

Libas

INTERNATIONAL

SUMMER
FASHION
ramp sizzlers

SHAHZIA
SIKANDER

NYC's High Priestess of Art

**NEW WAVE
ENTERTAINMENT
INC.**

RETURN OF THE NATIVES
Celebrity expats visit Pakistan

SADEQUAIN

reviewing an iconoclast



Libas

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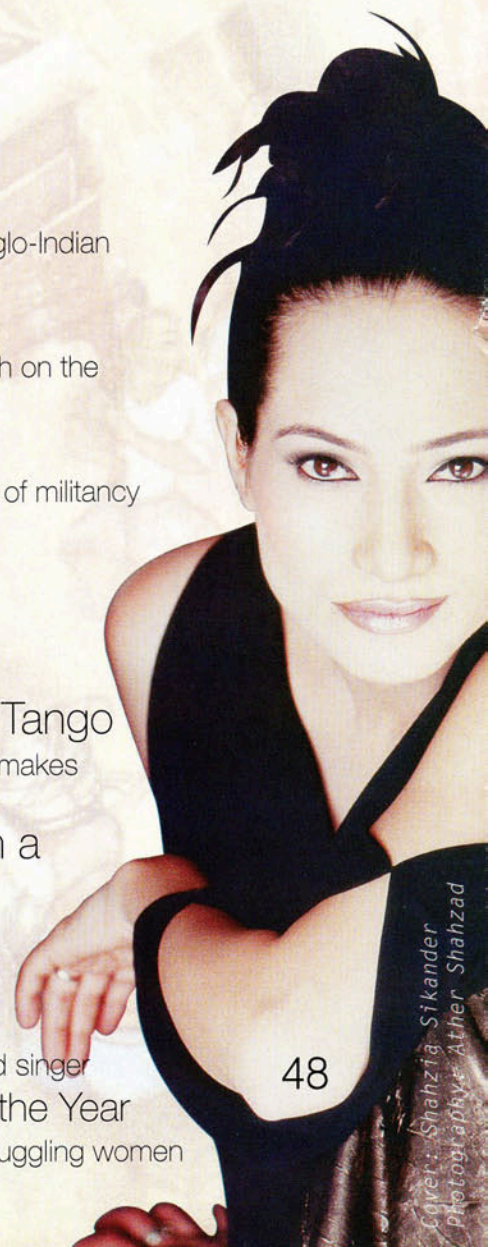
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Cover: Shahzita Sikander
Photography: Ather Shahzad



feature

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 illusory and the abstract meet and intertwine. She employs the temperamental medium of egg tempera, gouache and acrylic on *washi* 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

ACTS OF BALANCE

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

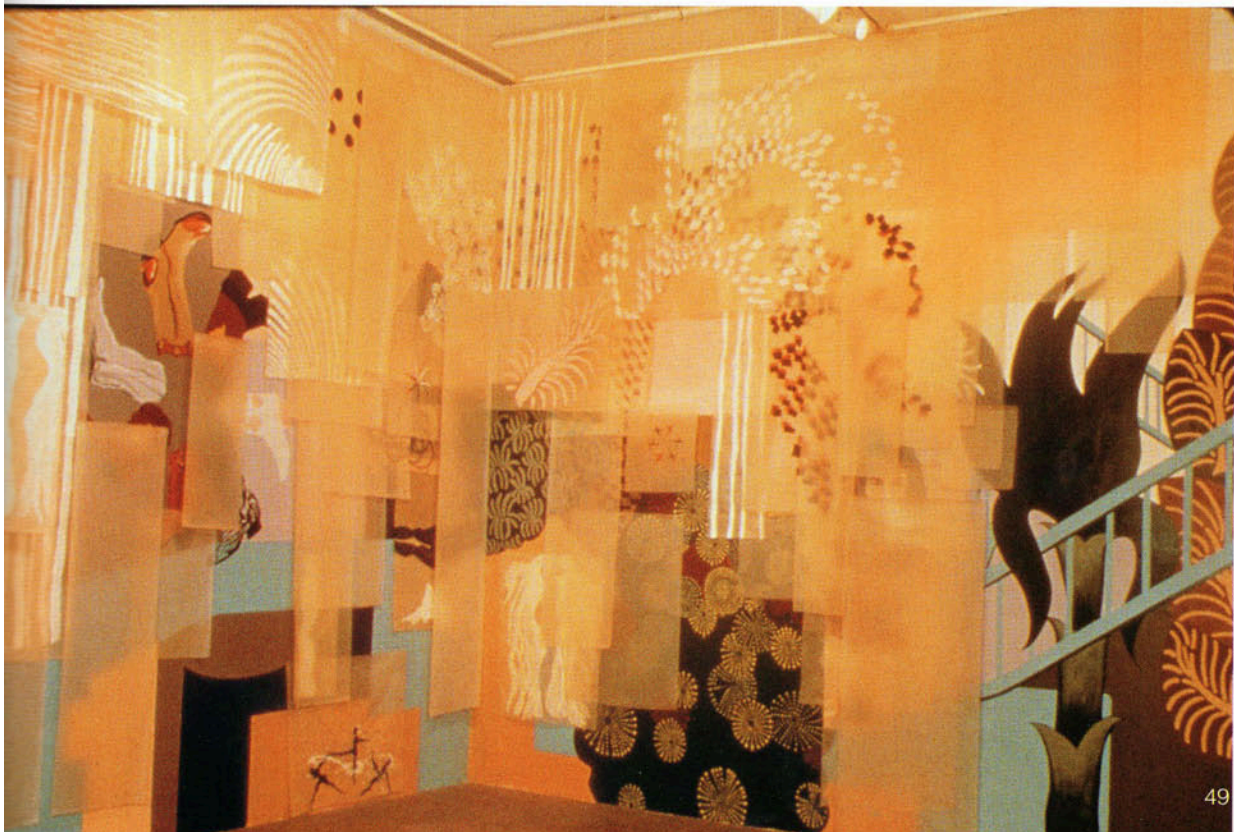
WITHIN A PERIOD OF 9 YEARS, SHAHZIA HAS CARVED A NICHE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE. AFTER SUCCESSFULLY SHOWING AT THE RENOWNED WHITNEY MUSEUM AND THE MUSEUMS OF MODERN ART (NYC & PARIS), THE NATIVE RETURNS...



"Greatest Hits I- Kate Moss"

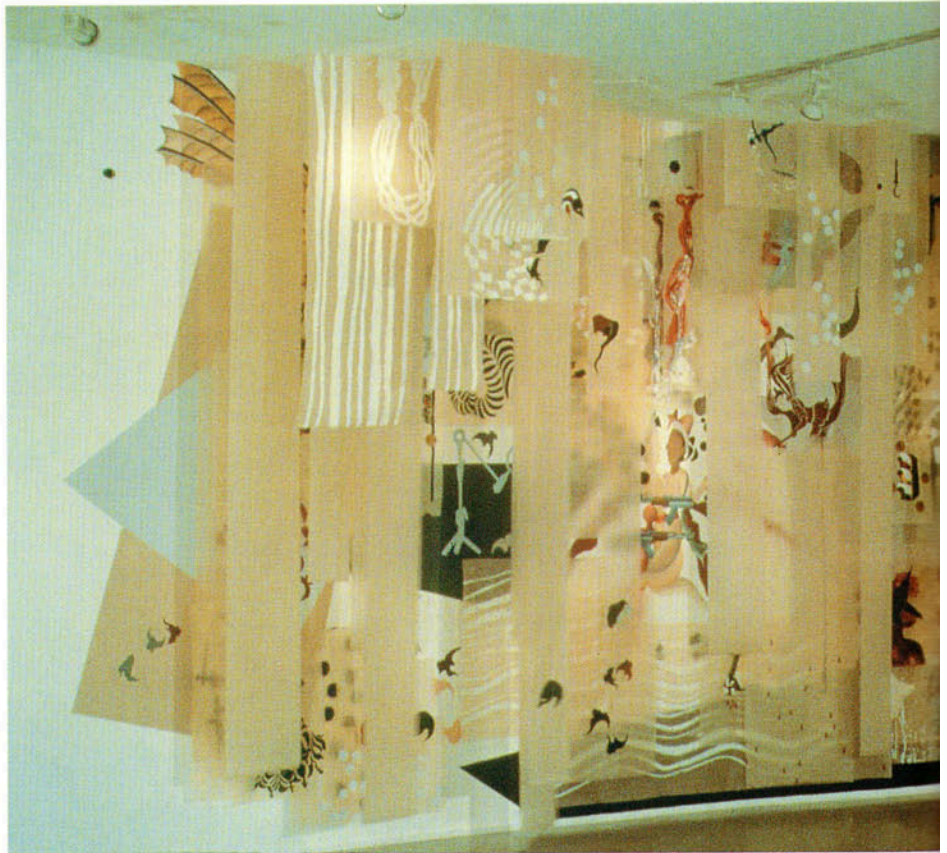


"Malignant Monsters"-banner for MOMA, NYC



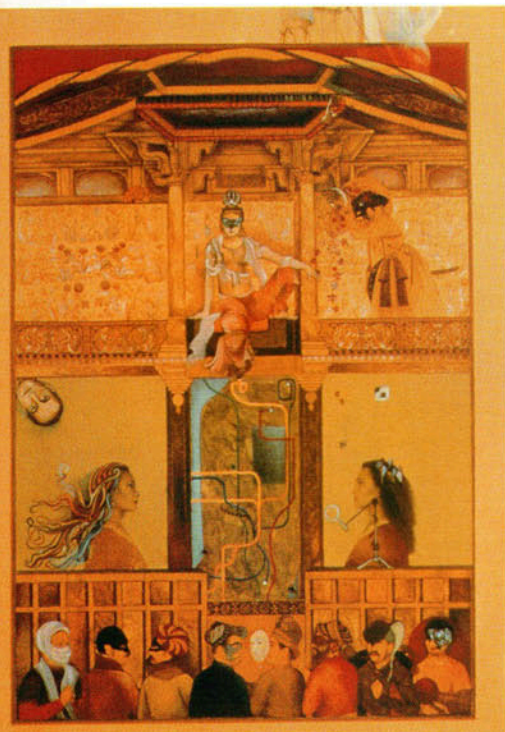
"Chaman"-Whitney Museum, NYC

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.



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"Mind Games"



"Running on Empty"



"Sly Offering"

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 Shahzia's paintings was sometimes integrated with animal forms, such as the 'griffin' or more aptly *Chillava*.

Shahzia 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 Shahzia 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. Shahzia 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 NYC 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

and Gagosian queuing up outside her atelier in TriBeCa.

The year 2000 marked a turning point in Shahzia's career when she deliberately moved on from the miniature format to a large scale mural. She painted the gallery walls from floor to ceiling, layering on top of them vertical bands of diaphanous paper suspended from the ceiling. These bands served as veils, hiding certain areas while exposing others. In this installation at Whitney at Philip Morris in New York called 'Chaman', vegetation, self-portraits, and staircase – delicate, ethereal as the artist has rendered them are but banal decorative images uprooted and reset within arch or architectonic scaffold. Yet like small fragments – the stroke and gouge that denote a leaf, a flight of stairs, even an unfound door – blown big, these panels demand an upclose and sensual reading. For the most part, the theatrics of the prevailing critical practices of the '90s – self-conscious irony, pastiche, and the nudge and wink at history – eclipsed those attempts at alternative investigations of aesthetic experience in the previously most privileged medium. The beauty of Shahzia's installation is that it taps into this desire, demanding sensual engagement in order to further a structural contemplation of that relation between viewer and object.>111



"Then and N.O.W-Cinderella dialogues Rapunzel"

<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 stiffly 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 (1998), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC (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

<83 CONTEMPO TWISTS & TANGO

concentrating on structural improvisations and faced with the constant challenge of crafting volume within three dimensions".

Earnestly, Omar talks of how "the aim of the choreographer should never be to glorify himself, but to see the people he works with and to work on them, pushing them to their own creative peaks and boundaries".

With a litheness in his movements and a fresh artistic and aesthetic approach, this multi-faceted young choreo-director/ dancer is bound to make his own groove in the international hall of fame...

(photo courtesy: Universal Studios with Working Title Pictures)

<98 TAINTED LEGACIES

overseas, so they don't know what it means", Laura hunted for a research project that would focus on this message which she felt had been left specifically for her. In reading about Kharagpur and West Bengal, she felt she had found her project.

Apart from its real characters, what makes *The Jadu House* so totally engrossing and evocative is Laura's writing style. Keeping the text crisp, yet fluid, Laura's reconnaissance is filled with local colour, vocabulary and fas-

cinating insights, all blended with a sardonic sense of humour. A beach book this isn't...a riveting must-read, definitely!

Laura Roychowdhury is a social anthropologist and historian, who did her dissertation on Anglo-Indians and the railways at the University of Michigan. She has recently returned from Delhi to London, where she now lives with her husband.

*Transworld Publishers, Great Britain
Photo credit: T. Ristan Oliver*

<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-Tahir 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 future 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.

Vanguard Books, (Pvt) Ltd.

<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
100ml raspberry puree
40ml 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 puree 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.