

SARAH SHEPARD

GALLERY & ART ADVISORY

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Marta Elise Johansen  
*A Suggestion of Nature*  
March II - May 8, 2021



Sarah Shepard Gallery is pleased to announce its first solo exhibit with Bay Area artist Marta Elise Johansen (b. 1980, Rawalpindi, Pakistan) who makes beautifully sculptural, methodical and immersive line drawings. For this show the artist investigates the id, ego, and superego, to illustrate how we emotionally connect to humanity. In a current moment of physical human distancing these drawings remind us we are all connected emotionally and spiritually. Johansen calls these invisible connections shadow layers and believes they offer a way through the barriers of age, race, sexuality, and physical limitation. Working only in natural light, she draws with one pen at a time, one line at a time, one drawing at a time - never overlapping - until a drawing is complete.

Johansen is interested in the way our sense of self is defined by this mental and physical connection to our environment. The largest drawings attempt to embody our mental sense of self - our basic instincts, the reality of ourselves and our morals - learned and ideal. The small to mid-scale drawings identify how we uniquely relate to the natural world through a physical sense of self. They are personal reflections of the artist's place in the world - a sensory reflection of her experience. These themes are shared within humanity, but each impression or experience is unique, resonating in themes of magnetism or gravity, resonance or connection, isolation or alienation, and pleasure. The work does not mimic nature and is not a literal representation. Johansen is attempting to establish order out of impression, pacify chaotic urges and delineate emotion through process.

Formally trained as an architect, inspired by artists such as Vija Celmins, and raised in a creatively driven household, Johansen is driven in her practice - rooted in a strong work ethic, formal discipline and technical skill. Her mother, an American textile designer and consultant for the United Nations, met her father, a Norwegian engineer who designed railway systems in Asia, while working in Pakistan. That was where Johansen was born and raised until they moved to a farmhouse in Vermont when she was five to be closer to family. Growing up in a household that was frequently visited by her parent's friends from all over the world, including her mother's circle from the Black Mountain College scene, led her from a young age to appreciate the cultural arts.

"When I learned to draw, the first lessons were to draw 'living lines'. Almost twenty years later, I find myself living in the lines I draw... To follow a line, a curve, to slow down and see everything one line at a time. I find character in each precise movement.. I am constantly evolving but always returning to the line." - Marta Elise Johansen

The gallery is currently open Tuesday - Saturday from 11-4pm or by appointment. We have strict social distancing measures in place allowing only a few visitors inside the space at once and mandatory face coverings required.

For more information contact sarah@sarahshepardgallery.com or 917-375-2720.

Image: © Marta Elise Johansen, *Three Parts of Self | Id, Ego, Superego*, 2019, ink on paper, 53 x 41 1/4 in.  
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