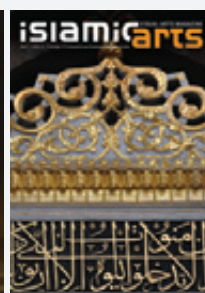


# islamicarts

VISUAL ARTS MAGAZINE

FREE ISSUE 2012 | [islamicartsmagazine.com](http://islamicartsmagazine.com)



# FREE ISSUE

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**ISLAMIC ARTS MAGAZINE** IS THE FIRST E-ZINE IN THE WORLD DEVOTED TO ISLAMIC ARTS. THE TOPICS RANGE FROM TRADITIONAL TO CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC ART AND COVER ALL MEDIA.

In this **FREE Issue** we present the cover, the content and one article from each digital Issue we published.

Enjoy!



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*Kenan Šurković (BiH)*

ART DIRECTOR  
*Elvira Bojadžić (BiH)*

EDITOR  
*Valerie Behiery, Ph.D (Canada)*

CONTRIBUTORS  
*Kenan Šurković (BiH)*  
*Nisa Terzi (Australia)*  
*Amina Huković (BiH)*  
*Emma Rose, Intern (Canada)*  
*Ahmed Pašić, Ph.D (Singapore)*  
*Elvira Korman (BiH)*

TRANSLATORS  
*Jasmina Čosić-Karin (BiH)*  
*Đana Šurković (BiH)*  
*Ćamila Fetahović (BiH)*

TECHNICAL SUPPORT  
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# CONTENT



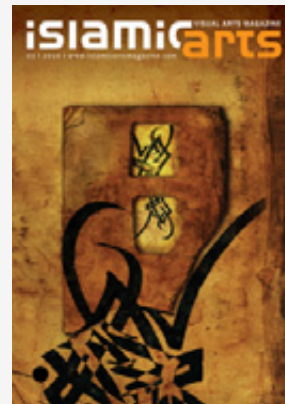
**ISSUE 01 / PAGE 14**

The theme of this Issue  
**EBRU - ART OF  
PAINTING ON WATER**



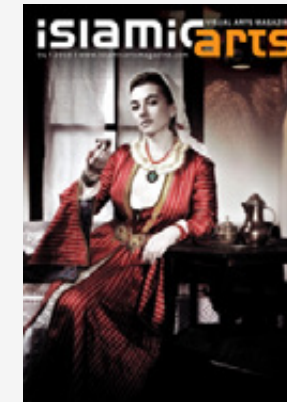
**ISSUE 02 / PAGE 42**

Museum of Islamic  
Art in Doha (Qatar)  
**A NEW AWAKING OF  
THE ARABIC SPIRIT**



**ISSUE 03 / PAGE 80**

Interview with Iraqi artist  
Malik Anas al-Rajab  
**FROM CLASSICAL TO  
CONTEMPORARY  
CALLIGRAPHY**



**ISSUE 04 / PAGE 104**

Interview with Muiz Anwar  
**GRAPHIC  
EXPERIMENTATIONS  
WHICH PUSH  
THE LIMITS  
OF LEGIBILITY**



**ISSUE 05 / PAGE 148**

Interview with Mohammed  
Ali, Aerosol Arabic (UK)  
**SPRAYING SPIRITUALITY  
ONE CAN AT A TIME...**



**ISSUE 06 / PAGE 178**

An interview with the  
Jameel Prize winner  
**AFRUZ AMIGHI'S  
CAPTIVATING PATTERNS  
OF DRIVING INTENSITY**



**ISSUE 07 / PAGE 212**

Elvis Hajdarević and  
Velid Hodžić, two Bosnian  
master calligraphers  
**CONTEMPORARY  
TRADITION: A NEW  
APPROACH TO  
MOSQUE DECORATION**

# Issue 01

248 pages

LEARN MORE



Cover image:  
**AMAR ČUDIĆ**, 3D model of the Mosque in Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009

ISSUE 01  
**CONTENT**



OLD IDENTITIES  
AND NEW PERSPECTIVES



THE MARK  
OF SOLIDARITY  
WITH GAZA



PHOTO EXHIBITION:  
DIVINE CITY JERUSALEM



MOSTAR - THE TOWN IN WHICH  
EVEN THE STONES SPEAK

BOOK  
REVIEW



MUSLIMS  
OF  
NEW  
YORK

MUSLIMS OF NEW YORK / ZLATAN GANIC

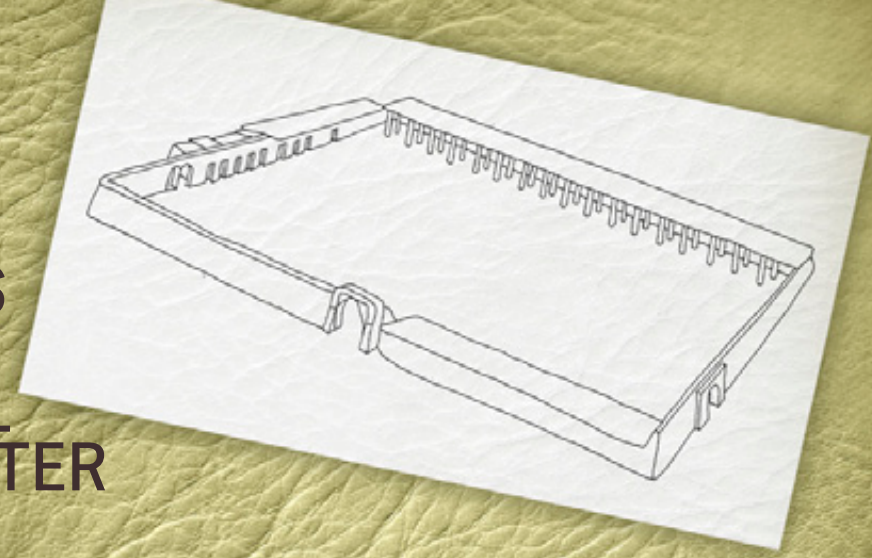


ARTS IN THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL  
CONTEXT

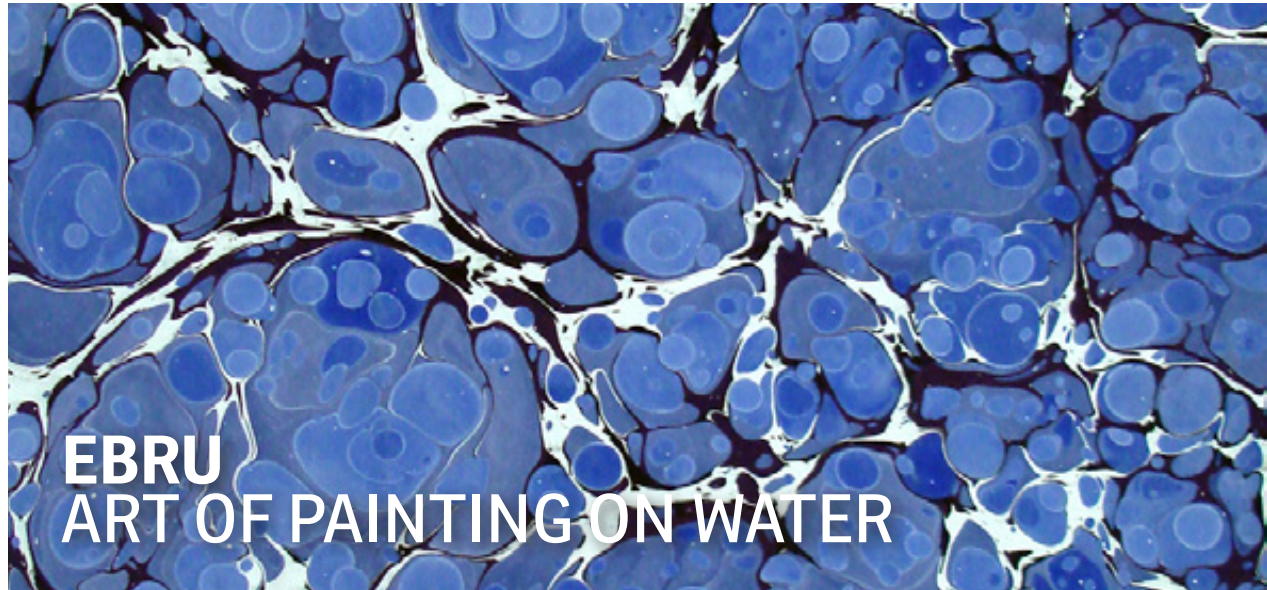
ARCHITECTURE  
IS THE MIRROR  
OF LIFE



PROPHET'S  
MOSQUE  
THE MODEL  
FOR ALL LATER  
BUILDINGS



QUR'AN OF MEHMED-PASHA SOKOLOVIĆ



EBRU  
ART OF PAINTING ON WATER



ART OF  
TEZHIB  
INSPIRED  
BY  
NATURE



ART THERAPY  
1/2



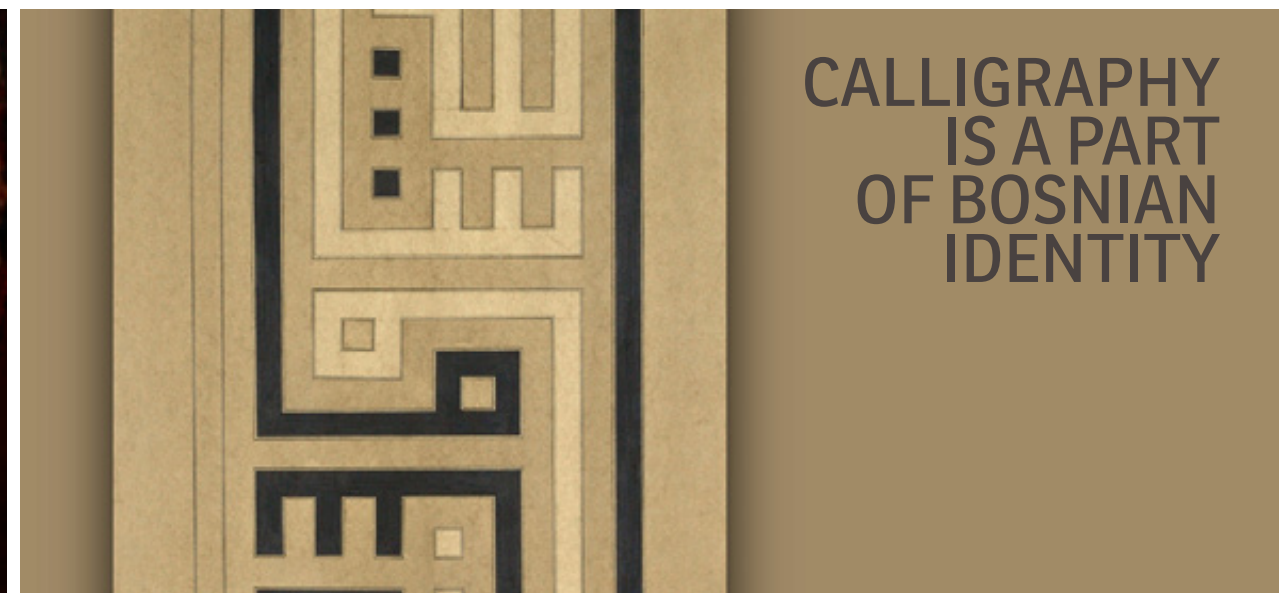
PHOTO  
GALLERY  
ISTANBUL



FROM  
CALLIGRAPHY  
TO NEW  
VISUAL  
DIMENSIONS



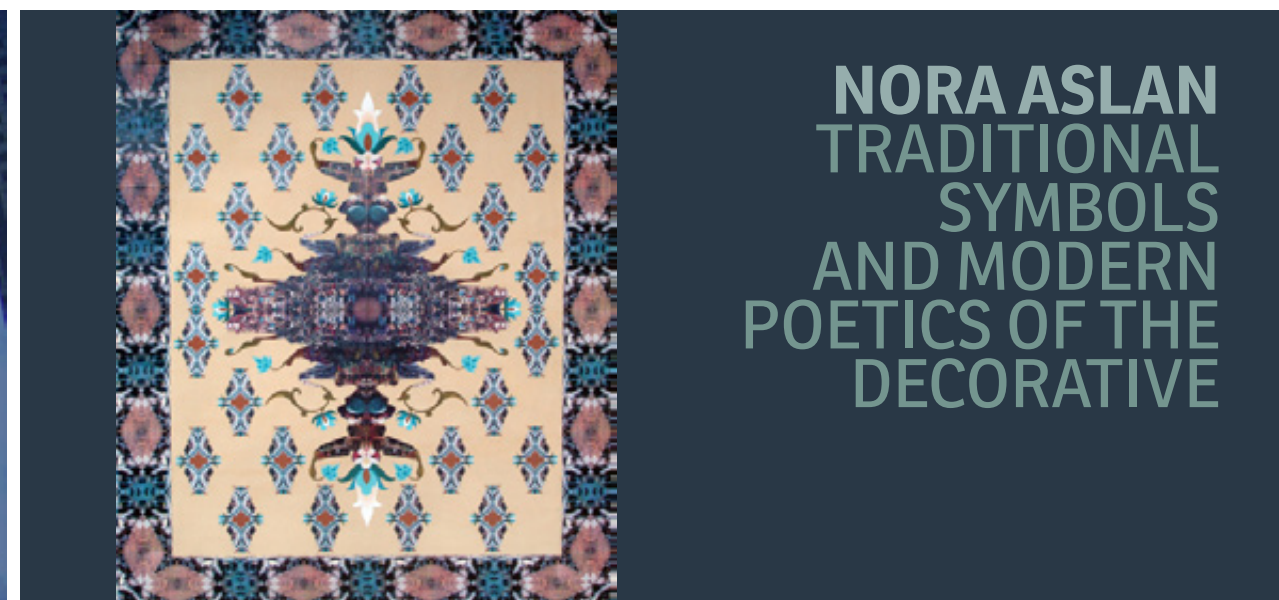
"MUSLIMS LIVE  
ON CARPETS,  
IN FACT ON  
THE ARTISTIC  
PICTURES"



CALLIGRAPHY  
IS A PART  
OF BOSNIAN  
IDENTITY



SINGAPORE  
THE CITY OF LION AND TIGER



NORA ASLAN  
TRADITIONAL  
SYMBOLS  
AND MODERN  
POETICS OF THE  
DECORATIVE

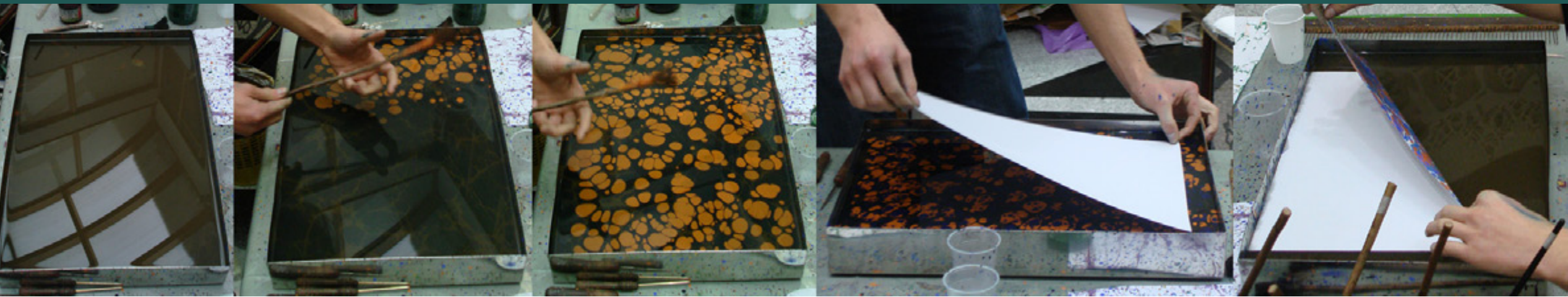


The theme of this Issue

# **EBRU**, ART OF PAINTING ON WATER

Bosnian artist Azra Hamzagić makes ebru. Photo by Islamic Arts Magazine





**E**bru, as the most specific form of Islamic decorative art, is called 'PAINTING ON WATER'. This makes ebru special in the history of painting.

Usually, we paint or draw directly on 'hard' materials as paper, wall, wood, ceramic, canvas, etc. However, ebru presents a different approach. As a story tells us, Ebru appeared when artists attempted to paint clouds on water. This dreamy approach, so characteristic for Turkish and Iranian artists, got its ingenious technical performance. Therefore ebru, in general, is most sensible expression of Islamic decorative art.

On the surface of water (mixture of water and certain compounds), in a bowl, an artist, with the technique

of spraying and dripping, applies the colour of mineral origin on the surface of the water. After a number of interventions artist collects the already shaped art form on a selected paper. In this way 'the magic' of ebru appears, which can't leave anyone indifferent. Thus, being present at this process is a fascinating experience.

Today, we can't tell where ebru exactly came to life, but its origin is related to the regions populated with Turkish and Iranian people. This kind of art appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, most probably in the Middle Asia. At first, it began to spread in the region of Turkmenistan and then Iran where it was called **EBRU** (cloud) or **ABRU** (the face of water). In the Ottoman's

art it appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. From then, this way of decorative art becomes permanently present when books and calligraphy would be decorated, and it became the trademark of the Ottoman's art. Within the Islamic art we can talk about certain style characteristics developed, depending on the area in which they appeared, so it seems that ebru is filled with the sensibility of Turkish and Iranian artists.

Ebru can be ranged within large context of the Islamic ornamentics, although, according to its formal shaping and technical performance it differs from other approaches of decorating, not because it can be made on paper (technically possibly on some other materials like silk),

but, because it can function as freely shaped abstract picture. However, like the curly ornaments, flower samples and geometric arabesques, ebru represents recognizable decorative art, often combined with calligraphy. On the other hand, ebru can be treated also as the independent fine art, since it can be perceived as an abstract painting.

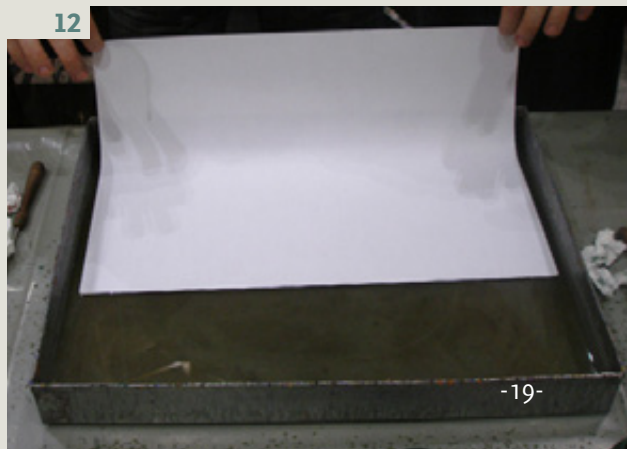
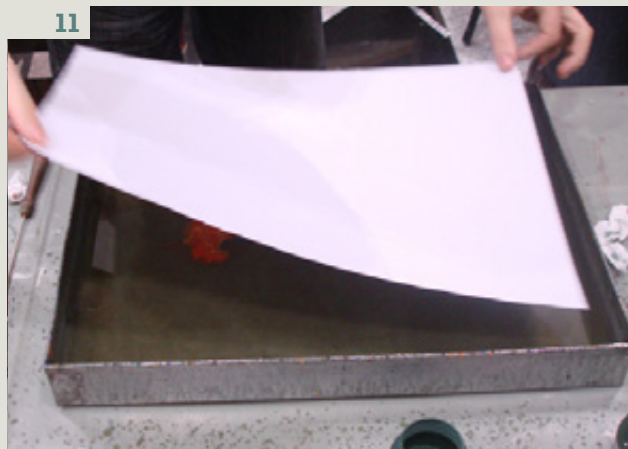
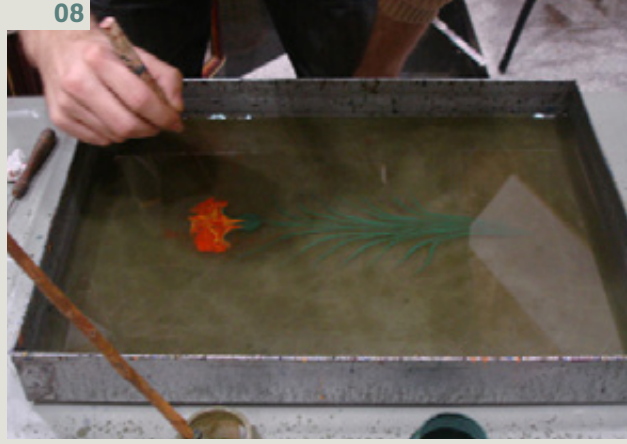
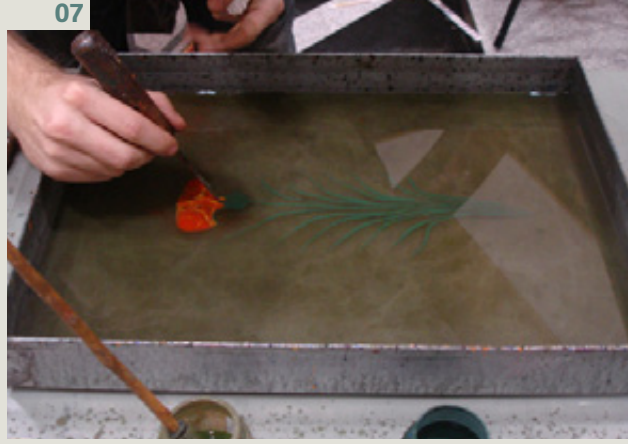
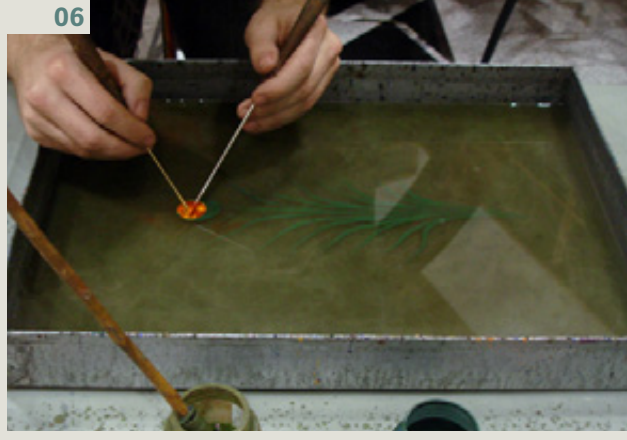
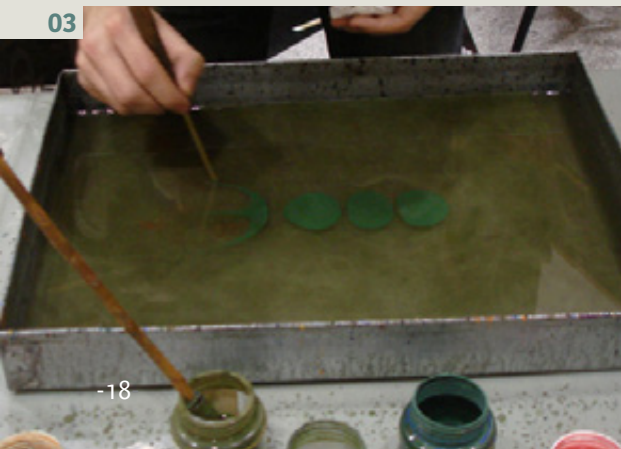
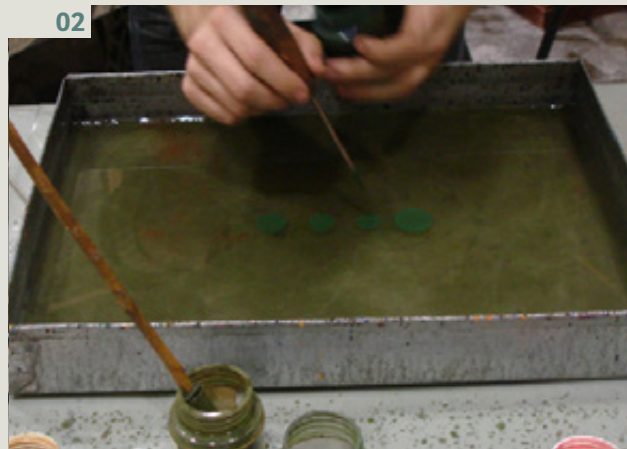
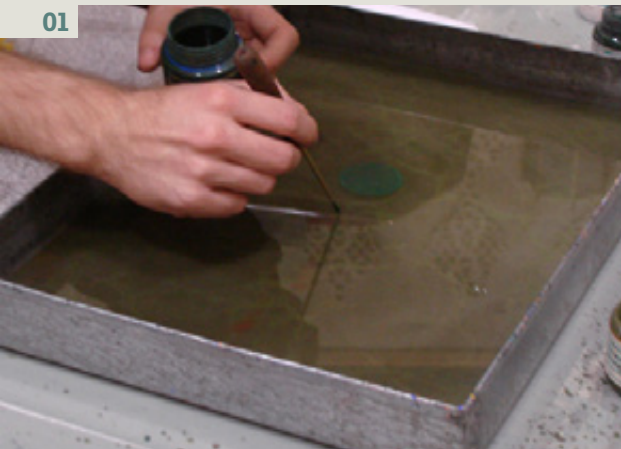
However, especially with the Ottomans, various flowers were made in ebru technique, which later became the recognizable mark of this art.

All these different approaches led to the style classifications of ebru, so with the artistic imagination and a large possibility of combinations of the initial ebru patterns, many different decorative patterns appeared.

# Step-by-step process of painting the floral ebru in the form of carnation

Ottomans, in particular like making different flowers in ebru technique, and with time, they became recognizable mark of this art. Most often artists paint rozes, tulips, hyacinths, carnations and pansies.

*Alen Glušac presents step-by-step Carnation ebru. All photos by Islamic Arts Magazine*

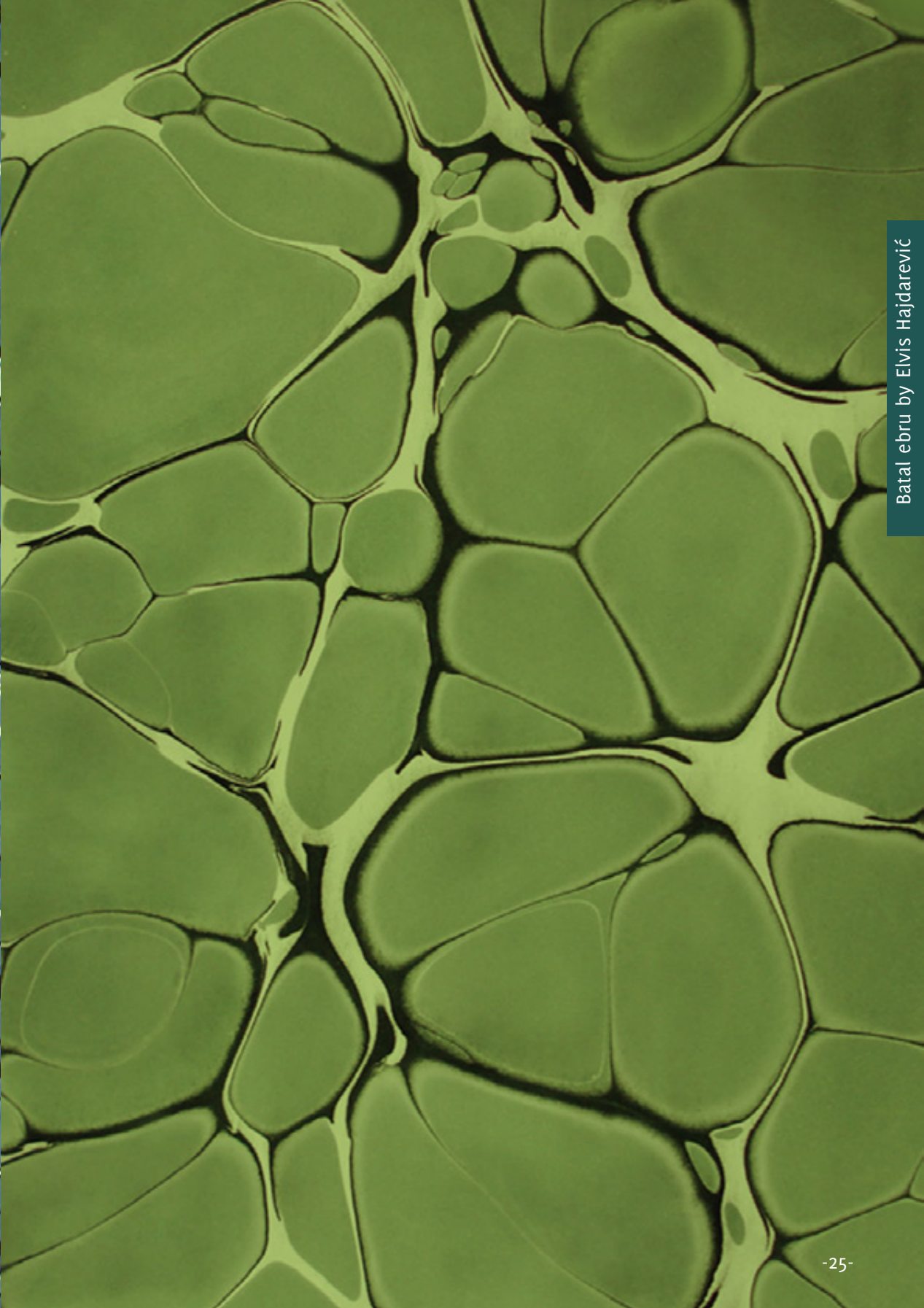




Ebru is categorised by shape, intensity of colour and theme.

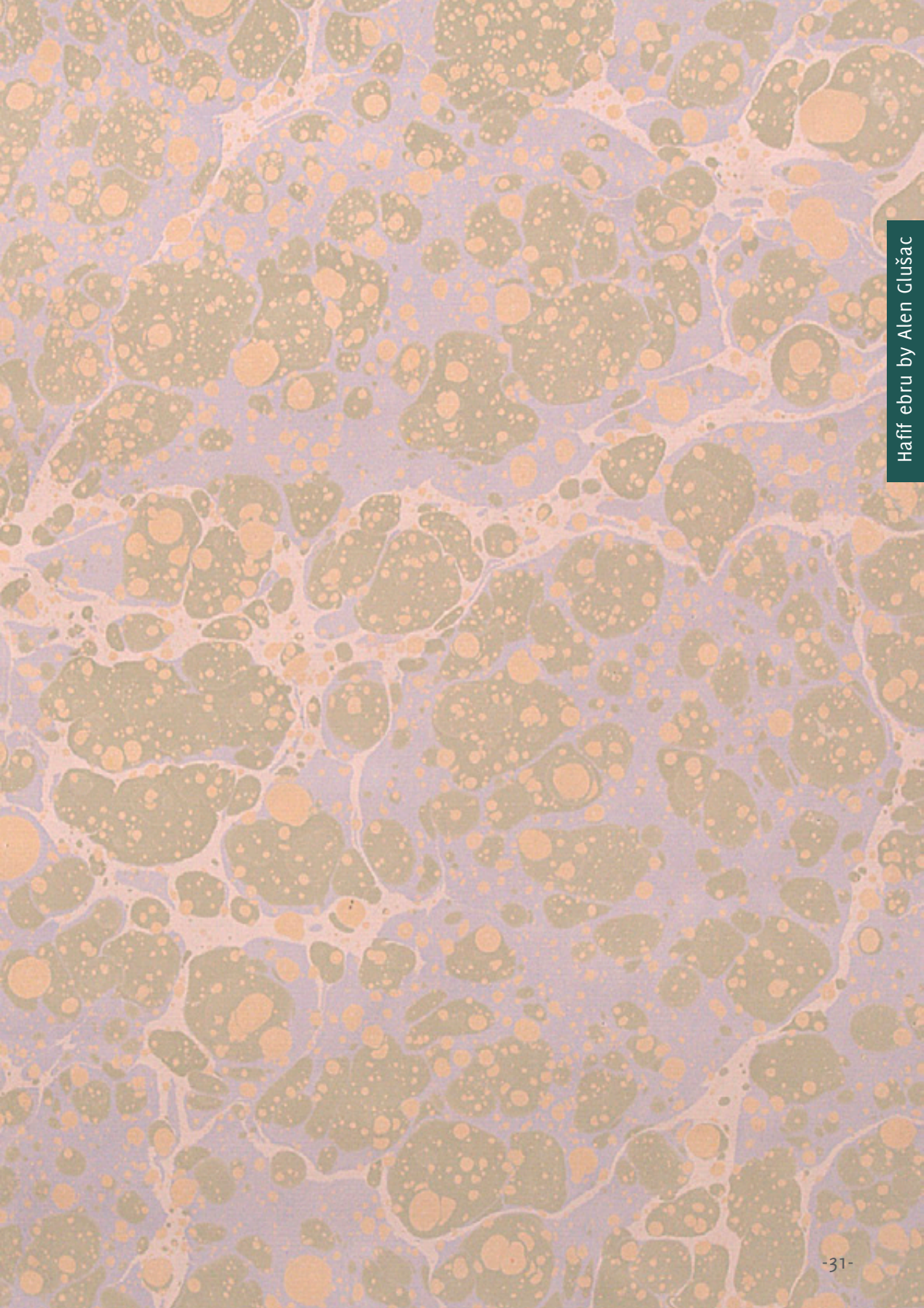


















# Issue 02

262 pages

[LEARN MORE](#)

Cover image:  
**VASEEM MOHAMMED**, Knowledge , 85x50 cm, 2006



ISSUE 02  
**CONTENT**

SHORT REVIEW  
OF SOME BASIC  
PRINCIPLES OF  
ISLAMIC ARTS



**SARAJEVO HISTORIC CENTRE OF  
ISLAMIC CULTURE IN EASTERN EUROPE**



**"WHILE I WORK, I FEEL FREE, AS A  
CHILD WHO JUST RESEARCHES"**

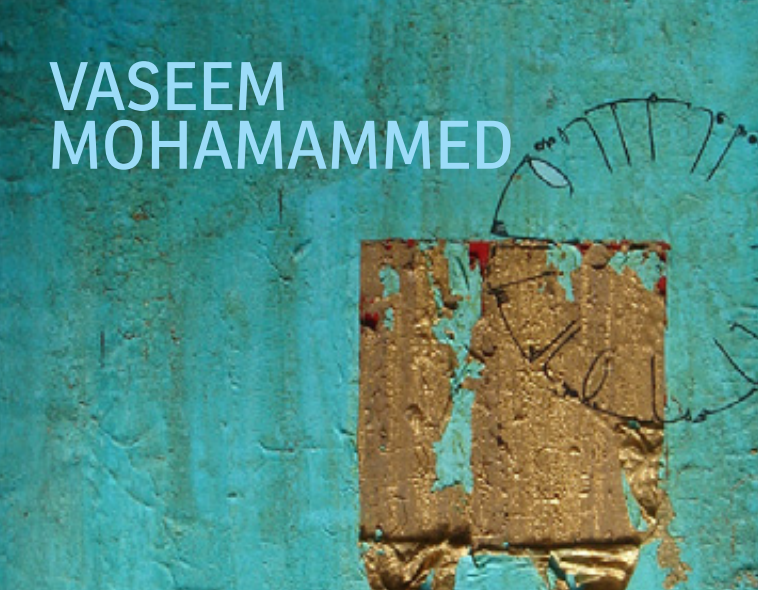


**QUR'AN FROM  
THE MEHMED  
KOSKI PASHA  
MOSQUE IN  
MOSTAR**

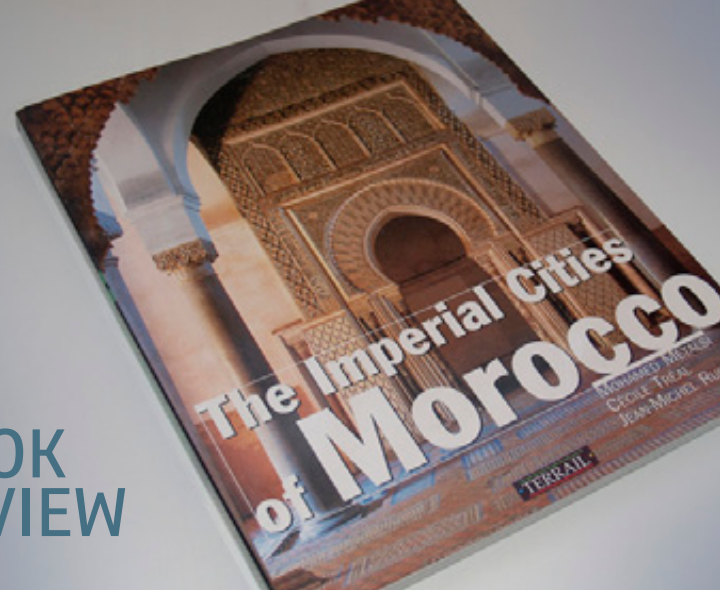


**A NEW AWAKING OF THE  
ARABIC SPIRIT**

VASEEM  
MOHAMAMMED



BOOK  
REVIEW



BOOK  
REVIEW



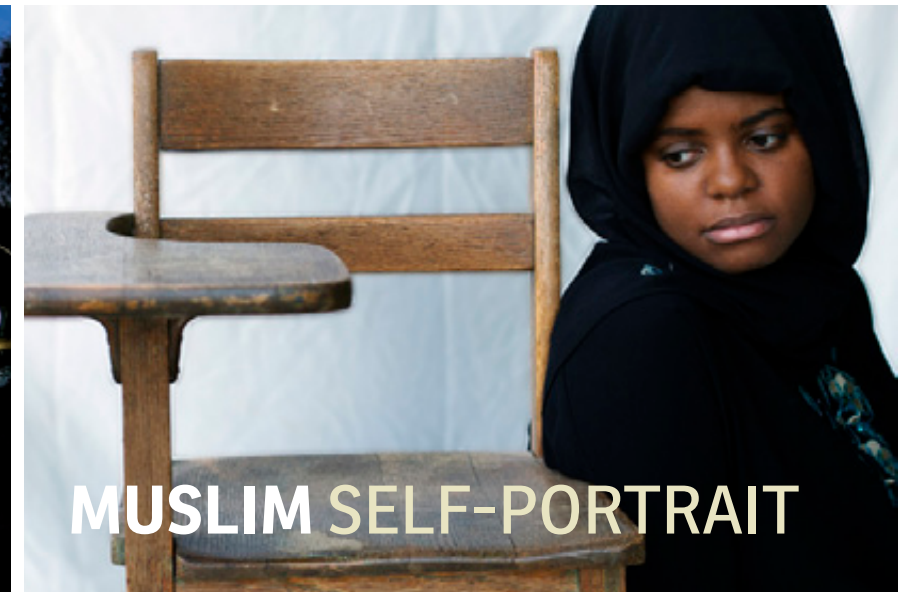
SULEYMANIYE  
MOSQUE



JULIEN  
BRETON



MUSLIM SELF-PORTRAIT



ESFAHAN, IRAN



HISTORY: MOSQUE IN  
LOG UNDER MANGART



ART THERAPY  
2/2



Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (Qatar)

# A NEW AWAKING OF THE ARABIC SPIRIT

Opening of the museum of the Islamic art in Qatar represents one of most important cultural events in the Arab world in the last few decades.

**T**he importance of establishing of such institutions is manifold. Although Arabs through its history gifted a grandiose arts, in the last hundred years a cultural institutions did not exist, which would treat the artistic heritage of the Islamic arts significantly and systematically. However, this art was presented in national museums sporadically and inadequately. In simple words, in a large part of the Arab world, particularly in the countries of the Gulf, museums of Islamic arts did not exist, so its good presentation was overdue. The only phenomenon of the museum of Islamic arts or specific collections, firstly appeared in the Western countries, and that interest began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by establishing of the oriental studies and general interest in arts of the Orient, and which had the influence on the very art of the West, first, with its modernistic tendencies.



**< Bowl**  
Iraq (probably Basra),  
9<sup>th</sup> century  
Earthenware, with  
painting in cobalt blue  
Diameter: 20.5 cm  
Courtesy of the  
Museum of Islamic Art



*The grand staircase at the Museum of Islamic Art, as seen from the main entrance*  
Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art





*Angular structural supports of the Museum of Islamic Art complement the faceted dome above*  
Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art

*The Museum of Islamic Art features a 5-storey window that offers views of the Gulf and the West Bay of Doha*  
Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art



“ The collection of museum of Islamic arts contains the collections of manuscripts, ceramics, metal, glass, white bone, textile, wood works, and jewellery. ”

The Western museums competed over larger collection of the artistic objects from the east, and the colonial government, which made it easy transfer of the artistic heritage from the Islamic countries to the western museums, supported them. Many exhibits that we see today in a large museum collections of European and American cities, were illegally transferred, while some of them came through buying off and gifts. However, although that process of 'filling' of the Western museums with the objects of Islamic arts, due to ignorance and absence of value for the own artistic heritage by the

Muslims, can view as negative, in that way, even paradoxically, few master pieces of Islamic arts were saved from destruction.

Today, museums like Louvers, British Museum, Metropolitan, Museum of Islamic arts in Berlin, David Museum in Copenhagen or Chester collection in Ireland, houses the true treasury of Islamic arts. As for the Islamic countries, the awareness about the importance of the Islamic arts increased with the loss of the colonial influence and due to the effort of some individuals that through museum collections present that kind of arts. Because of that the Museum of



**Vase ('The Cavour Vase')**  
Probably Syria, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Glass, vitreous enamel, gilding.  
Height: 29 cm, diameter: 19.7 cm. Photo credit: Lois Lammerhuber



*Museum of Islamic Art situated 60m off the Doha Corniche on an island made of reclaimed land Courtesy of the Museum of Islamic Art*

of Islamic Art in Doha presents a decisive effort to move things from the dead point and that this project initiates similar museums in other Arab countries. This way Islamic art would be presented in the best way, and in be in contact with the wider audience, which is of paramount importance for the dissemination of the idea of Islamic art.

During the economic expansion of many Arab countries artis-

tic institutions operate both ways, humanizing society and with dynamic artistic activities stimulate production and development of the art market which, of course, can be stimulating for those who want to invest in the cultural sector. Museum of Islamic Art in Doha stirred hope that the Arab countries of the world summon the strength to update many bright traditions of the past, before all Islamic art.

The mission of the museum of

Islamic arts is directed towards presentation and promotion of diversity of the artistic world of Islam. We talk about very important institution that collects, keeps, studies and exhibits masterpieces from three continents and within a period from 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Museum has the goal to attract a largest audience and promote the civilization dialogue and cultural exchange. In this way, Sheikh Al Mayassa, transforms the state

of Qatar into the cultural centre of the Near East. The Qatar Museums authority stands behind this project, and it was founded in October 2005. Its task is developing of museum institutions of Qatar.

The collection of museum of Islamic arts contains the collections of manuscripts, ceramics, metal, glass, white bone, textile, wood works, and jewellery. Exceptionally good works date from the period from 7<sup>th</sup> until 19<sup>th</sup> century.



The well-known architect **I. M PEI** designed the object and he, himself was inspired by the Eastern ziggurat architecture. The result of this is exceptional, so the object of the Museum of the Islamic arts in Qatar is one of most beautiful architectural projects in the Arab world.













**Imperial Decree,  
Ferman of Sultan Sulayman The Magnificent**  
Turkey (Istanbul), 966 AH (1559-1560 AD)  
Ink, colours and gold on paper  
Length: 2.95 cm, width: 59.5 cm  
Photo credit: Hughes Dubois

Spatially, the collection is exhibited on two floors and on galleries that surround the atrium of this museum. Apart from the rooms for permanent exhibits, there is the gallery for occasional exhibitions, the lecture hall with 197 seats, laboratory for restoration and treatment of artistic objects, library and a souvenir shop, offices, rooms for study researches, mesjids. The entire space of this museum amount to 35.500 square meters. The well-known architect I. M Pei designed the object and he, himself was inspired by the Eastern ziggurat architecture. The result of this is exceptional, so the object of the Museum of the Islamic arts in Qatar is one of most beautiful architectural projects in the Arab world.



**Mosque Lamp**

Syria (Damascus), c.1277

Brass, traces of silver and black compound inlay

Height: 29 cm, diameter: 29.3 cm

Photo credit: Nicolas Ferrando



**Illuminated Qur'an Section**  
Calligraphy and Illumination by Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Abi Ibrahim  
Morocco, dated 1063 AH (1653-1654 AD)  
Ink, pigment and gold on paper. Width 20 cm, height 26 cm  
Photo credit: Nicolas Ferrando



**Calligraphic Jade Pendant (Haldili)**  
India, dated 1401 AH (1631-1632 AD)  
Jade (nephrite).  
Height: 3.3 cm, length: 5.1 cm  
Photo credit: Lois Lammerhuber

**Tray Stand >**

Northern Syria or Northern Iraq, mid-13th century  
Brass with silver and niello inlay  
Height: 25.1 cm, diameter: 25.7 cm  
Photo credit: Nicolas Ferrando



**Pen Box**

Western Iran, 1262-1284  
Brass, gold and silver inlay  
Length: 19.8 cm  
Photo credit: Nicolas Ferrando



# Issue 03

268 pages

LEARN MORE

Cover image:  
MALIK ANAS AL-RAJAB, Oriental page No.34



ISSUE 03

# CONTENT

THE ORIGIN OF  
SHAPE IN ISLAMIC  
ARCHITECTURE



POČITELJ MUSIC IN THE  
HERZEGOVINIAN STONE



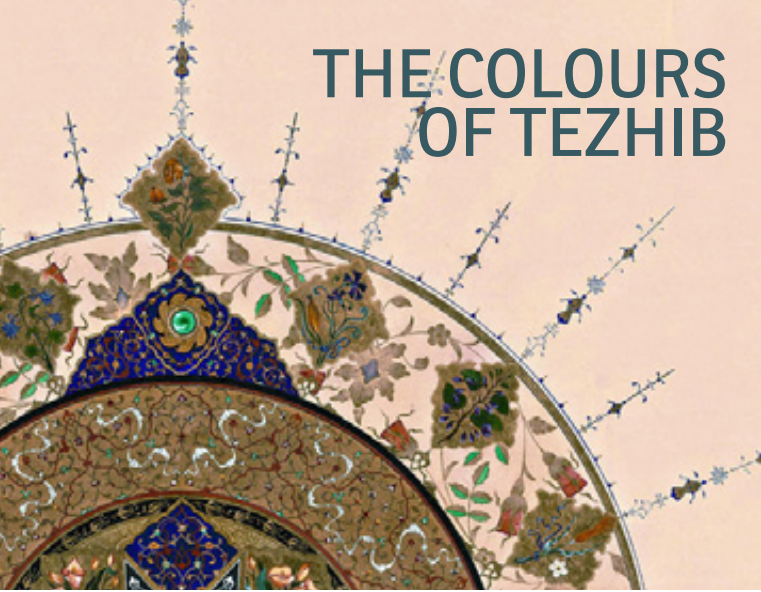
FROM CLASSICAL TO  
CONTEMPORARY  
CALLIGRAPHY



BOOK REVIEW



BOOK REVIEW



# THE COLOURS OF TEZHIB



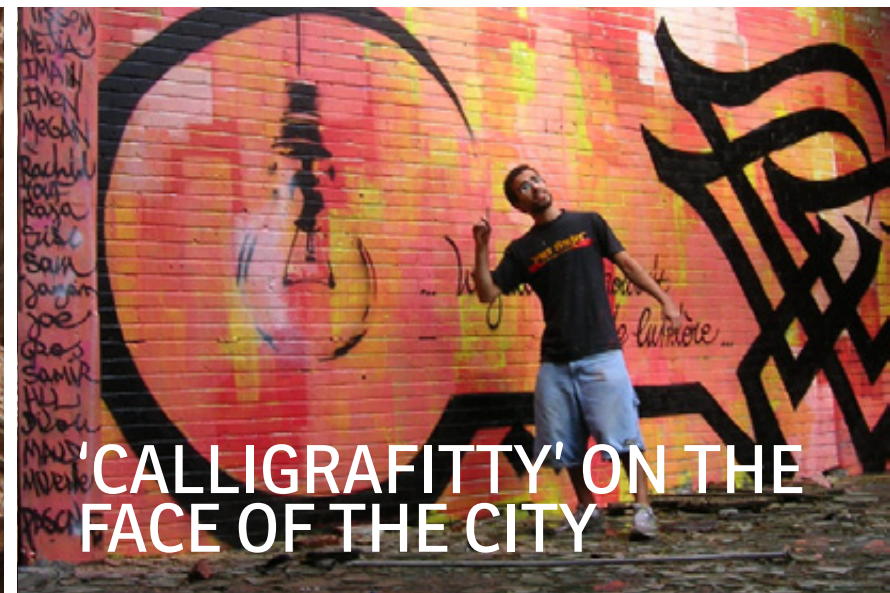
# THE SCANDINAVIA'S LARGEST COLLECTION OF ISLAMIC ART



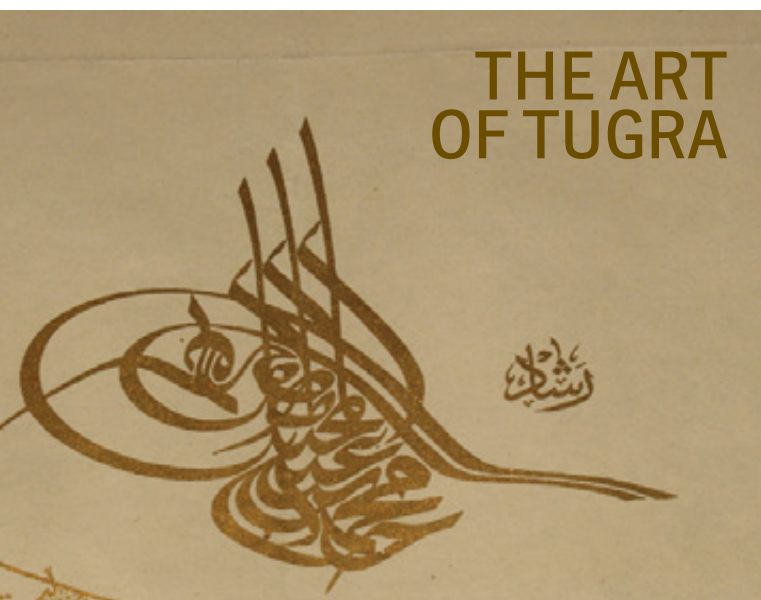
# HAJJ AS ETERNAL INSPIRATION



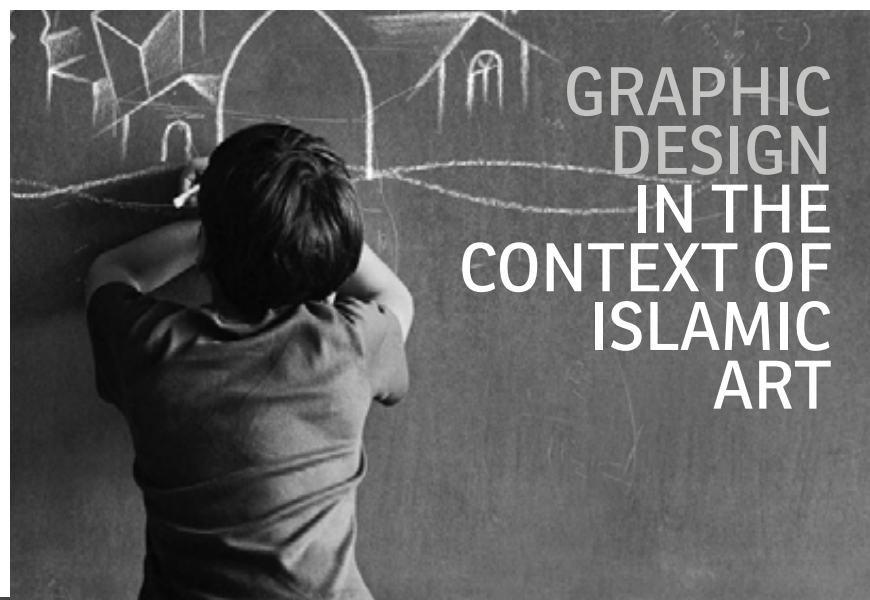
# CORDOBA AND GRANADA



# 'CALLIGRAFITTY' ON THE FACE OF THE CITY



# THE ART OF TUGRA



# GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAMIC ART



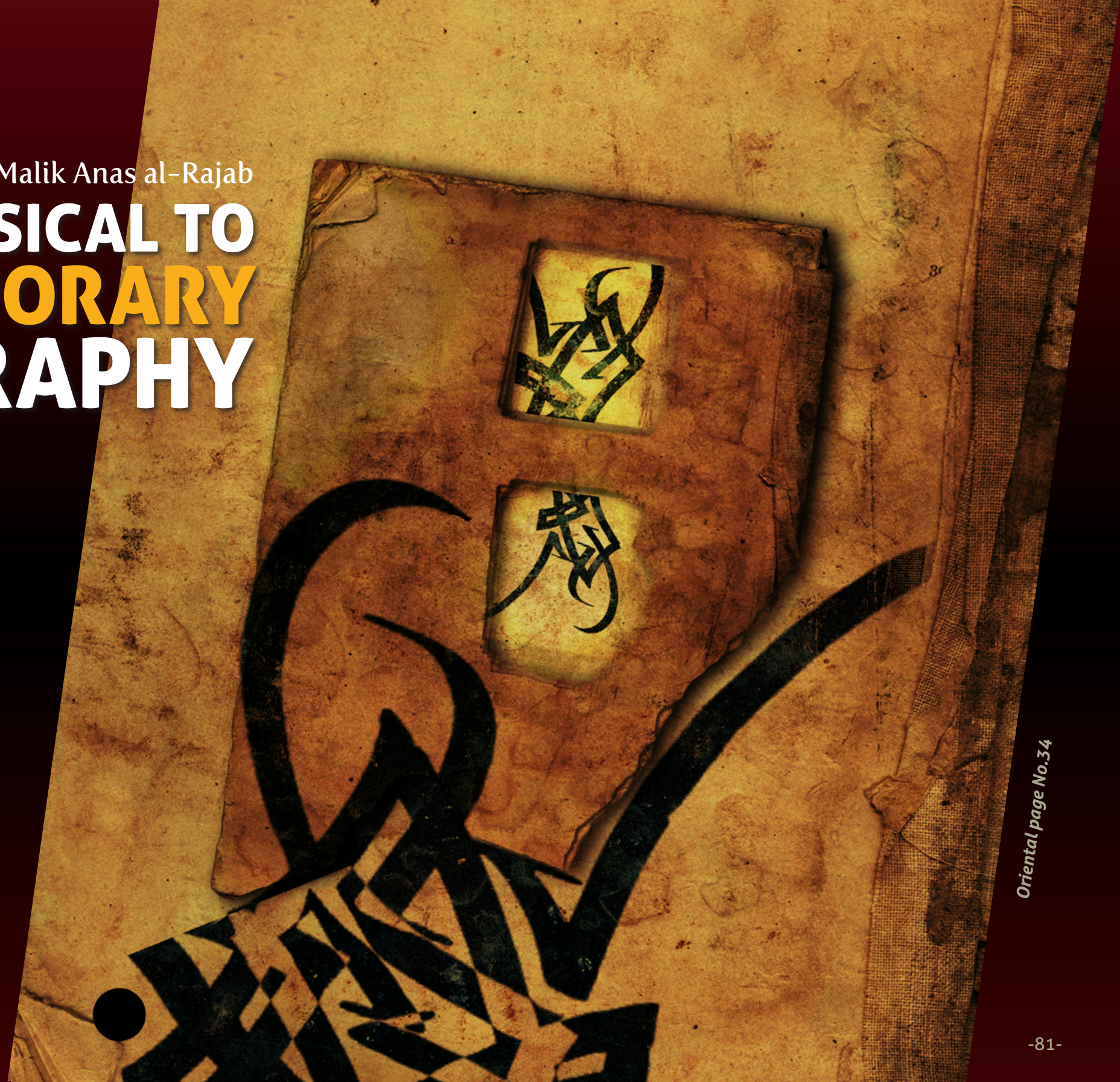
# TUTORIAL HOW TO MAKE A DIGITAL ARABESQUE



Interview with Iraqi artist Malik Anas al-Rajab

# FROM CLASSICAL TO CONTEMPORARY CALLIGRAPHY

*All photos in this article are copywritten.  
Copyright © 2010 Malik Anas al-Rajab*



# MALIK ANAS AL-RAJAB

Born in Baghdad - Iraq, 1976.

BSC in Economics. University in Baghdad.

Studied traditional calligraphy (1990-1995).

Member of Iraqi Calligraphy Society since 2007.

Currently working in Baghdad as a  
contemporary calligrapher and  
freelance graphic designer.

CLICK > [www.malikanas.deviantart.com](http://www.malikanas.deviantart.com)



***Tell us about your artistic path and how did you start making calligraphy. Was it your first choice?***

I can still remember that day vividly! I was about 15 years old when I saw my elder brother practicing calligraphy, I was amazed instantly and I started paying attention to calligraphic types and styles around me... a few months later I started my first lessons on Thuluth Style. In last 4 years I became more attached to this form of art and made a lot of connections and contacts with most of the famous masters in Baghdad.

In 2002 a new passion of graphic design and computer generated images was growing in me so I started to learn the tools of the trade by myself.

In 2005 I decided to specialize in contemporary calligraphy using my practice in classical form of Arabic Calligraphy tradition as a background and merge it with graphic design, after reaching a certain level I was able to infuse calligraphy with graphic design the way you see it now.





***Your calligraphic expression is a free style. I suppose that, in the very beginning, you had some classical models. How did you come to the style that you work on now?***

I studied the artworks of many contemporary calligraphers from around the world. I noticed that there is many ways to express calligraphy and you still get the reaction and the reflection of a calligraphic piece. There were lots of sleepless nights and tryouts trying to come up with my own voice.

***Can you explain the technique you use in your work?***

I used to make several drafts using a breed pen and a paper, then scan it and generate a suitable background which I feel relevant to the piece. A few years later I was able to do the first step digitally using a digital pen and some brushes that I've created for the job. I still using the breed pen sometimes, depending on the project that I'm trying to do.

***Oriental Page No.39***





Malik Anas

“

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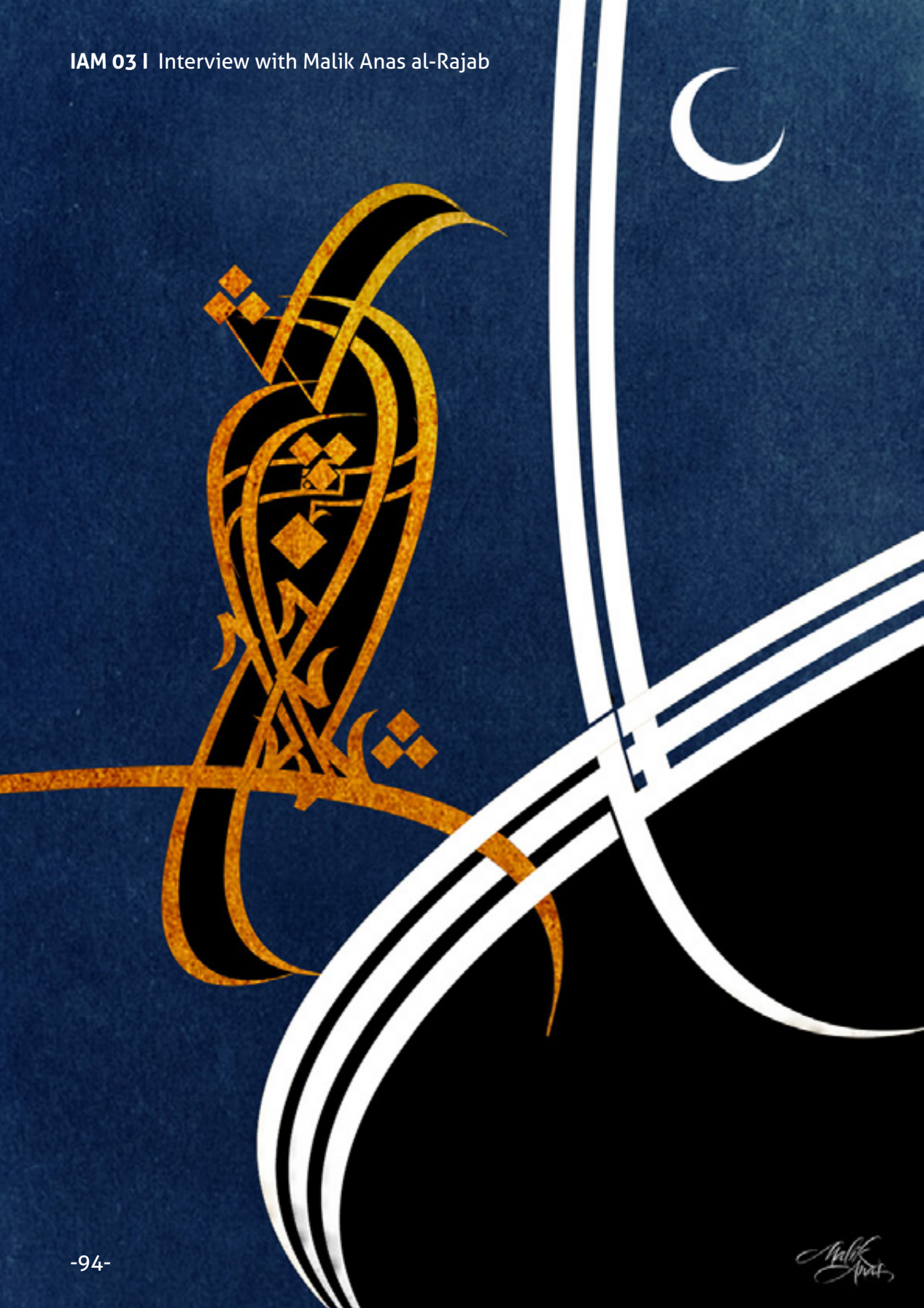
”

< Oriental Page No.39

*In your pictures we can feel the sensibility of the oriental arts, like Chinese or Japanese art. Were you perhaps influenced by those arts as well?*

Off course, Chinese or Japanese calligraphic tradition is a very rich heritage that can not be overlooked. I think that I've learned so much about how a single stroke can be more than enough in balancing the canvas, composition and the power of empty space from browsing their artworks.



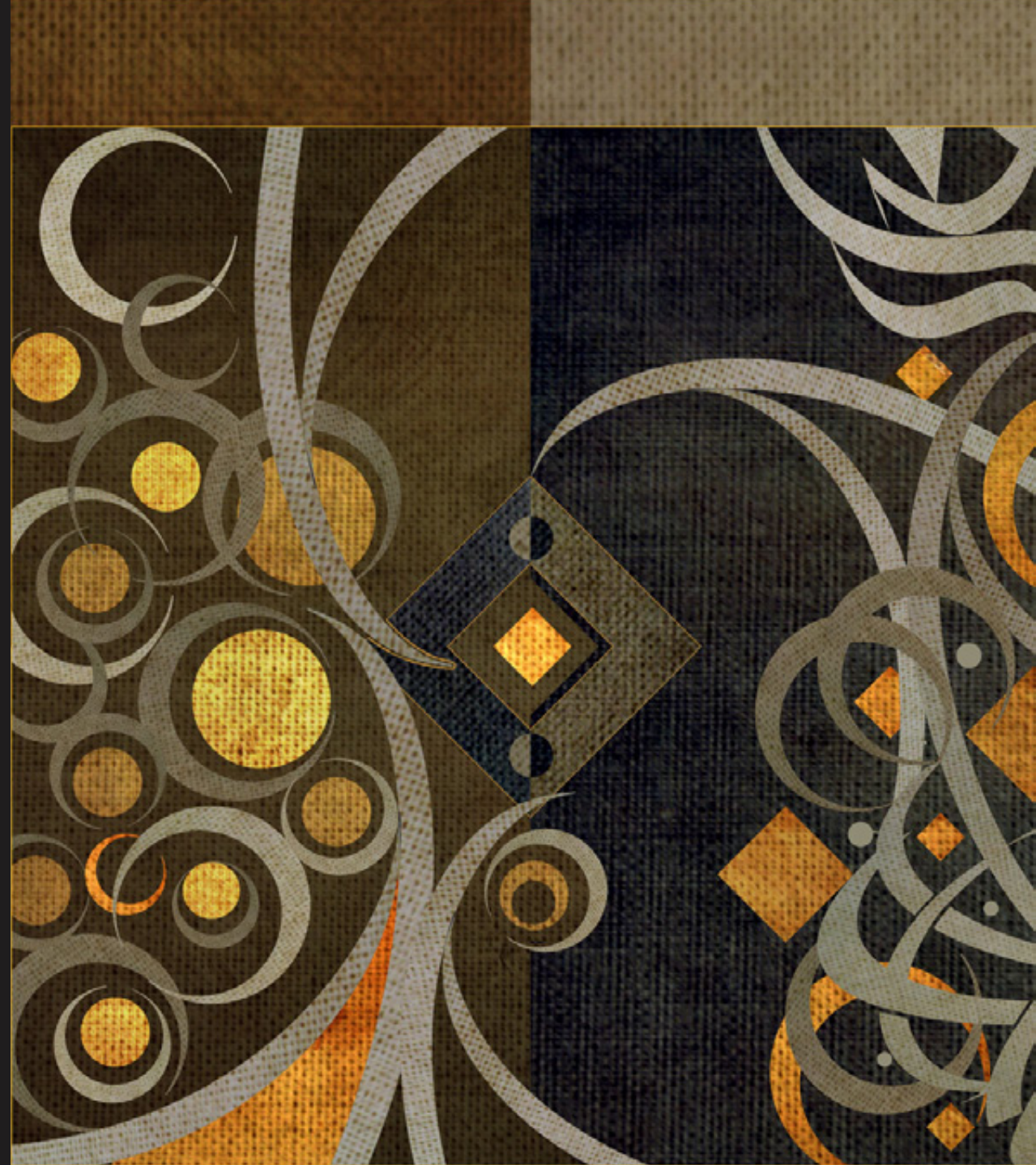


Aesthetics of your image is very recognizable. We would say that this is the combination of purely decorative aspects of Islamic art and the expressive treatment of calligraphy. Is the development of calligraphy in Islam a finished story, or there are some new possibilities today?

Thank you so much, calligraphy in Islam is far from being a finished story but – unfortunately - it's being neglected in many ways for the past few decades.

Did you know that a few centuries ago, a man lived in Baghdad called Ibn Muqla was responsible for generating and developing many of the calligraphic styles that we know today... One man! It seems that the process of developing the original styles of calligraphy has been put to a halt for many reasons, you have some attempts to develop this incredible heritage by some artists who – most of the time - have a little knowledge of the Arabic/Islamic calligraphy traditions, on the other hand you have the masters of this tradition who - most of the time - are not keen on changing this solid rules and guides. I have noticed some attempts to solve this dilemma from some calligraphers from Iran and Turkey but it will take time to be adapted by others.





# Issue 04

258 pages

LEARN MORE



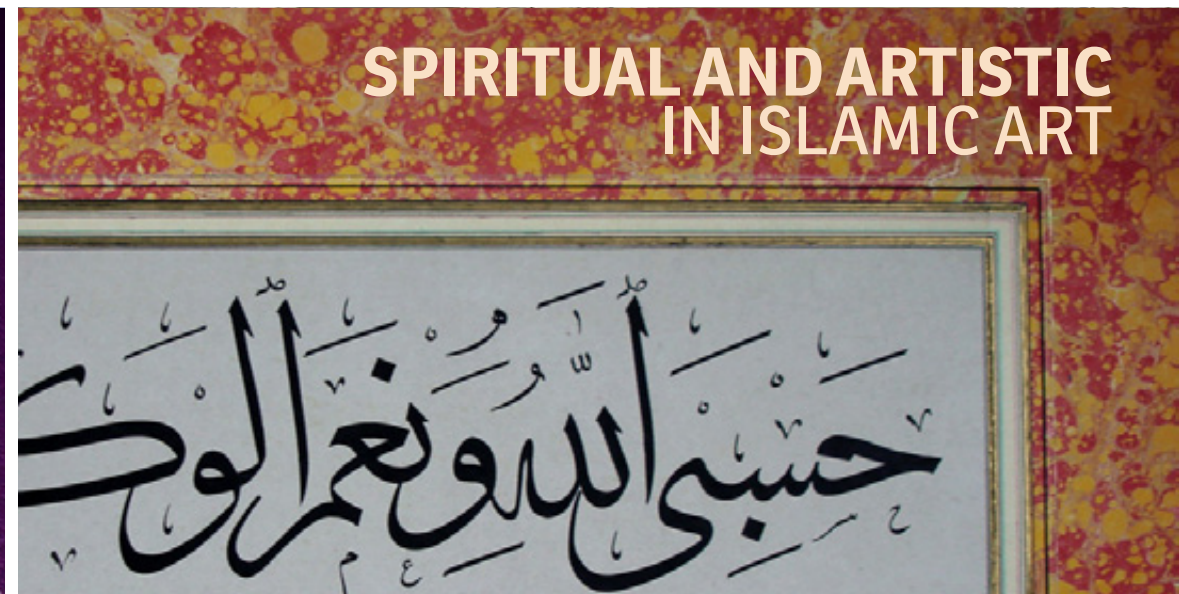
Cover image:  
**JASMIN FAZLAGIĆ**, 'Bey's wife' from the Photo Monography  
'Traditional clothing and jewelry in B&H', 2010

ISSUE 04  
**CONTENT**

**TAJ MAHAL  
THE SYMBOL  
OF LOVE AND  
ARCHITECTURAL  
PERFECTION**



**BOOK  
REVIEW**



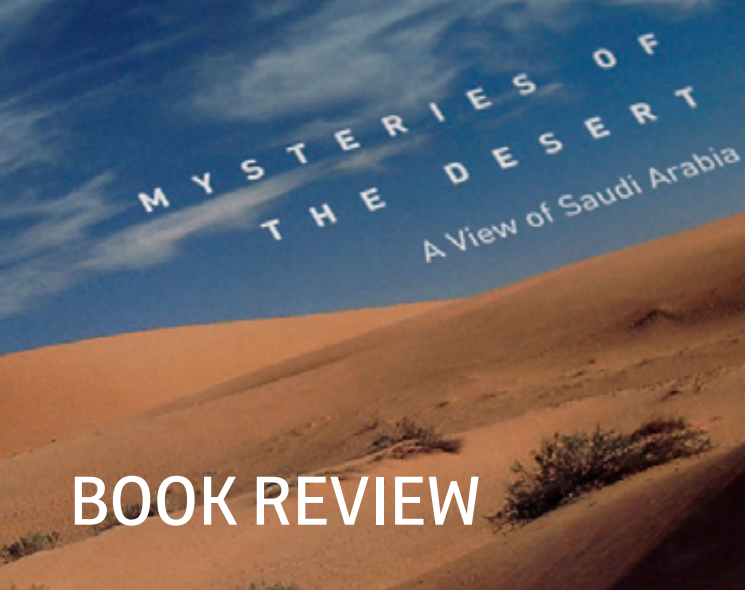
**SPIRITUAL AND ARTISTIC  
IN ISLAMIC ART**



**NEW WAY OF  
SEING AND  
BUILDING  
A MOSQUE**



**TRADITIONAL  
CLOTHING  
AND JEWELRY  
IN B&H**



**BOOK REVIEW**

**ISLAMIC ART  
COLLECTION  
IN THE WALTERS  
ART MUSEUM**



**HUMAN TREE: LOCAL  
ARTISTS, GLOBAL CHARITY**



**GRAPHIC  
EXPERIMENTATION  
THAT PUSH  
THE LIMITS  
OF LEGIBILITY**



**BOSNIAN TRADITIONAL  
ARCHITECTURE**

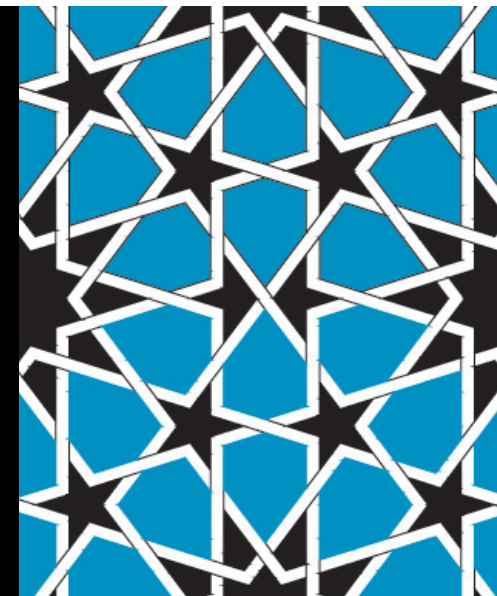


**CAIRO  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
TREASURE**

**SOCIAL REALITY THROUGH  
THE SOCIAL CONCEPT**



**LINE AND  
RESEARCH**



Interview: Muiz Anwar

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**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.

**CLICK >** [www.muiz.co.uk](http://www.muiz.co.uk)

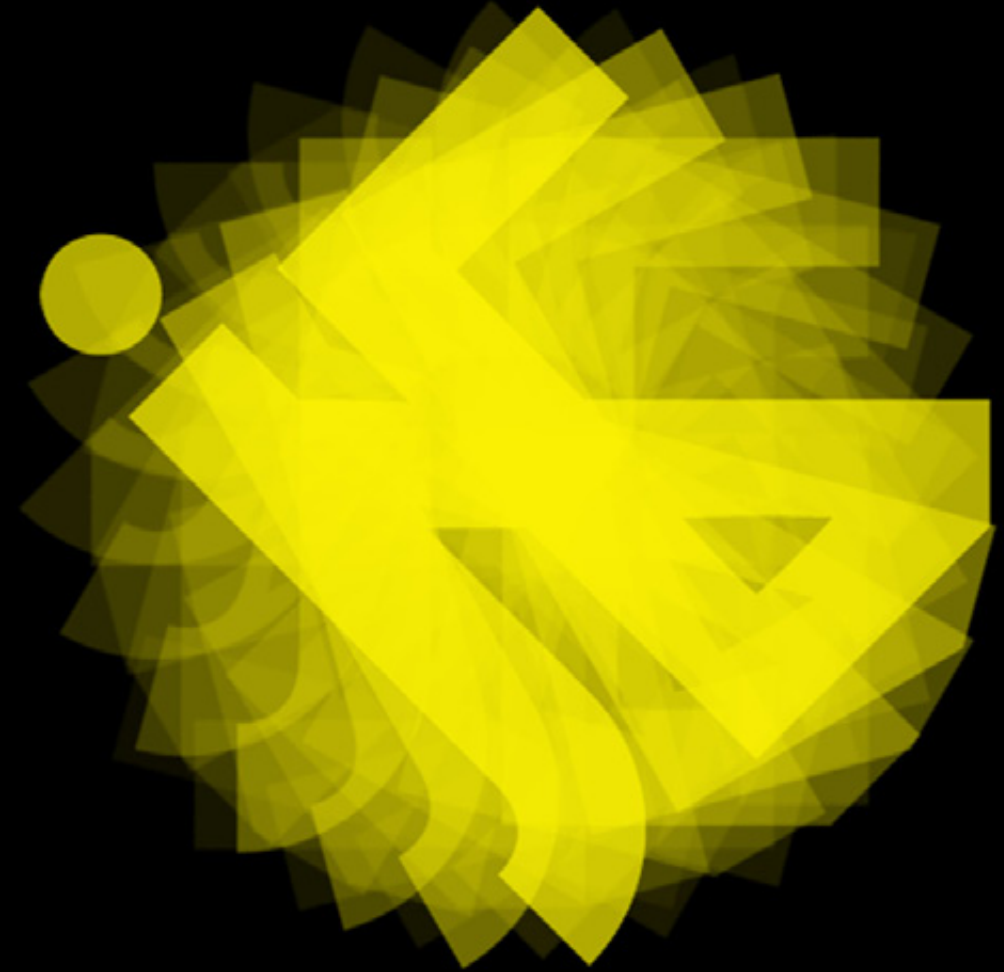


***You are graphic designer and today the graphic design combines different ways of expression (fine arts, photography, typography, sculpture, conceptual art, etc). What is graphic design according to you?***

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



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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 11<sup>th</sup> - 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

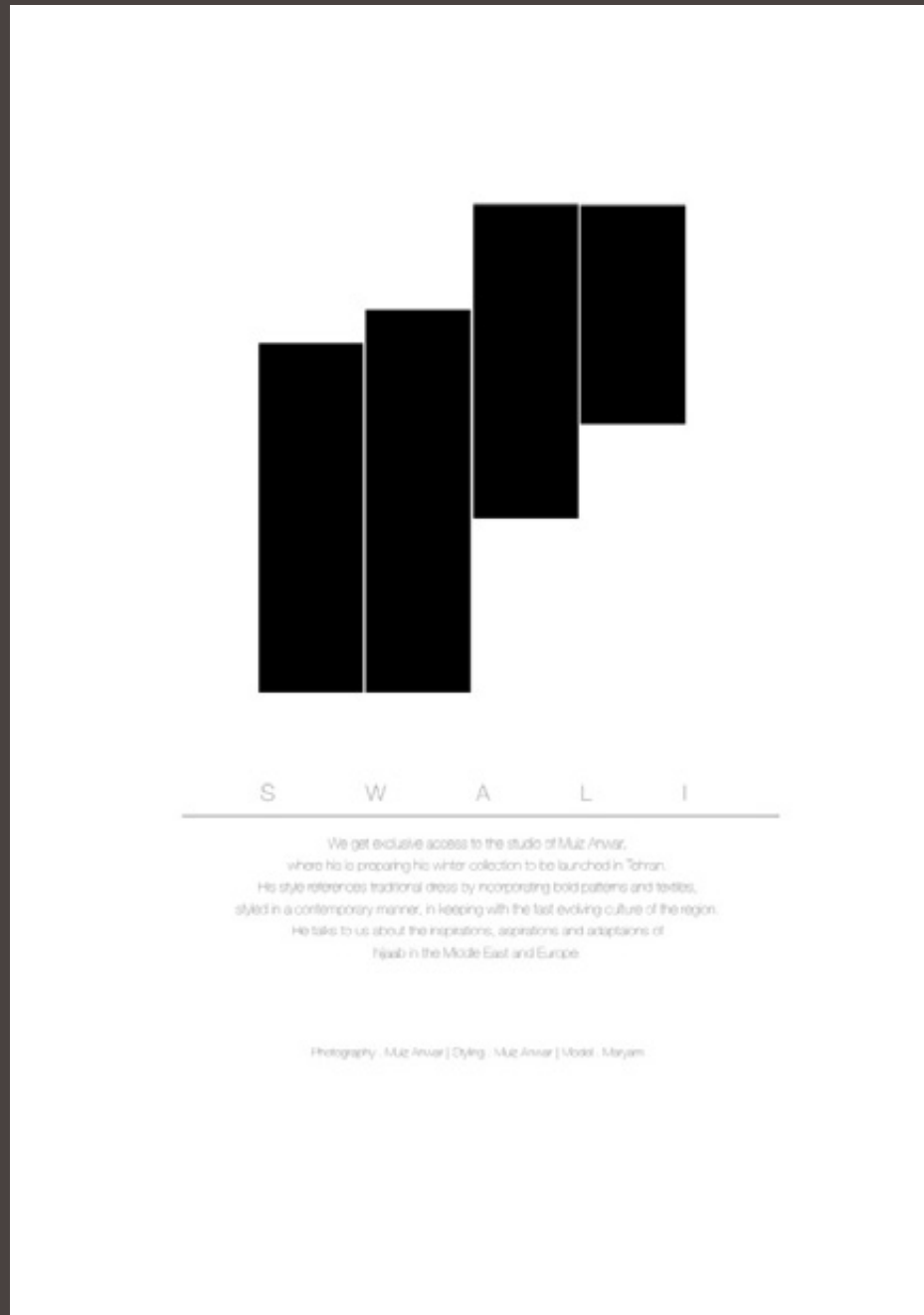
Dr. John Smith and Dr. Mohammad Rahman discuss in-depth, an analysis of how the traditional headscarf was conceived, its' relation, innovation and evolution from early Christian and Jewish doctrine and how it became a symbol of "repression" for some and "freedom" for others.

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

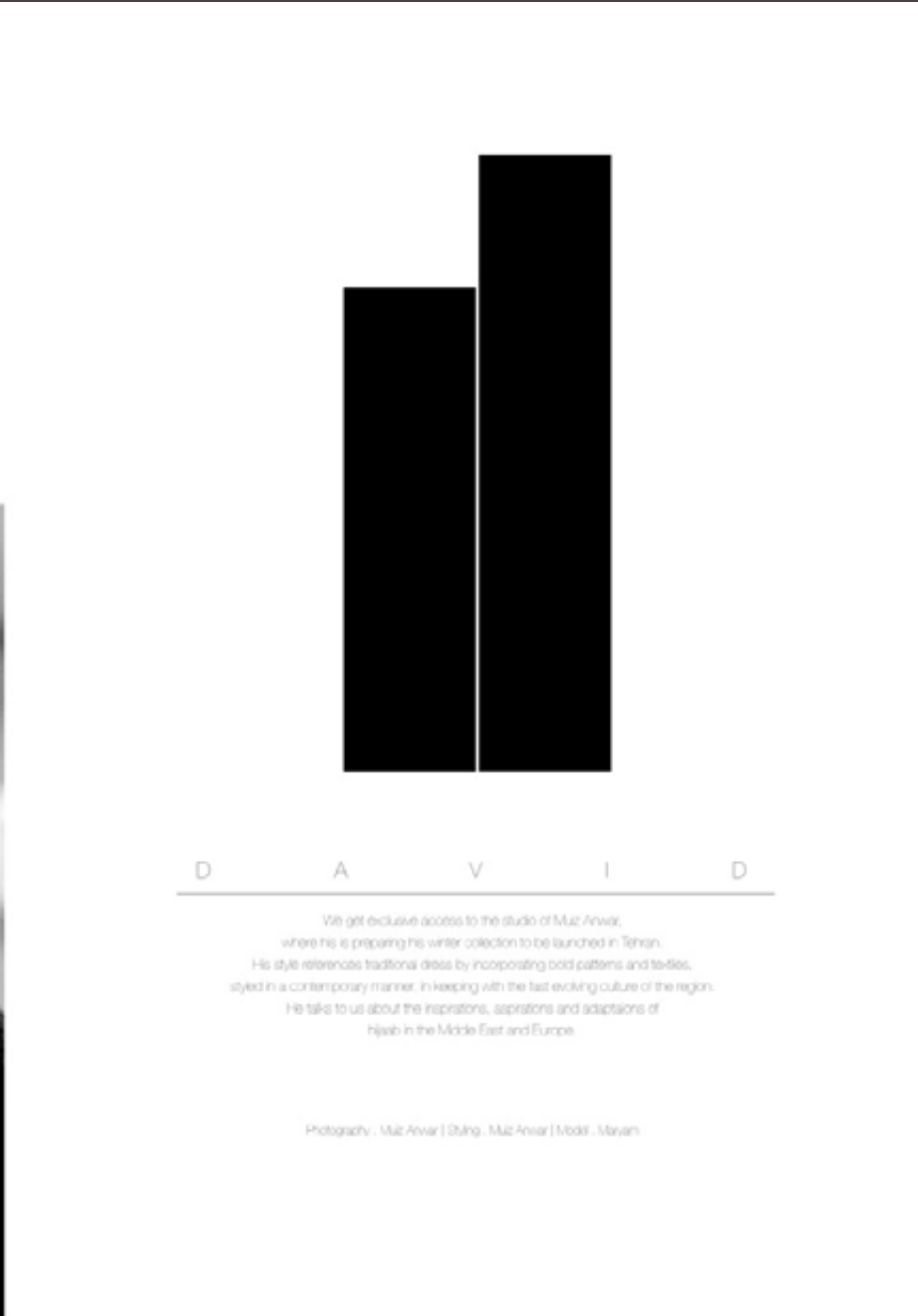
*In some of your projects, you combine the photography and typography in very interesting way, especially in the second issue of the Intellectual Lifestyle Magazine. Can you tell us more about that project?*

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.



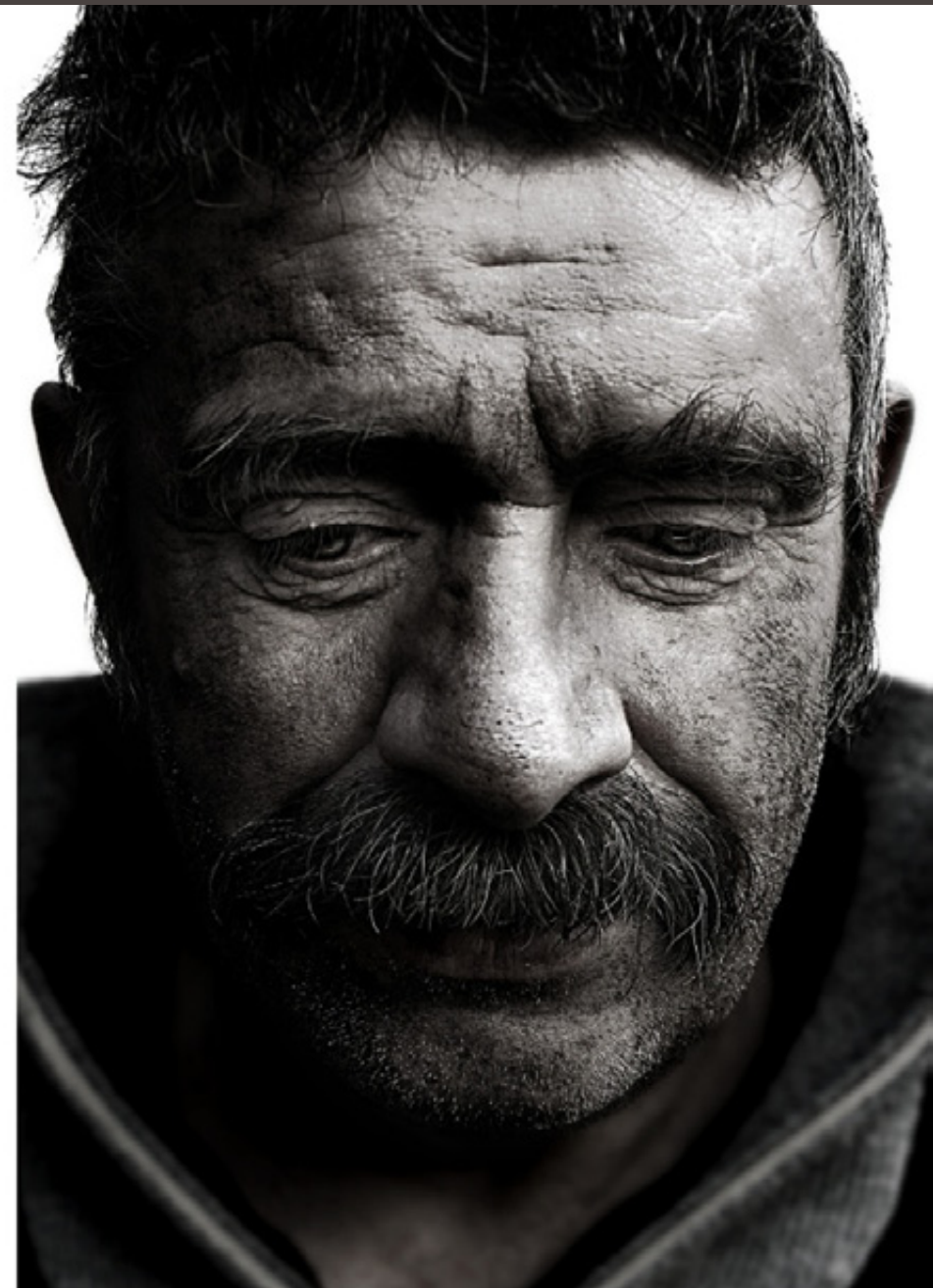
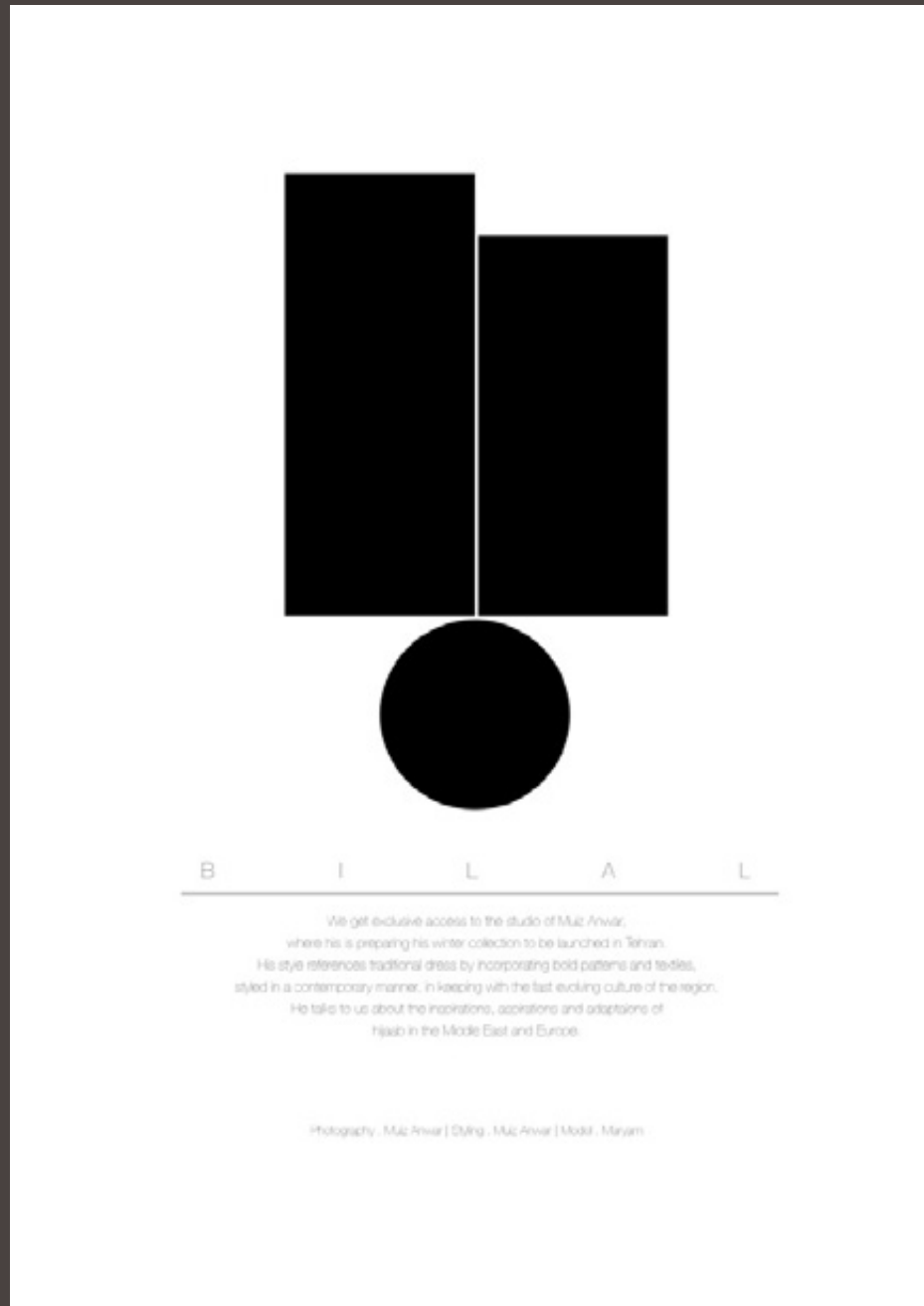




Characters which normally exuded a horizontal elegance were now crushed into vertical alignment (the beh character). This was to represent the seizure of land, the lack of freedom, the political, economic and civic imprisonment of the population in Palestine. The strong vertical aesthetic – which was 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.

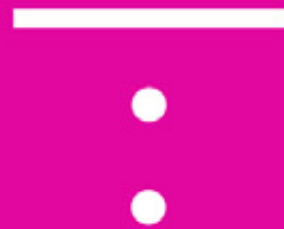


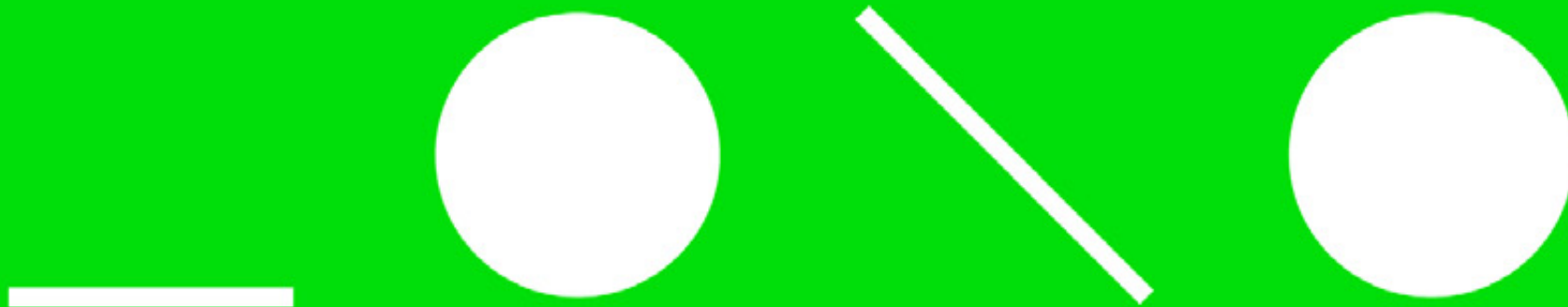
# "Morse Code" Arabic

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 >*





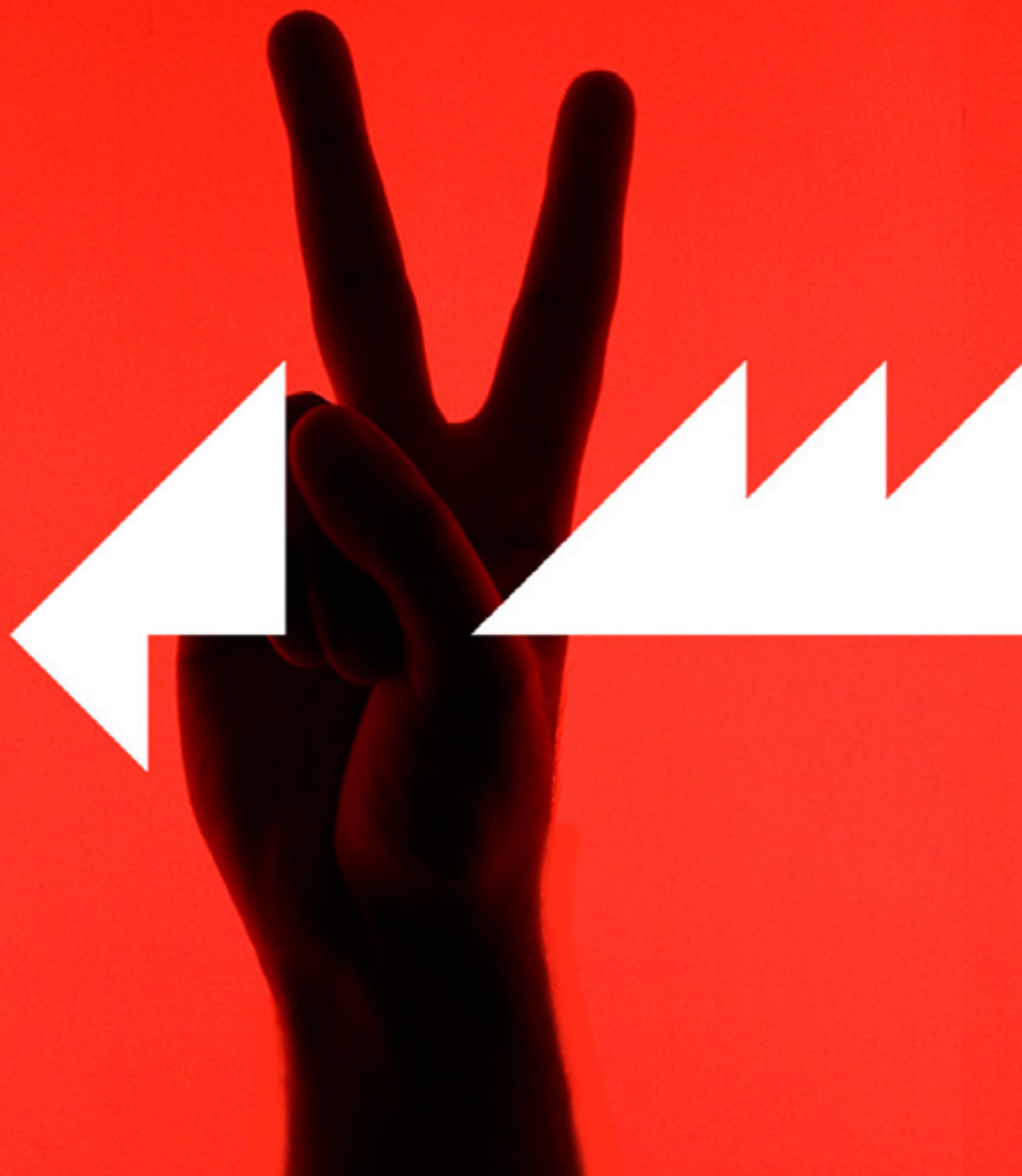


***Would you describe your art as Islamic art?***

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,

*"Morse Code" Arabic: Bismillah*



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)

# Issue 05

290 pages

LEARN MORE

Cover image:  
**VELID HODŽIĆ**, Ornated helmet from the Islamic Art Collection of the Askeri  
Museum in Istanbul, Photograph, 2010





ISSUE 05

# CONTENT

TARIH THE ART OF STONE 1/3

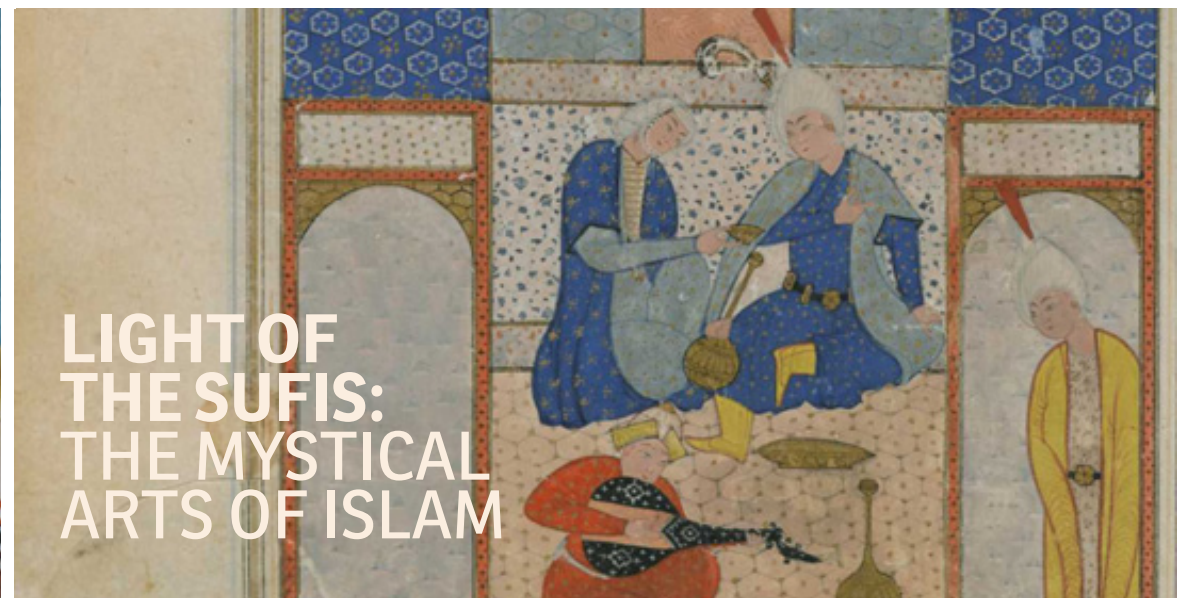


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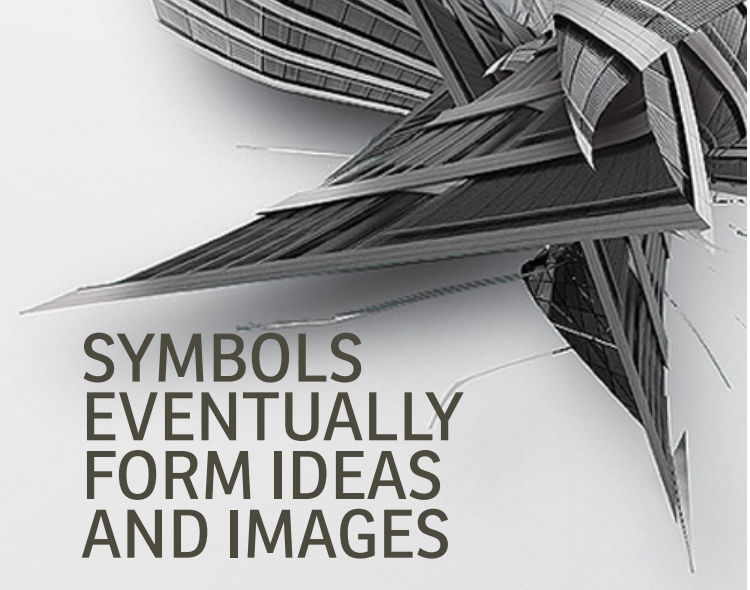


SPRAYING  
SPIRITUALITY  
ONE CAN  
AT A TIME...

BOOK REVIEW



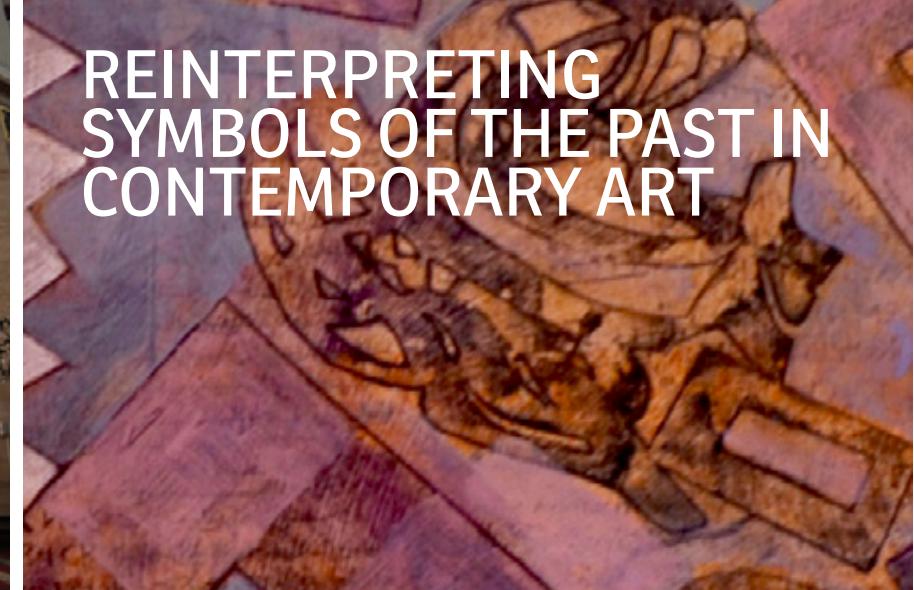
LIGHT OF  
THE SUFIS:  
THE MYSTICAL  
ARTS OF ISLAM



**SYMBOLS  
EVENTUALLY  
FORM IDEAS  
AND IMAGES**



**THE ŞEHZADE MEHMED  
MOSQUE IN ISTANBUL**



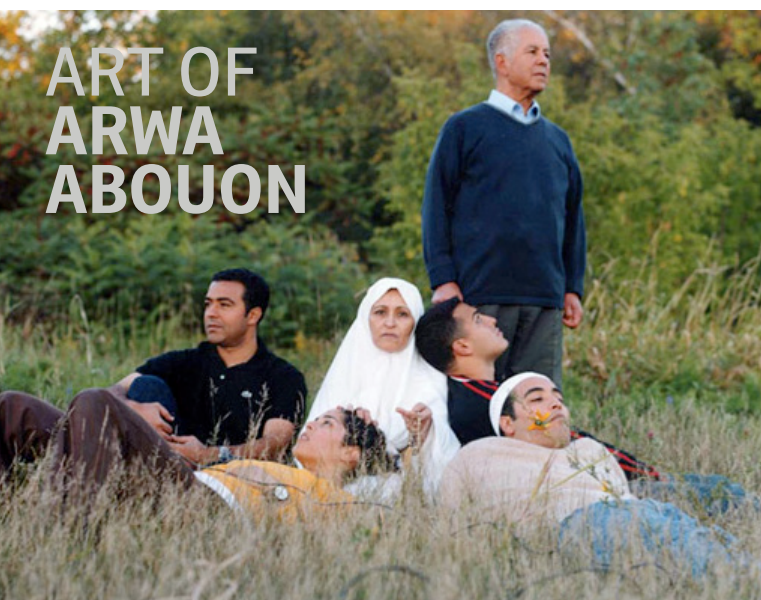
**REINTERPRETING  
SYMBOLS OF THE PAST IN  
CONTEMPORARY ART**



**ASKERI MUSEUM  
WEAPON AS ART**



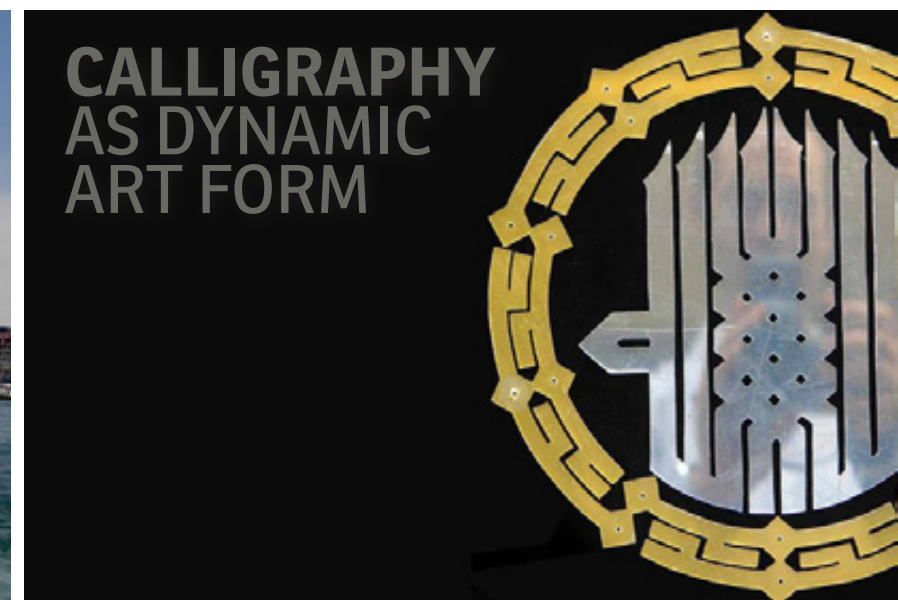
**PAKISTAN  
THE LAND OF COLOURS**



**ART OF  
ARWA  
ABOUON**



**ISTANBUL  
WHERE EAST MEETS WEST**



**CALLIGRAPHY  
AS DYNAMIC  
ART FORM**

Interview with **Mohammed Ali**, Aerosol Arabic (*United Kingdom*)

# SPRAYING SPIRITUALITY ONE CAN AT A TIME...

by **Nisa Terzi**

*Journalist (Melbourne, Australia)*

*All photos in this article are copy written. Copyright © Mohammed Ali*

# MOHAMMED ALI

## AEROSOL ARABIC

Known for his unique message-filled graffiti murals, Mohammed Ali has been pioneering a unique combination of mediums and delivering them in public spaces all around the world.

Also known as Aerosol Arabic, Mohammed was born and raised in Birmingham UK — a true “Brummie” as he likes to call himself. His passion for graffiti art began as a teen in the early eighties and he has been painting ever since.

Initially aspiring to be a computer games designer, at 20 Ali found he had a bigger role to play, something that was about designing hope and a change for humanity. He decided to leave the virtual realm and focus on reality.

Unlike many graffiti artists, Ali started to incorporate Islamic concepts and script within his art. He has since pioneered what he calls “urban spiritual art,” a fusion between urban street graffiti and eloquent Islamic script.

Much of Ali’s work depicts universal principles of peace, knowledge and patience — concepts that cross faiths and cultures. Ali’s art celebrates spirituality; it’s far from being provocative and controversial. Instead of art that shakes the bridge, Ali’s art aims to build bridges.

The 30-year-old father of one has become a household name across the Muslim community. Some of his accolades include public spiritual murals in the streets of major cities, such as New York, Chicago, Toronto, Melbourne and Dubai.

**CLICK >** [www.aerosolarabic.com](http://www.aerosolarabic.com)



*Rehearsals of Writing on the wall mural in Birmingham UK*

*From the beginning of time, man has carved his message into the public space, from ancient rock carvings to the modern day spraypainter.*

***At a time when people are afraid to speak up, graffiti art provides such a platform. It enables artists to illustrate a unique and stylistic view of the world and the problems people are facing. How do you view the world and what does your art aim to do?***

George Orwell once said "in these times of universal deceit, speaking the truth will become a revolutionary act". That is all I aim to do highlight truths that are now becoming lost and forgotten, bring back principles and virtues that are fading away from our modern societies. Freedom, justice, brotherhood, seeking knowledge, these are values people don't speak about anymore. We don't see these values anywhere. Quite the contrary, we wonder why we have so many problems in the world today. The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.s. said "speak the truth, even if it's against yourself", so these truths, however comfortable it may be, someone needs to bring them back and there is no better way to do so, than putting them in the public space, out in the open for people to see on a daily basis.



***When did you first decide to incorporate graffiti art with Islamic calligraphy? It sounds like an oxymoron; the two art forms seem like opposites. How is it that you can draw such parallels?***

Graffiti art was a frustrated and aggressive display of one's own self. Selfish glorification of one's own identity, glorifying ones 'tag' in a public space. It was about the self, the word of man, wanting to be known and heard, making his mark. Historically even, man has forever left his mark, told his story for others to see in a public space. However Islamic Art was about the opposite, about everything but the self, not the word of man, but the word of God. The artist was anonymous - like a graffiti artist

- but would also be selfless, and pointing to everything but himself, pointing to a divine message. Both artforms were a non-figurative expression of words being the focus, but one being about the word of Man, and the other word of God. Perhaps even Art for Art's sake, and the other Art for God's sake (or mankind's sake).

***Has there ever been any conflict between your faith and your art?***

Initially, one might have been uncomfortable about the street art and sacred Islamic messages being mentioned in the same breath, two opposing worlds coming together as a clash. In fact, I would say what this represents to me is the very idea of the "clash of civilizations",

because here we see worlds colliding but doing it with perfect harmony, showing how Islam and Islamic art can be meaningful and relevant to modern society. Sometimes I worry about losing myself within the art, and have to pull away and take time out for myself, such as during the month of Ramadan, going on Hajj/Umrah wherever possible, and just taking time out to reflect on the religion. Yes, I love doing things to inspire others, but sometimes I need to refuel my own batteries.

***Who would you say inspired you to become the artist you are today?***

There is no doubt, that I do what I do today because of my faith in Is-

lam, or I should say re-discovery of Islam. At one stage in life I began to question the purpose of Art in society, question the purpose of my existence. I was immersed in the commercial design industry making computer games - a dream career that I had wanted since I was a kid. But what was I doing? Using this creative ability to turn kids into zombies in front of their TV screens? Surely this skill I had could be used for better purposes, something that could serve mankind, and in turn serve my Creator. So I began using my creativity to bring about change in the world today. I felt that as an artist, I could finally offer something back to society, rather than create art for art's sake. I could benefit the world, just like how doctors and teachers could.



**Are you a preacher?**

Everyone knows I'm not preaching or telling people to 'come to the truth' but in some ways I am preaching. Just how the billboards preach and say how they are the best product, I tell people to wake up to the injustices in the world and spread peace and understanding amongst one another.

**What would you say the role and responsibility of graffiti artists are?**

We are using the public space that is seen by millions of people. We are partly responsible in shaping our environment quite literally. We can turn the ugly grey concrete cities into spaces of colour and life. We have the power to transform people's condition through what they see on a daily basis. Just like how billboards that surround us, shape the way the people think and operate. Airbrushed women, latest flash cars, Hollywood mov-



Day 8 of working on the writing on the wall mural in Birmingham UK

ies - this is what becomes our priorities in life when we are bombarded with such visuals. We as graffiti artists must think about our social responsibility in how we offer something back to the public. So for me, it is about offering something not just with colour, but also meaning.

**The beauty of graffiti art is that it is not framed or hung in a gallery to be accessed by certain people at a certain time. It is for all people, readily accessible and powerful in the way it can be related to by everyone. Where would you say was the most inspiring location to paint? Is there a country or a specific location you dream of painting in one day?**

I always describe graffiti art, as breaking outside of the conventional art spaces, bursting outside of the walls, and spilling out onto the streets around us. This is where art should be. We should be living and feeling art, enhance our



*Free Gaza, Birmingham, England*

condition, unlike anything else out there. We need art in our lives, it is an essential part of human development. One of the most inspiring places I painted was New York, in the Bronx. Being at the heart of graffiti - the Mecca of graffiti - where it all started and to be able to take something back there, with a spiritual angle, not far from the shadows of the twin towers was pretty special for me. Melbourne was a pretty unique project too. Painting street-art in places other than the run down districts, and doing some in a central business district, was pretty inspiring for me, seeing a totally different atti-

tude to graffiti art. I have been invited to paint in Sarajevo in a few months which I am looking forward to. Taking art into unusual places, places that don't see this type of thing is what I enjoy doing. With the history of war and destruction in Bosnia, and how the people have dealt with it is what appeals to me about painting there.

***Having established yourself in the arts scene, your latest project "Writing On The Wall" earlier this year marked a unique point in history with a one-off live performance of painting, poetry and percussion in a vast,***

***concrete workshop just days before it was demolished. What was this project inspired by and what did it aim to do?***

I have always felt I wanted to take graffiti art to that next level. More than just paint street-corner murals or canvas exhibitions. For years I have been saying that I am going to do something really unique - the BIG ONE - the one that will really make some big waves. I wanted to choreograph something powerful and impactful on a scale unimaginable. I wanted to bring together different mediums of expression, the best poets, the best

performers, different mediums of artforms and bring them together as a kind of multimedia experience, with graffiti intertwined with that, at the heart of it.

So I began four years ago on a journey to find the right people for this project. I narrowed it down to three national and international poets that I could work with to develop this unique project. I employed a renowned theatre director to make it happen. And it had to take place in my city, the city of Birmingham where I was born and raised and still based in. I had to give something back to the people of my city. I have travelled all



over giving art to all these cities. I had to give my biggest project to date to my city as a gift if you like. I used the cities most loved and respected 100-year-old theatre, to transform their space into a one-night only performance of spray painting and spoken-word in front of a 450-strong sold out audience. It brought together people of all backgrounds together in an amazing way, women in face veils to the middle-class regular theatre-goers. I have never seen anything like it, so for me, it was mission accomplished.

Aside from painting the murals, I was providing the poets with themes, and then painting from the words of the poets - so it was a two way process where the poet and the painter became one.

What I was doing there, was incorporating for the first time, my background in multimedia (that's what I



*A thirst for change,  
Melbourne, Australia*

studied at university). I always loved film, photography, animation and sound, and playing with that. So in the show there were parts where the room was lit dramatically and sounds from my Umrah trip, that I had captured on my mobile recorder, were layered. There was video projected onto the walls, footage I had shot over the years, in subway stations, time lapse footage of a mural being painted over a day, random bits of typography flashing in and out, high energy rhythms that I had put together from the sounds of a spray can - the rattle, the hissing of a can - all of this to create an ambience in the auditorium, accompanied by a live percussionist. This is why I loved this project so much, I felt I was really able to explode and fully utilize all the things I had been trained up to doing over the past decade, just creating an all-round experience.







*Brotherhood, Toronto, Canada*

***September this year, audiences gathered for the first screening of the "Writing On The Wall" documentary followed by a Q&A, a panel discussion and closing performances by artists. Funds were raised for the Pakistan Flooding***

***Appeal. How did you think this event proceeded? Why do you think there is such a great need for such events to take place?***

Since the end of *Writing on the Wall* which was early this year in Janu-

ary, there was an amazing buzz from those who came. Words cannot describe the special vibe that took place in that space that night. The show could have sold out 3, 4 or five nights in a row. But it was a one night only. You missed it, it

was your loss. In fact even more special, is that the walls were demolished two weeks later. So there is no trace left of that momentous occasion on a cold winter evening. So the only record we had was via film. We had a team of four

cameramen document the whole process. I knew this would be magical, so I focused on bringing some of my favorite film-makers on board with this. I flew in someone I had worked with in Australia to direct it - simply because my best project to-date had to have the best working on it. So recently we did a screening of the film, followed by all artists, directors and performers form part of a panel discussion. We wanted to share the magic of that evening. For those that missed out, I wanted to show via the film, this took place. Also it wasn't a sporadic event, a one-hit. This was part of mission, to build upwards, build towards a movement, of how the arts can be used to change the world! *Writing on the Wall* can happen in any city, any country, and that is what I intend to do insha'Allah!

***The Hubb Arts Centre is a new and innovative space launched April this year in your home town of Birmingham. The venue***



***promises to host public exhibitions, workshops and live performances bringing art to the people. What initiated the idea to open up such a venue? What programs have been hosted thus far at the Hubb?***

The Hubb is quite a special project for me. Some may say I take a lot on. I paint murals, I deliver educational sessions, both in the UK and abroad, I program different artist events. In fact over the past few years I've only been 50% artist as

I do many other things. Establishing the Hubb is just one part of my mission. I wanted to bring the arts into people's lives, and continuing with the ethos as a graffiti artist of taking art to the people. I decided to launch a unique arts centre right in the community that probably needs it the most. I wanted to bring the 'art gallery' outside of the glitzy parts of the city and right into the inner-city areas, the neglected neighborhoods, where you wouldn't dream of seeing a bright white-walled gallery space.

I decided to place it right in the neighborhood where I was born and raised - an area called Sparkbrook. This was the area where my father decided to stay back in the 60's. So offering something back to that community which has had its fair share of issues, from troubled youth to unemployment and crime. I felt a duty to do something for the area. The gallery has brought people in, people who would never step foot in that part of town, giving them a different perspective. My art is about trying to bring people together, people who don't otherwise get together. One of my favorite projects was when I went to a neighbourhood which had some serious racial problems. These kids told me straight up what they thought of me, as a person of colour - as a Muslim! But by the end of four days of engaging with them, we became the best of friends. This is the kind of reaching out that is required in this day and age.



*Educating a woman is educating a nation, Victoria University, Melbourne*

***Finally, what would be your message to artists and art lovers around the world?***

There are many other artists now painting with inspiration from the Arabic script. It is refreshing to see this and really brings a good feeling to me that people are inspired by their own culture and script, rather than imitate something other than their own. But I think it's important that as artists we need to innovate, not imitate. Years ago when I first started doing this, it was quite exciting to be doing something that hardly anyone else was doing, there was a great buzz to deliver something fresh that few had seen. But I think, like with everything, there is a saturation point. Where that visual soon becomes like a visual blur. I feel that about my own work at times, I look back and I know I have to move forward, I have to move on. How do I create something that is unique. If we as artists, cannot deliver unique concepts, then there really is no point.

# Issue 06

312 pages

LEARN MORE

Cover image:  
Elvira Bojadžić, Tarih from the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Photograph, 2010



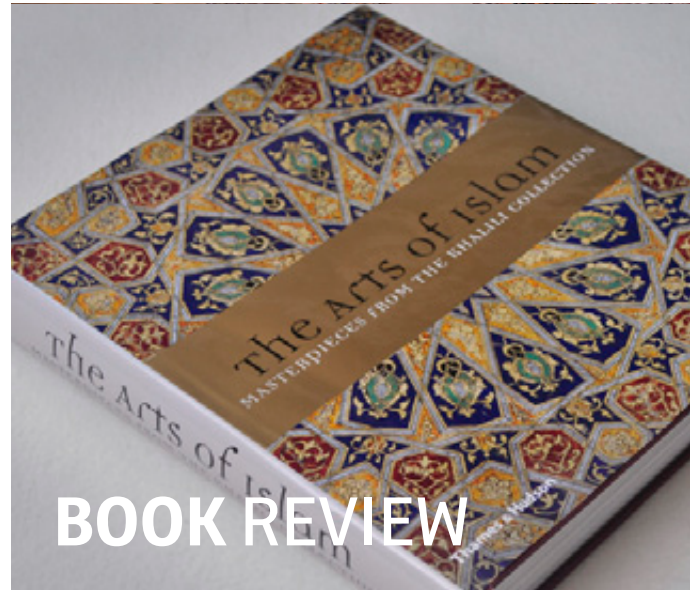
ISSUE 06  
**CONTENT**



**THE SULTAN AHMED  
MOSQUE IN ISTANBUL**



**TARIH  
THE ART  
OF STONE  
2/3**



**BOOK REVIEW**



**ACTION COUPLED WITH  
LINE IN MATOX'S WORK**



**AFRUZ  
AMIGHI'S  
CAPTIVATING  
PATTERNS OF  
DRIVING  
INTENSITY**



**COLORS OF THE OASIS:  
CENTRAL ASIAN IKATS**



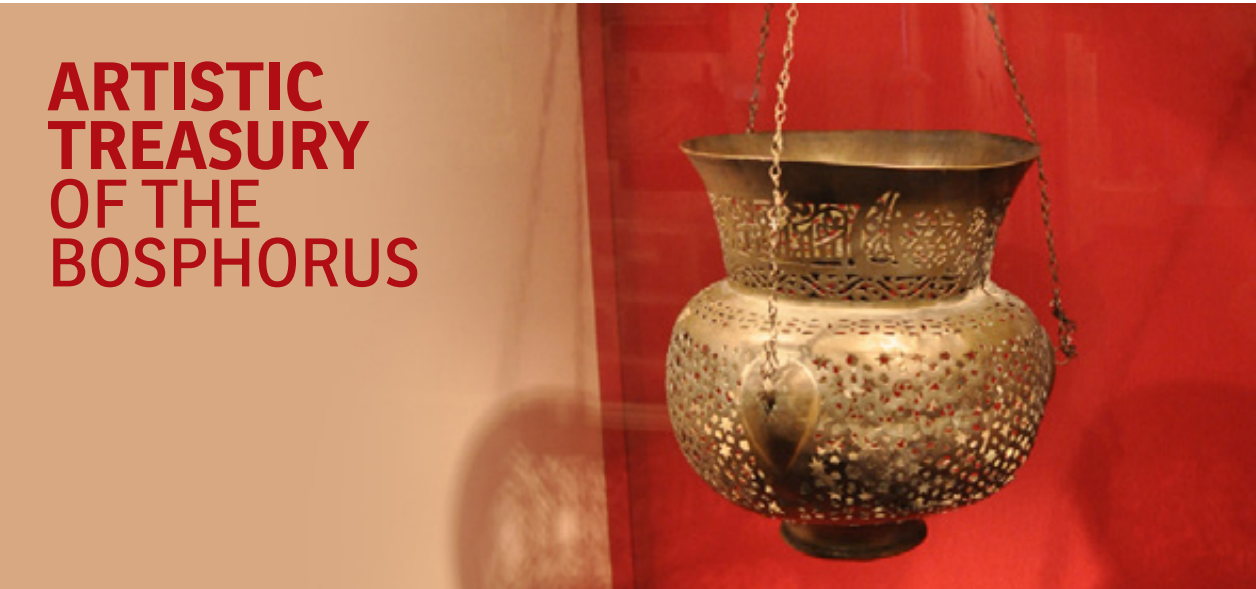
**EL SEED AT THE  
MUSEUM OF  
ISLAMIC ART  
OF DOHA**



**CREATIVE SPECTER OF  
AATIF SHARIEFF**



**ARTISTIC  
TREASURY  
OF THE  
BOSPHORUS**



**www**

**"AT NO POINT DOES GRAPHIC DESIGN  
FEEL LIKE 'WORK', IT IS JUST FUN"**

**TESTAMENT TO HISTORY**



**CERAMIC ART BY SHAHIDA AHMED**



An interview with the Jameel Prize winner

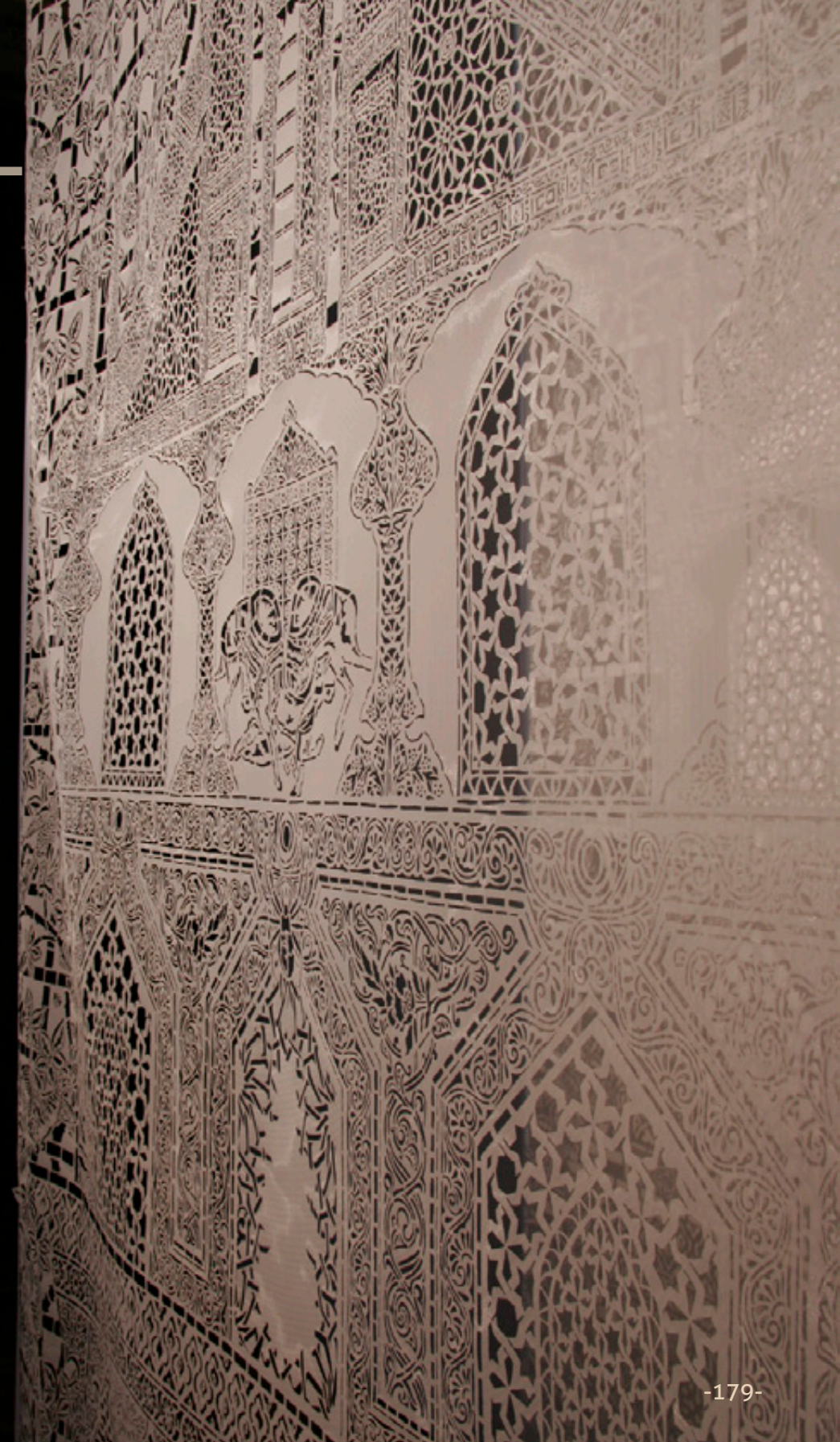
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# AFRUZ AMIGHI'S CAPTIVATING PATTERNS OF DRIVING INTENSITY

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by **Valerie Behiery**, Islamic art historian, Ph.D.

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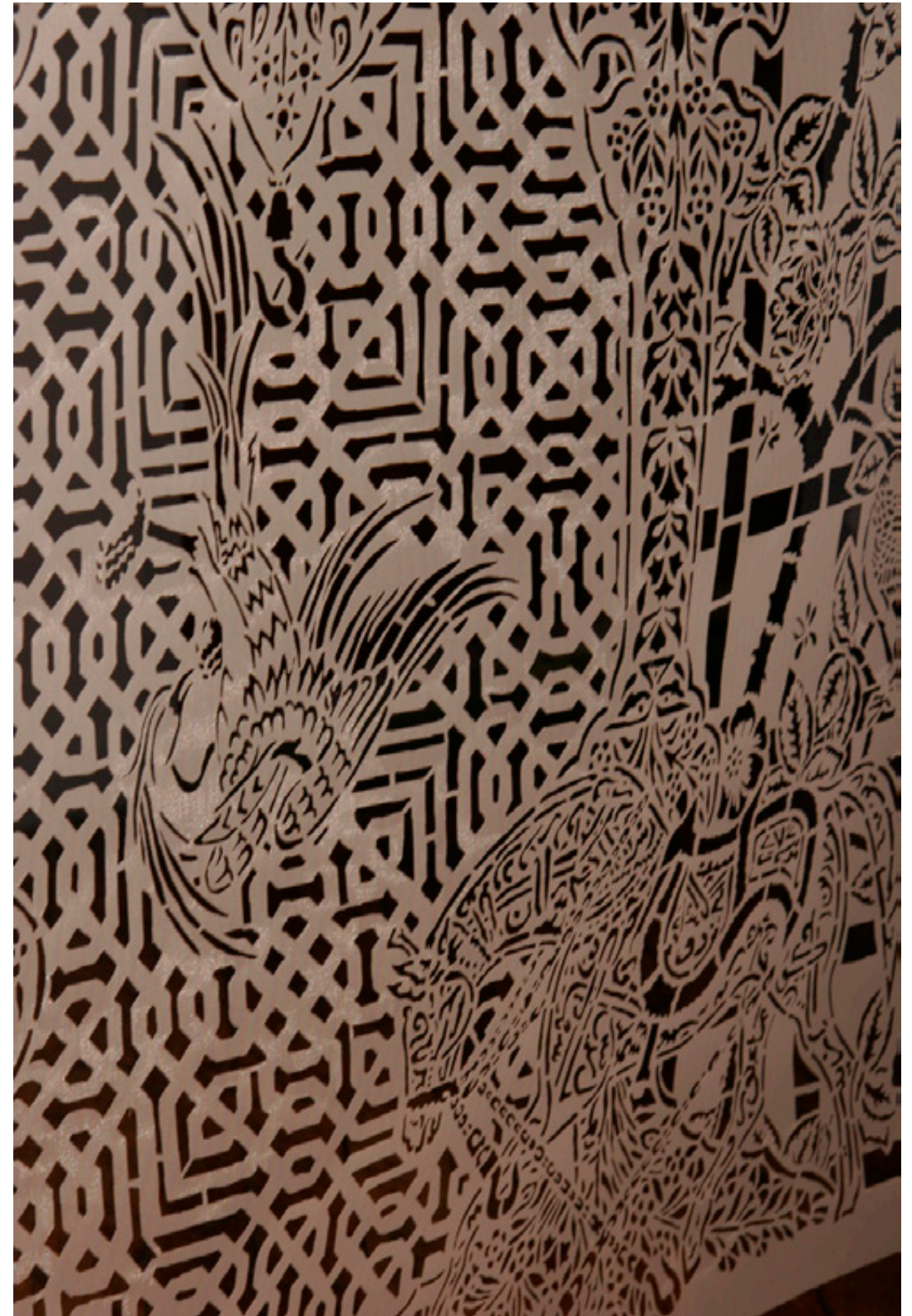
“Winning the Jameel Prize, and its aftermath, enabled me to become a working artist without having to worry about another job. This was something I always hoped for but never thought would actually happen.”

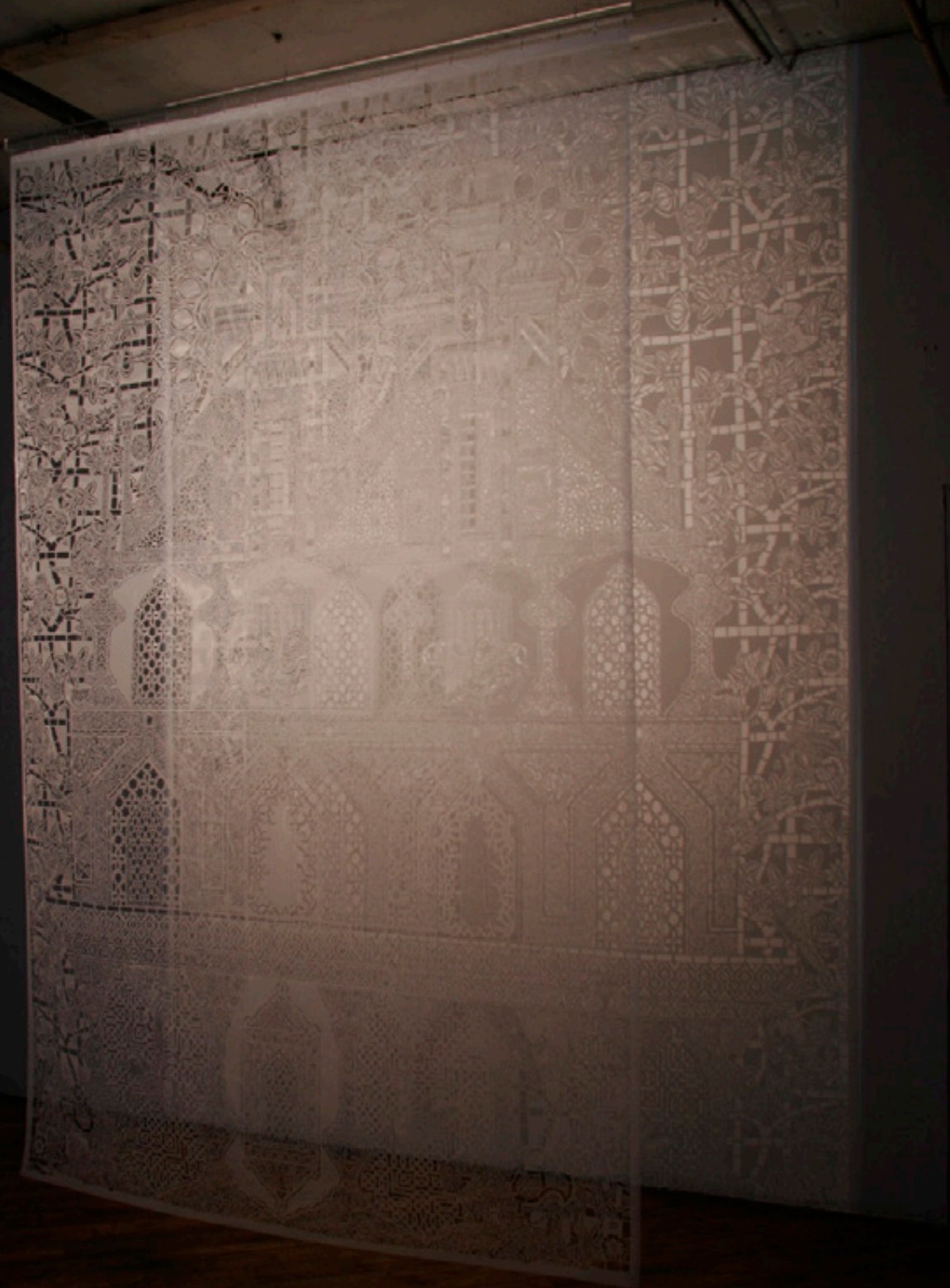
**Afruz** Amighi’s work is, if often enchanting, always profoundly captivating. Her difficult to describe pieces *cum* sculptures for lack of a better term pulsate with purposeful intent and display a love of craft very rarely seen in contemporary art.

The patterns and forms that weave the work together, both delicate and powerful through restraint, all possess a poetic quality only heightened by the integration of light and space that proffer to the work a sense of ethereality. It is the magic operated by the sensation of immateriality and not only the com-

plex dizzying motifs and designs that echo the art of her native Iran. However, if the Tehran-born New Yorker’s work is fully premised on traditional Islamic art, the artist transforms it, giving it a contemporary inflection.

Having graduated in 2007 with an M.F.A. from New York University, Amighi’s career was fully launched two years later when she won the prestigious Jameel Prize operated by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and funded by philanthropist Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel. The purpose of the biennial prize is to recognize and





promote contemporary art or design inspired by Islamic traditions of craft and design. The show of finalists has since travelled to several locations across the Muslim world, and Amighi has had her very first solo exhibitions, one in New York at the Nicole Beauchene Gallery, and the other in Dubai at the Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde.

I sat down with Afruz to discuss her art.

***Hello Afruz. What did winning the Jameel Prize do for you as an artist, not only in terms of the international visibility it has given you, but also in terms of how it affected the course of your work, if it did that is?***

Winning the Jameel Prize, and its aftermath, enabled me to become a working artist without having to worry about another job. This was something I always hoped for but never thought would actually

happen. In terms of the course of my work, the way this has unfolded is, as usual, a mystery to me and usually makes sense after enough time has passed. I didn't make an 'Islamic' type of piece for the Jameel Prize, I just entered the work I was making, and since then I have continued to make what has come naturally.

***You won the Jameel prize with your work, '1001 Pages' (2008), which is representative of an important body of your work in which you carve out Islamic style tessellations and patterns in large plastic sheets, and through which you project light so that the beautiful patterned shadows become an integral part of the work. The shimmering dematerialization of the piece which gives it a spiritual aura echoes the aesthetic experience of much Islamic art. Discuss how you are inspired by Islamic art.***



I think it would be more accurate to say that I am informed and inspired by Middle Eastern art and architecture, rather than specifically by Islamic art. Even things seen as exclusively Muslim, such as the mosque and shrine, were the aesthetic culmination of thousands of years of civilization and culture. What inspires me most about Middle Eastern art is its ability to contain dizzying detail amidst an overall feeling of vastness. I would describe it almost as a minimalist sensibility. The result is a kind of precarious elegance.

***That is indeed an accurate description and it's funny not many people see the minimalist aspect of Islamic art. The visual and technical execution of the designs in '1001 Pages' and your other shadow works demonstrates an equivalent mastery to Muslim artisans who have studied, designed, and rendered***

***such drawings for years. How do you come up with the overall designs? '1001 Pages' seems to reference architectural decoration. Do you work from specific buildings or models, or do you combine motifs from different sources into a new design?***

The designs for my shadow pieces usually start as a rough sketch on paper where I map out different symbols that I want to incorporate into the overall visual image. In order to bring this drawing to life, I use a combination of images gleaned from books, photographs and the internet. After scanning these images into my computer I create a design from them using Photoshop. The end result may not appear as such, but was born from what began as a giant collage.

***I am intrigued by the actual process of your work especially as it is rare that what may be considered, rightly or wrongly, a craft***



***process be reconfigured into global contemporary art. How do you set up your drawings on(to) the plastic and how do you go about cutting them out?***

After much trial and error I eventually found a method to facilitate this process of transferring my design onto the plastic sheeting. At first I simply drew with graphite pencil onto the sheet, but this proved to be very messy and time consuming. Now I simply print out my design in large format and place it under the plastic sheet so that I can use it the way one would use a stencil.

***What is a stencil burner exactly? And how time consuming is it to work with? Are you involved in a type of modern 'lace-making' or other traditional craft in which the time and process of making involve a meditative dimension?***

A stencil burner is like a hot pen. It is a thin piece of metal



**Angels in Combat, 2010, pe-cap and plexiglass, 99 x 65 inches (217,8 x 143 cm)**

that gets plugged into an outlet. It heats up and can be used to cut out designs from any kind of plastic material. It is kind of like using a pencil, except that it must be guided over the plastic much more slowly, so that it burns through and allows for the negative shape to fall away from the sheet. Although the process has nothing in common with lace making, the end result shares the same feeling as lace. Rather than join pieces of material together, I am cutting pieces out from a whole. This process definitely is a meditative one. I have to focus completely on each detail without thinking of the end result. This emphasis on the present moment gives way to an extraordinary sense of tranquility.

***Your titles are also evocative. We all know '1001 Nights' but what do '1001 pages' refer to? Of course, pages in Arabic often signify the Qur'an...***



**Hall Way**, 2010, pe-cap and plexiglass,  
115 x 76 inches (253 x 167,2 cm)

'1001 Pages' is a reference to two things. For one, it refers to the '1001 Nights'. The second reference comes from the process I went through in order to make the piece. I had been in an artistic rut for a few months and all I could do was read. I thought at the time that what I was going through was fruitless. But in the end all of those pages culminated in this project that became '1001 Pages'.

***That is such a nice story or experience to help us appreciate the piece, that's why it is so useful to hear the artist's words about his or her art. If your work excludes the serenity of traditional Islamic art, it also contains a darker shadow or fearful aspect. For example in '1001 Pages', you have inserted a large spider in a scene funnily enough reminiscent of the scarab and solar symbol in ancient Egyptian art. In 'Poppy Garden' (2007), a stunningly***

***beautiful work showing a Persian carpet style lavish tree of life motif, you have woven in syringe designs. Does beauty harbour a dangerous element for you? Does the absolute beauty of Islamic art seem too idealistic for the imperfect world we live in? Or is it a 'yin and yang' type of thing? And are these elements personal signs? So many questions and that might in fact be the point...***

The dangerous and violent symbols in my work come from contemporary reality. They are both personal and political. I do not see the coexistence of beauty and violence as a yin and yang phenomenon, with the implication that they both need and balance each other out. The extreme violence in our world is far from necessary. I work with imagery that was often used in the past to describe paradise. My inclusion of danger is simply an attempt to bring this paradise down to earth.

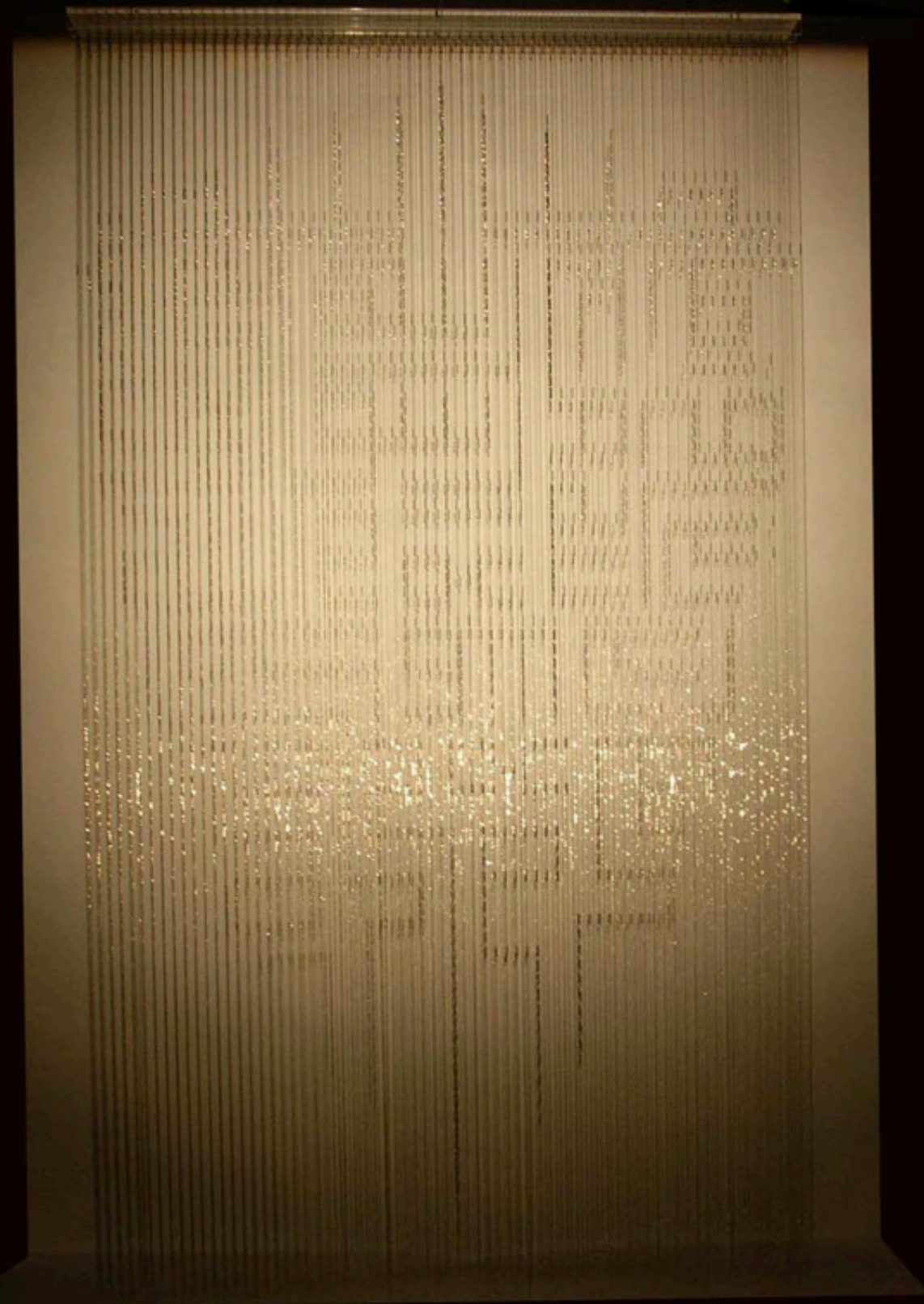




*'1001 Pages' is a reference to two things. For one, it refers to the '1001 Nights'. The second reference comes from the process I went through in order to make the piece.*

*Your recent show at the IVDE Gallery entitled Angels in Combat featured three shadow works, the actual piece 'Angels in Combat' (2010), which seems to be inspired by Ottoman Iznik designs, displays amidst the designs angels wielding machine guns. The discourse in the press around the work puts forth that these are related to a near death experience you had. Can you say a few words about this?*

I was very sick and I nearly died. I did not come away with any life affirming revelation as happens in the movies. I came away with a greater sense of vulnerability, not simply in regards to my existence, but in regards to human life in general. This has not led me to include more violent imagery in my work than previously, but rather I can feel the implications of that imagery in a way I could not have felt before.



99 Names, 2007, chain, bead and plexi glass, 120 x 70 x 10 inches (264 x 154 x 22 cm)

**99 Names**, 2007, chain, bead and plexi glass, 120 x 70 x 10 inches (264 x 154 x 22 cm)

*The sensitivity that you show to Islamic art and aesthetics is astounding. How many years did you spend in Iran as a child, and do you go back regularly? Or does this sensitivity come more from within and from your plural self-identity so to speak? As a contemporary artist, as a New Yorker, out of all the modes of visuality that could have chosen, you chose this one ...*

I was only 3 years old when my family came to the United States from Iran. I was too young to have taken much in. What did influence me was growing up in homes that looked very American on the outside and completely Persian on the inside. I think this is the root of my sensitivity to the Persian aesthetic. It was never a choice I made, that is, to make Middle Eastern looking art work. It is intuitive. It is just the way I transform material.

*The Muslim world historically was both multicultural and multid denominational, and as such many objects that we classify as Islamic art were fashioned for the Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, or Hindu communities living therein. But normally these objects do not evince any overtly Islamic symbolism. However, although you are not of Muslim descent, religious inscriptions interestingly find their way into your work, for example the kufic words in the star at the top of the mihrab shape in the piece 'Hall Way' (2010). A more overt reference is to be found in the work made of chains and beads '99 Names' (2007). Do these references make their way into the work intuitively, are they about bringing different traditions together, or something else?*

Interestingly, '99 Names' was inspired by my father who is Zoroastrian.

**Poppy Garden**, 2007, pe-cap and plexiglass,  
126 x 90 inches (277,2 x 198 cm)

He spent an entire summer amassing beads from which he made hundreds and hundreds of prayer beads (*tasbeeh*). He swore on their soothing powers and proceeded to hand them out to both his students and friends over the course of the next few years. I relate this anecdote simply to show the extent to which 'Islamic' traditions have been influenced by and embraced by the various religious groups in the Middle East. So, my inclusion of Kufic script or a mihrab, functions in a similar way.

*I like your focus on the places where different cultures meet rather than differ. Another aspect of your work that I admire and again mirrors historical Islamic art is the way you use very humble materials only to transform them into something unabashedly beautiful. The shadow pieces are constructed out of the same plastic used to make refugee tents as well as less poignant industrial objects. Your metal pieces,*

***including '99 Names', use generic metal chain to create the most lyrical formations. Is this aspect important to you?***

My choice of materials comes largely from the fact that I am inspired most when trolling down the halls of giant hardware stores. I especially love plumbing and electrical equipment and am always looking for ways to manipulate it into something different. I enjoy the transformation of the ordinary into an object of veneration. Not only is it an inexpensive way to work, but it gives me great satisfaction to place items from a hardware store that I see as beautiful into a realm where others are kind of forced to acknowledge their beauty.

***I completely get that especially as I have a weakspot for hardware stores as well! The metal pieces are as intense and poetic as the shadow pieces. I really like 'Floorpiece' (2010) which is a work of utmost simplicity. I appreciate it because***



**Poppy Garden, 2007, pe-cap and plexiglass, 126 x 90 inches (277,2 x 198 cm)**

***it is ephemeral, maybe nomadic might be a better word as one can pick it up and take it with one. What also pleases me about it is that the motif is evocative of embroidery, jewellery, or even henna patterns, in short art forms often associated with women who are so often left out of Islamic art history. In addition the design is less culturally specific and can thus be suggestive of many artistic traditions...***

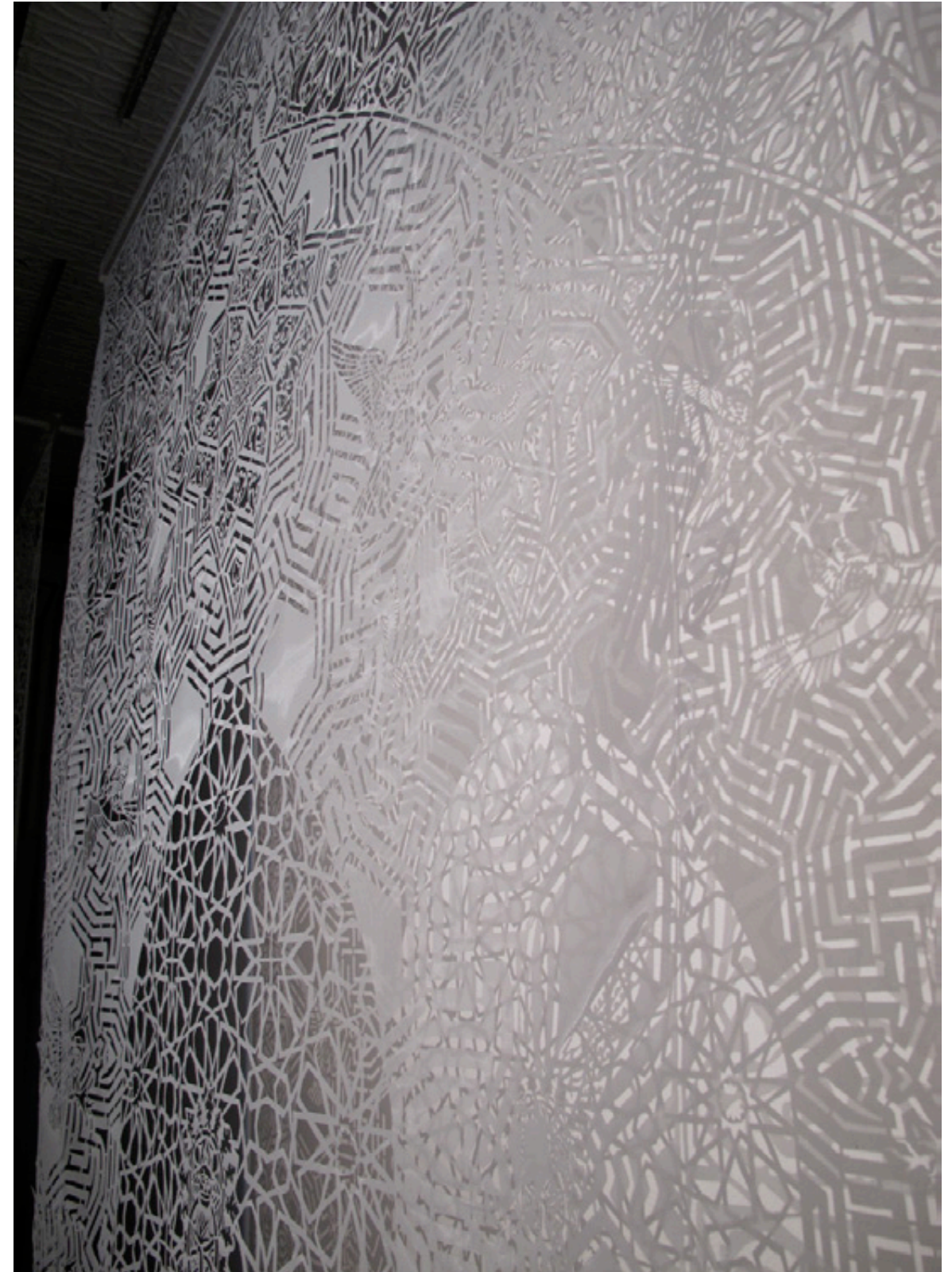
The 'Floorpiece' actually started out as a silver earring I made when I was bored in the studio one day. I became fixated on it and over the course of a few weeks it grew into a giant earring better suited for an Amazon. As I was making it I was thinking of the lace patterns Venetian women used to weave, incorporating motifs about the ocean and sailing. In the end the piece reminded me more of one of those enormous Nazca designs made in ancient Peru that can only be discerned when looking at them from a plane high in the sky.

*The other metal pieces evince a similar minimalist power but they are three dimensional and incorporate negative space and shadow as part of the work. They are multi-levelled whimsical bird cage and chandelier like structures suspended in space from the ceiling. However, although the aesthetic is seemingly delicate and the artefacts apparently frail, there is nonetheless an extraordinary power to them. As in all your work, it is as if holding back condenses and multiplies its visual potency. Take 'Locket' (2010), the title suggests a delicate piece of jewellery and yet the work is too long, too oddly shaped, and too fully present to be experienced only as 'delicate'. As in the shadow pieces, there seems to be a tremendous unknown or hidden power to beauty. Is this a comment on gender or on the 'less is more' philosophy of minimalism, or else something that sim-*

*ply makes its way into the work unconsciously, reflecting both your process and intent?*

In these metal works I was thinking a lot about nationalism and the cages it places people in, cages that are both destructive and comforting, annihilating and seductive. I was thinking about all the structures we create for ourselves and we find ourselves in. We often wonder whether we had any role in their construction because they seem to have materialized so quickly and definitively before our eyes like magic. I am interested here in both blame and responsibility.

*In some of the works, there is a reference to present day political events and situations where the lockets clearly become rockets, commenting, as in 'Rocket Gods' (2008), on the American arms-based economy, or on the contrary, as in 'Cages' (2009),*



**Hall Way**, 2010, pe-cap and plexiglass, 115 x 76 inches (253 x 167,2 cm) -201-

***on Iranian weaponry, the latter piece said to replicate the number of missile tests recently launched by Iran. What I find fascinating about these pieces is the fact that you can both espouse and criticize different positions because of your bicultural outlook. I often think that those of us with complex plural identities can be the best ambassadors or mediators...***

It does make it a lot easier to make criticisms when you have the so-called 'legitimacy' of your nationality, regardless of how absurd that actually is. However, the impetus for these works, cages and rocket gods, did not come from any initial desire to criticize, but rather from the desire to feel closer to the invisible pulse that keeps our economy strong, that of weapons production.

It seemed that the arms economy was the main factor that kept the American economy from

crashing deeper into a full on depression. I wanted to mimic that production in my studio, to echo the process, however disgusting, that was responsible for putting food on our plates. In the way that ancient societies very literally worshipped fertility gods for their harvest, I set out to create a set of idols that looked like bullets, missiles and rockets for people to pray to.

***This said, whether there is or not a political aspect to certain pieces, your work retains all its visual poetry; it is not so to speak what is often referred to as 'political art' as it seems to be concerned with bringing things together. As such, a work like 'Cages' is just as evocative if the viewer remains unaware of its political dimension.***

I'm happy to hear you say that. I often struggle with how many



visual clues to embed in my work, or with whether to place an accompanying text on the wall explaining the conceptual content. But in the end, I always opt for less. I feel that the experience of the work will exist on different levels for different people and that sometimes its meaning will unfold over time.

***It has been a veritable pleasure speaking with you and hearing what you have to say about your art. I wish you every success and greatly look forward to following the evolution of your work. Thank you very much.***

Thank you.

**Hall Way, 2010,  
pe-cap and plexiglass,  
115 x 76 inches  
(293 x 193 cm)**

# Issue 07

332 pages

LEARN MORE

Cover image:  
**MOHAMED GABR**, 'Untitled', Photograph, 21x30 cm, 2011



ISSUE 07  
**CONTENT**



**TARIH**  
**THE ART**  
**OF STONE**  
3/3



**AN INTERVIEW**  
**WITH REEDAH**  
**EL-SAIE, DIRECTOR**  
**OF MICA GALLERY**



**'FROM FACEBOOK**  
**TO NASSBOOK'**



**BOOK REVIEW**



**'VISUAL DHIKR'**  
**THE REMEMBRANCE**  
**OF THE DIVINE**





**THE RÜSTEM PAŞA MOSQUE IN İSTANBUL**



**BOOK REVIEW**



**CONTEMPORARY TRADITION: A NEW APPROACH TO MOSQUE DECORATION**

**MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE ARTS (MWIA)**

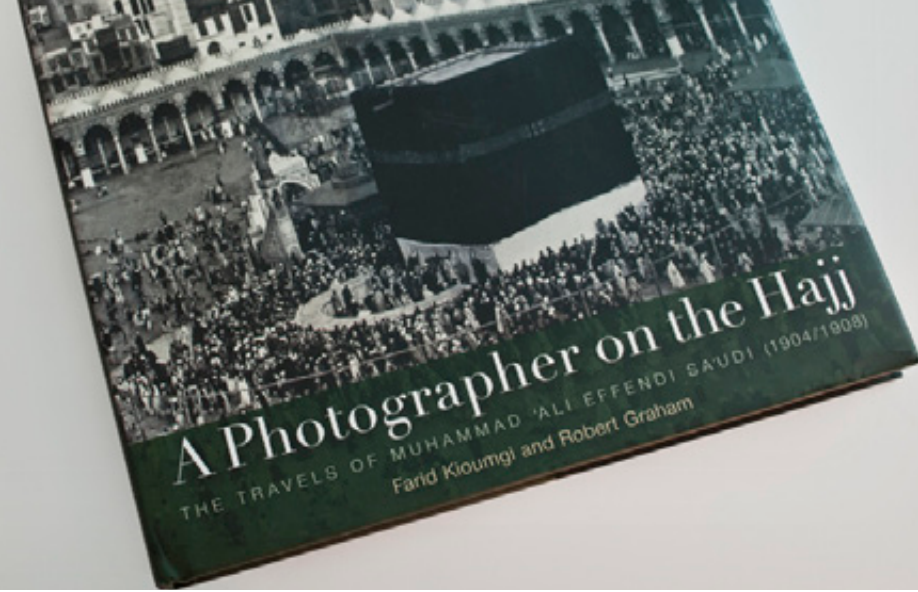


**MOROCCO THE KEEPER OF THE GIBRALTAR DOOR**



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

**BOOK  
REVIEW**



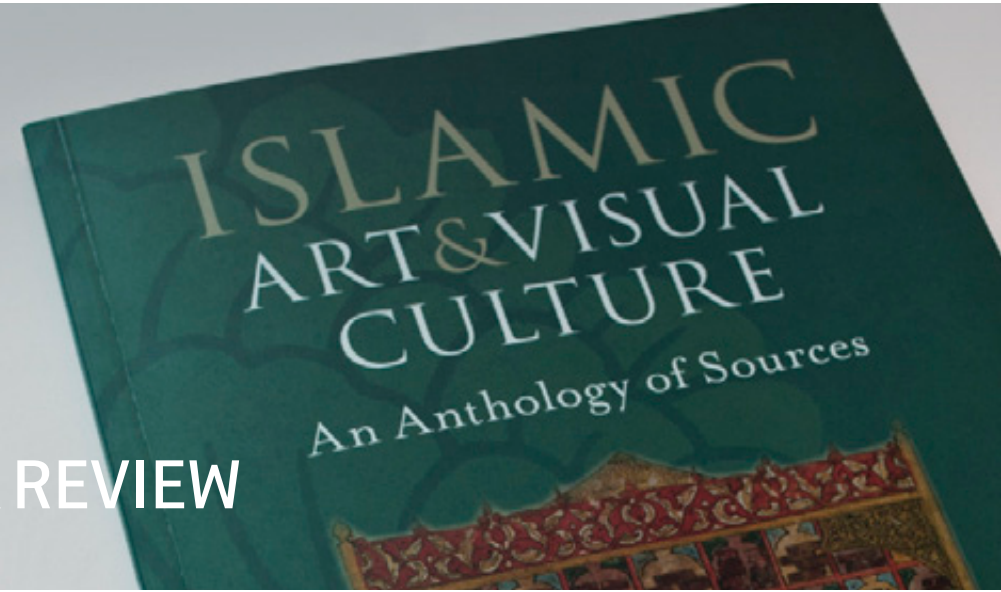
**LET YOUR  
CREATIVITY  
FLOW...  
GET STYLEIN!**



**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**

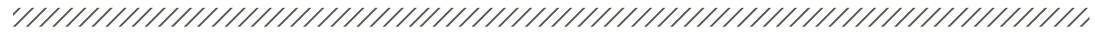


Elvis Hajdarević and Velid Hodžić, two Bosnian master calligraphers

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copyrighted. © Velid Hodžić

# 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> century Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque in Sarajevo, one of the most important Ottoman mosque complexes in the Balkans. The wall paintings dating from 19<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 style with rumi ornaments by Velid Hodžić and Elvis Hajdarević, the Mosque in Biljani. Photo by Velid Hodžić





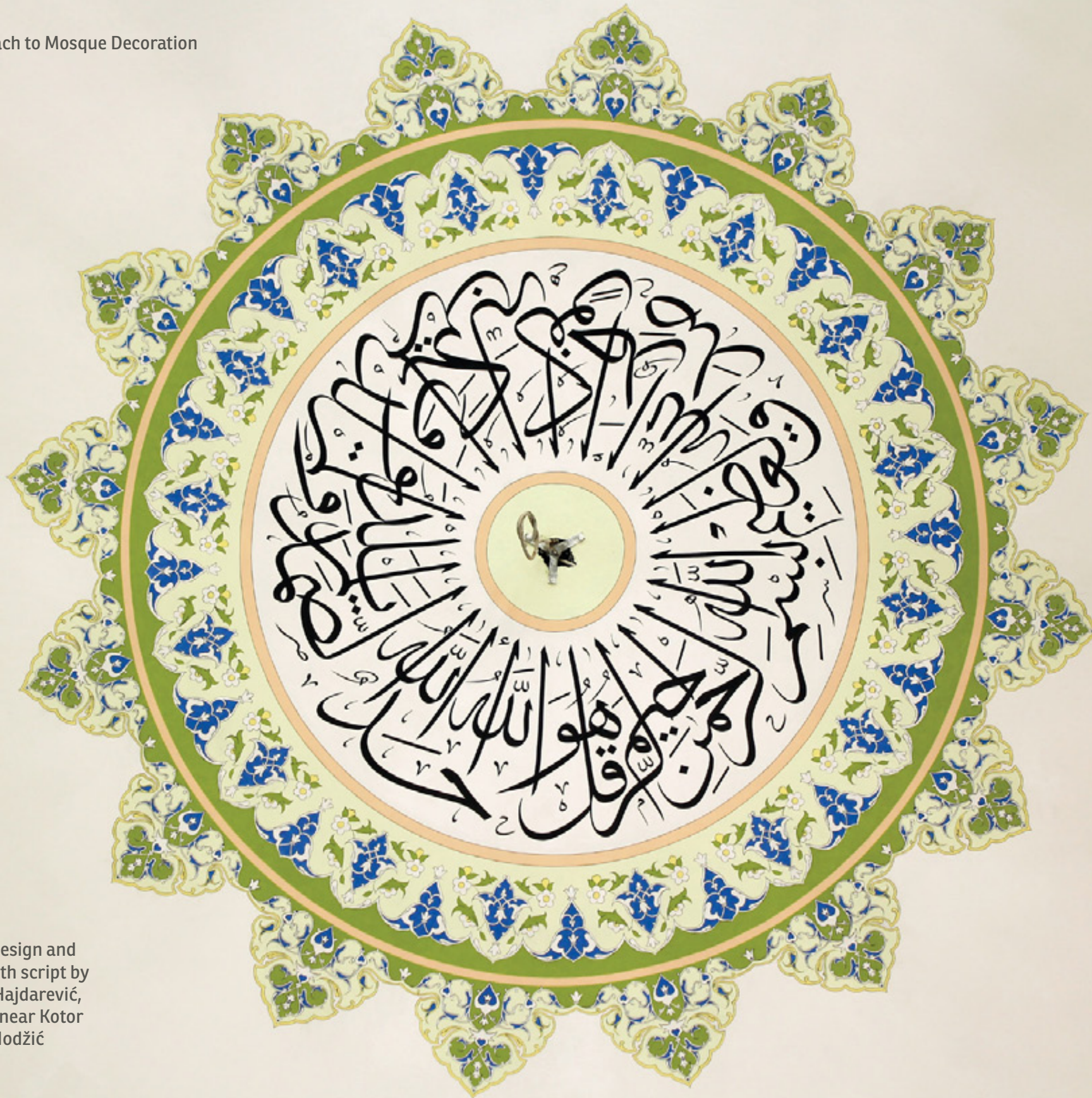
*Hajdarević and Hodžić's work should be viewed from two perspectives; on the one hand, they are renewing the light of tradition in Bosnia, while on the other, they are creating new forms of expression and a new and contemporary approach to mosque decoration.*

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.

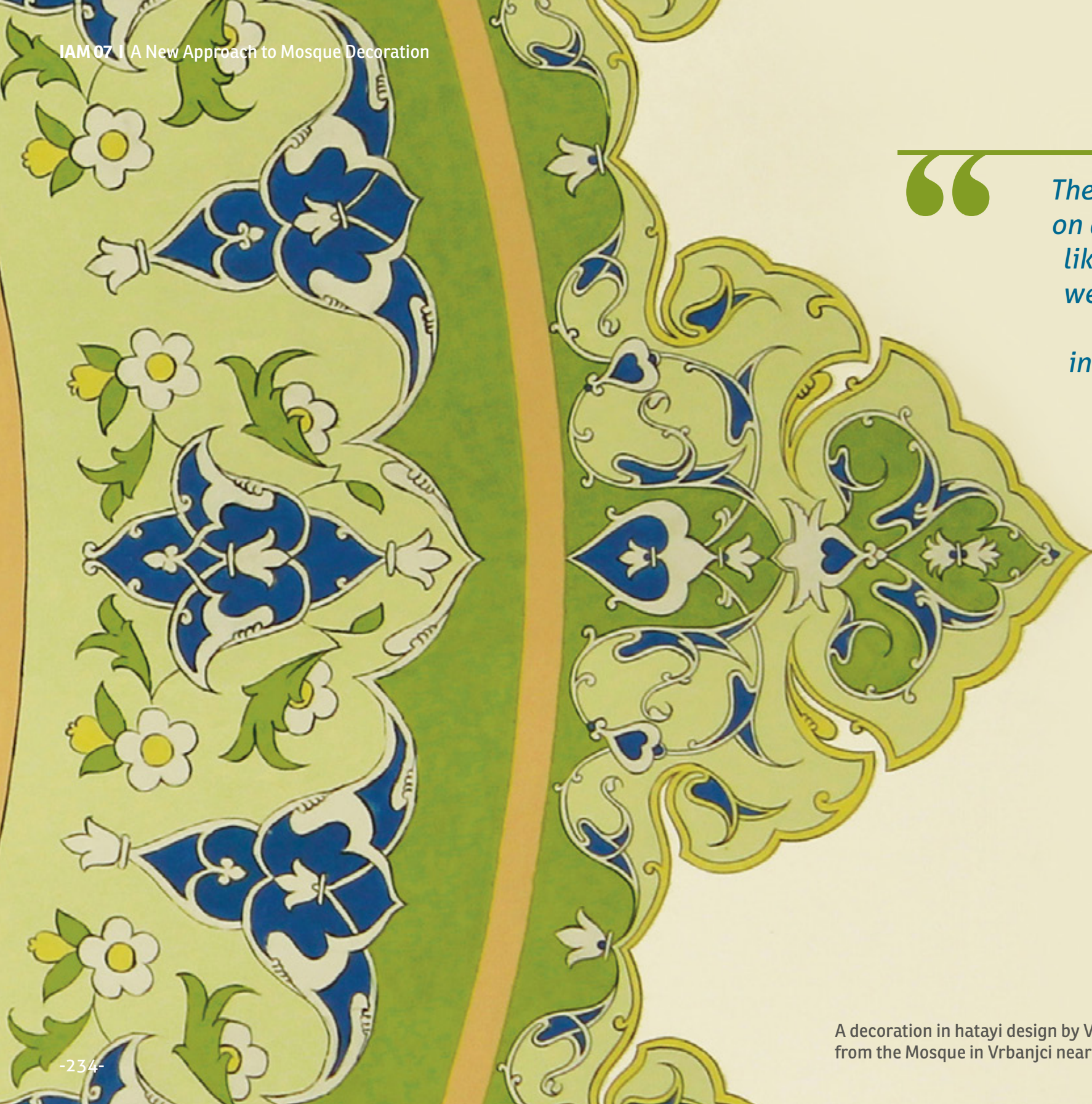
The working site in the Mosque in Biljani. Photo by Velid Hodžić







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



“

*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.*

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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