

# Time Out

## New York

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment

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### Interviews

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## Shahzia Sikander, “Acts of Balance”

Whitney Museum of American Art  
at Philip Morris, through Jul 7  
(see Museums & Institutions).

Shahzia Sikander burst on the New York scene in a 1997 group show at the Drawing Center, which was quickly followed by appearances in the Whitney Biennial and a solo show at Deitch Projects. Distinctly '90s in feel, her ultratight paintings on paper—never larger than letterhead—offered a revisionist take on classical Islamic miniatures. The paintings, usually allegorical scenes featuring fantastic floating women, were seductively precise, while also revealing a sexy humor: Rather than simply updating Islamic miniatures, Sikander transformed them by adding bits and pieces of hypercontemporary pop culture along with a dash of autobiography.

“Acts of Balance” at the Whitney Philip Morris, her first solo museum

**Shahzia Sikander, *Chaman*, 2000.**

exhibition in New York, cements her reputation as one of today's more interesting young artists. In the main gallery, she performs a balancing act of scale by enlarging the intricate imagery of her miniatures to a mural-sized work. The walls, painted and drawn over with garden landscapes and architectural motifs, are covered here and there with sheets of yellow tissue paper, creating a kind of translucent effect. A woman in the central section of the work, opposite the gallery doorway, peers through these sheets as if through a veil. Icons such as a Matisse-like circle of dancing women or cowboy boots (Sikander lives in Houston) leaven the artist's compositional spontaneity with the barest hints of a narrative.

In the museum lobby's public atrium, a triptych hangs high on one wall. Each panel features a different female figure in a statuesque pose. Free of the swirling characters and symbols that usually surround Sikander's figures, each woman

manages to project an air of serenity, whether standing on her head or sitting with legs akimbo. It is a delicate balancing act in which each of the figures seems to be looking down at you as much as you are gazing up at her.

—Franklin Sirmans

