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Vakil, Iman. "Pera Museum Launches Exhibition Dedicated To Middle Eastern Miniaturists." Harper's Bazaar Arabia. October 26, 2020.

Harper's
BAZAAR
ARABIA



Shahzia Sikander. *Parallax*. 2013. 3 channel HD video animation with 5.1 surround sound

Pera Museum's new exhibition *Miniature 2.0* is entirely dedicated to contemporary miniaturists in the MENASA region. BAZAAR Art surveys the politically charged upcoming show presenting the miniature's formal expansion into sculpture, moving images and assemblage, proving it to be anything but archaic.

Recognising the traditional miniature's capacity for carrying multiple narratives and its unique relationship with text and image, Turkish curators Azra Tüzünoğlu and Gülce Özkara are demonstrating the contemporary miniature's farreaching subversive potential in the *Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art* exhibition at the [Pera Museum](#) in Istanbul.

The show features 14 [artists](#) across Turkey, South Asia and the Middle East. Exploring their shared cultural heritage, works by Halil Altındere, Dana Awartani, Fereydoun Ave, CANAN, Hayv Kahraman, Imran Qureshi, Shahzia Sikander, Saira Wasim and others readapt the traditional miniature to delve into colonialism, identity politics, forced migration and representation.

Taking reference from renowned Pakistani contemporary miniaturist Shahzia Sikander's *Fleshy Weapons* (1997), controversially combining Indian and Pakistani symbology, the exhibition intertwines the work of various Muslim-majority countries, disrupting isolationist politics during the rise of nationalist discourses.

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Laden with conceptual meaning since its inception, miniature painting has long held distinctive principles rejecting illusionistic representation. Created collectively, the significance and meaning of a subject-guided miniature [painting](#), instead of its physicality, which utilises an unfolding perspective, is in stark contrast to the European single-point. Today, the miniature, at large, remains frozen in both time and function, serving as an emblem of a past, independent era of glory.

“Miniatures are a foreign area for Turkish contemporary art viewers,” Tüzünoğlu and Özkara summarise. “Apart from the Jameel Prize, there are not many publications and wide-ranging exhibitions that focus on the miniature in [contemporary](#) art.”

Tüzünoğlu and Özkara, who is currently completing her PhD work on the contemporary miniature art as curatorial activism, approach the contemporary miniature as a uniquely “Eastern” medium, citing Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘closeness of difference’ as an underlying philosophical foundation, and as capable of conjoining ancient histories with the present, with each sustaining the other.

In the exhibition, several works employ the fable, manipulating its pedagogical function and glorification of historical events, such as in Halil Altındere’s *Sultan’s Accession to the Throne Ceremony with Drone*, which refers to the 1789 painting by Konstantin Kapıdağlı. Similarly, Hayv Kahraman draws from the canonical 13th century texts by Maqamat al Hariri describing everyday life, and inserts her own narratives and female subjects.

The curators also commissioned an installation called *The Beauty and the Beast (The Lion and the Gazelle)* by Turkish artist CANAN, depicting the WaqWaq Tree, a prominent feature of Indo-Persian mythology and folklore as a prophetic or carnivorous tree bearing humanoid fruit, which is found in numerous Arabic and Persian manuscripts.

Tüzünoğlu and Özkara also trace the legacy of Miniature Painting Department at the National College of Arts in Lahore and its integral role as a dynamic hub for the medium. Founded in the 1980s, featured artists Shahzia Sikander, Imran Qureshi, Saira Wasim and Noor Ali Chagani all alternately studied and sometimes, taught there.

First shown at the 11th Sharjah Biennial, Sikander’s seminal work *Parallax* (2013), a three-channel installation made up of digital animations, explores conflict and control in the postcolonial condition by examining the geostrategy of the Strait of Hormuz, through which forty per cent of Middle Eastern oil is shipped.

Alternatively, younger cohort Saira Wasim’s paintings remain anchored in the dreamlike styling of 16th century traditional Iranian miniatures, while being ambivalently embedded with caricatures of right-wing symbols, violent iconography and a weary Madonna and child.

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Miniature 2.0 is on show now at Pera Museum until 17 January 2021