

Geometric Aljamía: a Cultural Transliteration
Exhibition Prospectus

Geometric Aljamía: a Cultural Transliteration

By addressing the fundamental geometry embedded in two-dimensional art, this exhibition acknowledges hybrid connections between Europe, the Mediterranean basin, and the Middle East. In the past, *aljamia* played a significant role in preserving Islam and the Arabic language in the West. By understanding the visual arts as a transliteration of one form of thinking to another, this exhibition revisits the ongoing impact of Islamic art, science, and philosophy throughout the world today.

Since ancient times, geometric perfection (circle, square, and triangle) has been thought to convey sacred and universal truths by reflecting the fractal interconnections of the natural world. One finds these similarities across cultures embedded in many diverse ethnic patterns. Incorporating these patterns into works of art promotes access through recognition and this commonality creates a connection. Geometric ornamentation may have reached a pinnacle in the Islamic world, where it has been assimilated into all aspects of everyday life. The exhibition examines an extended cross-cultural integration of the arts into life.

The papercut installations of [REDACTED], Gower, and Korchi use sacred geometry to blend subtle imperfection with structured repetition. Townsend is inspired by Koran Illumination Tehzip patterns in the Ottoman style for her wall tracings and papercut while [REDACTED] draws upon the Behzad School of Illumination for his calligraphic wall tracing and papercut. Benitez uses linear perspective as a metaphor for Western Civilization. Their shared artistic and intellectual interests speak to the larger hybrid relationship that the West shares with the Middle East, and especially with the Golden Age of Islamic Civilization.

This exhibition evolved out of a workshop conducted by Gower and Benitez during the 2013 Tasmeeem Conference, which was organized by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCUQ) School of the Arts in Doha, Qatar.

Artists Bios

[REDACTED] was born in Khair Khana, northern Kabul. Having finished high school Saleh took the decision to enroll at the [REDACTED]. Although neither Saleh's family nor friends took an interest in the craft, [REDACTED] found himself drawn to calligraphy and miniature painting from a young age. It was a dangerous hobby in the age of the Taliban, but now it is [REDACTED] profession, and he owns his own thriving business. [REDACTED] is particularly inspired by the Moghul and Behzad schools of design, and his work is typically Afghan in his sensitive use of the local pigments, Lapis lazuli, gold and silver. [REDACTED]

With a new startup company, **Jorge Benitez** designs and creates luxuriant one-of-a-kind weavings. He is a native of Cuba who spent his formative years in Belgium and is fluent in French and Spanish. His work reflects an earlier career in advertising, an interest in the American "culture wars," and his study of the links between words, images, and demagogic politics. After the events of September 11, 2001, he became increasingly interested in his own Spanish ancestry and the Iberian links to the Muslim world while simultaneously mistrusting the notion of *identity*. He currently participates in regional and international exhibitions and writes on subjects ranging from the Cuban Revolution to

postmodernism. His work is represented in corporate collections and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Recently retired, Professor Benitez taught drawing, art theory and the history of visual communications in the Communication Arts Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. Benitez holds a MFA and BFA in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University. <http://arts.vcu.edu/communicationarts/faculty-bio/jorge-benitez/>

Reni Gower received a 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. In 2017, she was awarded SECAC's Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement. In 2014, she received the College Art Association's Distinguished Teacher of Art Award, as well as distinguished teaching awards from Virginia Commonwealth University and VCUarts. Her art work is represented in many prestigious collections and has been exhibited at international and national venues for over 40 years. In addition to her painting practice, she curates award winning traveling exhibitions that include *FLASHPOINTS: Material / Intent / Fused*, *Geometric Aljamia: a Cultural Transliteration*, and *Pulped Under Pressure: The Art of Handmade Paper*. After 37 years, Professor Emerita Gower retired from Virginia Commonwealth University in December 2018. Gower is represented by Chroma Projects, Charlottesville, VA. www.renigower.com

Hanane Korchi is a freelance graphic designer, who specializes in art for identity, print promotions, packaging and web design. From 2011 – 2013, she was an interactive / graphic designer for the College of the North Atlantic – Qatar. Prior to living in Doha, she worked for Apple Canada, Inc in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She recently relocated to Hayward, CA after returning to Canada. She holds an Arts & Entertainment Management Certificate and a Graphic Design & Illustration Diploma from Capilano College, North Vancouver, British Columbia.

██████████ was born in Kabul, and comes from a long line of calligraphers tracing back to his Great Great Grandfather. His family has been crucial in the preservation of the Behzad School of illuminated work. ██████████ was one of the first teachers to work at the ██████████, having gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Kabul Faculty of Arts. The quality of his work was recently recognized by the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, who awarded him first prize in their calligraphy competition. ██████████ has exhibited his work widely, both nationally and internationally, and in March 2013 participated in a high profile exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. <http://www.turquoisemountain.org/>

Julia Townsend is primarily a painter of cartoon and surrealistic imagery. She also works in sculpture, installation, and illustration/creative writing. Past exhibitions in Dubai include wall drawings and shaped surfaces that explore how images travel in and out of frames. Her interest in geometry came out of two years of study at the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, where she had the opportunity to learn the traditional techniques of Koran illumination. She lived in the UAE from 2003 – 2016 and taught in the Department of Visual Communication at the American University in Dubai. She has also taught and exhibited in Istanbul, Berlin, and Barcelona. Her current project is the renovation of a 1932 peanut processing mill in Edenton, North Carolina, US, which is becoming The Peanut Factory, an international artist retreat. <http://www.juliatownsend.com/>

***Geometric Aljamia: a Cultural Transliteration* / FACT SHEET**

Geometric Aljamia: A Cultural Transliteration is a cross-cultural collaboration that addresses how connections between the Middle East and the West during the Golden Age of Islamic Civilization continue to be relevant and vibrant in the twenty-first century. The project includes artists, designers, performers, and writers from Afghanistan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Canada, and the United States. *Aljamia* is a medieval Spanish word that refers to Romance languages written in Arabic script. The resulting transliteration contributed to the dissemination of the Arabic language and Islamic influences throughout the Iberian Peninsula and beyond. By understanding the arts as a transliteration of one form of thinking to another and addressing the fundamental patterns and geometry embedded in visual art and poetry, this project revisits the ongoing impact of Islamic art, science, and philosophy throughout the world today.

SIZE OF EXHIBITION: Approximately 225 running feet / Exhibition may be sized to fit your gallery

NUMBER OF WORKS: 26 wall mounted works and 4 sculptural works

- Condition Report with detailed installation instructions travels with exhibition
- Special installation hardware travels with exhibition
- [Catalog](#) (1) travels with exhibition Extra copies available at venue expense

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL PROVIDED BY VENUE:

Signed contract, invitations, mailing, e-vite, gallery signage and labels, press material to appropriate media list, reception, installation / de-installation / repacking, security (guard/gallery attendants during the day - alarmed doors/windows at night), onsite insurance with transit insurance to next venue, and a non-refundable deposit / fee of \$1,500 - paid at point of booking.

TRANSPORT: Packed in reusable museum quality boxes or crates

Each venue to provide one way insured shipping to the next venue or return to Gower

- Free shipping estimates available through –
- Artisan, Inc / Contact Shlomo Ben-Yaacov: artisanshipping10@gmail.com
- TCI International / Contact India Crawford: india@shippingmadesimple.com
- See prospectus for detailed box / crate information and shipping estimates
- Art Handler Preferred (may require a 53' cab / truck) / May ship FedEx Ground upon approval
- Cost and transit time will vary – dependent upon distance

AVAILABLE ON REQUEST:

High Resolution Digital Image Files / Press Packet

Gallery Talk / Panel presentation / Workshops when funding permits

ITINERARY:

VCUQ Gallery, Doha, Qatar; March 2013

Langford120 Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; August 2013

Total Arts Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Aug – Sep 2014

Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA; Nov 16, 2014 – Feb 21, 2015

Chapman University Art Collections, Orange, CA; Aug 15, 2016 – Jan 15, 2017

Helen E. Copeland Gallery, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT; Feb 27 – Apr 7, 2017

Kohl Gallery, Washington College, Chestertown MD; Jan 15 – Mar 15, 2018

The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA; Jan 24 – Mar 8, 2019

Baron and Ellin Gordon Art Galleries, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA; Aug 24 - Sep 29, 2019

The Daura Gallery, Lynchburg University, Lynchburg, VA; Jan 6 - Apr 10, 2020

Howard County Center for the Arts, Ellicott City, MD; Sep 4 - Oct 9, 2020

Las Cruces Museum of Art, Las Cruces, NM; Feb 5 – Mar 13, 2021

Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL; Sep 3 – Oct 14, 2021

University of New Hampshire Museum of Art, Durham NH; Feb 1 – Apr 2, 2022

Available: May – November 2022

Rockhurst University, Greenlease Gallery, Kansas City, MO; Dec 5- Mar 26, 2023

Available: May 2023 and beyond

Geometric Aljamía: a Cultural Transliteration / BOX SIZES

Exhibition ships in 7 reusable boxes: (Sizes / weights rounded up)

1 box @ 77" x 9" x 8" / 35 pounds	(Box 1)
1 box @ 46" x 9" x 8" / 15 pounds	(Box 2)
1 box @ 31" x 19" x 9" / 24 pounds	(Box 3)
1 box @ 14" x 14" x 16" / 5 pounds	(Box 4)
1 box @ 14" x 14" x 18" / 5 pounds	(Box 5)
1 box @ 16" x 12" x 12" / 6 pounds	(Box 6)
1 box @ 18" x 18" x 16" / 7 pounds	(Box 7)

FedEx Ground Estimate \$615 (1-way shipping VA - CA)

- Free shipping estimates available through:
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- TCI International / Contact India Crawford: india@shippingmadesimple.com

Inbound Shipping Insurance provided by preceding venue

Outbound Shipping Insurance provide by venue

Transport / Storage / Care of Works

- Wear white cotton gloves when handling unframed works. (Gloves provided)
- Unwrap and repackage with extreme care following the instructions provided.
- Use a climate-controlled van for shipping or FedEx Ground.
- Ask for an early-evening pickup to minimize the time work spends in transit.
- Store away from direct heat in a climate-controlled storage room.

Contents of Each Box

Box #1:

Gower Papercuts (3) / ██████ Papercut (1)

Box #2:

██████████ Papercuts (2) / Townsend Papercut / Korchi Papercut / Benitez Mailing Tube (10 drawings)

Box #3:

Benitez Portfolio (4 drawings) / Townsend Papercut / Stencils / Installation Hardware / Condition Report / Installation Instructions Binder

Boxes #4 - #7 (Benitez sculptures – one sculpture per box)

<i>Islamic Design (Clear Stencil)</i>	2014	60" x 10"	Graphite Powder Pouncing	NFS / Value	\$200
<i>Untitled (Blue Stencil)</i>	2013	60" x 10"	Graphite tracing	NFS / Value	\$200
<i>Islamic Design</i>	2014	62" x 13"	Hand cut paper	NFS / Value	\$3000
<i>Ghaznavee Design</i>	2014	36" x 36"	Hand cut paper	NFS / Value	\$3000

Julia Townsend

916 Badham Road Edenton, NC 27932 USA

Phone Number: (252) 484 0225 juliatownsend@yahoo.com

<i>Untitled #1</i>	2013	72" x 48"	Hand cut paper and wall tracing	\$3000
<i>Untitled #2</i>	2014	24" x 60"	Acrylic on hand cut paper	\$3000
<i>Border Stencil #1</i>	2014	Wall tracing / installation variable		\$2000

Stencil Values / \$200 each

Sculptural Work by Jorge Benitez



National Registry 2014
 14" W x 11" H x 14" D
 Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
 \$1500
 Optimum Pedestal Size: 20" x 20"* / 1 box @ 16" x 12" x 12" / 6 pounds
 1-way shipping estimate via FedEx Ground VA – CA / \$40



The School of Social Engineering 2014
 14" W x 11" H x 14" D
 Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
 \$1500
 Optimum Pedestal Size: 24" x 24"* / 1 box @ 18" x 18" x 16" / 7 pounds
 1-way shipping estimate via FedEx Ground VA – CA / \$68

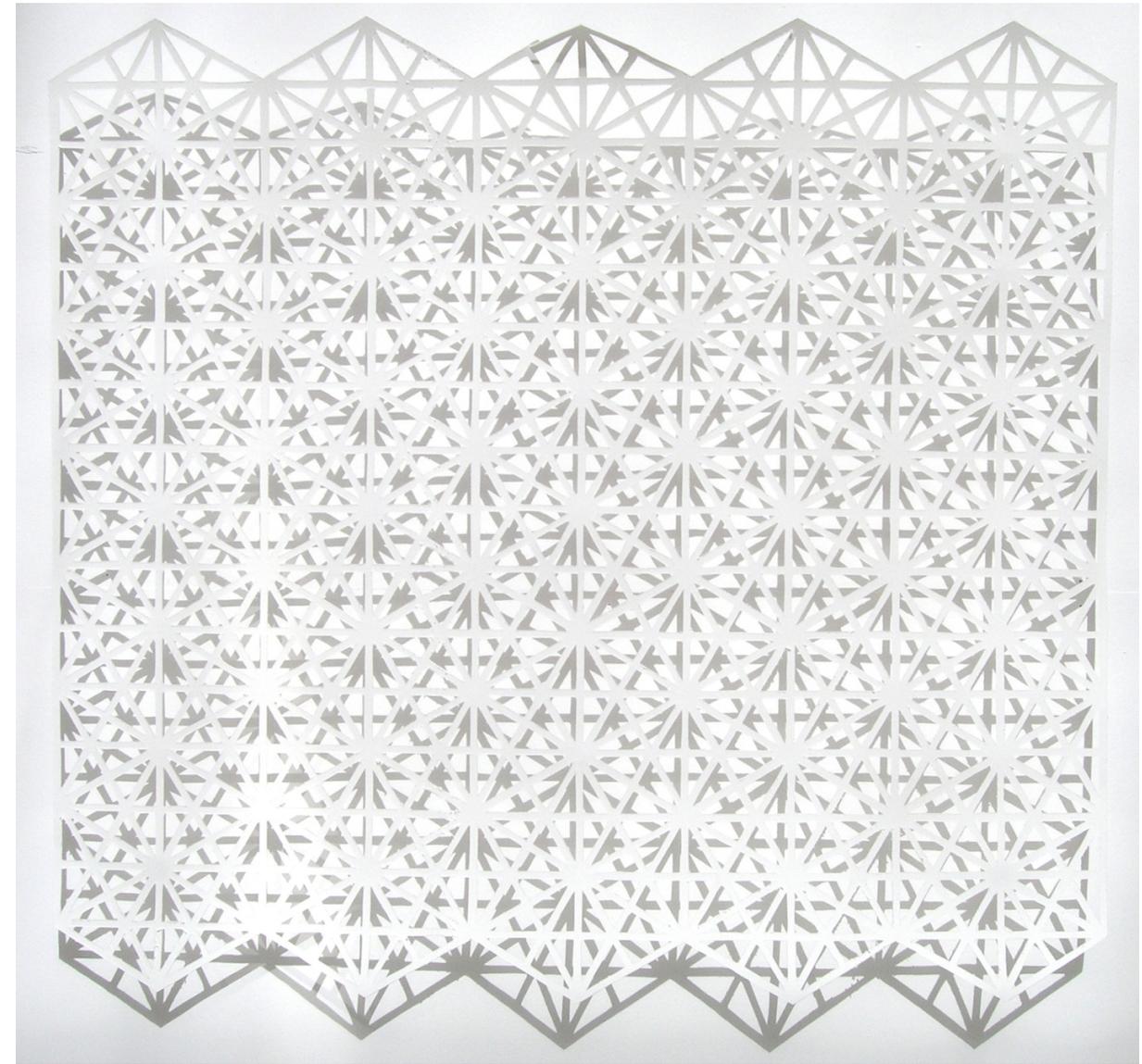


National Center for Neologisms 2015
 9" W x 10" H x 9" D
 Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
 \$1500
 Optimum Pedestal Size: 20" x 20"* / 1 box @ 14" x 14" x 18" / 5 pounds
 1-way shipping estimate via FedEx Ground VA – CA / \$40



The Temple of Sensitivity 2015
 10" W x 10" H x 10" D
 Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
 \$1500
 Optimum Pedestal Size: 20" x 20"* / 1 box @ 14" x 14" x 16" / 5 pounds
 1-way shipping estimate via FedEx Ground VA – CA / \$40

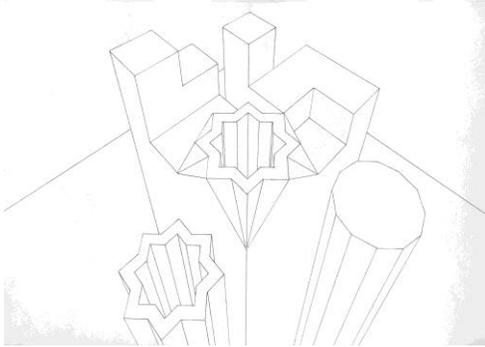
*All 4 sculptures may be displayed on a single pedestal approx. 20" x 83"



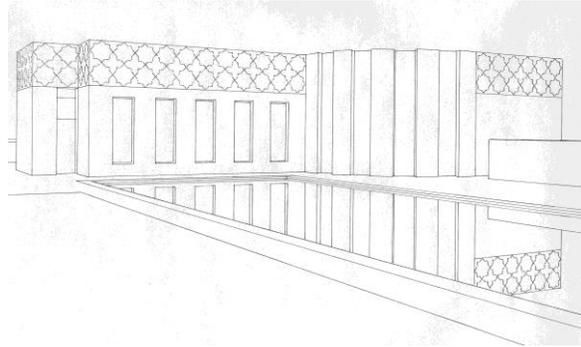
Untitled 37" x 40" Hand cut paper 2013

JORGE BENITEZ

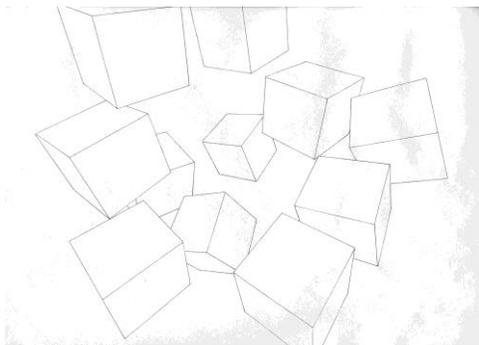
31 Huneycutt Drive Richmond, VA 23238-4410 USA
Phone Number: (804) 349-3437 c. (804) 828-3858 w. jbensagol@msn.com



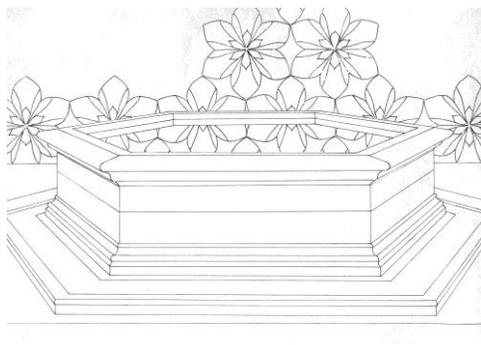
Alcázar 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum



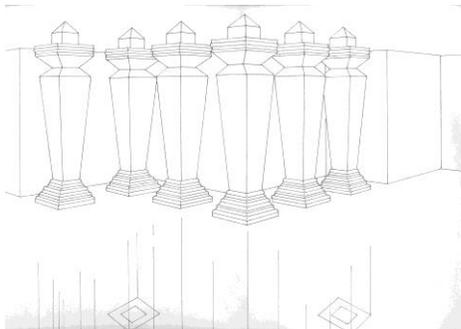
Recuerdos de 1492 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum



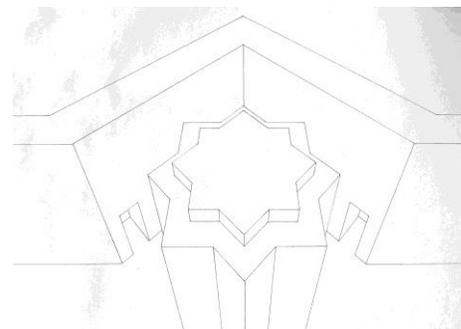
Para Boabdil 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum



Azulejos 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum



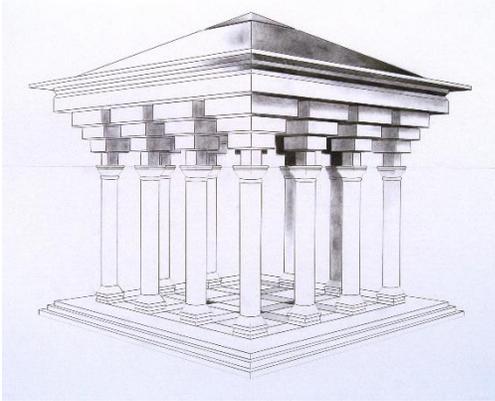
Descubrimiento 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum



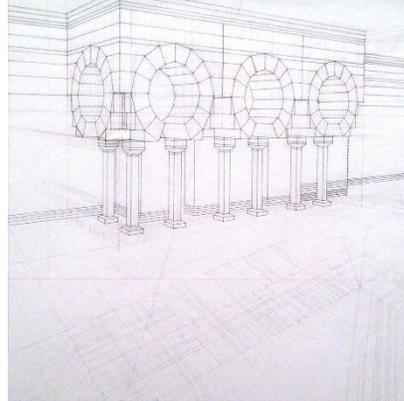
Al-Ándalus 2014 24" x 36"
Graphite / ink on architectural vellum

JORGE BENITEZ

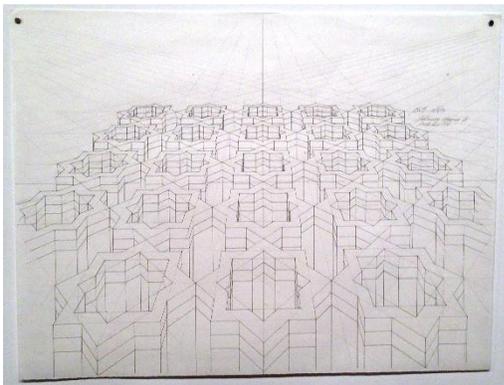
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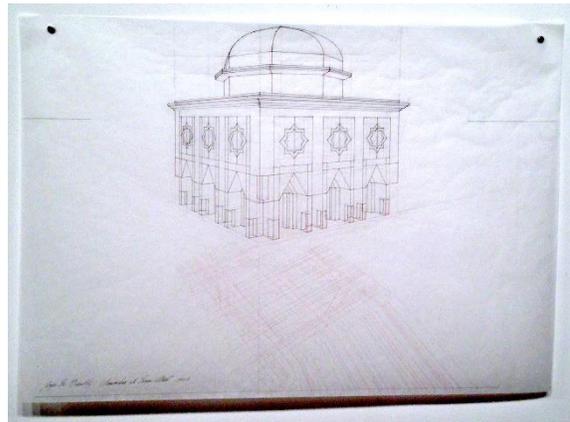
Preliminary Drawing for Pavilion-detail
2013- Redrawn 2018 20" x 25"
Ink on Duralar



Proposal for Student Housing-detail
2013 – Redrawn 2018 20" x 25"
Ink on Duralar



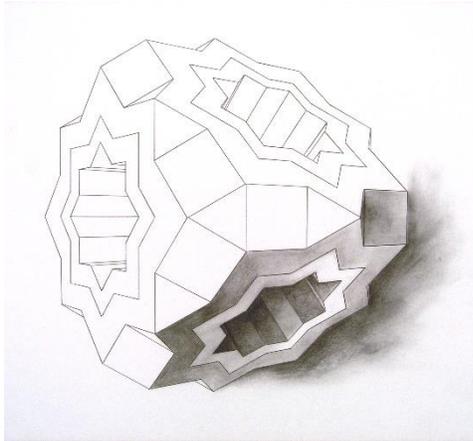
Preliminary Drawing for Perspective Tiles
2012 – Redrawn 2018 20" x 25"
Ink on Duralar



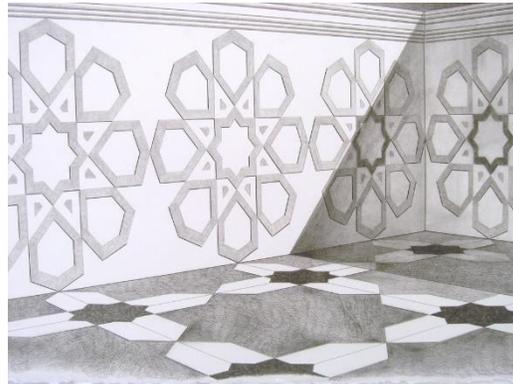
Somewhere on Main Street
2007 - Redrawn 2018 20" x 25"
Ink on Duralar

JORGE BENITEZ

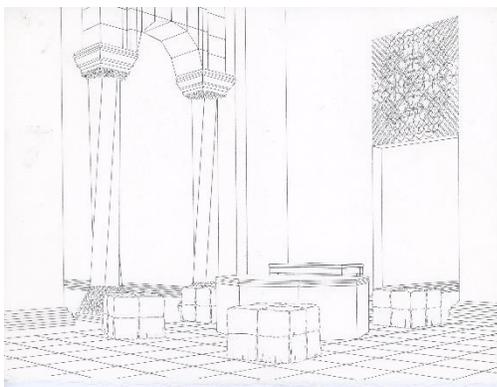
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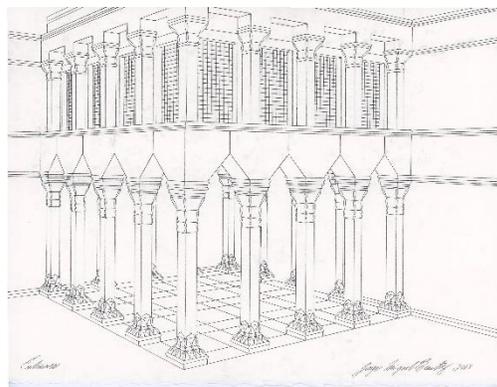
Comet-detail 2013 11¼ x 15¼"
Graphite on Arches paper



Courtyard 2013 11¼" x 15¼"
Graphite on Arches paper



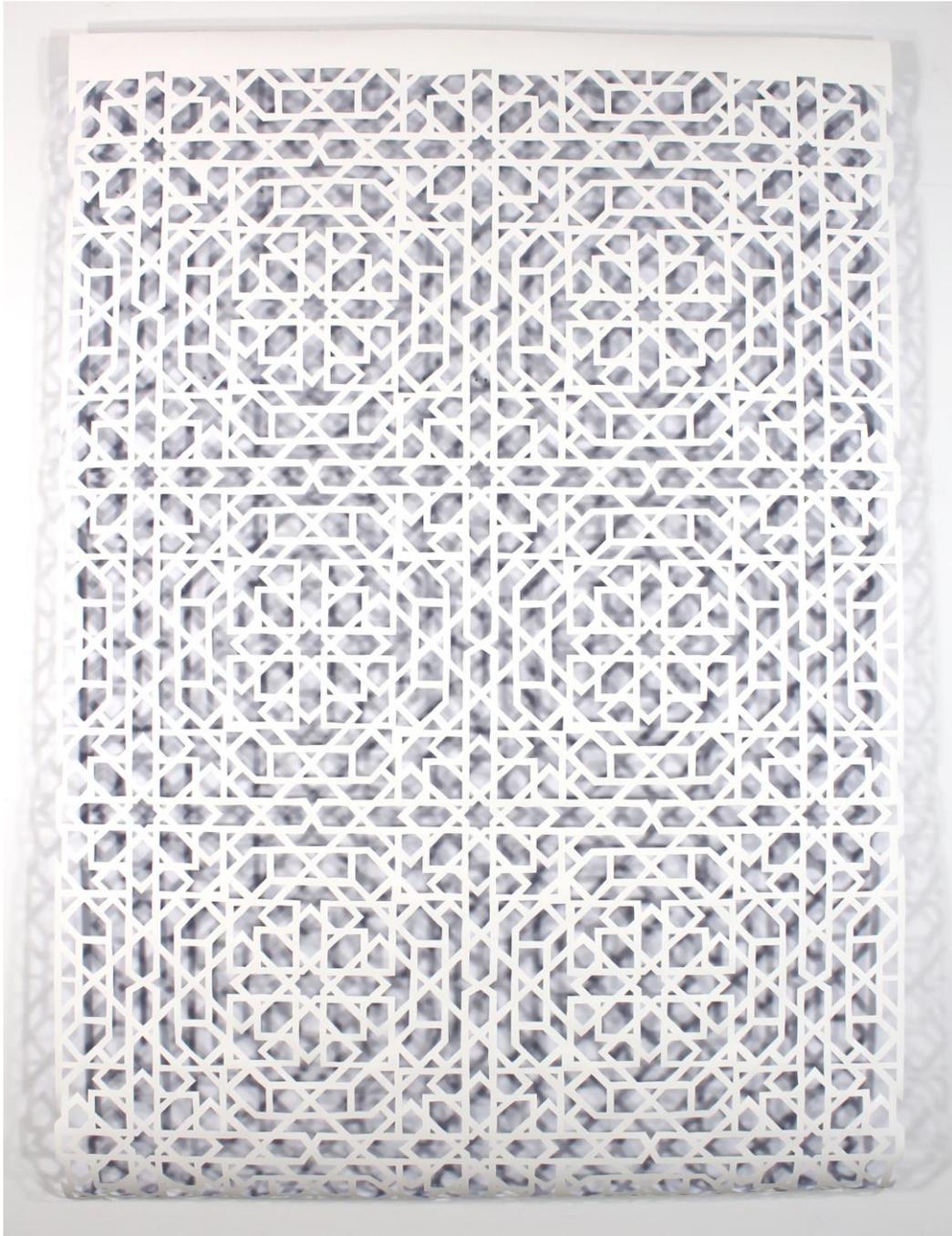
Waiting Room 2013 11¼" x 15¼"
Graphite on Arches paper



Entrance 2013 11¼" x 15¼"
Graphite on Arches paper

RENI GOWER

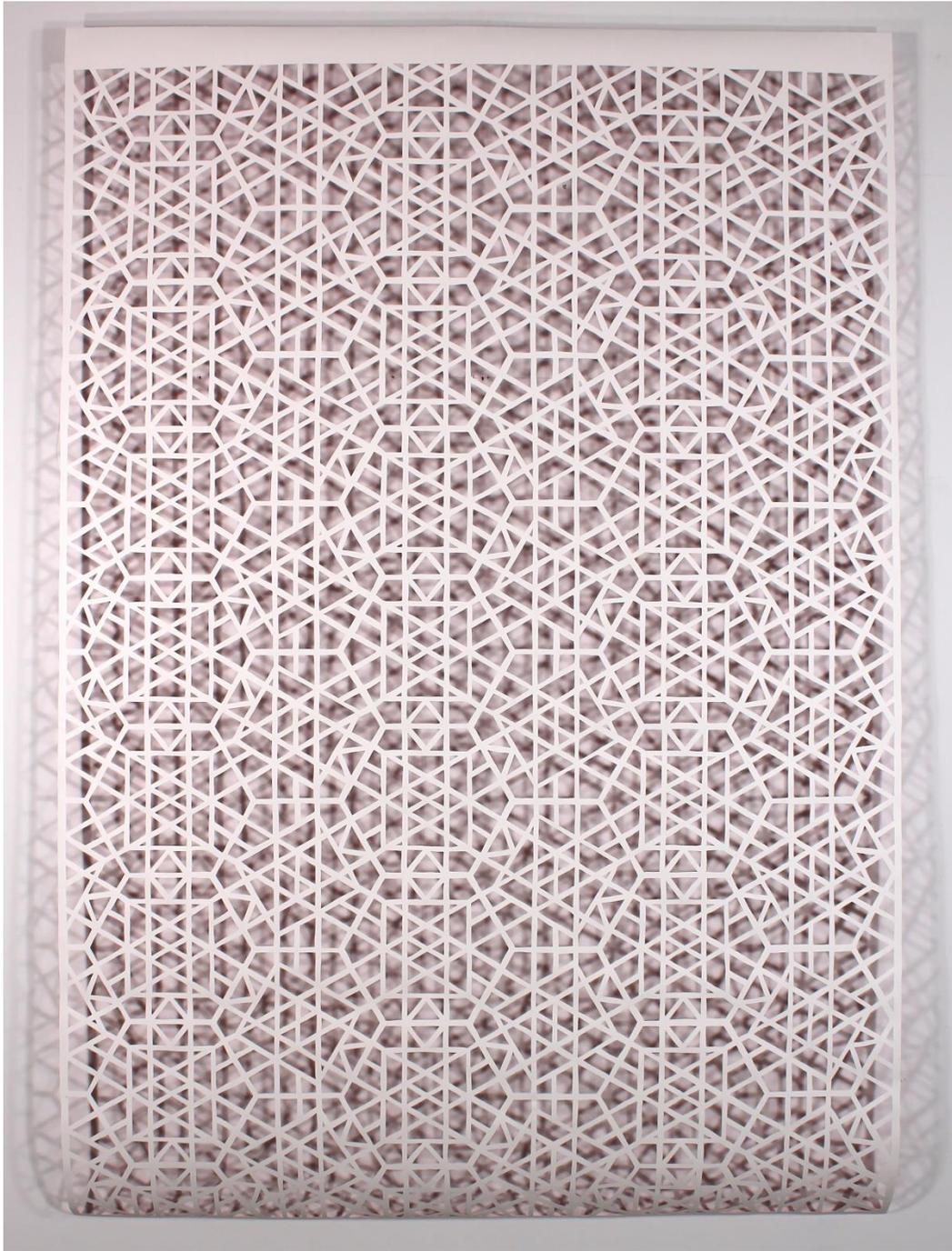
10407 Morning Dew Lane Mechanicsville, VA 23116 USA
Phone Number: (804) 550-2616 rgower53@comcast.net



Papercuts: White/cobalt Acrylic on hand cut paper 8½" x 56¼" 2013

RENI GOWER

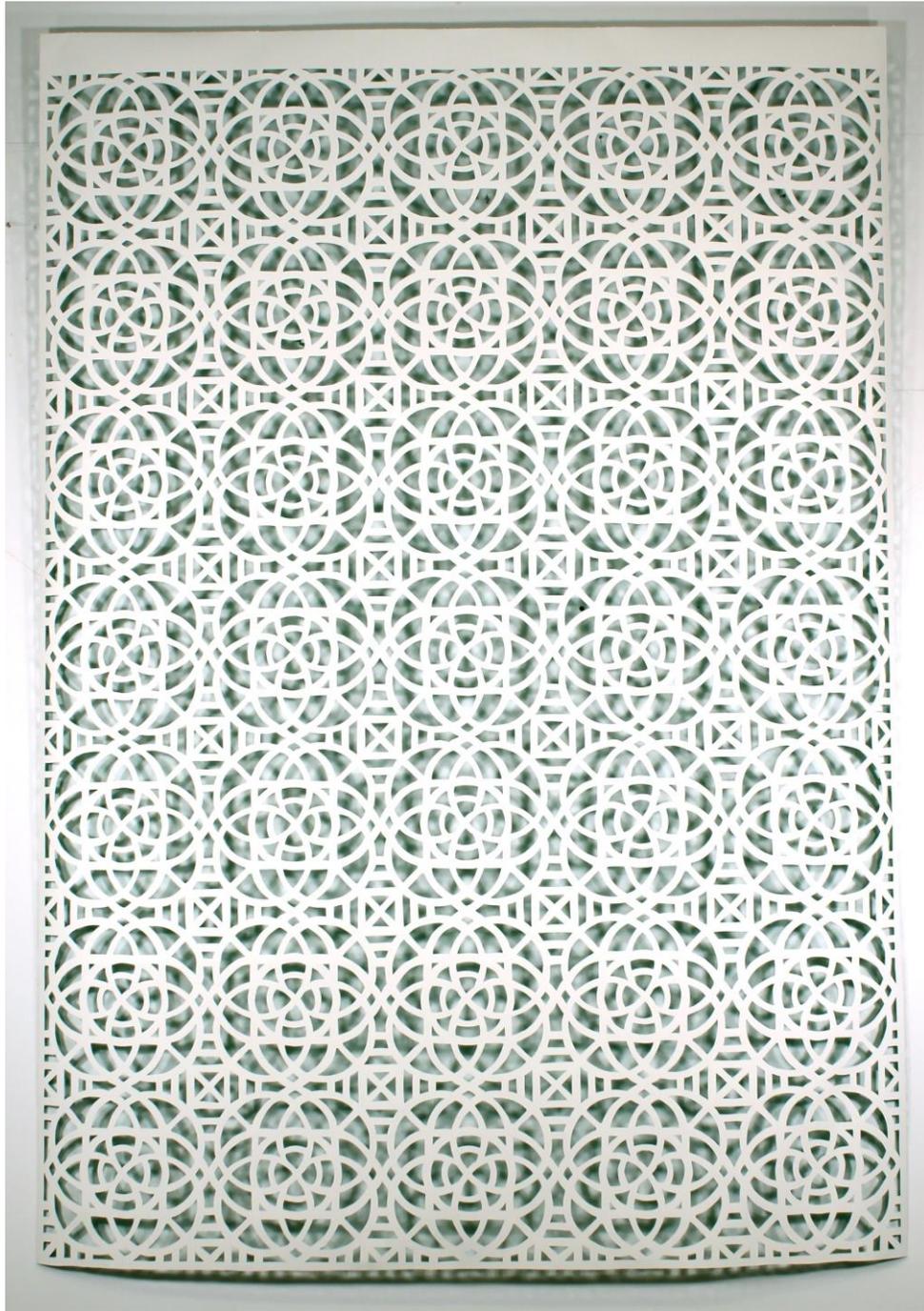
10407 Morning Dew Lane Mechanicsville, VA 23116 USA
Phone Number: (804) 550-2616 rgower53@comcast.net



Papercuts: White/copper Acrylic on hand cut paper 81¾" x 56" 2013

RENI GOWER

10407 Morning Dew Lane Mechanicsville, VA 23116 USA
Phone Number: (804) 550-2616 rgower53@comcast.net

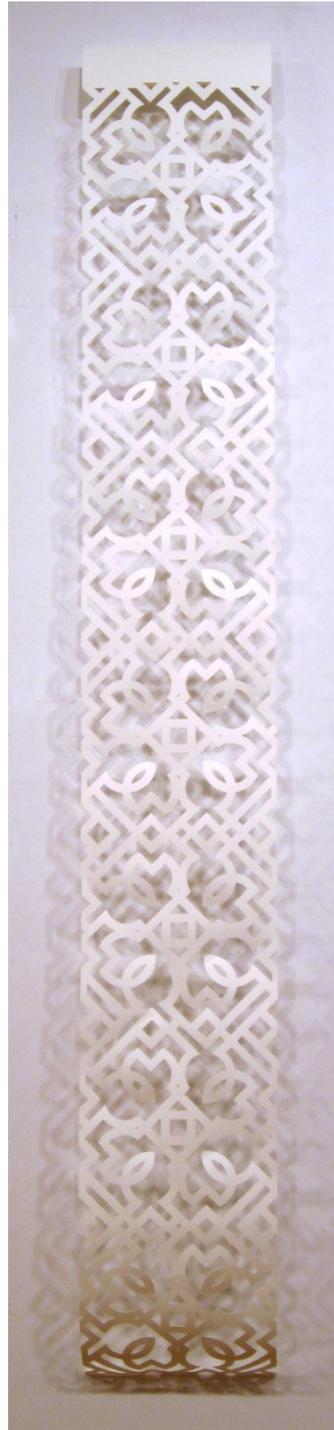


Papercuts: White/malacite Acrylic on hand cut paper 81½" x 56¼" 2013

HANANE KORCHI

22103 Vista Del Plaza Lane #16 Hayward, CA 94541
Phone Number: 415-610-9643 hananekorchi@gmail.com

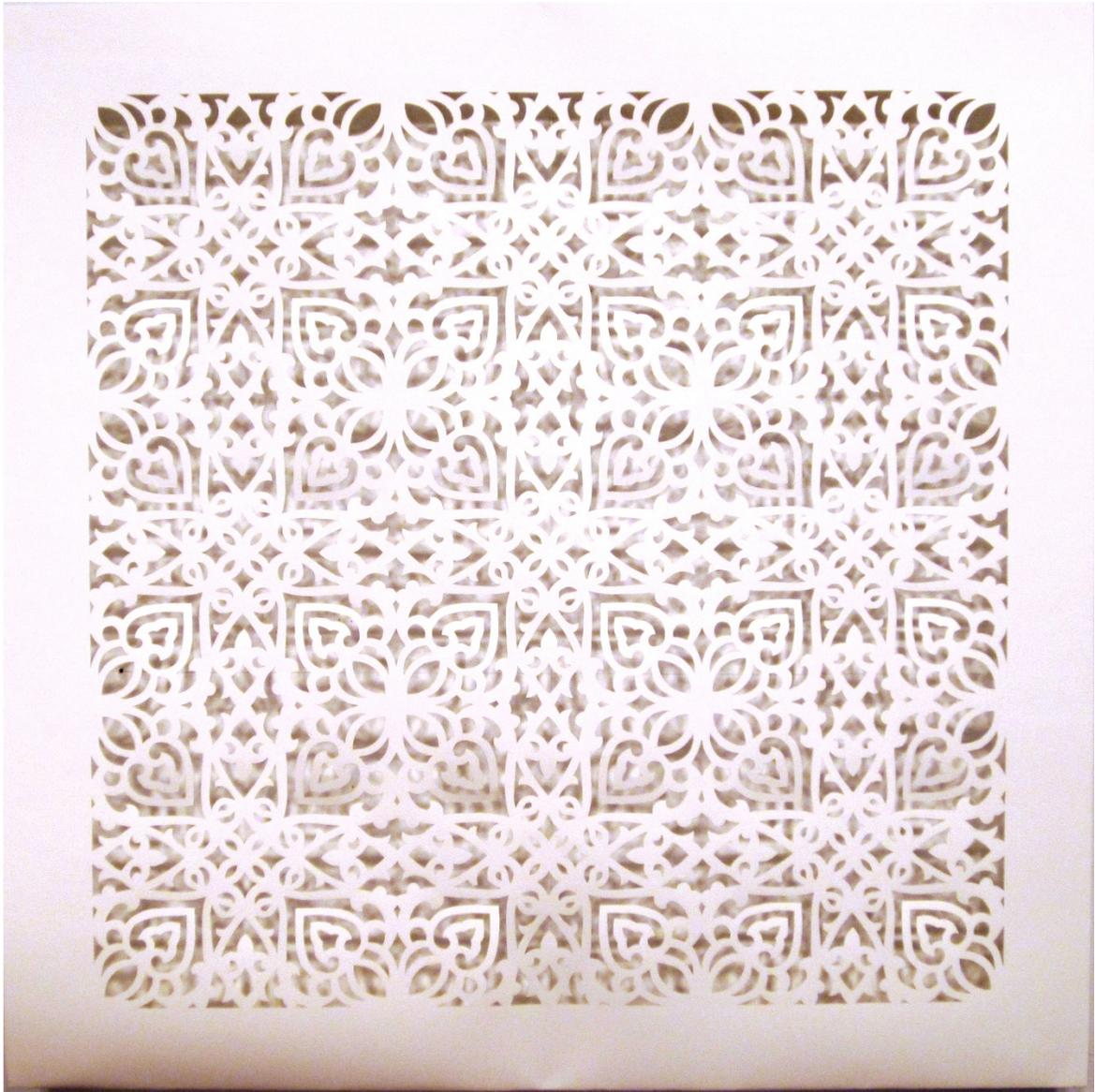
Dancing Buds
72" x 10"
Hand cut paper
2013





Islamic Design
62" x 13"
Hand cut paper
2014



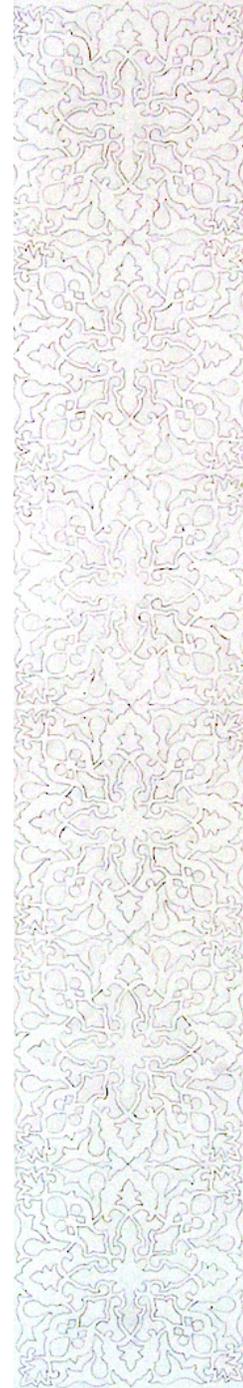


Ghaznavee Design-detail 36" x 36" Hand cut paper 2014



Islamic Design
(Clear Stencil) 2014
60" x 10"
Graphite Powder Pouncing

Detail of pattern

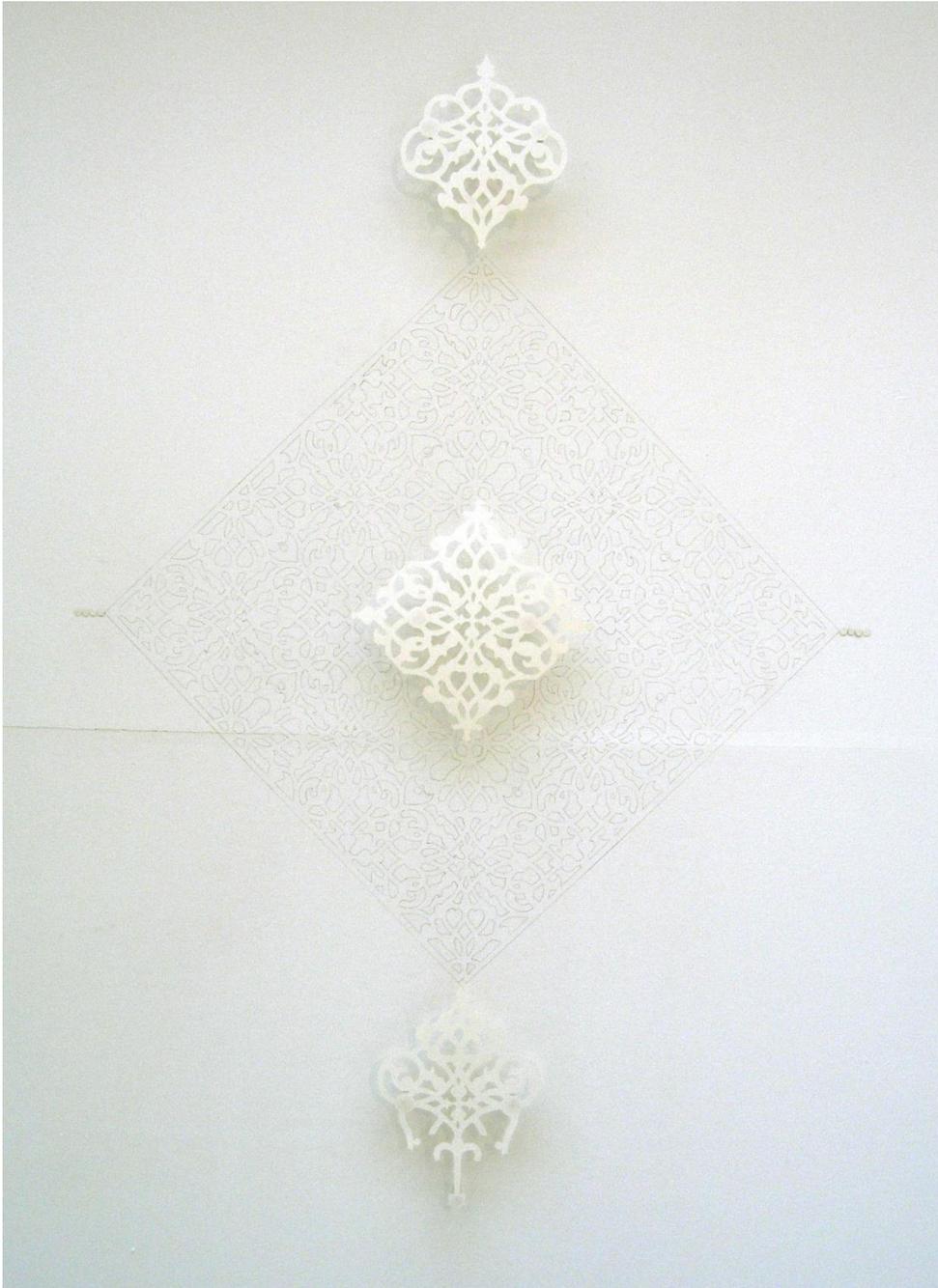


Untitled (Blue Stencil)
2013
60" x 10" each column
Graphite tracing

Detail of pattern

JULIA TOWNSEND

916 Badham Road Edenton, NC 27932 USA
Phone Number: (252) 484 0225 juliatownsend@yahoo.com



Untitled #1 72" x 48" Hand cut paper and wall tracing 2013

JULIA TOWNSEND

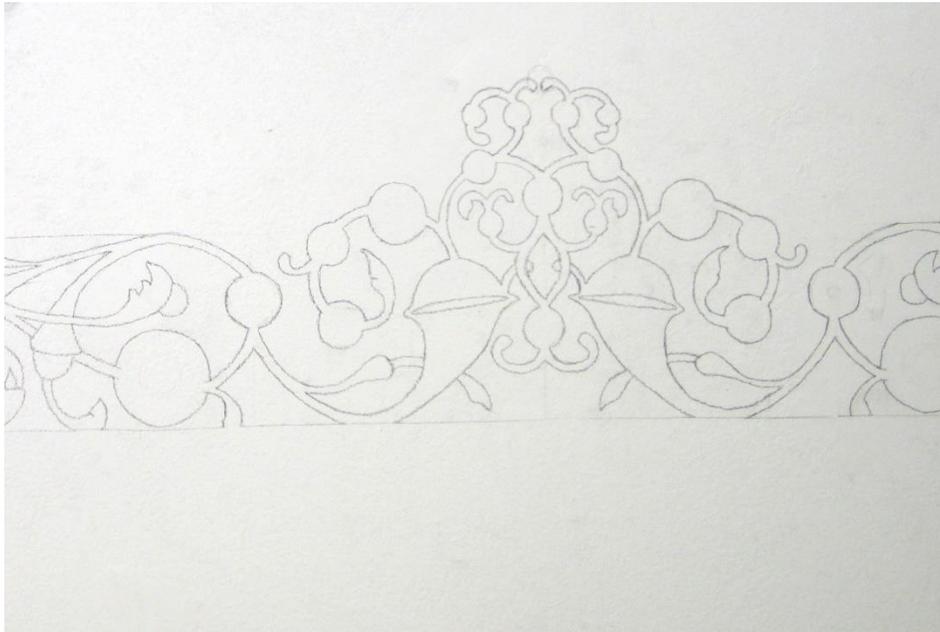
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Untitled #2
24" x 60"
Hand cut paper
2014

JULIA TOWNSEND

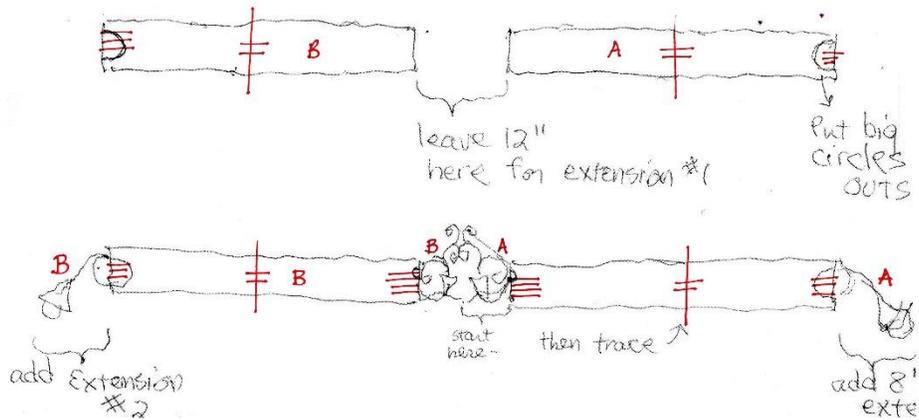
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Townsend - Stencil #1 Long Version

Note that the long horizontal stencil is in two parts.
Match the lines and letters where the stencils come together for correct placement.
Place large circles at the ends.
Trace both sections with a graphite pencil as mirror images to either side of the middle.
Leave 12" for the center motif extension (Ext #1), which should be traced twice as a mirror image.
Trace the end motif (Ext #2) at each end.
You can install in variable lengths depending on the gallery

Do not remove the labels from the stencils.
Handle with care / Stencils are fragile / Repack in foam caddy when done.



BENITEZ SCULPTURES
CHECKLIST / GEOMETRIC ALJAMIA: A CULTURAL TRANSLITERATION



National Registry 2014
14" W x 11" H x 14" D
Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
\$1500

Optimum Pedestal Size: 20" x 20"*
1 box @ 16" x 12" x 12" / 6 pounds
1-way shipping estimate via FedEx Ground VA – CA / \$40



The School of Social Engineering 2014
14" W x 11" H x 14" D
Illustration board, Hydrocal, Bristol board, acrylic
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*All 4 sculptures may be displayed on a single pedestal approx. 20" x 83"

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Twenty-first-century cultural awareness is fraught with difficult questions. Who owns a given culture? What defines it? Is it exclusive? Can be it shared? When does it transcend its boundaries and assume a universal character? These and other related questions become even more delicate and complex when addressed in a postcolonial context that places the West in the role of the intrusive outsider: the conqueror who takes from other cultures without understanding or sensitivity. If such issues seem difficult in relation to the history of Europeans in Africa, Asia, and Latin American, they then would appear to be nearly impossible when it comes to the Middle East, especially for Americans. Yet such an approach misses both the point and the actual facts of history. Like the West itself, the Middle East has porous boundaries. Neither is self-contained. Neither can exclude the other. Both share common roots.

Historically, the interlaces and lacertines of the Lindisfarne Gospels and the complex geometric patterns and rich calligraphy of a medieval Quran provided the viewer with an abstract experience that transcended the visual information on the page. In fact, visual seduction served as a vehicle for spiritual reflection. Seemingly endless variations on geometric themes gave the faithful a glimpse into the infinity and incomprehensible complexity of God. For some of the more secular Westerners of the twenty-first century, the same variations could provide aesthetic satisfaction and even spiritual depth through the balance of geometry, sensuality, and plastic tension. As cultures throughout the ages have understood without necessarily expressing it in the critical language of modernism, the formal qualities of geometric patterns easily cross cultural boundaries because they are rooted in the numerical codes of the cosmos itself.

For Gower and Benitez, cultural interpretation follows form. Each thinks canonically with a keen sense of art historical and cultural precedents and their continued relevance to the present. Yet while history and culture inform their pieces, neither artist is an antiquarian. If anything, they work dialectically and synthesize disparate elements as echoes of their sources within something entirely new. They let the formal elements be the primary carriers of information. Ultimately their individual temperaments are as important as their intellectual and aesthetic understanding. Gower's work speaks to a spiritual strength that embraces possibilities and invites all sides to an open aesthetic experience. Benitez, in spite of his superficial classicism, reveals a darker temperament that questions possibilities even as it appears to accept them.

In the fall of 2012, Reni Gower and Jorge Benitez began a series of conversations that led to a proposal for workshops and lectures to be presented at the 2013 Tasmeeem Conference in Doha, Qatar. Since the theme of the conference was "hybrid making," Gower and Benitez developed a proposal centered on the medieval Spanish concept of *aljamía* as an expression

of East-West hybridization. *Aljamía* is the transliteration of Iberian Romance languages with Arabic letters. Since both Gower and Benitez already worked with geometry, albeit in very different ways, the idea of a visual transliteration of one culture's forms into those of another became the basis of what they called "geometric *aljamía*." Gower, whose roots in non-representational painting resulted in expansive and sensual work, had been working on a series of cut paper pieces based on *sacred geometry*: patterns whose mathematical foundations were universal and had variants across many cultures. Although her initial inspiration came from Celtic patterns, she soon found Islamic analogs that addressed similar formal concerns.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Jorge Benitez wondered how two interrelated civilizations could have taken such divergent paths. Christianity and Islam share common religious roots and a Mediterranean heritage centered on ancient Greece, the Middle East, and North Africa. Furthermore, their science, mathematics, languages, philosophy, religion, and art were intertwined. These historical and cultural facts led Benitez to develop a series of perspectival drawings built on the shared language of geometry and optics. The depiction of Islamic visual motifs through Western perspective spoke to the tragedy of "a divided family within a very large single civilization."

Still, Benitez does not believe that the differences can be easily reconciled. As a Cuban-born Iberian he sees a negative side to cultural syncretism that speaks to forced influences through conquest and oppression. Andalusia was a Muslim colony until 1492, a fact that still resonates among Spaniards whose ancestors sought freedom from foreign occupation. While the Alhambra is undeniably beautiful, it remains a symbol of alien invasion and imperialism. That understanding led Benitez to draw "absurd" buildings that suggest that beauty can also be a prison. His architectural environments are built with a seductive geometry that discourages individuality and personal freedom. They caution against yearning for a golden age that was more imaginary than real, and they serve as metaphors for faith-based fear as well as signs of respect for the better contributions of a conflicted time. His translation of geometric patterns into perspectival illusions distinguishes between aesthetic flatness and what he calls "conceptual-cultural flatness." He sees the former as "formal, positive, and full of pictorial tension" whereas the latter is "philosophically one-dimensional and oppressive."

If Benitez's work is closed, Gower's is open and full of light. Her pieces quietly activate the spaces where they hang and encourage the viewer to slow down and be contemplative. As ecumenical works they transcend the particulars of any given artistic or religious tradition while reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable. Gower addresses universal themes that highlight a common humanity that knows neither physical nor cultural boundaries. She goes beyond the limits of history and provides an uplifting counterpoint to the real and manufactured divisions of the twenty-first century. These qualities proved crucial to an unforeseen phase of an expanding project.

While working at the Tasmeeem Conference, Gower and Benitez met Susan Schüld, an assistant professor of voice and speech in the Virginia Commonwealth University Theatre Department who was conducting a workshop on voice and poetry. Their encounter led to a

collaboration that culminated in a performance in which Schuld recited three poems written by her workshop students while standing in front of Gower's work. Benitez accompanied her on a classical guitar, an instrument that is derived from Arab stringed instruments. In addition, with the help and encouragement of participants from Morocco and Kuwait, Schuld performed while dressed in an *abaya* and *hijab*, respectively the over-garment and headscarf that many Muslim women wear as a sign of their faith. Although the performance, especially in Muslim dress, could have degenerated into an offensive form of cultural pastiche and orientalization, Schuld brought to bear a level of sensitivity and professionalism that moved both Middle Eastern and Western audience members. She demonstrated through her art the combined power of voice, physical expression, and costume as a means of crossing boundaries and reflecting the same universality as the cut paper pieces in front of which she performed. She never ceased being a Westerner and an American, but she was, above all, an artist who brought forth the ritual power of the theatre arts as something analogous to religion in its ability to approach the mysteries of existence. She too expressed the spirit of *aljamía* as an open-ended transliteration. The collaboration between Schuld, Gower, and Benitez demonstrated the reach of the visual, performing, and literary arts in an international and multicultural venue.

The three artistic partners, each with a different and specific vision and means of expression, showed that form and culture cannot be separated any more than the concept of sacred geometry can be split from the underlying mathematics of the universe. Their work makes real and accessible what appear to be abstractions without simplifying or denying the inherent richness and complexity of their themes. Whatever contradictions they hold remind the viewer that, like the richness and paradoxical challenges that haunt the West and Middle East, nothing can be reduced to black and white. A region and a people may give birth to a specific culture, but the results belong to humanity.

PAPERCUTS / MOTIF MATRIX
Workshop conducted by Reni Gower and Jorge Benitez

Workshop: (6 hours)

Under Gower's guidance participants will design motifs inspired by Sacred Geometry (Celtic knotwork / Islamic tile patterns) which will be used to create unique papercuts or colored grid patterns. Tessellation, mirror imaging, and tiling, will be investigated. Gower / Benitez will introduce the workshop with an overview of sacred geometry and a brief history of papercutting across cultures. Under Benitez's supervision workshop participants will transform a traditional Islamic geometric motif into a perspectival drawing. The workshop can accommodate up to 20 participants. Travel expenses, workshop materials and honorarium provided by the host venue.

Materials per person

Drawing paper (2 sheets per participant) at least 22" x 30"
(Canson Edition Bright White 250g 22" x 30" works well)

Heavy weight drawing paper (7" x 7" squares) for making stencils.
1- 3 squares per participant. (Bristol 96 pounds works well)

Tools per person:

Snap Blade (from the dollar store) or Exacto Knife
Self-healing mat or corrugated cardboard
Long straight edge / 24" ruler
Large drafting triangle
Compass (optional - great to have)
Pencil & Eraser

Additional shared supplies:

Painter's tape or masking tape, extra drawing paper, scissors

6-hour workshop: Morning and afternoon sessions. Perspectival studies and stencils will be started in the morning with tracing and cutting or coloring of the design occurring in the afternoon. Papercuttings may need to be completed by participants after the workshop concludes.

Reni Gower received a 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. In 2017, she was awarded SECAC's Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement. In 2014, she received the College Art Association's Distinguished Teacher of Art Award, as well as distinguished teaching awards from Virginia Commonwealth University and VCUarts. Her art work is represented in many prestigious collections and has been exhibited at international and national venues for over 40 years. In addition to her painting practice, she curates award winning traveling exhibitions that include *FLASHPOINTS: Material / Intent / Fused*, *Geometric Aljamía: a Cultural Transliteration*, and *Pulped Under Pressure: The Art of Handmade Paper*. After 37 years, Professor Emerita Gower retired from Virginia Commonwealth University in December 2018. Gower is represented by Chroma Projects, Charlottesville, VA.

With a new startup company, **Jorge Benitez** designs and creates luxuriant one-of-a-kind weavings. He is a native of Cuba who spent his formative years in Belgium and is fluent in French and Spanish. His work reflects an earlier career in advertising, an interest in the American "culture wars," and his study of the links between words, images, and demagogic politics. After the events of September 11, 2001, he became increasingly interested in his own Spanish ancestry and the Iberian links to the Muslim world while simultaneously mistrusting the notion of *identity*. He currently participates in regional and international exhibitions and writes on subjects ranging from the Cuban Revolution to postmodernism. His work is represented in corporate collections and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Recently retired, Professor Benitez taught drawing, art theory and the history of visual communications in the Communication Arts Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. Benitez holds a MFA and BFA in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Geometric Aljamía:
a Cultural Transliteration**

Exhibition catalog

May be purchased at

<http://www.blurb.com/b/5659694-geometric-aljamia-a-cultural-transliteration>

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Geometric Aljamia: a Cultural Transliteration / LINKS

For Digital Prospectus pdf - link to

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/u2zni1rzx52hsio/Geometric%20Aljamia%20Prospectus%20PDF.pdf?dl=0>

For Digital Condition Report / Installation Instructions pdf – link to

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/2vboz4dft0b1xyl/Geometric%20Aljamia%20Condition%20Report%20Installation%20Instructions%20PDF.pdf?dl=0>

For Press Packet – link to

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ps9jvn8509ga03x/AACcIXgZYycodJIKkefu44pPa?dl=0>

To Preview / Purchase exhibition catalog - link to

<http://www.blurb.com/b/5659694-geometric-aljamia-a-cultural-transliteration>

Gallery copy at venue expense. Take-away coupons for additional orders in Condition Report. Print coupons, cut apart, and place near gallery copy of catalog.

To View Performance Videos – link to

(Doha) <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6h83fck7v5fcvyd/AADaMF7Mx9jnp17uyMPFs1bYa?dl=0>

(Dubai) https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3zuwjmq0r1yjy7t/AACKVBF3ZuvKQn-4qiokm_Sua?dl=0

PLEASE INSURE THAT THE FOLLOWING TRAVELS ON TO THE NEXT VENUE.

- **Condition Report / Installation Instructions Binder (Inside Box #3)**
- **Stencils (Inside Box #3)**
- **Installation Hardware (Inside Box #3)**
- **Gallery gloves (Inside Box #3)**
- **Please replace the supplies you use**

Many thanks for your care and attention as you handle these works.

Reni Gower

Curator

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(804) 550-2616 home

(804) 357-5442 cell

For the safety of our Afghan artists - names and links have been temporarily blocked. Please do not publish their names in your promotional materials. Thank you for your understanding during these unprecedented times.