

PROFILE



88A-L (2021) A series of 12 screenprints on Somerset Satin Radiant White 410gsm, each: 420 x 294 mm. Editions: 20. © Rana Begum 2022.
Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Mark Blower



No. 784 Baskets (2017) Installation at Kettles Yard. Photo: Paul Allit

Seeking the Essence

Whether working with baskets, mesh or print, **Rana Begum** investigates the inherent properties of space, light and colour in the medium, writes **Romina Provenzi**

‘There are always things that I want to be doing and ideas that I want to be pushing, or materials that I want to be exploring,’ enthuses Rana Begum. Being elected as a Royal Academician in 2019 gave Begum the strength to be more ambitious with her projects as well as new opportunities for conversations with artists, writers, architects, musicians and designers. ‘An artist needs to explore and have all the doors open, and have conversations with people from all different kinds of backgrounds and disciplines to

develop their art practice further. For example, I have always been fascinated by space and by how architects are able to manipulate light, and physically experience space and light in a way that another person wouldn’t normally do. For me, this is what opens up the possibilities that otherwise I wouldn’t have seen within my own work.’ Due to her highly inquisitive character, Begum explores numerous mediums through her practice including printmaking, drawing, sculpture, painting and design. Her show *The Space Between* in 2016 at the former Parasol unit foundation space in London,



Rana Begum in her studio. © Rana Begum 2022. Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Philip White

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represented a turning point in helping her to find the narrative to connect her work in all its different mediums. The exhibition unfolded a thread in front of her eyes, connecting her art practice to the body of work now and in future.

As an artist fascinated by the possibilities of the unknown, Begum was initially won over by printmaking as a medium due to its element of surprise. Last year, Begum made 12 new screenprints using geometric abstraction to explore the relationship of colours in printmaking as Begum says, 'Printmaking allows me to be more focused as I have to think carefully only about how one colour sits with the other and their interaction.' These recent prints are called *88 A-L* (2021) and they are based on the use of reflector tape as a material. 'With the drawings, I was really struggling with



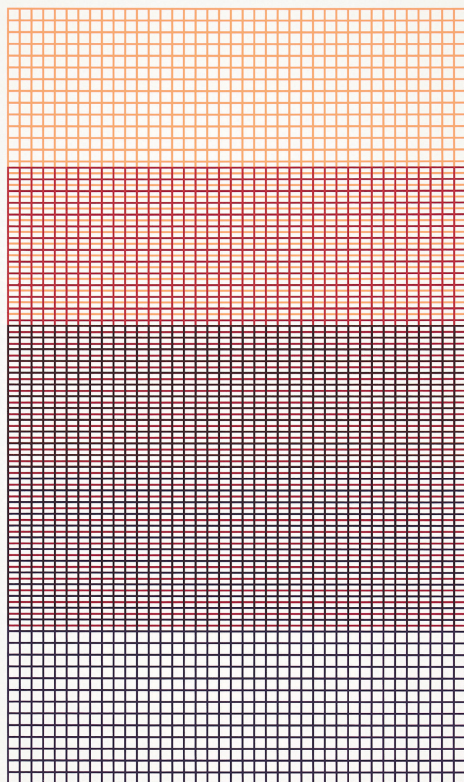
No. 673 M Drawing (2016) and *No. 480* (2013) *The Space Between* at Parasol Unit, 2016. Photo: Jack Hems

the reflector tape. I had to find a way to keep it down because it kept lifting off the surface, given it is a type of material that won't stay attached for longer than a month without extra adhesive. Despite the challenges, I loved the geometry and the reflectiveness of the reflector tape as well as their combination, which allows this

material to have a beautiful movement,' Begum explains. The prints have the textural quality of the drawings without the technical complications of using an adhesive tape. It is a unique series which plays with surface texture: what the viewer sees depends on the viewpoint. The series will be included in Rana



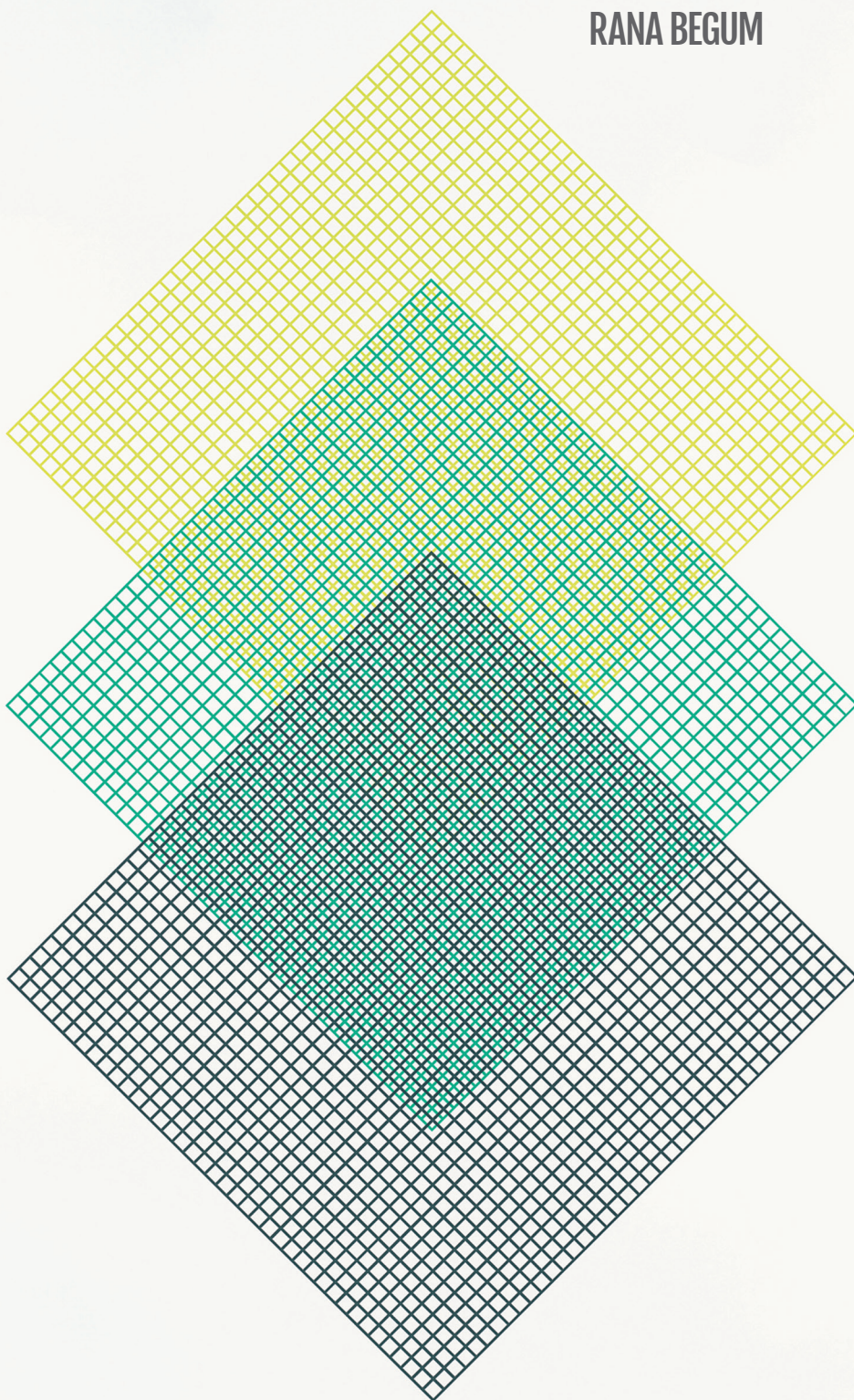
88B (detail) (2021) One from a series of 12 screenprints on Somerset Satin Radiant White 410gsm, 420 x 294 mm. Edition: 20. © Rana Begum 2022. Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Todd-White Photography



No. 924 Mesh (2019) Screenprint on Somerset Tub Sized Satin 410gsm paper, 795 x 470 mm. Edition: 20. © Rana Begum 2022. Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Maxwell Anderson

Begum's first solo print exhibition at Cristea Roberts Gallery in June. The comprehensive exhibition will also include all previous series of prints and a recent one based on lenticular movements that encourages the viewer to navigate the physical space around the work to fully experience it.

Begum enjoys experimenting with printmaking as well as with other mediums because of her desire to explore materials and her excellence at working manually. She tells me, 'I love being hands on because you can't really understand materials without having them in your hands and being at one with them to be able to understand their possibilities. If you don't work with your hands, you end up losing the "questions and answers" process that is something I love so much.' The elements of light, colour and space come up several times in our conversation and are constantly present and intertwined in everything she creates, but in truth it is the material she selects



No. 925 Mesh (2019) Screenprint on Somerset Tub Sized Satin 410gsm paper, 1090 x 660 mm. Edition: 20. © Rana Begum 2022. Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Prudence Cumming Photography

for each specific project that is the essence of her work. *No. 473 Baskets* (2013) consists of wicker baskets forming a sculptural installation that Begum made in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The material not only allowed light to come through but

also celebrated colour at the same time. There is no question that the artist is driven by a search for the interaction between colours and how that influences the composition of her work whatever medium she is working with.

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No. 861 (2018) A set of 15 etchings with chine collé on Somerset and Canson Mi-Teintes paper, each: 248 x 196 mm. Edition: 20. © Rana Begum 2022. Image courtesy Cristea Roberts Gallery. Photo: Maxwell Anderson

Begum is determined to avoid being pigeonholed and this is evident in all her work. Early on in her career Begum was categorised as a female, Muslim artist using colour (and researching the use of light and geometry). She explains that ‘undoubtedly, there is an influence from Islamic art and architecture in my work that is coming from the faith I grew up in, although I feel that it is not about gender or being a Muslim artist, but solely about the work and how it interacts in a space with light. Geometry, light and colour are all words that are universally understood so I get more excited about the idea of using a universal language that everyone will understand.’ Rana Begum encourages younger artists not to fall into the temptation of defining themselves and their work too early, or allowing others to finalise and pigeonhole their work because

as she says of her motivation, ‘I want people to respond to the work and take something of their own from my work.’

Being elected as a Royal Academician made a significant difference to Begum. ‘These amazing artists that I respect and admire, they voted for me and welcomed me into this prestigious institution. It was a clear sign of encouragement and allowed me to be more ambitious and to get involved with more challenging projects. Immediately in the art world the fact you are a Royal Academician brings respect, thanks to the title as well as the network and visibility you gain. Amazingly it feels strange and great to be part of a place and a community such as the Royal Academy because your views can be heard and you can have some kind of impact,’ she reveals.

Begum is busier and busier as the year progresses. Her exhibition *Dappled Light* at the Mead Gallery at the Warwick Arts Centre in West Midlands opened in January (until 13 March) and then tours to Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery in March; she has been chosen as a committee member for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, coordinated by Alison Wilding RA on the theme CLIMATE; she will be unveiling a large, public art piece in April for The Line at London City Island before opening her solo exhibition at Cristea Roberts Gallery. We look forward to what is guaranteed to be a joyful exploration of materials and their inherent properties.

Rana Begum has a solo exhibition of works on paper at Cristea Roberts Gallery 10 June – 30 July