Poetry and the rich literary traditions of the Middle East have always played a pivotal role in the cultures of the region. The works grouped together here are inspired by literature and the sentiments evoked by particular writers. The first works in this section include paintings and calligraphies that focus on early Arabic literature. In Arab tribal kingdoms before the coming of Islam, a powerful oral tradition existed that ensured the survival of a remarkable body of Arabic poetry, which continues to be cherished and learnt today. This includes poetry by writers such as Zuhayr ibn Abi Su’ima, author of one of the mu’allaqat, (“the hanging ones”) – the seven odes (qasidas) reputed to have been the greatest poems ever composed and honoured by being hung up in the enclosure at Mecca. Poems such as these often dramatically evoke the life of the desert, with tales of love, chivalry, honour and battle written in beautiful language. Iranians, too, have their favourite poets: Umar Khayyam, author of the famous rubayat, and Hafez, the acknowledged master of Persian lyric poetry, are both represented here. The writing of modern Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad also appears in Shirin Neshat’s work. Another group of works included here show artists drawing their inspiration from modern Arab poets of the region: Adonis, Mahmoud Darwish, Badr Shaker al-Sayyab and others who articulate the sentiments and preoccupations of the modern generation. In many cases artists and poets work closely together, creating printed or hand-crafted books in the tradition of the French livres d’artistes. Other artists are moved by the great mystic writers such as Ibn ‘Arabi, al-Hallaj and Rumi, and yet others are inspired by stories such as the evocative tales of The Thousand and One Nights.
13. Suad al-Attar

Inspiration from a poem

HAND-COLOURED SOFT-GROUND ETCHING
AND AQUATINT, ARTIST'S PROOF, 1999
H 53.8 cm, W 50.5 cm
IRAQI
2000 2-27 (2)
PRESENTED BY THE ARTIST

"Sunset alighted in my heart, and I waited
Even as love melts when engulfed by flame.
Wherefore, O eyes, pour forth thy tears,
or stire your flow...
Nor be, O heart,
At being told with sorrows."

(Translated from Fadlallah Attar 2004: 136)

This verse from the early Arab poet Layla al-Yahyai (al-Hudawi 1999: 34) is inscribed at the base of the painting. Suad al-Attar’s work is characterized by dreamy figural imagery, often drawn from the ancient Mesopotamian past.
This verse from the early Arab poet Layla bint Lukayz (al-Lihali, 999–1045) is inscribed at the base of the painting. Suad al-Attar’s work is characterized by dreamy figurative imagery, often drawn from the ancient Mesopotamian past.

Wherever a man has a peculiar cast in his nature, although he suppose it concealed, it will soon be known.

How many men dost thou see, whose abundant merit is admired, when they are silent, but whose failings are discovered, as soon as they open their lips.

Half of man is his tongue, and the other half is his heart: the rest is only an image composed of blood and flesh.”

(Translated Jones, 1972, Commentary Judges)
"A gesture from one man to another is more noble than pearls or coal."

A verse from the poetry of Wallis bin al-Hobab (d. c. 780), very little of which survives. He was born in Kufa in Iraq, wrote poetry about wine and licentious love, and was a teacher of the great Arab poet Abu Nuwas (d. c. 813). The word 'mar' (mar' or 'person') is boldly isolated from the others in black. To achieve these broad strokes Massoudy uses a piece of board dipped in coloured pigments. The complete phrase is written in red in the angular告诉你 style of script.

This phrase for wa anta hur ('come forward and you are free') is written in bold and repeated in continuous lines that fade away towards the top of the page. It is from the popular epic by 'Antar, written in about the twelfth century about the celebrated warrior-poet Antar bin Shaddad (525-615). Chivalrous and brave, he was famously in love with his uncle's daughter 'Aisha. However, as a child of mixed birth (with an Arab father and a black mother), he grew up as a slave and was freed only when he was needed to fight for his tribe, the 'Abo. When all appeared lost for the tribe, his uncle begged him to fight and said these words, making it clear to him that he was now a freedman and an Arab (Massoudy 2007a: 54).
17. All Omar Emres
Hayf al-âhaf (Brushwork in Maghribi)
BLACK INK ON PAPER, 1981
H 153, W 123 cm
EXHIBITION
INCH 82-15-1-81
PRESENTED BY THE ARTIST
Emres focuses on the single letter, in this case the letter 'âhaf, with deliberate borrowing of his calligraphic style on the Maghribi script of his native North Africa. In another link with tradition, he signs his paintings in the traditional manner, employing by medieval calligraphers: 'Ain is among the works of... His dramatic works are always given an additional layer of meaning by the inclusion of tiny lines of poetry that have a bearing on the behaviour of those in power and so on. The verse he has chosen here is attributed to Caliph al-Mansur (d. 775) and comments on the injustice of the society of the day, lamenting its lack of concern for the plight of the poor.

18. All Omar Emres
Shadda
WATERCOLOUR AND GOLD ON PAPER, 1980
H 40, W 42,5 cm
EXHIBITION
INCH 82-2-2-01
In this painting Emres has featured the shadda, the symbol used in Arabic to double letters. Around the shadda he has inscribed passages from the Alfh al-dajam wa-al-dajam (The book on elegance of expression and clarity of exposition) by al-jehzi (d. 776-846/9). A prolific writer and the leading literary personality of his age, he includes sayings by various poets and writers associated with Bava in Iraq—such as the blind poet Baha al-Bawari (714-84) and Hana al-Bawari (d. 728), the latter known for his short pious treatises. One of the passages featured in this composition is a gem in verse taken from a praise poem said to be by Bahlul:

"If you see the need to take advice, then rely on that of an eloquent or a decisive man. Do not be ashamed of seeking counsel from others. [It will benefit you].

Right feathers are supported by those behind them. Let weak men disdain. Don’t go to sleep; a breeze never sleeps."
(Translated: Abdullah)
19 Jila Peacock
Ten poems from Hafez

HANDBIND BOOK OF 10 SUGGESTIONS WITH POEMS ON JAPANESE PAPER, GLASGOW PRINT STUDIO, 2004
H 33.1 cm W 45.2 cm [closed]

BROADC dWELL PERMANENT

"Until your hair falls through the fingers of the breeze,
My yearning heart lies rent in two with grief.
Black as night, your magic eyes
Render this existence an illusion."

The daily meal eroded by your curls,
Is like the ink drop falling in the cane of .

And waiting trears in the perfect garden of your face,
Drop like a peacock falling into paradise."

[Translated Jila Peacock from the Divine of Hafez, see also Fall 1995]

Following the tradition of zoomorphic calligraphy which became particularly popular in Iran and Turkey in the nineteenth century, in this book Iranian-born Jila Peacock has used the Persian text of whole poems from Hafez, the fourteenth-century lyric poet of Iran, to create images of animals mentioned in the poems, such as the peacock illustrated here. Her approach is highly innovative. Using saddle colours and the nasta’liq script, developed in the fifteenth century specifically for writing in Persian, she builds up her legible word shapes by spacing them into the creature’s silhouette. For Jila, whose mother tongue is English but whose first written language was Persian, the making of this book marks a personal journey, revisiting the culture of her early childhood. In a recent interview she said, “I am really a painter, not a calligrapher, and my aim in making these visual translations is to show an artistic response to the luminous world of Hafez’s love poems.”

20 Farhad Moshiri
Drunk Lynx

OIL ON CANVAS, 2002
H 272 cm W 175 cm
IRAN
2003.5.2.1
BROADC dWELL PERMANENT

"The exalted lover, always drunk and diseased,
Frenzied, love-talk and crazed.
When sober, pleading he will be
When drunk again, what will be, will be."

[Translated Farhad Moshiri]

These lines by the celebrated Iranian poet Umar Khayyam (d. 1123), inscribed in nasta’liq script on a jar, have been described as a type of ‘blasphemous prose’ that Khayyam wrote alongside his poetry. In Moshiri’s words, “I see a poem written on a wall, bumper sticker or TV... Iranian urban poems casually without knowing who it’s from... It affects me one way or the other so I use it (personal communication).” Moshiri began his jar paintings in 2001. The form reflects for him a fascination with archaeology, in particular with the aesthetics of excavation, the formal aspect of the work, the aged look and everything, rather than the history unearthed. The surfaces of his canvases are therefore deliberately cracked [Singh-Burlet 2005: 76].
Jila Peacock

Ten poems from Hafez

Hand-made Book of 10
Handwritten诗词 on Parchment, Paper, Glasgow
Printed in 1994
H 33.7 cm, W 34.2 cm (closed)
Edition 2,000
6.6.2004

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

Visit your hair falls through the fingers of the lover,
My yearning heart lies rent in two with grief.
Black as sorrow, your sweet eyes
Render this existence an illusion.
The dewy rose embroidered by your cheek,
Is like the ink-drop foliing in the curve of j.
And out of tercet in the perfect garden of your face,
Doth like a peacock falling into paradise.
(Translated by Jila Peacock from the Queen of Hafez, see also Bell 1996)

Following the tradition of zoological calligraphy which became particularly popular in Iran and Turkey in the nineteenth century, in this book Iranian-born Jila Peacock has used the Persian text of whole poems from Hafez, the fourteenth-century Persian poet of Shiraz, to create images of animals mentioned in the poems, such as the peacock illustrated here. Her approach is highly innovative. Using subtle colour and the nasta’liq script, developed in the fifteenth century specifically for writing in Persian, she builds up her legible word shapes by squeezing them into the creature’s silhouettes. For Jila, whose mother tongue is English but whose first written language was Persian, the making of this book marks a personal journey, re-creating the culture of her early childhood. In a recent interview she said, ‘I am really a painter, not a calligrapher, and my aim in making these visual translations is to show an artistic response to the luminous world of Hafez’s love poems.’

Farhad Moshi

Drunken lover

Oil on Canvas, 2003
H 200.0 cm, W 175.0 cm

Bank
2003.7.61
Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

‘The enchanted lover, always drunk and disgraced,
Fainting love-mad and crowned.
Whence sobbing, grieving he will be
When drunk again, what will be, shall be.’
(Translated Farhad Moshi)

These lines by the celebrated Persian poet Umar Khayyam (d. 1123), inscribed in nasta’liq script on a jar, have been described as a type of ‘blasphemous prose’ that Khayyam wrote alongside his poetry. In Moshi’s words, ‘I see a poem written on a wall, bumper sticker or TV... hammers utter poems casually without knowing why it’s from... it affects me one way or the other so I use it (personal communication).’ Moshi began his jar paintings in 2001. The form reflects for him a fascination with archaeology, in particular with the aesthetics of excavation, the formal aspect of the work, the aged look and everything, rather than the history unearthed. The surfaces of his canvases are therefore deliberately cracked (Singh-Barrett 2005: 76).
Inscribed within the eye is the poem I feel sorry for the garden, by Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad (1935-67):

"no one is thinking about the flowers
no one is thinking about the fish
no one wants to believe
that the garden is dying
that the garden's heart has swollen under the sun
that the garden
is slowly forgetting its green moments."

[Translated Shirin Neshat]
In the poem ‘I feel sorry for the garden’, by Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad (1935-67):

No one is thinking about the flowers
No one is thinking about the fish
No one wants to believe
that the garden is dying
that the garden’s heart has swelled under the sun
that the garden
is slowly forgetting its green moments.’

(Translated Shinin Neshat)

Many of Shin’in Neshat’s images are focused on Iranian women. She questions stereotypes and passionately believes in women’s emancipation, as did Forough Farrokhzad before her untimely death in 1967. This poem is included in the collection Let us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season, published posthumously in 1974.

The writer and artist Etel Adnan began working with Japanese folding paper during the 1960s. Combining her interests in literature and art, her new renowned livre d’artistes, in which she transcribes in her own hand Arabic poetry from a variety of sources, have placed her with Iraqi artist Sholeh Hassan al-Said firmly at the center of the genre known as hors-d’oeuvre (see pp. 15-19). This poem, ‘Blessed Day’, is by the Lebanese poet Nelly Salloum Amri, now living in Paris. It was written during the Lebanese civil war and its central figure is Antigone, it begins:

Today is a blessed day. A day off for the snipers.
Antigone addresses the King. She has to die. Today is a blessed day. She has to express questions which carry no anger, no need for revenge, no sorrow. Her duty is written on her dark skin as somber revenge and anger. Antigone’s action is due to her compassion for the dead and not to any love for the living.

(Translated Israa Fattal)