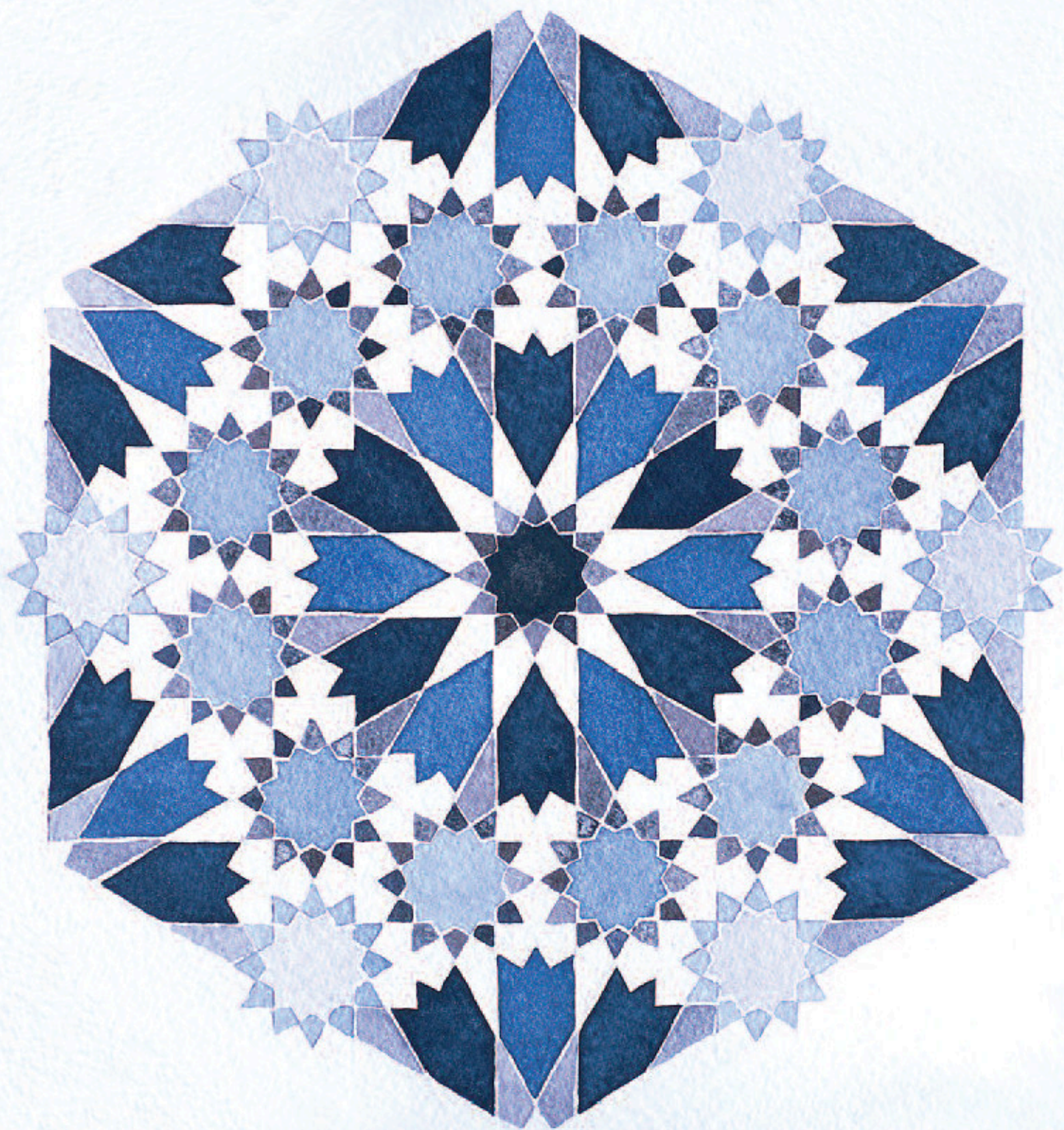


# an

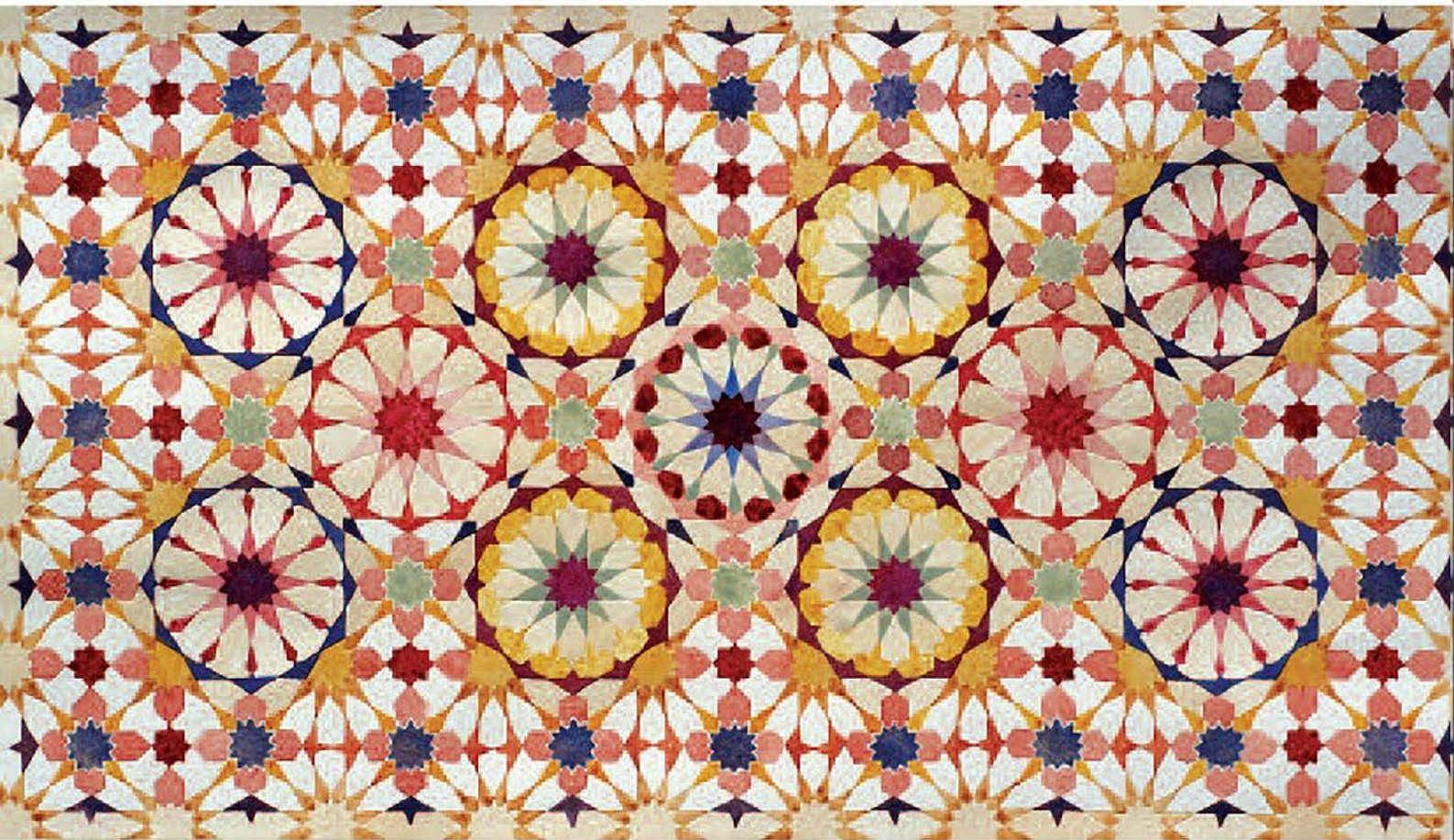
a - n Magazine



10> OCT 2004  
£4.25  
(€ 6.75)

ART OF CONFLICT / ART FAIRS / NAN INITIATIVE / OVER 150 JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES

9 770261 342034



Zarah Hussain,  
*Flowerbed*, hand-  
ground watercolour  
56x32cm

# Unity in pattern

Artist's story: Zarah Hussain

I have always been fascinated by complex geometry and pattern making. Initially, when starting out as a painter I made large abstract canvases inspired by the Op art movement and Bridget Riley. I soon found this work to be clinical and cold, yet my fascination with pattern and pattern-making continued. Searching for a mode of expression that I could understand more fully, I started to rediscover my artistic cultural heritage and this led to me taking a path toward traditional Islamic geometry.

I was fortunate to be offered a place at the Visual Islamic and Traditional Art (VITA) department based at the Prince's Foundation in London, here I was taught by master geometers Paul Marchant and Keith Critchlow. During my time at VITA I discovered the inherent beauty of number and how this relates to the

natural world and the order that pervades the universe.

Muslims are encouraged to take heed of the order and harmony of God's creation, there is beauty and profound symbolism in the sun, earth, moon and orbits of the planets, this is reflected by the order, symmetry and balance in geometric pattern.

**Verily there are signs  
For those that reflect**  
'The Holy Qu'ran (30.21)'

The purpose of my artwork is to help humans to contemplate the Divine.

Sacred art is not representational; it does not imitate Divine creation, but the way in which the Divine spirit works. Sacred art brings out the inward essence of the things that are being presented, not the outer.

The Islamic standpoint is that in

the effort to trace origins in creation, the direction is not backwards but inwards – when the soul seeks sources and reasons for its existence it is led inward and away from the outer world towards fewer and more comprehensive ideas and principles. The primary function of these patterns is to lead the mind from the literal and mundane world to the underlying reality of existence.

During the past two years I have learned how to construct geometric patterns using a straight edge and compass, the underlying spiritual aspect being that geometry like all creation starts from a point that is extended to a line and then a circle. The circle represents unity and the making of pattern represents multiplicity, these two elements are manifest in every type of Islamic Art and Architecture.

My paintings are inspired by patterns from all over the Islamic world and I am fascinated by the

sense of vibration, energy and spirituality present in geometry. I paint on handmade paper and I now make my own hand-ground watercolour paints from natural substances such as cochineal, earth pigments, semi precious stone and natural materials.

**Zarah Hussain**

[www.zarahhussain.com](http://www.zarahhussain.com)  
[info@zarahhussain.com](mailto:info@zarahhussain.com)

'Handasah – Unity in Pattern' is at Ordsall Hall Museum, Salford from 14 September – 14 November.

Zarah Hussain's exhibition is part of a project initiated by Shisha, the international agency for contemporary South Asian crafts and visual arts, which aims to exhibit six solo artists over three years. Shisha is now programming for year three of the project and is considering proposals from artists. See Opportunities under Exhibiting for more details.