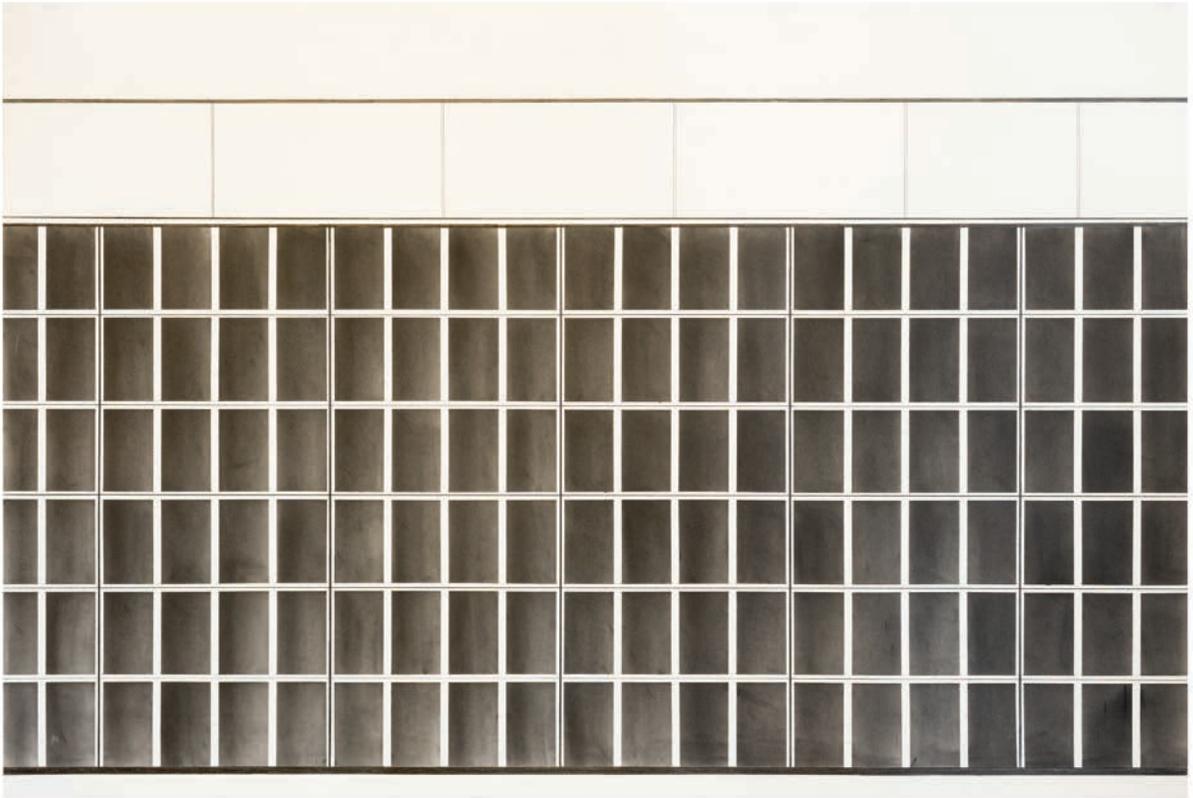


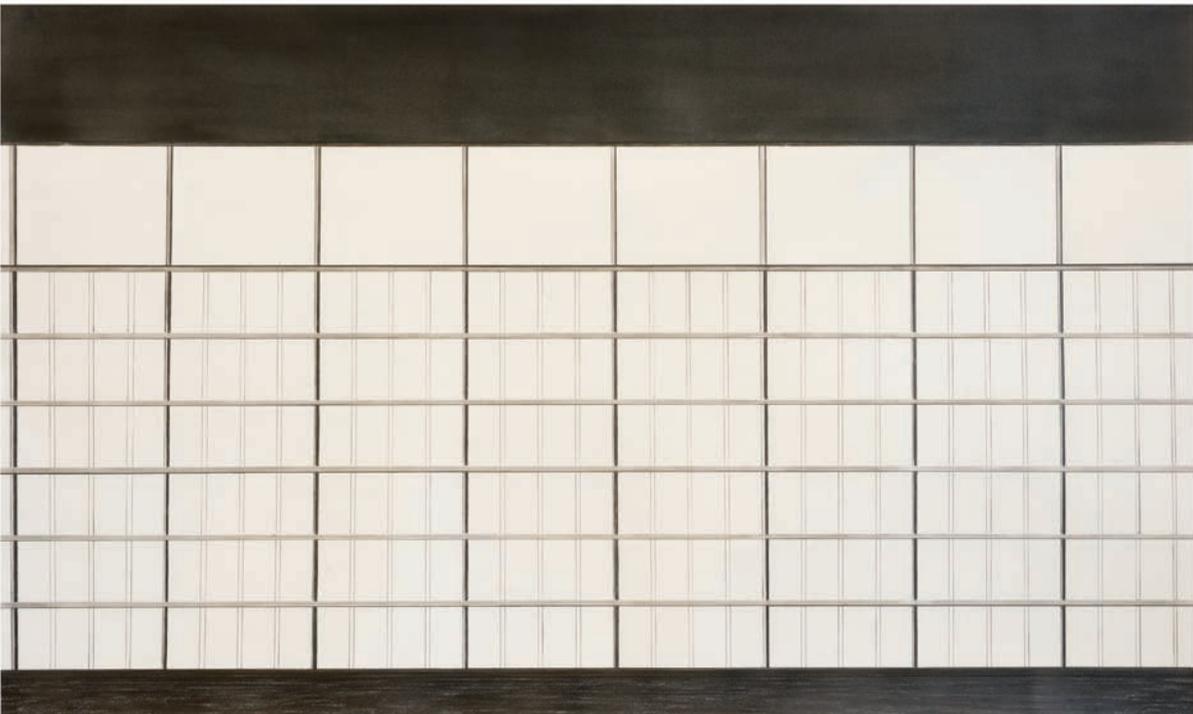
APPEX%

AVANTIKA BAWA

August 18, 2018 – February 10, 2019



Coliseum 01, 2016



Coliseum 02, 2016



Coliseum Blue, 2018

APEX: AVANTIKA BAWA

Over the last three years, Avantika Bawa has produced a series of works focused on Portland's iconic Veterans Memorial Coliseum. The project brings the artist's long-held interest in architecture and geometry to bear on the International Style building, designed by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and completed in 1960. Bawa's examination of the Coliseum's grids, lines, perspectives, and mass has developed into an exploration of abstraction and memory of a place.

Though drawing has long been a part of Bawa's practice, the Coliseum series brought it to the forefront, culminating in more than a hundred studies of the building. This intensive gaze stems from the artist's simultaneous love of architectural history and her deep—if not ecstatic—fandom of the Portland Trail Blazers basketball team.

Mostly created in graphite and pastel on paper, the crumbly medium of Bawa's *Coliseum* series runs up against the inevitable challenges of depicting the hard-edged, glassed surface of its

subject. Yet strikingly, the medium also seems to soften an otherwise block structure with nuances of gray. The occasional jolt of a flat red, blue, or yellow in the background reminds the viewer of the surrounding atmosphere.

Bawa first began working with the architecture of the Coliseum as a subject in 2015 for the thirtieth anniversary of the Visual Chronicle of Portland, a City-owned collection of works on paper commissioned by the Regional Arts and Culture Council. Concurrently she has embarked on a number of other site-specific projects, including *Parallel Faults* (2017), an examination of fault lines at Los Angeles Valley College; *Beyond the Wall* (2017), which brought the surrounding landscape into the Annex Space of the Bush Barn Art Center in Salem, Oregon; and *Mineral Spirits* (2016), a project for the Portland Biennial in which she erected golden scaffolds in the defunct Astor Hotel in Astoria, Oregon, and bounced field recording sounds off the walls. In her responses to these locales, Bawa is perceptive of terrain, color, and architectural

nuances. Similar to artists like Daniel Buren or Sol LeWitt, Bawa works with a set of self-imposed rules while exploring various potential outcomes within them.

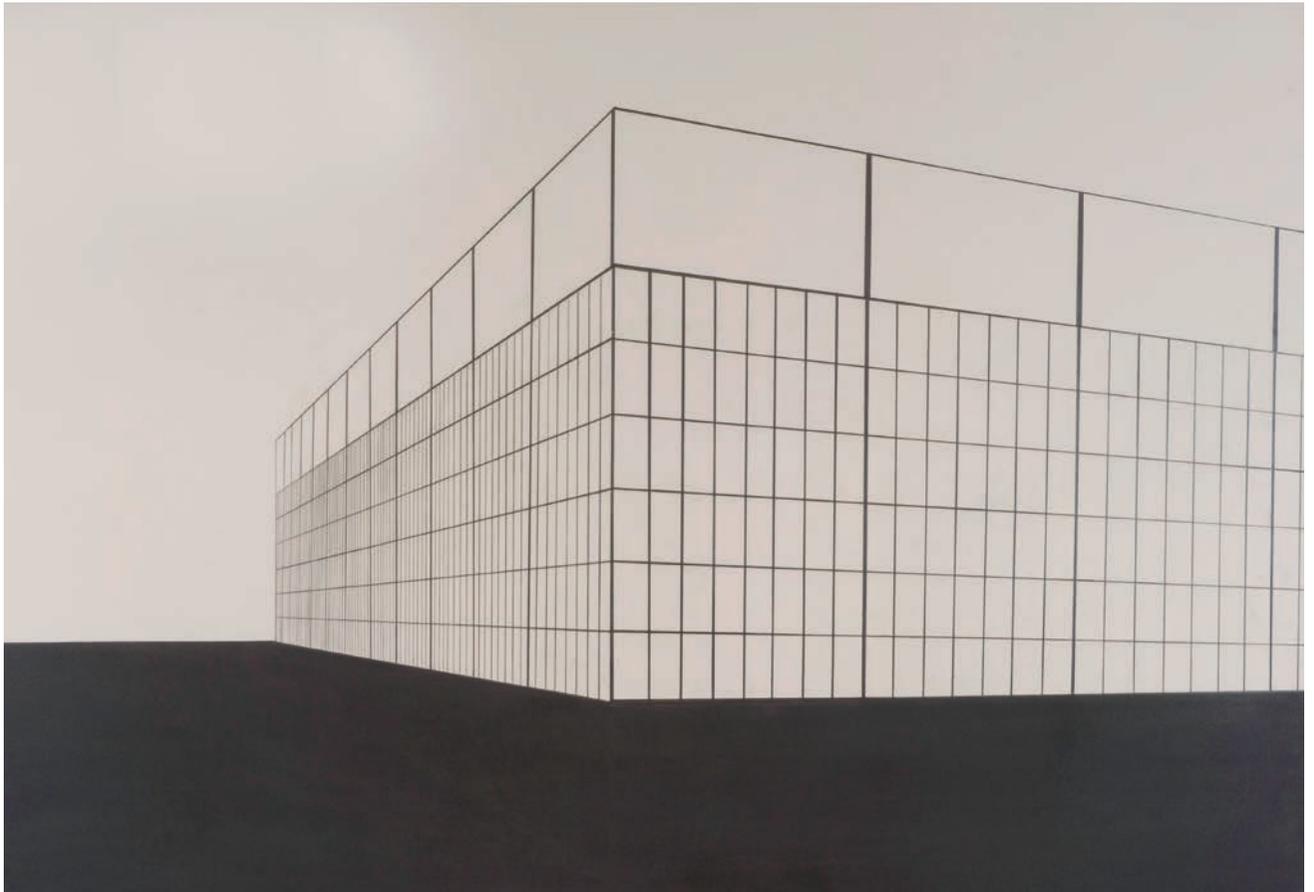
In *Coliseum 17* (2017) and her print series created at Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts this summer, Bawa's approach brings to mind Ed Ruscha's dramatic two-point perspective depictions of gas stations in Los Angeles. The singular focus of this gridded structure is also reminiscent of Ruscha's *Parking Lots* (1967/1999), where an aerial view of a gridded parking lot turns further into grids among other aerial views of parking lots. Bawa's intensive look at the exterior of the Coliseum on occasion hints at the sensual bowl curve housed within the steel and glass frame, but most of the works have a frontal perspective, viewing the body in the landscape similar to Lewis Baltz's *The New Industrial Parks series* (1974), capturing a stark landscape dominated by a building rather than a natural environment.

Though none of the works depart from the Coliseum as a subject, Bawa's sensitivity to her locale is revealing and these affects can be recognized in her work. Most notably, during her

recent spring residency at Nes Artist Residency in Skagatrönd, Iceland, Bawa continued her drawings of the Coliseum, but they differ in their lightness and gray-blue atmosphere. The three works in the APEX exhibition produced during this residency reveal less contrasted grids and a softer delineation between the foreground and background.

Just as Bawa's work is informed by the places in which she works, Bawa also gives in to and acknowledges the flaws in her memory. *Coliseum 15* (2017) appears to be a straight on view. She captures the various gridded distinctions in this horizontal structure, but instead of twelve columns on the façade, Bawa illustrates it with eleven. Rather than seeing the work as a failure of memory, Bawa folds this drawing into the mix of her study of the historic building—it is a body of work made to know the building and, in particular, Bawa's relationship to it.

The Coliseum was the original home of the Trail Blazers until the team's move to the Rose Garden arena in 1995. The 12,000-seat venue is the historic site of three NBA Finals, including the Blazers' sole championship in 1977. Just recently, in 2016, the



Coliseum 17, 2017

Coliseum was recognized for its architectural significance with its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Given this history, it is a celebrated building, admired by many in the local and architectural communities.

The Coliseum is located on the east bank of the Willamette River, in Portland's Albina district, a black community shaped by labor migration during World War II and the Vanport City flooding in 1948. After voters approved the construction of the Coliseum in 1956, commercial establishments and 476 homes, about half of which were inhabited by African Americans, were razed. Further destruction of the community was facilitated by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which allowed for the demolition of several hundred additional homes in the Eliot neighborhood to make way for Interstate 5 and Highway 99, splicing through Albina. In 1957, Portland's Exposition-Recreation Commission announced a declaration of the east side site between the Broadway and Steel bridges as the location for the arena. In that same year, the Housing Act of 1957 further uprooted the Albina neighborhood.¹ This cascade of bureaucratic maneuvers led to the forced displacement of the community where the Coliseum now resides.

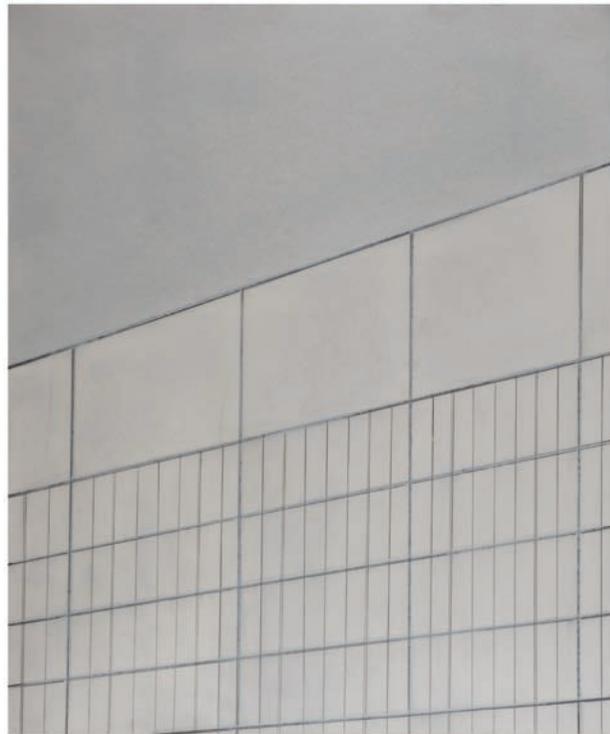
How do we remember a place or a site? How can we simultaneously hold the admirable architecture of the Coliseum, the celebration of the Blazers' original home, and the veterans the building honors, while also holding in our memory a place of great joy, community, displacement, and heartache? How do we hold these memories together instead of erasing an inconvenient one for an easier one?

Bawa's prolific study of the Coliseum does not specifically address these difficult questions, but it is a combination of perspectives, blips of color, misremembered columns, atmospheric changes, gradations, and soft contrasts that bring her far closer to understanding the historic building than any single rendering could attempt. Her approach to the *Coliseum* series is a revelation in illustrating that despite the formal practices in the work, the breadth of the artist's own locations and relationship becomes transparent through this body.

—Grace Kook-Anderson

The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art

¹ Karen J. Gibson, "Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment, 1940–2000," *Transforming Anthropology*, Volume 15, Issue No. 1 (2007): 11. Further discussions with artist Sharita Towne around this topic—also a subject of her work— informed a deeper perspective of this recent history.



Coliseum Blur 1c, 2018

BIOGRAPHY

Avantika Bawa (b. 1973) is an artist, curator, and educator based in Portland and often resides in her hometown, New Delhi, India. Bawa has an MFA in Painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA in the same from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. She has participated in the Skowhegan, MacDowell Colony, Kochi Biennial Foundation, and Djerassi residencies, among others. Bawa has exhibited at institutions nationally and internationally including the Schneider Museum, Ashland, OR; Suyama Space, Seattle, WA; Saltworks Gallery and the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, GA; Nature Morte and Gallery Maskara in India; and White Box and Disjecta, Portland, OR. In 2004 she was part of a team that launched *Drain*, an online journal for contemporary art and culture. In 2014 Avantika was appointed to the board of the Oregon Arts Commission. She is currently an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at Washington State University, Vancouver, WA.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All are courtesy of the artist. Photo by Dale Strouse.

Coliseum 01, 2016

Graphite and pastel on paper
24 x 36 inches

Collection of the Regional Arts and Culture Council, Portland

Coliseum 02, 2016

Graphite and pastel on paper
21 x 36 inches

Collection of the Regional Arts and Culture Council, Portland

Coliseum 24, 2018

Graphite and pastel on paper
60 x 40 inches

Coliseum 29, 2017

Graphite and pastel on paper
60 x 40 inches

Coliseum 17, 2017

Graphite on paper
40 x 60 inches

Coliseum, Dark Red Sky, 2018

Lithograph

14 x 10 inches

Printed at Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts

Coliseum, Red Sky, 2018

Photopolymer Lithograph

14 x 10 inches

Printed at Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts

Coliseum, Grey Sky, 2017

Photopolymer Gravure

14 x 10 inches

Printed at Washington State University Vancouver

Coliseum Black, 2018

Acrylic and oil pastel on wood panel

80 x 120 inches

Coliseum 14, 2017

Graphite and pigment on paper

30 x 22 inches

Coliseum Blue, 2018

Graphite and acrylic on wood panel

80 x 120 inches

Coliseum 16, 2017

Graphite on paper

40 x 60 inches

Coliseum Blur 1a, 2018

Graphite, color pencil and pigment on paper

17 x 14 inches

Coliseum Blur 1b, 2018

Graphite, color pencil and pigment on paper

17 x 14 inches

Coliseum Blur 1c, 2018

Graphite, color pencil and pigment on paper

17 x 14 inches

Coliseum 15, 2017

Graphite, pigment on paper

22 x 30 inches

Coliseum 20, 2018

Graphite on paper

22 x 30 inches

Coliseum 27, 2018

Graphite, pigment and oil pastel on paper

22 x 30 inches

Coliseum White, 2018

Graphite, acrylic and oil pastel on wood panel

53 x 120 inches

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 125-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art.

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