



26 January 2009

The Jameel Prize

The V&A today announces a new £25,000 international art prize for contemporary artists and designers inspired by Islamic traditions of craft and design.

The Jameel Prize aims to raise awareness of the thriving interaction between contemporary practice and the rich artistic heritage of Islam, and to contribute to a broader debate about Islamic culture. The Prize will be awarded every two years.

Over 100 nominations for the first Jameel Prize were received, and nine artists and designers have been short-listed by a panel of judges. The first winner of the Prize will be announced at an awards ceremony at the V&A on 7 July 2009. Work by the winner and by the other eight short-listed artists and designers will be exhibited in a new temporary display gallery at the V&A from 8 July until 13 September 2009.

The output of the nine artists and designers is very varied, reflecting the richness and diversity of the Islamic traditions that inspired them. The pieces exhibited at the V&A will range from jewellery to photomontage to turned wood and screen prints. The works will show how dynamic Islamic tradition can be, and how complex and eloquent the art and design inspired by this tradition has become.

The Jameel Prize is sponsored by Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel, who conceived the idea after providing the financial support for the renovation of the V&A's Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art, which opened in July 2006.

Award-winning architect Zaha Hadid is Patron of the Jameel Prize. The panel of judges is chaired by Mark Jones, Director of the V&A.

The judges are:

Jananne Al-Ani, artist

Khaled Azzam, CEO, The Prince's School of Traditional Arts, London

Ali Yussef Khadra, editor-in-chief, Canvas Magazine, Dubai

Charles Merewether, art historian and curator

Venetia Porter, curator, Middle Eastern Department, British Museum

Parviz Tanavoli, sculptor

Zaha Hadid says: *"I am delighted to be Patron of the Jameel Prize and support its aims to explore the cultural dialogue between Islamic art and contemporary practice. I have always been fascinated by the logic of mathematics within the Islamic art traditions. The fragmentation and abstraction evident in my architecture relates to the Islamic arts and sciences in terms of its algebra and geometry. I hope the Jameel Prize will inspire a new generation of artists, designers and engineers to further this dialogue."*

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, says: *"The V&A's Jameel Gallery opened three years ago to house one of the most extensive and renowned collections of Islamic art in the world. It aims to help people appreciate one of the world's great cultures and spread a deeper understanding of Islamic art. The new Jameel Prize builds on the success of that gallery and will be part of our continuing programme of activity to develop cultural links around the world and promote cultural understanding."*

The short-listed artists and designers are:

Hamra Abbas will show a new work entitled *Please do not step 3*. The work takes the form of a floor covering composed of an intricate and delicate pattern drawn from Islamic sources. Its position in the gallery means that visitors are compelled to walk over it, despite their natural reluctance to step on a work of art. This contradiction provides the work with its power and captures the centrality, urgency and vulnerability of the role of Islam in today's world. By covering a large area, the work will convey a feeling of inescapability from the issues involved. Hamra Abbas was born in Kuwait and currently lives between Pakistan and the USA.

Reza Abedini has played an important role in the resurgence of Iranian graphic design since the 1990s. He will show a selection of five posters, including *Musulmanes, Musulmans* (2004), for an exhibition in Parc La Villette, Paris; *Badaneh* (2004), for a group exhibition of painters; and *IAF* (2007), for an Iranian art festival in Amsterdam. Abedini's work reflects the central place of calligraphy in Iranian culture, and he uses calligraphy to create strikingly expressive images. He often combines the outline of a human figure with text in a way that suggests the inner life of the figure, or the richness of the culture to which he or she belongs. Reza Abedini was born in Iran and lives and works between Iran and the Netherlands.

Afroz Amighi will show *1001 Pages* (2008). This work is from a series of shadow pieces in which Amighi uses light and shadow to create complex and engaging designs whose precise location can elude the viewer. She employs a stencil burner to hand-cut the design from a thin, porous sheet of plastic – a material used in the construction of refugee tents. The work is suspended, and an overhead projector illuminates the piece, which casts a shadow of the intricate pattern against a wall. To create her designs, Amighi is inspired by a broad range of Islamic sources, including carpet design, miniature painting and architectural decoration. Afroz Amighi was born in Iran and lives in the USA.

Sevan Biçakçı will present examples of his hand-crafted jewellery, which combine contemporary glamour with vivid evocations of the historic cityscapes and urban life of his native Istanbul. His designs, which can represent an entire Ottoman mosque on the body of a single ring, are realised in a wide range of techniques; these include metal-based painting, engraving, calligraphy, intaglio carving and micro-mosaic setting. Biçakçı will show a selection of jewelled rings including *Pleasure* (2006), *Seraglio Point* (2005); and *Bird Palace* (2005). Sevan Biçakçı was born and lives in Turkey.

Hassan Hajjaj's work is a zestful commentary on the strength of Islamic traditions in the face of external challenges. He highlights the power of image and branding, but also shows how this power can be subverted. The logos of major Western brands appear on traditional Arab items, while local brands convey a nostalgic sense of place. Hajjaj will create a site-specific installation called *Le Salon* in which everyday items, complete with their brand names, are used to create the atmosphere of a hectic Arabic market. Hassan Hajjaj was born in Morocco and lives between Morocco and the UK.

Khosrow Hassanzadeh will show two acrylic and silk screen prints on canvas, entitled *Ya Ali Madad* (2008). The title is a traditional invocation asking the Imam 'Ali for help. The repetition of Ali's name forms the background pattern to the image. Both screen prints are based on antique photographs which show two wrestlers holding hands and surrounded by figures from other walks of life. Photography was introduced to Iran soon after it was invented in the 1840s, and old photographs often show a lost world in which the figures display great dignity and humanity. The use of such images represents many aspects of Iranian culture that are being lost today. Khosrow Hassanzadeh was born and lives in Iran.

Susan Hefuna will display two works in turned wood, *10 x Ana* (2007) and *Nous* (2008). They were inspired by the *mashrabiyyahs* of Cairo, where these latticed woodwork screens cover windows and balconies in traditional houses. They provide shade and coolness, but they also allow women to look out without being seen. The *mashrabiyyah* screens often incorporate short religious texts in Arabic or Coptic, and the artist has responded by using modern inscriptions in her work. Hefuna works with the *mashrabiyyah* in a range of media, including ink drawings, photography, bronze and wood. Susan Hefuna was born in Germany and lives and works between Germany and Egypt.

Seher Shah will show a series of six drawings in graphite on paper. They are *Interior Courtyard 1* (2006), *Interior Courtyard 2* (2007), *Black Cube untitled 4* (2007), *Black Cube untitled 8* (2007), *Black Cube untitled 11* (2008) and *Black Cube untitled 14* (2008). The sources for Shah's intricate and sophisticated drawings include Islamic patterns and geometric designs, which she combines with other elements to produce dramatic imaginary landscapes. Seher Shah was born in Pakistan and lives in the USA.

Camille Zakharia's work is strongly influenced by traditional Islamic geometric designs, which he re-interprets through contemporary media. In *Markings I* and *Markings II* (2008), he uses patterns from Middle Eastern mosaic tiles and carpet making. They are photomontages from single negatives, carefully arranged to create geometric shapes which are then printed on rag paper. Zakharia will also show *Division Lines* (2004–6), an artist's book of collages created from photographs of street markings. Camille Zakharia was born in Lebanon and lives in Bahrain.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

Please see separate sheet for biographies of the judging panel and short-listed artists and designers.

The exhibition of work by artists and designers short-listed for the Jameel Prize will be on show at the V&A from 8 July to 13 September 2009. **ADMISSION FREE**

The V&A has specialised in collecting Islamic art since the 1850s, and was the first institution in the world to collect Islamic art in a systematic fashion. In the late 1800s the V&A was very interested in contemporary practice in the Middle East particularly through the work of Robert Murdoch Smith in Iran. The V&A wanted to revive that interest and does so through the Jameel Prize. The Jameel Prize is also part of the V&A's ongoing programme of activity to develop cultural links around the world and promote cultural understanding.

About the Jameel Prize

Leading curators, designers, artists and cultural figures from across the world were invited to nominate applicants to the Jameel Prize. Over 100 nominations were received from which a short-list of nine artists and designers was drawn up by the judging panel.

For further PRESS information please contact Henrietta Sitwell in the V&A press office on 0207 942 2500/2502 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk (Not for publication)