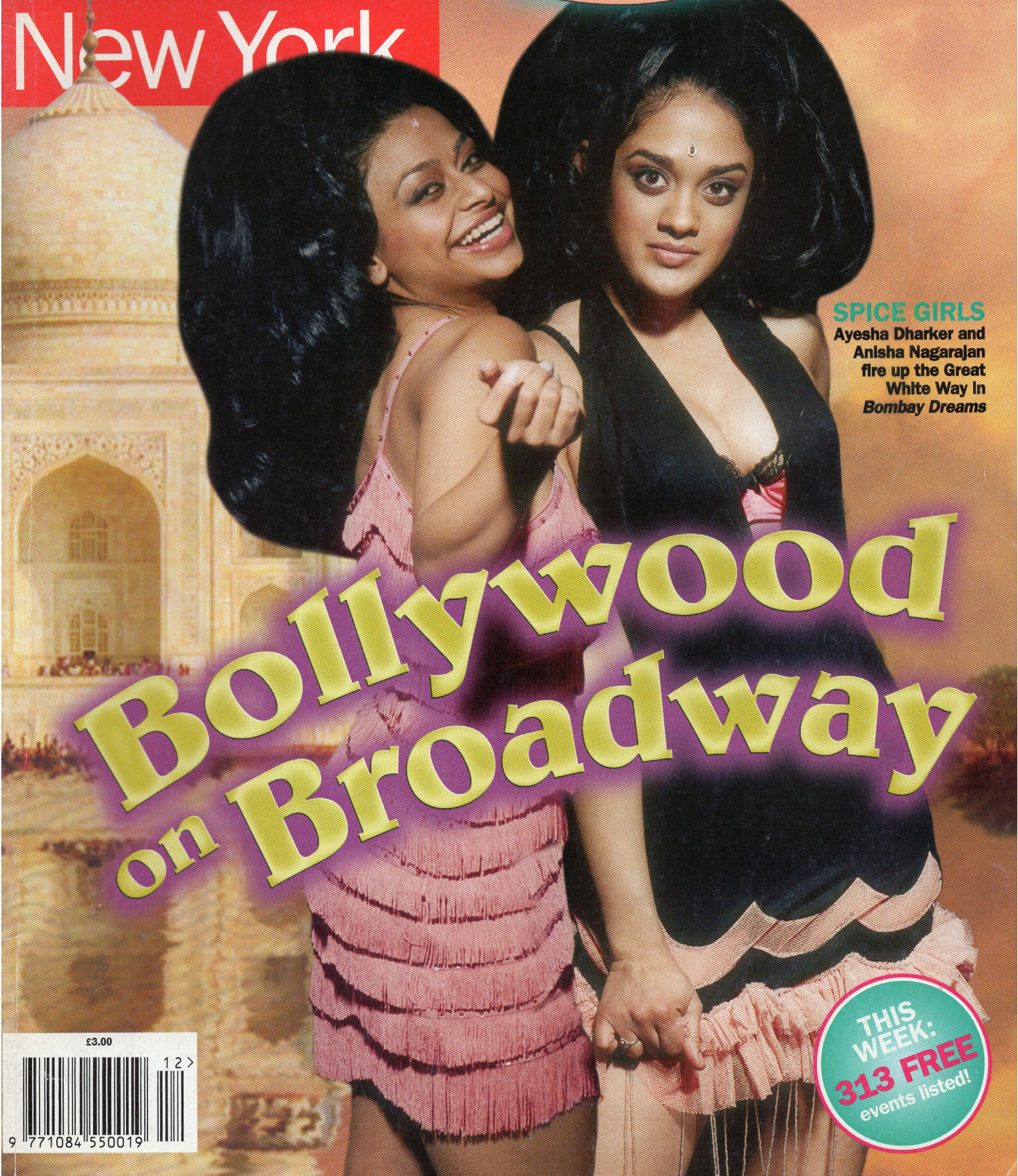


# Time Out

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## SMALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Shahzia Sikander is big on miniatures

For the past 15 years, Pakistani-born, New York-based Shahzia Sikander has been reinventing the genre of miniature painting. In her work, mythical creatures, elements of Hindu and Muslim culture, supermodels and even the American flag are juxtaposed, to question the borders that define gender, religion, ethnicity and ownership.

Sikander's work is now on display in Saratoga Springs, New York, at Skidmore College's Tang Museum, in an exhibit called "Nemesis." In an animated digital "painting" of the same name, an elephant materializes; a sinister red beast rides it. The Nemesis then falls off and is attacked by three winged creatures. Without the fiend atop it, the elephant decomposes.

The piece lends itself to social and political interpretations, but Sikander says she doesn't intentionally endow her work with such significance. "If something becomes excessively contrived, it loses its impact," she says.

Sikander, 35, received an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1995; two years later, her work was included in the Whitney Biennial. She moved from Texas to New York City the same year, and says the "multiple aesthetics" that exist here allow artists to adopt an extremely specific focus. Sikander also creates large, multidimensional tissue-paper installations, within which she experiments with abstract forms and images she later brings back into the scale of the miniature.

"The work has very little to do with notions of where one is or who one is," Sikander says. "I am who I am, but I don't necessarily enjoy the category of 'South Asian' as a place where I feel most comfortable."—HS

