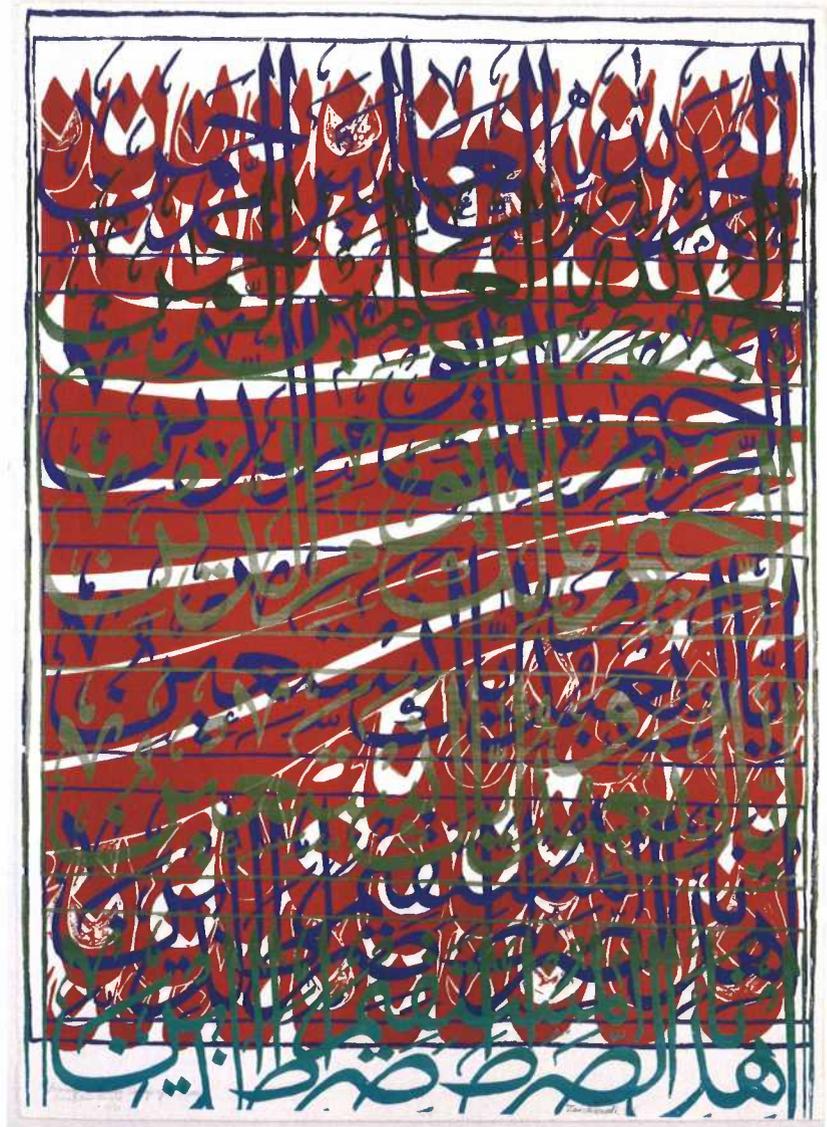


THE RIGHT TO WRITE

CALLIGRAPHIC WORKS FROM
THE COLLECTION OF THE
JORDAN NATIONAL GALLERY
OF FINE ARTS

THE DALTON GALLERY
AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
JULY 15TH – OCTOBER 16TH
1996



CALLIGRAPHY AND ISLAM

The origins of Arabic calligraphy go back to the eighth century AD when the message of Islam, the third monotheistic religion after Judaism and Christianity, was revealed through the Prophet Muhammad. God's revelation in the form of Qur'anic verses was brought to the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel. Thus writing took on a special aspect in Islam. Its direct link with God through the Qur'an made it next to sacred for the Muslims, who throughout fifteen centuries spared no effort in developing, embellishing and producing it in the best form possible.



THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW STYLE-THE CALLIGRAPHIC SCHOOL

After World War II, as Western colonialism withdrew, people in Asia and the Middle East began to explore their heritage. By the second half of the 20th century, a new art movement came about out of the need felt by Arab and Islamic artists to ground imported art styles in the local environment. An answer to these needs emerged in the Calligraphic School of Arts, *al-Madrassa al-Khatiya F'il-Fann*.

The foundation of the calligraphic movement in modern Islamic art is the traditional Islamic art of calligraphy. The central nature of calligraphy as a medium of Islamic art and aesthetics led Muslim artists to return to the Arabic alphabet in a search for an artistic identity.

The Calligraphic School of Art emerged as individual young artists worked in isolation from each other, both in the West and the Islamic world. Probably none of them envisaged that his or her efforts would flourish



into a full-fledged school of art in a span of a few decades. By the 1980s the Calligraphic School reached its peak among contemporary Islamic artists.



The Calligraphic School of Art in modern Arab and Islamic painting is more than a novel style; it is a form of artistic identity through which the artist is able to gratify his or her creative instincts and establish an individuality as a contemporary Arab and Islamic artist. Evolving from the art of classical Arabic calligraphy and developing into a current form of expression, it employs modern media and technique, including



printmaking and sculpture. It unites the legible value of letters and words with their optic and graphic abstract shapes, allowing artists to understand their works inside a contemporary Arab and Islamic movement, yet within an international artistic framework. The show is made up of fifty-five works, by forty-five artists from seventeen countries. This in itself is proof enough that the contemporary School of Calligraphic Art, prevalent

throughout the Islamic world, is a well established art style in its own right. The exhibition is divided into four stylistic groups: Pure Calligraphy, Abstract Calligraphy, Figurative Calligraphy and Calligraphic Combinations.

PURE CALLIGRAPHY

The Pure Calligraphy style includes works composed only of letter-forms that make up both the background and the foreground of the composition. The main component within this category is the Arabic alphabet which forms the entire subject matter and composition.



It can be a letter or a group of letters, a word, words, sentences, paragraphs, or any combination. Artists of the Pure Calligraphy style use various scripts that range from the highly regulated classical script, to a personal free-form handwriting which follows no rules or regulations; and because of the connection between writing and religion in Islam, many of the pure calligraphic works either have a numinous message or carry spiritual symbolism.

ABSTRACT CALLIGRAPHY

The second group of art works are of Abstract Calligraphy which subtracts form and meaning from letters. Abstract art either does not represent anything in the world of nature and appearances or alters forms from the real world into patterns. Abstract Calligraphy fits well within this definition whereby the artist exploits the visual aspect of the Arabic letter as a structural element in the composition, and the abstract quality of letters builds up his or her abstract work. Artists following this style usually use two kinds of script; the first is a legible script whose letters are recognizable, yet because of the way they have been placed within the composition make no legible sense. The second is a pseudo-script inspired by calligraphy, yet is totally illegible.



FIGURATIVE CALLIGRAPHY

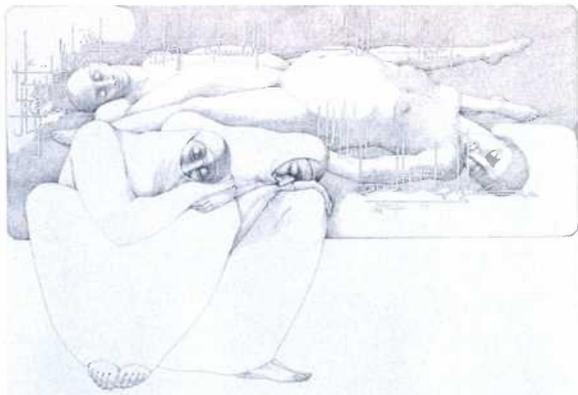
The third group of works falls within Figurative Calligraphy, which consists of shapes made up entirely of writing.



This form of calligraphic art was always popular among the Persians and Turks whose zoomorphic and human calligraphic figures are well known in Islamic art.

CALLIGRAPHIC COMBINATIONS

The fourth group belongs to Calligraphic Combinations. In this style, words and letters are used in conjunction with other components to create a work of art. Legible and illegible Arabic script forms part of the composition, while the rest is made up of either pictorial and figurative shapes or expressive symbols. Most of the artists who work in this style are concerned with sociopolitical themes which deal with humanitarian, social and political issues.



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 Dr. Wijdan Ali Rajwa Ali

WORKS PICTURED

COVER: Hossein Zenderoudi, "*Homage to a Master Calligrapher*", 1986, etching, Pure Calligraphy. Verses from the Qur'an in well-known classical scripts form the whole of the composition.

INSIDE BOTTOM LEFT: Osman Waqialla (Sudan), *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor on paper, Pure Calligraphy. Waqialla mixes the classical Ottoman *Tajwid* style with printed collages of Fadwa Toukan's poetry.

INSIDE BOTTOM CENTER: Wasma Chorbachi (Iraq), *Untitled*, 1993, glazed ceramic plate, Pure Calligraphy. Chorbachi uses a Chinese type of Arabic script to write "There is no God but God".

INSIDE TOP LEFT: Chant Avedissian (Egypt), "*Star of the Orient*", 1994, mixed media on recycled paper, Calligraphic Combinations. Um Kulthum, from the series "Nile Icons", was the most popular Egyptian singer in the Arab world for over 40 years.

INSIDE CENTER: Mahmoud Hammad (Syria), "*Arabic Calligraphy*", 1984, oil on canvas, Abstract Calligraphy. Hammad was more concerned with placement of abstract calligraphic shapes and constructional effect within the space of the composition than with their meanings.

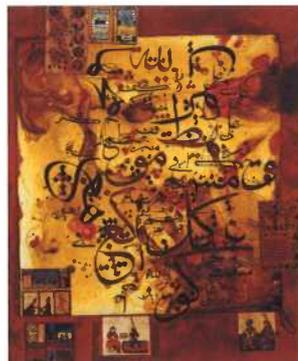
INSIDE TOP RIGHT: Amina Ahuja (India), "*The Lion Weeps*", undated, china ink on handmade paper, Figurative Calligraphy. Ahuja uses verses by classical Persian poets such as the Sufi Hafiz to form her subjects.

INSIDE MIDDLE RIGHT: Parviz Tanavoli (Iran), "*Hich*", undated, bronze, Pure Calligraphy. Tanavoli uses the *Nasta'liq* script to form the word *hich*, which means "nothing".

INSIDE BOTTOM RIGHT: Mahmoud Taha (Jordan), *Untitled*, 1980, glazed ceramic, Abstract Calligraphy. Taha uses a *Tughra* – a calligraphic version of the sultan's insignia placed at the head of Royal Ottoman edicts – on a modern glazed ceramic shape.

BACK TOP: Aziz Ammoura (Jordan), "*Echoes of Sabra and Shatillah*", 1984, ink on paper, Calligraphic Combinations. Ammoura's ink drawing depicts the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees, and the calligraphy repeats the words Sabra and Shatilla to identify the naked bodies.

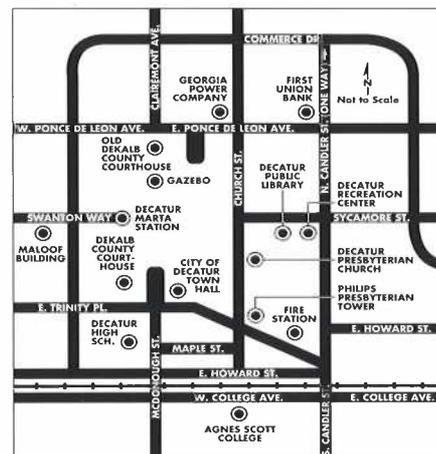
BACK BOTTOM: Erol Akyavas (Turkey), "*Hem Batin*", 1993, etching, Pure Calligraphy. Akyavas from Turkey uses the curvaceous *Nasta'liq* script as the main component of his composition.



Photos by
 Caroline Joe
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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

Agnes Scott College, founded in 1889, is an independent national liberal arts college for women. It offers a variety of courses ranging from art and classical languages to economics, physics and astronomy. The school, ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the nation's top ten women's colleges, offers an innovative hands-on curriculum through such programs as Women, Leadership and Social Change: The Atlanta Semester, and Global Awareness, providing students with opportunities to study abroad.



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