Research Paper

A Philosophical Approach on Islamic Art: Past Potentials and Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract

Islamic art possesses significant inherent values, including its divine and revelatory origins, sacredness, transcendence, coherence of its elements, and its invitation to unity with God. Islamic art has also drawn upon the strengths of earlier artistic schools, combining them with Islamic teachings, which gives it a unique importance. A prominent feature of Islamic art is its expression of divine unity through linguistic methods such as symbolism, metaphors, allegories, and similar approaches. Hence, the historical authenticity of Islamic art can be analyzed within the framework of Islamic civilization. However, recent shifts in global discourse and the lagging progress of Islamic civilization in keeping pace with these changes have also resulted in the stagnation of Islamic art. Consequently, Islamic art faces challenges of obsolescence and inefficiency, failing to address the questions, needs, concerns, and problems of contemporary Muslim individuals. As a result, Islamic art today appears more as a cultural heritage from the past rather than an art form reflective of the present realities of Muslim societies. To overcome this crisis, Islamic art must focus on addressing the current questions and concerns of modern Muslims, leveraging the capabilities of Western modern art, and integrating art with other dimensions of contemporary life, including culture, politics, economy, religion, and particularly social issues.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Islamic art originates from divine inspiration and Islamic teachings. It embodies sacredness, transcendence, and unity with God, expressed through symbolic, metaphorical, and abstract forms. Drawing from ancient artistic traditions, it integrates them into an Islamic framework. Islamic art reflects divine unity and the pursuit of higher truths. It employs symbolism and metaphors to communicate spiritual realities, offering a pathway to transcendence. The Quran serves as a central influence, shaping the artistic forms and content. Islamic art, also, avoids direct representation of God or sacred figures, relying instead on geometric patterns, calligraphy, and architectural elements to convey divine order and harmony. This abstraction emphasizes unity within multiplicity, reflecting Islamic theological principles.

Therefore, some strengths of Islamic art are as follow: timelessness and universality, integration of spirituality with aesthetics, rich symbolic language rooted in Islamic metaphysics. Its limitations, however, can be considered in cases like: overemphasis on abstraction and sacredness disconnects it from contemporary life, lack of adaptability to modern forms of art like cinema and theater, inability to address current social, political, and cultural issues.

Islamic art has struggled to evolve alongside modernity, remaining tied to historical forms. It has become more of a cultural artifact rather than a dynamic, living art form. The dominance of Western modern art, with its focus on individualism, social critique, and contemporary issues, has highlighted the stagnation of Islamic art. This paper advocates blending the spiritual values of traditional Islamic art with modern artistic techniques and approaches. It suggests

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learning from Western modern art's ability to engage with social and cultural issues, while preserving the sacred essence of Islamic traditions.

2. Conclusion

The rich heritage of Islamic art deserves preservation and protection. While its historical value should not be overlooked, it is equally important not to rely solely on past traditions. Despite its past significance and effectiveness, Islamic art has lost its relevance in contemporary times, becoming more ornamental and ceremonial. On one hand, we have the valuable legacy of traditional Islamic art, and on the other, Western modern art, which has its own advantages and disadvantages.

The primary strength of Western modern art lies in its ability to address contemporary human questions, needs, concerns, and challenges while striving to resolve the spiritual crises of modern man. It also focuses on the complex dimensions of culture, politics, society, and religion, although its neglect of sacred elements remains a notable shortcoming. By adopting a socially engaged and critical approach—particularly through cinema—Western modern art effectively depicts public beliefs, superstitions, oppressive political systems, injustices, and the moral and spiritual crises of modern humanity. In contrast, Islamic art lacks such capabilities.

The greatest crisis facing Islamic art is its stagnation in the past, its disregard for the contemporary questions and concerns of Muslim societies, and its inability to artistically represent various aspects of modern life. The rational solution lies in paying attention to the realities of our time as framed by dominant Western discourses. These realities encompass the questions, concerns, and challenges faced by con-temporary individuals, which Western modern art effectively attempts to address. However, Islamic art must carve out its own path by critically rethinking its traditional approach, drawing inspiration from contemporary Western questions, and providing answers by blending the traditional heritage with insights from modern discourses. In other words, there is a need to rethink and create modern Islamic art through several essential steps:

1. Critical Evaluation of Past Traditions: Traditional approaches should be examined critically, and elements that are no longer relevant or hinder artistic innovation should be set aside. For example, excessive emphasis on sacredness, transcendence, and tradition should be balanced with an acknowledgment of worldly matters as legitimate themes for Islamic art.

2. Realistic and Critical Engagement with Modern Western Art: modern western art should neither be fully accepted nor outright rejected. Instead, it should be analyzed critically to extract its positive and effective aspects. By combining these strengths with the latent values of Islamic artistic heritage, Islamic art can address contemporary human needs and enhance its relevance and dynamism.

By adopting this hybrid approach, Islamic art can become both responsive to modern challenges and faithful to its spiritual roots, ensuring its survival and evolution in a rapidly changing world.

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