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Installation view of **AFRUZ AMIGHI**'s "Echo's Chamber" at Sophia Contemporary, London, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary.

ECHO'S CHAMBER AFRUZ AMIGHI

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Around this time two years ago, I visited the exhibition "Alexander Calder: Performing Sculpture" at London's Tate Modern. Like many who went to see the retrospective of the late American sculptor's works, I was blown away. The highlight of the show was a series of very early works—portraits and scenes consisting only of skilfully folded lengths of wire and their shadows—which perfectly captured the essence of their subjects with recourse only to the simplest of forms. In figurative painting and sculpture, the work that will always speak is that which retains form in spite of fashion or function. We will never know for certain the purpose of the 30,000-year-old *Venus of Willendorf* (c. 28,000–25,000 BCE), but in its exaggerated features we see something enduring.

Afruz Amighi is a New Yorker like Calder (at heart if not by birth, having grown up in the Big Apple after she was born in Iran), and creates sculptures whose lines and shadows culminate in evocative figures that, refreshingly, speak directly of their subjects without the need for explanation. The artist has concentrated on architectural forms in past works, conveying the essence of a mosque or cathedral in the shadows of only a few simple shapes. In "Echo's Chamber," her exhibition at London's Sophia Contemporary gallery, however, Amighi's focus was on more human figures, though with no less of a monumental sense.



AFRUZ AMIGHI, *Impaler*, 2017, graphite on mylar, 91 × 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.



AFRUZ AMIGHI, *The Nun*, 2017, graphite on mylar, 91 × 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.



AFRUZ AMIGHI, *Amazon*, 2017, graphite on mylar, 75 × 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.

The exhibition consisted of nine wall-mounted sculptures and a set of eight graphite-on-Mylar-paper drawings on which many of the three-dimensional works are based. These abstract, grayscale drawings all suggest some archetypal feminine form. Some are ethnographically inspired by visits to the Greek and Roman sculpture collections and the “Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas” wing of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, while others are more totemic, mythic references to the natural world. *Impaler*, *the Nun* and *Amazon* (all works 2017), for instance, both suggest angular female faces in profile, extended by headgear and what may be jewellery into more ambiguous shapes, while *Lady Shark* and *Shell* appear composed of the same basic parts—delimited by the darkness of their shading—but are less grounded in their composition, suggesting their titular subjects by the swimming motion implied in a curve, or the carapacial solidness in a set of parallel lines.



AFRUZ AMIGHI, *Lady Shark*, 2017, graphite on mylar, 91 × 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.



AFRUZ AMIGHI, *Shell*, 2017, graphite on mylar, 91 × 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.

The composition of these images from segments shaded in assorted grayscale values realizes its full effect once Amighi translates her subjects from two dimensions into three. In the sculptural works, the artist mounts several translucent layers consisting of steel, fibreglass, mesh and chain in front of one another, each separated by a couple of inches. On the floor in front of each creation—and integral to its overall power—is a bright, white light. As with Calder's earlier works and so much other modern art, the effect is to draw attention both to the abstract elements of an image and its relationship to an essential, perhaps platonic, form. As light passes through each segment of a piece such as *Antler*, the more densely layered sections of mesh darken to create a sense of depth that changes with respect to the viewer's position, and the cumulative shadows that are ultimately cast on the wall assume a stature that is at once grand and ethereal, impalpable and yet more complete than the physical objects that are related to them, like an inversion of Plato's allegory of the cave.



Installation view of **AFRUZ AMIGHI's** *Antler, Omen and Lady Shark* (all 2017), at "Echo's Chamber," Sophia Contemporary, London, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary.

Greek mythology did have an influence on the show, whose title references the story in which Echo, a nymph condemned by the goddess Hera to only ever repeat the last few words spoken to her, falls in love with the vain Narcissus and eventually disappears following his death, leaving her voice behind. There is in this explanation something to be said for the "echo chamber" as a space where women's voices are amplified—despite the term's more troublesome connotations—but the analogy is both incomplete and unnecessary. Lit from below in such a way that they loom powerfully over the viewer, the creations here are sufficiently communicative in their formal expression of substantial feminine figures that any textual addenda could be stripped away and no power would be lost. That these works are thoughtfully engaged with ideas of womanhood goes without saying, and, whether they constitute an echo chamber or not, Amighi's creations resonate with something that is both very old, and very human.

Ned Carter Miles is the London desk editor of ArtAsiaPacific.

Afruz Amighi's "Echo's Chamber" is on view at Sophia Contemporary, London, until January 19, 2018.

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AFRUZ AMIGHI, *Antler*, 2017, steel, fiberglass, mesh, chain and light, 61 × 41 × 23 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary, London.

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