SEYED EDALATPOUR

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The Third Line (khate-sevom) or the third script, as it is known in some translations, is the description that Shams Tabrizi gave of himself. It is amongst the very few recorded accounts of his conversations with Rumi, the thirteenth-century poet. The Third Line is part of the quest for the otherness of the other which must not be mistaken for the quest for alternative or that of the hybrid. The presence of the unreadable is a familiar concept in Persian literature and it is the recognition of the unreadable which is the central theme for this exhibition.

آن خطاط سه گونه خط نوشت

یکی را خود خواند و لا غیر

یکی را هم خود خواند و هم غیر

یکی را نه خود خواندی و نه غیر

آنمنم... [خط سوم]

شمس

*The writer wrote three lines: One he read and no other, the second he read and the
other and the third neither he nor other read. That is me . . . the Third Line.*
Shams Tabrizi

INTRODUCTION

THE WORK OF SEYED EDALATPOUR

At the end of a long and dangerous journey, Seyed Edalatpour arrived in England in 1983 as a refugee from Iran. He had trained as a painter in his native country but as he struggled to come to terms with his experiences he found a new means of expression in sculpture. The practical demands of the medium – sourcing materials, moving and carving stone, drawing, weighing and measuring, helped him to survive the stress of dislocation and exile. His earliest works were experimental as he explored basic principles of three dimensional design in order to establish a viable and meaningful foundation for his work. He was inspired by the pure and beautiful geometry of Islamic architecture – the interrelationship of square and circle, the repetition of form and the proportions of the smaller elements to the whole. The resulting works were intricate, octagonal structures of terracotta brick and mortar with rhythmic, intersecting arches. He began to apply the underlying principles to the human figure with reference to the canons of Archaic Greek and Egyptian art and the formalised sculpture of ancient Sumer. These templates and systems gave him a conceptual framework for continued experimentation. They offered endless permutations, like a game of chess, in which often unexpected relationships could emerge and evolve in new directions. The process is not forced, but intuitive, driven by the artist's curiosity and imagination.

His figures, when they emerged, were far from the Classical ideal. They were tough-looking resilient characters with features lined by time and toil, like pilgrims on some heroic journey. Their large, intelligent heads sit firmly on narrow shoulders as they kneel in attitudes of prayer or contemplation. In *Cheheltan*, the forty figures are similar in stature, all conforming to the format of the square which echoes the structure of the earliest mosques. There is a strong sense of silent, almost telepathic, communication between them. Within the geometry of the square lie the implied circle and the endless, crystalline subdivisions beyond. Edalatpour's work is rooted in his own experience but is never an illustration of it. In speaking about this work however, he recalls a moment during his escape from Iran when, exhausted and famished, he shared a simple meal with a group of men seated on the ground at a refugee camp near Karachi. This sense of common humanity and the psychological interplay between the individual and the group are central to his work.

The complex word-play and layered meanings of Sufi poetry have also been a constant inspiration to him. The theme of *Cheheltan* comes from the story of The Conference of the Birds written by the Persian poet, Farid ud-Din Attar in which the birds travel together to seek enlightenment from the all-knowing hoopoe. In *Twelve and the 13th*, the disembodied stone heads have the solemn gravity of Roman first-century portraits as they confront the massive and isolated image of the 13th whose presence disrupts the numerical and formal symmetry of the group. It represents the creative principle – the vital factor of difference that springs, sometimes unlooked for, from within the labyrinth of the underlying structure – that self imposed system the artist has employed from the very start. The viewer entering that semi-circle becomes part of the silent dialogue, subject to the enquiring gaze. The neatly chiselled heads in the *99 Names of God* jut forward into the viewer's space like the corbels on a Gothic porch. Lifelike and energised, they seem to be breaking free from the stone block from which they have been carved.

He explains that the reason his figures and heads are exclusively male is because the life model he was using as the basis for his first large scale figurative sculpture, *Geographical Transformation*, happened to be male. When he began to develop the form of the figure from memory he naturally adhered to the male prototype. The female figure, for him, has so many profound psychological and mythic associations that to represent it in conjunction with the male would disrupt the fierce simplicity of his conceptual language.

Repetition and duplication of form are key elements in Edalatpour's work – drawing or modelling the figure again and again, moving towards a point of resolution or tension. His etchings are an extreme example, characterised by the repeated acts of drawing, inking, wiping, burnishing and editioning. The constant recreation and manipulation of the image allows the subconscious and intuitive elements to emerge as part of the process. He likens it to the repeated, rhythmic mantra that clears the mind for

meditation. His drawings and graphic works are not intended as preparation for sculpture but are simply different ways of exploring a coherent theme. They stand as independent works in their own right though the ideas they generate are often realised in other media.

Edalatpour has little time for the shifting fashions and self-referential debates of the contemporary art world. He pursues his vision with an irrepressible excitement and dedication, creating work of great integrity, rooted in ancient principles of representation in which art is a constant process of discovery, not an end in itself. He is not alone. Artists like Ana Maria Pacheco, who taught him at Norwich School of Art, John Davies and Mandy Havers have also pursued the emblematic approach to the figure with equal resolve, creating works of art that illuminate some of the most subtle and timeless aspects of the human condition. Appropriately, his studio stands in the shadow of Glastonbury Tor – a landscape inscribed with its own ancient geometry.

Brendan Flynn
Curator of Fine Art, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

SQUARE

Four figures in limestone, 2000–2007

Portland limestone
Overall diameter:	360cm × 360cm × 145cm
Platform size:	360cm × 360cm
Figures:	The largest figure is 145cm × 70cm × 70cm
	The smallest is 120cm × 68cm × 68cm

The defined space of the Square provides a perfect platform for this group of figures. The four figures were carved out of irregular blocks of Portland stone. The blocks were roughly cut and they where different in size and proportion. The seating position which all the figures have in common corresponds to the way one seats on a Persian carpet. The figures are slightly animated and quite distinct. The overall composition of the figures in relation to one another is arbitrary. They can be placed in different areas of the platform and they do not need to follow the formality of the square shape however the figures in relation to one another create the four corner of a shape which reflects the possibility of a square.

The definition of Square in geometry is that of a two-dimensional figure with four sides of equal length and four right angles. It is one of the very first proportional systems used by the Ancients and the magical properties of the root 2 proportional system were fully explored in Art and Architecture. Square is easily derived from a circle, it contains a series of harmonic squares and in rotation it can create octagon which leads to an infinite number of possibilities in geometrical patterns. Indeed, Persian carpet and most of the Islamic art is based on the proportional properties of square, triangle and pentagon.

The presence of a platform provides a finite space of significance for the figures. The figures are no longer in direct connection to the given architectural boundaries (i.e. the four corners of a gallery space) and therefore not subject to the rules of the real. Square provides a fictional space. The rules of the real is dictated by its current institutional position, it is attached to here and now. A fictional space is in distance, it is an intellectual property and it defines its own rules.

99 NAMES OF GOD

Six heads carved relief of an intended series of 99, 1999–

High relief in Portland limestone
Dimension of each head: 30.5 cm × 30.5 cm × 30.5 cm

*'Everything we can know about God, and ultimately everything we can
know about "other than God" (ma siwa Liah)_ that is, "the world" or
"the cosmos" (al-alam)_ is prefigured by the Names. They delineate
God's perfections inasmuch as hierarchy, some are broader in scope than
others; the "Universal Names" in the last analysis correspond to all things.
Hence Ibn Arabi can say that the **Divine Names are infinite in keeping
with the infinity of the creatures**. (William C. Chittick, Islamic
Spirituality)*

The Beautiful Names, The 99 names are divine attributes as described
in Islamic texts. This project, which is an ongoing one, explores the
presence of plurality in the attributes and the many names of god. The
heads are carved in high relief and are in three quarter view. The
plasticity of form suggests a multiple viewpoint.
So far seven heads have been carved.

These sculptures do not claim the representation of the 99 Names of
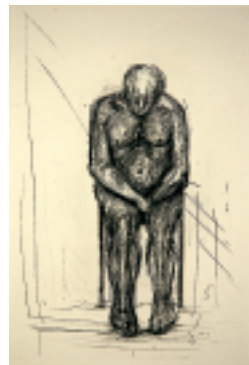God. The heads are contemplation of form and possibilities in stone.

CHAIR

I – XXIV, 2008   Etching, drypoint, plate size: 15.3 × 10.2 cm, paper size: 23 × 28 cm, edition of 24, 3 a/p, 2 p/p, printed on Somerset TP 300 gms

TWELVE & THE 13TH

Thirteen heads carved in limestsone, 1997–98

Portland limestone
Diameter: 600cm, Height: 200cm
Small heads: 33cm × 33cm × 33cm
Large head: 66cm × 66cm × 66cm

This is an installation of thirteen heads, twelve of which are identical in dimension and the thirteenth head is twice as large. The installation is designed in accordance with geometrical rules. It follows the division of circle into square and further crystallization of form. A point once extended forms a line with no dimension. The line becomes the radius of a circle and the circle presents the potential for division. A square can contain the circle or it can be contained within the circle. The square provides the root 2 proportional system. Square generates a series of harmonic squares whose sides are also in the root 2 proportion. The square in rotation becomes octagonal. And the octagon multiplies into infinity of forms and shapes.

Twelve and the 13th began with twelve blocks of stone, identical in dimension. Within the square block exists a perfect sphere. The sphere, the desired sphere is the reflection of a point, a point has no dimension.

The journey from O to twelve is an investigation into the desired Sphere. The possibilities of form are the many faces of the sphere.

Twelve is a number, perhaps of a significant value. Any given number is the smaller sum of its proceeding one. Twelve as significant as it may be is not more so than the thirteenth. The Thirteenth creates a different proportional system and suggests the multitude, the plurality and the insignificance of the significant.

O Lord how marvellous is Thy face

Thy face, which a young man, if he strove to imagine it, would conceive as a youth's; a full-grown man, as manly; an aged man as an aged man's! Who could imagine this sole pattern, most true and most adequate, of all faces - of all even as of each - this pattern so very perfectly of each as if it were of none other? He would have to go beyond all forms of faces, and all likenesses and all figures. And how could he imagine a face when he must go beyond all faces, and all likenesses and figures of all faces and all concepts which can be formed of a face, and all colour, adornment and beauty of all of all faces? Wherefore he that goeth forward to behold Thy face, so long as he formeth any concept, thereof, is far from Thy face. For all concept of a face falleth short, Lord, of Thy face, and all beauty which can be conceived is less than the beauty of Thy face; every face hath beauty yet none is beauty's self, but Thy face, Lord, hath beauty and this having is being. 'Tis therefore Absolute Beauty itself, which is the form that giveth being to every beautiful form. 0 face exceedingly comely, whose beauty all things to whom it is granted to behold it, suffice not to admire! In all faces is seen the Face of faces, veiled, and in a riddle; howbeit unveiled it is not seen, until above all faces a man enter into a certain secret and mystic silence where there is no knowledge or concept is the state below which Thy face entereth when he goeth beyond all knowledge or concept of a face. This mist, cloud, darkness, or ignorance into which he that seeketh Thy face 'entereth when he goeth beyond all knowledge or concept is the state below which Thy face cannot be found except veiled; but that very darkness revealeth Thy face there, beyond all veils.

Illustrated front cover and opposite

HEAD I

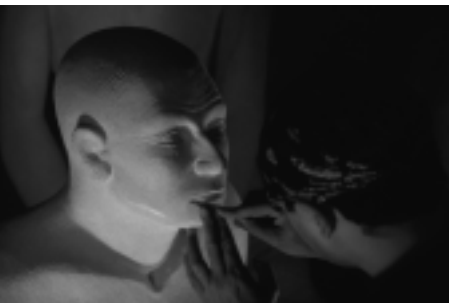Portland limestone, 50 x 35 x 30 cm

HEAD II

Portland limestone, 50 x 35 x 30 cm

HEAD III

Portland limestone, 50 x 35 x 30 cm

Seyed M. S. Edalatpour was born in Shiraz, Iran, in 1962. Since 1983 he has been living and working in England. Following a Foundation Course at Camberwell School of Art he obtained a First Class BA (Hons) Degree in Fine Art (Sculpture) at Norwich School of Art. He went on to complete the Interdisciplinary MA in Art and Architecture at the Kent Institute of Art and Design at Canterbury in 1990.

He is currently employed as an Artist-in-residence/Art teacher at Millfield Preparatory School and since 1998 he has been contributing to the MA Fine Art and MFA International Practice at the University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury (formerly known as KIAD).

Solo Exhibitions:

2006   *Na-koja-abad* at Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury, Kent

2000   *Circling the Square*"at Wolverhampton Museum, Wolverhampton

1999   Sculpture, Drawing & Prints at Atkinson Gallery, Somerset

1998   Major sculpture installation, "*Twelve and The 13th*", ART 98, London Contemporary Art, BDC, London, organised by Pratt Contemporary Art

Sculpture & Drawing, Gallery M, Flowers East, London

1997   *Simurgh*, the Royal Academy of Arts, Original Print Fair, London, represented by Pratt Contemporary Art

Selected Group Exhibitions:

2006   *Sculpture at Canterbury, A gathering of new forms here*, Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury, Kent

2005   *Work on Paper*, Lemon Street Gallery, Dublin, UK

1999   Guest Artist at Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University, Kingston Upon Thames

1997   Invited Artist, *4th Biennial Sculpture Exhibition* at Dean Court, Wimborne Minster, Dorset

Selected Artist, International Print Exhibition, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, USA

1995   Invited Artist to represent Great Britain at the 10th Tallinn Print Triennial, Estonia

Selected Artist, *Identity*, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.

1993   *Sculpture and Prints*, Draw Gallery, Canterbury

1992   *Young South East Artists*, Maidstone Library Gallery and Johnson Wax Kiln Gallery, Kent

1991   *Resoluting the Irresolute, Irresoluting the Resolute*, Two-person exhibition at the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh

1990   *Issues in Art & Architecture*, Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury, Kent

Sculpture at Canterbury, Saint Augustine's Canterbury, Kent