

## What did the school want to achieve?

Ostensibly inspired by the 'Offscreen' education programme, a window to the Middle Eastern art scene, this Year 8 project might be seen to address many of the aspirations of the new programme of study. Contemporary as well as traditional forms were examined and the project sought to break down both cultural and curricular boundaries while developing a wide range of art media competences.

## How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspirations were managed through a carouselled timetable over a term between painting, ceramics, printmaking, textiles and new media teachers within the art and design department with parallel lessons contributing to the project in maths and religious studies. In this way, curricular time was won to extend the range and content of the art lessons.

As well as working with the Offscreen resource pack, students undertook a joint Art/RS trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum and made studies of Islamic pattern work evident in tiles, rugs and decor.

The symbolism and significance of pictograms (Afghani war rugs as warnings to children etc) was discussed while in parallel; students examined the patterns that can be achieved through the application of 'Vedic Number squares' (an Indian variation on Sudoku), the mathematical basis of much Islamic design.

Back in the art studio, students made studies from flowers from direct observation and designed a panel which incorporated both the geometric shapes gleaned from Vedic square research and stylised floral pattern based on their studies. Using carbon paper, these drawings were mirrored both horizontally and vertically to achieve a symmetrical design.

Students examined the effects of warm (advancing) and cool (receding) colour, complementary contrast and techniques of tonal manipulation of paint and then applied this knowledge to a personal response to the brief, using Islamic patterning as a jumping off point for more idiosyncratic responses: to take the project beyond pastiche. With a view to addressing range and content aspirations, extension exercises included: Block printing a detail to compare the different qualities of symmetry and asymmetry; ceramic mirror frames; collaging traditional designs with modern advertising images to examine the effect of cultural juxtaposition; embroidery, and digitally manipulating details of paintings to explore accidental kaleidoscopic effects.

Students presented their work to the class for oral evaluation and discussion of the results.

## How effectively were the aims realised?

There is a danger with interdisciplinary work that art can be seen as merely of subsidiary service to the core curricular subjects. In this project, the relationship was symbiotic, and by the end of the project, understanding and skills in all areas undoubtedly exceeded the sum of the contributing parts. While range and content were extended in art lessons, it was equally true that understanding in maths and RS were increased through 'making'.

It was also liberating for students to see how adventurous and iconoclastic is much of Middle Eastern contemporary practice, some of which is itself a strong synthesis of western and eastern traditions. The double-edged result was that Islamic students felt valued and included and, in breaking with the flat colour conventions of Islamic pattern to create purposeful personal responses using a synthesis of influences, non-Islamic students began to reference Islamic culture as more than a derogatory tabloid headline.

**Tom Hardy** is Head of the Art Department at North London Collegiate School  
[www.offscreened.com](http://www.offscreened.com)

