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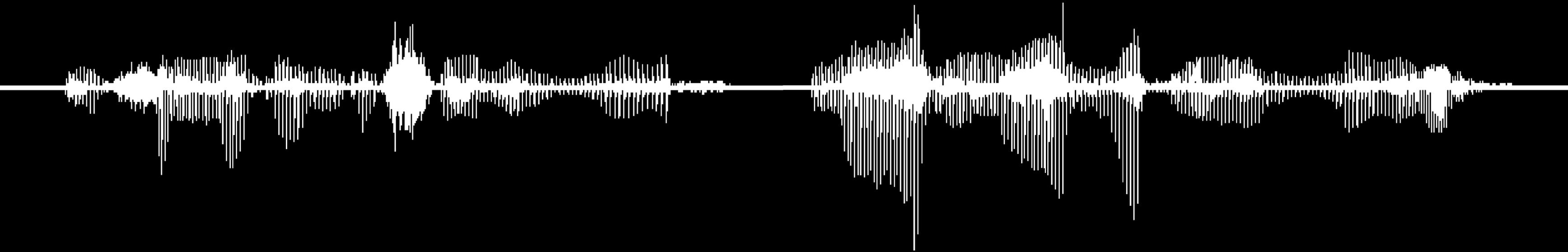
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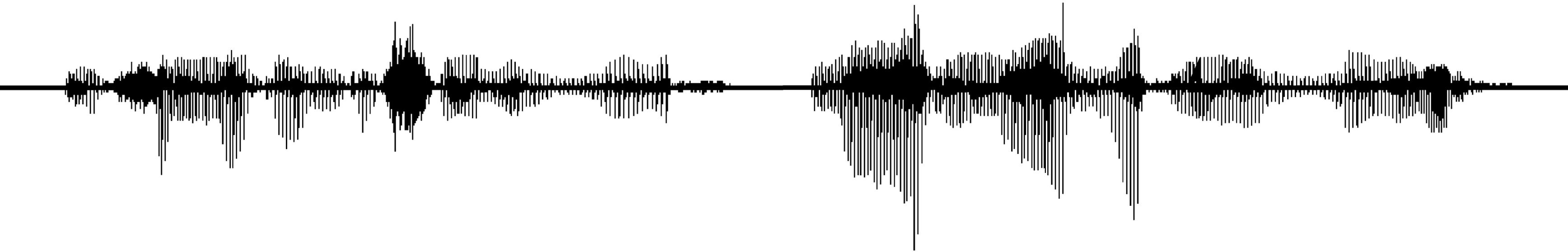
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RITUALS, Our Past, Present and Future
Glimpses of Islamic Enrichment

Othman M. R. Khunji



RITUALS, Our Past, Present and Future
Glimpses of Islamic Enrichment

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my late mother,

Majeeda Ali Ahmed Al-Awadhi,

for raising me to be the person that I am today,

as this thesis is a sentiment validating her voice that lives within me.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank SH. Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned for her vision for Education City in Qatar Foundation, I am grateful to have had this opportunity to study and collaborate with students from many universities and cultures from around the world.

I am using this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude towards my thesis committee: Richard Lombard, Diane Derr, Michael Wirtz and Ovamir Anjum for seeing me through every step of this life altering experience. In addition I would like to thank my professors, colleagues and friends: Pornprapha Phatanateacha, Thomas Modeen, Yousef Ahmad Al-Homaid, Paolo Cardini, Peter Chomowicz, Simoné Muscolino, Marco Bruno, Law Alsobrook, Bibi Baloyra, Abdulla A. Al-Awadhi, Sh. Mohammed Janahi, Valerie Jeremijenko, Allyson Vanstone, Timothy Devoe, Muneera Spence and Maryam Al-Homaid, who supported me throughout the course of my thesis within this MFA program. I am thankful for their aspiring guidance and invaluable constructive criticism and friendly advice. I am sincerely grateful to them for infinitely sharing their truthful and illuminating views.

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‘People tend to believe that to be modern you have to disengage from your heritage, but it's not true.’¹

SH. Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned

Abstract: A Muslim should be encouraged to comprehend the benefit and value behind every aspect of Islamic practice and wisdom, and not just practice their religion because they were told so. The products proposed in this thesis aim to achieve this by inviting and encouraging a Muslim to practice the five pillars of Islam while comprehending their value through the use of modern means such as Arduino technology, 3D printing and visual computing programming.

I am provoked by the fact that the circle of Gulf-region Muslims I'm surrounded by, and have been exposed to since childhood, belong to one of two stereotypes: those against or afraid of change who force adherence to religious chapter and verse, or those straying further and further away from our religion's rituals and traditions. Can the practice of religion, and the values that it teaches us, be made more accessible and engaging by incorporating the very technology that is often accused of distracting us from its practice?

¹Nelligan, Conor. «Heritage Overview.» Lecture, West Cork Heritage Conference from Cork Country Council, Clonakilty, September 12, 2014

Introduction: At a young age, when instructed by a parent or family member with authority to do or say certain things, you simply agree and obey. The very first memory I have of my religion, Islam, is having been asked to say the words *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ* (In the name of Allah), before eating lunch in my grandmother's house. At the time I was confused, it felt like I needed permission to obtain the simplest pleasure in life: food. The early years of my life were somewhat confusing, being exposed to two expressions of Muslim families, one liberal and one conservative, where what was permitted and forbidden (الحلال و الحرام) wasn't always agreed upon. The same rituals were undertaken slightly differently and it made grasping the concept of what was right and wrong in Islam vague. Abiding by two sets of rules, generated by two drastically different expressions of faith, was difficult. Gradually, increasing access to global media exposed me to the diversity within Islam and the variety of day-to-day lifestyles of other Muslim children. Being exposed to such diversity was beneficial, but the resulting confusion in my faith was not. Having to exercise our religion's rituals without comprehending the underlying value behind their engagements, led to a lack of interest in truly wanting to commit to such actions.

At the age of 20, I was put through the greatest challenge: losing my mother. (اللَّهُ يَرْحَمُهَا وَيَسْكُنُهَا فِي وَاسِعِ جَنَّتِهَا) At the sudden, devastating time of her passing, my sister was cornered by conservative members of our family who instructed her that she should cover her hair by wearing the hijab, which my mother had been hoping for but my father was absolutely against at the time. The idea of asking my sister to make

such a critical decision at such a fragile period, which would affect her permanently, seemed unfair especially at such a young age of 15, while she was battling between the different views of both our parents. Using such methods of passing down knowledge and educating Muslim youth certainly taints the love and understanding a Muslim should naturally adopt towards their faith in Islam.

(لا إكراه في الدين قد تبين الرشد من الغي فمن يكفر بالطاغوت و يؤمن بالله فقد استمسك بالعروة الوثقى لا انفصام لها والله سميع عليم)¹

(There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the trust worthiest handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.)

(ادع الى سبيل ربك بالحكمة و الموعظة الحسنة وجد لهم بالتي هي احسن إن ربك هو أعلم بمن ضل عن سبيله وهو أعلم بالمهتدين)²

(Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from his way, and he is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.)

When one is unprepared, any journey could be challenging and difficult to endure. Thankfully, my sister grew accustomed to wearing the hijab until she reached a stage where she fully understood and grasped the meaning and value behind such a life-changing decision. This understanding generated new significance and value to her life and surroundings, which ultimately truly deepened and strengthened her connection to Allah.

Coming from a rich Islamic, Arabian background, it was a shame to not fully comprehend our morals and values. As a child, simply following within other's footsteps formed an identity, but provided me with little insight into the meaning behind the rituals and practices that would eventually empower the formation of my true identity. Year after year, the internalizing of my interpretations of faith grew clearer and stronger, from observing the various behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles of the circle of people that surrounded me. Encouraged by my professor, Peter S. Chomowicz, I am hoping to use the design process to create objects and experiences that speak to others who shared the same conflicting scenarios that I did, and provide a catalyst for discussion among people of every type of faith.

¹Albaqara, 256, Sahih International <http://quran.com/256/2>

²Alnahl, 125, Sahih International <http://quran.com/125/16>

Problem Statement: Forced adherence to religious rituals does not lead to engagement and commitment. ‘Wanting to’ practice is a key to a successful religious exercise. This necessity is seen in how Islam came to refute other religions that were blindly practiced by individuals. Allah says in the Qur’an “And when it is said to them, ‘Follow what Allah has revealed,’ they say, ‘Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing’ Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided” (2:170).

My thesis aims to examine the religious and cultural rituals and traditions of the Gulf region with an eye to reimagining them and making them engaging to all, as this would allow various audiences to experience and interact with these objects and environments without prejudice. I would like these experiences to emphasize the five pillars of Islam: Testimony, Prayer, Charity, Fasting and the pilgrimage to Makkah. Ultimately, I hope this exploration will positively contribute to the concept of incorporating religion in one’s daily life.

I would like to state that I am certainly not dictating a behavioral method or system, but creating a platform for dialogue.

I believe Islamic rituals can be interpreted within a contemporary context that better engages and reveals their essential value. Looking into social behaviors and ‘cultural phenomena’ in the gulf region has led me to focus on social/critical design facilitated through environment/product design. My intent is for these experiences

to trigger change in human behavior, to enrich and enhance the connection with the meaning behind the ritual, and ask if it is valuing or devaluing the essence of the process and goal of the action. I hope that the interactive experiences that I have created will engage people and open their eyes to new ways of practicing and teaching religion, and will also strengthen their faith in the ideals of Islam.

Background: Ritual and the Five Pillars

Ritual, in the most general sense, is a term that indicates fixed acts and actions that take place at certain recurrent moments and in which certain bodily gestures, words, music, and material objects may play a role. In the past the word ritual referred to religious ritual acts. Early twentieth-century scholars of religion such as Sigmund Freud and the biologist Julian Huxley began to use the word ritual in a much broader meaning.¹

Ritual in Islam varies slightly from the accepted definition because certain sacred practices and rituals are very important to Muslims. There is a significant way that followers of Islam remember history, express conviction, and grow in devotion. Some rituals are practiced daily like prayer, which is performed throughout the waking cycle of the day, influencing the rhythm of the entire day in many Muslim nations. Yet other rituals are practiced annually, like those aligned with specific Islamic holidays.

The religious practices and rituals of Islam are relatively few in number, but great in importance. The Five Pillars of Islam are five practices regarded by all sects of the Islamic religion as essential to the Muslim faith.

I have chosen to examine rituals because they are the simplest and most powerful actions that are regularly experienced in a Muslim's religious journey, and they remind the practitioners of the value of religion and its traditions throughout history. The rituals that I have touched upon are derived from the five pillars: The Shahadah, Salat, Zakat, Sawm and Haj.

The first pillar, the shahadah, consists of two declarations. The first, "There is no god but God," affirms belief in a single divine reality (tawhid). The second, "Muhammad is the messenger of God," affirms submission to God via acceptance of His message as revealed to humanity through Muhammad. This declaration of faith signifies entrance of the believer into the broader community (ummah) of Muslims and is required of converts to Islam.

The second pillar, the five daily prayers, signifies the believer's submission to God and serves as public, physical evidence of the believer's adherence to Islam. Prayers are to be performed just before dawn, at noon, in midafternoon, just after sunset, and in the evening, between an hour after sunset and midnight. Prayers are to be made in the direction of Mecca and must be carried out in a state of ritual purity, achieved by either ritual ablutions or a bath.

The third pillar is observation of the month-long fast (sawm) of Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar), from sunrise to sunset. The believer is supposed to abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity during the daylight hours, demonstrating affirmation of ethical awareness and serving as a purifying act of sacrifice of one's bodily desires for the sake of God. The direct experience of pain and hunger over a prolonged period of time reminds the believer of the pain and hunger experienced by the poor and hungry.

The fourth pillar is the zakat (alms tax), typically paid to a religious official or representative of the Islamic state or to a representative of a local mosque. This amount is traditionally set at one-fortieth, or 2.5 percent, of the value of all liquid assets and income-generating properties owned by the believer. It is used to feed the poor, encourage conversion to Islam, ransom captives, help travelers, support those devoting themselves to God's work, relieve debtors, defend the faith, and any other purpose deemed appropriate. The Zakat serves as a reminder of one's broader social responsibilities to the community.

The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca during the first ten days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. Every Muslim who is physically and financially capable of making the trip and performing the prescribed rites is required to make the hajj. The nine essential rites of the hajj are the putting on of the ihram (unsewn cloth symbolizing the humility and equality of all believers), circumambulation of the Kaaba, standing at the plain of Arafat, spending the night at Muzdalifa, throwing stones at three symbols of Satan, sacrifice of an animal at Mina, repetition of the circumambulation of the Kaaba, drinking of water from the well

of Zamzam, and performance of two cycles of prayer at the Station of Abraham. The hajj can be considered complete without performing all of the required rites, but the pilgrim must pay expiation for the failure to complete them. During the hajj, the pilgrim is to avoid thinking about anything but the remembrance of God and the rites of pilgrimage, since the circumambulation of the Kaaba, like canonical prayer, symbolizes the believer's entrance into the divine presence.²

عن أبي عبد الرحمن عبد الله بن عمر بن الخطاب رضي الله عنهما قال : سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول :
(بني الإسلام على خمس : شهادة أن لا إله إلا الله ، و أن محمداً رسول الله ، وإقام الصلاة ، وإيتاء الزكاة ، وحج البيت ،
وصوم رمضان) رواه البخاري و مسلم .

¹Mohamed, Rashid. *Encyclopedia of Islam & The Muslim World*.

Accessed December 2014 ,3. [https://archive.org/details/](https://archive.org/details/EncyclopediaOfIslamAndTheMuslimWorld_201211)

EncyclopediaOfIslamAndTheMuslimWorld_201211

²«Pillars of Islam.» - *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.

Accessed March 2015 ,30. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com>

/article/opr/t125/e1859?_hi=17&_pos=3.

Background: Adherence to Ritual and Education

Although adherence to the rituals is part of the Islamic faith, many times it is done with little or no understanding of the original meanings behind the practice. Rituals may drift out of meaning or acquire new meaning in changed circumstances, for example, as a result of “transplantation” to a Western country, or as result of the secularization of rituals. ‘Preaching and practicing Islam rests on five pillars, rituals that Muslims are required to perform. Although a large majority in most of the 39 countries surveyed by the Pew Research Centre say that religion is very important in their lives, the practice of these rituals is uneven. The hajj is the least practiced: only about 9% have been to Mecca. But it is also the most complex and costly.’¹

Therefore, for the meaning behind rituals to survive, education of the meanings as well as the practice of a ritual is imperative. A Muslim should be encouraged to comprehend the benefit and value behind every aspect of Islamic practice and wisdom. As noted Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan, proponent of a movement to reform Islam through an ethical appeal, states: “Every Muslim has to have the right to knowledge, freedom and well being, as without education there will be no humanity”². This idea is crucial, not only because a Muslim is supposed to comprehend the purpose of her/his practice, but also because a Muslim should want to practice Islam and not just have to. Having been brought up in a Muslim household amongst a family who taught me right from wrong and good from bad, I can relate my own experience of learning about my religion. Although most of my experience was positive, sometimes the way some values were passed

down seemed unfair and unnecessarily forceful, where children like myself weren’t given the right to think for themselves or generate an opinion. If a Muslim child, who has no prior knowledge of the meaning of faith in Islam was given a more engaging experience that communicated the meaning of the ritual of fasting, the child might actually comprehend the value of the ritual and be eager in wanting to learn more about the significance of the actions.

“A Muslim would also accord seeking knowledge priority, as knowledge has been equated with light, and ignorance with darkness. Allah brings out believers from darkness to light. The Prophet (PBUH) has said that a moment’s reflection is more important than a whole night’s worship. Thus knowledge has priority even over worship. Muslims who imbibe these characteristics will survive the challenges of time and not face difficulty in keeping pace with changing reality.”³

¹«Preaching and Practising.» *The Economist*. August 18, 2012.

Accessed April 29, 2014 .<http://www.economist.com/node/21560542>.

²Ramadan, Tariq. «Professional Ethics: Meaning and Applications in Our Daily Lives.» *Lecture*, Doha, November 29, 2014

³Engineer, Asghar Ali. «Who Is a Progressive Muslim?» *World Muslim Congress*. November 14, 2011. Accessed December 4, 2014
<http://worldmuslimcongress.blogspot.com/11/2011/who-is-progressive-muslim.html>.

Precedents: The below demonstrative examples helped inspire my thesis's vision and direction, as they are various interpretations of how Islamic rituals can be perceived and comprehended. Aiming to make each ritual more inviting and engaging through the various channels that the language of design has to offer.



An interactive audio mug/cup, designed by a Turkish designer to embed the notion of quenching ones thirst within playing the name of Allah upon picking up the glass, and then thanking Allah for his blessings upon putting down the mug in a repetitive manner to embrace such a pure and divine notion.¹

¹Bardak, Aeken. «Besmele Äziken Bardak.» YouTube.

Accessed March 13, 2015.

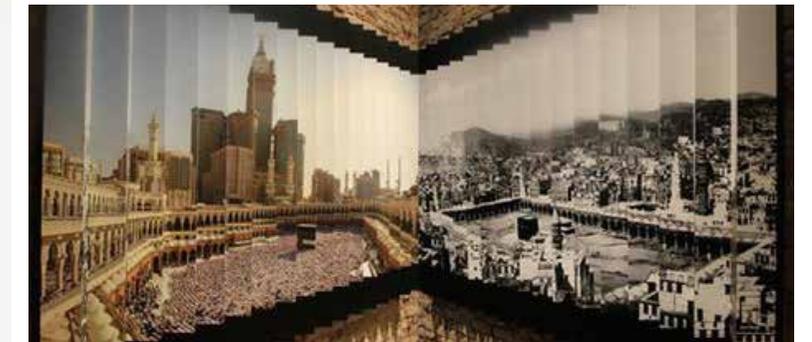
²Porter, Venetia. *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East.*

London: British Museum Press, 2006.

³Ayad, Myrna. *Contemporary Kingdom: The Saudi Art Scene Now.*



Untitled Porcelain Dish by Wasma'a Chorbachi. The Islamic testimony carved and inscribed twice facing one another. The mirrored testimony emphasizes that no matter the angle or perception from where the reader shall read from, the continuation in renewing your faith purifies your belief in there being only one god and one prophet.³



Wijha at Rhizoma. Two photographs showcasing old and new Makkah. Artist, Ahmad Angawi's collage demonstrating the excessive change Makkah has gone through due to globalization. It engages a Muslim conceptually depending on the angle they're standing at facing the collage, in realizing the transformation of such ritual and a the timeline of change that the Muslim society has been exposed to.³



The Stamp, Insh'allah, by Abdunasser Gharem.

Addressing social issues through commitment to the gravity of the meaning of the phrase: Insh'allah. The artist wishes to portray the gravity of the act of commitment throughout a Muslim's lifetime through a seal that indicates their faith in their everyday religious practices towards Islam.¹

¹www.eoaprojects.com. Accessed March 13, 2015.

Porter, Venetia. *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012.



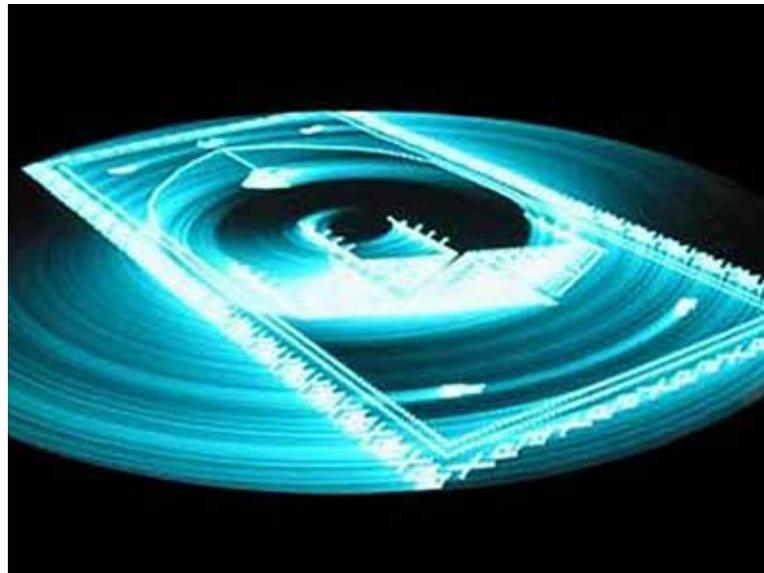
Demonstration of the spirit of unity that bound all races of people. Engaging a Muslim with the humble essence of Allah's message about brotherhood and fellowship through Islam.²

²Porter, Venetia. *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012.



Musaed Alhulis, The sajda 'bowing to god' is an important symbol of Islam relating to the commandment of prayer. The work *Dynamic* expresses the dynamism and spiritual power the artist feels during prayer. It characterizes the connection between god and the subject praying, much like an unbreakable chain that links the two in that moment.³

³Edge Of Arabia - Contemporary Art and Creative Movements from the Arab World.» Musaed Alhulis. Accessed April 13, 2015



LED censored compass Muslim praying mat that sheds light when facing Mecca. Introducing modern technology to enhance the ability of the Islamic ritual of praying, which introduces to a whole new perspective to methods of devotion.¹

¹Markoe, Lauren. «New Muslim Prayer Mat Sheds Light When Facing Mecca.» *The Huffington Post*. July 12, 2012. Accessed December 2014, 3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/12/07/2012/new-muslim-prayer-mat-sheds-light-when-facing-mecca_n_1668696.html.



A Quran Pen that reads, translates and recites. A new method for children and adults to learn the Quran, taking the act of reciting the Quran to an advanced level that caters to all Muslim states and allows the practice to be more engaging and independent, glorifying the powerful and private connection between ones self and Allah.²

²Accessed March 2015, 11. <http://www.simplyislam.com/the-complete-digital-islamic-pen-teacher-with-bonus-full-holy-quran-pen-reader-islamic-electronics-digital-quran61665-.html>.



Compassed pocket size travel praying mats: designing for size and mobility, allowing prayer to be more encouraging and engaging.³

³«Travel Pocket Prayer Mat rug with Qibla Kaaba Compass in pouch.» *Ebay*: Accessed December 3, 2014. <http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/TRAVEL-POCKET-PRAYER-MAT-RUG-WITH-QIBLA-KAABA-COMPASS-IN-POUCH-/190644856894>.



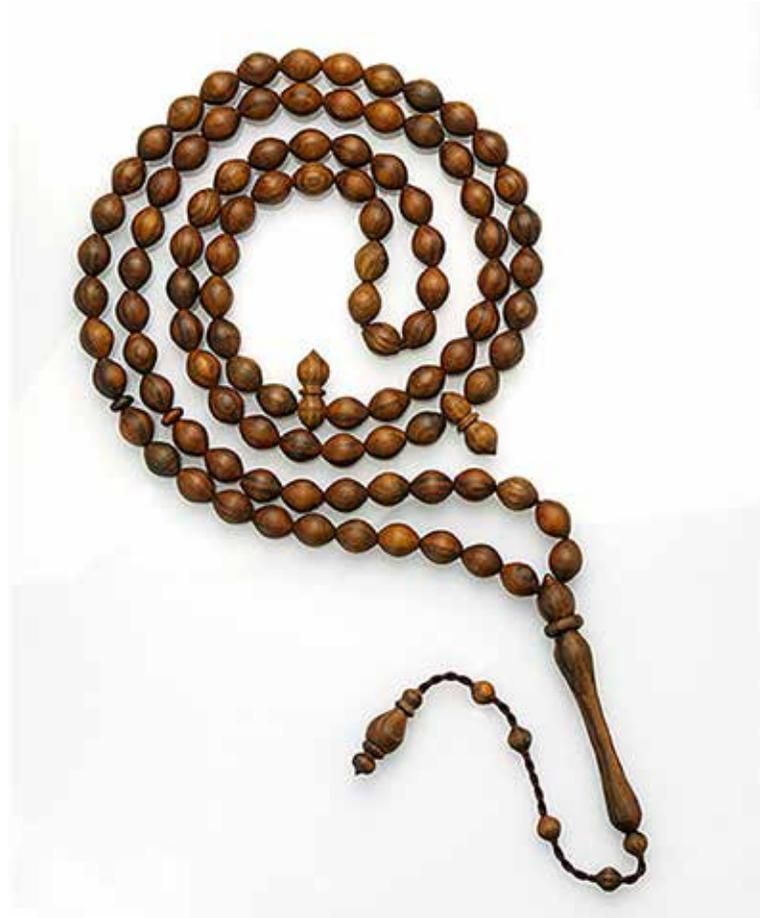
Palm rosary counters: designing for size and mobility, allowing prayer to be more encouraging and engaging.⁴

⁴«4Digit Number Clicker Golf Tasbih Tasbeeh Manual Hand Tally Palm Click Counter.» *Ebay*: Accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.ebay.com/itm/-4Digit-Number-Clicker-Golf-Tasbih-Tasbeeh-Manual-Hand-Tally-Palm-Click-Counter-/331427185639?pt=LH_DefaultDomain_15&hash=item4d2a9983e7.



Wrist-rosary counters: Palm rosary counters: designing for size and mobility, allowing prayer to be more encouraging and engaging. This version of a religious enabler enlightened me with the fact that prayer in all its forms can be executed anywhere, in any size and place.¹

¹ «3X Digital Tally Counter Hand Ring Finger Tasbeeh 6 Colour Black Orange Grey.» *Ebay*. Accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.ebay.com/itm/-3x-Digital-Tally-Counter-Hand-Ring-finger-Tasbeeh-6-Colour-Black-Orange-Grey-/151394518365?pt=LH_DefaultDomain_3&hash=item233fd1055d..



Ebrahimi Rosary: introducing an innovative method of spiritual focus and keeping count through an infinite counting system. The Ebrahimi Rosary has extra bead separators which allow an enhanced counting flow to take place, allowing a Muslim to infinitely engage and connect with Allah without any restraints such as lack of memory or the product's limitations.²

² «Gifting Your Parents, Islamic Gifts.» *Women's World*. Accessed March 11, 2015. <http://forums.mn66.com/t393025.html>.



Christian rosary ring: introducing an innovative method of engagement via keeping count of your prayers whilst encouraging praying mobility. Another example of the accessibility of ones focus and dedication at all times.³

³ «Anillo Rosario Oro Amarillo.» *Tavola Joyeros*. Accessed March 11, 2015. <http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rl=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAcQjRw&url=http://tavolajoyeros.com/es/anillos/-143anillo-rosario-oro-amarillo.html&ei=fC0AVeKrJanHsQSI8oEg&psig=AFQjCNGiRhX1SabdZ2iUomqLw-SS22Cj3g&cust=1426>.

I see my work in sync with the above precedents, as they use the powerful language of design to address social narratives and issues about the Islamic countries' past, present and future. I share the same culture, heritage and religion and through an interdisciplinary approach, I've tackled this subject from a different perspective and through a different lens.

1 (Shahada) Testimony:

‘Profession of faith, is the first pillar of Islam. Muslims bear witness to the oneness of God by reciting the creed «There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.» This simple yet profound statement expresses a Muslim’s complete acceptance of and total commitment to Islam.’¹

¹ Washington DC, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. «The Five Pillars Of Islam.» *The Five Pillars Of Islam*. Accessed March 2015 ,11. http://www.saudiembassy.net/print/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx.

Testimony Embodiment:

Experiment Objective:

The Shahada, or ‘Testimony’, is the primary pillar and has no behavioral method, time frame nor specific space. Renewing your testimony is a ritual that should be repeated as often as possible, not just in time of need, sickness and death.

I sought to find a medium through which Muslims can relate to the fact that the testimony is always there yet it isn’t. As the testimony is mandatorily repeated in our daily prayers yet when one voluntarily utters the words of the testimony which is the first gate to pass for one who wishes to embrace Islam, they hence willingly embrace the purity of their soul, where they independently treasured and remembered to renew their faith in anytime and any place.

Construction methodology:

To address this ritual, I designed an interactive experience using Microsoft’s Kinect® technology and a projector mounted to the ceiling.

Method of use:

Once an individual is detected by the Kinect sensor, their silhouette, created from the phrase of the Testimony, will be displayed on the opposite wall, which will be layered by Allah’s 99 names defining his attributes in life.

The concept of this is for Muslims to sense the notion of the infinite renewal of their Testimony through their presence’s ‘embodiment’ of the Testimony. This attempts to express that when a Muslim has accepted the Testimony, then they have embraced all of Allah’s attributes which are displayed on the wall.

The surprise element of the detection plays on the perception that the testimony might not have a specific place or time, yet it’s always there for any Muslim who needs to seek Allah by renewing their faith through the Testimony.

2

(Salat) Prayer:

‘The Prayer is the second pillar. The Islamic faith is based on the belief that individuals have a direct relationship with God. The world’s Muslims turn individually and collectively to Makkah, Islam’s holiest city, to offer five daily prayers at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. In addition, Friday congregational services are also required. Although salah ‘Prayer’ can be performed alone, it is meritorious to perform it with another or with a group. It is acceptable to pray at home, at work, or even outdoors; however it is recommended that Muslims perform Salah in a mosque.’¹

Prayer is a sacred ritual, repeated 5 times a day, creating a channel to connect with god, Allah. Over time, some Muslims from recent generations have been distracted and are straying away from their mandatory 5 daily prayers. Below are the experiments that led me to my final piece, representing a more engaging experience through Islamic prayer.

¹Washington DC, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. «The Five Pillars Of Islam.» *The Five Pillars Of Islam*. Accessed March 11, 2015
http://www.saudiembassy.net/print/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx.

²Hadeeth: Volume 263 :21 ,2.

Istikhara Prayer:

Supporting investigation:

'Istikhara' means to seek guidance from Allah, meaning when one intends to undertake an important task, they can choose to do Istikhara before the task. In conducting the Istikhara, it is as if one requests Allah Almighty, O the Knower of Unseen 'Exalted is He', to guide me as to whether this task is good for me or not. According to Bukhari: ‘The Prophet 'Sallal Laho Alaihi Wasallam' used to teach us the way of doing Istikhara, in all matters as he taught us the Suras of the Quran. He said, "If anyone of you thinks of doing any job he should offer a two cycle prayer other than the compulsory ones."²

The way to perform Istikhara is as follows: First pray Two Cycles (rakaʿ) of ritual Prayer (nafl) such that in the first rakaʿ after Surah Fatiha (Allhamd...) recite Surah al-Kafirun (Chapter 109) and in the second rakaʿ after Fatiha (Allhamd...) recite Surah al-Ikhlās (Chapter 112). After finishing prayer, recite this (supplication/duaʿ): Dua in Arabic Text above.

Translation: «O Allah! I seek goodness from Your Knowledge and with Your Power (and Might) I seek strength, and I ask from You Your Great Blessings, because You have the Power and I do not have the power.

You Know everything and I do not know, and You have knowledge of the unseen. Oh Allah! If in Your Knowledge this action ----- (which I intend to do) is better for my religion and faith, for my life and end [death], for here [in this world] and the hereafter then make it destined for me and make it easy for me and then add blessings [barakaʿ] in it, for me. O Allah! In Your Knowledge if this action is bad for me, bad for my religion and faith, for my life and end [death], for here [in this world] and the hereafter then turn it away from me and turn me away from it and whatever is better for me, ordain [destine] that for me and then make me satisfied with it.»

Experiment objective:

Introducing Muslims to, or reminding them of, a powerful option to resort to at any time of need, no matter it’s gravity. As any human being who tries to address and tackle the obstacles they face, Istikhara offers a platform of release, where a Muslim gathers all their efforts of thoughts, solutions etc. and surrenders by having faith in such powerful ritual, as when all capabilities have failed them, god, Allah is always there to unconditionally help guide the way to the rightful path.

Experiment Components:

- A quiet space to allow for privacy and serenity to gain comfort and openness.
- A blindfold to introduce the concept of helplessness leading to total surrender. Blindfold has the quote: 'Seek guidance from the god who knows all' printed on it as a takeaway item to encourage and motivate the use of this prayer.
- Cardboard boxes with fitted paper inside and a pencil/pen.
- The Istikhara prayer's dua and instructions printed on a sticker seal.

Method of Use:

- Invite a participant to think for a bit about something they are helplessly indecisive about.
- Ask participant if they're pleased by the approach of their thinking process and if they would have used further alternative approaches.
- The blindfold is for the participant to experience total surrender and the concept of helplessness to address their approach and rethinking of their decision-making process.

- Ask participant in only 5 minutes to truthfully write every word they think is relevant to their dilemma or indecisive situation, and the thinking/reflecting process and solution on the paper in the box.
- When their 5 minutes are up, they are to immediately close the box and tape it shut with the Istikhara prayer, Dua, and instructions printed on top sealing their thoughts and process within, and completely surrendering to god 'Allah' with their matter, trusting and placing their faith in the hands of Allah. The idea is to surrender to Allah by boxing all your contemplations away, and sealing the box is a promise of your faith in Allah and his guidance.
- Such practice can be utilized globally in any religion, as this methodology embraces patience, belonging and connecting to higher power.
- Finally ask participant if they've heard about the Istikhara prayer, if not introduce them to a different, more powerful approach, which is the Istikhara prayer and its use in our everyday lives no matter the gravity of our situation.

Salah al Istikhara

"Istikhara" means to seek goodness from Allah (Exalted is He), meaning when one intends to do an important task they do Istikhara before the task. The one who does the Istikhara is as if they request Allah Almighty that, O the Knower of Unseen (Exalted is He) guide me if this task is better for me or not?

According to Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 21, Number 263: Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah :The Prophet (Sallal Lahu Alahi Wasallam) used to teach us the way of doing Istikhara, in all matters: as he taught us the Suras of the Quran, He said, "If anyone of you thinks of doing any job he should offer a two Rakat prayer other than the compulsory ones

WAY TO PERFORM ISTIKHARA: First pray Two Cycles (raka) of ritual Prayer (nafl) such that in the first raka' after Surah Fatha (Alhamd...) recite Surah al-Kafirun (Chapter 109) and in the second raka' after Fatha (Alhamd...) recite Surah al-Khlas (Chapter 112). After finishing prayer recite this [supplication/dua]: Dua in Arabic Text above.

TRANSLATION: "O Allah! I seek goodness from Your Knowledge and with Your Power (and Might) I seek strength, and I ask from You Your Great Blessings, because You have the Power and I do not have the power. You know everything and I do not know, and You have knowledge of the unseen. Oh Allah! If in Your Knowledge this action [which I intend to do] is better for my religion and faith, for my life and end [death], for here [in this world] and the hereafter then make it destined for me and make it easy for me and then add blessings [baraka] in it, for me. O Allah! In Your Knowledge if this action is bad for me, bad for my religion and faith, for my life and end [death], for here [in this world] and the hereafter then turn it away from me and turn me away from it and whatever is better for me, ordain [destine] that for me and then make me satisfied with it."



Experiment components



Experiment tested on various audiences, Muslim and others

The Prayary:

I designed The Prayary to embed the value and beauty of the connection with Allah, Salat, prayer, and in order to sustain this connection even after a person is done praying.

Experiment Objective:

Create a mechanical contemporary praying mat that adds an additional incentive to the Islamic prayer in an analogue manner, making the process engaging both physically and mentally. The audiences targeted are children and adults who need a reminder to continue remembering Allah through their prayers.

Construction methodology:

Experimenting with building the frame in the woodshop, printing the mechanism via the 3D printer, UV printing the Quranic verses or poetry, laser cutting the shape of the rosary bead's material.

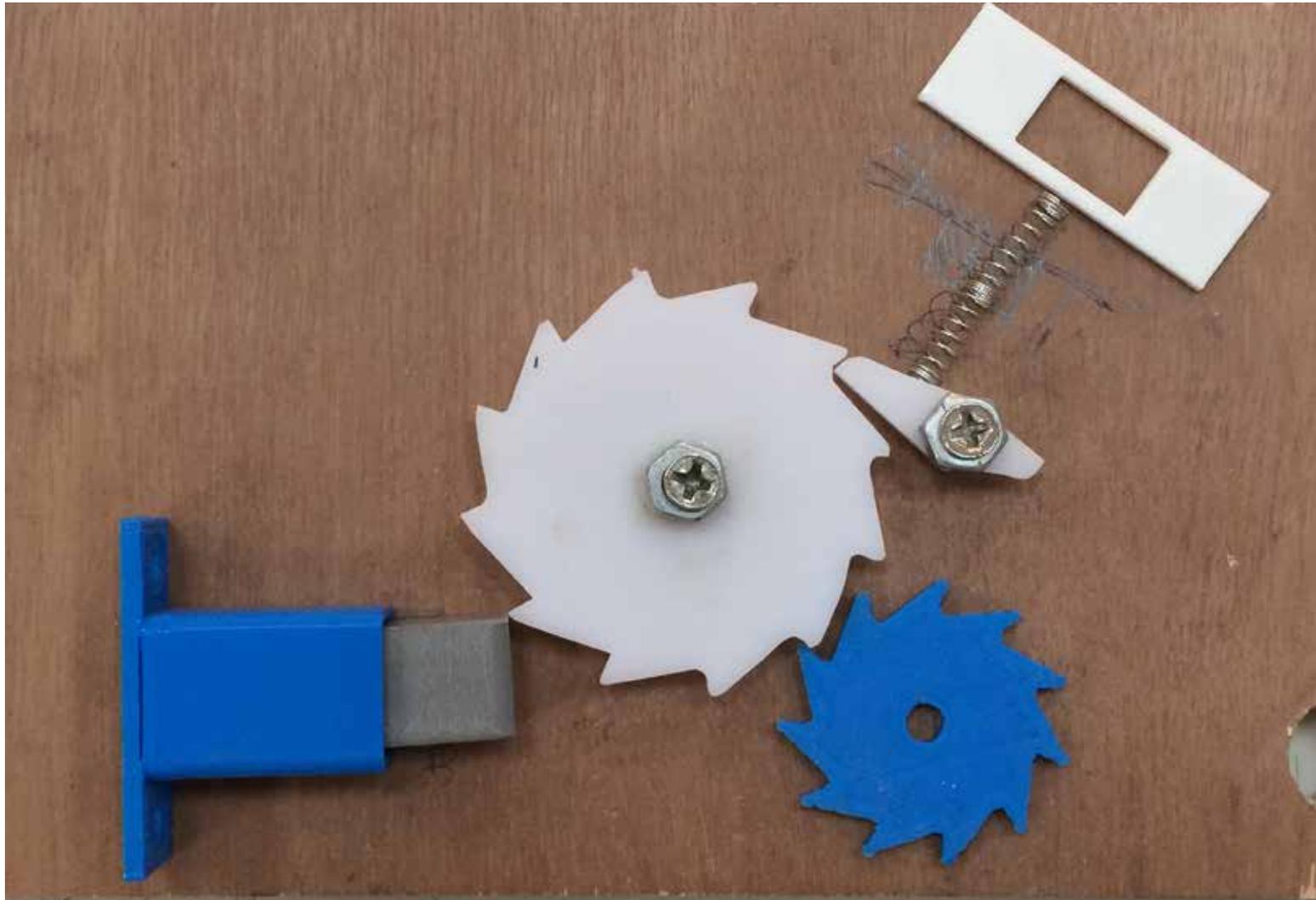
Method of Use:

Prayary, the mechanical praying mat, starts by the bowing down position 'Sujood' is the total surrender to god 'Allah', when our forehead touches the praying mat, it triggers the mechanism to pull on the cartridges with the right amount of tension. This draws the canvas through a glue box and around an irod rod, forming solid beads which are turned into a custom-made rosary of quotes from the Quran, Hadith or your own choice of words and made of your own efforts while praying.

The beads formed from the physical act of praying, portray the capturing of time and accuracy of your prayers and being able to, from physical praying to now continuously pray tangibly through your rosary. This interactivity is a tangible record of one's devotion.

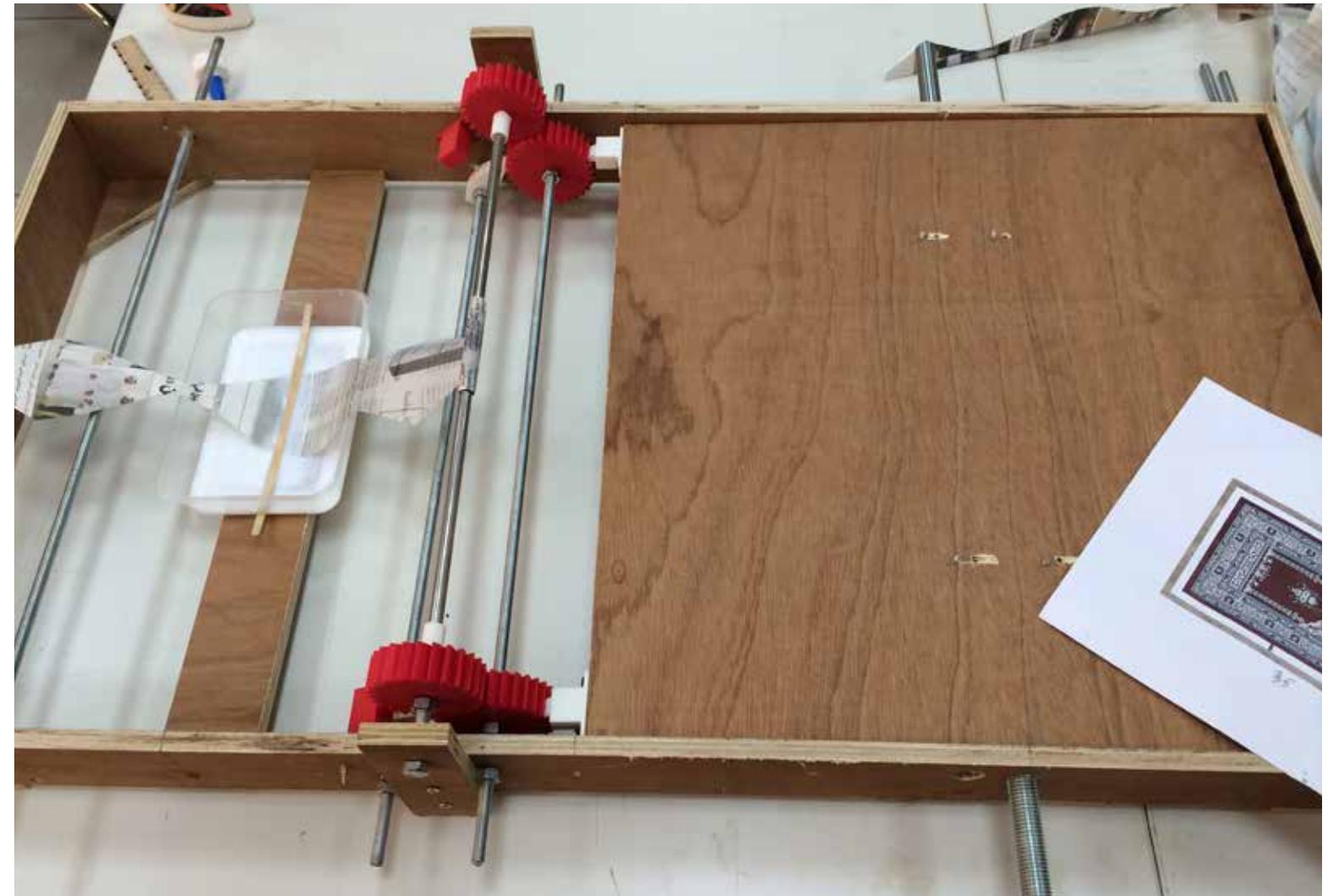


Model render



Mechanism testing

First prototype



Final prototype visual 1



Final prototype visual 2



Outcome prototypes



Market Testing:

To test my Prayary prototype, I installed it in a public square in Katara, Doha, during an exhibition. Amongst numerous comments, **Ali Al-Mahmoud**, Head of Operations at the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), said, “Mixing religion with art is something really critical! However, what I found in the creative Prayary product was something amazing and it invites us to start thinking of how a small but creative way can encourage us more to do our prayers regularly”¹ Dr. Jaser Awdah from Qatar Foundation’s Islamic Studies, also said, “If only these devices existed a couple of years back, my children would have been more interested in some of our Islamic traditions”.²



¹ Al-Mahmoud, Ali. “Souvenirs- The Prayary” WISE Learning Festival- Katara. October 2014, 18. Accessed December 3, 2014

² Awdah, Dr. Jaser “Personal interview” Qatar Foundation Islamic Studies. Accessed December 3, 2014



(Zakat) Charity:

‘Zakat, almsgiving, is the third pillar. Social responsibility is considered part of one’s service to God; the obligatory act of zakat enshrines this duty. Zakat prescribes payment of fixed proportions of a Muslim’s possessions for the welfare of the entire community and in particular for its neediest members. It is equal to 2.5 percent of an individual’s total net worth, excluding obligations and family expenses.’¹

Supporting investigation

I initially chose the “rosary”, a tool used to encourage a strong communication with Allah to enrich and enhance a Muslim’s ability to give and connect with Him, as an initial object to explore.

The Empathetic Rosary (Subha):

Prayer beads are used in many religions and cultures, either to help with prayer and meditation, or to simply keep the fingers occupied during times of stress. Islamic prayer beads are called subha, which comes from the verb tsbeeh, which is to glorify God (Allah). Subhas may vary in style or decorative embellishments, but they share some common design qualities. Subhas either have 66, 33, or 99 round beads separated by flat disks. There is often a larger, leader bead and a tassel at one end to mark the start point of recitations. The subha is used by Muslims to help count recitations and concentrate during personal prayers. The worshipper touches one bead at a time while

words of dhikr (remembrance of Allah). These recitations are often of the 99 «names» of Allah, or of phrases that glorify and praise Allah.

These phrases are most often repeated as follows:

- Subhannallah (Glory to Allah) - 33 times
- Alhamdilillah (Praise be to Allah) - 33 times
- Allahu Akbar (Allah is Great) - 33 times

This form of recitation stems from an account (hadith) in which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) instructed his daughter, Fatima, to remember Allah using these words. He also said that believers who recite these words after every prayer will have all sins pardoned, even if they may be as large as the foam on the surface of the sea.

Muslims also use prayer beads to count multiple recitations of other phrases while in personal prayer. Prayer beads are a common gift item, especially for those returning from Hajj (pilgrimage). They are also known as: misbaha, dhikr beads, and worry beads. The verb to describe the use of the beads is tasbih or tasbeeha.

I began my exploration by looking into installing a booth and recording messages from children for a certain cause of aid and embedding it in the beads of a rosary, where a call for help is conveyed and an appropriate answer whether hadith or a verse from the Quran follows. This was to secure a personal, empathetic connection

between two audiences to raise awareness and strengthen our bond of brotherhood and fellowship with other Muslims.

After investigating the concept, I decided I wanted the device to be less dramatic and reach the widest audience by creating an ‘Empathetic Rosary’ that would portray the third of the five pillars of Islam, which is the ‘zakat’ charity or donation. The device would contain several functions exhibiting a Muslim’s duty in life to Allah and demonstrating his devotion in a virtual manner.

¹Washington DC, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. «The Five Pillars Of Islam.» *The Five Pillars Of Islam*. Accessed March 2015, 11. http://www.saudiembassy.net/print/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx.

The device consists of several technological components that serve the purpose of this device as follows:

- A joystick sensor that senses every swipe while praying which, at the end of every day, will be displayed on the LCD screen keeping one aware of their daily prayers to encourage the amount of prayers per day.
- A push-button sensor that transacts a donation every time the user presses the button, allowing the user to willingly and anonymously donate to help the needy. The LCD screen will display a message indicating the donation being made to a charity organization.
- A tilt sensor will be incorporated to sense the behavior of tilting that is made by Muslims in general and mostly by Muslim men. This addictive habit has come to be accustomed by all Muslims in the past several generations and can be interpreted as a misuse of this secular object. Anyone who has spent time in the Middle East has seen this: rather than counting the beads of their subha, men will twirl their rosaries around a finger, first one direction, then the other. In response, an RGB LED sensor has been added which will light red and the LCD screen will display a message stating (أذكر الله يذكرك) remember god and he'll remember you, alerting the user not to continue such behavior and to properly use the device.
- The RGB LED sensor will also light green when a certain amount of prayers are accomplished, indicating a tree being planted in heaven, strengthening a Muslim's belief in brotherhood, fellowship and belonging in 'Janah' heaven.

The Empathetic Rosary enriches the performance of what a regular rosary does as an enabler by continuously allowing a Muslim to connect with Allah and either introducing or reminding a Muslim with the rich values that our rituals hold.



Prototype visual 1



Prototype visual 2



Prototype visual 3



3D Printed prototypes

The Purifying Yearglass:

Experiment Objective:

The rosary experiments led me to design this experience, which portrays the concept of Zakat through a conceptual and engaging lens. The essence of Zakat boils down to two main aspects: embracing charity to keep a healthy cycle of wealth distribution amongst the Muslim community and helping the less fortunate, as well as the annual renewing of the movement of funds and property. These aspects 'purify' a Muslim's wealth, as money that hasn't been purified through Zakat is considered tainted money that breeds negative traits such as greed, jealousy and inviting the evil eye.

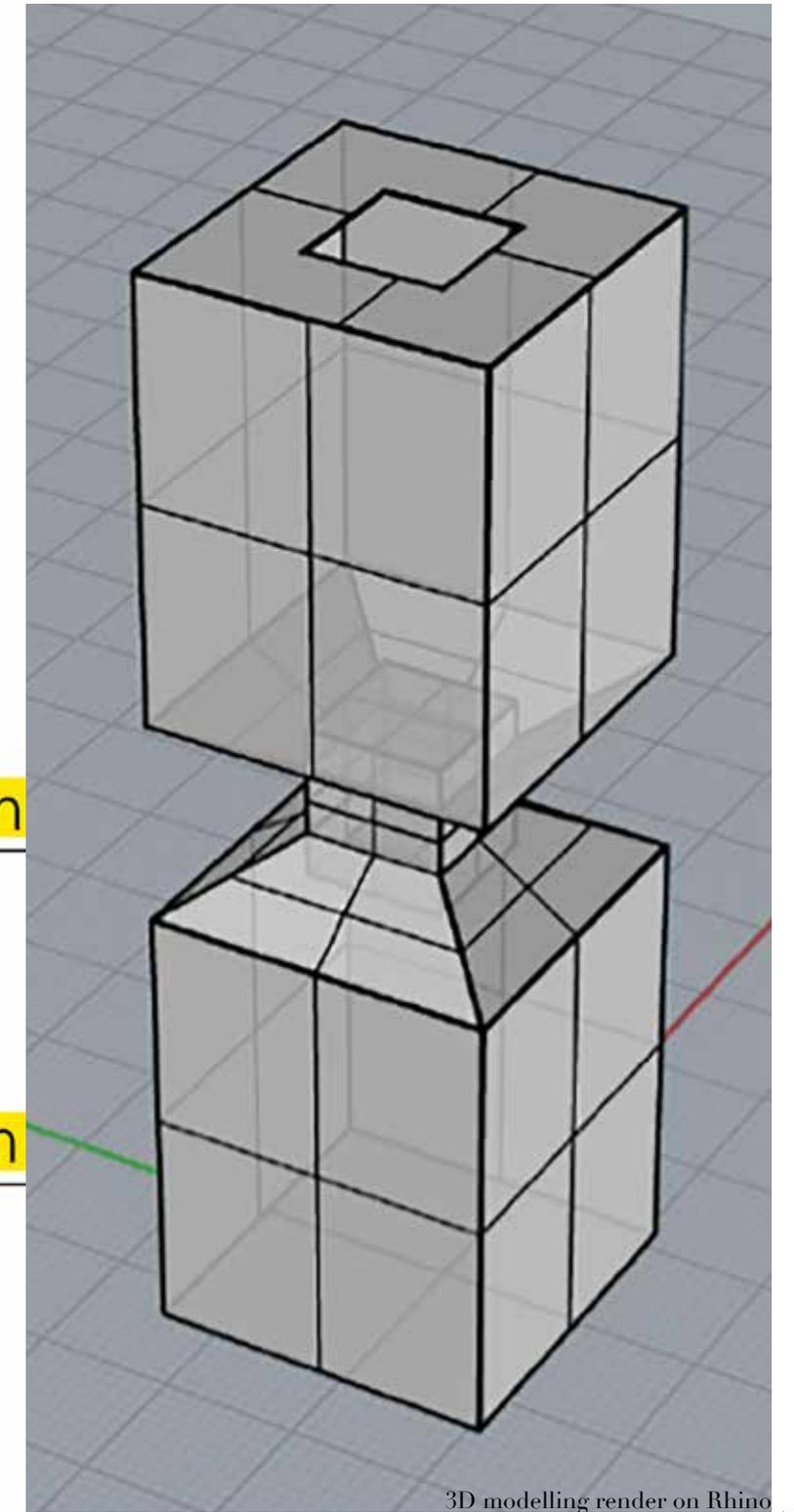
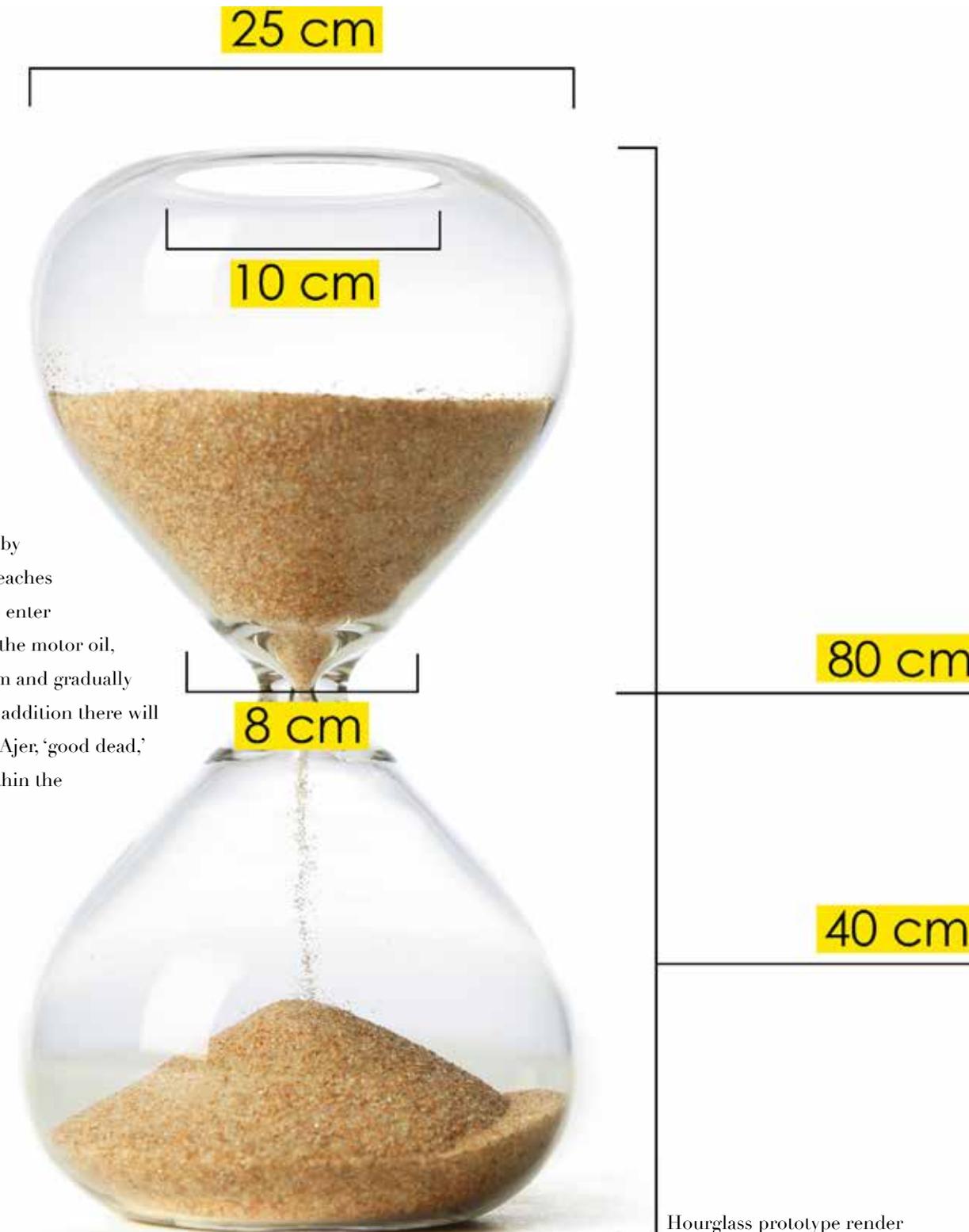
Construction methodology:

I designed the experience to take place in an hourglass figure, signifying the yearly period during which Zakat should take place. The hourglass figure is filled with two dense and incompatible liquids dividing the hourglass in half. The top part of the hourglass is filled with dark motor oil, and the bottom half with transparent corn syrup.

Method of Use:

How this experience portrays itself is that the audience will engage with the piece by donating coins to charity by placing the coins in the hourglass from the top.

The coin will slowly fall through the darker liquid, 'tainting' its nature by being enveloped by the dense dark colored liquid. Once the coin reaches the middle slender part of the hourglass, it will enter the transparent corn syrup, which will remove the motor oil, 'purifying' the coin before it reaches the bottom and gradually accumulating for the noble cause of charity. In addition there will be a non-tangible reward, the accumulation of Ajer, 'good dead,' through subtly moving the scale embedded within the bottom half of the hourglass, shining light on a Muslim's contribution to their community and Allah.





4

(Sawm) Religious Fast:

Experiment Objective:

‘Sawm, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, is the fourth pillar of Islam. Ordained in the Holy Quran, the fast is an act of deep personal worship in which Muslims seek a richer perception of God. Fasting is also an exercise in self-control whereby one’s sensitivity is heightened to the sufferings of the poor. ‘Ramadan, the month during which the Holy Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, begins with the sighting of the new moon, after which abstention from eating, drinking and other sensual pleasures is obligatory from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is also a joyful month. Muslims break their fast at sunset with a special meal, iftar, perform additional nocturnal worship, Tarawih, after evening prayer; and throng the streets in moods that are festive and communal. The end of Ramadan is observed by three days of celebration called Eid Al-Fitr, the feast of the breaking of the fast. Customarily, it is a time for family reunion and the favored holiday for children who receive new clothing and gifts.’¹

Unfortunately, many younger Muslim generations actually look forward to the month of Ramadan for other reasons. In contemporary Muslim society, the month of Ramadan is often clouded by several distractions such as reduced working hours to increase a person’s sleeping hours, local television series specifically shot and only shown in this holy month, entertaining Ramadan 'Iftar' tents as part of a pleasurable tradition, consumption of shisha is amplified, 'Ghabgha' gatherings, overeating and many other distractions have changed the main purpose of such a beautiful month filled with rituals that enhance our religion.

¹ Washington DC, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. «The Five Pillars Of Islam.» *The Five Pillars Of Islam*. Accessed March 2015, 11. http://www.saudiembassy.net/print/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx.

The Ramadan Circle:

Experiment Objective:

The idea behind this design is to bring the family together during 'Iftar' to break their fast together as a Muslim family after the 'Athar' call for prayer has commenced, and once again at the end of the day to return their glasses. This emphasizes the concept of brotherhood and fellowship embedded in the Islamic fasting tradition.

Construction methodology:

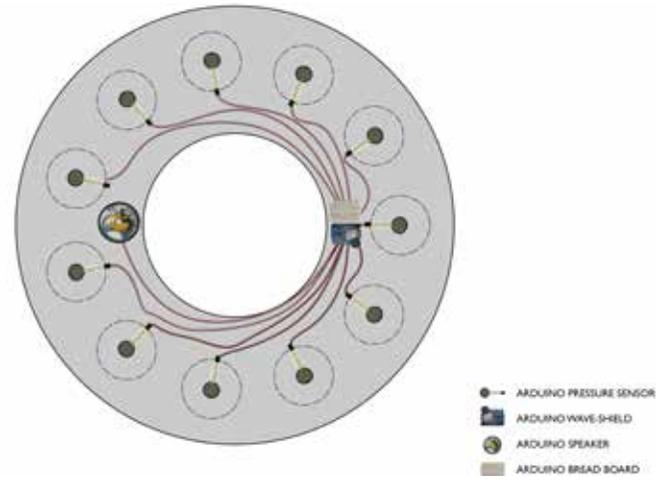
In order to introduce and engage people in the meaning of our fasting ritual during Ramadan, I designed The Ramadan Circle, which is a container that consists of one bowl to accommodate dates in the center, and eleven-cup holders. Accommodating a significant odd number that allows for a Muslim family to invite guests to share Allah’s blessings with others, and yet not so large as to overcrowd the audience with only one container.

Method of Use:

In use, a Muslim would approach the container by helping themselves to a date/dates and a glass with the sufficient amount of water, a third of the volume of a standard glass, with their right hand. Once the glass is taken, the break-fast 'Dua' prayer: (اللهم انى لك صمت وعلى رزقك افطرت) ‘Allah for you I have fasted, and now I break my fast with your blessings’ is announced, either introducing or reminding Muslims of the specific prayer.

This is followed by the quote (ذهب الظمأ وابتلت العروق وثبت الاجر إن شاء الله) after 1 minute, continuing with the quote (إن الصلاة كانت على المؤمنين كتابا موقوتا) after 3 minutes, which alerts and encourages all present Muslims to go pray the maghrib prayer on time. Finally after 20 minutes, there is the announcement of a prayer stating that Ramadan is a 30-day period, for the purpose of motivation and continuation of a Muslim’s intention of fasting the following day.

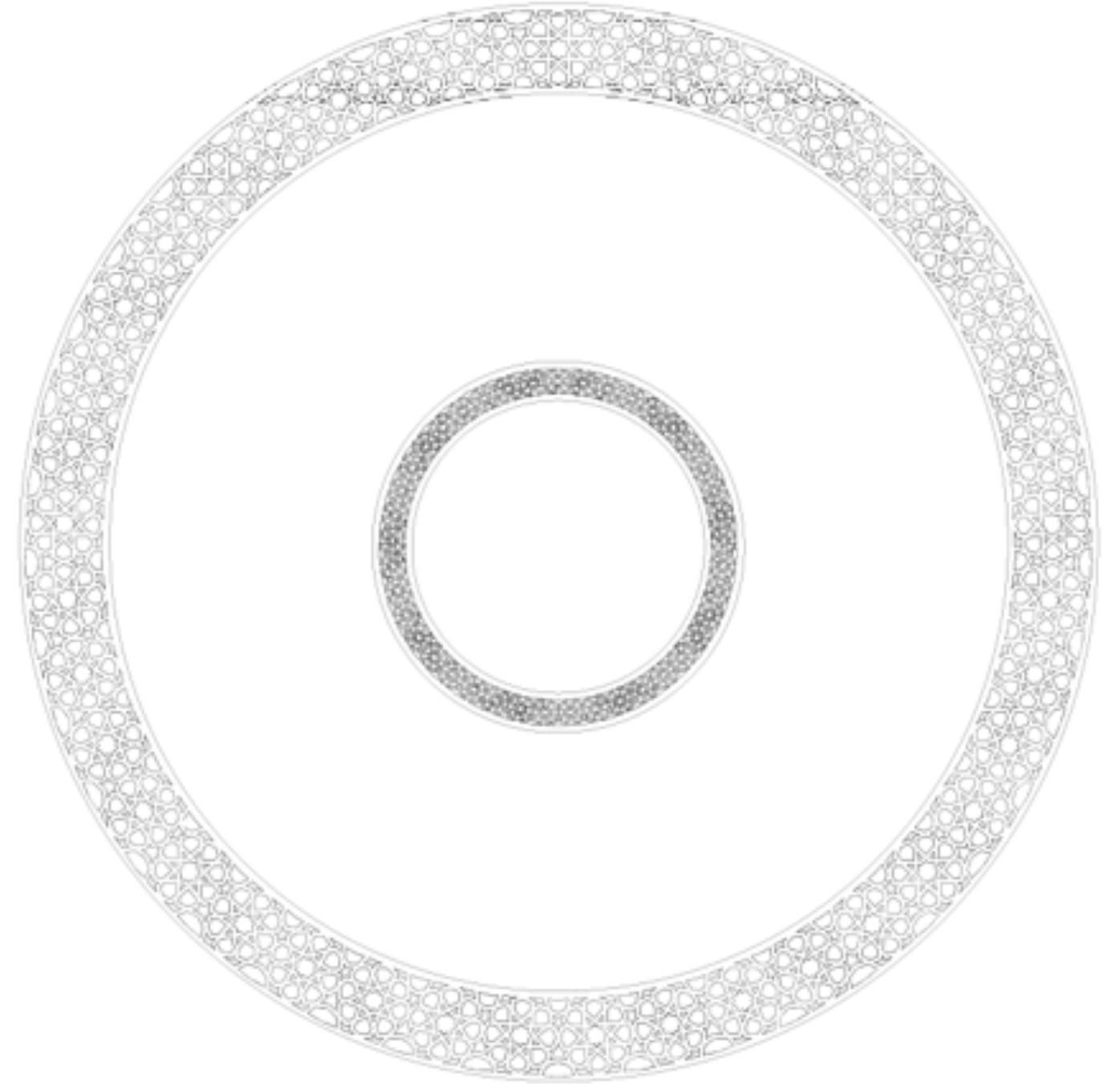
It also consists of other reminders such as the night of ‘Qadr’ the night of power, value or destiny; in which the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the prophet Muhammad. In addition to the ‘Zakat Al Fitr’ which consists of donating items such as food or clothing. These reminders are recorded and embedded in the Arduino wave shield incorporated within the product, and these reminders are only to take place in the last 10 days of Ramadan, giving a Muslim a chance to reimagine and re-experience such rich Islamic rituals in a more progressive and interactive manner to engage the upcoming generations.



3D modelling final perspective / technology section renders on 3Dmax



Top image: The Arduino Pressure sensor's placement
Bottom image: Prototype 1



Islamic aesthetics incorporated in product's design



5

Haj, The Pilgrimage:

‘Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah, is the fifth pillar and the most significant manifestation of Islamic faith and unity in the world. For those Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the journey to Makkah, the Hajj is a once in a lifetime duty that is the peak of their religious life. The Hajj is a remarkable spiritual gathering of over two million Muslims from all over the world to the holy city. In performing the Hajj, a pilgrim follows the order of ritual that the Prophet Muhammad performed during his last pilgrimage.’¹

Many Muslims of the current and upcoming generations intend to accomplish the journey of Hajj, to come full circle with all 5 pillars of Islam, yet aren't emotionally or physically aware of the journey's meaning and value. One should be more than alert to what is to be expected and given when embarking on such a rich, beautiful empathetic journey.

¹ Washington DC, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. «The Five Pillars Of Islam.» *The Five Pillars Of Islam*. Accessed March 2015, 11. http://www.saudiembassy.net/print/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx.

The Ablution Soap:

Experiment Objective:

To represent the washing away of sins, with the washing away of phrases. Muslims can repent their sins by washing them and watching them fade away with soap created by sacred/holy water ‘Zamzam.’ The soap is engraved with specific verses from the Holy Quran, and is embedded with an emotive object. The idea is to create a rewarding tangible outcome, measuring the effort put in strengthening one's faith in Islam.



3D printed mold producing and engraving the abolition soap

The Clean Slate:

After initial experiments with the notion of repenting through a tangible object projecting the notion of one's sins fading away, I created an interactive experience through designing a Hajj Soap that demonstrates the essence and gravity of a Muslim deserving and gaining a clean slate after the journey.

Construction methodology:

Soap mixed and made with Zamzam water, which is also embedded with an amulet/keepsake.

The ritual of Zamzam water:

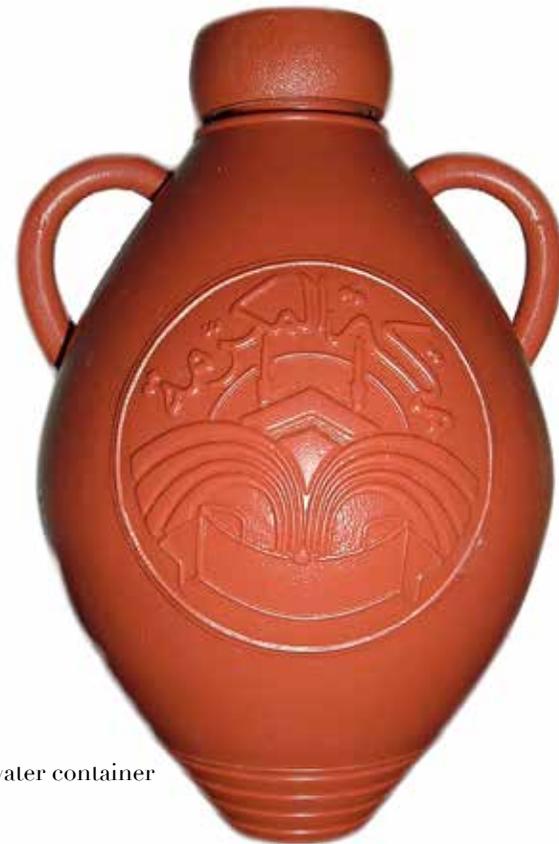
One of the rituals of Hajj is to drink from the spring of Zamzam and to bring the water back to relatives and friends. Pilgrims either use the containers they have brought with them or acquire some specially while they are in Mecca. These containers are called zamzamiyyas. The water of Zamzam has been used for other purposes, too: Qur'ans were sometimes copied with ink made from it and it was also held to have protective powers.¹

Method of Use:

The soap would have a life span of the Hajj journey, which consists of 10 days, ending with a reward of a tiny, traditional Zamzam water container that a Muslim would use to pour water on themselves or wash their face, embracing their courageous completion of Hajj and, officially, the five pillars of Islam.

The Soap has a tainted, unclean and rigid outer layer made of sand and soap, taken from the concept of 'Taramum', cleansing with sand when water is unavailable, which represents a Muslim's true commitment to such a grave journey. This layer covers a colorless, unscented, and alcohol-free inner layer that represents the pure and humble nature of a Muslim on this journey. The semi-transparent

nature gives the Muslim the motivation towards the days that are left, and as the layers vanish, the tangible reward becomes clearer. This experience parallels the notion of a Muslim truly understanding and deserving the clean slate, which the Hajj journey provides if a Muslim is unconditionally true to his devotion in Allah.



Classic Zamzam water container



Final render of The Hajj Soap showcasing its meaningful layers and 3D printed container embidiment

¹Porter, Venetia. «The Well of Zamzam.» In *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012.



Conclusion: The five pillars of Islam define the basic identity of Muslims - their faith, beliefs and practices - and bind together a worldwide community of believers into a fellowship of shared values and concerns.

Throughout this thesis I have produced interactive products that I have intended to enhance a user's engagement with the meaning and value behind the rituals associated with Islam. I have received various comments on how these objects could and would trigger a positive enhancement and enlighten towards the course of Islamic history, on how rituals are perceived and evaluated. For example, mothers strongly supported The Ramadan Circle, as it would help assist their roles during the holy month of Ramadan, and The Prayary showed a powerful example of how the fusion of tangible and non-tangible reward elevated the practice itself to today's generation of Muslims.

Through ongoing research, interviews, and experimentation, this research should guide me towards a better understanding of how, through design, I can best facilitate these experiences of ritual within Muslim society. Through form and function, both theoretically and practically, these objects are designed to generate new meanings that emphasize how to deal with the necessary and sensitive enrichment of understanding the value behind such religious rituals that engage and encourage Muslims to willingly practice their faith in Islam. I am hoping that this thesis challenges myself, as will it others, to continue where I left off, and gradually this message will be an everlasting enrichment towards our faith in Islam.

Rapid advances in media technology, combined with globalization, are challenging many societies, not just the Muslim world, and it is my hope through this thesis to contribute to this dialogue which prepares me for the next dialogue that can be facilitated through the design of my products.

Future Directions: Another proposed project is to exploit The Prayary to reach different audiences by designing a collection of Prayaries to address many different sectors. I would like to enhance the collection's capabilities through the combination of state-of-the-art technology and local traditional Khaleeji materials. Examples of this may include: recycling the Qatari Dhow wood for my framework, incorporating the Qatari pearls from the cultivated pearl farms, and utilizing resources such as Oud incense. One example would be a luxury version that speaks to an audience like the Khaleeji, aiming to praise the tradition and give it both a greater tangible and non-tangible value; another would be a smaller and more practical version to excite children to pray more often; and finally, exploring a version with enhanced technology.

The MFA program at VCUQ has enhanced my creative tool set and broadened my horizons/vision. My thesis investigation and direction have empowered me to arrive to where I am today. I would like to raise awareness to the message I am sending that Muslims should be encouraged to comprehend the benefit and value behind every aspect of Islamic practice and wisdom, and not just practice their religion because they were told so. To create such awareness, my investigation leading to my creations, need to be heard and seen through my identity, a Khaleeji Muslim designer. As every Muslim and human being interoperates their faith through a lens they're naturally provided with since childhood which consists of family, society etc. I would like to take my interactive experiences to a level where they best represent my intention and my story which portrays my own personal identity, being a Khaleeji Muslim.

I have proposed a residency project to The Fire Station that will enhance the experiences I created for my MFA thesis that enrich the values of our Islamic rituals, derived from the foundation of Islam, the 5 pillars: Testimony, Prayer, Fasting, Charity and the Pilgrimage to Makkah.

The Fire Station is an interactive artistic platform that brings together talent from various disciplines in one creative and open space. Their

aim is to inspire an appreciation of the arts in the very heart of Doha. They are opening their doors to new ideas, concepts and talent, from people of diverse backgrounds.

Qatar Museums has evolved the building's purpose, from one of civil administration to one of civil use. In the past, public visits to this building were limited to schools. Today it is open and accessible to anyone interested in learning about emerging artistic talent in Qatar and the region.

The Fire Station runs an Artist in Residence program that focuses on the visual arts, fashion, anime, performance, multimedia, literature and music, and is open to curators in all disciplines. It will strive to initiate and support new approaches in understanding, producing and valuing art; based on openness, innovation and originality.

My residency could deliver a unique sense of connection, which is possible with the visiting public during open studio sessions. My MFA thesis journey has been effective in bringing these prototypes to life, yet now I believe that they are ready to be investigated under a larger and richer lens, which I believe this residency can offer.

My sense of community would serve the inaugural class of resident artists as a temperamental asset to the temporary family this group will form. I would hope my project's vision and direction, my passion, and my interdisciplinary design skills add positive energy to the collaborative environment. This residency is an enormous opportunity

to incubate my work amongst peers and talent while engaging with the very public I intend to reach with my work.

The Five Pillars Collection's virtual exhibit:

<http://www.slideboom.com/presentations/1212437/The-Five-Pillar-Collection?pk=2b7-64dc2-5c-86f8a-7bba7-6fg-3834-60ee2>

I am proud to come from such a rich Muslim, Khaleeji background.

I would like that richness to speak through my work; through creating and delivering the enhanced awareness of our Islamic rituals in provoking and sustaining a dialogue about faith through ritual.

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