Projection ²

Abstract

This project originates from an engagement with *my own culture*, exploring how *culture* can inform *graphic design practices* today. It aims to show what lessons individuals can draw from their own cultural background and how they can integrate these insights into their creative work. It also emphasizes the importance of *appreciating* cultural values as a source of *inspiration* and meaning in contemporary practice. Furthermore, it encourages *personal expression*, highlighting that what is *personal* does not necessarily have to be *private* – and that expressing personal perspectives can often bring greater depth and resonance to creative work.

Kilim is used as the main medium through which these ideas are gathered and communicated. As a familiar and emotionally resonant object in *Turkish culture*, kilim becomes a point of connection, allowing broader concepts to be introduced through a recognizable and meaningful form. While engaging with the practice of *kilim-making*, a shared logic between *weaving* and *designing* was revealed: both involve planning and improvisation, structure and expression, personal meaning and cultural transmission.

Building on this connection, the project proposes a model where *traditional making processes* and design thinking are closely intertwined. It invites creative practitioners to explore *culturally grounded alternatives*, to value personal narratives, and to develop design approaches rooted in both *individual* and *collective memory*.

[212 words]

Context

The project began as a personal exploration—an attempt to understand the world of kilims and the symbolic language embedded in their motifs. As I immersed myself in this visual tradition, I began to observe how meaning could be constructed through form—how patterns and shapes were not merely decorative, but carriers of ideas, beliefs, and intentions. These were not just design elements but visual codes, often functioning like a quiet form of language passed through generations.

As the research progressed, I realized how deeply Western design systems had been internalized—often without question. I felt the need to step away from those defaults and search more deliberately within my own culture for design tools, visual languages, and references. At that stage, I believed the answers could be found by replacing one system with another. However, that approach didn't fully hold—at least not for the culture I belong to. Especially in a context where definitions of beauty, structure, and value are often borrowed, it became clear that the goal was not to reject one set of norms entirely, but to understand how they interact with inherited, local systems.

Because our culture—geographically, culturally, and experientially—is not tied to a single side. We are shaped by both Eastern and Western influences. We carry the traces of both in our visual memory, architecture, aesthetic decisions, and methods of making. These influences do not conflict—they coexist, forming a unique cultural space. We are a bridge—not only metaphorically, but literally. Our creative processes draw from both ends, and we will continue to connect them. In-betweenness is not a struggle—it is a source of creative potential.

This shift allowed me to see kilims not just as visual references, but as vessels of cultural knowledge. These patterns taught me how meaning is encoded through repetition, disruption, asymmetry, and rhythm. What appears abstract is often a condensed narrative—a kind of memory system. I began to understand design not as something imposed from outside, but as something that could be learned from within culture.

One of the most important discoveries in this process was realizing that the logic of weaving closely mirrors the logic of designing. Both practices require planning and improvisation, rhythm and attention, and time. You move forward slowly, step by step, and often have to look back to understand where you are. The structure of the loom in weaving even echoes the layout grid used in publication design—both systems that balance constraint and freedom. This shared logic became the backbone of the project—not only conceptually, but also structurally. It informed how I approached the format and methodology of the final book.

The process became a form of translation—a dialogue between observation and response. I moved fluidly between manual techniques (weaving, stitching, bookbinding) and digital methods (typeface design, coding, motion graphics, interactive publications). I drew from disciplines including graphic design, product, fashion, AI-generated visuals, and data art. The goal was not to replicate kilim forms, but to absorb their logic and reimagine it through contemporary tools.

Symbolism and semiotic thinking became central to this process. Kilim motifs—protection, fertility, migration, unity—are not ornamental. They hold emotional, cultural, and even spiritual weight. They showed me that design can do more than organize or decorate—it can make memory visible. As O'Sullivan (2023) notes, sustaining cultural heritage is not merely about form preservation but about retaining cultural relevance. This emphasis on meaning over mere visual continuity has influenced how I now interpret kilim motifs—not as static icons, but as evolving symbols embedded with lived experiences.

I also examined the work of Turkish designers whose practices draw from local references, whether consciously or intuitively. Their work revealed a shared visual language that hasn't yet been clearly articulated. This project became a way to collect, extend, and contribute to that emerging culture—by gathering practices, connecting references, and building a design language grounded in where we live, what we inherit, and how we create meaning. As Erdem Akan puts it: "A Japanese eats sushi, an Italian eats pasta, and I eat kebab. We all have the same digestive system, but if the input is different, the output will be different too. Design works the same way. We might use the same tools, the same software—but what those tools pass through is never the same. In my case, it's shaped by Istanbul, by Anatolia, by everything that makes up the cultural fabric of Türkiye."

It also features a series of participatory exercises aimed at encouraging readers to observe and interpret cultural elements around them, draw from their own context, and think through making. These tasks include constructing new motifs, experimenting with weaving using a small kit embedded in the book, and reworking symbols through contemporary design tools. One of the activities focuses on observation—as in the Street Observation Society (Japan)—recording and examining everyday spaces as a way to draw inspiration from one's immediate cultural environment. These exercises emphasize *introspection, attentiveness, and proximity* as tools for culturally engaged design practice.

The book is bilingual. Turkish ensures accessibility within the local design community and encourages discourse among emerging designers working in this geography. English, meanwhile, allows the work to engage with broader international audiences—those interested in cultural heritage, semiotics, symbolism, and context-based design practices. Its form as a reference publication reflects the intent: to contribute not only as a personal project, but as a shared cultural resource.

To borrow from Steve Jobs: "You can't connect the dots looking forwards; you can only connect them looking backwards." This project is an act of looking back—not to retreat, but as a way to move forward. It searches for continuity. It argues that our strength lies in our in-betweenness—not East, not West, but the weave that stretches between.

Ultimately, this project isn't about resolving dualities, but creating through them. In-betweenness is not a boundary—it is a space of complexity, memory, and possibility.

[969 words]

Projected contribution

This project contributes to the field of graphic design not only as a *personal or aesthetic exploration*, but also as a *foundational gesture* toward building a distinct *Turkish graphic design culture*. While "Italian design" or "Japanese graphic language" are associated with well-established histories, visual systems, and theoretical frameworks, *Turkish graphic design* lacks a clearly defined cultural foundation. In the absence of this, most of the references used—both in *education* and *practice*—are drawn from *Western design histories and models*.

In Turkey's design education system, foundational courses are predominantly shaped by *Bauhaus-inspired* frameworks, and *Western design narratives* dominate course content, case studies, and visual references. As a result, students are rarely introduced to their *own cultural design histories* and often struggle to find ways to position themselves within their *local context*. This project responds to that gap by proposing a *starting point for a more culturally rooted approac*h.

By using the *kilim —a warm and culturally embedded object—* as the starting point, the project offers a space for rethinking what design can look like when it emerges from within, rather than being imported. It connects with *other Turkish designers*, collects insights and practices, and forms a *creative network that values shared memory, geography, and symbolism*. This is not simply a personal act of reflection but a step toward *constructing a collective design narrative.*

On a personal level, this work has *already* transformed how I approach design. I no longer view *Western norms* as the *sole lens* through which design problems should be solved. Moving forward, I will approach each brief not only through *inherited frameworks* but also with a renewed commitment to looking inward toward my *culture, context, and personal archive*. This shift will shape my *creative decision-making* and expand the range of *visual and conceptual references* I will draw upon in future projects.

Ultimately, this project seeks to contribute to the emergence of a *culturally grounded, pluralistic, and locally informed graphic design ethos*. It aspires to take a small but meaningful step toward articulating what a *uniquely Turkish design practice* might become—not as a fixed or essentialist identity, but as an *evolving, reflective, and rooted creative language* shaped by both *tradition* and *transformation*.

[360 words]

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