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MOHAMED GABR, 'Untitled', Photograph, 21x30 cm, 2011



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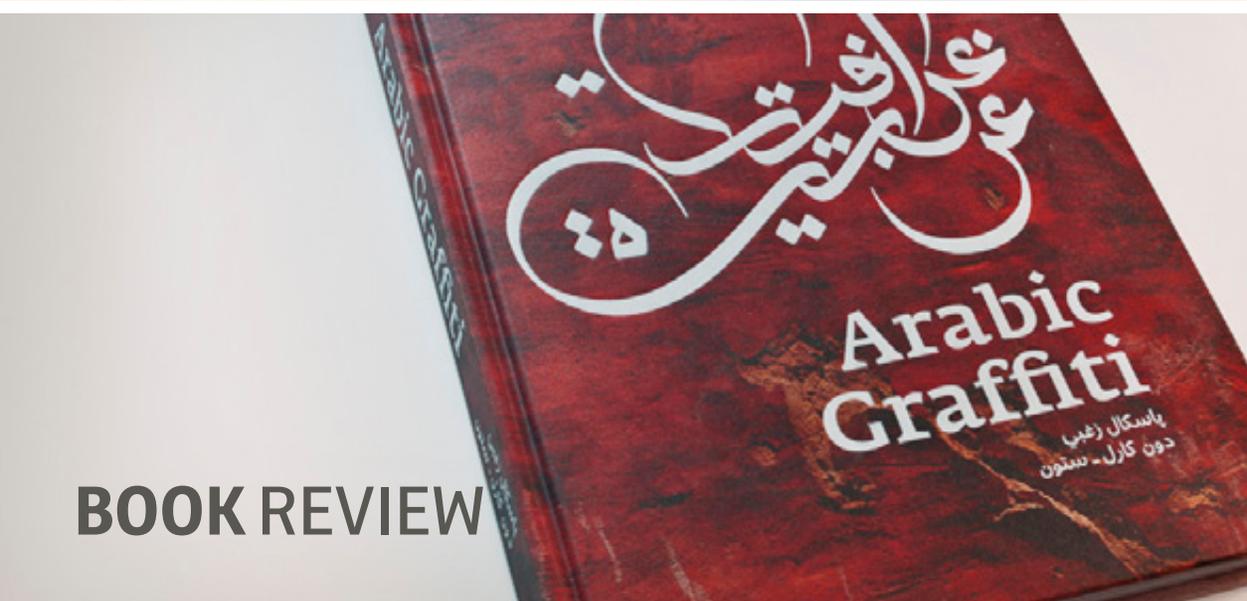
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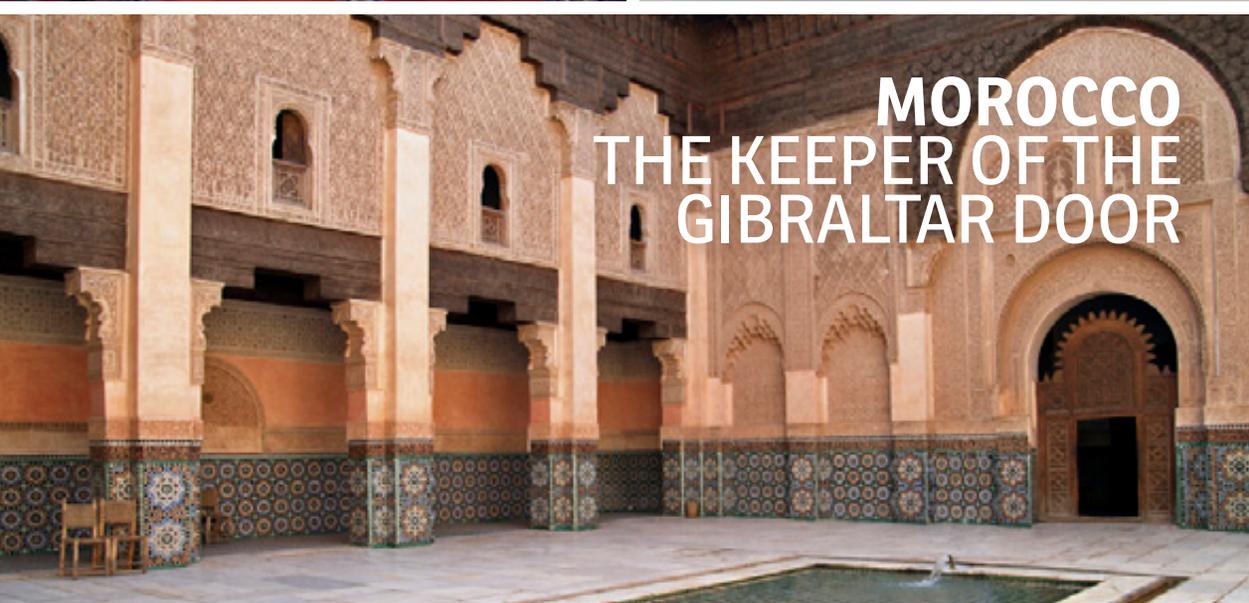


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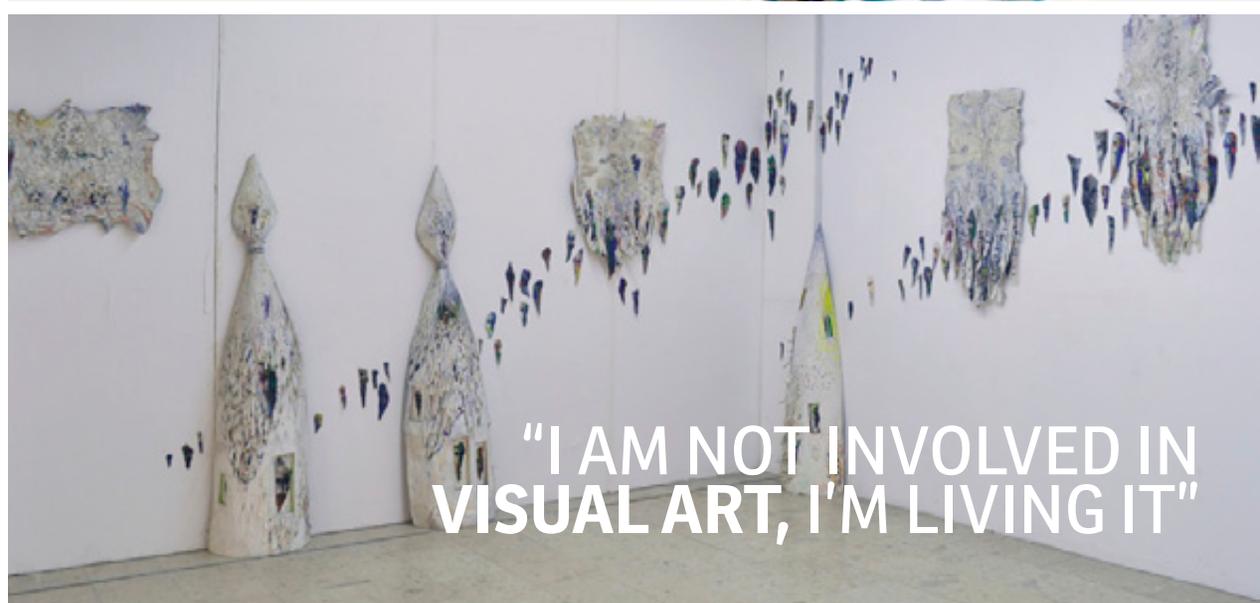


CONTEMPORARY TRADITION: A NEW APPROACH TO MOSQUE DECORATION

MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE ARTS (MWIA)

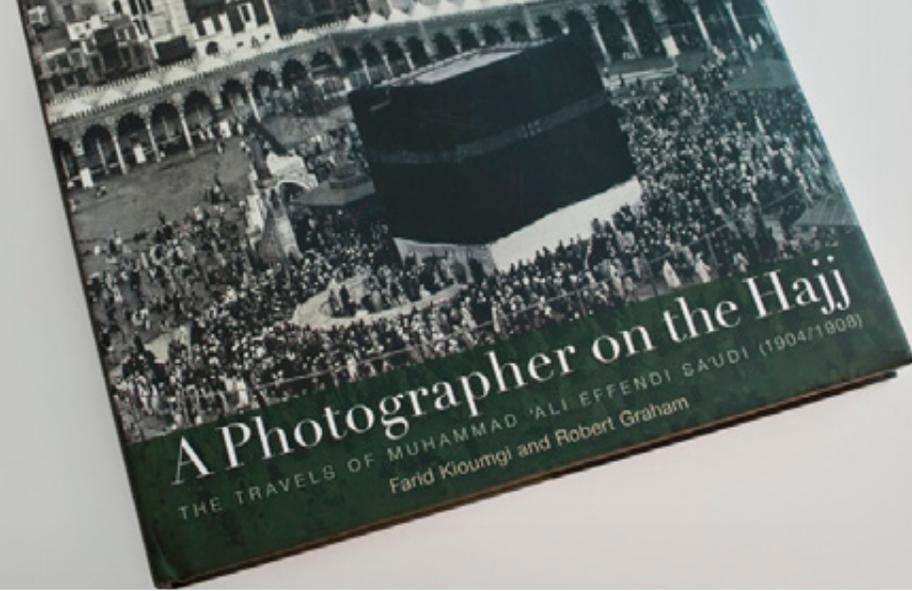


MOROCCO THE KEEPER OF THE GIBRALTAR DOOR



"I AM NOT INVOLVED IN VISUAL ART, I'M LIVING IT"

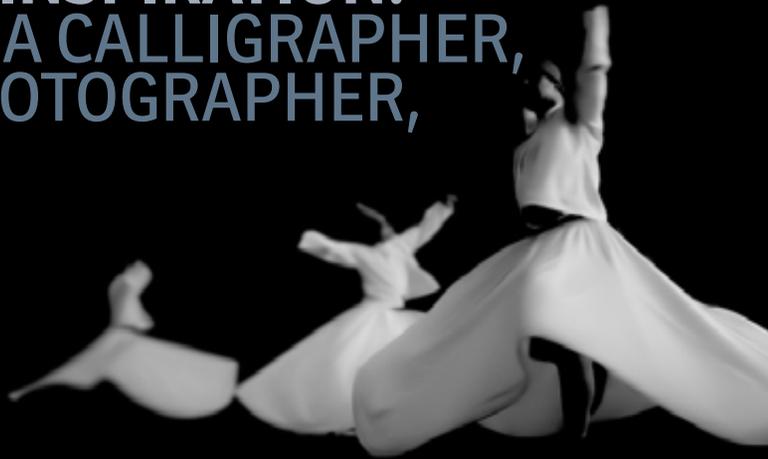
**BOOK
REVIEW**



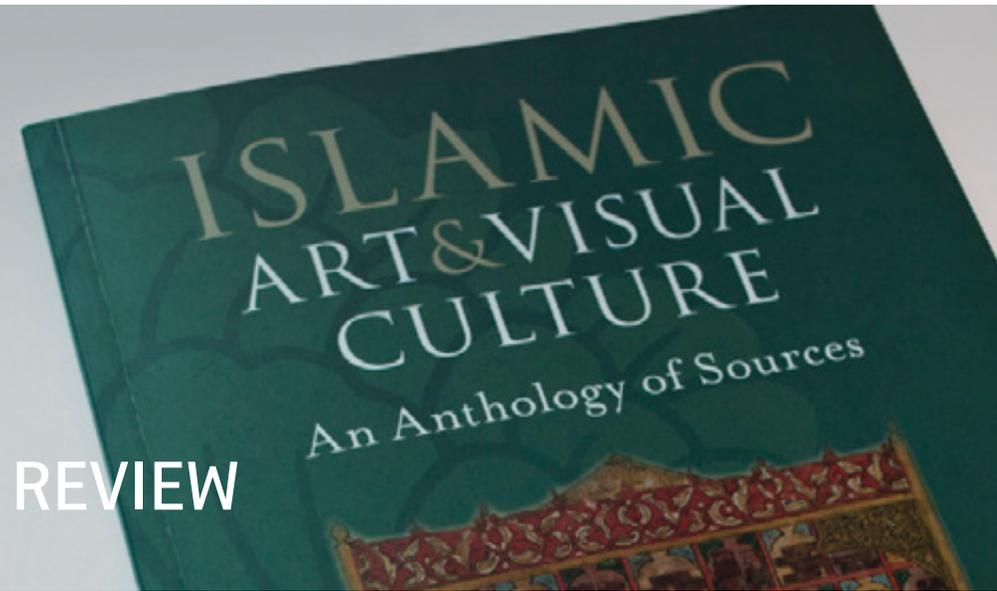
**LET YOUR
CREATIVITY
FLOW...
GET STYLEIN!**



**MIXED MEDIA INSPIRATION:
MEET DURAN, A CALLIGRAPHER,
DESIGNER, PHOTOGRAPHER,
AND POET**



BOOK REVIEW



**THE MUSEUM OF SARAJEVO
THE GUARDIAN OF HISTORY**



**BUILDING COMMUNITIES
UNDER THE THEMES
OF APPROACHABILITY,
PARTICIPATION AND
INCULCATING RESPECT**



Elvis Hajdarević and Velid Hodžić, two Bosnian master calligraphers

The photos in this article are
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CONTEMPORARY TRADITION: A NEW APPROACH TO MOSQUE DECORATION

by Kenan Šurković, Art historian



How does one decorate new religious architecture in a manner that at the same time remains true to Islamic spiritual and artistic traditions and reflects a contemporary approach to technique and design?

< Velid Hodžić is drawing the calligraphy. Photo by Ismihana Mumdzic-Hodžić

> Elvis Hajdarević is painting the calligraphy. Photo by Velid Hodžić

Decorating the interior of mosques has a long tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first Muslim master craftsmen emerged in the 16th century. Their styles and designs not only relate to local and regional artistic traditions but to the decorative artistry of numerous mosques found in other parts of what was once the vast Ottoman Empire. All domed mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina were richly decorated since a mosque was not considered finished until it was appropriately and beautifully decorated. Many historical sources describe early Bosnian mosques, like the works of the famous educated traveler, Evliya Çelebi, who visited Bosnia in the 17th century. Little of this early decoration has survived, partly because of destruction caused by war, and partly because of inadequate preservation and restoration policies and practices.





The decoration of the dome in the Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque in Sarajevo. Photo by Kenan Šurković

A completely new and very important issue inherent to the preservation of traditional decoration of mosque interiors appeared in the post-war period, when projects were devised for the renewal of the architectural heritage destroyed by both Serbian and Croatian aggression in the 1992-1995 period. One of the most important restoration projects was that of the decoration of the 16th century Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque in Sarajevo, one of the most important Ottoman mosque complexes in the Balkans. The wall paintings dating from 19th century had all been destroyed or severely damaged; they had to be redone from scratch, and were reconstituted in part in accordance with the preserved layers of the original 16th century designs found beneath the decoration done by the Austro Hungarians.





Left:
Calligraphy on the window frames,
designed and painted by Velid
Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević, the
Sarač-Ali Mosque in Sarajevo.
Photo by Velid Hodžić

Bellow:
The Sarač-Ali Mosque in Sarajevo,
16th century. Photo by Kenan Šurković

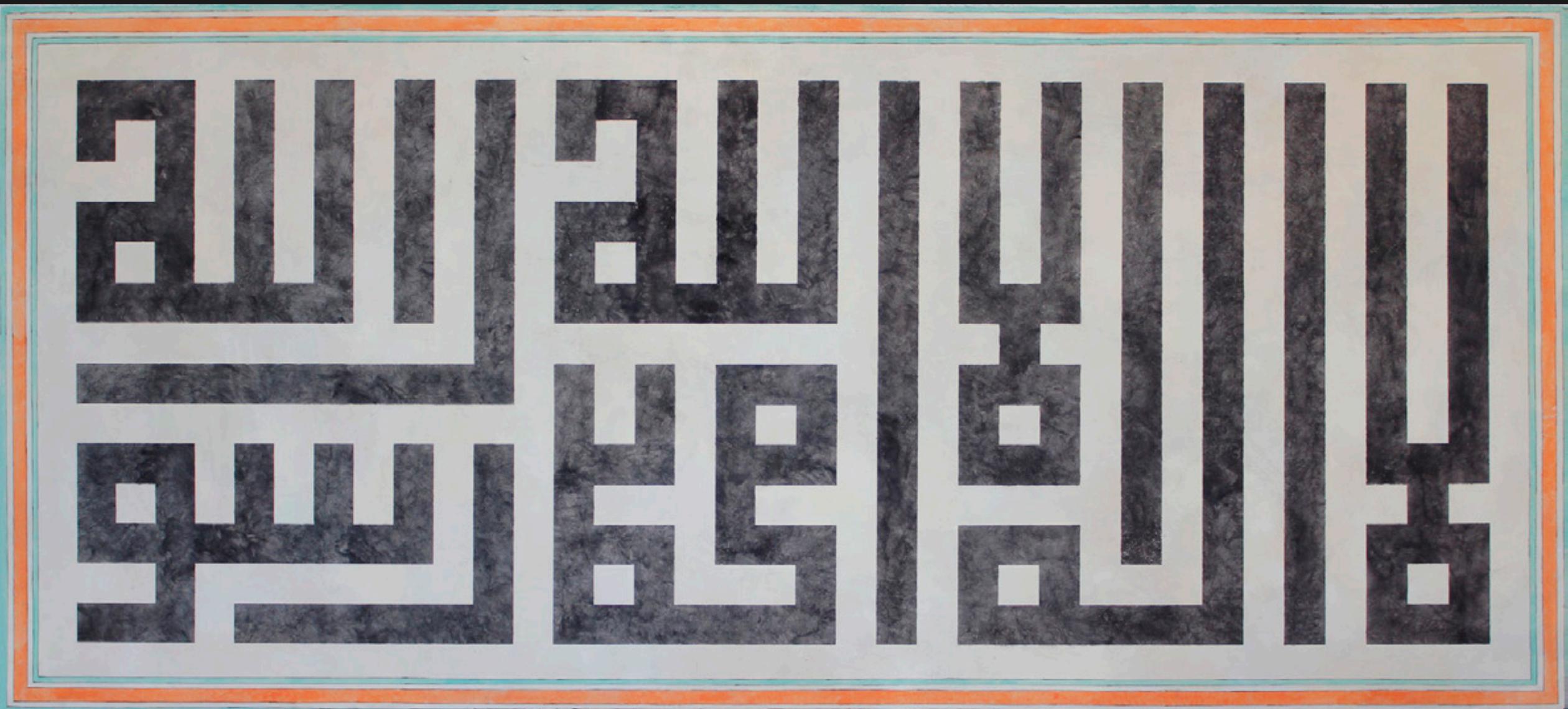


However, in addition to the many practical and historical considerations raised during such restoration projects, there emerged a new challenge: How does one decorate new religious architecture in a manner that at the same time remains true to Islamic spiritual and artistic

traditions and reflects a contemporary approach to technique and design? Some of the most significant work in this area has been successfully undertaken by Bosnian master calligraphers, Elvis Hajdarević and Velid Hodžić, who both specialize in various forms of Islamic

art. The core premise of their work is to meet the challenge evoked above. Their work successfully manages to simultaneously revitalize traditional manners and motifs – especially those from the 16th century, the golden century of Ottoman art–, while equally integrating and

developing modern features and design. It evinces a recognizable Islamic stylistic preference for vegetal and geometric ornamentation and an equally classical use of thuluth script, but these are combined with a new sense of color and innovative compositional solutions.



The two artists are members of ELIF, an *Association of Artists* based in Bosnia dedicated to promoting the Islamic arts, drawing upon the rich legacies of both Islamic art history and global modernity.

During my interview with Hajdarević and Hodžić, I learned

that their first commission for decorating a mosque came after their calligraphic works had been noticed by waqf officials in various exhibitions. The first project constituted quite a challenge and feat for the young artists since they were commissioned to design and

execute the calligraphic decoration of the 16th century Sarač-Ali Mosque, one of the most important and oldest mosques in Sarajevo. Their calligraphic compositions adorning the window frames are in thuluth decorated with a minimalist floral decoration.

“La illahe illallah, Muhamedun Resulullah” by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević. The kufic calligraphy is made in fresco technique for the Mosque in Sanicama near Biljani. Photo by Velid Hodžić

The inscriptions are hadith or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad acknowledging the importance of both prayer and the acquisition of knowledge.

The key places for ornamentation inside a mosque are the dome, the area around and between the windows, and that of the mihrab. In the dome, the two young designers placed an arabesque while in the mihrab region they placed circular forms with Allah and Muhammed written on them.



The Mosque in Biljani, 1998. Photo © Velid Hodžić



Ayetul Kursi (first part) written in kufi syle with rumi ornaments by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević, the Mosque in Biljani. Photo by Velid Hodžić





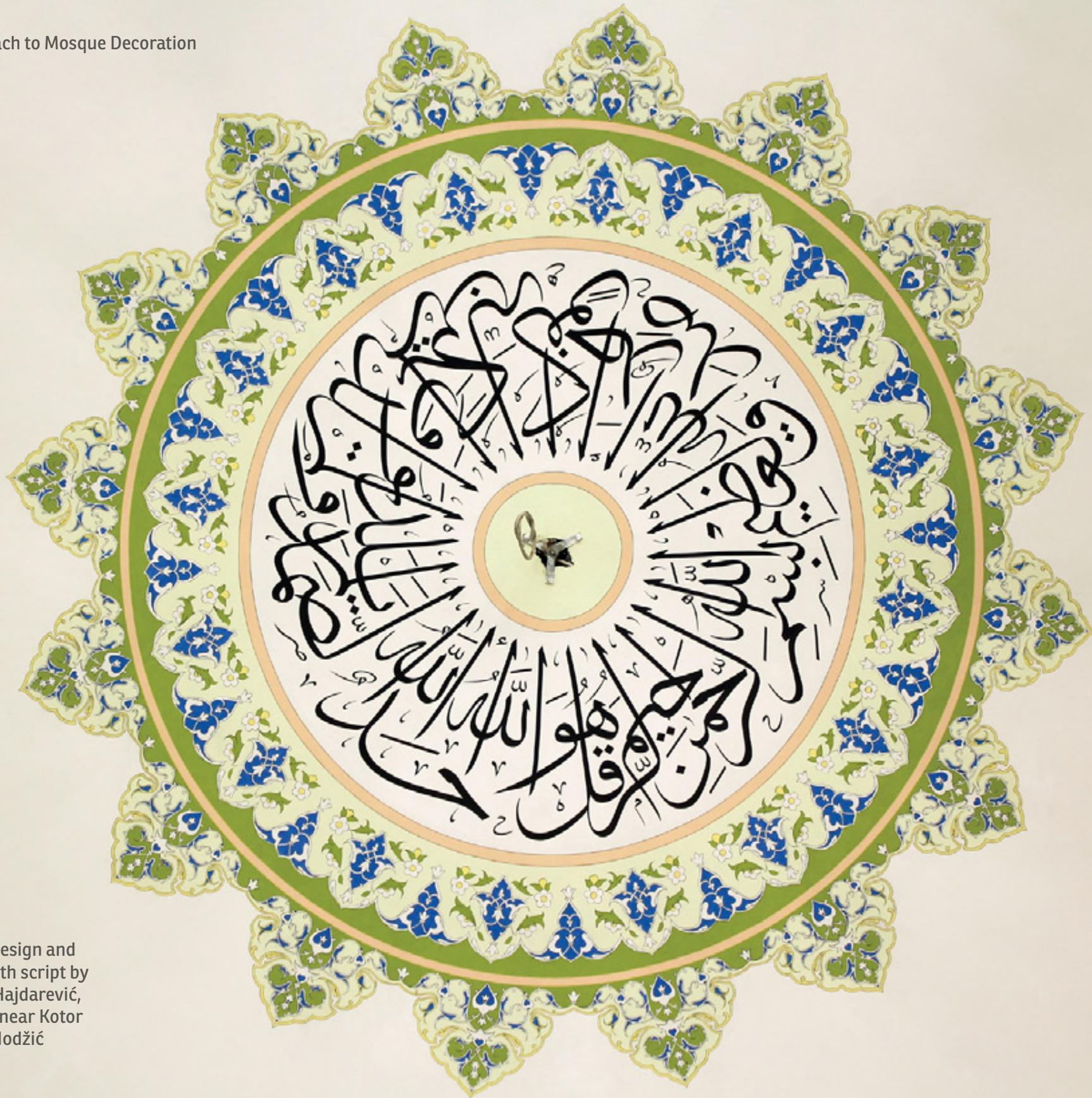
Hajdarević and Hodžić's work should be viewed from two perspectives; on the one hand, they are renewing the light of tradition in Bosnia, while on the other, they are creating new forms of expression and a new and contemporary approach to mosque decoration.

When I asked the two about the experience of devising designs for such a venerable religious space, Hodžić put forth that they while their years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo had prepared them for such an endeavor, they had themselves undertaken on their own research on the techniques of mural painting and decoration, especially the use of modern materials and techniques. The knowledge gained was especially useful when they were commissioned to decorate mosques like the ones in Biljani and Vrbanjci. Because the latter are both recent, they were not decorated using ancient techniques.

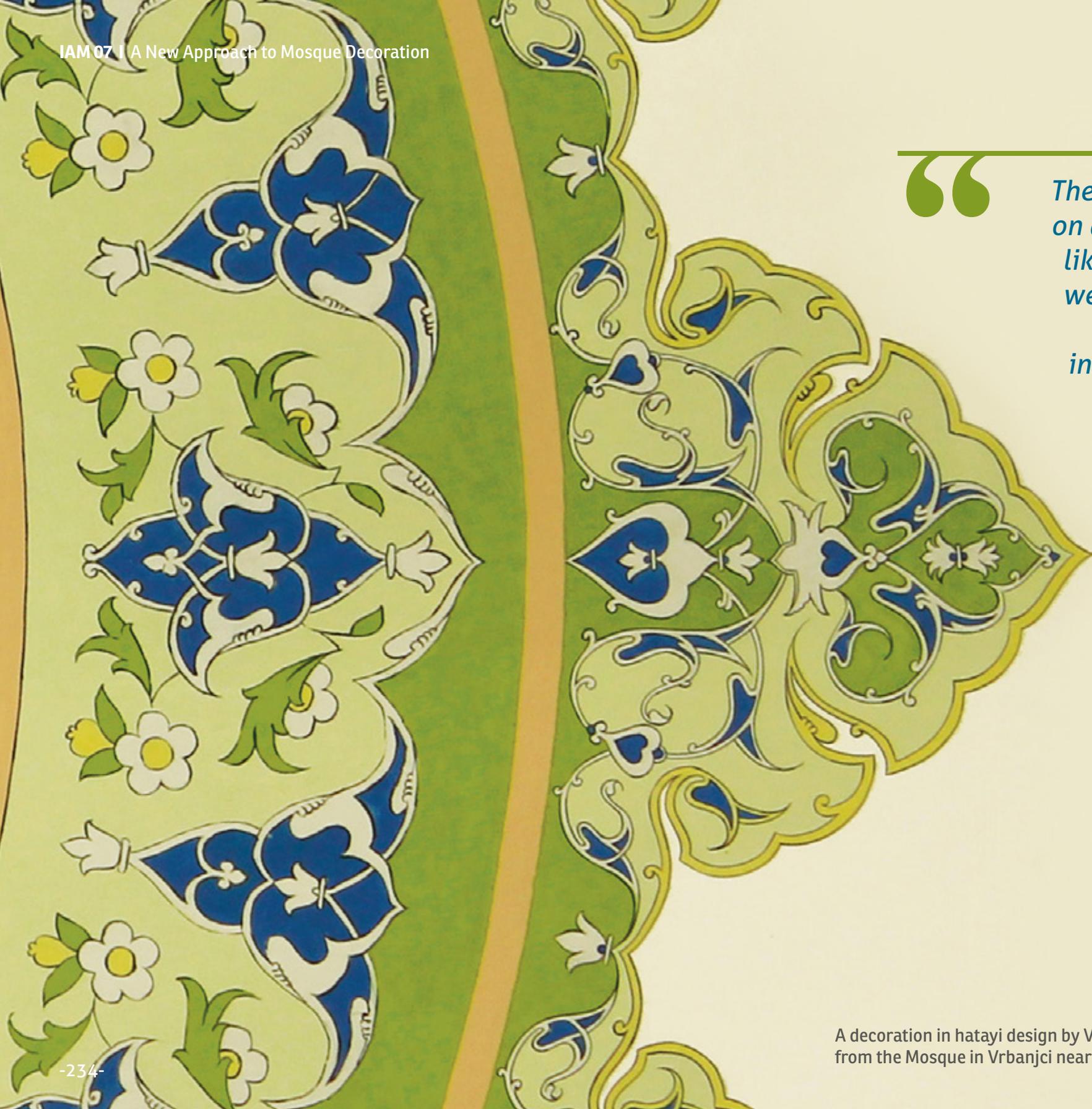
The working site in the Mosque in Biljani. Photo by Velid Hodžić







A decoration in hatayi design and calligraphy in jali thuluth script by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević, the Mosque in Vrbanjci near Kotor Varoš. Photo by Velid Hodžić



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The ornamentation is largely based on and inspired by historical styles, like the Chinese-inspired hatayi as well as the rumi designs. However, the contemporary calligraphers integrate such motifs into entirely new compositional schemes.

A decoration in hatayi design by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević. A detail from the Mosque in Vrbanjci near Kotor Varoš. Photo by Velid Hodžić

All of the ornamental and calligraphic designs produced by Hajdarević and Hodžić are original and not simply the reproductions of older models. Thus far, they all employ two scripts with a long history in Islamic architectural decoration, thuluth and kufic. The ornamentation is largely based on and inspired by historical styles, like the Chinese-inspired hatayi as well as the rumi designs. However, the contemporary calligraphers integrate such motifs into entirely new compositional schemes. Moreover, the color palette is neither exaggerated nor high contrast, but rather adopts pastel tones and multiple shades of green. The precision of the contours of their work, deriving from a combination of thin and thick lines, bestows upon it a special elegance.

Hajdarević and Hodžić's work should be viewed from two perspectives; on the one hand, they are renewing the light of tradition in Bosnia, while on the other, they are creating new forms of expression and a new and contemporary approach to mosque decoration.



The Mosque in Vrbanjci near Kotor Varoš. Photo by Velid Hodžić

A decoration in hatayi design and the calligraphy in jali thuluth script by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević. The Mosque in Vrbanjci near Kotor Varoš. Photo by Velid Hodžić

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