

Practice of Design Principles in the *Qur'ānic* Calligraphy of *Binqulander*

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Abstract

Calligraphic art in Pakistan is one of the major art forms of Fine Arts and Design practices. It is a popular art form, because of its religious importance and secular appeal. Calligraphic art is based upon Quranic Verses written in the beautiful script. It can be called a traditional genre of art and design. This study is an attempt to explore Binqulander's calligraphic art from aesthetic point of view as well as high scale design compositions with color and text and his work as a reflection of formal art & design learning from Pakistan. The methodology adopted for this study is based upon extrinsic and intrinsic analysis. It will particularly focus on its aesthetics and underling philosophical concepts. Binqulander is one of the most renowned trendsetters of this generation.

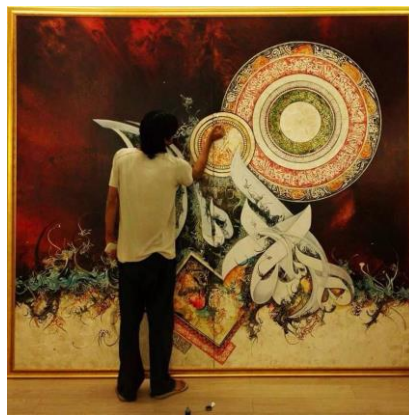
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Introduction

In Pakistan, calligraphic painting has been an art known to a few only. Binqulander introduced this art in Pakistan around 2009. The formal academic training of Binqulander in the field of Art & Design from one of the prestigious institute of Pakistan National College of Arts, is fully reflected in his calligraphic design compositions.

The scale of his work is also the journey of spirituality but the compositions and layouts indicate the command in the application of design principles through a formal learning of art & design. Binqulander carries the mystic heritage of Sufi sage. His connection with divine adds a little extra to his work which is both detailed-oriented and highly profound. Islamic art has always been inspired by calligraphy. Many Islamic monuments are decorated with detailed calligraphic art; hence Binqulander's inspiration has always been spiritual affiliation with Islam. He expresses his devotion towards his religion in his art. His blend of calligraphy with miniature is the landmark for calligraphic art in Pakistan. His creative expression is widely admired in the fraternity of art as well as in the masses.



Artist with work

The institutional pedagogy of teaching ‘Design’ as a basic mainstay for all fields of art practices contributes in the development of great art & design practitioners and Binqulander is one of finest Calligraphist whose work reflects the major principles of design in terms of harmony and balance.

Binqulander’s expression is blend of traditional calligraphic practices with abstract art. He practices the pre-creation warm-up exercises which are a convention in art calligraphic art. Binqulander’s interest for calligraphy developed since his early years. He later chose calligraphy for specialized diploma. He used to express his intuitive bent towards spirituality through calligraphic art. His mystic bent is quite evident from his art pieces. Mysticism evolves a human into a self-less being where he tries to become one with God. All forms of arts, including music, visual art and dance have been inspired by mysticism. Mysticism acts as a language for the artist as he expresses his emotions into his art piece. Binqulander’s approach towards mysticism is the potential source of fluency in his art pieces. His inspiration is calligraphy is mostly inspired by Islamic concepts with Sufi bent.

Binqulander’s art work divided in five parts based upon the stylistic changes

Using blank surface with pencil renderings

Binqulander's art work is very symbolic. He works with words and Quranic verses to create master pieces which provoke through in viewer's minds¹. His work tries to enlighten the viewer through his depiction of Quranic *ayat* into us. Binqulander's compositions represent words where the calligraphic medium is used in abstraction to ignite thoughts in viewers 'minds².

Binqulander has used asymmetrical composition contrary to traditional calligraphy with its symmetrical plan. He plans his composition asymmetrically to break monotony and drives the viewer's eye in a more fluid way. His style of work amounts to a dialogue between representational and abstract. He used pyramidal composition in his early work invoking the Egyptian symbol of closeness to God³. His earlier works also are reminiscent of the concept of divine power. Binqulander focuses on visual expression in his calligraphic work; creating an indistinct and dreamy environment that sometimes deviates from the literal meaning of the text. Instead, he allows the abstract quality of these textual renderings to serve as visual stimuli for the observer, which, he masterfully combines, with visual symmetry of composition⁴. He comments on his techniques as: I work freely and challenge the laws of calligraphy to express myself on canvas. I believe all artists should exercise their creative freedom to create their own style after being trained for the art they want to use as a medium.

Binqulander combines all the distinctive shape of the characters with the fluidity of the whole, integrating rhythmic nature of the signs without isolating them. We find characters starting from right, as the field of action, and then unfold and move towards the left. This horizontal movement can be symbolic in a sense that it suggests a movement directed

towards heart. The symbolism used in Binqulander's artwork is being represented as the mixture of divine and evolution. The vertical lines show the divine aspect whereas the horizontal lines represent change and evolution. The vertical lines also represent unity and oneness whereas horizontal lines illustrate how difference and variety. Both these lines show the marriage between oneness and multiplicity⁵. The horizontal line in his work creates the relationship between sky and the earth. Sometimes his paintings give an impression of landscape. In his works, pencil rendering is usually prominent alongside silver leaf, some part is filled with color and rest of the canvas is usually blank. As a result, multiple instances of contrast can be witnessed. The most prominent and large words create the focal point and the supportive variation of words make a beautiful perspective so that the attention of viewer's eye is instantly drawn in the focal area. The focal area of the painting surprises the viewer vibrant details. A central horizontal non-visible line usually separates the upper flowing words from the lower flowing words. He also uses circular shapes unevenly and makes borders inside and outside of the circle filled with calligraphy and also geometric patterns.



Binqulander, *Ayat-ul-kursi/ Sorah Fatiha*, 2010, 24" x 30", acrylic, silver leaf and mix medium.

Wash color technique in backgrounds

Using water or liquid pigments, Binqulander experiments with wash technique, creating beautiful and imaginative backgrounds. Washes with words and colors are usually not readable and are rendered as abstractions. Alongside, he uses colors symbolically in warm and bright tones. At times, a stroke of the line looks like birds in flight. Multiple layers in his work show words in the background and foreground which correspond to physical and metaphysical. Texture of silver leaf with wash technique, makes his work look like a sea inside with forms and shapes in the context of the absence and presence of words. Chunks of words through splashes of colors also produce a constellate effect.

On his observation, he adds: “Beginning from interest in both painting and Arabic calligraphy, I have become gradually more interested in the association between ‘textuality’ and ‘visuality’. As time has progressed, the alphabet and the calligraphic gestural line have become my primary subject matter, sometimes with text and sometimes without it”⁶. He further adds, “my work currently is about creating impression that reflect the words I write or simply creating a mood”. Strokes of the brush and the surfaces of the canvas create visual texture in his work.

One finds both curvilinear and diagonal line in his work. These lines are found in the forms and shapes creating a multi-dimensional effect in his painting. These lines are used as outlines as well as for making different shapes and forms. The curvilinear line creates movement and a floral effect in his work. He intelligently uses curvilinear and rectangular lines; with varying thickness and different colors a sense of depth is created. Overlapping reduction of sizes and layers through different techniques also create perspective.

Binqulander' work can be interpreted in multiple categories. Since his work is mostly abstract, it can be interpreted into many abstractions. Abstractions can be seen in the textural forms and geometric forms. Due to multiplicity in this work, it should not be interpreted on one level; it should be looked into multiple dimensions. Binqulander' work gave out subjective interpretations and has potential to be looked into multiple ways. It can be analyzed into multiple forms

His mystic approach towards art is expressed in calligraphy. The object and the subject dissolve into one being and becomes a piece of art. Although the words are written on the canvas however the representation of these words are subjective in the minds of the viewers. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty the contrast between object and subject, visible and invisible is unavoidable⁷. He established that interdependence between perceived and perceiver is unavoidable. In his concept, objectivity and subjectivity is dialectical and mutually inclusive⁸.

According to Merleau-Ponty, word does not simply relay thought but it finalizes and complete it. Language as a domain of signification is embodied in Binqulander's work in a way that soul and body becomes relative notions. The narrative of Binqulander's art is a commentary on the world in which the mind is essentially "literary" in nature. Binqulander's paintings are subjective which are there for the viewer to observe in all cases. His work shown on the surface is simply words on canvas however those words in when combined with Islamic context and Sufi mysticism depicts abstraction on unconscious level. His work transcends the viewer from the physical world to the world of imagination and creativity⁹.



Binqulander, *Surah Rehman*, 2013, 48" x 48", acrylic, silver leaf and mix medium

Solid color technique in backgrounds

Binqulander typically uses a deep red color that establishes his identity. Besides, Binqulander produces solid backgrounds as well; one-third part of the canvas is filled with solid color and then the lettering supports the entire composition. Following that, the most prominent words are composed in silver leaf. He makes the circle with aptness and makes encircling borders circumscribing words and colors, and on the outer side providing room to geometric patterns. The use of deep red color shows passion and purity, while flowing lines, shapes and geometric patterns are repeatedly used in his work creating a rhythmic environment.

His combination of writing with the use of contemporary practices makes his work exemplary compared to those who are active in tracking the western patterns through life like reality depiction of local culture. A keener look makes the viewer witness his work and distinguish it from diverse angles, this

is only possible because he continuously tries to innovate and challenge the conventional schemes of calligraphy.

He used stationary expressions with floral writing and evenhanded them astutely. Binqulander repeatedly works with a rectangular sketch and a spherical form in his calligraphic master pieces while his technique of inscription is extra floral and abstract as opposed to clear writings used in conventional calligraphy¹⁰.



Binqulander, *Surah Ikhlas*, 2011, 96" x 96", acrylic, silver leaf and mix medium

Black and White series

In the most recent work of Binqulander, monochrome painting is very delicate and mature. In this series he only uses silver leaf, and black and white color with a combination of grays. Black and white tones make a contrast between light and dark. He also creates a high contrast between static and floral words. On the borders of the painting he uses gray tones with low opacity. A change of the silhouette constitutes an intrinsic change in the object; the silhouette is part of the object and creating depth and

perspective. A silhouette is not a depiction because it exists independently of any intention to represent the object¹¹

Binqulander also used the famous symbol of Yin-Yang. In Chinese culture, the yin and yang depict contrast between two extremes, the good the bad, the light he darkness. Yin (moon) represents light, hope, feminine power and cool whereas the yan (sun) is the masculine power which symbolize instability, force and heat. in Chinese philosophy, the yin-yang is the balance of the universe. It is how the universe evens out the forces that lie within it. The good balances out the evil and vice versa. According to this philosophy, the balance is created when both these forces complement each other and make sure that the one is working to support the other. They both are mutually inclusive; one cannot survive without the other. The philosophers also ask this question in the way if darkness is absence of light or is light absence of the darkness. Hence the darkness needs light and vice versa to exist¹².

Binqulander made his work more beautiful with overlapping of words, reducing size of shapes and the layering through different techniques. His work is informally balanced with the help of color, shapes and through negative spaces. Flow of words and composition makes a visual hierarchy. His work gives the observer a chance to interpret the art in his/her capacity. The subjectivity in his work gives the viewer a discretion and autonomy to take the art piece the way he/she perceives. He states, "I want the audience to see the writings with pictorial eyes. I want my audience to see the dance of the letters and to allow their minds to take them as far as they can go". After this work, he experimented in many similar styles. He created many paintings using one or two tones with black and white. Prior to that, his lettering big words were only in silverfish white tones, but around this time, he used the

background in lighter tones for big words. The most prominent letters used in different colors are related to backgrounds.



Binqulander, *Four Qull*, 2013, 24" x 36", acrylic, silver leaf and mix medium.

Circle series and cut flash technique

In this work, Binqulander composes his painting with the circle. Approaching the same style of work, he uses third quarter space of the canvas filled with silver leaf. The whole composition and words in the painting revolve inside the circle, which is certainly a novel approach. He also uses circular and rectangular shapes in his work and, at the same time, works within the circle and rectangular canvases in an innovative way. Different shapes and forms have individual identity through religious, political, social and spiritual interpretations. Combination of different lines, shapes, forms, sizes and colors make a unique recipe. Binqulander takes the viewer into exploring a new direction and also shows the interlinking between shapes and form through his work. Continuity and connectivity create a balance and rhythmic atmosphere. His work is a transformation of traditional form into contemporary context. Legibility of words depicts a

physical form and un-readability of words creates abstraction and metaphysical relationship. Visibility and non-visibility form a contrast dialogue between absence and presence. If we relate the circle with the symbolic platonic circle, it would complete the meaning because circle itself is the central religious and spiritual symbol¹³. Colors are also used symbolically which show different connotations. He uses cut flash technique by sometimes cutting an area of the painting and some words. Through his cut flash technique, words are no more readable and depart in abstract way. But this type of work is not encouraged in Pakistan; people criticize his work that it is not readable and calligraphy must be readable in some way. This ensures an unremitting flow of insight. The recurrence and uniformity of over-lapped letters encourage the observer to stir the rhythmic flow and expression in a continuation of the entire composition that which is often seen in contemporary abstract art. It can be concluded that, Binqulander's scrupulous working technique in calligraphic painting invites imagination and fascination. In his art work, the deliberation is not separable from what is obtainable by the art itself. It means that the observer and the art work become one. In order to correctly understand the full measure of his accomplishments, his artwork is now mostly admired as modern gestural work in the fraternity of art¹⁴.



Binqulander, *Surah Ikhlas*, 2011, 96" x 96", acrylic, silver leaf and mix medium

Conclusion

Binqulander's painting as a philosophical figure gives way to the observer to view the preconceived notions that are unavoidable in perception. His work of art invites the observer to re-think in a social context, customarily, and politically the questions and themes that are deeply rooted in the Islamic ideas. It invites in-depth mystic deliberation that proceeds to place the idea, insight and comprehension. His calligraphic pieces of art reproduce patterns of definite appreciation of theories that depict indirect spirit of insight. Mostly, in the crammed space and the bare spaces, the technique of composition and the backdrop turn out to be visually appealing and balance each other out.

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- ⁶ (Image of the Self in Contemporary Art; Mohammad Ehsai 2011)
- ⁷ Thomas Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (Routledge, 2004), 256.
- ⁸ (Image of the Self in Contemporary Art; Mohammad Ehsai 2011)

⁹ (Image of the Self in Contemporary Art; Mohammad Ehsai 2011)

¹⁰ (Image of the Self in Contemporary Art; Mohammad Ehsai 2011)

¹¹ (Sorensen 2016)

¹² ("Light and Dark" n.d.)

¹³ Gülru Necipoğlu, *Muqarnas, Volume 16: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* (BRILL, 1999), 48.

¹⁴ (Image of the Self in Contemporary Art; Mohammad Ehsai 2011)