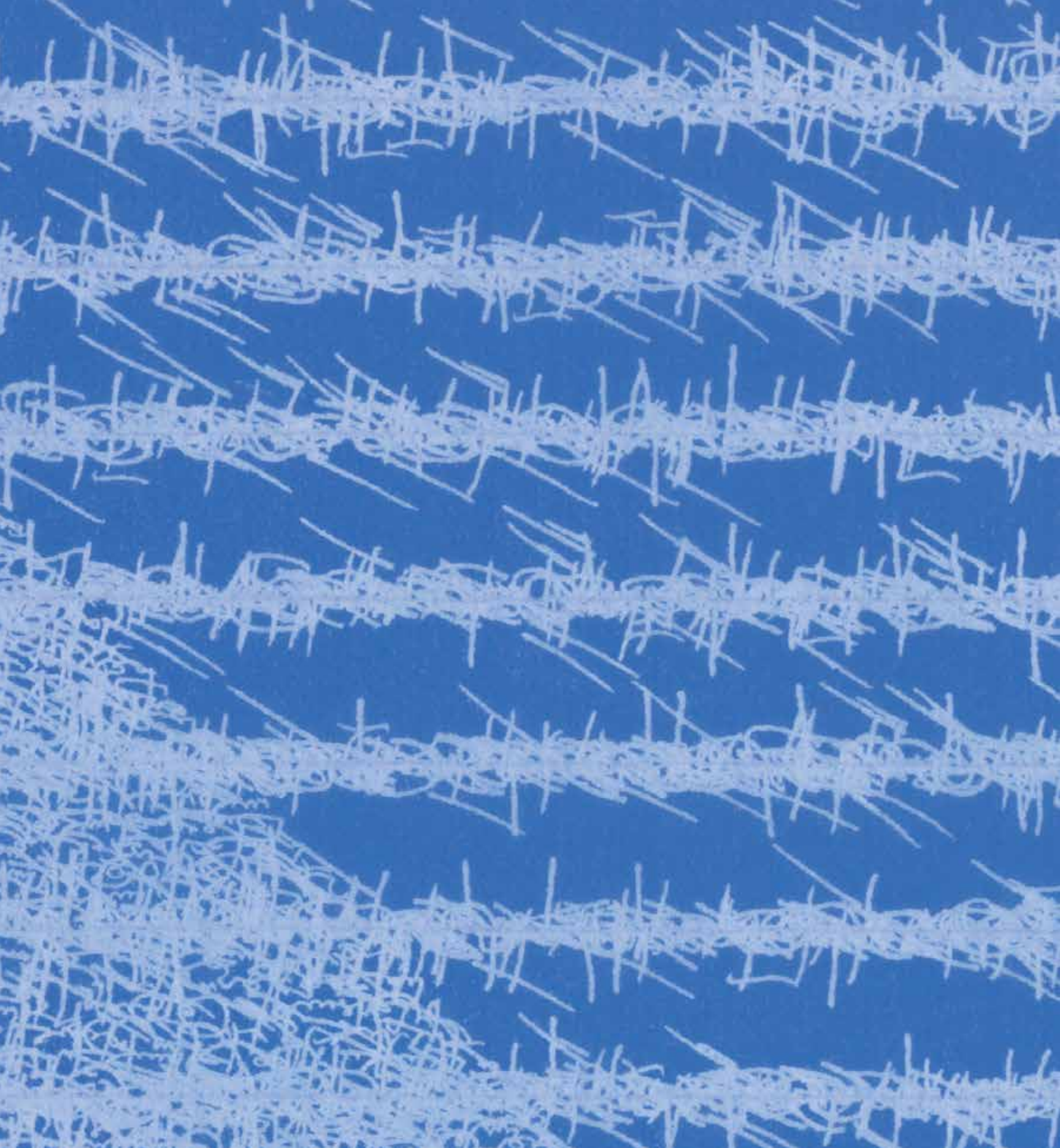




POURAN JINCHI  
BLACK & BLUE





POURAN JINCHI  
BLACK & BLUE







## A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

The first work that Pouran Jinchi showed me in her studio, one that will be featured in her upcoming exhibition in Chelsea, was *Hanged*, 2015, a multipart sculpture assembled from hundreds of pieces of copper painstakingly hand-cut by the artist. The title is literal – it is hanged, or at least hung – but also conveys other, harsher meanings such as execution. Of a shattered brilliance, each piece ends in stiletto points, some curved like scimitars, and linked to each other by copper safety pins. Interspersed with small red diamonds reminiscent of drops of blood, its quiescent, albeit barbed elegance curiously intensifies its message of mortal violence. The glitter of red and the luster of copper, however, are also chosen for their color and reflective light, for their material allure, all the works in the show “balanced between beauty and violence,” Jinchi said.

Consisting of 18 strands of different lengths attached to the wall at their upper end, the rest tumbles downward, held in place by gravity. The copper pieces are letters from the Persian alphabet and the red diamonds are surrogates for the dots that distinguish similar letters from each other. Persian is a fluid language, one letter easily becoming another, Jinchi explains. When she studied calligraphy, the first thing she learned was the proper placement of the dots. It was the beginning of language, and metaphorically speaking, the beginning of the world. Each of the strands represents a line of text – some are shorter, others longer – that together spell out the first page of *The Blind Owl*, a book by Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951).

Considered by many to be the first and finest of Iranian modernist writers and translated into many languages, Hedayat was deeply influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, Franz Kafka, Anton Chekhov and Rainer Maria Rilke. He was highly critical of the increasingly oppressive rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi and the clergy, and *The Blind Owl* was an eloquent, very personal denunciation of life in Iran in the 40s and 50s. His masterpiece, it was begun in Paris in 1930 and completed in Bombay (Mumbai) in 1937, appearing in Tehran in 1941. Hedayat had spent four years in Paris in his mid-20s, returning there in late 1950 in crippling despair, committing suicide a few months later at the untimely age of 48. Attacked by Islamists as blasphemous and unpatriotic, his writings have been banned in Iran in uncensored form since 2006.

*The Blind Owl* has great significance for Jinchi as a touchstone, not only as a forbidden, coming of age book eagerly devoured when she was a rebellious teenager but also as a source of new profundities. It is “a book to read and re-read,” she said, sympathetic to its author’s and its unnamed narrator’s existential distress, the protagonist a commercial painter who confesses his suffering and violent thoughts to his owl-like shadow on a wall. Every work in this show is based on text from the book, as was an earlier exhibition in Dubai in 2013, simply titled “The Blind Owl.”

Calling the exhibition “Black & Blue,” she wanted to highlight the pain and violence found in Hedayat’s book, the two colors synonymous with acts of brutality, trauma, and wounds, however abstracted. It is an encryption that seems to be second nature to those who come from a mostly aniconic tradition as well as from repressive regimes. Indeed, her palette for the show is limited to the hues that flesh assumes as it cycles through injury and recuperation: reds, pinks, violets, blacks



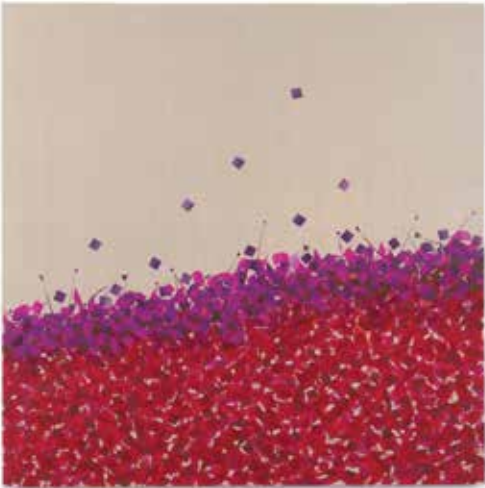
and blues. The copper, linen and wood supports, which are untreated and therefore “natural,” are also emblematic of the body, representing skin. All her titles refer to assaults and their consequences, in one way or another, such as *Stitched*, 2013-2014, *Hacked*, 2014, *Slashed*, 2014, *Pierced*, 2014, and *Sores*, 2015.

A sculptor and painter, her work characteristically text-based, the emphasis in this exhibition is on several encompassing wall installations of works on paper. There will also be a few red or blue paintings, (*Wounds*, 2015, or *Sores*) on view, some with purple or a blue green added, the top half of the field virtually empty. In the bottom half are a heap of mostly illegible letters accompanied by diamonds (dots) and needle-thin slashes (lines), the latter also used to determine meaning in Persian script. Suggesting an abstract rendition of a battle scene, the lines shot upward breaching the void might also be spears, the letters like slain, anonymous warriors from an illuminated Persian manuscript or from contemporary videos and photographs of global carnage.

Translated into English, the letters piled and scrambled in the paintings state, “I write only for my shadow which is cast on the wall in front of the light. I must introduce myself to it,” the quote that for Jinchi is the most crucial, her takeaway if she were permitted only one quote from the book. However, the meaning of her work goes beyond the burdened meaning of the text, so moving in its sense of isolation and disregard, embracing also the shapes and the brushstrokes. She said, “it doesn’t matter if you can’t read it; I don’t use the quotes as something to be known as a statement. It is a structure; I want what I’ve made to be a visual experience, not about reading the text.” Nonetheless, it is difficult to separate image and text, since they enrich and are integral to each other.

Emphasizing works on paper in this show, one of them is her remarkable *Bruised* series, 2014. On transfer paper, its blue might represent both the ethereal sky, the spiritual, and physical abrasion. She scratches the paper, scraping the pigmentation off, leaving whitened striations on the blue ground like raised scar tissue (or like the markings of an electroencephalogram, its frazzled edges suggesting the crackle of disturbed neurons), as she writes and overwrites text taken from pages and pages of *The Blind Owl*. It has “nothing to do with calligraphy,” Jinchi said, and is very labor intensive, as all her work is, requiring the touch of her hand and handwriting to forcefully imprint her presence onto the work. “Perhaps artists can endure more pain. I want viewers to see the pain.” It is not masochistic on her part but an acknowledgment that pain and violence exist and have always existed. Her room of blue, then, might be a room of atonement and of beauty, dedicated to those who suffer and who have suffered.

*Inked*, 2014, is another series of drawings. An expansive project of well over two hundred pen drawings in black ink on white paper, it is installed so that the bottom of the sheet is loose. Each work is unique, with its one, two or three diamonds, permutations of the three dots extracted from throughout *The Blind Owl*. Intricate patterns taken from architectural designs and myriad other sources are meticulously depicted inside diamond shaped



Upper:  
*Wound 6*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm

Lower:  
*Sores 1*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
24 x 24 in / 61 x 61 cm

Opposite page:  
*Hacked*, 2014 (detail)  
Enamel on wood panels  
55.5 x 63 in / 141 x 160 cm

Previous page:  
*Hanged series*, 2015 (detail)  
Copper, paint, safety pins  
7w in / 18w cm



dots, matched at times with all-black diamonds. They are also a reference to tattoos which, in Iran, were formerly seen only on lower class men, a badge of their machismo. Women, however, have adopted tattooing enthusiastically, at first perhaps as a symbol of defiance and empowerment or as something exotic, ritualistic. Eventually, however, it became as much cosmetic as anything else, a variant of Jinchi’s theme of pain, an emblematic wounding and branding of the flesh that has become commonplace.

Jinchi likes to introduce something new into each exhibition. In *Black and Blue*, it is the sewing together of paper with copper wire, as in *Pierced*, 2014, and *Stitched*, a technique that she plans to explore further in future endeavors. Her process is incremental, methodical, testing a range of possible solutions and their permutations, reflecting her mathematical inclinations and her scientific training; she had studied engineering before she became an artist. *Pierced*, drawn in pen, is sewn with copper wire; the word suggests body piercings, such as navel rings, earrings, and nose rings as well as far less savory body mutilations, each black and white fragment of a letter ornamented with beautifully filigreed tracteries similar to those in *Inked*, only lacier, lighter. *Stitched* has 71 sections, with one square of paper placed outside the grid. It is sewn together with copper wire, the text again her cherished quote from *The Blind Owl*. The inked words are cropped, the blue sometimes edged with a thin red line to make it more vibrant and three-dimensional. The sewing together of the leaves of paper is irregular, underscoring that it is handmade, but it also connotes an act of restoration, a body exploded, broken apart and reconstituted, repaired, but imperfectly, if it can be repaired at all, the fractures visible. In this work the truncated words can be read, if you know the language, but again, Jinchi stresses that it doesn’t matter, the meaning found more in the forms, patterns, and structures, in the color and materials.

*Hacked* and *Slashed* use the same quote, again divided into 71 parts and legible, the text chopped apart, signifying acts of deconstruction and dismemberment, then re-assembled. Made of enamel on wood panels, the former is a seductive red and pink while the latter is an austere black and white, their surfaces softly aglow, another subtle combination of beauty and ruthlessness.

A minimalist of sorts, Jinchi’s graceful abstractions at first might seem more formal than otherwise, and innocent of narrative. But they become unsettling upon longer viewing and closer reading, upon awareness of their subtext and the artist’s points of reference. They might also be viewed as autobiographical, however oblique, as most creations inevitably are on some level. She herself has experienced involuntary exile due to upheavals that have derailed and isolated Iran, burdened by the calamities that Hedayat foresaw for his native land. Her touch light but also lasered, her use of a formal language to convey the barbaric all the more emotive in its understatement, Jinchi offers us beauty as consolation, as a way to temper the wrath of the angels of devastation.

LILLY WEI

*Lilly Wei is a New York-based art critic, journalist and independent curator.*









On a sunny July afternoon, Dr. Shiva Balaghi, Curatorial Director of Leila Heller Gallery, spoke with the artist Pouran Jinchí about the works exhibited in *Black & Blue*.

SB: Over the past year, I've been making regular visits to your studio here in Brooklyn. It's a beautiful space, filled with light. It's peaceful and embracing.

PJ: The space in which I work is very important to me. There is a sense of order to my studio that helps my creative process. I sketch out my work carefully before I begin making it. And even as I am making the pieces, I have a sense of how they will be presented in an exhibition.

SB: Your process is very planned, very meticulous. It strikes me that there is a distinct relationship between the materials you use, the colors you use and the meaning embedded in the work. Can you discuss this in relation to this particular body of work?

PJ: Every new body of work presents new possibilities for me. I like to experiment with new forms, new materials, new colors. I think about how the material can add dimension, texture, color to the work that can help convey meaning. For this exhibit, I used a defined palette of blues, blacks, red, and fuchsia. I use raw canvas, handmade paper, transfer paper, and shiny copper. These surfaces all reflect something about the work itself.

Of course ultimately, my art takes different meanings based on how other people see the work. That communicative capacity of art is very important to me, for people to be able to see the work through their own lenses, understand it in their own ways.

SB: The pieces in the show are extraordinarily beautiful. Yet in this exhibit, you are exploring the themes of pain and violence. Describe the tension between beauty and pain in this work.

PJ: The idea for this body of work stemmed from a human reaction I had to this pervasive violence in our society. There is always news of more violence – in Syria, Iraq, the earthquake in Nepal. What is a possible artistic response to all this violence? This question led me back to Sadegh Hedayat's novel, *The Blind Owl*. Pain and violence are threaded throughout the novel. So it became a starting point for this new



work. At the same time, I wanted the viewer's experience of this work to be reflective and contemplative. When it comes to art, beauty is very important to me. When we see something beautiful, it attracts us, draws us in, and puts us in a space of contemplation. In each work, there is an element of fear, of danger, of angst. Yet this is balanced by a sense of calm, of beauty.

SB: Sadegh Hedayat's writing clearly resonates with you. On the one hand, his writing was very rooted in Iranian problems and thematics. On the other hand, his work has a universal resonance and translates well into other languages. I can see this element in your own art.

PJ: In some ways I do identify with Hedayat, even though we are from different eras. I can identify with his life experiences. His stories are dark, always full of angst and pain. But he's always holding something back, either consciously or not. I think this is a reason he uses so many metaphors in his writing. And yes his writing is deeply Iranian on the one hand but it also translates well and has a universal meaning. This aspect has been very appealing to me.

SB: There is a fascinating installation piece in this exhibit. It features 243 ink drawings of dots—the diacritical notations taken from the pages of *The Blind Owl*. Each noqteh or dot has its own unique design—your detailed interpretation of various Islamic designs.

PJ: In Islamic art and calligraphy, the noqteh represents the beginning. Each word we write, each line we draw begins with a dot. In writing, the dots help determine the letters, therefore give meaning to the words. And yet, when Persian is written by hand, these dots often get overlooked, they can disappear. So I wanted to focus on these dots, on their importance in giving language its meaning. Sometimes the things we don't notice at first glance are the most important of all.

SB: In this body of work, you return to Persian calligraphy. But the letters are fragmented; nothing is actually legible. Can you talk about the relationship of language to this body of work?

PJ: My art is text-based. I'm really a writer without words. At some level, every work in this show is a form of writing. Artists always use their art to say something they can't convey with words. I happen to work with Persian text, but any language can be translated into a visual experience.

*Shiva Balaghi, Ph.D. is Curatorial Director and Director of International Programs at Leila Heller Gallery and a Visiting Scholar of art history at Brown University.*







*Wound 1*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm

Previous page:  
*Wound 1*, 2015 (detail)  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm



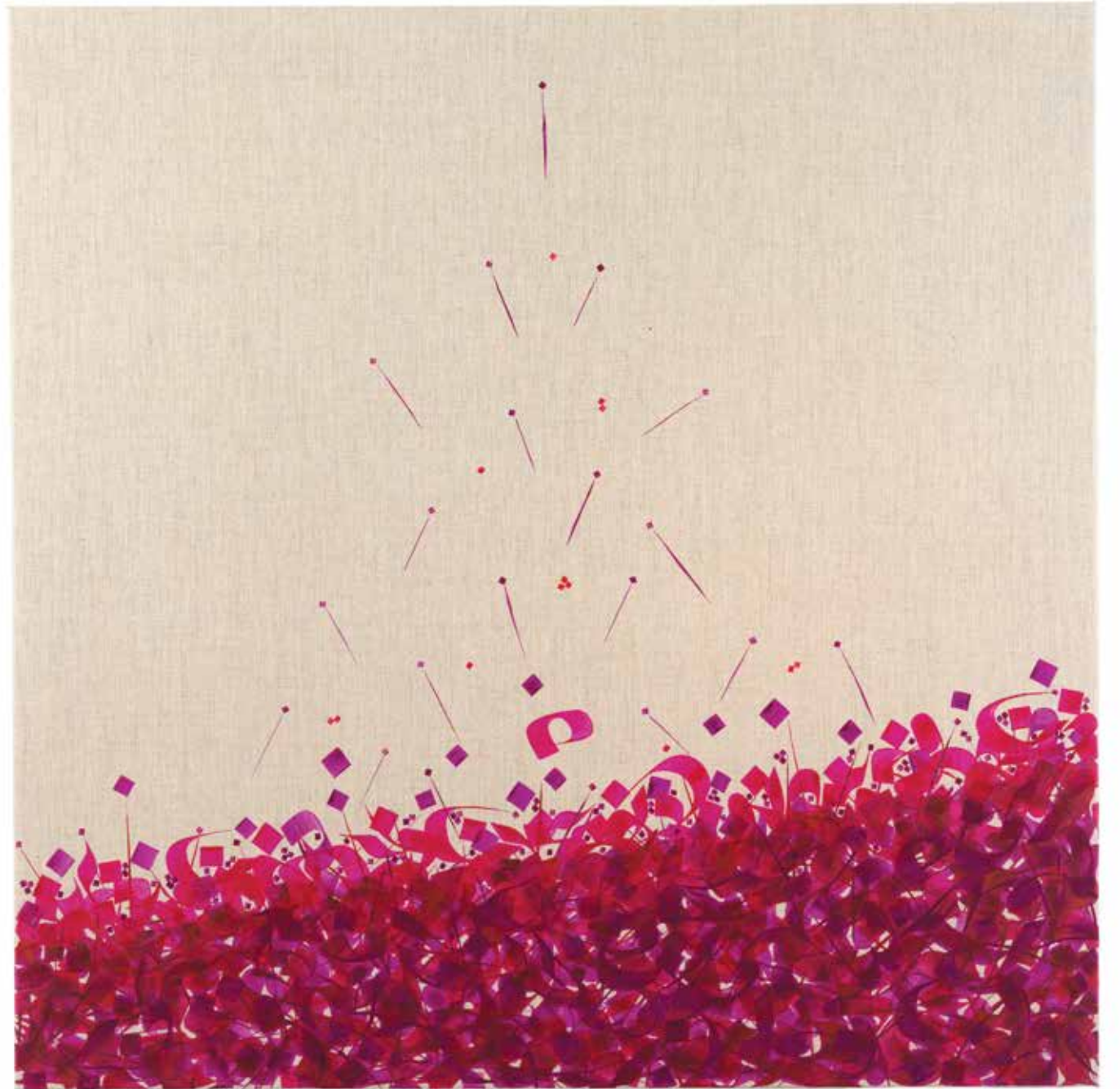




*Wound 2*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm



*Wound 4*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm







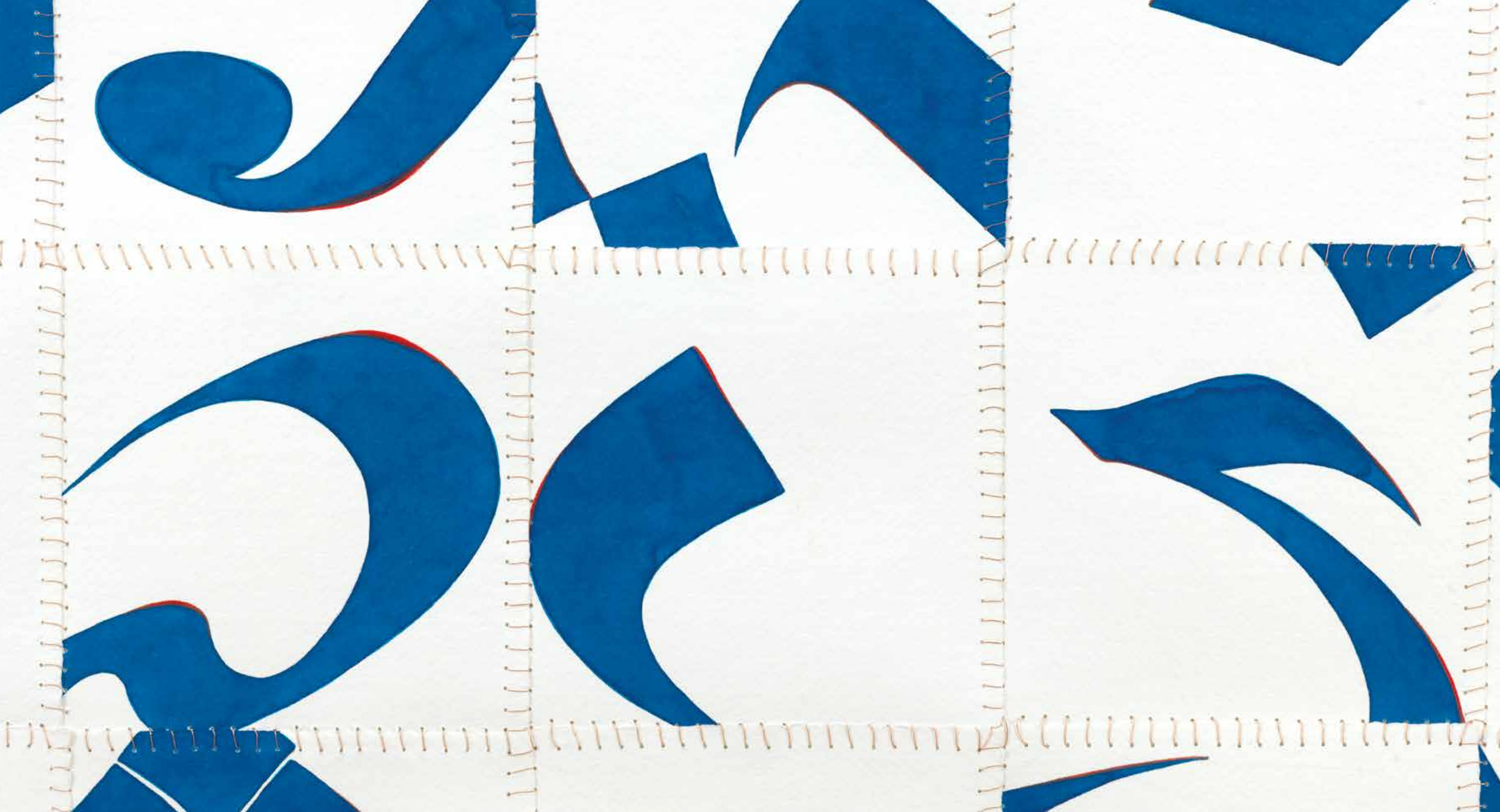
*Wound 5*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm



*Wound 6*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 48 in / 122 x 122 cm











*Stitched*, 2014  
Ink and copper thread on paper  
46 x 57 in / 117 x 145 cm

Previous page:  
*Stitched*, 2014 (detail)  
Ink and copper thread on paper  
46 x 57 in / 117 x 145 cm





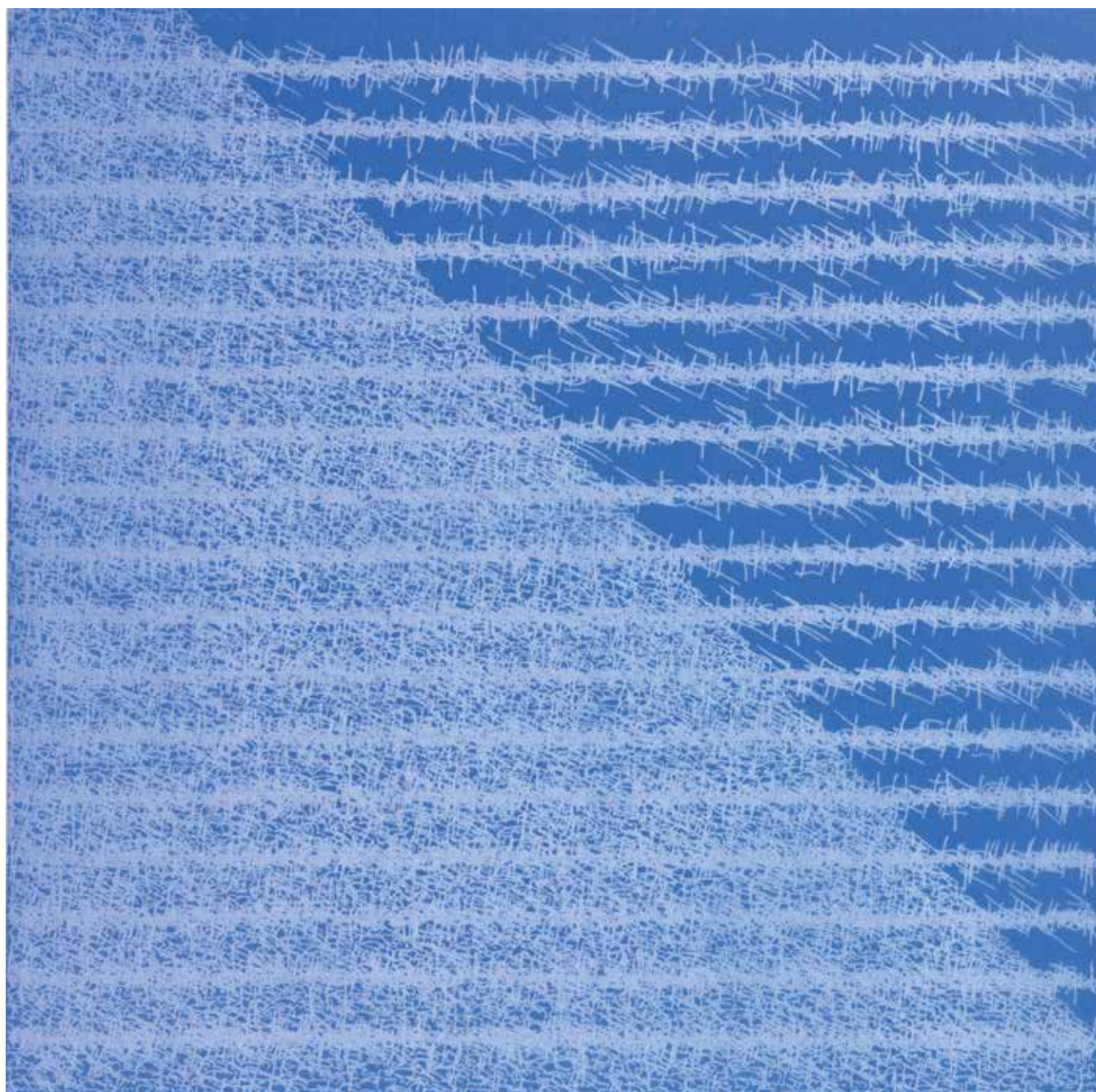
*Pierced*, 2014  
 Pens, copper thread on paper  
 36 x 108 in / 92 x 274 cm



*Hanged series, 2015*  
Copper, paint, safety pins  
7w in / 18w cm



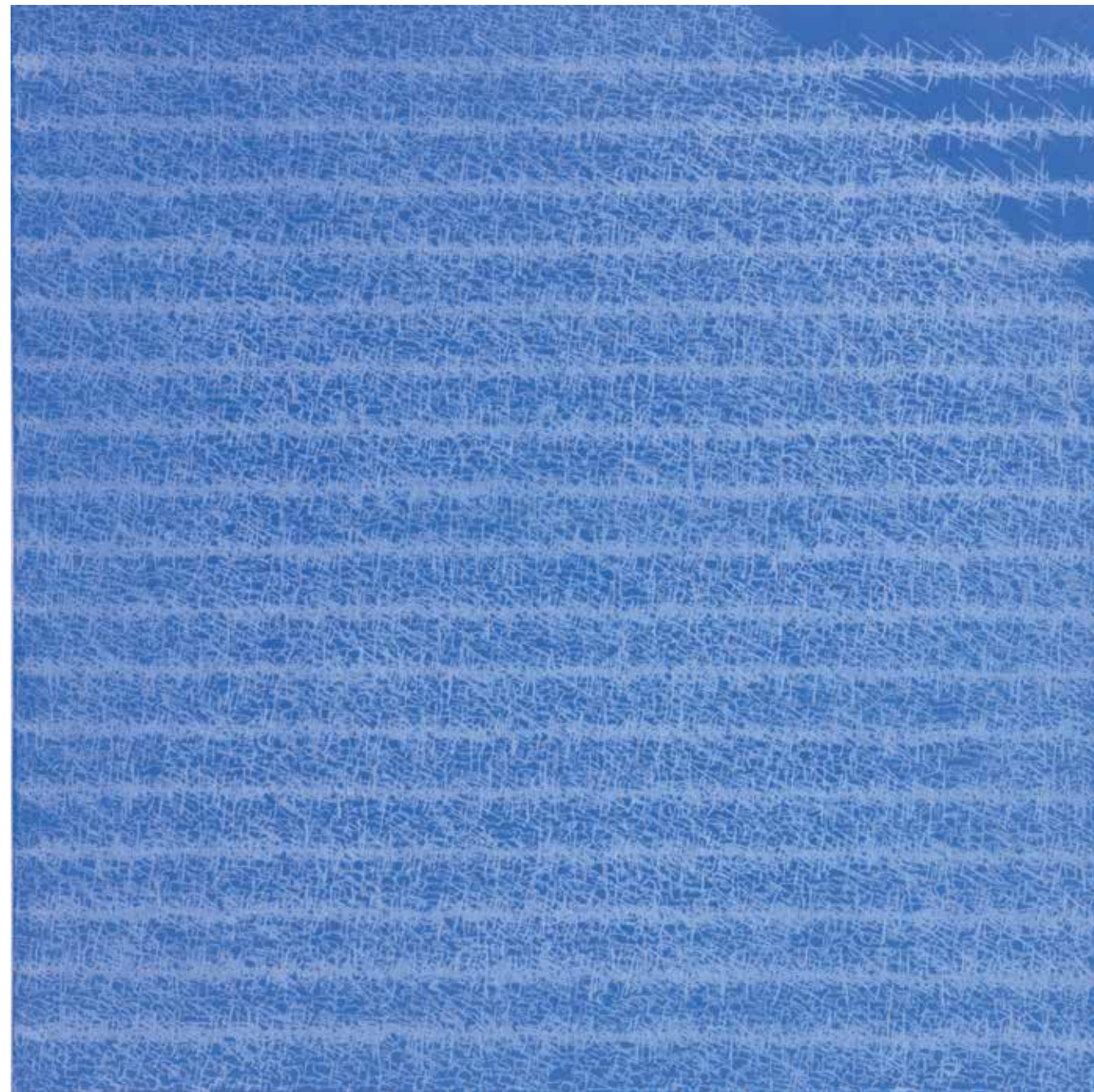




*Bruised 1*, 2014  
Transfer paper  
18 x 18 in / 46 x 46 cm

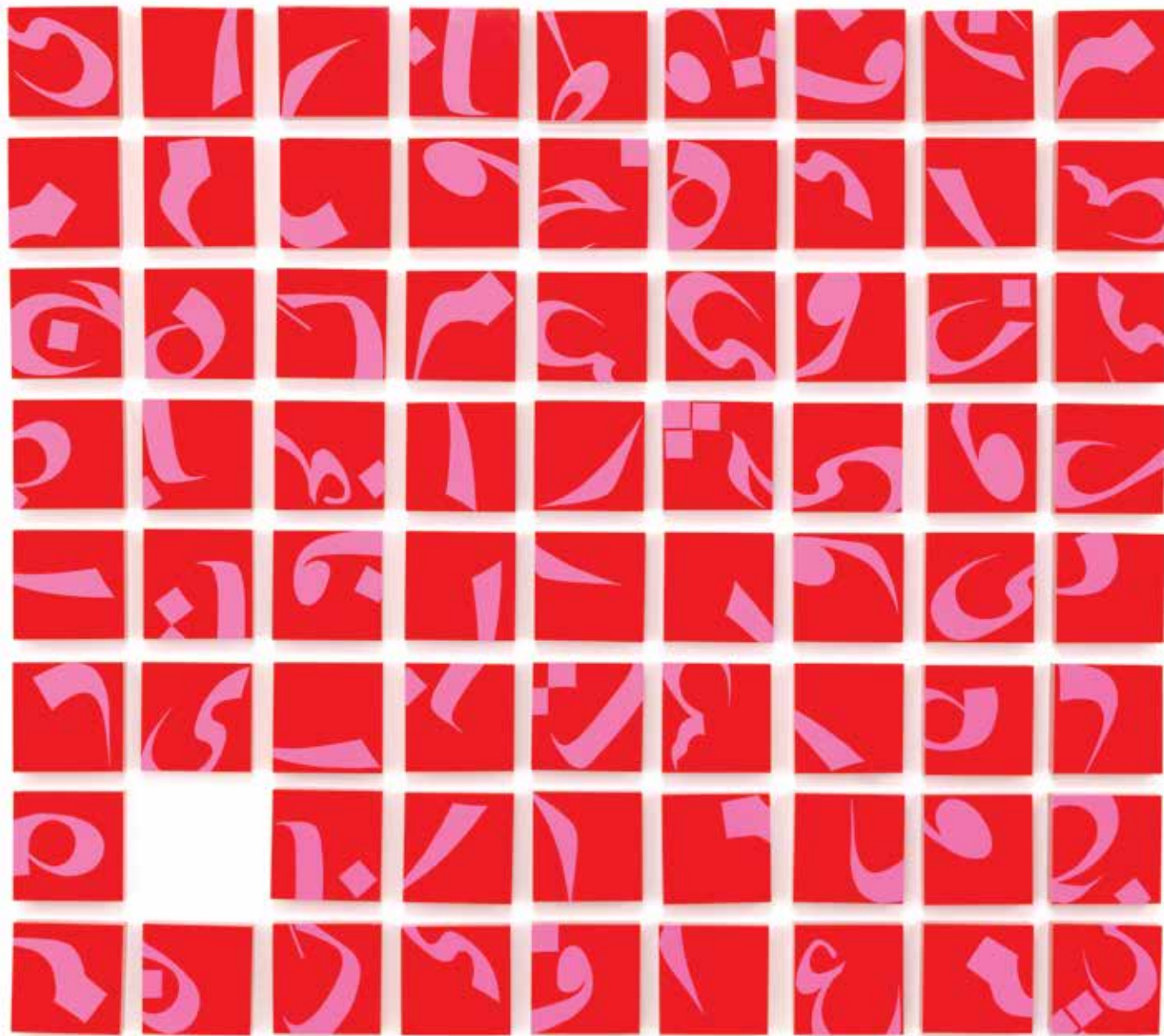


*Bruised 2*, 2014  
Transfer paper  
18 x 18 in / 46 x 46 cm









*Hacked, 2014*  
Enamel on wood panels  
55.5 x 63 in / 141 x 160 cm

Previous page:  
*Hacked, 2014 (detail)*  
Enamel on wood panels  
55.5 x 63 in / 141 x 160 cm



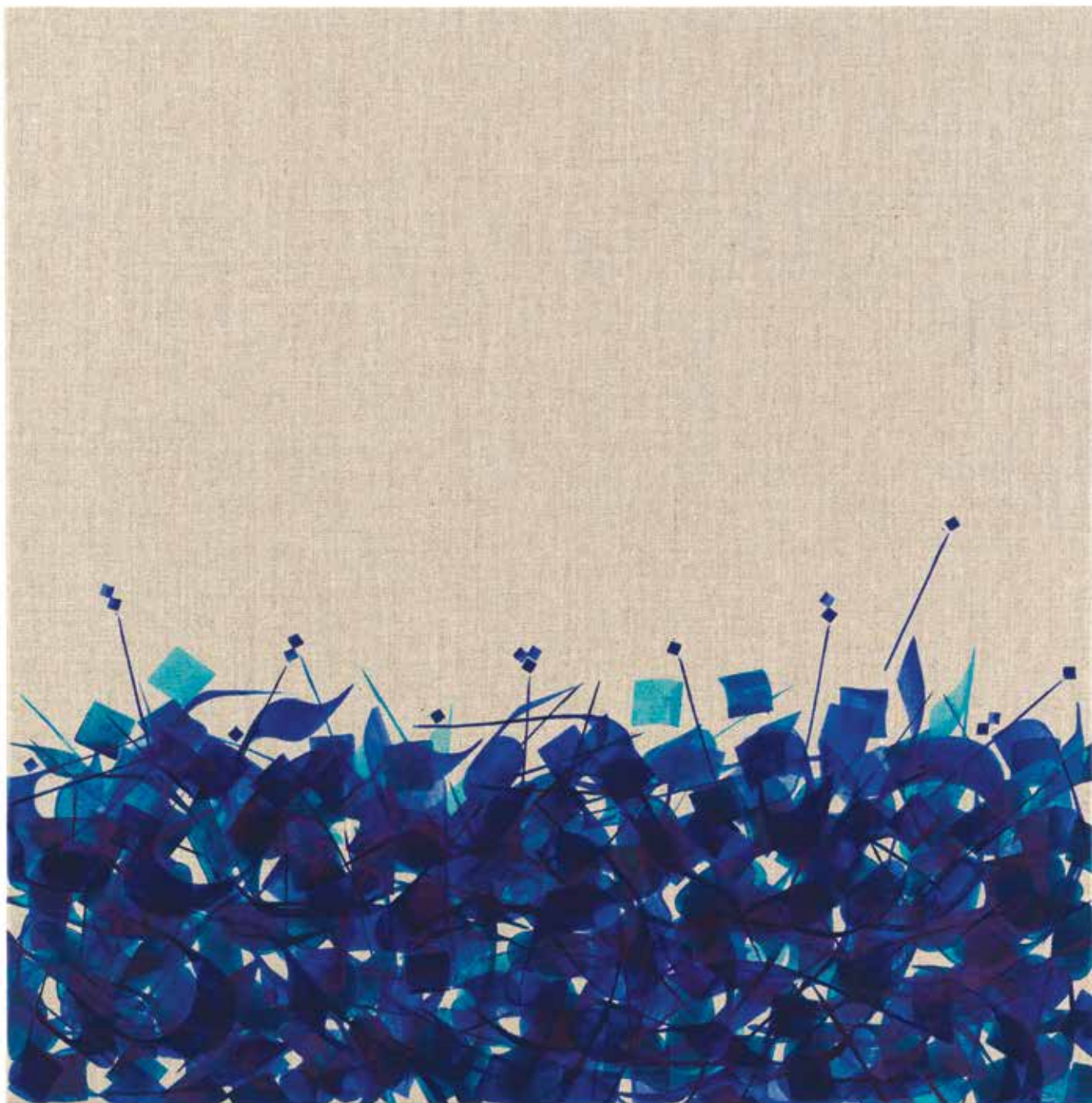




*Slashed*, 2014  
Enamel on wood panels  
62.25 x 77 in / 158 x 196 cm

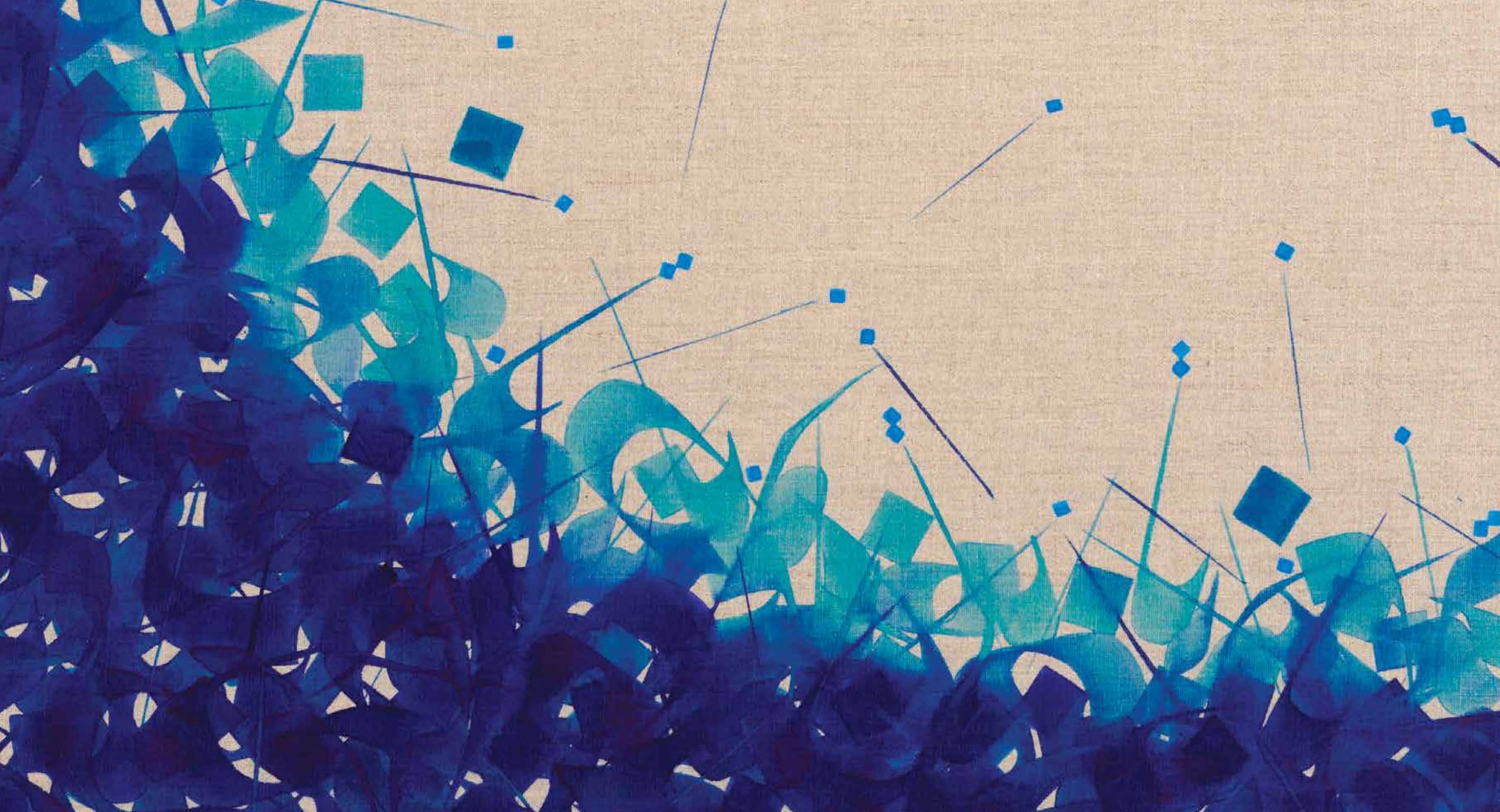
Previous page:  
*Slashed*, 2014 (detail)  
Enamel on wood panels  
62.25 x 77 in / 158 x 196 cm





*Sores 1*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
24 x 24 in / 61 x 61cm

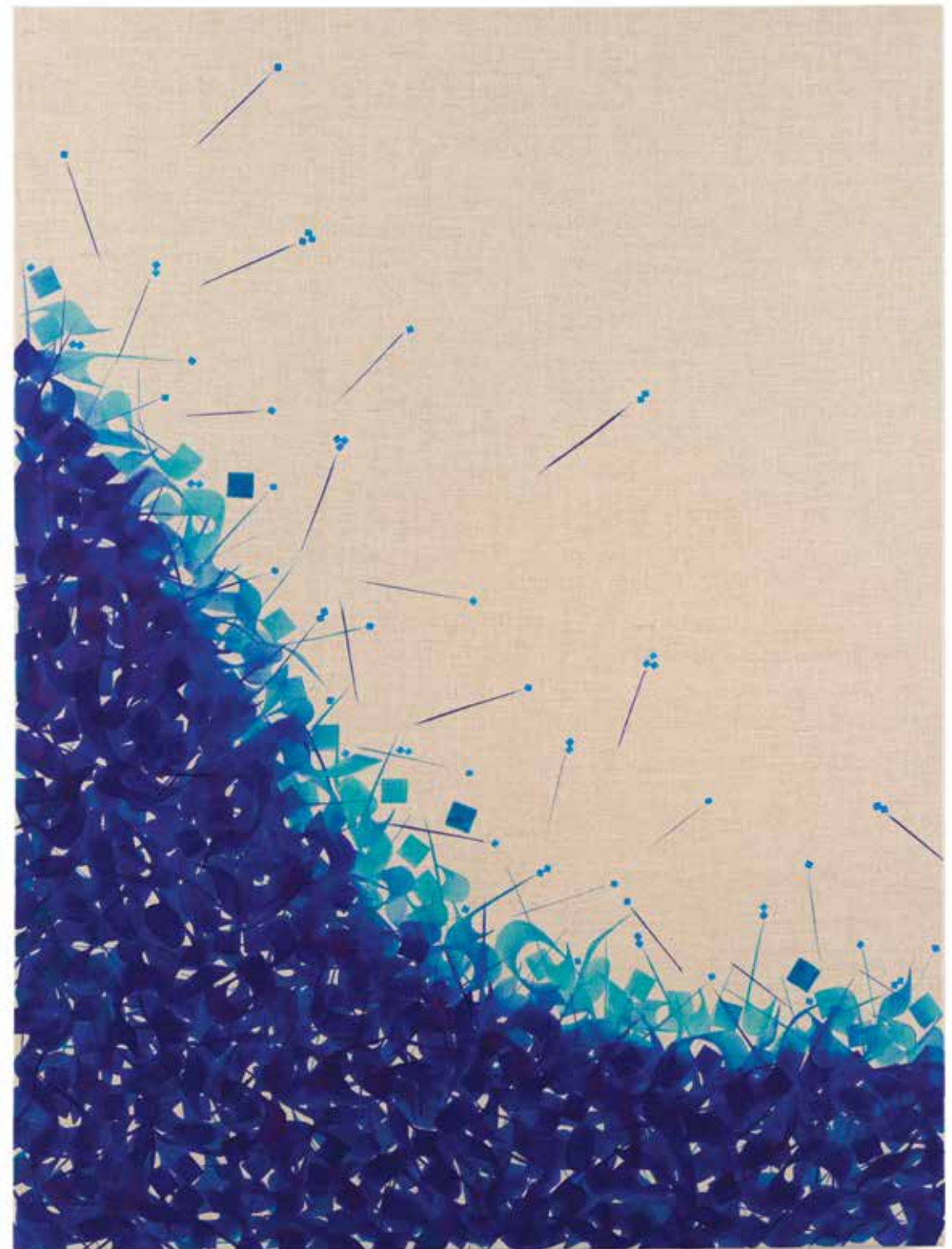


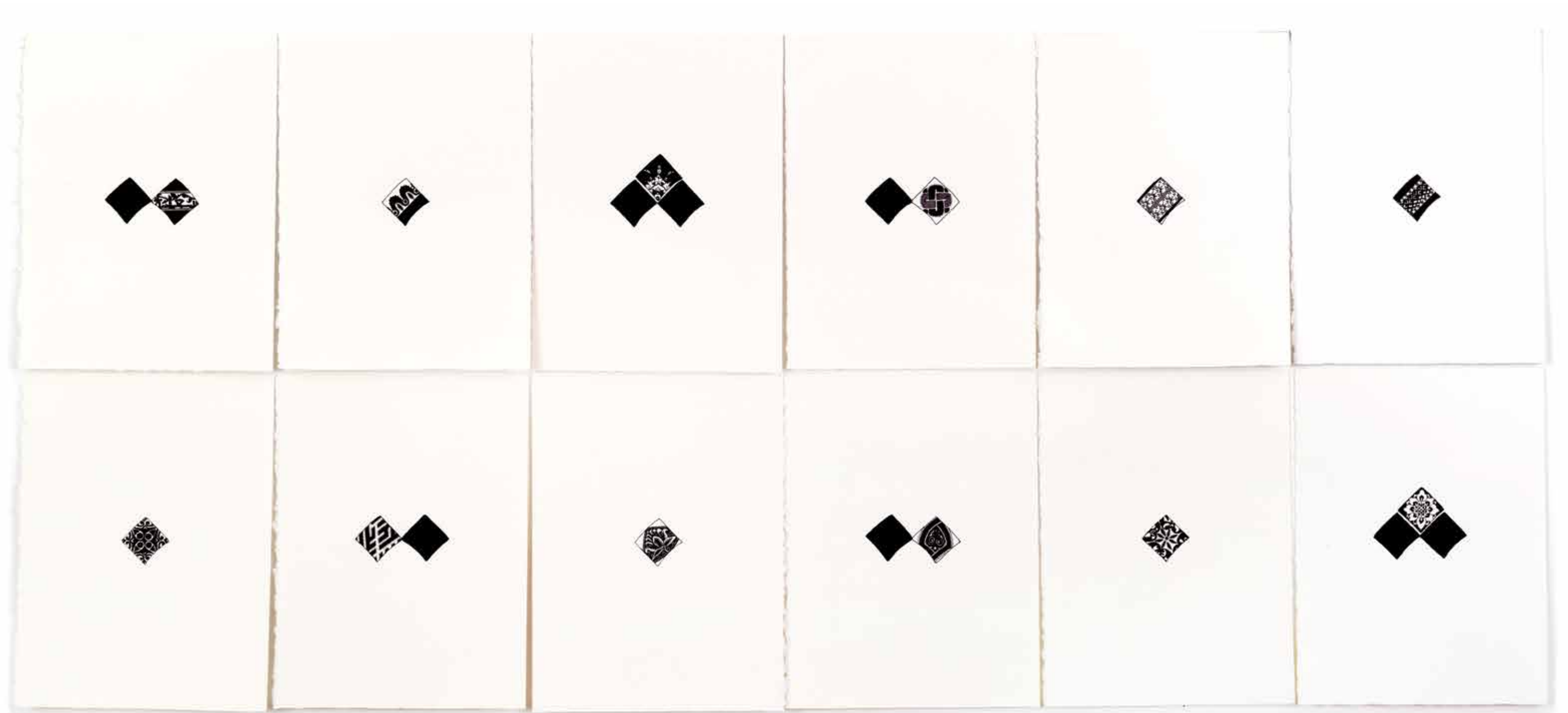




*Sores 3*, 2015  
Inks on linen  
48 x 36 in / 122 x 92 cm

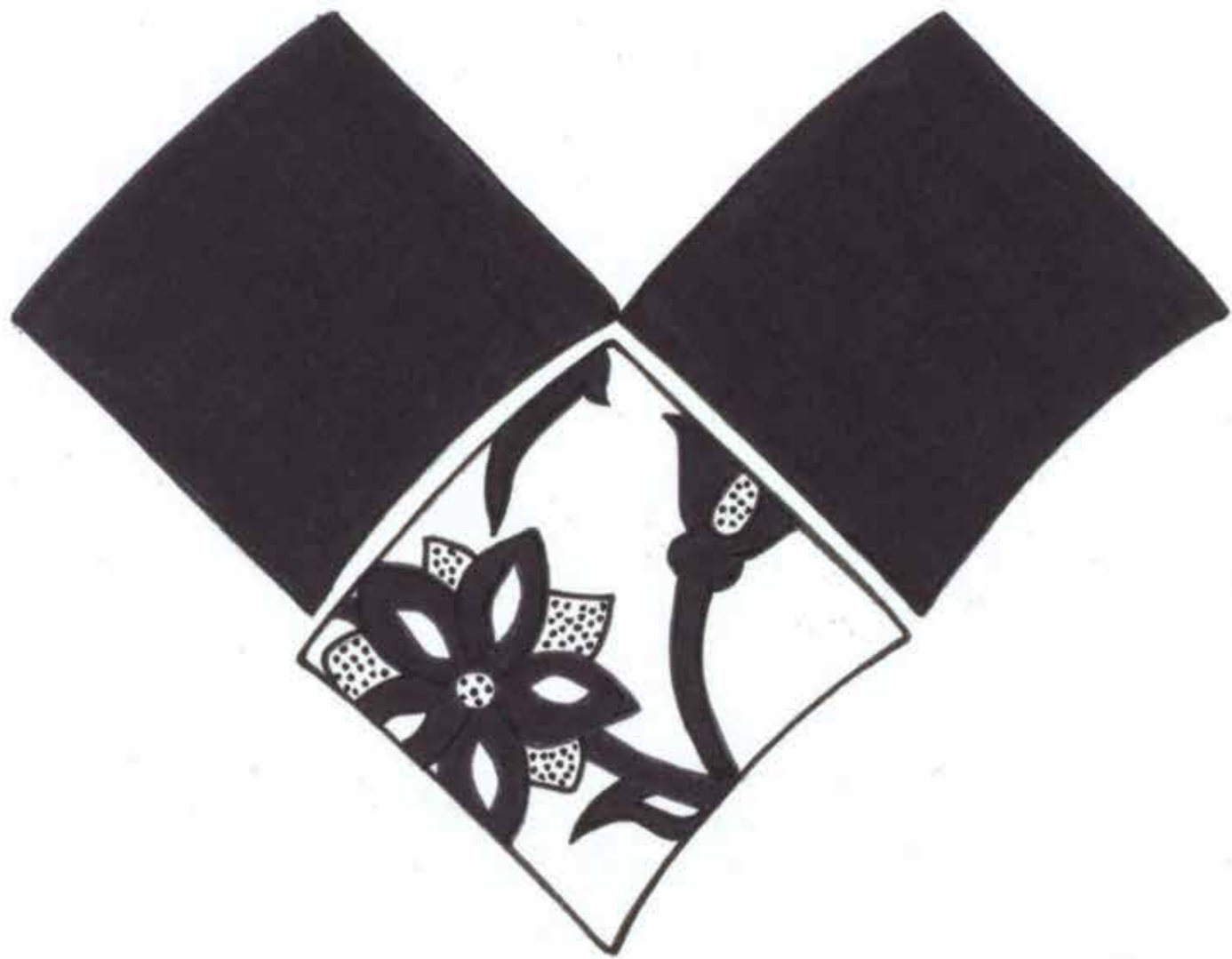
Previous page:  
*Sores 3*, 2015 (detail)  
Inks on linen  
48 x 36 in / 122 x 92 cm





*Inked*, 2014  
Pens on paper  
15 x 11.25 in / 38 x 29 cm each





*Inked*, 2014 (detail)  
Pens on paper  
15 x 11.25 in / 38 x 29 cm each

POURAN JINCHI

B. Mashad, Iran  
Lives and works in New York, NY

EDUCATION

- 1993     Studio Painting, Arts Students League, New York, NY
- 1989     Painting, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
- 1982     Engineering, George Washington University, Washington D. C.

SELECTED SOLO EXHBITIONS

- 2015     *Black & Blue*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York (forthcoming)
- 2013     *The Blind Owl*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2012     *Pouran Jinchi: Dawn, Noon and Night*, Art Projects International, New York, NY
- 2010     *Entropy*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY
- Ritual Imprint*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2008     *Pouran Jinchi, The Vilcek Foundation*, New York, NY
- A Survey*, Art Projects International, New York, NY
- Fabricated*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2007     *Recitation*, M. Y. Art Prospects, New York, NY
- 2005     *Alef*, M.Y. Art Prospects, New York, NY
- 2004     *Alef*, 511 Gallery, New York, NY
- 2003     *Derakht*, 511 Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002     *Entangled Thoughts*, Macy Gallery, Columbia University, New York, NY
- 2001     *Antworks*, M.Y. Art Prospects, New York, NY
- Derakht*, Shibata Etsuko Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2000     *Ruba iyat Series*, M.Y. Art Prospects, New York, NY
- Pouran Jinchi: Recent Paintings*, Art Projects International, New York, NY
- 1999     *Poetry Paintings*, Nikolai Fine Arts, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHBITIONS

- 2015     *The Great Game*, Iranian Pavilion curated by Marco Maneguzzo and Mazdak Faiznia, 56th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
- Accented*, curated by Murtaza Vali, Maraya Art Center, Sharjah, UAE
- 2014     Islamic Art Festival, Sharjah, UAE.
- Artist in Exile*, Yeh Gallery, St. John's University, Queens, NY
- Persepolis: Word & Image*, The William Benton Museum, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
- 2013     *Calligraffiti 1984/2013*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY
- Summer Selects*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY

- Summer Selections*, Art Projects International, New York, NY
- New Blue and White*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, curated by Emily Zilber, Boston, MA
- 2012     *The Rule and its Exception*, Contemporary Middle Eastern Art, Deborah Colton Gallery, Houston, TX
- Phantoms of Asia: Contemporary Awakens the Past*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA
- 2011     Two Person Show, Frieze Art Fair, London, England
- The Bravery of Being out of Range*, Athr Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
- Third Eye / I: Iranian Contemporary Art*, Other Gallery, Shanghai, China
- 2010     *Light of the Sufi: The Mystical Arts of Islam*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- Translation/Tarjama*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
- 2009     *Iran Inside Out*, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, NY
- Translation/Tarjama*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, NY
- Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY
- Selseleh/Zelzeleh: Movers & Shakers in Contemporary Iranian Art*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY
- Unknown Territory – New York: Il Lee, Pouran Jinchi, Flipe Rocha da Silva*, Art Projects International, New York, NY
- 2008     *East West Dialogues*, curated by Dr. Layla Diba, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY
- 2007     *Culture Village, Flashback/Forward*, The Third Line Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- Contemporary Calligraphic: Three artists Image the Word*, Binghamton University Art Museum, Binghamton, NY
- 2006     *A Distant Mirror*, M. Y. Art Prospects, New York, NY
- 2003     Art Miami, Miller/Geisler Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2002     Art Miami, M.Y. Art Prospects, Miami, FL
- Flag Art Festival, Poetry of the Winds*, 2002 FIFA World Cup, Seoul, Japan
- 2001     Art Miami, M.Y. Art Prospects, Miami, FL
- Benefit Auction for American Friends of Cambodia Trust
- 2000     *The Rose and The nightingale*, Columbia University, New York, NY
- United Nations Millennium Day, Benefit Exhibition, New York, NY
- Group Show, St. John's University, Queens, NY
- Benefit Auction for American Friends of Cambodia, New York, NY
- The Learning Project*, Benefit Auction, The Craft Museum, New York, NY
- Group Show, Vibrant Gallery, New York, NY
- 1998     Third Annual Exchange Show, Nikolai Fine Arts, New York, NY
- Artists for Gardens*, Benefit Exhibition, The Puck Building, New York, NY
- 1997     Two Artists Show, Gallery Stendhal, New York, NY
- 1996     Art Exhibition, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The Federal Reserve Bank, New York, NY



SELECTED COLLECTIONS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC  
Federal Reserve Bank, New York, NY  
Sprint Corporation, Kansas City, MO  
Lehman Brothers, New York, NY  
Pratt Institute, New York, NY  
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY  
The Farjam Collection, Dubai, UAE  
The Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi, UAE

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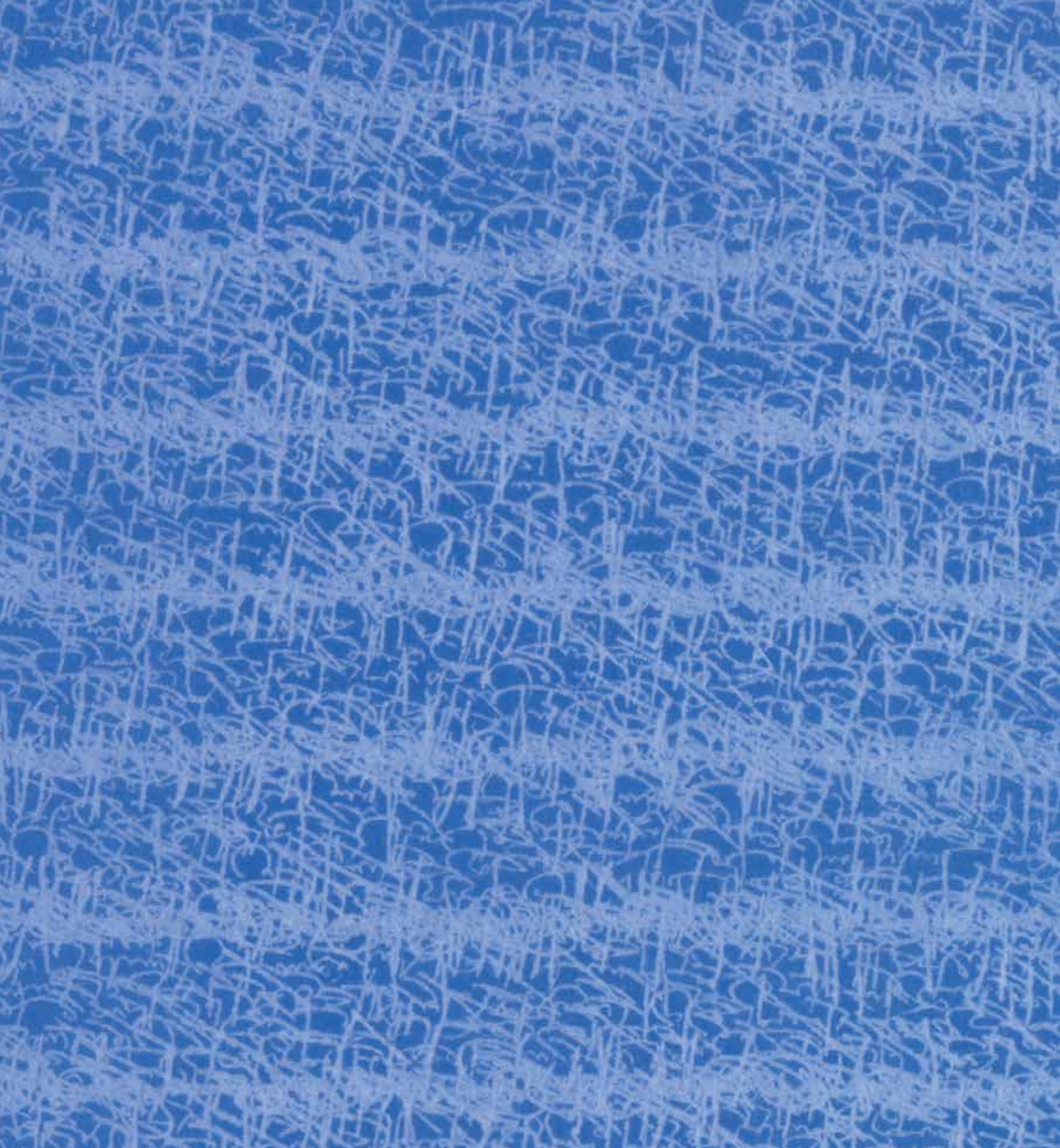


Cover:  
*Hanged series*, 2015 (detail)  
Copper, paint, safety pins  
7w in / 18w cm

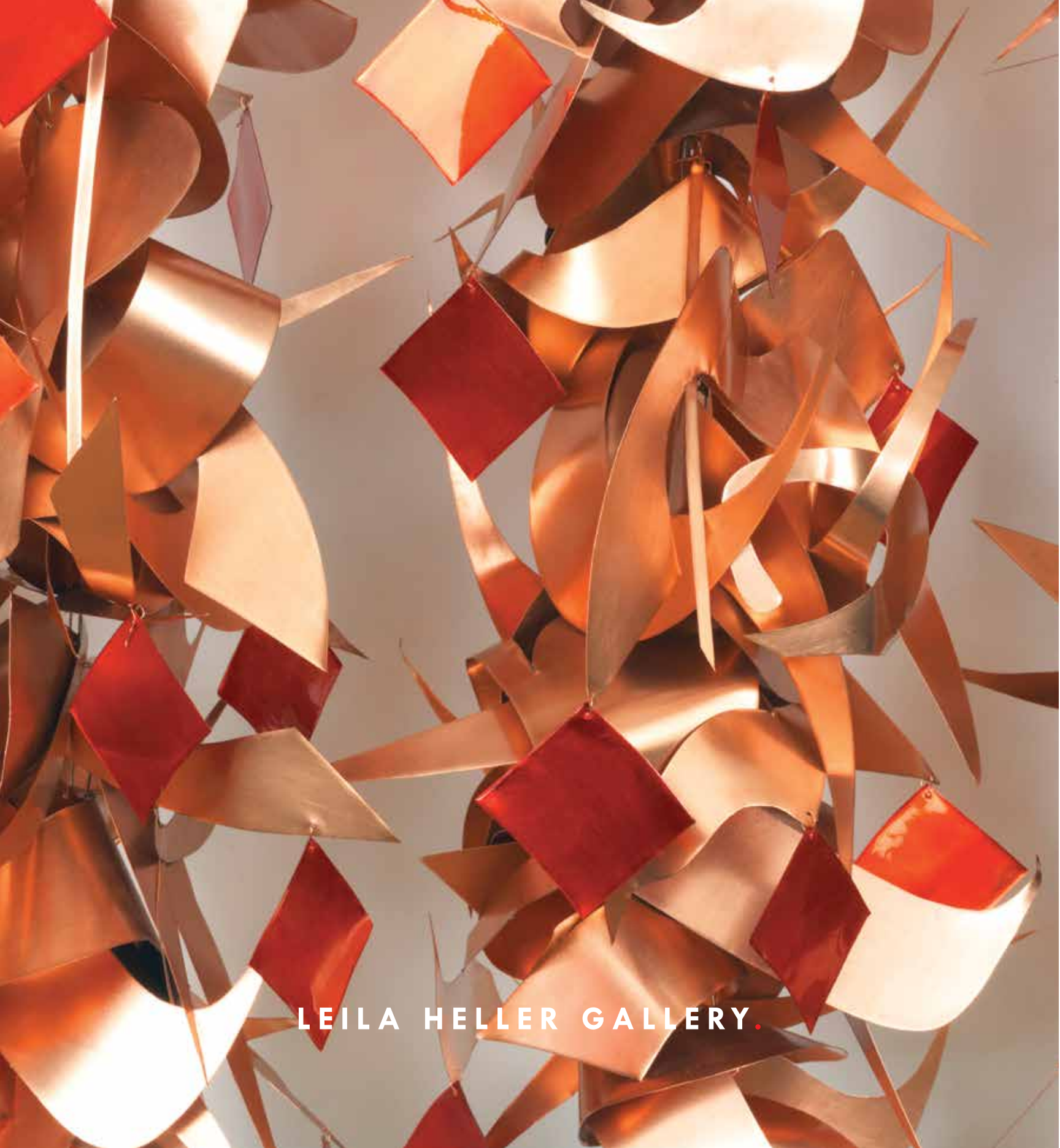
Inside cover:  
*Bruised 1*, 2014 (detail)  
Transfer paper  
18 x 18 in / 46 x 46 cm

Back cover:  
*Hanged series*, 2015 (detail)  
Copper, paint, safety pins  
7w in / 18w cm

Inside back cover:  
*Bruised 2*, 2014 (detail)  
Transfer paper  
18 x 18 in / 46 x 46 cm







LEILA HELLER GALLERY.