

The role of art in Islamic civilization

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Art is considered a main pillar in building human and civilizations and their enhancement. It is just not a means for expressing aesthetics but it is a strong means that contributes in shaping and documenting cultural identity of nations and peoples. Through art societies can communicate with deeper understanding to build strong bridges and links among various individuals and cultures, through it individuals can express their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a unique and creative way. Art in the Islamic civilization is considered at the top ranking among arts in the entire world, being the only one controlled by divine high and holy means that prevent it from slipping towards the fall of morals and values and preserve its purity and benefits for humanity.



Islamic art is an ancient art from the depth of history along the time and rooted from the Arabic and Islamic culture with deepened authenticity that was formed 1400 years ago.

In order to recognize the role of art in Islamic civilization we have to explain the identity of Islamic art and its development and effect on Islamic civilization and the entire world with demonstration of some models with its characteristics.

Art in the Islamic civilization:

Islamic art is one of the time miracles that started with the beginning of Islamic faith, its miracles influenced cruel people of desert to modify their behavior, values and coexistence with each other. Icons of Arab poetry, literature and eloquence, and calligraphy, etc. were influenced at countries where Islam was achieved and interacted with, values were inspiring for more glam, identity and creativity, till it was identified as Islamic civilization, hence was the diversity of kinds of arts in such civilization to include all fields that expressed belonging, traditions and habits mixed with the new identity of the nation.

Definition of Islamic art:

There is no absolute definition for Islamic art as it covers many different lands and peoples over 1400 years. It isn't linked specifically to a certain religion or time or place or medium such as painting, but we are going to present an identification from Islamic heritage that matches the subject of this paper as the following:

Art is a language: expansion and behavior.

Term: it signifies each humane work that requires a special skill and acquires a particular intelligence and training in order to be achieved, industrial production was acknowledged as an art as it requires skills in all its types such as sewing, agriculture and blacksmith and all other kinds of crafts and industries with no exception.

Professionals in fields of cultures and arts identify the term “Islamic art” as all what is applied to art production since the hijra of the prophet in the year 622 AD- till the 19th century in an area extending from Spain till India, it is a group of intellectual principles inspired mostly from Islamic doctrine and principles of worship, reflections of doctrine and what is related to it from legalizations and ideas on Muslim artist’s behavior and production which gives him its uniqueness compared to other arts.

Islamic arts along history:

- 1- Started during the 7th century AD since the migration of the prophet.
- 2- Starting with the development till the 9th century AD especially during the Umayyad era because of new concepts that was included. It was obvious in the building of Qobbat As- Sakhra Mosque in Jerusalem, which is considered of the most significant buildings in Islamic art.



- 3- The shine of Islamic art during the Abbasid era in building capitals, in particularly cities in circular shapes then building mosques in the middle of them, and make furniture from gypsum that contributed in engraving motifs.
- 4- Architectural art started in the 9th century till the 15th century in Morocco with semicircular rainbow shapes inspired from gothic and Roman models, which appeared in the building of the Great Mosque in Cordoba and many other places, not just at this area but parallel to that was the art in east of Asia.



- 5- Minor Asia and Iran were more present as each country tried to prove itself with its art, major cities were built such as Kyrenia, Neyshabur and the great mosque in Isfhan. Funeral architecture had witnessed huge progress, many decorated artworks with motifs were created. Islamic art also appeared in golden domes as it was influenced by China, the craft of making jewelry inspired from Chinese civilization was so evolved, also there was the Islamic art in Anatolia with architecture inspired from the Iranian styles, wood had the largest share in its art,

example for its architecture is the Blue Mosque in Tabriz and the domes, also the use of ceramics as noticed from the 15th to the 19th centuries in the Ottoman empire.



Unity of Islamic art:

Some think that the best about Islamic civilization is its unicolor arts that represented a communication ring among diversified peoples and cultures that defies all shapes of radicalism and racism. Kaaba and the honored mosque of the prophet are the most important models for Islamic art unity in the current time.



Such unique feature in Islamic art is due to its symbolism, as mentioned before, it was influenced by many kinds of arts in previous civilizations and it had influenced many later arts, as it was considered a bridge among cultures and peoples along history. Its rising depended on heritage of ancient nations that Islam had reached as Yemen, Egyptian, Mesopotamia, Persian, Indian and Chinese civilizations, which confirms that Islamic art has one trend and one color and general identity and style that includes many art schools with regional characteristics taken from its inherited heritage, traditions and habits, that was controlled by the system of high principles, and legalizations of Islamic doctrine framed in one aesthetical image full of beauty and positives and clear of negatives and evils.

Based on that, Muslim artist wanted to mimic nature with its spirit and essence not with its variable shapes, so his measures were spiritual and emotional, he tried to abstract material things and defragment them into their primary elements then reconstruct according to philosophical and aesthetical point of view as a result of this moral and religious sense. That's how Arab and Islamic peoples have lived in the shadow of unified arts that invaded their lives with beauty in everything, in door knockers, doors, pavs, even at the streets of Islamic cities you could find art pieces that amazed western artists and orientalists so they transferred such beauty, that could elevate the human soul on the surface of such artworks, to the rest of the world.

Types of Islamic art and its characteristics

- Applied arts that are considered a decoration process for daily humane needs as pottery, glass, textiles, carpets and wood.
- Pottery and ceramic motifs are considered its most prominent types; Islamic earthenware are at the top of Islamic artworks.



- Glass industry arts, is an ancient industry in Syria and Egypt, that reached its peak in the 6th century H.
- Wooden motifs art, wood was a field for diversified beautification processes that were common at many Islamic countries.



- Textile and carpet arts, some Muslim countries established houses supervised by the country to produce cloth for the Caliph house which were called embroidery houses.



- The art of binding, which was linked in the beginning to a decoration process for the Quran then it developed to be an art industry related to books.



- Architecture, Islamic architecture since the time of prophet Mohamed and the start of Al-Madina urban and architectural features starting with the prophet mosque, his house, the market, the place for 'Eid prayers till the military fortification of the entire city.



- Literature art, most important ones are poetry and speech which are of the primary Arabic literal arts even before the presence of Islam.
- The most important Islamic arts are calligraphy and literature, the need for writing appeared after Islam due to the need for writing Quran then the writing turned into art, till calligraphy was recognized as one kind of Islamic arts.

Arabic calligraphy on the top of Islamic arts

Among all the arts in the world, Islamic art is characterized by motif calligraphy that was used on a large scale in all art and architecture products. Arabic calligraphy with its aesthetics and spiritual meanings replaced paintings in churches. First Muslim artists realized the significance of that calligraphy and used it as a formative element in the process of decoration and they were innovative in its creations. Quran was the basic element that calligrapher cared about as they decorated names of Surah with gold and put them in frames decorated with floral, geometrical or calligraphic motifs. Hence appeared the art of multiple letters, for example; pure line, new classic line, modern classicism, graffiti, free line, line groups (that use any mix of handwriting styles), abstract calligraphy (that decomposes letters and includes it as a drawing element in an abstract art, messages can be read or unread or a fake script is used, etc.).



Arabic calligraphy still at the top of universal arts, modern design applications of the 4th generation with all their categories are incapable of covering the art of Arabic calligraphy with digitalization, the hand of the artist is the ultimate owner of this context.

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