

AVANTIKA BAWA

simplenothingsimplesomething

Educator Handout: Grades 7-12

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

[*simplenothingsimplesomething*](#) comprises several new works on paper and a large-scale installation. This exhibition is the most recent iteration of Avantika Bawa's experiments with construction scaffolds, which began in 2012 and have spanned several formats. Compelled equally by their geometrical elegance and their passive ubiquity in daily life, Bawa has revealed scaffolds to be a surprisingly rich sculptural medium. She has eked novel designs out of their crossbars and rectangles on salt flats in India and fields in Oregon, as well as in gallery interiors across the United States. She has also miniaturized her scaffolds using 3D printers, and used them as matrices to create embossed prints, demonstrating how slight adjustments to a consistent form's scale, color, surroundings, and means of presentation can beget a large range of visual effects. This exhibition, which presents both a new series of relief prints and a network of jet-black scaffolding, shows a progression in Bawa's approach to her signature material.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

[Avantika Bawa](#) is an artist, curator, and educator based in Portland, Oregon. She often resides in her hometown of New Delhi, India. Bawa has an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. She has participated in the Skowhegan, MacDowell, Kochi Biennial Foundation, and Djerassi residencies, among others. Her work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon; Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, Oregon; The Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia; Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia; and Disjecta, Portland, Oregon. In April 2004, Bawa was part of a team that launched [Drain: Journal for Contemporary Art and Culture](#). In 2014, she was appointed to the board of the [Oregon Arts Commission](#). Bawa is currently Associate Professor of Fine Arts at [Washington State University](#) in Vancouver, Washington.

VOCABULARY

- **Form:** a three-dimensional enclosed area that has height, length, and depth—such as a cube, cylinder, or pyramid
- **Medium:** refers to the type of art, such as drawing, installation, or printmaking; as well as the materials an artwork is made from, such as ink, metal, or light¹
- **Minimalism:** a type of abstract art developed in the United States in the 1960s. Minimalist artworks are generally composed of simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle.²
- **Monochromatic color scheme:** a range of values—tints, tones, and shades—of one color in an artwork. Tints are created by adding white to a color. Tones are created by adding grey. Shades are created by adding black.
- **Negative space:** refers to the areas within and around the subject—such as the areas between the metal bars of the scaffolding in this exhibition
- **Positive space:** refers to the subject—such as the metal scaffolding in this exhibition
- **Relief print:** an image made by inking a raised surface—like a stamp—and pressing it onto paper
- **Scale:** refers to the size of something
- **Shape:** a two-dimensional enclosed area that has height and length, but not depth—such as a square, rectangle, or triangle
- **Site-specific installation:** an artwork that is designed in response to and placed within a specific location
- **Subject matter:** what is portrayed or suggested in an artwork—such as a person, place, or thing

¹Tate (n.d.). *Art Term: Medium*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/medium>.

²Tate (n.d.). *Art Term: Minimalism*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism>.



Installation view of Avantika Bawa's solo exhibition *simplenothingsimplesomething*, curated by Troy Sherman. This exhibition was on view at University Galleries of Illinois State University from January 17 through March 2, 2023. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESPOND - VA:Re.8.1 - Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Drawing on her [Minimalist](#) influences, Avantika Bawa often works with [monochromatic color schemes](#), industrial materials and geometric forms. Through various [arrangements](#), [locations](#), [colors](#), and [sizes](#), Bawa explores the creative potential of scaffolding. In her [site-specific installation *simplenothingsimplesomething*](#), Bawa has accompanied the scaffolding with large-scale [relief prints](#) and [miniature sculptures](#) that emphasize the repetition of [positive and negative spaces](#) within and around the scaffolding. Each element in the exhibition—including the cast shadows—informs the next and serves as part of a larger whole.

As a class or in small groups, analyze the exhibition using the following prompts:

- Describe the formal elements of the scaffolding, such as line, [shape](#), [form](#), and [scale](#).
- Look closely at the cast shadows, [relief prints](#), and miniature sculptures. What elements of the scaffolding do they emphasize? Which do they alter or omit? What common elements are present across each component of the installation?
- How has Bawa used color to tie works in the exhibition together? Why do you think she chose this [monochromatic color scheme](#)? How might you interpret the installation if it consisted of tints, tones, and shades of a different color?



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CREATE - VA:Cr.1.2 - Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

In response to *simplenothingsimplesomething*, prompt students to create a series of works that closely examine details within and around an object of their choice. Encourage students to use a variety of mediums and a [monochromatic color scheme](#). Provide students with the following instructions:

1. Analyze the formal elements of your object, such as line, [shape](#), [form](#), space, and texture. Document these attributes through writing, drawing, or photography.
2. Familiar with Midwestern winters, Bawa used white, black, and shades of gray in *simplenothingsimplesomething* to respond to the dreariness of this time of year. Consider what color you will use for your series. What associations do you have with this color? Do you want to reference a particular place, space, or time?
3. Using [mediums](#) of your choice, create three artworks, or a series of works, in response to your observations in step 1. Focus on continuity of [form](#), [shape](#), and [subject](#) across the series.
4. Like Bawa, consider using tints of your chosen color for one artwork or series, tones for another, and shades for the third.

PRESENT - VA:Pr.5.1 - Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

After completing their work, have students submit a proposal for a [site-specific installation](#). Provide students with the following prompts:

- Describe the structural attributes of your work, such as mediums and scale.
- Where would your installation be located?
- How would your work respond to the physical location, the surrounding community, or the history of the area?
- How would your artworks be arranged in relation to one another within the space?
- What would your intentions be for this installation? Would you want the work to influence people's ideas, feelings, or behaviors? Or would you want it to provide a purely an aesthetic experience?

- Educator resources are available on the exhibition [webpage](#).

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