

PART II

The extraction of part two is an empirical research to prove Islamic calligraphy as a means for Islamic art and Muslim Identity.



K U W A I T

1997 (26) James 1998 (27) Bloom and Blair 1997 (28)
Ettinghausen 1997, Arab Painting (29) James 1998 (30)
James 1992 (31) Lings and Safadi 1976 (32) The Quranic Art
of Calligraphy and Illumination (33) Hofstra University 1996,
Inscription as Art in the World of Islam (34) Welch 1979 (35)
Bloom and Blair 1997 (36) Hofstra 1996 (37) Welch 1979
(38) Ettinghausen 1980 (39-40) Hofstra 1996 (41)
Ettinghausen 1997 (42) Hofstra 1996

read and spoken in official and government circles and is considered the second language in the schools.

Most Kuwaitis are Sunni Muslim, and about 20 percent of citizens are Shia. Most foreigners are also Muslim, and the majority is Sunni. The *Dewani*, a traditional sitting room, plays an important role in Kuwaiti life. It is a place for social gatherings where aspects of duty and social, economical or political problems are discussed.

C A L L I G R A P H Y & I D E N T I T Y

A short while after the residence in Kuwait in 1998, the researcher found out the importance of Arabic calligraphy as a tool for Kuwaitis' daily life directly or indirectly. Reading the Koran is their duty. Particularly, Muslim artists and calligraphers use calligraphy in their work to express the Muslim identity to the West. In doing a research on this subject, the collection of information is not sufficient, because the method of data collection depends on the type of issue and the subjects. Consequently, two methods (quantitative and qualitative data) were approached. The multiple choice technique is a convenient way to gather general information in a statistical form. On the other hand, a qualitative method of deeper information can support the validity of quantitative data.

Accordingly, a survey was conducted by questionnaires concerning the role of Arabic calligraphy in modern Kuwait. The respondents ranged from artist, calligrapher to computer designer in related fields in Kuwait. Of the 26 recommended candidates, 20 replied to a 19-item questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 15 multiple-choice queries and 4 short answer requests, either structured or not.

During this process, a few difficulties were met: 1) understanding Arabic or English, 2) contacting people by pager, mobile, and fax at certain times, 3) Kuwaitis' attitude to non-Muslim foreign women and, 4) lack of enthusiasm for academic research on calligraphy.

The data compiled from the survey was analyzed in two ways. The first analysis tabulated the cumulative statistics in the form of percentages of the entire survey group. Afterwards, the respondents' few comments were noted down to enrich the question information. The second analysis sought to examine noteworthy opinions to special questions. The finding of the survey can identify "Arabic calligraphy as an illustrative tool for religious and applied art in modern Kuwait". It can also examine the relationship between calligraphy and Muslim identity.

More detailed information is as follows:

Artist: Abdul Khader Hasan, Ahmed Abu al Adas, Jaber Ahmed Mokkar, Mohaad al Shekh al Faresi, Ms. Haya al Khalifa, Nabeel Ali, Naser al Rifai, Qasem Yaseen

Calligrapher: Abdul Elah Abu Jaish, Monther Ganam, Naif al Haza, Zuhair Zuhrrar, Pseudonym

Artists/calligrapher: Ali al Bidah, Farid al Ali, Fadel al Rais, Hmood al Anizy, Khariy Mohammed Farran, Mohamed al Moathen

Computer designer: Waleed al Askar

Lettr from Khajal al Qatas

السيدة الفاضلة / سوكن لى نيتيوننا

تحية طيبة وبعد

أولاً أود أن أشكرك على الاتصال وإرسال الفاكس والتي يحمل في طياته كثير من الحكمة... والاستفادة.

وأما بالنسبة للخط العربي وتشكيله في لوحاتي فهو قليل جداً ومن الصعب أيضاً أن يقال بأنى من الفنانين الخطاطين ، ففي الساحة كثير من زملاء الفنانين الكويتيين والمعروفين وأنا سأذكر بعض الأسماء لعل ذلك سيفيدك كثيراً إذا ما اتصلت بهم هذا إذا لم يكن تم الاتصال بهم مسبقاً . الفنانين المعروفين باهتمامهم بالخط العربي هم : قاسم ياسين ، فريد العلى ، وليد فرهود ، جابر احمد ، ناصر الرفاعي وكثير غيرهم .
وأما أنا فالخط العربي لم أتناوله في أعمالي إلا قليلاً جداً ولا أذكر بأنى عملت أكثر من عمل أو وعلى العموم هذه فرصة سعيدة بأن تعرفنا عليك وأسعدنا كثيراً اهتمامك بالخط العربي وما يتناولون ... عملين الفنانين في لوحاتهم من تشكيلات تزيد الخط العربي جمالاً وتطوره في التشكيل وتطويقه الى ان يصبح لوحة فنية ، هذه الاهتمامات التي تواصلين في دراستها ستوصلك الى جماليات الخط العربي والى تاريخ هذه اللغة على كل حال مرة ثانية أشكرك وأرجو لك التوفيق ...التندمة

وتحياتي لك ،،،

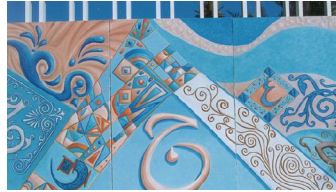
الفنان / خزعل القفاص



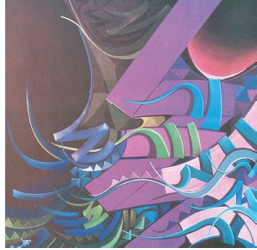
Ahmed Abu al Adas



Fadel al Rais



Ms. Haya al Khalifa



Jaber Ahmed Mokkar



Abdul Elah Abu Jaish



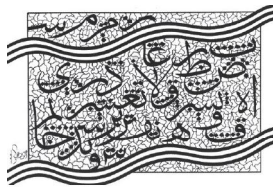
Khariy Mohammed Farran



Mohamed al Moathen



Mohaad al Shekh al Faresi



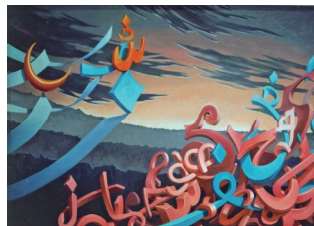
Zuhair Zuhrrar



Monther Ganam



Nabeel Ali



Naser al Rifa

Questions

1. What do you consider to be the most important element of your work?

- a. Artistic concept and idea as an artist: 70%
- b. Quality of the artist's craftsmanship: 20%
- c. Message of Islam as a Muslim: 10%

The main importance for artists and calligraphers is the artistic concept and idea, but delivering the message of God should not be neglected.

(1) I need message of Islam as a Muslim too, because my art is related to religion. I can't get away from message, as my works are about the Koran and Islam. Idea and message are both valuable for me. (2) I am a serious Muslim artist and calligrapher. I need to give people messages from God through my writing.

2. To what extent do you consciously utilize principles of calligraphy in your work?

- a. Very mindful of incorporation with calligraphy principles: 60%
- b. Somewhat mindful: 0%
- c. Rely on momentary happening: 40%

The rule of calligraphy is necessary, but is not obligatory all the time. The difference between artist and calligrapher is that artist creates calligraphy with ideas, while calligrapher must follow the rule. However, calligrapher sometimes breaks the rule.

(1) Without a certain rule, calligraphy can't be beautiful. The man who knows all the rules knows how to break them. I don't care about any rule, although it can destroy the beauty. I am looking for the beauty, relying upon the moment. (2) Every letter should be written very exactly.

3. A few calligraphers refused to be called "artist", saying that "I am not artist, but am calligrapher". What do you feel mostly about you?

- a. Calligrapher: 25%
- b. Artist: 40%
- c. Both calligrapher and artist: 30%
- d. No comment: 5%

The definition of artist or calligrapher is not clear in Kuwait. The purpose of artwork determines the title. If idea is found, the person is referred to as artist. Two types of calligrapher exist: classical and artistic calligraphers. Classical ones follow the rules of calligraphy, and do not believe in abstract modernism, while artistic calligraphers use the aestheticism of alphabets in formative art. However, Arabic calligraphy, both classical and artistic, should be classified as formative art, because it follows rules of a balanced aesthetic structure, considered space, formation, and direction. Moreover, calligraphy in many parts of the world is generally recognized as formative art.

(1) I do not write calligraphy, but draw calligraphy. I have an artistic feeling, and I don't mind to religion. I only care about art. As calligrapher, you would compare with other calligraphers all the time, but as artist, you have freedom. (2) I feel myself both artist and calligrapher. I want to be an artistic calligrapher.

4. If you do not wish to be called "artist", what is the main reason?

a. Calligraphy as a religious tool for the homage of God: 7%

b. Calligraphy as superiority than art from early Islamic tradition: 45%

c. Calligraphy as the only skill of enabling to execute your work: 7%

d. No comment: 41% (this belongs to artists)

Calligraphers prefer to keep their titles, because calligraphy is considered as a more superior tool than art, according to the early Islamic tradition.

(1) I don't like to be called "artist" all the time. Calligraphy, for me, is a way to pay the homage to God. The homage to God every moment is very important for my life. (2) Calligraphy is more difficult to make, because you have to follow the rules with much discipline. Many artists can't write calligraphy. That's why they imitate calligraphy. Calligraphy has been admired all the time.

5. If you use calligraphy for your work, what is the reason for it?

- a. The best way to pay tribute to God: 25%
- b. The most suitable tool for your work, keeping Muslim identity: 55%
- c. The easiest and safest method to sell your work: 5%
- d. No comment: 15%.

Calligraphy is the foremost means for keeping Muslim identity.

(1) People know that I am a Muslim, and calligraphy is the alphabet of the Koran. (2) The beauty of calligraphy enforces me to work with it. Calligraphy is a trademark for Muslims.

6. How much control do you have in determining the use of calligraphy for your work?

- a. Complete: 40%
- b. Partial: 50%
- c. Little or none: 10%

Calligraphy is used for artworks both completely and partially.

(1) I use calligraphy almost 100% in my works. (2) Partially, when I take calligraphy only to my work, I make decoration with colors and patterns on it.

7. How much does Western art influence your art?

- a. Greatly: 15%
- b. Partially: 35%
- c. Very little: 50%

Western art has influenced artists and calligraphers very little.

(1) Colors and techniques of Western art taught me a lot. Nevertheless, designs are absolutely mine. (2) From the beginning, I was completely influenced by my own Islamic culture, but started to see the works of Western style through magazines and Internet.

8. If you use calligraphy for your work, which way do you use?

- a. Classical and traditional calligraphy: 45%
- b. Abstract and free style of calligraphy: 10%
- c. Combination of the two styles: 45%

Both the classical and combination of classical and abstract styles are favored among artists and calligraphers.

(1) As calligrapher, I use classical calligraphy. As artist, I use modified Kufic in a modern style. (2) Combination. If you write calligraphy, you must repeat the same thing all the time, and I don't like it.

9. What is your favorite calligraphy style in your work?

- a. Elongated and straight (Kufic): 10%
- b. Curved and round (Naskh, Diwani, Thuluth, etc.): 35%

- c. Combination of straight and curved styles: 50%
- d. No comment: 5%

Combination of straight and curved styles is mostly applied to art and calligraphy.

(1) Combining both lines suits best for painting, due to the artistic beauty in calligraphy. (2) Combination. For me, the beauty of calligraphy means everything, allowing movements three-dimensionally.

10. Which material do you generally use for your work?

- a. Paper: 45%
- b. Textile: 5%
- c. Others including paper (Please specify): 50%

Paper is absolutely used for classical calligraphy, but for other purposes, all materials and techniques are allowed.

11. How do you execute your work?

- a. Manual work (by hand): 85%
- b. Computer aid: 10%
- c. Combination of manual work and computer aid: 5%

Calligraphy should be written only by hand.

(1) I don't like computer. There is no human touch. When I use my hand, I feel that God is with me. (2) I don't consider selling my works, because they were done by computer.

12. Whom do you consider primarily when you start to work?

- a. Yourself as Muslim artist: 50%
- b. General viewers: 40%
- c. Galleries/ Art buyers/ Art commissioners: 5%
- d. No comment: 5%.

Concerning their work, artists and calligraphers think of themselves first, then of general viewers.

(1) General viewers: My work should be international regardless of Muslims or non-Muslims. (2) I am a Muslim and must be honest with myself. (3) Being myself first: I discover something new and enjoy it for my happiness. (4) I love to do. I do what they want to see in their eyes.

13. For which purpose is your work being used?

- a. Religious message to Muslims and non-Muslims: 55%
- b. Art as decorative purpose: 20%
- c. Applied art for daily practical use: 20%
- d. No comment: 5%.

The purpose of calligraphy is to deliver religious message to Muslims and non-Muslims. Calligraphy is applied to decoration and daily use.

(1) I don't want to use my work just for message of the Koran, but somehow for applied art. I want to show that calligraphy is not only for the Koran, but it also is the

most beautiful art in the Arab world. (2) I want to keep the Arabic folklore, culture, and heritage.

14. Are you employed or self-employed?

- a. Employed: 15%
- b. Employed and self-employed: 50%
- c. Self-employed: 35%

Artists and calligraphers are employed or self-employed.

15. How do you promote your work?

- a. Through personal contact: 50%
- b. Selling through galleries: 45%
- c. Commissioned by others: 5%

Sales of artworks are done through personal contact and galleries.

In Europe, there are art agents, but in Kuwait, we don't have them.

16. List a few calligraphers and artists who have influenced your work.

Foreign calligraphers from Iraq, Turkey, and Iran influenced Kuwaiti artists and calligraphers greatly, and most of Kuwaitis studied calligraphy abroad.

17. List a few contemporary calligraphers and artists you admire.

Contemporary artists and calligraphers from Iran and Turkey are the most popular among Kuwaitis.

18. What is the advantage and disadvantage for using calligraphy in your work?

Calligraphy has more advantages than disadvantages. For advantage, calligraphy distributes the words from the Koran and enhances Muslim identity. Besides, it endows human beings with its beauty. For disadvantage, calligraphy needs much time, and demands understanding of Arabic language.

(1) My reason for being calligrapher was that I found myself in calligraphy. (2) For disadvantage, I believe that non-Arabic people don't understand the language, but can see and feel the beauty of calligraphy. For advantage, Arabic calligraphy is a direct and clear message, and is easy to be learned and understood by Muslims. (3) One of the advantages is; 'pleasure for general viewers; decoration for Amir (king); and money and beauty for the poor people.' I don't see any harm in calligraphy.

19. Comment about calligraphy as an illustrative tool for religious and applied art in modern Kuwait.

In Kuwait, calligraphy plays an important role as an illustrative tool for religious and applied art.

(1) I wouldn't do calligraphy, if there were no money to earn and time enough. It is a professional job for me and others too. (2) Calligraphy as a religious means; I want to distribute my new art calligraphy to all over the world, in

order to change the idea about our Islam. Western people think that Islam is blood and killing, but is a flexible religion.

Several other findings are observed during fieldwork and interviews.

- Muslim artists and calligraphers often emphasize the word of “Islam”.
- There is no modern invention in calligraphy.
- Religious calligraphy is more seriously treated than artistic one.
- The words of the Koran should not be displayed on the ground.
- Kuwaitis love calligraphy more than modern art.
- In the applied art form, calligraphy is found on textiles.
- Calligraphy is seen on television, in newspapers, and on streets.
- Calligraphy is the most suitable form for illustration in Kuwait.
- Historically, calligraphers were highly respected; now they are not.
- Between classical and artistic calligraphers, conflict exists.
- Calligraphers who write Thuluth feel superior to others.
- Calligraphy is considered to be an artistic hobby and pleasure.
- Artists and calligraphers have no financial problems.

- Calligraphers are relatively small in number, compared to artists.
- No calligraphy school or association has been founded yet.
- The majority of artists and calligraphers learned calligraphy abroad.
- Calligraphers' qualification is generally low without family tradition.
- Artists and calligraphers do not practice enough, despite workspace.
- Calligraphers write poems and love music.
- There are calligraphers who work as a religious leader at mosques.

Conclusions

From all the findings, Arabic calligraphy has been greatly applied to religious art in Kuwait as an illustrative tool for keeping Muslim identity. Moreover, it has utilized the beauty in applied art, thus Muslims can enjoy calligraphy with pleasure.

- (1) The homage to God every moment in my life.
- (2) Keeping identity.
- (3) I love calligraphy.
- (4) Calligraphy is a special art of Islam.
- (5) For me, beauty means everything.
- (6) Arabic calligraphy in Kuwait became one of Kuwaiti elements.
- (7) Calligraphy is a trademark for Muslims. Without it, no Kuwait exists.

Arabic calligraphy was created for the writing of the Koran. Muslims must read it to honor God and to deliver messages of Islam to non-Muslims at the same time, as a duty. Exception is not found in Kuwait. Arabic calligraphy has been loved by Muslim Kuwaitis, and will be enlivened in their hearts as long as the country exists on this globe. It strengthens Kuwaitis' identity, due to a precious gift from God who provides a strong relationship between Him and Muslim Kuwaitis. And for non-Muslims, it is its beauty.

Recite in the name of thy lord who created,
Created man from a clot;
Recite in the name of thy lord,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man what he knew not
(The Holy Koran 96.1-5)

I S L A M I C O R N A M E N T

Islamic ornament seems to be conceptual and intellectual rather than emotional, expressing contemporary ideas of beauty and aesthetic concepts to communicate Muslim thoughts and to reflect the spirit of their times.⁽¹⁾ In the context of a belief that ‘God alone is the Creator’, a new way of expression in ornament was created, using floral, geometric, and epigraphic motifs,⁽²⁾ bringing ambiguity to their function as purely decorative, but also as possessing significant meaning.

Islamic ornament was inherited from Byzantine and Sasanian culture, and underwent changes over time, stretching from Spain to India and Indonesia. Therefore, they cannot be understood without detailed studies of the regional, social, and temporal variations of the techniques and use of individual motifs.⁽³⁾ Islamic ornament consists of three genres: arabesque, geometry, and calligraphy.

Arabesque is a stylised form of the vegetal scrolls,⁽⁴⁾ signifying a concept of Paradise.⁽⁵⁾ Kühnel in *Die Arabesque* (1949) argues that arabesque is the most expressive artistic manifestation. Many debates on the term ‘arabesque’ took place over a long period, ranging from the sole vegetal scrolls to the whole range of Islamic ornamentation.

Moreover, Islamic ornament is best shown in geometric patterns where basic devices of repetition, rotation, and reflection were found, evoking mystical thoughts.⁽⁶⁾ As the only novelty, calligraphy became the chief means of expressing symbolic connotation and aesthetic beauty.⁽⁷⁾

Muslims understand it as a visible form of the revealed Word of God, the Holy Koran. It is no wonder that a fine script had to be developed as a Muslim's religious duty and the most appropriate ornamentation for mosques.⁽⁸⁾ Arabesque, geometry, and calligraphy are integrated to maximize their beauty and symbolism.*

* (1) Mitchell, G. (ed) 1978, *Architecture of the Islamic World*, Thames & Hudson (2) Hillenbrand, R. 2001, *Studies in Medieval Islamic Architecture*, The Pindar Press (3) Baer, E. 1998, *Islamic Ornament*, Edinburgh Univ. Press (4) Riegl, A. (1893/1992), *Problems of Style: Formation for a History of Ornament*, Princeton Univ. Press; Burckhardt. T. 1976/1980, *Art of Islam Language and Meaning: The Common Language of Islamic Art*, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd (5) Ardalan. N and L. Bakhtiar 1973, *the Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Univ. of Chicago Press (6) Irwin, R. 1997, *Islamic Art*, Laurence King Publishing (7) Grabar, O. 1973/1987, *the Formation of Islamic Art*, Yale Univ. Press (8) Davies, J. G. 1982, *Temples, Churches and Mosques, a Guide to the Appreciation of Religious Architecture*, Blackwell



Islamic ornament at Al Hambra, Nasrid dynasty (1232-149), Granada, Spain.

PART III

The extraction of part three highlights the relationship between Islamic calligraphy and Muslim Identity.



C O N T E M P O R A R Y

Calligraphy derives its strength from the act of reading, and that of looking without reading. There is ...an imbalance between the two, a displacement, scansion and a loss of meaning...a picture in process of developing from its original conception. It opens the way to another stage of reading, that of their writer, who searches continually for an emotional and perceptual rhythm for the written structure that he strives to create. It is within the very syntax of a style that one senses this desire for rhythm and for ways of varying it: the variations of appearance.. belongs to modern art.⁽¹⁾

The Calligraphic School is not limited to a single country, but reaches across the Islamic world and shares a common identity. It consists of all works where artists have used calligraphy in their art for purpose of identity.

The school began when the Iraqi artist Madiha Umar held an exhibition of letters in Washington, D.C. in 1947. It was liberation from the word. This awakening of calligraphy spread to the whole Arab world, and reached their zenith in the 1980's, although independent experiments of works are separately done.

Different artists tried different ways, and four main types of the school arose. The first one is "pure" calligraphic works, in which the meaning of letters and words plays as an important role. The second is "abstract" works which abstract the letter and the word from its original context and meaning. The third is "figurative calligraphy" including human, animal, and other recognizable shapes that are formed with writing. The last is "calligraphic combinations" which range from mixed media with a background of Arabic script to paintings with superimposing text on the image. Despite the similarity of material and formats to Western style, these works are non-Western, pointing to a culture in which the writing has historically played a central role. This clear, non-Western element is attached to the issue of identity, and Arab artists confirm that identity has many aspects worth exploring. An artist says: "assertion of one's identity is an act of survival".

When Arabic artists showed their work for the first time to the international stage in the early post-colonial years, they had ideas full of western old masterpieces and a new stream of modern avant-garde. They were trained as Western artists, but felt "marginalized". No matter what they did, they ran the risk of being dismissed as mere foreign imitators. They had to cast about for a visual vocabulary that would reflect their cultural identity.



Arabic script was the answer. “Using calligraphy in contemporary modes tells people, ‘this is how we are trained, but we’re not cut off from our heritage, and our heritage did not stop with the demise of the Ottoman Empire”.

This case is apparent to works of Zenderoudi, an Iranian artist, who has lived in France since 1961. The desire for a culturally identifiable art stirred him. “I wanted to take advantage of the richness of Eastern art and mix it with Western art to produce a synthesis in works that would be avant-garde”. Calligraphy, words and letters became the means to self-knowledge, providing the tools to express his hope too: “a truly universal language of geometry, rhythm, proportion, space, light color”. As a result, Arabic calligraphy moved from mosques, monuments, and the page of manuscripts to framed canvases, mental sculpture, and tapestries with beautiful colors and shapes in the last four decades.

However, the Calligraphic School had its destiny. After the 60’s and 70’s, numbers of calligraphic works gradually diminished, as many artists no longer dealt exclusively with letters and script. At the same time, the younger generation chose international modes of expression like video art and installations that have no connection with Arabic culture. Whether calligraphy or writing appears as an artist’s primary concern or not, it is “a means to identify the modern Islamic artist”.⁽²⁾

Boullata goes to the linguistic and symbolic roots of calligraphy. Instead of playing with calligraphy, he

takes it as the foundation of Islamic art. For him, the arabesque is a geometric development of Arabic letterforms, providing the basis for its vegetal and floral motifs. Within classical Arab science, geometry, mathematics and the form of letters share an identical basic structure. However, the artist does not intend to teach the grammar of signs of science and history, but his job is to enable us to see ourselves. His works are written in Kufic with a pure line and a certain angle, as he attempts to uncover the secrets of Arabic lettering by this transparent linearity. Being inspired by classical calligraphy, his works brought him to an important status in contemporary art. He enjoys examining the kind of abstraction that characterizes the art of Islam.



In **Korashi's** engravings, the appreciation of the spatial directions lets viewers know that the artist is left-handed like the Arabic alphabet. The strength of his work is that the viewers have no idea of the starting point and its end. His art has no distinction between form and formlessness, structure and chaos. It is this quality which distinguishes graphic art from other art. Korashi also created a connection between Arabic writing and painting for pure signs both from Western and Far Eastern ones. His art plays a bridge between civilizations. He discovered that each word is already inwardly written before being pronounced and written in any particular style. Despite the readability of his work, time is still needed for them to be read. Reading is not linear, although he follows the

rule of line: it suspends duration, separating language from its immediate signification. Calligraphy has a root at the point where the word is a painting, a graphic form.



Shakir Hassan has developed a theory which symbolizes painting as the artistic identity of the Arab intellectual. He sees language as an “open field in which all known aspects of contemporary Arab civilization are in operation”. If the letter loses all links with language, one can

achieve a logical complement. What an artist does is a transformation of calligraphy, writing, and language into pure sign and graphic line in other symbols, taking ideas from everywhere. Hassan throws letters into the space of abstract art by liberating them, as a means of new abstraction. He integrates the violating action within abstraction. Then there is no longer calligraphy, but with

an extended space in which the painted letter, whether readable or not, refers back to itself.



Hossein Zenderoudi is a versatile Iranian artist in traditional calligraphy. He has shown his capability of creating compositions with various single letters. Among his multiple series of letters with a meaningful phrase, sometimes one can find it hardly readable, because of the saturation of letters in the whole space of his painting. However, he is capable of

losing its original written form, retaining only its moment and essence. He knows a rhythm behind his successful calligraphy. Sometimes, his letters are differently presented: horizontal, vertical, slanting and reversed to give effect, so that the writing can move in the space. Or, the artist brings the viewer into a maze where one is



liable to “trip on reading of a word”. The desire of the artist is to create an image in which the conscious viewer can read the letters both as signs and as images equally. Zenderoudi inherits a magnificent graphic tradition in calligraphy,

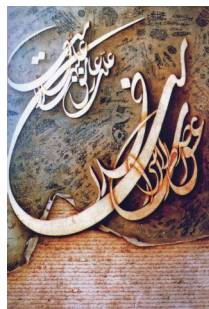
miniature painting, and illumination.⁽³⁾

Mohamed Zakariya is a calligrapher and artist. He works with both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish language. He considers: the meaning is cast into the art by a proficient master artist, and preserved for the future like recording of a musical performance. Just as one can love opera without knowing Italian purely for what is communicated, great calligraphy can be enjoyed without reading. The reading makes the visual communication more involved. Words frequently appear banal or trite with repetition, but when enveloped in an exquisite written form, they are renewed and enriched. In his calligraphic compositions, almost invariably the entire process is completed by himself which includes the preparation of writing paper, the making of *ebru* (marble

paper used for borders), blending the ink, illuminating with gold leaf.^{(4)*}

SEARCHING FOR SELF

Naser Afjehee



An influencing calligrapher-artist to Kuwaitis. Interviews: October 1999 during his visit to Kuwait/my visit to Iran in January 2000.

Why do you use calligraphy in your work?

Calligraphy is a kind of communication. It is important both for Muslims and others who use calligraphy. See old paintings from the Far East and Hartung's modern art! I am a Muslim and use calligraphy for my painting, due to its international language. Moreover, calligraphy is a kind of graphic design. A section of calligraphy has logotypes, and language is a

* (1) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy (2) Lee, A. L. 1997, Letter Word Art (3) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (4) Hofstra Museum 1996, Inscription as Art in the World of Islam-Unity in Diversity

sign. So, I choose calligraphy to show my idea to be understood. I add poems too. Although people don't know Persian language, but can understand my idea. My "painting calligraphy" is the same communication as TV and radio.

Is Arabic calligraphy used in different ways?

There are two types. The first is "classical calligraphy". A calligrapher writes calligraphy only for esthetics, showing the principle of calligraphy, as he learned from his master who taught him to follow the rule. This calligrapher doesn't have new idea. The second is "painting calligraphy" which I am trying. Artists use calligraphic alphabets for the basic design of painting. This painting calligrapher uses colors for different compositions. With what he creates, he can speak with new language, because he realizes his ideas into work. In short, the only difference between the two types is "idea" as a new material.

Does an idea of "painting calligraphy" connect with your identity as a Muslim?

I don't copy materials or techniques of others. Everybody should have his own source; otherwise, he would be named as "He is a copy of mine". You might copy how to use brushes from van Gogh, but you never do it as he did. "When I see your work, I can still guess that this is yours, even though you are absent". Through my work, I can show my real and unique identity which has also a background as a Muslim.

What is the role of a "painting calligrapher"?

“Classical calligraphy” during Safavid as the best was my first love, but, later, I changed. I had different ideas, because painting bears symbols. For example, graphic designers use a very simple form of calligraphy for telling messages. A painter must be a graphic designer. He can only show a simple sentence with idea. If your painting can't tell a short sentence, you can't tell your idea either. You are unsuccessful. Contemporary artists use short sentences to show their ideas. Painting is an international language.

How is it possible to become a master of calligraphy?

When a master was a student, he had to practice very hard until he could arrive to the same writing as his master. But becoming master means a new beginner at the same time, like a musician. You have to practice enough, so that you can decide to be a composer or a violinist. You have to specialize on your calligraphy.

Why do you use Iranian love poems in your work?

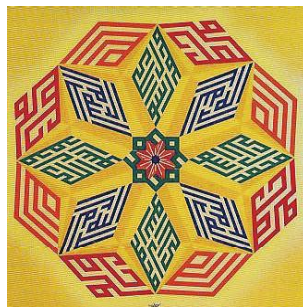
In Iran, you can find many poems, which gave meanings to Sufis. Iranian poems are based on religion. We are religious people. Hafiz, the famous poet, used the words of the Koran. We are dealing painting with our sense. We are searching for our romantic feeling within religion. When we read poems, we can catch powers or energy from God.

What is your favorite style and color?

Nasta'liq. When I finished school, I got a degree for Nasta'liq. But I know all styles. I can design Arabic

alphabets. I use various colors like vocabulary, such as white for peace. Olive green is my main color.

Farid Al Ali



His 500 calligraphic designs for the Prophet Muhammad's name are used at schools in Arab world. Interview: September 1999 in Kuwait.

Are you both artist and calligrapher?

If you see my works, I am both artist and calligrapher. I participate in all exhibitions with other artists and calligraphers.

What is the mission for you, using calligraphy?

I like to show to people is that I am trying to mix calligraphy and art. If you are a Muslim, you feel happy when you read words from the Koran. To non-Muslims, I want to show that we, Muslims, have flexibility in Islam through the variety of simple calligraphy design.

How can you make non-Muslims understand you?

From the start, I don't make complicate design. I discuss with non-Muslims about the whole procedure of doing calligraphy. But sometimes, I create complicated things and leave them to my viewers' imagination. They

can try and understand them step by step. After a while, they can feel that this is the Arabic script.

Do your colors have a meaning in your writing of the Koran's words?

Yes, there is a meaning for myself. I like to put many colors. Islamic writing uses colors, but I want to make modern colors with Islamic design.

By which style were you mostly influenced?

My designs are mostly architectural Kufic due to its simplicity. I like Diwani too.

Besides giving messages to people about Islam, do you make works for sale?

No, not all the time. I made many exhibitions all around the world at my own expense. My works are not just for sale, but I want to say that our Muslims' mind is big, and God gives us good knowledge, nourishment, and unlimited imagination.

Qasem Yaseen



Artist,
expressing the
beauty of Arabic
calligraphy to
his mix media.
Interview:
October 1999
in Kuwait.

What is the distinct character in Arabic calligraphy?

If you see Chinese characters, you find lines and circles. English letters have lines and angles, while there are triangle, circle, and half edge in Latin. But Arabic calligraphy is one type in the world which finds all these things: triangles, lines and shapes. Everything is in there. You can create so many things from Arabic calligraphy. If you can't find the word of the Koran from my work, then you can find figures or shapes, which are moving through space. I make abstract calligraphy without details. I create the same, but new effect as does in traditional styles. They are design-related. I do "calligraphy painting": open and loose, no geometry and shape. I open up calligraphic lines, in relation to ground space. If you see my calligraphic words, you can play with them. My words are playing on the ground. My line is dancing.

Do you have a reason for using color?

Through centuries, most mosques used blue, because it was easy to get it. Islamic art was created from the Koran, from which I get my main inspiration. I explain the words of the Koran by paintings by my colors.

Why do you favor calligraphy, despite your study in the West?

When I was doing my master degree in the U.S.A, I wanted to do new things. My professor told me: "Don't do arts which we are used to do. Don't try to do full abstract either. Try to do something new which is different from other countries, but which we can understand. Make things which connect to your environment." As a matter of fact, I don't have any interest in a still-life style or

Kuwaiti traditional things. In general, Beduin (nomads living in the desert) connects with falcon, but I don't feel to do it. If it is not interesting subject, I don't feel to do it, and don't do it. I found that the strongest, biggest, and most interesting thing is the work of God. I collected all Arabic calligraphy since then.

How do you promote your message to non-Muslims?

First, I translated titles of my works in English, so that non-Muslims could understand the meaning behind, but I realized that they were more interested in my three-dimensional shapes, lines, and painting techniques which I had learned there. If you can understand Arabic, you know what it means. Furthermore, calligraphy effects visually to non-Muslims. Although they can't understand the words, they can get a benefit from it, becoming emotional and passionate for calligraphy. They are allowed to feel the beauty of calligraphy, because the words of the Koran give artists new power of creation. God is the Creator.

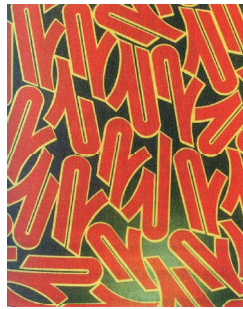
What is your style?

My character is to work with space. I show up moving figures in space. For "painting calligraphy", I have to work with concept. I also want people to understand that my message, new style, and technique are different from others. Many famous calligraphers use the Koran for decoration. They are decorators. I am an artist, painting the words of God. I want to come out from the title of a calligrapher. I recreate Koranic words through painting. The rule of calligraphy controls you if you are a calligrapher. I am an artist who controls calligraphy.

Does Arabic calligraphy give you a stronger identity as a Muslim?

No. I don't lose my identity, whether I do with calligraphy or not. But, when I work with calligraphy, I feel the strongest.

Abdul Al Arab



owns a calligraphy school in Manama, Bahrain. Interview: January 1999 in Bahrain.

Do the different Islamic countries have preferences for different styles of Arabic calligraphy?

In Egypt, they write all kinds of scripts. In Iran, they use their own calligraphy, Farsi. Now, the new generation prefers Thuluth. However, I learned Thuluth, the most difficult one, in Egypt.

What is a difference between Arabic & Chinese calligraphy in material?

For Arabic calligraphy, we only use a pen, not a brush used in Chinese calligraphy.

When did you start calligraphy, and what are you doing now?

In 1975, I went to a special institute in Cairo to learn calligraphy from old masters, since there was no such school in Bahrain. This institute was the first of its kind in Arab world. There, I was lucky to study four years. After, I worked at the Bahraini Ministry of Defense as a calligrapher for 17 years. I became one of the founders of "The Society of Bahrain Calligraphers". Now, I am writing, teaching, and participating in international art exhibitions.

What was the reason for opening a calligraphy school?

Unfortunately, we had few calligraphers in Bahrain at that time. We didn't learn calligraphy at school either. So I thought, I could open a school, not only for teaching calligraphy, but also for keeping our heritage, because Bahrain is a Muslim country. After returning to Bahrain from Egypt in 1990, I established a school. Bahrain people were happy for it, especially Arabic language teachers.

What are you teachings?

Calligraphic letters. Beginners start with Kufic and end with Thuluth or Naskh. Contents are poems, Koranic words, and *Hadith*. We, Arab artists, use calligraphy for the part of our life, as it is our Muslim culture and character. Although many artists went to the West to learn art, they came back. Calligraphy is the most suitable for modern art with variation.

How long does it take to learn basic calligraphy at your school?

It takes minimum one or two months, if you study 16 hours per week. I have an exercise book which students must follow. Many young people and children learn calligraphy.

What is your working process?

I do sketches with pencil and ruler; then I write it with pen. The best pen comes from Iran. It is very important to use a correct pen. Depending on material, different results come out. I use black ink. I put silk in the inkwell for control of ink in pen. I sometimes put color to calligraphy and execute it by silkscreen, a kind of modern art. Now, commercial calligraphers use computer, due to its fast and cheap reasons. I also work with advertising.

Which style do you feel is better classical calligraphy or modern?

I am working for both, but I prefer the classical one. I like modern art with Arabic letters which look classical. I am a calligrapher and designer. My works are “design calligraphy”.

What is your style?

I write all types, but I like old Kufic. I write the words from the Koran, but I don't follow the rule of calligraphy any more. Every calligrapher has his character. Some people break up the rule. Best calligraphers are Iranian, but Arabs have close relationship with them.

How can non-Muslims understand your message?

It is impossible to understand it, if you don't know Arabic. However, you can feel it.

Ali Al Bidah



learned both the rules of calligraphy and its beauty from distinguished Egyptian and Turkish calligraphers. He has received prizes in competitions. Interview: in May 1999 in Kuwait.

Why do you need calligraphy?

There is a strong relationship between the Koran and Arabic calligraphy. Kufic was already shown in the Koran after its invention. To write the Koran, we needed calligraphy. Of course, I need it to give a message of Islam to people.

How many types do you have in Kuwait?

We have many types, at least five, which we are using. Some types are still alive, and some disappeared. Different schools in different types. However, Iran favors of Ta'liq, and Turkey Diwani. I prefer to Iranian style. I also take from Turkey. In Kuwait, calligraphers and artists are mixing with everything. It is nothing to do with our mentality. When you become professional, you can choose your own style.

What is your advice for material?

We have different tools for writing. The best quality is made from a bamboo material. You should not write so hard. Otherwise you can't move your hand. But not so light either. You have to cut bamboo very sharply with a special knife. Pen needs a hard edge. Iranian one is good. The thickness of writing depends on different cutting of angle. In calligraphy, the angle is very important. It decides the beauty of calligraphy. You also prepare correct ink, so that you don't need to put your pen twice in the inkwell. Becoming a calligrapher demands much quiet time. For a beginner, I recommend to use different magic pens, normal HB pencils, and tracing papers for repetition of writing calligraphy.

What is the beauty of calligraphy?

Each style has its character. Not all the time, you can make variations of it. You must follow the rule of calligraphy. The secret beauty of calligraphy comes from straight lines and neat shapes of letters. If line is not neat, calligraphy doesn't look good. You have to correct it. Calligraphy is architecture- space between length and width of letters. You can have linked or separate letters. Vertically, *Alif* (the first letter of alphabet) has 12 dots, and horizontally, 7 dots. This is the most beautiful balance. The relationship between verticals and horizontals decides the whole beauty.

Why do people like calligraphic works?

Without understanding Arabic, you can't read calligraphy. However, I believe that some people like our

works, because of strange ideas with the rule of calligraphy. It is “design calligraphy”. Some like our works, due to new techniques and different media. Some like our works, owing to harmony of color. When I explain of “peace”, I use green, as colors have meanings. It means, some like our works, caused by their interested in art. But some can understand the meaning of the Koran, despite no idea of styles of calligraphy, and whether the writing is wrong or not. Therefore, we use favorite part of the Koran.

What is the easiest way to learn calligraphy?

Start the easiest one! Kufic is the easiest way to do. You can use a ruler on normal paper. First, measure and follow the rule of calligraphy. After that, you can combine Kufic with other cursive styles. Cursive scripts give you more artistic feeling.

How do you like calligraphy done by computer?

Sometimes, I use computer to show my work. Calligraphy should be done by hand. It is a human touch.

Mohammed Qambar



The Islamic civilization has its brightness all over the world. It greatly influenced the world heritage and contributed to the happiness of mankind. Arabic calligraphy is a prominent feature of the Islamic civilization which contributed to the spread of numerous features of life

worldwide. Calligraphy is a means for aesthetic expression and a way to become closer to God as well as a feature of worship and purity. When the Muslim artist adopts Arabic calligraphy as a means of expression, then he deepens his faith in God and the Holy Koran. Therefore, I found that Arabic calligraphy has beautiful components, I formed them with spiritual and psychological coherence with a link to the movement. Accordingly, I have executed the collection of works 'pictures' quoting Arabic letters with its partial beauty and, added to them beautiful oriental ornaments which bestowed beauty on the whole (Artist, Kuwait, February 2000).

Fawaz Abdulla Al Dowaish



Arabic calligraphy is known since the dawn of Islam and is the language of the Holy Koran. It is highly valued by Muslims; it is the language that granted the Arabs distinctiveness and beauty among the world civilizations. Islamic civilization has been characterized, during the past era, with these lovely writings and ornaments which are now evidences of the existence of this civilization. And these artistic works are being displayed in museums in Islamic and foreign countries. Therefore, I used Arabic calligraphy in my ornamental works, and shaped them accordingly. Art works that are harmoniously done by using Arabic calligraphy make the viewer feel that they are like musical and beautiful artistic work. I would like to register Arabic calligraphy for the coming generations. Since pottery is an old art craft that lasts for ages to

come, I used calligraphy in this art so as to be a highly artistic work (Ceramist, Kuwait, February 2000).

V O C A B U L A R I E S

Allah the name of God among Muslims.

Ablution the ceremonial washing of parts of the body or of sacred vessels.

Arabesque a design of geometric patterns with intertwined leaves, scrolls, etc. on any forms of Islamic art after the tenth century.

Bismillah (from the Arabic *Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim*, “in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”) The invocation with which a pious Muslims begins most utterances and activities.

Byzantine of “Byzantium”, dated from Constantine’s transfer of the capital to Constantinople in 330 until the Ottoman capture of the city in 1453.

Caliph the chief Muslim civil and religious ruler, regarded as the successor of Muhammad’s death in 632.

Hadith the traditions relating to the life, deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. The second source of Islamic Law after the Koran.

Hajj a Muslim who has been to Mecca as a pilgrim, and also a title given to such a pilgrim.

Hegira Muhammad's departure Mecca to Medina in 622, the date from which the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar is calculated.

Islam submission to God. The religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah, and the Muslim world.

Kabaa a sacred building at Mecca, the Muslim Holy of Holies containing the sacred black stone.

Koran "revelation" or "recitation". The sacred word of God as dictated to Muhammad and written down in Arabic. A primary source of Islamic law.

Kufic an early angular form of the Arabic alphabet found chiefly in decorative inscription, which was popular in early Islamic times.

Madrassa a theological college, often founded by Sunni Muslims.

Mihrab a niche or slab in a mosque, used to show the direction of Mecca, in which Muslims pray.

Minaret "place of light". A tall tower attached to a mosque. It is often used to call the faithful to prayer.

Minbar the stepped pulpit in a mosque used by the preacher or community leader for the Friday bidding prayer.

Mosque "place of prostration". Muslims' place of worship.

Muslim "one who submits to God", a follower of the Islamic religion.

Qibla the direction of prayer. All Muslims pray towards Mecc.

Ramadan the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset. One of the five duties on Muslims.

Shiite Muslims who believe that leadership of the Muslim community passed from the Prophet Muhammad through his son-in-law Ali.

Simurg a monstrous bird of Persian myth, with the power of reasoning and speech.

Sufi mystics, whose very personal approach to religion became increasingly important alongside the communal practice of Islam.

Sunni one of the two main branches of Islam, described as orthodox. Differs from the Shia in its understanding of the Islamic law and in its rejection of Ali as Muhammad's first successor.

Tiraz "embroidery". Inscribed fabrics made in state workshops and distributed by the ruler to his courtiers. Also refers to the inscriptions on such fabrics.

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