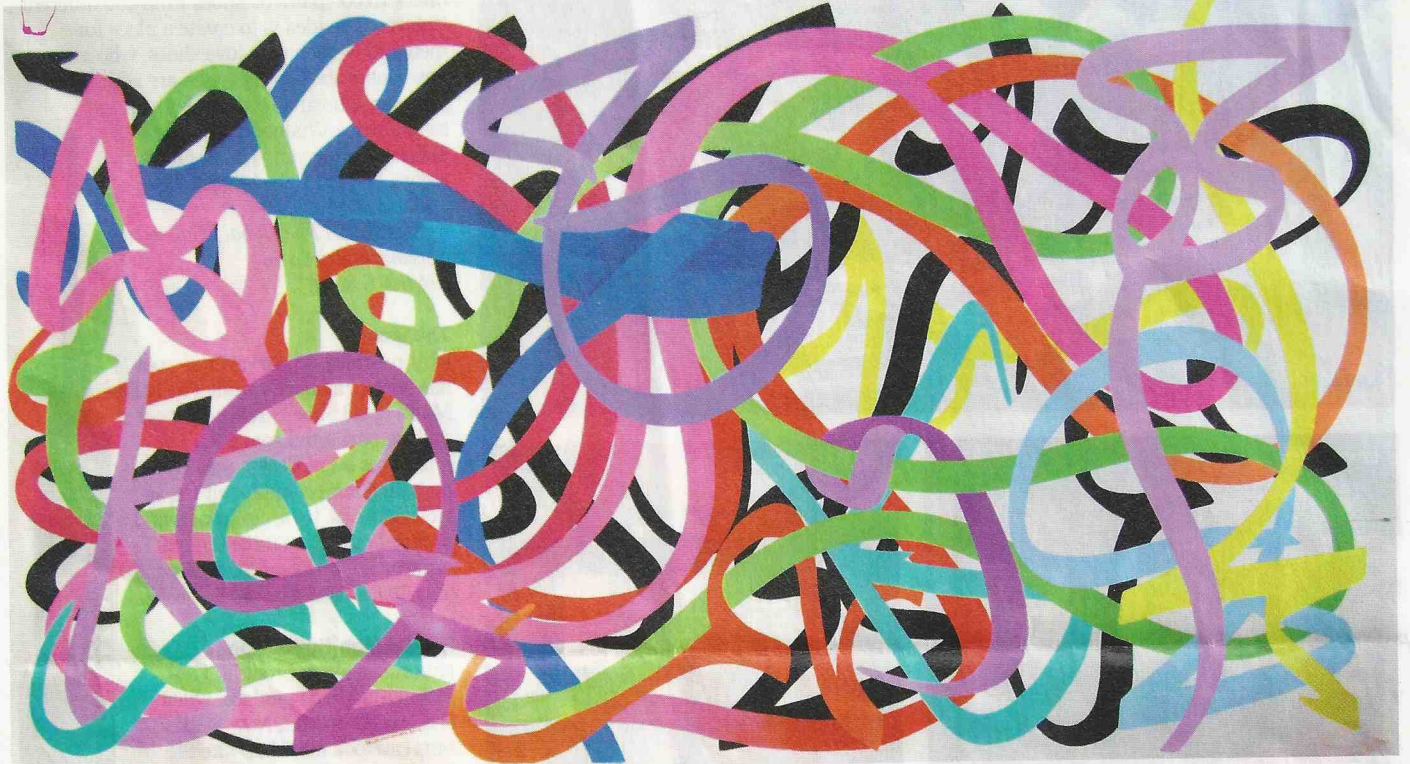


Colourful language



Canada-based Iranian artist **Salar Ahmadian** draws on pop-art influences to give calligraphy a contemporary twist. *Jenny Hewett* examines his striking work

Having spent three decades of his life in the west, Iranian-born calligraphy artist Salar Ahmadian's art is a product of cross-cultural symbiosis. Today, his colourful, unconventional calligraphy-based acrylics reflect both his past and his present.

'Calligraphy is a long-standing linguistic and visual art form that has been popular in the Arab world for centuries. It's something I've been familiar with in my immediate Persian context through culture and religious references,' he says. Yet it was his studies in Canada, of the pop-art

movement prominent in the US in the '50s, which began to shape his work into graffiti-like swirls of overlapping colour and contemporary movement of text.

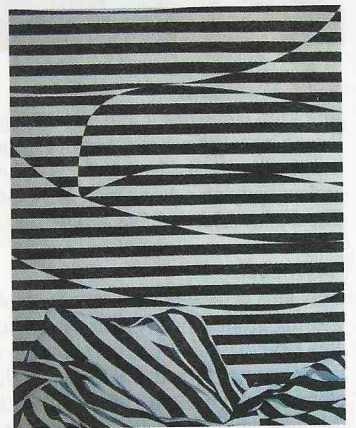
'I'm attracted to words I can manipulate and change into something that doesn't have a translated meaning'

These characteristics are particularly apparent in his new exhibition, 'From Past to Present', which runs at Gallery Etemad until Tuesday March 12.

'In this exhibition, calligraphy is reworked into something beyond text. It's not just about the text, but about the colour compositions of these reworked texts,' says Ahmadian. 'It's contemporary in the sense that it uses colour as a means of interpreting what is essentially

text-based work. I have reworked traditional calligraphy into a unique and new visual language.'

Ahmadian, who lists colour-field paintings and minimalism as his biggest influences, explains it took many months of research to transition from traditional calligraphy to modern and postmodern styles. 'It requires an in-depth visual study of



historic text, but I'm mainly attracted to words that I can manipulate and change into something that doesn't have a translated meaning. They are now mutated words and purely visual,' he says.

The monochrome image pictured above is even more abstract. 'This is a departure from more recognisable calligraphy work,' he explains. 'It's an experiment into a more postmodern form of my take on calligraphy.'

THE LOWDOWN
Exhibition: 'From Past to Present', until March 12 at Gallery Etemad, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz (04 346 8649).
Artist: Salar Ahmadian.
Price of works: On request.

▶ **NEXT WEEK:** Learn more about Dubai's first Mobile Art Gallery pop-up truck