

The background of the slide is a large, vibrant abstract painting. It features a warm color palette of reds, oranges, and yellows. In the upper left, there's a yellow Arabic calligraphic element. A large, swirling, pinkish-red form dominates the center. To the right, there's a purple and blue section with intricate geometric patterns, including a grid of small squares. The bottom right corner shows a signature 'Zohra' in Arabic script. The overall style is expressive and symbolic, blending traditional Islamic art motifs with modern abstraction.

EXHIBITION:

Of abstraction
as a symbolic expression
symbolic expression of an
of an inner adventure.

By Zohra Hassani



Zohra Hassani

Born in France in 1985 to Algerian parents, Zohra Hassani made the choice of gesture at an early age in an initially unconscious search for coherence and freedom in the face of the dissonance of her double culture. It is via the creation of a coded language in the form of symbols that she creates for herself, as a child, a space of free expression.

After scientific studies that brought her a Cartesian vision of the world, she graduated from the Bratsart School of Art in Tours in 2009 and became an art director and teacher, before devoting herself entirely to her painting. Initially influenced by historical artists such as Kandinsky or Pollock, Zohra

Hassani adopts abstract form and symbolic expression as means of spiritual elevation. She is then inspired by her

personal heritage, more specifically by spiritual practices stemming from the symbolic traditions of Arab-Muslim mysticism, but also by works on the unconscious.

Considering that she lives in an era reflecting the end of a cycle in the history of humanity (crises: health, migration, ecological, wars) Zohra invites us to transcend the current challenges by changing our perception in order to improve our existence.

The universes that she proposes on the surface of the canvas, have thus for will to be a support of contemplation and elevation of the consciences. One finds here the Hegelian vision which implies the existence of a spiritual content in the art. The art is the occasion, by a phenomenological process of absence and presence - absence of the real, presence of the quite other - of a sensitive experience that gives to see the truth as phenomenality.



Abstract black 2, 2021
Acrylics, inks, pastels and aerosols on canson
Freedom Series - 65 x 50 cm

ticular the discovery of Kandinsky in her youth that allowed her to establish a link between plastic expression, inner and spiritual universe, and the symbolic traditions of Arab-Muslim mysticism. Aware that the visible and

This is why she adopts, very early on, the abstract form as an expression of the impalpable, in search of the mysteries and secrets hidden by ordinary reality. She tries to give form to the psyche. It is the materialization of the

latter and its contemplation that allows us a spiritual elevation.

In this quest, she carries out an introspective approach to try to materialize the human psyche by calling upon: meditation, automatic writing, agent intellect¹⁰, waking dreams and danced gestures.

In order to connect to the sacred - to the other - invisible

Background & legacy

Zohra Hassani's work is a hyphen between East and West, proposing a different way of thinking to overcome contemporary challenges. In the same way, it testifies to the emergence of a new spiritual identity, federating.

Franco-Algerian, it is the meeting and the positive setting in perspective of its two cultures - Eastern and Western - which allowed the artist to develop a language and a symbolic plastic expression which frees itself from the traditional codes of the history of the art and the strictly Western iconography.

She explains that it is in par-

ordinary reality is, like the iceberg described by the painter Asger Jorn, incomplete, Zohra's painting explores and seeks to complete this other part of reality: the one that we do not see immediately.

« I think of an iceberg floating in the sea. It is easy to describe what is to be seen above the surface of the water, but this does not prevent that 7/8th of the mass of the iceberg remains below the water and escapes any superficial description. »
Asger Jorn¹



Genesis, 2021- Oil on canvas - Freedom Series, 80 x 100

¹Quote from the interview between A. Jorn and Walter Korun on March 29, 1956. See Berréby, 2004, p. 56.

² Lambert, Jean-Clarence Lambert, The reign imaginal, Paris, Art Circle, 1991

¹⁰The agent intellect can be defined as an active principle conceived as both immanent and transcendent. It differs from the passive intellect, which only collects knowledge from the senses. This is why this productive function belongs to the domain and is housed in the human soul. See Aristotle On the Soul, III and Generation of Animals, II

but present in each one of us, Zohra explores via techniques of setting in state of modified consciousness, various states which open on the unconscious as much as on the imaginary.

Her reflection on the forms pushes her to outline a language which wants to be universal, joining the idea dear to the Cobra movement according to which

« the forms are the product of a dialectic of the memory and the imagination »²

while being the fruit of a personal and contemporary language.

Zohra has evolved spiritually (notably via the symbolism of dreams) in the concept of the Imaginal described by the philosopher Henry Corbin.

It is the existence of an intermediate visual world between the purely intel-

ligible, abstract world and the sensible world, borrowed from the thought of the philosopher and Sufi, Ibn Arabi³.

Unlike the Imagination, which represents an unreal and anarchic world involving no knowledge, the Imaginal is an intermediate world described by the Iranian thinker Mohsen Feyz Kâshânî as a :

« world through which the spirits are corporalized and the bodies are spiritualized »⁴



Aluja, 2022
Inks and acrylics on wood
27 x 41 cm

³ Ibn Arabi, is an Andalusian theologian, jurist, poet, Sufi, metaphysician and philosopher, author of 846 alleged works. His work has dominated Islamic spirituality since the thirteenth century, and he can be considered the pivot of Islamic metaphysical thought.

⁴H. Corbin, Spiritual bodies... p.109, quotes Mohsen Feyz Kâshânî, Kalimât maknûna, chap XXXI.

This is precisely what is at work in Zohra's work since, like Mohsen Feyz Kâshânî, she proposes a more global, more unitary perception of reality when spirit and matter meet.

Finally the archetypes, as described by Carl Gustav Jung, join the idea of a hidden part of the knowledge in the unconscious that the human must (re)find by an effort of spiritual elevation.



Sacred man, 2022

Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and sprays on canvas and wood
New Talisman Series - 140 x 100 cm



Sacred man, 2022

Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and sprays on canvas and wood
New Talisman Series - 140 x 100 cm

UV LIGHT

Thus, two types of magic emerge, one prohibited: bâtir and the other authorized: hal-lal, stemming from the theological definition: « an operation in which one gets closer to Satan and obtains his help » and sometimes philosophi-

The Arab - Muslim magical thinking

At the birth of Islam in the 8th century, the Arabian Peninsula was populated with deities and jinns to whom diviners, poets and healers had recourse to influence the destiny of men. From the 8th century onwards, a form of learned magic inspired by Mesopotamian, Greek and Indian heritage developed.

The Qur'an and hadiths mention magic, in Arabic «sihr», on several occasions and raise the question of its authorization. Notably with the story of the two fallen angels Harut and Marut who, knowing magic, use it in an evil way in order to obtain the favors of a woman with whom they have fallen in love.



Detail of the artwork **Fragile balance** under UV light

cal: « that whose cause is hidden from the intelligence of the many and whose discovery is difficult ».

From the philosophical definition that interests us here, the sihr becomes an initiatory science, based on the science of letters, reserved for the literate elite.

The science of letters seeks to decipher the hidden meanings of the Qur'an, the divine names and the creation. The idea being that the created world is the fruit of the divine language itself.

God says: «Let it be» and it is. Therefore, if one can decode the grammar of the divine word, called cosmic grammar, then one can act on the creation and on the world.

This science also has rules. According to the texts, the world was created from the 28 letters of the Arabic al-

phabet, which composed the 99 Beautiful Names of God (which are the matrices of all created beings), and then spread throughout the cosmos.⁵

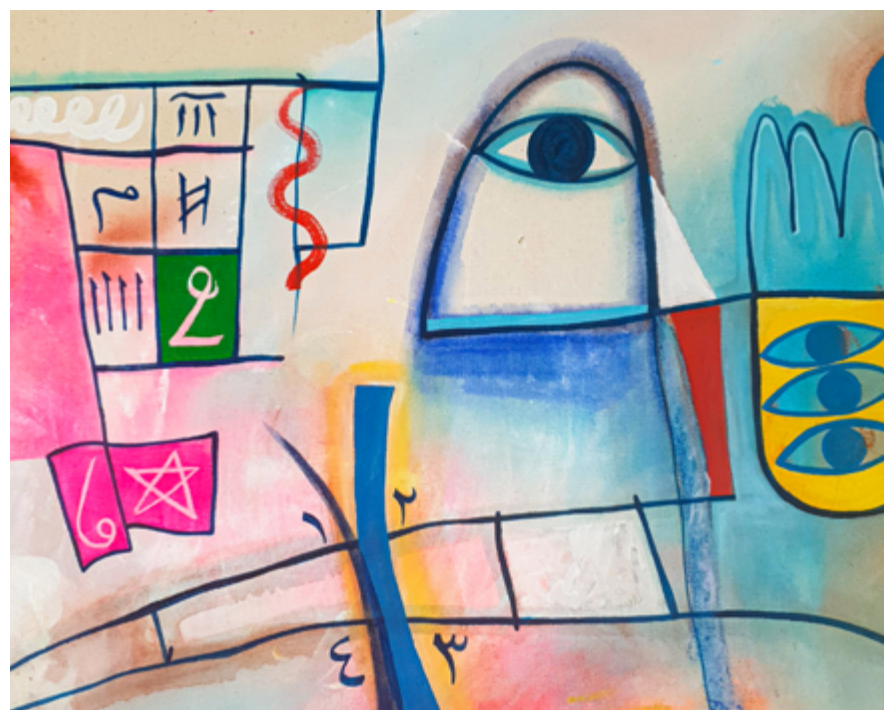
Divided according to the Elemental Qualities (hot, dry, cold, wet letters), the letters also structure the physical laws of the sublunary world. There is no aspect of the material or psychic life of each human being that cannot be translated according to this cosmic alphabet.

Numerology integrates this science of letters. Indeed, each letter has a numerical value. The number is the spirit of the letter, which takes the function of the body for the number.

Finally, the verb and the word also have a role of literal magic

The Qur'an is received as a divine message «dictated», so to speak, to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel, and every word, phrase and verse of which was intended and constructed by divine intention⁵.

By reciting the text of the Koran, the simple believer



re-actualizes the descent of the Word to earth. In a way, he takes the position of the angel of revelation. The words he articulates are not comparable to a simple liturgical recitation, for they are fully charged with the power of the divine energy that uttered them. By this recitation of the Koran, the Muslim appropriates the divine energy, he lets himself be penetrated by its supernatural

efficiency.⁵

In this sense, the Arabic language is a reflection of the cosmic order. This implies that whoever knows the secrets of the language penetrates the deepest secrets of creation. On the other hand, it suggests that the man who knows the intimate structure of this language, having understood that each letter is, in its highest degree, an angel, is thereby invested with a vast power.

The way of Simiya «the science

of letters and magic squares» developed by the Algerian Sufi master Al Buni appeared in the 13th century. He left a substantial written legacy including the famous reference treatise «TALISMAN - the sun of knowledge» from which Zohra Hassani's work is directly inspired and bears the traces of it.

It exposes the science of letters as well as their correspondences with the numbers, the stars, the angels under very aesthetic geometrical forms called also magic squares, popular and mystical at the same time. **The figures present are considered as talismans bringing protection, love or fortune at the same time.**

⁵ H. Corbin, Verbe coranique et magie en terre d'Islam



***Fragile balance*, 2022**
 Acrylics, inks, pastels, and aerosols on canvas
 New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm



***Fragile balance*, 2022**
 Acrylics, inks, pastels, and aerosols on canvas
 New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm

UV LIGHT

mysticism is considered as a hidden science. That is to say that to know it, one must be initiated into it. The magicians are therefore in search of this hidden science to reveal it and thus contribute to the elevation of the human soul.

Symbols and talisman

The symbol is a sign or an object of the imaginary which allows according to its etymology of : «to gather what is scattered».

The characteristic of the symbol is to be a double element: the first order of the symbol comes from reality, from concrete experience and has to do with the material knowledge of things. The second, as for him, is contained elsewhere and belongs to a beyond of the everyday, inaccessible and invisible at first sight. The symbol, through a phenomenological process of absence and presence, then highlights the

correspondence between material and immaterial reality that the spiritual man seeks and can reach through ritual in order to access the sacred and to reconnect with unity.⁴

Zohra Hassani adopts this symbolic expression notably in the series: New Talisman. Le talisman est un objet issu des pratiques spirituelles de la mystique arabo-musulmane, marqué de signes auxquels on attribue des forces magiques, généralement protectrices. Here «magic» refers to the sciences of the «magi» which in Arab-Muslim



Detail of artwork **The Tiger's Dream** under UV light

⁴Bénédicte Maselli

Zohra reappropriates the imaginary of the talisman. Indeed, she mixes the codes of traditional talismans: **Arabic numbers and letters, magic square, the 7 fallen letters of the Fathiha, the symbols of the seal of Solomon, the 99 names of God** while adding its own free forms of symbolic expression.

Through contemplation, this new talisman reveals the viewer to himself and makes him aware of his own protective force.

The protection, the magic, of this new talisman is now inside and not outside the viewer.



The Tiger's Dream, 2022

Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery, gold leaf and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm



***The Tiger's Dream*, 2022**
Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery, gold leaf and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm

UV LIGHT

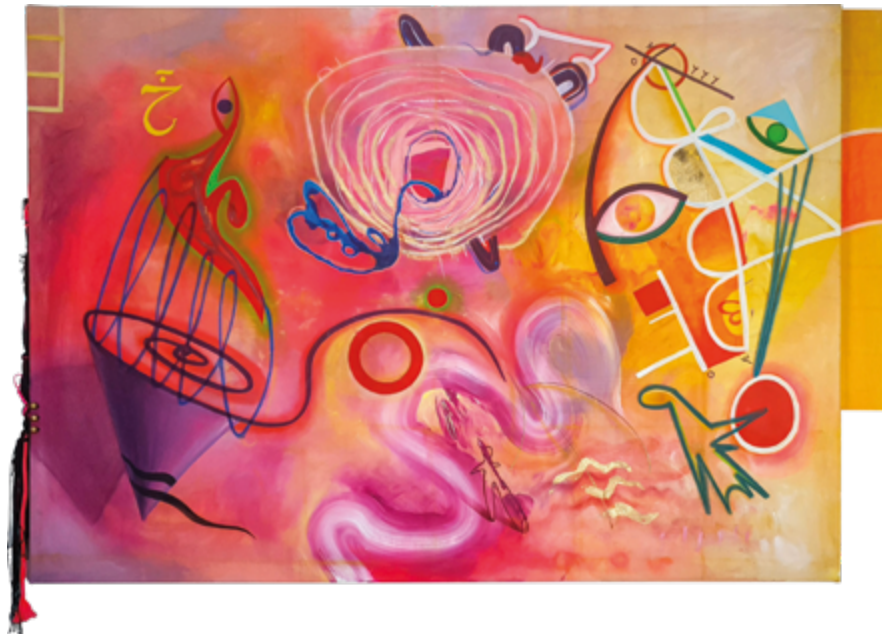
Abstraction and Arab-Muslim mysticism

To understand this, let's take the example of the painting: **The Sacred Man**, from the New Talisman series.

This last one, reveals 2 readings, a first one visible from the start and a second one hidden.

The first reading is done in natural light where one discovers a world made of abstraction and imaginary objects such as the eye and the symbol of the human being by the silhouette in outline in the central lower part.

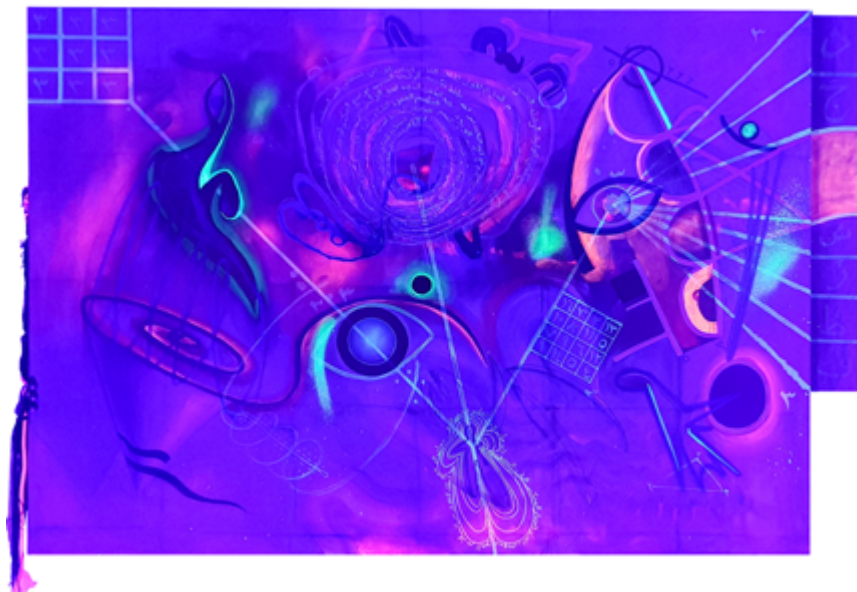
The eye is a universal symbol of consciousness.



The Sacred Man, 2022 - Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and on canvas and wood - 140 x 100 cm

You will also find outside the frame, a knotted and intertwined woolen mat, a symbol of conflict and to the right an enigmatic wooden stand in orange and yellow. The elements outside the frame, belonging to an off-field, invite the viewer to think differently outside the norms, to take a step aside to perceive what is outside the usual field of perception.

The second reading is revealed under UV light and corresponds to the hidden knowledge of the world. They draw from the symbolism of Arab mysticism.



The Sacred Man, 2022 - Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and aerosols on canvas and wood - 140 x 100 cm under UV light

Indeed, you will discover on the wooden support. The 7 fallen letters of the Fatiha Fa, dia, choun, sa, za, kha, zoun

ث ح ج ز ش ظ ف

The opening sura of the Qur'an: «The Fatiha», presents the absence of 7 letters of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, have the calls the 7 fallen letters of the Fatiha.

They are endowed with special magical virtues studied at length by Al Buni.

The science of letters appears to the initiate through

long individual meditations, causing the progressive germination of esoteric meanings which then present themselves to him as inspirations, inner illuminations accompanied or not by visualizations.⁵

They are closely related to 7 of the 99 names of God: **The one, the all powerful, the firm, the obvious, the vigilant and the pure.** Each of its names begins with one of the fallen letters of the Fatiha.⁷

Closer to the center, you will

discover a magic square of order 4 of property 34 realized in Arabic numerals.

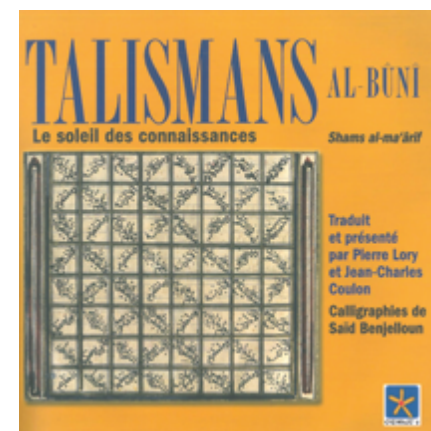
The magic square or «walf» in Arabic, which means harmonious arrangement, is a square divided into squares in which different numbers are written in such a way that the sum of the numbers in each row, column and diagonal is equal. Magic squares have made the fame of Arabic talismans.

Some of them mix numbers, symbols, letters and names of God as Al Buni developed tables of correspondence between them.

Al Buni is an Algerian philosopher and Sufi of the 13th century particularly known



Example of Arabic magic squares



Cover of the book Shâms al-Ma'arif by Al Buni, translated and presented by Pierre Lory and Jean Charles Coulon.



Object representing the 99 names of God

for his writings on the esoteric value of letters and subjects related to mathematics and spirituality. In particular via his talisman treaty: **Shâms al-Ma'arîf (the sun of knowledge)** which is still a reference today.

On the upper part in the shape of a swirl, you can read the 99 names of God. The 99 names of God are attributes of God's perfection.

Here are for example the first 5:

- 1- **Ar-Rahman**, *The Most Gracious*
- 2- **Ar-Rahim**, *The Most Merciful*
- 3- **Al-Malik**, *The Sovereign*
- 4- **Al-Qoddas**, *The Pure*
- 5- **As-Salam**, *The Peace*

Hadith⁶ :

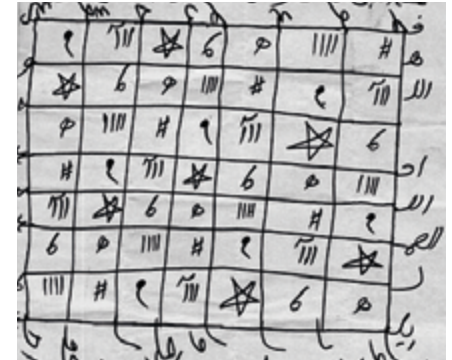
« **Certainly, God has ninety-nine names, a hundred minus one. Whoever lists them will enter Paradise; He is without alter-ego and rewards the naming of these names one by one.** »

In this hadith, Islam shows us that there is an alternative way to paradise, a way that is based on the power that is enclosed in the 99 names of God.

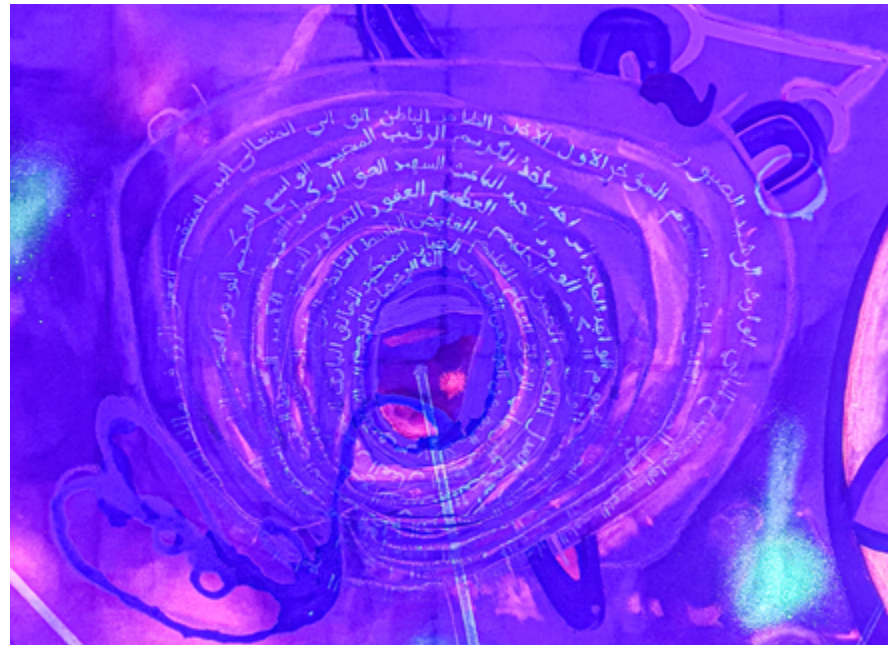
The 99 names of God are a manifestation of His essence: they symbolize the invisible Reality of God.

The mystical quest for this understanding will give rise to the practice of dhikr: a method of meditative recollection based on the repetition of the 99 names of God.

In the painting **Fragile Balance** of the series: **New Talis-**



The 7 Arabic signs of the seal of Solomon used in a magic square



Zoom on the 99 names of God visible under UV light on the painting **The Sacred Man** - 2022 - 140 x 100 cm

man, you will discover at the second reading under UV light, the use of the 7 Arabic signs of the seal of Solomon. The signs engraved on the seal of Solomon contained the «great name» of God, like those engraved on the heart of Adam, explains Al Buni⁷. This seal allowed him, with God's permission, to command demons and genies. The use of these symbols would therefore facilitate power over the jinn in an analogous way to the power of the prophet Solomon.

⁶ Bukhari, vol. 8, B.12, R.12, hadith «of the Prophet» from Abu Hurayra.

⁷ Edmond Doutté Magic and religion in North Africa

You will also notice that all these elements are presented in a precise architecture creating a link between the first and second interpretation. It is this possibility of different interpretations of the same that opens the mind to a unitary understanding of the world. The fact of discovering a second reading by illuminating with another source of light pushes the viewer to experiment the perceptive change as access to a new knowledge, to the other part of the symbol that we evoked earlier.



Fragile balance, 2022 - Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and aerosols on canvas and wood - 140 x 100 cm under UV light

Here the light (emitter of photons) is analogous to the eye (organ receiving photons). By this analogy the artist invites the viewer to change his usual look (since we change the source of light) to access another knowledge, non-dualistic, uninterrupted and unifying. The painting of Zohra Hassani is thus truly an invitation to look differently and beyond.

Moreover, the darker it is, the more visible the second rea-

ding will be. The aim is to push the viewer to go beyond the deep and usually frightening darkness to explore this beyond of the visible where the other resides. Following the example of the introspective approach, it is a question of reaching the revelation of its own interiority.

« A form of spiritual experience, similar to an initiation that invites the viewer to a completely different apprehension of his reality ».

He will finally find, through contemplation, the protective magic that one generally confers to the talisman in his own interiority.



Detail of the table **Fragile balance** under UV light



Big bang, 2022
Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm



Big bang, 2022
Acrylics, inks, pastels, embroidery and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm

UV LIGHT

directly from the meeting of the elements inside the precise formula of a «recipe».⁸

This way of proceeding is The work of Zohra Hassani is both evocative of analogical thought and of what is at

think that the walnut is beneficial for brain health. Indeed, rich in fatty acids, minerals and trace elements such as zinc, the walnut has the property of stimulating memory and ensuring the proper functioning of the brain.

Analogical thinking

Al Buni uses the same analogical process in his tables of correspondences between numbers, planets, letters, etc.

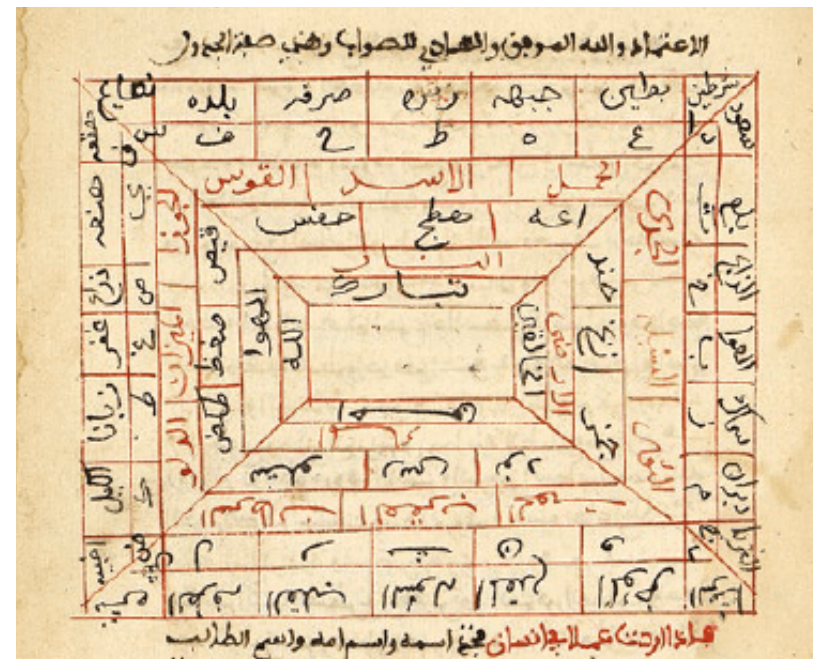
The functioning of the Arab-Muslim magic works on

« a set of relations, without precise causality, between various levels and series of elements which define a general structure of the universe, made of correspondences, without hierarchy nor notorious preeminences. [...] It is the combinations between the series and their one-to-one relationship that constitute the grammar of this cosmological exercise. The operative efficiency comes

work in her painting. Indeed, with her, everything is a matter of correspondences and it is a question, beyond the strict contemplation to put the various present elements in relation.

Analogy is a relationship of resemblance established by the mind (association of ideas) between two or more essentially different objects of thought.

For example, the resemblance of the walnut with the human brain by analogy leads us to



Al Buni's correspondence table

⁸Constant Hamas, *Between Al-Būnī's magic recipe and al-Ghazālī's Islamic prayer: talismanic texts from West Africa*

« Know that numbers have their secrets (asrâr) and influence (atâr) just like letters. The upper world is the extension of the lower world. [...] In the upper world, Saturn is associated with the letter jîm, to which corresponds the number three or, if it is broken down (at-tafsîl), the number fifty-three...; Saturn is associated with the magic square 3x3 (al-mutallat), the best known among experts. »⁸

Hermes Trismegistus embodies this thought in the West via the Emerald Table in the Middle Ages:

« That which is below is like that which is above and that which is above is like that which is below; by these things the miracle of one thing is made. And as all things are and come from One, through the mediation of One, so all things are created from that one thing by adaptation ».

Analogical thinking is favored by mystics to stimulate unitary

perception of the world, intuition and to develop sensitivity. For the mystic the visible and the invisible are analogous and the function of the symbol is to establish a bridge from one to the other. The analogical vision of the world is liberating because it breaks the straightjacket of apparent contradictions. Indeed the dualistic vision of the world is alienating, because it maintains the man prisoner of a vocabulary created for the needs of the immediate perception.⁹

Matter and spirit (thus the two parts of the symbol) in analogical thinking are consubstantially associated. Cosmic harmony is the fruit of a unity and not of a duality. This way of thinking allows to reveal what is unconscious in our way of thinking and thus to access to hidden (extraordinary) knowledge. This way of thinking allowed for

example the discovery of the vaccine, because to discover it Pasteur had to think that the poison and the remedy are of the same nature. That is to say a unitary vision opposed to the dualism which would have separated the good and the evil, that is to say the remedy and the poison. Or Newton to formulate his theory of the universal gravitation in an analogical way between the fall of apples and the movement of stars.



Detail of the **Big Bang** painting under UV light

⁸Constant Hamas, Between Al-Bûnî's magic recipe and al-Ghazali's Islamic prayer: talismanic texts from West Africa.

⁹Benedicte Maselli

Thus, the abstract painting of Zohra Hassani by bringing together both, the method of reasoning of analogical thinking and Arab Muslim mysticism, its symbols and its meanings, **invites the viewer to raise his or her consciousness through a sensitive experience that is meant to be initiatory** and this, in order to raise the consciousness towards the ideal of a resolution of the contemporary challenges.



Third eye, 2022
Acrylics, inks, pastels, and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm



Talisman 10, 2022
Oils, Acrylics, and aerosols on canvas
New *Talisman* series - 120 x 100 cm



Talisman 10, 2022
digital painting
New *Talisman* Series - 7074 x 5877 px



The eye from below, 2022
Acrylics, inks, pastels, and aerosols on canvas
New Talisman series - 140 x 100 cm

