

## PRESS RELEASE

MEHDI MOUTASHAR

*CARDINAL POINTS*

5 Oct – 24 Nov 2021

Lawrie Shabibi is excited to announce *Cardinal Points* by French-Iraqi artist Mehdi Moutashar, the artist's first solo at the gallery. Born in Iraq in 1943, Moutashar spent most of his artistic life in his chosen home France, where he moved to in 1967. Very early on, his practice embraced the hard-edge abstraction and Op-Art movements of the 1960's, becoming part of the roster of the legendary Denis René Gallery in Paris, renowned for her geometric and kinetic art programme, where he exhibited alongside artists such as Francois Morellet, Julio Le Park, Viktor Vasarely and Carlos Cruz Diez. At the same time, he never lost sight of his innate Iraqi, Babylonian and Islamic art influences and was guided by their mathematical and geometric investigations as well as their early methods and systems. In recognition of the "contemporary relevance of his work" and ability to demonstrate a "profound understanding of the cultures from which he comes" he was a joint winner of the Jameel Prize 5 (2018).

In *Cardinal Points*, the exhibition's centrepiece is *Trois angles à 135°* (Three Angles at 135°) nicknamed by the artist as "The Spider". This large-scale work is made up [hundreds] of wooden blocks accented with blue and produced by the intersection of three broken lines that spread outwards in six directions. The use of blocks and glimpses of blue reference the architectural traditions of Mesopotamia where mud bricks were highlighted in an ultramarine blue glaze. Moutashar does not think of his floor pieces as sculptures or installations but rather as *Constructions* - constructed as they are of elements within a certain arrangement, in this case a mutable space of broken lines that appear to rotate.

This sense of rotation and dynamism is also apparent in Moutashar's wall-based works. Using only black, white and ultramarine blue, these geometric sculpture-paintings give the illusion of an object in flux - either spinning or moving deliberately towards a target. In his black steel works for example, each black rectangle is folded against itself and arranged as if to trace the points of a spiralling object.

In his other wall-based works he combines rectangles and squares made from steel, wood and elastic, endlessly configuring and reconfiguring them into energetic geometric compositions according to a set of rules of the artist's devising. In all of these works the artist is equally concerned with the voids as with the solid parts, with light and obscurity, leaving the viewer to create their own imagined outlines.

Moutashar's working method and visual language reveal themselves in the titles of the works. Recurring words such *plis* (folds), *mouvement* (movement), *angles* and *carrés* (squares) appear in many of his titles. Though rarely explicitly calligraphic, his works also share certain traits with Arabic calligraphy. Hence, Moutashar's squares recall the *nuqta* (dots) of the *qalam* (reed pen); his black rectangles and lines fold in on themselves, attenuating like calligraphic flourishes; his rule-based approach recalling those laid down by Ibn Muqla, Arab Vizer and calligraphers in the 10th century.

Alongside these are a group of works entitled *Mouvements* (2016) in which Moutashar remakes his lost geometric paintings from the late 1960s. Rather than using paper or canvas, his choice of laser-cut steel, painted either blue or black, allows for very different optical effects.

Mehdi Moutashar's work inhabits a world of angles, folds and in-between spaces; an elusive universe that occupies the space between Iraq, his home of origin, and France, his home of choice.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Born in the city of Hilla in central Iraq, close to the ancient city of Babylon, Mehdi Moutashar graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad, Iraq in 1966 and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France in 1970. He is a former professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1974-2008.

Moutashar has held numerous solo exhibitions, including *Racines carrées*, AL/MA Gallery, Montpellier, France (2021), Hoffmann Gallery, Friedberg, Germany (2019), *Measuring Space*, National Theatre & Albareh Gallery, Bahrain (2017), Victor Sfez Gallery, Paris (2016), AL/MA Gallery, Montpellier, France (2016), Le Petit Temple Gallery, Lasalle, France (2014), Linde Hollinger Gallery, Ladenburg, Germany (2013), AL/MA Gallery, Montpellier, France (2012), and Kleine Museum, Weissenstadt, Germany (2011), amongst others.

In 2018 he won the prestigious Jameel Prize 5 at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) London, sharing the accolade with Marina Tabassum, an architect from Bangladesh. Moutashar received the award for his bold work of minimalist abstraction rooted in Islamic geometry - exhibited as part of the finalists' group show at the V&A (2018), followed by a second iteration at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai (2019).

Other select group exhibitions include *Small is beautiful!*, Galerie Denise René, Paris (2021), *Structure du Silence*, Galerie Denise René, Paris (2021), *Espace Oblique*, Galerie Denise René, Paris (2018), *Bagdad Mon Amour*, Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris (2018), Art Dubai with Albareh Gallery (2017), *Au-delà de la forme: Richard Serra / Mehdi Moutashar*, Palais du Tau, Reims (2016), *Hommage au Carré noir de Malevitch*, Musée Vasarely, Budapest (2015), Galerie Deleuze-Rochetin, Arpaillargues (2011), and *François Morellet et Mehdi Moutashar*, Institut des Cultures de l'Islam, Paris (2010).

His work is held in public collections worldwide, including: Fonds Régional Art Contemporain Provence Alpes, Côte d'Azur; Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Kleine Museum, Weissenstadt, Germany; Montbéliard Museum, France; Conseil général des Bouches-du-Rhône, France; Klingspor Museum der Stadt, Offenbach, Germany; Fine Arts Museum, Cholet, France; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; National Gallery of Fine Arts, Ammann, Jordan; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Modern Art Museum, Tunis; and, National Modern Art Museum, Baghdad, Iraq.

Moutashar lives and works in Arles, France.

## **ABOUT THE GALLERY**

Lawrie Shabibi was founded in 2010 and opened its doors in early 2011 in Alserkal Avenue, located within the light industrial warehouse district of Al Quoz in Dubai. Following the relocation of several renowned galleries, this quickly became the hub of contemporary art in the region. We support the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists, with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa, and more recently diasporic artists within the UK. We have also organized art historical exhibitions, working with an older generation of artists from the Middle East and North Africa region. In October 2020 we held our first exhibition at our London outpost in Cromwell Place.

## FOR GALLERY INFORMATION

[lawrieshabibi.com](http://lawrieshabibi.com)

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