

#### Locations:

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G),  
Steintorplatz 1, 20099 Hamburg

Universität Hamburg (UHH), Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC),  
Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

#### Organizers:

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès (Khatt Foundation)

Jasmin Holtkötter (MK&G)

Shervin Farridnejad (CSMC/UHH)

Wibke Schrape (MK&G)

# SHIFTING SCRIPTS

24.04.  
—26.04.  
20  
25

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
Contemporary Arabic & Persian  
Graphic Design

MK&G  
Museum für Kunst  
& Gewerbe Hamburg

UHH  
Universität Hamburg  
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

Kingdom of the Netherlands

Khatt Foundation  
Center for Arabic Typography

CENTRE FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
MANUSCRIPT  
CULTURES

DFG Deutsche  
Forschungsgemeinschaft

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE  
UNDERSTANDING  
WRITTEN ARTEFACTS

Poster Design:  
Amir Mahdi Moslehi

## Thursday, April 24

- **Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Steintorplatz 1**

16:00 REGISTRATION

16:30 OPENING REMARKS

Tulga Beyerle (MK&G)  
Wibke Schrape (MK&G)  
Shervin Farridnejad (CSMC/UHH)

17:00 INTRODUCTION

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès  
(Khatt Foundation)  
*Inner Structures – Outer Rhythms:  
Contemporary Arab and Persian  
Graphic Design*

17:45 VISIT TO THE EXHIBITION

18:30 GET TOGETHER

## Friday, April 25

- **Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Warburgstraße 26**

9:00 REGISTRATION

9:30 **PANEL 1: Beyond Calligraphy**

Chair: Shervin Farridnejad (CSMC/UHH)

Bahia Shehab (The American University  
in Cairo)  
*The Language of Connection: Activating  
Communities through Arabic Letters*

Amir Mahdi Moslehi (CSMC/UHH)  
*From Calligraphy to Type Design:  
Purpose and Process*

Lara Assouad (Landor, Dubai)  
*The Case for a Typographic Kufi*

Alba Fedeli (CSMC/UHH)  
*Historical Scripts Between Cultural  
Legacy and Academic Research: A Kufic  
Type Design Project*

11:30 COFFEE BREAK

12:00 **PANEL 2: Rhythm in Music, Poetry,  
and Script**

Chair: Yasemin Gökpinar  
(Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Utrecht  
University)  
*The Musical Enchantment of Hafez's  
Poetry*

Kourosh Beigpour (KB Studio)  
*Curves and Cadence: The Intersection of  
Iranian Calligraphy, Music, and Poetry*

Amir Karimian (Graphic Designer &  
Motion Graphic Artist)  
*The Synergistic Relationship  
Between Rhythm in Poetry and  
Music and Its Representation in  
Graphic Design (in Persian)*

13:30 LUNCH BREAK

- **Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Steintorplatz 1**

14:30–18:30 **WORKSHOP: Type & Politics**  
Golnar Kat Rahmani (Berlin International  
University)

## Saturday, April 26

- **Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Steintorplatz 1**

9:00–13:00 **WORKSHOP: Arabic Lettering  
Workshop (Episode 21): East–West**

Kristyan Sarkis (TPTQ Arabic) &  
Amir Mahdi Moslehi (CSMC/UHH)

- **Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Warburgstraße 26**

13:00 LUNCH BREAK

14:00 **PANEL 3: Typography as Cultural  
Engagement**

Chair: Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès (Khatt  
Foundation)

Iman Raad (Independent Graphic Designer  
and Visual Artist)  
*Persian Design and Typography Movement*

Kristyan Sarkis (TPTQ Arabic)  
*Type, Voice, Identity*

Walid Bouchouchi (Akakir Studio)  
*TypoTales*

Borna Izadpanah (University of Reading)  
*Typography Across Cultures: Tracing  
Iranian Newspaper Typefaces to Their  
Multicultural Origins*

16:00 COFFEE BREAK

16:30 **PANEL 4: Graphic Design in the  
Cultural Sphere**

Chair: Jasmin Holtkötter (MK&G)

Jana Traboulsi (American University of  
Beirut)  
*A Critical and Creative Design History*

Aria Kasaei (Studio Kargah)  
*Graphic Design for Art and Culture in Iran*

Golnar Kat Rahmani (Berlin International  
University)  
*Multilingual Design in Practice*

Hatem Iman (Studio Safar)  
*The Multilingual Moment*

18:30 CLOSING REMARKS



For more information,  
updates and registration

# SHIFTING SCRIPTS

## Contemporary Arabic and Persian Graphic Design

Thursday, 24 April 2025 – Saturday, 26 April 2025

### Locations

- Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Steintorplatz, 20099 Hamburg
- CSMC, Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

### Organizers

- Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès (Khatt Foundation)
- Wibke Schrape (MK&G)
- Shervin Farridnejad (CSMC/UHH)
- Jasmin Holtkötter (MK&G)

### Summary

The conference “Shifting Scripts: Contemporary Arabic and Persian Graphic Design” examines Arabic and Persian typographic design from SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) and its diasporas within the broader academic framework of script studies. The event is organized by the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G) in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg and the Khatt Foundation. It is held in conjunction with the exhibition “Inner Structures – Outer Rhythms: Contemporary Arab and Persian Graphic Design”, currently on view at MK&G.

Focusing on typography as a script-based practice, this conference explores the intersections of Arabic and Persian graphic design with cultural, political, and artistic narratives. It provides a unique platform for engaging with Arabic and Persian script from both academic and design perspectives. Additionally, the conference explores how contemporary graphic design can be analyzed and contextualized within the broader fields.

## INTRODUCTION

### Inner Structures – Outer Rhythms: Contemporary Arab and Persian Graphic Design

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès (Khatt Foundation)

This talk provides an introduction and contextual framework for the “Inner Structures – Outer Rhythms: Contemporary Arab and Persian Graphic Design” at the MK&G, which highlights the dynamic developments in Arabic and Persian graphic design today. Bringing together works by 33 designers and studios from South-West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) as well as the diaspora, the exhibition presents a wide range of graphic design practices, from posters and books, to moving images and large-scale murals.

The talk explores the underlying themes of the exhibition, focusing on the Arabic script, that was expanded to accommodate other non-Arabic languages such as Persian, Urdu, and others. The script constitutes an *inner structure* that connects this religiously, linguistically, ethnically, and socially diverse SWANA region. It unpacks how typography serves as a tool for communication, activism, and identity, and how this *inner structure* synchronizes with the *outer rhythms*, that is, the various visual cultures of this region.

By tracing the intersections of tradition and contemporary design, this talk examines how graphic designers today engage with their heritage while pushing the boundaries of visual design and typographic innovation. It will offer insights into the exhibition’s key works, highlighting how typography can challenge dominant narratives, preserve cultural memory, and foster new forms of global dialogue.

**Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès** is the Founding Director of the Khatt Foundation and Khatt Books publishers, in Amsterdam. She works as an independent design curator, researcher, writer, designer, and publisher. She holds degrees in Graphic Design and Design History from Leiden University (PhD, 2017), Yale University (MFA, 1990), and Rhode Island School of Design (BFA, 1987). Dr. Smitshuijzen AbiFarès specializes in typographic design research and Arab design history. She is the author of several seminal books on the topic. She is editor in chief of Khatt Books’ Arabic Design Library series and has authored two books in this series to date.

## PANEL 1: Beyond Calligraphy

Moving beyond calligraphic forms, this session explores innovative approaches in contemporary graphic design that reimagine and expand upon calligraphy. Presentations and discussions will focus on the engagement with historic scripts, showcasing how designers blend cultural legacies with contemporary aesthetics to create novel visual languages.

Chair: **Shervin Farridnejad** (CSMC/UHH) is Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Hamburg and a member of the Cluster of Excellence Understanding Written Artefacts and the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), where he also leads the MA program Manuscript Cultures. His research focuses on Iranian philology, Zoroastrianism, manuscript cultures, and the intellectual history of Jewish and Zoroastrian Islamicate communities in Iran and India. He is editor of *Sasanian Studies*, *Ancient Iran Series*, and *DABIR* (Brill). Recent publications include works on Zoroastrianism, the Shah Tahmasp Shahnama, and Sasanian epistolography.

### The Language of Connection: Activating Communities through Arabic Letters

Bahia Shehab (The American University in Cairo)

My street interventions explore the transformative power of Arabic letters as a medium for cultural engagement and connection. By reimagining Arabic script in public spaces, I aim to challenge mainstream media bias, preserve cultural heritage, and inspire collective action. Through the integration of traditional forms with contemporary narratives, Arabic letters become tools for empowerment and dialogue.

Projects like “A Thousand Times No” reclaim the power of Arabic calligraphy to resist oppression, highlighting the rich history of Arab visual traditions in relation to modern discourses. It is an ongoing project that started in 2011 on the streets of Cairo during the Egyptian uprising and has been sprayed in many streets across cities around the world since then.

The “Mahmoud Darwish Mural Series,” painted across 18 cities worldwide, highlights the ongoing struggle for our shared humanity and for freedom in Palestine and across the Arab world. By adding poetry to different urban fabrics, I hope to encourage conversations about identity, belonging, and resistance. Public spaces also become spaces for dialogue, enabling individuals to connect through shared cultural experiences. Each mural serves as a bridge across generations, cultures, and communities, addressing collective struggles and aspirations. Arabic letters in my various projects invite reflection on the intersections of tradition, modernity, and advocacy, in the hope that art can activate communities and inspire difficult yet necessary conversations.

**Bahia Shehab** is a professor of design and the founder of the Graphic Design Program at The American University in Cairo where she developed a full design curriculum focused on the visual culture of the Arab world. Her artwork has been on display in exhibitions, galleries, and streets in over 35 cities around the world and has received several international recognitions and awards, including a TED Senior fellowship, the BBC 100 Women list, a Bellagio Residency, and a Prince Claus Award. She is the first Arab woman to receive the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture. Shehab holds a PhD from Leiden

University in The Netherlands and is the founding director of Type Lab@AUC. Her publications include *You Can Crush the Flowers: A Visual Memoir of the Egyptian Revolution*, *At The Corner of a Dream*, *A Thousand Times No: The Visual History of Lam-Alif*, and the award winning co-authored book *A History of Arab Graphic Design*.

## From Calligraphy to Type Design: Purpose and Process

Amir Mahdi Moslehi (CSMC/UHH)

Arabic calligraphy is a treasure of letterforms and styles that have evolved over centuries since the emergence of Islam. From the eastern to the western Islamic lands, calligraphic styles reflect the cultural agency of their host societies, which have adopted, adapted, or redefined them based on regional needs. For instance, Naskh—a highly legible and widely accepted style—varies in form across Pakistan, Iran, and the Arab world, reflecting each region’s cultural identity.

Calligraphic styles are also tied to historical periods and functional purposes. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, Nasta’līq was used for street signs in Cairo, a medium that demands legibility from a distance. Yet, in Iran, it was historically considered unsuitable for such functional purposes due to its perceived illegibility. This highlights how legibility is subjective and shaped by cultural beliefs that shift over time and geography.

As type designers, we use creative tools that interact meaningfully with users. Beyond learning the grammar of calligraphic styles—a fundamental starting point—we must explore their regional, historical, and contextual nuances. These layers of meaning enrich Arabic type design, ensuring cultural relevance and user engagement.

How, then, can we as designers harness calligraphic specimens and manuscripts as sources of inspiration? How can we translate their beauty into digital typefaces that retain their cultural essence while embracing contemporary expression?

In this talk, I will present methods I have applied in my type design projects to navigate this transition—from manuscript-based calligraphic language to digital typography. By analyzing calligraphic specimens and exploring both conservative and experimental interpretations, I will demonstrate how preserving the historical, regional, and contextual character of Arabic-Persian calligraphy can inspire typefaces that resonate with modern audiences. This approach not only preserves the cultural legacy of Arabic-Persian calligraphy but also expands the boundaries of contemporary type design.

**Amir Mahdi Moslehi** is an Iranian type designer, calligrapher, and researcher based in Hamburg, Germany. He holds a Post-Master’s degree in Typographic Research from the Atelier National de Recherche Typographique (Nancy, France). He is currently pursuing a master's in Manuscript Culture at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) in Hamburg. Recently, he became a Ph.D. candidate at the CSMC, University of Hamburg. His Arabic-script typefaces blend research with calligraphy and are distributed by Maryamsoft (Iran) and Rosetta Type Foundry (Czech Republic). Amir’s work has received multiple awards, including the Certificate of Typographic Excellence from the New York Type Directors Club and Granshan Type Design Prizes.

# The Case for a Typographic Kufi

Lara Assouad (Landor, Dubai)

It is often assumed that the only correct calligraphic style to be adapted into typographic forms in Arabic is Naskh—a script whose name literally means “to copy” or “to transcribe.” By contrast, Kufi is generally perceived as too rigid and geometric to lend itself to such interpretation.

However, Kufi is a very broad term that encompasses, under this “generic” title a rich variety of styles that are very distinct from each other with perhaps a few shared aesthetic traits: straight verticals, a flat horizontal baseline, and a more structured and restrained language of forms in comparison to the more cursive scripts.

From the early stone inscriptions in Wadi Assila in Saudi Arabia, to manuscript Hijazi, Kufi Mushafi, Eastern Kufi, Maghrebi, and Fatimid Kufi (also known as Geometric Kufi), the world of Kufi scripts is a treasure trove of inspiration and raw material. These scripts, with well-designed systems of forms, can readily be translated into a rich typographic language—one that shares comparable stylistic elements with Latin typography, such as stroke angles and modulation, tight descenders, and serif-like treatments.

**Lara Assouad** is a graphic and type designer with a particular interest in the relationship between Arabic and Latin scripts and multicultural identities. She is currently the Executive Creative Director for Landor for the MENA region. She has degrees in Graphic Design and Type Design Research from the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Atelier National de Recherche Typographique (ANRT) in Nancy, France. Her work has received recognition from the Type Directors Club in New York, the AIGA, and the Bologna Children's Book Fair. She was one of the selected artists for the Jameel Prize 4 in 2016.

## Historical Scripts Between Cultural Legacy and Academic Research: A Kufic Type Design Project

Alba Fedeli (CSMC/UHH)

The Arabic script styles used during the early centuries of Islam for copying the Qur'an are commonly designated as Kufic. However, some scholars refer to these scripts based on the political authorities associated with them, specifically the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Although commissioners and scribes later favored more rounded scripts, Kufic script continued to be used, particularly for surah titles—an enduring practice still found in contemporary copies of the Qur'an. The style permeated European craftsmanship through paintings of inscriptions in pseudo-Kufic characters resembling the historical script as applied by artists from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

Despite its legacy, the historical Kufic scripts make early Qur'anic manuscripts hard to read. This is primarily due to an essential difference in the writing system in terms of diacritics that are now known and used. The vowels, in particular, followed a different system that employed dots and colors, a practice that was later discontinued. The technology of the writing system of these early Kufic manuscripts has not been supported in the change of writing support and implementation into the digital environment.

Kufic script has been the subject of extensive academic research in palaeography. However, its representation in typefaces has always been mediated through the available technology and fonts that do not accurately reflect the characters as found in manuscripts. In most cases, colored dots are either replaced by modern symbols for vowels or ignored. This compromise perpetuates not only a misrepresentation of scholarly interpretation, but also of the cultural identity of the community.

As part of a the DFG project “InterSaME,” which focused on the writing system of early Qur’anic manuscripts, a typeface was commissioned and a collaboration initiated with Nadine Chahine, the award-winning Lebanese type designer. This collaboration between the type designer and a scholar in manuscript studies culminated in the creation of a unique typeface, QUMAR. This initiative was followed by the conceptualization of a future project, which aims to amalgamate the cultural legacy of the historical Kufic script and writing system with contemporary aesthetics.

**Alba Fedeli** is a research associate at the Cluster of Excellence “Understanding Written Artefacts” at Universität Hamburg, where she serves as Principal Investigator (PI) of the research project “What is in a Scribe’s Mind and Inkwell.” She studied under Sergio Noja in Italy and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Birmingham, UK, where she unraveled the history of the Qur’anic manuscripts in the Mingana Collection. Her work includes the edition of the Mingana-Lewis Qur’an palimpsest. She was co-PI of the DFG-AHRC project “InterSaME” (2020–2023) in collaboration with Geoffrey Khan at the University of Cambridge and has worked on several Qur’anic manuscript projects, including the digitisation of the Sanaa Palimpsest at Dar al-Makhtutat in 2007.



## PANEL 2: Rhythm in Music, Poetry, and Script

This panel explores the synergetic relationship between graphic design, music and poetry. Discussions will consider how visual rhythms and patterns in graphic design are inspired by and reflect the auditory rhythms found in music and the metric structures of poetry, particularly within Arab and Persian traditions.

Chair: **Yasemin Gökpinar** (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) is an Arabist, Islamic Studies scholar, and musicologist. She earned her PhD in 2016 in Bochum with a dissertation on *Courtly Music Practice in the Arab-Islamic Culture from the Abbasid to the Mamluk Period*. Her research focuses on Arabic music theory and culture, Greek-Arabic translations, and manuscript studies. From 2018 to 2023, she worked at Ruhr University Bochum in the ERC project *Ancient Music Beyond Hellenization* at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Currently, she is a visiting professor at the University of Hamburg, researching al-Fārābī's music theory and its adaptation of ancient traditions.

### The Musical Enchantment of Hafez's Poetry

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Utrecht University)

Among the poets whose lyrical poems have been set to music, Hafez of Shiraz (1325–1390) holds a foremost place. Despite composing a relatively modest body of work, some 500 ghazals, Hafez is probably the most celebrated poet of the Persianate world. As Shahab Ahmed indicates, his *Dīvān* ("collected poetry") is "...the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely-invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history ... in the period between the fifteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries" across a vast geographic area, stretching from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal. Hafez's poetry is celebrated for its enchanting musicality, wisdom, ambiguity, and sensuality, being deeply intertwined with everyday life. The captivating beauty of his verses has not only inspired painters to make the most mesmerizing miniature paintings. His poems have also adorned everyday objects, including carpets, tiles, ceramics, and royal lampstands, weaving his poetry into the very fabric of Persian culture. What sets Hafez apart is the rhythm and musicality of his poetry, which lends itself effortlessly to a wide range of musical interpretations. His poems have been sung across diverse hierarchies of society, from religious (Shiite) singers and mystic performers to contemporary pop and rap artists, invoked for purposes as varied as spiritual devotion, festive celebrations, rhetorical embellishments, entertainment, and even wartime mobilization or revolutionary announcement. In this lecture, I will examine the musical qualities of Hafez's poetry, analyzing its rhythmic and melodic merits. Additionally, I will refer to a few instances of Hafez's musical reception, highlighting how his poetry has been adapted, performed, and celebrated in various cultural settings.

**Asghar Seyed-Gohrab** is Professor of Iranian and Persian Studies at Utrecht University in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, and a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). He has published extensively on Persian literature, mysticism and religion. His publications range from Persian poetry to Sufism, the role of religious and mystical motifs and metaphors in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), and how peaceful religious injunctions are used to justify violence. *Martyrdom, Mysticism and Dissent: The Poetry of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War*

(1980–1988), Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021. Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, (2015, ed.). His most recent book is *Of Piety and Heresy: Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazzālī's Persian Treatises on Antinomians*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024. He is the General Editor of *Sufism Studies: The Mystical Philosophy of Islam* at De Gruyter (Sufism Studies) and *Iranian Studies Series* at Leiden University Press (Publications - Leiden University Press). At the moment, he is the Principal Investigator (PI) of an ERC-Advanced Grant entitled *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam* ([www.beyondsharia.nl](http://www.beyondsharia.nl)), examining Islamic non-conformist movements.

## Curves and Cadence: The Intersection of Iranian Calligraphy, Music, and Poetry

Kourosh Beigpour (KB Studio)

This talk delves into the intricate connections between Iranian graphic design, particularly in album covers, and the profound influence of Persian music and poetry on these designs. Iranian design has long been shaped by the cultural heritage of poetry, with the rhythm and structure of Persian verses acting as a guiding force within the visual arts. Through this exploration, we will see how the cadence of poetry not only influences the flow of text but also impacts the overall composition of design, creating a harmonious balance between word and image. Similarly, music serves as a powerful influence on the visual expression of Iranian sound. Designers have often sought to translate the melodies, rhythms, and emotional depth of Persian music into compelling visuals, resulting in a fusion of auditory and visual artistry that is unique to Iranian culture.

One of the key focuses of this talk is the relationship between Nasta'liq calligraphy, Persian music, and architecture. Nasta'liq, a celebrated calligraphic style in Iranian culture, is known for its fluid, flowing forms that echo the rhythms of Persian music. This talk will demonstrate how Nasta'liq's curves and balance are reflective of musical patterns, highlighting a deep connection between the visual and auditory. Furthermore, it will explore the link between Nasta'liq and Iranian architecture, where symmetry, repetition, and rhythm create a sense of tranquility and order. Iranian architecture, much like Nasta'liq, emphasizes balance, rhythm, and harmony, mirroring the cultural values of refinement and introspection.

Ultimately, this talk uncovers the deeply rooted ties between graphic design, music, and poetry in Iranian art, demonstrating how each form of expression informs and enriches the others in a continuous cultural dialogue.

**Kourosh Beigpour**, an award-winning artist and designer based in Los Angeles, is known for blending contemporary and traditional design. Born in Kermanshah, Iran, and of Kurdish descent, his work is deeply influenced by mysticism and cultural heritage. He holds a BFA from Tehran University of Art, an MFA from Limkokwing University, and a postgraduate degree in Type Design from Type West. Kourosh's work is part of the permanent collections at LACMA and the San Diego Museum of Art. He founded K-B Studio in 2011, collaborating with clients like Google, The Broad, and Getty, with a focus on typographic innovation.

# The Synergistic Relationship Between Rhythm in Poetry and Music and Its Representation in Graphic Design (in Persian)

Amir Karimian (Graphic Designer & Motion Graphic Artist)

## موضوع پروژه: رابطه هم‌افزایی ریتم در شعر و موسیقی و بازنمایی آن در گرافیک

نخستین تجربه های شنیداری من برآمده از ریتم های نهفته در لالایی های مادرم بود که بعدها آن را در زبان مادریم به شکلی دیگر تجربه کردم. افزون بر این، دیدن نقوش قالی‌ها در کودکی، نخستین شگفتی بصری من بود که در همان ریتم رویت‌پذیر می‌شد. الگوهای تکرارشونده، هماهنگی رنگ‌ها و نظم هندسی نقش‌مایه‌ها، همگی مفهومی از ریتم را در قالب تصویر به من می‌آموختند. این تجربه ها، پلی بود میان دنیای درونی‌ام و جهان بیرون؛ که بعدها در تجربیات هنری‌ام از آن بهره بردم. این پروژه با تحلیل نمونه‌های گرافیک و موشن‌گرافیک، جلوه‌هایی از هم‌افزایی ریتم در شعر و موسیقی را به شکلی تجربی به نمایش می‌گذارد که ارتباطی با ریتم نهفته در نقوش سنتی دست‌بافته‌های کردستان برقرار می‌کند. این نقوش یکی از غنی‌ترین جلوه‌های هنر سنتی و فرهنگ بصری مردمان آن منطقه‌اند که ریشه در تاریخ و شیوه زندگی روزمره دارد. در برخی از آثار، با تمرکز بر فرم حروف نوشتاری و عناصر بصری، بازنمایی تجربی ریتم موسیقی را به تصویر می‌کشند. در سوی دیگری از این پروژه، شعر معاصر فارسی به‌عنوان مبنای بازنمایی بصری ریتمیک انتخاب شد. در این راستا، اشعار احمد شاملو، از برجسته‌ترین شاعران معاصر ایران، مورد مطالعه قرار گرفت. در این آثار تلاش گردید تا مخاطب هم‌افزایی ریتم را تجربه نماید. ریتم در شعر که از تکرار، وزن و هارمونی واژگان سرچشمه می‌گیرد، می‌تواند از طریق تایپوگرافی به شکلی بصری بازآفرینی شود. بازنمایی حروف از طریق خلق فرم‌های بصری و تلفیق آن‌ها با عناصر گرافیکی، می‌تواند ریتم شعر را به‌صورت ملموس درک‌پذیر کرده و یک تجربه بصری پویا ایجاد نماید. در پایان، این هم‌افزایی میان شعر، موسیقی و گرافیک، هنرمندان را قادر می‌سازد تا با الهام از ریتم، آثاری خلق کنند که تجربه‌ای منحصر به فرد و چندحسی برای مخاطبان فراهم کند. این تلفیق، نه تنها مرزهای هنری را گسترش می‌دهد، بلکه بستری برای خلاقیت و نوآوری به وجود می‌آورد.

**امیر کریمیان** (متولد ۱۳۶۳ کردستان- ایران) طراح گرافیک و موشن گرافیست مستقل است که در ایران زندگی و کار می‌کند. وی دارای مدرک کارشناسی ارشد گرافیک بوده و در حال حاضر مدرس گرافیک در دانشگاه‌ها و مدارس است. بیان بصری او بر اساس تایپوگرافی است و از متحرک‌سازی فرم‌ها و تصاویر در پوسترهای موشن گرافیک بهره می‌گیرد. او در سال ۲۰۲۳ مقام دوم و مدال نقره پانزدهمین دوسالانه بین‌المللی پوستر بولیوی و در سال ۲۰۲۴ دیپلم افتخار و جایزه تشویقی شانزدهمین دوسالانه بین‌المللی زنبور طلایی روسیه را دریافت نموده است. او همچنین در بسیاری از دوسالانه‌ها و نمایشگاه‌های بین‌المللی پوستر حضور داشته است.

My earliest auditory experiences stemmed from the hidden rhythms in my mother's lullabies, which I later experienced differently in my native language. Additionally, as a child, seeing the patterns in handwoven fabrics was my first visual wonder, where rhythm became perceptible. The repeating patterns, the harmony of colors, and the geometric order of motifs all taught me the concept of rhythm through images. These experiences formed a bridge between my inner world and the outer world, which later influenced my artistic explorations.

This presentation focuses on such experiences and aims to showcase the synergy of rhythm in poetry and music through exemplary analyses of graphic design and motion graphics samples, establishing a connection to the inherent rhythm in the motifs of traditional Kurdish handwoven fabrics. These motifs are selected from the rich repertoire of traditional art and visual culture of the people in the region, deeply rooted in history and daily life. Some of the resulting artworks, which will be discussed, focus on the form of letters and visual elements to create an experimental representation of musical rhythm. In another group of my works, contemporary Persian poetry was chosen as the basis for rhythmic visual representation. Utilizing the poems of one of the distinguished contemporary Iranian poets, Ahmad Shamlou, in my works, I aim to allow the audience to experience the synergy of rhythm. My goal is to visually demonstrate how the rhythm in Persian poetry—emerging from repetition, meter, and the harmony of words—can be recreated through typography. The representation of letters can make the rhythm of poetry tangible and generate a dynamic visual experience by creating visual forms and integrating them with graphic elements.

Ultimately, this synergy between poetry, music, and graphic design enables artists to create works inspired by rhythm, offering audiences a unique, multi-sensory experience. This fusion not only expands artistic boundaries but also fosters a platform for creativity and innovation.

**Amir Karimian** is a graphic designer and motion graphic artist who lives and works in Iran. He holds a master's degree in Graphic Design and currently teaches Graphic Design at universities and schools. His main artistic focus is typography, and he incorporates motion graphics and illustration into poster design. In 2023, he won second place and a medal at the Hollywood International Poster Design Awards. In 2024, he received an honorary diploma and a special jury award at the Golden Turtle International Design Awards. Additionally, he has participated in numerous international poster exhibitions and competitions.

## WORKSHOPS

### Workshop 1: Type & Politics

Golnar Kat Rahmani (Berlin International University)

In this workshop, Golnar Kat Rahmani will present her project Type & Politics. She will address the background, causes, and impacts of negative associations with Persian-Arabic scripts in our daily lives in Europe. The hands-on workshop intends to dismantle these prejudices and negative perceptions.

In the practical part, participants will learn about the principles of Perso-Arabic scripts, create their own graphics, and print them on fabric. The aim is to spark curiosity, appreciation for aesthetics, and enjoyment of Perso-Arabic scripts. This workshop seeks not only to inspire creativity but also to foster intercultural friendships and contribute to overcoming prejudices against these scripts in society.

### Workshop 2: Arabic Lettering Workshop (Episode 21) East–West

Kristyan Sarkis (TPTQ Arabic) & Amir Mahdi Moslehi (CSMC/UHH)

Arabic Lettering Workshops (ALW) is a series of workshops dedicated to Arabic lettering, with each episode exploring a unique theme. In this episode, Amir will delve into the writing traditions of the Eastern part of the Arabic-scripted world, while Kristyan will focus on its western counterpart.

Through two introductory talks, participants will gain an immersive understanding of the heritage, forms, and mechanics of the Arabic script. They will then have the opportunity to create a lettering piece based on one of the quintessential writing styles from either side—Ruqaa or Nastaliq. A series of guided exercises will allow them to explore the defining characteristics of the Arabic script and its letterforms and manipulate them to create specific expressions.

\* ALW is a project by Khajag Apelian, Wael Morcos, and Kristyan Sarkis. This episode will be hosted in collaboration with Amir Mahdi Moslehi.

## PANEL 3: Typography as Cultural Engagement

This panel examines the role of typography in driving cultural change and community movements. Designers create and/or use typefaces to communicate powerful messages, inspire collective action, uphold cultural heritage, and challenge cultural norms. The discussion will focus on how typography serves as a tool for advocacy and for shaping public conversations. By combining local and digital graphic traditions, designers strengthen their messages and enhance their impact.

Chair: **Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès** (Khatt Foundation)

### Persian Design and Typography Movement

Iman Raad (Independent Graphic Designer and Visual Artist)

The Persian Design and Typography Movement emerged during the late 1990s and 2000s, a transformative period in Iran marked by social and political change. This era brought renewed hope to society, revitalizing a nation after an eight-year war and two decades of domestic repression. This movement, led by the fourth and fifth generations of Iranian graphic designers, sought to cultivate a distinct sense of "Persian aesthetics." This new wave formed around the centrality of the Perso-Arabic script, fusing the European and American typographic tendencies to the aesthetics of pre-print calligraphic styles. It emphasizes the distinctive features of the Perso-Arabic script while rejecting the Romanized aesthetics imposed by movable-type-based systems on joined-up writing systems like Arabic and Persian.

The movement profoundly altered the landscape of graphic design in Iran, encouraging new styles, themes, and experimental approaches to calligraphy and fostering a vibrant community of designers producing posters and books, forming groups, and organizing exhibitions. Despite their stylistic differences, these designers shared connections and a joint tendency: bridging the daringly innovative design aesthetics of their time with the ancient spirit of calligraphy. The movement gained recognition for its lyrical harmony of letterforms, mystical imagery, and artistic revival of forgotten design principles. As societal optimism waned in the 2010s, the movement declined and gradually dissolved into the commercial design scene, yet its influence endures within Iran and many other nations in Southwest Asia and North Africa.

Despite the importance of understanding the societal, political, and technological changes that catalyzed this new wave, the Persian Design and Typography Movement has remained understudied, often reduced to mere biographical overviews of its designers. In contrast, this paper aims to offer a more comprehensive perspective on the era, highlighting its socio-political context and the distinctive qualities of its design works.

**Iman Raad** is a New York-based visual artist, graphic designer, and educator. He holds an MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University and currently teaches at The Cooper Union School of Art. His work has been featured in several books, including *The Phaidon Archive of Graphic Design* (Graphic: 500 Designs That Matter), and his art practice has been acknowledged in various media outlets, including The New York Times, Artspace, and Art21. Raad was a contributor to the contemporary Persian Design and Typography Movement before leaving Tehran in response to the advancing socio-political repression and moving to the United States in 2013.

## Type, Voice, Identity

Kristyan Sarkis (TPTQ Arabic)

Writing has long been held in the highest esteem in regions that adopted the Arabic script. Since its inception, it has played a ubiquitous role in artistic and cultural production from China and India to Spain and Morocco. This led to a plethora of highly developed writing styles ranging from the most ornamental and monumental variations to those developed for clear communication and legibility. As native speakers and designers focusing on the Arabic script, we are fortunate to inherit an immense and rich script heritage.

For a long time, however, Arabic type design lagged behind due to various challenges, including technological and cultural constraints. Fortunately, over the last two decades, this status quo started to change significantly.

Within this context, this talk explores my approach to Arabic type design over the past fifteen years, emphasizing the importance of engaging with the script's historical, technical, and cultural dimensions. It focuses on the relevance of studying and analyzing different aspects and characteristics of the Arabic writing heritage while embracing experimentation to re-interpret and adapt these forms in order to provide innovative solutions to contemporary needs and challenges. The talk also underscores the importance of type design in providing new tools for self-expression and asserting cultural identity.

**Kristyan Sarkis** is a type designer and lettering artist, born in Beirut and based in Amsterdam. He has co-founded TPTQ Arabic, a type foundry specializing in high-quality Arabic fonts, Arabic Type Design – Beirut, the first international educational program dedicated to the subject, and Arabic Lettering Workshops (ALW), a traveling series with 20 episodes to date. He currently teaches at the Type & Media master program (KABK), The Hague. He has worked with clients such as Apple, MoMA, Ford, and the Louvre. His work received numerous awards, including the New York Type Directors Club's Certificate of Typographic Excellence, ATypI's Letter.2, and the European Design Award.

## TypoTales

Walid Bouchouchi (Akakir Studio)

In the field of graphic and typographic design, we face complex challenges related to the harmonization, representation, and arrangement of different writing systems. These challenges become even more pressing in contexts of globalization, where cultural and linguistic flows intersect; in creolization, where multiple identities coexist and blend; or in cultural activism, where visual identity becomes a tool for advocacy and the valorization of marginalized cultures. Typography, far more than just a visual or aesthetic support, asserts itself as a true language. It becomes a tool for translation, dialogue, and even resistance.

Creating or adapting a typeface means designing a space where stories can be fully expressed, identities reaffirmed, and ancient traditions engage in dialogue with contemporary visions. Through its forms, rhythms, and structures, typography becomes a powerful medium for storytelling and expression. In my approach, every project is an opportunity to weave connections between diverse linguistic and cultural worlds. Working with various writing systems—whether Arabic, Latin, Tifinagh, or other—allows me to

explore the intersections between these realms and transcend the limits imposed by linguistic barriers. Typography enables me to convey universal messages while avoiding stereotypes and clichés. Through this presentation, I aim to shed light on how typography can enrich the visual and narrative content of my creations. It is an invitation to discover the fundamental role of typography in building unique visual identities that are meaningful and profoundly rooted in values.

**Walid Bouchouchi**, born in Algiers and based in Marseille, founded Akakir Studio in Paris in 2017 after studying Graphic Design at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts d'Alger and completing a master's degree in Aesthetics, Practice, and Contemporary Art History at Université Vincennes – Saint-Denis. He worked at Parisian studios such as AAAAAtelier and Tactile Studio, where he was introduced to accessibility design for museums. Since 2017, he has been developing Akakir Studio, collaborating with museums, publishing houses, festivals, and cultural institutions to create signage, exhibition catalogues, campaigns, and multilingual typefaces. He also leads workshops and gives lectures on graphic design.

## Typography Across Cultures: Tracing Iranian Newspaper Typefaces to Their Multicultural Origins

Borna Izadpanah (University of Reading)

The 1979 Iranian Revolution is vividly remembered through the bold headlines of Tehran's leading newspapers, *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan*. Set in a heavy, oversized typeface, the historic declaration "Shah raft" ("The Shah is gone") not only announced the end of centuries of imperial rule but also became a visual emblem of a nation in upheaval. At the heart of this typographic composition lies the work of Hossein Abdollahzadeh Haqiqi (1937–2003), whose influential typefaces—beginning with the release of *Kayhan 84 Black* in 1962 (later popularized as *Zar Bold*)—redefined Iranian newspaper typography from the 1960s onward.

This paper uncovers the unexpected and cross-cultural lineage behind Haqiqi's seminal designs, revealing a narrative that extends back to the nineteenth-century Russian press. A pivotal figure in this story is Otto Herbeck (1837–1910s), a Bavarian-born printer and typefounder in Moscow, whose typographic contributions to the Crimean Tatar newspaper *Tercüman* in Bakhchysarai significantly shaped the traditions Haqiqi later adapted. By examining this transnational exchange—spanning Moscow to Tehran via Bakhchysarai—this study highlights how typography functions as both a bridge and a catalyst: not only facilitating aesthetic innovation but also serving as a tool for cultural advocacy.

**Borna Izadpanah** is a Lecturer in Typography at the University of Reading, where he also earned his PhD and MA in Typeface Design. His doctoral research explored the history of the early typographic representation of the Persian language. Borna has received numerous prestigious awards for his research and typeface design, including the Grand Prize and the First Prize for Arabic Text Typeface in the Granshan Type Design Competition, three Awards for Excellence in Type Design from the Type Directors Club, the TDC Best of Discipline Award, and the Symposia Iranica Prize for the best paper in Art History.



## PANEL 4: Graphic Design in the Cultural Sphere

This session will focus on graphic design in the cultural and art scene in SWANA. Contemporary designers engage with and contribute to the broader cultural landscape, thereby also promoting it internationally through their works. Topics include the mutual relation between cultural narratives and graphic design in the promotion of cultural events and institutions, as well as the complexity of bilingual graphic design often encountered in posters.

Chair: **Jasmin Holtkötter** (MK&G) is an art historian specializing in the SWANA region. She earned her MA in Islamic Art History and Archaeology from Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg and studied abroad at the University of Tehran. Her master's thesis on *the 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* (l. 9493) manuscript explores the transition of manuscript culture in the Punjab region under colonial rule. In her research she examines the transformation of twentieth-century craft in the SWANA region, analyzing its intersection with design in the wake of industrialization and imperial expansion. Currently, she is a Junior Curator for the SWANA collection at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg.

### A Critical and Creative Design History

Jana Traboulsi (American University of Beirut)

This paper engages with the tradition of Arabic book design focusing on medieval manuscripts and early printed books. It proposes practice-based research as a methodology for historical investigation and explores visual rhetoric as a means to blur the lines between scholarly and artistic work.

It does so first by examining the visual properties of books—from format to layout and letterforms—often considered marginal to the textual content but which are revealing of the history of written and oral cultures. Also, it advocates for the production of research outputs that present historical material in contemporary formats through both content and form. By investigating my own practice, I discuss my current research on the anatomy of letters and books and use my book *Kitab el Hawamish (The Book of Margins, 2017)* as a case study. It is an artist book that lays out a series of tools and techniques, formal and functional elements, reading devices, and book craft terms across time and place. It was produced in a run of 1000 copies as a contemporary commission for the inaugural exhibition of the Cultural Center Dar el Nimr in Beirut. Finally, this exploration proposes to rewrite the Arab manuscript into the design legacy: its study has often been marginalized in the history and practice of contemporary graphic design, particularly with the emergence of print, and it has often been confined to the discipline of Islamic Art History. This paper therefore presents an example of narrating the history of art and design both critically and creatively, in ways relevant to regional contexts, engaging in a contemporary fashion with both the tradition and the lively practice of Arabic book design. Ultimately, this research offers insights into identity-related questions regarding the visual language we employ in our artistic practices today.

**Jana Traboulsi** is an artist, designer, and researcher. She is an assistant professor in Graphic Design at the American University of Beirut. She is the co-founder and creative director of the pan-Arab quarterly *Bidayat* and the artistic director of Snoubat Bayrou publishing house. In 2014, she co-founded Sigil, an art collective based in Beirut and New York. Her artist book *The Book of Margins* (2017), shortlisted for the Jameel Prize 2021, has been exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and in Chile and Argentina.

## Graphic Design for Art & Culture in Iran

Aria Kasaei (Studio Kargah)

Countries in the SWANA region have very different political, economic, social, and cultural realities. But in all these countries, freedom of expression, including in culture and art, faces significant restrictions.

In Iran, there is a wide gap between government-approved art and the freedom of independent artists. This makes the work of independent organizations, such as galleries, cultural foundations, publishers, musicians, filmmakers, and theater groups incredibly important.

In Iran, public spaces and resources are controlled by the government. As a result, private spaces take on a bigger role. Private galleries host museum-level exhibitions. Musicians hold small underground concerts. Filmmakers turn their homes into screening venues. What is the role of graphic design in this landscape? Graphic design is a powerful and inescapable medium. It reaches audiences through every communication channel. It is the most modern and consistent visual language of our time. Graphic design is not just a business that provides services; it is also a practice that can reflect the vision of its creator. It can develop ideas, design them, and bring them to life. It can work with other creators to build projects and create a community where the designer wants to live. I believe in this situation, graphic design for art and culture is a form of resistance. Thus, the graphic designer becomes a cultural activist.

**Aria Kasaei** co-founded Studio Kargah in 2001 as a graphic design studio in Tehran and has recently expanded with a satellite studio in Paris. Studio Kargah is an independent studio that collaborates with artists, researchers, museums, publications, and cultural institutions. In 2014, Studio Kargah Archival Projects was launched: an initiative to collect, classify, and curate documents on Iran's visual arts and culture. In 2021, a retrospective of Studio Kargah's works was featured at the International Graphic Design Biennial in Chaumont, France. Aria has collaborated with international institutions, including the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs Paris, Palais de Tokyo, Fondazione MAXXI, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and numerous other cultural organizations across the globe.

## Multilingual Design in Practice

Golnar Kat Rahmani (Berlin International University)

Designing for an international audience requires a deep and nuanced understanding of cultural diversity. How can designers navigate cultural norms and expectations while addressing an increasingly interconnected and multifaceted world? This challenge is

especially pressing in societies shaped by migration, globalization, and evolving identities, where individuals bring diverse lived experiences and perspectives.

As visual communication plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world, designers must consider not only national and ethnic cultures but also economic backgrounds, religious affiliations, generational shifts, gender identities, and shared subcultures – all of which influence how people engage with design.

Typography, in particular, acts as a powerful bridge between languages, histories, and modes of expression. Designing across linguistic and cultural boundaries requires sensitivity to script differences, typographic traditions, and the social or political contexts in which typefaces are used. In multilingual societies, typography is not just a technical tool but a medium of representation and inclusivity. How can designers challenge Eurocentric norms while fostering a design language that embraces cultural plurality? This talk explores intercultural design knowledge in practice within German academic institutions, focusing on multilingual typography as a means of fostering inclusivity and cross-cultural dialogue. Growing up and working in Iran, as well as in various international contexts, Golnar Kat-Rahmani will discuss the complexities of working with both Latin and non-Latin scripts, highlighting their potential to challenge dominant design narratives. Through student projects from workshops at Burg Giebichenstein, Halle, she will showcase how typography can serve as a vehicle for cultural expression, activism, and meaningful global engagement in design.

**Golnar Kat Rahmani** is a Berlin-based creative director and artist. Born in Iran, she studied visual communication at Tehran University and the Academy of Arts Berlin-Weißensee. She runs Studio Kat Rahmani, specializing in multilingual typography and type design, working with Deutsche Welle, BBC, Daimler, and Lucas Fonts. Her initiative "Type & Politics" challenges ideological constraints in Persian/Arabic typography through workshops at UDK, KHB, and Burg Halle. She has spoken at Typo Berlin, Type Club Berlin, Type Thursday, and Typographics New York.

## The Multilingual Moment

Hatem Iman (Studio Safar)

As the global political mood edges towards the right, we are witnessing exclusionary policies fueled by fear-mongering creep into our daily life, tainting even our cultural institutions. At a time of infinite connectivity, we are being instructed to shut our doors and shutter our windows, to “protect” ourselves from “the Other.” What we are shielding ourselves from is in fact an exceptional opportunity, the very essence of our cultural evolution.

We still nostalgically cling to the idea of traveling to learn the ways of the world. In our minds, we still celebrate polyglots. Yet, we are reluctant to engage with a foreign neighbor, let alone learn a new vocabulary. Navigating the world through more than one language offers the possibility of looking at it from a different angle, of being in someone else’s shoes. This can be the first step toward recognizing the other’s humanity. As designers working with the visual manifestation of language through letters, we are privileged to hold the keys to communication and as such can be active agents of change.

In this talk I will discuss how bilingual design can be more than a response to a practical need and rather an invitation to dialogue through projects like Journal Safar, Past Disquiet, Lyon Biennial of Art, Raddar Magazine, Photography Triennial Hamburg, and Samandal comics.

**Hatem Imam** is an artist and a graphic designer living and working in Beirut, Lebanon. He holds a BFA in graphic design from the American University of Beirut (AUB), and an MA in Fine Arts from the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury. He co-founded the design agency Studio Safar, and the design and visual culture magazine *Journal Safar*. He is also one of the co-founders of the Samandal comics collective, and the artistic director of Annihaya record label. He has taught design and printmaking at AUB since 2007. His art practice centers around landscape and employs painting, printmaking, and sound to negotiate a relationship with place.