

"Islamic art is a world of irresistible fascination in which we strive for a better understanding of the objects and of the people who made them"

Barbara Brend, Islamic Art

#### **Editorial**

Starting a brand new magazine causes a number of overwhelming feelings.

Excitement at first, when you start dreaming about what you want to do and how. Uncertainty, when you figure out how things should be done. Fascination when the drafts come into being. Anxiety when you wait for the articles. Satisfaction when people recognize your effort. Restlessness as the deadlines approach too fast. And now we start with this project, in a moment when the Islamic world itself is causing overwhelming feelings. If you look at the Islamic World as a whole, it is difficult to define it. From the Emirates, rich in petrol and money, proudly showing ultra-modern architectures, to Syria and Iraq, extremely rich in history and tradition, but oppressed by internal and external conflicts and threats: the Islamic World is anything but united both historically and politically. Each country, each area of the greater Islamic World has its own peculiarity, and its own history.

The Islamic World, and Islamic Art alike, has long been ruled by a homogenising view: no differences are detected, no time, no space. In the past and today.

This is the aim of this magazine: give an insight, an unbiased narrative of Islamic Art taking into account context and regionalisms, recognizing influences and overlappings, but without insisting on too wide categorizations.

This first issue of IWA concentrates ideally all the new and old main topics we think it is worth to discuss: news, ancient art, modern art, artistic identity, architecture, heritage, unbroken cultural stereotypes. Every article is an original output written exactly to meet the purpose of the magazine: giving a detailed, fresh, critical and yet un-academic overview of Islamic art, architecture and culture. We consider it as a journey across Islamic identity, and we try - the best we can - to build or rebuild a new sense for the Islamic world.

We strongly believe that no stereotypes, walls, biases, ideologies or religious belief should change or discredit the essence of things and the value of human being, because before stereotypes, walls, biases, ideologies and religions there are people: and people, with their great ability to abstract and create new concepts and ideas just looking through everyday life from a different angle, are the real added value to life and art.

IWA aims at building a little piece of this new consciousness starting from now, going back to the beginning of the Islamic time, and getting here again, ready to leave soon for a new, glorious era of revolutionary and truthful thinking, where prejudice and disinformation will be only a far and old memory.

We are ready to start the journey. Are you ready to join us?

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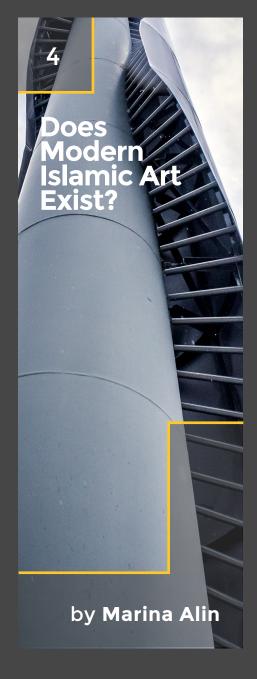
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Cultural beheading,

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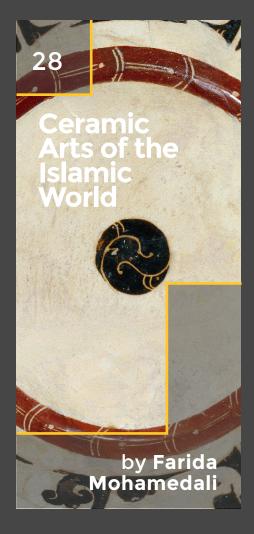














**IWA Islamic World of Art** Fall 2015 Vol. 1 - N. 1

## Marina Alin Designer and Founder of Nazarli interior Décor

## Does Modern Islamic Art exist?

# The concept of modern art implies a break with the tradition for a more personal interpretation of reality. Can this definition be applied to define today's Islamic Art?

Googling the phrase Modern Islamic Art shows interesting results. One of the museums of modern art explains its Islamic art collection by saying that artists from the Middle East "are not so much reinventing Islamic art as they are repurposing it so that it becomes more clearly a vehicle for personal expression, freed from the constraints of patronage and functionality." The phrase shows that an understanding of

the nature of Islamic art does not exist today.

Islamic art and Islamic thought stayed silent for such a long time that the art community does not know how to approach Islamic art and uses the same vocabulary as it does for Western art.

Can Islamic art, when "freed from the constraints of patronage and functionality," still be considered Islamic? Can it be "a vehicle for personal expression" and Islamic art at the same time? My attempt to answer these questions is the subject of this article.

I do not claim to be right in all the answers I give, but rather invite you to the discussion of this upto-date topic.

Modern art emerged from a European painting tradition due to changes in artists' worldviews.

An openness to everything new

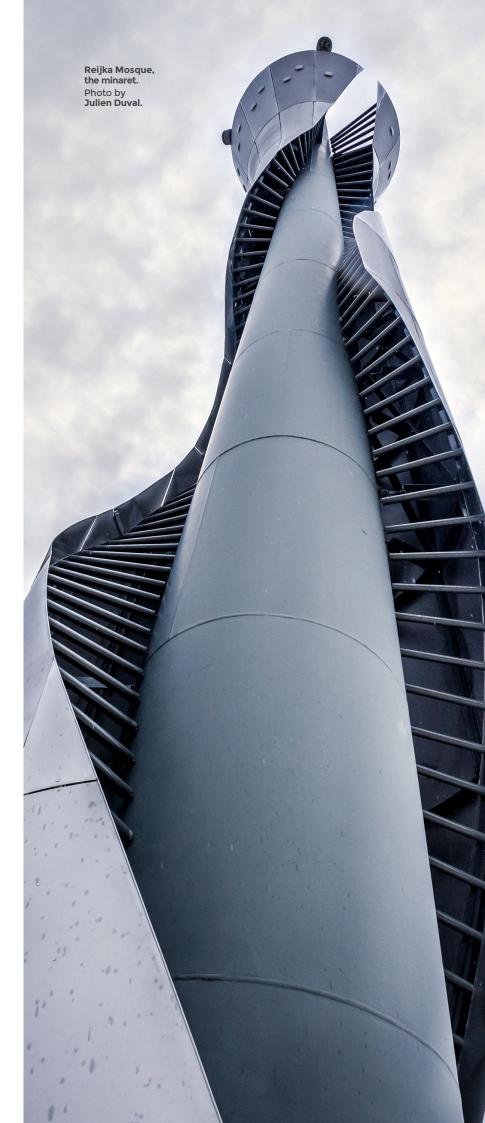


was always a feature of Islamic art, and also surely a feature of the mind of a Muslim artist.

When we look back on innovations in Islamic art, we see that they did not rupture artists' devotion to tradition, probably because they were never connected with changes in artists' worldview as happened in the West.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'modern art' is the art of "the 20th and 21st centuries and of the later part of the 19th century. Modern art embraces a wide variety of movements, theories, and attitudes whose modernism resides particularly in a tendency to reject traditional, historical, or academic forms and conventions in an effort to create an art more in keeping with changed social, economic, and intellectual conditions".

Modern art, as any art movement in the West, was brought to life by changes in artists' minds. It seems that the main innovation in the modern art movement was the absence of any restrictions and boundaries. Starting as a formal opposition to the existing painting tradition, it came to the idea of 'experiment for the sake of experiment' and to the absoluteness of self-expression. A desire for experimenting as a method of understanding the surrounding world was an impetus for secular Western artists. Most extraordinary artists were also great experimenters, and not only in the era of modern art. An experiment for a modern artist at the beginning of the movement was a way





to escape reality in order to come back with a new worldview.

At the end of 20th and in the 21st century, experimentation in art became a means of avoiding reality. Islamic art always treated reality in a different way than Western art did.

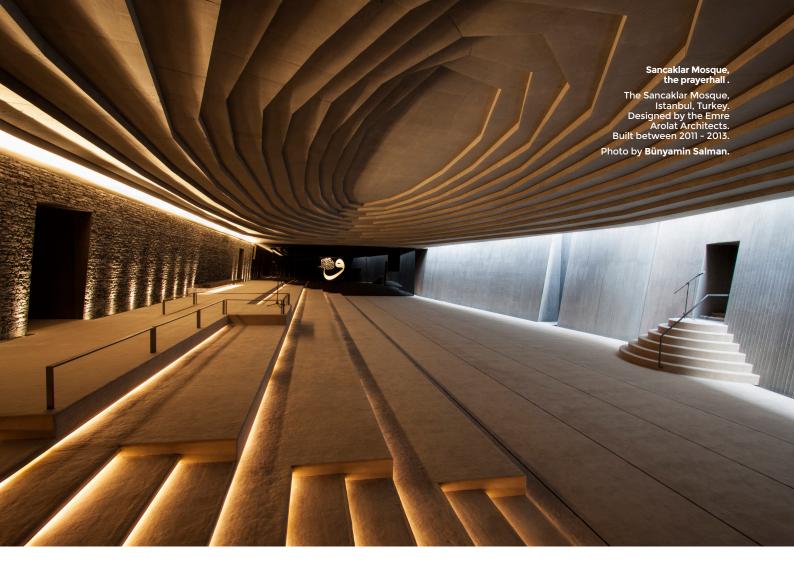
Reality was not a burden or a restriction for an Islamic artist, as he or she did not express it in his or her art. Islamic art was a reflection of the philosophy of Islam, not secular Western philosophy, which is, as a science, formally separated from religion.

As Oleg Grabar shows in his book Formation of Islamic Art, Islamic art can be distinguished from any other kind of art by the "internal creative purpose... rather than the external formal, iconographic, or functional characteristics". This 'internal creative purpose' for Islamic art can be summarized in the following statement by another renowned Islamic art researcher, Tatiana Starodub, in her book The Islamic World: "The creativity of the Islamic artist is directed to God, not to a man".

An artist surrenders his/her ego, imitates God in "his manner of operation", and acts as an intermediary transmitting Universal and Divine beauty. Islamic art is traditional art; functional, scientific, symbolic and, most important, of a superhuman origin.

An artist being inspired by God's creation, first of all, by nature, expresses perfect beauty (*al-jamal al-akmal*).

Functionality of the work of art is a dimension of its beauty.



Functional works of art demonstrate the unity of shape and substance, of visible beauty (al-jamal al-zahir) and inner or invisible beauty (al-jamal al-batin). Harmony is considered to be a main principle of the world order and of the law of beauty.

Traditional art is also considered a practical science. According to Grabar, the intellectual status of a work of art is reflected by the fact that Islamic ornament, for instance, "raises fundamental questions about the relationship between the visible and its meaning". Grabar shows that two characteristics of Islamic thought are reflected by Islamic art. One is ex-

pressed by the phrase *lilah al-ba-qi*, 'the remaining belongs to God', and means that, "no creation of man can reflect physical reality because God alone makes anything permanent". Another one is the Hellenic idea of atomism, developed by Islamic thought. According to this idea, "all things are made up of and distinguished by various combinations of equal units".

The first principle explains why motifs in Islamic art, as in any traditional art, are symbolic and stylized. Being a reflection of a hidden order, Islamic art's motifs and themes can be read as a message for those who are aware of their meaning.

#### Islamic art always treated reality in a different way than Western art did

The idea of atomism not only shows the principal of any matter organization; the repetition of a certain unit is also fundamental for geometrical or biomorphic ornament creation in Islamic art. The construction of ornament starts with the drawing of a unit, which is repeated by reflection, rotation or gliding to form a pattern.

The nature of Islamic art and the role of the artist is well described by Khaled Azzam in his introduction to his book, *The Doors of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*: "The central role that the arts held in the life of the Muslim derives from the attitude that the craftsman has towards his work and the role it plays in the life of the community.

The Muslim architect, for example, acknowledges by his Islam, his submission to the Divine will, that God is the Supreme Creator. Thus the relationship between the architect and his surrounding space is one that is based on reverence and not arrogance. The Muslim sees himself as the cus-

todian of nature and if he has to leave an imprint on this physical space then it must be done with humility and with no sense of defiance to the natural order of being. The primordial nature of the Islamic revelation emphasises this harmony between man and nature..."

Being traditional does not mean being outdated. Historically, Islamic art welcomed innovations both in techniques and in materials and motifs. Innovations spread due to trade connections, military raids and also artists' migration. New motifs were brought to Islamic art by local traditional practitioners as Islam absorbed vast territories from Spain to Indonesia.

They were not merely copied by Islamic artists but adopted, transformed and changed to the degree that their origins cannot be found now. Moreover, not every work of Islamic art was made by a Muslim artist. Islamic rulers were tolerant to communities of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Hindus living in their territories, so a lot of craftwork was produced by non-Muslims for Muslim patrons.

The variety of innovations formed Islamic art as we know it now, with its elaborate surface decoration, intricate artwork, sophisticated techniques and superb level of craftsmanship.





Would it have been possible without demand from the high-end market? A patron, who was usually a man of culture, played a crucial role in the formation of Islamic art. Many rulers had their own court ateliers of craftsmen and artists, where a style distinctive for the particular time and region was developed.

Rulers' patronage was copied by nobility; nobles' patronage - by merchants. Craftsmen were commissioned with works imitating royal style and the designs spread. There was a demand in society for beautiful goods of high quality for everyday use.

The need for such goods could be explained by the existence of a man of culture who, as K. K. Aziz says in his book, *The Meaning of Islamic Art*, "represented the Islamic civilization at its best. His sensitivity was well trained. His aesthetic values were partly inherited from his elders and partly developed by his milieu.... The variety and wealth of available beauty taught him an acute sense of discrimination. In his own self he united a catholic taste and virtue".

So the coexistence of artists and patrons, with their minds open to new things and with their interest in, and acceptance of, experiments made innovations in Islamic art possible. But truly Islamic art never existed outside the tradition. Islamic art was formed as traditional art and cannot be anything other than traditional.

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Sancaklar Mosque, the minaret. Photo by Nancy Habbas.



Are any innovations in Islamic art possible now? Historically, innovations touched upon new motifs and themes, new techniques and new materials. In order for the art still to be considered Islamic, new motifs and themes have to be used as a kind of surface treatment; they also have to be stylized and based on universal principles of proportion and symmetry.

Such innovation as European-style portrait painting in Qajar Iran can serve as an example of tradition-breaking and cannot be considered as a contribution to Islamic art.

The kinds of artistic expression that are new for Islamic art, such as sculpture or installation, cannot be considered as part of Islamic art, as they contradict the nature of Islamic art designated above.

Islamic artists welcome new techniques. If a new technique does not reduce the quality of an artwork produced and is easier for an artist to use, Islamic art will most likely benefit from it.

So using a new technique or innovation, such as a wood-processing machine instead of hand cutting, or glue instead of egg white, can save the artist time and energy for paying more attention to the design and quality of a finished product.

If new materials are used for producing Islamic art, but the motifs are traditional, most likely we are talking about Islamic design.

Truly Islamic art was always func-

Truly Islamic art was always functional; basically, it was craft. It always served a certain function, either religious worship or civil needs. But truly Islamic craft was made with an artist's love and passion put into it. Using the phrase 'Islamic design' instead of 'Islamic craft' indicates that the product is made from a present-day material, sometimes in mass-production, but it was designed with respect to Islamic artistic tradition.

It seems that Islamic art has been in recession for such a long time. We see that artists are trying to reproduce the same model of development for Islamic art that exists in Western art experiences. Is it a shortage of self-respect and knowledge of Islamic cultural heritage, or an admiration of Western culture, that plays a crucial role in such decline? Or maybe it is a lack of men/women of culture among artists and among patrons, or the inability to distinguish truly beautiful works of art and design from all others.

Artists making traditional Islamic art today should rather be referred to as contemporary Islamic artists. The phrase 'Modern Islamic

ic Art' seems senseless to me. Modern art, being a characteristic of an art that abandoned tradition in favour of experiment, differs from Islamic art, which can only refer to traditional art, not merely to the art made by Muslim artists. Moreover, the adjective Islamic, if used with the art, represents the Islamic faith and Islamic worldview. The Islamic artist is not bothered with the reflection of reality and with self-expression, as the modern Western artist is. Islamic art cannot be "a vehicle for personal expression", and it stops being Islamic if it does.

Originally published in Turkish magazine *Sabah Ülkesi* N 41, 2014.

"I wish people didn't design masjids like these. Masjids have an identity which can be spotted and differentiated from afar designs like these can resemble any building for that matter.

There's so much beauty in Islamic designs which can be incorporated in contemporary ideas rather than just using them as mere concepts. The interiors don't look like it has the serenity and beauty that a *Masjid* usually does."

Marwa Hashim - International Indian School Dammam

## Islamic Art from Pakistan to San Francisco

## A conversation with Sophia Ahmed Sattar, Pakistani - American artist

Sophia Ahmed Sattar, born and raised in a politically unstable Pakistan, decided to take her art career far away from her homeland: to the US.

After living in Louisiana, she moved to San Francisco, where she completed her MFA at the Academy of Art University.

Her art is personal, aesthetic and political, all at the same time. In her paintings and prints we can recognize her background.

Going back to her roots, she was

heavily influenced by the colorful Pakistani truck art in which color and calligraphy mix.

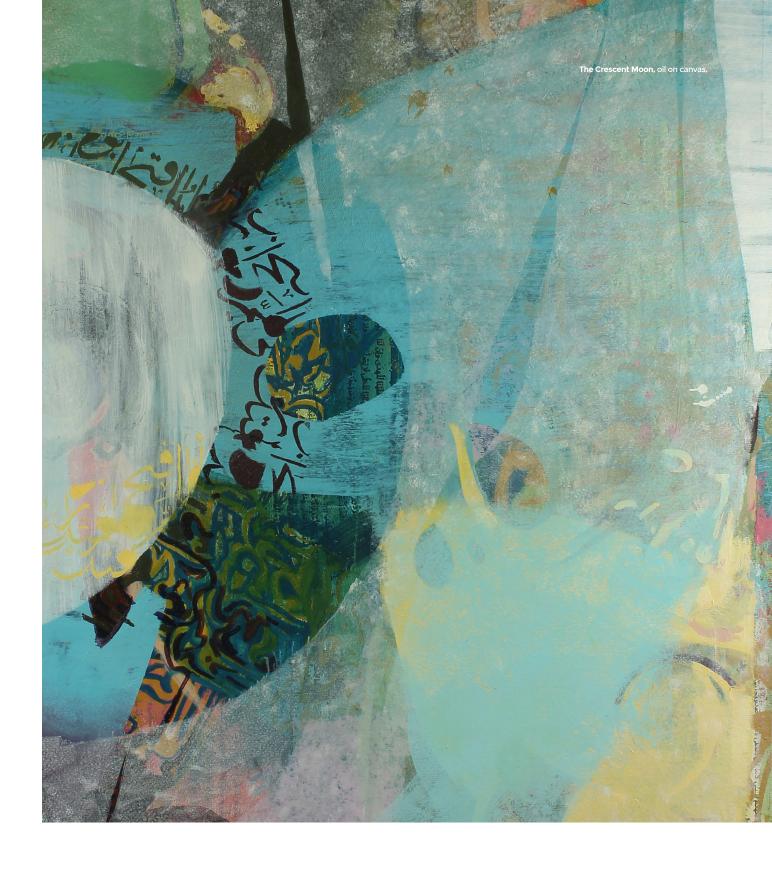
As time passed by, her art developed as a hybrid, a bridge between her Eastern roots and her Western present.

In her words: "Coming from a culture that is blunt and expansive, I was adapting to my new country that was sophisticated and urban. Crossing that bridge was a very intricate departure." But this is nonetheless the final goal of art

and artists: crossing the border and reach out.

The art of a Muslim woman living in the US cannot be anything other than political and meaningful, against the mainstream representation of Islam in contemporary media and popular culture. And this is the key concept of art: not only beauty and aesthetics, but developing counter-narrative and rephrasing history and contemporaneity.





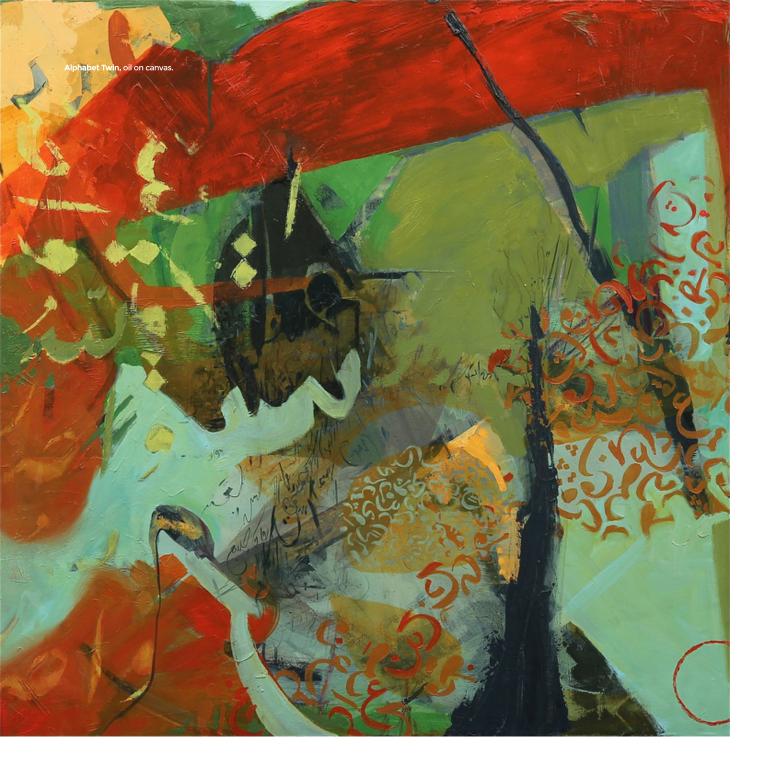
IWA: What is Islamic art for you and what do you convey of your multicultural background in your paintings?

Sophia Ahmed Sattar: The concept of Islamic art has changed over the years. It started as mere decoration for the walls of the Kabah and continued to adorn the

walls of masjids in the Muslim world.

But as the world shrinks and inter-cultural exchange happens, art transforms.

As Islam comes into the forefront of world politics, artist are compelled to take their art towards it. For me and many artist living in the US, Islamic art has become a vehicle for transporting views: political, urban, cultural issues. As I live in the US and am raising a family, I face issues of multicultural engagement and that is what I portray in my work.



IWA: You, like many other contemporary Muslim artists, live the US. There you create an art that is inevitably influenced both by your own Pakistani roots and by the environment you live in. Many definitions have been proposed to define 'Contemporary Islamic Art'

What is contemporary Islamic art for you? How can you define it taking into account the hybridi-

#### zation process it undergoes?

Ms. Sattar: Contemporary Islamic art doesn't have to have calligraphy in it or minarets or mosques. Artist like Monir Shahroudy and Shazia Sikandar use fundamentals of Islamic art and have expanded on it. Both are heavily influenced by their culture and religion.

IWA: You have been living in the US for 17 years now, and in these

years the image of the Islamic World and of Muslims have changed, due to, for instance, 9/11 and in the last few months,

How has your life as a Muslim and as a Muslim artist changed? Against which old and new stereotypes do you want to fight?

Ms. Sattar: Islam has taken a 180 turn in these past years, from being an exotic, mysterious religion

to a terrorist platform. The change was overnight and instantaneous. It really took a long time to absorb what was really going on. A number of racist remarks and unadulterated events filter through my work. The stereotypes did not change after 9/11. First it was the Taliban, now ISIS. They bring the same message and the West feeds off of it. And some artists like me try to fight it by showcasing the beauty and the pure message of Islam.

IWA: Your paintings aim at representing the beauty of Islam, but your art is also highly political.

#### How can you combine the political and the aesthetic dimensions in your works?

Ms. Sattar: Well, I do so by combining my Western art education with my cultural and religious sensibility. I use alphabets as loops rather than words, an ancient tradition in Islamic art. I combine the play of color, composition and design.

My work is not flat but has dimension and depth.

IWA: Which of your works do you think best represents you as an artist?

Ms. Sattar: It would be the "Cres-

cent Moon". I guess because of the title. The crescent moon represents Islam. It is also a well balanced composition and a successful painting alover.

IWA: Would you define yourself as an Islamic artist?

Ms. Sattar: Yes.



# Isis and the Illicit Trade of Artifacts From looted archaeological sites to the art market: how the illicit trade supports the Islamic State Amr Al-Azm Associate Professor of Middle East History and Anthropology, Shawnee State University



In the past year, ISIS has become increasingly involved in the illegal looting and selling of antiquities. Their expanding footprint has been precipitated by both the lucrative nature of the illicit trade and the damage ISIS's financial infrastructure has sustained since the beginning of Coalition airstrikes. When ISIS occupied large swathes of Syria and Iraq during its important offensives of 2014,

it found a blackmarket for antiquities and artifacts already in place, though not on the scale the organization has presently established. An extremely efficient and obsessively bureaucratic organization, ISIS began to take full advantage of the illicit trade a an addition to its already extensive financial resources that includes ransom, natural resources, and taxation, to name a few.

In early 2014 ISIS began its involvement in the illicit antiquities trade by issuing permits to loot archaeological sites. The permit seekers were most often locals or contractors who claimed to have knowledge or information pertaining to hidden "treasure troves". In return, these locals and contractors were required to pay a tax, based upon an Islamic Sharia'a law interpretation know as



## In early 2014 ISIS began its involvement in the illicit antiquities trade by issuing permits to loot archaeological sites

khums. The law requires all Muslims to pay a fifth, or 20%, of the value of any treasure discovered to the state. By fall 2014, however, in keeping with its methodical

approach to governance and administration, ISIS established the Manbij Archaeological Administration (MAA) to manage and organize the systematic looting of

archaeological sites in the region. With ISIS's aggressive expansion into the illegal trade, the MAA has become regularly involved in directly digging and looting sites. They routinely use earth-moving machinery, including bulldozers and trucks, to accelerate the digging and recovery process, which intensifies the amount and rate of destruction to archaeological sites in the region. Many archaeological sites have been deeply scarred as a result.

Since the establishment of the MAA, the antiquities trade is now centered in and around the towns of Jerablus and Manbij in northern Syria, close to the Turkish borders, due to readily available smuggling routes and networks which ease the transfer of objects from Syria into Turkey. The MAA continues to issue licenses allowing local individuals and contractors to dig on private land or on public land under the control of ISIS. However, there is now increasing reliance on ISIS's own digging operations established and managed directly by

Looted antiquities are inspected by agents of the MAA to identify items of special interest or significant financial value (including precious metals such as gold). ISIS particularly values archaeological artifacts from the Islamic period: any such items are immediately confiscated by ISIS and processed by the MAA directly. Otherwise the looters are given a grace period of twenty days to find buyers for their goods. Items

the MAA.



remaining unsold after that are gathered up by the MAA and then sold directly by ISIS through its own established network of dealers and middlemen. They charge a 50% tax on the value of the sale in this event.

The MAA organizes the sale and transfer of artifacts it acquires either directly through its own digging operations, or through confiscation for reasons cited above. The MAA has established a network of approved dealers, to whom the looted antiquities are sold, and middlemen who facilitate these sales. Once sales are completed, goods are transported to the Turkish borders, sometimes escorted by ISIS fighters, where they are then smuggled across into Turkey and resold there primarily to Turkish dealers, although there have been reports of foreigners (Russians and Syrians) coming to purchase them as well. The Turkish cities of Orfa and Gaziantep are considered to be centers for this activity. It should be noted that the Turkish authorities are clamping down on the this illicit trade with seizures of looted antiquities from Syria and Iraq being regularly reported.

2015 has also heralded a darker and more sinister manifestation of ISIS's control and exploitation of cultural heritage, but this time in the city of Mosul in neighboring Iraq. In what can only be described as cultural atrocities, ISIS very publicly set out to destroy the contents of the Mosul museum and the archaeological sites of Nimrud and Hatra (most likely extensively looting them as well). These atrocities shocked the world, allowing ISIS to demonstrate its ability to both act with impunity and the impotence of the international community to prevent these atrocities. Today as ISIS occupies the city of Palmyra in Syria, a UNESCO designated World Heritage site, fears are being raised as to what fate awaits these majestic ruins. There are no doubts that the ruins of Palmyra offer a great opportunity for ISIS to loot a rich archaeological site and museum, with plenty left over for a public cultural heritage atrocity.





If this happens, ISIS's ability to act with impunity and the international community's inability to stop them will be clearly demonstrated again.

ISIS is clearly involved and profiting at every level from the illicit trade of antiquities, from their initial extraction from the ground to their final sale and exit from Islamic State controlled territory. ISIS as an organization today is probably the richest radical terrorist organization in contemporary history with widely diversified sources of income. There is

no doubt that looting and illicit trade in antiquities is highly lucrative, enough for ISIS to be deeply involved. Stopping this illicit trade inantiquities therefore must be an imperative not only because it is a major source of income for terrorist organizations like ISIS, but also because it's causing irreparable damage to Syria's cultural heritage.

The importance of this cultural heritage is nowhere more demonstrable than the issue of national identity and what makes a Syrian a Syrian. Syria has a resilient sense of identity based on the concept

of a shared citizenship around a common history, supported by a long and rich cultural heritage.

Once the current violence ends, the people of Syria will need to find ways to reconnect with the symbols that once united them across religious and political lines. The country's ancient past as represented in this rich cultural heritage will be key to this. Protecting and preserving Syria's history and heritage therefore is about safeguarding its future, too.

ISIS as an organization today is probably the richest radical terrorist organization in contemporary history with widely diversified sources of income



by Arielle Blattner
Graphic Designer and MA
Student of Islamic Art

## ISIS'S TURN OF THE SCREW

Why ISIS is tightening up its Islamist propaganda

Over the last several years, the rise of Islamic extremism has resulted in the public destruction of several objects of archaeological and artistic value. Recently, we have seen various demonstrations of such destruction, including the Taliban's demolition of monumental Buddhas in Bamiyan in 2001. While there have been numerous cases, this article will focus on the recent destruction of Assyrian statues in the Mosul Museum by the extremist group the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. This article aims to understand such destruction as a modern and politically motivated act, rather than a result of archaic ideology.

#### The Destruction

A legitimization for the act of destroying figurative "idolatrous" artwork is found in Islamic religious tradition. For example, we know from Said bin Abu Al-Hasan that Ibn 'Abbas heard from an apostle that Allah punishes men who make pictures of animated beings. This is because figurative artwork reflects life; however, the artwork can never contain actual life. These traditions are a clear continuation of monotheistic teaching beginning with the story of the golden calf in the book of Exodus. Debates regarding figural imagery within the Islamic world have been ongoing, resulting in a lack of a unified set of rules. Moreover, the iconoclastic attitude varies depending on regime, time, and place. In fact, there is a long history of figurative elements within Islamic art, even regarding depictions of the prophet Muhammad, a point made recently by University of Michigan Art History professor Christine Gruber.

Figurative images were generally avoided in religious art, whereas many examples exist within the realm of secular art. When objects were deemed idolatrous and inappropriate by a new regime, destruction, decapitation or defacement were the measures adopted to deal with the improper images. There are numerous examples of Persian miniatures with hu-

man figures whose faces were later smudged into oblivion, as well as examples of figural architecture with decapitated faces. Attitudes varied from individual to governmental interpretations, and the treatment of figurative images was not dependent on whether the artist or culture of manufacture was Muslim or non-Muslim.

As New York University Art History professor Finbarr Barry Flood has written, defaced artworks were usually salvaged; total destruction was a rare event. Defaced elements were also re-used (usually in architecture) and incorporated into new buildings (as spolia) as a sign of victory over the former regime. The defacement or decapitation was meant to defuse any divine power that figuration implied (the reason for their prohibition), not to annihilate the images themselves. Both the use of spolia and defacement were ways to "correct" idolatrous artwork and render them ineffective while maintaining other aesthetic elements of the works. In the total destruction of artworks that we have seen in recent years, all value of the artwork and previous culture is obliterated. This act is a physical metaphor for the complete intolerance permeating extremist regimes that kill any individual with a differing opinion.

### The Publication

The ruination of the Assyrian statues is not just an orthodox Islamic iconoclastic response. Rather, it is a political message delivered at a specific moment in history. The filming and publication of recent ISIS destructions reveals a deeper motivation.

One of ISIS's political tactics is to publicize the atrocious acts it commits in order to communicate their "jihadist" goals and shock the West. The act of filming and public dissemination turns the destruction into a performance for specific audiences. Through this performative act, ISIS is communicating a message of intolerance, resentment, and revenge.

Most obviously, their videos emphasize ISIS's seriousness and hatred for anything that fails to uphold the group's religious standards. The clips demonstrate clear consequences to idols or to the people who make them. Videos of ISIS fighters killing foreign 'infidels' prove this point. Moreover, the publication of these acts shows the degree to which they are proud of their actions and that this is precisely the public image they are building for themselves. It is a provocation to the West: look what will happen to you and the things you cherish! While it is clear that ISIS considers anyone who does not follow the group's strict reading of the Quranic and Islamic teachings to be an infidel, the West has a special place in the hierarchy of infidels.

It appears that ISIS has a specific (in their view, legitimate) political score to settle with Western powers. ISIS members mentioned the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 in a 2014 documentary published by Vice News and in a statement by ISIS. In the agreement, British and French diplomats held secret conferences, along with Russians, to secure their power and divide up the area formerly controlled by the Ottoman Empire.

Even to this day, the agreement represents a symbol of lingering colonialism amid the search for an independent Isla-

mic political identity. American and foreign troops in Iraq and Afghanistan for the past several years, along with other proxy power struggles, have only exacerbated this issue. The current events are a backlash from the Islamic world's colonized past, not to mention intra-Islamic sectarian divides that recall the succession of Muslim power following Muhammad's death.

extremist Islamic groups to target the Western world. While perhaps aimed at the West, any individual who does not fit ISIS ideology will be pulled into the category of infidel. These include imperfect Sunna Muslims, Shiites, and local Christian and Yazidi communities.

Another reason for this specific act to be publicized and used as a tool to provoke the West is tied to the symbolism of the museum. The concept of the art museum, a relatively modern European conception, was used to (at times) exploit the Islamic world. Indeed, many treasures of Islamic art are to this day situated in museums in Europe and the United States or in private collections. The destruction at the Mosul Museum awakens viewer awareness regarding colonialism, material culture, and Western Imperialism. These are all modern issues that have been raised within contemporary art historical analysis regarding the role of museums and the objects displayed within them.

From the appropriation of object collections to the way they are displayed to the public, regional history plays an important role in defining the relationship of the museum to the culture it exhibits. In addition, ISIS may not want to identify the non-Islamic Assyrian culture (or the statues that were made then) with Iraqi history. In short, the museum raises two issues: 1) Western ideas of 'art' and the implication that colonialism has had on Islamic art objects, and 2) ISIS's own desire to distance itself from Iraq's non-Islamic cultural history.

It is important to understand the rationalization, legitimized resentment, and self-righteousness that compel ISIS and

#### The Reaction

Of course, ISIS performed all of these acts as provocation. In return, the group received a reaction from the West. The visceral response was the result of the destruction of objects that hold worldwide historical and cultural significance. But it is not Western history - it is also Iraqi history. Assyria was a Semitic kingdom in Eastern Mesopotamia covering much of the area of Syria and Iraq that ISIS today controls. From the time of the Islamic expansion, Quranic teaching has been interwoven within local culture - a phenomenon that sociologists refer to as GLOCAL (Global plus Local). As Islamic caliphates expanded their influence and borders, new non-Islamic communities were incorporated into the empire - some converted to one of the many sects of Islam and some did not. The great peak of the Islamic Golden Age included the mingling of diverse populations and ideas: - the Fatimids, Abbasids, Seljugs, Mamluks, and Safavids, to name a few. Islamic art displays both consistent aesthetic qualities and a diverse range of elements that remain true to varying local cultures. Islamic art and culture remain manifold as a reflection of time and place in one of the manifestations of the Islamic experience. If what extremists are doing in

the name of Islam may be considered offensive on a general basis, it is even more offensive to those who appreciate the multifaceted nature of Islamic art. Just as extremist Islam oversimplifies its variety, the ripples of this monolithic view inevitably impact art and culture. Where there is overlap of populations, a place for creativity occurs. As Homi Bhabha has written in his seminal book The Location of Culture, creative cultural expression develops in places of overlapping populations with divergent identities. This nuanced view is not allowed in extremist regimes where everyone must have the same Islamic identity, both internally and externally. There is no area for integration of ideas or creative expression because counter-culture is stifled. The consequences of this repression are clearly seen as most political artists in Iraq must move to Europe or the United States in order to continue to freely produce works.

Sharia law offers non-Muslims protection, and they are allowed to live with Muslims if they pay a tax called jizya. While it appears that ISIS has offered the usual three options - convert to Islam, pay the Jizya tax, or die - according to an article in the Washington times and Forbes, the tax they are requiring appears exploitative. In addition, the clear aggression towards non-Muslims makes many suspicious of whether a one-time tax would realistically alleviate the threat to their lives. It is telling that until now, Christians have lived alongside Muslims in Iraq for thousands of years, not to mention the different sects of Muslims living side by side. Furthermore ISIS fighters, while purportedly the purest of Muslims, are not acting very Muslim. In a 2014 film by Itai Anghel Kurdish guerrilla fighters describe ISIS members as taking hallucinogenic

drugs before battles and camping out in mosques before they were blown up. The recent destruction by ISIS of Assyrian statues is not simply an act born out of medieval religious iconoclasm. It is an extreme political statement against the West, a misguided modern reaction to the current geopolitical situation. Modern extremist Islam is distinctive in its complete intolerance and denial of the multicultural ethos of Islam. The destruction of the Assyrian statues fits into this modern extremist Islamic jihad ideology; however, ISIS is waging not only a religious war against the West, but also against its own roots in Islam.

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## Ceramic **Arts of the** Islamic World

#### The evolution of techniques and design of early Islamic ceramics

This article sheds light on the evolution of techniques and the design of these early Islamic ceramics and how during a series of migrations to new geographical locations, Islamic potters adapted the ceramic tradition to these new lands.

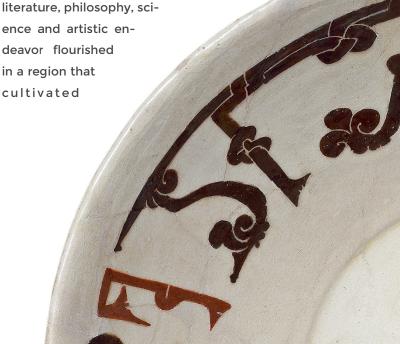
Islamic potters, working as early as the ninth century in the heartland of Arabia, discovered valuable techniques in the design and production of ceramics that many centuries later were adopted by their Chinese and European counterparts. It was Islamic potters who created the blue-on-white aesthetic that had a long-lasting influence on the production of Chinese export porcelain and in turn ceramic production in Europe. European potters, in time, learned to create maiolica, Delftware and faience directly from the Islamic world.

Islamic potters can also be credited for the innovation of the lustre technique that transformed ordinary objects of clay into shimmering metallic works of art. As well as influences on design, a series of innovations in ceramic production is the greatest legacy of Islamic potters. In twelfth century Egypt, a newly migrated group

of potters incorporated quartz into the local clay to improve the quality.

This eventually led to a new class of fine ceramics known as fritware (or more recently called stonepaste) that eventually displaced earthenware as a medium for ceramic production in Syria and Iran.

Basra Islamic ceramics production gained momentum in ninth-century Abbasid Iraq during a period referred to as the golden age of Islamic culture, a time in which literature, philosophy, science and artistic endeavor flourished in a region that



trade connections with countries as far away as China.

From their capital in Baghdad and later Samarra, the powerful Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) ruled over territories in North Africa, Iraq and Iran. It was in the port city of Basra on the Persian Gulf that local potters learned to create beautiful ceramics, and this is where our journey begins.

Early Basran ceramics were inspired by the Chinese



T'ang Dynasty (AD 618-906) wares that reached Iraq via the maritime trade routes that existed at time. Archaeological excavations carried out in the port cities of the Persian Gulf unearthed medieval Chinese T'ang stoneware and porcelain. It is highly likely that these Chinese

imports inspired Basran potters to create their own versions of Chinese porcelain, which were probably expensive to import and susceptible to damage during shipping due to their fragility.

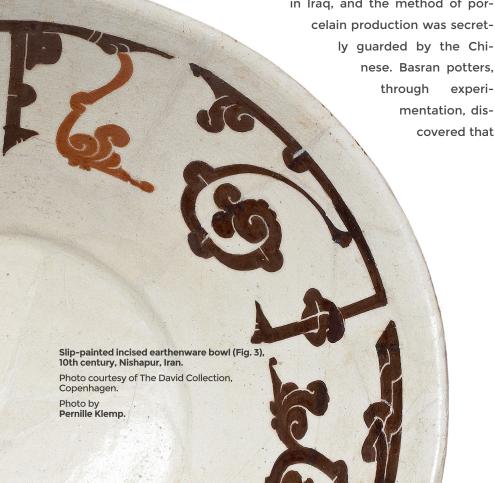
Chinese porcelain incorporated an important raw material, kaolin, which needed a firing temperature of 1400 degrees in specialized kilns. Kaolin was unavailable in Iraq, and the method of porcelain production was secret-

> nese. Basran potters, through experimentation, dis

tin-oxide glazed earthenware on firing at 900 degrees produced an opaque white glaze that successfully imitated the Chinese porcelain. Fig.1 illustrates an example of a Basran imitation (RHS) of a Chinese original (LHS). Once this technique was successfully mastered, Basran potters further experimented with the decoration of these blank 'canvases'. This step is what distinguished the Islamic potter from the Chinese T'ang potter - the insatiable need to decorate a plain object, otherwise esteemed by other cultures for its whiteness and translucence. This is the inherent nature of Islamic art, referred to by the great, late scholar Richard Ettinghausen in his 1971 article where he gives many a fine example of the 'busy' nature of Islamic art (Ettinghausen, 1979).

The horror vacui is illustrated in the detailed arabesque exhibited in the 7th century Mshatta façade, and can be seen Spain's Madinat al-Zahra.

The Islamic potter, not content with leaving the bowls in plain



state, set about fashioning it with motifs from the established vocabulary of Islamic design of the time. What followed was a series of ceramic designs that explored simple abstract, geometric and non-figurative pattern and design with the use of colorful pigments derived from cobalt (blue), copper (green) and manganese (purple) to add drama and substance to these creations.

by Islamic craftsmen
and later used
for a ceramic
body by Basran

craftsmen in ninth century Iraq. A complex and expensive technique, lustre painting involved applying lustre as a paste (usually copper and silver oxides) to tinglazed earthenware, followed by firing in a 'reduced-oxygen' kiln to produce objects with a metallic sheen. Basran craftsmen painted simple abstract lustre designs that included human figures, as well as animal and vegetative forms. The lustre technique was highly specialized and was believed to be a 'secret' technique confined to a few craftsmen who therefore held a monopoly on this process. Its practice seems to have abruptly ceased in the tenth century as economic

decline

set in to Abbasid Iraq. It is highly likely that craftsmen from Basra left for Cairo in search of work, as this technique simultaneously appeared in Fatimid Egypt.

#### **Fatimid Egypt**

The power and influence of the Abbasid Dynasty in Iraq eventually began a long and slow decline, and the centres of power shifted to new regional centres. The Fatimid Dynasty (969-1171) came to rule parts of North Africa, Sicily, Egypt and Syria and established a capital in Cairo. Fatimid rulers traced their descent from Fatima, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and unlike the Sunni Abbasid Dynasty, the Fatimids were Shi'i. Egypt enjoyed great prosperity at the time due to its unique geographical location,

allowing

Mshatta façade (Fig. 2), 8th Century Umayyad Palace Qasr Mshatta, Jordan. Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

Photo by Sailko. it to benefit from lucrative trade routes connecting it to the Mediterranean world and India. The affluent Fatimid court attracted artisans from neighboring territories, and Cairo soon became the most important cultural centre of the Islamic world.

Fustat, a neighboring town, became a centre of production of pottery, glass, metalwork, rock-crystal, ivory, woodcarving and textile production. Fatimid art is remarkably rich in detail in its decoration; scenes often show dancing and hunting. Here artisans took inspiration from ancient forms of Greek and Roman figural representation and combined these with the non-figurative designs experimented with in the early Islamic art of the Umayyads and Abbasids to create a new design repertoire.

#### Human and animal imagery employed a lively realism not exhibited in Basra

The lustre technique developed in Basra became the primary form of ceramic decoration in Fatimid Egypt, and a large number of quality lustre pieces in museums and collections today, with evidence from archaeological excavations, indicate lustreware was produced in large quantities. Potters in Egypt, now using a different clay than what they had used in Basra, set about improving the clay mixture with the addition of

quartz; this was an important step in the evolution of the ceramic tradition, as this new body called 'fritware' lent versatility and ease to the shaping of earthenware. Fritware, as this new medium began to be named, also had a whiter appearance, creating more visually appealing glazed wares than those produced using earthenware. Fritware eventually replaced earthenware as the main ceramic medium in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the eastern Islamic world.

More incidents of human and animal depictions occur in ceramics in Fatimid Egypt than in Basra. Human and animal imagery employed a lively realism not exhibited in Basra. This liberal approach to representational art was characteristic of the Fatimid Dynasty in general. Fatimid lustre ceramics later became an important form of documentation of painting of this particular period. The Fatimids were considered heretics by the new incoming Sunni Ayyubid Dynasty, so some documents and palaces (non-religious buildings) were sadly destroyed.

The lustre technique reached its height in the Fatimid capital of Cairo, then gradually faded out, moving onto Syria, Iran and, at some point in time, Spain, when the Fatimid Dynasty eventually collapsed in 1171.

## Samanid Slip-painted Wares

The Samanids (819-1005) were a Sunni dynasty that ruled northeast Iran and western Central Asia from their capital Bukhara. Under the Samanids the Iranian



of the most sophisticated kind of decoration was also the earliest. Their beauty is of the highest intellectual order; they hold the essence of Islam diluted

world regained its cultural identity, and Bukhara and Samarkand became major centres of learning and civilization. The tenth century was the height of Iranian poetry and literature: Rudaki (d. 940) was a great Samanid court poet and one of Persia's greatest poets. Firdausi (d.1020) continued the epic Shahanamah (Book of Kings) under Samanid patronage. The Samanids encouraged a revival of Persian pre-Islamic culture and the use of Persian instead of Arabic in court. Paradoxically, it was in the midst of the Persian literary revival that a significant group of slip-painted wares decorated exclusively in Arabic calligraphy emerged.

In Samarkand local potters developed pottery from methods that were quiet different from those currently being used contemporaneously in Basra and had little direct influence from Chinese wares. Here, a technique was developed that involved dipping the entire earthenware piece into a white, red or in some cases black liquid opaque clay called slip. Once dried this would provide a uniform background for decoration that was created with a contrasting coloured liquid opaque clay slip. This method, known as 'slip-painted', is unique to this region and common to a distinct group of ceramics known as Samanid epigraphic slip-wares, which were often covered in creamy white slip backgrounds with dark brown or black calligraphic inscriptions applied in a graceful rhythmic fashion.

Fig. 3 features a Samanid slippainted bowl from the David Collection, Copenhagen. Concentric black floriated Kufic calligraphy contrasts visually against stark white background. The calligraphy is interwoven, knotted and decorated with palmettes and seems to terminate in a leaf-like tendrils and reads:

"He who believes in a reward (from Allah) is generous with gifts,"

The difficulty in reading this highly decorated form of Kufic calligraphy may have been intended by the potter. Sophisticated and executed in high quality, these epigraphic wares are unmatched in their uniquen beauty. Arthur Lane, a pioneer in the study of Islamic ceramics, wrote of this distinct group:

"It seems some of the most sophisticated kind of decoration was also the earliest. Their beauty is of the highest intellectual order; they hold the essence of Islam diluted." (Lane, 1947)

#### Kashan

Another town in Iran, Kashan, became the dominant centre for ceramic production in the Islamic world in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The fritware that began to be created in twelfth-century Fatimid Egypt seems to have been the only type of ceramic produced in Kashan and may have arrived there via Syria. We are extremely fortunate to have a manuscript dated 1300 AD that describes ceramic production written by Abu'l-Qasim, a member of a well-known Abu Tahir ceramic family of Kashan. This important document describes in detail the materials and the process of ceramic production in Kashan. Despite Mongol



continued in Kashan, though with notable changes in style and output. Under the patronage of the Mongol overlords, an interesting exchange of Chinese and Islamic motifs and design occurred on arts of this period.

The fifteenth century saw the impact of Chinese blue-and-white painted porcelain that began arriving in the Middle East in the mid-fourteenth century. This colour palette, believed to have

been inspired by early Basran potters' cobalt-blue-on-white wares, came back in vogue in the Islamic world as mid-fifteenth century potters eagerly adopted this colour range, now popularised in the production of Chinese blue-andwhite porcelain.

Over the course of time, the Islamic ceramic tradition took on new forms and meaning reflecting local tastes and materials. Islamic potters seem to have been a mobile group of artisans who responded and adapted to new environments well and managed to transfer their skills with relative ease. Ceramic production continued from the early phase described above and established itself in new centres of the Islamic world: Kashan in Iran, Raqqa in Syria, Islamic Spain and Ottoman Turkey.

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## The Architeture of Contemporary Mosques

The mosque is the symbol of Islam and of Muslim communities around the world.

On the symbolic level, the mosque, and in particular the jami', the Friday Mosque, is the image of the act of group prayer, the very affirmation of the Muslims membership to the community of believers, the ummah. On the architectural level, the mosque is strictly linked to its time and place: the social and cultural background contributes and highly influences the style, the elements and the overall composition of the mosque as a functional building, serving a specific purpose.

Today, as ever, architecture is influenced by a number of variables: the region, the period, the trends of the moment, but also the client's and and architect's views, the purpose and the symbolic value the building is aimed to convey. Different variables can bring different results, in an overwhelming moltitude of forms, compositions, materials and elements.

Bearing this in mind, it is even more fashinating to look at the different results architects have reached in the last few decades when facing the design of mosques.

"The importance of the architecture of the mosque lies not only in the forms or architectural language but also in the collective meanings it transmits to us over time"

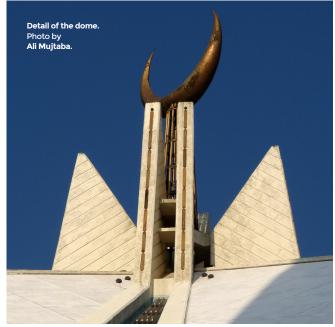
#### King Faisal Mosque Islamabad, Pakistan

The Shah Faisal Mosque, Islamabad, Pakistan was completed in 1987. It was designed by the Turkish architect Vedat Dalokay in the 1970s.

The mosque was conceived to be the national mosque, thus highly symbolic. Having been designed by a Turkish architecture, not surprisingly, the mosque, with the thin flaking minarets and the open central space, has the Ottoman style as a source of inspiration. On the other hand, the mosques wants to break with the past and points to the expression of a modernity totally belonging to the 20th century.







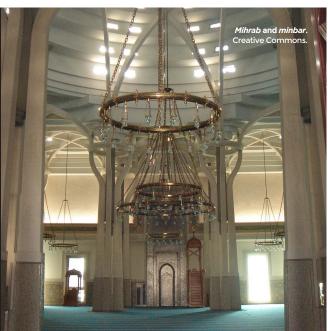


#### Mosque of the Islamic Centre Rome, Italy

The Mosque of the Islamic Centre in Rome, Italy. Designed by Paolo Portoghesi, Sami Moussawi and Vittorio Gigliotti and completed in 1995.

As in many other mosques built outside the traditional borders of the Arab-Islamic world, the architecture of the mosque of Rome has no direct connection with one sinagle style developed in the traditional Islamic architecture. While the exterior needs to finto into a non-Muslim urbanistic context, the interior is lavishly decorated with Islamic decorations that form a poutpourri of styles: the interior aims at emphasizing the Muslim-ness of the inner space.









#### Sakirin Camii

Istanbul, Turkey

The Şakirin Mosque opened in Istanbul, Turkey in 2009. Commissioned by the Semiha Şakir Foundation, it was designed by Hüsrev Tayla and Zeynep Fadillıoğlu.

The mosque is clearly influenced by the Turkish Ottoman style in its general design: the open courtyard and the domes resamble the architecture of historical mosque in Istanbul. Yet some of the elements display an ultra-modern attitude. This is the case of the fountain in the centre of the courtyard and of the mihrab, in acrylic, designed by Tayfun Erdoğmuş.









#### Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque Putrajaya, Malaysia

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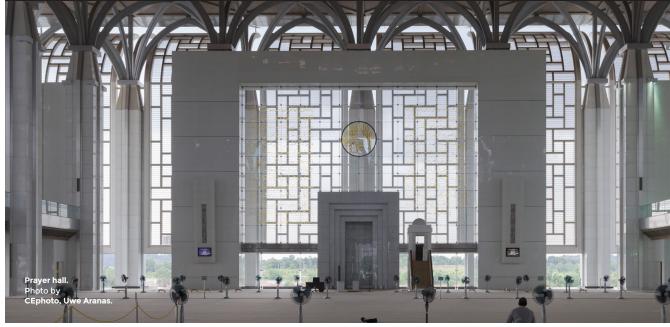
The Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque opened in 2004 in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

Also known as the "Iron Mosque", the building is made of high-tech materials, and the design is linked to historical Islamic buildings, such as the Alhambra.









#### Riyadh International Airport Mosque

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The King Khalid International Airport Mosque in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia was designed by Helmut, Obata and Kasselbaum. The mosque was commissioned by the Airport Development Authority.

The mosque is located in the center of the passenger terminal of the airport. This feature makes it the most prominent architecture of the whole airport. The place of worship thus assumes a new meaning, being a symbolical landmark. The central position points out the centrality of the Islamic faith in the institution where the mosque is set.





Abdulrahman Al Saddik Mosque Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The Abdulrahman alSaddik Mosque, also known as the Spine Mosque, was designed by the Yaghmour Architects. Erected in Dubai for the Nakheel Investment Co.

The mosque faced some opposition during its construction, mainly because of the contemporary approach of the architects. The mosque is not linked to a traditional architecture and deploys contemporary techniques and materials. Farouk Yaghmour, founder of Yaghmour Architects stated that they 'believe in liberating the mosque from the traditional to reflect our time and the era we live in, plus utilising the latest technologies and contemporary approaches in construction and materials'.

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