

Lecture 7

Islamic Art: Its Spirit, Philosophy, Forms , and Influence on Western Art

- **A. What Is Islamic Art?**

1. There are those scholars who deny that there is such a thing; but as there is Christian art, so there is Islamic art.
2. The formation of Islamic art has deep roots in the Quran.
3. The Islamic civilization integrated many of the arts of earlier civilizations: Sassanid, Byzantine, Egyptian, Roman, and pre-Islamic Arabia.

B. The Spirit and Philosophy of Islamic Art

- 1.** Jews share with Muslims the idea that there should not be any graven image or representation of God.
- 2.** Christian sacred art is very iconic, whereas Islamic sacred art is aniconic in nature.
- 3.** Islamic art features the integration of multiplicity into unity.

B. The Spirit and Philosophy of Islamic Art

4. Islamic art also weds art to wisdom and the crafts—art is life itself.
5. The Islamic understanding of beauty—“God is beautiful and He loves beauty.”
6. Islamic art is marked by the language of symbolism and “abstraction.”

C. The Hierarchy of the Arts in Islam

- 1.** Quranic psalmody and calligraphy is extremely significant to Islamic civilization; similar to the situation of Chinese and Japanese civilization, calligraphy is of great importance to Islamic civilization.
- 2.** Wherever Islam has gone, it has made major contributions to architecture and urban design (for example, the Taj Mahal).
- 3.** The Islamic art of dress is seen in many different forms, all of which emphasize modesty, dignity, and feasibility.

4. The art of everyday objects of human life—such as the carpet, textiles, tile, and glasswork—all have great artistic significance in the Islamic world.
5. The role of painting is not as central in Islamic civilization as it is in the West; there is very strict opposition to painting sacred subjects or animals in a naturalist style.
6. This philosophy led to the art of the miniature, with certain stylistic and technical differences among Persian, Ottoman, and Mughal schools of miniature.
7. The Persian garden was an attempt to create a paradise-like environment, often in stark contrast to its arid surroundings; it proved to be very influential throughout the world.

8. Calligraphy and geometric forms such as the arabesque have both a decorative and religious function.
9. Some people say Islam bans music, which is untrue—the Quran itself is chanted. Only certain types of music that incite base passions are banned.
10. There are various schools of music in the Islamic world: Arabic (Eastern and Western) Persian, Turkish, North Indian, Javanese, black African.
11. Music in the Islamic world was closely related to Sufism; classical music was internalized by the Sufis in mosques while the Quran is chanted; except for religious songs, music is not allowed nor are musical instruments.

12. The performing arts of the theatre differed from what developed in the West, and Muslims were never interested in the Greek dramas.

13. Muslims had their own passion plays (*ta 'ziah*), *folk performing arts*, and Sufi dances (for example, whirling dervishes).

D. The Influence of Islamic Art in the West

1. The influence of Islamic art was seen in almost every domain: architecture and urban design, carpets and textiles, glass and metal works, geometric patterns and arabesque design—in both the medieval and the post-medieval periods.
2. This influence was also seen in painting: in both the medieval (miniature forms) and modern periods (Orientalism in both Europe and America), notably in the works of Matisse and Cézanne.

3. Islamic influence was felt in music too: for example in Flamenco and Spanish medieval and Renaissance music.
4. This influence is seen also in Islamic musical instruments adopted in the West and the military band and Turkish marches of Mozart and Beethoven.
5. *Mudéjar art in the Iberian peninsula was influential in Latin America* and even in certain parts of North America.