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The Peculiarity of the Art Critical Aesthetics in the Arab-Muslim World

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The article discusses the peculiarity of the art critical aesthetics in the Arab-Muslim world from wide perspective of comparative analysis. Based on the analysis of the principal sources and various fields of artistic creativity, the author shows that the art critical aesthetics of the Arab-Muslim world is peculiar in several specific ways as compared with the Western, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese aesthetic traditions. Most importantly, it directly derives from essential tenets of Islamic metaphysics, but is also influenced by religious worldview and principles of geometric comprehension of aesthetic reality and artistic creativity. It constitutes an integral whole of ideas that has been created by various Muslim thinkers, scientists and artists, and has developed in numerous forms of intellectual expression: philosophical metaphysics, theology, philology, poetics, theory of literature, and art critics. A constant debate between concepts and ideas derived from various movements and schools has been evident while contemplating beauty, harmony, perfection, the artist and his creative potential, the origin of art and its nature, the process of artistic creativity, the art's relationship with reality, specificity of works of art, and other fundamental problems of aesthetics and philosophy of art.

Keywords: aesthetics of the Arab-Muslim world, art critical aesthetics, Islam, art, artist, process of artistic creativity.

The foundational principles of aesthetics and philosophy of art

All students of Islamic, or Arab-Muslim, civilization are amazed by its incredibly rapid flowering and its important role in the history of the world's culture, philosophy, aesthetics, and art. Because of the expansion of Arab tribes, this civilization based on Muslim faith in Allāh spread through Eurasia and North Africa from Spain in the west to Indonesia in the east. It arose in the early 7th century and, in barely two hundred years,

began to dominate the cultural history of the world alongside India and China.

Unlike the Romans, who after conquering the Greeks had fallen under their prolonged cultural influence, the small Arab nation was not only able to impose its language on peoples with great cultural traditions but also, with incredible speed, absorbed these cultural traditions into Arabic, which had become a sacred and universal language and under the Caliphate played the same role as Greek under Hellenism or Latin in medieval Europe.

Under the first Islamic dynasty in Medina, the Arabs already sought to consolidate their rule by actively suppressing local cultural tendencies. After their capital was moved to the important Near Eastern cultural center of Damascus, an intense interaction began between the cultural traditions of the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Jews, the Byzantines, and other peoples. This process grew perceptibly stronger when the capital of the Caliphate was transferred to Baghdad. After accepting Islām and the Qurʾān, whose “holy” language had been adopted by the state, the people of many conquered nations with old cultural traditions began to energetically create the values of Arab-Muslim civilization.

To tell the truth, the creators of Arabic-Muslim philosophical aesthetics were charged with endless confidence in the power of their cultural aesthetic thought and art tradition, thus did not feel any psychological complexes in presence of neither antiquity, nor other aesthetic traditions. This is evident in analysing the critical arrows of al Fārābī, ibn Sinā, ibn Ḥazm, ibn ʿArabī, ibn Khaldūn, Al-Bīrūnī, Ibn Rushd, pointed at the theories of their opponents. Rudaki (889–952) has even explicitly stated that the one who looks for truth will not be able to do so in the dried out springs of Hellas (Rudaki, 1949, p. 80). He is being by other encyclopaedist thinkers ibn Sina and al Biruni, who, while admitting that the quest for truth was characteristic to the Greeks, simultaneously state that the Greeks were unable to free themselves from allegory, religion and shackles of already uncovered laws.

In the West we come across different views towards Arabic-Muslim world of aesthetics and philosophy of art. These at-

titudes significantly changed during the last thirty or forty years as base traditional texts were translated and analysed comparatively. Alongside academics who highly value the achievements of Arabic-Muslim aesthetics and philosophy of art, such as F. Gabrieli, A. Papandoupulo, O. Grabar, H. Stierlen, A. Sagadeev, V. Cantarino, V. Gonzalez and others, we also come across an academic like Grünebaum, who is more reserved in praising the achievements, while admitting that although Muslim world thinkers deeply pondered the laws of specific arts, such as artistic laws of poetry and poet’s creativity, they did not come up with neither a total aesthetic system, nor solid aesthetics of literature. They magnificently developed a plentitude of poetic techniques, tropes, poetic language images and gifted us with many accurate insights into specific verses, poetic motives, qualitative features of one or the other poet. However, these often exceptionally clearly and mostly always metaphorically articulated insights rarely make up a foundation for clear solution formulation (Grünebaum, 1955, p.16).

Behrens–Abouseif, the author of monograph *Beauty in Arabic Culture* expresses similar thoughts, except he accentuates slightly different aspects of the discussed issue. She states that Muslim world also ignores aesthetic theories and even if musical and poetry tractates are written, then scientists are barely interested in problems of the fine arts. (Behrens–Abouseif, 1998, p. 115).

Comparing the specific features of Arabic-Muslim world aesthetics and literary theory with traditions of Antiquity and Western aesthetics, Grünebaum explains main differences of Arabic aesthetic thought, highlights conflicts arising in polemics on

various Arabic-Muslim world aesthetic questions and presents his critical conclusions on their objectives their practical achievements. On other note, Grünebaum pinpoints that the majority of aesthetic insights by Arabic-Muslim world thinkers are associated with instrumental didactic issues. Special attention here is given to young creators who are just embarking on their creative journeys, seeking to familiarize with the subtleties of chosen form of art and to become the masters of this sphere through recommendations; for example – how poets should research problems of grammar, syntax, prosody, rhythm, embellishments, mimicking; how to perfect individual style and create works of art that would stand the test of time.

In Arabic art critical tractates Grünebaum accurately notices the attention that is given to praising aesthetic canons of the past, a specific intimacy of artists' self-expressivity, search for close associations with apprehenders, artist's delving into the stream of own tradition. Simultaneously, he also sees the dangers associated with it, as unconditional dedication to a canonical tradition often enchains the artist's aspirations, limits the dispersion of their originality and innovations. To tell the truth, the majority of Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetic and especially literary aesthetic tractates possess a dialectic character: in them significant attention is given to discussion of elements of artist's creative potential, problems of technical mastery as the development of these skills is the most reliable way to excellence and recognition.

I hold Grünebaum's statements that the Arabic-Muslim world thinkers did not come close to creation of a total aesthetic system

or literary aesthetics, but merely developed types of poetic technique, speech figure theories, in which they applied many of their critical remarks on specific verses, poetic motives, features of works by one or another poet, to be peremptory. He is throwing these accusations on all *in corpore* Arabic-Muslim world tradition of aesthetics and philosophy without any grounds. The majority of his insights are grounded only in reference to Arabic-Muslim art critical tradition of aesthetics, while simultaneously they are false as they do not take into account philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art, which are based on completely different principles.

In his peremptory generalizations, Grünebaum seemingly forgets the concepts by most prominent proponents of philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art - ibn Rushd, al Farabi, ibn Sina, ibn Hazm, al Gazali, ibn Arabi, ibn Khaldun. Their concepts, in their total ideological scope, depth and multifacetedness of theoretical analysis were far superior to theories of philosophical aesthetics created in Antiquity and by contemporary Western thinkers. On other note, the one-sidedness and bias of Grunenbaum's conclusions must have been influenced by the fact that as he formulated these far-reaching generalizations, the majority of main texts of Arabic-Muslim world philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art had not quite yet been introduced into academic circulation, as there was no Western country, in which their translation and research programme had been systematically implemented. Also there was a lack of anthologies with abundant commentary and solid academic research, dedicated to these problems.

To tell the truth, opposing to in Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics, in which various empirical and didactic problems take the centre stage, philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art reserve the forefront of its attention to fundamental questions of origin of aestheticism, beauty, harmony, perfection, the essence of art, artistic creation subject, his creative potential, artistic creation process and various influencing factors, art's relation to reality and other questions. Thinkers from different directions and schools differently interpreted the fundamental aesthetic category of beauty. Tolerance to differing aesthetic views and ideas of various directions is one of the most characteristic features of mature philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art in the Muslim world. Aesthetic features and beauty here are envisaged in many different phenomena, which, according to al Farabi, ibn Sina, ibn Hazm, ibn Arabi, ibn Khaldun, provide a human being with a sense of inner aesthetic satisfaction and enables him to improve, while according to pan-aesthetic views of al Farabi – beauty even 'aids a human being by giving sense to his existence in the most profound way' (Al Farabi, 1970, p. 221).

Some thinkers of Arabic-Muslim world comprehended beauty as an objectively existing feature of according to principles of harmony functioning and human world surrounding cosmos; others associated it with categories of harmony or perfection, a third category of thinkers – with universally aesthetically interpreted sense of divine love, fourth category – with divine creative act and closeness of divine forms of beauty to harmonious human shapes, fifth category – with objective laws of harmony, symmetry and

proportionality. A prominent Arabic thinker ibn Khaldun, a proponent of the last attitude, wrote: 'if the apprehended object is harmonious in its shapes and features, which were provided to him by material from which it is created in such a way that it corresponds to the relations of perfect harmony and symmetry (and this is where the essence of beauty and prettiness lies whichever sensitively comprehended object we would talk about), thus this object harmoniously correlates with the apprehending spirit which feels pleasure while apprehending something pleasurable. This is why people, feeling love towards each other, express their ultimate admiration in telling that their spirit is interacting with the spirit of the loved one (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, Vol. II, p. 397–398).

On other note, analysing the origin of beauty in the works by this thinker, we come across anthropocentric problems, association of beauty with human essence and characteristic attitudes towards various forms of existence of beauty that flow from human senses and ways of world apprehension. 'Object, closest to man and merely comprehended as perfect harmony – is human nature. Thus he is most likely to comprehend beauty and prettiness in shapes and sounds, that are in special relation to human nature. Every humans seeks, for example, to apprehend beauty in object with sight and hearing as something that is required by his nature' (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, Vol. II, p. 398). From here flows the conclusion that sight and hearing are precisely those instruments of sensory world that provide human with the highest inner aesthetic satisfaction because of shape and sound harmony inherent to objects, apprehended through senses.

The creators of mature classical Arabic-Muslim aesthetics possess subtle sense of harmony and beauty, expand the spheres of aesthetic and artistic existence, enthrone the rise of artistic, universally educated personality and intensification of anthropocentrism, individualism, critical thought and trust in scientific progress. In many of these features, these aesthetics are reminiscent of Renaissance-like movements of other nations. As Arab-Muslim civilization goes through significant cultural rise, anthropology and strengthening of humanist and universalist tendencies gain an increasingly important role. These tendencies reflected intellectuals' and artist's attitudes towards human in cosmological, ontological, ethnic, aesthetic and other planes. The spread of 'the good life' attest for the growth of aesthetic value influence vis-a-vis all other value systems. This cultural shifts, characteristic to Renaissance worldview, closely associated with the revival of aesthetic ideals of the past 'Golden age' had been reflected in various arts.

Fundamental categories

On other note, the universal principle of 'love for beauty' (*muhabat al-džamal*), directly associated to Renaissance type culture and worldview, has become an intrinsic part of 'the good life', dispersed throughout the Caliphate and encourages educated people to take interest and cultivate various spheres of aesthetic personality dispersion and art. This is connected to aesthetic principle penetration into the book culture, poetry, music, calligraphy and other spheres of art. The educated elite of thriving classical Arabic-Muslim world often regard the aesthetic

relation to reality, cultivation of various arts to be one of the pivotal ways for personality's spiritual development. From here flows the attention to fundamental categories of aesthetic existence: beauty (*husn*), harmony (*nsiğām*), perfection (*kamāl*), prettiness (*kusi, ġamāl*), the influence of aesthetic relation to reality on various spheres of human life and creative activity becomes stronger. These shifts are characteristic to thinkers, belonging to various directions and schools of aesthetics and philosophy of art; they comprehend and interpret the personality's aesthetic relation with the surrounding world in different ways.

As the influence of humanist and universalist ideas grows, tolerance to differing views becomes increasingly stronger, there is a liberation from religious normative convictions and strengthening of secular tendencies, all of which were depicted in detail in *The Renaissance of Islam* by Swiss Islamist Adam Mez and other researchers. The analysis of category of beauty (*jamal*), gaining increasingly stronger influence in universal aesthetic theories, is inseparable from the opposing concept of ugliness (*qubh*), which in Arabic-Muslim aesthetics is most often depicted as the violation of harmonious forms or their imperfection. The concept of relativity of beauty and its dialectic relations with ugliness were developed by sufism ideologist ibn Arabi who, talking about various manifestations of beauty, contrasts them to various manifestations of objects, created by evil, ugliness and created imperfectly, but he also highlights the relativity of relations between beauty and ugliness. In reality, there is nothing but the beautiful through relation and the ugly through relation, for everything

from God is beautiful, whether the thing is ugly or brings about happiness. The affair is relative.

Alongside increasingly more influential secular and individualistic theories, enthroning the importance of human creator, in parallelly unfolding aesthetic concepts, influenced by theological worldview, we see the omnipotent God (Alach), identified with existence, becoming the starting point for aesthetic evaluations. From here flows the growing prominence of such concepts, influenced by religious consciousness, like *jamal* – perfect divine beauty, *jadal* – divine majesty, greatness. These different, with theological worldview associated concepts of beauty in Arabic-Muslim world unfold parallelly, polemising with the secular and in a sense affirming the real tolerance that thrives in this civilizational cultural space.

The great Andalusia-born Arab thinker ibn Hazm (994-1064) connects the idea of beauty with divine love and in his concept of beauty distinguishes three different aspects – material, spiritual and ethical. Splendour is the brightness of the external members (*bahāʾ al-ʾadāʾil-ʾuāhira*); it is also liveliness and nobility (*al-farāha waʾl-ʾitq*). Beauty is something that has in language no other name (than the one) that designates it, but is unanimously perceived by the souls (*maʾ sis fiʾl-nufis*) when they see it (*fi-ttifāq man raʾa-hu*). It is like a fine linen covering the face, a glance (*ishrāq*) that inclines hearts towards it (*yastamīl alquḥib naʾ wa-hu*), in such a way that opinions (*ʾarāʾ*) coincide in judging it beautiful (*istiʾ sāni-hi*) and, although it does not possess fine qualities (*ʾ ifat jamīla*), everyone that sees it, admires it (*rāqa-hu*), considers it beautiful (*istaʾ sana-hu*) and ac-

cepts it, even though contemplating its separate qualities afterwards, one finds nothing remarkable. It seems like something that lies within the soul of the contemplated object and is found by the soul of whoever contemplates it. This is the highest of the categories of beauty (*ajall marātib al-ʾ abāʾ a*). Thereafter tastes (*ahwāʾ*) differ: there is the one who prefers splendour and another who prefers gentleness, but we did not find even one who considers righteousness (*qawām*) as superior in itself (cit. in Gonzalez, 2001, p. 9). Ibn Hazm connects true beauty with the sense of love for the Divine, characteristic to Islamic aesthetic tradition. In other words, Beauty is especially embodied in the beloved, and refers in general to the phenomenon of love itself: the beauty of lovers and the feelings of love, to which nothing compares, neither the wonders of nature, nor the splendours of art.

Attempting to more clearly explain his aesthetic convictions, ibn Hazm notices that ‘neither the leaves and the plants flourishing after the rain, nor the brightness of the flowers after the clouds pass over with the showers of the temperate season, nor the whisper of the spring tides between the branches in bloom, nor the beauty of white palaces (*taʾannuq al-quʾir al-bīd*) surrounded by green gardens, are better than union with the beloved (*waʾl ʾ abīb*), when his characteristics (*akhlāquhu*) satisfy you and you appreciate his innate gifts (*jarāʾizu-hu*) and his qualities each correspond in terms of beauty (*taqābalat fiʾl- ʾ usn*). This is a fact that neither the rhetoricians can express nor the oration of the most eloquent describe’ (cit. in Gonzalez, 2001, p. 10).

Comparing the aesthetic act of contemplation of beauty with apprehension of

loved one's beauty, ibn Hazm speaks about an image of 'beauty', emerging within the apprehender's consciousness, a compound of a plentitude of visible and invisible, physical and intellectual features, enchanting and mysteriously attracting the comprehender. This charm and attraction towards beauty can be associated with the beauty of well-formed proportions, harmonious forms, a pleasant face and other factors that are based on strict ethical criteria, inseparable from the idea of divine manifestation, so important to Islam adepts. From here flows in ibn Hazm's conception prevalent clear distinction between beauty, closely connected to ethics and religion principles, and ugliness, which is understood as an opposition to true beauty as it is associated with immorality, uncontrolled instincts and disregard for religious truth. Summing up his contemplations of the essence of beauty phenomena, ibn Hazm reaches a conclusion, that the true supreme beauty, connected to the divine origin of this concept, is an ideal compound of moral, spiritual, intellectual and even physical features that amalgamates all mentioned qualities to a perfect fusion, deserving of supreme love. The link between Divine love and celebration of category of beauty is a defining feature of Islam aesthetics.

In philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art of Arabic-Muslim world, beauty is closely associated with another fundamental category – that of harmony. Indulgence in harmony of visible forms and audible sounds here is explained as human nature and the attraction towards various pleasant objects of aesthetic contemplation, while ugliness and disgust are associated with the imperfection of shape and chaos, giving birth to natural

effect of repulsion. On other note, harmony between subject and the object of aesthetic contemplation here is explained as the essential prerequisite for admiring beauty.

Eventually, two different concepts of universal harmony emerged in Arab aesthetics – ones that we may conventionally call the theological (metaphysical) and the naturalistic (scholarly). The first is close to the Pythagoreans, the Neo-Platonists, and similar Near Eastern aesthetic traditions. The most eminent followers of this concept were al-Kindī, the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'), and al-Ghazālī, all of whom grounded the concept of universal harmony in the absolute beauty, wisdom, and purposeful creative power of Allāh.

The followers of the second, naturalistic aesthetic system (al-Fārābī, al-Bīrūnī, ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], ibn Rushd [Averroës]) were oriented toward the rationalistic Egyptian and Aristotelian tradition in aesthetics. Criticizing the cosmogonic, metaphysical, and theological concepts of harmony, they relied on the achievements of physics, mathematics, and other sciences and based their conclusions on real life experience. Expressing the longing for universal harmony characteristic of the followers of naturalistic aesthetics, ibn Rushd compared the Universe to a perfect work of art. The naturalistic tendency to poeticize the principles of mathematics and geometry greatly influenced the development of music, architecture, and the fine and applied arts, which were characterized by a penchant for harmonizing geometrical, spatial, and ornamental structures.

Alongside the categories of harmony and beauty, perfection also becomes a fundamental concept of Arab aesthetics and philosophy

of art in which creator's impeccable attitude towards personal creative process, seen in his masterfully crafted, ideal formed works of art. During various developmental stages development of Arab aesthetics the category of harmony was examined from different angles. Usually, it was understood as a universal aesthetic principle the essence of which is balance of form, ideal mathematical ratios. Harmony was discerned in many aspects of the cosmos, nature, and art – especially in music and in the human figure and its physical proportions. In Arab aesthetics, the universality of the principle of harmony is grounded in different ways, depending on the theorists' premises.

The originality of art critical aesthetics

In order to ground their ideals, the creators of Islam, just as of any other civilization striving for universality, widely utilised the natural human attraction towards beauty, various forms of aesthetic expression, especially the possibilities of artistic expression, provided by different forms of art. Art critical aesthetics are substantially different from our discussed strikingly conceptual and sometimes even speculative philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art. Its main generalizations and ideas flow from theoretical contemplations on specific art practices, laws of various forms of art, which artists come across in their daily creative practice.

Art critical aesthetics and kindred theory of art emerges, unfolds between Western and Eastern civilizational worlds reflecting its historical mission, connecting cultural, aesthetic and art traditions of different civilizational worlds. It seemingly absorbs

within itself the aesthetic ideas characteristic to Hellenism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Manichaeism, nations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, semi-desert and steppes, and relates them to Arabic aesthetic attitudes. This genetic duality and obvious hybridity of Islamic art critical aesthetic tradition did not fade away in subsequent history of Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics even though it was reinforced with fundamental postulates of Islamic ideology.

Traditionalism is a defining feature of Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics, much stronger than in philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art, and in culture in general, compared to other great Eastern and Western civilizations. It flows from sacral streams of creative forms, at the top of the hierarchy of arts. Besides the main in the beginning prevalent Arabic tradition, at least three traditions of art critical aesthetic thought eventually unfolded in Islamic civilizational space: Persian, later replaced by Turkish (Osman) and, finally, Indo-Islamic (Mogol), influenced by Persian cultural traditions. Each can be distinguished by a particular genesis, different tendencies influencing their development, styles of art, attention to specific forms of aesthetic expression.

Another important factor, determining the originality of Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics is the hierarchy of arts, in which, during different evolutionary periods and in various regions, three major arts (poetry, calligraphy and architecture) are fighting for priority (in East Asia the reigning arts were calligraphy, painting and poetry), while other arts, even if significant for the lives of nations of different regions, were pushed to the background.

The rise of art critical aesthetics and with it closely connected theory of art in Islamic world is directly associated with the heyday of fine and applied arts, architecture and other forms of art. Thus, we can become acquainted with the majority of foundational ideas and principles of Arab-Muslim world art critical aesthetics by moving 'from below', i.e. from the specifics of art practice. The main stream of art critical aesthetic thought was more connected to research of poetic, literary and philological direction, which, akin to Hindu tradition of art critical aesthetics, most often took shape within poetics during theoretical contemplations of laws of the art of poetry, less frequent, during contemplations of theoretical problems of architecture, calligraphy, literature, music and other arts.

Analysing art critical aesthetics, unfolding in Arabic-Muslim civilizational space, or attempting to implicitly single it out from the specific world of art, we instantly come across complex obstacles. Firstly, since Antiquity, in the majority of countries and regions, belonging to Arabic-Muslim Caliphate (Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Persia, Armenia, Georgia, Iraq, India, Arabized Spain, Sicilia, India, etc.) rich indigenous, sometimes dissimilar aesthetic traditions and theories existed.

On other note, Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics differed from Hindu, Chinese, Antique and Western aesthetic traditions firstly by a narrower field of art system reflexivity and stronger penetration of some foundational Islamic religious and ideological convictions into the sphere of aesthetic consciousness. In art critical aesthetics, forms of art, firstly associated with the dispersion of Divine word – poetry (and much less significantly – literature and calligraphy) became

the main object of theoretical contemplation of aesthetic phenomena, processes and products of aesthetic creativity. This is in contrast to philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art, in which the creators' attention was centered upon broadest philosophical problems of a spectre of forms of art.

The most significant influences determining the originality of Islamic art phenomena during the course of history were changing periodically, same as its most vital nourishing streams. In the early formation process of Arabic-Muslim art critical aesthetics, the pivotal role was played by Syrian, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Byzantine, Brothers of Saint John and Nestorian (Christian) and Hellenist traditions that provided Arabic aesthetics with the majority of foundational aesthetic convictions, visually perceived structures, poetic symbols, metaphors. From here flows characteristic to art critical aesthetics high estimation of importance of ornamental structurality, geometrization of visual forms, arabesque, real floral and zoomorphic image schemes.

Later, the becoming of tradition of Islamic art critical aesthetics was strongly influenced by aesthetic traditions and styles, formed during the rule of Persian Sasanian, Achaemenid dynasties. Finally, after the Mongolian conquests, Mongolian, Chinese, Hindu, Turkish, Copts, steppe and other nations (especially Skit) influences become extremely forceful. During the process of historical dispersion of Islamic aesthetic thought, all of them amalgamated and, depending on many specific political and cultural factors, differently unfolded in various regions of Arab-Muslim civilization, which saw continuously growing influence of art

forms by nations and regions that succeeded to preserve their national traditions.

Here, we come back unavoidably to a question that is constantly left at the margins of discussions about originality of Arabic-Muslim traditions of art and aesthetics: What is the connecting link between a plentitude of specific traditions and forms of Islamic aesthetic thought and art, that allows to classify them as an organic part of Muslim art critical aesthetics and practice of art? As we search for the answer to this problem we might remember French Islamist's L. Massignon statement, that 'Arab-Muslim world's art conceptions develop directly from foundational Muslim metaphysical statements about the illusion and transitionality of human surrounding world, and the thought that only God can be the creator of constant existence' (Massignon, 1963, p. 12).

Truly, we must admit that from the sacred book of Quran flowing Muslim philosophical religious concept of human and the surrounding world, significantly influencing aesthetic and artistic ideals developing in Islamic civilization, becomes an important connecting and mostly stable link between different traditions of aesthetics and arts in Arabic-Muslim world and also the key to knowledge about Muslim philosophical and art critical aesthetics. From this text flow many foundational worldview convictions, influencing the originality of Islamic aesthetic tradition. In this aspect, Quran truly is the foundational text for apprehending the majority of most important features of Arabic-Muslim civilization aesthetics; a sacred text, in its importance incomparable to any other, similarly as Tora is for Jews, or Bible for Christians.

But I would like to turn the readers' attention to another as important aspect of the discussed problem - Quran in the Arabic-Muslim cultural tradition is understood as the ultimate word of God for the believers, thus it has nothing to do with poetry, which is the result of human imagination. Delivered in Arabic, for the creators of traditional Islamic art critical aesthetics Quran embodies absolute and unique perfection in its composition, structure, language, image system and beauty, thus it cannot be translated to any other language as in the process the word of God can be misconstrued. Due to all aforementioned factors, already at the dawn of Arabic-Muslim civilization, a foundational conclusion is reached by Islamic theological direction aestheticians: Quran is the embodiment of absolute truth, while poetry is the result of human imagination, which diverges from telling of the truth. Because of this, Quran - the sacred text of incomparable Divine beauty and aesthetic value - was clearly demarcated from poetry, despite it being held to be the highest of arts. Thus the aesthetic hierarchy, drawn in the world of art was understood as secondary vis-a-vis the highest divine hierarchy.

But despite the radical demarcation between divine and Earthly aesthetic value systems drawn by the religion of Islam, some Arabic aestheticians, seeking to defend art from the influence of religion, claimed that 'religion and poetry are completely different things without no connection at all' (Socialnyje, eticheskiye i esteticheskiye, 1984, p. 80). The autonomy of art (poetry – held to be the highest of arts) vis-a-vis philosophy and history was proclaimed by another coryphaei of Arabic aesthetics – ibn Rachiq. He

writes: 'philosophy and history are separate branches of science, foreign to poetry. If anything from them will attempt to penetrate into poetry, it has to be with good measure. We should not hold these sciences to be the pillars for poetry and we should not put our hopes into them. Poetry is what affects, tangles the spirit and shocks the heart. This is the field of poetry. It is created for that purpose and nothing else' (ibn Rachiq, 1991, p. 310).

The complexity of the concept of 'art'

The majority of authors, writing on the art of Islamic worlds (*fann*) use various terms, such as 'art of Islam', 'Muslim art', 'art of Islamic regions', 'Arabic-Muslim art'. Delving into the analysis of originality of Islamic art critical aesthetics, the complexity of these concepts instantly arises. Firstly, these authors quite rightly seek to cover a wide civilizational space with different theories and traditions of art and creation, ranging from the Atlantic to Indonesia, inhabited by many nations with completely dissimilar development level and actual aesthetic needs but on other note, they unavoidably come across the fact, that in this civilizational space, alongside nations with gargantuan cultural and art traditions (Egyptian, Syrian, Greek, Persian, Hindu), this civilizational space was also inhabited by nomadic Arab Berber, Turk and other nations.

Having grasped this, Grabar, analysing the Arab-Muslim art tradition genesis phenomena, is justified in talking about two essentially different paths of its knowledge, naming them *vertical* and *horizontal*. The first path, *vertical*, delves into old pre-Islamic art traditions, existing, for example, in Spain

before the emergence of Arab conquerors during the Visigoth kingdom rule (in Central Asia – Saudi rule). But even though later, in the specific moment of historical development these territories were Islamized, the deep genetic layer under the superficial layer of Arabization can be identified and recognised by specific accurate formal features.

In the second, *horizontal* level of analysis, we can see the changes, which, for example, manifest in ninth century art of Cordoba, in its stylistic features more similar to the art of distant Samarkand than to that of nearby Compostela. The outcomes of this secondary level art development are truly unusual in their unpredictability. In the year 700, Cordoba and Samarkand must have never heard of each other, but at around year 800, they became parts of the same civilizational world.

These succinctly discussed examples of comparative analysis suggestively show the complexity of traditional Islamic art genesis and aesthetic composition. It was determined first by the multi-rootedness of the origins, complex amalgamation processes of different traditions and forms of art, determining an exceptionally fast becoming of Islamic art towards an original artistic phenomena, significantly different from well-known different historical, for example Greek, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese forms of traditional art.

On other note, analysing the manifestations of this complex art and its forms, canons, codes, symbol aggregations in Arabian peninsula, Maghreb, Near East, Mesopotamia, Little Asia, Central Asia, Andalusia, Sicilia, Islamized India and other parts of the Caliphate we often come across dissimilar nourishing artistic expressivity forms, themes, repertoires, composi-

tional, technical, constructive decisions and ways of art phenomena interpretation. And finally, whichever sphere of Arab-Muslim world of art we select for our analysis, in all of them we will find striking variety of various historical and regional forms of art. Thus, such natural questions arise like: what do these different forms of art have in common? What is the main connecting link between these forms of art, different in their artistic level and aesthetic value? To what extent here we can talk about a unified 'complex of Islamic forms of art' representing a more or less undivided Arab-Muslim tradition of art?

As we search for these answers, we must admit that it is most likely that this art form aggregate, characteristic to all regions and historical periods of Arab-Muslim world had been dispersed throughout this civilizational space by Arabic military and Islamic ideological cultural expansions, in the process synthesizing, unifying and bringing together a particular to this civilizational space system of formalized structures and compositional devices, influenced by indigenous traditions and demarcated from anthropomorphic structures. A close two-way relationship between aesthetic thought and practice of art had settled in classical Arabic-Muslim civilization as the majority of most prominent proponents of art critical aesthetics are also famous artists, great masters of most topical problems in specific art spheres and also the subtleties of their profession. This is why problems, arising in the plane of ideology and aesthetic thought, unfold in an equally complicated way in the forms of art, influenced by them.

The term 'Islamic art', according to Dominique Clevenot, 'represents a creative production, that cannot be held to be merely an aggregate of random things. In this totality we can envisage unified antagonistic forces, seemingly coalescing in one singular central point and these various forces gravitate towards the central unifying pole' (Clevenot, 1994, p. 12). This pole that Clevenot talks about is precisely the traditionalist Islamic ideology, which in its historical development intertwines with foundational thoughts of Islamic art critical thought.

Thus, it is precisely the ideology of Islam that was incomparably more tolerant and liberal than in Latin Western or Byzantine Christianity, that became the main ideological and in other words, the ordering axis for Islamic art critical aesthetics and practice of art, merging the regional art traditions of Arabian peninsula, Maghreb, Egypt, Levant, Mesopotamia, Iran, Central Asia, Islamized Pyrenean peninsula, Islamized India, Turkish, black sub-Saharan Africa into a more or less unified system of aesthetic and artistic attitudes. But, different from the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Tantric arts, the classical period Arab-Muslim world art, influenced by Islamic ideology was substantially more liberal in its main convictions and, most importantly, often foreign to strict requirements of religious cult and canons. This was hugely influenced by the absence of influential churchman stratum, which could otherwise have controlled these processes. This is because under the influence of Quran metaphysics, every adept of Islam firstly sought to approach the vital streams of his belief without any mediators.

The originality of Islamic tradition of art

Georges Marçais, the subtle French master of Islamic tradition of art, in his book *L'art musulman*, (*The Muslim Art*, 1962) defines the art of Arabic-Muslim civilization as 'the last of the arts, born in the cradle of West Asian culture in our olden world' (Marçais, 1962, p. 5). Here, Marçais firstly has in mind that the original Islamic art tradition is a powerful tradition, formed by the latest in the third decade on the seventh century AD in the Western part of Asia, striking not only in its majesty and the grandeur of its expanse, but, akin to other great art traditions of the old world, is able to evolve, change, experience various complex historical shifts and leaves a deep imprint in the World's civilizational history.

This problem, originated by Marçais, was later further developed by another master of Arabic-Muslim world aesthetics and art – Oleg Grabar. For the analysis of Islamic art genesis and originality problems he dedicated a volume, entitled *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973), in which he brought about two hypotheses: the first is that unified singular Arab-Muslim art exists. But instantly we are presented with questions like *what does the adjective 'Muslim' means in this two-word compound, doesn't it simply add in the concept of 'art'?* *To which spectre of art works can we a priori attribute the features of this singularity? Can we compare these with different artistic entities?*

Firstly, it is clear that philosophical and art critical conceptions, emerging from the old civilizations in Caliphate's territory during pre-Islamic times, and the originality of specific art forms, thriving for centuries in

various regions, held huge influence in the formation of Arabic-Muslim world tradition of art. In other words, Islamic art had assimilated pre-Islamic traditions of Near East and Mesopotamia regions, but it also annexed various forms of art of Ancient Greeks, Byzantine, Roman, Syrian, Persian, Ancient Hebrew, Copts, as well as in the periphery of Islam residing Skit, Mongolian, Middle Asian, Chinese, Western African, Berber, Hindu and others.

On other note, as we analyse forms of art, unfolding in Arabic-Muslim civilizational space, we must make sure not to forget that various art forms completely or mostly detached from Islamic faith and influenced by cultural and religious traditions of Judaism, various manifestations of Christianity, Armenian, Georgian, Zoroastrian, Manichaeism, Mazdaist, Buddhist, Hindu and others successfully thrived within that civilizational space for centuries. Finally, in the Islam-influenced civilizational space forms of art by Jews, Christian nations and sects: Armenian, Georgia, Copt, Brothers of Saint John, Nestorian and others, that have already been affected by the influence of Islam also unfolded. This is why it is especially important for researchers of Islamic art critical aesthetics to clearly comprehend that the concept of Islamic art is abundant with different semantic meanings to what we usually attribute to such concepts as 'Christian art', 'Buddhist art' or 'Taoist art'. But alongside the discussed interpretation of the adjective 'Islamic', in the texts of Islamic art critical aesthetics there is a different, more widely familiar interpretation, which is defined as 'the culture, in which the majority of its inhabitants, or at least the ruling elite are

practising Muslims. In this case, the concept *Muslim art* also differs in its definition from Chinese, Hispanic or steppe art, in a sense that it is not based in 'Islamic territory or nation' (Grabar, 1987, p. 12).

The process of interaction between different local aesthetic traditions and amalgamation with the universal aesthetic convictions of Quran metaphysics during the Persian, Mongolian and overruling Turkish dynasty rule significantly alters the majority of contemporary stylistic features of Islamic art as the revival of different nation aesthetic and art traditions in specific territories of the Caliphate leaves more or less deep imprints in process of amalgamation and nivelation of different local and universal art conceptions, flowing from Islamic ideology.

Thus, according to an accurate remark by Alexander Papadoupoulos, one must merely take a deeper glance into the architecture, applied and fine arts, calligraphy, miniature, or listen to some music, influenced by Arabic-Muslim civilizational aesthetics to be able to see that despite a plentitude of streams nourishing the Islamic tradition of art. These forms of art shape the originality of Arabic-Muslim aesthetic and artistic phenomenon, which is distinguished by only to Islamic tradition of aesthetics and art characteristic strongly conveyed distinctive features. This is why it is no more a Sumerian, Assyrian, Persian, Hebrew, Mongolian, Copt, Byzantine, but precisely Arabic-Muslim art phenomena with its own typological features flowing from a plentitude of re-fused various ancient and contemporary traditions of art and simultaneously conserving the traces of the mentioned traditions (see Papandoupulo, 1976, p. 22)

Analysing the originality of Arabic-Muslim art, we see a substantial demarcation between visual and verbal forms of art. Truly, the relations between VISUAL and WORD in Islamic and Christian traditions of art are substantially different in Christian artistic consciousness, the respect for the visual of Christ is evidently more important than the respectful obedience of with word. The aesthetic consciousness in Arabic-Muslim world is governed by opposite principles. Here, word is always of utmost importance, instead of a visual, this is why the visual is reduced to various abstract forms, ornamental structures and arabesque shapes. The majority seems to think that this attests for lower level of aesthetic consciousness and its artistic needs. However, in reality it is the complete opposite as the process of abstraction from straightforward mimicry of natural forms and moving towards a higher level of artistic generalization requires much higher level of intellect and universal education, essential for the ability to solve most complex abstract artistic composition problems, for example, the creation of complex arabesque fabrics and their integration into specific spaces. Here we come across a similar situation as when elementary mathematics interact with the high mathematics, which requires the employment of much more abstract thought and higher level of intellect.

The Islamic concept of *art*, born during the process of artistic creation - in its most general form combined within itself firstly in seventh century Near and Middle East born and later in all of the Muslim civilizational space unfolded various forms of art by Islamized nations. The Islamic civilizational space spread through massive territories from

Atlantic Ocean to Southern Africa, it even reached Indonesian islands in the East. The originality of Islamic art manifested itself in various shapes firstly in traditionalist and canonical convictions, the art interaction requirements based on strict hierarchical principles: in architecture, interior design, decorative arts, poetry, calligraphy, miniature, music, dance, textile, carpets, ceramics, mosaic, stained glass, glass and other creations of applied arts.

The image of the artist

One of the most important research fields of Arab-Muslim critical aesthetics covers a complex problem field of creative subject, i.e. the artist, his creative process and generation of work of art. When analysing these problems it becomes clear that theorists of Islamic world widely rested not only on attentive observation of art processes, but also actively inserted the ideas by their predecessors into their theories. These theories were synthesized based on personal experience. To tell the truth, in Islamic aesthetics emerging attitude towards the artist and his creative process is not that different to what we can witness in Hindu, Chinese, Greek and other ancient and medieval Eastern and Western civilizations as here there is no clear demarcation between an artist and an artisan, with poets, architects and calligraphers held to probably be the only exception. Eventually, in volumes by separate thinkers we notice the strengthening of the conviction that one can only be born as true artist, and not made into one, as the totality of inherent qualities, characteristic to a creator of true and exceptional talent, is seemingly gifted to him from above.

But these inherent qualities are not enough for the true mastery of a sphere of certain artistic creation, thus constant learning and development is essential, as well as mastering of wide humanitarian culture (*adab*) principles and knowledge of artistic expression possibilities of various arts.

The majority of forms of creative activity, which are held by contemporary culture and art historians to be the pride of Islamic art culture – calligraphy, architecture, music, applied arts, textile and carpet art – were comprehended as the results of labour, similar to that in artisan guilds. From here flows the relatively low social status of creators of various forms of art, except for poets, calligraphers and architects. The special position of an architect, poet and calligrapher in Muslim society calls for a more detailed discussion.

In Islamic civilization, architects from noble strata could only be rivalled in their social status by poets and calligraphers, who often rose from educated strata as well or sometimes even were the most prominent representatives of their noble aristocracy. The total field of their creation was branded with sacredness as poets were directly associated with the spread of divine word, calligraphers – with the spread of sacral script and architects – with constructing various buildings for worship, mosques in the first instance. On other note, all of these creation fields required possession of wide humanitarian culture and multifaceted education. Thus the representatives of these art spheres often enjoyed high social status in the palace and when they reached wide recognition in their fields, often were welcomed into the closest environment to the ruler and took

part in dealing with important questions on national life, culture and art.

Differently from comparatively high social status of the creators of the 'sacred arts' - architecture, calligraphy and poetry, the social prestige of musicians in the early period of Islamic aesthetic dispersion was low, because music did not fit into the framework of dutiful Islam adept lifestyle, defined by Islam influenced aesthetics. Thus musicians and singers, spreading the feelings that might 'tempt the devil' and often perverse people, as well as spreading sinful thoughts, distracting from the main purpose of adepts of Islam in Arab-Muslim world were often publically despised and humiliated even though admired in secret with marvel about the virtuosically performed musical works.

The growth of social status and the appreciation of the artistic value of works by painters, mainly working not with wall painting, but with miniatures, influenced changes in attitude towards fine art painters as well, who from the end of fifteenth century already started signing their works. The fame and artwork value of some painters was so significant, that their works, just as in China, were not only copied, but also forged in order to sell them for profit. For example, the fame and artwork value of the great sixteenth century miniature painting master Bihzad and seventeenth century Reza Abbasi was so high in the art market that they were often forged and sold as originals.

It has so come to be in Arabic-Muslim world tradition of aesthetics that if in its texts we search for fragments in which problems of artist, artistic creation process and artwork problems are discussed respectfully and in length, we will first come across tractates for

the art of poetry and poet's creation in which the image of the artist (poet) is praised and various problems of his creative potential, inspiration, intuition, mastery, innovation, artistic style, artist's relation to nature and many other perennial problems of aesthetics and philosophy of art are discussed.

The rise of poetry and calligraphy in the hierarchy of arts highlights similarity to such status of the artist that we see in Chinese civilization. To tell the truth, this is not very surprising as Arabs were familiar with Chinese culture ever since it had been opened to the world during Tang epoch as large colonies of Arabs lived in the main Chinese international sea trade centres. But simply stating this important intercultural fact is hardly a motive enough to make old and far-reaching conclusions about the effect of ancient Chinese civilization on the Arabic concept of the artist. In this likeness we can also see the similarities of natural, consistent civilizational development, which engenders similar sociocultural development phenomena. This is magnificently demonstrated by Toshihiko Izutsu in his comparative and precise study called *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, 1984*) in which he compares the ideas of sufists and Taoists.

Different to modern Western tradition of aesthetics and art, in which under the effect of Renaissance individualism and universalism the exceptionality of artist's personality and universality of his creative strives is highlighted, in Islamic aesthetic tradition there are no such manifestations of narcissism and emphatic individualism. Subtle Arab poetry master Régis Blachère states that 'Arab poet never puts himself at the centre of the world as the bearer of light or perfect prophet. He

presents himself in the shape of his humanity, with all of his failings, only caring that he wouldn't be overshadowed in the society in which his voice resounds' (Blachère, 1958, p. 7). Truly, in Arabic-Muslim civilization, due to characteristic totalitarian model of social organization, the artist is firstly the member of the society who feels strong connection to the civic environment he lives in, thus in his creation sensitively reacts to its aesthetics needs.

The concept of artistic creation process

But the thinkers of Arab-Muslim world were interested not only in the image of the artist, his social status in wider society, but also in the analysis of his creative potential and various firstly with forms of sacred art associated creative activity strategies. From here flows the orientation towards previously in this civilizational space thriving traditions of art, settled forms and canons of creation. The strive to enrich them and assimilation of new synthetic artistic relations determined new, semantically oriented changes in artist's consciousness and creative activity. Traditionalism, widely discussed by S.H Nasr in his books, truly is one of the most important convictions of artist's consciousness as the artist who is saturated with traditionalist convictions naturally becomes a producer of traditionalist art. He writes: 'Tradition speaks to man not only through human words but also through other forms of art. Its message is written not only upon pages of books and within the grand phenomena of nature but also upon the face of those works of traditional and especially sacred art which, like the words of sacred scripture and the

forms of nature, are ultimately a revelation from that Reality which is the source of both tradition and the cosmos' (Nasr, 1989, p. 221).

In art critical aesthetics of Islamic world manifesting characteristic attitudes to artistic creation process and from it emerging work of art are not all different from attitudes prevalent in other civilizational worlds. The origins of artistic creation in the works of early Arab theorists (first generalizing the laws of poetic art) were associated with rationally unexplainable fountains of creation, speaking specifically about the shadowy fountains of artistic inspiration, they were often associated with creative magical force, the ability to influence the course of various natural and everyday human life processes, taken from djinns. This is why poets and other great artists were often attributed with various mystical incomprehensible powers. Rationalist thinkers (al Farabi, ibn Sina) and sufists (ibn Arabi, al Farid) justifiably explain artistic creative process and from it born works of art as the power of specific artist's creative potential, imagination, talent, the ability to not only penetrate into the otherwise invisible essence of phenomena, but also distinctively convey that in one's creations.

On other note, the interpretation of creative process in which there are no processes, associated with logic of inner aesthetic thought development, was highly influenced by Quran text. From here, in the concept of artistic creation flow many various canonical requirements, the veracity of which was sometimes disregarded in different arts. The canonical requirements were more closely observed in various sacred architectural forms, especially in mosque building. But elements of canonization dis-

tinctly unfold even if seemingly liberal art of miniature in which when drawing figures of people of different ranks, their social status was reflected in the figure size, clothing, various symbolic signifiers. The canon even reglamented the depiction of male and female characters, clearly defining several important visual system elements (oval of the face, eyebrow line, lip shape, etc.)

On other note, according to Quran text, God creates the world anew every single second of existence, thus time does not have a duration for Muslim aesthetic consciousness. Existence here is understood as a chain of moments which follow one another and can be severed any time by divine will. Thoughts about the finiteness and ephemerality of human existence push the artists to depict the world in a state of instability and change in which there is only one arterial direction – from existence to non-existence. Images of human and animal world in this concept of existence were connected to not yet assimilated sphere of natural world, which still required more management and introduction to ethically and aesthetically full-fledged sphere of culture, corresponding to God's demands. Such concept of existence, according to some Islamic aesthetics and art researchers, encouraged the entrenchment and spread of atomicity, formalisation and eternal consistently re-emerging geometric structures and forms in Islamic art. From here flows the 'ornamental structurality', inherent to Islamic art, tendency towards stylisation of zoomorphic and floral forms and enthroning of arabesque structures. On other note, compared to other traditions of art critical aesthetics, for example, Chinese or Japanese, in which significant attention is given to descriptions of various elements of

artist's creative process and the subtlety of creative process, in the origins of Islamic art critical aesthetics, according to Valerie Gonzalez, the knowledge of the specifics of artistic creation process developed more empirically, as the reflection of these complex processes without clearly defined doctrines would only become clearer when poets themselves contemplate problems, arising in their creative paths. Thus the work of art, which in other cultures is bathed in the light of thought and ethics, flowing from Arabic tradition of sacred and profane, is integrated by being expressed in abstract terms, poorly didactic in the essence of their existence and the way of expression, with the exception of calligraphy (Gonzalez, 2002, p. 21).

Artistic creation process in Arabic-Muslim world tradition of aesthetics and philosophy of art is treated as the result of harmonious interaction between two Islamic cultural categories of knowledge and process, as in the true work of art we see merging the knowledge, born first in the shape of idea on how to create the imagined creation and practical, technical, material work of bringing this idea to life. Analysing the problems of artistic creation process in Islam aesthetics, the unconditional primacy of intellectual creative activity vis-a-vis practical technical process of producing an artwork is highlighted.

Akin to thinkers of Antiquity, the theorists of Islamic world, analysing the problems of artistic creation process stated, that the foundation of artistic creation is the principle of mimicry which was associated with the creative force of artist's imagination, the ability to convey the highest truths of existence through the untruth, in metaphorical means of artistic expression. From here flowed the

theorists' call for artists to employ the power of creative imagination in creating works of art of not just any kind, but perfect in their form and ethical value. The photographic conveyance in painting and superficial clamour of the colours here was poorly valued, much more attention was given to the expressivity of painting, masterful emphasis of the type, stylistic clarity. Conversely, depictions of imperfect and ugly objects should be avoided as they evoke negative emotions and do not encourage people to evolve spiritually. As it is written in Noble Brothers' tractate – 'when we speak about art created by painters, it is nothing else than such precise mimicry of visuals of existing things – as much fake things as natural, as much humans as animals that the mastery of artists reaches such a level that the gaze of the living turn away from the real objects, bedazzled by the beauty of created images and blinded by their form (Izbrannyje proizvedenija, 1961, p. 145).

Significant amount of attention in the tractates is given to the relationship between tradition and innovation in the artistic creation process. Some theorists exalt the importance of the canon, while others, conversely, highlight the originality of artist's thought and interpretation of reality. Among the main factors, encouraging artistic inspiration we most often come across mentions of love, hatred, disappointment, joyous elevation of spirit, passionate desire for recognition, effects of alcohol and other drugs, encouraging spontaneous dispersion of creativity which in turn influences the organic whole and stylistic purity of emerging forms of art. Artist's conscious withdrawal from the outside world and quiet concentration on inner experiences and thought is considered

to be one of the most important prerequisites for authentic artistic creative process. In the latter feature, this concept of artistic creation process is closely associated with introversion and self-reflection exalting aesthetic theories of Taoism, Chan and Zen, unfolding in East Asia. Similarly to aesthetic theories of Hindu Alamkaric school, the most favourable hours for inspiration and dispersion of authentic creativity are late night hours before sleep and early morning hours when there are least external disturbing factors.

The majority of theorists recommended the artists to take note of the achievements of their predecessors in their specific art spheres and recommendations and notes by authoritative critics. Inherent talent, the power of creative imagination, balancing between rational thought and the extremities of feelings were held to be the most important prerequisites for a successful artistic creation process, distinguishing the true creator from pathetic imitators. Additional features were good knowledge of technical and artistic expression means of chosen artistic creation sphere, the ability to suggestively convey personal metaphorical ideas in the shape of perfect artistic forms.

Different thinkers did not share the same views towards the product of artistic creation process – the work of art (*amal*); many thinkers of rationalist direction highlighted almost mathematical purity and completeness of artistic form proportionality and symmetry, while sufists, whose main sphere of artistic expression was poetry, music and dance, conversely, in the spontaneous artistic creation process exalted the openness and incompleteness of artistic forms, the artist's ability to open up space for different interpretations

of the artwork's metaphorical content. In the emotional spontaneous artistic expression they saw the most reliable way of unfolding the highly valued essence of authentic art, helping the true artist to free himself from strict social and cultural conventions and influence of rigid artistic canons.

From here flowed different aesthetic evaluation criteria for artworks originating from artistic creation process. Theorist of different directions, for example ibn Khaldun, appealing to the importance of category of taste, invited the assessors to take note of both content and formal aspects of the artwork, while theorists of orthodox traditionalist direction most often invited to evaluate the correspondence of the creative results to aesthetic requirements, declared in Quran.

But most often the highest artwork aesthetic evaluation criteria were its closeness to reality, artistic suggestiveness and the power of harmonizing effect on the apprehender. In the works of pictorial art, technical mastery, perfect compositional decision, form harmony and refined style were emphasised, while in fine art, it was the purity of colour and the expressivity of linear drawing.

Thus, the Arab-Muslim world not only absorbed many of the art critical aesthetics ideas of the East and the West but also developed original conceptions and fostered the appearance of a refined artistic culture filled with ornamental structuralism. The Arabs not only adopted many of the humanistic ideals of China and India but also spread them widely in Western Europe.

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