

# Works of shahzia sikander

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The paper "Works of Shahzia Sikander" is an excellent example of a case study on visual arts and film studies. The work of Shahzia Sikander is difficult to categorize because, as the artist herself is keen to point out, it makes a deliberate effort to cross boundaries and in so doing "articulate their shifting nature" (Sikander, quoted in Crown Point Press Website). The drawing 1 from 51 Ways of Looking (Sikander, 2004) uses layers of drawing, some very faint, and others, like the repeated black circles, much denser. This technique leads the eye to shift its focus from one layer to the next and back again, as it follows lines, forms or shadows. The male face in the middle of the drawing, for example, has a very clear head shape and brow line, but as the cheek line descends from the eye, it transforms into the outline of an arm belonging to another, much smaller scale figure to the right. This one line has, therefore, two different meanings, depending on whether the viewer reads it as belonging to the face, on the left or the body on the right. In the other work, the painting Perilous Order (Sikander, 1997) there is a mingling of traditional forms, such as the marbled frame of Pakistani miniatures, and modern techniques, including the way that the figures break out of the lines of the frame (MOMA Multimedia, no date). The work has traces of Islamic art in the calligraphic patterns outside the oval in the center, and elements of Hindu philosophy in the way the legs turn into roots at the bottom of the painting (PBOS video, no date). This juxtaposition of contrasting elements is typical of postmodern aesthetics, where ambiguity, layering and a fusion of abstract and figurative elements are common. I like the novelty of this because it makes me think more carefully about the widely used patterns, traditions, formats and styles that we tend to take for granted. Seeing them

put together in these dense layers reveals more of their properties, and makes them somehow new. The black circles, for example, appear disruptive of the main composition at first, but the longer they are viewed, the more they become part of the whole.