

Ela Shah's Art Journey



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Jab Tak Hai Card (As Long as I Have the Card), 2013 Gold Leaf and Mixed Media on Wood 60" x 55" x 1.5", Artist Collection A "Desi" girl

I was born in Bombay, India and hold a Master's degree in Arts from both India and the United States. Although I am an American citizen, I have been able to preserve my Indian heritage and incorporate elements of it into my artwork, blending them with Western influences. I work primarily in digital media and installations, while sculptures and paintings remain integral to my practice. My multi layered artwork addresses women's issues and explores the conflicts between the spiritual and material worlds. The works are spiritual, yet the notion of religiosity they evoke is universal rather than specific. They also depict women's hopes, fears, pleasures, and pains.

I have held numerous solo exhibitions in India and America. My work has been showcased in countless group exhibitions in the United States and abroad, at prestigious galleries and museums such as the Museum of Modern Arts in New Delhi, Hunterdon Museum, Newark Museum, William Benton Museum, and others across the country. I also served as the chairperson for the National Association of Women Artists in New York. My work was selected for inclusion on the Smithsonian Museum of Asian Pacific American Center's website. My artworks are part of various collections, including the N.J. State Museum, Montclair Museum, Jersey City Museum, Hunterdon Museum of Art, Air India, the Indian Embassy, and several other public spaces and private collections.

I have received numerous awards and fellowships, including two grants from the N.J. State Council on the Arts for sculptures and paintings, as well as support from the Dodge Foundation and the N.J. Innovative Printmaking Fellowship at Rutgers University. Additionally, I have received two awards from the National Association of Women Artists in New York: the Amelia Peabody Memorial Award and the Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation Award.

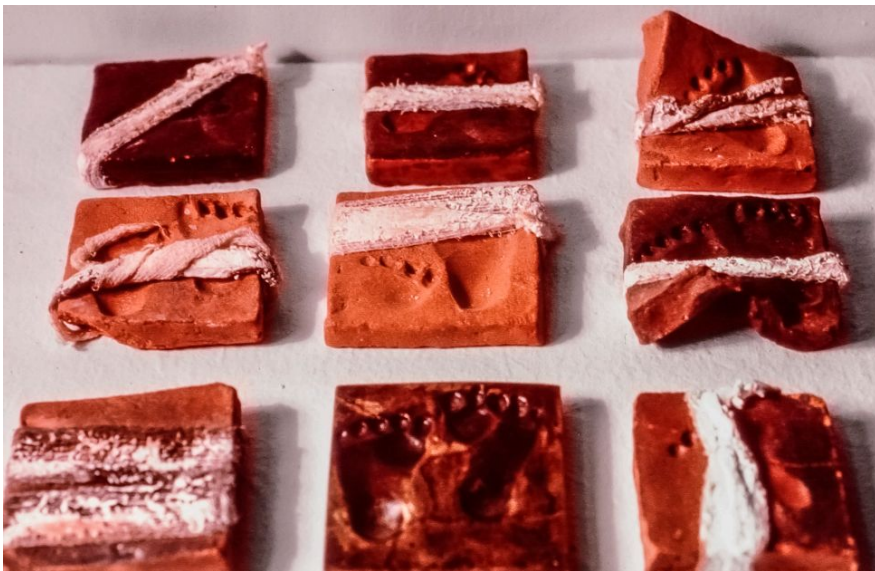
Most of my work, dealing with issues of faith, is about search and survival, both personal and political. I focus on the themes of feminism and social issues in the South Asian and East Asian diaspora in the United States. I often question the elusive nature of faith in my sculptures and paintings. The work is spiritual, but the notion of religiosity is universal rather than specific in nature.

The large architectural structures are structures of faith for me; faith in oneself, humankind and divine power. At times Indian gods and goddesses go hand in hand with American pop culture icons such as Big Bird, Super Woman and Spider Man, because they both symbolise hope and justice. Future generations will hopefully view them as a representation of our contemporary mythology. Although the sculptures appear comical or humorous at first sight, they also address religious, political and cultural issues created by multiculturalism in our globalised society.

The wall works and hanging mobiles depict woman's hopes, fears, pains, and confusions as well. They address their plight in modern America; including the struggle to balance their family life and career goals. Women are paired with Indian goddesses who can perform many impossible tasks.

My work also contains a multitude of symbols, including ladders, puzzles and collapsing towers. After my daughter was bitten by a cobra, the image of a snake also appears in my work every now and then which symbolise the power of healing. Sometimes I would have the urge to burn my work. These burnt images are symbolic of purification and transformation and remind me of Shiva, the Hindu God who is both creator and destroyer.

As an immigrant, I grapple with the fear of losing my culture and traditions. This conflict between holding on and letting go deeply informs my art, reflecting the dualities of belonging and alienation, preservation and evolution. I search myself through art and it helps me survive and have faith in this confused and often contradictory world.



Unborn Sculptures. 1978 Burnt Clay, Cotton Gauze and Bronze 24" x 30" (Dimensions Vary), Artist Collection This work was done in the memory of my first child who was 1 year old and passed away



Pagla, 1978 Bronze 4" x 4", Artist Collection

Earlier Paintings



Warrior, Circa 1969 Opaque Watercolor on Paper 18" x 24", Artist Collection A warrior taking blessings.



Swayamvara (from Vedic literature, choosing a marriage partner), 1969 Tempera, Gouache, and Mixed Media on Board 20" x 24", Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Avanti Shroff A princess with a garland in her hands chooses her groom in a ceremony.



Yatra, 2006, Acrylic and Silkscreen on Canvas 48"x 36", Artist Collection

Ram Rakhe Ane Kon Chakhe? (Who can Touch You if God is Taking Care of You?), 2018 Acrylic on Canvas 36"x 48", Artist Collection



Bronze sculptures



Tired of Routine, 1986 Mixed Media
19" x 16" x 14" Artist Collection



Tired Rocking, 1982 Bronze 5" x 6"
x 3" Artist collection



Working Mom 1, 1981 Bronze and
Iron Rod 26" x 10" x 9", Artist
Collection

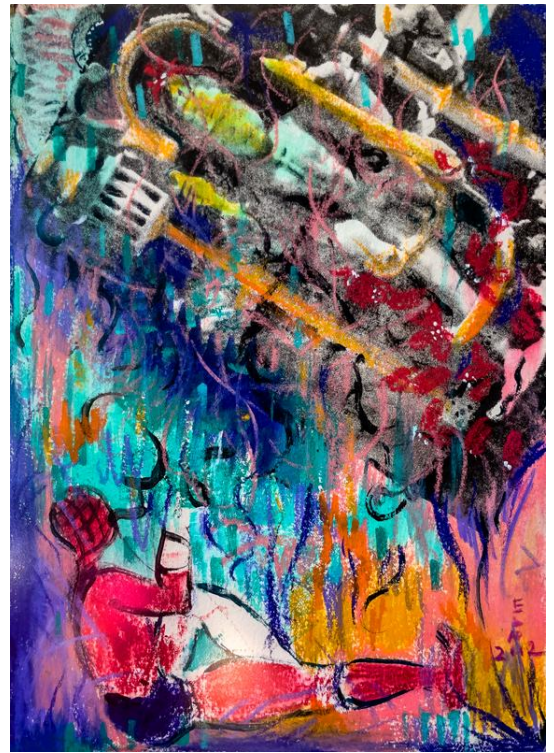


Human Bondage, 1983 Bronze,
Steel Rod 22" x 10" x 10", Artist
Collection

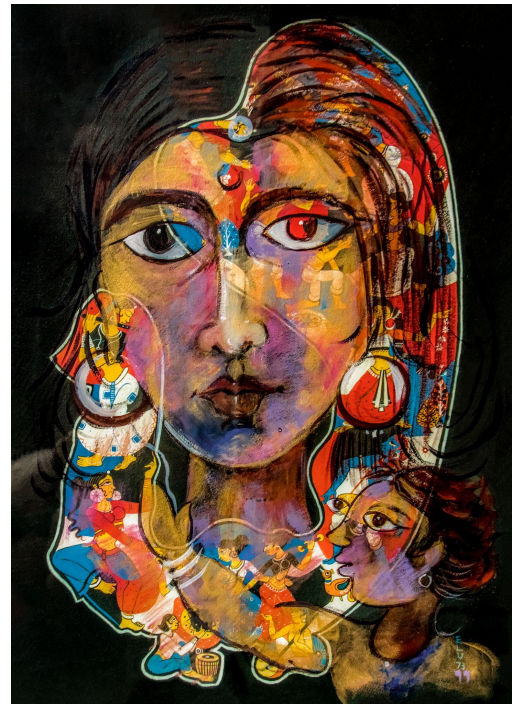
Works on paper



Cradle of Faith, 1995 Paper Pulp Print with Natural Dye 60" x 18", Private Collection

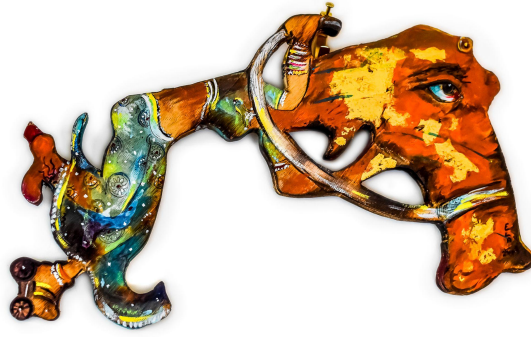


Silent Prayer, 2002 Silk Screen and Mixed Media on Paper 24" x 18", Artist Collection



Colors of Ma, 1999 Mixed Media on Print 20" x 14", Artist Collection

Wood Cuts



Horsey Horsey



At the Click of a Mouse, 2003
Gold Leaf and Mixed Media on
Burnt Wood 48" x 25" x 1", Artist
Collection



Faith in Fate, 1990 Silver Leaf
Media on Wood 11" x 10" x 1/2",
Collection



Watch Out Umrica, 2003
Silver Leaf and Mixed Media
on Burnt Wood 48"x 20"x 1",
Artist Collection



Welcome, 2001 Gold Leaf, Paint on Burnt
Wood 48"x 38"x Artist Collection

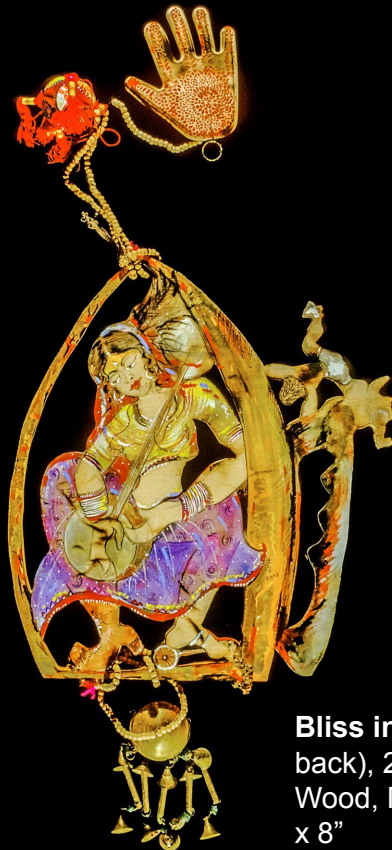
Mobiles



Row, Row the Pan..., 2004, (front and back) Gold Leaf, Mixed Media and Burnt Wood 30" x 16" x 8"



Heaven and Hell (detail), Gold Leaf, Paint, Wood, Mixed Media, 36" x 18" x 6"



Bliss in an Iron (front and back), 2003 Gold Leaf, Paint, Wood, Mixed Media 22" x 18" x 8"



Power of Faith, 1998 Wood and Paper Mache Idols 19" x 20" x 8", Artist Collection



Farewell, 2022, Mixed Media, Size Varies, <https://vimeo.com/762096773>



Curious Cow, 2000 Wood, Clay and Rope 20" x 18" x 8", Artist Collection



Power of Myth 1, 2002 Mixed Media and Paint on Burnt Wood 84" x 32" x 10", Artist Collection



Swan Rescue Van, 2022, 90' X 40" X 30", Gold leaf and paint on burnt wood, <https://vimeo.com/762096006>

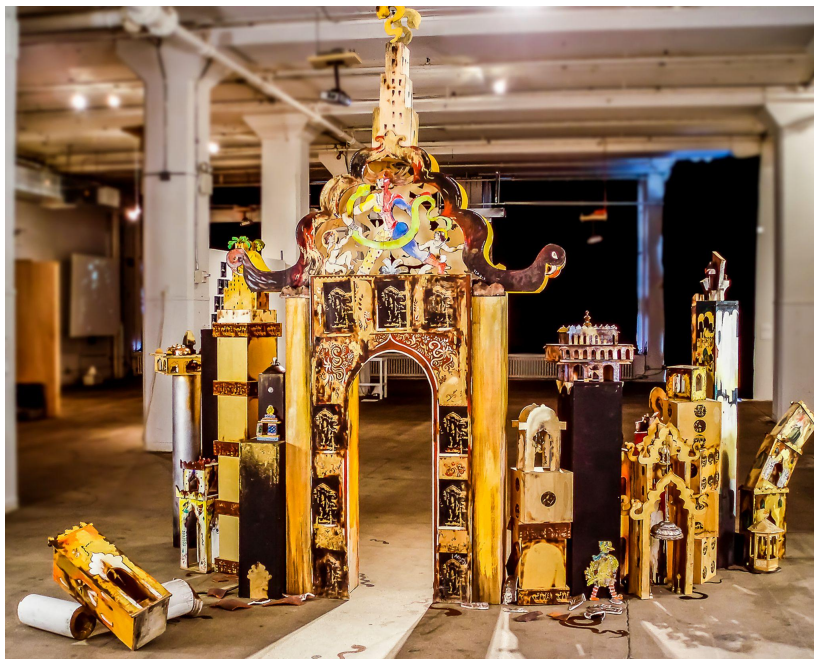
Installations



Leaning Tower of Faith, 1998
Mixed Media, (Installation view) 12'
x 12' x 18', Montclair Museum, NJ



Destination, 1992, Brass Idol,
Gold Leaf and Paint on Burnt
Wood, 90" x 18" x 13", Artist
Collection

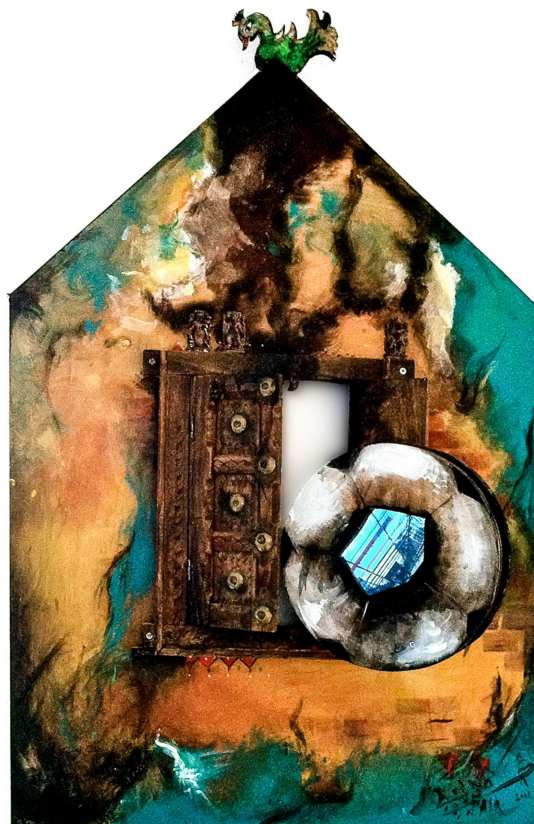


Pilgrimage (installation: front view), Collaboration with Asha Ganpat,
Exit Art Gallery, NY, Mixed Media on Wood, Found Objects, 120" x
150" x 200", (dimensions vary), Artist Collection

Sculptures Embedded with Videos



Fire Balls

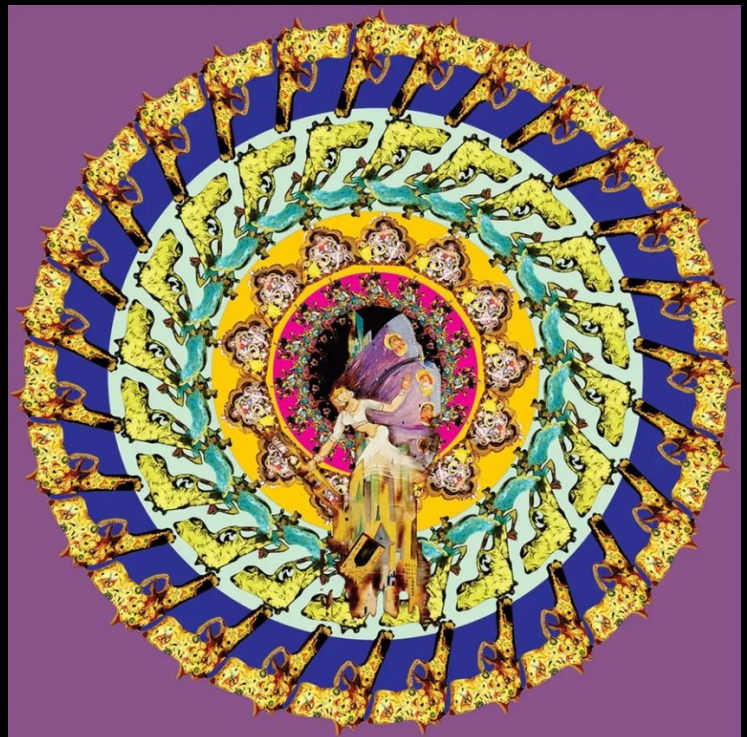


Coming to America

Digital Images



[Bobdi Ma](#)



[Hope Fairy](#)