CYBERANGELS: AN AESTHETIC PEACE PLAN FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
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This exhibition [1] proposes that peace in the Middle East can emerge from a fresh metaphor in which Arabs are invited to see Israel’s existence as Allah’s will. This metaphor, derived from Islamic art and thought, invites a shift in perception in which the conflict is seen as an aesthetic problem.

The central image shows a geometric pattern from a Damascus mosque superimposed on a map of North Africa and the Middle East (Color Plate C.) The Islamic pattern is painted in green, red and metallic gold on a digital print mounted on canvas. Israel is a tiny sliver with an alternative pattern—blue stripes on a white background, like the Jewish prayer shawl and the flag of Israel. An “angel of peace,” a digitized version of a Rembrandt drawing, is shown emerging from the blue stripes carrying the message of my aesthetic peace plan worldwide through the Internet. In the exhibition, actual rugs woven in Muslim lands were hanging beside my digital artworks.

Islamic art teaches Muslim Arabs to see their world as a continuous geometric pattern that extends across North Africa and the Middle East. Unfortunately, they see tiny Israel as a blemish that disrupts the pattern. From this perspective, Israel is viewed as an alien presence, one that they have continually tried to eliminate through war, terrorism and political action. Arab television calls Israel a “cancer in the body of the Arab nation.” Fortunately, the perceptual shift needed to lead to a genuine peace can be found in Islamic art and thought. In Islamic art, a uniform geometric pattern is purposely disrupted by the introduction of a counter-pattern to demonstrate that human creation is less than perfect. Based upon the belief that only Allah creates perfection, rug weavers from Islamic lands intentionally weave a patch of dissimilar pattern to break the symmetry of their rugs to demonstrate that they are not competing with Allah (Fig. 1). In “Anomalies in Kilims” [2] we learn that devout Muslim women who weave kilim rugs would not be so arrogant as to even attempt a “perfect” rug, because such perfection belongs only to Allah. Consequently, they deliberately break the rugs’ patterning as a sign of their humility.

Peace can be achieved when the Islamic world recognizes that they need Israel to realize their Islamic religious values. Israel provides the counter-pattern in the contiguous Islamic world that extends from Morocco to Pakistan. Just as a religious Muslim weaver introduces a counter-pattern in designing a rug as a mark of humility, so Muslim leaders can honor the diversity in all of God’s creations by perceiving Israel as the necessary break in symmetry. The gathering of the Jewish people into its historic homeland in the midst of the Islamic world is the fulfillment of Mohammed’s prophecy in the Koran (Sura 17:104): “And we said to the Children of Israel, ‘scatter and live all over the world...and when the end of the world is near we will gather you again into the Promised Land.’”

References

Fig. 1. Wool kilim Bakhtiari rug woven by Muslim women in Central Iran. (Photo © Mel Alexenberg) They express their humility in not competing with the perfection of Allah’s creations by weaving two anomalous rows of white circles as a counter-pattern to the overall pattern of the rug.
My career has focused on explorations in science and technology as a distinct feature of contemporary culture—from early work with light, lasers, aviation and space development to scientific exploration, digital imaging and most recently nanotechnology. In my work I aspire to meaningful fine art with a healthy awareness of the mediating role that visual images can play in scientific and public understanding. I have always been intrigued by physics, by looking out on the expanse of space, but would not have imagined taking an interest in chemistry or focusing in on the extremely small, until my science-studies group read Bill Joy’s striking article “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us” [1].

In my courses on digital imaging, students often wondered, “Will computers take over the world?” I used to laugh, confident in the fact that we build, program and power these helpful tools. Then, slowly, a collection of eminent scientists such as Stephen Hawk-