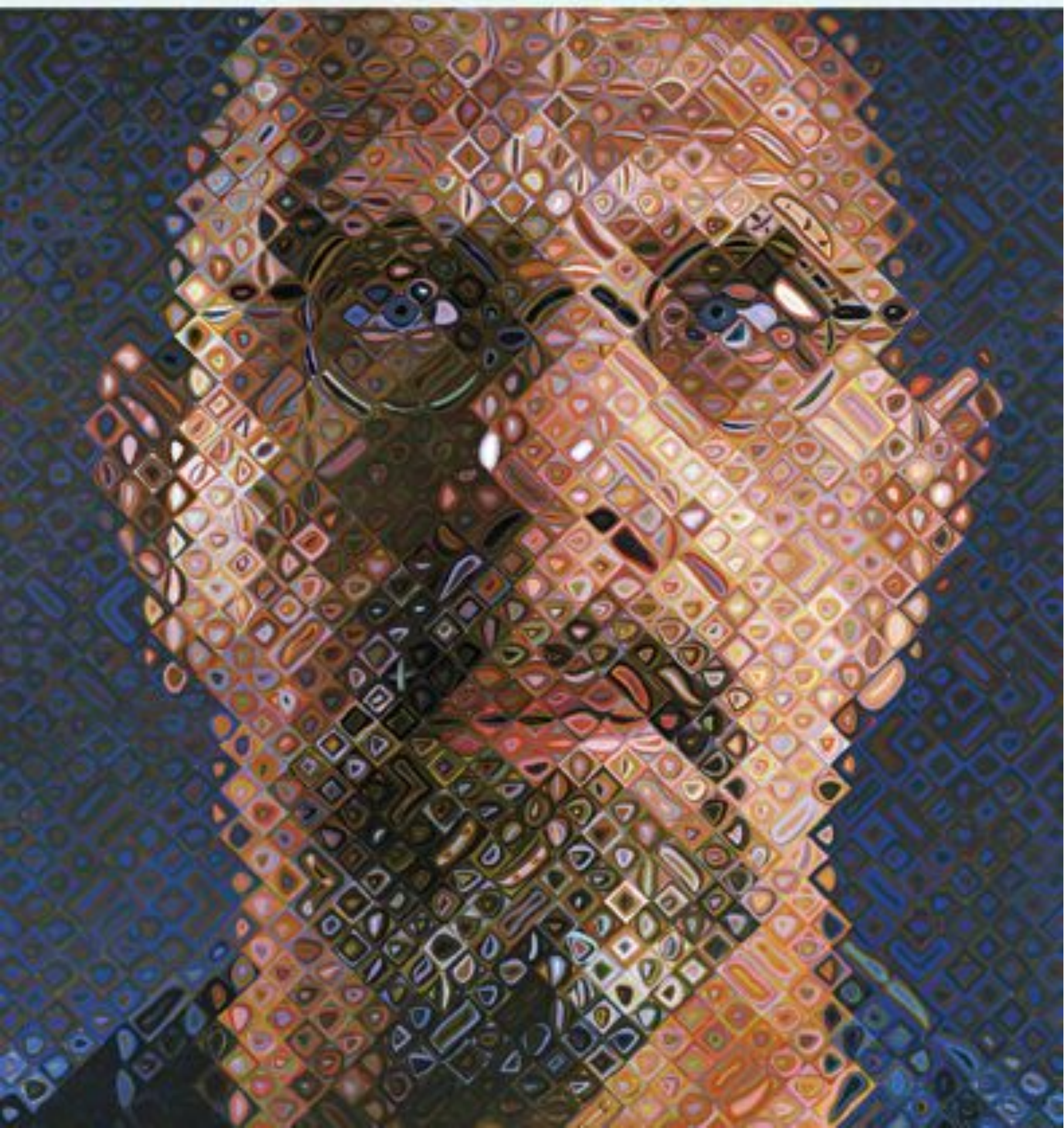


SOLO • MOSAICO

TRADITION — TECHNIQUE — CONTEMPORARY ART





Contemporary Art in the Middle East

RISING STARS

NEGAR AHKAMI
KHOSROW HASSANZADEH
HADIEH SHAFIE
NOOR ALI CHAGANI
SAHAND HESAMIYAN
ABDULNASSER GHAREM

Robin Pogrebin



Negar Ahkami has never lived in Iran, though she is of Iranian descent. She was born, raised and educated in the United States and currently lives and works in Brooklyn. Nevertheless, the colors and patterns of the Middle East have powerfully informed her artwork — paintings evocative of the geometric patterns prevalent in Islamic art and mosque mosaics.

“For me, Iranian tile work and ceramics have always been the greatest source of inspiration,” she says.

Ahkami is one of many emerging and established artists whose work incorporates elements of the decoration, fragmentation and modularity typical of Middle Eastern art.

“A lot of artists in the diaspora are looking for a link to their culture, their heritage,” says Leila Heller, whose gallery represents many Middle Eastern artists, including Ahkami. “Some use carpets, some use old ceramics.”

Khosrow Hassanzadeh’s work consists of painting and mixed media on ceramic tiles. They are an ode to Iran’s pahlevans, champions of wrestling and weightlifting – an age-old tradition in Iranian society.

“I choose this material because people know it very well,” Hassanzadeh says. “I want to introduce what we are. I know this language. I’m trying to translate it by the material, by the technique.”

Similarly, Samia Halaby creates art by assembling pieces in mosaic, stained glass, tile inlays like those found in the arabesques of Alhambra, or mother of pearl inlaid in wood – each technique a significant part of the history of Arabic and Islamic art. “I grew up with this art and continue to enjoy and study its formal attributes,” he says. “Consciousness of it permeates my painting and is one of the principal influences on it.”

Halaby says his stitched pieces were influenced by interviews he conducted with Palestinian artists, who first create distinct units, then puzzle them together. Halaby began to cut canvas into odd shapes, then paint these pieces and assemble them to form a single unified work. An example of this is his mural-size piece, *Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea*.

Through their work, these artists seek not only to honor their roots, but also to counter

stereotypes and misconceptions about their culture. After the 1970’s hostage crisis in Iran, for example, Ahkami says she was frustrated by the negative image associated with her ancestors. “Suddenly, your culture is reduced to what people see on the news,” she says.

“For years my work was overtly political because I didn’t feel people were being political enough,” she adds. “My work is essentially about taking rich textures and obsessive patterning and using it to create some new form of expression.”

In pieces like *The Source* and *Hot and Crusty*, Ahkami comments upon what she describes as “cartoonish representations of Iran in the United States.”

“In spite of the incredible sophistication of Iran’s mosque architecture,” she adds, “the notion of an Iranian mosque would conjure menace and fear to most Americans.”

By applying multiple layers of thickened gesso onto her canvases to achieve a three-dimensional quality and using patterns that seem to advance towards the viewer in fragments, Ahkami says her work tries to convey the concept of meltdown, a breaking apart. “It’s a riff on people’s Islamophobia,” she says.

Persian herself, Heller says it was a strong cultural connection that first attracted her to Ahkami’s work. “I was in exile,” she says. “It sort of reminded me of something of my past.”

NEGAR AHKAMI

The Source, 2009.
Acrylic and glitter on gessoed panel 122 x 137 cm / 48 x 54 in.
Image courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.



KHOSROW HASSANZADEH

Dome, 2010.
Ceramic and mixed media
500 x 300 cm / 196.85 x 118.11 in.
Image courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.



ROBIN POGREBIN

Has been a reporter at *The New York Times* since 1995. As a reporter on the Culture desk, she covers arts institutions, architecture and other issues. She previously wrote about the magazine industry for the Business section and city news for Metro. Prior to joining *The Times*, Pogrebin worked as an associate producer for Peter Jennings’ documentary unit at ABC News. Before that, she was a staff reporter at *The New York Observer*. Pogrebin has written freelance articles for various publications including *Vogue*, *Departures*, *Architectural Digest* and *New York Magazine* and her work has been featured in several anthologies. She has taught journalism at the School of Visual Arts and at Riverdale Country School. Pogrebin has a BA from Yale University. She lives in New York City with her husband and their two children.

Certainly the use of traditional techniques like mosaic in contemporary Middle Eastern art is on the rise – as is the attention it's receiving in the international arts world. Here, a few of its rising stars...

NEGAR AHKAMI
United States of America, Iran

Negar Ahkami's work brings together Middle Eastern and American artistic sensibilities reflective of her Iranian-American heritage. The pattern, color, and ornament of traditional Persian-Islamic arts are brought together with the individualist, expressive

nature of modern American art. By applying multiple levels of gesso, acrylic, and varnish, she creates an effect evocative of Iranian tiling, opening the precision of Persian artwork to the imperfections of contemporary living.

The Source, 2009.
Acrylic and glitter on
gessoed panel
122 x 137 cm / 48 x 54 in.
Image courtesy of the artist and
Leila Heller Gallery, New York.



KHOSROW HASSANZADEH
Iran

Khosrow Hassanzadeh composes “canvases” of ceramic tiles across which he depicts modern Iranian wrestlers alongside classical figures from illuminated manuscripts. By representing his figures in tilework, visually synonymous with the devotional space of

the mosque, Hassanzadeh suggests what he calls “an almost devotional struggle for the Pahlavan ideals of freedom, chivalry and righteous code of conduct that can be found in the people of contemporary Iran.”

Remember, 2010.
Mixed media on ceramic tile
200 x 480 cm / 79 x 189 in.
Image courtesy of the artist and
Leila Heller Gallery, New York.



Dome, 2010.
Ceramic and mixed media
500 x 300 cm / 196.85 x 118.11 in.
Image courtesy of the artist and
Leila Heller Gallery, New York.





HADIEH SHAFIE
Iran

Hadieh Shafie's works are composed of thin strips of paper, hand-painted and rolled into scrolls of which we see only the outer edge, brilliantly colored concentric circles which are then juxtaposed to create an abstract composition. From a distance, the work is

all color, shape, line – yet as one moves closer, the external form gives way to a sense of interiority: an awareness of the handwritten marks within each scroll, words and thoughts hidden from us at the same moment that we become aware of them.



21600 Pages, 2012.
Ink, acrylic and paper with printed and hand written Farsi Text
Eshenghe "Love"
122 x 122 x 9cm / 48 x 48 x 3.5in.
Image courtesy of the artist and
Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

NOOR ALI CHAGANI
Pakistan

Noor Ali Chagani creates installations of miniature bricks that imitate acts of creation and demolition on a small scale. Each brick is a unit of strength, a piece of a larger whole that is representative of the individual's place

in society and of the centrality of physical space – land ownership, building construction – in our concepts of both individual and national identity.

Life Line, 2010.
Terracotta bricks and nylon wires
213.4 x 91.4 x 45.7cm.



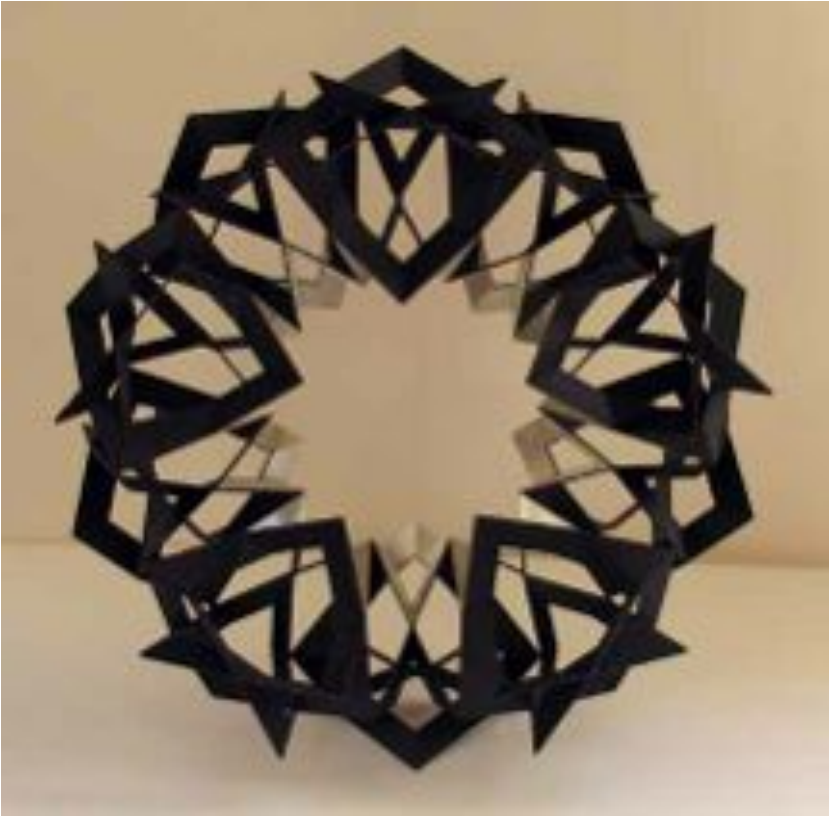
SAHAND HESAMIYAN
Iran

Sahand Hesamiyan extends the linearity and patterns of Islamic architecture and geometric tilework into three-dimensional sculpture, the scale and weight of his installations a contradiction to any purely decorative reading of the patterns.



Memory Lives On, 2011.
Steel, UV Color, and black light,
710 x 340 x 370 cm.

Khorshide Sharghi
(*Eastern Sun*), 2008.
Steel, aluminum and paint
62 x 62 x 29 cm



ABDULNASSER GHAREM
Saudi Arabia

In Abdunnasser Gharem’s “Stamp Paintings”, the rubber letters of office stamps are mounted on boards and rearranged to create a literal subtext, a series of spelled-out messages – “Freedom is indivisible”, “Don’t trust the concrete” – that serve as the “canvas” for a larger painting, rich with political and social commentary.

Men at Work, 2010.
From the series “Restored Behaviour” Industrial lacquer paint on rubber stamps on 9mm Indonesian plywood 85 x 120cm.

