**Visual Arts in the Arab World**

When talking about Visual Arts in the Arab World, it is important to acknowledge that the “Arab World” covers a wide range of lands, and several periods and genres. From Islamic architecture to calligraphy to miniature, pottery, and textile arts, what makes Islamic Art distinct is that it has both religious and secular elements to it. If you visit a mosque, you will find religious architecture and calligraphy and very cultural-specific furnishings, including carpets, fittings, and woodwork.

Visual Arts in the Arab World is very diverse and several different elements to it. If you look at Arab Visual Art before independence, it was strongly influenced by Roman Art, Byzantine Art, and Sasanian Art. As time passed by, Arab visual arts also incorporated elements of Central Asian nomadic traditions and Chinese Art.

Minarets are a common feature in Arab architecture. Minarets are basically tall towers, and the link with Islam is that these tall Minarets are used to broadcast the call to prayer five times a day. Domes are another important feature of Arab Visual Arts. For example, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is an important part of Arab History.

Arab Visual Arts is also known for its geometric patterns. These have been derived from earlier cultures, including Greek, Roman, and Sassanian. Geometric patterns are an important component of Islamic decoration. Two other forms of decoration in Islamic Art include arabesque, which is based on curving and branching plant forms and calligraphy. All three of these forms - geometric patterns, arabesque design, and calligraphy are frequently used together in paintings, embroidery, and other art pieces.

Arabesque is a form of geometrical floral or vegetal design that is repetitive in nature. In Arab art, this is used quite often to symbolize the many qualities of Allah - his transcendence, his infinite power, and his indivisible existence. In fact, many times, these Arab artists intentionally introduce mistakes in their Arabesque repetitive design to demonstrate that only Allah is perfect, and no human being on earth can claim perfection. While most other faiths and art disciplines disagree with this theory, Arab art is dominated by this blind faith in Allah.

It is important to note that the depiction of the human form is forbidden in Islam, and hence it can be observed that all Arab art usually does not include any human form. If you look at paintings before Independence, you might see men and women and even camels and horses, but after independence, true Arab art tends to avoid the use of human form. This is also something that sets Islamic/Arab art, apart from other art forms. For example, Roman and Greek sculptures are known for their exquisite human-oriented designs (David by Michelangelo, for example), but you will not see any such thing in Arab Visual Arts. Patterns, geometric and floral designs, calligraphy focused on verses from the Quran or names of Allah, are all prominent themes in Arab art but not paintings showing men, women, children, or even animals and no sculptures of humans. There are artists who produce such material, but they are generally not appreciated, recognized, or encouraged. Obviously, there are Arab painters who paint humans, but again, that is not a major component of Arab visual arts.

If you look at Islamic calligraphy, it is very representational in nature. It represents the words of Allah and is a form of prayer or praise for Allah. The geometrical patterns and arabesque designs are more abstract in nature, and the focus is on developing creative patterns and attractive designs instead of communicating a message. Object-oriented art is not common in the Arab world. Their visual strength lies in their use of the Arab language and patterns. However, when it comes to buildings and architecture, minarets and domes dominate their style and, again, represent the immense power of Allah.

The Arab world has numerous examples of beautiful artistic creations. The Blue Mosque of Istanbul is known for its immense beauty and mesmerizing artistic quality. Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is considered to be one of the most beautiful architectures in the Arab World. The Umayyad Mosque is another beautiful example of great Islamic architecture. If you go inside these mosques, you will see spectacular examples of Islamic calligraphy, arabesques, and geometric patterns. Overall, Arab Art, though very different from Roman or Greek Art, for example, has its own special charm and quality. The focus is always on depicting the supreme being, but the creativity, the design, and the quality are some of the best in the world.