

MALICHEH AFNAN

(1935 - 2016)

TRACING MEMORIES

ART DUBAI MODERN 2016



Untitled, 1969
(Detail)
Collage on rice paper
38.5 x 54 cm

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MALIHEH AFNAN

By Lutz Becker, 2009

‘Always in movement - that is how the philosophers saw the essential being of the soul - so I have tried to tear out just a few scraps of that beauty which makes up the miracles of the Cosmos and which is in the multi-facetedness of life.’

Mark Tobey, 1964

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, Chronos (χρόνος) and Kairos (καιρός). While Chronos refers to the measured passage of time, Kairos describes the quality of time, which includes also the awareness of the inspirational stillness between times. Kairos is also seen as the time of the Gods, a time given to meditation, of waiting for the ‘right moment’ that precedes creative action. The emotional, even physical awareness of time and memory gives subject and substance to the work of the artist Maliheh Afnan. In the contemplations that precede her creative decisions, and guide her working processes, she finds timelessness.

Afnan writes her paintings. Successions of pre-representational signs, like traces of lost languages, appear in single formations and clusters or in linear configurations of script seemingly written by time itself. Instinctively found structures emerge as the artist builds and weaves, writes her images. Composed in fluent rhythms, Afnan's images seem to illuminate unspoken poems. The rhythmic order of signs, gestures, repetitive movements of micro-calligraphic marks are of a high degree of expressiveness. This expression, which is in fact based on an informal abstractness, refuses to refer to a subject, but is endowed with the richness of a life's experience. The power and symbolic meaning of these inscriptions is realised in the contained charge and flow of writing.

Besides scriptural elements there emerge in her paintings fragments of archaic architecture, accumulations of textures and dark surfaces build up by layers of paint like palimpsests. Hidden meanings and reverberations enrich the surfaces. Her inspiration flows from her Middle Eastern roots and her knowledge of structures found in nature and the Earth's erosion. Written into the dust of time, her paintings seem to contain both, past and present.

When she lived in Paris she also made a number of haunting drawings and small paintings of faces in a series she calls *personnages*. They are not portraits but show imaginary features which seem to summarise the melancholy of displacement. Faces like landscapes marred by tragic histories. 'There is a lot of melancholia in me, because in a way I am a displaced person. Place is very important for me, and the memory of a place,' she explains.

Maliheh Afnan was born of Persian parents in Haifa, Palestine. War overshadowed her life and has certainly influenced her outlook. During the Second World War she lived through the air raids on Haifa which was under the British mandate. There were more deprivations, more air raids and the sound of sirens during the night. Later came the Arab-Israeli wars and later still the many wars in Lebanon. War and political restlessness have been in the Middle East for over half century; they have been a constant part of the artist's reality.

Afnan was raised and educated in Beirut, Lebanon. She originally studied Sociology and Psychology but when she moved with her husband to Washington she decided to follow



Lost City, 1987
Mixed media on paper
40 x 46 cm

her calling to study art. In 1957 she joined the Corcoran School of Art which is affiliated with the George Washington University. She took courses in painting, sculpture, print making as well as in the history of art. One of her teachers was the principal of the school, the painter Richard Lahey, who himself had studied in Europe. He was much influenced by Cezanne, and his pre-occupation with the latter's pictorial and structural innovations informed his teaching method. She remembers: 'Lahey gave us a lot of freedom; we used to work every day in the studio and twice a week he would come into the class to give us his criticism. And when he did his rounds, all the students would follow him and listen to the observations he had on all of the student's works. Very early on he looked at me and said, "You have found something of your own, stay with it."'

Afnan had begun to include in her paintings and drawings scriptural elements, memories of her Persian home of her childhood, where she had been surrounded by ornaments, manuscripts and the engraved calligraphy in the household copperware. Calligraphy had always been, and would be, part of her life. Already in her childhood she had collected interesting samples of writing, such as the electricity bills in Haifa

which were printed in the scripts of three languages: English, Hebrew and Arabic. It was this fascination with the various forms of scripts that surfaced in her student work. She rejected Cezanne's disciplined tectonics promoted by her master and experimented with their dissolution into movement and freely growing forms.

She came to recognise affinities with the art of Paul Klee and Henri Matisse and the echoes in their work of the art traditions of the Mediterranean world and North Africa. It was at the Philips Collection in Washington where she first encountered the work of Mark Tobey, whose art became a source of encouragement to her. Just as Jackson Pollock had revolutionised art through the invention of drip painting, Mark Tobey had introduced and legitimised the use of abstract calligraphy and script pattern in 20th-century art.

With this inspirational capital at heart she returned to the Middle East in 1963, to Kuwait and Lebanon, standing now on her own as an artist in a world that, at the time, did not have a serious contemporary art scene. This 'time in the wilderness' as she called it, ended in 1971 when she had her first one-woman show since her students days at the Galerie Claire Brambach

in Basel under the mentorship of Mark Tobey. In 1974 she finally moved to Paris where she lived, worked and exhibited for the next twenty years. Her first exhibition in Paris was organised by Michel Tapié at Galerie Cyrus. In 1997 she moved to London.

Advancing her art Maliheh Afnan always retained her deep attachment to her Middle- Eastern origins. But her work transcends its origins: it is as much connected to the Orient as much as to modernist developments in the West. 'My material is the past that may be true to most of us,' she says. There is a collective subconscious; some may call it genetic memory. It's not just my own memory but also the memory of my family and ancestors. In a way I do feel connected to all that. I unconsciously but continually refer to scripts, places, faces from the past, both real and imagined. If all of one's life is registered in the recesses of the unconscious, than one's work might simply be an unravelling, filtered and transformed through time and the need to give it form.'

Her chosen media are works on paper, surfaces worked in ink and water-soluble pigments like tempera and gouache, also oil pastels. This decision, based on her need to create the essential

image within an intimate scale determined restraint and an economy of means. This was at the beginning a clear artistic decision opposing the trend towards large scale canvasses produced by some of her contemporaries. 'I love paper, I have an affinity with paper, she explains. In fact any kind of paper has latent possibilities. Rice paper, for instance, reacts in a particular way; when I write on it with a very fine nib the ink bleeds a little bit. I use fine brushes; sometimes I use a pen, or a pencil which leave their distinct marks on paper. Sometimes I just want to work on a plain piece of paper with a very fine nib and just do some *écriture*, with maybe a few blotches of colour, and that's it. Occasionally I take a piece of paper of a rather heavy kind, and scratch different designs and lines into the back of it. Turning the sheet over I rub graphite or pigment into it, which gives it a relief effect.'

The selection of certain paper qualities is decisive for each of her works; it influences the fluency of composition, strength of line, transparency, lightness or solidity of colour. The character of paper is chosen to utilise texture and to support the materiality of a particular pigment. Held mostly in a monochrome of subtle browns, burnt umber, yellow ochre, the paintings are colour-fields



Untitled, 1969
(Above, and detail, left)
Collage on rice paper
38.5 x 54 cm

as well as fields of reading, strangely reminiscent of ancient scripts on crumbling papyrus or glyphs on shards of terracotta.

‘Calligraphy has been my main source. But I have always loved ruins, archaeological sites,’ Afnan says. ‘In our part of the world we have had the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and many others. I find aspects of my work look quite archaic, almost archaeological. This is not intentional but it comes from my love of these places. Texture in my work is about the passage of time.’ Afnan lays out her calligraphy or drawing onto fields of overlaid washes or she rubs dry pigment into the paper, layer after layer; procedures she often combines. Even brighter colours, like orange, blue or green are subdued by layers of such patination. Colour densities define atmospheres. Differing tonalities describe timeless spaces filled with silence.

As in the works of Klee and Tobey line has predominance in Afnan’s work, it functions most effectively within a monochrome setting. She develops surface tension through accumulations of lines and textures. A vocabulary of straight lines, zig-zags, curves and loops in multiplication create structures of varied compression and expression.

Starting with sharp or liquid up and down strokes, the amplitudes of writing, clear vertical and horizontal lines, dots and scratches, quivers and vibrations - the physical ‘performance’ and variety of graphic gestures is both content and form. ‘Script is abstract in its essence. I don’t turn it into abstraction, it is abstract. I was never interested in reflecting or interpreting the literal meaning of a text, whether it was in Persian, Arabic or English script. For me script is the source of line, expression and rhythm. I follow the line to where it takes me.’ Beyond the expressiveness of mark-making each gesture has its specific function within the larger context, contributing to the sum of elements that make the work complete. Individual brush strokes or pen marks make up a grammar for which the total equilibrium of line, tone, structure and configuration is the syntax.

Afnan’s awareness of the cultural inconsistencies in the modern world has sharpened her sense for the dynamics between tradition, subjectivity and originality. The polarities present in Oriental art like spirit and matter, divine and human, personal and impersonal, man and nature, expansion and contraction, improvisation and premeditation remain the tensions constantly active in her work. ‘When I look at my work, I do not quite know

how it has come to be. I never plan my work, I never know beforehand what’s going to come out, it leads me. I enter a dialogue with the work in front of me, it is an inner dialogue, in which I find out where it will take me. I am the editor, I have to find the balance. - Equilibrium is as necessary in painting as it is in life.’

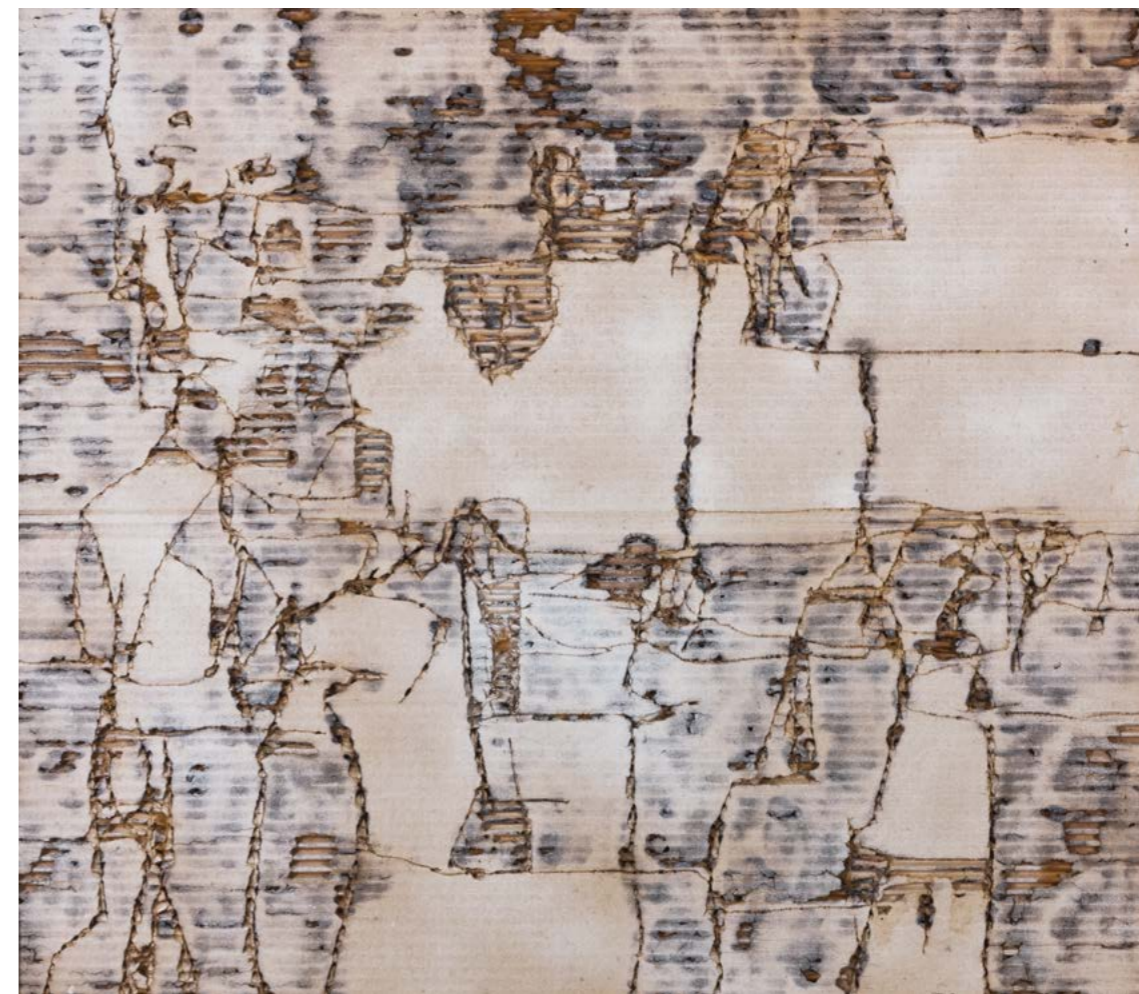
Afnan’s attachment to a humanist philosophy motivates and supports her search for harmony, for the reconciliation of contradictions, and the striving towards universal truth through art. Always of distinct originality and character each of her works represents a unique component within a life-long artistic continuity. It is the same hand, the same tension of the wrist, which drives and directs the brush or pen, apportions the amounts of paint or ink, organises fields of textures and energies. The artist balances both active and passive qualities: there is the active ductus of the brush or the pen, which measures the drive of each sign or rhythmical sequence, while in her dialogue with the work at hand she experiences a passive and grateful acceptance of that which cannot be willed.

Maliheh Afnan has faith in time, her time. She is one of those contemplative artists who are totally

aware of that ‘right moment’, which she would call ‘the moment of grace’.

TRACING MEMORIES

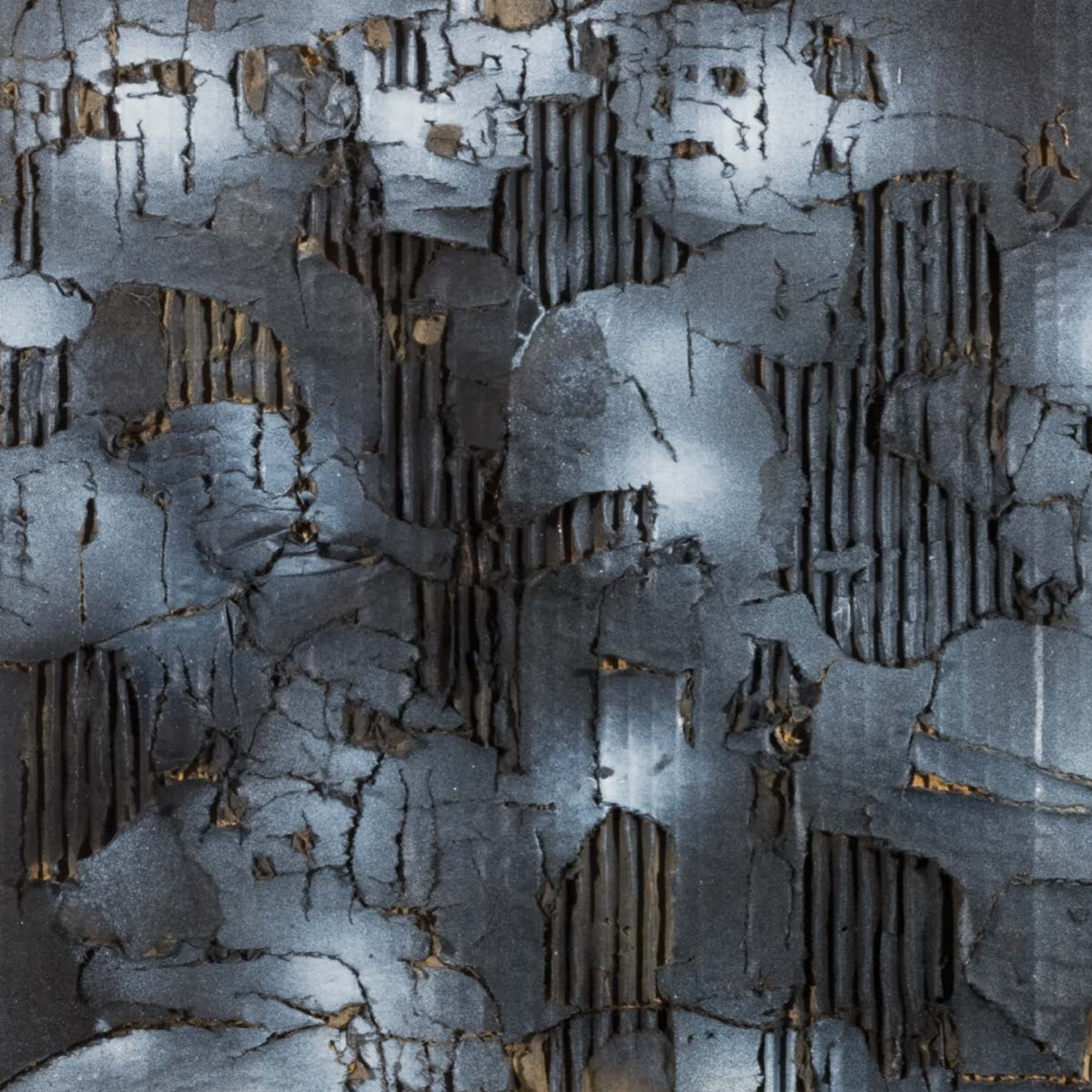
“My work is rooted in memory -
both my own and a more distant,
perhaps collective one.”



Silent Witness, 1979
(Above, and detail, left)
Mixed media on torched
corrugated cardboard
61 x 71 cm

Omen, 1978
Mixed media and collage on
torched corrugated cardboard
51 x 76 cm





Wartorn, 1979
(Above, and detail, left)
Mixed media on torched
corrugated cardboard
56 x 66 cm

MEETING MARK TOBEY

By Maliheh Afnan

From 1956 to 1963, my husband and I lived in Washington DC where he was working for the IMF. Soon after, I enrolled at the Corcoran School of Art, taking courses in painting, sculpture, printmaking and studies from the nude. I also took courses in art history at The George Washington University.

Most of my fellow students at the Corcoran were American - I was the only one from the Middle East, and that soon began to show in my work. Sometimes I would add calligraphic forms and linear designs to the background of my subject matter. Increasingly, I would incorporate scripts, both English and Arabic. One day, my teacher Richard Leahy asked me if I liked the work of Mark Tobey. 'Who is Mark Tobey?' I replied. In the Middle East, I hadn't had access to galleries or museums showing contemporary or any kind of original work by Western artists.

Leahy suggested I visit the Phillips Collection, which I did. It was a revelation. Here was an American artist, Mark Tobey, who in 1923 had been introduced to Chinese brushwork by a Chinese student at the University of Washington in Seattle. Later he spent time in Japan, where he studied Sumi ink painting with a master calligrapher. He also studied calligraphy in a Zen monastery, initiating a style later known as 'white writing'. I felt an affinity with his work. Years later, whenever I had an exhibition, there was often the mention, 'reminiscent of Mark Tobey'.

After I graduated with an MA in Fine Arts, we returned to the Middle East. First to Kuwait, and shortly after to Beirut, where I had a few exhibitions. I was working, but felt very isolated. This was my 'time in the wilderness', as far as the art scene was concerned. I needed some serious feedback. In my frustration, I decided one day

in 1971 to call Mark Tobey in Basel, where he was living. I got his number from the telephone exchange, plucked up my courage and dialed. A man's voice answered, and I meekly asked to speak to Mr Tobey. 'Speaking,' came the reply. I blurted out, 'I'm a Persian painter living in Beirut and would like to come and see you.' 'Where did you say you're calling from?' he asked, and when I repeated Beirut, he laughed and said, 'Actually I'm very busy right now preparing for an exhibition, but if you can, come in two months' time.' (It was his 80th-birthday exhibition at the Galerie Bayeler.) I thanked him profusely and told him I would. Needless to say I was thrilled. At last I would be meeting the man in person.

For the next two months I worked hard and prepared a collection of what I thought was my best work. When the time came, I bought myself a warm coat - it was winter - picked up my portfolio and flew to Geneva. The next day I took the train to Basel, settled in my hotel and called Mark Tobey. The appointment was for the following morning.

I arrived at his home, 69 St Alban-Vorstadt, with my portfolio under my arm and knocked on the door. A gentleman whom I later discovered

was Mr Tobey's secretary let me in and led me to a staircase. I looked up, and saw as I climbed towards him Mark Tobey's piercing blue eyes and beautiful white hair. A very handsome man indeed.

He led me to an armchair and sat opposite me. I had brought him a bag of pistachios and a Persian scarf, which he promptly put around his neck. After a brief conversation, he opened my portfolio and looked carefully at each work. He then turned to me and asked, 'What can I do for you?' I replied, 'I would like to have an exhibition in Basel.' He thought for a while and said, 'Come back tomorrow and I will take you to someone who may be able to help.' He asked me to leave my portfolio with him. He then led me to his studio and showed me what he was working on, all the time commenting on his views about the current American art scene, with its emphasis on size and money. He felt that at that time Europe was more appreciative of his work. He advised me to keep some of my best work from each period for myself - something he did not do himself, which he regretted. Unfortunately, I admit that, like him, I did not heed this advice. After a while I thanked him and left.

Next morning, I rang his bell at the appointed



Maliheh Afnan showing one of her paintings to her daughter Shereen, in their apartment in Beirut, which the artist used as her studio space. The photograph was taken in 1972, two years before Afnan moved to Paris.

time and out walked Mr Tobey and his secretary. We walked down a narrow street in single file, Mark Tobey ahead, me in the middle and his secretary behind with my portfolio. We arrived at a private home and were greeted very warmly by a Swiss lady named Claire Brambach. She looked thrilled to be visited by Mr Tobey. He introduced me to her as we sat in her living room with Brambach doing most of the talking. Finally, looking at Mrs Brambach, he said, 'She is a good artist, give her an exhibition.' He then got up saying, 'I have to go now, I have an interview with the press.'

I stayed on while Mrs Brambach looked at my work. She then took me to see her gallery, which was nearby, a lovely place in the old section of Basel. I realised I needed more work to cover her walls. She gave me a date several months away. I thanked her and left very elated at the prospect of my first one-woman show in Europe.

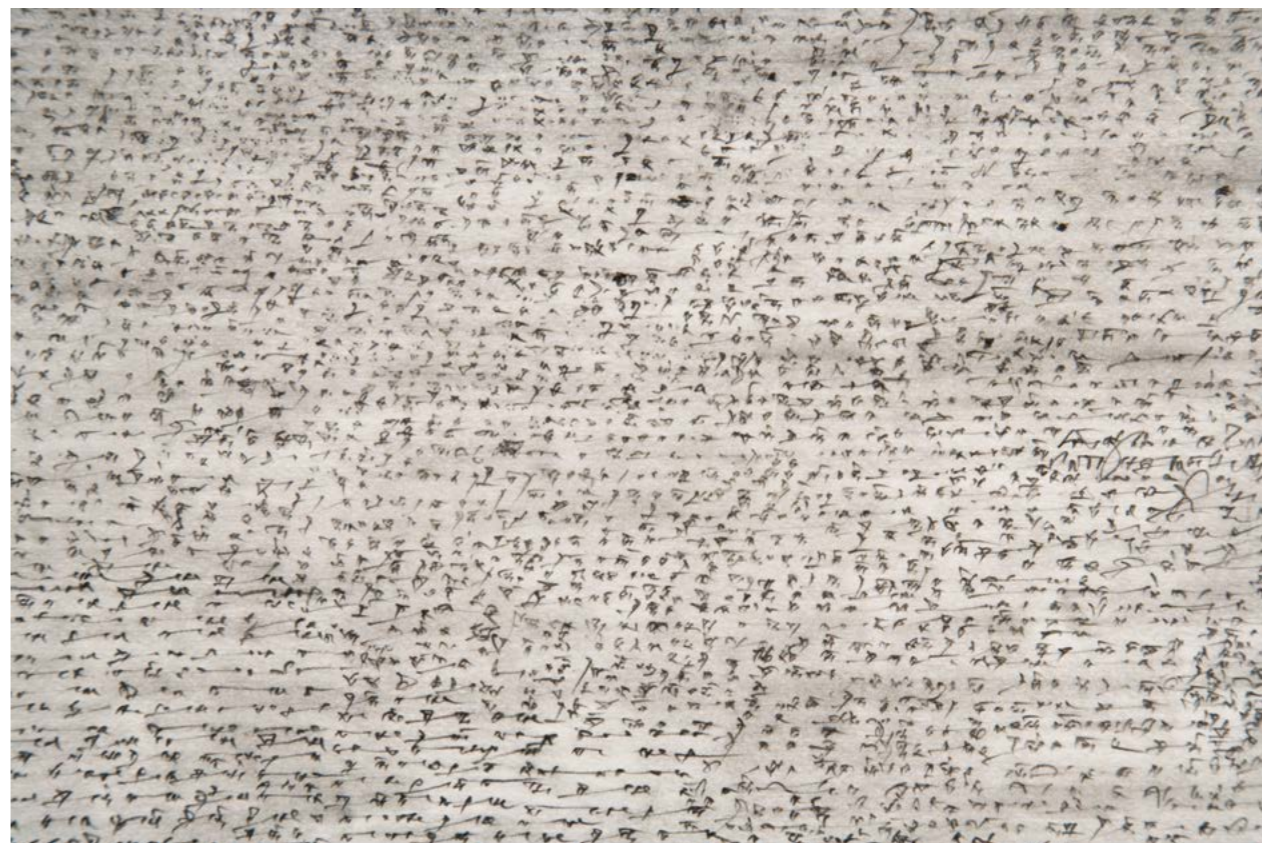
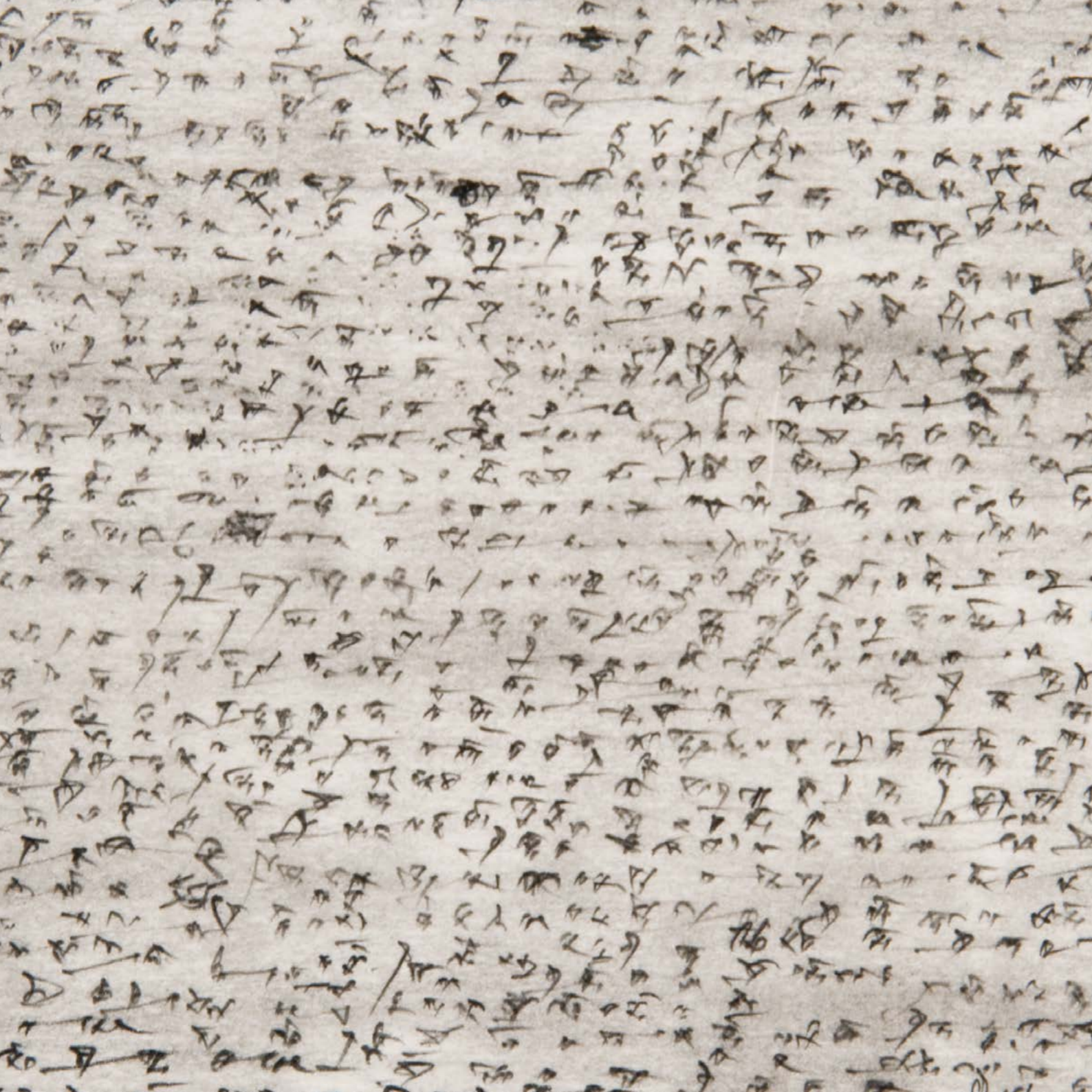
Back at my hotel, I called Mark Tobey and invited him to tea the next day on the terrace of my hotel overlooking the Rhine. It was a bright sunny day. He spoke and I listened. He was not only a wonderful artist whom I admired immensely, but also gracious, interesting and full of humour.

The next day I left for Beirut, worked hard, and in May was back in Basel for the opening of the show. I met interesting people, collectors and artists, sold some works and even had a review in the local press. Mark Tobey came to my exhibition, but not on the opening night. He left me a card at the gallery, which I treasure to this very day.

Three years later I left Beirut for Paris. The art critic and director of Galerie Cyrus, Michel Tapié, had invited me to have an exhibition there. I planned to spend one year in Paris, I stayed for twenty-three.

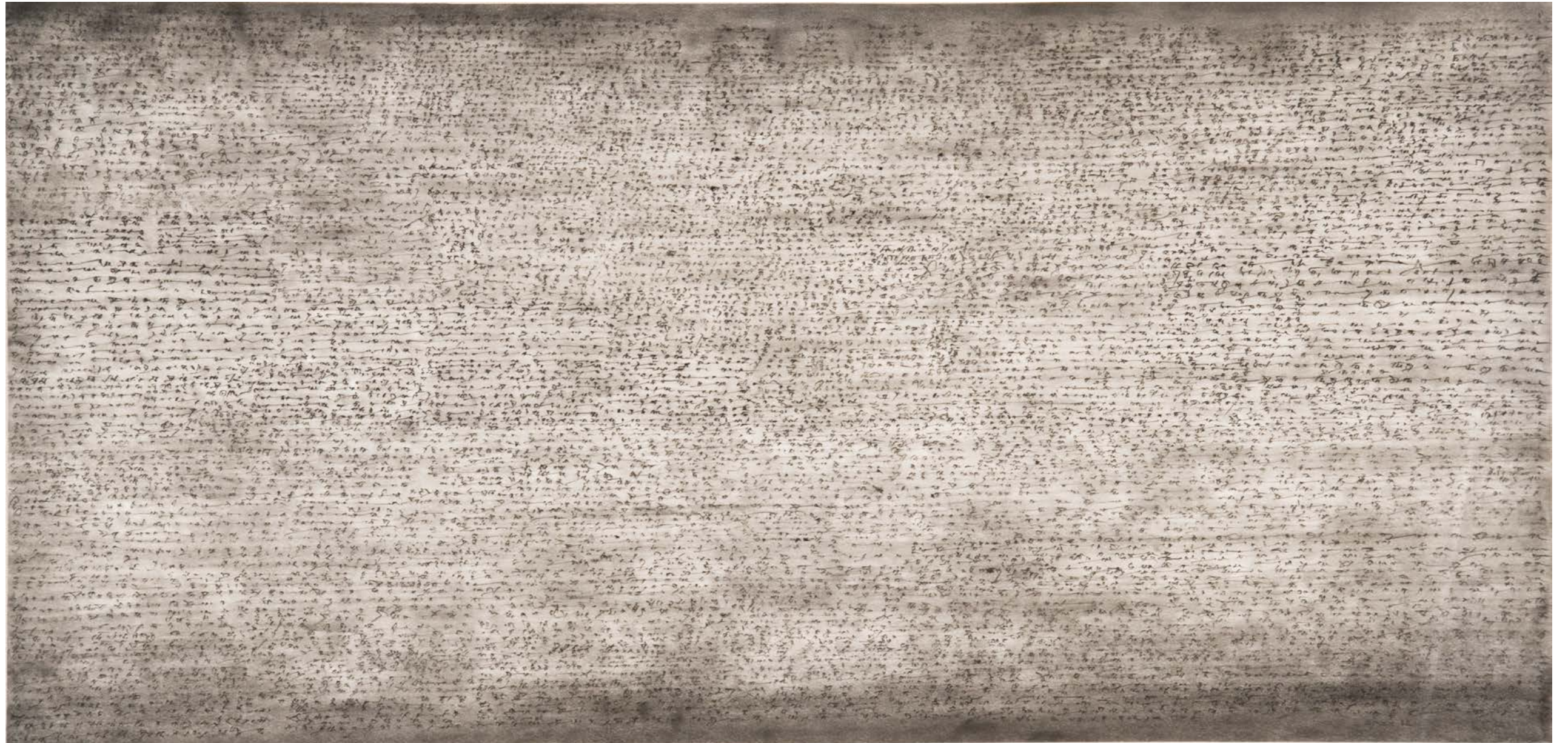
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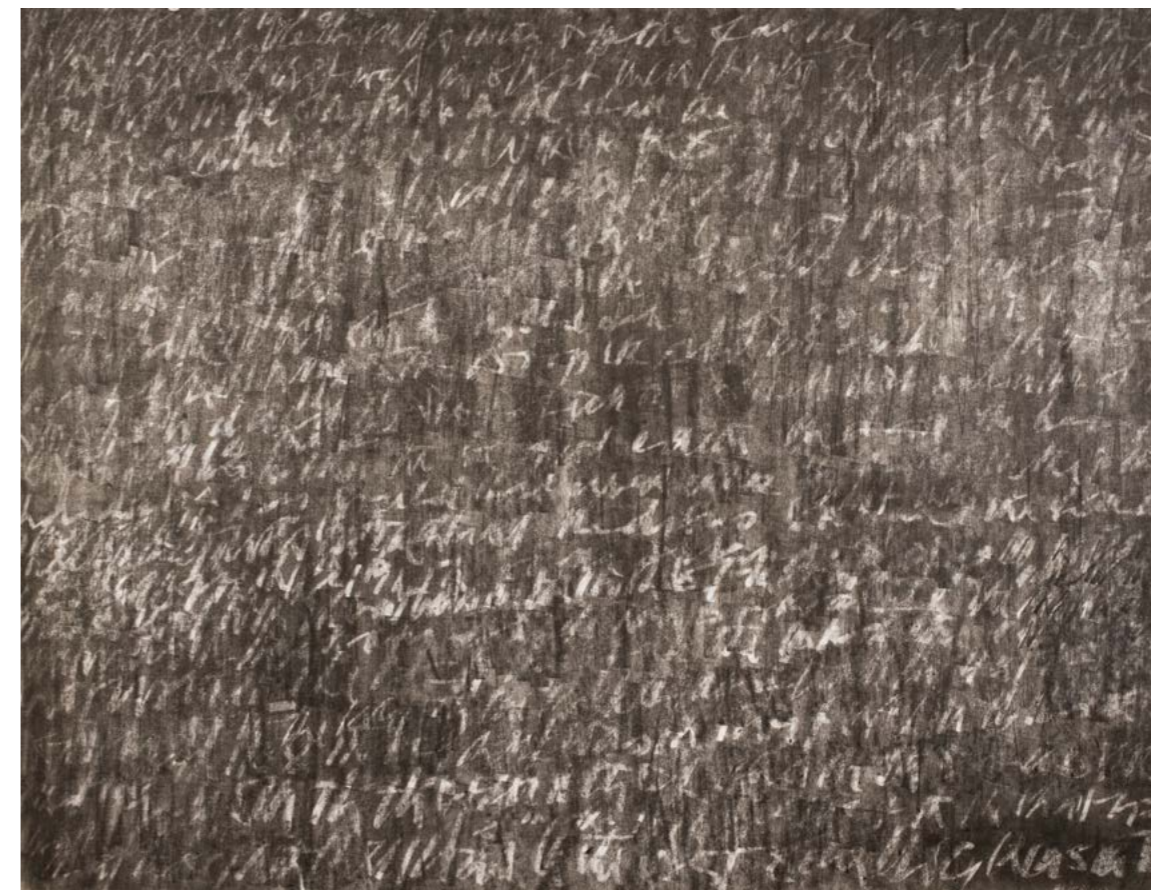
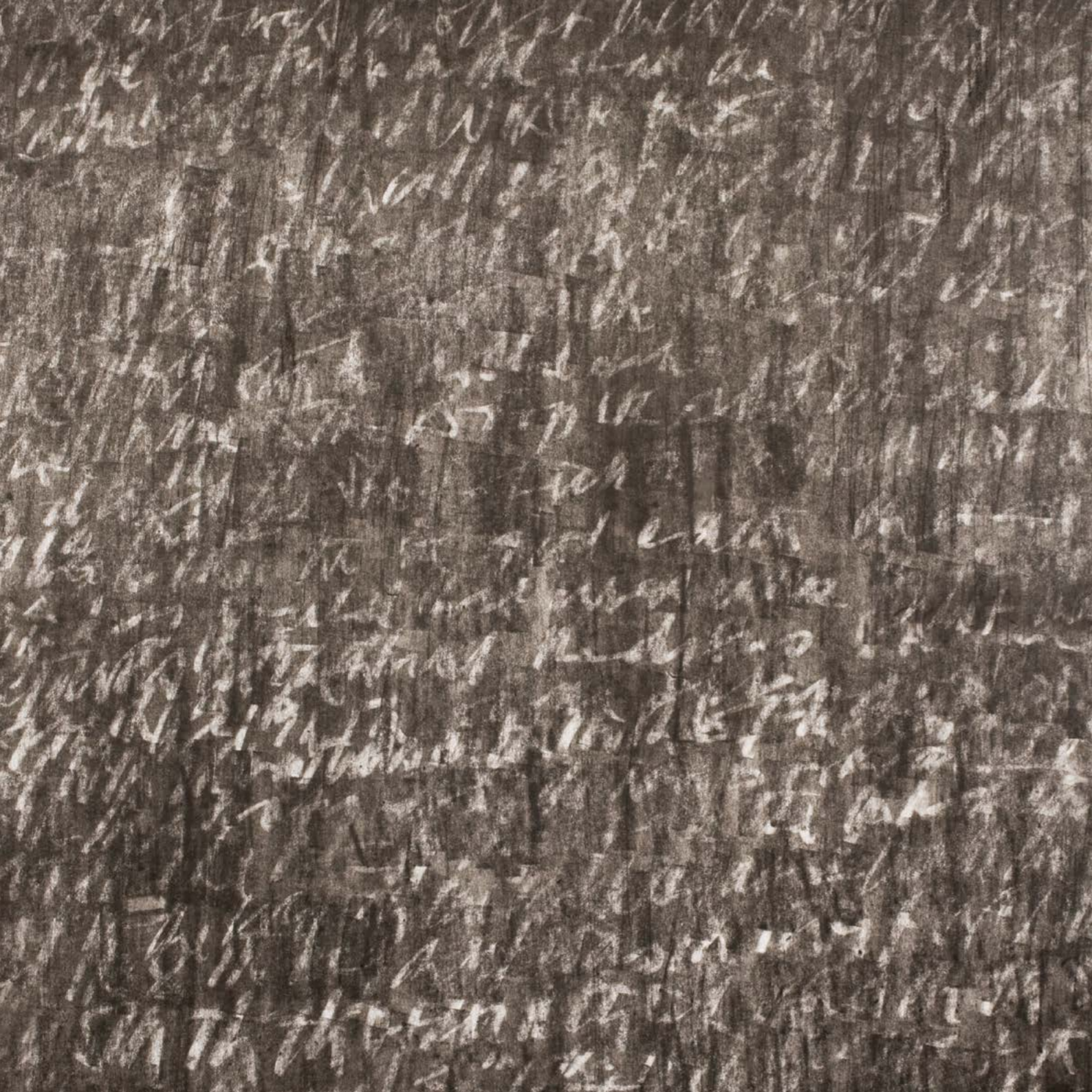
“I have always been fascinated by all kinds of scripts and inscriptions, the more enigmatic and unreadable the better. Most of my work is based on English and Arabic scripts, sometimes even invented ones, and always devoid of literal meaning.”



Écriture I, 1982
(Above, and detail, left)
Pencil on paper
50 x 64 cm

Écriture II, 1982
Pencil on paper
31 x 64 cm





Blackboard, 1987
(Above, and detail, left)
Graphite on paper
50 x 65 cm

MALIHEH AFNAN IN AN INTERVIEW WITH HANS ULRICH OBRIST

London, April 2010

Obrist: You were born in Palestine.

Afnan: I was born in Palestine, of Persian parents. There was a small Persian community at the time. My family left, because the situation became very difficult.

Obrist: Were you already interested in art as a child when you were in Palestine?

Afnan: Yes, but my art background was not so much painting as it was manuscripts, calligraphies, carpets and these things. As a child, I was interested in writing. I couldn't write, but I used to pretend that I could write and I would fill pages with writing. I had a young uncle who was an artist, and his studio fascinated me. But I started on my own, because there wasn't much art education at school, and when I went to university in Lebanon, there was no Art major at

the American University of Beirut at the time, so I majored in Psychology and Sociology.

Obrist: Your early work is from the early sixties. Is that in Lebanon?

Afnan: No, I started when I went to America as an art student. In Lebanon, there was a lot of copying of Van Gogh and other artists, but nothing to speak of. I was busy with my university studies and there was no creation whatsoever.

Obrist: And then something happened in America.

Afnan: Yes. I got the chance to go to Art school, and that's when the whole thing started for me. I enrolled at the Corcoran School of Art and did an MA in Fine Arts.

Obrist: There is one painting which you did

in 1961: "Lady with the Hat". That's still very figurative but then very soon, already in 1962, you find your language. There is an incredible transition—you go from a figurative copying process to a very structural, almost abstract, very dark sort of field. What was your epiphany?

Afnan: I did that painting when I was in Art school; the lady with the hat was a model in class. But on my own I would do other things, and that is where the idea of writing and using it in my work came back. I rather doubt there was a moment of epiphany.

Obrist: Was it a gradual process?

Afnan: There are certain things that naturally, gradually came out in my work, although not intentionally. One is the passage of time over something. There is almost a conscious effort to make something look ancient or ageing, whether it's a face or a landscape. Another point is that earthen things appeal to me; things that relate to the Earth. And, of course, always scripts, whether it is Persian script, Arabic script, or even English script. For me, script was a point of departure. The meaning was totally irrelevant, It is like an invented writing.

At one time I was very curious to see where these things came from. This was my first love, writing. And I think it will also stay with me. I love all the materials—the brush, the eraser, the sharpener; their smell, their sound, their feel.

Obrist: Is your writing a form of automatic writing?

Afnan: Almost. Sometimes there is a word that comes out. It's inevitable. But it is totally meaningless; it is the form of the words rather than the proper lettering of one letter after another to make a meaning.

There is one painting called "My Story", of 2007, which is *lisible*. It started out as my tombstone. And it begins with the date of my birth. The writings on it are all highlights of my life; addresses where I have lived, certain dates that are important, people that have been important in my life.

Obrist: That's like a map of your life, or a compressed biography.

Afnan: Yes, it is a map of my life, although I am very reticent about putting myself into my

work, even though it is my work. I've tried, unconsciously, to get out of my work.

Obrist: Mapping plays an important role in your work. Do you think that your paintings are maps?

Afnan: It could be. Even when I do a *personnage*, I feel it is the map of a life on the face. And the older the face, the more interesting it is. There is nothing more uninteresting than a young face. It's beautiful, but uninteresting.

Obrist: Baghdad-born architect Zaha Hadid talks a lot about calligraphy and the inspiration of calligraphy. It's interesting that architecture, visual art and literature in the Arab world seem to be very connected to drawing and calligraphy.

Afnan: Absolutely. Our cultural heritage in the Middle East is basically calligraphy in all its forms, whether it is on vellum paper, on copper, on silver; and of course, architecture. We don't have a history of painting as such. For us, painting is a foreign thing.

Obrist: If one looks at your work, it's painting,

but it's also writing.

Afnan: I haven't said this, but some people have remarked it. In a sense, I write my paintings, whether it is just writing, a *paysage*, or even a *personnage*. They are linear in quality and very much like writing. Even the materials that I use are pencil, pen and ink. Very often I add colour.

Obrist: So, in a sense, your work is in the tradition of calligraphy.

Afnan: Yes, but I am not a calligrapher. If you see the dictionary, it says that calligraphy is "decorative writing." Traditionally, calligraphy was meant to enhance the Qur'an; done beautifully and artistically, yet the meaning is very important. Even though it's highly stylized, the net end of calligraphy has to be *lisible*, whether it's poetry or the Qur'an, Persian or Arabic calligraphy. I don't think that mine is "decorative writing". I use writing as a point of departure, a source of line. The meaning has absolutely no significance in my work.

Obrist: There is a very strong connection to poetry, both in the Arab world and in Iran. Is there

any Arabic or Iranian poetry you are inspired by?

Afnan: Less so. I was not raised in Iran and my reading material is neither Arabic nor Persian, even though I can read them. Of course, when you are raised in Iran, poetry is a part of your life. Everybody can recite poetry in Iran, especially Hafiz, Saadi and Khayyam. I don't have this background. I enjoy it, but it isn't really a part of my upbringing. I read English poetry, whether it's American or British poets. For example, I read the poetry of Emily Dickinson at one time, and I liked it very much. There is a line which is in one of my paintings, "Death is the only secret", or some such thing.

Obrist: Have you ever collaborated with poets or done books with them?

Afnan: No, I haven't. I am a very solitary person by nature, and I can only work alone, knowing I'm not going to see anybody that day, in my studio, and then I go into myself. It's very difficult to go into yourself when there's somebody else.

Obrist: Is it a situation of trance in which you work?

Afnan: No, it's just a certain calm, a sort of inward journey, I would say.

When I work, I don't know beforehand what I'm going to do. I start the work, and then it tells me what to do. It builds itself, and at some point, I edit. I am more of an editor than a creator, it feels like there is an energy that comes through me, and I feel very connected to a very ancient past. I literally feel it.

Obrist: Have you ever worked on canvas?

Afnan: I have, but I love paper, all kinds of paper. Paper for me is a wonderful thing, whether it's rice paper, plain consol paper or cardboard. It has many possibilities.

Obrist: Your paintings are very multilayer. Do you work on them for a long time?

Afnan: Yes, over and over. I rub the pigment into the paper with my finger..., and it's layer upon layer. There was a period when I did works that are like a maze. There is also *écriture*, but I took the paper I scratched the *écriture*, then turned the paper upside down, and then rubbed dry pigment

over it with my hands. I love working with my hands. And my colours are earthen colours but sun-kissed. During the civil war in Lebanon, I also did a lot of burning down with a blow torch in several works. Unfortunately, there is great beauty in destruction.

Obrist: You did a lot of structural work in the beginning. When did the *personnages* start?

Afnan: I believe that faces started when I was in Paris. I don't know what triggered it. I used to do little caricatures, ink on paper, quick caricatures. And then, I developed them into paintings. There are no models; it's just faces from memory. I noticed they are all men. I have only one woman. And they all have lives of suffering. They are not happy people. A lot has happened to them; there is displacement, there is suffering.

Obrist: It is interesting that these characters assume a very important place in your apartment.

Afnan: Yes, I have kept a few things from different periods for myself. It's almost like I have taken different bits and pieces from my roles, things that matter to me, and I have put them all together.

And I live with them.

Obrist: It's like a retrospective of your work. Do you also collect old books?

Afnan: It's interesting; my uncle, who was an artist, later on in life became a collector of manuscripts. When he died, he left me his collection in his will. I donated part of the collection to the British Museum in his name, and I kept some of the manuscripts for myself.

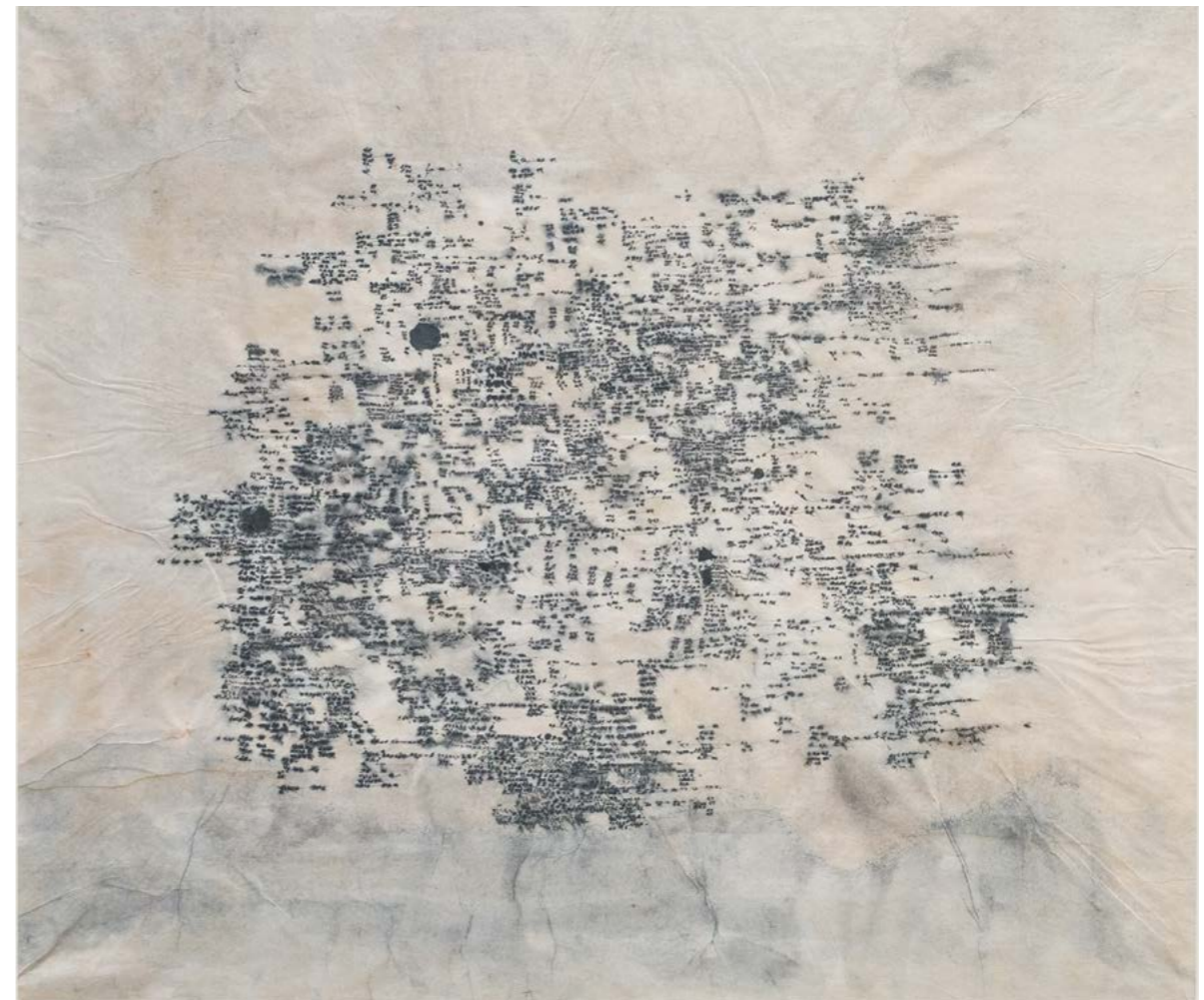
Obrist: Were they Arabic manuscripts mostly?

Afnan: Both Arabic and Persian. Different Kufi scripts, old Qur'ans, poetry. He had become quite an expert in those things.

Obrist: And your own work is a continuum of the manuscripts?

Afnan: Yes, but nothing is intentional. When I work, it is almost as though I said "Speak, Memory" –and the thing happens. But nothing is intentional or planned in advance.

Obrist: Memory is a very important aspect in



OF Numbers, 1980
Ink on rice paper
54 x 64 cm

your work.

Afnan: Absolutely. Memory is crucial in my work. Not only my memories; I feel connected to a distant memory also, it's a continuum. Memory is a strange thing, because it's filtered with time, and it changes, it's never really the same, memory is a continuously dynamic thing.

Obrist: Do you think that your landscapes are the landscapes of your childhood?

Afnan: There is a link that I had forgotten. Ten years ago, I went back to Haifa, where I was born and where I lived. Of course, all the memories came back, and I found certain shapes that recur in my work. I could see them from my home in Haifa.

Obrist: Do you have any unrealized projects?

Afnan: Yes, I have two. I use very subdued colours in my work. I don't use bright colours and if I do, usually I put another layer to darken it. I would love to have an exhibition where the lighting is direct sunshine on my work. Because it brings out every nuance of every little bit of colour I have used. Occasionally, the sunshine comes through

my window on my work and it's a totally different thing. To my mind, it is ideal. But it's an impossible project, I think.

Another idea is to create a world of my work, to have a room where my work, *écriture*, *paysage* and *personnage*, is projected on the wall, to go into that room and to feel the space completely dominated by this world. Because all these works are living in that world. It's my universe.

Obrist: It would be an immersion. The viewer would be immersed inside the work.

Afnan: It would be an immersion, yes, because even when you have an exhibition, you have paintings on a wall, but they are still limited in size, there are lots of white spaces, and so forth. I would like to create such a universe. I don't know if it's ever going to be realized, but it's nice to hope.

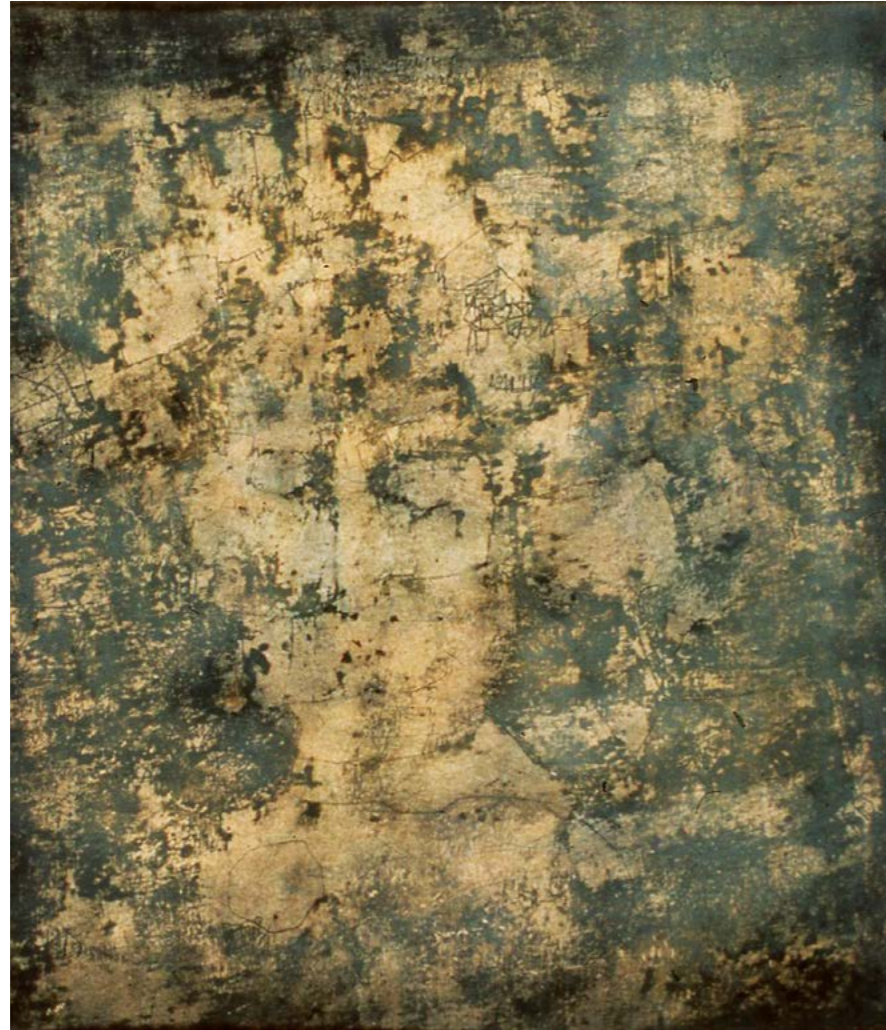
*Nabokov's book, "Speak, Memory"



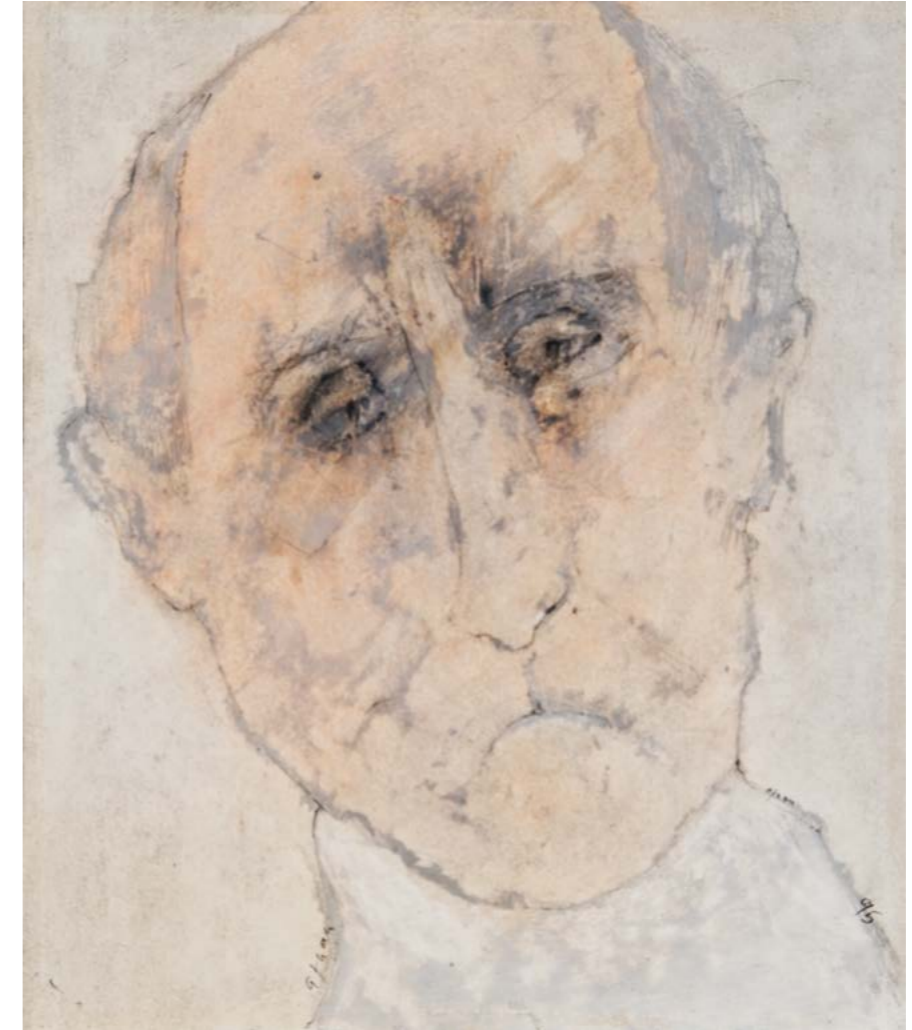
Maliheh Afnan in Athens, 1989

PERSONNAGES

“I call these images 'personnages' because they are no-one in particular. They are anonymous — figments of my imagination, based on all the faces I have seen in my life. Curiously, they are all male and almost always old. They seem to wear a map of their lives on their faces.”



SHE, 1991
Mixed media on paper
40 x 35 cm



Eminence Grise 2, 1995
Oil pastel on paper
18 x 16 cm

ARTIST C.V.

(1935-2016)

Born in Haifa, Palestine

EDUCATION

1955 BA from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon

1962 MA in Fine Arts, Corcoran School of Art, Washington DC, USA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Speak Memory*, Rose Issa Projects, London, UK

2010 *Traces, Faces, Places*, Rose Issa Projects, London, UK

2006 *Selected Works*, England and Co, London, UK

2000 *Maliheh Afnan: Retrospective*, England and Co, London, UK

1996 Galerie Mouvances, Paris, France

1994 Théâtre de Beyrouth, Beirut, Lebanon

1994 Galerie 10 Bonaparte, Paris, France

1993 Leighton House Museum, London, UK

1987 Galerie Arcadia, Paris, France

1982 A&A Turner Galerie, Paris, France

1980 Galerie Brigitte Schehadé, Paris, France

1978 Galerie Principe-Anne Merlet,

Paris, France

1974 Presented by Michel Tapié, Galerie

Cyrus, Paris, France

1971 Presented by Mark Tobey, Galerie

Claire Brambach, Basel, Switzerland

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014 *What Remains*, Rose Issa Projects, London, UK

2014 *Asemic*, Cultuurcentrum Brugge, Belgium

2013 *The Blue Route: Journeys and Beauty from the Mediterranean to China*, Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, Belgium

2013 *Hope Map*, Cuulturcentrum, Bruges, Belgium

2012 *Persian for Beginners*, Rose Issa Projects, London, UK

2011 *The Art of Writing*, Kurhaus

Kolonnade, Wiesbaden, Germany

2011 *Zendegi: Twelve Contemporary Iranian Artists* (curated by Rose Issa Projects),

Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon

2011 *Miragens*, touring exhibition at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Brasilia, Brazil

2010 *Modern Times – Responding to Chaos*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge and De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-On-Sea, UK

2009 *Taswir: Pictorial Mappings of Islam and Modernity*, Martin Gropius Bau Museum, Berlin, Germany

- 2008 *Contained Thoughts*, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK
- 2008 *Re-Orientations: Contemporary Arab Representations*, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium
- 2008 *Routes*, Waterhouse & Dodd, London, UK
- 2008 *Word into Art*, DIFC, Dubai, UAE (previously at The British Museum, London, UK, 2006)
- 2008 *Occupied Space*, AM Qattan Foundation, London, UK
- 2008 *Art Contemporain Arabe*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France
- 2007 *The Dance of Pen and Ink*, The State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow and
- The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia
- 2006 *Routes*, the British Museum, London, UK
- 2001 *Iranian Contemporary Art*, Curve Gallery, Barbican Centre, London, UK
- 1997 *Salon de Réalités Nouvelles*, Espace Eiffel Branly, Paris, France
- 1997 *Traditions of Respect: Britain and Islamic Cultures*, The British Council, London, UK
- 1995 *Salon du Dessin et de la Peinture à l'Eau*, Espace Eiffel Branly, Paris
- 1994 *Salon d'Automne*, Thorigny-Sur-Marne, France
- 1992 *Exposition Inaugurale*, Galerie du

- Chêne – Donald Vallotton, Lausanne, France
- 1991 *Collecting 20th-Century Art*, The British Museum, London
- 1988 *Painting and Sculpture at the End of the 20th Century*, European Cultural Centre of Delphi, Greece
- 1985 *Selected Artists*, Kufa Gallery, London, UK
- 1985 *Paysages*, Galerie Faris, Paris, France
- 1984 *Salon de Réalités Nouvelles*, Espace Eiffel Branly, Paris, France
- PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS**
- The Metropolitan Museum, New York, USA
- The British Museum, London, UK
- Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France
- Akkram Ojjeh Foundation, Paris, France
- BAlI Bank Collection, Paris, France

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