



is in this place that you are able to sense or allow yourself to feel the divinity that is always present.” *Numina* encapsulates many of the concerns embedded in the artist’s practice: innovation, complexity and spiritual beauty. It demonstrates the way in which the artist uses Islamic geometry to explore abstract ideas and experiences that are felt by the body and understood by the mind. At one point she describes the piece as, “this surround sound of beauty, and music and love.”

Islamic geometry is a discipline the artist has been working in since completing an MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Art at the Prince’s School of Traditional Art, London in 2004. Trained in the fine art of creating complex geometry using just a pencil, ruler and compass, Hussain explains, “you’ve got one foundational thing, all the geometry starts from the circle. You have an infinite number of designs and patterns. It’s a kind of metaphor for us, and life.” Indeed, Islamic geometry is a language that describes patterns of mathematical meaning: patterns related to nature and the universe. In works such as *Super Sonic Star*, (2014) and *Double Star Supernova*, (2014), Hussain demonstrates how multiplicity can be created from a single foundational structure found in nature. “The science of it is complexity,” says Hussain. “We live on the earth and we are all the same, there is universality in the complexity.” Each sculpture starts with the same configuration as carbon, onto which the artist hand paints precise lines of colour. Every piece in the series is exceptional, yet its origin is the same.

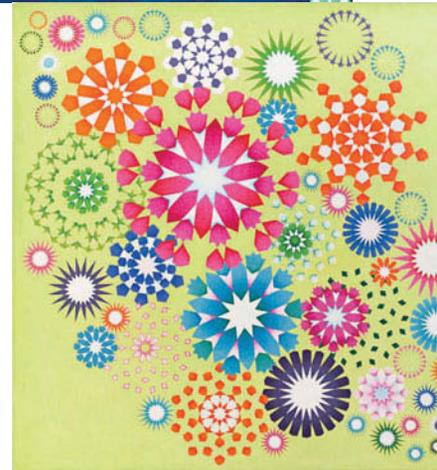
“One of the criticisms people say about Islamic geometry, is that it’s just patterning,” she explains, “Or it’s just decoration and actually if you understand the grids and the sub-grids and the numbers and where it has come from and how we do it, it is not. I think it is a very Orientalist critique of undermining a culture, a tradition of a whole people, to say your art is just decorative.” Hussain’s celebration of Islamic geometry involves an uncovering of obscured narratives and a revelation of meaning. “When I was at school, you just did Western art history, you did Sonia Delaunay, you did Klee, but they didn’t tell you that Klee spent time in Tunisia. They didn’t tell you that bit. And they didn’t tell you that artists/teachers at the Bauhaus looked to Islamic architecture for inspiration,” states the artist. For *Magic Carpet I*, (2014) and *Magic Carpet II* (2015) Hussain extrapolated the influence of Islamic carpets and znik tiles in the work of William Morris (Morris was instrumental in the V&A purchasing the *Ardabil Carpet*), literally ‘carpeting’ the exterior of the William Morris Gallery with a changing light projection.

Hussain’s identity as a Pakistani-British Muslim is integral to her work: it informs a desire to resist harmful generalising misrepresentations of Islam by communicating the power of her culture and faith, and the complexity and diversity within it. This

purpose is especially urgent during the current geopolitical climate. “For us growing up, I grew up in a small town in the north of the country, Islam was a source of pride, of happiness, of joy, of searching for Islamic art and of thinking that’s who I am...that’s my cultural heritage,” she says.

Hussain is constantly innovating. From early paintings that have a beautifully intense symmetry such as *Pomegranate* (2004) to the more abstracted blossoming rosettes in *Circle Composition* (2009) her work exhibits a continuing desire to animate forms. In *Southend Colour* (2015) Hussain captured local responses to migration. The data was submitted by mobile phone and translated in real time into a continually changing mathematical geometric pattern. This impetus for interactivity was applied once more in *Sharjah Spectrum* (2015) an infinitely looping animation across three walls of the Sharjah Art Museum. Visitors could change the vivid colour of the work using their phones.

Hussain’s interest in technology also refers back to her Islamic heritage. “I think there is a nice synthesis...If it wasn’t for Muslim achievements in science and maths, of algorithms and algebra, digital technology would not be here today and that is a debt that the world owes to Muslim civilisation,” she says. For the artist, technology is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. “Ideas come first,” she explains. Moving beyond the idea of projecting a piece, Hussain is in the process of designing a permanent public art commission made exclusively from light. She has also recently designed a mobile phone artwork with musician Peter Chilvers. Inspired by the light passing through Fatehpur Sikri, the patterns used are taken directly from Indian Jali screens. The piece has been created specifically for a mobile phone and reacts to the touch of the screen. As with all of Hussain’s work, it has to be experienced rather than described. Hypnotic and addictive, it responds to the omnipresence of the mobile phone in our daily lives. “I think what you don’t want to do is replicate the past, you don’t want to make something that is already existing, what you want to do, is do something different.” ■



Facing page: *Circle Composition*. 2009. Oil paint on gesso panel. Diameter: 150 cm. Above, from top: *Magic Carpet*, an animated projection on the William Morris Gallery commissioned for the Walthamstow Garden Party, and to mark Eid-al-Fitr, July 2014; *Desert Night Sky*. 2012. Oil on Gesso. 150 x 150 cm; *Green Composition*. 2010. Oil on gesso panel. 110 x 110 cm.