

Amina Ahmed

For some three decades, Amina Ahmed has focused her artistic practice—which she refers to as ‘site-specific drawing’—on pattern and color as a way of revealing the spiritual connections that link diverse communities across dimensions of time, culture, and space. Ahmed approaches patterns, as rooted in geometry, from various standpoints, particularly as they relate to the natural world. Her sensitivity to geometric forms derives in part from her Muslim faith and training in Islamic and traditional arts. It informs her belief that pattern, rhythm, and shape are inherent to life and give structure to physical reality. The universal nature of these patterns has led the artist to consider geometry as a primordial artery, one that provides a ‘reconnection to the origin.’ Thus, her explorations often include considerations of her ancestors whose presence is reflected—sometimes quite directly—in her art. Color is equally important to Ahmed who uses naturally-derived pigments and dyes, especially indigo, in ways that highlight the perceived, yet unknowable, manifestations and qualities of the divine.

Ahmed arrived at FSA with a collection of textiles, old and new; some were collected during her travels, some were given to her by friends and family, and many were inherited from her late mother. While Ahmed has always employed a range of media and methodologies, textiles constitute an important aspect of her practice. Early childhood experiences among women, gathering to sew and quilt, have led her to embrace collaboration as a way of exploring what is shared amidst cultures, families, persons, memories, as well as what tethers the human and the divine. In Charleston she embarked on an extraordinary collaboration with Precious Jennings, a textile and performance artist familiar with indigo cultivation and processing. Their site-specific drawings—layerings of cloth, color, pattern, seams, and stitches—trace a relationship of loving labor, and an interlinking of their personal histories, ancestries, and spiritual affinities. They are also expressions of play and wonder.

Almost every textile in the studio has been dyed in indigo, the result of many hands—apart from Ahmed’s and Jennings’—who cultivated and processed the dye. The differing shades and effects of the indigo on plain and printed cloths result from material differences but also speak to acts of divine providence. The studio floor is covered in indigo-dyed cloth in order to invoke the concept of a sanctuary or *zawiya*. A dark indigo cloth extending from the ceiling references the cloak of the Virgin Mary; its blue color is also significant in Islam as emblematic of mercy.

Together with the nearby mirror and ceramic pot, this site-specific drawing references the protection provided by the sacred womb and is a reminder that the archetypal goddess manifests herself in everything including oneself as perceived in a reflection. Of particular note in the studio is a drawing of suspended wool—in natural and indigo-dyed form—spun by Jennings. An important material in her own artistic practice, it hangs in the studio in reference to an aspect of Sufi teaching—the cultivation of interior practices in order to purify the heart and self—that has universal applications.

About the artists:

Amina Ahmed (b. 1964) is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, printmaking, and textiles. Of Kutchi-Indian, Turkic, and Nubian heritage, she was born in Uganda, grew up in England, and now lives in the USA. She studied at Winchester School of Art and Chelsea School of Art before earning an MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts from the Royal College of Art.

Amina's work has been exhibited at Jhaveri Contemporary Mumbai, Nottingham Contemporary (UK), the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Riga), The Showroom (London), Queens Museum of Art (NY), Twelve Gates Gallery, and Pearlstein Gallery (PA). Amina's practice is rooted in geometry and in the alchemy of material preparation, making pigments, inks, threads, and paper as acts of remembrance.

Precious Jennings is a Charleston-based performance and textile artist with a diverse dance, yoga, and bodywork background. She learned to sew with her mother and continues to be inspired by the ancestral textiles that have been passed down to her. Trained in the art of indigo-dyeing, she works closely with various indigo growers and textile communities across the southern United States.