



105. THE ELEPHANT

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Did you see how your Lord treated the troops with the elephant? Did He not cause their stratagem to miscarry? And He sent against them flocks of birds pelting them with rock-hard clay and made them like stubble of grain eaten down -

106. QURAISH

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

So that the Quraish might remain secure, secure in the winter and summer journeys. Let them serve the Lord of this House, who fed them lest they starve, and secured them against danger.

American Qur'an

Toured by Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions

In response to a decade of travel to various Islamic regions of the world and his own research into Islamic religion, American artist Sandow Birk created a large series of codex-like paintings adapting the techniques and stylistic devices of Arabic and Persian painting and albums, blending the past with the present, the East with the West, creating his “American Qur'an”.

Unlike the Gospels of the New Testament – which relate narratives of Jesus’ ministry on earth – the Holy Qur’an is believed to be the verbatim words of God as communicated through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad in the 7th Century CE. Collected together and grouped generally according to length (rather than chronologically), the 114 chapters (“suras”) form a collection of sermon-like “revelations” that are the fundamental text of Islam.

Presented in the form of illuminated verses and using an English translation of the Qur’an in hand rendered text that is an amalgam of Islamic calligraphy and the letters of urban graffiti that he finds around his Los Angeles neighborhood, Birk illuminates the verses with scenes from contemporary American experiences, both at home and abroad. The project, when finished, will illustrate the entire 114 suras of the Qur’an, 83 of which are represented in this exhibition.

At a time when the United States is involved in wars against Islamic nations and declares itself to be in a cultural and philosophical struggle against Islamic extremists, Birk is recreating the Qur’an in his own hand and illustrating it with everyday scenes as a way to reflect on Islam within the context of American culture, and is inviting viewers to do the same.



Installation, 2012
Front page: Sura 105-106, 2008

NUMBER OF WORKS

85

FRAME SIZES

(84) 19 x 27 inches

(1) 58 x 35 inches

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

400 linear feet (122 linear meters)

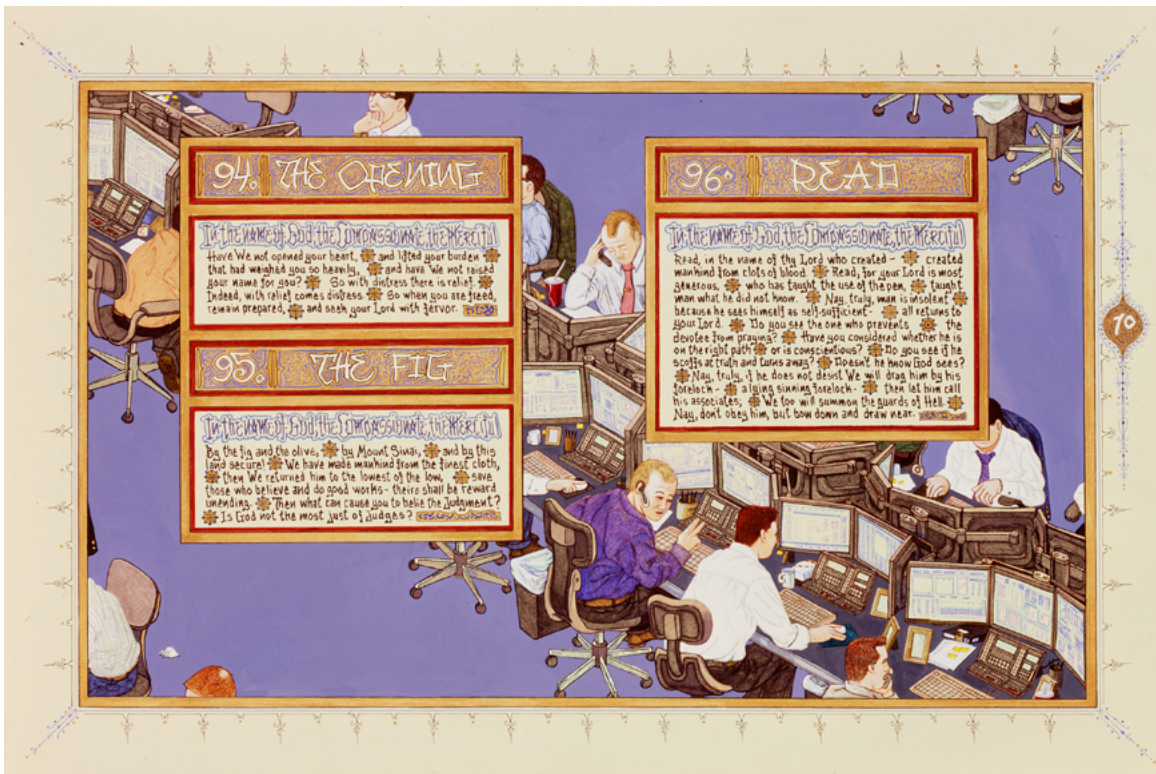
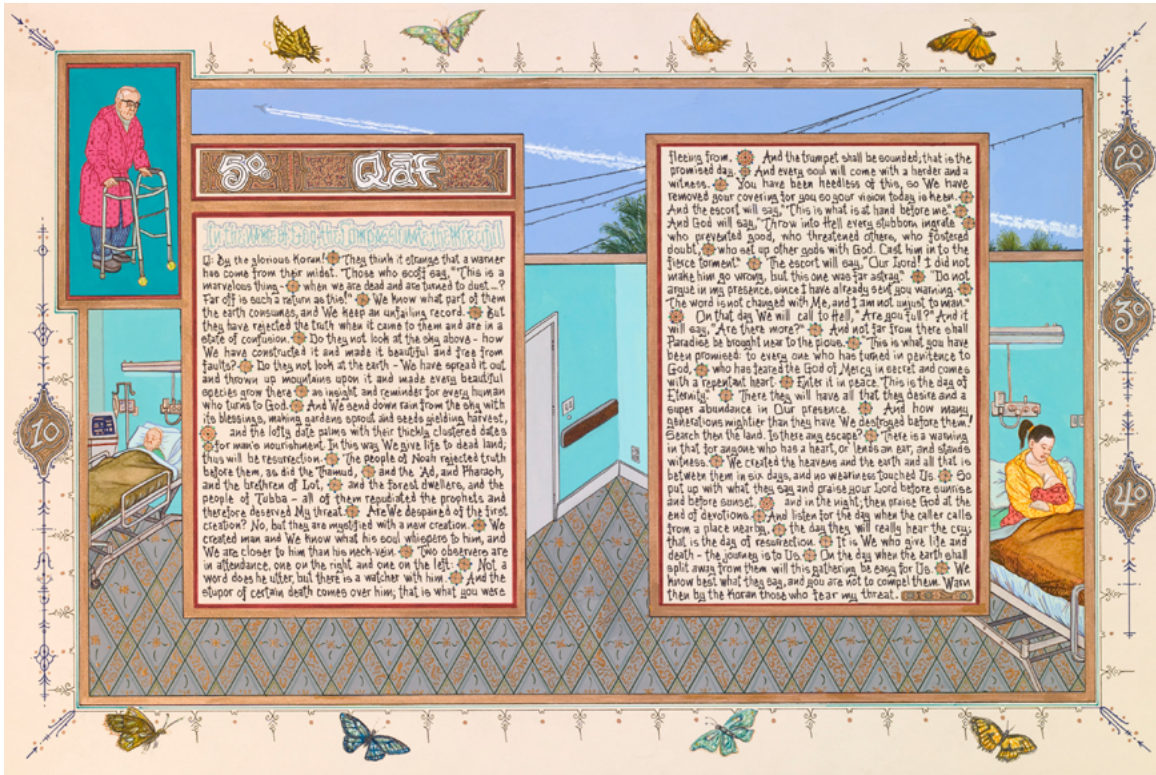
CONTACT

Alexia Cameron, Exhibitions Coordinator

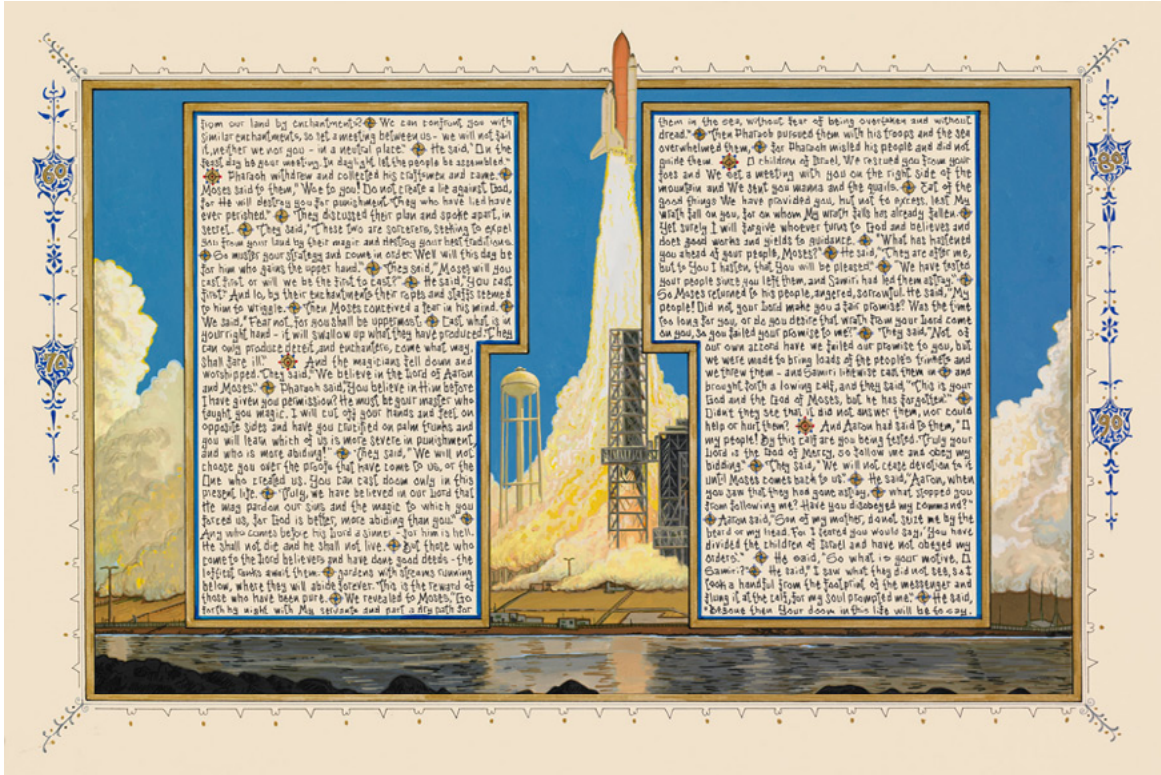
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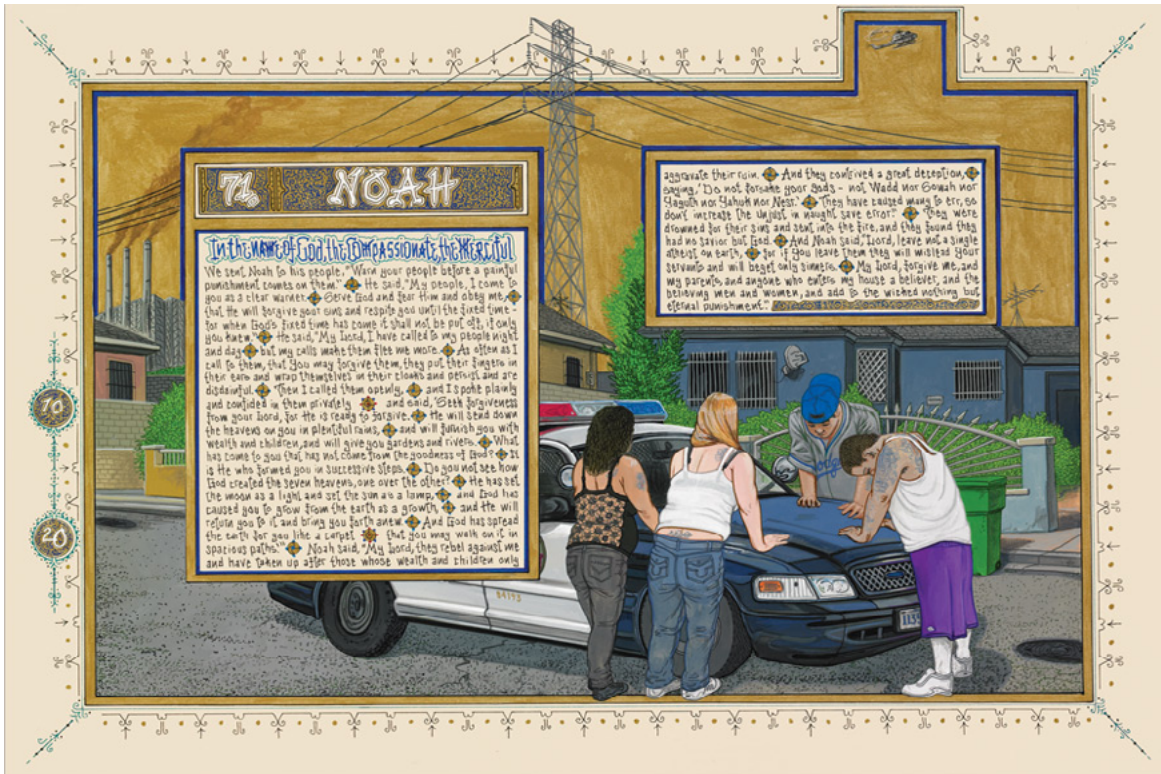








Sura 20b, 2011



Sura 71, 2012



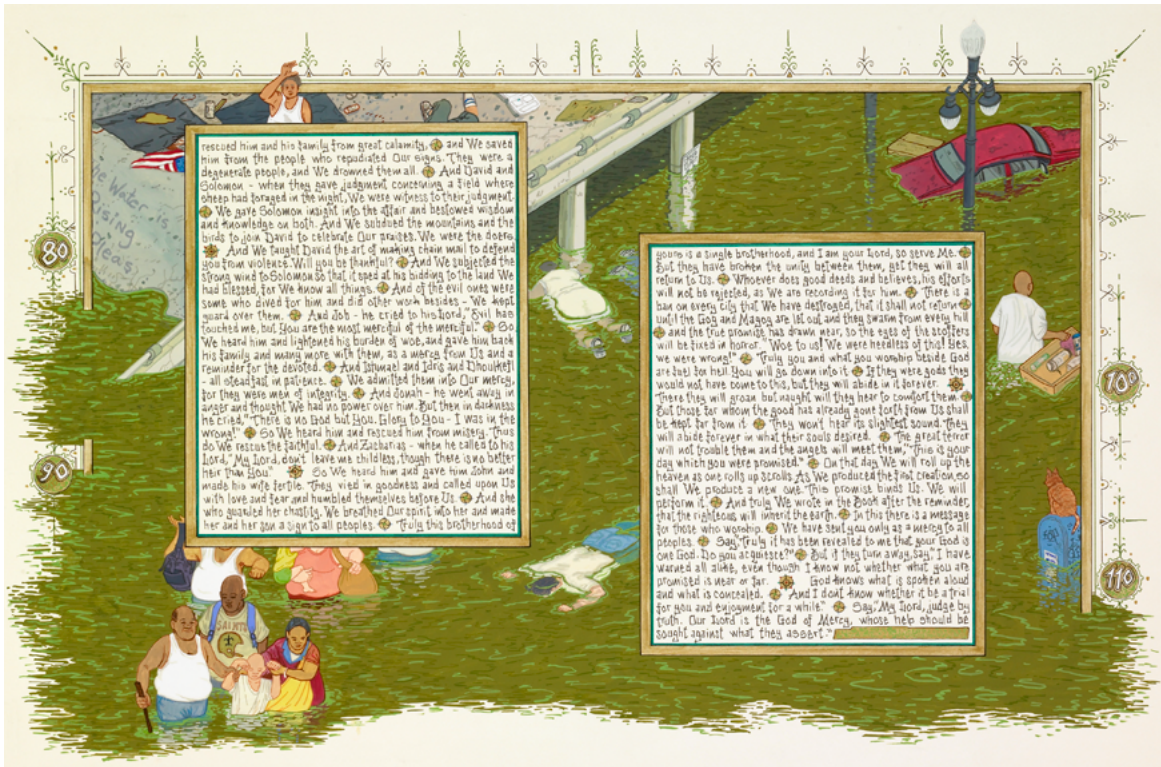
Sura 37b, 2008



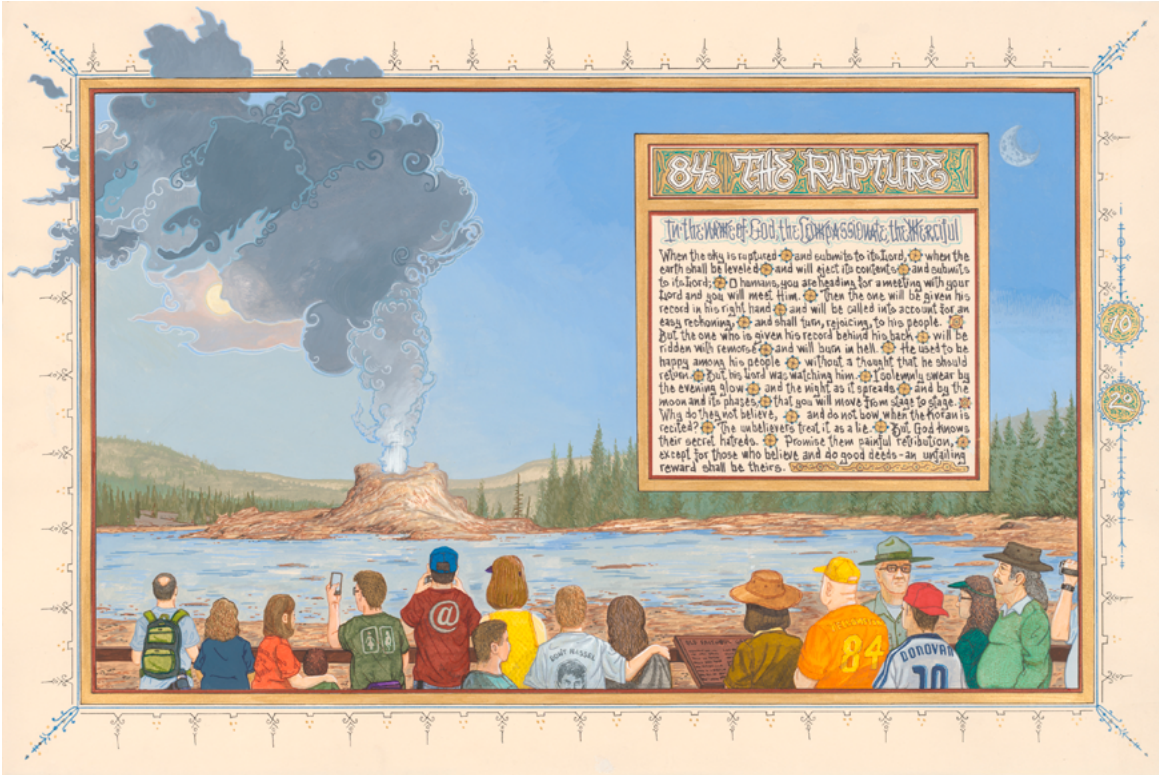
Sura 36b,



Sura 19a, 2010



Sura 21c, 2010



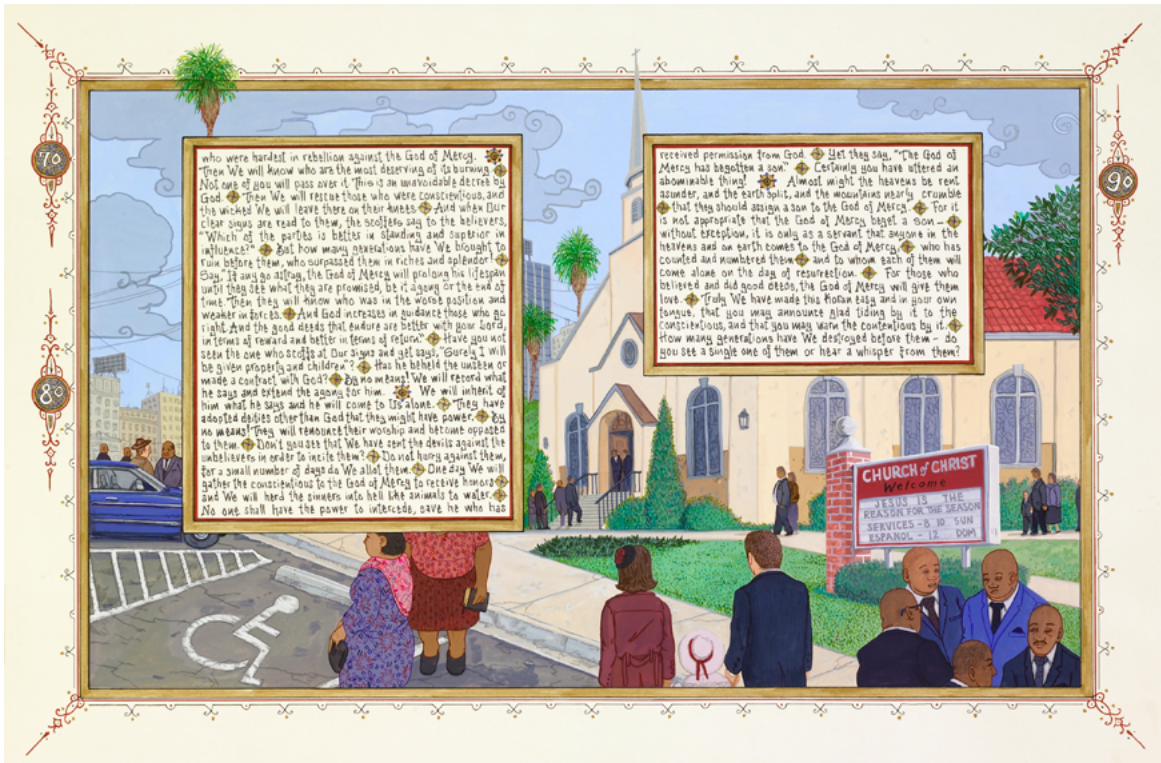
Sura 84, 2009



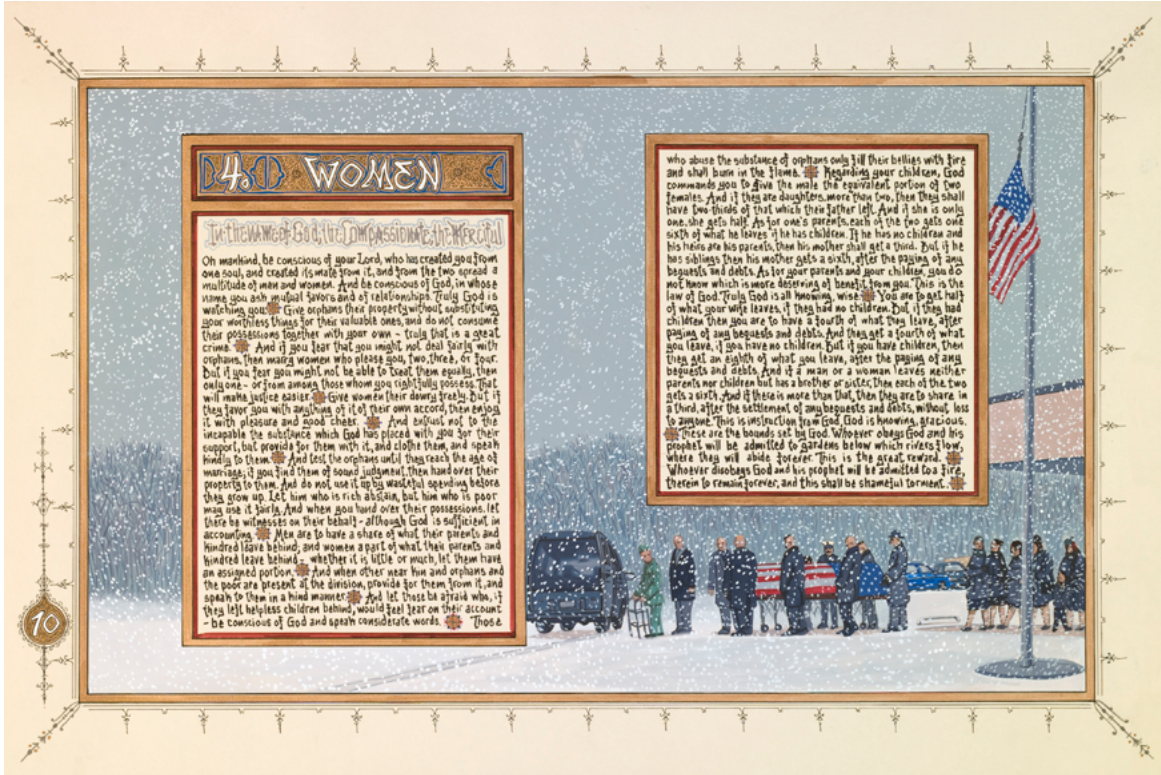
Sura 101-104,



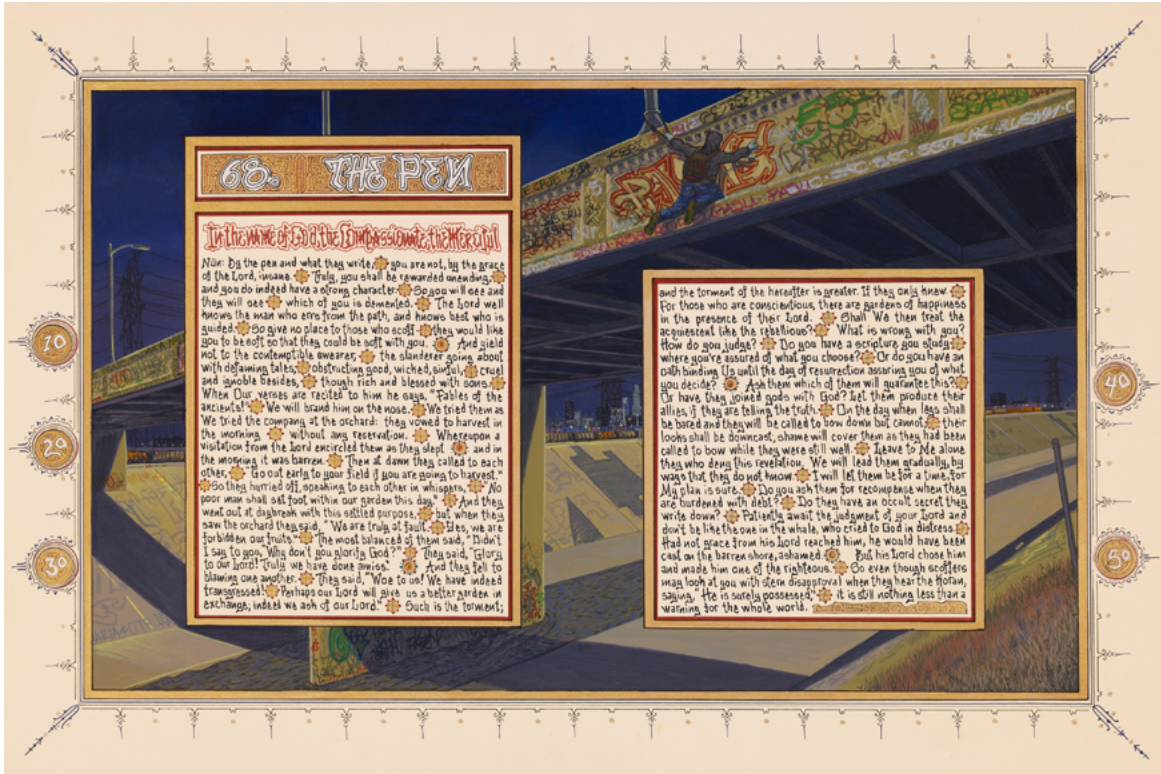
Sura 45a, 2003



Sura 19c, 2010



Sura 4a, 2008-2009



Sura 68, 2009



Installation at the Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, 2012

Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions (CATE) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for access, outreach, and education in the visual arts through the origination and circulation of diverse and innovative exhibitions for museums and art organizations worldwide. CATE fosters collaborations between public and private resources by developing traveling exhibitions that expand public opportunities to view and experience significant works of art. Formed in 2000, CATE has toured more than 400 exhibitions to over 850 art venues worldwide.

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