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See more of Mohamed Zakariya's calligraphy online. www.mohamedzakariya.com

Career Profile

Mohamed Zakariya

Calligrapher

Mohamed Zakariya is an internationally known Islamic calligrapher born in Ventura, California, in 1942. His home, studio, and workshop are in Arlington, Virginia. He also takes private students in his role as *hoca* (teacher).



Photo by Frank Wing.

What got you interested in Islamic calligraphy?

In 1961, I came back from a trip to Morocco that had opened my eyes to a new language, a new culture, a new religion. I began teaching myself Arabic and converted to Islam. I saw a beautiful piece of

Islamic calligraphy in a Santa Monica antique shop.

It was very expensive. I decided that, "If I can't buy it, I can make it."

How did you learn to write the scripts?

I found photographs of ancient manuscripts in library books. There was lots of experimenting with making pens to use with different inks and papers. Eventually, in 1983 I was chosen for sponsored study in Istanbul with a master *hoca*.

What skills does one need to be an Islamic calligrapher?

You have to know the language. I work in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. Then you need skills in gilding, illuminating, paper coatings, burnishing, lamination, adhesives, inks, colors, and marbling. Very few materials are commercially available, so a traditional calligrapher like me makes his own pens, inks, and decorative papers. Then I have to mount the finished work in the traditional presentation and create the frame.



Fig. 1-52. Mohamed Zakariya says good calligraphy is "engaging and pleasing to the eye." Would you say this drawing fits that description? Why or why not?

Mohamed Zakariya, *Islamic calligraphy*.

Courtesy of the artist.

What texts do you use for your work?

I choose most of my texts from original classical Arabic sources including the Koran and other texts. I like to augment these with material in Ottoman Turkish.

Does one need to read Arabic or Ottoman Turkish to appreciate Islamic calligraphy?

It helps with the meaning, but the beauty and power of the line, color, and composition have power for everyone. I like to think of this art as an Islamic gift to world civilization and to art lovers everywhere.



Fig. 1-51. Mohamed Zakariya, *Eid Mubarak*, 2012.

Ink and gold on ahar paper, 7 1/2" x 13" (19.05 x 33.02 cm). © Mohamed Zakariya.