

Islamic Art

Inside Out

Symmetry & Symbolism

A Student Activity Guide based on the exhibition

*Islamic Art
in Image and Object*

February 5 - May 31, 2007



From the Godwin-Ternbach Museum @ Queens College



Bowl decorated with blue and white trellis design, inhabited by birds, fish, and plants, (Seljuk Period, Iran, 12th - 13th c. AD), scalloped rim "Rhagesware" terracotta, 8 3/4" diameter x 4" height. TOP: Inside view; BOTTOM: Side view.

1 Pre-Museum Activity: Form and Function



Fig. 1
(also on cover)

Look and Discuss

Look carefully at **Fig. 1**. This Islamic work of art was made in Iran between the 12th and 13th C. It is **Islamic art** because it was made in a region where people practiced the religion of **Islam**. Look at the **map**. What region of the world is Iran in? How do you think life in the 12th and 13th C was different from life now in the 21st C?

This artwork is a **sculpture** and has a **function**, or purpose. What do you think it was used for?



The **decorations** painted on the surface can give us a hint. What do you see? Both the inside *and* outside of the artwork are decorated. What can this tell us about its function?

The **form** of this artwork can also help us to understand its function. How would you describe its form? It is a bowl or type of **vessel** made of **terracotta**, which is a type of **clay**. Have you ever made a work of art out of clay before? What do you think this vessel held? What about its **form**, **size**, or its **material** makes you say that? What other types of vessels can you name? What are they used for?

Not all functional works of art are vessels. If you were to create your own functional work of art, what would it be? How could you make its form, decorations, size, and material reflect its function?

“Form” your own original three-dimensional vessel

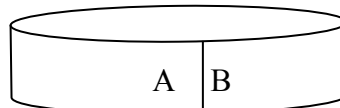
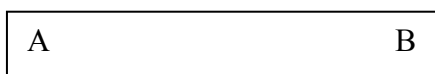


Fill a **balloon** with air (use varying sizes). Place it with the mouthpiece down in an **empty bowl** to keep it steady. See image to the right.

Use **scissors** to cut **Pariscraft™** into small strips (approximately 2” by 5”). Fill a **bowl** with **warm water**. Dip Pariscraft™ in the water and gently apply to the surface of the balloon. Using your thumb and pointer finger, smooth strips, until about halfway down the balloon is covered. Once finished, apply a second layer.

Allow Pariscraft™ 24 hours to dry. When *completely dry*, carefully remove the balloon from the bowl and pop the balloon.

Create the foot for your bowl. Cut a strip of **thin cardboard** (approximately 1” x 7”). Wrap end A to meet and slightly overlap end B, forming a ring. (See diagrams below.) Use **hot glue** to secure. Next, smooth Pariscraft™ strips over the entire surface of the ring. Apply two layers and let dry.



Finished “foot”

When both the bowl and ring are *completely dry*, hot glue the ring to the bottom of the bowl. If handles are desired, cut thin cardboard into narrow strips and form into the letter “c”. Cover with two layers of Pariscraft™. When *completely dry*, hot glue handles to the bowl where desired. If desired, use **sandpaper** to smooth the surface and prepare for painting.

To be continued in the Post-Museum Activity... (See back cover.)

2 Museum Activity: Putting a “Spin” on Symmetry



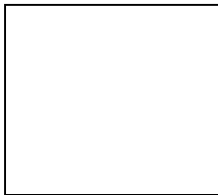
Look and Discuss

Look closely at the **decoration** on the Islamic vessels in this exhibition. **Islamic** religion forbids including people in artwork. Instead, we see many different **shapes, lines, and patterns**.

Look carefully at the decorations on the inside of **Fig. 1**. What different animals do you recognize? Do you see any **repetition**? This design is an example of a type of repetition called **radial symmetry**. We see examples of radial symmetry every day. What examples can you name?

Create your own radial symmetry spinning top

Choose a **shape, line, or animal** from one of the vessels in the exhibit and draw it in the square below. **Cut it out** to make a **stencil**.



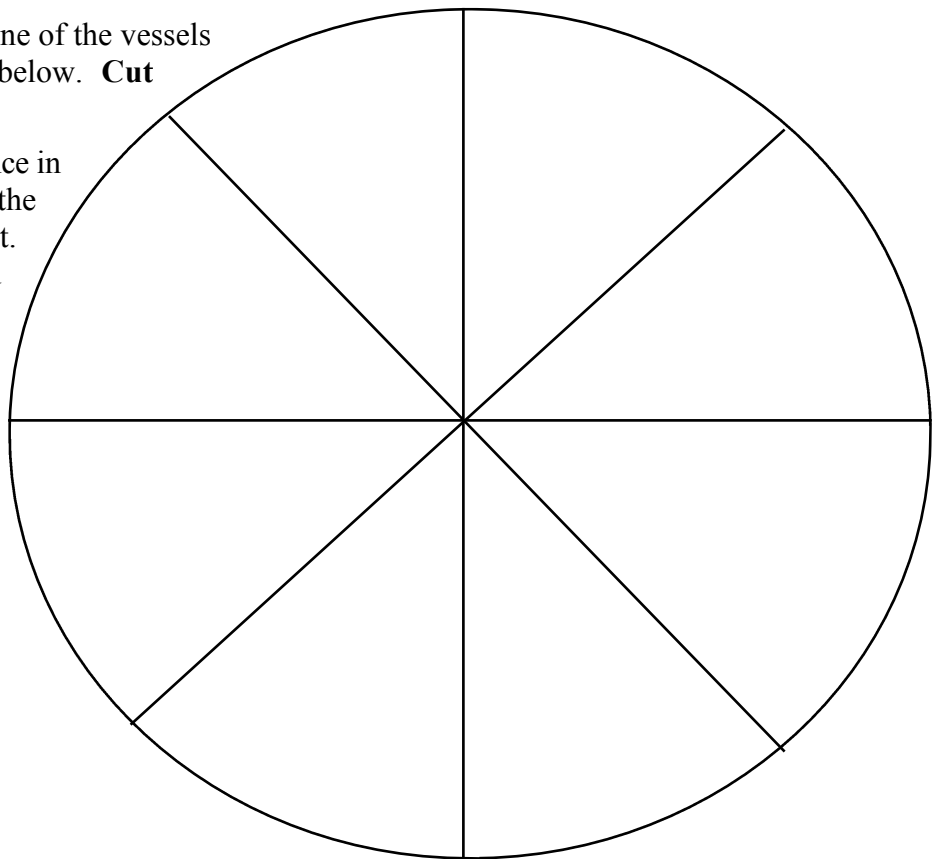
Trace the stencil once in each section of the circle on the right. Once finished, add more repeating shapes and lines.

Add **color** to your design.
What colors will you use? Why?

Make your symmetry SPIN!



Cut out your circle and **glue** it to the bottom side of a **small paper plate**. Poke a hole through the center and insert a **5” dowel** (sharpened at one end). Attach on the underside with **masking tape**. You have made your own radial symmetry spinning top!



WORDS TO KNOW

Functional art: A work of art that serves a purpose, or has a specific **function**.

Three-dimensional: An object that is not flat. It has height, width, and depth.

Sculpture: A work of art that is **three-dimensional**.

Form: A **three-dimensional** shape. For example: a **circle** is a shape, a **sphere**, is a form.

Foot: The base of a vessel that provides support and allows it to stand upright.

Lip: The outer rim of a vessel. Can be scalloped, rounded, or straight.

Repetition: When a certain shape, color, or line repeats more than once.

Radial symmetry: When an image repeats or “radiates” out equally from a central point.

3 Post-Museum Activity: Symbolic Self-Portrait Vessels



Discuss

What is a symbol? Islamic art uses many **symbols**, or images that represent ideas and create meaning. Instead of showing ideas through literal images, they used **shapes, colors, lines, and patterns** to represent them symbolically. For example, in Islam, radial symmetry is often used because it represents the spread of the Islamic religion from one point outward to other countries.

What symbols would you use to represent yourself? The vessel you created in Activity 1 will now become a type of **self-portrait**, or work of art about you, the artist.

In keeping with Islamic religious art traditions, however, you are forbidden to show an image of a person. Instead, you must design your vessel with shapes, lines, patterns, or animals that represent you.

Brainstorming Ideas

Think about what makes you unique: ● Personality ● Interests ● Culture ● Experiences
If you had to choose an **animal** to represent you, what would it be? Why? What **colors** represent you? Why?

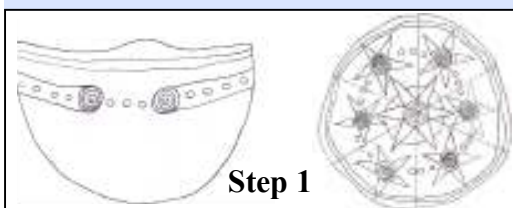
Think about the **outside** and **inside** of your vessel. Imagine you are a vessel. What would you use to represent the “outside” you? What about the “inside” you? Are they different? How?

Sketch two symbols (one “outside” & one “inside”) that represent YOU!

OUTSIDE	<p>We show certain things about us on the “outside” for everyone else to see. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clothes you wear • what you say & how you act towards others • the music you listen to... <i>What else?</i> 	My symbol:
INSIDE	<p>There are many things that are <i>not</i> so visible on the “outside” for everyone to see. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memories • fears • your dreams... <i>What else can you think of?</i> 	My symbol:

Personalize your vessel

Redistribute the vessels created in Activity 1



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3

1: Plan your design. Look at your vessel from two **points of view**, or angles. Sketch its shape from above and from a side view. Add your designs. Include at least **2 symbols** and make the inside show **radial symmetry**.

2: Use a narrow strip of **tag board** as a flexible ruler to draw lines dividing the inside of your vessel into a series of equal sections. If desired, create a custom **lip**. Draw a line along the top edge and cut with **scissors**.

3: Sketch your design on your vessel. Create a **stencil** for any repeating shapes to make it quicker and easier. Choose a **color palette**. Use **acrylic paints** for large areas and **paint markers** for small details. Apply a **clear varnish** to protect and add shine, if desired. Share your vessel with the class and discuss how it represents you.

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