



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Archives of American Art*

## **Zarina Hashmi Papers, Clippings and Press, 1970-1999**

Extracted on Mar-28-2024 02:47:00

**The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.**

The Smithsonian Institution (the "Smithsonian") provides the content on this website ([transcription.si.edu](https://transcription.si.edu)), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence ("SI Websites") in support of its mission for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the [following terms](#).

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the Archives of American Art as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the Archives of American Art website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact Archives of American Art or [transcribe@si.edu](mailto:transcribe@si.edu)

For more information on this project and related material, contact the Archives of American Art. [See this project](#) and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.

image has a psychic address and it is immaterial where it is placed because it has no natural orientation and can be seen even upside down without any loss of meaning.

**RADICAL CHANGE :** There is this big shift in the values in regard to the tilt of the picture plane - and it is the most radical shift in the subject of art - the shift from nature to culture.

A picture, that is to say, that does not hark back to the natural world. No doubt the last of nature painters were the Abstract Expressionists despite the fact that they painted on canvases laid on the ground and yet their art still belonged to the wall. These can be seen in the normal erect posture and it did not matter whether these paintings stimulated the same vertical field as the paintings done since Renaissance do.

For appreciating Zarina's prints it is essential that we keep this shift of values of the picture plane in mind, and she makes a silent declaration that art is now more of an operational process than the old analogue of a visual experience of nature. This should become quite clear when we are confronted with what she calls art objects, which are functional as well as have a high decorative value. Their thingness has the same dimension as her serigraph prints.

#### GRAPHICS The Prints As Technologies

Zarina is a graphist's graphist, in fact a teaser pushing the boundaries of art to the farthest limits—so far indeed that it becomes impossible to distinguish art from technology. One is not sure whether hers is a language of art or science. Her serigraphs in McLuhan's language may look like extensions of the printing machine. That is to say the visual faculty itself is extended: the vision gets the precision of the abacus and the counting frame. The art product delinked from the sensory experience becomes the by-product of the machine and all because it has a high degree of precision, uniformity and repetitiveness.

The serigraph art of course is nothing more than a mode of reproduction, and in her hands it becomes a kind of mathematical calculus which ~~enables her to translate~~ every kind of space—tricky or otherwise—into the flat, the uniform and the rational. The machine rationality is the core of her work: nothing bumpy, curved, mystic Pythagorean about her prints.

**UNIFORMITY :** The flat surface is indeed absolutely flat: it mirrors nothing because it does not reflect any light. The white paper like the stretched canvas is empty: it is the thing itself and so is black which has no texture, no tone variation nor value gradations. It is as if a piece of coloured paper is pasted onto the white surfaces. Now, white has the same frame, a rectangle of more or less uniform proportions, only the black shapes vary but always belonging to the white rectangular field producing a contrast of positive and negative areas. The black does not disturb the uniformity of the visual field, for the simple reason that it has no light of its own like the flat white of the paper. So what is presented is a mere contrast of shapes, not a contrast of colours.



The business of design too is thus limited: all the pictorial elements are ordered with respect to the edge of the picture frame: the edges of black shapes in relation to white or the ground of the canvas, or to suggest the interrelationship between two black shapes. The value of the shapes however remains fixed as no colour contrasts are suggested. Optically speaking there is no distinction between the visual scale and physical scale. And this to be sure is easy enough as black and white are complementaries, both visually and physically.

ACTUALITY : So the black shape does not disturb the white area: it merely gets accentuated looking blacker, accentuating its difference from white in the direction of the complementaries of white. The edges of the black shape always lie in the neighbourhood of the white so that when the eye moves from the edge of the black it goes in search of the stable shape of the white or towards the edges of the white. No room here for any illusionistic game because one cannot draw any line between appearance and actuality because the physical scale has the same appearance in all contexts. Moreover the actuality is not about appearances since no reference is ever invited beyond the actuality of the edges either of the black shapes [[?]] or the white frame. To seek actuality elsewhere, in colours for instance, is to misread the intention of the artist.

All this explains very little and indeed reads flatter than Zarina's flat pictorial essays into serigraphy. Or being the ideated flatness they are addressed more to the imagination than to the eye. Indeed, the everused word 'flat' has become rather stale meaning as many things to as many people.

In art critical terms orientation to flatness, for instance, has assumed the severity of a Kantian imperative: we no longer talk of pictures in terms of what they reveal but measure them in terms of their shallowness of depth, the flatness of the flat canvas that is. Or another way of saying this is to ask how much the sensation of flatness one actually experiences standing before a modernist work. It is like the flatbed picture plane which has the same relation to the painted image as table-tops, studio floors, charts and boards have to the scattered objects on them. The painted surface thus has no valid, desired relationship with visual experience of nature. The

LINK

38

OCTOBER 15, 1972

Zarina Hashmi Papers, Clippings and Press, 1970-1999  
Transcribed and Reviewed by Digital Volunteers  
Extracted Mar-28-2024 02:47:00



## Smithsonian Institution

*Archives of American Art*

The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!

The Transcription Center: <https://transcription.si.edu>

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter>

On Twitter: [@TranscribeSI](https://twitter.com/TranscribeSI)

Connect with the Smithsonian

Smithsonian Institution: [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian>

On Twitter: [@smithsonian](https://twitter.com/smithsonian)