



Pixelated Kingdom

Yusef Alahmad
يوسف الأحمد



Pix-el-ated [pik-suh-leyted]:

When an image is magnified to a point that its resolution does not have smooth edges and clear tones, the image's pixels begin to look like squares. The appearance of these squares is called pixelation and the image is considered pixelated. This represents low design standards. However, pixelization may be deliberately created when applied to specific areas of an image and it may be used to hide nudity or sensitive data as well as keep a person's identity safe.

Yusef Alahmad
Pixelated Kingdom

—
This book is published on the occasion
of the Misk Global Forum 2017
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia November 15–16, 2017

—
Organized by Misk Art Institute
Misk Art Institute Director Ahmed Mater

The Misk Art Institute is a new cultural
organization established under the Misk
Foundation, which was founded by Crown
Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz
Al Saud. Under the leadership of pioneering
Saudi artist, Ahmed Mater, the institute
aims to establish Saudi Arabia's leading
platform for grassroots cultural production,
diplomacy and exchange. These include an
international exhibitions program, artist-
led communications and an arts education
program aimed at schools and universities
across Saudi Arabia.

miskartinstitute.org

—
Exhibition produced by Stephen Stapleton
& Anthony Tino

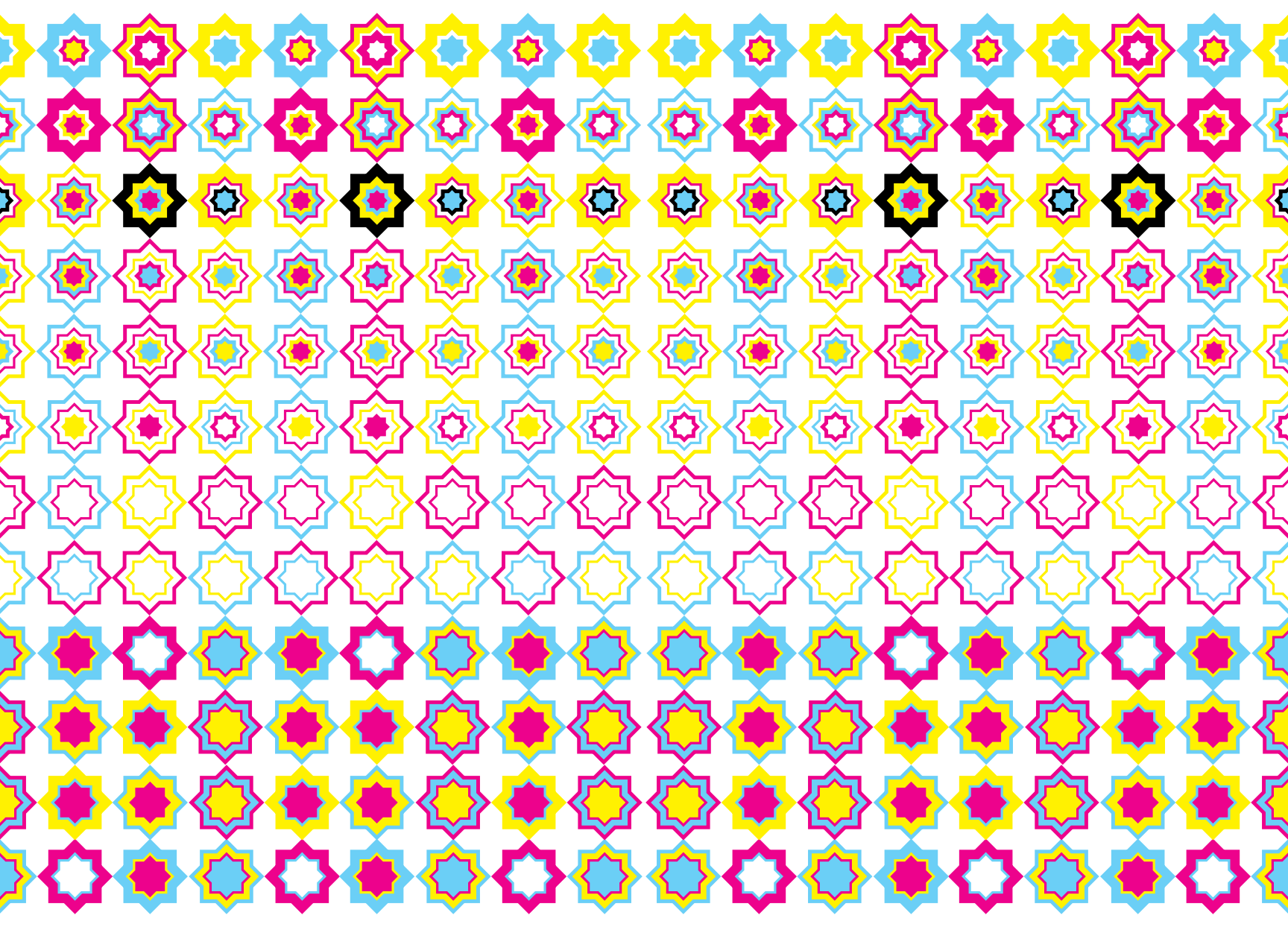
—
Wall graphics printed at Griffin Editions,
Brooklyn NY

—
Catalogue edited by
Yusef Alahmad & Anthony Tino

—
Printed by Toil & Tinker, Dubai UAE

—
© 2017, Yusef Alahmad
ISBN 978-1-5323-5996-5

—
yusefalahmad.com
ysf.alahmad@gmail.com
Instagram: @yusefalahmad



Introduction

Pixelated Kingdom

Pixelated Kingdom takes its name from one of the few research documents to-date, which uniquely addresses the historical, and social contexts in which Saudi Arabian graphic design has established itself in the last few decades. Written and designed by Yusef Alahmad, the original research invested into developing the concept of *Pixelated Kingdom* was influenced by the designer's experience working as a creative producer in both the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The driving force behind this work was to 'elevate graphic design standards in Saudi Arabia' by providing a resource guide for the artist's peers.

For the occasion of the Misk Global Forum, we have chosen to incorporate the graphic images that were created to visually communicate the main thesis of *Pixelated Kingdom* within a display of Alahmad's broader graphic practice. As the Misk Global Forum looks to "explore, experience and

experiment with ways to meet the challenge of change," Alahmad's artwork considers the ways in which the proliferation of graphic design practices within Saudi communities can affect positive social change and encourage creativity within various digital spaces.

Throughout the works presented in *Pixelated Kingdom*, the manipulation of type and the implementation of traditional Islamic patterning and calligraphy acts as a vibrant and futuristic exploration of Saudi and Middle Eastern heritage. The dialogue of sensibilities that occurs within the artist's design choices such as wide gradients of color, bold repetitive lines, digital textures and color separations was largely influenced by the artist's time spent living in San Francisco studying international graphic design movements.

Alahmad believes that visual design is a reflection of broader societal values. By incorporating visuals from

his cultural upbringing, and blending these design archetypes with his changing environments, Alahmad seeks to create visual connections between cultures. This is most present in several works included in *Pixelated Kingdom* such as "Bas," "Oud," and "Sejjada."

Alahmad's work within this unique visual identity has effectively inspired emerging graphic designers and artists throughout the MENA region and the United States.

Pixelated Kingdom surveys works created by Yusef Alahmad from 2013 to 2017, including works that were generated during his time at the Academy of Art University MFA graphic design program in San Francisco. In recent years Alahmad was featured in/worked with Print Magazine (US), Baseline Magazine (US), Oasis Magazine (Saudi Arabia), Khaleesque Magazine (Kuwait), among others and exhibited in numerous shows around the world,

including, P21 Gallery x Kalimat Magazine (London), SoulSpace (Oakland, California), Loud Art: Executing Culture Shock (Saudi Arabia), Khaleeji Reinterpreted (Kuwait), Local Not Local: The Arab American Museum/The Levantine Center (Michigan/Los Angeles), Fully Booked Art Book Fair (Dubai).

The contents of this catalogue include a range of pieces selected for this exhibition at the Misk Global Forum 2017, as well as adapted spreads from the original *Pixelated Kingdom* document, created by the artist in 2014. The intention is to both historicize this event, and to disseminate the core concepts of *Pixelated Kingdom*. This is the first time that *Pixelated Kingdom* has been produced in an edited format.



9
IMAGE

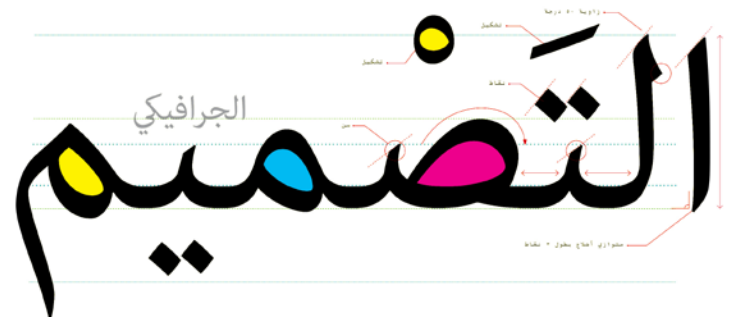
+

WORD

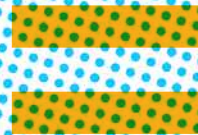
=

IDEA

Graphic design is a part of your daily life: From humble things like gum wrappers to huge things like billboards to the T-shirt you're wearing.



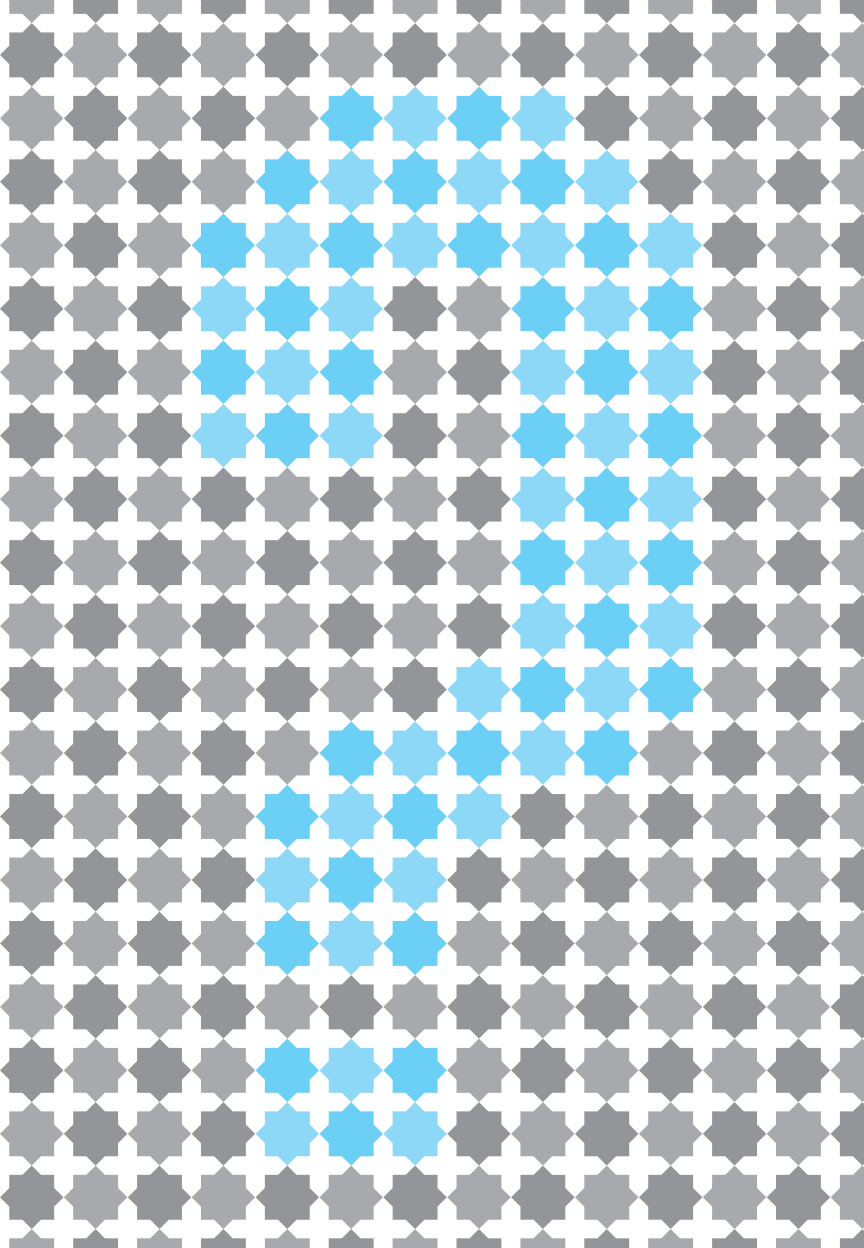
GRAPHIC DESIGN

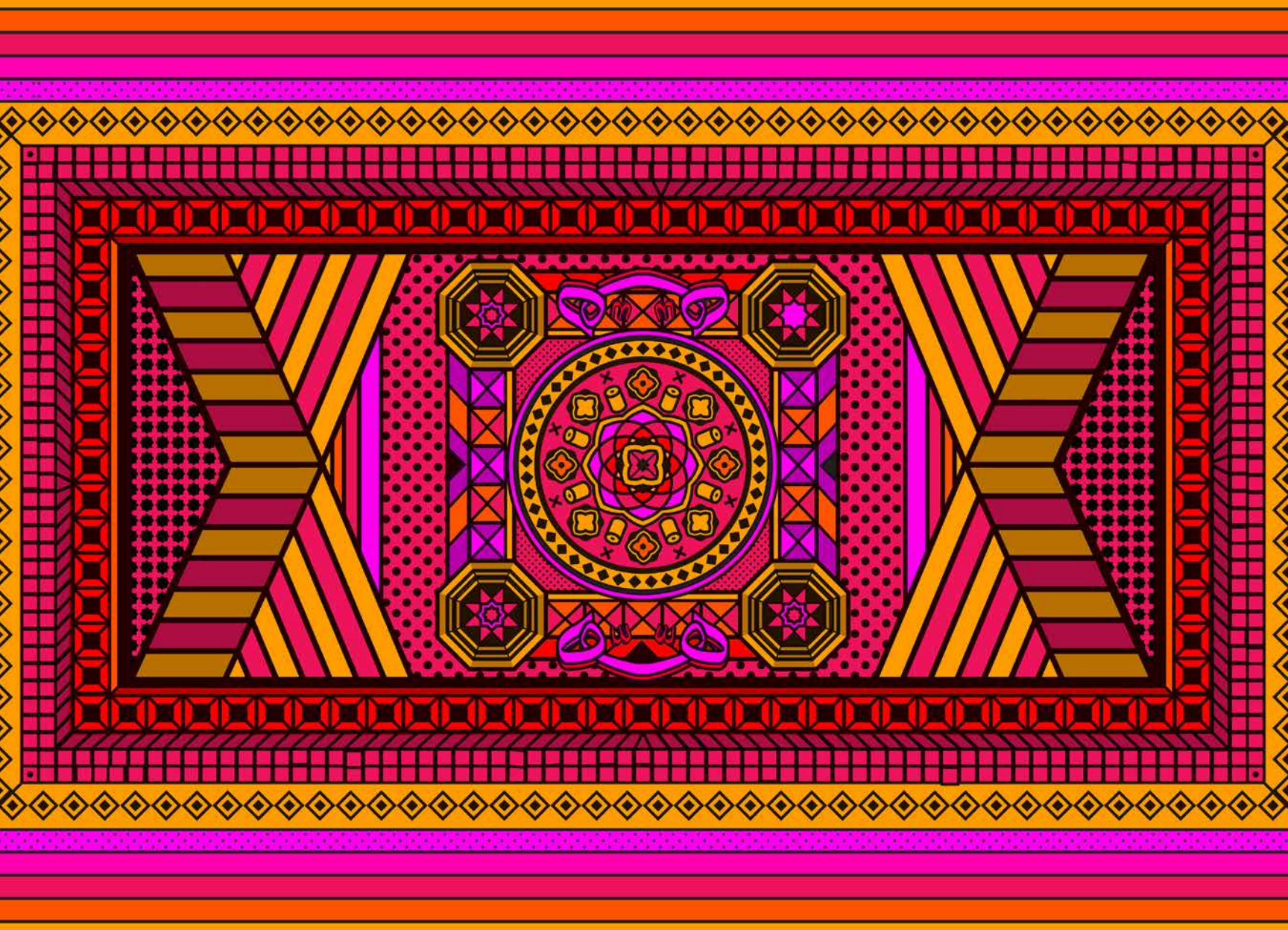


VISUAL COMMUNICATION

“I am not really familiar with Saudi graphic design, like at all. Which I think says something in and of itself.”

—Sidney, American graphic designer, 23.





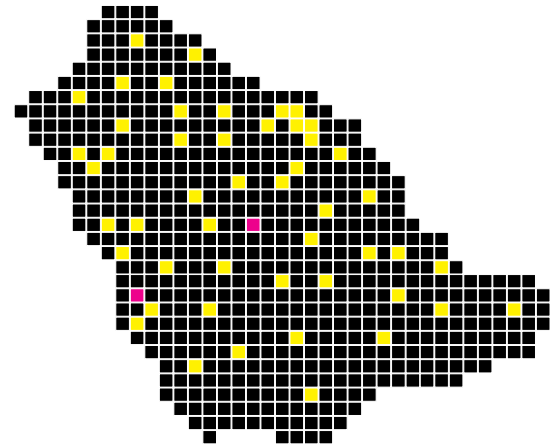
As of 2014, there were **fifty-nine** colleges in Saudi Arabia

Two colleges offered graphic design degrees for **women**

Zero colleges offered graphic design degrees for men

- ☀ All colleges
- 🌸 Colleges offering a graphic design degrees for women
- ⚙ Colleges offering a graphic design degrees for men

Map of Saudi Arabia



وَاللَّهُ
وَاقِعٌ
فِي رُؤُوسِ
الْعُلَمَاءِ

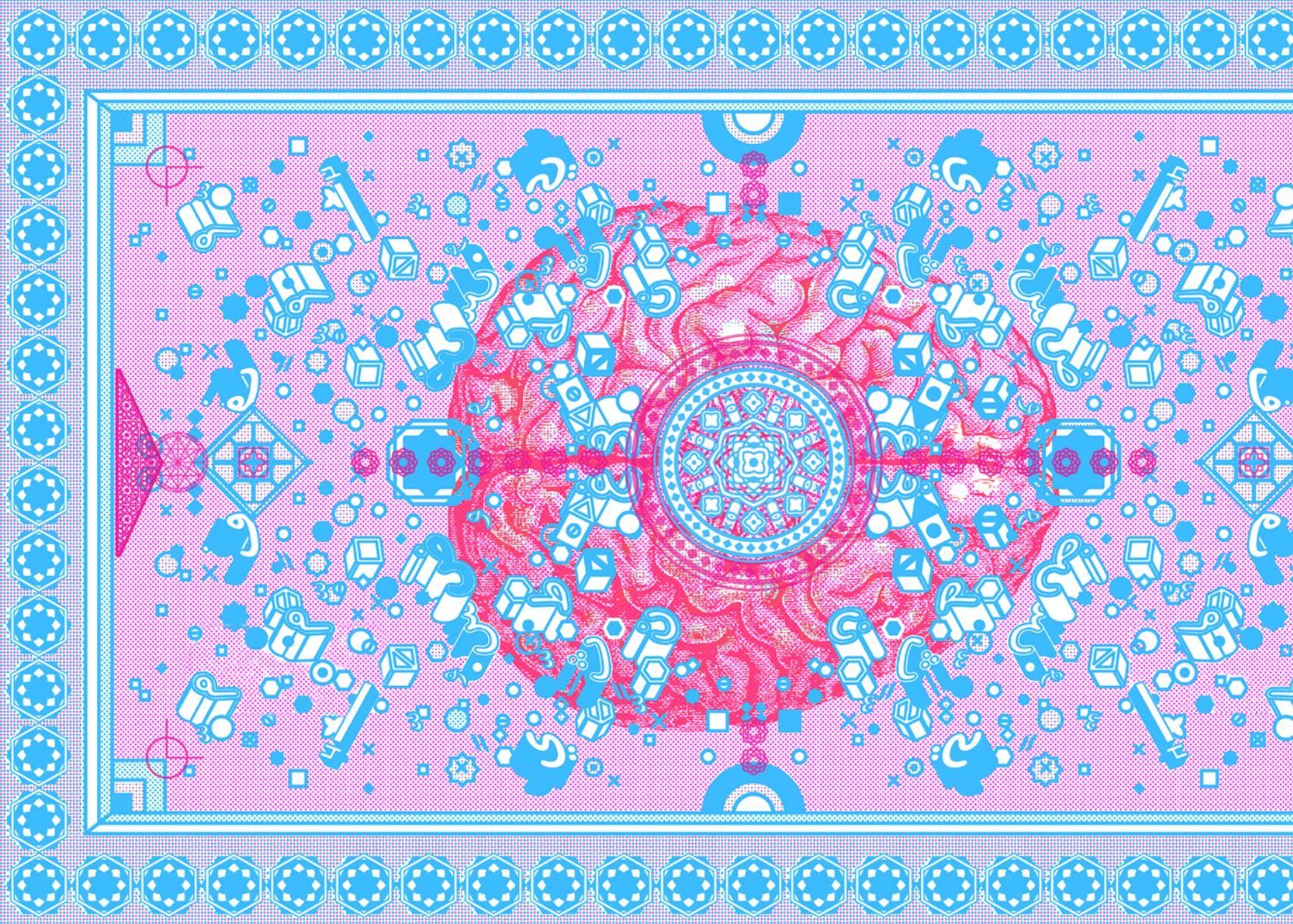




Unlike other countries,
there is very little—if any—art
instruction in Saudi schools.
I think we have more barriers
to push against than artists
from many others parts of
the world.”

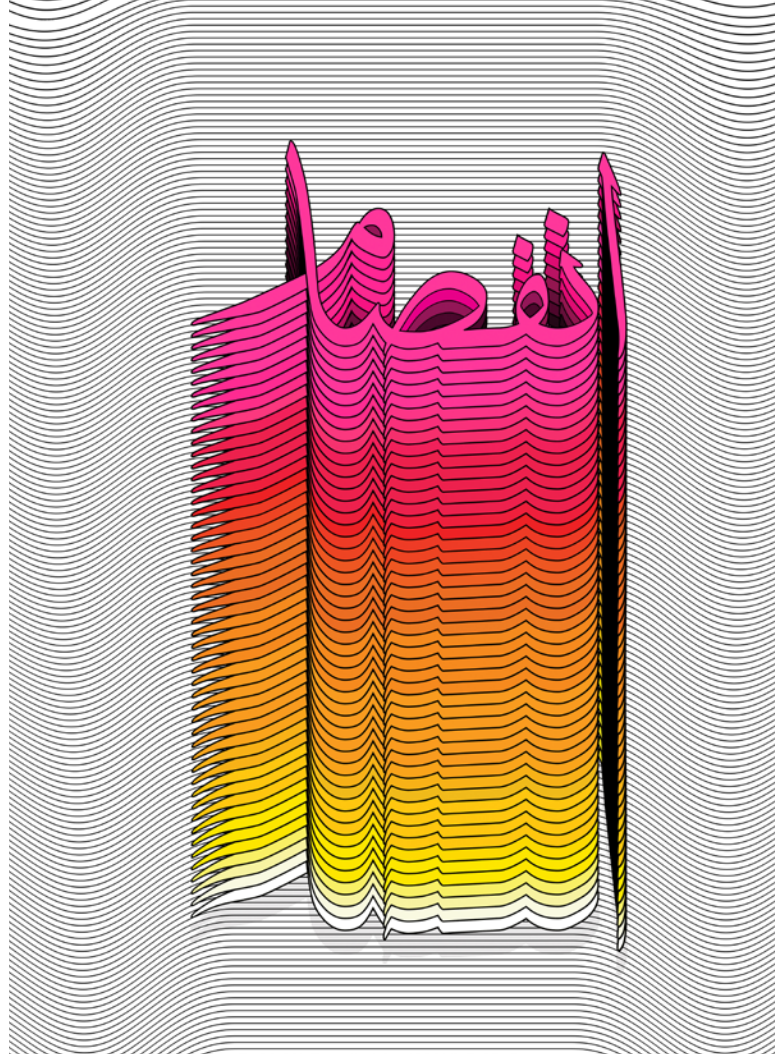
—Abdulnasser Gharem, Saudi artist

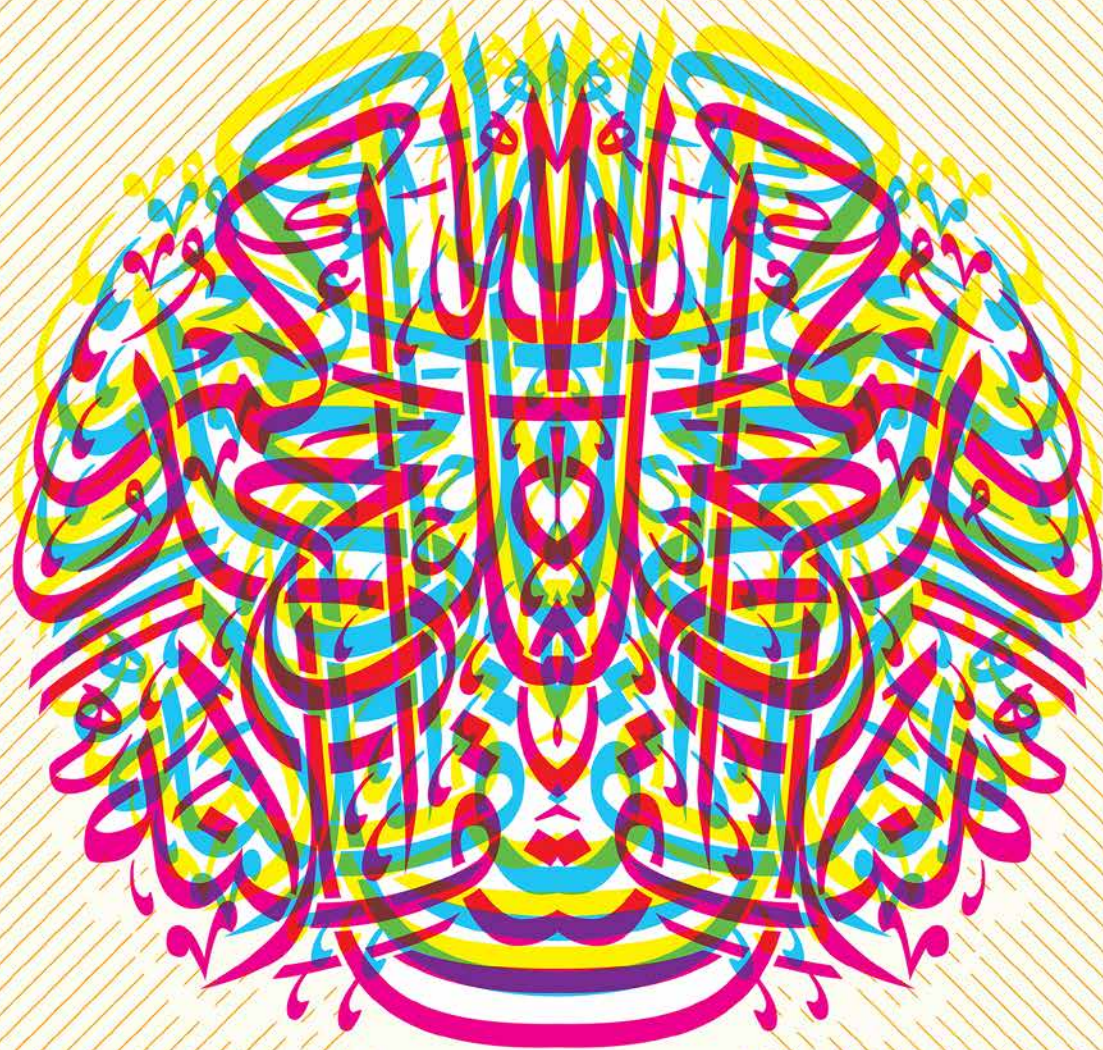




The ban of figurative art

by religious extremists
contributed to the flourishing
of the calligraphic arts.



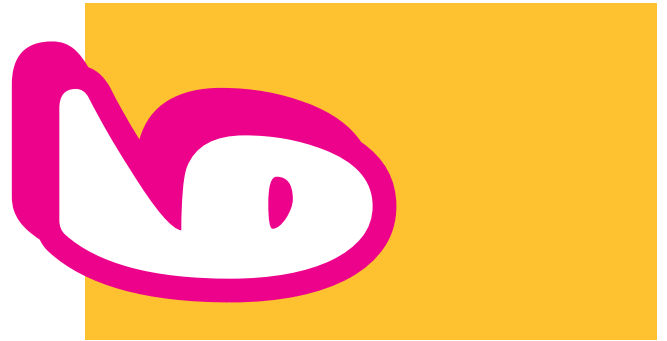


Zoomorphic Calligraphy was developed during early Islam as a way around the restrictions of image making. The words and letters are manipulated and structured into the shape of a human figure, a bird, an animal, or an object.





There were some movements in the 1930s to 'modernize' the Arabic script and adapt it to modern means of type—production, these ideas were neither widely popular nor implemented.





KHA'A



H AA



JEEM



THA'A



TA'A



BA'A



ALIF



SOD



SHEEN



SEEN



ZAIN



RA'A



THAL



DAL



QAF



FA'A



GHAIN



AIN



THAA'A



TA'A



DHOD



YA'A



WAW



HA'A



NOON



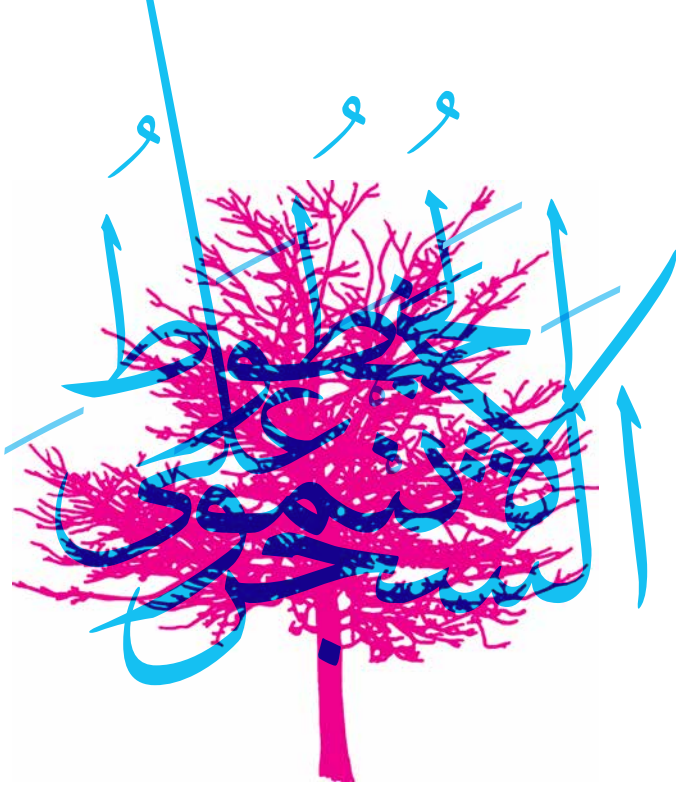
MEEM



LAM



KAF



Type doesn't grow on trees.

Affluent Arab nations have historically been active in global culture. But still, their script has remained poorly represented in global digital media.

التغلب

البي السبع

قف

وقو كلب

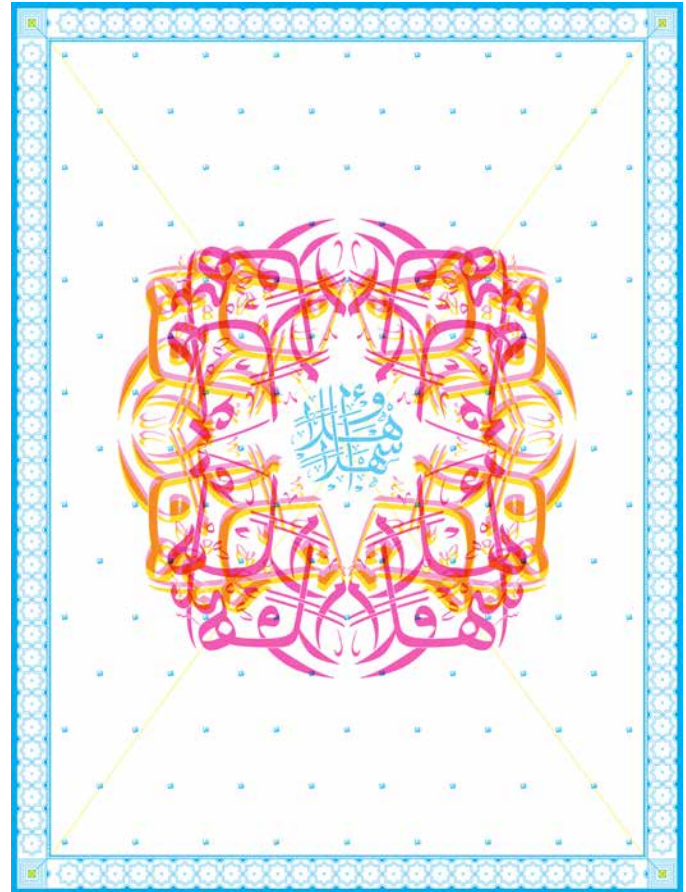
كسول



JUMP LAZY

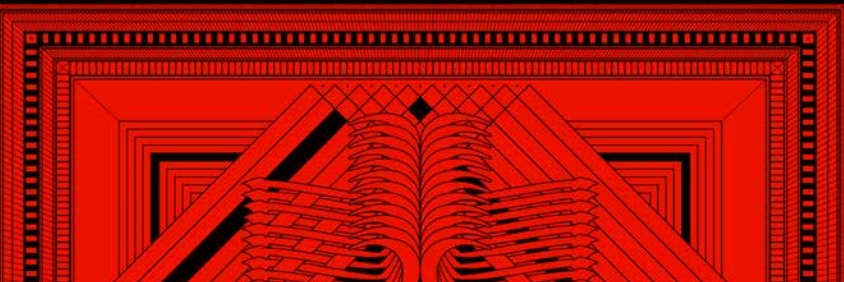
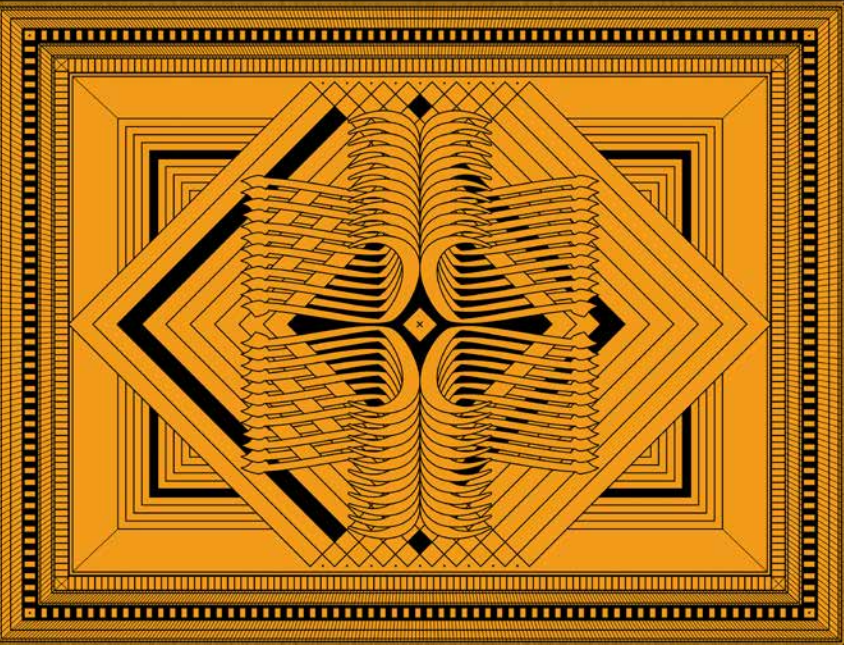
“Design directly expresses the cultural, social, political and economic complexion of a society, and it thus provides a snapshot of that society’s condition.”

—Nigel Whiteley, contemporary art professor and author of “Design for Society”



Yusef Alahmad & Josh Higgins
Ahlan wa Sahlan, 2017





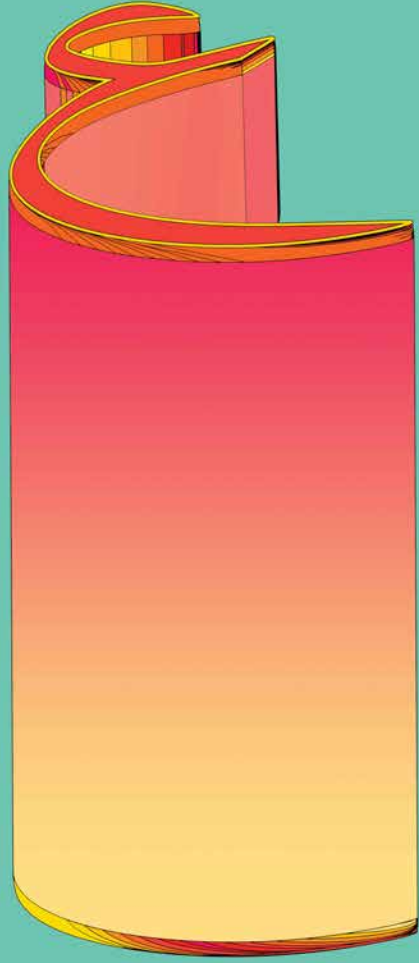
“It was disorienting to adjust to a culture in which picture making appeared to be subordinate to the written word, concluding that whilst in the West, fine art consists of painting, sculpture, and all its siblings, in the Arab world, the hierarchy of the arts has always given precedence to language: written, spoken, and sung.”

—John Martin, CO-founder of Art Dubai





Saudis know a lot about Western culture, but conversely the world knows very little about Saudis; besides stereotypes and what is in the media.

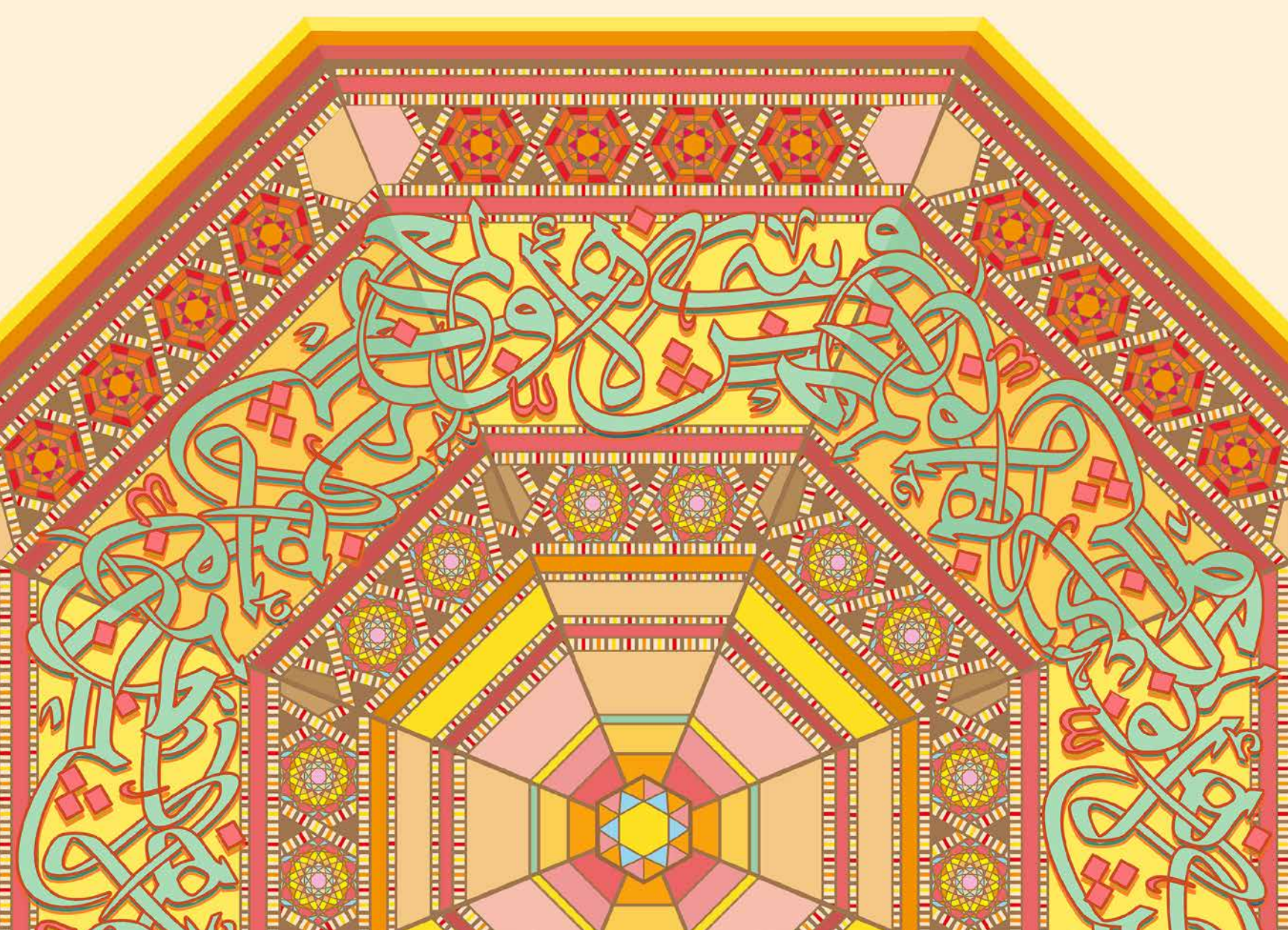


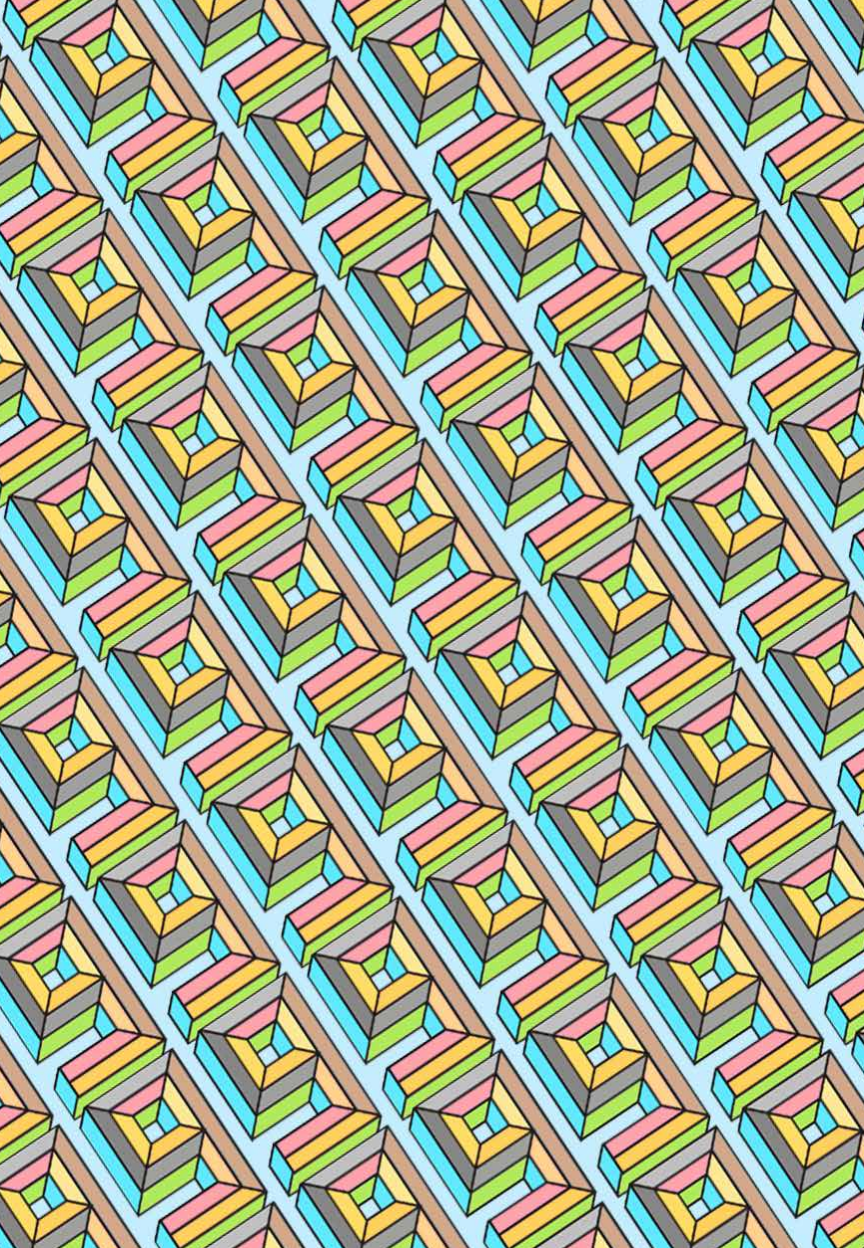


“I predict art & design will
follow soccer in Saudi Arabia.

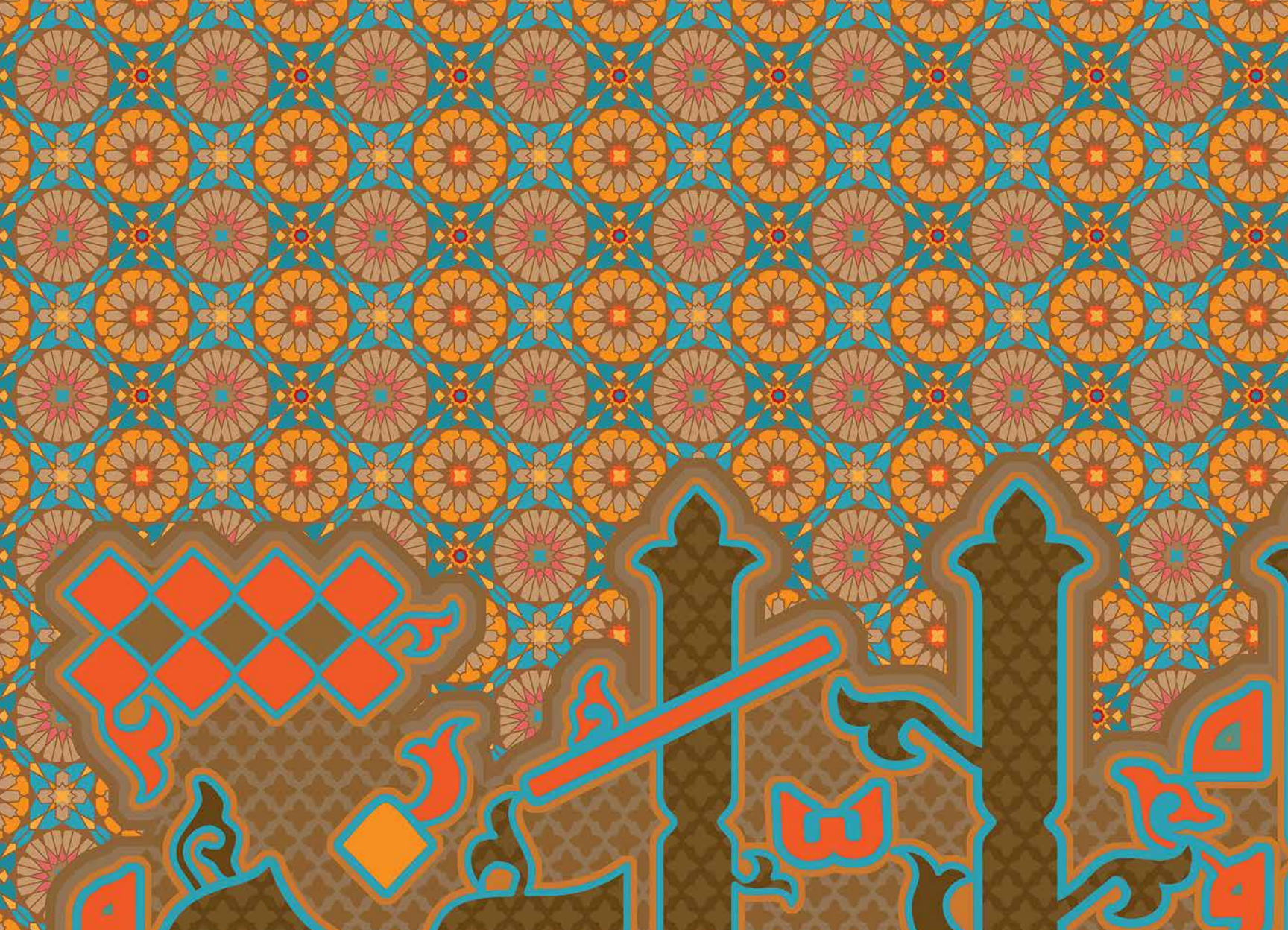
When there was no professional league in the Kingdom, no one was interested in playing soccer, but now that there's a serious, well resourced league, it receives good media coverage, more money and players are respectable, recognized heroes. Families, who previously saw soccer as a shameful career for their children, are now encouraging them to practice towards a professional career.”

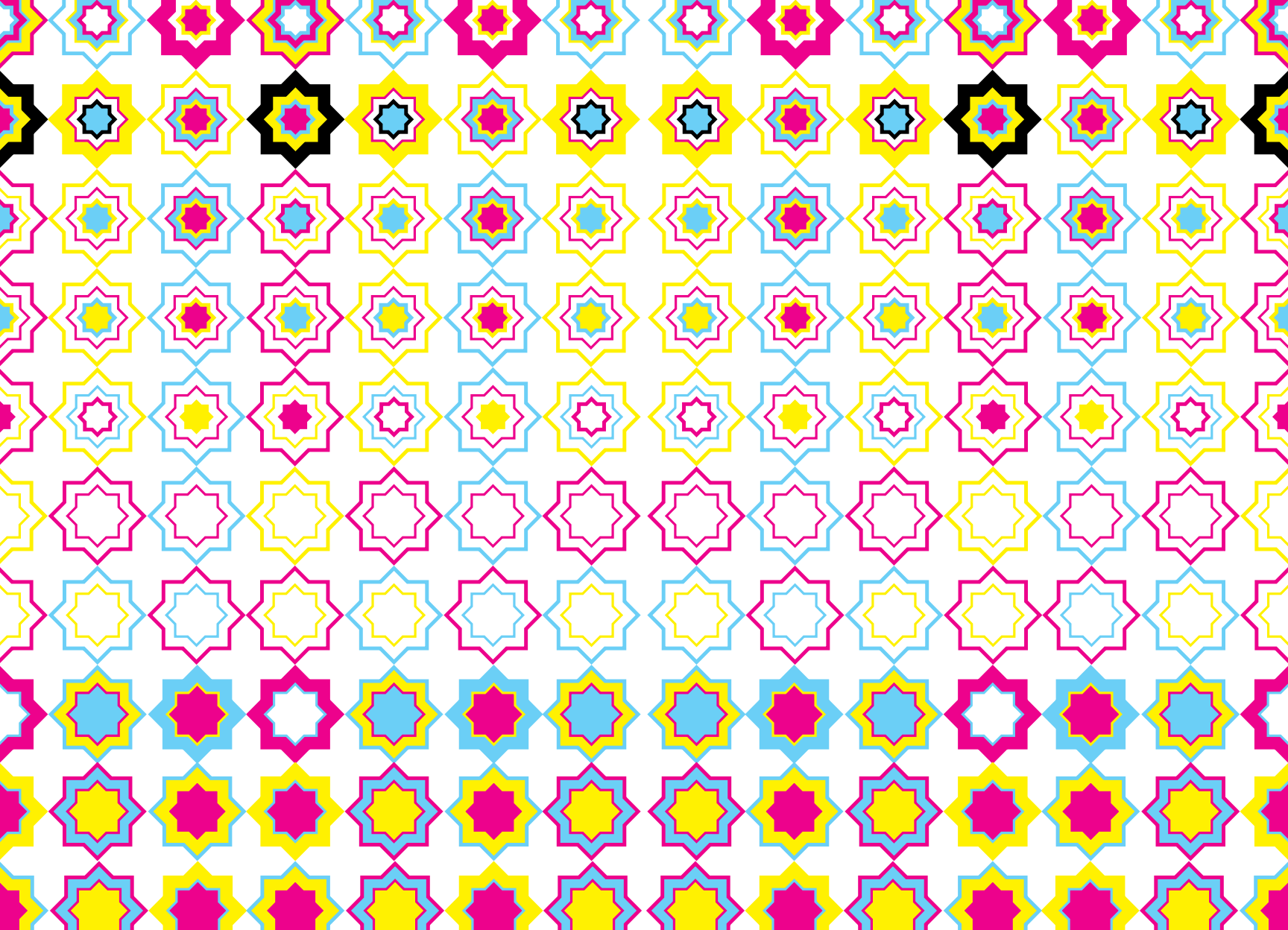
—Abdulnasser Gharem, Saudi artist





It's all about creating role models
and the change will follow.





Acknowledgements

—

The Misk Art Institute would like to thank:

Anabelle De Gersigny

Bader Al Asaker

Mohamed Ali Ghomriani

Stanislas Albert

Thunayan Althunayan

Aga Antosz

Rachel Bennett

Khaloud Almansour

Sven Knowles

Nojoud Alsudairi

Mohamed Elabbouri

Mahmoud Sami

Shaima Hamidaddin

Michelle and Paul at Toil & Tinker

Charles and Junko at Griffin Editions

—

Yusef Alahmad would like to thank:

Ahmed Mater & The Misk Art Institute

Stephen Stapleton

Abdallah Khashoggi (animation displays)

Anthony Tino

