



ABOUT THE ARTIST



Born in the multicultural city of Lahore, Pakistan, Sikander grew up equally conversant with international pop culture and her country's heritage of miniature painting. Highly detailed and stylized, the art form originated as a courtly embellishment for royal manuscripts and reached its height

during the Mughal empire (1526-1857), when Muslim rulers of Persia reigned over predominantly Hindu India. By Sikander's day, cliché miniature images were "abundant as gift items everywhere, saturating the tourist market," she recalls. "My initial feeling... was that it was kitsch, but I saw the potential of subversion." After completing her studies at Study National College of Art in Lahore, she moved to the United States in 1993, where she received an M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1995. During her graduate and later post-graduate study at Houston's Glassell School of Art, Sikander discovered Southeast Asian painting styles that, given the highly charged political relationship between Pakistan and India, had previously been unavailable to her. Into her own Pakistani-based Mughal style, she began to incorporate the sensual designs and vibrant colors of the Indian Rajput school and the woman-centered format that first emerged in India's Kangra valley in the 18th century. Sikander's debut onto the New York art scene in 1997 quickly won attention and acclaim.

Since, she has been featured in solo shows at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC., the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut; the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art; ArtPace, San Antonio, Texas; and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. She has been included in exhibitions such as "Drawing Now" at the Museum of Modern Art (2002); "Urgent Painting" at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2002), and the 1997 Whitney Biennial, as well as a part of international exhibitions including the Venice (2005) and Istanbul (2003) Biennials. Her work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the San Diego Museum of Art. In 2005 Sikander was awarded the "tamgha-e-imitiaz," the National Medal of Honor bestowed by the Government of Pakistan on those who have attained academic distinction in the fields of science, art, and literature. Sikander lives in New York City.

Miami Art Museum



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The exhibition is organized by Miami Art Museum and curated by Assistant Director for Special Projects/Curator Lorie Mertes, as part of *New Work*, a series of projects by leading contemporary artists.

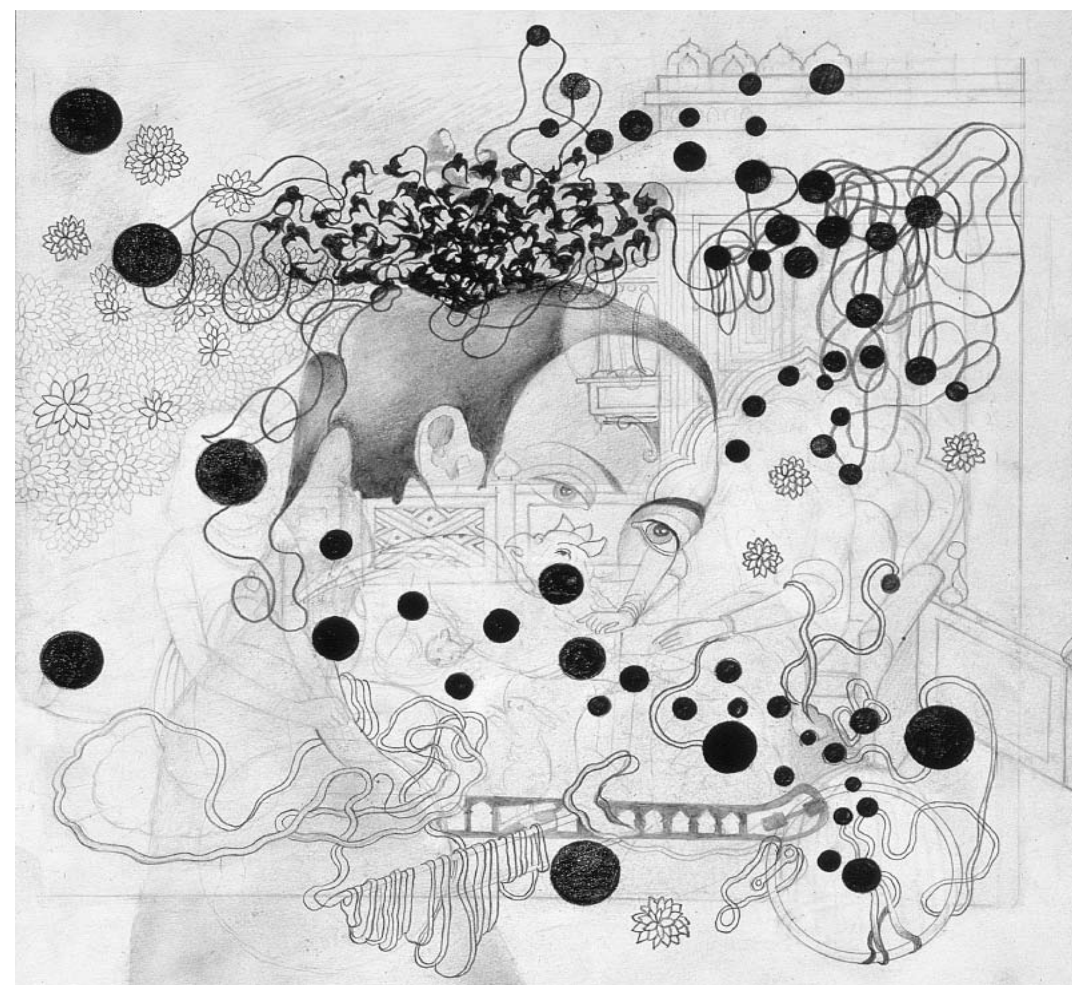
¹ *Threads of Vision: Toward a New Feminine Poetics*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Arts, "Shahzia Sikander," Roxana Marcoci, 2001, p. 38

² Interview with Shahzia Sikander by Meg Linton, March 19, 2005, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York City.

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COVER From *51 Ways of Looking* 2004, Graphite on paper, Series of fifty-one works: 12 x 9 inches each, Private Collection. Courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.
INSIDE Stills from a digital animation-in-progress, 2005 repeat the 51 Ways credit for the two drawings on the inside and the one on the back? Credit for color image on the back?

SHAHZIA SIKANDER
NEMESIS



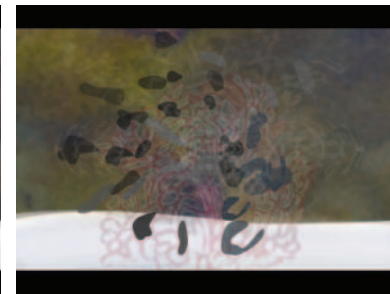
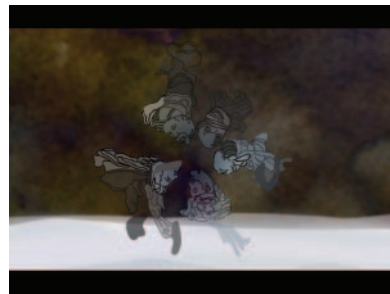
October 28, 2006 – January 15, 2006

Miami Art Museum

STOCKPILING AND DISSEMINATION

SHAHZIA SIKANDER BEGAN HER FORMAL ART TRAINING BY STUDYING MINIATURES IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ARTS, WHERE SHE RECEIVED A BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS IN 1992. THIRTEEN YEARS LATER, AFTER MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES, AND THE PROCURING A MASTER OF FINE ARTS FROM THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN IN 1995, HER INNATE, VORACIOUS CURIOSITY CONTINUES TO COMPEL HER TO INVESTIGATE A VARIETY OF MATERIALS, FORMS, AND IDEAS. HER WORK SPRINGS FORTH FROM A STRICT AND DISCIPLINED VISUAL CANON CONNECTED TO ANCIENT LITERARY TEXTS INTO A SUBJECTIVE REALM OF SELF-EXPLORATION TO DISCOVER HER INDIVIDUAL AESTHETIC VOICE.

SHAHZIA SIKANDER NEMESIS



by

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and Design

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Dissonance to Detour* by the Ben
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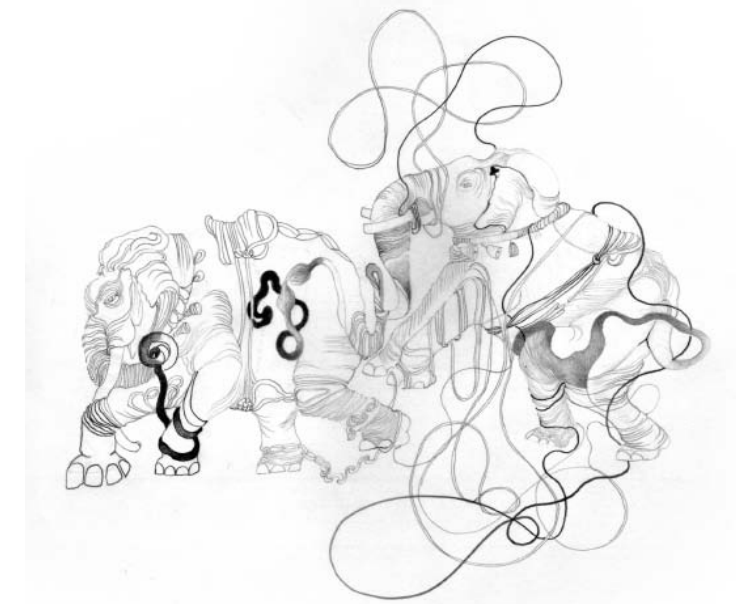
As a student, Sikander's initial choice to engage miniature painting was a calculated decision about finding an art form which exaggerated contradictions of scale versus labor, precision versus gesture, and formal versus subjective.¹ This discipline enabled her to connect with a particular aspect of Pakistani art and history that had been reduced to kitsch for the tourist market place; understand the original significance of miniatures; and reinvest the form with her present day images and concerns. She uses her early training as a springboard for composing formal images that transcend other genres, styles and techniques. Combining the flurry of media images, the annals of European art history, and her own vivid imagination, this methodology provides her with a rich image bank for her elaborate and beautiful compositions.

Sikander's decision to embrace the miniature in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time of international celebration of grandiose painters like David Salle, Francisco Clemente, and James Rosenquist, can be seen as a defiant act. Focusing on a frame smaller than 8 x 10 inches she created intimate, disciplined, labor-intensive works on paper using stacked perspective, historical and stylized imagery, and ancient painting techniques. These earlier works combine tediously rendered borders, architecture, and realistically executed figures placed in multiple aspects of the painting to imply narrative. Moving on, Sikander begins to defy her self-imposed scale limitations and creates *The Scroll* (1991-92), a 13 1/2 x 63 7/8 inch meticulous genre painting depicting her daily life as a young woman, family member and artist. It is a personal narrative rather than historical epic defined by centuries of tradition.

Like many artists coming out of an American graduate art program in the mid 1990s, Sikander struggled with issues of identity. In her case, what did it mean to be a progressive, independent, freethinking, educated, traveled, Pakistani woman working in Rhode Island—a foreigner who did not fit the American stereotype of an

oppressed, veiled Muslim woman? Sikander has never worn a veil and she often found herself being inappropriately categorized. Her reaction was to experiment with the stereotype, so she veiled herself in several social situations to gauge public reaction. Surprisingly, the inevitable expectation of the veil—always read as restrictive—led her to discover the compelling power of anonymity. Her paintings from 1995-1997 speak to this duality and confusion of warring truths; freedom within discipline became the platform for her dissent. She broke down borders of the page compositionally and infused her tiny tight precise images with gesture, fluidity, and a bit of chaos. She defaced her pristine surfaces with her own graffiti and collaged elements. Life spilled over, muddied the implied narrative and formed sedimentary layers of information.

Ultimately, layering is both a technique and metaphor for Sikander. Her paintings, site-specific installations, murals, and more recently, her digital animations, resemble palimpsests in which she places one image on top of another and leaves visible a trace of what came



is secondary or arbitrary. It is not personal.¹ By "personal" she means the work is not an intimate narrative of her daily experiences as depicted in *The Scroll*, but instead an attempt to use the formal characteristics of pattern, repetition, shape, color, and size to tap into overarching themes she finds compelling: mutability, translation, obliteration, duality, accumulation, reduction, multiplicity and interconnectivity. She carefully chooses her structural devices whether a circle, a rectangle or a bisecting line the basis for the more figurative elements of disembodied headgear, morphing animals, and fragmented people. Sikander's appropriation of loaded imagery like the Gopi, griffin or turban is complicated. On the one hand, she employs symbols with multiple associations in various cultures and on the other hand she appears to be hunting for a simple form that she can map endlessly. She embraces the notion of representing divinity with a visual form that successfully exists as a single unit and also through repetition becomes a critical building block for the monumental. This patterning, both in the making and in the viewing, is a physical and visual metaphor for personal and universal experience. The individual forms like the turban may represent gender, mind, a region, a race of people, a religion, the enemy; or they may simply be graphic stand-ins for everything and nothing to demonstrate the process of stockpiling and dissemination.

The swelling and deflating visual rhythm of Sikander's new imagery moves from medium to medium, allowing her to twist figures into a myriad of contorted combinations. She has a penchant for showing states of transition—morphing people into landscapes, a cadre of demons into an elephant, and turbans into a flock of birds. Using highly stylized arabesque lines, she interconnects disparate human, animal and architectural elements. Morphing implies a beginning, middle and end, but Sikander manages to keep linearity at bay and sustain the non sequitur whether in a painting on paper or a digital animation with sound. The transparency of the gouache or digital manipulation of atmosphere, combined with the detailed rendering overlaid with a rapid-fire gesture give the work a dynamic undulating breath. She takes command of the strict rules of her training to forge her own path with a distinctive use of scale, labor, precision, and gesture whether formal and subjective. Both the artist and the work are in constant flux, ravenously receiving and disseminating experience and information. Perhaps this is why Sikander is attracted to composite mythical creatures like the griffin—entities in perpetual struggle against their dual nature, trapped between aggressive and domestic desires, beasts that defy understanding or categorization. Like artists these misfit beings are always evolving, challenging what came before, reinvesting the past with the present, and providing no absolutes.

