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Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Presents “Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection”

“Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection,” the ninth installment in an exhibition series devoted to showing rotations of the museum’s holdings, will be on view from March 6, 2009, and continue through Sept. 7, 2009, at the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. Internationally acclaimed artist Shahzia Sikander will mine and interpret the museum’s collection and produce an installation of the selected objects. A highlight of the exhibition will be a new work created by Sikander, inspired by Cooper-Hewitt’s collection.

Trained at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan, Sikander merges the traditional South Asian art of miniature painting with contemporary forms and styles. Her work, which ranges from intimate watercolors and multilayered paper installations to mural-sized wall paintings and digital animation, explores the relationship between the present and the past and the richness of multicultural identities.

“As an artist who blends Eastern and Western imagery, Sikander brings a singular perspective to exploring the museum’s collection,” said director Paul Warwick Thompson. “This is the ninth rotation in the series and, each time, the guest curator’s selections and viewpoints on collection works are fresh and wholly unexpected.”

To personally engage with the objects in Cooper-Hewitt’s collection, Sikander first looked to Indian and Persian miniature painting from the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery—sister units in the Smithsonian Institution focused on Asian art—and used these as a lens through which to focus her selections.

At Cooper-Hewitt, Sikander chose a unique range of works from all four collecting departments and the National Design Library. Through the installation of the selected work, Sikander seeks to elicit a new visual read on the works, revealing surprising nuances and details and unveiling

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layers of meaning. “Discovering relationships among the works is a creative process, and it is my hope that viewers will also share in it,” said Sikander. “The purpose is not to confine a read, but to leave space for anticipation and reinterpretation.”

Among the works on view will be:

- A Jacquard-woven facsimile of the Declaration of Independence and books of *shikasta* calligraphy, which examine the idea of authenticity, replication and identification, as well as the importance of the written word and its extension into design.
- More than 20 Jacquard-woven portraits of notable figures throughout history and George Augustus Sala’s “Panorama from the World’s Fair,” which explore the line between portraiture and caricature and the effects of time on the nature of satire and humor.
- Richly illustrated early 20th-century German medical illustrations by Friedrich Eduard Bilz, which unfold in multiple layers to allow further investigation of the human anatomy.
- Ilonka Karasz’s large-scale scenic panel, which uses geometric and architectural structures that can be traced back to Safavid paintings, and also encourages new ideas about interior space.
- Drawings and prints showing the grotesque and the hybrid nature of the human body, including an etching by Francisco Goya, “A Way of Flying.”
- A number of manuscripts and paintings from the Freer and Sackler galleries drawn with fixed viewpoints and forced perspectives, which look at framing devices and how they affect outlook and perception.

A highlight of the exhibition will be a new work by Sikander. Using the collections of Cooper-Hewitt and the Freer and Sackler galleries as inspiration, the artist will create two works on paper, which will be bound in the middle to imply an open book. The piece will combine drawing and printmaking and will include direct references from exhibition objects, further establishing connections between seemingly disparate works and providing new ways of looking at the collection.

“Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection” is made possible in part by Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz.

The “Shahzia Sikander Selects” brochure is made possible by funds from the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

About Shahzia Sikander

Following her undergraduate training, Sikander received a master’s degree from the Rhode Island School of Design and served as a fellow of the Glassell School of Art’s Core Program in Houston and an artist-in-residence at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. She is a 2006 recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship “Young Global Leader” award. Her work has

appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions at such national and international venues as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the National Gallery of Canada; the Venice Biennale 2005; and, the Museum of Modern Art, Paris.

About the “Selects” Series

“Shahzia Sikander Selects” is the ninth exhibition in a series of small one-gallery exhibitions in the Nancy and Edwin Marks Gallery. The museum invites guest curators from all around the world to create exhibitions and installations interpreted in their own voice from works in the museum’s permanent collection.

Previous guest curators include novelist, design critic and public radio host Kurt Andersen, Dutch designer Hella Jongerius, Nigerian-British artist Yinka Shonibare, the innovation and design firm IDEO and the Brazilian designers Fernando and Humberto Campana.

About the Museum

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution is the only museum in the nation devoted exclusively to historic and contemporary design. The museum presents compelling perspectives on the impact of design on daily life through active educational programs, exhibitions and publications. Founded in 1897 by Amy, Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt—granddaughters of industrialist Peter Cooper—as part of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, the museum has been a branch of the Smithsonian since 1967.

Cooper-Hewitt is located at 2 East 91st Street at Fifth Avenue in New York City. Hours are Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. The museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. Public transit routes include the Lexington Avenue 4, 5 and 6 subways (86th or 96th Street stations) and the Fifth and Madison Avenue buses. General admission, \$15; senior citizens and students ages 12 and older, \$10. Cooper-Hewitt and Smithsonian members and children younger than age 12 are admitted free. For further information, please call (212) 849-8300 or visit <http://www.cooperhewitt.org>. The museum is fully accessible.

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