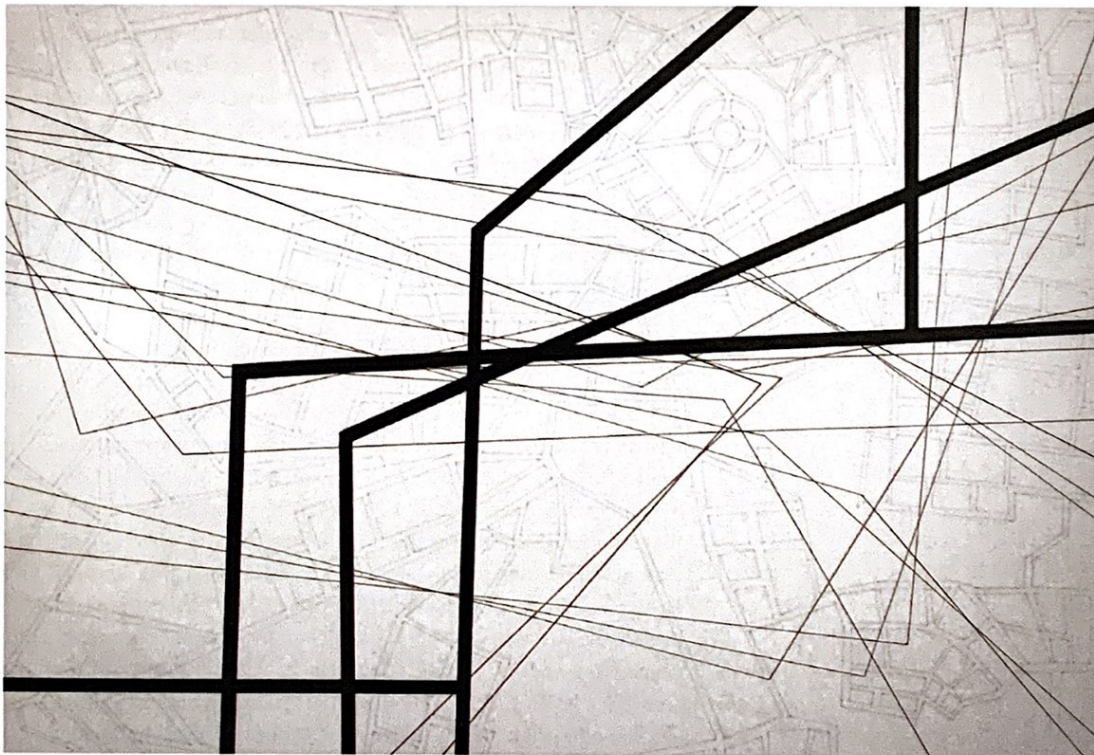


# LIFE LINES



As the Emerging Artist of the Year, 2014, **Chetnaa Verma** is representing India at the Glenfiddich Artist in Residence (AiR) programme along with other recipients from other parts of the world. An abstractionist by nature and a minimalist in practice, she tries to capture and reflect the city's architecture deconstructed into horizontals and verticals. **Abhiruchi Jain** catches up with her for a heart-to-heart.



**For a lot of our readers, Chetnaa Verma the artist and her work might not ring a bell. What kind of style or work do you do?**

Art for me has always been an attempt to capture the essence of a form rather than its mere outward appearance. An abstractionist by nature and a minimalist in practice, I try to capture and reflect the city's architecture deconstructed into horizontals and verticals.

**Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

Born and brought up in the Capital, I feel I'm lucky to witness the city evolve and transform over the years. I have been a part of many exhibitions in Delhi, Chandigarh, Chennai and Brussels. Currently, my work is moving into a new direction with experimentation in installations with laser lights though it continues to conform to the ethos of my geometrical drawings.

**Where do you get your inspiration from?**

Lines are everywhere...  
 Lines can make you wait...  
 Lines can hold you back...  
 Lines can set you free...  
 Lines can keep you together...  
 Lines can set you apart...  
 But eventually what matters are the lines that you leave behind...  
 My works owe a lot to the urban grid that we are a part of, or rather that is there because of us. Essentially geometric in nature, my works illustrate the journeys of a moving point, a Bindu. The beginning and end of all – a Bindu, or a point in English, when progresses, the trajectory it leaves behind can be called a line. From a point to a line, my works encapsulates the trails left behind them.

I believe that these lines and points are an inevitable part of our existence, which are there

everywhere around us and are constantly following us wherever we go, for example, the street wires, electric poles etc.

**That's really interesting. Can you tell us any artists who have influenced you in your line of work?**

It will be very hard to say, or name an artist since art is a very personal development. On your course towards development of one's art, an artist is constantly moved psychologically by not only other artists, but also their own personal surroundings and environment. In my case, since I travel a lot on the city road, it is my constant quest to abstract the cityscape to a form of minimal geometric purity that could be visually consumed in an instant. I would like to quote Oscar Wilde here from his essay, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, 1891: "A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist."

**Abstracts have been part of the western art movement. Any western influence in your work?**

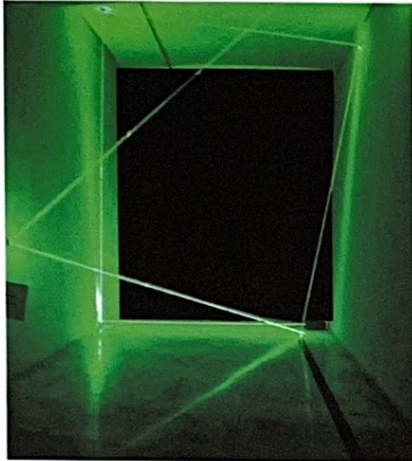
Well, the term abstraction itself owes its inception to the western art. Kandinsky, Mondrian and the German Bauhaus movement are some of my favourite and the biggest influencers in my journey as an artist.

**You must be going to different art galleries to showcase your work**



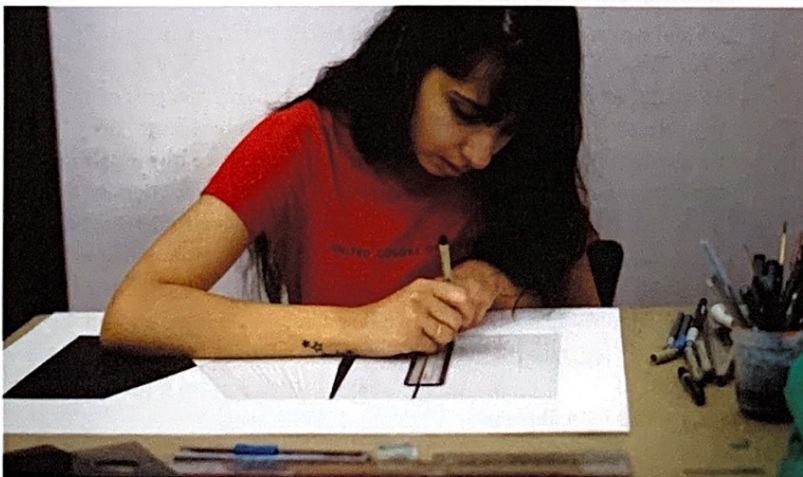
**or see others. How do you see art when you go to a gallery?**

I go with an open mind whenever I visit a gallery for somewhere some artist has put his heart and soul in creating the work in front of you. It is the artist's personal dialogue with himself and his material, therefore I believe an artwork should be felt and absorbed without any influences.



**How would you describe your work and what meaning do you draw out of it?**

I'm often asked as to how I would describe my work, or the underlying story that people believe would facilitate a reading of my works. I rather feel that my works speak for themselves. They do not need any long-winded narration to support them. Each work is a harmonious order in the layering of maps, lines and angles — drawn on and threaded through the paper, flexible and tenuous all at once. I have no explanation to go along as to why a line has been overlaid over another in the manner that it is. The works are rather a representation of the deconstruction of the complex city grid into a simple and minimalist array of vertical and horizontal moving points and its trajectory.



**How has working with different people helped you grow as an artist? Any new techniques that you saw and later inculcated in your work?**

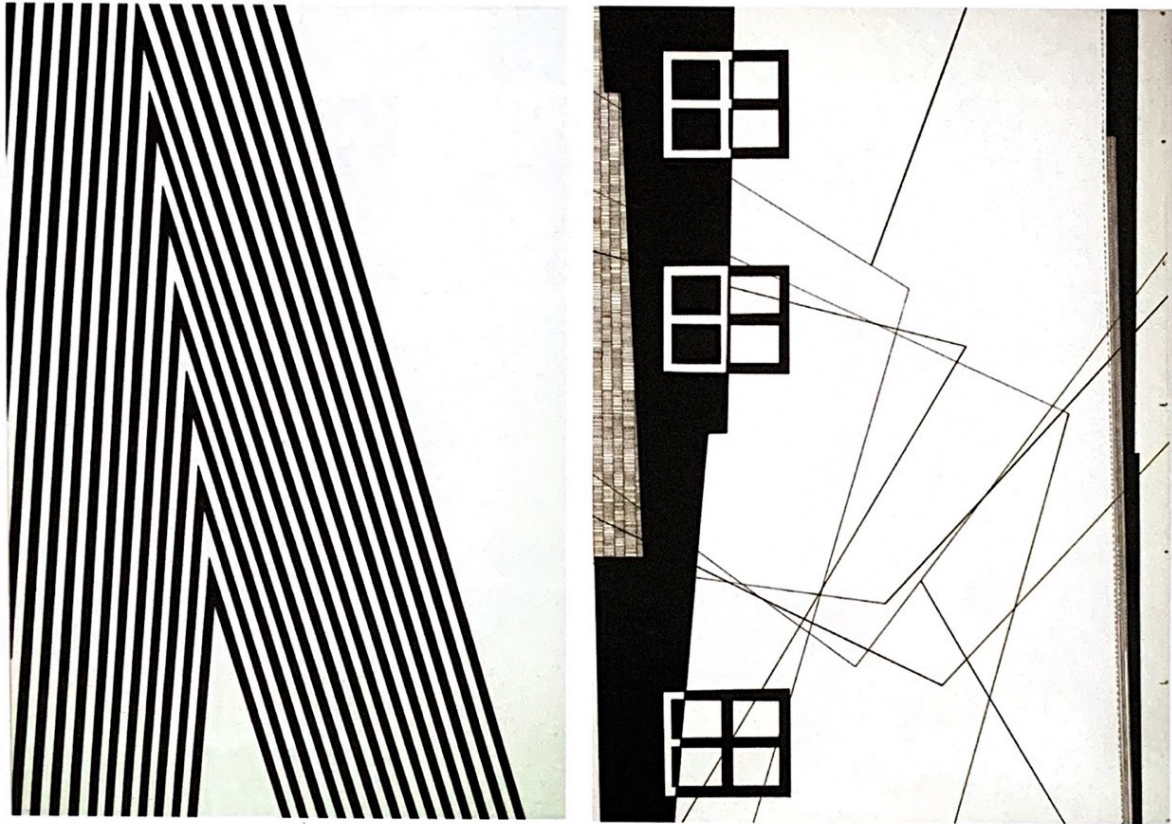
It is always great to be working along with other artists practicing various genres of art. The synergies that come together have always resulted in the creation of something special and something relevant to the space. I feel when you are working with different artists, more than new techniques it's the communication, the criticism, the art scenario in different parts of the world, or even in India that comes forth and is something that helps one grow in their practice. The idea of sharing a space outside your studio and being together with like-minded sensibilities is what helps u grow as an artist.

**What kind of experimentation do you do when it comes to using new technology or different techniques that have come into use?**

The concept of my lines is straight and simple and yet they are perfectly balanced in their discourse. Another dimension of my lines is explored through laser installations. These lines come to life, interjecting, crossing, turning, twitching, reflecting, deflecting and interlocking – they seem to be forming their own path here and yet conforming to the ethos of my geometrical drawings.

**What is your opinion when it comes to young artists like yourself and how our generation sees the field of art?**

I feel we have come a long way and the generation today respects an artist and his or her art. People now consider art more than a piece of mere decoration on their wall to, in fact, reflect or



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make a statement about themselves. However, in my opinion I feel we do need to start the basic study of understanding an artwork right at the school level. Instead of having only a special privileged few learning and understanding the nuances of art, a module should be introduced whereby at least the pioneers of Indian art should be read and understood.

**Tell us a little bit about your journey and how has your work grown over time?**

The journey of an artist is a lifelong commitment towards being true to oneself and their art. I have been lucky enough to have found my support in my better half, which has enabled me to concentrate more effectively towards realising my dreams and turning them into reality over the years.

The language an artist develops through practice only gets better with time. In my case too, my works

seem to be getting more simplified in representation as well as in their meanings.

**What are you involved in at the moment? We would love to hear about what you are doing in Europe and how has the experience been so far?**

As the Emerging Artist of the Year, 2014, I'm very proud to be representing my country here at the Glenfiddich Distillery amongst the other recipients from the respective parts of the world. The Glenfiddich Artist in residence (AiR) programme plays host to various visual artists from around the globe, working in diverse media, including paint, sculpture and installation. A different land, a new territory with bright and helpful people around you has been a wonderful experience so far. With no set boundaries or limitations, the residency aims to bring forth the best of what the artist has to offer

from the ever so peaceful and the quiet of the town where the distillery is situated.

**What is the difference in the working environment in India and in Europe? How has the experience of exchanging ideas with artists from world over been for you?**

The first and most foremost would be the coming together of so many synergies from all over the world. And it's really great to know and understand the different cultures people are from. The working environment that has been provided to us has been extremely conducive and supportive and freedom to experiment with the range of options, or rather work along the structure of the place itself. But I feel it's the same in India also now, people are more responsive to experimental work and are accepting art as an extension to an artist rather than a mere wall hanging. I think it's wonderful opportunity for myself and I'm sure for all of us to get to know each other and our respective cultures and to be more appreciative of the same. It's actually nice to know how some one is working with only light and sound is yet able to express, or how someone actually involved the locals here to create a piece of themselves in bronze. I'm currently involved in the archival maps and the topography of the place and trying to form a balance within my works.

**Can you elaborate a little about your work?**

I'm fascinated by the result of White on White - a current series of my works - including 'Blanc Sur Blanc' and 'Finestre Finestra' are part of my ongoing quest with the same. Playing with recession and accession of paper on paper itself, the contrasts' and the edges the work has to offer enamours me to go deeper into layering sheets of plain white paper with itself. Also, I have now tried to add a new dimension or rather a new colour to my otherwise black and white projections on paper. Certain parts of the works are now layered with pure 22 and 24 carat gold. The reason for using gold essentially is because it holds a lot of value and has a very pious feel to it. Also, gold can be claimed to be the purest of all metals as well. The work, Crossways of a Diagonal, is a recent work of mine, reflecting the essential sensibilities often attached to my works. With the underlayering of the city map in not so bold lines, the diagonals intersect perfectly conforming to a balanced and a harmonious reflection of the city grid.

**THE GLENFIDDICH PROGRAMME**

Breakthrough and award-winning artists from all over the world – the UK, USA, Mexico, Chile, India, China, Korea and more – are invited to use their historic setting, deep in the highlands, to create original pieces of art. "Every summer over the last decade, the programme brings bright new talent to stay together," says the Glenfiddich communique.

**THE ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE PROGRAMME**

This summer, it's the 13th year of the Artists in Residence programme. This year the distillery plays host to 11 visual artists from around the globe, working in diverse media, including paint, sculpture and installation. As always, Glenfiddich is grateful to the selection partners at IT Park, Taipei. Don Gallery, Shanghai. Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, NYC, and the Royal Academy in London for their ongoing assistance.

**Any dream projects you would like to share with us?**

Wow, if only dreams and wishes had wings... Well, there are many! Some in the heart, some in the mind, some on paper, inked to remember...

One of the few would be creating a light installation. An installation that just involves light either natural or not, the effect it creates while only peeping through a small creek. The various lines and spaces that it will form has left me surrounded with ideas and the various possibilities one can create. As an extension of my experiments with laser, I would like to create an Infinity zone, or a zone which I would like to term as the 'Shunya' zone. A zone which will allow one to connect or to reconnect with oneself and realise that life is too short, and happiness lies in small things around us. So look and feel life and live it rather than just being alive!