

daily Calivada

09-10 NOVEMBER 2012 | ISSUE 4 | ABU DHABI ART EDITION

THE ART OF SCRIPT

Myriad artworks which draw inspiration from the age-old practice of calligraphy reveal Contemporary twists.

AN ARRAY OF Contemporary calligraphic works including those by Pouran Jinchi and Golnaz Fathi at The Third Line (1M13), Nja Mahdaoui at Galerie El-Marsa (2P4), Hadieh Shafie at Galerie Kashya Hildebrand (2P11/154) and Ghada Amer at Kukje Gallery/Tina Kim Gallery (2P13), celebrate the art of script in a variety of forms. The inspirations behind these works stem from a commemoration of the Farsi or Arabic letter, the region's poetry, spirituality and even abstraction.

Jinchi, a classically trained calligrapher, combines Eastern and Western ideals within an increasingly minimal form. Her work, *Transparency*, references the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay cylinder from

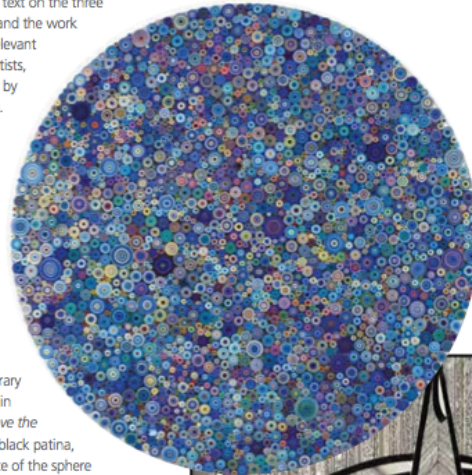
539 BC inscribed with an account by the King of Persia, Cyrus, of his conquest of Babylon. The repetition of text on the three cylinders have no beginning and no end, and the work highlights how age-old texts can still be relevant today. Like many Contemporary Iranian artists, Fathi, like Jinchi, revisits the seminal poem by Ferdowsi, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings). "The actual text is very abstract but also includes a figurative element to create a dynamic interaction," says The Third Line's Dina Ibrahim. "You can barely see figures; it's almost like reading a book and visualising them in your head."

Kashya Hildebrand says she's intrigued by artists who make classical reference points to their culture in their own contemporary way. "Hadieh doesn't think of herself as a calligrapher, but the repetition of the Farsi word for love in her tightly wrapped scrolls is a very contemporary and fresh reference point," she says. Also in the name of love is Amer's *The Words I Love the Most*, a bronze off-centred sphere with a black patina, inspired by whirling dervishes. "The surface of the sphere is drawn with words, which are inspired by the existence of 100 words to express love in the Arabic language," says the artist. "I chose the ones I like the most and wrote them in reverse so that you are only able to read them from inside."

Tunisian Mahdaoui uses calligraphy, but says it was always crucial for him not to fall into the trap of replication, and to develop a fresh way to use this age-old art form. "I used to criticise folklore and Orientalist and colonial paintings," he adds. "But then I observed the Arabic script in its aesthetic identity, not in its nationalistic identity, and I immediately separated the two." Mahdaoui says his work is founded on liberating the art form from its Middle Eastern identity and opening it up to other cultures. "Calligraphy is modernity through tradition and vice versa," adds Ibrahim. "Whether aesthetically or conceptually, there is innovation that went into bringing an age-old tradition to a contemporary platform." ■



Ghada Amer. *The Words I Love the Most*. 2012. Bronze with black patina. 152.4 x 152.4 x 152.4 cm. Edition one of six. Image courtesy Kukje Gallery/Tina Kim Gallery, Seoul/New York.



Left: Hadieh Shafie. *22150 Pages*. 2012. Ink and acrylic on paper with printed handwritten Farsi text *Esheghe* (love in Farsi). 122 x 122 x 9 cm. Image courtesy Galerie Kashya Hildebrand, Zurich. Below: Nja Mahdaoui. *Graphemes on Vellum*. 2012. Indian ink and acrylic painting on vellum. 85 x 85 cm. Image courtesy Galerie El-Marsa, Tunis.

