

## Design in the Art of Illumination

Pınar TOKTAS<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Traditional Turkish Arts, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Turkey)  
Corresponding Author: Pınar TOKTASI

---

**Abstract:** Islamic art involves a unique sense of beauty, other than that of the Western art. The artistic elements and the design principles that form a work of art not only continue their existence, but also get shaped within the frame of its own discipline in the art of illumination. The artist puts forth a unique work of art by sticking to these rules. In this study, the equivalents of the artistic elements and design principles, as well as their symbolic meanings, and the manners of application thereof in the art of illumination are assessed on the basis of both past works of art, and contemporary manners of application thereof. It is consequently ascertained that, the effect of depth based on light-shadow as being seen in the Western art is not observed in the art of illumination, the background arrangement is predominant, foreground and background relation is in the form of pattern-background relation, symmetry, repetition, and rhythm are the principal rules of the art of illumination, symmetry and central balance usually take place in the compositions, spacing principle is shaped within the frame of the arrangement of the compositions and the techniques applied, and that the use of color within decoration not only is applied in adherence to nature, but also implicates symbolic meanings.

---

Date of Submission: 26-08-2019

Date of Acceptance: 10-09-2019

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

It is a widely recognized understanding that, the Islamic art, contrary to the development in the Western art of painting, elevated from depth and sense of perspective to the background, and from the truth and strictness of reality to the abstract (Özcan, 2012, 479). A unique philosophy of beauty is predominant in the Turkish art of illumination. Having found the spring of this philosophy in the nature, the artists thereupon either drew the plant and animal patterns in a form close to their actual appearances, or re-shaped them according to their likings or conceptions. Neither the nature was copied exactly the same, nor any unnatural shape was drawn, thanks to this manner, called stylization (Üstün, 2007, 34). Having constituted a cornerstone in the illuminative arts, stylization brought infinite richness and variety into the art. As one looks at such a work of art, he/she may see both the nature and the artist at the same time. This manner, also called abstraction, is far more difficult and precious than creating exact the same of what one sees. A Muslim artist believes that, he not creates, but discovers the beauty (Derman, 2007, 10). The patterns, designs, and compositions, as well as the gold and colors used in the art of illumination involve different symbolic meanings. While the blue color used in the art of illumination represents eternity and peace, the gold represents the sun, *rumi* pattern represents the wing of a bird, *hatai* and *penç* represent the plants, round compositions represent the earth, and continuous repetitions of the patterns inside a composition represents the continuity and rhythm of the earth (Üçer, 2016, 28).

In terms of definition, design is the whole of the works that have been applied and put forth as the project drawing or 3-D image of an instance visualized in one's mind. According to this definition, designing may be described as the realization of an idea and action contemplated in one's mind (Tepecik, 2002, 27). In other words, the design may also be defined shortly as the visual expression of an idea being visualized in one's mind. Having existed throughout the history of the mankind, the act of designing has been shaped by the taste and liking of the human beings in line with their needs, and with the materials they could have found and mastered in the nature, and has further undergone changes within the frame of the aesthetic elements, and improved in accordance with the materials they could have used in the course of time. The problem, in the act of designing, firstly develops in the mind of the human being, and then transforms into practice. The individual questions the problem he/she determines in his/her mind, establish relationships, interprets, and applies. While planning all these, he/she takes into consideration, and makes use of his/her creativity, as well as his/her accumulated knowledge and skills. The act of designing is intertwined with the society, cultural and belief systems, time, and with technology it pertains to at all times (Toktaş, 2014, 18).

In the art of illumination, the forms designed and developed in one's mind are reflected onto paper surface. While the dots gather and create the lines, the lines gather and create the forms. Forms create the design upon being arranged with different versions in the direction of the backgrounds they are to be applied onto. Each and every detail that is to be used in a work should be helpful in reaching its objective. Even the tiniest line

that was used randomly, or a single color that was used inappropriately becomes an eyesore. The only approach that may lead a work to success is to assign even a single dot of the with a duty within the frame of the whole work (Biol, 2017, 82).

While indicating that, art makes use of its own language, and that visual elements and principles are the equivalents of the words in that language, Mittler (1994) further states that, the principals assume the role of a guide in the placement of the elements. Such design principles as form, repetition, rhythm, and balance that are easily expressed in the Western art were applied in the art of illumination within the frame of its own discipline, and in line with its own arrangement principles. In other words, the choice and place of use of color on the patterns and background, the use of gold, the manner of arrangement of the design were not only put forth within the frame of these principles, but also shaped within the frame of the rules of the art of illumination, such as the arrangement of the spirals, the direction and manner of placement of the patterns, the principle of symmetry, additional designs, etc.. The artist should concurrently stick to these rules, and also create unique works. This necessitated a long-term and ceaseless training. Workmanship, theoretical knowledge, and creativity are the aspects that constitute the design.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This is a descriptive study based on screening model. Having screened the literature regarding the subject matter of this study, works of the art of illumination from the past and present are assessed herein in view of artistic elements and design principles.

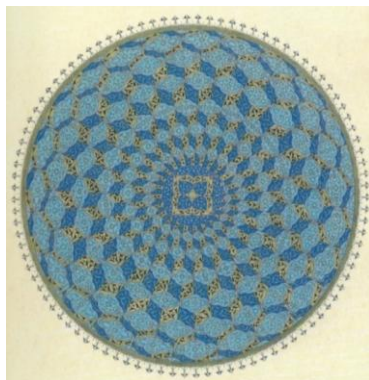
## III. RESULT

In the art of illumination, the artist has to have studied the basic rules and principles existing in the art, main forms of the classical examples, spacing and dimensions, pattern and design features, color and material features, and the methods of technique and application comprehensively while creating his/her works. In the meantime, he/she should be capable of blending the cultural and belief systems he/she is living and his/her imaginary world (Özkeçeci, 2008, 14-15).

Symmetry, as an aspect of balance, is one of the crucial rules of the art of illumination. Starting from the patterns, the most simplistic aspects of ornamentation, symmetry was applied in enclosed forms, and on the whole of the surface of the page, which consisted of the whole of the composition, even on both of two reciprocal pages (Özcan, 2012, 483). For instance, just as in the heading illumination, symmetry was complied with widely in nearly all branches of the Islamic art, including architecture. Despite the plans of the structures are generally symmetric, symmetry was easily abandoned in the figured compositions. Symmetry was also not applied in the flowers of naturalist style, which were treated in accordance with their shapes in the nature. Geometrical designs are more suitable for the application of symmetry (Demiriz, 2017, 11). Geometrical designs are among the most distinguished visual expressions of Islamic art and architecture. Most of the designs in Islamic art and architecture are based on the repetition of a single pattern that creates a harmony with each other by means of a perfect alignment (Broug, 2016, 7-8).

The effect of depth based on light-shadow as being seen in the Western art is not observed in the art of illumination. The effect of depth may be created by way of applying the sheets involved in the symmetrically formed compositions in colors with different tone values (Image 1). In the screening technique applied in the arts of illumination and miniature, lines with different values are not deemed as individual lines connected to the unity, but possess background quality, and create tone values.

The idea of eternity occupies an important place in Islam. Perfection, i.e. *kemal*, is teemed with the idea of wholeness. It is antecedent, eternal, and invisible (Koç, 2014, 164). Eternity is the most prevailing principle in Islamic art of decoration. Eternity extends in the designs covering the whole of the background over two dimensions (Demiriz, 2017, 11).



**Image 1.** *Hashatun Eyuboglu*

Lettering features a specific role in the art of illumination, which is described as the garment of lettering. Size of the patterns, large-small relation, and the manner of arrangement of the design are all shaped according to the lettering they decorate. The space around the text, in the art of illumination, is determined as 1.5 times more of the thickest measure of the reed pen. The space formed in the decoration is created by means of the size of the patterns and the large-small relation between them, and that of the balanced arrangement of the branches and spirals that form the design. Spacing is arranged by means of different versions within the frame of the different techniques applied in illumination. In other words, the spaces formed in a freely designed figure, to which *halkar* technique is applied, in a design created by the classical illumination technique with painted background, or in a design involved in the illumination of a *tughra*, are completed with different patterns, or group of patterns; just like the works, in which the free design suitable to *halkar* technique is filled with leaves, the design suitable to classical illumination is filled with triple dots, or the spaces inside the *Haliç*-work style design used in the illumination of *tughra* is filled with clovers.

Rhythm involves special highlights formed of regular repetition of similar or different elements, so as to control the spectator's eye movements over the design (Zelanski and Fischer, 1996, 41). Rhythm is a unifying and integrating aspect that maintains animation in a design. It constitutes the basis and essence of all fine arts, and lack of rhythm, therefore, creates disarray. Above all, it is a regular repetition, and helps the one to easily perceive the work of art as a whole (Boydaş, 1994). Numerous sorts of composition were applied in Islamic works of art. Additional design, among them, is one of those mostly preferred by the Muslims. Such favor arose from the fact that, such a design without any definite beginning or end reveals the eternity and continuity of creation (Derman, 2007, 19). Additional designs used in the art of illumination also reflect the principle of repetition among the designing principles. Repetitions revealed in the color, pattern, or design create the rhythm. At this point, colors and patterns are arranged symmetrically. In the designing process, animation for the sheets involved in the symmetric compositions that are created by means of the repetition of the colors, patterns, and designs, may be maintained by the sequential arrangement of different colors but similar designs. The monotonousness that may arise on the background, may thereby be avoided.



**Image 2.** Pinar Toktas

Illumination is an art of balance. Maintaining balance in this art is attempted by means of the large-small, conformity-nonconformity, light-dark, warm-cold color relations, and that of the emptiness-fullness effect (Özcan, 2012, 483). Conformity and proportion of the patterns with each other is quite critical. Main and auxiliary patterns should be in harmony (Özen,2003, 4). The principle of balance, which is based on the availability and arrangement of the elements within a work in similar proportion, was applied in the art of illumination by means of symmetric balance. While asymmetric balance was not preferred, central balance was applied mostly in the architectural illumination. In today's works in the art of illumination, on the other hand, compositions based on the central balance are applied frequently.

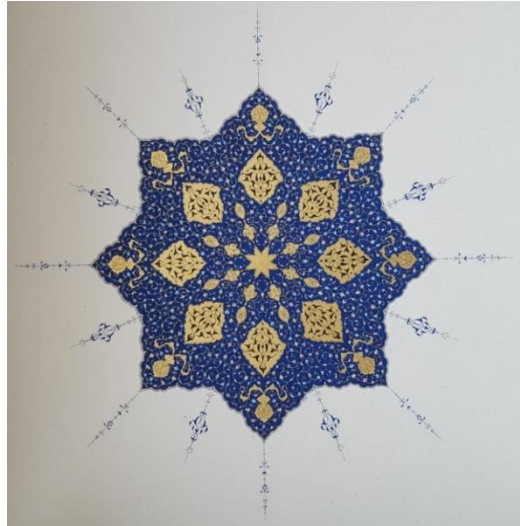


Image 3. Pınar Toktas

Harmony is maintained by way of making use of, and arranging the design aspects, such as measure, proportion, direction, color, etc., in the formation process. This harmony is one of the basic principles being applied for maintaining the wholeness feature among those of the successful forms (Özcan, 2012, 480).

Colors used in illumination are by no means incidental. Apart from their conscious visual effect, the choice of colors, and places of their use further implicate the meaning. (Semi-) stylized flowers, having been created by their inspiration from the nature without any figure, were applied in the colors they existed in the nature vividly and brightly, but also in a way not to strain one's eyes. Golden, which may be described as the basic material and main color of illumination, was used in the illumination of the written works, *Holy Kuran* being in particular, and such other works as calligraphy boards, *divans* and *fermans* in line with varying styles applicable in their historical processes.



Image 4. Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan Vakfiyesi-

19th century



Image 5. Ferman from Sultan II.Süleyman period

17th century



**Image 6.** Hududname belonging to Prince Mehmet Han - 16th century

Dark blue is the most commonly used color as the background color in the art of illumination. Introducing depth into the page, dark blue suggests the feeling of being at the background, far back, unless it is used as a quite vivid, saturated color. Besides, painting the patterns placed on the dark blue background with warm colors distracts one's attention more by constituting a harmony with the background color (Özcan, 2012, 484). Alongside the mostly used color of dark blue, brown, black, and maroon were also used. Colors are filled as coating in the art of illumination in order not to form a shady effect onto the background. While the effect of depth based on light-shadow as being seen in the Western art is not observed, the background arrangement is predominant in the art of illumination. As being one of the principal rules of the art of illumination, foreground and background relation is in the form of pattern-background relation (Özcan, 2012, 484). It is impossible to find in the art of illumination the equivalent of highlighting by way of either using the light onto the figures, or arrangement of the composition practiced in the art of painting.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the design, which is the visual expression of the idea being formed in one's mind, and animated in one's imagination, is embodied by visual elements and design principles. Its application purpose is formed in line with the place to which it is to be applied, and with the messages to be delivered thereby. It sometimes serves for a cause, and sometimes glorifies the same cause. It is difficult to describe all design principles by way of finding their equivalents in the art of illumination, since a unique philosophy of beauty derived from the Islamic art prevails in illumination. In this study, such concepts as symmetry, repetition, rhythm, balance, highlighting, color, harmony, spacing, etc. in the art of illumination are attempted to be explained. It is important to assess not only the past and present applications of the art of illumination, but also the other branches of our traditional arts from this point of view.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Birol, İ.A. (2017). *Klasik Devir Türk Tezmini Sanatlarında Desen*. İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı.
- [2]. Boydaş, N. (1994). *Ta'lik Yazıyla Plastik Değerler Açısından Bir Yaklaşım*. İstanbul: MEB Yayınları.
- [3]. Broug, E. (2016). *İslam Sanatında Geometrik Desenler*. İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları.
- [4]. Demiriz, Y. (2017). *İslam Sanatında Geometrik Süsleme*. İstanbul: Hayalperest Yayınevi.
- [5]. Derman, F.Ç. (2007). *Türk Tezmini Sanatlarını Oluşturan Tefekkür Sistemi*. Türk Tezmini Sanatları Sergisi Katalogu. Ankara: Kariyer Matbaacılık.
- [6]. Koç, T. (2014). *İslam Estetiği*. İstanbul: İSAM Yayıncılık.
- [7]. Mittler, A.G. (1994). *Art in Focus*. Illionis: Glencoe/Mc-Graw-Hill.
- [8]. Özcan, A.R. (2012). *Tezhip Sanatında Tasarım Kurgusu*. Hat ve Tezhip Sanatı. Edt. Ali Rıza Özcan. Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- [9]. Özen, M.E. (2003). *Türk Tezhip Sanatı*. İstanbul: Gözen Kitap ve Yayınevi.
- [10]. Özkeçeci, İ. (2008). *Türk Sanatında Kompozisyon*. İstanbul: İlhan Özkeçeci Yayınları.
- [11]. Tepecik, A. (2002). *Grafik Sanatlar*. Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.
- [12]. Tepecik, A., Toktaş, P. (2014). *Güzel Sanatlar Fakültelerinde Temel Sanat Eğitimi*. Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı.
- [13]. Üçer, M. (2016). *Padişahların Hamiliği İle Gelişen Tezhip Sanatı*. Sultanların Sanata Yansıyan İzleri. Edt. Münevver Üçer. İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür A.Ş. Yayınları.
- [14]. Üstün, A. (2007). *Türk Tezhip Sanatı*. İSMEK Türk Kitapları Sempozyumu Bildirileri. Edt. Muhammet Altıntaş. İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Sanat ve Meslek Eğitimi Kursları (İSMEK) Yayınları.

- [15]. Zelanski, P., Fischer, M.P. (1996). Design Principles and Problems. USA: Harcourt Brace College Publish.

**Visual References**

Image 1. Hashatun Eyuboglu. Konya Büyükşehir Belediyesi Uluslararası İslam Sanatları Yarışması Katalogu. 2016. Fatih Özkafa (Edt.). Konya: Konya Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları.

Image 2. Pınar Toktas

Image 3. Pınar Toktas

Image 4. General Directorate Archive of Land Registry and Cadastre

Image 5. Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry State Archives

Image 6. General Directorate Archive of Land Registry and Cadastre

Pınar TOKTAS. " Design in the Art of Illumination." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 24 no. 09, 2019, pp. 46-51.