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Inter-Art Parallels in Artistic Expression: The Case of Arabic Script's Visual Identity

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Abstract

This study investigates inter-art parallels in artistic expression, with a special focus on the visual identity of Arabic script as a case study. Building on the creative interplay between literature and visual arts, the research examines how artistic expression operates as an aesthetic practice integrating visual stimuli and literary signification. It explores how aesthetic experience emerges from the interaction of text and visual symbols, from classical mimesis of nature to the interdisciplinary overlaps of the digital age.

The study also addresses the theoretical foundations of visual stimuli through Gestalt principles, emphasizing the role of visual rhythm in harmony with linguistic rhythm. Additionally, it considers the semiotic dimensions and shared symbolism between text and image, showing how poetic metaphors can evoke vivid visual scenes.

By focusing on areas such as theater, cinema, novels, music, and painting, the research demonstrates that the aesthetic synergy between literature and visual arts, exemplified in the Arabic script, is a historical and culturally rich process that enriches human creativity and provides multi-sensory experiences for the audience.

Keywords: Artistic expression, Visual stimulus, Literary signification, Visual arts, Arabic script.



1. INTRODUCTION

Artistic expression is one of the most profound manifestations of human creativity, aiming to convey both reality and imagination through symbols and images. Philosophers and aestheticians have long examined the relationship between form and content in the arts. Plato considered art a mirror of truth, whereas Aristotle regarded it as a creative imitation (*mimesis*) of nature. In the modern era, artistic movements such as Impressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism expanded this conception by introducing subjective, emotional, and symbolic interpretations of reality, as exemplified by Van Gogh's expressive use of color and Picasso's innovative reconstruction of form.

The relationship between literature and visual arts extends beyond decorative representation; it embodies humanity's continuous effort to understand itself and interpret the surrounding world. Literature, through linguistic structures, generates vivid mental imagery comparable to the expressive power of visual arts. Consequently, the dialogue between visual stimulus and literary signification has become a significant interdisciplinary field that reveals the shared aesthetic foundations underlying different artistic practices.

Among the most remarkable manifestations of this interaction is the visual identity of Arabic script, which transcends its communicative function to become an autonomous artistic language integrating linguistic meaning with visual composition. Throughout history, Arabic calligraphy has developed into a unique aesthetic system that combines proportion, rhythm, symbolism, and spatial organization, making it an exemplary model for investigating the convergence between literary discourse and visual representation.

This study therefore examines artistic expression as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of literature and visual arts. It traces the historical evolution of this relationship from the classical concept of *mimesis* to contemporary interdisciplinary approaches while emphasizing the cognitive, semiotic, and aesthetic mechanisms that connect verbal and visual communication.

Purpose and Research Questions:

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the parallelism between literary and visual arts through the concept of artistic expression, with particular emphasis on the visual identity of Arabic script as an interdisciplinary case study. The research seeks to clarify how visual stimulus and literary signification interact to generate integrated aesthetic experiences and how this interaction contributes to the development of artistic creativity across different historical periods.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does artistic expression emerge through the interaction between visual stimulus and literary signification?
2. What historical, aesthetic, and methodological mechanisms govern the parallelism between literary and visual arts?
3. In what ways does the visual identity of Arabic script illustrate the integration of linguistic meaning and visual aesthetics?
4. How can interdisciplinary perspectives contribute to understanding contemporary artistic expression in the digital era?

To achieve these objectives, the study aims to:

- define the conceptual foundations of artistic expression, visual stimulus, and literary signification;
- examine the historical evolution of the relationship between literature and visual arts from classical aesthetics to contemporary interdisciplinary theories;
- identify the principal aesthetic and semiotic elements that establish parallelism between verbal and visual expression;
- analyze Arabic script as a representative model of artistic integration between language and visual form;
- explore future perspectives for artistic expression within contemporary digital and multimedia environments.

Methods:

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical method, supported by an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that integrates concepts from aesthetics, semiotics, visual culture, and literary criticism. The descriptive dimension is employed to define the principal concepts and trace the historical evolution of artistic expression, whereas the analytical dimension is used to examine the aesthetic, visual, and semantic relationships between literary and visual arts.

The study relies primarily on qualitative analysis of theoretical and critical literature addressing artistic expression, visual perception, Arabic calligraphy, and inter-art studies. In addition, selected examples from painting, theater, cinema, literature, and Arabic calligraphy are analyzed to illustrate the mechanisms through which visual stimulus and literary signification interact within different artistic contexts.

The scope of the analysis is limited to the relationship between literary and visual arts, with particular emphasis on the visual identity of Arabic script as a representative case study. The investigation is further supported by Gestalt theory, semiotic analysis, and contemporary perspectives in visual culture, allowing the research to interpret artistic expression as a multidimensional communicative process that integrates visual perception, linguistic meaning, and aesthetic experience.

2. The Visual Stimulus in Artistic Expression: A Reading in Literary Connotation

The visual stimulus refers to visual images, whether moving or still, used by the artist to draw inspiration from literature and raise the recipient's horizon of expectation. The visual stimulus is a powerful tool for conveying messages of development, freedom, and creativity, especially when language fails to articulate, guiding audiences towards modern topics that occupy public opinion. Elements of the visual stimulus include lines, shapes (round shapes may indicate safety, triangles may indicate danger or action, while rectangles and squares evoke a sense of stability), color (to convey mood), symmetry, balance, movement, and size, all of which contribute to its connotation and impact.

The ability of the visual stimulus to overcome language barriers and "evoke emotions" indicates its immediate and non-verbal communicative power, making it an essential complement, or even an alternative, to linguistic expression in some contexts. This means that visual art can reach deeper levels of the recipient's consciousness or unconsciousness, which may be difficult to access with words alone. This characteristic explains its importance in contexts that require immediate or universal impact, and confirms that aesthetic experience is not exclusive to language.

The concept of the visual stimulus has evolved throughout the ages. In classical Greek art, art was synonymous with the imitation of nature (*mimesis*), where ancient Greek statues depicted the human body in its ideal perfection. In the Middle Ages, the visual stimulus was linked to religion, with artworks focusing on Christian symbols such as the cross and the halo, making paintings akin to sacred texts aimed at spiritual guidance.

During the Renaissance, art returned to focusing on humans and nature, using perspective to create visual depth. This coincided with the flourishing of European literature, such as Shakespeare's works, which utilized visual imagery to describe emotions and environment. In the modern era, with the emergence of Impressionist and Abstract movements, the visual stimulus became more connected to the artist's subjective experience, moving away from literal representation of reality. In Monet's paintings, for example, landscapes transform into changing, hazy scenes, reflecting personal impression rather than an accurate depiction of reality.

Literary connotation is the general concept derived from a text or phrase; it is not tied to a single word but rather relates to the writer's choice and taste in expressing a specific need that no other writer can express in the same way. Literary connotation includes suggestive, stylistic, systemic, and contextual significance, all of which stem from the aesthetic-literary dimension of the text, transcending the functional use of language. Cultural criticism relies on multiple

connotations: direct literal, suggestive metaphorical and symbolic, and systemic cultural, with the latter being the most important as it reveals the latent meaning in the textual implicit.

Focusing on literary connotation as a "general concept derived from the text" goes beyond literal meaning to suggestive, systemic, and cultural dimensions. This confirms that literature is not merely a means of conveying information but a complex structure whose connotations are shaped by the interaction of words with the cultural and mental contexts of the recipient. This complexity in literary connotation reflects the complexity of the human experience itself, and how language, in the hands of a writer, becomes a tool for constructing multi-dimensional worlds, not merely describing them. This perspective also emphasizes the role of literature in shaping collective and individual consciousness, by activating critical and interpretive thinking in the reader.

In ancient Arabic poetry, visual imagery is strongly present. Pre-Islamic odes often begin with descriptions of ruins, as Imrou'l Qays says: "Stop, let us weep, remembering a beloved and a dwelling..." This description conveys a complete sensory image of the desolate land to the reader. In contrast, Islamic visual arts show a tendency towards abstraction and geometric ornamentation, which parallels the metaphorical images in literature that express meanings without direct imitation of nature.

The visual stimulus cannot be understood outside its cultural context. For example, the color white may symbolize peace and purity in Western culture, but it may be associated with mourning in some Asian cultures. This cultural symbolism is also reflected in literature; writers use colors and symbols to deepen the semantic structure of texts (Belting, 2011, p. 41).

2.1. Narrative as a Common Expressive Element and Techniques of Parallelism Between Arts:

Literary and visual arts share several fundamental expressive elements and employ various techniques to enhance their parallelism and integration. Narrative is a shared essence between literary and visual arts. Poetic narrative relies on words and rhythm, while visual narrative relies on visual elements such as color, light, perspective, and composition to tell a story. Visual narrative evolved from primitive, single-narrative drawings to more complex forms in ancient civilizations, such as chronological sequencing in ancient Egyptian art, and continued to change in form and function throughout history.

Visual narrative is clearly evident in graphic novels (manga and comics) that integrate written narrative with visual arts, where illustrations transcend what words alone can offer. The existence of narrative as a common element between literary and visual arts confirms that storytelling is a fundamental human need expressed through multiple mediums. The evolution from primitive visual narrative to complex contemporary forms indicates that each art develops its own narrative "language," enriching the recipient's experience and making the narrative more comprehensive

and impactful. This means that narrative is not limited to words; it is a cognitive structure that can be expressed visually and verbally. The evolution of visual narrative parallels the evolution of literary narrative, indicating that humans constantly strive to improve their ways of constructing and communicating stories, utilizing the unique potentials of each medium.

3. The Psychological Background of the Visual Stimulus

Visual perception is one of the senses most influential on human consciousness, as humans rely heavily on sight to form mental images of their surroundings. Among the psychological approaches to understanding perception, Gestalt psychology, founded by Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler in the early twentieth century, is particularly significant. This school emphasizes that visual perception is not based on isolated elements but on the integrated whole. The human mind naturally organizes shapes and lines to create coherent meaning, even if individual elements are scattered or incomplete (Arnheim, 2004, p. 45).

According to Gestalt theory, the perception of an artwork is determined not by its individual components—colors, lines, or points—but by the harmonious whole, which produces an aesthetic impression in the viewer's mind. For instance, when observing Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, the viewer perceives the celestial scene as a unified, dynamic composition rather than focusing on each individual star, evoking a sense of grandeur and wonder.

Several Gestalt principles can be applied to understand the visual stimulus in both visual and literary arts, including:

- Principle of Similarity: The eye groups elements similar in color or shape into a coherent unit. In Impressionist paintings, such as those by Claude Monet, similar colors create visual homogeneity. In literature, recurring poetic images can produce a similar semantic rhythm.
- Principle of Proximity: Objects close to one another are perceived as related. In Arabic calligraphy, the arrangement and density of letters guide the eye toward specific areas, giving the composition dynamism and visual flow.
- Principle of Closure: The mind completes incomplete shapes. This principle appears in abstract art, where viewers mentally fill gaps to perceive a complete image. Similarly, in literature, writers may leave semantic gaps for the reader to interpret, engaging imagination to complete the meaning.

By applying these principles, this study examines how Arabic script functions as a visual and literary sign, bridging visual stimulus and literary signification. The calligraphic form, like visual art, conveys meaning through rhythm, balance, and composition, reflecting the broader parallelism between visual and literary arts explored in this research.

3.1. The Relationship between Visual Rhythm and Poetic Rhythm:

Visual rhythm in a painting – resulting from repetition, symmetry, or color gradation – resembles musical and linguistic rhythm in poetry. When a poet like Mahmoud Darwish repeats a poetic refrain ("On this earth, there is what is worth living for"), this repetition reflects a "visual movement" within the text that parallels linear or color repetitions in paintings. Roland Barthes states that "rhythm is a common element between text and image, both working to create an internal harmony that captivates the recipient" (Barthes, 1977, p. 152).

3.2. The Visual Stimulus as a Tool for Psychological Catharsis:

According to psychoanalytic theories (Freud and Jung), art – whether visual or literary – represents a release of repressed psychic energies. Twisted shapes or harsh colors may reflect internal anxieties of the artist, just as desolate words or grim images in literature reflect states of fear or alienation.

4. Literary Connotation as Aesthetic Discourse:

4.1. The Relationship between Text and Image in Light of Semiotics:

Semiotics (the science of signs) is one of the most important fields of knowledge that attempted to link visual and linguistic texts. Roland Barthes explains that "the image is read as the text is read, for it contains symbols and signs that require interpretation" (Barthes, 1977, p. 152). Julia Kristeva emphasizes that a literary text is not merely an accumulation of words, but a "polyphonic space" where other texts and different symbols interact within it. When looking at a plastic painting, its elements (colors, lines, composition) resemble linguistic signs that need to be "read". Just as a literary text requires skill in interpretation and understanding metaphors, an image requires a trained eye to analyze visual connotations.

Illustrative Examples: when we read a novel like Flaubert's "Madame Bovary," we find an elaborate visual description of colors, clothes, and houses, almost making the reader see the scene before them. In Arabic poetry, in Al-Mutanabbi's poems, we read a visual description of heroes, swords, and battles, comparable to a cinematic shot. Modern semiotics (as with Umberto Eco) sees image and text as forming two parallel semiotic systems that can exchange roles: a painting may become a text to be "read," and a text may turn into an "image to be seen" (Eco, 1976, p. 34).

4.2. Rhetorical Figures as a Mechanism for Scene Building:

Rhetorical figures, especially metaphor and simile, are central tools in creating a visual scene within a literary text. When Mahmoud Darwish says:

"On this earth, there is what is worth living for: on this earth, the lady of the earth..."

These words transform into a vivid image that transcends the boundaries of language, as the reader imagines the earth as an elegant lady, visible as a symbolic painting. Metaphor in

literature can be viewed as a visual framework, where a property is transferred from one thing to another in a way similar to color mixing in painting. An example of this in English poetry is William Blake's: "To see a world in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wild flower." This image reflects an astonishing visual perception of the world in small details. The rhythmic structure and its visual role are manifested in poetic rhythm, where through repetition and meter, it creates a "visual" movement in the text, similar to the visual undulations in a watercolor painting. With Darwish, we find that the repetition of phrases generates a sense of linguistic waves that move like a dynamic painting.

4.3. Shared Symbolism between Texts and Art:

Artistic and literary symbols intersect remarkably; there is a universal "symbolic lexicon" shared by artists and poets.

- **Flowers:** In Gustav Klimt's paintings, flowers represent love and renewal, which is also found in Nizar Kabbani's poetry, where a flower transforms into a metaphor for feminine beauty or pure love.
- **Moon:** Appears as a symbol of mystery and beauty in Van Gogh's paintings, as well as in Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's poetry: "A moon melting behind the clouds of night..."
- **Bird:** A symbol of freedom and liberation, whether in Western Romantic literature (Percy Shelley's poems) or in Arabic literature (such as Darwish's "I yearn for my mother's bread" where the bird symbolizes return to the homeland).

Both literature and visual art use symbols as tools to convey deep meaning, but in different styles:

- Text relies on metaphor, simile, and rhythm.
- Painting relies on color, composition, and space.

However, they both involve the recipient at an interpretive level, where the reader/viewer is asked to complete the meaning through their culture and experiences.

5. Creative Parallelism Between Literature and Arts:

5.1. Theater: The Art of Visual and Linguistic Synthesis:

Theater is one of the oldest arts that embodied the parallelism between word and image. It is not merely a written text to be recited, but a living art that relies on visual and auditory senses in an integrated manner. Since classical Greek theater, theatrical performance has been based on integrating visual elements such as elaborate costumes, expressive masks, lighting that sets the mood, and décor that reflects the social or religious context, with the literary text carrying dramatic and intellectual dimensions (Bulbul, 2001, p. 12).

Some critics suggest that the stage is like an oil painting where characters move like colors in the painting. Fawaz Al-Sajer states that a theatrical scene should be read as a plastic painting is read, where lines, colors, and visual symbols interact with the linguistic text to create an integrated visual experience (Bulbul, 2001, p. 14). Theatrical lighting, for example, is not only used to show actors, but to create a psychological state. Red lighting may express tension or anger, while blue lighting suggests calm or mystery (Al-Akkad, 2014, p. 103).

In Arabic theater, especially with Saadallah Wannous and Tawfiq al-Hakim, we find that the literary text is accompanied by strong visual components. The play "Ahl al-Kahf" (The People of the Cave) represents a model that combines philosophical texts with visual images that stimulate imagination. Decorations, shadows, and actors' movements transform into a "visual language" parallel to the text, while dialogue deepens the play's intellectual idea (Bulbul, 2001, p. 20). Roland Barthes believes that theater is a "space of signs," relying not only on the text but on everything that is seen and heard (Barthes, 1977, p. 152). Theater combines arts: painting (décor), music (sound effects), literature (text), and even dance (expressive movement). Thus, theater becomes a platform that reflects creative parallelism in its purest form.

5.2. Cinema and Novel: The Relationship of Visual Intertextuality:

Cinema is the art that derives its spirit from literature, especially from the novel, but expresses that spirit through visual and auditory means. Cinema can be viewed as a kind of "illustrated novel," where a cinematic shot takes the place of a narrative paragraph in the written text. Naguib Mahfouz has been described as an "excellent cinematic writer" because he details scenes and characters as if he were writing a screenplay.

In his novel, *Midaq Alley*, the details of daily life in the Egyptian alley are revealed as if they were cinematic scenes, from the faded colors of buildings to the sounds of vendors and street noise (Al-Akkad, 2014, p. 101).

Since the twentieth century, literary narrative techniques have been influenced by cinematic concepts such as montage, close-ups, and rapid temporal transitions. These techniques are found in works like Márquez's

One Hundred Years of Solitude, where time is cut and the reader is moved between distant periods in a cinematic style (Kristeva, 1986, p. 50). Examples of cinematic-literary intertextuality include:

- The adaptation of Tolstoy's: *War and Peace* into an epic film added visual dimensions to the image that were not present in the written text (Belting, 2011, p. 37).

·Mahfouz's novel: *The Thief and the Dogs* was cinematically embodied in a style that relied on close-up camera shots to portray the psychological anxiety of the protagonist (Al-Akkad, 2014, p. 104).

5.3. Music, Painting, and Text:

Music, as an abstract art, shares the element of rhythm and intonation with literary text. Poetic text, especially in the works of Al-Sayyab and Darwish, flows like a musical piece with emotional crescendos and decrescendos (Al-Sayyab, 1960, p. 45). Rhythm in classical Arabic poetry is equivalent to repetition and harmony in a classical musical piece. Modern poetry, however, resembles jazz music with its freedom in distributing notes and words (Al-Akkad, 2014, p. 106).

In Kandinsky's paintings, there is a clear endeavor to transform sound into color, so that color becomes a visual equivalent of a musical note (Belting, 2011, p. 39). Literature also employs a musical language, as in Adonis's metaphors: "I write you, melodies of light..." where the text is seen as a symphony of letters.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the interaction between literature and visual arts is not incidental, but the outcome of a long historical trajectory of interwoven symbols, signs, and connotations. Both text and image aim to generate meaning and aesthetic experience in complementary ways. With the ongoing development of digital media technologies, this interaction is expected to become even more dynamic and multifaceted.

The research highlights that visual stimulus and literary signification jointly create an integrated aesthetic experience, where text functions as a linguistic painting, and visual art transforms into a symbolic discourse that can be "read." The relationship between visual stimulus and literary signification, and the parallelism between the arts, is historically rooted, evolving from the simple mimesis of ancient times to the complex cognitive interplay of the digital age.

Literary and visual arts share fundamental expressive elements—such as narrative, symbolism, composition, and emotion—which manifest differently across media but collectively aim to enrich the audience's experience. Major artistic and literary movements, from the Renaissance through Parnassianism, Symbolism, Surrealism, and Modernism to Postmodernism, played a key role in blurring the boundaries between the arts and enhancing their mutual interaction.

Finally, the advent of digital technology has led to radical transformations in artistic expression, offering unprecedented opportunities for creativity, hybridization, and inter-art experimentation, while also presenting challenges regarding the authenticity of artworks and the audience's perceptual experience. In this context, the visual identity of Arabic script exemplifies

how traditional forms of writing can participate in this inter-art dialogue, bridging literary meaning with visual aesthetics in both historical and contemporary frameworks.

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