

An Exhibition of  
*Afghan calligraphy and  
miniature painting*

from Herat, Afghanistan



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Ilac Centre Library, Dublin

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*Calligraphy & Painting*

## Introduction

**T**hank god that during my second re-settlement I am now living in a cultivated country such as Ireland. In an effort to encourage cultural exchange I am introducing some examples of Afghan culture into Irish society.

It is evident to everyone that the last two decades of war in Afghanistan have severely damaged the country. Afghan educated people such as scientists, artists government employees have immigrated to Europe, America, Canada, Australia and most have moved to Iran and Pakistan. These exiled artists tried to learn from their host country and have exchanged and shared their culture.

The art of calligraphy and painting developed during the Timorid period in Khurasan especially in Herat, Afghanistan. Kamaluddin Behzad and Baisanqoor were the most well-known artists at that time and we can observe their work in the Chester Beatty Library in Ireland and other museums throughout the world. There are hundreds of artists in Herat who followed their style of working and trained others.

This exhibition includes a number of different calligraphic styles such as Arabic, Kufic, Persian, Pashtu, Naskh, Taliq, Shakisteh (broken) Rihan etc and a number of miniature paintings which are painted by some exile artists who are living in Australia, Netherlands and Iran.

Most pieces of printed calligraphy are from a book entitled "*Gajinh-I Khutoot*" which means treasure of calligraphy which was written by Mohammad Ali Attar Heawi and published by the Ministry of Art in Afghanistan in Kabul, 1976.

As I am working on a publication about Herati Calligraphers and painters I have received some examples of miniature painting from well-known exiled artists who are living in Australia and the Netherlands. I welcome the opportunity to present the work of these artists at this exhibition to the people of Ireland.

**Nasruddin Saljuqi**

## Calligraphy

**T**he art of calligraphy as we know it today actually finds its origins in cave paintings. Back in the days when communication was a series of grunts, the written word was a mere pictorial representation of significant events in a caveman's life. As humans developed, the art of drawing pictures became quite highly developed and reached great heights under the direction of the Egyptians. About 3500 BC, the Egyptians created the highly stylized hieroglyphics for which they are so well known. These symbols were incised inside tombs or painted with brushes across papyrus paper.

A few thousand years later, around 1000 BC, the Phoenicians went a step further and developed what is believed to be one of the first alphabets and writing systems. Luckily the Phoenicians were sea faring types and they readily passed along their new talents to every seaport through which they passed.

They most likely influenced the Greeks who later developed their own form of writing which by 850 BC the Romans had adapted to suit the Latin language.

It just so happens that Latin was the lingua franca of the churches of Europe in the Middle Ages and the monks (and a smattering of nobility) constituted the only literate members of society.

Since nothing could be more glorious than the word of God, the monks began to carefully scribe ancient texts into decorative books used by high-ranking church members and royalty. Paper was expensive during the Middle Ages, so scribing monks developed a writing style that was narrower allowing more words to fit on a single line. This style came to be known as Gothic and lasted as a popular scribing technique throughout much of the Middle Ages.

By the mid 15th century, however, Johannes Gutenberg had invented the printing press based upon the Gothic lettering of the monks. This new technique allowed for faster printing of Bibles and threatened the métier of the monks. Although the use of the printing press spread worldwide, handwriting skills were still in high demand. The bulky printing press was too coarse for everyday letters, formal correspondence and invitations. As the arts flourish during Europe's Renaissance, so too did the art of calligraphy. Italians during this time invented the italic script, which became popular throughout most of Europe.

But calligraphers were threatened once again with the advent of engraved copperplates in the 17th century which permitted the printing of finer lines more attuned to italic script. One hundred years later, artistic penmanship was in a steep decline.

To further complicate matters for artistic scribes, by the 19th century the steel pen and fountain pen replaced the flat-edged pen. The rounded tip of these new pens made the special curves of calligraphy more difficult to achieve.

The art itself might have seen its extinction if it weren't for the British poet and artist William Morris. In the mid-19th century William Morris spearheaded a calligraphic revival, reintroducing the flat edged pen and elevating the act of writing to the art form of its past.

It might appear that the art of calligraphy couldn't possibly withstand the competition from the 20th century's most important invention – the computer. With a click of the mouse, a list of various scripts are generated electronically and lasered onto bleached paper in an instant – the art of script preserved in an electronic pulse. But calligraphy is flourishing more than ever with calligraphic societies throughout the United States and Europe. According to noted calligrapher, Julian Waters during a lecture at Washington's Sidwell Friends School in 1997, true calligraphy is the art of producing letters that capture the spirit of the text they represent. For many artists, much mental pre-planning is necessary to fully understand the text before deciding how to display it in its full beauty. This type of emotion can not always be generated from a computer, which for Julian Waters is 'simply another tool' to be manipulated by the artist.

Calligraphy is a popular art form whose boundaries are not restricted to Europe and the United States. Around 1500 BC the Chinese developed a complicated writing technique using more than 1500 characters. Today the Chinese consider calligraphy to be one of their most respected art forms. Master Chinese calligraphers may appear to be spontaneously stroking a brush over the paper, but many meditate extensively before designing. The Arabs are also noted for their history of calligraphy. Their cursive is written from right to left and formed by eighteen distinct shapes, the various combinations of which produce twenty-eight letters.

Arabic script appears highly distinctive from the lettering used throughout most of Europe, but Arabic calligraphy has had many of the same Greek and Phoenician influences. In Arabic calligraphy there are six major scripts (Farsi, Naskh, Kufi, Deewani, Req'aa, and Thuluth) representing various artistic styles.

For true calligraphers, the art of penmanship will always be alive as long as there is at least one artist willing to carry on the tradition. Despite super fast computers that can produce a myriad of different fonts, real calligraphy comes from deep within the artist who strives to evoke the true emotion of

the script through the words they draw. Calligraphy has survived throughout history despite printing presses and copperplate engravings, and dedicated followers of the art expect it to outlast the next big invention of the 21st century.

### Persian Calligraphy

With the penetration of Islam into Iran (Persia), the Arabic script, which in early Islamic period was Kufic script, was copied by Iranians. The Iranian writing from there became first Kufic and then Naskh. Thus, some Arabic words entered Farsi, the result of which was a language called Farsi-e Dari.

For more than a century during the time of Abbasids Califs (8 AD - 12 AD), the Kufic script did not have dots and accents, and this caused certain difficulties in reading the words. The accents and dots were invented by Abol-Asvad and Naser-Asen in the 2nd century of Islam. For the next two centuries, more than 20 different scripts were used. This period of time was the period of manuscript anarchy in Persia.

In the third century of Islam (9 AD), Ibn-e Moqleh, a famous writer of the *Koran* and an unmatched master of calligraphy, literature and poetry, invented new rules in calligraphy and limited the variations to six styles: Thulth, Naskh, Reyhan, Mohaggeg, Towgi and Rega. These six scripts advanced and flourished as other calligraphers practiced, and because of the solidity and perfection in their forms and styles, they have remained even until now. Most of *Korans* have been written with one of these scripts; Naskh and Thuluth were the most popular.

In addition to these six styles, another script was created by Iranians, and was used to write their books called *Taliq*. This type, although not used as much as other scripts, became a major element for the next, and outstanding, movement in Iranian calligraphy.

In the 14th century AD an Iranian calligraphy master, Ali Tabrizi, created a new form of writing which is called Nastaliq (also known as the "Bride of Scripts") by combining Taliq and Naskh and adding new rules to them. From then on, the six original scripts and the new Nastaliq have been used for writing books in Persia. Naskh and Thuluth have been used for writing *Korans* and Nastaliq is mostly used for poetic writing. Nastaliq has flourished and advanced in Iran during past 7 centuries, with 12 principles in mind. These principles are defined as ways of developing one's character: Boundary Rules, Balance Level, Relation, Combination, Surface, Rotation, Wild, Narrow, Ascent, Descent, Grace and Dignity. The last two principles (Grace and Dignity) are the highest level of excellence, and which can not be achieved without spiritual involvement in the art.

Nastaliq is an art in which laws of math and nature are obeyed, and has a mysterious power that enables the artist to create a beautiful piece of calligraphy by using several forms of the same letter, or by employing various forms of the words and using them in different compositions. With its mystifying beauty, Nastaliq has closely accompanied Persian poetry and has played an important role in communicating the poetic concepts to the readers. Looking at the works of calligraphers, both modern and traditional, reveals that Nastaliq has served both literature and mysticism. In fact, compared to other poets, the poems of Hafiz and Rumi have most often been used by artists. In Persian culture and art, poetry, traditional music, and calligraphy are intimately related and complimenting elements. When combined together, they create a specific mystical atmosphere from which a host of transcendent values irrigate the desert of human soul.

Within the last 50 years, Nastaliq artists have developed another mysterious form of this art, while observing the classical rules and regulations of calligraphy. This new form creates a modern composition of words known as Khat Naqsh which can be translated to calligraphic painting. The main characteristic of this modern evolution are briefly as follows:

- ✿ Using inherited Nastaliq principles in writing words.
- ✿ Putting the pieces of the poetry around each other to create a harmonious composition in an integrated and pleasant piece.
- ✿ Use of colors in Khat Naqsh splashes a sense of vitality as the calligraphy expresses the poem.

Once one's eyes are attracted to such a piece, then the message will be more noticeable. The importance of conveying the message is the ultimate goal and commitment of calligraphers. While creating a beautiful composition, artists try to make it possible for the viewer to recognize the original writing so that the beauty and message of this sacred art can be transferred in a coordinated manner.

## Naskh

Naskh was one of the earliest scripts to evolve. It gained popularity after being redesigned by the famous calligrapher Ibn Muqlah in the 10th century. Because of Ibn Muqlah's comprehensive system of proportion, Naskh style displays a very rhythmic line.

Naskh later was reformed by Ibn al-Bawaab and others into an elegant script worthy of the Qur'an — and more Qur'ans have been written in Naskh than in all the other scripts together. Since the script is relatively easy to read and write, Naskh appealed particularly to the general population.

Naskh is usually written with short horizontal stems — and with almost equal vertical depth

above and below the medial line. The curves are full and deep, the uprights straight and vertical, and the words generally well spaced. Currently, Naskh is considered the supreme script for almost all Muslims and Arabs around the world.

## Taliq

Ta'liq (hanging) script is believed to have been developed by the Persians from an early and little known Arabic script called Firamuz. Ta'liq, also called Farsi, is an unpretentious cursive script apparently in use since the early 9th century.

The calligrapher Abd al-Hayy, from the town of Astarabad, seems to have played an important role in the script's early development. He was encouraged by his patron, Shah Isma'il, to lay down the basic rules for the writing of Ta'liq. The script is currently in great favor with Arabs, and it is the native calligraphic style among the Persian, Indian, and Turkish Muslims.

The Persian calligrapher Mir Ali Sultan al-Tabrizi developed from Ta'liq a lighter and more elegant variety which came to be known as Nasta'liq. However, Persian and Turkish calligraphers continued to use Ta'liq as a monumental script for important occasions.

The word Nasta'liq is a compound word derived from Naskh and Ta'liq. Ta'liq and Nasta'liq scripts were used extensively for copying Persian anthologies, epics, miniatures, and other literary works — but not for the Holy Qur'an.

Deewani script is an Ottoman development parallel to Shikasteh (broken style). The script was largely developed by the accomplished calligrapher Ibrahim Munif in the late 15th century from the Turkish/Persian Ta'liq. Deewani reached its zenith in the 17th century, thanks to the famous calligrapher Shala Pasha.

Like Riq'a, Deewani became a favorite script for writing in the Ottoman chancellery. Deewani is excessively cursive and highly structured with its letters undotted and unconventionally joined together. It uses no vowel marks. Deewani also developed an ornamental variety called Deewani Jali which also was known as Humayuni (Imperial). The development of Deewani Jali is credited to Hafiz Uthman. The spaces between the letters are spangled with decorative devices which do not necessarily have any orthographic value. Deewani Jali is highly favored for ornamental purposes.

## *Kufi*

Kufi was the dominant priestly script in early times. It was created after the establishment of the two Muslim cities of Basrah and Kufah in the second decade of the Islamic era (8th century A.D.). The script has specific proportional measurements, along with pronounced angularity and squareness. It became known as al-Khat al-Kufi (Kufi script).



Kufi script had a profound effect on all Islamic calligraphy. In contrast to its low verticals, Kufi has horizontal lines that are extended. The script is considerably wider than it is high. This gives it a certain dynamic momentum. The script often is chosen for use on oblong surfaces. With its glorious Handasi (geometrical) construction, Kufi could be adapted to any space and material — from silk squares to the architectural monuments left by Timur at Samarqand.

Because Kufi script was not subjected to strict rules, calligraphers employing it had virtually a free hand in the conception and execution of its ornamental forms.

## *Muhaqqaq*

Muhaqqaq is less round than Thulth, and Riha is similar to a smaller version of Muhaqqaq.

Riqa, a miniature version of Taliq, was used mostly everyday writing.

In addition to these style we must mention two more important styles developed in Persian, taliq and Nastaliq. These forms did not appear until the 14th century, but by 15th and 16th centuries were the most important and widely used style in Persia.

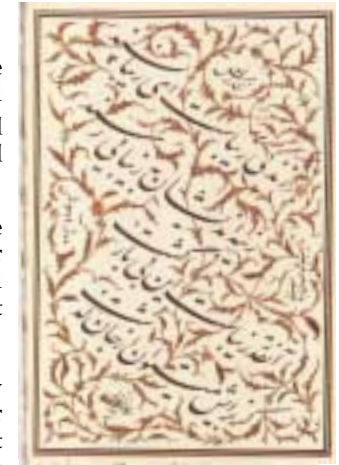
## *Taliq and Nastaliq*

When Persia began to recover from the Mongol devastation of the 13th century and Timur's invasion of the 14th century, Taliq (changing script) and its derivative Nastaliq emerged.

Taliq appears to have been formalized in the 13th century, though it existed from earlier scripts for several centuries prior to this and was claimed to be derived from the old script of pre-Islamic Sasanian Persia.

Taliq was written with a thick pen obliquely cut and looks quite different from earlier scripts. Basically it is the combination of short thin verticals with broad horizontals whose natural length is exaggerated whenever possible, especially at the end of words.

In the 14th century Mir Ali Tabrizi developed Nastaliq from Taliq style. His was a fluid style, which was used extensively in copying romantic and poetry. Mir Ali is said to have dreamt of a flight of geese whose wings and movement inspired the shapes of letters. Numerous copies of Persian literary manuscripts, among them the famous edition of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh were produced at Timurid court and it was here that Nastaliq was perfected.



## *Shikastah (Broken) Script*

In the 17th century the final calligraphic development in Persia was invented by Sayed Shafua in Herat. This was a personalized Nastaliq called shakistah or broken script.

Shakistah was really an elaborate romantic form of handwriting in which contrary to its implied meaning, the natural pauses between the letters and words are blurred by calligrapher joining up the normally empty passages of the verse or sentence. In the 18th and 19th century Shakistah became so formalized and involved as to be incomprehensible as text and assumed decorative function only.

## Thulth

Thuluth script was first formulated in the 7th century during the Umayyad caliphate, but it did not develop fully until the late 9th century. The name means 'a third' — perhaps because of the proportion of straight lines to curves, or perhaps because the script was a third the size of another popular contemporary script. Though rarely used for writing the Holy Qur'an, Thuluth has enjoyed enormous popularity as an ornamental script for calligraphic inscriptions, titles, headings, and colophons. It is still the most important of all the ornamental scripts.

Thuluth script is characterized by curved letters written with barbed heads. The letters are linked and sometimes intersecting, thus engendering a cursive flow of ample and often complex proportions. Thuluth is known for its elaborate graphics and remarkable plasticity.

This script, also called Ruq'ah (small sheet), evolved from Naskh and Thuluth. Although Riq'a has a close affinity with Thuluth, Riq'a developed in a different direction. Riq'a became simplified. The geometric forms of the letters are similar to those of Thuluth but are smaller with more curves. Riq'a is rounded and densely structured with short horizontal stems, and the letter alif is never written with barbed heads.

Riq'a was one of the favorite scripts of Ottoman calligraphers and underwent many improvements at the hand of Shaykh Hamdullah al-Amasi. Later, Riq'a was revised by other calligraphers and went on to become the most popular and widely used script. Today, Riq'a is the preferred script for handwriting throughout the Arab world.

## Painting

Painting is the most important art in Afghanistan. In all historical places we can observe ancient old painting. Heart the blue mosque is a good example toils painting. Afghan contemporary such as painter and miniaturist follow the style of painting from the Timurid period 14th century. There are many painter and miniaturist who established courses and institute faculty for Art



in Afghanistan and a number of students are learning in these centres, they follow the Behzad style and western style too. The professional artists have their own exhibitions which are displayed in origion country and abroad. One of the most famous artists who lived in the court of the Timurid Kingdom was Kemaluddin Behzad<sup>1</sup>. The Behzad artistic foundation can be found in some museums in foreign countries.

## Behzad

Behzad was born in 1450 A.D. 854 A.H. in Heart Afghanistan. His primary life is unknown to us, but according to ghazi Ahmad (the author of glisten –i-honer) he was trained by mirak , the librarian of sultan Hessian Bayqara , the famous king of Timuride dynasty (1369 – 1514 A.D.), and the patron of the artists. In a few time he has grown younger and became an expert: man in the art of miniature, drawing , painting, mixing of the coulars , making of good and beautiful sites, and other especial ties of these tiny arts, till he became the paragon of art of his time. Sub equently, Behzad enjoyed the affection and benevolence of Sultan Hosien Bayqara, and his very famous and scholar minister Amie Ali Shir Nawai.

In that time there was an academy of fine arts and painting in Heart, which was founded by Sultan Hosien , and his minister, and Behzad was appointed at the head of that institute. Since he was young and hard working man, he worked with fullenergy and soon became very popular among the other artists.

After some times, when Heart was invaded by Shah Ismaiel Safavi, in the year 1510 A.D. Behzad and the other artists of Heart such as Mirak Haji Qasim Ali and many other summoned to Tabriz.

<sup>1</sup> According to some historians, his father was Sharafuddin, he emigrated from Kapisa, to settle in Behzadi, now part of Heart city. But probably this claim would not be correct, because in other old references has not mentioned such fact.

## The exhibition features Calligraphy and Painting from Herat, Afghanistan

### Biographies of the Artists

#### **Mohammad Arshad Behzad Saljuki**

Mohammad Arshad Behzad Saljuki was born in 1937 in Herat. His family was cultured and he learned the Art of calligraphy from his father professor Fekri Saljuki, a noted calligrapher, painter, musician and historian.

Mohammad Arshad worked as a teacher, specialising in Art, English and Persian, for over thirty years. He finished his careers as cultural Secretary in the Afghan Embassy in Moscow.

Mohammad Arshad is regarded one of the greatest Afghan 20th century calligraphers and miniaturist painters. He worked in the Art centre of Ghulam Muhammad Maimanghi institute in Kabul and exhibited nationally and won many prizes of his work.

He produced calligraphic work and miniature painting for renewed lithographic editions of Holy Quran. He lives in Neatherland and his artistic foundation is exhibited in Germany and Holland.

#### **Abdul Karim Rahimi:**

Abdul Karim Rahimi s/o Abdul Rahim was born in Herat Afghanistan and worked as a teacher in Herat. Due to his deep interest, he worked under well-known artist professor Moushammad said Mashal, specifically in miniature Art.

In 1976 after passing special entrance exams, he registered in the Fine Arts Department of the faculty of letters and Humanities. After graduation in 1979 he was accepted as Assistant Instructor of Art in the fine Arts Department. From 1982 to 1983 he served as Department Head in the painting department of the Art Faculty until 1990.

Rahimi moved to Australia in 1998 and doing his post graduated in new South Wales university. His artistic foundations were exhibited in Afghanistan and Australia and won prizes.

#### **Khalil Aqa Azhar:**

Khalil Aqa s/o Haji Ahmad was born in 1964 in Herat Afghanistan and took his degree in Art faculty from Kabul university. Due to his deep interest in

arts, he worked under well-known artist of Herat professor Mohammad said Mashal specifically in miniature Art.

He forced to immigrate to Pakistan in ( ) and in his immigrant life he could train a number of new students and established Afghan Gallery in Pakistan

#### **Muhammad Ali Attar Herawi:**

Mohammad Ali Attar was born in Herat Afghanistan. His father Mohammad Esmail, was a grocer and (Attar) means grocer in Persian. Muhammad Ali Attar learned calligraphy from childhood through his father and another calligrapher, Mohammad Sadiq Niazi.

Mohammad Ali is the most renewed calligrapher in Afghanistan. His work may be seen in museums and collection in Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan. His work survives on many historical monuments in the region including the Herat great mosque and Mashhad holy shrine in Iran.

#### **Abdul Aziz Mardan:**

Abdul Aziz Mardan was born in Herat Afghanistan in 1924. He was an accomplished artist renewed for his miniaturist, painting, calligraphy and fine art designs. He was interested in poetry and music and worked as a Persian and painting teacher in Herat for a time but later opened a studio in Herat. He was opposing the communist government of Afghanistan in the late 1970. Following a large demonstration in March 1978 which was crushed by government forces with thousands killed, Abdul Aziz was arrested for participating in the protest. He was sentenced to jail but was executed along with forty five other prisoners at Thakhti Safar where was a sightseeing in Herat.

**List of Tableaux an summary of exhibition**

Calligraphy features:

1. Styles of kufic script from first to 6th century of Islam.
2. The Thulth script.
3. Thulth Raihani.
4. The Nastaliq Persian style of writing used in Lithography.
5. Rayhan script
6. Kufic style of witting in fourth century
7. Thulth
8. Kufic adventure of second century of Islam.
9. Mohaqiq Script.
10. Kufic in Mohaqeq script.
11. Moadqali script.
12. Kufic style of writing in Shahrookhi period.
13. Kufic style of witting during Ghoorid kingdom in 6th century.
14. Kufic Mikhi(naily) and Moadqali verses.
15. Kufic locked.
16. Kufic script during Saljuki Kingdom.
17. Thulth in Khorasan.
18. Nastaliq style of writing in lithography and Shakesteh (broken).
19. Decorated script.
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21. Reqa script.
22. Arabic script.
23. Reqa and Rayhan script.
24. Kufic script.
25. The Pashto style of writing a formal Afghan language.
26. Method of writhing Mashaf (Mirror).
27. Arabic writing Naskh style of writing used in typography.
28. Kufic script during first century.
29. Arabic, Kufic and Nastaliq calligraphy by Abdul Aziz Mardan.
30. Arabic, Kufic and Persian calligraphy by Aminullah Pirzad



# Calligraphy & Painting



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