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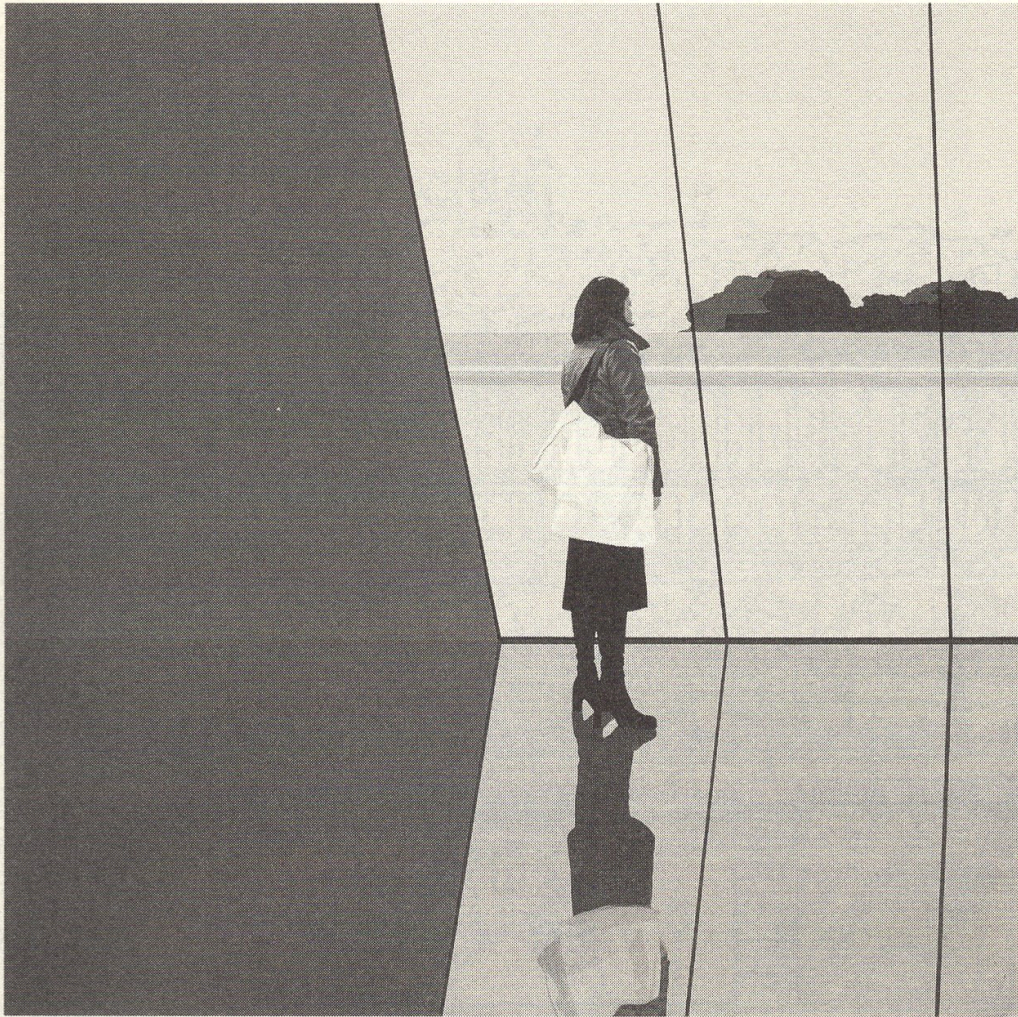


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Shahzia Sikander

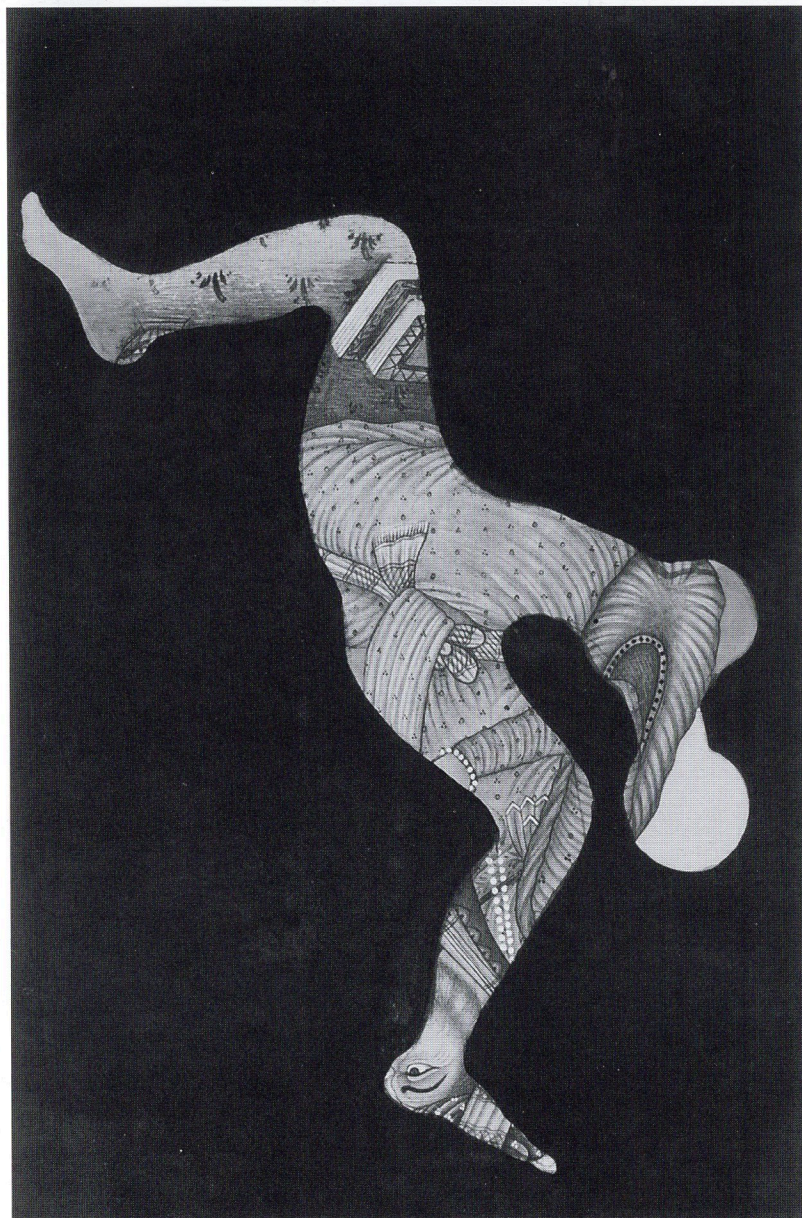
Miniatures

Like Sheherazade, the miniaturist spins the world in a series of tales. Having trained in traditional Persian and Indian miniature painting, Shahzia Sikander neither worries herself over Modernist strictures against narrative art nor toils away on copies of Mogul masterpieces. Born in 1969 in Lahore, Pakistan, where she earned a degree in fine arts before coming to the US to study at the Rhode Island School of Design, Sikander has been flouting both American and Indo-Persian artistic traditions for the better part of a decade. She began by taking up the miniature form—small-scale depictions of court life and historical incidents painstakingly rendered on handmade paper—in order to create tableaux that picture contemporary life: kids in jeans and cowboy boots cavorting in Pakistani homes; women, veiled and unveiled, reading, rescuing a cat, or slipping off to the fridge for a nighttime snack. Since her first American shows, she has exhibited in a number of major museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, and she has explored virtually every sort of contemporary artistic mode from installation to performance. In the seven sheets reproduced here, Sikander has returned to the miniature format. However, in these images she turns away from horizontal narratives in favor of somewhat more vertical statements—comments that still employ her careful line, her taste for phantasmagoria, and the clash of Eastern and Western forms—but which have perhaps less directional thrust, less certainty than her short stories. That Sikander often comments on, or tells stories about, politics ought to come as no surprise, given her background. What is surprising is that beauty and nuance always take precedence over politics in these images. Some of the angles flying in her No Fly Zone have wings that are the colors of the American flag, and that flag structures the pictorial space of Utopia, though it must be admitted that Usurpia, with its exotic animals, seems a more idyllic place to live. In dry pigments, she can do abstract or figurative, Asian or American, decorative, narrative, or declarative: Shahzia Sikander is a visual ventriloquist.

—Daniel Kunitz



Running on Empty 2



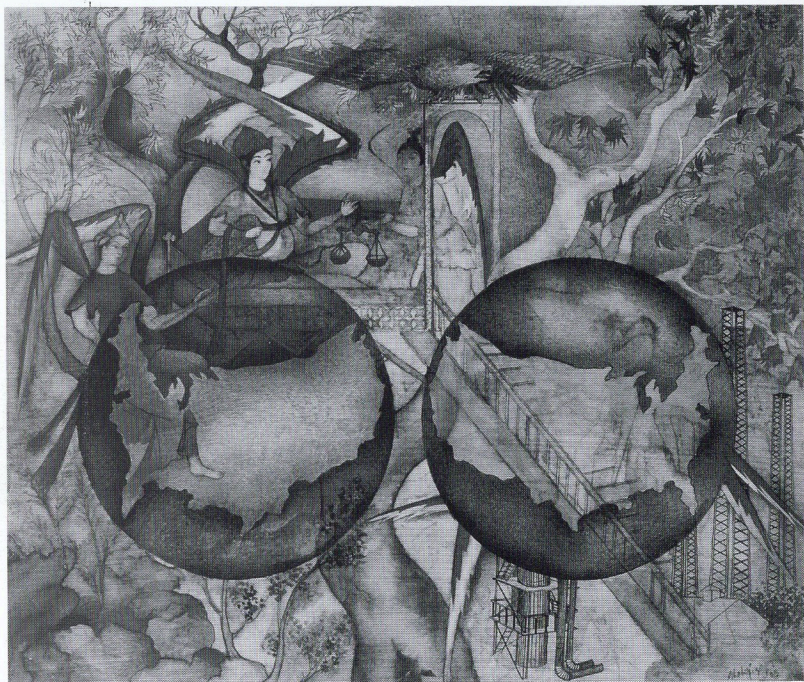
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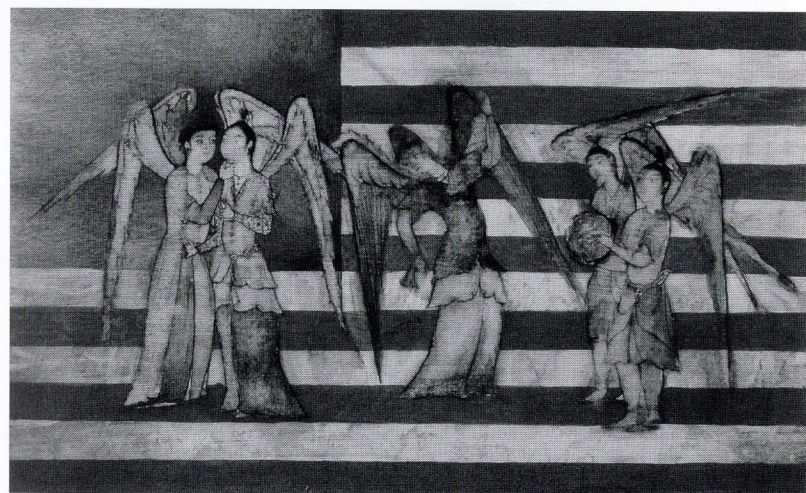
No Fly Zone



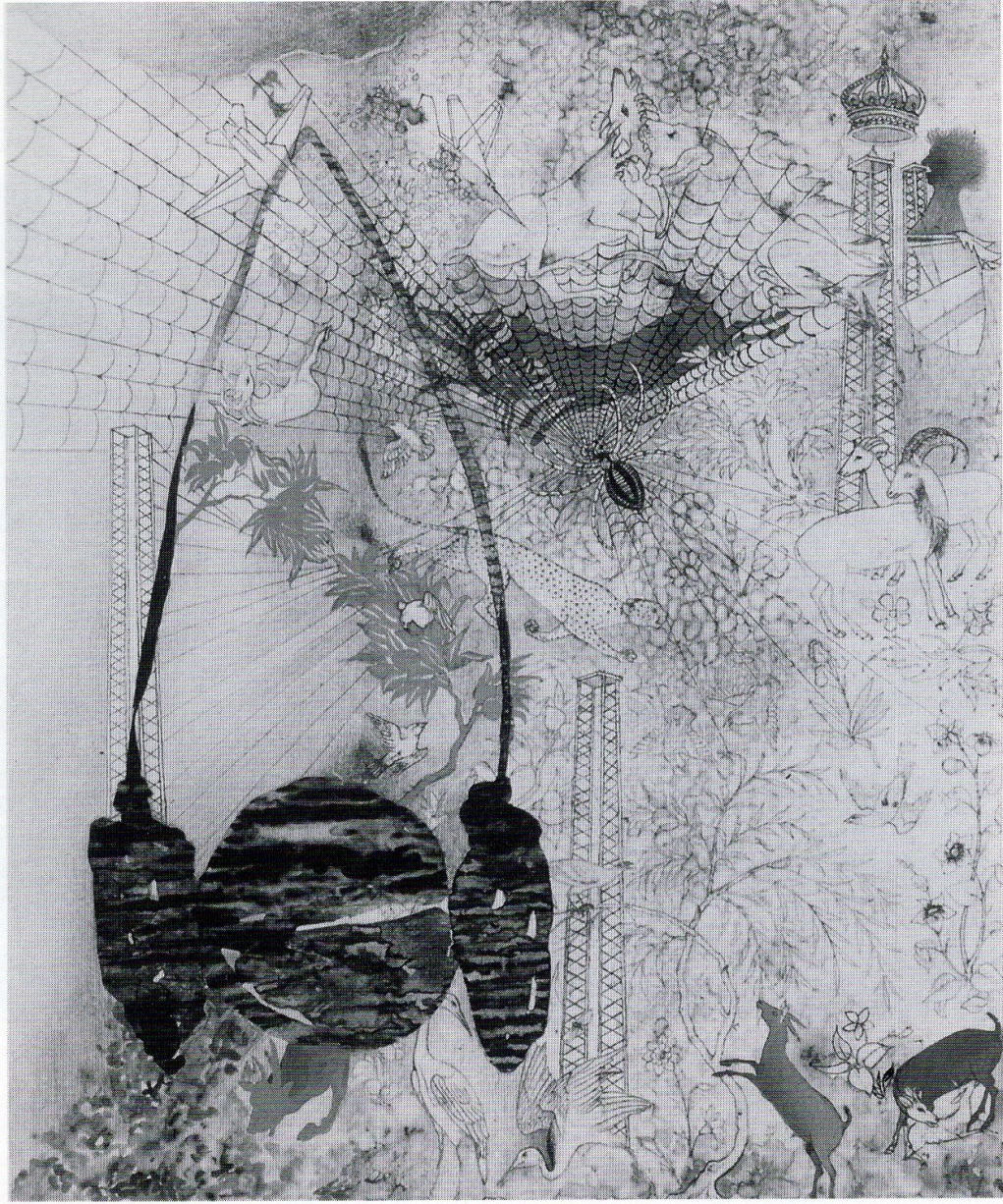
Usurpia



Utopia



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