

Monir Farmanfarmaian 2004-2013

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian

March 18 - April 19, 2013

The Third Line is proud to present a survey exhibition of Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian that reflects upon the past decade of her remarkable artistic journey. Showcasing works from 2004 until now - including those being displayed for the first time - the exhibition highlights Monir's stellar career as a pioneer in contemporary Iranian art.

Mapping a chronological trajectory through the different series of works that Monir completed over the past nine years, the exhibition follows the evolution of her signature style *aineh-kari* mirror mosaics and her investigation into divine cosmology. The principal theme in her art practice of correlating mysticism with numerology, Islamic geometry and architecture remains a quintessential feature within this exhibit.

Through wall based panels and free standing works, Monir presents a masterful balance of meticulous craft and contemporary abstraction that utilizes an interaction of surface texture, light and reflection, colour and form. She also delves into media such as drawings in felt marker and pen and ink, layering works of coloured lines to trace structures of nomadic tents, minarets and models of architectural sculptures. Employing techniques from her Iranian heritage that date back to the sixteenth century, Monir chooses to return to the origins of abstraction and theology, and moves beyond the craft to present a modern interpretation of both the medium and the content.

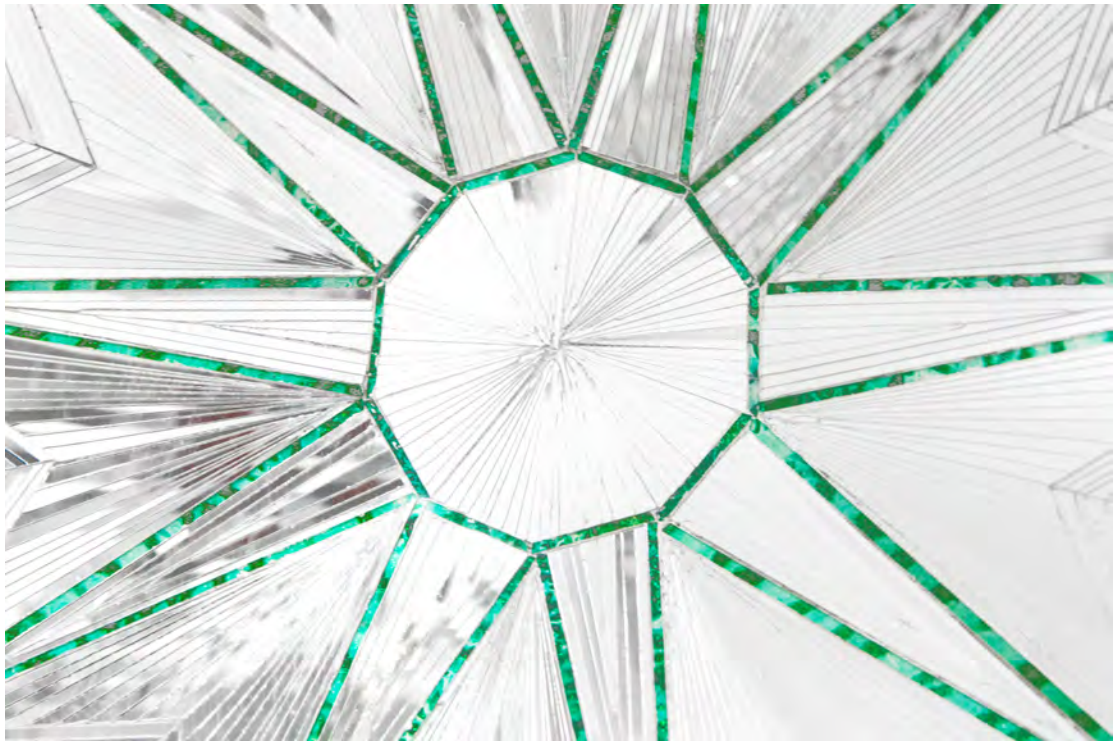
Monir strives for perfection in her intricate drawings and kaleidoscopic mirror mosaics, which is highlighted in her impressive career that spans over 60 years. From early beginnings in Iran, and a later period in New York where she was a contemporary of Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol and Frank Stella, Monir began to tie the two dichotomies of her influences - arriving at modern abstraction in form through the use of Islamic geometry found in Iranian architecture. The resulting work has been an unconventional marriage between the deeply traditional and the genuinely avant-garde, placing her in a league of her own.

About Monir Farmanfarmaian

Monir was born in Qazvin, Iran, in 1924, where she studied Fine Arts at the Tehran University. She was one of the first Iranian students to travel to the United States after World War II where she completed her studies at Cornell University. Having graduated from Parsons School of Design in 1949, she became a Member of the New York Art Students' League (1950-53). Her works have been exhibited extensively in Iran, the U.S.A, Europe, and the Middle East, including the Museum of Modern Art, NY; Leighton House Museum, London; Haus der Kunst, Munich; 29th Bienal de Sao Paulo; The Third Line, Dubai; and the Venice Biennale (1958, 1964, 1966 and 2009). Monir's major commissioned installations include work for the Queensland Art Museum, Australia (2009), the Victoria & Albert Museum's Jameel Collection (2006), the Dag Hammerskjöd building, NY (1981) and the Niyavaran Cultural Center (1977-78), as well as acquisitions by the Metropolitan Museum, NY; The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, and most recently the Guggenheim Museum, NY. In 2011, The Third Line and Damiani co-published '*Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian - Cosmic Geometry*' (2011), an in-depth book edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Karen Marta, surveying Monir's work extensively. She is also a participating artist in Sharjah Biennial 11, where her works can be viewed from March 13 to May 13, 2013. Monir currently lives and works in Tehran, Iran.



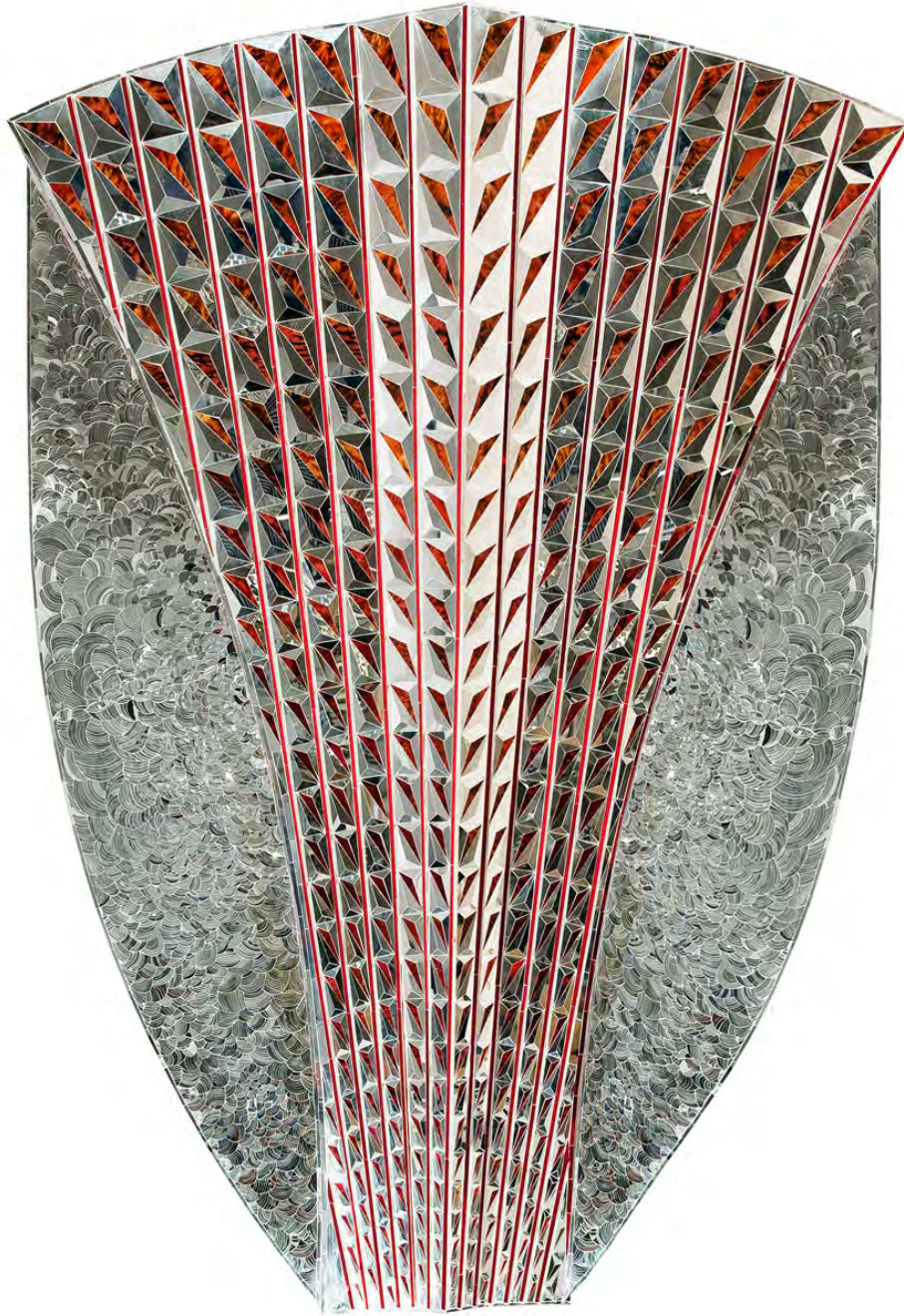
Decagon, 2011
Diameter of a 120cm circle
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, glue and plaster on wood



Decagon, 2011 (Detail)
Diameter of a 120cm circle
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, glue and plaster on wood



Decagon, 2011 (Detail)
Diameter of a 120cm circle
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, glue and plaster on wood



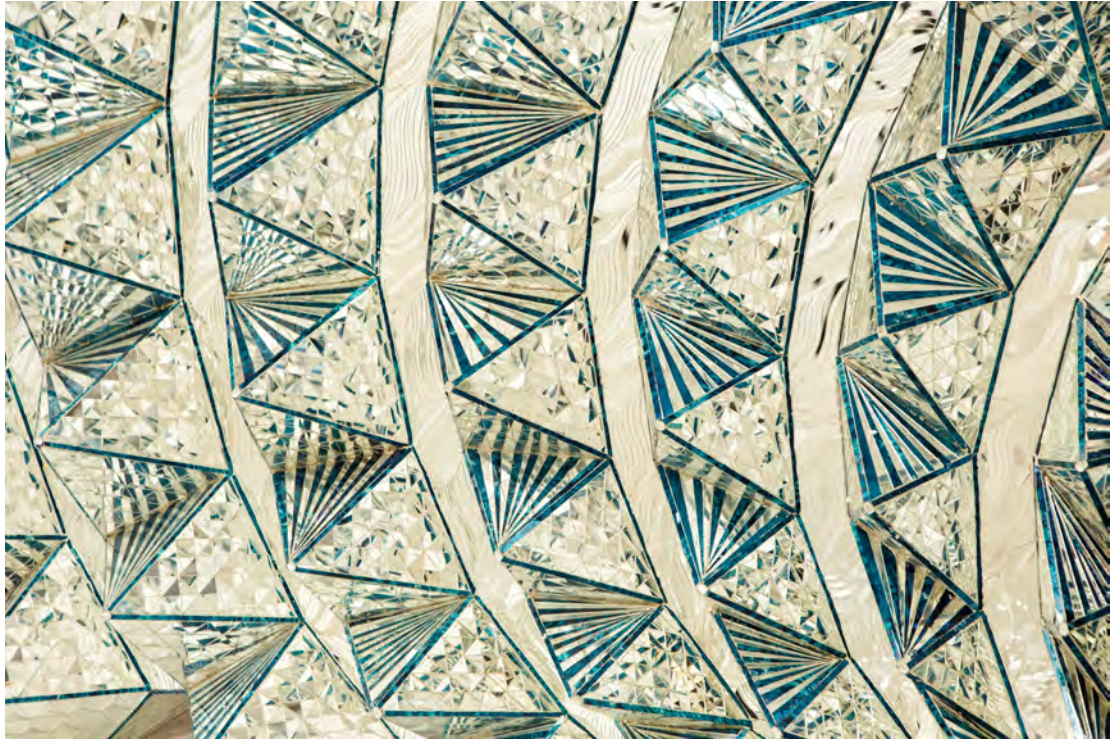
Fire and Water, 2010
Mirror, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
205 x 145 x 23 cm



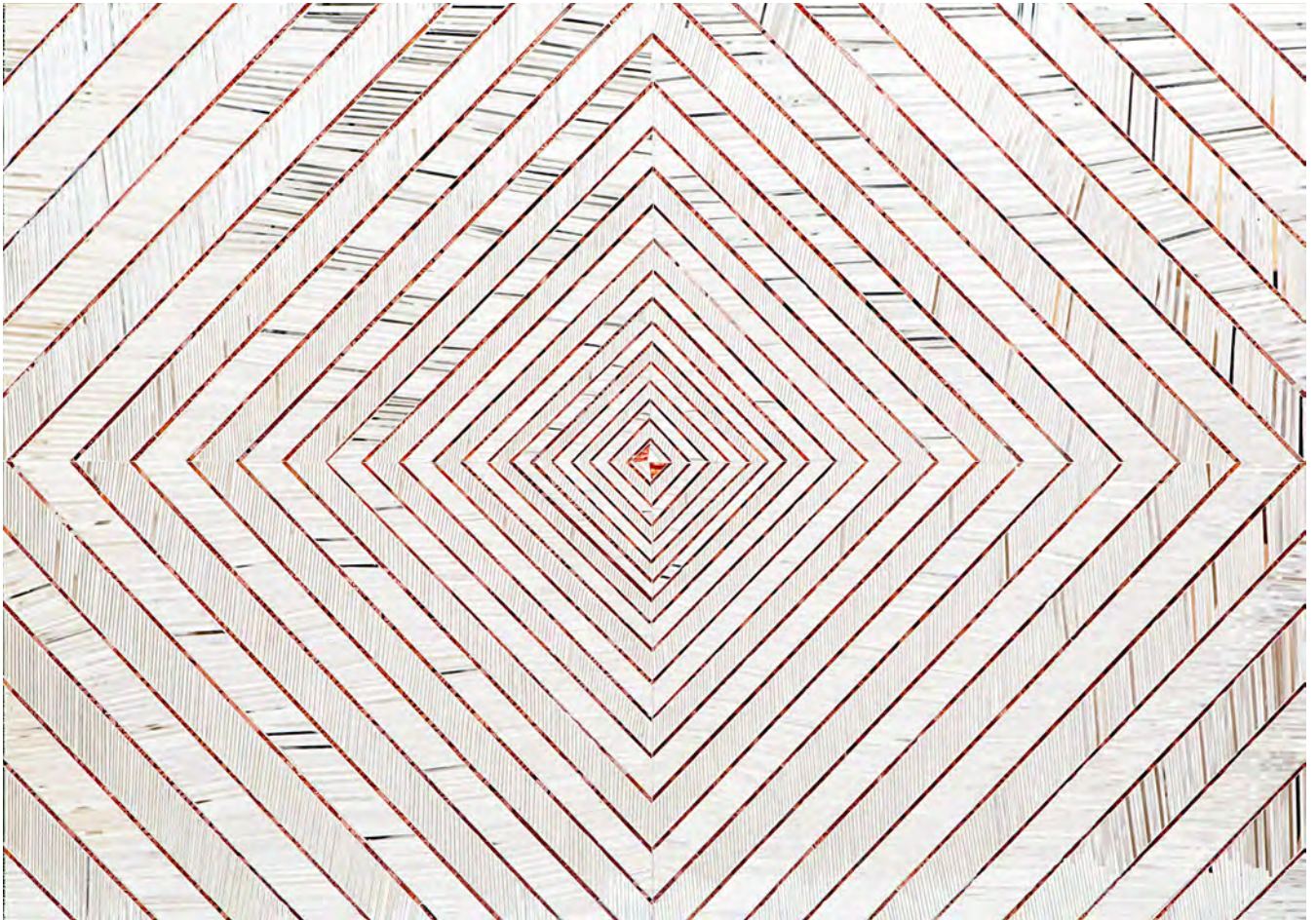
Fire and Water, 2010 (Detail)
Mirror, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
205 x 145 x 23 cm



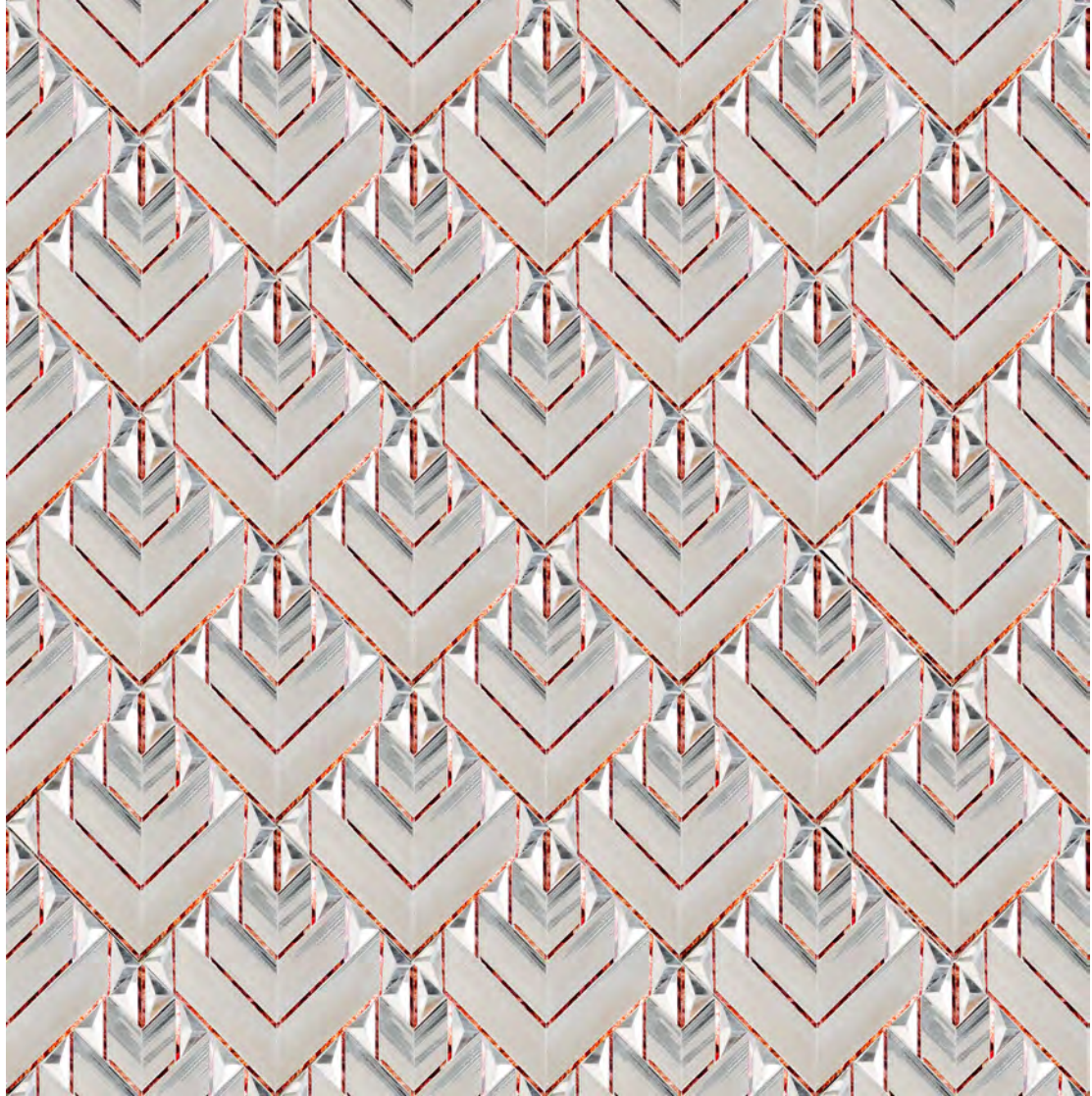
Moghanas #2, 2012
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
160 x 140 x 90 cm



Moghanas #2, 2012 (Detail)
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
160 x 140 x 90 cm



Drawing with Mirror 1, 2012
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
70 x 100 cm



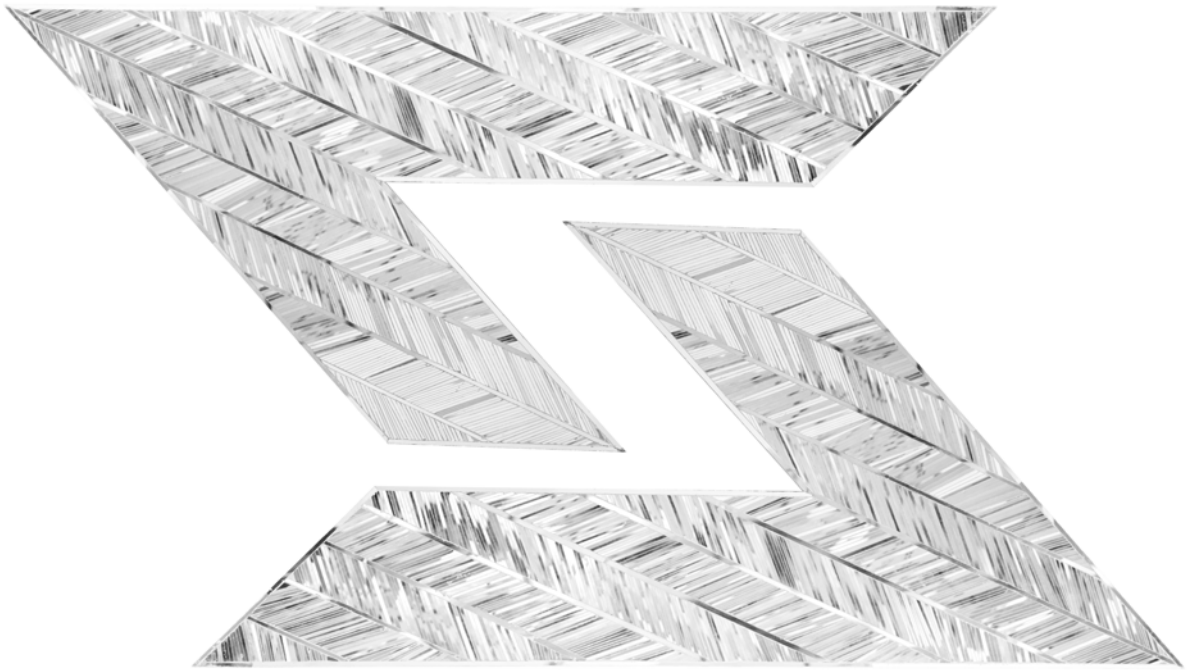
Drawing with Mirror 2, 2012
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
93 x 93 cm



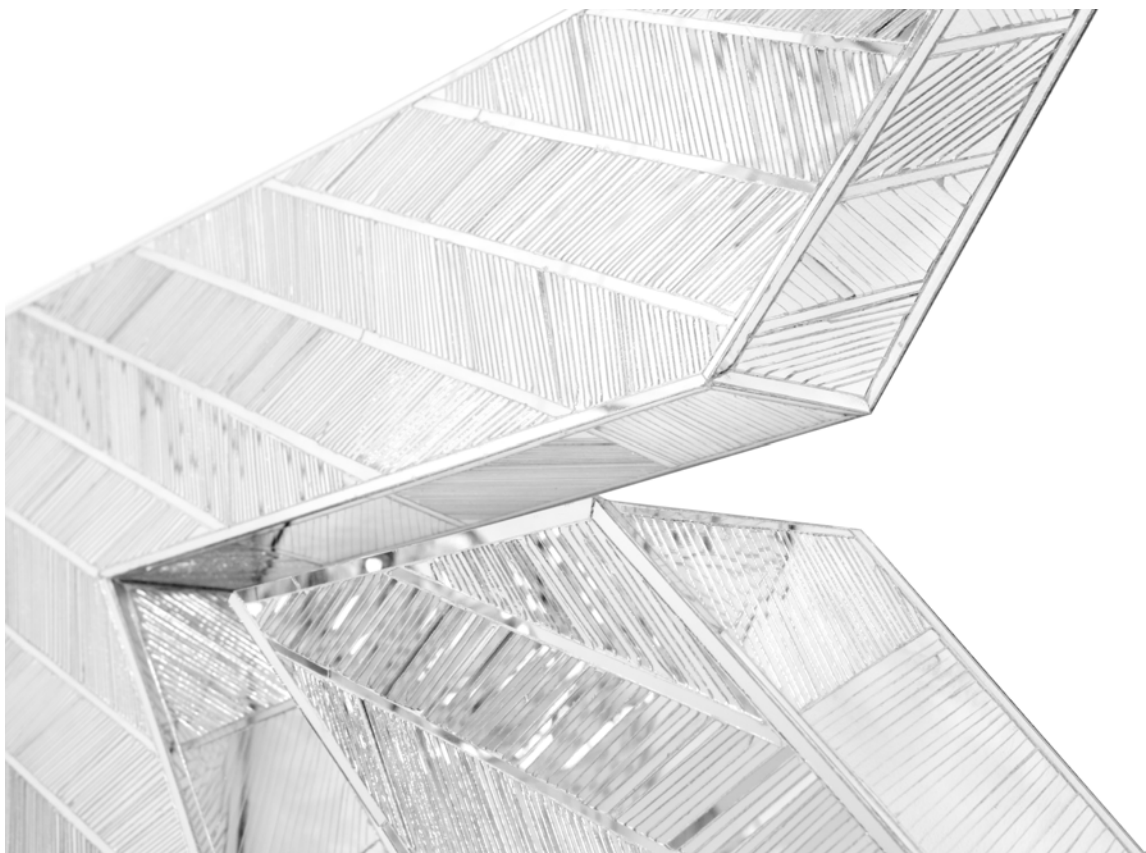
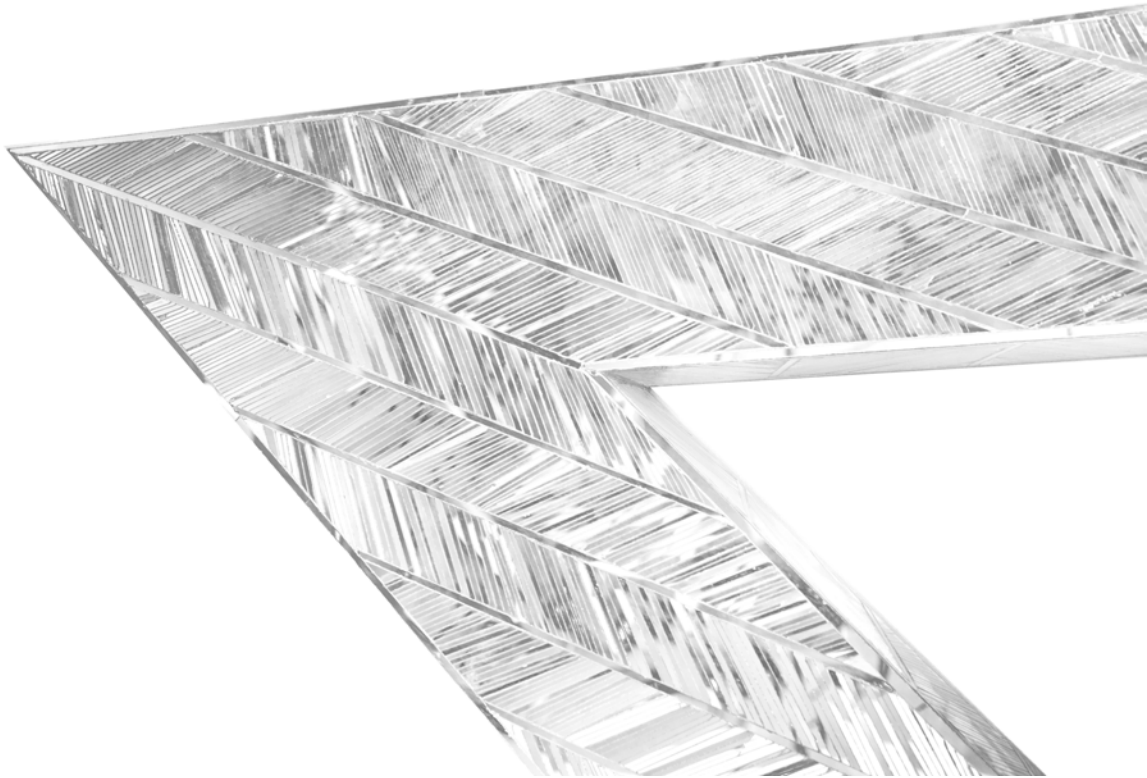
Drawing with Mirror 2, 2012 (Detail)
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
93 x 93 cm



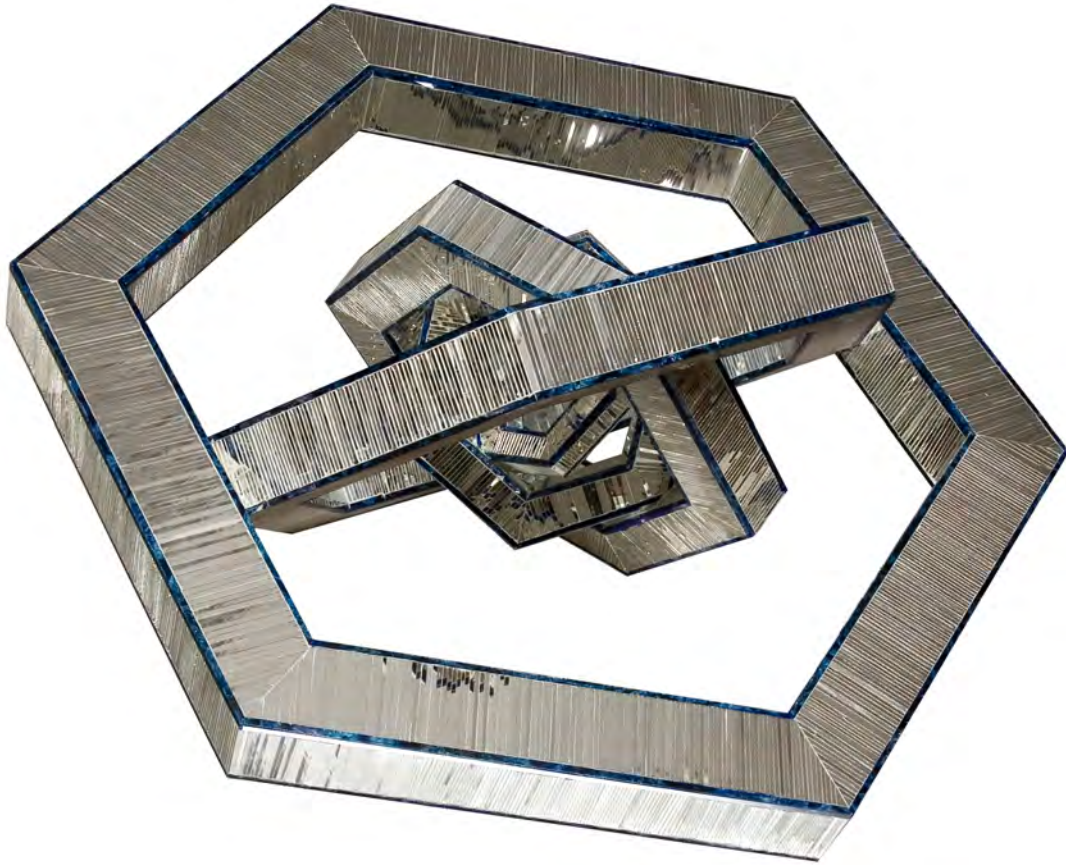
Convertible Series, Group 6-Variation 1, 2010
Mirror and reverse glass painting on plaster and wood
Variable size



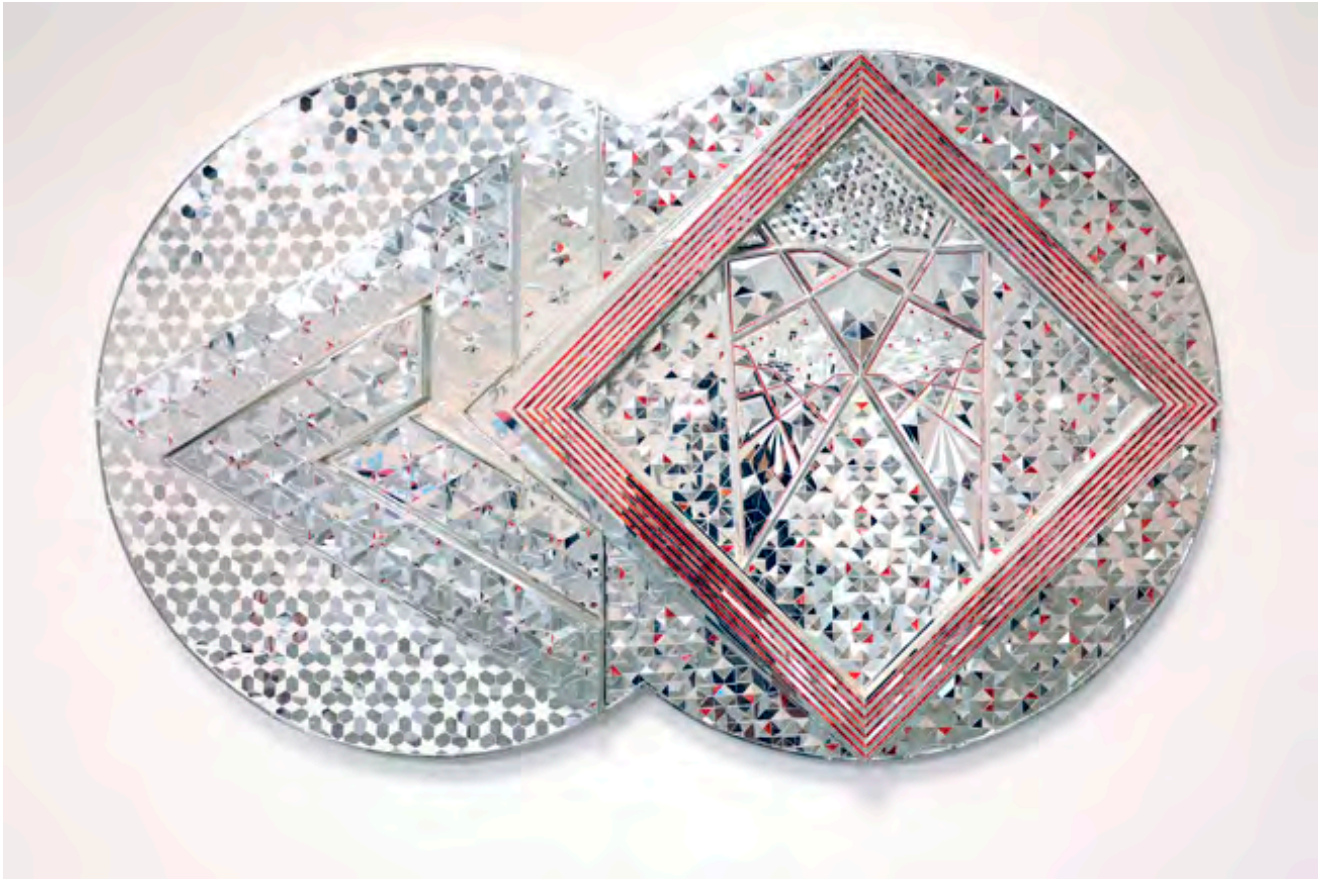
Seven, 2012
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
90 x 40 x 10 cm each



Seven, 2012 (Details)
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster and natural glue on wood
90 x 40 x 10 cm each



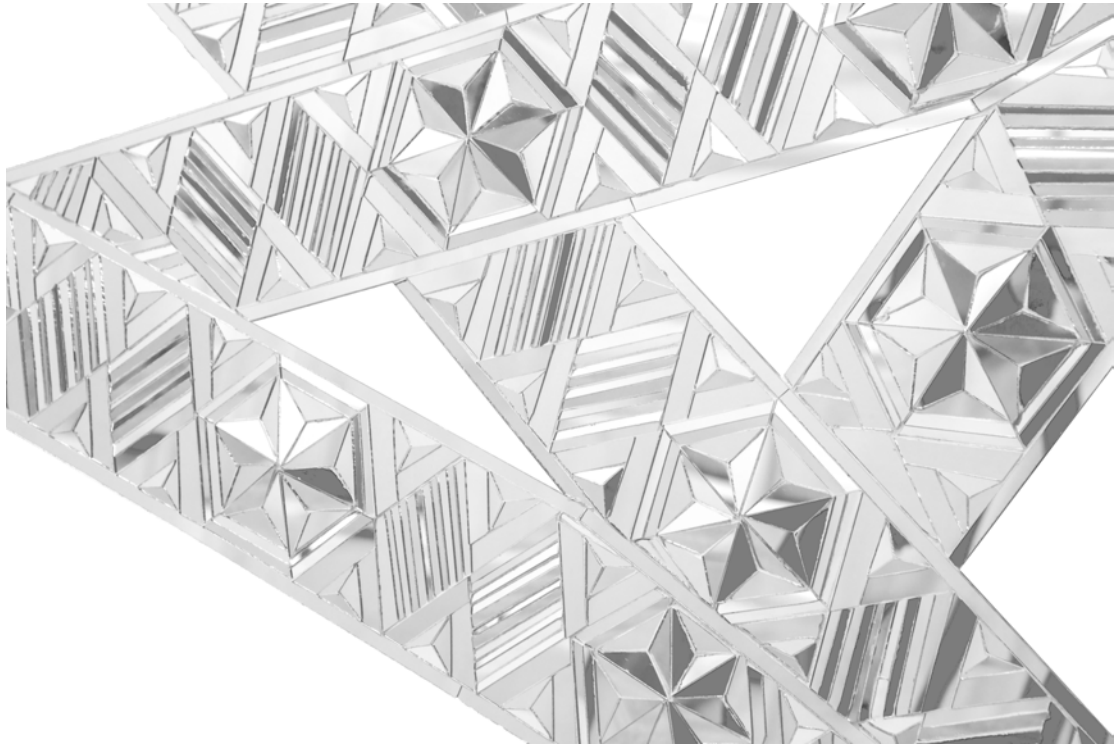
Untitled (Sculpture 2), 2008
Mirror and reverse glass painting on plaster and wood
73 x 73 x 50cm



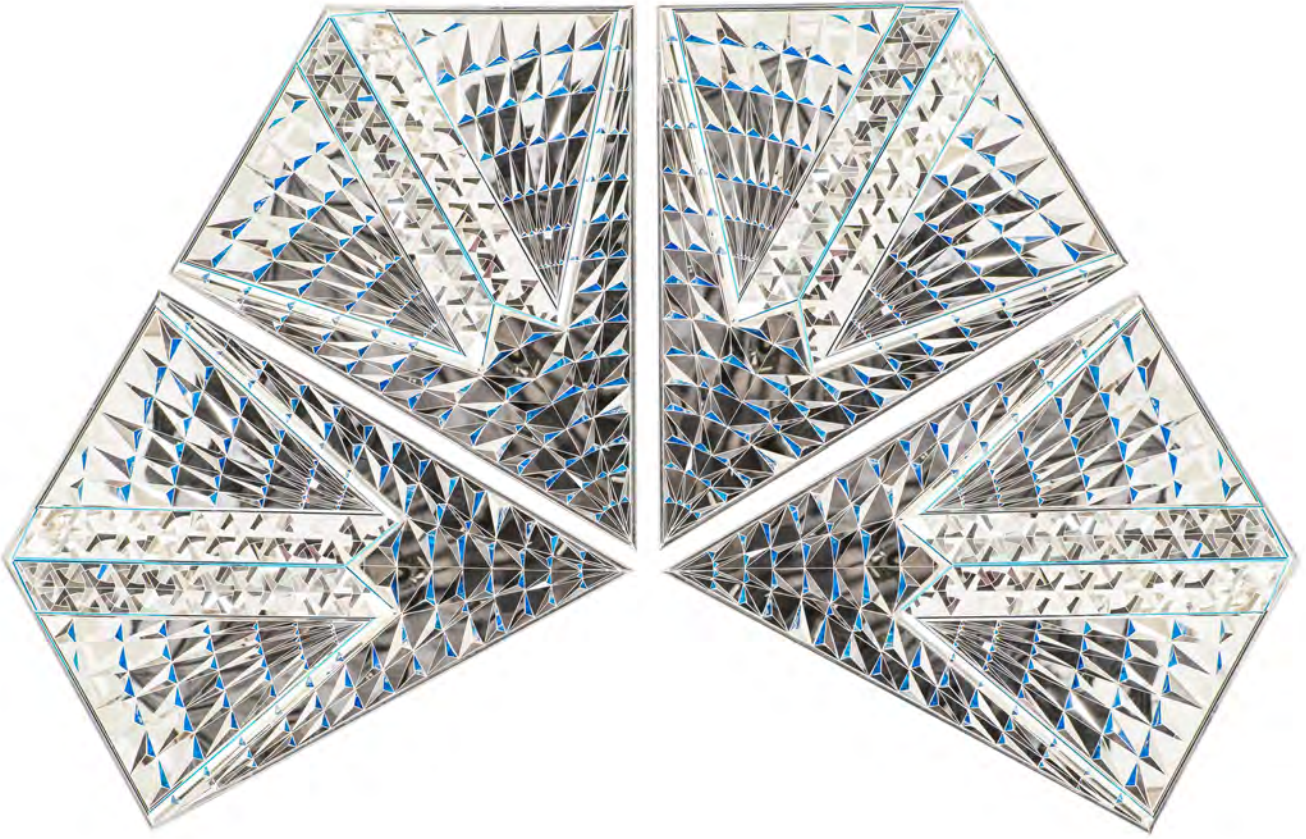
Square and Triangle, 2010
Mirror, reverse-glass painting and plaster on wood
100x160cm



Decagon, 2008
Mirror, plaster natural glue on wood
100cm diameter circle
edition 2of3



Decagon, 2008 (Detail)
Mirror, plaster natural glue on wood
100cm diameter circle
edition 2of3



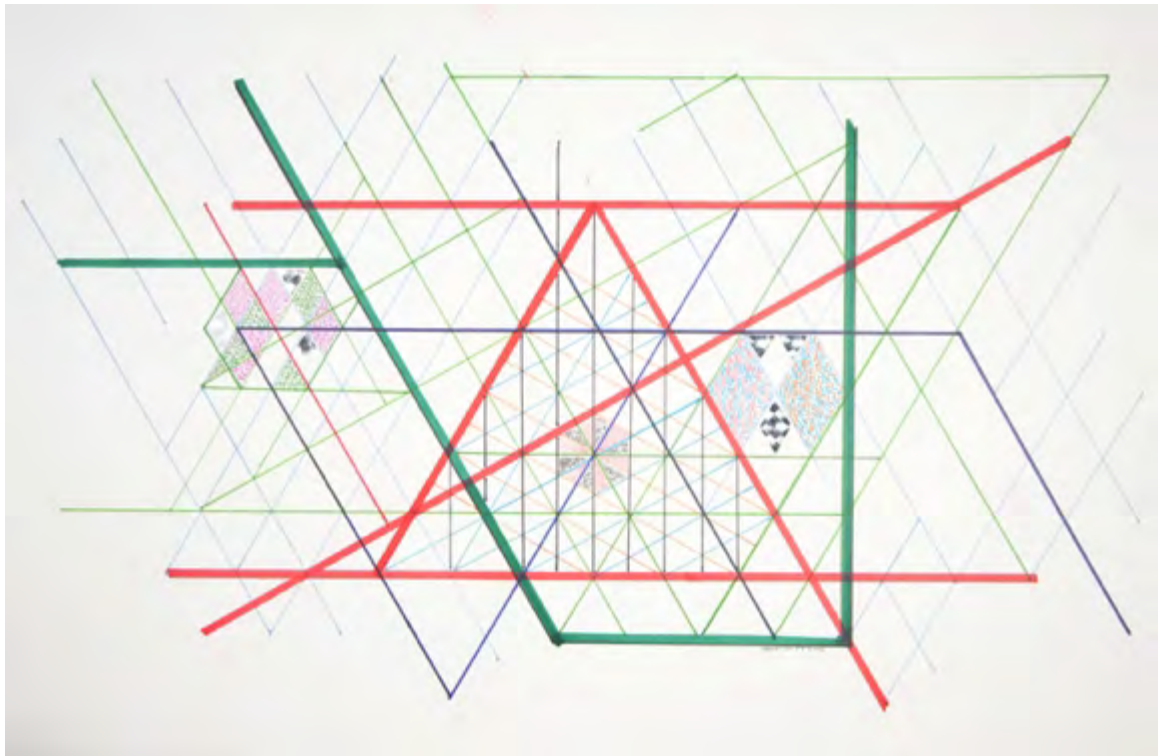
Convertible Series, Group 7-Variation 1, 2010
Mirror and reverse glass painting on plaster and wood
Variable size



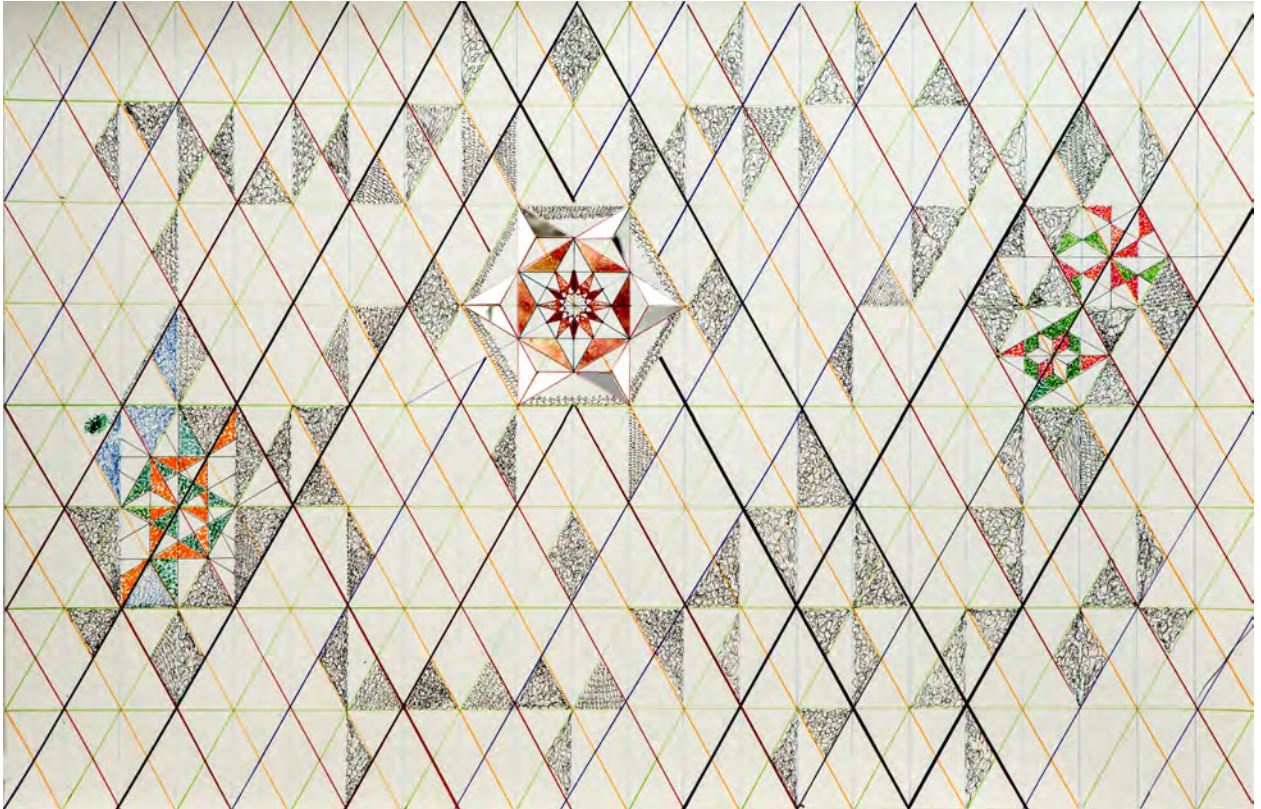
Convertible Series, Group 7-Variation 1, 2010 (Detail)
Mirror and reverse glass painting on plaster and wood
Variable size



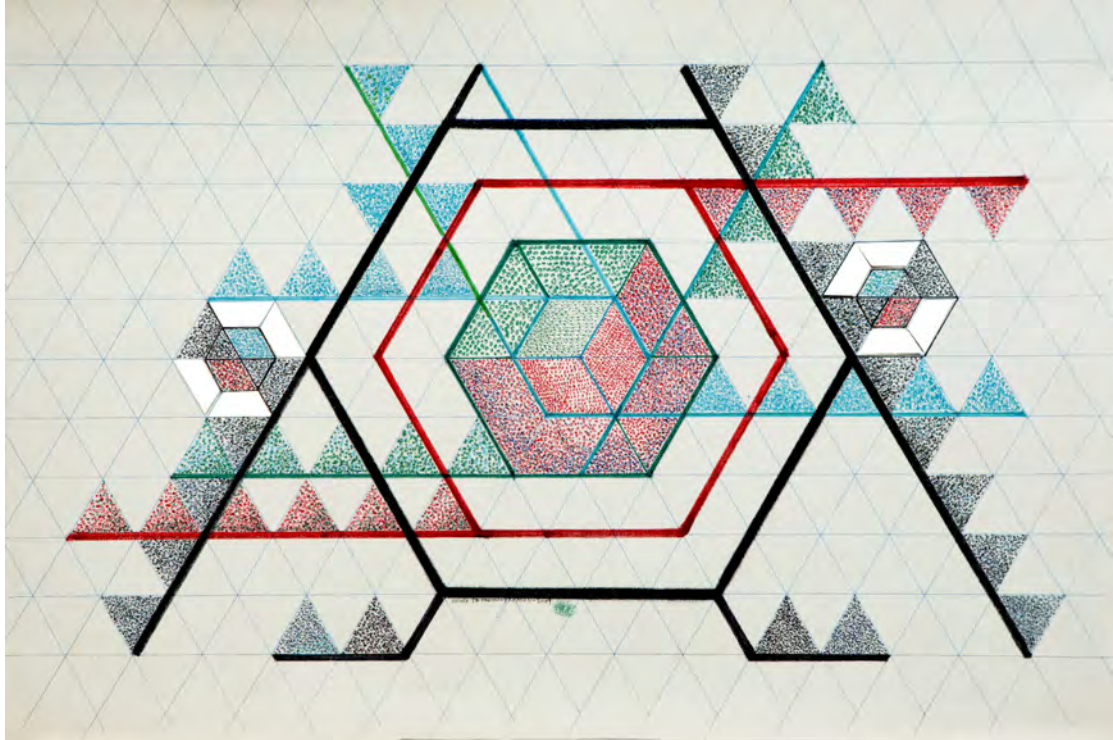
Installation of 9 Elements, 2004
Mirror, Reverse Glass Painting and plaster on wood
Diameter of circle 120cm



Hexagon On Hexagon No.3, 2008
Felt marker, color pencil and mirror on paper
60 x 90 cm



Drawing 1, 2012
Felt marker, color pencil and mirror on paper
50 x 70 cm



Drawing 2, 2009
Felt marker, color pencil and mirror on paper
50 x 70 cm

Monir FarmanFarmaian 2004 - 2013

Essay by Media Farzin

Many of Monir Farmanfarmaian's mirror works look to traditional Iranian architecture for their inspiration. The geometric decorations of mosques and palaces, especially the mirrored surfaces popularized in the seventeenth century, have served as important models. The current exhibition—a selection that spans nearly a decade of Farmanfarmaian's recent work—includes several mirror works that emphasize the decorative device of *muqarnas*. The term describes the descending tiers of arches and niches that have been used in Islamic monuments since the twelfth century. *Muqarnas* marks zones of transition, usually covering the area where the wall meets the ceiling or dome. Its projecting tiers have been compared to stalactites, cascading down to create a glittering surface that appears to be floating weightlessly. The technique became one of the most distinguishing aspects of Islamic architecture in the late medieval and early modern period, from remote mausoleums of Central Asian saints to the star-studded domes of the Alhambra.

Like many aspects of the Islamic geometry, *muqarnas* was considered symbolic of the divine: the Persian poet Hafez often used the term *falak-e muqarnas*, the “decorated sky,” as a metaphor for the dome of heaven. The precise mathematical calculations required to construct these starry skies are considered to represent the cosmos, and by extension, the cosmic order of the world. Any sense of religious sublime, however, requires actually being present in front of the work (or rather, beneath it): unlike tilework or painting, the three-dimensional fragmentation of space in *muqarnas* makes it difficult to photograph, and their true effect can only be perceived by experiencing the play of light over shifting planes.

Farmanfarmaian's recent three-dimensional mirror works do not replicate the structure of *muqarnas*, not exactly, but they do require the same presence to understand their dynamic design. They are based on the concept of an abstract geometry that grows exponentially to cover a zone of transition. One work seems to open from the center like a pair of wings, its triangles and pyramids radiating like mechanical feathers. Others flatten the space, using corners and sharp angles to bend the surface by restructuring the reflections of light. As with *muqarnas*, these works consider the relationship between parts and whole, connecting forms through repetition and logical progression.

The interpretation of traditional Iranian architecture in Farmanfarmaian's work is highly subjective. The cosmic sense of the interplay between organic and abstract, which sets surface against space, is clearly derived from her sources. Her works create pattern out of basic repetitions that are visible in the structure of the work. But the distinctly modern quality of Farmanfarmaian's interlocking forms is due to their independence from any architectural support. Unlike *muqarnas*, they are not intended to transform the identity of a public monument. Rather, they create an order that is all their own, foregrounding the beauty and presence of their source material through the creative adaption of traditional patterns and structures.