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Religious Art in the Postmodern Era: From Exclusion to Acceptance

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Introduction

Religious art has undergone an evolutionary process characterized by the integration of religious values with diverse artistic traditions, adapting to historical, cultural, and social conditions. In ancient times, the primary role of religious art was to mediate between humans and the spiritual realm, through sacred objects, visual symbols, and sacred architecture. In Judaism, the second commandment prohibiting the creation of statues and carved images deeply influenced the perception of religious art, leading to the development of a more abstract style based on geometric decorations, calligraphy, and the creation of functional and decorated ritual objects. This approach, which developed from religious limitations, was influenced by neighboring cultures, such as the Hellenistic world, the Roman Empire, and the decorative styles that evolved in the Islamic world during the medieval period.

In contrast, in Christianity, art was seen as a central tool for spreading the faith and creating a powerful spiritual experience among believers. Since the Byzantine period, Christian iconography relied on realistic and allegorical images, depicting the figure of Jesus, saints, and key scenes from the New Testament. Through the use of advanced artistic techniques, such as Renaissance perspective, the dramatic lighting of the Baroque, and the rich symbolism of the Protestant Reformation, Christian art continued to thrive and evolve. It was directly influenced by Jewish tradition but also incorporated classical elements from Roman culture, reflected in church architecture, mosaics, and fresco paintings.

Islamic art differs from both by avoiding depictions of human or divine figures, in accordance with the traditional interpretation of the prohibition in the Quran against creating images. Instead, it developed into a unique visual language based on calligraphy, arabesques, and intricate geometric patterns. This combination, seen in structures like the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or Ottoman mosques, demonstrates how Islamic art expressed religious principles through magnificent buildings that emphasized symmetry, order, and harmony. These influences were also evident in Jewish art in Muslim communities, where emphasis was placed on geometric decorations in manuscript illustrations and metal and glasswork.

During the modern era, trends of secularization and Enlightenment challenged the status of religious art, especially in Western Europe, where rationalist approaches pushed religious views aside in favor of humanistic and individualistic principles. In fact, the groundwork for

secularization was laid as early as the Renaissance, when a significant shift in European worldview occurred, emphasizing humanism, rationality, and science, while still preserving religion as a central element of culture. Renaissance influences were evident in art, which developed new tools like mathematical perspective, realistic anatomical studies, and dramatic use of light and shadow. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo did not focus solely on religious subjects but incorporated scientific and philosophical principles that expressed a more independent intellectual inquiry. However, it was only more than 300 years later that art gradually began to disconnect from religion. In the 18th century, with the rise of the Enlightenment, secularization became more pronounced, with rational concepts largely replacing religion as the organizational framework for knowledge and public life. During this era, religion no longer served as an absolute source of truth but was viewed as a subject for critical study, leading to the continued marginalization of religious art in favor of secular art with universal or personal messages.

However, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in religious art, alongside global cultural processes that challenge the distinction between religion and secularism. Contemporary artists combine religious traditions with modern artistic methods, creating a new visual language that does not strictly adhere to either religious or secular conventions.
This work seeks to address the question of how, if at all, the contemporary art establishment marginalizes works with religious ideas and their religious and faith-driven creators.

This work is structured in four chapters:
The first chapter provides extensive historical background on religious art in the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It describes how these religions shaped and responded to religious art, from resistance to iconography and the creation of images (as in Judaism and parts of Islam) to the adoption of art as a tool for spreading religion and glorifying God, as in Christianity and later Islam. The chapter focuses on the theological, social, and cultural aspects of religious art creation, examining the development of Jewish art under religious prohibition, the evolution of Christian imagery as a means of conveying religious ideas, and the use of geometric and calligraphic motifs in Islamic art.

The second chapter discusses the integration of religious art into broader society during the modern period, examining the changes in society's attitude toward religious expressions in art. It explores

the status of Jewish art in the public sphere and within the community, analyzing synagogue architecture, Jewish ritual objects, and stylistic influences from local cultures. Additionally, it discusses the development of Christian art during the Renaissance, when religious art became central to artistic patronage and cultural expression. The chapter traces the changes brought about by secularization processes and shifts in patrons, such as the transition from church support to aristocratic sponsorship, which allowed for a gradual "secularization" of religious content and changes in artistic style. This chapter shows how religious art shifted from a central and unquestioned position in the art world to a relatively marginal one, highlighting the secularization processes that began to influence art. This chapter serves as an introduction to the discussion of the marginalization of religious art in the contemporary era by explaining the cultural roots of modern attitudes toward religious art.

The third chapter addresses the shift in the perception of religious art and the places where it is displayed, with a focus on Jewish museums and museums dealing with religious art. One of the central trends described is the rise of Jewish museums, which began in the 20th century with the aim of preserving Jewish culture through ritual and artistic objects. The chapter also presents the development of religious museums in Israel, such as museums of history, art, ethnography, and natural history, some of which focus on general Jewish identity, while others focus on the religious aspect. Another part of the chapter deals with Israeli religious museums.

In the fourth chapter, the discussion section presents the main conclusion, which is that the art establishment must adopt a broader and more complex approach toward religious art and religious creators. Post-secular processes may enable a more integrative approach, where religiosity and secularism are not viewed as complete opposites. The future of religious art in the art establishment depends on the struggle between two trends: secular-critical trends that continue to push religious art to the margins, and state and public perceptions that see Judaism as an integral part of the national and artistic landscape in Israel. To foster a more equitable artistic discourse, art institutions must recognize that art is primarily an aesthetic and visual experience, which does not necessarily have to be aligned with ideological, religious, or secular agendas. Only through an open and diverse approach will it be possible to allow religious art and religious creators to integrate into the contemporary artistic landscape in an equitable and authentic manner.

Chapter One: The Development of Monotheistic Religious Art

Religion has had a long association with art, particularly when it comes to expressing and understanding spiritual values. As civilization progressed, so did the belief systems connected to art. Humans developed an understanding of dual reality – one that is tangible and visible, and another that is invisible and spiritual. Art became a mediator between humans and unseen forces – artistic works, despite lacking life, were seen as possessing souls and spiritual powers. Animism – the belief in objects having souls – became a central component of human beliefs, with people believing that even natural objects like trees, stones, and rivers had souls. These practices, once widespread in ancient cultures, were later prohibited in religious texts that condemned the worship of idols and tangible representations of spiritual forces.

1.1 Jewish Art The central characteristic of Jewish art is based on the prohibition found in the second commandment in the Bible, which states: "You shall not make for yourselves a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:4). This prohibition is repeated twice more in the Book of Deuteronomy: "You shall not make for yourselves a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth" (Deuteronomy 5:8), and also, "Cursed be the man who makes a graven image or a molten image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret" (Deuteronomy 27:15). This prohibition shaped Jewish art over the generations, effectively limiting it within the plastic arts, which led Jews to focus more on the development of texts such as the Talmud.

However, until the Second Temple period, the second commandment was interpreted as a complete prohibition on creating images of animals, but only when they were used for idolatry. The argument given was that the prophets did not oppose the creation of images per se, but rather the worship at altars, where foreign gods were revered. Alongside this, as seen in later generations, the Jews were greatly influenced by neighboring cultures such as Canaan, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Assyria. Archaeological excavations have uncovered many clay figurines from the First Temple period, which were made with meticulous design and sometimes distinctive patterns. These figurines mainly depicted female figures, some of whom were naked or partially naked (see

Image 1). Examples have been found at sites such as Jerusalem, Hazor, Beit She'an, Tel Amal, and Megiddo. Some of the figures hold round objects such as tambourines, which were sometimes identified as ritual symbols, and others are depicted holding children, indicating their connection to fertility worship.

In addition to the female figurines, figurines of animals, particularly horses and horsemen, and occasionally animal-shaped tools, have been found. These figurines were used in various locations – homes, tombs, and temples – and it seems that they served magical purposes, such as protection, promoting fertility, and safeguarding the family. Some scholars speculate that these were Canaanite fertility deities, while others believe they represent priests or women playing musical instruments in fertility rituals. The emphasized genitalia and the objects carried by the figures strengthen the hypothesis that these figurines were used for Canaanite ritual and magical purposes. One of the key findings in this period is the incense altars found at Taanach (see Image 2). These altars, built in four stages, are decorated with detailed depictions of animals, winged bulls, human figures, and the Tree of Life, motifs known from Canaanite and Mesopotamian culture. The decorations indicate deep symbolic ties to worship and religious themes. The depiction of Astarte, holding lions, which appears on the altars, reinforces the connection of local worship with symbols of power and fertility. Even in the Bible, there is confirmation of such figurines; in the Book of Kings, there are many references to the artistic wealth of Solomon’s Temple, where depictions of animals were incorporated as symbols of power and divine presence. For example, the sea stood on twelve oxen (1 Kings 7:25). Other decorations include lions and cherubim, which also appeared on Solomon’s throne (1 Kings 10:18-20).

1.1.2 The Iconoclastic Approach Pottery finds from the period of the Kingdom of Judah (see Image 3) show the use of Greek alongside Hebrew, indicating a significant influence of Hellenism. However, this intrusion also brought with it a counter-response, and it seems that the Jews began to adopt an iconoclastic approach, meaning a particular insistence on adhering to the biblical prohibition on creating images of idols, especially since the Hellenistic occupation attempted to impose its culture and religion on the Jews, including through the placement of statues of gods and rulers in the Temple and the enforcement of idol worship. In the luxurious rock-hewn tombs in Jerusalem from the Second Temple period, for example, there is a noticeable influence of Hellenistic-Eastern architecture, with the use of elements like Doric and Ionic columns, Doric

friezes, cornices, and Egyptian pyramids. The tombs are richly decorated with reliefs of plant and geometric motifs, but they completely avoid depicting human or animal figures, which were common in Hellenistic art. In fact, this is one of the core features of Jewish art – maintaining the prohibition while emphasizing beauty and aesthetics.

Archaeological findings, such as simple and designed pottery, coins adorned with flowers and holiday symbols, and decorated ossuaries from the Mishnaic period (see Image 4), reflect the Jewish aesthetic that developed around the need to praise God and express spiritual values. In the Talmud, the verse from Genesis "May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:28) is emphasized as the basis for incorporating the beauty of Greek culture into Judaism. This perspective allowed a certain influence of Greek culture, which appreciated beauty and art, on Jewish life during the Talmudic period. Additionally, in the Book of Exodus it says: "This is my God, and I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:2), which is interpreted as a commandment to "beautify the commandments," creating an aspiration for high-level artistic creation in religious rituals. Artistic inspiration also comes from the instructions in the Book of Exodus: "You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty" (Exodus 28:2). Rashi explains that the detailed instructions for building the Tabernacle teach the importance of being conscious of beauty, describing the contribution of Bezalel, who excelled in wisdom and the ability to create beautiful ritual objects, including gold, silver, and copper vessels, as well as designs in stone and wood, while adhering strictly to the instructions for building the Tabernacle. Another verse connects the observance of the Sabbath with the use of beautiful utensils: "But you shall keep My Sabbaths" (Exodus 31:13), expressing the importance of beauty in the enjoyment of the Sabbath. Psalms also praise the beauty of sacred work.

In the Middle Ages, Jewish art retained its religious characteristics while adapting to the styles of the time and place. Ritual objects, such as Torah scrolls, mezuzahs, menorahs, and kiddush cups, became the focal point of Jewish art, and are what is today known as Judaica. In Europe, Jewish artists adopted Christian models and styles, especially in the creation of illustrated manuscripts, but often altered the original meaning of the images. For example, in illustrations of poems like "Atah miLevanon Kallah" ("You are from Lebanon, O Bride"), Christian models depicting the church as a bride were adapted into Jewish representations that protest against Christian ideas and

sanctify the Jewish covenant. Another example is the depiction of Pharaoh's daughter rescuing Moses from the Nile, which appears both in the synagogue at Dura-Europos (see Image 5) and in later Christian artworks. In these cases, the Christian figure sometimes contradicts the Christian biblical text but draws inspiration from Jewish midrashic sources. In Muslim countries, on the other hand, Islamic geometric decorations were used to adorn synagogues and holy books, but without human figures.

These decorations served as symbols designed to glorify the sacred text and create a spiritual experience for the user. The use of Judaica became an integral part of Jewish daily life. Every ritual object, from menorahs (see Image 6) to kiddush cups, served both as a practical item and as a spiritual symbol. For example, menorahs were designed in a variety of ways according to the places and periods in which they were created, incorporating models and shapes characteristic of the communities that made them. Other examples include kiddush cups made of metal or glass, decorated with Jewish symbols such as the seven-branched menorah or Hebrew inscriptions (see Image 7). These objects held significant symbolic meaning, and their transmission from generation to generation served as tangible evidence of ongoing Jewish life, even under conditions of alienation and oppression. Again, this is one of the features of Judaica – they passed down from generation to generation, serving as a cultural anchor. Generally, it can be said that Jewish art focused particularly on creating objects for religious rituals, such as challah covers, Shabbat candlesticks, or kiddush cups. Every object carries within it the values of tradition and expresses the individual's and community's connection to faith. Famous examples include the illuminated manuscripts from Eastern Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, which show the influence of Baroque designs but adapt them to the Jewish context.

1.2 Christian Art

Christianity grew out of Judaism, relying on Jewish theology and prophecy as described in the scriptures of the Tanakh, which became the first part of the Christian Bible. The Jewish Bible describes the creation of the world, the stories of Adam and Eve, and the leadership of Moses, who received the Ten Commandments from God and led the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. These stories, along with later Greek writings describing the life of Jesus and the activities of his followers, the Apostles, served as the foundation for Christian art. However,

Judaism, as mentioned, forbade the creation of visual depictions of God and was cautious about representational religious art due to the fear of idol worship. In contrast, Christianity, especially under the influence of Greek-Roman culture, adopted a completely different approach. In this culture, visual depictions of deities and their actions were common and not considered forbidden. This approach had a profound influence on the development of Christianity, which chose to emphasize the centrality of artistic images in presenting the divine. By adapting images from the pagan Greek-Roman tradition to create representations of Jesus and develop visual symbols of his figure, the Christian Church opposed the Jewish prohibition on images. This move helped distinguish Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism, both theologically and culturally. The existence of Christian art thus became one of the unique and foundational characteristics of Christianity.

Ancient Christian art developed in secret due to persecution by the Roman authorities. During this time, Christianity gradually began to establish its unique motifs and themes. Because it was an illegal religion, Christians could not build central places of worship, so they gathered in private homes or in catacombs—burial caves that were also used for secret worship ceremonies. The walls of the catacombs were covered with plaster, and simple paintings were created, relying on decorative motifs influenced by Roman art, such as birds, plants, and angel-like figures resembling Cupid, but also incorporating hidden religious meanings. For example, a painting of a fish (Image 8) and a basket of bread can be interpreted as a still life in the Roman style, but for Christians, it is a reference to the miracle of the loaves and fishes performed by Jesus. The paintings contained dual messages: a visible message that suited Roman or Jewish culture, alongside a hidden message with Christian religious significance. In 313, with the issuance of the Edict of Milan by Emperor Constantine, Christianity was recognized as a legitimate religion. From this moment, Christian art no longer needed to hide, and it began to adopt and define clear symbols like the cross (Image 9). Starting from the 4th century, public places of worship were built where community ceremonies took place, and their walls were decorated with paintings. At this stage, a gradual stylistic change occurred: art became dogmatic, schematic, and focused on spiritual values. Many works during this period were based on existing Jewish visual traditions. For example, the synagogue at Dura-Europos from the 3rd century presents visual scenes depicting Midrashic elements, such as the crossing of the Red Sea, which later inspired Christian works.

During this period, Christianity made use of mimetic motifs, which simulate physical reality alongside fantastic motifs, creating images that transcend reality and draw inspiration from the metaphysical and spiritual world. This approach allowed early Christians to convey deep religious messages about the nature of the divine and the relationship between man and God, focusing on a spiritual and visionary experience. A central example of this is the Transfiguration scene—Jesus' transformation, depicted in art from the 4th century onward (Image 10). This scene deals with the moment when Jesus changes before his disciples, his face glowing with heavenly light, and he converses with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor. The scene presents a blend of the divine and the human, of earthly and heavenly reality, thus representing the pinnacle of spirituality in early Christian art. The artistic representations of the Transfiguration highlight the tension between realistic and idealized images, using symbolic elements to expand the religious meaning. The figures of the disciples, for example, are often depicted in postures expressing awe and reverence, while the figure of Jesus is centered and surrounded by divine light.

In the Middle Ages, iconography developed—a kind of "visual code," a system of symbols that allowed for the identification of figures, places, themes, and even abstract ideas. The word comes from the Greek: Eikon - image and Graphia - writing, meaning "writing through images." This fits its function, which is to convey religious and moral messages to the audience. It was the artist's responsibility to present the message in a clear, understandable, and didactic way, relying on the stories of the Old and New Testaments and on accepted and familiar principles of Christian doctrine. In the Middle Ages, many people were illiterate, and their connection to Christian texts was based primarily on listening to the sermons of preachers. The subjects of these sermons were depicted on church walls through colorful and clear works of art. Christian iconography served as a tool to attract the audience and convey educational messages through stories, parables, and allegories, helping to clarify the key points of Christian belief.

However, Christian art in this form, particularly the existence and veneration of religious images, was under threat during the Iconoclastic Controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries, when icons were destroyed and removed from churches by imperial decrees. The controversy arose from doubts about the biblical prohibitions against idol worship and the question of whether it was permissible to depict Jesus in images without separating his human and divine natures. Iconoclasts argued that images of Jesus emphasized his human nature and allowed for worship through them, while their

opponents warned of the dangers of idol worship. The controversy ended in 843 with an imperial decree in favor of the icons, which returned them to the center of Christian worship. Icons became a symbol of Orthodox identity, relying on a tradition attributed to Saint Luke, who was said to have created an icon of the Virgin Mary. This tradition gave religious legitimacy to the creation of images in Christianity, integrating them into Christian doctrine and worship, making them an inseparable part of the faith. Since the 9th century, the use of Christian art spread across the Christian world, with local adaptations, and continued for centuries, until the end of the 15th century (Image 11).

It is also very important to note the monumental approach, which was expressed centrally in monumental architecture, mainly in churches, cathedrals, and monasteries. These buildings served as places of worship as well as social, educational, and political centers. Gothic architecture, which developed in the 12th century, was one of the most prominent expressions of monumental art in the Middle Ages. It was characterized by pointed arches, which allowed for the construction of taller, more stable, and impressive buildings, as seen in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris (Image 12). These architectural elements, combined with large and richly colored stained-glass windows, created an effect of elevated light and a spiritual atmosphere. There was also widespread use of mosaics and frescoes to decorate walls and ceilings, sometimes even completing entire spaces. Until the end of the 13th century, religious art was primarily based on the power of various institutions and organizations. Art subjects mainly focused on religion and served as an educational tool and a means of spreading God's will.

1.3 Islamic Art

Islamic religious art differs significantly from Christian religious art. It refers to visual works created starting from the 7th century by Muslims and also by non-Muslims living in regions dominated or influenced by Islamic culture. As a result, it is difficult to define Islamic art unequivocally, as it spans a period of about 1400 years and stretches over many regions and cultures. Moreover, it is not limited to religious domains alone but includes a wide range of artistic forms, such as architecture, calligraphy, painting, glasswork, ceramics, textiles, and more. Additionally, it has no specific ties to a particular period, place, or material, instead reflecting the cultural and artistic diversity of Islamic societies throughout the ages. This art is not necessarily religious, and sometimes includes secular elements, even though some Islamic religious figures

opposed certain aspects of it.

Islamic art began to take shape between the 7th and 10th centuries, during the reigns of the first Islamic dynasties: the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. During this period, as the Islamic empire expanded rapidly across vast regions of the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, it encountered the rich artistic legacies of previous cultures. Islamic art drew much inspiration from these legacies, particularly Byzantine and Persian art, but adapted the motifs and styles to the values of Islam and the religious, social, and political needs of the new Muslim society. The influence of the Byzantine Empire on Islamic artists is reflected in the use of geometric decorations and floral motifs, as well as in techniques for ornamenting and planning monumental structures like domes and public buildings. From Persian culture, more complex decorative motifs were borrowed, along with the use of clay bricks to create unique architectural patterns, emphasizing symmetry and visual richness. Islamic artists incorporated these elements into their works but adhered to a central principle of Islamic art: the avoidance of depicting living figures, mainly due to religious prohibitions, which saw the creation of figures as a threat to divine unity.

One of the earliest representations of Islamic art is the most sacred monument in Islam, the Kaaba – the Black Stone located in Mecca (Figure 13). The Kaaba, meaning "cube" in Arabic, is a square structure wrapped in decorative cloth, considered the spiritual center of Islam. According to Islamic tradition, it was built by Ibrahim – Abraham, and his son Ismail – Ishmael, as a temple to God. When Muhammad returned to Mecca in 629/630 CE, he consecrated the Kaaba and the Black Stone inside it, and it became the focal point of the pilgrimage (Hajj) that every Muslim is obliged to attempt at least once in their lifetime. The connection between the Kaaba and early Islamic architecture is also reflected in the tradition related to Muhammad's house in Medina. This house, which had a courtyard surrounded by a wall and a veranda supported by palm columns, is seen as a structure that influenced the design of traditional mosques. Thus, it can be seen how elements from ancient buildings, both the Kaaba in Mecca and Muhammad’s house in Medina, inspired the later Islamic architecture, as will be explained further. Apart from the Kaaba, during the Umayyad period, structures such as the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus (Figure 14) were built, influenced by Byzantine and Roman architecture. Later, during the Abbasid period (750–1258), Baghdad became a cultural and artistic center, and buildings like the Great Mosque of Samarra and the Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo were built, alongside the development of ceramics and calligraphic decorations. In Umayyad Spain, the Great Mosque of Cordoba combined Roman

and Islamic designs.

Islamic art draws its inspiration from three main sources, which influenced the design of its unique character and approach to the creative process. A central source is the Quran, regarded as the first and most important work of art in Islam. The Quran, as a sacred text, deeply inspired Muslim artists, not only in its content but also in its visual form. Calligraphy is an art of writing with a visual dimension, including the design of letters and their execution using tools like broad pens, brushes, and other writing instruments. It is an art that gives form to signs in an expressive and harmonious manner. Islamic calligraphy, which developed into a high art, was born from the desire to glorify the Quranic text and imbue it with a sense of holiness and aesthetics (Figure 15). Verses from the Quran are written in elegant calligraphy and are incorporated into many forms of art and architecture, from ceramics to wall decorations. The use of calligraphy in Islamic architecture expanded beyond the borders of Islamic countries, such as in the Great Mosque of Xi'an in China, where Arabic verses were written in a Chinese calligraphy style.

Another source of inspiration is the Quranic verses that criticize excessive poetry and emphasize the importance of work related to faith and connection with God. This approach led to a preference for art that is functional and religious in nature, aimed at emphasizing the spiritual aspect rather than the visual or outwardly displayed. These values manifested in the fact that Islamic art focused on conveying messages of spiritual beauty and a connection to religious values and belief. Finally, the religious prohibition on depicting living figures, which aimed to deter idol worship and prevent deviation from the worship of the one God, significantly impacted the style of Islamic art. This prohibition led to the development of abstract and geometric patterns, as well as floral decorations, which became prominent features in Islamic art and are known as arabesques. These represent paradise, a central ideal in Islamic thought, and symbolize divine beauty and eternity. The philosophical inspiration of this art draws from sources like Neoplatonism, which emphasizes divine unity and the aspiration for spiritual elevation, and Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, which nurtures a deep personal connection between humans and God. These ideas are reflected in art through endless patterns that guide the eye on an endless journey of discovery, evoking a sense of elevation beyond the material world. The combination of abstract philosophy and religious principles created art that not only serves to adorn but also provides a profound spiritual experience, emphasizing the indescribable connection between humanity and God. Their use is common in both religious buildings and everyday items, often combining with geometric patterns

and calligraphy to create complete and harmonious art.

Due to conquests and the rise of new Muslim empires after the collapse of old ones, Islamic art underwent developmental processes in different periods, adapting to unique cultural, religious, and architectural characteristics. Islamic art evolved over different periods, adapting to religious and cultural values. First, the Fatimid art period should be mentioned, an artistic movement that developed during the rule of the Fatimid dynasty (697-1171 CE), which developed in North Africa, Egypt, and parts of the Middle East. The dynasty, which originated from the Ismaili branch of Shiism, believed in scientific, cultural, and artistic development, and its architecture is considered one of the central influences on the design of the urban environment of the period. One of the central features of Fatimid art is monumental religious architecture. During this period, mosques, palaces, and public buildings were built to emphasize the power of the Fatimid regime and Cairo's centrality as the new capital of the Islamic world. One of the most notable examples is the Al-Azhar Mosque (Figure 16), founded in 970 CE, which served not only as a place of prayer but also as a religious learning center that became one of the most important academic institutions in Islam. In addition, the Al-Hakim Mosque is considered one of the architectural pinnacles of the period, with decorated facades and massive entrances indicating the power of the regime. Another feature of Fatimid architecture is the use of complex geometric decorations, arabesques, and calligraphic decoration. Decorations were incorporated into walls, gates, minarets, and other architectural elements, creating stunning symmetrical patterns. Stucco art (sculpted plaster) was used as a central tool for developing these decorations, alongside intricate wood carvings on doors and ceilings. Many buildings included calligraphic inscriptions in Kufic script, giving them an additional textual character and emphasizing the link between architecture and religious tradition.

Fatimid architecture blended external influences with local innovation. Common elements can be identified with the Umayyad and Abbasid styles, alongside influences from local Coptic architecture in Egypt. The technological innovations of the period are reflected in the sophisticated planning of buildings, using arched vaults and precisely cut stones. The facades of buildings were often made of local limestone, decorated with intricate designs that gave these buildings their prestige and uniqueness. The minarets of Fatimid mosques had a unique design, with tall, decorated towers, sometimes featuring several levels. Another dominant element in this period was the complex vaults, which supported the roofs and domes of mosques and palaces. The

construction featured spacious interior spaces with the use of natural light that entered through designed openings.

Chapter 2: The Status of Religious Art from the 16th Century Onward

2.1 Jewish Art in the Public Sphere

In general, it can be said that Jewish art in the public sphere, particularly regarding European Jews, focused on decorating synagogues and communal ritual objects that served the entire community. Synagogues were the social and religious centers of the communities, and their decoration expressed a connection to heritage, tradition, and religious concepts. Synagogues in various diasporas reflected the lives of Jews at that time. An example of this is Ashkenazi Jewry in Germany and France during the Middle Ages, who faced a harsh social and historical reality characterized by religious persecution, physical violence, economic hardships, and legal restrictions that limited their social and cultural activities. This situation prevented Jews from developing artistic initiatives. Persecutions like the Tenth Crusade (1096), the Crusades, and legal restrictions made investing in construction and aesthetics secondary to the daily struggle for survival. Ashkenazi synagogues, built under these conditions, were characterized by great modesty both externally and internally, reflecting the economic hardships and the communities' dependence on local rulers' decisions, which sometimes allowed only limited construction. The buildings were often made from simple materials, and sometimes existing structures were adapted for prayer, instead of constructing dedicated buildings.

However, within this forced modesty, unique features developed in Ashkenazi synagogues that were designed to address the spiritual and ritual needs of the community. Special emphasis was placed on the bimah, which was located at the center of the space. This location reflected the central role of the bimah in Jewish worship, where the Torah was read, sermons were delivered, and prayers were led. The central bimah became a symbol of centralized worship and the spiritual significance of the space. The separation of men and women was reflected in the meticulous planning of separate prayer areas for men and women. In many cases, the women’s section was added as a secondary element, either as an external addition or by building a gallery. This separation, which was rooted in Jewish law and tradition, became a prominent feature of Ashkenazi synagogues. Additionally, the Ark, which housed the Torah scrolls, was always designed to serve as a central symbol of the sanctity of the place. Its location in the eastern wall, facing Jerusalem, not only reflected the centrality of the Torah but also the Jewish longing to return to Zion. Its design was relatively simple during these periods, mainly due to the constraints of the

time, but its symbolic role was significant. Another unique innovation in Ashkenazi Judaism was the "Shulhof" – the synagogue courtyard, which served as an integrated community center where communal institutions were concentrated. The courtyard included the synagogue itself, the study house (Bet Midrash), the mikveh (ritual bath), and the kosher slaughterhouse, and sometimes other institutions like a community hall. The "Shulhof" was not only a religious center but also a social and cultural hub where community life took place. Thus, it reflected the central role of the synagogue as a space not only for prayer but also for the everyday life of the Jewish community.

At this time, synagogues were built in one of two architectural styles: one was the two-story synagogue, characterized by a division into two sections with central supporting columns that held up the vaulted ceiling. This type began to develop in Central Europe, especially in Germany and Bohemia, and spread to Poland, where it saw further development. The two-story synagogues reflected the adaptation to the needs of worship while emphasizing the bimah as the symbolic center of the building. The bimah's central location, between the support columns, became a prominent architectural feature, refined and adapted to the local Jewish tradition. The second type was the single-story synagogue, which was simpler in design and lacked internal supporting columns. This type allowed for a more open and uniform appearance, where the Ark was prominently displayed as a central sacred element. Although this type was less common than the two-story design, it remained an integral part of Jewish architectural heritage in Ashkenaz.

In Poland, during the 16th and 17th centuries, synagogues developed into a unique style that combined Ashkenazi tradition with local creativity. Two main styles emerged: fortified synagogues (image 23), made of stone, and wooden synagogues (image 24). The fortified synagogues were built during times of political insecurity and served both as religious buildings and as defensive strongholds for the community. They were characterized by thick walls, towers, and solid structures, but also featured an interior design that maintained the focus on worship, with a central bimah. The wooden synagogues, which were common in rural areas and small towns, featured folk architecture that was simple and intimate. These buildings combined original Jewish motifs with local influences. They were known for their unique polychromatic decorations with traditional motifs and aesthetic concepts that harmonized with the prayer space.

The architectural and artistic design of synagogues was significantly influenced by the local Christian culture but retained a clear Jewish identity. Synagogues were integrated into the architectural landscape of their surroundings, and often adopted architectural features from the Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance styles prevalent in Europe at the time. However, designers maintained a distinct Jewish identity by using traditional Jewish symbols and creating spaces suited for Jewish worship. Inside synagogues, walls and ceilings were adorned with stunning paintings that included religious symbols such as the Star of David, the menorah, or the Tablets of the Law. Alongside these symbols, decorations of animals such as lions and eagles were included, symbolizing strength, courage, or connections to biblical stories. Biblical verses were incorporated into the design, sometimes with decorative elements that enhanced their meaning. The Arks, the focal point of synagogues, were designed with great splendor, often using carved wood (image 25). Many were adorned with geometric patterns and ornamental forms, incorporating religious motifs and symbols reflecting Jewish history and culture. In Germany, synagogues were clearly influenced by the major European styles of the period, such as Gothic and Baroque. High ceilings, arched windows, and elaborate decorations were part of the architectural motifs borrowed from local churches, but redesigned in a way that suited Jewish sensibility. Additionally, valuable materials such as silver and gold were used to create ritual items like Torah crowns (image 26), Torah finials, and embroidered curtains, all expressing the sanctity and reverence of the space.

In Italy, medieval synagogues were characterized by unique structural and ritual features. In Venice, for example, there are known synagogues that served as community and prayer centers, where the Torah was read in both Hebrew and Italian. The tradition of the "Ma’aneh" – a musical dialogue between the cantor and the congregation – was dominant, and it dictated an architectural style in which the bimah was positioned to allow interaction between the cantor and the congregation. This created a structure where the bimah and the Ark were secondary spaces connected to the main hall. An example of this is the Spanish synagogue designed by Longhina in the 17th century (image 27). This tradition, based on the customs of the Land of Israel and an early form of Byzantine Christianity, formed the basis of the "Italian custom," which continues to exist today. In terms of interior design, there was an influence from the Renaissance and Baroque styles that dominated Italy during these periods. However, they retained central Jewish symbols like the seven-branched menorah, the Tablets of the Law, and vine decorations that integrated harmoniously into the local aesthetic. Synagogues were typically small and modestly designed on

the outside, due to the constraints of living in ghettos and laws that limited their prominence in the public sphere. However, inside, furniture was adorned with delicate decorations, hand-embroidered curtains, and magnificent Arks made of wood or stone, highlighting the sanctity and symbolic value of the space. During the period of emancipation, many Italian synagogues began to emphasize exterior magnificence, such as the inclusion of organs, large windows, and colorful decorative motifs, but less so in traditional interior design that allowed active participation in prayer. The introduction of the organ, for example, required changes to the bimah structure, leading to a separation between the cantor and the congregation, which caused a certain detachment between worshippers and the prayer service.

The Sephardic synagogues reflected the rich culture of Muslim and Christian Spain, and after the expulsion, the heritage brought by the communities in exile. Synagogues in Andalusia, such as those in Toledo and Cordoba, were characterized by ornate Moorish arches, complex arabesques, and high sculpted ceilings. Sephardic communities that settled in the Ottoman Empire or Western Europe preserved these features while adapting them to local styles. For example, synagogues in Livorno and Amsterdam were built with an emphasis on large, open spaces, a central bimah, and a beautifully adorned Ark made of carved wood and gold.

In countries under Islamic rule outside of Europe, the status of Jews as protected people (dhimmi) provided them with protection for their lives, property, and religious freedom, but it also came with certain limitations designed to emphasize their inferior status relative to Muslims and ensure the dominance of Islam. One limitation was the requirement to avoid overly emphasizing non-Muslim places of worship. Religious buildings, such as synagogues and churches, were not supposed to compete in beauty or height with mosques. Therefore, synagogues were often integrated into local construction and did not stand out externally. In many cases, they were built within Jewish neighborhoods and did not stand out in shape or height. Unlike the Western world, where stone construction preserved through generations, in the East and North Africa, building materials like wood, bricks, and less durable materials were used, which did not survive over time. As a result, many synagogues were destroyed and rebuilt. Occasionally, Jews faced difficulties from Islamic authorities who prohibited the renovation or rebuilding of synagogues, but despite this, there was always a tolerant ruler or merciful judge, and sometimes even economically interested parties, who allowed Jews to build or renovate their synagogues at different times.

In the Eastern countries, characterized by extremely hot climates, such as Iraq, parts of North Africa, and several Central Asian countries, a unique phenomenon of open-air synagogues emerged, which is not common in Western countries. As early as the Mishnah and Talmud periods, open-air synagogues can be found in these regions. The reasons for this are varied and include the hot and dry climate conditions as well as restrictions imposed by Islamic law on Jews. This phenomenon reappeared in different locations and periods, though it did not extend beyond the Mediterranean and Asia. The synagogue in Aleppo, Syria (image 28), built probably in the 6th century CE, is characterized by a unique design that includes a courtyard open to the sky. The synagogue was used for prayers according to the seasons: the courtyard was used for prayers on hot days, and the covered hall was used for prayers in the winter. In the center of the courtyard stands a bimah, and at the southern end, there are three sanctuaries. The covered parts of the synagogue resemble Jewish basilicas from the Talmudic period in the Land of Israel, indicating stylistic continuity in open-air synagogues from then until this later period. Similar features can be found in synagogues in Iraq. For example, the ancient synagogue in Baghdad, called "Salah Al-Kabiri," is traditionally believed to have been built from earth brought from Jerusalem by Jehoiachin, King of Judah. This building, made from soft construction materials like clay and bricks, has been restored many times, but the practice of restoring it precisely has preserved its ancient character. A typical synagogue structure in Babylon included a spacious open courtyard with a central bimah, covered by a small roof supported by columns. Around the courtyard, "heikhalim" (sanctuary rooms) were built for seating, some of which included niches for storing Torah scrolls. A central room, called "Knesset Heikhal," was used for storing the most precious Torah scrolls. The women’s section was usually located on the second floor of the heikhalim or on the roofs. This structure of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms worked well in the hot climate of the region and provided a space for gatherings. Similar planning can also be found in Central Asia and Kurdistan, where synagogues included a central courtyard with a bimah in the center, surrounded by colonnades resting on wooden columns. Torah scrolls were stored in niches in the walls surrounding the courtyard. Regarding art, it was forbidden for Jewish artists to produce images of human or divine figures, based on the interpretation of the Second Commandment in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the art found in Jewish spaces was symbolic. The decorations were based on geometric patterns, such as stars, squares, spirals, and floral motifs. These symbols had spiritual meaning in the Jewish tradition and represented divine order, unity, and harmony.

2.3 Christian Art in the Public Sphere

The Renaissance

In the 15th and 16th centuries, an extraordinary revival of drawing, art, painting, sculpture, and architecture took place in Italy, what is today referred to as the "Renaissance," a term which in French means "rebirth." During this period, new techniques developed that allowed artists to create more realistic images with a sense of depth and space. While religious art continued to be central, secular themes and mythological subjects became more widespread, reflecting the cultural and societal changes of the Renaissance period. Another significant cultural and social change, which directly affected artists, occurred in the second half of the 15th century when rulers and aristocrats became patrons of the arts, replacing the institutions that had supported artists until then. Art became a tool to reinforce their status and power, leading to the "secularization" of art.

The Renaissance brought about fundamental changes in artistic techniques. One of the most significant innovations was the use of mathematical perspective, which allowed artists to create a sense of depth and three-dimensionality in paintings. This technique was first developed by the architect and artist Filippo Brunelleschi in the early 15th century and was based on geometric principles, where converging lines point toward a single vanishing point on the horizon. This method was applied in the works of Masaccio, especially in his painting "The Holy Trinity" (Image 31), where figures and structures appear with a genuine sense of depth. The use of perspective became a crucial tool for artists of the time and was employed in the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and other contemporary artists.

Besides perspective, Renaissance artists began emphasizing the accurate depiction of the human body, based on in-depth studies of human anatomy. This approach stemmed from the desire to understand nature and the structure of the body in a realistic and scientifically grounded way. The anatomical research of Renaissance artists was based on the humanist idea developed at the time, which sought to return to rational thinking, similar to the Hellenistic period. The study of the human body became a symbol of the pursuit of perfection and was integrated with the principles of aesthetics and harmony that were central to Renaissance art. Leonardo da Vinci was one of the prominent artists who engaged in this, performing dissections to study muscle structure, bones, and body proportions. His famous work, "The Vitruvian Man" (Image 32), demonstrates the

integration of anatomical knowledge with mathematical principles of proportion and symmetry, inspired by the ideas of the Roman architect Vitruvius. Another iconic work illustrating the desire for anatomical precision is Michelangelo's sculpture "David" (Image 33). The statue, which stands over five meters tall, depicts David before his battle with Goliath, highlighting a combination of potential movement, physical strength, and mental focus. Michelangelo managed to give the statue a sense of natural movement using contrapposto—a technique of positioning the body asymmetrically to create a feeling of motion and vitality. Another prominent work of Michelangelo is the "Pietà" (1498-1499), a marble sculpture depicting Mary holding Jesus' body after the crucifixion. This piece blends classical idealization with profound emotional expression, with the Virgin's face conveying peace amidst the pain of loss. Here too, Michelangelo demonstrated exceptional control over anatomy and composition, creating folds of fabric that mimic the natural movement of the clothing, along with refined proportions that give the figures a sense of harmony and balance.

Another mathematical element that guided Renaissance artists was the "golden ratio," considered a tool for achieving perfect aesthetic balance. Using this ratio, artists created compositions in which each element of the painting naturally fit together, creating dynamic yet controlled movement within the artwork. One of the most famous examples of this is Raphael's painting "The School of Athens" (Image 35). In this work, the figures are arranged in a classical architectural structure, with each figure positioned deliberately to serve the overall narrative of the painting. Diagonal lines lead the viewer’s gaze to the center, where Plato and Aristotle stand, while the surrounding figures are arranged in groups that function as separate units but are interconnected within the composition. Another notable work that uses the golden ratio is Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" (Image 36), where the figure of Jesus serves as the central focus and the apostles are divided into groups, contributing to a balanced composition.

Another significant element was the advanced use of light and shadow techniques in the development of Renaissance art, which helped give depth and realism to works. This technique, later perfected by artists such as Caravaggio, began to appear in the works of earlier artists like Leonardo da Vinci. One of the most notable examples of this technique is his use of sfumato—a gradual and soft transition between different shades without hard boundaries, which creates a sense of naturalness and brings the figures to life. A prominent example of this is the "Mona Lisa" (Image

37), where the smooth transitions between light and shadow create a sense of depth and human expression. This technique was also used by artists like Titian (Image 38), who, through layers of paint and subtle shading, gave his paintings a dramatic dimension and a sense of volume. The use of these techniques enabled a shift from the flat depiction of figures, as seen in medieval art, to a more realistic representation of space and the human body, reflecting the scientific and philosophical ideas of the period.

Even in Renaissance architecture, principles of harmony, symmetry, and classical proportions were emphasized, inspired by the buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. One of the most significant projects in this field was the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican (Image 39), designed by Michelangelo in the second half of the 16th century. The dome, completed after his death, reflects the Renaissance aspiration to combine advanced engineering with aesthetic beauty, using harmonious proportions that create a sense of height and grandeur. Michelangelo drew inspiration from the dome of Florence's cathedral but developed the design into a structure with balanced and impressive aesthetics, which became one of the symbols of the late Renaissance.

In Northern Europe, Renaissance art developed uniquely. Northern Renaissance artists first developed and perfected the oil painting technique. The pioneer of oil painting, Jan van Eyck, who worked in the early 15th century, managed to give his works an almost photographic quality. His painting "The Arnolfini Wedding" (Image 40) demonstrates his remarkable ability to use light, reflections, and textures, highlighting the materiality of fabrics, glass, and wood in exquisite detail. Northern artists combined the Italian innovations in perspective, anatomy, and composition with local traditions of meticulous detail and emphasis on realism. A prime example of this is the works of the German painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who combined Italian influences with depictions of rural landscapes and common folk (Image 41). His works were characterized by rich narratives, dynamic compositions, and detailed representations of everyday life, maintaining natural proportions and full of vitality. In contrast, Albrecht Dürer, from the 16th century, merged Italian humanism with German realism. He was a master of graphic arts, woodcuts, and engravings, and in his works, one of the most famous being "The Rhinoceros" (Image 42), he applied Italian anatomical principles while incorporating tiny, precise details characteristic of Northern painting. Dürer was also one of the first to use mathematical perspective in Northern art, and his influence spread throughout Europe. It's also worth mentioning Hans Holbein the Younger, who worked in

England and became famous for his realistic portraits of royal court members, especially in his work "The Ambassadors" (Image 43), which combines extraordinary visual accuracy with complex symbolic hints. The painting shows elegant figures alongside objects symbolizing knowledge, science, and political power, using innovative perspective techniques like anamorphosis, seen in the distorted skull at the bottom of the picture.

The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 16th century in Germany, brought a significant change in the perception of religious art and became one of the most influential movements in Christian art. Ideologically, this movement was based on the Renaissance; Martin Luther, one of its prominent leaders, criticized the Church using humanist ideas that advocated for a critical investigation of the Scriptures, and many of the Reformation's supporters, like Erasmus of Rotterdam, were deeply influenced by Renaissance humanism. However, the discussion on this matter was more complex. During the Renaissance, art served as a tool for spreading theological ideas, and Christian architecture was imbued with symbolism, but most Protestant movements called for a reduction in the use of religious iconography, sometimes even rejecting it completely.

Luther, for example, took a moderate stance on religious imagery. Initially, he opposed dedicating religious art with the intention of "buying" God's favor, but later acknowledged the educational benefit of religious imagery for "children and simple people." Luther did not support iconoclasm (destruction of images) and sought to preserve religious art with a focus on faith as the source of salvation rather than "good deeds." Other reformers, however, such as Calvin, were more hostile to religious art. He argued that images detract from the divine majesty and emphasized the power of written words instead. In many Calvinist churches, religious images were completely removed and replaced with biblical texts or prayers. The Lutheran approach, however, allowed the continued commissioning of altar pieces, though adjusted to Protestant views, namely those based on stories from the Bible, especially from the life of Jesus, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. In Calvinist communities, however, the influence of the Reformation was so profound that Christian art nearly disappeared from the public and church spaces. This had a significant impact on the Christian art market, particularly in Northern Europe, where the demand for traditional works such as images of saints and the Virgin Mary significantly declined.

Outside of churches, religious imagery served as an important tool in the propaganda of the Lutheran Reformation against the Catholic Church and its practices. Especially notable were printed pamphlets and broadside prints with woodcut illustrations that developed during this period. These depicted criticisms of Catholic practices like indulgences and the corruption of the clergy. One of the leading Protestant artists of the time, Lucas Cranach the Elder, was deeply involved in the creation of such images (Image 44). His woodcuts and engravings served as important propaganda tools and helped spread the Protestant message to the masses, particularly through popular visual depictions.

2.3 Islamic Art in the Public Sphere

From the 16th century onward in the Muslim world, public art can be divided into two main categories: art typical of Southeast Asia, particularly architectural art, with one of its great symbols being the Taj Mahal, which was discussed earlier. Alongside this, there was significant development in the Middle East, attributed to the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the origins of the Ottoman Empire date back to the 14th century, when Ottoman architecture began to develop with Byzantine and Mamluk influences, characterized by thin minarets, large domes, and sophisticated engineering systems.

During this period, Islamic architecture developed into a more formalized system of planning public buildings, such as mosques and royal structures, using models and constructive plans that were preserved in the sultans' archives. Unlike the European conception of this period, where detailed facade drawings were used, Ottoman architecture was based on a geometric grid system that helped transform two-dimensional plans into three-dimensional structures. This design allowed for the creation of buildings with harmonious proportions, based on principles of symmetry and centrality – as can be seen in the mosques designed by the famous architect Sinan (1520-1588), who worked during the 16th century and created buildings that made advanced use of dome architecture techniques (Image 53). The spatial design of these buildings emphasizes the connection between the interior and exterior, using natural light to create a sense of calm and spiritual elevation. Alongside religious buildings, Islamic architecture also included palaces, baths, and bazaars.

The central characteristic of Islamic art in the public sphere was its alignment with the principles and cultural values of Islam, whether it pertained to religious or secular buildings. This architecture is characterized by elements such as domes, arches, vaults, and intricate decorations featuring geometric patterns and calligraphy, while avoiding any depictions of living or human figures (Image 54). Additionally, there is an emphasis on orienting buildings towards the Kaaba – the direction Muslims face during prayer. During the planning process, there was an attempt to design structures that provided light through large windows, which also allowed for ventilation, crucial in regions with hot climates prevalent in parts of the empire. Fountains and pools were also constructed in inner courtyards, serving as natural cooling systems. Furthermore, cleanliness and order were essential components of the perception of public and private space in planning, and were considered both religious and social values. In mosques, there was also a focus on external decoration, as the form and design were meant to emphasize the presence of God and enhance the spiritual experience. Architectural features such as arches, domes, and geometric or calligraphic decoration schemes reinforced the spiritual connection, as seen in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Image 55), where impressive internal and external decorations are integrated.

Regarding building materials, construction was characterized by a functional and flexible approach, adapted to the environment and the local availability of materials. The mosques, khans, and madrasas built during this period were often constructed using materials that were readily available throughout the empire; limestone was the primary building material in urban centers and areas where it could be easily quarried. Its use allowed for the creation of massive and durable structures, especially in religious and monumental buildings like the great mosques in Istanbul, including the Süleymaniye Mosque, previously mentioned, and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. Limestone allowed for precise carving for decorations and sculptures, which enriched the architectural embellishments of the period. Additionally, bricks were often used for building interior walls and domes, especially in areas where stone was not abundantly available. The bricks were also used for decoration, as they were incorporated into geometric patterns along with colorful glazed tiles. This can be seen in many regional buildings in Anatolia, particularly in khans and madrasas. Furthermore, wood was widely used, primarily for roof beams, decorated ceilings, and carved doors, which were characterized by elegant lines and refined details. In residential buildings and smaller public structures, such as khans and hammams, wood was extensively used for support and interior design. The use of local materials was part of a broader approach to

optimally utilize available resources, alongside a building tradition that evolved over generations, rooted in Byzantine, Seljuk, and early Islamic building techniques.

Outside the empire, in Spain, Muslim influences from the period of occupation were evident in later Christian and even Jewish buildings, as already discussed in the case of Spanish synagogues. Islamic architecture in Seville during the 16th century reflects the continuation of Islamic design principles in a space that had been under Christian control since the end of the Nasrid period in 1492. Despite the change of rulers, the Islamic architectural heritage continued to exist and significantly influenced domestic construction in the city. One of the prominent features of this period is the preservation of the inner courtyard, which served as a central element in the design of homes in Seville. The inner courtyard, an integral part of Islamic architecture, was designed to provide privacy for the home's inhabitants while utilizing smart climatic principles, such as natural cooling through vegetation and small water sources.

Additionally, the architecture of the period continued to make use of decorated arches with geometric and ornamental patterns that were common in Moorish architecture. Another motif was the use of colorful tiles, which were an inseparable part of the design of both the interiors and exteriors of buildings. These colorful tiles, often adorned with intricate geometric patterns, not only provided impressive aesthetics but also served functional purposes, such as thermal insulation and protection from humidity. Beyond the decorative aspects, the use of natural and local materials was common in this period, in line with Islamic architectural tradition. The buildings were primarily made of clay and plaster, materials ideal for dealing with Seville's hot climate. These materials allowed for natural heat regulation and the preservation of a cool atmosphere inside the homes, using traditional building technologies that had developed during the Islamic period.

2.3 The Enlightenment and the Syncretic Revolution

In Europe, during the 18th century, a significant shift began to take place. This century was a transitional period for both art and religion. The Enlightenment led to a change in attitudes towards religion and religious art, as people began to express skepticism and engage in rational inquiry and critical interpretation of religious traditions. Rulers continued to commission religious art and architecture for various reasons, including fulfilling vows, expressing faith and reverence for the divine, and celebrating the power of dynasties. The period was simultaneously characterized by

trends of extravagant decoration and more restrained displays, alongside the rise of new artistic styles such as Rococo, Neoclassicism, and a revival of Gothic style. The "Grand Tour" brought many Protestants from Northern Europe to Rome, the center of Catholicism. Protestant attitudes toward "papist art" softened during the 18th century, partly due to the increasing cultural exchanges between Catholic and Protestant cultures in Rome, and the perception that Catholicism no longer posed a significant threat to Protestants, who had become a numerically significant minority. With the decline of Rome's temporary and spiritual power in the 18th century, the papacy sought to re-establish itself as a cultural authority, decorating Rome with archaeological and architectural initiatives that linked the popes to classical civilization and presented them as guardians of the shared Western cultural heritage.

At the same time, the major power institutions of Europe – the Church and absolute monarchy, which had once been the great patrons of Baroque art – weakened. These institutions faced growing criticism, and people began to question their traditional authority. The Enlightenment era, which developed during this time, promoted ideas of critical thinking, individualism, and belief in the power of humans to shape their destiny. At the beginning of the 18th century, Europe experienced a sense of optimism, a thriving economy, political stability, and reforms, in contrast to the tumultuous 17th century. During this period, a unique artistic style, Rococo, emerged, and many scholars believe its development is linked to the political, social, and intellectual changes of the era. Rococo first developed in France during the Regency (1715–early 1720s), in the reign of the young King Louis XV. This period was characterized by wide cultural and artistic development, supported by the aristocracy, and was full of opulence and court amusements. It was considered completely different from the formal and rigid period of Louis XIV, and after his death, the French nobility, which had been freed from the tight control of the royal court, began to build private palaces (châteaux), salons, and workshops, where they patronized artists according to their personal taste. This led to a freer, livelier, and more vibrant artistic style. A central figure of this period is Madame de Pompadour (Image 56), who was an important patron of the arts and influenced the taste of the high society.

Artistically, some view Rococo as the final stage of the Baroque style, while others see it as a transitional phase. Although there are many similarities between Baroque and Rococo, including the use of rich decorations and emphasis on detail, Rococo differs in its unique characteristics.

This style first developed in France, where it reached artistic maturity, and later spread to Italy and Central Europe. During its development, Baroque characteristics became more decorative and embellished, creating a style and techniques that distinguished it from earlier art. The term "Rococo" is derived from the French word *rocaille*, referring to a decoration technique that used shells, pebbles, and small stones to adorn sculptures and fountains. Rococo style is characterized by rich decoration, elegant and freer designs, and a lighter approach compared to the heavy and formal Baroque. While Baroque served as a means of expression for the Church and the absolute state, Rococo was not linked to religious or political purposes. Art during this period was primarily intended for aesthetic enjoyment and to reflect the fashionable and hedonistic lifestyle of the aristocracy. Rococo paintings and sculptures dealt with light and secular themes. The art was playful and optimistic, focusing on romantic courtship, pleasures, leisure, scenes of nature, and depictions of young figures participating in light entertainment and various social events.

The central genre of Rococo painting was *Fête Galante*, which focused on elegant party scenes in gardens and open landscapes. This genre was developed by Jean-Antoine Watteau, who altered certain elements of Baroque, creating a more natural and softer style. Unlike many painters of his time, he did not receive direct patronage from the monarchy or the aristocracy, but rather commissions from wealthy bankers and merchants of the bourgeoisie, who sought to emulate the aristocrats by collecting and displaying art. Watteau came from a modest background in provincial France, and even in his most theatrical and light-hearted paintings, a note of melancholy can be found. His paintings appealed to the emotions and fantasies of the bourgeoisie, and many view his art as a reflection of the transience of wealth and worldly pleasures, as seen in his happy and dreamy scenes. His most famous painting is *The Journey to Cythera* (Image 57), depicting a romantic journey to the Island of Love. Another prominent artist of this period was François Boucher, who was the court painter to Louis XV and served as the director of the Royal Academy of Arts. Among his patrons was Madame de Pompadour. He was known for his idyllic and serene paintings, as well as portraits of the French nobility. His style had a significant influence on artists across Europe, and his works included not only paintings but also designs for carpets, furniture, and porcelain. His most famous painting is *The Triumph of Venus* (Image 58), depicting the goddess Venus surrounded by joyous figures in a light and harmonious atmosphere. Two other notable Rococo artists who were not French are the English William Hogarth (Image 59), the

Spanish Francisco Goya (Image 60), and the Italian Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (Image 61), each of whom contributed to the development of European Rococo style in their own way.

As the art market expanded and consumerism revolutionized, the general public gained increasing access to religious imagery. These ranged from prestigious religious paintings collected by Catholic and Protestant elites to prints that were accessible to nearly everyone in society. However, the Enlightenment led to a significant undermining of religion. Religious art lost its original context in private displays and official salon exhibitions, where it was presented alongside secular and erotic themes. These works were judged not for their religious messages or functions, but in purely aesthetic terms and in comparison to other works. Towards the end of the 18th century, and especially leading up to the French Revolution, religious art began to lose its hegemonic power in the public sphere, partly due to de-Christianizing and iconoclastic approaches. During this period, a new understanding of religious artistic representations emerged, in which many religious works were presented in new contexts, often without clear religious symbols, in an attempt to preserve them as cultural heritage rather than as ritual items. These processes paved the way for broader changes in the status of religious art in the following centuries, when Christian art became a part of general cultural history, not necessarily a direct expression of a specific religion.

In the 19th century, philosophical and theological circles in both the Christian and Jewish worlds began to engage with questions about the nature of God, His interest and involvement in the world, and even His existence. Figures such as Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and later Voltaire, Hegel, and Kant placed these issues at the center of their thought. Baruch Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher from Amsterdam, stands out among these thinkers as a syncretist, meaning one who combines ideas from different traditions. In his writings, such as *Ethics* and *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza proposed a new approach to religious and philosophical issues, blending Jewish and Christian elements in an effort to resolve interfaith conflicts. In *Ethics*, Spinoza changed the traditional terminology used to refer to God. Instead of addressing God as a personal name, he introduced the concepts of "active nature" (*natura naturans*) and "passive nature" (*natura naturata*) in an effort to challenge the historical human tendency to view God as a personal object and to assign names such as Zeus, Aphrodite, or "God" to Him. In this, he sought to shift the discourse away from claims of "ownership" of the divine and "correct" ways to approach it, especially in the history of monotheistic beliefs where there is only one God. According to

Spinoza, however, "Nature" is a universal reality shared by all humanity, and no one has ownership of it. In his discussion of prophecy and prophets, Spinoza mentions that God can communicate directly with humans, without physical mediation, and suggests that prophets are individuals with exceptional consciousness. While in some of his writings, he acknowledges the Messiah as a significant figure, he also explicitly states that he neither affirms nor denies Christian doctrines about him, admitting that he does not fully understand them. This approach represents a position that is neither Jewish nor Christian, but a unique blend of both, reflecting a syncretic revolution in Western thought.

The Zionist Perspective

At the end of the 18th century and during the 19th century, a significant change occurred in the attitude of secular Jewry towards the Second Commandment; the revival of modern Hebrew, which began in the Diaspora, laid the foundations for the development of cultural fields such as literature, poetry, theater, and cinema in the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. Visual arts, also developed by Jewish artists in the Diaspora, found its continuation in the Land of Israel. A natural connection linked Jewish artists working in the Land of Israel to those in the Diaspora, as many of them had emigrated from countries where they had been exposed to the works of their peers. The second half of the 19th century was marked by a wealth of artistic works created by Jewish artists. Jewish painters and sculptors began to gain significant recognition in the European art scene, both in terms of the scope of their works and their quality—an achievement that had not been seen before, primarily because until then, there had been no Jewish artists in the contemporary sense of the word, as Jews, even if they were interested, were not permitted to practice art due to medieval guild laws.

Jewish artists began to emerge in the mid-19th century against the backdrop of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, which sought to break away from traditional norms and integrate Jews into European culture. In this context, many of the Jewish artists of the time adopted secular approaches that viewed art as a tool for personal expression and the creation of a new identity, distancing themselves from religious restrictions and traditional communal frameworks. It is also worth noting Nietzsche's theory of the "death of God," which had a significant impact on the perception of the relationship between religion and art. Nietzsche argued that in the modern age,

religious ideas, particularly those related to the divine presence as a source of moral and cultural authority, had lost their validity and influence. The "death of God" symbolizes the cultural rupture in which society no longer bases its identity on religion, but on secular, rational, and individualistic principles. Nietzsche saw this both as an opportunity and a threat: on the one hand, it was a new freedom that allowed for the creation of independent values, and on the other, it created an existential and moral void that could lead to chaos. This idea profoundly influenced Western culture in general and Zionist thinkers in particular, as it provided intellectual validation for the exclusion of religion and tradition.

In 1901, during a speech at the Fifth Zionist Congress, Martin Buber emphasized the role of art in the cultural renewal of the Jewish people and called for deepening the connection between art and the national process in the Land of Israel. The speech also served as a framework for presenting the first exhibition of contemporary Jewish artists at that congress, showcasing works by artists such as Joseph Israels, Ephraim Moshe Lilien, and Edward Bendman. The exhibition aimed to demonstrate the ability of Jewish artists to create high-quality art and to refute the claim made in Europe that Jews were incapable of producing meaningful art. These ideas were reinforced at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, where Boris Schatz, a sculptor and visionary artist, succeeded in convincing Herzl of the importance of establishing an art school in the Land of Israel. This led to the establishment of the "Bezalel" school in Jerusalem in 1906, which became one of the central institutions of cultural Zionism. Bezalel functioned not only as an art school but also as an educational and cultural institution designed to shape a new Jewish national identity. It encouraged its students to create works that combined traditional Jewish motifs, such as cultural symbols and customs, with modern artistic styles (Image 63). Bezalel's contribution to Jewish art heritage was also reflected in the fact that it was one of the first Zionist institutions to be established. It even preceded the founding of the first kibbutzim and was an integral part of the vision for building a progressive Jewish society in the Land of Israel.

The education at "Bezalel" serves as a central example of the attempt to combine traditional Jewish elements with modern approaches to visual art. "Bezalel" focused on creating sacred objects such as menorahs, goblets, and Torah ark cabinets (Image 64), but its approach to art was more cultural than religious. For many of its founders and supporters, Judaism was viewed as a source of cultural and aesthetic inspiration, not necessarily as religious worship. They sought to design works that

connected Jewish heritage with the values of national Zionist identity, while also incorporating influences from contemporary European art. The products of "Bezalel," as well as works by other artists of the time, reflected the tension between the desire to preserve Jewish symbols and the aspiration to detach from distinctly religious symbols. For example, the sacred objects produced at the institution, while carrying a traditional Jewish character, were also designed to appeal to secular tastes and were sometimes even presented as part of a global visual culture. In this way, the works of Jewish artists in the second half of the 19th century were not only an expression of distancing from religious tradition, but also a call for the creation of a modern Jewish identity, rooted in heritage but aiming to integrate into the modern world. More broadly, this process reflected the cultural and social changes that Jewish communities in Europe and the Land of Israel were undergoing, with art becoming a central tool in creating a new link between Jewish history and the vision of the national future.

Israeli Art

Over time, Israeli art distanced itself from its direct connection to Jewish tradition, especially its Galut (Diaspora) character, as part of a broader process of shaping a new Hebrew culture in the Land of Israel. Artists of the time, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, sought to emphasize the difference between the Jewish Galut and the new Israeli Jew. They aimed to create new "Hebrew" imagery that highlighted the connection to the Land of Israel and its local landscapes, with the goal of instilling a sense of belonging to the new physical and cultural space. One of the main ways this was done was by focusing on local landscapes and figures like the Arab Fellah, who symbolized a deep connection to the land and the Middle East (Image 65). The Arab Fellah was often portrayed as an aesthetic hero—a solid, sensual figure with a direct connection to nature. In contrast, traditional Jewish figures, such as rabbis, Hasidim, or synagogue scenes, were pushed to the margins of artistic production. When these figures appeared, they were usually portrayed exotically, as a kind of testimony to a distant and foreign heritage that did not belong to the new space the artists were seeking to create.

This process was accompanied by conscious attempts to distance from "Galut" symbols and present "Hebrew" identity as detached from religious tradition. For instance, landscape paintings focusing on sacred Jewish sites were replaced by depictions of Arab villages, mosques, and

Muslim graves. The emphasis shifted not only away from the Jewish-religious center but also towards mythical and pagan motifs, drawing inspiration from the ancient East. Figures like the Canaanite Nimrod and designs with Assyrian and Mesopotamian characteristics reflected the search for a "pre-Jewish" Hebrew cultural identity that connected the Jewish people to its ancient roots in the Middle Eastern space. This process, which reflected the cultural struggle to create a new identity, viewed Jewish tradition primarily as an artistic and symbolic source of inspiration, rather than as an essential part of the contemporary artistic language. Traditionalism was seen as exotic and folkloric, while the focus was placed on shaping a modern, secular, and Israeli national identity that connected local landscapes, ancient myths, and contemporary Western aesthetics. Israeli art drew inspiration from Jewish sources such as the Bible and tradition, but did so with a critical and sometimes subversive approach. Many works incorporated Jewish religious symbols, such as the Binding of Isaac, but were sometimes interpreted in secular or pagan ways. Artists emphasized the search for a modern Israeli identity, rejecting traditional Jewish imagery. Figures such as Moses or Nimrod became symbols of an ongoing dialogue between Judaism and paganism, between spirituality and physical power. Israeli art moved in a dialectical motion between these two poles.

Modern Israeli art, especially avant-garde, tended to distance itself from a direct connection to Judaism, adopting a universal artistic language rooted in Western progress. For avant-garde artists, Jewish tradition was often seen as restrictive and opposed to the freedom of expression and human sensitivity they sought to present in their work. This struggle, between commitment to tradition and distancing from it, was reflected in the tension between two central streams: on one hand, the approach of Yosef Zaritsky, who advocated for abstract, secular art, and on the other, the approach of Mordechai Ardon, who incorporated Kabbalistic and Midrashic symbols in an attempt to elevate Jewish history into mystical-cosmic landscapes. Zaritsky’s success led Israeli art far from traditional Jewish customs, leaving Ardon and his circle on the fringes of the artistic discourse. While works with clear connections to tradition, such as symbols of the Sefirot or the Tree of Life, were removed from the Israeli art center, artists who approached Judaism in indirect or symbolic ways remained. Works by artists like Naftali Bezem, Abraham Ofek, and Shraga Weil (Image 66) incorporated Jewish symbols such as Shabbat candles, fish, and rooster figurines, but did so not as central elements, but as cultural or folkloric interpretations. Israeli avant-garde art approached Jewish tradition primarily through external and symbolic imagery, often with distance or critique.

In this context, Israeli art repeatedly asked itself how to deal with central Biblical myths like the Binding of Isaac. This myth appeared in many works but was mostly expressed through pagan or secular interpretations, stripping the ram of its messianic symbolism and emphasizing the sacrifice of Isaac alone. This pattern reflected a historical disenchantment and a questioning of divine oversight.

Even among completely secular circles, such as the young Sabra generation in the 1960s, there remained cautious references to Judaism, mostly through detachment. The new Hebrew cultural vision aimed to create a modern, rational Jewish identity that was not directly connected to religious frameworks. The rejection of religion was an inherent part of the process of establishing the "new Jew," focused on physicality, self-reliance, and national solidarity. Still, echoes of Jewish tradition, like the figure of the Jewish mother or the theme of redemption, persisted as symbols within Israeli culture. However, for many artists, especially those in the avant-garde circle, these references were used cautiously and critically, emphasizing that the modern Hebrew nation must not be a prisoner of its past. For Israeli artists, especially those who were part of the avant-garde movement, Jewish tradition was often considered an obstacle to the modern and progressive worldview they sought to establish in Israel. As a result, the early stages of Israeli art saw a significant distancing from religious symbols and practices in favor of shaping a modern, secular Israeli identity. The future of this art would lie in the intersection between the secular and the religious, between critique and adherence to tradition.

2.5.Meir Ben Uri

Meir Ben Uri (1908–1983) was an architect, city planner, painter, designer, composer, and technical advisor for building in the Department of Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. He was born in Riga as Meir Maximilian to his parents Moshe and Rosa Svotsky. The family later moved to Munich, Copenhagen, and Berlin, where he completed his high school education. During his studies in architecture at the Technical University of Berlin, he was active in the Zionist youth movement "Blau-Weiss" and the student association "Kadima." In 1934, he immigrated to Israel, Hebraized his surname to Ben Uri, named after Bezalel Ben Uri, the biblical artist, married Yehudit Bernstein, the daughter of Peretz Bernstein, a member of the Knesset and minister from the General Zionists, and became a student and assistant of Herman Struck. He also served as the architectural advisor for the Ministry of Religious Affairs during the early years of the State.

Ben Uri was an extremely prolific artist; in 1972, a catalog of "The Institute for Religious Art" was distributed, showcasing nearly a thousand works, architectural plans, and hand-made creations. The catalog includes a wide range of works in the fields of architecture, design, art, and music. It documented close to a thousand items, including architectural plans for synagogues, public buildings, and settlements, as well as drawings, oil paintings, etchings, and illustrations inspired by the Bible (Image...), the Midrash, and the landscapes of the Land of Israel. In addition, the catalog featured original religious artifacts, Torah curtains, embroidery patterns, metalwork, ceramic and clay vessels, and more. The catalog also included educational materials for children, designs for sacred places, research on art and architecture topics, documentation of original musical compositions, and scripts for theater and non-animated films. His archive showcases the development of his artistic work over the years, preserving and restoring Jewish and religious art heritage in Israel. Ben Uri designed synagogues, ark furniture, and furnishings for many communities in cities, kibbutzim, and moshavim. He designed religious artifacts and memorial plaques, illustrated books, and adapted Talmudic stories and legends into non-animated cartoons, which he presented at his children's Bar and Bat Mitzvah events. He planned and renovated holy places and historical sites, supervised construction, published articles on art, architecture, and Jewish history in music, exhibited his works, composed and arranged liturgical music, and worked on improving the public religious space from an aesthetic perspective.

Ben Uri had a personal vision for synagogue design; in an article published as part of a collection of essays by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, he expressed a creative and holistic vision for synagogue architecture in the country, which was contrary to the modest and uniform model promoted by the Ministry in those years. Ben Uri stated that while many synagogues had been destroyed in the Diaspora and many Jewish architectural assets were lost, no large synagogues had been built in the Land of Israel for hundreds of years, while other religions built magnificent structures to demonstrate their presence. According to him, buildings should be constructed to highlight faith through their symbols and the very structure itself, and not settle for modest prayer spaces. In his 1955 article, he described how, in Israel, it is possible to adhere to Jewish law, which stipulates that the synagogue should be taller than any other building in the city, and if someone builds a taller building, they should be forced to lower it. In the Diaspora, this could not be implemented, and many synagogues were built in low buildings or even in basements, as a symbol of Jewish life under persecution and humiliation. However, in Israel, synagogues could be planned as "towers" on top of public and private buildings, creating a Jewish character in the urban landscape and offering a view of the scenery above the roofs. This vision of towers was not realized, and the state's involvement in the aesthetic redesign of synagogues also did not come to fruition. Although he opposed uniform and simple solutions ideologically, Ben Uri designed synagogues, such as the Yeshiva in Kfar HaRa'ah and the Yeshiva in Kiryat Ye'arim, demonstrating his talents as an architect and designer. At the same time, he agreed to contribute his work to the more uniform synagogues and designed many of them.

Throughout his life, he worked to promote religious art in the country and founded the "Institute for Religious Art" in 1980 in his home in Kiryat Shmuel-Haifa, on the second floor that began operating in 1948. The uniqueness of this institution lies in the fact that it served both as an artist's workshop and as an exhibition, guidance, and teaching place for his diverse works. Some of the works were created with his artist wife, Yehudit. Over the years, Ben Uri established an archive documenting his works in all fields, and the museum, along with the archive, continues to operate in a wing that was built in 1980. From the perspective of "Zionist religious art," Ben Uri believed that an artist faithfully expresses his soul and spirit, and that true Jewish art is one that adheres to the commandments and is filled with the spirit of the Sabbath. In this way, he laid the foundation for his concept of a museum dedicated to art that preserves the purity of the soul and serves as a model for any artist wishing to create from his religious faith. As part of his work at the Institute and in political and private circles, he sought to create religious expression in new artistic forms and provide an original artistic form to religious life.

It seems that, despite his extensive work, Ben Uri did not receive proper institutional recognition for his significant contributions. There are only academic articles about his work, and a search on the Israel Museum website revealed that despite his substantial work, only one solo exhibition of his was held, nearly two decades after his death, in the summer of 1999. This exhibition was held at the niche Bar-David Museum of Art and Judaica in Kibbutz Bar'am. A few of his works were displayed in two thematic exhibitions: one in 1988, titled "A Nation Building the Land: Israeli History in the Mirror of Art," which took place at the Herzliya Museum, and another titled "The First Decade: Hegemony and Multiplicity" in 2008 at the Chaim Atar Museum in Ein Harod. One would expect leading museums in Israel to pay more attention to his work, given the scope of his creation and influence on Jewish-religious art and architecture. However, it appears that, like other artists involved with Jewish and religious art, Ben Uri did not receive widespread recognition in the Israeli art establishment, which tended to favor secular, universal, and modern art. This approach led to artists like Ben Uri, who believed in the power of art to serve the religious community and reflect its values, not receiving the same visibility and legitimacy as creators working outside of this framework.

Nevertheless, Ben Uri's contribution to shaping the religious and public space in Israel was significant. The synagogues he designed and his works in the fields of Judaica and architecture

continue to serve many communities and are an integral part of the religious landscape in Israel. In addition, the Institute for Religious Art he founded continues to serve as a testament to his work and influence, albeit on a smaller scale. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of renewed interest in Jewish art, with initiatives that blend tradition with contemporary art, which may lead to a re-evaluation of his work and his unique place in the history of Israeli art, not only as an architect and designer of synagogues but also as a creator who bridged art, religion, and Jewish-Zionist identity in his unique way.

2.6 Mohammed Said Kalash – A Palestinian Arab Muslim Calligraphy Artist

Khalil Shukri, a Palestinian Arab calligraphy artist, resides in Kafr Qara in northern Israel. The emergence of arabesque and calligraphy in the field of art dates back as early as the 10th century BCE, becoming central elements in architecture, textiles, and sacred books.

Islam prohibits the depiction of human portraits or sculptures, leading to the prominence of decorative arts in Islamic culture. Arabesque is characterized by plant motifs and geometric patterns, while calligraphy is distinguished by ornamental lines that repeat infinitely. These art forms play a central spiritual role in Islamic culture, expressing the structure of the universe and divine perfection.

Mohammed Said Kalash is a calligraphy and arabesque artist who merges tradition with contemporary artistic interpretation. His work incorporates motifs from the Quran, integrating verses into his designs. Kalash utilizes diverse materials, primarily wood, combined with ink, oil paints, and wood engravings to create artistic interpretations of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

His work is both unique and widely appreciated, particularly among local galleries and a Muslim audience that recognizes the depth of his craftsmanship. Observing Kalash's creations reveals a profound conceptual foundation with meticulous attention to detail. His execution is both breathtaking and precise, offering an innovative interpretation of Quranic verses that resonates deeply with viewers.

The AMOCA Museum – The Arab Museum of Contemporary Art in Sakhnin

AMOCA is a pioneering museum in Israel focusing on contemporary local and international art, with a special emphasis on works from the Arab world and the Mediterranean region. The museum's collection includes over 200 contemporary artworks, operating under the belief that art is a powerful tool for fostering dialogue, coexistence, and mutual respect among communities.

Founded by Blue-Simeon Fainaru and Avital Bar-Shay, AMOCA is housed in the Environmental Center of the Beit Netofa Valley Municipal Association in Sakhnin. Sponsored by the Sakhnin Municipality in collaboration with the Environmental Center, the museum aims to make contemporary art accessible to both Arab and Jewish populations.

The museum's inaugural exhibition, "Hiwar" (حوار), embodies its vision—creating dialogue and collaboration between Jews and Arabs. The Arabic word "Hiwar" signifies both a calm conversation between individuals and a constructive dialogue between groups, aimed at achieving mutual understanding.

AMOCA distinguishes itself with a mobile approach, bringing exhibitions to various locations in the Galilee and the periphery. Alongside the museum operates "Beit Al-Sulh," a center for conflict resolution, complementing AMOCA's mission by providing a space for discourse and mutual understanding. This combination reflects the aspiration to create a platform that promotes dialogue and conflict resolution through art and constructive communicatio (Appendices, p,51).

Chapter 3: The Museology of Religious Art

In Europe and the United States, from the late 19th century to the present, there has been a significant shift in the approach to Jewish art. Jewish art became integrated into the scholarly study of Judaism and the Jewish experience, distancing itself from direct religious involvement and aligning with the modern spirit. As a result, ritual art objects ceased to be seen as functional items used only for religious commandments and began to be studied as historical phenomena of cultural value.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the phenomenon of Jewish museums began to flourish. These museums became centers for collecting and displaying Judaica. They exhibited objects of beauty, interest, and cultural significance, functioning as an alternative to synagogues in showcasing Jewish heritage. The goal of the museums was to preserve the Jewish past, improve the image of Jews and Jewish culture, and raise awareness of their values. The founders, who often were not observant, were art lovers, collectors, or intellectuals who saw museums as a way to preserve and honor Jewish heritage. Sometimes, even Christians were involved in these initiatives, aiming to promote Jewish artists. Jewish museums worldwide are generally divided into six types: museums of history and archaeology, ethnography and folklore, art museums, national museums, educational museums, and natural history museums. Some museums focus on a single field, while others include departments covering a range of subjects.

3.1 Religious Museums in Israel

In Israel, the first Jewish museum was Yad Vashem, which is actually part of the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Authority. The establishment of Yad Vashem began in 1942 when Mordechai Shenhavi, a member of the Mishmar HaEmek kibbutz, proposed creating a memorial site in the Land of Israel to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish resistance. He also suggested the name "Yad Vashem," inspired by a verse in Isaiah. After the war, the idea gained momentum, and in 1945, Shenhavi presented a detailed plan to establish an institution in Jerusalem for remembrance and research. The plan included memorializing the names of the victims, presenting historical findings, erecting monuments, and creating a memorial forest, as well as establishing an educational institution for future generations. In 1947, the first full meeting of Yad Vashem took place, but the outbreak of the War of Independence delayed the implementation of

the plan. After the establishment of the state, efforts resumed, and in 1953, the Knesset passed the Yad Vashem Law, making the institution a state authority. The law defined the purpose of Yad Vashem as commemorating the six million Jews who were murdered, the communities that were destroyed, and the bravery of the fighters and rescuers. Additionally, Yad Vashem was tasked with collecting, researching, and disseminating information about the Holocaust. The institution operates as a public body supported by the government but also raises additional donations and resources. The law empowers Yad Vashem to represent Israel in international projects and grant honorary citizenship to victims.

The first museum dedicated to religion is the L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, which was inaugurated in 1974 in Jerusalem. The museum focuses on collecting, preserving, and presenting artifacts of Islamic art and archaeology, depicting the traditions of Islamic art from the 7th century to the 19th century. Over the years, the museum has become a world-renowned center due to its unique and comprehensive collection, considered one of the most important of its kind globally and the only one in Israel. The permanent exhibition at the museum provides an in-depth look at the treasures of Islamic art from regions such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, India, Afghanistan, and Spain. Among the items displayed are ancient Quran pages, functional objects, ceramics, metal and glassware, jewelry, carpets, and more, reflecting the variety and richness of styles in Islamic art. In recent years, the museum has also been showcasing the connections between Arab culture and the Jewish communities of North Africa and Spain.

The first museum for Jewish art was Beit Hatfutsot, which was founded in 1978. The museum presents a permanent exhibition focused on the ongoing existence of the Jewish people and the lives of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. In addition to the permanent exhibition, it hosted hundreds of temporary exhibitions on various topics. The museum has developed unique information databases, including a photo and film archive on Jewish topics, a Jewish genealogy center for registering family trees, a center for Jewish music, and a database on Jewish communities and the origins of Jewish surnames. The institution also publishes books, catalogs, and CDs related to its activities. Due to financial difficulties, the Knesset passed the Beit Hatfutsot Law in 2005, declaring Beit Hatfutsot the national center for Jewish communities in Israel and worldwide, ensuring its existence through a budget allocation in the state budget. In 2012, the

museum's name was changed to the Museum of the Jewish People to emphasize that the museum is not only focused on Diaspora Jewish culture but also on its Israeli aspects.

Alongside Beit Hatfutsot, there are other museums in Israel focusing on religion. For example, the Heichal Shlomo Museum, located in a historic building in the heart of Jerusalem, boasts a rich history and a magnificent collection of heritage and Judaica items. The building, constructed in 1958 at the initiative of Sir Isaac Wolfson, served as the headquarters of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel until 1994. The museum was established with the encouragement of Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and its first curator was Yehuda Leib Bialer. Inside the building is also the "Rinnenim" synagogue, which was the largest synagogue in Jerusalem and served the leaders of the country, its ministers, and presidents until 1982. The museum contains more than 4,000 unique items, reflecting the material and cultural heritage of the Jewish people. The permanent exhibition is organized according to traditional principles, where the objects and the human stories behind them together create a general narrative. The exhibition is divided into six rooms: The Herzog Room, which presents the heroic stories of individuals who influenced their generation; the "Between Times" room, dedicated to synagogues, sacred objects, and symbols like the menorah; the "Women's Time" room, which focuses on women and their roles in Jewish life cycles; the "Small World" room, which includes dioramas and miniatures depicting the story of the Jewish people; the "Vilna" room, which presents a unique display of Torah scrolls; and the "Other Eyes" room, which is dedicated to contemporary art addressing issues of personal and group identity.

The museum combines permanent exhibitions with temporary ones, based on one of the most important Judaica collections in the world, which includes items from the Second Temple period to the present, from a variety of Jewish communities and sectors worldwide. The collection was built over the years through the efforts of collectors and individuals who dedicated their lives to preserving Jewish heritage. The collection began with the work of Yehuda Leib Bialer, a native of Warsaw, Poland, who was active in the Mizrachi movement and used his post-World War II years to rehabilitate Jewish communities in Europe. Bialer, who immigrated to Israel in 1949, was one of the founders of the museum and its first director. During his missions to Europe, he was involved in rescuing Jewish cultural treasures, thus laying the foundation for the museum’s collection. In 1977, with the support of Sir Isaac Wolfson, an important collection gathered by Shlomo Golnitsky, a collector of sacred objects, was acquired. This collection was seen as having an

educational role, connecting to previous generations. Additionally, the rich collection of André Naareh and Rina Bernaheim, who immigrated to Israel from France, was added to the museum after being preserved in their home in Jerusalem. The collection was made up of unique items inherited by Rina from her father, Dr. André Bernaheim, a leading figure in Jewish communities in France. In 1979, the museum also received a long-term loan of the Max Grundt collection, which includes sacred objects and textiles and is considered the product of the meticulous work of the collector Arthur Huet from England. Among the items in the collection are menorahs, kiddush cups, scrolls, Torah scrolls, embroideries, and more.

The Bible Lands Museum, opened in 1992, is the only museum in the world that presents the history of the biblical period in the lands mentioned in the Bible and traces historical and cultural processes from the dawn of civilization to early Christianity. Among the items on display are ancient tools, gold jewelry and gemstones, statues, and other findings that offer a rare and unique glimpse into daily life, worship, and cultures that thrived during the biblical lands period. The museum offers a variety of permanent exhibitions and temporary exhibitions, including guided tours on various topics such as the history of the Judean exiles in Babylon, Greek mythology, and inventions of the ancient world. The displays highlight central events from the Bible, the influence of Greek and Roman culture, daily life, rituals, and dietary customs in ancient cultures, as well as unique stories about historical figures such as the Queen of Sheba and Queen Esther. The museum also engages in research and documentation of the roots of innovation in the ancient East, focusing on technological and cultural developments that occurred in these regions throughout history, with an emphasis on the history of the Jewish people.

The emphasis on Judaism distinguishes the Bible Lands Museum from the Rockefeller Museum, the first museum designed specifically for antiquities. The museum was built between 1930 and 1935, during the British Mandate period, and opened to the public in January 1938. During the Jordanian rule in East Jerusalem, it was managed by a board of trustees, and in 1967, the Israel Museum took over its management, preserving its original character. The museum presents the beginnings of archaeological research in the area and focuses on rare objects from the prehistoric period to the Ottoman period. The museum also features thematic exhibits, including periods of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Israel Museum also contains a unique, permanent exhibit of

archaeology of the Holy Land, which allows the public to explore archaeological sites and objects connected to the historical context of the Bible and early Christianity.

The artist explains how they choose verses with wisdom and spiritual depth to integrate into their work, emphasizing balance, harmony, and beauty. Personal biography plays a key role, connecting the themes of their life with those found in the Quran.

The artist's studies at the University of Leeds helped shape their interest in Arabic script and its diverse forms, which inspired their continued exploration into this field.

Their work has been exhibited widely, with locations including Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and the Palestinian Authority, and it carries deep symbolic meanings that explore the intersection of personal and spiritual dimensions.

Ultimately, the artist hopes to foster dialogue and empathy through their art, believing it can bridge divides between cultures, religions, and nations. Their exhibition in Haifa, in collaboration with Jewish and Christian artists, exemplifies their belief in shared existence and peaceful coexistence.

The **AMOCA Museum** plays a vital role in promoting such dialogue, offering a platform for contemporary art from the Arab world and beyond, with a focus on Jewish and Arab collaborations. Their mission aims to promote mutual understanding through art and create space for constructive communication.

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Appendices

Interview with Mohammed Said Kalash

Q: How do you select the verses to incorporate into your work?

A:I choose verses rich in wisdom and life insights that provide peace and comfort. I strive to infuse new aesthetic values that emphasize balance, harmony, and beauty within the text itself.

Q: Do you incorporate personal elements into your work?

A: Yes, I integrate aspects of my personal biography that reflect my place in the world and how my life story interacts with the themes of the Quran.

Q: Why did you choose this form of art and these materials?

A: I graduated from the University of Leeds in England, where I discovered the diversity of materials and learned that Arabic script originated with six fundamental styles and has since expanded to nearly 100 styles. This realization fascinated me, leading me to delve deeper into the field.

Q: Where have you exhibited your work?

A: I have exhibited in galleries in Israel and abroad, including Jordan, Morocco, and the Palestinian Authority. Visitors to these exhibitions appreciate the symbolism in my artwork, which expresses the interplay between the personal and the spiritual worlds.

Q: What is most important to you in your artwork?

A: I want my artwork to spark dialogue and foster empathy, bridging divides and bringing people closer together.

Q: Do you collaborate with Jewish and Christian artists?

A. The exhibition I held in Haifa was built on the belief in shared existence among all people. My art has the power to bridge religions, cultures, and nations because its message is one of beauty and peace.

The AMOCA Museum – The Arab Museum of Contemporary Art in Sakhnin

AMOCA is a pioneering museum in Israel focusing on contemporary local and international art, with a special emphasis on works from the Arab world and the Mediterranean region. The museum's collection includes over 200 contemporary artworks, operating under the belief that art is a powerful tool for fostering dialogue, coexistence, and mutual respect among communities.

Founded by Blue-Simeon Fainaru and Avital Bar-Shay, AMOCA is housed in the Environmental Center of the Beit Netofa Valley Municipal Association in Sakhnin. Sponsored by the Sakhnin Municipality in collaboration with the Environmental Center, the museum aims to make contemporary art accessible to both Arab and Jewish populations.

The museum’s inaugural exhibition, "Hiwar" (حوار), embodies its vision—creating dialogue and collaboration between Jews and Arabs. The Arabic word "Hiwar" signifies both a calm conversation between individuals and a constructive dialogue between groups, aimed at achieving mutual understanding.

AMOCA distinguishes itself with a mobile approach, bringing exhibitions to various locations in the Galilee and the periphery. Alongside the museum operates "Beit Al-Sulh," a center for conflict resolution, complementing AMOCA’s mission by providing a space for discourse and mutual understanding. This combination reflects the aspiration to create a platform that promotes dialogue and conflict resolution through art and constructive communication.

PHOTO'S

Image 1: A ceramic figurine, Jerusalem, the Upper City. From: Avigad, N. *The Upper City of Jerusalem*. Jerusalem 1980, Photo 15.

Image 2: Incense stand made of clay, Ta'anakh, early Israelite period. From: Lapp, P. W. *A New Cultic Stand from Ta'anakh*. *Qadmoniot* 5 (1969), Plate G.

Image 3: A jug from the Kingdom of Judah, with Greek and Hebrew inscriptions on its handle. From: Aliza Davis, *Folk Art of the Jews Through the Ages*. Jerusalem: Reuven Mass (1978). Plate 91.

Image 4: A decorated ossuary from the Mishnah period. From: Aliza Davis, *Folk Art of the Jews Through the Ages*. Jerusalem: Reuven Mass (1978). Plate 28.

Image 6: Hanukkah Menorah with the Tablets of the Covenant, the Menorah, and grapevine motifs. Copper, silver, and bronze alloy, Italy. From: Aliza Davis, *Folk Art of the Jews Through the Ages*. Jerusalem: Reuven Mass (1978). Plate X.

Image 5: The Finding of Moses. Dura-Europos synagogue. From: Shalev – Eini, Sarit. "Jewish Art and Christian Art – Interactions." *Mahaniym*, Issue 10 (1995). Plate 4.

Image 8: Engraving of a fish, catacombs of St. Sebastian, Rome. From: Vatican Catalog.

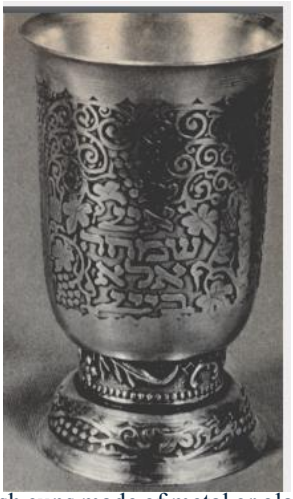


Image 7: Kiddush cups made of metal or glass, adorned with Jewish symbols such as the seven-branched menorah or Hebrew inscriptions.

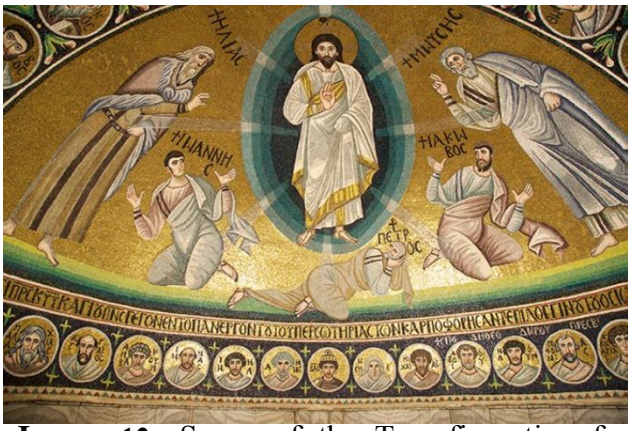


Image 10: Scene of the Transfiguration from the mosaic of St. Apollinaris, 6th century. Retrieved from: https://www.thewayofbeauty.org/blog/2022/8/the-history-of-the-icon-of-the-transfiguration.

Image 9: The Crucifixion on a 5th-century ivory relief from Northern Italy, British Museum. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Crucifixion-on-a-5th-century-ivory-relief-from-North-Italy-British-Museum-see-16_fig1_356210403.

Image 12: Notre-Dame Cathedral, retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Notre-Dame-de-Paris.

Image 11: Byzantine icon of the Crucifixion, mid-10th century. Retrieved from: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464428.

Image 14: The Great Mosque of Damascus, retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Great-Mosque-of-Damascus.

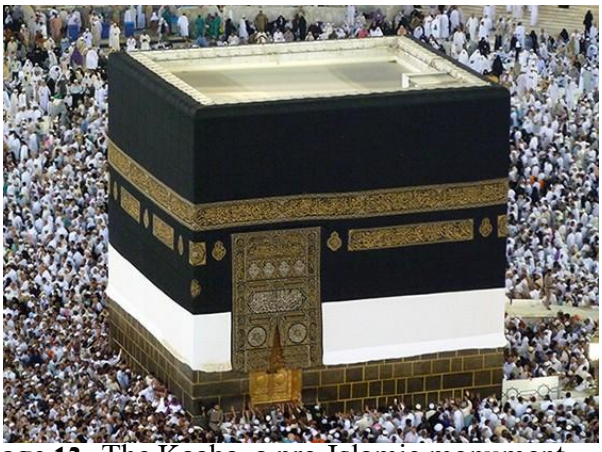


Image 13: The Kaaba, a pre-Islamic monument, renovated by Muhammad in 631-32 CE. Over the years it has been refurbished many times. Today, it is clad in granite and covered with a silk curtain and calligraphy in gold and silver threads. Retrieved from: https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/arthistory/chapter/early-islamic-art-and-architecture/.

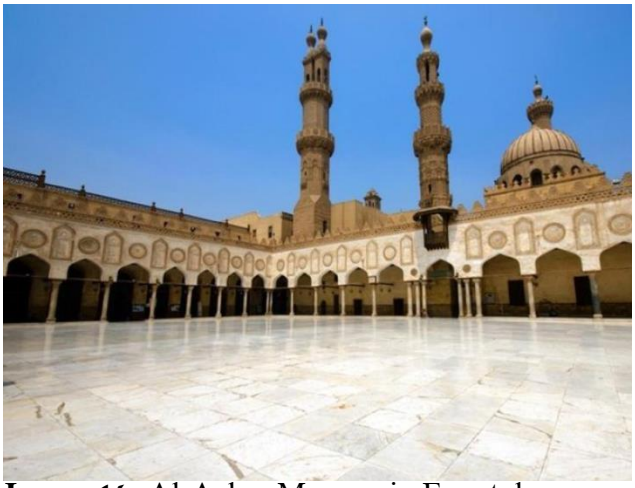


Image 16: Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt, known as "the first international university in the world." Retrieved from: https://nasseryouthmovement.net/Al-Azhar-Mosque.tps://nasseryouthmovement.net/Al-Azhar-Mosque.

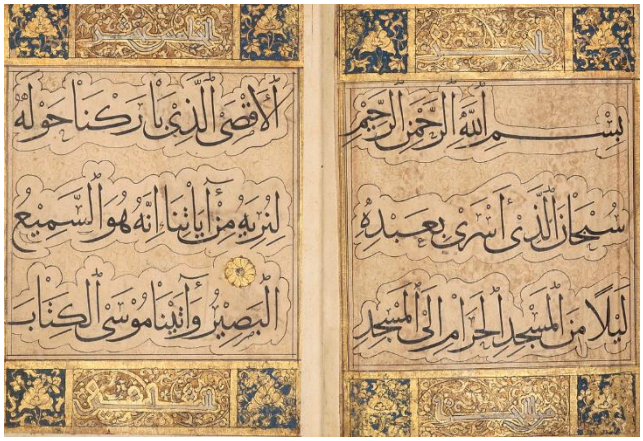


Image 15: The Surah "Al-Isra" copied by the 13th-century calligrapher Yaqut al-Mustasimi. Retrieved from: Wikipedia.

Image 18: Mamluk enamelled and gilded bottle from the late 13th century. Retrieved from: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/450409.

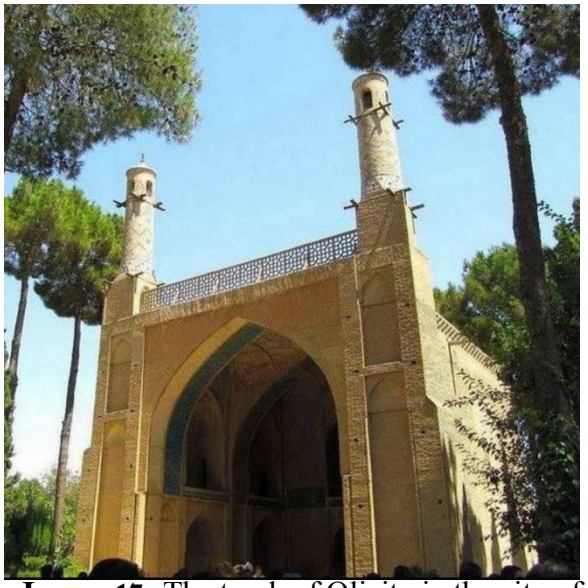


Image 17: The tomb of Oljeitu in the city of Soltaniyeh. Retrieved from: The Institute for Iranian Culture.

Image 20: Alhambra Palace in Granada. Retrieved from: https://www.lametayel.co.il/articles/9m4rxk.

Image 19: Mamluk metal stand from the mid-13th century. Stands like this were used as mobile grills and heating stoves. It belonged to the second ruler of the Rasulid dynasty, who reigned from 1250-1295. Retrieved from: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/444540.

Image 22: Hamam Mosque in Isfahan.

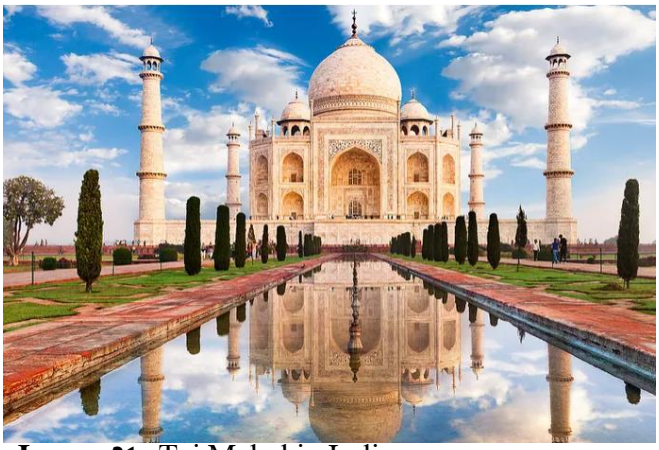


Image 21: Taj Mahal in India.

Image 24: Ruins of the synagogue in Łaściów – view of the inner arches.

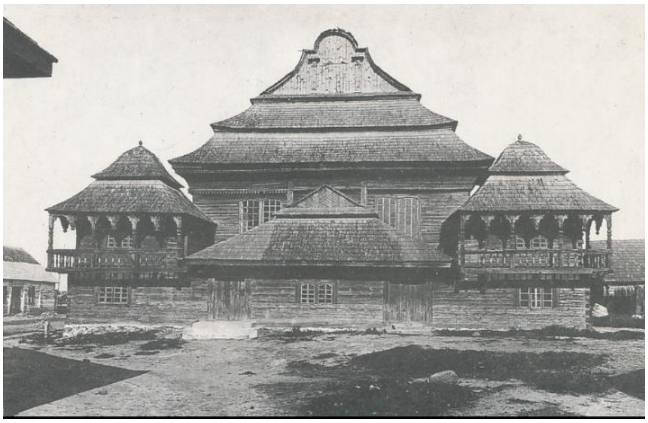
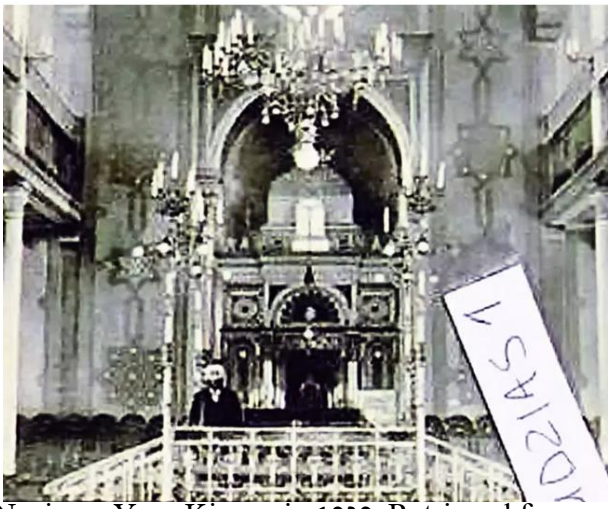


Image 23: Wooden synagogue in Włodawa, Poland (today Belarus), late 16th century.

Image 26: Torah finials in silver, Vienna, 19th century. Retrieved from:

Image 25: Holy Ark in the synagogue in the town of Jasło, Poland, which was burned by the

https://www.imj.org.il/he/collections/361228-0.



Nazis on Yom Kippur in 1939. Retrieved from: https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/396427.

Image 28: Courtyard of the synagogue in Aleppo, model at the Diaspora Museum, Tel Aviv.

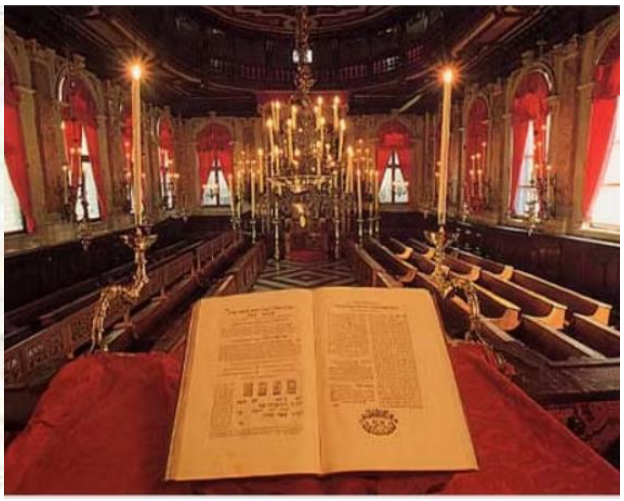


Image 27: Spanish Synagogue in Venice. Retrieved from: https://www.sandpcentral.org/venice.

Image 30: Torah case and decorations, Afghanistan, 20th century, made of wood, cotton, and silk, with gilded metal thread ribbons and silver finials adorned with glass beads. Retrieved from: https://www.imj.org.il/he/collections/363200-0.

Image 29: Torah pointer in silver, engraved and decorated with leaves and flowers, Morocco, 19th century. Retrieved from: https://museum.imj.org.il/stieglitz/resultsH.asp?cat=1.

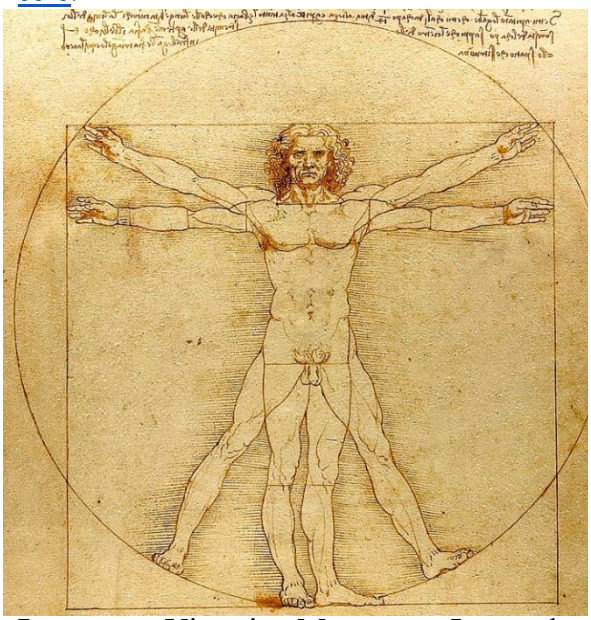


Image 32: Vitruvian Man, 1490, Leonardo da Vinci. Retrieved from: Wikipedia.

Image 31: The Holy Trinity, 1425, Masaccio. Retrieved from: Wikipedia.

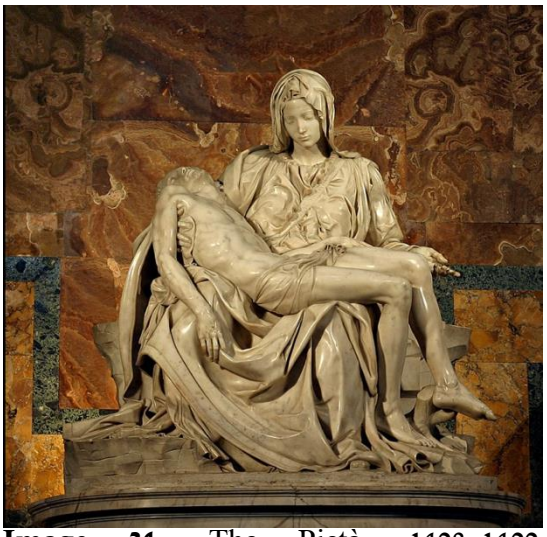


Image 34: The Pietà, 1498–1499, Michelangelo.

Image 33: David, 1501–1504, Michelangelo.

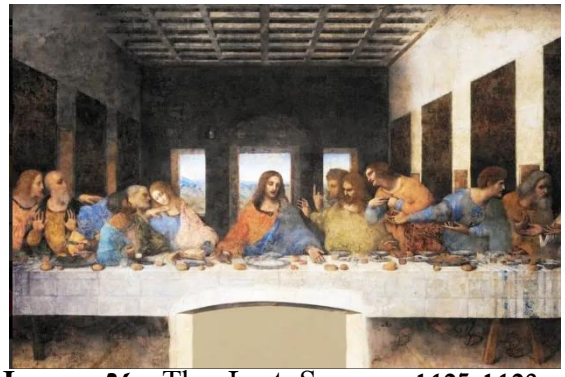


Image 36: The Last Supper, 1495-1498, Leonardo da Vinci

Image 35: The School of Athens, 1509-1511, Raphael.

Image 38: Venus Warming Cupid's Eyes, 1565, Titian.

Image 37: Mona Lisa, early 16th century, Leonardo da Vinci.

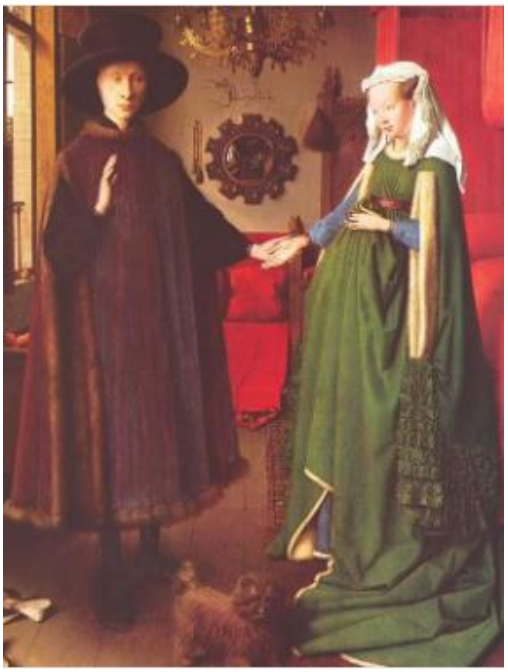


Image 40: The Arnolfini Wedding, 1434, Jan van Eyck.

Image 39: Dome of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. The helicopter in the image provides a perspective that illustrates the scale of the dome.

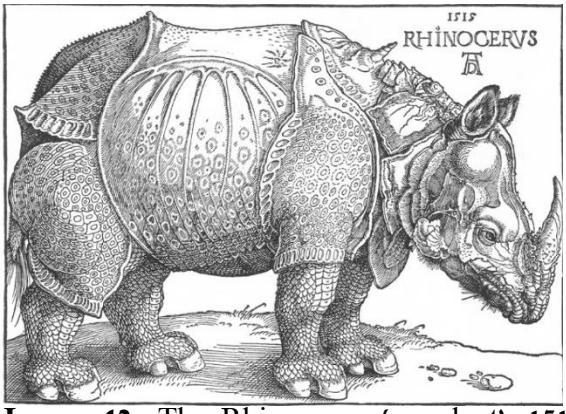


Image 42: The Rhinoceros (woodcut), 1515, Albrecht Dürer

Image 41: Dutch Proverbs, 1559, Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Image 44: The Sale of Indulgences, Basel 1523-1522 (approx.), Cranach.

Image 43: The Ambassadors, 1533, Hans Holbein the Younger.

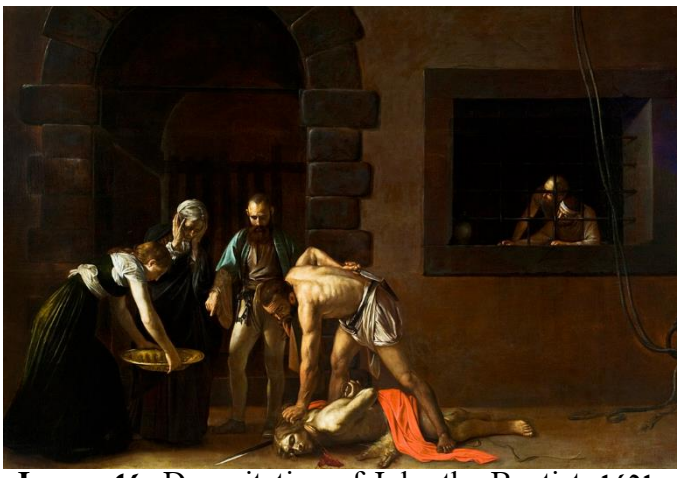


Image 46: Decapitation of John the Baptist, 1601, Caravaggio.

Image 45: The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa, 1647–1652, Bernini.

Image 48: High altar table, wood, approximately 30 meters in height, in the Church of San Esteban, Salamanca, Spain, 1693, José Benito Churriguera. Retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/art/Golden-Age-Spanish-literature.

Image 47: Las Meninas, The Maids of Honour, 1656, Velázquez.

Image 49: Venus and Adonis, 1614, Peter Paul Rubens.

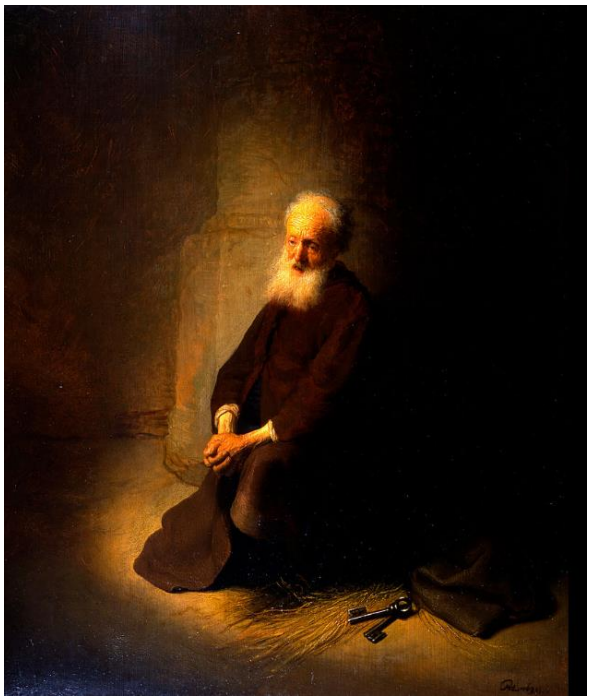


Image 50: Saint Peter in Prison, 1631, Rembrandt.

Image 52: Palace of Versailles in Paris, France.

Image 51: Girl with a Pearl Earring, c. 1665, Johannes Vermeer.

Image 54: Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, Turkey, commissioned by Sultan Selim II and built by Sinan between 1568-1575. Sinan considered it his masterpiece.

Image 53: Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, built between 1550–1558. Retrieved from: Wikipedia.

Image 56: Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour, Maurice-Quentin de La Tour.

Image 55: One of the walls of the inner courtyard of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Image 58: The Triumph of Venus, 1740, François Boucher.

Image 57: The Journey to Sitheria, Jean-Antoine Watteau.

Image 60: Venice - View of the Giudecca and the Church of La Zitella, 1712-1793, Francesco Guardi.

Image 59: The Agreement, 1744-1742, William Hogarth.

Image 62: The Last Supper, 1986, Andy Warhol. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/02/arts/design/warhol-religion-museum-review-catholic.html.

Image 63: Artwork by Boris Schatz. Retrieved from: https://www.imj.org.il/he/exhibitions/%D7

Image 61: Wedding of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Beatrix of Burgundy, 1156, detail of a ceiling fresco in the Kaisersaal, Würzburg, Germany, 1750-1752, Tiepolo.

Image 64: Shmuel Katz, from the book *After the Flood: Genesis*, 1965. Retrieved

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Image 66: "Auschwitz Presentation," 1956-1964, Joseph Beuys. Retrieved from: https://www.erev-rav.com/archives/52635.

Image 65Shlomo Weil, Samson and the Lion, 1962. Retrieved from: https://www.tiroche.co.il/auction/178/lot-12-315/.