

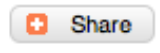
LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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Shows That Matter: Steven Naifeh Exhibitions in NYC and Jersey City

by Anna Kats 22/04/14 2:02 PM EDT



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Steven Naifeh's "Found in Translation" exhibition at Mana Contemporary.
(Courtesy of Mana Contemporary)

WHAT: "Steven Naifeh: Found in Translation"

WHEN: March 27-April 26 in New York; March 6-August 31 in New Jersey

WHERE: Leila Heller Gallery, 568 W. 25th St., New York City; Mana Contemporary, 888 Newark Avenue, Jersey City, N.J.

WHY THIS SHOW MATTERS: Though Steven Naifeh's art practice took a backseat to the prolific author's literary pursuits in the late 1970s, his first gallery show since the mid-'70s offers proof of his enduring ability to fuse Western abstract art with the decorative motifs of aniconic Islamic art. Naifeh, co-author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Jackson Pollock biography (he's also penned a Van Gogh biography and has Ph.D. degrees from Harvard and Juilliard), transforms the literary task of translation into an artistic act of cultural mediation.

The work's strength lies in its ability to emphasize the connectedness of different cultures through purely decorative, rather than overtly political, themes. Naifeh began making the cycles of decorative work on display in Chelsea and Jersey City in 2012, and some of the work in these simultaneous exhibitions was shown at the Columbia Museum of Art in South Carolina in 2013. The shows at Leila Heller Gallery and at Mana include Naifeh's architectural sculptures, like the copper-rectangles of his 2014 "Saida XXXVI" assemblage, and his canvases, such as the

"Aljun" series and the "Topkapi" series. Naifeh's 2014 pieces displayed here — including the "Saida" series of canvases arranged on the wall in geometric formations that, combined, create architectural sculptures from objects traditionally associated with painting; and the "Uzbek" series of acrylic square panels with LED backlighting, articulated in the whirlpool design traditionally found on textiles from the namesake country — focus on the similarities between the Western and Middle Eastern canons of geometric art. And this is precisely what the artist "finds" during his act of translation: that for all the disparities distinguishing the two geopolitical realms, there remains a wealth of shared visual culture.