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## FROM CALLIGRAPHY TO MYSTIC LETTERS: THE EXPRESSIVE ARTISTIC JOURNEY OF ARIF KHAN

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### Abstract

The art of calligraphy remained an essential feature in portraying the spiritual and the religious association throughout the Islamic world. After the advent of Islam, it went through enormous evolution of stylistic innovations for the purpose of beautifying the divine messages. Traditional calligraphers practiced it with complete devotion but with the passage of time artists started using it with modern vocabulary of art. Pakistani artists also practiced this art but in a modernized manner with focus on personal connotations. Arif Khan is a contemporary Lahore based calligraphic artist known for recording his interest in this genre. Actively practicing from the last two decades, the artist has evolved his style that is analyzed as a transformation from simple calligraphy to Mystic letters. His artistic devotion towards this genre allowed him to explore it with creative endeavors. This novel approach of the artist left marked influence on the younger generation of modern calligraphic painters mainly in Lahore, Pakistan.



### 1. Introduction

The history of Islamic art dates back to the practice of Islamic calligraphy which was meant to be didactic for communication initially.

Calligraphy, which is known to be the art of linear graphics went through stylistic development with the introduction of different styles or *khatt* of writing i.e., *Kūfic*, *Ta'liq*, *Rayhānī*, *Thulth*, *Tawqī'*, *Riqā'*, *Nasta'liq*, *Shikasta* and *Naskh*

(Masud. 1981, p.69). Calligraphers throughout the Islamic world kept on beautifying the sacred script which was recorded as a tribute to the grandeur of Islamic calligraphy. But this was not the end of story; the aesthetic impact of calligraphic letters took artists under its enormous influence. Artists from Islamic and the western world got inspired by the geometry of letters and found a vast visual vocabulary of expression under this genre. Among western artists Mark Tobey, Paul Klee, Henry Matisse along with some others researched on Islamic arts and were moved by its gestural vocabulary. Abstract expressionism, a modern art movement is an extension of calligraphic expression having its association with the oriental art of calligraphy (Read. 1986, p.252). Artists across the globe, for the realization of their vision used the elements of calligraphy in their work. This was how the genre of modern calligraphy evolved leaving significant impact on the practice of artists globally. “The urge to individual pronouncement enlightened artists in realizing new vistas to add new fundamentals and discover new potential” (Halem. 1975, p.53).

The Islamic republic of Pakistan is also observed to be a country where the art of calligraphy has evolved without any internal or external pressures. This art has been practiced under two dominant styles i.e., traditional calligraphy and modern calligraphy. Pakistani artists used calligraphic vocabulary in their art practice according to their own understanding and conceptual framework. The predecessors who experimented with modern

calligraphy include Shakir Ali, Hanif Ramay, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Sadequain, Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq, Aslam Kamal and Gulgee (Khan. 2018, p. 13). These artists had their own stylistic expression and on the bases of which they paved a smooth path for exploration in this genre which was followed by a number of contemporary artists as well. From the contemporary practice of modern calligraphy Arif Khan is observed to be a stimulating reference not only in writing the Quranic text but also employing it in metaphorical gesture to address his inward journey. His soulful involvement in this genre allowed him to explore this expressive artistic dimension ranging from its didactic use in the form of traditional calligraphy to creative experimentation adding his personal expression into it. This artist is credited by introducing a novel dimension into modern calligraphic art by focusing on its painterly expression. Trained as a graphic designer his inclination towards colors provides him enough liberty to utilize colors according to his own aesthetic sensibility and this creative feature in his work left marked influence on his students and the younger generation of modern calligraphic painters in Lahore, Pakistan.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

To conduct this research, qualitative methodology has been used. The main analysis of the research has been achieved through interviews conducted with the artist selected for this research along with some renowned practicing artists and scholars of the field currently active in Pakistan. Personal visit

to the studio of the artist and his exhibitions provided authentic information throughout this research.

### 3. Results

For this research paper Qualitative research methodology is focused, in which the results were obtained after reviewing the available resources and references with the critical understanding of the researcher. This paper helped in looking at the subject with open-ended results while considering and analyzing visual references of the artist.

### 4. Discussion

In the Holy Quran at a number of references, stress has been given to read and understand the written text and to decode the references it contained.

English Translation:

“Recite in the name of your Lord who created,  
Created man from a clinging substance,  
Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous,  
Who taught by the pen, Taught man that  
which he knew not.” (96:1-5)

This quest of reading, understanding and narrating the divine message remained the sole intension for the traditional calligraphers looking at the historic graph of Islamic art. But with prior advancements in visual arts over the decades, innovative ideologies evolved in art practice and as a result, artists started focusing on the evident and hidden expression of the calligraphic text as well. Arif Khan (b. 1960), a contemporary Lahore based calligraphic painter also documented his interest in translating the hidden and the evident vocabulary of this expression. Actively working from more

than two decades, he has earned a well-reputed position in the genre of modern calligraphy. He is professionally trained as a graphic designer, earned the degree of bachelors in graphic design from the College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab and afterwards received the degree of M.Phil (Professional Practice) from the same Institution. Khan owned a great sense for design, color theory and aesthetic ability. The artist shared that he developed his interest in calligraphy since childhood which was further increased when he got matured and entered into the art world. He was able to see alphabets flouting over in the pop-culture that took a new direction for the artist. “I remember when I was a child; I used to draw the Persian letters. It was my dream to explore myself through calligraphy and colors. Even my dreams were about calligraphy, in which I often found myself playing with the alphabets” (Arif Khan, personal communication, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

His aesthetic sensibility pulled him towards the art of writing, which was not just a part of practice for him but an inner response towards his wandering soul which was in search of finding hidden meanings of the calligraphic letters since the early days of his creative practice. For gaining perfection in the art of calligraphy, he remained under the guidance of two renowned calligraphers of his age i.e., *Ustad* Irfan Ahmed Khan and *Ustad* Khursheed Alam Gohar Kalam (the term *Ustad* is used as the synonym of a master in a specific style).

After gaining knowledge of traditional calligraphy, his practice evolved with the fusion of designer vocabulary. In the initial journey of his artistic flight, he kept on focusing on the didactic purpose while repeating the Holy verses of the Quran with continuous flow. His aesthetic sensibility allowed him to manipulate his visual expression according to the requirement of the compositional framework. The reference of his practice during the initial phase can be seen in his work where his focus was more on the traditional practice of calligraphic text which was further enhanced with the colorful palette employed by the artist. Khan is observed to be more inclined towards writing *Ḥarūf-i Muqatt'āt*, which is also known with another term i.e., *Lauh-i Qur'āni*. *Ḥarūf-i Muqatt'āt* is a set of letters written in a joint way but they do not make any word jointly. These are recited as separate words like *Alif Lām Mīm*, every word has its own significance and standing. Though, none of the letter is associated with a specific meaning. Their connotation has been kept hidden and except God this mystery has never been exposed on mankind. In this painting titled "*Alif Lām Mīm*" different verses taken from the Holy Quran are composed in repetitive manner over the colorful layered surface (fig.1). This textured layer with light and dark overtones enhances the effect of the text written in series of settings on the compositional plan which were combined as a unit with the application of *Alif Lām Mīm*. Its rhythmic flow adds movement in the composition making it the focal point. Whereas,

next to this a medallion of gold leaf complements the flow of composition and also focuses the concept of Oneness. On the other hand, it also provides a pause to contemplate on the scheme of the universe that holds the center of religious believe, it serves as the dot that contains everything in one point. The artist shares his ideas about his practice of calligraphy in an interview by saying that "I want to give it a contemporary look and destroy the illusion that it is some primitive or non-coherent art" (Khar, 2006).

Arif Khan is a restless soul and is one of those artists who kept on exploring their surface with different mediums and materials. With the passage of time, he discovered his personal visual vocabulary that kept on evolving with different phases of his artistic development. His colorful symphonies on the created surfaces enhances the effervescent quality complementing his aesthetic sensibility. For him, his color palette holds spiritual connotations that can be seen in the painting titled "*Alif Lām Mīm*" (fig.2). He used to work with layers of colors, each layer overlapping another which at one point seems to merge. Every action of the artist has symbolic suggestions, i.e., layers represents the layers of skies, spirituality, and Ultimate reality. Here in this reference, the range of color palette contains the earthy and the celestial nuances comprising on red, yellow, green, violet, and brown colors. The noticeable feature in the composition is his creative transformation in style. Instead of the layered surface of background, white color of the surface

is used for creating spatial depth. White layer of the surface is meant to address infinity, over which layers of colors were fused to get the final effect. Modification in written text is also visible but as witnessed earlier, *Alif Lām Mīm* is rendered with melodious rhythmic gesture that stitched the whole composition together. Its gesture seems like a hovering bird that makes connection with the temporal and the heavenly world. This metaphorical suggestion in the composition adds spiritual meanings taking the artistic practice from ordinary to extra-ordinary. The designer sensibility of the artist is the foremost feature in this composition. If closely analyzed, his action contains a reaction as it left a mark on viewer's aesthetic sensibility and provokes their sense of inquisition. The artist believes that it is this practice that allows him to make connection with the Ultimate One, not only this but he also achieves a certain equation when he is working in his studio. He shares that, "whenever I am into my practice, it always feels like as if only my soul accompanies me inside the studio leaving all impurities out of the material body. Writing of divine text, enables me to explore my surface and I believe that some divine assistance helps me in the process. Colors are symbolic for me with certain meanings and these meanings are personal and I do not want to disclose them onto others. I want my work to have mystery and I love it, not just love but I live it. This is what I have! And this gave me energy, I can never think of a day I have not practiced in. This practice makes me what I

am, I am nothing without it. It is my passion, my life." (Arif Khan, personal communication, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

Following his passion, he went through difference phases of advancement where sometimes the color dominated the whole scheme focusing on design elements and at some places practice revolves around a certain scheme of artistic fervor. The concept of *Vird* became a prominent feature of his practice whether enhanced through the repetition of letters or colors. This concept of *Vird* attained immense expression in Islam. It is linked with the spiritual attire, which is meant to heighten the associated soulfulness of the devotee. *Vird* refers to a state (physical and spiritual) that responds in harmony to the melody of the specific recitation of a word or phrase. During this state, at initial stage the word seems comprehensive but after synchronization with the melody the word lost its inclusiveness making it abstract and the same happens with the person who got involved in the practice, the sensory consciousness became vague whereas the spiritual dimension got activated. At a specific stage, the exercise generated with the repetition of words became meditative, when words lost their identity becoming vague or leaving just impressions on the surface. This is how the practice became soulful succeeding the union of soul. The *mashq* (practice) of Khan is observed to be soulful in the process of meditative exercise. Repetition of calligraphic text, as a metaphor of *Vird* is noticeable in the painting titled "*Vird*" (fig.3). Repetition and overlapping of

Quranic verses over monochromatic layers of colors adds into the symbolic suggestion of the composition. Color and text both from obvious to vague impressions complements the desire of artist to achieve mystery that is heightened by the flow of layers from right to left. This rhythmic melody achieved through the flowing gesture of the overall composition, intends to leave a comprehensive effect on the eyes of the viewer.

The abstract imagery generated as a result of the soulful exercise varies in its means of expressiveness not only in its reception but perception too. In the vocabulary of mystic dimension *Wajd* is another level of meditation, when the conscious mind involved in meditative process at a certain stage it lost its conscious connection being in the trance which allows the stimulation of the inner and as a result it start reflecting. This reflection of the inner is evident in the work of Khan who shares his views by saying that “I meditate through my practice, this *riyādat*/practice is my oxygen” (Arif Khan, personal communication, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

Rahat Naveed Masud, a renowned Pakistani artist and art educationist shares during an interview that: “Looking into the contemporary art scene, it is observed that Arif Khan owned his distinct innovative style. He does not belong to any calligraphic family. He has learned calligraphy during his academic years and is seen practicing it day in and day out. He is not concerned about keeping the symmetry in his work. His colors and calligraphic text owns a certain flow and

spontaneity. In his compositions he uses space in a different way. His selection of colors has more subjectivity which brings out the meaning of the written text and has strong effect on the senses. His work has more painterly quality than calligraphic exercise. He believes in experimenting with different mediums and sizes. His influence on the youngsters is very obvious.” (Khan. 2012, p. 71).

Khan’s journey went through multiple stations of inquisitions. He experienced the traditional exercise of calligraphy, while exploring varied possibilities for widening his vision and conceptual understanding. *Nuqta* remained an exceptional feature of his work embedded with objective and subjective approach. *Nuqta* is a concept that refers to everything visible and veiled, it provokes contemplation. A dot, point or mark is synonym to *Nuqta* that offers infinitude. Metaphorically it generates a dialogue that welcomes multitude of responses. Everything that exists physically or metaphorically refers to the conception of *Nuqta*. It signifies God’s eternity and his creation, even the creation of this universe is linked with the contemplation of *Nuqta*, having certain meanings behind. God revealed in the Holy Quran that:

English Translation:

“I was a concealed treasure; I wanted to be well-known thus I created the world with the intention that I would be known” (Bakhtiar. 1976, p.12).

The quest of mankind is to find God, who exists in each and every creation of this universe whether it be the changing light, weather, day, night, air, water, sky, etc. All these references contains a certain point (*Nuqta*) for investigation. Khan focuses on the spiritual dimension of *Nuqta* in his practice. For him point of the *Qalam* (pen) initiates a dialogue by employing single dot but sums up with a subjective dot (Arif Khan, personal communication, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012). His series of work titled “*Nuqta: An Emblem of Divinity*” unfolds the hidden quest of unification with the Ultimate reality. *Nuqta* is the light of hidden treasure and the Divine messages stresses to understand this light signifying wisdom as a reflection of the Ultimate truth. In the Holy Quran it is mentioned that:

English Translation:

“God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled by a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil well-nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it. Light upon Light, God guides to His Light whom He will.” (24:35) (Arberry. 1968, p. 25).

In the series of *Nuqta*, subjective mystery was heightened with the use of black and red colors over a white tinted surface. In the painting titled “*Nuqta: An Emblem of Divinity*” a dialogue was generated by the artist with the application of layered surface ended at a dot (fig.4). Dot that

holds certain connotations and serves as the initial stage of the journey whereas on the other hand it sums up with conclusion of the dialogue. Over the layered surface at certain intervals some Quranic letters are inscribed, few visible and the rest vague. Some written on the surface while other engraved over the painted layer adds certain mystery into the overall composition. Whereas, the reference of letters is taken from *Harūf-i Muqatt‘āt*, a favorable inclination observed in the initial practice of the artist that kept on evolving with the passing time. In the central scheme of composition, the letter *La* is emerging over of the surface because of its visibility and off-centered placing. Besides every element of design, the flow of composition moves in the direction of dot placed after a pause that holds the main concept behind its execution. Baba Bulley Shah, a renowned Punjabi Sufi poet also sums up the concept of *Nuqta* in a thought-provoking manner by saying:

English Translation by Kartar Singh Duggal:

“It’s all in One contained.  
Understand the One and forge the rest.  
Shake off your ways of an apostate pest  
Leading to the grave to hell and to torture  
Rid your mind of dreams of disaster  
This is how is the argument maintained  
It’s all in One contained.

What use is it bowing one’s head?  
To what avail has prostrating led?  
Reading Kalma you make them laugh  
Absorbing not a word while the Quran you

quaff

The truth must be here and there sustained  
It's all in One contained.

Some retire to the jungles in vain  
Others restrict their meals to a grain  
Misled they waste away unfed  
And come back home half-alive, half-dead  
Emaciated in the ascetic postures feigned  
It's all in One contained

Seek your master, say your prayers and  
surrender to God.

It will lead you to mystic abandon  
And help you to get attuned to the Lord  
It's the truth that Bulleh has gained  
It's all in One contained.” (Qausain, 2009)

This series of *Nuqta* provides Khan with the route towards further exploration that leads him towards undertaking the dimension of mystic letters for creative practice. His journey from objective to subjective creativity, from traditional calligraphy to mystic letters directs him to fabricate an open-ended dialogue. Here again, the subject addressed within revolves around the concept of unification with the ultimate One, for the realization of the inner self in response to the soulful yearning of the artist. According to him, “This practice refers to my expedition towards decoding the hidden language of the Holy Quran with meditative practice of the mystic letters on my surface” (Arif Khan. personal communication, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Conceptually, *Harūf-i Muqatt'āt* are used as a reference of contemplation to generate a visual dialogue. In his series of work titled “*Mystic*

*Letters*” some of the letters are observed readable while some are a bit vague. According to the artist, “Mystic Letters refers to my expedition towards decoding the hidden language of the Quran spiritually. Being in the process, sometimes consciously and subconsciously the movement of my hands creates *Harūf* generally known as *Harūf-i Muqatt'āt* usually these *Harūf* are written in a joint scheme but are recited individually. Each particular word has its own significance. Although, there meaning is unknown, the underlying mystery and connotations have not been exposed on mankind except God. My practice of interweaving the surface with colorful *Harūf* led me further to explore them individually. So, the interplay of both the visible and the non-visible, readable and the vague letters helped me to highlight the Mystic Letters in bridging a link between extrinsic and the intrinsic Truth. These letters are suggestive of the signs as Allah has mentioned in His message that: ‘There are signs for the wise to understand’. These signs can be unveiled through meditative practice and by seeing through the eye of the soul. I wish my audience could relate in the same way as I have fabricated this dialogue onto my surface” (Arif Khan, personal communication, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

So, in this context the current series of work talks about the underlying soulful fervor that helps in creating a dialogue between a self and the ultimate One. The main quest was to find out and recognize the illuminated light that God has bestowed within these Mystic Letters. These letters embrace

spiritual measures and the latent point of which lies in the union. The emblematic expression laying in the visual form has Divine quality where symbolism combines the hidden and the evident, the spiritual and the sensory. Everything that is unknown to mankind and can never be deciphered provides references that God is the Only light and search of light within, example can be seen in the painting titled “*Mystic Letters-I*” (fig.5). The principal foundation for Muslims lays in this belief that says ‘there is no God except Allah’, similarly the journey of a believer starts from this point and also concluded at the same point. This belief is aesthetically expressed by Khan on the top register of this composition. The interplay of colorful palette on the surface with the fusion of Mystic Letters having rhythmically interlaced pauses at certain points within the composition heightened the mystic effect achieved sub-consciously by the artist. *Nuqta* remains a significant feature which is visible in the foreground that sums up the whole composition focusing on the One that is the center of contemplation and the mystery within everything.

Shaukat Mahmood (a renowned Pakistani scholar commonly known as Maxim Cartoonist), after viewing the artworks of the series “*Mystic Letters*” shares that: “The concept of mysticism and the Arabic alphabet is a kind of sacred weaving and mysterious interlacement of characters, and meaning that is embedded far deeper than the letters themselves; it is the significance of them and their shapes that says something hidden to the

other forces in the world. Breathing, or whispering words generate mysticism and issue magic. It was surely the ancient belief that the alphabet was a kind of multidimensional loom and that means layering between the transcribed, the scribed and pronounced and the knowledge that these interceptions actually created power. In the Holy Quran we have a set of fourteen letters known as *Ḥarūf-i Muqatt‘āt*. It is generally believed that the meaning and purpose of the *Muqatt‘āt* is not known and that Allah alone knows their real meaning. That is the reason these letters are often termed as ‘*The Mystic Letters of the Quran*’. Muslims recites them believing that their mysticism inspires a kind of Holy response to the supplications. Arif Khan focused not exactly on *Muqatt‘āt* but letters or characters that albeit motivate fondness and religious sentiments. The artist is an expert in Islamic calligraphy and the best part of creations is that he seldom goes after the classical or neo-classical styles of calligraphy. His every new work provides a new dimension to the art of calligraphy. His innovations are reflected in his characters, his penmanship, his brush-strokes as well as in his colors. He has a special knack for mixing colors with letters in a unique way and this singularity and individualism makes him different from all those artists who are using Islamic calligraphy as their genre” (Khan, 2018). The meditative journey of the artist took him towards exploration of the Mystic Letters with an abstract dialogue focusing on certain words most notable among is *Ḥa* as can be seen in the

paintings titled “*Mystic Letters-II*” and “*Mystic Letters-III*” (fig. 6 and 7). *Ha* for the artist represents *Haq* (Ultimate truth). The artist believes that the practice of this letter holds some mystic association for him. Whenever he holds his *Qalam* (pen) he could not resist himself for writing it, this letter came out of his practice subconsciously. *Ha* holds mystic truth that contains all the connotations of this universe. It initiates the dialogue and concludes as well in an abstract manner (Khan, 2018). The abstract visual vocabulary created by the artist holds multiple undertones whether in the execution of letters or color application that again takes a direction towards the purpose of creation by the Ultimate power who has created mankind to find codes in nature, to explore and to research. The concept of abstraction is also created by God, as the whole world contains abstract suggestions that serves as manifold signs in it. In the Holy Quran it is mentioned that:

English Translation:

“And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers; and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates; He causes the night to cover the day. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought?” (13:3)

God’s created nature contains abstract metaphors comprised of abstract scheme. Every single element of it is attributed with convincing codes, every word, every sound, every bit of light and dark, including the whole universe encompasses explicit signs. It is unto the ability of mankind to

search for the hidden meanings of these signs and for that they have to look beyond the perceptible truth. For this pursuit, they need to activate the inner eye of soul in order to search for the means of soulfulness. Being in the process one has to be disconnected with the exiting reality to explore the essence of the hidden reality. When somebody involves himself in exploring the hidden reality, it is obvious to lose connection with the existing reality. This investigation led Khan to perceive through the insightfulness of the soul to contextualize his experience throughout the creative journey. The voyage of the artist facilitated him to express his insightfulness freely through expressionistic style with abstract suggestion of letters ranging from calligraphic *marshq* (practice) to the creative interplay of mystic letters. The hidden with the obvious, the vague with the vibrant, the real with the abstract, the worldly with the celestial, and all actions prevalent in the image making heightened the expressive journey of the creative soul visible in the painting titled “*Mystic Letters-IV*” (fig.8).

Khan with his expressive artistic journey is busy in findings more ways for creative exploration. Commitment with his passion left marked influence on his students and the younger generation of modern calligraphic painters. Although few have found their own way by the passage of time but Khan serves as the initial inspiration in their artistic endeavor. His sense of design, compositional flow and color palette inspired Asghar Ali, Shahid Rana, Bin Qalandur,

Noreen Akhtar, Muneeb Ali, and few more. Inspiration serves as a chain of connectivity which kept on finding more dimensions in terms of artistic expansion with the passage of time. In contemporary Pakistani art, modern calligraphy has opened novel ventures for the younger generation of artists which is conceived as a positive sign.

## 5. Conclusion

The art of calligraphy has been practiced immensely looking at the graph of its evolution and the stylistic creativeness it has been through. Artists could not resist to use this medium to express their personal statements. After reviewing Arif Khan expressive artistic journey with reference to different phases, it is observed that he kept on exploring text aligned with its associated connotations in both direct and indirect manner. His creative endeavor as a practitioner from calligraphy to Mystic Letters enables him to search for the hidden within inclusiveness, a promising feature observed throughout his visual vocabulary. The artist is not a follower of any particular school of thought but followed his own path of decoding the silence within multitude of calligraphic *mashq* (practice) focusing on the mystic ambience. With insightfulness and soulful vigor his expression became obvious and observed to reflect his soulful expedition leaving a mark on the current generation of modern calligraphic painters.

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25/ek-nukte-wich-gal-mukdi-ae-bulleh-shah/

**Appendices:**

*Ḥaq* ----- *Truth*

*Ḥarūf* ----- letters

*Ḥarūf-i Muqatt'āt* ----- Mystic letters of the Holy Quran written as a set of letters in a joint manner but they do not make any word jointly

*Mashq* ----- practice

*Nuqṭa* ----- dot

*Qalam* ----- pen

*Ustad* ----- teacher

*Vird* ----- practice

*Wajd* ----- trance, ecstasy

*Riyāḍat* ----- practice, devotedness

**Figures:**



Figure. 1. Arif Khan, *Alif Lām Mīm*, 2006, 20”x 16”, watercolor washes and ink on *waslī*, artist’s own collection (Source: picture by the author)

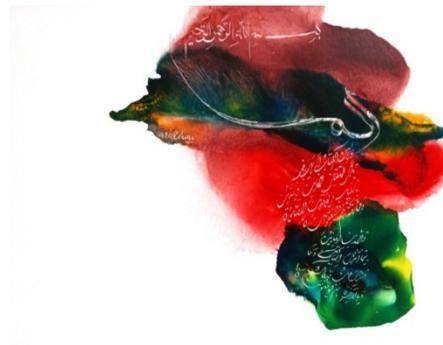


Figure. 2. Arif Khan, *Alif Lām Mīm*, 2011, 17.5”x 13”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection (Source: picture by the author)



Figure. 3. Arif Khan, *Vird*, 2011, 16”x 24”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection (Source: picture by the author)



Figure. 4. Arif Khan, *Nuqta: An Emblem of Divinity*, 2015, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection. (Source: picture by the author)



Figure. 5. Arif Khan, *Mystic Letters-I*, 2018, 16” x 20”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection (Source: picture by the author)



Figure. 6. Arif Khan, *Mystic Letters-II*, 2018, 10” x 15”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection. (Source: picture by the author)



Figure.7. Arif Khan, *Mystic Letters-III*, 2018, 11” x 17”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection. (Source: picture by the author)

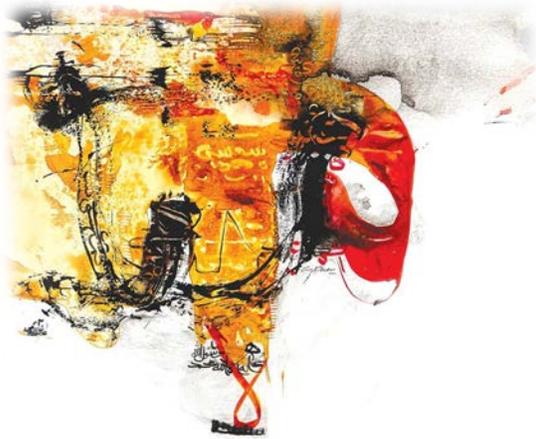


Figure. 8. Arif Khan, *Mystic Letters-IV*, 2018, 15” x 16”, mixed media on paper, artist’s own collection. (Source: picture by the author)