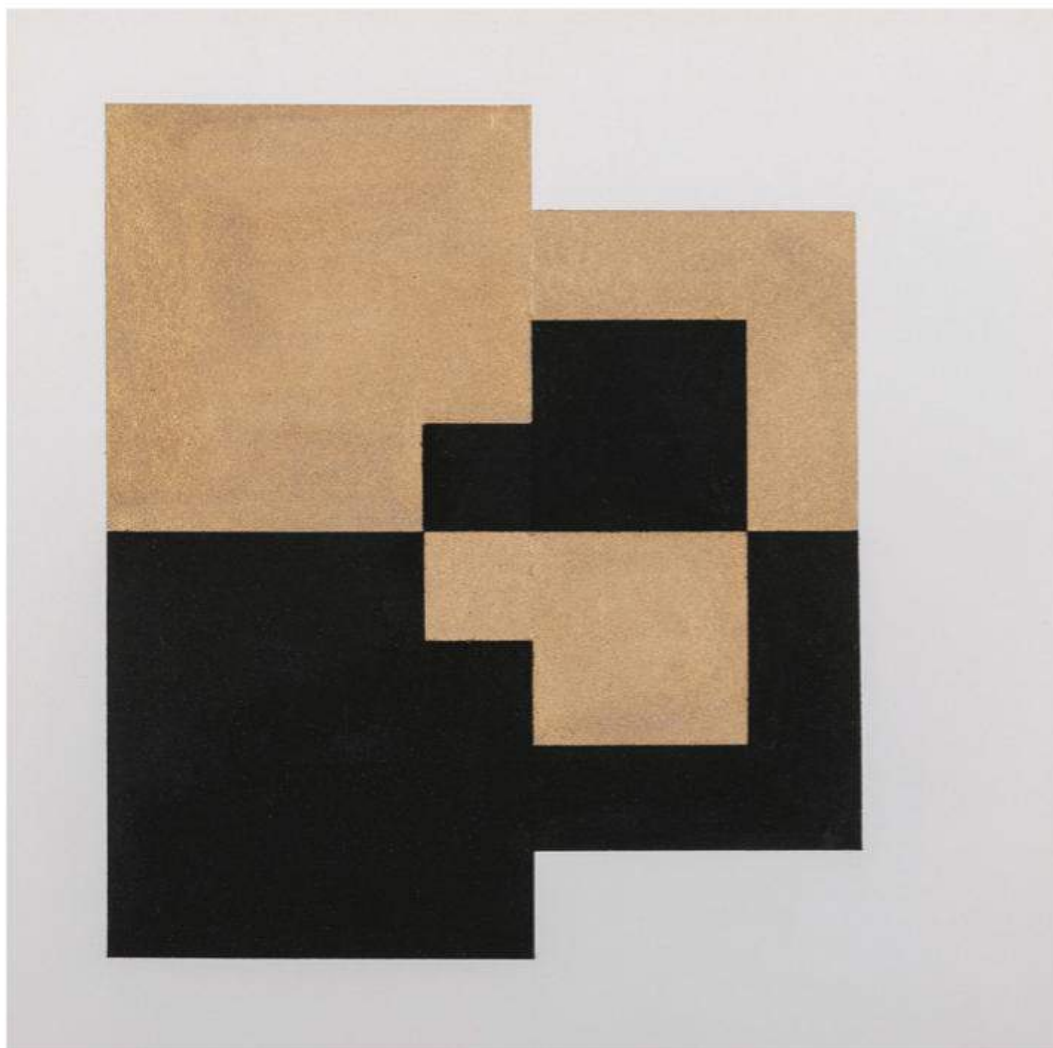
Besides the omnipresence of black, the visitor cannot but help notice Gupta's preoccupation with the square. For all its simplicity, it is a form she has personally found intimidating, primarily because of its rich art historical lineage. The square forms the basis of the modernist grid, which in turn bestowed independence from narration and enabled the movement towards an absolute visuality. It also

summons up the image of Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich's radical 1915 painting *Black Square*, that represented the 'zero point of painting' and the promise of a utopian future. Gupta, however, is drawn more to Nasreen Mohamedi and Sol LeWitt than to Malevich. In 2018, she decided to focus her energies solely on "breaking the square", the results of which are on display. As a point of departure she often uses four squares, each measuring 48 cms x 48 cms, which she pieces together in a series of permutations and combinations. In some works, she orchestrates them together like parts of an elaborate jigsaw to create another central square; in others, she pries them apart at quirky angles, or seemingly inserts them into each other. While some manoeuvres are obvious, others are subtle shifts, calling for a closer and more attentive reading.

In a suite of black and white works rendered in oil pastel and etching on archival paper, Gupta again invites viewers to perform a similar set of mental gymnastics. She adroitly uses the frames of the works to carve out positive and negative spaces, leaving it to viewers to complete the geometrical forms in their mind using their imagination. In her four-part creation #34, squares are placed within squares and it takes a discerning eye to tease out the tilted shadowy black square that lurks within the frames. In one of the smaller rooms abutting the central gallery space, blocks of dull gold are paired with black in a series of diptychs. In these charcoal and gold pigment works on archival paper, squares



**Parul Gupta.** #97. Ink on archival paper. 53"x 41"x 3". 2020.



**Parul Gupta.**  
#71 (Diptych).  
Charcoal and gold  
pigment on archival  
paper pasted on  
archival mount.  
12"x 12"x 2". 2020.  
Images courtesy of the  
artist and Nature Morte,  
New Delhi.

seem to form and dissolve before one's eyes, like mysterious shapeshifters. In some curious way, they also recall architectural floor plans.

In all these works one cannot fail to notice the mathematical precision with which the artist works. Underlying Gupta's language of geometric abstraction, is a complex set of calculations. Working with numbers she divides up the space of the paper in a variety of ways, which in turn spawns a plethora of angular shapes.

Gupta's quest for depth and three-dimensionality has also led to the creation of

a series of sculptural works that are mounted on the wall and on a long plinth, running the length of the room. Each of the sculptural pairs measuring 25 cms x 25 cms is identical, but because of their vertical and horizontal placement they succeed in appearing completely different from each other. Gupta skilfully accentuates the seeming differences between the sets by employing matt and glossy black industrial paint on these angular aluminium shapes. Nuanced though these manipulations might be, they lead to a radical shift in perception. /