

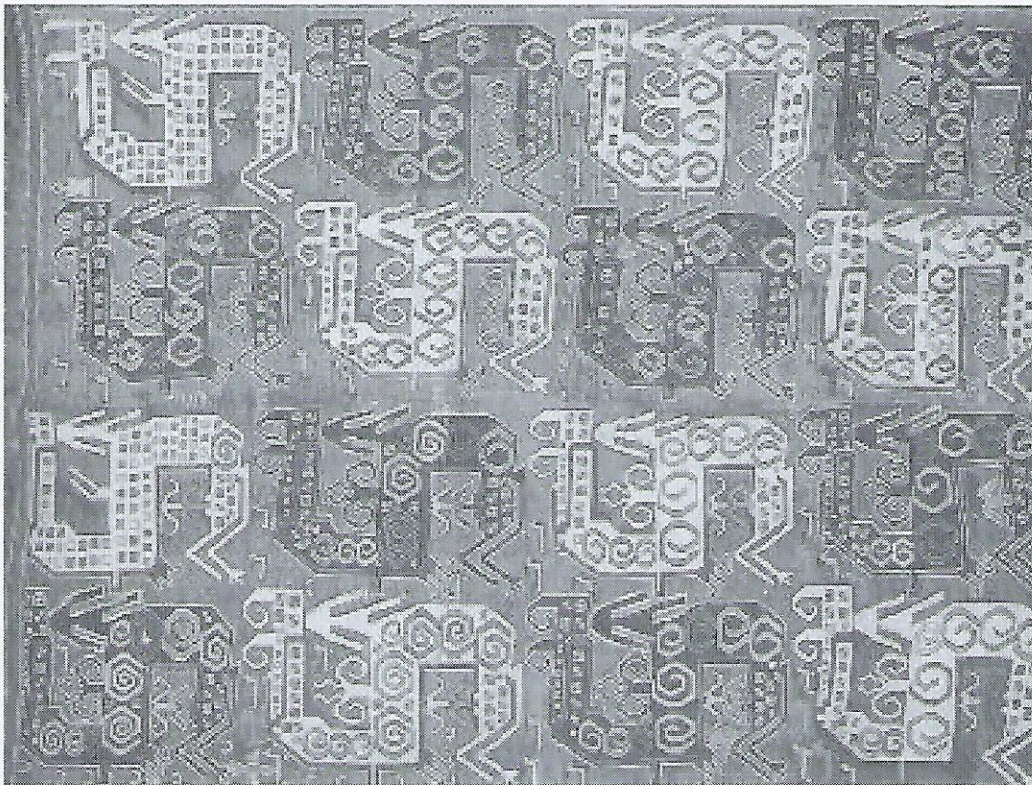
World Art and Music Activity 6



Islamic Textiles

Islamic carpets and silks are works of art. They use bold colors and incorporate geometric shapes, flowers and trees, real and mythical animals, and inscriptions. How did this artistic tradition develop?

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage below. Then answer the questions in the space provided.



Islamic carpet (detail)

Rugs are walked on, clothing is worn out, and even fabric hanging on the wall fades and tears. Because of its dual aesthetic and practical functions, much Islamic textile work does not hold up over long periods of time. The examples that remain, however, display originality, creativity, and artistic ability within a strictly defined religious atmosphere.

The Quran teaches that art should inspire contemplation and prayer. According to Muhammad, only God can make a human figure. Therefore, Islamic

artists are forbidden to re-create the human form in artistic representations. The restrictions inspired past artists to create art that moved away from explicit representations of the real world and instead employed patterns and geometric shapes. These patterns illustrate a highly developed aesthetic sense that often emphasizes symmetry, repetition, and proportion. Later Islamic sects were less strict and allowed artists to incorporate real figures into their artworks as long as there was no religious connection.

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Some of the most highly valued objects in the Islamic world were carpets. Not only did these carpets serve utilitarian or religious purposes (such as prayer rugs), but they were also used as gifts, rewards, and signs of political favor. Carpet making was highly developed in Iran, where a great, royal carpet could have more than 300 knots per square inch. Some carpets, with their intricate designs and tightly woven piles, could take a single weaver more than 20 years to complete. Many carpets were designed to look like gardens, something that was highly valued in such an arid land.

Another important Islamic art form was the illuminated manuscript. These took the form of either beautifully adorned pages from the Quran or imaginative and richly colored illustrations of romances, historical

accounts, and fables. Because of religious constraints, many artists concentrated their efforts on lovingly and painstakingly copying the sacred text of the Quran to such a degree that it developed into a separate art form—what we know today as calligraphy.

Due to the nomadic lifestyles of many early Islamic peoples, much of their textile art was portable. Rugs were carried for personal use throughout the common trade routes. As rugs and other Islamic textiles began to be traded, they influenced the art of India and the Western world. The influence of Islamic art in Europe can be found in the art from both the Medieval and Renaissance periods in which the arabesque design, a commonly found Islamic pattern of interlaced lines, was frequently used in tapestries, manuscripts, and wood carvings.

Reviewing the Selection

1. How is the carpet shown typical of Islamic textiles?

2. Why do most Islamic textiles show patterns instead of human figures?

Critical Thinking

3. **Making Inferences** Why do you think carpets were so highly valued?

4. **Drawing Conclusions** Do you think the Islamic religious restrictions helped or hindered the development of textile art?
