

The artist’s role is to bear witness—to both the past and the present.
—Nilima Sheikh

Over the course of her five-decade career, Nilima Sheikh has transformed narrative painting through a distinctive visual language that engages history, memory, and contemporary experience. Originally trained as a historian, she received a master’s degree in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda (now Vadodara). Founded after India’s Independence, the school was an important center for artistic and intellectual exchange that challenged inherited cultural and pedagogical frameworks. Sheikh’s work has consistently questioned a singular narrative of modernism, drawing on diverse artistic traditions and voices and foregrounding women’s perspectives and experiences. “Discovering a feminine voice was never separate from my search for a painter’s voice,” she has remarked.

In her nonlinear and research-based art practice, Sheikh adapts an array of historical accounts, archival materials, art-historical references, and literary sources—including mythology, poetry, and folklore. As she has explained, “The task has been to interiorize and hone these other histories into the fabric of my language till their weight transforms into fluency.” Painting primarily in casein and gum temperas, Sheikh interweaves image, text, and stenciled patterning to create multilayered narratives that unfold across canvas scrolls—a traditional format she deploys to new ends. Suspended in space, these double-sided works reveal themselves gradually through the experience of moving around them, reflecting Sheikh’s connection to the South Asian tradition of storytelling as a continuous, rather than fixed form.

Since the early 2000s, Sheikh has often turned her attention to the Kashmir Valley, the culturally rich and politically complex northernmost region of the Indian subcontinent. *Fractured Skies* brings together three major bodies of work that trace Sheikh’s engagement with the region and underscore the broader themes that inform her expansive practice: violence, displacement, loss, and the enduring power of human connection across place and time.

Nilima Sheikh: Fractured Skies is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi (KNMA). The exhibition is organized by Cara Manes, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, and Roobina Karode, Artistic Director and Chief Curator, KNMA, with Elizabeth Wickham, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, and Avijna Bhattacharya, Senior Curator, KNMA.

Major support for the exhibition is provided by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

Generous funding is provided by The Young Patrons Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

The Bloomberg Connects digital experience is made possible through the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies. Scan the QR code below to explore the exhibition with audio commentary by the artist.



For related content and programs, as well as the artist’s compiled bibliography, visit moma.org/sheikh.