

# OLD TRADITIONS, NEW IDEAS

The shortlist for the 2011 Jameel Prize has just been announced, celebrating traditions of Islamic craft in contemporary art

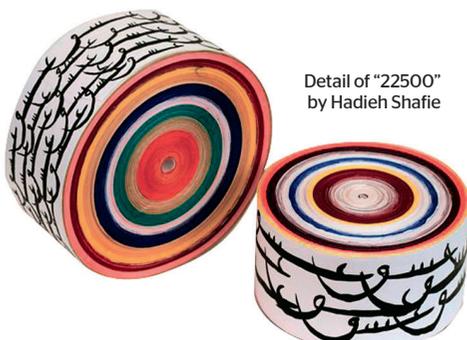
BY JOSEPH LANNER

**B**ricks are like my second skin," says Noor Ali Chagandi, a young Pakistani artist recently nominated for the Jameel Prize 2011 at London's V&A Museum. He's referring to "Life Line", the piece that scooped him a nomination, built from 5,000 tiny terracotta bricks. The finishing is so clean that Chagandi's final structure is almost fabric-like in its fluidity of shape, despite being made from kiln-fired material.

Chagandi is one of ten artists short-listed for this year's £25,000 (Dhs150,000) prize, with the winner to be announced in September. Now in its second outing, the award celebrates the work of those inspired by Islamic traditions of art, craft and design and takes its name from the Jameel gallery in the V&A.

Yet the selections are always very contemporary, and each piece has a subtle but vital element of craftsmanship. Iran's Bita Ghezelayagh, for instance, recreates the felt talismanic coats traditionally worn across Iran and Central Asia to give spiritual protection to the wearer – but stitches tiny machine guns, crowns and tulips (a symbol for martyrs) into the garments to create an overlapping of traditional craft and post-Revolution Iran's visual memory.

Similarly, Hadieh Shafie, another Iranian artist shortlisted this year, has been selected for two pieces, "22,500" and "26,000" – each relating to the number of tightly wound strips of multi-coloured paper daubed in Farsi that



Detail of "22500" by Hadieh Shafie



"Life Line" by Noor Ali Chagandi

she has arranged into a huge circular installation, with nods to the whirl of colours found in op art and underpinned with ideas related to the movements of the Sufi whirling dervishes.

One of the other strengths of the prize is its scope of catchment. Pakistani artists represent some of the strongest talent in the lineup – Noor Ali Chagandi is

joined by Lahore-based Aisha Khalid who has crafted a work inspired by the copybooks used in Pakistani schools to drill literacy in English and Urdu. Both Chagandi and Khalid are classically trained painters, versed in the Mughal tradition of miniature painting – traditionally used

to illuminate books of poetry and history from Persia and across North India.

Aisha Khalid, the other nominated Pakistani artist this year, takes the education system itself to task in her work, "Name, Class, Subject". This 280-page hardback tome, referencing the copybooks used to practice writing in Pakistani schools, is a visual demonstration of what she

calls "the colonial effect".

"There are two sides to this book, the English to be taken from left to right and the Urdu from right to left," she explains. "The English side is without mistakes, but the Urdu is full of inaccuracies, wrong pages and errors. These two sides overlap

BEING ONLY A COUPLE OF YEARS IN, THE JAMEEL PRIZE IS GATHERING MOMENTUM

each other in the book, and this is to show two different cultures overlapping each other.

The colonial era brought English words into Urdu, and this has affected the purity of the Urdu language."

Although only a couple of years in, the Jameel Prize is gathering momentum. Its directive – of exploring contemporary art through a funnel of design traditions in the Islamic world – brings a refreshing tangibility and sense of continuity to the art that's being celebrated. 3

The shortlist exhibition opens on July 21 at the V&A and continues until September 25

## ALSO ON THE SHORTLIST...



**Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Iran**

Mirror mosaic inspired by a sparrow's feathers found on the artist's balcony.

**Babak Golkar, Iran**

Persian carpet with a wireframe Gulf-style city model rising from its pattern.

**Hayv Kahraman, Iraq**

Stunningly painted series of playing cards that personify the Iraqi diaspora.

**Hazem El Mastikawy**

Sculptural installation made from cardboard that creates a complex bridge structure.

**Sody Sharifi**

Digital collages created using traditional Persian miniature paintings.