



ISLAMIC ART SYMPOSIUM

***Intersections:
Visual Cultures of Islamic
Cosmopolitanism***

A collaboration between

Edith O'Donnell Institute
of Art History

Islamic Art Revival Series

Aga Khan Council
for the Central United States

in partnership with the

Dallas Museum of Art

Shahzia Sikander Keynote Address

Abstract

Artist Shahzia Sikander on her multicultural past and our future.
(Excerpt from Op-Ed published in LA Times, March 26, 2016)



American Muslim identity is one of the most palpable, elusive and intellectually challenging ideas of our time, and intellectual freedom, knowledge and imagination are essential in opening up the discourse. It is essential for the perception of Muslim Americans to gain depth and momentum through art and literature that is free to engage, explore, critique and expand its inherent Muslim-ness. Personal, communal and institutional support such that other religious and immigrant communities enjoy is necessary for multi-faceted Muslim American voices to emerge in the 21st century. Where is my Muslim American Historical Society? Why is there no stand-alone Museum of Islamic Art, contemporary or otherwise, in the United States?

For me, cultivating imagination and fostering empathy started early in childhood. Learning how to co-exist begins with understanding and celebrating all our identities, pluralities and intersections. Art and literature have played significant roles in shaping my understanding of differences (and similarities). Creativity is essential for both young and adult, but it's adults who must address and correct the forces of ignorance, fear and misplaced rage.

Bio

Born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1969, Shahzia Sikander took up the traditional practice of miniature painting amidst Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, a time in which the medium was deeply unpopular among youth. She received her BFA in 1991 from the National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan, where she undertook rigorous training studying with master miniaturist Bashir Ahmed. Sikander became the first woman to teach Miniature Painting at NCA alongside Ahmed, and was one of the first artists from the department to challenge the medium's technical and aesthetic framework. Sikander moved to the United States to pursue her MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design (1993-1995). Entering the early 2000s, Sikander continued to pioneer technically, engaging in novel ways with miniature painting, to include large-scale floor and wall drawings, installation, multi-media works, and collaborations with other artists. Following a residency at Artpace in 2001, she began experimenting with video and animation, marking a critical turning point in her career.