ISLAMIC ART, WEST, AND CENTRAL ASIA

630 CE-Present

Art History AP | Studio 213 Schorsch
ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS
Cultural exchanges on a vast scale take place in West Asia.

Essential Knowledge:
- The Silk Road connected distant lands culturally and economically.
- Intercultural exchanges cause a rich diversity of expression combining European, Asian, and Islamic sources.
- Islamic art dominates West Asia and South Europe.
ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS
Islam is the dominant religion in North Africa, West Asia, and Spain.

Essential Knowledge:
- Islam unites a diverse region.
- Islamic architecture includes mosques, tombs, and monuments.
- Islamic art is spread through pilgrimages.
The use of figural art varies in the Islamic tradition.

**Essential Knowledge:**
- Religious art contains no figures, but uses tessellation, calligraphy, and arabesques.
- Figural art flourishes in secular writings in Persia.

*Banner of Las Navas de Tolosa*
Silk tapestry-weave with gilt parchment
Spain
c. 1212–50
ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS
Islamic art specializes in ceramics, book illumination, textiles, and metalwork.

Essential Knowledge:
- Islamic art tends to avoid perspective, be two-dimensional, and have arabesque and geometric designs.
- Ceramics were created for useful and decorative purposes.
- Metalwork was used for sculptures, armor, and utilitarian items.
- Carpets and tapestries are particularly prized examples of Islamic textiles.
- Islamic art excels in manuscript decoration, as we as wall paintings.

The Macy Jug
Composite body glazed, painted fritware and incised
Iran
c. 1215–16
There are a number of beliefs which go beyond the Five Pillars, or which are logically dependent upon the Five Pillars. They include: strict monotheism, continued revelation, submission, community, purity, a day of judgment, angels, belief in God’s scriptures, pre-destination, and resurrection after death.

The Five Pillars of Islamic faith are considered the cornerstones of Islam. These are obligations which are required of every Muslim.

- shahadah (statement of faith)
- salat (prayers)
- zakat (alms)
- sawm (fasting)
- hajj (pilgrimage).
The Qur’an is the main collection of holy scriptures of Islam. All suras (114 chapters total) are supposed to represent material dictated to Muhammad from God through the angel Gabriel. The Qur’an is thus believed to be the direct Word of God and must be obeyed without question.

Islam can be found all over the world. Muslims number around 1 billion people, so naturally there are several nations where Muslims are a majority. Islam has played a critical role in shaping the culture and politics.
Figurative art is excluded from the decoration of religious monuments. This absence may be attributed to an Islamic antipathy toward anything that might be mistaken for idols or idolatry, which are explicitly forbidden by the Qur’an.
PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC LIFE

Calligraphy is the most important and pervasive element in Islamic art. It has always been considered the noblest form of art because of its association with the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book, which is written in Arabic.

This preoccupation with beautiful writing extended to all arts—including secular manuscripts; inscriptions on palaces; and those applied to metalwork, pottery, stone, glass, wood, and textiles—and to non-Arabic-speaking peoples within the Islamic commonwealth.
Islamic art is perhaps the most accessible manifestation of a complex civilization that often seems enigmatic to outsiders. Through its brilliant use of color and its superb balance between design and form, Islamic art creates an immediate visual impact. Its strong aesthetic appeal transcends distances in time and space, as well as differences in language, culture, and creed.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- The Prophet Muhammad’s powerful religious message resonated deeply with Arabs in the 7th century.
- By the end of the Umayyad Dynasty in 750 CE, North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Spain, India, and Central Asia were converted to Islam or under control of Islamic dynasties.
- Expansion occurred under the Abbasid Caliphate who expanded their rule and establish Baghdad as the capital.
- In 1258 the Islamic world split into 2 great cultural divisions:
  - East: South and Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey
  - West: Near East, the Arabic peninsula, North Africa, parts of Sicily and Spain
- Exists now in 2 principle divisions: Shiite and Sunni
Islamic art features 3 types of patterns- arabesques, calligraphy, and tessellation- used on everything from monuments to everyday items.

- Acanthus and spli leaves
-Scrolling vines, spirals, wheels, and Zigzags

Calligraphy is highly specialized:

- Kufic: highly distinguished and reserved for official texts
The Kaaba
Islamic: Pre-Islamic Monument
Mecca, Saudi Arabia
Granite masonry, covered with silk curtain and calligraphy
in gold and silver-wrapped thread
631–632 C.E

Video Resource: Inside Mecca
Dome of the Rock
Islamic, Umayyad
Jerusalem, Palestine
Stone masonry and wooden roof decorated with glazed ceramic tile, mosaics, and gilt aluminum and bronze dome
691–692 C.E., with multiple renovations
Great Mosque (Masjid-e Jameh)

Islamic

Isfahan, Iran

Stone, brick, wood, plaster, and glazed ceramic tile

C. 700 C.E restorations in the 14th, 18th, and 20th centuries C.E

Video Resource: Islamic Architecture of the Isfahan Mosque
Courtyard, Masjid-e Jameh, Isfahan Iran
11th–18th century 14th-century iwan vault, 17th-century minarets
Great Mosque at Cordoba (La Mezquita)
Islamic Spain, Moorish
Cordoba, Spain
Stone
8-10th Century CE
Video Resource: Mosque of Córdoba, Spain | A Walk to the Mezquita's Mihrab
Great Mosque; Cordoba, Spain Umayyad
Alhambra Palace
Islamic Nasrid Dynasty
Granada, Spain
Whitewashed adobe stucco, wood, tile, paint, and gilding
1354–1391 C.E.
The Alhambra
Granada, Spain; Nasrid Dynasty
1354–91 CE
Muqarnas Dome, Hall of the Abencerrajes
Whitewashed adobe stucco, wood, tile, paint, and gilding
The Alhambra
Granada, Spain; Nasrid Dynasty
The Court of the Lions
Whitewashed adobe stucco, wood, tile, paint, and gilding
1354–91 CE
The Alhambra
Granada, Spain; Nasrid Dynasty
The Court of the Lions
Whitewashed adobe stucco, wood, tile, paint, and gilding
1354–91 CE
Mosque of Selim II
Islamic: Edirne, Turkey
Sinan (Architect)
Brick and Stone
1568-1575 CE
Taj Mahal
Ustad Ahmad Lahori, Architect of the Emperor Agra
Uttar Pradesh, India
Stone masonry and marble with inlay of precious and semiprecious stones; gardens.
1632–1653 C.E

Secrets of the Taj Mahal
Pyxis of al-Mughira
Umayyad
Islamic Spain
Ivory
c. 968 C.E
Basin (Baptistère de St. Louis)
Muhammad ibn al-Zain
Egypt or Syria
Brass inlaid with gold and silver
c. 1320–1340 C.E.
Folio from a Qur’an
Arab
North Africa
Ink, color, and gold on parchment
c. 8th to 9th century C.E
Page from the Qur'an (Surah II: 286 and Title Surah III) in kufic script
Black ink pigments, and gold on vellum
9th century

By Shazi
Pen Box
Brass with inlaid silver, copper, and black organic material
1210–11
Attributed to Galinus
Arabic manuscript page
1199
Iraq

Qur'an frontispiece (right half of two-page spread)
Ink, pigments, and gold on paper
C. 1368
Cairo, Egypt
Illuminated *Tugra* of Sultan Suleyman
Ink, paint, and gold on paper
Istanbul, Turkey
c. 1555–60
The Ardabil Carpet
Iran
Maqsud of Kashan
Silk and wool
1539–1540 C.E.
Bahram Gur Fights the Karg
Islamic; Persian
Persia (present-day Iran)
Ink and opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper
c. 1330–1340 C.E
The Court of Gayumars
Islamic
Tabriz, Iran
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper
C. 1522–1525 C.E