

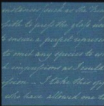
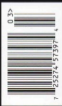
Letter Arts Review

LETTER ARTS REVIEW 313 · The experimental impulse in contemporary letter arts
The garden as calligraphic inspiration

Ahora
o Nunca

AHORA O NUNCA (NOW OR NEVER) · Yari & Guille

\$14.50





Left, top to bottom:
Our true nationality is mankind.
Quote from H. W. Wells.
Love understands all languages.
Proverb.
The stone is safe, but there is no buffer for the sea.
Quote from Emily Dickinson.

Muhammad Massoudy

Born in Iraq in 1960, Muhammad Massoudy has been doing calligraphy for almost as long as he can remember. At the age of ten, his calligraphy attracted the attention of his teachers, and he began exhibiting his work.

Years of study and work as a calligrapher in Baghdad followed. An opportunity to study art in Paris led to a degree in the visual arts. Still not sure what he wanted to do, he remembered the proverb: When you don't know where to go, remember where you came from. So, he returned to the study of Arabic calligraphy and decided to work on abstract compositions based on the shapes of Arabic letters. He became disillusioned with this path, he says, "as I was continuously producing similar forms and dealing with the same questions and solutions from a visual point of view. Words, however, have the capacity to impose shapes I hadn't considered—through their meaning."

Eventually, he turned to poetry. Massoudy says, "There is a major aspect of poetry that is also present in calligraphy. A poet doesn't disclose all the words and meanings, inviting the listener to become involved in the poetic images and perhaps even to interpret them differently. Similarly, words provide an opportunity for the reader to create his own imagery."

For Massoudy, calligraphy is image making. "In my opinion," he says, "scripts were born from images. Ancient Sumerian and Egyptian writings were simplified images, as were the letters of the alphabet themselves at a later period."

For a dozen years, Massoudy performed calligraphy on stage with a musician and an actor reading Arabic poetry. That experience spilled over into his work on paper. His modern studies were always accompanied by ancient Kufic calligraphy in situ to the first Arabic script, whose roots are similar to drawing. "Today," he says, "this ancient precursor is represented by the horizontal-line-written beneath each colossal flourish of scripts."





Drawing inspiration from the past, Massoudy likes to create new calligraphic scripts. He has created new tools to help him draw his letters because the traditional *qalam* (writing pen) is thin compared to the size of his work. He produces most of his calligraphy tools made of thick cardboard or bamboo. All of his letters, however new, have thick and thin in accordance with the rules of classical Arabic calligraphy.

Massoudy imagines his "calligraphic structures" as entities "flying into the sky, resisting both atmospheric pressure and the downward pull of the earth's gravity." His inspiration comes from nature. "I want my scripts to express the unity of their bond with the vast universe."

Since I am made of earth, this letter is my country in its entirety, and all of humanity are my brothers. Spins from the Tayler al-Najafi, a 20th century Arab Islamic scholar and politician.



Left, top: Make me always more surrounded at the excess of my love for you. Quote from *Itis al-Parid*, a 12th-century Arab poet.

Left, bottom: Woman is a ray of divine light. Quote from the 12th-century Persian poet Rumi.



Right, top: Oh friend, don't go to the flower garden; the flower garden is within you. Quote from the 17th-century Indian mystic poet Kabir.

Right, bottom: Trusting is an act of courage. Quote from the 19th-century Austrian novelist Anton von Eber-Eichenbock.





The last piece on this page is on canvas and measures one meter square.

All the other Abstractly pieces shown in this article are on paper and measure 29 x 23 centimeters.

Altogether I saw that the eye was the window of the heart. Quote from the 9th century Arab poet Al-Mutanabbi (the Mawlawiyyah Al-Bihar).

Right: Generosity is giving more than you own. Quote from Gabriel-Gilman.

