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Exhibition Title: **Islamic Practices:** *An insight into the sacred doctrines of unity through pattern and movement.*

Within Islam, there is at the core the key principle known as a doctrine of unity. Seyedd (1976, p.6) claims that 'Islamic spirituality could not but develop a sacred art in conformity with its own revealed form', suggesting that Islamic art practices consistently reflect this key principle. As Critchlow states (1976, p.7) '*no divinity if not the sole divinity*', using this primal revelation as a spiritual frame, Islamic artists throughout the ages have expressed this central doctrine through a symbolic, geometric, and aniconic art. Through displaying examples of these rituals and artistic artefacts, the exhibition *Islamic practices: an insight into the sacred doctrines of unity through pattern and movement* aims to encourage the viewers to partake in pilgrimage, reflecting the spiritual journey that Islamic artistic practices offer.

The location of the exhibition, within the Core of the Eden Project, brings the principles of Islamic art into a focal point. The company Grimshaw Architects' (2005) who built The Core describes how 'the design concept was developed from naturally occurring geometries' with The Core reflecting that of biomimicry. Critchlow's (1976, p.8) perspective of Islamic art is that it 'is predominantly a balance between pure geometric form and what can be called biomorphic form', this background of Pythagorean design can be further described in Islamic terms by Seyedd (1976.p.6) who claims that 'within the spiritual universe of Islam, there is a dimension called Abrahamic Pythagoreanism a way of seeing numbers and figures as keys' this practice which created Islamic art can also be said to be the main blueprint behind The Core.

The chosen Islamic art and practices which are displayed within The Core illustrates this understanding of the practice of discovering how pattern figures and movement with reflection towards the Arabic Keys Alif and Ba (refer to figures A+B) can be used to investigate into the heart of matter and the structures that surround it. By using this location to house the exhibition, the elements of unity which underpin both the selected Islamic artworks and The Core's architecture intuitively complement each other. Whilst encouraging engagement against the wider elements of the Eden project such as the hexagonal tiled greenhouses which hold an array of biodiverse plant life.

Letter 1: Alif

ا

Letter 2: Ba

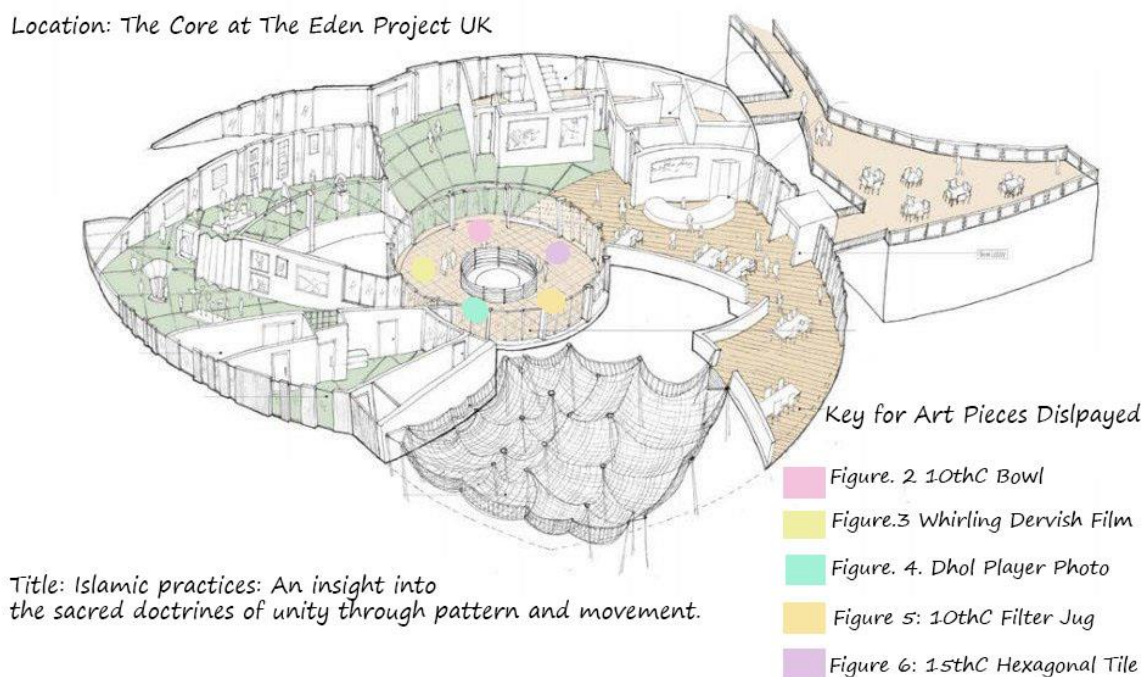
ب

Figure A and B: Visual Key for Arabic Alphabet for letters Alif and Ba.

Eden Project / Annual Report 2015–2016

Ways Of Perceiving Exhibition Plan

Location: The Core at The Eden Project UK



Title: Islamic practices: An insight into the sacred doctrines of unity through pattern and movement.

Figure 1: The Core Floor Plan Eden Project (2015) – Edited with my floorplan.

The exhibition begins through entering the inner circle of The Core, (refer to figure 1). Critchlow (1976, p.58) maintains that 'The circle surpasses all other geometric patterns as the symbol of cosmic unity becoming the timeless movement of the revolutions of time and the dimensionless point of encompassing space' meaning a circle within geometric art is the basis which governs the creation of the further shapes such as the hexagon. As the exhibition takes place within the inner circle of The Core it upholds the value of unity and maintains connection to the wider elements of hexagonal shapes.

The exhibition encourages a form of pilgrimage, as defined by Lockley (2016) 'a devotional journey as an act of ascetic discipline to gain spiritual healing', the pilgrim can engage and take appreciation in the exhibition's esoteric unity by exploration around in a circular motion. As an addition, the directional experience within the space of the of the exhibition is key, Baldock (2004, p.22) maintains that for the Islamic pilgrim 'Orientation entails an act of surrender to divine will', the participant pilgrim is recommended walking around the exhibition, starting from the 10thC Arabic Bowl (Figure 2) in a counterclockwise motion.

This is to reflect a major element of Hajj, an Islamic practice where a pilgrim makes an anticlockwise circumambulation of the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba defined by Encyclopaedia Britannica (2016) is 'a shrine located near the centre of the Great Mosque in Mecca and considered by Muslims everywhere to be the most sacred spot-on Earth' in this way this exhibition aims to emulate the key motions of spiritual pilgrimage in Islamic traditions.



Figure 2: Bowl with Arabic inscription (10thC Arabic Bowl) Artist Unknown, Period Samanid Dynasty, The British Museum Collection.

The first artefact the pilgrim expects to meet on this exhibition journey is this *Arabic 10thC Bowl* believed to be from the Samanid Dynasty. This artefact sets the theme of pattern keys and their meanings through the visual figures of Kufic (early style of Arabic script) design illustrated around the bowl (which

resemble the arm positions in the Sufi stance and the cane of the Dhol.), whilst the distinctive metaphysical circular point holds place at the centre of the bowl can be portrayed as having a deeper meaning in Islamic Sufism. This point is the start this idea reflects a key teaching in Islamic Sufism. Ali, the son in law of the Islamic prophet told a story on how all the divine knowledge can be found in the opening Surah (of the Holy Quran), The Fatihah, within the first letter of the first verse, bismillah, the point beneath the Arabic letter Ba. Baldock (2004) references Shaykh Amad Al Alawi (1934, p.35) writing 'everything is enveloped in the unity of knowledge; symbolised by the point' suggesting the point as a symbol of Islamic unity. Furthermore, Baldock (2004) references the Shaykh Badruddin (1420, p.35) writing 'when a pen touches the paper, before it writes, it first produces a dot', this practice represents how much power is held behind the metaphysical and physical idea of the point, concluding this artefact has value in being placed at the beginning of the pilgrimage exhibition journey.

The next artistic encounter the pilgrim, is the video *The Whirling Dervishes – Dancing to get closer to God*. This visual and audio encounter displays to the exhibition pilgrim a practice of movement within Islamic Sufism which aims to connect the dancer to the *sole divinity*. Dhwtty (2020) expresses how 'the white skirt symbolises the egos shroud' the Semanzen (one who performs the dance) wears this specific clothing meant to enhance the visual effects of the spinning motions. A spinning movement and orbital orientation for the Semanzen emulates the spinning structures of the cosmic. Cosmic structures being the orbital spinning of solar systems, Williams (2015), 'our planets have continued spinning because of inertia, the solar system and the rest of our planets keep spinning' these factors in space maintain orientation movements of the cosmos. The Sufi dancer furthermore combines this devotional language of a cosmic spinning continuum with hand gestures which are held close to the body and then extend in a direction reminiscent of the visual shape of the Arabic letter, Alif. These arm quotation movements are so the Semanzen can receive and share divine unity.



Figure 3: The Whirling Dervishes - Dancing to Get Closer to God, The culture trip. (2018) Whole Video. [The Whirling Dervishes - Dancing to Get Closer to God - YouTube](#)



Figure 4: Punjabi Dhol Players (1977) Photographed by R.Wolf.

With the photography by Wolf (2006) displayed to the evermoving exhibition pilgrim, a snapshot of a Punjabi Dhol player who has mastered the art of a Sufi spinning devotional motion whilst rhythmically beating the circular drum with an elongated cane continuing the pilgrim journey of transcendent cyclicity. Drum beating in an Islamic practice of movement is essential in a ceremony to reach a connection to the divine. Dhwtly (2020) 'symbolising God's command for be' the drum player begins the dance ceremony with commemoration for the creation of the universe by playing specific patterns of drum that resonate in synchronicity of the spinning dances. As an Islamic ritual Wolf (2006) explains 'playing and dancing in unison is morally equivalent to dissolving ones being into the love of God' in this way the dancers and drummers have created an interconnected space specific practice to achieve a spiritual ambition of unity. In speaking of the notion of the interconnectedness of place. Massey (2005, p.5) presents place as 'the symbolic value endless, of valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold onto as the globe spins' meaning the Islamic patterns of drumming and spinning movements are a way of embedding practices of Islamic spirituality in a spatial reality within the context of the world.



Figure 5: Filter Jug, (10th C) Artist Unknown, Period Fatimid Dynasty, Egypt The British Museum Collection

This fragment of an Fatamind Dynasty Islamic water filter jug 10thC stands as cosmic symbolic value for the pilgrim's unity and relationship with water and pattern. The MWNF (n.d) maintains that 'according to the hadith (sayings of the Islamic Prophet) Muslims are partners in water,' In this way Islamic practices are guided by the spiritual use of water. The aesthetic circles of design express a key philosophy of cosmic unity. Khalid (2000, p.72) defines these nucleated centres as ' , a Dairah, a circle, our patterns of existence are circular, the orbit of the planets are all Dairah' with this artefact there is an expression of the beginning point of a circle, which radiates out almost invoking the orbital spinning of the Sufi artistic practice. Combining this circular design with the key beliefs of Islamic human attributes such as the notion that humans are as Khalid (2000, p.108) quotes 'created men of clay' with a connection with water, reaffirms for the Islamic pilgrim, the doctrine of unity, we come from the divine and to the divine we return.



Figure 6: Hexagonal tile with vegetal motif(15thC) Artist Unknown ,Syria Ashmoleum Museum Oxford

At the conclusion of the orbital circular journey, the exhibition pilgrim comes to understand the Syrian 15thC hexagonal tile. Leading from the origin of the circle combined with life giving water and clay, refined vegetal ornamentation

within a hexagonal structure reflects the biomimicry and symmetrical properties of Islamic philosophy as well as the wider context of the location of the exhibition. As an adorning tile, the hexagonal geometric shape represents inner and outward awareness of the divine due to how the hexagonal shape, when repeated fills the space without leaving empty space between. For the Islamic artist, the hexagon shape portrays the limitational boundary to earthly domains, where a line emerges and extends from the beginning point, changing direction until it fulfils a shape from these limitations. These limitations of line in symbolic geometric Islamic art are to contrast the primal revelation as Critchlow states (1976, p.7) '*no divinity if not the sole divinity*' confirming the limitless power of the divine. Using the journey through these artefacts, the exhibition pilgrim comes to understand the context of a spiritual basis of Islamic pattern and movement as keys to achieving unity.

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Figure 5: Filter Jug,(10th C) Artist Unknown, Period Fatimid Dynasty, Egypt The British Museum Collection. Available at:

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