

LINK

### Mutahir Ariff

My recent studio work has focused solely on Islamic geometrical patterns, with my earlier figurative work in animation taking a back seat. However, I would not be truly sincere in saying that I do not still yearn for animation. My decision to abandon the animation industry also meant leaving the group of friends who were like a family to me, familiar faces who shared the same artistic goals and vision. I still find myself blown away after watching a newly released and sublime piece of animation, astonished at the new heights that the latest technology brings to the craft, while at the same time marvelling at the power of stories to move the human spirit. With each piece I wait, as before, until the end credits roll just so that I can acknowledge the creators of these latest masterpieces.

Three video artworks, completed during the first year of my postgraduate studies, *Kelp*, *Moss* and *Sand* (2013), are proof of my unwillingness to let go of the moving image. Nevertheless, these works unintentionally strayed away from animation and abandoned the depiction of figurative creatures. Unknowingly at this time, I entered a state of introspection in choosing nature as subject matter. Regarding this, I quote Moustafa who says, "conscious reflection upon nature and all its composites is enough to inspire a purity of heart."<sup>1</sup>

A surprise finding resulted in the formation of the pieces eventually chosen for my final studio projects: *Link* (multimedia), *Untitled* (projection) and *Hajib*. *Link* (2014) was my first foray into the exploration of Islamic geometrical patterns. It consciously referenced popular Hollywood feature animation, in terms of the borrowed colour palette, and acted as a bridge connecting me to my past line of work. *Untitled* (2014) was inspired by Islamic parquet 'deformations' created by Craig Kaplan. Kaplan's work was based on research by William Huff, and was later popularised by Douglas Hofstadter who in turn had been influenced by M. C. Escher's *Metamorphosis* series.<sup>2</sup>

I extended Kaplan's spatial animation work by applying the animation principles, known to most professional animators, to the star forms of Islamic patterns. Although Kaplan was successful in rendering his Islamic star patterns by way of an inference algorithm written as a standalone and executable Java application, he conceded that "(t)he construction of Islamic parquet deformations requires many separate invocations of the inference algorithm, and [was] currently too slow to run interactively."<sup>3</sup> To solve this problem, I adopted a more traditional approach by constructing the parquet deformations animation the old-fashioned way by using a more basic technique, frame-by-frame animation. The drive to realise Kaplan's vision of "a gently changing geometric design that is still recognizably Islamic" was inspired by the fact that nobody had attempted this approach before, owing to the painstaking nature of the undertaking. Changing shapes by hand and then executing the application was very time-consuming.<sup>4</sup> Even in today's digital age, achieving such a result is no mean feat.

In attempting this, I also paid homage to two early abstract animations from the previous century, Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1923) and the Academy Award-winning short film directed by Chuck Jones, *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics* (1965). According to Pixar founder John Lasseter, "it was such a wonderful cartoon for its minimalism ... so exquisite in its simplicity of design ... character animation in its purest form."<sup>5</sup> Wonderful in execution, *The Dot and the Line* was familiar in the sense that it still had a narrative component to it. Essentially, both movies consist of geometrical design emerging "from the interplay of the circular and the straight tendencies in universal law."<sup>6</sup> My work, *Untitled* (2014), is an oblique reference to Jones' masterpiece, striving to highlight the maxim "To the vector belong the spoils," which appears right at the end of the film.



Figure 1. Mutahir Ariff, *Hijab* (2014).



Figure 2. Mutahir Ariff, *Link* (2014), multimedia.

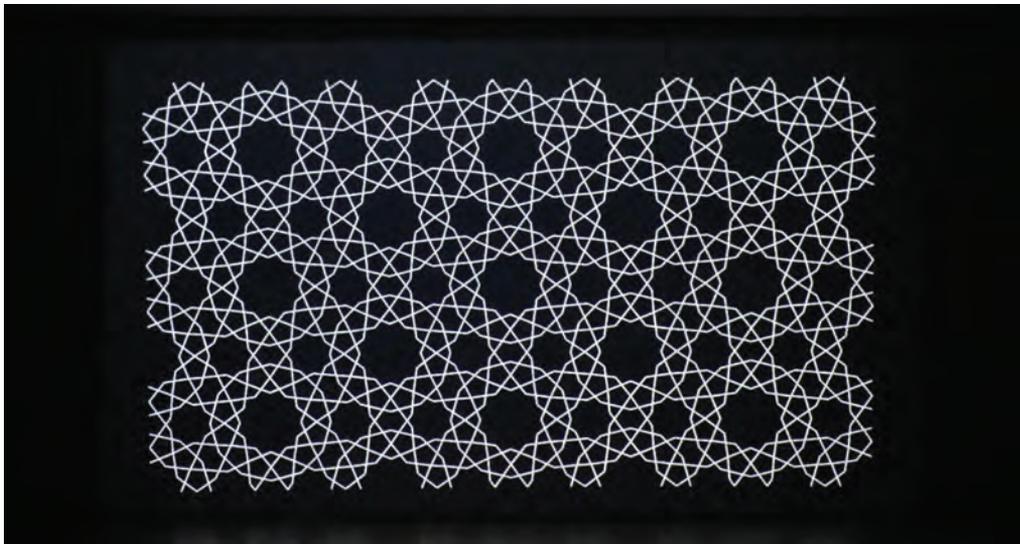


Figure 3. Mutahir Ariff, *Untitled* (2014), projection.

**Mutahir Ariff** worked as a commercial animator in his home country of Malaysia. Having abandoned figurative work, he now focuses on Islamic geometrical patterns in his practice. He can be contacted at [deartahir@gmail.com](mailto:deartahir@gmail.com).

- 1 N Moustafa, *Divine Inspiration: Seven Principles of Islamic Architecture* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia Publications, 2008), 70.
- 2 C S Kaplan, "Islamic Star Patterns from Polygons in Contact," p. 180, paper presented at Graphics Interface 2005, Victoria, Canada, 9-11 May 2005, [http://www.cgl.uwaterloo.ca/~csk/papers/kaplan\\_gi2005.pdf](http://www.cgl.uwaterloo.ca/~csk/papers/kaplan_gi2005.pdf) (accessed 29 Oct 2013)
- 3 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 181.
- 5 David Yañez, *Chuck Jones: Extremes and in Betweens – A Life in Animation*, 11 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrD0aog7Kts> (accessed 5 Aug 2014).
- 6 Moustafa, *Divine Inspiration*, 17.