

# **Mohammad Bozorgi**

# Transcendental Strokes

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### Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz

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### **Transcendental Strokes**

By Jules McDevitt

Recite in the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man from a clot;
Recite in the name of thy Lord,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man what he knew not.

(Holy Quran 96.1-5)

Occupying a unique and sacred place in the Islamic religion and culture, Arabic script still remains the great unifier of the 1.57 billion Muslims spread throughout the modern world. Reaching far beyond the primarily Arabic speaking Middle East, from West Africa to the Sub-Continent, not to mention the growing diaspora adherent to the Islamic faith, we continue to see the rapid development of Arabic script in all of its visual manifestations.

New Arabic Typography for use in graphic, fashion, and product design as well as the growing trend for graffiti and street art has kept the form relevant, despite the onslaught of an increasingly globalised landscape. Artists are also continuously finding new and innovative ways in which to reinvent this ancient written language. Looking beyond traditional manuscription and experimenting by merging calligraphic forms with modern and contemporary art movements, in particular abstraction, works of great originality and resonance continue to be produced.

As the medium of the Holy Quran, the word of God, Arabic script has continuously been accorded an exceptional status in Muslim society; and in the absence of religious representation, the written word became a form of visual expression, with inscriptions fulfilling the function of holy imagery present in other religions. The idea was that the perfect word of God should be written down in a suitably perfect script. Beyond the holy manuscripts, calligraphy ubiquitously appears in the ornamentation of all forms of material culture of the Islamic world, from ceramics to metalwork to architectural decoration.

Originating in the Arabian Peninsula, in the seventh century AD the Arabic alphabet in its present form, quickly spread over a vast geographical area via the early Islamic conquests. Evolving over time and region, two distinctive calligraphic styles emerged, the refined and formal Kufic and the cursive Naskh (originally used for strictly secular purposes.)

In Iran, the greater use of paper due to its proximity to China and the Silk Road encouraged the early development of a more refined and slender script than the examples used in Western Islamic lands which became known as Eastern Kufic. By the end of the seventeenth century a distinctly Iranian style of Naskh emerged in Iran thanks in part to the hugely influential calligrapher Mirza Ahmed Nayrizi who worked at the court of the Safavid Shah Sultan Husayn in Isfahan. This style, characterised by its clarity and large size, was used in both secular and religious contexts and

continues to be by far the most popular script used in Iran today.

Far from being a lost or dying art, the practice of traditional calligraphy is still an important part of Iranian culture. As a member of the prestigious Society for Iranian Calligraphers for over a decade Mohammad Bozorgi reached the level of 'Master' after perfecting an impressive eighteen scripts including 'The Six Classical Hands' – Riqa, Thulth, Tawqi, Rayhan, Muhaqqaq, and Naskh, and variations of these including Nasta'liq, Shikaste, Divani, Ta'liq, Ijaze and Ruq'a scripts. But it was a desire to liberate himself from the constraints of this formal, conservative training that emboldened Bozorgi to leave the Society, and to start experimenting with his own artistic practice, following in the innovative footsteps of artists from the Saqqakhaneh school.

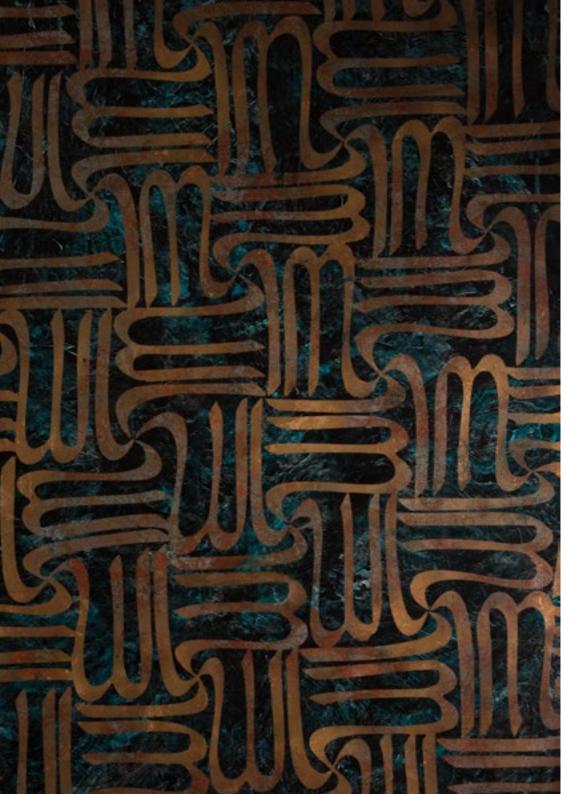
Credited with the establishment of a modernist approach to a national artistic identity, the 'neo-traditional' Saqqakhaneh School was formed in the early 1960s. The movement that initially applied to painting and sculpture and repurposed visual elements from votive Shiite art quickly came to be more generally identified with artists whose work was rooted in traditionally Iranian, decorative pre-Islamic and Islamic elements, and folk art. From the formal, stylised motifs present in Islamic and pre-Islamic courtly art to vernacular handicrafts, many forms were explored and reinterpreted, including calligraphy, miniature painting, textiles, and architectural elements. Artists such as Parviz

Tanavoli, Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Faramarz Pilaram and Mansour Qandriz, who were all affiliated in some capacity with the Tehran College of Decorative Arts (later known as the Faculty of Decorative Arts), created a modern idiom by realising the affinity between aspects of these indigenous forms and modern Western art movements, most notably twentieth-century abstract art. What resulted was a diverse variety of modern, innovative artwork embodying a uniquely Iranian identity and character that set a standard for future generations of Iranian artists.

The successors of this movement continue to develop both the conceptual and aesthetic aspects pioneered by the masters of the Saqqakhaneh School with a particularly strong resurgence of artists inspired by the practice of calligraphy emerging in the 1990s. Representing the vanguard of this 'Next Generation,' artists such as Azra Aghighi Bakhshayeshi, Golnaz Fathi, and Mohammad Bozorgi have achieved both local and international acclaim for their work.

Erupting with ferocious energy, omnipotent words seemingly burst out of Bozorgi's canvases like cosmic matter communicating between heaven and earth. Kaleidoscopic compositions, redolent of the splitting of an atom seen through the lens of a microscope or the explosive display emanating from a dying star in space, introduce us to life forces that exist beyond the realms of direct human experience and remind us of our own inherent limitations.





'To me a word is just as beautiful as a miracle.' Mohammad Bozorgi

Transforming the many names of God and other exigent words and passages from the Holy Quran into powerful visual manifestations that allude to metaphysical existence, he combines his faith and spirituality with his studies of cosmology and metaphysics. There has always been an inherent relationship between esoteric theory and Islamic art, summed up by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his foreword to the seminal work Islamic Patterns, *An Analytical and Cosmological Approach* by Dr. Keith Critchlow, he writes:

'Ultimate Reality is at once Absolute and infinite, the source of all being, of all consciousness and of all life, Itself beyond form, it speaks to mankind through revealed forms which, while externally bound and limited, open up inwardly towards the Boundless... The doctrine of unity which is central to the Islamic revelation combined with the nomadic spirituality which Islam made its own brought into being an aniconic art wherein the spiritual world was reflected in the sensible world not through various iconic forms but through geometry and rhythm, through arabesques and calligraphy which reflect directly the words and ultimately the supernal sun of Divine Unity.'

The artist gives the words an elastic quality, effectively stretching, flattening and bending the forms in order to fit them into the boundaries of their assigned boarders or the physical edges of the canvas, he explains: 'To me, words are like molding clay in the hands of a playful child, who curiously touches, smells and shapes it.' Using the multidimensional perspective of Op art Bozorgi gives the illusion of depth and movement to the words, enlivening them with a dynamic, hypnotic quality. Elegant modes of symmetry are employed demonstrating the potentially endless permutations of the artist's forms, an aspect of his work that persuades meditation as viewers are invited to enter a world of infinite space.

'I see the words as dominating the entire surface of the canvas, in essence, it is their kingdom, and the viewer should imagine the work as part of an untold story which continues its movement far beyond the restrictions of the canvas.'

Reminiscent of his background in both engineering and the practice of classical calligraphy, Bozorgi goes through a lengthy preparatory process for each painting. Creating multiple, technically detailed sketches using mathematical instruments such as setsquares, protractors, ellipse templates and a pair of compasses as well as traditional implements like reed brushes, he experiments with the endless possibilities of geometry, symmetry, proportion and form before embarking on his final composition executed by freehand on canvas.

All of the artist's new works are executed on a large scale and have poignant but universally relatable titles alluding to the spiritual nature of the words contained within them.



In *The Paradoxical* Reality the monochrome canvas is divided into two by the illusion of a central fold. The mirroring sides which repeat the word Allah are identical except that one is in positive and one is in negative reflecting the many dualities and contradictions of the human condition.

The Maker is comprised of two canvases joined at an angle, giving the viewer an immersive, multi-dimensional experience. In some places the words are stretched and distorted to the point of complete abstraction giving the illusion of travelling through a black hole.

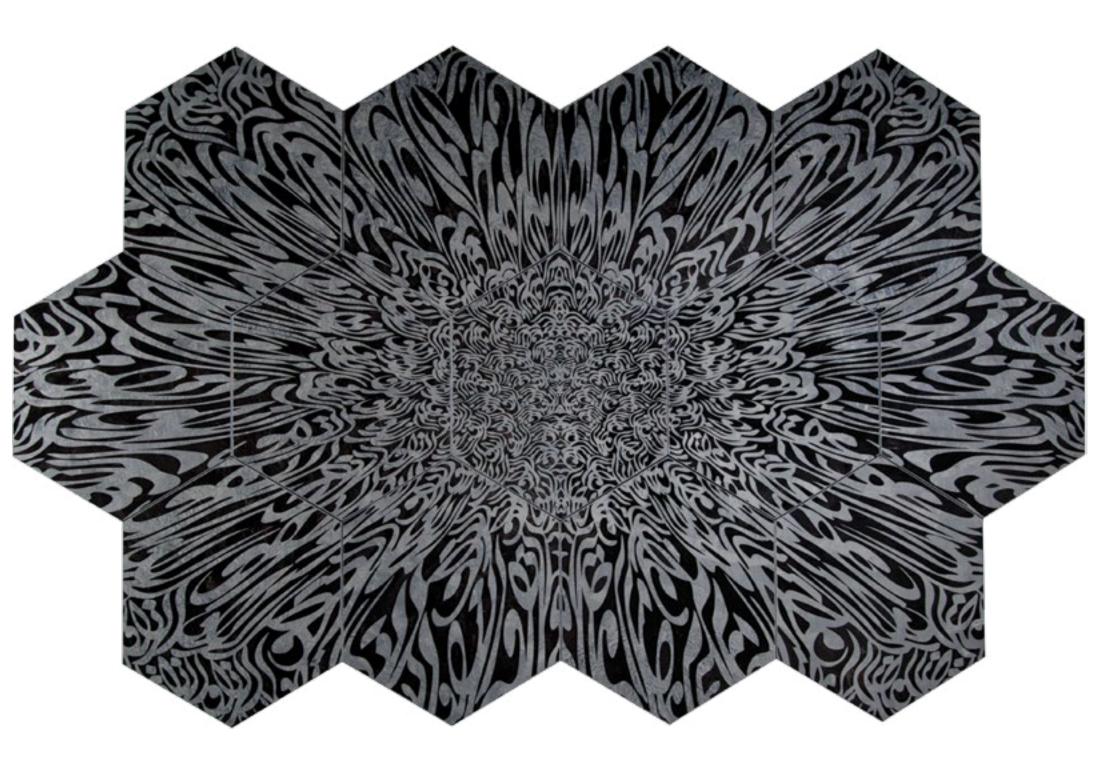




He Will Provide is an enormous, multi-canvas work consisting of thirteen hexagons, a ubiquitous shape seen in Islamic geometrical decoration. Inspired by the An-Nahl or Bees Surah that recognises the complex mechanisms of beehives and the miraculous production of honey as an example of God's mastery and provision over mankind. The words emanate from the center of the composition becoming larger and more elongated as they get further away from their nucleus.

These works mark a new stage in Mohammad Bozorgi's development that focus on the examination of the aesthetic and spiritual power of the written word. Like a scribe, the artist's meditative artistic process sees him painstakingly practice his craft with both technical prowess and extraordinary artistic ingenuity. Using his expertise in mathematics and engineering to draft elaborate designs he goes on to beautify his compositions with the deft hand of a master who has conceived his own unique approach to calligraphic script.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach. Thames and Hudson, London, 1976





## Mohammad Bozorgi

(Iran, born 1978)

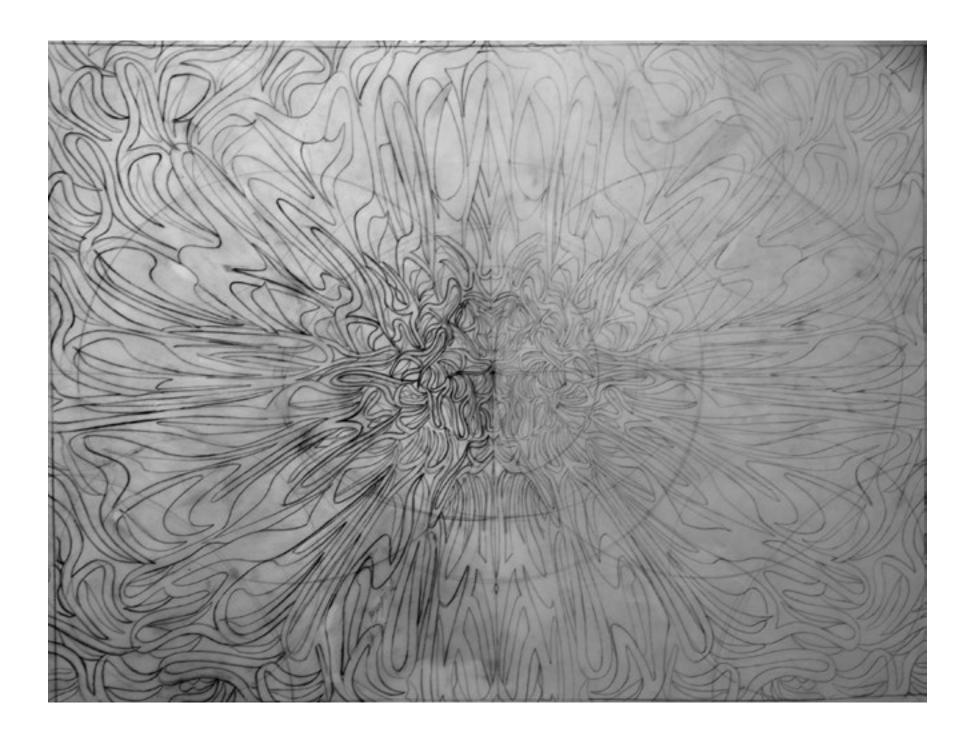
Mohammad Bozorgi approaches calligraphy with an architectural eye that is evident in the mathematical structure and symmetry of letters in his paintings, particularly in his Crying for Honour series. Bozorgi's masterful command of the centuries-old tradition is the result of intensive studies in classical calligraphic forms such as divani, kufic, nastaliq, naskh, sols, Mohaggegh, and broken nastaliq in order to develop distinctly stylised characters based on Arabic and Persian examples. After training with the Society of Iranian Calligraphers for over a decade, Bozorgi left the institution to pursue more innovative calligraphic techniques. Drawing from his background in engineering, he makes qualitative calculations when constructing his works, using the directives of geometry to create abstract illusions of movement and space. Building on the breakthroughs of his predecessors, such as those who led the Saqqakhaneh school of Iranian painters in the 1960s, Bozorgi is recognised as a leading figure among the 'New Generation' of contemporary calligraphers.

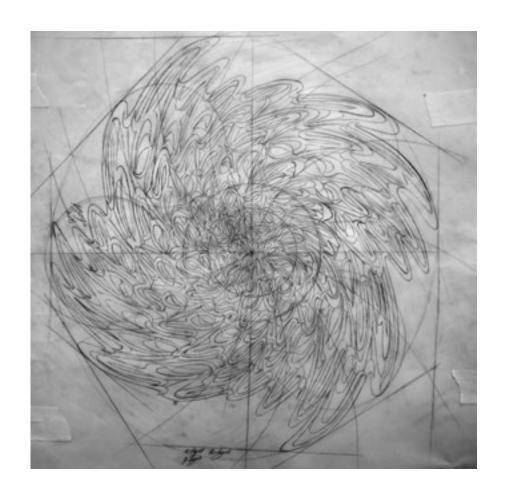
Born in Tehran in 1978, Mohammad Bozorgi holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Engineering as well as a graduate degree from the Industrial Management Institute and Momtaz degrees from the Calligraphy Association of Iran. His recent solo and group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery Dubai, Al Quoz (2015); Ayyam Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2014); Homa Gallery, Tehran, Iran (2014); Galerie Nicolas Flamel, Paris, France (2013); and Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland (2012).



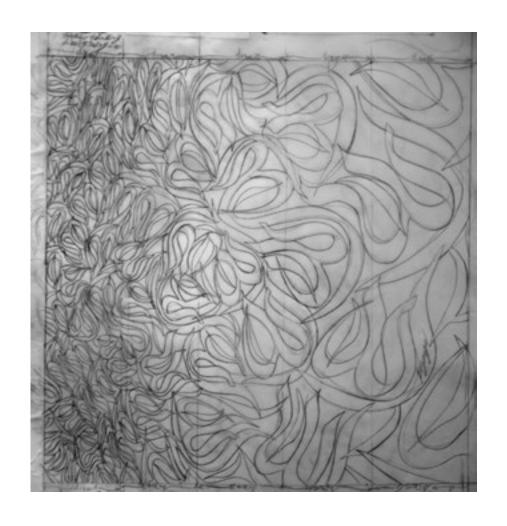
Studies
Pencil on Tracing Paper

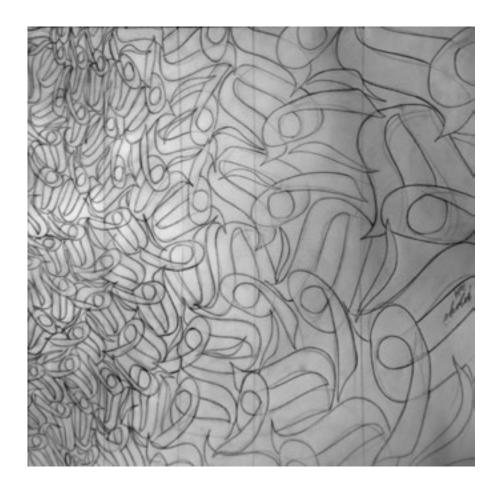




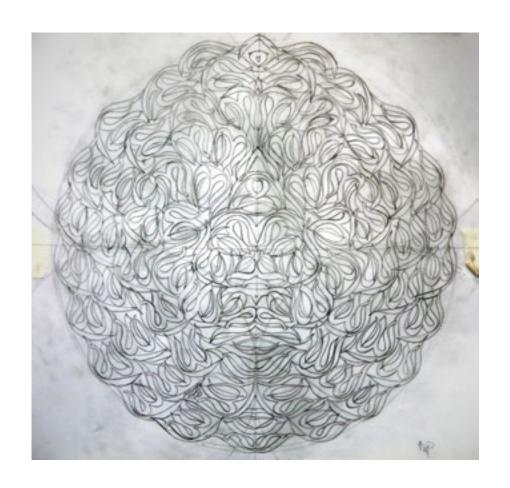






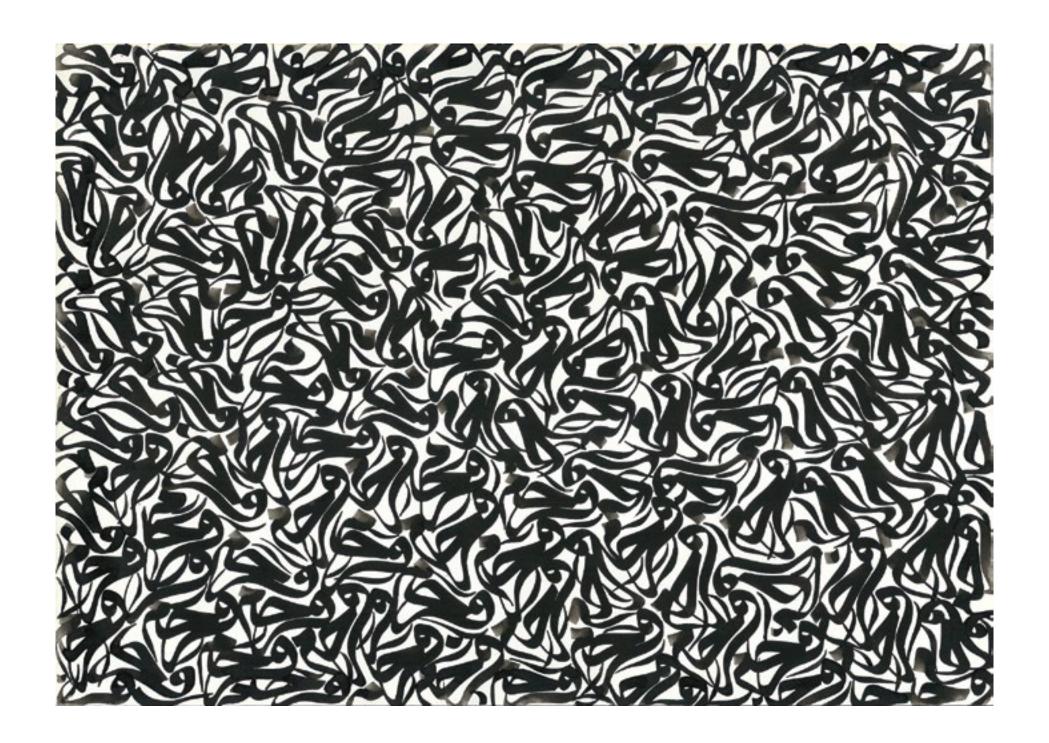


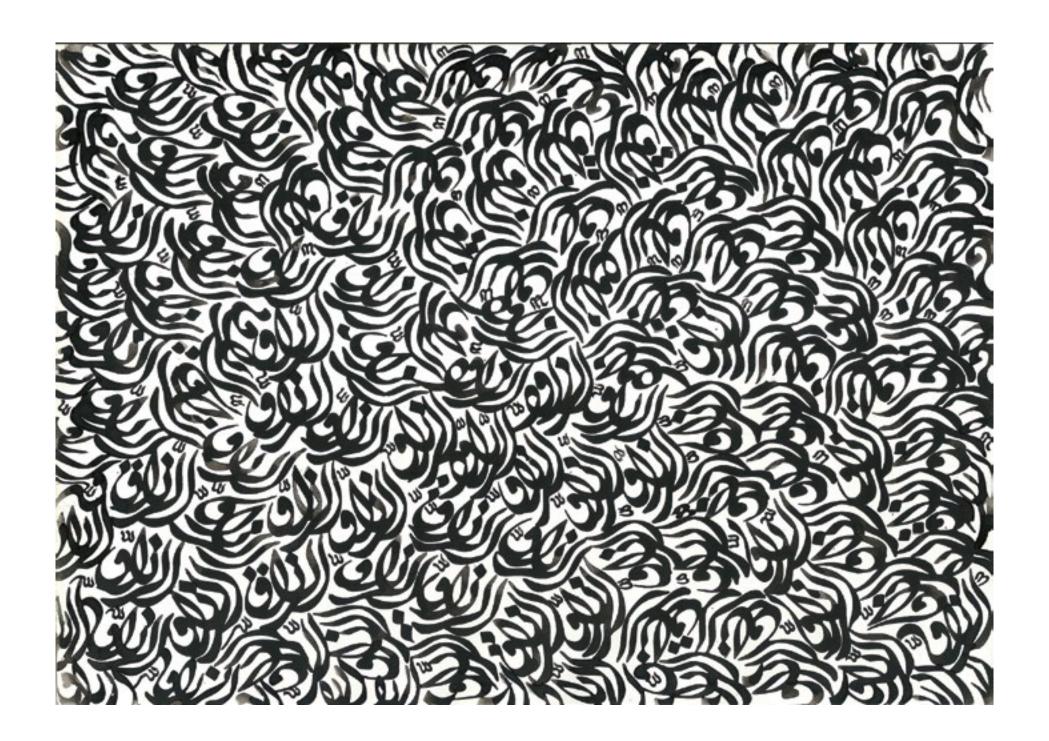


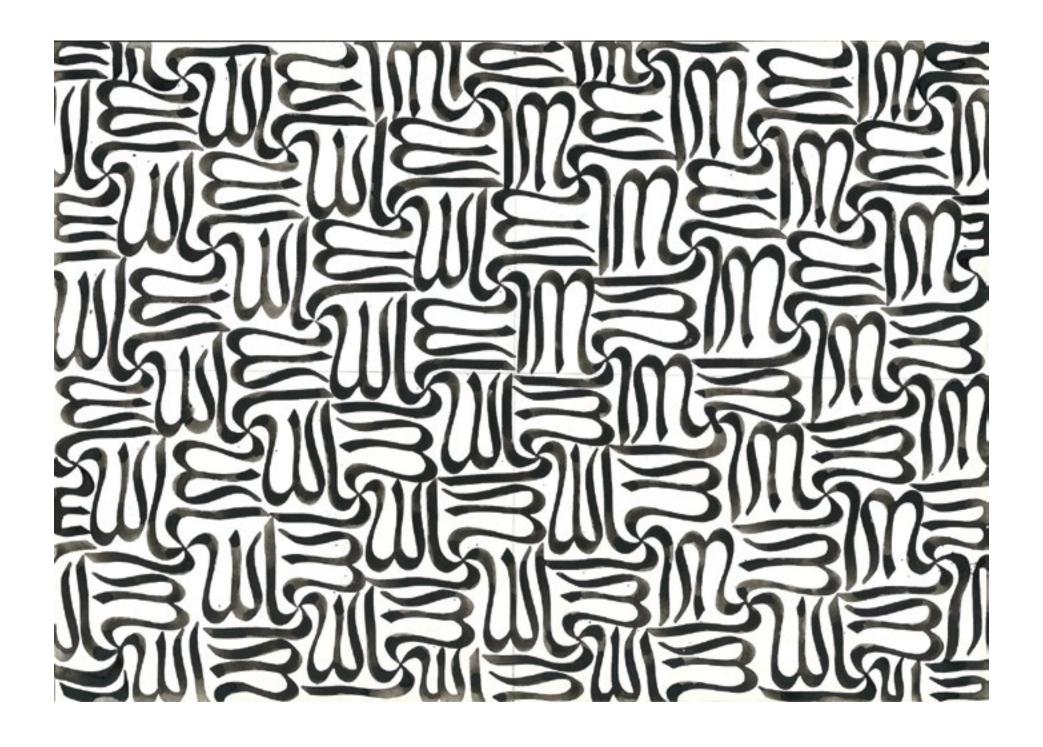


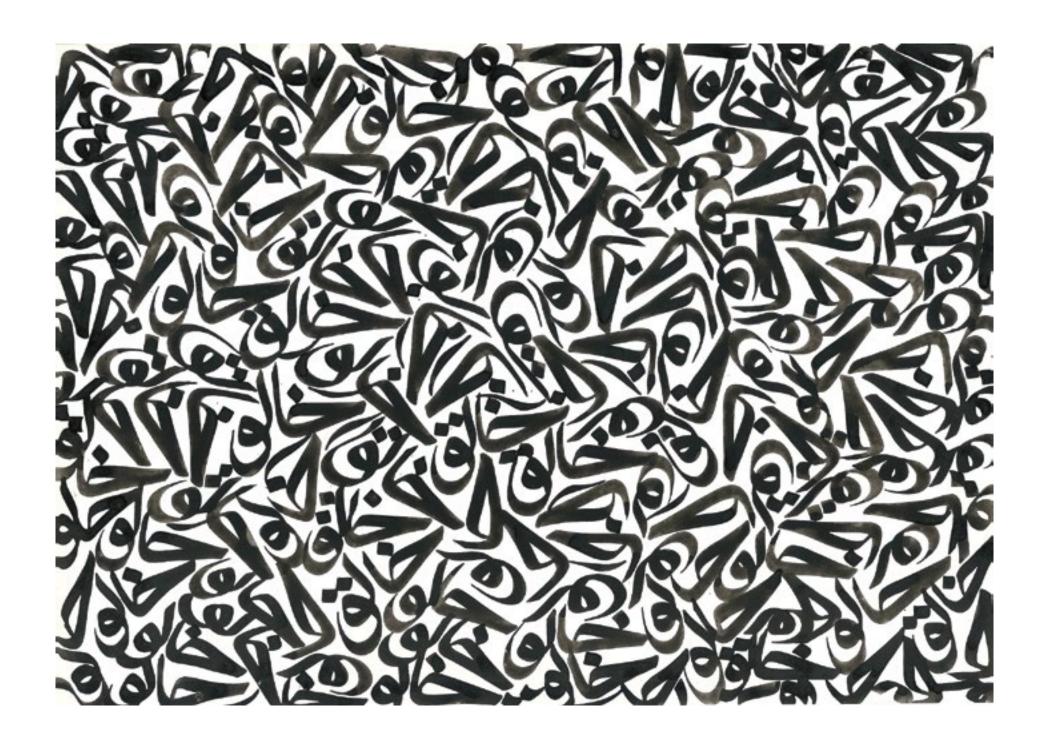
**Studies** 

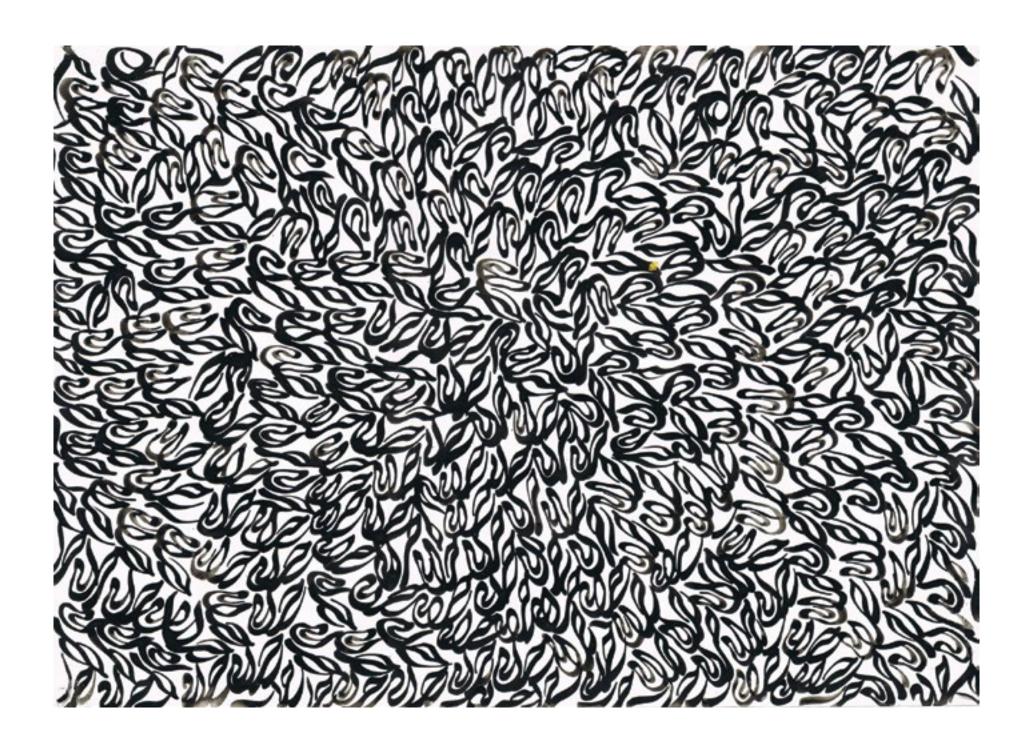
Ink on Paper

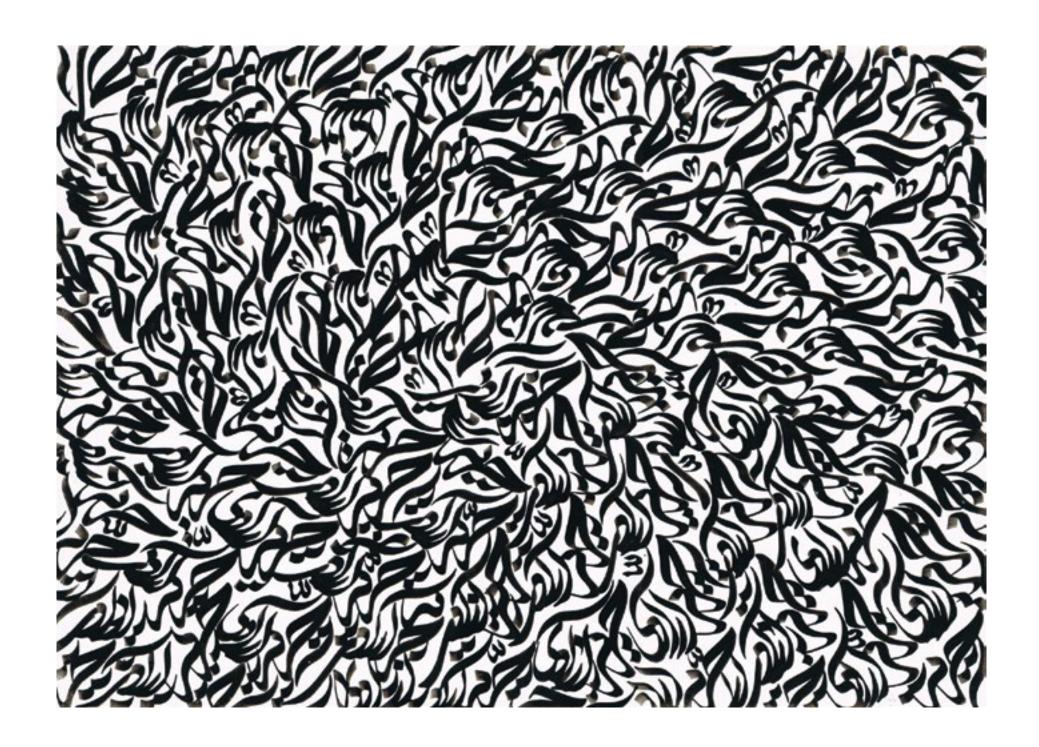


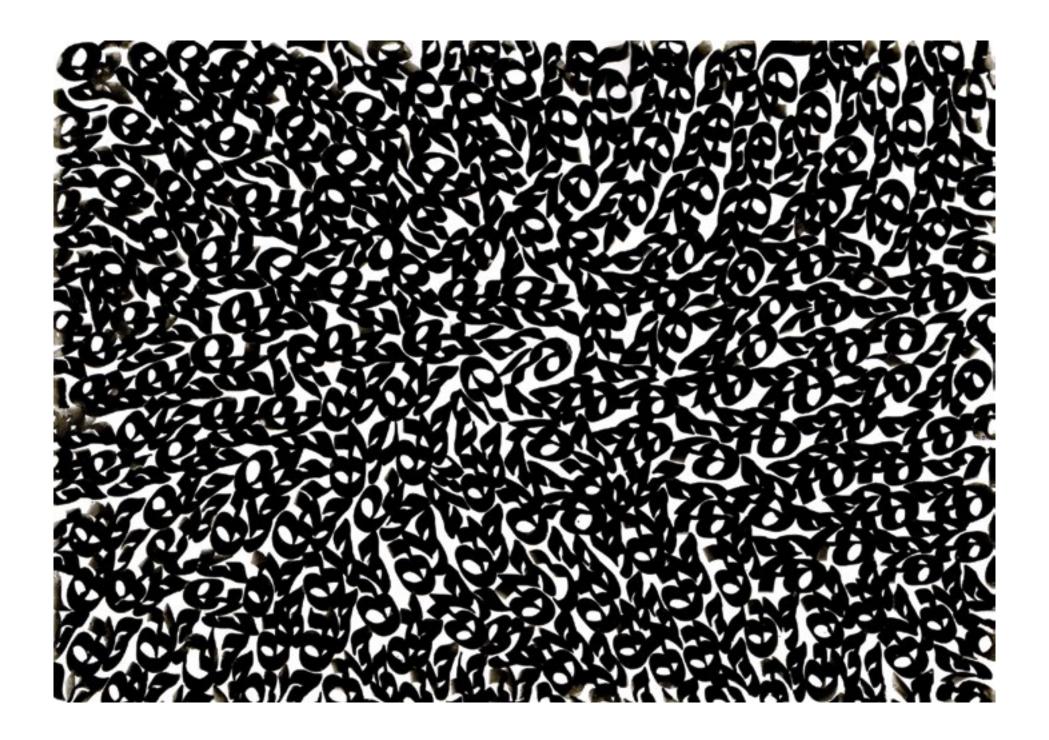


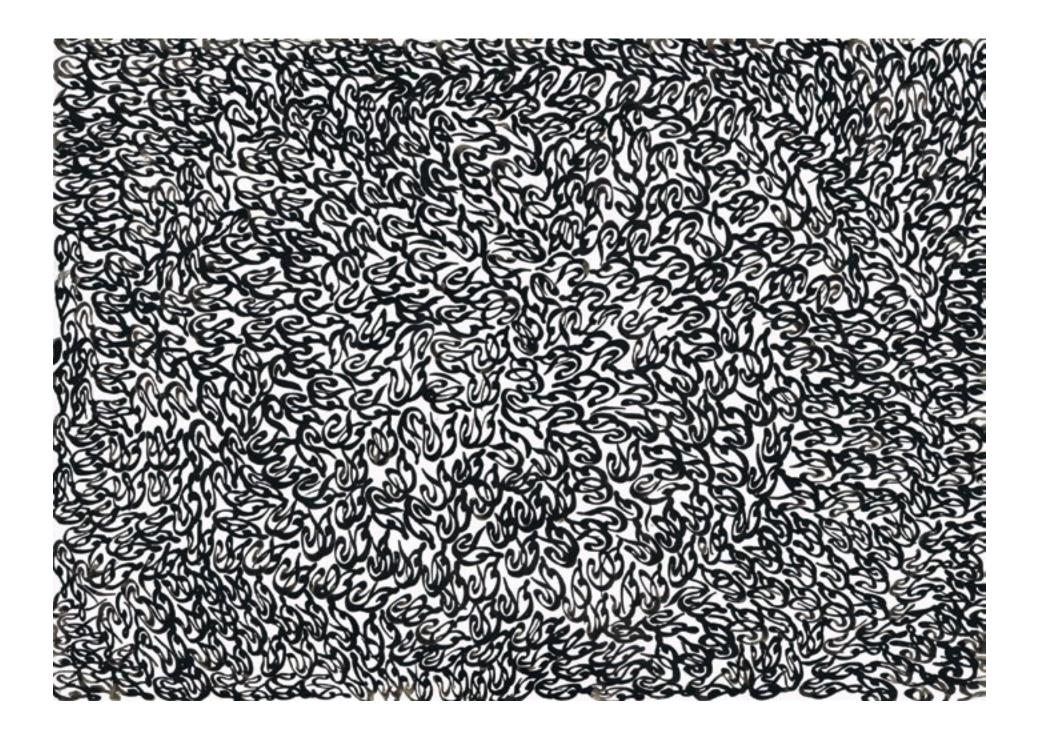


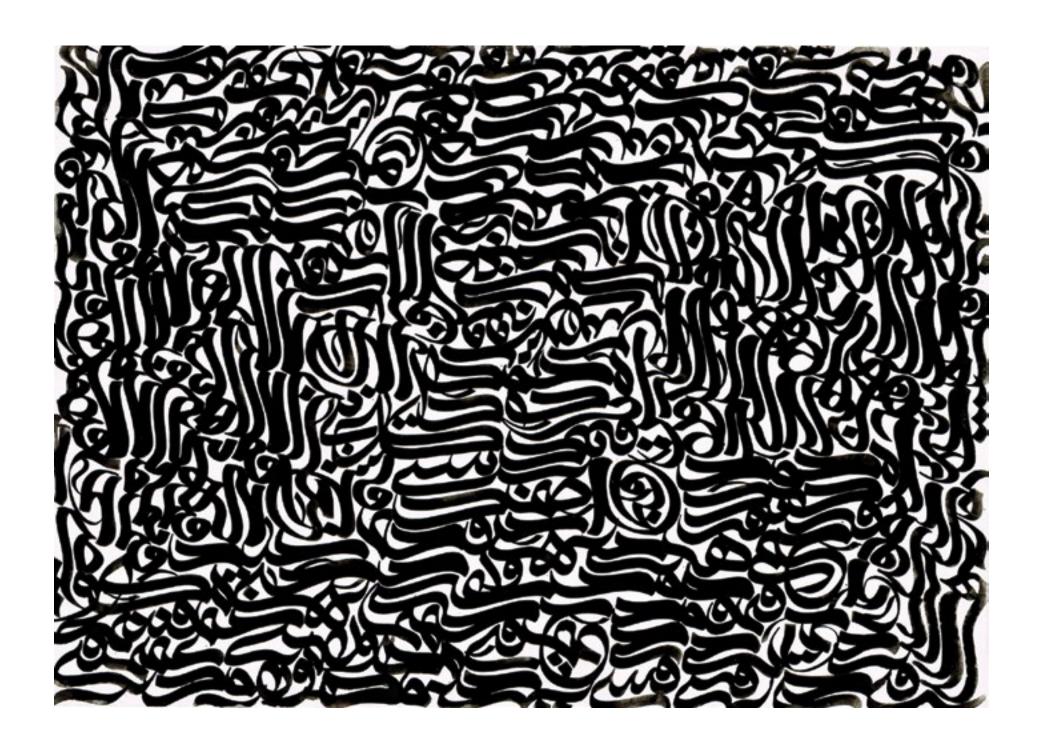


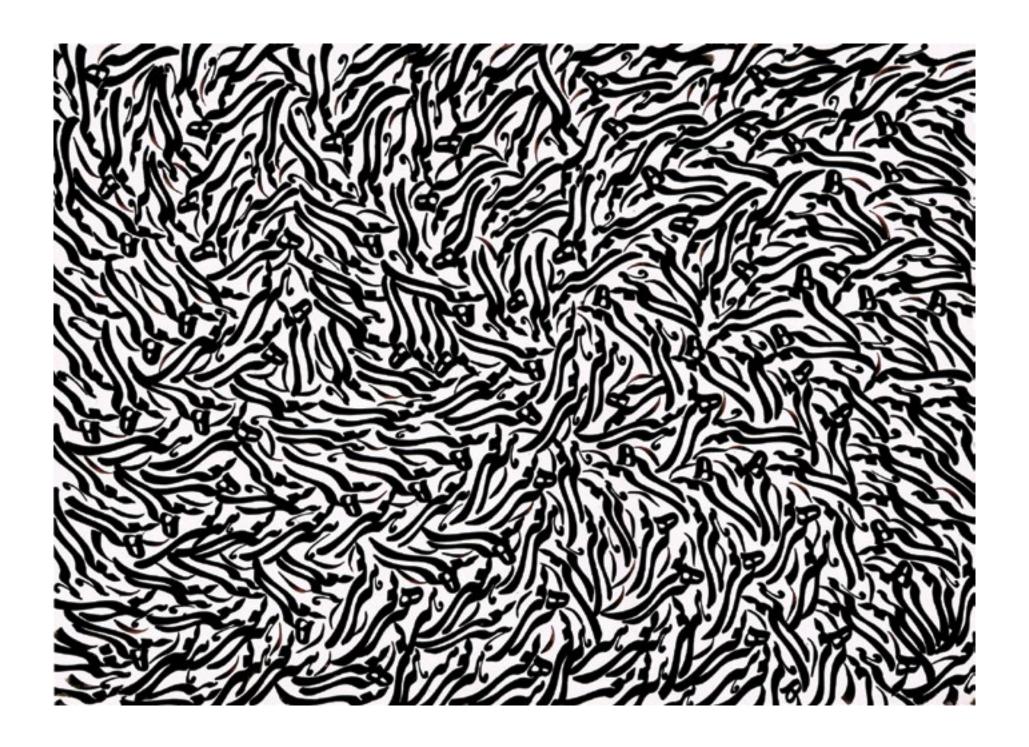


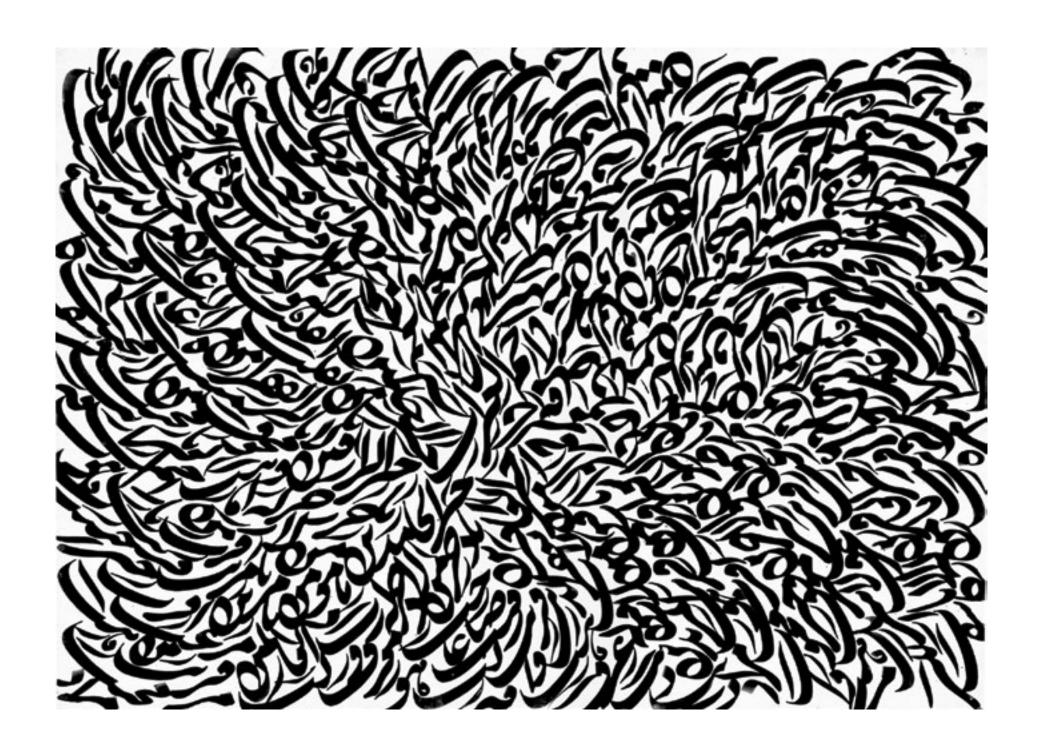


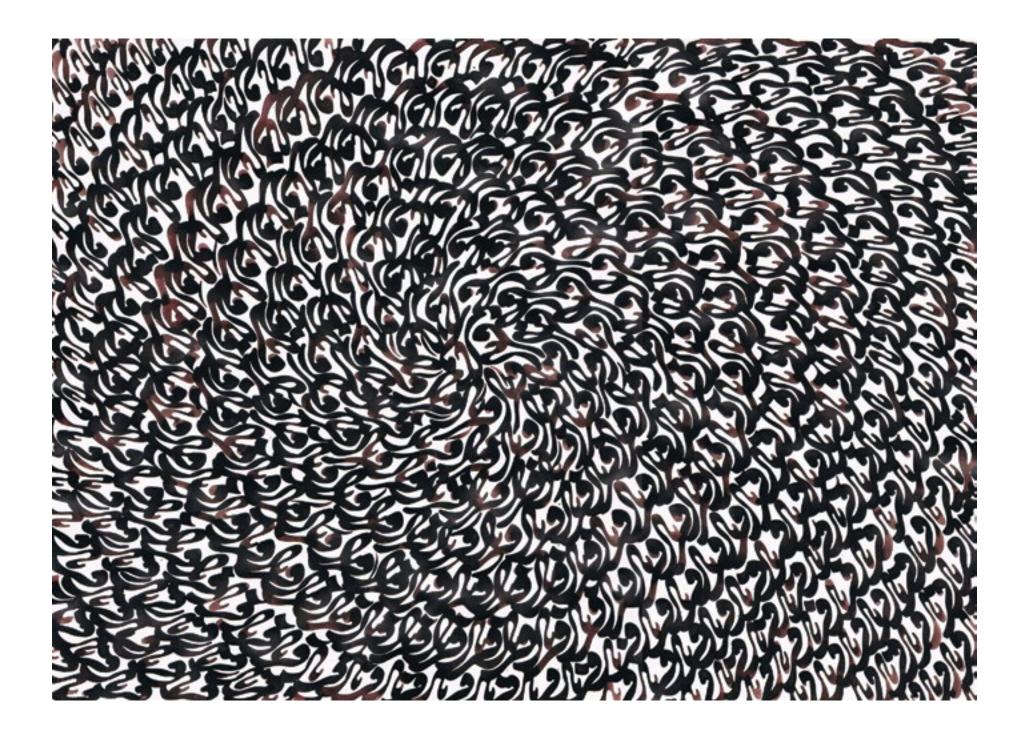


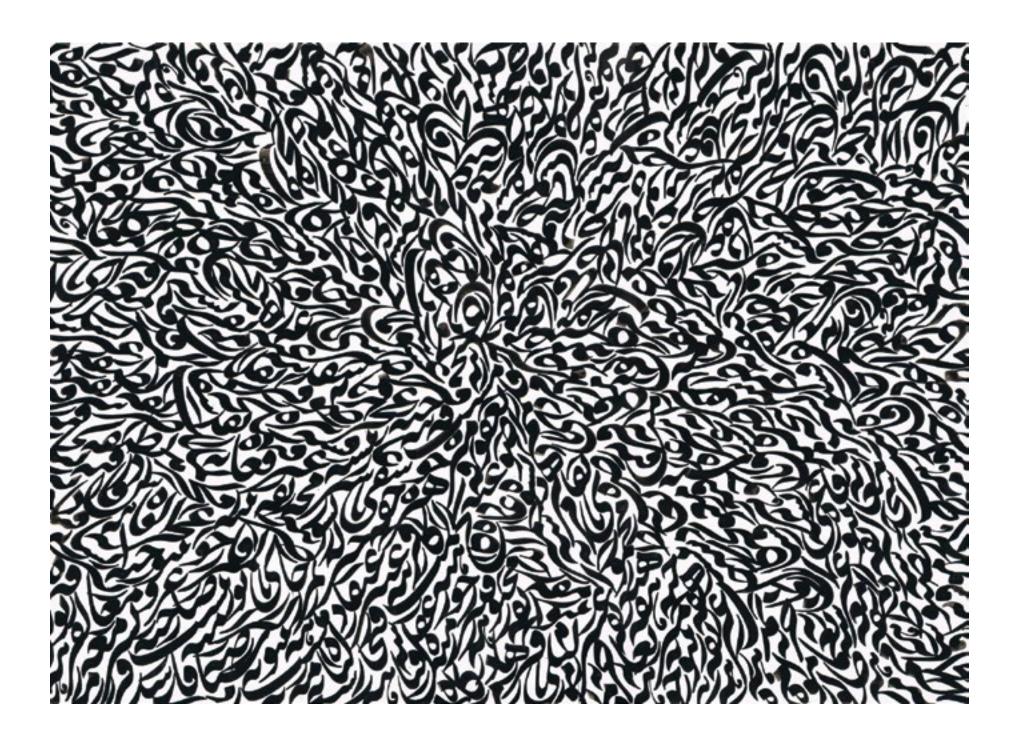


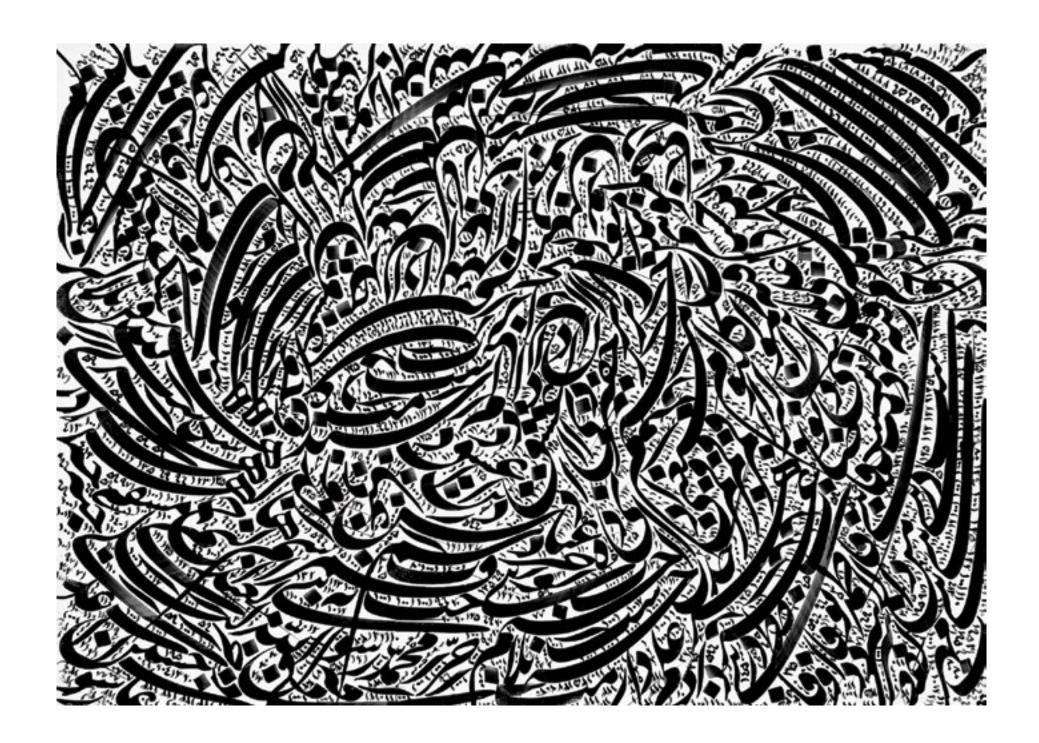


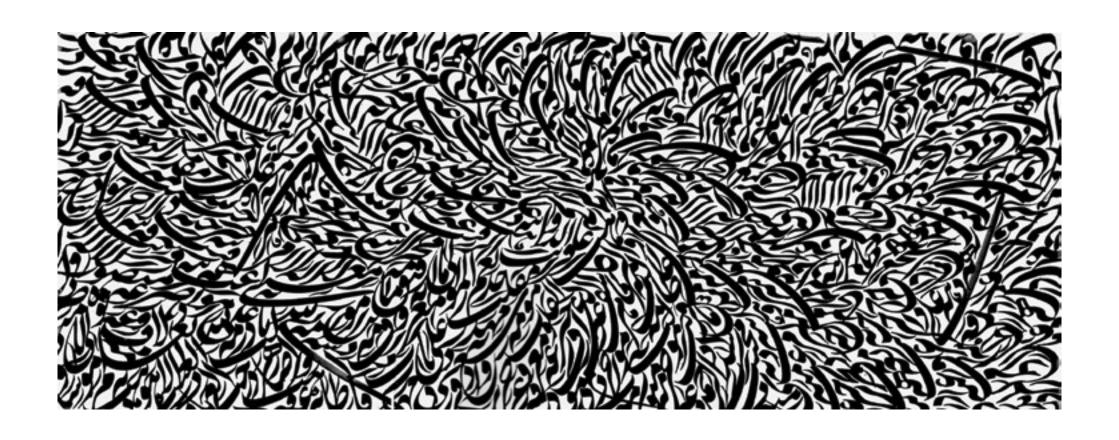


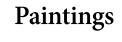


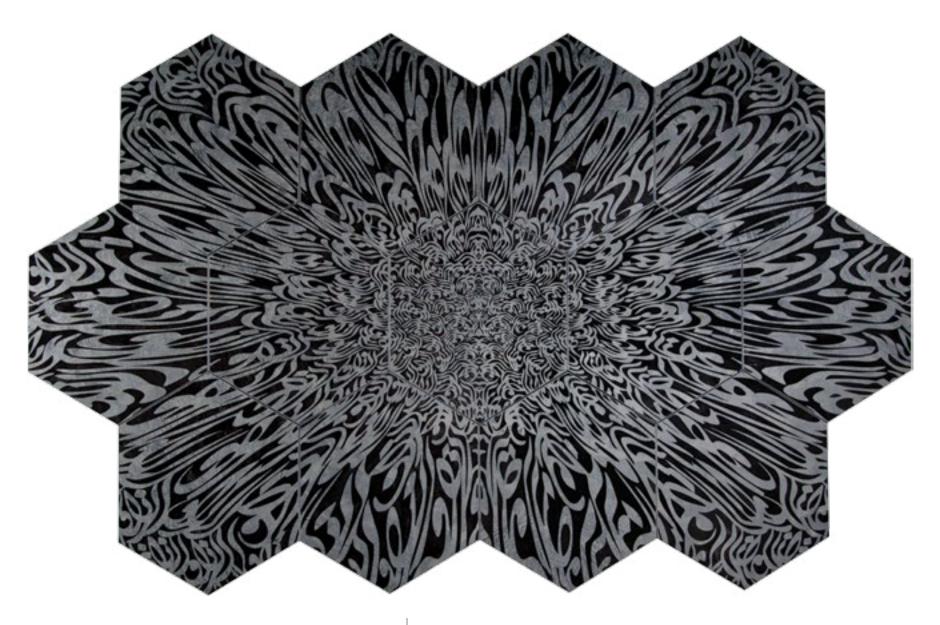




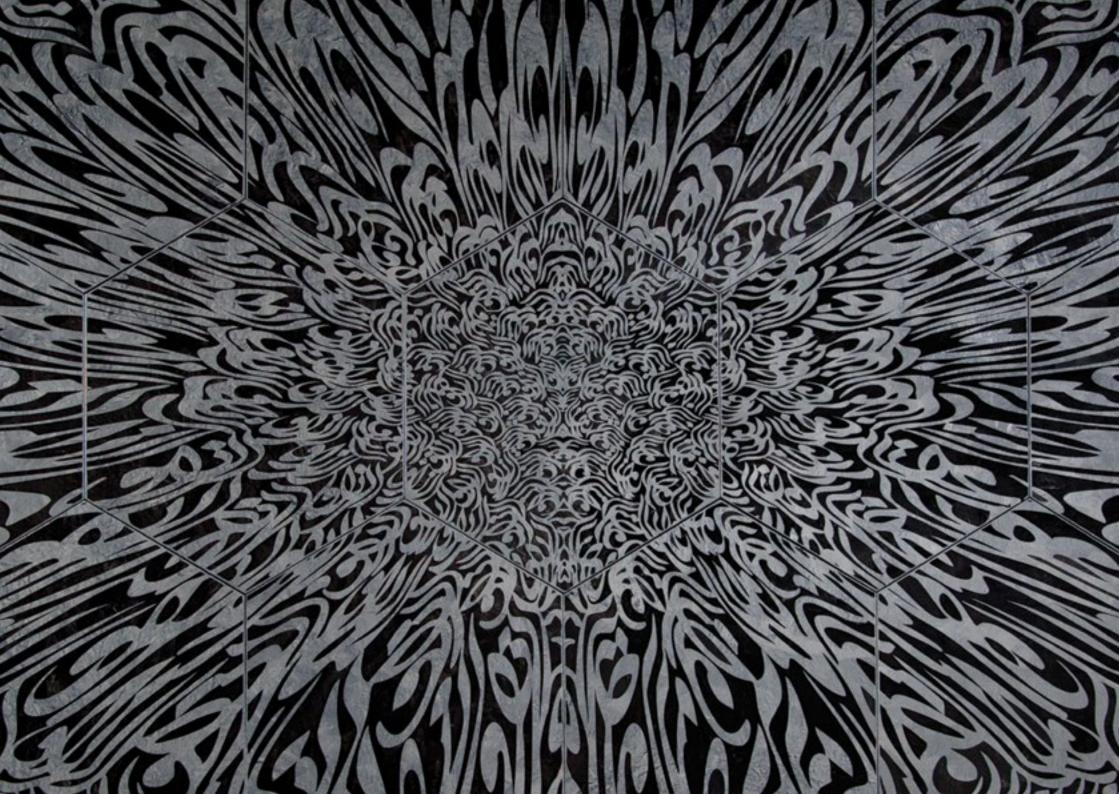








 $He\ Will\ Provide$  2015 Thirteen Panels, Acrylic on canvas  $364\ x\ 574\ cm$ 

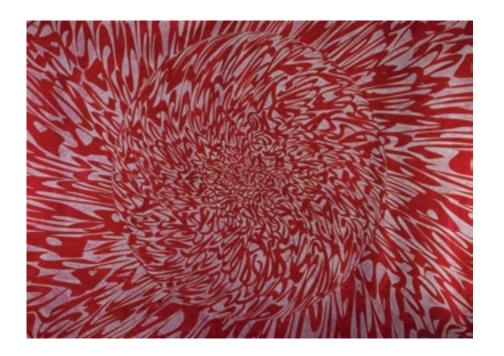






Destiny Square 2015 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 150 cm

The Creator - The Source 2015 Mixed media on canvas 150 x 150 cm





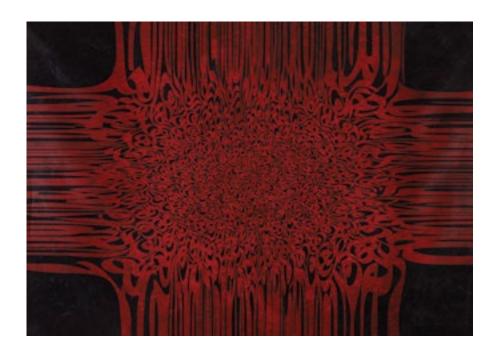
The Guardian Angel 2014 Acrylic on canvas 185 x 266 cm

The Watcher 2014 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 210 cm





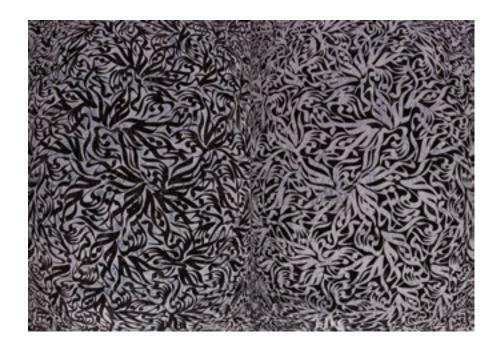
 $The \ Maker \\ 2014$  Diptych, Acrylic on canvas  $170 \times 150 \ cm \ each$ 



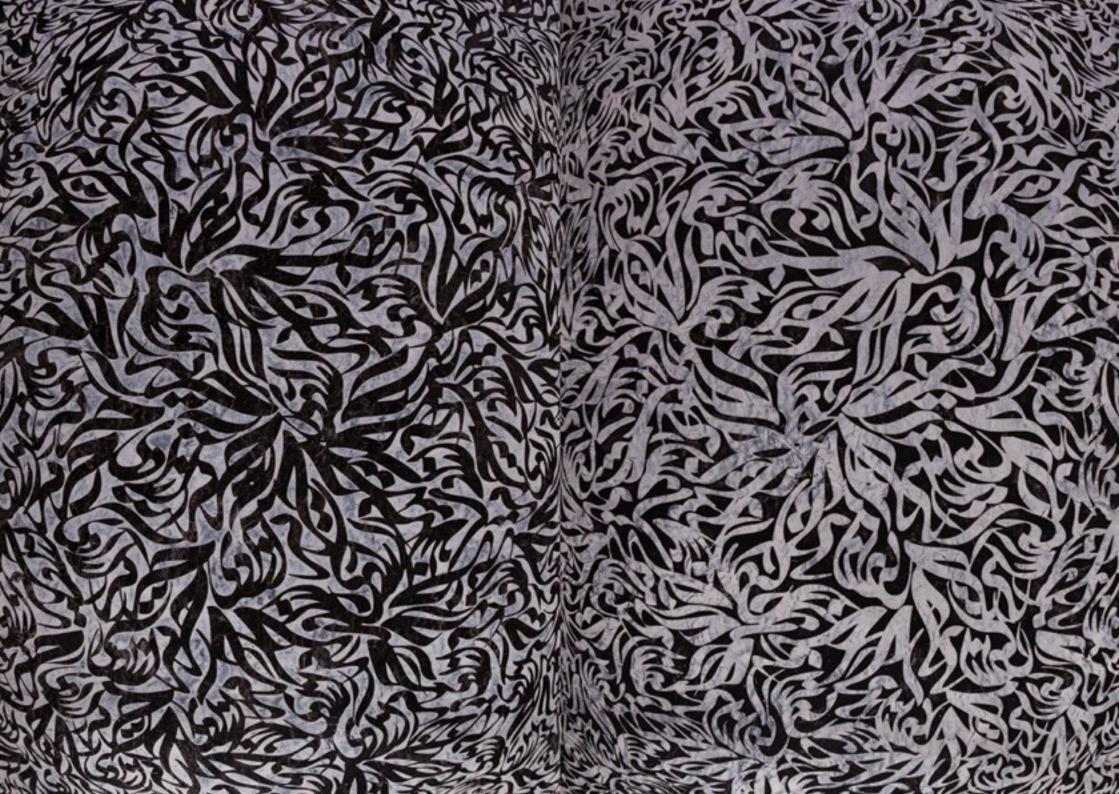


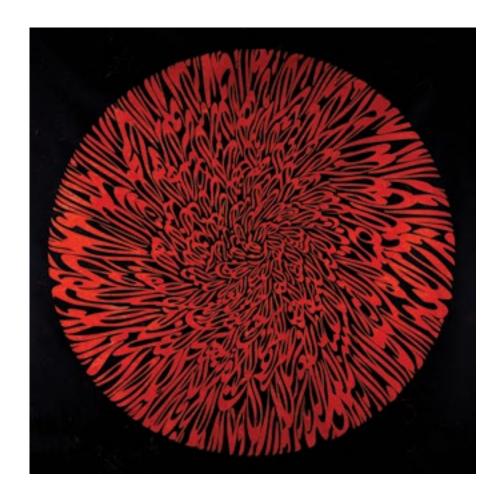
Soul Mate 2014 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 213 cm





Karma 2014 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 205 cm The Paradoxical Reality 2014
Diptych, Acrylic on canvas 165 x 118 cm each







The Oracles of Truth
2014
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 160 cm

 $\begin{tabular}{ll} Independence-Freedom & 2014 \\ Mixed media and magazine on canvas & 117.5 x 178 cm \\ \end{tabular}$ 



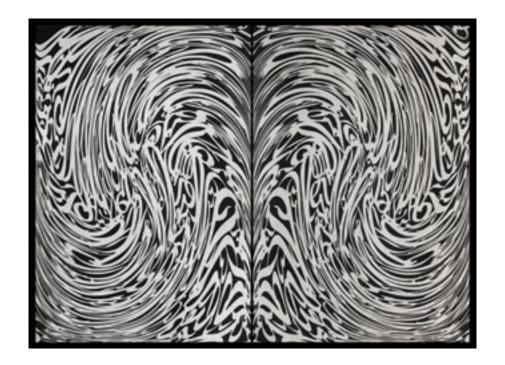


 $\begin{array}{c} \textit{Deja Vu} \\ \textrm{2014} \\ \textrm{Mixed media on canvas} \\ \textrm{150 x 205 cm} \end{array}$ 

 $\begin{array}{c} \textit{Perplexity} \\ 2013 \\ \text{Oil and acrylic on canvas} \\ 150 \times 210 \text{ cm} \end{array}$ 



Drops 2013 Oil and acrylic on canvas 120 x 210 cm





 $\begin{array}{c} \textit{Cascade} \\ 2013 \\ \text{Diptych, Acrylic on canvas} \\ 165 \times 235 \text{ cm} \end{array}$ 

 $\frac{\textit{Numbers}}{2012}$  Quadriptych, Mixed media on canvas  $236 \times 330 \text{ cm}$ 





## Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organisation, managing the careers of a diverse roster of established and emerging artists from the Middle East. Blue-chip art spaces in Beirut, Dubai, and London, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts programme have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art by introducing the dynamic art of the region to a global audience. With its widely respected multi-language publishing division and a custodianship programme that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also spearheaded recent efforts to document the region's art history.



