

THE CENTER IS EVERYWHERE

Alyssa Sakina Mumtaz

Tuesday, 31 May 2022

5 – 8 PM

Continues until: Wednesday 15 June 2022



KOEL

GALLERY

ARTIST STATEMENT

My artistic practice is both devotional and contemplative; it is simultaneously an offering and a way to bear witness. The artworks that emerge from this commitment are more than material gestures; they are artifacts of my interior life—venerations of the everyday miracle of making something from nothing.

Linked by the common thread of geometric abstraction, the drawings and textiles assembled in this exhibition are inspired by metaphysical spatial symbols: the prayer niche—the narrow gate—the radiating star—the center as sanctuary. Drawing these forms from within, using the simple yet sweepingly effective tools of geometry, allows me to access archetypes that are hidden just beneath the surface of consciousness.

In 2011, while living in Lahore, I became a practicing Muslim. Having spent my entire early life outside of religion, I entered Islam through an existential *tawba*: a change of heart in which I turned toward a new way of being. This transformation has reverberated through every dimension of my life, raising many complex questions that I grapple with daily. What does it mean to lead an inward-looking, contemplative life in times of global turmoil? Can contemporary art communicate the sacred? When is creativity a form of prayer? My practice attempts to respond to questions like these from a place of humility and sincerity. Consequently, my work is deeply influenced by the philosophy and aesthetics of my religious perspective. While most would agree that there is no monolithic “Islamic art,” there are principles and themes that have linked Muslim artists across time, space and culture. If we listen to the many things Muslim artists have had to say about their own practices, it becomes

clear that the tradition does not impose harsh categorical divisions between so-called “art” and “craft.” Embracing this fluidity, I have plunged headlong into making art objects that are intensely “crafted” and serve a purpose in my everyday life. Within this framework, the patchwork quilt janamaz that I stitch by hand is as conceptually charged as the paintings, drawings and collages that I make en route to it.

My visual language is informed by sacred geometry, architecture, pattern, domesticity and motherhood. I work with media including mineral and botanical pigments, leather, artisanal fabrics, handmade papers, tapestry weaving and hand quilting to create meticulously fashioned artworks that demarcate spaces of sanctuary or recall the human body engaged in ritual acts. My media experimentations frequently transform how a material is perceived—for example, drawing on cowhide with a ballpoint pen to achieve a visual quality that hovers between embroidery and tattooing.

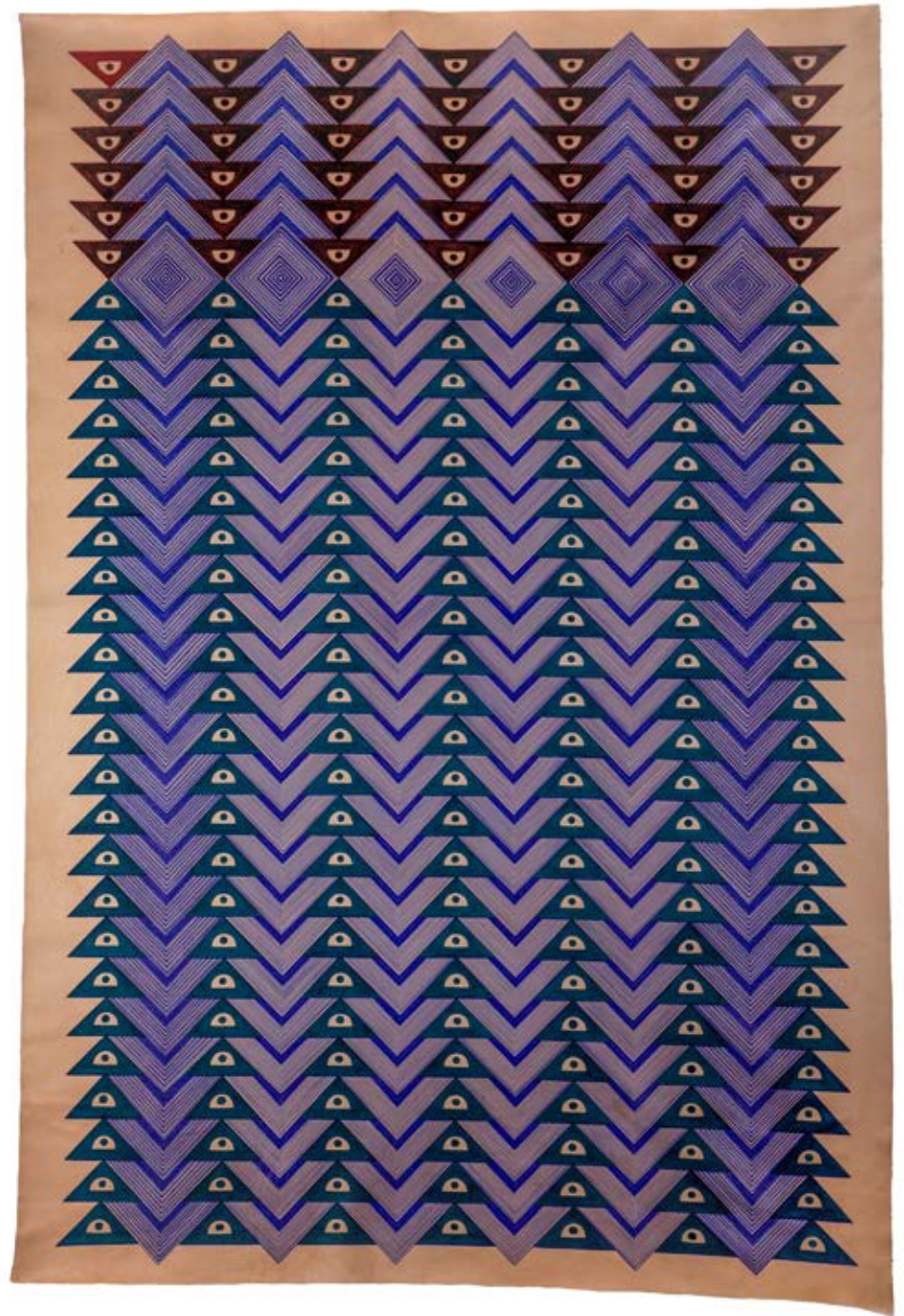
Increasingly, my practice serves as a discursive space in which the diverse experiences that shape my everyday life can be expressed. My imagery evokes Muslim material culture—embroidered robes, talismanic garments, prayer rugs and miniature paintings—as well as traditional American quilts, handloom weaving and the devotional art of American utopian communities like the Shakers. Despite the apparent eclecticism of what I do, a string of prayer beads is an apt metaphor for how I work: like beads turning in the hand, my cyclical practice loops back on itself, revisiting images and ideas that have become objects of concentration.

The All-seeing

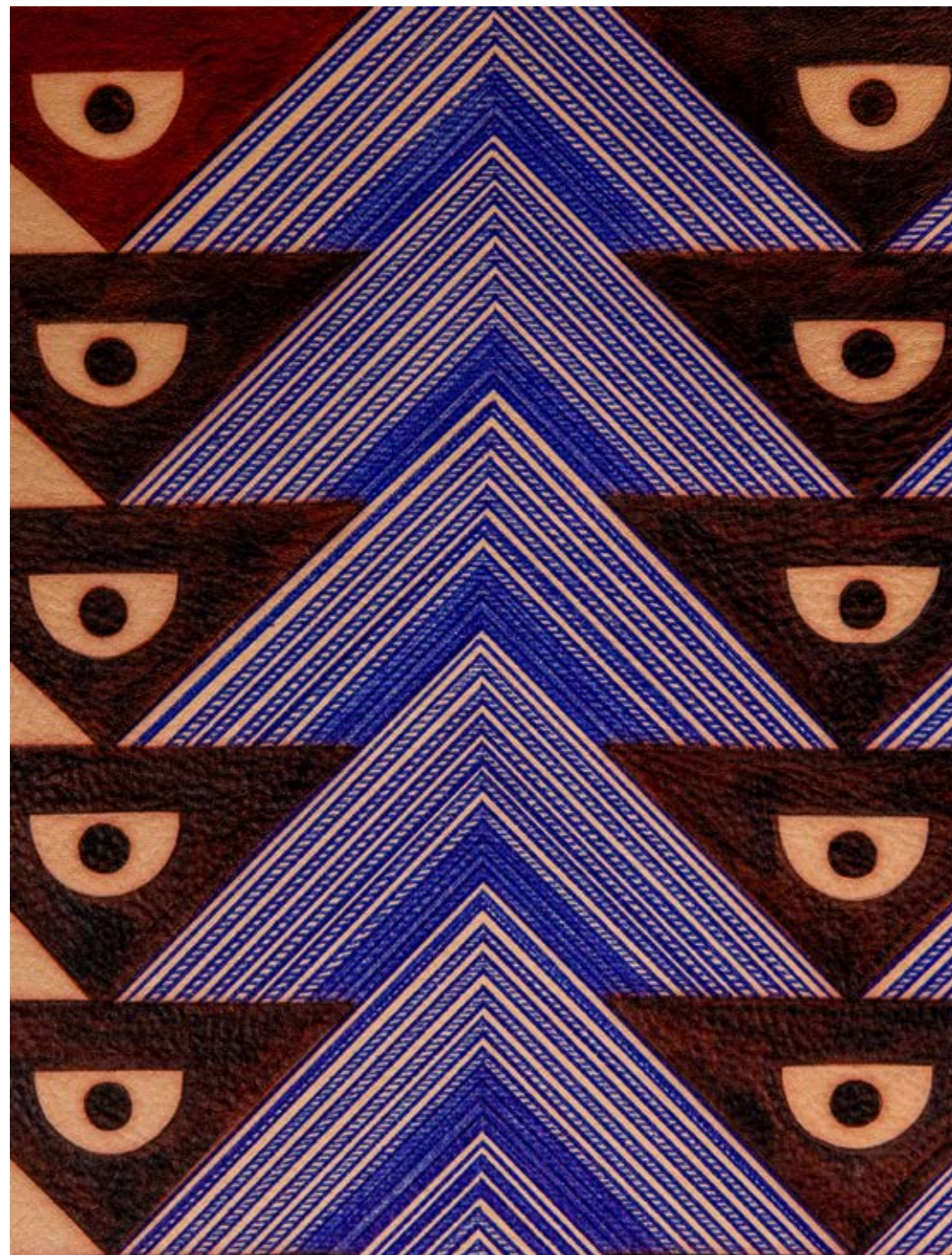
2012-22

Ballpoint pen and leather dye on cowhide

65 x 43 inches



The All-seeing
2012-22 (singular)

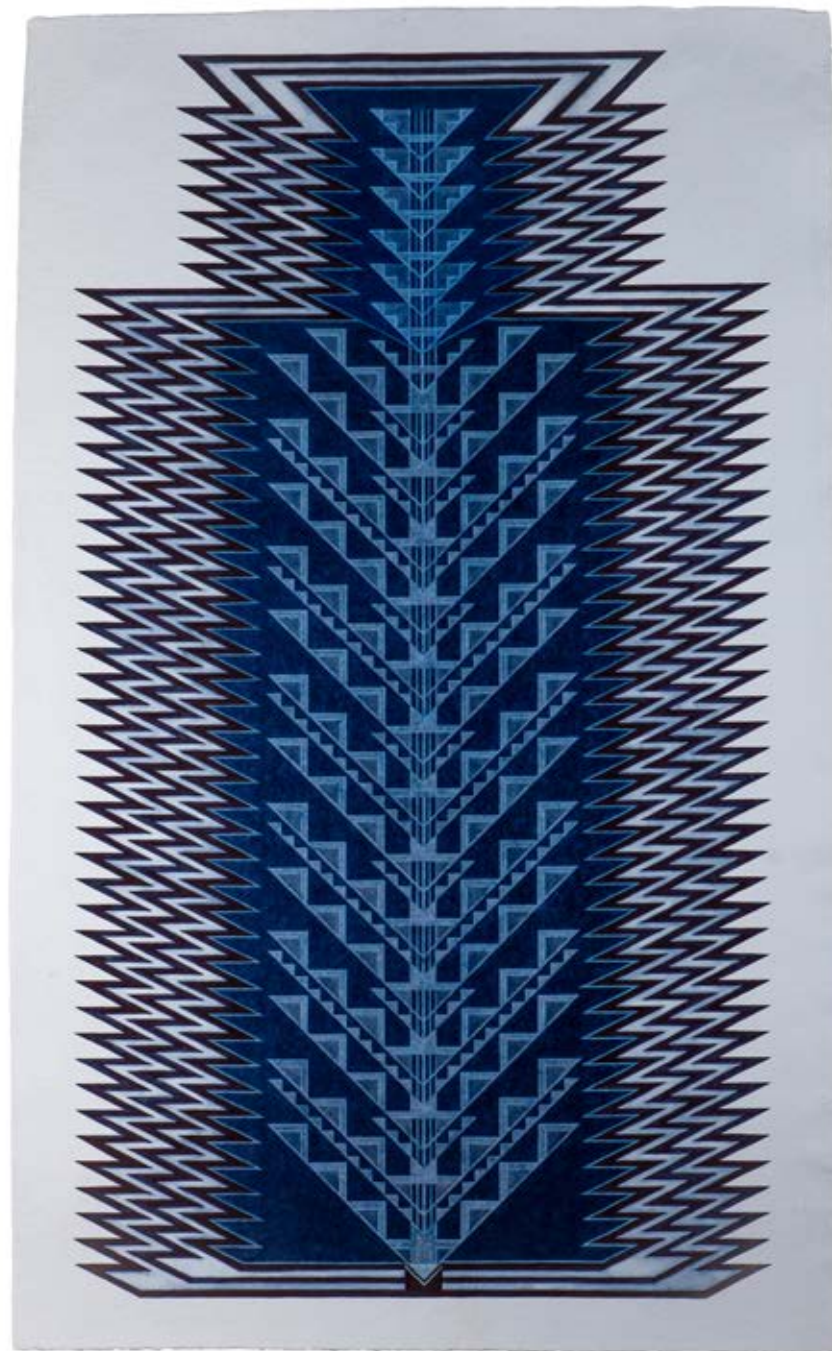


Portal

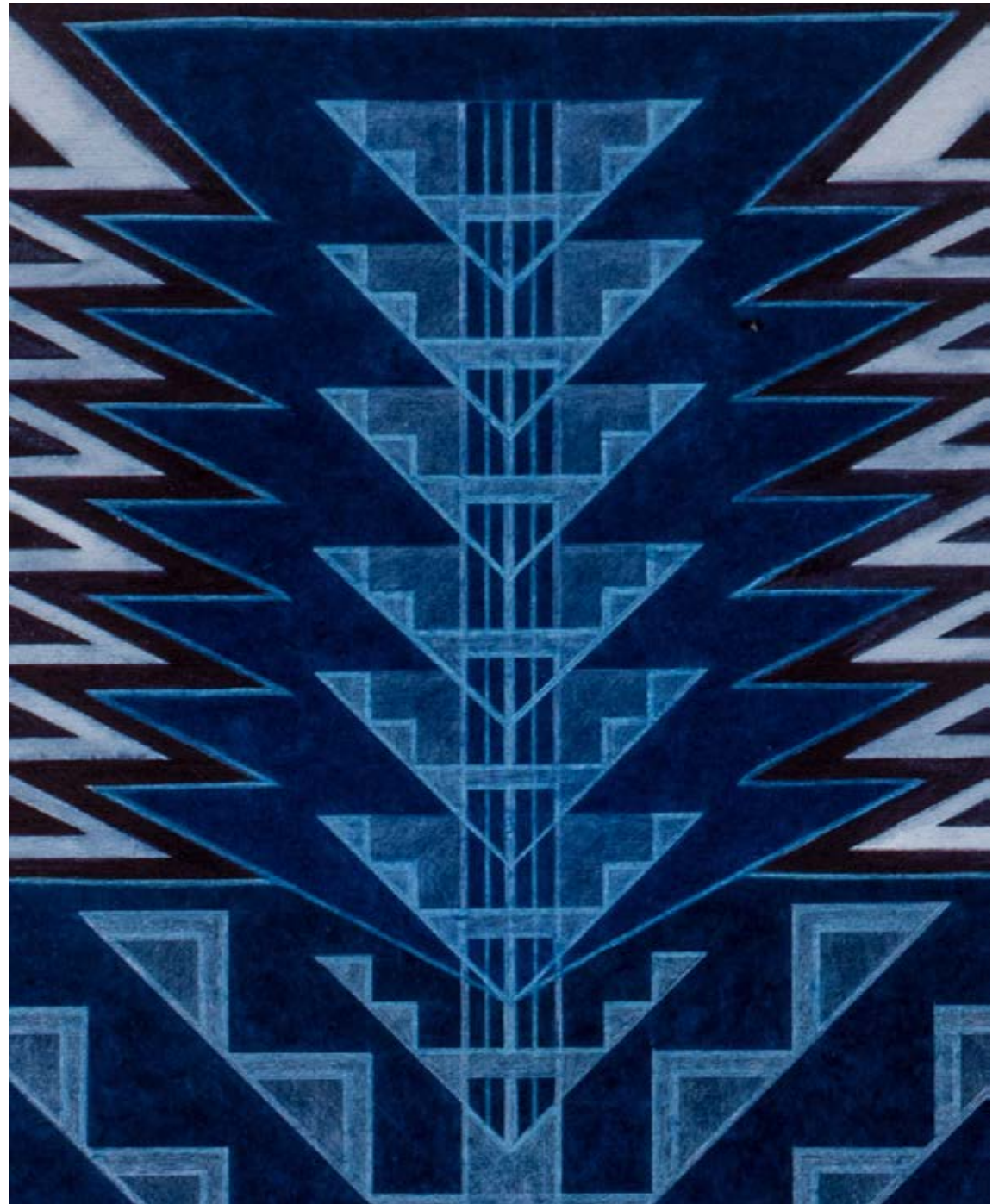
2021

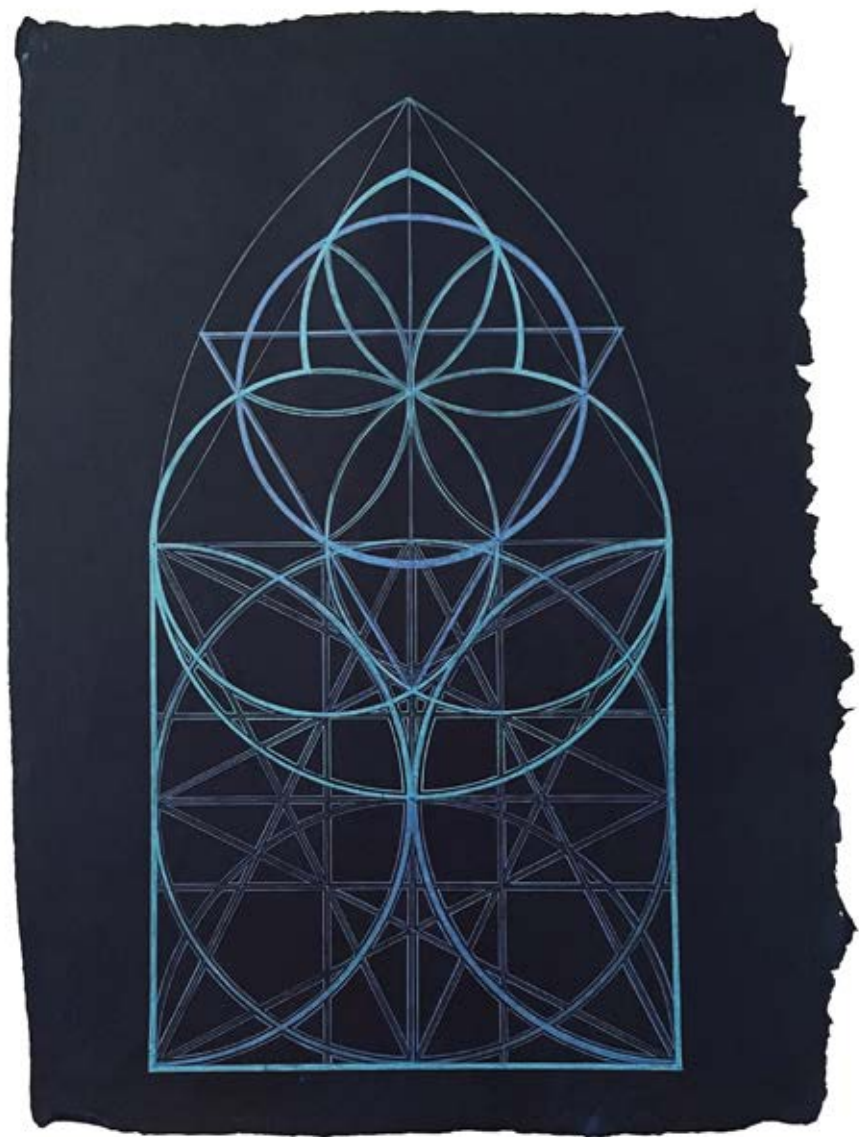
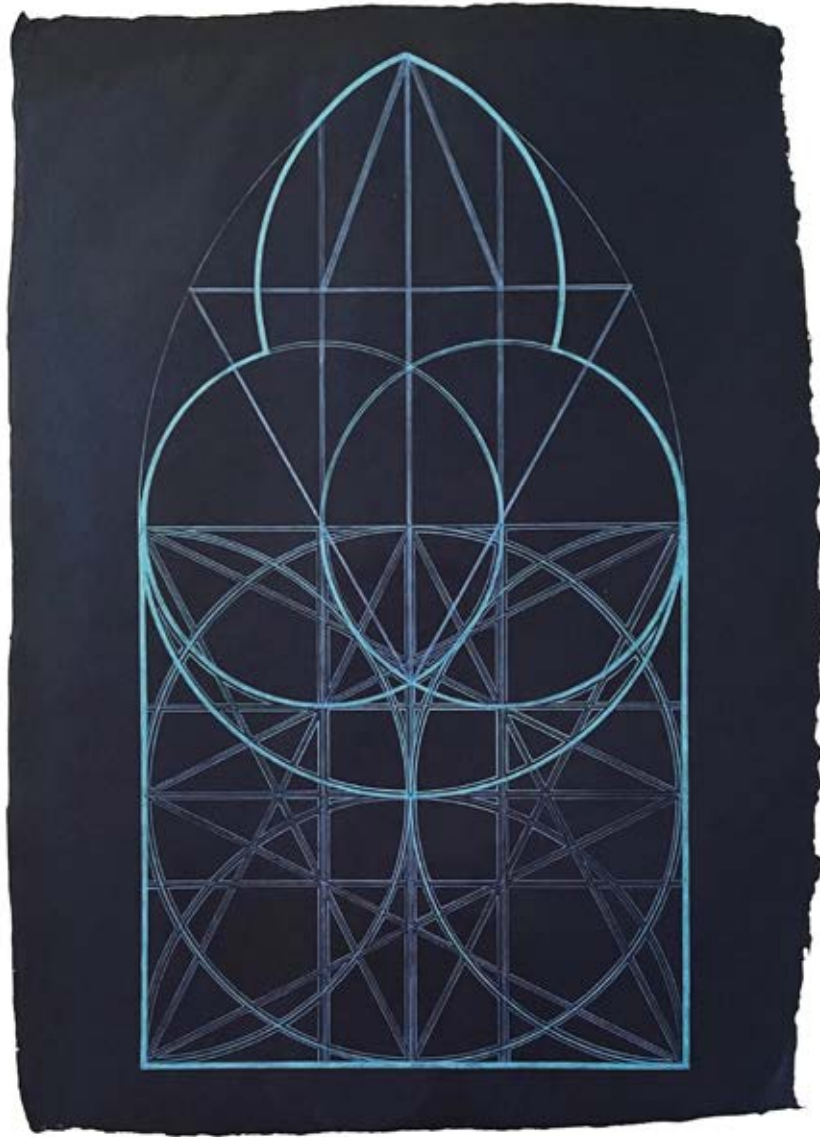
Colored pencil, opaque water colour and
collage on handmade cotton rag paper

52 x 32 inches



Portal
2021 (detail)





I Have Been A Portal Twice: Hadi/Jahanara (diptych), 2021

Colored pencil on handmade indigo wasli paper

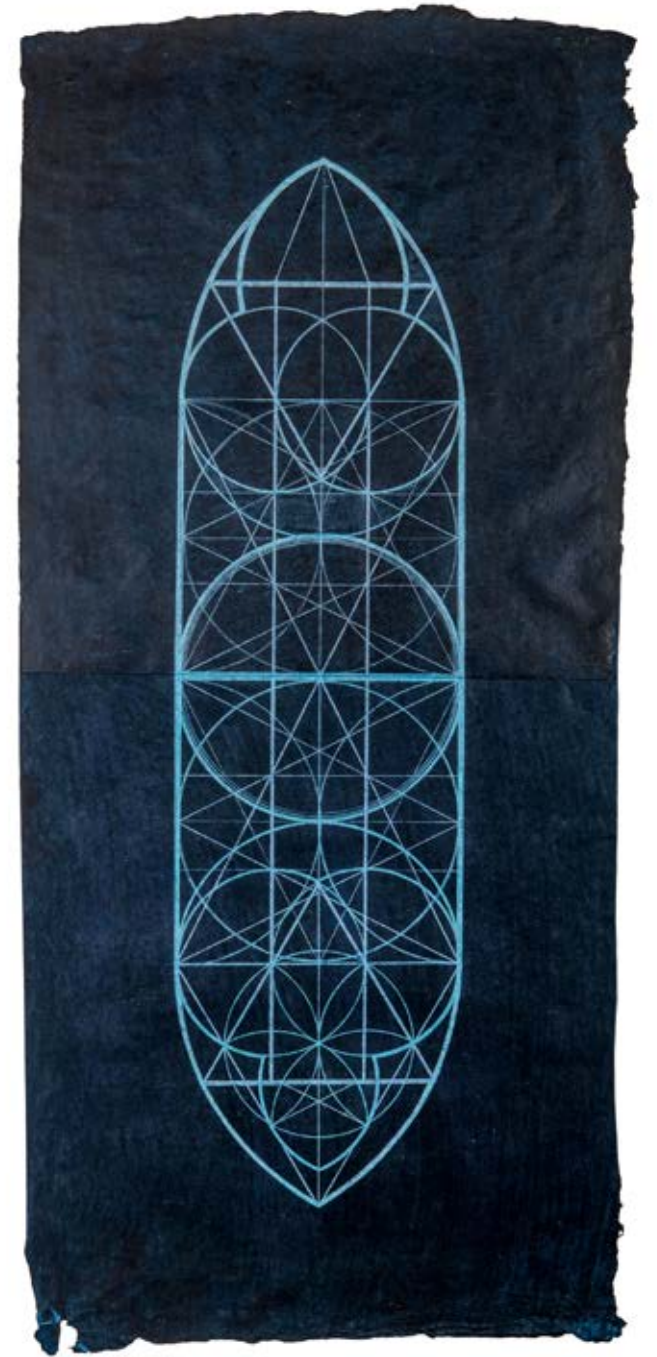
22 x 15 inches

Safina

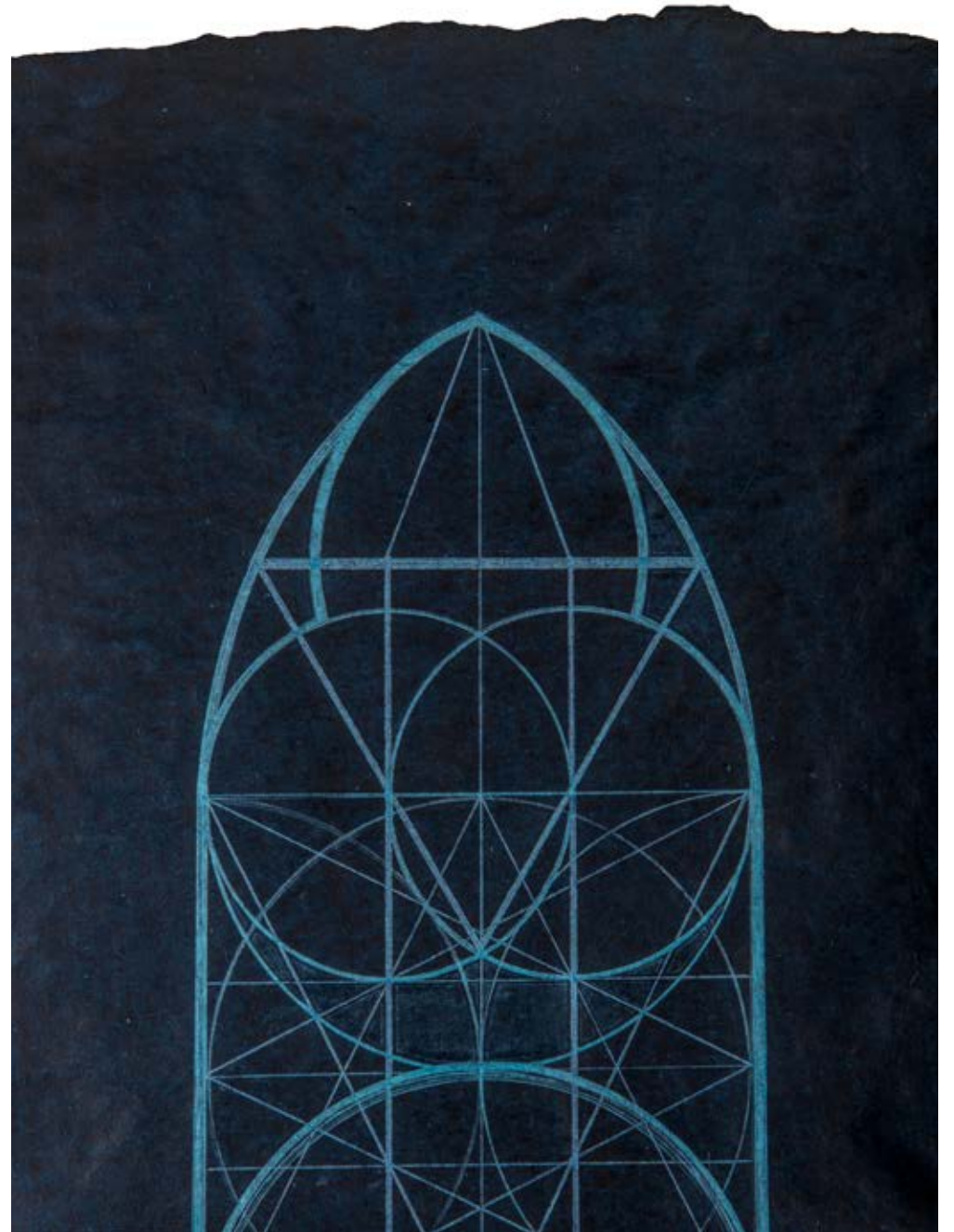
2021

Colored pencil on handmade indigo wasli paper

28 x 12.5 inches



Safina
2021 (detail)



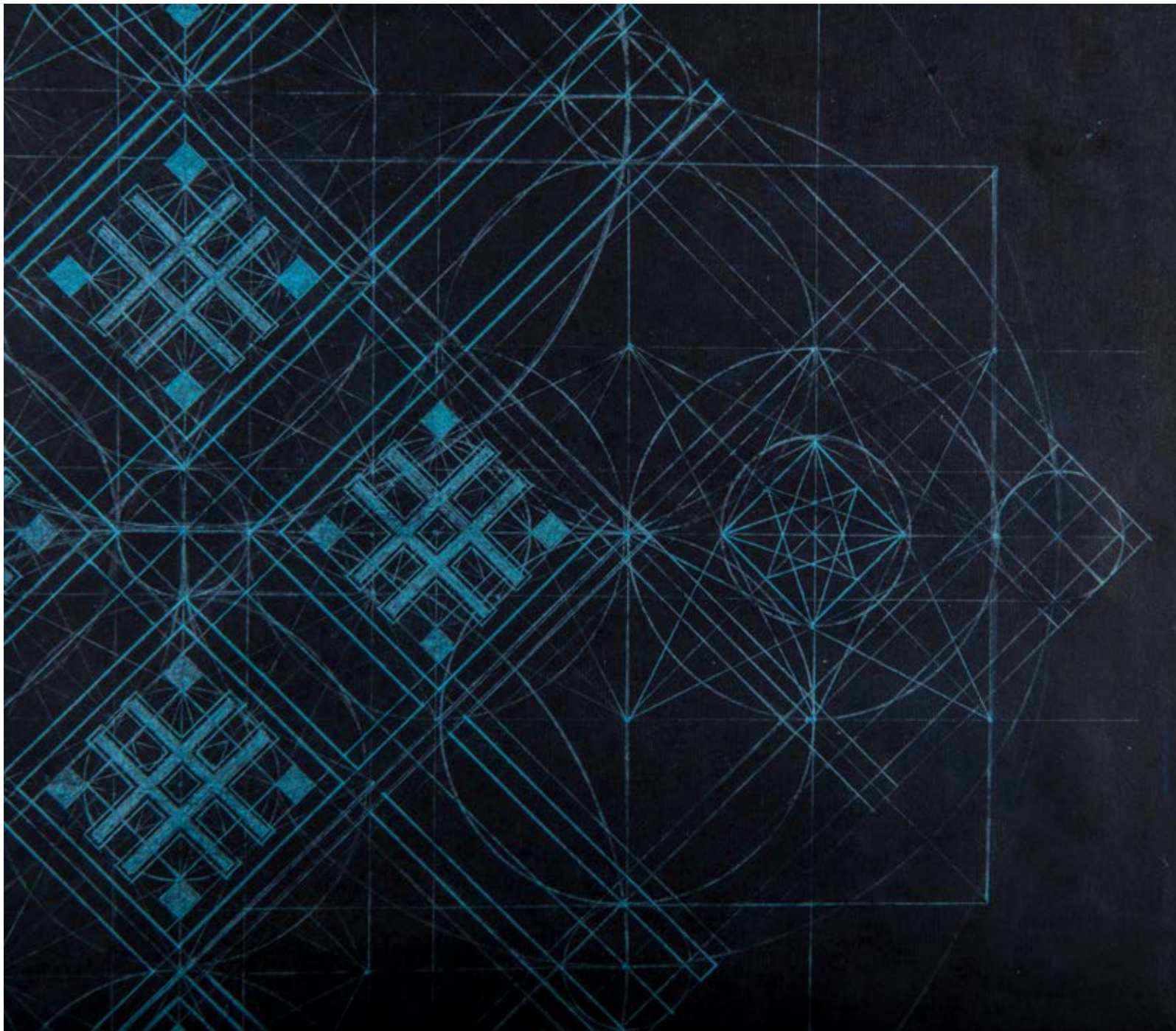


Harmonic Crossing

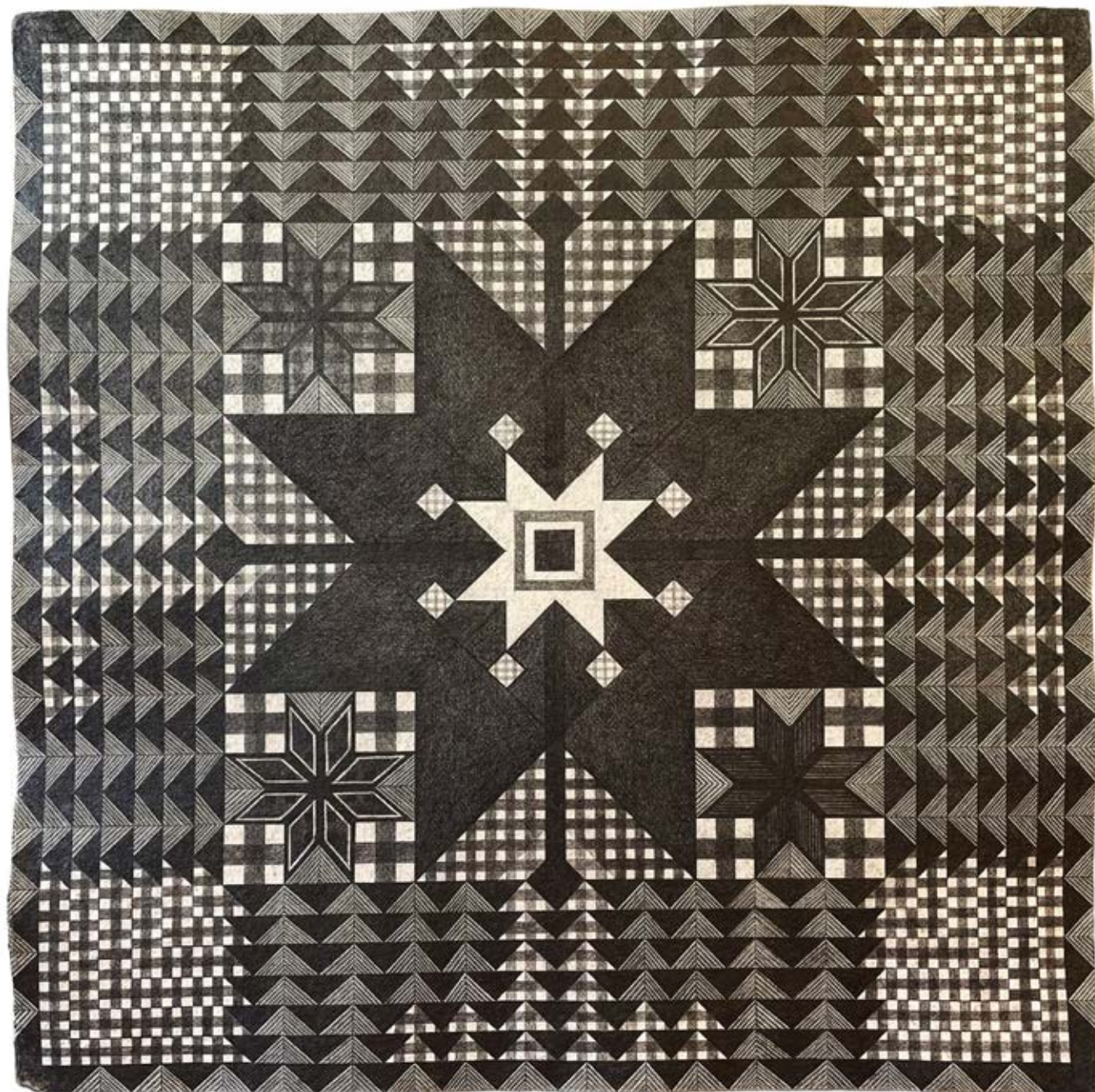
2021

Colored pencil on burnished indigo wasli paper

20 x 20 inches



Harmonic Crossing
2021 (detail)



Harmonic Star (Design for a Star Quilt)

2020

Pencil on handmade cotton rag paper

29 x 29 inches

Harmonic Star (Design for a Star Quilt)
2020 (detail)



Marriage Blanket

2022

Pencil on handmade wasli paper

31 x 22 inches

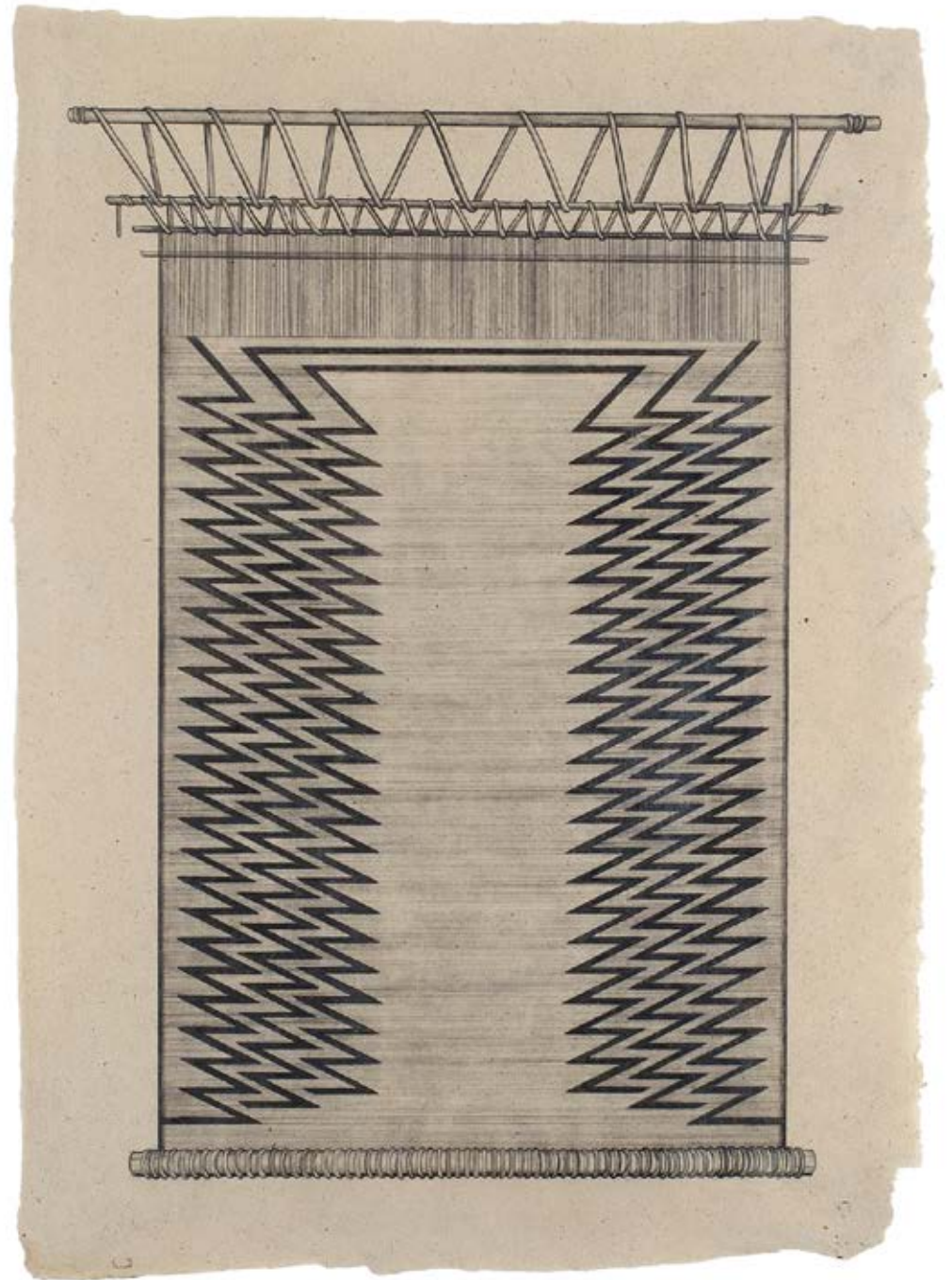


Loom (Narrow Gate)

2016-17

Pencil on handmade wasli paper

21 x 15 inches

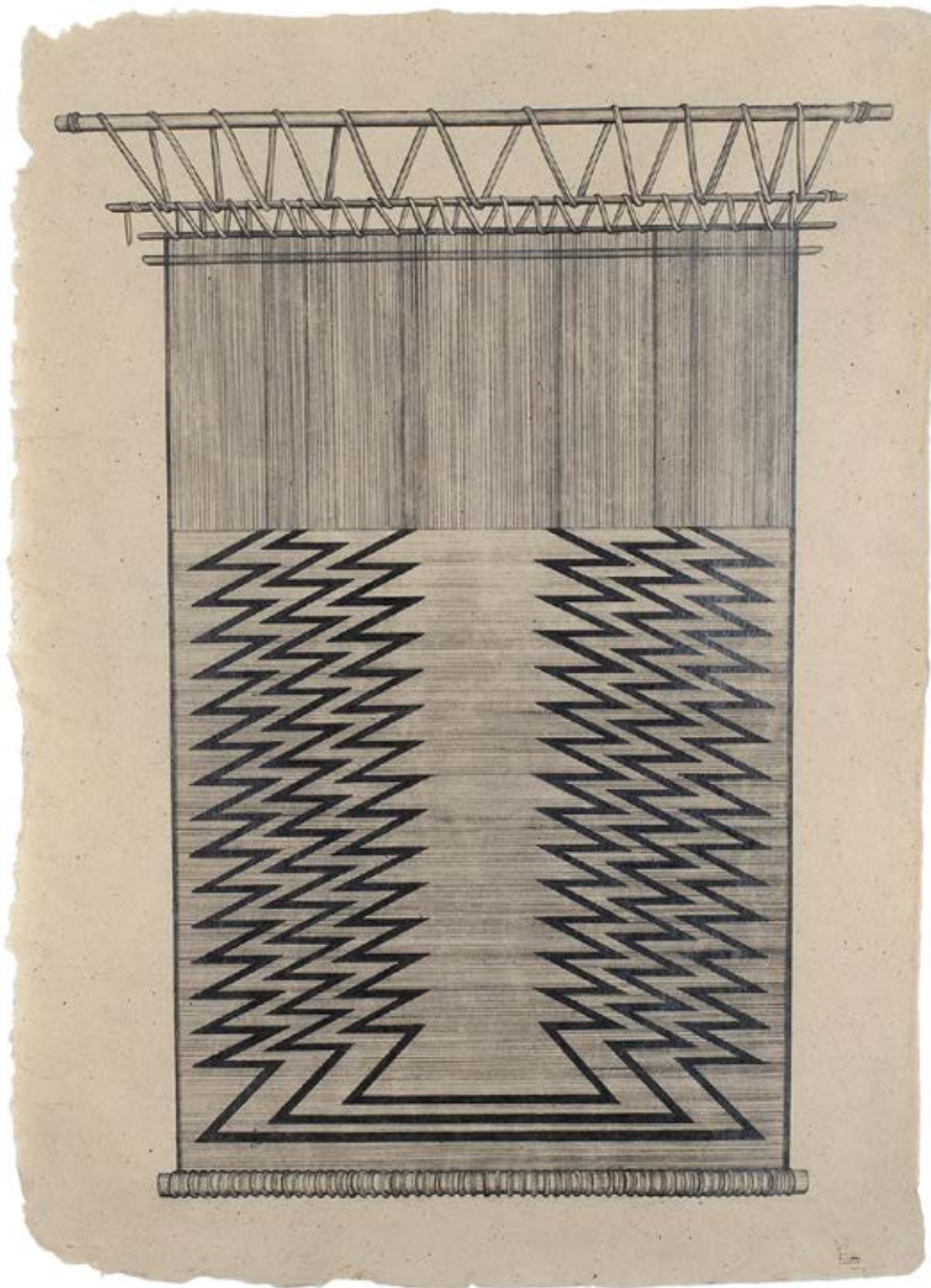


Loom (Inverted Narrow Gate)

2016-17

Pencil on handmade wasli paper,

21 x 15 inches





Flooded Ghat

2018-22

Paper applique on handloom silk

50 x 102 inches

Janamaz

2021-22

Hand-stitched applique quilt

38 x 62 inches





Janamaz
2021-22 (detail)



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Alyssa Sakina Mumtaz is an American artist and educator working at the intersections of art, craft, and contemplative practice.

She attended Yale University and completed her MFA at Columbia University's School of the Arts, New York. Mumtaz's creative projects and research have been supported by grants and fellowships from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, MASS MoCA, the Berkshire-Taconic Community Foundation, the Kittredge Fund, the Lighton International Artist Exchange Program, the Mid Atlantic Art Foundation, Dieu Donn e, the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University.

Her work has been exhibited and collected internationally, including solo presentations in Karachi, Mumbai, New York, London and Palma, as well as curated group exhibitions at institutions including the University of Buffalo Art Galleries; Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, New York; KMAC, Louisville; the Weatherspoon Art Museum; White Columns, New York and the International Print Center, New York. In 2018 two of her early song text drawings entered the permanent collection of the Seattle Art Museum. Her work has also been shown at art fairs including Miami Art Basel, the India Art Fair and Art Dubai. Mumtaz has taught at numerous universities and art schools in both the US and Pakistan, including Lahore's National College of Arts and Beaconhouse National University.

She lives and works in Williamstown, Massachusetts with her husband, art historian and artist Murad Khan Mumtaz, and two young children, Hadi and Jahanara.



F-42/2, Block 4, Clifton, Karachi, Pakistan

T. +92 (21) 35831292 | E: gallerykoel@gmail.com

www.koelgallery.com