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ZARINA: PAPER LIKE SKIN

Hammer Museum presents first retrospective of Indian-born American artist Zarina
On view September 30 – December 30, 2012



Los Angeles—The Hammer Museum presents *Zarina: Paper Like Skin*, the first retrospective of Indian-born American artist **Zarina**, featuring approximately 60 works dating from 1961 to the present. This long overdue survey of Zarina’s work will be on view September 30 to December 30, 2012 at the Hammer Museum, and will travel to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York from January 25 to April 21, 2013, and the Art Institute of Chicago from June 27 to September 22, 2013. The exhibition is organized by Allegra Pesenti, curator, Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts.

“*Paper Like Skin* reveals the breadth of Zarina’s vision and the versatility of her practice,” explains Hammer director Ann Philbin. “It joins a series of survey exhibitions organized by the Hammer that highlight important but under recognized female artists such as Lee Bontecou and most recently Alina Szapocznikow. The presentation of Zarina’s work also emphasizes the museum’s commitment to the study and collection of works on paper through its Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts.”

Zarina Hashmi, who prefers to be referred to simply by her first name, was born in Aligarh, India, in 1937 and has lived and worked in New York for the past 30 years. Paper is central to Zarina’s practice, both as a surface to print on and as a material with its own properties and history, which she employs in woodcuts, etchings, drawings, rubbings, and casts made from paper pulp. Although she is primarily a printmaker, she considers herself to be a sculptor as well, in part because the activity of carving blocks of wood is central to her practice. Many of the works in this loosely chronological exhibition will be displayed for the first time. Zarina’s vocabulary is minimal yet rich in associations with her life and the themes of displacement and exile. The concept of home—whether personal, geographic, national, spiritual, or familial—resonates throughout her oeuvre.

Above. Left-right: Zarina. *Dividing Line*, 2001. Woodcut printed in black on Indian handmade paper mounted on Arches Cover white paper. Edition 16/20. 25 3/4 x 19 3/4 in. (65.4 x 50.2 cm) (sheet); 16 x 13 in. (40.6 x 33 cm) (image). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum. Purchased with funds provided by the Friends of the Graphic Arts. Photograph: Robert Wedemeyer. *Baghdad* from *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness (Adrienne Rich after Ghalib)*, 2003. 1 from a portfolio of 9 woodcuts with Urdu text printed in black on Okawara paper and mounted on Somerset paper. Edition 16/20; sheet size: 16 1/4 x 14 1/4 in. (41.3 x 36.2 cm); image size variable. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. Photograph: Robert Wedemeyer. *Blinding Light*, 2010. Okawara paper gilded with 22-carat gold leaf. 72 1/2 x 36 1/2 in. (184.2 x 92.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. Photograph: Robert Wedemeyer.

“Today it is common for artists from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to live in Western cities, travel extensively, and make art that reflects a sophisticated awareness of contemporary art but that is also grounded in their cultures of origin, often exploring issues of identity and history,” remarks curator Allegra Pesenti. “In many respects Zarina’s career can be seen as a precursor for this new generation of diasporic artists.”

EXILE & TRAVELS

While Zarina’s work has its roots in abstraction, it has always been informed by a profound socio-political awareness. The border between India and Pakistan that was demarcated by the British during the partition of 1947 caused the uprooting and deaths of millions of people, and eventually disrupted the lives of Zarina’s family members, causing them to leave their home in 1959. Since then, Zarina’s visits to India have not been simple homecomings. From 1958, she began a life abroad and relocated to different cities including: Bangkok, New Delhi, Paris, Bonn, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Santa Cruz, and finally New York.

Paper became a transportable surface for Zarina, readily available wherever her travels took her. She developed an appreciation for the characteristics of papermaking unique to each country that she visited and began to incorporate them into her work. In Bangkok she made her first woodcut and produced stone rubbings from temple carvings on handmade plant-fiber papers. In Paris in the mid-1960s she studied printmaking under the tutelage of Stanley William Hayter at Atelier 17, and was influenced by the intellectual currents of the times spurred by the existentialist writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, and the films of the French new wave. She went to Tokyo in 1974, and continued her exploration of the woodcut practice as an apprentice of the Toshi Yoshido Studio while printing for the Dominican priest and printmaker Father Gaston Petit. She limited her palette to a range of mud-like blacks and browns, but these tones were generated as much from the varieties of paper that she selected as they were from the color of the inks. In a country where paper is embedded within the fabric of life and habitat, she deepened her relationship to the material.

Zarina moved to the United States in 1975, first to Los Angeles and then, a year later, to New York where she engaged with the local community of artists. Her involvement with the collective of women behind the journal *Heresies* and with the New York Feminist Art Institute introduced her to the writings and work of Lucy Lippard, Louise Bourgeois, and Ana Mendieta among others. She also cocurated *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists in the United States* at A.I.R. (Artists in Residence, Inc.) Gallery, the first cooperative gallery for woman artists in the U.S.

ARTISTIC PRACTICE

While committed to abstraction from the beginning, Zarina uses it as a vehicle for message and meaning that often begins with words – derived from poems by Urdu writers such as the classical poet Asadullah Khan Ghalib and the twentieth-century poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz or from her own literal evocations of the time and moment. These origins are suggested in titles like *A Sigh* or *Cocoon* and in her use of text and the printed page as integral components of her images. This use of text has its roots in the tradition of the illustrated manuscript, particularly in Islamic cultures, and in the advent of cubism and the collage. Zarina has assimilated these practices into her own deeply individual language.

The white on white works Zarina produced in the 1970s testify to her engagement with the ideas of minimalism and conceptualism prevalent in New York at this time. Using no ink, she began to build her images from within the paper itself, incisively and palpably manipulating the material, scratching, perforating, and folding it. Zarina's approach suggests an awareness of the process art movement, in which artists such as Richard Serra, Sol LeWitt, and Eva Hesse sought to realize the content of their work both in the physical act that determined its form and in the physical qualities of the materials employed to make it.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, an event that affected her deeply, Zarina pursued her exploration of the lines that define (or confine) civic communities in a sequence of perceptive "portraits" of cities bombed in recent times, many of which have large Muslim populations (*These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness (Adrienne Rich after Ghalib), 2003*). In the quietly provocative work *Dividing Line* (2001), the political boundary is made personal by her bold handcrafted line and the shaved surface from which it emerges. The line represents the border between India and Pakistan that was demarcated during the partition of 1947. The woodcut's typical appearance of white against black is reversed here, an effect achieved by carving out the background of the block, the negative space of the two neighboring countries, instead of the line itself.

Zarina's most recent works trace a journey into the self and the intangible realm of spirituality. The Sufi concept of *noor*, or divine light, is evoked through the layering of her papers and objects in gold leaf, while the deep, inward search for unity with God, as described in the writings of Saint John of the Cross, inspired her use of obsidian, a shimmering black medium derived from volcanic glass. In two of her most radiant works, *Blinding Light* (2010) and *Dark Night of the Soul* (2011) the luminosity of gold and the seeping shadows of obsidian evoke parallel visions of eternity. Zarina's oeuvre, which encompasses prints, manipulated papers, sculptures cast out of paper pulp and bronze, and wall installations, evokes personal notions of transience, memory and identity, while also embodying themes common to all of humanity.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

Zarina's work has been included in major thematic exhibitions throughout the United States in recent years, including *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, (2007); *Gouge: The Modern Woodcut 1870 to Now* (2008) at the Hammer Museum; *Mind and Matter: Alternative Abstractions, 1940s to Now* (2010) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia 1860-1989* (2009) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. She also participated in the 2008 Gwangju Biennale in Korea, the 2011 Istanbul Biennial, and was one of four artists to represent India at the 2011 Venice Biennial.

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CATALOGUE & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Zarina: Paper Like Skin will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by exhibition curator Allegra Pesenti, curator at the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum;

Aamir Mufti, professor of comparative literature at UCLA; and Sandhini Poddar, assistant curator of Asian art at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition will be accompanied by several free public programs. Visit www.hammer.ucla.edu for details.

ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum, a public arts unit of the University of California, Los Angeles, is dedicated to exploring the diversity of artistic expression through the ages. Its collections, exhibitions, and programs span the classic to the cutting-edge in art, architecture, and design, recognizing that artists play a crucial role in all aspects of culture and society.

The museum houses the Armand Hammer Collection of Old Master, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist paintings and the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection. The museum also houses the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present; and oversees the management of the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden on the UCLA campus. The Hammer's newest collection, the Hammer Contemporary Collection, is highlighted by works by artists such as Lari Pittman, Kara Walker, Ed Ruscha, Barbara Kruger, Mark Bradford, Richard Hawkins, Lynn Foulkes, among many others.

The Hammer presents major single-artist and thematic exhibitions of historical and contemporary art. It also presents approximately ten Hammer Projects exhibitions each year, providing international and local artists with a laboratory-like environment to create new work or to present existing work in a new context.

As a cultural center, the Hammer offers a diverse range of free public programs throughout the year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music performances. The Hammer's Billy Wilder Theater houses these widely acclaimed public programs and is the new home of the UCLA Film & Television Archive's renowned cinematheque.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

For current program and exhibition information call **310-443-7000** or visit www.hammer.ucla.edu.

Hours: Tuesday–Friday 11am–8pm; Saturday & Sunday 11am–5pm; closed Mondays, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Admission: \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors (65+) and UCLA Alumni Association members; free for Museum members, students with identification, UCLA faculty/staff, military personnel, veterans, and visitors 17 and under. The Museum is free on Thursdays for all visitors. Public programs are always free.

Location/Parking: The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, at Westwood Boulevard. Parking is available under the Museum. Rate is \$3 for three hours with Museum validation. Bicycles park free.

Hammer Museum Tours: For group tour reservations and information, call 310-443-7041.