

ARTFORUM

“Brute Ornament”

GREEN ART GALLERY

Al Quoz 1, Street 8, Al Serkal Avenue, Unit 28

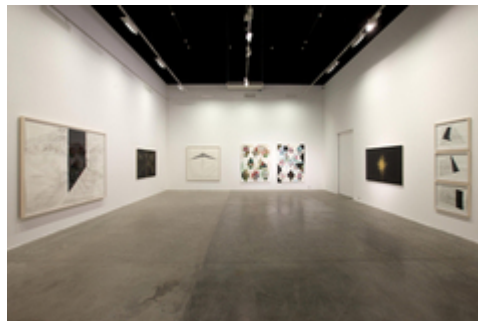
March 19–May 5

Curated by Murtaza Vali, this exhibition of recent works by Kamrooz Aram and Seher Shah could easily be mistaken for yet another critique of modernism’s ideologies, myths, and utopian flops. However, it distinguishes itself by adopting a distinctive approach to the highly analyzed canon, using modernist tropes—such as the grid, chevron, and line—to reexamine history.

Shah’s drawings deconstruct modernist architecture by combining geometry with notions of repetition and pattern that are often associated with ornament. The gridded fields in many of these works, particularly in *Emergent Structures: Capital Mass*, 2011, resemble overpopulated cities. Overlaid on their orderly formations are geometrical black motifs that dominate the surface, as if to place the imaginary sites under siege. Similarly in Aram’s paintings, gestural decorative flower motifs compete for space with large monochromatic shapes. In *Aspirations in Black and Red*, 2012, for example, thick brushstrokes sweep over floral depictions and keep the viewer’s gaze in a constant state of flux. Still, the work is balanced by a flat, red sphere that hovers over the picture plane.

While the show successfully engages the role of ornament in the development of modernism, its strength lies in its ability to take on more than one theme. Indeed, the works also open up a compelling, if anxious, conversation about their status as precious and perhaps merely decorative objects. “Brute Ornament” poses important questions about the values, frameworks, and desires projected onto these pieces, as well as who exactly is projecting these concerns. These queries in turn promote self-reflection, for the audience and society.

— Dina Ibrahim



View of “Brute Ornament,” 2012.

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