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Editors. "The Morgan presents the artistic journey of internationally celebrated Shahzia Sikander." *Art Daily*, June 18, 2021.



Shahzia Sikander, Spaces in Between, 1995. Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, graphite, and tea on wasli paper; 27.4 × 25.9 cm. Private Collection, Göttingen, Germany, © Shahzia Sikander. Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York.

NEW YORK, NY.- The Morgan Library & Museum opened Shahzia Sikander: Extraordinary Realities. This exhibition is organized by the RISD Museum, in Providence, Rhode Island, where it will be on view from November 12, 2021, through January 30, 2022. It then travels to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where it will run

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from March 13 through June 12, 2022. The exhibition is accompanied by a book copublished by the RISD Museum and Hirmer.

Born in Lahore in 1969, Pakistani American artist Shahzia Sikander is internationally celebrated for bringing manuscript painting traditions from South and Central Asia into dialogue with contemporary art practice. This exhibition includes nearly 60 works borrowed from public and private collections and tracks the first fifteen years of her artistic journey, from her groundbreaking deconstruction of manuscript painting in Pakistan to the development of a new personal vocabulary at the Rhode Island School of Design, expanded explorations around identity as a Core Fellow at the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and her global outlook during her first years in New York. During this period, Sikander richly interrogated gender, sexuality, race, class, and history, creating open-ended narratives that have sustained her as one of the most significant artists working today.

The exhibition begins with work Sikander made while studying miniature painting, another term for manuscript painting, at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore (1987–1991). Her decision to major in this tradition was met with skepticism at the school, where many viewed the practice as lacking in creativity. Yet for her, the Western genres she was taught seemed fraught with the weight of colonialism. Manuscript painting had a tireless advocate at the NCA in Professor Bashir Ahmad, whose passion intimated the potential of this territory. Working under his mentorship, Sikander ruptured all expectations with her thesis, *The Scroll* (1989–1990), which was striking for the originality of its subject, format, scale, and execution. With this work, she demonstrated the tradition’s potential for experimentation and relevance to contemporary art, beginning what would become a neo-manuscript movement in Pakistan.

The radical nature of Sikander’s pursuit and her extraordinary success in Pakistan was unknown at RISD during her graduate studies (1993–1995). She took up new materials as she confronted the “cultural dislocation” of coming to America. Working with gouache and ink on tracing paper and clay-coated paper, she continued an interrogation of gender and power begun in Lahore, developing new archetypes as loose gestural marks were suggestive of figures. Responsiveness to materials and techniques was now applied with new abandon as drawings informed by deeper investigations into feminism and sexuality emerged.

By the time Sikander left RISD, she had created a personal lexicon and strategies for layering her new imagery within traditional paintings. She juxtaposed these invented motifs during her 1995–1997 residency at the Glassell School of Art, creating narratives that referenced multiple times, geographies, and traditions. Her work became more expansive in its interpretation, and at the same time began to increase in scale as she combined and layered her tracing-paper drawings. Her focus on women continued with new imagery and themes inspired by the region’s culture as well as her engagement with Project Row Houses, in Houston, through which she gained a deeper understanding of American race relations.

Even before Sikander left Houston, her work was quickly gaining the attention of the art world. In 1997, she was invited to show at the Drawing Center, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Johannesburg Biennale; Deitch Projects, New York; and the Queens Museum of Art, New York, among many other venues. Following her 1997 move to New York, where she still lives, she continued to make work grounded

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in manuscript painting traditions while simultaneously expanding her ambitious wall drawings and floor-to-ceiling installations layering works on tracing paper. By the early 2000s, the dynamism of her drawings led Sikander to video animations, which today comprise a major part of her practice. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath opened up new engagement around economics, global trade, and news cycles, and Sikander's work became more overtly political.

For Sikander, "this project is an important opportunity to historicize and coalesce themes and multiple languages in the work from perspectives within and outside of the U.S." Throughout her career, Sikander has been remarkably prescient, and the vocabulary and themes she has developed since the early 1990s continue to resonate in contemporary discourse. Multifaceted, nuanced, and open-ended, her narratives shatter expected hierarchies, norms, and stereotypes with an imagination and wit that have conjured extraordinary realities indeed, placing her among the most significant artists working today.

The Morgan's Director, Colin B. Bailey, said, "We are delighted to present the work of internationally renowned Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander at the Morgan Library & Museum. Her synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions has differentiated her practice among contemporary artists and provided a unique visual vocabulary for exploring politics, gender, and archetypes of beauty. Her work is resonant with the Indo-Persian manuscript tradition represented in the Morgan's collection, and we look forward to collaborating with her in an exhibition that throws light on her creative process during the formative years of her career, as well providing the setting for a new site-specific installation."

"Morgan Stanley is proud to sponsor Shahzia Sikander's exhibition Extraordinary Realities at the Morgan Library," said Susan Reid, Morgan Stanley Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion. "Our Firm is committed to celebrating diverse ideas and perspectives and, as a Pakistani American artist, Sikander's meaningful work will undoubtedly inspire and create dialogue surrounding important topics in our communities and beyond."

Shahzia Sikander: Extraordinary Realities is accompanied by a publication of the same name, edited by Sadia Abbas and Jan Howard, which includes contributions from Bashir Ahmad, Dennis Congdon, Faisal Devji, Gayatri Gopinath, Vasif Kortun, Rick Lowe, Julie Mehretu, Kishwar Rizvi, Shahzia Sikander, and John W. Smith. Comprising new archival material, fresh scholarly essays, and conversations with artists, curators, and Sikander's teachers, the book presents a bold, in-depth examination of the artist's early work.