



Pavilions of Remembrance and Gratitude

“Remember Me and I will remember you; and be grateful unto Me, and deny Me not”.
(Qur'an Sura 2, Verse 152)

“The Arabic script has two states - one is a state of detached letters and the other is the state of joining them into word formation, and the words in turn to form sentences to elucidate ideas and thoughts, which in turn are a testimony on meaningfulness” (Ahmed Moustafa)

This spectacular composition is a culmination of the work of Ahmed Moustafa over the past three decades. Inspired by the concepts of Remembrance and Gratitude, Moustafa explores these themes on several levels, and the result is one of his most complex and profound works.

The text is the remarkable Qur'anic verse in which man is urged to engage in a reciprocal encounter with God. The work contains the whole text of the verse in interlacing layers that revolve around a common centre. The notion of reciprocity and mutuality expressed in the Qur'anic verse is thus mirrored both in the composition of each statement and in the compatible relationship between them.

Multi-layers are built up to form each statement in a complimentary fashion, masterly employing different techniques for each.

The reason for the dominant function which the letter shape of kaf assumes in this composition is likewise rooted in the text of the verse. The letter forms part of the Arabic words which convey its key concepts: 'remembrance', 'gratitude', 'denial' as well as, notably, the pronoun 'You' which addresses Mankind. The visual rendering of the verse in the panels is thus a highly effective reflection of its linguistic fabric, its sound and its syntax. Language here is made truly palpable to the eye.

The Qur'anic verse enshrines in singular fashion the perennial challenge of man's spiritual encounter with the divine. In its archetypal form that meeting is said to have taken place at the beginning of time when, as another Qur'anic verse tell us, the Creator faced the assembled souls with the words 'Am I not your Lord?', whereupon they affirmed their allegiance to Him. The aim of 'Remembrance' lies in seeking to recapture the lost memory of that experience, to excavate it from the deepest layers of the soul. This is a life-long process which demands ceaseless renewal because whatever is, in one blessed moment, salvaged and recaptured, disintegrates and falls prey to weakness, disregard and forgetfulness the next. The dynamic power of Moustafa's composition conveys both the pain of this unending struggle and the glory of the promise it holds in crystallised plains. The former is evoked in the flaking and rust coloured debris of letters in the background as memory is sapped by rack and ruin, while the latter shines out in the chiselled green, blue and copper of the verses in the foreground as memory is recaptured and revived. The life force released by this supreme moment is embodied in the plasticity and pliancy of letter shapes engaged in vigorous but harmonious and balanced motion.

Such revival is, however, not simply the fruit of man's own effort but rather comes to him as a divinely bestowed gift, hence the need for every moment of 'remembrance' to be, simultaneously, also a moment of 'gratitude'. The gift is conveyed to man in many guises, but most notably in the text of the Qur'an which describes itself quite literally as a 'remembrance for Mankind'. Reciting its verses and meditating upon them is thus in itself an act of remembrance. Similarly, any work of art it has inspired, aims at nothing less than rekindling such remembrance, such recollection of an archetypal mutual encounter. Herein lies the principal aesthetic endeavour of Islamic art. Moustafa's work emanates from the very core of this tradition.

Image size : 194.5 x 153 cm

Media : oil and watercolour on 638gsm 100% cotton paper

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