



Proposal: Install Shahzia's Sikander's *Witness* Sculpture near the east side/Larkin Street side of Civic Center Plaza

Timeframe: Late October 2024 – April 2024 unless extended upon mutual agreement of the parties

Approximate Cost: \$112,000 preliminary estimate from Atthowe Fine Arts which includes round trip transportation, installation/deinstallation, structural engineering, fine arts insurance, inspections by conservators upon arrival and departure, signage, rental of steel plates, security during high-capacity Civic Center events.

Necessary Approvals: Arts Commission and Recreation and Park Department. Please note that installation location has already been approved by the Recreation and Park Department.

Loaned by: Sean Kelly Gallery, New York City

Background: Artist Shahzia Sikander's work deals with the theme of women and justice. Sikander is renowned for creating work that transforms and updates the tradition of Indo-Persian miniature painting. This commission, entitled *Witness* (2023), is her first major outdoor work. It features a towering skirted female figure, titled *Witness* (2023) that is 18' x 13' x 13' weighing 2,500 pounds. The golden female figure is dressed in a steel hoop skirt

with mosaic detail. The figure's appendages suggest tree roots, something the artist has likened to the "self-rootedness of the female form." Sikander states that "it can carry its roots wherever it goes." The figure's hair is braided to resemble two ram's horns, identified in many traditions as symbols of strength. The mosaic is calligraphic, mapping the surface with the word "havah" in Arabic.

Over centuries, throughout cultures, in literature, paintings, sculptures, and monuments, Justice has been rendered in the form of a woman, often holding scales, to symbolize the balance of power. Paradoxically, historically, the female figure is often blindfolded to indicate impartiality, her concealed eyes preventing clear-sightedness, eclipsing the lawgiver's vision. In Sikander's sculpture, the allegorical figure has her eyes wide open, wearing a decorative jabot at the neckline, referring to the lace collar popularized by the United States Supreme Court associate justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the feminization of the black judicial robes traditionally worn by male justices of the court.

In *Witness*, a steel hoop skirt with mosaic detail adorns a golden female. The skirt form is inspired by the historic courtroom's stained-glass ceiling dome with its leaded lines that resemble the longitudinal and latitudinal lines on a globe, a proclamation of the figure's authority in the world. Her appendages suggest tree roots, something the artist has likened to the "self-rootedness of the female form." Sikander states that "it can carry its roots wherever it goes." The figure's hair is braided to resemble two ram's horns, identified in many traditions as symbols of strength. The mosaic is calligraphic, mapping the surface with the word "havah" in Arabic, meaning 'air' or 'atmosphere' in Urdu and 'Eve' in Arabic and Hebrew.