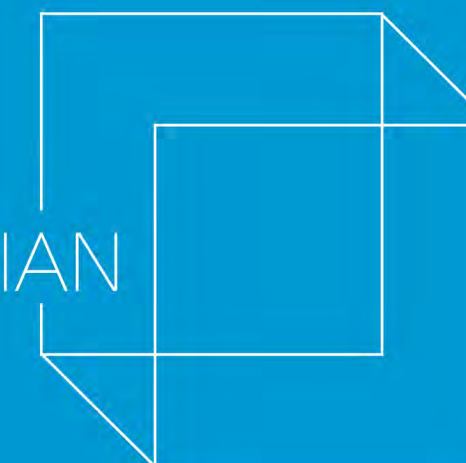


theDISCORD



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BENJI BOYADGIAN



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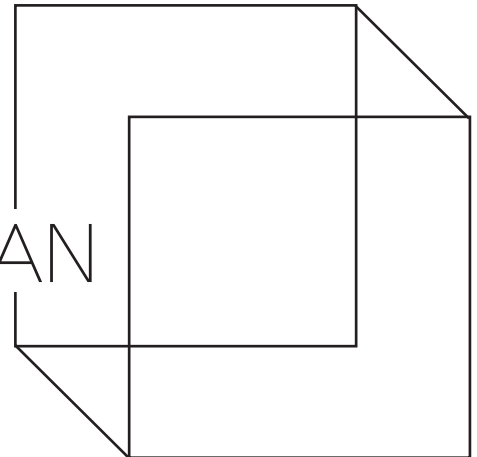


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theDISCORD

edited by BAŞAK ŞENOVA

BENJI BOYADGIAN



theDISCORD

WRITINGS ON theDISCORD

theDISCORD.....	I
NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH BENJI BOYADGIAN.....	2
Jack Persekian	
REACHING THE FLOATING TILE.....	5
Başak Şenova	
A KALEIDOSCOPIC GAZE.....	7
Jonatan Habib Engqvist	
CROSSING THE LINES.....	13
Sinan Logie	
THE DERMIS OF HISTORY.....	14
Behzad Khosravi Noor	
REPETITION, COVERING, AND TABULA RASA.....	16
Timo Tuhkanen	
BOULEZ-DELEUZE-GUATTARI: SMOOTH AND STRIATED.....	18
Ali Akay	
SETTING THE DISCORD.....	23
Benji Boyadgian in conversation with Başak Şenova	

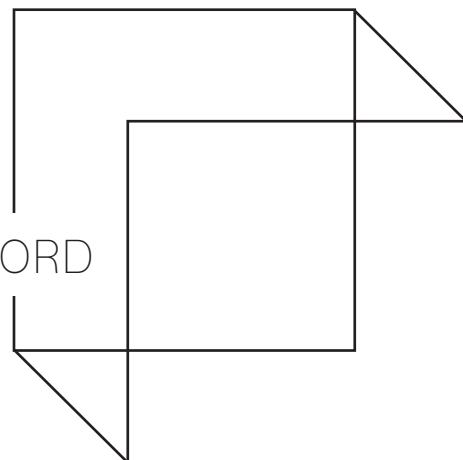
THE WORKS AND THE SECTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION

DISCORD.....	32
CRYPT OF SKY.....	83
TRACES.....	89
MAGNET.....	92
SEDIMENTS OF DISCORD.....	96
TERMINAL.....	99

THE SPATIAL DESIGN

THE DESIGN.....	105
Benji Boyadgian and Başak Şenova	
THE PLANS.....	108
THE SECTIONS.....	112
THE AXONOMETRIES.....	116

WRITINGS ON theDISCORD





theDISCORD

The idea of 'discord' stems from its geological definition. It is an attempt to look at what lies beneath the surface of 'tiles' as the subject and core of the artistic research. Therefore, the tiles can be considered as an analogy of 'surface', as well as the source inspiration for this project that lasted six years. The notion of surface contains information in the standpoint of the long temporality, whilst in a certain way, it tends to create entropy by the machines of the industrial era.

The tiles are evidently a trace of an accumulative history. *theDiscord* dismantles the entangled layers and temporalities encompassing the story of those tiles. The numerous fictions hovering around these histories, which the project researched and reflected on are the suggestions of layered, eroded, discordant surfaces and sediments. The project itself addresses a discordant act of digging through layers by inverting temporalities of multiple histories and the present.

JACK PERSEKIAN

NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH BENJI BOYADGIAN

13 FEBRUARY 2017

I've always been mesmerized by the checkered floor tiles, the ones that make a stair pattern going up and down in different directions. When I was a kid I would imagine that by stepping in one particular direction and order (forever a mystery to me), I could step into another dimension, a sort of fantasy space where I would find my imaginary world. To me, the real world was not exciting enough (I guess) and I was hoping for a phantasmagoric place. As I grew up I became more aware of the other phantasmal worlds that were around, whether religion, drugs, or Palestinian politics. But it was the multitude of realms and spaces created and made accessible by art which offered the most imaginative, exciting and progressive world that I could ever hope for.

Yet one cannot, and should not, detach oneself from reality. Some of the most interesting art in circulation today deals with the current pressing issues, offering insight from unexpected and unexplored perspectives, and interpretations as yet unimagined. But what is fascinating and unique about art are the processes by which its outcomes unfold and its multiple transformations unravel. The more layers there are, the deeper the journey through the artwork and the more captivating it is, making visible the process the artist goes through and the true meaning of technique, precision and temporality.

I became aware of the *Discord* project some five years ago. I understood from Benji that the project was prompted by his desire at the time to recapture the magic of the craft of pattern making, lost in the rush for mass production and digital reproduction. He was after the magic of handicraft, the craftsmanship and singularity; all sacrificed in the machine age. He wanted to stimulate the collective visual memory that the floor tiles with their decorative patterns bring about, and at the same time propose another fiction. In the early stages of the project, the work was about fictionalizing the patterns in a Palestinian historical context, reflecting upon the different layers, the passage of time, the movement of people,

and the erosion that all of these, and the tiles as well, bear. Boyadgian was looking at these ornamental tiles during a period when they became important relics of the Palestinian home, heritage symbols infused with memory and belonging.

In my research on objects that people would never part with for the Never-Part project, I came across Mohammad Radwan, who was by then living in the old city of Jerusalem. Radwan had held on to a floor tile from the house in Deir Yassin that he had been exiled from after the massacre in 1948. He had taken the tile during a visit he made to the house in 2008, when he discovered that his house had been turned into a carpentry workshop. Radwan recounted to me the events in 1948 that had led to the fall of the village of Al-Qastal, and to the Deir Yassin massacre, as he had witnessed them from his house located at the far west of the village. To my surprise, he had written on the back of the tile the name of the factory that had produced the tiles for his house. It was the Kassissieh tile factory, located then in New Gate, and which, remarkably, happens to be the same tile factory that we renovated and turned into the home base for the Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, where this first exhibition of Boyadgian's *the Discord* takes place.

Over the years, I have witnessed the painstaking processes of drawing and colouring that Boyadgian follows; such a repetitive, monotonous and tiring process. He tells me that he notes every time he makes a misstep; an inaccuracy permits him to mutate the pattern almost infinitely. It is a process he repeats again and again, imagining himself as a sort of human machine, mass-producing patterns in endless colour progressions and articulations for his own personal ocular pleasure. Yet, watching him closely as he was painting the series, I could see how rigorous the calculations and considerations are to plan ahead what seems to be a natural flow of pigments, mixed with water, moving across the surface of the cotton rag paper. It is one thing to think and imagine what the colour might be, or the movement or formations in a certain progressive pattern, but it is something else to mix the pigments, get the right fluidity and have only the one chance to get it right on the paper.

Why is Boyadgian revisiting history when it has been revisited over and over again? We are aware that the tile pattern is formed by a mould, which is set and cannot be changed, and where everything is codified according to Boyadgian. The reproduction of patterns in the age of the machine is losing its richness; it's repetitive in a literal sense, and dull.

Boyadgian's *Discord* might seem banal, but if we look carefully we see that he reproduces the patterns in an inverse way. He mutates them. He slows down the process. He makes us realise that we need to pay attention to the fact that in ancient times these patterns had a meaning for the peoples and cultures that started making them. These patterns did not just appear out of nowhere he says. There is a philosophy behind their making, and it is incorrect to think that they were originally made for purely decorative purposes. Boyadgian's attempt to bring new meaning to these patterns is yet to be fully realized, but they surely bring back the magic of a craft that has been killed off by mass production.

CRYPT OF SKY [detail]
2017



REACHING THE FLOATING TILE

... a sound
caught by a spell just under crescendo and sustained.¹

It was the autumn of 2013. I was in Jerusalem, working on the *Jerusalem Show VII: Fractures* and doing studio visits. One morning, I was sent to a studio at the verge of Wad el Shami, a valley, located in the southern tip of Jerusalem, between the green line and the Wall. It was the studio of Benji Boyadgian, a young Armenian artist, documenting the states of the transformation in the city through ruins in the valley, which was subject to be destroyed for a new neighbourhood as part of the “Great Jerusalem”. He was using only watercolours and painting in situ. Not only his artistic methodology, but also his critical approach to the act of documenting caught my attention. Since the starting point of *Fractures* was Jerusalem as a city that persistently folds multiple pasts into contradictory presents and many flows and perspectives in-between fractures of time, the first chapter of this work-in-progress found a relevant ground in the *Jerusalem Show VII: Fractures*. During the same studio visit, I also had the chance to have a closer look at Boyadgian’s other on-going projects and one specific project captivated my interest: *Discord*. Our long discussion on this project occupied most of that visit. This dialogue was followed by some meetings and online sessions, generating and developing ideas for the steps to come. Accordingly, since 2014, we exhibited the processes of the project on several occasions². Interviews and texts in some magazines³ and a part in a book⁴, along with talks at some art institutions⁵ accompanied our collaboration. Eventually, this venture was finalized as a solo show⁶ by Boyadgian back in Jerusalem.

In the process of developing the project, Boyadgian’s act of producing each piece turned to an act of thinking to take concrete steps to gather the pieces as units of patterns that would be presented by following and breaking the implied grids of the space. Each series has its own rhythm and they create crossing rhythms when they intersect. In a like manner, the visual intensities of the pieces create different patterns to be crossed when they are placed in a systematic grid system in reference to the architectural structure of the building that frames these compositions. Apart from the artist’s intention to re-enact the presence of the tiles in the Al Ma’mal building⁷, the *Discord* is an attempt to articulate another layer to the history and the structure of the building. By referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of *smooth space* and *striated space*⁸, one can say that the grid system, which serves to partition space into sections, functions as the *striated space* that codes and decodes the tile factory, while simultaneously the *smooth space* is being created by the rhythmic patterns of *Discord* by territorializing or deterritorializing the building with its content and intensities. *The Discord* unravels the connections between intensities and flows of thought; observations and narratives, heritage and past; mental blocks and visual complexities; language and silence.

Not only the structure of the exhibition, but also the narrative of the production process along with the artist's motivation to install the *Discord* at this specific building brings *La Traviata* to my mind. Written and first performed in 1853 at Teatro La Fenice in Venice (as “the” specific building to host this particular opera), *La Traviata* has been the most-performed opera of Giuseppe Verdi and is a perfect example for using crescendo “to convey representational and interactive meanings”⁸. Especially at the end of Act I, intensities of meaning culminate with the simultaneous use of crescendos: we hear a long crescendo by the protagonist Violetta singing ‘Sempre Libera’, while her lover Alfredo professes his love with another crescendo from outside as the curtain falls.

With *the Discord*, the visual intensity gradually grows simultaneously from different angles and positions in the building. The wires that reach to the sky while suspending and connecting the *Crypt of Sky* installation to the building create a crescendo that overlaps with the *Traces* installation's transparent threads, which follow the ray of light, as they progressively grow to another crescendo. Likewise, the layered rhythmic patterns of *Discord* paintings both on the walls and on the boxes on different levels with different heights elevate crescendos with their content and their positioning in the space. The exhibition exceeds the confines of the building with a floating tile on the roof. This tile resonates as the last crescendo of the *The Discord*.

~~~~~

<sup>1</sup> Faulkner, William. 1990. *The sound and the fury: The corrected text*. New York: Vintage Books, p.102

<sup>2</sup> The processes of *the Discord* were exhibited in *Spinning On An Axis* exhibition (co-curated with Stephane Ackerman) under the coverage of *curated\_by* 2014 at Mario Mauroner Contemporary Art, Vienna (2014), *Line* and *Traces* exhibitions at Art Rooms, Kyrenia (2015 and 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Some interviews and texts on *Broadsheet Magazine* (Australia, 2014), *Fukt Magazine for Contemporary Drawing* (Germany, 2015), *ibraaz.org* (UK, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Senova, Basak. 2017. “Generating Questions: Archives and Curating Data-Based Projects”. *Futures of Artistic Research – At the Intersection of Utopia, Academia and Power. Writings from the Academy of Fine Arts* Ed. Jan Kaila, Anita Seppä, and Henk Slager. UniArts, Helsinki. ISBN 978-952-7131-42-8

<sup>5</sup> Talks took place at Salt (Turkey, 2014), EMMA (Cyprus, 2014), The Armory Show (USA, 2015), and Helsinki Art Museum (Finland, 2017)

<sup>6</sup> *The Discord* as a solo show by Benji Boyadgian co-curated with Jack Persekian, took place simultaneously at Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art and Anadiel Gallery in Jerusalem (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Al Ma'mal building was operated as a tile factory by an Armenian family for 70 years after being founded in the beginning of the twentieth century in Jerusalem.

<sup>8</sup> Rossi, Fabio and Maria Grazia Sindon. 2017. “The Phantoms of the Opera. Toward a Multidimensional Interpretative Framework of Analysis, in *Mapping Multimodal Performance Studies*”, ed. by Maria Grazia Sindoni, Janina Wildfeuer and Kay O'Halloran, London/New York, Routledge, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi, Athlone Press, London.

JONATAN HABIB ENGQVIST

# A KALEIDOSCOPIC GAZE

## GRIDS

Benji Boyadgian's site-specific installation in the stairwell of the gallery is a crisscross-system of transparent wires. Thinking of the laser-grid of advanced alarm systems, we might associate the installation to questions of contemporary surveillance on a broader level. The grid inhabits a space of transit. The grid no longer can be comprehended as a two-dimensional surface, but has become a three dimensional volume.

When Rosalind Krauss' analyzes the use of grids in art through modernism and in the 20th century she describes it as: "flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature". Whilst she, in order to speak of the use of grids prior to the 20th century, looks at fifteenth and sixteenth century perspective studies by Uccello or Leonardo and Dürer "where the perspective lattice is inscribed on the depicted world as the armature of its organization"<sup>1</sup>. In the cases of the early use of grids she writes that it was "the science of the real, not the mode of withdrawal from it. Perspective was the demonstration of the way reality and its representation could be mapped onto one another, the way the painted image and its real-world referent did in fact relate to one another – the first being a form of knowledge about the second."<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Krauss, reminiscing her first grid-painting, the American painter Agnes Martin says: "When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees and then this grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence, and I still do, and so I painted it and then I was satisfied. I thought, this is my vision."

Notably, both the sixteenth century perspective lattice of perceptive drawing mentioned by Krauss and Agnes Martin's fine vertical lines and lightly shaded horizontal bands in oil and pencil, along with her softening of the geometric grid beyond the confines of the canvas, connect to Benji Boyadgian's work. The correlation to former can be seen in his installations, whereas the connection to Martin is most apparent when we look more closely at Boyadgian's series of eighty-by-eighty centimetre patterns that play with personal and collective memory. Boyadgian's choice to work with watercolour creates a specific kind of volatility. Coming close to the works, we find slight variations in the repetitions — in blurs and transparencies of colours, although the pencilled lines remain visible. Boyadgian speaks of a "process based painting experiment on repetition and reinterpretation of paradigms from abstract and ornamental art". For Agnes Martin the grid likewise evoked not a human measure but an ethereal one — the boundless order or transcendent reality associated with non-western philosophies.

## ABSTRACTIONS

The problem with Krauss' analysis seems to lie in how she understands contemporary abstraction's use of the grid as separated from reality. With his background in architecture, Boyadgian appears to have a more pragmatic approach. For instance, he uses the grid to unfold city planning, layers of history and materiality. It is accurately placed in a juncture between abstract and concrete, between reflection and landscape. The grid is a signature element in both Martin's and Boyadgian's practice. Moreover there is in both cases remarkably little regularity about the way it is used. For instance the arabesque might be used to destroy, or at least put pressure on, the grid – expanding the grid, while also connecting points and creating a network. Scale and proportions will shift from work to work, the form varies depending on material and connotations transmute over time. In Boyadgian's case, the grid unmistakably bestows a construction of architectural determinism, such as the imposed grid of occupation, of the law and of planning. The grid is a system in itself. It signifies the way things are organized. And ever since early Modernity the grid has epitomized the way we treat the landscape.

The abstract paintings on the walls are based on floor tiles and organized in a grid. These meticulously worked canvases portray what the artist calls the “end of craft”, stemming from the mid-19th century and the dawn of mass production the “Palestinian” tiles replicate Catalonian tiles, which in turn look to the Moorish tradition. They are based on so-called hydraulic tiles, an industrialized version of cast tiles that are made by pouring white cement in a mould. The meticulous labour of the paintings vis-à-vis the source subject matter, the deployment of mutative repetition is an attempt to materialize collective memory through projection and reflection of a heritage. Perhaps pushing the patterns against an orientalist projection. In this respect, I am tempted to speak of them as “pointings” just as much as paintings.

## MIRRORS

In a Skype conversation while he was preparing this exhibition Boyadgian rhetorically asked “what happens if you go inside the sculpture?” Perhaps this question could be a means of exploring what is at stake in the exhibition as whole. By utilising reflections, refractions, squares and grids Boyadgian seems to be attempting to turn the exhibition inside out. Through an appropriation of the paradigms of abstract art, the exhibition becomes a complex survey of how our understanding of space is defined by gaze.

The desire to invent artistic practices that intervene in everyday life, and also point toward a different way of perceiving the world, is often labelled “utopian”. In architecture, utopian fantasy has a legacy extending back to the French revolution, and for some historians it was even an integral part of the founding moment of Renaissance architecture. To imagine, and to see both the “imagined” and the “real” at once; to ask for the place or site of imagination in this way is an attempt to remain in the

CRYPT OF SKY [detail]  
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017





physical architecture of the exhibition rather than delve into psychology or modes of consciousness. I believe we need to use alternative vocabulary to that of “utopia” to grasp these proposals and prospects, and that we need to free the imagination from the alternative between the utopian and the real, in order to consider the work of the works and how they warp our perceptual habits.

In the posthumously published lecture, *Des espaces autres*, a young Michel Foucault located three general historical transformations in how we understand space. First the idea of hierarchical emplacement (holy space / profane space) was, according to Foucault’s analysis, overthrown by Galileo’s (re-) discovery of infinite open space, substituting extension for localization. Foucault argues that extension now has been replaced by the notion of site. Site is defined as relations of proximity between points or elements. Relations formally described as series, trees or grids. Foucault writes that our “epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites”<sup>4</sup>. Half a century later it is perhaps an analysis that can be seen as commonplace. After all, we find ourselves living in an age where electronic communication, cheap travel, globalized mass media, “anachronistic” histories and multiple layers of virtual worlds are becoming such an integrated part of our daily lives that it can even be hard to separate the different realms of reality from each other.

What is key here is that the idea of heterotopia is presented in contrast to the idea of utopia. This is in line with Foucault’s overall endeavour to construct a genealogy of knowledge and power, which he later came to call a “history of the present” or an “ontology of actuality”<sup>5</sup>.

A genealogy that in turn implied a resistance toward what he felt to be the all too facile themes of utopia and transcendence as traditionally bestowed to us. It is obviously a complex and delicate task. In Swedish philosopher Sven-Olov Wallenstein’s words: “such a counter-history also requires that we somehow free a virtual becoming, or a becomingvirtual, inside the present in its relation to past that is no longer simply past, that we release a swarm of other pasts and futures that constitutes a proliferation of doubles, so as resist a historicist version of history as a burden that enforces an already formed future upon us. In this sense we may take heterotopia as a reformulation of utopia, or as attempt to excavate an untimely moment inside utopia, for which the other, the heteron, at a certain point appeared like a more apt term than the negative ou, the negative non-place in u-topia.”<sup>6</sup>

Boyadgian states that “looking into a mirror is the first level of abstraction. It is an abstraction, or deconstruction of time.” A mirror is simply sheet of glass with a reflective surface. It exists in reality and exerts a counteraction on the position occupied by the beholder.

In a beautiful quote from *Des espaces autres*, Foucault explains:

From the standpoint of mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed towards me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the

other side of the glass, I come back towards myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: It makes this space that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.<sup>7</sup>

In this description of mirroring as heterotopia it is the temporality, the duration that is significant. It is a question of shifting focus. Of optics.

By introducing a temporal aspect to the gaze, this mirroring ontology of optics appears to be supremely real in its virtuality. Boyadgian's exhibition at Al-Ma'mal seems to encourage a similar refraction of the gaze: Is it in fact the former tile factory that is being exhibited?

Wires in the centre of the room suspend a cubical prism clad with mirrors on the inside. This steers our gaze to the sky and the floor rather than the walls, and not only brings in a Y-axis to the notion of the grid but makes it bodily unmistakable. By invading and amplifying the features of the space, the combinations of surfaces create an extremely tangible abstraction of abstraction. The only paintings on the wall are images of floor tiles. It is kaleidoscopic and completely lucid.

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¹ Krauss, Rosalind. 1979. *Grids*. October, Vol 9, MIT Press, Boston. p.52

² *ibid.* p. 54

³ Martin, Agnes. 2012. *Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*. Phaidon, London/New York. [Facsimile of notebook].

⁴ Foucault, Michel. 1984. *Des espaces autres*. Dits et écrits, Paris. Foucault (original, p. 752-762). All quotes from Jay Miskowicz, English translation: <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. 2016. *Architecture, Critique, Ideology: Writings on Architecture and Theory*. Axl Books, Stockholm. p.307-308.

⁷ Foucault, Michel. *ibid.*

theDISCORD

Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



CROSSING THE LINES

From a Eurocentric perspective, history, history of art and architecture are frequently encapsulated in linear existences with fixed boundaries. Especially when it comes to the question of Eastern (or Middle Eastern, to be even more Eurocentric) art, it seems that some discourses are forbidden, or seen as not worth paying attention to. Traditional geometric patterns are probably part of this group.

However, the treaties on the optical drafted by Alhazen in Baghdad in the 11th century had a profound impact on Western and Eastern architecture. Alhazen's researches were based on light, its displacements through space and time and optical instruments. During his researches, the scientist developed a tool described as the world's first camera obscura. His researches were used in Orient by architects, stone carvers and carpenters. Alhazen's scientific book on "Geometric and physiologic optic" arrived till Andalusia, then under Arabic rule, where it was translated into Latin, in a Jesuit monastery, under the name of "Perspectiva". The spread of this book through Europe has been one of the vectors in the development of the perspective by Brunelleschi and Alberti, therefore influencing directly European architecture's trajectory. Despite those common sources, both cultures evolved differently.

Occident built its imaginary structure on the sight, Orient, on its side, pursued an introspective quest in abstraction's deepening. The first one projected itself into space while the second confided itself in a meditative and geometric inwardness. This spiritual interiority has commonly been transcribed to architecture by Space as an extrusion of these geometric rules. The patterns and the space were one.

Seeing space and time as a constellation of crossing lines must be a first step before contemplating Boyadgian's work. The artist, educated as an architect also stands at the crossing point of several lines between: Disciplines, ethnicities, religions and geographies.

Boyadgian's work on patterns can be at first glance seen as aesthetic essays on traditional heritage. But if we refer to the artist's education, then the watercolors seem to transform into the plans of a house, a palace or a temple, where light is constantly reflecting on the surfaces. Nevertheless, the artist's approach is more deeply anchored in the research of universality.

Under Boyadgian's sight, the tiles as decoration elements appropriated by different cultures through history are shifting into the records of constant struggles. In this frame, the tiles must be seen as discordant strata such as in geology, where the conflicts between the overlapping layers are related to the memory of different occupied territories around the globe.

Therefore, Boyadgian's handcrafted works may be parchments containing the plans of an ideal city, or an ideal land, that once hosted all the colors and all the nations on earth. If you look long enough to the works, maybe you will remember how to cross the lines and the borders; in fact, his patterns are treaties for freedom.

~~~~~

<sup>1</sup> Alhazen, or Abu Ali al-Hasan (965-1039) is a Persian scientist well-known for his researches on optic and geometry.

<sup>2</sup> Belting, Hans. 2011. Florence and Baghdad. Renaissance Art and Arab Science', Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge.

## BEHZAD KHOSRAVI NOORI ON THE DERMIS OF HISTORY

History for me has been a twisted riddle. Not knowing it, its secrets and mysteries, its antiquity, its continuous existence, its discordant narratives, its essence and its permanent state of transience makes it more baffling.

The macro-narrative of history, contrary to how it appears, has its macro-existence within the realm of the subconscious. Being macro does not make it visible but hides it even more from the spectrum. Macro-history or the historical macro narrative has an underlying existence and its presence is unseen, unnoticed and unacknowledged by geo-political historians. Perhaps Palestine and the Middle East in larger geo-political context is the example of this grand narration of political agenda. The representation of these places has a strong tendency to permanently be in relationship to a grand narration of what we know about them and what we have learned from the ongoing and endless conflict. The conflict that has become part of natural being of the specific geo-political condition. We as spectators unconsciously hunting for blood in their arts and representation. But where did this understanding of history originate? When did it come into existence? How has it metamorphosed in the face of the inconsistencies of the essence and narration of history? How did "I" find its way

into the historical narrative of this geo-history? Or in short what is my relationship to history? Can I recognize my position or political narrations of history by hiding itself under my skin and then becoming hypo history. I carry it everywhere without being conscious. Perhaps there is a relationship between everyday life and the grand narrations of historical orders. There is a relationship between “I” as an individual and the history at large.

The understanding of the weight of history comes into focus at the time when the recognition phase is substituted by a phase of grand-recognition; at the time when I, as an individual, return to historical memory and attempts to re-evaluate it. Perhaps it is here where everything returns to “againness”: to re-read, re-evaluate, re-research, and re-exist and revising the history.

In geo-political locations with a long history of conflicts and paradoxes, the relation between the individual and such a general notion of history takes on unique characteristics. Historical and political identity of the current period is branded by the past; the current period itself identified according to the grand narrations of the historical past.

The question of ‘who one is’ has a strong link to the social and political positionality that one claims. Although any location has a history, but perhaps the mark of an artist and the underlying history reminds us of the essential difference between an artist from the geo-political location such as the Middle East and ones from geographical regions who have an ability to have more distant relationship with the existence and practice of grand historical narrations in everyday life. However Boyadgian’s original pattern exploration suggests or presents comparatively a particular exit door from this expected grand hegemonic narrations of art in the realm of contemporary art within historicized geo-political context. But his work should not be misled and apoliticized into the state of craftsmanship and material practices itself. Knowing, not essentially consciously but intuitively, that in the contexts of Hyper-political time and place any action, movement and representation associates with the grand hegemonic narration of political conflict.

History is unbearable and in short, for these historicized social and political claimants, has become a quarry from which we cut stones to hurl at each other. Boyadgian by revising and rereading historical patterns through the scope of the traces left on hydraulic tiles represents a hyper political object in the format of painting. I believe the conceptual and political assessment of his abstraction in relation to temporality of materialization, are the main point. It is indeed related to whimsies of the idea of phantasmagoria and fetish and more crucially self-reflective attitude toward the concept of hyper-politics in order to tie up the notion of the politics to social abstraction. His work manipulates grand narration of political agenda by its perpetuity; mise en abyme of thought, slowness and determinacy.

Boyadgian forms his relationship with this transience of history’s essence through the entanglement of raveling historical elements. Boyadgian is a narrator of the dermis of history of places and patterns; the place between the skin and flesh of the human body; the place where blood flows.

TIMO TUHKANEN

# REPETITION, COVERING, AND TABULA-RASA

When looking at beautiful tiles, what is often forgotten is what is covered. The act of tiling repeatedly hides rough surfaces and makes spaces sanitized and more manageable. A clean, shiny new surface is installed which then serves as a functional space inside which time-full activities and histories can then start to impact the surface from the outside. When looking at beautiful tiles, the tiles are already there, they are a fact of nature.

This then is the temporality where Boyadgian's paintings land. The landscape painting he uses to document ancient ruins that are about to be destroyed shows nature, his home, as the surface that must be cleaned before industry and occupation can cover it with their tiles: roads, houses, walls, all creating the new surfaces on which inhabitants can then live their lives and onto which their histories get recorded. These paintings are contemplative and analytical. They emit a sense of wanting to record the artefacts and memories associated with the ruins and the society that created the ruins, but they also want to reveal the psychotic mechanism geared towards destroying social fabric and living history in an effort to create a tabula rasa, a clean slate. They are snapshots of the surface right before the fixing agent is applied, right before the tile is applied to the fixing agent.

The tile paintings then take this surface to its logical conclusion. In these paintings the tiles become repetitive, even obsessive and controlling. It feels like the only thing that stops their expansion into space from the paper are the frames and the air gap between the paper and other objects. And even then, the painting is repeated in another similar painting.

Confined to a location, the tiles then turn around and start morphing, pushing and pulling each other until the force becomes too great and they lose their rigid nature and begin climbing over and eating each other in an effort to take over territory. I am reminded of the mental process of strategizing over a *Go board*, influence territory, attack directly, surround and eat your enemy, command area, survive till the end, win. At this point Boyadgian's real task begins. He wants to understand how it is that these simple tiles become so strategic. How these flat objects with beautiful surfaces that have their own histories can hide so much of what they cover, and it is his unique position in time and space, and his understanding that this is what is happening, that allows him to paint precisely this process.

DISCORD [detail]  
2011-2016



Boyadgian does this by entering into the medium of watercolour and it is through this medium that he is able to communicate that between the viewer and the covered history. It is not that the erasure of the colours, or their transparency, reveal the history of the object.

Repeatedly only one thing emerges from this archaeological process. Underneath the painted decorative surface, which can give so much beauty to the world, is the white paper. A blank wall and document onto which to project desires for different futures. Seen this way the landscape paintings take on a new meaning. The white paper on which they are painted is the document appropriated from this use of desire projection. It no longer acts as a suppressive tool to conceptually cover nature and reimagine an alternative from white nothingness.

In the landscape paintings the white becomes the place and the bright air, it becomes the translucent body onto which shadows mark themselves speaking of a world between histories, of a world in rotation.

ALI AKAY

## BOULEZ-DELEUZE-GUATTARI SMOOTH AND STRIATED

The preliminaries of Gilles Deleuze's book, Francis Bacon, can be detected in a work co-authored with Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Mille plateaux*), published in 1980 by Les Éditions de Minuit in French, and in Deleuze's own work at the end of the book entitled *Smooth and Striated*. This is also how the sequence of his historical courses at the University of Paris VIII (Université de Paris VIII, Vincennes) advanced. It is possible to say that with Deleuze's inclination towards plastic arts, they were talking about an 'Aesthetic Model' of the Plastic and Musical while speculating about the 'smooth and striated spaces' with Guattari. Although the terms 'smooth space' and 'striated space' were coined by the renowned French composer and theoretician Pierre Boulez, there is a minor difference between Deleuze & Guattari, and Boulez which we will touch on later.

The chapter “The Smooth and the Striated” is also the chapter that follows “Apparatus of Capture”. Deleuze and Guattari deal with the chapter in association with nomad art:

*Nomad Art. Several notions, both practical and theoretical, are suitable for defining nomad art and its successors (barbarian, Gothic, and modern). First, ‘close-range’ vision, as distinguished from long-distance vision; second, ‘tactile,’ or rather ‘haptic’ space, as distinguished from optical space. ‘Haptic’ is a better word than ‘tactile’ since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this non-optical function..<sup>1</sup>*

Deleuze and Guattari talk about Alois Riegl, who gave fundamental aesthetic status to the couple, close vision-haptic space. However, they continue to say that they decided to set aside the criteria proposed by Riegl (then by Wilhelm Worringer, and more recently by Henri Maldiney), and take some risks themselves, making free use of these notions. The Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). According to Deleuze and Guattari: “the Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space — although the eye in turn is not the only organ to have this capacity”.<sup>2</sup> They give Cézanne as a precise example for this: “The law of the painting is that it be done at close range, even if it is viewed from relatively far away. One can back away from a thing, but it is a bad painter who backs away from the painting he or she is working on. Or from the ‘thing’ for that matter: Cézanne spoke of the need to no longer see the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself without landmarks in smooth space. Afterward, striation can emerge: drawing, strata, the earth, ‘stubborn geometry,’ the ‘measure of the world,’ ‘geological foundations,’ ‘everything falls straight down’ . . . The striated itself may in turn disappear in a ‘catastrophe,’ opening the way for a new smooth space, and another striated space...”<sup>3</sup> Smooth and striated spaces, or nomadic and settled spaces, — in other words, the two spaces where the ‘war machine’ and ‘State apparatus’ institutionalize — are not the same. The correlation between the two spaces seem to be functional in two ways: sometimes there is an extremely complicated situation where perfectly acceptable, tandem terms do not completely intercept, creating a gap between the terms. Other times, the two spaces exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space.

Deleuze and Guattari state that a painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance. Similarly, it is also the case with music:

*Even writers write with short-term memory, whereas readers are assumed to be endowed with long-term memory. The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step. Examples are the desert, steppe, ice, and sea, local spaces of pure connection. Contrary to what is sometimes said, one never sees from a distance in a space of this kind, nor does one see it from a distance; one is never ‘in front of,’ any more than one is ‘in’ (one is ‘on’ ...).<sup>4</sup>*



When is the eye optic and when is it haptic? Deleuze and Guattari approach this question as follows:

*The opposition between the striated and the smooth is not simply that of the global and the local. For in one case, the global is still relative, whereas in the other the local is already absolute. Where there is close vision, space is not visual, or rather the eye itself has a haptic, non-optical function: no line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor centre; there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary. Like Eskimo space. In a totally different way, in a totally different context, Arab architecture constitutes a space that begins very near and low, placing the light and the airy below and the solid and heavy above. This reversal of the laws of gravity turns lack of direction and negation of volume into constructive forces.<sup>5</sup>*

Earlier, it was mentioned that Deleuze and Guattari borrowed the terms ‘smooth space’ and ‘striated space’ from Pierre Boulez. Boulez approaches the space as a potential space in which polyphony is distributed, rather than perceiving the space itself as soniferous data. Noise is used — by default non-hierarchically — by the anecdotal.

When comparing the hierarchical sounds in primary and secondary structures, Boulez underlines that secondaries depend on the noise factor. He criticizes that no sound from daily life (motor and mechanical noises) can break its connection from the anecdotal, and that it is often confused with ‘Modernism’ or being ‘machine-like’.

However, when we look at Modern music such as Varèse’s *Ionisation*, this seems to be too serious an argument. Of course, Varèse was using the anecdotal when he used the sound of sirens in 1929, just as Cage did later on. There is a contrast here with Deleuze and Boulez, where in his book *Logique du sens*, Deleuze emphasizes that in a way, philosophy is carried out in anecdotes; such as the falling of Empedocles into a volcano, or the volcano spitting out his sandals. If we are to insist on its usage, Boulez says that it should be indicated that they belong to everyday life. If we discard hierarchy, every sound of an object that belongs to anecdote would be completely isolated from its inherent state.

Although Boulez differed in his perspective regarding the anecdotal from Deleuze, he separates the sonorous space of which Deleuze talks about in his book *Logique du sens* in terms of continuum and breaks it into two: while there are two spaces where the continuum is both intercepted and sustained, there are also transitions from one point to the other. Again, the space here intersects based on certain rules. Together with the break, the continuum changes mark. The senses start working like an epsilon as the break sharpens. As it approaches an interruption, the break forms a physical and physiological border. Therefore, according to Boulez, the musical space encounters two kinds of interruptions: first, through the change in meter where it often adapts; secondly where the non-distinctive break occurs inconclusively. One smooths out the surface of the space, while the other striates.<sup>5</sup>

The perception of the space quality as a micro structure is going to change depending on the space being smooth or striated. These two spaces will function through creating inter-transitionality based on the variations in the intervals in perception or rhythm.

The expressiveness of the arrangements, and the coinciding factor in the organizational principles correlate the two spaces. Thus, it all takes place within the coincidental or the expressive.

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¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1985. *Art & Text*, Volumes 17-19, the University of California, p16.

² Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi, Athlone Press, London. p 544.

³ *ibid.* p.493

⁴ *ibid.* p 544

⁵ *ibid.* p 545

⁶ Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, Gallimard/Tel, 1963, p.19, 95, 96.

WHIM #3 [detail]
2013



BENJI BOYADGIAN
IN CONVERSATION WITH
BAŞAK ŞENOVA

SETTING theDISCORD

BAŞAK ŞENOVA

As the stimulus of the project, ‘aged tiles with pattern designs’ are not only objects, eroded with time and friction, but they also appear as traces to read the movements and actions of the past. Nevertheless, not only these traces, but also the patterns constantly re-appear and repeat. How does the project engage with the notion of ‘repetition’?

BENJI BOYADGIAN

Repetition is omnipresent in the project; the subject matter, the process, and the materialization are all based on repetition. Unlike the monotony which could potentially be created by repeating the same thing infinitely, the form of repetition I suggest is a mutating one, or the impossibility of repetition.

These hydraulic tiles, a product of the industry, contain a more complex history than they suggest. The gnawed aspect caught my attention, traces of time and passage. A feeling of infinite discordance, made possible by the way each tile aged differently. Maybe it was this romantic feeling. Walking on the surface made sense to the erosion, a layered history resonates bellow those patterns, a story of repeated passage.

Speaking of the history of the tiles, what kind of stories of production lie beneath these tiles?

Somehow, they represent a threshold in the history of non-figurative imagery, the end of craft, and the passage to the age of commodification. The process of production of those tiles, an archaic hydraulic press aided by a person whose function is also to pour pigmented liquid cement into a mould, is today perceived as craftsmanship. This is something I find interesting and understandable. They are ordinary ornamental objects, products of the 19th century, whose materiality has the potential to age charmingly.

The essence of their commodification, the projections that make them desirable and the associations they produce, make them objects of many stories. The kind of stories that construct the 'phantasmagorical' value of those tiles. As I see it, it is not only their capacity to be reproduced in terms of functional objects, ornamental motifs or metaphors of history, but also how they manage to produce and reproduce subconscious projections, or 'phantasmagorias'.

This project was also stimulated by a book that mentions a claim of heritage on those tiles – published by Riwaq. At a personal level I found it interesting, and I agree with it, but I think it calls for other ways to look at heritage and identity

Could you briefly talk about your research on the history of these tiles?

Hydraulic' tiles were invented sometime in the middle of the 19th century, during the industrial revolution, as a result of the invention of the hydraulic press and cement. A Catalan product, presented by Garret, Rivet and Co. as 'antique tiles' at the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition. The concept was a new pavement, which did not need cooking, and could be produced industrially, a replacement for 'encaustic' tiles. At the same time, in Barcelona a new movement known as 'Catalan Modernism' (Catalan Art Nouveau or Jugendstil movement) was developing. Antoni Gaudí and Lluís Domènech i Montaner were influential figures in this movement, the latter having written its manifest. The originality of their design stemmed from the association of Gothic and Moorish elements taken from their local heritage and merging them with rational lines. One of the aspects of this movement was the manifestation of Catalan identity. Those tiles were a by-product of this movement made possible by the industrial patronage. The first designs were made by figures of the movement.

Spanish history contains traces of different hegemonic occupations of the Mediterranean basin, its heritage shares similarities with Palestinian heritage. In terms of how those tiles are politicized and associated to identity, there is a parallel to draw.

At the turn of the 20th century, those tiles started appearing in Palestine, essentially in urban residences, the new residential suburban neighbourhoods of the burgeoning bourgeoisie, and institutional buildings. One of the first of such tile factories in the old city of Jerusalem was the Kassissieh Tile Factory, in the vicinity of the New Gate. It is now the Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art. Of the other traditional tile factories operating in Palestine, only two remain, one in Nablus and one in Jerusalem (Al Ram neighbourhood), and they still repeat the same patterns, using the same old moulds.

After the Oslo accords and the emergence of a permanent proto Palestinian state, in a context where the status quo is an adequate analogy for repeating patterns, the absence of capable institutions makes organizations such as Riwaq important actors in the apparatus of the formation of identity. The claim of heritage of those tiles questions the absurdity of national identity building, maybe suggesting other

ways to look at identity. In Palestine, there are numerous examples of motifs from different historical periods and styles. Some can be found on those tiles in a simplified way. They are the accumulation of a long history of imagery without mimesis, an anachronistic amalgamation of its iconographical history.

What make the tiles part and parcel of Palestinian heritage is the reflection of its history of occupations. Those tiles, a by-product of their time, are objects of discord, simultaneously a trace, an agglomeration and a projection.

In that sense, what is Catalanian, Palestinian and others heritage, is not the tiles per se, but the history of common occupations. In this historical context, how about the politics of ornamentation? What do you think about the patterns that were also employed in ornamenting?

I am not sure if it is necessary to say that the history of patterns is a story of exchanged and mutated influences. Or that patterns surround us in our environments, and nature has always been a source of inspiration, whether abstractly or figuratively. It is another story of appropriation and projection. As said, those tiles are just the history of ornaments embodied in a mould, ordinary, generic and aesthetic objects. I think that historically, patterns had meaning that went beyond their ornamental value, and this has been lost with time.

For example, if we look at Islamic art, which probably took patterns the furthest in terms of geometric complication and intricacy, this form of art was made possible by a certain philosophy. Yet those tiles are commonly associated with something oriental, maybe due to Orientalism that surrounded the tastes of the times when they were designed, or the heritage Orientalism has projected upon history.

Many of the patterns on those tiles exist also in Islamic art, but this association is a form of amalgamation that does not do justice to Islamic art.

One can find many historical examples of ornaments and patterns that have symbolic meanings or are just ornamental. The moment an ornament serves as an expression of opulence or has only a decorative value, the magic starts to disintegrate, yet old traditions repeat themselves, so there remains a form of aura, due to the process of production and its long history.

The industrial and digital era have completely changed modes of production and reproduction, as well as the ways we engage with those imageries. There is no longer a form of rarity, they are very present in the realm of a collective visual imagery. This has transcended the functional and ornamental value, to a 'phantasmagorical' value, an object of projection, whose poetry derives into everything and nothing. The unbearable reproducibility of those patterns has turned them into background retinal distraction for orientalist fetish.

Could your approach also be read as a procedure that precipitates an ‘oriental projection’?

The oriental projection exists in the collective imaginary. It is a matter of recognizing it and identifying its constructs. Then there is the phenomenon of projective identification repeating itself like a pattern where the subject identifies with the projection and ends up reproducing it. I don't know if there is any way to precipitate those projections; their existence is consumed by mass production. In a larger sense, a question that often comes up when working on specific topics from a time and space overly politicised is: how to deal with subjects that contain so many projections?

The Oriental projection also corresponds with the input of ‘Islamic Art’ in the realm of patterns and the way western romantic movements from the 19th century looked at the East. Islamic Art benefited from the local traditions of the covered territories; they adapted themselves to new ways of thinking representation. The motifs used in Islamic Art were not invented but inherited, they were just taken to another level, they mutated and became something else, some of the most beautiful nonfigurative art pieces. In the project, I choose to start from an interpretation of a pattern from a tile, as the point of departure already contains projections. In doing so, I try to trigger the projections, and treat them in a profane way. Mutated until exhaustion. Thinking about those tiles in this context leads to some questions. What would be their abstract fiction? What lies beneath them? What do they reflect?

As I see it, the most performative and obsessive aspect of *the Discord* project is ‘the act of painting them today’. Would it be accurate to say that the departing point of this act was to question how to appropriate something that has been appropriated so many times before?

Patterns are as old as the beginning of time and on so many levels it is about repetition, hence it became an interesting subject to appropriate and repeat. We seem to forget that historically, craft evolved in parallel with a creative and conceptual approach. We forget that those motifs have always evolved. The stagnation is due to the new ways of reproduction. Then came the question of how to appropriate them. It seemed obvious that I had to go through a crafty process of endlessly performing the same task. I was interested to construct a situation with many references to appropriate and repeat, references taken from the history of non-figurative art, in general. The process became an act of tautological derivation, a one-way road, where there could be a cycle of mutative repetition.

I chose to work with watercolours for various reasons. It is a fragile medium, with soft tones, and cannot be corrected. Traces cannot be hidden. There is a permanence and spontaneity in the act. I concluded that the unintentional elements that happen naturally were necessary for the appropriation, repetition and mutation. It became an exploration of a few patterns, a dialogue, you go on until you cannot go any further, because it becomes mechanical, and then you move on. It was an experimental process where painting became an instrument, a mode of production, a support. Looking at the world through painting interests me in the visual language. Painting has a long

"TILES FACTORY" plate on the front façade of the Al Ma'mal Building
Jerusalem, 1900



history that can be a burden, but I am interested in continuity. What can what add, what could be shown through painting, and how? Therefore, this project also became about the process of painting. It was not about technical tendencies, or developing a style, but about considering materiality.

You define different anecdotal and successive states, creating tension during their transition.

Consider a parable. Someone passes, stays and leaves, an ordinary story. Any question of 'how' and 'why' is irrelevant. Traces are left behind while elements are brought along. In both cases, things mutate, the former by erosion, the latter by agglomeration. It is a matter of a pattern repeating itself. A second person passes in the same place, stays, then realizes that the beliefs have changed, he continues on a different road, while the first re-enacts something he learned but did not agree with during his stay in the place where the story happened. A third person passes, gets taught the symbols the first protagonist left behind. Persuaded by them, he casts them into matter. Later he leaves. In the meantime, an earthquake destroys the place, but the reinforced concrete object survives. A fourth person passes and notices sticking out of the rubble the intact object. He worships the monument. Loyal, he creates a machine that can repeat the symbol to perfection. He resists, but eventually leaves. A fifth person passes by, discovers the existence of the second person, and destroys the monument. He modifies the machine to emulate something he has learned elsewhere, a trace the first protagonist learned from the place where this story happens...a sixth person passes by, and so on, the story repeats itself. Between the vague memory of the act and its repetition there is form of discord as the constant.

This story is also linked with the possible traces of a 'ruin' – an issue that you have been processing with your previous and on-going projects. Could you elaborate on this link within the framework of your research?

Ruins seem to appear in many of my projects, maybe they are made of an accumulation of ruins. It is about suggesting alternative readings of ruins, questioning the 'romantic' and 'sublime' associations, particularly in the Palestinian context. The choice of starting this project with old aesthetic tiles flirts with the 'romantic' fiction of ruins. There is charm in things that age well, which is the reason why I got attracted to the tiles. The materiality gives it the potential of ageing well. It is through this material image that we negotiate with our phantasms. I think this poetry, this innocent attraction, is only human. Something that I wanted to convey, the element that triggers the romantic fiction of a ruin, the moment before projections colonise matter. The ruin for what it is, a feeling of time, for its functional value. A ruin remains a ruin, it is only preserved by choice, and the stories it contains only exist by projection. Maybe this work suggests one possible ruin for those patterns.

The terrain of multiple and diverse individual memories along with the collective ones are seemingly inconsequential in Palestine, yet these fragmented memories or the traces of them appear as patterns in the series.

The tiles and their images are a pretext to play with collective memory in a larger sense. The tiles and patterns exist in Palestinian heritage. A product of the 20th century, the tiles have a strong association with the lost house, the old stone house. It can be explained by the historical conjunctures of the 20th century in Palestine. Hydraulic tiles, industrialization and the Naqba happened in the same duration, the same historical temporality. In the case of the Naqba, which is a historical event, it reverberates, and this explains its constant presence, a memory projected like patterns. By scratching the surface of those tiles, other stories unfold, and like any story it is an association of fragments of memory. Projections are drawn by patterns of memories. It's this feeling of déjà-vu, but not exactly. Those tiles became an analogy for the surface of Palestine, a story where passage is a pattern.

Along with the patterns, one of the crucial elements of the project is the usage and deformation of the grids. What has been the exact role of this element throughout the development of this project?

Patterns are shaped by a geometric logic. The ones I chose to work with all have as basis a grid made of squares, very ordinary motifs. The grid as the underlying structure becomes important.

In the paintings, drawn in pencil, they loom in the background. There is an impalpable permanence to it, beneath patterns it seamlessly re-affirms itself. It is visually stringent, the opposite of organic shapes, an economical form of spatial division. But there is something trivial in it and it mediates the space in which we are made to operate, in which patterns can repeat themselves, and possibilities can happen.

How does the exhibition in general perform this intention?

The context in which the exhibition is taking place is important, in Jerusalem, in the old tile factory. For a while I have been thinking about showing this work in ways that you look down and up. Thinking of the surface as a cross section, discordant sediments are excavated, selected and projected. There is a sense that interactions happen with what lies beneath and above. This makes us live in a weird entanglement of temporalities, where the presence is an absence contained between memory and projection. The exhibition is site-specific, a dialogue with the building and its past. The way it was refurbished highlights this history of passage and time that is Jerusalem. It is a preindustrial building that served an industrial function, so there is no Cartesian logic to the architecture. It is vernacular, and was refurbished in that same spirit, architecture without architects.

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<sup>1</sup> *Progressive Architecture*. 1924. Volume 5, Issues 7-12 Ed. by Eugene Clute, Russell Fenimore Whitehead, Kenneth Reid, Elizabeth L. Cleaver. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation.

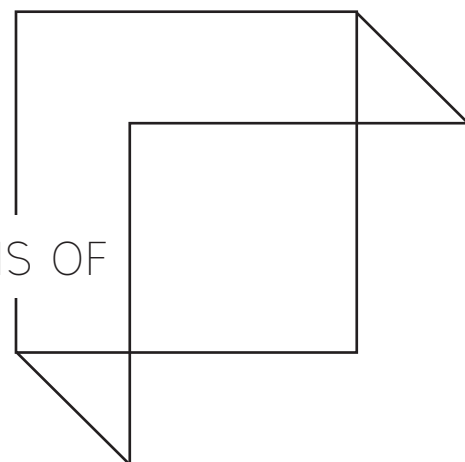
<sup>2</sup> A. Papadopoulos. 1976. *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, Ed. by Lucien Mazenod, Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, Editions d'art Coll. Grandes Civilisations.

<sup>3</sup> Suad Amiry and Lena Sobeh. 2000. *Traditional Floor Tiles in Palestine*, Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah.





THE WORKS  
AND THE SECTIONS OF  
THE EXHIBITION



# DISCORD

## PAINTING SERIES

Watercolour and Pencil on Paper, 80x80cm  
2011-2017

*Stripping the object to its sheath, shattering the aura, bears witness to a kind of perception where 'a sense of similarity in the world' is so highly developed that, through reproduction, it even mines similarity from something that only happens once. For instance, we are starting to see in the visual field what in the field of theory is emerging as growing importance of statistics. The orientation of reality toward the masses and of the masses toward reality is a process of unbounded consequence not only for thought but also for the way we see things.*<sup>1</sup>

Walter Benjamin

Simultaneously a trace and an accumulation, “hydraulic tiles” are the result of a series of appropriations and mutations of patterns in the historical temporality, culminating in the potentiality to reproduce an image infinitely. But where did this image originate? What happened when it started to derive across borders? Those cement tiles are objects that go beyond their functionality and materiality but exist in the time and space of ‘phantasmagoria’.

Tiles contain desires, stir imaginaries, and are subject to projections. Scratching the surface of those tiles, underlying layers appear, the sediments of history: discordant dialectics. Discordance in geology is ‘an unconformity characterized by an absence of parallelism between adjacent series’.

The project connects the idea of discordance to the story of those tiles. A process-based painting experiment on the interpretation, repetition and mutation of patterns extracted from the tiles. Suggesting an alternative fiction for those patterns. Attempting to unsettle the imaginaries associated with those tiles.

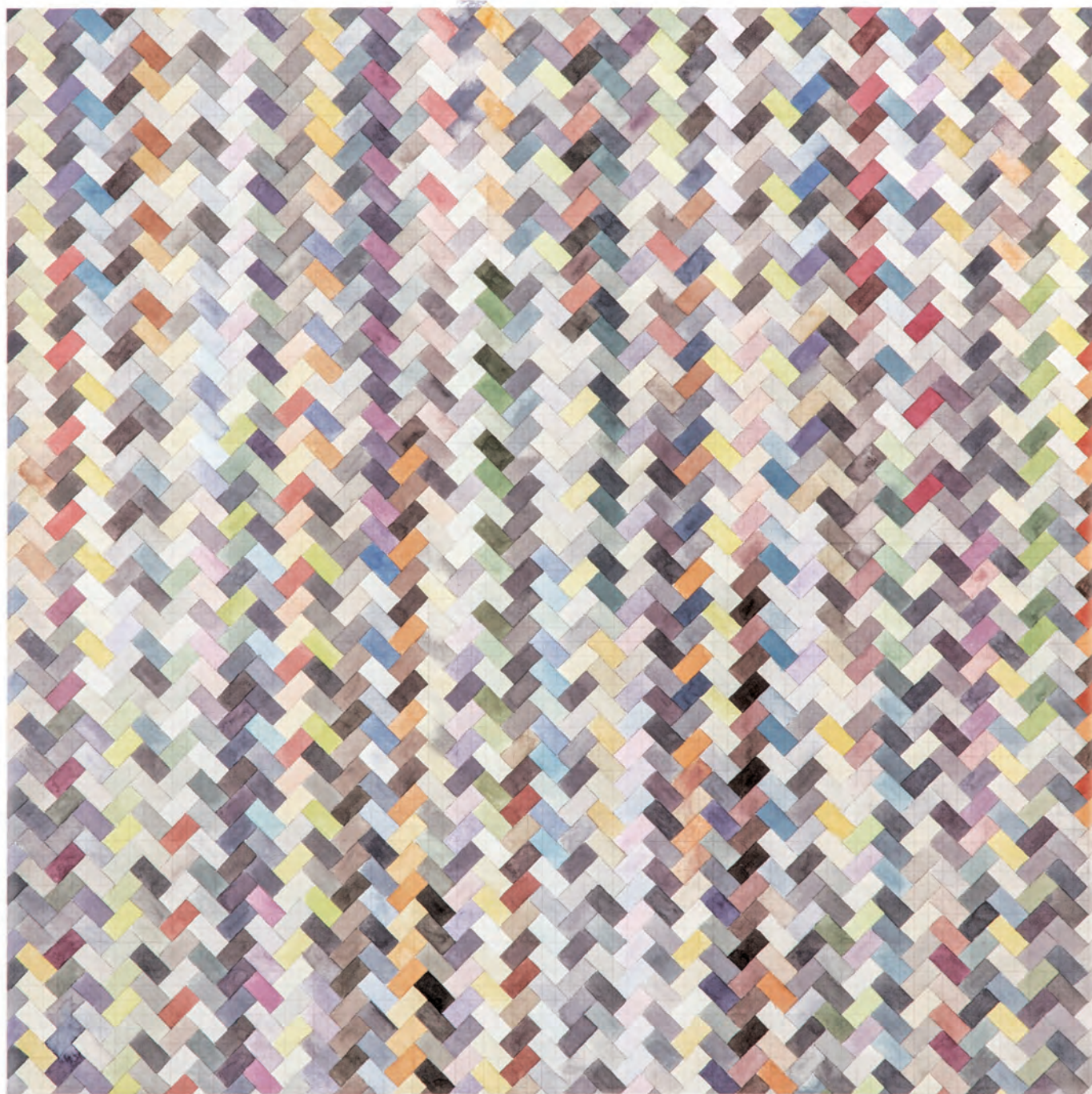
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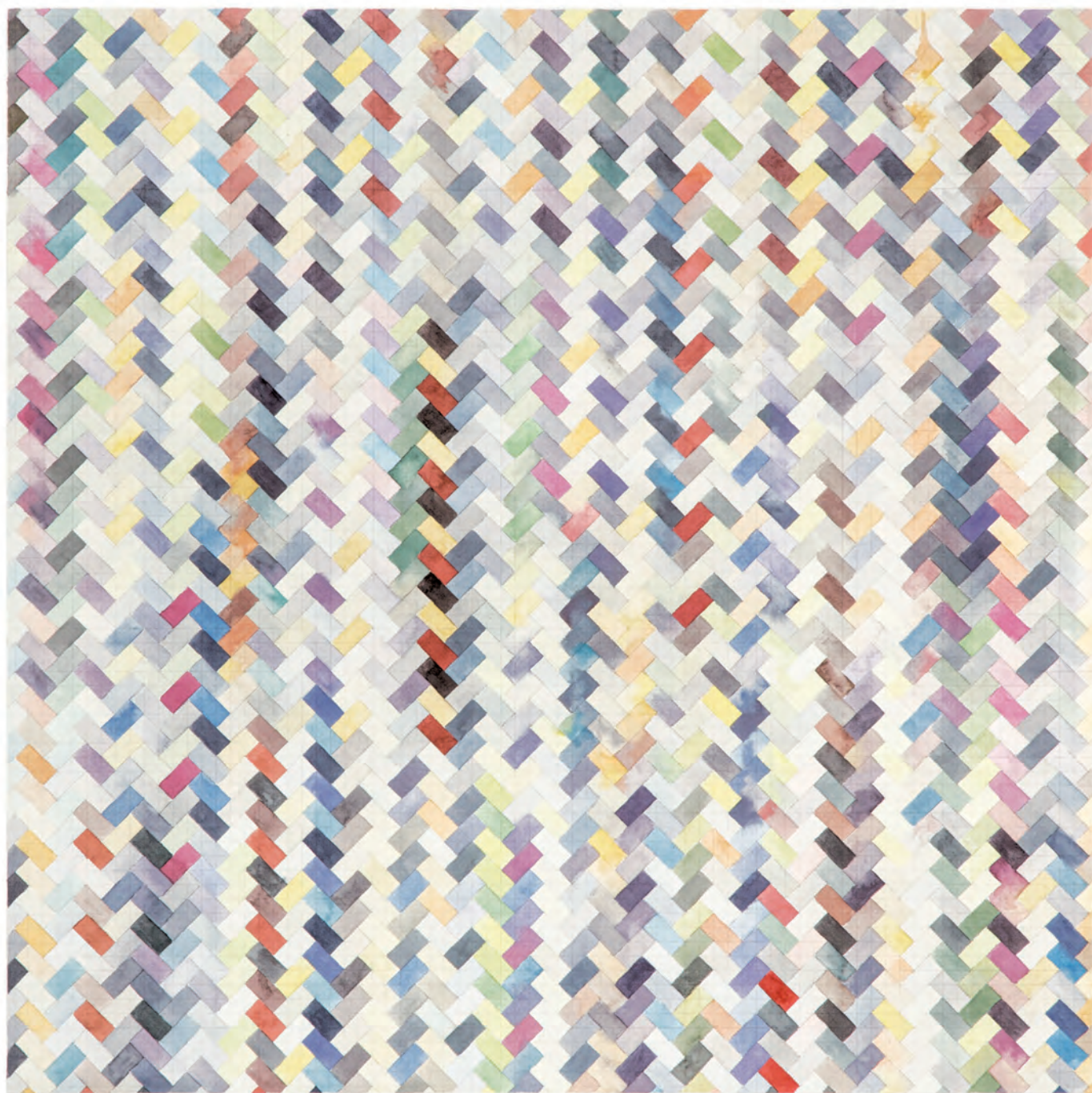
¹ Benjamin, Walter. 2008. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. translated by J. A. Underwood Penguin Books. London. p.10

SCRAPPERS #1
2016

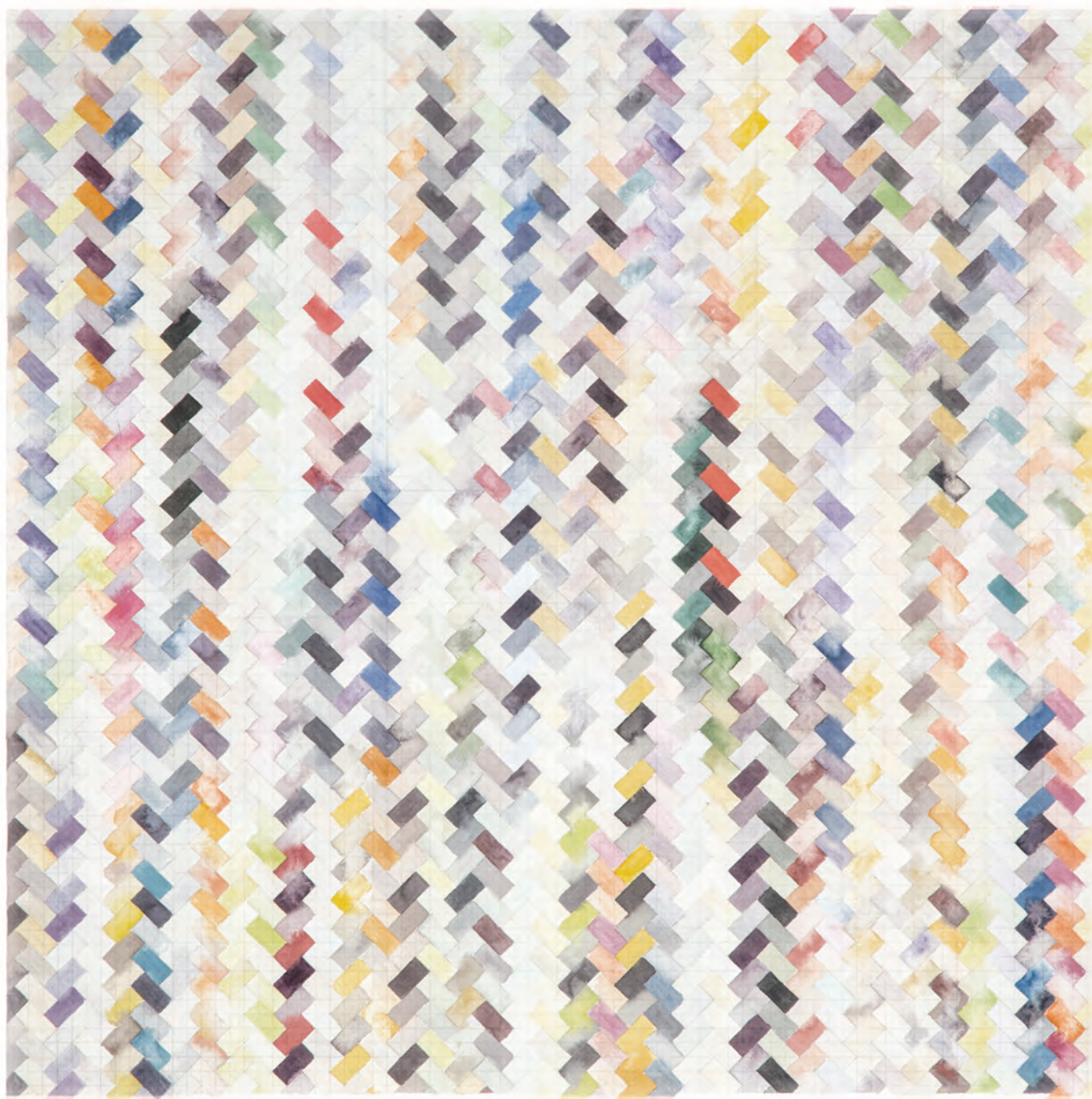


SCRAPPERS #2
2016





SCRAPPERS #4
2012





SCRAPPERS #6
2012



theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



theDISCORD [exhibition shots]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017

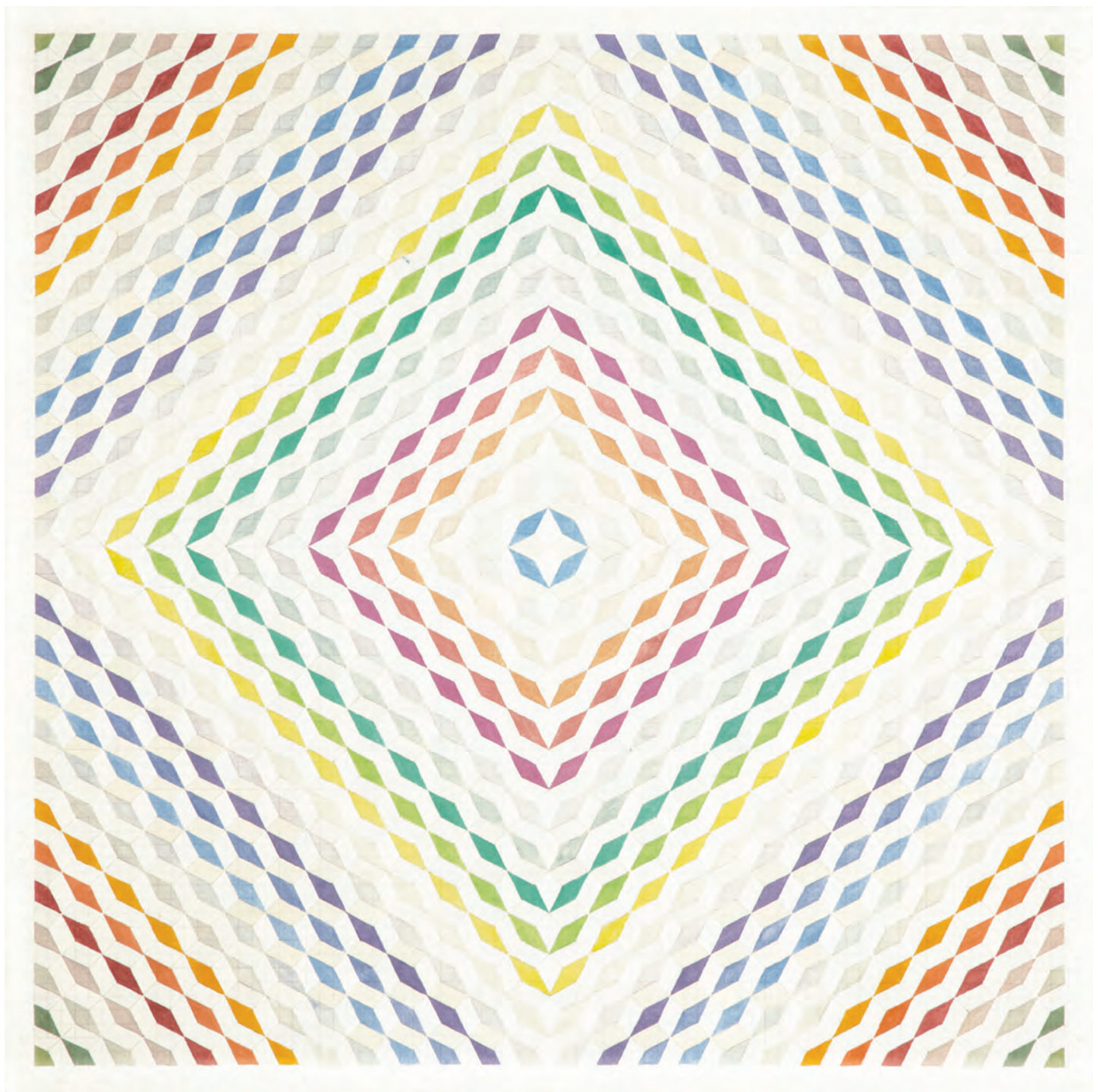




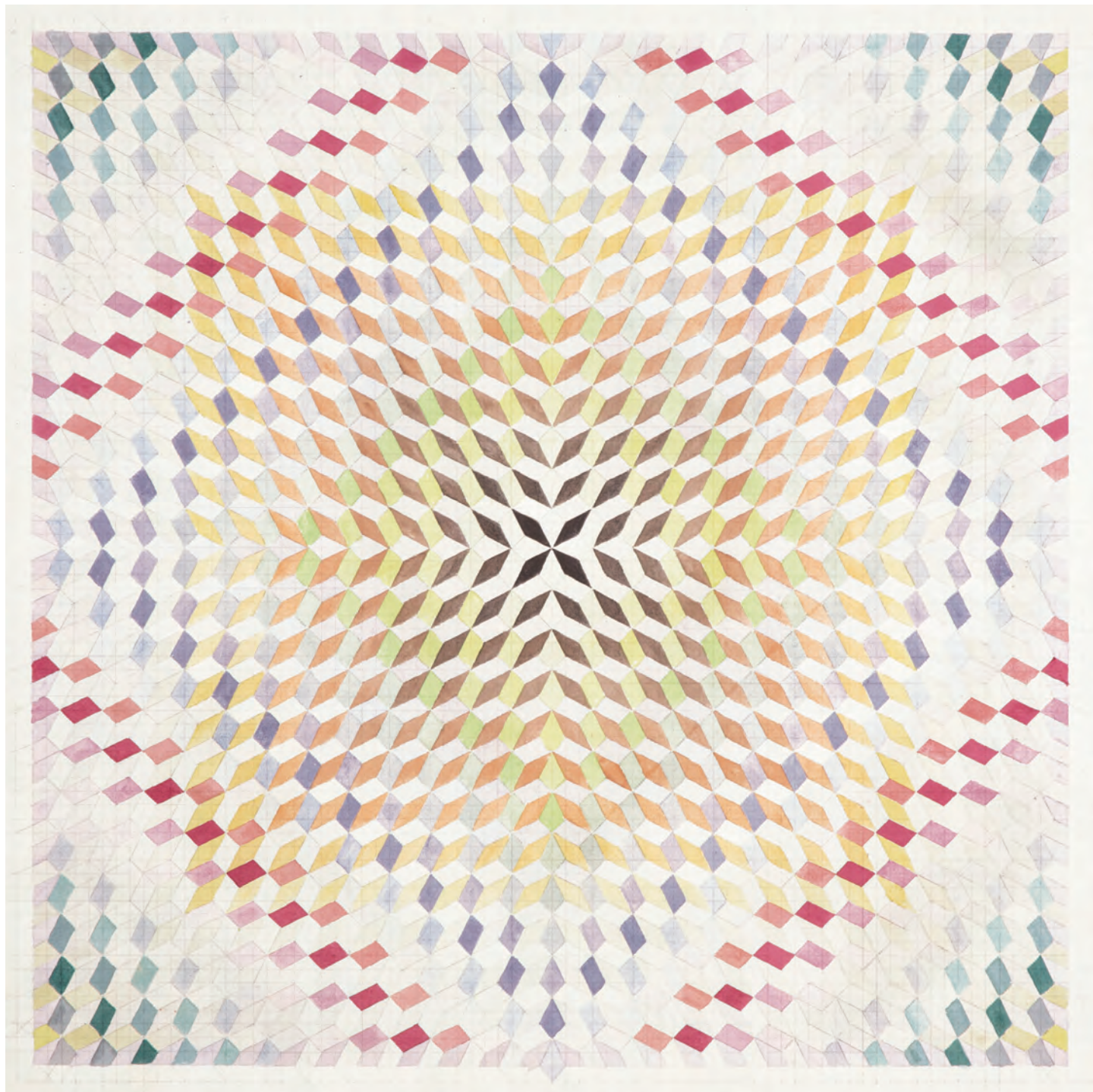
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2015



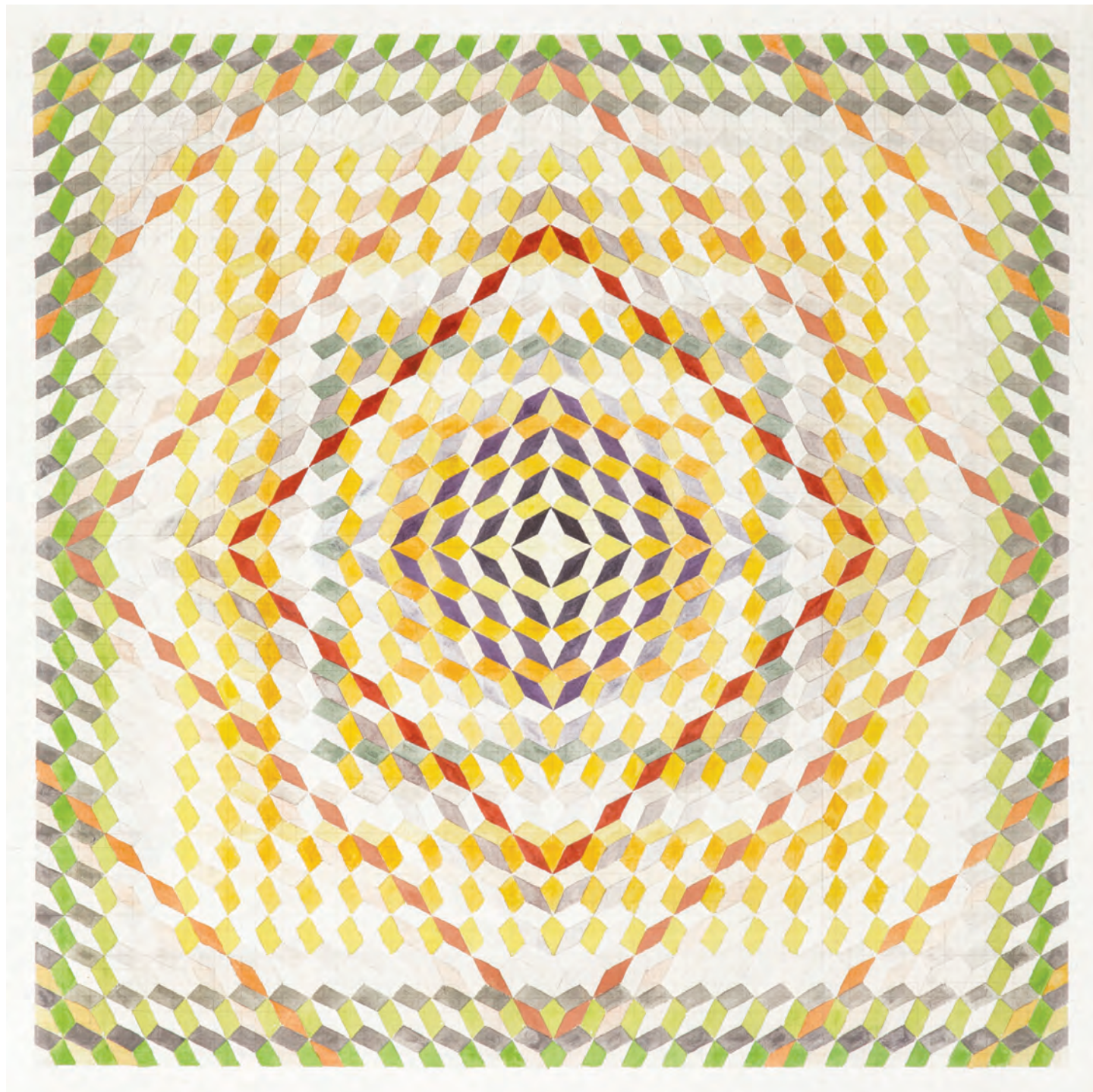
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ABYSS #3
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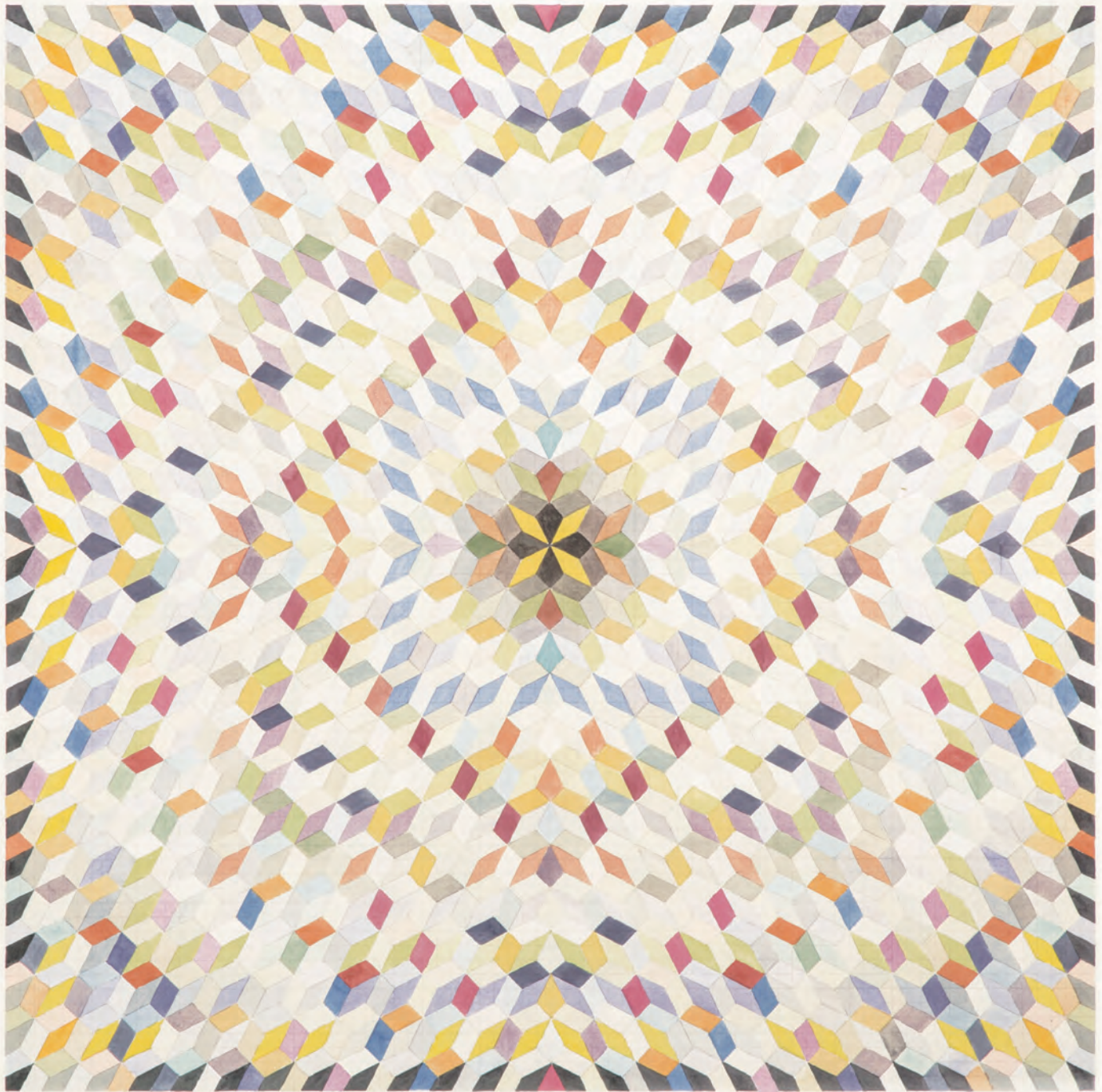
ABYSS #4
2013



ABYSS #5
2016



ABYSS #6
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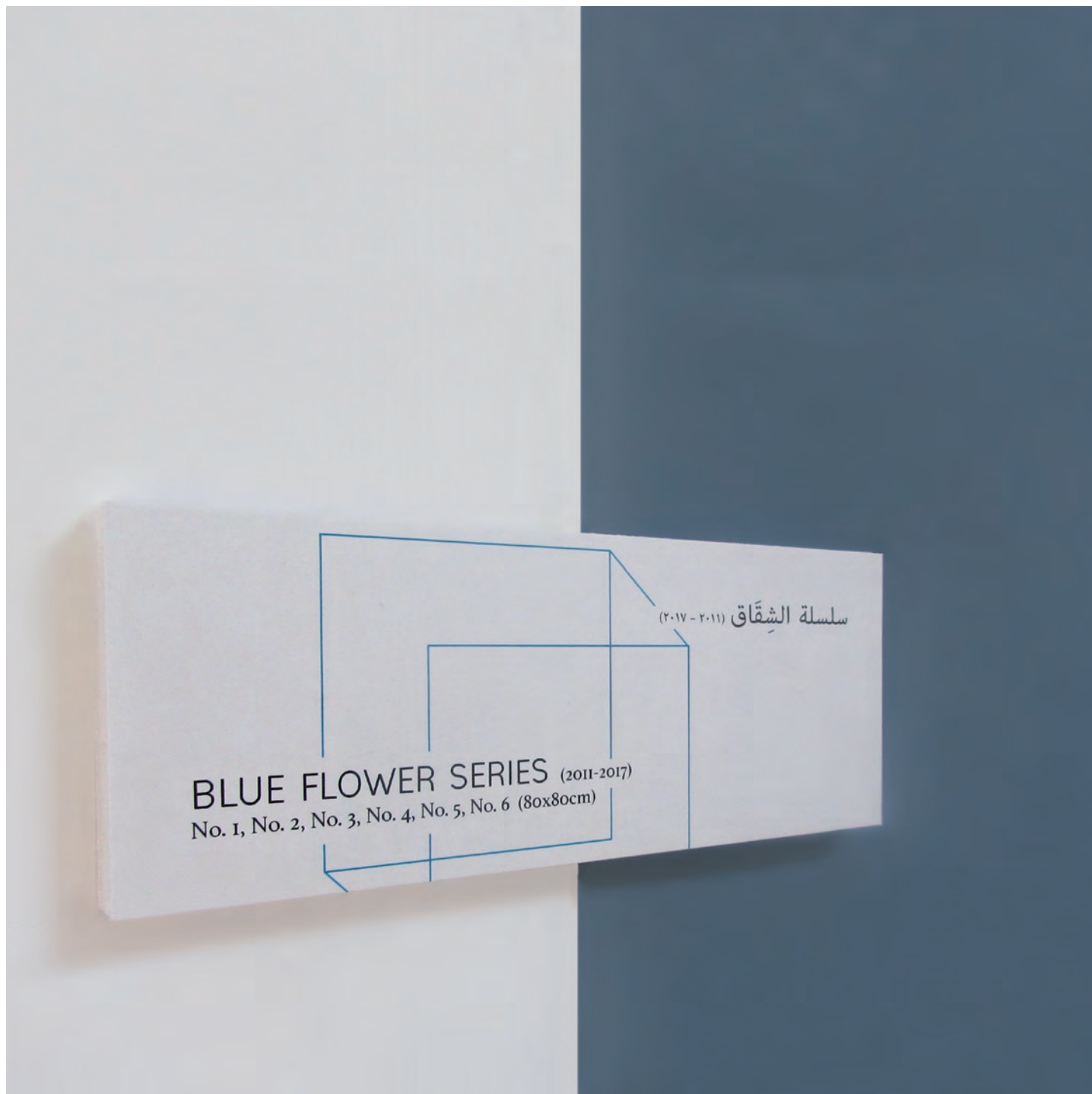


theDISCORD [exhibition shots]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017

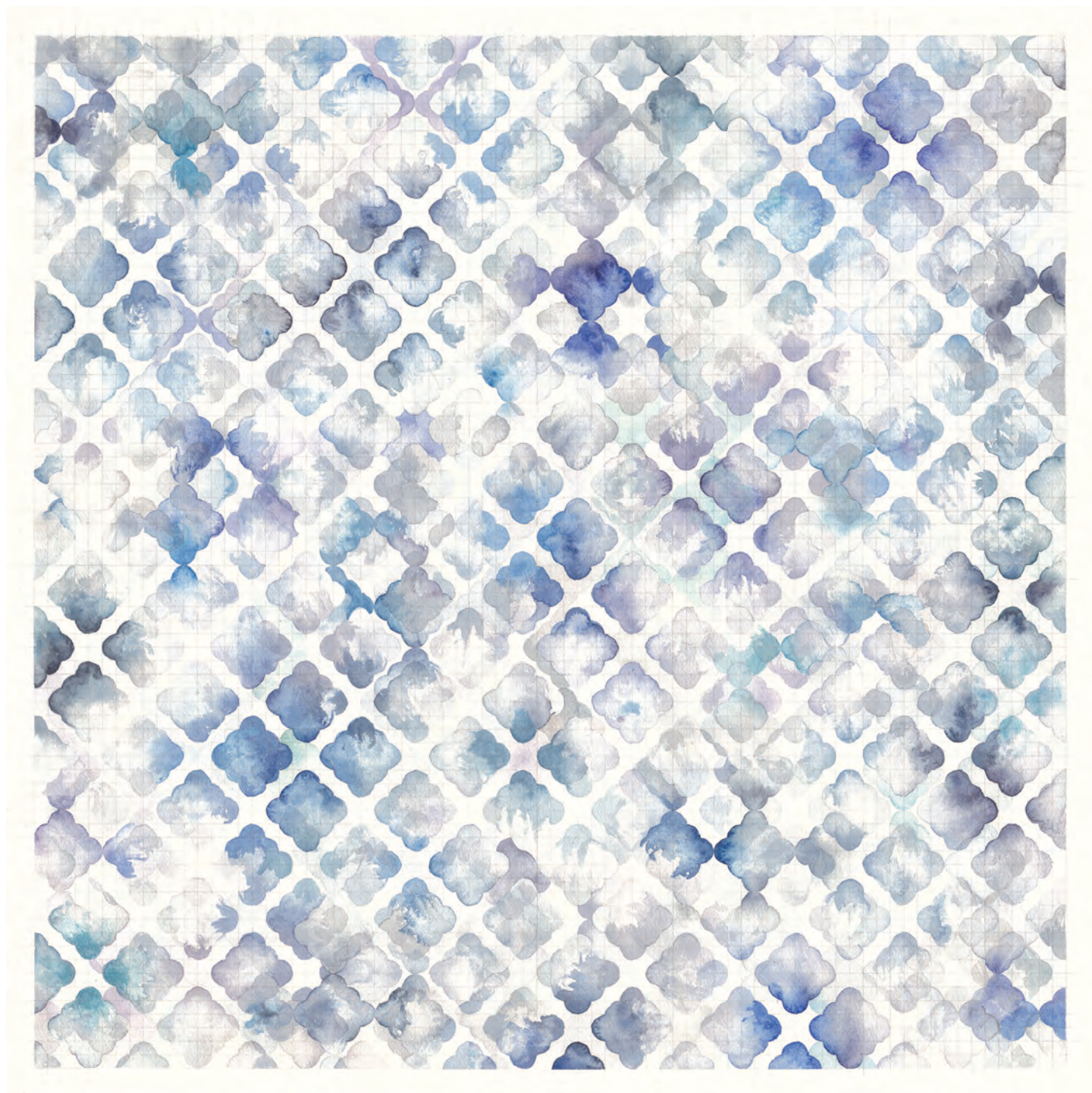




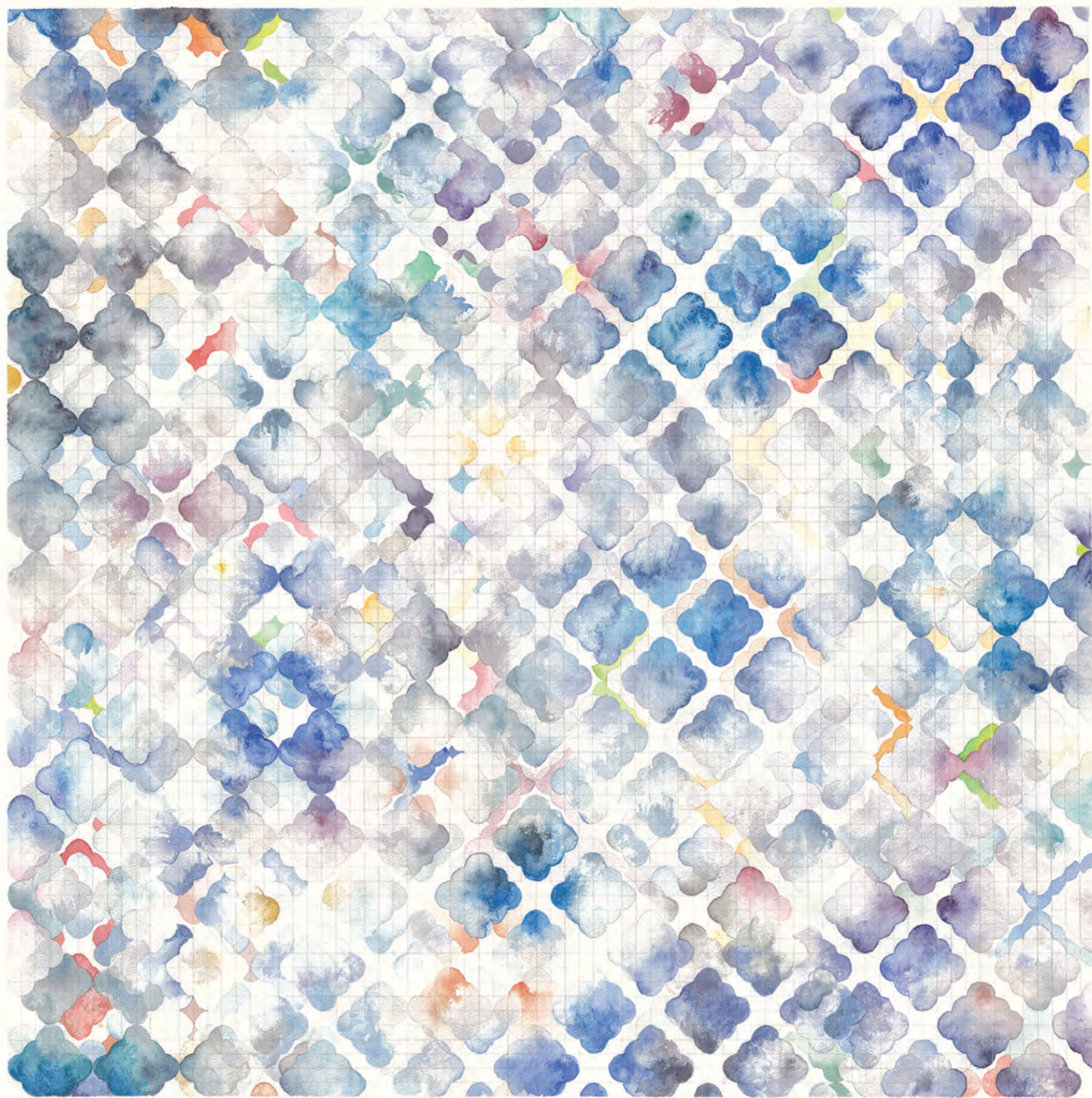
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Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017

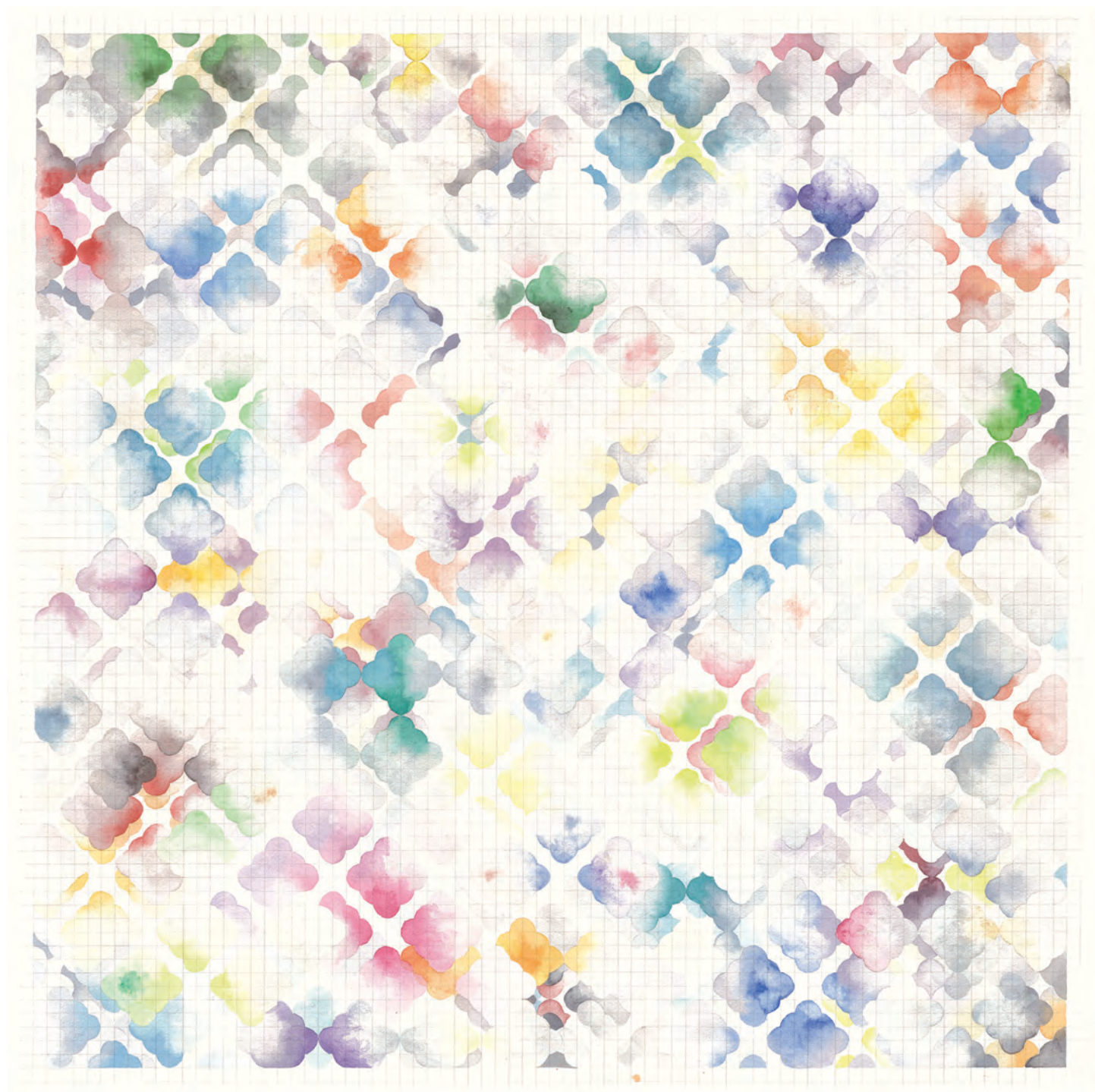


BLUE FLOWERS #1
2012

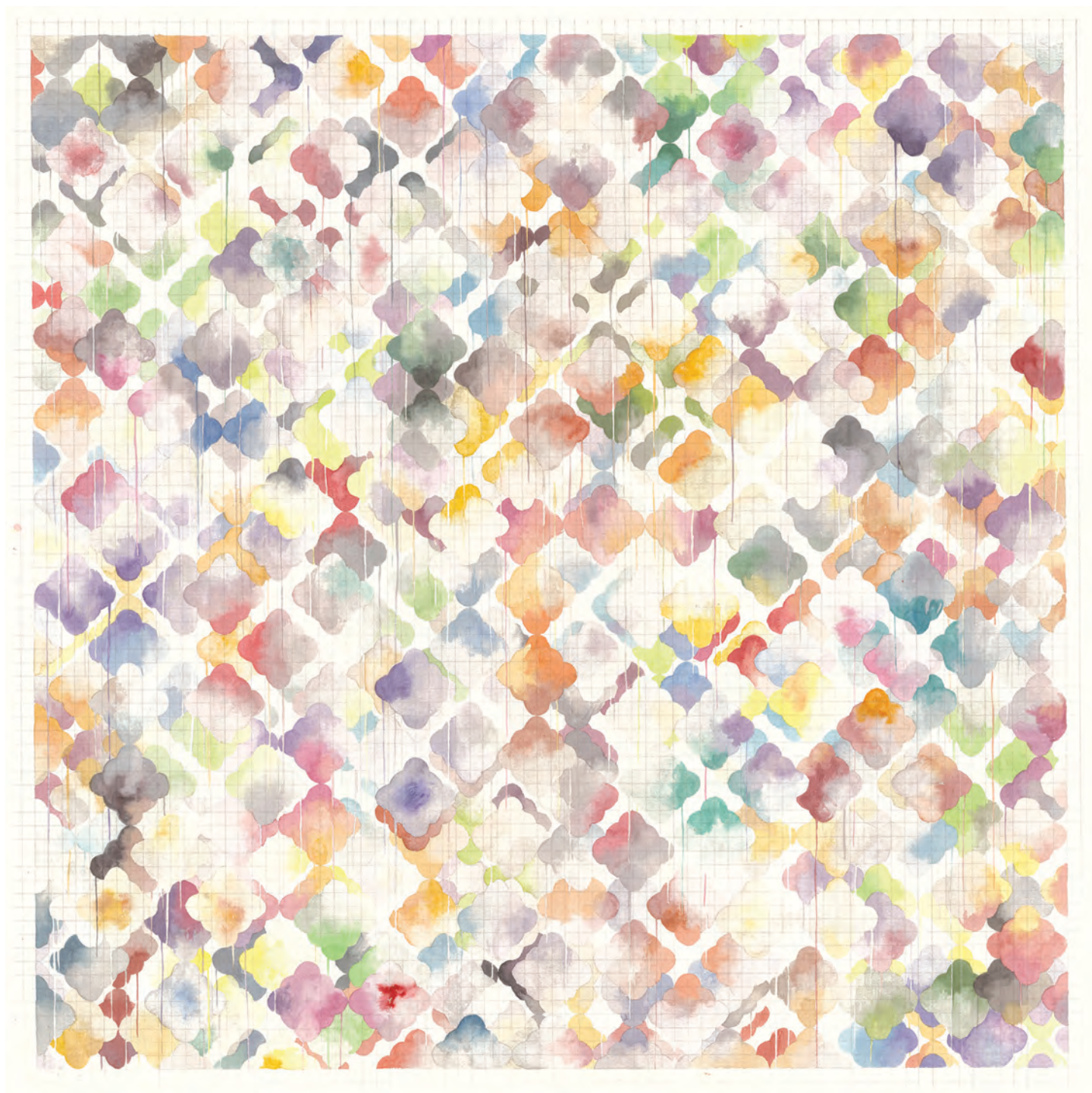


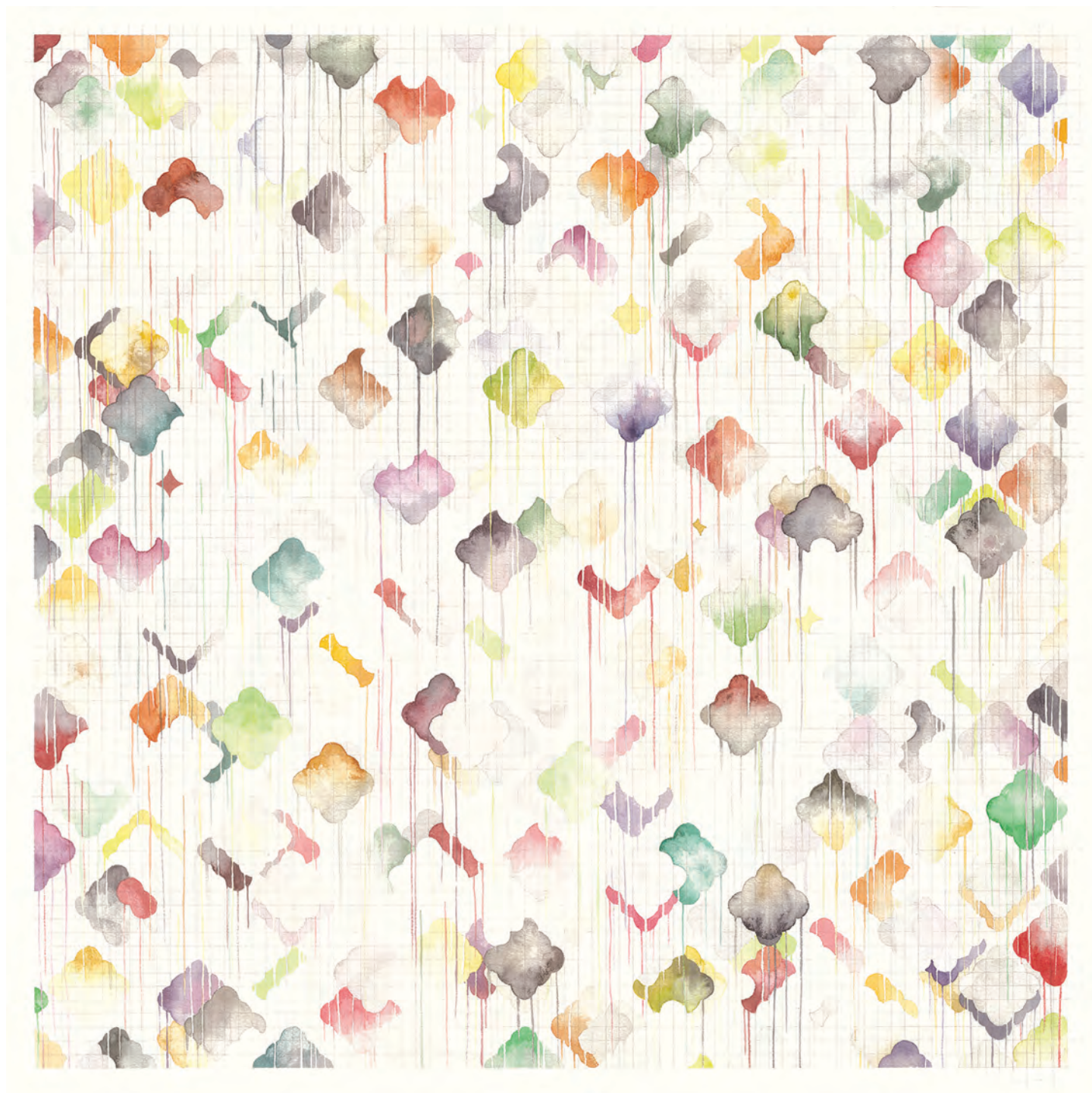
BLUE FLOWERS #2
2012





BLUE FLOWERS #4
2015





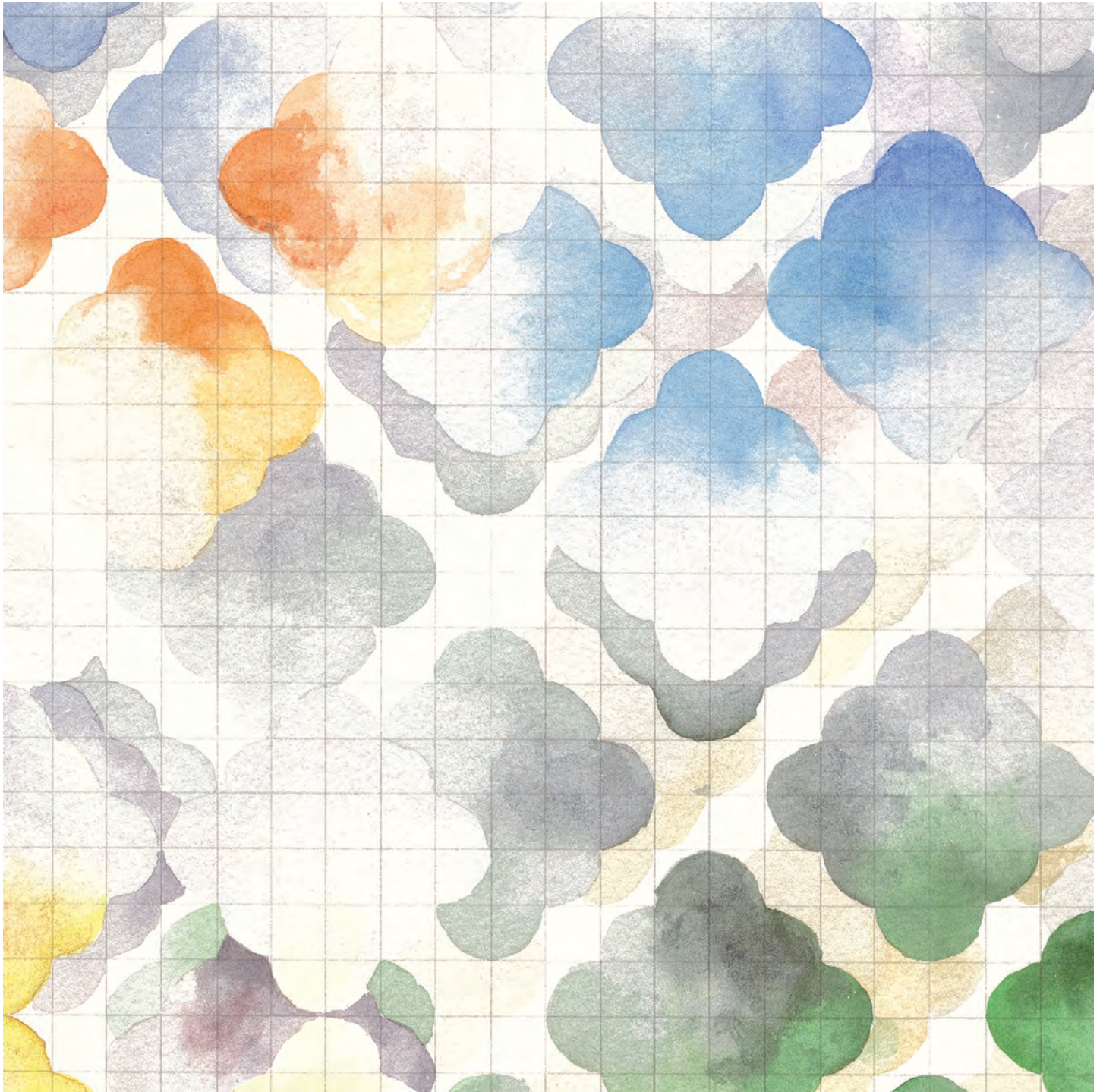
BLUE FLOWERS #6
2015



theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017

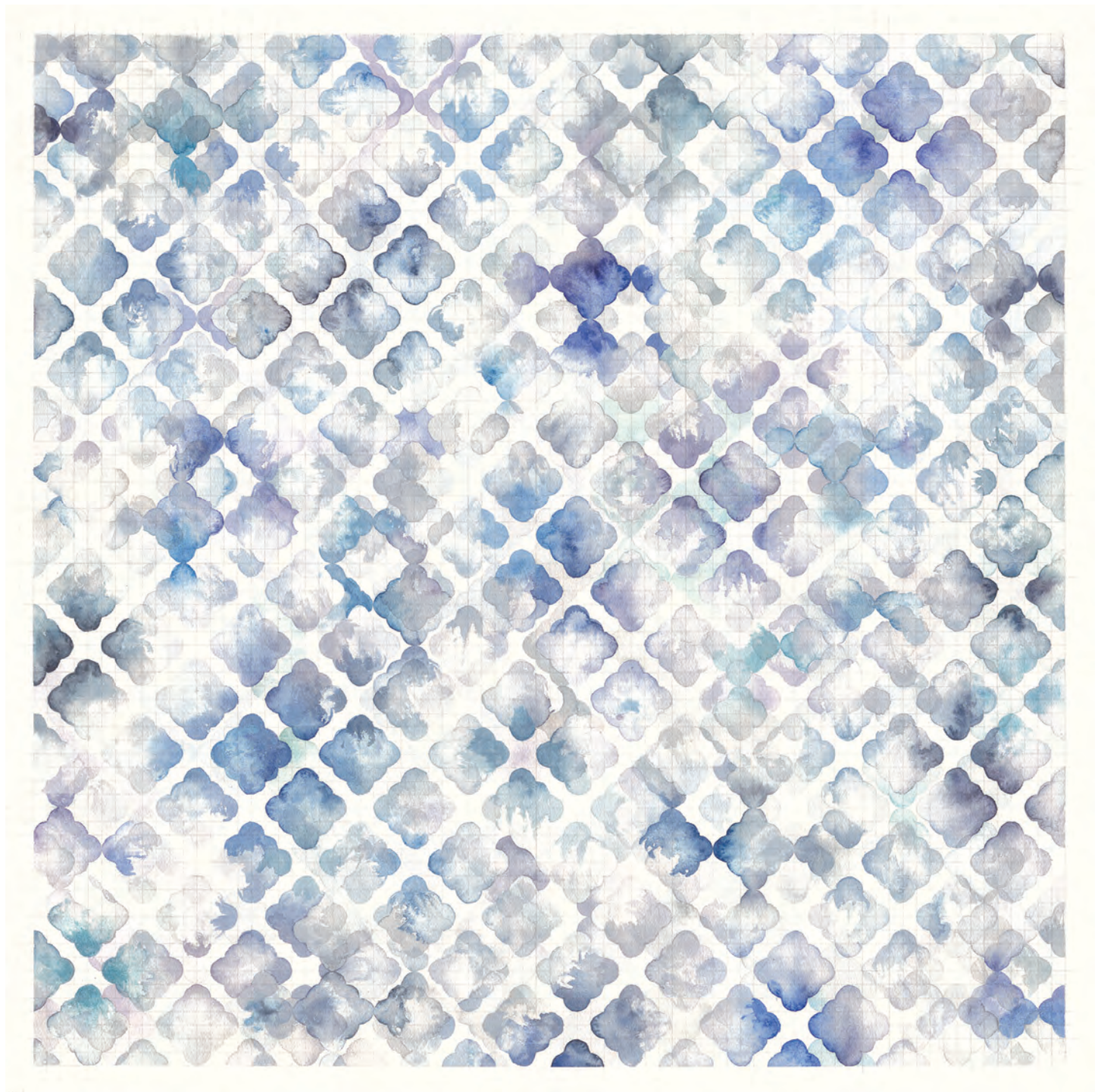


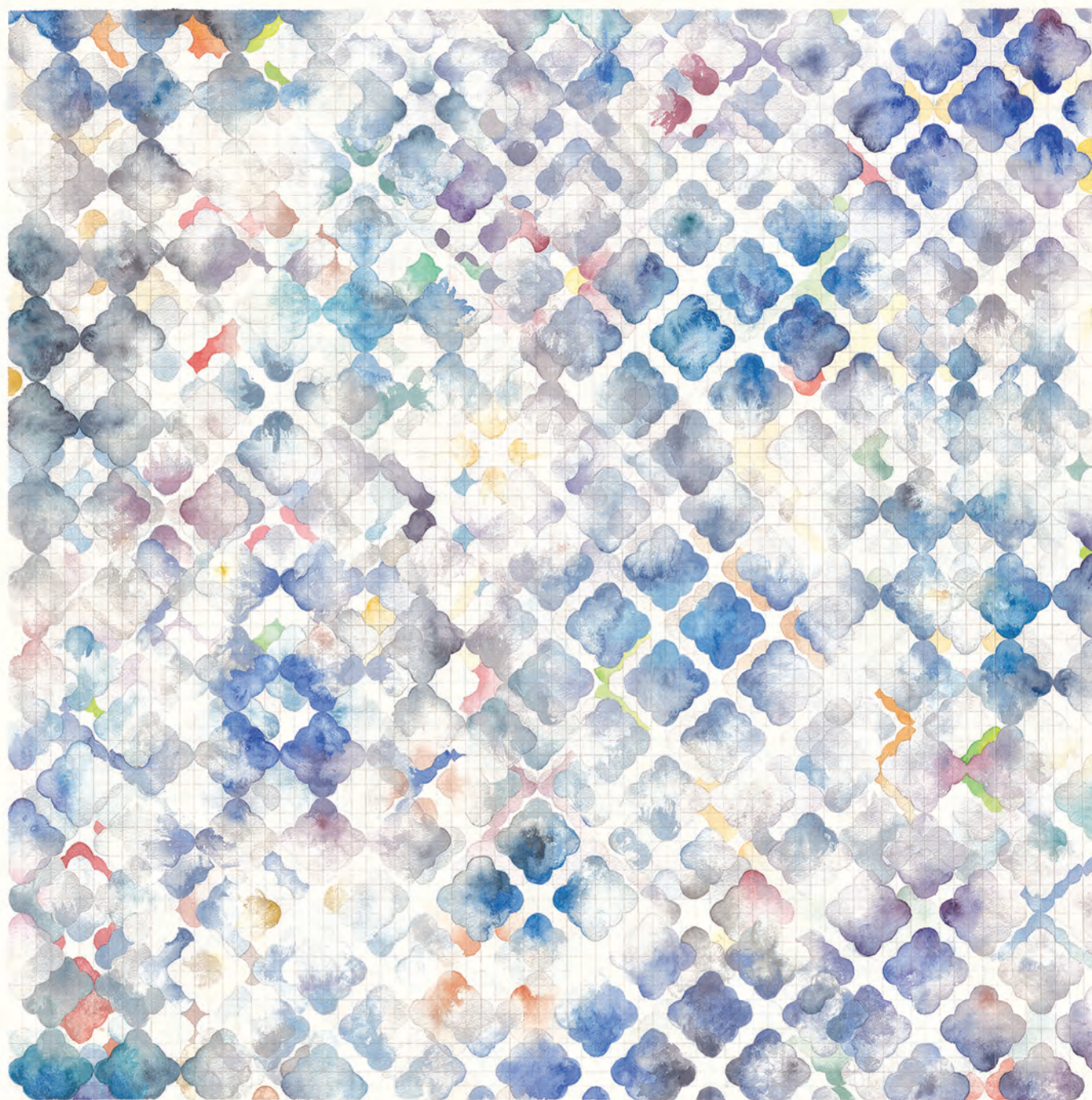
BLUE FLOWERS #3 [detail]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



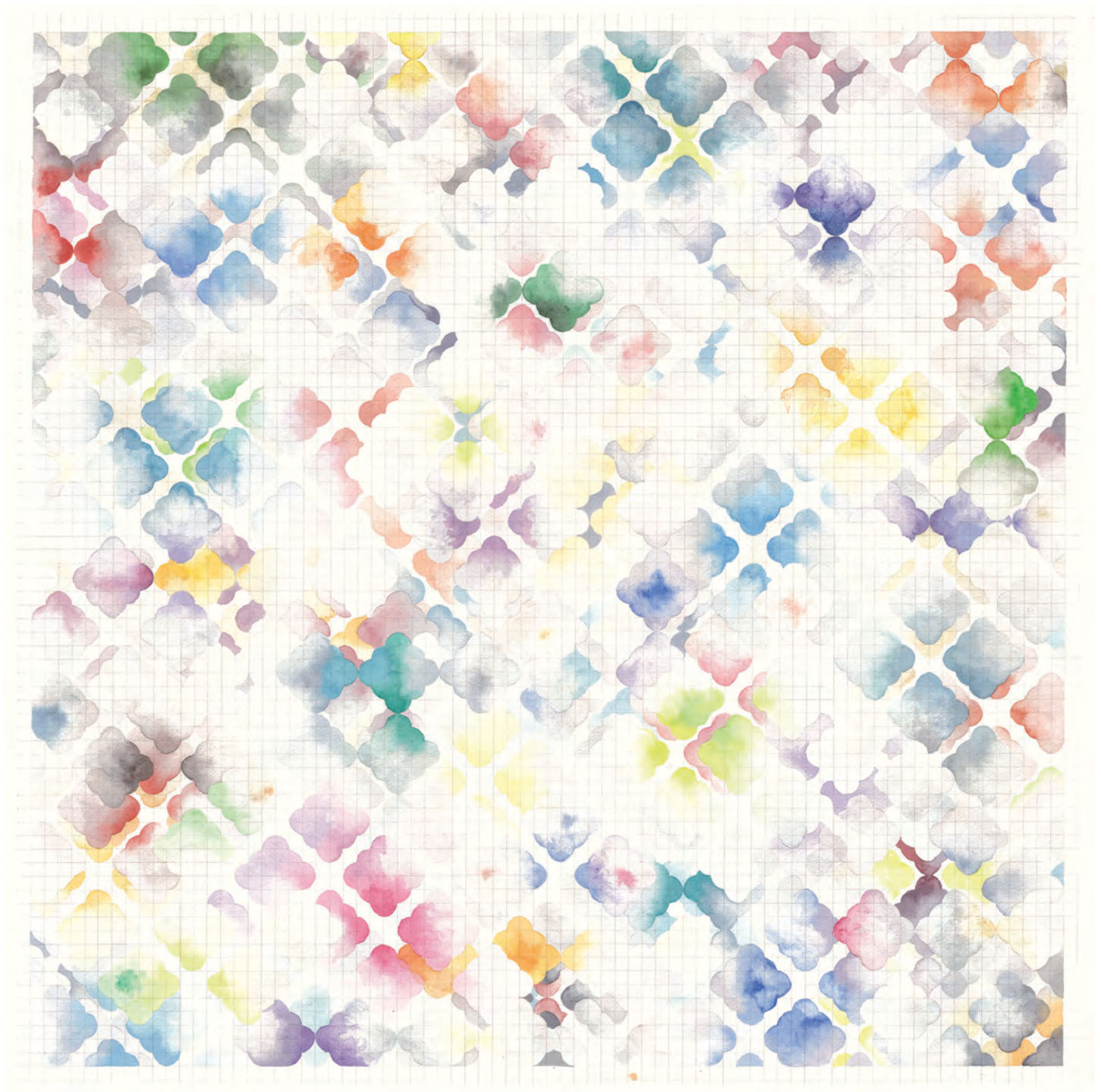


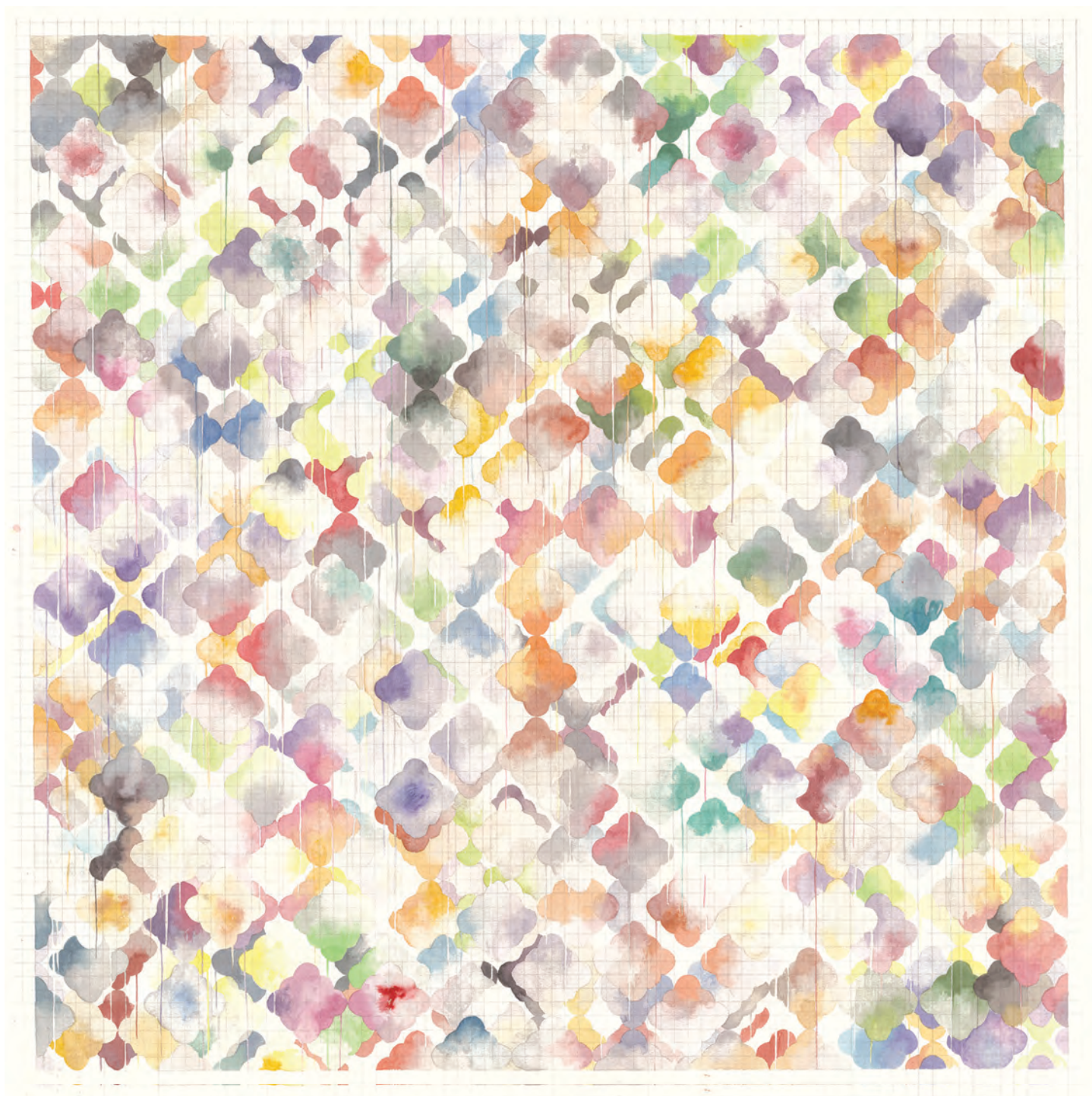
WHIM #1
2011





WHIM #3
2012





WHIM #5
2015



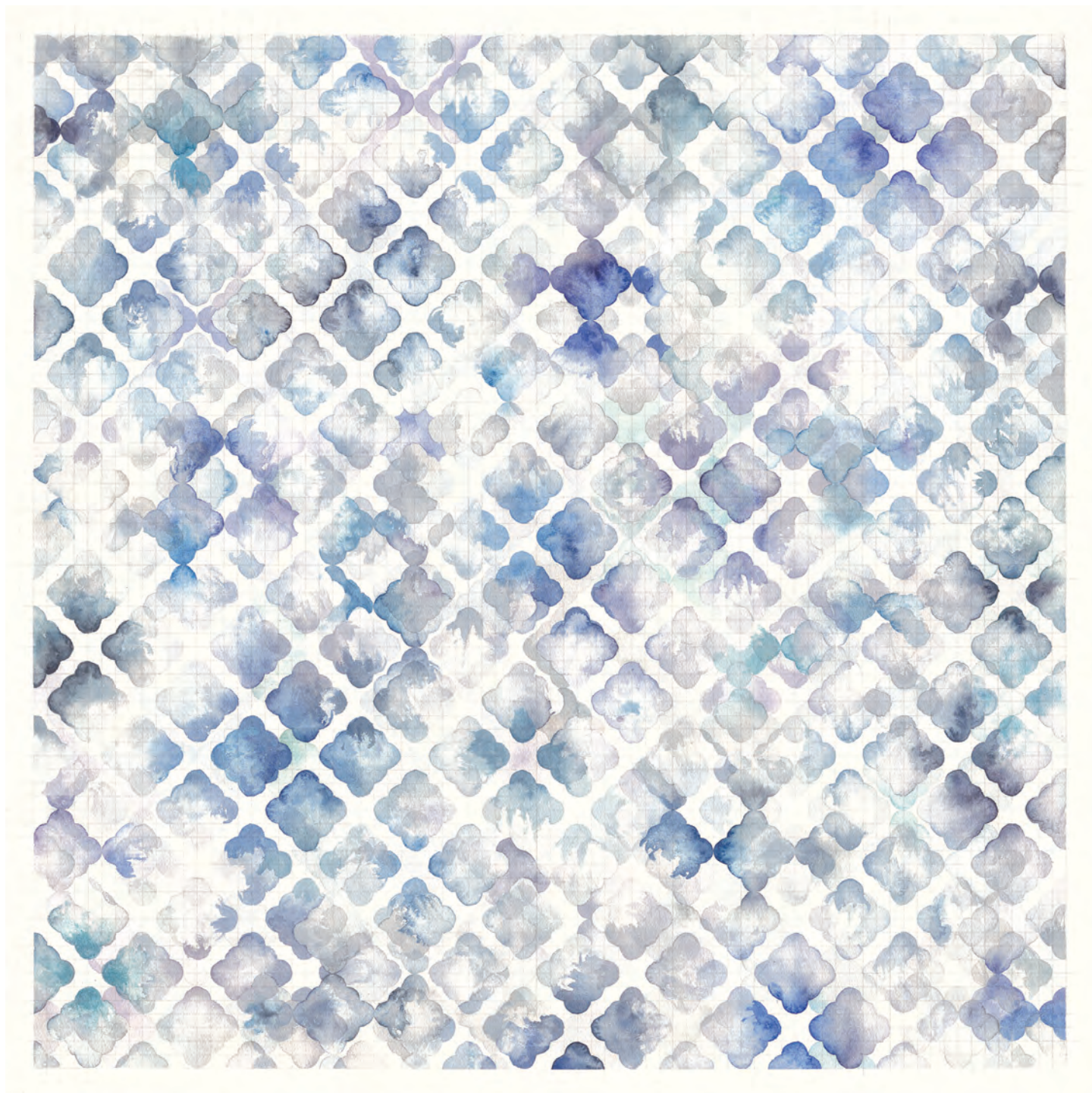


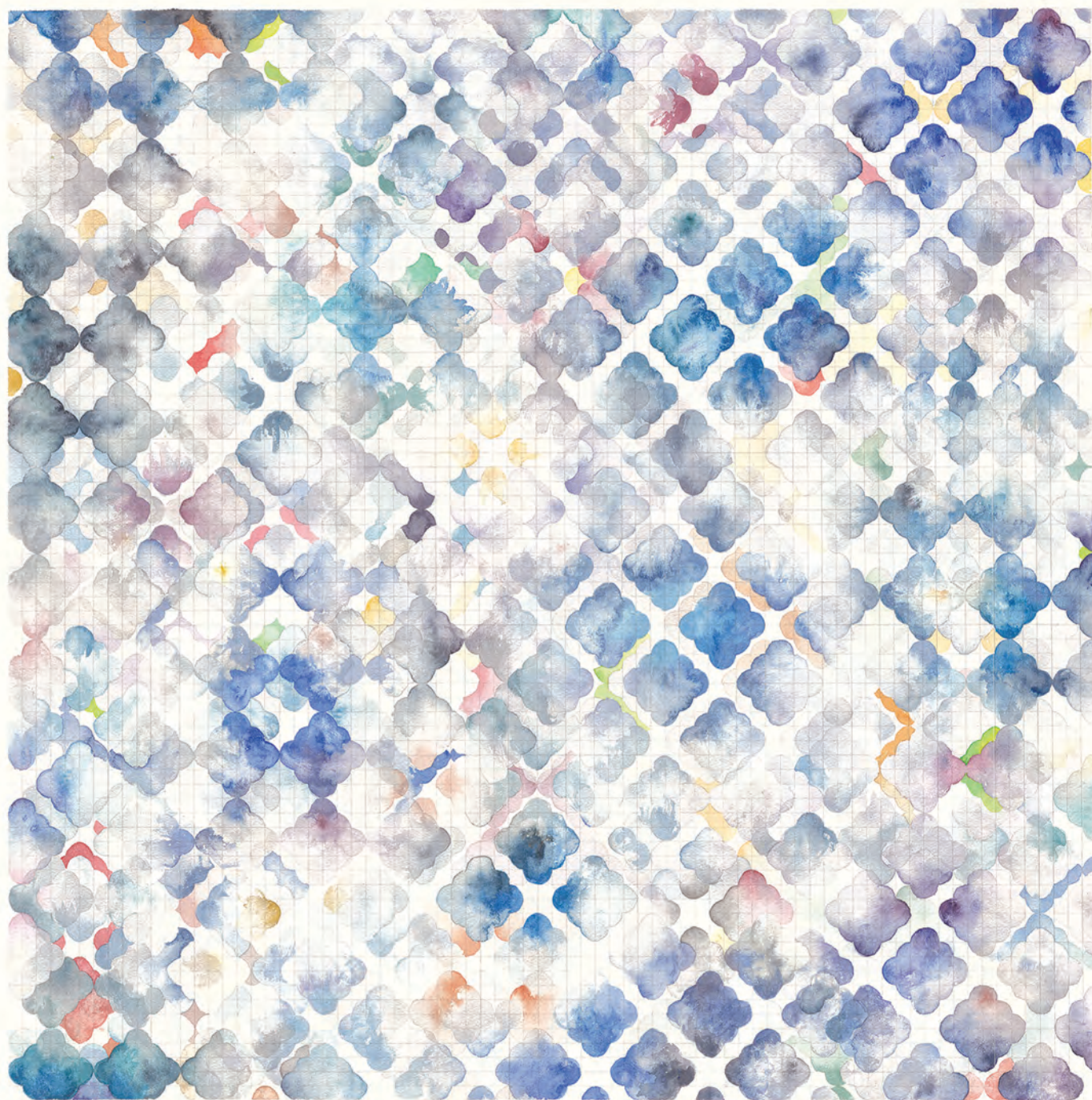
theDISCORD [exhibition shots]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



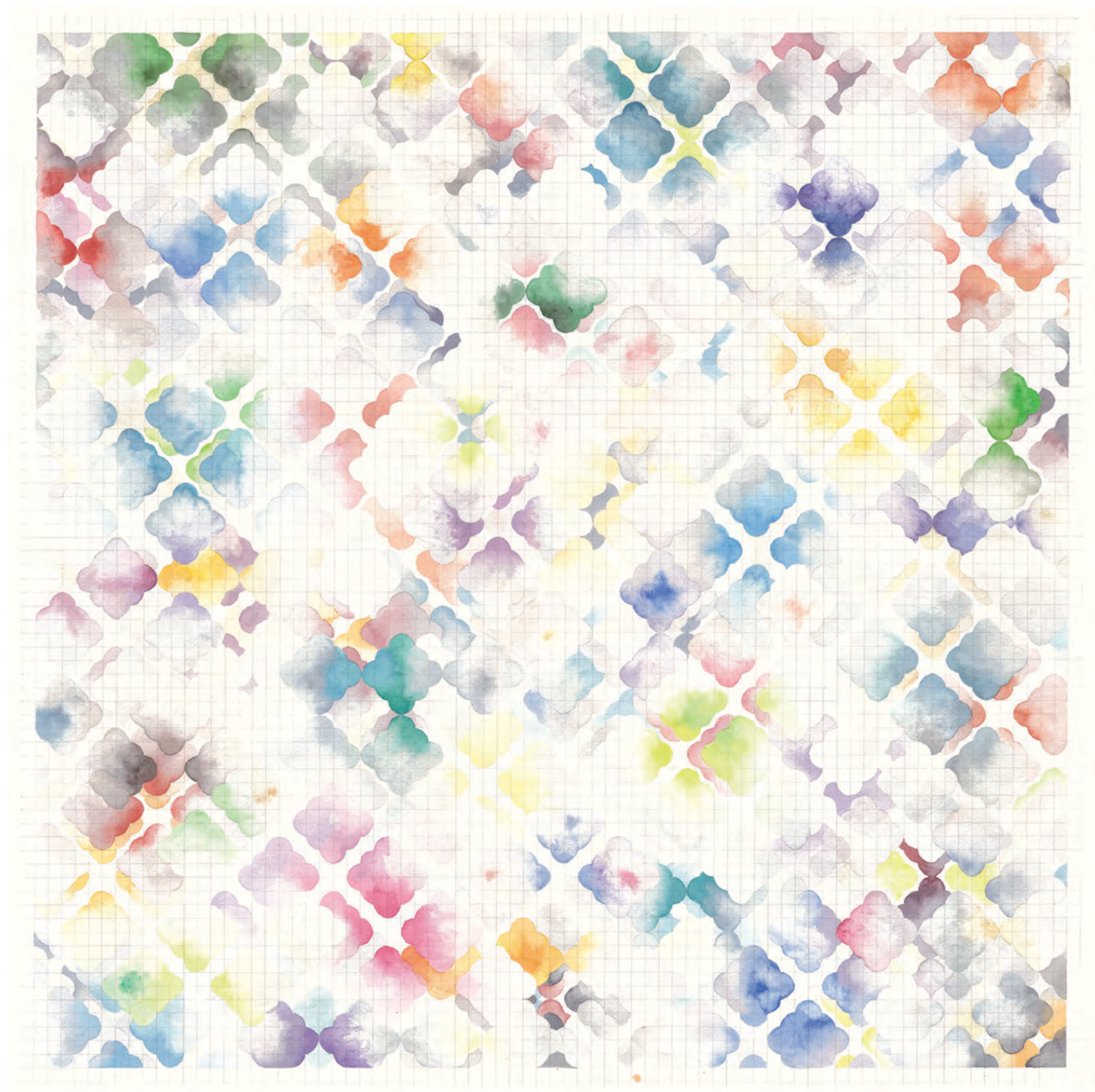


ODYSSEY #1
2015

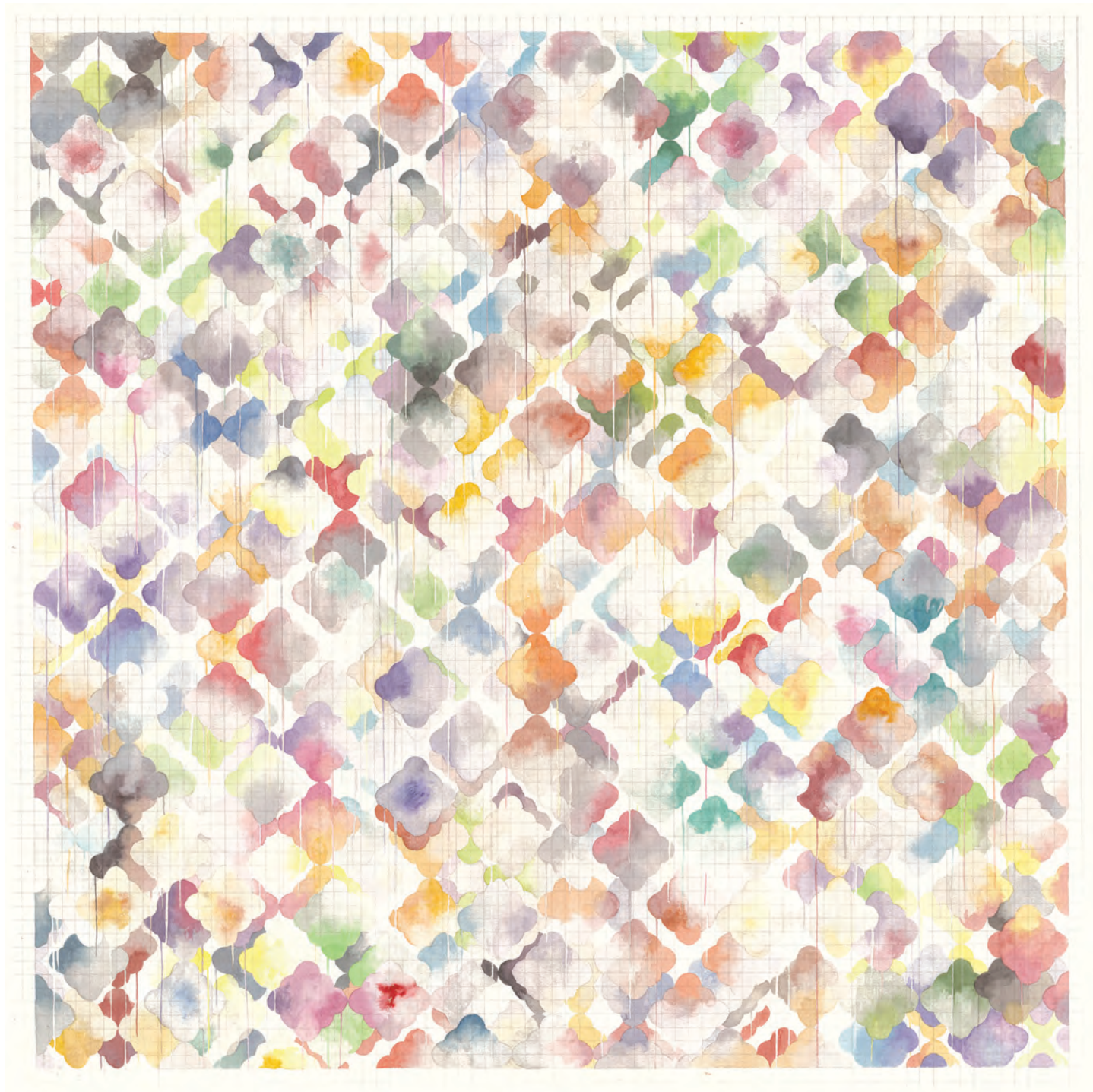




ODYSSEY #3
2016



ODYSSEY #4
2016



ODYSSEY #5
2017



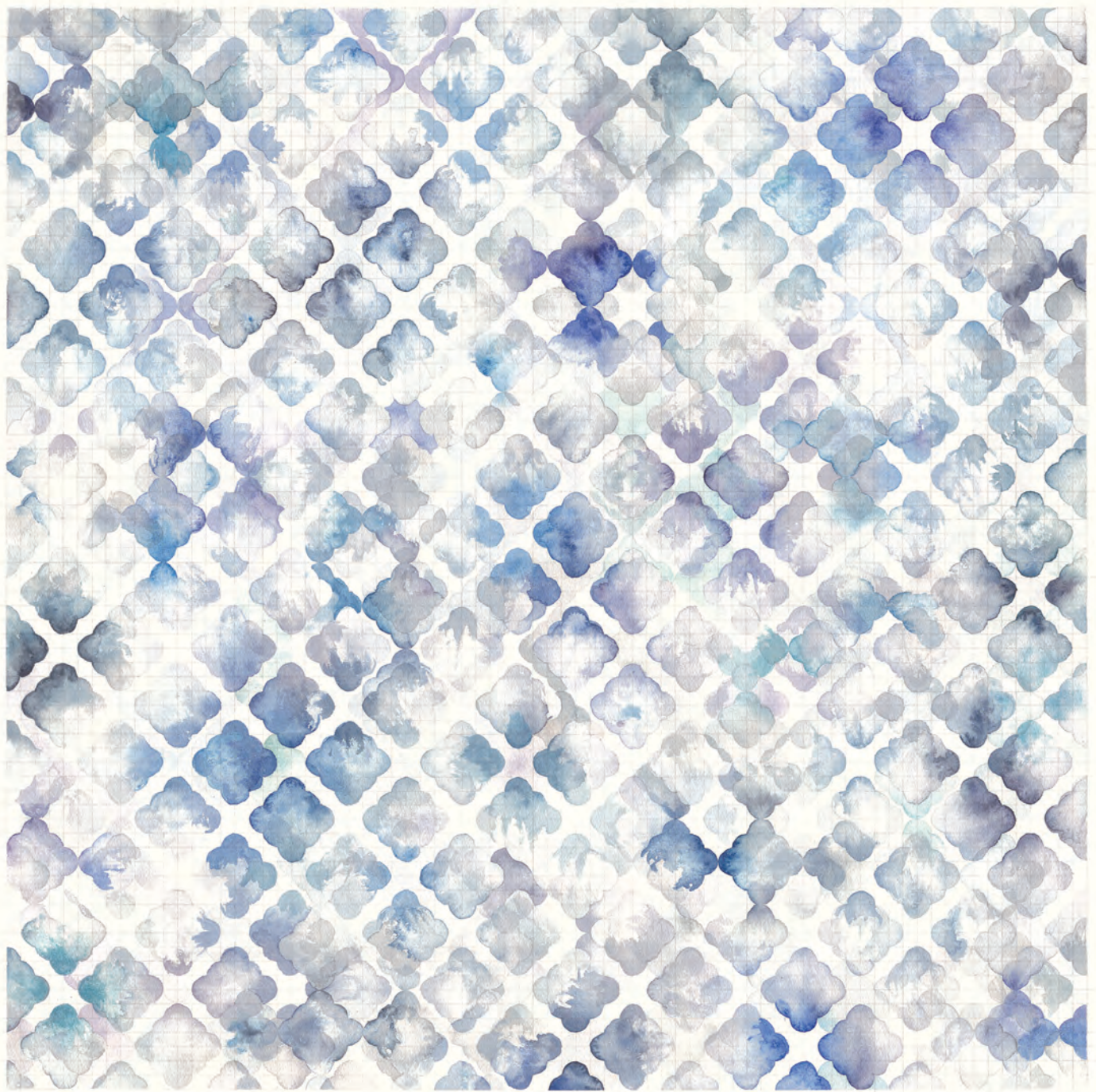


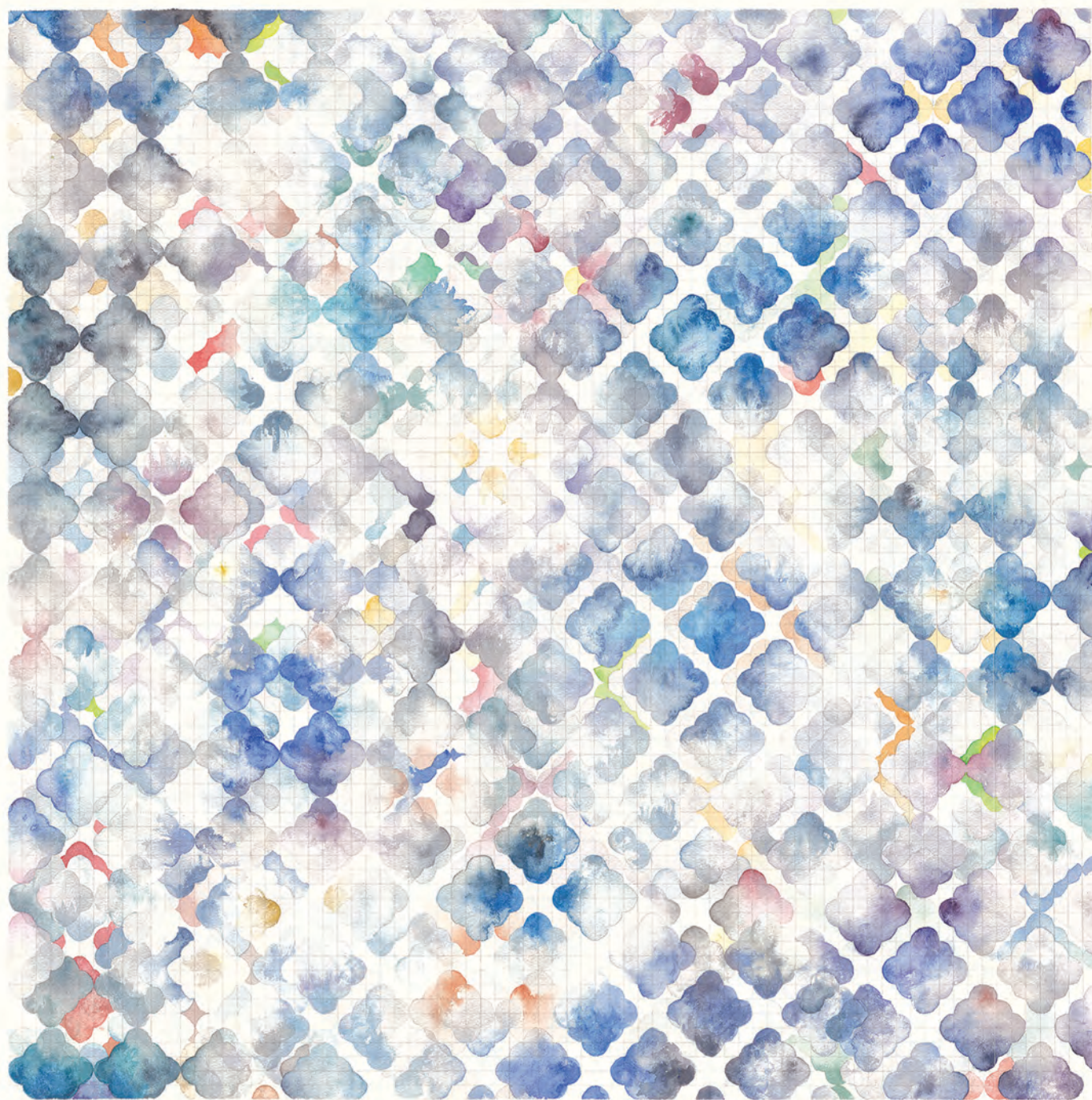
theDISCORD [exhibition shots]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



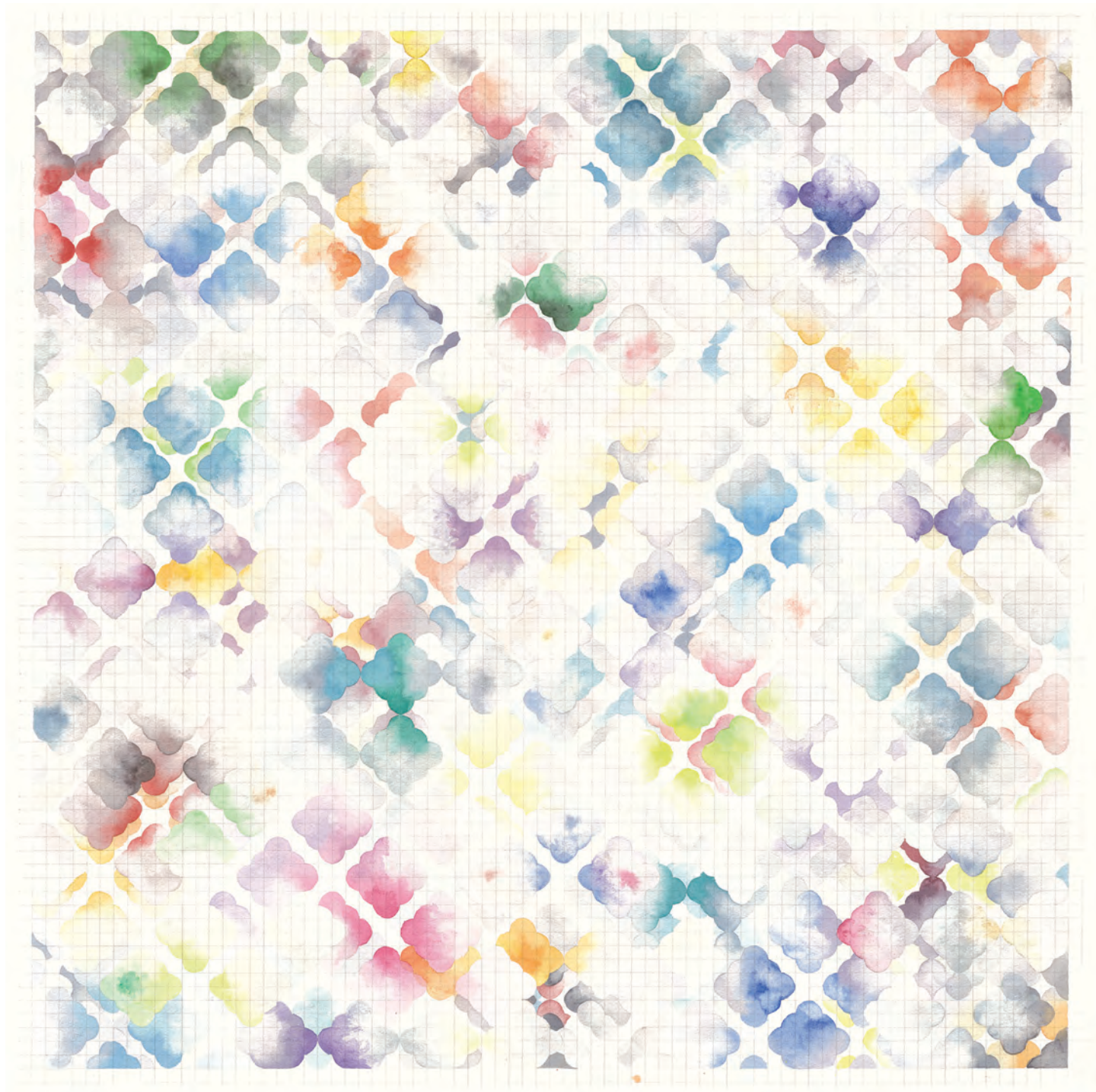


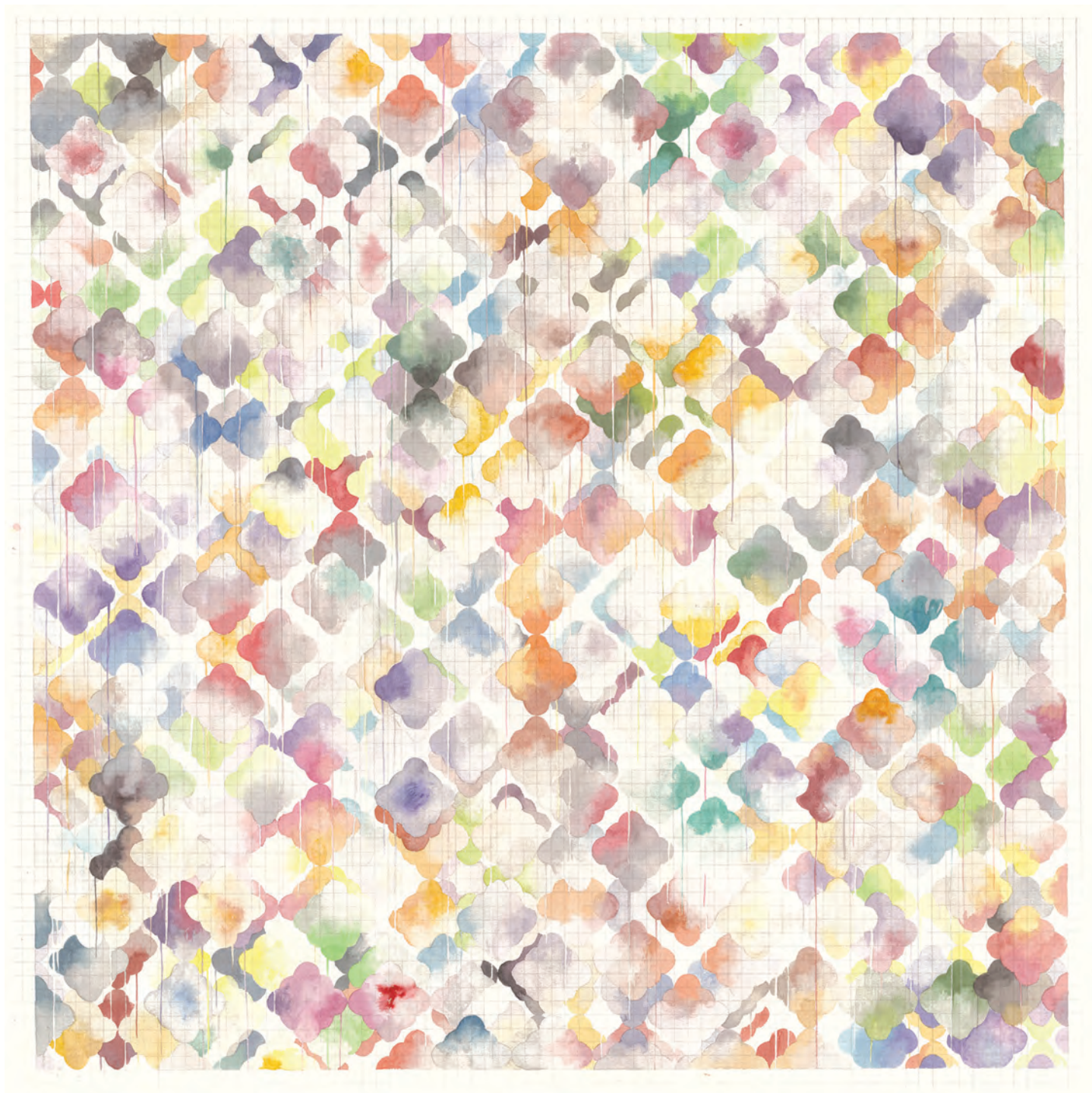
STALEMATE #1
2014



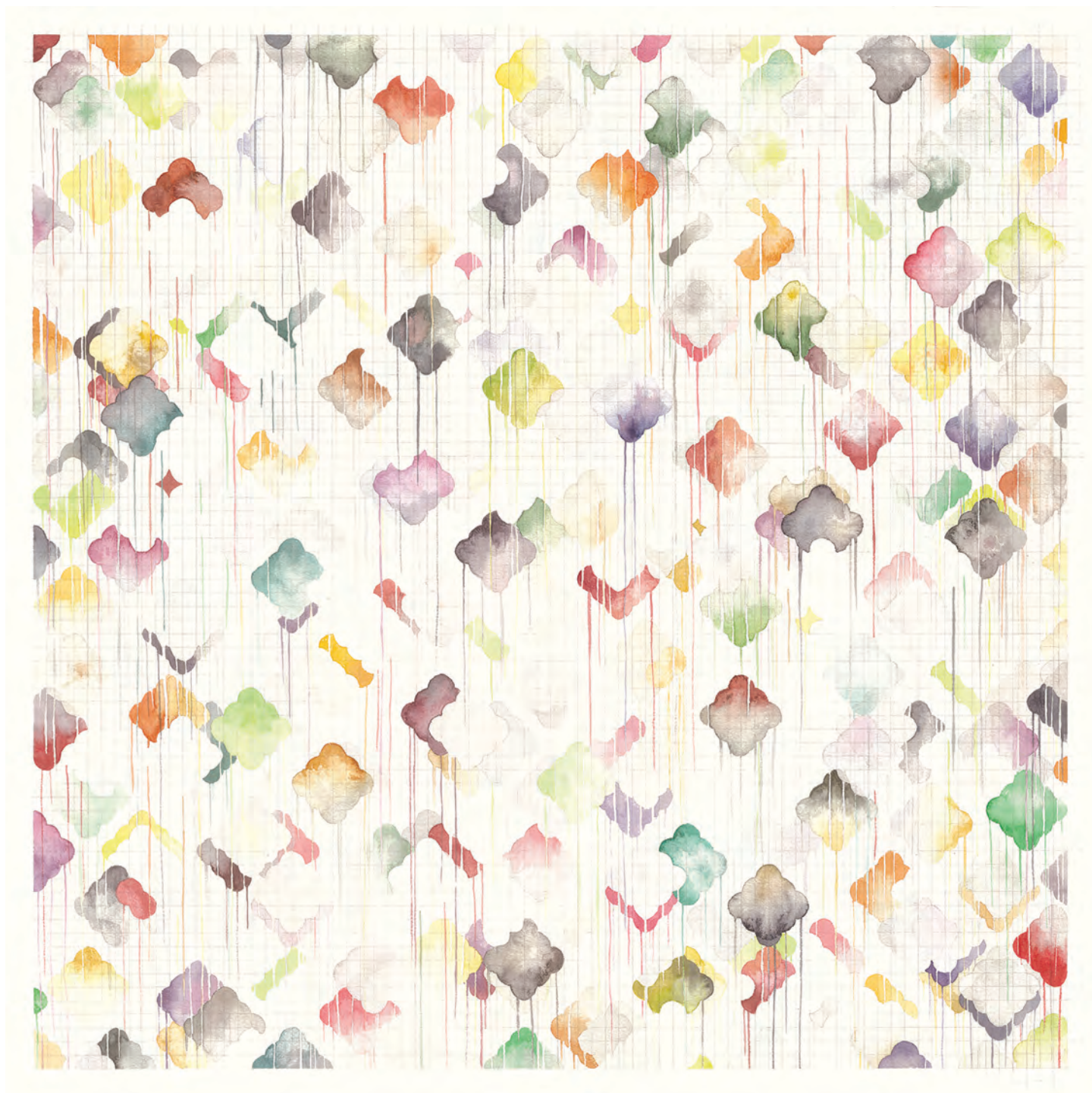


STALEMATE #3
2015





STALEMATE #5
2016





theDISCORD [exhibition shots]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



CRYPT OF SKY

SPATIAL INSTALLATION

Wood, Mirror, Steel, Stainless Steel and Wires
2017

Duration:

A time between two points.

Surface:

A space contained between memory and projection.

Trace:

A silo, phantasm launcher.

Temporality:

An abstract absence, industry of moments.

Thoughts:

A permutation of durations, anagrams of a pattern.

Patterns:

A hallucinatory labyrinth, hall of mirrors.

Mirror:

A discordant reflection, my first abstract refraction.

Me:

A body between two points.

Crypt of sky.

Benji Boyadgian

The installation consists in juxtaposing two mirrors that reflect each other on a vertical axis. Two central hollow points are cut out from the mirrors suggesting an alignment. The space in between is contained, past and future reflecting each other, a metaphor of uninterrupted temporality. In between, a tilted rectangular kaleidoscope, refracts and multiplies the image into a sphere-shaped grid, creating a pattern out of the surroundings and the Y axis. An analogy of the moment, constructed by multiplied refractions of memory and projection.

theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017





theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017





theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



TRACES

SPATIAL INSTALLATION

Transparent Threads and Acrylic Paint, 2017

Also in Raissa, city of sadness, there runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence.¹

Italo Calvino

In the invisible space, dust reflects sources of dark and light, rendering the visible world. Patterns of micro particles hover endlessly between physical elements, registering instants of light. Every ray reveals a potential relationship between two elements, registering the memory of the moment. In this void, elements contain each other and timeless threads unravel in the space.

~~~~~

<sup>1</sup> Calvino, Italo. 1972. *Invisible Cities*. Trans. William Weaver. Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego; New York; and London. p.149



theDISCORD [exhibition shot]  
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017







# MAGNET

## VIDEO

Animation, 2017

*And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable), would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.*<sup>1</sup>

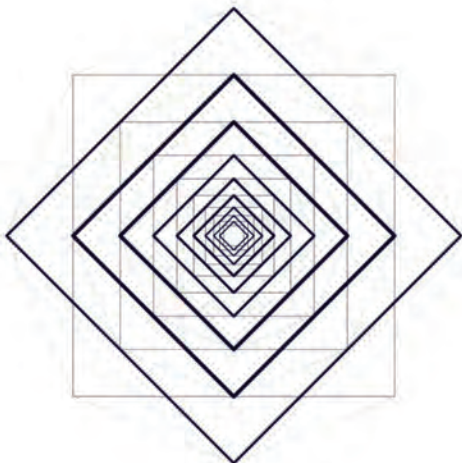
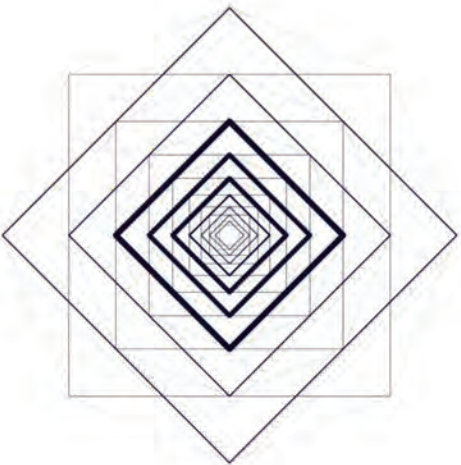
Plato

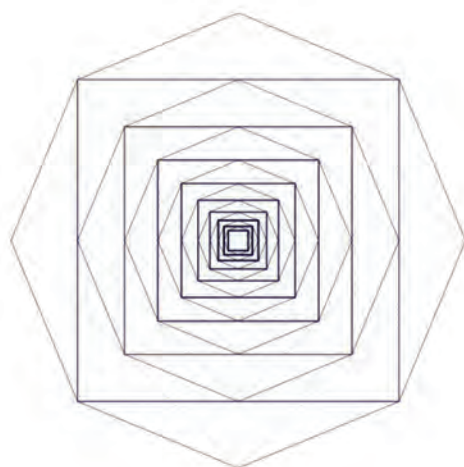
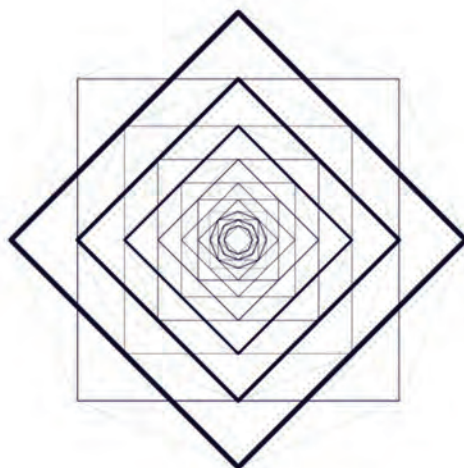
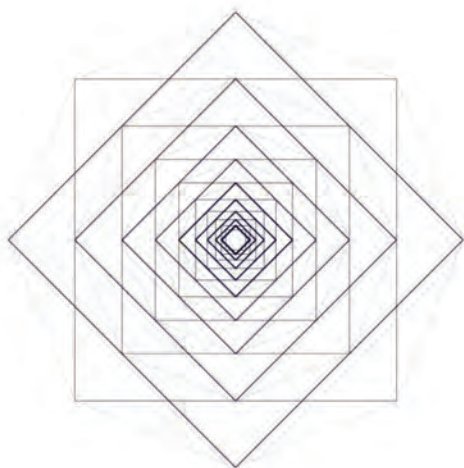
An optical trip based on simple geometrical shapes. To create a pattern, two squares that form two octagons repeat themselves endlessly, with different variations. A reflection on 'mise en abymes', as a repetition of frames in frames, perpetually moving back and forth. Memory and projection are trapped in the same vacuum.

~~~~~  
¹ Plato, 2008. Book VII "The Allegory of the Cave". *Republic*. Trans Benjamin Jowett. The Project Gutenberg EBook, retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm> in July 18th 2015

theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017







SEDIMENTS OF DISCORD

PAINTING SERIES

Watercolour and Pen on Paper, 56x18cm
2015

Inner duration is the continuous life of memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past... Without this survival of the past into the present there would be no duration, but only instantaneity.¹

Henri Bergson

The tension adopted on an element stretches it in opposite directions causing tensile stress, eventually forming fractures. Like geological sediments, the surface is also subject to tensions, mainly man-inflicted. As a result of the accumulation of tensions, a landscape transforms itself into an a-temporal amalgamation of repeating patterns.

~~~~~

<sup>1</sup> Bergson, Henri. 1912. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. T.E. Hulme. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. p. 44-45

theDISCORD [exhibition shot]  
Anadiel Contemporary Art Gallery, Jerusalem, 2017





theDISCORD [exhibition shot]  
Anadiel Contemporary Art Gallery, Jerusalem, 2017



# TERMINAL

## SPATIAL INSTALLATION

Old Found Tiles, 2017

*This unique balance –between mechanical, inert matter which passively resists pressure, and informing spirituality which pushes upward- breaks, however, the instant a building crumbles. For this means nothing else than that merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favour of nature. This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature’s revenge for the spirit’s having violated it by making a form in its own image.<sup>1</sup>*

Georg Simmel

The ‘Romantic’ fiction of ruins is linked with the material condition, if its decomposition can convey a feeling of age, and push further the idea of our reduction in the face of nature. In the case of the tiles, the motifs are imageries that are already subject to projections, hovering in our collective imaginary; this is what will give the tiles a ‘phantasmagorical’ value. Without the material, there is nothing tangible to negotiate with, no possible form of ruinification. The material condition is only the functional value of ‘romantic’ ruins, the potential to fictionalize time and nature. When all is said and done, the final destination is entropy. Can we travel across time without feeling nostalgia, and look at erosion for what it is, a trace of time?

~~~~~

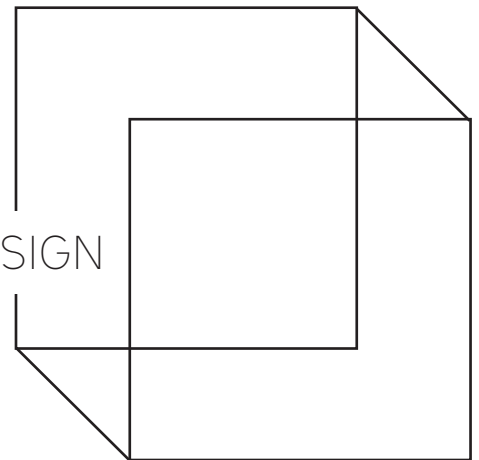
¹ Simmel, Georg. 1959. “The Ruin”. A Collection of Essays with Translations and a Bibliography. Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. Ohio State University Press, Columbus. p. 259

theDISCORD [exhibition shot]
Anadiel Contemporary Art Gallery, Jerusalem, 2017





THE SPATIAL DESIGN



theDISCORD
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2017



BENJI BOYADGIAN
and
BAŞAK ŞENOVA

THE DESIGN

Located in the old city of Jerusalem, the Kassisieh Tile Factory was one of the first hydraulic tile workshops in Palestine. It was founded in 1900 and produced industrial ornamental cement tiles that would cover the floors of the urban architectural landscape of that period. In the seventies, after the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem and following the cessation of industrial activities in the old city, the tile factory closed. For a few decades, the building was neglected. After more than a decade of planning and bureaucratic obstacles, in 2013 the refurbished old factory opened its doors and houses the cultural institution: Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Arts — the word 'al Ma'mal' means 'the workshop' in Arabic. During this process, mandatory archeological excavation were carried out in the building. Some older traces were uncovered revealing the layered history Jerusalem is known for. Those different historical elements were integrated into the design of the new space, to serve its new function. Resulting in a space with different sections, of different sizes and heights, on different levels, and of different material and functional nature.

At first glance, the spaces of the building seem hard to decipher. There are potentialities intrinsic to its nature, which offer ways to perceive space in its different coordinates, to interpret the building through its own history and relationship to a place and time at large. Without any spatial intervention, placing the works in a situation of dialogue with the space proper, the installation re-orientates the building.

Highlighting elements through a dialogue with the forms and materials, in order to reveal a reading of the space. A back and forth dialogue between the positive and negative space, mirroring and projecting stories onto each other. Creating a situation of 'Gestalt', where the elements and the space are put in tension in a composition that creates a whole. Connections are created in this site-specific installation where movement is required; from many different angles the audience can see and be seen, transparencies are suggested. The notion of transparency is essential to the work and its approach on colour, and to the way the work connects with space, is understood as a void between elements, where invisible particles reflect light.

Approaching Al Ma'mal from the New Gate, a square shaped inverted mirror floats horizontally over the building, like a signal. Entering the main space, a tensile structure suspends a kaleidoscope between two skylights, inviting the viewer to the existing vertical link of the building. Under the hanging object, the viewer is in the center of the installation *Crypt of Sky*. The top mirror is juxtaposed

to a mirror in the lower floor, suggesting a contained space between the sky and the excavated ruins. In the room the stone walls are left bare, telling their own story, the space is empty except for the two recesses in the wall, shelving some old tiles. This room leads to a lower and a higher floor suggesting a loop, both routes are possible.

Continuing up some steps to the first floor that has the appearance of a 'white cube', watercolours from *Discord* are displayed on the walls, the background of which is painted a blueish grey, a frame suggesting a space in a space. In the room, one painting is placed on a box, questioning our sense of perception. From this space, stairs lead to the roof, where the inverted mirror hovers over the building. Looking down through the skylight, the kaleidoscope creates the optical illusion of a dome.

Back down to the middle room, the installation *Traces*, connects a skylight to the spiral staircase. Strings echo the direction of the rays of sunlight that immerses the space with light during the day. From the top of the stairs, the lower floor can be seen.

The paintings of *theDiscord* are placed on top of boxes of different heights suggesting topography. Spiraling down the stairs, two painting are displayed in a vertical logic accompanying the movement up and down. The boxes are dispersed in the L shape room, one of the wings is a large hall, the other a vaulted passage that leads back up to the main space, and again the old walls are left bare. The rectangular angles of the boxes create an effect of juxtaposition to the irregular geometry of the space.

From the second space, one can enter the room where the ruins and the lower mirror are found. Back in the vaulted room, four painting are aligned on the longitudinal gypsum wall, accompanying the movement. Under the steel stairs that lead back up to the main space, the video *Magnet* is projected. A dark cornered space lit by the optical piece. On the way up, another vault frames the kaleidoscope, shaped like a keystone.

The exhibition extends to Anadiel Contemporary Art Gallery, sited in the vicinity of Al Mamal Foundation for Contemporary Arts. It is a rectangular space, a typical ground floor Old City shop structure from the 19th century. In symmetrical display vitrines, two old tiles are placed on red velvet.

At the entrance in the space between the facade and a mezzanine, seven watercolors form the series *Sediments of Discord* are displayed on both sides, placed one above another, following the verticality of the space.

Under the mezzanine, watercolors from *Discord* are displayed on the walls of the space. *The Terminal* is an installation, composed of inverted recovered tiles which are juxtaposed to the tiles of the space. The installation is positioned at the center of the space by anchoring a reference point to the symmetrical setting of the gallery space. This is the last stop before image decomposes into ruin.



THE PLANS

UNDERGROUND LEVEL

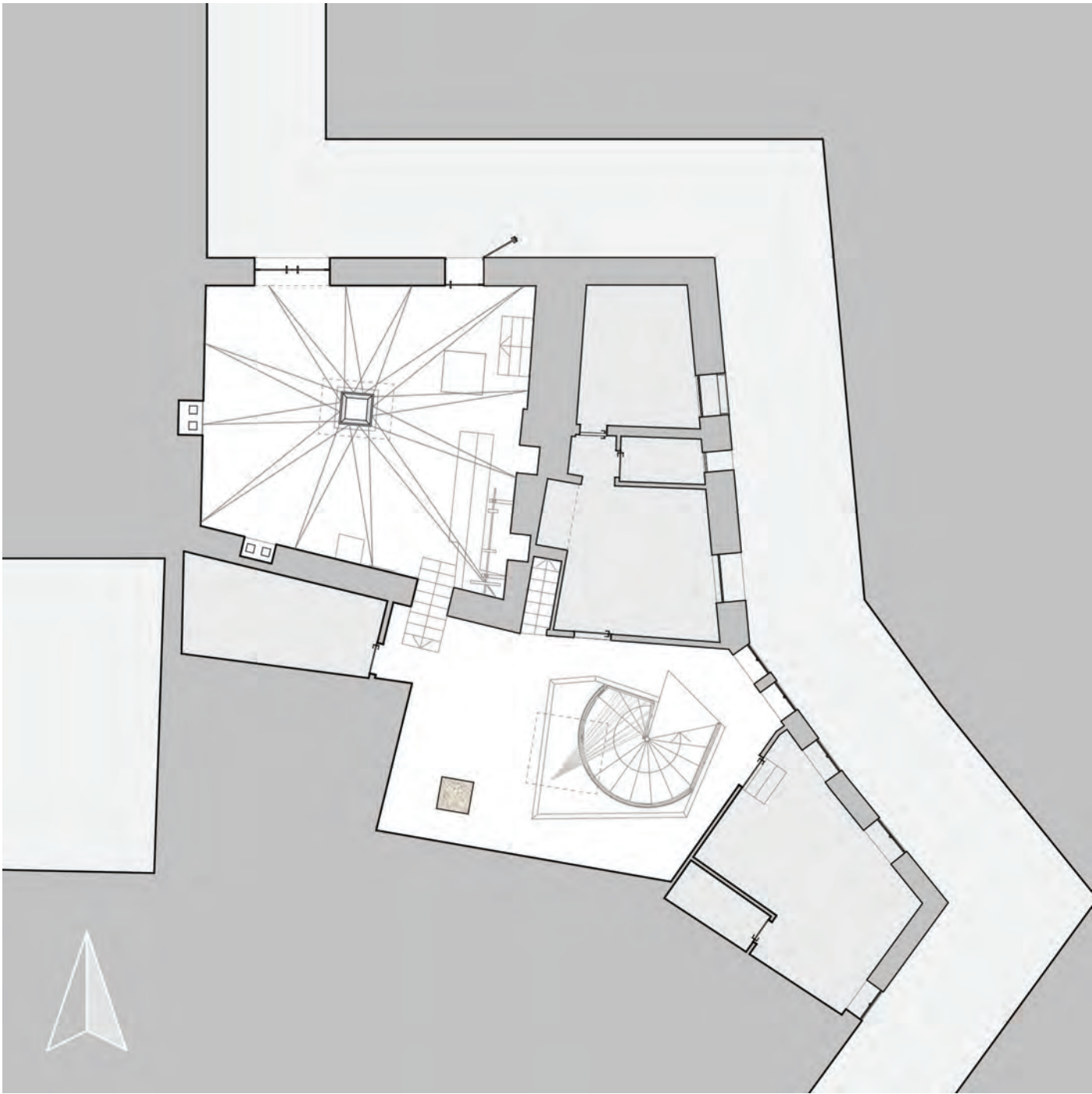
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



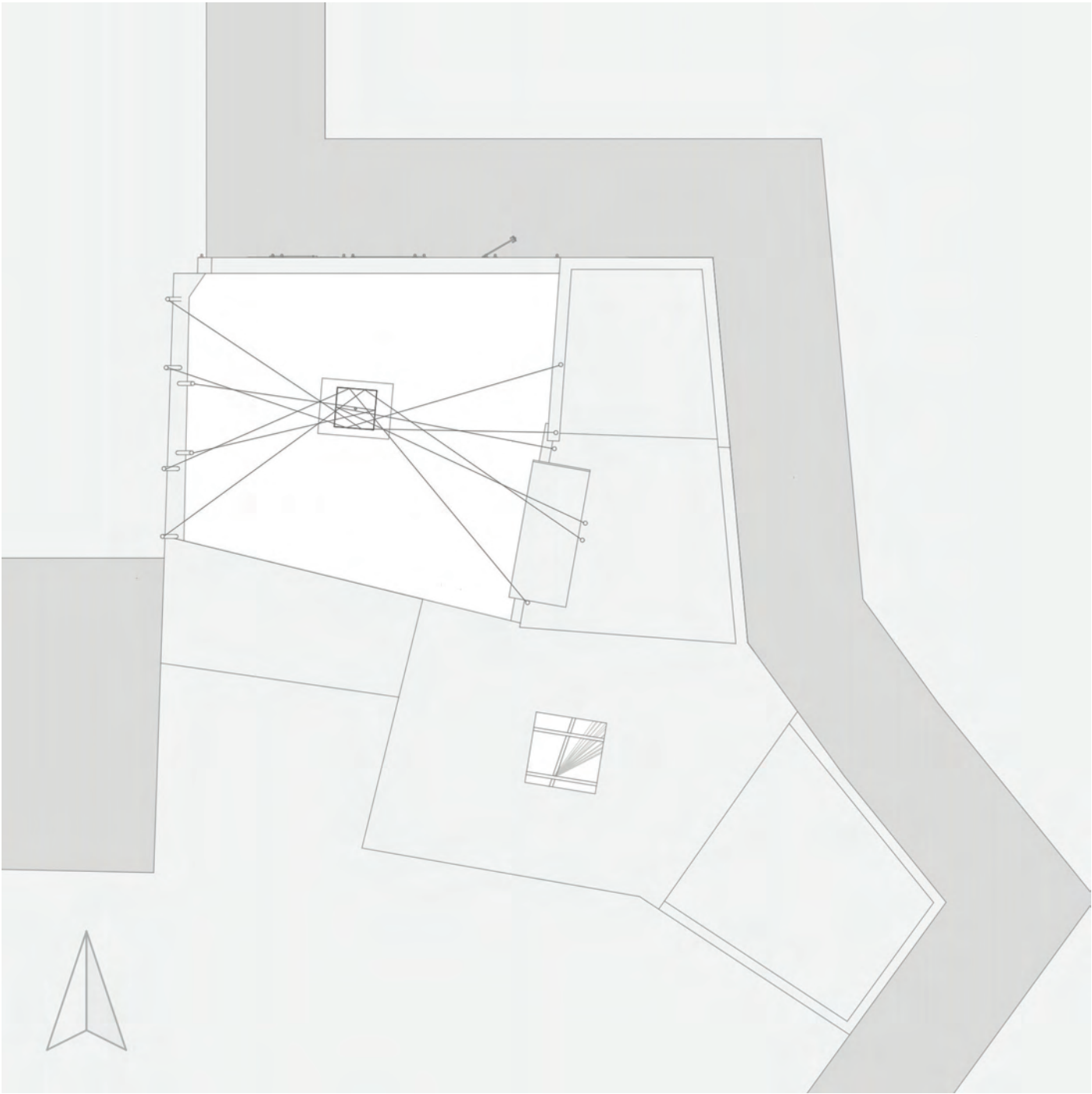
BASEMENT LEVEL
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



GROUND FLOOR and LEVEL 1
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



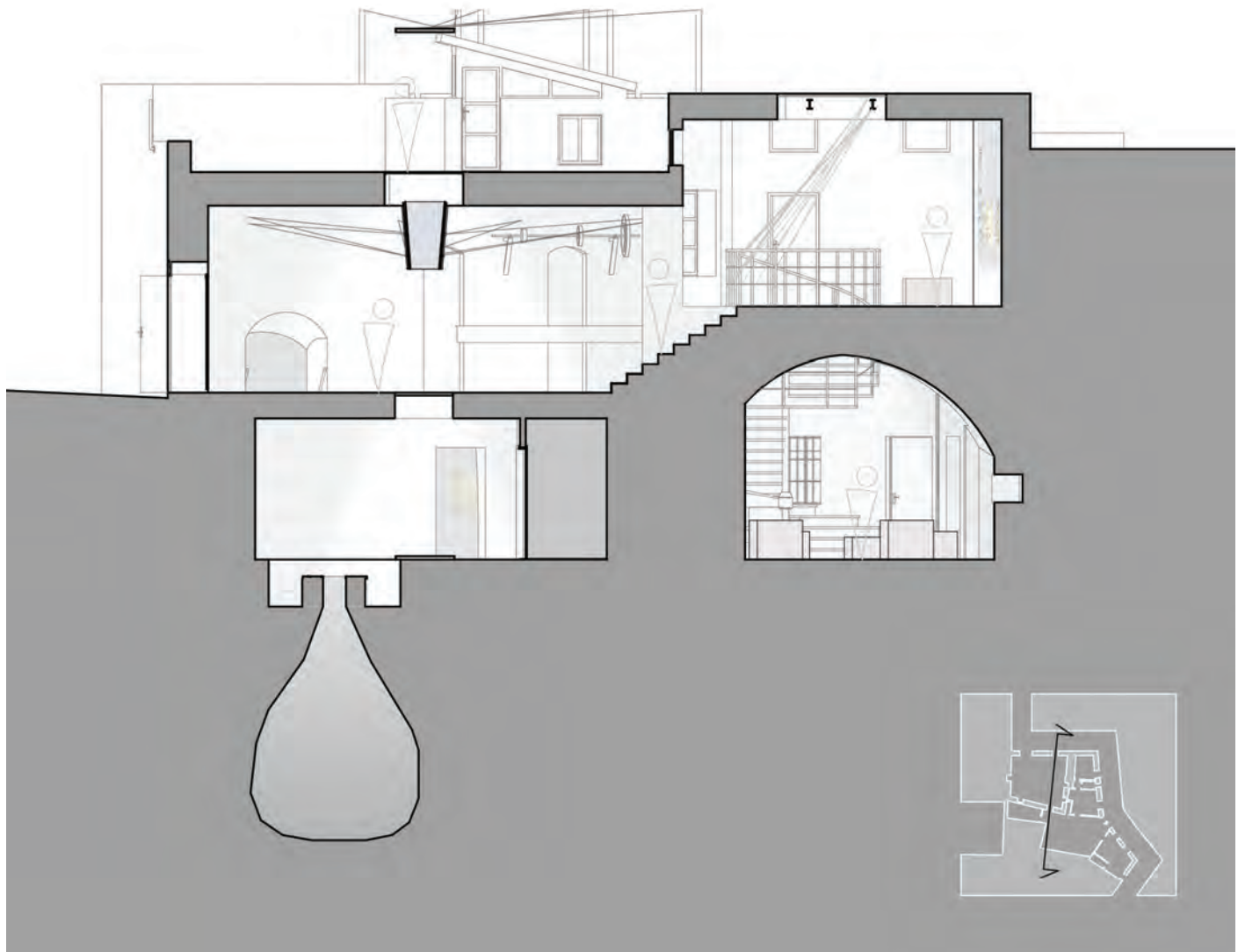
ROOFTOP
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



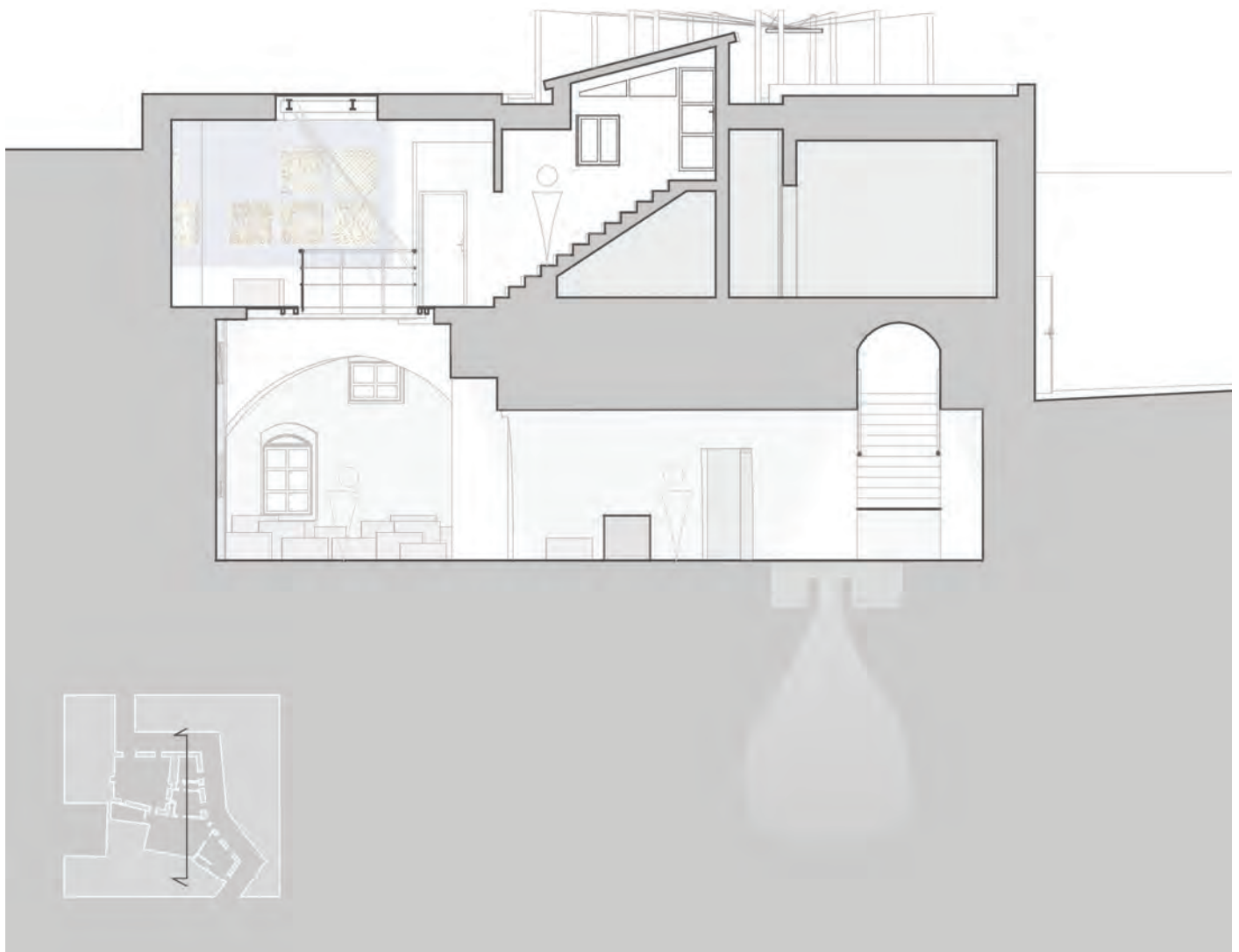
THE SECTIONS

EASTERN SECTION

Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



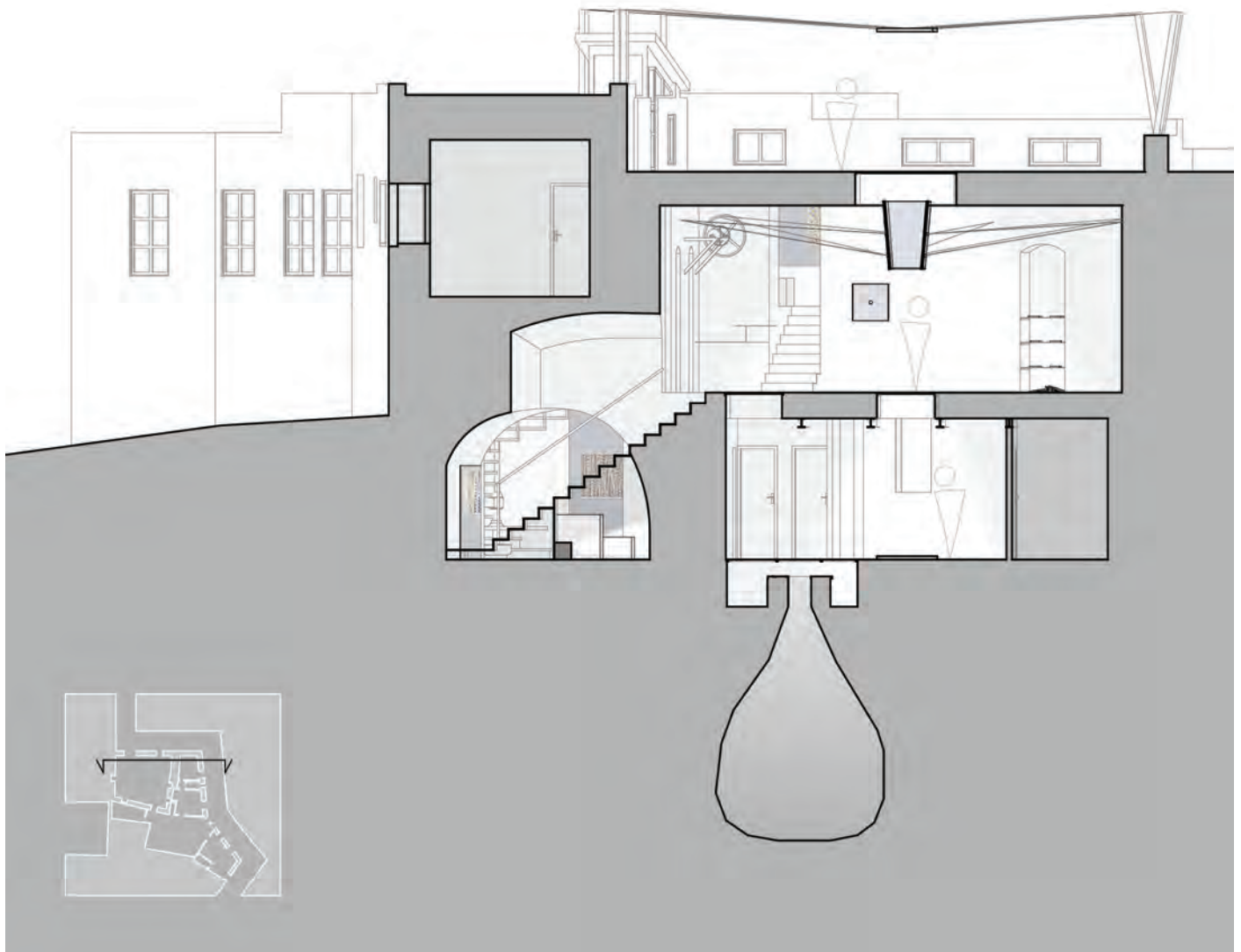
WESTERN SECTION
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



NORTHERN SECTION
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



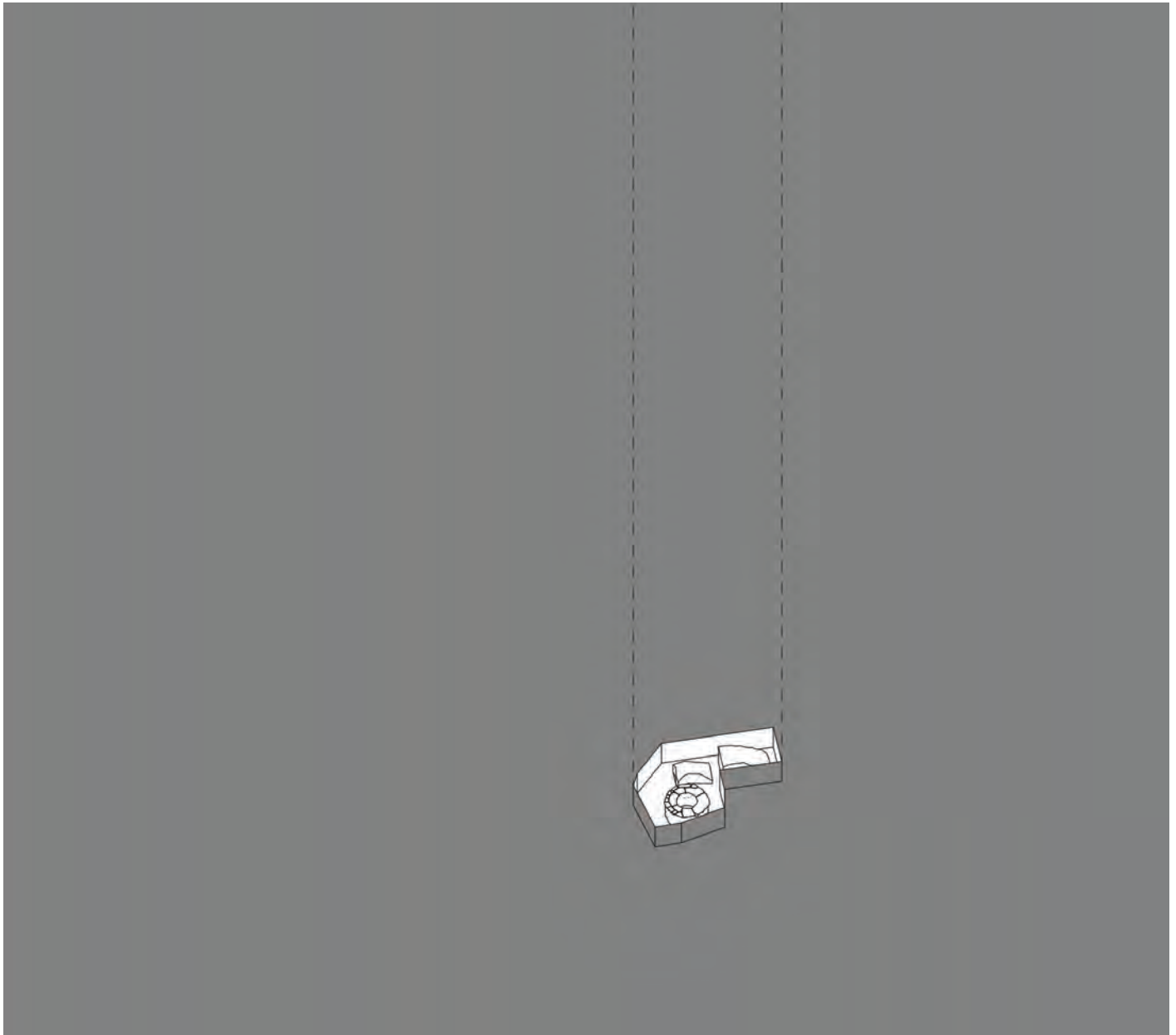
SOUTHERN SECTION
WAI Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem



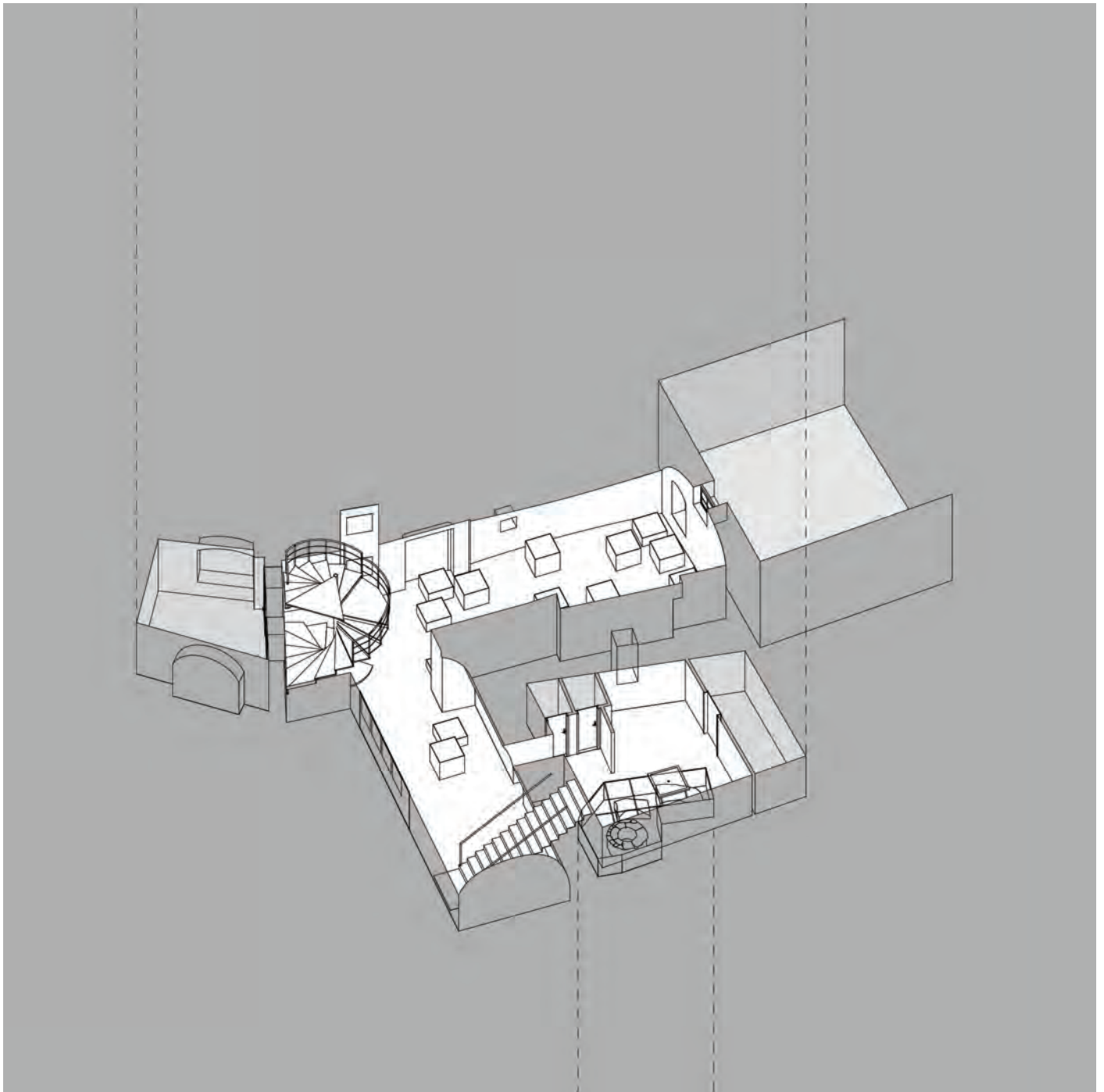
THE AXONOMETRIES

UNDERGROUND LEVEL

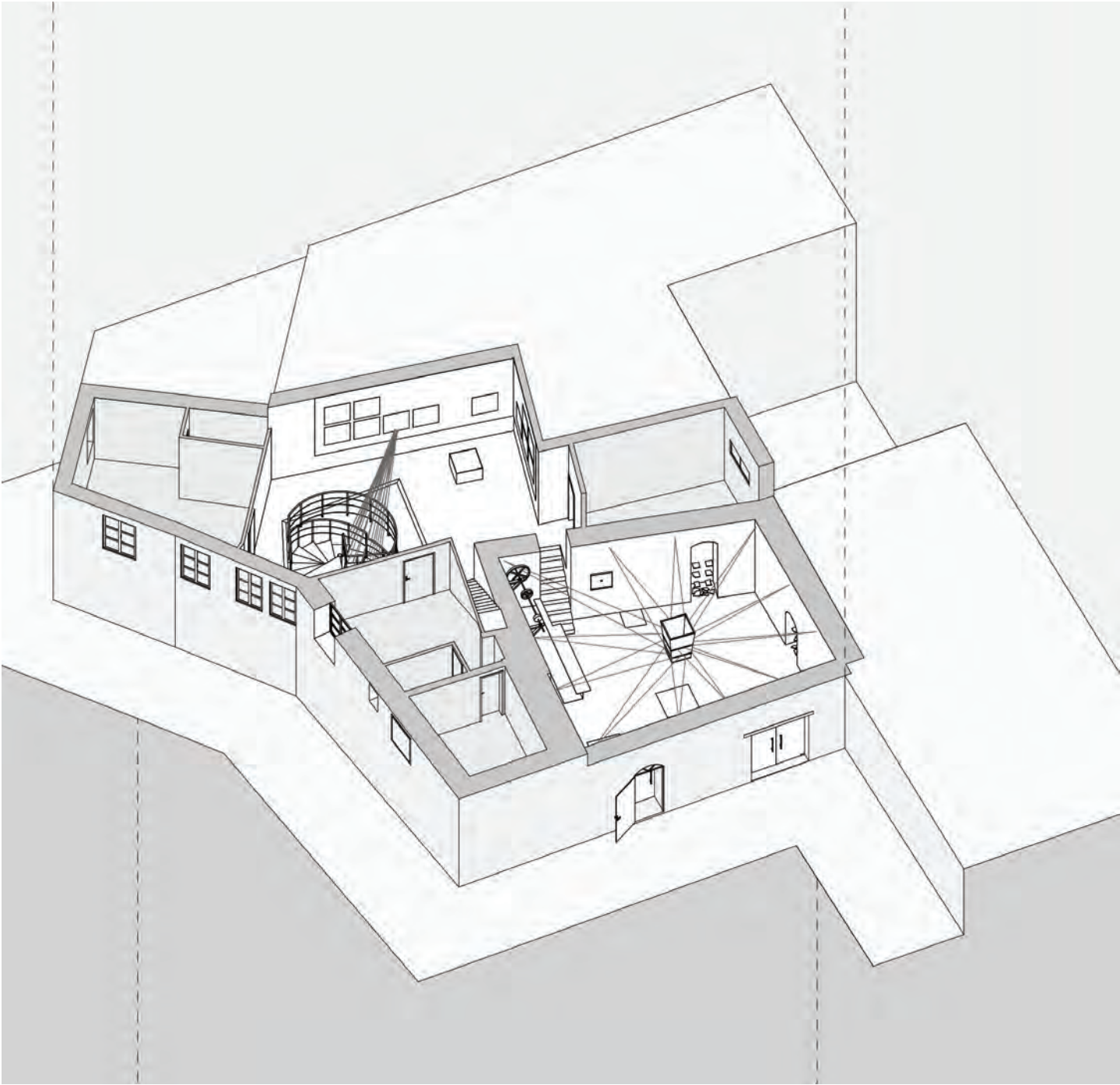
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



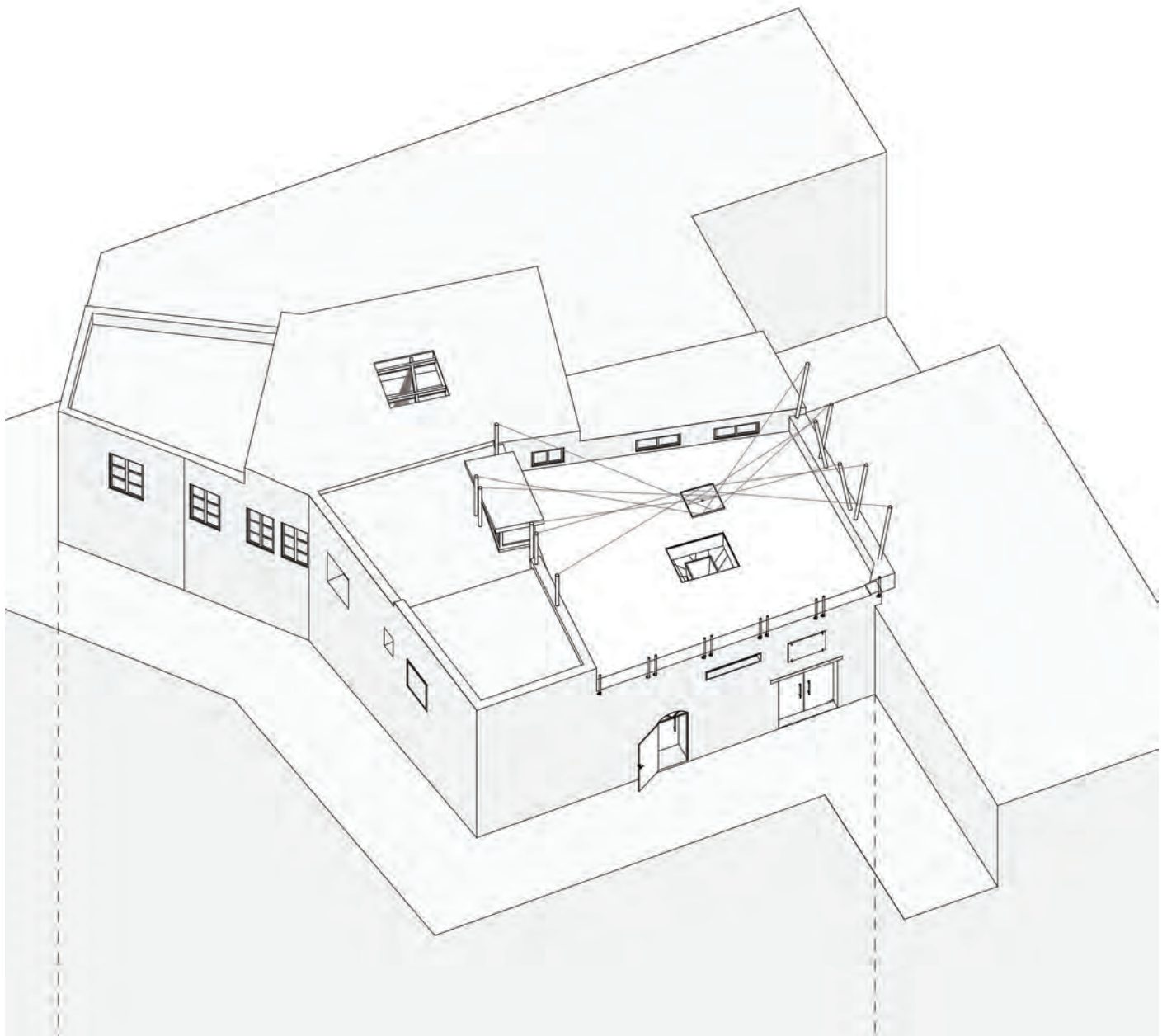
BASEMENT LEVEL
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



GROUND FLOOR and LEVEL 1
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



ROOFTOP
Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art , Jerusalem



BENJI BOYADGIAN

1983, Jerusalem

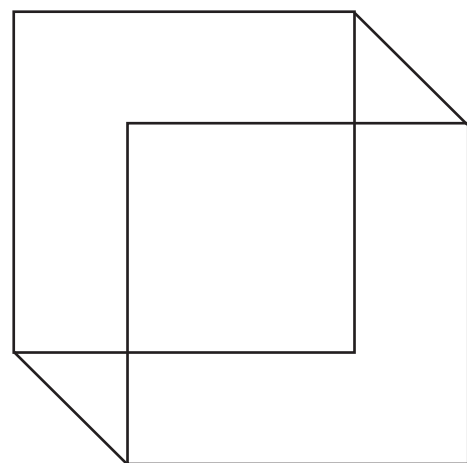
Benji Boyadgian (FI/PS) studied architecture at ENSAPLV School of Architecture (L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris La Villette), attaining a Masters of Architecture. With his master thesis, titled, *Contemporary habitat and urban expansion in Bethlehem, Palestine* (2009), he was specialized in urban sociology in post-conflict areas.

Boyadgian works on research-based projects that explore themes revolving around perception, heritage, territory, architecture and landscape. He works with multiple media by employing painting and drawing as his primary tools.

His exhibitions include in 2019 *Shared Religious Sites*, DEPO, Istanbul, *Climbing through the tide*, B5L9, Tunis. *Intimate Terrains*, Palestinian Museum, Birzeit; in 2018: *Dissolutions*, Oktem Aykut Gallery, Istanbul, *Jerusalem Show IX, 'Actual and possible'*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, *CROSSECTIONS Trilogy* (3 exhibitions), Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, *AQUA, Contemporary Artists and Water Issues*, Isola dei Pescatori, Stresa, Lago Maggiore; in 2017: *Sharjah Biennial 13 Offsite: Shifting Ground*, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah; *Armenia Standart: Mount Anlaloque, the Triennial of Contemporary Art in Armenia* Gyumri; *Around About*, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah; *AQUA, Contemporary Artists and Water Issues*, Chateau de Penthes, Geneva; 2016: *Traces*, Art Rooms, Kyrenia, Cyprus ; *The Jerusalem Show VIII: 'Before and After Origins'*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem; *De lova de oss en skola, de lovade en Simhall*, Skånes konstförening, Lund ; *Lines of Passage (in media res)*, the Municipal Art Gallery, Lesvos; in 2015: *Line*, Art Rooms, Kyrenia; *Stepping over the Borders*, European Mediterranean Art Association (EMMA), Nicosia; *Shared Religious Places*, Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MuCEM), Marseille; 2014: *The Jerusalem Show VIII: 'Fractures'*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem; and *Spinning On An Axis*, Mario Mauroner Contemporary Art, Vienna, Austria; 2013: *A journey into Abstrabesque*, Al Ma'mal Foundation, Jerusalem; and 2010: *Vanishing Landscapes*, Al Kahf Gallery, Bethlehem.

Boyadgian was a studio grant holder of the Iaspis (The Swedish Arts Grants Committee) programme (2015); attended the Young Artists Residency Programme of *Confrontation Through Art Project*, organized by EMAA and Rooftop Theatre Group (2015), Nicosia. He has been awarded the Ismail Shammout Prize 2015 in Palestine.

Boyadgian lives and works in Jerusalem.



COLOPHON

theDISCORD

EXHIBITION

March 8th – May 12th 2017

Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art and Anadiel Contemporary Art Gallery, Jerusalem



GALLERYANADIEL

Artist Benji Boyadgian

Curators Başak Şenova and Jack Persekian

Project Coordinator Aline Khoury

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Graphic Production Başak Şenova

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