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Exhibition

# Geometric aljamía: A visual transliteration and Re-claiming the wild colors of Qatari voices

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## GEOMETRIC ALJAMÍA: A VISUAL TRANSLITERATION

Reni Gower, Jorge Benitez, Khaled Saoud, Jochen Sokoly

By addressing the fundamental geometry embedded in two-dimensional art, this workshop acknowledged hybrid connections between Europe, the Mediterranean basin, and the Middle East. In the past, *aljamía* 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 workshop revisited 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 workshop participants examined an extended cross-cultural integration of the arts into life.

This interdisciplinary collaboration produced papers presented at the conference by Benitez, Sokoly, and Saoud; an exhibition of large papercuts by Gower, Alawadhi, Korchi, Amin, Sahebzada, and Townsend; as well as perspectival drawings by Benitez. Sokoly introduced an art historical perspective. Benitez examined recent scholarly research that shed light on the links between medieval Islamic science and the development of European perspective. Saoud described the properties of Islamic quasicrystalline tiling in the creation of complex periodic patterns.

Jochen Sokoly and Khaled Saoud are colleagues at VCU Qatar, while Reni Gower and Jorge Benitez are colleagues at VCU Richmond. This diverse group spans the visual and language arts to physics and math. Sokoly is an Islamic scholar who works closely with both regional and international contemporary artists and designers to address issues of culture, identity and artistic practice. Saoud is a physicist whose research focuses on nanoparticles and nanotechnology. Gower and Benitez are both painters. Gower's paper cut installations use sacred geometry to blend subtle imperfection with structured repetition. 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.

## RE-CLAIMING THE WILD COLORS OF QATARI VOICES

By Susan Schuld

This workshop explored the voices in Qatar today. Using Kristin Linklater's Voice Pictures & Voice Poems as a guide, workshop attendees examined visual images, creative writing and the spoken word. Throughout the process, participant's asked the following questions. How can we invite people into useful self-awareness instead of restrictive self-consciousness? How can we re-claim the unrestrained freedom, the wild colors of our natural voices?

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Unwittingly, most people learn to repress, restrict or re-shape their voices in response to the world. As human beings we internalize messages from society and those close to us, developing “good voices” that we believe are non-threatening; masculine, feminine, strong, calm, perky—the list is endless. It is only by discovering, revealing and re-claiming all the colors of our natural voice—our true self—can we begin to be a “voice for good” in our world, our art, our personal lives and our classrooms.

Participants learned how the voice does and does not work. They explored personal voice histories and how their lives shaped their voices and their self-image. Each participant was guided through imagery to picture his/her voice as it is today, what he/she would like his/her voice to be, and what was stopping him/her from having the voice he/she desired. They were guided through imagery to look back on the people, places, or events that helped to shape them into what they are today and they subsequently drew these pictures with materials provided by the instructor. The final exhibition and performances blended with **Geometric Aljamia: A Visual Transliteration.**

Diane Woodcock and Jean Hodges are colleagues at VCUQ. Susan Schuld teaches at VCURichmond. Schuld incorporates Kristin Linklater’s Voice Pictures & Voice Poems into her teaching. As a transformative experience - one that invites people from all walks of life to explore self-image as manifest through the voice, she has seen light bulbs go off, observed people develop renewed focus, and witnessed people claiming new ownership of their voice development.

#### **VCUarts Richmond Workshop Leaders**

Reni Gower / Professor / Painter  
 Jorge Benitez / Assistant Professor / Painter  
 Susan Schuld / Assistant Professor / Actress / Voice Trainer

#### **VCUQ Partners**

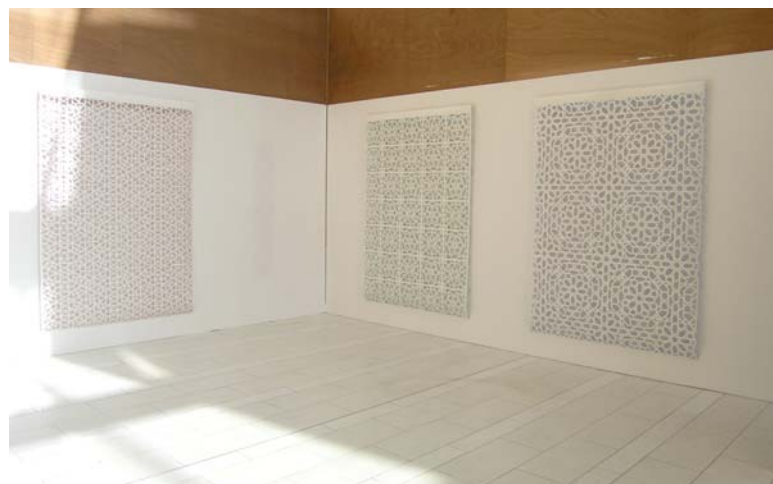
Khaled Saoud / Assistant Professor / Physicist  
 Jochen Sokoly / Assistant Professor / Islamic Scholar  
 Diane Woodcock / Assistant Professor / Poet  
 Jean Hodges / Assistant Professor / Writer

#### **Participants**

Ghadeer Alawadhi / Alsura, Kuwait  
 Hanane Korchi / Doha, Qatar  
 Mohammed Saleh Amin / Kabul, Afghanistan  
 Tamim Sahebzada / Kabul, Afghanistan  
 Julia Townsend / Dubai, United Arab Emirates

#### **Gallery**

High-resolution, full-size images are available with the html version of this article.



**Figure 1.**



Figure 2.

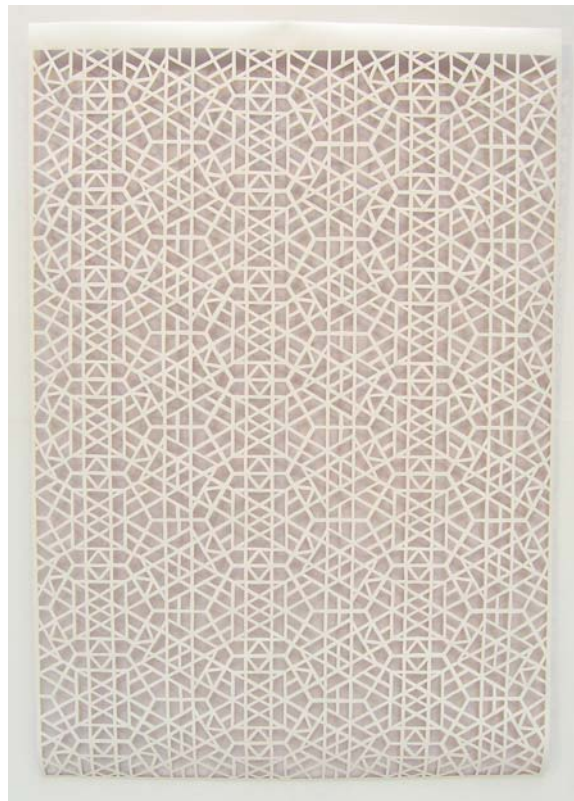


Figure 3.

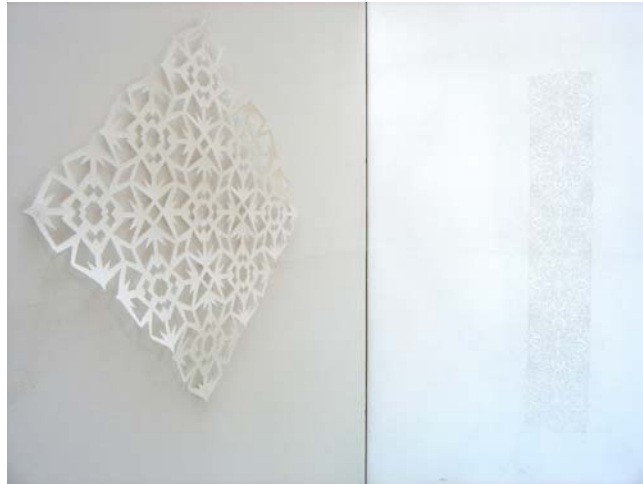


Figure 4.

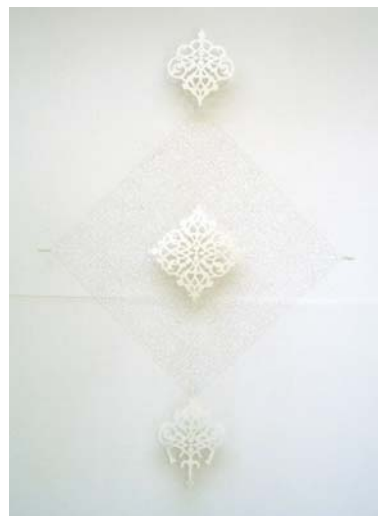


Figure 5.



Figure 6.

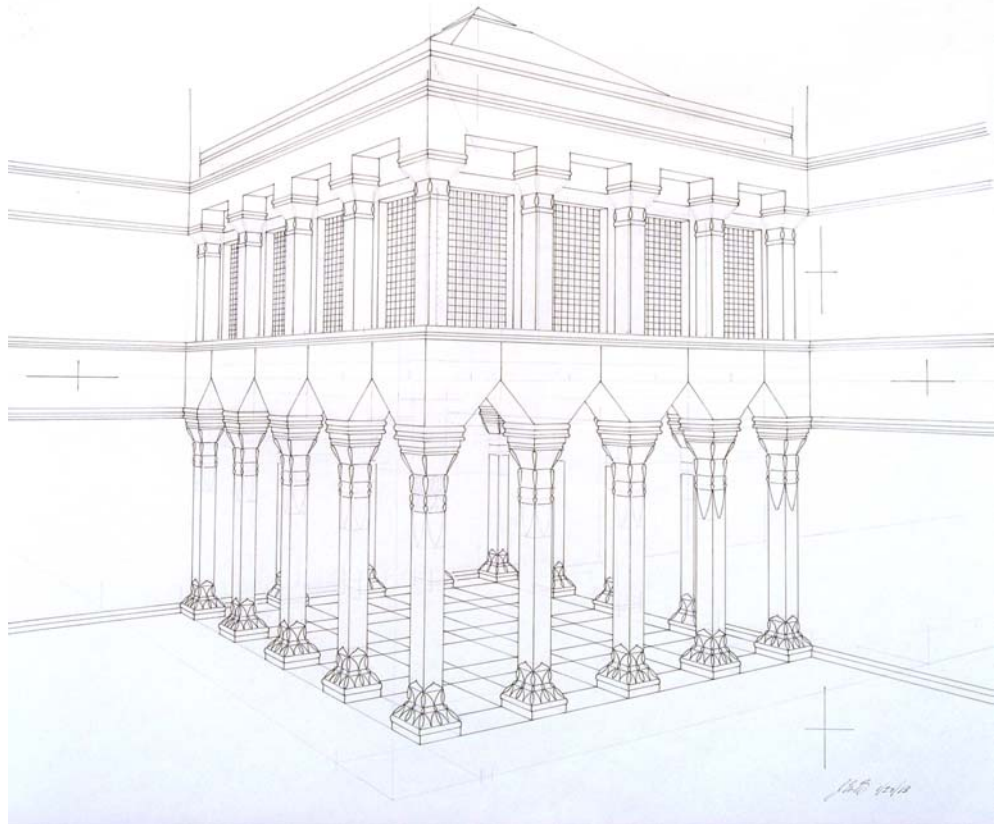


Figure 7.

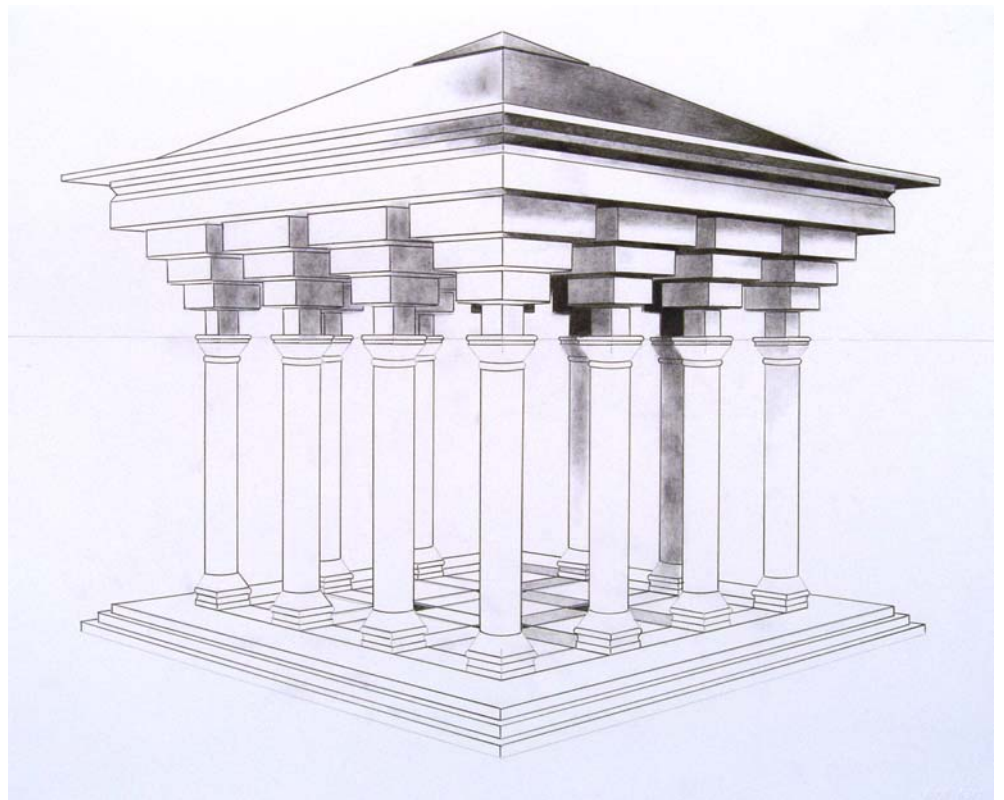


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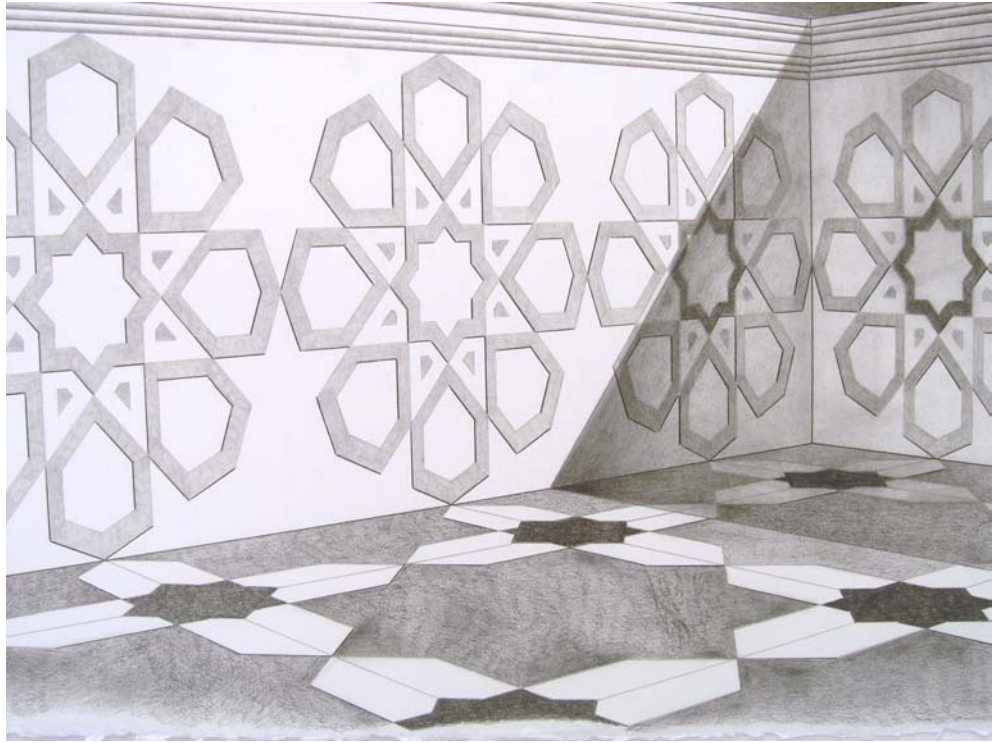


Figure 9.

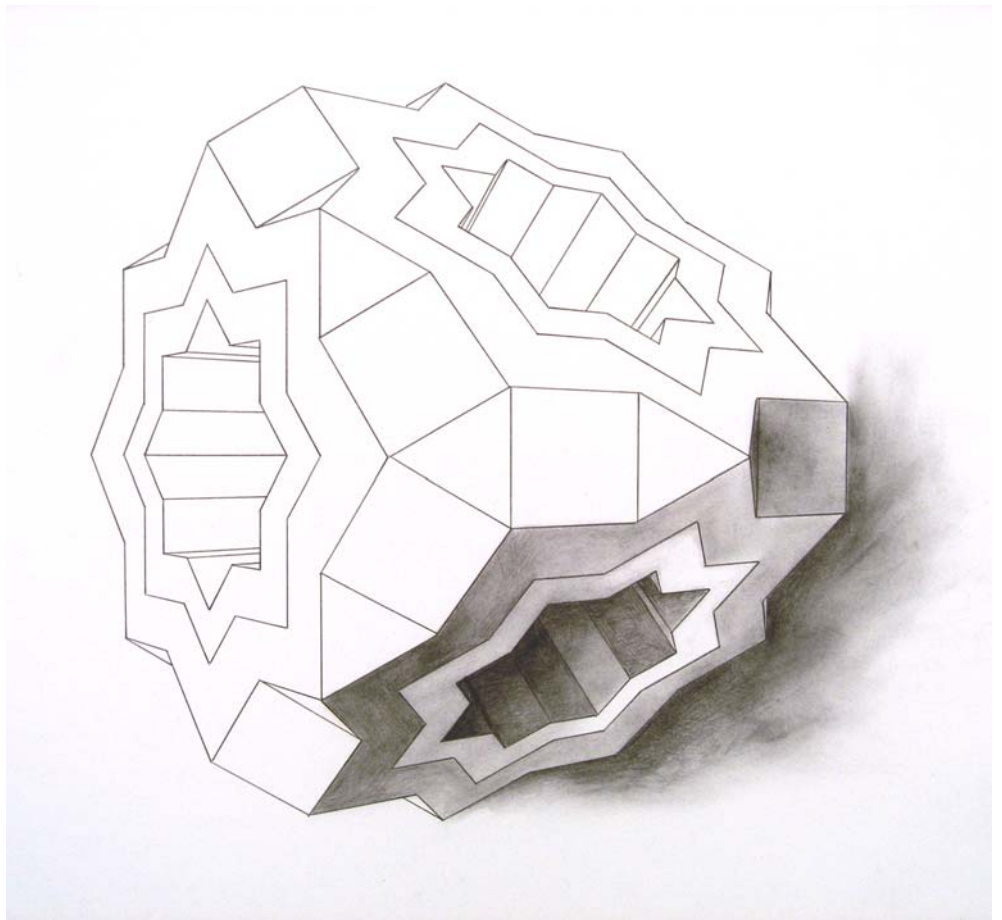


Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

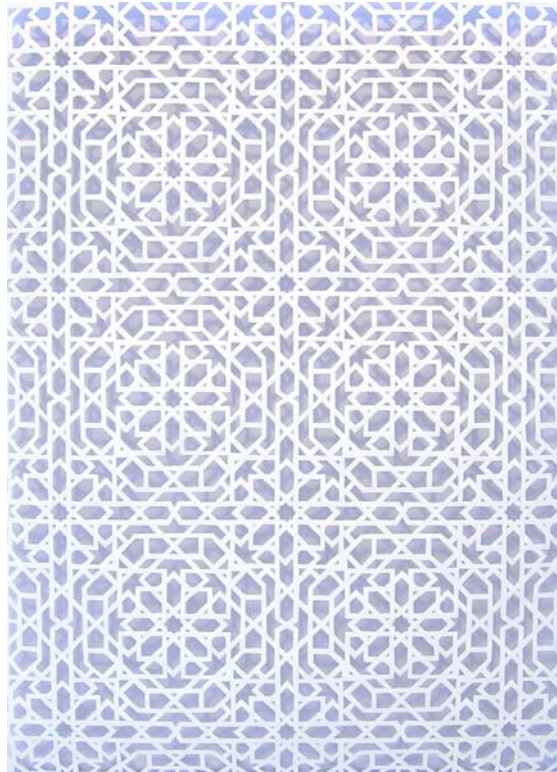


Figure 13.



Figure 14.





Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.



Figure 20.

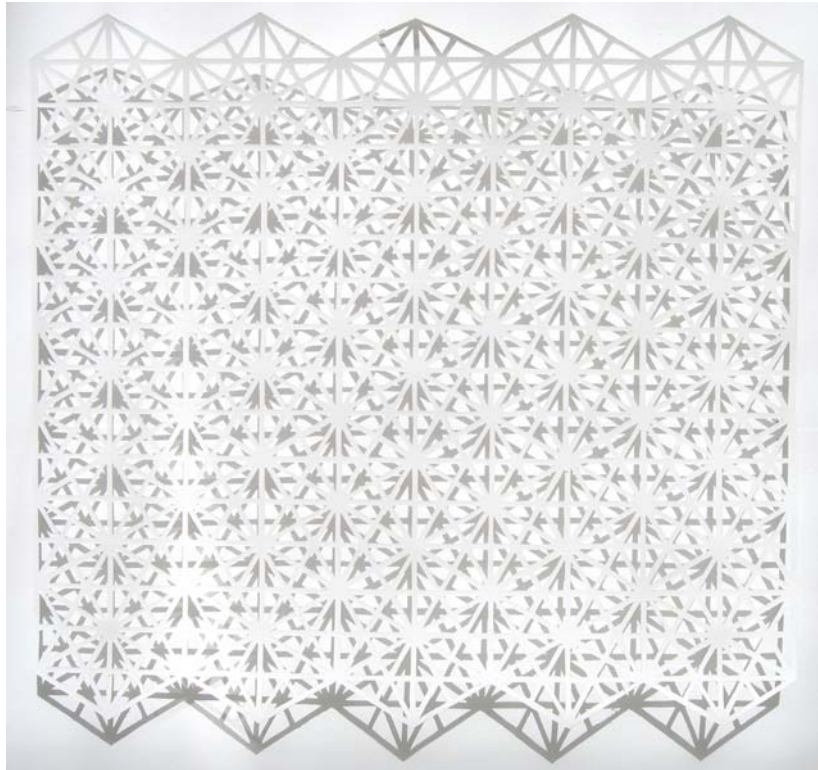


Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 23.



Figure 24.



Figure 25.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

## Image Identification

### Geometric Aljamia: A Visual Transliteration and Re-Claiming the Wild Colors of Qatari Voices

1. Installation View: Reni Gower (left to right) *Papercuts: White/copper*, *Papercuts: White/emerald*, *Papercuts: White/cobalt* (81" × 56"/each) and Tamim Sahebzada (Wall tracing 60" × 10")
2. Reni Gower *Papercuts: White/emerald* 81" × 56" Acrylic on hand cut paper 2013
3. Reni Gower *Papercuts: White/copper* 81" × 56" Acrylic on hand cut paper 2013
4. Installation/Corner View: (left) Ghadeer Alawadhi (papercut approx. 50" × 50") (right) Tamim Sahebzada (wall tracing 60" × 10")
5. Installation View: Detail: Julia Townsend's Papercut and wall tracing approx. 72" × 48")
6. Installation View: (right) Reni Gower (*Papercuts: White/cobalt* 81" × 56" and Hanae Korchi papercut 80" × 10")
7. Jorge Benitez Perspectival drawings developed from Islamic tile patterns approx. 18" × 24"
8. Jorge Benitez Perspectival drawings developed from Islamic tile patterns approx. 18" × 24"
9. Jorge Benitez Perspectival drawings developed from Islamic tile patterns approx. 18" × 24"
10. Jorge Benitez Perspectival drawings developed from Islamic tile patterns approx. 18" × 24"
11. Jorge Benitez and Reni Gower cutting from reverse – *Papercuts: White/cobalt* in progress 81" × 56" Acrylic on hand cut paper 2013
12. Reni Gower *Papercuts: White/cobalt* 81" × 56" Acrylic on hand cut paper 2013
13. Reni Gower DETAIL *Papercuts: White/cobalt* 81" × 56" Acrylic on hand cut paper 2013
14. Julia Townsend Papercut and Wall Tracing (detail) Finished piece approx. 72" × 48"
15. Julia Townsend developing motifs inspired by Turkish designs
16. Hanane Korchi cutting motifs into strip
17. Hanane Korchi's finished papercut 80" × 10"
18. Ghadeer Alawadhi designing motifs
19. Ghadeer Alawadhi finished papercut approx. 50" × 50" based upon Kirigami folded pattern
20. Mohammad Saleh Amin cutting multiples of traced hexagonal motif
21. Mohammad Saleh Amin's finished papercut approx 64" × 80"
22. Tamim Sahebzada (detail wall tracing) 2 finished wall tracings 60" × 10"
23. Tamim Sahebzada tracing hand drawn pattern based upon traditional Afghan designs
24. Susan Schuld pre-performance: Re-Claiming the Wild Colors of Qatari Voices standing in front of Gower's *Papercuts: White/cobalt*
25. Susan Schuld pre-performance: Re-Claiming the Wild Colors of Qatari Voices standing in front of Gower's *Papercuts: White/cobalt*
26. Jorge Benitez and Susan Schuld performing Re-Claiming the Wild Colors of Qatari Voices Poetry by Jean Hodges and Diane Woodcock
27. (Left to right) Tamin Sahebzada, Hanane Korchi, Julia Townsend, Saleh Amin, Jorge Benitez, Reni Gower, Ghadeer Alawadhi, Susan Schuld
28. (Left to right) Khaled Saoud, Jorge Benitez, Reni Gower, Jochen Sokoly

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