

Understanding some of the Symbolism of Geometric Shapes in Islamic Art

Common features of geometry in Islamic art

- Islamic art includes all art from Muslim civilizations, not only religious art
 - Geometry and patterns are important
 - Surfaces in Islamic art are covered with geometric patterns which is meant to “reflect the language of the universe and help the believer reflect on life and the greatness of creation. “
- A common feature of Islamic art is the covering of surfaces covered with geometric patterns.

The geometry is spiritual because:

- Circles have no end they are infinite - and so they remind Muslims that Allah is infinite
- Complex geometric designs create the impression of unending repetition, and this also helps a person get an idea of the infinite nature of Allah.
- The repeating patterns also demonstrate that in the small you can find the infinite ... a single element of the pattern implies the infinite total.
- Plant motifs are used, called “arabesques” along with stylized Arabic calligraphy
- Because Islam is integral to every Muslim’s life and it makes it beautiful, so should the art be used to make things of everyday life beautiful.

Hussain, Zara. “Introduction to Islamic Art.” September 30, 2009. Retrieved: November 20, 2016 from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/art/art_1.shtml

Use of geometric patterns

- They are part of a major decorative element in art and found on a variety of different objects.
- Islamic artists took ideas from pre-existing artistic traditions and then developed them as they gradually became more complex and elaborate in order to create their own new form of decoration which stressed the themes of unity and order. In doing so, they consulted the ideas and beliefs of Islamic mathematicians, astronomers and scientists.
- The circle and square were “combined, duplicated, interlaced, and arranged in intricate combinations.”
- The patterns in fact do not follow the strict rules of geometry and are in fact quite free both in the repeated nature of the patterning and its complexity. This therefore creates many opportunities for increased ornamentation and to be abstract, use repetitive motifs and symmetry.
- There are 4 basic shapes or “repeat units,” from which the more complicated patterns are constructed are:
 - circles and interlaced circles;
 - squares or four-sided polygons;
 - The star pattern, made up of square and triangles inscribed in a circle
 - Multisided polygons

Note: Some of the more complex patterns are made up of different shapes and arrangements

Department of Islamic Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Islamic Art and Geometric Design: Activities for Learning*. New York City, 2004. Retrieved from:
http://britton.disted.camosun.bc.ca/Islamic_Art_and_Geometric_Design.pdf

The symbolism of the circle

- Because early Islamic societies forbid the use of figural art of humans or animals, mosaics emerged in Islamic art connected to Euclid's geometry and featured eight-pointed stars and circles in their patterning.
- Circles represent the unity of the monotheistic God
- At its center is God and the City of Mecca, both the spiritual and geographical centres of Islam

Symbolism of the 8 point star

- Represents the light of God spreading throughout the world. When it is repeated it represents "God's infinite nature, and Islam's preoccupation with harmony and order."

Salaam. "Islamic Patterns and Geometry." November 20, 2016. Retrieved from:
<http://peopleof.oueverydaylife.com/circle-islamic-culture-4284.html>.

Symbolism of the Triangle

- Represents human consciousness and the principle of harmony

Symbolism of the Square

- Represents the physical experience and the physical experience-or materiality.

Symbolism of the Hexagon

- Represents heaven.

Symbolism of the star

- Represents equal radiation in all directions from a central point.
- The stars may have 6,8, 10, 12 or 16 points-all created by dividing a circle into equal parts. The rays of the star originating from the centre and reaching into all directions symbolizes the spread of Islam.

Salaam. "Islamic Patterns and Geometry." November 20, 2016. Retrieved from:
<http://peopleof.oueverydaylife.com/circle-islamic-culture-4284.html>.