

Issue 04

258 pages

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Cover image:
JASMIN FAZLAGIĆ, 'Bey's wife' from the Photo Monography
'Traditional clothing and jewelry in B&H', 2010

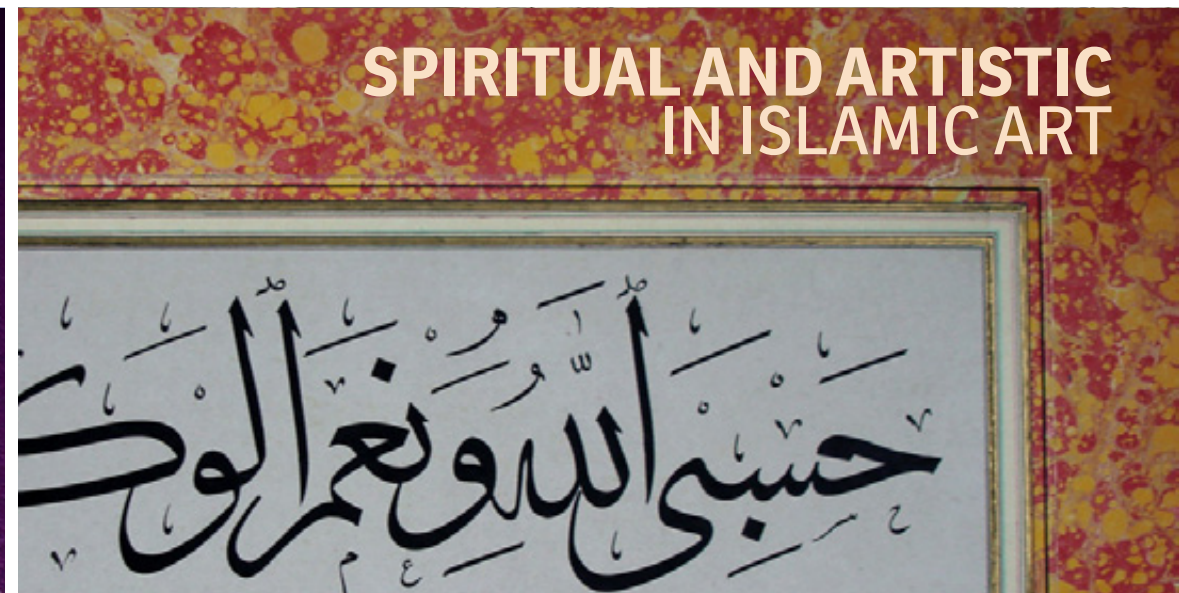
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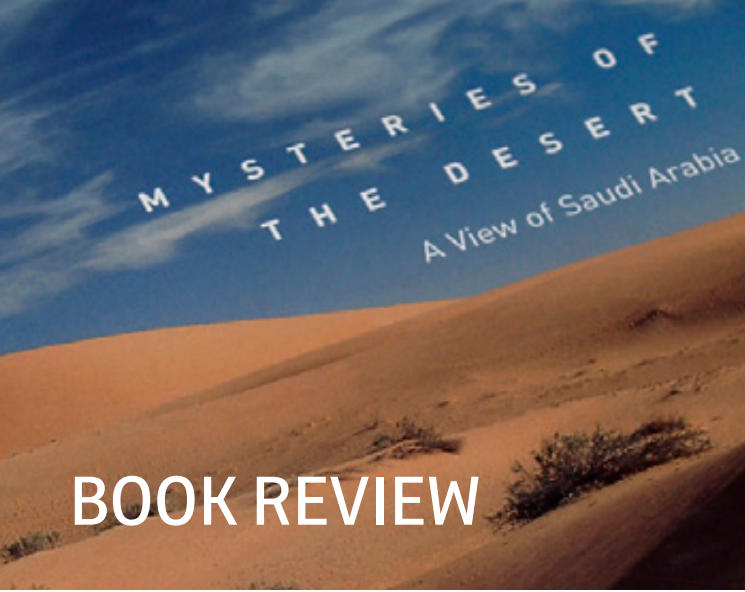
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Interview: Muiz Anwar

**GRAPHIC
EXPERIMENT-
ATIONS
WHICH PUSH
THE LIMITS
OF LEGIBILITY**

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MUIZ ANWAR

Grew up in the industrial city of Manchester but blessed to have travelled the world at an early age. His first love was illustration - as a child he always had a pen in one hand, paper in the other. Through school he was introduced to fine art painting and sculpture. That coupled with his illustrative skills led him to become a protégé product design, being runner up in the regional final of Young Audi Designer of the Year in 2005. Upon completing a Foundation Course, he was introduced to a world of graphic work alongside fashion and photography.

All these creative outputs have gifted him with an enriched visual style, which encapsulates many ideas and concepts, considers many media - but ultimately remains as minimal and true to the message it is intended to communicate as possible. After all, whether you consider yourself an artist, designer or both, you have a role, however important, to communicate the messages as efficiently as possible.

Graphic design was crucially introduced to him as a form of visual communication. Having witnessed the global miscommunication and reinforcement of stereotypes of a faith, culture and community he's a part of, he found his role as a 'visual communicator' all the more relevant and significant. He has a role and responsibility to help initiate change and promote the voice of rationale to all parties involved.

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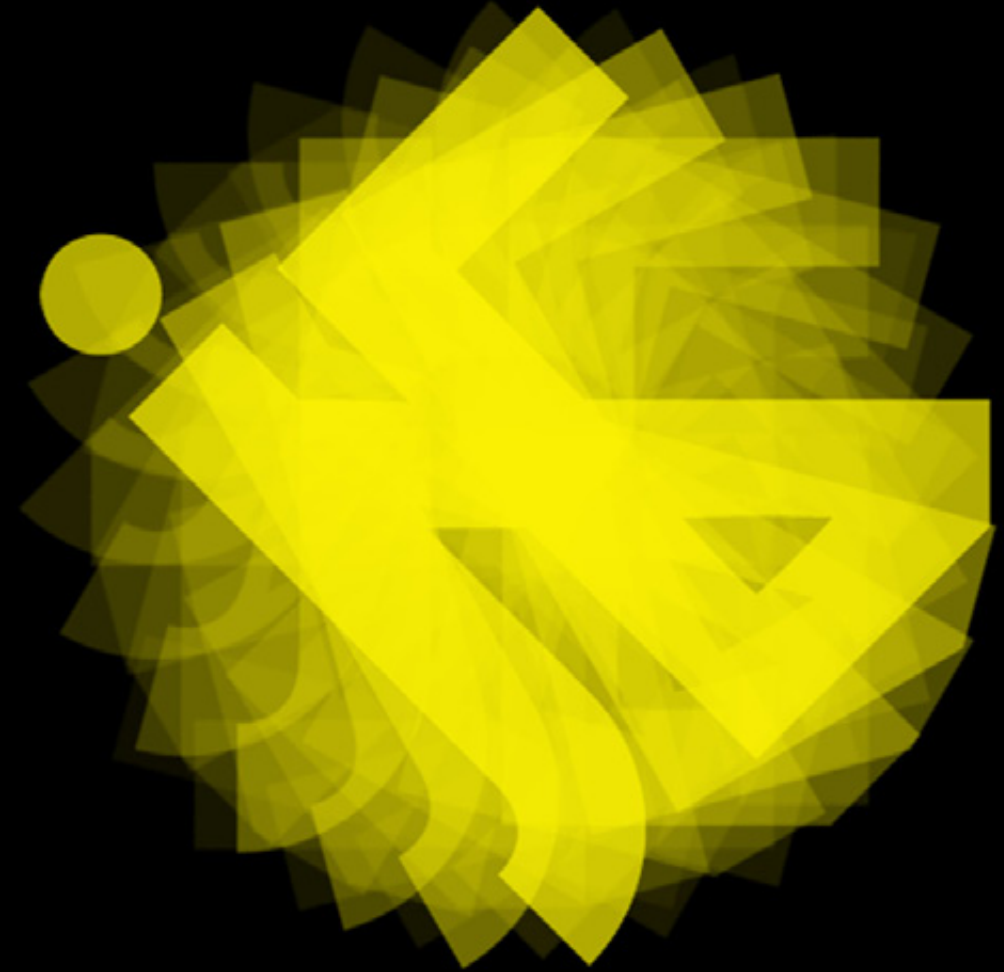


You are graphic designer and today the graphic design combines different ways of expression (fine arts, photography, typography, sculpture, conceptual art, etc). What is graphic design according to you?

Graphic Design is fundamentally, 'Visual Communication' – a canvas upon which we scribe carefully articulated messages through a series of visual linguistics, tailoured into the dialect of the recipient.

As designers, we have a responsibility to ensure that the message we are given charge of delivering, reaches its' destination in the spirit it was given to us. We often forget our responsibility in this capacity – and get lost in the superfluous aesthetic – following trends instead of nurturing an aesthetic organically relative to the message we are crafting.

Graphic design was very much an 'invisible' medium – it was everywhere but nowhere. It was never consciously acknowledged. Today, society is incredibly design literate, they are better equipped to recognise, read and decipher aesthetic indicators aimed at them as an audience – and so we find that graphic design has shifted towards a 'less is more' ideology – whereby a message will be distilled into what is often a heavily manicured, aspirational but unattainable reality.



مُؤَيَّنَاتُ الْمُؤَيَّنَاتِ
MUIZ ANWAR



This trend and self-conscious design though beautiful, serves more toward artistic merit than design principle. Artistic messages are given a unique license for abstraction in their message, making them more ambiguous and interpretative. Design however, is there to communicate with clarity – to be pure in its conveyance of the idea. 'Good' design can be the difference between life and death (health & safety signage). Good design allows people to access information with greater ease and efficiency.

You experiment a lot with typography. Can you tell us something about that?

I never gave much thought to typography as a technical design form until I attended a lecture by acclaimed type designer, Bruno Maag. Prior to that, my relationship to letters was purely calligraphic and dealt primarily with evolving the aesthetics of the Arabic language for contemporary use – but I never really considered this to be within the realm of 'typography' - as up until this point, I'd had no formal typographic training.

Bruno really introduced me to the cultural and historical significance of typography as a language and codes – he opened my eyes to the philosophy, psychology and science of linguistics and how we decipher these symbols into sonics and in turn, into language. It was a revelation, like a light bulb had been turned on in my head, it was so in keeping with the profound significance I had already attributed to graphic design as visual communication – it affirmed the philosophy I had already formulated and realised in my design practise – design for purpose – design informing culture – design informing society – the responsibility of the designer etc. Bruno, in that hour long lecture in Manchester City centre, at the end of my final year at university, on a hot summer afternoon, was my Mr. Miyagi!

I've been exploring the potential to evolve Arabic characters through type design ever since – through graphic experimentations which push the limits of legibility – and others which challenge the seemingly conventional, calligraphic preferences and parameters of legibility that most native Arabic readers seem so accustomed to in current Arabic type design.







Arabic typography still seems inextricably linked to classical calligraphic styles, 'clipart' handwritten styles or Orientalist notions of what Arabic should look like. There is centuries of rich, technical and creative development of this language to draw upon and yet there have been so few significant leaps in the aesthetic development of the language typographically over the past century. This is partially due to the limitations of technology being able to handle the advanced and elegant nuances that make Arabic such a rich script – and also due to the decline of the arts being seen as a viable academia / career path for many individuals from the Middle East and Asia.

It's time that we saw Arabic that really represented the design sensibilities of the new generation of Arabic speakers / readers in the world today. That doesn't mean we should ignore the centuries of technical proficiency Master calligraphers developed and honed in over 1,000 calligraphic styles. We should honour their technical proficiency, but also their courage to innovate.

You worked on the Intellectual Lifestyle Magazine. The Issue 'Hijab' is very interesting. You present hijab through different context: historical, cultural, fashion... Tell us more about this project.

ILM was a project I had been waiting to realise since I started university – it was the crowning project of my working practise on the principle of design with substance. It was an incredibly personal project.

ILM in Arabic means 'Knowledge' and in English, it is the abbreviation of Intellectual Lifestyle Magazine.

As a brief, it is a bi-annual publication aimed at the 16-25 year old, European/American demographic which would explore some of the worlds' most complex and controversial issues with academic detail, whilst offering the most comprehensive spectrum of opinion available on said issue from experts or those directly affected or involved in that chosen topic – to give the

choice and freedom for the reader to come to their own conclusion.

My main foray into the Arabic aesthetic was primarily motivated/catalysed by the War on Terror. I had never consciously identified or understood my religious, cultural, ethnic or political identity (like many other young Muslims of my generation), until we were put into the public spotlight following September 11th - where mass hysteria ensued of the Muslim Menace propagated by media stereotypes and misinformation. No one seemed articulate enough to clarify who or what this community I was born into were or represented and consequently we were easily demonised and targeted.

During this process of academic and rigorous questioning of my identity - to better understand who, what, where, when, why and how my faith is the way it is - I gained a more intimate and intellectual relationship and awareness of all these things.





I wanted to put together a publication, which could provide this sophisticated information in an engaging format, that didn't patronise the reader because of their age or ethnicity – but trusted and respected their intelligence to allow them to ponder and discuss the facts of the situation they were reading. To provide a platform for these adolescents upon which they could feel empowered and in control of their political awakening – to the realities of corruption, politics, faith, culture, finance and history – subjects which all too often are seen as worthy of a text book or classroom.

The ability to communicate sophisticated messages through visuals (A Picture is worth a thousand Words) was an incredibly potent sign in giving design a sense of purpose beyond the superfluous / 'soul-selling' commercialist aesthetic. It had a function / significance / power to shape communities and minds - and as a member of community increasingly misunderstood, I saw it as a timely opportunity to use visual skills I had been blessed to have a lifetime's worth of development to good use.



N I Q A B

Designer Muiz Anwar has taken one of the most conservative and controversial pieces of female, Muslim attire and injected it with the same formula that transformed a small Middle Eastern desert into the new capital city of the world, Dubai. He exclusively offers us a glimpse through the looking glass, at the inevitable evolution of traditional, Islamic fashion.

Photography . Muiz Anwar | Styling . Muiz Anwar | Model . Parisa





FILE

A M E N

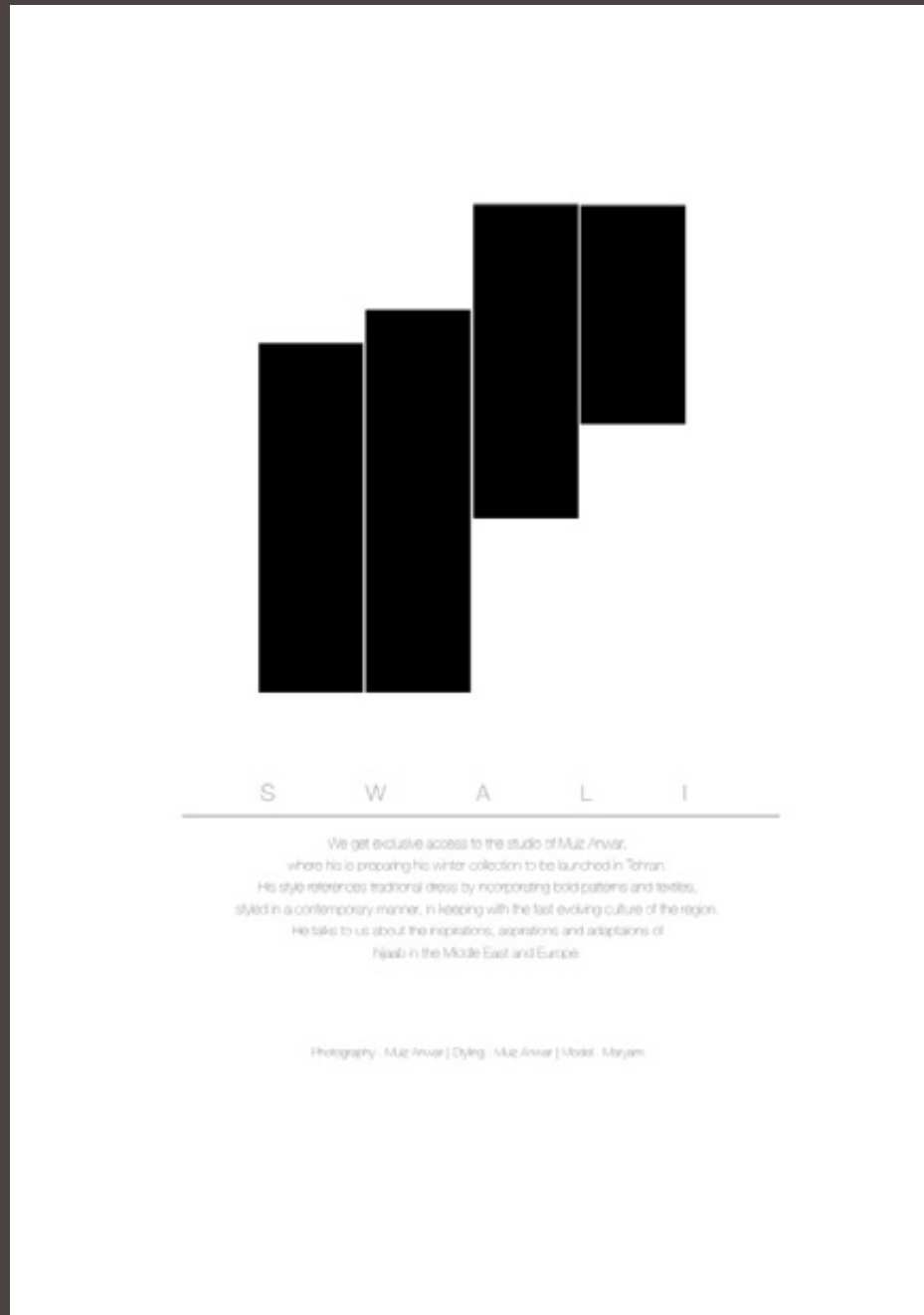
Dr. John Smith and Dr. Mohammad Rahman discuss in-depth, an analysis of how the traditional headscarf was conceived, its' relation, innovation and evolution from early Christian and Jewish doctrine and how it became a symbol of "repression" for some and "freedom" for others.

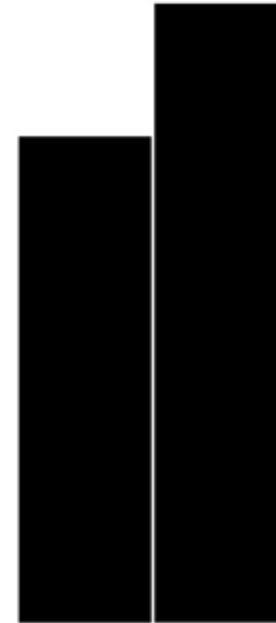
Photography . Muiz Anwar | Styling . Muiz Anwar | Model . Patsa

In some of your projects, you combine the photography and typography in very interesting way, especially in the second issue of the Intellectual Lifestyle Magazine. Can you tell us more about that project?

In issue 2 of ILM, the proposed topic for the publication to explore was the Israel and Palestine conflict. The striking black and white photography by Qamar Ramzan, captured exactly the tone of the piece – it cut through the propoganda of heroism and villainy – and instead showed sombre, emotional, worn human beings. Men. Israeli. Palestinian. Christian. Jewish. Muslim.

The typography needed to express this level of sophistication in its' conveyance of the complexity of the situation. Arabic is known for it's elegance, grace and fluidity – its' sensual and seductive curve and contours. The typography I developed was large, blunt and blocky.





D A V I D

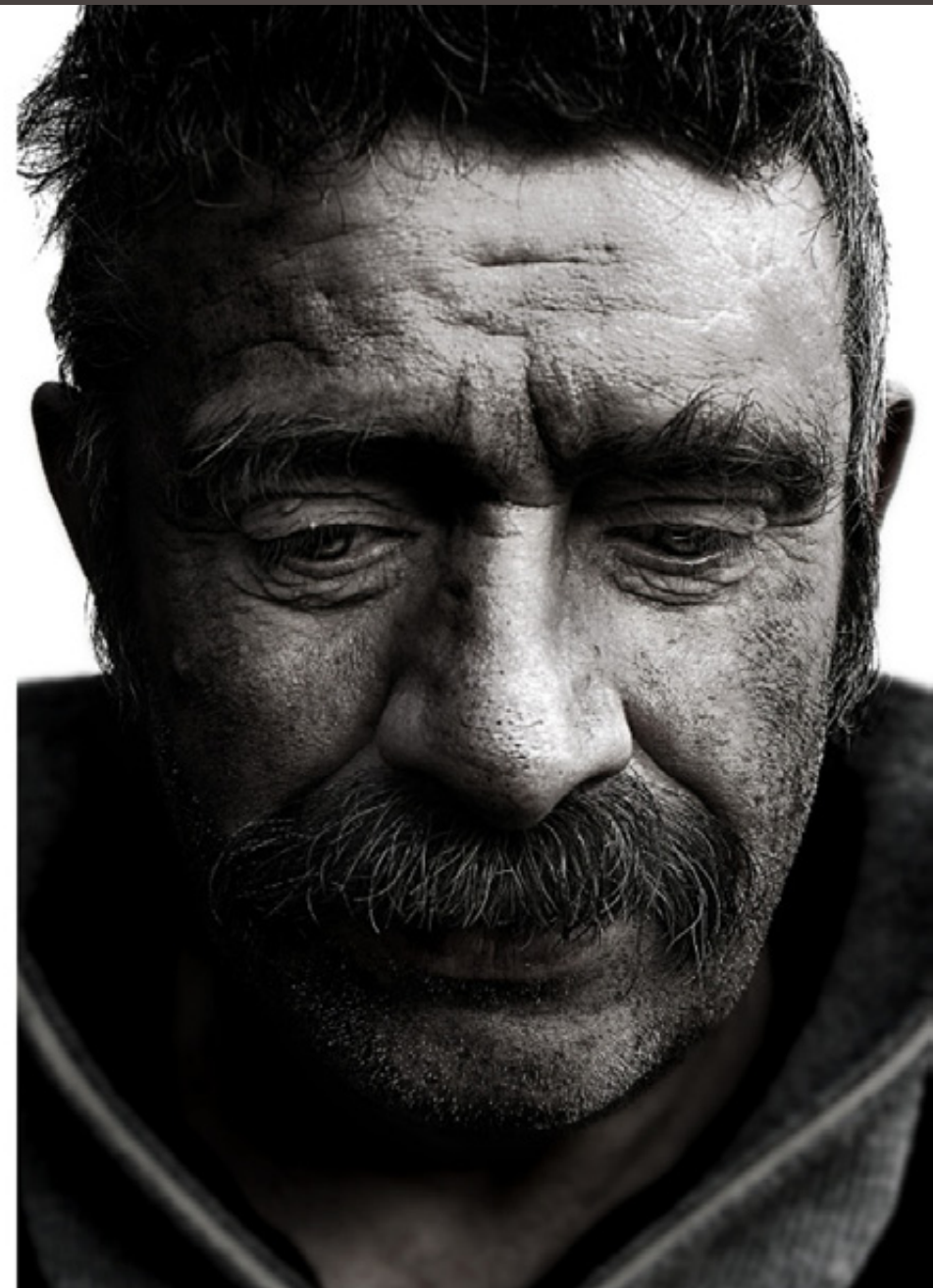
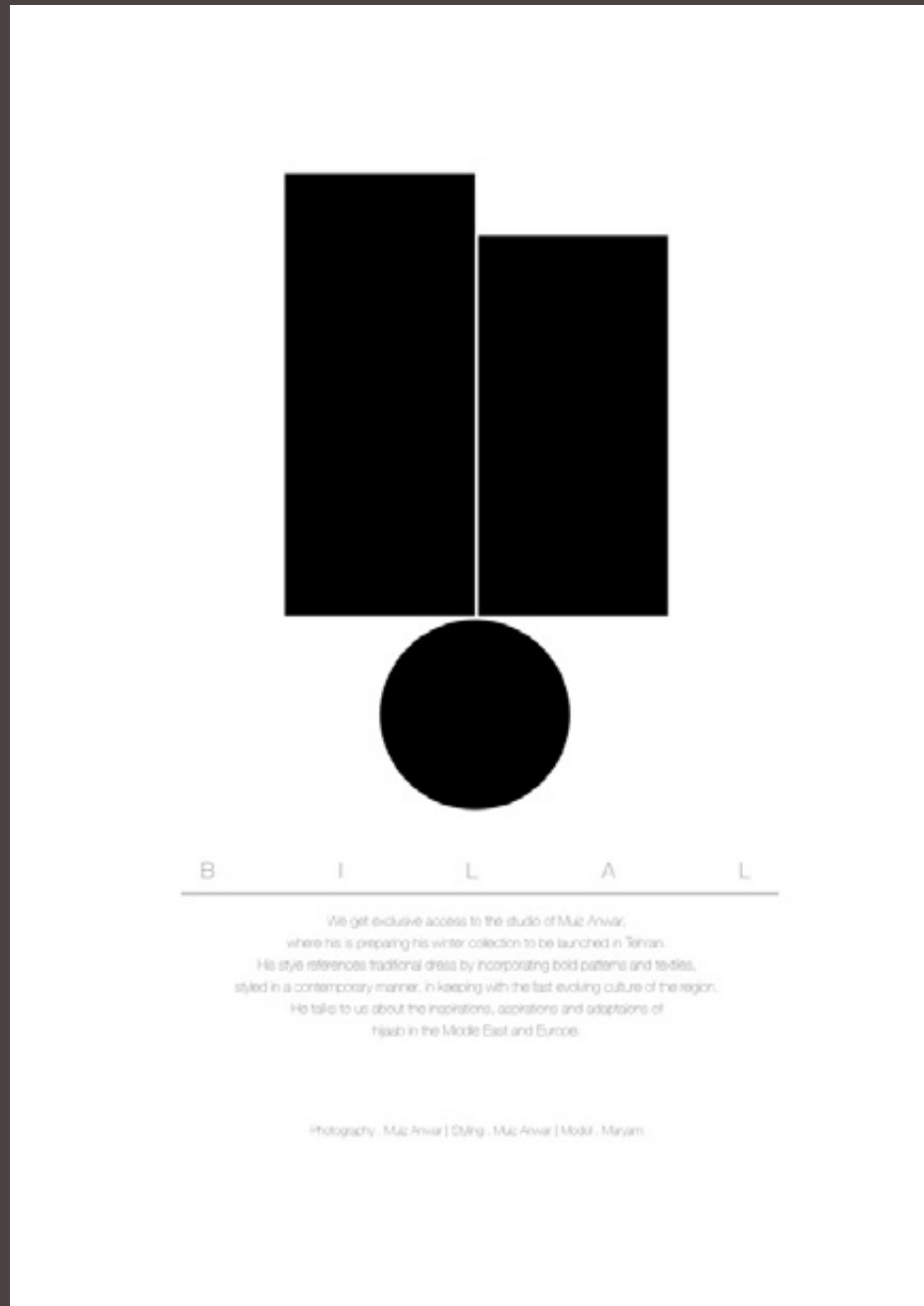
We get exclusive access to the studio of Muiz Anwar, where he is preparing his winter collection to be launched in Tehran. His style references traditional dress by incorporating bold patterns and textiles, styled in a contemporary manner, in keeping with the fast evolving culture of the region. He talks to us about the inspirations, adaptations and adaptations of hijab in the Middle East and Europe.

Photograph: Muiz Anwar | Styling: Muiz Anwar | Model: Mayan

Characters which normally exuded a horizontal elegance were now crushed into vertical alignment (the beh character). This was to represent the seizure of land, the lack of freedom, the political, economic and civic imprisonment of the population in Palestine. The strong vertical aesthetic – which was designed to be a stark contrast to the grace of the horizontal rhythm of Arabic was intended to imply the level of disruption to heritage, history and culture. The condensed characters coupled with this vertical alignment also represented what was at the time, officially referred to as the 'security fence,' which is now known as the 20ft high concrete 'security wall.'

It was a bold departure from how Arabic has always been read and seen aesthetically. And yet it retained a familiarity amongst all native Arabic readers. Despite these voluptuous characters being distilled into bold linear, condensed forms, the rhythm and distinctive features of the characters were still evident enough to make them legible.

It was a fascinating exercise in pushing Arabic into the 21 Century – pushing the boundaries of what is considered legible to a community who are so used to reading from digital renditions of classical, calligraphic scripts. It ultimately led me to my most radical typographic experiment – the Morse Code Arabic.

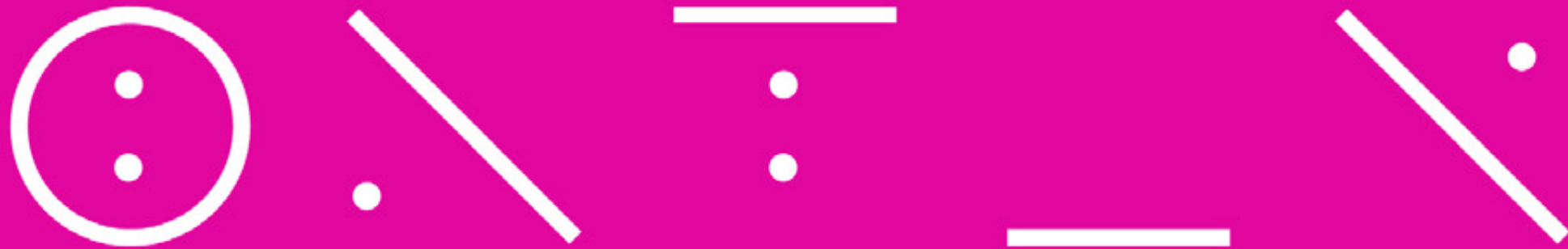


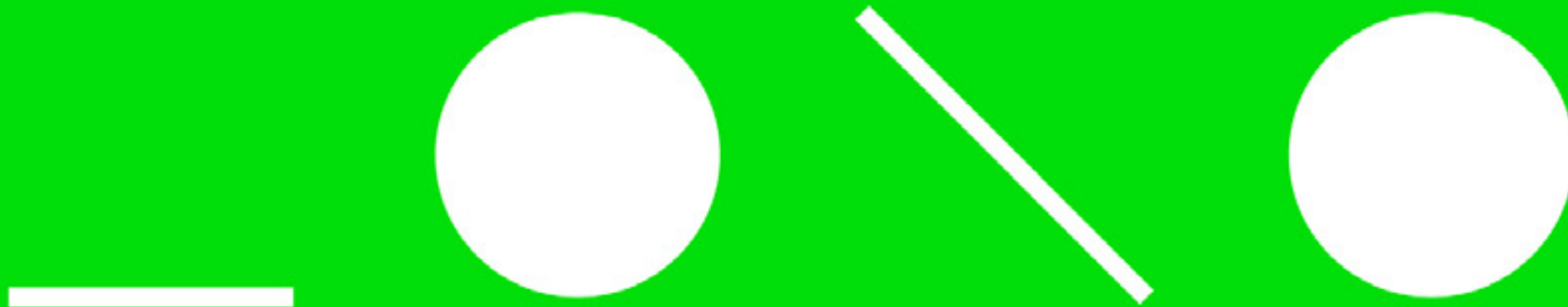
"Morse Code" Arabic

Typographically pushing Arabic to its' legible & aesthetic limits. Each character is entirely unique in the line simulation and space it occupies – so I was curious to see how I could retain their relative distinctive features by also diluting their detail and muting their form.



"Morse Code" Arabic: Allah >





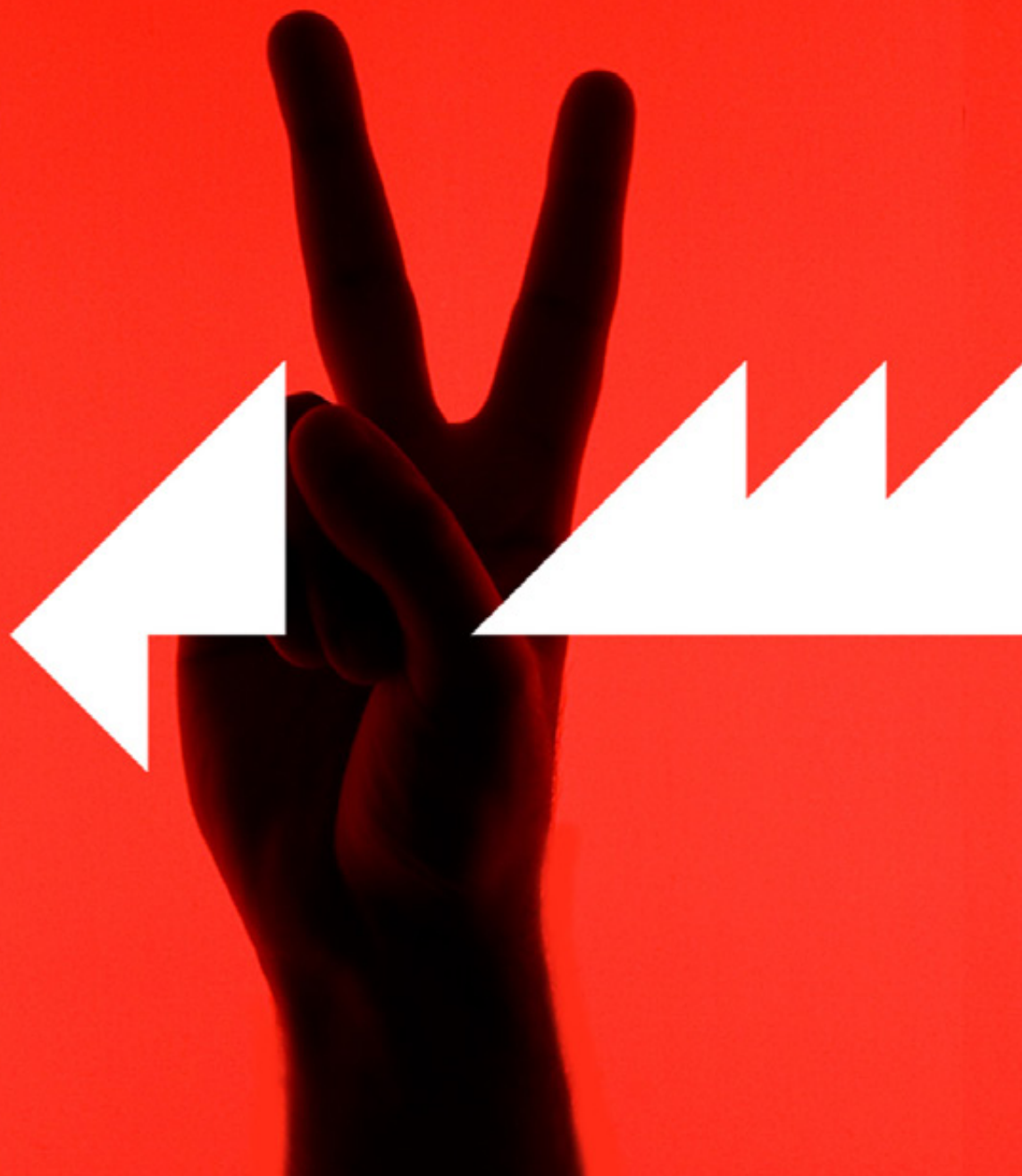


"Morse Code" Arabic: Bismillah

Would you describe your art as Islamic art?

It depends on what you would define as Islamic art? People have had great debates over the classification of calligraphy as Islamic calligraphy or Arabic calligraphy? Does it depend on the content of the work? The language? The country? Or the faith of the artist?

The subjects I explore bear more relation to the science, technology, culture, philosophy and history of language than Islam as a theology. The fact that my typographic work deals primarily with the Arabic language can make it easily classified as coming from an Islamic sphere – but this would in essence be born from a colonialist mentality whereby the Middle East and Arabic is ostensibly Muslim. The Middle East is the birth place of Christianity, Judaism as well as Islam – and there are many examples of ancient Torahs and Bibles written and illuminated in Arabic,



in the same style as the Qur'ans of the time.

In conclusion, though my work uses the Arabic language – though my work deals with Middle Eastern politics – issues related to the Muslim community – It is not Islamic according to the Orientalist principle.

Traditional 'Islamic' art was renowned for its fusion of mathematics, science and technological proficiency and craftsmanship. It was a rare example of art informing science and science informing art – a beautiful discourse producing objects which are now treasured and marvelled in equal measure by professional and experts in every field.

I'd like to think if my work was to fit any category of Islamic definition, I'd aspire for it to be classified as that.

< TYPE - Salaam (Peace)

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