

THE AESTHETICS OF CALLIGRAPHY ART IN THE KISWAH OF THE KAABA

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ABSTRACT

Arabic calligraphy art is the main artistic element that has been used to ornament the Kiswah of the Kaaba. Beautiful examples of Arabic calligraphy composition and design can be found in the Kiswah of the Kaaba during the Saudi era. The Kiswah of the Kaaba is selected in the present research due to the unique composition of the Arabic calligraphy art. The study will provide a source of information to understand the Arabic calligraphy art applied to the Kiswah of the Kaaba from a unique perspective. This study is an artistic analysis to reveal about the aesthetics aspect of Arabic calligraphy design in the Kiswah of the Kaaba. The study utilised the qualitative method of research. The data collected for the study was analysed based on the Feldman's four-step approach in evaluating an artwork. The four steps are namely; descriptive, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment. The discussion section focuses on the detailed analysis of the artistic criticism method. The study concludes that the process of artistic criticism has led to reveal the aesthetics' element and principle of the Arabic calligraphy that is embodied within the applications of the Arabic calligraphy design in the Kiswah of the Kaaba. Also, the process of artistic criticism has led to reveal that the Kiswah of the Kabbah has achieved the highest aesthetical aspect of the Islamic art dimension.

Keywords: Islamic architecture, Arabic Calligraphy, Islamic ornamentation, Islamic art, Islamic civilisation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the artistic analysis of the art of the Arabic calligraphy embellished on the Kiswah of the Kaaba. An example of the significance of the representation of the Arabic calligraphy composition is presented on the Kiswah of the Kaaba. The Kiswah of the Kaaba is considered the most famous sanctuary of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The application of Arabic calligraphy used on the Kiswah demonstrates the importance of the Arabic calligraphy art in the Islamic cultural identity (Abdul Gayoom, 2001).

Arabic calligraphy has a long-standing history in the Muslim society. Qur'anic verses have traditionally been written using this art form making it not only aesthetically pleasing but sacred in nature as well. Arabic calligraphy has deep spiritual and artistic values which are expressed on the Kiswah of the Kaaba. This art has a long history and is considered a sacred art form for the Muslim society. Adoring the Kiswah with some

beautiful intricate design and composition of Arabic calligraphy with Qur'anic verses add sacredness to the Kiswah. The unique design of the Arabic calligraphy art which is presented on the Kiswah implies an aesthetical and spiritual appearance that is exquisite and distinct. The aesthetical dimension of the linear formation on the Kiswah of the Kaaba presents unity, variety, balance and rhythmic pattern of the Arabic letters. Moreover, the aesthetical principles of the Arabic calligraphy design reflect the values and richness of the Islamic art. The configuration of the Arabic calligraphy design makes profound artistic styles and directions (Al-Anbaki, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though many writers have written extensively about the history of the Kiswah of the Kabbah, this research attempts to examine the art of the Arabic calligraphy that is visible on the Kiswah of the Kabbah from a different perspective. This research aims to reveal the aesthetical elements and principles that are inherent in on the Kiswah of the Kabbah. The Kiswah is considered a valuable piece of the Islamic art. Generally, Arabic calligraphy and linear formations embodied on the Kiswah of the Kaaba are characterised by a combination of artistic beauty magnificent and majestic view due to the flexibility and ability of the Arabic letters to form, mutate, superposition, intertwine and overlap. This gives the Kiswah a very beautiful appearance and adds a touch of dignity and prestige to it. Also, these calligraphic formations were distinguished by the combination of the aesthetic of the reciter and the good writing in an artistic calligraphic panel interconnected in the textual structure in order to produce for us an aesthetic visual rhetoric indicating the genius of the calligrapher based on a great Islamic artistic legacy that combines the heritage of the past and the originality of the present (Al-Mojan, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework of this analysis is adapted from Edmund Feldman's (1993) four-step structure of criticism consisting of description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.

FINDING

The artistic analysis of the Kiswah of the Kaaba during the Saudi era is based on the Method of Art Criticism – The Critical Process by Edmund Feldman which includes four steps which are namely; description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.

Figures and Pictures

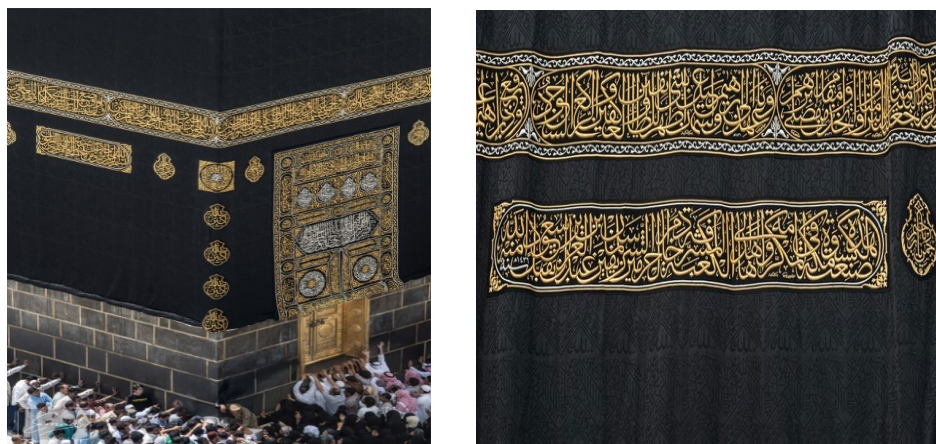


Figure 1. Detailed pictures of the Arabic calligraphy art displayed on the Kiswah of the Kaaba (2014)
<http://www.emadphoto.com/#/makkah/>

Table 1 Method of Art Criticism – The Critical Process by Edmund Feldman

No.	The Critical Process by Edmund Feldman	The Critical Process
1	Description Naming and describing the facts	Naming what an observer sees is part of the overall process of description.
2	Analysis Analyzing the facts	Dealing with visual evidence. It is an advanced type of description.
3	Interpretation Interpreting the evidence	The crucial third stage of art criticism: this is the point at which our search for meaning reaches a climax.
4	Judgment Judging the works of art	Final stage of evaluation of criticism is the evaluation of whole works of art. This sort of judging may seem presumptuous or perhaps it is downright foolish.

Description

At the first step of the analysis; description, the Kiswah of the Kaaba is made of natural black silk. The size of the cover is 658 metres and is made of 670 kilograms of silk. The embroidery contains 15 kilograms of gold threads. It consists of 47 pieces of cloth, and each piece is 14 metres long and 101 centimetres wide. All Qur’anic verses are written in Arabic calligraphy using the Thuluth style of writing. The formerly manual process of designing the embroidery of the Qur’anic verses is now assisted by computers, thus increasing the speed of production. The top third portion of the Kiswah is designed with an ornate belt. The belt’s dimensions are 95 centimetres in width by 45 metres in length. It is made of 16 pieces and surrounds the Kiswah from all four sides of the Kaaba. The belt is embroidered with protruding designs that are enamelled with silver threads and covered in gold. Traditionally, the Kiswah has been embroidered by hand. Today, the use of computer technology is helping artisans weave the designs, thus increasing the speed of production. The material is made up of silk, and a gold embroidered band is sewn about three fourth the distance from the bottom. The part covering the door, which stands 2.13 metres above the ground on the north-east side wall is covered separately with richly embroidered Qur’anic verses.

Analysis

The second step is the analysis of the elements and principles of the design. The lines are undoubtedly of extreme importance in the art of the Kiswah. Throughout the piece, the lines are beautifully placed in repetitive patterns in contrast to one another. There are strong geometric lines running horizontally and vertically across the surface, most of which are rectangular or circular in shape. The calligraphy itself is more organic with its circular and fluid lines. The words themselves are made with thicker lines while thinner lines are used for the diacritical marks. On the Kiswah, the lines in Arabic calligraphy can be described in several things. Some lines are flowing while others are delicate that can be seen on the black background of the Kiswah cloth. There are some simple geometric lines that form the shape of the composition of the calligraphy.

When it comes to analysing the tone of the application of the calligraphy design on the Kiswah, there is a high contrast between the subtle background and the creative and linear beauty formations of the calligraphy. There is a sharp contrast in the value of combination between the light and dark areas in the Kiswah background. The texture of the Kiswah is an essential element of designing the work of art. The texture of the cloth of the background of the Kiswah is beautiful and smooth. On the other hand, the texture of the Arabic calligraphy art is coarse, raised and uneven.

The art of calligraphy composition design on the Kiswah comes in various shapes. Therefore, there are some elements in the composition, such as the lamps that are distributed on the four sides of the Kiswah. On the other hand, the most visible shape of designing the Kiswah comes in geometric shape such as the rectangle that appears under the belt. The shape of the rectangle can be analysed as elongated. Also, there are many geometric shapes such as circles, triangles and squares. Also, the organic shape can be seen through the Islamic motifs. The design of linear formation of the calligraphy on the Kiswah is symmetrical on the four sides. The principle of movement is seen in every composition of the art calligraphy in the Kiswah design. The principle of movement can be seen through the calligraphic lines such as the swirling and flowing line of the Arabic letters.

In the Kiswah of the Kaaba, the colour is a crucial element to define the linear formation of the calligraphy. The colour of the calligraphic line helps each piece of different composition to stand out. The application of the colour of the Kiswah determines the composition. The background is black while the colour of the calligraphy line is gold and silver. The gold colour is considered as saturated colour because it has a high amount of brightness. The black background of the Kiswah can be defined as negative space. Meanwhile, while the calligraphic composition and form can be defined as positive space. In the Kiswah, the focal point of the Kiswah is the calligraphy geometric form and the curtain of the door of the Kaaba.

The element of value is tastefully executed and intricately designed throughout the Kiswah. Both high value contrasts and low value contrasts can be observed. At first glance, high value contrast is most prominently featured with the delicate gold embroidered calligraphic lines carefully placed in a linear manner across the rich, black silk surface. These lightly coloured lines follow a rectangular pattern with some circular patterns infused as well. Upon taking a closer look at the seemingly flat black surface, however, it becomes apparent that there are subtle dark valued lines of Arabic calligraphy also woven into the black the silk. They are equally linear but there is a strong repetition of diagonal lines that zigzag in their own rectangular pattern across the subtle dark background. The strength of their geometrical shape and linear repetition attracts the viewers' attention despite the seemingly low value contrast.

Interpretation

The third step of an artistic analysis is the interpretation of the design principle. The Arabic calligraphy composition on the Kiswah of the Kaaba creates an animated perspective using calligraphic line, repetition form and high contrast in the work to a point that the Kiswah of the Kaaba depicts the 3D view of the Arabic calligraphy. The most prevalent format of the piece is rectangular and the rich black background contrasts the gold and silver calligraphic line well. The calligraphy composition draws attention to the Kiswah. Also, all Arabic calligraphy designs are considered the focal point of the piece. This compositional choice of the placement of the calligraphy creates energy in a peaceful moment.

The design of the Kiswah uses various line qualities to create motion and animation throughout the whole work. The line of the Arabic calligraphy is dynamic and flow across all composition. The smooth and flat background of larger-scale script contrasts the small script that adorns the door of the Kaaba as well as the other composition. The writings in the background and foreground show evidence that repetition is made. The contrasts on the writings that adorn the background are made in a delicate way. This difference in line quality creates a dynamic relationship between the composition and the background.

Repetition is commonly used throughout the design of the Kiswah and it is evident in the calligraphic lines in the show movement and repeated gestures. Horizontal, curved marks act as directional lines to guide the viewers' eyes across the horizontal plane of the Kiswah of the Kaaba. The repetition of the size of the calligraphy and space also creates unity and balance in the Kiswah work. Incorporating layers of Islamic calligraphy applied by gold and silver threads over the entire composition using lines and repetition, the main elements of the Kiswah are visible.

As a result, the calligraphy lines successfully create an individual piece of art that creates movement, rhythm and dynamism using a technical, thoughtful approach. The art of calligraphy that is implied expresses the beauty and depth of the Islamic art heritage. The complexity of the Arabic calligraphy composition creates this language in its visual form to be seen by people from around the world. The calligraphy design combines some composition of the Islamic motifs in botanical shapes such as foliage. The aesthetical principles of calligraphy pieces that ornament the Kiswah are to demonstrate the values of the Arabic language.

Judgment

The fourth step is the evaluation the quality of the Kiswah. The Islamic calligraphy that is presented on the Kiswah has a distinctive character that makes it unique and different from other calligraphies in the world. It has balance and rhythm. Moreover, it is handwritten and the lines are overlapping. The Kiswah of the Kaaba contains a variety of shapes and patterns. Geometrical system of the calligraphy composition creates movement and harmony throughout the Kiswah. The elements and principles of design reinforce the organisational and aesthetical aspect of the design structure of the Arabic calligraphy on the Kiswah.

In the linear formation of the calligraphy, the illusion of space has been achieved through the overlapping between the Arabic letters and words. The design of the Kiswah looks organised via value relationship. The importance of this Arabic art form that is presented in the Kiswah describes its dimensions in detail and explain its significance not only as an art form but also as a sacred religious expression that has been held to the highest esteem by the Islamic civilisation. Unity, rhythm, and balance are the strongest principles of design associated with the calligraphy found on the Kiswah. The placement of the letters, their linear form and the high contrast between the lettering and the background reflect the values and richness of this ornate Islamic art.

The use of gold, silver and other colours has a profound meaning in the Islamic culture. In the Islamic culture, gold is the colour of paradise as the Qur'an states, "Those will have gardens of perpetual residence; beneath them, rivers will flow. They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold." In general, the calligraphy art on the Kiswah of the Kaaba is an engaging, spiritual and unique artwork. The bright colours of gold and silver give the calligraphy art a sense of beauty, luxury and elegance. In addition, the technical skills and the quality workmanship to create the whole piece of the Kiswah as an example of a marvellous Islamic art. Finally, the Kiswah of the Kaaba is presenting a beautiful example of the Islamic calligraphy art and design. This art adds to the Kiswah a sense of spirituality and aesthetical character as well as enhancing the aesthetic of the Islamic art.

CONCLUSION

The Arabic calligraphy in the cover of the Kiswah appears in conjunction with organic patterns and motifs. The Islamic motifs that adorn the Kiswah have testifying diverse artistic statement. The aesthetical aspects of the calligraphy presented on the Kiswah are rhythm, repetitions and decorative patterns. Moreover, the art of the Arabic calligraphy and ornamentation presents complexity that holds the worshippers' attention to contemplate on the Kaaba.

Furthermore, the aesthetical aspects of Arabic calligraphy are movement and dynamism through the intricate lines and forms of the Islamic motifs. The beauty of the Islamic calligraphy presented on the Kiswah of the Kaaba is associated with Islam. The aesthetical principles of the Islamic calligraphy express unity and balance as well as to deliver a sense of universal spirituality. Meditating on the meaning of the sacred verses of the Qur'an is considered an essential aspect in adorning the Kiswah by using the holy book. The calligraphy on the Kiswah shows the variety and creativity as well as traditional Islamic colours.

The study demonstrates the effectiveness of the elements and principles of artistic design to enhance the aesthetical dimension of the Arabic calligraphy art that is presented on the Kiswah. The Kiswah of the Kaaba is notable for its sacred pieces of the Islamic art which is adorned with the verses of the Qur'an to convey the spirituality and the message of Islam. The glorious artistic heritage of the Islamic art is delivered throughout the Islamic motifs and calligraphy. The Arabic calligraphy is considered one of the most beautiful lines in the world because of its unique aesthetical features.

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