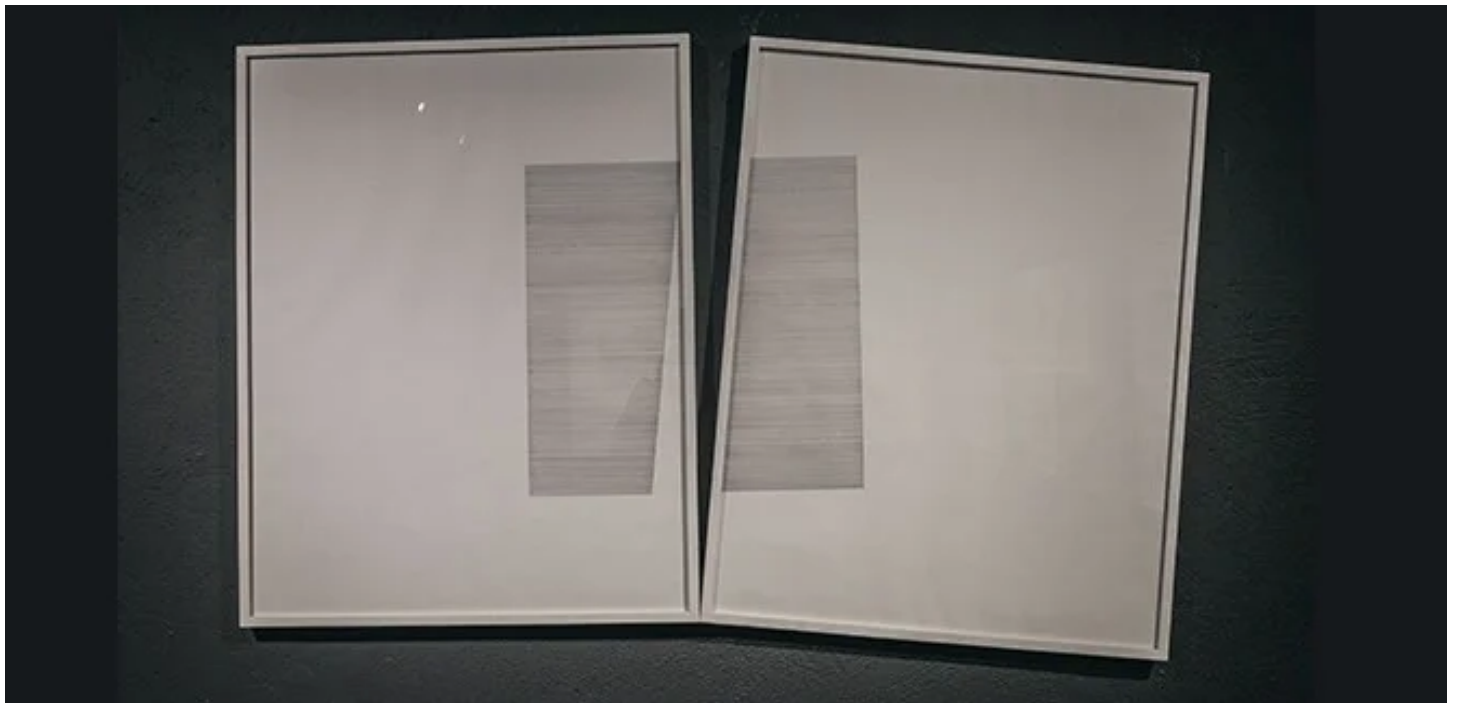






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CULTURE & LIVING

Artist Parul Gupta's exhibit at the reD studio uses lines to break boundaries in art

BY MIHIKA AGARWAL

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The Noida-based artist collaborates with reD Studio to present a three-part installation on line, form and space

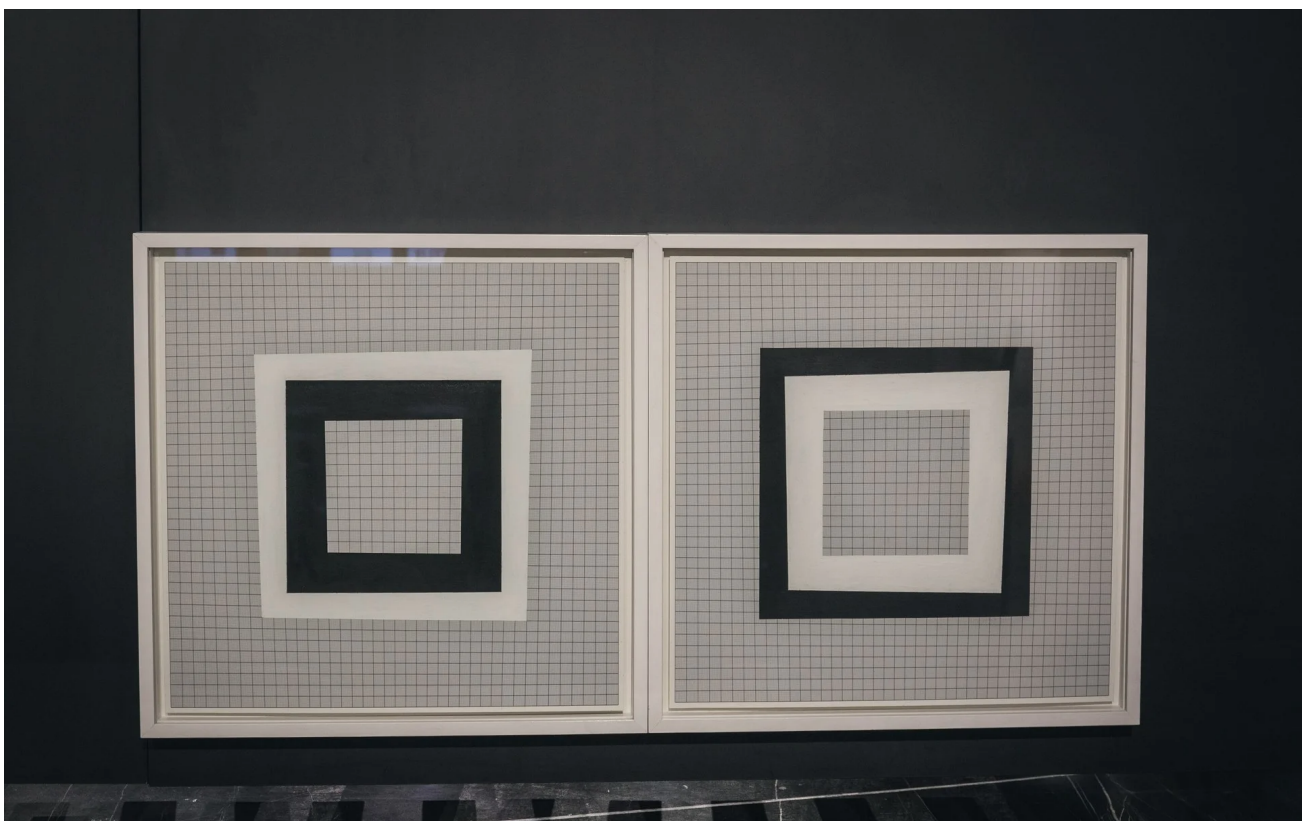


Space is a dynamic entity for artist Parul Gupta, as are lines, planes and shadows—all of which are the artist's favourite tools to play with. Her exhibit at reD Studio, titled *space; underscore* is a three-part affair featuring a site-specific installation, a workshop with the studio assistants at reD, and a series of drawings and sculptures based on the square form.

Embracing a minimalist aesthetic, Gupta avoids the use of colour in her work because it evokes emotion. “I strictly approach my work through an architectural lens, and I’d like the viewer to ideally do the same. Negating colour helps me control some of that,” she says. “The illusionary behaviour of architecture really fascinates me. For me, it’s all about the whole game of perception and cognition. For instance, we talk about sunsets and sunrise, but in reality, the sun never sets or rises. Science says that the earth moves, we all know that. But when we’re looking at a sunset or a sunrise, enjoying it, we’re not thinking through science. I’m somewhere in between those logics of what is scientifically true, and what our eyes perceive to be true. And that’s where I play my game, of building those kinds of illusionistic characteristics.”

Gupta also believes in working with the poetic narrative of the space—the physical elements of it— rather than its socio-political context. “Every space has individual characteristics of its own. Every space is guided through the performative element created by the architect. I like to move that around and break it. I don’t identify with any particular genre or as a minimalist or conceptualist or performative artist. What defines my work is solely drawing and space,” she explains.

Tracing down her journey with spatial architecture, Gupta recounts how she rendered a sketch in pen and hair on a wall for her first site-specific drawing as a Master’s student at the Nottingham Trent University. When the space around the art began to get developed, Gupta began to feel her work getting suffocated. As an artist, she didn’t want anything to come between the viewer and the work. It was then that she realised her interest in how space and the elements in a space activate the work, and at the same time, inhibit it.

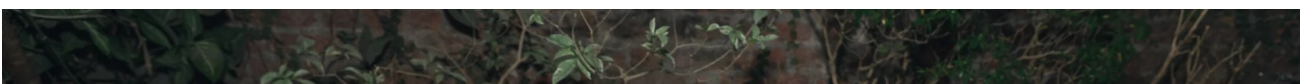




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Gupta's work makes you consider your spatial perception and challenges your cognitive sensibility. A square is imposed upon a grid background, but on closer observation it doesn't conform to the grid. A rectangular frame with a square drawn in the centre looks like it has a crack in the middle. Layer upon layer of solid squares appear to leap out of the paper. But her art is also characterised by its counterintuitive nature. At times, there's grotesque repetition of lines, and something inside you feels restless. Or there's a very minimal intervention, which is nonetheless amplified against the muted and geometric backdrop. The unruly symmetry and orderly chaos in her art strips the line of its linearity.

Gupta worked from 10am to 5pm over the course of ten days for her durational drawing series, continuously drawing straight lines. The work ended at 5pm on the tenth day. She then transcribed her drawing into text, as a set of precise instructions to be interpreted by the architects and interior designers at reD Studio. The responses to Gupta's work were displayed in a courtyard-turned-gallery, with each designer walking the viewer through their masterpiece. A data artist had re-created the given numbers into a visual sound piece, whereas a team of young architect scaled the numbers down to produce a 3D structure. The workshop was an attempt by the collaborators to make the exhibit interactive. "I was working within a functioning space occupied by people all the time. So I thought, why not engage them in my art?" Gupta said.





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The site-specific installation featured a series of squares etched on a derelict red brick wall in a grid-like pattern in a courtyard. One might think they've stumbled upon the remains of a dilapidated structure, or encountered the entrance to a secret passage; the interpretations could be multifarious—as was the artist's intention. "I'm trying to build a narrative here. I want the viewer to question what came first: the etching, or the wall? These walls have actually been made to look derelict. They weren't this way originally. To me, that represents two time periods coming together, which really got me interested in the space," explains Gupta.





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reD, which stands for 'Research, Enquiry, Design' is nowhere close to your traditional white cube-style art gallery. It used to be a textile manufacturing, which has now been turned into an edgy, modern design studio. Panels of red-brick courtyards form the periphery, while the interiors present an airy, dimly-lit loft vibe peppered with Gupta's minimalistic artwork. The neutral blacks, whites, greys and browns of the background do a good job of accentuating the art.

Conceived in 2004, the space aspires to 'generate an environment that surpasses trends and fads by offering a more enriching spatial experience.'

Telling us more the collaboration, curator Farah Siddiqui says, "With the aim of taking art outside the traditional white cube, reD arch and I have come together to present a series of exhibitions in a creative and alternate space. The space lends itself to display art in a more imaginative and experimental way." Rajiv Parekh, founder, reD Architects, adds, "When I saw Parul work in the studio, what fascinated me about it was how it was a very subtle intervention, but still had a lot of thought and strength in it. The first selfish interest for me, of course, was that I'm constantly thinking of ways to get the whole reD team excited and motivated to think differently, and to question briefs that we, and the clients, give them."