Malihah Alsan
Not Farllari
MONOCHROME ON PAPER
UNIDENTIFIED (L. 1990)
14.8 x 24.8 cm, W 32.2 cm
£480-
1991.10.29.01

Malihah’s delicate abstract works come from her love of
scripts, particularly those of her native Iran. In this work
she creates a pattern of letters in relief that echo ancient
inscriptions.

‘Malihah Alsan’s distrust of the obvious, of the brush, of the
shell, has led her to create an expressive form that is as subtle
carefully as ancient stones. Some of her sketches works
involves her at the unrecorded tablets from a civilization that
is no more cryptic relics that will only revealed themselves to a
patient eye with a delicate understanding of the human eye.’
(Kabbari 1990)
Maliheh Afzal

Net Pahlav
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER
UNORIENTED (L), 1990
H 240 cm. W 320 cm.
IRAN
1991.12.01

Maliheh Afzal's delicate abstract works come from her love of scripts, particularly those of her native Iran. In this work, she creates a pattern of letters in relief that echo ancient inscriptions.

'Maliheh Afzal's distrust of the obvious, of the thread of the shell, has led her to create an expressive form that is as subtle as the patina on ancient stones. Some of her abstract works strike me as being like unearthed tablets from a civilization that is no more; cryptic messages that will only reveal themselves to a patient eye with a delicate understanding of the human past.' (Valdman 1990)

INK ON PAPER OVERLAPPED WITH CALKEZ, 2000
H 240 cm. W 320 cm.
IRAN
2005.1.1.01
BROOKE SUMERU PERMANENT FUND

In this example of her work Afzal's distinctive vocabulary is clearly evident. The idea of the veil which she subtly evokes with the grey openwork fabric takes on a number of different meanings and becomes a universal theme; veiling in her own words 'not only women but threats and intentions' (personal communication).
This drawing is from a series entitled "Requiem" inspired by the time Harmoney spent in Afghanistan in the 1990s. As a mathematician, he is fascinated by notions of order and chaos. After leaving Afghanistan in 1995, he started to draw systematically:

"I am a composer searching for notes and creating melodies, I parsed through lines and constructed patterns. Gradually this evolved into a personal vocabulary and an abstract calligraphy that I use to draw these lyrical essays."

[Artist's statement]
Toured as a calligrapher, Fathi often incorporates script in her abstract works. As in Shah Armajani’s work (cat. 54), it is poetry that inspires her but it is deliberately beyond legibility. As she said in a recent interview:

‘There has always been rhyme and only one poem, but the point is that the poem is [known] not important. I know it by heart and that is why I always see it unconsciously. Poetry is no longer important, it is important that I can trust [it] just the way that I want it exactly.’
Trained as a calligrapher, Fathi often incorporates script in her abstract works. As in Shah Arasgian's work (cat. 54), it is poetry that inspires her but it is deliberately beyond legibility. As she said in a recent interview, ‘It has always been here and only one poem, but the point is that the poem is [blank], not important. I know it by heart and that is why I always see it: unconsciously. Poetry is no longer important, it is important that I can trust it.’ Just the way that I want, to exactly.

The mysterious lines and patterns in Arabashikh’s work deliberately evoke his ancient Persian past. As an active member of Saqqakhaneh—the art movement that consciously reconsiders past traditions and incorporates them into contemporary art—his work has had that past as a constant theme. Among the lines can be detected letters and words.
Working in a variety of materials (see cat. 39), Mahdoussi has been described as a 'choreographer of letters'. He is fascinated by the shapes of Arabic letter forms but does not set out to write meaningful texts. In the words of Mauroick (1990: 5), Nja Mahdoussi does not paint. He writes but he does not write ... Arabic calligraphy yes and no. Yes in the fluidity of the shapes. No in the reading of it. In this composition shapes resembling kufic script are grouped at the base and in the centre of the image, with lines of different styles of tiny pseudo-cursive script in the rest of the circle.
Working in a variety of materials (see cat. 39), Mahdouli has been described as a "Choreographer of letters". He is fascinated by the shapes of Arabic letter forms but does not set out to write meaningful texts. In the words of Mauveick (1990: 5), "Nja Mahdouli does not paint. He writes but he does not write... Arabic calligraphy yes and no. Yes in the fluidity of the shapes. No in the reading of it." In this composition shapes resembling hufic script are grouped at the base and in the center of the canvas, with layers of different styles of tiny pseudo-cursive script in the rest of the circle.

"It is only through our past that we can accede to modernity, I know of no historical modernity," wrote Belkahia. Abandoning the use of oil and canvas during the 1970s, he preferred to work with natural materials such as sheepskin and wood, using henna, saffron and other natural dyes for decoration. His designs often evoke traditional motifs such as tattoo or magical numbers and symbols. The designs on this piece and cat. 66 are inspired by rituals known as gnawa after a people of that name who today live in southern Morocco. They have strong ritual traditions that include trance ceremonies, dance and music. These allow participants to communicate with the spirits (both good and bad) who are thought to play a powerful role in people's lives. The accompanying music often contains references to exile and slavery. The spiritual forces in gnawa rituals are represented by different colours: green, yellow, black and white. The designs on the works possibly allude to the focus on movement of the dances and express the contradictory nature of the spiritual forces released during the state of trance.
Splashes of colour and humbly written and repeated words are the hallmark of the pottery of Khaled Ben Slimane. His interest in writing began after finding a stash of old family contracts in 1979, which he transformed into beautiful glazed bricks covered in script. The texts he uses are written with a brush and are often combinations of illegible scribbles and symbols interspersed with real words written almost like graffiti. Included here are the words waqf al-Allah (‘God has brought me success’). The repetitions of words and phrases so characteristic of his ceramic works come from Sufi Zikr, in which religious phrases are rhythmically repeated; he often listens to these before working.

68 Rachid Koraichi
Untitled
PAINTED SUR BANNE, 1988
H: 223.0 cm; W: 195.0 cm
ALGERIAN MINISTRY 1982-5-301
BROOKS/SMILL PERMANENT FUND
This textile is one of a series that was created for an exhibition called Soused that took place in Paris [Koraichi 1999]. The composition is characteristic of Koraichi’s work: symbols, words and magical squares drawn from the Islamic magical tradition recall designs on West African talismanic shrines and magical bowls. These are combined with other symbols which, intentionally or not, recall Japanese pictograms.
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Rachid Korichi

Untitled
PAPENDSU BANNER, 1988
11.122 x 4; 14.440 cm
ALGIRAN FRANCE
1985 3.057
BROOKLYN MUSEUM PERMANENT FUND

This textile is one of a series that was created for an exhibition called Salamé that took place in Paris (Korichi 1990). The composition is characteristic of Korichi’s work: symbols, words and magical squares drawn from the Islamic magical tradition recall designs on West African talismanic shirts and magical bowls. These are combined with other symbols which, intentionally or not, recall Japanese pictograms.
The composition consists of a fragmentary page with additional strips of paper attached. It is inscribed with a magical square within which are letters, numbers and symbols, all drawn from the Islamic magical tradition. There are rows of repeated single letters, the use of which was regarded as particularly efficacious in the making of charms and spells.
Faisal Samia

Text body

CELL PHOTOSYNTHESIS, HENNA AND GOLD LEAF, DRY CLAY AND WIRE-MESH, 2002
H:165 cm, W: 45.5 cm, Depth: 25.0 cm (approx.)
SAUDI ARABIA

Lend by Dr. Annmarie Cleghorn

Samia has been working in different media over a number of years. In this sculptural work, he has used text made up of deconstructed words written in Arabic letters, which he describes as follows: The text hides a subject or story which we can only decode if we wish. It covers a "body" made of wire-mesh and dry clay created with an improvised movement, the two (text and body) become one like water taking the shape of the cup. "The writing also recalls paper charms and amulets in which strings of incomprehensible letters are inscribed to heal the sick or ward off evil. In conformity with certain types of charms, the Arabic letters are written in their isolated form, unconnected to other letters. In magical contexts, letters written in this way were deemed to have particular power. In talking about the form of his compositions, Samia said in a recent interview:

In 2009 I burned the border between painting and sculpture by freeing the treated canvas from the frame and then I cut it to an organic shape and hang it from one side on the wall or in space. This act enabled me to open a dialogue between the artwork and its context."

69 Iman Abdullah Mahmud

Ritual signs

COLOURED INK ON PAPER
MOUNTED ON CARD, 1999
H:195 cm, W: 45.8 cm
IRAQ/GERMANY

2003-10-6-02

HEINRICH BEHRENS PERMANENT FUND

The composition consists of a fragmentary page with additional scraps of paper attached. It is inscribed with a magical square within which are letters, numbers and symbols all drawn from the Islamic magical tradition. There are rows of repeated unit letters, the use of which was regarded as particularly efficacious in the making of charms and spells.