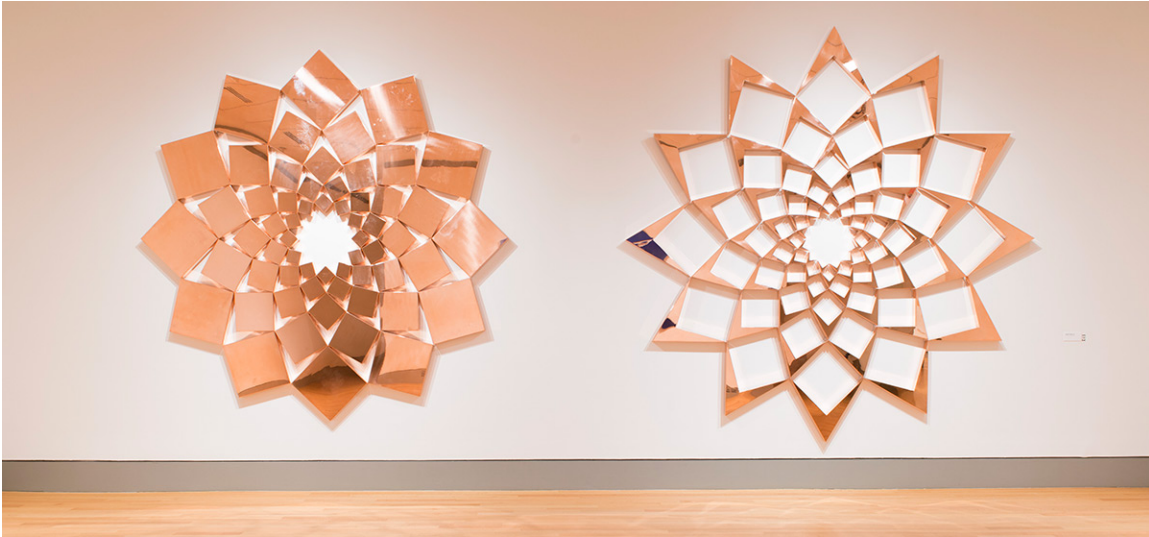


LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

STEVEN NAIFEH *Found in Translation*

March 27 – April 30, 2014



Saida XX: Iridescent Copper, 2013, Copper-plated steel, 84 x 168 in / 213.4 x 426.7 cm

Opening:
Thursday, March 27, 6 – 8 pm
Leila Heller Gallery
568 West 25th Street

New York, New York -- Steven Naifeh's first solo show in New York City will be on view at Leila Heller Gallery in Chelsea at 568 West 25th Street from March 27 – April 30, 2014. The exhibition will include paintings, wall sculptures and floor sculptures that blend the patterns and colors of traditional Islamic art with the shapes and minimalism of the Geometric Abstraction movement. Additionally, LED light sculptures from Naifeh's *Uzbek* series will be featured in the Gallery's 11th Avenue Windows. A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by curator and Islamic Art specialist Heather Ecker will accompany the exhibition.

Naifeh is perhaps best known as the co-author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (with Gregory White Smith). His most recent work, *Van Gogh: The Life* (also with Smith,) has been praised as "definitive" by the curator of Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and was named "Art Book of the Year" by *The Times* of London.

Spending his childhood throughout the Middle East, including Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and the U.A.E., Naifeh became enamored by the beauty of the geometric shapes and patterns that decorated everything from the textiles to the buildings of the Islamic world. Naifeh also became interested in the mathematical basis of these shapes and patterns, which were developed a millennium ago throughout the world of Islam. He has adapted those ancient formulas to modern purposes in conceiving his geometric, often large-scale works.

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The Geometric Abstraction movement of the United States and Europe also resonates in Naifeh's work. The movement, embraced by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, relied on line, color, and geometric shapes. By looking to both the art of the Middle East and the West, Naifeh highlights the similarities and harmonizes two cultures that are often found at odds.

Naifeh studied art history at Princeton and Harvard Universities, focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western European and American art. At the same time his own art began to explore the kinship between the geometric abstraction of Western art and the millennium-old tradition of Arab and Islamic abstraction. Naifeh studied contemporary art with Sam Hunter, former curator of the Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum, and Islamic art with Oleg Grabar and Cary Welch. It has taken 40 years for these influences to fully emerge in Naifeh's most recent body of work.

In his *Saida* series, Naifeh combines the satisfying resolution of geometry with the playfulness of Op Art. *Saida III: Iridescent Copper* (2014), which will be on view, consists of numerous copper-plated steel squares formatted to create a star-like whole. The eye oscillates constantly between the stable overall design and the shape-shifting separate elements. Naifeh's use of separate pieces (sometimes wood blocks, canvases, or metal plates) underscores the composition's modular nature and the strict mathematical progression that defines the relationship of the parts to the whole.

In his *Uzbek* series, Naifeh saw his challenge as making the perfect spiral that the rustic Uzbek craftsmen aspired to make but did not have the means to make. He used a computer application to identify the geometry of a specific Uzbek dome to distill its mathematical formula. Naifeh chose the media of this series – colored acrylic light boxes and LED lights – because they seemed best suited to achieving those goals. The *Uzbek* images are directly inspired by the East, but the materials are completely western.

Born in Iran in 1952 to American diplomats, Steven Naifeh lives and works in Aiken, South Carolina. He was the first artist ever to have a solo exhibition in Abu Dhabi, which was held in 1975 at the Embassy of the United States. His work has been exhibited at the Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC; the Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; and the Consulate of the United States, Kaduna, Nigeria. As an artist and author, Naifeh has been profiled in many publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Harvard Magazine*, *People*, and *The International Herald Tribune*.

ALSO ON VIEW:

March 2 – August 31, 2014

Found in Translation

Middle East Center for the Arts at MANA Contemporary
888 Newark Avenue, Jersey City, NY 07306

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