

GRAHAM DAY



ZOOMORPHIC CALLIGRAPHY















بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي
خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَالَّذِي يُضَوِّبُ الْمَوْتَى
إِنَّ رَبَّهُ لَسَدِيدٌ
إِلَىٰ عَرْشِهِ الرَّحِيمُ
الَّذِي يُخَوِّضُ الْغَوَّاصِينَ
الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُ السَّحَابَ
كَالشَّجَرِ الْمُنْتَجِبِ
الَّذِي يُسْقِطُ الْمُنْتَزِلَ
الَّذِي يُمْسِكُ بِالضُّلُومِ
وَالنَّجْمِ أَكْشَادًا
الَّذِي يَكْنُزُ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتْرٍ
الَّذِي يَكْنُزُ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتْرٍ
الَّذِي يَكْنُزُ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتْرٍ

کے امین
ری





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الحمد لله الذي جعل
الخطوة الأولى
في كتابه العزيز
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

ع امير

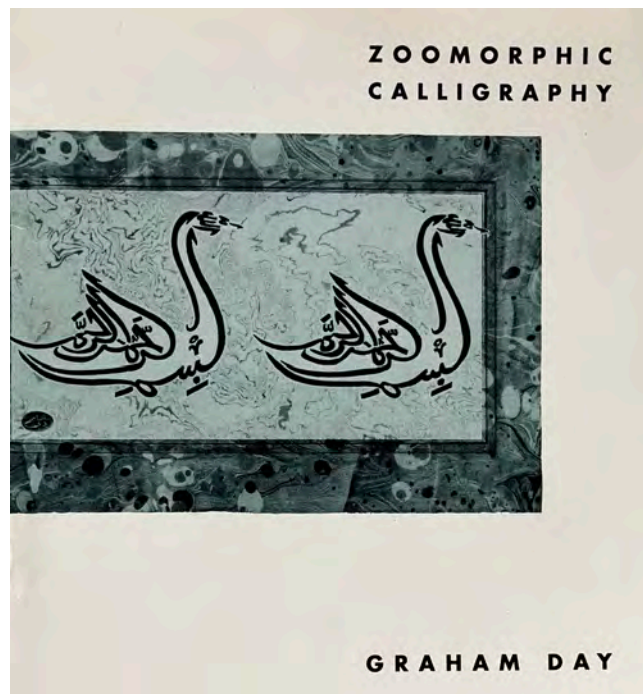
In the name
of the Lord







Text below by Graham Day
with research by Rose Issa is from the
1990 catalogue of the exhibition
Graham Day Zoomorphic Calligraphy held at
The School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London W.C. I.



ZOOMORPHIC CALLIGRAPHY

Such writing, usually in Arabic and arranged in the shape of an animal, arose from the invention of the calligrapher faced with the task of giving reverence to religious texts.

As well as the meaning of the words and the particular style of the script, the creative calligrapher introduces a third element: The design of the letters into a recognisable shape.

A precursor of animal calligraphy can be found in the square Kufic tile mosaics on Persian architectural facades from the fourteenth century. These so-called 'Mazes' arrange the letters in a square spiral. Another stage in the development is 'mirror-writing' where the texts are offset on either side of a central pillar. Although non-representational, they have a monumental character necessitating extensive modulations of the letters. The words juxtaposed become objects of contemplation through which the reader picks their way, easily at first, but with increasing difficulty when interpreting the distortions. The words making up the image of a lion tell us that Ali is the lion of God. The important point to recognize here is the transformation of the text into an object, albeit two dimensional, from its more mundane status as a piece of information. This object can then function as a talisman, proclaiming its power, inviting ownership.

The Islamic reverence for the written word has imbued the letter shapes with a magical quality that shines forth making itself felt even if the words are unintelligible. Rich marks indeed that not only please by their formal arrangement but are also doors into other words, a link with other souls, the chance to discover something new or old.

I believe that zoomorphic calligraphy is the response of artists frustrated with the curiously applied Islamic prohibition on image making, to create images that are only temporarily arranged into animals. Images that can be de-constructed back into anonymity. I like this argument, it is as if the letters rearrange themselves. Bored with forever being put down into rows and lines, they slide around on the page when the volume is closed, proudly posing as tigers and falcons with ludicrous extensions and diacritical eyes.

The examples that I have collected and transcribed here are for the most part familiar formulas that have been used by calligraphers repeatedly. Often printed in books on Arabic calligraphy in plain black ink, divorced from their margins and decorative borders, they return to the status of information, losing their object quality, just one page forever under threat from the next.

THESE IMAGES BY GRAHAM DAY
WERE MADE BETWEEN 1985-88 AND ARE
TRANSCRIPTIONS FROM EXISTING EXAMPLES OF
ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY
THEY ARE ALL INK ON VARIOUS PAPERS
WITH INTEGRAL MARBLING

FOR DETAILS SEE
www.grahamday.co.uk