

Exploring the world of

DYING ART FORMS

Middle East and North Africa



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Research Scope



Identification of global art forms that are considered dying or near extinction



Historical origins and cultural significance of these dying art forms



Evolution of the dying art forms



Factors that contribute to the decline of these art forms

Focus Geography

Middle East and North Africa

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Yemeni Kohl Jar Making

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Picture Credit: Ingrid Langerak



Image Source: <https://i.ebayimg.com/>



Picture Credit: Brid Beeler



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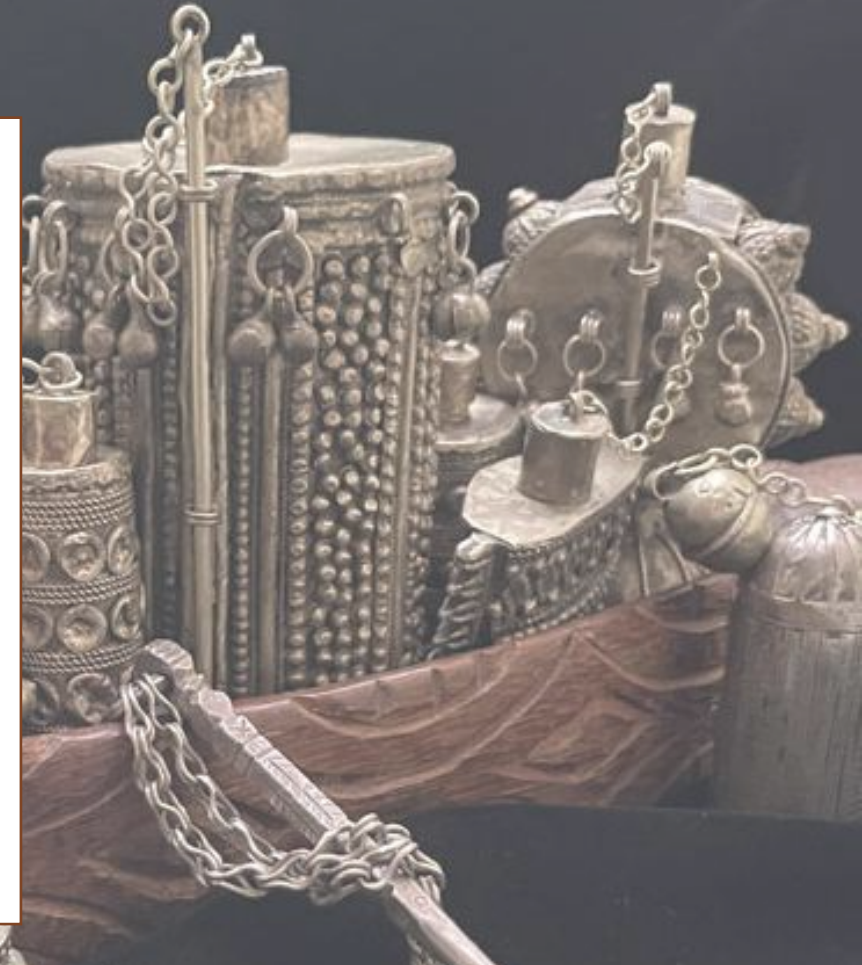
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Yemeni Kohl Jar Making

Yemeni kohl jar making is a traditional craft of creating small ceramic or metal containers to hold kohl, a black eyeliner commonly used in Yemen and other parts of the Middle East. The craft involves skilled artisans who shape, mold, and decorate the jars with intricate designs using traditional techniques. These kohl jars are not only functional but also serve as decorative items, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of Yemen. However, the craft of Yemeni kohl jar making has faced challenges due to modernization, changing beauty trends, and limited market access.

How has this art form evolved over time?

Modern Yemeni kohl container craftsmanship maintains historical techniques while adapting to contemporary demands. Artisans begin with traditional material preparation, maintaining strict standards for silver content while employing historical techniques like *tinkar* fluxing. Craftsmen typically fashion these containers from hollow silver beads known as *dugag* or *bedihi*, distinguished by their intricate granulation work (*šaḍir*) and the addition of functional elements like feet and necks. The creation of hollow *dugag* beads demands precise temperature control and skilled handling, followed by application of granulation patterns through traditional soldering methods. Today's craftsmen integrate protective caps and application needles while preserving the containers' cultural significance, particularly in wedding traditions.



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Yemeni Kohl Jar Making



What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Modernization: The shift towards modern beauty products and packaging reduced the demand for traditional kohl jars.
- Limited Market Access: Yemeni artisans faced challenges in accessing wider markets, impacting the economic viability of the craft.
- Competition from Mass-Produced Items: The rise of cheaper, mass-produced alternatives reduced the demand for handcrafted kohl jars.
- Skill Transfer: The passing of traditional knowledge and skills to the next generation faced challenges, leading to a decline in skilled kohl jar makers.
- Economic Viability: The time-consuming and labor-intensive nature of kohl jar making made it economically challenging for artisans to compete with cheaper alternatives.
- Socio-Political Situation: The ongoing conflict in Yemen disrupted traditional crafts, including kohl jar making.

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Kufic Calligraphy

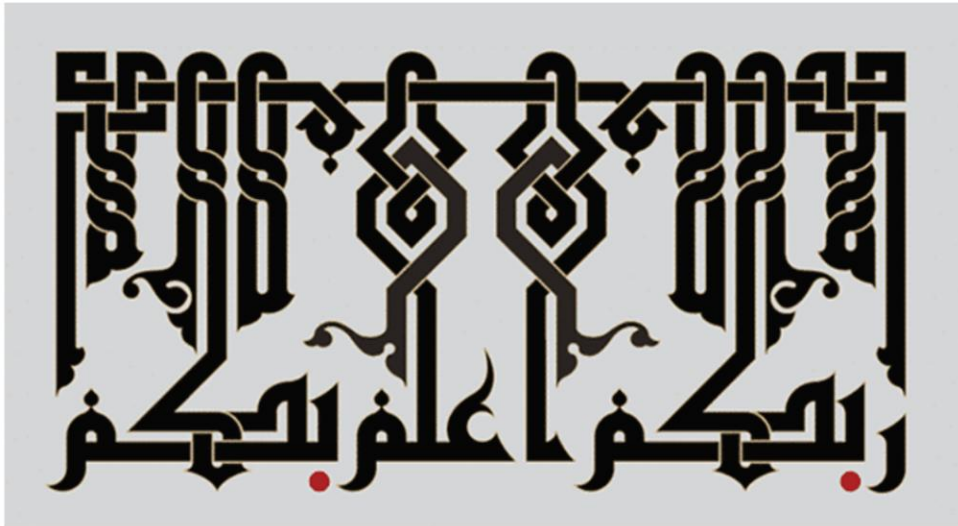


Image Source: <https://www.arabic-calligraphy.com/arabic-calligraphy-styles/kufi-script/>

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Image Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/twiga_swala/5834037457

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Kufic Calligraphy

Kufic calligraphy is a style of Arabic calligraphy that originated in the town of Kufa, Iraq, in the 7th century. It is one of the earliest forms of Arabic calligraphy, and is characterized by its angular and geometric shapes, with thick, straight lines and circular dots or shapes. Kufic calligraphy was widely used in the early Islamic period for the writing of the Qur'an, as well as for architectural decoration and inscriptions. The style has evolved over time, with different regional variations and adaptations, and remains an important and influential style of Arabic calligraphy today. It has been used to express both religious and secular concepts and is often featured in art and design throughout the Islamic world.

How has this art form evolved over time?

Originating in the 7th century, Kufic was one of the earliest Arabic scripts and was predominantly used for writing the Quran. Initially characterized by angular and simple letterforms, Kufic gradually transformed into various styles, including floriated, geometric, and square Kufic, each with its unique aesthetic and complexity. With the spread of Islam, Kufic calligraphy expanded its artistic expression across different cultures, influencing diverse art forms and architectural designs. Despite the evolution of other Arabic scripts, Kufic remains revered for its historical significance and remains a symbol of Islamic art and culture.

Image Source: Wikipedia

ART FORM Kufic Calligraphy



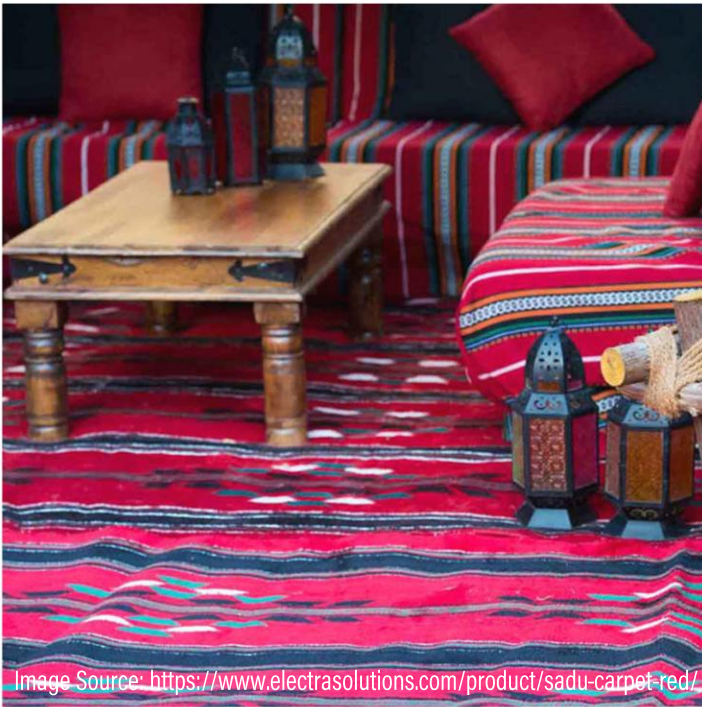
Image Source: Kufic Calligraphy Creation (Meta Page)

What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Practical Adaptations: Calligraphers switched to cursive script due to its ease of writing and superior legibility with diacritical marks. An emphasis on accessibility and wider reach for religious texts prompted a shift away from the more rigid Kufic style.
- Administrative Changes: While retaining some of its decorative appeal, Kufic script became less practical for administrative purposes and everyday use. The artistic intent was transformed from being a primarily religious script towards more diverse applications, like decoration of architecture.
- Technical and Educational Factors: Complexity of Kufic script (with up to 15 rules for writing a single letter) and its time-consuming nature, requiring patience, discipline and stamina made it challenging to master and transmit in a newly administered province.
- Islamic Expansion: By the 12th century, the vast expanse of the Islamic empires led to a gradual replacement of Kufic with more fluid cursive forms, eventually leading to the modern Arabic script.

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Sadu Weaving



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Sadu Weaving

Sadu weaving is a traditional style of weaving practiced by Bedouin women in several countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The term "Sadu" refers to the horizontal-style weaving technique used to create woven textiles with distinctive geometric patterns and designs. These textiles were traditionally used for clothing, tents, and other functional items, and often featured bright colors and intricate patterns. Today, Sadu weaving remains an important part of many Bedouin communities. The art of Sadu weaving has been preserved and adapted in modern times, with contemporary designers and artisans incorporating Sadu weaving techniques into a range of products, from clothing and accessories to home decor.

How has this art form evolved over time?

Originating in the Arabian Peninsula, Sadu was traditionally a functional craft used by Bedouin nomads to create practical items like tents, rugs, and camel bags. The early designs were simple and utilitarian, reflecting the nomadic lifestyle. However, with changing times and influences from settled communities, Sadu weaving expanded its artistic expression. Today, Sadu weavers incorporate more intricate patterns, vibrant colors, and modern materials while still preserving the traditional weaving techniques. The craft has transitioned from being solely functional to becoming a cherished form of art, reflecting the cultural heritage and identity of the region.

Image Source: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-weaving-of-al-sadu-01586>

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Sadu Weaving



What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Modernization: The shift from traditional nomadic lifestyles to settled communities reduced the demand for utilitarian Sadu woven items.
- Limited Market Access: Weavers faced challenges in accessing wider markets for their handcrafted items, impacting the economic viability of the craft.
- Competition from Mass-Produced Items: The rise of cheaper, machine-made textiles reduced the demand for handwoven Sadu products.
- Skill Transfer: The passing of traditional knowledge and skills to the next generation faced challenges, leading to a decline in skilled Sadu weavers.
- Changing Lifestyles: As lifestyles evolved, the demand for traditional Sadu weaving patterns faced reduced interest.
- Limited Patronage: The decline of traditional patronage and appreciation for Sadu weaving impacted its continuation as an important craft.

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Berber Carpet Weaving

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Image Source: <https://www.boucherouiterug.com/blogs/moroccan-rugs/history-of-moroccan-berber-rugs>



Image Source::
<https://carpet-berber.me/>

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Berber Carpet Weaving

Berber carpet weaving is a traditional craft of the Berber people in North Africa. Berber carpets come in traditional and modern designs and are hand-woven from materials such as camel hair, sheep wool, olefin material, or nylon. The materials are washed and then woven using a special knotting technique called the Berber knot, which involves knotting the yarn around pairs of warp threads. Berber carpet weaving is a significant part of the cultural heritage of the Berber people, and the art of carpet weaving is passed down from generation to generation. Today, traditional Berber carpets are still produced using these techniques, and can be found in homes and markets throughout North Africa and beyond.

How has this art form evolved over time?

Originating as a traditional craft among Berber tribes in North Africa, it was initially a utilitarian craft, creating durable and functional carpets for domestic use. Over the centuries, the art form expanded its aesthetic appeal, incorporating more intricate and diverse geometric designs, symbols, and vibrant colours. As Berber carpets gained popularity in global markets, the weaving techniques adapted to cater to modern tastes and demands. Today, Berber carpet weaving continues to be celebrated for its unique style and cultural significance, with artisans exploring contemporary interpretations while preserving the traditional essence of the craft.

Image Source: <https://www.vivamorocco.com/the-story-behind-moroccan-berber-rug/>

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Berber Carpet Weaving



What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Modernization: As societies modernized, demand shifted towards machine-made carpets, reducing the demand for traditional handwoven Berber carpets.
- Limited Market Access: Berber artisans faced challenges in accessing wider markets for their handcrafted carpets, impacting the economic viability of the craft.
- Competition from Mass-Produced Carpets: The rise of cheaper, machine-made carpets from other regions and countries reduced the demand for handwoven Berber carpets.
- Skill Transfer: The passing of traditional knowledge and weaving skills to the next generation faced challenges, leading to a decline in skilled Berber weavers.
- Economic Viability: The time-consuming and labour-intensive nature of Berber carpet weaving made it economically challenging for artisans to compete with cheaper alternatives.
- Changing Lifestyles: As Berber lifestyles evolved, the demand for traditional Berber carpet designs faced reduced interest.

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Mashrabiya Wood Carving



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Mashrabiya Wood Carving

Mashrabiya wood carving is a traditional woodworking technique used to create the intricately carved latticework panels that are a signature feature of mashrabiya architecture. Mashrabiya woodcarving involves carving intricate geometric and floral patterns and designs into wooden panels which are then used to create screens, windows, and other architectural elements. The wood used for Mashrabiya carving is typically hardwoods such as oak, teak, or cedar, which can be carved and shaped with precision and detail. Mashrabiya woodcarving is celebrated as a form of art and has a long history in Islamic architecture, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.



How has this art form evolved over time?

Originating in the Middle East, Mashrabiya was traditionally a type of wooden lattice screen used in architecture to provide privacy and ventilation. Over the centuries, the art form expanded beyond its functional purpose, incorporating intricate geometric and floral designs to create captivating patterns of light and shadow. As architecture and design styles evolved, Mashrabiya wood carving adapted to incorporate contemporary elements while still preserving its traditional essence. Today, Mashrabiya wood carving continues to be celebrated for its aesthetic beauty and cultural significance, with artisans exploring innovative techniques and applications in modern architecture and interior design, ensuring its continuity as an iconic Middle Eastern art form.

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Mashrabiya Wood Carving



What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Modern Building Techniques: The adoption of modern building materials and techniques reduced the demand for traditional Mashrabiya in architectural designs.
- Limited Market Access: Artisans faced challenges in accessing wider markets for their handcrafted Mashrabiya products, impacting the economic viability of the craft.
- Changing Architectural Trends: Contemporary architectural styles shifted away from using Mashrabiya in favor of other design elements.
- Skill Transfer: The passing of traditional knowledge and carving skills to the next generation faced challenges, leading to a decline in skilled Mashrabiya artisans.
- Economic Viability: The time-consuming and labor-intensive nature of Mashrabiya wood carving made it economically challenging for artisans to compete with cheaper alternatives.
- Conservation and Heritage Concerns: Preservation of historical buildings with traditional Mashrabiya limited the use of new installations, reducing demand for the craft.

Image Source: <https://riadrenovationproject.blogspot.com/2012/04/traditional-mashrabiya-woodwork-is.html>

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Khatam Wood Marquetry



Image Source:
<https://gopersis.com/khatamkari/>

Image Source: <https://taratiti.com/product-category/handcrafts/wooden-handcrafts/khatam/>



Image Source: <https://hafezgift.com/>

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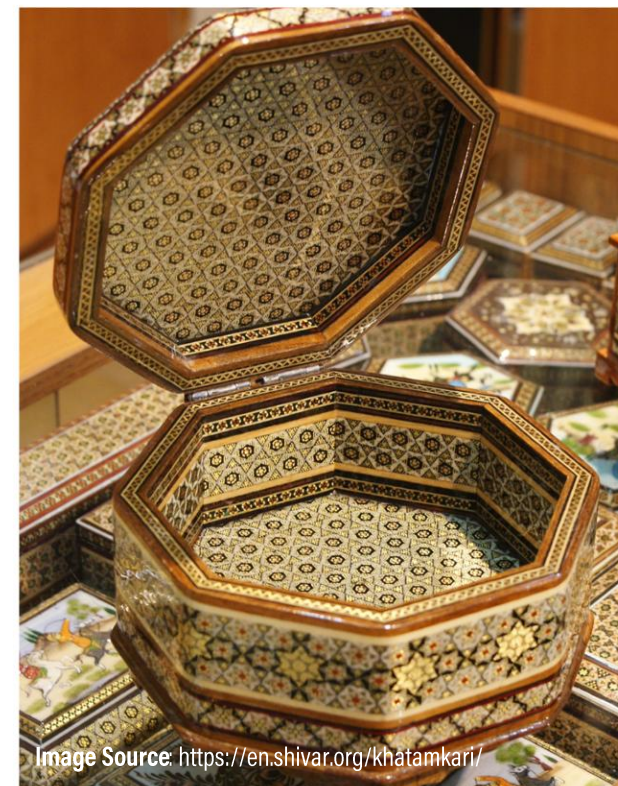


Image Source: <https://en.shivar.org/khatamkari/>

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Khatam Wood Marquetry

Persian Khatamkari, or Khatam for short, is an ancient craft that involves the creation of intricate designs using thin sticks of wood, bone, and metal. This form of marquetry is renowned for its detailed and precise geometric patterns, which are a hallmark of Persian craftsmanship.

Khatamkari is a prime example of the fusion of art and mathematics that is characteristic of many Islamic art forms. It reflects the cultural emphasis on intricate design and craftsmanship that has been a staple of Persian culture for centuries.

The traditional techniques of Khatamkari have been passed down through generations, with each artisan adding their personal touch to the craft. The precision and skill involved in this art form are a testament to the dedication of Persian craftsmen.

How has this art form evolved over time?

The origins of Khatamkari are believed to date back to the Safavid era in the 16th century, although some suggest it could have earlier roots in the Shiraz region. The art form flourished during the Safavid period, where it was patronized by royalty and used to decorate furniture, boxes, and even architectural elements like doors and windows.

The Qajar era saw further development, with Khatamkari becoming more accessible to the middle class. In modern times, the art has had to adapt to new market demands and the availability of materials. Khatamkari has evolved over the centuries, with changes in design complexity and material use reflecting broader trends in Persian art and society. Despite these adaptations, Khatamkari remains a significant part of Iran's cultural heritage, with contemporary artisans striving to maintain the traditional methods while also addressing to the modern market conditions while retaining artistic integrity.

Image Source: <https://luxuryproperties.ir/blog/item/229/art-of-khatam-kari-in-persian-architecture-craft>

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Khatam Wood Marquetry



What factors have contributed to the decline of this art form?

- Industrial manufacturing of marquetry items across Iran and the Middle East in general, presents a significant challenge. The demand for high-quality, handcrafted Khatam pieces has declined in favor of machine-made alternatives which are much cheaper.
- Additionally, the scarcity of traditional materials has prompted artisans to seek out new sources or substitutes, which can alter the look and feel of the final product. While local wood varieties remain accessible, the acquisition of materials like camel bones and expensive metal components is much more challenging.
- This material constraint influences both the craft's economics and its artistic execution. Market pressures have led to adaptations like greater focus on more functional, simplified designs that, while necessary for survival, have diluted traditional Khatam marquetry techniques.

Image Source: <https://luxuryproperties.ir/blog/item/229/art-of-khatam-kari-in-persian-architecture-craft>



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