

# A Preliminary Study on Axiology in the Malaysian Islamic Visual Art

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Received: 9 December 2013 Accepted: 5 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

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## Abstract

The visual art should aim at the good (ma'aruf) things, lawful and moral. The soul of art must be lean towards the nature of human beings. This is because the freedom of soul in designing the art is very much related with the purity of its nature awarded by the Almighty, Allah S.W.T. Basically, art and intelligent in terms of its function are quite similar, in which the inclination is in the acknowledge and the relation with the universe, Godhead, spiritual as well as the physical world. Thus, the realization of the greatness of God and the uniqueness of His creation. Despite the pressures of modernization, this study refers to the fact that Islam is synonymous regardless of place and time, which indirectly strengthen the facts that every Muslim art should be view as an Islamic way of life.

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*Index terms*— malaysian, islamic, visual art, way of life.

## 1 Introduction

It is the power to feel, realize and virtually live the supernatural experiences. It is also beautiful in its natural way and to express the unexplained complex feeling but lively phenomena like love, agony, loneliness, pain and life itself.

In the book by Qardhawi (1995) 1 entitled 'The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam: Al-Halal Wal Haram FillIslam' which discussed the concept of Halal (legitimacy) and Haram (prohibition) in Islam, the Prophet Muhammad said (as narrated by Muslim),

The most severely punished among people (on the Day of Resurrection) will be those who try to create something similar to what Allah has created. In Qardhawi's summary, Imam Thabari stated in the Hadith that people who creates something to be worship besides Allah and he or she realizes it but still does it intentionally; he or she is considered kufr (denial). However, if it is done accidentally, then it is sinful.

Islam literally means submission, purity, obedience and peace. While technically Islam means a way or rules of life which designed the human life who believe in five pillars of Islam (Rukun Islam) which proclaim that there is no God except Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is God's Messenger, perform ritual prayer five times a day, fasting during the blessed month of Ramadhan, to pay Zakat which means giving alms to the poor and needy and lastly to perform pilgrimage (Hajj) to Makkah at least once in a lifetime if he/she has all the ability to do so.

In Islam there are three basic elements, which are Belief (Aqidah), Rules (Syariah) and Ethics (Adab) in which the meaning and interpretation are based on the Al Quran and Al Hadith.

By this, any form of art can be view as Islamic art as long as its content is align to the thoughts and teachings of Islam. These artworks must be produce by Muslims. A Muslim artist should base and refer to both Al-Quran and Al-Hadith in the effort to develop artwork.

### 2 II.

#### 3 Brief Literature Review

Art is considered as the product of creative human activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey an idea, emotion or visually interesting form. Art itself refers to the use of creative skill and imagination to produce beautiful work such as painting or sculptures produced by the skill. ?? In the art making process (1998) 3

In understanding an artwork, we have to realize the existence of two major aspects that are "formalistic" and "iconography", or in other words, "form" and "content". The characteristics of formalistic aspect include the elements like color, tone, lines, shapes, forms, levels, space, rhythms, and movements and so on. The ability in analyzing these characteristics of formalistic aspect will make us look closer with the question of iconography in the particular artwork.

Subject, form and content are the ingredients in producing a work of art. Subjects concern persons, objects or themes. A subject also refers to a particular agreement of the art elements. Form, is commonly understood as the use of the elements in constructing an artwork. Meanwhile, contents can be referring to as a statement, expression or mood, read into the emotional or intellectual message of an artwork. It also refers to the sensory, subjective, psychological or emotional properties felt in a piece of art.

Normally, iconography involves questions regarding literature, sociology, psychology, history, belief and others.

Tolstoy (1896) 4 stated that art as a method of communication, which transfers the emotional sense of an artist. In addition, Read (1959) ?? Art is a discipline, which combines studies on philosophy, aesthetic, cultural science, sociology, psychology, dissemination, anthropology, comparative study and history of art. From the aspect of element of art, the art origin, art development, art creation, art appreciation, art propaganda, all formulates that art is an idea for the future trends in which it engenders changes and development in human art.

Osman Bakar (1995) 11 III. defines art as an attempt to create pleasant forms. The pleasant form shall be seen as a form of that captures and frames beauty.

#### 4 6

The absence of tradition in visual and 3-D art before the 20th century can be considered because of its Islamic background and due to its strong bonding with its tradition of craft culture. Islamic tradition that rejects the depiction of iconography has validated the common historical practice that is the depiction of symbols in craft tradition. Even though this situation has guaranteed and maintained the existence of sophisticated handicraft culture, it however does not promote a tradition of painting and sculpture.

In the context of Contemporary Malaysian art, the deficiency in the development of art has always been related to the religions and cultural background. T.K. Sabapathy in the opinion that: , suggests that Islamic art is form by two words, "Islam" and "Art". He defined Islamic art as a piece of artwork that reflects the advancements of Islam or an advance art object which accepted by Islam.

Osman Bakar (1995) 11 III.

#### 5 Challenges in Malaysian Visual Art

said Islamic art in actual fact refers to Islamic manifestation and therefore whenever we talked about Islamic manifestation in art, we actually refer to Islamic art. Hence, any form of artwork can be seen as Islamic art as long as its contents are in line with the thinking and teaching of Islam. This artworks must be presented by Muslims and the Muslim artist must base and refer to both Al Quran and Al Hadith in creating and developing artworks.

Historically, the earliest paintings found in Malaysia were in various caves such as Niah Cave in Sarawak; Batu Putih Cave at Kodiang, Kedah; Tambun Cave in Perak and Batu Cincin Cave at Hulu Kelantan. It is believed that all those paintings have been painted by the caveman during the Stone Age. There were many tools used in the paintings, among them were charcoal, hematite and manganese oxide. Most of the motives or subject of the paintings were much related to their daily life activities and living objects of its time such as hunting scenes, hunted animals like barking-deer, deer, image of boat, hut and hunting tools. ??? Generally, there are three main factors, which have influenced the development of the early modern art in Malaysia. First, there is the British colonization. Second, is the immigration of "trade nation" and third, the education status. Painting in Modern art was considered as a different piece of artwork as compared to any other conventional art which are more traditional. They are more individualistic in the sense that it reflecting more about the artist than the manifestation of value as a whole in any society.

The development of art in Malaysia can be seen through phases, involving such as drawing, painting, printing and sculpture. Malaysian artist used these areas as platform to express their feeling and emotions for the audience. only within fellow artists and their own colleague's artworks. ??? The National Art Gallery established in 1958 by Malaysia. It showed a real support from government in the effort to promote local artists and to mark the declaration of independence. 15 There were various style of artwork since 1950's up to 1960's, from Realist to Impressionist work, from Expressionist to Abstract Expressionist movement. All these works are from the result of influences and exposure received by the Malaysian artists. ??? These style, were developed by group of artists who tried to identify themselves identity and they are loosely related. Their artworks indirectly show their

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101 personality value of the nation from sociological, cultural, and religions believers. Their works can be considered  
102 as an extended reaction towards the National Culture policy introduced by the government in the 70s. ??? The  
103 writing by RogayahEstar (2010) In producing artworks, the artists tend to get closer to the subjects related to the  
104 situation or events occurred in the country. In other words, they try to approach the in subjects that relate to the  
105 local myth and legend, per sue the discussion about cosmological identity, culture inheritance, political issues,  
106 situation in Islamic context, the extension of calligraphy art, the physical features of substance, current values  
107 and traditions, also any other options of interesting subjects. on the National Cultural Policy explained that the  
108 execution of the Policy is tough in terms of accomplishing its objective. Most Malaysian is a quite sensitive of  
109 their ethnic group and believers. Furthermore, there are problems due to the rapid development in socioeconomic  
110 and politic, which resulted from open and free relations with foreign affairs. The acceptance of foreign value of an  
111 influential system and system among small groups of people had resulted in dispute in the value system and education,  
112 which hindered the development of nationalism and Malaysian national identity. Nevertheless, Dr Tan Chee Beng,  
113 speech had said that even though the establishment of National Cultural Policy is not fully accomplished but, on  
114 the whole the basic aims and objectives of the Policy has shown positive impact and success which can be proud  
115 of.

116 The most essential things here, whether traditional or modern art, it should not go against the fundamental  
117 faith and divine character in the respective religion. In fact, it must shine the positive identity of each group of  
118 race. The variety of custom, tradition and religions in a multi-racial setting of Malaysia, which existed peacefully  
119 since long time, must be well preserved.

120 IV.

## 121 6 The axiology: Islamic and Malaysian

122 Axiology derived from the word axios which comes from Yunani language means value and logos which means  
123 theory. Therefore, axiology is a theory about value. ??? According to Sun Myung Moon ( ???003) ??? Tefko  
124 Saracevic and Paul. B. Kantor (1997) Axiology is the theory that generally deals with the values of trueness,  
125 beauty and goodness and serves as a basis for the three particular theories of education, art, and ethics. In  
126 conclusion, to make possible a future society based on a culture of Heart (realizing the values of trueness, beauty,  
127 and goodness centering on Heart), a unified culture with a new view of values is a real necessity.

128 21 According to Md. Nasir (2013), the theory of value, or axiology, is the branch of philosophy that deals  
129 with the nature of value and valuation. Philosophers consider value as the worth of something, and the process  
130 of valuation as an estimate, appraisal, or measurement of its worth. In their works, worth seems to be an  
131 undefined primitive term. They consider that value is related to, but not synonymous with, "good," "desirable,"  
132 or "worthwhile," and that it can be positive or negative.

## 133 7 22

134 Axiology means a theory of value relating to the use of gained knowledge, Axiology is one of philosophical branch,  
135 which refers to the value about good and bad, right or wrong, beautiful and ugly. Among the axiology branch  
136 is an ethic, which emphasized on reasonable and relevant matters that one should do. Ethic is also focusing on  
137 quality of moral and human attitude covering individual, society and life.

138 As soon as Malaysia gained its independence on 31 August 1957, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia has  
139 declared Islam as the official religion in Malaysia. However, according to Ahmad Rashidi Hassan (2012) First,  
140 moral conduct, which means the act of moral that, produces ethic. Second is aesthetic expression, which refers to  
141 beautifulness of expression. Third or final category is socio-political life that produces philosophy in socio-politics.

## 142 8 25

143 Islamic art is a part of Islamic culture. The differences between Islamic and non-Islamic arts are its intention,  
144 aim and ethical value. The main objection in Islamic art is for the sake of Allah (swt). Unfortunately, Aminah  
145 Syed Muhammed (1995) most of the art exhibition, which themed based on Islamic Art, only began in 1980s and  
146 1990s.

## 147 9 26

148 The multi-racial and multi-cultural elements in Malaysia have influenced the artist in producing their artworks.  
149 Sulaiman Esa's identified some of the basic value taken from the West such as egoistic has been practice by fine  
150 art artist that really contradict with the Islamic value. With the egoistic value, the artist is creating works to  
151 fulfill himself. In addition, that the fine art artist is a revered being superior to others, allow to be very selfish,  
152 even thoroughly antisocial in his behavior and actions, simply because he is an artist.

## 153 10 27

154 Islam begin as soon as a Muslim artist recites his creed *La ilahaila Allah* (No God Except Allah), and accept the  
155 meaning of the Oneness of God (tawhid) that Allah is the "One" (wahid). Tawhid is a comprehensive concept  
156 which not only as a statement by a Muslim about God, but also his/her view on the universe and his/her role in

157 life either as individual or a member of society. Once one recited the creed or Syhadah, one will automatically  
158 be responsible to manifest the creed he/she has recited with the fulfillment of knowledge about the vital of life  
159 in this world. painting, *Waiting for Godot* (1977) has created a controversy because of his insensitivityact by  
160 putting Al-Quranic verse together with image of naked women. The painting represented himself, which is not  
161 only shows the crisis of art identity in himself but also depicted the crisis of culture in the country in the year of  
162 1970s especially among the Malay people who are Muslims towards the Western influence.

## 163 11 SayyidQutb (1979) 29

164 Meanwhile, Ismail R. Faruqi (1980) in his view mentioned, the art activity comprehensively is aboutdecorating  
165 humanly about the concept and the reaction of the man himself/herself. It also concerns on the concept of  
166 existence and life which flourishing in the man's soul. 30 V.

## 167 12 Conclusion

168 in his opinion stated that unlike other cultures which associates the beautifulness as a luxurious, intrinsic value  
169 to gain or satisfy one's self-interest, in contrast Islamic art associates the beautifulness as a value, which entirely  
170 depends on the truth of Islam itself.

171 The value is not only base on the belief solely. The value also has other dimension, which is emotion. The  
172 value shows the influential commitmenton emotion, which is how one is demonstrating his /her feeling whether  
173 love, or hate towards something.

174 Islam is a religion that rules the relations of man and God, between man and universe based on Al Quran  
175 and As Sunnah. Islam supports every artwork that in line with its teaching, but ban, which goes against. Those  
176 artworks is the statement of worldview of life specifically which relevant and coherent with the Islamic values  
177 and perspective.

178 Prophet Muhammad (saw) has conveyed Muslim clearly. One of them is Aqidah or faith. Aqidah has become  
179 the main principle in Islamic development.

180 Art is use as a tool to spread religion and to strengthen assistances and goodness among the society (ummah).  
181 Through artistic talents, Muslim artists can use various techniques and artworks as the thorough force to  
182 remember and praise the greatness of Allah S.W.T. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the artists to translate  
183 Islamic ideas into artistic language. According to Islamic perspective, artistic creativity is the urge or force given  
184 by Allah S.W.T., which highlights the importance of Allah S.W.T. In addition, art also enhances union or unity.  
185 Islamic art does not revolve around individual human but it contains social orientation based on the needs of  
186 fellow human beings.

## 187 13 VI.

188 parties will be remembered always. Finally, we hope that we will gain blessings from God Almighty and continue  
189 to obtain happiness in this world and hereafter, Insha'Allah. <sup>1 2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Yusuf Al-Qardhawi. Translated by: Kamal El-Helbawy, M. Moinuddin Siddiqui and Syed Shukry.1995. *The Lawful and The Prohibited in Islam (Al-Halal wal Haram fil Islam)*. Islamic Book Trust: Kuala Lumpur.pg 109

<sup>2</sup>Robert Allent& Andrew Delahunty. 2002.Oxford Students Dictionary (Eds). pg 52. 3 Ocvirk, Otto G., Stinson, Robert E., Wigg, Philip R., Bone, Robert O., Cayton, David L.. 1998. *Art Fundamental*. p. 9-16.



Figure 1: 13

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 6 DzulHaimi Md. Zain. 2001. Seni Islam (Ed.4). Kuala Lumpur: Hans  
 Press Sdn. Bhd.

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 Ismail R. al-Faruqi  
 and Lois Lamya 'al-  
 Faruqi  
 Robert Irwin (1982)  
 defined 10

*[Note: 9 5 7 MuliyadiMahmod. 2001. Modern Art Malaysia. Malaysia. Utusan publication & Distributors SdnBhd 8 Ismail R., Lois lamya'al-Faruqi. 1985. The Cultural Atlas of Islami.New York: Macmillan Publishing. 9 Robert Irwin. 1982. Islamic Art.London: Laurence King Publishing. 10 DzulHaimi Md. Zain. 2001. Seni Islam (Ed.4). Kuala Lumpur: Hans Press Sdn. Bhd.]*

Figure 2:

28  
 25 Ahmadrashidi Hassan. 2012. Contemporary Islamic Painting in  
 Malaysia 1980 to 2000. UiTM: UiTM Press.

*[Note: 26 ]*

Figure 3:



190 .1 Acknowledgment

191 In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful, All the praises and thanks be to Allah. Peace and  
192 blessings to the beloved prophet Muhammad PBUH as well as his family, friends, and the rest of followers.

193 We would like to record our accreditation to all parties involved, either directly or indirectly during the  
194 information gathering process. All the information and assistance that have been obtained from all involved 29  
195 SayyidQutb.1979. PetunjukSepanjangJalan.Kuala Lumpur: El/Ikhwan Enterprise.pg 129.