

about south asia institute



South Asia Institute aims to cultivate the art and culture of South Asia and its diaspora through local and global collaborations, curated exhibitions, innovative programs, and educational initiatives that aim to engage diverse communities. At the Institute, the common heritage and identity of South Asian Americans are showcased while celebrating the common connections and values that are shared with the universal community at large. Art and cultural expression bring together diverse peoples in a shared experience, resulting in a better understanding and greater tolerance for ethnic differences.

It was the passion for South Asian Art that inspired the founders, Shireen and Afzal Ahmad - first generation immigrants from South Asia and longtime residents of Chicago, to assemble the Hundal Collection, over a period of 50+ years. One of the most significant collections of South Asian art in the United States, the collection includes works ranging from early Mughal Miniatures to Modern and Contemporary masterpieces by artists from the region and the diaspora. Having enjoyed living with the works, it has always been their mission to share the collection on a much larger scale and promote South Asian Art and cultural heritage in the United States.

Co-Founder and President
Afzal Ahmad

Co-Founder and Director
Shireen Ahmad

Exhibition Manager / Design and Layout
Andrea Moratinos

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1925 S Michigan Ave.
Chicago IL 60616
www.saichicago.org



materials metaphors & miniatures

selected works from the Hundal Collection

second floor gallery
exhibition guide

list of artists

bashir ahmed
asif ahmed
waseem ahmed
farhat ali
faiza butt
imran channa
alexander gorlizki
nusra latif qureshi
imran mudassar
shoaib mahmood
fariha nadir
imran qureshi
shahzia sikander
amjad ali talpur
saira wasim
muhammad zeeshan

Traditional miniature painting was a prominent art form during the Mughal rule, but it is an art form that has been deeply ingrained in the cultural heritage of South Asia for centuries. Its existence was endangered during the 19th century due to the waning imperial support and the impact of British colonialism. Despite these challenges, the movement has been revived and transformed in the modern era. Notably, the National College of Art in Lahore, Pakistan, has played a pivotal role in this revival, later echoed by artists in the UK and the USA. The exhibition *Materials, Metaphors, and Miniatures* looks at the revival of traditional miniature painting through the works of contemporary South Asian artists, who have innovated by moving beyond the traditional format exploring contemporary themes.

This exhibition featuring works from the Hundal Collection, presents significant artists who are at the forefront of this international movement of contemporary miniature painting. Contemporary South Asian Miniature or Neo-Miniature art is distinctive in that rather than rejecting convention, the artists innovate through acquiring a mastery of traditional skills and then move beyond its boundaries. Early in their training, miniaturists are taught traditional technical skills, which they are required to practice by reproducing historical works. The intimacy of those early encounters is frequently reflected in many contemporary miniature works, which often bear a strong resemblance to the earlier paintings. While the artists start their training with traditional technical skills, they innovate by exploring other forms of expression and even other mediums such as photography, textile, ceramics, and sculpture.

Everyday societal and political tensions significantly shape an artist's practice by dominating the intellectual space within which the artist lives. Neo-Miniature artists frequently explore their reactions to political and social injustices, and religious and cultural taboos in their paintings. The exhibition highlights their satirical approach to socio-political commentary, utilizing imagery inspired by traditional miniature art. Ustad Bashir Ahmad has commented on how Shahzia Sikander, trained in the traditional style, "transitioned to broader mediums for a more globalized expression." The artists' unique reinterpretations challenge the boundaries of the form, exploring a spectrum of themes from personal psychology to broader global concerns. Through their creations, the exhibition underscores the dynamic nature of South Asian miniature painting, evolving and adapting to the contemporary context.