SUMMER FASHION RAMP SIZZLERS

SHAHZIA SIKANDER
NYC’s High Priestess of Art

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The paintings of Shahzia Sikander bespeak a haunting yet poetic lament for a nature idealized and for a pictorial system based on human experience. Like others before her, Shahzia’s search is an aesthetic one: a journey where the past and the present, the illusionary and the abstract meet and intertwine. She employs the temperamental, medium of egg tempera, gouache and acrylic on wasli panels, borrowing the technique and palette of the Mughal masters and the illusionistic properties of modern art. A harmony of warm ochres, golds, reds and ambers is applied in layers, and disrupted by a seemingly random series of painterly flecks. Intentional seams appear like scars on the surface of these delicate, altar-like works whose skins are further worked and distressed.
by the artist creating a sentimental patina. Despite their aura of calm repose, however, a pointed tension exists between the paintings' more representational images and loose grid of geometric forms. This tension brews both within singular works and throughout Shahzia's oeuvre.

Born in 1969 in Lahore, Shahzia graduated cum laude from the National College of Arts in Lahore. While at the Arts College, she realized the enormous potential of the miniature format, and tried to rescue it from the clutches of the traditionalist mould while incorporating themes of personal import. At this point the impulse to express herself creatively became an urgent imperative. Although the College adopted principles of modernism and a relaxed and popular form of Mughal and Rajput miniature, it was still the norm to learn by copying the master's work. Following Ustad Haji Shareef's example, she emulated his sense of courtly regalia, his forlorn princesses, and his intricate studies of architecture, but increasingly identified with more expansive, experimental approach. During this early period she also produced woodcuts and western-style abstract compositions as well as personalised, often humorous, interpretations of her own life, endeavouring to break from the practice of slavish imitation. The Scroll that constituted her degree show reflected the more representational crescent of this enclosure. Her slender enframements gave the illusion of architectural space, in which implied transoms, doorways and shelves added structure and depth.

During her stint at the Rhode Island School of Design at Providence, Shahzia's painting activity increased

WITHIN A PERIOD OF 9 YEARS, SHAHZIA HAS CARVED A NICHE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE, AFTER SUCCESSFULLY SHOWING AT THE RENOWNED WHITNEY MUSEUM AND THE MUSEUMS OF MODERN ART (NYC & PARIS), THE NATIVE RETURNS...
and she read extensively. Her first solo exhibition at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington D.C. in 1993 demonstrated a nascent talent exploring a variety of personalised themes with no particular clarification of direction. The work that she developed over the next decade became more focused and formally consistent. Pushing the technically painstaking and historically laden medium of miniature painting and the traditional pictorial format into the present, Shahzia decided to suspend contemporary disbelief without denying or ignoring it. Predominantly eastern and symbolic in feel, and embraceable in size, she evoked a non-specific nostalgia while consistently traversing issues of identity and selfhood. To reach this point, she looked closely at archaic Hindu mythology and Muslim iconography in an attempt to ‘blur boundaries’ of cultural, social and religious configurations. She began to

"Spinn"-Installation, Museum of Modern Art, Paris

SHE HAS ENJOYED PHENOMENAL SUCCESS, WITH OFFERS FROM MARY BOON AND GAGOSIAN QUEUING UP OUTSIDE HER STUDIO IN TRIBECA.
paint 'line works' in a subdued range of tones. Allusions not only to Radha and Krishna but also to the veiled, burqa-clad female form became more explicit. This fluctuating linear rhythm of Shahnazia's paintings was sometimes integrated with animal forms, such as the 'griffin' or more aptly 'Chillava.

Shahnazia positioned her art at the emerging edge of the cultural curve, and in the field of public, even mass discourse. Never having subscribed to the discredited notion – still upheld in some quarters of the contemporary Pakistani art scene – of the privileged status of aesthetics, she self-consciously implicated herself in the very cultural conditions she critiqued in her work. Take, for example, 'Extraordinary Realities' conducted at the Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, in which Shahnazia appears dressed in heavy bridal wear juxtaposed over a spurious edition of a commercial miniature. The painting emphasises, precisely in order to expose, the dubious roles traditionally reserved for women in myths as embodiments of unreason, passion, and madness – forces which must be subjugated. The artist's claim that the universal meaning of myths can often be exposed as a patriarchal construct becomes quite persuasive, in this case. Shahnazia eschewed publicity for five years after her graduation, keeping away from the gallery circuit to develop her own vocabulary while exploring new avenues and negotiating fresher perspectives in Texas. The break in her career, however, came with the exhibition 'Selections Spring '97' at the Drawing Center in New York followed soon after by her nomination as a participant in the Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Since then, she has enjoyed phenomenal success as an artist par excellence, with offers from Mary Boon...
<51 ACTS OF BALANCE

Over the last 2 years, Shahzia has heightened the tension by slowly closing the gulf, continuously pulling us closer and closer to the surface of the work, collapsing the interior space, and bringing the hard-edged geometrics of frame and molding to the fore. In earlier works, she balances the purely lyrical flight of colour, form and alchemic gambol against the sacredness of deities and gods. The intensity of iconic stage was less constricted, more open in composition. However, over a relatively short period of time, the works have grown increasingly more complex as Shahzia abandoned ground line in favour of more spatially ambiguous and abstracted compositions.

Knowing that meaning is ascribed through a constantly renegotiated series of relations and that access—however one may choose to diagram or demarcate it—has always followed along the lines of intimacy, Shahzia has created small windows in her video installation called 'Intimacy' at the Art Pace, San Antonio, Texas, through which one can again glimpse belief. What is perhaps so compelling about Shahzia’s works is her ability to index the depth of our intimacy with the purely painterly passage against the shifting stress on intent and interpretation over history. And she has done so by carefully constructing an axis of airless artifice between viewer and pictorial surface, a space of anxious possibility. With the help of two large walls facing each other, Shahzia has created a corridor-like passage for the viewer to walk through in between the walls. On the one wall is a miniature painting facing an identically-placed video monitor on the other. Within a loop of 4 minutes, the moving image on the monitor articulates stages of miniature-making. To fully read this work—its small defacements and layered perspectives—one must be within arm’s length of them. Compelled to interact with them at a distance that is both respectful and intimate, one is allowed the freedom of rational perspective on the one hand and abandon on the other.

Shahzia has garnered quite a bit of critical response over the last few years—both in and outside her current base, USA—for her strikingly beautiful paintings. And it is precisely her considerable abilities as a 'paramedic of painting' which have captured such widespread attention. Apart from solo exhibitions at such prestigious venues as the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Kansas City (1998), the Renaissance Society, Chicago (1996), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C (1999), Shahzia’s work has featured in innumerable group shows including one at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris recently. Forging new visual/aesthetic frontiers, Shahzia has also been part of video talks and programmes concerning the South Asian Diaspora on the East Coast, and occupies sizeable coverage in Phaidon’s ‘Fresh Cream’ and Edward Lucie-Smith’s upcoming discourse on modern art of the world.

* The title is taken from a series of 3 paintings entitled ‘Acts of Balance’ by the artist herself, shown at Whitney

<101 JIHAD ‘ISTAN’

Islam of Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda movement, have enmeshed the ‘Stans’ in a bleak agenda. Such is the case with the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, led by Juma Numangani), and the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, with its avowed end of establishing a caliphate akin to that of the Ottomans.

Ahmed Rashid warns that the growing militancy of Central Asia, already responsible for a spiral of senseless violence, could spell doom for the international community, if the latter does not put into place an effective machinery to regenerate the region economically and politically. With a book in hand that has proved unusually prescient, perhaps the international community should take heed of his words.

<110 COOL-IT!

APPLE SNOW WITH RASPBERRY SAUCE

Serves: 4
Calories: 130
Fat: 1.0 gm
2 cups dried apples, chopped
4 egg whites
1/4 cup apple concentrate
2 cups water
Sauce
100 ml raspberry puree
40 ml apple concentrate

In a saucepan place the chopped dried apples, apple concentrate and water. Cover and simmer until softened. Leave the lid on and set aside to cool. When cold, place in a food processor and purée until smooth. Beat the egg whites to a stiff consistency and gently fold through the apple puree. Spoon into serving dishes and serve with raspberry sauce.

To make the sauce, place the raspberry puree in a small saucepan with the apple concentrate and bring to the boil. Cook for 1-2 minutes, strain and cool.