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# Sakshi Gallery's "Here be Dragons and other coded landscapes" is a collective reimagining of cartography

*Art writer and critic Meera Menezes' new show at Mumbai's Sakshi Gallery explores the nature of maps in all their multi-faceted interpretations.*



Avantika Shankar

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Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai



*Madhvi Subrahmanian's 'mappa mundis' are maps of the psyche*

Meera Menezes brings together 11 artists for her

exhibition at Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, each of whom comes with an entirely unique perspective on the idea of mapping. "For me, a map is a way of understanding the world around us," says Meera, whose aim for the exhibition was to uncover the various definitions of the word, and consequently, the varying ideas of territory and landscape. Some, like Marie Velardie, have created temporal maps that illustrated time through colour; others, like Zarina Hashmi, have used cartographical symbols to represent the ineffable nature of home.

The exhibition can be said to be a map in its own right—a meta-map of the many journeys that are immortalised in each work. Each work is a part of the journey, a catalogue of discovery, with each artwork a signifier, like the title of the exhibition so aptly suggests, of what lies in lands that might be dangerous and some that are yet to be explored. Gulam Mohammed Sheikh's digital collage, "mappa mundi"—a medieval European map of the world—looks at the relationship between cultural and political identity; Raj Jariwala uncovers the relationship between modern-day mapping software and olden cartographical techniques; and Mithu Sen's revisits the human body as a territorial landscape.



(Right) Anju Dodiya, *Pink Delivered*, 2017, mixed media on printed page, 15×11 Inches; (Left) Anju Dodiya, *Sea in my Head*, 2017, mixed media on printed page, 15×11 Inches.

The second half of the title of the show, “coded landscapes” is inspired by the work of Nilima Sheikh, whose “Majnun 4” is a striking departure from the bold colours and strong lines of the other works. “She embeds her own codes, her own symbolism, her own meaning into her landscapes”, explains Meera. “In recent times, Nilima’s works have been dealing a lot with the situation in Kashmir, but she doesn’t do it in a literal sense. She engages with the poets, with the narrative of Majnun. [Majnun’s symbols of] love and loss inflect this particular work.”

Contemporary and new media artist Shilpa Gupta’s “Tree Drawings” line the far end of the room; from a distance, they look like a series of blank frames against a white wall. On closer inspection, you find that each frame carries the silhouette of a tree, painstakingly measured out in white thread. Shilpa’s concept is as complex and ingenious, as it is simple—the trees represent vegetation that is shared between two neighbouring countries that are politically divided—the olive trees of Israel and

Palestine, the mangroves between India and Bangladesh, the mango trees that are native to both India and Pakistan. The white on white might be said to reflect the arbitrariness of the border, the lack of physical distinction that makes the political tone all the more striking. Moreover—and here is where Shilpa's work is really clever—the numbers scrawled at the bottom of the piece represent the ratio of the length of the thread to the length of the actual fences that make up the border between the two countries.

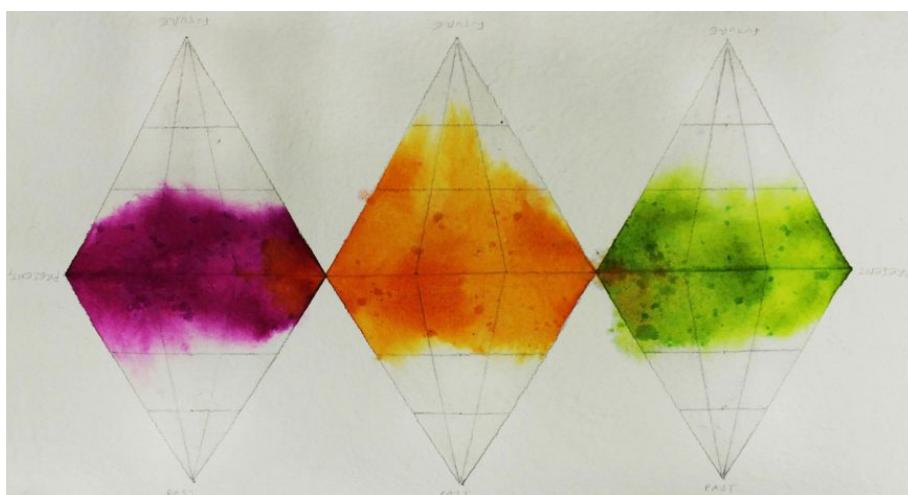


*Arpita Singh, Palmyra-tailors & Drapers, 2015, water colour on paper, 11.5×16 Inches.*

Mumbai-based artist Anju Dodiya's maps are significantly less cartographical—she takes her inspiration from the landscape of the body, of humanity. Her work "Sea in my Head", for example, comes with the tag: "This is a sensory map. We smell the rose, hear the ocean, touch the thorn..." In another, "Pink Delivered", we see the map of the journey that a foetus takes from the mother's womb out into the world. Anju works with a lot of old medical illustrations—"What are they, if not maps of the body?" questions Meera.

Artist Varunika Saraf works extensively with

miniatures. Her work "The Map of Pain" is interestingly the largest piece in the show, and also the most prominent in its political commentary. Based on Botticelli's rendering of Dante's Inferno, Varunika has illustrated various instances of political strife throughout Indian history—from the 1984 tragedy in Bhopal to the recent lynchings in Dadri. "It may seem hopeless, but she is hoping you learn from what has happened in the past. It is a map of pain [but also] of history, of memory," elaborates Meera.



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THE LIST PLANNER 2017

[f](#) came before, and where we might be heading. Madhvi Subrahmanian's "mappa mundis" are maps of the psyche. The folklore of the medieval age led to the making of imagined maps, which were part fantasy and part spirituality: "Circular maps which

were an amalgam of everything”, e  
✉ Madhvi herself shuttles between Si  
— Mumbai, so her work explores the  
NEXT and imagined spaces. Interestingly,  
▼ employed the Japanese art of Kint  
pottery with threads of gold—to cr  
lines that cross the piece in cartog

*“Here be Dragons and other code  
will be up at Mumbai’s Sakshi Gal  
Mumbai until May 31, 2017.*

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5/5





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