

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

By

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1991
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia

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Professor Ronald Watson

Dr Mark Thistlethwaite

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For the College of Fine Arts

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BIOGRAPHY

Shafaq Ahmad was born and raised in Pakistan. After completing her Bachelor of Science degree at the Punjab University in Lahore, she left Pakistan at age 20 and lived in England, Iran and Denmark before settling in the United States. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, Virginia in 1991. The following year she opened an interior design studio/art gallery, Interior Dynamics, Inc., in Richmond, Virginia, which she operated until moving to Texas in 2002. She specialized in residential and commercial interior design and represented local and international artists; she was also the Director and Chief Curator of the gallery.

During this time she designed art glass for Barovier & Toso in Czech Republic from 1995 to 2002, where she worked closely with the glass masters to create hand blown art objects. Her work was represented in the “Ambiente”, Frankfurt Germany International Fair”, and the New York International Gift Fair, among other venues each year. Her designs were also made by Ajeto Studio, Studio Hut Charlotta and Studio Hut Prince in the Czech Republic and Studio Lindshammar, in Sweden.

After moving to Texas, Ahmad pursued her interest in art at North Lake Community College in Irving and Brookhaven Community College in Dallas, by studying painting, printmaking and photography from 2006 to 2009. She is currently completing a Master of Fine Arts degree in studio arts at Texas Christian University, in Fort Worth. After she finishes her MFA program in the

spring of 2011, she plans to move into her own studio, where she would continue to paint, and keep experimenting with other media to make her work.

Shafaq Ahmad currently lives in Irving, Texas, with her husband Naeem Ahmad.

She has two sons Faisal and Fahd and daughter Shehrazade.

VITA

SHAFaq AHMAD

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Irving, TX 75063
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EDUCATION

MFA	2011	Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
BFA	1991	Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia Summa Cum Laude
	2008-2009	Brookhaven College, Dallas, Texas, Academic Achievement List
	2006-2008	North Lake College, Irving, Texas

WORKSHOPS

2009	Printmaking with Timothy High, Assistant Professor University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas
	Print making with Tom Reed, Faculty, Washington University, St Louis, Montana
	Painting with Margo Margolis, Professor, Tyler School of Art, New York
2008	Painting on Glass with David Kittrell, Kittrell Riffkind Art Glass, Dallas, Texas

AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS HONORS

2011	Finalist, Photographer's Forum, Best of College Photography International Competition, 2011
2009	Graduate Assistant ship, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
	Purchase Award, Brookhaven College, Dallas, Texas
	Forum Gallery, Brookhaven College, First Place Award
	Academic Achievement List, Brookhaven College

- 2008 Purchase Award, North Lake College, Irving, Texas
Texas And Neighbors Regional Art Competition, Irving Arts Center, Irving, Texas, Award
Finalist, League of Innovation, Mountain View College, Dallas, Texas
Image selected by Dallas County Community College District for fundraising, Award
- 2007 Purchase Award, North Lake College, Irving, Texas
Images selected by Dallas County Community College District for fundraising, Award
- 2005-2006 Member, Grant Review Board, Irving Arts Center, Irving, Texas
- 1999-2003 Member, Multi Cultural Advisory Council, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia
- 1996-2000 Vice President, The Collector's Circle, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia
- 2000 Recipient, Residential Design, Category 1, American Society of Interior Designers, Virginia Chapter, First Place Award
Recipient Residential Design, Category 2, American Society of Interior Designers, Virginia Chapter, Award
- 1991 Graduated Summa Cum Laude, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
Member Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
Member Golden Key Honor Society

INTERIOR DESIGN

- 1992-2003 Owner/Designer, Interior Dynamics, Richmond, Virginia
Residential, commercial, furniture

ART GALLERY

- 1992-1997 Director/Curator, Interior Dynamics, Richmond, Virginia

ART GLASS

- 1993-2004 Designer, Fanoos, Richmond, Virginia
- 1995-2002 Designer, Barovier & Toso, Vsetin, Czech Republic

2000-2004 Visiting Designer, Ajeto Studio, Novy Bor, Czech Republic
 1999-2003 Visiting Designer, Studio Prince, Czech Republic
 2000-2003 Visiting Designer, Studio Hut Charlotta, Vsetin, Czech Republic
 1997-1998 Visiting Designer, Lindshammar Sweden, Vetlanda, Sweden

EXHIBITIONS

2011 Moudy Gallery, MFA Thesis Exhibition, Fort Worth, Texas
 500 X Gallery, Dallas, Texas

2010 Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Fort Worth, Texas
 Twelve Gates Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2009 Gallery 414, Fort Worth, Texas
 Dallas Art Revue, Bathhouse, Dallas, Texas
 500 X Gallery, Dallas, Texas
 Texas Visual Arts Association, Dallas, Texas

2008 Forum Gallery, Brookhaven College, Dallas Texas
 Jaycee Park Gallery, Irving, Texas

2007 Sabira Gallery, Dallas, Texas
 Fort Worth Community Arts Center, Fort Worth, Texas

2006 Sabira Gallery, Dallas, Texas

2004 Fanoos, Dallas International Market Center, Dallas, Texas

2003 Cantoni Furniture and Gallery, Dallas, Texas
 Cantoni Furniture and Gallery, Houston, Texas
 Cantoni Furniture and Gallery, Irvine, California
 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
 Market, High Point, North Carolina
 Fanoos, Dallas International Market Center, Dallas, Texas

2002 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
 Market, High Point, North Carolina
 Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
 Frankfurt, Germany

2001 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
 Market, High Point, North Carolina
 Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair, Frankfurt, Germany

2000 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
 Market, High Point, North Carolina
 Fanoos, Atlanta Gift Mart, Atlanta, Georgia
 Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
 Frankfurt, Germany

1999 Fanoos, Javitz Center, New York, New York
 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
 Market, High Point, North Carolina

- Fanoos, Atlanta Gift Mart, Atlanta, Georgia
Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
Frankfurt, Germany
- 1998 Fanoos, Javitz Center, New York, New York
Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
Market, High Point, North Carolina
Fanoos, Atlanta Gift Mart, Atlanta, Georgia
Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
Frankfurt, Germany
- 1997 Fanoos, Javitz Center, New York, New York
Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
Market, High Point, North Carolina
Fanoos, Atlanta Gift Mart, Atlanta, Georgia
Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
Frankfurt, Germany
- 1996 Javitz Center, New York, New York
Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
Market, High Point, North Carolina
Fanoos, Atlanta Gift Mart, Atlanta, Georgia
Barovier & Toso, Ambiente Frankfurt International Fair,
Frankfurt, Germany
- 1995 Fanoos, High Point International Furniture and Accessory
Market, High Point, North Carolina
- 1991 Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, Virginia

JURIED SHOWS/COMPETITIONS

- 2011 Photographer's Forum, Best of College Photography
International Competition, 2011, catalog
- 2010 Cross Talk, Texas Christian University, Juror, Vance Wingate,
Curator, Texas Women's University, Denton, Texas
- 24TH International Juried Art Competition,
Contemporary Visual Arts Center, New Jersey, Juror, Susan
Kismaric, Curator Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
- 2009 Forum Gallery, Brookhaven College, Dallas, Juror, Patricia
Meadows, Dallas, Texas
- Texas and Neighbors Regional Art Competition, Irving Arts
Center, Juror, Randal Hasson, New York, New York
- Digital, Texas Visual Arts Association, Juror, David Blow,
Dallas, Texas
- Chuckles, Texas Visual Arts Association, Juror, Pier
Lassard, Dallas, Texas

- Multicultural Show, Texas Visual Arts Association, juror, Sussan Afrasiabian, Director, Dallas, Texas
- 2008 Texas and Neighbors Regional Art Competition, Irving Arts Center, juror, Pamela Nelson, Dallas, Texas
- Kiva Gallery, League of Innovation, Mountain View College, Dallas, Texas
- Regional Art Competition, Richardson Civic Art Society, juror, Millie Giles, Dallas, College, Dallas, Texas, catalog
- 2007 Let's go Kandinsky, Texas Visual Arts Association, juror, Liz Netherland, Dallas, Texas
- Art Gallery, North Lake College, Irving, Texas

IN PRINT

- 2011 Photographer's Forum Magazine, Best of College Photography, Catalog
- 2010 Glasstire, Texas visual art on line, Texas
Dallas Art Revue, April , Dallas, Texas
News at Brookhaven College, Dallas, Texas
- 2009 Star Telegram, December, Dallas, Texas
Dallas Art Revue, June, Dallas, Texas
Brush Strokes, Texas Visual Arts Association newsletter, Texas
News at Brookhaven College, Dallas, Texas
- 2008 Brush Strokes, Texas Visual Arts Association newsletter, Texas
Irving Journal, Irving, Texas
DCCCD News Letter, Texas
- 2007 North Lake College News, Irving, Texas
- 2000/1 Valassko, Vlastivedna Revue, Czech Republic
- 2000 Home Magazine, March Issue
- VAIA, bont VOOR BINNEN, The Netherlands
- 1999 Ceramic & Glass", Italy

COLLECTIONS

- Private International
- Public North Lake College, Irving, Texas
Brookhaven College, Dallas, Texas
Fas Mart Corporate Office, Richmond, Virginia

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

In my work I am intrigued and inspired by mysticism, which is to believe in the unity of Allah, signifying that all creation emerges from one source and eventually goes back to it. It is an all-encompassing unity and nothing exists without it. This belief influences both the conceptual and formal aspects of my work. My mystical thought manifests in the physical reality of my work as it relates to our existence in the Universe. It attempts to convey the realization and acceptance of people of diverse backgrounds and cultures and bridge the disparity to convey the message of sameness and equality. The universal aspect of being the threads of the same human fabric is expressed through my artistic process of layering, adding, subtracting and mark making.

The process involves intuition, experimentation and decisions made at subconscious level. For me, the process of repetitive calligraphic text applied in layers is deeply meditative, when the hand is moving and the heart is in flux, but the soul is still. Each layer intends to create a unique spiritual space for the mind to penetrate, pass through and enter the realm of imagination.

I draw from childhood memories, Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature, and other diverse cultural influences from Pakistan, steeped in rich history and always saturated with colors, textures, and flavors. During my travels around the world and my study of world religions, I have found similarities in religious and mystical thought pointing to universal collective consciousness.

Although I have learned from and appreciated the study of various world religions and believe that mysticism is a universal spirit, which is at the heart of

all religions, personally I am most familiar with the Islamic mysticism or Tasawwaf, or Sufism.

Sufism is based on the wisdom of one's own heart, and strives for union that will bring enlightenment through the chance to know Allah at an intimate level. Once the Sufi sets out on the path toward enlightenment, he or she will be led by an inner light that grows stronger and polishes the mirror of his or her heart with the removal of each layer of the material and transient world, to which the title "In the World but not of the World" refers.

Accompanying the Sufi path Prayer is Zikr, a rigorously disciplined practice of remembering Allah through the constant repetition of and meditation on the divine attributes or other sacred phrases. Only after purification followed by illumination, when the seeker is filled with love and higher wisdom or gnosis, can the seeker achieve unity, the mystical union with Allah that will lift the veil of ignorance and surround the seeker with divine light. The seeker who has achieved unity has passed beyond the veils that stand between him or her and arrived at the final goal. Although, the veils are infinite and every instant in life in this world and for all eternity represents a continual lifting of the veils. Sufis are fully aware of their ambiguous situation as a result of the bewilderment of finding and knowing Allah and of not finding and not knowing at the same time.

For me, the act of making the paintings serves as contemplative process through which I attempt to show the connection of the universal spirit of all living beings. My process always starts in the center of the canvas and spreads out in a radiating fashion. I repeat the process by going back to the center and then

coming out again. The center is the point of origin and the point of final return for all things (Plates 1 and 3).

I focus and am absorbed in the meditative act of painting. The application and choice of colors is primarily instinctive. I choose intense colors to signify an inner light and its outer manifestation. I see color as light of different transparencies, playing the role of inner enlightenment expressed as outer beauty. The Arabic calligraphy is repetitive and it intertwines through the process of layering representing veils that keep us from seeing the ultimate truth, a common origin.

I attempt to express an experience of being embraced by the beauty of the universal spirit through luminosity of color and light, movement through gesture, richness through layering of color, and depth through intertwining mark making. The element of geometric shapes coming through is inspired by the long tradition of geometric Islamic art that manifests beauty through balance and harmony (Plates 5 and 6).

I chose the square as the canvas shape in my work to represent the Perfection of Allah and because the simplicity of the shape points to the humility of a human being and the annihilation of the ego. The calligraphic mark with a sense of forever being repeated in the paintings represents the infinite consciousness. The movement and the energy of the calligraphic marks show the constant state of flux of each thing. The words come from Sufi Zikr or meditation, in which attributes of Allah are rhythmically repeated. I believe that the calligraphy moves from right to left in a circular composition mimicking the movement of the atoms, the circular motion of the planets, which is also repeated symbolically by the

pilgrims around the Kaa`ba, which Muslims believe to be the first temple built to honor Allah, by the prophet Abraham and his son Ismail.

The white writing or woven incantations in the paintings represent a sliver of light piercing through the veils and making a uniform noise like movement as if in the act of meditation (Plates 2, 4 and 9). It also represents the thin sliver of last light remaining just before night and the light that appears just before the sun rises separating day and night and night and day, pointing to the mysteries and realization during the mystic's journey on the spiritual path. The inspiration for the white writing also is reminiscent of the tradition of micrography, a technique developed in the ancient Middle East by scribes who were able to render sacred texts into minute form. The glowing quality of the paintings represents the inner light, the realization of the higher consciousness coming through the veils as if reaching out to encompass the viewer.

In the *Transparent Veils* (Plate 7), a solid cube with transparent cube on top made up of twelve layers of clear acrylic painted with slivers containing minute calligraphic marks is a metaphor for material and spiritual existences coming through the transparent veils and inviting the viewer to participate visually through the layers from all sides. To me the six directions of the cube symbolize The all-encompassing universal consciousness.

As I work I realize that all painting retains an awareness of the history of painting. I draw from Persian miniature paintings, traditional Arabic calligraphy, contemporary Islamic paintings as well as the work of Modern masters including, Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miro, Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee and the Abstract

Expressionist painter Mark Tobey. The words in my work are based in part on the tradition of automatic writing where phenomenology of calligraphic gesture is poised at the boundaries of verbal and graphic forms of representation and are inscriptions of a living pulsating body. Superimposed words in the painting create different visual planes and as the eye shifts from one plane to the other, a sensation of movement is created: the unexpected color combination adds an effect of brilliance.

Combining the two arts of calligraphy and painting enhances and accentuates each of the other's qualities. Using the words as abstract structures enables the letters to transform themselves into painting. Deconstruction of the word makes it obscure. The script is not easily readable and at some point the word loses its meaning and a new form is born out of this. As the structure of the word is decomposed and the reading is challenged by different orientations and interrupted script, it results in a composition that emphasizes the creative aspect of the artwork over the interpretive one. The compositions strive to be the manifestation of the divine appearing as vehicle for the spiritual ecstasy sought by the mystic seeker. Even when the words are clear the meaning is abstract and the message is somewhat subliminal. In order that such writing manifests its truth, it must be literally unreadable to some extent. The illegibility of words in my work for the Western viewers is easily achieved, as most of them are unable to read the text, but I also intentionally obscure the writing to an extent for those able to read the Arabic alphabet. Obscuring the text generates mystery and another layer to visually pass through to find the legible letters or words, which

demands extra attention from the viewer and, hopefully, piques their interest. My paintings are open to two different readings and in a way this ambiguity represents the two aspects of my identity. It is an encounter between East and West with the intention of an image that is capable of having a wide appeal. One does not need to know the Arabic language to derive pleasure from its lyrical calligraphic marks, and what the viewer is invited to do is to explore the different realities presented that could be defined as intercultural or multicultural. A rhythm is created by the sense of the repetition of the prayers from my childhood and echoes of mystic incantations. The word acts as an isthmus to go through from the world of existence to the world of imagination and thought. Words also play a role in paintings' titles. The titles I choose are inspired by the poetry of mystic poets like Mohammad Iqbal, Fariduddin Attar, Jallaluddin Rumi and others. The dialog between the poetic titles and the work allows the intellectual and spiritual content to submerge the word into painting. The inscription of my title may seem to be ambiguous, but signifies a great deal. In the words of Michael Leaman, the contributing author to the book *Art Word and Image, 2,000 years of Visual/Textual Interaction*, by John Dixon, David Lomas and Michael Corris, "words in painting have a special meaning, one beyond natural language and communication".

In my painting it is not so important that the meaning be read, but rather, I want the viewer to experience the result of all the elements combined. I am not just dealing with mark making and layers, but with an extended spatial world where calligraphy ends and painting begins. The word is transformed into imagery in a

kind of an imaginary world. The space created hints at the vastness of the universe with all its complexities and the mysterious spiritual space, which is sometimes translucent and some times a denser veil. My work evokes a sense of organized chaos creating flux and energy through back and forth and up and down movement (Plates 5, 6, and 9).

PLATES



Plate 1. *“Cluster of Roses Spring from the Face of the Fire”*
74 x 74 inches, oil on linen, 2011



Plate 2. *"Firmaments revolve and Merge"*
60 x60 inches, oil on linen, 2011



Plate 3. *"Eternity of Before and After"*
74 x 74 inches, oil on linen, 2011



Plate 4. "*Uniform Repose*"
60 x60 inches, oil on linen, 2011

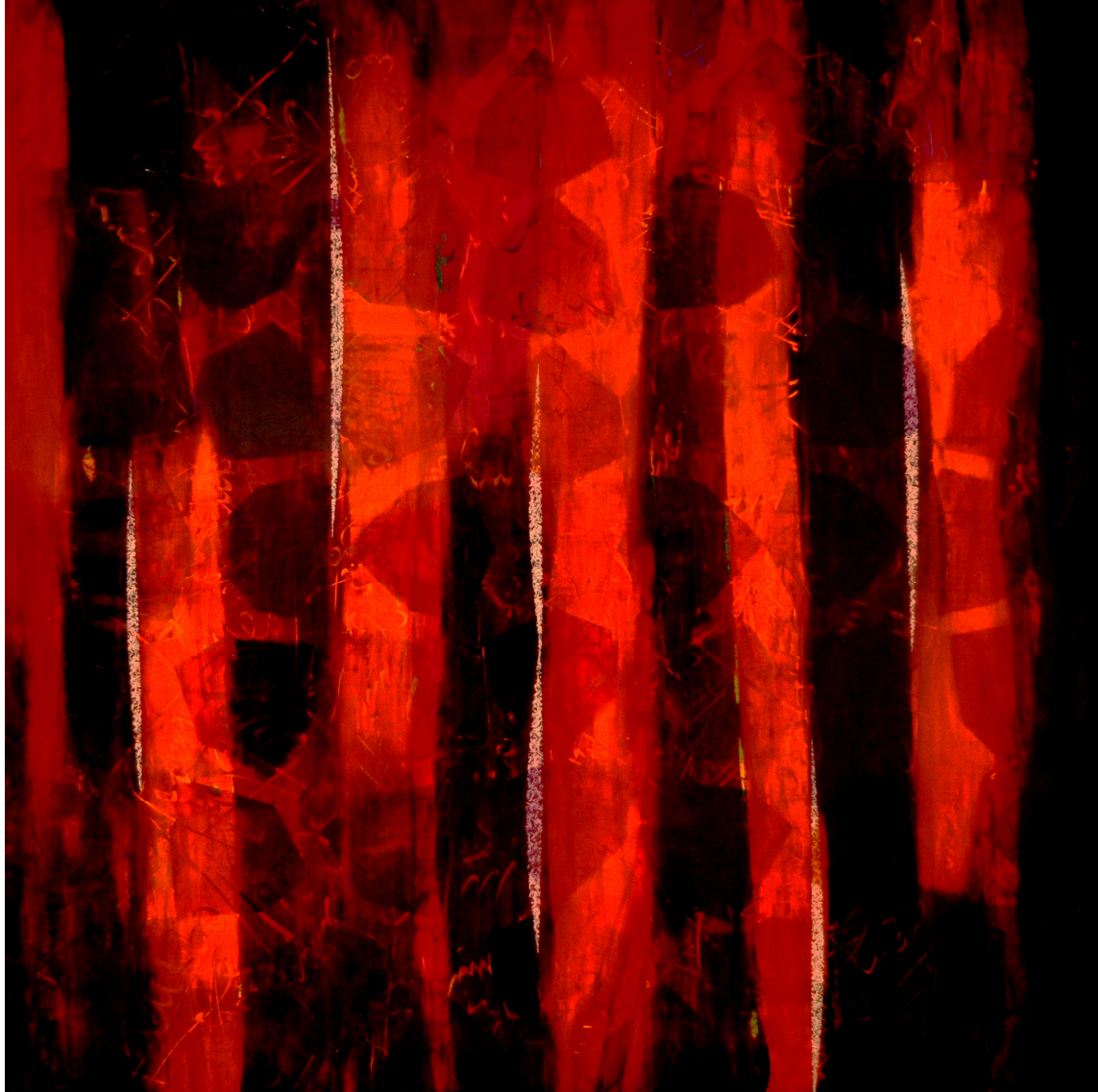


Plate 5. *"When the Veils Dissolve"*
74 x 74 inches, oil on linen, 2011



Plate 6. *"When the Veils Dissolve"*
74 x 74 inches, oil on linen, 2011

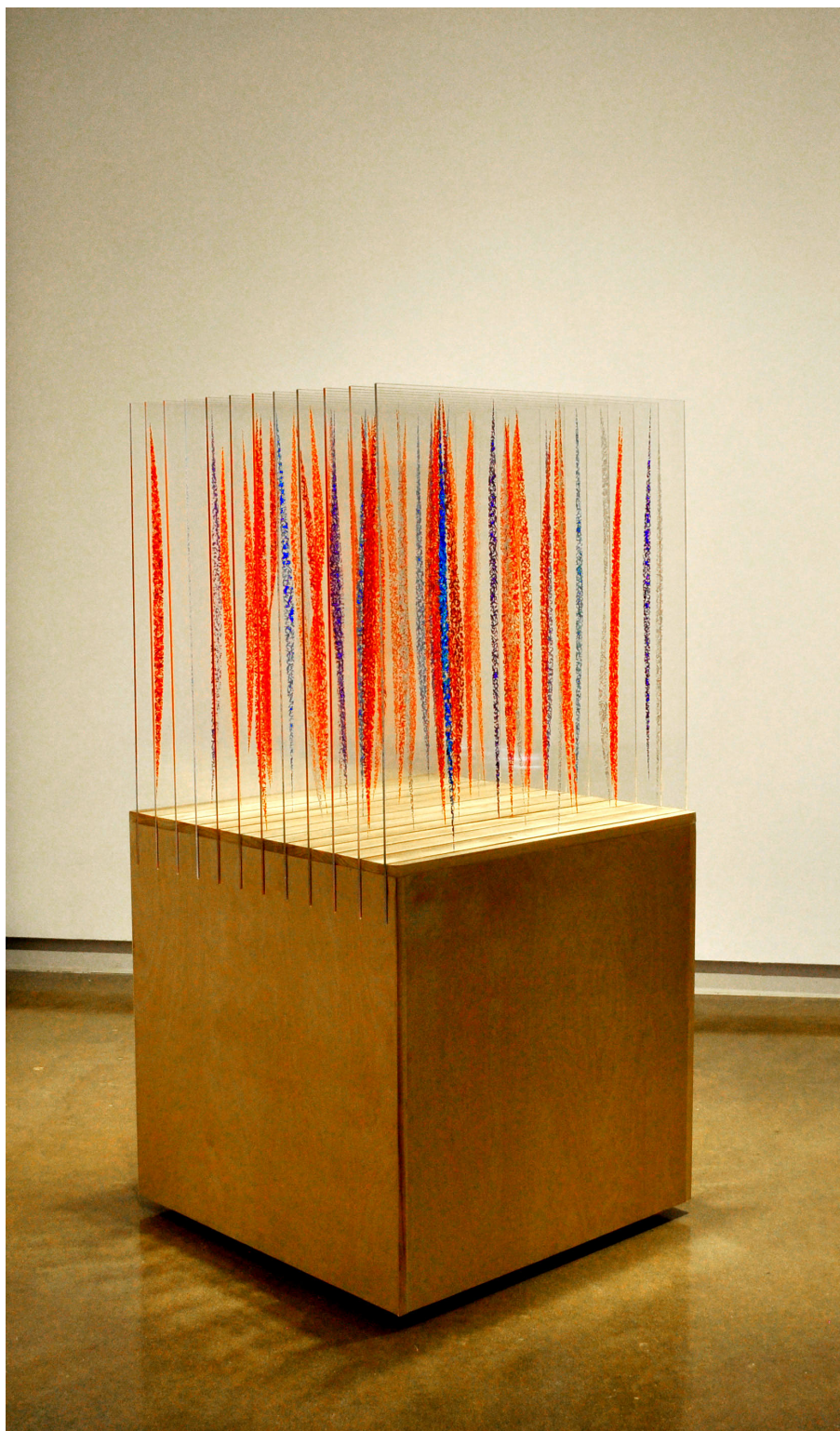


Plate 7. *"Transparent Veils"*
30 x30 x 60 inches, oil, acrylic sheets, wood, 2011



Plate 8. "*Hundred Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness*"
42 x 210 inches, oil on canvas, 2011

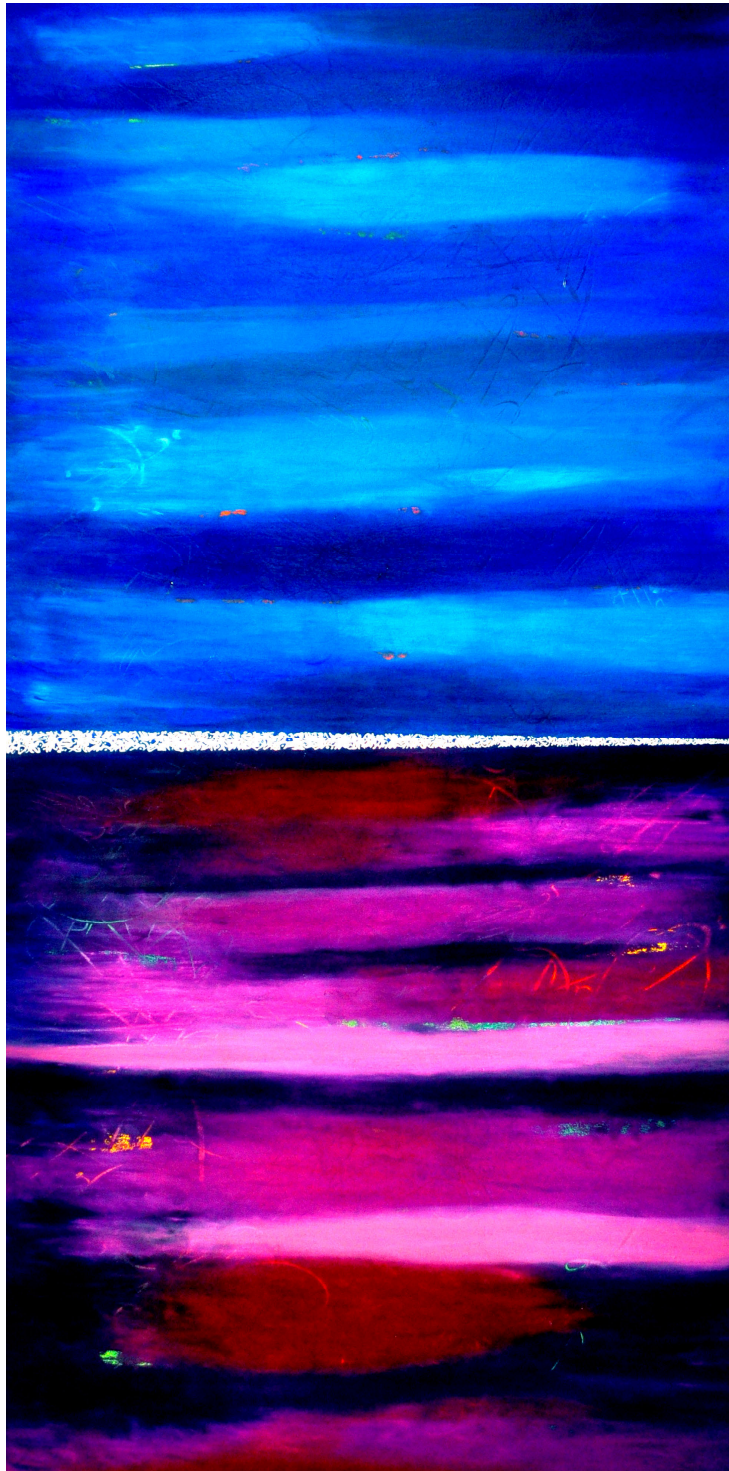


Plate 9. "*Veils upon Veils Merge*"
54 x 109 inches, oil on canvas, 2011