

**Flash Art: November-December Issue 2004**

RIDGEFIELD

Shazia Sikander

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

Shahzia Sikander's painted installation *Duality* (2004) is the first image to greet viewers as they enter the newly renovated Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. In a circular pattern on the museum's new 16-square-foot "art wall," the painting depicts the heads of five men whose lengthy turbans wrap and twist into one another, entwining into new forms. Although the work is painted in variations of grays and whites, it retains a rich, jewel-like quality, and despite its flat surface, the image is dynamic and full of movement, rotating around itself like a whirling dervish. Sikander's works are inspired by Indo-Persian miniature painting traditions, and she is celebrated for transcending the style's boundaries without sacrificing its preciousness, vigor, or grace.

In addition to *Duality*, Sikander's exhibition, "Nemesis," includes a series of drawings entitled "51 Ways of Looking" (2004), most of which are quite minimal compared to her previous works: a simple rectangle filled in with graphite and centered on the page, or a dotted circle crisscrossed with geometric lines. These works suggest a link to the under-drawings of Indo-Persian miniature paintings, making "51 Ways of Looking" an invitation to contemplate miniature painting as a science and exposing Sikander's preoccupation with physics, be it of landscapes, human beings, or other subjects.

A highlight of the exhibition is an animated video, *Pursuit Curve* (2004), which the accompanying description explains is "a term in mathematics used to describe the path an object takes when chasing another object." The seven-minute video, accompanied by the emotionally charged sounds of composer David Abir, is a delightful pursuit of experience, a spectacular but also serene metamorphosis of imagery where all is flux. A line transforms into a curve, then into a row of mountains, which become filled with turbaned men standing majestically in rows, then transforming into starburst shapes, exploding fireworks, and so on. "Nemesis," in its entirety, is similarly uplifting and filled with revelations about Sikander's own creative trajectory.

**Leeza Ahmady**