

 dailytimes.com.pk

   /DailyTimesPak

@Fahdhusain

High time we created a 'Ministry of Filth'.
Plenty will qualify from all parties.
Volunteers may raise their hands

Fahd Husain, Journalist)

Award-winning artist

Pride of Pakistan

— Shahzia Sikander

Showcasing her work internationally | B8



Daily Times

20 Pages Lahore Edition

Your Right to Know

Lahore | Zilqad 15, 1438 Tuesday, August 8, 2017

PRIDE OF PA

Shahzia Sika

In lieu of Independence Day on August 14, all of August, the Daily Times will highlight our eighth interview is with the award-winning contemporary artist who has shown

By Saira Agha

Tell us about your foray into the field of art. How did it all begin for you?

Art is hard to put into words. I like to think of it as a lens through which to observe and experience life, a go-to guide, in short a means to think outside of the box. Creativity has no national, racial or religious boundary. My interest in art probably came from being an introverted child and from finding inspiration in nature. Drawing from a very early age was evident and at that time it was a means of expression and communication. Later it evolved from a background of studying math and poetry. Energy sparked by creativity is full of potential. An artist often has the burden to reimagine. In reimagining lies the ability to break moulds and re-examine the norms. I have examined the art - historical tradition of Indo-Persian miniature painting for more than three decades and see my role as fundamentally investigative.

How are opportunities different for aspiring artists residing in the US than those living in Pakistan? Do you think there are more avenues for US-based artists?

Social media has changed the ability to exhibit work from any place in the world. My interest in historical Islamic art and Indo-Persian miniature painting has been one of the reasons for engaging the historical artworks in institutions across US and Europe. So much of that tradition remains in storages in Western institutions. It is important for me to study actual works and open new interpretations. Recently I created a permanent video work, *Disruption as Rapture*, for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which owns the original 18th Century manuscript *Gulshan-e-Ishq*. The video work created in collaboration with others as well as the musician Ali Sethi highlights the significance of Nusrati's poem in masnavi format and its reference to Sufi enlightenment. The *Gulshan-e-Ishq* an epic poem, an allegorical tale was written in 1657-58 by Nusrati, court poet to Sultan Ali Adil Shah II of Bijapur. The poem is also written in Daccani Urdu and Persian naskh script, the language of the Muslim elite in South and Central India, a North Indian Hindu love story recast as a Sufi tale for an Islamic court. The story emerges as a metaphor for a soul's search for, and connection with, the Divine.

Tell us about your first or your most favourite work of art.

My thesis painting *The Scroll*, which I created in 1989-90 at the National College of Arts! That painting was a five-foot detailed miniature and it took more than a year to make. It also started a trend in the miniature-painting

Achievements

▶ GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Artist Shahzia Sikander is the first Pakistani-American to be inducted in the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution. She is also the first Pakistani to win the National Medal of Art in 2012. Shahzia Sikander was given the MacArthur Genius Grant in 2006. She is also the proud recipient of the Asia Society Award for Significant Contribution to Contemporary Art in 2015 and the American Academy of Religion & the Arts Award in 2016. Two recent survey exhibitions of Sikander's practice 'Apparatus of Power' were held at the Asia Society in Hong Kong and *Ecstasy as Sublime, Heart as Vector* at the MAXXI National Museum of Rome in 2016-2017. Sikander has held solo exhibitions throughout the US, the UK, Germany, Ireland and Australia. She has had solo exhibitions at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. Her work has been shown in-group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum, at the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia and at the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany.

▶ MULTI-TALENTED ARTIST

Sikander is not just a contemporary artist but has also worked in various art mediums including drawing, painting, printmaking, animation, large-scale installation, performance, video and more.

department to make large-scale "miniature" paintings. I was studying calculus and

its experiment with depiction of space. I was also looking at films and how visual narrative

Works, which are collaborative in nature, are most intense, challenging and satisfying as different languages and personalities have to come together to create a dialogue

advanced geometry and had interest in architecture, which influenced the painting and



structures inject the personal into storytelling. That work embraced the personal in a wholehearted manner by depicting the anxieties of youth. Also how in Persian and Safavid Paintings especially Behzad's work, the use of interior and exterior space can be compared to beat and rhythm in music. I made *The Scroll* while listening to Sabri Brothers on repeat in Ustad Bashir Ahmed's tiny miniature painting classroom.

You are a versatile artist having worked in various art mediums, for instance drawing, painting, printmaking, animation, installation etc. Which is the toughest? Which of these do you enjoy the most?

All work and related research is tough for various reasons. Drawing is my thinking tool. Out of the act of drawing, many possibilities emerge. Works, which are collaborative in nature, are most intense, challenging and satisfying as different languages and personalities have to come together to create a dialogue.



PAKISTAN

Shahzia Sikander

Highlight individuals who continue to make Pakistan proud. Showcase her work internationally— Shahzia Sikander

Art requires a lot of focus. How do you maintain your concentration?

Work allows me to imagine and imagination is empowering. Curiosity and search for knowledge is nurturing and that sustains the work ethic.

You have exhibited your work internationally. Tell us about your most memorable experience.

Working with my composer and long-time collaborator from Shanghai, Du Yun has been a rewarding experience. We have travelled and worked at length with poets, playwrights, actors, community leaders, children, scholars and sopranos in Istanbul, Sharjah, Italy, and Shanghai. We

are also working with musicians from Pakistan.

Creating work that can reflect on human experience and speak to the world is inspiring.

What according to you has been your biggest achievement until now?

To embrace failure and to keep wanting to learn and grow.

Growing up, who have been some of your most favourite artists?

We learn something from everyone around us at all stages of our lives. All the artists of Pakistan, dead and alive, painters, writers, poets, musicians, composers and actors. There is so much talent. It's a lifelong experience of discovering other's work. One of my favourite, challenging and intriguing philosopher is Ibn Arabi.

What are you currently working on?

I am working on several permanent public artworks in multiple cities. Two were installed recently at Princeton University. One a 66 foot mosaic and another a 25-foot glass painting. There is a documentary on this which you can find on YouTube.

We at Daily Times, consider you one of our national heroes. Who are some of yours?

Mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, women and men who fight for women's rights. Bilquis and Abdul Sattar Edhi are deeply inspiring Pakistanis.

