



Mysterious Lines and Forms | An Abstract and Dynamic Language of Forms
Aatifi – News from Afghanistan – Painting, Graphic Art and Video



Aatifi's abstract art is based on Islamic calligraphy and is not related to text. © Aatifi Archive

Modern, abstract art composed of curved lines and forms – that is what viewers from Europe and overseas see in Aatifi's large-scale paintings and graphic art. People from Islamic countries recognize a familiar language of forms, which at the same time seems foreign to them. The artist Aatifi combines both in his art: elements of classical Islamic calligraphy with those of contemporary art.

Already as a four-year-old Aatifi used to practice drawing in his native town of Kandahar, and approached the Arabic script from his very own perspective. For him the mysterious forms and lines represent living beings. Since then Islamic calligraphy has not ceased to captivate the artist's imagination.

During years of strict study he learned to master the most important styles of classical calligraphy. He soon started to modify the traditional characters – to the displeasure of his masters.

Reduced Language of Forms without Reference to the Text

As a professional calligrapher and painter – having studied at the Department of Fine Arts at the University in Kabul and the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts – Aatifi started to develop further his calligraphy and combine it with painting, developing over time his own, reduced language of forms. Until the beginning of the 1990s his art still included lyrical text fragments. For about two decades his work has no longer been related to text and has therefore become open to interpretation and universally understandable.

"In calligraphy I see abstract forms, I regard it like classical music that can also be enjoyed without text", explains the artist, who has been living in Germany since 1995 and who now lives in Bielefeld and Kabul. He sees his art as "not limited": "It is not bound to any specific place, country or religion. It is pure aesthetic expression!"

As a painter and graphic artist Aatifi gets to the essence of Arabic script, creating vibrantly-coloured sceneries with monumental script fragments. In his scriptural work Aatifi combines classical stylistic elements, the abundance of light and the colours of Afghanistan with techniques and means of expression used in abstract, modern art. Fragmented, turned and layered, these selected characters stand symbolically for aestheticism, momentum, dynamism, depth and space.

The Colour Blue and Its Significance

Aatifi's solo exhibition "News from Afghanistan" in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Pergamonmuseum Berlin comprises three dozen paintings and graphic works, within a setting of Islamic art from 14 centuries. Particularly fascinating is the installation in the Mshatta Hall with its impressive, early Islamic palace facade from the 8th century (Jordan), where two monumental,

magenta paintings are presented on the front walls, facing each other. These works, measuring 3 x 3.80 and 3.80 x 6 metres, correspond to the reliefs of the sandstone façade, as do the two medium-sized paintings in various shades of blue on the ground platform.

The colour blue plays an important part in Aatifi's work, on the one hand because he associates it with the depth of space, and on the other because it references lapis lazuli, as Aatifi describes: "Lapis lazuli is a very good colour, as this shade of blue is at the same time deep blue, bright and transparent. Afghan lapis lazuli was already highly appreciated and employed by the ancient Egyptians as well as Michelangelo. Unfortunately, in the recent years its deposits brought as little luck and prosperity to most people in the country as other mineral resources." One example of the precious stone is part of the exhibition – placed in a showcase in the book art cabinet.

Apart from paintings presented along the staircase, the carpet room, the Mshatta Hall and its ante-chamber, Aatifi's graphic art is also displayed in the book art cabinet. In the front room the artist shows several works on paper, created by means of the sugar lift technique, whereby the motif is etched into the copper plate. In Dresden Aatifi became acquainted with various graphic methods. Since then print graphics have been an integral part of his work.



Aatifi's large-scale paintings and graphic art created especially for the Pergamon Museum. © Archiv Aatifi

Self-Designed Tools

Closest to traditional calligraphy are his ink drawings in vibrant red, blue and violet, exhibited in the showcases. As in his paintings, for which Aatifi uses self-designed, up to 35 cm broad brushes in order to be able to paint his forms in one movement, he also works with his own ink brushes. "From the start I have been used to create my own tools", says the artist, "I already experimented as a young boy and have mixed my ink with spices and other additives; to this day I mix the pigments for my paintings myself."

The Berlin Pergamon Museum with the Museum für Islamische Kunst is for Aatifi: "an important intersection place for different cultures", and he hopes that the works presented in his exhibition trigger a dialogue among the people.

Aatifi – Calligrapher, Painter and Graphic Artist

1965 born on December 12 in Kandahar, Afghanistan
1971 Apprenticeship as a calligraphist at the age of six
1989–1992 Studies painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Kabul University, Afghanistan
1997–1998 Visiting student at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden, Germany, classes of Prof. Siegfried Klotz

Awards and Scholarships

2012 Scholarship for the Internationales Grafiksyzposium Zwickau, Germany
2009 Scholarship for the Landeskulturzentrum Salzau, Germany
2008 Scholarship for the 18th Sächsisches Druckgrafik-Symposium, Leipzig, Germany
1991 First Prize from the Afghan Art Society, Hakim Naser Khesraw Balkhi
1990 First Prize from the Afghan Culture Ministry
1989 First Prize from the Afghan Culture Ministry

Museums and Collections

Kupferstich-Kabinett/Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, Germany; Städtische Kunstsammlung Radebeul, Germany; Schleswig-holsteinisches Landeskulturzentrum Salzau, Germany; Sammlung des Kunstvereins Zwickau e. V., Germany; Städtische Kunstsammlungen Zwickau, Germany; Private collections in Afghanistan, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, USA

Aatifi – News from Afghanistan
July 3rd – October 18th, 2015
at the Pergamonmuseum,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
www.aatifi.de
www.smb.museum

A 132-page catalogue in English and German accompanying the exhibition is published by Kerber Verlag (available in the museum shop and in bookshops).