الخط العربي

Arabic Calligraphy

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mohawk

Contents

History of Calligraphy

The Arabic saying, “Purity of writing is purity of the soul” vividly describes the status of the master calligrapher in Islamic society. It was believed that only a person of spiritual devotion and clear thought could achieve the skill required for this supreme art. The most talented of calligraphers attained honorable positions as scribes in the Imperial Palace or as teachers of Imperial rulers. The foundation of Islamic calligraphy was laid down by the creative genius of three great calligraphers from Baghdad; the Vizier Ibn Muqla (886–940) of the Abbasid court, Ibn al-Bawwab, and Yakut al-Musta’simi of Amasya (d. 1298). Calligraphy is a fundamental element and one of the most highly regarded forms of Islamic Art. The word calligraphy comes from the Greek words kallos, meaning beauty, and graphein, meaning writing. In the modern sense, calligraphy relates to “the art of giving form to signs in an expressive, harmonious and skilful manner.”1 Islamic calligraphy is one of the most sophisticated in the world and is a visual expression of the deepest reverence to the spiritual world.The Holy Qur’an mentions, with regard to the revelation of the Holy Qur’an “And we have arranged it in the best form.” According to contemporary studies, Arabic writing is a member of the Semitic alphabetical scripts in which mainly the consonants are represented. Arabic script was developed in a comparatively brief span of time. Arabic became a frequently used alphabet--and, today, it is second in use only to the Roman alphabet.

The early Arabs were basically a nomadic people. Their lives were hard before Islam, but their culture was prolific in terms of writing and poetry. Long before they were gathered into the Islamic fold, the nomadic Arabs acknowledged the power and beauty of words. Poetry, for example, was an essential part of daily life. The delight Arabs took in language and linguistic skills also would be exhibited in Arabic literature and calligraphy. The early Arabs felt an immense appreciation for the spoken word and later for its written form. The Nabataean were semi-nomadic Arabs who dwelled in an area extending from Sinai and North Arabia to southern Syria. Their empire included the major cities of Hijr, Petra, and Busra. Although the Nabataean empire ended in 105 A.D., its language and script would have profound impact upon the early development of Arabic scripts.

History Behind Arabic Calligraphy

Here is what we know for sure: The Arabic language is very ancient, but it was not a written language until perhaps the third or fourth century C.E. What the earliest written forms looked like we can hazard only a barely educated guess. Inscriptions on stone suggest both unconnected and connected letter alphabets were in use. The connected letter alphabet is recognizable as the true Arabic alphabet. We also know that a small number of people in the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime knew how to read and write. We know the Prophet had secretaries, or scribes, to write for him, as he was unlettered. What did this writing look like? I believe the preserved letters of the Prophet may be of greater help here than early Koran manuscripts. The letters are either authentic or copied from originals in look and content, while the dates of the early Korans cannot be demonstrated. I doubt the authenticity of the available copies of the Koran from the caliph Uthman's time—the calligraphy is too well developed. The letters, on the other hand, must represent contemporary writing practice and may even be in the hand of some of the scribes who made the first complete mushaf under the caliph Abu Bakr. But too much early material is simply gone forever.

Arabic calligraphy was originally a tool for communication, but with time, it began to be used in architecture, decoration and coin design. Its evolution into these major roles was a reflection of the early Muslims' need to avoid, as their beliefs required, figures and pictorials that were used as idols before Islam was established in the Arabian Peninsula.

History of Arabic Alaphabet

The origins of the Arabic alphabet can be traced to the writing of the semi-nomadic Nabataean tribes, who inhabited southern Syria and Jordan, Northern Arabia, and the Sinai Peninsula. Surviving stone inscriptions in the Nabataean script show strong similarities to the modern Arabic writing system. Like Arabic, their written texts consisted largely of consonants and long vowels, with variations on the same basic letter shapes used to represent a number of sounds.Arabic is written and read from right to left. There is no distinction between upper- and lowercase letters, though shapes of letters usually vary depending on whether they are in an initial, medial, or final position in a word. Punctuation marks were not adopted until the twentieth century. Short vowels, represented by a set of marks below or above the letters, aid in the pronunciation of a word—these are usually only written in the Qur'an, where correct recitation is important, and in texts for novice readers.

The Arabic alphabet consists of eighteen shapes that express twenty-eight phonetic sounds with the help of diacritical marks. Second most widely used alphabetic writing system in the world (the Latin alphabet is the most widespread). Originally developed for writing the Arabic language and carried across much of the Eastern Hemisphere by the spread of Islam, the Arabic script has been adapted to such diverse languages as Persian, Turkish, Spanish, and Swahili. Although it probably developed in the 4th century CE as a direct descendant of the Nabataean alphabet, its origins and early history are vague. Some scholars believe that the earliest extant example of Arabic script is a royal funerary inscription of the Nabataeans dating from 328 CE.

ARABIC ALPHABETS

Kha خ	H ح	G ج	Th ث	T ت	B ب	A ا
Sa ص	Sh ش	H س	Z ز	R ر	Dh ذ	D د
Qa ق	Fa ف	Ghain غ	Aain ع	DHa ظ	Ta ط	Da ض
ya ي	W و	Ha ه	N ن	M م	L ل	Ka ك

Development of Script

Over the course of their development, the Arabic scripts were created in different periods and locations of the expansive Islamic Empire. There is also a close relationship between each Arabic script and its common usage throughout history. This leads to the question to why this information is important, especially for non-Arabic speakers, and what information can be gleaned from each script. Understanding the history of each script and how Arabic calligraphy evolved over the history of the Islamic Empire can expand our visual experience beyond the beautiful glyphs and forms.

Some scripts reflect the time period in which they developed, such as the Musand script, which emerged at an early stage in the history of Arabic calligraphy. Others provide geographical insight into where the artwork was developed, such as the Maghribi script, which distinguishes the artwork and inscriptions of northwest Africa.

Arabic Musnad

By around 1000 BC two families of ancient writings had developed in the Arabian Peninsula. The one in the north (the North Arabic family) was called Musnad al-Shamali and the one in southern Arabia (the South Arabic family) was called Musnad al-Janubi.

Musnad al-Shamali (North Arabic) spread out around the first millennium BC through northern Arabia, and from this developed the Lihyanite, Safaitic and Aramaic writing systems, which flourished in the north of Arabia around the middle of the first millennium BC. From Aramaic Nabataean script and from Nabataean, Arabic writing developed. It consisted of 29 letters and is written in a monumental style.

The first arabic script, which likely developed from syriac and Nabateen alphabet. This script doesn't have the cursive aesthetic that most people associate with modern Arabic scripts. Discovered in the south of Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen, this script reached its final form around 500 BC and was used until the 6th century. It did not look like modern Arabic, as its shapes were very basic and resembled more the Nabataen and Canaanite alphabets than the Arabic shapes.

Arabic Musnad script

Ta'liq Script

The word Ta'liq means "suspension" and was inspired by the shape of the script's lines, which look hung together.

Widely used for a variety of purposes, such as messages, books, letters and poems, the Ta'liq script was formed during the 11th century, was refined during the 13th century in Persia and is still used today.

As mentioned, the words appear hung together and connect to each other, and the letters are rounded and have a lot of curves. While this makes it less legible, the script is often written with a large distance between lines to give more space for the eye to identify letters and words in the design.

While the spaces between lines are helpful, they consume the page, which is obviously a disadvantage when space is limited or the text is long.

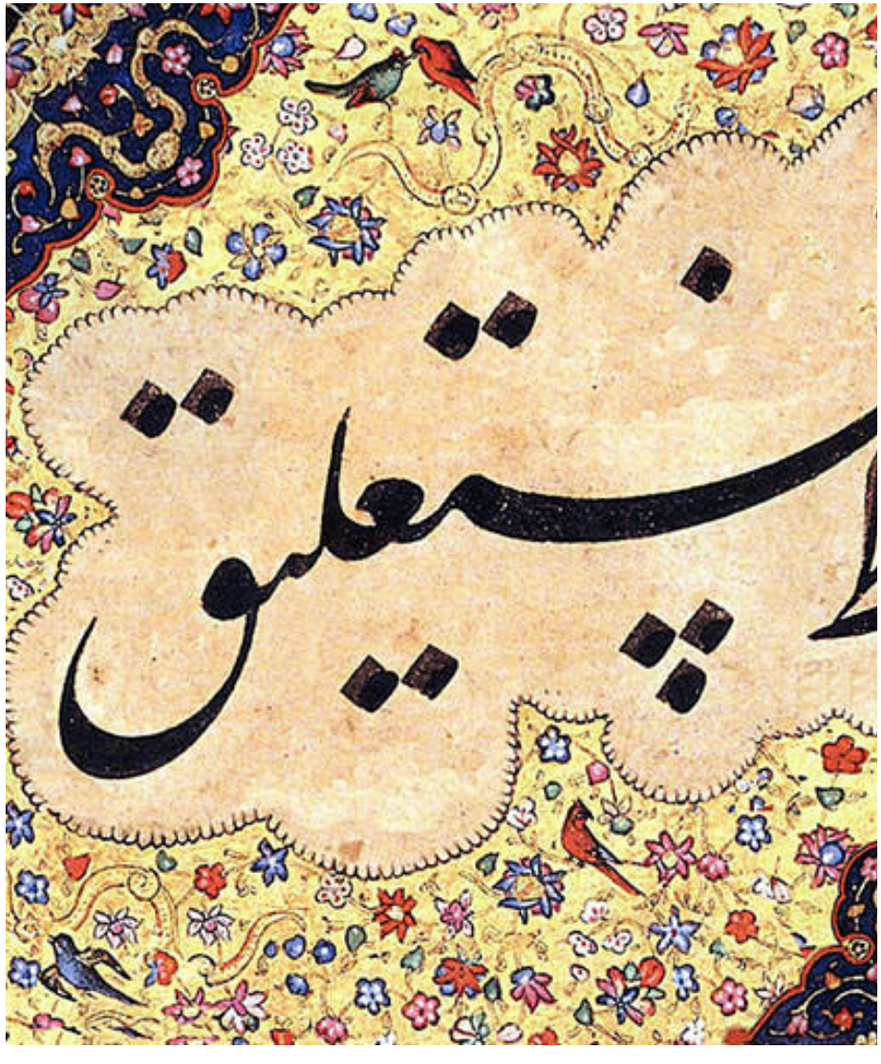
Example of using Ta'liq Script

Nasta'liq Script

The Nasta'liq is a refined version of the Ta'liq script, although with elements of Naskh. It developed during the 15th century and continued until the 16th century in Persia and Turkey.

Merging the characteristics of both scripts, such as the short vertical lines of Naskh and the long curved horizontal strokes of Ta'liq, it is still used in Persia, India and Pakistan for wof legibility, it's an improvement on the Ta'liq but harder to read than Naskh.

The letters are a little hooked, similar to those of the Ta'liq script, and vary in thickness. Although the arrangement of letters flows smoothly and in harmony, it is hard to write and is less readable than many other scripts. Both the Ta'liq and Nasta'liq scripts have left their mark on Persian art and architecture, and you can easily identify Persian inscriptions by the type of scripts they're written in.



Kufic Script

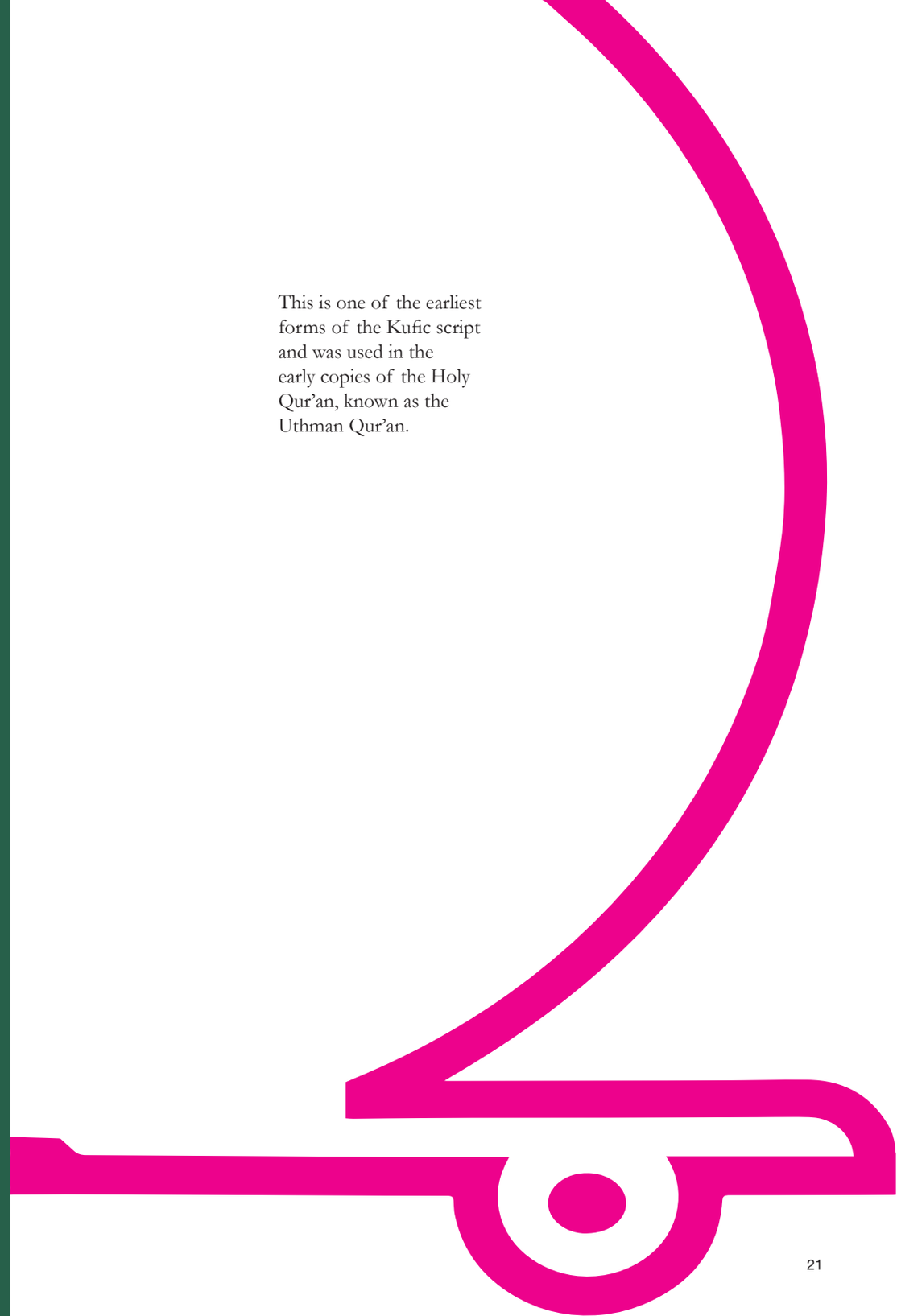
Its name refers to the city of Kufa in Iraq, where it first appeared, yet most instances of this script were found nearly a thousand kilometers to the south in Medina in the Arabian Peninsula, where the Prophet Mohammed stayed after moving from Mecca. In the early stages of its development, the Kufic script did not include the dots that we know from modern Arabic scripts. The letter dots (Nuqat) were added during the later development of this and other scripts. Also, at a later stage, Abul Aswad Al Du'ali (688 CE) and Al Khalil Ibn Ahmed Al Farahidi (786 CE) developed the diacritical marks (Tashkeel) that indicate the vowels of the letters.If we examine Kufic script inscriptions, we'll notice particular characteristics, such as the angular shapes and long vertical lines.The script letters used to be wider, which made writing long content more difficult. Still, the script was used for the architectural decoration of buildings, such as mosques, palaces and schools.

These characteristics affected the usability of the script and made it more suitable for architectural and written Islamic titles, instead of long texts.The Kufic script continued its development through the different dynasties, including the Umayyad (661 – 750 CE) and Abbasid (750 – 1258 CE) dynasties. Following the Arabic Musnad and Al-Jazm, the Kufic script evolved as the next stage of Arabic calligraphy's development. Unlike those two old scripts, we can identify known letter shapes in the early development of the Kufic script.As the Kufic script developed over the 7th century, it played an essential role in documenting the Muslim holy book (Qur'an Kareem). The Kufic script is one of the oldest Arabic scripts that persisted in common use until the 13th century.

An example of Kufic Script used.

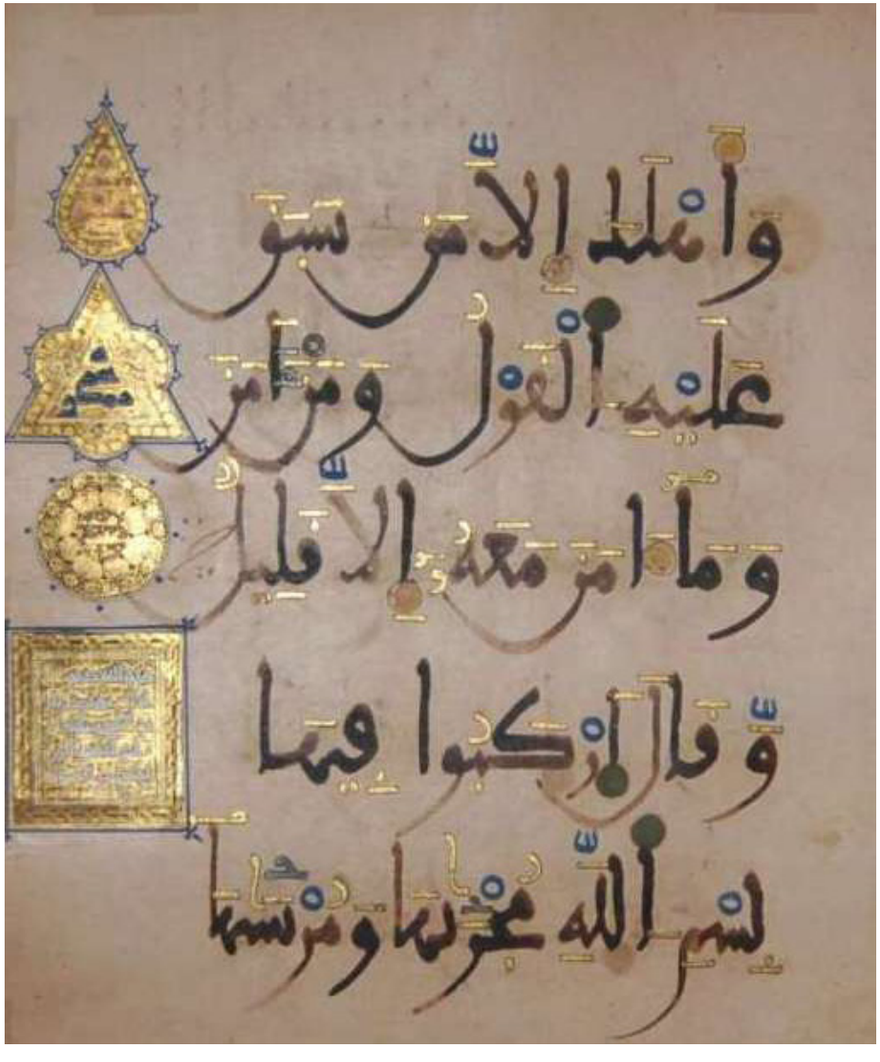
Thick Kufic Script

This is one of the earliest forms of the Kufic script and was used in the early copies of the Holy Qur'an, known as the Uthman Qur'an.



Magribi Kufic Script

Maghribi script, maghribi also spelled maghrebi, in calligraphy, Islamic cursive style of handwritten alphabet that developed directly from the early Kufic angular scripts used by the Muslim peoples of the Maghrib, who were Western-influenced and relatively isolated from Islam as it was absorbed into the eastern part of North Africa. The script they developed is rounded, with exaggerated extension of horizontal elements and final open curves below the register. Maghribi script is still used in northern Africa from Morocco to Tripoli.



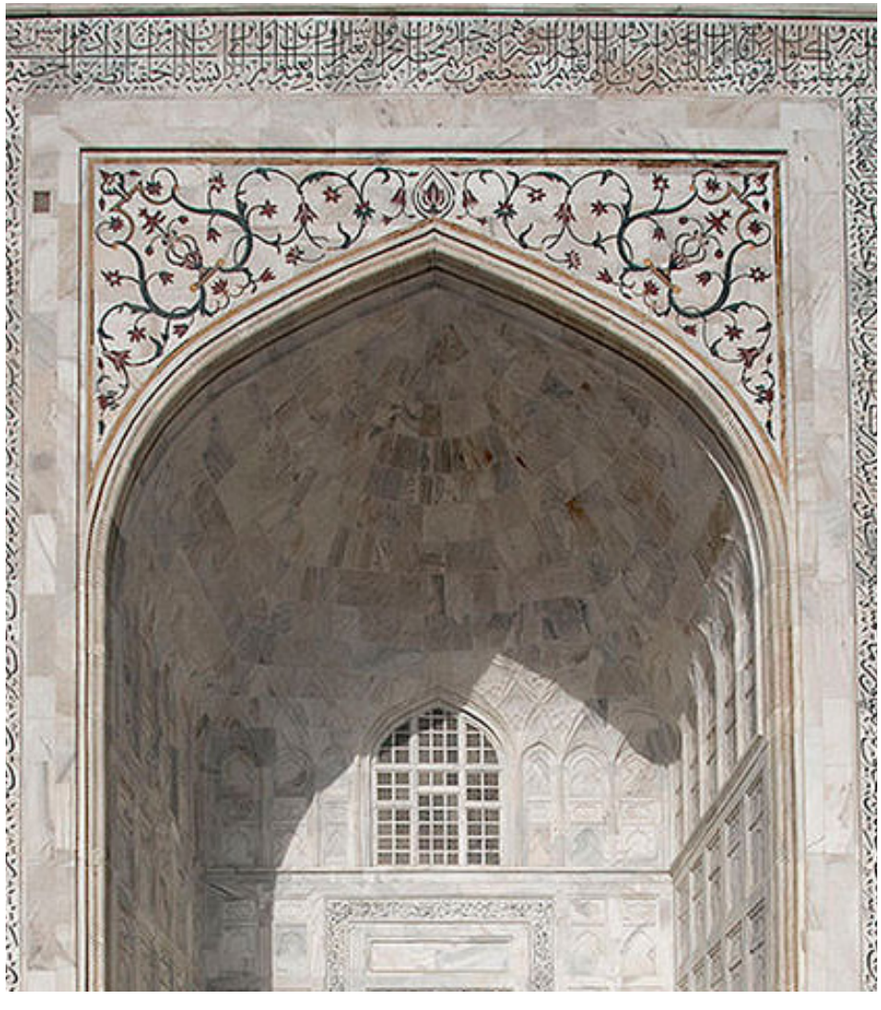
An example from the Qu'raan using Maghribi Kufic Script.

Thuluth Script

The name "Thuluth" means one third, which might refer to the size of the pen used to write the script. It is one of the cursive scripts that was commonly used to decorate mosques and different types of texts.

The Thuluth script was first developed in the 11th century during the Abbasid dynasty and was refined by calligrapher Seyh Hamdullah during the Ottoman dynasty. It is the basis of scripts that appear later, such as the Jeli Thuluth, the Naskh and the Muhaqqaq, the last two of which we will cover later in this article.

The Thuluth script is marked by its clear structure and readability, which make it suitable for a number of purposes, even today. The cursive letters and long lines make it easily readable and usable for both titles and long texts. Therefore, it was used in the Holy Qur'an and in architectural decorations in many regions of the Islamic Empire. Below are some examples of the Thuluth script.

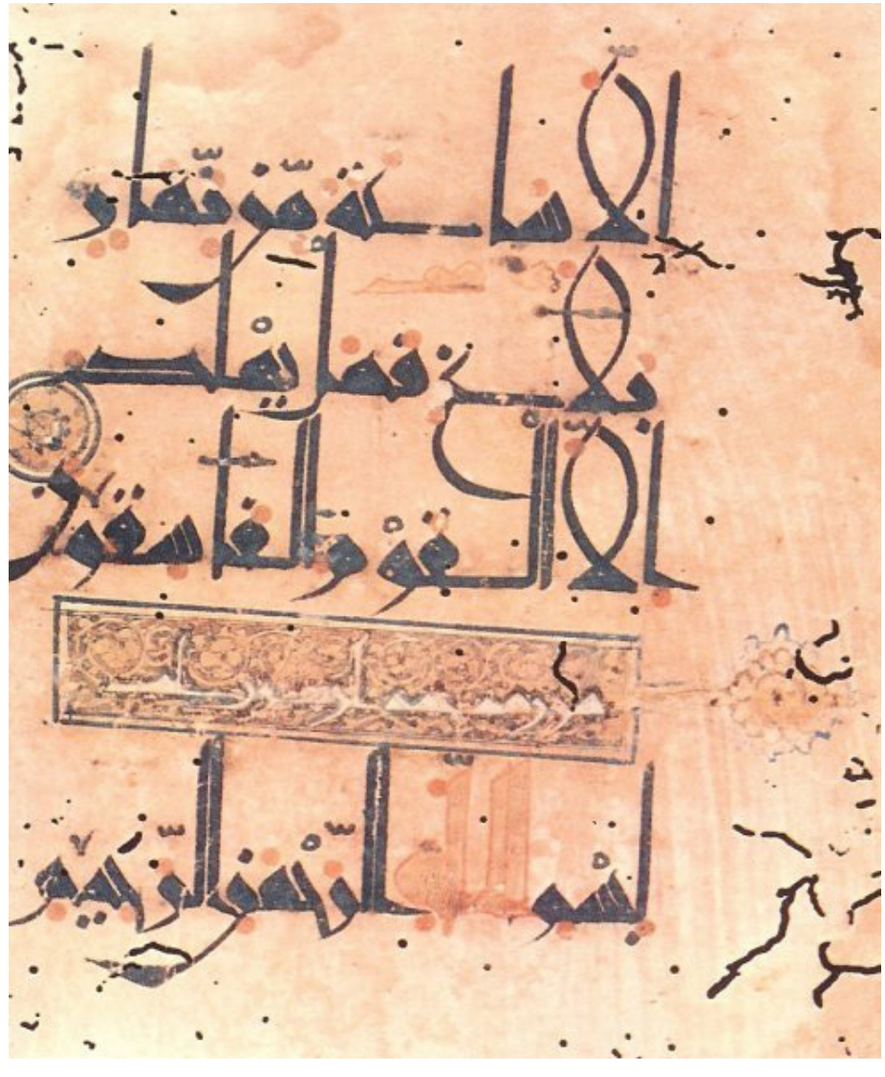


The exterior decorations of the Taj Mahal in India, written in the Thuluth

Mashriqi Kufic Script

Mashriqi is similar to the original Kufic script through its lettering. Mashriqi Arabic, Ammiya, is the varieties of Arabic spoken in the Mashriq, including the countries of Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Syria and Iraq.[2][3][4][5] The Eastern Arabic known also as Mashriqi Arabic (as opposed to the Western Arabic known as Maghrebi Arabic) that includes Mesopotamian Arabic and Peninsular Arabic along with Levantine Arabic. In Lebanon, Mashriqi Arabic as a colloquial language was taught as a separate subject under French colonization, and some textbooks exist. Speakers of Mashriqi call their language Ammiya, which means "dialect" in Modern Standard Arabic.

It is primarily used as a spoken language; written communication is primarily done in Modern Standard Arabic (or English or French), along with news broadcasting. Mashriqi Arabic is used for almost all spoken communication, as well as in TV dramas and on advertising boards in Egypt and Lebanon whilst Modern Standard Arabic for written communication. The varieties of Darija have a significant degree of mutual intelligibility, specially between geographically adjacent ones (e.g. Lebanese and Syrian, or Iraqi and Kuwaiti). Conversely, Darija is very hard to understand for Arabic speakers from the Maghreb, as it does derive from different substratums and a mixture of a few languages.



A page from a Qur'an written in the Kufi Mashriqi script.

Calligraphy Tools & Materials

The art of calligraphy was passed down from master to student, often within the same family. In order to become a master calligrapher and acquire a formal license, a student had to train for years by copying models to perfect his/her skills. Most calligraphers were highly educated and some came from the upper echelons of society. Many rulers received extensive calligraphic training from the best court masters and became accomplished calligraphers in their own right. While most calligraphers at the time were men, some wealthy women practiced calligraphy too. Today, the art of calligraphy is widely practiced by both men and women.

Tools and materials affected the quality of the final product. Every calligrapher learned how to prepare pens, inks, and paper. Pens (qalam) were often fashioned from reeds due to their flexibility. First, hollow reeds were harvested and left to dry; the calligrapher then cut a tip in the shape, width, and angle that best matched the particular script he or she planned to use. Inks were made of natural materials such as soot, ox gall, gum Arabic, or plant essences. Manuscripts were written on papyrus and parchment (animal skin)before paper was introduced to the Islamic world from China around the eighth century. Because of the status of calligraphy as an art form, the tools associated with it—shears, knives, inkwells, and pen boxes—were often elaborately decorated and sometimes made of precious materials.

Reed pen and ink used to write Calligraphy

Top 4 Calligraphy Artists

Each Artists showcases a diffeent way of visually showing arabic calligraphy in an effective and elegant way. These four artists showcase Calligraphy in a beautiful way and their process behind their work is unique and different which helps different ways of using arabic calligraphy as an art form.Each artist also comes from a different background. Reza Abedini is from Iran but currently teaches at the American Univesity of Beirut, Lebanon. El- Seed is from Morrocco. Ruh-Al alam is from London but learned Calligraphy in Egypt. Ayad Al-Khadi is originally from Iraq but currently lives in New York City.

Reza Abedini

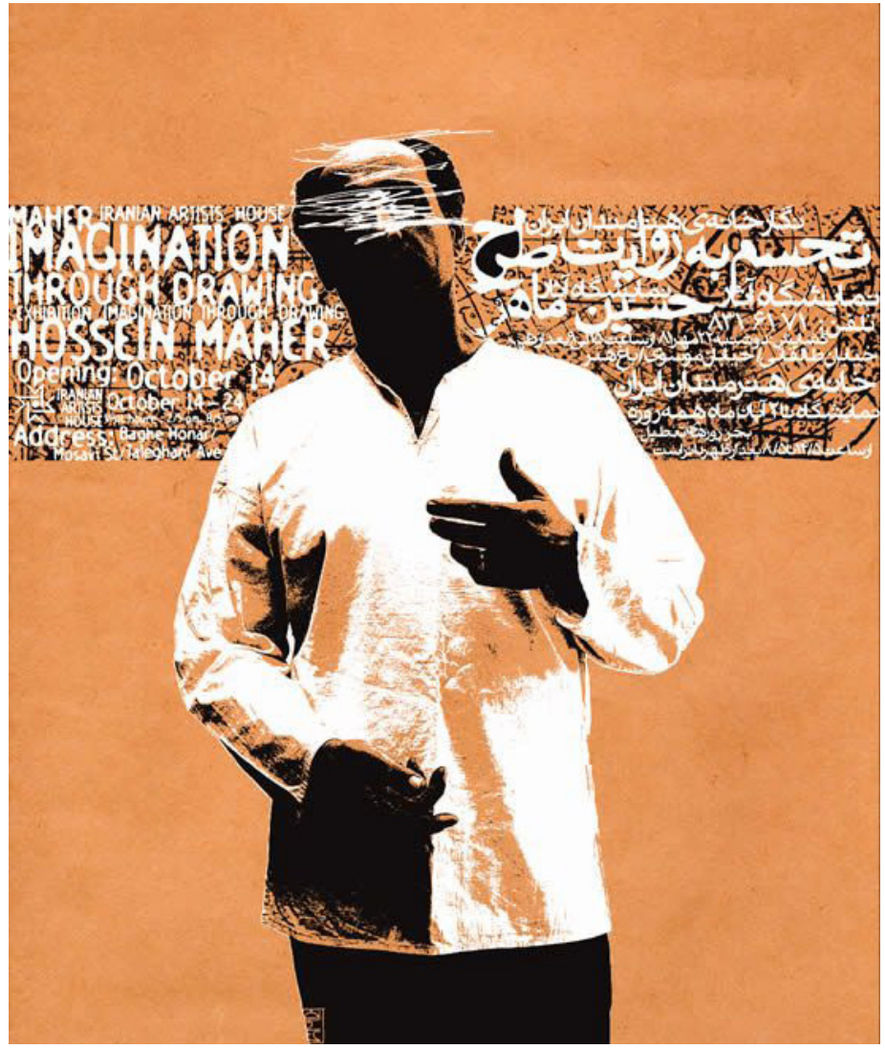
Reza Abedini is a notable contemporary Iranian graphic designer. He also teaches graphic design and visual culture at the American University of Beirut. He is not only recognized for his graphic designs but also Persian typography. While keeping a modern thematic pattern he dexterously blended the traditional themes in his works as well, hence maintained a unique style.

Born on 1967, Reza Abedini was raised in Tehran, Iran. Growing up, Abedini's teacher saw potential in him to embrace art and guided him. He was requested to write a short story and upon favorable response his teacher took him under his wing. Henceforth, he assisted his teacher on several creative art projects. The journey expanded his vision of art and creative thinking. The continuous exploration of creative art filled Abedini with the self-confidence and curiosity which culminated in him picking up the brush and paint. Once during his schooling he found the opportunity of illustrating the set for the play they organized. His effort was met by his teacher introducing him to eminent graphic designer and creative artists of the time, who held the key to understanding the creative universe and Iranian and Persian culture
and history.

Early Life of Reza Abedini

Eventually Abedini realized that he belonged to the world of art and received his formal art education from the school of Fine Arts, graduating in 1985. He then majored in Painting from Tehran Art University and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1992. While studying at TAU, he was still not certain which avenue he ultimately wanted to travel down, whether it was more on the typography side or graphic design mainly.

However, his bewilderment was answered by his growing popularity as his commissioned artwork was publicized and lauded by many. In fact, he received request by his clients to avail his painting expertise in some of the graphic design projects. The field of graphic design stood out to be a rational choice of profession for him.Abedini began his professional career as a graphic designer in the late 1980s. Notwithstanding his lack of formal graphic design education, he designed meticulously relying solely on his own methods of creative expression. He ultimately blended the self expression of the art world, print making, lettering and typography.
His love of Persian calligraphy and typography grew in his youth when certain powerful political and religious figures restricted the public from exploring the outside world and its culture. Utilizing the art he learned in his youth Abedini's style of graphic design evolved as he employed intricate shapes, minimalistic use of colours on the textures of aged paper. Similar to Islamic architecture, his work feature the same floral patterns, shapes and elements. The distinguishing characteristic of his work is his manipulation of multifarious elements, fonts and languages.



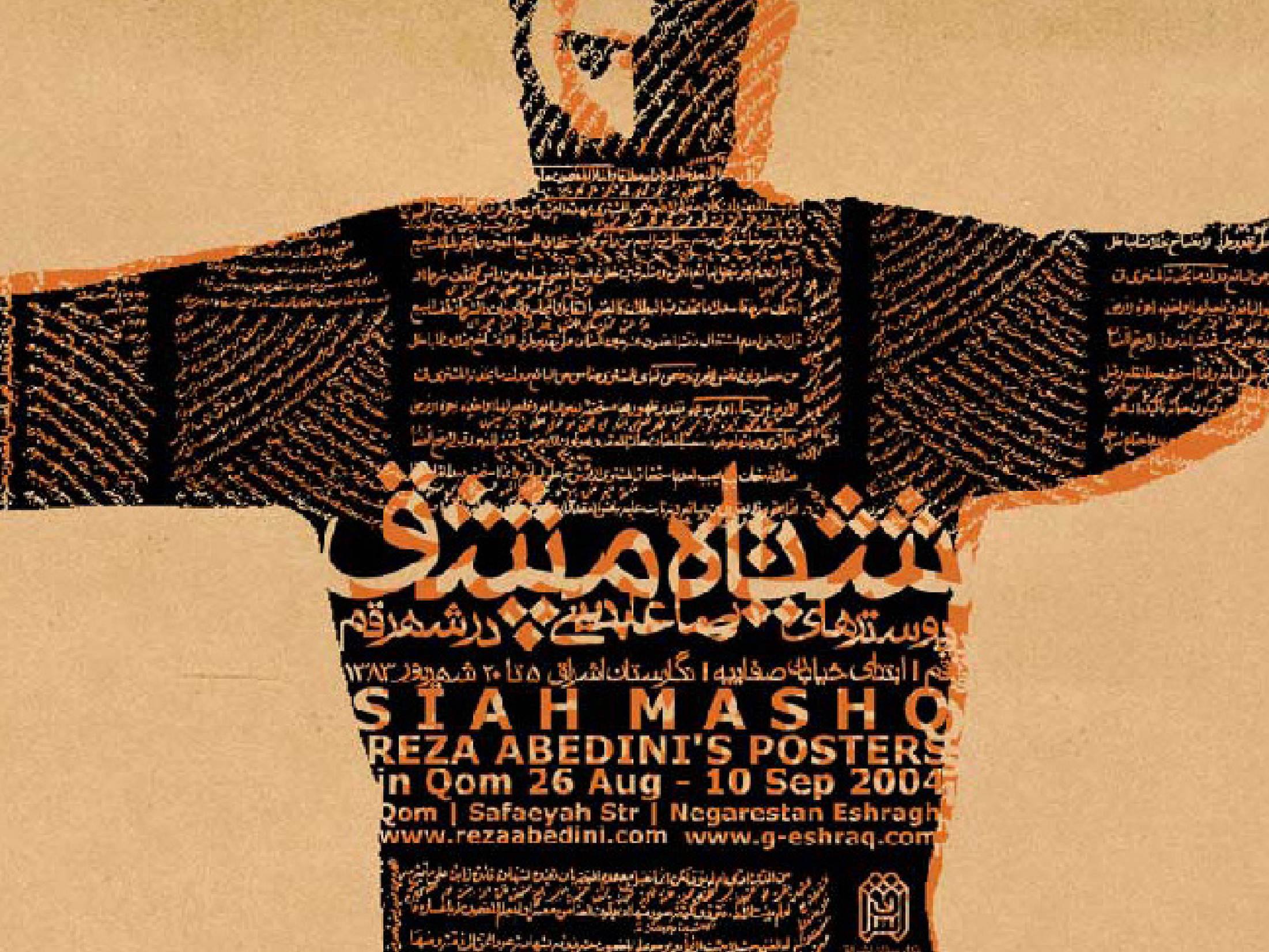
Imagination Throughout Drawing 2002.

Persian type and typography. 2003.

Discovering Reza Abedini

The poster which allowed me to discover Abedini is called 'Persian Type and Typography'. The poster was designed for a lecture at the Iranian Academic Centre, and demonstrates the technique with which Reza merges Persian culture with western design principles. The text that appears inside the silhouette is a mixture of Farsi script and English. Also included in the text are words written in a hybrid of Farsi and English commonly used in Iran for SMS texting and are referred to as 'Pinglish'. The typographic layout of this poster was influenced by an Iranian calligraphic composition written in Arabic, based on different typographic ways to express one's relationship with God.

So from learning the history from the design, it is obvious what Abedini is trying to convey. It seems that with combining Farsi with Western roman lettering, Abedini is linking the differences between the two writing systems. Rather than succumbing to Western design trends, he has succeeded in creating his own unique hybrid style that creates a relationship between Persian and Western type, as well as referencing his own cultural style and heritage. By doing this, his work, which has been recognized so successfully, is opening the eyes of the world to Iranian typography and design.


سیاه مشق
پوسترهای رضا عابدینی در شهر قم
از ۵ تا ۲۰ شهریور ۱۳۸۳ | ابتدای خیابان صفاییه | نگارستان اشراق
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El-Seed

Born to a Tunisian family in France in 1981, EL Seed grew up speaking only the Tunisian dialect, and did not learn to read or write standard Arabic until his teens, when discovered a renewed interest in his Tunisian roots. EL Seed's intricate compositions call not only on the words and their meaning but also on their movement, which ultimately lures the viewer into a different state of mind. Working primarily with subjects that seem contradictory, eL Seed's art reflects the reality of mankind and the world we live in today. eL Seed installed his work on public spaces, galleries and institutions on every continent. From the streets of Paris or New York City, to the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro or the slums of Cape Town. Using Arabic calligraphy, eL Seed paints messages of hope on the sides of buildings. He says the beauty of Arabic script — even if you can't read it — can change negative perceptions of Arab culture.

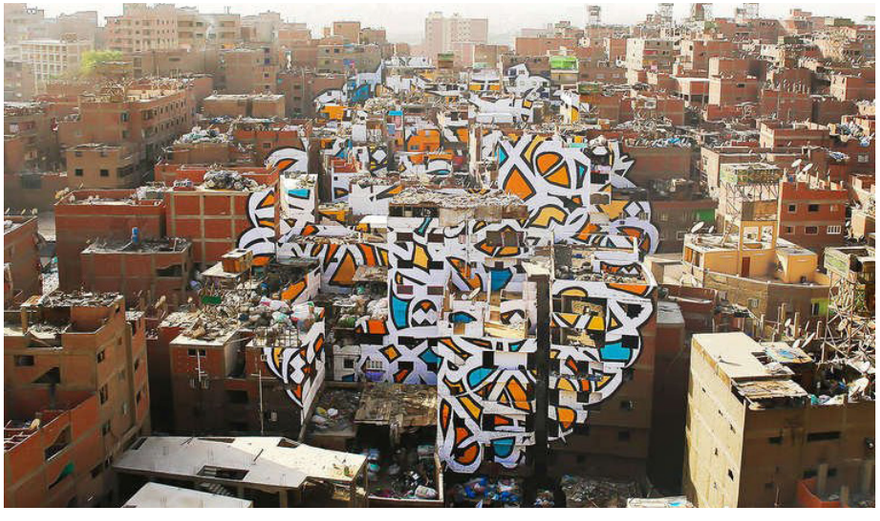
Minaret of mosque in Gabés, 2012.

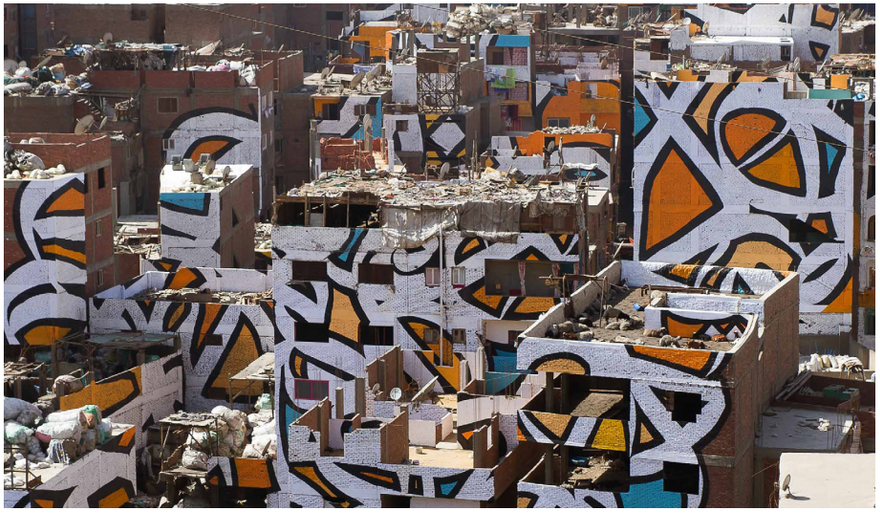
Early Life and Career

Born to a Tunisian family in France in 1981, EL Seed grew up speaking only the Tunisian dialect, and did not learn to read or write standard Arabic until his teens, when discovered a renewed interest in his Tunisian roots.He cites the 2011 Tunisian Revolution as a major factor in the opening of political space to alternate forms of expression. “The revolution pushed people to be more creative because before they were scared – and now they have more freedom”.

He created his first large-scale mural one year after the beginning of the Tunisian revolution, in the city of Kairouan. This mural was a calligraphic representation of passage from a Tunisian poem by Abu al-Qasim al-Husayfi dedicated to those struggling against tyranny and injustice.
His most controversial project was the 2012 painting of a minaret of the Jara Mosque in the southern Tunisian city of Gabes. About the project, el Seed explained, “my goal was to bring people together, which is why I chose these words from the Quran. I like graffiti because it brings art to everyone. I like the fact of democratizing art. I hope it will inspire other people to do crazy projects and not to be scared”. EL Seed’s art has been shown in exhibitions in Berlin, Chicago, Dubai, Paris, and São Paulo, and he has also painted murals on the walls of various cities including Melbourne, London, and Toronto, in addition to various Tunisian cities.

Photographs of Zareeb in Cairo Egypt





Perception, Cairo, Egypt

In his last project 'Perception' eL Seed is questioning the level of judgment and misconception society can unconsciously have upon a community based on their differences.In the neighborhood of Manshiyat Nasr in Cairo, the Coptic community of Zaraeeb collects the trash of the city for decades and developed the most efficient and highly profitable recycling system on a global level. Still, the place is perceived as dirty, marginalized and segregated.

To bring light on this community, with his team and the help of the local community, eL Seed created an anamorphic piece that covers almost 50 buildings only visible from a certain point of the Muqattam Mountain. The piece of art uses the words of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, a Coptic Bishop from the 3rd century, that said: 'Anyone who wants to see the sunlight clearly needs to wipe his eye first.' '

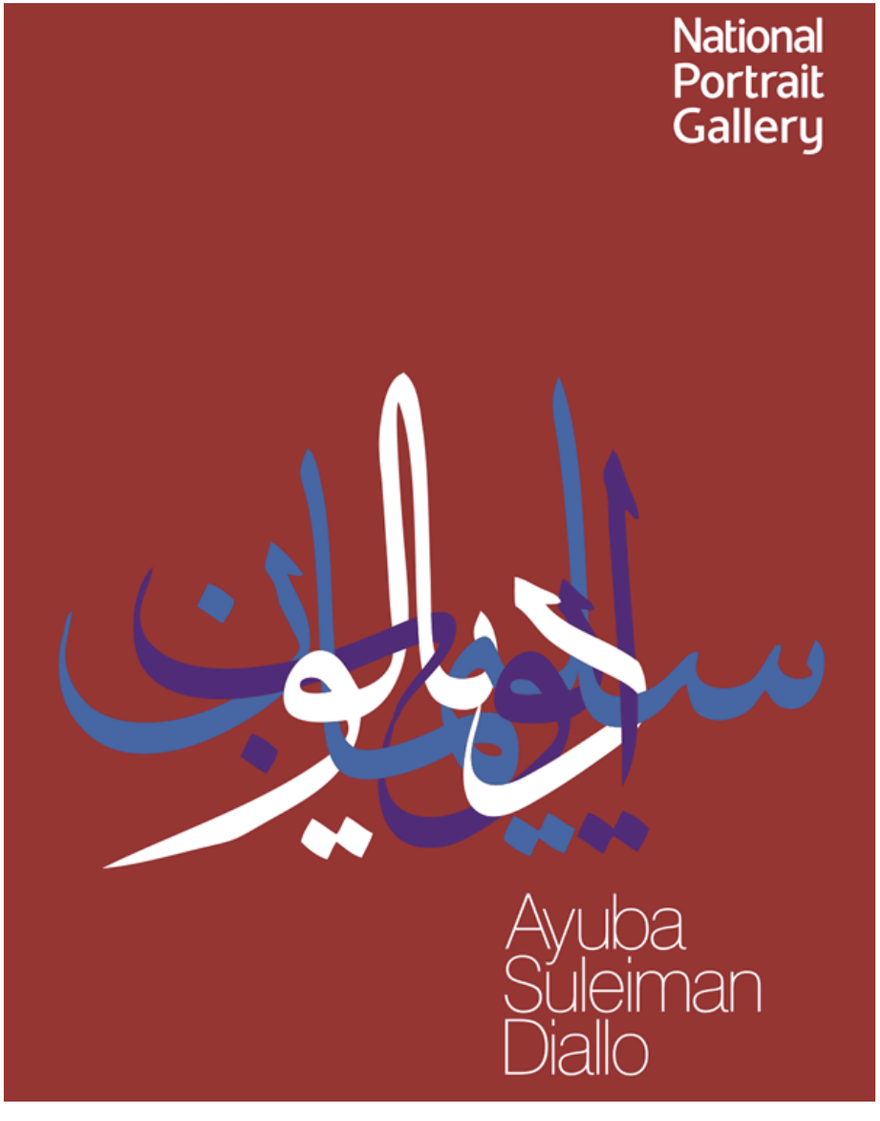
Ruh Al-Alam

Ruh is a London-born British artist and designer who has been continuously evolving his work across multiple disciplines for almost two decades. Although from a fine art background, Ruh studied Graphic Design at the prestigious Central St. Martins College of Art & Design, with a focus on illustration and film. His work has ranged from traditional painting to digital interactive animation videos.

In 2003 he pursued a lifelong dream of learning the traditional art of penmanship, Arabic calligraphy, in Egypt for several years. His study placed him with some of the leading teachers of this age and added a new dimension to his work. He is known for developing his own calligraphic script styles (see Spirit, Jude and LatinArabi) and innovating with Arabic typography (see Kufica, Arabic Didot and Moda). While not all of his work is calligraphic, it plays a significant role in the message he portrays. His passion for calligraphy stems from his love of typography and visual communication.

In early 2000 he founded his own creative agency Make Me Believe, now called Archetype. It has had a successful track record in becoming one of the leading specialist creative studios dealing with Arabic, Middle Eastern and Global Halal markets in the West. Ruh has worked on large and high profile commissions from both local and international projects for Sony, Channel 4, BBC, National Portrait Gallery and luxury brands in the Middle East.He has exhibited in local galleries in the UK and abroad. His most recent exhibition was in Sharjah, UAE. Recent TV appearance has been for the BBC's documentary on 'The Hidden Art of Islam' and BBC Radio's Asia Network.

National Portrait Gallery designed for Ayub Suleiman Diallo exhibition by Ruh Al-alam



National Portrait Gallery Calligraphy Design Project

This project outlines the different and varying styles adopted for the Ayuba Suleiman Diallo touring exhibition commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery. Ruh al Alam went through series of different arabic calligraphy to find the right feel for the National Portrait Gallery. Ruh al Alam went through series of designs as well to really find the right fit overall that would make National Portait Gallery happy with. In this piece we are able to see how beautifully balanced the design is in the use of color and type. As well as the calligraphy that was set in an effortless way. Ruh al-alam is still working on this project and is wanting to create a bigger series of designs.

Ayad Alkhadi

Born and raised in Baghdad, Alkadhi left Iraq for a better future after the first Gulf war. Alkadhi currently lives and works in New York City. Ayad Alkadhi's work employs traditional and stylized forms of Arabic calligraphy as a platform to present current social and political issues of Iraq and the Middle East. These creations are personal and sometimes incorporate his painted image - a reflection of an artist at the crux of East and West polarities. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, Alkadhi spent his childhood between England, the United Arab Emirates and Baghdad. At the age of 23 after the first Gulf War, Alkadhi left Iraq for a better future - first in Amman, Jordan and shortly thereafter in Auckland, New Zealand. He then moved to New York City where he graduated with an MFA from New York University's ITP Tisch School of The Arts. Alkadhi currently lives and works in New York.

Alkadhi, who received his MFA from the New York University's ITP Tisch School of the Arts, exhibited in the Middle East, New Zealand, Europe and the U.S. His most recent exhibits include: the Honolulu Museum of Art in Hawaii; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in North Carolina; University of Michigan Museum of Art; Nevada Museum of Art; Los Angeles Municipal Gallery in Los Angeles; the Queens Museum, the Austrian Cultural forum and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum in New York; the Station Museum in Houston, Texas; the Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah in the UAE.

Get The Picture? (2011)
Charcoal, acrylic and pen on Arabic newspaper on canvas

But, what does it mean?(2011)
Charcoal, acrylic and pen on Arabic newspaper on canvas

Colophon

This book goes through the history of arabic calligraphy and the story behind it. This bookwas created at the Savannah College of Arts and Design in Winter 2019. This book is a Wire-o binding. and was designed by Lynn Maarouf. The typefaces that were used are Garamond and Helvetica Neue. Garamond was designed by the French type designer Claude Garamond. Helvetica Neue was designed by Max Miedinger. Helvetica Neue was founded by Mergenthaler Linotype Company.

Citation

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2. “Arabic Calligraphy – Taking A Closer Look.” Smashing Magazine, 20 Mar. 2014, www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/03/taking-a-closer-look-at-arabic-calligraphy/.

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