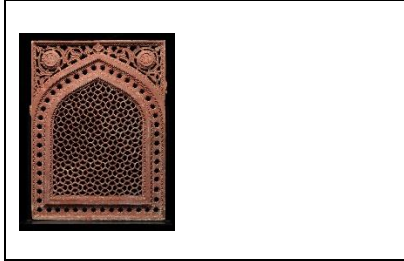

Title of Object

Jali with pointed arch frame

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: Indian (Mughal)

Date of Object: 18th century

Country: India

Accession Number: 2000.78

File Created: 10/1/2016

Material/Medium: Red sandstone

Author of File: Shelly McGinnis

Department: Chinese, South and Southeast
Asian Art

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 8/23/2017

Tour Topics

Group 6 tour, symbolism-art, Symbolism-in-art, highlights 1600 to 1850, Mughal, Islamic, Islam, Muslim, pattern, geometric, geometry, architecture, spirituality, nature/flowers, floral decoration, symbolism, writing/calligraphy

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. Take a look at the screen. How would you describe the patterns or decorations?
 2. What would have been the most difficult part of making this window or screen?
 3. Why do you think the artist added the inscription to Allah on the screen? How might a window connect with god?
 4. How does this compare to a window in your own home?
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Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

NO recognizable subject matter, but floral and geometric patterns are evident as well as calligraphic inscriptions on the roundels in the corner.

Red sandstone was a favorite material of Akbar (Mughal ruler from 1556-1605 with dominion over N & Central India traded w European states & Ottoman Empire). Akbar commissioned the building of a great tomb for his father Humayun. "Humayun's Tomb was built in the 1560's ... Persian and Indian craftsmen worked together to build the garden-tomb, far grander than any tomb built before in the Islamic world...The structure is of dressed stone clad in red sandstone with white and black inlaid marble borders." (UNESCO). This set a fashion for the use of red sandstone in Mughal architecture, continuing through to the mid-19th century.

From the Met Museum, Geometric: "Geometric patterns make up one of the three nonfigural types of decoration in Islamic art, which also include calligraphy and vegetal patterns. [All three types of patterns are apparent in our Jali.] Whether isolated or used in combination with nonfigural ornamentation or figural representation, geometric patterns are popularly associated with Islamic art, largely due to their aniconic quality. These abstract designs not only adorn the surfaces of monumental Islamic architecture but also function as the major decorative element on a vast array of objects of all types. While geometric ornamentation may have reached a pinnacle in the Islamic world, the sources for both the shapes and the intricate patterns already existed in late antiquity among the Greeks, Romans, and Sasanians in Iran. Islamic artists appropriated key elements from the classical tradition, then complicated and elaborated upon them in order to invent a new form of decoration that stressed the importance of unity and order. The significant intellectual contributions of Islamic mathematicians, astronomers, and scientists were essential to the creation of this unique new style.

Consisting of, or generated from, such simple forms as the circle and the square, geometric patterns were combined, duplicated, interlaced, and arranged in intricate combinations, thus becoming one of the most distinguishing features of Islamic art. However, these complex patterns seem to embody a refusal to adhere strictly to the rules of geometry. As a matter of fact, geometric ornamentation in Islamic art suggests a remarkable amount of freedom; in its repetition and complexity, it offers the possibility of infinite growth and can accommodate the incorporation of other types of ornamentation as well. In terms of their abstractness, repetitive motifs, and symmetry, geometric patterns have much in common with the so-called arabesque style seen in many vegetal designs. Calligraphic ornamentation also appears in conjunction with geometric patterns."

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Utilitarian object: red sandstone latticework within a framed arch. This architectural feature was permanent and used to create shade and concentrate air flow to help create cooling effects (area around Delhi, India). Grand and luxurious buildings commissioned by the Mughal emperors often included a practical approach to the harsh Indian climate. They also created visually pleasing effects of geometric patterns - cast on the floors and walls in shade and light- that changed all day.

"The buildings commissioned by the Mughal emperors were grand and luxurious, but also reflected a practical approach to the harsh Indian climate. Pierced stone screens, known as jali, were used widely in Indian architecture as windows, room dividers and railings. They were often incorporated into external walls, especially those of women's quarters. The openwork permitted light and air to enter while protecting the interior from both public view and the heat of the sun. Jali screens also created the

visually pleasing effect of geometric patterns of light and shade, changing with the time of day.”
(National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)

Culturally the Mughals were Muslim rulers of a Hindu majority in the region. They were known to be religiously tolerant and citizens of different faiths held governing positions. (BBC Religions)

The art, though considered Islamic, reflects regional and even national styles and influences but the most distinguishing characteristic is all-over surface decoration. (Met Museum, Nature of Islamic Art)

The repetitive geometric decoration is math-based, derived from geometry. The template of circles and squares are pure and accessible to anyone with a compass and ruler. There is a celebration of pattern: mathematical elegance resulting in elaborate and beautiful intricacies. (Met Museum, Geometric)

Mathematics reflects the vision of an underlying order of both the cosmos and the natural world that was embraced by both the Muslims and the Mughals alike.

These patterns rarely have shading - or a foreground & background. They often extend beyond the frame, or are ‘contained’ by a frame or architectural element. “In the course of the day, the movement of their patterns in silhouette across the floor would enhance the pleasure of their intricate geometry.”
(Met Museum, Jali)

The SYMBOLISM is in the representation of the never-ending or infinite nature of God. The transcendent, indivisible nature of God repeated without end or limitations, certainly beyond the control or realm of Man...Mistakes may have sometimes been made intentionally (* like Amish quilts) because only God is perfect. (Met Museum and Wikipedia)

Regarding Islamic Art (from Wikipedia): “Islamic art is not at all restricted to religious art, but includes all the art of the rich and varied cultures of Islamic societies as well. It frequently includes secular elements and elements that are frowned upon, if not forbidden, by some Islamic theologians. Apart from the ever-present calligraphic inscriptions, specifically religious art is actually less prominent in Islamic art than in Western medieval art, with the exception of Islamic architecture where mosques and their complexes of surrounding buildings are the most common remains...Calligraphy and decoration of manuscript Qu'rans is an important aspect....

Islamic art developed from many sources: Roman, Early Christian art, and Byzantine styles were taken over in early Islamic art and architecture; the influence of the Sassanian art of pre-Islamic Persia was of paramount significance; Central Asian styles were brought in with various nomadic incursions; and Chinese influences had a formative effect on Islamic painting, pottery, and textiles. Though the whole concept of "Islamic art" has been criticized by some modern art historians, calling it a "figment of imagination" or a "mirage", the similarities between art produced at widely different times and places in the Islamic world, especially in the Islamic Golden Age, have been sufficient to keep the term in wide use by scholars.

There are repeating elements in Islamic art, such as the use of geometrical floral or vegetal designs in a repetition known as the arabesque. The arabesque in Islamic art is often used to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible and infinite nature of God. Mistakes in repetitions may be intentionally introduced as a show of humility by artists who believe only God can produce perfection, although this theory is disputed.

Typically, though not entirely, Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns, whether purely geometric or floral, and Arabic calligraphy, rather than on figures, because it is feared by many Muslims that the depiction of the human form is idolatry and thereby a sin against God, forbidden in the Qur'an. Human portrayals can be found in all eras of Islamic art, above all in the more private form of miniatures, where their absence is rare. Human representation for the purpose of worship is considered idolatry and is duly forbidden in Islamic law, known as Sharia law." (end quote)

From Metropolitan Museum (Nature of Islamic Art): "The term Islamic art not only describes the art created specifically in the service of the Muslim faith (for example, a mosque and its furnishings) but also characterizes the art and architecture historically produced in the lands ruled by Muslims, produced for Muslim patrons, or created by Muslim artists. As it is not only a religion but a way of life, Islam fostered the development of a distinctive culture with its own unique artistic language that is reflected in art and architecture throughout the Muslim world. The lands newly conquered by the Muslims had their own preexisting artistic traditions and, initially at least, those artists who had worked under Byzantine or Sasanian patronage continued to work in their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons. The first examples of Islamic art therefore rely on earlier techniques, styles, and forms reflecting this blending of classical and Iranian decorative themes and motifs. Even religious monuments erected under Umayyad patronage that have a clearly Islamic function and meaning, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, demonstrate this amalgam of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian elements. Only gradually, under the impact of the Muslim faith and nascent Islamic state, did a uniquely Islamic art emerge. The rule of the Umayyad caliphate (661–750) is often considered to be the formative period in Islamic art. One method of classifying Islamic art, used in the Islamic galleries at the Metropolitan Museum, is according to the dynasty reigning when the work of art was produced. This type of periodization follows the general precepts of Islamic history, which is divided into and punctuated by the rule of various dynasties, beginning with the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties that governed a vast and unified Islamic state, and concluding with the more regional, though powerful, dynasties such as the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals.

With its geographic spread and long history, Islamic art was inevitably subject to a wide range of regional and even national styles and influences as well as changes within the various periods of its development. It is all the more remarkable then that, even under these circumstances, Islamic art has always retained its intrinsic quality and unique identity. Just as the religion of Islam embodies a way of life and serves as a cohesive force among ethnically and culturally diverse peoples, the art produced by and for Muslim societies has basic identifying and unifying characteristics. Perhaps the most salient of these is the predilection for all-over surface decoration. The four basic components of Islamic ornament are calligraphy, vegetal patterns, geometric patterns, and figural representation." (end quote)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This intricate stone screen (jali) allowed for air and light to circulate within architectural spaces. The spotted red sandstone from the Delhi-Agra region had been a popular medium for architecture and sculpture for centuries, and the Mughals, the dynasty that ruled much of India from the early 1500s through the mid-1800s, used it frequently. This jali blends geometric and floral decoration. The two floral roundels in the upper corners are carved on one side with the word "Allah." While these screens served a practical purpose by allowing in light and air, the idea of divine light, which was intrinsic to Islamic theology, provided an added metaphorical dimension.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Geometric Patterns in Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum,
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm

The Nature of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum,
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orna/hd_orna.htm

Islamic art, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_art

Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, Unesco World Heritage site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/232/>

Pierced screen, jail (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra):
<https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=129691>

Screen, Metropolitan Museum: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453344>

BBC, Religions, Mughal Empire:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/mughalempire_1.shtml