

# SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

#36



THE CREATIVE ISSUE

- CREATIVE SYNERGY: AYMAN BAALBAKI AND JEAN BOGHOSSIAN JOIN FORCES •
- MAPPING THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE GUGGENHEIM NEW YORK • INSIDE THE PRADA FOUNDATION •
- DISCOVERING LISBON'S ART SCENE • KAREN CHEKERDJIAN TAKES ON PARIS • BRUNO CORÀ ON THE ART OF SEEING •

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## THE INTROSPECTIVE GAZE

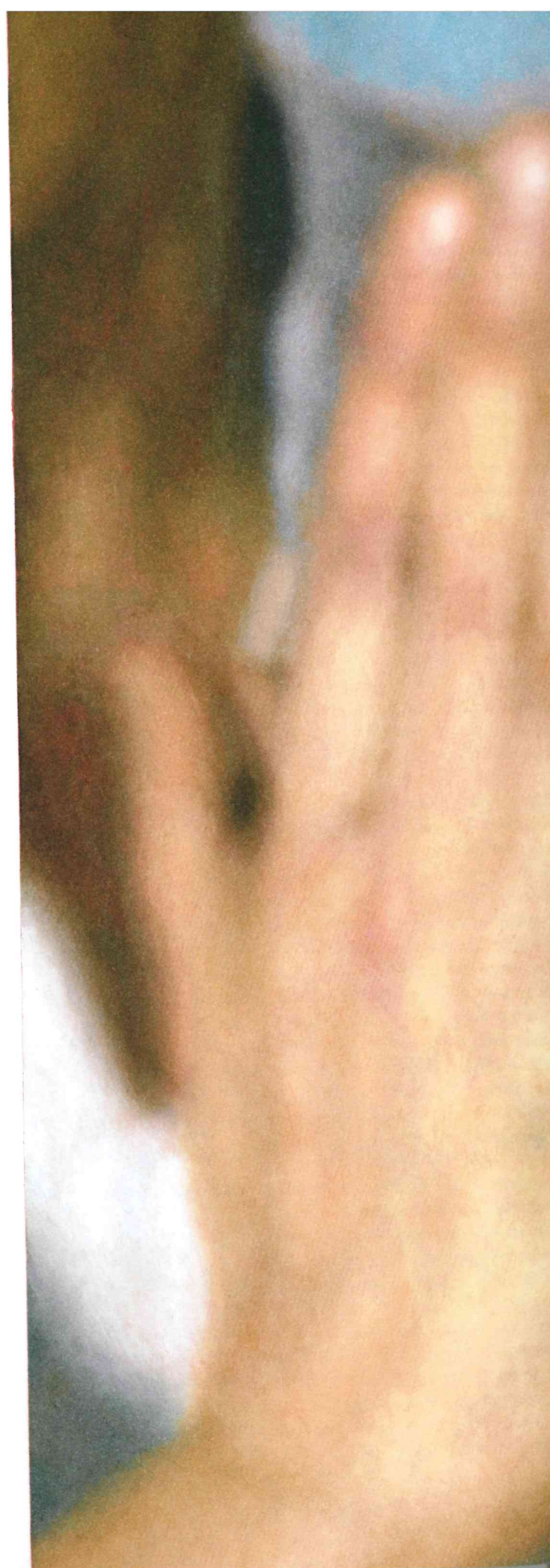
**Y. Z. Kami** tells **Selections** the story of transcendence behind his work

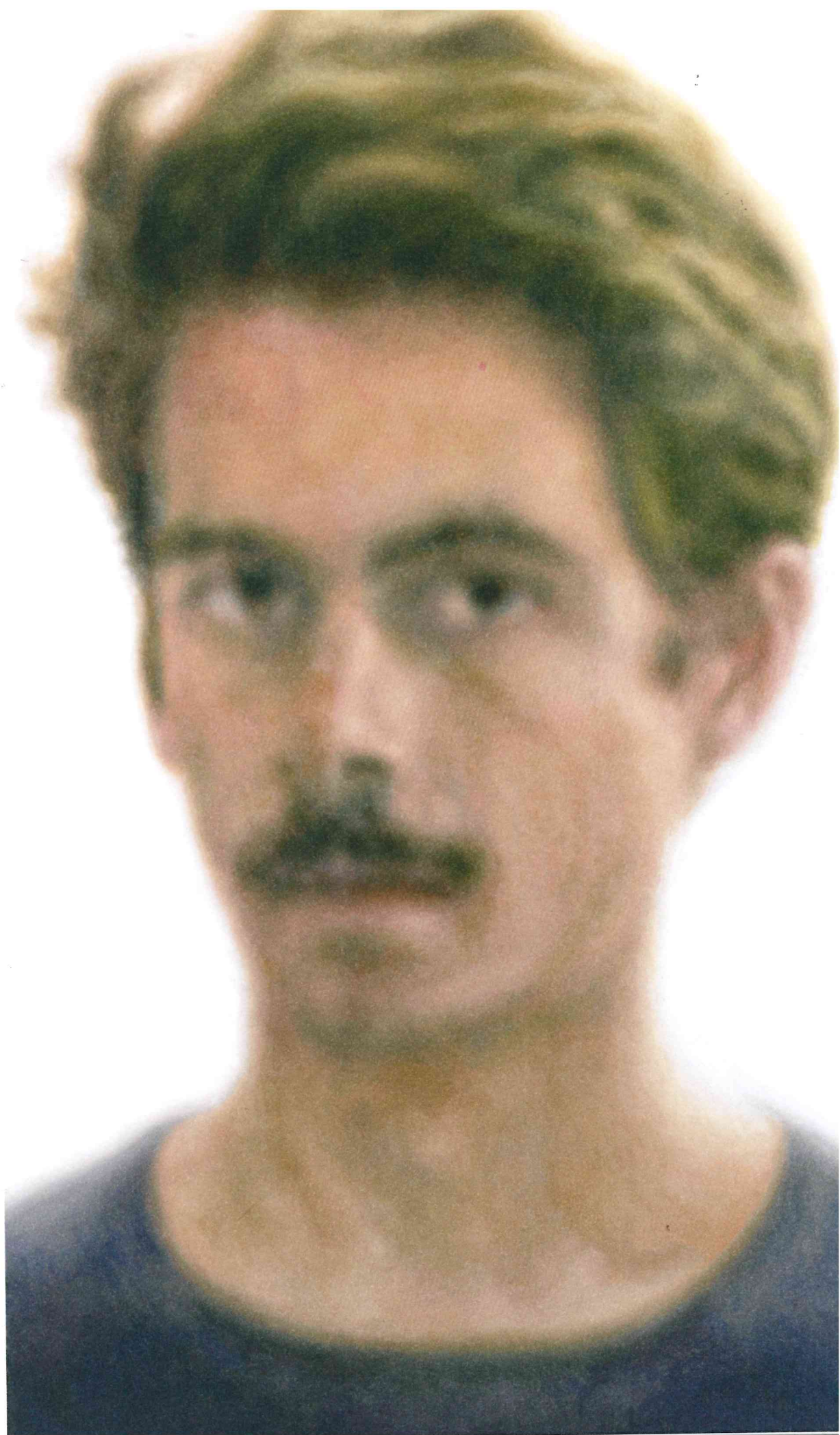
by Corinne Martin

New York-based Iranian painter Y. Z. Kami is best known for his large-scale ethereal portraits. *White Domes*, his most recent solo show, ran at Leila Heller Gallery's Alserkal Avenue exhibition space in Dubai from March 9 to April 25, showcasing paintings, works on paper and a sculptural installation rooted in minimalist abstraction, exploring ideas of spirituality and transcendence.

**right: Kami YZ, *Untitled (Hands) III*, 2013, oil on linen, 221 × 119.4cm**

**opposite page: Kami YZ, *Paul*, 2014, oil on linen, 228.6 × 137.2cm**





**YZ Kami**, *Rumi, The Book of Shams e Tabrizi (In Memory of Mahin Tajadod)*, 2005, soap stone, salt and lithography ink, dimensions variable



**Corinne Martin: What inspired the *White Domes* series?**

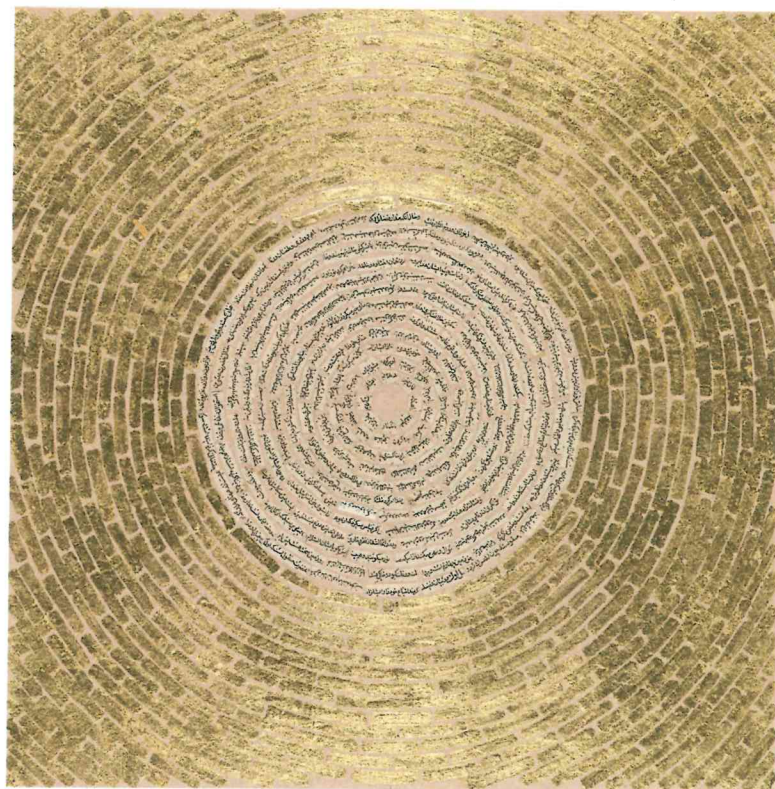
**Y. Z. Kami:** Portraiture is my primary preoccupation in my painting. I grew up painting portraits but at the same time had an intense connection to architecture. The *White Domes* came out of that connection. They refer to the ceilings that I have seen in Iran, or in different places in the Middle East, or even in Turkey in mosques and sacred structures. The *White Domes* refer to that repetitive pattern, very simplified sometimes, that you see with bricks and sometimes with mosaics.

**CM: What motivated your choice of colors?**

**YZK:** The dome paintings start from the Black Dome, which is the internal darkness, followed by the White Dome, which is the light, and then finally reaching the ultimate, the Gold Dome. The gold is the gold that you see in illuminations of the Quran in miniatures, in religious scriptures, which refers to the inner gold. It is an alchemic process of going from darkness to light and the end goal is the gold, to reach the inner glow of the gold.

**CM: Why are your paintings based on the circular form?**

**YZK:** At the centre there is always the appearance of the white light coming from the centre that you can see in all of them except one where the light became a doorway to the light instead of that circular shape or motion. They are very simple mandalas ultimately. Mandalas are as old as civilisation and they come from all over the world. You have many cultures that make that sort of circular imagery, so the white domes refers to that.



**CM: Do you use the same philosophy in your portraits?**

**YZK:** I try to achieve in the *White Domes* what I have been trying to do with my portraits. The portraits have a kind of vibration and tremor. The colors are diffused and up close they are almost abstract. Some of the subjects are looking down away from the viewer, or have eyes that are closed, and it becomes a contemplative gaze, introspective and internal. Ultimately, I want the painting to be more than just a picture, I want it to become like an experience, almost like a journey that does something to you, that triggers something deep inside of you.

**CM: What is the text that is used in your stone installation?**

**YZK:** The sculpture is based on Rumi, who is a 13th century Persian poet. *The Poem* is a mystical love poem from *The Book of Shams e Tabrizi*. The sculpture is twelve circles. Each circle is one verse of the poem. Each verse of the poem is a repetition of one or two words. My theory is the repetition in the poem is meant to be recited to the whirling dervishes. Each circle refers to one dervish. At the centre of the sculpture, the salt refers to the ultimate destination, the white light. ■

**YZ Kami, *Endless Prayers IV*, 2015, mixed media on paper, 76.2 x 57.2cm**