



Dignify the Understanding Process in Visual Art: Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Art is a subject area that blends philosophy, aesthetic, cultural, scientific discipline, psychology, propagation, anthropology, comparative study, and historical art. The multi-racial and multi-cultural elements in Malaysia have influenced the artist in creating their artworks. Through artistic talents, Muslim artists can use various techniques and arts as a thorough force to call in and praise the greatness of Allah S.W.T. Thus, it is the duty of the artist to translate Islamic ideas into artistic language. Agreeing to the Islamic view, artistic creativity is the urge or force given by Allah S.W.T., which runs up the importance of Allah S.W.T. In addition, art also enhances the union or unity. Islamic art does not revolve around individual humans, but it applies to social orientation based on the requirements of fellow human beings. Muslim art could include the contextual conditions, an artist's intention, and expressly because not all artworks have the same instruction with the ultimate destination of art actions that is the Unity of God or Tawhid. So, with local (Muslim / Malay) shifting of identity, demonstrate the changing of the Malaysian cultural identity. The objectives of this paper are to dignify the Understanding Process in Visual Art that have similar philosophies, knowledge of Islam and Malay civilization. This model can contribute to the development of a guideline that has been improved as compared to the existing one. This theoretical framework has been designed for understanding with the chronicle of contemporary art, which keeps to the aim of the Islamic art concepts, especially in lifting up the concept of Tawhid is the ultimate expiration of Muslim art.

Keywords: Process, Islamic, Muslim, Tawhid, Art

1. Introduction

Since the independence of Malaysia in 1957, Islamic society's acceptance towards Western secularism or liberalism has placed Islam as part of other faiths; however, the dualism has influenced the worldwide forms of thinking and community support. Islamic art developed its own distinctive styles and share certain characteristics, such as the use of calligraphy to transform simple objects into works of art, or the role of abstract designs to decorate works intended for religious contexts. The continuous movement of artists, patrons, and objects throughout the Islamic world has taken on a substantial part in shaping the dynamic nature of its artistic tradition.

For the Muslim, reality begins with and centers on Allah. Allah is at the center of worship and aspirations for Muslims and is the focus of lives. So Islamic art, focusing on the spiritual representation of the objects and not the physical qualities. The Muslim artist does not try to duplicate nature as it is but tries to conduct what it stands for. This directs the creative person, and those who experience the artwork, go nearer to Allah. Art as an endeavor to create pleasant forms, the pleasant form shall be construed as a form that designs beautifully. Art is an important element in a guild, hence without art, the evolution of a particular company can be alleged to be incomplete, including human evolution. In fact, this would be overstated if the matter was regarded in the Islamic context. As for Islam, the arts correlate with the growth of human understanding, because Islam itself is a mode of life that emphasizes beauty and artistry (Read, 1959).

Islamic art is the artistic creation of Islamic cultures and not just as arts-related to Islam as a faith. Furthermore, Islamic art is neither the artistic creation of a specific epoch nor that of a particular place or people and it is neither



a trend nor a trend. (Robert Irwin, 1982). Islamic art is a conscious product by artists who aim at producing religiously permissible art. Therefore, what makes art Islamic is the ambition of artists to produce a workplace that will be accepted as Islamic by others. In the constitution of inclusion and exclusion taking place in the discursive tradition of Islam, new artistic work needs to find space and be allowed to see it.

The beginnings of art in Malaysia can be traced as early as the 20th century when most of the local artists began to employ techniques and approaches that developed in the West. In addition, at the same time, due to the modernization process that resulted from British colonization; they have been exposed to Western educational approaches, which were more analytical and investigative in seeking knowledge. Then came new ways to fully value and interpret the cultural perceptions of nature and reality. Once the influences and values of Western art had been taken on in the local art practice, this is seen as an indication of the acceptance of secular norms as in the setting of current art galleries and museums.

Islamic art as a manifestation of aesthetic value and this is very appropriate as it tied the revealed knowledge of Islam based on the Quran. In other words, messages of any Islamic artworks should be founded on the revealed knowledge and the messages contained in the Quran (Ismail R. al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya' al-Faruqi, 1992). Scarcely any of the artworks reflect Islam except in a superficial style, and the bases of contemporary Muslim art are firmly established in Western art rather than in traditional Islamic art. The values, thus elevated by it are Western and as such, they are frequently in conflict with Islam (Aminah Syed Muhammed, 1995). Islamic art historiography went through a vacant state of the heart and its persistence has been satisfied with the knowledge of Western art. Sometimes we are in the field of art history very anxious to speak close to a particular art as a composition of Islamic art (Dzul Haimi, 2001).

The reason for lack of popularity in Malay society regarding Islamic Art is the lack of sympathy and appreciation among Malaysia Society themselves due to the advancement of the evolution of contemporary artistic creation that took place since 1980 (Ahmad Rashidi Hassan, 2012). Islamic art has its own historical heritage and uniqueness. It has grown continuously in its own form and philosophy that is oriented based on Islamic sources emphasized the needs of Islamic Tawhid and laws. The history of Islamic art has undergone a vacant state of affairs and the continuation has been run through with Western art. Western formulas have been applied in studying Islamic art. Still, the Western world view could not sit with their divinity. As a consequence, it creates problems in composing the story of Islamic artwork. This is because the Islamic research methodology is based on The Quran (Dzul Haimi, 2013).

Islamic art is a part of Islamic culture. The difference between Islamic and non-Islamic art is their intention, aim and ethical value. In the Arabic language, the word Islam means surrender or submission, specifically submitted to the volition of God. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim, which implies "one who surrenders to God." Consequently, all Muslims belong to one community, the Umma, regardless of their cultural or national setting. The achievement gained by Islamic art was a contribution of Islamic culture in which the primary aim is for the sake of Allah (SWT).

2. Literature Review

In the early days of Islam, there was not much growth in the art arena, because, during that time, the focus was more on the call for jihad to fight for Islam as a religion of truth, instead than the world of aesthetic shapes. Even so, after the conquest of Syria, the Arabs started to see the beauty of the creative arts in accordance with the emotional state of Islam (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1999). However, we can find several hadith Sahih (authentic hadith) which highlight the prohibition of painting or drawing in Islam. One of the main reasons given to justify the prohibition of making a painting, drafting, or sculpture, is because it can distort the religion of a Muslim in which it can associates Allah SWT as The Creator. Thus, Western observers claimed that Islam is an anti-idolatrous religion, or in other words, an ideology of anti-living pictures (Mohamed Anwar Omar Din, 2010).

Nevertheless, there are also some scholars who are of the view that the creation of drawing or painting of every living creature is permitted in Islam, as long as the creators (artists) do not have any intention to misuse their artworks, which they got into the pattern of drafting or painting to destroy the trust and belief of Muslims towards the Oneness of Allah as the great Creator (Osman Bakar, 1995). Islam requires art to be intended purely for Allah SWT. So a sincere purpose for the sake of Allah SWT should always be implanted in the hearts of artists. The fact about sincerity is described by Allah in Al-Quran, which stands for: And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakat. And that is the right faith. (Surah al-Bayyinah: Ayah 5)



Yet, in the process contributing to the creation of artworks, there are many different steps needed by the creative person to determine the approach of the approximation. The whole of the advances is performed in order to collect information data that is expected to sustain the cognitive operation of understanding or enlightenment. In short, the practice of thinking activity of the human psyche is a factor of information obtained by the senses that later are processed and passes to an interpretation of individuals (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1999). In one of the articles documented in the catalog of an exhibition titled *Menifestasi Jiwa Islam in Senirupa Malaysia Sezaman* (The manifestation of the Islamic soul in contemporary Malaysian art), states that Ismail Zain loudly criticized and questioned the understanding of local artists who glorify the Western idiom and ideology. Ismail also questioned the values of modern graphics and suggested they should be reviewed as for him the modern art promotes a sense of individuality, anti-social ness and the concept of 'art for art' (Muliyadi Mahamood, 1992).

Islam has its own philosophical system. The primary worry is the trust, without ignoring the office of ethics and law in the production of artwork. Though aesthetic and beauty are borne every bit a natural passion of man, the 'truth' is the basic element, therefore Islamic art must include the values of beauty (al-Jamal) and truth (al-Haqq) at the same time. As Islamic artists, they should hold the Islamic philosophy and artistry must be preserved for the sake of Allah and humanity and not art for art. The philosophy of artistic production of art does not bring benefits to humans, even to religion. Islamic philosophical terms evoke some controversy among Islamic scholars associated with the etymology of the word philosophy itself, in which the word philosophy in Arabic is the immersion of the Greek word 'Philosophia' which also means love of wisdom or news. He too mentioned that Prof. M Saeed Sheikh strictly distinguished the term Muslim philosophy from Islamic philosophy, of which Muslim philosophy may only be un-Islamic. For instance, there are philosophers who are Muslims who adapt their philosophy with philosophies that developed from Western culture (Awang Sariyan, 2010). Al-Ghazali, an Islamic philosopher who is very immobile, was believed to have a philosophy founded on the Greek philosophical system and was wide through his writings titled *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (Confusion of Philosopher) and *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error).

Islamic philosophy is a philosophical system that cannot be differentiated from two authoritative sources that are al-Quran and al-Sunnah. This implies that whatever field or branch of philosophy that is discussed based on the Quran and the Sunnah should not oppose the rules of Islam. The Islamic philosophical discussion has focused along with a few key questions, that is to say, the question of the divine, human, nature, and life (Asmawati Suhid and Fathiyah Mohd Fakhrudin, 2012). The Quran is the main source of Islamic philosophy because it is the book of guidance and a mercy for the whole universe. According to, the oneness of Allah S.W.T, or monotheism, forms the foundation of Islamic philosophy. The religion in this belief obviously has a substantial impact on human life (Nik Mustapha, 2014). Another purpose of where the philosophy of Islam to reconcile revelation with reason, knowledge, belief, and religion with philosophy, and to show that the rationale and revelation are not against each other, and that religious belief shall be delivered by the pagan when it is shining with the brightness of wisdom philosophy. It is alleged to prove also that when religion includes philosophy, it carries on the characteristics of philosophy as philosophy to consider the color of religion. On the whole, philosophy is a tool of the surroundings in which it arises and bloom, and every bit is obvious, it is a spiritual philosophy and spiritual.

Although the news report about efforts to raise the estate of Islamic tradition and try to bolster the Islamic Civilization date back only to the start of the twentieth century, a great heap of advance that has been acquired and more material available to researchers. Nonetheless, new requirements analysis and treatment based on the theme of the new facts that are available and the sources are not really denying. The transformation procedure of the Malay community in Islamic civilization and mode of life before 1970 was concluded as a process of Islamisation with some central features of Islamisation occurring in the Malay Archipelago peacefully with a moderate attack and designed based on the current state of affairs in the Malay community at the time. Islamisation started from the rulers, the pastors and people that reflected a top-down concept and governing rulers has patronage by giving more extensive space to propagate Islam in society as a whole. The function and contribution of the Muslim Sufist scholars who are Sunnis (Shafi'i) in the public exposure and understanding of Islam have increased the presence of Islamic educational institutions in the Malay Archipelago, which at the same time aided in creating a network of intellectuals at international and regional stages. In addition, Islam contributed to the formation of Malay identity, calling back, intellectual excellence and Malay civilization and changed the structure of Malay culture and societal spirit. Islam is often a factor that supported the revitalization of the Malays in determining the natural selection of future religion and the Malay race from the shape of Islamic traditionalism to the Islamic reformism (Mashitah Sulaiman, 2013). Still, Islam is a religion revealed by Allah S.W.T to the entire human race, whereby Islam is a compatible religion that fits human nature in all ways of spirit. It also fulfills



human preferences, needs, traits, wishes, desires, feelings, people, and heads. Allah S.W.T. creates men with soul, emotion, conscientiousness and a touch of natural love for all beautiful things. Art, as a matter of fact, is equal in beauty and subjective in nature. Art can be foreseen, heard and touched by refined souls, simply may not be expressible by words and speech. It is difficult to define art accurately and it is still more difficult to explain the concept of exceptional beauty and loveliness.

3. Methodology

Conventional analysis of works of artistic production and laboratory analysis was used to ascertain the age and identity of materials. Reconstruction of the artist's working process and analysis of the related historical documents, including letters or journals was applied as easily. In some theaters, interviews with the artist and others affected in the artistic creation are also imaginable. Most researchers of art have used books entitled *The Art of Art History*, *The Art History and Its Methods*, which both of the books analyzed the agreement and the appreciation of the arts. Those records are not conventional in enlightening about the history of art history, but slightly more on the assemblage of provoking things to think with, which has numerous associations with others within both the anthology and elsewhere. The concept involved various ranges, inclusive of philosophical approaches such as humanism or post-structuralism and academic fields of studies, such as anthropology and archaeology. Then it goes to a more narrowed defined tool like iconography or the whim of the cycle (Donald Preziosi, 2009 and Eric Fernie, 2011).

The grounded theory was chosen for this survey as an approach for carrying on this research which aimed to produce a theory that illustrates the characteristics of the Local Model of Islamic Art. Artwork needs to be studied to see the effects of the art with all its troubles, including being more sensitive to aesthetic values contained in this. This study, view of the theory of art appreciation to Prof. Dr. D'zul Haimi Md. Zain (Dzul, 2008) and Dr. Nor Azlin Hamidon (Nor Azlin, 2012). Prof. Dr. D'Zul Haimi bin Md. Zain is a Professor who teaches the subject of History of Art particularly Islamic art at the Faculty of Art and Design, University Teknologi MARA (UiTM). He was awarded a Ph.D. posthumously. graduate in History of Islamic art from the Univesity of Edinburgh, United Kingdom (1996). He has brought about many academic books and among them are *Bibliografi Seni Islam* (Bibliography of Islamic Art), *Manifestasi Tulisan Jawi* (The Manifestation of Jawi Script), *Ruang: Syed Ahmad Jamal* (Space: Syed Ahmad Jamal), *Nur Al-Quran, Al-Quran: The Sacred Art of Revelation, the Message and the Monsoon: Islamic Art in South East Asia and Ragam Hias Al-Qur'an DI Alam Melayu* (Decorations of Al Qur'an in the Malay World).

The beginning chapter of this volume sets the basic subjects in the appreciation of Islamic art that indirectly helps those who want to read and learn more about Islamic art. While, the second chapter illustrates the evolution of the history of Islamic art, which was initiated since the epoch of the Umayyad Caliphate until the 19th century in the Malay world. The diversity of Islamic art styles can be seen distinctly through the selection of images of the arts since the earliest century of the coming of Islam. Dr. Nor Azlin Binti Hamidon is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Arts, Academy of Malay Studies Building, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. She had a Ph.D. in Art and Design from University Teknologi MARA (UiTM), MHIST, School of Oriental & African Studies, London and BUSUL, University Of Malaya (UM). She was the student under the supervision of Prof Dr. Dzul Haimi Md Zain.

Dr. Nor Azlin studies al-Ghazzali's theory and it is parallel to Panofsky's theory, in which the classification of the knowledge is based on the senses, the mind, and the spirit. The knowledge derived from the first two processes in al-Ghazzali's theory is through the senses, while the second two processes fall into the category of through the mind; whereas the knowledge of the final process is gained through spirituality and the Sufism. It is also connected to the truth, either physical or spiritual. The first four levels produce the physical truth, while the fifth level produces the spiritual truth. It is in the spiritual truth that the question of the application of Islamic rules and laws pertaining to the output of art. This is the layer that would specify whether the artwork as a final product or the cognitive operation of creating art that is parallel to Islamic rules and world view or achieves the Ultimate Reality, which is Tawhid Allah SWT or the Unity of God.

4. Result and Discussions

The Islamic art book written by Prof. D'Zul Haimi bin Md. Zain discusses the gold age of Islam by conjoining the appreciation of artistic production and its history from the aesthetic detail of perspective. The Islamic art book written by Prof. D'Zul Haimi bin Md. Zain discusses the golden age of Islam by conjoining the appreciation of art



and its history from the artistic point of view. This script is used as the primary textbook for Islamic Art subjects in the Faculty of Art and Design in all UiTM. Islamic art was briefly discussed pertaining to the discernment of the four basic processes in the making of artwork inclusive of the aspects of impersonation or imitation, denaturalization, styling, and generalization. Dr. Nor Azlin's framework is fixed as the History of the Muslim Art Tradition and not the History of the Islamic Art Tradition because to label artwork as Islamic art is a lot more challenging than Muslim art. A Muslim may or may not produce something parallel to the Islamic teachings. In any condition and situation, a Muslim has given a multiple-choice and faith. By this, Muslim art could include the contextual conditions, artist's intention and expression, which this because not all artworks have the same direction with the ultimate goal of art activities that is the Unity of God or Tawhid.

Table 1: Process of Obtaining Understanding based on D'zul Haimi Md Zain and Nor Azlin Hamidon

D'zul Haimi Md. Zain	Nor Azlin Hamidon	Understanding Process in Visual Art (Wan Samiati)
1) Imitation of Physical Nature	1) Formal Analysis.	1) Describing the physical aspect
2) Styling the Physical Nature	2) The Analysis of Context.	2) Regulation of Interpretation
3) Abstracting the Physical Nature	3) Themes and Concepts.	3) Generate
4) Shahadah	4) Tawhid.	4) Intentions

From table 1, we can see that the foremost stage is the process of imitation of the physical nature, in which the process of reason, memorizing, and appreciating is similar to the Formal Analysis that is the starting to understanding the art. This procedure can be named as "describing," in which the artists gather the data to create the understanding and interpret all the motion works that have been performed. The term "imitation" is "re-representation" or "re-creative activity". It does not mean copying, mimicking or making a forgery of anything whatsoever. The concept of imitation and representation interchangeably portray the nature, features, and character of artistry. Thus art is essentially an imitation or representation of reality. In representing reality, the artist's present structures and harmonies in a much broader context than mere self-expression. Art is decentralized, spread out, and given to all in the form of a certain focus of attention, brought to bear on the world as it is. The formal analysis is to explain how the formal elements of a work of art affect the representation of the subject matter and expressive content. In another word, a formal analysis addresses an artwork's formal element.

In styling the physical nature, the artists inject creative elements in the artwork they produced. A similar equation in the Analysis of Context, which depends on the ability of the mind of the artist to synthesize the arts that will define the theme and content that are the use of elements of creativity. This means that incorporating the components of creativity requires the "regulation" in organizing and decorating the overall understanding of the artworks produced. It is an in-depth interrogation of how the technical elements were used by the artist creating the overall impression conveyed by the art. The third stage is abstracting the physical nature. In this process, those artworks start to be analyzed and defined. This is similar to the idea of themes and concepts. The ambiance of the spiritual experience that typified by the shapes, the writing and the symbolism in which both of them are the main quest in the appreciation of artistic production in which it concentrates more on the "generate" as a period at which something takes form into being or from which it derives or is held. It is like the artist's own supposition intended the purpose of producing the artwork. The last stage is Syahadah, which is similar to the concept of Tawhid, which is the oneness of Allah S.W.T. Both are concentrating on the intentions, which initiated the very first stride of every workplace. It is a signal of the heart that guides the action to ensure it leads to the right and appropriate way. The intention is something unseen, nevertheless, most of an individual's deed and action are enabled to give signs and define the implicit purpose.

5. Conclusions

The theory that was introduced by Prof. Dr. Dzul Haimi; in most of his writing, it can be labeled as the theory of the History of Islamic Art Tradition, which he employed in analyzing his artworks such as Timurid miniature paintings and ornamental varieties in Al-Qur'an in the Malay world. Meanwhile, a theoretical framework, which



was designed by Dr. Norazlin Hamidon, claims that her framework is fixed as the History of the Muslim Art Tradition and not the History of Islamic Art Tradition. This is imputable to the fact that, labeling an artwork as Islamic art is a great deal more challenging than Muslim art. She founded the Islamic concepts (contributed by the theory of Islamic knowledge by Al-Ghazzali and a few Muslim scholars) and the theory of Iconology by Panofsky. Nonetheless, because the artworks she has analyzed are more towards a calligraphic theme, so her theory may also be able to be distinguished as the History of Islamic Art Tradition.

In order to label artwork as Islamic art, it means that every individual facet of the production, bulging from the idea, the process, until the final product must be followed, so as not to go against Islamic theology, laws, and rules. Art moves human beings and lives up to their emotional dimensions. Artistic emotional response inspires a man to cast illumination on the sympathies of human existence as easily as the facial appearance of the world. In general, the oeuvre of art, as we are familiar with, is a well-thought-out variety of emotional and communicative fundamentals, and its constitution is its shape. Only in Islamic art, man's spiritual dimension has been overemphasized. All art and sentiment have been replicated from this very emphasis. Art is one of the possible aspects of God that was granted to a man and there is a certain natural process that was made possible, as long as it does not work against Islamic law or violate the Sharia. It is clear that Islam is not a religion that bans art without understanding. This is because the arts are part of the entertainment, while the demand for entertainment is part of human nature. Equally for the ability to produce art is ace of the disputes between man and other animals, it should remain preserved as a kind of human refinement.

Art and culture are the two entities that are nearly linked and are suspended between each other. The range of both these fields is vast and complex as if both of them cannot be told apart from one another. Arts and culture really nearly relate to the identity, ideology, and patterns of groups of the citizenry. Worldwide, every society has an identity of its own in culture and the arts, forming the uniqueness of their way of life. The arts have become an identity and practice that are essential to the cultural society of Malaysia, which is a multiracial nation. With the variety of the art practices of multi-cultural social clubs in the country, the identity of multicultural Malaysia has become more highlighted and recognizable. No doubt, things that are asserted in the sphere of the production of visual art are creative activities involving objects that can be touched, seen and imagined to encourage the development of perceptual experience and intuition. History and appreciation of visual arts concentrate on experiencing art in everyday life and in the national culture. Comparison with art and culture from outside are too encouraged to disclose the balance the exposure in the subject area of the visual arts in order to distinguish the visual arts in the ethnic development of nationalities. It is hoped that through visual arts, generations of Malaysians will be literate in culture, have high aesthetic values, critical, creative, inventive, innovative and imaginative, as well as explore thought, exploration, and design in a full scope of visual arts to allow the evolution of ideas and self-expression. This is a significant experience because it helps one build self-confidence, make an assessment and get to experience the way things fell on its own.

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