

Introduction

The timing of this *Compendium of Ismaili Artists*, the idea for which was first announced in 2012, is opportune considering that the Aga Khan Museum was officially opened in the presence of His Highness the Aga Khan on Friday, September 12, 2014, followed by Museum's public opening a few days later on Thursday, September 18. The Museum is an exciting time for artists and art lovers, and it is my sincerest hope that outstanding visual Ismaili artists will collaborate and submit proposals to the Museum to have their works displayed in the superb temporary gallery space located on the upper floor of the Museum.

The preview version of this compendium, published on September 1, 2014, introduced nineteen Ismaili artists from numerous countries. This first official edition, for simplicity I will call it Version 2014.1, follows a very satisfactory response from many more Ismaili artists who learnt about the compendium during the past month. Henceforth, a revised version will be published at the beginning of every month, and will be referred to as 2014.2, and so on. In 2015, the numbering will be 2015.1, 2015.2 and so on.

The internet has made artists and their works more accessible worldwide. Many are coming forward, often in joint collaborative efforts to showcase their work in exhibitions. A number of Vancouver Ismaili artists, with support from the local Ismaili community and other art organizations, have taken a lead that should be emulated at other centres. The incredible output from Ismaili youth during the 2007/2008 Golden Jubilee Celebrations of His Highness the Aga Khan was inspiring and demonstrated the rich artistic talent in the Ismaili Jamat, but it was showcased only briefly and never displayed again. The internet would have been the ideal setting for making their noble efforts available to a worldwide audience in the form of a permanent gallery on the community website.

It is my hope that a guide such as this will help bring the worldwide Ismaili artists together, and raise their profile both within and outside the Ismaili community. Through a growing network, artists can also share ideas to produce unique works of

art for the Diamond Jubilee of His Highness the Aga Khan 2017. The same year marks the 150th anniversary of Canada. How fitting and inspiring it would be for their works to be shown at the Aga Khan Museum!

It is my hope that the number of artists profiled here will increase significantly over the next 12 months. I take this opportunity to thank all the artists who submitted profiles for inclusion in this first edition, and look forward to many more artists coming forward in the coming weeks and months.

My simple request to artists not yet represented is this: Please send your profile and an image, and I will be delighted to include them in the next monthly revisions. Then, as this compendium expands, together we can work towards refining and improving this publication, with a view to one day, Inshallah, producing a superb print edition.

Please communicate with me via my email address Simerg@aol.com.

Thank you

Abdulmalik Merchant

October 1, 2014.

Ottawa, CANADA.

I. THE ARTISTS AND THEIR WORKS

Javid Jah, **Zulfiqar Ali Khan**, **Shariffa Keshavjee**,
Shamim Subzali, **Shirin N Malik**, **Karim Muhammad**,
Alnoor Nathani, **Sher Nasser**, **Nilofar Kotadia–Sohail**,
Akbar Kanji, **Naznin Virji–Babul**, **Ataullah Asmate**,
Nizar Macnojia, **Alia Noormohamed**, **Azmina Kassam**,
Taslim Samji, **Hamida Madhani**, **Khatun Jannohamed**,
Laila Devji, **Mahmood Bharwani**, **Mehboob Dewji**,
Nadir Mackwani, **Bahadurali (Badur) Pyarali Jaffer**,
Narmin Hemnani, **Nazmu Mamdani**, **Noorin Fazal**,
Rubina Rajan, **Shahira Patni–Tejpar**, **Nurin Merchant**,
Yasmin Pyarali Karim, **Zainab Khuwaja**, **Sonny Sultani**,
Shazia’Ayn Babul

Javid Jah

TORONTO, CANADA



Javid Jah, *Communa 12*, aerosol on concrete, 33ft x 14ft (at City of Medellin, Columbia)

Javid Jah is a visual artist with a history in mural making and a future in architecture. Known by his alias, JAH, the artist has been painting murals since 2000, creating graffiti art murals in his hometown Toronto as well as internationally, including New York City, Mumbai, Lahore, Johannesburg, Dar-es-Salaam, and Bogota, Colombia. Inspired by relationship between graffiti and Arabic calligraphy, Javid has produced works for a variety of Islamic organizations, creating "calligraffiti" artworks on walls and canvases as well as exhibiting in some of the premier urban art festivals and galleries in North America. He will be creating murals in Venezuela this October, and showcasing new work at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto, in September 2014. He has also recently completed a Masters in Architecture at the University of Toronto and his first assignments include renovating a 100 year old home and converting a warehouse into an Islamic community centre.

Zulfiqar Ali Khan

RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN



Zulfiqar Ali Khan, *Forever Alone*, watercolour, 14in x 17in

Zulfiqar Ali Khan hails from the Gilgit-Balistan region of Pakistan, and is currently in Rawalpindi where he is a medical student pursuing MBBS at the Rawalpindi Medical College. His love for art began at the age of ten when he started to sketch and paint. He finds that art connects him to the Almighty Allah who is "Al-Musawwir" (One who Fashions and gives distinct shape and form).

Shariffa Keshavjee

NAIROBI, KENYA



Shariffa Keshavjee, *Lion*, watercolour

A multi-talented individual, Nairobi resident Shariffa Keshavjee expresses her artistic gift with colour through porcelain, gauche, silk, oils and ink. Her paintings are on the walls at the Aga Khan University Hospital as well as at the Diamond Trust Bank in Nairobi. She also runs an expression class where friends come and explore various mediums and subjects. She gets her inspiration from the *chakra* colours within and the colours of nature

Shamim Subzali

LONDON, UK



Shamim Subzali, Girl with a Purple Background,
oil on canvas, appx. 16in x 16in

Always interested in drawing and painting, Shamim Subzali finally began painting properly about ten years ago. Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Shamim has lived in England since the age of eight.

Shirin N. Malik

HOUSTON, USA



Shirin Malik, *Conference of the Birds*

Originally from London, UK, Shirin N. Malik's passion for freelance art was rekindled during her years at the Houston Baptist University where she graduated with a BSc degree in Biology. An independent investment entrepreneur as well as a certified jeweller by profession, she also practices art in Texas where she now resides. Through her pencil art work she examines the parallels that exist between numerous spiritual journeys described in mystical works. Lately, her interest has broadened to include faux paintings.

Karim Muhammad

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

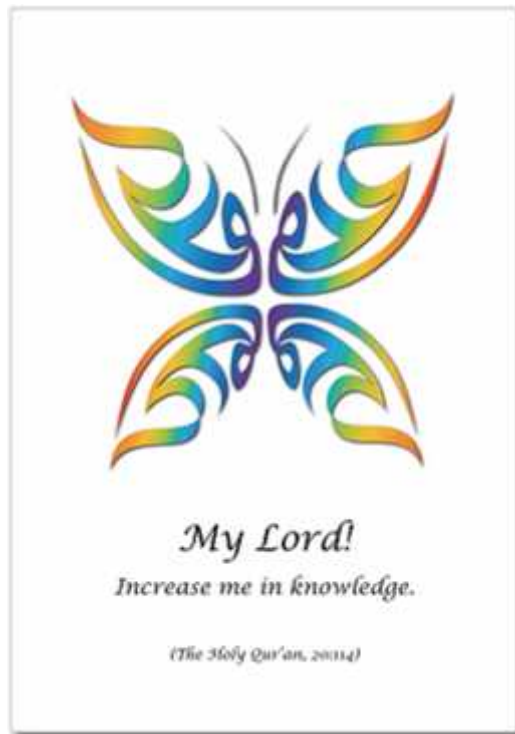


Kareem Muhammad, *Aga Khan III*, low poly illustration

Kareem Muhammad from Hunza, Pakistan, has been residing in Islamabad for the last 6 years practising graphics and publication design. He has a degree in communication design from "National College of Arts," a renowned art college located in the city of Lahore. Being a student of graphic design, Kareem loves to explore his creative abilities within the field. He specializes in creating digital illustrations along with designing publications for the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) in Islamabad. Besides digital art, he is skilled as a sculptor and a photographer.

Alnoor Nathani

LONDON, UK



Alnoor Nathani. *Ilm (Knowledge).*

MDF art box, 34in x 24in

Originally from Uganda, Alnoor Nathani is a London based Graphic Designer. He has always had an interest in all kinds of creative activities ranging from conventional art to digital design. Alnoor's artwork was first displayed during the Visual Arts Exhibition in the UK celebrating the Golden Jubilee of His Highness the Aga Khan. Inspired by ayats from the Holy Qur'an, hadiths and Ismaili ginanic tradition, as well as contemporary art and design, Alnoor aims to make Islamic Art accessible to a wider audience by the use of English in his artwork. Alnoor's work has been exhibited at the Ismaili Centre in London, and also at various Jamatkhanas.

Sher Nasser

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Sher Nasser, *Dignity*, oils on board

A resident of British Columbia, Sher Nasser was born in Zanzibar. Thus her paintings are of home that used to be and of her adopted home, Canada. Colours of nature fascinate her and when life afforded some precious time in the busy schedule of lifestyle changes of a new country and caring for the family's welfare, she was blessed in discovering visual arts. Sher paints in oils, acrylics and watercolours and loves bright happy colours, the sunshine and the shadows, the busy people and animals in their natural surroundings. Although the blessings of painting came to her much later in life than she would have liked, Sher feels that she is very much blessed.

Nilofar Kotadia–Sohail

KARACHI, PAKISTAN



Nilofar Kotadia–Sohail, *Phool (flower)*, print on paper, wasli (laser cut),

January 2013, 30in x 40in

Nilofar Sohail of Karachi, Pakistan, has been a keen artist since childhood. She grew up to pursue a career in art by completing a Bachelor of Fine Art from Karachi and then working as an artist. She specialized in miniature painting, a traditional art form of South Asia. To her, miniature painting teaches discipline and patience. She is also experimenting with mix media techniques. Her art work has been exhibited in a few art galleries in Karachi.

Akbar Kanji

TORONTO, CANADA



Akbar Kanji, *The closer you come the more you will see him*, digital

Originally from Bangladesh, Akbar Kanji's childhood dream of becoming an artist was considerably enhanced with the training that he received from numerous Pakistani artists including the late Ismaili artist Gulgee, Rabia Zubairi, Talat Hussein and others. He resides in Toronto where he works as a graphic designer. In the sphere of digital art, he has produced an astonishing portrait of Mawlana Hazar Imam, His Highness the Aga Khan, which depicts the Imam's entire life through hundreds of thumbnails.

Naznin Virji-Babul

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Naznin Virji-Babul. *Woman Making Roti*, 2003, terracota, appx. 11 in.

Naznin Virji-Babul of Vancouver is a neuroscientist and sculptor. People often ask her if she sculpts as a “hobby” or to “relax” – and she responds that she does not *because relaxing makes her tense*. She sculpts for the same reason she does science – to find beauty and meaning in life. For Naznin, the practice of science and art involve parallel journeys of discovery – journeys full of struggle and passion to understand the meaning of patterns in nature, or to create and reflect the meaning of nature.

Ataullah Asmate

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN



Ataullah Asmate, Waves off the Moon, watercolour

Ataullah Asmate spends his time between Kabul, Afghanistan, and Ottawa, Canada. His interest in arts goes back to his childhood when he started sketching using pencils. He then took an active interest in calligraphy and later started painting using oil and watercolour as the medium. His inspiration is nature, especially where he senses various forms of waves, and many of his paintings are centered around the meaning of life, where Allah is central.

Nizar Macnojia

HOUSTON, USA



Nizar Macnojia, Morales

Born in India in 1964, Nizar Macnojia's interest in art was sparked at a very early age. In fact, he was only nine years old when he sketched His Highness the Aga Khan III, and entered his first art competition a year later. After college graduation, he worked as a graphic designer in Karachi where he was introduced to watercolour, oil painting, and palette knife techniques by friends who were artists at the Fine Art Institute in Karachi. In 1983, he held his first exhibition in Karachi. Since then, he has created many commissioned art works in all different sizes for commercial and home use. In 1984, Nizar immigrated to the USA where he now resides in Houston, Texas. He currently concentrates on Islamic calligraphy, and portraits in oil, and watercolour.

Alia Noormohamed

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Alia Noormohamed

Alia Noormohamed grew up in a household with both parents being designers. Through their encouragement, Alia was able to nurture and explore her creativity through art and design, which led her to scholarships and awards for her high school art work. She has been commissioned to do art work for several hotels as well as private homes across Canada. She has participated in local exhibitions in numerous cities since 1999, including a well-attended solo entitled “Light” in Ottawa in 2006. Alia also designs furniture, light fixtures, photography and clothing. In 2007 she received the ADEX award for her coffee table and lamp design, and in 2013 won the NorthWest Design Award for contemporary room design for a home in North Vancouver. Her works have been published in numerous magazines and featured on television.

Azmina Kassam

NAIROBI, KENYA



Azmina Kassam. Masai Woman 2

Vancouver resident Azmina Kassam, originally of Nairobi, Kenya, has been engaged in art since the age of 12. She studied portraiture and iconography at the Vancouver Academy of Art, as well as pursued mixed and charcoal drawing. Dedicated and disciplined in her field, she feels that it is an honour and privilege to be an artist.

Taslim Samji

VANVOUVER, CANADA



Taslim Samji, *Reunited*, 12in x 36in

As a young girl Taslim Samji fell madly in love with paint and colour. The very act of transferring the paint onto the canvas connects her to a place of freedom and unlimited possibilities.

She received her Bachelor of Arts from University of British Columbia and is now finishing up a Certificate in Fine Arts at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. She is continuously exploring different materials, techniques and methodologies. The process of creating helps Taslim to better understand the world she exists in.

Taslim is an active member of the local art community, and believes strongly in encouraging and inspiring others along their journey.

Hamida Madhani

ATLANTA, USA



Hamida Madhani, *The Majestic Horse*, mixed media on canvas, 20in x 22in

Hamida Madhani is an Atlanta, USA, based contemporary artist. Her fascination with art began at a very young age which led her to pursue her education in visual communication and digital art. She seeks to create powerful images that express her soul while embodying the essence of her subject. Through the medium of art, she also celebrates the beauty and richness of her cultural heritage as well promotes an understanding of Islam. Although she works with acrylics, ink, canvas and fabric she seems to be drawn towards the digital one much more than others.

Khatun Janmohamed

LONDON, UK



Khatun Janmohamed

Originally from Nairobi, Kenya, Khatun Janmohamed settled in England in 1968. She took a keen interest in painting, and developed her skills in watercolour and acrylic by taking classes.

Khatun, now 70, continues to paint which shows her love for art!

Laila Devji

VANCOUVER, CANADA



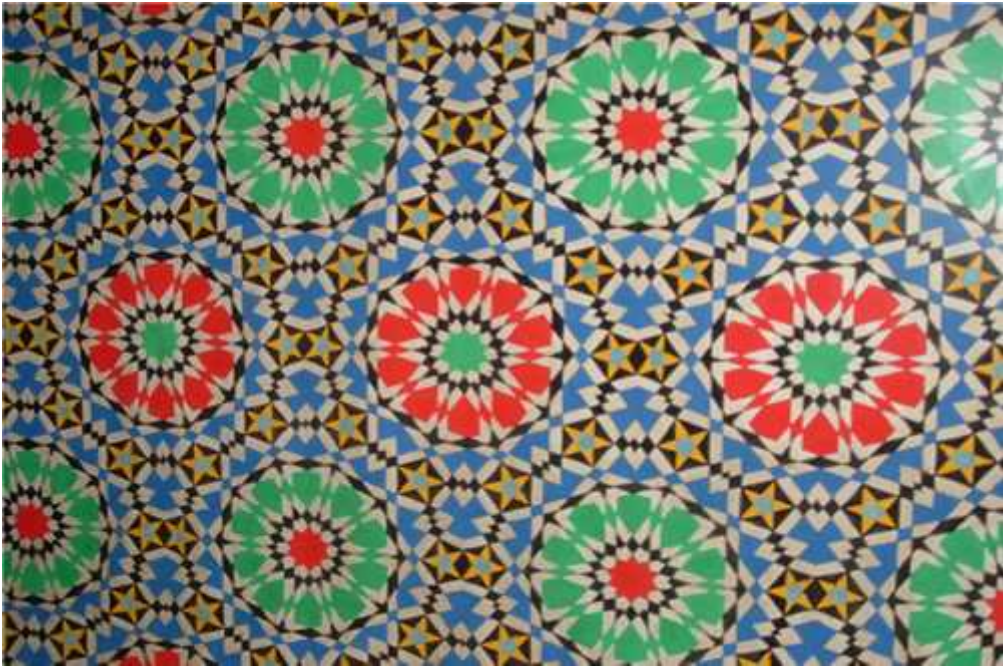
Laila Devji, *Fannah*, acrylic, 24in x 20in, 2013

Laila Devji is a Vancouver based artist who partners with acrylic paint to explore questions and understandings surrounding Sufism and change. Her work has been displayed at Burnaby Lake Jamatkhana and at the Round House Community Centre in Vancouver.

Laila's favourite tool is the paintbrush which she uses to bring images to life. She finds inspiration from her dreams, nature and that which surrounds her. Having returned later in her life to art as an expression of her voice and creativity, Laila finds much joy in each individual stroke.

Mahmood Bharwani

UNITED KINGDOM

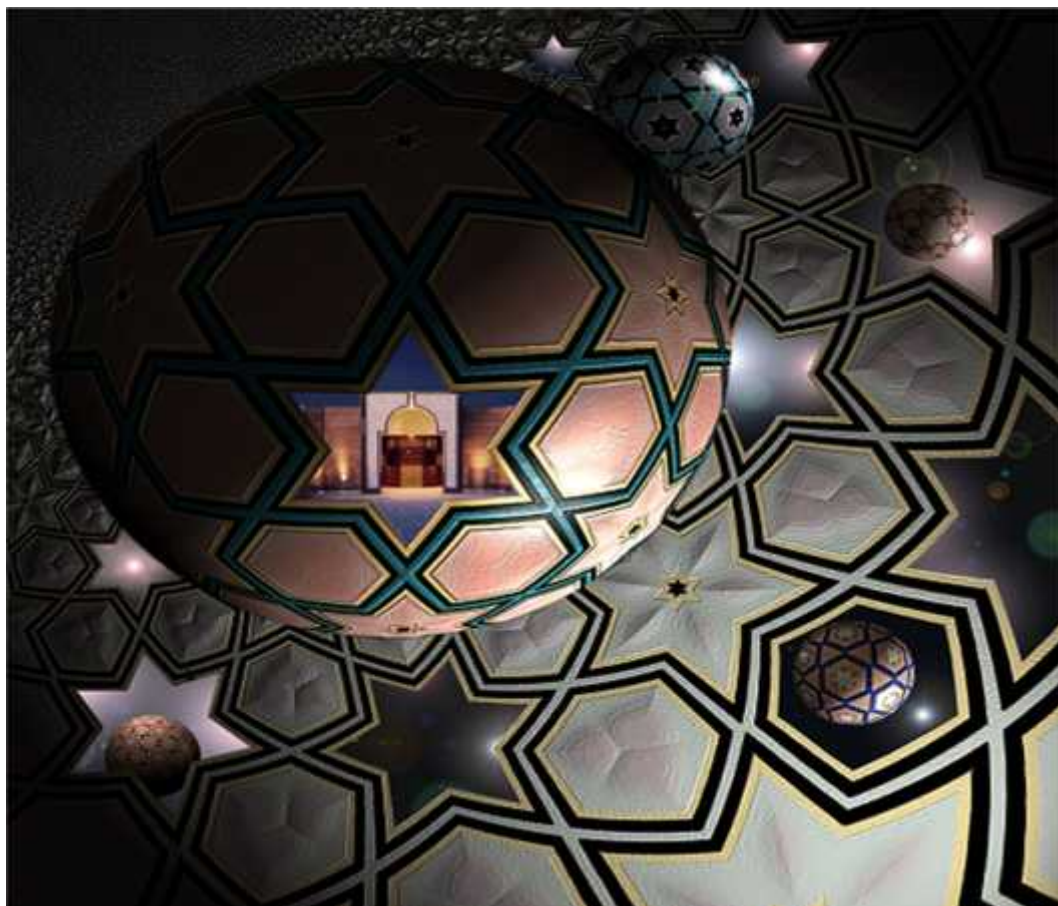


Mahmood Bharwani

Originally from Mengo, near Kampala, Uganda, Mahmood Bharwani, now in his fifties, arrived in the United Kingdom during the exodus of 1972 and settled in Scotland with his family. The natural beauty and landscape deeply connected him with the Divine, and he introduced himself to art, first sketching with pencils and then working with acrylic and watercolour. He then combined his interest in art and design with Engineering Drawing. His art works won him prizes in school. His other interests include astronomy and writing spiritual poetry. He aspires to create an Ismaili Astronomy Club.

Mehboob Dewji

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Mehboob Dewji, *Diversity*, digital

Born in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, Vancouver resident Mehboob Dewji has a huge hobby of creating digital Islamic patterns using Photoshop. His designs are inspired by the Alhambra. He starts with just one straight line, gives it a texture and colour and uses filters to create geometric patterns. Again, using different colours and texture, he adds layers of different geometric shapes to create a “tile” that he uses to make a seamless pattern. These patterns are then used to create backgrounds and spheres using several different shapes and colours.

Nadir Mackwani

PARIS, FRANCE



Nadir Mackwani, *Alamut*, jigsaw puzzle

Nadir Mackwani of Paris, France, has always been interested in Islamic civilization and arts. Within this framework, he sought to combine his extracurricular interest in jigsaw puzzles with his field of study. Therefore, he set out in search for puzzles featuring Islamic monuments and paintings, and has over the past few years created a series of remarkable high quality jigsaw puzzles so that children and adults alike develop knowledge, admiration and appreciation for Islamic arts and architecture in an entertaining way.

Bahadurali (Badur) Pyarali Jaffer

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Bahadurali Pyarali Bandali Jaffer, *African Ladies grinding food*, Oil on Canvas, 24in x 36in

Badur Jaffer's artistic talent became apparent at an early age whilst attending the Aga Khan School in Kampala, Uganda. He credits his artistic ability and flair for colour to his paternal grandmother who, upon arriving in Kampala, collected fauna and flowers to make natural dyes from which she created colourful fabrics. The family home in Kampala became the Fairway Hotel, where Badur's Wall Mural received considerable television exposure. Residing in Vancouver, with his wife Gillian, since 1974, and although a Travel & Tour Operator by profession, Badur continues with his Art, painting in all mediums but focusing primarily on African themes. As well as private commissions and sales, he has had several Shows in Galleries, both in Vancouver and Seattle, and upon presenting his work to a company in Connecticut with regard to Limited Editions, he was described as a 'Winner'.

Narmin Hemnani

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Narmin Hemnani, *Remembrance of Allah*

Vancouver resident Narmin Hemnani's artistic inspiration comes from living in a city with access to the Pacific Ocean, the mountains, the whales in Tofino and the rich forests of BC. Living in this city and the province of British Columbia has allowed Narmin to experience nature and the abundant creations of Allah. Many of her artistic works are based on the Zucchini plant. The plant's bright yellow-orange flowers break open in the morning and uproar to the attention of the pollinating bees. The bees respond drunkenly to the bright display, flying from male to female flowers and pollinating intensely.

Nazmu Mamdani

OTTAWA, CANADA



Nazmu Mamdani, *Yellow Shafted Flicker (Woodpecker family)*

Ottawa based veterinarian, Nazmu Mamdani, originally of Mbale, Uganda, took up serious painting after watching artists on Younge Street, in Toronto during the summer of his first year in Canada. In later years he reverted to painting wildlife, which came quite naturally, being not only in the business of but also having a keen eye for the anatomy and behaviour of animals out in the wild.

Noorin Fazal

BURNABY, CANADA



Noorin Fazal, *Cycles of Film*

Noorin Fazal's engagement with literary, visual, and performing arts began in early childhood, and she has served as a featured artist and curator for a variety of exhibits in Vancouver, Toronto and London, UK. With a preferred medium of acrylic on canvas, Noorin creates abstract, textured and monochromatic representations of concept, emotion and experience. Her inspiration comes from an understanding of art and creativity as spiritual expression, articulation of identity, and foundation for interfaith dialogue.

Rubina Rajan

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Rubina Rajan, *Indian Kana*

Currently based in Vancouver, Rubina Rajan spent her formative years in Kigali, Rwanda. This land of a thousand hills instilled a deep reverence for nature. After Rwanda, she lived in Belgium before moving to Canada. Professional art-making came after many years of working in various fields including French-English translation. To date, Rubina has had the privilege of exhibiting in various community galleries, nationally and internationally. She is an artist who creates abstract ink or acrylic paintings based on the contemplative and dynamic practice of *zen* calligraphy. Her work is also highly influenced by lyrical abstract expressionism, particularly the works of Rothko and G. Mathieu.

Shahira Patni–Tejpar

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Shahira Patni–Tejpar, *Masai*

For Shahira Patni–Tejpar, pottery is a form of meditative therapy which is a wonderful release and escape from the fast-paced, technologically driven life that we all lead. Working with clay is like playing with nature. Since time immemorial, humans have transformed clay, not only into practical items like plates and cups, but also into vessels of beauty and grace reflecting the artists soul. Shahira practices Japanese *wabi sabi* (willful creation and acceptance of imperfection). She prefers making functional pottery that reflects the diverse cultural and historical influences of her life – her pots are often decorated with Arabic calligraphy, Masai figures, Indian paisley patterns and Islamic geometric shapes.

Nurin Merchant

OTTAWA, CANADA



Nurin Merchant, *Nature of Prayer*, mixed media,
acrylic on canvas, 14in x 10in

Ottawa born Nurin Merchant recently graduated in Biological Sciences with Honours from the University of Guelph. She started taking interest in paper crafts, playdough, and finger painting from a very young age. That interest evolved into more complex methods, and her favourites are working with clay and painting in watercolour, oil, as well as acrylic. Nature is one of her biggest inspirations, and it is present in nearly all of her pieces.

Yasmin Pyarali Karim

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Yasmin Pyarali Karim, *Ha Mim*, mixed media, 13in x16in

Yasmin Karim has been working as a professional interdisciplinary artist for sixteen years and is award winning non-narrative experimental director. She has shown her work in public spaces locally and internationally. Yasmin is currently Communication Designer at Ba Production. Her current work is about symbols that go beyond the physical outward experiences, to explore the hidden sublime beauty of nature. She uses the interconnection of physical sciences with spiritual science, to create new possibilities of expressing the subtle in a physical form, using colour as light and texture with movement.

Zainab Khuwaja

HOUSTON, USA



Zainab Khuwaja

Committed to a range of community services in the USA, Houston based Zainab Khuwaja is a talented artist who strives to integrate Islamic concepts into her artwork. She began her passion for art as a means to educate her peers about the diversity and values of Islam. She works through various media ranging from canvas to ceramic tiles and glass sculptures.

Sonny Sultani

CHICAGO, USA



Sonny Sultani, Whirling Sufi, watercolour, 5in x 7in

Chicago's Sonny Sultani graduated from the Northwestern University, Illinois, with an honours degree in Communications. His engagement and flair with the visual arts and his identity as an "artist" is a more recent phenomenon in his life, happening *"when a beam of luck hits you."* After purchasing a set of a watercolour set for his wife, Nusrat, Sonny decided to draw on some blank boards he had purchased at the same time. After finishing a drawing of a lighthouse, which impressed Nusrat, he went on to draw a *"Whirling Sufi"* because of his addiction to Sufi devotees and their devotion to God.

Shazia'Ayn Babul

VANCOUVER, CANADA



Shazia'Ayn Babul, *Identical*, conte pastels, 12in x 18in

Shazia'Ayn Babul of Vancouver is a sixteen-year old high school student with a passion for art. She has loved painting and drawing ever since she was able to hold a pencil.

Shazia uses a variety of materials and subject matters in her art, and her style is still being developed as she explores new areas of fine and visual arts.

II. ARTISTS' EXHIBITIONS, GALLERIES AND WEBSITES

The following is a list of additional information for artists represented in this compendium:

RUBINA RAJAN

www.rubinarajan.com

ALIA NOORMOHAMED

www.nowstudio.ca

NURIN FAZAL

www.noorinfazal.com

HAMIDA MADHANI

www.myhmstudios.com

KARIM MUHAMMAD

<https://www.behance.net/caureem>

JAVID JAH

www.javidjah.com

NADIR MACKWANI

www.sindbad-puzzle.com

ALNOOR NATHANI

www.islamiccreations.co.uk

SHER NASSER

[www.shernasser.com,](http://www.shernasser.com)

www.sher-nasser.artistwebsites.com

NIZAR MACNOJIA

www.nizarmacnojia.com

TASLIM SAMJI

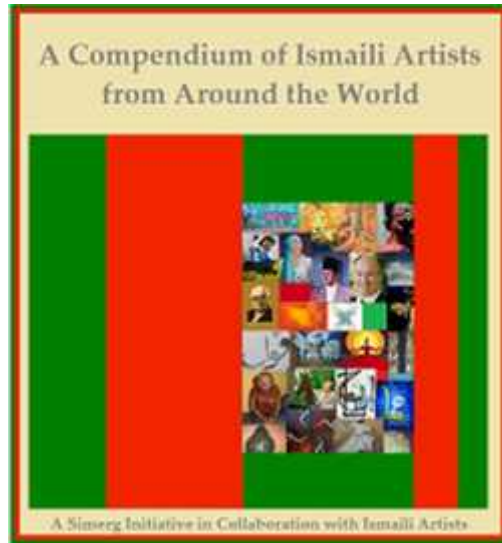
www.ArtByTSamji.com

www.ArtByTSamji.wordpress.com

III. ARTISTS AT SIMERG

Selected works of some of the Ismaili artists portrayed in this compendium are presented at www.simerg.com under the category of Modern Artistic Expressions in [Visual Arts: The Artists and their Works](#) .

Works of artists not yet shown on the website will be added in due course.



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