

Original Research Article

Reviewing and Classifying the Painting-Calligraphy Work Stages of ‘Mohammad Ehsai’ Based on Traditional and Modern Calligraphy Approaches

Ahad Ravanjoo¹ 

1. Assistant Professor of Graphics Department, The Faculty of Art of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran.
E-mail: ahadravanjoo@scu.ac.ir

Received: 11 March 2024

Revised: 20 June 2024

Accepted: 27 June 2024

Abstract

Introduction: The position of calligraphers, experienced and skilled artists has always been appreciated and respected in Iranian society. Mohammad Ehsai one of these expert calligraphers has great experience and a clear background in calligraphy and calligraphy paintings. He has paved the way from traditional calligraphy to modern style thoughtfully and patiently. He has a unique style in calligraphy painting according to the development of his works in Persian art which arose from religious concepts, verses of the holy Qur'an, and hadiths. He has always obliged himself to observe the principles and rules of calligraphy and the word concepts in his works, as he created his works in a fascinating style with a dynamic balance of positive (Bayaz) and negative (Savad) spaces. In developing his character, there have been various stages from traditional to secular art. The current research covers and analyzes a wide range of his works, from traditional to modern art. The main research question here is to address the classification of his works to comprehend their unique characteristics. The research aims to identify and classify his traditional and modern works and identify the traditional elements of calligraphy as a traditional array in a modern application.

Research Method: This study has applied a qualitative research method by using written documents and library texts and observing the artist's visual works.

Findings: The achievement of this article is based on the artist world in the contemporary era both in ancient and modern styles which implies his avant-Grade style of working, as it is surprising that while he is dealing with traditional styles of work in the form of Siyah-Mashgh, the Eternal Alphabet, practicing with holy words, he also actively creates post-modern and secular artworks without any contradictions between these two fields.

Conclusion: The environment of forming various calligraphy scripts of Mohammad Ehsai was formed under the influence of the modern artist's movement, its coincidence with the formation of modern academic centers in Iran, and also in consequence of opening the international relations of Iranian artists with their counterparts in other countries at that time, as this new life of the world along with teaching in the academic centers and learning the modern graphic lessons together with its connection with his mastery in writing traditional calligraphy scripts all led him to a different path compared to his other peers, which was rather a distinct style compared to those artists like Pilaom, Zinda Rudi and some others counterparts.

Keywords

Mohammad Ehsai, Traditional Calligraphy, Painting-Calligraphy, Calligram, SAQQĀ-KĀNA
School of Art, Secular Art.

How to cite this article: Ravanjoo, A. (2024). Reviewing and Classifying the Painting-Calligraphy Work Stages of ‘Mohammad Ehsai’ Based on Traditional and Modern Calligraphy Approaches. *Paykareh*, 13(37), 1-19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22055/PYK.2024.19239>



©2024 by the Authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

Introduction and Problem Definition

The art of calligraphy has gone through evolutions from its origin to the development process and entry into modern art; it has always been a central art and source of inspiration for arts related to book design in Iran. Persian calligraphy is an art that has acquired its decency, credibility, and sanctity from the Holy Word of the Quran, which has a wide contribution to the expansion of Iranian knowledge and culture. As evidenced by the history, the tradition of book design in workhouses was established during the Ilkhanate and Timurid eras, which originated from the school of Herat and Shiraz in the 9th century A.H. during the Timurid era; during this time the art of calligraphy became a structure for the art of book design. The Persian script of Nastaliq was established in the Herat school following the creative invention of «Mir Ali Tabrizi»¹ and the hard workings of «Sultan Ali Mashhadhi»², «Mir Ali Heravi»³ And other experts. During the Safavid era, the efforts of other prominent artists such as «Babashah Esfahani»⁴, «Mir Emad Hassani Qazvini»⁵, «Alireza Abbasi»⁶, «Abdul Rashid Deilmi»⁷ Made this art flourish. During the Qajar era, with the efforts of «Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor»⁸, the Nastaliq script adapted itself to the emerging art of lithography, and Siyah Mashgh turned into an independent and evolving artwork in the hands of «Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani»⁹. Similarly, Shekasteh Script flourished with the efforts of Seyyed «Ali Akbar Golestaneh»¹⁰ and «Darvish Abdul Majid Taleghani»¹¹ed and found a strong position. In the post-Qajar era, with the efforts of «Emad al-Kitab Seifi Qazvini»¹² and his students, the «Mirkhani»¹³ brothers and experts the «Iran Calligraphers' Association»¹⁴ was founded, and the art of calligraphy, which was initially established based on the tradition of teacher-apprentice form of education, with the foundation of this association, made an effort to educate enthusiastic learners according to the traditional style of this art to provide the opportunity for eagers to learn calligraphy. The Iranian Calligraphers Association (The Society of Iranian Calligraphists) has continuously taught calligraphy techniques to learners. The current of calligraphy after the establishment of the association provided the conditions for the emergence of the School of Saqakhaneh. The master, Mohammad Ehsai as an expert calligrapher arising from this developmental process was among these two currents. The purpose and motivation of the current research are to investigate, analyze, and recognize the multiple art styles of Mohammad Ahassait as one of the most prominent contemporary artists in Iran, who, in addition to being a master of calligraphy in the traditional style, has been creating calligraphy works of art since the 1940s with the flourishing of the Saqaqhana school relying on the calligraphic elements. He has acquired all the experiences of traditional to modern calligraphy courses and manifested a restless, dynamic creative artist in paving modernism. According to the definition, traditional art is a kind of art that refers to the concepts of wisdom and spirituality in the discourse of traditionalists, in other words, it is a kind of art that has emerged from the fundamental concepts of traditional time, and has grown and flourished according to its evolutionary process. This manner enriches the calligrapher artist with this traditional discourse and culture and invites him to a kind of spiritual behavior to reproduce the art of the traditional age thoughtfully and wisely. The artist calligrapher, Mohammad Ehsai, has drawn from this specific discourse on tradition-based culture and adopted a spiritual behavior to reproduce art according to these traditional thoughtful and wise norms. Therefore, it can be mentioned that during his artistic life, he spiritually insisted on the wise concepts of tradition, and has insistently kept his traditional art style. The major questions arising here are as follows: To what courses have the artistic works of Mohammad Ehsai been divided? And what special topics represent the concepts and contents of his works?

Research Method

This study is a qualitative research method that has gathered the research data based on written and library sources. The research results achieved visual interpretation and review of the artistic works. The statistical population of this research includes the traditional, modern, and secular calligraphy works of Mohammad Ehsai published on his page and the 'Tehran Auction'.

Research Background

Regarding the literature review of the present study, the following works can be mentioned: Aghdashloo, an Iranian artist, had a long interview with «Hasheminejad» (2003) in which he presented relevant valuable information about the techniques of book design, layout, calligraphy, and its place in Iranian culture in nine sections, in the book known as «Earthly and Heavenly» (Zamini va Asemami). The book deals with the art of calligraphy from the beginning of Islam to the contemporary era and targets its historical and aesthetic aspects. Aghdashloo points to the growth and expansion of the Nastaliq (gh) script and its evolutional courses, especially in the Qajar era. «Ghelichkhani» (2014), in an article entitled: «Painting, Calligram or Painting-Calligraphy», addresses the two mentioned concepts in its title: «Calligram and Calligraphy-Painting are two different expressions that must be carefully applied». Both techniques have ancient history, which has to be addressed precisely more than before based on today's needs by considering practical and theoretical aspects. In response to the audience needs, the potential of these arts should be recognized more and more to create great works. «Keshmirshkan» (2011) in his book entitled «Exploring Iran's Contemporary Art» deals with painting in the Saghakhaneh School as a contemporary art of Iran and believes that calligraphy painting has been influenced by the European modern art movement. He divides it into two main categories traditional and secular art. «Ravanjoo» (2022) in an article entitled «A Survey on the Modernist Art Movement of Iran in Calligram (Based on the Orientation Towards Traditional and Modern Art Strains)» argues that calligraphy follows the modern movement of «Letterism» in the West, which highly admitted by artists in the form of Saqakhane movement by focusing on identity approach that is divided into two types of traditional and modern styles or calligraphic and painting approaches. «Mojabi» (2011) has also addressed the Painting-Calligraphy works of Mohammad Ehsai in an article titled: «A More Detail of Mohammad Ehsai, in the art magazine of Honar-e Farda; He has evaluated the works of Ehsai in various forms of Thuluth or Sols script», which contain either verses, poems or literary phrases. In these works, there is still a traditional relationship between calligraphy on one hand, and literature & ritual ceremonies on the other hand, in which the concept-based traditional calligraphy is connected to its form. As, it can be said that literary expression is dominant in his works, with the harmonic composition of letters in a creative texture representing a rhythm and a harmonious melody, in a final pleasant lively texture. Each of these paintings looks like a long, compact inscription that presents the ancient glory of previous expert artists. In a similar study by «Fouladvand» (2011), entitled: «Mohammad Ehsai; A Modernist Study in Form and Content of Calligraphy» the author focused on the thought and ideology of traditional thinking and expressed the domination of modern tools and techniques in his works with specific textual representation. She has also pointed to some of the signs and symbols of his works in traditionalist classification. The editorial members of an art magazine (Majale-ye Roshd) visited Mohammad Ehsai and discussed his contribution to the growth of traditional calligraphy as one of the founders of contemporary art in a conversation titled: «Reflecting five decades of painting-calligraphy art, an

interview with Mohammad Ehsai, the Expert» (2016). During this conversation, Ehsai reminds his artistic journey in learning calligraphy, in companionship with «Reza Mafi», and targeting his spirit of exploration, as an influencing factor in knowing «Mirza Gholamreza» and his works in Siah Mashghs, and the ability of «Mir Emad» in calligraphy. «Ghelichkhani» (2014) has also discussed with Mohammad Ehsai about the quality of Calligraphy-Painting works and their connection with the audience in an article entitled: «Painting-Calligraphy in a Conversation with Seyyed Mohammad Ehsai, the Expert». In this conversation, Mohammad Ehsai by emphasizing the *Sols* script in applying calligraphic elements in Painting-Calligraphy indicates: At first place, Solos script makes the artists be able to do various artworks. The most interesting thing is that it can be implied as a personal narrative, as it can be said that, any graphic work conveys a message to the audience to comprehend a social concept. The value and originality of each work depend on the artistic effort and knowledge of its creator. Finally, «Alimohammadi Ardakani, and Pajooeshfar» (2015) in an article titled: «Analysis of the Representation of the Traditionalist Approach in calligraphy works of the 1980s of Iran», addressed the characteristics of calligraphy in the 1980s, and believed that Painting-Calligraphy is an art with a traditional approach. Traditionalism is a movement of returning to rituals to reconstruct the identity. The achievement of the mentioned study represents the implication of traditionalist concepts, which was under the influence of successful sale of painting-calligraphic works in the Middle East auctions, as in the 80s, these currents improved the tendency of audiences to this kind of works. Due to the structural limitations in the traditional approach, the relevant works presented more eye-catching visual work suitable for the market than conceptual artwork. By reviewing the studies related to the works of Mohammad Ehsai and addressing his main idea, it can be concluded that Ehsai is a traditional artist, who astutely uses modern tools, materials, and techniques. He also knows how to use calligraphic elements in his works to represent traditional-based art as an implication of traditionalism. In conclusion, it can be said that the artist has tried to manifest a kind of traditional-modern style of calligraphy in the form of contemporary art. His works are classified as ontology knowledge of Iranian art with a decorative essence. However, there was no study extensively dealing with the classification of his works, which is highly focused as the main object in the current article.

Analysis of Calligraphy Works Based on hypertextuality

To study the origin of painting-calligraphic works of the Sagha-Khane school, the abstract style and the relevant topics can be referred to. Among them the movement of Letterism and Tachism in European artistic currents are considerable. Reviewing the art movement of Lettrism in contemporary European art is very important for comprehending the origin of Iranian modern and contemporary art of calligraphic works. The current of letterism or abstract calligraphy in the middle of the 20th century includes a group of European modern artists, who were influenced by the appearance and form of calligraphy style of the Far Eastern region with expressionist tendencies. Calligraphy has always been a prominent art, especially in Eastern cultures. The art of calligraphy intrinsically is visual as much as it is a linguistic art, which resembles personal feelings through the hand movements of the artist, and even an expressional tool. Therefore, the general expression of the artist has been conveyed by visual and linguistic approaches. It is the same for iconography, although in this case, there are technical and mechanical limitations of letter design, layout, and printing» (Arnason, 1996, 586). One of the most significant styles that emerged from the context of the abstract movement of the 20th century was Tachism and Letterism. In the case

of making words meaningless, letterism was influenced by *Dadaism* thinkers. In letterism, one of the following techniques is used alternatively, the repetition of words, making them free of meaning, and using symbolism; words are placed in the form of fonts, calligraphic scripts, or other applications of visual art. In these works, the words in the context and structure of the artwork are shaped in a nostalgic and fascinating appearance, as their calligraphic structure is more considered. The Saghakhane School in the 1940s and 1950s, was able to connect tradition and modernity by benefiting from calligraphic elements that were merely used in prayers, charms, amulets, and talisman icons before that, as they started to be imprinted on the canvas by removing the narrative and the literature aspects of the words. The artists following the Saghakhane school created artworks based on a structure of words in a modern style. By referring to the ideas of traditionalist thinkers, these artists had found their conceptual foundation based on returning to oneself and looking for identity. The Painting-Calligraphy works in the School of Saghakhane were categorized as decorative words, which were created based on the visual appearance of letters and words by applying repeated, geometric, and circular forms, and using positive and negative spaces, that resemble the shapes of domes, inscriptions and the decorated rosette patterns (Shamseh) of Islamic art. «[The contemporary artists] started to use a combination forms of Persian calligraphy, carpet/rug patterns and colors, and also the folkloric rustic forms with new methods. Their work was called «Saghakhane» due to their connection with the past religious and artistic culture» (Pakbaz, 1999, 596). However, during the prevalence of Islamic art, using calligraphy art in book design, fabrics, and weaving patterns, were the implications of this idea.

Mohammad Ehsai, An Artist with the Ability of Creating Traditional Works in the Modern Era

According to his words, Mohammad Ehsai started his calligraphic works by practicing the works of «Mir Emad» and «Emad al-Kottab», and was trained by «Seyed Hassan Mirkhani»; he was also attracted to the calligraphic scripts of Sols and Reyhan, and the prolonged forms of letters, he was expert in reading inscriptions, as he has also known as an expert of decoding inscriptions during his whole life. Relying on his high self-confidence and mastery, he has become an expert calligrapher in most calligraphic scripts in a self-taught manner, without being in the presence of a teacher, by having complete skill in the traditional rules and techniques of calligraphy. He has experienced almost all the traditional-based calligraphic styles and created excellent artworks specially and innovatively originating from the Iranian traditionalist calligraphy. His calligraphic practices of Siah Mashgh, Chalipa, and Ghateh (writing piece of work) confirm this issue (Figs 1-3). He has also paid special attention to all the conceptual aspects of calligraphy according to the recognized format (Table 1). Ehsai is also an expert calligrapher of traditional calligraphy who has taught modern graphic techniques and has combined the discourse and skill of this style with modernist art. Although he has never addressed himself as an artist who is following the Saghakhaneh School, his art and discourse are an implication of the Saghakhane letterism, as he can be considered one of the first artists who entered graphical calligraphy to the modern time originally from the traditional styles. «Ehsai is one of the founders of calligraphy-painting in Iran, who has achieved global recognition relying on his calligraphy-painting works» (Keshmirshekan, 2011). He deals with this artistic style according to his traditional works, by observing all the principles and rules of calligraphy



Fig 1. Mohammad Ehsai, Siah Mashgh, ink on paper, 1991; source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>



Fig 2. Mohammad Ehsai, Chalipa, ink on paper, 1991; Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>.



Fig 3. Mohammad Ehsai, Siah Mashgh, ink on paper, 2018. Source: <https://mohammadehsaei>.

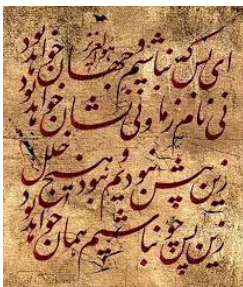
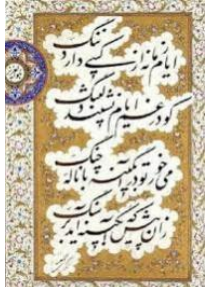
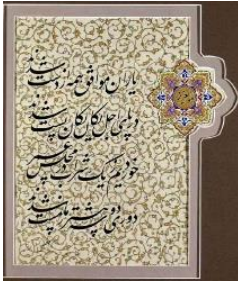
Table 1. The Calligraphic Works of Mohammad Ehsai (traditional, modern, and secular styles) based on word concepts and spirituality. Source: The author.


Type of Artworks	Art Form	Literary Aspect of Work	Material used	Material of Context	Calligraphy Script	Calligraphic Principles
Traditional	Chalipa	Dominance of literature aspect	Black Ink, color ink	Paper	Nastaliq (k)	According to Calligraphic Principles
	Siyah Masgh	The literature aspect is the next priority for creating artwork	Black Ink, color ink	Paper	Nastaliq	According to Calligraphic Principles
	Satr-Nevisi	Dominance of literature aspect	Black Ink, color ink	Paper	Nastaliq	According to Calligraphic Principles
	Ghateh Nevisi	Dominance of literature aspect	Black Ink, color ink	Paper	Nastaliq	According to Calligraphic Principles
	Mus'haf	Dominance of literature aspect	Black Ink, color ink	Paper	Mohaghegh, Reyhan or Rayhānī	According to Calligraphic Principles
Modern	Painting-Calligraphy by modern application	The literature aspect is the next priority for creating artwork	Oil paint, acrylic paint, car paint	Canvas, paper, gold foil, aluminum foil	Sols, Reyhan, Nastaliq, and a combination of scripts	According to Calligraphic Principles
Secular	Painting-Calligraphy by modern application	No literary aspect	Oil paint, acrylic paint, car paint	Canvas, paper, gold foil, aluminum foil	Sols, Reyhan, Nastaliq, and a combination of scripts	According to Calligraphic Principles

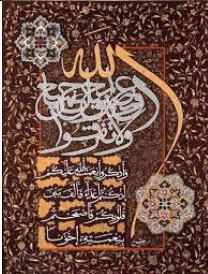

Classifying the artworks of Mohammad Ehsai into 1. Traditional Style and 2. Painting-Calligraphy

The artworks of Mohammad Ehsai can be classified according to his tendency to traditional calligraphy, modern style, and secular art. Ehsai is a calligrapher who trained under the education of master calligraphers in traditional calligraphy for many years and developed his artworks influenced by the modern art style. However, according to relevant critics, calligraphy cannot be considered an artistic expression. «... calligraphy is not an art, and is classified as a skill and technique, although there have been some expert calligraphers like Mir Ali Heravi, Mir Emad, Darvish Abdul Majid, Mirza Gholam Reza Esfahani, and Mirza Reza Kalhor, who have created great artworks relying on their ability and genius» (Mojabi, 2011). His ability to create traditional works is similar to the style of his predecessors in calligraphy, as he has performed almost all styles of traditional-based forms professionally (Figs 1-3; Table 2). However, his work style in calligraphy as a mere art has not been restricted to writing Siah Mashgh and repeating some patterns in calligraphy, rather the artist has used this essence to create artworks to show the viewer a world full of beauty enriched with innovative calligraphy works. During his artistic life, Ehsai has been engaged in traditional calligraphy and created artworks in this style. Following the traditional works, he started a modern style of works using knot-like patterns and calligraphic intertwined coils. In these works, he has creatively considered both the background and foreground spaces, and the density and dispersion of the layers of the painting structure of calligraphy work; he also organized the visual elements in all parts of the work to convey the concepts and meanings of words, letters, hadiths, verses, and other similar items. «His artistic style has been inspired by modern movements, originating from the Persian and Islamic art of calligraphy, which is still considered a traditional and spiritual kind of art» (Fouladvand, 2011). Among the relevant examples, one can point to the creation of modern calligraphic works, the "Eternal Alphabet" based on the concepts of sentences, verses, and hadiths.

Table 2. The traditional calligraphy works of Ehsai, based on preserving the word concepts and adhering to the rules of calligraphy. Source: The author.

Art Form/ Characteristics	Traditional Artworks	
Chalipa/ Traditional		
Chalipa/ Avant-Garde in case of the line direction		

Art Form/ Characteristics	Traditional Artworks	
Siyah-Mashgh/ Traditional style		
Siyah-Mashgh/ Avant-Garde Work direction in line with the sitting line, created by using two different rhythms and colors		
Siyah-Mashgh/ Avant-Garde Using black and red colors, Using different, rhythms		
Satr-Nevisi (Line-based Calligraphy) Traditional style		
Ghateh-Nevisi/ Traditional style		

Art Form/ Characteristics	Traditional Artworks	
Mus'haf/ Avant-Garde Applying poster techniques in the calligraphy of the Quran (Mus'haf)		

Reviewing Some Modern Style Works of Ehsai; The Collection of «Eternal Alphabet»

The «Eternal Alphabet» collection reflects spiritual concepts in calligraphy forms with a dynamic movement of letters that shows creativity in positive and negative spaces between the line spaces of Sols and Reyhan scripts. This work, which is known as the collection of Allah, does not represent the skills of calligraphy and composition as a separate concept, nor the mere painting-liked skills; All these characteristics have disappeared and replaced by a feeling of movement, love, and freshness, and the final Dhikr is a visual praying of art. For this reason, the observer does not see a determined principle of calligraphy rules in that specific collection, as there is no trace of indigenous and technical geometry (Ehsai, 2011). To create the collection of ‘Eternal Alphabet’, Ehsai has dealt with writing and making the word «Allah» in which his moving pen is linked with the floating spaces of the work surface, creating both similar and unique experiences in various contexts. The rotational combinations of the word Allah, and the presence of monographic composition, two four-word combinations, in different contexts all represent his attachment to the modern style of art by using various themes of color, which are mostly black. However, in representing the concepts in the works and following the principles of calligraphy in the performance, he has never been out of the defined area of traditional art. Relying on his knowledge of making graphical signs, he has even reached the level of logo typing in each work of this collection; which is a kind of process in which the artist creates a stunning, independent, and attractive design for each word or set of words, by considering the negative and positive spaces and controlling the background space of the words; as it can be said that he has considered all movements and rhythm to induce a traditional and spiritual space. These experiences are entangled with the dynamic dialectic and continuous connection of form and background. ‘The aesthetics of [Iranian] traditional art is a kind of aesthetics in which the geometry of [forms] has been shaped gradually to be presented to its native observer (Ehsai, 2011). Ehsai has always been attached to a kind of traditional geometry and spiritual aesthetic, as he has always addressed his works as a holy prayer and a visual manifestation of Dhikr, who forms these works in a modern art structure, which has more emphasis on the presentation discourse. A successful example of his other tendencies is his exhibition on the theme of Allah, which was held before the Islamic revolution of Iran, in which his pen style initiated its holy journey like a spiritual Sama performance. The sudden explosive appearance and glory of the holy word out of the background’s dark colors and tones, expansively passed through his works one after another due to its great spiritual nature. The pray-like floating of the letters, which are extensively struggling to emerge, in a low tonality of colors, turn into attractive painting works that have got their power from the artist's improvisation coupled with a spiritual fascination (Mojabi, 2011). Ehsai continued the creation of the

'Eternal Alphabet' and visual praying until recent years initiated in the 50s SH (70s AD). He still deals with the same artistic style of working. As in most of his works, especially the "Eternal Alphabet" collection, he applies the capacity, rhythm, and dynamics of Sols' script. Mohammad Ehsai by focusing more on the texture and construction of the *Sols* script letters in their compositions, considering *Bannai* script and the use of decorative scripts in the inscriptions and epigraphs (Sar-Lohe) could give a cultural glory and a new artistic form to the architecture of the script, which had a history of thousand years in case of geometric coherence while making the compositions of these works (Mojabi, 2013). He has spent a long time creating his modern artworks with various experiences, and the 'Eternal Alphabet Collection' can be considered one of these productions. This artistic style of works, known here as Modern style in the case of the application of artworks, has been presented in various forms of entangled, separated, logo-shaped, and mirror-typed works (Figs 4-16).



Fig 4. Mohammad Ehsai, title: «Iqra Bismi Rabbik», ink on paper, 230×110 cm, 1976. Source: Collection of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts.



Fig 5. Mohammad Ehsai, «Eternal Alphabet (Alephba-ye Azali) No. 13», black-tape printing, acrylic, 56×76 cm, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>



Fig 6. Mohammad Ehsai, «Eternal Alphabet (Sama)», black-tape printing; acrylic, 130×130 cm, 2016. Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>.



Fig 7. Mohammad Ehsai, untitled, 2004, private collection, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com>



Fig 8. Mohammad Ehsai, Untitled, Quadric, 2008, 70x70 cm, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com>



Fig 9. Mohammad Ehsai, Untitled, 2014, oil on canvas, 100x100 cm, private collection, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>



Fig 10. Mohammad Ehsai, «Doosti» (Friendship), 1954, oil on canvas. Source: Kerman Museum of Contemporary Arts.












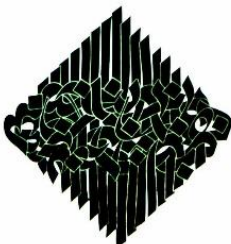
Fig 11. Mohammad Ehsai, title: «Khodavanda Ma ra aan deh ke aan beh (Oh God, give me what is better for me)», oil paint and gold foil on canvas, 171x133 cm, 2014. Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com>



Fig 12. Mohammad Ehsai, title: «Love», oil on canvas, 150x150 cm, 2007, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com>

Table 3. The Classification of Mohammad Ehsai Painting-Calligraphy Works, Modern style based on keeping the concepts of words and spirituality in calligraphy. Source: The author.

Type of Artwork	Artistic Structure/Characteristics	Modern Artworks	
Modern	Eternal Alphabets/ Focusing on the literary aspect, Visual praying, Observing the calligraphic principles, Composition, form, and color in the texture		

Type of Artwork	Artistic Structure/Characteristics	Modern Artworks	
	Entangled/ Literary aspect, Observing the calligraphic principles The entangled context as the main form		
	Non-entangled/ Literary aspect, Observing the calligraphic principles Smart application of positive and negative spaces		
	Symbolic/ Observing literary aspect, according to calligraphy principles Logo-typing/ Smart application of positive and negative spaces		
	Entangled coupled with symmetrical aspect/ Observing literary aspect, according to calligraphy principles Applying the symmetrical aspect, observing positive and negative spaces		

The Secular-based of Works

Hossein Zenderoudi as the pioneer in the painting-calligraphy style and the manifestation of secular art in the Saghakhaneh school in Iran (Fig 13). Due to the tendency of Ehsai to traditional art and his identity-based approach, he had a modern structured view in traditional-based calligraphy in creating almost all of his works; he also made efforts against the movement of Saqakhaneh, which was opposite to the traditional-based principles of calligraphy and the literary aspect of letters and words, as he showed his tendency to the establishment of principles and rules of calligraphy in protecting the literary aspect and concepts of words as the message of his artworks. However, it should be noticed that the other tendency of calligraphers of the Saqaqhana movement which was initially formed by Hossein Zenderoudi, was not following the two mentioned aspects of the Iranian letterism

movement. He created a novel style of writing that was brilliantly established in the dominant atmosphere of «lyrical abstraction» of that time, somewhere between the free action of «Non-figurative art», according to the signifier/signified dialectic of «lettrism» (Rastani, 2010, 19). Zenderoudi was not a calligrapher as he was unconcerned about literary and dignity features of words and their meanings; Rather, he was a powerful and creative letterist, who took advantage of the formal aspect of calligraphy and its decorative function, as he [gradually] started to remove its religious and literary content and used merely the calligraphic elements of letters to create an abstract and rhythmic art (Fig 18). The most similar approach of «Word-Art» movement to current forms of artistic expression is the movement of Dadaism. One of the components of the anarchic and unimaginative ideas of the Dadaists was to make words devoid of meaning, or at least to trivialize them like a childish mumbling to give them a new and surprising order. But, as a general rule that a specific manner might bring out its opposite object, in this case, there was also a strong motivation for creating a kind of careful structure and texture of words – similar to the Dadaist movement who were dealing with creating words – with pleasant appearance (Arnason, 1996, 586). However, Ehsai in part of his artistic life, experienced the secular form of art as well, which was a kind of response to the Dadaist experiences in creating textures with the magical theme of calligraphy, which is still considered an attractive and exciting experience of the artist (Figs 14- 17), (Table 4). Eliminating the literary aspect from the calligraphy works, which was initiated in line with the artistic movement of «Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani» in transforming practicing Siah-Mashgh into an artistic one, facilitated the creation of secular and form-based style of art afterward. The spiritual and mystical aspects of Ehsai`s works create a kind of form in the mind of viewers that represents the wise concepts of the holy spirit available in the calligraphy style of inscriptions. ‘To me when [something] is supposed to be decorated, legibility is not an issue. As long as it brings a spiritual feeling, it would be enough for me (Mojabi, 2011).



Fig 13. Hossein Zenderoudi, title: «H, Howaz (هوز هانسدل)», oil on canvas, 150×120 cm, 1982, Source: Tehran auction site



Fig 14. Mohammad Ehsai, «Red Page», 82×122 cm, oil on canvas, 1974, Personal Collection, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>



Fig 15. Mohammad Ehsai, untitled, acrylic on canvas, 170×133 cm, 2017, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>









Fig 16. Mohammad Ehsai, title: «Hyacinth flower», Symbol of Nowrooz, oil on canvas, 100×130 cm, 2015, personal collection of Mohammad Ehsai; Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>



Fig 17. Mohammad Ehsai, title: «Narges [Narcissus] of Shiraz (1976)», oil on canvas, Golden Page, 70×100 cm, 2014, Source: <https://mohammadehsaei.com/>

Table 4: Classification of secular painting- calligraphy works of Mohammad Ehasai by removing the concepts of words. Source: the author.

Secular Works	Characteristics of Calligraphy/ Script	Artistic Form/Characteristics
	Applying traditional calligraphy and observing its principles/ Noskh & Sols	Entangled/ The presence of composite form and color in texture, The fluidity of form toward an image
	Applying traditional calligraphy and observing its principles/ Sols & Nastaliq	Separated/ composition, form and color in texture, The fluidity of form toward an image No literary aspect
	Applying traditional calligraphy and observing its principles/ Sols	Entangled/ Astute application of negative and positive spaces

Secular Works	Characteristics of Calligraphy/ Script	Artistic Form/Characteristics
	<p>Applying traditional calligraphy and observing its principles/ Sols</p>	<p>Logo-typed/ The presence of composition, form and color in texture; The fluidity of form toward an image</p>
	<p>Applying traditional calligraphy and observing its principles/ Nastaliq</p>	<p>Entangled composition, form and color in texture, The fluidity of form toward an image</p>
	<p>Applying traditional Calligraphy</p>	<p>Entangled/ Central composition, The presence of form and color in texture</p>

Now, the questions arising here are as follows: What are the artistic phases of Mohammad Ehsai in creating artworks? And what are the topics and concepts of them? By reviewing his artistic works, it can be clearly said here that Mohammad Ehasaei, by having Persian calligraphy education under the training of master calligraphers, has created outstanding traditional calligraphy works in the forms of Chalipa, Siah- Mashq, compound forms of *Moaraq*, and following this time, he turned into the Saqakhane movement and initiated the creation of works on canvas with modern styles. However, her modern artworks have two characteristics rigid attachment to the traditional calligraphy rules and the manifestation of the literary concepts of words are rooted in the traditional-based calligraphy. The works of the «Eternal Alphabet» and those with the entangled forms are prominent examples of his modern times (Table 3). Beyond this, in creating works that lacked literary aspects with no clear concepts, he highly considered the apparent form and figure of them in passing through his modern time. His secular works are still based on the basic calligraphy rules with rigid attachment to the traditional calligraphy instructions. However, the words` concepts in these calligraphy works have been removed, as the connected letters and words present no specific spiritual meaning. The difference between the secular works of Ehsai and others such as Hossein Zenderoudi on creating Painting-calligraphy works is that the works of the second artist lack the two aspects of observing the traditional principles and rules of calligraphy and attaching to the literary meaning them. However, in the works of Ehsai, whether having a literary meaning or not, the principles and techniques of calligraphy have not been deviated. Having experience, mastery, and a strong free hand in presenting

various scripts, which can not be overlooked in calligraphy, are quite obvious in his works; The characteristics that, according to «Babashah Esfahani», bring light to the viewer's eyes, and excites them to watch his works. It should be mentioned that Ehsai has applied the tonality of traditional colors in his modern and secular works (Table 4).

Conclusion

According to what has been mentioned, the artistic lifetime of Mohammad Ehsai was divided into three phases 1. Traditional 2. Modern and 3. Secular. He has presented all the traditional calligraphy formats, including Chalipa, Ketabat, Satr-Nevisi (Line-based Calligraphy), Siyah Mashgh, Ghateh-Nevisi (a separate piece of calligraphic work), and Mus'haf (collecting books) in full skill. The quality of his traditional works has placed him at the same level as his master precedents including Mir Emad, Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani, and Emad al-Ketab. His modern artworks, include the collection of 'Eternal Alphabet', single and entangled artworks, logo typing compositions, and lyrical and symmetrical works, which, inspired by Islamic architecture lines, geometry, and aesthetics aspects, reached the idea of celestial unity by harmony. In religious culture, repeating the forms and words is the reminiscence of Dhikr; Therefore, the collection of 'Eternal Alphabet' is a kind of visual representation of remembering God and the heart's presence. Generally, from the point of social criticism, the painting-calligraphy works do not have a social and practical aspect and are merely categorized as decorative arts and objects. They are a kind of artwork in which calligraphic elements are entangled in an amazing pattern, and the letters and words are carefully interwoven. The words have presented two or multiple layers and their edges, punctuations, and structures are sticking out from under and over each other. Some of the letters are hidden under the other ones, and appear in different directions, as the whole structure by representing an entangled and gorgeous texture, makes the curious eyes of the viewer move dynamically in a space between the surface and bottom layers of the work; This pattern can decrease the boredom of viewers, and leads them to the bottom of abstraction while moving in overlapping compact layers of the work by making an structured-composition instead of removing the storyline. Beyond this, Ehsai is the pioneer of a movement that has linked the world of tradition and the structure and configurative aspect of modern art together. In his modern artworks, he has not removed the storyline to have an abstract work despite the fluidity in elements and space, the rhythmic nature of calligraphic elements does not exceed the principles and rules of calligraphy. His unique style of calligraphy-painting by flexibility and fluidity, coupled with symmetrical elements in the workspace, has brought an enigmatic sense of art to calligraphy. However, another part of his artwork is the representation of calligraphic elements by removing the storyline and literary concepts of letters and words, which can be considered secular art. In these works, he puts words on the canvas, with the same application of modern abstract, however, he has presented them still by meeting the principles and rules of traditional calligraphy. He has never removed the form and figures of the letters in favor of the composition, as it can be said that he would never been able to pass the rules of calligraphy, which he has spent his whole artistic life on. The secular artworks of Ehsai, with a unique experience, are very few in number, however, they are valuable for the artist who had various experiences in the field of painting-calligraphy with traditional rules. The special rhythm and tune invite the viewer to a dynamic and lively texture of the works, which brings to mind the viewers the idea of an attractive inscription work in an architectural body in case of beauty and historical stability by reminding the masterworks of Persian traditional art. He has merged his experiences of modern graphics with those of traditional works in calligraphy to create

consistent artwork. As, it can be said that he has achieved the hidden secrets of calligraphy, and the artistic intuition behind the Siyah Mashgh works of Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani. In almost all of his works, visually and in the case of the characteristics of positive and negative spaces, the composition and dynamics in the foreground and background of the work, have reached an expressive level to invite the viewer not to stop at any visual elements and actions of the work, rather moving flippantly and freely to all corners, indents, and protrusions of the letters, perceiving all the knots and playfully moving with the letters from the foreground to the background of the overlapping layers. The rhythm and fluidity in artwork take the viewer to a harmonious context, which is the concept that makes modern abstraction independent of the literary aspect of words. However, Ehsai in his modern abstract style, inspired by letters, has considered the concepts and literary of words and takes the general concept of form and color into the context of the text, as it can be said that the form serves the text. The artistic style of Ehsai in works with abstract impressionism presents a kind of European 'Post-Painterly Abstraction' of the 1960s in their painting works of him. His calligraphy works in abstract compositions support this idea. However, keeping the storyline represents a new idea in the letterism movement. Focusing on his modern works reminds the viewer of the previous concepts of Islamic perception and culture. His artworks by making new contexts relying on his constant struggle with the boundaries of traditional calligraphy are considered as his distinct ability. The sale of his works in national and international auctions has influenced his next artworks. After selling his works in art auctions, Ehsai followed his customer requests and moved toward attracting art investors, as the influence of the Art Expos can be traced in his next works. For example, his art exhibition in Nov. 2021 (Aban, 2021) is an example of an Art Expo, where the artist presented some of his selected works in printed form and sold them out in limited numbers with his signature. Such effects in today's art market will not lead to her promotion.

Author Contributions

This research has no authorship.

Acknowledgment

I am glad to express my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Mohammad Ehassai and Professor Sedaghat Jabari.

Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

Research Funding

The author (s) did not receive any financial support for conducting the research, writing up, and publication of this article.

Appendix

1. Mir Ali Tabrizi: (died 850 AH) with the title of «Qudwat Al-Kuttab» (means the pioneer of calligraphers), is one of the famous Iranian calligraphers in the 8th and 9th centuries of Hijri, who is known as the author and creator of the beautiful Nastaliq script of calligraphy.
2. Sultan Ali Mashhadi: (841-926 AH/1435-1520 AD) known as «Sultan Al-Khatatatin» (means the king of calligrapher) is one of the famous Iranian calligraphers and one of the most prominent Nastaliq writers of the 9th and 10th centuries.
3. Mir Ali Heravi: (951 AH/1544 AD) known as «Kateb-e Soltani», was one of the great Nastaliq writers of the 10th century of Hijri, whose handwriting style has been determined as compliance with principles, and characteristics of firmness and smoothness, dignity and purity which are known as Shaan & Safa.
4. Babashah Esfahani: who lived in Shah Abbas Safavi era was one of the most famous calligraphers of the 10th century. Resalah-e Adab al-Mashagh is his most important educational text of him.
5. Mir Emad Hassani Qazvini: (1554-1615 AD / 961-1024 AH), was a famous and great calligrapher of Iran, and according to some statements the greatest calligrapher in the Nastaliq script.
6. Alireza Abbasi: was one of the Iranian masters in calligraphy who was known as «Shah Nawaz Khan». He had his master style in writing Naskh and Thuluth (Sols) who had his special style in writing Nastaliq script.
7. Abdul Rashid Deylami: (1081 AH) is one of the great Nastaliq calligraphers of the 11th century in Iran and India. He was Mir Emad's niece and student.
8. Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor: (1208-1271, Tehran) was one of the great Nastaliq calligraphers during the Qajar era, who created a special way of calligraphy by adapting his works to lithography as an emerging industry.
9. Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani: (1246-1304 AH) was one of the great Iranian calligraphers in the Nastaliq script of the Qajar era. He turned Siah Mashgh from a mere practice to an independent artwork.
10. Seyyed Ali Akbar Golestaneh: (1274 - 1319 A.H.) was one of the great calligraphers in Shekasteh-Nastaliq. The master calligraphers and researchers consider him the best Iranian calligrapher of Shekasteh.
11. Darvish Abdol Majid Taleqani: (1150-1185 AH) was a great calligrapher in Shekasteh Nastaliq. He was a master in writing Shekasteh similar to the style of Mir Emad in Nastaliq who reached the skill that no one has reach
12. Mirza Mohammad Hussein Seifi Qazvini: (1861-1936) also known as “Emad al-Kottab” was born in Qazvin (1285 A.H.) and spent most of her life on writing and educating Nastaliq calligraphy.
13. The Mirkhani brothers: Seyed Hossein (1907-1982) and Seyed Hassan Mirkhani (1912-1990) were among the great and expert calligraphers in writing Nastaliq who are known as the founders, head and senior tutors of the “Iranian Calligraphers Association”.
14. The Iranian Calligraphers Association: with the efforts of experts including Seyed Hossein Mirkhani, Ali Akbar Kaveh, Ebrahim Bouzri, Seyed Hassan Mirkhani, and Dr. Mehdi Bayani, a researcher and university professor, and with the cooperation of the then Ministry of Culture and Arts, established on sep. 1967 (19th of Shahrivar, 1346 SH).

References

- Alimohammadi Ardakani, J., & Pazhoueshfar, P. (2015). Analysis of Representation of Traditionalist Approach in the Iranian Calligraphic Painting in the 2000s. *Negareh Journal*, 10 (35), 78-92. doi: 10.22070/negareh.2015.256 [In Persian]
- Arnason, H. H. (1996). *History of Modern Art, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in the 20th Century* (trans. Mustafa Al Islamiah). Tehran: Agaah. [In Persian]
- Ehsaei, M. (2011). Me without Myself: The speech of Artist, contemporary art magazine, *Art Tomorrow*, 6(28), 23. [In Persian]
- Fouladvand, H. (2013). *The Revelation and Intuition of Mohammad Ehsaei in the form of calligraphy*, Access on Jan 4, 2024; Available at <https://mohammadehsaei.com/articles-interviews>. [In Persian]
- Ghelichkhani, H. (2014). Painting, Calligram, or Calligraphy Painting. *Biweekly Magazine of Tandis*, 302, 4-5. [In Persian]
- Hasheminejad, A. (2003). *Heaven and Earth* (Asemani va Zamini) (A conversation with Aydin Aghdashloo). Tehran: Aban Book Publishing. [In Persian]
- Keshmirshakan, H. (2011). Mohammad Ehsaei, Painter and Graphic Artist, *Honar-e Farda*, 6 (28), 36. [In Persian]

- Mojabi, J. (2011). Multiplicity in the works of Mohammad Ehsaei. *Honar-e Farda*, (28+6), 25-27. **[In Persian]**
- Pakbaz, R. (1999). *Encyclopaedia of Art* (The entry of «New Painting in Ira») Encyclopaedia of Art. Tehran: Farhang-e Moaser Pub. **[In Persian]**
- Ravanjoo, A. (2022). A Survey on the Modernist Art Movement of Iran in Calligram (Based on the Orientation Towards Traditional and Modern Art Strains). *Paykareh*, 11 (28), 53-66. doi: 10.22055/pyk.2022.175400. **[In Persian]**