

Rasheed Araeen *In the Midst of Darkness*

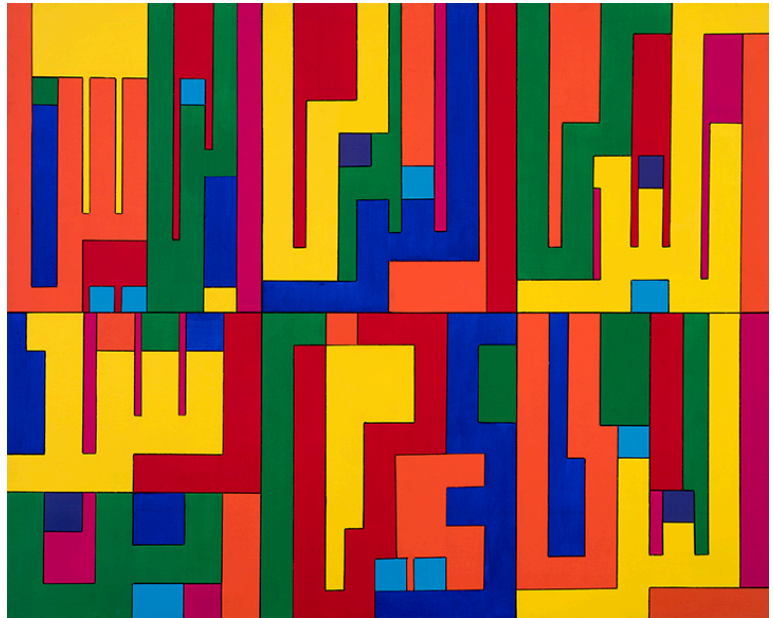
Debut Virtual Exhibition: April 16 – May 23, 2020

Hosted by Kunstmatrix:

<https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/629060/rasheed-araeen-in-the-midst-of-darkness>

Aicon Art New York is proud to announce *Rasheed Araeen – In the Midst of Darkness*, a major exhibition of the artist's recent works that constitute his fourth solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition also marks the gallery's foray into virtual exhibitions, an exciting space that offers new ways of engaging with art, accessible the world over.

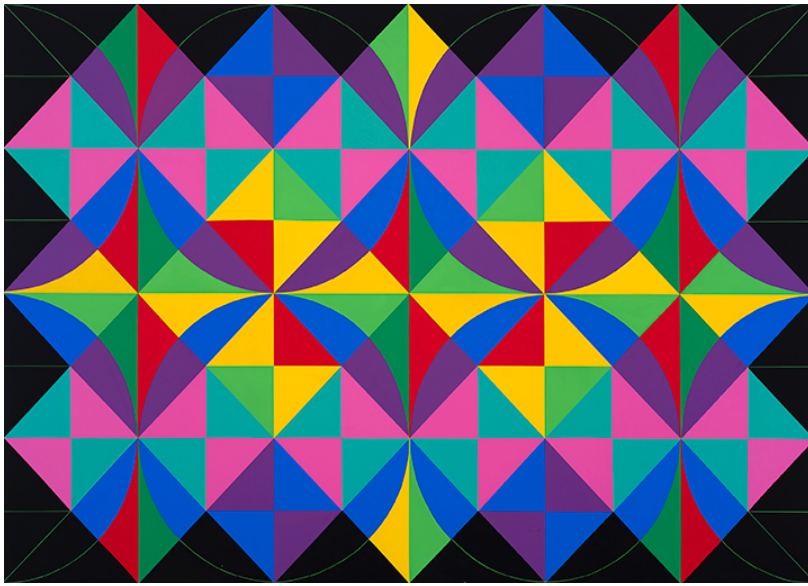
It is fitting to debut our virtual exhibitions with a pioneering voice such as artist Rasheed Araeen's - a voice for alternative and Non-Western interpretations of Minimalist and Conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s, outside of the typically referenced canon. The artist introduced a lattice structure into the oeuvre of Minimalism, a visual language that had come independently to Araeen at the same time as it was taking root in New York; although, in Araeen's case, it was linked back to his background in structural engineering. As art critic Jean Fisher has noted the key differences between Araeen's articulation of Minimalism and that of the New Yorkers: "There are, however, important distinctions to be made between the Minimalist cube and Araeen's Structures, which to my mind resides in the difference between an instrumental, abstract-logical regulation of the world and an organic one." This approach of creating stable but open structures by finding inspiration in nature and the classical elements – earth, fire, air and water – is at the centre of Araeen's innovative practice.



Rasheed Araeen, *In the Midst of Darkness* 1, 2012-13, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 55 in.

Araeen has recently enjoyed significant institutional support, receiving overdue attention for his international career. A major retrospective of his work toured the world starting at the **Van Abbemuseum** in the Netherlands before making its way to the **Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO)**, Geneva in Switzerland, and the **BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art**, Gateshead, UK, before concluding at the **Garage Museum of Contemporary Art**, Moscow, Russia. The current exhibition brings together a series of early calligraphic and cruciform works that had formed an important part of this retrospective tour. These works are juxtaposed with more recent geometric paintings from the *Opus* series – an attempt to see how the artist's early engagement with geometric form relates to his ongoing practice.

In the early 80s, Araeen began combining photographic images along with painted green panels to form an assemblage. The resulting image was that of a cross thus christening the body of work as the cruciform series. The images – often raw, and grainy – exemplified the tensions between East and West, particularly after the Gulf Wars. The cross – a reference to Christianity – paired with the blank unyielding 'consciously Islamic' green picture plane, opened up a space for enquiry into our value systems. In a similar vein, the calligraphic paintings reference famous Islamic thinkers of the Abbasid era (8th to 13th century) and



Rasheed Araeen, From the *OPUS* series, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 104.75 in.

encode their names in complicated geometric structures. The relevance of medieval Arabic philosophy to Araeen's artistic concerns became more evident to the artist in his later years, though he still warns against basing the interpretation of his work on his supposed heritage. 'The symmetry of geometry in Islamic art offers, in my understanding, an allegory for human equality (Musawaat), something that humanity now desperately needs,' Araeen has said.

In 2017, Araeen contributed to **documenta 14** in Athens by presenting *Shamiyaana – Food for Thought: Thought for Change*. The

project, inspired by the shamiyaana, a traditional Pakistani wedding tent, situated itself as a functioning restaurant aimed at fostering equality and fellowship between participants. The vibrant canopies are traditionally distilled to a few colors and geometric patterns, two features that seamlessly incorporate themselves into Araeen's artistic practice and influenced his subsequent series of paintings titled *Opus*. In this collection of paintings, Araeen deviates from his open, modular sculptures and uses symmetry – a unifying theme in his work – to represent greater conceptual ideas that are otherwise invisible. Each painting consists of a grid tipped on the diagonal and while the colors of the central patterns vary considerably, the compositional rules remained fixed. The series of work exemplifies the shift in Araeen's latest work that delves into his ideas of Islamic art in relation to the notions of twentieth-century abstraction.

Rasheed Araeen has participated in several important group exhibitions including the **57th Venice Biennale** and **documenta 14 – Universe in Universe**, staged in Kassel and Athens respectively. Araeen has previously had solo shows at institutional spaces such as the Ikon Gallery (1987), the South London Gallery (1994) and the Serpentine Gallery (1996). In all, mainstream critical discussion of the early part of his career up until the early 1970s was less prevalent, until 2007 when the Tate London purchased and displayed his works from the late 1960s. In 2010, Aicon Gallery, London hosted the first major retrospective of Araeen's work in over a decade, paving the way for a new string of exhibitions and critical attention. In 2014, Araeen's work was a prominent feature in the exhibition *Other Primary Structures* at the **Jewish Museum** in New York, a long-overdue exploration of Minimalism outside its art-historical canonically Western context. His work is also included in the collections of the **Museum of Modern Art**, **Metropolitan Museum of Art** and **Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation**. The recent re-hang of MoMA's galleries has seen his work included in step with artists like Donald Judd and Eva Hesse. Challenging the roots of ethnic barriers, neo-colonialism and imperialist attitudes, Araeen's work and texts are as relevant today as they were when first scribed.

Please contact Aicon Art (dheeya@aicongallery.com) for more information.

At Aicon Art we take the health and well-being of our community, clients, and associates very seriously. Like you, we're closely monitoring the quickly developing effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, we will practice social distancing. The gallery is open by appointment at this time. In light of this, we have revitalized our digital presence and we will continue to announce our digital programing – on our Instagram [@aiconart](https://www.instagram.com/aiconart) and our virtual exhibitions - for the upcoming months. Stay tuned and stay safe.