

Vikram Divecha

Minor Work

9 March – 11 May 2017



Mohammed Mostafa Mohammed Junu Mia, Vikram Divecha, *Sketchbook 3*, 2017, Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle fine art photo rag, 78.4 x 100 cm, Edition of 3 + 2 AP

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is pleased to present Vikram Divecha's works in a solo exhibition *Minor Work*, curated by Murtaza Vali.

Over the last few years, Vikram Divecha has realised a series of ambitiously scaled and publically sited projects across the United Arab Emirates, each realised through an engagement with what he terms "found processes." Collaborating with various institutions, infrastructures, and communities, Divecha identifies hidden seams within pre-existing systems of urban life, through which he introduces "glitches" that, if only temporarily, disrupt the status quo, creating interventions and installations that bring otherwise invisible structures and operations into plain view.

Boulder Plot (2014) was a monumental but temporary public installation that consisted of a carefully gridded arrangement of boulders sourced from the mountain quarries of Ras Al Khaimah, on the United Arab Emirates' east coast, and destined to become building material for Dubai's hyperactive construction industry. For *Shaping Resistance* (2015), Divecha collaborated with municipality gardeners in Sharjah to introduce a set of subtle vernacular disruptions into the otherwise regimented hedge design of the popular lagoon-side Al Majaz Park, a temporary intervention that has

become a permanent feature in the park. And in last year's *Warehouse Project* (2016), where the artist converted a warehouse structure in Alserkal Avenue's extension, newly built for art and culture activity, into a fully functioning storage facility for commercial goods, orchestrating a node where two disparate economic systems temporarily intersected, playfully blurring the distinction between art object and commodity.

Minor Work presents a number of new series related to, emerging from, and reflecting on some of Divecha's past projects. *The Road Marking* (2017) series, created in collaboration with crews who refresh and maintain road markings across Dubai, revisits Divecha's *Urban Epidermis* (2012) works, a set of painstaking trompe-l'oeil recreations of sections of local road. In the new series, Divecha isolates the painted mark—in thick, textured gooey thermoplastic paint that uncannily approximates impastoed oil paint—from the substrate of the city, transforming an infrastructural tool for city planning into a means of gestural and formal expression. While some works register the line as spontaneous gesture, others carefully transcribe segments of existing road markings, abstracting infographics into minimal geometric abstractions.

The Remapped Sweeper Route (2017) body of work is

a set of working drawings Divecha made for *Sweeping* (2017), a daily performance project involving five sweepers who maintain the streets surrounding the Sharjah Art Museum, recently realised as part of the Sharjah Art Foundation's *March Project 2016*. Divecha remapped each sweeper's usual route so that it ended outside the museum's entrance, where a row of green trash-filled bags gradually accumulated through the morning, drawing attention to the sweeper's otherwise overlooked labour—by temporarily repositioning sanitation work as art practice—and its relationship to the edifice of the museum. Executed using coloured ball point pen on photocopies of a neighbourhood map obtained from the Sharjah Municipality, Divecha's drawings evoke On Kawara's seminal *I Went* (1968–79), subtly recasting its existential proclamation of presence as a declaration of the indispensable labour of invisible bodies.

Grappling with complicated questions of authorship, appropriation, access, and value, the *Gardeners' Sketchbooks* (2017) revisit key processual residue from *Shaping Resistance*—a set of sketchbooks used during drawing workshops conducted by Divecha, in which his five collaborators experimented with and developed alternative designs for the park's hedges. Divecha leverages the visibility afforded him through this exhibition to introduce these vernacular expressions, and their primary creators, into the commercial art context through a series of five photographs—each a neutral, almost clinical, image of a two-page spread selected by the individual gardeners themselves. The gardeners will also collaborate with the gallerist to determine the final price, restoring their stake—artistic and financial—in their work while displacing Divecha from the chain of transactions.

Each of Divecha's public projects involves many months of rigorous in-depth research, dialogue, and reflection, as constraints of existing material, space, and labour are negotiated with, as ideas are repeatedly tested through presentation and discussion, and refined before finally being put into action. *Minor Work* also includes a series of conceptual line drawings in black felt tip pen that wittily illustrate, distil, and reflect on minor moments and unexpected lessons learned through this process. Extending across these distinct series is the prominence of line, a traditionally “minor” mode of mark-making which returns in various guises, as a formal and gestural trope, as a way to articulate outline and volume, as a tool for tracing a path of action, as a vehicle for soliciting vernacular expression, as a means of illustrating a thought and condensing a moment.

Unlike the ambitious public address of Divecha's recent projects, these works inhabit a more intimate and private register, acknowledged in the exhibition's tongue-in-cheek title. However, “minor” is not meant only as an adjective of diminution. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “becoming-minor” is an act of solidarity with those who are less powerful, through which one can adopt a position of resistance, and possibly even revolution, within and against discourses of power. Paired with “work,” in this exhibition it draws attention to the frequently overlooked but absolutely vital labour and forms of working life of Divecha's many collaborators.

Artist's Biography

Vikram Divecha (born 1977, Beirut) is a Mumbai-bred

artist based in Dubai. His work addresses labour, time and value, interrogating specific environments and challenging socio-economic structures. His practice has developed around what he calls ‘found processes’—those forces and capacities at work within state, social, economic and industrial spheres. These processes are his realm of intervention: Divecha introduces ‘glitches’ or realigns a system, which in turn generates an altered, amplified outcome as the operation runs its course. Constantly negotiating for existing material, space and labour, he navigates communities in deepening dialogues with potential participants. The changes he initiates are not simply injected into a system and then showcased; rather, Divecha's are slow processes, capable of enduring well beyond the time/space framework of what is ‘exhibited’, in some cases generating sustained social associations. By aligning himself to the system, working alongside participants, Divecha adapts his strategies as the project itself evolves. Re-contextualising the ebb and flow of goods through a warehouse, re-framing agency among municipal gardeners who create lasting public works, injecting non-artists into an artistic space, and superintending the re-generation of context as uprooted bricks from a bus stop are re-laid elsewhere – such are the situations created across a practice invested far more in the social dynamics of an actual urban space, than in the hermetic world of the white cube. Despite interacting with largely invisible systems, his works have a definite materiality and formal rigour – a regimented plot of boulders, stylised hedges, stacks of boxes. His engagements translate into public art, sculptural installations, video and drawings.

Divecha's exhibitions include *Portrait Sessions*, Tashkeel, Dubai (2016), *Warehouse Project*, Alserkal Commission, Dubai (2016), *White Cube... Literally*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai (2016), *DUST*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2015), *Accented*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah (2015) and *A Public Privacy*, DUCTAC, Dubai (2015), among others. Recipient of the 2014 Middle East Emergent Artist Prize, he has also created projects for The Arab Fund For Arts and Culture's public art commission InVisible in 2014.

Murtaza Vali's Biography

Murtaza Vali is an independent critic and curator, and Visiting Instructor at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. A recipient of a 2011 Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for Short-Form Writing, he regularly contributes to various international art periodicals and to publications for non-profit institutions and commercial galleries around the world, including the book accompanying the U.A.E. National Pavillion at the upcoming 57th Venice Biennale. Curator of the 2013 Abraaj Group Art Prize, his other recent curatorial projects include: *Text/ures of Iraq: Contemporary Art from the Collection of Oded Halahmy* (Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, 2017); *Mouteea Murad: Thresholds* (Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, 2016), *Between Structure and Matter: Other Minimal Futures* (Aicon Gallery, New York, 2016), *Formal Relations* (Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York, 2015), *Accented* (Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, 2015), *Geometries of Difference: New Approaches to Abstraction and Ornament* (Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, 2015), *PTSD: Shahpour Pouyan* (Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai, 2014), *Brute Ornament* (Green Art Gallery, Dubai, 2012) and *Accented* (BRIC Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, 2010). Currently based in Sharjah, he is a Lead Tutor of Campus Art Dubai 5.0.