

THE ROLE OF A MUSLIM ARTIST

Noor Idayu Abd Wahid

Raja Zarith Sofiah Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilization,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
E-mail : ayuwahid@gmail.com

Khalif Muammar A. Harris

Raja Zarith Sofiah Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilization,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Tracing the history of human civilization, works of art have existed for a long time, and have been made for various purposes from good to bad. Because of that, an artist has the ability to influence others through their artwork. Certainly, there are values that formed the basis for them to function as an artist. But today, the never-ending conflict of values due to the influence of Western secularization has confused Muslims on the values they should uphold. This article then is aimed to clarify the role of a Muslim artist based on the Islamic values. This is a library research study which applies the conceptual analysis methodology. An evaluation was done on the concepts of Islamic art according to scholars explaining the worldview of Islam and the roles of artists. This study finds that a Muslim artist is responsible to 1) bring other people to know and acknowledge Allah SWT; 2) invite to good and forbid evil; 3) produce artworks that are compliant with Islamic law and principles; and 4) to make art as a medium of good conduct instead of an end in itself.

Keywords: *The Role of Muslim Artist, Islamic Art, Islamic Values, Islamic Worldview.*

ABSTRAK

Menelusuri sejarah peradaban manusia, karya seni telah ada sejak lama, dan diciptakan untuk berbagai tujuan dari yang baik hingga yang buruk. Oleh karena itu, seorang seniman memiliki kemampuan untuk mempengaruhi orang lain melalui karya seninya. Tentu ada nilai-nilai yang mendasari mereka berfungsi sebagai seniman, namun dewasa ini, konflik nilai yang tak kunjung usai akibat pengaruh sekularisasi Barat membuat umat Islam bingung akan nilai-nilai yang seharusnya mereka pegang. Artikel ini kemudian bertujuan untuk menjelaskan peran seniman Muslim berdasarkan nilai-nilai Islam. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kepustakaan yang menerapkan metodologi analisis konseptual. Evaluasi telah dilakukan terhadap konsep seni

rupa Islam menurut para ulama yang menjelaskan pandangan dunia Islam dan peran seniman. Studi ini menemukan bahwa seniman Muslim bertanggung jawab untuk 1) membawa orang lain mengenal dan mengakui Allah SWT; 2) mengajak kepada kebaikan dan mencegah kejahatan; 3) menghasilkan karya seni yang sesuai dengan hukum dan prinsip Islam; dan 4) menjadikan seni sebagai media ibadah dan bukan tujuan seni sebagai seni semata.

Kata Kunci: Peran Seniman Muslim, Seni Islami, Nilai-nilai Islam, Pandangan Alam Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Art is a highly skilled creative activity¹ and has a certain aesthetic value that only the artists are able to produce.² This ability to create with subtlety and high skill is the result of the greatness of the human intellect that God has given humans and is closely related to their individual spirituality.³ In other words, art is an external form, a reflection of his inner expression. However, is man free to work according to his desires and thoughts alone? Or does he have to adhere to certain principles and values that in turn determine his role as an artist?

Today, the currents of Western secularization accelerated by the rapidity of information and communication technology, as well as globalization which have made the spread of these foreign ideologies readily available and in turn influenced the thinking of Muslims worldwide, and Muslims' understanding of principles and values to be confused and unclear. The Islamic worldview is completely different from the Western worldview, as well as the Islamic interpretation of art, which is by nature loaded with Islamic values and should not contain foreign values that are incompatible with Islamic teaching. This conflict of values has led to a crisis of identity among Muslims, which in turn affects their role as a servant of God in general, and as an artist in particular.

According to an outstanding Muslim thinker of the contemporary world; Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the dilemma that plagued Muslims stems from three roots of the problem, namely 1) confusion in knowledge and sciences which in turn causes 2) the collapse of morality (he stated as the loss of adab), and ultimately creates 3) false leaders who are frustrated with Islamic values in their spirituality and intellect, and as a result these are portrayed through their poor morals and weak personalities.⁴ A leader exists in various walks of life and in different fields. They play a role in influencing a group of communities and in turn are able to determine the behavior of those who follow or are influenced by them. An artist has the ability to influence the thinking of others through his artworks subtly. Thus, an artist is also a keeper of trust relevant to the matter of art, plays a role in leading the world of art and beauty and is responsible for the work and influence he creates. The

¹ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed.

² Ismail al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 163.

³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man*. (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015), 7-8.

⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: HAKIM, 1993), 106.

imbalance of high-moral values advocated by Islam in him will cause the artist to create damage and confusion as well as other bad influences through his artworks.

The influence of Western secularization has caused much confusion on the keywords that make up the main values in the Islamic worldview. Tracing the history of Western civilization itself, secularization has also affected their religion, to the extent that Christianity is seen as having failed to resolve the moral crisis plaguing mankind. A German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century has exclaimed that God is dead and Christianity is denied. According to Khalif Muammar, Nietzsche's call for the death of God really reflects the emptiness of values (nihilism) and the loss of Western society's belief in the authority of religion and in any absolute values.⁵ Values according to the secular West should be subjective and relative.

Harvey Cox in his work *The Secular City* says that secularization is characterized by three main features namely i) the disenchantment of nature ii) the desacralization of politics iii) deconsecration of life values.⁶ Al-Attas explained, that the disenchantment of nature as part the secularization process is the denial of nature's relationship with anything of a mystical, spiritual, or even connection to God. In other words, man has full power over nature and he can do anything according to his desires.⁷ He then further explained, the second feature, the desacralization of politics and is the separation of the role of religion in political affairs, state administration and law.⁸ While the third characteristic is the deconsecration of life values which means the removal and denial of religious values in determining the direction and way of human life.⁹ All this leads to the destruction of spiritual and religious values from human life which in turn affects knowledge, values, way of thinking and understanding of the reality of things, as well as the lifestyle of Western societies, and anyone who follows in their footsteps.

Modern Western ideas in art is seen to influence the art of Muslims in general around the world. Süha Özkan in his writing '*Moderns and Anti-Moderns- A Critical Look into the Architectural Developments of the Recent Past*' says, the influence of modernity has spread throughout the world regardless of geographical boundaries, beliefs, or culture. This condition according to him impact changes on values and thinking of the Muslims.¹⁰ Aminah Sayyid also made a similar statement regarding visual art in her writing on the '*Islamization of the Visual Art*', saying that contemporary Muslim art are laden with Western values, and that the artworks

⁵ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021), typed.

⁶ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City – A celebration of its liberties and an invitation to its discipline* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 21-36.

⁷ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, op.cit., 18.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Süha Özkan, "Moderns and Anti-Moderns- a Critical Look into the Architectural Developments of the Recent Past", in *Islām and the Challenge of Modernity: Proceedings of the Innaugural Symposium on Islām and the Challenge of Modernity – Historical and Contemporary Contexts, August 1-5, 1994*, ed. Sharifah Shifa al-Attas (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 211.

reflect Islam in a superficial way.¹¹ Princess Wijdan Ali in her writing entitled "*The Status of Islamic Art in the Twentieth Century*" stated that there are Islamic countries which are too fascinated with the progress of the West and want to emulate the West by imitating the Western way of life in various ways including in the production of arts. She referred this situation as 'schizophrenia' among Muslim artists, that is, those who profess to be Muslims, but are influenced by the Western way of thinking and lifestyle.¹² From all these studies done by others, we can say that the values thus promoted by these Muslims artists are Modern Western values which are often in conflict with Islam. For these Muslim artists who choose not to be left behind from following the latest trends and developments of Western Modern art, they will be more susceptible to produce works that are often not in line with the Islamic worldview. This can be seen in their artworks, whereby many artists today produced artworks which are absurd or confusing, and diverse (*juz'i*) without unity of principle (*kulli*). This disunity of principle indicates a state of mind where the 'meaning' of something is not clear and not established. This is the effect of the influence of Western Modern worldview which is constantly changing due to secularization.¹³ Such a worldview is open, subjective-relative, and equalizes all values. Eventually, it adds to the confusion and chaos.

Among the effects of this influence on Muslim artists voiced by Islamic scholars are such as the loss and confusion of identity¹⁴ which is detrimental to his '*aqidah*', making art the ultimate goal¹⁵ which certainly disadvantaged him from using art as a medium of worship to his God, behaving in a materialistic attitude instead of prioritizing the importance of spirituality,¹⁶ producing artworks that contain messages and values that are contrary to Islam¹⁷ instead of spreading the messages of God and the good values of Islam, glorifying Western humanistic values that are secular in nature¹⁸ instead of Islamic truths. All that has been mentioned above eventually gave birth to a Muslim artist who is confused and was unable to distinguish or recognize what is right from wrong as according to the Islamic worldview.

Concerns and calls for a re-examination of art, especially those laden with modern Western elements, were not only voiced by Islamic scholars, but also by many of the Western scholars themselves. Among them, Suzi Gablik in her book "*The Re-enchantment of Art*".¹⁹ She says that human beings are now facing a situation where

¹¹ Aminah Sayyid Muhammad, *Toward Islamization of Disciplines* in chapter *Islamization of the Visual Arts* (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), 483.

¹² Wijdan Ali, *The Status of Islamic Art in the Twentieth Century*, *Muqarnas*, vol.9 (1992), 186-188.

¹³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 5. Read also Syed Muhamamad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dan Sekularisme* translated by Khalif Muammar (Kuala Lumpur: RZS-CASIS, 2021), 30.

¹⁴ Wijdan Ali, op.cit., 186-188.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aminah Sayyid, op.cit. 483.

¹⁸ Khatijah Sanusi, *Visual Art Education: An Islamic Perspective* [Research Paper, 1998]. Bureau of Research and Consultancy, Institut Teknologi MARA. Shah Alam, Selangor. 2.

¹⁹ Suzi Gablik, *The Re-enchantment of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994).

meaning has become so confused that it has led to chaos, and this can also be seen in the art world. According to Gablik, modern art is empty spiritually, values have become vague, and distinguishing true from false has become increasingly difficult. Next, is Gordon Graham's opinion in his writing entitled "*The Re-Enchantment of The World: Art Versus Religion*", he insists that artworks which are separated from religious values will only end in failure and frustration. According to him, the separation of religion from life will only result in a state of permanent disenchantment (permanent disenchantment of the world).²⁰ He emphasized the important role of religion as a source of 'meaning' in today's materialistic world. Finally, an opinion by Barzun in his book "*The Use and Abuse of Art*".²¹ He reminded that art is a powerful medium that is able to influence the soul and hence one's thoughts. He has called for the art institution as a whole to re-examine its purpose and impact given that the state of art of Modern Western influence has brought confusion on many levels both to the artist and what he produces.²²

From the above discussion, it can be seen that modern Western values have had a detrimental effect on the thinking of Muslims, how he understood his role, as well as the production of their works of art around the world. Based on the factors of adverse effects discussed by many Muslim scholars, this study aims to discuss the role of a Muslim artist from the Islamic perspective. This study is hoped to be useful to the academics and Muslim artists in particular, as well as the general public.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is qualitative research which does not involve statistics and numbers. The data collection used in this study was from library research, which employed various sources such as books, journal articles, and websites. In analyzing the data obtained, the researcher has conducted content research (*penelitian konten*) towards the concept of art and the role of an artist from the Islamic worldview through conceptual analysis to extract descriptive and analytical findings. Descriptive method of analysis is the process undertaken to decipher the views of Islamic scholars to understand the role of a Muslim, which is not different from the role of a Muslim artist, and to also understand the principles of art. Then, based on Islamic principles, the results of the work will be critically examined in relation to its nature and elements. Analytical method of analysis is a process used to make judgments in terms of advantages, disadvantages, and suitability of a concept based on arguments and propositions from an Islamic perspective. This process is also done to accept or reject something that is not in accordance with Islamic principles.

THE CREED (AQĪDAH) OF ISLAM

In order to know and understand about the role of a Muslim artist, the discussion should begin with the most basic thing that forms the worldview of a

²⁰ Gordon Graham, *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art Versus Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45-49.

²¹ Jacques Barzun, *The Use and Abuse of Art* (Washington D.C: Princeton University Press, 1975).

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

Muslim which in turn shapes his understanding and determines his actions, namely the creed (*'aqidah*) of a Muslim.

In adhering to the religion of Islam, by only believing in the one true God or acknowledging His existence is not enough and inadequate as a condition of faith and does not guarantee his peace and security in the hereafter.²³ In his book *'Islām: Faham Agama dan Asas Akhlak'*, al-Attas has given an example from the story of Iblis, that is, even though Iblis believes in the one true God and knows his God Who preserves him (*rabb*), he still slips into a disbelieving creature of Allah and cursed by God.²⁴ Despite the pledge of Iblis, he has refused to obey the commands and prohibitions of Allah SWT. Iblis only adheres to *tauḥīd al-rubūbiyyah* which is to know the God who preserves him but does not adhere to *tauḥīd al-ulūhiyyah* which is to believe and act in accordance with the understanding that Allah SWT is to be obeyed fully, and all His rules must be fulfilled willingly. This clearly shows that the confession of the existence of Allah SWT followed by a refusal to obey His commands and the tendency to act based on his own will does not signify true faith and is completely hated and not accepted by Allah SWT.

Therefore, the following discussions will explain how important it is to know and understand the principles that make up the faith of a Muslim, and how the understanding of the Muslim faith requires him to act accordingly to the will and rules of Allah SWT.

Islam has its own values that are different from the secular values of the West or any other religions and beliefs. Values in Islam are fixed (*al-thabāt*) in matters pertaining to creed and dynamic (*al-murūnah*) in the *ijtihad* of the scholars.²⁵ Islam is a religion that Allah SWT has revealed to mankind to believe in Him, taught through Rasulullah SAW, and its followers, namely Muslims, should live by these values of Islam in all aspects of their lives. Islam which is derived from the Arabic word '*aslama*' means submission and surrender (*al-ṭā'ah wa al-khuḍū'*).²⁶ According to al-Attas, Islam is also *al-dīn* (religion) and the word stemming from the root word د-ي-ن from which derive other words which are interrelated and describe a system of life which contains a complete and balanced order for mankind.²⁷ This perfect and holistic system of life when adhered to will give birth to a superior civilization²⁸ and even guaranteeing the safety of the followers in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, Islam should be the only way of life that is fully lived.

In Islam, the whole life of the ummah is centered on *tawḥīd* to Allah SWT. *Al-tawḥīd* is the core of the Islamic faith, which asserts that there is no God worthy of worship except Allah SWT and the assertion that Allah SWT is the Ultimate Cause to every event, He was not created but He is the One who creates and gives existence to

²³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam: Faham Agama dan Asas Akhlak* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013), 31.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed.

²⁶ Syed Naquib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, op.cit. 62-65.

²⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*, op.cit. 41, 52-53.

²⁸ Ibid. 51-96

the whole universe. This concept of *al-tawhīd* gives the understanding that all creation must submit to Allah SWT. Muhammad al-Ghazali in his book *Reflections of the Islamic View of Art and Literature* states that each being has its own purpose which has been determined by the Almighty Creator, and not determined by himself.²⁹ Thus, a Muslim who is a believer should obey the commands and prohibitions of Allah SWT and this faith fulfills the consciousness of Muslims at all times and is displayed in his thoughts, decisions, deeds, words, even where he lives.³⁰

Islam, as a religion sent down by The Lord of the worlds, certainly has the best example (*uswah*) to guide mankind, even as a blessing that brings prosperity to all the worlds (*rahmatan lil 'ālamīn*). Because of that, Islam commands its believers to convey and spread the teachings of Islam which contain the messages of God of all the worlds as a blessing to mankind who follow it. Islam teaches pure values such as *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *tawbah* (repentance), *tawakkul* (trust), *khawf* (fear of Allah's punishments), *raja'* (hope), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and various other pure values which if diligently practiced, will create noble qualities in human beings such as abstinence (*wara'*), piety (*taqwā*), hikmah (wisdom), *'iffah* (moderation), *shaja'ah* (courage) and *'adalah* (just), all of which give birth to civilized human beings and produce prosperity.³¹

People who have good conduct are also called in Islam as *adabic* people. *Adab* according to al-Attas, is the ability of a human being to recognize and acknowledge his proper place in relation to things other than himself according to an order consisting of various dignity and degrees in a system of life determined by Allah SWT, and in the end, this recognition and acknowledgement will lead him to the knowledge of his Creator.³² This consciousness involves true knowledge and wisdom, which should be followed by their acknowledgement, which is an action that goes hand in hand with the true knowledge that they came to possess.³³ Thus, placement of something in certain places describes the level of knowledge in a human being. Only through true knowledge that is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet SAW will produce a clear understanding of right actions or *adab*. It is this understanding of *adab* that helps human beings with rational strength (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) in controlling their lower selves (*al-nafs al-ḥayawaniyyah*) to oppose the inferior animal lusts.³⁴ This self-discipline is the application of *adab* towards oneself by placing oneself in the proper place in all circumstances. Manners to oneself begins with voluntary surrender to The Giver of one's existence, which is Allah SWT.³⁵ This

²⁹ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Reflections on Islamic View of Art and Literature*, *Islamic Studies*, vol.35, No.4 (Winter 1996), 425-434.

³⁰ Ismail al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998) 1

³¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*, op.cit. 97, 104.

³² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014) 137.

³³ *Opcit.*, 72.

³⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man – A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā (4): 58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23): 12-14* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015) 38.

³⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Makna Kebahagiaan dan Pengalaman dalam Islam* (Kuala

can be achieved by seeking to understand about oneself and the meaning of life by earnestly seeking true knowledge, and then practicing the Islamic values contained in the teachings of the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet *ṣalla'llāh 'alayhi wa sallam*.

NATURE AS THE GREAT WORK OF GOD

Having understood how Islamic creed (*aqīdah*) shape the understanding and actions of a Muslim, this topic discusses that a Muslim who repents and loves his God will see all the beauties found in this whole universe is the work of his God. The universe (*alam shahādah*) is a great work of Allah SWT, which is brought closer to man so that he contemplates the signs of His greatness. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says:

*"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding."*³⁶

Islam values the beauty of this whole universe beyond its mere appearance and is always attributed back to its great Creator (*Al-Jalāl*) and His beauty (*Al-Jamāl*). Everything in this unfolding universe, including human life itself, is just a shadow that refers to the true Lord of this universe, that is Allah (*Al-Haqq*) who has power over all things.³⁷ Thus, the purpose of man and other beings is to act according to Allah's will, and not according to the will of his own lusts.

In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says that He created the whole universe as signs (*āyat*).³⁸ Man is endowed by Allah with an intellect that is able to take lessons from His signs.³⁹ Therefore, a believing Muslim will make every effort to apply the principles of beauty inspired by the *āyat* of Allah SWT. In fact, a believing Muslim artist should be amazed at the greatness of God as the Great Creator, who created the whole universe so beautifully, subtly, and to a perfect degree. Islam teaches that Allah SWT is the perfect Creator and Artist (*badī 'al-samāwāti wa al-arḍ*). It is this sense of admiration that makes him repent and submit in obedience to Allah SWT. This principle of the oneness and greatness of God becomes an important foundation in the believer so that they do not forget their relationship and position with their God.⁴⁰

In the Western modern art, due to the secularization process, which one of the key processes is the disenchantment of nature, that is, the removal of nature from its spiritual meaning, from its connection with the Creator,⁴¹ drawings and paintings of nature focuses only on the mere aspects of formality and rarely conveys a higher spiritual meaning. In contrast, a believing Muslim artist should not see nature as an object cut off from connection with its Creator, so that he does as he pleases towards nature, nor in his work, his focus ceases only on merely painting the beauty of nature

Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014) 4

³⁶ Al-Qur'ān, surah 'Āli 'Imrān, 3: 190

³⁷ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed.

³⁸ Al-Qur'ān, surah 'Āli 'Imrān, 3: 190-191, Ṣād, 38:27, al-Zāriyāt, 51:20-21.

³⁹ Muhammad Qutb, *Manhaj al-Fann al-Islami* (Kaherah: Dar el-Shorouk, 1980) 87.

⁴⁰ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed.

⁴¹ Al-Attas, *Islam dan Sekularisme*, op.cit. 32-33. Read also Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam*, (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit USM, 2007), 53-54.

without any deeper and beneficial meaning. He will always strive to convey good meaning in his works of art, as well as remind man of his Creator.

THE NATURE OF A BELIEVING MAN AND THE ROLE OF MUSLIM ARTISTS

To better understand the true role of a Muslim towards his God and in his life, apart from understanding about the Islamic faith, as well as how a believing Muslim should see nature as a sign of the Greatness of Allah SWT, it is also important for him to be aware of his own reality and its relation to his role.

In his book *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, al-Attas points out that every human being has already known Allah while they were in the realm of spirit (*alam rūḥ*).⁴² He had testified that God was the only God and subsequently entered into his covenant affirming his God. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا

“And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from their loins the progeny of Adam, and Allah bore witness to their souls (then said): "Am I not your Lord?" They replied, "Yes, indeed! We are witnesses” ...

But when he is born into the world, he forgets who his God is and the covenant he has sealed with his God.⁴³ Because of this forgetful nature, he tends to follow his lustful desires and commit various atrocities. Only when he seeks the meaning of self and life through the search for true knowledge that is through the teachings contained in the religion revealed by God, he is able to return to know his God and surrender (*aslama*) so that he can act based on the pleasure of Allah SWT. Only through the teachings of Islam, he realized that the true purpose of man was created is to perform worship (*ibādah*) and obedience (*ṭā'ah*) towards Allah according to the way He wills.⁴⁴

Through the teachings of Islam, he also realized that Allah SWT made man the representative (caliph /vicegerant) of Allah on earth ⁴⁵ and this responsibility can only be borne with full trust if he is able to place himself and others in the proper places according to the rulings of Allah SWT guided by the Islamic law (*sharī'ah*). Allah SWT made human beings capable of being caliphs or leaders on earth because of the strength of their intellect. He is equipped with *al-quwwah* and *wus'* that is, the power and ability of the intellect, which allows him to freely make choices, as well as the ability to make judgments to do justice.⁴⁶ He is given the freedom to choose (*ikhtiyār*) between the path of good or the path of evil. However, he only becomes noble if he

⁴² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*, op.cit. 46.

⁴³ Syed Naquib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, op.cit. 140. Refer also, *Makna Kebahagiaan dan Pengalamannya dalam Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014) 175.

⁴⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*, op.cit. 143-145. Refer also Ismail al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, op.cit. 62.

⁴⁵ Al-Qur'an, surah al-Baqarah, 2:30. Refer also to explanation by Syed Naquib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, op.cit. 141.

⁴⁶ Syed Naquib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, op.cit. 141. Refer also to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām – Faham Agama dan Asas Akhlak*, op.cit. 39.

chooses the path of goodness that is pleasing to Allah SWT, and he becomes humiliated when he chooses the path of evil that Satan loves.

The ability of the human intellect also allows him to create, with subtlety, highly skilled and beautiful works of art. However, his intellect is limited, and he works through imitation of his Creator.⁴⁷ Therefore, in Islam, art should be inspired by the majesty of God who creates beautifully, and full of benefits. A Muslim artist is also aware that Allah is *Al-Haqq* who controls himself and everything else, so he does not follow his own lusts in his works, but rather abide by the principles of Islamic rulings starting from his intentions, beliefs, knowledge, materials he uses, and the end result of his work. Although a work of art can be enjoyed as an end goal, it does not bring as many benefits as art as a method to achieve something more beneficial. Therefore, in Islam, art, apart from fulfilling the physical, spiritual, and natural needs of a human being, should also be an intermediary to towards goodness and glory, be it for the artist himself or for the rest of the people. The art that has the highest position in Islam is the art that leads to piety to Allah SWT. Hence, a Muslim artist should strive to spread goodness and creates artworks that evoke the remembrance towards His Creator.⁴⁸

Islam teaches its followers the limits that should not be exceeded as a guideline for them to live based on the pleasure of Allah SWT.⁴⁹ These inviolable boundaries show that everything in this system of life has its proper places that Allah SWT has set. According to al-Attas, the recognition and acknowledgment of these proper places is *adab* (proper conduct), and failure to recognize and acknowledge it is barbarism (*biadab*) and the cause of destruction⁵⁰ In this sense, a man of *adab* is aware of the limits that he should not exceed and will control himself. This recognition and acknowledgement in turn produces justice in him and makes him a believer who always behaves according to the will of Allah SWT and not according to his lusts.⁵¹ According to Al-Syeikh Arslān ibn Ya'qūb al-Dimasyqi (470-550 H), man is not free from Allah and should never feel his existence is separated from Allah SWT.⁵² Therefore, a Muslim artist should not display values that are contrary to the teachings of Islam in his works, but instead, he should promote the pure values that Allah SWT loves.

Since Islam brings its people to know the Almighty Creator, then, an artist should bring an art observer to know the Almighty God and abide by His commands and prohibitions. In other words, the content contained in each of his works of art should be a manifestation of the artist's understanding of Islamic knowledge derived

⁴⁷ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed.

⁴⁸ Ismail al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 169.

⁴⁹ Syed Hossein Nasr, *Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987) 4-5

⁵⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, op.cit. 137.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Al-Syeikh Arslān bin Ya'qūb al-Dimasyqi, *Risālah al-Tawhīd*, translation and notes by Raja Ahmad Mukhlis (Selangor: Maktabah al-Ihya', 2020), 18-19.

from the teachings contained in the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet SAW.⁵³ What a Muslim artist shows in his artwork is his thoughts, ideas, and understanding of the truth in Islam (*haqīqah*) and Islamic law (divine rule/ *syarī'ah*).⁵⁴

An artist must create works of art that glorify the dignity of human beings as servants and caliphs of Allah SWT. Al-Attas in the preface of the book of poetry '*Dalam Terang*' by Professor Wan Muhammad Nor Wan Daud, says that Islamic poetry is not merely inserting Islamic words and sentences, but should reflect truths that contain lessons and advice, purify the dignity of human knowledge and manners, the application of justice and *ādab* in the writer in particular, and the society in general.⁵⁵ In other words, a Muslim artist should produce art that positively educates and develop human morality.

Since a work of art is able to bind the emotions, intellect, and spirituality of the artist with others, and serves as a vehicle of communication, then a Muslim artist must make his work as a *wasīlah* or medium to educate, give benefit, invite to good and forbid evil (*al- amar bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*). A Muslim artist should not make art an ultimate end goal (as understood and practiced by the Modern West), but instead, have his work used as a medium of good deeds in order to achieve the greater goal of obtaining prosperity in this world and success in the hereafter in accordance with the nature of human creation by the Almighty Creator.

EXAMPLES OF MUSLIMS' ARTWORK

Figure 1.

Bismalah Khat in the shape of a Rooster by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.⁵⁶



⁵³ Syed Hossein Nasr, *Art and Spirituality*, op.cit. 4-5. Refer also to Ismail al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, op.cit. 169.

⁵⁴ Khalif Muammar, "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Islamic Art" (unpublished manuscript, Jun 4, 2021) typed. Refer also, Syed Hossein Nasr, *Art and Spirituality*, op.cit. 4-5.

⁵⁵ Al-Attas in Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Dalam Terang* (Petaling Jaya: Tradisi Ilmu, 2004) ix-x.

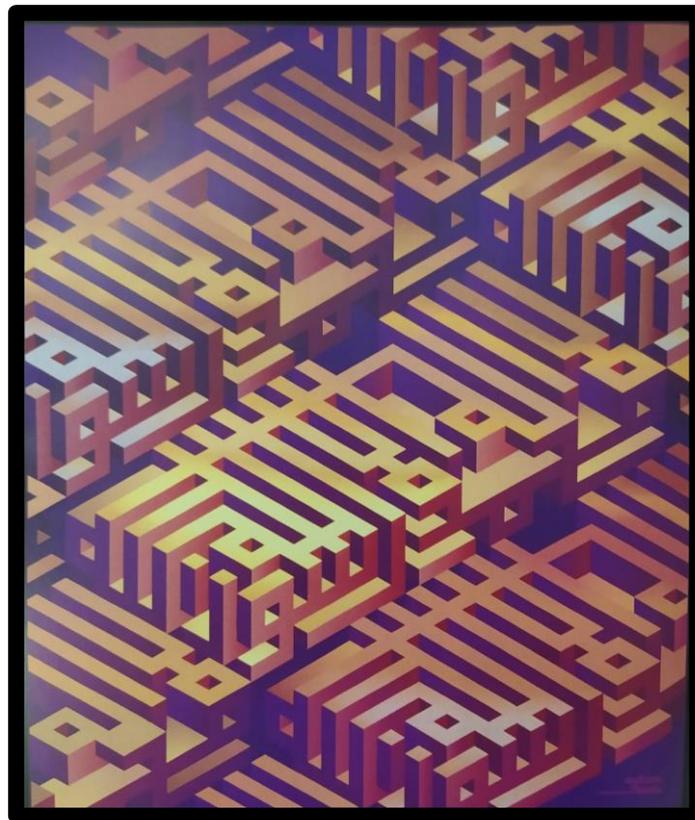
⁵⁶ The picture shown in this article was shared by *Akademi Jawi Malaysia*.

As seen in figure 1 above, from the words of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas⁵⁷, the Basmalah calligraphy of the rooster that he designed symbolizes the nature of the rooster and how it will crow at dawn at the coming of the sunrise. The harmonious and beautiful artwork contains a deeply profound metaphor, significantly meaning the rise of Islam in Malaya and the rising light of Allah SWT. This calligraphical artwork can be found as the cover design in al-Attas's book, '*Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*' (translated as Islam in Malay history and culture).

The artwork produced not only has benefits to the human eye and soul, but the assistance of true knowledge and deeper understanding of adab helps the artwork creator portray a means that when also coupled with the viewers own adabic stance allows higher and nobler benefits to take root; that are the benefits of the heart and intellect.

Figure 2.

'Steps and Shadows' by Mamoun Sakkal (1994). A computer-assisted graphic.⁵⁸



In figure 2 above, the graphic artwork was created using computer software and has been produced by an architect and a town planner. This work of art is a calligraphical art piece of the shahadah expression, in three-dimensional form. Apart

⁵⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is a renowned contemporary Muslim thinker who is competent in theology, philosophy, history, and literature. He was born in Bogor, Java on 5 September 1931.

⁵⁸ This picture was taken from Annette Hagedorn, 'Architecture and Art' in *Islam: Art and Architecture*, ed. Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), 599.

from it looking beautiful and cleverly arranged in a three-dimensional shape that need to be read from various directions, it contains valuable meanings, reminding art observers, especially Muslims, of their covenant of tawhid to Allah SWT. Such a harmonious and balanced work is free from negative features that can threaten the peace of mind of the person who sees it.

Figure 3.
Senibina indah di Istana Alhambra, Granada, Sepanyol.⁵⁹



The technique of repetition found from in the work of architecture as seen in figure 3 above was described by Ismail al-Faruqi as being a common element that is widely characterized as being tied to Islamic art.⁶⁰ Along with this, that same characteristics bring about the sense of serenity, elegance, and symbols of infinity which represent the soul's self-awareness of the memory of Allah SWT and His Endlessness. All those characteristics are of course a means for the artist of architect

⁵⁹ Picture taken from Wikipedia website, https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seni_rupa_Islam

⁶⁰ Isma'il R.al-Faruqi dan Lois Lamy'a' al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 430.

to bring the viewer of that architectural art closer to the Islamic worldview and to strengthen Islamic pride.

CONCLUSION

To sum, a Muslim believer is one who adheres to *tawhīd* to Allah SWT, which entails him to submit to Allah SWT. The ways for him to submit to Allah SWT as how Allah wants it is known through true knowledge which he knew through the guidance of the religion (syariat/ shari'ah) of Islam, that is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet SAW. A Muslim who submits to Allah SWT does not think and act as according to his own wishful thinking. This understanding and belief fulfill the consciousness of Muslims at all times and is displayed in their thoughts, actions, and even the ambience they create, manifesting the messages of God and the pure values in Islam. A Muslim artist who submits to Allah SWT will value the beauty of this whole universe beyond its mere appearance. He will see the whole universe as *āyat* (signs) of Allah SWT, and hence he will always attribute it back to the Greatness of his Creator (*Al-Jalāl*) and His beauty (*Al-Jamāl*).

A Muslim artist who understood the Islamic creed well, adheres to *tawhīd* to Allah SWT, will understand that he must create works of art that reflect truths, contain lessons and advice, glorify the dignity of human beings as servants and caliphs of Allah SWT, and demonstrating *adab* be it in the artist' conduct, or in his artworks which will in turn influence the society positively. He must make his works of art as a *wasīlah* or medium for *ibadah* by educating others, inviting others to good and forbid evil. By doing so, he is actually making his artworks as a medium to achieve the greater goal of obtaining prosperity in this world and success in the hereafter.

The role of the Muslim artist is closely related to his role as the servant and caliph of Allah SWT on this earth, by way of manifesting his knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Islam. Islam brings mankind to know its Creator, while teaching mankind to recognize and obey his God. Therefore, a Muslim artist does not work according to his desires, on the contrary, he abides by the demands of Allah SWT. The works of an artist are able to give a certain influence when people see them. So, like a leader who has influence over his followers, an artist is responsible for leading its followers or anybody who is influenced by his works towards good and not harm. He should be aware that he is fully responsible for his work as well as the resulting influence and will be held accountable in the hereafter.

In conclusion, among the roles of Muslim artists are:

- 1) Bringing other human beings to know and acknowledge Allah as the Lord of the universe. With this understanding, he also feels that he and other human beings are very small in the sight of God, so it is not himself who is glorified (as in modern Western art), but God is the one he glorifies.
- 2) He does not see the beauty of this world merely in appearance but realizes that the beauty of this world is *āyat* (signs) of the Greatness of Allah as the Most Beautiful Creator (*Al-Jalal wa Al-Jamal*), and he is inspired by Him.
- 3) Invite to good and forbid to evil (*al- amar bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*).

- 4) He produces works that are compliant with Islamic law that are certainly beneficial to humans and the environment. Thus, he is also obedient to the rules contained in the Islamic law such as obligatory, haram, mandub, mubah and makruh. Similarly, he understands the place of art according to the importance of the maqasid al-shariah of *al-dharuriyyat*, *al-hajiyyat*, and *al-tahsiniyyat*.
- 5) He does not make art as the ultimate goal, but only as a medium of good conduct and worship to attain happiness and safety in this world and the hereafter, both for himself and for others around him.

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