

ANGELA LARIAN

I Slept with the Light and Became Pregnant with Love

Thursday February 4th - March 1st 2016

Mysticism, spiritualism, minimalism, conceptualism, historicism, philosophical aphorisms, and a certain amount of self-referentialism, are all threaded throughout Angela Larian's art. In combination, these help to activate and energize the familiar, creating something fresh that pulls us between the realm of the seen and the unseen. But for me, all these "isms" take second place to the strong sense of design and visually compelling presence in her work. Her use of Persian texts, at times transformed into disentangled words, and her sleek geometrical grids, which often merge with writing, are what attracts me to her art; neither perhaps surprising given my own academic interests and Angela's Iranian cultural heritage.

Having traveled with Angela in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, I was struck by how quickly the types of designs and forms she experienced while traversing the borderlands of her native Iran were absorbed and assimilated into her artistic practice. The trip may have stimulated her own innate sense of design while also triggering and freeing latent visual memories of the land she left as a teenager. One thing that has never left Angela is the Persian language. Words and even texts, largely stripped of any narrative context, made brazenly abstract and yet intuitively understood by the Persian literate, are key to her work. This duality in which the physical letters simultaneously signify and visualize, serving both to decorate and to enlighten—intellectually and spiritually—is also integral to Iranian art from early medieval times until today. Persian culture, felt as much as imagined, remains as a palpable presence in Angela's art.

Khoda, the Persian word for God, and its related phonemes figure prominently in the current exhibition. While its use dates back to ancient Iran, as written in Modern Persian it comprises the consonants kha' (distinguished by a point above the letter) and dal, and the long vowel alif, a single vertical shaft. In this word, the letters kha' and dal are traditionally written connected followed by the unattached alif. In Angela's renditions of Khoda, all letters may be connected in a rectilinear manner, something which has a long history in Iran, especially in architectural decoration; at other times the letters are detached from one another, a more contemporary phenomenon in Persian calligraphy, while still retaining the coherence of the word.

Rendered as the uncoupled or disengaging kha'-dal-alif, and repeated hypnotically, in video as well as in still imagery, Angela's Khoda has a different vitality, a new presence. In the large-scale versions of Khoda printed on metal, the words cluster and unravel; the colorful letters become abstract forms, modular units of architectonic design. The negative void between the letters achieves its own visual primacy. And yet, for those who read Persian, the kha'-dal-alif are endlessly reconstituted and comprehended as the word Khoda, in much the same way as the deconstructed letters G-O-D will always be identified as God (or dog). In the interactive video version of Khoda, the word takes on another function, actuated by the person engaging with the work who is thereby empowered.

Related in meaning and form, the word Khoda'i is the active counterpart to Khoda, and perhaps can be understood as "godly," or else "masterly" as in Angela's interpretation. She runs together the letters of Khoda'i, which is inscribed over and over again within the geometric grid covering the back and seat of a silvery metal chair. On a coppery metal bench, Khoda'i is rendered in groups of four, in which the final letters ya' intersect with the alifs to create a dynamic design. It is left for the viewer to decide for whom these shiny, unyielding seats are intended.

There is a more clearly defined relationship between word and formal intent in two pieces which each incorporate the word Khod or self, which many believe forms the compound of the word Khoda (therefore signifying both God and self-created). Here, however, the interpretations are as complex and varied as each person who engages with the works. Entitled "Eternal", one work has the openwork letters of Khod run together and repeated to form a grid; lit by LED lights and mounted within a mirrored box, the word reverberates still further. At the center of this design is an unobstructed square of mirror allowing the viewer to become part of the composition. The second piece, Labyrinth, is both more and less ambiguous; the word Khod is now rendered in the positive and in the negative space of an openwork blue-painted grid within a box, but in this instance the shadows thus formed echo the word. In a rectangular, undecorated space near the center is a compartment filled with a golden face mask depicting the ultimate self—the artist.

Some may recognize here in the use of Khoda/Khoda'i/ Khod a subtle reference to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, which is the artist's intention. But Angela's messaging is not always so arcane.

In one of her most engaging works, she combines a neon sign with the spring coils from a discarded mattress box spring. These are the types of materials well known since the advent of conceptual art. But here there are multiple layers of meaning that are far removed from any notions of conceptualism. The stylized Persian calligraphy of the blue neon text, in which the ascending and especially descending shafts of the letters are lengthened to become gay streamers, quotes from a poem that Angela once read, heard or dreamed:

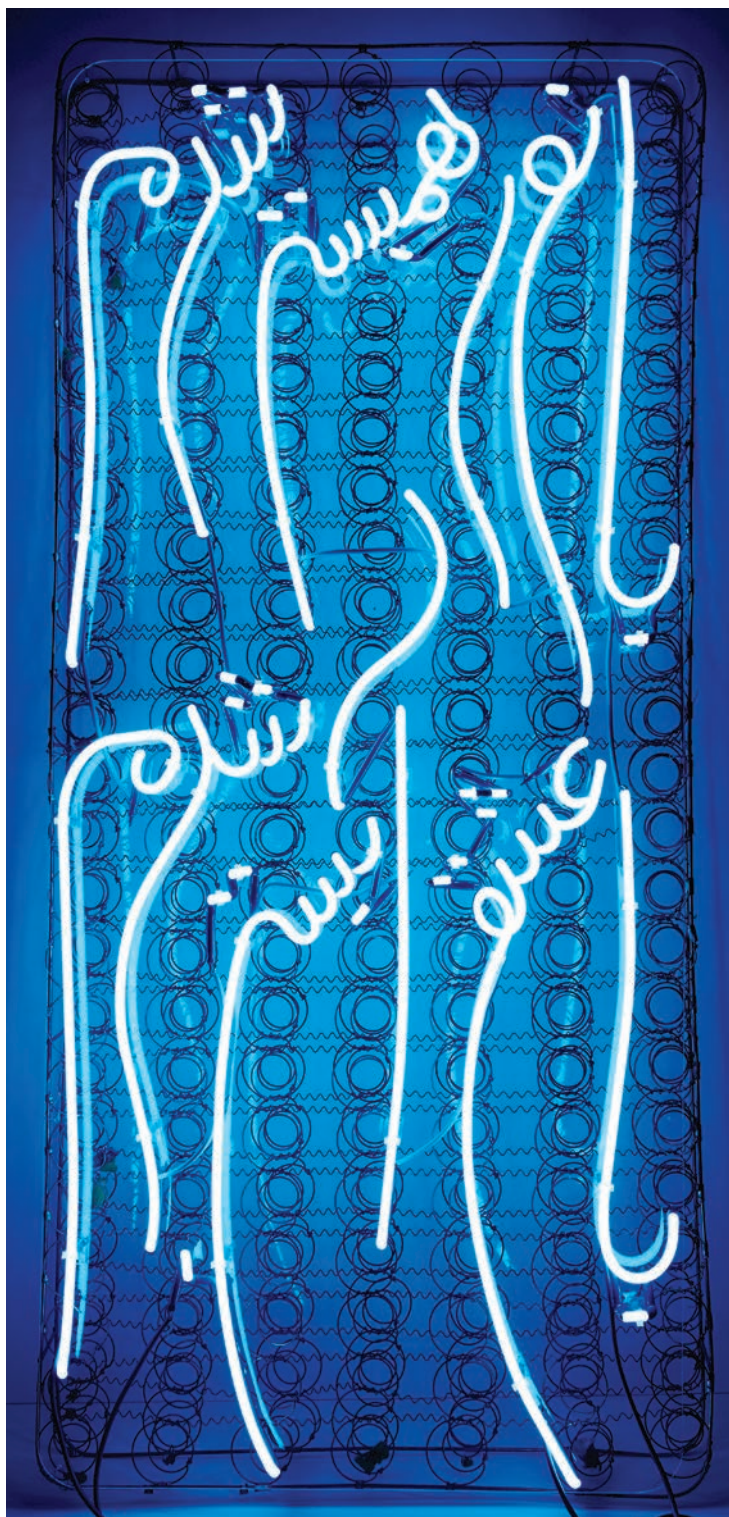
با نور همبستر شدم با عشق ایستن شدم

I slept with the light and became pregnant with love

Quotations from Persian poetry having a subtle or overt connection to the object on which they appear are a common device in Iranian art from the twelfth century onward. For example, drinking vessels were inscribed with poetry about wine, candlestick holders with verses on the theme of the moth and the flame, and so on. Classical Persian poetry simultaneously brings to mind a number of images through the juxtaposition of the often ambiguous or metaphorical meanings of the words. Poems of this sort, which allude to the function of an object, when inscribed on the actual object, were intended to evoke one further image. The selection of such verses can to some extent be viewed as a kind of pun meant to be appreciated by those who used or else viewed the object.

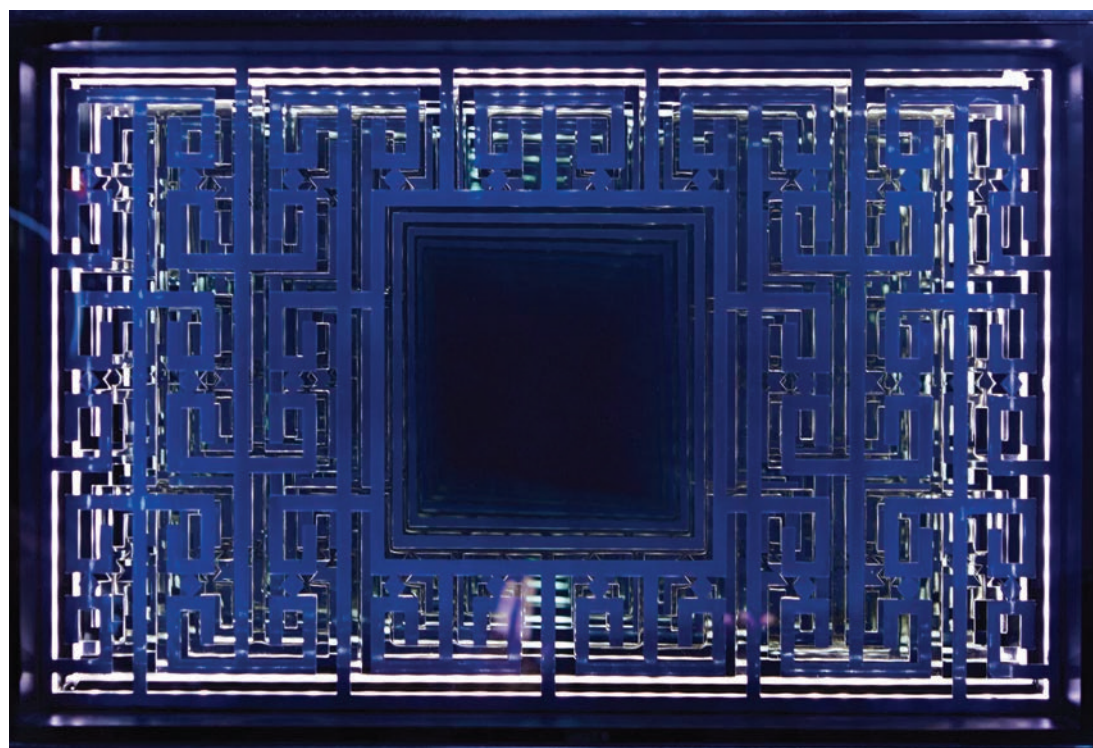
Angela's pairing of the verse and the mattress box spring follows in the tradition of earlier Iranian art. It is a practice that reveals a sophisticated way of thinking that not only gives primacy to the word, but which can render the intangible by visualizing something so entirely abstract, spiritual, mystical, and personal, as the notion of (divine) light.

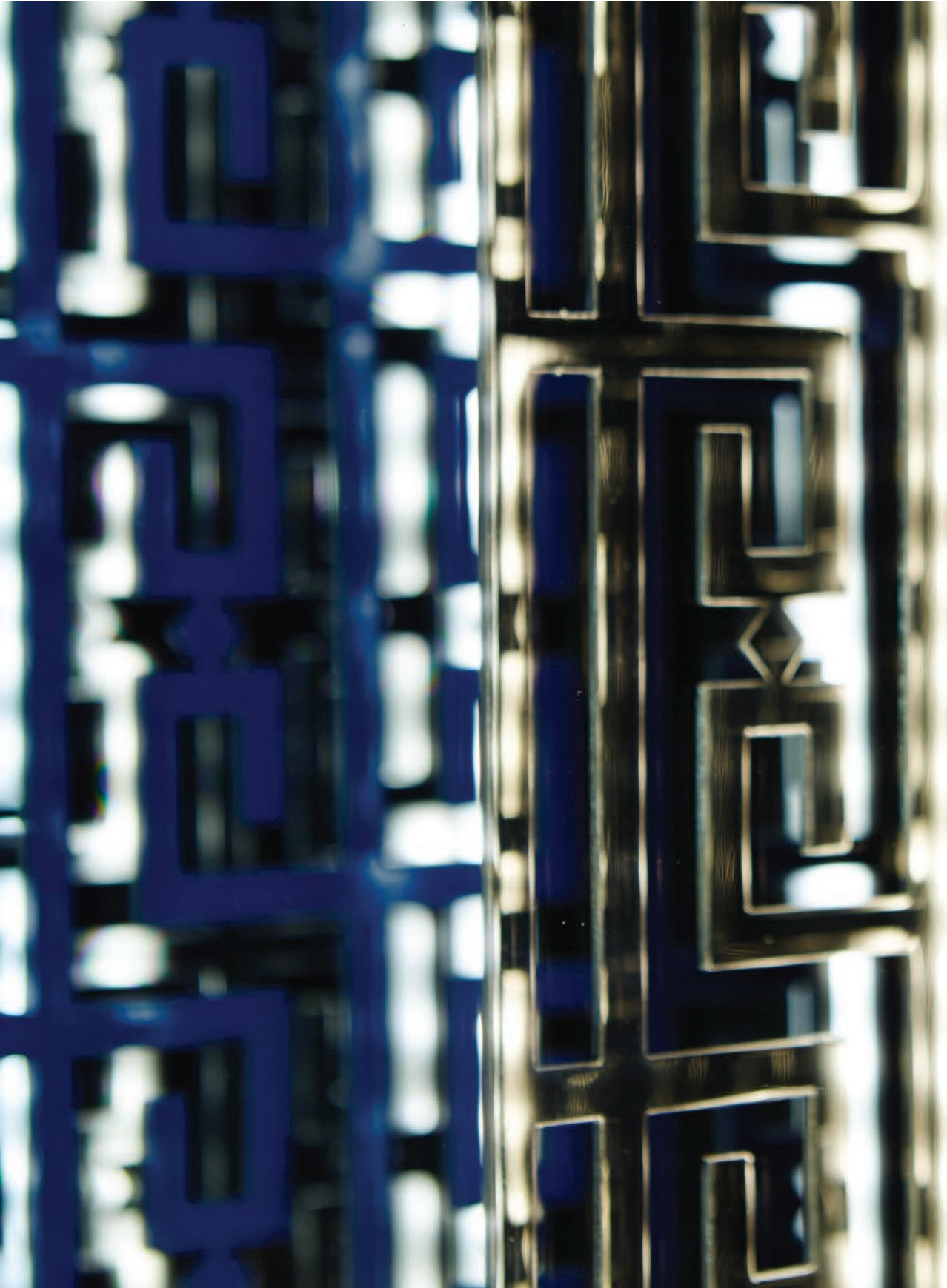
Linda Komaroff
Curator and Department Head, Art of the Middle East
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

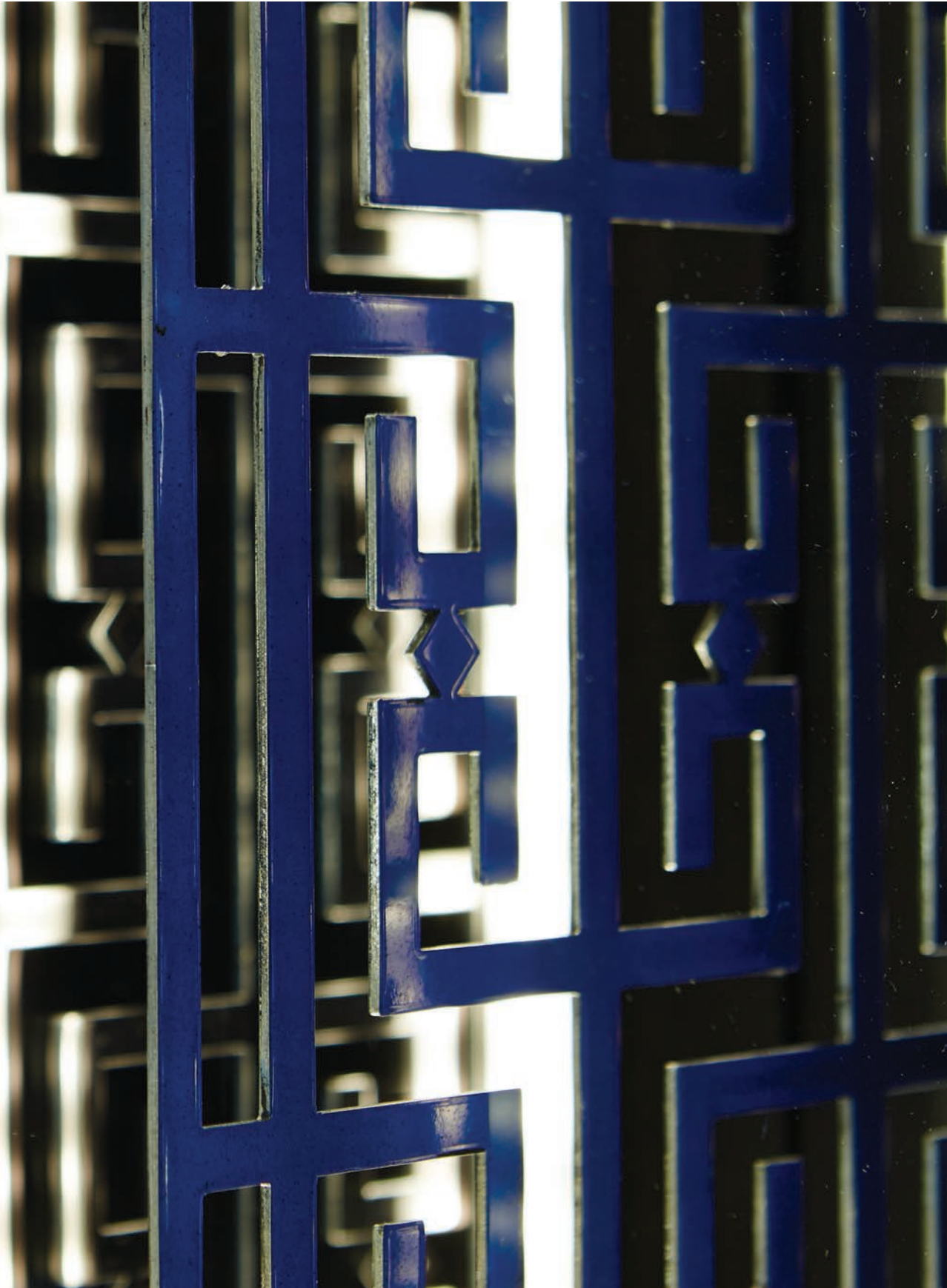


*I Slept with the Light and
Became Pregnant with Love*
Neon, Steel Box Spring, Acrylic
73x33.5x8.5 inch
Single+AP
2016

Eternal
Khoda series
LED Light, Stainless Steel, Mirror,
Glass, Wood, Metal Plating
14x25.5x6 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2016







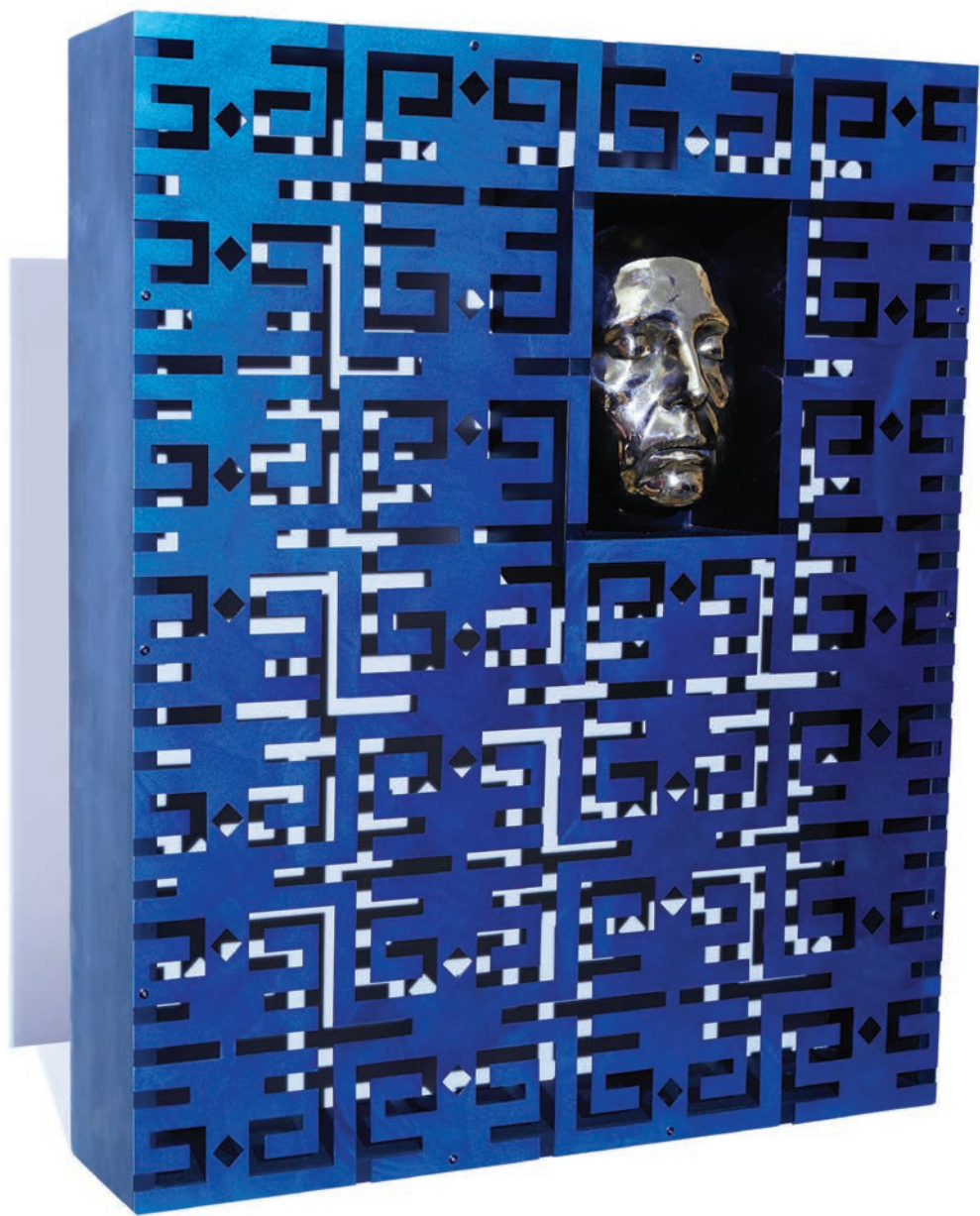


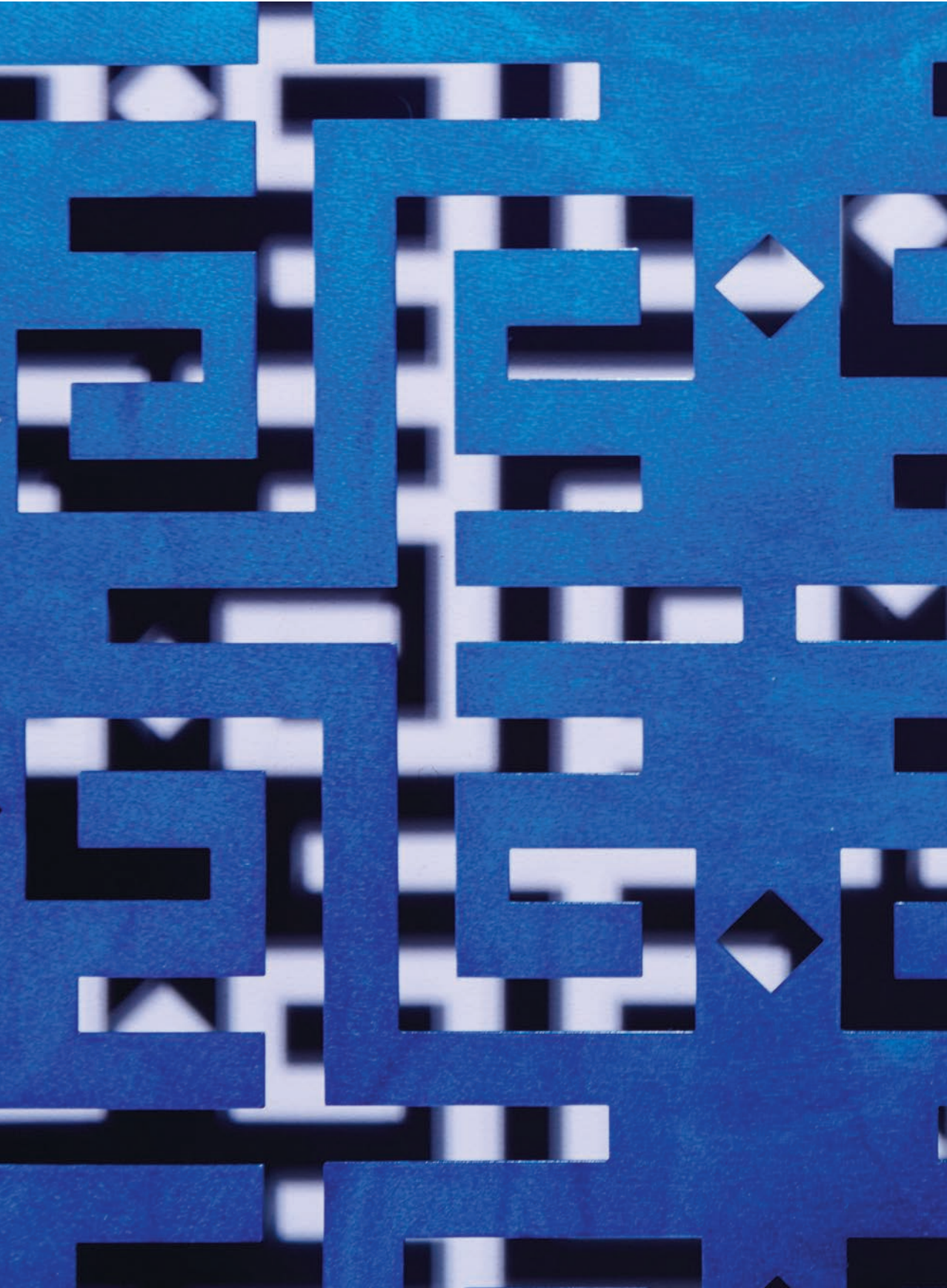
Khod-e Man
Khoda series
Bronze, Steel, Metal Plating, Wood
18.25x11x11 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2016

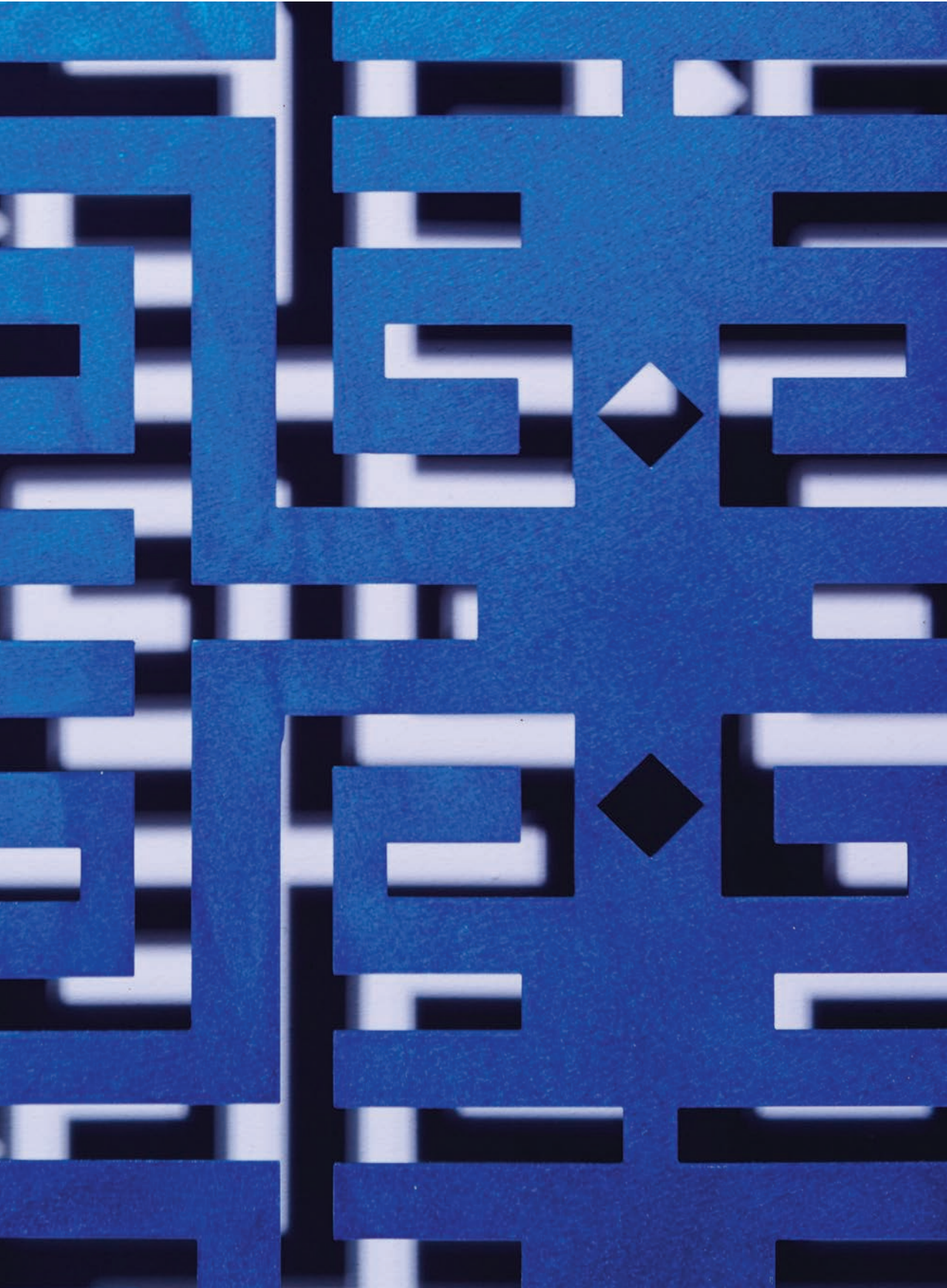


Labyrinth

Bronze, Steel, Metal Plating, Wood
29.5x24.75x5 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2016

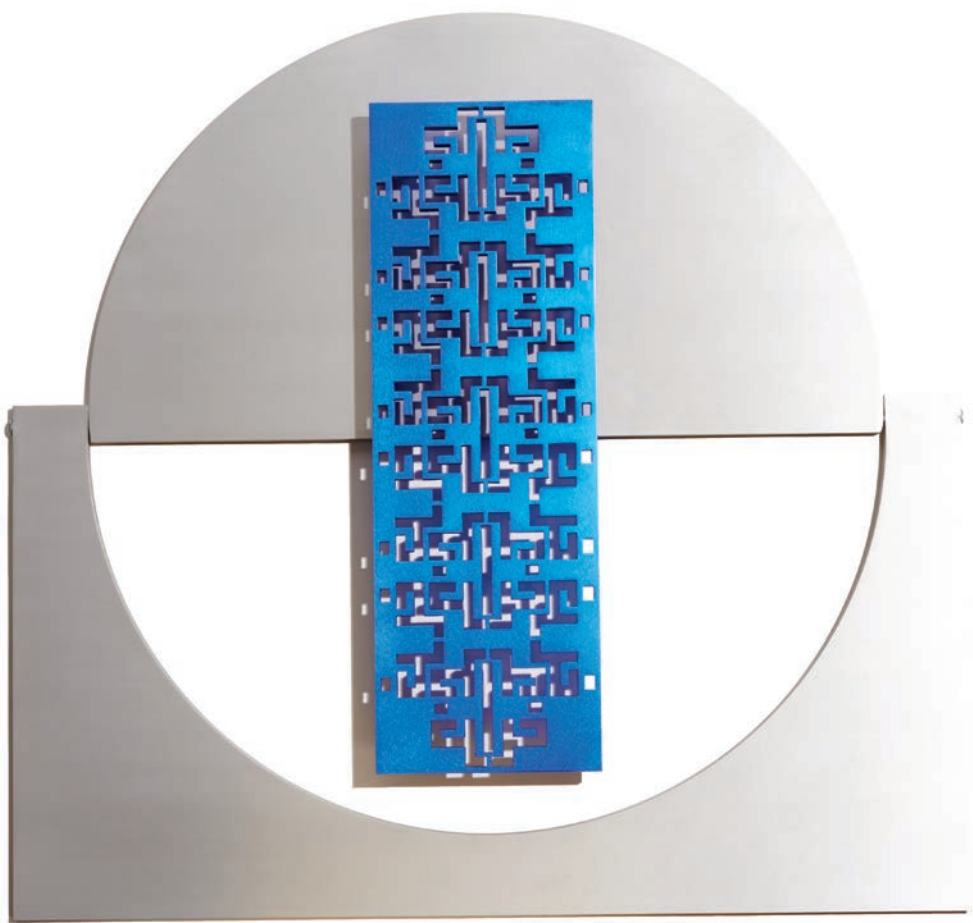




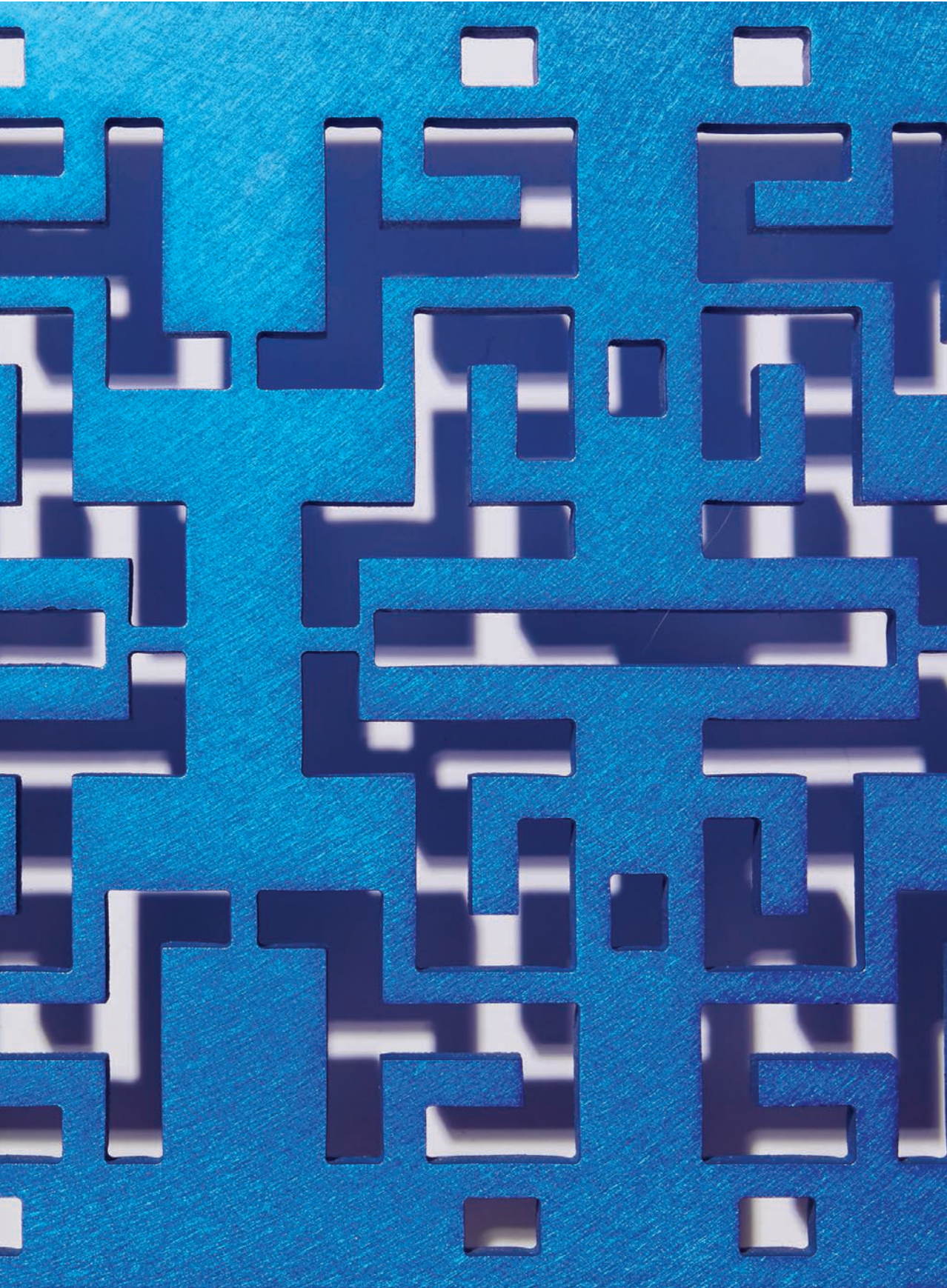


Khoda series
Stainless steel, wood, lacquer paint
34x35x32 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2015



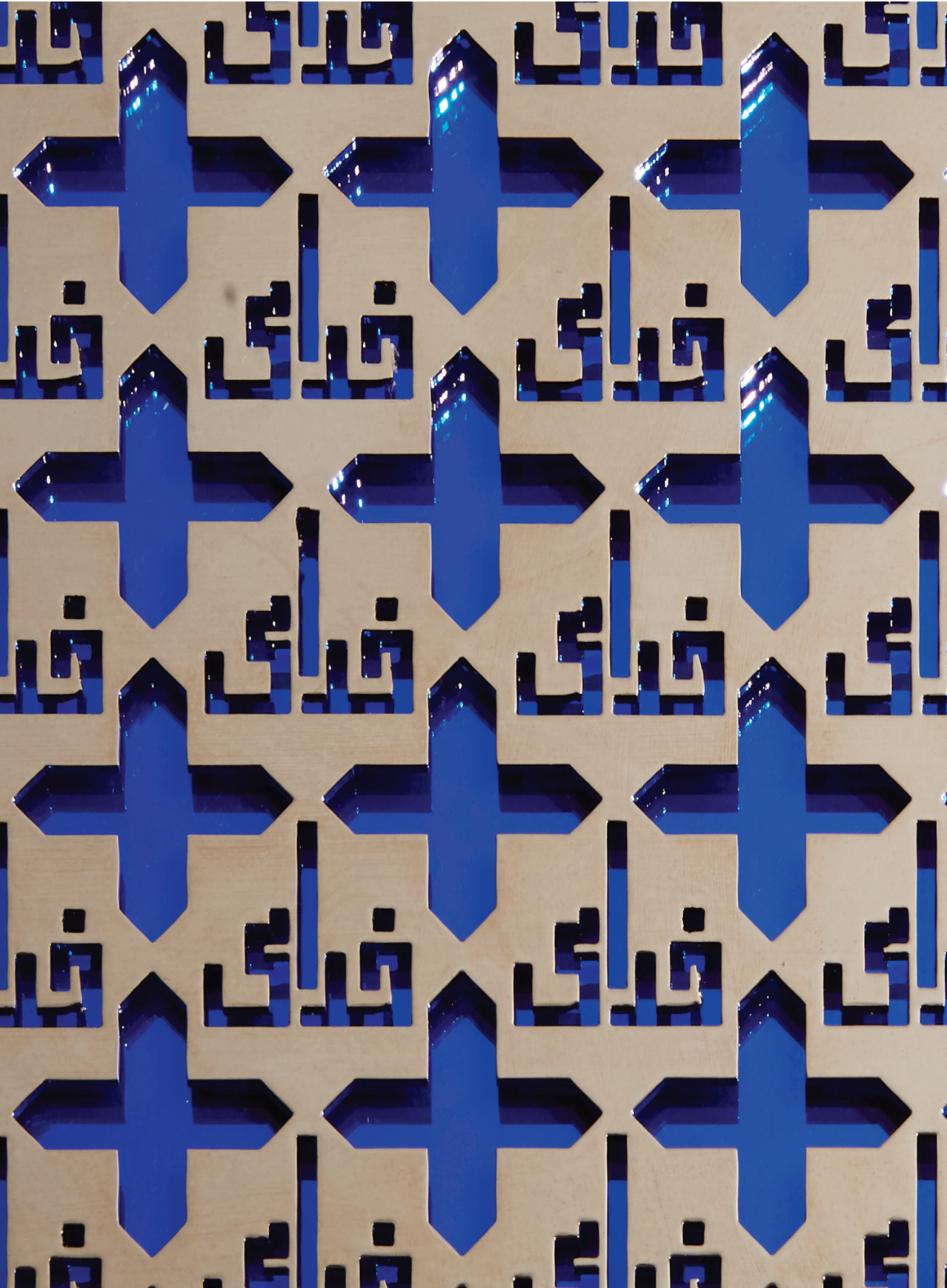


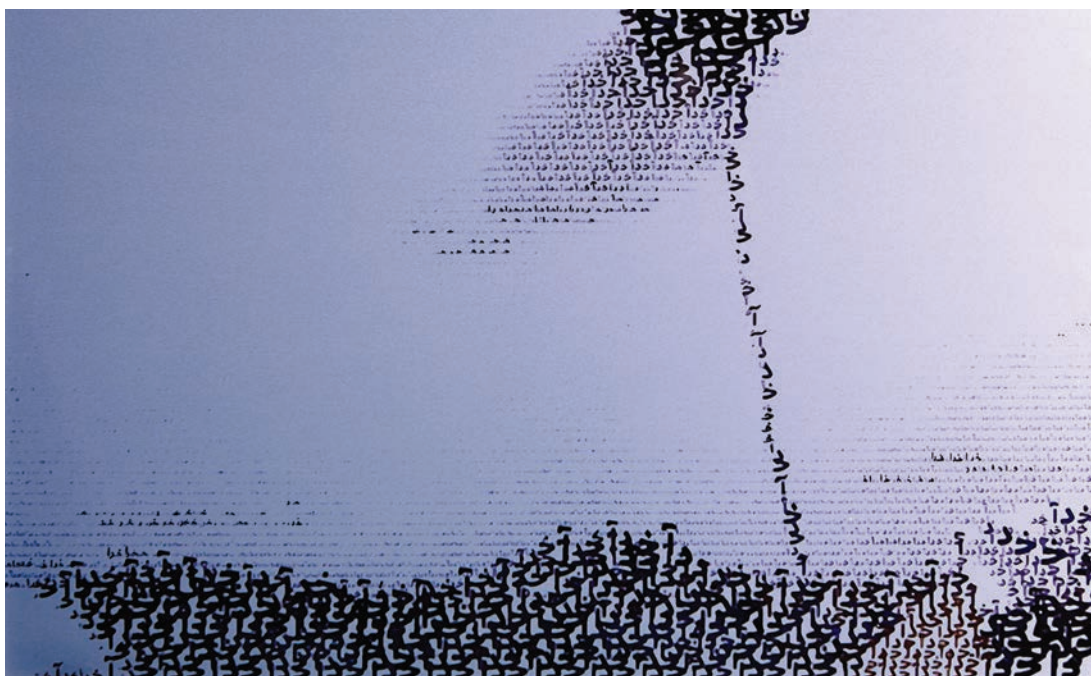
Khoda series
Aluminum, Metal Plating
24x25x2 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2016





Khoda series
Stainless Steel, Acrylic Mirror
28x31x32 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2015





Khoda series
Archival Ink on Metal
18.5x30x2 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2015



Khoda series
 Archival Ink on Metal
 18.5x30x2 inch
 Edition of 3+AP
 2015



Khoda series
 Archival Ink on Metal
 65x40x3 inch
 Single+AP
 2016



Khoda series
Archival Ink on Metal
65x40x3 inch
Single+AP
2016

Interactive Video Instalation
Khoda series
LED Screen, Processing Software,
Mac Mini computer, Webcam, Wood
66x37.8x3 inch
Edition of 3+AP
2016
Music by Ali Nouri and Nick Scappa
Audio video consultant: Alberto Ierdo



Metaphor is the language of our unconscious. It is a suspension of the conscious mind that releases our subconscious imagination, a coded way of understanding the world. My art finds its language through metaphor, mysticism, poetry and philosophy. My early works were subjective and similar to automatic drawing. As I have grown, my work has naturally evolved. I draw inspiration from the philosophies of Plato and Nietzsche as well as the poetry of Rumi and Hafez. Where my art once represented my unconscious and veiled self, my personal development has led me to visualize my own perceptions of the collective human consciousness. My art is the concrete representation of an inner dialogue, a vessel through which ideas are manifested. I endeavor to create a space for viewers that will allow them to reflect inwardly and to transcend the limits of physical vision. Through my art-making, I feel I have built a bridge for the collective unconscious to transcend the limits of reality, one that encourages viewers to go beyond the mere sense of sight to perceive the boundless nature of their own self-awareness. My latest evolutionary step has been to focus on the paradigm of God and the divine within our modern culture. For this I drew inspiration from ancient Avestan, the language of Zoroastrian scripture, and the word Khoda, which means not only God but literally the self (Khod) who has risen. It is this innate knowledge of the higher being within each of us that I have tried to instill in the art shown here, especially as personified by the Rumi-inspired verse "I Slept With the Light and Became Pregnant with Love".

Angela Larian

