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AESTHETICS OF TEMPORALITY AND GENDER POLITICS

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CURATING CONTEMPORARY MINIATURE
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GÜNCEL MİNYATÜRÜ KÜRATE ETMEK
ZAMANSALLIĞIN VE CİNSİYETİ POLİTİKALARININ ESTETİĞİ

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- 1) Miniature
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- 3) Gender
- 4) Temporality
- 5) Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Miniature painting is a book illustration that visualizes a following text in a narrative style. Concerning its formal characteristics, the main source of the most common definition of miniature is still the attitude that considers the evolution of miniature painting along the axes of Western naturalistic and mimetic theories. Opposed to central perspective rules and singular viewpoint of Western painting, miniature aesthetics is shaped by multiple perspectives and different vanishing points.

This thesis intends to form a frame of the cultural context in which “miniature aesthetics” resurfaced in contemporary art. It addresses the aesthetics of the politics of temporality and gender by contrasting miniature aesthetics and the perspectival paradigm. The study conceptualizes how the lack of perspective in miniature aesthetics coincides with the way femininity is culturally constructed through *lack*. Through this work, I expand on the question of gender by suggesting that feminine writing can inform the formation of new subjectivities.

Orientalism thinks East as a timeless geography which is exclusive of historicity. I engage with the historical and social construction: “timeless Orient” as a productive act and subvert it as a tool to critique the Eurocentric temporalization. Miniature aesthetics’ multi-perspectival structure opposes to perspective’s organization of one-centered space which represents the line of progress and coincides with modernity’s future oriented understanding of historical time. In this context, the notion of *contemporary* gains a politico-cultural importance beyond its temporal significance. Following Giorgio Agamben, I assert that being contemporary means adopting a critical approach towards one’s own time.

Thereafter, I discuss how contemporary miniature aesthetics is an exploration of multiplicity and its temporal condition by examining how “contemporary miniature” was contextualized in the framework of large-scale exhibitionary

formats. By doing so, I discuss miniature aesthetics' anachronic relation with *contemporary* and its potential meanings for the theory of curating.

Finally, I curate a hypothetical exhibition entitled *Shirin* by engaging with the concept of *curatography*. I focus on the textual; poetical and architectural; ornamental aspects of miniature aesthetics in the contemporary works of women artists. I argue that artists' engagement with ornamentation is an alternative way to write. As opposed to rigid geometry of perspective, the geometrical structure of ornamentation allows poetry and architecture to replace each other through their rhythmic character. Moreover, by debating my curatorial selection, concepts and methods of installation I explore what curatorial activism means.

Keywords: Miniature, Contemporary art, Gender, Temporality, Perspective

ÖZET

Minyatür, yer aldığı metni kendine özgü bir anlatım biçimiyle görselleştiren kitap resmidir. Günümüzde minyatürün biçimsel tanımını hala Batı'nın natüralist ve mimetik kuramları üzerinden yapılmaktadır. Batı resminin merkezi perspektif kurallarının ve tekil bakış açısının aksine minyatür estetiği, çoklu perspektifler ve farklı ufuk noktaları ile şekillenir.

Bu tezin amacı güncel sanatta “minyatür estetiğinin” yeniden ortaya çıktığı kültürel bağlamın bir çerçevesini çizmektir. Tez, minyatür estetiği ile perspektif paradigmasını karşılaştırarak zamansallık ve cinsiyet politikalarının estetiğine odaklanır. Bu tezde, minyatür estetiğindeki perspektif eksikliğinin, kadınlığın kültürel olarak eksiklik yoluyla inşa edilme biçimiyle örtüştüğünü iddia ediyor ve *eksikliği* kavramsallaştırıyorum. Bununla birlikte, kadınlık yazının yeni öznelliklerin oluşumunu tetikleyebileceğini öne sürerek toplumsal cinsiyet üzerine düşünüyorum.

Oryantalizm, Doğu'yu tarihselliğin dışında, zamansız bir coğrafya olarak düşünür. Tarihsel ve sosyal bir yapı olan “zamansız Doğu” kavramını altüst ederek, Avrupa merkezli zamansallığı eleştirmek için bir araç olarak kullanıyorum. Minyatür estetiğinin çok perspektifli yapısı, modernitenin ilerlemeci tarihsel zaman anlayışıyla örtüşen tek merkezli mekân organizasyonuna karşı çıkar. Bu bağlamda, *güncel* kavramı, zamansal öneminin ötesinde bir politik-kültürel önem kazanır. Giorgio Agamben'e atıfla, güncel olmanın kişinin kendi zamanına karşı eleştirel bir yaklaşım benimsemek anlamına geldiğini ileri sürüyorum.

Daha sonra, güncel minyatür estetiğinin nasıl çokluğun ve zamansal koşullarının bir keşfi olduğunu tartışıyor ve büyük ölçekli sergilerin “güncel minyatürü” hangi bağlamlarda sergilediğini inceliyorum. Bu yolla, minyatür estetiğinin *güncel* ile kurduğu anakronik ilişkinin küratöryel teori için potansiyel anlamlarını tartışıyorum.

Son olarak, *küratografi* kavramına odaklanarak *Shirin* adlı varsayımsal bir serginin küratörlüğünü yapıyorum. Kadın sanatçıların güncel sanat eserlerinde minyatür estetiğinin metinsel; şiirsel ve mimari; süsleyici özelliklerine odaklanıyorum. Sanatçıların süsleme ile uğraşmasının alternatif bir yazma yöntemi olduğunu savunuyorum. Katı perspektif geometrisinin aksine, süslemenin geometrik yapısı ritmik bir ortaklığa sahip şiir ve mimarinin birbirinin yerine geçmesine izin verir. Ayrıca küratöryel seçimlerimi, kavramları ve yerleştirme yöntemlerini tartışarak, küratöryel aktivizmin ne anlama geldiğini soruyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Minyatür, Güncel sanat, Cinsiyet, Zamansallık, Perspektif

INTRODUCTION

Today, it is remarkable to see the mark of miniature aesthetics in contemporary artworks of critically acclaimed artists such as Shahzia Sikander, Imran Qureshi, Hayv Kahraman, CANAN, Fereydoun Ave, Hamra Abbas, Shahpour Pouyan and Nilima Sheikh. The current artworks which employ miniature aesthetics for their own end have been called *contemporary miniature*. Shahzia Sikander's thesis work *The Scroll* (1989-90)—a large-scale narrative painting depicting daily life through a personal and feminist perspective is considered the first example of contemporary miniature art and brought international recognition to this form within contemporary art practices. The term *contemporary miniature* has been associated with the contemporary art practices of the artists graduated from miniature painting at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan, such as Shahzia Sikander, Imran Qureshi, Hamra Abbas and Saira Wasim.

However, throughout my thesis I intend to redefine this term as many of the artists of whose work I investigate were not officially trained in miniature painting but were influenced by it in various ways. By exploring what *contemporary* means, I aim to reformulate it. I claim that contemporary artworks' ambition to engage with miniature aesthetics is to make powerful political statements. Sometimes they benefit from miniature's symbolic use that can both reflect on how past act upon our current life and sometimes they turn to history to find toolboxes to fix today and also to build the future. While other artists use the exact forms of the miniature painting to create conceptually powerful works to draw a link between the realities of the present and the fragments of the past. Each of the artist has her own unique way to transform the miniature and a different reason to use its theoretical potential.

Research Motivation and Theoretical Background

This thesis intends to form a frame of the cultural context in which miniature aesthetics resurfaced in contemporary art. Contemporary Art enables us to think

aesthetics as a political matter as it can create cracks and reconfigure a different regime of perception and signification (Rancière, 2009: 73). I aim to contribute to the discussion of how politics interfere into the cultural field by highlighting *contemporary* as a cultural context of a specific temporal condition in which gender politics are shaped.

Miniature painting's anachronic use in contemporary art opens up a space to think our present temporal and political condition. Today, we observe a rising nostalgia in the speeches of political leaders such as Trump, Erdogan and Johnson. They all use an imaginary golden past to manipulate past, present and future. This political ambience coheres with Svetlana Boym's argument: "Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future." (2001: 21). According to Svetlana Boym, *restorative nostalgia* is at the core of recent national and religious revivals, the rhetoric of the return to origins (24). Brexit, neo-Ottomanism, the slogan "Make America Great Again" are the symptoms of the same political strategy.

In Steven Henry Madoff's collection *What About Activism?* (2019), the famous curator Hans Ulrich Obrist argues that philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy "aligns the reactionary trend in contemporary politics with a willful blindness toward issues that threaten humanity, writing that the major stumbling block that prevents us from confronting threats such as climate change, nuclear war, or runaway advanced technologies is our conception of the future as unreal" (119).

A nostalgic political climate has power to create a collective desire to return to a past that never existed. An ideal past might have a powerful role in a political sphere as it effects how we act today and how we imagine the future.

However, Obrist's statement continues: "By utilizing fragments of the past, art can help us to grasp the reality of the future and alert us to the problems of the present." (2019: 119). So, the artistic engagement with the past can be an example of how past can be used to start a dialogue in the political sphere. The creative use of the

past tackles with contemporary realities for better futures in contrast to political nostalgia. Strategical employment of tools from the past might be a way to resist to the cruel promises of a return to an idealized past. Svetlana Boym proposes that nostalgia can be subverted and “creative rethinking of nostalgia” can be “a strategy of survival” (2001: 21). Boym names this creative rethinking of nostalgia as “reflective nostalgia”. She bisects nostalgia as restorative and reflective:

“Restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals; it knows two main plots the return to origins and the conspiracy. Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholies. This typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.” (25).

One way of using nostalgia as a creative tool, and thinking the past critically is to use pre-modern art forms in contemporary art such as miniature painting.

Miniature painting is a book illustration that visualizes a following text in a narrative style. The books with miniature paintings date back to 12th century and transformed into a traditional art form under the patronage of rulers. It has become a unique visual language in the Islamic world and was a visual language in the Christian world until Renaissance. Concerning its formal characteristics, the main source of the most common definition of miniature is still the attitude that considers the evolution of miniature painting along the axes of Western naturalistic and mimetic theories. In miniatures, there are no single perspective in the traditional sense but there are multiple perspectives in contrast to the illusion created by

looking from a fixed point. To this extent, the main quality that distinguishes miniature aesthetics from the Western painting is perspective.

My thesis attempts to address the aesthetics of the politics of temporality by contrasting miniature aesthetics and the perspectival paradigm. I establish a correlation between Orientalism, progressivist narration of the historical time and the visual regime of perspective which constructs the Eurocentric art canon which produce the White European Male subject as the representative of patriarchy. I remark that this comprehension of culture prevented miniature painting to produce its own critical concepts as it has been excluded from the progressivist art history which is founded on the perspective principal. Then, I explore how the lack of perspective in miniature paintings transforms into a concept that manifests multiplicity in contemporary art as the contemporary art world adopts a critical attitude towards its own monophonic history.

Although perspective is not a relevant criterion since the early 20th century, it continues to structure our view of art and art history. It creates a look to the past from a singular point that considers history as linear (Shaw, 2019: 301). The multiplicity of viewpoints of miniature painting is a threat to this single vantage point. The art historical discourse that is founded on the concept of perspective suppresses “the potentially revolutionary multiperspectivalism” (303).

In *What is “Islamic” Arts?* (2019), Wendy Shaw writes:

“... the theorization of perspective as a rupture in human subjectivity took place in the early twentieth century, precisely when it lost its structuring force in painting. The moment that perspective ceased its function as the premier structuring device of visual representation, its elision with rationalism transformed it into a structuring device legitimating the European hegemonic world order. No longer symbolic of good art, it became symbolic of Western dominion (318)”.

Perspective marks the superiority of western visual cultures and symbolizes the achievement of modernity. Perspective is seen as an achievement towards rationalism and Western science in a progressive narrative structure. As Shaw further argues, this conceptualization of perspective as a single line of progress ignores the existence of non-Western cultures in which perspective played no role in either representation or reason (321). Additionally, perspective allows us to think the interaction between visual representation and subjectivity.

Furthermore, Zeynep Sayın remarks that Jeremy Bentham's infamous *panopticum* is an output of the seeing regime produced by perspectival paradigm (2017: 12). Since Foucault *panopticum* represents the mechanisms of surveillance. The eye as the center of the surveillance mechanism is everywhere and everywhen. Nevertheless, as Sayın claims, in the early twentieth century important figures such as Ruskin, Bergson, Cézanne and impressionists endeavored to reconfigure the eye as tameless and innocent. The Surrealists, especially Breton argues that the eye should go back to its primary way of seeing (12). The critical artistic movements of the '20s problematized the eye-centered modernist styles. Sayın writes that the Pavel Florenski's questions on perspective and Duchamp's path-breaking explorations on seeing and producing art coincides. This coincidence points out to the search in the artistic field which can goes against the grain of modernity's eye-centered way of seeing which was materialized in the political field as control mechanisms such as *panopticum*. Thus, it is significant that in the times of World War I Duchamp rejected the work as "retinal" art, intended only to please the eye. Duchamp's motivation was to find artistic strategies which can engage, affect and mobilize society in new ways. They were also search of new subjectivities, new ways of being in the world.

Losing the importance of perspective in the 20th century caused an anxiety that results in its preservation as an ideology. This ideology depends on the universalization of singular understanding of vision to human which is the European white male.

I argue that the anxiety derived from the loss of perspective coincides with the contemporary anxiety of losing cultural identity which creates the tendency towards nationalism and reactionary politics. Yearning a golden past or expecting an ideal future to come are the two sides of the same coin; the progressivist line of history. These politico-temporal discourses rise from the ruins of modernity. Ironically, idea of going back to an origin is linked to moving towards an “ideal future”. They both produce nationalist and essentialist political discourse which we can observe its repercussions in the cultural field. The tempo-cultural anxiety has power to mobilize public through cultural production.

Through my thesis I explore how miniature painting can inform contemporary art to stand against this tempo-cultural anxiety. It is possible to see the inclusion of miniature aesthetics in the Western artistic practices in the 21st century is a search for an answer to rise of this nostalgic discourse associated with the introversion of the nations in opposed to once rising discourse of globalism. The temporal understanding of the modernity haunts us disguised as nostalgia ironically and miniature painting returns from the pre-modern.

We can assume the global art world’s impulse to answer to this ghost with an artistic practice associated with so called Orient can be interpreted as an Orientalist one. Orientalism thought East as a timeless, unchanged geography which is exclusive of historicity, without history. Orientalism confines East into a frozen past. West imposed hegemony by dividing the time according to its development.

However, I read this Orientalist timelessness as a productive act. Artists and curators approach Eurocentric temporalization critically by using miniature paintings’ multi-perspectival structure which opposes to perspective’s organization of one-centered space which represents the line of progress and coincides with modernity’s future oriented understanding of historical time. Eurocentric temporality imposes the idea of non-Western cultures didn’t go through the same

processes with the East. Following Renaissance, Industrial Revolution marked the historical timeline of the West and the history of the East has been excluded from this Western history of progress therefore it is perceived as left behind and marked as anachronic.

Although the artists and curators can't change this temporal structure they adopt a subversive and critical approach. They subvert the Orientalist temporality and transform the timelessness into untimely. Moreover, just like contemporary miniature works, miniature painting itself is detached from its historical background, from its chronological place in art history, from the Europocentric visual regime and reappears untimely in Contemporary Art. As Agamben quotes Roland Barthes "The contemporary is the untimely (40)." and suggests that "those who are truly contemporary [...] are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. [...] through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time (2009: 40-41).".

Today, anachronicity of miniature painting in regards to the Eurocentric models of art historical writing becomes the condition which renders miniature contemporary. In such a context, *contemporary* gains a politico-cultural importance beyond its temporal significance. I assert that being contemporary means adopting a critical approach towards one's own time. It requires new forms of subjectivation other than the eye-centered rationalist white European male manifested by perspective. Following, I focus on the intersection of femininity and miniature. I observe that they are culturally constructed through lack. They are both located as the Other by Eurocentric patriarchy. I expand on femininity and suggest that feminine writing can inform the formation of new feminine subjectivities. In *Laugh of Medusa* (1976) Hélène Cixous explores the resistive quality of feminine texts and defends that feminine writing opposes to the phallogocentric systems.

Therefore, I argue that feminine writing can be a model for a more inclusive art history and be a beneficial practice for producing new cultural concepts. Cixous suggests to write art history as much as fiction and poetry to discover femininities through texts. Additionally, Cixous' idea of writing art histories which narrates different experiences of femininities instead of the Art History of White Male intersects with Julia Kristeva's "creative time" (quoted in Apter, *Women's Time in Theory*, 2010: 3) which situates itself outside the linear time of identities. Kristeva's idea of creative time which expresses a temporal fluidity is associated with women's time where identities are in flux just like in Rosi Braidotti's writings. Braidotti's "nomadic time-continuum" produces nomadic subjects "by looking to the past in order to construct sustainable futures by activating present practices" (2014: 236).".

I suggest that one of the ways of constructing cultural identities, such as gender, has been sharing the same linear narrative which produces and reproduces Others and solidify identities. Therefore, anachronicity of miniature painting can be a mark of cultural and sexual difference by disrupting the art history that is constructed on the white heterosexual male identity.

Thereafter, considering curating as a way of doing cultural activism I examine how contemporary miniature is used as a mark of difference in different curatorial contexts. In *Curatorial Activism* (2018), Maura Reilly describes the term "curatorial-activist" to describe people who "committed themselves to initiatives that are leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, and encouraging new strategies of resistance- all of which offers hope and affirmation (22)." An activist curatorial stands for a cause. I propose that curators include contemporary miniature art works to their selection with the aim of criticizing the Eurocentric cultural politics. The visibility of non-Western artists in the global art scene gains importance in the present politico-cultural context of restorative nostalgia which aims to invent a

nationalist memory. I examine the contemporary as the temporal condition of globality.

In *The Contemporary Condition* (2016) Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund characterizes contemporaneity as our present temporal condition in which we find the togetherness “of a multitude of different temporalities on different scales, including different grand narratives and imagined communities of nation-states and cultural clusters developed during modernity (9)”. Following Cox and Lund, I argue that contemporaneity is the coming together of different times that forges the temporal condition of the global present; contemporaneity is the temporality of globality (17). Within this framework, multiple times represents other multiplicities such as geography, history, race, gender...

I assert that this contemporary condition enables us to produce new forms of subjectivation. Accordingly, I use the method of feminine writing to curate an exhibition entitled *Shirin* which explores the possibilities of forming a new contemporary feminine subjectivity. Through discussing my curatorial selection of women artists' contemporary miniature art works I explore the idea of miniature painting as a mark of sexual difference and underline its intersection with ethnic, national and racial difference. Maura Reilly (2018: 25) discusses the women only exhibitions under the name of *Area Studies*. She offers that they disrupt the normative discourse by focusing on the racial, geographical, gendered or sexual orientation and paying attention to what is outside the white-male-Western center. Additionally, I embrace Rosi Braidotti's feminist strategy which makes sexual difference operative: “the affirmation of sexual difference as positivity is the answer” (1993: 3). Following Irigaray, the contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti uses extreme affirmation of sexed identity to reverse the hierarchical differences.

I aim to challenge Euro-centrism by engaging with feminist theory in the curatorial field. I examine various ways which contemporary miniature's visual and

theoretical potential informed feminine subjectivities. I focus on the textual and architectural aspect of miniature painting in the contemporary miniature works of women artists. I argue that artists' engagement with poetry and ornamentation is an expression of the emergence of new feminine desiring subjectivities. As opposed to geometry of perspective the geometrical structure of miniature painting allows poetry and architecture to replace each other. Furthermore, in contrast to perspective, which depends on the fixed position of the viewing subject, miniature aesthetics provokes a new kind of subjectivity as it decenters her, allows multiple viewing experiences and most importantly multiple experiences of femininity. In such a way, I aim to express how visual culture informs the formation of feminine subjectivities and vice versa. It asserts the importance of visibility in the process of socio-cultural construction of gender. I aim to find ways of subverting sexual difference to create a more inclusive space where different femininities can manifest.

My thesis suggests to think the temporality of *contemporary* through miniature aesthetics in contemporary art. I aim to challenge the current crisis of cultural identity manifested by politics of temporality by studying curatorial practices. As Rossi Braidotti wrote: "Fear, anxiety and nostalgia are clear examples of the negative emotions involved in the project of detaching ourselves from familiar and cherished forms of identity." (2006: 83), I propose to rethink the concept of identity itself. I hope discussing the paradigm of perspective as an aesthetical manifestation of the solid identity will expose that aesthetic is a political matter. Or as Rancière (2004) would say; the political goes into aesthetic regime and Walter Benjamin (1968) would add; political gets temporal.

Methodology

Today we need new methods for interpreting the echoes of socio-political issues in the cultural field. They should provoke interdisciplinary strategical thinking in the field of Cultural Studies. Accordingly, this thesis aims to be an exploration of a new

methodology. I suggest that curatorial can be an alternative research method, a way to produce knowledge through cultural practice.

Instead of an art historical perspective that evaluates an artwork according to the era it has been produced, I embrace the curatorial approach that encourages presenting an artwork to the public in such a way that it gets public visibility for the first time or in a very different way than it was seen before; to change the audience's point of view. My thesis differs from a thesis of art history as I am interested on the cultural and political context of the present day which contemporary miniature emerges. I focus on contemporary art's sociocultural effect. Additionally, I discuss cultural concepts such as Orientalism and gender which has been part of Cultural Studies all along.

The international curator and the director of the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Singapore, Ute Meta Bauer defines the curatorial as "a strategy for the production of meaning, a mode of thinking and working that traverse complex fields of cultural production and articulates itself in different formats and temporalities." (2019: 206). Bauer writes:

"Does the curatorial have the potential to support action with political theory and vice versa? The answer is not yet complete. However, what comes with the curatorial is a specific way of drawing connections between different materials, bodies of knowledge, histories, places, and people that can reveal what is otherwise not seen. That is what makes curating worth doing and worth an audience's time to discover. The curatorial can establish such an interplay of connections and layers that are often set up in opposition or in unexpected relationships, shaping a specific space for the public to encounter, experience, and engage critically. This is the curatorial as a form of cultural production whose ideas bear a sense of the crucial issues and concerns of the now and demonstrate its relevance in the public sphere. (206-207)"

Following Bauer, I take the curatorial as a good place to produce knowledge and as a form of communication. I believe that this thesis will also be a contribution to Cultural Studies by exploring a new methodology. I engage with the concept of *curatography*: writing of exhibitions (Lin, 2020) as a methodology. I endeavor to form this methodology by focusing on four different large-scale exhibitions as case studies. I examine where they stand in the cultural memory. Furthermore, I also interpret *curatography* as writing an exhibition. I curate an exhibition myself to experiment with the theoretical potential of miniature aesthetics. Additionally, besides discussing the concept feminine writing throughout the thesis, I also use it as an approach to curating.

My choice to discuss the miniature aesthetics through contemporary art and curating is, as Hongjohn Lin wrote in the online platform *Curatography* (2020):

“the desire to demonstrate contemporary art’s urgency by treating the present as a critical moment within a disrupted temporality. Giorgio Agamben pointed out our consciousness of contemporaneity is a sort of anachronism involving a discontinuity from both the past and the future. In such a case, an individual’s engagement with the present becomes crucial. As much as an individual act, the curatorial production of knowledge becomes a practicing wisdom which involves ontological dimensions of curation. As the etymology of “to curate” suggests, there is a sense of “care” and “cure” involved, as from the Latin *curare* and *cura*.”

In this context, as the symbol of anachronism, the use of miniature aesthetics in contemporary art can be seen as a cure for the cultural anxiety informed by the art discourse of which roots go back to the Renaissance concept of perspective. The failed modern dreams for the future are transformed into the fantasies of going back in time. What is left to the critical thinkers is the present. In such manner, my

methodology is also a way to contribute to the discussions on the relation between art, time and politics.

Thesis Structure

My thesis consists of three main chapters. In the first chapter I claim that contemporary means more than a temporality and explore the condition of contemporary. I expand on the significance of “contemporary” for art and especially for miniature. Furthermore, I propose that miniature’s multi-perspectival structure weakens the perspectival linear system and alters the future-driven modern deployment of historical time. Miniature’s anachronicity enables a critical look towards the past, present and future. Additionally, I will explore the relation between temporality, miniature aesthetics and feminist writing. I propose that feminist theory can inform a more fluid understanding of time and an alternative history writing.

In the second chapter I discuss how contemporary miniature’s aesthetics was an exploration of multiplicity towards the homogenizing cultural universalism. I examine how curators engaged with contemporary miniature art works in a globalized art world system. Analyzing curatorial concepts and their relation to contemporary miniature I explore how miniature aesthetics can provoke a change in present cultural politics. I answer these questions by exploring how “contemporary miniature” was contextualized in the framework of most prestigious large-scale exhibitionary formats.

I explore four different examples of biennials who exhibited contemporary miniature; 11th Sharjah Biennial (2013), 10th Istanbul Biennial (2007), 51st Venice Biennale (2005), documenta 14 (2017). Sharjah Biennial entitled *Re:emerge Towards a New Cultural Cartography* curated by Yuko Hasegawa and Istanbul Biennial entitled *Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War* by Hou Hanru are examples of biennials in two different non-western

regions. They both interrogate Western centrism in the art field by their location and also content.

Venice Biennale curated by Rosa Martinez and Maria de Coral with two different exhibitions entitled *The Experience of Art*, and *Always a Little Further*, and documenta entitled *Learning From Athens* curated by Adam Szymczyk are both a challenge to these most important art event's history with their search for an alternative globalism.

I interpret each biennial's curatorial concept in relation to a contemporary miniature work that they've exhibited. I explore their similarities and differences towards contemporary miniature. By doing so, I discuss miniature painting's relation with contemporary art and its potential meanings for the theory of curating. I explore how artists thought in terms of formal aesthetics of miniature painting. I claim that the absence of the perspective use in miniature painting's structure introduces a new world view consisted of multiplicity. I propose that shifting from a subjectivity rooted in a single focal point can create a new multifocal subjectivity.

In the third chapter I curate a hypothetical exhibition called *Shirin*. Through the works of Shahzia Sikander, Hamra Abbas, Nilima Sheikh, Dana Awartani, CANAN and Hayv Kahraman I discuss the miniature aesthetics' effect on the formation of a new subjectivity. I focus on two formal qualities of miniature painting; geometry and poetry which feed from each other.

Focusing on other features of miniature painting besides the absence of perspective can produce fresh concepts to think about art. I argue that artists' engagement with this two aesthetics creates the potential to formulate a new female subjectivity. My intention is to demonstrate how thinking outside the limit of Western art discourse can inform the feminist thought using miniature. Moreover, by debating my selection, concepts and methods of installation of the exhibition, I explore what curating contemporary art means.

1. TEMPORALITY OF MINIATURE AESTHETICS AND CONTEMPORANEITY OF FEMININE WRITING

In *Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity* (2006) Terry Smith claims that “the word contemporary has always meant more than just the plain and passing present (702)”. The contemporary is the temporal condition of our day. It signifies the socio-temporal world order. As Smith writes: “During the period of modernity’s dominance, the downside of what used to be called cultural imperialism was a kind of ethnic cleansing carried out by the displacement of unmodern peoples into past, slower, or frozen time. [...] [Today], the power to force everyone forward in broadly the same direction has been lost. Multiple temporalities are the rule these days, and their conceptions of historical development move in multifarious directions. Against this broad tide, fundamentalisms move in just one direction (702).”

In this first chapter I argue that anachronicity of miniature is what makes it contemporary because contemporary requires criticality and temporal disjuncture. I suggest contemporary incorporate of multiple ways of seeing and being in time against the nationalist, fundamentalist, reactionary political trends which rise from the ruins of the modernity.

Smith expands on this condition of contemporary: “contemporaneity consists precisely in the constant experience of radical disjunctions of perception, mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them (703).”

Renaissance perspective has been the symbol of future oriented thinking of the master narratives. Thus, contemporary miniature, like Smith suggested, has the ability to mismatch ways of seeing in oppose to perspectival paradigm’s

progressivist look. Moreover, the multiple perspectival structure of miniature painting provided artists to express various cultural, social and also temporal multiplicities.

Although master narratives persist and continue to promise everything from continuing modernizing progress in public political discourses, art as contemporary by engaging with history can create alternative narratives. Bearing in mind that the fundamental question of “who writes history?” I discuss the phallogocentricity of the historical regime that conditioned a progressivist experience of time. However, I claim that a fluid *feminine* time can inform new ways of writing history where multiple temporalities can emerge. In this chapter, I explore a multitemporal history formed from miniature aesthetics and feminine writing.

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was also the fall of one of the last master narratives of the twentieth century; “the futurism of modernity—a regime in which actions are guided by the future and cease to be envisaged in continuity with the past; in which history is teleologically conceived as a vast process of emancipation of humanity through (and not merely in) time, towards universal progress” (Ross, 2012: 13). But today the future is in crisis too.

In *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) Mark Fisher quotes from Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s book *After The Future*, which he refers to the ‘the slow cancellation of the future:

“But when I say “future”, I am not referring to the direction of time. I am thinking, rather, of the psychological perception, which emerged in the cultural situation of progressive modernity, the cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization, reaching a peak after the Second World War. These expectations were shaped in the conceptual frameworks of an ever-progressing development, albeit through different methodologies (...) “My generation grew up at the peak of this

mythological temporalization, and it is very difficult, maybe impossible, to get rid of it, and look at reality without this kind of temporal lens (24).”

I propose that the “slow cancellation of future” introduced nostalgia into the political arena. The reactionary politics which aspires to an illusionary past cause blindness towards the future. This temporal crisis reveals the need to reconstruct the relationship between past and future. The ghost of modernity’s future oriented ideology is still with us and paradoxically causes political nostalgia. Nonetheless, contemporary miniature provides a reproductive ground to contemplate on this tempo-binary thinking.

1.1. Aesthetics of Linear History

In *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (2012), Christine Ross proposes that “contemporary art operates a shift away from an aesthetics grounded in the conventions of time of classical modernity, understood here as a condition, a discursive rhetoric, and a historical period. It is a shift away from time conceptualized as pure continuity, unity, and succession, together with history as progress, acceleration, and teleology; towards a post-metaphysical “presentifying” aesthetics of reorientation of modern conventions of historical time (15)”. This “temporal turn” in contemporary art paved way to a reorientation of modern conventions of history, time and historical time. According to Ross, one of the ways to challenge this modern regime of historicity is “perspectival weakening” (15).

I argue that miniature’s multi-perspectival structure weakens the perspectival linear system and alters the future-driven modern deployment of historical time. Miniature aesthetics “confronts the futurism of the modern regime of historicity—modernity’s progress-oriented articulation of past, present, and future, in which the future is constituted through the devaluing of the past and the erasure of the present

(5).” contemporary miniature searches new ways of writing art history which challenges the modern historicity as a progressive paradigm.

The perspective’s ideology lies at the heart of the Western art historical discourse. The progressive structure of perspective is both a way of thinking and seeing inherited from early modernity. However contemporary art practices such as contemporary miniature can spoil this perspectival system inured by art history.

In Latin, *perspectiva* means seeing through. Panofsky explains the “Perspectival” view of space as a transformation of a picture into a window and the look through this window into a space (Panofsky, 1991: 27). Perspective emerges as a modern way of viewing and arranging space. It creates an illusion created by looking from a fixed point. To achieve perspective, the painter should stand on one fixed point. In other words, the drawing must have one central point, one horizon line and one measurement. Vanishing point of the all horizontal lines which goes toward the depth of the painting should be converged according to that central point. All other vertical line’s vanishing point should be on the same central point. This is the totality of perspective (Florenski, 2017: 89).

Perspective creates an optical unity where “bodies and space are bound to each other. Subsequently, if a body is to liberate itself from its attachment to the surface, it cannot grow unless space grows with it at the same rate.” (Panofsky, 1991: 67). Therefore, the body becomes dependent to the space but independent from the eye which is the only organ that can perceive the external world according to perspective. It creates an eye-centered world view which separates retina from touching. It objectifies the subjective “mathematical space” and systematizes the external world as an extension of the domain of the self.

1.2. Miniature Aesthetics' Alternative Temporality

However, “as opposed to the Western painting principles of a singular viewpoint where linear/central perspective rules are applied, miniature paintings do not use perspective. Rather than the illusion created by looking from a fixed point at any given moment, in miniature paintings multiple perspectives and different vanishing points come into play.” (Toprak, 2020: 61). Miniature paintings have multiple centers and the eye of the viewer can't perceive all of the image at once. When an eye focuses at one center it misses other points. The eye is free to choose its center; it escapes from the eye centered authority. Miniature breaks the authority of the eye of the one-centered perspective.

Therefore, miniature paintings have a very different spatial organization than a wall-hanging oil painting produced according to perspectival rules. As Toprak writes “a miniature painting, in its simplest definition, is a book illustration that visualizes an accompanying text in a distinct, graphic, narrative style (61)”. This definition brings us to the second different quality of miniature painting; the medium of book. Book as a medium and as a physical space has its own specific features. At the outset, a viewer engages with these illustrated books with their body, in private spaces, they touch them, turn the pages with their hands and have to lean on them to look at them. The book as the material space acquires an active and engaged body position in contrast to the perspectival system where a human body is fixed into a space and also time.

This fixed body, especially the eye which is focused to a single point and directed towards a single horizon brings the idea of a progressivist linear historical time. Perspective creates this linear history both ideologically and aesthetically. Aesthetically, perspective defined a direction for the bodies, a focal point to achieve, a horizon to be arrived. The modern idea of progress has arisen within this aesthetical sensibility. Perspective is the aesthetic manifestation of modernity's future-oriented regime of historicity.

However, miniature painting's multifocal structure "might allow us to construct a different representational temporality" (Firat, 2015: 173). In contrast to painting which the viewer can grasp the image at one glance, miniatures have different trajectories therefore multiple moments. There are different ways to enter to the picture plane. The space can be arranged with multiple focal points which creates multiple "potential reading paths" with alternative time tracks. A scene in miniature paintings can be read as "taking place in the past and future". Miniatures can capture "successive events that take place at different times as well as various locations. By using such a technique in which different temporalities come together in one image, the miniature creates its own temporality." (174). Moreover, the reader of the miniature painted books can travel inside a story, from one time and space to another by turning the pages. Miniature aesthetics offer to the viewer to wander inside a narrative at her own pace as the book offers a material space to read and look, for text and image.

1.3. Cultural Politics of Contemporary

In his Collège de France lectures Roland Barthes says: "The contemporary is the untimely." with a reference to Nietzsche. Giorgio Agamben focuses on this note in in his famous essay *What Is the Contemporary?* (2009) and writes:

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are in this sense irrelevant. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it. (40-41).

Additionally, In *Historical Untimely* (2009), referencing Rancière, Kristin Ross proposes that “to be untimely means to be about time, not outside of it, or beyond it (18)”. From this viewpoint, I argue that being contemporary is taking distance to one’s own time and thinking it critically and the assignment of the word “contemporary” to art describes more than a temporality, but instead, it is used to indicate its strain to challenge the norms and forms. Contemporary miniature is a way to emphasize this meaning of “contemporary” as it is disconnected and anachronic with its engagement with a past art form but also because of miniature aesthetics’ potential to construct a different representational temporality. Miniature in contemporary art is an exploration on this crisis of “temporality”.

It is urgent to rethink “contemporary” while the reactionary politics aspire to an illusionary past which chases an illusionary future. Even if, as Agamben suggested, contemporary is a “dys-chrony”, it doesn’t mean living in another time and being a nostalgic, but instead it means despising one’s own time while knowing that it is not escapable. Each relationship with time is singular. Contemporariness is observing today, taking a distance from it while thinking it critically. What adheres one to its time is this critical relationship through a disjunction and anachronism. (41).

This definition of contemporary makes it a subject of cultural politics. Contemporariness necessitates the problematization of the demands of the time. Miniature painting’s potential to underline these sociopolitical issues is what makes it contemporary.

1.4. More Than a Temporality

In *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience* (1993), Agamben addresses “the chronologically oriented process become the guiding categories of historical knowledge” (97) and proposes “a concept whose spatial model can be represented by a broken line” as a “critique of continuous, quantified time”.

Agamben searches a new concept of historicity; a more authentic one. An analysis of temporality should lie at the foundation of this authentic historicity (102). Following Walter Benjamin, he suggests that cartological time is the foundation of the authentic history which alters time qualitatively. Opposed to chronology; lineal timeline of history, Walter Benjamin proposes “cartology” which is a pile of non-synchronized moments of now (Lindroos, 1998: 78). Cartology is consisted of breaks, ruptures, multiple temporal dimensions of history. Further, Benjamin critiqued the homogenized structure in the art historical canon (13). A new look at art history begins at the idea of the temporalization of politics.

The look Benjamin suggests is very differs from the static gaze that is incapable of looking at the contemporary. Perspectival paradigm’s static gaze is the aesthetic symbol of the European progress that is secular, rational and linear. This aesthetic concept creates “a universalization of a singular understanding of vision to Man who stands in for reason as the founding attribute of the West” (Shaw, 2019: 303). This way of looking limits body’s and eye’s freedom to move. Therefore, perspective renders us to an incapability of understanding temporality in multiple ways. Perspective as a representational system is a way to look at the world. However, miniature aesthetics offers a different means of understanding and feeling the world. In *Reverse Perspective* (1920) Pavel Florenski writes:

“Conversely, during other periods people absolutely forget the meaning and significance of non-perspectival representation and lose their feeling for it, because the life-understanding of the age, having become utterly different, leads to a perspectival picture of the world. In both instances there is an internal consistency, a compulsory logic that is essentially very elementary, and if it does not come to full strength with exceptional speed, it is not because this logic is complex, but because the spirit of the age fluctuates ambiguously between two mutually exclusive self-definitions (218).”

Miniature was seen as “anachronic” and not in sync with “the spirit of the age”. Therefore, art history didn’t approach to this premodern art form which could produce its own critical concepts. Most of the research on miniature painting is chronological and periodical and it remains in the limits of traditional form of art historiography that has focused on the historical process and different styles. This approach presents a linear understanding of history and evaluate miniature in chronological order rather than producing critical art theories based on this pictorial art form. Miniature painting can only be included in linear modern history in condition of being a non-critical traditional timeless Oriental heritage. This points out the existence of regime of historicity. Historian François Hartog uses the term “regime of historicity” as a conceptual tool to account for analyzing Western culture’s different ways of ordering and articulating the relationship between past, present, and future (Ross, 2012: 13).

Paradoxically miniature painting’s anachronism is actually what makes it “contemporary”. Today, the miniature painting which is stuck to its time of production falls from 20th century art historical practice and becomes not timeless but untimely. By becoming untimely, it gains agency.

As in today’s art world, the assignment of the word “contemporary” to art describes more than a temporality, but instead, it is used to indicate its strain to challenge the norms and forms. In the collection *What About Activism?* (2019) Boris Groys argues that “without political engagement, art ceases to be contemporary, because to be contemporary means being involved in the politics of one’s own time.” (134). For Groys’ “contemporary” signifies a political engagement.

Groys’ definition of a temporal description “contemporary” allows us to think aesthetics as a political matter. Contemporary miniature does not mean practicing miniature painting in 21st century but it is a way to engage with the political. So, what differs the phenomenon of contemporary miniature from the nostalgic

appropriation and touristic kitsch reproductions of miniature painting is their potential to create social change.

As if contemporary enables us to think aesthetics as a political matter then, in a Rancièrien way, miniature aesthetics should resist latent communicational flow, it should create an obstacle in the exchange of signs and disrupt the predetermined meanings. Aesthetics as a political matter, creates cracks and reconfigure a different regime of perception and signification (Rancière, 2009: 73). As opposed to these cracks opened in the unity of the given where new possibilities can emerge, the nostalgic appropriation and touristic kitsch reproductions of miniature painting are only a recurrence which reproduces what is already sensed and perceived. There isn't any criticality or unpredictability in these reproductions, therefore a political subjectivation can't occur through the aesthetics of reproductive nostalgia.

However, contemporary miniature creates a disconnection in the field of symbols, signs, communication. It allows to create its own meanings and interpret the artwork. Miniature becomes contemporary as it creates an aesthetic disconnection, a break. Furthermore, it also creates a disconnection between past, present and future. It breaks the progressivist historical narrative and disrupts the experience of time. The nostalgic appropriation or touristic kitsch reproductions of miniature painting has no ambiguity and they have a preset destination just like the perspectival paradigm's progressivist history. The gaze is predetermined in these both aesthetics. It is a gaze oriented towards a yet to come future or yet to come past. The temporality isn't purified from the relations of power instead the time is a social, political, economic and cultural construction. To this extent, contemporary is a temporality that is more than that, it is a temporality where there is multiplication of connections and disconnections occur. The contemporary has lost its destination. As such it is political because it dis-identify and through this disidentification the political subjectification proceeds (106).

1.5. Revolutionary Anachronism

Kristin Ross (2009) writes on Rancière's thoughts of "the way time gives form to relations of power and inequality and how its denaturalization shatters those relations". Ross writes that Rancière's "thinking concerns itself with both the temporal rhythms and schedules of work and ideology, as well as the temporality of emancipation" (18). Perspective as the visual symbol of progress and development also marked the rhythm and schedule of history where time is flat and linear.

Rancière suggests that subjects of history resurface at moments of non-synchronicity, they pass through fractures and fissures in time. These historical figures "serve as a diagnostic of the contemporary situation"; they appear untimely as remnants or revenants (24). Rancière defends that actions and writings of marginal individuals can be used against the dominant ideology when resurrected and reframed with care.

However, I suggest that not only marginal individuals but marginal art forms such as miniature painting can be used against dominant ideology. It is important to explore attentively how and at which moment it is reframed. Ross continues by reminding Rancière's essay *The Names of History* (1996) in which he writes on the fear of anachronism. Fear of anachronism was the fear of not belonging, coinciding with or resembling to one's time (26). Therefore, for him, being anachronistic is revolutionary. It is a way of doing politics; "the temporality of politics is not progressive, nor dialectical, it is not continuous and it is not over (29)."

Accordingly, I suggest that anachronism is what Rancière describes as *dissensus*. Dissensus is a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds (2009: 85). Anachronism creates a temporal collapse; it creates a conflict between past and present. Therefore, in a way contemporary miniature is the aesthetization of temporality which can create a rupture in the temporal and cultural harmony. By

gaining the adjective “contemporary”, miniature gains a temporal agency and a new aesthetic meaning. It is disidentified from its previous colonial, nationalist, nostalgic significations. Contemporary creates a dissensus in miniature.

Following Rancière, we can diagnose Eurocentric art history’s refusal to produce cultural theories on miniature painting because of its anachronicity as the “fear of anachronism”. Even if it is not the criteria for contemporary art, perspective’s ideology lies at the heart of historical art discourse which defines the visual regime. Therefore, stepping out of the universalized Western art history can create new ways to think the visual culture and the political in the way Rancière suggested. It requires to look at the world out of perspective. Miniature painting provides this look with their multiple perspectives: new way of seeing, an anachronistic one.

1.6. Feminine Anachronism

Feminist theory is familiar to this anachronic strategy. In the *Untimeliness of Feminist Theory* (2010) Elizabeth Grosz writes:

“Something is untimely, out of its own time, either through its being anachronistic, which is another way of saying that it is not yet used up in its pastness, it still has something to offer that remains untapped, its virtuality remains alluring and filled with potential for the present and future this is precisely what a good deal of feminist theory has directed itself to: re-reading the past for what is elided, repressed, unutilized, or unconscious in it (48). [...] Something is untimely not only to the extent that exerts forms of the past in the present, but perhaps more interestingly, it is untimely through becoming, a movement of becoming-more and becoming other, which involves the orientation to the creation of the new, to an unknown future, what is no longer recognizable in terms of the present (49).”

In this context, “untimely” is the way to activate an overlooked past in the present to bring about a new future. According to Grosz, “feminist theory too is able to undertake this revivifying activity: it too is able to leap into a future it does not control through finding something untimely in the patriarchal present and past (48)”.

Feminist theory’s definition of untimely corresponds to the use of miniature aesthetics in contemporary art. Miniature in contemporary art aims to differ itself from nationalist nostalgia and also from modernist futurism because while it engages with the past it also imagines a better, a not yet defined future. Miniature aesthetics is untimely; by being irrelevant and disconnected it creates an unscheduled history in the realm of visual culture. Contemporary miniature can be seen as a search for a future in dissensus.

Additionally, the lack of perspective echoes the theorization of the feminine through the phallogocentric theory of lack. The Renaissance concept of a single point of view is the foundation of the modern Western subjectivity that is European white man, the colonial master.

According to Shaw, perspective is a metaphor for subjectivity (2019: 298). The concept of perspective created the ultimate Western subject which is white European male who has the right to dominate. Through the discourse of perspective, miniature painting becomes the Other, the different, the one with the lack. Therefore, it cannot produce its own art concepts and can’t write its own art history. As Shaw says: “Western and Islamic ways of looking pertains not simply to art, but to our ideal of how subjectivity functions (299)”. However, multiple perspectives of miniature painting can be an alternative metaphor for subjectivity.

The untimely, the fissures in time disrupts the identities. This multifocality can be an alternative to the reactionary politics which promotes an illusionary history,

discriminatory progressive narratives, and to the isolationist politics which finds danger in difference and finds comfort in sameness.

Therefore, today, we should critique this representational disembodiment and liberate the observer from the single point and create new desiring embodied subjectivities. This assignment comes with the critique of the male dominated art discourse. Perspective finds its provision in the domain of sexuality through phallogentrism. Stepping out of the perspective can allow us to imagine an alternative to an art history and a feminine subjectivity. The absence of perspective can be a base of “multifocal subjectivity like the a-centered system proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari” (Shaw, 2019: 331).

This similarity between the construction of miniature and feminine that is based on “lack” recalls Griselda Pollock’s words: “The term 'feminine' can thus be radically understood to signal both the negated other of the phallogentric model – an absence - and the as yet uncharted potentiality of what is beyond the phallogentric imagination - an enlargement. The feminine is, therefore, both a 'difference from' the norm and the signifier of a potentially differing structure of subjectivity contribute. The term 'feminine' can thus be radically understood to signal both the negated other of the phallogentric model – a dynamic play of subjectivity, creates the space for a feminist differencing of canonicity, which is an element in the larger politics of differencing current orders of sexual difference.” (1999: 28).

If the feminine is a difference from the norm and has the potential to form a new subjectivity and challenge the canonicity, this absence contains new ways of being and thinking art history. Likewise, the absence of perspective in miniature painting can expand our imagination and the miniature painting can carry us beyond the phallogentric model of art history. A critical approach to miniature painting can produce new concepts of thinking art production.

1.7. It's Time for Feminine Writing

Just like miniature art, Julia Kristeva's "seventies theory" Women's Time resurge anachronistically In *Women's Time in Theory* (2010) Emily Apter quotes Kristeva:

“By contrast, post-'68 feminists sought “to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past. [...] [T]hey have undertaken a veritable exploration of the dynamic of signs [...]. By demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical, this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate through projection and revindication (3)”.

From this feminist political ambience “aesthetic practices” emerged which Kristeva links it with what she calls “creative time”. She poses this concept against the “epic time”; in literary studies epic time is a mostly male-authored tradition of historical novel (4). This genre picks an event such as a war or revolution to define a narrative that goes through an epoch. However, Kristeva untimes these historical periods. As Kristeva's feminist theory thinks the temporal through literary analogy, her contemporary Hélène Cixous explores the resistive quality of feminine texts. According to Cixous, feminine writing opposes to the phallogocentric systems.

In *Laugh of Medusa* (1976), Cixous writes:

“To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything,

guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing...)-tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of herself that she must urgently learn to speak.”

Cixous encourages feminists to write art history as much as fiction and poetry. She defends that women become women through women-texts. This feminine shift can make a change in culture and history. Perhaps that’s the reason that one of the feminist strategies, as Elizabeth Grosz mentioned, is to look at history sometimes to find fictional feminist characters or at overlooked women writers and historicize them as a subversive act. They untimely the history and rewrite it, not linearly but fluidly. Just like Kristeva associated women’s time with temporal fluidity.

As Firat (2015) quoted Hubert Damisch’s *The Origin of Perspective* (1987) argues that “the perspective paradigm is equivalent to that of the sentence, in that it assigns the subject a place within previously established network that gives its meaning”. When the feminist writing combined with miniature aesthetics can disrupt the “sentence’s” and “perspectival paradigm’s” pre-defined assignment to the subject. The untimely feminist contemporary miniature challenges the male-authored progressivist linear history and create new subjectivities.

This is a process of disidentification where political subjectification happens aesthetically as Rancière suggested. Kristeva’s idea of temporal fluidity is associated with women’s time where identities are in flux resurfaces in Rosi Braidotti’s writings. Braidotti suggests “a nomadic time-continuum” which actualizes nomadic subjects “by looking to the past in order to construct sustainable futures by activating present practices” as “the untimely does not work by only fast-forwarding to possible future mindscapes, but it also functions by rewinding toward forgotten or half-sustained past possibilities (2014: 236-7).”.

These nomadic subjects of the nomadic time-continuum replace the predefined subjects of the perspective paradigm. A Braidottian affirmative strategy considers the otherness of miniature and feminine as pejorative and seize their possibility to form new and alternative subjects.

Braidotti's nomadic project is also "a critique of Eurocentrism" (2014 :235) as one of the methodological engines of the untimely is "the dis-identification from socially enforced identities, familiar representations, and, often, unearned privileges. Dis-identifications expose the power structures at work in the process of unitary identity formation and reveal the internal and external fractures that compose the subject. Dis-identification actualizes virtual options by disconnecting the subject from what is already available in the present (237)."

This necessitates an embodied and affirmative self, which takes difference not as a problem to be solved or an obstacle to be overcome, but rather as the starting point for experiments with alternative ways of seeing, thinking but also writing. It is crucial to stay multifocused and refuse to both monumentalize the past and fetishize the future.

One of the important aspects in the formation of cultural and gender identity is sharing the same linear narrative. This linear narrative operates by excluding the others and create solid identities. Therefore, anachronically, a past art form can become a mark of cultural and gender difference who disrupts the art history that is constructed on the "white heterosexual male identity".

Miniature's "anachronicity" is what makes it "contemporary". Contemporary miniature combined with feminist theory disrupts reading and writing history from a very narrow perspective as it deeply influences our relationship with time. Engaging with miniature means engaging with the past and being critical of who wrote the histories of art. Moreover, using the strategy of feminine writing we can

reconstruct fluid temporalities and inclusive art histories that gives us ability to shape a new future. Contemporary miniature emerged when the world was exploring how histories and identities were actually produced and reproduced. Contemporary miniature and women's time refuse the subjective limitations imposed by the white male-dominated historical time which lacks pleasure.

Agamben suggests that "the true site of pleasure" is history (1993: 102) but perspectival paradigm creates a disembodiment which distances the bodily pleasures, as "perspective divorce the eye from the body and its pleasures" (Shaw, 2019: 308). According to Agamben, history can have a true meaning for humanity when it is grasped as a source and site of happiness. Pleasure is within each now as something whole and complete (1993: 102). We should look for an aesthetic which reconfigures the relation between pleasure, history and subjectivity.

2. CURATING PRACTICES AND MINIATURE AESTHETICS

Miniature painting's history goes way back and it is diffused to a wide geography what is now so called MENASA (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia). It developed together with medieval Islamic book illustration. There were culturally significant differences in miniature painting practice along the Middle East and South Asia. Persian and Indian miniatures used a pastel palette to depict stories of love and bravery, Ottoman miniatures tended to document historical events, using more lively colors, focusing in more on details, and in general employing a more realistic style. It was the dominant pictorial art in this broad territory until the eighteenth century. As the Orient's interactions with the West deepened, the interest in art shifted from miniature to European art and this visual art practice witnessed a rupture.

For centuries, miniature paintings resided only in books as historical pieces of art but today, engaging with contemporary art, miniature is transformed into various media such as video, installation and painting. Originally commissioned by sultans, shahs, and rulers of Ottoman, Mughal or Safavid Empire to tell their own stories, today, miniature art narrates stories of the marginalized which itself is a marginal art form since the 19th century. With the late arrival of capitalism to the MENASA region which was struggling with the process of modernism and westernization combined with colonialism miniature painting became a *démodé* art form. The miniature painting was not providing the needs of the time; it was not a modern art form. Therefore, modern artists weren't even considering in miniature painting as a heritage. The practice continued in some countries in South Asia like India and Pakistan, under the condition of being labeled as traditionalist but in most of the other regions, including Turkey and most of the Arabic-speaking world, it did not continue. Also, one of the reasons of disappearance of miniature paintings from the art scene is their status as exotic historical objects. Most of the illuminated manuscripts are collected by European collectors and museums and consequently,

modern artists didn't have access to them as they would to the contemporary artworks. Thus, the absence of miniature paintings in the visual culture can be read as a ramification of the Eurocentric discourse of art history. However, miniature reemerges in contemporary art and with a claim of challenging the Eurocentric discourse. The "pre-modern" character of the miniature painting becomes a strategy towards the normative art history.

According to Firat (1995) the new exhibition practices appeared during the mid 90s which have developed in parallel with post-colonial practices points to a geographical and representational paradigm shift and can be understood with a structural transformation that can be grouped under three headings: "1) the inclusion of artists from previously neglected (mostly colonial) countries into the global art world; 2) tying institutional nodes (exhibitions, biennials, publications, etc.) to be connected to the global art network in non-Western countries; 3) the revival of a discursive change in local and global exhibitions that enables and even mandates the addressing of concepts such as cultural difference and diversity, otherness, multiculturalism and hybridity." These curatorial practices aimed to bring west and east; local and global; same and different together.

As I've been arguing in the first chapter; Eurocentric art discourse is rooted back to the perspective which was the aesthetic criteria of the Renaissance painting. The aesthetic perspective turned into a political structure that effects our relationship with others. However, miniature appears as an opposition to the perspective paradigm which can provide us a new way of seeing, with multiple perspectives. In this context, pre-modern becomes contemporary as the curatorial engages with it because of its capacity to disrupt the progressivist narration of art history that inhibits the new narratives of globalization which seeks ways to produce hybrid culture.

I claim that contemporary miniature emerged when curators started to examine global art history; to challenge Eurocentrism and sexism. The large-scaled

international exhibitions which questions the dominant art historical discourse engaged with miniature aesthetics. As Boris Groys described contemporary is a political engagement, these exhibitions saw miniature aesthetics as a way to leak into the political domain. contemporary miniature's promise of multiplicity was an answer to the curatorial question of a global multicultural future.

In this second chapter I will discuss four large scaled exhibitions which exhibits contemporary miniature: *11th Sharjah Biennial* (2013), *10th Istanbul Biennial* (2007), *51th Venice Biennale* (2005), *documenta 14* (2017). Sharjah and Istanbul Biennial has been prestigious exhibition venues in non-Western countries. They aim to ensure the relations between global art world and non-Western regions by hosting many international visitors and art professionals. The formation of Sharjah and Istanbul Biennial became possible in the context of globalization. I evaluate them as the examples of the emergence of new art scenes in non-Western countries. They are examples of the effort to add new cartographies to the global art scene. I argue that exhibiting contemporary miniature works in such countries reveals the notion of shared cultural heritage. On the other hand, Venice Biennale has a different format than these two exhibitory practices. It has been the most prestigious art event 1895. Venice Biennale has a unique structure; it has been constructed on the system of national representation th pavilions. Venice Biennale reveals the nationalist structure that lies at the foundation of the biennale concept. Hence, documenta was founded in Kassel in 1955 after the WWII to reestablish Germany's international cultural relations. Each of them shares the aspect of establishing and strengthening the countries' international relations through culture.

The inclusion of contemporary miniature has different connotations in each biennial as they have their own unique significance. For example, exhibiting contemporary miniature in Sharjah expresses its motivation to be included in the global art scene by embracing its cultural heritage. It gets included in the Western art practices through miniature aesthetics. Nonetheless, In Venice Biennale, viewing contemporary miniature means another thing. We see a non-Western artist's work

as it engages with miniature aesthetics in a Western country. In such a way we can observe these contextual differences. Yet, in all of the cases we observe that there is a question of inclusion. I want to draw attention to the practices of inclusion through contemporary miniature which represents the cultural heritage of a non-Western region. Miniature aesthetics finds its way in the contemporary art scene as it becomes an object of cultural heritage. It becomes available by becoming part of an Oriental culture by its status of heritage which artists can engage to interact with the global art scene. As I've discussed earlier, whether it is Sharjah Biennial or Venice, they fall into Orientalism. However, they use it for bending the Western art discourse in times of globalism. Examining curatorial practices, we can diagnose the various sides of Orientalism in contemporary art and also the relationship between Orientalism and globalism.

These various cases enable us to see how the cultural context informs the curatorial and vice versa. I dwell into the type of curatorial which inserts miniature aesthetics into large-scale exhibitions in formats of biennale and documenta which has the emphasis on the inclusion and expression of cultural difference in the neoliberal art world. In doing so, I examine how contemporary miniature has been contextualized by the curators. I argue that using contemporary miniature's untimely character they question the socially enforced identities. How does miniature perform their aim of providing a representation for marginalized identities? How miniature became contemporary through the curatorial? I suggest that contemporary art system's eagerness to create a global visual culture which can cross the borders of culture, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality gave rise to miniatures in the name of *contemporary*. This multiplicity manifests itself also temporally.

2.1. The New Exhibition

The biennial model is arguably the main exhibition format of our age. A biennial is capable of disrupting the center/periphery opposition by bringing international artists in relation with the local art scene. It reaches out to an international audience

and attract cultural tourism and investment. There has always been criticism towards this model in the art scene as it is seen as a spectacle, exhibiting the same works and same artists, as an echo of the populist cultural politics of our time. However, curators of recent biennials have been exploring new ways to respond to these criticisms. Biennales thought as a way to challenge the contemporary art discourse to be more inclusive.

The “activist” exhibitions of the late 1980s and mid 1990s such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), *Mining the Museum* (1992-93), *Cocido y Crudo* (1994-95), 2nd *Johannesburg Biennial: Trade Routes – History and Geography* (1997) introduced a more global scene. This new “theoretical and exhibitional attitude” is known as “the new internationalism” which emerged out of “the geographical and economic globalization of the artworld in the early 1990s” (Firat, 2009: 183). This attitude introduced new artists, new locations, new artistic and curatorial practices to the contemporary art field. As Firat suggests: “the rhetoric of the new internationalism now appears to be largely outmoded, the material and conceptual shifts it brought about can still be observed” (184) in some biennial concepts happened in these last two decades. One of the outcomes of this “new internationalism” is contemporary miniature.

I assert that the artistic engagement of contemporary miniature and the curatorial practice which is in search of new ways to construct an international and inclusive art discourse in an age of globalization is adherent. We can observe this new stage that criticizes the Euro-U.S. and monocultural perspective through exploring biennials which included contemporary miniature art works in their selection. I examine the different links between biennial’s curatorial concepts and artworks “in miniature”, and demonstrate why miniatures are relevant today.

2.2. Contemporary Miniature Reemerges Towards a New Cultural Cartography

My first case is the 11th Sharjah Biennial (2013) entitled *Re:emerge Towards a New Cultural Cartography* curated by Yuko Hasegawa who “proposed a Biennial that reassess the Westerncentrism of knowledge in modern times and reconsiders the relationship between the Arab world, Asia the Far East, through North Africa and Latin America (2013: 8).” The Sharjah Biennial is a large-scale contemporary art exhibition that takes place once every two years in the city of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Sharjah Biennial supports artists from the MENASA region and beyond with an internationally recognized platform for exhibition and experimentation. Since 1993, the Sharjah Biennial has been commissioning, producing and presenting various art works to the international art scene. It is a prestigious platform with an aim to broaden the contemporary art practice and its geography. In the art world, Sharjah Biennial has been known as an alternative model for Western-based biennials.

Sharjah Biennial is relatively a new territory for contemporary art. Alongside its content, its location is also an attitude towards the Westerncentrism of contemporary art. The format of Sharjah Biennial is an exemplary of ambition to assert non-Western artistic production, geography, history and culture into art historical discourse.

In the 11th edition, this scope of challenging the Euro-U.S. centric culture is in the foreground. Hasegawa is interested in creating a space for the production of new awareness and non-Western knowledge. The first sentence of the curatorial statement is: “A Western perspective once dominated the debate about globalization.”¹ The emphasis on the word “once” points out to a recent change in the discussions towards globalization. But what effected this change? According to

¹ <http://sharjahart.org/biennial-11/about>

the curator, it is re-looking at the “shared historical roots in the context of the present [which] allows us to re-orientate ourselves once again”².

Shahzia Sikander’s work *Parallax* (2013), commissioned for this Sharjah Biennial, reflects the search for a new global historical narrative. Shahzia Sikander (b. 1969, Lahore, Pakistan), lives and works in New York, U.S.A., is the pioneer of -now called by many scholars- “contemporary miniature”. Sikander transformed the miniature form into moving image, animation, performance and installations. She took up the traditional practice of miniature painting at a time when the medium was deeply unpopular among young artists. Sikander studied at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, where she received a rigorous training. She became the first woman to teach in the Miniature Painting Department at NCA and was the first artist from the department to challenge the medium’s technical and aesthetic framework. Artist’s acclaimed work *The Scroll* (1989–90) (fig.2.1.) brought international recognition to this medium within contemporary art practices. Shahzia Sikander transforms the image to create alternatives and to transforms our worldviews. She produces images that subvert and pose critical questions. Transformation is a fundamental strategy for Shahzia Sikander’s artistic practice. She broke a ground by transforming miniature paintings.

Shahzia Sikander’s video-installation *Parallax* (fig.2.2) is a monumental three-channel single-image audio-visual video animation created from hundreds of detailed hand-drawn paintings. *Parallax* was inspired by Sikander’s journey through the unique landscape of the United Arab Emirates. The work examines contested histories of colonialism, mechanisms of power and cultural authority, and tensions over the control of the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Maritime trade, movement of resources and commodities (such as bodies and oil), naval warfare, the East India Company, and the imperial air and travel routes are all points of reference. *Parallax* investigates interdisciplinary visual and verbal languages,

² <http://sharjahart.org/press/sharjah-biennial-11-curator-yuko-hasegawa-announces-first-selection-of-arti>

migration patterns, cultural quarantine, and the flux of human identity. Motifs, trenchant historical symbols, and poets' words are given shifting identities as they come together to cultivate new associations through movement, repetition, velocity, and magnitude to challenge perceptions around historical narratives, conflict, omission, and loss. The animation's original score, created in collaboration with the 2017 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Du Yun, creates tension and rhythm while poets from Sharjah recite and narrate in classical and colloquial Arabic, engaging geographical locations that can be occupied from afar through emotional connection.³



Figure 2.1. Shahzia Sikander, *The Scroll*, 1989-90, Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, and tea on hand- prepared wasli paper, 33 × 162 cm, © Shahzia Sikander

Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York

³ Correspondance with Shahzia Sikander's studio manager.



Figure 2.2. Shahzia Sikander, *Parallax*, 2013, 3 channel HD video animation with 5.1 surround sound; 15 minutes, 26 seconds, Music by Du Yun, Installation view, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 2015, © Shahzia Sikander, Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York

While examining cultural and political boundaries as a space for discussion and intervention, Shahzia Sikander's practice creates an interpretive and critical dialogue with history and Indo-Persian miniature painting. Alongside its content, Sikander's miniature aesthetics resonates with the conceptual framework of the Biennial as miniature painting is a fertile ground to explore cultural exchange and shared historical background in a vast geography from a non-Western perspective. Curator Hasegawa writes:

“[The] rich cultural accumulation (...) originated in great civilizations that morphed into countries stagnated by the transition to ‘modernity’. These countries currently inhabit a moment of enormous potential, energized as they are by the forces of globalization, by the vibrant cultural exchange migration has facilitated, and by increased socio-cultural, political and economic hybridization (2013).”

The pre-modern miniature becomes contemporary by Hasegawa's curatorial discussion on globalization, migration, and hybridization.

In *Parallax*, Sikander forms a visual imagery from a mechanical device which is used to extract oil, this oil-tool is called "Christmas Tree" because of its resemblance to a Christmas Tree (fig.2.3.). This figure becomes a colonial symbol; a symptom of the homogenizing Western culture. After Renaissance the concept of perspective also transformed the Western art history which has been developed within the Christian culture. Before Perspective/Renaissance paradigm Christian and/or Western culture were also engaged with miniature painting. Perspective became a secularized concept that carries the same ideologies of monocular perspective. In Christianity, the monocular gaze of perspective was attributed to God and later it is "exported in the Western cultural hegemony accompanying colonialism. By the 19th century, this monocular gaze no longer represented God. Instead, a perspectival view indicated ownership, both in the literal sense of land and the metaphorical" (Shaw, 2019: 314). However, in the course of Renaissance and with the concept of perspective, this monocular gaze attributed to Man. Christian theological and aesthetic practices incarnate in secular art history and are crystallized in the perspective (331). In Shaw's words: "perspective serves as a visual metaphor both for power and for history casting its gaze onto the past" (316).

Christmas Tree resumes the interdependent economic and cultural hegemony of the West. Naming an oil extension device located in Sharjah, Christmas Tree, a crucial cultural image in Christian culture, manifests how politics goes into the field of aesthetics. The right to claim ownership on foreign lands comes from the idea of superiority finds its equivalence in the field of art through the notion of perspective. According to Zeynep Sayın, this static gaze tames the world and turns it into a space that can be looked at and controlled (2003: 50). Nevertheless, depicting this figure with miniature aesthetics that have a dynamic and pluralistic gaze is a subversive act. It makes the constructedness of the concept of perspective alongside the discourse of the superiority of Western culture visible. Shahzia Sikander brings a

look of multiple perspectives which sees the colonial history in the Gulf region and reveal its cultural heritage suppressed by the hegemonic culture.



Figure 2.3. Comparison of Shahzia Sikander's drawing of Christmas Tree in miniature aesthetics and the oil devices named Christmas Tree because of their resemblance.⁴

Parallax, is a manifestation of how trade of oil effects the cultural exchange. In the video animation *The Christmas Tree* motif multiplies, gather, crack, shatter, and blow away. This transformation highlights the transformation of symbols and cultures. Sikander tells:

“[The image of Christmas Tree] is a much more direct reference to the discovery of oil, but it is less about representing the oil rig than about capturing the transformative potential of an image and its laden meaning. The expansion of the image, the accumulation of Christmas Trees on the screen, to be precise is also about the proliferation of

⁴ <https://twitter.com/shahziasikander/status/1315754350736797701/photo/1>

wealth, capitalism. The image shatters and reformulates itself into new iterations, emphasizing economic and global interconnectedness (Schlegel, 2018: 42).

Hasegawa asserts that “all people internalize the practices (...) that characterize their cultures, preserving them as bodily memories”. She sees embodied knowledge and imagery as a criticism of Western normative thought’s focus on language and logic. In Hasegawa and Sikander’s hands, miniature painting got contextualized as a bodily memory. More importantly, it is part of Sikander’s subjectivity. Hasegawa’s writes:

“When such artists visit a new location, they perceive and interpret it through the lens of their own unique subjectivity, formed gradually within their culture(s) of origin out of an amalgam of sedimented habits and sensibilities. In doing so, they enter into a dialectical relationship with this new locale, producing, as a result, new knowledge in conversation with it. This process produces hybrid knowledge and intercultural products that could potentially constitute the genetic material for a novel culture (2013).”

In opposition to the immobile single point that creates disembodied subjects in Western painting, miniature aesthetics engages with the body. In miniature, there are multiple forms of seeing that distinguish this art form from other ways of perception. In miniatures, seeing is not merely attributed to the eyes but the visible world’s depiction depends on how it is perceived and how it is transformed into images. This form of seeing is related to the memory created through remembering/association in the mind.

In this context, Shahzia Sikander’s exploration of the Gulf Stream region with a road trip echoes the miniature aesthetics. She interprets her own experiences, depicts the region in the way that is perceived with her unique practice –

contemporary miniature. The viewer of the video engages with the realities of the region through Shahzia Sikander. In such a way, the work has been intending to challenge the superiority of the Western culture over the non-Western as the audience engages with the region's cultural heritage in Sikander's terms. It makes the work very significant for "Re:emerge Towards a New Cultural Cartography" and the exhibition very significant as well for this work, especially its title.

By making this work public, Hasegawa's curation creates an encounter with the idea of multiplicity. Through the exhibition, it gains a potential to diffuse into the public realm. In such way, miniature can be seen differently by a global audience.

Hasegawa and Sikander's research of a globalism that embrace cultural difference echoes Édouard Glissant's term "Tout-Monde" which can be translated in English as "One World" but also in French it means "everybody". Even this pun explains his understanding of globalism. The poet and philosopher; Édouard Glissant suggests that our humanity struggles with linear and discriminating monolingualism. In such a system, everything should echo the same and the differences should be erased. His "philosophy of relation" is to embrace differences as they don't divide us and even unite us individually and collectively (2009). He proposes a new way of thinking, a change in our perspective by forming the concept "Tout-Monde" or "Mondialité". Contrary to homogenizing globalization, these concepts consist and create both difference and transformation. Glissant's term Tout-Monde is an alternative to the Western style globalization which 11th Sharjah Biennial opposes to.

In contrast to the Western painting principles of a singular viewpoint where linear/central perspective rules are applied, miniature can offer a globalism where different vanishing points come into play.

2.3. Contemporary Miniature as Alternative Modernity

The question of globalization in non-Western countries is a persistent one. Similar to the 11th Sharjah Biennial, the 10th Istanbul Biennial was also dedicated to the exploration of a new perspective towards globalization.

The international curator, art critic and the director of the MAXXI Hou Hanru curated the 10th edition of Istanbul Biennial (2007) titled *Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War*. His practices and writings are essential to gain a critical approach towards contemporary art while interrogating the meaning of global.

In the curatorial statement of the Biennial (2007), Hanru writes: “Spanning both across Europe and Asia, the multilayered urban texture combining historical and modern buildings, the incessant two-way movement of expansion and densification, and a mixture of legal and illegal constructions, have made the city one of the most spectacularly hybrid and dynamic metropolis in the world. Migration and urbanization of the population are constantly changing the social, economic, cultural and political structures of city (25).”. Hanru’s contextualization of Istanbul corresponds with Hamra Abbas’ work *Love Lessons* (2007) (fig.2.4.) that he exhibited at *Antrepo No. 3*. In the work series of *Lessons on Love*, Abbas takes figures from Indian miniature paintings and transforms them into three-dimensional sculptures. Isolating the figures from their context, artist draws an unmistakable attention to their combined act of love-making and hunting. The title of the series is the English translation of 'Kama Sutra' which is the title of the infamous illustrated book on sex and pleasure.

Hamra Abbas (b. 1976, Kuwait) lives and works in Boston and Lahore. She received her BFA and MA in Visual Arts from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 1999 and 2002 respectively before going on to the Universitaet der Kuenste in Berlin where she did the Meisterschueler in 2004. Abbas' artistic practice draws

from a myriad of sources and takes a diversity of forms. Her works originate from encounters and experiences that are manipulated by the artist transforming its scale, function or medium. Her intention is to deconstruct the act of seeing by recreating images that form part of a collective memory such as miniature painting.

Abbas refers to the urban consumerist aesthetics by rendering the bodies of lovers like the cheap plastic dolls in gaudy hues. Aside this material resonance, the work and the city engage with each other conceptually. Hanru, underlines the “contrasting and complex coexistence and juxtapositions of old and new architecture” of Istanbul. As the multilayered city’s architectural features coincide with Abbas’ work as it is also a product of the synergy between old and new. The precious miniature painting aesthetics that is produced with fine craftsmanship contrasts with the mass consumerism’s single-use material. *Love Lessons* is as hybrid and dynamic as Istanbul itself. Abbas, assemble the miniature and pop aesthetics together and then enlarge them to dramatize. The past art form becomes dynamic in Abbas’ hands.



Figure 2.4. Hamra Abbas, *Lessons on Love*, 2007, Sculptures, colored plasticine, © Photo: Haupt & Binder

As described earlier, miniature painting is part of a broad geography's collective memory. Exhibiting a work of a Pakistani artist who engages with miniature aesthetics other than Ottoman at a modernist space, Antrepo No:3, is noteworthy. These "third world" countries such as Pakistan and Turkey have ambiguous relationships with modernity.

In these countries, modernization associated with "Westernization" is a strategy to have a role in the Western hegemonic world. Towards this goal, a different, diverse and culturally hybrid modernity has been created in the Third World. Western modernity manifests itself in different cultures outside of the West.

Hanru mentions the case of Turkish modernization in the curatorial text of 10th Istanbul Biennial. He suggests that Turkish modernization is a top-down model with a nationalist legitimation. Hanru argues that a bottom-up modernization could take Turkish society out of contradictions of this authoritarian model. This new alternative model is based on multitude, "a whole consisting of singularities, a multiplicity of groups and subjectivities". (2007: 23-24).

This is where miniature's multifocality steps in. Hamra Abbas' work *Love Lessons* is inspired from the use of a single word for fornicating and killing in Urdu and a few regional languages spoken in Pakistan (and some parts of India). Abbas draws a parallel between this linguistic limit and several erotic Indian miniature paintings in which a ruler is making love to a woman in extraordinary positions as well as while he is hunting, pointing his arrow or sword. Unity of these two expressions, in visual and vocal fields, points out to a contemporary cultural phenomenon.

Today, the media resembles to the conventional concept of God as it is everywhere and observant at all times. As I've discussed previously in the context of Shahzia Sikander's work, this concept of God who sees everything from a stable point and as an entity who absorbs all the multiplicities inside, is produced by the same discourse that constructed the criteria of perspective as the mark of Western

civilization. In such context, sex and violence are being used for marketing purposes in media in present age. Therefore, a voyeur is the one who watches bomb explosions, social violence, school shootings, large scale attacks instead of gazing at porn. As constantly looking at naked bodies makes one indifferent to them, then seeing the images of violence constantly makes the viewer numb from the reality of those events. The images of violence become a burlesque.

Hamra Abbas, highlights the connection between violence and desire by using Indian miniature painting. The most horrible memory of our recent history is probably the attacks on World Trade Centre, but after almost twenty years, now 9/11 has been reduced to ‘archetypical’ image of smoke coming out of the two towers. Especially after this attack, the world insisted on segregating religious people. One form of segregation revolves around calling attention to culture of violence in non-Western societies. These images of non-Western, especially Muslim people become symbols of violence. This led to a more obsessive state of secularization. Wendy Shaw writes:

“[The] universalization of (Western European) Christian values became normative under the aegis of secularization precisely as Europe became a global hegemonic power, reinscribing the Christian as ‘Western’, and transforming missionary zeal into modernization through Westernization. The repurposing of altarpieces as art helped translate the rhetorical frame of Christian visual culture into the secular discourse of art history. The valorization of the representational image establishes a normative relationship between the viewer on one side of the image and reality that is always necessarily elsewhere (2019: 8).”

Therefore, I suggest that the present-day media is the reflection of the normalization of Western violence on “foreign” lands. First it was legitimized with the concept of God, later with the concept of perspective that imitates the singular god who sees everything. But this time it is the European Man who is omnipotent and today it is

the media which is omnipresent. Abbas's work reveals this bias. As Shaw says: "Just because one removes words such as 'Christian' or 'God' from the discussion of art does not mean that the naturalized habits established through the religious contexts with which art was long associated suddenly disappear." (9). The normalization of violent images in media comes from the same place and serves to the same purpose. It comes from the single pointed being, be it God, Men or media. The lustfulness of these images echoes the Oriental images of woman bodies and the feminization of the non-Western lands to be conquered.

Marking the non-Westerns as religious therefore violent but paradoxically desirable at the same time is inherited from the Christian ideology. The multi-perspectival look of the miniature painting can disrupt the religious/secular dynamic. It is an aesthetic intervention to break the connection between the Christian idea of God and the omnipresent media. Additionally, Indian miniature paintings shows the multiplicity of religions and beliefs in the "non-Western" category. On the other hand, it is also a comment on the Western effort to secularize the religion and divide it into the regions and categorize it under the names of nations. This nation/religion distinction is another binary that comes with the Western modernization.

Religion was always a symbol of being not modern enough. The perspective is the symbol of progress and enlightenment that symbolizes rationalism and Western science. However, these paradoxical situations, such as the one Abbas points out, shows us that the idea of modernity is based upon the omnipotent God. During the Renaissance, this attribution of God turned towards the Man. They are produced and reproduced by the same discourse.

Yet, in an alternative modernity that embraces the multifocality of miniature painting can be an escape way from this narrative. The dynamic and pluralistic gaze can offer a new way of seeing images which doesn't render the view indifferent instead surprises them. Perhaps, being pre-modern, foreign and heterogeneous can be even liberating. Abbas' work challenges narrow-minded assumptions that exist

on a societal level and complicates the difference between miniature painting and contemporary art.

Hamra Abbas, plays with miniature's scale and by transforming it into a monumental scale she universalizes it. She links between universal with grand and local with small then play with our perception. The local miniature painting becomes the universal by becoming into a monumental sculpture.

Firat (2015) argues that miniature painting got its name because of its size by compared to oil-painting. She writes:

“Current usage of the term “miniature” stems from a historical etymological confusion. The word is derived from the classical Latin *miniat*, past participle stem of *miniare*, which means to colour or paint with vermilion; to rubricate or (in extended use) to illuminate (a manuscript) (OED). In medieval book production, red lead or vermilion was used to mark particular words in manuscripts and to illuminate capitals. As these images were of necessity small, the term came to denote small portraits, a usage probably reinforced by an association in folk etymology with the (ultimately classical Latin) *min-* root expressing smallness (as in *minor*). According to the OED, the etymologically mistaken usage of “miniature”, connoting a comparison in size, appears only around 1566. I propose that this etymological overlap should be taken neither as a mere coincidence in the “evolution” of language nor a “slip of tongue” but rather should be contemplated in a historical context (157).”

Miniature's name just like its history is constructed in relation to perspectival paradigm as miniature is relatively small than a tableau. Firat elaborates her argument by quoting Susan Stewart: “there are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product [. . .] of an eye performing certain operations,

manipulating, and attending in certain ways to, the physical world” and adds: “through this operation of the eye we construct the notion of scale, which according to Stewart “is established by means of a set of correspondences to the familiar” (2003: 46). The miniature arrives as a historical outsider in comparison to the objects we regard as familiar (158).”

However, by enlarging miniature painting and using plasticine she turns this “stranger” form into something more familiar and universal. Moreover, plasticine is a material associated with as a child’s toy, childhood, a moment before we learn to differentiate. She challenges the idea of “universal truth”.

To this extent, through miniature aesthetics Abbas stands against the homogenizing globalism, nationalist modernism and reactionary trends of cultural isolationism that operates through media in this particular case. Abbas’ work *Lessons on Love* reflects an alternative modernity. Abbas interprets a pre-modern medium and adapts it according to the needs of today, both in content and form. Abbas, shows how the idea of a universal truth which is linked with modernity can be shifted and different story lines are possible. In an alternative historical narrative, miniature painting could be a sculpture for an epic war. While she challenges the size norms, she also questions the hidden violence in nation’s history narrated as epic war. Therefore, *Lessons on Love* is also a critique of what is considered as a cultural heritage.

Miniature painting wasn’t even seen as a cultural heritage during modernization process however when it could get the status of heritage it also became contemporary art. Or, it can become contemporary art to the extent it is a heritage. Perhaps, Abbas imagines an erotic miniature painting as an alternative national monument.

Dilip Goankar proposes the concept “alternative modernity” to describe many ways of modern notions to unravel within different cultures (1999: 1-23). According to

Goankar, modernity comes in multiple forms and in a variety of places. Studying alternative modernities involves taking new paths in coming to terms with the past.

I discuss that contemporary miniature is an example of alternative modernity; it creates an infinite number of bewildering combinations as well as their subsequent combinations. The miniature has been reborn within modernity and has found a new form. It has strayed far from its classical definition and turned into a vital and fresh way of creating art. Non-Western countries have potential to create alternative and effective models of modernization that resists to the forces of globalization dominated by Western capitalism. The contemporary miniature can be interpreted as the expression of the possibility of new ways of thinking and living together.

In previous chapters *Contemporary Miniature Reemerges Towards a New Cultural Cartography* and *Contemporary Miniature as Alternative Modernity*, I've discussed two biennials; 11th Sharjah Biennial and 10th Istanbul Biennial who took place in non-Western geographies. Both of them aims to challenge the normative globalization which is homogenizing and dominated by Western cultural and economic discourse. They were attempts of expanding contemporary global art scene contextually and geographically. The increase of biennials in the Third World is a remark of the alternative ways of cultural production.

What about contemporary miniature in biennials of Western geography? In the next chapter I discuss the ways of conceptualizing contemporary miniature in two most prestigious large-scale exhibitions: Venice Biennale and documenta.

2.4. Contemporary Miniature Goes A Little Further

The 2005 Venice Biennale directed by Rosa Martinez and Maria de Coral, was the first in the Biennale's then-110-year-history to be directed by woman. For the Italian pavilion, in Giardini, María de Corral conceived a show *The Experience of Art* with 42 artists. For Arsenale, Rosa Martinez curated the group show *Always a*

Little Further; the exhibition suggests that art is an imaginary construct and that fantasy helps us towards a better understanding of reality. Through the works of 49 artists and artist groups, exhibition argued that art is a fight in the symbolic order and the artists open new perspectives for linguistic, social and ideological transformation. Martinez puts the artist alongside an adventurer, a philosopher, a scientist who constantly tries to discover new lands and to create new possibilities of thought and describes the artist as a dreamer.

One of the artists who were exhibited at the show was Shahzia Sikander whom I discussed earlier with her work *Parallax* (2013) exhibited at 11th Sharjah Biennial, in Venice, Sikander presented her seminal work *SpiNN* (2003) (fig.2.5) which is engaged with Indo-Persian miniature aesthetics. Sikander digitally animates the hand-drawn miniature paintings. It is one of the unique characteristics of Sikander's practice.

The 6.38 minute long digital video-animation *SpiNN* narrates an imperial Mughal court, with hairs rising from the disappearing bodies of Gopi women, or female worshippers of the Hindu god Krishna. Gopis (followers of the god Khrisna), are depicted in an Indian Moghul dynasty court which is a space traditionally reserved for men at the. The Gopi women increase in number but then their bodies start to fade and leave thier hairdos behind. Small black forms swarms around the court with swirling forms, like a flock of birds or colony of bats. The hall is represented in the style of miniature painting: flat but with intricate details and patterns. There is a constant movement combined with visual effects. The birds/hairdos fade from the Mughal court and angels appear followed by demons. These angels and demons are taken from Western canon of art but also echoes the aesthetics miniature painting. Sikander compound Christian imagery with miniature aesthetics to point out the hybrid nature and origins of the miniature painting. As miniature painting is highly associated with Islamic culture however, it was also used in part of Christian culture, used in the book production until Renaissance. She combines the Christian, Hindu and Persian imagery to highlight the cultural exchange, not just

the “west” and the “east” but also “east” and the “east”. She underlines the cultural intersectionality. These mixed symbols echoes the fluidity of identity which is the main theme of Sikander’s works.



Figure 2.5. Shahzia Sikander, *SpiNN*, 2003, digital video, color, silent, 6 minutes 30 seconds.

Homi Bhabha, for example, argues that in Shahzia Sikander’s works, the juxtaposition of the East and the East is more striking than that of the West and the East (2011: 171-97). Bhabha calls this “the closeness of difference” and “the sincerity of difference.” In Sikander’s works such as *Parallax* and *SpiNN* notions about India and Pakistan are intertwined, not separated. This is the expression of the complexity of cultural symbols, not their simplified representation. Today, the search for meaning in miniature can be read as an effort of the new dynamism observed around the world, striving to find that very meaning. Debates based on the opposition between copying reality as it is and the depiction of meaning are no longer valid, and artists have taken meaning out of the context of this debate and turned it into a critical tool. In the exhibition, the search for meaning is cast as a

critical approach to current affairs and as an alternative reading. The contemporary miniature demolishes the structural cause–effect relationships, and social events are addressed once again. Issues such as colonialism, orientalism, economic inequality, gender, politics of identity, the struggle against traditional prototypes, social violence, compulsory migration, and representation are problematized.

SpiNN is an important work in Sikander’s artistic journey as it’s the first time she uses her -to be recurrent visual trope - the gopi hair. Gopis are the women devotees of the Hindu god Krishna. Sikander dislocates the gopis’ hair from miniature paintings, isolates them and animates them digitally. In the animation *SPiNN*, the hair rises from gopis’ heads, filling a large Mughal durbar hall (the space where the Indian emperor would meet his ministers or subjects), they often move in circles, fly like birds, multiply and transform into a mass of spiraling and abstracted forms. The gopi motif offers a set of references including gender and its dislocation raises the question of creating new contexts, meanings and associations. Also, the split from its female origin is an exploration of the space of sexuality and eroticism within a certain system of representation. At the end of the video the hair cluster around a red horse ridden by the Hindu god Krishna and they take the horse and wander the halls of the Mughal court. They subvert the imperial power with their femininity. She challenges the conventional gender representations.

Moreover, *SpiNN* is a pun on the cable channel CNN. The work challenges the univocal reading of symbols, instead propose a closer look on deductive and biased “spin propaganda” in mainstream media. Akin to Abbas, Shahzia Sikander puts media under the scope. It refers to mass-media corporations and to the ways they produce information which is hidden behind layers of perception and far from the truth. Our perception can be controlled on a daily basis and the information can transform into many things such as the hairdos that we perceive as birds. However, our identities are constantly in flux and more layered than the mass-media’s “single perspectival” structure which creates nothing more than stereotypes.

SpiNN echoes the Rosa Martinez's (2005) curatorial statement: "art is a fight in the symbolic order" as *SpiNN* is a univocal reading of symbols against the stereotypes of the mainstream media. It opens new perspectives as the hairs of the gopis find new meanings while they transform into other forms. Abandoning the Hindu god Krishna, gopis, through their hair, go to an adventure to discover a new way of life. It also resonates with *Always a Little Further*'s feminist agenda.

The Venice Biennial is one of the fragments of Shahzia Sikander's successful artistic career. But it was an important opportunity for international audience to encounter miniature aesthetics as Venice Biennale is one of the most prestigious contemporary art events. Besides, the Biennial's effect on global visibility, the conceptual framework of *Always a Little Further* enabled miniature painting to be contextualized in a new fashion. *SpiNN* got in relation with other works of other critically acclaimed artists such as Pipilotti Rist, Guerilla Girls, Allora & Calzadilla, Francis Bacon, Louise Bourgeois, Oscar Muñoz, Olafur Eliasson, Mona Hatoum, Barbara Kruger, Lara Favretto and many more.

In the press release Martinez writes: "The exhibition *Always a Little Further* is an essay presenting artists and aesthetic trends relevant at the beginning of the third millennium. A visit to the Arsenale proposes a fragmentary trip, a subjective and passionate dramatization to discover the zones of light and dark in our convulsed world. This journey intends to draw the most significant lines in contemporary artistic production and to show that art still holds a promise for those who want to embark on the sort of voyage that made Deleuze take Proust's motto: the real dreamer is the one who goes out to try to verify something (2005).".

The exhibition presented contemporary miniature as one of the "aesthetic trends" and as a "significant line in contemporary artistic production". Shahzia Sikander and the gopi hairs took a voyage to verify something using miniature painting as a tool.

Maura Reilly speaks of Maria de Coral and Rosa Martinez's Venice Biennale in her book *Curatorial Activism* (2018) where she explores the practices of "curatorial activism". Reilly argues that their curatorial practice is feminist and activist: "De Corral, for example, awarded Kruger the most prominent position in the show- the white façade of the Italian pavilion itself, upon which she placed an enormous vinyl mural with her signature direct-address phrases such as "Admit Nothing, Blame Everyone"; "Pretend Things Are Going As Planned"; and "God Is on Our Side." Similarly, Martinez turned over the first few rooms of the Arsenale to the feminist collective the Guerrilla Girls, whose statistics, irony, and humor about gender biases at the Biennale and in Italian museums roused audiences from the start, and left no doubt that the show that lay ahead would inflect other feminist sentiments, such as those put forward by Emily Jacir, Shahzia Sikander, Kimsooja, Pipilotti Rist, Pilar Albarracín, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Donna Conlon, Berni Searle, and many others." (71) All the names Reilly mentioned are the representatives of feminist art.

Additionally, the Venice Biennale of 2005 was more global than it was before. Reilly writes: "The selection of the artists in the group shows demonstrated the curators' concerted effort toward full transnational inclusion. Indeed, of the thirty-four feminist artists in the exhibition, seventeen were non-Euro-U.S. The global feminist scope of the exhibitions ensured that viewers were consuming feminisms, in the plural- that is, they were being offered not consensus, but a multiplicity of points of view, and ones that emphasized differences among artists cross-culturally. By extension, theirs were curatorial projects that challenged the Euro-U.S.-centrism of feminist, contemporary art trajectories as well. Given the fact that no biennale before this had been curated by women, let alone by self-identified feminist curators, in addition to the geographic breadth of works on display, the exhibition can perhaps be deemed the first transnational feminist Venice Biennale (72)."

It is noteworthy that one of the most prestigious art events adopted a transnational feminist perspective. As Reilly suggests that 51st Venice Biennale is curatorial activism, then contemporary miniature stands at the intersection of contemporary

art and political action. I claim that contemporary miniature emerged at a time when curators started to examine global art history, the Euro-US-centrism and sexism.

2.5. Learning from Contemporary Miniature

documenta 14 took place in Athens aside from its main location in Kassel, between April 8 and September 17, 2017. Documenta 14, entitled *Learning from Athens*, aims to examine the European perspective from the vantage point of Greece. Artistic director of documenta 14, Adam Szymczyk's choice of Athens was of course a strategic one when we consider the high population of migrants in Greece. He decentralized the event by choosing Athens for its economic, political, social, and cultural dilemmas that reflects Europe today. Szymczyk asserts that it took place in two locations because the world could no longer be explained, commented on or narrated from a single place. We need multiple perspectives.

Documenta 14 carries the motivation of being open to other geographies in its core. In 1955, the Kassel painter and academy professor Arnold Bode wanted to bring Germany back into dialogue with the rest of the world after the end of World War II, and to connect the international art scene through a "presentation of twentieth century art" but this "international" scene was a Euro-centric one.

Quoting from documenta 14's own website; "more than 160 international artists (including Nevin Aladağ, Banu Cennetoğlu, Peter Friedl, Gauri Gill, Hiwa K, Amar Kanwar, Naeem Mohaiemen, Otobong Nkanga, Emeka Ogboh, and Artur Żmijewski), mainly new productions were shown at both sites. The presentation was supplemented by historical work complexes, from book art from the Jahângîr album compiled under the four Mughal emperors in the sixteenth and seventh centuries to socialist realist painting." It critiqued Western-influenced concept of art and art history. one of the concerns of documenta 14 was disrupting the assimilated aesthetic hierarchies.

In such a way, Nilima Sheikh's works exhibited in documenta 14 resonates very well with its curatorial concept. From the series *Each night put Kashmir in your dreams* (2003–14) (fig 2. 6.) and a new work commissioned by documenta; *Terrain: Carrying Across, Leaving Behind* (2016–17) presented at Neue Galerie, Kassel. Nilima Sheikh (b.1945, India), lives and works in Baroda and Delhi, is one of the doyennes of the Indian contemporary art. She studied history at the Delhi University from 1962-65 and received a MA in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda in 1971. She even taught painting at the Faculty between 1977 and 1981. Under the mentorship of K.G. Subramanyan and Gulammohammed Sheikh, she learned the significance of craft and folk art in modern Indian art forms and the power of narrative structure. She learned miniature techniques from painters in traditional ateliers of Jaipur and Nathadwara.

Her works narrate loss, migration and exile, especially in the Kashmir geography. In an early age, Sheikh got interested in the connection between text and image, an important aspect of manuscripts where miniatures resided in for centuries. Using her own life experiences, Sheikh produces work that evoke mystical imaginary landscapes that address feminine experiences. During the last two decades, she has often been working on subjects that relate to the northern region of the Indian sub-continent, with particular emphasis on Kashmir. Sheikh created her own hybrid visual language to have a better understanding of the region. (Sangari, 2013)

The series of *Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dreams* (2003–10) consist of double-sided canvas scrolls that allows audience to move around a metanarrative form. Sheikh draws upon figurative styles including miniature manuscript painting, Pichwai cloth scrolls, the hand-stenciled patterning of landscape, folktales, colonial-era illustrated manuals, the writings of Kashmiri poets and historians, and the voices of Sufi mystics traversing a troubled land. This series plots the cartography of pain, grief, and violence which maintains a hold over the Kashmir valley and its people—caught in the struggle between calls for communal freedom and the hegemonic forces of nationalism.



Figure 2.6. Nilima Sheikh, *Each night put Kashmir in your dreams*, 2013-14, installation view, Benaki Museum - Pireos Street Annexe, Athens, documenta 14, photo: Stathis Mamalakis

In her new work *Terrain: Carrying Across, Leaving Behind* (2016) (fig. 2.7) is a sixteen-panel tempera painting that forms an octagonal space. Its spatial poetics relate to traditional South Asian tented pavilions where people assemble for ceremonies, theater, memorial events, and political gatherings. The fragile paper architecture addresses the temporary shelters that offer rest to pilgrims. The work's visual vocabulary is formed of multiple languages of movement and distance: migration, exile, transient geographies, and shared historiographies crossing Asia and Europe. Sheikh includes song and poetry as a performative mode of public address as well as polyphonic speech memory—as when echoing the fourteenth-century female mystic Lal Dēd of Kashmir.⁵

⁵ <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13561/nilima-sheikh>

Sheikh's works resonates with documenta 14's claim of "unlearning assimilated aesthetic hierarchies" which aims to include aesthetics differences based on cultural differences and regions' different histories of art.

Sheikh resists the exclusionary, centralizing and possessive gaze of perspective. In her paintings, sky and ground merges with each other, they are depicted by using the same color. The junction of sky and ground, text and image create alternative and surprising perspectives. In Sangari's words: "Sheikh crafts an aesthetic that struggles against closures of regional, religious, gendered identity (...) avoid closures [that] permits multiplicity and allows different narrative options against politically unifying conclusions" (2013: 167-68).

The need to rethink the Eurocentric perspective of documenta had been addressed by several curators. For example, Okwui Enwezor's goal in documenta 11, as Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie argued "was to construct a new and inclusive discourse for art in an age of globalization, one that could confront the 'ethics and limits of occidental power' demand a radical overhaul of contemporary structures of power and privilege, and thereby depart from hegemonic, Euro-US cultural perspectives and their exhibition projects, criticizing the latter's tokenist inclusion of "non-Western" people." (quoted in Reilly, 2018: 142)

The solution is to act against the safeness in sameness and to replace it with multiplicity. For a sometime art world has been reconfiguring itself to be open to differences. Today, what lies at the core of the art world is these two questions: "How can we get people in the art world to think about gender, race, and sexuality, to understand that these are persistent concerns that require action? How can we all contribute to ensuring that the art world becomes more inclusive?" (Reilly, 2018: 21).

Nilima Sheikh's work stands where action is required with its feminist content and non-Western miniature form. She narrates the erased narratives of a politically

charged geography with a sidelined form of expression. Using miniature, an art form of the past, points out to the injustices in the writing of art history. Sheikh adopts the uncentred gaze of miniature painting towards single lineage of progressive art history. It considers other cultures immature, as they didn't go through the process of perspective. Intention of showing Jahângîr album compiled under the four Mughal emperors in the sixteenth and seventh centuries is to readjust the art history because then the miniature painting can find itself a place in history and art history can be really global.

Szymczyk's decision to show a historical miniature album and Nilima Sheikh's work which is engaged with miniature aesthetics in the same exhibition highlights the importance of writing history. The right to access cultural history can help us to have an alternative point of view towards the present and to think alternative ways to produce art.



Figure 2.7. Nilima Sheikh, Terrain: Carrying Across, Leaving Behind, 2016-17, various materials, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Mathias Völzke

2.6. When Form Becomes the Attitude

The curatorial which I've been discussing asked "How can we make art world more inclusive?". Wendy Shaw's response to this question is:

"The problem with understanding a culture different from our own is that its answers rarely match our questions. This difference belongs not only to space, culture, or religion, but to time: across the course of history, all of us moderns, become foreign to [non-Western cultures]. As Emmanuel Levinas points out, often the expressions of the culture of an Other can, at best, enter into a conversation with a culture we define as our own, thereby producing an ethical relationship, despite the inalienable boundaries produced between the analyst and the analysand. "To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression...It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I...this also means: to be taught (2019: 103)."

Western curatorial practices included Shahzia Sikander, Nilima Sheikh and Hamra Abbas' contemporary miniature to get in dialogue with Other. The inclusive discourse of the biennales welcomes this unfamiliar way of expression; miniature aesthetics to communicate with the Other.

This type of curatorial is a search for sexual and cultural differences. In other words, contemporary miniature demonstrates this turn in the art world, the mark of multiplicity, the mark of the sexual and cultural difference. Miniature aesthetics is conceptualized as the representation of new perspectives for linguistic, social and ideological transformation by the curators.

Hand to hand with reactionary political climate which Obrist asserted we are also witnessing the reemergence of nationalist and culturally isolationist discourses. One of the reasons of this recent change is the refugee crisis we've been experiencing

globally. The governmental politics varies locally but it caused a new version of anxiety of “cultural identity” globally. Besides the rise of nationalism in countries such as Turkey and Russia; paradoxically the countries who are associated with being the sources of globalism are now the ones who produce the nationalist and isolationist rhetoric: Brexit and Trump’s discriminatory speeches. This new mobility in the world gave birth to a new discussion in the cultural field. European Countries have different perspectives on the issue as France and Germany followed the path of assimilation, Poland was totally against accepting immigrants. These governmental decisions effected the cultural field. Even the politics of immigration differs we observe a turmoil caused by the fear of losing national and/or cultural identity. We are once again living in a polarized political climate; one of them is the pole of cultural isolationists.

However, Groys goes against the grain and argues that only migration can lead to the emergence of a universalist, international, global culture (Madoff, 2019). This global culture and is different from the Western expansionism, cultural homogenization, universalism of neoliberalism as it acknowledges and fosters difference. It is a global, international and universal culture just as the radical avant-garde wanted at the beginning of the 20th century. “They wanted their art to be universal, to develop a visual language that would be accessible to everyone beyond traditional cultural borders” (132). Despite the hostility in the political institutions, today’s art system can be a role model “by the biennials, documentas and other exhibitionary projects that claim to present universal global art and culture.”

In other words, the spaces of the art world play an important role to confront isolationist and discriminatory politics. At this point, curatorial practices are very crucial as they form the framework of the exhibitions and determine the content. If they are going to take to role to disrupt the polarization in the cultural terrain they need to create “a unified space of representation in which different fragments are equally represented” (136).

The common aim of the curatorial concepts I've been discussing, is going beyond the Western art discourse. All of the curators adopted Maria Lind's definition of the curatorial: "a methodology that takes art as its starting point but then situates it in relation to specific contexts, times, and questions in order to challenge the status quo (quoted in Lin, *What is Curatography*).". They situate art into the context of the nationalist, reactionary, nostalgic political climate, especially in the countries which was once the fuel of the globalization. Contemporary miniature's anachronistic quality makes it eligible to expose these contradictions.

Because, in today's art world the assignment of the word "contemporary" to art describes more than a temporality, but instead, it is used to indicate its strain to challenge the norms and forms. In the collection *What About Activism?* (2019) Boris Groys argues that "without political engagement, art ceases to be contemporary, because to be contemporary means being involved in the politics of one's own time." (134). For Groys' "contemporary" signifies a political engagement.

The artists and the curators adopted the multiple perspectives in the miniatures as a method of finding meaning in the world and open a space for new subjectivities to emerge. All of the biennials I've mentioned has globalism on their agenda. They search for an alternative global order that is heterogenous and inclusive. The multifocality of miniature painting is adopted by contemporary artworks. The curators who makes these works public contribute to a collective sense of self. They situate the knowledge of the other through art (331).

This kind of knowledge of the other produces a multifocal subjectivity. This multifocality is what resists to the reactionary politics which promotes an illusionary history, discriminatory progressive narratives, and to the isolationist politics which finds danger in difference and finds comfort in sameness. Contemporary miniature subverts its attribution of difference in the aim of creating an alternative understanding of the global world.

Miniature not only symbolizes the difference between the East and the West within the single-centered system of thought but also contributes to the definition of subjectivities by marking this difference. On the other hand, the longing for a glorious past, which forms the background of nationalism, and the reflex of colonial thought to freeze miniature in time both function in terms of remaining the same, imprisoning in the past, and gathering everyone different under the label of a single other. In fact, these two apparently contradictory tactics have the same result: domination. It is convenient for miniature art to liberate the relationship between difference and similarity. Contemporary miniature moves the dialectics of similarity–difference and places it in a context with many voices.

The global curatorial practice engaged with miniature aesthetics subvert binaries. Contemporary miniature is an ally of orientalist binaries; it used them for its own end. Binary thinking gave miniature a mobility; it is a strategy to survive. Miniature aesthetics survived as long as it gets included in the Western artistic and curatorial practices by being the other. Contemporary miniature used difference as a tool where the curatorial was in a search of another to rebuild itself.

The aforementioned exhibitions see the miniature as a mean of subversion. The relationship the world has forged with the miniature, its style, and debates about perspective– this phenomenon that fix the miniature as the “other” – are taken out of the context of comparing the East and the West. Miniature offer answers to questions regarding art and society. Instead of being sidelined by the characteristics that sets it apart from other forms of art, the miniature triggers a new form of thinking. This becomes a fertile ground for answering the questions of why and how, which in turn helps us understand the changing structure of society and repeating patterns as well as notice cultural meanings.

Miniature painting is a way to understand, examine and articulate our time. I affirm what makes miniature “contemporary” is its theoretical potential to raise the art

world's questions regarding *multiplicity*. Within an “activist” curatorial context, contemporary miniature becomes a form to subvert temporal and cultural anxiety caused by the encounter with the other and the cancellation of the future. However, this new alternative model of representation is based on multitude, “a whole consisting of singularities, a multiplicity of groups and subjectivities”. (Hanru, 2007: 23-24). To this extent, contemporary coheres with multitude, therefore stands against the homogenizing globalism, nationalist modernism and reactionary trends of cultural isolationism. The strategy of multitude against the oppressive forces echoes with the claims of the biennales and works that are discussed in previous chapters. In this aspect, “contemporary” that precedes miniature means this critical multitude.

Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund's description of our present in *In the Contemporary Condition* (2016) corroborate the multiplicity in contemporary:

“characterized by contemporaneity in the characterized by contemporaneity in the sense that it is a present constituted by the bringing together of a multitude of different temporalities on different scales, including different grand narratives and imagined communities of nation-states and cultural clusters developed during modernity. Our present is formed by an intensified global interconnectedness of different times and experiences of time that both challenge as well as consolidate some of the hierarchies that have been associated with modernity (9). [...] contemporary art biennials in particular appear as cultural spaces where similarities and differences between geopolitically diverse forms of social experience are being represented and explored within the parameters of a common world. As such our interest is therefore in contemporary art forms that in different ways are concerned with the issue of temporality and constitution of subjectivity in our historical present. Fundamentally this is what makes them worthy of the predicate “contemporary” (13).”

Contemporary miniature is such an art form which is concerned with temporality and subjectivity by fabricating different temporalities, geographies and histories together. What makes miniature “contemporary” for the art biennials is its power to manifest various differences. The globality of the contemporary art world not just means the togetherness of different geographies and cultures but also temporalities and therefore historical narratives. Agamben suggests that “every conception of history is [...] accompanied by a certain experience of time” and “every culture [has] [...] a particular experience of time and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience (1993: 96)”. The contemporary signifies the interconnectedness and contemporaneousness of disparate cultures and art worlds which forms global networks of influence. Therefore, globality’s aim of bringing different geographies and cultures together incorporates histories and therefore times. Globality prerequisite contemporaneity; the contemporaneousness of different times. Contemporaneity is the temporality of globality (Lund & Cox, 2016: 17). Thus, just like contemporary globality entails anachronism.

To follow, “contemporary” means questioning hierarchies, challenging assumptions, problematizing historical erasure, disrupting the center-periphery binary, promoting the minority, cause intelligent debates and produce new knowledge. In this sense, what makes art “contemporary” is its capacity to make disconnections in order to generate new associations. This criticality comes from anachronism which makes true contemporaries capable of grasping their own time. Today, contemporary art is everywhere and everywhen, beyond today and beyond West. It is multiple.

As I’ve suggested previously, the culture of the East has been seen as frozen in the past therefore it is accurate to use miniature aesthetics which is associated with Eastern culture. To this extent, Orientalism’s East/West binary is productive for an anachronic strategy.

Contemporary miniature disrupts reading the history from a very narrow perspective as it deeply influences our relationship with time. Also, engaging with miniature means engaging with the past and being critical of who wrote the histories of art. Contemporary miniature emerged when art world was exploring how histories were actually produced and reproduced. One of the important aspects in the formation of cultural identity is sharing the same linear narrative. This linear narrative operates by excluding the ones who are seen as a threat to the unity and solidarity. Therefore, a past art form can become a mark of cultural difference who disrupts the art history that is constructed on the “white heterosexual male identity”. In this chapter by describing the history of three biennale and a documenta that exhibited contemporary miniature I tried to emphasize the social matrix which connects aesthetics and politics.

3. FEMININE WRITING AS CURATING CONTEMPORARY MINIATURE

In the previous chapter I've examined how contemporary miniature is a mark of difference and how curators engaged with it to discuss globalism. It has been used as a way to differ from the Eurocentric canon and also to underline the differences inside the category of non-Western artists. Additionally, I've explored how its lack of perspective transformed into a concept that manifests multiplicity: multiplicity of geographies, histories, cultures and times. Contemporaneity is the coming together of different times that forges the temporal condition of the global present. In this chapter, I expand on another difference: femininity.

Contemporaneity and the coming together of times produce new forms of subjectivation (Lund & Cox, 2016: 18). In this chapter I use the method of writing to curate an exhibition entitled *Shirin*. *Shirin* explores the possibilities of forming a new contemporary feminine subjectivity. I interpret the method of *curatography* (Lin, 2020) defined as writing of exhibitions as writing an exhibition. I experiment feminine writing as a way of curating.

Thereby through my exhibition, I ask how miniature painting can also be a mark of sexual difference. Where does femininity stand in this temporal condition? How women's body and the reaction against ethnic, national, racial differences act together? How can Euro-centrism be challenged by engaging with feminism in the curatorial field? How does feminine subjectivity cohere with contemporary miniature's visual and theoretical potential to bring out differences and to point out multiplicity?

The hypothetical exhibition entitled *Shirin* is constituted of artist-women's works which sees miniature as an aesthetic way of thinking. *Shirin* explores the ways in which artists employ aesthetic strategies of miniature in favor of their feminist subject. In this manner I survey the unexpected relationship between contemporary miniature and femininities. By discussing the curatorial selection, I will explore what new meanings could emerge when miniature painting and

feminist intentions meet in the field of contemporary art. In *Shirin* the hypothetical visitor will encounter with the works of Dana Awartani, Hamra Abbas, CANAN, Hayv Kahraman and Shahzia Sikander. Discussing one work of each artist I will focus on the textual aspect of miniature painting. I propose that what associates these artists is their strategy to engage with poetry and ornamentation for producing desiring subjectivities.

My main motivation behind curating an exhibition of contemporary women miniature artists is not claiming contemporary miniature as a new movement or a canon. Instead, my aim is to gather all these works created by women in one exhibition to explore miniature painting's potential for feminist theory. It can be a mediator to underline how sexual and other cultural biases operate together. Femininity and miniature aesthetics were articulated by their lack in the phallogocentric order of culture. Their difference, otherness comes from their lack. However, sexual, ethnic or artistic difference can be a base of a new subjectivity. Curating by engaging with feminist theory, as a site of difference, can produce a new knowledge of the Other. Just like feminine writing, feminine curating can disrupt the regime of historicity.

Cixous defines feminine writing not as a text written only by "women" but instead she evaluates some texts of male authors as feminine such as Jean Genet (1976: 884). Cixous places Jean Genet's texts in the feminine. Genet's play *The Balcony* (1956) is set in an anonymous city that is experiencing a revolutionary uprising in the streets. The play mostly takes place in a brothel that functions as a microcosm of the current political regime. Irma, The Madame of the brothel casts and directs performances in the brothel. Genet uses settings to explore roles of power in society. However, settings are scripted in a scene which a "General" roleplays with a sex worker; she disrupts the narrative by playing with time. She acts slowly or fast. As Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler noted in *Revolution a Reader* (2015: 582) General is in the dominant role but the woman is in charge of time; she controls the

quickness or slowness of time. For her, time is the only way to be in control; by getting “outside of time, outside of the clock”.

Just like Genet’s sex worker who controls the scripted narrative by getting outside of time, an exhibition by featuring anachronic works such as contemporary miniatures can control time and disrupt a historical narrative. The sex worker agitates the gender roles and identities by playing with time. Anachronicity is a temporal strategy to create alternative subjectivities. Moreover, curatography, writing of exhibitions and writing an exhibition can be a platform for women to control time, find ruptures and breaks in history. In this manner, they can find pleasure in history as Rancière suggested a time of desiring subjects (Ross, 2009).

Furthermore, writing an exhibition is a curatorial way of employing miniature aesthetics as illuminated manuscripts equalize seeing and reading. A textual exhibition can be a space of exploring the relationship between writing and curating, both visual and textual.

3.1. The hypothetical exhibition: *Shirin*

In 1989, the same year of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the start of the post-Cold War, English engineer and computer scientist Sir Timothy John Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web. The collapse of the Berlin Wall served as the symbol and internet served as the medium of globalization. However, Groys argues that today we can see that “the internet is not unified and universal, but instead extremely fragmented” (2019: 132). He is not concerned with its global availability but its failure to become a universal public space. This failure arises from internet’s response to the user’s questions; “In other words, the user finds on the internet only what he or she wants to find there. [...] It is a mirror of our specific interests and desires. In the context of the internet, we also communicate only with the people who share our interests and attitudes, whether political or aesthetic.” (133). In other

words, users do not encounter with what is already familiar and doesn't come across with the different.

Nevertheless, curatorial selection can subvert this user habit by choosing the works of art that we might not see on our own, what is not familiar to us. I take the curatorial as a good place to produce knowledge of the Other. The hypothetical exhibition entitled *Shirin* gathers women artists' works of contemporary miniature in a hypothetical exhibition. Exhibition's title refers to the heroine Shirin from the love poem Khusraw and Shirin. Miniature paintings used to illustrate classical poems. In the introduction I described miniatures in their simplest definition, as book illustrations that visualize an accompanying text. The poem Khusraw and Shirin narrates a famous tragic romance that is part of the Khamseh ("Quintet") written by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209). This tale has been told by many poets and illustrated many times by Safavid, Moghul or Ottoman painters. It is a fictional version of the story of the Sasanian king Khosrow II's love for the Armenian princess Shirin, who becomes the queen of Persia. The essential narrative was already well known from the great epic-historical poem the Shahnameh and other Persian writers and popular tales.

Despite the lack of feminine figure in the miniature paintings, the heroines in love stories such as Shirin portray an adventurous and empowered woman (Mernissi, 2001). In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Fatema Mernissi writes: "Women in love in Muslim miniatures always have some sort of problem, which they often solve by taking boats and crossing oceans. Shirin has to do this as well, and as we see in many of the paintings depicting her sea voyage, her entire crew is female." (213).

In such manner, poetry is a place of agency for women in miniature paintings. They could be represented in active roles as opposed to stereotypical figure of the women in harem. It also opposes to the contemporary stereotype of "victim Muslim and/or non-Western" women. As Gayatri Spivak once famously summarized the situation

as: “white men [claiming to be] saving brown women from brown men” (1988: 296).

Sara R. Farris (2017) claims that the xenophobic campaigns in the West stereotypes the non-Western, especially the Muslim women. Also, it shapes and shaped by anti-immigration and racist ideologies. Gender inequality and the popular image of suppressed non-Western women are threats to the Western values. It is assumed as being “backward” and not “civilized”. It is a paradoxical situation as this fear of going backwards provoke the reactionary politics and nostalgia.

Poetry in such context, can be seen as an act of resistance. It is a bodily act that cannot be repressed. Hélène Cixous discusses the resistive quality of the feminine texts in her seminal essay *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976). These texts oppose to the phallogocentric systems, and critiques Freudian models of sexual difference. They can't be “theorized, enclosed, and coded” because it is impossible to define feminine writing. They always disrupt the discourses of phallogocentrism. As the feminine texts can't be categorized, they can't be stereotyped either. Therefore, they can be a tool of resistance against oppressive discourses. According to Cixous, they have the potential to subvert the patriarchal systems.

As such in Genet's case feminine writing doesn't mean a text written by “women”. There are some men and texts which are feminine. The poets are the exceptional allies of the feminine writing “because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women” (879). According to Cixous, the language of poetry is closer to unconscious because it holds double meanings, hence it is similar to the women sexuality.

Wendy Shaw mentions the Persian literary critic Shams-i Qays' (1204–1230) analogy between the nature of poetry and architecture. For example, Shams-i Qays argues that the famous Islamic architecture Alhambra is a kind of poetry (2019:

288). Shaw explains that he compares poetry to “a patterned brocade, a rhythmic arabesque, or stringing a necklace according to the rules of measured composition and proportion. Likewise, poetry of the Alhambra depended on a kaleidoscope of metaphors of gardens, jewelry, color, and harmony that often inverted the relationship between subject and object by speaking through the voice of the building.”.

This aspect of poetry and architecture stands in the face of the Western centric thought as they oppose to the imposition of the single-point view of European art discourses that defend perspective. Shaw quotes Olga Bush: “In addition to a mimetic and a contemplative gaze, then, poetic epigraphy articulates a self-reflexive gaze, speaking for the ways in which architecture and objects wish to be seen, as well as the ways beholders may see themselves in relation to the works of art they behold.” (288). Additionally, Shaw finds similarity between Bush’s claim and the Ottoman literary theorist Muslih al- Din Mustafa Sururi (1491–1562) use of craft metaphors, as he compares the ornamental arts of poetry to wall ornament (naksh), tile work, and inlay. Poetry and ornamentation rely on the viewer’s interpretations.

Shaw’s (2019: 24) claim that the poetry, imaginative speech, addresses soul echoes Cixous’ concept of poetry. Miniature paintings are produced as the illustrations of these poems. However, they are not mere reflections of texts but visuals who have their own dynamic in itself and in relation to text. In such context, it is noteworthy that all the women artists engage somehow with miniature’s poetic quality. Some of them use texts in their work, others are influenced by a poem or just use poem as a conceptual matter.

Another common aspect is the engagement of women artists with ornamentation which is used to illuminate the borders of miniature paintings or to decorate the clothes, floors, buildings. It is a recurrent pattern in miniature paintings.

Ornamentation and poetry have the power to replace each other (Shaw, 2019). Their rhythmic character ties them to each other.

In Islamic arts music, poetry, geometry, painting and text can replace each other and each of them carry an aspect of the other. Miniature paintings are not mere visuals but they go beyond the pictorial realm. Miniature aesthetics makes you, as Cixous would say, “use all your body, look at the text with your ears, listen with your eyes”.

Shirin aims to challenge the current temporal and identity crisis of the Western subject. Rossi Braidotti suggests that “Fear, anxiety and nostalgia are clear examples of the negative emotions involved in the project of detaching ourselves from familiar and cherished forms of identity.” (2006: 83). Therefore, I argue that the reactionary politics and the rise of nationalism is born out of the situations who create shifts in the identity. Today, the idea of a fixed identity itself is nostalgic. Nationalism creates an illusionary past where there is a fixed identity that is once lost. The aim of isolationist politics is to find this constructed identity. As Braidotti suggests, national identity is an imaginary tale (82). A feminist perspective can reveal “these tales of nationhood” are cultural constructs who legitimize themselves over the bodies of women (83).

Feminism is a tool box which distances us from the dominant social institutions of femininity and masculinity and consider other variables such as ethnicity, race and class. From a feminist point of view this situation can be evaluated from different angles. A feminist curating can confront the forces which find comfort in sameness by presenting and connecting differences. Exhibiting them in a particular style can create new ways of thinking and produce fresh knowledge. This “activist” curating practice can provoke the formation of political agency.

In *Curatorial Activism* (2018), Maura Reilly describes the term “curatorial-activist” to describe people who “committed themselves to initiatives that are leveling

hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, and encouraging new strategies of resistance- all of which offers hope and affirmation (2018: 22).”An activist curatorial stands for a cause.

Following Reilly, Bauer, Groys, and Obrist, exhibition *Shirin* stands against the reactionary and nationalist political climate which legitimatizes itself through non-Western women’s body. In the previous chapter I’ve discussed the curators’ strategies against nationalist and nostalgic discourses in the format of biennials. Although I discussed it through the works of women artists I didn’t focus on the role of women’s body in such discourses. In this chapter by specifically focusing on contemporary miniature women artists’ works I want to explore the ways in which the figure of the non-Western women is shaped as a passive subject by xenophobic politics, how artists challenged this idea and used miniature aesthetics as a form of resistance against discriminatory politics. My exhibition is an experimentation of a feminist curatorial activism.

Rosi Braidotti suggests that “feminist thought is the movement that makes sexual difference operative.” It is “the affirmation of sexual difference as positivity is the answer” (1993: 3). It is a way to problematize identity. Following Irigaray, the contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti prefers the strategy of “extreme affirmation of sexed identity as a way of reversing the attribution of differences in a hierarchical mode”. The task of feminist theory is to think identity as a site of differences, think it through multiplicity. Feminist thought include obviously sex and gender, but also race, class and any other sociocultural divisions and representations. The only-women exhibitions use this strategy of feminism. They highlight the gender difference. Maura Reilly evaluates this strategy under the name of *Area Studies* which produce new canons and extend the normative discourse by focusing on the racial, geographical, gendered or sexual orientation. Reilly defends that we should give “special attention to anything

outside the white-male-Western center”. (2018: 25) It is an effective way to diversify the contemporary art discourse. However, many artists, curators, writers and scholars argued that they create another separate canon and they are ghettoizing, segregating, and culturally and/or biologically essentialist (26). As a response to the claims of the restrictive aspects of this strategy, Reilly quotes Lucy Lippard: “The restriction to women’s art has its obvious polemic source, but as a framework within which to exhibit good art it is no more restrictive than, say, exhibitions on German, Cubist, Black and white, soft, young or new art.” (27). The motivation behind Area Studies is “visibility”.

Rosi Braidotti (2012) considers “otherness” as an expression of a “productive limit” or a “generative threshold”. Braidotti considers Woman as the privileged site of otherness in the process of becoming as it is the Other of the Other. She pursues Deleuze’s nomadic vision which “looks for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilizes and allows for flows of affirmation of values and forces which are not yet sustained by current condition.” (172).

Through discussing my curatorial selection, I examine how artists use the pre-modern art form and employ formal qualities of miniature painting to express similar issues in various ways. I argue that their artistic practices are examples of “global multitude” and the miniature painting’s aesthetic can offer a new kind of perspective. Then my curatorial strategy is to underline the differences, not as a threat to identity but as the base of a new subjectivity. Also, through disputing my curatorial choices I aim to continue the discussion on the relationship between contemporary art, curating and politics.

I’ve explored the contemporary miniatures in biennial formats for their potential to reflect the global age. In this context, it would be meaningful to curate my exhibition; a mini-exhibition as part of a biennial. Since it is a hypothetical exhibition I could dream big and imagine it as a collateral exhibition in the format of an extra pavilion in the Venice Biennial. Aside the curated main exhibition, there

are national pavilions at the Giardini, and at the Arsenale that host each participant nation's official representation during the Venice Biennial. Some countries own pavilion buildings while others rent buildings throughout the city, but each country controls its own selection process and production costs. In 2019, there were 89 National Participations, four of which were participating for the first time: Ghana, Madagascar, Malaysia, and Pakistan. Therefore, the Venice Biennale is a good platform to explore national discourses in a global context.

I propose to install the artworks in a temporary pavilion erected at Giardini, the park that forms one of two main venues of the Venice biennale and hosts 29 national pavilions. The pavilion will have a “contemporary Islamic architectural” style designed by an architecture. Inspired by the Islamic courtyards, the pavilion’s courtyard will be designed as a social space where the Biennial visitors can take a break, meet up and discuss.

Shirin Pavilion is intended to challenge the 100-year-old Venice Biennial’s model at Giardini section based on national representation. Our age is marked by mass migration –from different countries around the world including India, Mexico, Syria among others- in search of a better life, better education, and a safer as well as a more democratic future. *Shirin* aims to question the validity of concepts such as border, (mother)land, nation, representation, xenophobia, and hospitality / hostility, which people still rely on. It opens up a discussion on unrepresented and marginalized people, minorities, unwanted, immigrants and asylum seekers’ right to be represented.

A Pavilion with women artists from many nations that share a culture, will invite visitors to think about the nostalgia for an essential, cultural ‘time before time’. The nostalgia works as twofold. The first one is from the non-Western countries who search for an unsoiled culture before Western modernism and an immigrant’s nostalgia for a lost identity. Also, the cultural phenomenon I have described earlier;

the Western nostalgia that longs for a time when the national culture was the essential/pure and greater without the immigrants.

I address this political dead-end where everyone is living in a cultural anxiety as it is an impossible task to find a pure culture. Long ago, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, infamously drew a parallel between the architectural structure Kabyle House and the structural nostalgia (Silverstein, 2004). Kabyle home is a cultural form associated with the lost Kabyle culture which created “structural nostalgia” through self-essentialization. With architecture, nationalist and nostalgic narratives can rise. Bourdieu’s famous claim has been appropriated by scholars for a sometime to refer to a non-Western model for the organizational space. Bourdieu coded outside (the public) as the masculine and inside (the domestic) as the feminine (1998: 24). Although today they are seen as old binary divisions and structuralist attributions they still lie at the ground of our sociological thinking. In a Braidottian way we can subvert this distinction and use it as a feminist strategy.

Therefore, architecture in a non-Western context is important for our understanding. Also, it is not a coincidence that women artists use miniature painting’s intersection with architecture: geometry and ornamentation. Just like Bourdieu, the exhibition takes the personal and casts them onto a social background. Moreover, it casts personally consumed miniatures onto a public background.

3.2. Dana Awartani: I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I’d forgotten you. I was dreaming.

The work *I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I’d forgotten you. I was dreaming.* (2017) of Dana Awartani (fig. 3.1.), who socializes her personal experiences, stands at the starting point of this exhibition. Dana Awartani’s installation and video were created in a vacant house in one of the

old neighborhoods of Jeddah, where her grandparents once lived. Awartani began to cover the floors of the house with sand in a manner reminiscent of old Arabic houses as well as of the geometrical tile forms in traditional Islamic art. Once this difficult work was completed, she began sweeping the floors in symbolic reference to the destruction of this cultural heritage. The way traditional forms of art are abandoned for “civilized,” “advanced,” and “modern” forms and the erasure of both cultural identity as well as collective memory become visible with this small gesture. Awartani proposes a communalism that protects—guards—nourishes instead of a society that fixates on modern and industrial life, energized by a senseless feeling of need and prepared to destroy for this purpose.

Dana Awartani refers to the earlier forms to make conceptually powerful points about contemporary realities and the fleeting role of the past in them. Dana Awartani, born in Jeddah in 1989, engages the intricacy and skills of manuscript painting and geometry to explore specific historical and cultural moments of relevance. Dana Awartani, traditionally trained at the Prince’s School of Traditional Arts, received her Masters after her BA at Central Saint Martins. Her works aims for the revival of traditional geometric figures of Islamic illuminations, enacted in the contemporary. Artist uses various methods and mediums such as performances, miniature painting, parquetry, ceramics, and embroidery. Awartani often prepares her own pigments to reinforce her concept. Her practice stands within deconstruction, reinterpretation and repetition of signs, symbols and patterns in the pursuit of demonstrating the structure of meaning.

The video installation in the exhibition *Shirin; I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I’d forgotten you. I was dreaming.* (2017) refers to the miniature painting by using its ornamental aspect to make conceptually powerful points about contemporary realities. Awartani engages with tradition in an act of exploring cultural history. She draws from a wider context of Islamic aesthetics, not merely focused on miniatures.



Figure 3.1. Dana Awartani, *I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I'd forgotten you. I was dreaming*, 2017, Video installation, 22 minutes and 11 seconds, Courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery, Jeddah.

Ornamental constructs the pictorial space of the miniature painting. In contrast with the three-dimensional space in perspectival system the ornamentation invokes two-dimensionality. In miniature paintings the clothes, buildings, gardens, carpets, walls or the frame itself can be ornamented. Therefore, there isn't any hierarchy between space and the figures. The figures position or size shouldn't have to be defined in accordance to the space in contrast to the perspectival paradigm where the figures' spatial organization is dependent to the geometrically defined one centered space. The ornamentation creates a fluidity in the pictorial space. The pictorial space that doesn't have one central point can be looked from different ways. Firat (2015) elaborates on the spatial fluidity:

“This fluidity is in congruence with Zeynep Sayın's argument that in Islamic visual arts the relations between centre and periphery, figure and the ground, and inside and outside are different than those determined by the modernist ontology of the work of art. She argues that the idea of unity of the work – that is *ergon* – as a closed

achievement designed in advance is alien to Islamic aesthetics (2000: 184). The unity in Islamic work, Sayın contends, does not revolve around a centre. The centre in Islamic works is simultaneously nowhere and everywhere. Therefore, the attachment and detachment of parts in relation to this non-unity do not lead to a structural ergon constructed around a center. No doubt, such an understanding of the work of art refuses the Kantian opposition between ergon and parergon, since the work does not assert itself as a complete product. Rather, it is a site of contingency, and, as such, the distinctions between essence and attachment and outside and inside are undone (135).”

Kant’s definition of ornamentation constructs the representational space as an act of parergon, providing the ergon with what would otherwise be lacking (134). However, the spatial organization of Islamic aesthetics, including miniature painting, there is no unity as there is no center. It doesn’t have defined borders and an end therefore it has a constant lack that can’t be overcome because the lack is what constitutes the image (135). Hence, ornamentation’s constant lack opens up a space where the affirmative sexual difference of femininity can express itself. Feminism of difference can use ornamentation as an intellectual and political.

After 1950’s Saudi Arabians started to leave their homes and build new houses in Italian style as the main belief was the Western tradition makes you more civilized. In the video of Awartani’s talk at Jameel Prize, artist states that she wanted to create an aesthetic so Arab that reminds you directly an Arab home. She created geometrical tile forms with sand and swept it to talk about how the Saudi Arabian society is purposely destroying its culture. She didn’t destroy it in a shocking or violent way but in a more smooth and therapeutic style.

Another reference to miniature painting is the title of the work *I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I’d forgotten you. I was*

dreaming. It is a citation from Mahmoud Darwish's poem *Memory for Forgetfulness* (1982) where he narrates his memories of Beirut under siege.

In such manner, Dana Awartani's orientation towards a poem which narrates the destruction of culture during Lebanese Civil War and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Darwish observes young Palestinians born in Lebanese camps who defend their homeland that they've never seen in Beirut. Darwish is drawn to the idea of the loss of homeland and engages it as a metaphor. He explores this idea of homeland in History. Mahmoud Darwish's text *Memory for Forgetfulness* can be interpreted as an ally to a feminine text as he confronts his "Eastern masculinity" (2015: 119) while he searches the identity of a new day. While Beirut were under the siege the people encounter with different types of identities including gender. In addition, Darwish is also in search of a time, a time for his own, a time to escape as he writes: "What if this inferno were to take a five-minute break, and then come what may? Just five minutes! [...] I want the aroma of the coffee. I need five minutes. I want a five-minute truce for the sake of coffee (117-8)". His return to history to compensate lost geography coincides with his five-minute coffee break. Darwish' search for a time and history when he could consolidate his subjectivity indicates the time-history-subjectivity correlation.

The poem serves Awartani in many ways as she is a third generation half-Palestinian, an artist who explores a land's lost culture in history. The abstract idea of a lost homeland reminds the constant lack of the pictorial realm of miniature painting. They both can never be complete. History, memory nor the pictorial space of miniature are complete in Darwish's poetry. Moreover, Darwish feels like his masculinity is shattering simultaneously with his heritage. Through architecture's poetic language ornamentation Awartani expresses Darwish's incomplete history where he will continue searching his homeland which he will never find. Artist's poetic orientation converges with her use of ornamentation.

Shaw (2019) writes: “In contrast to perspective, which depends on the fixed position of the viewing subject, such geometry refuses to place the subject. [...] Wherever the viewing subject looks, he or she experiences a new center.” (297). In such context, ornamental and/or poetic aspects of miniature painting provoke a new kind of subjectivity. Awartani uses the decentering aspect of ornamentation to confront the colonized subject’s self-destructive behavior towards its own culture. Just like miniature painting’s inferiority against Western painting, the classic Arab home became inferior compared to Italian architecture. The ornamentation is the extension of multi-focality of miniature painting. The single-point in the European art forms creates an immobile and disembodied subject. In Shaw’s words: “Western and Islamic ways of looking pertains not simply to art, but to our ideal of how subjectivity functions.” (298).

Awartani’s video installation highlights how politics and aesthetics are related to each other. It is so forceful that it provokes us to abandon our homes to be more “civilized” in Italian aesthetics. However, if colonial ideas can affect our aesthetic choices embedded in our everyday life, likewise aesthetics can subvert them.

Multiple perspectives and ornamentation refuse to place the subject. Geometric patterns embody the multiplicity of viewpoints of miniature painting (299). The absence of a fixed point, the geometry in miniature paintings and in architecture as a cultural counterpoint to perspective can be a model for a new subjectivity, especially for a new feminine subjectivity.

Rosi Braidotti defines feminist thought as a practice that aims to locate and situate the grounds for the new female feminist subjectivity (1993: 3). Braidotti suggests to create a new subject of desire. Braidotti’s new theoretical style is based on sexual difference which centralizes the embodied subject.

This new embodied desiring subject is in contrast with the Renaissance single-point which creates disembodied subjects. It creates a desire rooted in the eye, not in the

body (Shaw, 2019: 308). The multifocal subjectivity that Braidotti defends which is also emphasized by miniature painting doesn't produce identity. Therefore, this new subject won't have a cultural identity crisis which can lead to abandoning her own home for a new cultural identity coded as civilized or will not be an essentialist/nationalist and hostile to a new culture. This desiring subject plays with the cultural binaries.

3.3. Hamra Abbas: Waterfall Drawings

The links that Awartani establishes between home, cultural identity, Islamic geometry and desire are even more pronounced in the works of Hamra Abbas. The transient life that Abbas has led for a long time (in Boston, Lahore, and Berlin) becomes visible in her installations which use a variety of materials and forms. This nomadic life led her to work with more “ephemeral” materials. When the artist turns back to her hometown, Lahore, her materials began to change as well. *Please Do Not Step* (2004), the installation exhibited at the Kusthalle Friedericanum in 2004, consists of sticky sheets of paper cut like lace and simply fixed on the floor. The artist was trained in classic miniature art in Pakistan and specialized in video art in Berlin. Fifteen years after this work, which was rooted in Islamic geometry and ornamentation, she began to work with marble, attempting to make the ephemeral more durable. The geometrical patterns the artist creates using two kinds of marble with different colors are reminiscent of floor tiles used in homes as well as the marginal ornamentations in miniatures. In her series of work *Waterfall Drawings* (2020) (fig 3.2.), which constitute the project entitled *Gardens of Paradise* (2017), Abbas finds inspiration in the promise shared by many traditions to live eternally and eschatologically in a garden full of fruits, flowers, and healing waters. In this sense, the choice of materials like marble and sand is not coincidental. The kinds of structural materials that artist choose go hand in hand with the feeling of belonging and the desire to reinforce memories.

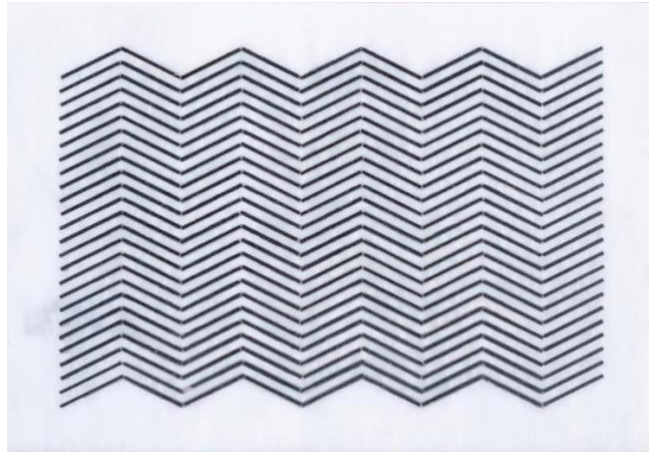


Figure 3.2. Hamra Abbas, *Waterfall Drawings*, 2020, Marble, granite, 23 x 31 x 2 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Pilot Gallery

Gardens of Paradise, is the promise of living eternally and blissfully in a garden, an eschatological feature found in many traditions around the world. Mughal gardens were inspired by Islamic ideals of Paradise (al-janna), and its attendant imagery of trees, fruits, flowers, water. Returning to Lahore after living for almost a decade in Boston, Abbas describes her experience of seeing this garden imagery (frescoes and stone inlays) again after a prolonged absence from home as a kind of a rediscovery. She became interested in examining the symbolic significance of such images in relation to its architecture – to transport the ineffability of what these images seek to communicate. In this body of work, Abbas addresses the politics of desire and the relation in which ideology stands in regulating the aesthetics of devotion through architectural monumentality and ornamentation.

Along with the love poems, miniature paintings also depict religious stories. The story of Adam and Eve's dismissal from Paradise is a recurrent theme in almost every culture with little differences. The story renders the first woman as guilty of the lost paradise.

Hamra Abbas draws waterfalls that is part of paradise imagery with geometric abstraction where reality is not portrayed but indicated. As Abbas combines the language of contemporary art, especially of minimalism and structuralism with religious iconography, she reminds us that this guilty Women imagery is still alive in our contemporary culture. Contemporary society pursues the task of rebuilding the lost paradise that is once lost but this lost paradise itself is a product of imagination. Mughals and other Muslim dynasties have been creating gardens in reality and in images. Hamra Abbas recreate this ideal world in her own way. These gardens are deeply connected to the idea of desire. The first implication of the story of Adam and Eve is to condemn desire but paradoxically the desire of paradise is the main drive behind religion. Also, these gardens in Mughal Architecture and these images of fruits, flowers, waterfalls are part of this politics of desire. These visuals should tempt one towards the gardens and therefore to the paradise. These contradictions coexist in Abbas's works like they exist in society.

These gardens were built according to a strict geometrical rule. The repetition of shapes and forms create a rhythm similar to poetry's structure. *The Waterfall* is one of the elements of the poetry of *Paradise Garden*. Water symbolizes the movement, illusion, interaction and animation. It is visual as much as its auditory. Depicting it with geometric abstraction manifests the geometry's aesthetical potential to express motion and sound. Waterfall manifests the architectural poem of *Paradise Garden*.

Another contradiction is the image of non-Western women. The non-Western women's body is once a colonial phantasm of Western men and at the same time it represents oppressive Islamic religion. Fatema Mernissi tells her realization that Westerners "see the harem as a peaceful pleasure-garden where omnipotent men reign supreme over obedient women." (26). Mernissi describes the harem, the emblem of feminine space in the Orientalist imagination as a "pleasure-garden". The idea of pleasure garden connects with the image of Paradise in Abbas' work. Moreover, Reina Lewis claims that the harem represents "the fulfilment of seeing the forbidden faces and bodies of Muslim women; and the fantasy of one man's

sexual ownership over many women” (quoted in Firat, 2015: 66). These relations between the forbidden fruit, faces, spaces of pleasure make the women’s body a place where contradictory politics meet.

Hamra Abbas combines two aspects of miniature painting and she uses the geometric abstraction as a poem. She rewrites the first narrative of humanity that render the ultimate desire (paradise) as once had but now lost because of the women who seduces men to oppose to the prohibition. Its impossibility of having it during the life on earth is the main drive of the human act. The expel from paradise reverberates the Oedipal narrative that constructs the desire on the prohibition of incest. Additionally, it echoes the ornamentation’s constant lack which can never be achieved.

However, as Braidotti suggested we need new subjectivities and new understanding of desires. The single-focused perspective concept is analogous with the desire which is based on prohibition of the first desired object. Abbas’s geometric poetry of the water as a symbol of paradise, her abstraction is a “feminine text” that coincides with Braidotti’s feminism of sexual difference. This feminism emphasizes the political importance of desire and its constitution of the subject (1993: 6).

In *Differencing Canon* (1999), Griselda Pollock writes: “sexuality, subjectivity and representation form a critical set of interrelating issues for feminist cultural analysis of visual representations that traverse the terrains of desire, fantasy and ambivalence.”

3.4. Nilima Sheikh: Construction Site

In the exhibition *Shirin*, Nilima Sheikh’s work *Construction Site* (2010) (fig. 3.3. & 3.4) should follow Hamra Abbas’s work *Waterfall Drawings* as Sheikh also dwells into the imagery of paradise but in a very different way. Nilima Sheikh’s

work in the exhibition is a double-sided scroll where we see a construction site. As introduced in the previous chapter, this scroll belongs to the series entitled *Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dreams*, created between 2003 and 2014, and draws attention to the relationship between the industrial nature of Kashmir and the local architectural heritage. The series – about the Kashmir valley and its people – draw a map of the pain, sorrow, and violence born of the conflict between the people’s desire for freedom and the hegemonic powers of nationalism. Sheikh opposes the destruction of the cultural legacy and uses her work to express the respect she has for the people of Kashmir, who were once known for their artisanal skills. *Construction Site* (2010) is a summary of Sheikh’s praxis with its subject and the visual symbols it uses. The work juxtaposes scenes of daily life and work with scenes of elegant beauty. In *Trace Retrace* (2015) Sheikh says, “My way of using beauty is a critique of people who in modern times find beauty outside of expression, causing closures and therefore feel guilty.” Sheikh brings a multitude of universes together; mythology and modern history coexist side by side in her works. For Sheikh, Kashmir was once a paradise on earth, a cultural paradise. However, today it is a site of conflict.



Figure 3.3. Nilima Sheikh, *Construction Site*, 2010, Casein Tempera on Canvas
305 x 183 cm, Courtesy: Shireen Jungalwala

The series gets its name from Agha Shahid Ali's poetry I see *Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight*. Ali's poem speaks of the loss of identity, exile and longing for homeland. The series also include reference from Salman Rushdie's *Salimar, the Clown* and from fourteenth-century female mystic Lal Dēd of Kashmir.

The work *Construction Site* is a very large silk scroll that can be installed up from the ceiling and the visitor can walk around. In such a way they engage with the narrative through their body. Behind the work we see two poems translated in English and an excerpt from Chitralkha Zutshi's *Language of Belonging*. The text reads:

The reason Lal Ded's poetry is so essential for votaries of Kashmiriyat is selfevident from an examination of her verses. These are suffused with a sense of the fluidity of religious boundaries, and this has been interpreted as a manifestation of the Kashmiri ethos of tolerance.

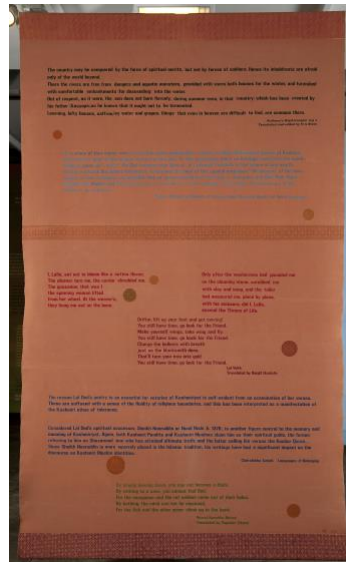


Figure 3.4. Nilima Sheikh, *Construction Site*, 2010, Casein Tempera on Canvas 305 x 183 cm, Courtesy: Shireen Jungalwal

Kashmiri was a region that was engaged with feminine text. Lal Ded's poetry mentions the fluidity of religions which is opposite of the contemporary situation as one of the aspects of the conflict between Pakistan and India is religion. Miniature painting is a tradition developed with Islamic book art and has been categorized as Islamic art in museums and academic field. However, it was also an art practice in India where we encounter Hindu mythology. The miniature painters who escaped from Mughal Empire formed the Rajput painting in India.

Nevertheless, miniature aesthetics based upon Islamic artistic endeavors especially with isometric geometry and poetry/language/narration. Thinking in aesthetic aspects of Islamic arts can contextualize Islam as a culture instead of a mere religion. Wendy Shaw (2019) call attention to the tendency to avoid the category of Islam after 9/11. She adduces the example of the 2011 reconstruction of the Islamic galleries at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the secularization and regionalization under the new name Galleries of the Arts of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, South Asia. According to Shaw "it is presumably aimed to rectify the reductive perception that Islam is only about religion, and never about culture." (14). Still this new revised system has its own erasures: "While addressing the exclusion of religious minorities implicit in the term 'Islamic,' the new name perpetuates the historical oppression of linguistic and ethnic minorities, such as the Amazigh, Balochi, Kurdish, and Palestinian peoples, who do not have nation states and who have participated in Islamic perceptual culture (understood in cross-religious frameworks). The problem may not be the categories so much as the fixed taxonomies implicit in the practice of categorization." (14).

The underlying problem is "the presentation of art as a metonym for culture at large fails when supplemented only by history" and as a solution Shaw suggests that "viewers need a lexicon of intrinsic meanings through which to engage with, and not simply observe, worlds illegible to the modern viewer" (15).

We should create new knowledges and concepts to rethink “Islamic” arts. One way to engage with viewer and to reframe Islamic arts not as mere historical objects but as cultural is through contemporary art. In this context, curating creates a space for the viewer to interact with this foreign culture. This culture is not just foreign to Western viewer but also to the non-Western as Shaw says: “regardless of nation, gender, or creed, we are all moderns now” (15). This “modern” is the subject formed according to the Western norms which is symbolized by perspective in the aesthetic field.

Islamic arts and therefore miniature painting have been evaluated along the axes of Western naturalistic and mimetic theories. If the main quality who distinguishes miniature painting from Western one is perspective then perhaps we can focus on the other qualities of miniature but not as a replacement of perspective but as new aesthetic concepts to be used as tools when we think about art. We can learn from the premodern art form to create new ways of thinking. We can learn from culture.

Sheikh uses this premodern art form’s textual and geometrical potentials just like the other women artists I’ve argued previously. In a 2001 interview with Vishakha N. Desai, Sheikh tells that when she converted to Islam after she got married, her family didn’t care about the religious aspect of it but concerned about the language that she will speak to her children. In Sheikh’s words: “It’s very interesting that they were more concerned about the language and the culture of language than the culture of religion.” (Conversations with Traditions, 2001: 69). This anecdote emphasizes the language’s importance for the both cultures.

Visitors encounter different texts from many voices at the back of the scrolls. History, narrative, poetry and craft gets mixed in Sheikh’s works. The text is used as an interface to enter into the regional history and contemporary concerns (Sangari, 2013: 162). According to Sangari, Sheikh’s works refuse to see the visual as a self-sufficient terrain and highlight the interdependence of text and image. For

Sheikh, visual is not sufficient to represent violence. However, miniature aesthetics provide us a space to think the text/image synergy.

Additionally, the conjunction of text/image coincides with the conjunction of beauty and violence. Sangari suggests that: “the conjunctions of beauty and violence defamiliarize or distance violence, but only to open and enfold it in ways that serrate the body and beauty to engender a troubled, insecure rather than a consuming gaze”. (159)

Violence is usually represented in the limit of expected narratives and the experience of victim/witness becomes unnoticed. However, violent stories such as Partition can be expressed by using ambivalent modes of representation to eliminate the mass media images of violence such as the interdependence of image and text.

The representation of the complexity of violence is central to Sheikh. She questions the reason what makes Kashmir open to violence. Why is there such violence in a such beautiful region? In Nilima Sheikh’s work, beauty is vulnerability, it is an invitation for possession (2013: 157). In such context, Sheikh uses geometric patterns as a reference to beauty. She uses them depicting rivers, on the buildings and on human figure’s clothes. They represent the cultural heritage of Kashmir which is now getting destroyed.

A woman who has ornamental hair sits at the beginning of ornamented river and prays. The geometry symbols the divine aspect of Kashmir. They are what makes the Kashmir so wanted and so violent at the same time. The ornamented things symbolize the cultural and natural richness of the region. Paradoxically they are what makes Kashmir a region of conflict who wanted to be conquered.

The question of how to represent violence occupied feminists since 1980s. The violence in Kashmir’s representation is problematic similar to the non-Western and/or Muslim women’s relation with violence. They are both oversimplified. It is

not a coincidence that Kashmir was once a paradise and deeply invested in Lal Ded's poetry.

3.5. CANAN: Exemplary

Hell is a central theme in CANAN's video-animation *Exemplary* (2009) as opposed to Hamra Abbas and Nilima Sheikh's paradise. In Turkey, CANAN (b. 1970, Istanbul, Turkey) is a significant figure, known with her feminist practice and her controversial engagement with miniature. The video titled *Exemplary* (fig. 3.5.) that is on display, is a story centered on the incredibly beautiful daughter of a poor family living in southeast Anatolia. *Exemplary* is shaped around personal narratives which CANAN heard from her close surrounding. The video looks at Turkey's recent history, with both conceptual and visual critique of the modernization process. Through the life of the main protagonist, the narrative problematizes the oppressive nature of the institutions of marriage and family, the political and religious instrumentalization of the female body and the implementation of the notion of female beauty as a topos of orientalisation and consumerist exploitation. The video uses abundant visual vocabulary that resembles classical Ottoman miniature illuminations and calligraphy, many of them adapted from their original forms and combined with collaged fragments.⁶

The theme of beauty and the consuming gaze in Sheikh's work reoccurs in CANAN's video. CANAN implies that female beauty is the main area of orientalist forces. The video which adapts the format of "The Thousand and One Nights" to tell the story of "transformation of the women's body into a political and religious merchandise" (Höller, 2014: 34) through her female protagonist Fadike.

⁶ http://11b.iksv.org/sanaticilar_en.asp?sid=61



Figure 3.5. CANAN, Exemplary, 2009, video animation, 27 minutes 30 seconds

In the story, Fadike's mother constantly informs her for her transformation from tradition to modernity as she moves to city from the little Eastern village of Turkey. The mother always gives her advice, tells her how to dress, how to talk and who to marry. In the end the story comes full circle as Fadike finds herself arranging the marriage of her own daughters. This full circle symbolizes the gender formation in the phallogentric discourse and the phallogentric style of narration.

Whenever the mother appears in the video we see geometric patterns at the background. CANAN correlates ornamentation with the dominant mother figure who forms Fadike's subjectivity (fig. 3.6). Wendy Shaw (2019) argues that geometry in Islamic art is a mimetic practice. CANAN uses geometry's mimetic feature to point out to the mimetic repetition of gender that is based on the phallogentric codes.

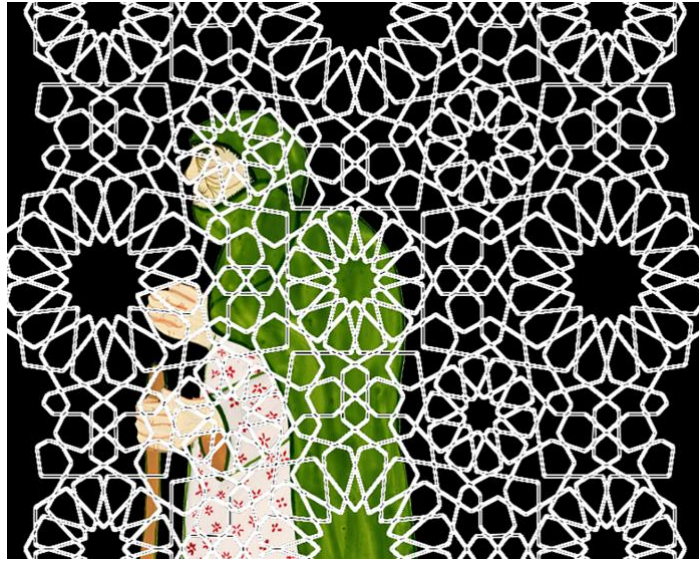


Figure 3.6. CANAN, Exemplary, 2009, video animation, 27 minutes 30 seconds

Hande Ögüt finds CANAN “close to the second-generation feminist women artists who deal with how the woman is represented and how to transform the woman into an active subject by removing her from the position as the watcher-watched” (Ögüt, 2014: 57). CANAN critiques the way patriarchy pits women against one another and builds opposite poles. The art of this period, frequently used feminist strategies are *mimesis* and appropriation. Ögüt writes:

Mimesis is producing a parody discourse to reconstitute womanhood through alienation for the purpose of deconstructing the masculine discourse. Luce Irigaray’s contribution to feminist critique, the concept of mimesis, on the one hand emulates patriarchal discourse and transgress its logic onto the other. The feminine role should be deliberately undertaken. This in turn corresponds to restraining the form of sub-alteration by turning it into an affirmation. And as a postmodern art tactic or an individual art shaped in the early ‘80s, appropriation is virtually a challenge to modernist, Western values (61).

The tradition-modern opposition is part of the mimetic phallogentric structure. CANAN dwells into the rupture between the old and new caused by the modernist,

Western-oriented ideology. Fadike gets stuck in this dilemma as she tries to adjust to the urban-modern life while preserving old customs.

In the video, Hell has a particular narrative function (Höller, 2014: 33) which is related to the mother figure. After a certain point, Fadike starts to see elements from hell in her dreams whenever she does something that she thinks her mother wouldn't approve. Instead of the direct control of her mother she starts to control herself. CANAN establishes the conceptual framework and feminist basis of her art on Foucault, specifically on the concepts of bio-politics and the panopticon metaphor. In CANAN's video, the mother reverberates the panopticon metaphor as Fadike starts to think that she is constantly being monitored even if her mother isn't really there. Her mother becomes part of her subjectivity. This leads Fadike to take on "the reactionary role that religiously infested patriarchy had already assigned to her mother."

In CANAN's video the predetermined narrative shapes the subject: Fadike's life. What puts Fadike in the same path with her mother is this structure of narrative shaped by the tradition/modern dynamic. Fadike's life is an example of the subjective consequence of male dominance.

While CANAN criticizes the mimetic repetition, she uses it in a strategic way to subvert the predefined plot. CANAN use the mimesis by engaging geometric patterns of miniature painting to make a difference through conscious repetition. It is an extreme affirmation of the mimesis to deconstruct the masculine discourse. This affirmation underlines the sexual difference and highlights the parodic quality of gender as well as the parodic quality of modern and religious women figure. Additionally, CANAN embodies the 18th century erotic Ottoman miniature paintings that is part of her mimetic strategy. It is a parody of the Orientalist gaze who constructs the womanhood. In such a way, she emphasizes the sexual difference as Braidotti suggests to develop a female subjectivity outside of the Oedipal narrative.

CANAN's narrative of Fadike who ends up as her mother is the result of Oedipal plot and it is essential for women to break free from this narrative (Braidotti, 1993: 2) Braidotti explains: "This Oedipal structure organizes the meaning of a text as a process of identification of the practitioner -whether male or female- with the achievement of subjectivity that, active and empowered, is defined as masculine" (2). This is a subjectivity based on male, white and Eurocentric ideal. Fadike's mother (even if she is a female) is the result of this structure. CANAN uses ornamentation to alienate herself and us from the mother, the symbol of the Oedipal desire. This alienation is a way to use the mimesis in a subversive way. The video *Exemplary* demonstrates how two notions who seems opposite such as tradition/religion and modern/secularism, Hell/Paradise categorize the female body in same way. Without the change of structure, the female subject finds herself in the same place whether secular or religious, in hell or in paradise. In either way she is without agency.

Unlike the European tradition of perspective, there is no theorization of the geometric structure as a mimetic device (Shaw, 2019: 268). Therefore, as CANAN uses the ornamentation as a mimetic device to highlight the mimesis of gender she takes the female subject out of the Western male discourse. She adds another tool to the mimesis strategy, she creates a new cultural concept which leads to the formation of a new female subjectivity. Therefore, CANAN's video *Exemplary* is an example of Helene Cixous' "female writing" as she disrupts the Oedipal plot. In such a way, CANAN opens up a space for a feminine text which is analogous with the biographic narration of a women's life.

CANAN writes with her body perhaps not in the literal sense but through using miniature painting's and video's textual aspects. Fadike couldn't tear away from superegoized structure (her mother), however it opens up a space for viewers to escape from their predefined story and write their own.

3.6. Hayv Kahraman: How Iraqi Are You?

Just like CANAN, Hayv Kahraman leads the discussions on narrative, Orientalist desire, and female agency. Hayv Kahraman subverts a 12th century miniature painting's narrative by using her own life story as a refugee. Hayv Kahraman uses miniature painting to recall personal memories of her upbringing in Iraq and to learn to write Arabic again. Modeled after Arabic illuminated manuscripts, the series *How Iraqi Are You?* (2014-16) draws specific inspiration from *Maqamat al Hariri*, a canonical 12th century text describing the everyday life of Iraqis of the time. Hayv Kahraman changes the manuscript's original texts with her own stories, and uses photographs of herself as the models for all the subjects depicted. She asks "What makes someone an Iraqi, woman, refugee or Swedish?" In her works memories are fragmented and identities are in flux. Hayv Kahraman demonstrates her the large-scale oil on linen painting entitled *Nabog* (2014) in Shirin.

Kahraman (b.1981, Baghdad, Iraq) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her visual language is the product of her experience as an Iraqi refugee. Kahraman witnessed events of the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf War firsthand when she was a child. At the age of 11, she and her family fled from Iraq using fake passports and settled as refugees in Sweden. These early experiences of war and living as a displaced minority in a small and insular community have been influential to the artist's work. Then, from Sweden, Kahraman moved to Florence to study graphic design at the Accademia d'Arte e Design for four years—a period that exposed her to the dominant Western European Renaissance aesthetic. This was followed by another radical change in 2006: moving to a small town in the United States outside of Phoenix, Arizona, before she eventually settled in California. She engages with miniature aesthetics for a long time as she produces her iconic female figure which we encounter in her most works. However, her series *How Iraqi Are You* is inspired from a particular illuminated manuscript *Maqamat al Hariri* dated 1237. Artist changed the male figures with the female ones to subvert the male narrative to a

female one. As I've been discussing the miniature painting is a male dominated field where women don't have the agency to shape the narrative.

However, Kahraman interferes by changing the images of men with the image of her body. To this extent, she creates her own narrative against the male dominated field of art history. This female figure is a response to colonial Eurocentric standards of beauty with her thick and dark eyebrows, black hair and ironic white pale skin. They are not just rendered from Persian miniature paintings but also from Renaissance paintings, Japanese illustrations and books. She went on to study art in Italy before settling in USA and the figure, "She", emerged when Kahraman was a student in Florence. Her pale skin, her "contrapposto" is a symbol of a colonized body. It is an expression of artist's own view herself as an assimilated woman. The figure is an example of a subject who embodied the ideal of European art history. The contradictions she lived as an immigrant woman are crystallized in this female figure.

Kahraman, uses geometric patterns on the clothes of her figures. Her figures imitate the European ideal body figure while her clothes echo her own cultural background. In her Jameel Art Prize YouTube video, Hayv Kahraman explains that she designs all the paintings before starting them, except the patterns on the outfits which she does intuitively. In such manner, I suggest that they coincide with Cixous' idea of the female writing who escapes from the body. The geometric patterns symbolize the linguistically inexpressible, trauma, coloniality, physical and emotional pain are expressed through the body. These patterns symbolized the sensuousness and everyday bodily desire in opposition to the European perspective which is the symbol of rational subject.

Hayv Kahraman's work confirms that gender is inseparable from race. A reformulation and transformation of dominant discourses of feminism and nationalism can spark a change in the discourses of art and politics. As Griselda Pollock wrote: "The Orientalist siting of sexuality, where ethnicity and racial,

cultural and geographical othering provided the necessary conditions for the representation of European male heterosexual fantasies about female sexuality because female sexuality was being imagined through what social and economic colonization and exploitation had made it possible to imagine white people could do to other, non-Western people. The legacy of colonialism is that, while race and sex have independent determinations, they are perpetually part of a mixed economy in which one is often the scene or sign of the other.” (1999: 286)

Art history has its own paradigms with the concepts it produced in the axes of Western art. They have been used for such a long time that they’ve become “natural criteria”. They are also a measure for the assimilation of those designated others (Shaw, 2019: 10). Kahraman presents how assimilation of subject is related with aesthetic paradigms. She erased her own culture and got hostile towards her body. The Eurocentric art history demonstrates white ideal female bodies in opposition to the non-Western ones. Or they could exist as European male’s fantasies in an Orientalist discourse. The representation of women in European perspective centric oil paintings render non-Western women in an anxiety of identity.

Kahraman wrote a text titled *Collective Performance: Gendering Memories of Iraq* to Third Text’s March Issue (2015) which resonates with Pollock’s words. An excerpt from Kahraman’s text:

“Am I a commodity? Are my paintings and figures a commodity? I pose in the nude and photograph my body to use as outlines for paintings. My figures then are visual transitions of my own body. The figures are rendered to fit the occidental pleasures. White flesh. Transparent flesh. Posing in compositions directly taken from the renaissance. Conforming to what they think is ideal. Neglecting everything else. Colonizing my own body to then be displayed gracefully in my rectangular panels. Carnal and visceral palpability. I provide for you in

my rectangles. I know you like it. That's why I paint it. To catch your gaze. To activate your gaze. I want you to buy me so you can look at me all day long. I'm your little oriental pussycat. You can pet me if you like."

Kahraman frequently explores the non-White, immigrant woman and as well as exploring migrant consciousness, collective memory, and gender politics. Through *Nabog* (fig. 3.7), she draws attention to the once suppressed differences of herself to blend into the European society and also to the European-US centric male art history.

Kahraman engages the gaze with the narrative model she subverted from the miniature painting and she sings *Nabog* song from her memory. *Nabog* refers to Kahraman's memory of a song which she sings when she was a child in school about a Nabog tree in their garden in Baghdad: "I have a Nabog fruit, you have a Nabog fruit. I give you from my Nabog fruit, you give me from your Nabog fruit. If my Nabog fruit is tastier, I give you from my Nabog fruit. If your Nabog fruit is tastier, you give me from your Nabog fruit.". Once she couldn't even sing it as she forgot Arabic.

Shaw argues that "memorization enhanced the cultural power of poetry". For Kahraman, for some time, Arabic was just a visual as she didn't understand it and forgot it as she tried to perfect her Swedish for a very long time. Her eyes got used to the Latin alphabet instead of Arabic. Therefore, writing a poetry in her mother tongue is a subversive act. In the process of production of this series she learnt Arabic. As Cixous said "she must urgently learn to speak".



Figure 3.7. Hayv Kahraman, Nabog, 2014, oil on linen, 115 x 55 x 2 inches (each panel) diptych overall: 115 x 110 x 2 inches, © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, VELMETTER, Los Angeles, and The Third Line, Dubai.

The terms of assimilation subordinate her racial difference and denies her ties with her motherland and language. Creating the female figure by engaging with miniature aesthetics the artist draws attention to the once suppressed differences of herself to blend into the European society and also to the European-US centric male art history. Kahraman's work Nabog demonstrates how an aesthetic paradigm can branch out and even effect one's own mother language. Remembering the song Nabog, that shares the same structure, the rhythm with poetry, resonates with remembering her mother language, her motherland and herself. She creates her own narrative outside the assimilative structure which is symbolized by Renaissance painting and Swedish.

Engagement with language can create new concepts in the visual field. It can also expand the understanding of writing. Reading, writing and hearing can blend together just as it is in Hayv Kahraman's work. This new approach to pre-modern aesthetic can inform the new subject which is multifocal and which can overcome the anxiety of identity.

3.7. Shahzia Sikander: Parallax

Like Hayv Kahraman, Shahzia Sikander engages with Arabic and affiliate the logic of poetry. One of the leading representatives of contemporary miniature art, Shahzia Sikander uses classical Pakistani–Hindu miniatures as her departure point to level her current historical criticism. Shahzia Sikander's work in *Shirin* exhibition, *Parallax* (2013), is a three-way installation made up of hundreds of different digital animations (fig. 3.8). The work opens with an emphasis on the geostrategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz, through which forty percent of Middle Eastern oil is shipped, and continues with the concepts of conflict and control as the key themes of a period reaching from the modern to the postcolonial era. The abstract, figurative, and textual flow that follows the animation adds complexity to the narrative. Six different poems have been written and read in Arabic for this work, embracing a variety that spans from regional/historical events to human nature. Sikander maintains that ethnic and racial identities are heterogeneous, not homogeneous, and that specifications like Arab or Persian, differences in cultural, lingual, and religious practices, and their heterogeneous and complex nature cover this up. For the artist, language is a convenient point of entry: the language of creating images, the language of poetry, the language of words, colors, music. The artist went on road trip and traversed the Gulf from one end to the other. This trip gave her a new perspective. The flow between time, places, the real and the imaginary is reproduced in the structure of the work, which establishes the balance between flows on different planes.

For Shahzia Sikander Arabic is part of a ritualistic engagement used during the recitation of the Quran. Not knowing the language but hearing it constantly created yet another parallax of sorts for Sikander. The language gains a sensory aspect and can be experienced deeply. It communicates with its rhythmic character like a song or poetry. Shahzia Sikander explains her relationship with Arabic in an exhibition catalogue: “for me the presence of Arabic in the music has a power that lies in my childhood and still-conflicted adult experience of the ritual of learning to recite the Quran without understanding the meaning. While this kind of relationship to language is a handicap to really learning it, without grasping meaning I became familiar with the lyricism, melodiousness, and hypnotic power of the language’s sound. The call to prayer in Arabic is often made by someone with a powerful voice. Written Arabic has a visually arresting structure, with methodical and sophisticated geometric underpinnings closely related to architecture. It is in this sense that *Parallax* is an emotional map that envelops its viewer through sound and color into a landscape of history, simultaneously aerial and internal, mysterious and present.” (Schlegel, 2018: 61).

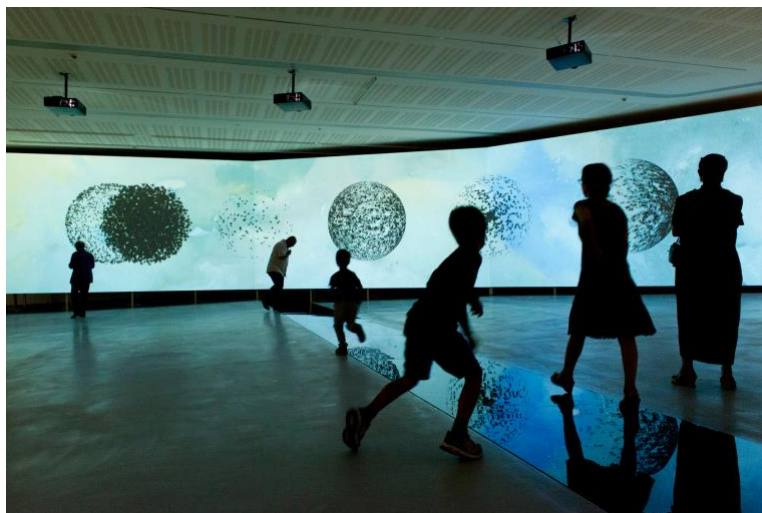


Figure 3.8. Shahzia Sikander, *Parallax*, 2013, Digital animation with, sound, 15’26’’, Music by Du Yun, Courtesy of the Artist and Sean Kelly, New York, Installation view: MAXXI, 2016

In *Parallax*, poetry is a geometry. There are six poems that are produced by local poets in Sharjah and recited in Arabic. According to Sikander, poetry is a more abstract way of addressing larger themes that allows for an open-endedness, a plurality of interpretations and multiplicity of meanings (2018: 55)

Parallax's soundtrack is composed by Du Yun and Shahzia Sikander draws parallels with Du Yun's and her practice as they are both "polyrhythmic and polytextual" that coincides with her employment of layers of color and varying opacities to craft depth in her visual compositions. In such manner, Shahzia Sikander underpins the polyrhythmic and polytextual aesthetic manifestations of miniature painting as well as the alternative ways to create a depth even if it is not visual.

Parallax captures very well the sound and visual dynamic that miniature aesthetics contain. In Sikander's words; "Parallax is visually symphonic." (56). Such as Arabic, when language gets sonorous and rhythmic it communicates through body, through other senses than the eye. Therefore, it is a way to resist the "eye focused" Western art paradigms. The melody creates an aspect of relatability to a foreigner. It symbolizes a way to communicate with Other. Wendy Shaw argues that "to practice art history out of perspective necessitates a profound reorganization of how we situate knowledge of the Other" (2019: 331). *Parallax* engages with miniature's out of perspective aesthetic and use it to form an alternative way to reach to the knowledge of the Other. Through rhythm (geometric or sonorous) one can understand the other through affective senses.

Shahzia Sikander mentions the female feminist poet Hamsa Younes' poem:

[poem] jumps between the metaphorical fingertips of time, bouncing between minutes and seconds. These leaps and dance steps are a means of navigating the sea of human emotion. She finally lands on a tune that resonates with her soul. Now, rather than jumping, she can fly, soaring

until the heights make her weary. The poem serves a cathartic function: the strong energy of emotions takes over the poet's physical being, leaving her out-of-body experience a witness to extreme passion and emotional independence. (56)

I want to underline the “fly” as it has an important place in Shahzia Sikander's works and also in Helene Cixous' writings. Cixous suggests that flying is a women's gesture -flying in language and making it fly (1976: 887). In *Parallax*, Shahzia Sikander's famous figure; gopi hairs (Sikander isolates the hairs of gopis, the devotees of the Hindu God Krishna, in miniature paintings) flies in her most video works. She isolates hairs from the gopis and the dislocated figures turn into abstract forms and shapes geometric patterns. They resemble to birds on flight which reminds Cixous' words: “women take after birds” (887).

These flying birds' movements are rhythmic as well. Shahzia Sikander's work highlights miniature aesthetics' features so well. The relation between geometry, poetry and visual gets visible in *Parallax*.

Furthermore, as Younes writes: “[poem] jumps between the metaphorical fingertips of time, bouncing between minutes and seconds” poetry's affective and rhythmic character meets with miniature's anachronism it enables the reconstruction of women's time.

Miniature aesthetics provide many tools for contemporary artists to engage. In my exhibition I've discussed how miniature aesthetics served women artists to create female subjectivities. Besides miniature painting's multifocality, its poetic and geometric dimension opened up new possibilities for a more inclusive art production.

I couldn't exactly discuss how to install them as I imagine a non-existing structure. However, the installation would possibly follow this narration. Their relation with

each other will create a dialogue that will bring to each one of the works a theoretical potential in the foreground. I imagined an architecture with a courtyard but it will not be wise to install the works on the courtyard because of the possibility of rain. As I've mentioned the courtyard will be a public place for visitors to hang out, read and discuss. The works will be around the courtyard and at other parts of the construction. I hope the exhibition would surprise the visitors and make them think new ways of living. And, learn more about miniature painting.

CONCLUSION

Miniature painting is an aesthetic way of thinking that can create alternative subjectivities in a global world. It opens up a space for us to see, hear and touch free from the boundaries of perspective. As Shaw writes: “If abandoning perspective forces us to abandon our bodies, abandoning perspective takes us to bed, to the rejected realms of woman, body, sleep, dreams, music, sex, desire.” (2019: 333). In such manner, contemporary miniature creates new subjects who desire and who can find pleasure in history. Multifocality, geometry and poetry create desire for thought. It is a feminist desire that has ability to change and to write alternative art histories.

This desire is what is at the center of feminist politics of pursuing alternative definitions of female subjectivity (Braidotti, 1993: 6). Braidotti’s feminism of sexual difference emphasizes the political importance of desire. For her, there cannot be lasting social change without the construction of new kinds of desiring subjects (11). Desire roots the subject into the body as it is the first location of existence and the first level of sexual difference.

However, in opposition to Braidotti’s embodied subject, as I’ve discussed earlier, the notion of perspective creates disembodied subjects since it evaluates the eye as disconnected from the body and doesn’t take other bodily aspects into consideration. Yet, the absence of perspective in miniature painting paves the way to multiple methods of seeing, not just with an eye but with the whole body. Miniature painting is a form to produce embodied knowledge in opposition to Western phallogocentric Renaissance concept of perspective. And still, miniature painting comes from imagination, memory, from one’s own perception of the external world. The *naqqash* (miniature artist) aims to paint things not as they are but in terms of their meaning. Just as in Orhan Pamuk’s novel, where a *naqqash* says, “I don’t want to be the tree itself, I want to be its meaning,” (1998: 63) the

search is for meaning. In this sense, miniature is not a direct representation of reality.

This embodied desiring subject uses multifocality as a tool of becoming. Wendy Shaw argues:

“Multifocal subjectivity does not produce identity. Rather, it functions as a tool. Like the a-centered system proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, such subjectivities function as “finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment.”. Such a system belongs to nobody and could come from any source.” (2019, 331)

In this system, just like individuals, painting, geometry and poetry are interchangeable. In Islamic arts “geometry may function as music and thereby as image. Painting may articulate commentary on text.” (332). They affect the whole body and don’t rely on the domination of visuality, but instead they are in connection with other aesthetic domains.

Moreover, the works in my hypothetical exhibition are also in communication with each other. It coincides with Ella Shohat’s term “relational approach” that she uses to address Eurocentrism and sexism (Reilly, 2018: 17). In regard to Shohat, Reilly asks “What if history was re-conceived as dialogic instead of synchronic?” (30). They offer a multivocal art history instead of a linear historical line. In such a context where time is wide, we can argue that non-Western art has significance. Reilly draws attention to Aiken’s argument: “by employing a relational approach we can present multiplicity in terms of an ongoing dialogue, or, more accurately, a polylogue” (298). This interplay of many voices can disrupt the monological, perspectivist and phallogocentric art discourse.

In my hypothetical exhibition and the biennials and documenta I've discussed in the first chapter, have the ambition of presenting many voices speaking in multitude. Their curatorial strategy is based on learning from culture and then teach from it. They are in search of telling alternate stories of difference.

In this light Griselda Pollock argues: "the cultural field may be reimagined as a space for multiple occupancy where differencing creates a productive covenant opposing the phallic logic that offers us only the prospect of safety in sameness or danger in difference, of assimilation to or exclusion from the canonized norm." (quoted in Reilly, 2018: 298). The phallogocentric and Western centric thought intersect with each other. The Western and masculinist canons of art history and contemporary art discourses refuse all minorities including sexual and racial. It is a refusal towards all the other bodies outside of the definition created according to the Renaissance perspective.

I explored this exclusion around the concept of lack and draw a parallelism with construction of femininity and miniature painting as otherness. I argued that they are both founded on lack. Moreover, there is a lack of concepts to discuss femininity and miniature theoretically in art history. Using the terms femininity and miniature are problematic as much as using East and West while knowing they are socially and historically constructed notions as it has been argued in Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*. Withal, my intention is to engage with *miniature* as if it is a contemporary concept to talk about various manifestations of lack.

Miniature painting's lack arises from the way it is defined; by its lack of perspective in comparison to Renaissance perspective. Filiz Adıgüzel Toprak problematizes the term *miniature*: "Before attempting to explore miniature painting as a form that has recently come to the fore in contemporary art, we must ask this question directly without any insinuation: How can miniature painting be defined as an art form? (2020: 61)".

I contemplate on Toprak's question by remembering Firat's writing:

Current usage of the term "miniature" stems from a historical etymological confusion. The word is derived from the classical Latin *miniat*, past participle stem of *miniare*, which means to colour or paint with vermilion; to rubricate or (in extended use) to illuminate (a manuscript) (OED). In medieval book production, red lead or vermilion was used to mark particular words in manuscripts and to illuminate capitals. As these images were of necessity small, the term came to denote small portraits, a usage probably reinforced by an association in folk etymology with the (ultimately classical Latin) *min-* root expressing smallness (as in *minor*). According to the OED, the etymologically mistaken usage of "miniature", connoting a comparison in size, appears only around 1566. I propose that this etymological overlap should be taken neither as a mere coincidence in the "evolution" of language nor a "slip of tongue" but rather should be contemplated in a historical context. The notion of miniature, as we use it today, is a relative term (2015: 157-158).

According to Firat, miniature is defined in comparison to another cultural product, it is *minature of something*. Additionally, Toprak claims:

In terms of formal characteristics, the primary source of the most widespread definition of a miniature painting is still the approach that considers the evolution of miniature painting along the axes of Western naturalistic and mimetic theories. According to this approach, as opposed to the Western painting principles of a singular viewpoint where linear/central perspective rules are applied, miniature paintings do not use perspective. (61)

They both suggest that the term miniature painting is defined according to Western painting practices. The cultural hegemony is embedded in the word *miniature*. The term carries powerful historical references, the baggage of the colonial past. Problematizing these definitions of the Western art history can create a fertile ground to reconceptualize it.

How did we include this concept, the concept of book painting, into our language and literature as *miniature*? We don't call the illustrations in medieval manuscripts miniature painting. Therefore, something separates miniature from book illustration. Is it its aesthetic characteristics or is it its relation with Islamic culture or is it the geography? Then, we should ask what is "Islamic" arts and culture? Why do we have the need to place it in a specific culture and geography? Can we draw definite borders for miniature painting's geography? What do we understand from geography? In any case, it is *miniature* of something.

These questions reveal the inseparability of the way we define miniature aesthetics and the colonial structures. Therefore, I wanted to use the term *miniature* to highlight the power structures embedded in art history. *Miniature* is a term to scrutinize how aesthetics is a shelter for cultural hierarchies. Despite the option of Ottomans' usage of two Arabic words; *naqsh* and *taswir* to describe what now we call miniature painting, I deliberately chose to engage with the European term *miniature*. The lack of a better term in Western culture coincides with my interest in lack. The *lack* in the process of defining *miniature*, miniature's definition with the lack of perspective and its similarity to our way of defining *feminine* coincides and produces a fertile ground for me to explore what miniature aesthetics is. We define miniature and femininity in comparison to Other; we define what we are in opposition to what we are not. Therefore, I am not interested in what *was* miniature aesthetics but what it can express today. What are its contemporary conceptual potentialities? What lack signifies today? A lack of perspective, phallus, progress, future, past... What miniature aesthetics signifies for me is the lacks in Western art history.

This study is an attempt to conceptualize miniature as a way to tell the stories of the ones who had to define themselves according to someone or something else. The miniature echoes an illusionary past in a land far away. For me, contemporary miniature aesthetics is a stance against this constructed past.

With this work, I tried to demonstrate different experiences of feminine through miniature and experiences of miniature through the feminine. I discussed why women artists are oriented towards this pre-modern art form. Feminist theory is familiar to the act of looking at the past, research the fragmented history and find unappreciated, unforgotten female figures, their works and their stories. Miniature is an aesthetic which is impossible to define like femininity. This impossibility to define enables to reflect on the absent narratives in art history, especially on women's.

The hiatus between male constructed notions of femininity and the experience of females are similar to the Western made art historical concepts and the miniature's aesthetics features. They don't respond to each other. However, in male/female case after recognition of the feminist standpoint "it becomes possible to widen the attention to difference to cover the differences among women and later difference within each woman that is to say, the split nature of the subject" (9). I claim that this idea of feminist standpoint can be appropriated to and from the examination of miniature aesthetics. "Contemporaneous with a political economy of European colonial dominion over the Global South, the understanding of Islamic art as 'lacking' perspective frames Islamic cultures within the broader associations of Orientalism: examined rather than examining; static rather than progressive, traditional rather than scientific, passive and feminized" (Shaw, 2019: 300). As feminist subject is involved in the patriarchy by negation, miniature painting got into the masculinist Western art discourse by lacking perspective. They are both marks of the otherness and they are both historical constructs. Braidotti writes: "The crisis of modernity makes available to feminists "the essence" of femininity as a

historical construct that needs to be worked (1993: 9)”. This constructed essence is analogous with the absence of perspective in miniature painting.

This criterion created the Orientalist gaze towards women and non-Western cultures. In such a way, desire is focused from one point to another. This constitutes the distinction between West/East and also male/female gaze. However, In *Encounters with the Ottoman Miniature* (2015) Begüm Özden Fırat suggests the “glance” as opposed to the gaze (55): “it is a mode of viewing anchored in the body, temporality, and desire”. This mode of viewing echoes miniature painting’s way of seeing: an embodied, sensuous and desiring. Later on, Fırat quotes Linda Nochlin’s suggestion about the two main ideological assumptions about power. The first one is men’s power over women, the second is the white men’s over darker races (55).

However, the multiplicity in miniature aesthetics “situates us all in a perpetual exile in the world. It thereby offers a means to welcome everybody home (Shaw, 2019: 334)”. This is the multiplicity of the glance. It “renders the unfamiliar not as foreign, but as an enriched expansion of ourselves. Multiplicity enters us not something alien but as from of nourishment through which we can approach the world anew, refreshed (334).”

Additionally, in contrast to the static gaze glance suggests a temporal look. As gaze evokes a more possessive and permanent look, glance urges a more ephemeral one. Miniature’s pictorial space encourages the glance where eyes can move freely in multiple directions. By using glance as a way of seeing we can differ from perspective’s future oriented stable gaze and create desiring female subjectivities which can not only looked at/from the future but also look at/from different times. Glance is the contemporary, temporal condition of looking which enables the multiplicity of feminine subjectivities.

The exhibitions I’ve discussed in the third chapter had the aim of establishing multiplicity. They present a selection of what is unknown to our time, to the

Western audience and to the populist politics. These exhibitions bring together artworks that resist to the “willful blindness toward issues that threaten humanity”. The works gathered different timelines, aesthetics and mediums together. They don’t respond to the visitor’s questions but they ask their own questions. This curatorial attitude is coherent with miniature aesthetics. They offer an unpredictable content, interacting different artworks to produce a new knowledge and imagine a better future. Through these exhibitions the ideas, knowledges, memories travel and stand against a unitary worldview.

As I previously quoted Groys, art can substitute the need of universal public space that where the resistance to the nationalist, isolationist and regressive politics is possible. If we imagine a new global public space it should be a place where an open-ended dialogue between cultures, times and spaces can be held.

Writing an alternative history of art in multiplicity, we should also keep history of curating “according to the social matrix which connects art with public affairs” (Lin, 2020). The curatorial practice is a part of contemporary culture. As I’ve been discussing that exhibition can be a space to imagine alternative ways of seeing, speaking, writing and living, it can help us to locate the relation between aesthetics and politics. Additionally, the curatorial is a way to produce knowledge. Today, where and when curators can construct a new and inclusive discourse for art in an age of globalization we should historicize the curating practices with the attitude we got from miniature painting. Also, we should explore curatorial modes of thinking about art. In *Curatography* (2020) Lin quotes Terry Smith: “curating seeks to encourage or enable the public visibility of works by artists either by assembling a selection of existing works for exhibition [...] so that they may be seen by disinterested audience for the first time or be seen differently by such an audience because of the ways the works are presented.”. Taking this approach of curating into account, my research aimed to show the importance of public engagement with miniature aesthetics through exhibitions. Therefore, I claim that we should develop new concepts of curating and aesthetic strategies of exhibiting art.

This thesis was also an exploration of alternative ways to think the curatorial in light of contemporary miniature. I argue that the curatorial is the proof of the inseparability of art and politics. Therefore, I used the concept “curatography” as my methodology which means the writing of curation (Lin, 2020). I interpreted this concept as writing of curation and as writing a curation.

Epilogue

In this study, I’ve imagined an immaterial exhibition entitled *Shirin*. It was an experiment where I endeavored to curate by writing. Perhaps we can say that it was a textual exhibition. Besides the envisioned exhibition *Shirin*, I’ve co-curated material exhibition with Azra Tüzünoğlu entitled *Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art* at Pera Museum, Istanbul held between August 11, 2020 - January 24, 2021.

Focusing on contemporary approaches to miniature painting, the exhibition brought together the works of 14 artists from different countries such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Azerbaijan. The exhibition suggested that the artists do not treat miniature solely as a historical object, they emphasize its theoretical potential as a contemporary art form. Using various forms such as sculpture, video, photography, and installation, they bring out miniature from books, where it has resided for centuries, give it a new dimension, and search for ways in which miniature can live in the contemporary world. The exhibition emphasized the artists’ various approaches to traditional miniature, as well as revealing the commonalities between them. *Miniature 2.0* claims that contemporary miniature goes beyond its former context in terms of form and content, and it focuses on issues such as colonialism, orientalism, economic inequality, gender, politics of identity, discrimination, social violence, compulsory migration, and representation. Curated by Azra Tüzünoğlu and me, the exhibition featured work by Hamra Abbas, Rashad Alakbarov, Halil Altındere, Dana Awartani, Fereydoun Ave, CANAN, Noor Ali

Chagani, Cansu Çakar, Hayv Kahraman, Imran Qureshi, Nilima Sheikh, Shahpour Pouyan, Shahzia Sikander and Saira Wasim.

By means of this study I had the chance to reexamine the curatorial of *Miniature 2.0*. In *Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art*'s curatorial text we indicate that our intention is to go beyond the binaries (Tüzünoğlu & Özkara, 2020: 87). However, retrospectively I think that we did not go beyond these dualities but we fell into binary. The exhibition fed from the oppositions such as East/West, tradition/contemporary, local/global, past/present. We curated and thought through binaries while we problematized them. Maybe we can say that it is a detour, a subversion. I am aware that the curatorial slipped into the pitfall of Orientalism but by befriending the contradictions and the untimely, miniature found a way to survive in 21st century. Therefore, I think the exhibition was provocative as it invited viewer to think with contradictions, with ambiguity, with in-betweenness.

Curating requires to ask many questions and self-doubt which contradicts with writing a thesis. However, this self-doubt is necessary for problematizing the capacity and incapacity of representation. The curatorial decision to choose which artist and which work to represent miniature in contemporary art is a responsibility that should be over thought and rethought. Preparing an exhibition pushed me to think theoretically about curating and write about exhibition making. Therefore, my thesis is also an exploration of my curatorial practice.

It is very hard not to notice that the art history was constructed on a white Western male subject for a former sociology student as myself. It was an instinctive act to think how could we write an inclusive art history, a history of others. I wanted to response to this patriarchal narration, to construct a counter-narrative by curating an exhibition.

Therefore, my thesis differs from an art historical one. It stands in the intersection of art history, gender studies and sociology where it finds its place in the field of

cultural studies. I hope my thesis contributes to studies of miniature aesthetics but also to contemporary art and especially, to exhibition culture.

Thinking with binaries, oppositions, lacks, comparisons can be a way to understand one's self, history, an art form, a society... Subverting, doing self-critique, problematizing every grain of cultural hegemony, constantly asking questions, especially to yourself is my academic and curatorial strategy.

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