

# Art in America

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Nasreen Mohamedi:  
Untitled, ca. 1970s,  
graphite and ink on paper,  
7½ inches square;  
at Talwar.

### NASREEN MOHAMEDI TALWAR

One of the highlights of Documenta 12 was the refined presentation of drawings and photographs by Indian artist Nasreen Mohamedi (1937–1990) alongside works by Agnes Martin (1912–2004). The subject of an impressive exhibition at Talwar Gallery (and of a show at the Drawing Center in 2005), Mohamedi's quietly powerful, square-formatted graphite-and-ink drawings from the 1970s are defined by austere yet gracefully dynamic configurations of lines in affecting dialogues with areas of blank paper that evoke open space.

Born in Karachi (a city then in India, now part of Pakistan), Mohamedi studied art in London and Paris during the 1950s, and then spent a year in Bahrain, an island country in the Persian Gulf where the desert and Islamic architecture made a lifelong impression. She returned to India in the early '60s and was drawn to the chaotic energy of Delhi.

Talwar's elegantly spare installation of Mohamedi's modestly scaled draw-

ings was accompanied by a selection of images of pages from her diaries, presented on a video monitor, that underscored with words and graphic patterns the discipline and passion with which she lived her life and made her art. The self-directives she jotted down were followed through in her drawings' straight, delicate and precise lines, of varying thicknesses, shades and lengths, which accumulated in mesmerizing rows and rhythms—sometimes vibrating, sometimes veering off at right angles. Press materials explained that far from being nonobjective, the drawings diagrammed events in time and space—rhythms of nature or Mohamedi's perambulations through Delhi. One was reminded of Ellsworth Kelly's abstract distillations of forms from the physical world. The tensions sustained by Mohamedi's different dispositions and weights of line on the page also recall Richard Tuttle's "Wire Pieces" of the same era, which confound actual and perceived realities of wire, pencil line and shadow against a wall.

The mystical quality of Mohamedi's irregular geometries makes them part of a utopian lineage that includes Kazimir Malevich's floating Suprematist forms; Piet Mondrian's abstract equivalents of essential and cosmic rhythms; and Agnes Martin's grids and lines, which embody the sensation of standing before nature. Mohamedi personalized and expanded upon the transcendent language of abstrac-

tion even as she drew upon the minimalist's idiom of geometry and preoccupation with real space in her yearning to transcribe the animated and evanescent patterns, textures and details of the everyday world.

—Susan Harris