

Minimalism: Installation – Printmaking

AVANTIKA BAWA

simplenothingsimplesomething

Educator Handout: Grades K-6

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

- **Contour:** refers to the outline of the surface of a form
- **Form:** refers to a three-dimensional enclosed area that has height, length, and depth—such as a cube, cylinder, or pyramid
- **Installation:** an artwork that is placed within and in response to a space
- **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
- **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:** refers to a two-dimensional enclosed area that has height and length, but not depth—such as a square rectangle, or triangle
- **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:Re7.2 - Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Through exploration of **mediums**, arrangements, locations, colors, lighting, and **scale**, Avantika Bawa reveals new and exciting possibilities within the familiar and seemingly simple form of scaffolding (metal frames used to support people when constructing, painting, or restoring buildings). In her **relief prints**, Bawa emphasizes the linear quality of the scaffolding and the **shapes** created within its **positive and negative spaces**. As a class, analyze and discuss Bawa's work using the following prompts:

- Name the **shapes** you see in Bawa's **relief prints**. Can you find similar **shapes** within the **positive and negative spaces** of the scaffolding?
- Look closely at the **negative spaces** within the scaffolding and the shadows it casts. What other **shapes** can you find?
- In what ways are the shadows different than the **form** of the scaffolding?

Right: Installation view of Avantika Bawa's solo exhibition *simplenothingsimplesomething*, curated by Troy Sherman.



CREATE - VA:Cr.2.1 - Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Inspired by Bawa's work, select a familiar object that has a variety of **positive and negative spaces**—such as a chair, tripod, or metal storage cubes. In small groups or as a whole class, collaboratively explore the **form** and shadows of your object using the **techniques** listed below.

Place the object on a large piece of paper.

- Trace the **contours** of the object. Repeat with different placements and arrangements. Try overlapping your drawings to generate new **shapes**. Create **contrast** by tracing the lines of your drawing with marker or coloring the **positive and negative spaces**.
- Explore lighting your object from different angles to cast shadows on another piece of paper. Trace the outline of the cast shadows. Invite students to add shadows with another object or with their bodies. Have students shade or color the **positive and negative spaces** with a **medium** of their choice.

RESPOND - VA:Re.7.2 - Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Present the object and artworks together. Use the discussion questions from the analysis of Bawa's work (above) to analyze their similarities and differences. Consider aligning your analysis with the following mathematical explorations.

- Name the properties and positions of the **shapes** you see in your artworks. For example, Bawa's **prints** consist of rectangles of various sizes stacked above, below, and beside one another. Rectangles have two sets of equal-length sides that are parallel to one another. Some of the rectangles are intersected by horizontal lines, creating additional rectangles within the **negative spaces**.

Early elementary extension: Measure the sides of each **shape** to determine their lengths.

Late elementary extensions: Use these measurements to calculate the area of the **shapes**. Measure and label the angles of select **shapes**.

- Count the number of different **shapes** or variations of the same **shape** within each artwork.

Early elementary extension: Add your findings together to calculate the total number of **shapes**.

Late elementary extension: Use ratios to represent the types of **shapes** to the total number of **shapes**. For example, if you counted 5 triangles and there were 24 **shapes** in total, your ratio of triangles to total number of **shapes** would be 5:24.

Invite students to share what they learned through the artmaking activities and analyses.

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

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Vimeo](#) and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact galleries@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.