

HASSAN MASSOUDY

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WORDS, BREATH, GESTURE

G A L L E R Y M I S S I O N

Established in 2000, Sundaram Tagore Gallery is devoted to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. We focus on developing exhibitions and hosting not-for-profit events that encourage spiritual, social and aesthetic dialogues. In a world where communication is instant and cultures are colliding and melding as never before, our goal is to provide venues for art that transcend boundaries of all sorts. With alliances across the globe, our interest in cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the visual arts into many other disciplines, including poetry, literature, performance art, film and music.

sundaram tagore gallery
new york · hong kong · singapore



WORDS, BREATH, GESTURE

Sundaram Tagore Chelsea is pleased to present the first New York solo exhibition of work by Hassan Massoudy, a celebrated Iraqi-born artist based in Paris. Classically trained in calligraphy, Massoudy inscribes oversized letters in vibrant color to create visually striking works which usher traditional Arabic script into a contemporary context. This exhibition features more than 25 works on paper alongside notable paintings on canvas.

Born in Najaf, Iraq in 1944, Massoudy was surrounded by Arabic calligraphy, which adorned the walls of libraries, mosques and religious schools, throughout his childhood. Since an early age, he observed his uncle who was an amateur calligrapher. At 17, Massoudy decided to move to Baghdad to study calligraphy. Living in the capital was an eye-opening experience for the young apprentice as he was exposed to contemporary art exhibitions for the first time.

In 1969, Massoudy moved to France to escape political turmoil and continue his education. He studied figurative painting at the world-renowned École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts while continuing his calligraphic practice. To support himself during his student days, he produced headlines for Arabic magazines. Over time, his calligraphy replaced his figurative paintings entirely.

Today, Massoudy is known for his colorful compositions based on texts from Eastern and Western poets, authors and philosophers.

Fascinated by ancient and contemporary writing, he often turns to quotes about love, nature and most importantly, humanism. Once he has selected a passage, Massoudy enlarges a single word from the text and paints it in the center of his composition using a flat brush or instruments fashioned from wood or cardboard. He then incorporates the full passage into the work which he writes using a *qalam* (a traditional writing instrument made from a dried reed).

Following tradition, Massoudy produces his own tools and inks. However, he breaks from the Arabic custom of using black ink by incorporating a bold palette of blues, greens, yellows and reds. He believes that this allows him to fully express himself and convey the emotion of the quotes.

Although executed with the utmost control, Massoudy's letters are fluid and charged with energy as he skillfully transforms the written word into evocative images. "When I think my gesture is just right, all the interior conflict ceases," he says. "It's a moment of joy when the alphabet is no longer an instrument of logic but an attitude...Calligraphy reflects my vision of the world, it has become the desire that the world should be thus-filled with a new harmony and freedom."

untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"O friend do not go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you" –Kabir



untitled, 1991, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Shall my heart become a tree heavy-laden with fruit that I may gather and give unto them"
—Kahlil Gibran





untitled, 2011, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Towards another land, a country where only light reigns" –Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi



untitled, 2012, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Oh time, arrest your flight" –Alphonse de Lamartine

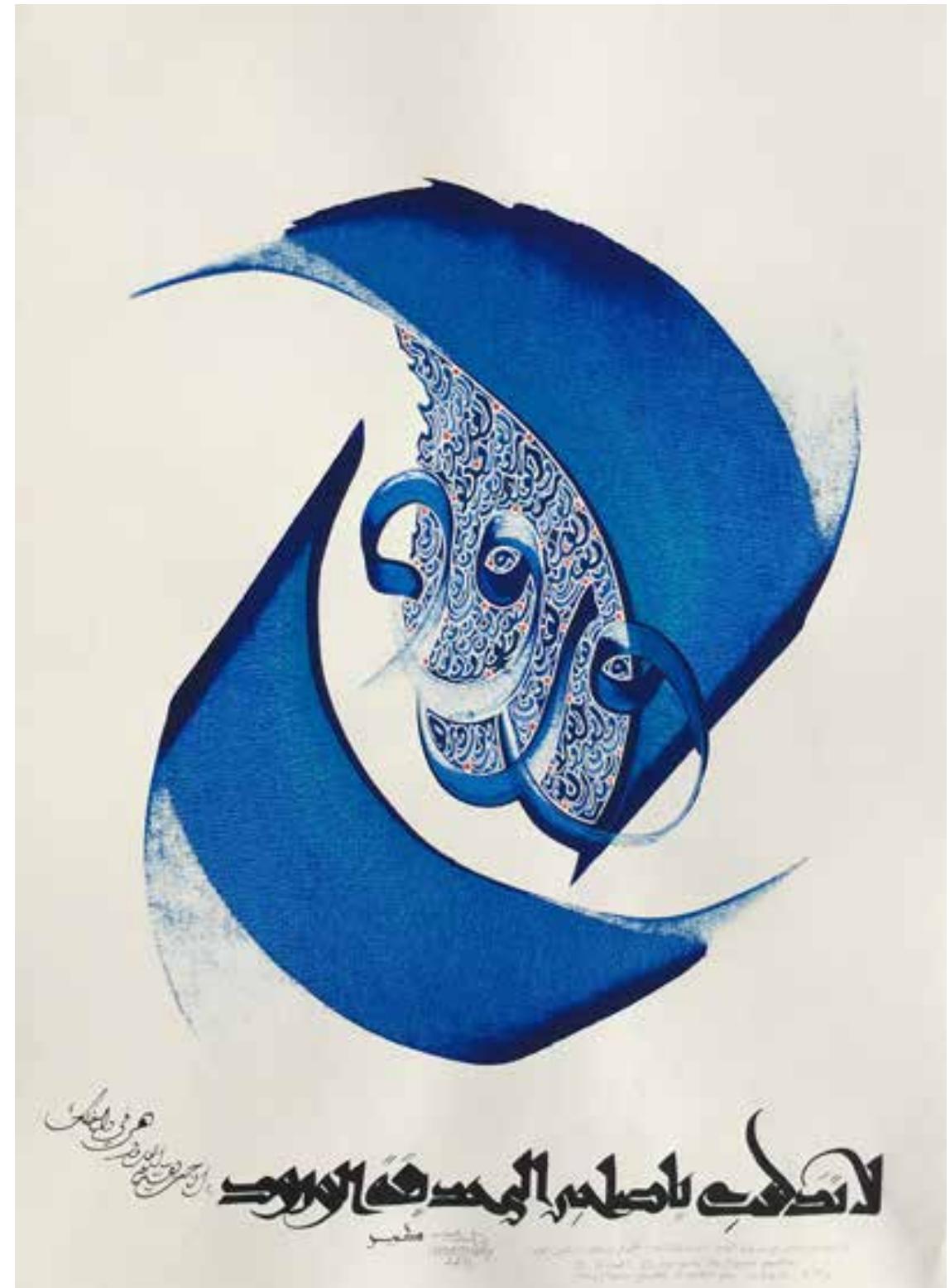
untitled, 2007, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Generosity is giving more than you can" –Kahlil Gibran





untitled, 2016, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"The eyes shield you from the heart" –Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma

untitled, 2013, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"O friend do not go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you" –Kabir

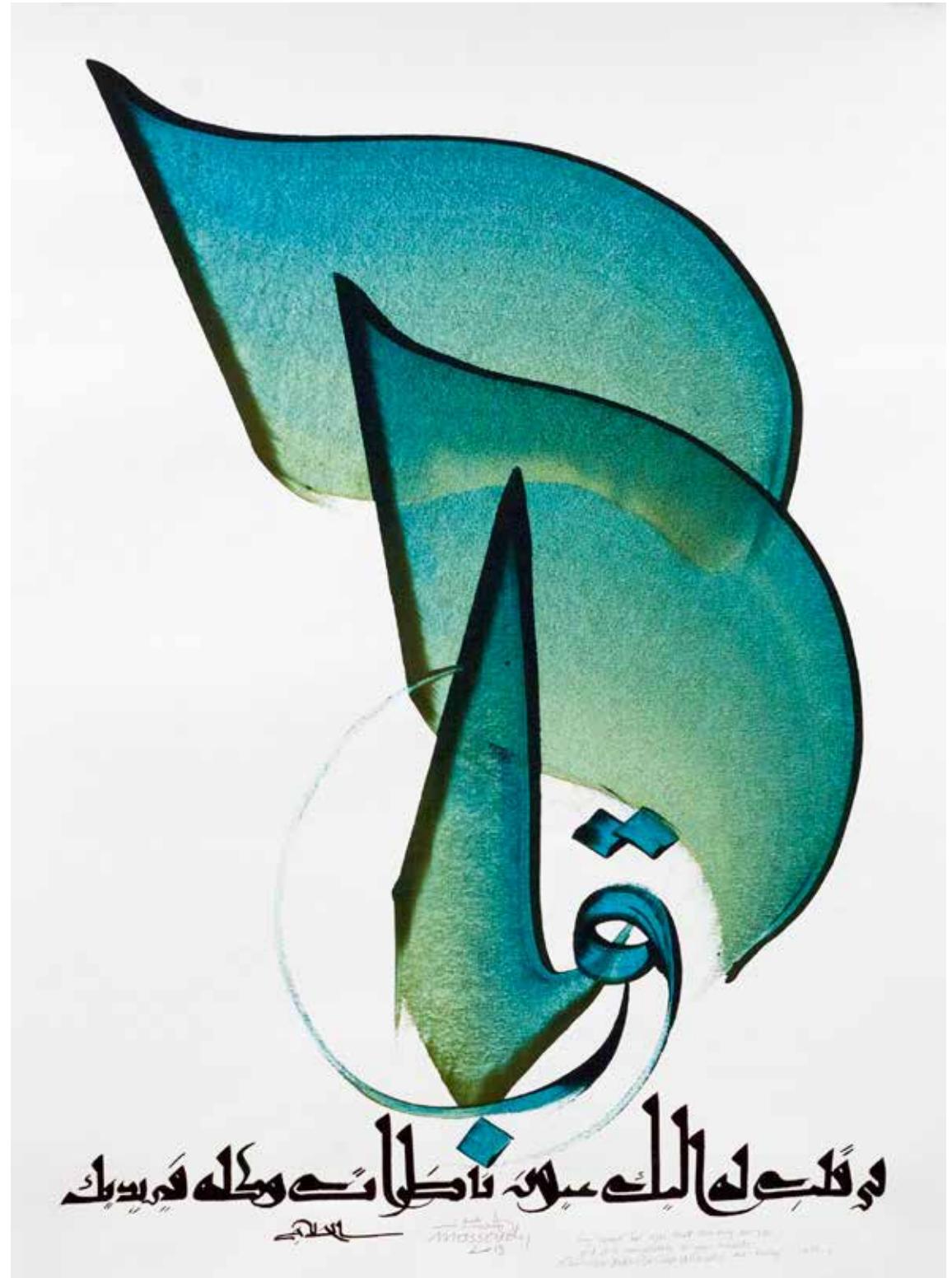




untitled, 2012, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"You fled to the desert on the wings of the heart. The desert is lost in the realm of your heart"
—Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi

untitled, 2013, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"My heart has eyes that see only for you, and it is completely in your hands" —Mansur al-Hallaj





untitled, 2013, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"Earth doesn't belong to man, it is man who belongs to the earth"

—Chief Seattle



untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"If I am made of earth, this is my country in its entirety, and all of humanity are my brothers"

—Jawhar al-Siqilli

untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Earth is my country and humanity my family" –Kahlil Gibran

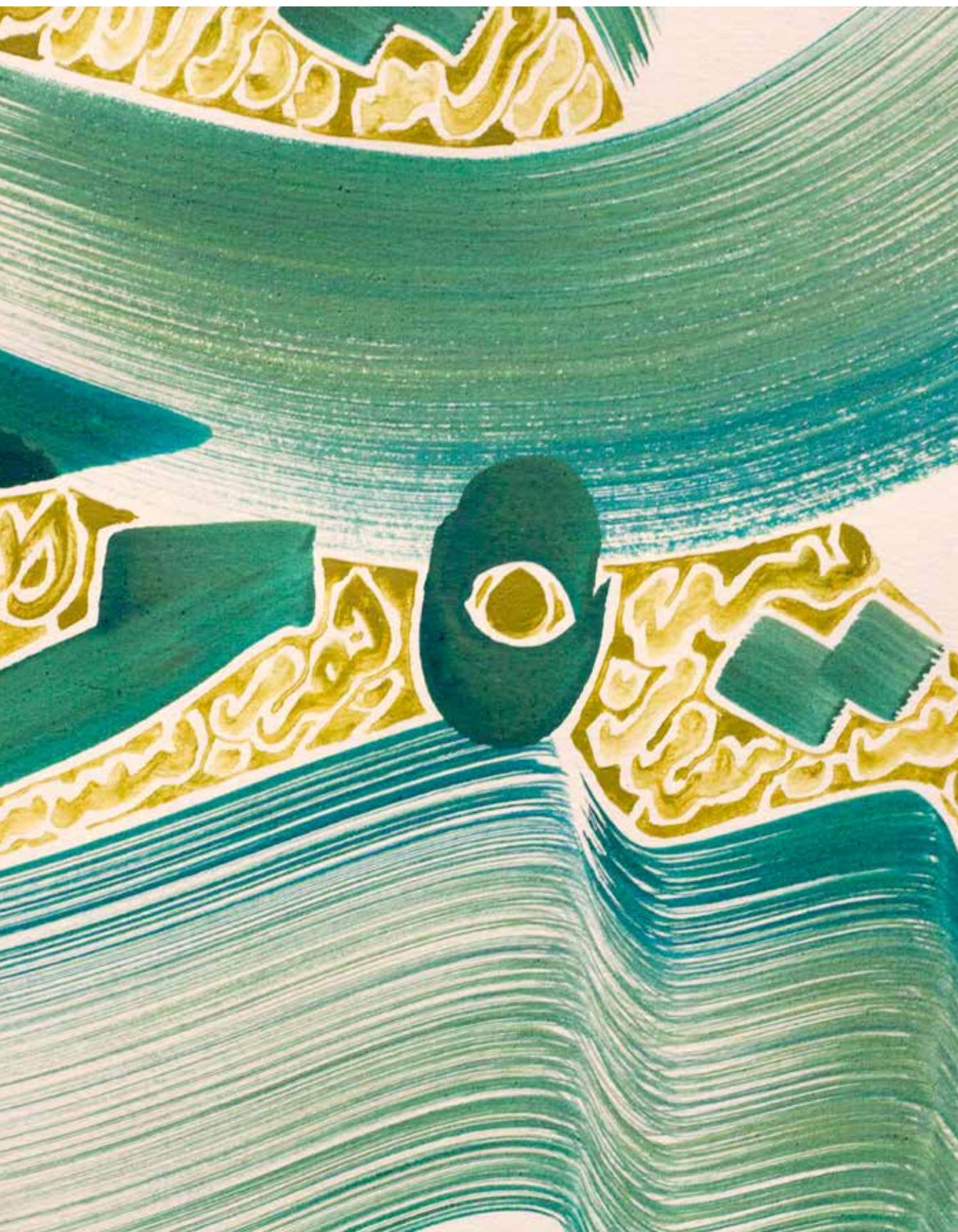


untitled, 2015, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"No man can take the place of another" –Mahabharata



untitled, 2016, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"If you shut your door to all errors, truth will be shut out" –Rabindranath Tagore



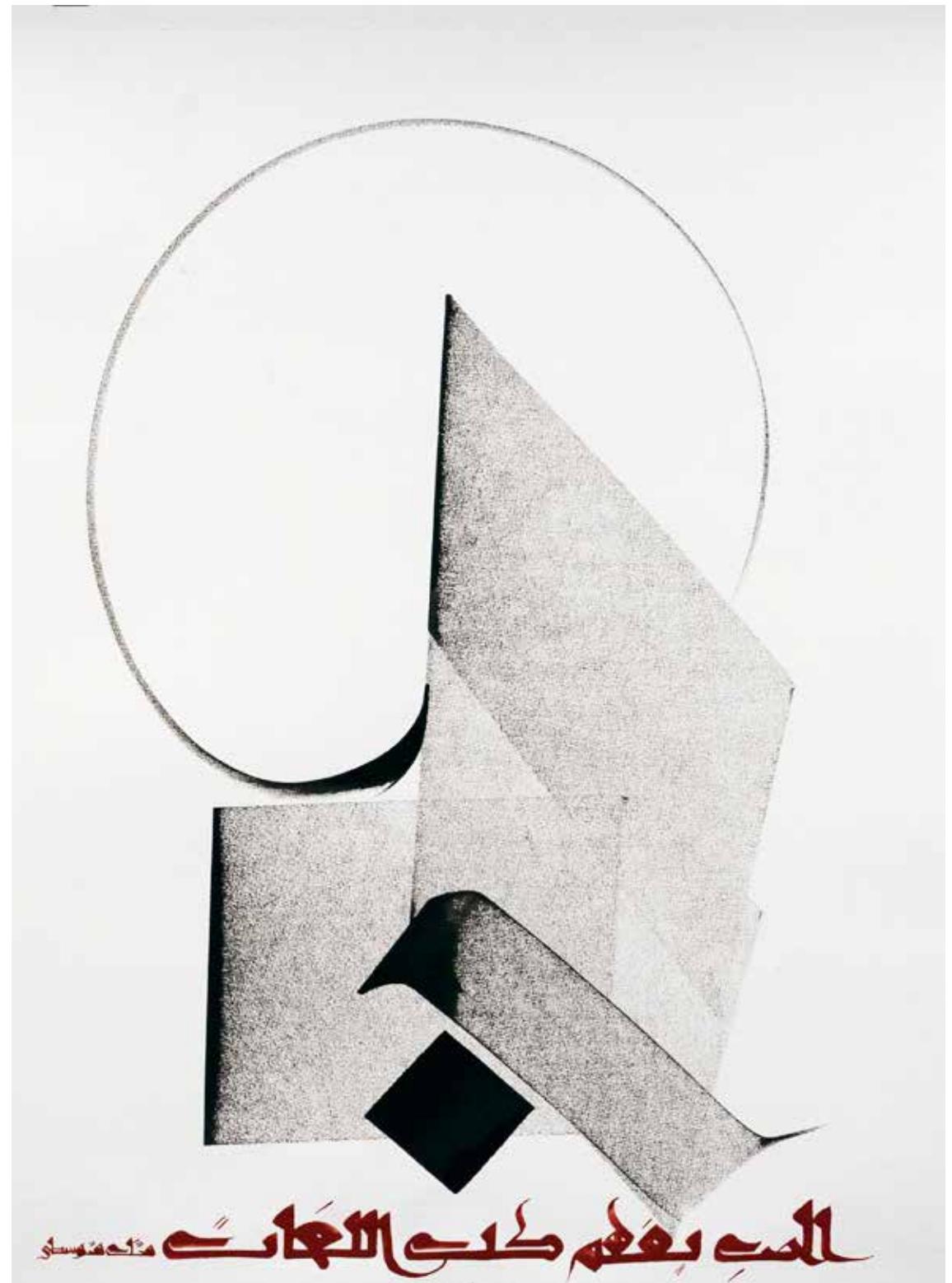


untitled, 2016, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Development is not to possess more and more, but to be more and more" –Mahatma Gandhi

untitled, 2012, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"This day will never be repeated again, each instant is an inestimable jewel" –Takuan Soho



untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Love understands all languages" –Mediterranean proverb

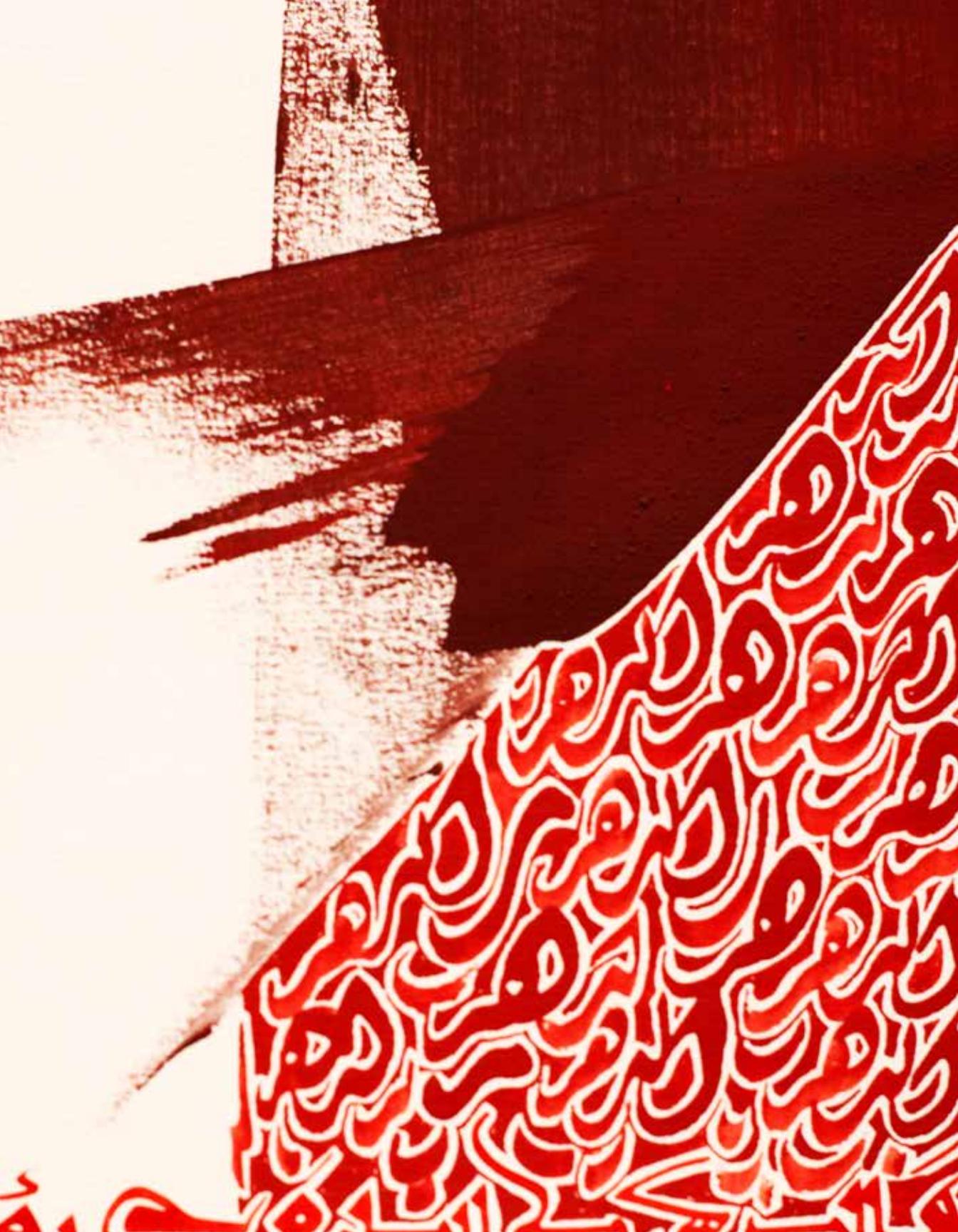


untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"Time is like a dream, all its misfortunes and favours unintentional. Neither praise nor blame!"

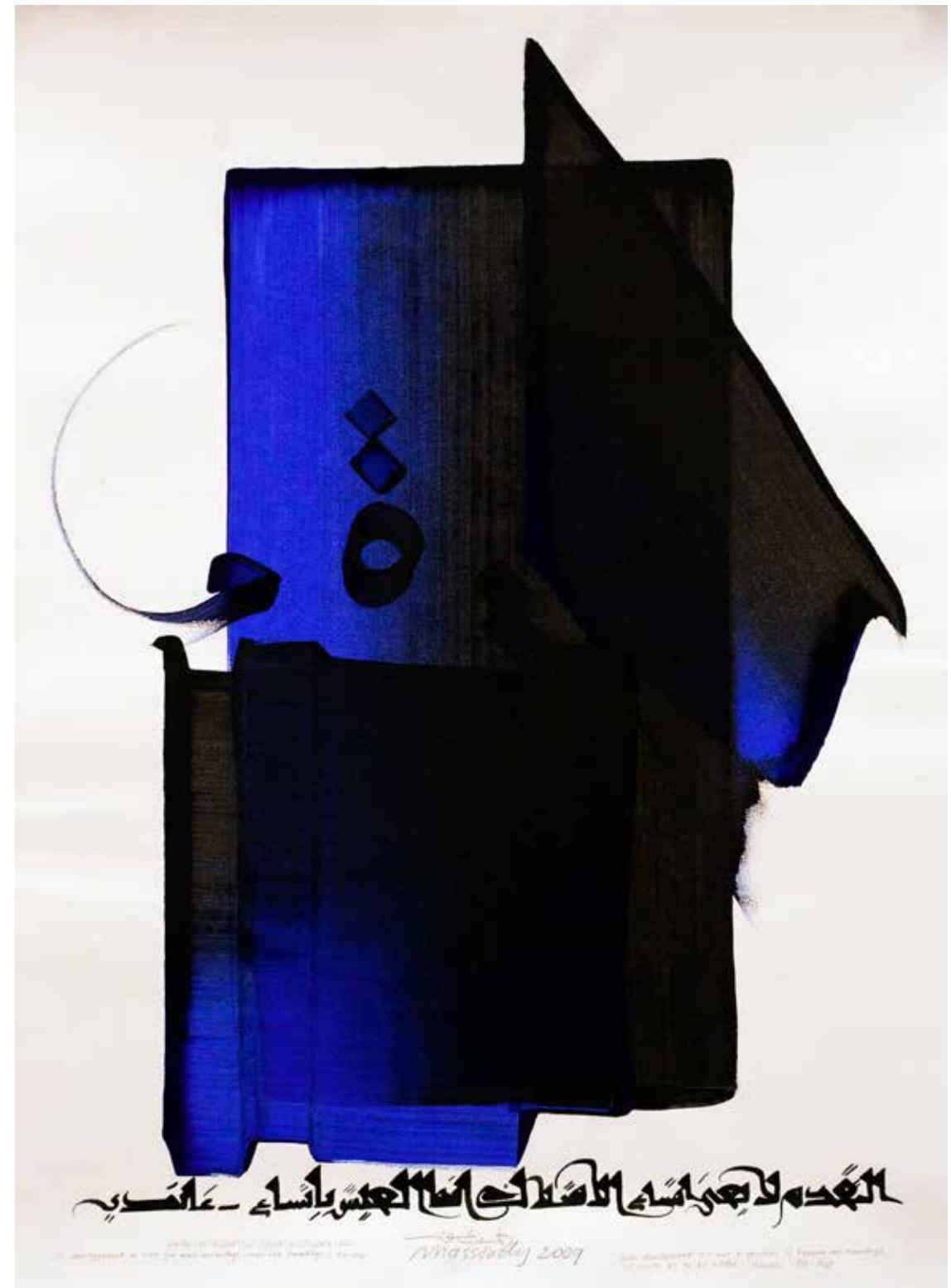
—Al-Touhami

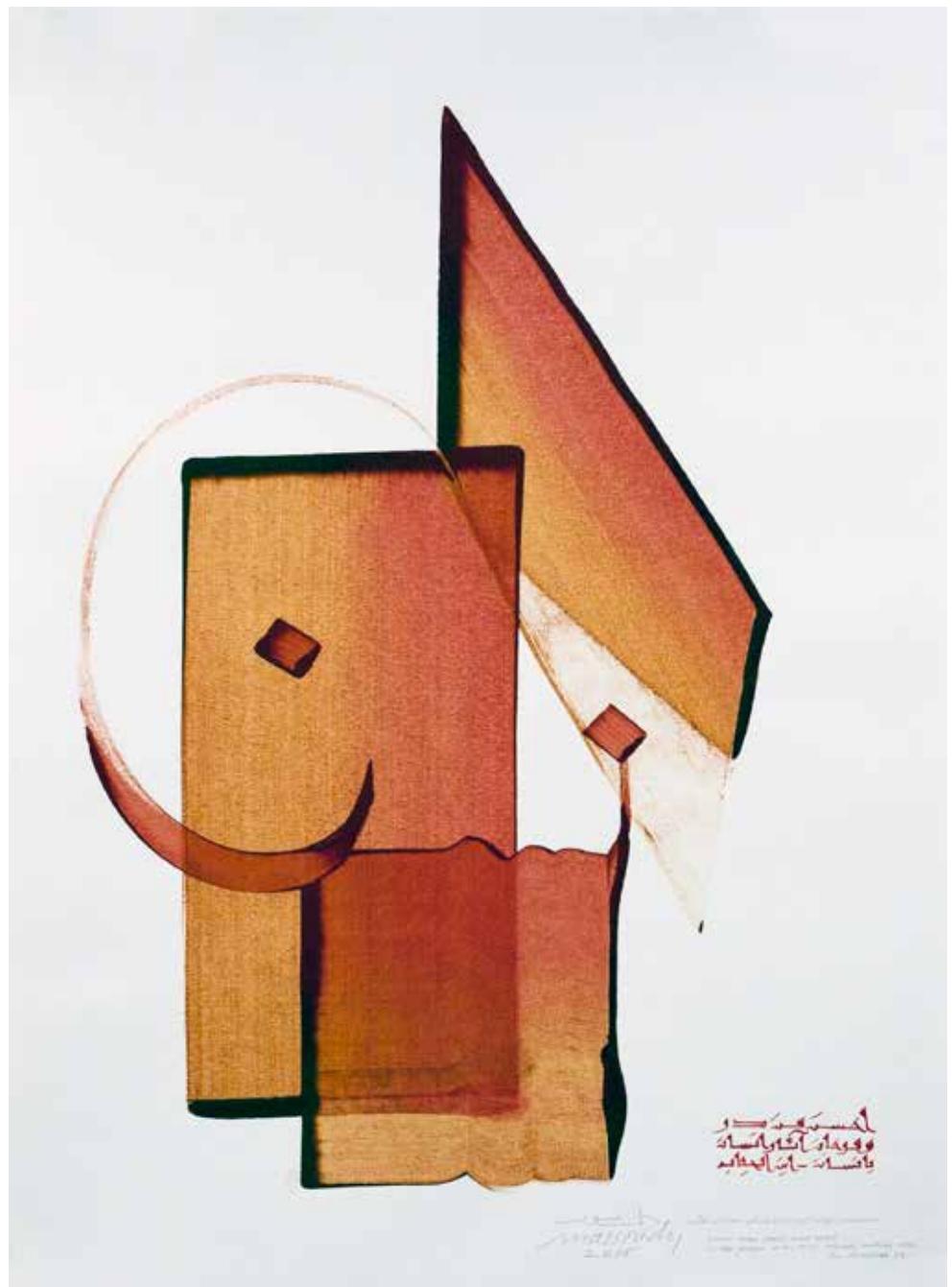




untitled, 2008, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Time is like a dream, all its misfortunes and favours unintentional. Neither praise nor blame!"
—Al-Touhami

untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"With development it's not a question of having an advantage so much as to be ahead"
—Mahatma Gandhi





untitled, 2006, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Better than pearls and coral is the gesture of one man towards another man"
—Ibn al-Habbab



untitled, 2016, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Nothing is real other than dreams and love"
—Anna de Noailles

untitled, 2007, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Even if happiness forgets you occasionally, never forget it completely" –Jacques Prévert



untitled, 2016, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"O friend do not go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you" –Kabir

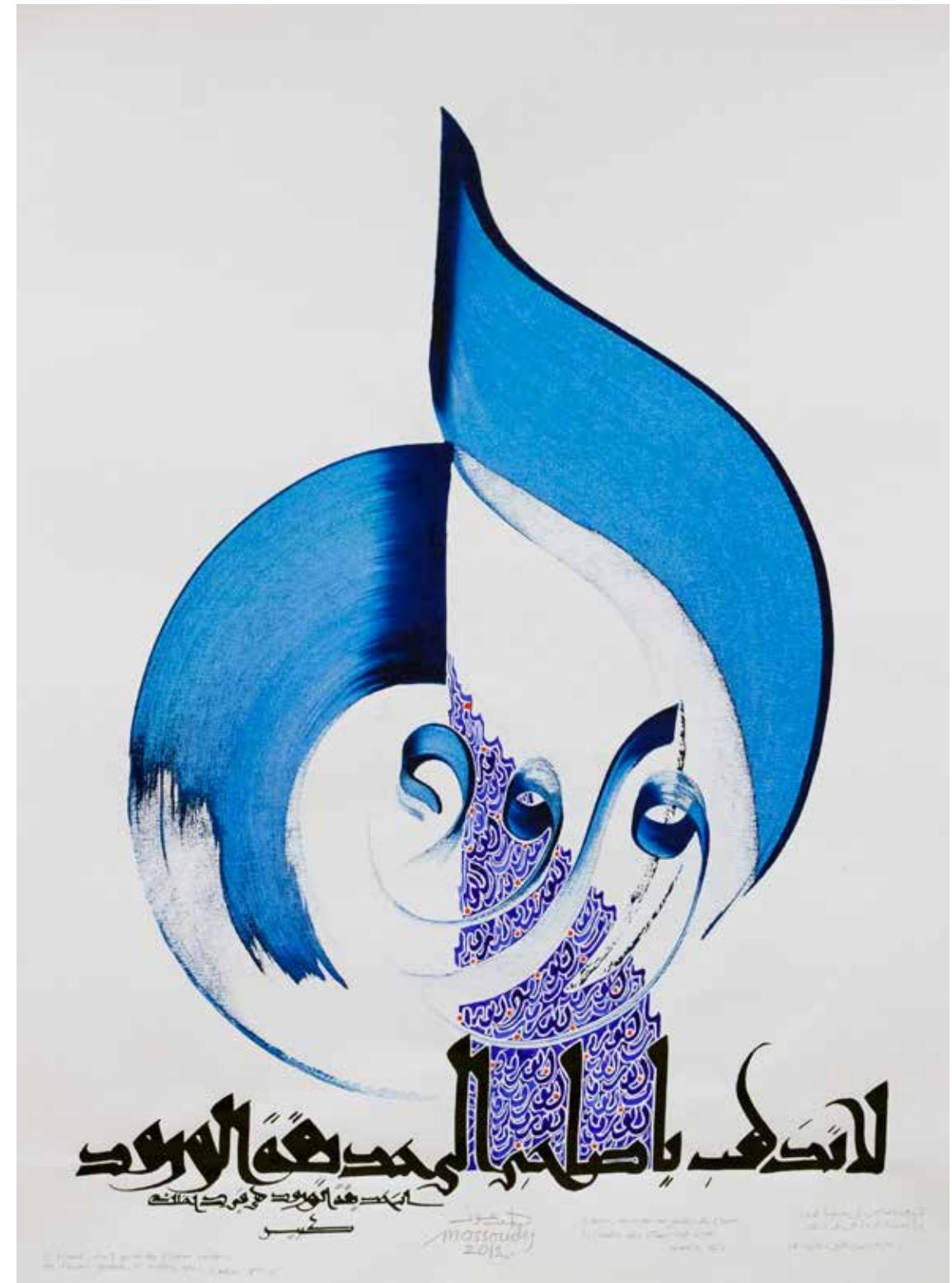


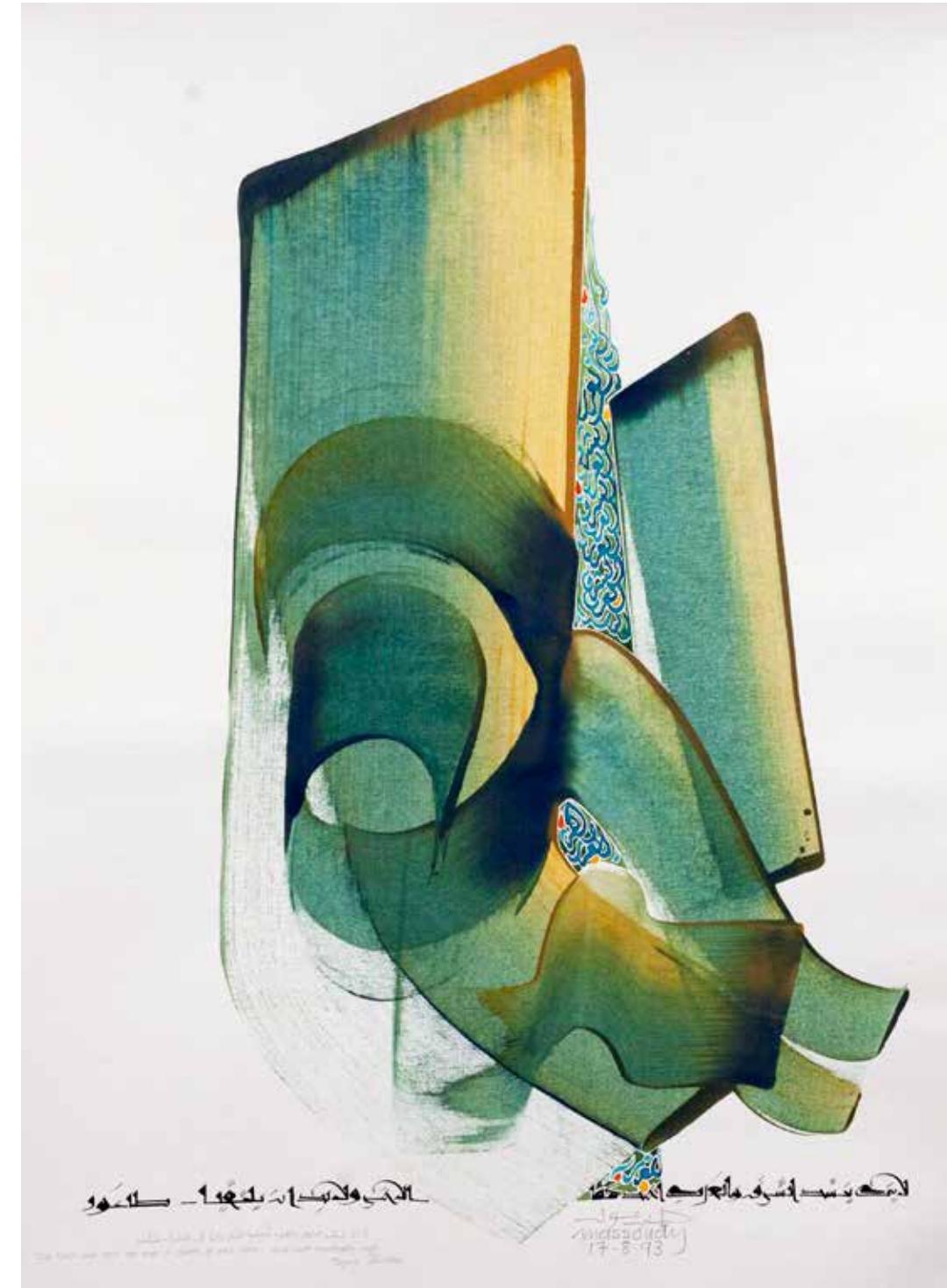
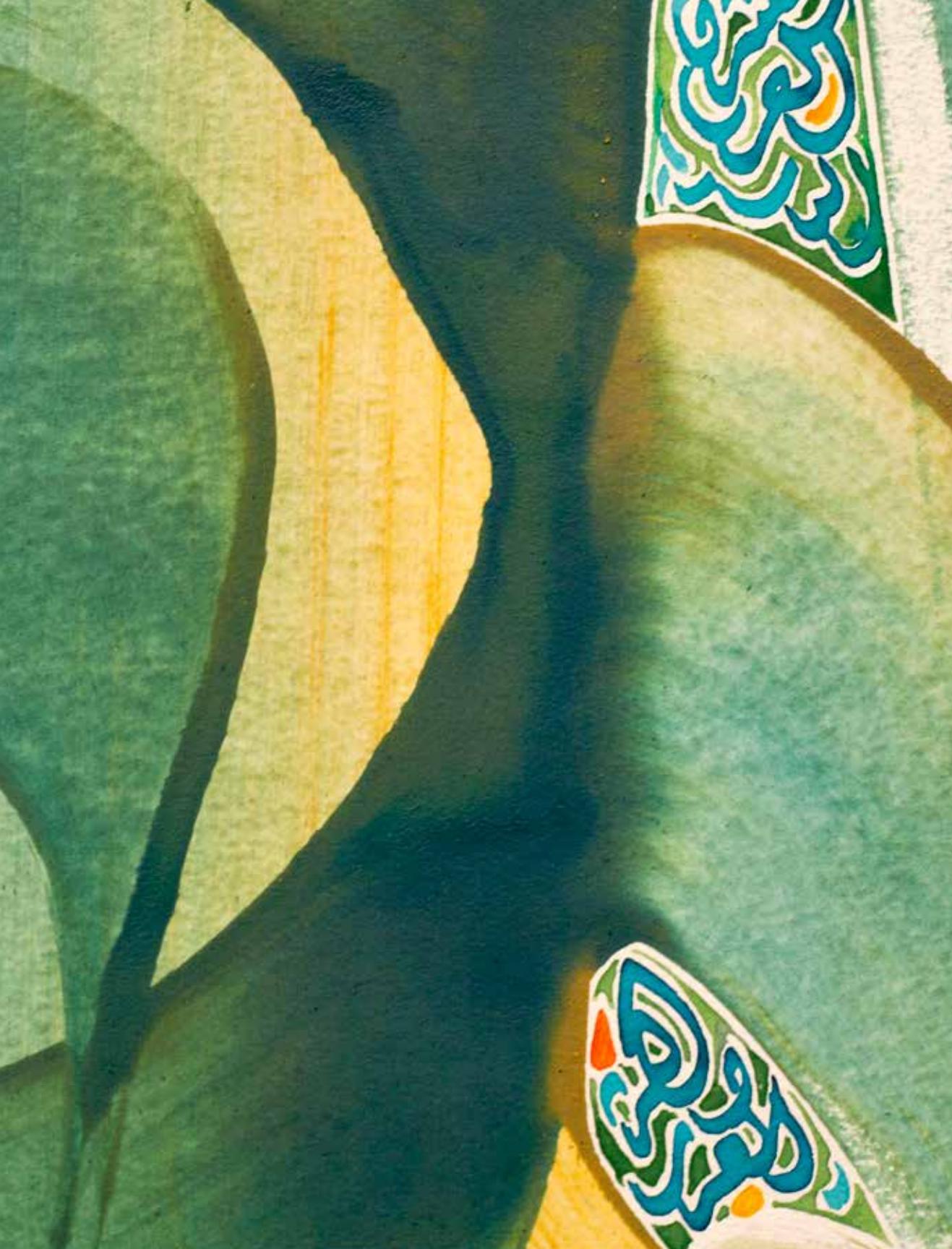
untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"When you have reached the top of the mountain, then you shall begin to climb" –Kahlil Gibran



untitled, 2012, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"O friend do not go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you" –Kabir



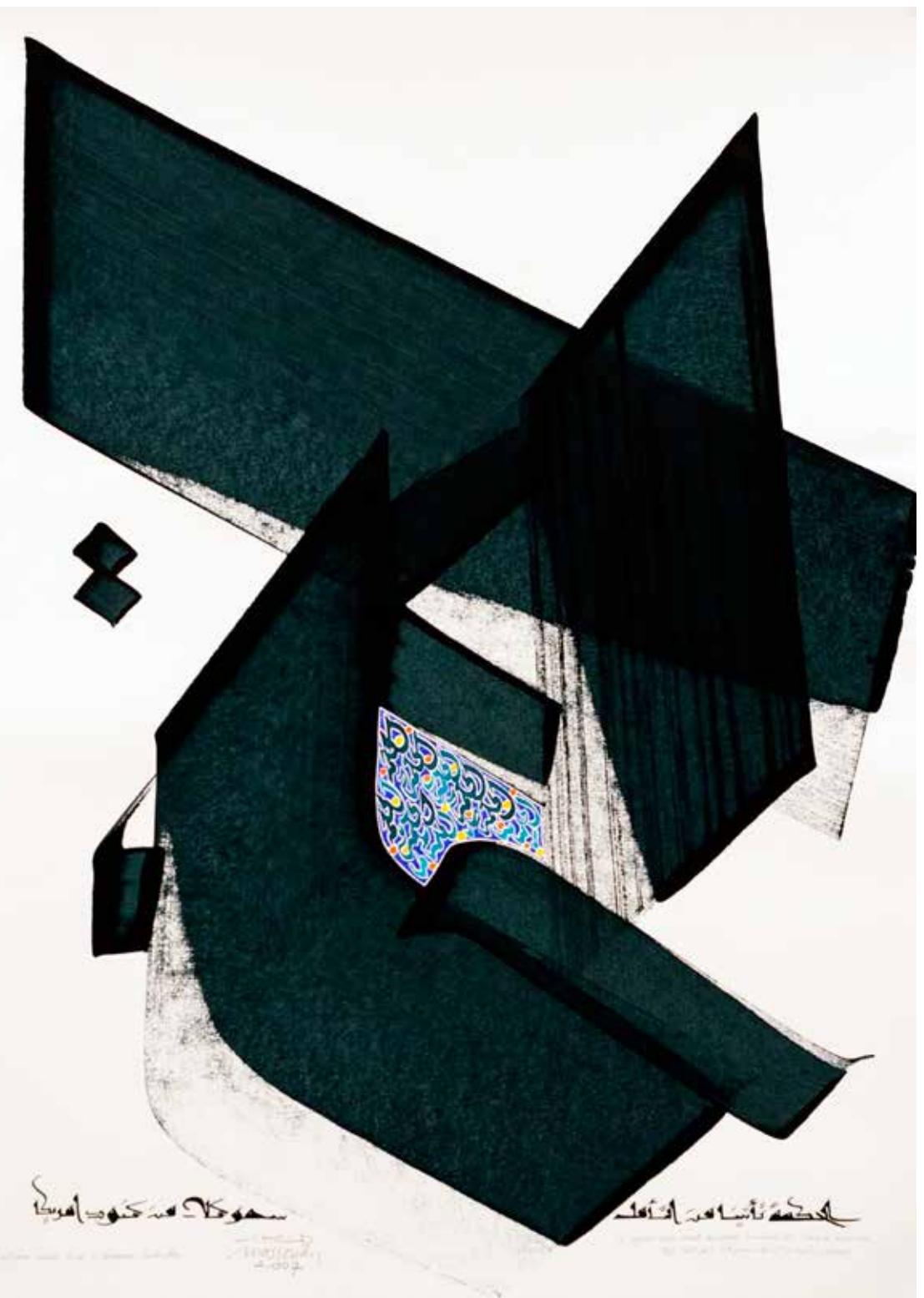


untitled, 1993, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"The East and West are ever in search of each other, and must eventually meet"
—Rabindranath Tagore

untitled, 2009, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Love guided me and I followed it docility. No one apart from you have I permitted to be my guide"
—Ibn Zaydoun



untitled, 2007, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"Wisdom comes to us in dreams" –Smohalla





untitled, 2006, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm
"What have I not yet done for love" –Ibn al-Faredh

HASSAN MASSOUDY

Classically trained calligrapher Hassan Massoudy inscribes oversized letters in vibrant colors on paper or canvas to create visually compelling works that bring traditional Arabic script into a contemporary context. Massoudy sources words from Eastern and Western authors, poets and philosophers. He selects a passage, which he writes at the bottom of a sheet of paper, then extracts a single word, enlarging it to monumental proportions over the entire surface of the paper.

In accordance with tradition, Massoudy makes his own tools and inks, but breaks from the Arabic custom of using only black ink by incorporating a bold palette of blues, greens, yellows and reds. Although executed with the utmost control, his letters are gestural, fluid and charged with energy, as he skillfully transforms the written word into a pictorial element.

Massoudy studied classical calligraphy in Baghdad. He moved to France in 1969, continuing his education at the L'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He has shown his work at The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.; the British Museum, London; Musée d'Avranches, France; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Abbaye de Trizay and the Palais des Congrès de Grasse, France. His work is in the collections of The British Museum, London; Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; and Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. He has also shown at Sharjah Biennale 11, 2013 and in 2015, two of his works were included in *Frontiers Reimagined*, a collateral event of the 56th Venice Biennale.

Calligraphies of Love (Saqi Books, 2017), Hassan Massoudy's new English language book of works inspired by love poems from the Arab and Islamic world, will be released in February this year.

Born in Najaf, Iraq, 1944 | Lives and works in Paris

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Cover: *untitled (detail)*, 2007, ink and pigment on paper, 29.5 x 21.7 inches/75 x 55 cm

"Wisdom comes to us in dreams" —Smohalla

