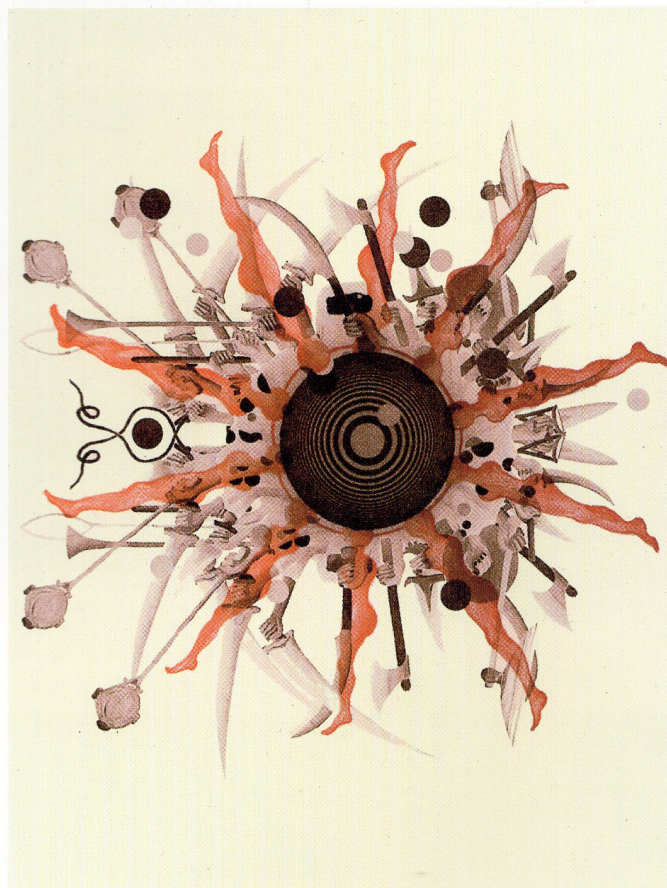


Overview



1. *Armorial Bearings*

Shahzia Sikander No Parking Anytime

Art is a poetic record of our culture, and perhaps the bewildering range of art in play right now has something to do with the bewildering and often devastating interaction of cultures that is so strongly in our news events and our minds right now. The few artists who are somehow in a position to grasp this unsettled time poetically are probably the ones who will finally define our age. I think there is a good possibility that Shahzia Sikander may be among them. I hope that she is, because her approach is essentially optimistic.

Sikander was born in Pakistan in 1969. She studied Mughal miniature painting under a traditional master at the National College of Arts in Lahore, and later attended the Rhode Island School of Art and Design. She has lived in the United States

for almost a decade. "I think of myself as an American," she says. "But I also feel that I have a privileged place from which to express things through art."

"Islam as terrorism or as repression of women is not my experience," she says. "All the women in my family did something with their lives." She approaches life with care and with confidence. Her art, though detailed, has something to do with immediacy. It is also beautiful.

The beauty of her life before she came to the United States is sweetly shown in a long painting she did on paper in 1991-2. It is approximately a foot high and five and a half feet long, and is titled simply *The Scroll*. At the beginning a young woman in white walks up a few steps into a house that unfolds

along the length of the scroll in the style and perspective of traditional miniature painting. A bedroom looks out on a small garden; there is a dining room, a family room, a tiled kitchen. The furnishings are comfortable and modern. Children and animals are playing. On the terrace off the living room the white-clad girl sits in a hooded rattan swing while her father lounges in a chair nearby. She is seen in her bedroom, looking in a mirror. At the end, she is painting in an outdoor courtyard. She stands at an easel a little outside the frame, and paints a portrait of a white-clad girl.

The innocence of the theme belies the work's complexity. "Formally I was engaging in a dialogue with the Safavid period of the Persian School of painting (16th and 17th century), which often depicts interior spaces, has specific usage of patterns, particular perspectives, dense surfaces, etc.," she explains. Her training was "methodical and ritualistic" and was about "surface, palette, form, composition, and stylization. Self-expression came later."

From her earliest paintings, stylistically Sikander has mixed Mughal (Islamic) and Rajput (Hindu) traditional forms. To those of us with untrained eyes she seems simply to draw on the Indian miniature tradition, but to someone used to looking at miniatures the paintings show shifting boundaries. The bloody Partition in 1947 that created Pakistan as a Muslim state separate from India still colors the attitudes of people on both sides of the divide. "Pakistan's identity is forever linked to its difficult relationship with its neighbor," Sikander says. "How do you acknowledge your past or your traditions when they are really part of a plural, a melting pot that has been stirred over the ages? How do you decide which part of one's own history is acceptable and which is not? When you're focusing on miniature painting and you come across a Mewar painting from Rajasthan, do you ignore it because it is from a Hindu court?"

Her answer, of course, is No. "People in the arts within Pakistan have always tried to create some understanding of what is happening in India," she says. There is a dangerous standoff at the moment between Pakistan and India, a standoff that until recently seemed parallel to the even-more-dangerous situation between Palestine and Israel that is presently preoccupying us. An all-out Pakistan-India confrontation has been held at bay, however, and this is at least partly by the influence of people in the arts: people who think about the value of culture and are not willing to destroy themselves or to invite destruction for the sake of ancient animosities.

To Sikander, art is "a ticket to experience." She sees boundaries in life that will "always exist" and lists them as "economic, cultural, national, religious, political, geographical, historical

and psychological." What she wants to do, as an artist, is to "articulate their shifting nature."

In her hands this articulation is painstaking and time-consuming. In Pakistan, she says, she learned "respect for tradition and respect for patience." She draws with great concentration and exactness, working at first on translucent paper. "The sheer act of doing it gives me a certain sort of peace," she says. In mixing Hindu and Muslim imagery she has no qualms about subverting both, often humorously, and since she has been in the "neutral" political situation of the United States she has also begun to receive inspiration from what she calls "mundane and ordinary things." She feels it is important to "be in communication with the community one lives in."

As she develops images, she overlays the thin paper she is drawing on with other drawings also in progress, and in this way discovers satisfying combinations. Once she has settled on a particular set of images, she uses them again and again in different media. Besides her work with miniature painting, she also has done a number of large wall paintings and installations that involve drawings done with whole-body gestural movements. Her installations, in particular, use layers of large drawings and often are put up in just a few days. They are a foil for her detailed miniature paintings that require



Shahzia Sikander in the Crown Point studio, 2001.

Shahzia Sikander

Born 1969, Lahore, Pakistan
Lives and works in New York City

Education

1995 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
1992 B.F.A. National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2001 The Asia Society, New York City (with Nilima Sheikh)
2001 Art Pace, San Antonio, Texas
2000 Whitney Museum, Philip Morris Branch, New York City
1999 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D. C.
1999 The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design,
Kansas City
1998 The Renaissance Society, The University of Chicago,
Chicago
1997 Deitch Projects, New York City
1997 Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, California

Selected Group Exhibitions

2001 *ARS 01*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Kiasma, Helsinki,
Finland
2001 *Elusive Paradise*, National Gallery Museum, Ottawa,
Canada
2000 *Greater New York*, PS1, in collaboration with the Museum
of Modern Art, New York
1999 *The American Century*, Whitney Museum, New York City
1999 *The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*,
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
1999 *Art-Worlds in Dialogue*, Ludwig Museum, Koln, Germany

NOTE: Quotations in the text from the artist are taken from three sources:
1.) E-mails from the artist to the author. 2.) *Art:21—Art in the 21st Century*,
Part 1, a videotape, produced for the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and
published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 2001. 3.) an interview with the artist by
Vishakha N. Desai in the exhibition catalog, *Conversations with Traditions:*
Nilima Sheikh and Shahzia Sikander, the Asia Society, New York, 2001.

In the Crown Point Gallery:

April 23 - June 1, 2002

Invention/Tradition: Etchings and Unique Works by Shahzia Sikander, Enrique Chagoya, Francesco Clemente, Brad Davis, Katsura Funakoshi, Bryan Hunt, Elaine de Kooning, Robert Kushner, and Tom Marioni. Also on view is *Purple*, a new portfolio of seven etchings by Richard Tuttle.

In Chicago:

Visit Crown Point Press at ArtChicago 2002, May 10 - 13 at Navy Pier, Booth A216. New prints by Shahzia Sikander and Richard Tuttle as well as other recent editions will be on view. Come and join us in celebrating the fair's tenth anniversary!

In New York:

Crown Point's new editions by Shahzia Sikander and Richard Tuttle are available at Pace Editions, 32 E. 57th St., New York.

No Parking Anytime, by Shahzia Sikander, 2001, was printed by Rachel Fuller, assisted by Dena Schuckit and Case Hudson. Paper size: 18-1/4 x 14-1/2"; image size varies. Nine color photogravures with (in various images) soft and hard ground etching; aquatint; and spit bite, soap ground and water bite aquatints. Prints 1 - 5 are printed on *gampi* paper *chine collé* mounted on Somerset soft white satin paper. Images 6 - 9 are printed directly on Somerset soft white satin paper. The edition is 25 with ten artist's proofs. The first twenty sets and the proofs are presented in portfolio boxes. Published by Crown Point Press.

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