

**SHAHZIA SIKANDER: PARALLAX**

Tisch Family Gallery, Aidekman Art Center, Tufts University • Medford, MA • [artgallery.tufts.edu](http://artgallery.tufts.edu) • Through December 6, 2015

**P***arallax* can be briefly described: A fifteen-minute video installation composed of Shahzia Sikander's images, Du Yun's music, and singing and poetic recitation in Arabic, *Parallax* was inspired by the geography, culture, and history of the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic maritime passage not far from Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, where it first appeared in the 2013 Sharjah Biennial. Its impact, however, is more elusive and resistant to easy notation; even numerous viewings are inadequate to unfold its layers of color, form, movement, time, allusion, sound, language, and feeling.



Shahzia Sikander, *Walled States*, 2011, ink and gouache on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

As a further step from her extensive and innovative exploration of the techniques and gestural, compact, narrative qualities of Indo-Persian miniature painting, Sikander began in the early

2000s to use her images in multimedia videos. In *Parallax*, delicately drawn and painted images are digitally animated across three screens, enfolded viewers in the challenge of capturing the simultaneity and flux, boundedness and flow of voice and instrument, washes and forms of color, and representational and abstract personal and cultural imagery.

A colossal, diaphanous, black form strides, heart-stopping and goddess-like, across the tumult, embodying both female grace and resilience and oil's dual nature as blessing and curse. A recurrent hand motif evokes human yearning and restraint even as its open palm gestures craft and benefi-

cence. An image based on the traditional Gopi topknot hairstyle appears in immense numbers, unceasing motion, and countless permutations of appearance and disappearance. Abstract but suggesting sorrowful or baleful organic forms, alternately volitional or driven, their constant deployment and redeployment across the screens' arc conveys poignant struggle and submission to internal and external forces and intelligences.

Parallax means a view obstructed due to spatial displacement. The artist uses this scientific authority to underscore the perceptual displacement effected in one site deeply marked by eons of history, geologic and human. Gopi forms in madly coalescing globes and threateningly rising tides invoke timeless always-already disaster. Yet singing and music, rich color, and energized, flowing forms weave a comforting counter-narrative. Disaster may be inevitable and endlessly recurrent; but in the ever-looping *Parallax*, a shift in perspective reveals the underlying beauty.

—Susan Boulanger