Pixelated [pik-suh-lay-tid]:

When an image is magnified to a point that its resolution does not have smooth edges and clear tones, the image’s pixels begin to look like squares. The appearance of these squares is called pixelation and the image is considered pixelated. This represents low design standards. However, pixelization may be deliberately created when applied to specific areas of an image and it may be used to hide nudity or sensitive data as well as keep a person’s identity safe.
Yusef Alahmad
Pixelated Kingdom

This book is published on the occasion of the Misk Global Forum 2017
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Organized by Misk Art Institute
Misk Art Institute Director Ahmed Mater

The Misk Art Institute is a new cultural organization established under the Misk Foundation, which was founded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Under the leadership of pioneering Saudi artist, Ahmed Mater, the institute aims to establish Saudi Arabia’s leading platform for grassroots cultural production, diplomacy and exchange. These include an international exhibitions program, artist-led communications and an arts education program aimed at schools and universities across Saudi Arabia.

miskartinstitute.org

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Pixelated Kingdom takes its name from one of the few research documents to-date, which uniquely addresses the historical, and social contexts in which Saudi Arabian graphic design has established itself in the last few decades. Written and designed by Yusef Alahmad, the original research invested into developing the concept of Pixelated Kingdom was influenced by the designer’s experience working as a creative producer in both the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The driving force behind this work was to ‘elevate graphic design standards in Saudi Arabia’ by providing a resource guide for the artist’s peers.

For the occasion of the Misk Global Forum, we have chosen to incorporate the graphic images that were created to visually communicate the main thesis of Pixelated Kingdom within a display of Alahmad’s broader graphic practice. As the Misk Global Forum looks to “explore, experience and experiment with ways to meet the challenge of change,” Alahmad’s artwork considers the ways in which the proliferation of graphic design practices within Saudi communities can affect positive social change and encourage creativity within various digital spaces.

Throughout the works presented in Pixelated Kingdom, the manipulation of type and the implementation of traditional Islamic patterning and calligraphy acts as a vibrant and futuristic exploration of Saudi and Middle Eastern heritage. The dialogue of sensibilities that occurs within the artist’s design choices such as wide gradients of color, bold repetitive lines, digital textures and color separations was largely influenced by the artist’s time spent living in San Francisco studying international graphic design movements.

Alahmad believes that visual design is a reflection of broader societal values. By incorporating visuals from his cultural upbringing, and blending these design archetypes with his changing environments, Alahmad seeks to create visual connections between cultures. This is most present in several works included in Pixelated Kingdom such as “Bas,” “Oud,” and “Sejjada.”

Alahmad’s work within this unique visual identity has effectively inspired emerging graphic designers and artists throughout the MENA region and the United States.

Pixelated Kingdom surveys works created by Yusef Alahmad from 2013 to 2017, including works that were generated during his time at the Academy of Art University MFA graphic design program in San Francisco. In recent years Alahmad was featured in/ worked with Print Magazine (US), Baseline Magazine (US), Oasis Magazine (Saudi Arabia), Khaleejesk Magazine (Kuwait), among others and exhibited in numerous shows around the world, including, P21 Gallery x Kalimat Magazine (London), SoulSpace (Oakland, California), Loud Art: Executing Culture Shock (Saudi Arabia), Khaleeji Reinterpreted (Kuwait), Local Not Local: The Arab American Museum/The Levantine Center (Michigan/Los Angeles), Fully Booked Art Book Fair (Dubai).

The contents of this catalogue include a range of pieces selected for this exhibition at the Misk Global Forum 2017, as well as adapted spreads from the original Pixelated Kingdom document, created by the artist in 2014. The intention is to both historicize this event, and to disseminate the core concepts of Pixelated Kingdom. This is the first time that Pixelated Kingdom has been produced in an editioned format.
Graphic design is a part of your daily life: From humble things like gum wrappers to huge things like billboards to the T-shirt you're wearing.
GRAPHIC DESIGN

VISUAL COMMUNICATION
“I am not really familiar with Saudi graphic design, like at all. Which I think says something in and of itself.”

—Sidney, American graphic designer, 23.
As of 2014, there were **fifty-nine** colleges in Saudi Arabia.

Two colleges offered graphic design degrees for **women**.

Zero colleges offered graphic design degrees for **men**.

![Map of Saudi Arabia](image-url)
Unlike other countries, there is very little—if any—art instruction in Saudi schools. I think we have more barriers to push against than artists from many others parts of the world.”

—Abdulnasser Gharem, Saudi artist
The ban of figurative art by religious extremists contributed to the flourishing of the calligraphic arts.
Zoomorphic Calligraphy was developed during early Islam as a way around the restrictions of image making. The words and letters are manipulated and structured into the shape of a human figure, a bird, an animal, or an object.
There were some movements in the 1930s to 'modernize' the Arabic script and adapt it to modern means of type—production, these ideas were neither widely popular nor implemented.
Affluent Arab nations have historically been active in global culture. But still, their script has remained poorly represented in global digital media.
THE QUICK LATER
FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG
“Design directly expresses the cultural, social, political and economic complexion of a society, and it thus provides a snapshot of that society’s condition.”

—Nigel Whiteley, contemporary art professor and author of "Design for Society"
“It was disorienting to adjust to a culture in which picture making appeared to be subordinate to the written word, concluding that whilst in the West, fine art consists of painting, sculpture, and all its siblings, in the Arab world, the hierarchy of the arts has always given precedence to language: written, spoken, and sung.”

—John Martin, Co-founder of Art Dubai
Saudis know a lot about Western culture, but conversely the world knows very little about Saudis; besides stereotypes and what is in the media.
“I predict art & design will follow soccer in Saudi Arabia.

When there was no professional league in the Kingdom, no one was interested in playing soccer, but now that there’s a serious, well resourced league, it receives good media coverage, more money and players are respectable, recognized heroes. Families, who previously saw soccer as a shameful career for their children, are now encouraging them to practice towards a professional career.”

—Abdunasser Gharem, Saudi artist
It’s all about creating role models and the change will follow.
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