



The Mediation of Ornament

By Oleg Grabar

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In this richly illustrated book, Oleg Grabar shares a veteran art historian's love for the sheer sensuality of ornamentation. Grabar analyzes early and medieval Islamic objects and uses this art to show how ornament in general enables a direct, immediate encounter between viewers and art objects from any culture and time period.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Based on the A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, which Grabar delivered in 1989 at the National Gallery of Art, ornament is defined as "an agent that is not logically necessary to the perception of a visual message but without which the process of understanding would be more difficult." Grabar examines this idea in the context of early Islamic art, frequently drawing comparisons to Western works of art. According to the author, four forces were important in the development of ornament: writing (i.e., calligraphy), geometry, architecture, and nature. The book is beautifully designed, with each work amply identified, and the author's clear, lucid style enables the reader to follow the ideas easily. The illustrations are reproduced well, although some are less clear than they should be. But the deplorable practice of putting footnotes at the end of the volume prevails. Recommended for scholarly collections.

- *Martin Chasin, Adult Inst., Bridgeport, Ct.*

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Review

"It is impossible to approach this profoundly stimulating book by Oleg Grabar without reflecting on the strange twists of fate that the discourse of ornament has undergone in the last two centuries.... Oleg Grabar takes up anew the challenge of using ornament to broach artistic questions."--**Margaret Olin, *The Art Bulletin***

"This is writing that not only rewards but requires rereading.... If *The Formation of Islamic Art* was the most provocative and generously conceived book on its subject in the '70s, *The Mediation of Ornament*, with its expanded frame of reference and sense of personal urgency, may well assume that status for the '90s."--

Holland Cotter, *Art in America*

"[Grabar's] book, written with a kindly wit and a keen intelligence, is beautifully illustrated, and itself illustrates the role of ornament in the world."--***Bostonia***

"Grabar seeks to understand the transmission of meaning from visual form to interpretation: what is it that mediates between the physical object and a viewer's understanding? He postulates that in Islamic art it is writing, geometry and (images of) architecture and nature, which together constitute ornament. . . . [This] is an honest statement of one scholar's personal intellectual journey. . . . Grabar's notes address intellectual issues and often summarize the history of interpretation of key monuments."--***Mesa Bulletin***

"An admirable treatise ... it offers its readers an exemplary interplay of art history and aesthetics. One receives a beautifully illustrated introduction to Islamic art, and each work earns its presence by serving to bring a theoretical issue to life. This is cross-fertilization at its very best."--***Journal of Aesthetics and Art***

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