

Anonymous MIT student

Professor Peter McMurray

21M.289

6 April 2015

Response to MFA Visit

1. What kinds of different relationships can be seen in this collection between writing and image? And between image and object? Give an example of an object that you find engages with these tensions in interesting ways.

Writing is used on the objects to give the objects attributes of blessings or to wish the bearer wealth and power. The writing seen on many of the objects is elongated, decorated, and contorted to be appealing to the eye in an aesthetic way. It is interesting how sometimes the image is bound by the object's shape and edges, while sometimes it is not. Wasmaa Chorbachi's "Plate: Bismillah, 2007" is an example of an object where the writing is unbounded by the limits of the object. The writing extends past the rim of the plate as if connecting with the world around it. Additionally, the writing/image coats the object following its contours. It is both a part of the object and part of the written tradition of Islam.

2. How Islamic are these objects? Pick two objects with differing qualities/degrees of "Islamic-ness" and briefly compare/contrast them.

The intensity of the Islamic influence varies. The Belt Ornaments are metal and lacking of most decorative elements other than Arabic text which states a verse from the Quran. Many of the objects have verses or blessings/Islamic messages on them, but not all. This is very Islamic, as it keeps the objects pure and directs all attention to the message of the Quran. The Iranian plate which comes from the same time period as the belt ornament features no text and instead seems much more rooted in Asian art forms than Islamic due to its glaze, blue coloring, and decorative images of nature and wildlife.

3. Along the wall opposite the cases of objects are a series of illuminated manuscripts and objects from medieval scientists like al-Jazari. What kinds of relationships between technology and arts is visible? Pick two objects that make use of/explore technology in different ways and briefly compare/contrast them.

-Similar materials are used in both the manuscripts and objects: gold and red paints

-Some manuscripts have decoration on the objects drawn on them. This technology is drawn with the primary purpose of conveying knowledge, yet the decorations such as the calligraphy on the dome of the building in "Device for display at a drinking party" tie the manuscripts to a secondary purpose of demonstrating the appreciate of the arts within Islamic society.

Two objects to compare are the bloodletting manuscript and the astrolabe. The bloodletting manuscript is symbolic and thus easy to decipher how it works. The objects drawn have

mechanical functions that can be reasoned out through examination. The astrolabe is intricately crafted with decorations on the different layers, making it hard to know how it works just from looking at it. It's function is hidden beneath the craftsmanship.

4. Walk through at least one other gallery in the museum. What do you observe about the curation of the Islamic Art gallery in contrast to others at the museum?

The windows in the Islamic art gallery are covered by geometric decorations. The materials used to construct the displays and the room are various woods and fibrous cloths. There is a lot of light in the hallway and illuminating all of the objects, and the light makes the ceramics and gold shine. In the Benin Kingdom gallery, the objects' surroundings lack any decorative qualities whatsoever, with the walls, pedestals, and cases all looking barren and purely functional. The lighting in the room is dark in order to enhance the effect of spotlights shining on the objects. The room is not meant to feel bright or warm as is the Islamic art gallery. The contrast between galleries makes me think about and appreciate how connected Islamic architecture is to Islamic art.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21M.289 Islam/Media
Spring 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.