

The International Lives of Pakistani Art: 1947-2001

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Abstract: Scholarship on Pakistani art's global exchange tends to focus on the interest that *contemporary* art generated after the events of 9/11. While this interest has been career defining for a generation of artists, it has also been fraught with pressures. As Jessica Winegar points out for example, after 2001 cultural production from the “Muslim world” provided Western institutions with the means to build “bridges of understanding”, while it has also pressured Muslim artists to appease Western prejudicial views of religion, gender, and culture through their work and its display.¹ A source of fractious debate within the Pakistani art world, these pressures find no resolve in comparative or historical scholarship.

In fact, Pakistani art circulated globally long before 2001. Abdur Rahman Chughtai and Zainul Abedin were included in a blockbuster exhibition of “Indian Art” that opened months after Partition at the Royal Academy in London. In 1964-5 two large-scale exhibitions of Pakistani painting took place in New York: one at the Rockefeller-funded Asia Society and another in the “Progressive Present” section of the Pakistan Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. In the context of Cold War internationalism and the Non-Alignment Movement, Pakistani art also travelled to biennials and exhibitions in countries as diverse as Argentina, Brazil, Iran, Japan, France and Yugoslavia throughout the 1950s–1970s. During the 1990s neo-miniature painter Shahzia Sikander exhibited globally, experiencing well in advance of 2001 the limits of Western discernment for Pakistani contemporary art and cultural production.

Covering a period from Independence to the events of 9/11, this dissertation places key developments in Pakistani art in their global and institutional contexts. The constellation of exhibitions that provide its archival backbone reveal how Pakistani artists strategically navigated the pressures and opportunities that the global art world presented to them during this period. The dissertation expands our understanding of Pakistani art history in general, and enables a fuller discussion of Pakistani contemporary art's place in the global art world today.

¹ See Jessica Winegar, ‘The Humanity Game: Art, Islam and the War on Terror’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol 81, Number 3, Summer 2008, p652. See also writings by Quddus Mirza including ‘Surprising Site/Side’, *The Rising Tide: New Directions in Art from Pakistan*, (Mohatta Palace: Karachi, 2010), pp36-39.