

ISLAMIC GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

Islamic ornaments – defined as the use of decorative patterns – feature within the framework of Islamic art, and can be broadly grouped into three fundamental categories:

- *Geometric patterns* consist of a collection of shapes, repeated and altered – that conform to geometric principles – which result in a strict cohesive design.
- Curving plant-based elements – the *arabesque* – is based on rhythmic linear patterns.
- *Calligraphy*, presenting religious scripture fashioned in a stylised approach, is employed decoratively, as well as being a tool to impart knowledge.

These three ornaments are often found working together, in elaborate interlacing compositions, on different scales, and across many forms (examples include mosaic, stucco, brickwork, and ceramics).

Islamic art has, throughout history, largely opposed the creation of images. The exclusion of figurative images has been a direct result of the aniconism deeply rooted within Islamic culture. Despite not explicitly prohibiting human depiction in the Qur'an – believed to be the literal words of God, and the theological basis of Islam – the Hadith however, which presents the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, clearly expresses a strong dislike for it.

If one were to create a figurative representation of man or god, this is considered an attempt to compete with God's brilliance. This is particularly evident in an ancient Islamic edict, which states that "painters will be among those whom God will punish most severely on the Judgement day for imitating creation". Idolatry is not permitted.

Given these constraints, and the potential fate of those who consider defying them – it is no surprise that Islamic artistic vocabulary leans towards abstract forms of expression – far more than many other cultures. Exploring non-figural art, geometric patterns and other Islamic ornaments were the most effective approach to conforming to religious scriptures, whilst still presenting magnificence.

It is undisputed that, in life, art is the mirror of culture, reflecting upon the beliefs and views of those who produce it. In this respect, the art of the Islamic world reflects both the cultural values of the religion, and the perceived view Muslims have over the universe and the spiritual realm. Within Islam, everything is attributed to the work of Allah, and all reality begins with, and centres on, Allah. In this sense, Islamic art serves to represent the spirituality surrounding the subject, instead of its physical qualities, in order to form a bridge, and in this way allow viewers to become closer to Allah. Through expansive surfaces, dressed in complex geometric patterns, Muslim artisans effectively articulate the language of the universe, and provide the means to cleanse both body and soul.