

# TimeOut

## Dubai

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# Pamper yourself

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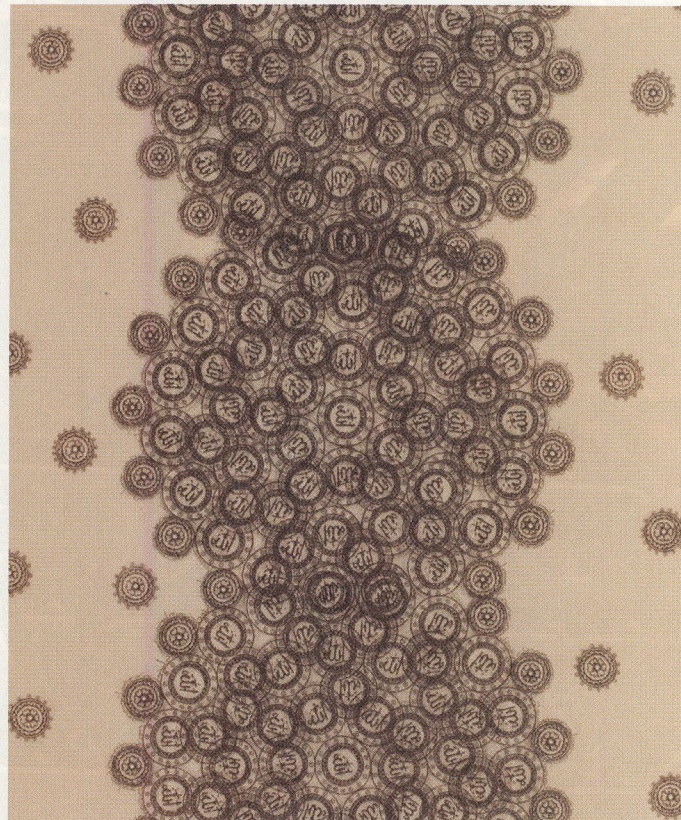
## Like a prayer

**Pouran Jinchi** attempts to imagine what prayer would look like, and talks to *Chris Lord* about achieving serenity through ritual

Stand in a room where there are people praying and there's an odd sensation that seems to sweep from wall to wall. The religion is unimportant. There's usually silence or murmuring, but also another feeling that permeates the room. It's a sense of focus, almost a stream of collective yearning, that can sometimes make the hairs on the back of your neck rise.

It's this intangible atmosphere that Iranian-born artist Pouran Jinchi has tried to capture in her huge solo show at The Third Line. When we meet Jinchi, wrapped in a kimono and with glassy eyes conditioned to focusing on minutiae, she leads us to a table covered in small tablet-like pieces of clay. Fresh out of bubble wrap from her New York studio, the stones are arranged with the same sort of magnitude that an archaeologist may ascribe to his latest find.

'These are the actual prayer stones that are placed on prayer rugs,' says Jinchi, picking up a stone painted in a gaudy combination of blue and pink. 'It's part of the ritual of prayer. The person places their head onto the prayer stone as they bend down to pray.' Jinchi's latest work uses imprints of these stones to form harmonious images that reflect on the movement and action of prayer.



soften the repetitiveness of the prints, each of the works hum with a serene, mandala-like completeness.

'What would I draw if I tried to draw prayer? It was this question that led into this work – it's my interpretation of that,' says Jinchi. The four series move from Dawn

dervishes), encompass a circular sense of logic and trance-like ritual. 'There's definitely an element of Sufism, but circles are universal,' adds Jinchi, insisting that the universal action of prayer is what made her explore the central question of visualising it. 'Ritual gives structure to life,' she

continues. 'It makes people happier, it helps them to understand what to expect day by day. Rituals are a big part of everyone's life, except ritual became shopping. And I think there's a big change happening in that sense.'

'I felt that so much had happened over the past two years globally, especially with the financial crisis. People suddenly felt a void – we were so busy consuming and buying and filling our lives with consumption that after the crisis there was a void.' These works, then, could be seen as attempting to visualise the action of reflection. In doing so, Jinchi aims to capture what she calls an 'atmosphere of silence and serenity' that had been long drowned out. 'I think a lot of people are thinking about religion now. They're reading books or watching films about it. I grew up in Iran, in Meshed, where religion is a big part of people's lives. I love watching people practising their religion – there's a sense of closeness to what they desire.'

At its root, Jinchi's latest collection could be seen as the result of a will-by-visualisation process. While the images carry an atmosphere of softened orderliness and calm, the process of the artist visualising and then creating the action of prayer is itself a ritual embedded in the works. The presence of the stones only adds to this, and the rubbings that create these subtle, delicate shapes heighten the ritual element. 'I'm not saying you should become more religious, not at all,' says Jinchi. 'I'm just drawing attention to what's going on in this society and to this ritual of prayer.' *Ritual Imprint continues at The Third Line until February 25*

## 'Ritual gives structure to life, so people understand what to expect day by day'

'My understanding is that it's mostly Shi'ites that use the prayer stone. In any religion you always have ritual, and the objects that we use to practice those rituals have always fascinated me. I would place each one on a piece of paper and use charcoal to create the rubbing, then from that I would create the composition.'

It sounds simple, but the works carry an atmosphere of refinement through repetition. We can sense that the pieces have evolved through several careful incarnations. Making delicate markings within the compositions with pencil, as if to

through to Morning, Noon and Night, progressing from a misty and intangible collection at dawn through to black and deep silver hues in the final series. Each piece gravitates around circular motions, with the prints placed to form circular patterns, but also a general cyclical movement within the composition. 'Circles are a representation of life,' Jinchi explains, referring also to the cyclical day-to-night movement of the collection. We suggest the connection with Sufism: Islamic mystics whose philosophies, whether expressed through ideas or dance (such as the

