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Staff Picks: Mammoths, Magazines, and Mysterious Marks

There is a wide variety of work in "[Weeping Willows, Liquid Tongues](#)," a show by Shahzia Sikander at Sean Kelly Gallery: massive, rough-edged mosaics; graphite drawings; videos; even a sculpture in bronze, in which a devata modeled on one in the Met balances atop a Venus based on a Bronzino painting. This could have lapsed into chaos, but all the works are bound together by the idea of mixture, mingling, boundaries—between places and eras, between languages or mediums, between people or within them—made porous. One particularly striking work is titled simply *X*, and I've looked at it on my computer for hours now, trying to figure it out. The painting is made up of text, neatly printed Urdu (and I think I see some English in the back) written over and over to form a red *X* on smoky black, the words legible in places but lost in others. The shape and the colors appear to indicate "stop," like a warning or something being forbidden, but the separations seem a trick of the eye. So maybe it is another kind of *X*—strips of tape holding something together, or bandages, or perhaps the *X* that marks the spot. The text, a quote from the poet Ghalib, points in that direction: "If the divine lives within earthly instruments and the music they produce, where is then the locus of divinity?"