In thirty squares Madi has written the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet (as well as the combined letters (Jan-alla) preceded by the word 'Madi' in the first square. Each letter is multiplied and playfully turned into its own composition. Long fascinated by the Arabic script, since 1973 when he first created his Alphabet - Madi in his graphic work and his sculptures has focused and worked with the pure form of the individual letter rather than the written context of the word.

Utterly inspired by the shapes of the Arabic letter, Metoui describes himself as an architect of words seeking to make the letters "as poetic and as plastic as possible" (Metoui 1999:4). His characteristic style is the use of single words or short phrases. Here he has written different forms of the word 'path', 'enly', 'al-nity' and 'moat', the thick black strokes evocatively suggesting a steep and windy road.
Trained as a traditional calligrapher, Ehsai achieves an extraordinary synthesis of the traditional form with a very modern aesthetic. In his colourful calligraphic paintings, letters represent what he describes as "pure visual elements." The theme at the heart is the Word of God (Islam):

But my perspective on word-formations is not based on literary criteria; my experiments with Islamic script compositions that look to the future at the same time as relying on the millenail traditions of my forefathers." 

[Issa, Mosque and School (2001: 129)]
Trained as a traditional calligrapher, Elsai achieves an extraordinary synthesis of the traditional form with a very modern aesthetic. In his colourful calligraphic paintings, letters represent what he describes as 'pure visual elements'. The theme at the heart of God (Islam):

'The perspective on word-formations is not based on literary criticism; my experiments with Islam create compositions that look to the future at the same time as relying on the millennia traditions of my forefathers.'

[tra, Brown and Sadik 2001: 199]

Abdul Qadir Al-Rasae

Untitled

WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
2004
H 90.0 cm, W 70.0 cm
DUBAI, UAE

LITERATURE BY MIRZIAH NAHIAN
AL-GAWI

Al-Rasae works in watercolour, achieving delicate paintings that include landscapes and architecture of his native Dubai. Increasingly turning new to abstract art, he often creates floating square shapes which recall the local store houses of his childhood and overlays these with juxtaposed Arabic letters.
Parviz Tanavoli
Neech in a cage
BRONZE, 2005
H 114.0 cm, W 66.0 cm
IRAN
2006 2-6-1
BROCKE (SEDEL) PERMANENT FUND
The foremost Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli was a founder member of Sapphaneh, a term coined for an artistic movement that began in 1960s Iran, and which sought to integrate popular symbols of SW's culture into art—a 'spiritual Pop Art', as it has been described. He has long been inspired by the word 'neecheh'—meaning 'nothing'—which he has created in numerous and ever more ambitious forms. It has been said that the word symbolizes for him both an ambivalence towards the past and a sense of meaninglessness or disorderliness with an inadequate present. The latter forms are in the traditional Persian nasta'liq script, while the cage alludes to the Sapphaneh itself (see p. 17).

Salah Faisal al-All
Untitled
SUGARCANE ON PAPER (250X), 1961
H 125.3 cm, W 90.3 cm
BAQU'AT AL-'ILM
1987 12-19 31
Salah Faisal al-All has created an abstract composition using lines of script that give the impression of illegibility. Within this trompe l'oeil composition words and phrases emerge and then are lost.
52. Parviz Tanavoli  
**Heach in a cage**  
BRONZE, 2006  
H 118.5 cm; W 45.5 cm  
RM  
2006 2 6 1  
BROOKE SKEEL PERMANENT FUND

The foremost Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli was a founder member of Sepaaehaneel, a term coined for an artistic movement that began in 1960s Iran, and which sought to integrate popular symbols of Shi'a culture in art — a 'spiritual Pop Art', as it has been described. He has long been inspired by the word *heach* — meaning 'nothing' — which he has created in numerous and ever more ambitious forms. It has been said that the word symbolizes for him both an ambivalence towards the past and a sense of meaninglessness or disinfestation with the inadequate present. The letter forms are in the traditional Persian nasta'liq script, while the cage alludes to the Sepaaehaneel itself (see p. 17).

53. Salah Falah Al-Abi  
**Untitled**  
SCREEN ON PAPER (2002), 1981  
112.5 x 81.8 cm  
MAQASID LAND  
1987 5:2 19:01

Salah Falah Al-Abi has created an abstract composition using lines of script that give the impression of legibility. Within this trompe-l'oeil composition words and phrases emerge and then are lost.
Armajani created word pictures for only a relatively short time during the 1960s. His work reflects a reverence for calligraphy, even though he does not follow traditional rules, and contains echoes of Persian poetry—he frequently held poetry in high esteem. "Poets are venerated in Persian culture... The poets always have the truth... in Iran poets were the only ones who were allowed to voice political and social protest" (Blakely and Cumberbatch 2002: 31).

This work, which also includes repetitions of words and numbers following the magical tradition (see cat. 68 and 70), is overlaid with red seals echoing the stamping of traditional documents.
This painting of the Arabic letter "ka" is from Wijdan’s Kehelba series, a collection of works focusing entirely on Arabic letter shapes. Wijdan describes the calligraphic school of art and her use of Arabic script as a form of artistic identity through which she is able to gratify her creative instincts and establish her individuality as a contemporary Arab and Islamic artist (Shaawa, Wijdan 1994). Kehelba is the site in Iraq of the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Husayn in 680. This cataclysmic event for Shi’a Muslims is re-enacted every year during the month of Muharram. For Wijdan the battle of Kerbelah is the epitome of the greatest human tragedy in Arab and Islamic history. It stands for loyalty and betrayal, courage and greed, right and wrong. Each era had a Kerbelah... Palestine, Vietnam, Bosnia and Somalia are a few among many. I chose Kerbelah as a subject for my art because I saw a hundred past Kerbelahs and four thousands more to come” (Shaawa, Wijdan 1994).
This painting of the Arabic lettergetStylea is from Wijden’s Kerbela series, a collection of works focusing entirely on Arabic letter shapes. Wijden describes the ‘calligraphic school of art’ and her use of Arabic script as a form of artistic identity through which she is able to gratify her creative instincts and establish her individuality as a contemporary Arab and Islamic artist’ (Shawa, Wijden 1994). Kerbela is the site in Iraq of the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Husayn ibn Ali. The cataclysmic event for Shi’a Muslims is re-enacted every year during the month of Muharram. For Wijden the battle of Kerbela is the ‘epitome of the greatest human tragedy in Arab and Islamic history. It stands for loyalty and betrayal, courage and greed, right and wrong. Each era had a Kerbela... Palestine, Vietnam, Bosnia and Somalia are a few among many. I chose Kerbela as a subject for my art because I saw a hundred past Kerbelas and fear thousands more to come’ (Shawa, Wijden 1994).

57 Jacob El-Hanani
Three Kavs
INK ON PAPER, 1997
H 65.3 cm, W 63.2 cm
MODERN ART IN ISRAEL
2003-3-30-016

El-Hanani’s compositions, drawn with pen, consist of weblike networks of delicate interlocking lines and symbols. He draws his inspiration largely from the ancient tradition of micrography. This was a technique of writing in tiny script, developed in the Middle East by scribes who were able to render entire sacred texts into minute form or create word pictures with lines of script. Some of the finest surviving examples of these are found in Hebrew writing.