



STEVEN NAIFEH
FOUND IN TRANSLATION



Saida H. - *Iridescent Copper*, 2013
Copper-plated steel
84 x 168 in / 213.4 x 426.7 cm

Cover:
Saida – Chrome, 2013 (detail)
Chrome on steel
72 x 72 in / 182.9 x 182.9 cm

Printed on the occasion of

Found in Translation

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Leila Heller Gallery
568 West 25th Street
New York, NY 10001

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FOUND IN TRANSLATION

MARCH 27 - APRIL 26, 2014

STEVEN NAIFEH: Chromatic Meditations

Large-scale compositions of bold patterns and sympathetic colors, Steven Naifeh's structured offerings in methodical series are not shy. These works inhabit substantial space with confidence. At the same time, they seem to invoke an exchange with their settings: give me space to breathe, and I will give you my oxygen. Perhaps paternal in scale and dignity, they also have a maternal assurance, generous and synchronous with the passage of daylight: Reflections wrought by metallic pigments cross the flat surfaces, provoking a gentle transformation of mood. Naifeh's works may reside monumentally, but they also envelop and embrace. The viewer, whether in the hermetic retreat of the art gallery, or just getting on with things in the course of ordinary life, senses the dual atmospheres of these works as feeling, in equal capacity with seeing.

Each multiply conjoined work is the result of precise thinking and execution. A duality is present here too: the mind of the artist is paramount, while the hand is irrelevant. The concept for each work is developed on a computer on the basis of a preliminary sketch. The joints and overlaps are calculated, and the proportions adjusted for scale. The search for congenial color relationships is an integral part of the artist's thought process. Once the detailed drawing is ready, a team of four technicians produces the work.

In the case of the canvas constructions, the techniques are identical to the traditional, labor-intensive craft: The wooden stretchers are measured, cut and assembled; the canvases are stretched and their surfaces prepared by priming, spraying and sanding to build up multiple coats of opaque consistency. When a smooth surface has been achieved, patterns are defined by tape stretched across the multiple canvases. There is no tolerance for distortion despite the invitation to err while traversing a possible a hundred and ten individual elements. The metallic colors are sprayed between the established lines. When the tape is removed, all evidence of the handwork dissolves.

A similar conceptual approach is adopted to produce the welded steel *Saidas*, bathed in copper or chrome-plate, or those cut from pale, Texas limestone.

The smooth, machine-like finishes of Naifeh's works recall John McCracken or Donald Judd, while a ready admiration of Frank Stella's Maximalism is cheerfully acknowledged by their three-inch depth. As an artist who chooses to work in the line of these Minimalist predecessors, Naifeh is inspired by the dual potentials of walls and floors as surfaces for display. However, the patterns that he proposes are linked with much earlier ideas about art. Each work stands alone, but also suggests the singular units of an infinite repetition, an idea evident

in various artistic traditions, most notably those developed in Muslim lands a thousand years ago. The floor works with their elements cut to various heights also explore possibilities of texturing and proportioning, blending the concerns of pre-modern arts with those of the present.

The abstract prisms of each pattern may represent the end-result of a process of harmonious calculations, but they also speak a language. Naifeh's language provokes meanings through associations—an evocation of memory of place, material and scale. The medium is architecture remembered from a childhood spent in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon and Jordan: Rustic *Ajlun* with its sturdy and rough-cut stone masonry, stately *Jerash* with its Greek proportions and elegant colonnaded streets, and *Petra*, the formidable, solitary funerary complex of the Nabateans with its classicizing pediments. The question of scale as a response to memory is part of Naifeh's calculus.

Far from Orientalist romance, communing with ruins is a local concern: it is an encoded trope in pre-Islamic and medieval Arabic poetry usually associated with nostalgia for the lost beloved. Other meanings are also possible. An encounter with ruins can signify both resignation to and a protest against the injustice of the inexorable and unidirectional passage of time—it can go for or against the grain.

Such ruins have preoccupied American artists for some time—Frederick Church's *El Khasne* (1874), inspired by a visit to Petra, comes to mind. More relevant to Naifeh is Stella's *Protractor Series* from the late 1960s and early 70s, also inspired by a trip to the Middle East. These bold paintings of synthetic colors laid down in stripes are comprised of planes constructed by means of the simplest geometrical instruments: the sweep of the compass and the straight edge of the ruler.

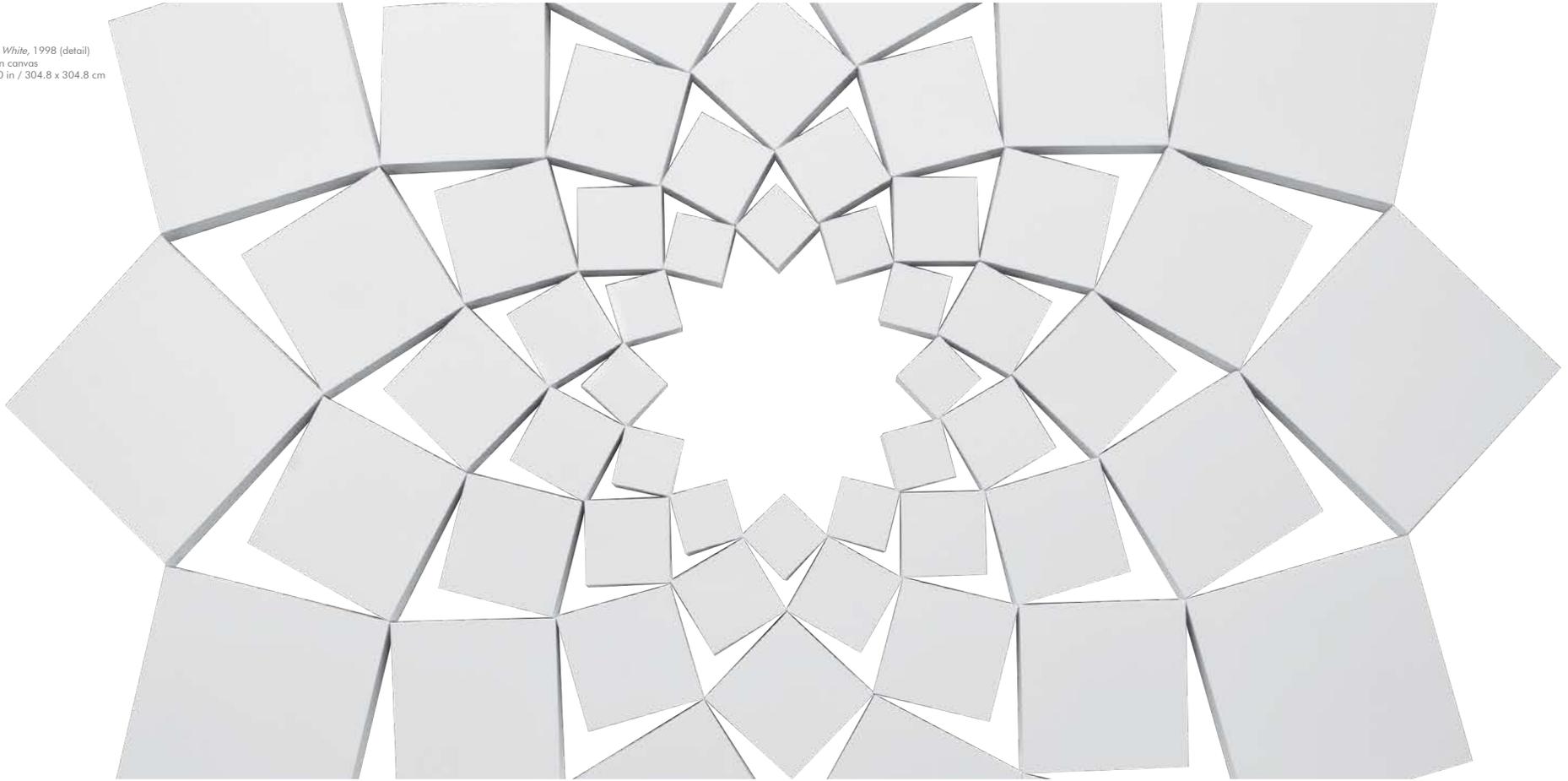
Stella was fascinated by the interlaced decorative surface patterns he saw in still-standing remains of buildings, mainly in Iran. He created a visual language catalogued by names that followed his itinerary—Ctesiphon, Tahkt-i-Sulayman, Harran, and Khurasan. Each series was created in multiples, representing phases of experimental development. Clearly, Naifeh follows this scheme as a form of tribute.

Naifeh's work mounts an intellectually considered challenge to Stella, in accord with his scholarly pursuits as an art historian. For example, the *Topkapı* series is, in a sense, a homecoming, taking its inspiration from the publication by a fellow scholar at Harvard of a fifteenth-century scroll of architectural drawings preserved at the Topkapı Palace Museum Library in Istanbul. This study throws into question the assumptions heretofore made regarding the structure, meaning and application of abstract geometrical designs, many of great complexity, in architecture in the late medieval period in Iran and Central Asia. Far from soulless and superficial schemes, these designs were intimately bound with ideas about religion, social affiliation, and advances in mathematics. By drawing upon this source, Naifeh is acknowledging a level of intended meaning in his own work that requires consideration.

Finally, through the exuberant Uzbek series, Naifeh moves in new directions, using acrylic sheets and other materials that are entirely cut by machine. Drawn from the patterns created by brick vaulting in some Central Asian domes, these works suggest something flowing and organic, a sea anemone or the petals of a flower. Their whirling vortices invite the viewer to let go.

Heather Ecker
Independent curator

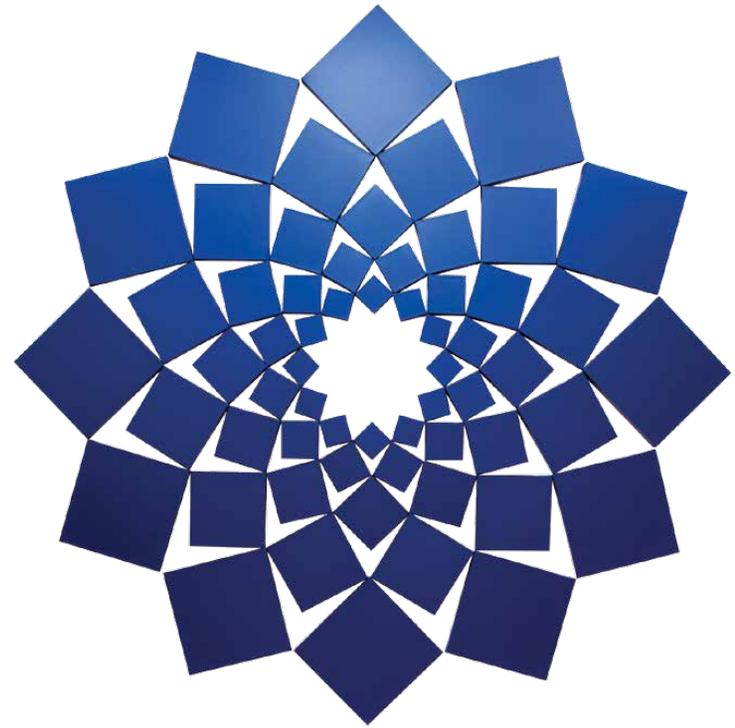
Saida II - White, 1998 (detail)
Enamel on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm



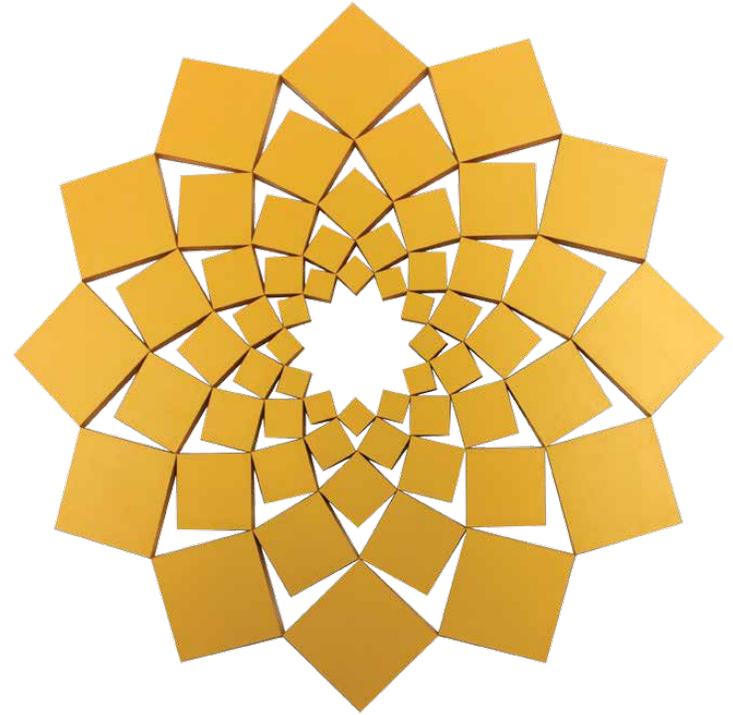
Saida XXX – Venetian Blue, 2012
Installation view at The Columbia Museum of Art



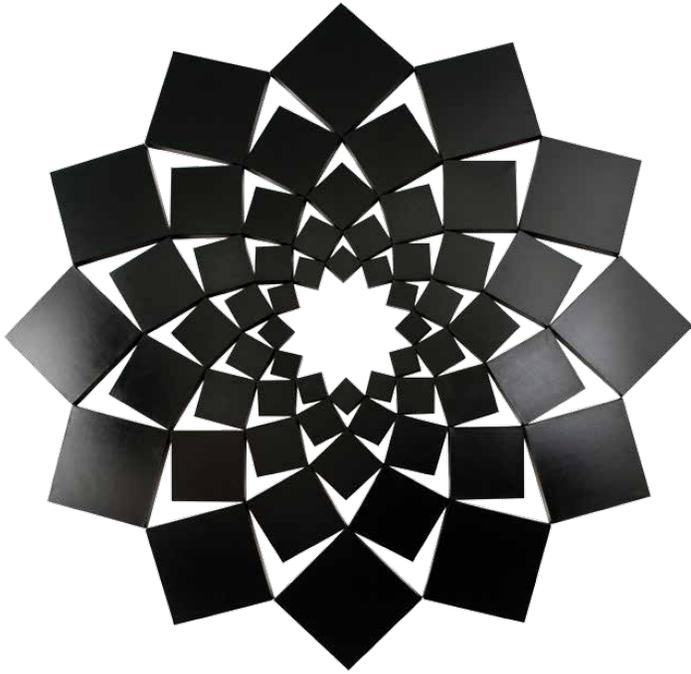
Saida XXX – Venetian Blue, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm



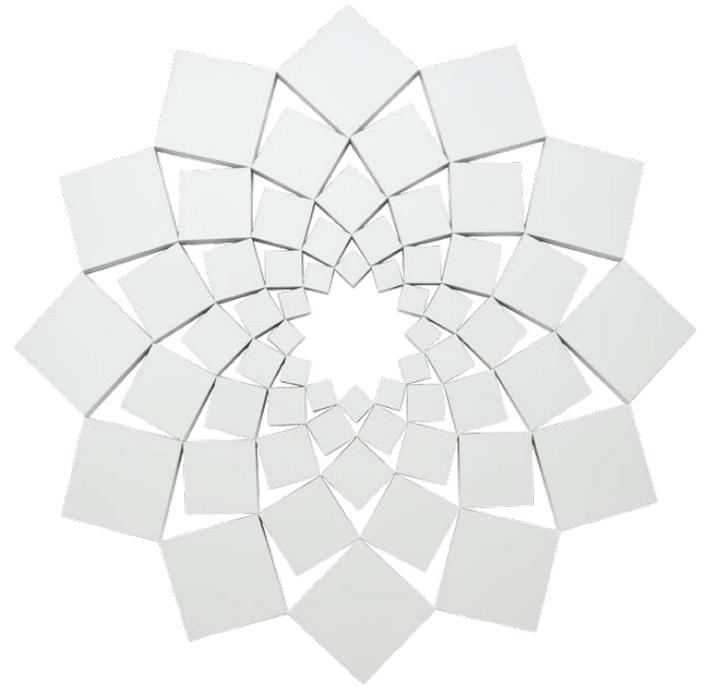
Saida V - Iridescent Gold, 1998
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm



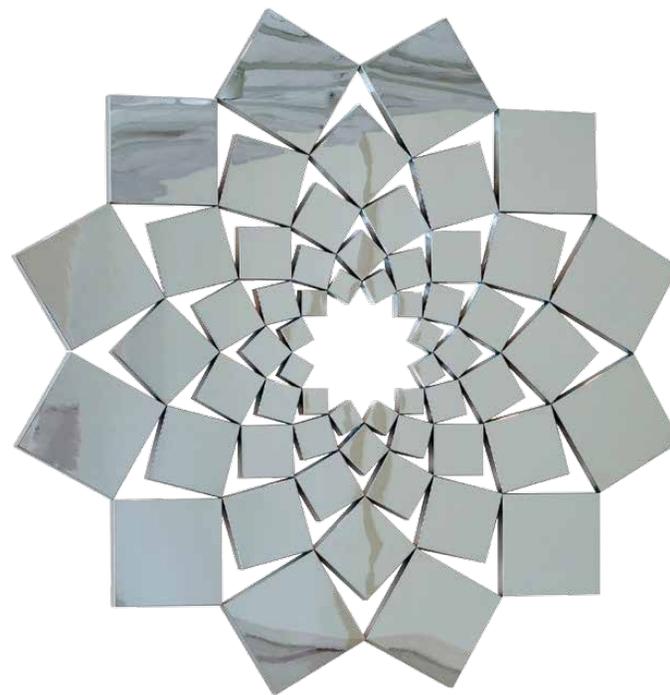
Saida I – Black, 1998
Enamel on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm



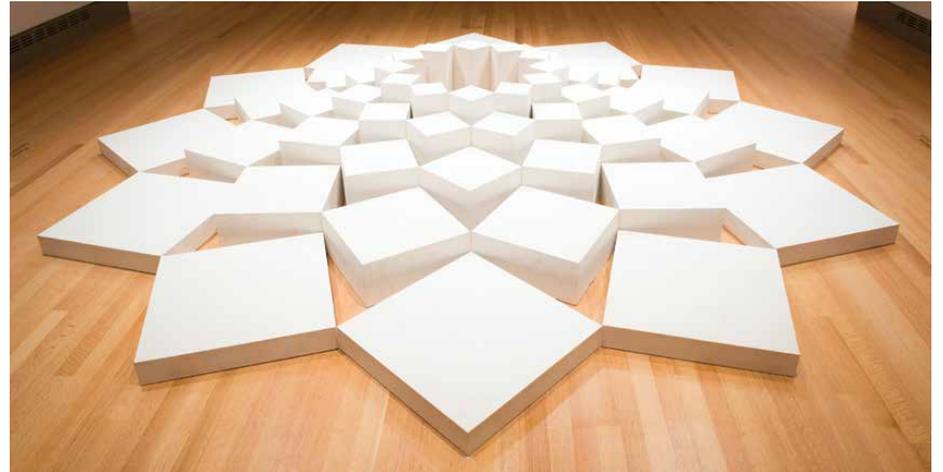
Saida II – White, 1998
Enamel on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm



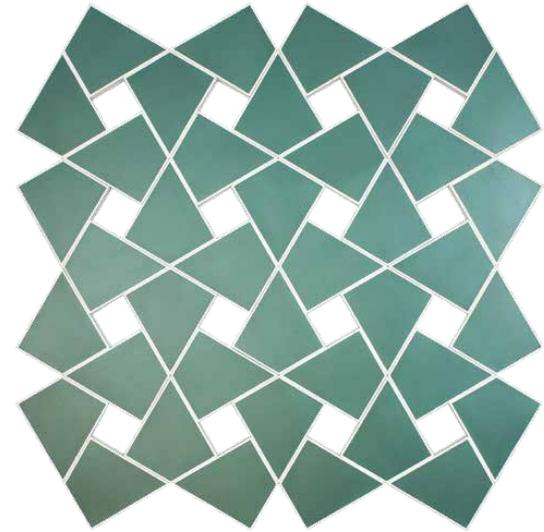
Saida X - Chrome, 2013
Chrome on steel
72 x 72 in / 182.9 x 182.9 cm



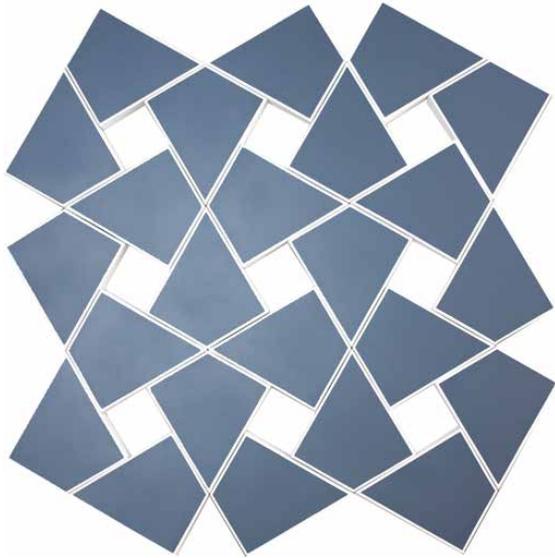
Saida XV - Limestone, 2013
Limestone
240 x 180 x 180 in / 609.6 x 457.2 x 457.2 cm



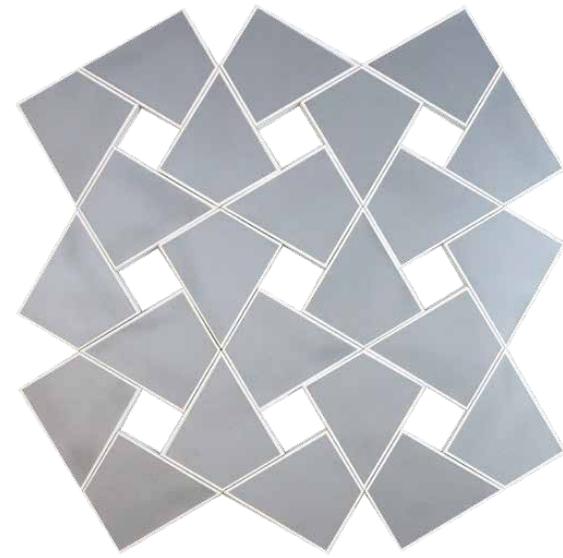
Cyrene XI – Mystical Green, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
64 x 64/ 162.6 x 162.6 cm



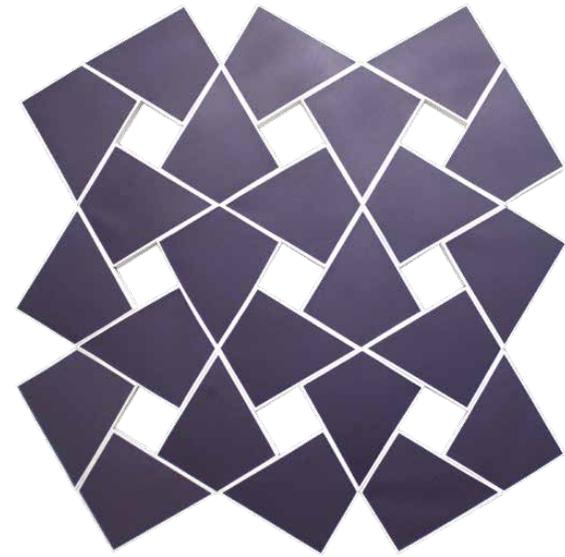
Cyrene IX – Shimmering Sky, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
53 x 53 in / 134.6 x 134.6 cm



Cyrene II – Silver, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
53 x 53 in / 134.6 x 134.6 cm

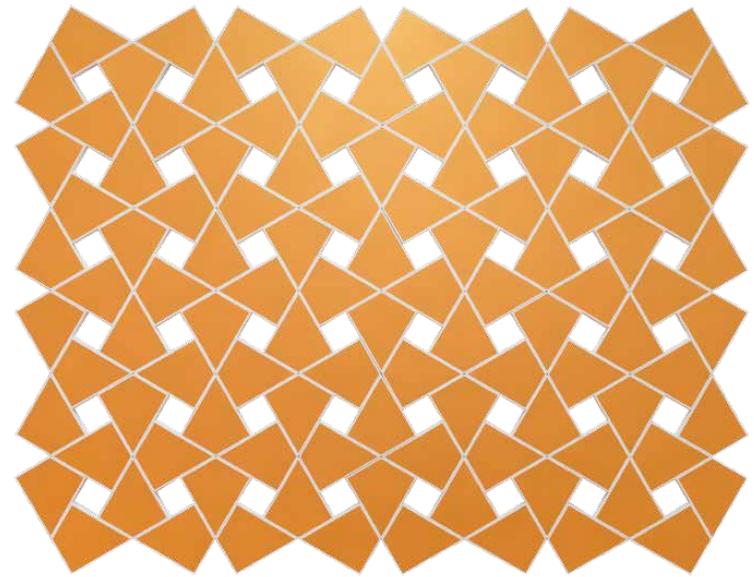


Cyrene VI – Lilac, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
53 x 53 in / 134.6 x 134.6 cm



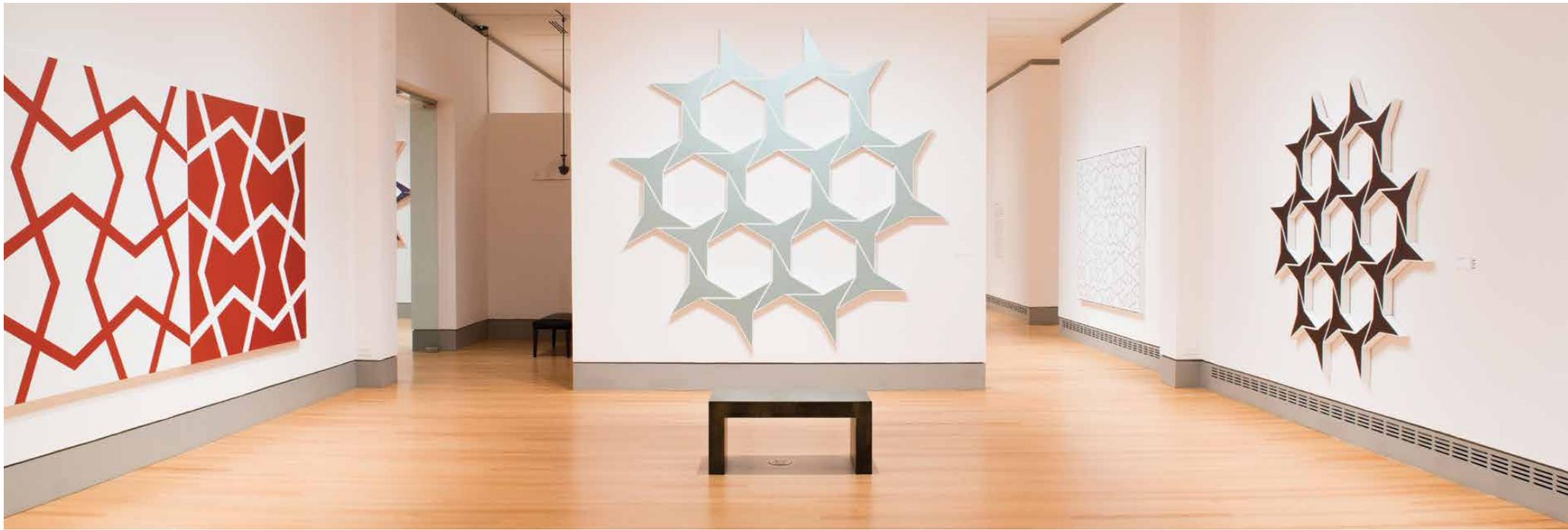
Cyrene XVI – Gold, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
89 x 115 in / 226.1 x 292.1 cm

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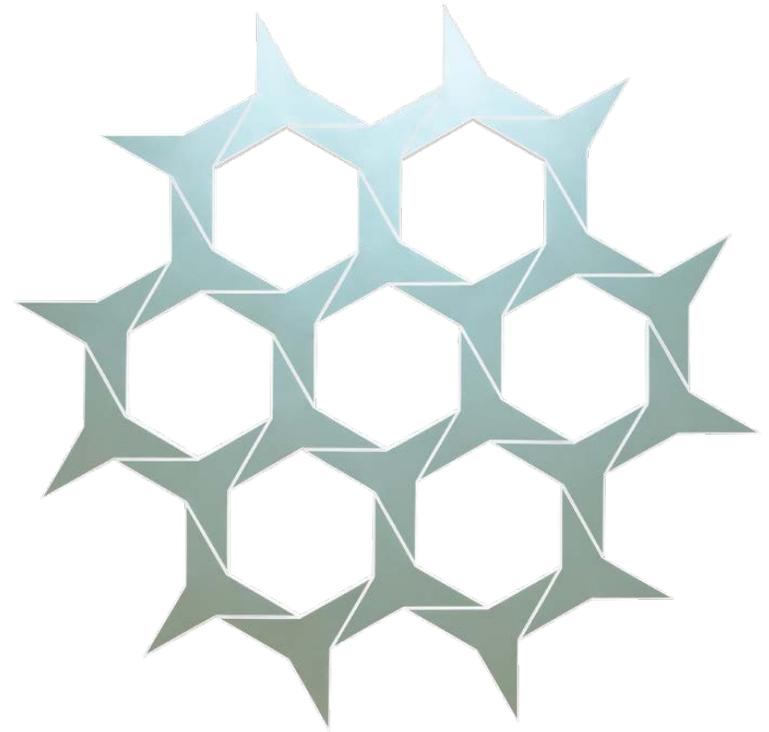
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Installation view at The Columbia Museum of Art



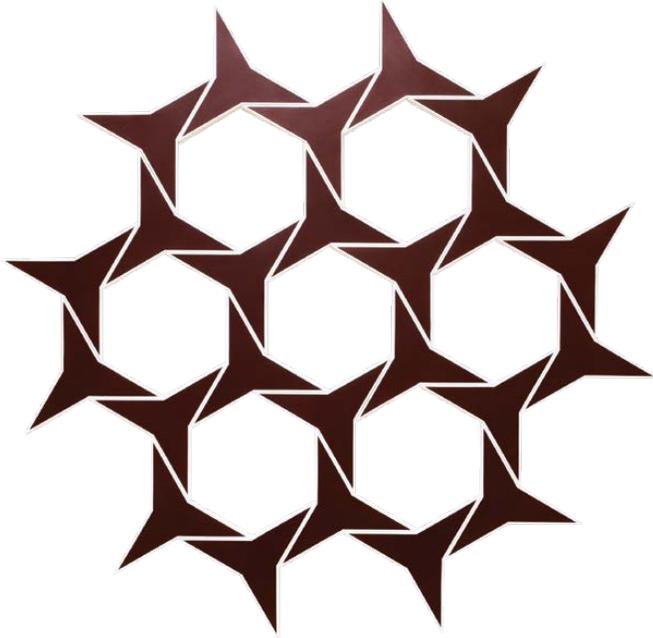
Jerash XXI – Teal, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 in / 304.8 x 304.8 cm

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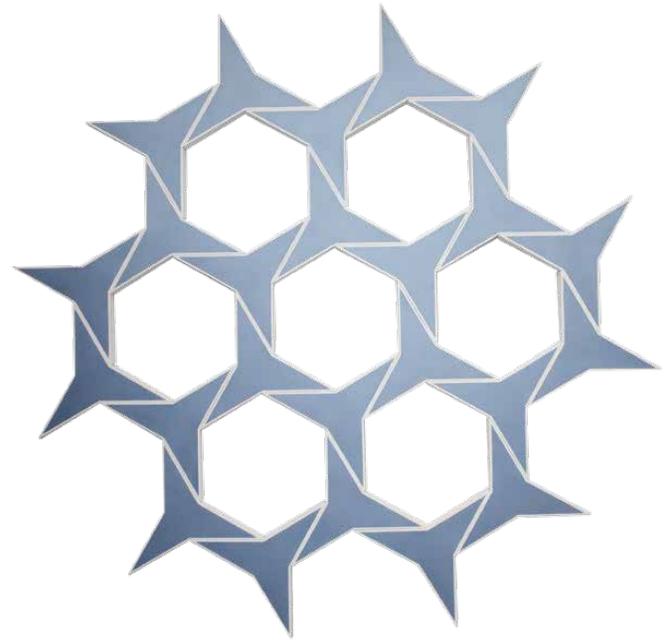


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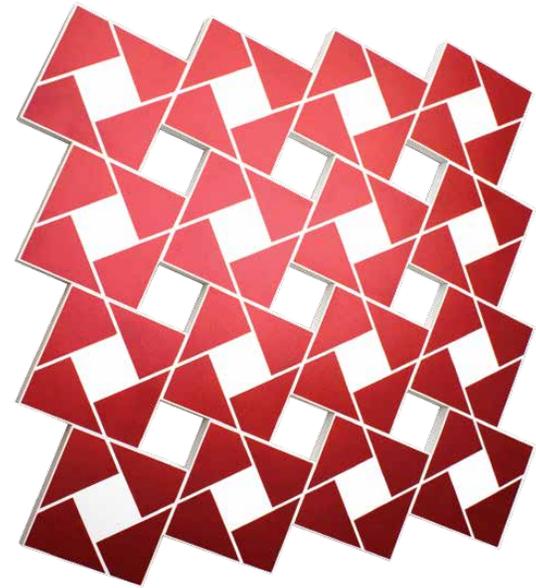
Jerash XI – Black Cherry, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
84 x 84 in / 213.4 x 213.4 cm



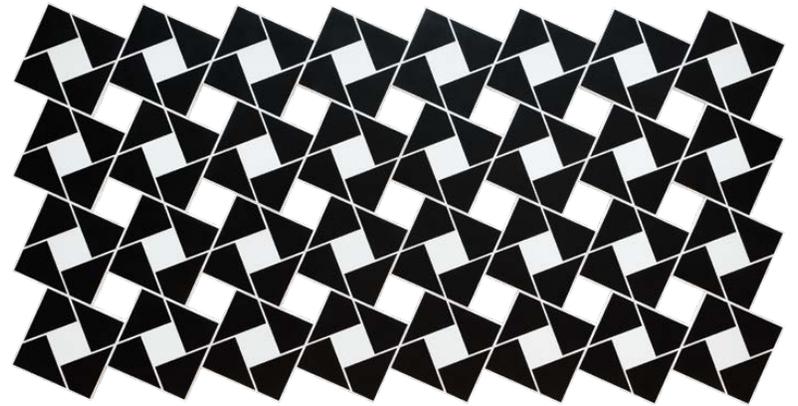
Jerash XIII – Shimmering Sky, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
84 x 84 in / 213.4 x 213.4 cm



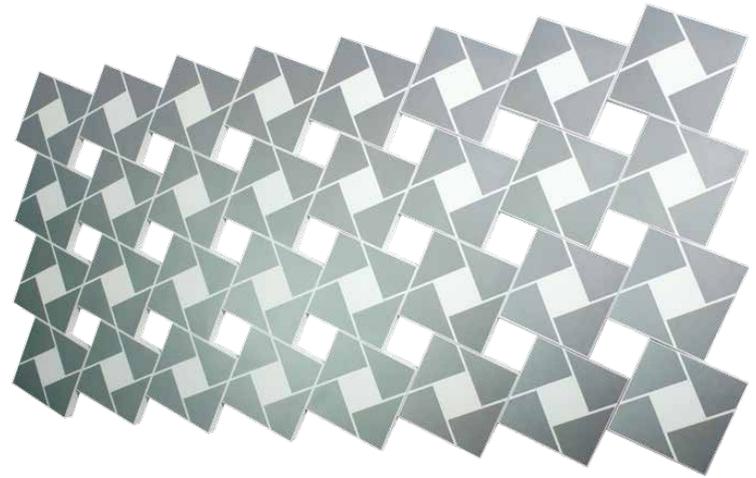
Ajlan X – Sashay Red, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 84 in / 203.2 x 213.4 cm

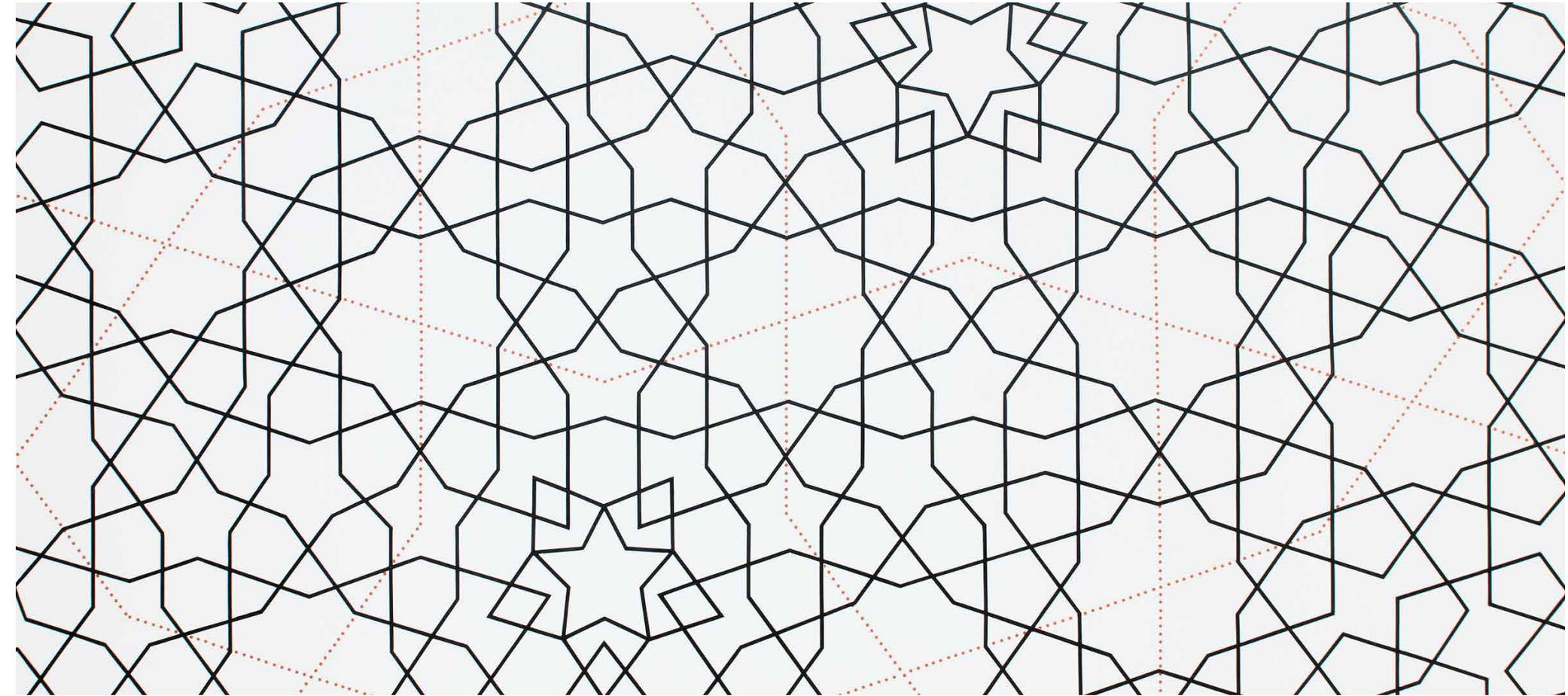


Ajlan I – Black Pearl and White, 2002
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 168 in / 152.4 x 426.7 cm



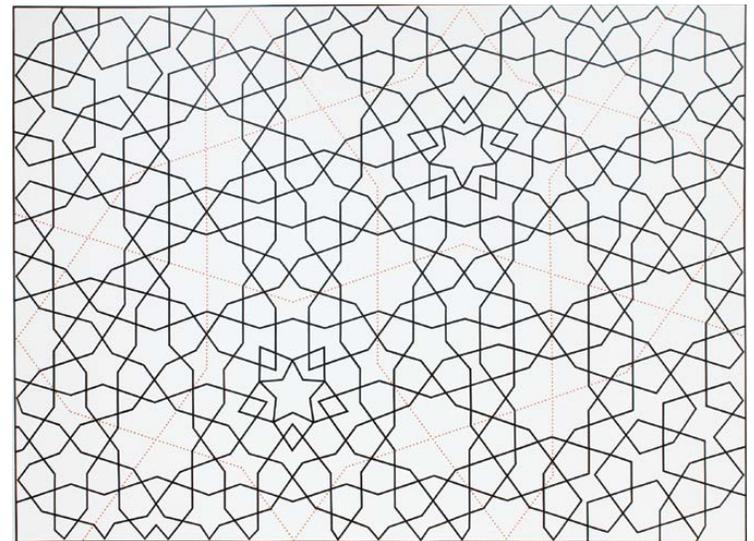
Ajlan IV – Silver and White, 2002
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 168 in / 152.4 x 426.7 cm



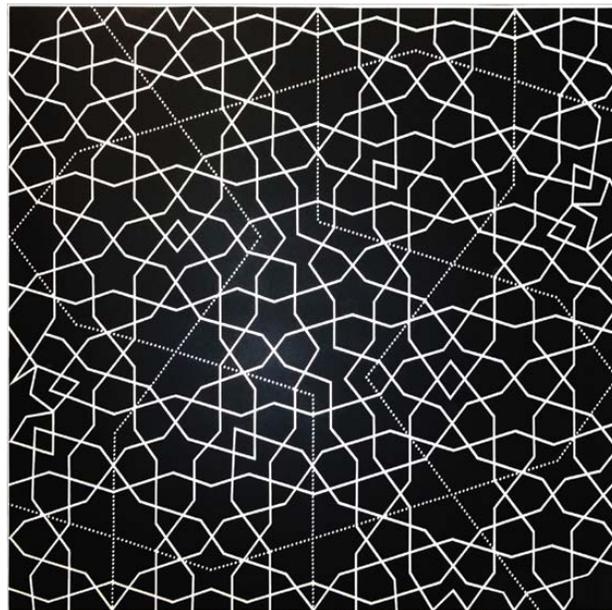


Previous page
Topkapi XX, 2012 (detail)
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 98 in / 182.9 x 248.9 cm

Topkapi XX, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 98 in / 182.9 x 248.9 cm

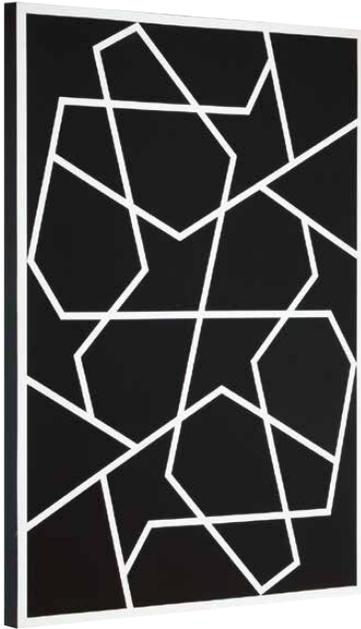


Topkapi XXIII, 2013
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 in / 182.9 x 182.9 cm



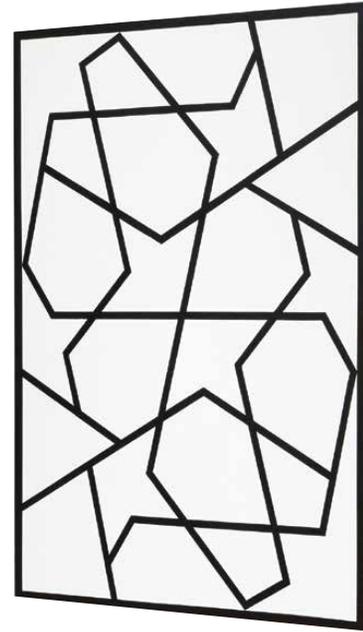
Topkapi XXIV, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 43 in / 152.4 x 109.2 cm

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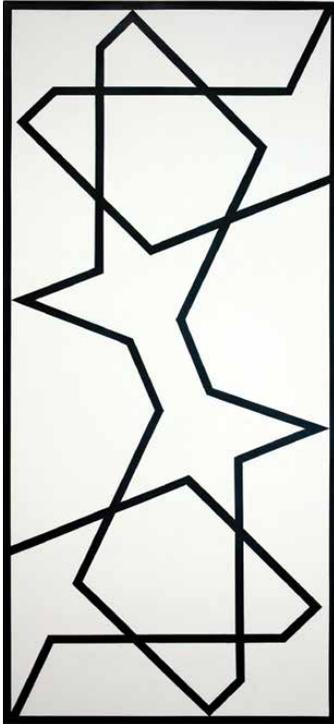


Topkapi XXII, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 43 in / 152.4 x 109.2 cm

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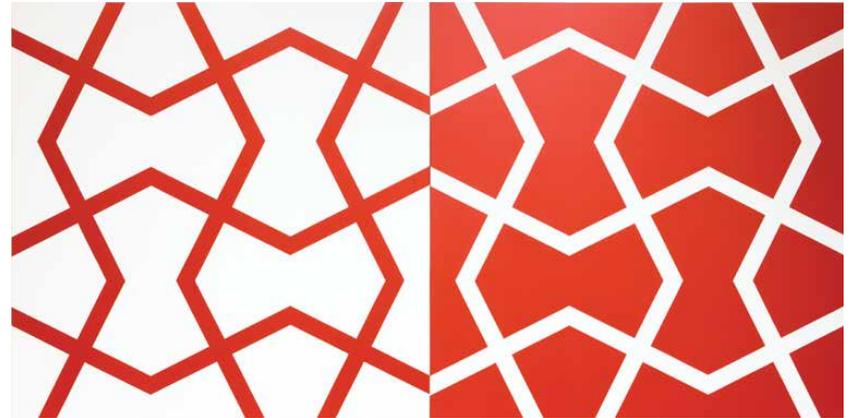
Topkapi IV, 1992
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 25 in / 152.4 x 63.5



Topkapi XIV, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 25 in / 152.4 x 63.5 cm



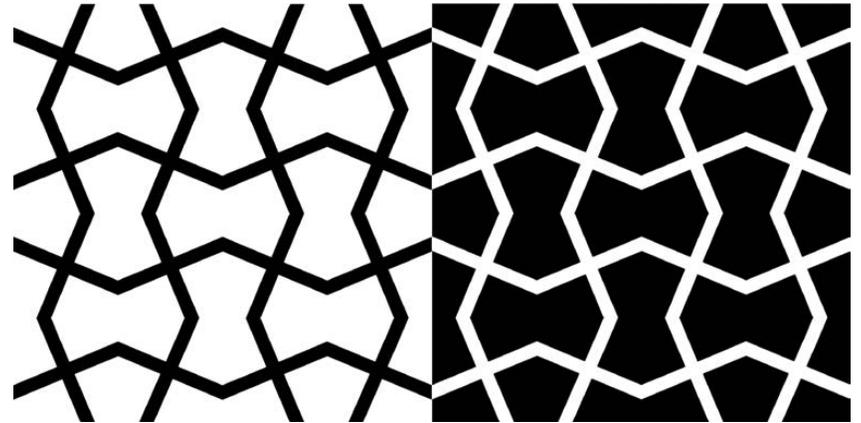
Jali XXVI – Sashay Red and White, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 144 in / 182.9 x 365.8 cm



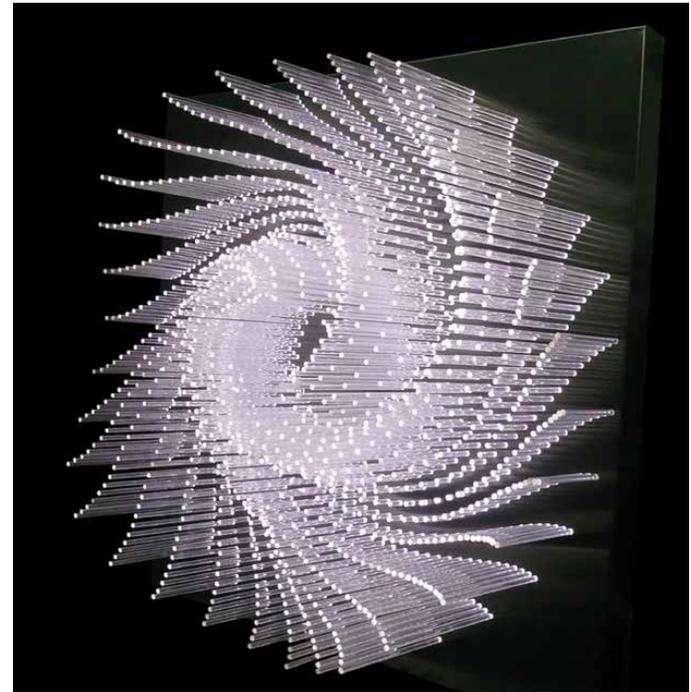
Mughal V – Silver and White, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 192 in / 243.8 x 487.7 cm



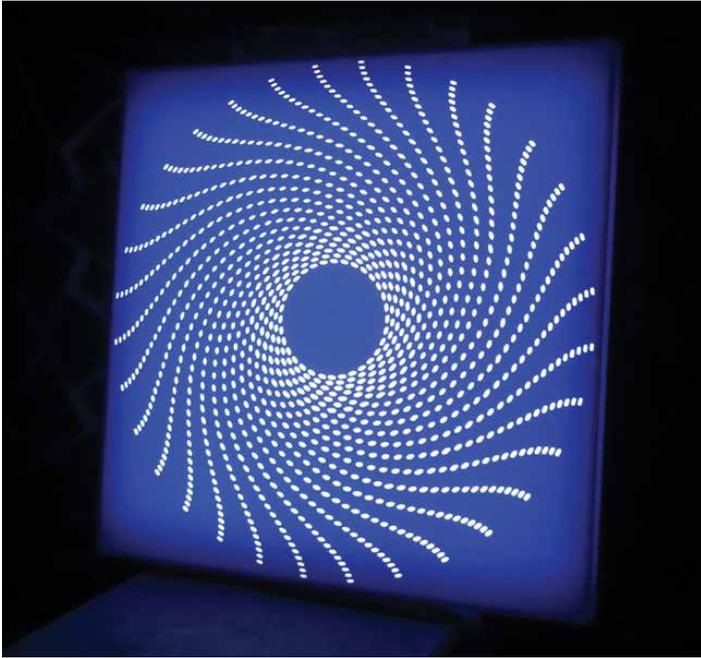
Mughal I – Black and White, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 192 in / 243.8 x 487.7 cm



Uzbek XIII (Stainless), 2014
Stainless steel and acrylic with LED lights
48 x 48 x 20 in / 121.9 x 121.9 x 50.8 cm

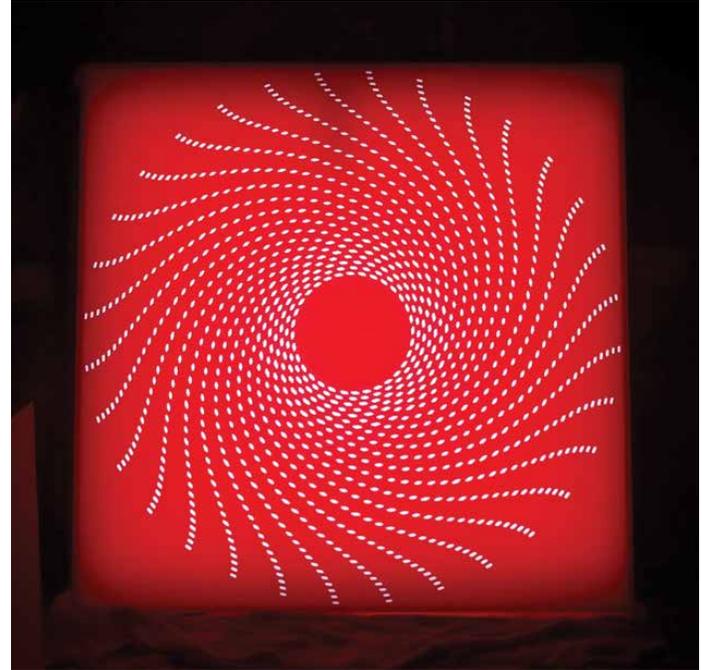


Uzbek II, 2012
Acrylic with LED lights
48 x 48 in / 121.9 x 121.9 cm



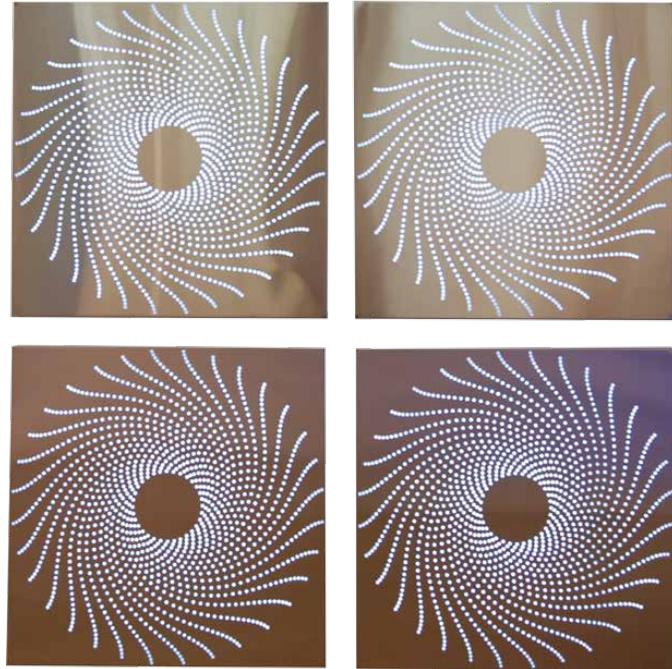
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Uzbek XI - Red, 2014
Acrylic with LED lights
48 x 48 in / 121.9 x 121.9 cm



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Uzbek XIII, 2014
Stainless steel and acrylic with LED lights
100 x 100 in / 254 x 254 cm



STEVEN NAIFEH

B. 1952, Tehran
Lives and works in Aiken, South Carolina

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EDUCATION

- 2012 The Juilliard School, New York, New York, Ph.D. in the Humanities
- 1991 University of South Carolina, Aiken, South Carolina, Ph.D. in Humane Letters
- 1981 Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ph.D. (ABD) in Fine Arts
- 1979 Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, M.A. in Fine Arts
- 1977 Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, J.D.
- 1974 Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, A.B. summa cum laude in American History
- 1970 St. Andrew's School, Middletown, Delaware, summa cum laude

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Found in Translation*, MANA Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey
- 2014 *Found in Translation*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, New York
- 2013 *Found in Translation: The Art of Steven Naifeh*, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina
- 1975 Embassy of the United States, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- 1974 Princeton University Art Museum
- 1971 Consulate General of the United States, Karachi, Pakistan
- 1969 Consulate of the United States, Kaduna, Nigeria
- 1969 Consulate of the United States, Kano, Nigeria

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1974 *Summer Show*, Henri Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1970 *Art in Embassies Program*, Lagos, Nigeria
- 1968 *American Artists*, United States Information Services

SELECTED LECTURES

- "**Van Gogh Repetitions: Conversation with Eliza Rathbone**"
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, November 14, 2013
- "**Van Gogh Repetitions: Conversation with Teachers**"
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, November 13, 2013
- "**Pollock: The Film**"
Columbia Museum of Art, August 18, 2013
- "**Steven Naifeh: Found in Translation**"
Columbia Museum of Art, May 19, 2013
- "**Becoming Van Gogh: Discussion with Timothy Standing and Louis van Tilborgh**"
Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado, October 20, 2012
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 12, 2012
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina, January 20, 2012
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, December 15, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, December 8, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Old Masters' Society, Chicago, Illinois, December 7, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
The Royal Academy, London, The United Kingdom, November 25, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life: Discussion with Ann Dumas**"
The Royal Academy of Arts Solon, London, The United Kingdom, November 24, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
The John Adams Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, November 22, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November 19, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life: Discussion with Lawrence J. Feinberg**"
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, November 16, 2011
- "**Jackson Pollock and Vincent van Gogh**"
Dallas Museum of Art, November 14, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Arizona Women's Board Author Luncheon, November 11, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life: Discussion with Timothy J. Standing**"
Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado, November 10, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
The Columbus Academy, November 8, 2011
- "**Jackson Pollock and Vincent van Gogh**"
High Museum, Atlanta Georgia, November 5, 2011

- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Politics & Prose, Washington, DC, November 2, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life: Discussion with Judith Thurman**"
The Juilliard School, New York, New York, November 3, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life: Discussion with George Shackelford**"
Boston Museum of Fine Arts, November 2, 2011
- "**Vincent van Gogh: The Life**"
Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 1, 2011
- "**Jackson Pollock and Vincent van Gogh**"
High Museum, Atlanta, Georgia, April 25, 2009
- "**Jackson Pollock and Vincent van Gogh**"
The State University of New York at Stonybrook, under the auspices of the Pollock-Krasner House & Study Center, July 20, 2008
- "**Jackson Pollock**"
Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, March 8, 1990
- "**Pillars of Wisdom: New Buildings for the World of Islam**"
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980
- "**Contemporary African Art**"
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1979
- "**The New York School**"
The College Art Association, Washington, DC, 1974
- "**Picasso: The Tragedy**"
The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1974
- "**Modern Art**"
The American Center Auditorium, Karachi, Pakistan, August 18, 1971

BOOKS

- Van Gogh: The Life*, by Steven Naifeh & Gregory White Smith, Random House, 2011
- Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, by Steven Naifeh & Gregory White Smith
- Gene Davis*, by Steven Naifeh, The Arts Publishers, Inc. New York, 1982
- Culture Making: Money, Success and the New York Art World*, by Steven Naifeh, Princeton University, 1976

ARTICLES

- "**Gene Davis: Equinox**" with Gregory White Smith, in Kerner, Joseph D., and Jane E. Neidhardt, eds., *A Gallery of Modern Art at Washington University in St. Louis*, St. Louis: The Washington University Gallery of Art, 1994

- "**Jackson Pollock: Under Fire**" with Gregory White Smith, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1991
- "**Jackson in Action**" with Gregory White Smith, *Mirabella*, November 1989
- "**The Myth of Oshogbo**" *African Arts*, February 1981
- "**Beyond the Stripe**" *Art International*, September-October, 1980
- "**Gene Davis**" *Arts Magazine*, October 1979

AWARDS

- 1994 Edgar Allan Poe Award Finalist in Fact Crime in 1994 for *Final Justice*
- 1991 Pulitzer Prize for Biography for *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*
- 1990 National Book Award Finalist in Nonfiction for *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "**Middle Eastern View**" Meredith Good, *Humanities*, September/October 2013
- "**Found in Translation**" *Saudi Aramco World*, July/August, 2013
- "**Found in Translation: The Art of Steven Naifeh**" *Columbia Metropolitan*, June 2013
- "**Found in Translation: The Art of Steven Naifeh**" *Collections*, Summer, 2013
- "**Award-Winning Author Crosses Cultures with New Art Exhibit**" *Aiken Standard*, May 23, 2013
- "**Columbia Museum of Art Announces Contemporary Exhibition by South Carolina-Based Artist**" *Arts Islamica*, May 20, 2013
- "**Harmonic Patterns: New Exhibit at Columbia Museum of Art**" *Olis R. Taylor, Jr., The State*, May 17, 2013
- "**CMA Summer Exhibition Opens Saturday**" *Times & Democrat*, May 16, 2013
- "**The Bold Geometry of Steven Naifeh**" *Free Times*, May 15, 2013
- "**Art Exhibition Makes Cross-Cultural Connections**" *Tom Mack, Aiken Standard*, May 14, 2013
- "**Found in Translation: The Art of Steven Naifeh**" *Saudi Aramco World*, May/June, 2013
- "**Highlights from Canvas Guide: Columbia**" *Canvas*, May/June, 2013
- "**CMA Announces Contemporary Exhibition by SC-Based Artist**" *Charleston Chronicle*, April 22, 2013

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Saida XVI – Granite, 2011
Granite
48 x 240 x 240 in / 121.9 x 609.6 x 609.6 cm
Installation view at Joye Cottage

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I want to thank all of the brilliant people at the Leila Heller Gallery who have created such a beautiful installation for my work and this splendid catalogue. My thanks go first, of course, to Leila Heller. My work simply could not be in better hands. It is such a privilege to be a part of her gifted group of artists, and to benefit from both her extraordinary eye and her radiant enthusiasm for art and life.

My thanks also go to Jessica Davidson, Director of Business Development & Sales at the Leila Heller Gallery, who works with me closely almost every day. I am so grateful to her, as well as to Lauren Pollock, Director; Daniel Hamparsumyan, Director; Ally Mintz, Exhibitions Coordinator; Laila Jabban; and Michael Watson, Preparator; all of whom have put tremendous energy and wonderful expertise into making this exhibition possible. And I am very thankful to Heather Ecker for her deeply thoughtful and affecting essay.

I also want to thank the people at Mana who are exhibiting my work so beautifully for much of the spring and summer of this year in their dazzling space for art: Yigal Ozeri, founder of MECA; Eugene Lemay, Chief Executive; Shai Baitel, Vice President for Strategy; Tyler Waywell, Director, Middle East Center for the Arts; Catherine Sippin, Executive Assistant; Lee Puckett, Exhibition Coordinator; Yeliz Secerli, Design; Serena Ricks, PR; Kendall Tichner, Marketing; and Crystal Gwynn, Photography.

My studio director, Chuck Ezell, has not only supervised the fabrication of the works in this exhibition with perfect craftsmanship and terrific intelligence, but has assisted in the installation as well. My gratitude to him, and to his team – Billy Jenkins, Debby Reese, Harry Rice – is immeasurable. Elizabeth Petit, Holly Boynton, Alysa Rubin, Brett Spradley, and Nicholas Elston have also worked tirelessly in the preparation for the exhibition, and contributed enormously to it.

And of course there is Gregory White Smith, my co-author, my inspiration, my genius.

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Catalogue design by Carolina Zalles
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