

Studies in Form

Seher Shah and Randhir Singh

Studies in Form is a new collaborative body of work between artist Seher Shah and photographer Randhir Singh, exploring overlapping ideas in architecture, photography, drawing, and printmaking.

Over the past few years, we have worked within our independent practices as artist and photographer to create a space for collaboration. This space, which is based on our interests in art and architecture, has been built around our education as architects and explores methods of representing scale, materiality, and mass through relationships between drawing and the photograph. These relationships have manifested into different series over the years. *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape Proposals* is a print portfolio that uses aerial photography combined with black forms that partially block out the image of the landscape. The *Mammoth* prints are about this simultaneous gesture of erasure and construction, creating ambiguously scaled structures that respond to the repetitive patterns inherent in urban planning and architecture. In the pale grey drawing series titled *Brutalist Traces*, horizontal graphite lines are used to render portraits of specific buildings into ghostly after-images. These drawings, which are drawn from photographs, explore the contradictions between mass and lightness, permanence and the evanescent. In the *Machrie Moor* photographs, elemental stones that have been weathered over time are discovered in the landscape, their visceral presence a result of their stoic stance.

In these different works, we look to allow for several threads of inquiry to enter our collaborative space. Within this space we have tried to remain constant in our engagement with the relationship between the individual and the larger context. How do we represent an experiential nature of space around us that is in constant fragmentation?

Studies in Form, an ongoing series of cyanotype prints, builds on shared interests of architectural scale and materiality by mining our personal photographic archive of concrete architecture built across multiple cities in the 1960s–70s. From this archive, we focused on four unique buildings, extracting architectural fragments and drawing attention to the incomplete nature of the experience of landscape. Our interest in these buildings (which share aesthetic qualities including heavy massing, the sculptural use of concrete, and use of repetitive structural grids) also signalled the many aspirations and desires within each of their respective contexts. Grouped into chapters, the four buildings are:

Akbar Bhavan (Shivnath Prasad, New Delhi. 1969)
Barbican Estate (Chamberlin Powell and Bon, London. 1976)
Dentsu Head Office (Kenzo Tange, Tokyo. 1967)
Brownfield Estate (Ernő Goldfinger, London. 1970)

Alongside these four, two additional chapters offer varying perspectives. A series of cyanotype drawings, titled *Flatlands Blueprints*, explores notions of incompleteness and uncertainty as a counterpoint to determined architectural expression. The sculptural forms and massing found in the photographs is further explored in a series of wood cut-based prints, titled *Hewn Blueprints*. Working with architectural representational methods, such as the plan and elevation, these cyanotype prints function between the precise formalism of a blueprint and the intuitive nature of drawing.

Cyanotypes were one of the first photographic processes developed in the 19th century, emerging only a few years after the development of the daguerreotype. They were a precursor to the blueprint, which was an important reproduction method for architectural and engineering drawings well into the 20th century. For *Studies in Form*, we were drawn to cyanotypes as a means to engage with the fields of photography, architecture, drawing, and printmaking.

Studies in Form was exhibited at the Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, in March–June 2019. Images courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Samdani Art Foundation for the Dhaka Art Summit (2018).

























