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Legendary Jazz Band Shares Good Vibes in Vermont

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COURTESY FAYEQ OWEIS



As an Arab-American living in fast-paced, computer-savvy San Francisco, **Fayeque Saleh Oweis**, Ph.D. 2001 uses his artwork as an expression of Arabic-Islamic cultural and artistic identity—with a 21st century spin. In his article "Islamic Art as an Educational Tool about the Teaching of Islam," published in the March 2002 issue of *Art Education*, the prestigious journal of the National Art Education Association, Oweis explains how his Union doctoral research and internship helped further his personal vision and mission: to preserve and teach others about the traditional elements of Islamic art and Arabic calligraphy using state-of-the-art digital media and artistic techniques.

In the journal article, Oweis explains that his definition of "Islamic" art is based on "the visual features and elements of Islamic art, rather than the narrowing boundaries imposed by its religious affiliation, its chronological development, or the land in which it is created." He theorizes that Islamic art exhibits three main unifying elements: Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and Arabesque (floral or vegetal motifs). For his doctoral internship, Oweis conducted six workshops in which San Francisco Bay area students from the Arab Cultural Center and Aptos Middle School learned techniques to create their own art using the three Islamic elements.

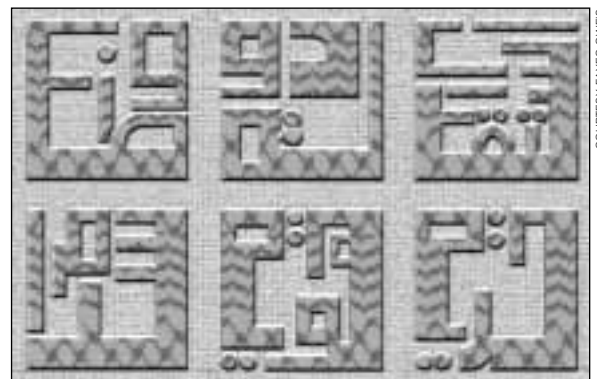
"I am pleased that I was able to introduce children from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds to Islamic culture through its art," Oweis writes in the article. He was also gratified by their teachers' comments that the creative exercises went "beyond art appreciation," allowing students to grasp the history behind the art form, as well as the mathematics behind the geometric patterns and other elements.

A graphic designer and computer artist, Oweis owns and manages a digital imaging business in San Francisco. His work is digitally created using computer technology and then printed on art canvas using large format inkjet technology, or transferred onto ceramic tiles using a dye-sublimation process. He has taught computer aided design and computer graphics at San Francisco State University and the Academy of Art College in San Francisco. In March 2002, he was appointed director of the Arabic Language/Arts Program at the Arab Cultural Center in San Francisco, which offers children's and college-level adult classes in Arabic language, arts, and culture. He is also a member of the Middle East Studies Association, Historians of Islamic Art, and other community and professional associations.

As a community activist, Oweis has given many presentations throughout the past year in hopes of contributing to greater understanding and tolerance. "Much of the current literature in the West and the media, especially after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, has depicted Islam as a violent, irrational, and fanatic force," he writes. "Islamic art speaks a universal language of aesthetics and functions, especially through its elements, that can illustrate the spiritual and peaceful message of Islam."

Describing his own artistic vision, he says, "The use of Arabic calligraphy in my work is an affirmation of an art form that has unified Islamic art all over the world. The flexibility of the Arabic language to form geometric shapes from letters and words is something that I adopted in most of my work, including the 'Palestinian Vocabulary' series, which, as a Palestinian, is my way of artistically relating to the struggle for freedom, independence, and a homeland."

But that clarity of vision does not come to an artist without effort and a solid grounding in research and theory. "To become proficient in any field, and to assume or discover an artistic identity, one must work hard," says Oweis. "My Union doctoral studies (in creative and visual arts with a primary focus in Islamic art and architecture), and the process of researching my dissertation, 'The Elements of Unity in Islamic Art as Examined through the Work of Jamal Badran,' allowed me to grow in my knowledge and artistic identity." —MARY BETH ORTH



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Oweis's Palestinian Vocabulary series adopts the Arabic language to form geometric shapes from letters and words