

THE VISUAL ANALYSIS OF 'PERILOUS ORDER' BY SHAZIA SIKANDER

Anum Mahmood^{*1}, Sumbal Azeem²^{*1,2}University of OkaraDOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19328455>

Keywords

Article History

Received: 31 January 2026

Accepted: 16 March 2026

Published: 30 March 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Anum Mahmood

Abstract

Art is a way to express one's inner feelings and thoughts. There is a great diversity in art styles all over the world because of the different cultures, history, Human race and many other natural factors. This research paper is based on the comparison of any contemporary artist artwork with the elements of Islamic art. Pakistan is a culturally rich country and it is having many talented artists. This research paper is regarding the analysis of painting, "*Perilous order*" by well-known Artist of Pakistan "Shāhziyah Sikandar".

It is evident that "Shahzia Sikander" has painted the painting "Perilous Order" under the influence of Islamic art. The Painting consists of an arabesque pattern, Use of Portraiture, Flora and Fauna, Geometric designs, use of geometry, Illumination and is a traditional style miniature painting with use of light colors. The Painting was being completed in 9 years span which ranges from 1989 to 1997. The painting is in vegetable colors, Water colors technique and is being done on Wasli Paper. The painting is being displayed at "Whitney Museum of American Art" in New York. One can always see the artworks of "Shahzia Sikander" on many websites related to Art which shows that she is committed with her passion to paint and to show her rich art history and culture.

Introduction:

The world is having diversity because of the different culture and history people. Every region is having its identity and art. South Asia is a Culturally rich land as many different areas ruler has been ruling over it in the past.

Miniature art is also one of the famous art forms of South Asian countries including the present-Day India, Pakistan and Bengal. A Miniature painting is a style of art that describes the visual with a long history that dates back to the scribes of the medieval ages. Mughal paintings are a particular style of South Asian painting, The Mughal Emperors introduced new techniques to the art of Subcontinent giving a new style of

Painting to the region which was being under the influence of Persians, Chinese and Japanese art, Hindu and Buddhist Influences.

The Miniature Art is an art of book illustration it was given great importance by the Mughal Emperor "Akbar", and later it was being practiced in different areas which formulated various types of Miniature paintings according to the region. Mughal period Miniature Artists followed the elements of Islamic art and it was being reflected in their art. The patronization of Miniature Art Is still present in subcontinent which was initiated by the earlier Turk-Afghan Delhi Sultanate, Central Asian Rulers.

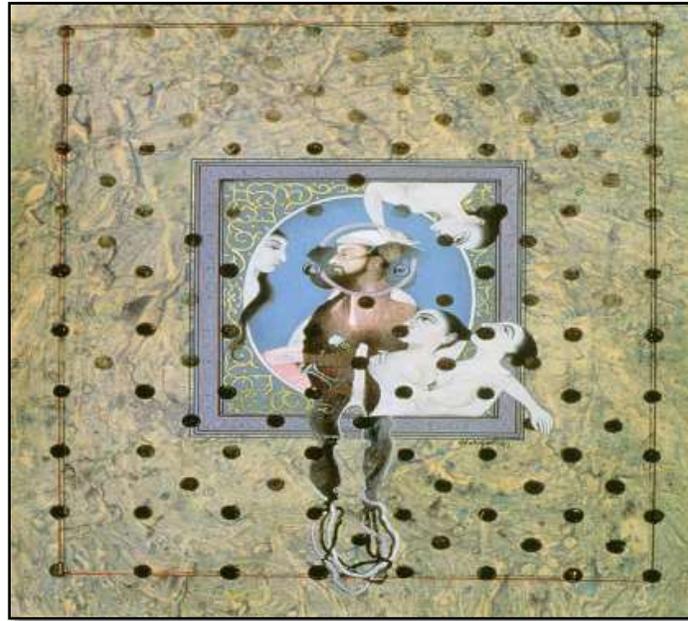


Figure 1: "Perilous Order"

The contemporary artists of Pakistan are producing beautiful art works and miniature paintings inspired by the basic techniques of Miniature painting which was being done by the ancestors.

Among the known artists of Pakistan, "Shahzia Sikander" has also contributed a lot in the field of Miniature art. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze the present-day artist work and how they have used the traditional aspects in their Paintings. The painting which is being analyzed in this research paper is called, "*Perilous order*" by "Shahzia Sikander"

- **Shāhziyah Sikandar:**

Shahzia Sikander is a Pakistani-American contemporary artist. She was born in 1969 in Lahore, Pakistan. Shazia Sikander has been shifted to New York, America few years ago. She was Graduated from "National College of Arts" (NCA) in 1993 in miniature art as a major subject. She is one of the most favorite students of NCA Famous Miniature Professor "Bashir Ahmad". She has done master's degree in Fine arts in 1995 from USA, Rhode Island School of Design. She works in various art mediums including; drawing, painting, printmaking, animation, large-scale installation, performance and video etc. (David 2001).



Figure 2: "Shahzia Sikander"

Shahzia Sikander did her first solo exhibition in 1993 at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, D.C. After that she had many exhibitions not only in Pakistan but abroad also. In addition to the solo exhibitions, Shahzia Sikander also participated in many group exhibitions, including those held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2005 and Museum Ludwig in Germany in 1999. Sikander received a number of awards, including the Shakir Ali Award/Kipling Award from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 1993, The Joan Mitchell Award in 1999, and the MacArthur Fellows Program in 2006 (Artnet 2000).

Shahzia Sikander expresses her personal feelings and understandings in her artwork and social views into what may be considered to be an impersonal and disciplined tradition. Religion plays a significant role in her work as well as her personal life, due to her Muslim beliefs. Through her work, she explores how Muslim women are challenged by the Western way of living. (Artnet 2000)

Islamic Art:

Islamic art is defined as an art created after the advent of Islam around 1400 years ago. The term "Islamic art" was being created by art historians in the 19th century to facilitate categorization and study of the material first produced under the Islamic people that emerged from Arabia in the seventh century. The religion Islam spread towards the east in many years' times during which the Muslim emperors also migrated and left their Islamic culture impact upon the countries they conquered (khan n.d.).

The term Islamic art is not used to describe about the art related to religion "Islam" or but applies to all art forms produced in the Islamic world. Islamic Art and Architecture can be seen at a large extent in the subcontinent countries. "Taj Mahal" is one of the Famous Islamic architectural Monument present in Agra, India. Although majority of the population of India Are Hindus

still Islamic Art and Architecture can be seen there, because Muslim rulers have ruled this region many times. "Mughal Empire" had ruled for the longest period of time and their impact is still visible in India.

The Nature of Islamic Art:

Islamic art differs from that of other cultures in its form and the materials it uses as well as in its subject and meaning. It is generally considered that the Eastside art is mainly concerned with color, unlike that of western art, which is more interested in form. The Art in Islam is representation of Faith, inner thoughts and love with Allah Almighty. It's the representation of never-ending beauty made my Allah Almighty. Art in Islam never lacked Depth and Philosophy even in its simplest forms.

- Main Styles/ Elements of Islamic Art:

The Islamic art is an abstract art which is having inspiration from the nature and environment. Mainly the Islamic art is divided into following main styles:

⇒ **Geometric Art:**

"Geometric Patterns" are one of the main elements of Islamic Art. These are the combination of various shapes and forms. The geometric art was developed because of two main reasons the first reason is that it provided an alternative to the prohibited depiction of living creatures. Abstract geometrical forms were particularly used in mosques because they encourage spiritual observation.

The drawing of living creatures is being prohibited in Islam so that's why the Muslim artist experimented in Geometric patterns and as the time passed the geometric patterns became "Islamic Art Identity".

The Geometrical patterns include shapes like circle, square, rhombus, triangles and emerged shapes. "Geometric art" became as the identity of the Islamic art and it can be seen in Islamic architecture also.



Figure 3: "Geometric Pattern"

⇒ **Arabesque:**

The arabesque is an element of Islamic art which consist of "surface decorations based on rhythmic linear patterns of scrolling and interlacing foliage, tendrils" or the lines which are interlacing with each other. Another definition is "Foliolate ornament, used in the Islamic world, typically

using leaves, derived from decorative half-palmettes, which were combined with spiraling stems". (saoud n.d.)

"Arabesque" is somehow similar to Geometric pattern, which is defined as "ornamental work used for flat surfaces consisting of interlacing geometrical patterns of polygons, circles, and interlocked lines and curves".

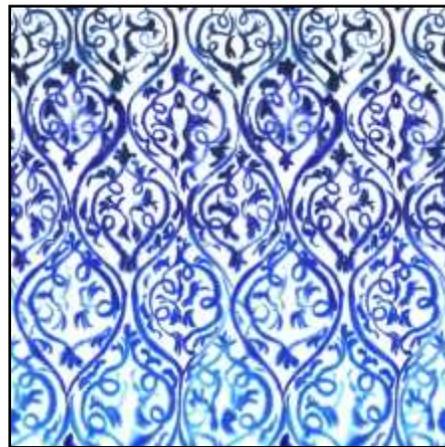


Figure 4: "Arabesque"

⇒ **Calligraphy:**

Islamic calligraphy is the artistic practice of handwriting and calligraphy, based upon the alphabet in the lands sharing a common Islamic cultural heritage. It includes Arabic, Ottoman, and Persian calligraphy. It is known in Arabic as *khatt Islami*,

meaning Islamic line, design, or construction. The genius of Islamic calligraphy lies not only in the endless creativity and versatility, but also in the balance struck by calligraphers between transmitting a text and expressing its meaning through a formal aesthetic code (Wikipedia n.d.).

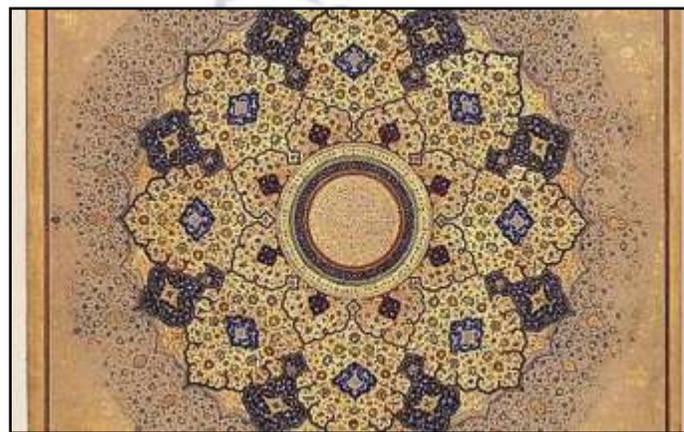


Figure 5:"Holy Quran verses at Wazir Khan Mosque, Lahore"

The Arabic language, and subsequently the art of calligraphy, is held in great esteem by Muslims because Arabic was the language in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. The Arabic text of the Qur'an is sacred to Muslims, and its high status gave rise to an associated respect for books in general. However, it is important to remember that while the Qur'an's holy status provides an explanation for calligraphy's importance, by no means all

Arabic calligraphy is religious in content. In general, calligraphic inscriptions on works of art comprise one or more of the following types of text:

- Qur'anic Quotations
- Religious texts
- Poems
- Praise for rulers
- Aphorisms



(Museum n.d.)

⇒ **Medallions:**

The medallion, basically of circular or oval design, is found in many parts of the Islamic world. The circular patterns take the shape of the sun, for example, on the first page of handwritten books, cloth, doors and windows. Oval medallions are

more likely to be found on the bindings of books. (GAMM n.d.)

Islamic art is very much based upon mathematics and science. The Islamic scholars had great interest in mathematics and science which can be observed in the Islamic art also. The patterns were being used in great amount in Islamic art and it

can be seen in architecture, pottery, carvings, tiles and floors.

The decoration of mosques, there is a relationship that follows strict mathematical principles. Muslims embraced the application of geometry in their art most likely because the portrayal of the human figure was forbidden and took it to new heights all over the Islamic world.

Islamic Painting Elements in Painting “Perilous Order”:

“Shahzia Sikander” is a Miniaturist. She uses the old and new art styles in her paintings. In “Perilous Order” many Islamic art inspirations can be observed. The painting is being mostly inspired by Mughal Period Miniature Painting style along with the Persian painting technique of wash. The Islamic Painting Elements observed in “Perilous Order” are described below:

1) Background of Mughal Miniature Paintings:

The Mughal period in Indian history had seen widespread cultural development, especially in the field of miniature paintings. These paintings are like binocular through which we can see the Medieval history of India. Mughal Emperors introduced new ideas of art, architecture and painting along with many other developments. The miniature painting had influences of Persians, Chinese, Jain and Buddhist art. During the Mughal Era, the art of miniature paintings in India became one of the richest and most productive schools. This spell of the art had carved out its own place in the history of Islamic art, too. Miniature Paintings were kept in albums and were part of Book Illustrations.

Mughal paintings later spread to other Indian courts, both Muslim and Hindu, and later Sikh. The mingling of foreign Persian and indigenous Indian elements was a continuation of the patronization of other aspects of foreign culture as initiated by the earlier Turko-Afghan Delhi Sultanate, and the introduction of it into the subcontinent by various Central Asian Turkic dynasties, such as the Ghaznavids. This art of painting developed as a blending of Persian and Indian ideas. There was already a Muslim tradition

of miniature painting under the Turko-Afghan Sultanate of Delhi which the Mughals overthrew, and like the Mughals, and the very earliest of Central Asian invaders into the subcontinent, patronized foreign culture. Mughal Emperors had interest arts and it gave rise of culture and art in sub-continent. By the time of the Mughal invasion, the tradition had abandoned the high viewpoint typical of the Persian style, and adopted a more realistic style for animals and plants (India n.d.).

The Art of Miniature Painting started during the Reign of Mughal Emperor “Akbar”. It was during his reign the artists were given great importance and patronage the Portraits were being painted along with the animals and leaves and plants representation also. the Mughals Art has roots back to Timur and were fully assimilated into Persianate culture, and expected to patronize literature and the arts.

Mughal painting immediately took a much greater interest in realistic portraiture than was typical of Persian miniatures. Animals and plants were also more realistically shown. Although many classic works of Persian literature continued to be illustrated, as well as Indian works.

⇒ Mughal Emperor “Jahangir Period” Miniature Art:

Mughal Emperor Jahangir reign was from (1605-1627). It was during his time period that the Mughal Painting flourished to a great extent. He had interest in portraits. The paintings had lighter colors and the brush work became fine and finesse. The Europeans had started visited “India” because of the Paintings in Jahangir era had European influences it.

had an artistic inclination and during his reign Mughal painting developed further. Brushwork Emperor Jahangir encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favored by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in traditional miniatures. He particularly encouraged paintings depicting events of his own life, individual portraits, and studies of birds, flowers and animals. The *Jahangirnama*,

written during his lifetime, which is an autobiographical account of Jahangir's reign, has several paintings, including some unusual subjects such as the union of a saint with a tigress, and

figths between spiders. It was during Jahangir era that naturalism was being used more and many portraits were being painted.



Figure 6,9: " Jahangir Era Mughal Paintings"

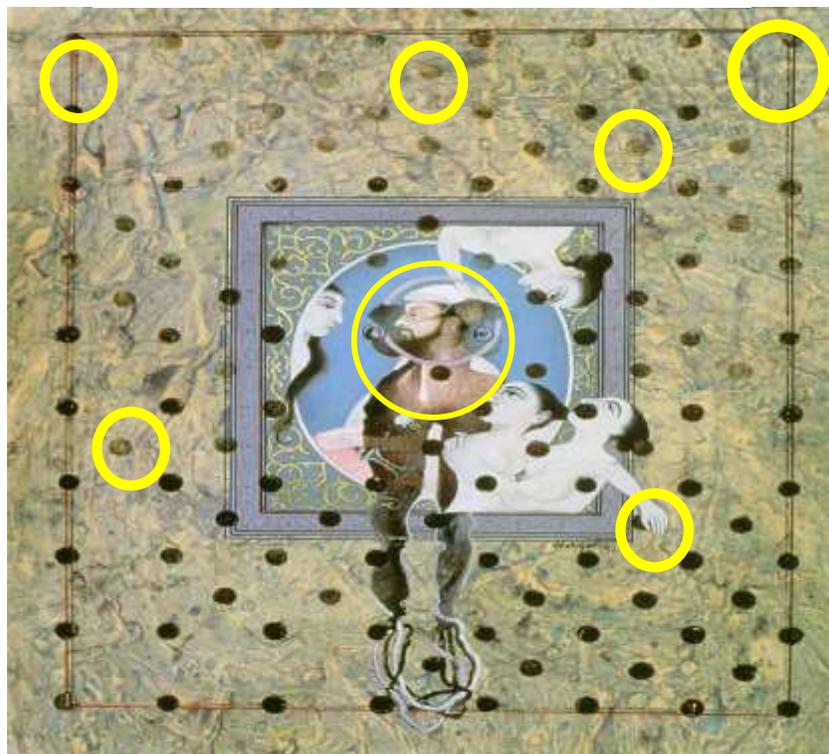


Figure 7:"Perilous Order"

- The Main Islamic Painting Elements Observed are:

- ⇒ Theme (Mughal Miniature Painting)
- ⇒ Portrait
- ⇒ Social Perspective /Narrative Perspective
- ⇒ Use of Geometry
- ⇒ Composition
- ⇒ Figures
- ⇒ Mughal Miniature Colors Palette
- ⇒ Arabesque
- ⇒ Border
- ⇒ Use of Texture (Inspired from Persian, Turkish and Mamluks Miniature)

● **Perspective in “Perilous Order”:**

In Islamic Paintings, Perspective is not an important Factor. Painting is a decorative art according to the Muslim artist and thus it can be observed that in mainly in Miniature Paintings the perspective is not only the 3-dimensional Effect but the perspective is being achieved by different aspect.

In the Painting “Perilous Order” Social Perspective can be observed as the portrait of the male is somehow in the center of the painting and is showing authority and importance. It is depiction of royal person or Power. Also, the Artist is trying to tell a story through the use of figures in the Painting.

● Painting “Perilous Order” features inspired by Mughal Miniature Paintings:

● **Portrait:**

Shahzia Sikander has been using Mughal Paintings elements in most of his paintings. In the painting

“Perilous Order” the Portrait of and Male is the representation of “Portrait style from Mughal Emperor Jahangir time period”. The details of the Portrait are also similar to the Mughal Paintings. The Turban is simple of Muslim Leader/Ruler along with the beard representation. The Minute details of Facial Expressions are being inspired by the “Jahangir Era Portraits”. As, during that era the miniature art produced was also leaning towards Realism under the influence of “Europeans”. The Portrait painted in “Perilous Painted” similarities can be seen in Many Mughal Paintings. The Mughal emperors also use to wear jewelry in ears, neck to show wealth, the ear tops can be seen in the portrait of “Perilous Order”. Also, the formation of a ring around the Portrait is being inspired by Famous Painting of Mughal Emperor “Jahangir”. The ring represents power, royalty.



Figure 8: "Portrait "

The Portrait of “Perilous order” is being drawn after being inspired by the painting of Mughal Emperor Jahangir by “Abu ul Hasan”. Which is being show below:



Figure 9: "Jahangir Portrait"

- **Facial Expressions:**

Jahangir had a very discriminating eye and Mughal painting reached its climax of glory during his reign. Portraiture was given great importance during Jahangir Era. The Facial expressions were being taken to almost perfection and realistic approach. This phenomenon can be seen in Portrait of “Perilous Order”. Jahangir patronized

many great painters of the time including Mansoor, Abul Hasan, Daswant and Basawan. He acknowledged that his liking for painting was so strong that he was able to judge which painter had executed which work. He also stated that if there was a picture containing many portraits drawn by different artists, he was able to identify the artists from the stroke of the brushes.



Comparison of Facial Expressions:

- **Colors of the Painting “Perilous Order” Inspired from Mughal Paintings:**

The Painting “Perilous Order” is having light and soft colors. Use of Golden color for the Arabesque around the portrait inspiration is being taken from the Islamic Paintings. The light colors are Inspiration from the Mughal paintings which are more of the pastels shades also including blue tones representing sky (purity and openness). The colors used are Having Organic look which means

they are having softness and similarity with Mughals Miniature Palette. The Color palette during Mughal Era was obtained from mineral pigments, organic dyes such as indigo, conch shells, precious stones, and real gold and silver. The **yellow** circles indicate the similarity of use of Blue colour pigment behind the Portrait’s. while the **red** circles indicate the use of Golden color for the texture on the surface of the painting. Islamic Art comprises of the shades and tones of Blue, Black, Green, Yellow, Red, Golden and White.



Figure 10,13 "Highly Detailed Facial Features"

Colours of the "Perilous Order" can be compared with the Mughal Miniature Painting, which is being shown below:



- **Wash Technique in Border (Inspired from Persian Miniature):**

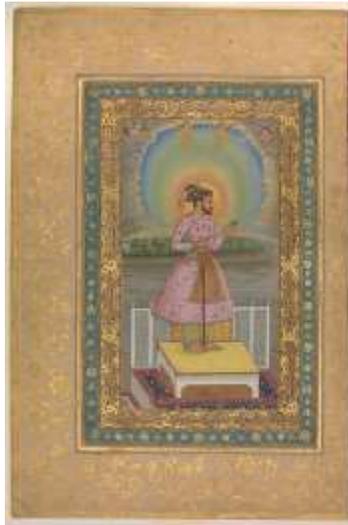
The Texture being shown in the painting "Perilous Order" is being inspired by the Persian Miniature Styles. The Turkish Artists also used Wash

Technique in their paintings. Persian Miniatures had great impact on the Mughal Miniature Art also.

Persian Miniature Painting:

A Persian miniature is a small painting on paper, whether a book illustration or a separate work of art intended to be kept in an album of such works called a *muraqqa*. Miniature painting became a significant genre in Persian art in the 13th century, receiving Chinese influence after the Mongol conquests, and the highest point in the tradition was reached in the 15th and 16th centuries. The tradition continued, under some Western influence, after this, and has many

modern exponents. The Persian miniature was the dominant influence on other Islamic miniature traditions, principally the Ottoman miniature in Turkey, and the Mughal miniature in the Indian sub-continent. Persian art under Islam had never completely forbidden the human figure, and in the miniature tradition the depiction of figures, often in large numbers, is central. This was partly because the miniature is a private form, kept in a book or album and only shown to those the owner chooses.



Example of Wash Technique in Persian/ Mamluks Miniature:

• **Composition of Painting “Perilous Order”:**

The Painting “Perilous Order” is a two-dimensional Painting. The Painting is on a Plain

surface (Wasli) Which Is a traditional Paper used for Miniature Painting. The painting “Perilous Order” composition is inspired by the Mughal and Persian Miniature Paintings which are also two-

dimensional plain Paintings but are highly detailed and decorative with minute details and patterns.

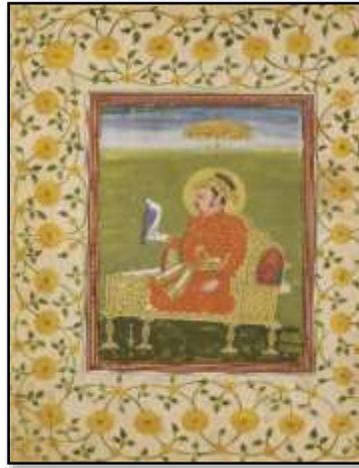


Figure 11: "Mughal Era Miniature Painting with Two-Dimensional Composition"

⇒ Arabesque used in Painting "Perilous Order":

The arabesque is an element of Islamic art which consist of "surface decorations based on rhythmic

linear patterns of scrolling and interlacing foliage, tendrils" or the lines which are interlacing with each other. Use of Arabesque can be seen in the painting "Perilous Order" which is being painted in Golden colour to give an illumination affect.



The example of Arabesque in Islamic art is being given below:

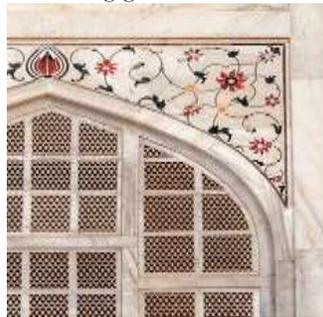


Figure 12: "Arabesque Art at Taj Mahal,"

• **Border:**

The border in Painting “Perilous Order” is having the influence of Persian and Mughal Miniature Paintings. The border is in rectangular shape with a two-dimensional effect. These types of borders were highly used in Persian Miniatures And later

the “Ottoman Empire artists” also added borders in their paintings which trend was being used in Mughal Art in Subcontinent. The Mughals were descendants of “Tamerlane” so they had used the Elements of Central Asian art and civilizations which gave a new addition to the Islamic art.



Figure 15: "Persian Miniature Painting"



Figure 16: "Turkish Miniature Painting"

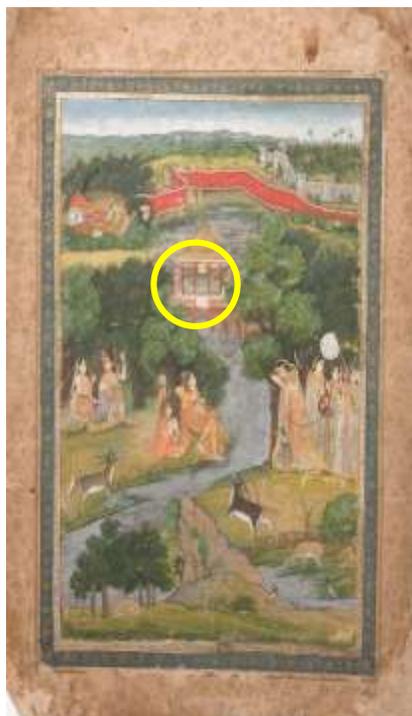


Figure 17: "Mughal Miniature Painting"

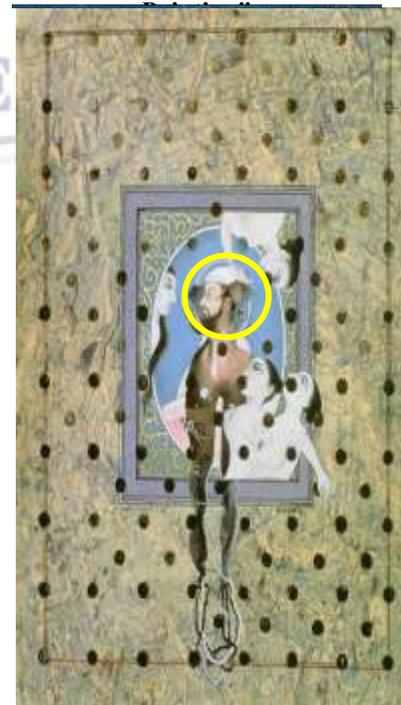


Figure 18: "Shahzia Sikander Painting"

Conclusion

Shahzia Sikander expresses her individual feelings and identifications through her artwork and social views into what may be considered to be an impersonal and well-organized practice. Religion plays a significant role in her work as well as her personal life, due to her Muslim beliefs. Through her work, she discovers how Muslim women are challenged by the Western ways of purely existing and living.

References

- Artnet. 2000.
<http://www.artnet.com/artists/shahzia-sikander/biography> (accessed november 4, 2017).
- David. Bomb Magazine . january 1, 2001.
<http://bombmagazine.org/articles/shahzia-sikander/> (accessed november 4, 2017).
- GAMM, NIKI. Daily news . n.d.
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/medal-lions-as-decorative-design-63588> (accessed november 6, 2017).
- India, AKBARNAMA: Painting the Medieval History of. mughal miniature paintings. n.d.
<http://mughalminiatures.blogspot.com/> (accessed november 6, 2017).
- khan. "Arts of the Islamic World." Arts And Humanities . n.d.
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/beginners-guide-islamic-art/a/arts-of-the-islamic-world> (accessed november 4, 2017).
- Museum, Victoria and Albert. "Calligraphy in Islamic art." Museum history of art and design . n.d.
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/calligraphy-in-islamic-art/> (accessed november 6, 2017).
- saoud, Rabah. "introduction to islamic art ." muslim heritage . n.d.
<http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/introduction-islamic-art> (accessed november 4, 2017).
- Wikipedia. "Islamic Calligraphy." Wikipedia. n.d.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_calligraphy (accessed november 6, 2017).