INDIAN-BORN ARTIST ZARINA FEATURED IN ART INSTITUTE SURVEY

**Zarina: Paper Like Skin** Explores Ideas of Home and Exile in 60 Works on Paper

With intimacy and delicacy, the Indian-born artist Zarina tackles some of the most wrenching themes of the 20th and 21st centuries—exile, dispossession, alienation, and displacement—by transforming complex historical events into deeply personal and abstract works. Organized by the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, **Zarina: Paper Like Skin** traces her career from 1961 to the present with approximately 60 works from the artist’s studio as well as from public and private collections. On view at the Art Institute of Chicago June 26 through September 22, 2013 in Galleries 182–184, the exhibition features works rich in associations with the artist’s life experiences that also serve as formal explorations of paper, perhaps one of the most humble yet varied of media. “I looked at paper and just loved it,” Zarina has said. “It is an organic material, almost like human skin: you can scratch it, you can mold it, it even ages.” The exhibition was previously on view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (September 30–December 30, 2012), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (January 25–April 21, 2013).

Zarina Hashmi (b. 1937), known by her first name, was born in Aligarh, India and has resided in New York for the past 30 years. Raised Muslim, her family’s life was disrupted by the turbulent
partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and the internal strife that followed. Her studies in mathematics helped form her visual language, with its focus on geometry and structure, and her shifting sense of home after her marriage to a diplomat drew her to the transportable qualities of paper. For every country where she has lived, she has learned and incorporated the papermaking techniques and cultures unique to each: the handmade plant-fiber papers of Thailand, the technical specifications of “fine papers” in Paris, the thick and opaque Khadi paper made in New Delhi, the intuitive treatment of woodblock in Tokyo, and the medium-as-the-image approach suggestive of the process art movement in New York.

Her subjects are similarly influenced by the places she has lived. Her 1997 series *Homes I Made / A Life in Nine Lines* chronicles the shapes and floorplans of dwellings which Zarina previously called home: First Home (Bangkok), Planted a garden of roses from Aligarh (New Delhi), Watched the Seine flow by and waited for him to come home (Paris), A room of four and a half tatami (Tokyo), A horizontal blue line (Santa Cruz), and A space to hide forever (New York). The use of Urdu in some of her works, itself a language without a traditional sense of home, further speaks to the concepts of displacement Zarina articulates.

Zarina’s outlook, while grounded in abstraction, is additionally informed by an acute sociopolitical awareness, rendered in visual terms. An example is *Dividing Line* (2001), in which a thick black line winds its way across the paper, the woodcut manipulated in such a way as to highlight the negative space of two countries—India and Pakistan—divided arbitrarily by the hand of a British colonial officer. And after the attacks of September 11, 2001, she created portraits of cities fallen victim to bombings in the series *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness (Adrienne Rich after Ghalib)* (2003), which includes Grozny, Sarajevo, Jenin, Baghdad, Ahmedabad, and New York.

A prominent figure in feminist circles of the New York art scene in the 1970s, Zarina was a contributor to the journal *Heresies*. She had a solo exhibition at Mills College in Oakland in 2001, which covered 10 years of her career, and her work has been featured in major exhibitions, including *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2007, and *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2009. She is represented in important public collections, including those of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts at the Hammer Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.
Zarina: Paper Like Skin is organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and curated at the Art Institute by James Rondeau, Frances and Thomas Dittmer Chair and Curator, Department of Contemporary Art; and Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian and Islamic Art.


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