

SHAHZIA SIKANDER ECSTASY AS SUBLIME, HEART AS VECTOR

The first solo show in an Italian museum for the Pakistani-American artist

22 June – 23 October 2016

www.fondazionemaxxi.it | #ShaziaSikander

Rome June 2016. Shahzia Sikander (Lahore, Pakistan, 1969, living in New York, USA) observes the present through the lens of the imagination, symbols, literature and history of diverse cultural traditions. A rich, complex oeuvre housed for the first time in an Italian museum with the exhibition **SHAHZIA SIKANDER: ECSTASY AS SUBLIME, HEART AS VECTOR** curated by Hou Hanru and Anne Palopoli at MAXXI from 22 June to 23 October 2016.

“Shahzia Sikander’s work is an outburst of energy, imagination, and creativity. – says **Hou Hanru** curator of the exhibition and Artistic Director of MAXXI - Her art is an expression of the exiled – voluntarily and propelled by curiosity about what happened in the past at home, and, more importantly, what will happen next, anywhere in the world”.

As **Giovanna Melandri** President of MAXXI Foundation, says: “Shahzia Sikander is an artist who transcends and interpenetrates cultural traditions, who can stake a claim to her roots because she knows how to speak to the world”.

In the exhibition the artist will create a layout specifically for the museum with over 30 works in various media and idioms, from drawing to miniatures referring to the Indo-Persian tradition and from video to digital animation. Included are works born from critical thinking and inquiry of historical, literary and political positions that delineate the inherent complexity of universal themes ranging from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial, geopolitical changes, migration, cultural quarantine and the birth of nations and religion and ultimately human identity. Sikander’s diverse practice investigates the blurred boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, storytelling and history-writing calling into question issues around redaction, perception of authority and independence.

SHAHZIA SIKANDER: ECSTASY AS SUBLIME, HEART AS VECTOR shows the artist’s work from 2000’s to the present day with exhibition design facilitating an immersive experience of the range of format and mediums.

The work which opens the show is **Parallax** (2013) a 3-channel video animation 20 metres in length, created for the Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates) and adapted to the curvature and inclination of the spaces in MAXXI’s Gallery 5. A ground breaking and cinematic work inspired by the artist’s trip to the United Arab Emirates with original score composed by Du Yun, in collaboration with poets from Sharjah, **Parallax** deals with the history of maritime trade in the Strait of Hormuz, particularly the fraught history of imperial control. **Parallax** exemplifies Sikander’s signature technique of animating freehand sketches to disrupt scale and destabilize the medium by interweaving both ‘organic’ and ‘artificial’ drawing. The process of making the animation is not a linear but rather a dynamic procedure that takes place over an extended period of time that is ongoing with the artist’s practice. Not only do the drawings shape the animation, but also the animations inform the drawing practice.

With **Parallax**, the spectator is transported to a sweeping landscape of deserts, abstract cavernous spaces, refineries, water courses, topographic maps and particle systems constructed from the hair of the gopis, the female followers of Krishna, the Hindu deity, a traditionally devotional subject of the Hindu court paintings. By isolating the hair from its associated female form, Sikander emphasizes the transformative potential in certain formal elements and her process of dislocation cultivates new meanings for trenchant symbols and motifs.

The gopi hair silhouette has been a recurring visual trope in Sikander's work first appearing in ***SpiNN*** (2003) and recently in ***Gopi-Contagion*** screened in October of 2015 on the enormous digital billboards in Times Square, New York, in which the hair particles move like flocks or reproduce the behaviour of cellular organisms. Both these works are exhibited in a room created at the centre of Gallery 5, functioning as a wunderkammer along with the video animations ***Nemesis*** (2003) where the fantastical comes together and falls apart repeatedly and ***Pursuit Curve*** (2004) where the 'turban', often perceived as a sign of race, religion, ethnicity, culture, or gender converts itself into butterflies or insects while simultaneously pointing to a graphic mark that is set in motion. Visual vocabulary conforms to set rules located within the miniature painting tradition but the interpretation is in flux.

The Last Post (2010) which tackles the issue of opium trafficking and colonial legacy of trade through the story of an officer of the East India Company and ***Gold Oasis*** (2015) in which the stylized and restrained language juxtaposed to the music of Nas and Damian Marley becomes a vehicle for reflection on last year's Ebola epidemic.

Alongside these works, the same room also houses numerous ink drawings and prints ***No Parking Anytime*** (2001) and ***Portrait of the Artist*** (2016) composed of four drawings by the artist and a text written by the Pulitzer Prize winner Ayad Akhtar. The series was inspired by the historic Miraj miniatures representing the mystical and visionary night journey (Miraj) of the prophet Mohammed used in this work as a metaphor for the realm of imagination and the presence of the sacred in the individual.

The exhibition concludes in front of the great glass wall of Gallery 5 with ***The Six Singing Spheres, a new series of drawings in ink and gold leaf created for the exhibition*** and a **site-specific installation** realised with multiple translucent drawings overlapped into a sculptural composite.

By disrupting entrenched ideas and formats and by considering different epistemologies, perceptual schemes and systems of representation, Shahzia Sikander creates worlds composed of evocative and disorienting images that remain open to diverse reflections and interpretations.

"My art is built with a lexicon of information, which grows and expands, is reused, edited, discarded and new ideas added. To move forward is to re think and to be able to detach to explore something new. Identity is not a given but a fluid process that unfolds over time. The pursuit of truth is a fleeting premise when held hostage to authenticity. I see identity as a pursuit curve, a chase where both real and fabricated are entangled." (Shahzia Sikander)

A **catalogue published by Bruno** with essays by Hou Hanru, Ayad Akhtar, Claire Brandon and Anne Palopoli and an interview by Alvaro Rodriguez Fominaya will be published in conjunction with the exhibition.

MAXXI – National Museum of XXI Century Arts

www.fondazionemaxxi.it - info: 06.320.19.54; info@fondazionemaxxi.it

opening hours: 11:00 AM – 7:00 PM (Tues, Weds, Thurs, Fri, Sun) | 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM (Sat) | closed Mondays

Admittance free for students of art and architecture from Tuesday to Friday

MAXXI PRESS OFFICE +39 06 324861 press@fondazionemaxxi.it

MAXXI

MUSEO NAZIONALE
DELLE ARTI DEL XXI SECOLO

soci
founding members



Ministero
dei beni e delle
attività culturali
e del turismo

enel



REGIONE
LAZIO

media partner



VOGUE

FONDAZIONE MAXXI

Via Guido Reni 4A, 00196 Roma T [+39] 06 3225178 F [+39] 06 3211867
info@fondazionemaxxi.it www.fondazionemaxxi.it