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ISLAMIC ART

Working With Pattern

SCHOLASTIC
ART



COVER: Detail of a Muqarna or arch in a Mosque, Isfahan; ©Corbis.

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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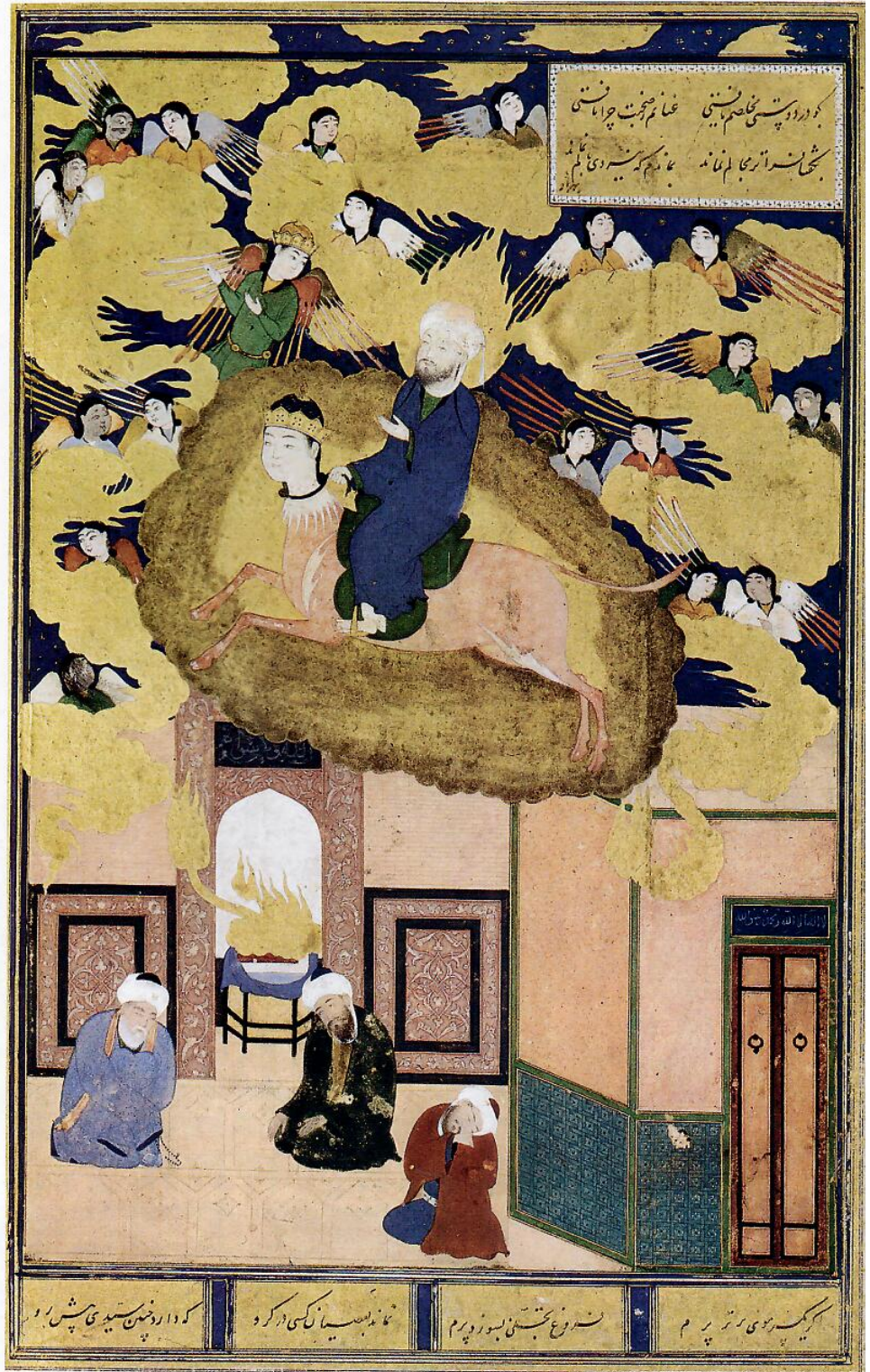
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HEAVEN ON



EARTH

**“Allah is beautiful
and he loves beauty.”
—Prophet Muhammad**

Not a day goes by that we don't hear words such as Islam and Islamic, Muslim, Muhammad, Koran. But do you know what these terms mean?

In Arabic, the word *Islam* means “surrender to the will of God.” Islam is not only a religion, but a whole way of life. Nearly every work of art a traditional *Muslim* (follower of Islam) artist creates is an example of *Islamic* beliefs. For the Muslim, everything that happens in life, large or small, is interconnected because it is part of the overall plan of *Allah* (Arabic for God). Traditional Muslim artists do not make art to express themselves, but to explain and celebrate this all-encompassing plan.

The manuscript painting (left) depicts one version of the way the Islamic faith began. The founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, was born in Mecca, Arabia around 570 A.D. Here, Muhammad rides



▲ Islam began in what is now Saudi Arabia and quickly spread to Asia, Africa, and Europe. Today, one of every four people in the world is Muslim.

toward heaven to receive Allah's message.

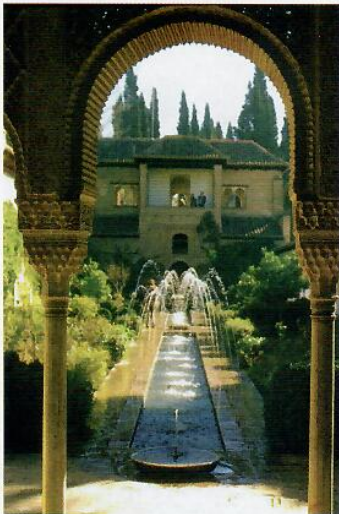
Sacred messages such as this one were later written down and collected to make up the Islamic holy book, the *Koran*. Calligraphy is considered an art form in itself since it expresses the word of Allah. Most Islamic art contains some type of calligraphy.

In the **abstracted patterns** that make up this painting, every detail is important. The **flat, geometric shapes** of the real world below contrast with the **organic curves** and brilliant blues and golds in heaven above. The **repetition** and **variation** of the pattern formed by the angels surrounds and **frames** the work's focal point, the Prophet Muhammad.

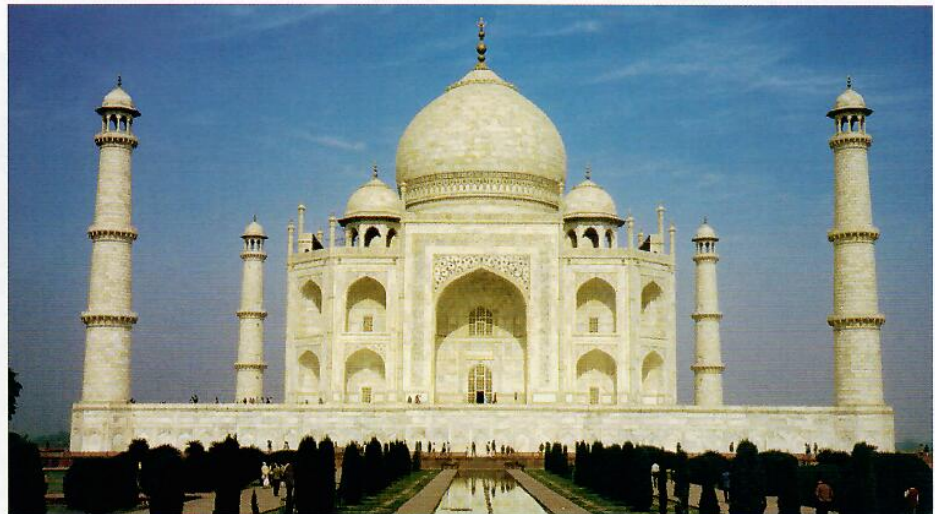
Over the years, Muhammad's followers spread the message of Islam from Arabia to Spain (bottom left) in the West, and India (bottom right), China, and Indonesia in the East. Muhammad's birthplace, the city of Mecca, became the spiritual and geographical center of Islam. It is believed by some that the Prophet Muhammad himself did not consider Islam to be a new religion. He thought of it as a continuation of the same basic message revealed by God to other prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus) before him.

◀ **The Prophet Muhammad, founder of the Islamic faith, is the subject of this 16th century manuscript painting.**

The Night Journey of Muhammad on His Steed, Buraq; Leaf from a copy of the Bustan of Saadi, dated 1514. Painter: Unknown; Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur, Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Colors, ink, and gold on paper; 7 1/2 x 5 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Louis V. Bell Fund and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1974.



▲ **Some typical Islamic architectural features—arches, columns, gardens, fountains, and courtyards—appear in this 14th century Spanish palace, The Alhambra.**



▲ **The perfect symmetry of the dome, arches, and minarets of the 17th-century Indian tomb the Taj Mahal, make it among the most beautiful Islamic buildings in the world.**

©Howard Davis/GreatBuildings.com

©Howard Davis/GreatBuildings.com.

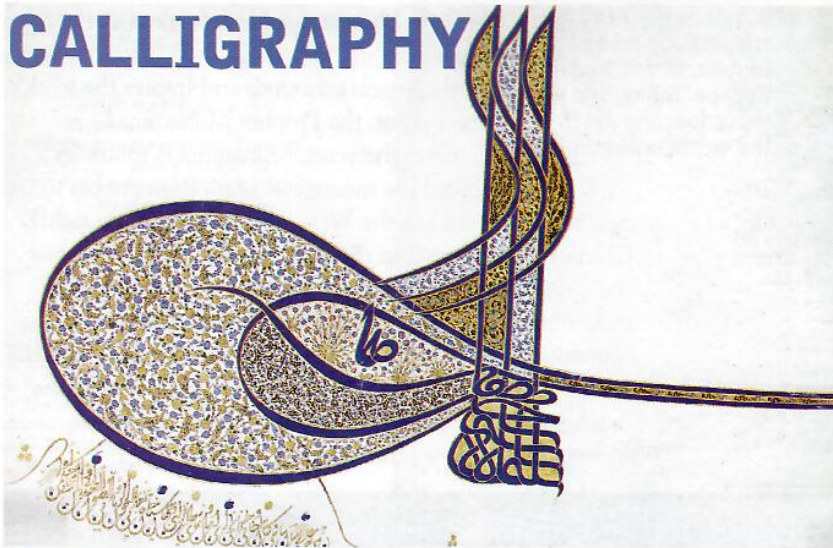
EVERYTHING IS

For the Muslim artist, reality begins with and centers around Allah. Allah is ever present, so every aspect of daily life is considered to be art—furniture, rugs, dishes, fabrics. Since only Allah can create life, the artist does not try to imitate nature but concentrates instead on conveying what nature represents. So, almost all Islamic art is made up of complex abstract patterns that create a sense of unending repetition—another reminder that Allah’s world is infinite.

There are three main types of Islamic patterns. For Muslims, geometry reflects the language of the universe and all **geometric patterns** are developed within a circle, the symbol of unity. **Plantlike patterns** reflect appreciation for Allah’s creations. The message of Islam was spread through Arabic writing, so **calligraphy** may be the most important Islamic pattern of all.

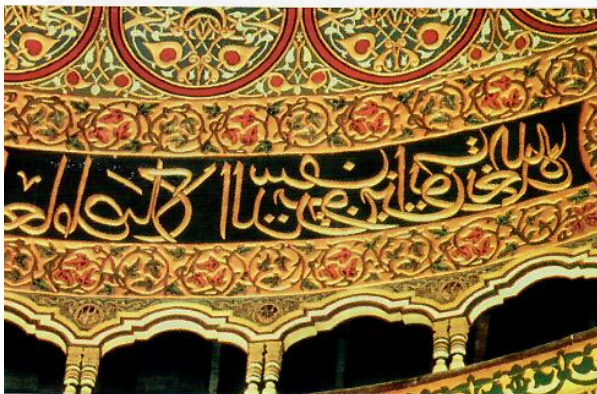
PLANTLIKE

CALLIGRAPHY



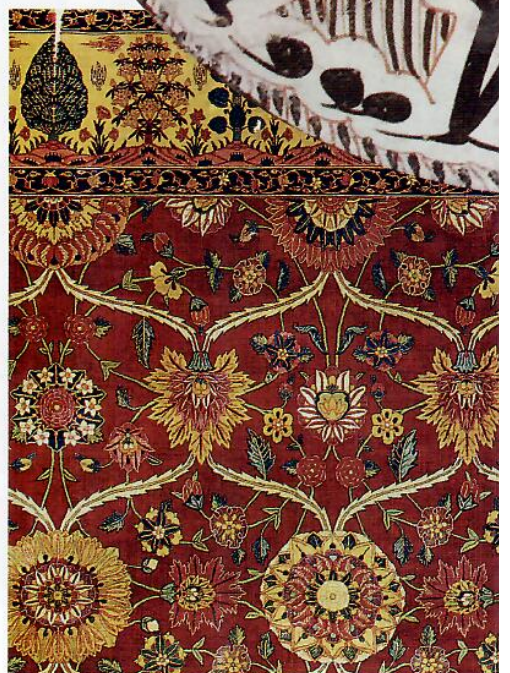
▲ This 16th-century signature is also a symbol of the sultan’s authority. Used on official documents, it is made up of three vertical lines and two concentric ovals. The radial repeat patterns of flowers within the ovals balance and contrast with the linear pattern of circles and dots below.

Tughra (Imperial Cipher) of Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), ca. 1555. Ink, colors, and gold on paper; 20 1/2 x 25 3/8 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1938.



◀ Calligraphy is often used in architecture, especially in mosques (Islamic houses of worship). Curving, overlapping lines make up this verse from the Koran. The plain, dark-blue background behind the lettering stands out against the gold and red rotating, repeat patterns that surround it.

Dome of the Rock, 692 A.D., Jerusalem. ©Marvin Newman/Woodfin Camp.



ART

“Geometry connects the material and the spiritual worlds.” —the Koran

PATTERNS



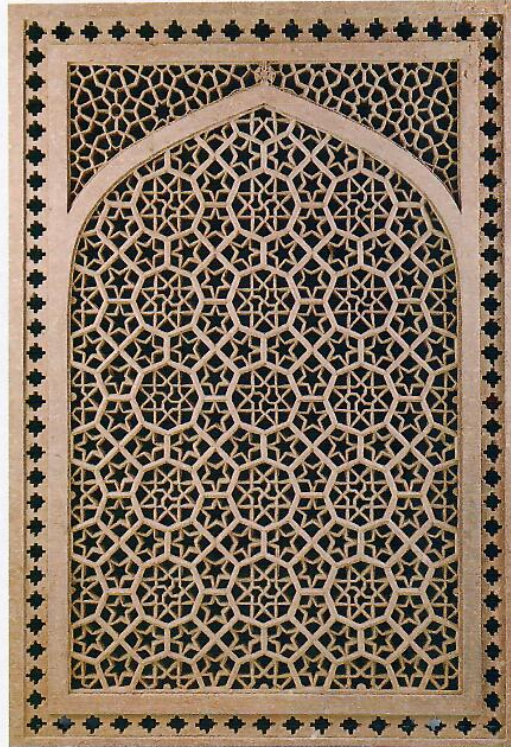
◀ Often, several Islamic art forms are combined. In this Iranian clay bowl, bold, angular calligraphic lines surround the delicate, circular plantlike design in the center. The text reads, “blessings, happiness, prosperity, health, and success.” The center features symmetrical, overlapping plantlike designs which are set against a stippled background.

Bowl, ca. 10th century; probably Iran; Earthenware; diam. of top 14 in. diam. of base 6 1/8 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1939.

◀ This Indian carpet features highly realistic flower images that have been flattened and arranged to make up a stylized, repeated and varied pattern. The linear vines connect the shapes and form interlaced outlines.

Carpet, fragments, ca. 1650; Attributed to Kashmir or Lahore, Pakistan Silk, pashmina wool; asymmetrically knotted pile; H. 55.25 x W. 155.75 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913.

GEOMETRIC PATTERNS



◀ Indian screens like this one are used as windows, room dividers, or railings. Positive lines balance negative spaces to produce a variety of geometric patterns. Eight-sided stars expand into circles which then become larger circles with a five-sided star inside each segment. These larger units interlock, meaning that part of each unit can also be read as part of the unit next to it.

Jali screen (one of a pair), second half of 16th century; India. Carved red sandstone; H. 73 1/4 in. W. 51 3/16 in. Th. 3 9/16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1993.

▶ This Syrian tile contains all the basic Islamic geometric shapes. Growing from a circular plantlike design in the center are encapsulated (shapes within shapes) hexagons, triangles, and trapezoids. All these shapes combine to make up a six-sided star.

M.2002.1.118. Unknown artist. Tile, Syria or Egypt, fifteenth century. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Madina Collection of Islamic Art. Gift of Camilla Chandler Frost. Photograph ©2005 Museum Associates/LACMA



SACRED SPACES

Mosques are not only centers of the Islamic faith. They can also be works of art.

Churches, temples, and synagogues are some of the places that serve as centers of worship in the West. In the Islamic world, religious life centers around a building called a *mosque*. In Islam's early years, the house lived in by the Prophet Muhammad was used as the first mosque. The call to prayer (devout Muslims pray five times a day) was given from the roof of the house. This feature later developed into towers called *minarets* (opposite page, bottom left). Sometime later, a high dome was added.

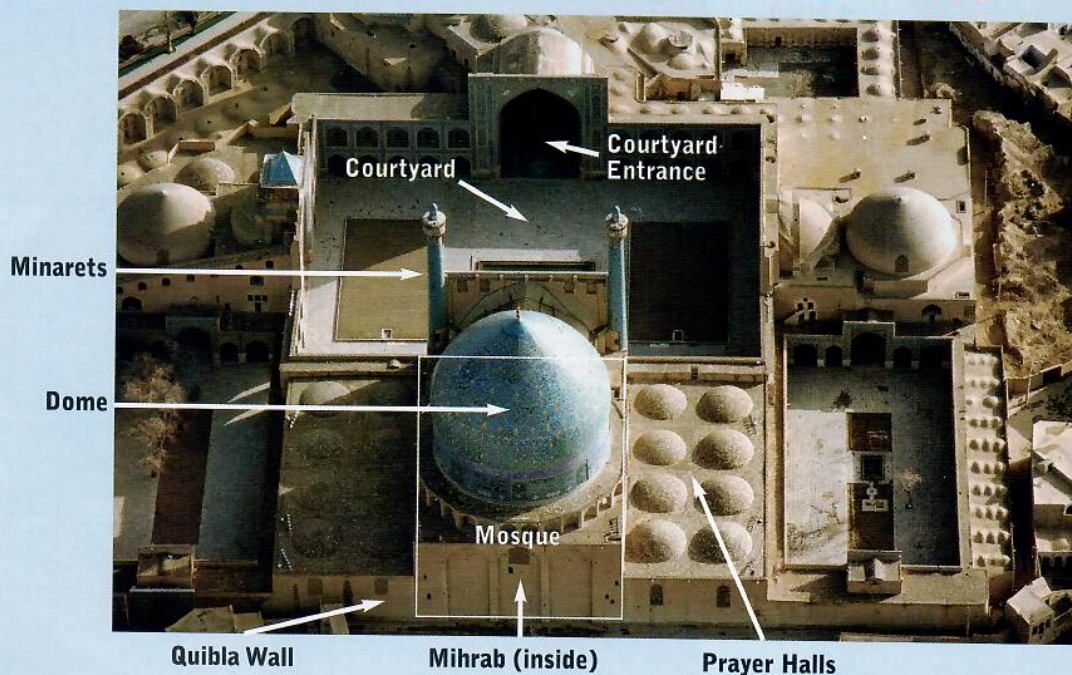
The dome (opposite page, top) of the Mosque of the Shah, in Iran, is decorated with patterns that turn endlessly upon themselves, inviting worshippers to come inside. The main entrance is a large, **recessed**, arched portal set between two tall minarets (opposite page, center right). The small door in the portal leads into a courtyard. Between two more minarets is another entrance that goes into the rectangular mosque located beneath the dome.

Intricate as the exterior of the Mosque of the Shah is, the interior is even more elaborate. Blue, gold, and white patterns decorate the glazed tiles (see cover photo) which decorate the walls, niches, ceilings, and floors. Opposite the

entrance is the *qibla* wall, the side of the mosque that faces toward Mecca. Worshippers sit in rows facing this wall which contains two recessed spaces. The space in the corner, the *minbar*, serves as a pulpit where the Friday sermon is given. If the mosque has any **focal point**, it could be considered the other recessed space, called the *mihrab* (opposite page, bottom right), which marks the spot where the Prophet Muhammad led the first prayer service. The importance of this space is emphasized by the fact that from it **radiate** a series of pointed, honeycomblike niches that grow larger as they rise to the dome above. In each niche are **symmetrical, repeat floral patterns** that also change scale as they get closer to the ceiling.

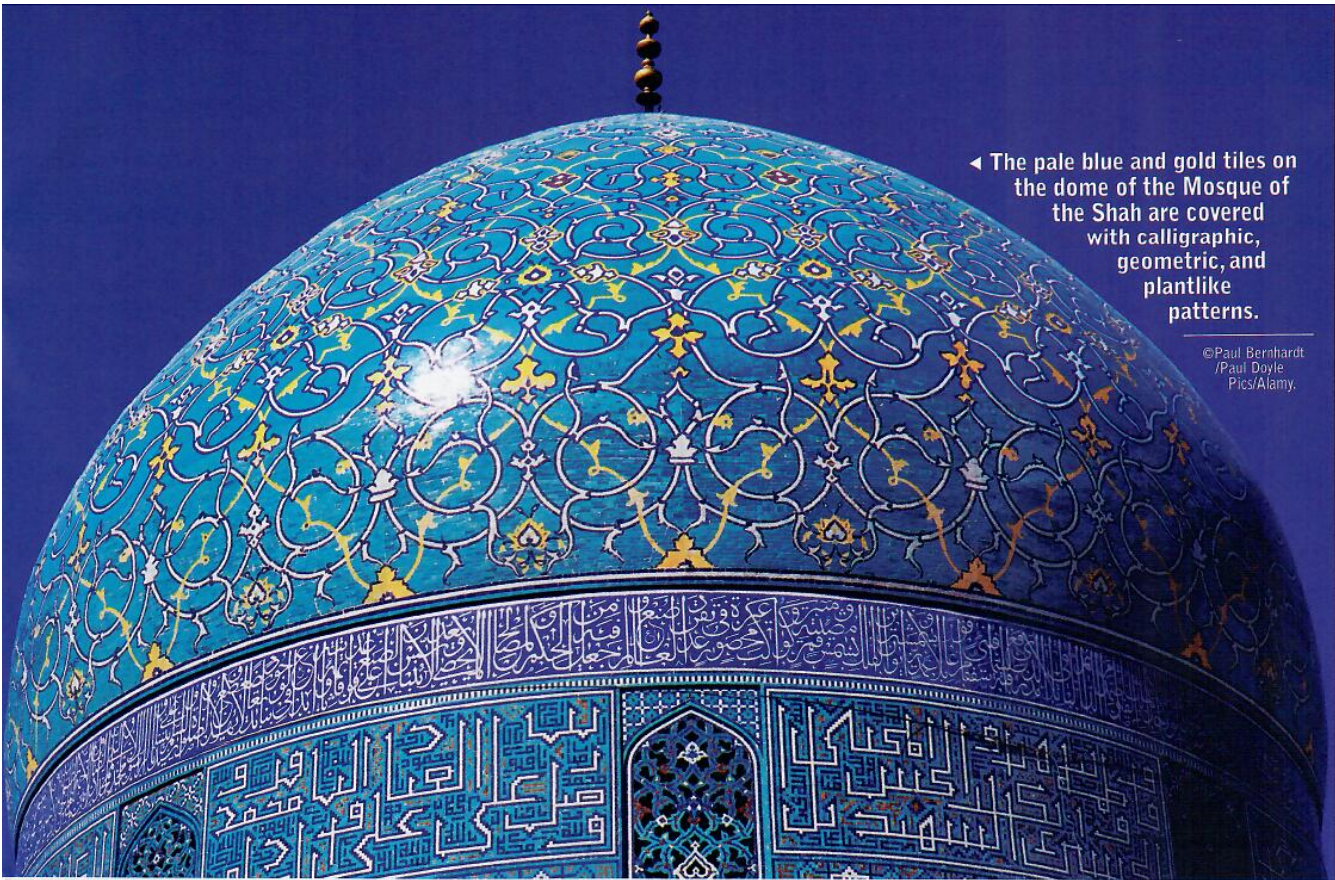
Throughout the mosque, the relentless geometric, calligraphic, and **plantlike** patterns on all sides hide the actual physical structure of the building. The patterns radiating from the center of the dome seem to explode outward, leading the viewer's eye visually beyond its circular edge. Being surrounded by all these endless patterns keeps the worshipper's attention from straying. In a mosque, the focus is always on prayer and the contemplation of eternity.

MOSQUE OF THE SHAH



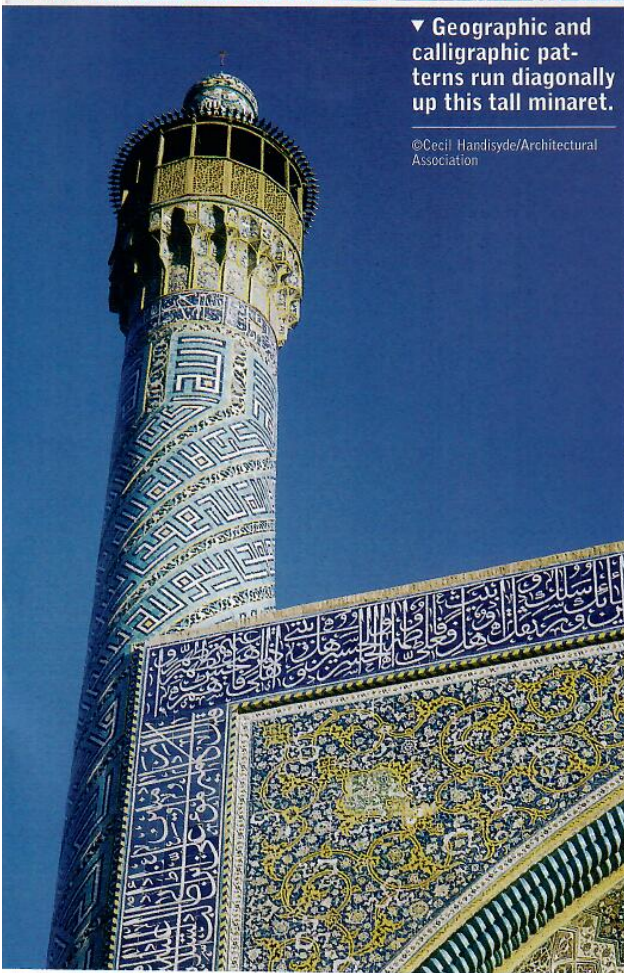
◀ At the heart of this complex in Iran, filled with religious colleges and prayer halls, is the Mosque of the Shah (the building in the center indicated by a white box).

©George Gerster/Photo Researchers, Inc.



◀ The pale blue and gold tiles on the dome of the Mosque of the Shah are covered with calligraphic, geometric, and plantlike patterns.

©Paul Bernhardt /Paul Doyle Pics/Alamy.



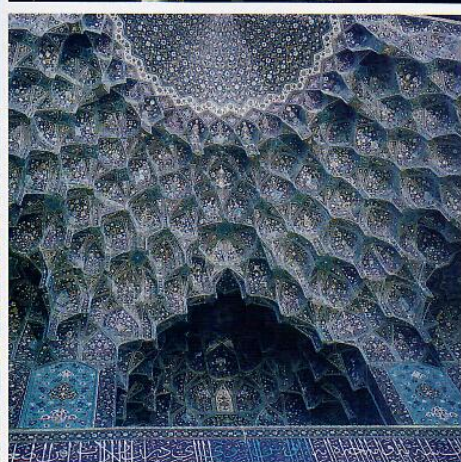
▼ Geographic and calligraphic patterns run diagonally up this tall minaret.

©Cecil Handisyde/Architectural Association



▲ The main entrance (above left) faces the street. The mosque (in back) is set at an angle so the quibla wall points toward Mecca.

© Roger Wood/CORBIS.



◀ Above the quibla wall—in a pattern of honey-comblike niches—is the mihrab, a deep symbolic, recessed space found in all mosques.

©Cecil Handisyde/Architectural Association.

SCHOLASTIC

ART

MASTERPIECE
OF THE MONTH #3

“Decoration transforms the material from which the mosque is constructed in the same way that religion transforms the base matter of mankind.”

—Sheikh
Lotfollah Mosque

The Blue Mosque, Istanbul.
© José Fuste Raga/zefa/CORBIS.

SCHOLASTIC ART 8-9
DECEMBER 2005/JANUARY 2006



THE BLUE MOSQUE

Istanbul, Turkey



UPDATING ANCIENT PATTERNS

Many contemporary Muslim artists reinterpret Islamic traditions

"I WANT TO CELEBRATE WOMEN'S CAPACITY TO OVERCOME."

—SHIRIN NESHAT

PATTERNS OF PROTEST

The art of contemporary Iranian Shirin Neshat, who now lives in New York City, questions the role of women in some Islamic cultures. In her photographs and films, Neshat uses the *chador*—the black head-to-toe covering that must be worn by Islamic women—as a symbol of female identity and rebellion.

This photo (right) is part of a series called *Women of Allah*. Arabic calligraphy, made up of texts written by Iranian feminists, is an important part of the image. The **radial pattern** formed by the Arabic characters brings the viewer's attention to the work's **focal point**—the woman's eyes, the only part of her body that is visible to the outside world.



► Shirin Neshat, b. 1957, *I Am Its Secret*, 1993. RC print & ink (photo taken by Plauto), 49 1/2 x 33 3/4 in. Framed edition of 3 + 1 AP © Shirin Neshat, 1993, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York.

“I AM INTERESTED IN AN ART FORM WHOSE PRESENT IS OF THE PAST.” —SHAHZIA SIKANDER

REINVENTING TRADITIONAL PATTERNS

Many contemporary Muslim artists adapt traditional Islamic styles and materials to produce their art. Pakistani-born painter Shahzia Sikander (Shah-ZEE-ah See-KAN-der) creates updated versions of early manuscript paintings. The artist works with traditional squirrel-hair brushes and hand-made vegetable pigments. Her creative use of another material, tea, refers to family life in Pakistan, where tea is always made by women.

The carefully composed, tightly detailed manuscript painting on page 2 tells a religious story. But Sikander's loosely painted work, *Ready to Leave?* (left), is filled with personal imagery. The painting's focal point is the traditionally dressed Islamic woman in the center, her face hidden by a blue circle. The veiled black griffin (part eagle, part lion) suggests the artist's theme of dual identity. The traditional geometric shapes at the bottom—patterns of overlapping, juxtaposed, concentric circles and encapsulated angles—contrast with the modern, almost cartoon-like drawings of laundry on a clothesline at the top of the painting.

▲ Shahzia Sikander, *Ready to Leave?*, 1997. Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, tea wash, xerox on wasli paper; 9 3/4 x 7 1/2 inches, Courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



“WHILE MY WORK SHOULD BE READ FOR MEANING, THE MAIN SUBJECT IS THE FORM OF THE LETTER ITSELF!” —ALI OMAR ERMES

CALLIGRAPHIC PATTERNS

Since calligraphy is so important in Islamic cultures, many Muslim artists base their work on calligraphic forms. One of the most recognized of these artists is Libyan-born Ali Omar Ermes. The bold, dark marks in the painting (right) form the Arabic word for peace. But the curved and straight, thick and thin, linked and separate lines also create a visually pleasing abstract pattern. Framing the main image are other elaborately curving phrases that comment on the concept of peace. The placement of the words on the page and the negative spaces in between are just as important as the positive letter shapes.



▲ Ali Omar Ermes *Salaam (Peace)*, 1993, Acrylic and Ink on Paper. For more information, please email: info@allomatermes.co.uk. © Copyright 2005 Ali Omar Ermes. All Rights Reserved.

PATTERNS IN GLASS

When Logan Lenker created this award-winning glass plate, he did what he normally does when he makes art. “I zoned out what was going on around me and got really focused,” he says. Logan, then a senior at Mount Vernon (Illinois) Township High School, studied a box full of scrap glass and carefully picked out the right colors. He positioned the glass squares so the colors would complement each other and create a sparkling, mosaic-like effect. “Working with glass isn’t easy,” he explains. “Since this was my first try, it was exciting to see how it turned out.”

Logan is currently pursuing a business degree with an art minor at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. He hopes to work as a corporate marketer someday. “Marketing appeals to me because you get to use your artistic skills making ads and billboards,” Logan says. “Art has always been a natural fit for me. I love bringing my ideas to life.”

How did you first get involved in art?

I’ve been doodling ever since I was a little kid. As I took more-serious classes in high school, my drawing skills improved.

How did you come to do this art-award-winning piece?

Actually, it was a birthday gift from my aunt. She took me to her glass-making class and let me make a piece. I wanted the plate to be a square so it would mirror the square patches of colors on the plate. I picked out this mold because I liked how the edges curved up.

Where did you get your idea?

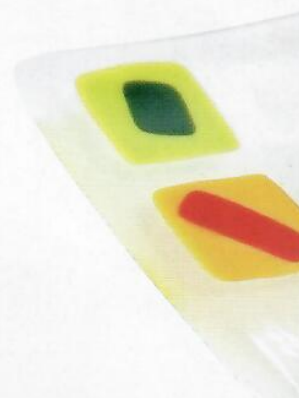
Before I took the class, I was looking at a magazine that had a cool plate with a mosaic design on it. I liked the symmetrical pattern and I loved the colors. They were really bright and seemed to pop from the plate. I knew I wanted to create something like that that would catch people’s eyes.

How did you come up with the pattern?

I knew I wanted to work in bright colors. To get them to pop out, I chose a clear piece of glass for the background. I wanted the plate to be symmetrical, with different color repeat patterns. I started with bright-green squares in the corners, with smaller blue squares inside them. I did the outside row, then the next one until I worked my way to the middle. To create a focus in the center, I used three colors to make a large square. Without realizing it, I reversed the green and blue from the corner squares. I liked how that tied the pattern together from the center to the outer edges.

How did you go about creating this piece?

I used a process called glass fusing, which means you’re using heat from a kiln to melt the glass pieces together into one piece. I chose a mold and picked out a flat piece of clear glass. Using a scoring tool, I cut a scratch along each edge to make the glass fit the mold. I snapped away the excess glass on the scored lines. Then



LOGAN LENKER

“To create a focus in the center, I used three colors to make a large square. Without realizing it, I reversed the green and blue from the corner squares. I liked how that tied the pattern together from the center to the outer edges.”



I started to decorate the dish with squares of scrap glass. I scored each scrap to the size I was after, and developed a symmetrical pattern leaving clear spaces to balance the positive shapes.

Then what did you do?

I took the color squares, placed them where I wanted them, and glued each square onto the glass with a special glass glue. I left approximately a quarter inch between squares. After I finished gluing, I placed the dish in the mold, putting a piece of clear glass underneath to keep the dish from breaking. Then I put the mold in the kiln for 24 hours. When the kiln process was over, the teacher removed the plate and sandblasted it to give the clear glass a hazy look.

What was the biggest challenge for you in creating this piece?

Being patient. Working with glass is tricky; I got cut four or five times. Also, I was working with available resources. Sometimes I couldn't find the color of glass I was looking for in the scrap box. Instead of getting

upset, I just kept searching and changing my design to make what I had available work.

Were you satisfied when you were done?

I was really excited. It was my very first time making a glass dish. Usually they don't turn out so well if you're a beginner.

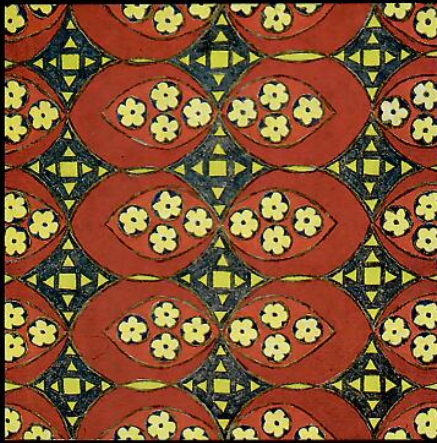
What advice do you have for other young artists like yourself?

If you struggle creating a piece of art, don't let it get you down. Keep with it and try to be patient. Although I struggled making this because it was my first time, I've grown to like the glass fusing process a lot. Since this plate, I've made some glass jewelry. Whatever art you're working on, try your best to accomplish your goal. You might be surprised at how well it all turns out.

To find out more about The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, ask your teacher to write to The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, Inc., 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999, phone 212-343-6892, or go to www.scholastic.com/artandwriting.

Logan Lentner, b. 1965, Mosaic glass plate.

NORA K. BESWICK



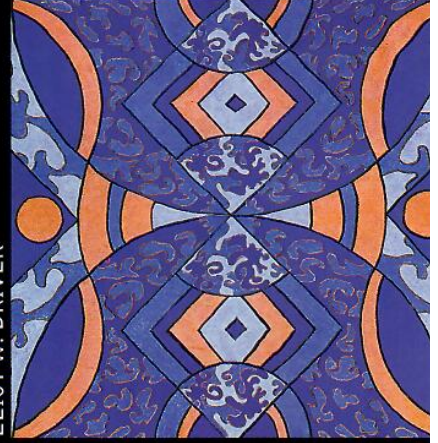
Nora's **symmetrical, overall, repeat pattern** is clearly based on a grid. **Geometric shapes**—squares, triangles, and **encapsulated** (one inside the other) ovals—contrast with **organic** (curved) flower shapes. The repetition of the identical units is supported by the calmness of the **related** (red, orange, yellow) color scheme.

KATELYN J. SEDIG



Geometric shapes—circles, triangles, hexagons, stars, and diamonds—dominate Katelyn's design. Each of the outer star shapes is made up of **overlapping diamonds**. **Organic** leaf shapes are woven around the inner star shapes and **frame** the large center circle.

ELIOT W. DRIVER



Eliot's composition is made up of **mirror images** that can be endlessly repeated. The top mirrors the bottom; the two sides mirror each other. Circles, **encapsulated semicircles**, and diamonds alternate with **negative spaces** filled with **organic** plantlike forms. The **complimentary** (opposites orange and blue) colors increase the design's feeling of activity.

SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

CREATING ENDLESS PAT

Design an abstract pattern that seems to go on forever

MATERIALS

- 18 x 24 in. 150 2-ply white tag board
- 18 x 24 in. 30 lb. newsprint
- 12 x 18 in. vellum tracing paper
- 3-H school pencil
- Vinyl eraser
- Graph paper (optional)
- 12 in. ruler
- Compass
- Templates (circle, square, ellipse, oval)
- Protractors
- French curves
- Prisma-colors or colored pencils
- Masking tape
- Temporary tape
- X-Acto knife
- 18 x 24 in. black construction paper
- Scissors

As you've seen in this issue, pattern is a vital part of Islamic art. Islamic patterns are used to decorate objects as small as a single tile and as large as a vast mosque. These patterns are made up of abstract forms, repeated and arranged to suggest infinity.

In this workshop, you'll create a complex, abstract pattern that appears to go on forever and flow endlessly outward. Your design should combine geometric and organic plantlike shapes.

STEP 1 Begin by dividing an 18 x 24 in. sheet of newsprint into a 3-in. square grid. Mark off a 12 x 12-in. square in the center and divide this grid diagonally. Your design will be created inside the 12 x 12-in. grid. The grid outside the central square will be used for shapes that extend beyond the design's edges. Compasses, French curves, and protractors can also be anchored in this area. Your design should be flat, all shapes must be closed. Geometric shapes work best: circles, squares, rectangles, octagons, almond shapes, triangles, diamonds, hexagons, stars, half-circles, and spirals. Begin in the center; repeat outward. Work from large and simple to small and complex.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison Junior High School, Morrison, IL • Assisted by Andrea D. Beveroth, Art Instructor, Buffalo Elementary, Buffalo, IA; Nicholas R. Bonneur, Art Instructor, Walter Reed Elementary, Chicago, IL; Charles Dubnick, Painter, Glendale Heights, IL; Joshua Gunderlock, Art Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL; Stuart Roddy, Art Instructor, Morrison High School. • Photos by Larry Gregory and Wade Duerkes, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL.

EITAK V. BUNT



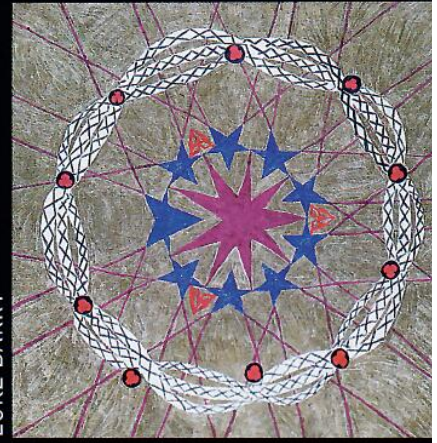
Triangular shapes appear to **rotate** around a **central axis** in Eitak's design. The same **organic** and **geometric** arrangement has been placed on a **diagonal**, then **repeated** four times. Complex patterns made up of thin, curling red lines contrast with large, solid yellow and green shapes.

STEVEN S. KARVELIUS



The **focal point** of Steven's design, the blue star in the center, is an **interlocking shape** (each point functions not only as part of the star, but as part of the circle beside it). The circular shapes are **repeated** and **varied** in an **ever-expanding** pattern that appears to extend beyond the frame.

LUKE BARRY



A circular white, ropelike line, broken up by small red dots, **frames** a circular group of stars **revolving** around the center of Luke's composition. From the points of each star, thin, straight red lines **radiate** and **crisscross**, seeming to move right out of the picture.

TERNS

STEP 2

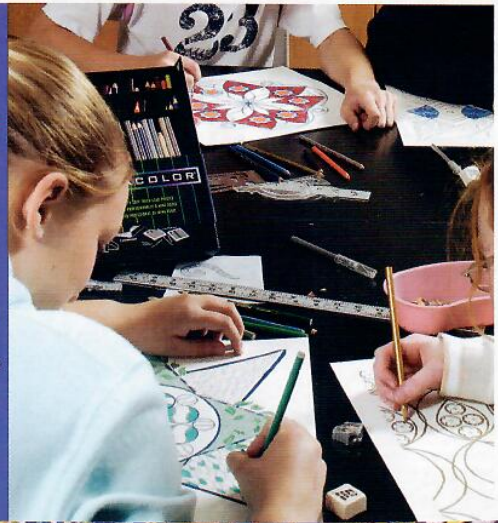
Use tracing paper to maintain precision, repetition, and symmetry of design. Place over geometric pattern. Trace on the back, flip over, then repeat, overlap, rotate, use mirror images to extend the same pattern in different ways. You can also enlarge/reduce pattern elements using a copy machine. Develop and add organic, plantlike shapes. Repeat patterns varying scale, negative and positive images, encapsulated and reversed versions.

STEP 3 Determine color scheme; limit number of colors for unity. One color should dominate the composition. Colors can be **monochromatic** (variations of one color); **complementary** (opposites such as red/green; blue/orange; yellow/purple), or **related** (colors that are close in hue such as blue, green, purple). You can use gold, silver and black to unify the composition.

SOME HELPFUL HINTS

GETTING STARTED: Working within a grid helps to develop an accurate and controlled pattern. Don't forget to use very light pressure when drawing.

KEEP IN MIND: Craftsmanship and accuracy are important in this project. Begin class by washing hands. Sharpen pencils often to create tight, precise edges. Keep work surfaces clean.

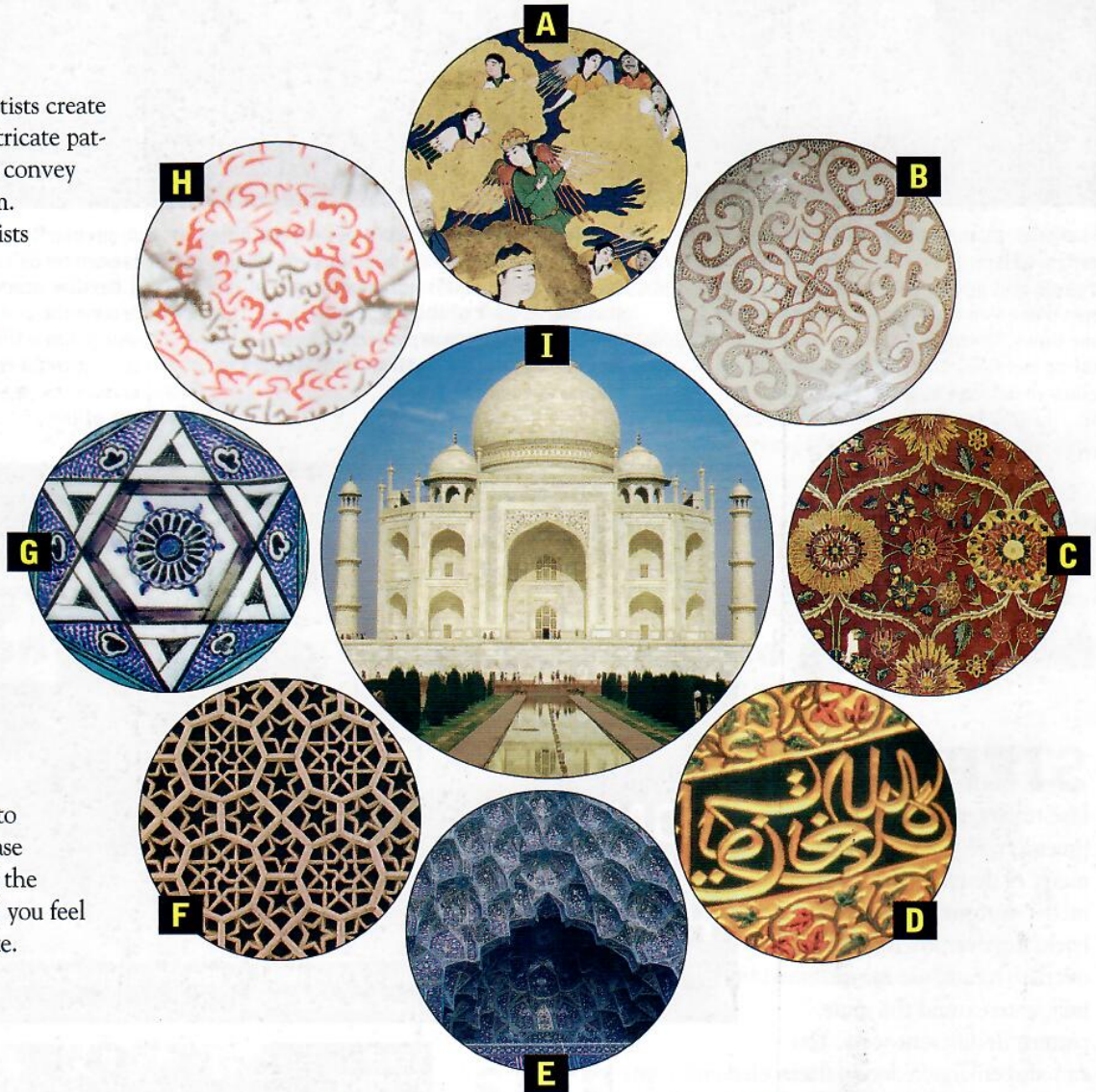


ISLAMIC PATTERNS

What role does pattern play in the creation of Islamic art?

Muslim artists create their intricate patterns to convey their faith in Islam. These Muslim artists believe that the endless designs they create serve to express the infinite nature of Allah's world.

Here are details of some of the patterns featured in this issue and a list of patterning methods, terms, techniques, and places associated with them. Next to each word or phrase write the letter of the image (or images) you feel is most appropriate.



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|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ___ 1. Geometric patterns | ___ 8. Triangles | ___ 15. Hexagons |
| ___ 2. Symmetry | ___ 9. Overlapping patterns | ___ 16. Repetition and variation |
| ___ 3. Dome | ___ 10. Qibla wall | ___ 17. Shirin Neshat |
| ___ 4. Encapsulated shapes | ___ 11. Plantlike patterns | ___ 18. Mihrab |
| ___ 5. Calligraphic Patterns | ___ 12. Stippling | ___ 19. Interlocking shapes |
| ___ 6. Interlaced outlines | ___ 13. Minaret | ___ 20. Taj Mahal |
| ___ 7. Honeycomb pattern | ___ 14. Abstracted patterns | ___ 21. Positive/negative |