

Long, Winding Journeys

Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition

Katonah Museum of Art



Hassan Massoudy, *untitled* ("O friend, don't go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you." –Kabir, 16th c.), 2005, ink and pigment on paper, 29 x 21 in. © Sundaram Tagore Gallery and the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York.

Long, Winding Journeys: Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition presents a focused look at a group of thirty artists of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent who engage the diverse forms of Islamic visual tradition. The works draw from forms—including calligraphy, architecture, miniature painting, textiles, and geometric patterning—that have long occupied a defining position in historical Islamic art. The exhibition seeks to answer a foundational question: in an age of instantaneous global visual exchange, in which technology exerts a powerful influence on artistic practice, why do these artists turn to forms that are centuries, even a millennium, old? Is it merely that this art history is their heritage? *Long, Winding Journeys* argues for a more complex motivation: these artists have chosen a distinct history of art as a lens through which to view contemporary experience. In engaging past modes of representation, they can explore the intersection of visual tradition and other facets of contemporary life that carry their own history. Like visual tradition, the rich meaning and complex strictures of religious and cultural customs, too, form a kind of inheritance. Upheaval and violent conflict in the Middle East and South Asia are often rooted in deeply entrenched political dynamics. Gender and diaspora have long shaped feelings of identity and belonging. Thus, by engaging the Islamic visual tradition, their work collectively argues that religion, politics, and culture, do not exist in a vacuum. With over fifty works in every media, *Long, Winding Journeys* demonstrates how artistic forms such as miniature painting, geometric patterning, architecture, textiles, and calligraphy offer artists a malleable vocabulary with which to parse the relationship between past and present.

A Question of Terms

A fundamental aspect of this framework is the language used to define it. The term "Islamic," as applied to art, is an imperfect label. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's

popular *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* describes Islamic art as "the art created specifically in the service of the Muslim faith," as well as "the art and architecture historically produced in the lands ruled by Muslims, produced for Muslim patrons, or created by Muslim artists."¹ The Met locates Islamic art as ranging "from the 7th to the 19th century [...] from as far westward as Spain and Morocco and as far eastward as Central Asia and India."² Such definitions suggest that, while some works of art dubbed Islamic were made for religious purposes, many others with similar stylistic characteristics served in a secular context.

Definitions of the label incorporate an improbably wide swath of time, place, and function, collapsing a diverse array of historical mediums, genres, and subjects into a narrow term. From this, a specific set of artistic forms—such as calligraphy, miniature painting, and mosque architecture, among others—have often been identified as the most historically significant.³ However, a more critical look reveals that Islamic art is not, as the label might suggest, a singular, monolithic category. Rather, it is a complexity of forms that shifted continually as they moved through time and space.⁴ The imperfections of the term "Islamic art" are contradictory: it is at once too big and too small, too vague and too specific. This paradox makes the term particularly inadequate as a descriptor in dialogues around contemporary art.

In contrast to "Islamic art," the term "Islamic visual tradition," as used in this exhibition, suggests a less rigid definition. Traditions can be both eclectic and supple, relying on the widely established yet encompassing the distinctly personal. Visual tradition recognizes a shared artistic vocabulary: forms can be passed on and inherited by subsequent generations. Within visual tradition—which is, after all, a *living* one—artists can embrace tradition, deny it, subvert it, and massage

it into a powerful tool for engaging contemporary life. By adopting and reshaping canonical forms, the artists forge a connection to the continual flux that, in reality, best describes historical Islamic practices.

Long, Winding Journeys and this essay treat a specific application of the term “Islamic,” as a descriptor for a visual tradition within a framework of art history and contemporary art. The term, and the attendant word, “Muslim,” bring up myriad associations for the wider public in the United States, where this exhibition takes place. Perhaps most intense at the moment is the anti-Muslim speech emerging from the current presidential administration and concretized in proposed legislation. This message is intertwined with recurring terrorist attacks, civil rights abuses in a number of regions throughout the Middle East and South Asia, and U.S. military intervention in some Muslim-majority countries. These phenomena necessarily shape how many Americans understand the words “Islamic” and “Muslim”—and, in turn, affect communities and individual lives directly. What power, one might ask, does art hold in this tangled landscape? Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander pointed to an answer in 2016, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, “The incendiary anti-Muslim rhetoric spreading in certain parts of the U.S. is dangerous and suffocating. It robs all of us of our innate human empathy. The Muslim tradition and Muslim cultural practices are intrinsic to our shared human history. Intellectual freedom, knowledge, and imagination are essential in opening up the discourse.”⁵

Long, Winding Journeys

The exhibition and its title originated with Shahzia Sikander’s *Portrait of the Artist* (2016). Comprised of four etchings and an accompanying text, this work provides a potent case study for considering Islamic visual tradition as a source for contemporary art. Sikander, who now

lives in the United States, trained at the National College of Art in her home city of Lahore, Pakistan. The school offers the world’s only program in Indo-Persian miniature painting, one of the art forms most central to the Islamic visual tradition. During her study in the late 1980s, the larger art world viewed miniature painting as a genre suspended in time, rather than a relevant field. Sikander has been credited with pioneering the neo-miniature movement, spurring its resurgence in her home country and its increased visibility in the international art world. Indeed, Sikander taught in the National College’s miniature department in 1992 and was the first woman in the school’s history to teach the genre. “I found it ripe with potential—to change its status and its narrative and to deconstruct its stereotypes,” she has said. “What others saw as an enslavement to tradition, I recognized as a path to expanding the medium from within, embracing the complexities of craft and rigor in order to open up possibilities for dialogue.”⁶ In her larger body of work, Sikander transforms the miniature into a dynamic tool for exploring colonialism, diaspora, and manifold identity.

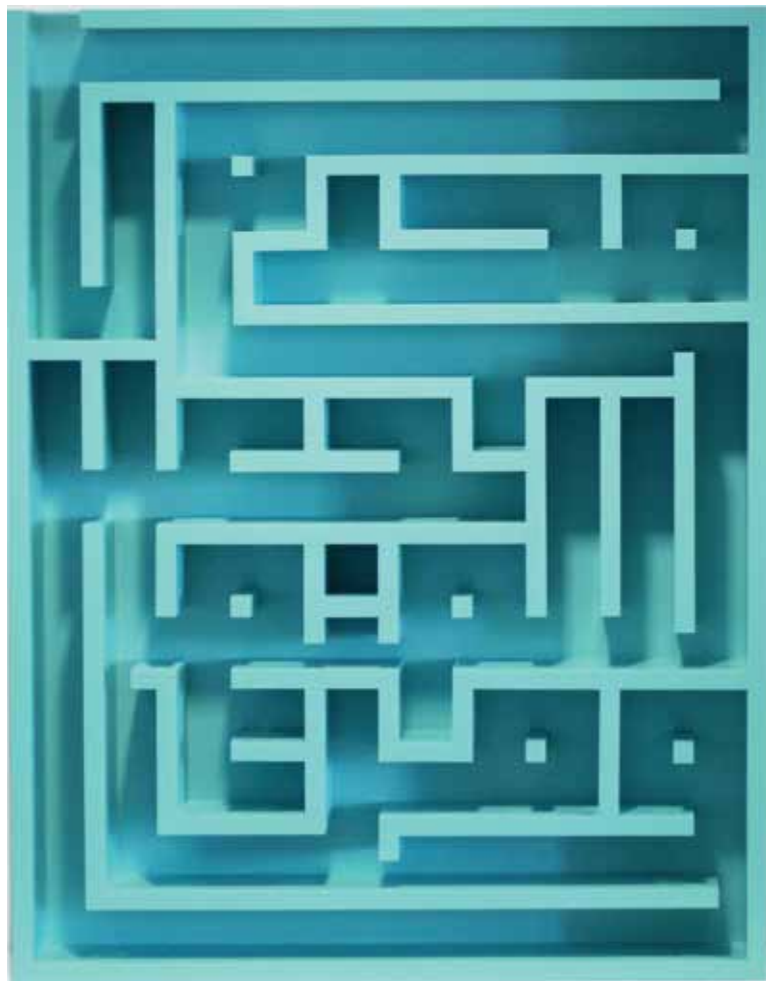
Portrait of the Artist is notable in Sikander’s practice for its interpretation of Quranic narrative and engagement with spirituality. It is also markedly personal. The work includes four etchings displayed alongside a text by Pulitzer Prize-winning, Pakistani-American playwright and author Ayad Akhtar, written in response to the artist’s etchings. Sikander’s images depict her own and Akhtar’s faces, overlaid with a figure moving through a swirling sky on a flying horse. Both the etchings and Akhtar’s text provide a lyrical interpretation of the Miraj, a central story in Islamic culture and in historical miniature painting. The story, as recorded in Islam’s holy texts, chronicles the night journey through heaven, on a winged, human-faced steed, taken by Prophet Muhammad (the founder of Islam) to meet



Shahzia Sikander and Ayad Akhtar, *Portrait of the Artist*, 2016, text by Ayad Akhtar and four etchings on paper, 27 x 21 in. each. © Shahzia Sikander. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Prints, NY.

God. Akhtar’s text, *The Breath of Miraj*, interprets the story as a metaphor for the creative process. “For what else is Miraj,” he writes, “if not the fulfillment of any artist’s deepest longing: to have made a journey into the great unknown—to have

seen the unseeable—and to return to the world as we know it with the capacity to express the inexpressible?” Sikander’s etchings take up miniature painting’s precise, elegant strokes to invoke a religious narrative and its relevance to



Nasser Al Salem, *Whoever Obeys Allah, He Will Make For Him a Way Out*, 2012, corian, 47 1/4 × 36 1/2 × 5 1/8 in. © Nasser Al Salem. Courtesy of the artist and ATHR Jeddah. Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds by an anonymous donor (M.2015.99).

artistic development. These images are, as Akhtar describes, “An homage, then, to [the artist’s] own long, winding, yearning journeys into the life-giving, life-defining mysteries of creative revelation.” Sikander deftly layers together narrative, spiritual, and artistic lineage. The work speaks to the richness of Islamic visual tradition as a source for artists to mine.

Sikander’s personal and contemporary embrace of a historical genre is echoed by other artists in the exhibition, many of

whom employ a wide range of traditions. This essay considers three prominent themes, as examined by eight artists: religious belief, geopolitical conflict, and personal and collective identity. Still many more overlap in the crisscrossing network of thematic connections that stretches among every artwork in the exhibition.

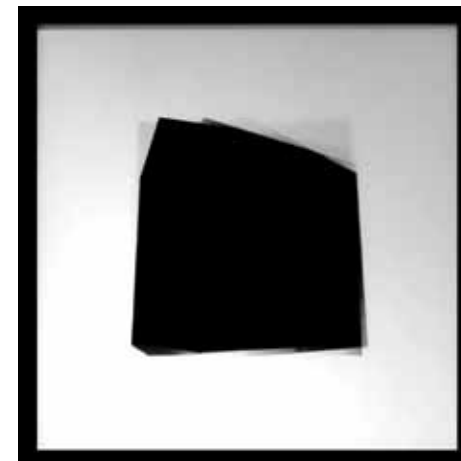
Objects of Belief

A number of artists approach expressions of belief through forms historically used for religious purposes. While much of

what historians have defined as “Islamic art” appeared in secular contexts and does not address religious subject matter, the following artists engage visual tradition as central to the Islamic faith.

Saudi artist Nasser Al-Salem’s *Whoever Obeys Allah, He Will Make For Him a Way Out* (2012) renders faith in physical form. Trained as a calligrapher, the artist writes this phrase (a verse from the Quran) in Kufic script, a calligraphic style used for centuries as the primary method for lettering the holy book. While maintaining the calligraphy’s compositional balance, Al-Salem translates the text to three-dimensions, converting its lettering into a rectilinear geometry and pulling it out into space. The verse appears as a maze that materially embodies its meaning: one can turn to Allah for guidance in the meandering path of life.

Canadian-Iranian-American artist Babak Golkar, too, ties together physicality, religious meaning, and abstraction in *Black Square(d)*. His medium is the lenticular print, a type of acrylic construction that creates the illusion of a changing image when viewed from different angles. Golkar depicts a black polygon, the movement in front of which creates the sensation of walking around a cube. This allusion to the cube in conjunction with its color recalls the Kaaba, the holiest building in Islam, which Muslim pilgrims circumnavigate in prayer. Golkar humorously asks, can the pilgrim enact this ritual in the museum gallery, or even in a collector’s living room? While drawing on the Kaaba’s remarkably minimalist design, the work also recalls another black square: Russian Suprematist Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Square* (1915), a radical abstraction of black paint within a white border on a square canvas. With its mystifying meaning and suggestion of creative purity, the work has long been interpreted by art historians as representing the divine. Leaning on tradition, both religious and art historical,



Babak Golkar, *Black Square(d)*, 2013, lenticular print, 46 x 46 in. © Babak Golkar. Courtesy of the artist.

Golkar collapses time and place to investigate art’s ability to catalyze spiritual experience, while revealing its allure.

Taken together, Al Salem’s and Golkar’s works suggest that calligraphic and architectural traditions cannot be entirely disentangled from their origins in a religion and its practices. The relationship between the ritual object and the human body underlies the ways in which visual tradition can be used as a tool for religious experience.

Conflict and Current Condition

Another theme in *Long, Winding Journeys* is the geopolitical conflict that shapes daily life in many of the artists’ Muslim-majority home regions. Locating their stories in particular current events, these artists speak to the specificity of how politics—including dictatorship, socio-political uprising, and wartime violence—influence both collective and individual experience. In addressing this subject matter, they disrupt the notion of a monolithic “Islamic art” unanchored from context and demonstrate, instead, how strongly visual tradition is tied to social and political conditions.



Shoja Azari, *Icon #3*, 2010, video portrait. © Shoja Azari. Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

In his video series *Icons* (2010), Shoja Azari unsettles historical definitions of the political and religious “hero.” Azari draws his imagery from a type of poster found in homes, shops, and restaurants throughout his native Iran. The poster-portraits depict Shiite imams and martyrs in a style that mixes religious iconography and vernacular representation. Though imams are typically male, in *Icons*, the artist seamlessly overlays the face with a woman’s. *Icon #3* is based on an image of Imam Reza, who died a martyr amidst political revolts in 9th century Iran. In depicting Imam Reza as female, Azari pays tribute to women’s roles as

activists, particularly in the pro-democracy Iranian Green Movement of 2009. Azari’s portraits, in contrast to the idealized icons in the ubiquitous posters, humanize these newly named heroes—here, animated tears slowly fall down the woman’s cheeks.

Hayv Kahraman left Iraq as a refugee during the Gulf War in 1991, later settling in the United States. Drawing from her own experience, Kahraman’s paintings treat the female body as a site of conflict, both cultural and political. Her figures blend references to Persian miniatures, Japanese painting, and European Renaissance painting, masking danger beneath an exquisite veneer. In the series *Would you like to play?* (2016), Kahraman continues her investigation of the female body, placing her depictions of women within the context of the Iraq war. She takes her cue from U.S. government pamphlets called *Iraq Visual Language Translators*—pictorial “cheat sheets” carried by soldiers to aid in communication with Iraqis, identify weapons, intervene in suicide bombings, and negotiate hostage situations. *Would you like to play.3?* (2016) transposes Kahraman’s imagery onto movable geometric wooden tiles, rendering them as symbols to be arranged in different patterns—or narratives—on a game board, determining women’s survival amidst sustained violence.

Iranian artist Nazgol Ansarinia, too, employs the geometric patterning tradition. In the series *Reflections/ Refractions* (2012), the artist cuts pieces from two different newspaper articles covering the same event and pieces them, interspersed, together. The resulting geometric pattern, inspired by the mirrored mosaics decorating the Shāh Chērāgh mosque in Shiraz, Iran, fractures the newsprint to the point of unreadability. In *Enemies Should Know That Syria Will Never Fall—Assad/ Syria Will Never Fall—Assad* (2012), a barely-legible image of Syrian



Hayv Kharaman, *Would you like to play.3?*, 2016, oil on wood on mobile octagons, 48 x 72 x 2 in. © Hayv Kharaman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

President Bashar al-Assad emerges from the page alongside text from the associated articles. The collage invokes journalism’s ambition to objectively report—or reflect—current events and the more complicated reality of political reportage. Here, Ansarinia points out the biases, conscious and unconscious, that often scramble reality, leaving readers with misinformation about events that could fundamentally alter the direction of their lives.

To investigate these subjects through Islamic visual tradition is to suggest a complex past behind contemporary political conditions. Despite the constantly shifting nature of political upheaval, as well as its diverse personal consequences, such moments in time will be historicized from a particular perspective. But how, the artists ask, and by whom?



Nazgol Ansarinia, *Enemies should know that Syria Will Never Fall- Assad/Syria Will Never Fall- Assad*, 2012, newspaper collage, 5 1/4 x 6 in. © Nazgol Ansarinia. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Art of the Middle East (M.2013.119).



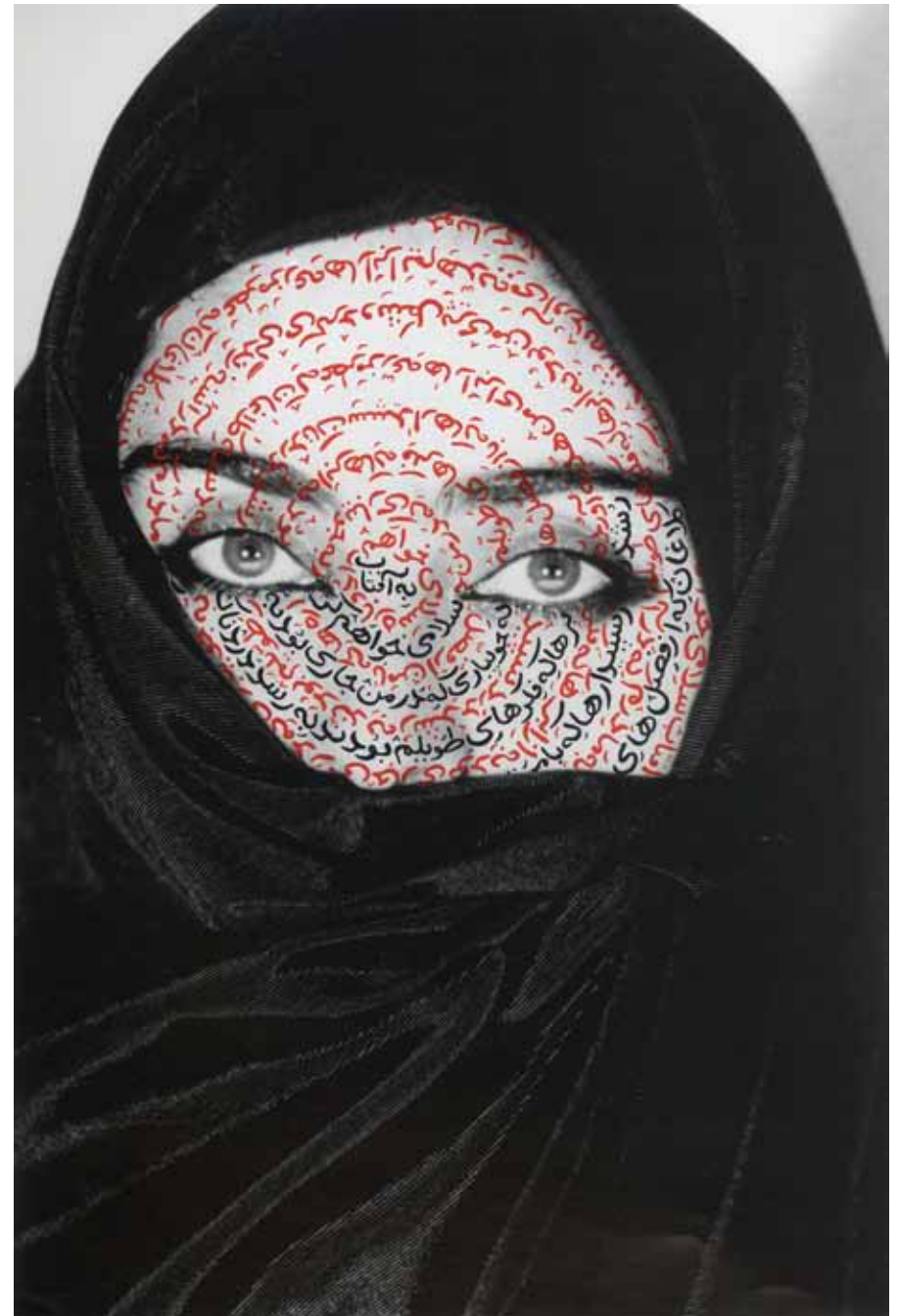
Baseera Khan, *Psychedelic Prayer Rugs*, 2017, three handmade silk rugs, 48 x 30 in. each. © Baseera Khan. Courtesy of the artist, with production support by Participant Inc., New York.

Lenses on Identity

Alongside the weight of objects and belief, and the turmoil of conflict, the concept of identity constitutes another key theme in the exhibition. While some artists in *Long, Winding Journeys* reject this interpretation outright, many embrace it as their primary concern. With nuance and depth, they explore the formation of individual and group identity, as influenced by ethnicity, diaspora, sexuality, and gender. These investigations often originate in personal experience and suggest an intimate familiarity with the ways in which outside forces shape self-understanding.

For *Long, Winding Journeys*, Afghan-Indian-American artist Baseera Khan has created an installation whose parts suggest a mosque space, including three prayer rugs set on a marble plinth and a set of transparent acrylic shoe shelves. The plinth recalls the seemingly extravagant but easily accessible materials used in mosque architecture in India, where Khan's mother and father grew up. The prayer rugs, designed by the artist and made by Kashmiri artisans, feature the form's typical sumptuous

hues and decorative, often architectural, imagery. At the same time, they depart from these stylistic characteristics, as Khan develops a personal iconography that speaks to her own experience as a queer, femme Muslim woman. Islam has a complex relationship to queerness—Muslim culture, like those of a number of prominent monotheistic religions, has, historically, largely rejected queer identity. Yet some Muslims have increasingly made space within the faith's culture for inclusivity, which Khan's installation adroitly reflects.⁷ The rug entitled *Act Up* (2016) features a moon—a shape historically associated with Islam—above a pink pyramid. The latter form directly references a poster from 1987, designed by gay activists at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, which reads, "SILENCE = DEATH." Mirroring this sentiment, the Urdu script below reads, "Talking is your right and silence is not," quoting a poem from Khan's childhood. Khan places this rug in a setting for gathering, where ritual meets community. Creating an environment for reflection, the artist considers how her own voice speaks within the context of a living religious and cultural history.



Shirin Neshat, *I Am Its Secret*, 1993, c-print, 19 x 13 in. © Shirin Neshat. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery. Collection of Joshua and Sara Slocum.

Iranian-American artist Shirin Neshat is known as one of the foremost artists exploring how women's identity is influenced by religious and cultural codes in both Muslim-majority regions and the United States. In one of her most iconic photographic works, *I Am Its Secret* (1993), a veiled woman—Neshat herself—stares boldly at the viewer. The artist has inscribed her face with black and red Farsi text, invoking a decorative, calligraphic tradition, while the words' arrangement into concentric circles recalls a target. The text is drawn from a poem by the iconoclastic Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967). Farrokhzad was known for writing from a distinctly female perspective, illuminating women's emotional lives in a society that imposes restrictions on their personal and public freedoms.

Born in Pakistan as a refugee, Khadim Ali is a member of the Afghan ethnic minority group Hazara, which has been the subject of discrimination and genocide throughout its history. This persecution has forced many Hazara to emigrate, and Ali now lives in Australia among a significant Hazara population. His work in textiles, among other mediums, speaks of a dehumanized and displaced community. In *Untitled 3* (2013), from the *Haunted Lotus* series, the artist draws his main motifs from the 14th century Siyah Qalam, a subgenre of miniature paintings depicting monstrous demons. Ali initially used these figures to represent groups such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda that so acutely persecuted his people, but later reversed the roles to depict these monsters as stand-ins for the Hazara themselves, as seen through eyes of the ethnic majority.

As in much of art, different aspects of the Islamic visual tradition have been used to construct identity through representation and to record that construction for posterity. Like those in the exhibition who take religion and geopolitics as



Khadim Ali, *Untitled 3* from the *Haunted Lotus* series, 2013, merino wool, afghan wool, and cotton, diptych 48 1/2 x 30 in. each. © Khadim Ali. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

their primary subject, these artists pose urgent questions. How is identity shaped by cultural tradition, and who decides? Ali, Khan, and Neshat seek to reclaim this power from ethnic hierarchies, patriarchal structures, and religious restrictions in order to define identity beyond these parameters.

From Past to Present

Here we return to the question of why Islamic visual tradition is, despite its age and slippery definition, valuable to artists today. If the tradition morphs as it changes contexts, it is exactly this fluidity that provides artists with a formal vocabulary that asserts such dynamism in a contemporary context. These works advocate for a nuanced understanding of history as multifaceted and intertwined. They recognize that cultural inheritance does not exist without context and that the present cannot be separated from religious, political, and personal pasts. This mutual dependence makes Islamic visual tradition a vital tool for artists in the long, winding journey that not only moves from past to present and present to future, but constitutes the creative practice itself.

Elizabeth Rooklidge, Curator

1. Department of Islamic Art, "The Nature of Islamic Art," in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–), accessed December 5, 2016, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orna/hd_orna.html. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of two institutions in the United States with a preeminent collection of Islamic art. The other is the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

2. Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Islamic Art," accessed December 5, 2016, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/islamic-art>. Elsewhere, the museum notes that Islamic art was "also created in many parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, and China." (Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of the Islamic World: A Resource for Educators*, ed. Maryam D. Ekhtiar and Claire Moore [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012], <https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources/art-of-the-islamic-world>.) Islamic art historian Finbarr Barry Flood has discussed this date span, which is typical of the field. See Finbarr Barry Flood, "From Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art," in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2007), 31-53.

3. For a scholarly overview of historical Islamic art, see Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, eds., *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); and D. Fairchild Ruggles, ed., *Islamic Art and Visual Culture: An Anthology of Sources* (Malden, MA.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

4. The problems of the term have been long been discussed in Islamic art scholarship. In addition to Flood's "From Prophet to Postmodernism?," see Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983), 1-14; and Avinoam Shalem, "What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012), <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/shalem.pdf>.

5. Shahzia Sikander, "We need diverse influences: Artist Shahzia Sikander on her multicultural past and our future," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-jc-shahzia-sikander-20160327-story.html>.

6. Shahzia Sikander, "The World Is Yours, the World Is Mine," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/04/opinion/shahzia-sikander-the-world-is-yours-the-world-is-mine.html>.

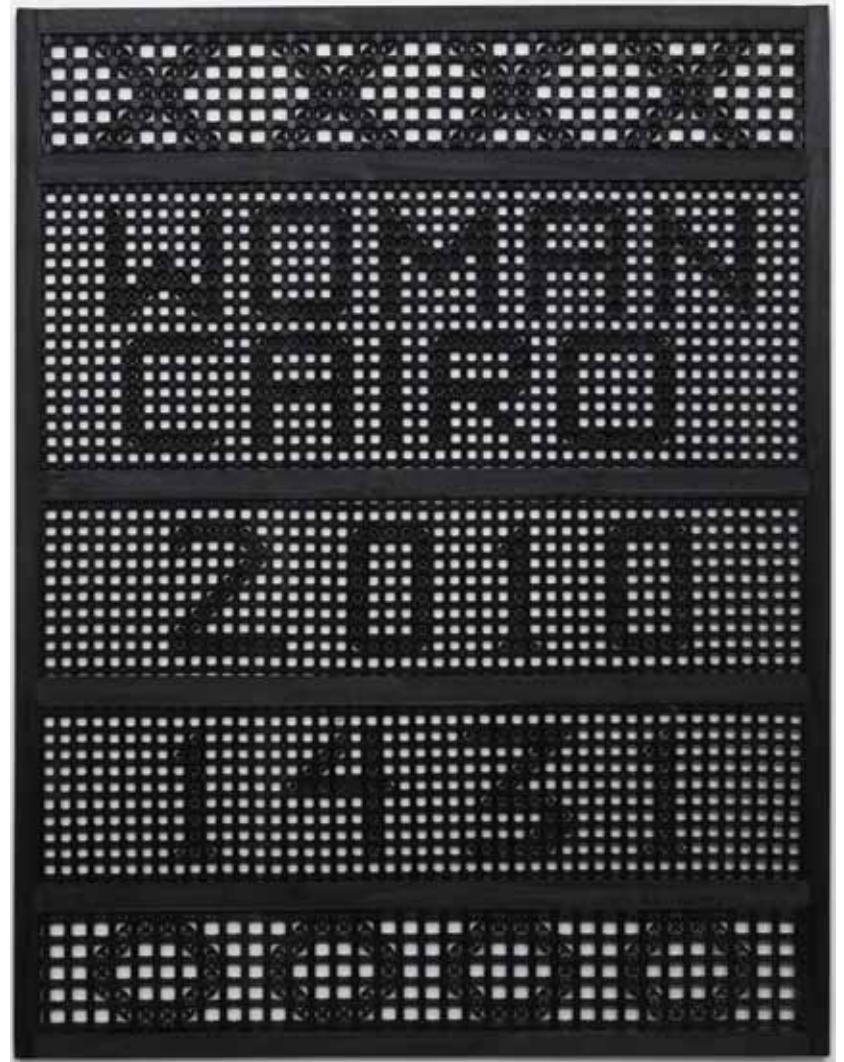
7. Baseera Khan in discussion with the author, January 29, 2018.



Noor Ali Chagani, *The Wall 2*, 2014, terra cotta bricks, cement, and watercolor, 5 x 23 1/2 x 1 1/2 in. © Noor Ali Chagani. Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.



Shadi Ghadirian, *Untitled from the Qajar series*, 1998, digital print, 9 15/16 x 8 1/16 in. © Shadi Ghadirian and Silk Road Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Silk Road Gallery, Tehran, Iran.



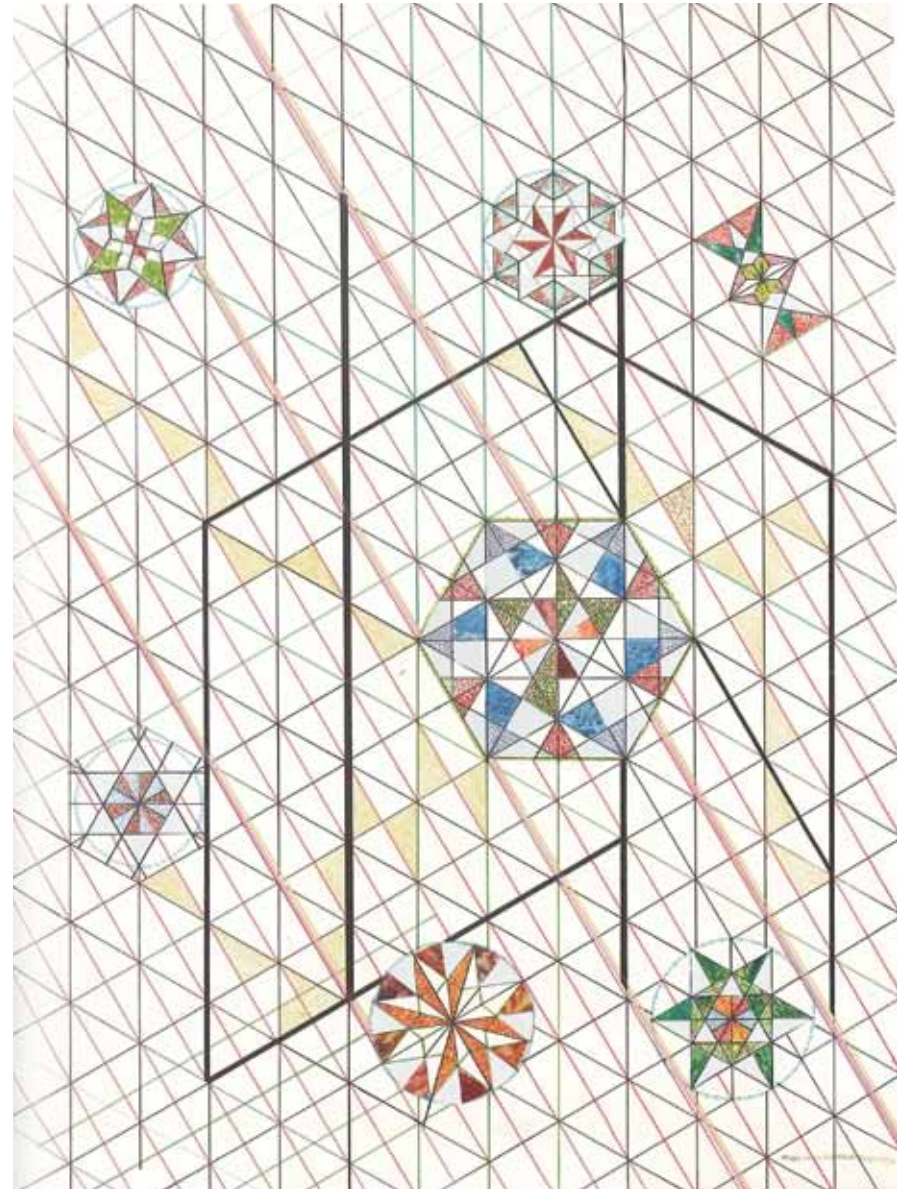
Susan Hefuna, *Woman Cairo 2010/1431*, 2010, ink on wood, 86 5/8 x 67 in. © Susan Hefuna. Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery. Collection of Thomas Rom.



Afruz Amighi, *Warrior's Headdress*, 2017, steel, fiberglass mesh, chain, light, 38 x 44 x 14 in. © Afruz Amighi. Courtesy of the artist, New York.



Ala Ebtakar, *Zenith V*, 2014, acrylic over cyanotype on canvas, four panels 60 1/4 x 30 1/4 in. each. © Ala Ebtakar. Courtesy of the artist and The Third Line, Dubai.



Monir Farmanfarmaian, *Untitled*, 2014, felt-tipped marker, reverse-glass painting, and mirror on paper, 41 x 31 in. © Monir Farmanfarmaian, image courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery. Collection of Joshua and Sara Slocum.



Faig Ahmed, *Impossible Viscosity*, 2012, handmade wool carpet, 98 x 39 in.
 © Faig Ahmed. Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary. Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody.



Ammar Al Attar, *Untitled* (UAE 89990006) from the *Prayer Rooms* series, 2012, c-print, 16 1/2 x 23 2/5 in. © Ammar Al Attar. Courtesy of the artist.



Ammar Al Attar, *Untitled* (US 041799995) from the *Prayer Rooms* series, 2012, c-print, 16 1/2 x 23 2/5 in. © Ammar Al Attar. Courtesy of the artist.

Checklist

Anila Quayyum Agha

Pakistani-American, b. Pakistan, 1966
Kaaba, 2016
mixed media on paper
29 x 29 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Aicon Gallery, New York

Shiva Ahmadi

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1975
Oil Barrel #9, 2009
oil on steel
34 1/2 x 23 1/2 x 23 1/2 in.
Collection of Howard and Maryam Newman

Faig Ahmed

Azerbaijani, b. 1982
Impossible Viscosity, 2012
handmade wool carpet
98 x 39 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Sapar Contemporary
Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

Khadim Ali

Afghan-Australian, b. Pakistan, 1978
Untitled 3 from the *Haunted Lotus* series, 2013
merino wool, afghan wool, and cotton
diptych, 48 1/2 x 30 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery,
Brisbane, Australia

Ammar Al Attar

Emirati, b. 1981
Four untitled prints from the *Prayer Rooms* series,
2012
c-print
16 1/2 x 23 2/5 in. each
Courtesy of the artist

Nasser Al Salem

Saudi, b. 1984
Whoever Obeys Allah, He Will Make For Him a Way Out, 2012
corian
47 1/4 x 36 1/2 x 5 1/8 in.
Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of
Art, Purchased with funds by an anonymous donor
(M.2015.99)

Noor Ali Chagani

Pakistani, b. 1982
Endless Stairs, 2015
carved book and terra cotta bricks
7 x 8 1/2 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery,
New York

Noor Ali Chagani

Pakistani, b. 1982
The Wall 2, 2014
terra cotta bricks, cement, and watercolor
5 x 23 1/2 x 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery,
New York

Ghada Amer

Egyptian-American, b. Egypt, 1963
The Lily Garden RFGA, 2011
embroidery and gel medium on canvas
65 1/2 x 77 1/2 in.
Private collection

Afruz Amighi

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1974
Fool's Headdress, 2017
steel, fiberglass mesh, chain, light
48 x 35 x 14 in.
Courtesy of the artist, New York

Afruz Amighi

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1974
Headdress for the Unborn, 2017
steel, fiberglass mesh, chain, light
46 x 28 x 14 in.
Courtesy of the artist, New York

Afruz Amighi

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1974
Warrior's Headdress, 2017
steel, fiberglass mesh, chain, light
38 x 44 x 14 in.
Courtesy of the artist, New York

Nazgol Ansarinia

Iranian, b. 1979
Enemies should know that Syria Will Never Fall- Assad/Syria Will Never Fall- Assad, 2012
newspaper collage
5 1/4 x 6 in.
Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Purchased with funds provided by Art of the Middle
East (M.2013.119)

Fereydoun Ave

Iranian, b. 1945
Rustam in the Dead of Winter, 2009
mixed media and print on canvas
39 x 58 3/4 in.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York (2013.1142)

Shoja Azari

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1958
Icon #3, 2010
video portrait
Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery,
New York

Ala Ebtekar

Iranian-American, b. United States, 1978
Zenith V, 2014
acrylic over cyanotype on canvas
four panels 60 1/4 x 30 1/4 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and The Third Line, Dubai

Monir Farmanfarmaian

Iranian, b. 1924
Untitled, 2014
Felt-tipped marker, reverse-glass painting, and mirror
on paper
41 x 31 in.
Collection of Joshua and Sara Slocum

Shadi Ghadirian

Iranian, b. 1974
Four untitled prints from the *Qajar* series, 1998
digital print
9 15/16 x 8 1/16 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and Silk Road Gallery,
Tehran, Iran

Babak Golkar

Canadian-Iranian-American, b. United States, 1977
Black Square(d), 2013
lenticular print
46 x 46 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Susan Hefuna

German-Egyptian, b. Egypt, 1962
Seven works (*Buildings B, D, E, F, G, H, and J*) from
the *Buildings* series, 2016
cast bronze, black patina
dimensions variable, approximately 12 x 6 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery,
Chicago

Susan Hefuna

German-Egyptian, b. Egypt, 1962
Woman Cairo 2010/1431, 2010
ink on wood
86 5/8 x 67 in.
Collection of Thomas Rom

Shirazeh Houshiary

Iranian-British, b. Iran, 1955
Desire, 2004
black aquacryl, white pencil, and ink on canvas
19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in.
Private collection

Pouran Jinchi

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1959
Pierced, 2014
pen and copper thread on paper
48 x 72 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery,
New York

Hayv Kharaman

Iraqi-American, b. Iraq, 1981
Would you like to play.3?, 2016
oil on wood on mobile octagons
48 x 72 x 2 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery,
New York

Baseera Khan

Afghan-Indian-American, b. United States, 1980
Psychedelic Prayer Rugs and Reading Room, On Purpose, 2017
installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist, with production support by
Participant Inc., New York

Hassan Massoudy

Iraqi, b. 1944
untitled ("O friend, don't go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you." –Kabir, 16th c.), 2005
ink and pigment on paper
29 x 21 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery,
New York

Hassan Massoudy

Iraqi, b. 1944
untitled ("Place your words well. For words place you." –Arabic proverb), 2013
ink and pigment on paper
29 x 21 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery,
New York

Hassan Massoudy

Iraqi, b. 1944
untitled ("Shall my heart become a tree heavy-laden with fruit that I may gather and give unto them?" –Gibran), 1991
ink and pigment on paper
29 x 21 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery,
New York

Jordan Nassar

Palestinian-American, b. United States, 1985
Mt. Tamalpais, 2015
hand-embroidered cotton on aida on canvas
40 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi Gallery,
Los Angeles, Collection of Shulamit Nazarian

Jordan Nassar

Palestinian-American, b. United States, 1985
Rosetta, 2015
hand embroidery in cotton on cotton canvas
43 x 77 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi Gallery,
Los Angeles, Collection of Giora Kaplan

Jordan Nassar

Palestinian-American, b. United States, 1985
The Apollo Series, 2016
hand-embroidered cotton on aida on canvas
40 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi Gallery,
Los Angeles, Collection of Shulamit Nazarian

Shirin Neshat

Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1957
I Am Its Secret, 1993
c-print
19 x 13 in.
Collection of Joshua and Sara Slocum

Imran Qureshi

Pakistani, b. 1972
And How Many Rains Must Fall Before the Stains Are Washed Clean, 2013
digital print with hand painting
24 x 30 in.
Collection of Joshua and Sara Slocum

Hadieh Shafie
Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1969
Saayeha 4, 2017
ink, acrylic, and paper
31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 4 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Shahzia Sikander
Pakistani-American, b. Pakistan, 1969
Ayad Akhtar
Pakistani-American, b. Pakistan, 1970
Portrait of the Artist, 2016
text by Ayad Akhtar and four etchings on paper
27 x 21 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and Pace Prints, NY



Hadieh Shafie, *Saayeha 4*, 2017, ink, acrylic, and paper, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 4 1/2 in.
© Hadieh Shafie. Courtesy of the artist.

Kurosh ValaNejad
Iranian-American, b. Iran, 1966
Peter Brinson
American, b. 1974
The Cat and the Coup, 2011
documentary videogame
Courtesy of the artists



Hassan Massoudy, *untitled* ("Place your words well. For words place you." –Arabic proverb.), 2013, ink and pigment on paper, 29 x 21 in. © Sundaram Tagore Gallery and the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York.

Long, Winding Journeys

Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition

February 25 – June 17, 2018

Curated by Elizabeth Rooklidge for the Katonah Museum of Art, with research assistance from Curatorial Intern Caitlin Monachino and Assistant Curator Olga Dekalo. Thanks to reader Natalie Dupêcher.

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Council on
the Arts

Cover: **Shahzia Sikander**, *Portrait of the Artist*, 2016, etching on paper, 27 x 21 in. © Shahzia Sikander. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Prints, NY.



Katonah Museum of Art

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