

THE JAMEEL PRIZE - A RICH HERITAGE AND A PROMISING FUTURE

By: Zeynep Uzuner, V&A Research Assistant, Jameel Prize 3

Having established itself as one of the most prominent arts and design initiatives at an international level, the Victoria and Albert Museum's Jameel Prize is celebrating its third anniversary this year with an exciting line up of artists and designers whose practice adopts and reinterprets traditions in Islamic arts and crafts in different ways. Founded in 2009, the V&A's biennial Jameel Prize is in partnership with Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives. The Prize was conceived after the redesign and redisplay of the V&A's Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art, which opened in 2006 to present the rich artistic heritage of the Islamic world. The Jameel Gallery showcases works ranging from carved ivories from Islamic Spain, inlaid metalwork from medieval Egypt, Iznik ceramics from Ottoman Turkey, to tile work from 14th-century Uzbekistan and oil paintings from 19th-century Iran, as well as the famous Ardabil carpet with its history dating back to the Safavid period in Iran. The Jameel Prize aims to raise awareness of the thriving interaction between contemporary practice and this great historical heritage and to broaden understanding of Islamic culture and its place in the world.

The V&A started collecting art from the Islamic world in the 1850s with an understanding that Islamic ideas about structuring patterns and matching decoration to shape and function could improve British design, as indeed they did. The Jameel Prize shows that this link between the Islamic art of the past and contemporary practice is still very much alive. In addition to promoting art and design inspired by these traditions to potential patrons, the Prize also demonstrates that contemporary artistic practice around the world continues to pay homage to this rich heritage without necessarily being bound to the geographic, cultural, political or even religious categorisations usually associated with a limited understanding of the influence of the 'Middle East' region on other parts of the world.

JAMEEL PRIZE AND ISLAMIC INFLUENCES IN ART

The Jameel Prize, worth £25,000, is not restricted only to artistic candidates from the Islamic world or the Middle East region but is open to any artist who aims to reflect on Islamic traditions of the past and contribute to reviving cultural or aesthetic aspects of this influence in their practice through their chosen medium. Entry for the Prize is by nomination and, in

order to allow for a truly international appeal, leading curators, designers, artists and cultural figures from across the world are invited by the V&A team to nominate artists and designers whose work corresponds with the criteria of the prize. The term 'Islamic influence' loosely refers to artistic traditions as, for instance, found in architecture, through the decoration of buildings including inscriptions in Arabic calligraphy; in calligraphic book manuscripts and finely painted miniatures; in special silk weaving techniques in carpet-making or textiles; the use of certain materials such as gold, silver, ivory and rock crystal; or finer works in base metals, glazed ceramics, enamelled glass and inlaid wood. Every two years, normally during the summer before the Prize is awarded, nominated artists and designers are invited to submit proposals to the Museum and go through a shortlisting process by a panel of independent judges who make their decision by December. The following March the shortlist is released and this year the winner of the Jameel Prize 3 will be announced at a ceremony on 10 December 2013 with the exhibition opening to the public on the following day.

JAMEEL PRIZE ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS

The involvement of prominent traditional as well as contemporary artists from a variety of regions in the Middle East and the rest of the world has been central to the role of the Jameel Prize. The Prize acts as a platform from which arts practices incorporating past arts or crafts traditions associated with specific societies or regions could take on new meanings. Similarly, as artists or designers might not necessarily want their practice to act as a direct representation of a specific regional or cultural influence associated with Islamic art or the Middle East region, the Jameel Prize project allows for a dialogue between artists and society through a focus on artistic skills, techniques and creative concepts. Thus, the Prize contributes to new ways of thinking about the meaning of Islamic cultures today.

Past recipients and shortlisted artists and designers of the Prize have included: Afroz Amiqhi, Hassan Hajjaj and Susan Hefuna in 2009, and Rachid Koraïchi, Hayri Kahraman and Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian in 2011: their practice reflects their living and working experiences across the world



1. Faig Ahmed, hollow, 2011, wool warp, weft and pile, 150x100cm - Courtesy of YAY! gallery, Photo by Fakhriyya Mammedova.



2. Faig Ahmed, pixelate tradition, 2010, wool warp, weft and pile, 150x100cm - Courtesy of YAY! gallery, Photo by Fakhriyya Mammedova.

including Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, the UK and the USA. Typically, these artists are interested in juxtaposing contemporary techniques in digital photography, print, installation or sculpture with traditional skills such as calligraphy, mosaics, rural crafts or miniature painting. Simultaneously, they are raising awareness of some of the cultural or political issues associated with the use of symbolic visual codes found in their respective cultures.

Another factor contributing to the Jameel Prize's rising importance as an international arts and design award is undoubtedly the collective experience and specialist knowledge brought by its panel of judges. This panel consists of leading designers, artists, academics, curators and influential arts professionals based in the Middle East, the Gulf, the UK, and the U.S.A. Under the patronage of prominent architect Dame Zaha Hadid, the panel of judges for the Jameel Prize 3 includes Thomas Heatherwick, designer and founder of Heatherwick Studio; Rachid Koraïchi, winner of the Jameel Prize 2011; Martin Roth, V&A Director; Nada Shabout, Associate Professor of Art History and the Director of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Institute at the University of North Texas, USA; and Huda Smitshuijzen Abi Farés, Founding Director of the Khatt Foundation, Center for Arabic Typography.

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarés commented on the Jameel Prize 3: "The shortlist features diverse and strong contemporary design work. We selected work that could set a trend in advancing new ways of interpreting Islamic art in a contemporary context as well as for its relevance to society and its impact on generations to come. The experimental use of material and techniques, the clarity of message, the simplicity and purity of form, the precision of craft, and the social implications, were all taken into consideration. It is exciting to see that the selected works, although referencing traditional Islamic culture, also reflect universal design concerns and fresh new ideas."

JAMEEL PRIZE 3 ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS

There were almost 270 nominations for the Jameel Prize 3 from a broad range of countries including entries for the first time from Algeria, Brazil, Kosovo, Norway and Russia. This year's ten finalists are made up of artists and designers specialising in diverse fields such as fashion design, Arabic calligraphy, typography, video, installation and jewellery who have lived and worked in countries ranging from Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to Turkey, France and India.

FAIG AHMED: Reflective of the rising prominence of young Azerbaijani artists within the contemporary art world, mixed-media artist Faig Ahmed creates visually captivating sculptural installations by reinterpreting the traditional craft of Azerbaijani carpet-weaving. Born in Baku in 1982, and graduating from the Azerbaijan State Fine Art Academy with a BA in Sculpture in 2004, his technique explores the composition of traditional Azerbaijani carpets and questions notions of cognition and perception in a radical way. For the Jameel Prize 3, Faig Ahmed will exhibit two works, *Hollow* (2011) and *Pixelate Tradition* (2010).

NASSER AL SALEM: Nasser Al Salem is the first Saudi Arabian artist to take part in the Jameel Prize. He lives and works in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Graduating in Architecture from Um Al-Kora University, Mecca, Al Salem's primary formation as a calligrapher gives him a rare ability to re-invent this prominent traditional art by employing non-conventional mixed media forms and exploring calligraphy's conceptual potential. For the Jameel Prize 3, Nasser will show two works *Kul* (2012) and *Guide Us Upon The Straight Path* (2013), which reflect both his use of mixed media but also the tradition of ink on paper. In *Kul* he exploits one of the most dramatic



1. Nasser Al Salem, *guide us upon the straight path*, 2013, ink on paper, 75x12cm. - Courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery, Photo by Khaled Bin Afif.

2. Nasser Al Salem, *kul*, 2012, paint on paper, 100x100cm. - Courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery, Photo by Khaled Bin Afif.

forms found in the Arabic script - the combination of the letters kaf and lam that spell out the word kul, meaning 'all'. Al Salem repeats the word on a diminishing scale to create a perspective effect that suggests infinity and all-inclusiveness, complementing the literal meaning of the word. In *Guide Us upon the Straight Path*, he uses a new and evocative calligraphic style based on the 'script' of the monitor to write out a believer's prayer. As a practice of personal devotion, his art also reintegrates the use of calligraphy into modern life by prompting the viewer to re-think their definition of Arabic calligraphy and to dispel the notion that it is limited to the category of ancient Islamic arts and crafts.

NADA DEBS: One of the most prominent designers taking part in the Jameel Prize 3 is Lebanese furniture and product designer Nada Debs. Born in Beirut and brought up in Japan, Debs received a BA in Interior Architecture from Rhode Island School of Design, USA, in 1988. In 2000, Nada Debs returned to her roots in Lebanon and set up her company East and East which designs, manufactures and sells her own furniture and home accessory lines. For the Jameel Prize 3, Nada Debs will exhibit *Concrete Carpet* (2010), a large scale work currently held in the Mathaf Museum collection in Qatar. This installation piece is exemplary of the designer's practice of blending Middle Eastern craftsmanship with Far Eastern philosophy and mixes concrete inlaid with mother-of-pearl to create a seemingly traditional Persian carpet made with modern materials. The carpet is divided into 28 panels, similar to Japanese Tatami mats, each panel featuring a letter of the Arabic alphabet. The font used in the design was developed in collaboration with Arabic type designer and typographer Pascal Zoghbi (also shortlisted for the Jameel Prize 3) as a corporate font for her business. Debs use of abstract repetitive patterns is typical of Islamic geometry and is a major feature in this piece.

MOUNIR FATMI: Notions of contemporaneity, urban culture, visual cognition and the mechanics of aesthetic consumption are juxtaposed with a nostalgic sense of Islamic visual culture in Mounir Fatmi's work. The artist's use of circular forms in Arabic calligraphy integrated as the 'wheels' of a machine into his video work entitled *Modern Times: A History of the Machine* (2010-12) is unique in its combination of cinematography, installation, traditional calligraphy and architecture. The work raises the question of the human impact of 'unrelenting' construction. Mounir Fatmi was born in Morocco and lives and works between Paris and Tangier. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts, Casablanca, in 1989, and the School of Fine Arts, Rome in 1991. Fatmi's videos, installations, drawings, paintings and sculptures directly address issues of commercialisation, globalisation and the loss of meaning in developed consumer culture which is not only linked to Western societies but can also be seen in forms of urbanisation and economic power in the Middle East.

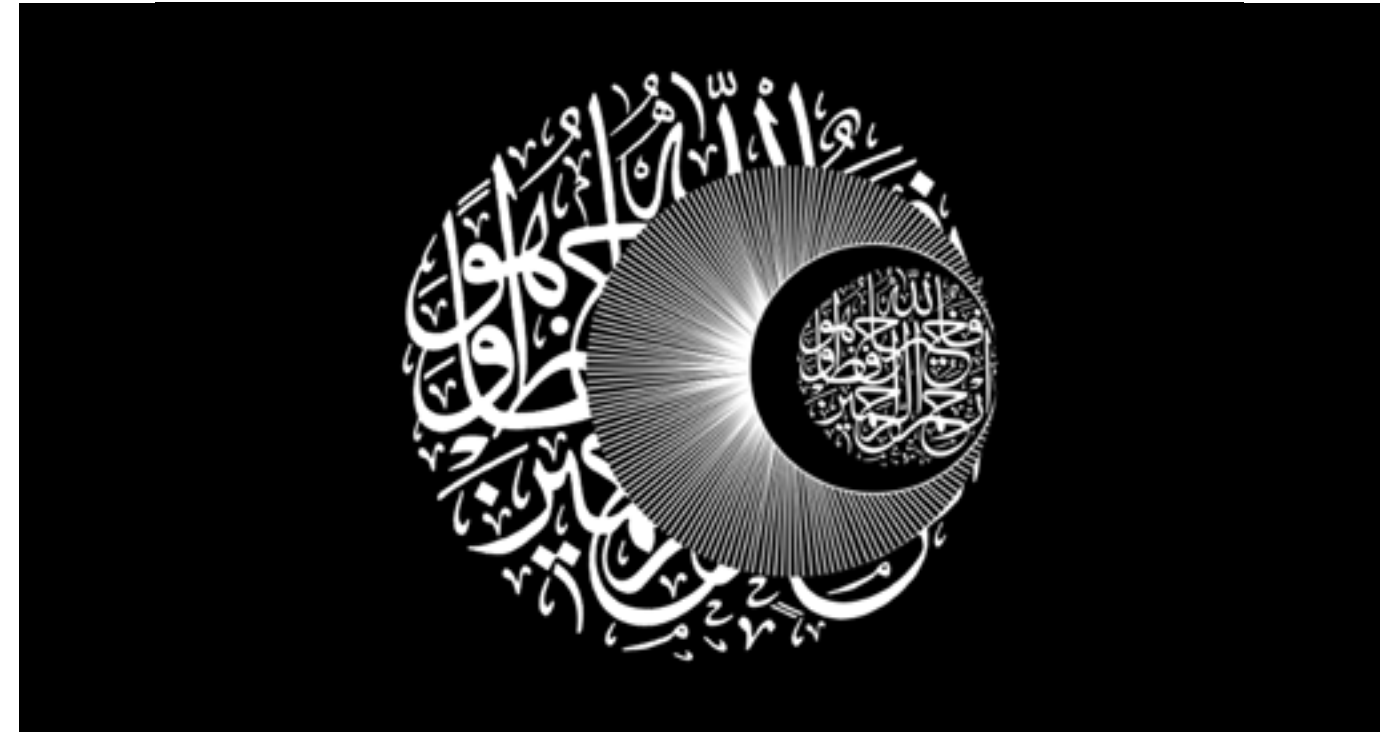
RAHUL JAIN: In Islamic art, textiles have had a long tradition of representing rituals as well as social status and religious beliefs through the use of imagery, geometrical patterns, materials and specific techniques associated with regional histories. This tradition continues to inform the work of Rahul

Jain, a textile designer and historian based in New Delhi, India. In 1993 he set up a drawloom workshop in Varanasi, India, to re-create Mughal silks of the 17th and 18th centuries. The workshop has five drawlooms operated by local Muslim weavers. Under Jain's guidance, they weave silk, gold and silver thread using complex historical techniques which produce textiles that match the great work of the past. The designs of *The Snow Leopard* (2007) and *The Birds of Paradise* (2008) stay true to the pattern structure of historical textiles, but the patterns themselves have been interpreted in new ways.

DICE KAYEK: This is the first year in which fashion design is included as part of the Jameel Prize. Turkish sisters Ece and Ayşe Ege established the Dice Kayek brand in 1992, in Paris. Dice Kayek quickly became one of Turkey's most well-known fashion labels due to their visionary yet simplistic designs which use high-quality materials. Born and raised in the textile capital of Turkey, Bursa, the sisters have a strong traditional background in working with Ottoman textiles and hand-weaving techniques. Having also received a fashion education in the centre of haute couture in Paris, they have also integrated their knowledge of modern cutting and fitting techniques into their practice. For the Jameel Prize 3, Dice Kayek will show three garments from *Istanbul Contrast* (2010), a collection of 19 couture pieces which draws inspiration from Istanbul's Islamic heritage in architecture, arts and crafts, and its rich religious and cultural diversity. As Islamic traditions in court dressing often included the use of elaborate textiles, such as silk brocade embellished with materials like gold or precious stones, the use of luxurious fabrics and jewellery in Dice Kayek's designs is reflective of this tradition. One of their designs on display in the exhibition, *Caftan* (2009), is a hand-made lamé brocade inspired by Ottoman sartorial style.

WAQAS KHAN: A rare and skilled practitioner of the art of printmaking and pointillism, Waqas Khan was born in Akhtarabad, Pakistan and lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan. He graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from the National College of Arts in 2008 where he trained in the miniature style. He experiments between the mediums of printmaking and miniature painting using the skills he acquired to create prints on handmade paper. He builds up his images using the very fine and meticulous mark-making process of the miniature painting technique. His drawings are constructed like buildings, brick by brick. In the three works that will be on display: *Forming Spaces III* (2012); *Forming Spaces IV* (2012); and *Letter to Lover 1* (2012), these 'bricks' are dots, marks and lines, assembled with precision and delicacy into a deceptively simple composition. The long process of creating these intricate works, which he does within a meditative state, is reflective of ideas and concepts obtained from Muslim, Hindu and Sufi traditions.

Laurent Mareschal: The work of Laurent Mareschal brings together notions of ephemerality, nomadic cultures and rituals through an inventive use of spices in his artworks in public spaces. Having spent his formative years in France, the artist received degrees from Le Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporains, Tourcoing, France in 2005, and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris in 2002. However, it was his involvement



1. Mounir Fatmi, *technologia*, 2010, video projection, 200x200cm. - Courtesy of the artist and Paradise Row.

2. Laurent Mareschal, *beiti*, 2011, detail of the installation, CAPC, Bordeaux, France *Spices* - Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Marie Cini. Photo by Tami Nolsani

with Hebrew and Arabic cultures whilst living in Israel for several years that allowed him to interact with political and social issues of access, identity, communication, citizenship and the notion of the precariousness of life at a personal level. For the Jameel Prize 3, Mareschal will display a new site specific work entitled Beiti (2013). Mareschal uses ephemeral materials such as spices, soap and food in his work as a powerful way to evoke our own fragility and remind the viewer that nothing lasts. Often his work is a replica of decorative ceramic tiles from an old Palestinian house or of traditional Palestinian embroidery and he invites viewers to take part and interact with culture through a reenactment of domestic space.

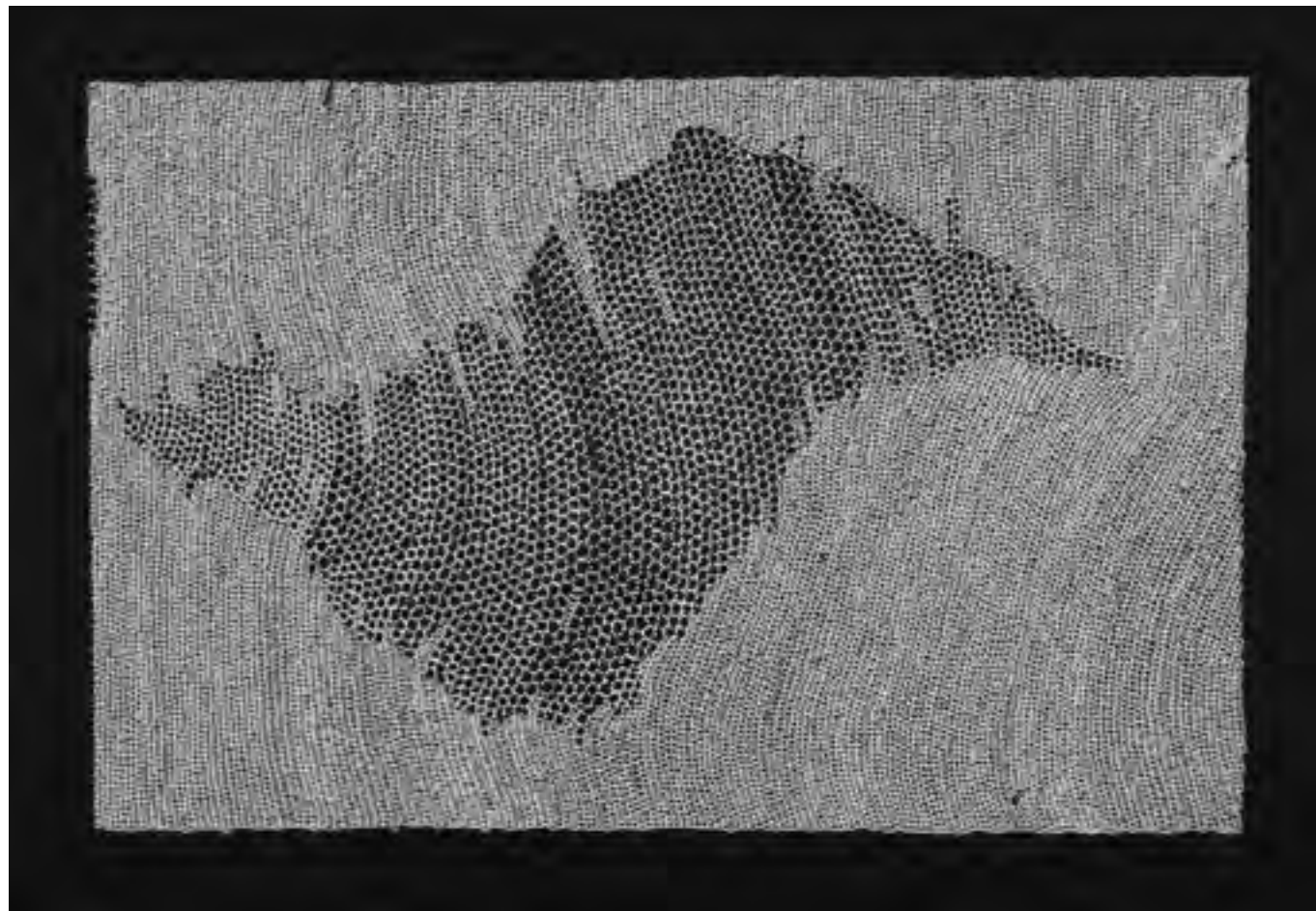
FLORIE SALNOT: Representing the art of contemporary jewellery design as a powerful social and therapeutic practice, Florie Salnot is interested in its potential as a medium to improve people's lives, to strengthen individual

and cultural confidence and to enable independent living. The designer was born in France and lives and works between Hamburg, London and Paris. With a background in Social Sciences (La Sorbonne), Cabinet Making (Ecole Boulle) and an MA in Design Products from the Royal College of Art, her practice re-inscribes the important role of crafts in contributing to the creation of collective experience, culture and memory. For the Jameel Prize 3, Salnot will exhibit jewellery designs from Plastic Gold (2010-ongoing), a project inspired by the traditional ornaments worn by women from Western Sahara. The women live in refugee camps at desert sites in Algeria, and Salnot has devised a craft they can practise despite their limited resources. She developed a technique that uses only hot sand, simple tools and spray paint to transform discarded plastic bottles into necklaces and bracelets. The necklaces on display in the exhibition will stand as an example of how this could be done by the refugees.

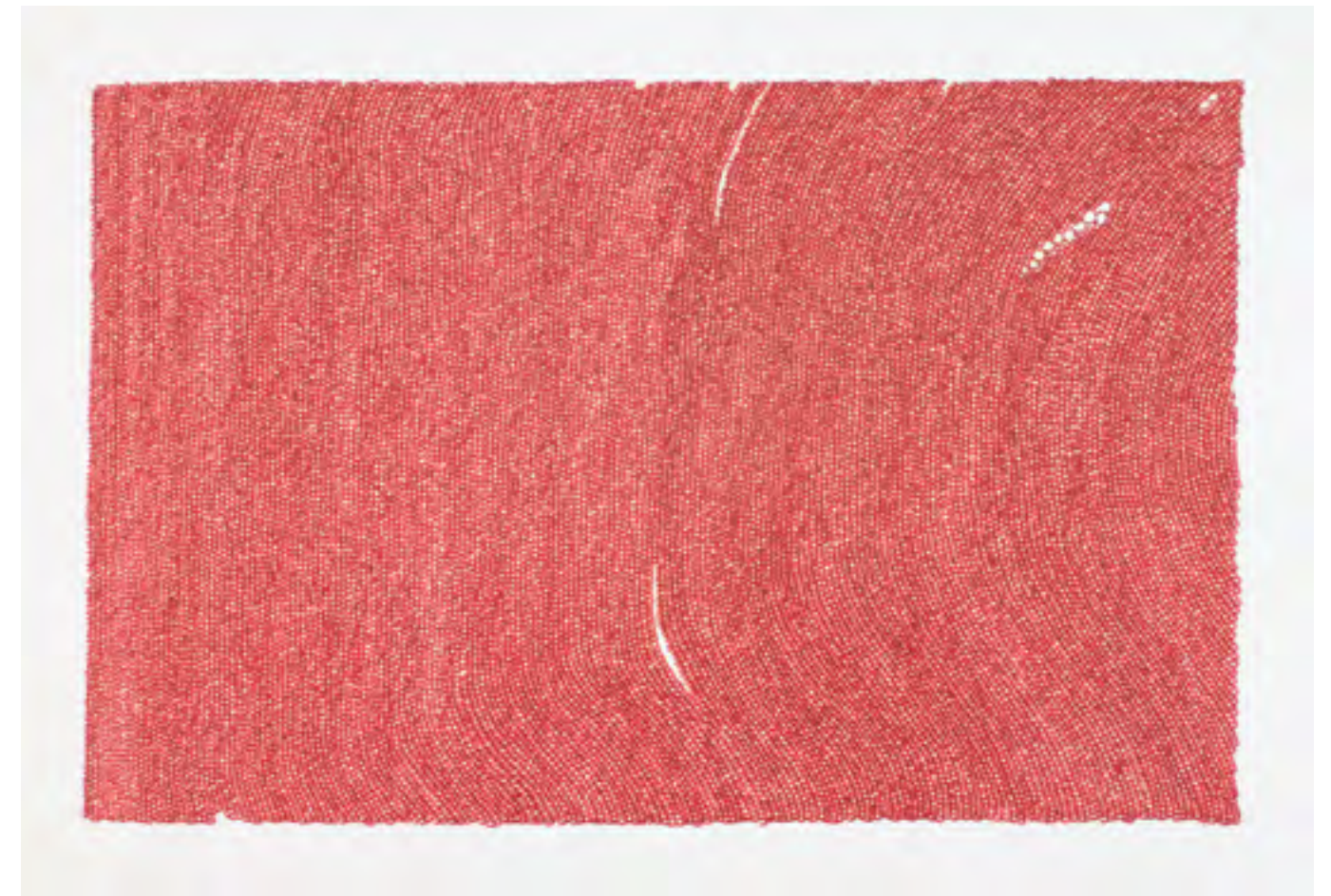
PASCAL ZOGHBI: One of the most important areas of graphic design in the Middle East and Gulf regions today refers to typography. This is because developments in technology, media and consumer culture are creating an unprecedented demand for increased visibility and access when it comes to the use of language. Accordingly, designers are required to think of novel ways to create user-friendly fonts and characters which will allow the Arabic language to be adapted to all areas of modern life. Exhibiting in the Jameel Prize this year, Pascal Zoghbi is an Arabic type designer who was born, lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. He graduated from Notre Dame University, Louaize, Lebanon with a BA in Graphic Design in 2002, and from The Royal Academy of Arts, The Hague, The Netherlands with a Master of Design in Type and Media in 2006. Zoghbi is the founder of 29letters, an Arabic type design and typography firm based in Beirut and his work includes creating new Arabic fonts, corporate identities and print publications. For the Jameel

Prize 3, Zoghbi will create a collage installation of his typography and graphic designs. His work refers to the traditional Arabic calligraphic style. His challenge is to draw new fonts in a contemporary way yet which remain in line with the structure and proportions of traditional letters.

The Jameel Prize 3 exhibition is curated by Tim Stanley, senior curator of the V&A's Middle Eastern collection, with Salma Tuqan, the V&A's curator of Middle Eastern contemporary art and design. After the winner's ceremony on 10 December 2013, the exhibition displaying work by the shortlisted artists and designers will be open from 11 December to 21 April 2014. The Jameel Prize 3 exhibition will then go on international tour. In previous years, the Museum has collaborated with Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris; Casa Arabe in Spain; Stanford University in the U.S.; and Sakip Sabanci Museum in Istanbul, Turkey.
www.vamac.uk



Waqas Khan, forming-spaces IV, 2012, ink on paper, 23x23cm - Private collection.



Waqas Khan, forming-spaces III, 2012, ink on paper, 23x23cm. - Collection of Hicham Ghandour.