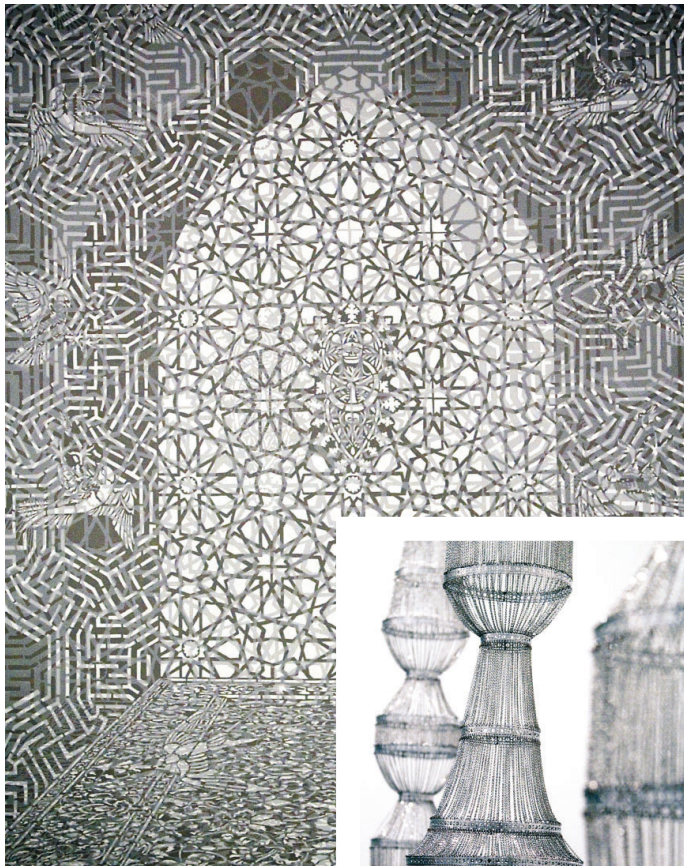


## Persian prowess

Al Quoz's galleries are showcasing the work of two pioneering yet refreshingly gracious Iranian artists. *Nyree Barrett* meets the women and their works



### Afruz Amighi

**Exhibition: 'Angels in Combat' at Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde, until October 21**

It's not often an artwork transfixes upon first sight, but Afruz Amighi's works have the ability to do exactly that. The winner of the Jameel Prize (the Turner Prize of the Islamic world), her current series, 'Angels in Combat', features a pencil drawing of refugee tents concealing a human figure, alongside chain lamps (above right) that mimic the shape of rockets. But most stunning are the huge woven polyethylene wall hangings (above).

No photo can do the works justice. Light shines through the cut-out patterns to create a three-dimensional element, and the physical work is just a vector for the real art – the shadow on the wall. Taking up to two months per panel, creating the pieces is a painstaking process: Amighi uses



a stencil burner (essentially a heated pencil) to craft the intricate patterns. She says she has never slipped and ruined a work at this stage because she plans the pattern so intensively.

Amighi moved from Iran to New York when she was three, yet the aesthetic of her works is Persian, perhaps because her father sold carpets while she was growing up. Spend time staring at the pieces, however, and you'll notice hypodermic needles entwined with vines, hazard symbols as flowers, and angels holding machine guns. The medical symbols may be linked to the fact that she was very ill when designing the pieces; the gun-toting angels address the duality and fundamentally violent aspect of life. Who knew a representation of violence could be so beautiful?

### Golnaz Fathi

**Exhibition: 'Controlled Chaos' at The Third Line, until October 21**

Today in Tehran, colourful, subversive slogans often appear on the street, stabbing at the system. Yet before long the establishment slashes over them, usually in black. Although Tehran-based Golnaz Fathi is careful not to make her work political, seeing this layering in her day-to-day life has undeniably influenced her latest series of works. 'To me, the walls in the city were pieces of art,' she notes.

We last spoke to Fathi in 2008 to discuss her 'Sleepless Nights' series; dark, monochrome pieces boasting the occasional dash of crimson.

The new series, 'Controlled Chaos', is contrastingly colourful (bar the stunning black-and-white light boxes), with rich blues, yellows and splashes of red anchoring the canvas, creating a base for the calligraphic scrawls.

'Why colour now?' we ask. 'Whatever comes, I accept. It's that easy,' she replies. 'I woke up one morning and thought: I should buy colour paint. So I did.' But is she happier now? Yes – knock on wood! she laughs, with the smile of a very content woman. 'It's a contrast, though. My personal life is better, but my country's situation is worse. That's why I called the series 'Controlled Chaos'. Yet ask Fathi too much about



politics and she'll gently deflect the questions, massaging the conversation toward aesthetics. Perhaps it's because, unlike so many of her contemporaries, she actually lives in Iran.

Though her work is deemed calligraphic, there is no recognisable script on the page. She doesn't plan a work, she just starts sketching, echoing the practice of 'siaah masgh', the tireless hand warm-up that a professional calligrapher goes through to prep their muscles. In the end, Fathi's works may appear figurative, or may be entirely abstract, but it's key to realise that she has extracted the art of calligraphy but left behind the meaning.

