

Production still from the *Extended Play* film, "Shahzia Sikander: Melting Boundaries." © Art21, Inc. 2023.

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Shahzia Sikander

"It is about transformation for me. Whether it is the transformation of an image or a mark or a symbol... It is a core notion that stabilizes my practice." —Shahzia Sikander

ABOUT

Born
1969 (Lahore, Pakistan)

Education
National College of Arts in Lahore, BFA
Rhode Island School of Design, MFA

Lives and Works
New York, NY

About the Artist
Sikander received her training in Indian and Persian manuscript painting, a traditional style that is both highly stylized and disciplined. Over the last three decades, she has produced a body of work that imbues the traditions of South Asian manuscript painting with a contemporary perspective. Sikander works across different materials, from manuscript illumination to sculpture and video, to subvert stereotypes of the East and, in particular, the Eastern Pakistani woman. While becoming an expert in this technique-driven, often impersonal art form, she imbues it with a personal context and history, blending the Eastern focus on precision and methodology with a Western emphasis on creative, subjective expression. In doing so, Sikander transports manuscript painting into the realm of contemporary art.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials
animation
painting
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas
colonialism
culture
divinity
discipline
feminism
language
patience
politics
practice
process
reflection
ritual
spirituality
time
tradition

Related Artists
Janine Antoni
Meriem Bennani
Louise Bourgeois
Guerrilla Girls
Ann Hamilton
Loie Hollowell
Wangechi Mutu
Tuan Andrew Nguyen
Michael Rakowitz
Kameelah Janan Rasheed
Salman Toor
Kara Walker

How to Use This Guide
Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Shahzia Sikander into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

1. How is the human body represented in art?
2. What does it mean for an artist to work within an artistic tradition?
3. If watching *Art in Twenty-First Century* episode "Spirituality," featuring Shahzia Sikander, consider this question: How much time does it take to complete an artwork?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

1. Make note of the ways Sikander represents women's bodies or the female form.
2. What tradition(s) does Sikander learn from? And how does she transform or change them?
3. If watching *Art in Twenty-First Century* episode "Spirituality," featuring Shahzia Sikander, consider this question: How does Sikander talk about time?

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

1. How does Sikander use the body to explore ideas about power?
2. Why is Sikander interested in transforming traditional forms of art rather than simply preserving them?
3. If watching *Art in Twenty-First Century* episode "Spirituality," featuring Shahzia Sikander, consider this question: Why might an artist need to be patient? Why is patience important to Sikander?

Related Activities

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ In the *Extended Play* film "Melting Boundaries," Sikander expresses interest in how her artworks inspire dialogue. Conduct research on the sculpture *Witness* (2023), featured in the film. What is the dialogue surrounding the artwork today? Host a small group discussion about your findings.
- ✓ How can traditional art forms be contemporary? Select a traditional craft (i.e. basketry, calligraphy, ceramics, etc.) and learn the basic skills of that craft. Then subvert or change one aspect of the making process, function, or typical subject of that art form.
- ✓ What cultures or experiences make up your identity? Consider religion, sports, clubs, neighborhood, race, etc. How do they complement or oppose each other? Make a figurative drawing of these identities combined.

Did you use this guide, Art21 films, or Art21-featured artists in your classroom? If so, tag Art21 on social media or email us at education@art21.org.