

تِرْحَال

TERHAL

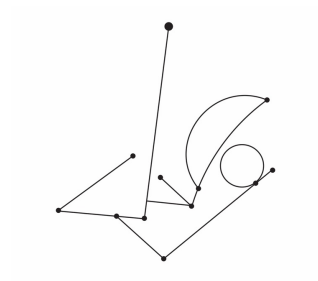
At

Wasl Art Space

Curated by Seif El- Rashidi & Markaz

This exhibition pays homage to a venerable tradition, while also nudging it softly forward to capture new moments of change and reflection.

WASL



Terhal – Travelling

The textile hangings in this exhibition focus on an experience shared by every living thing: the journey through life. In the pieces exhibited here, we encourage you to reflect on journeys as a changing state of mind, and the ways in which life's challenges and opportunities enable us to grow through them. We conceived this exhibition as a representation of a kaleidoscope of sentiments responding to the theme of the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah, which focuses on "The First House", the place to which millions of Muslims travel on pilgrimage, and many others aspire to and dream of. What is pilgrimage but a quest to explore, to encounter, to reassess and transform oneself?

The development of this collection was a journey in itself. We started with an idea for one piece, and that piece inspired the next, and so on. We began with the story of Mantiq al Tayr, (the Conference of the Birds), in which a group of 30 birds reluctantly decide to follow their leader, the hoopoe (Hudud), across seven dangerous valleys, in search of the wisest bird of them all, the Simurgh. When they finally find the Simurgh they realise that he is simply a reflection of all of them together, the sum of their collective wisdom.

Given our location in the port city of Jeddah, we also wanted to capture the physical milestones that were to be found from across the Arab world, indicating, mile by mile, the journey to the ultimate place of spiritual reflection and redemption: Mecca; and to reflect on Saudi Arabia, perhaps more than any other nation at a pivotal crossroads in its journey.

In the artistic tradition of the Islamic world, objects are bearers of sentiments and aspirations, often good wishes to their users, expressed through poetry. The poetry in this collection of wall hangings captures the wisdom of thinkers, writers and poets from the Islamic world, a world that encompasses many faiths and tongues, and has thrived on cultural exchange. Some of these luminaries, like Mahmoud Darwish and Khalil Gibran, are still remembered and celebrated; the names of others, whose wisdoms have only survived engraved on everyday items from as far back as the 13th and 14th centuries, have been lost to us, but their words are still youthful and relevant.

Textile hangings and banners have existed for as long as man has moved ceremonially from place to place and from one state of mind to another. They announce moments of change - collective and personal milestones – often celebrations, gatherings, and events.

This collection was made in the street of the Tentmakers in Cairo, (al-Khayameya) where a small community of craftsmen have safeguarded the tradition of creating the textiles that animate and define journeys: tents, banners and hangings.



**The Conference of the
Birds**

167 x 65 cm

Farid al Din Al Attar, who lived in Nishapur in the 14th century wrote an epic tale inspired by a verse in the Quran, referring to the wisdom of the birds.

In the Conference of the Birds, the story that inspired this collection, a group of birds travel through seven difficult valleys, following the hoodhood (Hoopoe) in search of the Sinmurg, a bird thought to possess great wisdom. When the birds reach their destination, they realise that what they think is the great Sinmurg is simply their collective reflection in a mirror. In other words, that the source of the great wisdom is actually their own wisdom, as a diverse group working together.

This piece captures the birds as they first embark on their journey, initially reluctant to embark on the quest for wisdom. The Hoopoe or Hudhud leads them through seven valleys:

The Valley of the Quest, where the traveller begins by casting aside all dogma, belief, and unbelief. The Valley of Love, where reason is abandoned for the sake of love. The Valley of Knowledge, where worldly knowledge becomes useless; The Valley of Detachment, where all desires and attachments to the world are given up;

The Valley of Unity, where the traveller realizes that everything is connected; The Valley of Wonderment, where, entranced by the beauty of the Beloved, the traveller becomes perplexed and, steeped in awe, finds that he has never known or understood anything and The Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, where the self disappears into the universe and the traveller becomes timeless, existing in both the past and the future.



The Birds and the Mirror

195 x 160 cm

This piece captures the moment when 30 birds who have travelled on a difficult and dangerous quest finally think that they have found their leader, the beautiful Simurgh, who possesses incredible wisdom. The birds discover that in fact, that they are looking in a mirror, which captures their collective reflections in such a way that it looks like one single fantastic bird.

The language of the piece is inspired by the ceramics of Nishapur in today's Iran, which often feature abstracted birds. The blue colour predominating here tells the story of another journey – the journey of ideas and raw materials back and forth. Cobalt used in the Islamic world to produce the colour blue was sent to China to produce ceramics especially ordered for Muslim courts. China possessed the secret of making porcelain, which was highly prized. The arrival of cobalt, initially used to make pieces for export to the so-called 'Islamic world', but the blue colour was so popular that the Chinese started to use it for themselves as well, creating what the world knows today as Chinese blue and white porcelain.



The Mirror

225 x 290 cm

The design of this piece is inspired by the 14th century Mosque built in historic Cairo by a Mamluk prince, Aslam al Silahdar, the Sultan's sword bearer. The interlaced central design copied here comes from a beautiful panel of inlaid marble above the main entrance of the mosque. What we found as we studied the applied textiles made in Egypt from the medieval period is that buildings and textiles inspired each other. Tent panels from the Mamluk period would also have used these designs. Like the story of the mirror in *Mantiq Al-Tayr*, the story of architecture is one of inspiration and sharing ideas.



The Journey of 1000 Miles I and II

98 x 112 cm

Milestones, both symbolic and metaphoric, act as guides, enabling us to reflect on where we are in our quest, and to create associations with places and times.

On a more practical level, although we don't often think about it, milestones and signposts are signs of an effective administrative system, that make it easy to navigate on our travels. A distinguishing feature of the Umayyad Empire, the period when the Muslim Empire expanded significantly, and developed its own visual identity, were beautifully carved milestones indicating the distance to important cities, including of course Mecca and Medina. These were inscribed in Kufic script, and can be seen as an early branding exercise, allowing creativity to flower within an established aesthetic landscape.

In our own pair of milestones, we chose a well known saying attributed to China, that the journey of a 1000 miles starts with a single step.

Calligraphy based on a design by Mohamed Abdel Hady



Calligraphy

by Mohamed Abdel Hady



Two Roads in a Yellow Wood

140 x 185 cm

– an homage to Robert Frost

Drawing design

The Road Not Taken By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.



Garden of Life

140 x 220 cm

In the midst of the olive and orange groves is the rose garden, silently capturing the cycle of life.



Drawing design



Drawing design

Searching for Wisdom

205 x 150 cm

In ancient Egypt, long beaked water-birds like the ones seen in this water channel were thought to be searching for wisdom. Here they search for knowledge in the midst of a paradisaical garden



Time-keepers

157 x 152 cm

This piece celebrates the universal time keepers of life's journey – the sun and the moon.

Drawing design



Drawing design

Circling

216 x 182 cm

The focus of this depiction of the Kaaba is the beautiful interplay of two groups circling it at the same time: humans and birds.

The kaaba, perhaps more than any other place in the world, represents the ultimate purpose of the exploratory journey through life, spiritual awakening, and self-betterment.



Drawing design

Flight

280 x 40 cm

This piece is inspired by the Egyptian tradition of painting murals on the walls of houses whose occupants have been to Mecca on pilgrimage.

In this version we reflect on different forms of journeys, from those with a purpose – like Aeroplane flights, to the cyclical journey of birds, day to day, season to season and year to year; to kites, whose journeys are not so much about distance but height – achieving greatness pleurably by rising above all others.



Birds and Boats on an Ocean of Air

250 x 135 cm

An unusual feature of some religious buildings in Egypt are wooden boats placed at the summits of their domes, which are filled with grain to feed the birds on special occasions.

It is thought that the scene of the birds flying around these airborne boats is meant to capture man's spiritual journey.

The feeding of the birds is generally seen as a charitable act, and in medieval times, it was believed that such birds would take our dreams with them to heaven as they flew upwards.



Drawing design

Patience is beautiful

190 x 105 cm

As we explored the theme of journeys, one great journey that we could not ignore was the story of Noah, and the 40 day journey in the ark.

In this depiction, the ark is made up of a series of coracles, typical Iraqi reed boats, used in the marshy areas of Iraq for thousands of years. We have taken the story of Noah as a story of patience.



والله اعلم
بالحق والعدل
والله اعلم
بالحق والعدل
والله اعلم
بالحق والعدل

Changing But Not Changing

180 x 147 cm

Peace be upon those whom life does not change,
paths do not separate, and circumstances do not
alter. - Khalil Gibran (Attributed)

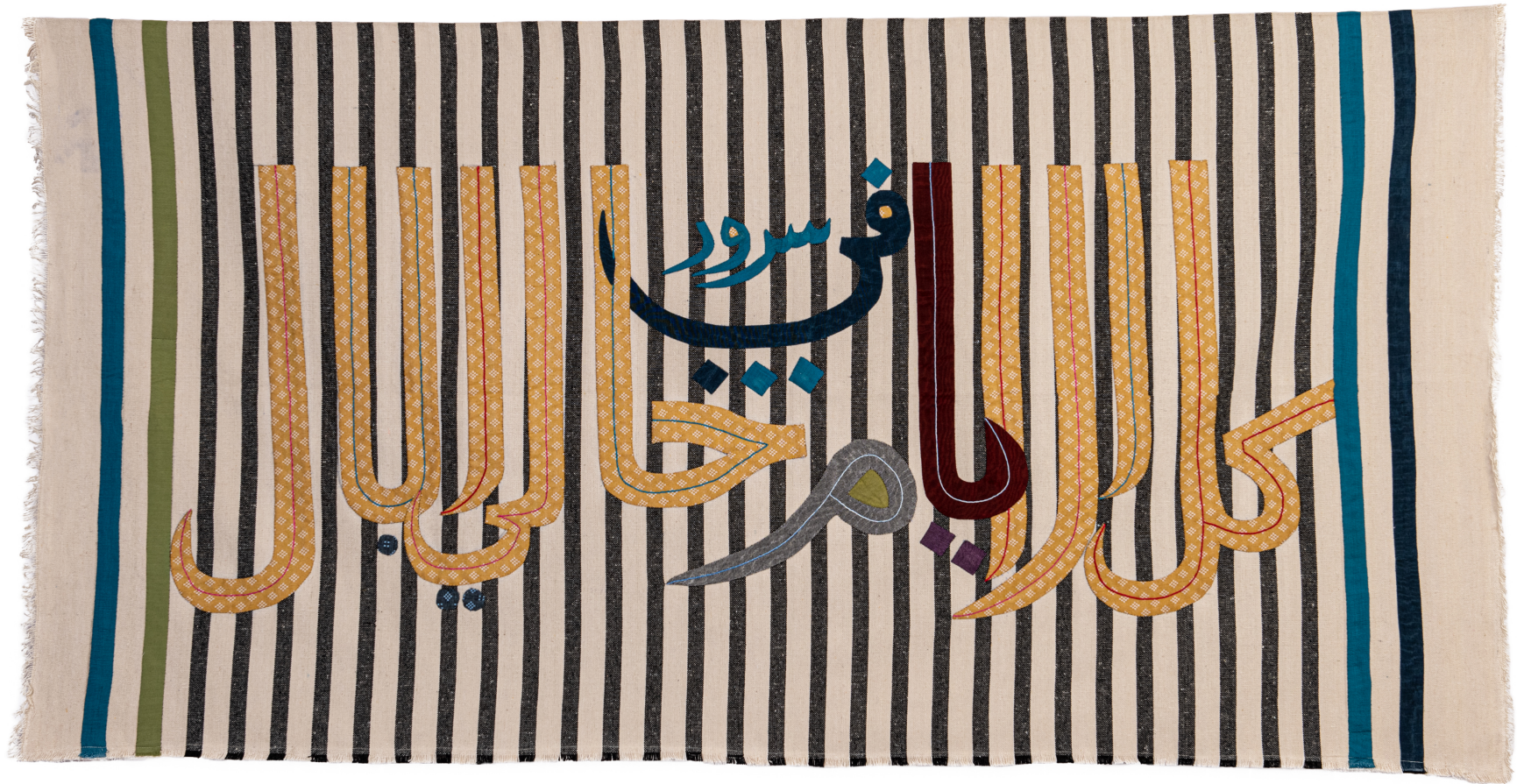
Calligraphy designed by Mohamed Abdel Hady



Across Generations

255 x 340 cm

Inspired by the tree showing the lineage of the Prophet Mohammed, PBUH, this piece celebrates the way in which ideas, traits, customs and values travel across time, through the bonds of kinship.



A Mind at Peace I

167 x 88 cm

A Mind at Peace II

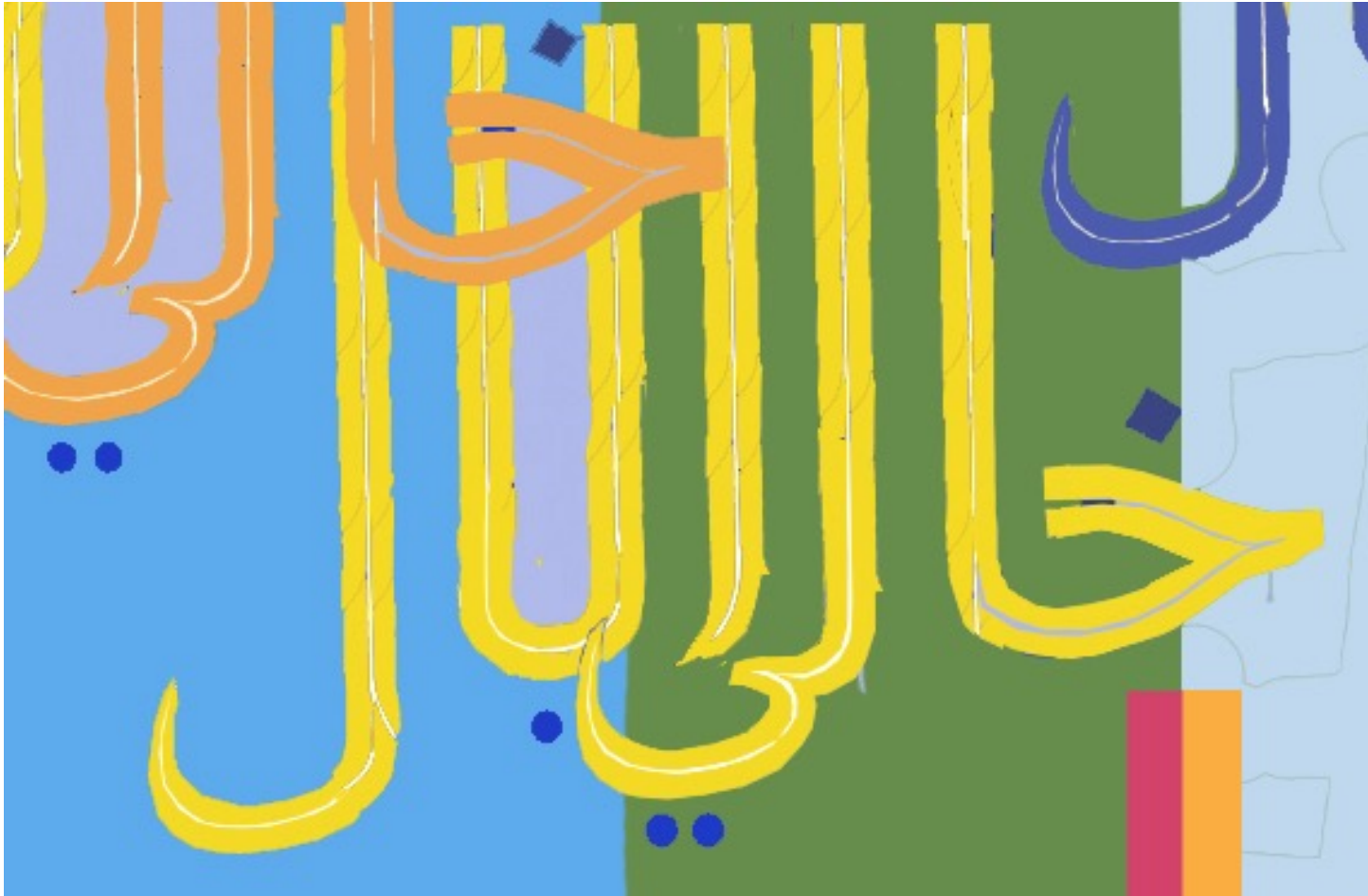
113 x 80 cm

Writing plays a very important role in the arts of the Islamic world, which are frequently ornamented with inscriptions. Objects often carry texts wishing specific blessings or states of mind on their users or owners.

These two pieces were inspired by an inscription on a 15th century metal drinking bowl from Egypt or Syria, inscribed with a line wishing that every day would be spent in happiness, free of worry. Perhaps this is the ultimate hope in life's journey.

Free of Mind I (Free of Mind)

Free of Mind II (Every day in happiness free from worry)



Drawing design



Live in the moment!

110 x 195cm

Penned by Omar Al Khayyam

and immortalised by Om Kalthoum, these words are for all times:

“Do not preoccupy your minds with things that have already passed, nor worry about what is yet to come”



Al-Musmak

127 x 195 cm

It was at the fort of Musmak, in Riyadh, in 1902 that King Abdul Aziz al Saud, regained control of Najd, establishing what became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Here, we commemorate that national journey through the recreation of the entrance wall of Musmak, today an important national landmark.



A Road Rising to Meet You

315 x 110 cm

“Once you attempt to begin the journey, the road becomes apparent”

Design based on the architectural details of Musmaq and other buildings around it.

Calligraphy based on a design by Muhammad Abdel Hady



All we need is enough

125 x 105 cm

This piece is inspired by the public water fountains of Cairo (sabils), which were often decorated with cypress trees and colourful medallions. Passersby and animals could come to these sabils and have their fill of water in yesteryear, leaving plenty for others.

“I have found contentment to be the completion of wealth, All we need is enough!”



Ya Allah, Ya Muhammed Processional Banner

110 x 215cm

“Ya Allah”

Ya Muhammad”

“Lal Ilaha Illah Allah”

“Muhammad Rasul Allah”

Banners like this one were used in religious processions such as the procession to attempt to see the crescent moon signaling the beginning of Ramadan.

This design is copied from an old piece, although the colours and materials are different from the 19th century original.



“Nasr Min Allah Wa Fathan Qareeb” Entrance
Curtain

One of the most popular sayings on old tent hangings is this one, reminding us that with God’s support, victory is imminent. The saying is one that is commonly associated with Muslim Spain, but was popular in Egypt as well, and often appears in the design of wooden mashrabiya windows. For centuries it has given travelers and seekers strength and comfort.



Star of Contemplation

108 x 108 cm

Traditional khayameya designs of the 20th century rely on bilateral symmetry to create an astonishing variety of star patterns. The mystery of this star is that even though symmetrical, its details are not the same, making it an object of contemplation.



Finding Happiness

“A house of prosperity, where the eyes that fall upon it are happy.”

”Bringer of Happiness, Eternally smiling”

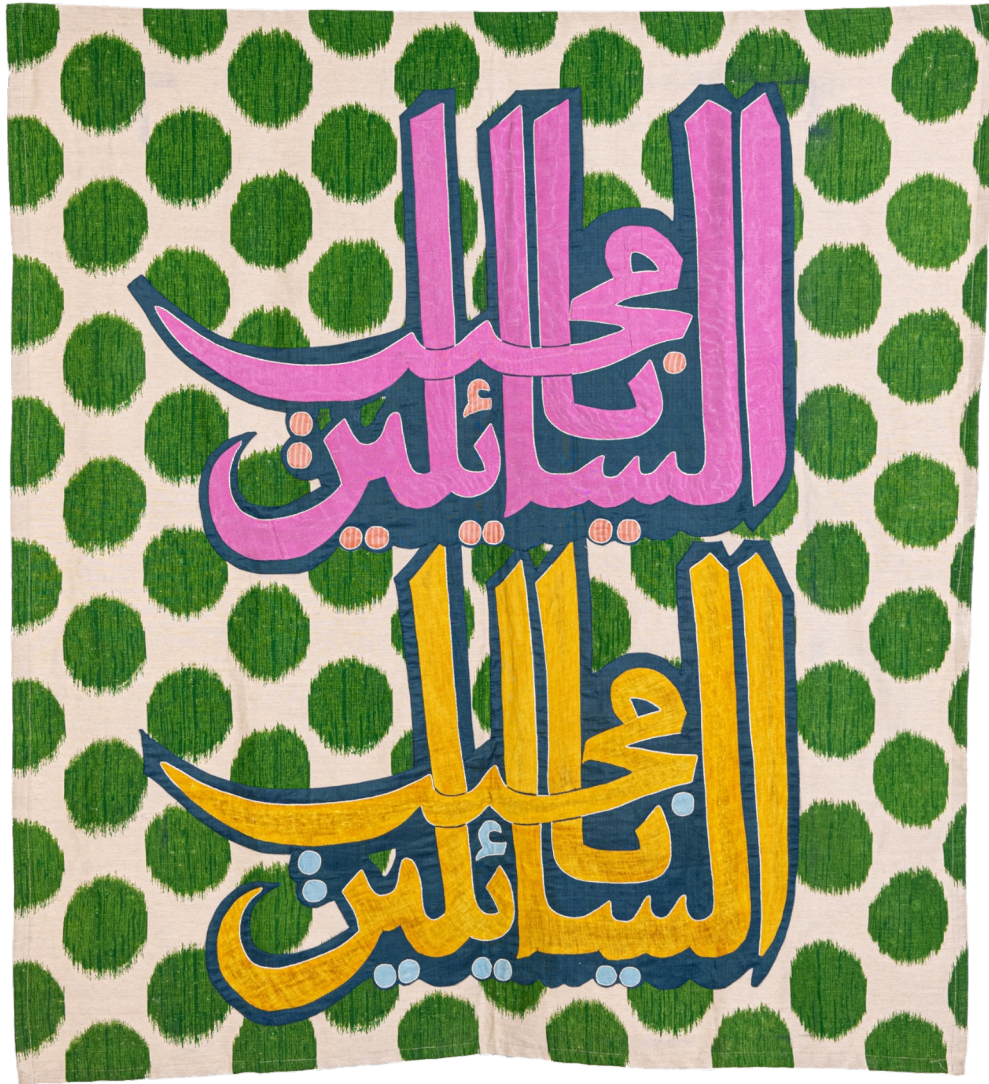
Inspired by 19th century tent hangings, this piece captures the sentiments that have rung true across time and place..... The wish for a happy home. Exploring often leads us to miss and to cherish the embracing familiarity of home.



Desert sky

150 x 290 cm

In the depths of the desert, the sky no longer seems empty, but full of movement. This piece, embroidered in Sinai and applied in Cairo, captures the density of the desert sky, alive with stars.



“Oh Answerer of those who request”

135 x 150 cm

Al Mujib, the answerer, is one of the beautiful names of Allah.

This banner reminds us that in our journeys great and small, the divine presence is there to guide us.

Calligraphy based on a design by Mohamed Abdel Hady

Khayameya Journey

205 x 195 cm

Drawing design



Khayameya, the Egyptian craft of tentmaking, is in many ways the ultimate example of recycling and Egyptian resourcefulness. Made out of small pieces of cotton, traditionally, many of these pieces used and reused fabrics to create beautiful handstitched tents and hangings out of discarded scraps, giving them new life.

The life of each tent panel also demonstrated an ingrained cultural attitude towards recycling. Each tent panel, usually measuring 5.75 cm by 2.75 cm would begin its life very brightly coloured and used for weddings and celebrations, almost on a daily basis. If it got damaged or worn, it would be repaired up to a point. Once it got too faded or damaged it was used as a 'screen' on building renovation projects to keep the dust away from passers-by in the street. At this stage it was sometimes further repaired using old scraps that did not have to match the original design.

This newly designed piece, inspired by the marbled work of Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo, is made up of old fabric salvaged from a tent panel that was so damaged that it could not even be used on building sites. When we took the old panel apart we found that it had been lined with green fabric that came from an election banner!



As such, our response to this exhibition celebrates an authentic, often overlooked form of reuse. Until the mid twentieth century most khayameya panels would have had writing on them, and honouring that tradition in this piece, we chose the words of the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish :

“We have on this earth what makes life worth living”

