

THE **SUBCONTINENTAL**
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Institutionalizing Arts & Culture...

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*Shahzia Sikander gives an Exclusive
Viewing of her Newest Collection*

*Bapsi Sidhwa comments on
Writing in English*

*Anna Sobel and Sandhya Jain
rescue South Asian Art Forms*

Sharbari Ahmed on Muslim Women Artists

*Divya Kumar calls on
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*Falu Bakrania and Peter Kvetko
investigate Desi Dance Club Culture*

Ibrahim Quraishi explains his Mannheim Installation

and

Aparna Sindhoor on Expanding the Notion of Dance

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The cover image is from Shahzia Sikander's collection, *Land-escapes* featured in this issue.
The border design is typical of designs found on fabrics produced in Western India and Pakistan.

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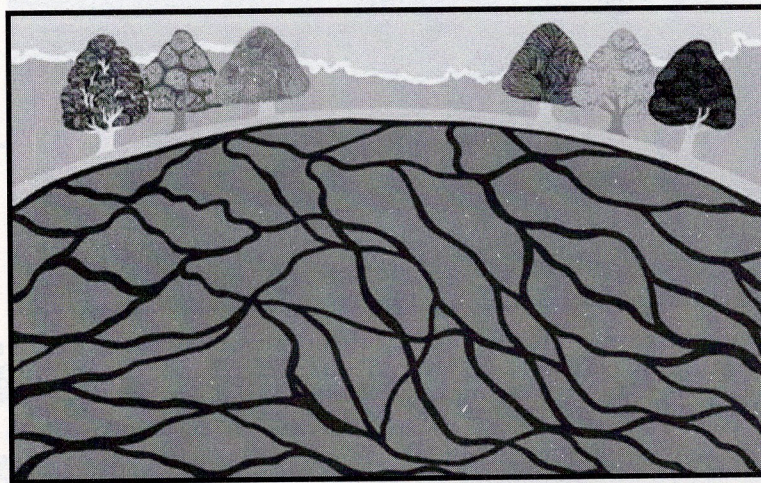
LAND-ESCAPES

Shahzia Sikander



Editors' Introduction:

The Subcontinental is proud to provide an exclusive advance look at the latest project by internationally renowned artist Shahzia Sikander.



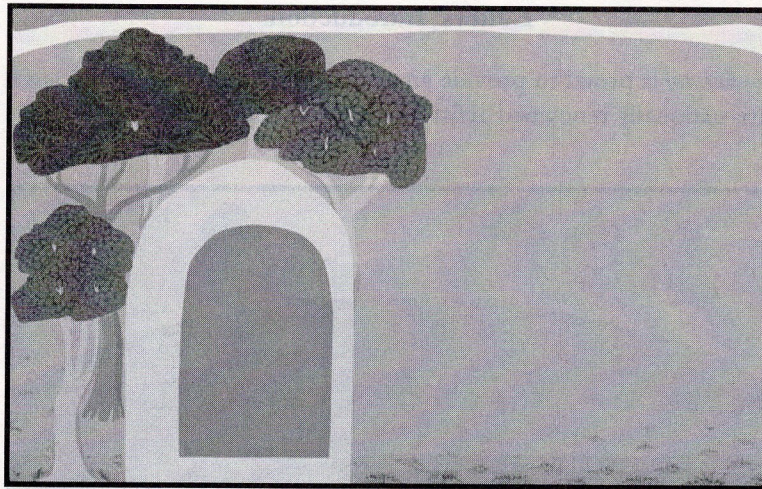
Sikander has recently completed *Land-escapes*, a series of works for the St. Bartholomew's hospital. St Bartholomew's is part of a network of hospitals under the NHS Trust, which also includes Royal London and Whitechapel. Serving an area of striking economic contrasts, the trust is a leader in clinical care, teaching and research and also one of the largest employers in East London.

The West Wing of St Bartholomew's Hospital was recently redesigned in order to create a new Breast Cancer center. This wing is situated in Smithfield, London, near Brick Lane, home to Bangladeshi and Somali immigrant communities. The original hospital was founded in the 12th century under the auspices of the Church, and London's oldest church, St. Bartholomew the Great, is situated next

SHAHZIA SIKANDER'S work has been exhibited at the Museum Of Modern Art (MOMA), Smithsonian Museum, Whitney Museum, San Diego Museum, Istanbul Biennial, MOMA Paris, and many other international venues. She has been in diverse group shows such as *Along the X-Axis: Video Art from India and Pakistan*, *Masters To Hipsters*, and *Aliens in America: Others in the USA*. In 2003, Sikander was recognized by the city of New York for pioneering the revival of miniature painting, for advancing the debate on multiculturalism, and for preserving and promoting the heritage and culture of South Asia. *Newsweek* (March 22, 2004) listed her as one of the most important South Asians transforming the American Cultural landscape.

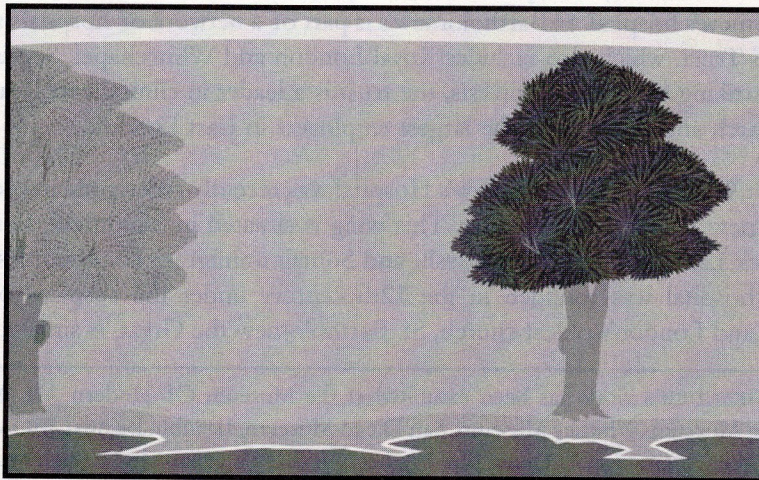
door. In the 16th century, after the suppression of many religious houses by Henry VIII, the hospital was given to the city of London. The city managed it for four centuries until the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. It now forms part of the Bart's and London NHS Trust.

The new hospital unit was designed with particular attention to the comfort and reassurance of female patients. Scientific research has discovered that environ-



mental factors and visual stimuli positively affect patient well-being, reduce stress levels and accelerate recovery rates. Based on this research, the hospital paid particular attention to the architectural and visual environment.

Shahzia Sikander's new artwork for the hospital was commissioned with the idea of "being transported somewhere else." The destination is one among several --



home, abroad, a dream-state, an exotic landscape, or somewhere more intimate. Sikander's new collection will be unveiled in west wing of St Bartholomew's hospital in September 2004.

We also present an excerpt from Sikander's statement on the *Land-escapes* series.



The Context of Miniature Painting in the *Land-escapes*

Shahzia Sikander

The *Land-escapes* series embodies the continued exploration of the conceptual and formal constructs of miniature painting, which has been at the core of my work for the past 15 years. Interested in the play, the flirtation with tradition, my interest in this genre remains primarily conceptual focusing on issues between scale and labor, narrative and translation (and failure of translation), precision and gesture, norm and its transgression.

The *Land-escapes* images are derived from photographs I took while driving in Texas and California and combining them with details found within a few selected schools of Persian and Indian miniatures. The often

obscure elements of landscapes are brought to the forefront by shifting the scale and removing all other figurative information. The drawings then made are scanned into digital files to further eliminate the hand drawn element. The *Land-escapes* renegotiate difference, questioning the boundaries imposed by time, gender, religion, and culture. Although



the work is inspired by a range of painting schools of both Hindu and Muslim cultures, they have been simplified and stylized to become non-nostalgic and stripped down of any type of sentiment. They are whimsical and buoyant and are intended to transport the viewer into imaginary worlds. The narrative is open ended.

The layering process is in reverse in this body of work. Instead of developing layer after layer of information, I am using subtractive labor in an attempt to create a space devoid of any recollection.

Whereas miniatures tend to deal with

intimacy, the resulting photographs here may be intimate in scale but are much more open and heroic in their depiction of space. The works are more of a commentary on lived experiences, art history and pop culture. Art as a tool for transgression can become material for questioning rather than mere contemplation. Art for me is mostly experience, it is not necessarily about politics, feminism or religion. I think that boundaries do exist, be they physical, emotional, geographical, cultural or psychological. For me as an artist it is not about being political, but to point at the shifting nature of such boundaries.

