

# Amitrakshar International Journal

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(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

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## Art in the Arab World: Various facets, various aspects

Sk Md Amanullah<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Maumita Sengupta<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Art in the Arab world represents a dynamic amalgamation of tradition, culture, and modernity, reflecting the region's rich history and evolving socio-political landscapes. This paper explores the diverse facets and aspects of Arab art, including traditional forms such as calligraphy, ceramics, and architecture, alongside contemporary expressions like visual arts, performance, and digital media. It examines how Arab artists have preserved cultural identity while addressing themes such as globalization, resistance, and social change. Furthermore, the study delves into the intersection of Islamic aesthetics with modern artistic innovation, highlighting the global influence of Arab art. Through an analysis of various mediums and narratives, this research seeks to showcase the role of art as a bridge between heritage and the contemporary, offering insight into the multifaceted nature of artistic expression within the Arab world.

**Keywords:** Arab Art, Islamic Aesthetics, Cultural Identity, Contemporary Expression, Heritage

**Introduction:** The Arab world, a region steeped in history, culture, and diversity, is home to a rich artistic heritage that has evolved over centuries. Art in this region transcends mere aesthetics, acting as a powerful medium for storytelling, preservation of tradition, and a reflection of societal shifts. It encompasses a wide array of forms, including calligraphy, architecture, music, poetry, visual arts, and contemporary installations. Each form carries the imprint of the Arab world's historical, religious, and cultural ethos, creating a tapestry that is both diverse and unified.

Islamic art, often synonymous with Arab art, is renowned for its intricate geometric patterns, arabesque designs, and calligraphy, reflecting the spiritual essence of the region. Architectural marvels like the Alhambra in Spain and the Great Mosque of Damascus are testaments to the ingenuity and aesthetic sense of Arab artists. Beyond the classical forms, the Arab world has also embraced modern art, with artists exploring themes such as identity, displacement, and resistance, often shaped by political and social contexts. Contemporary Arab art, showcased in galleries and museums globally, provides a platform for artists to address issues like globalization, gender, and cultural heritage. The rise of Arab women artists, in particular, has added new dimensions to the region's artistic narrative. Additionally, the influence of the Arab Spring has fueled a surge in art as a tool for activism, expressing the collective aspirations of people.

The art of the Arab world is not just a reflection of its past but also a dynamic dialogue with the present and future. By embracing both traditional and modern elements, Arab artists continue to create works that resonate universally while remaining deeply rooted in their cultural identity. This exploration highlights the multifaceted nature of Arab art, underscoring its enduring significance.



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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D scholar, Dept of Humanities, Techno India University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, HOD, Dept of Education and Humanities, Techno India University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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The maduli index is not embellished by art, but just ornamentally written verses, which look like complex designs, very unique in their look.

## Use of metal:

Among the most important branches of mechanical art, the Muslims of Spain excelled in the use of metals. They achieved perfection in bronze casting. Not only in the art of sculpture, but also for the purpose of worship and for domestic use, they produced a variety of utensils such as vessels, lamps, bows, cups, knives and other articles, all of which were prepared by scientific processes.

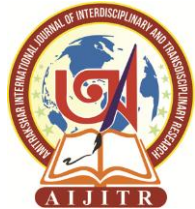
The Mosque of Córdoba had about 2,000 chandeliers, none of which survive today. The Lamp of Alhambra is not a widely recognized historical or literary reference, but it could relate to the famous Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. The Alhambra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its exquisite Islamic architecture, intricate arabesque designs, and stunning use of light and shadow. The palace's Moorish lamps, which were used to illuminate its ornate halls and courtyards, are a classic example of unique art featured in that part of the world. These lamps feature elaborate metalwork and colored glass, casting mesmerizing patterns of light and shadow. Culturally, these lamps today metaphorically symbolize the enlightenment, knowledge, and artistic grandeur that flourished in Al-Andalus under Muslim rule.

Arabian lamps are made of various metals: gold, silver, copper or, bronze. The lamps consist of two or more light bulbs, one above the other, and their beams were moderated or balanced through multi-layer screens. According to custom, four hollow spheres of lotus leaves or palm leaves and pomegranates were hung from the base and displayed poems or anecdotes from the Holy Quran. The lotus refers to the Sanatani influence on Islamic art, indicating the syncretic confluence on various aspects of World culture. There are some very elaborate portraits that Arab artists cast in bronze in the past. These etchings were carved by hand, they survive still. Lots of figures, among them were a lion, a doe, very rare in Islamic art. These pieces were discovered during architectural research in one of the expensive royal palaces on the outskirts of Saudi Arabia. Also, there are exquisite etchings that are inscribed with legends in Kufi characters. Kufic letters were used to express dignified or masculine power. The 'Nashkhi' character was used for the smooth rhythm of a well-balanced melody and the 'Nastalik' was used to create a flowing and sometimes almost incorporeal beauty.

## Engraved gems:

Muslim artists understood complex styles of coating metals with various crystals and artificial stones-they had all kinds of colors to paint and extra finesse; Their goldsmiths acquired such a craft, that they could produce sheets covering 56 square inches with just one grain of metal. The general principles followed by the Arabs in their art were also followed in the engraving of gems. They do not seem to have adopted the cameo process, i.e. the figure-carving of maniphashad, but the word itself seems to have been derived from the Arabic word 'kamah', meaning 'hump' or 'elevation'. The superimposition of the wearer's own name or initials, a verse from the Holy Qur'an, a wreath of entwined vines, a geometrical design drawn with straight lines or curves-these were the main subjects on which the artist's genius was legitimately exercised. Impressive small seals or rings were more numerous, but in Andalusian stone or gem-work the role of the shell was not insignificant. The hand and heart symbolizing the beautiful main sermons of Islam were popular subjects where subjects like these were inscribed. Ear-rings, simple rings, plaques on the waist band, crowns, turbans in gold-silver fringe work - inlaid or studded with precious stones like pearls, turquoise, limestone, kasis, carnelian etc.

The Islamic tradition of gemstone engraving was influenced by earlier civilizations, including the Persians, Byzantines, and Sassanids. With the expansion of the Islamic empire, artists refined and adapted these techniques to align with Islamic artistic principles, particularly aniconism (avoidance of human and animal figures).



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Engraving on gemstones requires specialized tools such as fine chisels, drills, and abrasives. Craftsmen worked with various materials, including:

- Carnelian (believed to bring protection and good fortune)
- Agate (often inscribed with Quranic verses for spiritual benefits)
- Jade (favored in Mughal India for its durability and beauty)
- Lapis lazuli (used for its deep blue color and association with wisdom)
- Turquoise (linked to protection against the evil eye)

Many exhibitions are now taking place in the Arabic world that celebrate this intricate art which is unique to the Islamic world.

## Pottery:

Nowhere else in the world did pottery achieve such perfection and excellence in material, design and execution as in Muslim Arabia. The conquest of Africa was the first sign of its progress and since then it has been on the road to further enhancement.

Even the crumbled specimens of dull clay (of ruins) which have come down to us bear witness to their superior character, and indicate that they are examples of the finest specimens derived from after Greek and Roman sources. Apart from the island of Majorca, famous for its fine pottery, eight cities in Muslim Arabia were engaged in this lucrative craft. Among these, Málaga was the first. The most prominent feature of the pottery here was the luster of the glaze of

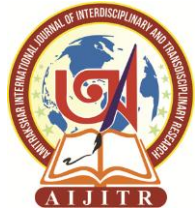
the objects, where one or more elements were mixed in such a way that this clarity was not disturbed and beautiful reflections were left like from the metal surface. This brightness is caused by the application of silicate (a crystal-sand compound). Silver and copper were used almost frequently for this decoration.

The shape of the Arabic pottery is reminiscent of the amphora (special two-handled container for holding liquids) of ancient Greece and Rome. They were designed to stand on metal or hollow wooden bases, from largest at the center to rapidly tapering towards the base. Their curves were extremely beautiful and their decorations were ample and extensive. The handles were large and thick. The colors that pleased Arabian potters the most were blue, white, black, brown and yellow, created from natural sources of lime, carbon black etc. The arrival of Islam led to glazed pottery and new decorative techniques, which were influenced from Persian, Byzantine, and Chinese ceramic traditions and are still found in major trading cities like Mecca and Medina.

Following is some of the stages of pottery development in Arabia:

- Early Pottery (Neolithic Period, c. 7000–3000 BCE)- Some of the earliest pottery in Arabia comes from the Ubaid culture (influencing eastern Arabia), featuring greenish and painted ware. Handmade, simple clay vessels used for storage, cooking, and ritual purposes, found in sites like Al Ain (UAE) and Al-Khiday (Saudi Arabia).





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- Dilmun Civilization (c. 3000–2000 BCE)- Centered in modern-day Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia, the unique features here are fine red-slipped pottery and painted motifs with geometric and floral designs, indicating Mesopotamian influences.
- South Arabian Pottery (c. 1200 BCE – 600 CE) - Found in regions like Yemen (Sheba, Ma'in, and Hadramawt), they consist of Incense burners, spouted vessels, and decorated storage jars. Some of the pottery includes inscriptions in the ancient South Arabian script.
- Nabataean Pottery (c. 4th century BCE – 2nd century CE)- Found in Petra (Jordan) and Hegra (Saudi Arabia), they are famous for extremely thin-walled, finely crafted ware, often red or orange, and decorated with floral, vine, and geometric motifs. these are luxury items, dining ware, and religious rituals.

### Leatherette wall covering:

One of the hallmarks of Cordova art from its inception was the use of leather-crafted curtains. This exquisitely crafted leather curtain that is studded, embellished, embossed and embroidered in the beautiful Arabian design style, definitely radiates an exquisite and opulent effect. They ranged from rich and whimsical fanciful cornices with special inlays to richly colored mosaic floors. These things were made with goat skin. We still find these artefacts in great demand, and artisans in Saudi Arabia create them for orders from all over the world. The materials are ethically sourced and treated very well, using scientific principles which were developed long back.

Leatherette wall coverings have become an integral part of Saudi Arabia's interior design landscape, reflecting a balance between tradition and modernity. They enhance spaces with their luxurious appeal, practicality, and compatibility with local aesthetics, making them a favored choice in both traditional and contemporary settings. As Saudi Arabia continues its modernization journey through initiatives like Vision 2030, innovative uses of materials like leatherette are expected to play a key role in redefining the country's architectural and interior design identity.

### Weaving Industry:

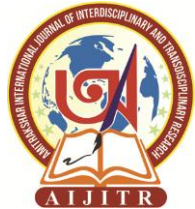
In perfecting the art of weaving the Muslims of Arabia an unending superiority over all their contemporaries in the world. In other European countries, the use of silk was limited to the nobility. 11th centuries later in Sicily and Arabia it was used by all classes of people, but elsewhere it was considered too expensive. The uniforms of the royal guards of Norman Palermo were made from it, as were the costumes of the middle-class men-romantes of Granada. The large Muslim flag preserved at La Huglas, near Burgos, is an excellent example of the weaver's art. The inscriptions on a dark red background were large round designs, woven together in blue, white, green and yellow colors. The robes of the royal class and the dignified loose robes used to have bright colors of Arabian design, various floral designs of rich embroidery, verses of the Holy Quran. There the portrait of a person dressed in natural colors was painted with perfect skill. Hisham II's special costume, preserved in the Historia Academia Museum in Madrid, is the only extant example of this theorized textile art branch. The color of this weave was permanent.

Under the patronage of the Safavid dynasty, Persian weavers in Yezd, Kashan and Isfahan produced the finest and most beautiful quality Butidar silk, damask buti embellished silk and other richly embroidered garments. Saudi Arabia is trying to revive this art, also research is being encouraged in the area of textiles using knowledge that has been created long back.

### Manuscriptology:

The art of calligraphy was highly favored by the Arabs from which it was named. As 'Golden Profession'. The Arabian Muslims acquired considerable wisdom in this regard. It was advanced and reached the peak of perfection by both the Eastern and Western classes of Caliphs. The skins they used were backed with gold or





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silver or dyed in various colors such as dark red, green, purple red, blue and black. Their luster was so bright that it reflected light as it did on the smooth surface of a mirror. Their ink was also different. They were very bright and permanent. Manuscripts were illuminated and enriched. They included large round designs, portraits, reproductions of men and animals, they were painted or painted with such wonderful skill that they surpassed all their predecessors in excellence.

Calligraphy art holds a deeply significant place in the cultural and artistic heritage of Saudi Arabia, as it is intricately tied to Islamic art and the reverence for the Arabic script. Rooted in Islamic traditions, calligraphy is viewed as a sacred art form because it has historically been used to transcribe the Quran. In Saudi Arabia, calligraphy transcends simple writing and is a highly respected and sophisticated artistic expression.

Several styles of Arabic calligraphy are prominent, many of which are practiced and celebrated in Saudi Arabia:

1. Kufic Script:

- An early and geometric form of Arabic script, it is often used in architectural inscriptions and Quranic texts.

- Saudi mosques and monuments, especially in Mecca and Medina, showcase Kufic inscriptions.

2. Naskh Script:

- A highly legible and widely used script, especially in printed and handwritten Quran copies.

- It is popular for modern educational and religious texts in Saudi Arabia.

3. Thuluth Script:

- Known for its elegance and complexity, Thuluth is often seen in decorative elements in mosques and on official documents.

4. Diwani Script:

- A decorative and intricate style often used in royal decrees and official correspondence.

- It reflects the historical administrative sophistication of the Arab world.

### Modern Calligraphy:

Contemporary Saudi artists incorporate calligraphy into modern and abstract art forms, merging traditional script styles with innovative designs. Saudi Arabia is experiencing a renaissance in cultural expression, and calligraphy plays a pivotal role in this resurgence. Modern Calligraphy Artists, famous Saudi names such as Nassir Al-Salem and Ahmed Mater combine traditional calligraphy with contemporary art to create thought-provoking pieces. Their work explores themes of spirituality, identity, and modernity, often incorporating calligraphy into mixed-media installations. Public Art and Murals have been made popular by such artists, as the Saudi government has initiated projects to incorporate calligraphy into public art. Cities like Riyadh now showcase calligraphy murals that celebrate Islamic heritage.

Digital and Experimental Calligraphy is being utilised by the artists with the use of digital tools to experiment with calligraphic forms, creating vibrant and dynamic pieces that appeal to younger audiences. Calligraphy Education has become very popular amongst them, dedicated workshops and courses are offered across Saudi Arabia to teach traditional calligraphy techniques to a new generation of Gen Z learners. Cultural Institutions such as museums and centers like the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) showcase calligraphic art and host exhibitions that highlight its evolution. In 2021, Arabic calligraphy was added to the UNESCO



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list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, with Saudi Arabia playing a leading role in this initiative. This recognition underscores Saudi Arabia's efforts to preserve and promote this art form.

### Conclusion:

Art, Architecture and handicrafts are the harbingers of civilisational richness and development. Saudi Arabia has been trying to create a bouquet of the traditional and the modern, showcasing advancements in science and technology, and also highlighting its multifaceted art and craft landscape. This paper is a humble attempt at concisely presenting a very vast canvas of historical as well as modern montages that the researcher has had the privilege of studying. Islamic traditions and culture have never been regressive, and that needs to be presented to the world for better understanding and recognition of the world.

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