Mohsin Hamid oscillates between the dangerous and pluralistic aspects of Pakistan in his new book **Moth Smoke**. When it comes to Pakistan’s relationship with the US, Hamid is blunt. He writes that the alliance between the US and the Pakistani military (controlling Pakistan’s economy, and financial dependence) re- mains intact. The Trump administration and parties viewing one another through a ‘realist’ lens—each blaming the other for putting its citizens in grave danger, each is correct to do so.” In what is perhaps the volume’s most impassioned piece, he contends that US drone strikes in Pakistan have caused a deep pernicious effect, facilitating “the reflux of the Pakistani state and Pakistani society to do more to confront the problems of extremism which threaten Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis alike.”

The attacks, he adds, also fuel the conspiracy theories that thrive in Pakistan — like the claim that flying robots from an alien power regularly strike down from the skies and kill Pakistani citizens. In the US, such a claim would be “science fiction or paranautic survivor cultism of the furthest fringe-dwelling kind. In Pakistan, it is real. And constantly, wrenching, in the news.”

Mohsin Hamid

From classic miniatures to massive installations

**S**hazia Sikander leads the way in exploring art as a form of narrative

**By Tania Bhattacharya Staff Writer**

Shahzia Sikander is a stalwart. The Pakistani artist, who possesses a force of creativity and technical genius, is arguably the country’s first to have gained worldwide acclaim for her work, and paved the way for future artists to attract global attention. And yet, she seems to be routinely erased from the narrative of contemporary art from the country.

Haris Rehman, director of the Asian Studies Centre at the University of Westminster in London, Newsworld Pakistan last year published a book by Bhikhar Dhari and Virginia Whiles that barely mentions Sikander’s contributions. Other critics refer to her for not engaging with her community or participating in the discourse surrounding her work. Understandably, she finds this assignment of values, roles, and expectations difficult. Particularly, Sikander’s comment that ‘the freedom of the artist is what allows them to create their own world’.”

Sikander tells GN Focus, “Contemporary artists are very much concerned about the state of things, and their reactions to positions of power.”

But perhaps this is changing. Sikander attended the Lahore Literary Festival last year — the first formal invitation she has received for an event of this kind in Pakistan — and is hopeful that with new talent, the Pakistani art scene will break away from its conservative mould.

**A class apart**

On this theme, Sikander entered the National College of Arts (NCA) in 1987 and took her art in motion over time. Beginning with miniatures, she made her way through large-scale artworks and murals to ultimately arrive at the realm of immersive multimedia installations that are unfathomable in terms of size, intensity, depth, focus and imagination. Not only did she question the scope and ability of miniature painting and conceptualised it in a way that gave the form a fresh lease of life, she tore down all cultural and political boundaries to establish its relevance and how deeply rooted it is in culture and civilisation.

Homi Bhabha’s _The Location of Culture_ (in which he talks about various forms of cultural collision — had a deep impact on her work, especially as she shifted scales. Drawing from the films of Federico Fellini, Mi- chelangelo Antonioni and God- ard, light also plays a very important role in her productions, and is often a narrative in itself.

**Journey to success**

In 1991, Sikander wrote a thesis outlining the possibility of experimenting in the area of immersive i nteractive painting, for which she received the Harris Barmester Prize for excellence in miniature painting from NCA. After graduating, she flew to Washington D.C. to install some of her work in the Smithsonian’s US Art Museum.

**S**mall is Big

**Mohsin Qureshi Posters from issues of violence in his book Pakistan-US ties and ability of miniature painting, for which she received for an event of this kind in Pakistan — and is hopeful that with new talent, the Pakistani art scene will break away from its conservative mould.

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