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## **The intriguing work of Huma Bhabha**

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The work of artist Huma Bhabha is intriguing, mystifying and captivating. A small but powerful show of her work is now at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield. Bhabha's work has been shown nationally and is collected by the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Aldrich has chosen her for its 2008 Emerging Artist Award.



One installation and six works on paper clearly reflect how Bhabha portrays human disparity. Bhabha, 46, was born in Karachi, Pakistan, studied art in America and lives in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. She tackles themes of displacement, estrangement from one's homeland and the captive state of inadaptability.

Her installation "Bumps in the Road" is framed by considerable empty space and echoes a sense of isolation. Two pieces sit on a small black platform whose thick, sludgy surface is unrelentless, holding both structures with an ominous gravity. One piece - a chair - is a torso. In most of her sculpture, Bhabha uses clay, wood, wire, Styrofoam, metal studs, acrylic paint, cast iron, burlap, newsprint and sand. The chair offers the human form as emaciated, crusty, stuck in a mired hold.

From the back of the chair is a squat face protruding from chicken wire; the spine of a seemingly petrified rat is the nose replete with hanging tail protruding from the nostrils; a gash of bent, black metal with screw holes serves as the eyes. An oversized, brittle, pink ear hovers over a low-slung, human arm (doubling as the chair arm), sweeping forward, ending

in an outstretched hand. The densely textured face in the back of the chair gives way to an architectural front. Laden, horizontal concrete slabs are the seat of the chair doubling as the floor, much like a

diminutive set with a single standing wall of what could be a bombed-out building - merging humanity with desolation.

To the side of the chair are two tall wooden "legs" whose lengthy feet are steel eye beams, immobile as snow skis trudging against the platform's inconsequential, coarse black terrain. Frozen mid-stride, the legs are denied forward or backward motion.

Limbs, like the legs in this piece, also are depicted in Bhabha's prints, which use photographs and ink. In one, drawn, inked feet are hindered in red viscous layers, organically breaking down in smudgy blurs. In another, the vista is a rough, red terrain framed closely by two legs from the calves down. The two are among Bhabha's six prints created within the last year and are all called "Untitled." They line up outside the gallery opposite a floor-to-ceiling window wall and because the prints are covered with glass, the reflections make it difficult to clearly see the work.

One print has a large, straight-lined, blue-inked square contrastingly imposed on a picture of a decomposing construction site with spiking rebar and piled rocks. The background is a turbulent gray sky imploding from bits of muted sepia and olive shadings, merging with a large rocky hill. Looming down the center of the watery blue square is a large, long black figure. The perspective constantly shifts here only to be stilled by a subtly placed, small picnic table tucked in the lower corner.

Another print uses a picture of a similar construction site. Here, a line of dirt and rock pilings swerves up in an S curve from the lower part of the frame. The curve reaches back to a deep blue "ocean" that sweeps up to a dominating backdrop - a translucent curtain of color, at first thin, opaque, then ultimately flowing into a sweeping, deep-blue tsunami wave with a magenta crest. Both prints instill Bhabha's ability to create tension by partnering reality's rough, harsh textures with silky, dreamlike colors.

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"Huma Bhabha: 2008 Emerging Artist Award Exhibition" will run through Feb. 8 at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main St., Ridgefield. Call 438-4519 or visit [www.aldrichart.org/](http://www.aldrichart.org/).

