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Zarina Hashmi Papers, Clippings and Press, 2000-2013

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PROFILE

Mapping Boundaries in Space and Time

Geeti Sen elucidates the multiple meanings evoked by the austere output of Zarina Hashmi.

"Journeys begin, roads are taken to unknown destinations. Borders are crossed, time allotted to stay is counted. The distance is measured from the place that was home".

-Zarina Hashmi. Catalogue to the exhibition at Gallery Espace, New Delhi, January 2000.

Zarina Hashmi returns after some 40 years of living abroad, to exhibit her new series of woodcuts in Delhi in January 2000 - to render in their finite abstraction, the essence of that which she recalls and reconstructs as 'home'. Etched deeply in the mind, or incised boldly like a knife cutting through wood, these minimalist gestures, of a single horizontal or vertical line or four triangles, map out for her all time and space, the course of her life. In their economic brevity they are more resonant than the recalling of places and people, the stuff of sentimental reverie. A few lines, fiercely black upon white, mere vestiges that defy tangible existence, these evoke much more than can be seen on that piece of finely grained paper.

That of course is the quality of memory, in that it is selective,

[[image]]

Journey. Woodcut. A unit of a set of 6 prints. 1999. 16 inches x 13 inches.

[[image]]

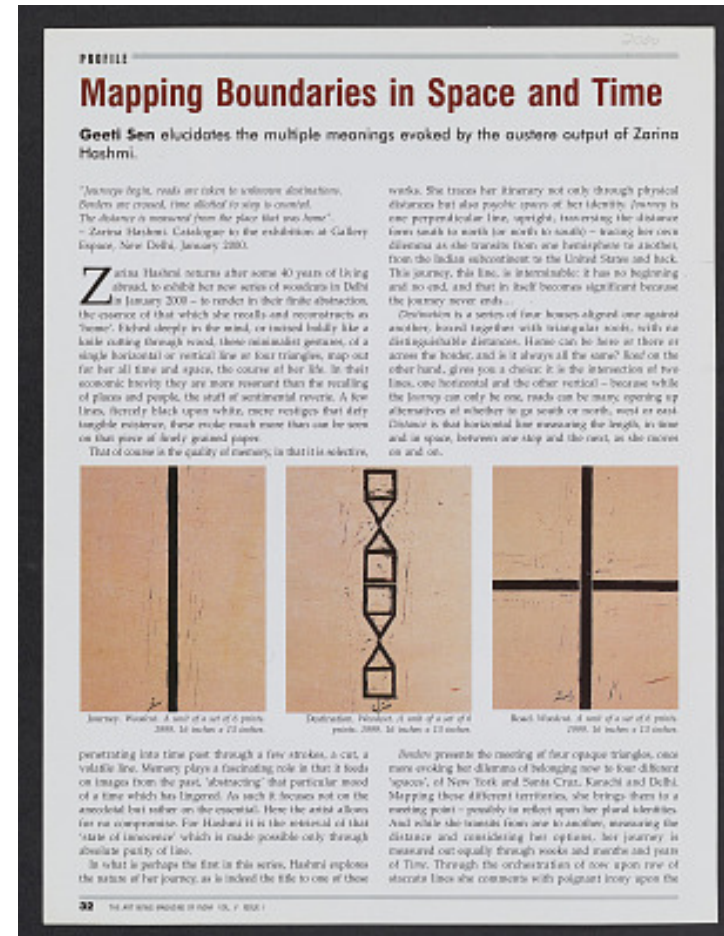
Destination. Woodcut. A unit of a set of 6 prints. 1999. 16 inches x 13 inches.

[[image]] Road. Woodcut. A unit of a set of 6 prints. 1999. 16 inches x 13 inches.

penetrating into time past through a few strokes, a cut, a volatile line. Memory plays a fascinating role in that it feeds on images from the past, 'abstracting' that particular mood of a time which has lingered. As such it focuses not on the anecdotal but rather the essential. Here the artist allows for no compromise. For Hashmi it is the retrieval of that 'state of innocence' which is made possible only through absolute purity of line.

In what is perhaps the first in this series, Hashmi explores the nature of her journey, as is indeed the title to one of these works. She traces her itinerary not only through physical distances but also psychic spaces of her identity. Journey is one perpendicular line, upright, traversing the distance from south to north (or north to south) - tracing her own dilemma as she transits from one hemisphere to another, from the Indian subcontinent to the United States and back. This journey, this line, is interminable: it has no beginning and no end, and that in itself becomes significant because the journey never ends...

Destination is a series of four houses aligned one against another,



boxed together with triangular roofs, with no distinguishable distances. Home can be here or there or across the border, and is it always all the same? Road on the other hand, gives you a choice: it is the intersection of two lines, one horizontal and the other vertical - because while the Journey can only be one, roads can be many, opening up alternatives of whether to go south or north, west or east. Distance is that horizontal line measuring the length, in time and in space, between one stop and the next, as she moves on and on.

Borders presents the meeting of four opaque triangles, once more evoking her dilemma of belonging now to four different 'spaces', of New York and Santa Cruz, Karachi and Delhi. Mapping these different territories, she brings them to a meeting point - possibly to reflect upon her plural identities. And while she transits from one to another, measuring the distance and considering her options, her journey is measured out equally through weeks and months and years of Time. Through the orchestration of row upon row of staccato lines she comments with poignant irony upon the

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