

Mixed Media in Arabic Calligraphy

Asma Ayadah Alshammari

Calligraphy is considered to be more than just a pure art of writing this being because it is also a form of expression. How a person communicates is also a depiction of the Arab-Islamic civilization which has been passed from one century and generations to another. In the modern world, it is evident that calligraphy has also evolved and new techniques have been implemented in art; like the mixed media art of Arabic calligraphy (Ghulam 1982). The question, therefore, is how valid are these new techniques in producing new ideas and particularly the mixed media technique. This paper will look into the incorporation of Arabic calligraphy in diverse media techniques, and how it can bring out different levels in artworks. First, it is prudent to understand what Arabic calligraphy is and how it has evolved from the ancient world to this modern world (Ghulam 1982). Arabic calligraphy has been a cultural and religious symbol in the Arabic and Islam world following the strong aesthetic formation and rich artistic traditions throughout previous centuries. Calligraphy, according to Ghani Alani in the first and second page of his book *An Introduction to Arabic Calligraphy*, is the geometry of the soul and is also distinct from all the other calligraphy there is like Chinese calligraphy among others (2016,1- 2). The distinctive nature of Arabic calligraphy is mostly attributed to the fact that it includes photography, ideography and alphabetical writing. Technically, calligraphy has always played the role of expressing the inexpressible and in today's world artists have embraced it to express their different ideas (YongsuYoun 2009). For instance, in ancient times, calligraphy used to be written on parchments and animal skins, but that has since changed and today worldwide are tattooing calligraphy on human skins. Moreover, according to Zoghbi, Stone and Hawley (2013, 36-47) calligraphy is linked to graffiti and thus has become an urban art form which has also spread sufficiently in the current world. Narrowing down to Arabic calligraphy, there are newer techniques that have been incorporated in the calligraphy, one of them is a mixed media technique which allows for multiple materials to be used to bring creative art into the field of calligraphy. Mixed media puts under consideration the audience in the society and the perception they have of Arabic calligraphy (De Freitas 2007, 6-7). With optimal experience in the field of Arabic calligraphy, an artist through mixed media can understand society based on the socio-historic context and hence bring forth an artistic expression that will be efficiently communicated to an audience without much struggle and yet keeping the aesthetic formation of his artwork and experience.

Ideally, before mixed art came into existence in the early 20th century, there was a lot of evolving which started way back when Arab artists travelled to Europe and particularly in France (De Freitas 2007, 11). Now, modern art is linked to the evolutionary painting and sculpting from a European context since it was in Europe where the Arabic artists went to study the foreign art styles which they did not know. This modern art consequently puts more emphasis to break off from the history and tradition of art which comes all the way from gothic to renaissance to baroque and neo-classical among others. The Arab pioneers who went to Europe to study the foreign styles paved the way for the modern art and by 1960s modern Arab art was finally born.

The application of Arabic art does allow for different models to be incorporated into the art without altering the final output of the art. Just as its meaning, calligraphy is all about beautiful writing and artists do strive to bring out the beauty of their art work by mixing different art styles. Adding to the idea that Arabic calligraphy as a visual art, it has to be attractive to the audience and at the same time communicate a meaningful message either religiously or socially. Technically, many individuals find tattoos appealing in the modern world and hence this has motivated the Arabic artists to use a mixture of different arts and combine them with Arabic art in drawing the tattoos which enhance the beauty of Arabic literature.

Modern Arabic artists do realize that Arabic calligraphy is a visual art that has to combine aesthetic formation but still it does not have to be dull due to the artistic nature it carries. Therefore, the Arabic calligraphy artist in maintaining the productive cultural and traditional ways of writing they understand that the current world is drifting away from the ancient ways of culture and traditions (Ghulam 1982). Consequently, this comes as a chance for the artists to write and portray a message to the modern world through calligraphy and yet maintain the rich

historic art of Arabic calligraphy. Moreover, creativity comes in, and these artists start combining different cultural and tradition materials in Arabic calligraphy to capture the attention of many other individuals across the world that possess different cultures and traditions.

To develop a cross-cultural art through Arabic calligraphy calls for combinations of techniques such as glass and metal arts incorporated together by artists to bring out beautiful masterpieces. This idea of the combination of art creates room for different cultures to diversify across all platforms in the field of calligraphy given that the world is based on various cultures (Zoghbi, Stone and Hawley 2013). Therefore, it becomes easier for individuals to identify with Arabic calligraphy through the mixed media since one can easily understand the message sent out by the artists.

Nonetheless, words used by artists in Arabic calligraphy may have different meanings from different people and to make an Arabic art acceptable by the mixed audience, it is prudent to use symbols to derive a standard meaning.

In creating a masterpiece, an artist decides on many aspects that they want to depict to their audience and this is according to Smith (2012). He further states that in many instances historical events dictate the styles and how ideas will be combined to form masterpieces that will give a clear understanding of the artists' mind in the fine art. This is the same case scenario when it comes to Arabic calligraphy where the Arabic artists use the ancient styles and historical events but introduce new ideas that will be understood by the modern world. Technically, according to De Freitas (2007, 5), the main aim here is to find a balancing point in between the traditional point of view and the contemporary art to bring the historical part into connection with the modern technique to create the sense of mixed media in Arabic calligraphy.

Another idea in creating a captivating masterpiece in Arabic art is through the use of human figures this being attributed to the fact that the masterpiece will be lively and attractive to different audiences (Roxburgh 2003, 39). Human figures connect different cultures and create room for artistic ideas. Ideally, in the current world connection of the different cultures is the main breakthrough in any masterpiece that will be done in Arabic calligraphy and yet create a sense of belonging for individuals from a different setting. Human figures might carry political or social aspects of life and hence establish a connection between the current events and the anticipated message to merge and create a beautiful artwork (Ghulam 1982). Although this idea of using human figures has to be discrete in the essence that if it is based on political ideology should avoid political biases by creating a negative impression of the political or religious beliefs causing the audience to pick on specific political sides or religious doctrine over others.

Geographical location contributes a lot when it comes to mixed media since specific geographic locations do not favour some formats of art like metal or glass. Metal and glasses are so far the best materials when it comes to masterpieces for doing artistic work in Arabic calligraphy. However, there are instances where metal can rust and thus spoil the beauty of the Arabic calligraphy written on the metal masterpiece or a glass breaking and destroying an artistic message. Therefore, mixed media as earlier stated where metal and glass are combined in the creating of masterpieces it is easier for artists to preserve their art work for many generations to come without having to worry about losing their beautiful calligraphy art. This idea of mixed media, therefore, enhances the security of the information written in the masterpieces when it comes to unsafe locations around the world.

Arabic calligraphy is also written on paper and it has been so for many centuries given that even the Quran is a book written in different styles of calligraphy and Arabic calligraphy is among them (Roxburgh 2003, 41). The idea of mixed media in writing on paper includes using different pens of writing with different colours. This will indeed create more beauty and make the artistic work more attractive as compared to a single colour and thus attract more audience. Moreover, writing on paper gives more room for artists to be free since they also know that it is easy to erase any content that may be inappropriate.

Culture is always evolving, and artists cannot expect it to be stagnant at any given time. This hence creates fear among people who are afraid of losing their culture due to modernisation. This is where symbols then come in since they are historical patterns of meaning which is how men and women communicate and develop an attitude towards life from their experiences (Ghulam 1982). This fear is what then motivates the artists in Arabic calligraphy to strive and create unique and new things to conquer the ideas of mimicry by embracing abstraction. Obviously,

the artists are acutely aware of how different individuals are, and thus they have to create a steady variation between each and bring out good art works that will address the diverse nature of human beings. The remedy to this fear then is the use of mixed media which will enable the artists to preserve the olden culture and still make it impressive to the new and modern individuals.

However, not all artists do have the ability to create variations between individuals regarding personalities. This is why one of the world's most familiar set of symbols are found in Arabic art, and ideally, they are just used by a small group of painters who exhibit the art of painting (De Freitas 2007,11). The artists' creative ability to bring out masterpieces of something old and familiar at the same time is as beautiful as the same pieces of masterpieces they produce. This technique is somehow a gift since not every artist can produce a mixed media artwork and capture the attention of both the individuals looking out for culture and the ones needing modernity. Moreover, in the Islamic universities students taking calligraphy are taught to form the words of God with a pen, and this through the connection of the Qur'an makes Arabic calligraphy such a unique ability that cannot be contrasted with the newly arrived western arts.

However, there is a lot of freedom in the calligraphy world now with all the mixed media bringing most of the western art styles into Arabic calligraphy (De Freitas 2007, 10). Artists of Arabic calligraphy should always make sure that they remember that calligraphy is neither an art nor a craft but a tool to communicate the word of God. Moreover, calligraphy is the supreme way of bringing up an aesthetic and added value to pre-existing useful arts. The imitation of the western techniques has been mistaken for long by calligraphers who adopted the mind-set that calligraphy is for display purposes only. This again made the audience look into the masterpieces and approach the view in whichever manner they thought hence losing the ancient touch of Arabic calligraphy. Nonetheless, this should not be mistaken with mixed calligraphy at all since the main idea behind mixed media is keeping the antique cultural feel in masterpieces and portraying it in a modern concept.

Back to contemporary art which has mixed media techniques incorporated in it, some barriers do rise. Using the Arabic calligraphy in the modern art may result to negative response from the intended audience, and thus the expected purpose of the art will be tampered with. The gradation quality when practising mixed media in Arabic calligraphy is key to ensure that the art is of optimal significance as intended by the artists. This is, therefore, the reason why metal and glass of different sizes will efficiently work in creating something unique. The primary aim of the artwork will be to bring out the fusion of the western glass and metal art with the Arabic calligraphy style of painting. Moreover, using the glass and metal artisans will be more environments friendly and conservative.

Since metal and glass masterpieces are attractive, bestowing the masterwork by protecting Arabic calligraphy and combining glass would create a cross-cultural figure with symbolism being employed to lessen the art uncertainties across different viewers. Mixed media, therefore, will put the final product to create a fashionable form of skill that bases on diversity and diminishes a one-theme tactic (Ghulam 1982). New ideas around Arabic calligraphy keep on immersing every single day in the current modern world with individuals struggling a lot to come up with creative ways of making sure that they catch the attention of their audiences. In coming up with these newer techniques of mixing different art styles from different historical cultures, religions and different regions where individuals come from, it is of much significance to always ensure that artists in Arabic calligraphy are keeping the Arabic art as visual art and obeying the linguistic symbols and aesthetic formations it carries.

In conclusion, research makes it evident to know that mixed media considers the perspectives of a society and most importantly the targeted audience. Mixing of materials in a creative way in the effort of producing the art is what it takes for mixed media to be effective. The field of mixed media is very wide because innovations and new ideas are always coming up and artists keep on changing the styles of doing their calligraphy and the materials to use when doing their art work. However, maintaining culture and tradition seems hard for many of the new Arabic artists who are just entering the market, and there is the challenge that has to be addressed.

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