A striking parallel between contemporary algorithmic art and classical Islamic art is that both are full of examples of text trying to become figure, or image that reverts to its basis in text. In digital art, the medium consists of code, which may or may not be expressed as image, sound, action, etc. In religious Islamic art, the written and spoken word of the Qur’an are considered to be the direct speech of God. Yet despite the constraint of clear and unambiguous Sunni scripts, I observe a fascinating will to figuration in Sunni Islamic art whereby letters and words start to look like bodies. I will show examples Islamic artworks where the text seems inexorably to give rise to a figure, and digital artworks that struggle to make manifest code that wants to stay latent. I “explain” the “will to figuration” drawing from new media theory, the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and the thought on latency and manifestation developed in Shi’i Islam.

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