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## No child's play: Artist Waqas Khan's mystical scripture

By Hassan Majeed



Aicon Gallery in New York is currently showing an exhibition of contemporary artists from the sub-continent. In the past decade, several Pakistani artists have achieved wide notice on the international art-scene. Most worked in the area of miniature or figurative work; some in the area of resistance and protest to the violence in Pakistan. Among this crowd of successful artists, Waqas Khan is unique in his abstract style and presentation. He has created a mystical scripture that has a timeless quality and universal appeal.

At first glance, Khan's work seems like several simple, symmetrical, and monochromatically-linked lines arranged in the form of curved and moving waves. But one quickly finds that these tight parallel lines are not just lying flat on the surface of the paper but instead have a multi-dimensional quality. The lines transform into a language; they engage viewers in an active dialogue in which one can impart one's own self-interpreted feelings and thoughts. They become part of the personalised narrative of the viewer.

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As one focuses on the small intricacies of these continuous lines, a new story arises in the mind. It has the quality of timelessness; the work does not end with the border of the painting but continues to expand in

one's imagination. The work that started on the paper on close observation becomes part of a mental image, molded and changed with one's imagination. To me, his work made me reflect on my own life. The monochromatic dots, dashes and lines represent small units of my life but the continuing and occasional curves, ridges and interceptions of other lines reflect the changes in the web of life.

Mr Khan is very determined not to box his work into any one particular category. His inspiration comes from his mindfulness of the details of everything around him. At times, his work shows the influence of the Sufi traditions of unity and harmony, reminding viewers of the simple geometric patterns that are repeated in traditional Islamic art. However for Khan, categorisation into one style or theory takes away the universal meaning of his work, which is as diverse as life, from roses to beetles. The units of creation for biological organisms are the same but the final product as a flower or an insect is very different and diverse. He lets his imagination lead him during the spontaneous creation of his art. His work is labor intensive. He is mindful of every minuscule dot and line; the whole work represents a totality for him.



Waqas Khan received his formal art education and training at the National College of Arts in Lahore. Thereafter, he broke away from the contemporary Pakistani art movement of miniature and figurative painting and followed his own passion for printmaking, showcased in several successful shows in Pakistan, India, Europe and the United States, achieving international recognition in the highly competitive art world. His work has been presented at several top art fairs, including Frieze London, Art Basel and Art Brussels, among others.

Ghalib once said, “Qatray main Dajla dikhayee na day aur Juzw main kul // Khail larkoan ka hua, deeda e beena na hua”

(Translation. One can't envision a river in a drop and a totality in a part, It's not a child's play but demands a vision of a philosopher)

Mr. Khan leads us to see a universe in a minuscule dot.

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