

How can Muslims represent stories in art?

For my R.E assessment, I chose to consider the story of the angel Jibril reciting every word of the Qur'an to Muhammed.

My piece of artwork shows the main features of the religious story I picked, as it highlights the descending light, showing messages from Allah:

"He it is Who has sent down To thee the Book"
Qur'an

In my artwork I represented God as a star because a star is recognised in many faiths such as Islam has the star and crescent moon Judaism has the Star of David and in Christianity, it is the 'star in the east' which is the sign that a king is to be born.

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his **star in the east** and have come to worship him." Bible Matthew 2:1-2*

The star can therefore be used to symbolise honour or high important status consequently, I think it can be used to represent God or an immortal being.

I also represented Muhammad as a star yet smaller than God's star, as Muslims believe no one is higher or greater than God. Muhammad was God's chosen prophet though so I placed Muhammad's star on the dark cloth, to represent that Muhammad carried a message from God that has turned the dark cave into a bright and warm place. The cause of this is the presence of the Angel Gabriel – which the Qur'an says are created from light and the teachings of Allah.

"He it is Who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of Darkness into Light: and He is Full of Mercy to the Believers." Qur'an 33:43

Muslims must follow the convention of Islamic Art. Muslims do not depict humans as Muslims believe that they should not create idols or imitate the work of God in creating a living thing. Muhammad (the seal and most important of the prophets) hated idols and was born of idols and idolatry. A hadith recorded by his wife Aisha shows what Muhammad thought about making pictures and that he believed that it was a sin:

I bought a cushion having on it pictures (of animals)/ When Allah's Apostle saw it, he stood at the door and did not enter. I noticed the sign of disapproval on his face and said, "O Allah's Apostle! I repent to Allah and His Apostle. What sin have I committed?" Allah's Apostle said. "What is this cushion?" I said, "I have bought it for you so that you may sit on it and recline on it." Allah's Apostle said, "The makers of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them, 'Give life

to what you have created (i.e., these pictures).’ “The Prophet added , “The Angels of (Mercy) do not enter a house in which there are pictures (of animals).”
Sahil al-Bukhari 3:34:318, 7:62:110

Another reason for such disgust of idols was that the annual pilgrimage during Muhammad’s early life in Makkah caused the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. People would come from miles around to visit the Ka’aba and worship the idols placed in and around it. Tradesmen and women from the Makkah and some from other places would also come, attracted by the large numbers of people and sell their goods during the pilgrimage season. This unbalanced the society and the economy during the period of Muhammad’s life.

There are a range of Islamic Art conventions such as the Islamic calligraphy and geometric patterns. Calligraphy is an art form used to make a link to the religious and spiritual world it is used to describe, but using letters and words, not in pictures. Calligraphy and geometric patterns are used to show the message of Allah but are not idolatry. If a Muslim drew or worshipped something living that could be idolatry and would disrespect Muhammad and the Islamic conventions.

Geometric patterns are also used as an art form in Islamic Mosques. The purpose is to attract people and to make the Mosque a beautiful place that feels holy. The patterns help to make the Mosque a place where people can show their commitment to their belief and be inspired by people who have shown their commitment by spending time making every detail of the patterns in the Mosque.