



An Examination of the Influence of Western Graphic Design on Ethical Ideals/Principles in Kuwait as a Conservative Society

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Abstract:

This study examines the extent -the extreme to which graphic designers could manipulate local and cultural traditions within their design works-to which graphic designers could influence the quality of commercial productions based on their individual or cultural ethical norms. The main purpose of graphic design is to represent ideas within creative design forms that influence the audience while providing opportunities to enrich aesthetic values. When graphic designers working in Kuwait might transcend the boundaries of local cultural traditions, their work might provoke critique of advertising in secular or conservative modern society. The study used a survey to report and describes the responses of various graphic designers and art students in Kuwait on the importance of ethical considerations in graphic design. The participants' responses were interpreted and evaluated based on certain criteria for the development of graphic design in conjunction with the digital age and globalization. A further connection explored the influence of foreign graphic design in conservative Islamic society. The conclusion from this study is that graphic design is more than merely an instrument for marketing; rather it is a vehicle that provides opportunities to educate people about their culture as well as other cultures in a way that enriches their everyday life.

Introduction:

One role of art is to engage people in positive activities that can enrich their everyday lives. Artistic expression can impart positive

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values and inspiration to a community or society (Eisner, 1997). In particular, the art of graphic design can be an important artistic vehicle for influencing the way people in a society think and act. By definition, “Graphic Design is the applied art of arranging image and text to communicate a message, or facilitate understanding. It may be applied in any media, such as print, digital media, motion pictures, animation, product design, packaging, and information, signs” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2004). However, certain kinds of graphic design can either strengthen or weaken the coherent structure of a cultural community if the designers have enough authority or the ability to influence the ethical values of their community. The latter seems to be a vital concern in relation to graphic design in Kuwait. As an artist and graphic designer, I believe that creative artistic expressions refer to successful verbal and visual implementations of content and technique within certain art or design forms that implicitly or explicitly convey the context within which these forms are placed.

Art itself may not seem important to most people, but they are influenced by it daily in the form of graphic design. It is often argued that art is an insignificant area with modest possibilities for promoting intellectual insights that enrich human experience. As Eisner (1997), an art educator and researcher, points out, researchers in the fields of art and education have reported that art is not perceived as an important component of education. In general then, since art may be considered only a minor part of life, most people pay little conscious attention to its contribution, especially to education. They often overlook the important role of visual forms for communicating ideas, even though creative art can serve people in many ways (Eisner, 1997).

More often, however, art expressed through the new digital media may cause problems if it fails to represent a society because of differences in the artists’ personalities, cultural beliefs, and backgrounds, as well as in their social and political interactions. A good example is the incongruity or incompatibility between graphic designers’ use of certain kinds of commercial digital art and the beliefs and values of the community in which they work, such as in a predominantly Islamic community like Kuwait. I refer; in particular,

to commercial advertising as a form of graphic design that promotes local or global products or services using different foreign characters and styles. Western graphic designs, for instance when used in an Islamic conservative society, such as Kuwait do not necessarily accommodate its local traditions, rather they might contradict with adherent's values of Islamic and Arab cultures. Figures (1 a, b) are ads copied from a magazine (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*) issued by Emirates Media, United Arab Emirates and published in Kuwait, 2004. The two ads raise issues concerning women life in modern society, such as working women and modernity. Although both ads address important and vital topics reflecting how Arab Muslim females battle for their rights and obligations, I believe that the two ads fail to present the appropriate form of Muslim women. In fact the way the designer has treated the content does not reflect the identity of Muslim women. In contrast, the design shows manifestations of Western women and values, that oppose Islamic traditions in terms of Muslim women's dress and appearance in public(Zahrat Al Khaleej, 2004, p.12, p.69).

Since productions in graphic design are derived from the designers' own educational background and artistic experience which is based on their clients' knowledge, the impact of their work on their society or the society in which they work can be enormous. In short, their commercial designs can help define what is good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, moral or immoral. This raises important questions for graphic designers working in Kuwait: What values can new trends in commercial advertising and graphic design help shaping a modern yet religiously traditional society? What kind of ethics might digital graphic designers promote in their design to influence adults and children in such a society?

Graphic design has been developed and is being used in educational, political, and business settings in ways that sometimes conflict with the social values of traditional communities. To what extent can people living in a modern Islamic society, such as Kuwait accept certain kinds of contemporary art and design? For example, are advertisements of modern clothing fashions for women acceptable,

particularly if they diminish or devalue their cultural heritage and native ethnicity? (Figures 1.a & b)

Researchers, educators and graphic designers living in conservative society need to consider the adoption of foreign lifestyles and products; advertising that violates respect for women, especially in a traditional Islamic society; and several perspectives and attitudes of different conservative groups regarding the relationship between the visual arts and religion. The main concern, however, is the threat that new technology and commercial advertising in particular, might have on religious traditions and values in a conservative society, which raises moral and ethical issues for graphic designers.

Since the country of Kuwait was the context for this study, it would be appropriate initially to determine if it is a secular or conservative community, taking into account that Islam is the religion of most of the people living in this community. However, the word 'conservative' - according to Webster's Dictionary (1991), one who adheres to traditional methods or views-(p.279). This word cannot be applied to some Kuwaitis because they are influenced by the idea of modern society as they behave and believe. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate to designate Kuwait as a secular community because the majority of people living in Kuwait are Muslims, including conservative individuals and religious groups, such as *Islamic Union*. This group rejects modernization and changes in the outward appearance of the Islamic community and Islamic law. However, because the culture of Kuwait is predominantly Islamic, and thus bound by Islamic laws and principles, I refer to the culture as a 'conservative community,' even though a minor segment of the population may not have a tie to Islam.

Emerging of Ethical Norms in Graphic Design:

Ethical norms have become an important consideration in the application of the art of graphic design and may be even more important in the context of a conservative community like Kuwait. What then is the relationship between ethics and graphic design?

Among the major ethical concerns of graphic designers is the

protection of their original work by copyright. Copyright as set out by the Berne Convention is part of a graphic designer's code of ethics as set forth by variation organizations. The term 'code of ethics' also refers here to a list of guidelines and standards for ethical business practices for graphic designers developed by the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA), which is modeled on an international code of ethics for graphic designers (*Code of Ethics*, 1988). The AGDA guide provides details and instructions for the legal use of various products and services as a means to protect the rights of the professional graphic designer. However, while this organization provides international standards and obligations of professional design ethics in general, it fails to address another major ethical concern, namely, respect for cultural and native beliefs and values by graphic designers. Although there are shared ethical values among different cultures, some people, including creators and users of graphics, do not abide by any particular ethical norms.

It is crucial that graphic designers give ethical consideration to the reactions of their audience, including children, to their design works, especially in a conservative community like Kuwait. Among these ethical questions are: Does graphic design contain provocative material that violates a culture's religious and ethical principles? Is there a conflict between the design and the audience that is exposed to the design? And most important, what is the ethical basis on which the graphic designer has planned and constructed their work? In other words, should the designer consider the effects of their commercial designs on the people in the society in which they work?

In Kuwait, local newspaper and magazine advertising and its potential influence on a community's values and beliefs, lead/make us bear in mind the combination of verbal and visual statements. For example, (Figure 2) adds a sense of cool sensitive celebration or entertainment held/offered in a five star hotel in Kuwait city during Ramadan nights, which is a time of worship and religious practices for Muslims. This visual expression does not reflect the actual purpose or meaning of what Muslims believe about the philosophy of fasting in Ramadan and what is expected religious practice during this time. The

ad implies fantasy atmosphere and a kind of physical relaxation and joy expressed by the time spent around feast tables accompanied with family members or friends. While the true relaxation, according to Islamic beliefs means making an effort worshipping God within a religious atmosphere that implies spiritual harmony or/and peace. In other words, the add functions against the genuine meaning of what Ramadan is and what Muslims suppose to behave during its nights (Al-Watan, 2003).

While graphic designers use technology for various communication tasks in different media, researchers question the impact of new technology on human development and raise critical concerns as to how novice or young graphic designers use their work in commercial art and how they influence their communities' values and beliefs. The researcher's main concern is to study issues that designers' visual thinking and problem solving promote (AIGA, 1996). Among these are the social implications of graphic design, especially in advertising, and whether or not the designer should consider the ethics of the messages in their ad designs.

David Berman, an expert with more than twenty years experience in graphic design and communication strategies. His work includes projects and applications of plain language and design in Canada. He addresses the dichotomy of the purpose for graphic design, i.e., between promoting human development and promoting products and services for commercial markets. In one of his lectures titled *How Logo Can We Go?* Berman asks whether new designers tend to help sell things according to community and professional ethics or attempt to connect knowledge with understanding (www.davidberman.ca/howlogo.htm). On his website, Berman claims "that communications professionals play a core role in helping corporations mislead audiences in order to invent unfulfilled 'needs', and have more conspicuous power and influence in society than they typically realize" (Berman, 2003). However, he also believes that, "in a world where design has become a recognized corporate asset, designers have the opportunity to use their skills responsibly and to accelerate awareness in the population of the influence of visual imagery and the need to

apply its persuasiveness responsibly” (Figure 3) - Culture.ca Web site (Berman, 2003). Berman is especially concerned about the over-consumption of goods that is being encouraged in the developing countries by Western corporations marketing their products around the globe. In one example, (Figure 4) he cites the misuse of graphic design and the negative influence that Tobacco Company advertising has on children, yet graphic designers are expected to ensure corporate cigarette sales through their ad designs. Berman realizes the potential harmful effects from the misuse of graphic design in tobacco advertising and the ethical issue involved. As he states,

The cigarette companies out there want my daughter to start smoking within the next eight years. I, as a parent will help her choose wisely. And hopefully, by making wise choices Hannah can live a long and healthy life: who knows perhaps she will see the 22nd century! And when that century comes and people look back on these times, what will they see as the biggest issue of our day? (Berman, 2003)

Graphic designers manipulate information in advertising in ways that can damage the environment or human life, simply because, as Berman suggests, they must use “lies” in order to sell needless ideas or even harmful products. However, Berman indicates that because of developments especially in Canada, “there is hope that there is still opportunity for designers and other professionals to decide what their still-young profession will be about: creating visual lies to help sell things or helping repair the world by bridging knowledge and understanding” (Berman, 2003).

Islamic Principles and Graphic Design:

Do ethics and morality in graphic design require conformity to a society’s religious principles? Contemporary graphic design, especially with its strong Western influence, has created a significant challenge for communities with longstanding religious traditions. In Kuwait, the Western-style of advertising used by many designers has the potential to change traditional customs. An example is the Muslim women’s

dress influence of contemporary fashion designs may be seen in local newspaper and magazine ads (Figure 5).

In addition, the influx of contemporary design into the traditional Islamic world has become quite visible in architecture as well as in advertising. In December 2002, during Ramadan, the holy month of Muslims fasting and special worship, a new trend in commercial architecture and interior design began to appear in Kuwait. Western style coffee shops like Starbucks, Costa Coffee, and others were being built in contemporary secular designs. English text, in signage was embedded within the city's predominantly Islamic style of building and architecture with its signs in traditional Arabic script.

This same kind of invasion of Western commercial design was also apparent, for example, in an ad in a local Kuwaiti newspaper (Al-Watan, 2003). The design shows two young men and two young women dressed in Western fashion inside a modern furniture store. The ad, which was foreign in terms of its local context, because it depicted a Western lifestyle, looked out of place (Figure 6).

At the top of the ad was a sentence written using traditional Arabic script Thuluth⁽¹⁾ (Figure 7) which conveyed a familiar Muslim greeting. Literally translated, it means 'Best wishes and congratulations for Ramadan.' The ancient-styled script was incompatible with the contemporary design and text of the ad and did not fit the context or the concept of the Islamic religious tradition of Ramadan, nor did it seem appropriate during this month of fasting and special worship by Muslims. This kind of ad design represents a contradiction between what is believed to be a longstanding native Islamic tradition and the so-called- from Western view- "contemporary Islam". For Kuwaitis,

(1) According to the Islamic art and architecture organization "Thuluth script (see figure) 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" (<http://www.islamicart.com/main/calligraphy/styles/thuluth.html>, 2003).

the advertising image of Muslim women in Western dress in a contemporary shop with a reference to a major religious observance would be confusing and inappropriate. In fact, these modern Western clothing fashions are taboo according to Islamic principles. The design in the newspaper ad reflected the readers' desire for and admiration of a modern Western lifestyle, but could be interpreted as disrespectful of native values and Islamic cultural identity in order to promote furniture sales in a Kuwait store in Ramadan.

From a critical observation of the ad just described, it is obvious that the designer has poor knowledge of what makes a good design in the context of an Islamic culture. This questionable design included its contemporary aesthetics, cultural incompatibility, and ethical disregard for an Islamic religious tradition.

In the contrary, there are professional Muslim graphic designers who live in Western cultures where they experience a contradiction between their embraced Islamic traditions and the traditions of the cultural context in which they live and function. For instance, Mamoun Sakkal, a Syrian Muslim graphic designer, calligrapher and educator living in Seattle, Washington State in the United States of America for more than twenty years. He also runs his own graphic design agency and produces different forms of graphic design such as posters, web design, advertising...etc. His challenge as he described during an interview I conducted with him on summer 2000 was to maintain his cultural identity within his design works without allowing new technology or foreign values to diminish his Islamic values and Arabic cultural heritage. Although he is exposed to Western values he is still able to maintain his traditions through his work. (Figure 8). Yet the remaining question is How much influence does commercial graphic design have when it introduces new images, texts, or concepts into a culture that is strongly traditional in the religious practices of most of its population?

Statement of the Problem:

An important concern regarding the practice of graphic design in Kuwait is whether certain kinds of commercial design and practice

would lead people in a conservative community to reject new ideas that have emerged from digital technology as a reflection of modern society. In most cases, graphic designers and owners of graphic design agencies in Kuwait approve widespread use of controversial subjects in graphic design, such as tobacco advertising or the exploitation of women, simply to sell products. The main ethical concerns are if designers have the right to produce works that can cause substantial harm or risk to people by manipulating cultural values and/or people in a community, and if designers should be held responsible for making such harm possible. In graphic design, it seems to be a blind claim to state that commercial designers should be allowed to design and sell their work without considering the results, or whether or not the designs violate cultural principles.

Significance of the Study:

The purpose of the study was to examine the responses of novice and professional graphic designers working in Kuwait to ethical concerns that can be associated with the design works they produce. The study addressed a number of research questions through a survey that was developed to collect and evaluate individuals' responses regarding cultural and social responsibility in graphic design productions. The survey provided an opportunity for participants to address the implications of graphic design production in Kuwait, including the enhancement of moral principles through art and design.

Methodology and Participants in the Study:

The survey for the study was divided into three sections. Section one included questions about the participant's personality, interests, and activities. Section two asks them to rate the company in which they work and their opinion of aspects of the job. Questions in this section addressed certain concerns about limitations that might influence the designer's thinking and production. Section three contained nine questions; participants were to rate five statements on commercial design and practice, and to answer several open-ended questions related to ethical and cultural concerns.

The study included a total of 68 participants selected randomly divided into 30 graphic designers, three were from the Philippines, two from India, 12 from Egypt, five from Lebanon, and eight from Kuwait. Their age ranked from 25-40 years only three Kuwaiti designers were under 25. Most of them had extensive experience in the design field and had worked for 5 to 10 years in advertising and design agencies in Kuwait, dealing with local business owners, customers, and consumers. Also, 15 art students (freshmen and seniors their age ranked from 18-22 years old) in Kuwait University who are interested in graphic design were also invited to participate in the survey, and 23 senior students their age ranked from 22-24 years old from other related fields, including studio art, architecture, communication, and art education, were involved in the process.

Research Questions:

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What professional skills and ethics could graphic designers working in Kuwait utilize?
- What kind of moral contribution could new technology and graphic design together make to the life of the Kuwaiti people?
- What ethical values might graphic design use in Kuwait as a conservative modern society?
- Are graphic design companies and other businesses in Kuwait accountable for imposing questionable moral values on the community?

Survey Responses and Statistical Findings:

Most of the respondents had participated in previous group college and business or professional workshops and discussions on topics related to the study before the survey questions were distributed. The participants were invited by the writer to meet and discuss these topics: artistic and graphic design concepts, technological development, ethical concerns, and cultural issues, as groundwork for responding to the survey. Their answers to the survey questions in sections one and two were based on their individual knowledge and

background, and were developed by the writer based on their awareness of the character of their work places, the contemporary community in which they live, and the lifestyle the digital age has created. In section three, in addition to nine specific questions, the participants were provided with a blank space for their individual response to several open-ended questions, which were based on the information provided in the first two sections of the survey. The following are the results of the participants' responses to the nine questions in section three of the survey.

Survey Questions:

- 1 - How important for graphic designers working in Kuwait to be aware of ethical concerns addressed within their design work? Please explain
- 2 - What are the reasons to address ethical concerns? Please explain
- 3 - What type of ethics (immoral) that is most obvious for you in most graphic design products in Kuwait? Please explain
- 4 - What is the most important ethical concerns and issues to be considered by graphic designers working in Kuwait? Please explain
- 5 - What are the factors that might prevent or support such misrepresentations? Please explain
- 6 - What are the important aspects to be addressed when developing graphic design program in Kuwait? Please explain
- 7 - What are the important issues that would enhance both teaching and producing graphic design in Kuwait? Please explain
- 8 - How do you help these agencies to reproduce appropriate graphic design? please explain
- 9 - How do you evaluate and value the quality of design works produced by foreign graphic designers working in Kuwait? Please explain

1- Awareness of Ethical Concerns in Graphic Design:

The first question raised a concern about the graphic designers' awareness about ethical values embodied in their design works. How

important is it for a graphic designer working in Kuwait to be aware of ethical concerns in his/her design work? In their replies, 88% of the participants considered it extremely important for graphic designers to consider the moral implications of their design work. Some of the respondents commented that it is unacceptable to break the solid moral customs inherited by a community through certain kinds of commercial design work. Just 10% of the respondents believed that it is somewhat important to consider moral issues, depending on the degree to which people in a society accept changes in their lifestyle. Basically, they stated that it is possible to change certain moral behaviors in a Western community rather than in conservative communities like Islamic communities. Only 2% of the respondents were undecided about this question.

2- Reasons to Address Ethical Issues:

The second question provided a space for the participants to express their opinions regarding the reasons for addressing ethical issues in graphic design works. The results show that 40% of the participants believe that religion is the most important reason for considering the ethics of graphic designs used in Kuwait. Some 29% of the participants saw that it is important to consider the influence of graphic design in technology and the new media on the morality and mentality of a developing modern community. Some 17% put emphasis on the kind of values that different cultures hold as the main reason to save a culture's identity by using appropriate graphic design material. Their concern raised an awareness of factors in design that could influence local values and traditions as a result of globalization and problems that have emerged from it. But 11% of the participants were uncertain about the most important reason for addressing ethical issues in graphic design. Some of them mentioned the effects of the media, especially on children, as one reason to consider ethical issues, while others saw the maintenance of one's identity as the most important reason. Only 3% of the participants were undecided on this question.

3- Accurate Misrepresentation of Ethics:

The third question offered the participants an opportunity to report on the obvious ethical misrepresentation by graphic designs in Kuwait. Some 25% of the participants indicated that most of the graphic design products in Kuwait have adapted Western styles. For these participants, this kind of imitation tends to distort the cultural identity of Kuwaiti society. Some 25% stressed graphic designers' ignorance of cultural ideals such as their misrepresentations of the classical Arabic language. They pointed out that there is lack of understanding of the standards of value in Kuwait, such as missing design elements and roles that function appropriately to represent one's culture and identity appropriately. And 10% of the participants stated that the exploitation of women in advertising is one of the most distracting problems for Kuwaiti people who have strict codes of ethics regarding women. For these participants, such design content represents careless and irresponsible attitudes towards Islamic religious traditions. Also 10% of the participants listed a concern about some designers' ignorance of the diversity in Kuwait. They observed that most graphic design works communicate mainly with Arab language speakers, disregarding non-Arabs. They also believe that it is essential that design works contain a variety of communication means to show an appreciation for cultural diversity. Some 15% indicated that there are no immoral representations in graphic design products in Kuwait, while another 15% of the participants were undecided on this question.

4- Significance of Ethical Concerns:

In question four, the participants were asked to describe the most important ethical concern to be considered by graphic designers working in Kuwait. The highest priority addressed by the participants in response to this question was the need to promote among designers a greater respect for the country's religion as well as an appreciation of its cultural traditions and values. The most obvious concern indicated in this part by most of the participants was an awareness of the effects of mass media on Kuwaiti children, especially violence and different

forms of sexual expression on television and in magazines. Only 1% of the participants expressed their uncertainty about the most important ethical concern.

5- The Struggle to Protect Local Ethics:

The fifth question raised a concern about the community's need to address local ethics within the heritage of Kuwaiti cultural traditions. The responses of the participants were based on their personal interpretations and experiences as well as on the level of their commitment to their traditional values, including religion. The main issue addressed by the participants, especially young Muslim designers, was the Kuwaiti community's lack of faith and trust in Islamic values to remain intact in spite of Western influence. These young designers stated that exposure to other cultural values, mainly Western values, conveyed in graphic design have a great influence on people in Kuwait, especially young children. Despite the positive aspect of various artistic expressions involving multi-cultural issues, there are major aspects of graphic design that could undermine local principles and ethical norms. To a certain extent, most of the participants reject the kind of design subjects that might clash with Kuwait's original cultural traditions. However, some of the participants, namely foreign designers, saw no conflict as long as the objectives of the design piece were achieved.

Another concern addressed in question five of the survey by some of the participants was the quality of the design work that is produced by inferior graphic designers, which is a major concern that affects the profession. The bases of this concern are the different evaluation methods and standards that distinguish Western design from Islamic design and the difficult task of determining what is appropriate and inappropriate design content for a sacred society. Some art students indicated that obvious cultural differences in certain designs might sometimes offend Kuwaitis if foreign designers unintentionally disregard what could produce negative reactions among Islamic people. Such would be the case if representing a subject that is gender-specific within various design forms. An example is sexuality as

expressed through modern, mostly Western fashions which exploits women. These students mostly held the owners of graphic design agencies in Kuwait responsible for allowing such design content; therefore, they asked for a regulation to enforce the owners of these agencies to educate their staff about Islamic culture to become aware of their responsibilities to the society in which they work. Several participants pointed out that exposing foreign designers to local cultural principles and values is among the most important factors that would enhance the quality of graphic design in Kuwait. Other participants asserted the importance of preventing the hiring of very open-minded designers because they would likely transcend the boundaries of conservative society.

Finally, in response to question five, the lack of graphic design education in Kuwait, including critical evaluation of ideas and design solutions before their production, was considered by most of the participants as the primary cause of inferior and limited design in both quality and content. However, some of the participants did not respond to this part of the survey; others were uncertain, and yet others saw no problem that there are no limits on free expression in art and design in Kuwait. Only 2% of the participants asserted that graphic design should not be subjected to cultural restraint to prevent inappropriate design contents; otherwise, it would be isolated from global development and new trends in graphic design and related fields. A number of senior art students, on the contrary, stated that the content of design must be examined by experts and critiqued before final production. They believe that the content of the design work is more important than its context or artistic execution. They thought that foreign graphic designers should be more knowledgeable and sensitive to the concerns of people living in a conservative community when presenting new ideas in unfamiliar design forms. They believe that these foreign designers should understand others' cultural concerns and values as a part of their professional practice. In this sense, some participants suggested that the owners of graphic design agencies present a list of guidelines for graphic designers and staff to

follow, when hiring them, in order for them to be aware of and appreciate local values.

In short, 82% of the participants agreed with the importance of addressing cultural concerns in graphic design. Only 12 % of the participants, non-Muslim graphic designers, opposed limiting design expression because of certain cultural restrictions. For them, expressing new ideas within creative design forms does not conflict with cultural traditions. They believe that modern Kuwaiti society should be open to new ways of thinking and, therefore, religion should not operate or limit free expression, especially in the arts. Only 6% of the participants did not respond to question five.

6- The Education of Graphic Designers:

Question six addressed issues regarding the education of graphic designers, including professional preparation and practice. Some 94% of the participants asserted the need for graphic design education in higher education and as part of graphic design professional development. They suggested teaching more topics about cultures, society, ethics, and philosophy as part of the graphic design preparation program. They also recommended more training workshops and sessions that provide life experiences to involve graphic design students in critical inquiries about topics on the positive and negative influences of art, design, and new technology in modern society. They believe this kind of involvement would help students to obtain a solid background in the role of contemporary art in conservative or secular modern society. Only 6% of the participants did not respond to this question. However, most of the comments offered by the participants suggested the need for an intensive graphic design program in Kuwait that provides both high quality artistic outcomes, including mastering skills to operate new technology and design software applications, and encourages creative expression.

7- Issues Emphasizing Graphic Design:

In question seven, the participants in this survey were asked how education would improve and help prospective graphic designers to value ethical and cultural concerns in Kuwait. As many as 79% of the

participants asserted that graphic designers should have a better understanding of all aspects of Kuwait's society, including family, with a stress on cultural identity. They considered developing creativity to be the next step in order to transmit messages and concepts within innovative approaches and advanced artistic skills. Several art students pointed out that their designs must be connected to real life. They see that age is a vital factor that could influence the quality of the design work. About 20% of the participants did not respond to this question, and 1% were uncertain about their answer.

8 - Holding Commercial Companies Accountable for Inferior Graphic Design:

The eighth question asked the participants if they think that commercial companies and agencies in Kuwait should be held responsible for producing inferior and unacceptable design works, and to suggest what could prevent the production of such work. As many as 80% of the participants, mostly art students, voiced their rejection of cultural manipulation of society through graphic design. They believe that graphic design agencies must respect a society's way of thinking and religious views through codes and regulations established by design professionals. One participant suggested what he called a "civilized solution," that is, to plan design competitions with high-level, sophisticated prizes for designers who best deal with the public and create ethical and useful products. Some art students suggested that design works produced by commercial and advertising agencies be viewed by a professional editorial committee consisting of experts from related fields before they launch any graphic design work. Other participants suggested establishing a division supported by the government whose mission is to follow and examine graphic design productions as a means of protecting cultural values from the influence of inappropriate visual representations. They believe that this division should also campaign against inferior design as well as illustrate and explain to the public through the media the detrimental and negative effects of such designs. In addition, it was suggested that this division develop educational seminars that explain reasons for rejecting designs

and provide appropriate solutions for successful designs. But 20% of the participants did not respond to this question.

9-The Influence of Foreign Graphic Designers in Kuwait:

In the ninth question, the participants were asked their opinions of the role of foreign graphic designers working in the commercial domain in Kuwait. As many as 70% of the participants stated that the quality of graphic designs-mostly in terms of creative artistic execution-that are produced by foreign graphic designers is of a high standard. However, the content of such designs might be influenced by their values and beliefs, which are different from the values of Kuwaiti society. On the one hand, foreign designers affect the quality of local graphic design on a high level and in a good way by introducing techniques that can improve design productions. On the other hand, these designers' work might adversely affect the culture and ethics of Kuwaiti society, especially if they come from countries that have lower standards in graphic design. Some 20% of the participants did not respond to this question. And 10% were uncertain as to what is considered a bad influence since graphic designers differ in terms of their educational experiences and cultural backgrounds, depending on the design work they produce.

The final comments to question nine of some of the participants provided important insights on critical topics being addressed in graphic design, regardless of the various forms of representation. Some of the art students surveyed noted that there are some cultural values and principles that, from their point of view, are definitely wrong and inappropriate, especially those transmitting certain messages to new generations. For these art students, graphic design is a means by which people in a community can be educated and advance their own traditions to a better quality and functional level by adopting valuable new ideas. At the same time, they believe that Kuwaiti designers must resist the inappropriate imitation of Western ideas that would distort their native values. For some of the participants, graphic design can be viewed as a sensitive subject that must be carefully planned. They encouraged both positive and negative criticism for their daily work

and for any type of design implementation in Kuwaiti society, not merely through graphic design education.

It is problematic to stereotype graphic design in Kuwait as lacking ethical and professional standards, especially since the findings of this study reveal a high level of ethical commitment regarding the effects of graphic design among the designers and students surveyed. About 84% of the participants asserted that it is very important to consider and respect ethical values that are associated with cultural and religious traditions in both graphic design education and professional work. The following statement in a survey response by a senior art student reveals such an attitude:

It is important that graphic designers consider cultural concerns because their design works will be displayed to all kinds of people. The designer's work will influence part of the audience, so for the safety of the society, the design work should not contain any outrage ethics. It is also important because the design work will represent the designer's background, so it would not be suitable to represent a design work that shows immoral or inappropriate ethics because this will reflect the designer's personality and background. For example, there are some occasions needed to be culturally maintained within the traditional values in the society. We can't design an advertisement for a product used in Christmas without using the red color, or for Ramadan without introducing Helal (crescent, half-moon) or a traditional typeface or using any element that is linked with context in question. The work will not be so effective as much as we respect some little issues and some cultural values. (2003)

This quote is an example of the misrepresentation of Islamic culture through graphic design. Although there is a big number of Christian people living in Kuwait, Christmas, which is mainly a Western Christian tradition, reflects certain cultural values that are different from Islamic values. Yet, the student gave an example of

embracing such a tradition in Kuwait while arguing the importance of embracing his own cultural values.

Other responses to the survey showed that there are two different attitudes towards placing restrictions on graphic designers, according to the participants' cultural backgrounds. One attitude is the reaction of non-Muslim graphic designers who gave minor consideration to the importance of the role of ethics in directing creativity or design solutions. They believe that ethical considerations should not prevent free expression of graphic designs that attract consumers and successfully market products, services, and ideas. Among these was a Catholic Philippine designer who worked at a graphic design agency in Kuwait. He states:

Designing needs to be free from any barriers of ethical concerns. It is like limiting the mind of the designer into one envelope...freedom of expression should revolve in the design so it would result in a different and probably oblique reaction. Foreign graphic designers gently influence the quality of works; it is a main contribution to a creation of ideas, concepts, and themes. (2003)

Another example of this attitude among the designers surveyed is acceptance of the exploitation of women in design works because images of them, which are often seductive, attract attention and sell products. This foreign value has been and continues to be imported into Kuwaiti society, partly because there has been no objection by society. Even though there is a certain loss of identity for Kuwaiti women because of such advertising, people in Kuwait have just accepted rather than disapproved of this advertising practice. However, it is important to search for what is important in a contemporary design piece contains images of women. These comments by a student of architecture, who is also a graphic designer and a conservative Muslim woman, question the lack of ethical values in graphic design. She states:

In my opinion the practice of graphic design in Kuwait is "neglecting our ethical values" the real reason behind lost identity. What is considered as innovative? The answer might draw some images

in one's mind of creative works seen in the past. But ask yourself if innovation is something new that has never been thought of before, something that adds a new contribution to human output. Are all the works considered as creative really unique and are not similar to anything nice that has been done before? The answer to these questions refers to when a writer, a poet, a thinker or a designer produces an art work in his mind, it should be genuine and his production should be pure from any influences that might affect the image of his/her work. I derived this argument from a response of a critic in a lecture when he was describing creativity in our part of the world, he said that if you want to do something creative, copy creative works done in western civilizations and apply your modification, and that is exactly what we see in many so called works of art or even administrative ideas. This statement is particularly true when you examine a work and see how many similar designs are close to it in the world. That is exactly why our designers are not guided by their judgment of morals and right and wrong, it is exactly why we suffer from a lost identity. (2003)

This statement asserts that graphic design in Kuwait is following the trends throughout the world to the extent that the local designers are not guided by what is moral in Kuwaiti society. The same notion was expressed by a non-Arabic speaking student who is very interested in graphic design and has very good artistic skills. As a foreign student studying at Kuwait University, he observes that designers are more interested in profit than in the ethics and cultural traditions in Kuwait. He feels that its people would be more positive about their culture had they been exposed to those of others. He states:

... as I mentioned before, it's the people who are responsible. The companies and business practices only tend to worry about making a profit, which is a shame but true. They don't think about ethics and different cultural backgrounds. And when I say they, I mean most, not all. So having known this, people should actually blame themselves for bringing foreign cultural values to your society mainly because the fact is that so many people might have been closed from foreign cultures and/or been

told it was bad, so that person by nature becomes more curious about it. And when the smallest opportunity comes along to see that in action, they take it. But if they were exposed to it and had positive knowledge about it, they wouldn't get influenced simply because they would know that their own background is so good that it was willing to say only positive things about other cultures. (2003)

Most of the art students in this survey indicated the importance of including multicultural art in graphic design education as a component of their professional preparation program. They believe that they must learn to understand different cultural values and meanings embodied in certain traditions in order to create and promote positive design forms within their own tradition. They think that they would gain a healthy multicultural perspective if their college or university had them share and exchange experiences with diverse people from various cultures. This attitude would then extend to their professional practice.

Although it is challenging for graphic designers to stay current and knowledgeable about events and new design trends around the world, it is extremely necessary that they do so in order to maintain a strong relationship with and commitment to the society in which they live and practice their profession. Their involvement in both the global and local community will keep them informed and certain to produce appropriate design forms that focus on valuable aspects of society without clashing with other aspects of society. This involvement will also provide them with a fundamental basis for comprehensive and critical evaluation of various graphic design forms and contents. In short, most of the participants viewed consideration of ethical issues as a natural facet in the diverse context of the "globalization" of graphic design, which will certainly influence the graphic design profession as it is engaged in global commercial distribution and marketing of its work.

Despite globalization and the fact that people living in various countries are invited to share their native traditions and accept modernization in terms of their own lifestyles, special consideration

should be given to the designs introduced to a traditional culture like Kuwait's.

A fundamental question remains: What is the role of graphic design in a conservative community? What does it reflect about people's lives? And is it important? If the goal of graphic design is to help improve human life, then its practices must reflect an integrity that imparts a sense that this profession is respectable and ethically responsible. Such a commitment by graphic design anticipates its consideration of important human and political ideas and topics. In this sense, graphic design should support positive representations of knowledge and advancement in human life. Consequently, the profession would contribute to people's achievements, yet in different directions than it currently has. In a conservative community, religion plays an important role in shaping peoples' behaviors. If we believe that practices in the arts, including graphic design, are facets of individual self-determination and independence, then we should question the basis from which religion and ethical responsibility would influence graphic designers in a sacred community to promote obedience to God, and question what diminishes one's self-governance.

Speaking to this issue, in *Meditation for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age*, Grayling (2002) indicates that religion is a reflection of absolutes, a subject of disagreement and competition among people of different religions and cultures in deciding what is good. In a conservative society, where a predominant religion such as Islam has a strong influence on the culture, it may be appropriate to ask questions such as these: Is a person independent to make his/her own choices or an inferior who obey the rules of a god? Should graphic designers follow their own self-ruled paths or should they obey their God or the God of their community's religion?

Rather than follow an ethical code based on religious belief, as a person from a strongly religious culture might, it seems that most graphic designers and agencies around the world follow the direction of their clients to market a product or a service, and, for example, often exploiting women can be a valuable and available option, even when it

offends certain cultural norms. The use of images of women is considered a profitable practice in the commercial world, which achieves success and cultural prominence despite the opposition of some people or cultures to such exploitation. Often these images are seductive, and humiliating to women in many ways. Yet, these kinds of designs might not be introduced if people in a conservative community rejected would reject them. What some people would consider good, pleasing design work might be considered by others as problematic or a failure because they were created at the expense of their unique cultural ideals.

Recommendations:

Based on the insights of the participants in this survey, the following are suggested guidelines for developing standards of ethics for graphic designers' professional practice in conservative communities such as Kuwait:

- 1 - The unique facets of a sacred community that distinguish a certain culture from another should be protected.
- 2 - The personal perspectives of graphic designers should not take precedence over obligations to their community and its cultural and ethical values.
- 3 - Professional design standards should encourage community development with respect to cultural traditions.
- 4 - Products and ideas of graphic designers that compete with or distort cultural ethical ideals and norms should be discouraged.
- 5 - Products, services, and ideas of graphic designers should be the subject of evaluation and criticism by a committee of professionals from various fields, including religion.
- 6 - The government should work to protect the community's cultural identity and ethical values as produced by graphic designers.

These guidelines could be adopted by governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Trading and the Ministry of Information, which are responsible for commercial practices in Kuwait. Through the

implementation of certain procedures and rules that could be developed by a committee of professionals in graphic design and related fields, professional agencies could be required to follow appropriate graphic design standards. In addition, this committee could also include professional Muslim graphic designers living in Western cultures to consider their experiences. These professionals could increase the quality of graphic design productions in Kuwait through their insights and life as well as career practices.

Conclusion:

Graphic design as an artistic expression has become prevalent in everyday life. However, in our technological world, the significant advancements in technology together with developments in graphic art and design have created a medium through which designers can not only convey their perceptions of modern society, especially through commercial art, but also influence the values and traditions of that society. Any design work naturally contains input from the designer's ethnic background and education, including the cultural values and personal characteristics that impart a special value to their design work. To a certain extent, a graphic designer creates a product or a service that contains information that can contribute to others' lives. Graphic design, in both the fine and applied arts, can be a means to educate people and improve human life as well as a means to market products and services. While designers mostly have personal autonomy and responsibility for their products, and create what the market demands, it is important that they consider the ethical implications of their products if they are to enhance the lives of people and not violate their cultural values. This requires continuous examination of the implications behind their new design ideas and critical insight concerning the role of graphic design in society.

In addition, it would be practical for designers to examine design works in terms of their significance and fit in the community context. Today, however, graphic design often incorporates inappropriate, irresponsible, and questionable expressions, which are used to attract attention in order to sell products, such as in exploiting women in

commercial design and advertising. Ironically, design works such as those that use unacceptable images of women would not be introduced if people in a community did not accept them. Thus, graphic designers would not produce works that violate people's feelings and rights in order to sell products or services if their designs were not accepted by their consumers. There is also a responsibility on the part of women who allow themselves to be exploited for commercial purposes, merely for publicity or for the money.

Some of the participants in the survey, especially graphic designers working in commercial art in Kuwait, expressed the need for a certain amount of flexibility to respond to market needs and consumer demands even if they break some "minor" cultural restrictions, as they put it. These designers view ethical consideration and cultural values as mostly limiting free expression and professional achievement, especially when dealing with foreign clients or products. In other words, they see a conflict between following the commercial trends in contemporary artistic expression and honoring the native cultural traditions and ethics of a conservative community like Kuwait.

On the other hand, the art students in this study strongly emphasized the importance of including ethical concerns in the graphic design education program, and of enhancing the practical training program that involves them in a real working environment in the commercial world. Most of these art students suggested that more activities be developed to prepare them for decision-making and problem solving while taking into account cultural constraints without confronting or transcending ethical and cultural boundaries.

In summary, the main issue addressed by this study was why it is important that ethical values be considered in graphic design. The participants stressed that graphic designers should not achieve their personal artistic success at the expense of cultural ethics, even if such an ethical obligation prevents or delays their personal and practical progress. On the contrary, graphic designers who transcend the ethical boundaries of their community might regret having distorted or misrepresented what defines humanity, or the uniqueness or indivi-

duality of a group. In Kuwait, it seems that the vast majority of people lack a fundamental education about graphic design.

Graphic design education should fully consider the types of skills and knowledge that are imparted to modern conservative or secular society through graphic design production itself. The positive contribution and participation of community members is required to examine and revise various design practices so that they enhance the stability of a society through this valuable art.

The participants in this survey expressed their agreement about the importance of addressing social and ethical concerns in graphic design education. Most of the participants, especially art students, advocated the need for intensive training activities along with a comprehensive program that involves them in real-life design experiences. This includes discussions of strategies and methods of practicing graphic design in various cultures and society. The participants also recommended engaging graphic designers and students in critical inquiries that evoke intellectual insights and inspire ethical concerns.

A conservative community like Kuwait stands to gain a great deal from raising the awareness of graphic designers about the ethical implications of their design works, and from engaging members of society in improving education in graphic design for both consumers and designers while maintaining its conservative traditions.

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Appendix

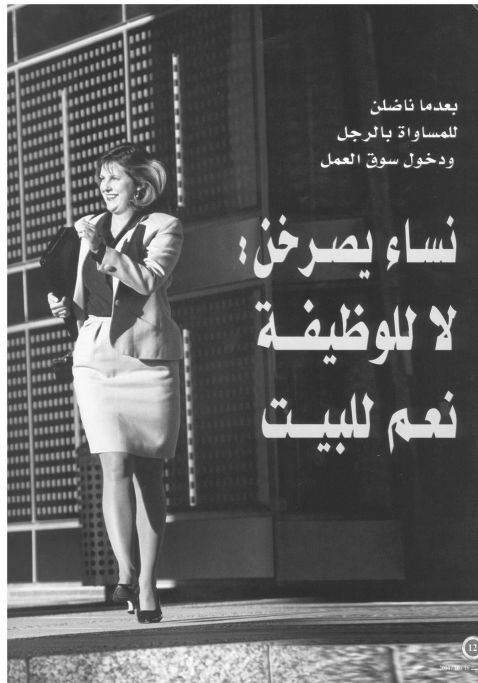


Figure (1.a)

This magazine ad, indicates an outcome of the working women experience and the demand for returning home after a battle to win male equality. However, the appearance of the female in this ad does not reflect an Islamic or cultural dress style, rather it emphasizes Western women appearance. The only cultural mark indicated in this ad is the Arabic text.

Zahrat Al Khaleej Magazine, Emirates Media,
United Arab Emirates and published in Kuwait, 2004.
Designer: not indicated



Figure (1.b)

This magazine ad, invites females to update and renew their modern appearance. and elegancy. Again, the appearance of the female in this ad does not reflect an Islamic or cultural dress style, rather it emphasizes Western women appearance which contradicts with Islamic traditions. The only cultural mark indicated in this ad is the Arabic text.

Zahrat Al Khaleej Magazine. Emirates Media,
United Arab Emirates and published in Kuwait, 2004.
Designer: not indicated

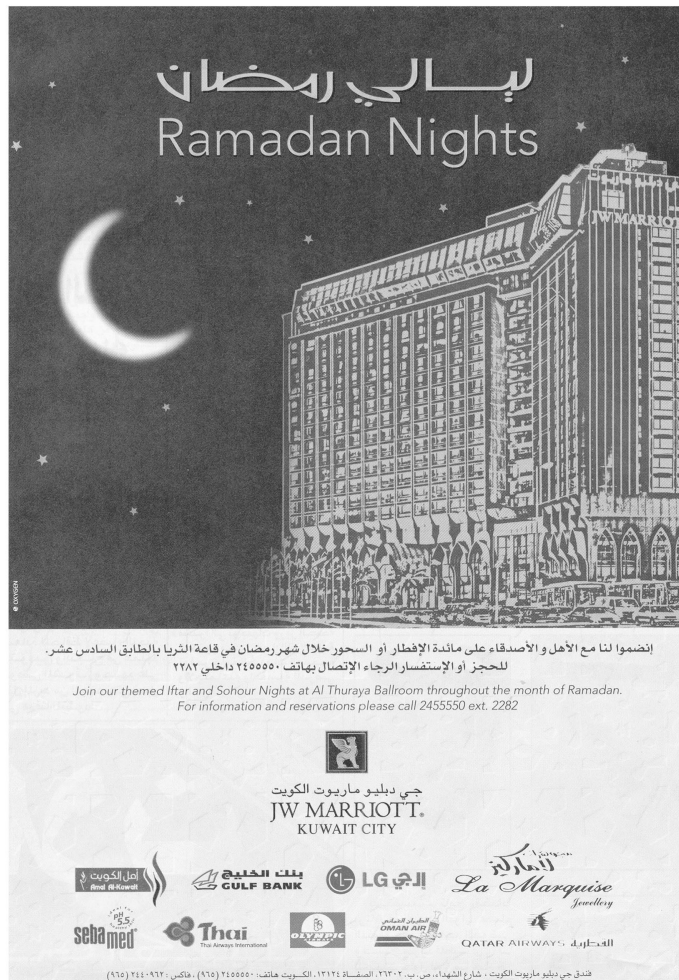


Figure (2)

One interpretation of the philosophy behind fasting during Ramadan is Muslims should feel the hunger and suffering of poor people and express their thanking to God for His merits. This expression might take a form of worshipping God during Ramadan nights through prayers. This newspaper ad reflects an enjoyable atmosphere in a way that is totally different than a religious atmosphere.

Al Watan Newspaper, Kuwait, 2004.
Designer: not indicated

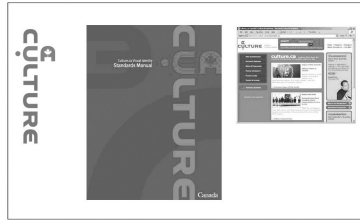


Figure (3)

"Project Case: Culture.ca Web site (for Department of Canadian Heritage)

"Culture.ca aims to engage Canadians in cultural life, to educate and entertain Web surfers with the stories of many peoples, and to provide access to the best of Canadian culture on-line." We developed a branding strategy for the site which settled on the bilingual name culture.ca, facilitated the development of strategic objectives for the project, and then developed a visual identity for the site.

Culture.ca identifier

whose rules of use are documented in the identity manual which we wrote and produced:

Culture.ca Visual Identity manual

In developing the identity, we decided we'd prefer to use a Canadian-designed typeface, and yet could not find one suitable, so we designed a custom typeface. The face reflects the sophisticated, modern direction while being based in Inuktitut type forms (to honor aboriginal culture with one of only two alphabets in use in the world today that was intentionally designed--the other is Korean).

David then directed the design of the Web site itself, using the custom typeface throughout..."

(David Berman, 2003)

www.davidberman.ca/howlogo.htm

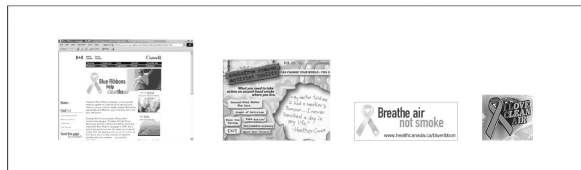


Figure (4)

"Project study: Tobacco Control through Creative Design (for Health Canada)

"Having a smoking section in a restaurant is like having a peeing section in a swimming pool." - anonymous. Over the past several years, we have worked with Health Canada's Tobacco Control Programme to develop a series of communications products in support of smoking cessation, and specifically in the area of second-hand smoke and the teenage audience. We have also completed successful evaluations for Health Canada. David's earlier work as a strategic consultant and art director for the design of Health Canada's public Web site and intranet, as well as numerous print assignments for the department over the past ten years, led to specific work on the Blue Ribbon Campaign against second-hand smoke. The first initiative was to develop the Blue Ribbon motif and write and design the public Web site for the Blue Ribbon campaign." (David Berman, 2003)

www.davidberman.ca/howlogo.htm

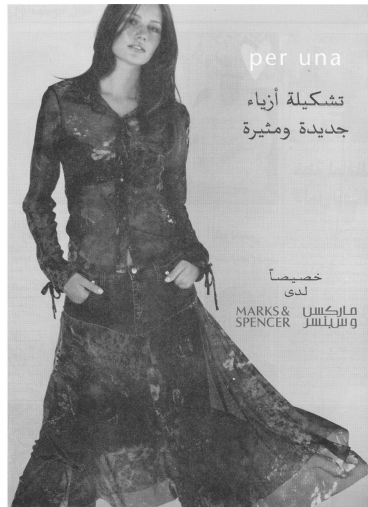


Figure (5)

This newspaper ad introduces a dress that attracts the eyes to certain parts of the female body.
Designer: not indicated

Al-Watan Newspaper. 2003, Kuwait.

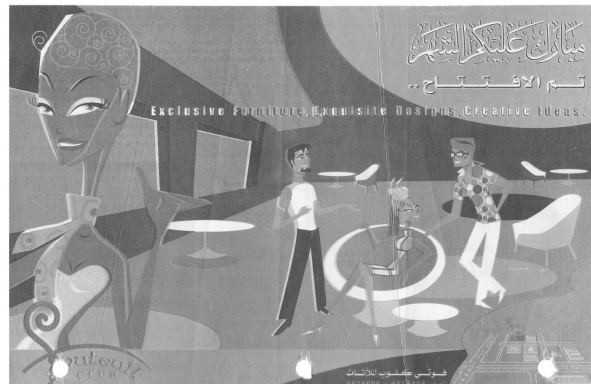


Figure (6)

This newspaper ad reflects a desire and admiration of a modern Western lifestyle, which could be interpreted from an Islamic point of view as disrespectful of native values and Islamic cultural identity to promote furniture sales in a store in Kuwait during Ramadan when this ad was published.

Al-Watan Newspaper. 2003, Kuwait.



Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (From the Holy Qur'an: Surah: 13, Ar-Ra'd, Verse: 28.)



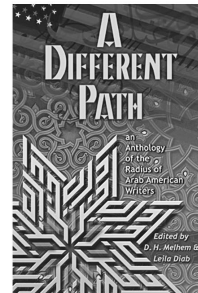
Allah Has taught man that which he knew not" (From the Holy Qur'an, Surah: 96, AL-Alaq, Verse: 5)

Figure (7)
Qura'nic verses written in Thuluth script

<http://www.islamicart.com/main/calligraphy/styles/thuluth.html>



Project: Poster for National Convention
Client: Islamic Society of North America
Designer/Illustrator: Mamoun Sakkal
 1998



Project: Book cover design
Client: RAWI (Radius of Arab American Writers)
Designer/Illustrator: Mamoun Sakkal
 2000



Project: Arabic calligraphy for
Paintbrush: A Journal of Poetry and Translation
Client: Truman State University
Designer/Calligrapher: Mamoun Sakkal
 2002



Project: Cover design for Cultural
Festival
Client: Arab Center of Washington
Designer/Illustrator: Mamoun Sakkal
 2001

Figure (8)

Sample works of a Muslim graphic designer living in a Western culture
Designer/Illustrator: Mamoun Sakkal