

visions

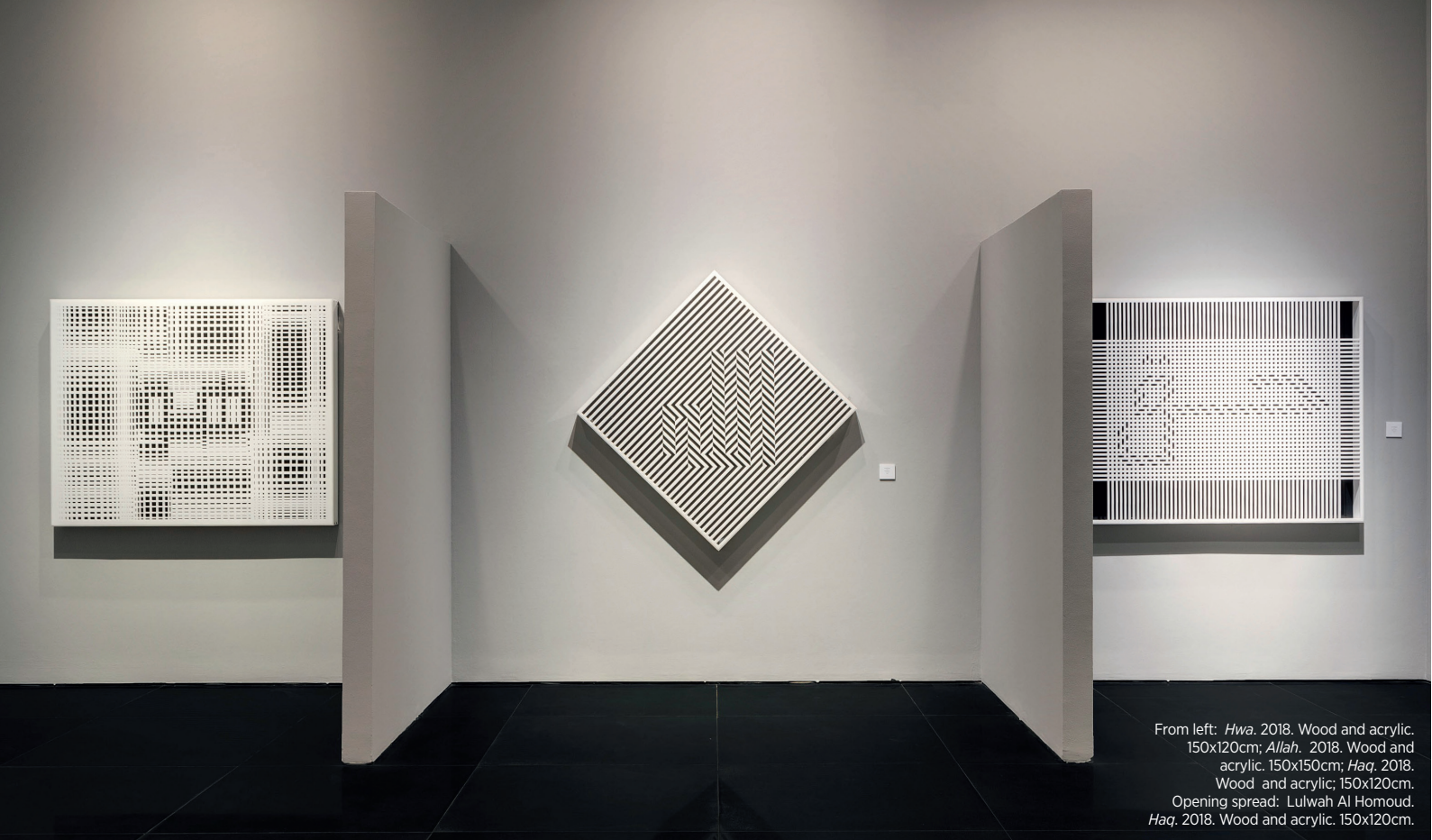
*The work of Saudi Dubai-based artist **Lulwah Al Homoud** combines geometric abstraction with influences from traditional Islamic art, writes Rebecca Anne Proctor*

meditative

Geometric patterns dance before us like performers on stage. Exquisitely patterned forms emerge and dazzle our eyes until we can't look anywhere else. This is the experience of looking at a work by Saudi Arabian artist Lulwah Al Homoud. Through her intricate work she uses

Arabic letters to create complex abstract works on paper, synthesising characteristic motifs from Islam with the rhythms found in calligraphy and geometry, transforming them into a new visual vocabulary. "I research the hidden rules of creation—not the outer appearance of things, but how they are created mathematically, from a seed to a tree or a seed to a flower," says the artist. "I think there is a different language that God tries to connect with us." Al Homoud's is a language that looks at the deeper side of things—the inner creation of the world around us. "It's a kind of meditation," she says of her work. "Islam itself offers us a universal message. It did not come just to Arabs or a certain race—it is for everyone. It is about spirituality and connecting to one God. I see Islam as a way of life and my art is about my faith."

In her recent exhibition at Dubai's Tabari Artspace titled *Beyond the Grid*, Al Homoud presented several large-scale minimalist pieces that emulate the geometric forms of Optical Art in



From left: *Hwa*. 2018. Wood and acrylic. 150x120cm; *Allah*. 2018. Wood and acrylic. 150x150cm; *Haq*. 2018. Wood and acrylic. 150x120cm. Opening spread: Lulwah Al Homoud. *Haq*. 2018. Wood and acrylic. 150x120cm.

“BY UTILISING A PURE LANGUAGE, MY ART BRINGS TOGETHER GEOMETRY, FAITH AND BEAUTY”

powerful and singular colouring. Among these are 50 silkscreens from Al Homoud’s series *99 names of God*, displayed as limited edition bound books. The works originated from the artist’s interest in written language and Arabic calligraphy and symbolise a desire to break the rules of traditional geometric design in order to create new patterns and codes. “I used to draw faces, figures and portraits but I wasn’t satisfied,” she says. “When I researched Islamic art and geometry, as well as Western artists like Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Mondrian, with time I saw how these artists too became spiritual and deep. It is about abstraction and I think language is abstract as and I wanted to abstract it more.”

Born in 1967 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Al Homoud now lives and works between Dubai and London. She studied sociology at King Saud University in Riyadh and went on to receive an MA from Central Saint Martins in London. Al Homoud then trained under renowned Pakistani calligrapher Rasheed Butt and was inspired by Egyptian Ahmed Moustafa’s system of calligraphy. She has since had exhibitions around the region and internationally, including at the Sharjah Calligraphy Museum, UAE (2015); Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2016); Sundaram Tagore Galleries in New York and Hong Kong (2011, 2012); AB Gallery in Lucerne, Switzerland (2014); and the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah (2014), as well as in France, Germany, Lebanon and Korea. In 2008, Al Homoud co-curated the exhibition *Edge of Arabia* at Brunei Gallery, London.

The influence of calligraphic masters such as

Butt and Moustafa have inspired Al Homoud to incorporate the visual interpretations of her Islamic faith into her art. Ultimately, it is about creating a spiritual art. “Your art reflects you,” she says. “If you are spiritual then you will create a spiritual art.” A quick look at her work and one will immediately become transfixed. There’s something about the movement in the precise and orderly geometric lines, their repeated patterns—whether in the form of a circle or square—that prompts one to continue looking, mesmerised by what lies in front of them.

Research forms a large part of Al Homoud’s art. She reads up on philosophy, mathematics and also art history, channelling her findings into her exquisite creations. “I was attracted to Mondrian’s lines—he liberated nature from its outer appearance and found something deeper,” she explains. But what is “deeper” is also mathematical. Her work departs from the idea of numbers and how each number can represent a letter. For example, the Vedic square, a multiplication system based on a 9x9 grid first developed in North India, has been of great influence. In her 9x9 works, the artist incorporates the system into her art but, instead of the traditional numeric use of 1-9, she uses the first nine stages of the creation of man. By then joining the repeated numbers in the grid, a series of patterns begin to emerge from which Al Homoud creates her designs. She thus moves from multiplicity to unity by using the laws of proportion practiced in traditional Arabic calligraphy.

There’s also a cultural harmony to Al Homoud’s oeuvre. In her art she employs a mixture of Islamic

and Western mathematics to deconstruct Arabic letters and create new codes to compose the *99 names of God*. The result is a series of new visuals and equally mesmerising patterns. It’s called *The Language of Existence*, and it is a “lifelong project.”

The book currently portrays 50 names of God. While we cannot read the names written in her coded script, her abstract compositions contain such an energy and spirituality that we experience the meaning of each name. The works in the series are revealed through 50 silk-screen prints on paper, limited edition bound books, as well as illuminated hand painted works mounted in light boxes. “I have been working on the series for 10 years,” says Al Homoud. “It is the continuation of my MA thesis where I wanted to bridge language with spirituality. It is about a universal idea and not religion as religion can be deeply personal and I see my work as something which connects to everyone from everywhere.” As we turn the pages we see a variety of geometric forms—squares, circles, and triangles—and each with their own symbolic meaning related to the Islamic faith. For example, the square can easily be related to the Kaaba in Mecca, which is also in a square formation.

The beauty of Al Homoud’s work is its ability to use simplified forms to create complex abstract creations that speak to all beings. “By utilising a pure language, my art brings together geometry, faith and beauty,” says the artist. “It pushes the boundaries of what we know, how we know it and how it is perceived.” Al Homoud’s is an art that aids us in our quest to finding meaning and place in the universe. ■ Tabariartspace.com

Lulwah Al Homoud
stands before her
artwork: *Hwa-Gold-
Circle*. 2018. Mixed
media on black linen.
170x170cm.