The Aesthetical Approach in Urbanism and Architectural Identity in Contemporary Islamic Cities

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Abstract:

Several cities in Islamic countries had enjoyed by the affluence of   aesthetic features. Islam as a religion had the ability to change the ideology of its adherents. Hence, the urban of the Muslims' cities was massively influenced by the religious needs and the Islamic political power and it adopted the Islamic conceptions. Islamic jurisprudence had an important role to identify and modify both the individuals' rights and duties in developing their cities.

Different types of architecture buildings and decoration were implemented to function in the cities' urbanism contexts. Though, a spiritual, unwritten agreement for the Islamic aesthetic conceptions, was framing the identity in these cities, and generating a consolidate identity for the image of these cities. However, the current image of the contemporary Islamic cities had been dramatically altered.

The scene of many contemporary Arab cities represents substantial changes resulted from several reasons. The fact that the present meager of the city image, is lacking to the meaning of "image of the city". The metamorphoses guise of the existing cities is a serious question, where is no clear genuine identity. Therefore, these massive changes would affect the social affiliations of the upcoming generations.

Cities are always the most productive areas, where society members aim to find better jobs and wealth opportunities. Citizens are considered as a focal component that helps in draw the composition of the city's image. However, they are struggling to survive inside this incommensurate image.

The current paper is investigating the Islamic aesthetic approach, that had been implemented in both the architecture and decoration in Islamic cities. Subsequently, the paper will discuss the present image of cities in two different Arab, Islamic countries: Cairo and Doha. Since the paper argues that, although these cities are considered as Islamic cities, but each represents a different image for the city.

The paper will discuss the different reasons and the outcomes for marginalizing the inherited and local identities on both; the cities' scene and their users.

Key words: Contemporary Islamic city- architectural identity - Islamic aesthetic conceptions

ملخص البحث باللغة العربية:

تذخر العديد من مدن العالم الإسلامي بتراث عامر بالقيم الجمالية . حيث تمكن دين الاسلام من تغيير ايديولوجية معتنقيه و الذى انعكس بالتبعية على العديد من مظاهر الحياة و منها مدن المسلمين ، و التى تأثرت بوضوح بمتطلبات الدين .

لقد تأثر عمران المدن ، حيث تبنى مبادئ الدين الإسلامي، و يظهر بوضوح الدور الهام للفقه الإسلامي في تحديد و توضيح دور الافراد و حقوقهم وواجباتهم فى الحفاظ و تنمية مدنهم.

لقد وظفت العديد من الطرز المعمارية و تطورت من اجل تنمية محيط المجتمع المسلم ، و قد تم ذلك ليس وفقا لدستور مسبق ، بل وفقا لفكر غير مكتوب متفق عليه روحيا من قبل المصممين المسلمين و ذلك من اجل اعلاء القيم الجمالية وفقا العقيدة الاسلامية. و يتضح ان ذلك قد اضفى اطارا عاما قيميا يحدد هوية و شخصية مدن المسلمين ، بل و يخلق صورة للمدن متشاركة الهوية. الا ان الصورة المعاصرة للمدينة الاسلامية قد اختلفت بشدة.

فالمشهد المعاصر في العديد من مدن البلاد العربية يقدم لنا مزيجا مختلفا من التغييرات نتيجة اسباب عدة.

فالحقيقة ان الوضع الراهن لصورة المدينة اليوم تشير بوضوح الى ان المدينة تفتقر الى المعنى الحقيقي لصورة المدينة. فالتحولات في مظهر المدينة الحالية و افتقارها لحقيقة وجود هوية حقيقية اصلية هو سؤال يطرح نفسه في ساحة علم التخطيط الحضري و المجتمعي من حيث دراسة الاسباب و النتائج التى تترتب على ذلك و ما لها من تبعات مؤثرة على انتماء المجتمعات لأصولها.

ان المدن غالبا من أكثر التجمعات الانسانية المنتجة ،أينما يهدف قاطنيها الى ايجاد أفضل فرص المعيشة و الانتاجية ، فالانسان هو أهم المفردات فى تكوين صورة المدينة ، الا اننا نجد انه هو اكثر من يصارع للوجود فى خضم هذه الصورة الغير متكاملة.

ان الورقة البحثية المقدمة تناقش مفهوم الجمال فى الاسلام الذى طبق فى مظهر المدينة المسلمة المبكرة و يتتبع تغيير الصورة لثلاثة مدن عربية معاصرة و هى : القاهرة ، دبى و الدوحة. فالبحث يناقش ان صورة كل مدينة من الثلاثة تقدم نموذجا مختلفا فى حين اشتراكهم جميعا فى هوية العروبية و الاسلامية.

ان البحث المقدم يناقش و يبحث الاسباب و النتائج المترتبة عن تهميش الموروثات و الهوية الاصلية للمجتمعات و اثرها على الشعوب و الاجيال الجديدة

Introduction:

Islamic culture is characterized by distinctive architectural and artistic personality for several reasons :

Muslims considered the mosque not only a religious building but also as a cultural center from which the main concepts of the religion and ethics were developed and then spread for the community in several forms. These forms had distinguished the Islamic personality from other cultures and arts. It is unquestionable that Islamic art and architecture had an undeniable influences on cities identities in the time.

Secondly, the Islamic philosophy had interacted and amalgamated with the preceding cultures which resulted distinctive art that colored the whole body of the Islamic empire with a solo perspective.

We should agree that the mutual influences between different civilizations was an important factor that helped in enriching the arts and cultures in both sides. Yet, the concept of evaluation of esthetics varies from one recipient to another as well as from one designer to another. However, in the actual contemporary Arab and Islamic society, despite the affluent quantity of aesthetic vocabulary in Islamic heritage, there are many negative aspects from which the society suffers in both; the application and evaluation of the Islamic artistic heritage.

Innovation or Simulation?

The research attempts to analysis the major aspects of the environmental and urban design and the important changes in two of the present Islamic city. The study focuses on the transformations in the aesthetic values in the current Islamic urban environment and the changes in the local taste and their ability to analyze and to understand what is inherited and authentic. On the same hand, the paper studies tell what extend the argument effects not only on the identity of the locals but also on the identity of the entire community, and how this applies on both recipients, designers and policy makers of the urban legislation.

The lack of understanding and appreciation for what have been inherited from the heritage is a serious disaster, that needs to be remedied. It can be noticed that replacing the heritage with quoted ideas, that have no roots in the inherited culture, but is exotic, is notably seen around and is regrettably accelerating the pace of collapse of the genuine image of the city, that in turn will lead to the decomposition for both the present and the upcoming generations, and to disintegration from their original reality.

It can be easily noticed the hybrid architectural style in most of the Arab and Islamic cities, a style that is not authentic but bears a glimpse from different models and cultures. The western affiliation is one of the main reasons for this phenomenon, whose indicators are hinted at in many vocabularies of the urban environment.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the main consequences of the penetration of this phenomenon, not only in the architectural environment, but also in various aspects of the society in an attempt to raise up the valuable concept of heritage and to detect both; the intellectual conflict between the 'modernity' and the Islamic culture, and to fake calls to marginalize the heritage

Religion, Art and Architecture:

Islamic had influenced different aspects in the conquered countries in various aspects such as applied industry, philosophy of art and architecture. There were many types of buildings and industries that were not previously familiar in these communities such as the architecture of mosques, *waqf, sabil, bimaristanat, khanqah* and religious schools, vast of decoration patterns, illustrations and carving of wood and ivory, as well as the creation of calligraphy which flourished inside and outside buildings, and became a significant feature for the Islamic arts.

Architecture and urbanization as the main features of change in societies:

History records the moments of change, but heritage is the result of these changes and for its cultural output. The major changes in the Arab countries rose through two stages, which carried in their groups the beginning of modernity and change, although the motivation for them is in fact was the political motivation in these Arab societies.

The first phase started in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Arab countries witnessed many political changes. These changes had in that time a great impact on both the intellectual thoughts in urban design, as well as, on the ability of evaluation of the common aesthetical standards in these communities. The second stage since the late nineteenth century that was characterized by a notable transformation in the communities citizens' educations that has been associated with exportation for many of the missions of learners to Europe.

First transformation phase:

The most prominent evidence for the urbanism changes in Islamic city was clearly seen on the transition for the Ottoman Sultan seat in Istanbul from the Palace of ToppKabbi to the Palace of Dolma Pache, which resembled the transition from the Islamic architecture to the European model. This great shift had symbolized the role of the new intellectual orientation of the Muslim rulers at that time that had undeniable change in the Islamic city.

- **Topkapi Palace in Istanbul:**

The palace was the residence for the Ottoman Sultans for almost four centuries from 1465 to 1856. The palace still has explicit Islamic features, not only in its facades design, but also are obviously seen in the layout plan in terms of Islamic philosophy

for privacy and interior decoration, Fig. (1), (2-a, 2-b, 2-c, 2-d). However, the palace had lost its political importance when the Ottoman Empire seat was moved to the new European-style 'Dolma Pache' palace by Sultan Abdul Majied I.
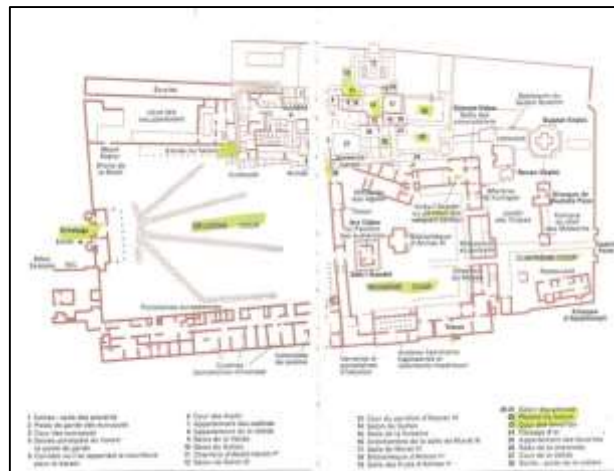

Fig 1, Layout for Topkapi palace in Istanbul, showing the Islamic philosophy features

Fig 2-a

Fig 2-b

Fig 2-c

Fig 2-d

Fig 2 (a,b,c,d) Details for the façade and interior decoration inside Topkapi palace, Istanbul.

- **Palace DolmaPach:**

The European style palace is divided into three main pavilions: Al *Salamak, Haramalk* and Celebrations halls (Fig. 3). The Islamic features were replaced by European architectural details, such as the columns that carry Corinthian crowns, as well as the large European-style frescoes in ceilings, corridors and rooms (Fig. 4).

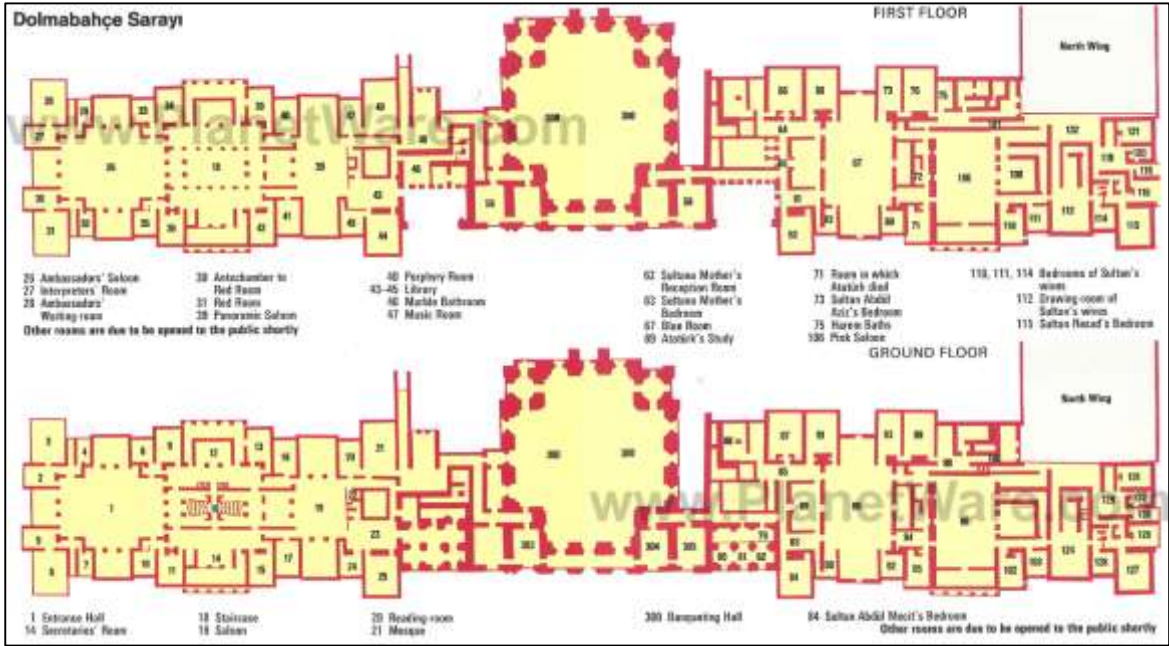Fig 3 Layout plan for DolmmePahe palace in Istanbul.

Fig 4-a   Fig 4-b

Fig 4-c   Fig 4-d

Fig 4 Details from the façade and the interior design of Dolme Pache palace in Istanbul, these details illustrate the dramatic changes from the Islamic design to the European style.

On the same hand, Cairo had witnessed similar intellectual changes that can be clearly observed in its urban scene. The notable change took place during the second half of the 19th century, when *Khedive* Ismail decided, as a result of his European education, to transfer Cairo's image to simulate the European cities in that time. *Khedive* Ismail called the assistance of the French designer Georges Eugène Haussmann to re-plan a new Cairo based on the Parisian foundations and standards. These fundamental changes were the base stage for Egypt transformation from an Islamic style to another country that is characterized by an inhomogeneous country.

This different hybrid style had an influential style, that carried two completely different sides in their features, attributes and symbols. In the same hand, the change had its impact on the Egyptian social life. Cairo, the capital city had two different sides , not only on the urban aspect but also it had two different communities parties, each lived in a different side. The new buildings were allocated in where is now known as downtown Cairo, which is identical to the Paris buildings (Fig. 6).

Figure 6-a   Figure 6-b

Figure 6 a, illustrates a domestic Parisian architecture that cannot be differentiated from fig 6-b that shows a new Cairienne style in Downtown of Cairo

This change aimed to introduce Cairo to the era of modernity that characterized the world in mid nineteenth century. One can consider this particular era as the prelude for the dramatic shift in urbanizing Egypt when many signs can be hinted as a reflection for the new western thoughts that dominated the Arab and Muslim world. In this regard one cannot neglect the influence of up raising economic structure of the settled European citizens and the colonization trends toward he entire region, an influence that had effected both the social and cultural fabric of the communities. (Fig.7, 8).

Fig 7 decoration from downtown of Cairo Al-Sett

Fig 8 exterior decoration from Beit

Saknaa in old Sayida Zeinab district in Cairo

The influence of the early urbanism changes on the Egyptian social fabric:

The change in the area of the residential areas is evident, with few exceptions in number of palaces and some large houses that have not been demolished or redistributed. However, we can see houses with yards that have been replaced by other types of houses that have changed to leased apartments. It should be noticed here, that the nature of the inhabitants in these houses used to be unified with homogeneous social nature, yet, after the new urban design, these domestic houses started to house another category from different social and economic income strata. The new inhabitants were mostly families from European communities, ho were associated with business or politics in Egypt and several Arab countries at the time.

These changes in the social and architectural topography have strongly influenced the change in the standards of thought and aesthetic taste of the social fabric of the city's inhabitants. They started to lose partially the city's historical heritage from their memory, and another alternative style started to build aesthetic taste in Arab countries.

The second Phase - Intellectual Colonialism:

Most of the Islamic countries had been subject to European colonialism. Many urban and social aspects of cities have been affected by the theses foreign interferences of thought and its control over various aspects of life. Despite decades had passed over the complete independence of these Islamic country, but One can spectate another intellectual contemporary trend of colonialism. This colonist trend unfortunately is inhered and has been associated with the idea of modernity. An idea that influenced the image of the Arab cities. This image carries imported forms and is being dominated with several alien principles in architecture and design.

We and the Other - the cultural transformation of the Arab countries:

The process of cultural transformation in the environmental urbanism of the Arab cities, included different fields of life in all the Arab countries. Several designers had considered the western style with no actual environmental or social studies. Hassan Fathi called this process "What is lower than the foreigner architecture ", expressing that instead of developing the national, Arab-Islamic designs, in order to create a sophisticated model of the traditional architecture. The designers went on to imitate without enough awareness of the outcome for this foreign trend and its effect on the new generations of both designers and recipients.

The domination of the intellectual principle which called that modernity is only what comes from the west had settled in the current Arab thought of many designers. A considerable number of them considered that heritage is symbolizing the concept for retrograde. Whereas one believes that the concept of modernity and contemporary environmental design does not absolutely required to be derived from western thought, as if the Arab society is not contemporary as well. One believes that modernity is to provide and prepare the surrounded environment with sustainable heritage, in a form that suit the modern needs and the updated requirements for new ideas and aspirations.

The movement of westernization in Islamic environment has been followed by a change in the general taste and artistic and cultural thought of the different classes of the community. These changes had represented defining moments in changing the principles of urban design and even the traditional crafts that have since started to call it " The extinct crafts", for example the craft of manufacturing 'Mashrabiyya' windows has become extinct and is replaced by glass windows and busy iron.

The Contemporary Vision of Islamic Art - Is it Stagnation and Intellectual Poverty or a Shift from Reality?

The contemporary concept of several designers that addition of some Islamic decorative symbols on the facades or the addition of wooden Mashrabiyya, is what will color the building Islamic with a heritage theme is certainly a misconception. They merely add only a cover to the building, which is often devoid of the philosophy of Islamic thought, since they must realize that these elements had a philosophical and cultural role that could outweigh their functional role in many cases.

And since it is indisputable that development and exchange of knowledge is inspiring cultures and experiences, yet, at the same time adding what should not be added to disturb the balance of the Arab community and the inherited culture. It is necessary here to consider what will be gained from such variables that commensurate with its personality with no major changes , this is to be compatible with these variables, without ceding the constants of its culture and heritage.

The poor aesthetics values in the environmental design in the Islamic cities can be seen in many models that are discussed in the current paper. Designers are still adding to our cities what decrease its culture. The quotation and repeated elements are added

to the image of the city with no enough awareness that art and well urbanized environment are measured by what they can added to the heritage but not what is borrowed from other cultures.

The Reality of our Islamic cities:

Many Muslim cities, especially Arab cities in the Arabian gulf, nowadays live in a different social reality that differs from the past, this is a result for several variables. The most prominent factor is the economic aspect, where communities, in these cities, became a mixture from several cultures and social fabrics. As a result, it was naturally led to a differences in tasting the aesthetic standards in planning the contemporary Arab cities.

In order to keep abreast of the social changes, many western designers have been involved in designing and planning many residential, public and administrative places. These updates had led to raising needs for different types of built environment which, in turn, had impacted on new inputs on the society itself who was forced to accept these urban developments with all its responsibilities. It can be assumed that designers built their ideas carrying their culture and a different art language to be placed not only in the construction sites, but in the minds and concepts of the new generations.

Figures (11,12,13,14) show a group of administrative towers in three Arab cities, respectively Dubai, Kuwait and Doha, and it can hardly distinguish any distinctive features among them or to catch a link with the Islamic environment, but almost one can notice the similarity of one the Qatari towers with the Gherkin Tower in central London designed by Norman Foster (Figure 15)

Fig. 12 Towers in Kuwait   City Fig. 11 towers in Dubai

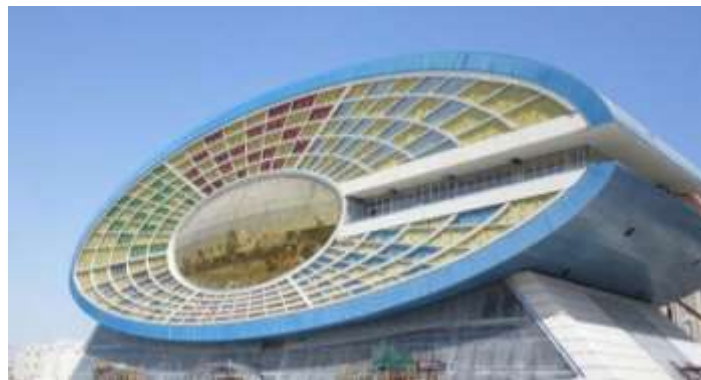Fig. 15 Gherkin tower in London   Fig. 13 Commercial towers in Doha

Fig. 14 Commercial building in Doha

One of these examples is the Pearl Project in Doha, State of Qatar (Fig. 16). The design of the built environment is strictly similar to the design of several European cities such as the city of Wroclaw in Poland (Figure 17) and city of Willemstad in the Netherlands(fig. 18). The selected colors for the domestic architecture in the mentioned European cities is consistent with the desire of the European designer to revitalize the cities due to geographical location and climatic conditions, located in northern Europe, while the situation is quite different in Doha. Moreover , the architectural façade of the buildings were did not taken into account the privacy for the inhabitants, since wide glass windows were allocated, allowing to oversee the neighbor completely. Figure (19).

Fig 16 Buildings facades in Wroclaw in Poland   Fig 16 The Pearl Project in Doha

Another Example in Doha is "Carnegie Mellon", an educational building inside the Education city. The building is designed by the Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta. The Mexican style is clearly seen on the building facades, in terms of the use of color and decorative units, as well as the architectural elements added in the surrounded landscape. At the same time, it is noticeable the similarity with the building of the Sheraton Hotel in Bilbao, Spain, designed by the same designer (Figure 21), this is clearly indicating that the aesthetics of Mexican architecture are what are directed to the recipients in Doha.

Fig 21 Sheraton Hotel in Bilbao, Spain   Fig 20 Carnegie Mellon, Doha

On the other hand, there are many attempts that calls to use the heritage vocabularies in designing the landscape. Faculty of Islamic Studies in the same Educational City has a significant, symbolic design that is serving Islamic art. One can clearly explore the philosophy of the designer where each detail of the design refers to the actual activity of the building, where students study the Islamic studies. The two high-rise towers , are dedicated to Mecca in a symbolic design resembling minarets. The Arabic calligraphy was used professionally to write the Qur'anic verses on the facades. This is a reference to the study of the principles of Islam in this building, which is carried on the five pillars of Islam, taking the color of the white as a sign of peace and tranquility as the message of Islam(fig. 22).

Fig 22 Islamic studies faculty in HBKU, Doha

How to treat our monuments and architectural heritage:

It is clear to us that the Islamic heritage is the evidence of the authenticity and depth of the thought of the Muslim designer. However what mourns specialists of art and heritage in general and Islamic art, in particular, how communities deal with these invaluable heritage. So the question here would be for the new generations is how to appreciate and cherish the merits of their heritage if it is lost and destroyed (Fig 23).

Fig 23, Aleppo mosque before and after being destroyed

Origins is a Must for Reaching the Globalization:

One of the most prominent examples of modern Islamic architecture that has preserved the philosophy of Islamic art and architecture in the region is the building of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (Figure 24). The museum was designed by the American designer (AMP) who was inspired by the aesthetics of the ancient Islamic architecture, (Fig. 25), as well as the design of the Al Fanar Islamic building (Fig 26), which was also inspired by both the minaret of Ahmed Ibn Tulun in Cairo and the minaret of Al-Mutawakel Mosque in Iraq (Fig. 27,28).

The belief that establishment and adherence to the heritage on the local and regional scale is what will lead to the restoration of Islamic art place.

Fig 25 Ahmed b.Tulun mosque, Cairo   Fig 24 Museum of Islamic Arts, Doha

Fig27 AlMutwakel minaret   Fig 28 Ahmed B.Tulun minaret   Fig 26, Al Fanar Building,Doha

The Recommendations:

The current growing situation should dramatically change toward an integrative interdisciplinary vision not only inclusive of the governmental inistitutions but with mainly the assistance of the civil society, private sector and policy makers. One believe that this is the only means to implementing the real genuine development for the future agenda in current cities.

The study recommends two important aspects:

First, the planning municipalities and policy makers:

1 - The need to form committees composed of specialists of arts, archeologists and sociologists to be an important factor to coordinate with the competent authorities responsible for approvals and permits for buildings and public facilities.

2 - To guide the designers in the non-governmental offices to the importance of understanding the philosophy of social and spatial topography of the Arab and Islamic environment.

3 - The need to preserve and make efforts to preserve the effects through the support of national institutions concerned and provide appropriate budgets for the work of restoration, which must be carried out by specialists.

Secondly, for officials and policy makers of education:

1- Establishment of specialized departments and colleges in national universities to teach Islamic arts with the need to pay attention to teaching heritage management and preservations courses in parallel with the teaching of architecture and arts curricula for undergraduate university students.

2 - Interest in teaching art education materials in schools, which suffers from marginalizing the role of arts and artistic criticism.

3 - Emphasize and maximize the role of the original Islamic artistic identity in the curricula of arts and architecture at different stages.

4 - Developing the visual memory and aesthetic sense of the students so that the generation acquire the ability to distinguish the original from the intruder on their culture and develop their awareness of the importance of preserving Islamic heritage.

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