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‘Review: Rasheed Araeen Has First New York Solo Show at Aicon Gallery’

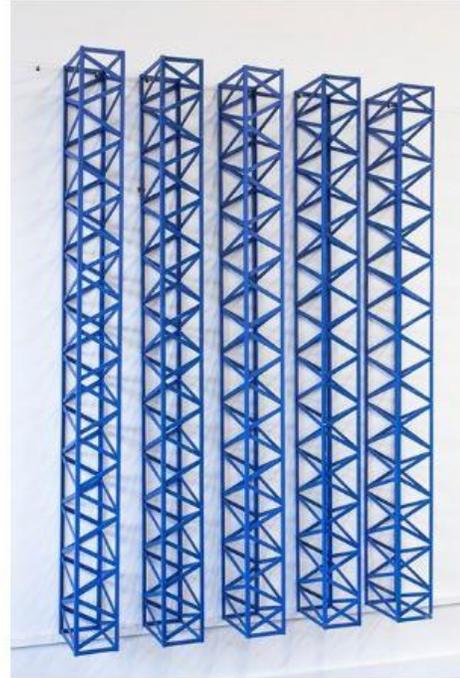
BY HOLLAND COTTER

Born in Pakistan in 1935 and a London resident since 1964, Rasheed Araeen has been an art-world legend since the 1980s, when he founded and edited *Third Text*, a journal that not only gave a voice to contemporary non-Western and nonwhite artists but also helped initiate an entire rethinking of 20th-century art history. Mr. Araeen also produced some of the most influential writing of the time (I still have his clips from 30 years ago) and organized shows like “The Other Story” in London, which laid the foundation for the concept that modernism, far from being a Western phenomenon, had happened all over the world, on different schedules.

Overlooked amid all these accomplishments was Mr. Araeen’s art, a selection of which is at Aicon Gallery in his first New York solo exhibition. Trained as a civil engineer, he became an artist after seeing Anthony Caro’s sculptures. His own early pieces combined Mr. Caro’s use of industrial materials with openwork structures adapted from architecture. In the early 1960s he developed a version of what would come to be called Minimalism before its introduction in New York by Donald Judd and others.

Mr. Araeen’s sensibility is quite different from that of the American artists. His sculptures are conspicuously handmade, often brightly painted, and configured to form — in some cases — layers of geometric patterning. Many of them were originally meant to be interactive. Viewers were invited to rearrange components and, in the case of a modular 1970 floor piece called “Triangles,” to toss parts into the River Thames and watch them reconfigure as they floated away.

Now in his 80s and busy writing, editing and making art, Mr. Araeen is one of many overlooked artists who should at last be finding a permanent place in the global picture. A number of them appeared in the important exhibition “Other Primary Structures” at the Jewish Museum in New York last year. Mr. Araeen was one. That the show existed at all was largely because of his efforts as a multitasking pioneer.



“Punj Neelay (Five Blues),” a 1970 work by Rasheed Araeen, is part of his show at the Aicon Gallery.
Aicon Gallery