

Mind the Gap

Ladders, sticky tape, and furniture, are some of the ordinary things that Avantika Bawa puts to extraordinary use. Deeksha Nath responds.

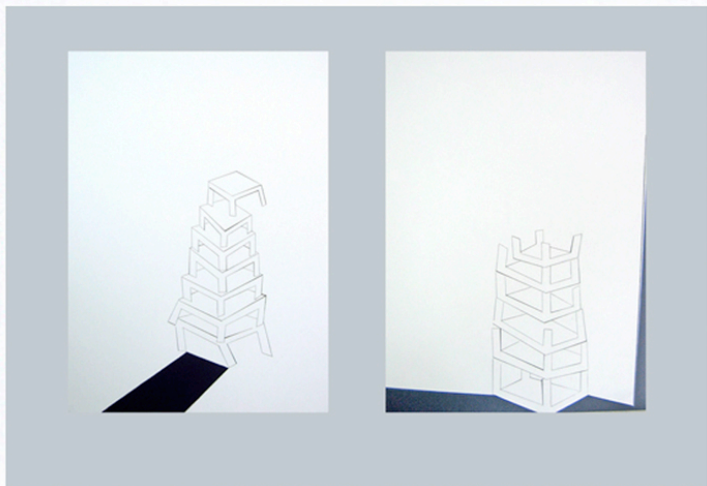


Avantika Bawa. Installation view of *Denied Readymades (spaces, gaps & stacks)*. Latex, tape on wooden panels, painted ladders, framed drawings, and painted cardboard boxes in the background. 40' x 11' x 12'. 2007.

IN AVANTIKA BAWA'S SOLO SHOW, *DENIED READYMADES (SPACES, gaps & stacks)*, the artist presented her latest experiments with Minimalism. Fittingly for an exhibition conceived across two continents – Bawa lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia – the sculptural installations and drawings played around with our notions of space and place. The display explored space in two main ways: firstly, by stacking objects, and secondly, by making us aware of the gaps between objects

The exhibition – which ran from December 23rd to the 29th at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi – contained drastically altered found objects. In one work, colourful plastic stools had their legs sawn off at odd angles. In another, the alterations were more superficial – wooden ladders were painted a bright blue.

These blue ladders made up Bawa's most effective installation. The ladders leant against a wall and were interspersed with panels in the same shade of blue. On the panels, Bawa had 'constructed' ladders in darker blue, using tape and latex, occasionally incorporating the dark lines created by shadows. It was only when one looked closely at the installation that one could tell where the 'real' ladders started and where the 'painted' ones ended.



Avantika Bawa. *Stool drawings (Details)*. Acrylic, graphite on Gesso board. 18" x 24" each. 2007.

Two ladders, laid across the floor, seemed to point in the direction of three stacked cartons. Here, Bawa had placed boxes between two sets of drawings. These pretty graphite works depicted various items of furniture – chairs and tables that were stacked or placed at odd angles to each other. In this juxtaposition of drawings and installations, Bawa seemed less concerned about pointing out the fragility of reality than in investigating the concept of balance. The drawings provided the installations with structural support, drawing on principles of architecture. Ironically, though, the objects had inspired the drawings rather than vice-versa.

Shadows and tape formed part of another installation too – altered pastel-hued stools were placed upright, green tape outlining the space that would have been occupied by their shadows in different lighting. By abstracting these shadows – and thereby altering readymades – Bawa's installation created optical illusions and made porous the boundaries separating the two-dimensional space from the three-dimensional space.

The drawings were the highlights of the show. Crisply lined, they combined line, colour, and space harmoniously – something the installations lacked. Nonetheless, Bawa explored the relationship between positive and negative spaces, between presence and absence, relentlessly. Interestingly, the installations were most successful when they looked out of place in the somewhat barren gallery.