

Zarina Hashmi: A Quest Of Own Space In An Unknown World

Tikendra Kumar Sahu

Assistant Professor Department of Fine Arts, Amity University, Noida email id: tikendra4sahu@gmail.com

DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2023.14.S02.28

Abstract

This proposition acknowledged education, artistic process, and inspirations based on the explored medium, focusing on the concept and contextual analysis of Zarina Hashmi's works. As Zarina Hashmi had always been interested in space and its adventures, her minimalist artwork draws inspiration from Urdu poetry.

Although Zarina's works give the impression that this language hides in a blank and that frames conceal themselves beneath lines and boundaries. The most recognizable geometry was created on the surface of cast paper sculptures, drawings, and prints; the simple, dramatic, and enigmatic outcomes were more aesthetically expressed.

This research paper is centered on the development of visual art, qualitative analysis, and empirical art practices. Her work questions the boundaries, delimitations, and navigation of familiar spaces like "country" and "home," as well as the emotions and memories that evoke enduring imprints in the minds of viewers. Given her extensive artistic path, it is astonishing that she navigated from the personal to the universal.

Keywords: Cast paper, relief prints, minimalist art, Indian American Artist, printmaker

Introduction

Zarina Hashmi (16 July 1937–25 April 2020), who goes by her first name, is an Indian-born American artist whose work stretches from minimalist drawing to printmaking and sculpture. She generally evokes and explores the idea of home, distances, and trajectories influenced by her extensive travels. With a degree in mathematics and a passion for architecture, Zarina uses geometry and works with strict structural integrity. She utilizes graphic aspects of Islamic religious decorations, particularly the regular geometry frequently seen in Islamic architecture.

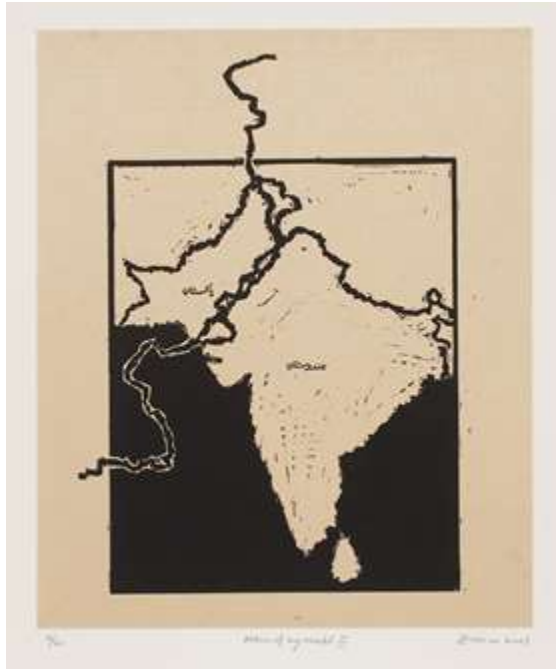


Figure 1: Zarina Hashmi. *Atlas of My World IV*, 2001. Woodcut with Urdu text printed on Indian handmade paper, sheet size: 25.5 x 19.5 in. Retrieved on 15th May 2018 from <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/ruminations/2017/zarina-hashmi-interview>

Ramaswamy (2017) *Decolonizing the Map* is the first book to systematically and comprehensively examine the engagement of mapping in the protracted—and obviously unfinished—parallel processes of decolonization and nation-building in the modern world. It makes a significant contribution to studies of both colonization and cartography.^[1]

In Zarina's art, abstraction is filled with sentiment and her pieces recreate emotions. Due to her father's occupation as a professor, Zarina has more exposure to architecture and is surrounded by books. While working in several professional studio settings, she did not complete any academic coursework at an art institution. Kumar (2012) Zarina's use of cartography and her propensity for abstraction in *Dividing Line* not only demonstrates a unique capacity to both recognize and "map" the tensions and contradictions inherent to the historiography of Partition but also facilitates an endless dialectic around Partition "history" and "memory" through which fixed understandings of Partition can then be challenged and unsettled in powerful and beneficial ways.^[2]

Women play a role like a homemaker; she started floor plans and at the beginning worked with dots, lines, and geometric plans. When she enjoyed the top view of the architectural and building plans while paragliding at the Delhi Flying Club, she was inspired. So, she began to consider using it in her works; *Flight Log* was the series of works she created as a result of her involvement. "How do you know if you don't try?" Zarina questions. "I tried and succeeded; I don't know what success is, but life teaches a very important lesson about home. What is called "home" when the person is nomadic? She generally starts with language, not with the image, so she writes down 49 words about home, and she has no idea where she goes with them. Every word had meant the door threshold and it goes up to the wall."^[3]

Zarina's sister Rani wrote to her that they called each other "home" because they shared a childhood and 21 years of life under one roof. Zarina's work is primarily written in black ink. Zarina believes that the image follows the words and that they all have a reference somewhere, usually in poetry. Zarina made her personal life the subject of her art, so she wrote what she had gone through. It's very painful; she has opened her life to the scrutiny of

strangers. She used all the letters that were involved in her paintings, and some of them were drawn under the shapes of houses. ^[4]

Medium and material

This language is used by Zarina Hashmi to frame faces within curves and walls and to express a concealed notion that is hidden in a void. Cast paper sculptures featured surfaces with the most recognizable and uncomplicated geometry, which sparked understanding and helped the minimal, intense, and enigmatic results to be expressed more sensually. She created a map of everything, from the house to creativity to the collective. ^[5]



Figure 2: Zarina, Home, cast paper sculpture, 20" x 20.5" x 5", 1988 retrieved on 15th May 2018 from <http://artasiaamerica.org/search/by/techniques/300053104>

Zarina doesn't mind receiving criticism. In a critique of her work, a former pupil of her father claimed that "Zarina's creative talents are dead." She then declared, "I haven't even started!" She doesn't mind criticism, therefore it's all right.

Zarina articulates, "Everybody can draw, you know—skills don't make art." That is the least important part; ideas make art. There are lots of people who can't draw, but they can make great art because it comes from ideas. "You can teach skills, but you can't teach ideas."^[6] Zarina likes natural materials that are close to the earth, like wood, paper, and clothes. She likes fragile materials that become part of the earth because it's like completing the circle. Terracotta and paper are the materials that have survived the centuries, and it's amazing how fragile they are while also having a high resilience.



Figure 3: Zarina Hashmi, “Letters from Home”, 2004, retrieved on 21st Dec 2018 from <https://biancaseverijns.com/zarina-hashmi-paper-artist-paperartview/>

Encouragements and impressions

With the cast paper, Zarina talked about her life. As a result of her memories of ancient buildings and ruins, elements of their architecture manifested in her imagination as incredibly evocative and fundamental shapes. On Thai plant-fiber sheets in Bangkok in 1960, Zarina created woodblock prints and stone rubbings. She produced prints on handmade papers that were provided to her by the Khadi Gram Udyog Bhavan in New Delhi after studying with S. W. Hayter at Atelier 17 in India in the late 1960s and visiting Paris. She later acquired the skill of paper size while studying woodblock printing in Japan in 1974. Lastly, she resides in New York. She started working after travelling to Bangkok, Paris, India, and Japan. Drawing on her experiences, she created a book.^[7]

Zarina is inspired by Japanese printmaker Hiroshige and Mona Carter, where she carved and printed her first block. The poetry must be read in its mother tongue because it loses its sensibilities in translation. She learns printmaking in Atelier 17 from Krishna Reddy and is encouraged by Stanly William Hayter. She used Kozo Japanese paper, Nepalese paper, Mulberry paper, Dutch paper, handmade paper, and Zane paper.

Form and subject matter

Zarina’s sculptures began to move beyond strict geometrical shapes and take on more subdued meanings. As artworks, they retain the unique power of being able to turn our attention away from its focus on their beauty into a deeper, perhaps darker, grasp of their melancholy and sense of loss. Sen, G. (2006) Zarina’s work is political as much as personal—it is using language as the assertion of an identity that can never be erased. Zarina Hashmi said, "Home is the center of my universe; I make a home wherever I am." "My home is my hiding place, a house with four walls, sometimes with four wheels."^[8]

Zarina states, "By memorizing the prayer, I can pray, but I do not know what I was saying." I do read and write, which have the same alphabet. I've lived outside India for more than 50 years but grew up with a cultural connection; being separated from the language is a huge loss. You don't have access to your own pictures, poetry, or literature, so that's why you feel emotionally connected. "I don't know what it says, but instinctively it touches something in me."^[9] Zarina adores traveling, embracing various cultural values, and growing up without shifting very much.



Figure 4: Zarina (American, b. India, 1937). I Went on a Journey III, 1991. Bronze with patina, 10.5 x 5 x 5 in. retrieved on 15th Nov. 2018

Zarina looked at the gardening and saw how a seed was planted on the pots and supported by threads and sticks, which marked a line. That's how she later adopted it in her work of art. She observed the threads, plants, and eventually a piece of soil or earth. Her parents' garden had two distinct personalities: her mother tried to create paradise by using pastel colors and sparkles on the fence.^[10]

Zarina cleared a path in the earth more than 50 years ago to plant a garden near Delhi; now, the only plants visible are those in her window, but every new blossom is still cause for celebration. She deeply adopts personal experience, secularizes artistic expression, and transcends it to create simplicity in art forms.

Karode, R. (2017) The Sufi views mathematics as a language of the mind, and geometry explains even the most complicated phenomena using straightforward shapes and equations. A pathway to spiritual peace that allows one to transcend from the tangible world to the ethereal one.^[11] The sensitive and intricate mediation between genders and religious, national, and transnational identities is brought to light through Zarina's art. Her "Home" artworks explore ideas of location, identity, and loss.

Context and concepts

Everyone links emotions with a commonplace, haphazard item, but an artist does this by conveying it with order, which shifts the viewer's desire from pain to pleasure and promotes artistic connections. For instance, everyone can see clouds in the sky, but poet Kalidas gave new insights on how to interpret them as messengers of love from the standpoint of poetry. Similar way, while something is being created, an artist's sensibilities are what add art.

Saloni (2017) Affective modes and subjective states are made possible by art, and dialectical and elliptical reasoning are encouraged in a way that undermines the foundationalist idea of a separated past and the made-up idea of separate cultural realms. ^[12]

Where is home? After several years, you recall all those memories, which haunt you; that's why the proverb says all great art has an edge of melancholy. The viewer came here connected with her thoughts and emotional impulses, which prompted a conversation with herself. House has failed, which Zarina interprets as falling under the weight of memories. ^[13] Zarina wants to go home, but she knows she can't. Zarina Hashmi states, "Home is in my imagination."

The geographical line in Zarina's artwork was analyzed by Zamindar (2017) along with its connections to history of exile, shelter, and displacement, as well as the circumstances of memory in a divided South Asia. The likeness to Urdu is what prompts our initial reorganization of her writing; every area and opposition are integrated into a single line and groove their shadows nostalgically. ^[14] In order to capture the inner sentiments of movement and seasons as she goes through the monsoon, the scent of jasmine, and a dust storm, Zarina's approach to building emphasizes the play of light and shadow.

Shirazi, S. (2017) Instead, Zarina's approach to design focuses on capturing the interplay of light and shadow while emphasizing the interior sensations of movement and seasons, such as going through the monsoon, the scent of jasmine, and a dust storm. Despite using national territory and having borders, she belongs to many different places. ^[15]

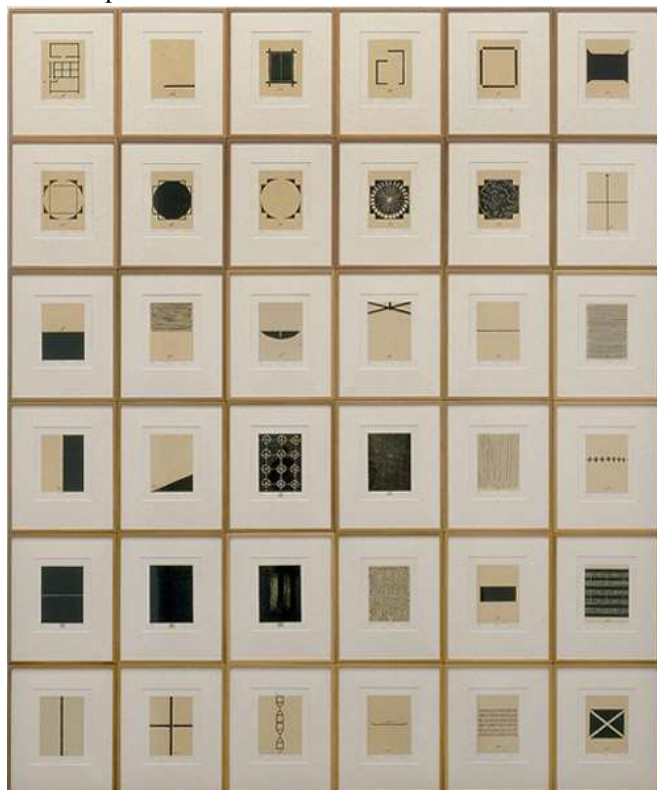


Figure 5: Zarina. Home Is a Foreign Place. 1999. Portfolio of 36 woodcuts and letterpress, mounted on paper, Retrieved on 15th May 2018 from https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/11/04/at-home-with-zarina/

Zarina's paintings, named Sinking Boats, are concerned with migration, and Kamat, A. (2017) addressed investigations of global issues. The sinking boats describe a stealthy plague of death that follows migrants as they go; the force reveals the severity of the cruelties. ^[16] Paper holds things together and is stronger and more robust than we realize. It also acts like skin. Our articles on other civilizations have taught us about our past. Penseti, A. (2012) Zarina is comparable to Picasso; she belongs to a generation of transit artists that is crucial in breaking down this barrier and exploring the larger context of artistic activities. ^[17] Kimbril, R. (2006) The squares are formally and abstractly designed; they contain and yet constrain the modernist mentality of viewing art as if it were simply made up of shattered memories, internal fragments, and pieces of architecture. The squares convey opposing impulses to the stillness inside their abstract lines as well as speaking in an annunciatory voice while remaining silent and pensive. ^[18]

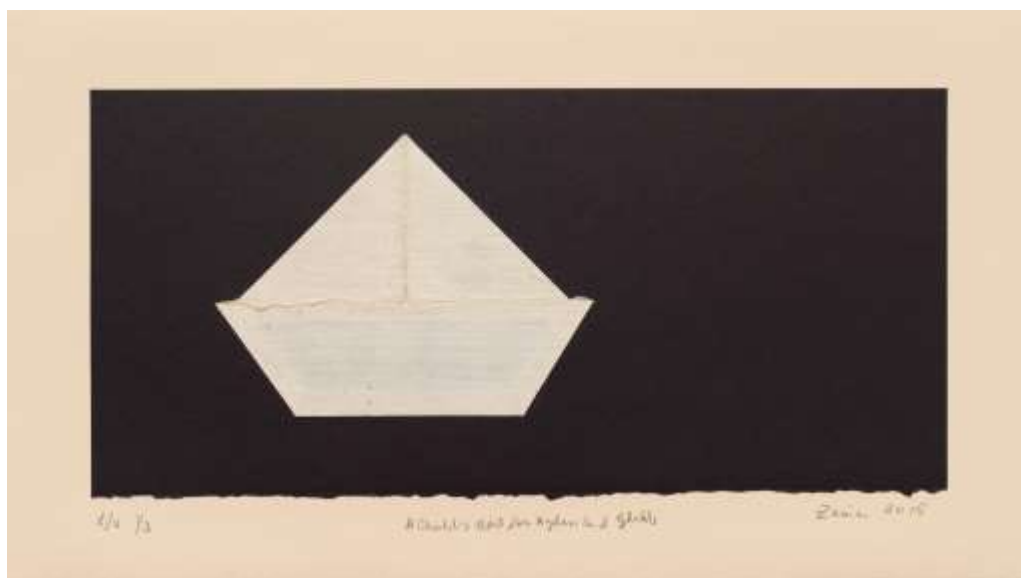


Figure 6: Zarina Hashmi, A Child's Boat for Aylan and Ghalib, 2015, retrieved on 20th Dec 2018 from <http://jeannebucherjaeger.com/artist/hashmi-zarina/>

Humans are roving creatures that must move; staying motionless is death. People believe they will live forever while they are young, but sooner or later they start to accept and wish for their mortality. You only must wait till the cycle's conclusion to join Devine. ^[19] Every turn is a choice, and once the path to God is reached, the path within God starts. It's not forever, but it's a pretty significant portion of our existence. We enter eternity when we cross over into another dimension. Sharma, S. (2016) When exploring the potential of conceptual history in modernism, artists like Zarina Hashmi and Krishna Reddy are antinational in their approach. Through creative expression, emotions are either recalled or preserved. Conceptual tenets of existentialism first appeared during this time. ^[20]

Conclusion

Zarina negotiated transcultural borders to exhibit these faces. Her performance was personal, political, and philosophical, with a visual dialogue between cultures. While thinking is the basis of Indian thought, in the west,

people are told to concentrate on the technical. Look into the tree and see how it has been terminated; that's the miracle.

The development of visual art practice is not just physical; it is more deeply rooted in the psychic as well as in the form of dynamic changes in nature. Her works of art are evidence of the dynamism of her sense of aesthetics; her nostalgic existence with an abstract form of time, space, and environment can only be experienced, and words become mute to justify. Investigators like to quote a statement that inspires a life journey in the accomplishment section.

“My mother tongue is the Art” - Zarina Hashmi

References:

- [1] Ramaswamy, Sumathi "ART ON THE LINE" Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation (2017): 284
- [2] Kumar, Apama Megan. Lines of Inquiry: Partition, Historiography and the Art of Zarina Hashmi. Diss. UCLA, 2012.
- [3] Hammer Museum, A Conversation with Zarina, (2012, October 18). [Video file] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDoCSEJOJG0&t=2s> on 14/12/18
- [4] TateShots Zarina Hashmi – Studio Visit, (2013, Apr 25) [Video file] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXJpbpvcMDU&t=114s> on 14/12/18
- [5] Robert, Kimbril. (2006) Paper Houses, Published by Gallery Espace, New Delhi, Page 5
- [6] Courtney A. Stewart, (2017, February 9) Seven Questions for Zarina Hashmi. Retrieved on 07/12/18 from <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/ruminations/2017/zarina-hashmi-interview>
- [7] Robert, Kimbril (2006) A personal language of geometry and architecture [exhibition catalog] Retrieved from Paper Houses, published by Gallery Espace, New Delhi, on 10/11/18.
- [8] Sen, Geeti (2006) A Conversation with Zarina in New York [exhibition catalog]. Retrieved from Paper Houses, published by Gallery Espace, New Delhi, on 10/11/18.
- [9] The Met, The Artist Project: Zarina Hashmi (2015, March 25). [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JK5GJ7ms0U on 12/14/18
- [10] Serpentine Galleries Garden Marathon 2011: Zarina Hashmi, "Invisible Gardens" (2016, February 8). [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vMIC1Uy6No&t=743s> on 12/14/18
- [11] Karode, Roobina. [Collectible Art Bank]. Looking at Art: Zarina Hashmi's Artwork (2017, May 05) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa-YrbXZBBE&t=5s> on 12/14/18
- [12] Saloni, Mathur. Partition and the Visual Arts, Third Text, 31:2-3, 205-212, DOI: [10.1080/09528822.2017.1381409](https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1381409) (2017).
- [13] APA Institute, Panel on Zarina: Dark Roads (2017, December 20). [Video file]. Retrieved on 12/14/18 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM7eF-DboFg&t=3s>
- [14] Zamindar, Vazira [APA Institute] Panel on Zarina: Dark Roads (2017, December 20) [Video file]. Retrieved on 12/14/18 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM7eF-DboFg&t=3s>
- [15] Shirazi, Sadia [APA Institute] Panel on Zarina: Dark Roads (2017, December 20) [Video file]. Retrieved on 12/14/18 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM7eF-DboFg&t=3s>
- [16] Kamat, Anjali [APA Institute] Panel on Zarina: Dark Roads (2017, December 20) [Video file]. Retrieved on 12/14/18 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM7eF-DboFg&t=3s>
- [17] Pesenti, Allegra Zarina: Paper Like Skin (2012, November 15) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyW9siP8Ku4&t=10s> on 12/14/18
- [18] Kimbril, Robert. (2006) A personal language of geometry and architecture [exhibition catalog] Retrieved from Paper Houses, published by Gallery Espace, New Delhi, on 10/11/18.
- [19] Home is a foreign place, Zarina: Paper Like Skin (2012, November 15) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyW9siP8Ku4&t=10s> on 12/14/18
- [20] Sharma, Sumeswar. [Met Speaks] Workshop and Legacy – Stanley William Hayter, Krishna Reddy, Zarina Hashmi (2016, October 07) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/workshop-and-legacy> on 14/12/18
