

- 048 Daniel Kunitz - *The Black Humor of O Zhang's Little Red Book*
- 066 TJJ Demos - *Monsters of the Future: On The Otolith Group's Preparations 1-5*
- 076 Ranjit Hoskote - *Nocturnes on Dayanita Singh: Blue Book [#18-23]*
- 082 Lucian Harris - *Night Skin: Chittramam Mazumdar*
- 092 Tejpal Shah - *"I Am"*
- 102 Bajju Parthian - *Leachrow: Art-Intimations of a Pan Global Underground*
- 106 The Phantom Lady Strikes Again - *Heroes*
- 122 Raqs Media Collective - *Shore Leave*

TAKE

ON ART

VOL I, ISSUE 01, New Delhi
January - March 2010

simply BLACK

— — — — —

“We want a black poem,
and a black world.
let the world be a black poem
and let all black people speak this poem
Silently or LOUD”

— — — — —

Selected poetry of Amiri Baraka/Le ri Jones - 1979

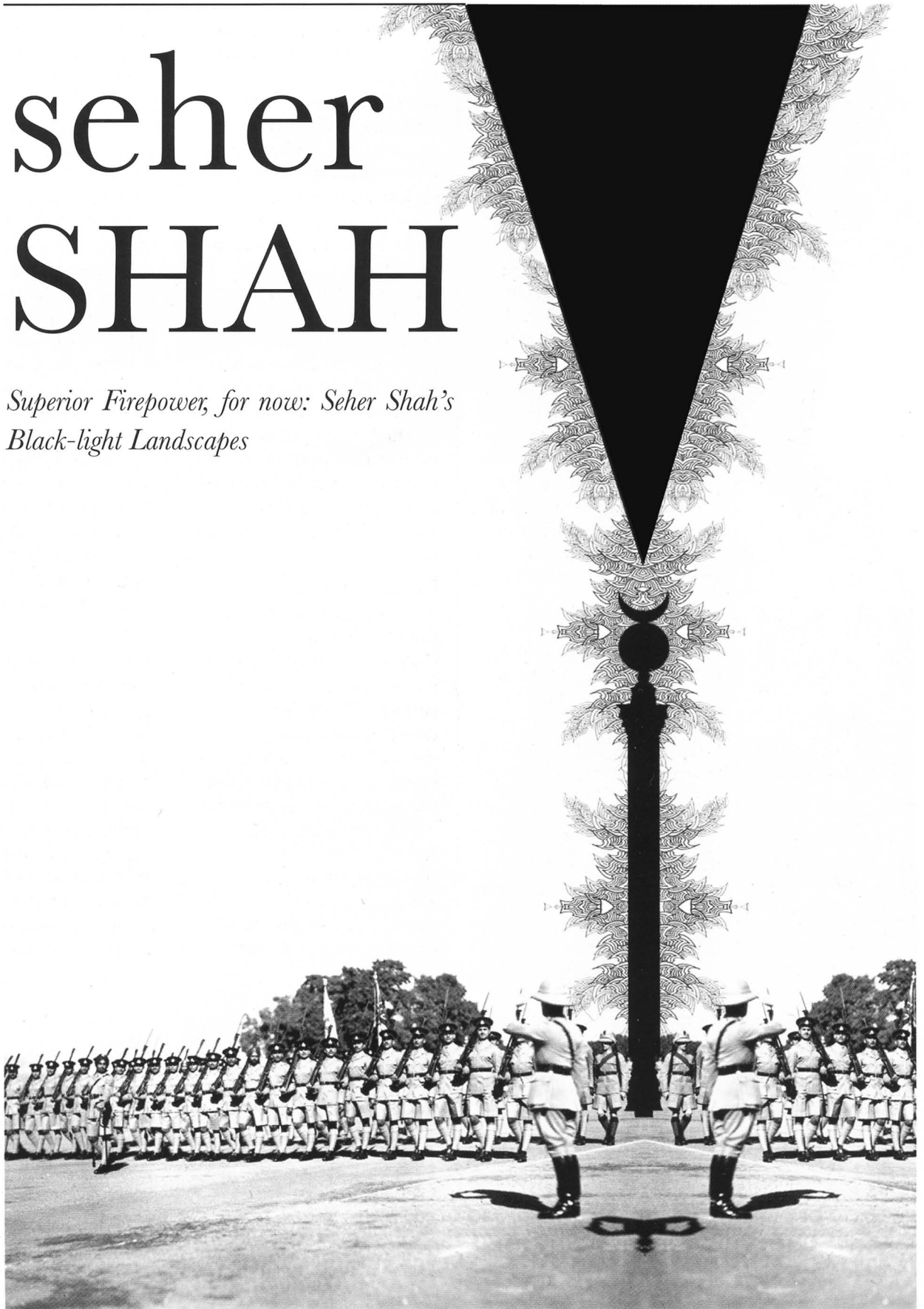


R.s. 200

by Alexander Keefe

seher SHAH

*Superior Firepower, for now: Seher Shah's
Black-light Landscapes*



SUPERIOR FIREPOWER, FOR NOW: SEHER SHAH'S BLACK-LIGHT LANDSCAPES

Alexander Keefe

Seher Shah works with an occult visual physics, with force fields. Indeed, some of the artist's best work is abstract and visionary, somewhere between Zaha Hadid's post-Constructivist geometrical fantasia and the formal and mysterious line-making mysticism of Nasreen Mohamedi. In *Progression I* (2006), the artist uses the simplest materials - graphite and paper - to create a highly precise mathematical sci-fi dreamscape, exploding in bold against constraining graph-paper boxes of evanescent gray pencil that refuse us an unmediated viewing, and keep us at a remove. This is an image that one would expect to see realized on a computer screen; the ghostly presence of the graph paper lines, fading in and out like a pencilled fabric, subvert that expectation and restore the aura of the analogue to an otherwise digital dream.

In *Interior Courtyard II* (2007), these shaded, interior spaces of the self become a set for a cosmic theatre, for an icono-clash of symbols and signs, where collisions between hard-edged utopian geometries, densely coded symbolic forms, hot gases and dark currents of graphite manifest, fracture and dissolve. The colonnaded tomb's cool marble shatters into spinning fireballs and burning clouds, its atmosphere of stillness, absence and death interrupted by cubes and crosses and lava bombs. The certainties

of the architect's drafting table sit in uncomfortable proximity to heaving, hand-drawn honeycomb topographies that mimic and hyperbolically extend the draughtsman's reasoned principles of repetition and repeatability - and challenge the representational regime of visibility, measurement and perspective that they encode. The architectural forms - the artist's own architectural training - enter upon the interior courtyard, adding structure and light to its tenebrous swirl of colliding broken patterns, but they ultimately fail to complete and stabilize the process of its construction, instead finding themselves stripped of their own implied gravity, afloat in turbulent currents of memory, irrational darkness and script, the tables turned, become content not form.

Cubes and crosses work a more public voodoo in the *Concrete Oracles* series (2008), a set of eight prints where tombs and obelisks cast long black shadows over tiny passersby in the darkly utopian urban spaces of an unidentifiable colonial capital. A recurring image from that series is the perforated screen, containing space and giving shape to vision with a simultaneous gesture of exposure and concealment.

The intense *chiaroscuro* and surreally long and opaque pitch-black shadows of the superhuman public squares, triumphal boulevards and marching grounds of these monumental landscapes work according to much the same logic, revealing and refusing the panoptical, white-light visibility that modernity demands as the condition for its totalizing efficacy - the surgeon's unshadowed operating room, the interrogator's torture-chamber, the viceroy's prison - Shah instead figures the unstable relation between self and state, between the private and the public, as a *mausoleum* interior, bookended and symmetrical, unfolding with a patterned precision; Shah shows us not the coffin, but the cenotaph of the absent ruler, hollow and public. Some weird dark energy emanates from the black cube at the center, some nullity.

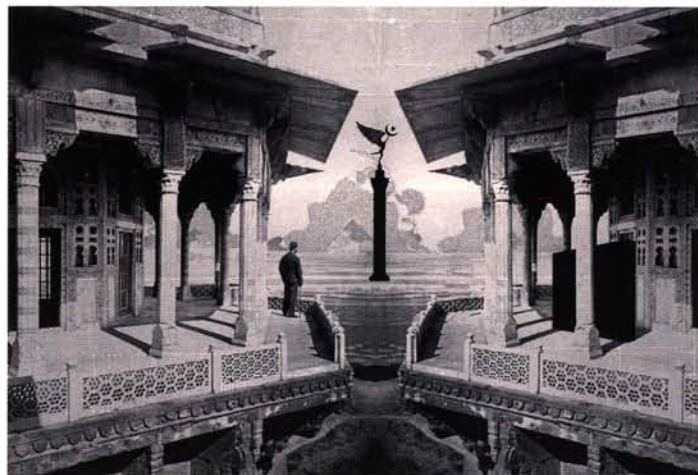
Her *The Expansion Complex of the First Great Ornamental Age* series (2009) continues this darkening display of public worlds, of shared imaginaries built around interchangeable images of soldiers, business partners, and cityscapes, where the turbulent and private theological passions brewing in interior courtyards are barely visible, patrolled and



Alexander Keefe is a critic and writer. He has written for *Artforum.com*, *Tank Magazine*, *Marg*, *Mint*, *ART India*, *Camerawork Delhi*, and many others. He blogs at jugaadoo.blogspot.com, and has curated shows of contemporary Indian art in Shanghai, New York and New Delhi. He did graduate work in Sanskrit and Persian at Harvard University, worked in the Indian Art department at the Sackler Gallery there, carried out research in India as a Fulbright fellow, taught courses in critical theory and Asian religions at Ohio University, and has divided his time between the United States and India since 1995.

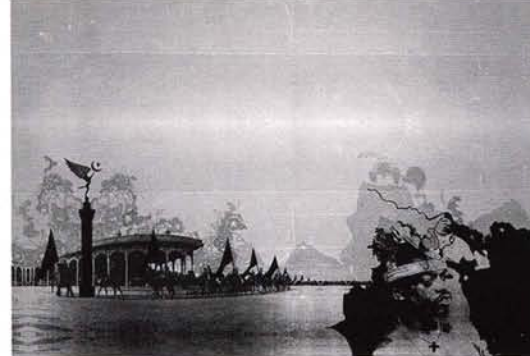
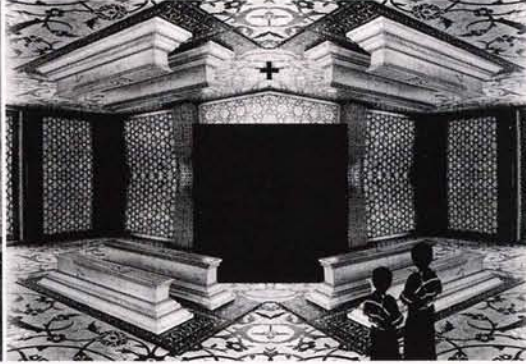
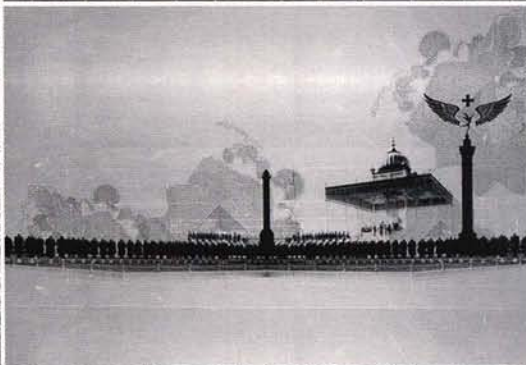
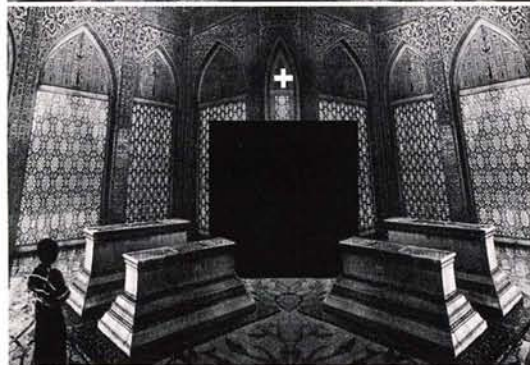
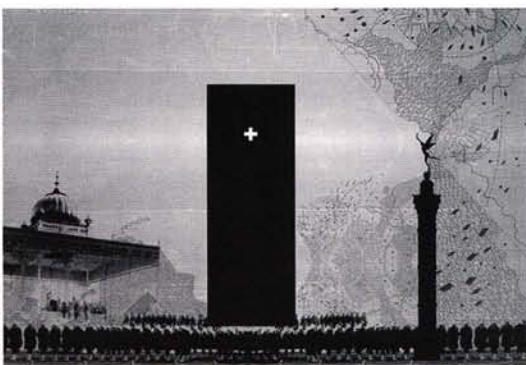
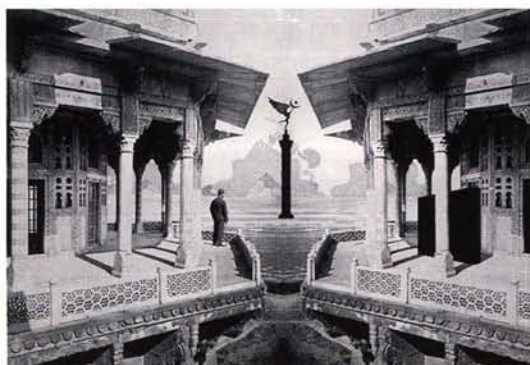
Seher Shah was born in 1975 in Karachi, Pakistan and grew up in Belgium, U.K., and New York. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1998. Over the past years her work has appeared in several international exhibitions ranging from *Zeichnungen* (conceptual and concrete), drawings in Switzerland, *Generation 1.5* at the Queens Museum of Art, 21: Twenty-first Century artists at the Brooklyn Museum, *Empire and its Discontents* at Tufts University, *FIAC*, *Cour Carree* at the Louvre in Paris, the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, *Drawing Space* at Green Cardamom, London, and part of the Twenty-first century acquisitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Her work is part of the collections at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, *Devi Art Foundation*, New Delhi, *Deutsche Bank Art Contemporary*, the *Progressive Art collection*, and the *Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation*, Vienna, Austria (T-B-A21) amongst others. She is currently living and working in Brooklyn, New York.

Left Page Image
The Horned God, 2009.



Concrete Oracles 1, 2008.

The intense *chiaroscuro* and surreally long and opaque pitch-black shadows of the superhuman public squares, triumphal boulevards and marching grounds of these monumental landscapes work according to much the same logic, revealing and refusing the panoptical, white-light visibility that modernity demands as the condition for its totalizing efficacy.



Concrete Oracles, 2008.

kept in check - for now - by superior firepower, if not hegemony. *The Horned God* (2009) presents an altered scene from the archive: colonial soldiers line up for inspection beneath a huge blank sky, as a *Janus*-like mirrored pair of officers looks on with a salute. An obelisk crowned with a horned orb towers behind and above them all, like a malevolent wizard's wand, pulsating with self-similar digital swirls and emitting a cone of black electricity at heaven stripped of gods.

Ⓣ



Concrete Oracles 2, 2008.



Interior Courtyard II, 2007.