

Grace in the Universe



Igshaan Adams, *Rahma (Grace)*, 2018. Glass and acrylic beads, wire, 123 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 127 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 1 inches (314 \times 323.2 \times 2.5 cm). © Igshaan Adams, courtesy the artist and blank projects, Cape Town. Photo: Mario Todeschini.

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Hill Art Foundation

December 9, 2025

Igshaan Adams is a South African artist known for his beautiful woven tapestries that are often created alongside his family and friends. Adams explores his spirituality through his work, coming from a Christian and Muslim household, and finds peace with the mystic religion of Sufism.

Igshaan Adams' piece, *Rahma* (2018), or Grace, is a multi-colored beaded installation that catches the eye immediately with its striking reds, purples, and blacks in contrast to the rest of the gallery's works. Surrounded by beautiful white and crystalline roses and hanging pieces, *Rahma* holds a deep power by drawing the viewer's eyes towards it almost immediately. Despite its placement alongside two other similar rose pieces, it imparts a very different effect. *Rahma* holds an inherent spirituality that differentiates it from all other pieces. Its placement on the floor reminds us of a prayer mat, and its similarity to the Milky Way invites the viewer to reflect and connect to the spiritual.

Rahma's installation on the floor is reminiscent of a prayer mat, despite differing from the typical shape of one. It invites you to lay your knees upon it, a place to unburden yourself. While spirituality can be expressed any time, the use of a prayer mat signifies a specific space dedicated to connecting with God, as well as the greater universe. Therefore, *Rahma* invites you to do the same: reflect and reach out to the universe. Spirituality often attempts to connect the mind and body with the greater universe, which is a force outside of the material. Practices used everyday, like yoga or prayer, tap into this idea.

Unlike the more conventional wall art that an observer would see head on, one must look down at *Rahma*. It is simultaneously harder on the eyes and easier for the body, allowing a shift towards the ground in tune with gravity. Being in tune with gravity allows your muscles to soften and let go of any stress built up in your body; a common resting yoga pose is Mountain Pose, where you stand up straight, free your muscles from any tension, and lightly dip your head downwards.

Looking up can invoke the presence of something greater than yourself as you are quite literally below the piece, such as the Sistine Chapel's ceiling fresco by Michelangelo. Had *Rahma* been a hanging piece, its resemblance to the Milky Way may have been an easier connection to make, but its installation on the floor subverts this. Looking down at a piece may have connotations of the work being below you, as when we look down we are often looking at something smaller and meeker than yourself. With *Rahma*, however, you are invited to kneel down beside the work – it is not less than, you are equal. This sentiment allows for greater reflection, an inherently spiritual practice, as you are freeing yourself from social constructs of who is superior to another.

The piece contains two shades of red beads, white beads, black beads, purple beads, and clear yellow beads, all of which are slightly different stretched hexagonal shapes. No clear line is present, as Adams uses beaded pointalism and color to tell the eye *Rahma* is a rose. The eye's natural instinct when looking at this piece is to follow the rose's circular nature and rest in the black pit in the middle. This is reminiscent of the galaxy: the dark blacks and purples represent space matter, the red represent colored gas floating, and the sparkles of the clear beads represent

the twinkling stars. The greater universe is a spiritual image, as it forces you to contextualize yourself in the great beyond – this unknowable being. The author Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan quotes a Sufi mystic in his work *A Sufi Message*, writing, “the universe is the manifestation of Allah.”¹

The most striking and clear image of the piece is that of the rose, fully bloomed, petals reaching out. The rose is one of the most identifiable flowers in history, in part due to its romantic connotation. Igshaan Adam’s mentor and a Sufi master, Ma Rukea, instead referenced the rose as a “metaphoric veil—its physical beauty acts as a façade for a hidden grace that remains unseen.”² The rose seems to hold a hidden nature that Ma Rukea points out, again relating to the unknowable, and therefore divine. Ma Rukea specifically uses the word “grace” to define the rose.³ *Rahma* translated to English means “grace,” which, while used day-to-day as a character trait, in a more biblical sense is defined as God’s help and aid. This continued distinction of *Rahma* as a metaphysical, yet spiritual art piece, separates it from all other pieces.

Rahma is one of the crux pieces of Adams’ portfolio, as it ties into the central theme of Adam’s spirituality through sufism, while bridging the quintessential elements of other works. One of many rose pieces, such as *Al-Hayy* and *I am with you*, *Rahma* could be chalked up to “just another rose piece.” Instead, *Rahma*’s unique yet referential qualities set it apart. Its similarity to a prayer mat draws connection to a similar piece, *69*, which is a more identifiable depiction of one. Similarly, there is another deep red rose piece, which, though installed on a wall, is likely meant to be seen as a sister to *Rahma* with their matching palettes. Of course,

¹ Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, *A SUFI MESSAGE OF SPIRITUAL LIBERTY* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1914).

² Siddhartha Mitter, “Igshaan Adams: I’ve been here all along, I’ve been waiting – Hill Art Foundation,” Hill Art Foundation, November 24, 2025, <https://hillartfoundation.org/art/exhibitions/view/igshaan-adams-at-the-hill-art-foundation>.

³ Mitter, “Igshaan Adams: I’ve been here all along, I’ve been waiting – Hill Art Foundation.”

Rahma is slightly different, referencing the Milky Way more so than a red rose. All of these unique but referential qualities come together to heighten *Rahma*'s inherent connection to Sufi spirituality through prayer and connection to the universe. This piece reminds us of the value of taking a moment to pause, reflect, and look inwards in your daily life, as well as taking time to re-connect with the universe.

Works Cited

Mitter, Siddhartha. "Igshaan Adams: I've been here all along, I've been waiting – Hill Art Foundation." *Hill Art Foundation*, Accessed November 24, 2025.

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