

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

خوشنویسی از بستر سنت تا جهان امروز

is also published in this issue of journal.

## Viewpoint\ Editorial

# Calligraphy from the Tradition to Today's World

Traditional calligraphy, which was born and developed as a “writing revolution” in the Islamic world after the Prophet (PBUH) through its semantic and spiritual connection to the Word of Revelation, has traversed a long and winding path until today—one that has been largely shaped by political and social changes within Islamic societies. Thus, it can be said that script and calligraphy, as living entities, serve as indicators of the condition of Islamic civilization in different eras. The emergence of the simple, early (non-geometric) Kufic script at the beginning of the Islamic government, and the later flourishing of complex variations such as interlaced, arboreal, and floral Kufic during the height of Islamic civilization, bear witness to this fact. In Islamic societies, traditional calligraphy, when confronted with modernism—including the advent of the printing press—continued to retain a relative vitality. This persistence was due to several reasons, foremost among them its intrinsic connection with the transcription of the Holy Qur'an and with the works of poets and mystics. This link preserved its dignity and authenticity, making it a symbol of resistance against Western art. However, with the institutionalization of Western art education in academic settings across Islamic societies, traditional arts—including calligraphy—were gradually pushed aside. Yet, within the broader movement of “identity-seeking” and “return to the self,” calligraphy reemerged in a different form, particularly through the artistic movement known in the Middle East as Hurufiyya, which influenced the development of the Saqakhaneh Movement in Iran. At this point, calligraphers could be classified into three groups: A. Traditionalists, who remained loyal to classical heritage and saw their mission as preserving the artistic traditions of their predecessors. B. Hybrid artists, who drew upon calligraphic traditions as a source of identity within their modern works. C. Reformists, who, inspired by the idea that “we do not imitate the past; we continue it,” altered the essence of calligraphy in favor of modern aesthetics. In recent decades, the economic success of artworks centered on calligraphy and modern calligraphic gestures has pulled some traditional calligraphers toward this trend. As a result, calligraphy increasingly became a vehicle for expressing emotions or serving political and social purposes within the framework of art markets. Consequently, many artists in these years sought exclusive, personal styles, often prioritizing formal or superficial innovation over deep meanings. In other words, this shift weakened calligraphy's long-standing semantic bond with mystical literature. Furthermore, festivals and art events—designed to lend credibility and vitality to the regional art market—produced new discursive spaces. Yet, they also deliberately shaped the modes of artistic creation, to the point that some critics argue Middle Eastern art is not a distinct kind of art but rather the product of a distinct kind of art market, governed by the policies of auction houses. Therefore, today Islamic societies—especially Iran—are confronted with certain forms of calligraphy that can be considered neither faithful to tradition nor true continuations of it.

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