The Impact of Indian & Persian Art from 1300–1800
Do Now!

What do you think is going on in this picture? Why do you think that? Use *specific* details from the painting to back up what your claims. Who are these people? What are they doing? Where are they? How do they relate to each other? Describe the plants and animals as well. What are the objects that the people are interacting with?

5 minutes
Agenda

1. Do now!
2. Agenda
3. Why Care?
4. Introduction/background
5. Arabic Calligraphy
6. Brain Break #1
7. Islamic Patterns
8. Draw it yourself!
9. Brain Break #2
10. Perso-Indian influences on American Visual Culture
11. Exit Slip
12. Dismissal
Why Care?

The way that these cultures developed complicated and beautiful traditions of bookmaking, calligraphy, and patterning centuries ago shapes our post-modern visual culture today. This shows that culture is fluid and that borders between lands are by definition arbitrary and man-made.
The Effect of the Quran on Visual Culture

- In the Quran, it is forbidden to make images of God/Allah or to depict the Prophet Muhammad’s face.
- Thus, while secular art still depicted people and animals, religious art and architecture focused on abstract patterns and beautiful letters (calligraphy) for decoration.
- Since Muslims believe that the Quran is God’s words, the copying down of Qurans became a very important task and they became more elaborate and beautiful over time.
- Soon, an entire culture of bookmaking as the highest form of art emerged in the historically Islamic lands.
Arabic Calligraphy
Background

• The divine revelations to Prophet Muhammad are compiled into a manuscript: The Quran. Since it is Islam's holiest book, copying the text is considered an art of devotion.

• Calligraphy appears on both religious and secular objects in almost every medium- architecture, paper, ceramics, carpets, glass, jewelry, woodcarving, and metalwork.
• The need to transcribe the Quran resulted in formalization and embellishing of Arabic writing.
• Before the invention of the printing press, everything had to be written by hand.
• Master calligraphers had a higher status than painters in Muslim lands.
• What sort of artists/entertainers have the highest status in our world today? Turn & talk with a partner.
Training was a long and rigorous process. The calligrapher traditionally prepares their own special tools. Pens (Qalam) were fastened out of hollow reeds for their flexibility. Inks were prepared using natural materials such as soot, ox gall, gum arabic, or plant essences. Manuscripts were written on papyrus and parchment from animal skin before paper was introduced.
Families

• In medieval Persia, calligraphers were the most highly regarded artists. The art was often passed down within the same family.

• What is something that has been passed down within your family? Turn and talk with a partner
Scripts

• The type of script used is determined by a number of factors such as the audience, content, and function.

• The first script to gain prominence in Qurans and in architecture was kufic. It features angular letters, a horizontal format, and thick extended strokes.
Proportions

- From the 10th to the 13th century, a new system of proportional cursive scripts, that were codified, emerged.
- In the proportional scripts, each letter's shape is determined by a fixed number of diamond-shaped dots. A word written in a particular script can vary in size but the letters will always be in strict proportion to one another.
The Six Proportional Scripts

- There are six proportional scripts, also known as pens (naskh, thuluth, muhaqqaq, rayhani, tawqi, and riqa).
- Scripts such as nasta'liq, that are graceful and fluid are used in poetry.
Usages of Different Scripts

• Quran manuscripts are often written in naskh, thuluth, muhaqqaq, and tawqi because they are bold and stately.

• Complex scripts were used in royal correspondence because they are difficult to forge.

• Why do we use different fonts today? Discuss.
**Naskh:** This thin, long script is the most popular script for Qurans.

**Regaa:** A quicker, easier way to write Arabic developed by Ottoman government officials for taking fast notes at important meetings.

**Thuluth:** A huge, monumental script most often seen on large buildings. The letters get very decorative and complicated. Associated with religions and found on mosques and for writing holy names.

**Nastaliq:** A local Iranian script which we will see a lot of in this exhibit. Used to write things in the Persian language, which is separate from Arabic. Seen a lot in poetry because it is considered fluid.

**Dewani:** This script was one of the secrets of the sultan's palace. Its rules were not known to everyone, but confined to its masters and a few bright students. This made it hard to forge, so it was used in the writing of all royal decrees.

**Kufic:** The first style of Arabic calligraphy developed, first used for Qurans but then for ornamentation, prizing visual ornamentation over legibility. Very vertical, geometric, thick.
**Muhaqqaq:** The name of this script means “clear,” and it is considered one of the most legible and beautiful scripts. It is, however, one of the hardest to execute.

**Rayhani:** The name of this script means “basil.” It is a variant of the Muhaqqaq script, but it is finer than Muhaqqaq, likened to the flowers and leaves of basil.

**Tawqi:** A modified, smaller, and simpler version of Thuluth—sort of like Thuluth without all the frills.
Brain Break!
Get up out of your chair and dance!

How low can you go?
Can you go down low?
All the way to the floor?
How low can you go?
Can you bring it to the top?
Like it never never stop?
Can you bring it to the top?
One hop!
Right foot now!
Left foot now y'all!
Cha Cha real smooth!

2 minutes
Islamic Patterns
Introduction

• The abundant use of geometric pattern is a defining characteristic in Islamic Art.
• The sources of basic shapes and patterns used in Islamic ornamentation come from the traditions of pre-Islamic empires.
• Artists adapted the patterns and designs into new forms to support new uses.
It’s all Math!

• Muslim mathematicians and scientists made essential contributions in the development of ornaments. Their ideas and advanced technological knowledge were reflected in the geometric patterns.

• Basic instruments, a compass and ruler, are used to construct geometric designs. These tools generate the circle and line upon which all designs are based.
Shapes

• The circle and line are also the basis of proportional system used in Islamic Calligraphy.
• Complicated designs are constructed from circles and polygons.
Primary Characteristics of Islamic Geometric Decoration

- Repetition and the Illusion of Infinity
- Symmetry
- Two-Dimensionality
- Central focal point - often used to emphasize the belief in one God, Allah’s oneness is an important religious motif
Watch Video & Take Notes

THE COMPLEX GEOMETRY OF ISLAMIC DESIGN
Try it yourself! Patience is Key
Experiment on Your own!

- Make up repeating patterns on your own
- 10 minutes
Indian kings used to have dancing bears as entertainment.
Perso-Indian Influences in American Visual Culture

- West Arabic Numerals 1234567890
  - Islamicate Scholars are responsible for the preservation of Ancient Greek and Roman science and philosophy during the Middle Ages
  - They made many advances in medicine and technology

- Sunburst tapestries in college dorm rooms
  - Clearly modeled off of Indian and Persian textile patterns

- Persian style rugs
  - Continue to be a staple in American Interior design to this day

- Blue and white porcelain china
  - This form of dishware originated in China, but then got very popular in the Islamic Middle East due to trade connections with the Silk Road and the Mongol invasions.
  - Eventually spread into popularity in European and later American culture
Perso-Indian Influences in American Visual Culture Cont.

- Many old movie theaters are designed to look “exotic”
- Paisley patterned clothing
- Photography advertisements
- Cosmetic advertisements: Why might someone find this lipstick ad offensive?
Exit Slip

What is an example of something you’ve seen in your daily life that you think may have been influenced by Arab, Persian or Indian culture?
Acknowledgements

These educational resources were developed for the Worcester Art Museum by Patrick D. Wilks, Lear Curatorial Intern, in partnership with local educators Batul Juma (volunteer through EnjoinGood) and Brian Leonard. Special thanks to Carina Ruiz-Esparza and Neal Bourbeau of the Worcester Art Museum Education Department.

Preserved Pages: Book as Art in Persia and India 1300-1800, October 13, 2018 – January 6, 2019
Worcester Art Museum/ worcesterart.org