

## **Persian Carpet as a Media of Communication between Iranian and European Artists**

### **A Semiotic Approach to William Morris' Tapestries**

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#### **Abstract**

Persian carpet weaving is one of Iran's most famous industries that has attracted the world's attention to Persian arts through the centuries. What above all, have given prominence to Persian carpet as a beautiful work of art are the pattern and its composition in a two-dimensional space. The diversity of patterns, use of deep and beautiful colors, good composition, harmony of colors, delicate and poetic composition are among the most outstanding features of Persian carpet. Industrial advancement and development of transportation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led the western explorers to travel eastward making them acquainted with the cultural heritage of these civilizations. William Morris, the leading thinker and artist of the British Arts and Crafts Movement is among the first to conduct a research on Persian carpet's patterns and designs. In this paper, we are proposing a semiotic approach to the transaction between Persian artists who made beautiful and ever-lasting carpet designs and William Morris as a pioneer of Pre-Modern Movements in Europe, who studied and recognized the underlying principles of Persian art (mostly carpet), and applied them in a creative way to his own remarkable hand-made designs.

**Keywords:** Persian Carpet, Media of Communication, Iranian and European Artists, Semiotic Approach, William Morris, Tapestries.

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## **Introduction**

Nineteenth century marks the onset of the expansion of industry and technology in all fields of human life. The holding of Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851 turned Britain into a global cradle and center for the development of technology. The design of the works showcased in this exhibition sparked a lot of aesthetic concerns among British intellectuals and artists regardless of technical novelty and technological creativity. Commercial transactions and the tour of eastern countries by archaeologists and explorers familiarized Europeans with the diverse aspects of life in these countries so that it created an appeal to gaining a deeper knowledge of eastern civilization among European artists and scholars. In the present paper, it has been attempted to first gain an insight into Persian carpets and then to elaborate on the way William Morris was inspired by the patterns of Persian carpets, with a semiotic approach to his works.

## **Persian Carpet as a Media of Communication**

Persian carpet is one of Iran's most famous and popular industries that has attracted the world's attention to Persian arts through the centuries. Persian carpet made its way to European, especially British museums and personal collections as a result of industrial and technological advances and the development of global transportation, thus familiarizing European artists with the eastern art. "For several centuries Persian art has been best known in the west by the carpets. They were a conspicuous feature of court life and hence immediately impressed themselves on foreign envoys and visitors, practically all of whom from

the fifteenth century on, spoke of them, often in terms of abundant admiration. Moreover, they were the most imposing of the trophies that travelers could easily bring back with them, and their beauty and magnificence were instantly recognized as wholly eclipsing the meager floor coverings produced in the west" (Pope, 1938: p 2257).

Art historians divide carpet weaving in Iran into three ages: youth age coinciding with the 15<sup>th</sup> century; golden age ranging from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries; and decadence covering 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Carpet weaving which was common among Iranian nomads and middle class families as well as in commercial factories began to attract the court's attention since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, that is, since significant royal factories were set up for weaving nice and delicate carpets. In those factories, the best and most expensive carpets were woven for the palaces and some of them were given to foreign kings. What characterize Persian carpets as an artistic and splendid work are its patterns and compositions in a two-dimensional space as well as the material and the weaving technique. "World supremacy can be accorded to an art only when it is the natural and authentic expression of the culture that produced it, and that Persian carpets are to an exceptional degree, for they incorporate in something like perfection an aesthetic vision that is profoundly, distinctively Iranian. In their themes, they rest securely upon ancient tradition, perpetuating ideals long enshrined in the language, the literature, and the most solemn spiritual heritage

of the race. They are executed with a technical skill, which from early medieval times had been the conscious aim of the Persian craftsmen, and offer unlimited scope for the Persian genius for pure design, its satisfaction in multiple rhythmic, and lucid pattern, freighted with deep implication and rich with allusion. However complex the composition or subtle the poetic appeal, it is guided by an unfailing intellectual clarity which is characteristic of the Persian spirit. The greatest examples never fall into the obvious but conceal within themselves infinite riches that yield their loveliness only to sympathetic and patient regard, realizing in substantial form the most opulent and excited visions of the illuminators, instructed and disciplined by the austere art of calligraphy. At once abundant and orderly, the age-old but ever renewed designs glow with colors learned in the art of faience, textiles, miniatures, and perhaps mural painting. Thus the carpets of the classical period fulfill the demands of the Persian sense of beauty with a completeness and justice that no other art except architecture can show” (Ibid, p 2259).

The king’s encouragement and support, the customer’s taste, the weaver’s art that sought perfection, full development of dying technique, and the collaboration of illumination masters who had talent, dexterity and good taste helped carpet weaving reach its pinnacle in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It was the carpets of the very era that made their way to western collection through archeologists and collectors. According to the American Iranologist, Arthur Upham Pope (1881- 1969), more than three thousand carpets

made their way to European and American churches, museums, personal collections and archeological markets.

Persian carpets can be pigeonholed into several groups based on cities, designs, patterns, and weaving techniques. Historians and carpet experts divide patterns and designs into the following: animal and floral carpet, medallion (toranj) carpet, animal carpet, vase carpet, flower carpet, Polish carpet, flower and garden carpet, Herati flower carpet (Shah Abbasi), prayer carpet, tree and compartment carpet. Finest and most beautiful carpets were woven in Isfahan, Kerman, Kashan, Qom, Gharah Bagh, Tabriz, Tehran, Herat, Shushtar and Yazd. The diversity of patterns and designs, beauty of colors, use of deep and effective colors, composition and harmony of colors, avoiding gaudy and showy colors, delicate, mild and poetic composition, and eschewing the invocation of numerous and immediate effects are among the most outstanding features of Persian carpet. “There is a wide range of qualities assigned to carpets which presumably highlight their essential character – their luxury and magnificence, monumentality, stately elegance, enticing rhythms, their sobriety, their exuberance, their tonic austerity, the harmonious balance of varied and intense color, satisfaction in the adroit resolution of conflicting movements or the discovery of a firmly rationalized scheme controlling a forceful geometric complex.” (Op.cit, p 3168) The garden in its infinite manifestations is the theme of most Persian carpets. Sometimes they are abstract, like the

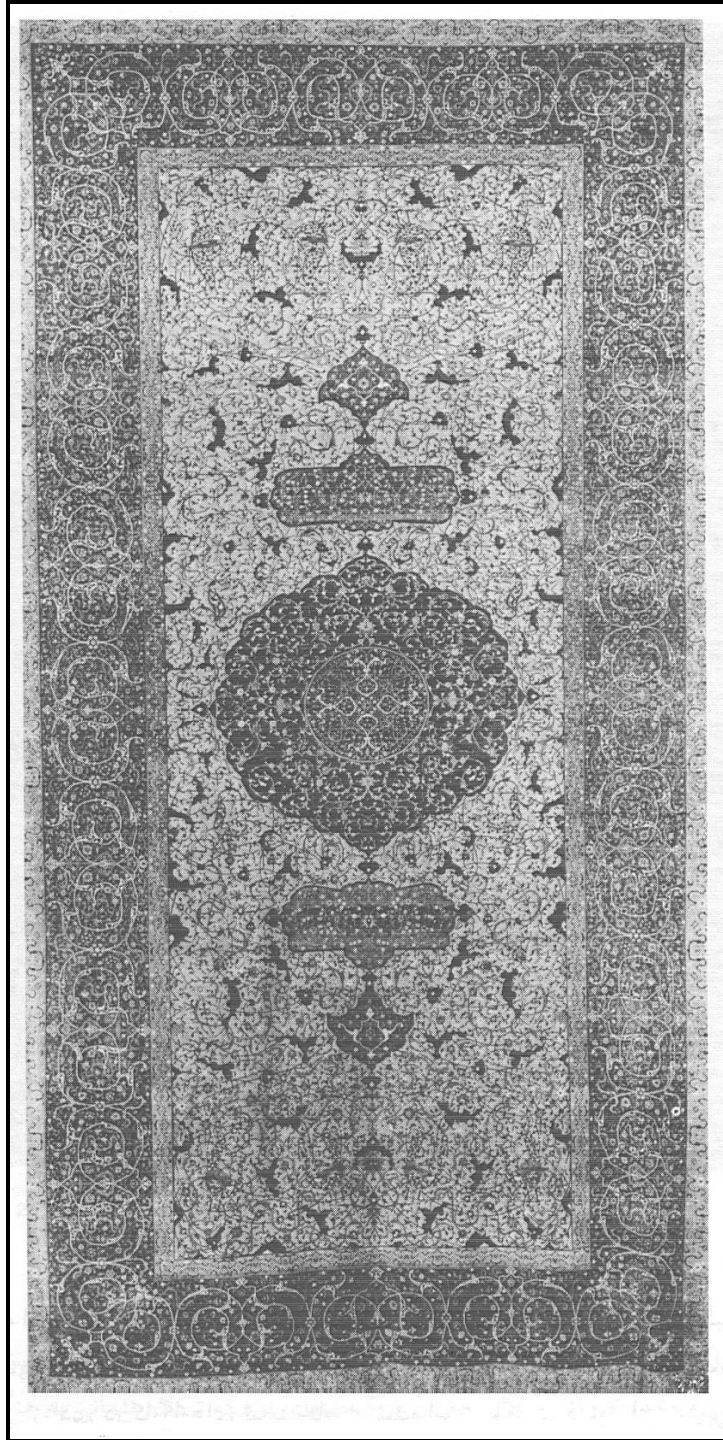
Ardabil and Anhalt and the so-called Isfahans; occasionally they are quite pictorial, recalling the miniatures and the borderal page illuminations.

One of the masterpieces and the world's most impressive carpets is the Anhalt medallion carpet that is in Metropolitan Museum (Figure 1) and is considered a perfect example of medallion carpets of the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It looks like that the carpet is part of the treasure left by Turks at the time of Vienna siege (1683). The carpet was taken to the palace of the Duke of Anhalt in the city of Dessau to be discovered in the middle of the past century. The flower and plant design of the carpet resembles Shah Tahmasb era's illumination and it may be assigned to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The carpet includes several khataei and islimi (arabesque) patterns (Figure 2) and cloud forms (abrak) all over the field, and also stylized images of four pairs, of peacocks have been worked in the bright colors of the khataei patterns. Anhalt carpets beautiful border is similarly dynamic and leaf palmettes islimi reminds one of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Persian enameled pottery.

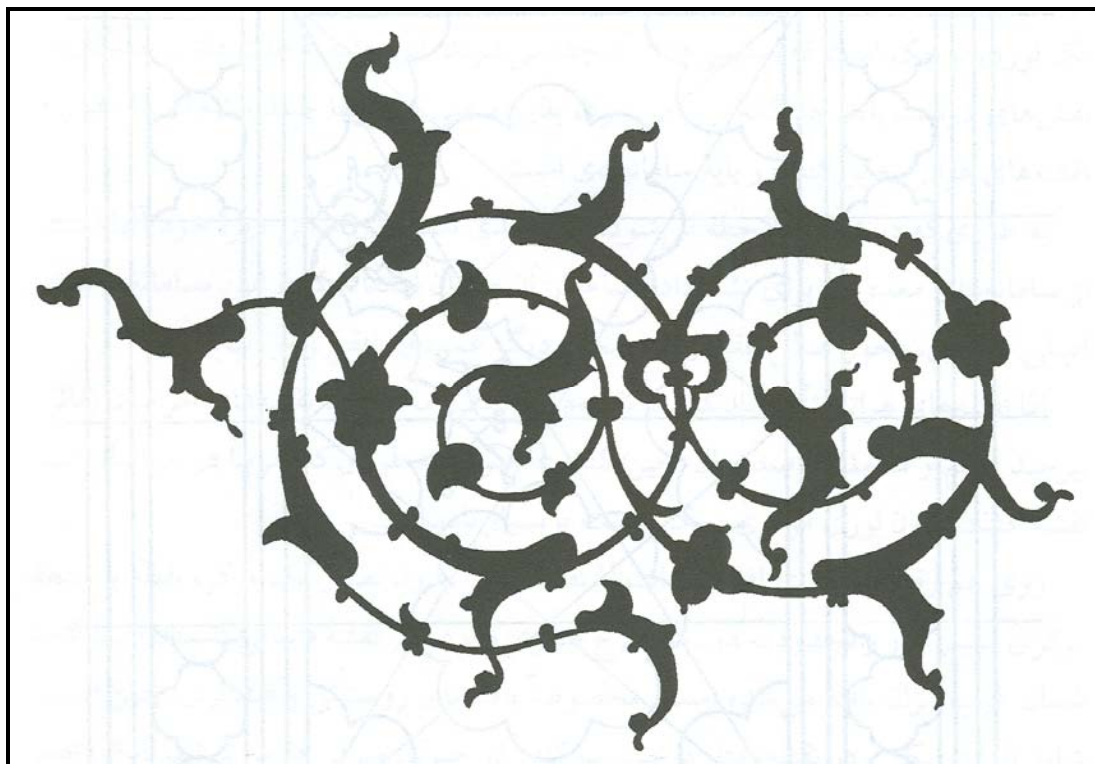
“The field under proper illumination is bright golden yellow, the border and central medallion deep scarlet. The patterns are in cerulean blue, black, and white. The scale is majestic, the colors brilliant and harmonious, the patterns animated and graceful - the whole has an air of jubilation and splendor. For although these are precisely formal compositions, with each element in exquisite

balance, and although there is no pictorial element to call to aid adventitious sentiment, none the less pure and abstract form are deployed with such mastery that a powerful and valid emotion is expressed with commanding force. This is abstract art at its finest and most real” (Pope, 1945, pp 208 - 209).

The medallion carpets were woven in northern and northwestern parts of Iran, particularly Tabriz and Kashan and they reached to their zenith in the 16<sup>th</sup>. The designs and patterns of these carpets consist of a medallion in the center having different forms with gems and at times there are different forms on both sides of the medallion and sometimes a dish or a vase can be seen. In every corner of the carpet, there are also a quarter medallion (lachak toranj). Such decorations are common in Persian arts, especially on books and the illuminated part of the calligraphic books. This is the main proof of the love of Muslim artists for balance and observance of symmetry in design. The designs and patterns of these carpets were adorned with flowers and bushes (gol-ô-boteh) and cornered stems and cloud forms, and were laced with red, green, light and dark blue, brown, yellow and white colors. The carpets had in general a narrow interior border inserted in a big exterior border. It is highly probable that most of these carpets were utilized in mosques they have no animal and human images. However, not all these carpets had such feature rather some medallion carpets had stylized animal and human images.



**Figure 1** The medallion carpet (Anhalt Carpet), Safavid era (the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century), Metropolitan Museum, New York



**Figure 2** The Islimi pattern (so-called Arabesque pattern) The Anhalt Carpet, the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Metropolitan Museum, New York

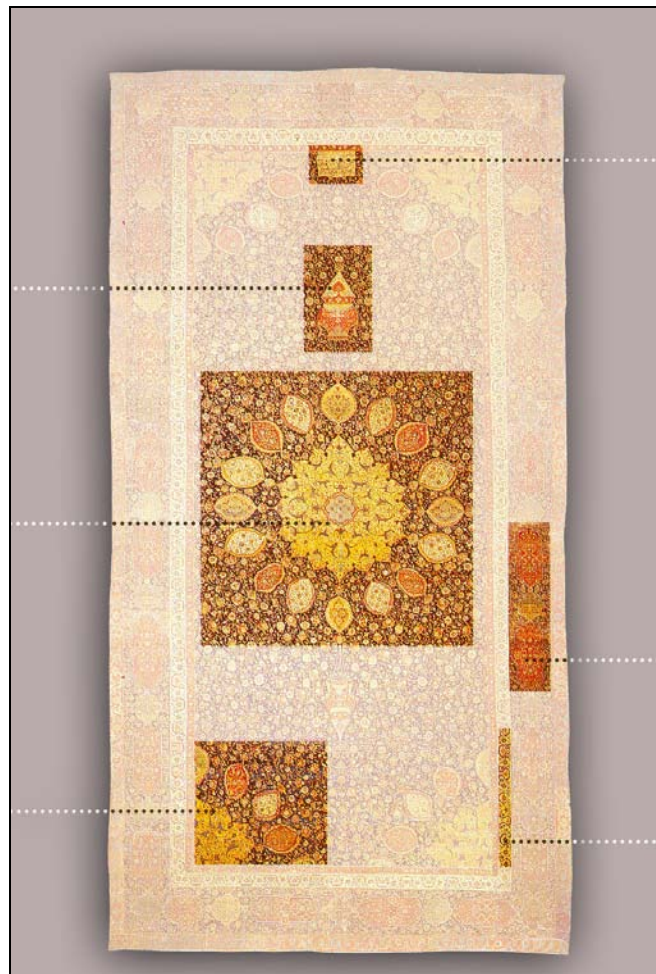
This is the Ardabil carpets that has attracted the attention of European art connoisseurs and artists. “The most famous carpets to survive from the sixteenth century are a pair of enormous carpets, a well-preserved one in London (Figure 3) and a patched one in Los Angeles, known as the Ardebil Carpet. It is said that they came from the shrine in that city where Shakh Safi, the founder of the Safavid line, is buried. Both carpets have the same design knotted in ten colors of wool on silk warps and wefts, but they differ in the number and texture of their knots. The London carpet has some 25 million knots, and the Los Angeles, when intact, would have had over 34 million. The two carpets

were probably woven in different workshops supplied with the same pattern of a central sunburst [toranj] surrounded by sixteen pendants [lachaki], with a mosque lamp hanging at either end (Figure 4). The corners are filled with one-quarter of the central design. All these elements float over a deep blue ground strewn with arabesques [islimi]. Both carpets are inscribed in a box with a couplet by the poet Hafiz:

‘I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold  
My head has no resting-place other than this gate’  
followed by the signature of the court servant, Maqsd of Kashan, and the date 1539-40.’  
(Bloom, p 367-368) .



**Figure 3** Ardabil Carpet, Tabriz, the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Victoria & Albert Museum, London



**Figure 4** The central toranj (medallion) surrounded by sixteen lachaki (pendants), Ardabil Carpet, Tabriz, the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The plan is true to the oldest conceptions and beliefs for in prehistoric time the sun was associated with a mysterious atmosphere pool from which the sun drew the beneficent rain, the other essential of fertility and here at the heart of the 'sun' medallion is a little pool of gray-green water with lotus blossoms floating on it. The pendant mosque lamp, a reminder of the sacred destiny of this carpet, is substituted for the conventional bar and pendant, but it is a little too pictorial and too detached from the texture and

movement of the whole design to be wholly successful and the experiment was not repeated in Persian carpets.

Pope mentioned Ardabil carpet as "deeper and quieter than its contemporary carpets and more appropriate to the holy place it was woven to adorn... a quite different kind of design: patterns in depth, with conflict and surprise, different levels of multiple design systems, each of which determines the placement of its attached foliage, blossoms and tendrils. This complex is quite different from the



obvious symmetry of the general format, so that there are surprises, arrangements which are not at all obvious but have the random irregularity of nature... This is accomplished by a combination of three or more different and apparently similar vine systems, each with its own character and function. Each system has its own framework. Furthermore, each system has its own implied rate of motion and its own implied weight and energy, but all move in concord, as with designer's pre-established harmony; contributing, blending, colliding, but not extinguished by the other related systems. The same principle of the separation of components is found in other arts, especially music... But the apparently irregular placement of these components of the design is really not at all at random. They are strictly and rationally controlled by the secondary or tertiary vine system, in itself not immediately noticed since it is suppressed by being of finer threaded vines and less color contrast with the ground. It is to this secondary system and not to the first or dominant level of patterning that the blossoms are attached. It supplies a rational control different from the distribution that would be expected from the primary system. It is the denial of expectation that gives the feeling of surprise and a new principle of an objective independent arrangement" (Op.cit, p 3170).

Nikos A. Salingaros suggested that old carpets have 'life': "the greatest carpets project a very powerful presence... By codifying the principles underlying the design of carpets, it may eventually be possible to compute the 'life' of a carpet as a mathematical coefficient from the design... In

order to grasp this highly complex process, we have to identify the different spatial scales in a design: from the very small scales near the knot size, through all the intermediate scales, up to overall size of the piece. A carpet, like any design, works on several different levels at once, posing a well-defined problem in hierarchical ordering. The small scale is defined by contrasts, directional forces, and alternation. The large scale requires relationships, harmony, and balance, and depends on matching similar patterns and shapes to tie the whole together." (Salingaros, 1998: p 2) We will discuss this subject more in detail in the semiotic approach.

### **The Influence of Persian Art on William Morris' Tapestries**

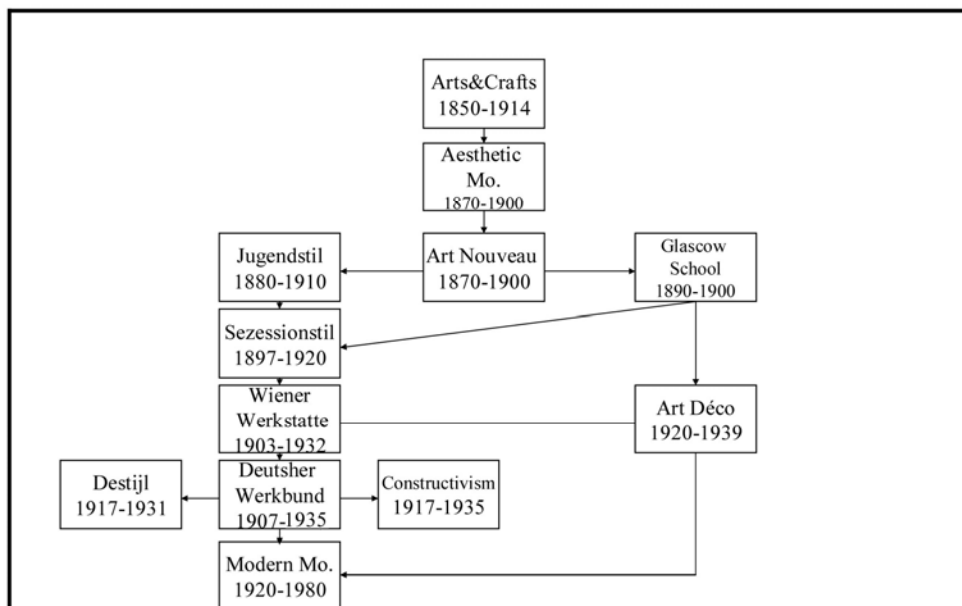
Victorian Age in England was concurrent with industrial advances, economic boom, and development of trade in European countries that expedite commercial and cultural ties between nations. It was during that era that western archeologists, orientologists, and explorers traveled to the east and became acquainted with the cultural heritage and historical greatness of these civilizations and sought to take the achievements of those nations home. It was also during then that European artists fascinated by the beauty and timelessness of Persian designs.

William Morris (1834-96), British Arts and Crafts Movement (1850-1914) theoretician is a pioneering thinker and artist who conducted research on Persian art. The study of materials and the process of manual production, and research on existing clues in patterns and designs of Persian

carpets, textiles and ceramics are among the significant activities of Morris' and his fellow thinkers in the Arts and Crafts Movement, which is known as the most important and influential of Europe's 20<sup>th</sup> century Pre-Modern Art Movements.

A study of the fascinating life of William Morris and his numerous and diverse works indicates the multi-dimensional character of a scholar and artist who has not only played a key role in the growth of art in Britain but has left a deep impression on the artistic developments in Europe and the world. Morris' thoughts on the role of the artist and craftsman in fact serve as a bridge that in a sensitive period of time interlinks the past and the future of European artistic movements. Thus, he is regarded as "a pioneer of Modern Art in Europe" (Diag.1) (Pevsner, 1936).

Morris is an artist who well knows how to embed his artistic, literary and political ideas and causes in numerous works, and that is why he infuses his artistic spirit in his works by using his creativity. His imagination causes artistic soul and thought to flow in the realm of time, enabling us to recognize his art in that time span between past and present and within a gap between tradition and modernity. "Morris' extraordinary understanding of his own time, and of that time as eternal, may explain his enduring presence today- some one hundred and fifty years after his birth. A time traveler, William Morris was a Renaissance artist in a Victorian age: inspired by the range of Leonardo, he wrote poetry and prose; designed, painted, and decorated; spoke in public as a socialist activist and thinker; and manufactured patterns of flower, leaf, stem, and pod" (Raven, 1985: p 8).



**Diag. 1** Pre-Modern Movement in Europe(1850-1940)

Spending his childhood in poetic atmosphere in the midst of the nature, Morris used flowers and plants as themes for his designs, creating decorative works with the use of some sort of a homogenous, harmonious and uniform composition laced with repetition, growth and alteration. These works were created in line with their applications. “Epping Forest, Morris’ childhood refuge, is a source for his many versions of Eden and her particulars, arranged in configurations of interwoven flowers, fruits, foliage, and creatures... Although Morris can be seen some way as an ecologist, a pacifist, and a conservationist, his plea was personal. He did not want to lose the annular refuge of peaceful contemplation he had nurtured and cultivated in all his work and life” (Ibid, p 9). Therefore, Morris loved Mother Nature as the epitome of God’s creation, as she is one of the most significant sources of inspiration for creating works of art (Figure 5).

He sought to create symmetrical and beautiful designs that have some type of uniformity and congruence for all their complication and complex designs, and incur peace and tranquility in the viewer (Figure 6). “Rest is also harmony, in the musical sense, as rhythmic silence... Morris’ need for homely respite was so great that his singular quest in all his endeavors was the creation of heaven on earth, a healing Eden.” (Ibid) So this is the fact, which explains his admiration for Persian Carpets. “We have Morris’ positive and repeated testimony, however, of his response to Persian carpets... On 13 April 1877 Morris wrote to Thomas Wardle: ‘I saw yesterday a piece of ancient Persian, time of Shah’ Abbas (our Elizabeth’s time) that fairly threw me on my back:

I had no idea that such wonders could be done in carpets’... By 1882 he was declaring ‘to us pattern-designers, Persia has become a holy land, for there in process of time our art was perfected’. The beauty of color, coherence of pattern and respect for surface shown by these designs provided Morris with essential examples from which he could create his own very individual works in a spirit of emulation rather than imitation and using ‘principles that underlie all architectural art’ ” (Swettman, 1988: p178).

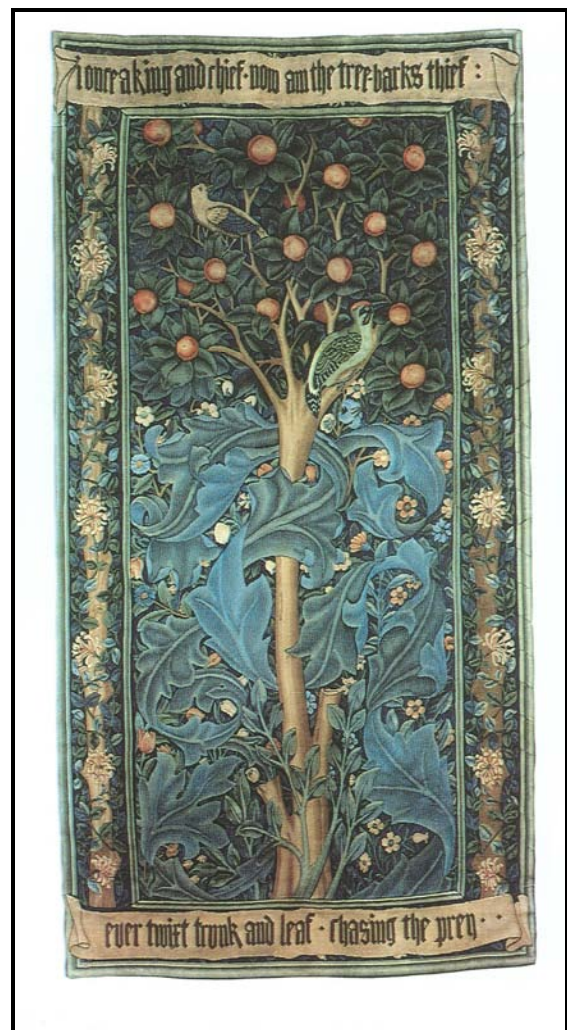


Figure 5 Tapestry, ‘Woodpecker’, 1885



**Figure 6** Runner, 'Hammersmith', 1880

One of his most beautiful works is a hand-woven carpet that was made of wool with cotton warp in 1889. The carpet is now kept at Victoria & Albert Museum in London (Figure 7). "While his own designs were very personal, however, Morris could throw his considerable energies into spreading awareness of genuine old Persian examples, and stimulating demand in the west for classical Persian patterns and the standards of weaving that should go with them... To Morris, the Ardabil Carpet was 'of a singular perfection... logically and consistently beautiful, and, as it was dated, it represented' a

standard whereby one may test the excellence of the palmy days of Persian design' "(Ibid). Therefore, Morris' carpets designs show love for Persian carpet weaving art and his attentive care in using animal and plant designs. In spite of the complexity and number of themes, the carpet's design remains a two-dimensional, non-outstanding decorative object so that the sense of underlying surface is always present. This is mainly due to the use of balance, symmetry and repetition together with growth, complementary and equivalent colors and generally a proportionality and order in the work as a whole. Thus, the complexity of patterns is in fact a result of the plurality of orders which have created harmony and coherence through the coupling of balanced opposites all over the levels of multiple systems of designs.



**Figure 7** Carpet, 'Bullerswood', 1889, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

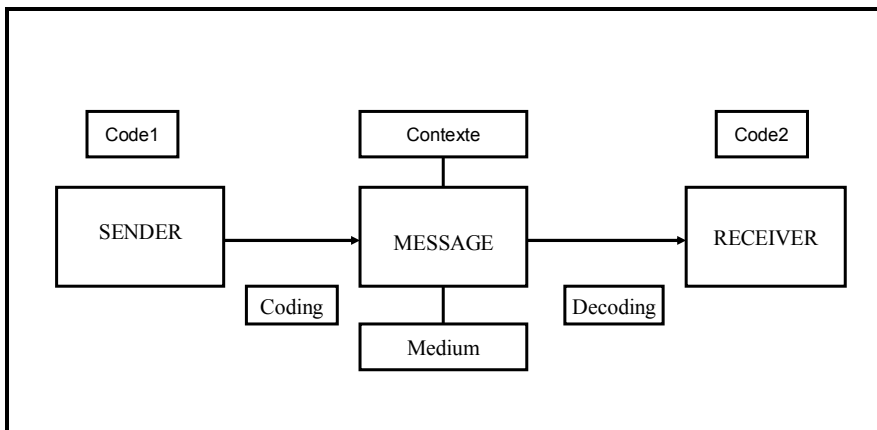
## A Semiotic Approach to the Art of William Morris

According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), semiotics (or semiology as he called it) is to study 'the life of signs in society', while John Locke (1632-1704) and Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914) believe that semiotic is originally the 'doctrine of signs'. The word 'semiotic' (sémiotique) originally derives from the Greek word σημειωτική meaning 'the concept of signs', which means σημαίω 'indicative of, expressive of, and equivalent to'. However, Pierce later used 'mediation' as a description of the subject matter of semiotics. And "Saussure not only argued that in the semiotics sciences, there is no object to be studied except for the point of view that we adopt on other objects" (Sonesson, 1992: P12), but also believes that a sign is a relatively ostensible phenomenon resulting from the interaction between values. Grimace has rejected the idea of 'sign' and his followers have put forth the same idea in 'pictorial semiotics'. Similarly, Umberto Eco (born in 1932) has also used (1976) the term 'sign process' in place of the relative term 'sign'.

Given these ideas, it however does not seem that the word 'sign' limits the field of semiotics too much, but the field of semiotics is the very realm of signification and 'semantics'. So, whether such image (that certainly conveys meaning) being considered as a sign? If so, then

research is conducted on the possibility that an image consists of units that are meaning, not sign. Hence, "pictorial semiotics may be described as that part of the science of signification which is particularly concerned to understand the nature and specify of such meanings (or vehicles of meanings) which are colloquially identified by the term 'picture'" (Ibid, p1).

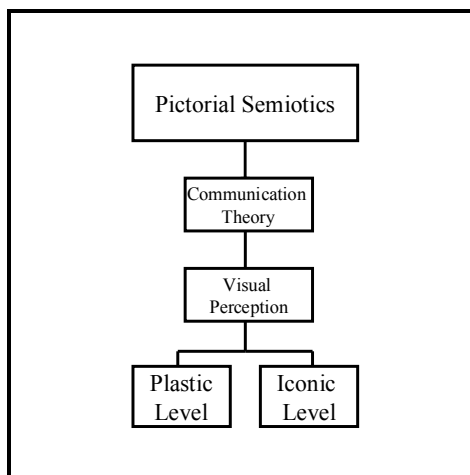
A semiotic theory which could be proposed to be applied in the field of visual art is 'the theory of communication' (Diag. 2). Deriving from the communication schema of Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), the semiologist from the School of Prague, the theory regards the 'artist' as the 'sender' of 'the message' and the 'viewer' as the 'receiver'. The message that is of the visual type is conveyed by the 'medium', which is a 'work of art'. If we consider communication 'the process of conveying the message by the sender to the receiver, provided that it incurs the sender's intended meaning in the receiver', 'the visual language' and 'the environment' in which information will be of great importance. By environment we mean all the social, cultural and intellectual as well as emotional factors, which can influence the process of transaction between a 'sender' (here the Persian artist) and the 'receiver' (here Morris) and influence the 'interpretation' of the message.



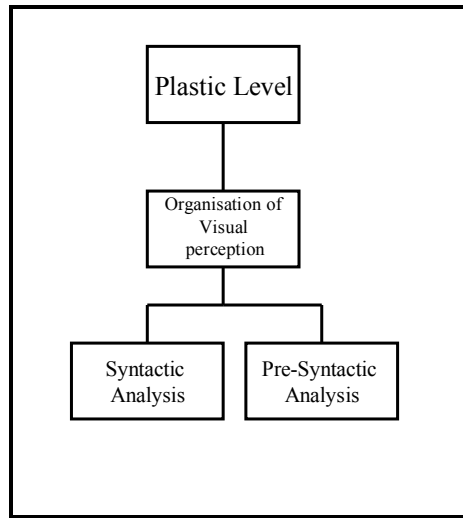
**Diag. 2** The communication schema of Roman an Jacobson

The interpretation of a visual message (Diag. 3) could be achieved by articulating two semiotics levels: ‘plastic level’ and ‘iconic level’. Plastic level (Diag. 4) could be explored in two phases: ‘pre-syntactic’ and ‘syntactic’ analysis. The plastic level shows the rules of composition such as symmetry, balance, rhythm, proportion and the relation between figure and ground, which organize the visual variables such as plastic (color/tonality, texture) and perceptual variables (form/limit, dimension, orientation, implantation in the plan) (see Saint-Martin, 1990).

The iconic level is the interference of the beholder in the plastic level to organize the nomination of figurations and representations in the picture: in this way, the viewer can recognize the objects; those there visions have been memorized before. These objects could belong to the ‘real world’ or to the ‘visual encyclopedia’ of the beholder; so the visual knowledge of the viewer will be of great importance in the process of interpretation of a visual message conveyed by any artistic medium (see Saouter, 2000).



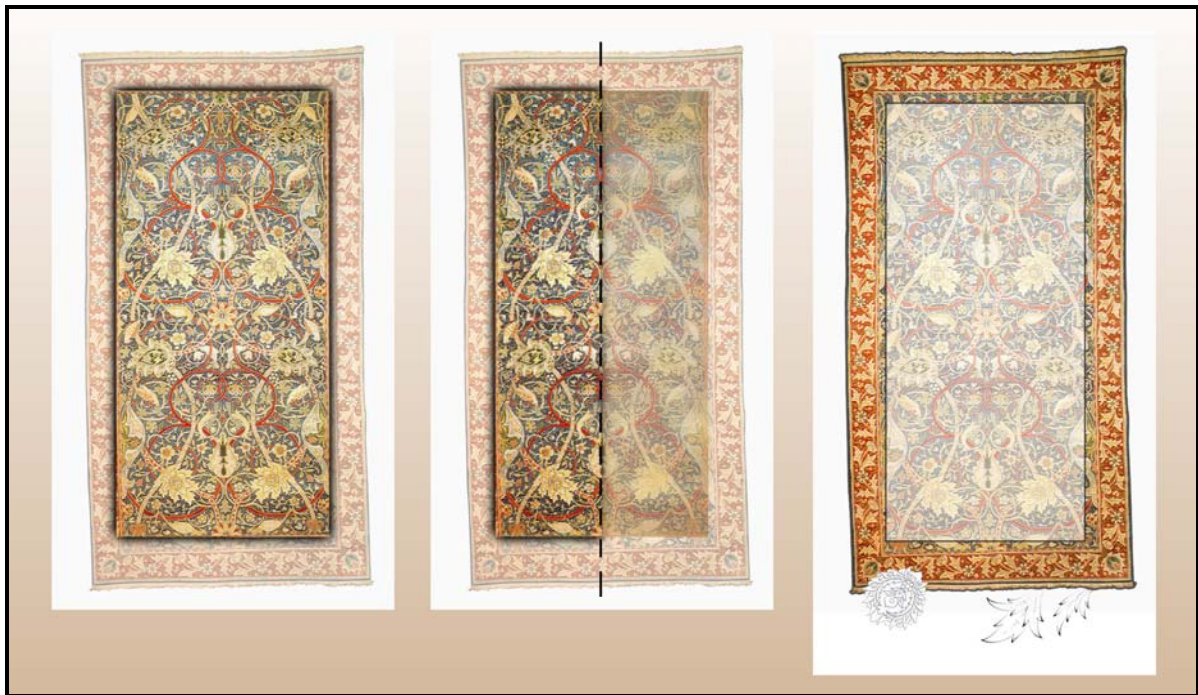
**Diag. 3** Pictorial Semiotics



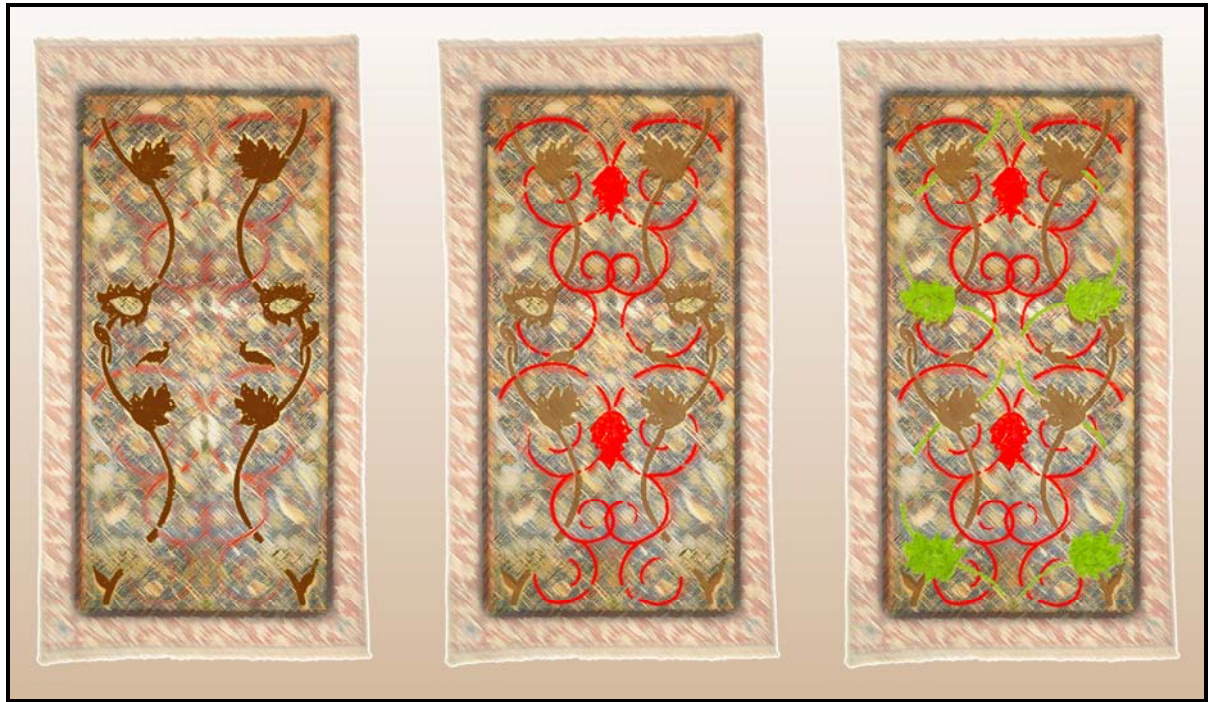
**Diag. 4** The Plastic Level

The 'Ballerswood' carpet is analyzed in two semiotics levels: plastic level which shows the composition of visual components, symmetry and balance (Figure 8). Levels of multiple design systems which depict several Islimi patterns

(Arabesque perspective) are shown in Figure 9. In the iconic level, the Persian motifs such as lotus palmette, leaf palmette, rosette, lanceolate leaf and stylized birds can be identified by 'trained' eyes.



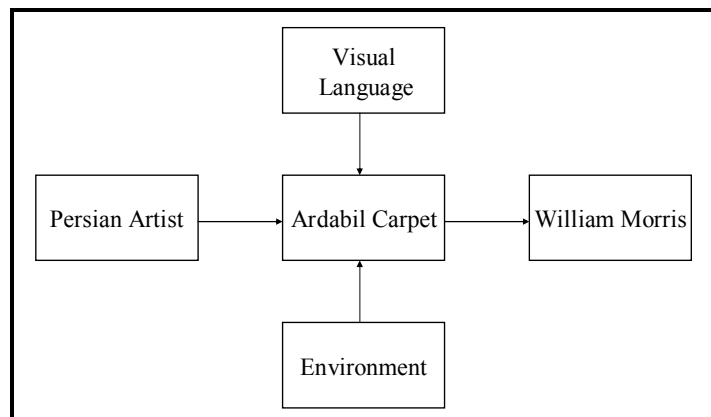
**Figure 8** The plastic level (Symmetry and proportion)



**Figure 9** The plastic level (Level of multiple design systems)

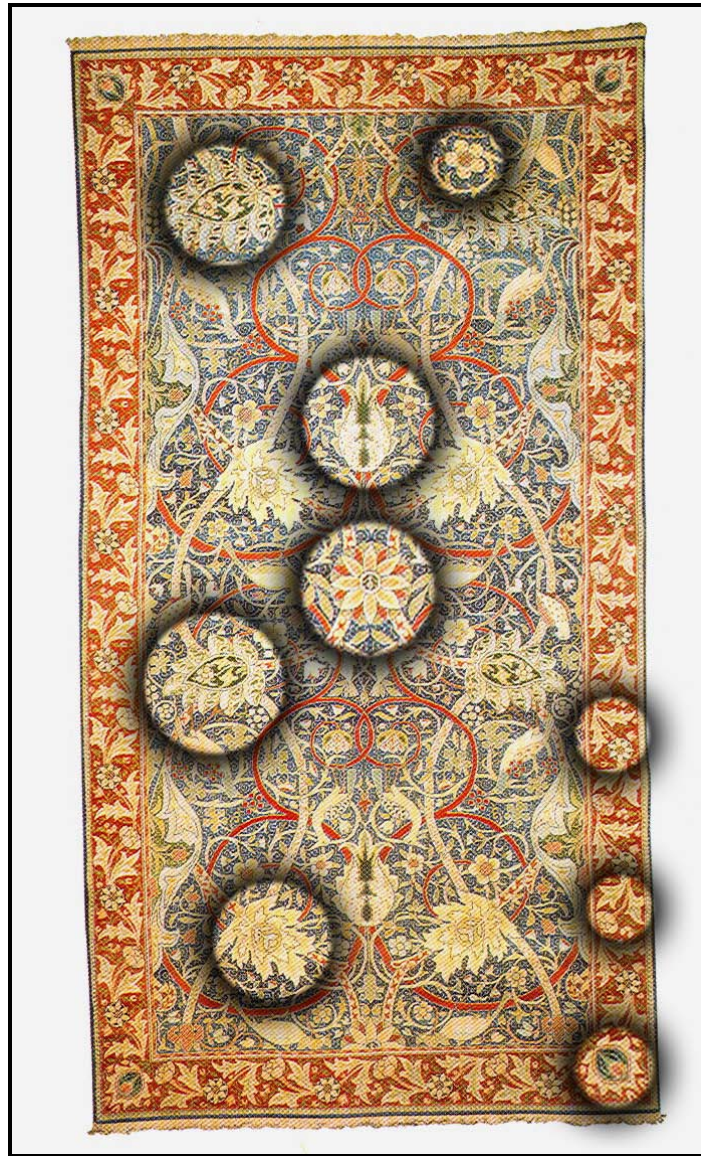
A semiotic study of Morris' works and designs (Diag. 5) sheds light on the fact that he has not just copied Persian works, but he has achieved artistic creation after a prolonged and systematic study of underlying components and also separate and fuseable levels of patterning as well as the Persian motifs which will be found in all the great carpets of the 16<sup>th</sup> century mostly in the great Ardabil Carpet. So he became familiar with the aesthetic principles of

Persian design and painting as well as the techniques of weaving and natural dying. Familial, social and historical environment, educational and intellectual characteristics, talent of influencing people and friends, and natural environment are among factors that caused Persian arts, particularly Persian carpets to leave a significant impression on aesthetic thoughts of Morris as one of the pre-founders of Modern art in Europe.



**Diag. 5** The process of transaction of visual information between the artist and the viewer





**Figure 10** The iconic level (Lotus palmette, leaf palmette, rosette, lanceolate leaf)

### Conclusion

Persian carpet is among those artistic works that, while introducing the Iranian skill and mastery, is considered as one of the most outstanding universal artistic achievements of Iran over ages. Persian carpet weaving hit its pinnacle during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, so that the masterpieces left from this time (which most of them are kept in the famous museums and

artistic collections of the world) are expressing the aesthetic mastery and deep-rooted principles of composition and harmony in Persian art by the Iranian craftsman.

Persian composition that is based on balance, rhythm, use of bright colors, equilibrium of form and ground, as skilled use of multi-layered order, all bringing about complexity beside beauty, is indicative of the creation of plurality in unity and

vice versa, a principle which has its root in the monotheistic nature of Iranians during the ancient times and after conversion to the holy Islamic religion.

William Morris is an artist who was born in one of the most decisive and turbulent era of European art, in a country that is seen as the center of Industrial Revolution in the world. At this decisive time when European art was assaulted by the ‘mechanization’ and ‘industrialization’ and that artists faced a dilemma as to choose between ‘the honesty of craftsmanship’ and ‘the beauty of man-made objects’ or ‘the dominance of ugly mass produced objects’, Morris and his followers sought to reconcile art and industry; so they returned to the East and selected eastern and mostly Persian art principles to attain this goal. Thus, a semiotic approach which could scrutinize the underlying aesthetic principles of both Persian and Morris’ art can show that these principles influenced the visual language of the European Pre-Modern Art in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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## فرش ایرانی: رسانه ارتباطی میان هنرمندان ایران و اروپا با رویکردی نشانه شناختی بر فرشینه‌های ویلیام موریس

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قالی‌بافی ایرانی از معروفترین صنایعی است که در طول قرون متمادی توجه جهانیان را به هنرهای ایرانی معطوف ساخته است. آنچه که بیش از هر عاملی قالی ایرانی را به عنوان یک اثر هنری زیبا مطرح می‌سازد، نقوش و چگونگی ترکیب‌بندی آنها در فضای دو بعدی قالی است. تنوع نقش مایه‌ها، کاربرد رنگهای عمیق و زیبا، حسن ترکیب و تناسب الوان، ترکیب‌بندی لطیف و شاعرانه و عدم ایجاد آثار فراوان از برجسته‌ترین ویژگیهای طراحی فرش ایرانی به شمار می‌روند.

پیشرفت صنعتی و توسعه حمل و نقل در قرن نوزدهم میلادی باعث شد که کاوشگران غربی با سفر به شرق، با میراث فرهنگی این تمدنها آشنا شوند. ویلیام موریس متفکر اصلی جنبش هنر و پیشه انگلستان و از پیشگامان هنر مدرن در اروپا از اولین هنرمندانی است که به تحقیق در نقوش و طرحهای قالیهای ایرانی پرداخته است.

در این مقاله کوشش شده تا در ابتدا با معرفی و مطالعه ویژگیهای فرشهای تأثیرگذار در بحث «فرش ایرانی به مثابه رسانه ارتباطی» جایگاه قالی ایرانی در هنر مغرب زمین تبیین شده، سپس با «رویکردی نشانه شناختی بر آثار ویلیام موریس» نحوه الهام وی از طراحی قالی ایرانی مورد مذاقه قرار گیرد.

واژگان کلیدی: فرش ایرانی، رسانه ارتباطی، هنرمندان ایران و اروپا، رویکرد نشانه شناختی، فرشینه‌های ویلیام موریس

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