

Epistemological Shift of Islamic Art in Museums

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Abstract: As the first collections of Islamic art were formed in Europe and then in America from the late 18th to the 20th century, our understanding of Islamic art is still affected by the legacy and dominant discourses of those first temporary exhibitions and interim collections of Islamic art in the West and the approaches taken by them. This study aimed to investigate the epistemological shift of Islamic art in early museums as founders of our existing knowledge and understanding of Islamic art. Though, an analysis of the literature related to exhibitions is presented and three dominant approaches of orientalism, art history and cross-cultural studies at museums are discussed as well as their consequences in reproducing meaning of Islamic art. The research believes that domination of the mentioned approaches in early exhibitions and museums of Islamic art in the West has affected our understanding of Islamic heritage as “goods”, “art” and “multilayer object” and correspond to three distinct values, i.e., economic, aesthetic and symbolic, in Islamic art.

Key words: Islamic art, museum, orientalism, Western art approach, Iran

INTRODUCTION

The aim of museums is the methodical change of things into objects. When at the museum, we're not in the real world anymore but in an imaginary world. Museum objects are separated from their original function and have become “context-free”; therefore, they no longer have a practical value. They have entered into a symbolic order that gives them a new meaning. As Krzysztof Pomian states, museum objects are objects with symbolic meaning (“carriers of significance”) to which new values have been attributed. This value is first and foremost a museal value. The meaning of what is registered as a museum object constantly changes in the transitions from the producer to the user, collector, protector and finally the viewer. New data are added to it over time and meanings are imposed over one-another in an evolutionary development. The object can be considered as a commodity, artefact, art, cultural heritage or a sacred symbol. These are all different ways to describe the same object and are in fact potential attributes or values of the object. Museum objects undergo epistemological reproduction in different systems of knowledge in the host society where different values are attributed to them. On the one side, there is the value that dates back to the production time and on the other, the current credit and admiration we give them as influenced by our current views about them. In this study, the second type of value,

i.e., the value that is added to the object following their presence in the context of museums is discussed. In other words, here, the nature of Islamic art and its meaning from the perspective of the creators are not the focus. Rather, the reproduction of the concept of Islamic art in the museological process is considered in this study. The present study investigates Islamic art museums in the West to introduce three general traditions in the museums and their implications in reproduction of meaning for Islamic art. The first is orientalism which is the former of the first Islamic art museums in the 19th century and early 20th century. In this period, our understanding of the Islamic art traces back to the orientalism approach. The second period includes the art museums of the 20th century which are influenced by the tradition of art history and the aesthetics approach. In these museums, a change of perspective is seen which deem artwork as context-free. The second period covers modified contemporary museums which try to be in line with cultural diversity in the community to meet the needs of the audience. They pay attention to different dimensions and layers of meaning in objects and seek ways to revise predominate approaches to create museums that are more democratic.

Background and hypotheses: Museums in the 18th and 19th centuries left a lasting effect on related scientific and academic disciplines with their elected approaches. These

museums, planned their activities with a focus on objects, detached an object from its original context and added new data to it after placing it in the museum. This way, they changed our understanding of ourselves and of the world around us. According to Donald Preziosi, the information taken from objects in this formative era evolved around two main points. The first was historical descriptions of the world or a history which purposefully started in the past and has led to the peak of human evolutionary changes or even the progressive developments at the present time. The second is information that attributed a collection of "being" possibilities in the world to museum objects. The object can be praised, desired; imitated or denied and rejected (Preziosi, 2006). In other words, the early museums presented selective description of objects to ascribe subjective states to museum objects and thereby leave important patterns for later museums and its related disciplines such as art history and museology.

Considering Islamic art, epistemological consequences of early collectors and collections of Islamic art have been proposed by researchers in the field. Referring to the role of early collections collected by travelers and the European orientalist, Oleg Grabar emphasises that attribution of the concept of Islamic art to objects is more affected by the "collecting" process rather than the process of "making" by their creators (Grabar, 2000). According to Grabar (2000) Islamic works turned into "art" when chosen for an exhibition and entered in museums of our time. They are often represented in the museum as material representatives of a certain period. These works that had functional importance or decorative functions are introduced independent of their initial context and function.

In an study entitled "Au Bonheur des Amateurs", David J. Roxburgh analyzes the early temporary exhibitions of Islamic art and methods of collection and representation of Islamic art during the period between 1880 and 1990 and introduces modes of representation of Islamic art in three groups. The first includes analysis of methods of representations of Islamic art through economic forces related to the "art market"; the second includes "aesthetic and artistic" analyses of Islamic art, that leads to new techniques of installation which are based on independence of works of art; and the third is the period of attention to Islamic art and non-Western art as a result of emergence of art museums in the Middle East and North Africa, formation and development of museum collections in Europe, the expansion of imperial and colonial programs and the emergence of the discipline of anthropology in which non-western arts were often placed which was another reason for attention to non-Western arts (Roxburgh, 2000).

Moreover, Eva Troelenberg in her article "Islamic art and the Invention of the Masterpiece: Approaches to art and archeology of the Muslim world in the 21st century" introduces two distinct approaches towards the Islamic heritage in art museums and anthropology museums. These different approaches in art and anthropology museums lead to different ways of selecting works for collections and ultimately to the formation of different values for museum objects. In the first approach which is compatible with the Museum of Anthropology, from a wide range of works, those that are more capable of expressing cultural characteristics and qualities are selected by analogy and displayed as "cultural evidence" representative of cultural history of a period. In the second approach, the criteria for evaluation and selection of works to display at the museum are confined to aesthetic values and works of art are displayed independently in art museums and emphasising the pure aesthetics. In anthropology museums, works are displayed as a cross-section. However, in art museums artworks are represented in isolation and independent of the context and employed unhistorical approach. According to Troelenberg (2012) "Muhammadian art", exhibition held in 1910 in Munich was an influential mainstream event in the formation of a solely formalistic and non-historical view to works obtained from Islamic lands.

According to the literature, it appears that analysis of works belonging to the Muslim world from a Western perspective created a heritage for Islamic art, the consequences of which can be seen today in museums. Examples of these effects can be seen in epistemological rotations of Islamic objects in Museums that have been in constant change according to the knowledge of the guest society. Studies conducted regarding Museums of Islamic art reveals that artistic and cultural discourses have been constantly in struggle with each other. The conflict appears to be due to incompatibility or in appropriateness of approaches of western art history for the eastern art and artworks related to the Muslim world. Each museum, give voice and dominates one of the discourses, highlighting different values in relation to Islamic heritage

In the end, it seems that the intercultural and interdisciplinary atmosphere prevailing in studies of Islamic art has paved the way for some reforms in the museums of Islamic art previously associated with orientalism. In other words, the discursive atmosphere of contemporary museums of Islamic art has become prepared for the incidence of multiple discourses and micro discourses that were previously excluded or marginalized.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses discourse analysis to review the available written sources related to the early exhibitions and museums of Islamic art in the West. To explain the change in the meaning of Islamic art in the context of early museums, first, discourses on Islamic art museums are identified according to an analysis of available texts. Then, the dominant discourses and view of each period in the order of discourse in museums are presented. Finally, the reasons leading to hegemony of the discourse and its effects on the development of our understanding of Islamic art in the context of museums will be discussed.

The data for this study, particularly in relation to the first two periods are limited to library information obtained from catalogs and other available written texts related to early temporary and permanent exhibitions and collections of Islamic art in the West. Regarding the third period, direct visits to the museums and other sort of media available for transferring information at the present (museum websites, videos, etc.) have been used. The focus of this study is on those temporary and permanent exhibitions formed during 19th and 20th century and affected our understanding and knowledge of Islamic art through publications and related studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic art as objects in the tradition of orientalism:

Explorers and colonial powers in 18th and 19th centuries were the first ones who began collecting objects related to “other” cultures not as a souvenir but rather as evidence. The objects were collected out of curiosity with the hope that they could obtain a structured knowledge of the customs and traditions of other societies. From the mid-18th century, the West started exploiting scientific disciplines such as ethnology, linguistics and history to study the East, giving identity to the East via a series of complex scientific measures. The study of artistic artifacts of the Muslim world that had a different quality compared to those common in the West started to receive attention. The inclusion of Islamic art (not known previously by this name) in the orientalist discourse attracted focus and curiosities and created dialogues and challenges on the meaning of this field of culture from internal and external discourses of this area. From the perspective of European travelers in the 19th century Islamic lands and the works of art therein as a live field and discipline can be considered as a lab for Western knowledge about the East. Orientalists of this era researched their discoveries, experience and their perceptions of the East using new terms and put thoughts related to East in very close contact with new realities.

At least for a thousand years, European travelers took Islamic crafts to their homeland and gave new meanings to them. Europeans prized those “exotic objects” but they certainly were not considered them as “art”, until the objects entered European museums (Blair and Bloom, 2003). These objects were arranged next to each other without any specific organization and categorization reminding people of the image of Eastern markets. In the early collections of Islamic art that looked like a big store, the layout of works indicated Orientalist tendencies and an effort to show the richness of the East according to collectors. In fact, many works that are now in museums of the West were once collected for their economic value. All these “strange” objects were collected as tangible samples illustrating image of the East and had material value. For example, about half of the 11000 books belonging to the Metropolitan Museum in New York as one of the most comprehensive and largest museum of Islamic art have been amassed from these dealers and collectors as gifts or sale objects. One of the most influential Islamic art collectors and dealers was Dikran Kelekian, who was associated with museums and held two exhibitions of the works in his collection at the Metropolitan Museum. Kelekian sold his Islamic art collection to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Freer Gallery of Art. He also played an important role in the formation and development of Henry Walters’ Islamic art collection (Komaroff, 2000).

So taste of personal art dealers and collectors heavily affected the formation of the first collections of Islamic art in Europe and America. The application of these personal preferences sometimes led to the dominance of a certain type of artistic medium in the museums. Collecting works of Iranian ceramics, to which dealers and collectors had paid low attention, Kelekian made the Metropolitan Museum a remarkable collection of Islamic potteries. From the perspective of Komaroff (2000) availability of Iranian arts and ease of their collection in the art market led to the rise of interest in Islamic-Iranian art, to the extent that Iranian art was introduced as one of the purest and finest examples of Islamic art. This process of evaluation of the art of Islamic lands which had rooted in the market became a mainstream in museums and publications related to Islamic art.

The struggle between Orientalism and Islamic studies was initially at a theoretical level and focused on the text and language. However, a new process of Islamic studies was founded by scholars such as Karl Heinrich Becker and Martin Hartmann in Germany in 1910 seeking answers to questions relating to history and social structure. They studied the history of cultural artifacts and paved the way for inclination to artifacts in this area. During this period, the “strange” works obtained from Eastern and Islamic lands attracted the attention of European travelers. In

early museums, a large body of works was collected in accordance with the tradition of anthropology and every object was considered as evidence of a culture. In those museums, priority was given to objects that represented or were evidence of a culture. Anthropologists like Jean Gabus used the term “symbol-witness”, a name that they retain when displayed at museums. Henri Riviere Georges even used the term “symbol-object” to describe the “witness-object” that can summarize a whole culture or period (Desvallees and Mairesse, 2010).

Islamic art in art history thinking of the West:

Innovation and application of the concept of “masterpiece” in 20th century art museums had a fundamental impact on Islamic art and was associated with the idea of mere art museum. It opened a new frontier for museums and paved the way for changing the view that saw artworks as individual works independent of the context. Through musealisation of artworks introduced as masterpieces, each work was represented not as a group member but as an isolated work independent from its context according to logical and apparently impartial criteria. According to Troelenberg (2012) the inception of this movement in Islamic art dates back to The Munich Exhibition Masterpieces of “Muhammadan art” under the management of Friedrich Sarre and his assistant Ernst Kuhnelt. The use of the term “masterpiece” by Sarre for the introduction of Islamic art was a new and historical approach. Kuhnelt, who was influenced by St. Alois Riegl’s “History of Style”, paid attention to formalistic features of works to present an isolated, non-historical analysis of arts (Troelenberg, 2012). From this time onward, the exhibitions of Islamic art were formed with the aim of distancing their position from the common anthropological approaches. Designation of artworks as “masterpieces” was made to draw specific and independent interpretive borders for Islamic art. Sarre’s emphasis on the word “masterpiece” was an attempt to differentiate him self from anthropologists and orientalist of his time. While orientalist needed familiarity with language and context related to the artworks, Sarre reverted to source study and such historical and ethnographical contexts as secondary to investigation of the artworks.

Sarre believed in neutral visual language and emphasized on pure aesthetics values of “masterpieces.” He followed the rules of illustrative style, visual and aesthetic categories and largely adopted this approach in the Munich exhibition. In the three published volumes illustrated 3500 works from the exhibition, the priority was given to visual culture and aesthetic achievements rather than cultural, historical texts (Troelenberg, 2012). This display method which was designed with the aim of distancing from the legacy of orientalism, was raised some

objections in French circles. However, it became one of the common museum display methods (Roxburgh, 2000). Later, in the 1931 Persian art exhibition, the focus on formalist approach in artworks of the Muslim world was once again observed. Barry Wood compares the approach of this exhibition with those held later and states that the 1931 Persian art exhibition in London under Arthur Pope management is our conception of completely formalistic Islamic art. While in the display of Islamic art in 1989 titled “Timur and Princely Vision”, works were collected based on dynasty and pure formalism approaches were avoided. The 1989 exhibition mixed cultural and political context shaping Islamic arts on display to show the maturity of knowledge in the field of Islamic art (Wood, 2000).

Other influence of museums included the application of Western patterns for Islamic art, modelling after Western art classifications and trying to match Islamic art with these classifications and categories and the inclusion of Islamic art in linear narration of art history in the West. According to the Munich 1910 Exhibition Guidebook, the main purpose of Sarre and Kuhnelt was to place Islamic art in a condition similar to that of Western art. The exhibition was considered as a “pure” art museum with ideal aesthetics: “Next to its scholarly aims, our exhibition wants to demonstrate the purely artistic importance of this realm of art which is still largely unknown and misconceived. It wants to show that the creation of Muhammadan art deserve an equal position next to those of other cultural periods”.

The dominance of the western approach to art and its application to Islamic art led to the formation of a group of Islamic arts called “applied” arts or “decorative” arts which are the borderline between “industry” and “art”. According to Preziosi (2006) the gap between “art” and “industry” was a consequence of the industrial revolution and mass production in the modern era and such a classification did not exist before the modern era. Identification of the boundaries between “applied” and “fine” arts and the accuracy of such classification has been one of the concerns of researchers as evident in the literatures related to Islamic art. Aesthetics in the sense that emerged from the 18th century onwards cannot be found in the world of Islam. Classification of arts into two groups of fine arts and applied arts (arts that are not fine) was not popular before the modern period as use of fine for a certain group of arts was deemed useless because all arts were considered fine (Pazouki, 2005). The concept of beauty was presented in mystical texts written by Islamic mystics like Farabi, Avicenna, Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. From the point of view of a Muslim mystic and philosopher, beauty is wholly ontological and is not related to subject (mind) as Kant believes. In other words, in the world of Islam, all creatures are beautiful (Grabar, 2000) and beauty is not subjective.

Human mind is not the criteria for realization of beauty and beauty has an external realization. In Islamic philosophy, the discussion of beauty is not confined to arts but covers all creatures. All the existence is beautiful and has metaphysical foundation.

In addition to the classifications and categories imposed on the Islamic Arts as one of the controversial issues in Islamic art museums, the challenge between two discourses of “art” and “material culture” is another point of controversy which has long been discussed in relation to definition of artworks in Islamic Museums. This controversy which originates from appropriateness or inappropriateness of approaches to Western art history for the Eastern and the Muslim world, fluctuates between the two discourses in the strategic plan of each museum. In an article entitled “Islamic Art Versus Material Culture: Museum of Islamic Art or Islamic Culture”, Julia Gonnella, Curator at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, believes that the term “material culture” like Islamic art was made in the 19th century. She points to the confrontation between the discourse of “Islamic art” and “material culture” and its impact on the representation method used in Islamic art museums (Gonnella, 2012). Some museums accept the opposition between these two discourses and display objects in two categories in museums of anthropology and museums of art. However, other museums display both in a single museum in order to overcome the incompatibility of this categorization with the norms of Islamic art. For example, the museum of Turkish and Islamic works and arts which was established in Istanbul in 1914, seeks the origin of fine arts in folk art in order to preserve the works belonging to the Ottoman Empire from being plundered by the orientalists. Nazan Olcer, the director of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Works and Arts, believes folk art and folk life as the natural extension of the fine arts and at the same time their roots, and thus displays both in a single museum (Olcer, 1999) (Fig. 1).

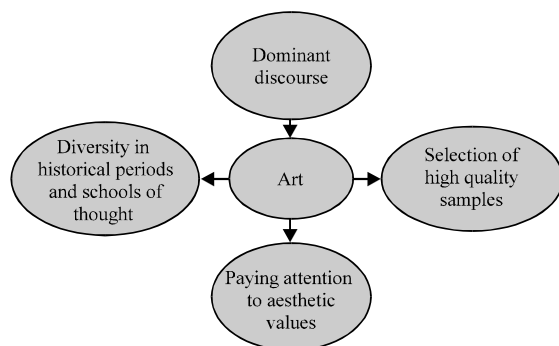


Fig. 1: The consequences of the domination of artistic discourse in Islamic art museums

Oleg Grabar, Director of the Islamic collection at the Metropolitan museum of art which was opened to the public in 1975, stressed the importance of displaying Islamic arts (including metalworks, textiles and manuscripts) in a group and as anthropological documents related to everyday life while the 1910 Munich exhibition separated these works of art based on medium. However, this method did not only aim at displaying museum objects in the context of related objects but also to reveal common artistic qualities in Islamic artworks. That is because Grabar's purpose was to demonstrate the visual relationship and proportions in different forms of Islamic art (Grabar 2000; Komaroff, 2000).

In those museums of Islamic art where artistic discourse dominates, the criteria for selecting museum works are often limited to aesthetic qualities and other aspects and features (works of worship value, scientific works, etc.) are marginalized. Here, all the museum processes including selection, arrangement and display of works are dependent upon the artistic dimension of the works. This dimension is ascribed with the presence of the object in the specific space in the museum and becomes the focus and the axis of other museum actions. In the selection process, priority goes to works with high aesthetic quality. In the arrangement process works are displayed in isolation and independently of each other in the museum space. In classification and organization of collections and museums, this artistic approach to Islamic works allows the curator to put works belonging to different styles and periods that have the common feature of being a “masterpiece” together. This approach became one of the most common approaches to the Islamic art museums. The approach allowed the curator the opportunity to display high quality objects of his collection with no need for contextualization. Here, too, the audience is treated like a customer who pays for looking at masterpieces of art in the museum. The masterpiece was once in the hands of owners of power at its own time and its presence alongside other high quality artworks is more a manifestation of museum's power rather than an introduction of a culture with all its dimensions. Gonnella believes that classification of objects as “precious” and “less important” is more than simply specifying clear boundaries between these categories but shows a way of looking at and dealing with objects. Thus, “valuable”, “high quality” and “masterpiece” objects are transferred to art museums as opposed to “insignificant”, “worldly” and “everyday functional objects” that are moved to anthropology and ethnographic museums. Art museums mainly focus on paintings and sculptures, followed by “secondary arts” such as ceramics, metalworks or glass works. Museum curators call their objects “art”. On the other hand,

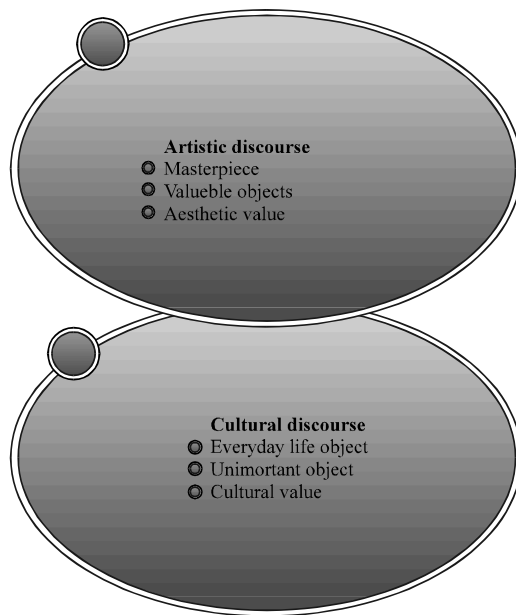


Fig. 2: Comparison of artistic discourse and cultural discourse in museums of Islamic art

museums of “cultural materials” pay attention to the context of the object more than the object itself and are more inclined to “culture” than “art”. Culture includes categories such as “religion”, “geography” and numerous cultural concepts like “time”, “space”, “authority” and “family life” (Gonnella, 2012). Despite descriptive inequalities and traditional classification of art in the 19th century, Gonnell adeems the term “art” more suitable for museumsthat “material culture”. He believes that drastic improvements have occurred in Islamic art during the past century, so that art museums have been able to create a flexible and unbiased ground to bridge the gaps and above all, make different readings possible. Given the constantly changing meaning of art and our understanding of it, the sufficiency of focus on the form of artworks and reliance on universal values such as beauty and harmony in introducing Islamic art has been questioned by researchers like Troelenberg (2012) (Fig. 2).

Re-contextualization of Islamic art at the museum: With the increasing growth of public curiosity about the Islamic culture and civilization, especially following September 11 events, museums of Islamic artaround the world increased their publication and notification activities with the aim of introducing Islamic civilization and answering the questions of their audience. The methods of displaying non-Western art in museums in the West have become a contentious issue in recent years. Museums are no longer considered a neutral location for

keeping artworks. Knell (2007) mentions the changes in museums in the material world. Today, a shift from object to subject and from static state to flexibility is observed in the museums around the world. Necipoolu, one of the scholars of Islamic Art, mentions the shift of focus of researchers from the nature of Islamic art to socio-political, religious, cultural and aesthetic dimensions of production of meaning and value in Islamic art. Necipooludeems interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exchanges as the reasons why recent studies focus on the contextual characteristics of Islamic art production . Many researchers believe that instead of isolating objects and becoming confined to the study of their visual and aesthetic characteristicsas a form of art, we should investigate layers of meaning in the socio-political, religious, cultural and aesthetic context of the artworks (Doumani, 2012). A museum artwork has several dimensions and qualities that are considered as multiple layers of meaning that provides grounds for different interpretations. The early museums focused on some features of artworks and marginalized and ignored some of their possible functionalities and descriptions. However, as Kramer points out, today, certain phenomena such as cultural shift, linguistic shift, and symbolic shift have affected Islamic studies and the Middle East history and Islamic history are no longer studied as before (Kramer, 2012). What in the past was considered a material heritage and as magnificent objects, showed the social class of the owners is now considered as the spiritual heritage of a group of people in the context of current museums (Duncan, 2003). These changes should be considered by curators and efforts should be made for re-articulations. In contemporary museums, attention should be paid to multiple layers of meaning. While in the past, museum management included controlling thoughts, facts and valuesin the society, the modern museology values the reflection ofmultiple voices in the discursive atmosphere of museums. Meeting the needs of the audience has put museums in a democratic state more than ever. This has led to a revision of the methods of displaying Islamic art in many contemporary museums. Changes in Hermitage, Victoria and Albert collections; re-opening of David collection in Copenhagen and Museum of Islamic art in Cairo reconstitution of the Metropolitan Museum of America establishment of Islamic art collection in France’s Louvre Museum and establishment of Islamic art museum in Doha are examples of these reforms. Group display and display of artwork in its architectural contextare prominent examples of such reform approaches. Group display can well show the repetitive decorations, techniques and features of Islamic art. The gallery at the Metropolitan Museum devoted to

the works obtained from Museum-sponsored excavations at Nishapur, Iran has the same purpose. According to Graber Islamic arts are not well understood in the display that has separated them from their goal, so there must be a way of connecting the functions of the objects with the forms on them" (Grabar, 2000). Like anthropological evidence, they should be considered as interconnected with lifestyle. They find more meaning as a group rather than individual creations. Graber (2000) stresses the importance of architectural context of museum objects. The effectiveness and popularity of the Damascus Room in the Metropolitan Museum (a complete room of a Damascus house belonging to the beginning of the 18th century) is a useful example in this regard (Komaroff, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Museums act as an identity-making machine. Upon selection of an artwork as a museum object and its entrance into museum space, its identity and in turn, the identity of its audience change. In dealing with the traditions of orientalism, art-historical tradition of the West and the seemingly democratic traditions of cross-cultural studies in the 21st century, Islamic collections of museums have been perceived and interpreted in different ways. These works received various values proportionate to the wisdom system of their time. Museums as legitimizing and reliable state institution reveal "facts" and have always been one of the most important contexts of production and reproduction of meaning for Islamic art.

In the first period, (late 18th century to the late 19th century) museums of Islamic art were affected by the perspectives of European travelers and orientalists to a large extent. The museum works were collected as strange objects and displayed like goods in markets and big stores. In early museums Islamic works were displayed in groups without classification and specific arrangements as a collection of goods obtained from the fantastic eastern world. Sometimes Islamic arts were displayed as secondary objects in the background of other Western artworks.

With the arrival of the 20th century, the focus of museums on the form of artworks paved the way for new exhibitions of Islamic art. This method relied on universal values such as beauty and harmony to introduce Islamic art apart from its cultural context. In this period, the concept of art masterpiece was introduced in museums and standards of Western art were imposed on Islamic art. This way Islamic works found their way into museums as works of art and were classified. In this period, artworks

were displayed individually and were associated with formalistic analyses and their aesthetic values were highly valued. The emergence of the concept of "masterpiece" was a movement in opposition with the mainstream historical-anthropological approach of the time in analyzing works of Islamic lands. Earlier, this pure artistic value was not present in the common discourse of Islamic art which was associated with a plethora of historical narratives of interest to anthropologists. Highlighting formalistic qualities of works in the field of Islamic art led to activation of new floating signifiers such as masterpiece, aesthetic value, form of artworks and distance from historical narratives associated with the works themselves. These paved the way for formation of a new articulation in the discourse of Islamic art. The impact of views of scholars like Riegl and formalism tradition at that time led to the weakening and marginalization of historical narratives and artistic discourse dominated the museum exhibitions for a long period of time. Display of works in a simple background without reference to the context of origin was a characteristic of Islamic art exhibitions in that period. Display of artistic masterpieces became prevalent in many museums of the 20th century and some new museums such as the museum of Islamic art in Doha still use this mode of representation.

In the third period, understanding the Islamic art in its socio-political, religious-cultural and aesthetic context was the aim. Criticisms heralded at orientalism heritage and cross-cultural studies prepared the ground for this approach and led to the emergence of some reforms in Islamic art museums. The significance of investigating artworks in their context was stressed and many museums started to modify their layout for contextualization purposes. Meeting multiple layers of meaning and various qualities of the works of the Islamic world is now stressed by many curators in contemporary museums of Islamic art. In order to match the cultural diversity in contemporary societies and meet the needs of these societies, contemporary museums choose different display methods and include different quality dimensions of artworks. Examples of such methods include display of works in groups or in the related architectural context. Contemporary museums consider multiple layers of meaning of a museum object and believe in the possibility to see work with a variety of approaches and hold exhibitions in many ways.

Becker founded a famous Islamic art magazine (*Der Islam*) in 1910. The publication of this magazine which is one of the major magazines in Islamic studies, has continued since then. Becker believes that Islam has

a Greek intellectual foundation. Edward Said stated that Becker is so fascinated by Greek Philosophical culture that deems Islam as a not so successful attempt to attract the intellectual foundations of Greek tradition.

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