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Islamic architectural elements as an expressive tool in Iraqi visual art

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Abstract

This research aims to reveal the ways in which Islamic architectural elements were employed in Iraqi visual art, not merely as formal or decorative elements, but rather as expressive media carrying cultural and intellectual messages and connotations. From here, the research problem arises in the following question: How did Islamic architectural elements contribute to shaping the expressive dimension of Iraqi visual art? The importance of this research stems from its attempt to uncover the formulas through which Islamic architectural heritage is re-employed within the Iraqi visual arts space. This highlights the dialectic between authenticity and modernity and demonstrates how Islamic architectural symbols can be transformed into living expressive tools in modern visual discourse. The research also sheds light on the Iraqi artist's awareness of his cultural role by evoking the Islamic visual heritage and activating it within contemporary visions and methods, opening the way for a deeper understanding of the transformations of visual identity in Iraqi art. The research relies on a descriptive approach (content analysis) that combines historical tracing, analysis of selected artistic models, and an aesthetic approach to reveal the expressive dimensions of Islamic architectural elements. Minarets, gates, and decorations appear as central elements in the works, not as aesthetic backgrounds, but rather as carriers of spiritual and philosophical connotations that reflect the continuity of Islamic identity. The three samples employ traditional architectural vocabulary in a contemporary format, embodying a visual and intellectual bridge between the past and the present.

Keywords: Islamic architectural elements, Artistic expression, visual art, Iraqi art.

Introduction

Throughout its history, Iraqi visual art has witnessed diverse developments in its stylistic structures and expressive content, influenced by cultural and social transformations and interacting with the region's rich cultural heritage. In this context, Islamic architectural elements have emerged as a visual and spiritual reference for Iraqi visual artists, given the symbolic and aesthetic connotations they carry, deeply rooted in the collective consciousness. Artists have found in these architectural elements, such as domes, minarets, arches, and geometric motifs, an expressive source capable of embodying identity, evoking memory, and reconstructing the relationship between heritage and modernity.

This research aims to reveal the ways in which Islamic architectural elements were employed in Iraqi visual art, not merely as formal or decorative elements, but rather as expressive media carrying cultural and intellectual messages and connotations. From here, the research problem arises in the following question: How did Islamic architectural elements contribute to shaping the expressive dimension of Iraqi visual art?

The importance of this research stems from its attempt to uncover the formulas through which Islamic architectural heritage is re-employed within the Iraqi visual arts space. This highlights the dialectic between authenticity and modernity and demonstrates how Islamic architectural symbols can be transformed into living expressive tools in modern visual discourse. The research also sheds light on the Iraqi artist's awareness of his cultural role by evoking the Islamic visual heritage and activating it within contemporary visions and methods, opening the way for a deeper understanding of the transformations of visual identity in Iraqi art.

The research aims to: Identifying Islamic architectural elements in the works of Iraqi visual artists.

Research methodology

The research is based on a descriptive approach (content analysis) that combines historical tracing, analysis of selected artistic models, and an aesthetic approach to reveal the expressive dimensions of Islamic architectural elements.

Research limits

- Objective boundaries: Employing Islamic architectural elements and their expressive dimensions in Iraqi visual art.
- Time limits: from 1990 to 2025.
- Spatial boundaries: within Iraqi plastic art.
- Human Limits: A group of Iraqi visual artists.

Definition of terms

1. Elements: Language

Element in the language: the origin and foundation upon which something is built. It is said: "the element of something" meaning the material from which it is composed. The plural is elements. (Ibn Manzur, n.d., p. 573).

"It is an architectural element that is concerned with the use of images and shapes, and expresses a group of architectural elements as a volumetric mass in a single composition." Hala Afifi, Imad al-Din Ibrahim, 2024 ^[11], p. 61.

2. Architecture: Language

Architecture comes from "Amara," meaning building and construction. It is also said that the architecture of a place means inhabiting, constructing, and repairing it. (Al-Sharbiny, 2010, p. 15) ^[12].

(Architecturally): It is the art and science of designing and constructing buildings and structures to achieve practical and aesthetic functions, while taking into account environmental and social factors (Al-Sharbiny, same source, p. 15).

Operational definition

Islamic architectural elements: These are the visual and structural components that designers or artists use to draw inspiration from the aesthetic characteristics of Islamic architecture, such as domes, arches, minarets, ornamentation, and Arabic calligraphy, with the aim of employing them as symbols or expressive patterns that carry specific aesthetic and cultural connotations.

3. **Tool:** It is the small tool (in the terminology of grammarians): the word used to connect speech or to indicate a meaning in something else, such as the definite article in a noun or the future tense in a verb (Shaaban Abdel-Ati Attia and others, p. 10).
4. **Expressionism:** A contemporary trend in art and literature based on the artist or writer expressing his emotions, imagination and ideas through external images, incidents or situations that have a general meaning (Madkour, 1979, p. 48) ^[17].

Operational definition

Expressive tool: It is the artistic medium that the creator uses to convey a specific idea or feeling, by providing the elements.

The plastic art has meanings and connotations that go beyond its formal value to serve the aesthetic or intellectual purpose of the artwork.

5. **Art: Language:** It is called what is equivalent to craftsmanship, and it is the opposite of science, which is concerned specifically with the theoretical aspect (Madkour, previous source, p. 140) An external expression of the motives and influences that occur in the soul through lines, colors, movements, sounds, or words, and includes the various arts of sculpture and photography. (Madkour, same Source, p. 140).

6. **Plastic: language:** "Shakl (with the fat-ha) means resemblance, and the plural is ashkal and shakul." "Shakl is the example. You say: this is in the shape of this, meaning in its likeness. So-and-so is the likeness of so-and-so, meaning he is like him in his states. This is more like this, meaning more similar." The concept of shakl of something means to imagine, and its shape is its image. The shape of something is its tangible and imagined image, and the plural is like the plural. Ashkal in all things is its white and red mixed together, and ashkal is an ornament that resembles one another and that women wear on their earrings (Ibn Manzur, n.d., pp. 348-349)

Forming is defined as "what shapes a material and transforms it into what we call art or a work of art. This means that formation is limited in its majority to the interaction of thought in the material, which selects and moves with an experience that establishes news. Accordingly, formation is one of the visual arts, and cannot transcend the "raw" material. What distinguishes the contemporary form from it is the dialectic of the material in the structure of the form and the system of display. The material was and still is a tool of action that may reach the stage of the pressing center in the aesthetic or artistic vision" (Najm Abdul Haider, *et al.*, 2006, p. 224) ^[13].

Operational definition

Iraqi plastic art: It is a visual production that employs the media of drawing, sculpture, ceramics, and others, expressing Iraqi cultural identity by blending local heritage with the spirit of modernity.

Concept of Islamic architectural elements

Islamic architectural elements are among the most prominent features that have distinguished architecture in Islamic civilization throughout the ages, combining aesthetic, spiritual, and practical functions. These elements are manifested in the use of arches, domes, muqarnas, and vegetal and geometric motifs, forming a distinct architectural identity that reflects the religious and cultural values of Islamic societies. These elements are also linked to the concepts of monotheism and harmony, serving as a means of expressing order and consistency in the universe from an Islamic perspective. Islamic architecture was able to interact with local environments and available materials, adding visual diversity and functional richness to its buildings. From here, Islamic architectural elements emerged as expressive tools bearing symbolic and aesthetic dimensions, influencing many subsequent arts, including Iraqi fine art.

Visual vocabulary in Islamic architecture

With the expansion of the Islamic state and the establishment of its major urban centers, such as Damascus, Baghdad, and Samarra, the Islamic architectural style began to take shape with independent features, transcending the simplicity of its early beginnings toward an architectural style characterized by a clear uniqueness, distinct from the architectural styles prevalent in neighboring environments. The maturing of religious and intellectual concepts among Arab Muslims helped develop a new architectural language, enabling Muslim architects to create a distinct construction vocabulary and introduce renewed and diverse architectural elements that embodied a distinct and unique aesthetic vision (Al-Yawar, 1999 ^[10], pp. 135–136).

In this context, Islamic architecture, particularly in the construction of mosques, relied on a set of architectural elements that constituted the most prominent stylistic features of this art. The most prominent of these elements are: the minaret, the dome, the mihrab, the minbar, muqarnas, arches and arches, columns and capitals, entrances, windows, balconies, the courtyard, the arcades, and the iwan. The function of these architectural elements was not limited to the structural aspect only, but was laden with symbolic connotations and spiritual and aesthetic dimensions, contributing to the crystallization of an architectural experience that expresses a special Islamic vision in shaping space. The researcher discussed the architectural elements adopted by Muslim architects in the design of their facilities, as follows:

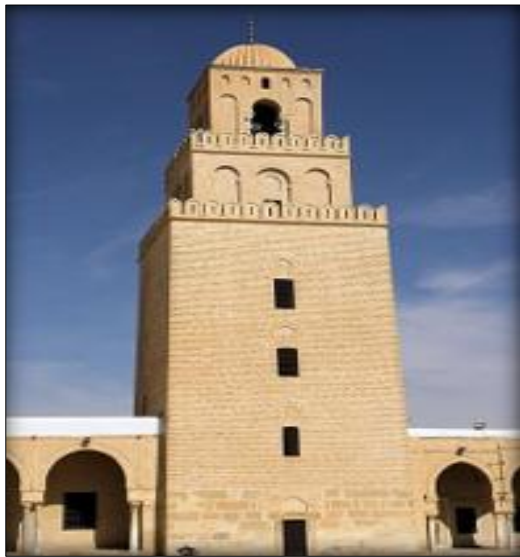


Fig 1: Minaret of Mosque of Kairouan <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wik>

1. Minarets

Minarets are constructed in positions that complement the mosque's architectural composition, alongside the dome. Both elements contribute to an aesthetic image that extends vertically and exceeds the building's height, giving the mosque's features a prominent visual presence on the horizon. While the dome, from the inside, represents a symbol of the sky with its spherical expanse, when viewed from the outside, it appears as an inward-looking structure with its fluid, downward-sloping lines. This makes the presence of one or more minarets alongside it essential to achieve visual balance and reinforcement.

And enhancing the overall aesthetic value of the mosque (Waziri, 1999, p. 55) ^[15]. See Figure (1).



Fig 2: Dome of Prophet's Mosque

<https://www.google.com/search?q>

2. Domes

The dome is a pivotal architectural element in the arts of architectural decoration and represents one of the most prominent structural features of Islamic civilization. It gives the domed ceiling additional cohesion and lends the architectural space a spiritual and aesthetic character, evoking deep feelings and emotional sensations that open horizons for contemplation of the meanings of existence (Al-Hadith, 1974, p. 9) ^[6].

The dome later became one of the most prominent spiritual and formative symbols in Islamic mosque architecture, as it is often erected above the sanctuary space, and takes a hemispherical shape, with its upper part representing the sky, while its lower part embodies the earth, making it a visual symbol of half the universe, as in Figure (2). This cosmic meaning is completed by the inner space of the sanctuary, which represents the other half of the cosmic sphere. The dome's design also shows a clear ascending path, starting from the square base at the corners, transforming into an octagon in the neck area, and then to a spherical shape in its final covering (Al-Bahnassi, 2005, pp. 52-53).



Fig 3: mihrab of Mujahid al-Din Mosque in Iraq

<https://www.google.com>

3. The niche

The mihrab represents one of the purest architectural innovations in Islamic art. It was used in the qibla wall to precisely determine the direction of prayer. Its appearance was directly linked to the establishment of the qibla toward the Holy Kaaba. This direction was established in the second year of the Hijra, when the Almighty revealed:

{Indeed, We have seen the turning of your face toward the heaven, so We will surely turn you to a qiblah with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram. And wherever you are, turn your faces toward it. And indeed, those who were given the Scripture know that it is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do.} (Al-Baqarah: 144). See the figure. (3).

It is likely that the idea of the mihrab was born from the first moments of the construction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. In fact, some sources indicate that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) placed something resembling a mihrab in the Quba Mosque outside Medina, which indicates an early awareness of the importance of orienting religious buildings towards the qibla.

has witnessed successive developments, as it began to appear more clearly with the deepening of the cavity of the qibla wall with each restoration or expansion carried out in the mosques. The mihrab reached its clear architectural form in the year 24 AH/644 AD, during the expansion works carried out by Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (Hadi, 1990, p. 48) ^[9].



Fig 4: of Mamluk pulpits <https://www.babmsr.com?q>

4. The platform

The minbar is considered one of the most prominent architectural elements in the design of Islamic mosques. It began with a simple form in its early stages, then underwent gradual development throughout the Islamic eras, until it took on an architectural form characterized by a triangular shape on both sides of the ascending staircase leading to the top, where the preacher's platform is erected. The minbar may be fixed in place or movable (Waziri, 2005, p. 27).

Muslims were creative in constructing and decorating pulpits, using luxurious materials such as high-quality wood, alabaster, or marble in their manufacture. They also paid great attention to decorating them with fine Islamic motifs and lines of Qur'anic verses, as in the figure () (Judy, 1998, p. 78) ^[5]. See figure (4).



Fig 5: represents muqarnas. <https://www.misbar.com/qna>

5. Muqarnas

Are considered one of the most prominent structural and decorative innovations that characterized the architectural style of Arab-Islamic civilization. Scholars agree that this element was unknown in pre-Islamic architecture, which confirms its authenticity and uniqueness in the Islamic cultural context. This achievement is attributed to the Muslim architect, who devised a structural formula that enabled architectural parts to protrude beyond the wall level, which formed the first structural basis for the emergence of this decorative element. The use of this technique began by pushing the heads of the arched niches slightly outward, to act as supports or bases that supported the upper architectural elements (Salman, 1982, p. 32) ^[7]. See Figure (5).



Fig 6: Contracts - (Al-Rubaie, 2013, p. 127) ^[18]

6. Contracts

Muslims used various arch styles in their architecture, varying according to the different Islamic regions. In the early stages, semicircular arches were common, and later, pointed arches emerged, appearing in the corridors of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, in the Qasr Amra Palace, and in the public entrance to the Jawsaq al-Khaqani Palace in Samarra. This arch style was widely popular in Persian architecture, as evidenced by the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, as well as in Mughal architecture in India. As is the case in the Jama Masjid in Delhi. (Al-Alfi, n.d., pp. 136-137). Figure (6).



Fig 7: Columns and capitals <https://sarayagrc.com>

7. Columns and capitals

The column is one of the essential architectural components used to support surfaces or walls. Its name has varied according to geographical environments. In the Levant, it is known as “the column,” in the Maghreb as “the mast,” while in Lebanon it is called “the candle.” Structurally, the column often consists of three main parts: the base, the body, and the crown, as shown in Figure (7) (Ghalib, 1988, p. 293) ^[14].

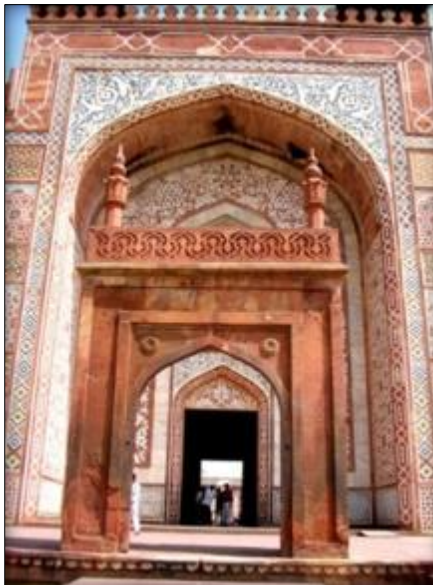


Fig 8: One of Islamic Entrance <https://byarchlens.com/islamic-interfaces>

8. Entrances and doors

Entrances in Islamic architecture, particularly in public buildings such as palaces and mosques, were distinguished by their massiveness and imposing architectural character, combining functional dimensions with aesthetic aspects. The entrance frame, along with the arches and internal projections connected to it, rose to the level of the facade, or sometimes even exceeded it, giving the building a festive character and an imposing architectural appearance. These entrances were also decorated with precise structural and decorative elements, including interlocking and colored

arches, the use of marble and stone, in addition to the employment of plaster decorations and muqarnas, which contributed to enhancing the aesthetic value of the building, as shown in Figure (8) (Al-Bahnasi, 1971, p. 45) ^[2].



Fig 9: Al-Aqsa Mosque <https://nabd.com/s/>

9. Windows

Islamic architecture is characterized by the diversity of window shapes and functions, as they took multiple forms such as rectangles, squares, circles, ovals, and other geometric formations. Rectangular windows, in particular, were either executed with simple, devoid of decorations, or decorated with plant and geometric motifs, or Arabic inscriptions, as shown in Figure (9). Sometimes these windows were covered with various arches surrounded by colored stone frames, which simultaneously achieved practical and aesthetic functions. From a structural perspective, these treatments facilitated the construction process, and from a visual perspective, they added a variety of formal rhythm to the facades, breaking the monotony of the wide, solid spaces (Ghalib, the previous source, pp. 428-429).



Fig 10: Balconies of Mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun in Egypt <https://www.annaharkw.com/Annahar/Article.aspx?id>

10. Balconies

Balconies are a prominent defensive element in Islamic architecture, appearing in walls, castles, and towers. They were built from stacked stones along the upper parts of the walls, providing a safe place for guards to take cover, monitor attackers, and fire their arrows through the openings. Over time, balconies transcended their military role to become a decorative element adorning the facades of buildings, whether above walls, entrances, or even on interior architectural elements such as niches, pulpits, and cupboards. This architectural style was known in ancient civilizations, particularly in Sassanian and Roman

architecture, particularly in the Levant, such as the city of Palmyra. One of the distinctive features of balconies in early Islamic architecture was the so-called "roof dome," which consisted of unique balconies popularly called "brides" due to their abstract human-like formations, where arms and legs intertwine in an unprecedented visual formation (Ghalib, *ibid.*, pp. 233–234). See Figure (10)



Fig 11: courtyard of Fatima <https://shiawaves.com/arabic/pics>

11. The plate

The plate, or inner courtyard, is one of the most prominent architectural components of an Islamic building, especially in mosques, as it represents a space directly open to the sky. This space is overlooked by two-story windows and doors, while a winding passageway called the "dlij" (vestibule) separates it from the outer street. Its function is to limit the entry of air currents laden with dust, smoke, or wind. Recent studies show that the upper air remains elevated above the courtyard and does not penetrate it unless both the "dlij" and the outer door are open, meaning that the temperature and purity of the courtyard air remains relatively stable, which reflects the environmental dimension considered in the planning of Islamic architecture (Al-Bahnasi, previous source, p. 19). See Figure (11).



Fig 12: Iwan in Islamic architecture
<https://civilizationlovers.wordpress.com>

12. The Iwan

The iwan is a distinctive architectural element that appeared in pre-Islamic architecture and continued to be present in various styles of Islamic architecture, whether religious or

residential. One of the oldest known historical examples is the Iwan of Khosrow in Ctesiphon (Al-Mada'in), built about four centuries before Islam, and the remains of which still exist today. This iwan is classified as one of the largest iwans in ancient history, as it is (about 25 meters wide) and (34 meters high) (Connell, 1961, p. 35) ^[8]. See Figure (12).



Fig 13: corridors of Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt - (Tawfiq, 2010, p. 398) ^[4]

13. Hallways

The portico is defined as the architectural space located between two rows of columns, or between a row of columns and a wall, and it is a common element in traditional architecture. Porticoes are usually built in front of the iwans and rooms on the ground floor, as well as in front of the rooms on the upper floor, where they take the form of a corridor open on one side, and are covered with a roof supported by stone or brick arches, as is clear in Figure (13) (Judy, the previous source, p. 65).



Iraqi visual art and its interaction with Islamic architectural heritage

Iraqi visual art constitutes a vital mirror reflecting artists' interactions with their cultural roots. This interaction has been strikingly evident with Islamic architectural heritage, a rich source of visual forms and connotations. Artists have drawn inspiration from decorative elements, domes, arches, and Arabic calligraphy, giving their works a spiritual and identity-based dimension. This interaction was not merely a formal imitation; rather, it carried an interpretive and aesthetic dimension that reflects the artist's awareness of the history of the place. Through this employment, visual art has reshaped the relationship between past and present, embodying a contemporary vision that opens to heritage without closing itself off from it. Thus, Islamic architectural heritage has become a catalyst for generating modern visual

forms that express a renewed cultural identity. Iraqi visual art has gone through several decades, including:

The nineties: (1990-1999)

During this period, Iraq went through harsh conditions as a result of the imposition of economic sanctions following the Gulf War in 1990. This war left a comprehensive blockade that directly affected the living conditions, causing a deterioration in the general situation and the birth of multiple social and economic crises. This was reflected in the artistic community, as the artist felt frustrated, his visions were scattered, and his role was diminished. The Iraqi visual art movement declined significantly at the level of Official institutions (Al-Saffar, 2019, p. 277) ^[19]. Among the most prominent artistic names that emerged during this period was the artist (Kazem Nower), who was known for his expressive style that tended toward symbolism, as in Figure (14).



Fig 14: Artist Kazem Nower <https://www.google.com>

The second millennium: (2000-2025)

Iraq, particularly after the US invasion in 2003, witnessed a widespread collapse of its cultural and artistic infrastructure, as a result of the profound political transformations represented by the fall of the Ba'ath Party regime and the execution of its leader, Saddam Hussein. These radical changes led to a state of chronic security and social unrest, making it extremely difficult for artists to continue their creative activities within the country, and even forcing many of them to emigrate or cease artistic production.

Following the years of occupation, the modern and contemporary art movement faded due to the systematic looting and vandalism that targeted cultural institutions. The Saddam Center for the Arts now known as the Baghdad Center for the Arts one of the most important centers specializing in archiving and preserving Iraqi art works, was subjected to looting, including rare art collections. Works preserved in the homes of prominent artists were also destroyed. The losses extended to the National Library of Arts, which was destroyed in April 2003, resulting in the loss of archives and documents documenting the history of Iraqi art. Popular cultural spaces were also damaged, most notably the bombing of Mutanabbi Street in March 2007, which dealt a severe blow to cultural activity in the country (Pocock, 2010, p. 92). Among the most prominent figures of this period is the artist Walid Hassan. who, through his

works, was able to reflect the transformations of the turbulent Iraqi reality. See Figure (15).

Indicators resulting from the theoretical framework

1. Islamic elements were not just an identity, but carried spiritual and philosophical connotations (infinity - geometric repetition mimics the concept of divine eternity) and (unity and harmony is the balance between space and mass).
2. Islamic architectural elements in contemporary Iraqi visual art represent a bridge between the past and the present, as artists re-interpret them to enrich and renew heritage in the Iraqi art scene.
3. Islamic architecture encompasses a set of aesthetic and engineering elements that have distinguished mosques, palaces, and schools throughout the ages.
4. Islamic architectural elements were used as an expressive tool that reflects the cultural identity and Islamic aesthetic spirit.
5. The function of these architectural elements was not limited to the structural aspect alone, but was also laden with symbolic connotations and spiritual and aesthetic dimensions, contributing to the crystallization of an architectural experience that expresses a unique Islamic vision for shaping space.
6. Iraqi visual art is a rich blend of historical and cultural influences, with roots stretching back to ancient civilizations such as the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, all the way to the Islamic era, which left its mark on art and architecture.

Research community

The period of time covered by the study produced a huge amount of productions related to Iraqi plastic art, which could not be statistically limited. The researcher relied on what is available in the statistics of the Ministry of Culture (the Iraqi Art Archive, as well as the Iraqi Plastic Artists Association, the General Center in Baghdad), as well as what was published and available of photographs of the artworks in which the features of Islamic architecture appeared, and benefiting from the artworks published on the Internet, through which the goal of the current research can be achieved.

Research sample

In order to sort the research sample, the researcher classified it according to the concept of Islamic architecture with different and diverse methods of showing it, and the researcher emphasized the pillars and characteristics to represent Islamic architecture, its connotations and intellectual, philosophical, psychological, ideological and social implications, and the nature of the changes that occurred in Iraqi drawing according to the decades that contemporary Iraqi plastic art went through, which are a reflection of the artist's self. Based on this classification, a group of artworks were chosen as a research sample amounting to (3) models, and the sample was chosen intentionally for the purpose of verifying the current research objective, according to the following justifications:

1. The sample models were chosen to allow the researcher the opportunity to be aware of: (Islamic architectural elements as an expressive tool in Iraqi plastic art

- In addition to the fame of these works based on the artist's experience, their strong connection to the research topic, and the importance of the artist.
- The selected models vary in their methods of dealing with the subject according to the forms and diversity of the concept of Islamic architecture, its causes, and the

diversity of its artistic styles, which provides the opportunity, in an enriching way, to know the mechanisms of work in Iraqi plastic art, in harmony with what the theoretical framework has concluded and the conceptual descriptions of the research topic.

Table 1: Presenting Sample

Model	Artist's name	Work name / year of production	Measurement and techniques of work and returns	Page
1	Afifa Laibi	1991	80 x 100 cm / Acrylic on canvas Private collections	15
2	Fakher Mohammed	Babylonian Dream / 1999	60 x 60 cm / Acrylic on canvas Private collections	16
3	Mahmoud Fahmy	Friday morning/2013	130 x 180 cm / Oil on canvas The media personality Samar Al-Mashta Dubai	17

Third: Research methodology

The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical approach, using the content analysis method, while analyzing the research sample, in line with the research objective. According to the following steps:

- General description of the artwork Samples (research sample)
- Track the mechanism of operation of technical processors in the sample, According to the elements and formative relationships, And the means of organizing it in the artwork and standing on the Islamic architectural elements and the extent of its effectiveness in the model.

Fourth: Search tool

Based on the indicators that the theoretical framework concluded, the researcher adopted it more effectively as a content analysis tool for the current research, and for the purpose of objectivity in the analysis.

Fifth

Tool application: After completing the procedures And its objective and scientific conditions, the researcher applied it to the research sample of (3) models in light of the descriptive approach and the descriptive analytical method.

Sixth: Sample analysis

Model (1)	
Artist's name	Afifa Laibi
Business name	without a name
Measurement	80 x 100 cm
The material	Acrylic on canvas
Year of completion	Production year 1991
Return	Private collections



Description

Represents a symbolic scene of a woman with wings, sitting brokenly in front of the sea, and behind her Samarra Minaret (Curved Tower) It is considered one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture from the Abbasid era. It seems that Afifa Laibi employed it here as a historical and cultural symbol that links the artistic scene to the depths of Iraqi heritage. Next to it is a carved face and an oud lying on the ground, in an interweaving of architectural and heritage symbols and human connotations, with warm and dramatic colors that reflect a mixture of nostalgia, loss, and the search for identity.

Analysis

This painting can be read as a conscious use of Islamic architectural elements represented here by the Samarra Spiral Minaret not merely as a spatial backdrop, but as a spiritual and philosophical symbol reflecting the continuity and eternity of Islamic identity. The presence of the minaret, with its ascending spiral repetition, evokes the concept of infinity and expansion toward eternity, while the balance between mass and void embodies the principle of unity and harmony in Islamic architecture. This architectural symbol is transformed in the painting into a visual bridge between the glorious Abbasid past and the present, where the winged woman with her human and emotional connotations coexists with the architectural heritage, in a scene that evokes nostalgia, loss, and the search for identity. The presence of the sculpted face and the oud also points to the intertwining of visual and musical arts with collective memory, forming the entire scene as a visual space that enriches heritage and reproduces it with a contemporary vision. This artistic use reinforces the historical vision that connects the artistic text to its cultural context, enabling a re-reading of heritage in a renewed form that aligns with current social and political transformations.

Model (2)	
Artist's name	Fakher Mohammed
Business name	Babylonian dream
Measurement	60 x 60 cm
The material	Acrylic on canvas
Year of completion	1999
Return	Private collections



Description

The work presents an abstract composition inspired by the architectural gate as a central element, combined with bright colors and adjacent color spaces. The free-flowing motifs and lines intertwine in visual rhythms that evoke architectural elements. Islamic as an expressive tool, the artist employs a blend of blue and earth tones to evoke the sky and the earth, creating a balance between symbolism and aesthetic dimension. The scene forms a visual space that reflects the interaction of architectural heritage with contemporary visual vision.

Analysis

This work is based on a contemporary artistic vision that reformulates Islamic architectural vocabulary into an abstract visual construction, with the gate taking center stage. The geometric repetition of lines and shapes suggests the concept of infinity and divine eternity, while the balance between color spaces and voids reflects the principle of unity and harmony that characterized Islamic architecture. These elements are transformed in the painting into a visual bridge linking the past to the present, through the re-routing of heritage vocabulary within a contemporary artistic context that enriches Iraqi artistic identity. The harmony between blue and earth tones also stands out as a visual suggestion of the relationship between heaven and earth, giving the work a philosophical dimension that goes beyond decoration to profound symbolic expression. The painting also demonstrates how Islamic architectural elements are not merely superficial decorations, but rather carry profound spiritual and philosophical connotations that reflect an Islamic vision rooted in theology and beauty. The use of this expressive vocabulary embodies the cultural identity and Islamic aesthetic spirit that permeates contemporary Iraqi visual art, affirming that the artwork constitutes a living embodiment of the connection between heritage and modernity.

Model (3)	
Artist's name	Mahmoud Fahmy
Business name	Friday morning
Measurement	130 x 180 cm
The material	Oil on canvas
Year of completion	2013
Return	The collector is Samar Al-Mashta / Dubai



Description

In this painting, artist Mahmoud Fahmy depicts a girl sitting on the back of a flying ladybug, a symbol of dreaming and soaring over Baghdad's historic skyline. The girl wears a yellow dress decorated with delicate flowers. On the left side of the scene, a traditional Qishla clock appears. The work is not limited to representing an architectural element, but rather reflects a close connection to Baghdad's cultural heritage, affirming the bridge between past and present upon which contemporary Iraqi visual art relies to enrich and renew heritage. The composition is completed with an architectural formation inspired by Baghdad's Islamic architecture.

Analysis

The painting reflects a masterful use of Islamic architectural elements that go beyond being mere decorations to become bearers of spiritual and philosophical connotations, as geometric repetition appears in the architectural elements. The overall composition of the work reflects the concept of divine infinity and eternity. The delicate balance between space and mass is highlighted, expressing the unity and harmony that characterizes Islamic architecture. The use of the traditional Qishla clock in the work is not limited to representing an architectural element, but rather reflects a close connection to the cultural heritage of Baghdad, affirming the bridge between past and present upon which contemporary Iraqi visual art relies to enrich and renew this heritage. The flying ladybug ridden by the girl represents a symbol of flight and hope, expressing the aspirations of the Iraqi people for a better future. The girl's plump body and relaxed features reflect an abundance of goodness and reassurance. The architectural composition evident in the painting embodies a sense of Islamic heritage and culture that characterizes the visual scene, reinforcing the national artistic identity. The balance and harmony between space and mass are evident, thus forming a visual and spiritual bridge between heritage and modernity. It emphasizes the symbolic dimensions that reflect a renewed Islamic vision in Iraqi visual art, reflecting the unity of cultural identity and bridging the past and present through aesthetic and spiritual symbols rooted in Islamic heritage.

Results

1. Minarets, gates, and decorations appear as central elements in the works, not as aesthetic backgrounds, but as carriers of spiritual and philosophical connotations that reflect the continuity of Islamic identity.
2. The three samples employ traditional architectural vocabulary in a contemporary format, embodying a visual and intellectual bridge between the past and the present.
3. The use of heritage elements is combined with human symbols (the winged woman, the girl on the ladybug, the carved face, the oud), to generate atmospheres of nostalgia, loss, and hope.
4. The balance between mass and space, geometric repetition, and color harmony reflect the aesthetic and philosophical principles that characterized Islamic architecture.
5. The use of these elements contributes to consolidating the Iraqi cultural and artistic identity, and reflects the artist's connection to his cultural and social context.

Recommendations

1. Deepening visual studies on Islamic architecture in contemporary visual arts, to demonstrate its symbolic and philosophical dimensions, away from purely decorative approaches.
2. Encouraging artists to employ local architectural symbols as a tool to express present-day issues and build bridges with collective memory.
3. Integrating historical analysis with aesthetic reading when studying artworks, to ensure a deeper understanding of the relationship between visual heritage and social and political transformations.

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