Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Collaborative Explorations in Contemporary Islamic Design Pedagogy and Practice

• Author(s) Name:
Tamadher Alfahal

• University or Company Affiliation:
University of Bahrain

• Abstract (300 words):
In traditional Islamic philosophy, the notion of creativity made no distinction between the different types of creating, thus there was no need to categorise a work of art as “fine art”, or “applied art”, or “crafts”. Today and particularly in the Arab gulf, while ‘fine art’ and ‘design’ are being taught as interrelated subjects, ‘Islamic art and design’ as a field of inquiry is being taught more or less in isolation. This separation in Islamic artistic knowledge happened after Islamic art has been documented and recorded as a field of inquiry in Western art history. And while the discourse of defining ‘what is Islamic architecture?’ has been a continuous emphasis by many scholars, defining what makes “Islamic” work in the field of ‘design’ as we know it today has been rarely, if not ever, ventured.

This pedagogical discourse reflects in how students aesthetically express their religious beliefs and cultural values; in a context where Islam is the main religion, there is a gap between the social practice and the artistic practice. Design students either produce work that is completely disconnected from their cultural values, or one that is merely imitating examples of the past.

This paper exhibits the collaborative methods used in practice-based research in order to
explore alternative approach in Islamic design pedagogy. The research reconciles traditional Islamic philosophy that underpins the historical examples with contemporary design practice by curating sessions with multidisciplinary participants. The sessions included a design tool-kit that is based on literature findings of research, conducted in order to investigate the possibility of such findings to generate creativity in Islamic artistic expression. The aim is to propose alternative pedagogical models for design that are culturally inclusive, highlighting issues related to design education such as tacit knowledge and its relation to learning-by-doing methods in education.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Designer, curator and TEDx speaker from Bahrain. In 2012 she co-founded Ulafa’a Initiative; a reconciliation-through-the-arts project that aims to bring Bahraini communities together through artistic practice after 2010’s political unrest. Her practice extends from curating community art projects to art installations. In her work, Tamadher sheds light on areas of cultural conflicts and religious misconceptions influenced by her upbringing in the Arab world. She also co-founded Beige and Teal; a creative platform for art and design that celebrates the social and cultural narratives of Bahrain. Her main areas of interest are cultural identity, art collaboration and the creative process.

Tamadher is currently doing her PhD in Art and Design Birmingham City University. In her research, she investigates the possible philosophical approaches in contemporary Islamic Design Studies by using curatorial practice of collaborative sessions as methodological tool and an advocate to challenge and inform contemporary Islamic design practice and education. Her research proposes alternative pedagogical models in design education that are culturally inclusive. In addition, her academic approach involves viewing curatorial practice as a disruptive form of knowledge that can include the structure and the visual experience of the written thesis.