

Human Definitions: Islam to the Bauhaus

This recent body of work questions the boundaries of human tribalism through a conflation of artistic conventions and motifs. The formal language of visual expression creates a paradox, in that it simultaneously breaches the boundaries of language, while expressing the specificity of ideology, both religious and secular. Design and décor become functional, and ubiquitous delivery systems for the conveyance of prevailing cultural power structures. By utilizing type-forms, architectural elements, facets of mechanical drawing, decorative patterns, and calligraphic manipulations, I am able to reference, or reject, cultural assignments as I work. In doing this, the walls of expectation become permeable, and the viewer is called upon to question their own preconceived aesthetic bearings.

“Human Definitions” is comprised of works that explore the intersection of Islamic Decorative Art & Architecture, a creative influence of mine for more than a decade, and the artistic approach of The Bauhaus. I am intrigued by philosophically driven design that endeavors to arrive at, and express, a statement that coexists with function. Art, in general, is exploring the tension between embellishment and distillation. In the midst of sacred Islamic geometry, where graphic density and formal intricacy is used to convey the sublime, and does, we find The Kaaba, the cube. Its irreducible form stands in stark contrast against much of the visual culture with which it is linked. Along with its place in faith-based tradition, it serves as a foundational component of an infinitely diverse artistic vocabulary. As William Morris influenced Walter Gropius, and Prussian Classicism influenced Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, so swings the pendulum of visual production. Ornament and utility are in continual conversation as they struggle to fulfill the desires of humanity. The need for both is ingrained in our collective psyche.

By using a variety of media I am able to explore the substance of design, and the questions that surround it. Is the act of creating primarily a temporal exercise that can only be expressed sequentially? How does the object itself relate to its representation on the spectrum of materiality? Along with video, drawing, and mixed media, I have found the lenticular image to be a key vehicle for gaining perspective throughout these investigations. Since the late 1940s, lenticular imagery has been widely used in advertising, religious media, and political campaign materials. Optics is used to create spatial relationships that are implied, but not physically present. Constantly in flux, these pieces speak to the malleable nature of human perception. The lenticular effect is essentially a control mechanism that results in a dynamic interplay between artist and audience. Does the art move the viewer, or vice-versa?

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