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Zarina Hashmi Papers, Clippings and Press, 1970-1999

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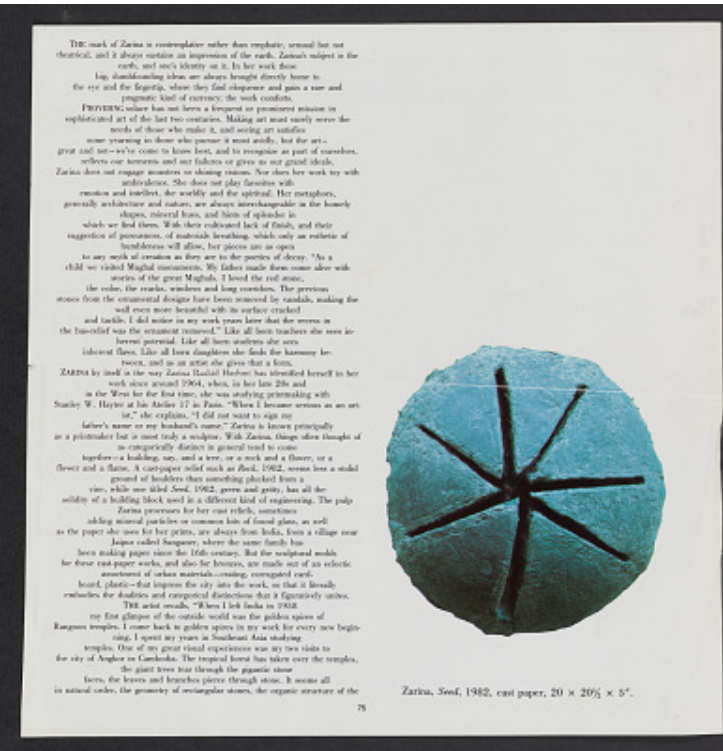
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THE mark of Zarina is contemplative rather than emphatic, sensual but not theatrical, and it always sustains an impression of the earth. Zarina's subject is the earth, and one's identity on it. In her work these big dumbfounding ideas are always brought directly home to the eye and the fingertip, where they find eloquence and gain a rare and pragmatic kind of currency: the work comforts.

PROVIDING solace has not been a frequent or prominent mission in sophisticated art of the last two centuries. Making art must surely serve the needs of those who make it, and seeing art satisfies some yearning in those who pursue it most avidly, but the art- great and not- we've come to know best, and to recognize as part of ourselves, reflects our torments and our failures or gives us our grand ideals. Zarina does not engage monsters or shining visions. Nor does her work toy with ambivalence. She does not play favorites with emotion and intellect, the worldly and the spiritual. Her metaphors, generally architecture and nature, are always interchangeable in the homely shapes, mineral hues, and hints of splendor in which we find them. With their cultivated lack of finish, and their suggestion of porousness, of materials breathing, which only an esthetic of humbleness will allow, her pieces are as open to any myth of creation as they are to the poetics of decay. "As a child we visited Mughal monuments. My father made them come alive with stories of the great Mughals. I loved the red stone, the color, the cracks, windows and long corridors. The precious stones from the ornamental designs have been removed by vandals, making the wall even more beautiful with its surface cracked and tactile. I did notice in my work years later that the recess in the bas-relief was the ornament removed." Like all born teachers she sees inherent potential. Like all born students she sees inherent flaws. Like all born daughters she finds the harmony between, and as an artist she gives that a form.

ZARINA by itself is the way Zarina Rashid Hashmi has identified herself in her work since 1964, when, in her late 20s and in the West for the first time, she was studying printmaking with Stanley W. Hayter at his Atelier 17 in Paris. "When I became serious as an artist," she explains, "I did not want to sign my father's name or my husband's name." Zarina is known principally as a printmaker but is most truly a sculptor. With Zarina, things often thought of as categorically distinct in general tend to come together- a building, say, and a tree, or a rock and a flower, or a flower and a flame. A cast-paper relief such as *Rock*, 1982, seems less a stolid ground of boulders than something plucked from a vine, while one titled *Seed*, 1982, green and gritty, has all the solidity of a building block used in a different kind of engineering. The pulp Zarina processes for her cast reliefs, sometimes adding mineral particles or common bits of found glass, as well as the paper she uses for her prints, are always from India, from a village near Jaipur called Sanganer, where the same family has been making paper since the 16th century. But the sculptural molds for these cast-paper works, and also for bronzes, are made out of an eclectic assortment of urban materials- crating corrugated cardboard, plastic- that impress the city into the work, so that it literally embodies the dualities and categorical distinctions that it figuratively unites.

THE artist recalls, "When I left India in 1958 my first glimpse of the outside world was the golden spires of Rangoon temples. I come back to golden spires in my work for every beginning. I spent my years in Southeast Asia studying temples. One of my great visual experiences was my two visits to the city of Angkor in Cambodia. The tropical forest has taken over the temples, the giant trees tear through the gigantic stone faces, the leaves and branches pierce through stone. It seems all in natural order, the geometry of rectangular stones, the organic structure of the



[Image]
Zarina, *Seed*, 1982, cast paper, 20 x 20 1/2 x 5". [Image]

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