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## Animated artist

Shahzia Sikander talks about recent work, NCA days and attacks on her identity.

By Saeed Rahman

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**LAHORE: “The story of Pakistan should include all kinds of artists...those whose sensibilities do not fall into the expected terrain should also make it to history books,” said artist Shahzia Sikander on Friday.**

She was speaking at the session titled The World of Miniature.

Sikander kicked off the proceedings by telling a packed hall that she was proud to be a Pakistani. Her clarification, she said, was in response to all that had been said about her work and her identity and she wanted that to be a part of the conversation.

Sikander started with images of her work Parallax that is on display in Dhaka. The work comprises of hundreds of tiny diagrams that have been digitally animated and deals with the “fraught history of imperial control”. The work focuses on history of maritime trade in the Strait of Hormuz and incorporates images specific to the site, topographic maps and aerial views. Sikander said that while researching the piece she came across the image of a multi-vat oil well called a Christmas tree. “It did not look like one, it was more the gift bearing idea I think.” She took the idea and turned it into a Christmas tree. “They multiply in the parallax, transform into mirages and break apart.” She spoke of another project where a building in the UAE was in decay, she found that an anomaly.

Sikander said when starting an animation she did not work with a narrative or storyboard. Rather with what was on her mind, which was usually her previous work. Drawing, she added, was her fundamental tool. Sikander said most of her works were exhibited in a variety of contexts and many times accompanied with a live score.

Speaking about her work on a historic building in San Francisco, she said, night projections had been mapped around the entire space transforming it.

She said her move to the US in 1993 was not the impetus to deconstruct the miniature. “That process had started long before the shift.”

Sikander said many assumptions had been made about her move away from the miniature. “Life is not linear. It is important to discover and be challenged. The intent is to question and not be stagnant.”

Looking at her earlier work from her days as a student at the NCA, she remarked on the compositional details of each pixel. She said at the core of her work lay the inherent interest in locating information, highlighting it, testing its ability to transform itself and remove itself from its point of origin.

Sikander commented on recent exhibitions from Pakistan that had not included her. “I welcome critique of my work but will not tolerate erasure of my contributions and attacks on my identity.” She said her email was on her website and that she was available for collaborative work.

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