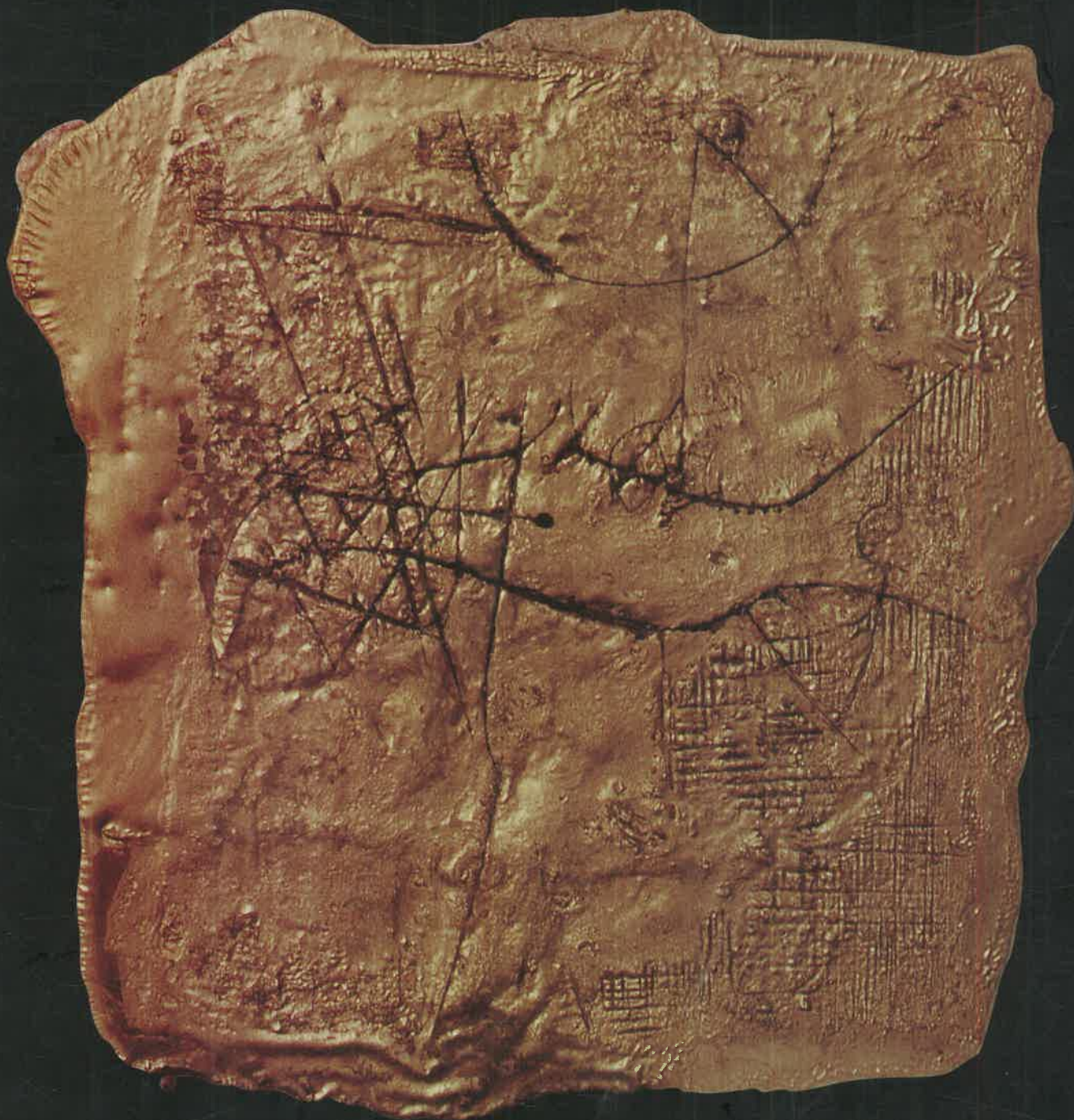


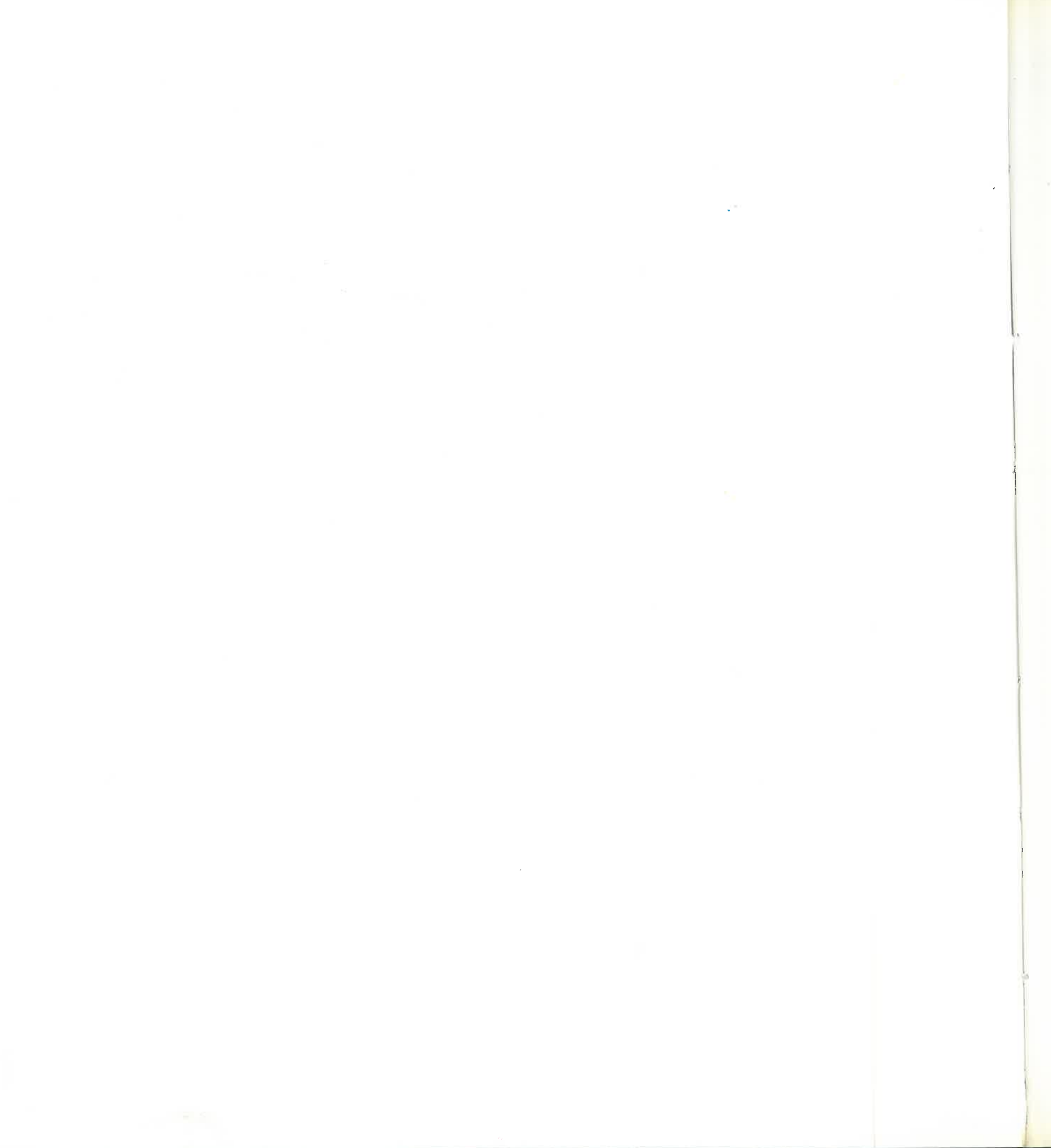
Jamil Naqsh



*Mobatta Palace Museum
Karachi*

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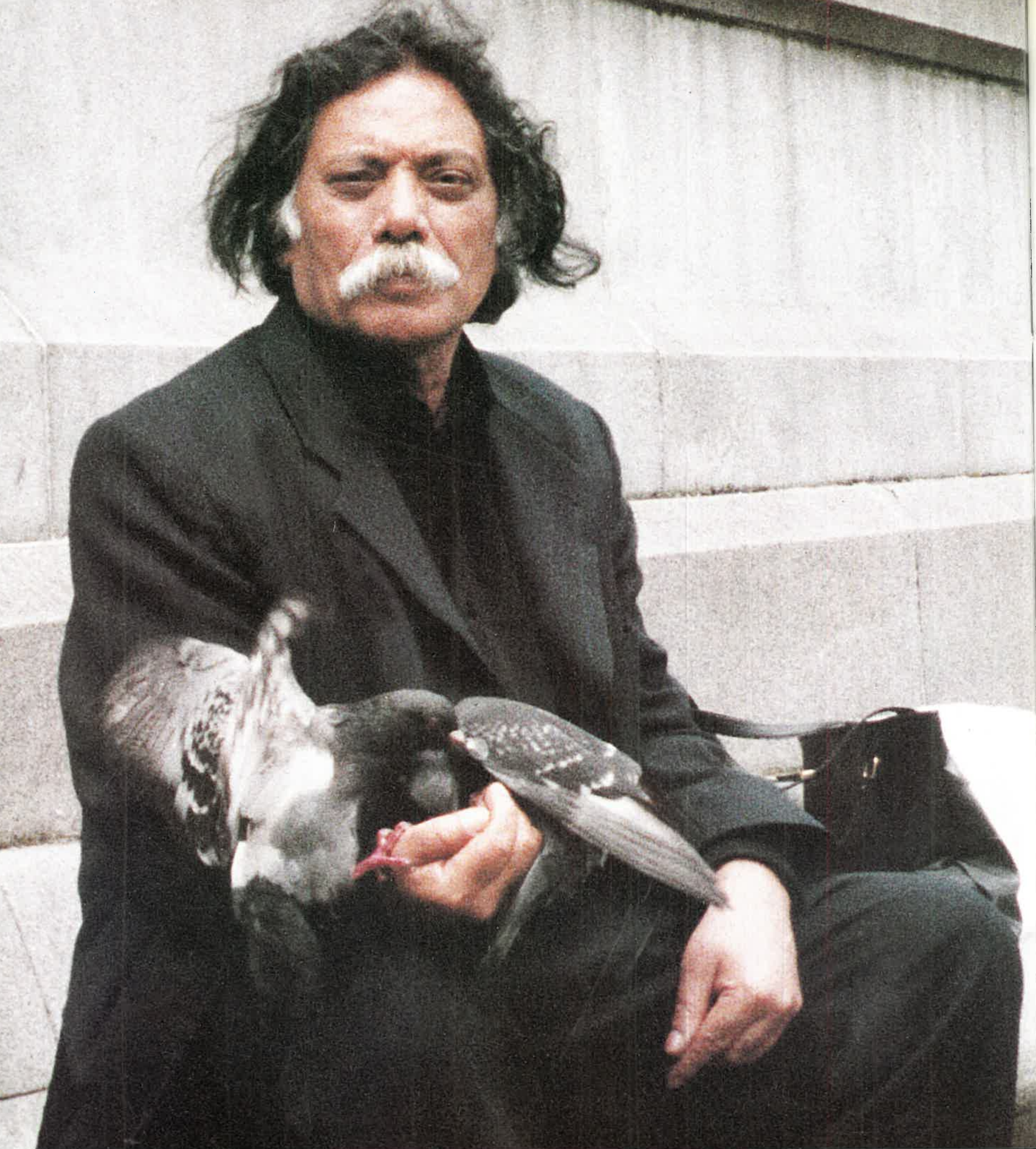




Jamil Naqsh

A retrospective

11th December 2003



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Sobia Naqsh
Bushra Shehzad

Jamil Naqsh: A retrospective

Curators
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Mohatta Palace Museum
Karachi

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Front cover: Oil on board, 1996
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

Inside front cover: Water colour, 1997
Courtesy Amina and Jehangir Tareen

Frontispiece: Jamil Naqsh, Trafalgar Square, London, 2001
Photograph by Shammi Ahmed

Photography by Abdul Wahid Khan

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Modern Manuscripts

Jamil Naqsh
Modern Manuscripts

Marjorie Husain



1

Watercolour, 1996

31 x 27 cm

Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

The development of calligraphy as an art form in Islam evolved from the aesthetic striving of Muslim artists for a non-figurative expression to fulfill both spiritual and creative demands. The word calligraphy is derived from the Greek, *kallos* for beauty and *graphein*, to write. The Arabic alphabet translated easily into exquisite linear rhythms in numerous styles of script. Curves, loops, circles and lines created an infinite variety of patterns. Written in black and gold with tiny red circlelets acting as full stops, pages were bordered with fine, intricate designs. Elegant *kufic* script and flowing, cursive *naskh* were followed in the 8th century by many other styles including *thuluth*, *mubaqqaq*, *rahan*, *tauqi*, *riqa*, *taliq* and *bahar*. A style that combined *naskh* with *taliq* evolved in Persia in the 14th century to form the *nastaliq* style. Its graceful strokes with curves created an aesthetic medium which, to this day, remains the most admired of all styles. The Muslim Sultans who ruled the Deccan in the middle ages sought the most accomplished literary and artistic talent for their courts and had close cultural links with artistic

developments in the central Islamic lands. Each year from Turkey, Persia and Arabia, scholars, poets, artists and calligraphers were invited to work with local scribes and artisans on architectural inscriptions and illuminated manuscripts in the royal libraries. Except for examples carved in stone, few specimens of pre-Mughul calligraphy have survived. In the 16th and 17th centuries the patronage of the emperors Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan gave impetus to the arts, raising the art of calligraphy to great heights. Akbar's extended and continually growing library included volumes on theology, biography, science, astrology, mathematics, history, medicine and anthropology. He commissioned books, conveniently sized, to be held in the hand with script illustrated by the most skilled artists of the royal studio. Many western artists including Matisse and Paul Klee were influenced by Arabic calligraphy. In Pakistan, contemporary artists including Anwar Jalal, Shemza, Shakir Ali, Hanif Ramay, Sadequain, Gulgee, Jamil Naqsh and later Zahoor-ul-Akhlaque, while examining their roots, were among the earliest to add individual viewpoints to this traditional art. Naqsh translated this classical art form into a modern linear style; his use of line can be traced to his years of study in the '50s with Ustad Sherif. While his peers explored western art forms with excitement, Naqsh was committed to the study of his own aesthetic legacy. He was determined to understand and absorb the discipline and the spirit of his roots in order to study modern art movements from a position of strength. The young artist produced several calligraphic works at the time together



2
Watercolour, 1996
34 x 26 cm
Courtesy Sbarifa and Sultan Allana

with miniature paintings that he signed: *pupil of Ustad Sherif*. In later years although Naqsh became known as a modern master, the training he received with the Ustad would permeate the rhythm of his work. In 1996 he began a series of linear pieces which later became known as the *Modern Manuscripts*. He was so absorbed by the creative possibilities of the inventive script, that this work engaged his focus for three years. From early in the morning until the evening he sat cross legged, as he had done during his apprenticeship with the Ustad, absorbed by the interplay of line, texture and light. Using the finest of brushes and watercolour as his medium, he manipulated lines creating horizontal and vertical patterns. Creating imaginary lines with the juxtaposition of colours and tones, he imbued his work with an illusion of three dimensional depth and space. The tactile surface and linear delicacy of the dancing script that form the ethos of Naqsh's manuscripts are inspired by the classical art form. Naqsh's aptly named *Modern Manuscripts* create the illusion of pages of ancient illuminated text.

Overlapping areas flow softly into a central mass, a seemingly effortless simplification: the result of incredible skill as personal as individual handwriting. Naqsh's style of abstraction explores the qualities of light, space and dimension inherent in the overall effect of the painting itself. Sensuously curvilinear and vibrant highlights attract and deflect the movements generated by sweeping brush strokes. Naqsh structures his images with a modern grammar whilst drawing on traditional calligraphy. There are myriad fragmented tonal

components in his work, a dynamic interrelationship of forces arising from dual instincts for what is precise, the freedom of abstraction and the shaping of one by the other. Naqsh's work is centered on the importance of line. He believes the aesthetic problems faced in art are common to all methods and media: line, surface and space. The crux of the quest, he opines, is how these individual challenges are handled.

In a catalogue accompanying the opening of the Naqsh Museum in 1999, a distinguished man of the arts, Syed Ali Imam talked of the enormous contribution to art made by Jamil Naqsh and spoke of his pioneering work in the field of modern calligraphy. "In evaluating Naqsh's work, in his journey through various periods, one notices that he has the rational growth of a painter charged with the dialectics of a visionary. He was eager to branch off and give a new meaning to his work, but his modern calligraphic painting has altogether different problems in comparison to the work of his earlier periods... As a young disciple of the late Ustad Sharif, he assiduously disciplined himself in the painstaking exercises demanded of a student of miniature painting... Different painters during this period were looking towards the west for inspiration. Only a few tried their hand in the art of calligraphy in Pakistan. In doing so, they utilized the 30 or so different modes of calligraphy in the building of their images, derivatively using western idioms of expression. But for Naqsh this posed quite a challenge. He started studying and practicing the art of calligraphy to gain proficiency in this



3
Watercolour, 1996
36 x 34 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

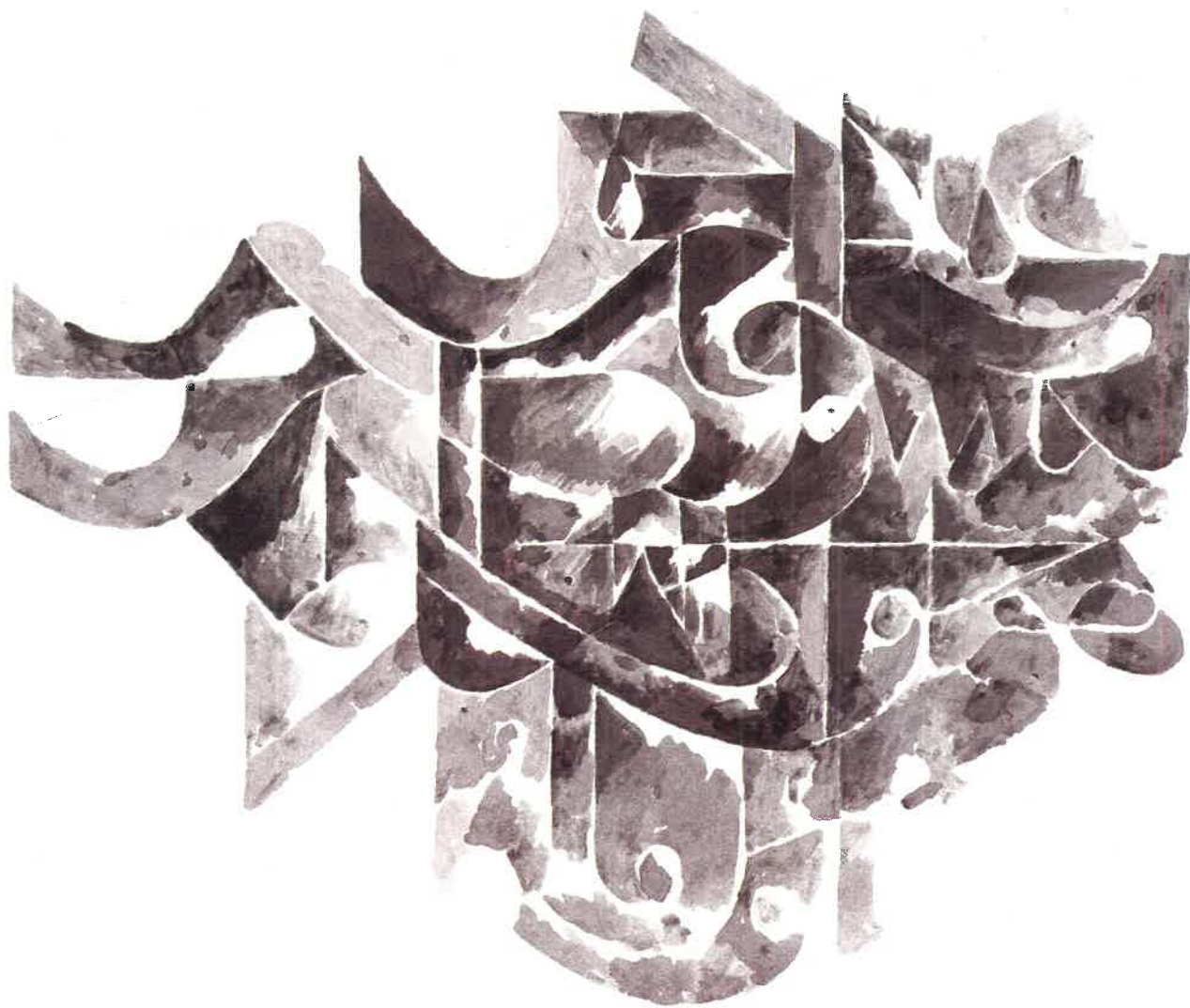


4
Watercolour (detail), 1996
 36 x 26 cm
 Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

discipline and discovered that great variations in scripts in the illustrated books were part of a tradition ingrained in our subconscious. This study brought about a qualitative change in the use of calligraphy by a modern painter in expressing himself as an artist of new vision... His drawings possess a magnetic crosscurrent of lines and forms in variations similar to musical notes, particularly in his calligraphic paintings. The optical effect is of a composite note pictorially. The contemporariness of his work is understood only by a few modern aesthetes. His linear dynamics emerge from active planes

against passive blanks. The rhythm of vertical, horizontal, diagonal, cursive and linear division has a magnetic and kinetically mobile inner essence as distinguished from the outer form of the subject... It is an inductively intuitive and heterogeneous manifestation of his expression."

In Naqsh's use of line one may perceive the kernel of life itself, with all its playful, bitter sweet caprice, its revelations, its interruptions, its constancies and joys flow together and then part in a refined, expressionistic link between past and present.



Modern Manuscripts



5
Watercolour, 1988
37 x 114 cm
Courtesy Najmi Sura





6

Watercolour, 1996
33 x 29 cm
Courtesy Sharifa and Sultan Allana



7
Oil on board, 1996
41 x 41 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



8

Watercolour, 1996
31 x 28 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



9
Watercolour, 1996
33 x 29 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



10
Water colour
37.5 x 27.5 cm
Courtesy Amina and Jebangir Tareen



11
Watercolour, 1996
28 x 20 cm
Courtesy Tyaba and Muslim Habib



12

Watercolour, 1996
27 x 54 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

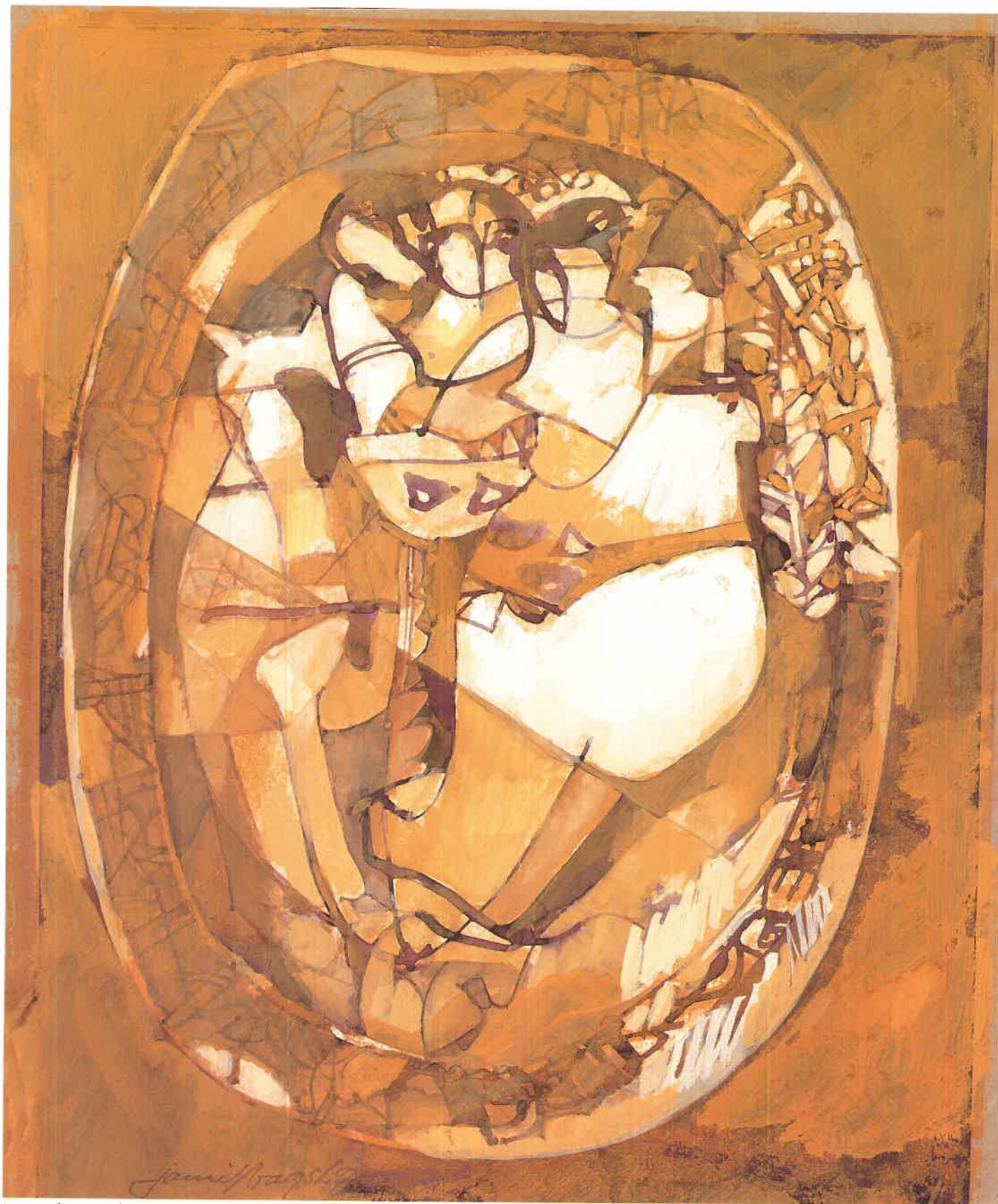




jamil naqsh
76

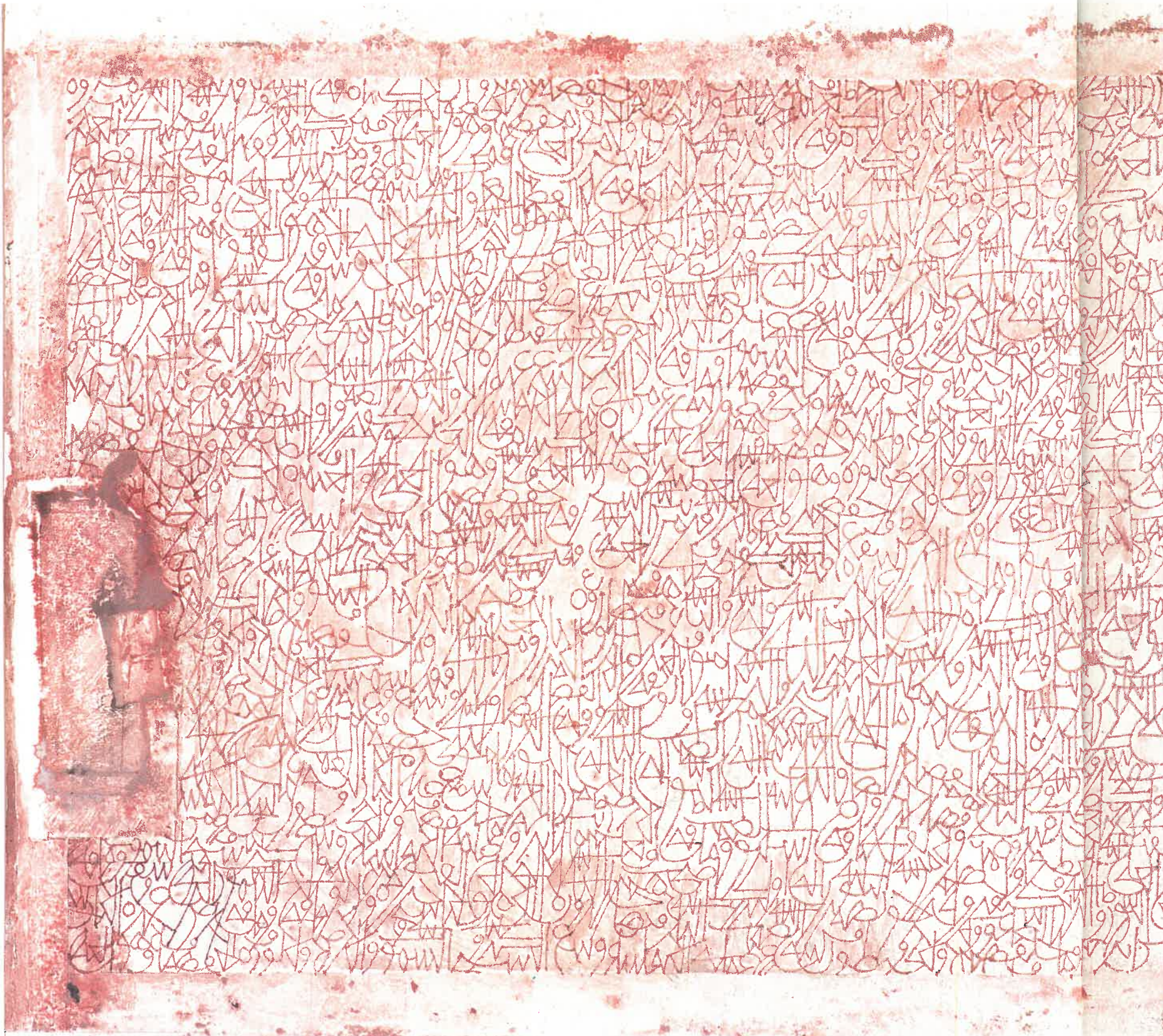
13

Watercolour, 1996
31 x 28 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



14

Watercolour, 1996
28 x 21 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation





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Jamil Naqsh



jamil naqsh 96

17

Watercolour, 1996
31 x 27 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



18

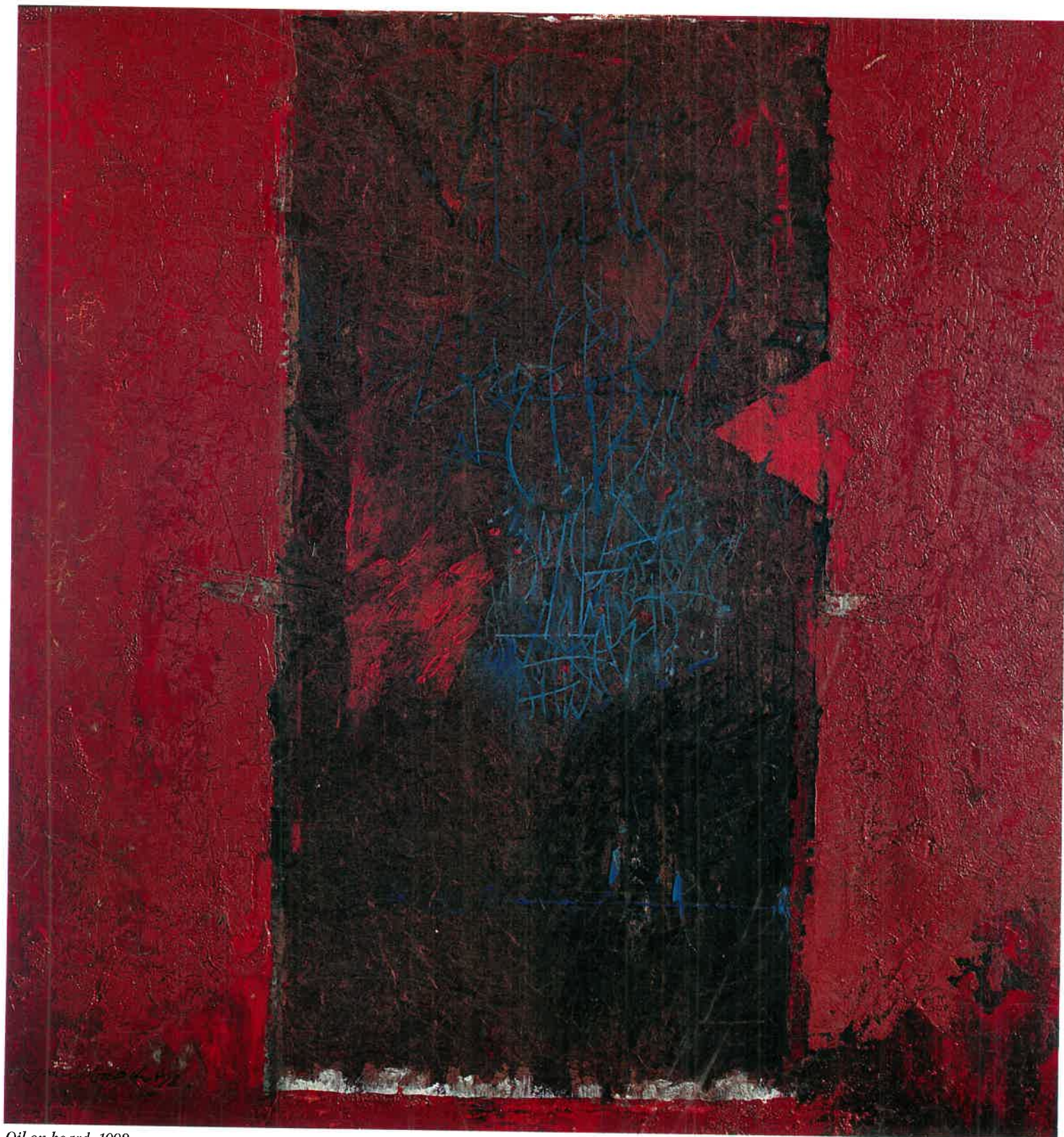
Oil on board, 1998
40 x 39 cm
Courtesy Tyaba and Muslim Habib



19
Oil on board, 1998
41 x 41 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



20
Oil on board, 1998
41 x 41 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



21

Oil on board, 1998
39.5 x 39.5 cm
Courtesy Tyaba and Muslim Habib



22
Watercolour, 2000
24 x 26 cm
Courtesy Sbarifa and Sultan Allana



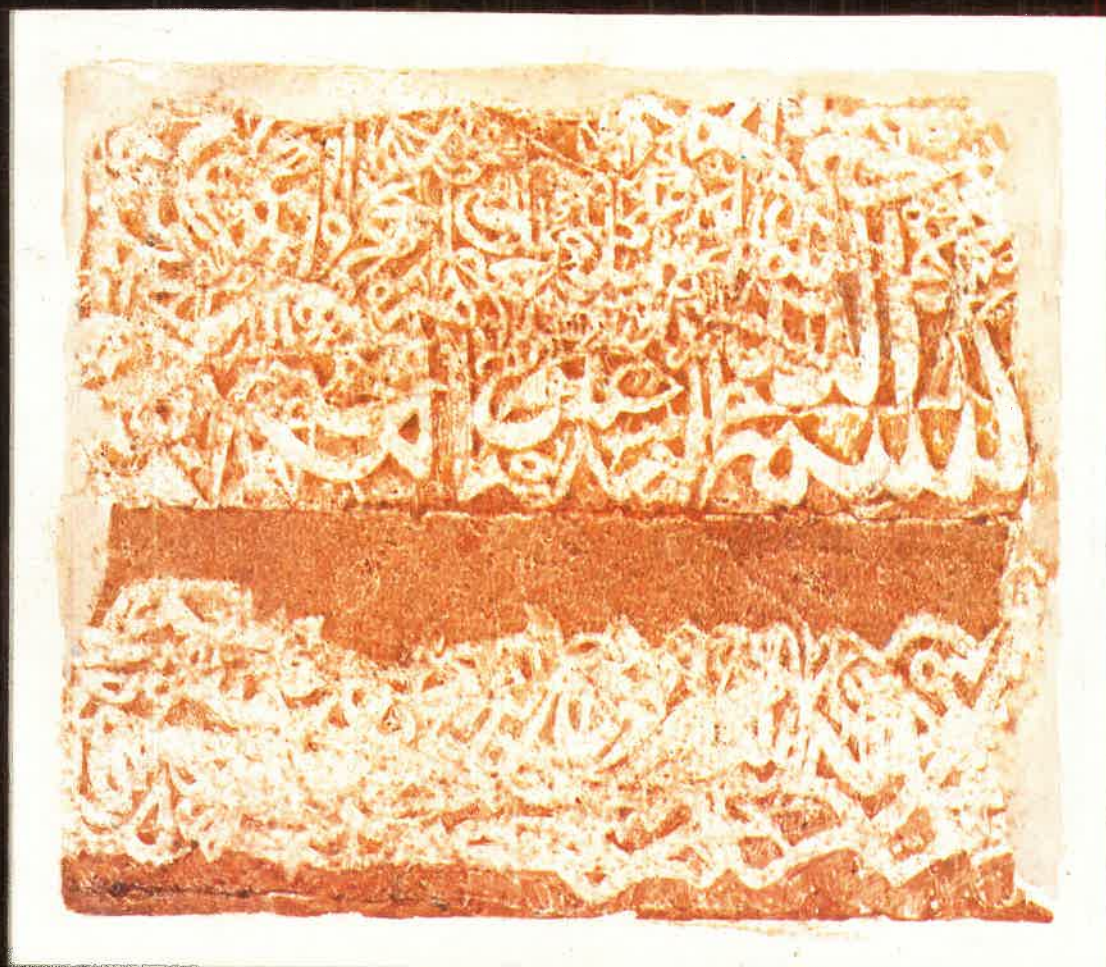
23
Watercolour, 2000
24 x 26 cm
Courtesy Sharifa and Sultan Allana





25
Watercolour, 2000
35 x 36 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsb Foundation





27

Watercolour, 2000
37 x 36 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsb Foundation



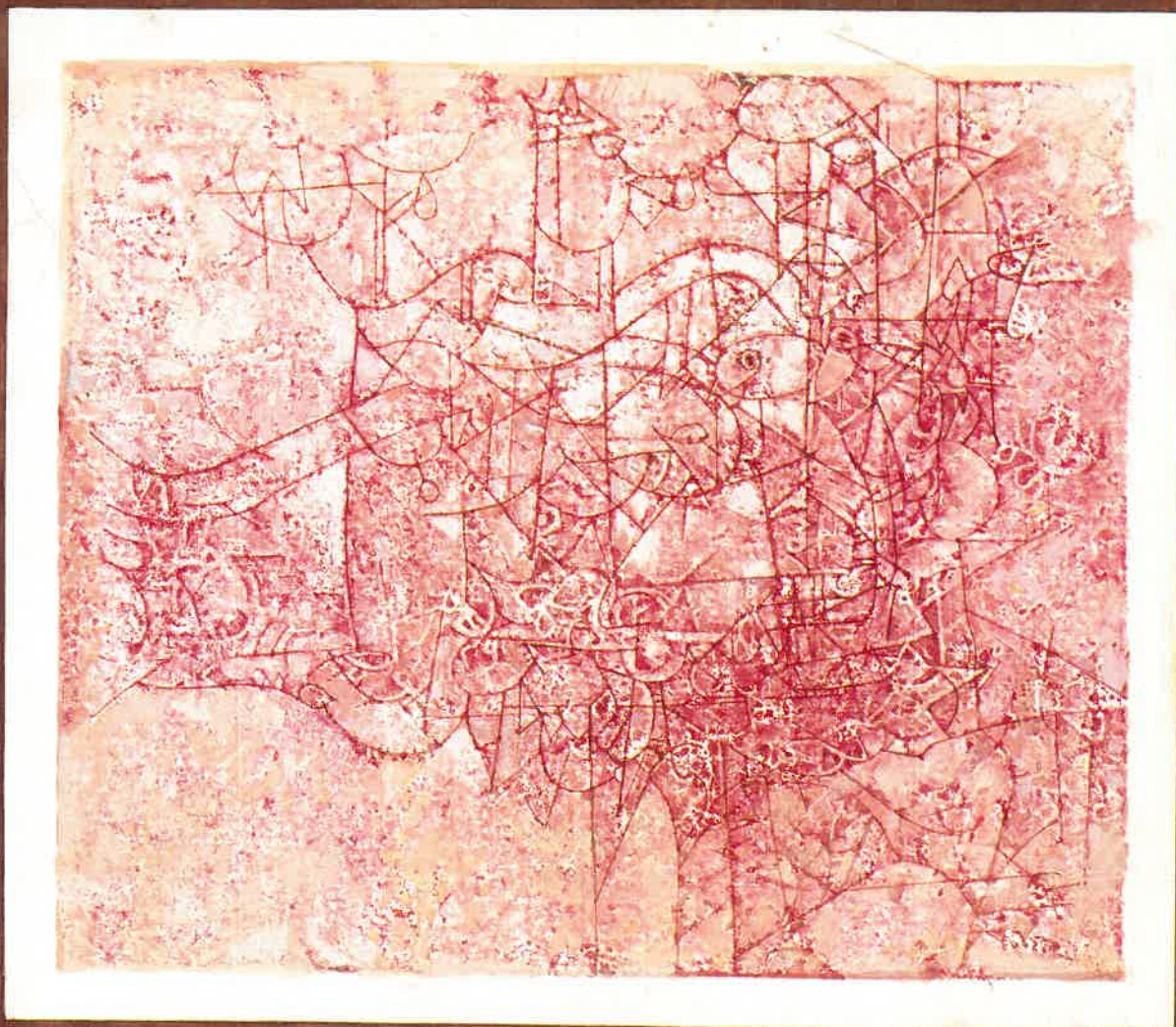


29
Watercolour, 2000
36 x 34 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation

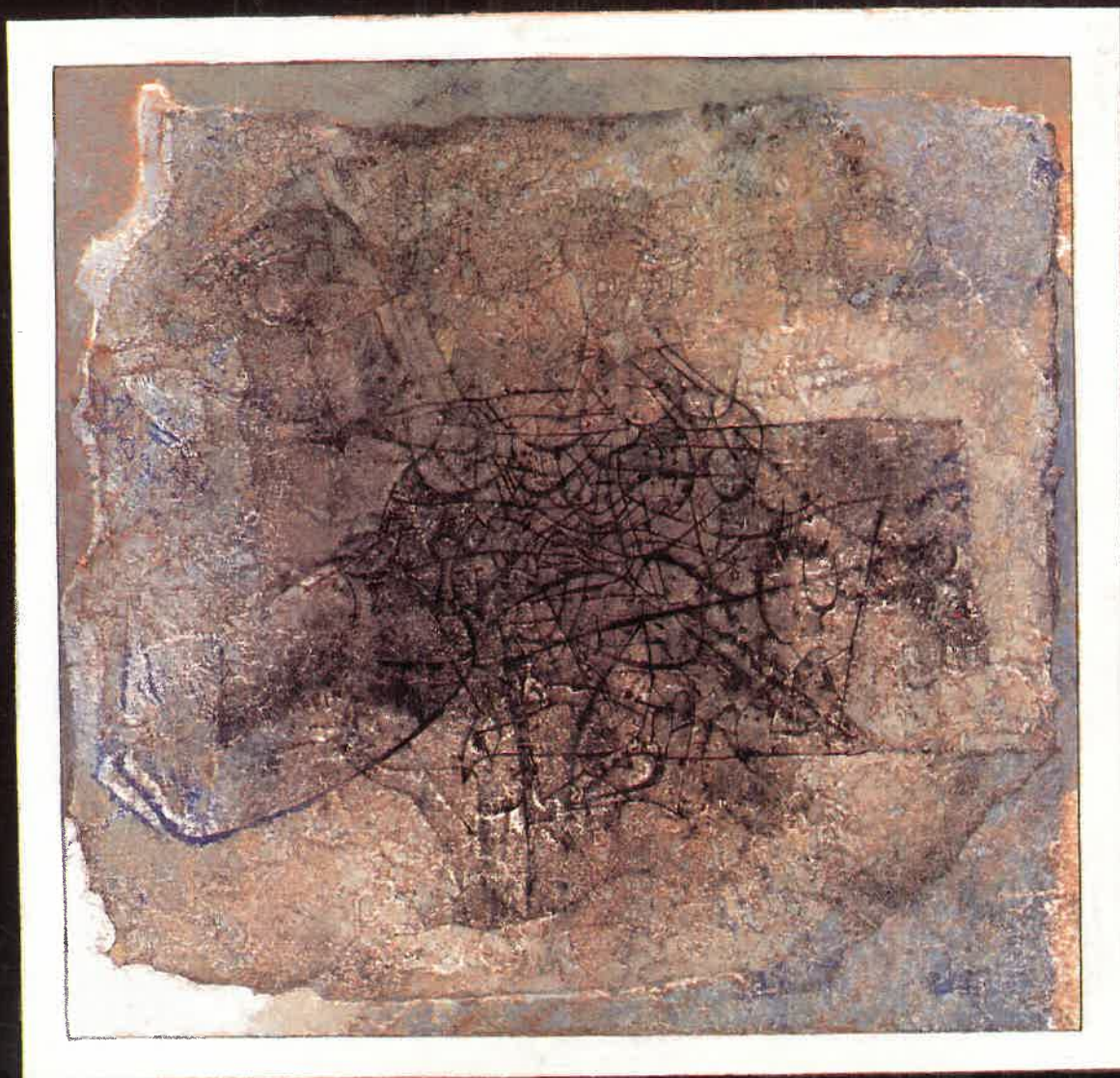


30

*Watercolour, 2000
40 x 35 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsb Foundation*



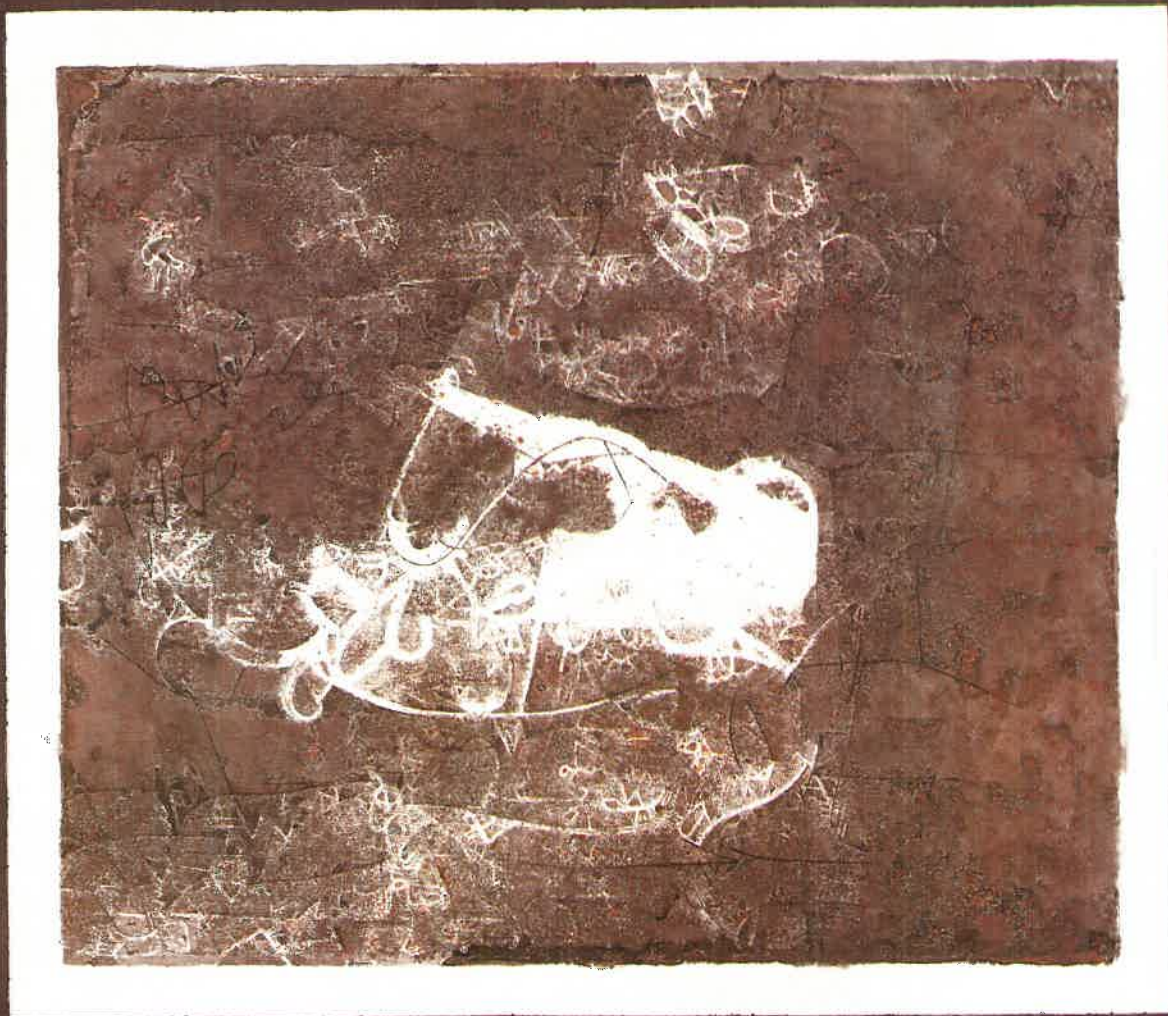
31
Watercolour, 2000
35 x 33 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



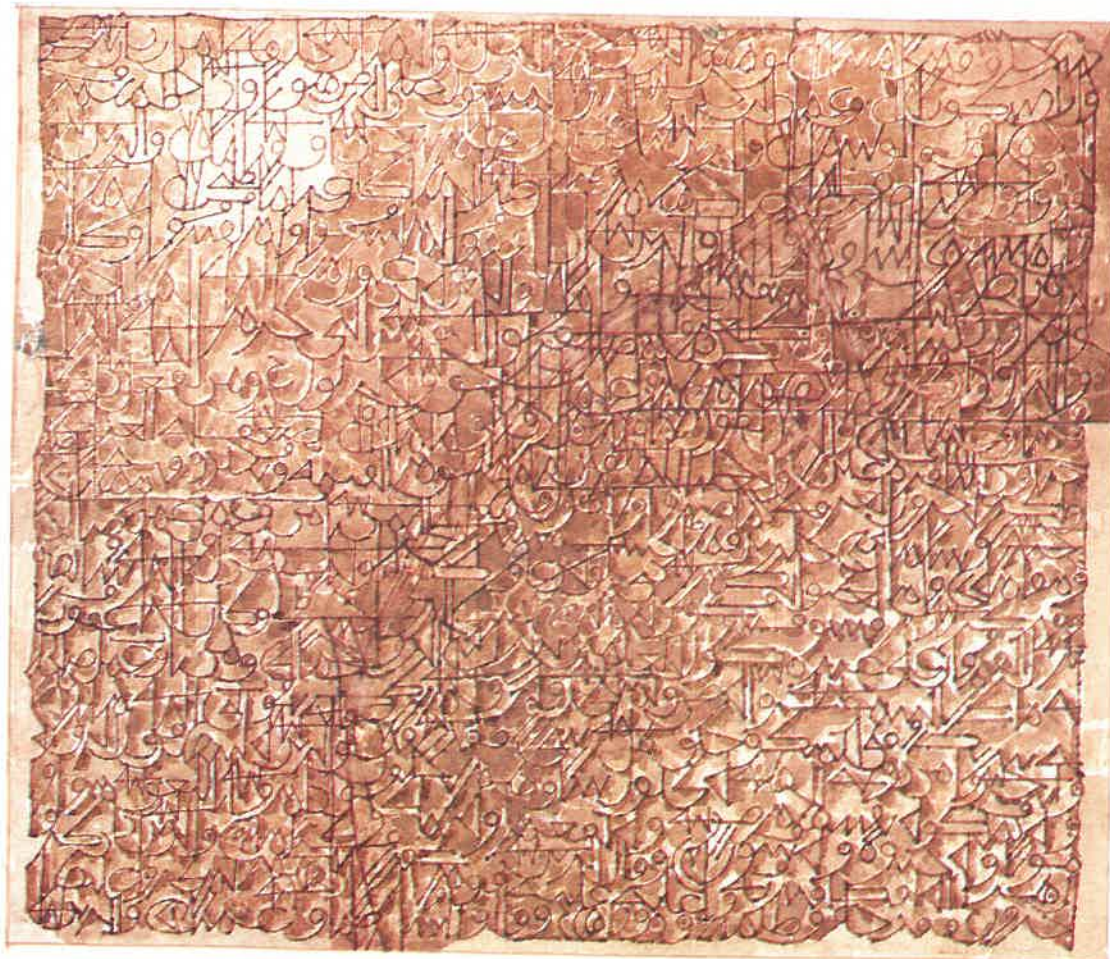
32
Watercolour, 2000
37 x 33 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



33
Oil on board, 2000
41 x 41 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsb Foundation



34
Watercolour, 2000
36 x 35 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsb Foundation



35

Watercolour, 2000
35 x 33 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



36

Watercolour, 2000
38 x 34 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



37
Watercolour, 2000
37 x 33 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



38
Watercolour, 2000
35 x 33 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



39

Watercolour, 2002
38 x 36 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



40

Watercolour, 2002
34 x 34 cm
Courtesy Jamil Naqsh Foundation



41

Oil on canvas, 2002
61 x 61 cm
Courtesy Ronak and Iqbal Lakbani

