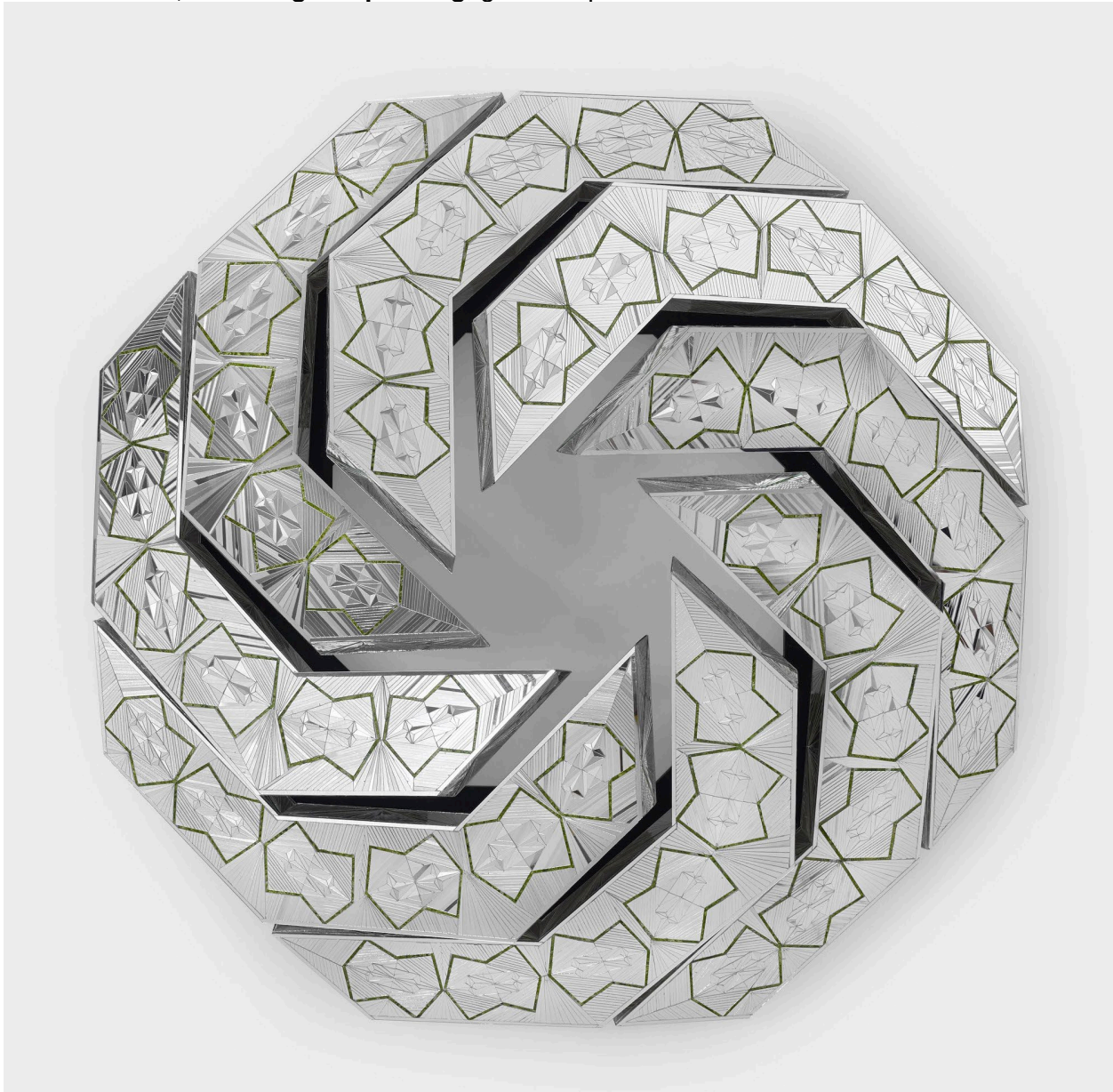


Fourth Family Octagon, 2013, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, 2021.35.2
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, glue and plaster on wood



Fourth Family Octagon, 2013
Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Iranian, 1922–2019
Reverse painted glass, mirrored glass, plaster
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund and gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky 2021.35.2

Note: somewhere I read that she thinks of each of the “arms that reach inward” as like a **family**.

- Monir Shohroudy Farmanfarmaian lived a long life (1922 - 2019). She was born in Iran and lived part of her life there and part of her life in the US. Her art reflects two worlds— one of tradition and also one of modern Western geometric abstraction.
- She moved to NYC to study the arts after WWII. She worked with many types of art: paintings, drawings, textile designs, monotypes, and as a fashion illustrator for magazines like Glamour.
- Involved in avant-garde art scene—making friends with some of the leading modern artists of the time.
- In early 1957 she moved back to Iran and she was inspired by her country's tribal/folk art tradition" —> "conceive a new path for her art."
- **Look closely at this — What is surprising about this sculpture when seen up close?**
- **Āina-kāri** — a traditional interior decoration made by Iranian artists— assemble finely cut mirrors together in **geometric** forms. Beautiful shining surface, complex facets —>reflecting light as patterns/reflections.
- She was the first artist combine cut-glass **mosaic** techniques AND modern Western geometric abstraction.
- Origins: In 17th century **Venetian glassmakers** were invited to Iran by Shah. Her work has a strong connection with mystical principles of **Sufi architecture—connecting the idea of God with light & reflected light.**

1970's visited the mirrored Shah Cheragh mosque in Shiraz, Iran (below)



In her memoir, Farmanfarmaian described the experience as transformative:

“The very space seemed on fire, the lamps blazing in hundreds and thousands of reflections . . . It was a universe unto itself, architecture transformed by performance, all movement and fluid light, all solids fractured and dissolved in brilliance in space, in prayer.”

Geometric patterns are one of the common expressions of Islamic art. Let’s look at some of the meaning it has.

1. It symbolizes the **never-ending or infinite nature of God.**
2. **Patterns:** essential contribution of **Islamic mathematicians, astronomers, and scientists.**
3. **Geometry creates unity and order** —> Islam believes in an **underlying order in the cosmos & the natural world.**
4. In its **repetition and complexity** is seen the possibility of **infinite growth.**

Do you feel this sculpture has a sense of movement? In what way? Does it seem like its getting larger? Or smaller? How does it draw you in? How would it change if the gallery was dark and the room lit by candles?

Her work has been associated with her friend the minimalist artist Frank Stella. He is famous for his *Protractor Series* of paintings — the protractor being a drafting tool used for measuring and making angles. It is the same tool Monir uses to plan her glass mosaics.

Stella’s titled the works after circular cities and archaeological sites he saw on a 1963 trip to the Middle East. Tahkt-i-Sulayman is an ancient shrine in Iran’s Azerbaijan province. Stella was more interest in structure rather than creating a picture that represents something.

He thought the forms advanced and receded. Human eyes complete the circular shapes and make it become a painting of the infinite.

What does Stella’s art have in common with Farmanfarmaian? How do they differ?



Tahkt-I-Sulayman Variation II, 1969 Frank Stella 69.132
On view in Mia’s Fountain Court room on the 2nd floor

Farmanfarmaian explains her work: “ With the reflections, you’re also a part of the art piece. Your own appearance, your own face, your own clothing—if you move, it is a part of the art. You’re the connection: it is the mix of human being and reflection and artwork.”

Reference:

<https://www.jamescohan.com/> —> click on artists and scroll down to Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian—> VIDEO IS GREAT! —> scroll down a little. Biography is insightful. Wikipedia is very thorough, too.

Tied to a mystical understanding of primary shapes as sacred and connected to a divine natural order, Monir’s unit-based compositions of luminous glass reveal uniformity, repetition, and precedent as the basis for endless recombination. Dissecting and reassembling the traditional surface construction of the mirror-mosaic, **each of her works is anchored by central polygons, whose numeric properties have symbolic meanings in Islamic design and Sufism. According to Monir, the six-sided hexagon, for example, “reflects the six virtues: generosity, self-discipline, patience, determination, insight, and compassion.”** The distinctive features of shapes used in each work precondition specific repetitive geometries that span outward to the edges of the object, serving to create a transcendent, ephemeral effect within the larger structure. **Her methodologies often invoke concepts central to Minimalism—such as seriality, modularity, and diagrammatic organization—manifesting in bodies of sculpture grouped into series she called “families,” suggesting an affinity of structure,** for example, or which are “convertible,” consisting of elements that can be arranged into a number of different formations. **Layering these contemporary ideas with an Islamic integration of mathematics with bodily presence and spirituality, her work reconnected abstraction with its theological roots.**