

JHAVERI CONTEMPORARY

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Anwar Jalal Shemza
Paper | Print | Collage
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Jhaveri Contemporary is proud to present a second solo presentation of works by Anwar Jalal Shemza.

An important modern artist from Pakistan, Shemza belongs to a generation of artists who emerged in the wake of decolonization. He arrived in Britain in 1956 to study at the Slade School of Fine Art, where a facility in drawing was a pre-requisite for entry to the main courses in painting and sculpture.

Two drawings in the exhibition, from his student years, display Shemza's innovative use of muslin and ink to create images that hover between abstraction and representation. Debates about abstraction in painting were swirling around Britain at the time as a result of major travelling exhibitions of American art at the Tate Galleries. *Berne* (1957) is inspired by a trip to Switzerland to study the works of Paul Klee, an artist Shemza greatly admired.

While at the Slade, Shemza received a British Council scholarship for an intensive course in etching and lithography under Antony Gross. Shemza embraced a range of rare and experimental printmaking techniques, including relief printing, and often combined different plates to achieve dense and luminous textures. He used the letters B and D of the Roman alphabet as building blocks for many of his compositions, comparing the final effect to the marble screens of the Sheesh Mahal at Lahore Fort.

It was not till the 1960s, while teaching at Stafford College, that Shemza met John Coleman who introduced him to colour printing. In *Royal Palace*, *Green Window* and *Brown Fortress*, all made in 1968, Shemza turns his attention to cityscapes, simplifying Islamic architectonic symbols such as domes, minarets and arches into geometric shapes. In *Meem* (1964), he returns to alphabets and calligraphy, turning the first letter of the Prophet's name into a simple and elegant composition.

Collage played an equally important role in Shemza's creative journey. In *Sun and the Sea* (1966), he turns to the formal qualities of wood to capture the British landscape. By arranging sawn-off unpainted legs of chairs, in varying diameter and height, Shemza captures the gentle swell and ebb of the ocean on his visits to the seaside towns of the English coast.

Wood is also the support for the final drawing in the exhibition, *Roots* (1983). Instead of pen and ink, Shemza uses pyrography – the controlled application of a heated object onto wood, his skill evident in the range of tones and shades he creates by varying the type of implement used and the pressure and temperature with which it is applied.

While the delicate plant forms are inspired by the many hours spent tending the large garden of his family home in Stafford, the roots rely on the creative manipulation of Arabic script to the point of illegibility. For Shemza, England was his home but his roots remained always in his homeland in Pakistan.

From the 1960s till his death in 1985, Anwar Jalal Shemza exhibited regularly at Print Biennales in Europe and Japan. He has also participated in Biennales devoted to Engraving in Argentina. More recently, his prints have been included in *Printmakers of Pakistan*, Bradford (1997) and *Trajectories: 19th – 21st Century Printmaking from India and Pakistan*, Sharjah Art Museum (2014).