

Rasheed Araeen

Minimalism Then and Now: 1960s - Present

Aicon Gallery Exhibition May 7th – June 6th, 2015

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday, May 7th 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Frieze New York: May 14th – 17th | Stand A21 – Randall's Island

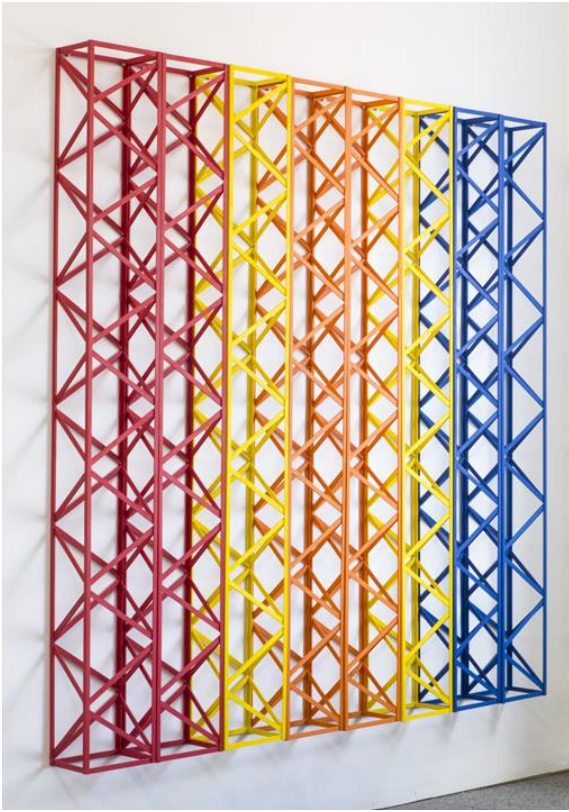
Aicon Gallery New York is proud to announce *Rasheed Araeen – Minimalism Then and Now*, the first major survey exhibition of the artist's work in New York City. A pioneering artist and voice for alternative and Non-Western interpretations of Minimalist and Conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s outside of the typically referenced canon, Araeen's work in this exhibition spans his oeuvre from his beginnings in Pakistan and London to the present day. The exhibition ranges from Araeen's earliest and most iconic sculptures of the 1960s, through his pioneering kinetic, interactive and performance-based works, in addition to a group of increasingly complex relief constructions from his current practice. The exhibition at Aicon Gallery will be accompanied by a solo booth in this year's **Frieze New York, Stand A21**, from May 14th through May 17th.



Rasheed Araeen, *Sculpture No. 2*, 1965, Steel and paint, 48 x 48 x 48 in.

Writing on the occasion of Araeen's retrospective at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery in 1988, editor and curator Patricia Bickers argued: "The formal language Araeen began to develop during the Sixties owed much to his critical awareness of Modernist discourse about abstraction, particularly the theories of Mondrian and the Constructivists. Such ideas were then still current in England." Araeen himself pinpointed the influence of Anthony Caro on his developing practice. "I have often talked about my encounter with Anthony Caro's works after I arrived in London in 1964 and its influence on what I myself subsequently arrived at in 1965, which turned out to be a form of sculpture that later became known as Minimalism." For Araeen, it was not so much the forms of Caro's artistry that were interesting but his use of engineering material such as steel girders which, as Araeen recalls, "had the appearance of having been picked up from a discarded heap of demolished engineering works." At the time, Araeen was working as a civil engineering assistant in London, producing drawings of industrial structures. The two influences of Caro and his day-job came together with the drawing for *Sculpture No. 1*, conceived in December 1965, which detailed four steel girders symmetrically placed next to each other. Conceived in the same year, the drawing for *Sculpture No. 2* again showed painted steel girders, this time arranged in four stacked layers.

However, Araeen was keen to move away from what he saw as an ongoing traditional approach to the relationship of work to its surroundings, seen in the work of London's New Generation sculptors and others. Instead, he was keen to explore a more non-hierarchical relationship between the work, the viewer and the work's surroundings. His solution was what he termed his 'structures'—works made in open modular form that theoretically could be re-positioned by the viewer. Moreover, Araeen introduced a lattice structure into the oeuvre of Minimalism, a visual language that had come independently to Araeen at the same time as it was taking root in New York; although, in Araeen's case, it was linked back



Rasheed Araeen, *RRYOYBB*, 2014, Wood and paint, 80 x 72 in.

to his background in structural engineering. Art critic Jean Fisher noted the key differences between Araeen's articulation of Minimalism and that of the New Yorkers: "There are, however, important distinctions to be made between the Minimalist cube and Araeen's Structures, which to my mind resides in the difference between an instrumental, abstract-logical regulation of the world and an organic one."

This acknowledgement of the spectator as being a constitutive element in the work resulted in a further development of Araeen's work. He opined: "My interest in participation emerged from the nature of my own work in 1968. While manipulating four small cubes to see how many different arrangements I could make out of them, I realized the potential in them of infinite movement and transformation." Works such as *Char Yar* (1968) contain this potential of the spectator unmaking and re-making the work through them. However, Araeen himself was moving away from making objects for viewing in galleries towards more participatory and collaborative work, which became increasingly informed by his growing political activism. In 1969, Araeen began working on *Chakras* and its subsequent counterpart *Triangles*, which were his first participatory works outside the gallery space. On the 21st of February 1970, Araeen and members of the public threw sixteen two-foot diameter discs into

London's St. Katherine's Dock. This quantity of sixteen, selected to reference a four-by-four configuration of a Minimalist structure, would immediately be undone by the action of being thrown into water.

Araeen went on to have solo shows at institutional spaces such as the Ikon Gallery (1987), the South London Gallery (1994) and the Serpentine Gallery (1996). In all, mainstream critical discussion of the early part of his career up until the early 1970s was less prevalent, until 2007 when the Tate London purchased and displayed his works from the late 1960s. In 2010, Aicon Gallery, London hosted the first major retrospective of Araeen's work in over a decade, paving the way for a new string of exhibitions and critical attention. In 2014, Araeen's work was a prominent feature in the exhibition *Other Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York, a long-overdue exploration of Minimalism outside its art-historical canonically Western context. In that same year, a major exhibition hosted by the Sharjah Art Foundation emphasized that the hiatus in critical and institutional responses to Araeen's works had finally passed. A variety of reasons contributed to that hiatus. Araeen's own activist-publisher activities setting up the periodicals *Black Phoenix* and *Third Text*, his involvement in the debates around 'Black Art' and his curating of exhibitions such as *The Essential Black Art* and *The Other Story* meant that the critical and curatorial focus on his artistry was irregular at best. More crucial however, was confusion amongst curators and art historians as to how to account for the appearance of Minimalist sculpture in Britain not directly influenced by the work of contemporaneous New York Minimalists. It has now been over fifty years since Araeen produced *My First Sculpture*, and with the belated institutional recognition his work is now receiving, it seems critical to bring this large survey of his works to New York in order to reconsider the various and overlapping accounts and artistic journeys that can be described as Minimalism.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.

RASHEED ARAEEN – Selected Works



Rasheed Araeen, *Sculpture No 1*, 1965, Steel and paint, 12 x 12 x 72 in. (x4)

RASHEED ARAEEN



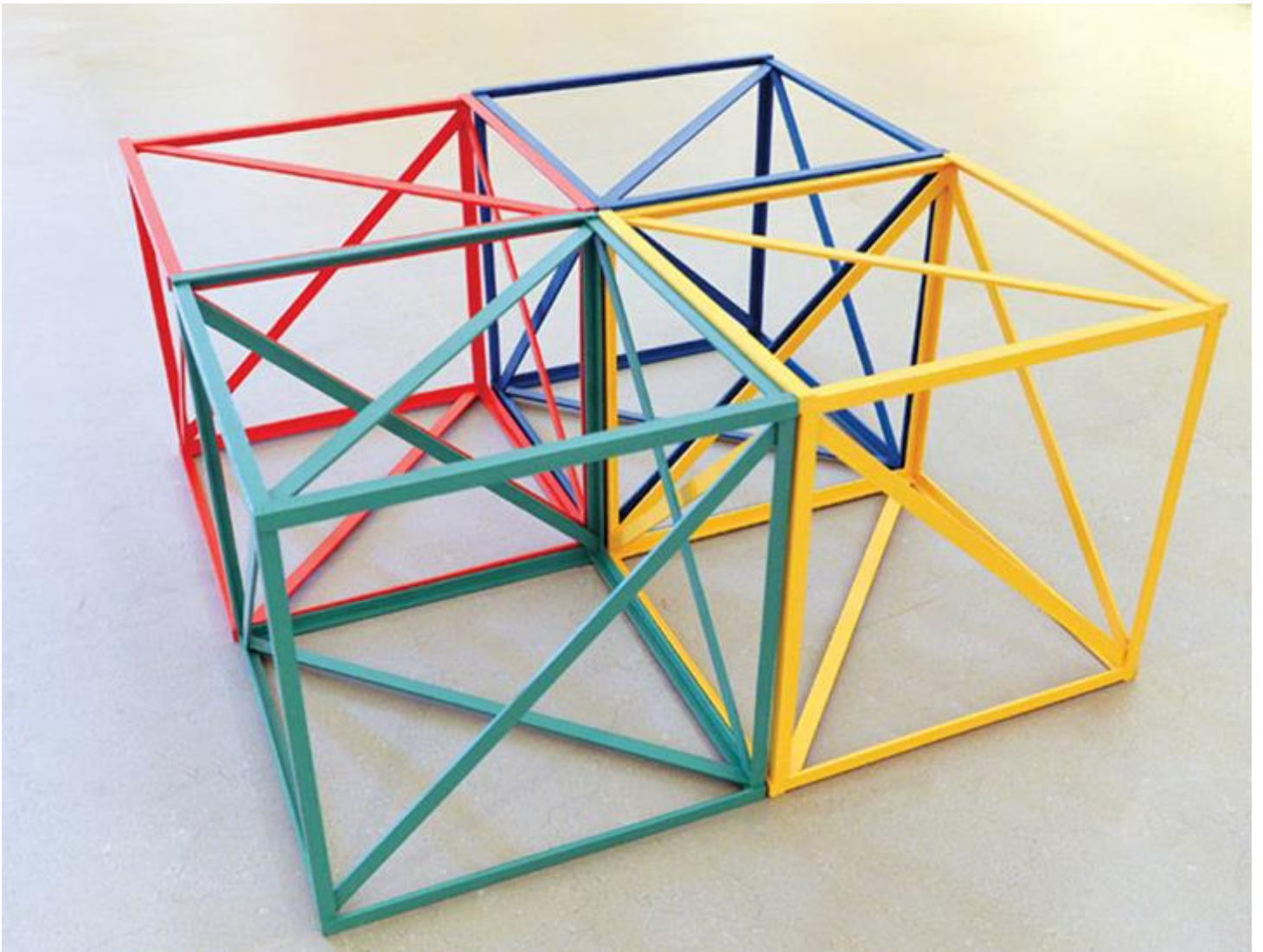
Rasheed Araeen, *Sculpture No 2*, 1965, Steel and paint, 48 x 48 x 48 in.

RASHEED ARAEEN



Rasheed Araeen, *First Structure*, 1966-67, Steel and paint, 55 x 55 x 55 in.

RASHEED ARAEEN



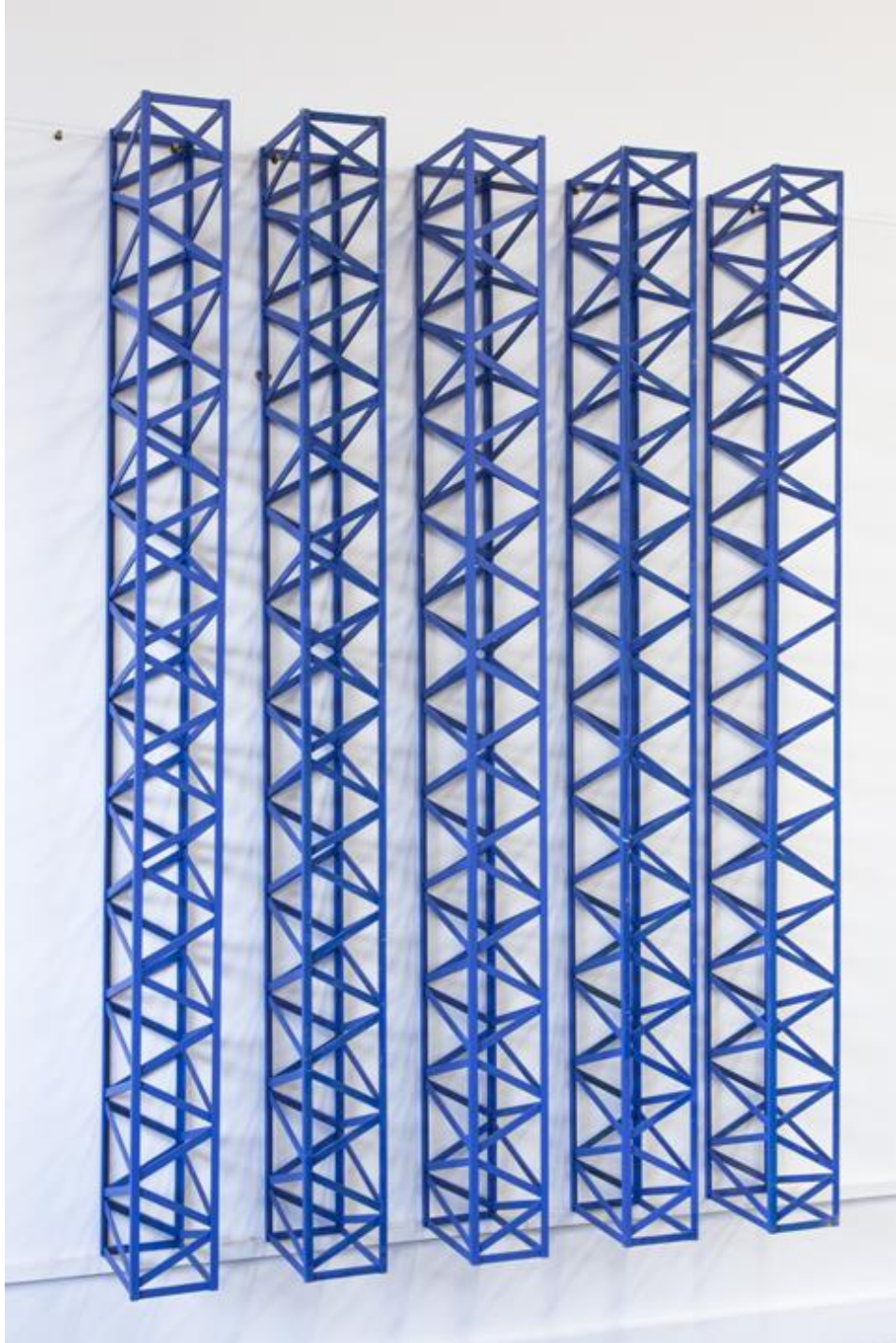
Rasheed Araeen, *Chaar Yaar II (Four Friends)*, 1968, Wood and paint, 24 x 48 x 48 in.

RASHEED ARAEEN



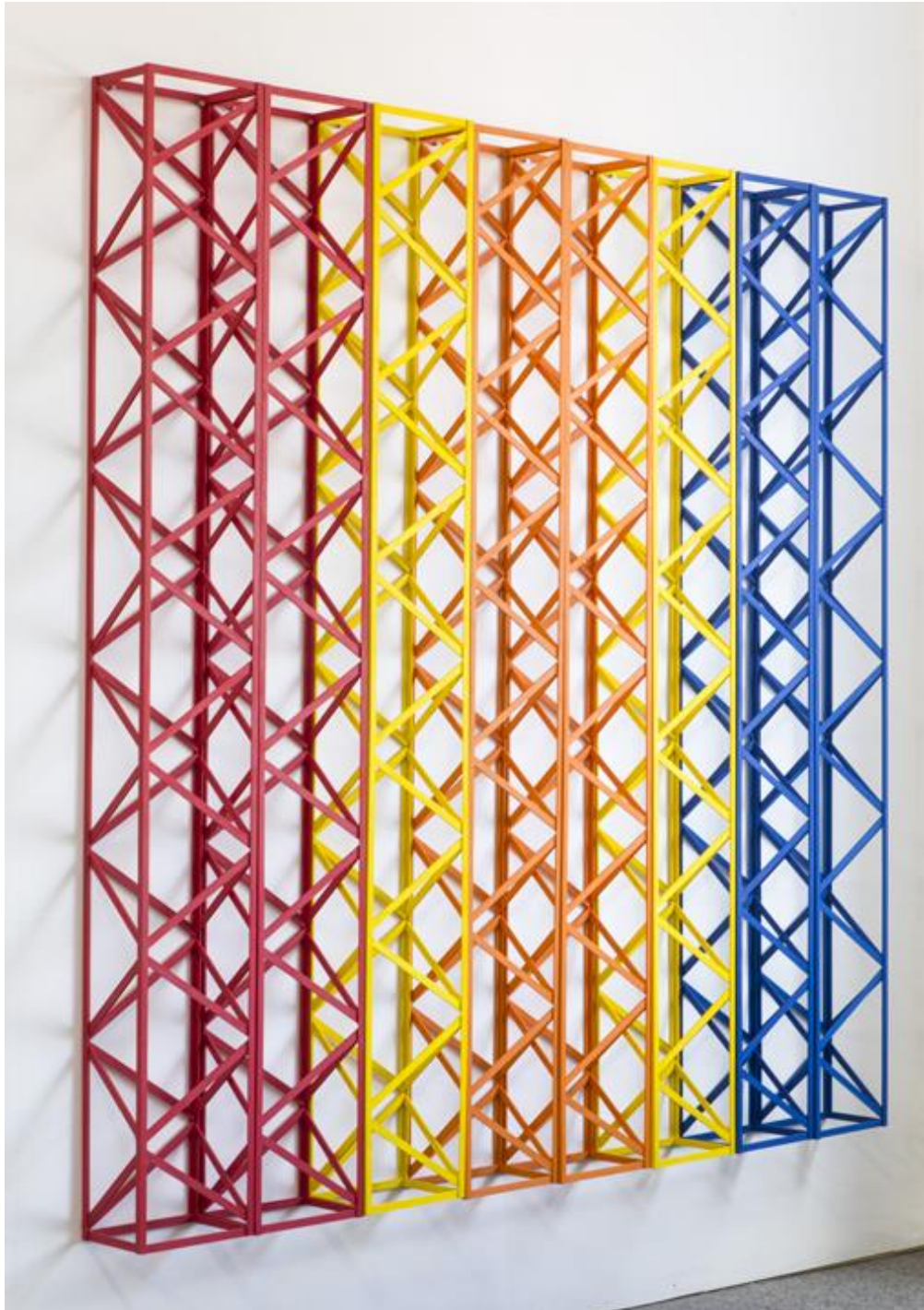
Rasheed Araeen, *Triangles*, 1970, Wood, paint and photographic prints on paper, 72 x 72 in. (x2)

RASHEED ARAEEN



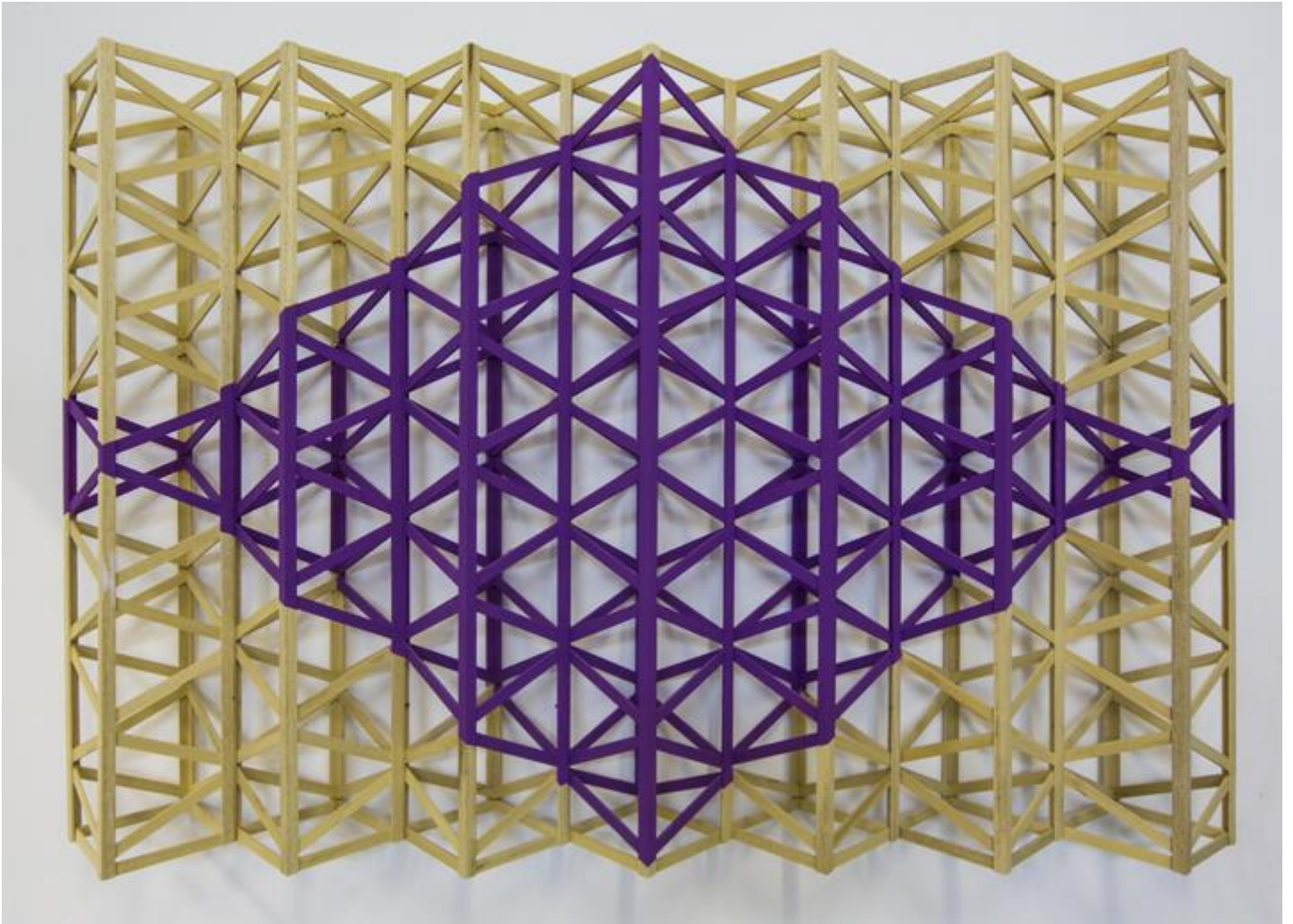
Rasheed Araeen, *Punj Neelay (Five Blues)*, 1970, Wood and paint, 80 x 72 in.

RASHEED ARAEEN



Rasheed Araeen, *RRYOOYBB*, 1971, Wood and paint, 80 x 72 in.

RASHEED ARAEEN



Rasheed Araeen, *Jaamni (Purple Diamond)*, 2014, Wood and paint, 72 x 80 in.

Is the pioneering British Minimalism of **Rasheed Araeen** finally receiving the attention it deserves?

A longtime collaborator reflects on the artist's struggle for recognition

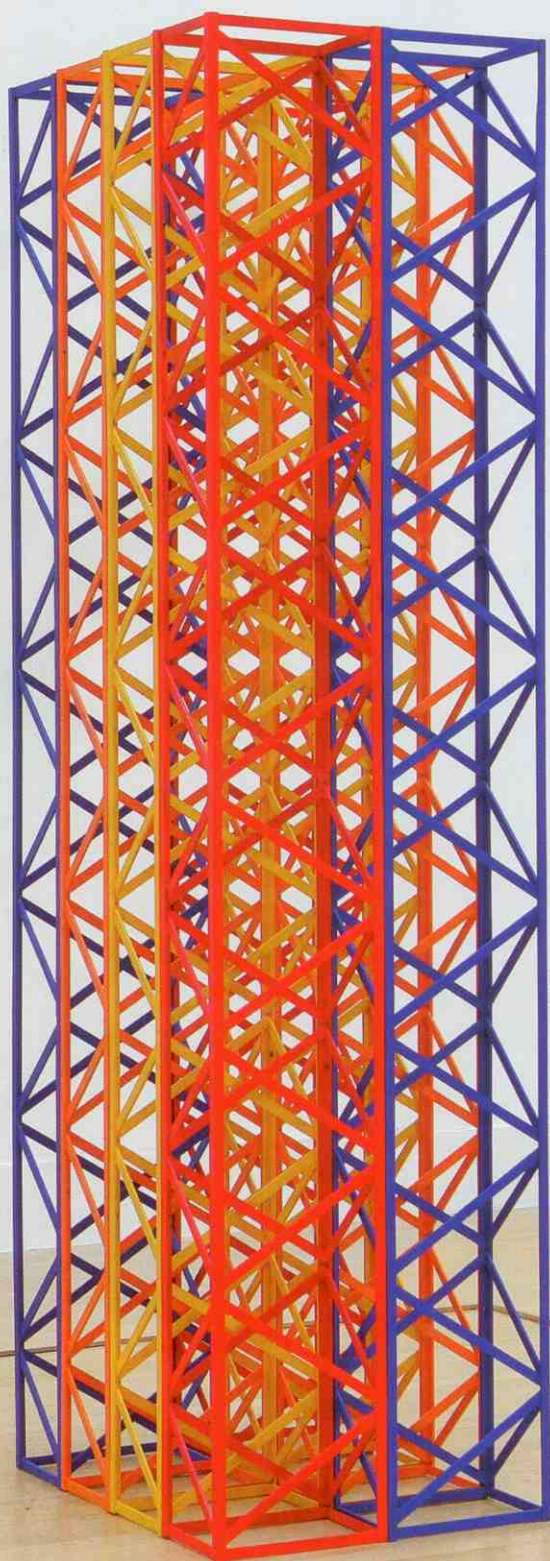
WORDS: RICHARD DYER

IN 2007 Tate Britain mounted a small exhibition of recently acquired works by Pakistani-born British artist Rasheed Araeen, including *Zero to Infinity* (1968–2007), *3Y + 3B* (1969) and *Rang Baranga* (1969). It was an exhibition that publicly, if modestly, acknowledged that Araeen was indeed – as the artist had claimed for many years – one of only a few British contributors to Minimalism during the 1960s. Indeed, as if by way of belated apology, a wall text in the exhibition stated precisely that.

This late acknowledgement by the British art establishment of Araeen's contribution to the history of contemporary art has come at the end of a lifelong struggle for recognition, not only of his own work but also that of other artists who are excluded from the official history of British postwar art due to the fact that they migrated to Britain from other countries.

Born in 1935, Araeen left Karachi for London in 1964 and has lived there ever since, beginning writing in 1975 (and, in 1978, publishing the art journal *Black Phoenix*, the precursor to *Third Text*, the scholarly journal he established in 1987). He's since had solo exhibitions at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery, in 1987, at the South London Gallery (1994) and at the Serpentine Gallery (1996). His career as a minimalist, however, began almost as soon as he moved to London.

Sculpture no. 1, comprising four metal I-beams painted the colour of rust and placed directly on the floor, and *Sculpture no. 2* (both 1965) were conceived in response to his encounter with the work of Anthony Caro. Although Caro's radical Modernism



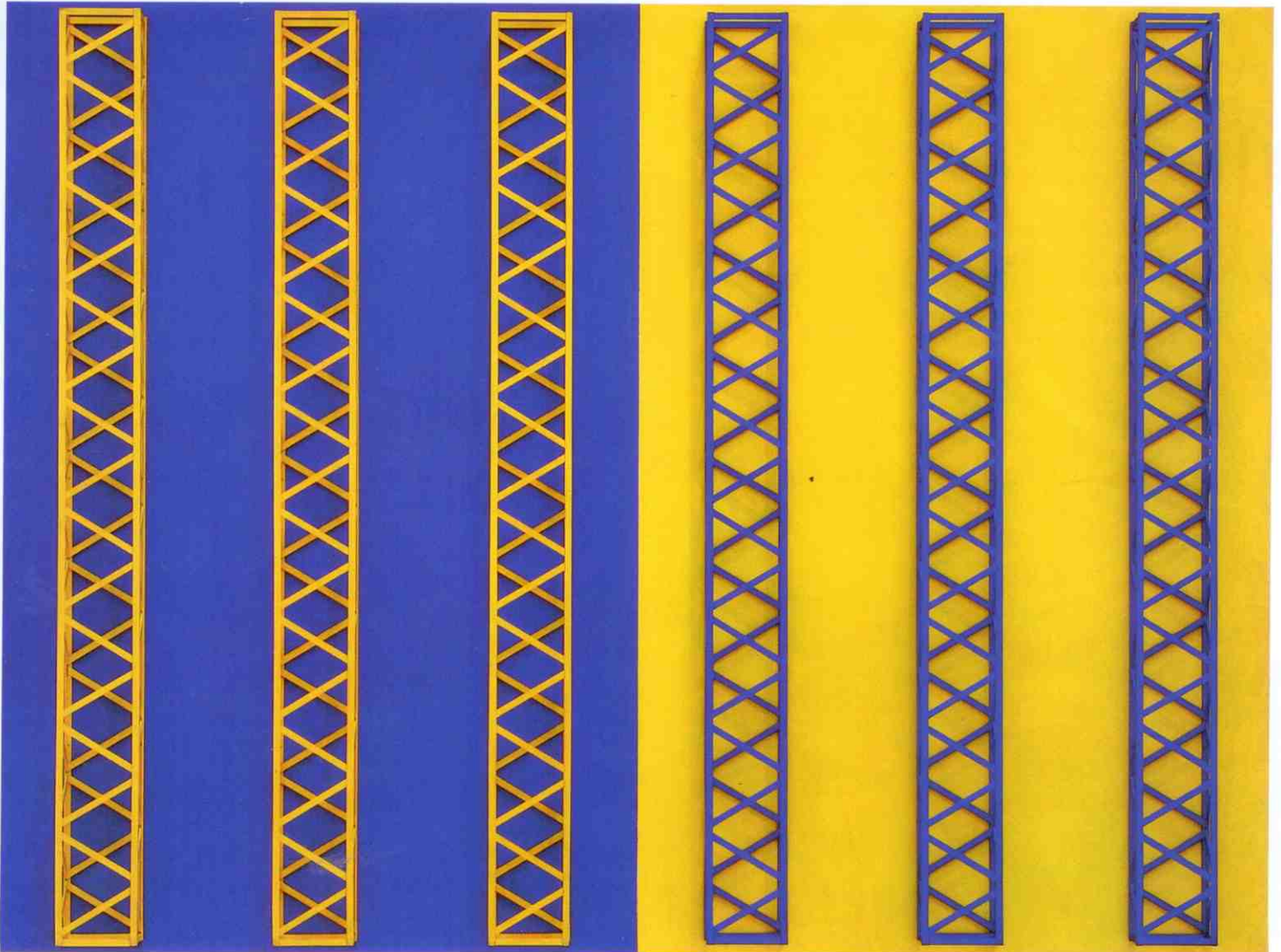
broke innovatively with the traditions of British sculpture, he could hardly be said to be a minimalist, continuing as he did established traditions of hierarchical composition and lyrical curvilinear form. Caro's contribution to the history of contemporary art was to liberate sculpture from its plinth – placing it on the floor of the gallery or on 'tables' – and to construct the work from separate elements welded together, in a manner akin to the construction of an early cubist collage by Picasso or Braque. Furthermore, Araeen's breakthrough into and personal take on Minimalism, and his innate grasp of its language, was not only informed by his reaction to Caro but also by this former civil engineer's familiarity with structures and materials such as girders, struts, latticework and the like.

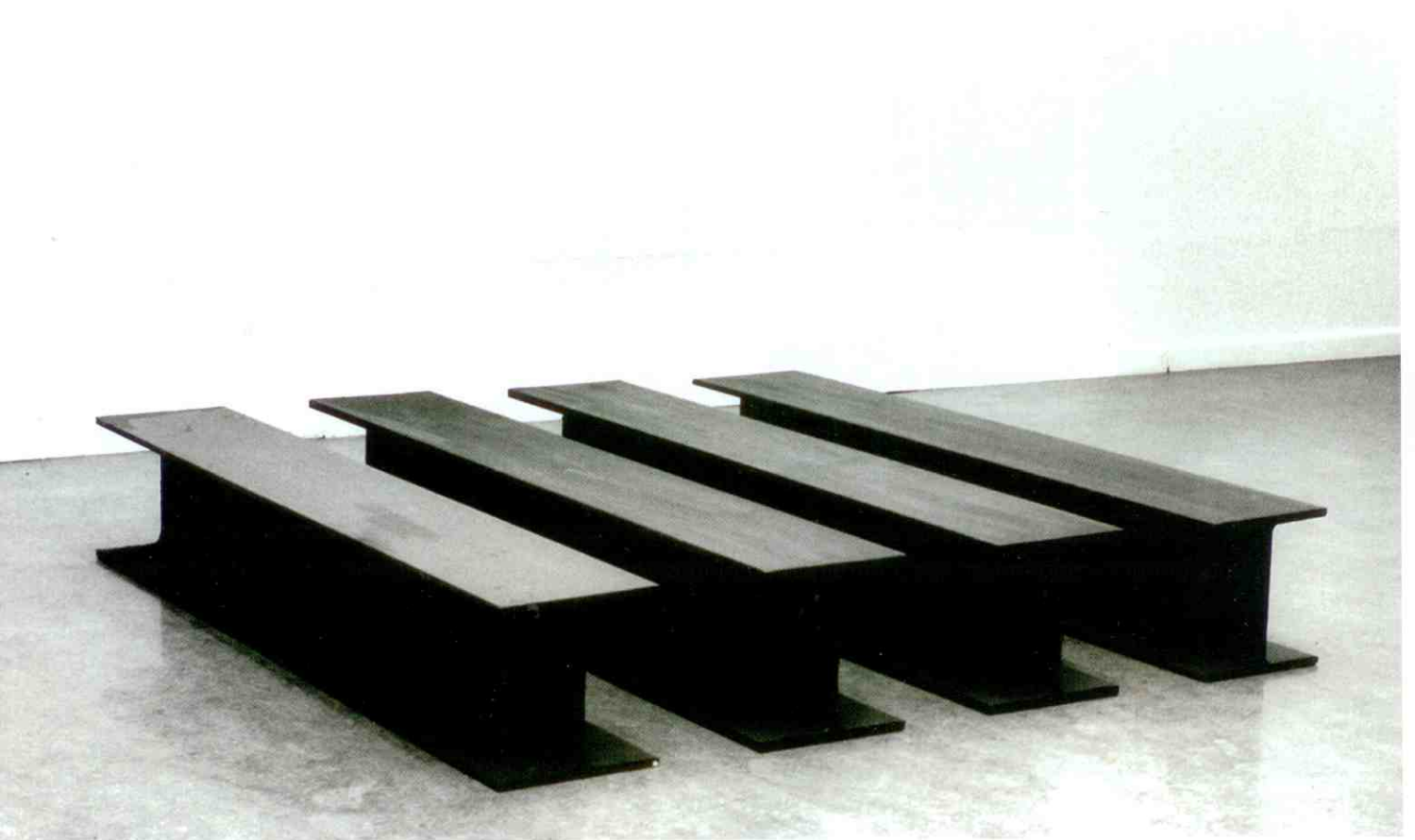
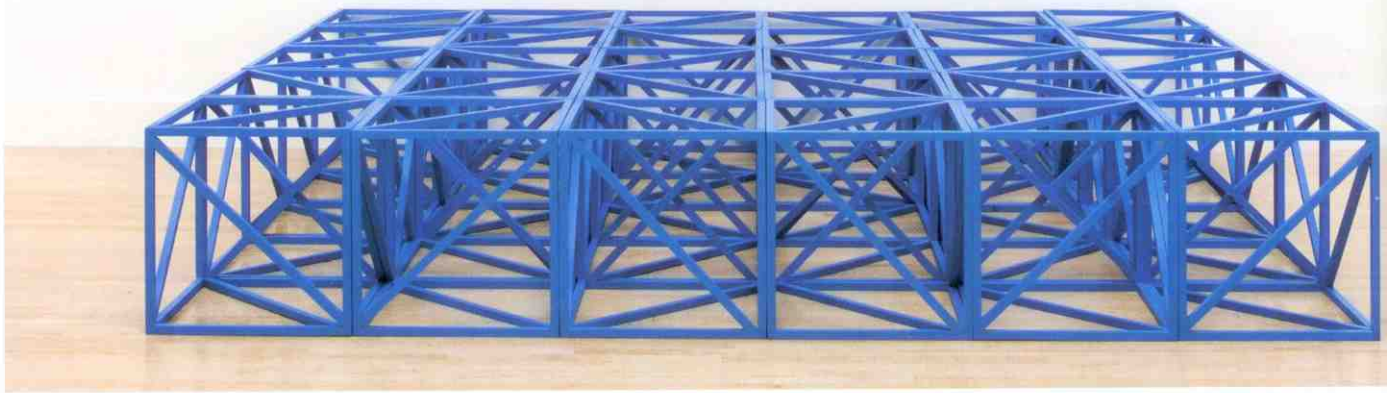
The minimalist movement, which emerged in the US during the early 1960s, was not widely known in Britain until 1968, three years after Araeen's first minimalist sculpture was conceived. Sol LeWitt's work, which demonstrates a close formal relationship to Araeen's, was not shown in the UK until the spring of 1969, in the seminal Tate Britain (then simply Tate Gallery) exhibition *The Art of the Real: An Aspect of American Painting and Sculpture 1948–1968*, and Araeen had not seen this work at the time of making *Sculpture no. 1* and *no. 2*. During this period, in works such as *Zero to Infinity* (1968–2007), Araeen didn't settle for discrete and static

objects: indeed, he dismantled that notion altogether. What at first appears to be a minimalist sculpture, comprising multiple boxes with diagonal cross struts, in fact only becomes an artwork via the viewer's participation: the sculpture can be endlessly reconfigured by the audience, creating new and original sculptures. This radical introduction of the participatory intervention of the viewer – also emerging in other art movements of the time, such as Viennese Actionism, Fluxus and Allan Kaprow's 'happenings', which Araeen was certainly aware of – challenged core notions of twentieth- and twenty-first-century contemporary art.

Although Araeen's minimalist sculptures stand as individual works of art in their own right, this interactive aspect of his practice is often overlooked. His photoworks have often been favoured instead (one, *Bismullah*, 1988, was acquired by Tate as early as 1995). This may be due to the fact that they fit more easily into the paradigm of work which artists from 'ethnic backgrounds' are expected to produce, ie, work dealing with their ethnic origins and identity. Araeen also produced many other artworks that were principally based on the participation of the audience, such as *Chakras* (1969–70), where the audience created the sculpture with the artist by throwing orange discs into the water.

Araeen's sense of frustration at the inability of the British art establishment to comprehend that a Pakistani, Indian, Afro-





Undoubtedly his struggle to alter perceptions of contemporary art history has distracted from a full appreciation of his own artistic practice



Caribbean, African or 'Other' artist could contribute to the history of contemporary art eventually drove him to establish *Third Text* in 1987. I have worked with him at *Third Text* (as assistant editor) since 1992 and have therefore had the opportunity to discuss in depth with him his views on the history of postwar British art. At first the journal championed the work of these hitherto-excluded artists, but it soon developed a more critical position, from which it questioned the whole official history of art and the domination of the West in constructing that history.

Writing and artmaking, however, haven't been the only vehicles for Araeen's thinking. Having begun a parallel career as a curator with *The Essential Black Art* in 1978, he curated the groundbreaking 1989 exhibition *The Other Story* at London's Hayward Gallery. It showed the work of British artists who had been 'written out' of art history due to their ethnic origin. This drew an extraordinary degree of blatantly racist rhetoric from the rightwing art press, while Brian Sewell wrote in *The Sunday Times* that it was impossible for an artist of African or Asian origin to make contemporary art, and that their production was either the continuation of an exhausted indigenous tradition or a second-rate copy of Western art. Araeen is now working on part two of this project, which will take the form of a book (now in production) and an exhibition with the working title *The Whole Story*, which will seek to present a more encompassing vision of postwar British art, exhibiting *all* of the significant artists contributing to postwar British art history together, regardless of ethnic origin. Consequently, we will see artists such as Frank Bowling, Avinash Chandra, Uzo Egonu, David Medalla, Ronald Moody, Francis Newton Souza and Aubrey Williams exhibited alongside Francis Bacon, Peter Blake, Lucian Freud and Patrick Heron.

Undoubtedly Araeen's involvement with the struggle to alter perceptions of what constitutes contemporary art history has distracted from a full appreciation of his own artistic practice. Though he may regret this, Araeen unquestionably felt he had no choice but to turn from his own practice to what he perceived

as a fundamentally necessary task. His work should be viewed in the context of the work of widely acknowledged artists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, John McCracken and Sol LeWitt, because although Minimalism has principally been constructed, historically, as an American movement, it was also significant to the development of British postwar art. Araeen's artistic practice in the 1960s and 70s was certainly central to this, in that his rejection of the 'pictorial' and 'expressionist' aspects of sculpture embraced a new notion of the artwork as demonstrated in the medium of painting in the work of his contemporaries such as William Turnbull.

Now that the art establishment would have us think that race has become a 'nonissue' in the artworld, with the rise of contemporary artists of African and Asian origin such as Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare, Anish Kapoor and Isaac Julien, it's worth remembering that Araeen's generation did not have such an easy time. :

Work by Rasheed Araeen is included in Modern British Sculpture, at the Royal Academy, London, 22 January – 7 April

WORKS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Rang Baranga, 1969, painted wood, 183 x 61 x 46 cm. Tate Collection

3Y • 3B, 1968–9, painted wood, 183 x 244 x 13 cm. Tate Collection

Zero to Infinity, 1968/2003/2007, painted wood, 100 cubes, each 50 x 50 cm. Tate Collection

Sculpture no. 1, 1965, painted steel, 213 x 183 x 30 cm

Sculpture no. 2, 1965/1987 (installation view, Hayward Gallery, London, 1989), painted steel, 122 x 122 cm

all works courtesy the artist

Rasheed Araeen

Born 1935 in Karachi, Pakistan

Rasheed Araeen is a civil engineer, artist and writer. In 2009, he was granted a US patent for an invention, which is both a floating sculpture and water sport, followed in 2001 by a full international Patent. Trained as a civil engineer, Araeen eventually turned to art as a profession. As an artist, he began his career in 1953, continuing his pursuit art while studying civil engineering at Karachi's NED Engineering College. While still in Karachi in 1959, he pioneered the concept of making sculpture by burning and transforming an object from one material (or form) to another. After establishing himself in Karachi, he left for London in 1964 (where he presently resides). In 1965, he pioneered minimalist sculpture, representing what is arguably the only Minimalism in Britain. After being active in several groups for liberation struggles, democracy and human rights, he began to write in 1975, and published his own art journals: Black Phoenix (1978), Third Text (1987) and Third Text Asia (2008). He also established online versions of Third Text in Cape Town, South Africa, entitled Third Text Africa, and the Spanish language Tercer Texto in Lima, Peru – both available free of cost to readers. He curated two significant exhibitions: The Essential Black Art (1987), The Other Story (Hayward Gallery, 1989); and, he is a recipient of three honorary doctorates (PhDs) from the universities of Southampton, East London and Wolverhampton (UK). In 2011, he developed a project that generated a comprehensive and inclusive history of art in postwar Britain, which was inclusive of all artists from all cultures who have contributed within the historical framework of modern developments. Rasheed Araeen published an autobiographical book, Making Myself Visible (1984), along with a second book, Art Beyond Art / Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the 21st Century (2010).

Select Solo Exhibitions

1963	The Arts Council Gallery, Karachi.
1974	Indus Gallery, Karachi.
1975	Artists for Democracy, London.
1984	Pentonville Gallery, London.
1986	Pentonville Gallery, London.
1987	'From Modernism to Postmodernism: Rasheed Araeen, A Retrospective: Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Cornerhouse, Manchester; John Hansard, Southampton; Chapter, Cardiff.
1988	The Showroom, London.
1991	The Central Space, London.
1993	'Strife and/or Strugure' Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka-Shi, Japan.
1994	SKUC Gallery, Ljubijana, Slovenia. V Habana Bienal, Havana, Cuba. South London Gallery, London.
1995	John Hansard Gallery, Southampton.
1996	The Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Luthuania. 'To Whom It May Concern' Serpentine Gallery (external project), London.
1997	The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Middlesbrough Art Gallery, Middlesbrough, UK.
2010	'Before and After Minimalism, 1959 - 1974', Aicon Gallery, London
2012	'Zero to Infinity', Tate Modern, London
2014	'Before and After Minimalism', Sharjah Art Foundation Art Spaces, Sharjah 'Homecoming', VM Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2015	'Rasheed Araeen – Minimalism Then and Now: 1960 – Present', Aicon Gallery, New York

Select Group Exhibitions

1957-64	numerous group exhibitions in Pakistan.
1970	'Manufactured Art', Camden Arts Centre, London.
1971	'SPACE', Midland Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK.
1973	'Artists from Five Continents', Swiss Cottage Library, London.
1975	'Vietnam Festival', Artists for Democracy,

- 1978 'Art for Society', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.
 1979 'Art from the British Left', Artists' Place, New York.
 Tape/Slide Show', Audio Arts, Riverside Studios, London.
 1980 'Accrochage', Gimpel Fils, London.
 'Koffer fur Rottweil', Forum Kunst, Rottweil; and Kunstverien, Freiburg.
 'Kontakt: From Contemplation to Agitation', Galleria MDM, Warsaw.
 1982 'New Art Platform', Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, UK.
 1983 'New Beginning', Pentonville Gallery, London.
 1984 'Creation for Liberation', Brixton Art Gallery, Brixton, London.
 1985 'Roadworks', Brixton Art Gallery, London.
 1986 'Conceptual Clothing', Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK.
 'From Two Words', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.
 1987 'Heros', Air Gallery, London.
 'State of the Nation', Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, UK
 1989 'Magiciens de la terre', Centre George Pompidou/La Villette, Paris.
 1989 'The Other Story', Hayward Gallery, London.
 1990 'New Necessity', First Tyne International, Gatehead, UK.
 1991 'Lost Illusions', Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada.
 'IV Habana Bienal', Havana, Cuba.
 1995 'Dialogue for Piece', Palais de Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.
 1996 'Inklusions:Exklusions', steirischer herbst, Graz, Austria.
 1997 '2nd Johannesburg Biennale', South Africa.
 1998 'every day', Sydney Biennale, Australia.
 1999 'Art-Worlds in Dialogue: From Gauguin to the Global Present', Museum
 Ludwig, Cologne, Germany.
 2000 'Live in Your Head', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.
 2001 'Live in Your Head', Museu do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal.
 2009 'The Death of the Audience', Wiener Secession, Vienna
 2010 'Raising Dust – Encounters in Relational Geography', Calvert22, London
 'A Rock and a Hard Place', Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Greece
 'A Missing History: The Other Story Re-visited', Aicon Gallery, London
 2011 'Situation Z art-cade', Galerie des grands bains douches de la Plaine, Marseille
 '3rd Thessaloniki Biennial of Contemporary Art', Greek State Museum of Contemporary
 Art, Thessaloniki
 '3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art', Old Intersections – Make it New, Thessaloniki
 Biennale of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki
 'The Global Contemporary', Art Worlds After 1989, ZKM Zentrum fur Kunst and \
 'Medientechnologie Karlsruhe', Karlsruhe
 'Super Farmer's Market', Handel Street Projects, London
 2012 '9th Gwangju Biennale', Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju
 'Migrations, Journeys into British Art', - Tate Britain, London
 2014 'Dark Waters Group exhibition', Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
 'Other Primary Structure's, The Jewish Museum, New York, USA
 'As Exciting As We Can Make It: Ikon in the 1980's', Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK

Public Collections

Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi, UAE
 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK.
 Arts Council of England
 CANAL PLUS, Paris.
 Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka-Shi, Japan.
 Wifredo Lam Centre, Havana, Cuba.
 Tate Gallery, London.
 Imperial War Museum, London.
 Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania.
 Museu de Arte Moderna Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro
 Arthr Gallery, Jeddah

Other biographical information

1962 Graduated in civil engineering, N.E.D, University of Karachi.

- 1964 Moved to London
- 1964-65 Architectural draughtsman with Wimpey Construction Co.
- 1965-69 Assistant architect/civil engineer, BHC/BP, London
- 1978 Founded/edited an art magazine, *Black Phoenix* (3 issues).
- 1982-84 Initiated and developed multiracial art/art education programme, as a result of which the Arts Council in 1994 established INIVA in London.
- 1984 Published a collection of writings, *Making Myself Visible*, Kala Press.
- 1987 Founding Editor of art journal *Third Text* (107 issues so far).
- 1989 Initiated and curated 'The Other Story' exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London
- 1995 Honorary Doctorate of Letters (PhD), University of Southampton.
- 1997 Honorary Doctorate of Arts (PhD), University of East London.
- 1998- Member, Advisory Board for the School of Communication, Design & Media, University of Westminster.
- 2001 Received an International Patent for an invention.
- 2003 Honorary Doctorate of Arts (PhD), University of Wolverhampton.

The artist lives and works in London, UK.

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