

CONTEMPORARY CALLIGRAPHY PAINTING: AN OVERVIEW OF ARTISTS' CONFUSION ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF SHARIA'S

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Abstract	<p><i>Islam is a religion that values aesthetics. The practice of khat painting is one of the Islamic art branches that has aesthetic significance. For instance, the evolution of khat art in modern paintings is being recognized by society in increasing numbers in Malaysia. According to the growth of modern khat art in Malaysia, some pieces blend images of living things with Qur'anic verses, despite the fact that the law plainly forbids such compositions. There are other academics who are perplexed by the shari'ah judgement, which concerns whether it is acceptable for artists to apply painting to all forms of living things or non-living things by combining the artwork with Qur'anic verses. Muslim artists require guidance to help them comprehend the concept and standards of shari'ah when creating their artistic artworks. This study makes use of the qualitative method, where visual content analysis is also performed to measure society's understanding of a particular art issue pertaining to religion and shari'ah. This study discusses the analysis of Islamic contemporary calligraphy painting characteristics that are permitted in shari'ah in order to understand the concept and principles of shari'ah production of works of art. This study uses a qualitative method by analyzing contemporary calligraphy paintings and data from related books and journals. Findings are analyzed using content analysis to measure the extent to which the community understands an art issue related to aspects of faith and shari'ah. The results of the study found that a specific guideline needs to be drawn up to overcome the issue of interpreting or drawing the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an with an artist's imagination. This is important so that the visual form drawn does not contradict the meaning of the Qur'anic verses and complies with the guidelines of the National Fatwa Council.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Islamic Art, Calligraphy, Painting, Contemporary, Shari'ah Guidelines.</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Art and Islam have a strong relationship which is as a medium of communication used for the purpose of conveying the teachings of Islam which is *syumul* ¹. This study is a survey on the confusion of local employees over *shari'ah* compliance in the production of contemporary khat artwork. Muslim artists should strive to produce good visual artwork (*ma'aruf*), doing things that are halal and moral. In Islamic tradition, artists are encouraged to produce visual artwork (or engage in any form of creative expression) that adheres to the principles of "ma'aruf," which means doing things that are good, righteous, and morally acceptable according to Islamic ethics and law (halal). This is because the freedom of the soul in designing art is strongly related to the purity of nature given by the Almighty, Allah SWT.

¹ Syumul which means complete or perfect. As we know, Islam is the complete way of life.

Basically, art and wisdom in terms of function are almost the same, which would form a tendency to acknowledge and relate the relationship with the universe, the relationship with *Robbul Alamin* which is Allah SWT as the Owner of this realm, spiritual relationships as well as the physical world. Thus, Muslim artists try to realize the greatness of Allah taala and the uniqueness of His creation in the form of visual works of art. Although shrouded in the pressures of modernization, contemporary khat artworks should refer to an indicator in Islamic art that conforms and adheres to fatwas and *syara'* in order to remain on the foundation of *shahadah*.

In general, Islamic art adheres to the concept of *shahadah*² which emphasizes the prohibition of the use of certain forms which is feared to give a meaning that contradicts the *shari'ah*. This is demonstrated in the conceptual framework of belief (*akidah*) shown in figure 1 below. According to Idham (2017) the concept of art is determined by monotheism, whereas Islam, which will lead all kinds of human artistic effort, is subjected to the reason for which they were formed.³

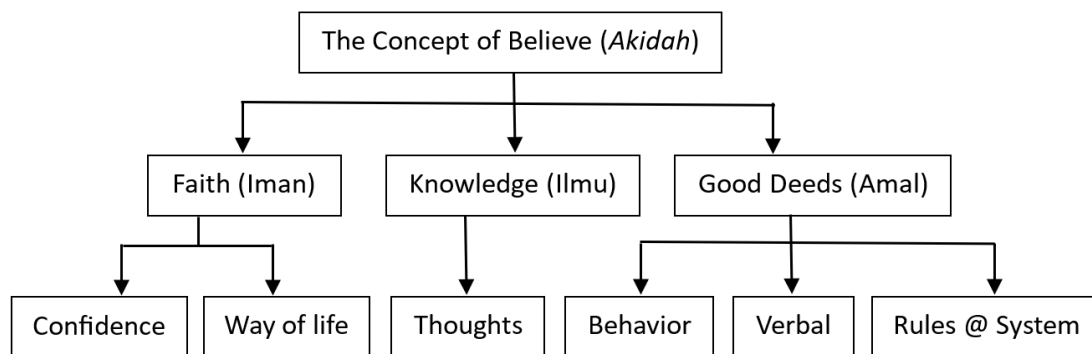


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of belief (*akidah*)

Polemics or debates in the interpretation of inaccurate meanings in defining Islamic art often occur today such as, should the measurement of the fact of religious truth be interpreted in the imagination of artists who are challenging to accept rationally in the manifestation of art? Is it permissible to paint the forms of nature, human or animal figures in Islamic art? Based on the development of contemporary khat art in Malaysia, there are works that combine pictures of living creatures with verses of the Qur'an. The question is, does the Islamic *shari'ah* allow all natural forms in painting? This is the concern of the researcher to study what is the understanding of the artists in producing the contemporary khat painting that is allowed in *syara'*. Of course, the artists desperately need a guide to understand the concept and principles of *shari'ah* in producing their works of art. The artists' confusion is a turning point for the researcher to gauge the extent of the public's understanding of an art issue related to the aspects of faith (*aqidah*) and *sharia*.

Therefore, a qualitative research approach might be used by researcher in order to conduct an in-depth investigation of this problem. Content analysis method is regarded as the most appropriate research approach for the semistructured interview process of identifying and improving Malaysian artist understanding on Islamic *shari'ah*. Hence, it is necessary to study the confusion and misunderstanding of the artists to be used as an indicator in designing contemporary khat painting that conforms to *syara'* and is in line with the fatwa issued by the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia.

² *Shahada* is the Arabic term for the declaration of faith in one God (Allah) and His messenger. It is the most sacred statement in Islam and the declaration of faith and must be recited with full understanding and mindfulness of its meaning.

³ Idham, M. H. (2017). *The Theory of Islamic Art, Aesthetic Concept and Epistemic Structure*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, pg. 35.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Art

Islamic art is a superior art that is born from the decline of the light of wisdom (al-Qur'an nul Karim). Art is Allah's gift to mankind and when it comes to art, it is closely related to the hadith of the Prophet PBUH which means, "Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty."⁴ Islamic art is indeed a rich and diverse form of artistic expression that has evolved over centuries, deeply rooted in the cultural and religious traditions of the Islamic world. Islamic art draws inspiration from the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The concept that "Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty" is often cited to emphasize the importance of aesthetics and beauty in Islamic art. This idea encourages artists to strive for excellence in their creative endeavors. Isabelle Meyer (2021) mentions about the veneration of the Islamic religion and its traditions underpin almost all of Islam art with the primary holy text, the Qur'an, serving as a guidepost for Muslim artists.⁵

One of the notable branches of Islamic art is calligraphy, including Khat, which is the art of beautiful writing. Islamic calligraphy is highly revered in Islamic culture, and it plays a crucial role in the visual representation of Islamic texts, particularly the Qur'an. Calligraphers use various scripts and styles to create intricate and decorative compositions that convey both the message and the beauty of the written word. Calligraphy art is a testament to the marriage of spirituality and aesthetics in Islamic art.

Islamic art encompasses a wide range of artistic forms, including architecture, pottery, textiles, geometric patterns, and more. It often features intricate geometric designs, arabesques, and motifs inspired by nature, as the representation of living beings is generally discouraged in Islamic art to avoid idolatry. Islamic art is a testament to the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Islamic world, and it continues to inspire and captivate people around the globe with its unique blend of spirituality and aesthetics. Its significance lies not only in its visual appeal but also in its deep connection to the religious and philosophical principles of Islam.

Zakaria stated that art and Islam have a strong relationship which is as a medium of communication used for the purpose of conveying the teachings of Islam. In the early days before the apostleship of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the Arabs were synonymous with rhymes and poems. The best *qasidah* - creations of their great poetry, recited in markets and events, and hung on the walls of the Ka'aba'.⁶

The revelation of surah Al-'Alaq led to the beginning of writing Qur'anic verses and the encouragement of Rasulullah S.A.W to the companions to learn the art of writing in order to write the verses of the Qur'an and hadith⁷. Al-Quran is *maujud*⁸, therefore it can be lost or erased from the memory of Muslims. Therefore it is important for us as Muslims to learn the art of writing (*khat*) and learn the art of memorizing the Qur'an. It also aims to ensure the preservation of the verses of the Qur'an and the continuation of its dissemination.

Islamic art avoids describing the 'fact of religious truth'; as an example of Christian art that uses myths as well as symbols of crosses and statues of crucified figures (supposedly the Prophet Jesus/Isa A.S.) as symbols of Christianity. The concept of shahadah which is *tauhid* does not show God through images or icons. In Islamic theology, Allah SWT never resembles any form of image of His creation, but he introduces Himself through the word in the form of revelation.⁹

⁴ Hadith. Muslim. Book 1, Hadith 171. <https://sunnah.com/muslim:91a> (accessed on 16/10/2023)

⁵ Isabella, M. (2021). Islamic Art - A Deep Dive into the Gilded World of Islamic Art. <https://artincontext.org/islamic-art/> (accessed on 16/10/2023)

⁶ Zakaria, A. (2001). *Jiwa Seni Islam*. Jabatan Seni Halus, UiTM Shah Alam, pers. comm in unpublished notes for lecturing session, UiTM Fine Art Department.

⁷ Mohammed Yusof, A. B. (2003). pers. comm., Perbincangan sesi kuliah *KUR 112 : Teori dan Amali Penulisan Al-Khat Al-Ruqa'ah & Artikel Perkembangan Seni Khat dan Islam*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

⁸ *Maujud* means the nature of being, existing, real but not visible to the eye.

⁹ Zakaria, A. *op.cit.*, pers. comm in unpublished notes for lecturing session, UiTM Fine Art Department.

The concept of *syahadah* emphasizes the prohibition of the use of emblems, symbols, icons, figurative forms, or animate creatures because Allah SWT never resembles any form of His creation. According to Ebrahim Moosa's view, he asserted that;

*'God is absolutely other than the natural world, no creature from nature could stand as a symbol for Him. Allah is described as a transcendent Being of Whom, no visual or sensory experience is possible. No vision can grasp Him...He is above all comprehension.'*¹⁰

Ebrahim Moosa (2006) stated that Allah SWT is not the same as what is seen in nature, and no creature from nature can stand as a symbol of Him. There are no visuals or senses that can describe His substance because Allah SWT is Almighty. The views by western scholars and orientalist on the work of Muslim artists and crafts are seen as art that depicts great, transcendent and superior perfection (archetype), and they even interpret it as a manifestation of the artist's self to prove the existence of God (Divine Presence). According to Mikhail,

*'The abstract implications of the geometric forms are further stressed by the symbolic and magic meanings of geometric shapes...The geometric elements bring with them their own specific ornamentation. It has become yet another aspect of the artistic language and an important means of expressing cardinal aspects associated with the divine.'*¹¹

He noted that the abstract implications of geometric shapes are further explained by the magical and symbolic meaning of geometric shapes. While geometric elements carry a specific meaning of distinctive décor. It has become an aspect of the artistic language and a way to express the main aspects of divinity. This clearly shows the geometric forms that contribute to the science of mathematics are the result of the successful discovery of Islamic scholars to be implemented in the field of engineering, mathematical knowledge and science for the well-being of human life. There is no other magical imposition or symbolic meaning of the imaginative metaphor that should not be fabricated because it is feared that there is an incorrect interpretation and violates the prohibition of *syara'*.

Zakaria Awang pointed out that Islamic art is not an art that can be portrayed through images either realistic or symbolic or abstractly styled which only ultimately leads to constant delusions. Islamic art according to him is the art of the Qur'an and Al-Hadith which is conveyed through pronunciation or writing as a *dakwah* of Islam.¹²

Syed Qutb explains that Islam is not anti-art. Islam places, adds, and perfects new aspirations and values that can add a creative artistic taste in shaping Islamic art with certain limits. Islam does not ignore any aspect, material, intellectual, religious or worldly. On the other hand, Islam regulates all this, so that each of them can connect with each other and thus create a union that covers each other.¹³ In Islamic teachings, all Muslim activities are worship and every Muslim act is enshrined within the limits (*syara'*). According to Mohammad Saheh, the limits (*syara'*) are necessary for perfecting the nature or nature of man himself and as His being.¹⁴ Allah SWT is beautiful, and He loves beauty. Thus, Allah SWT has decreed that man loves something beautiful and pleasant. Since human nature itself favours something beautiful whether it is visible in the eyes or in the heart, the Islamic sharia has placed limits for the purpose of perfecting human nature as a human being and as His being, it also aims to balance

¹⁰ Ibrahim, M. (2006). *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives* by M. A. Muqtedar Khan, ed. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pg. 78

¹¹ Mikhail B. (1999). *Piotrovsky, Earthy Beauty, Heavenly Art of Islam*. De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam Lund Humphries, pg. 30-32.

¹² Zakaria, A. *op.cit.*, pers. comm in unpublished notes for lecturing session, UiTM Fine Art Department.

¹³ Syed Qutb. (2016). *Pendekatan Islam Terhadap Keadilan Sosial*. Universitas Islam Indonesia, pg. 14

¹⁴ Mohamad Saheh, M. (2003). pers.comm., Sesi Perbincangan Kuliah *KMU 131 Projek Seni Khat (Masyru'Al-Kalam)*. Kolej Restu, Selangor.

the limitations of the human senses' ability in thinking and responding to the natural phenomena of Allah SWT's infinity.

Art can bind us to worship Him. The teachings of the Qur'an emphasize that worship should be performed because of Allah SWT. Surah al-Kahfi: verse 110 means; "Say, I am only a man like you, it is revealed to me that your god is only a god, so whoever believes and hopes for a meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous deeds, and do not associate anyone in his worship to his Lord."¹⁵

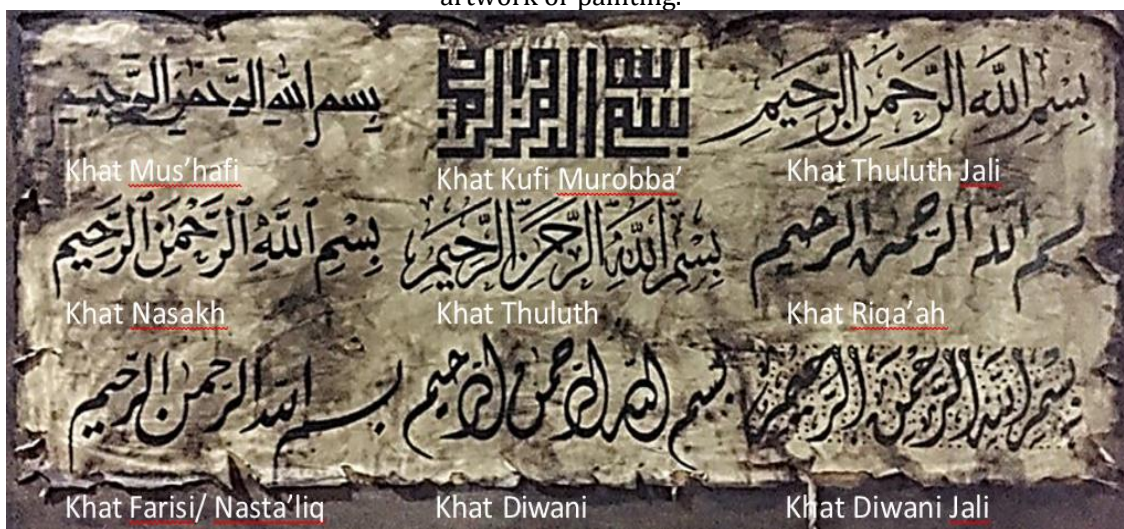
Therefore, all actions performed must be intended for Allah. In order to control the fundamentals and policies, Islam prevents every act that can mean worship among people or pave the way of confusing the meaning of worship to Allah.¹⁶

ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY (KHAT ART)

The word calligraphy comes from two consolidated Greek words, *kallos*, which means "beauty," and *graphein*, which means "to write" ¹⁷ - literally it is called "beautiful writing". Calligraphy art is decorative handwriting or the art of producing handwriting with a pen or brush.¹⁸ The art of writing (including the art of khat writing) and the art of memorization (*Qira'ati* art, *tajweed* art, *taranum*, etc.) were the earliest art that became an effective communication platform for disseminating knowledge of the Qur'an.

The art of writing (khat) is a visible medium of communication that clearly plays a big role in conveying the message of preaching. The verses of the Qur'an that are written should be researched and understood because that is a miracle of knowledge. Hence, it is important to convey God's message, not only the idea or form of painting is emphasized. It is feared that this will lead to endless notions or delusions in exploring the true meaning of Islamic art.

Figure 2: The various types of khat that are often used by artists or *khattat* in producing khat artwork or painting.¹⁹



¹⁵ al-Quran. al-Kahfi: 110.

¹⁶ Anon. (n.d). *Lecture: Rabitah Islamiyyah*. (2002). Matrikulasi, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM).

¹⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/calligraphy> (accessed November 15, 2021).

¹⁸ Oxford Learners Dictionary.

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/calligraphy?q=calligraphy> (accessed June 10, 2021)

¹⁹ Victoria and Albert Museum London Web Admin. (2024). Calligraphy In Islamic Art, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/calligraphy-in-islamic-art>, (accessed on 18/10/2023)

Calligraphy in Islamic art has many styles and forms, depending on the time period, the region, and the purpose of the writing. Some of the most famous styles are *Kufic*, *Naskh*, *Thuluth*, *Muhaqqaq*, *Rayhani*, *Tawqi*, *Riqa*, *Nasta'liq*, *Shikaste*, *Diwani*, and *Maghribi*. Each style has its own rules of proportion, shape, and composition. Calligraphers often use different colors, sizes, and backgrounds to enhance the beauty and meaning of their writing. Calligraphy in Islamic art is not only a way of writing, but also a way of expressing the faith and culture of Muslims. It is a form of art that reflects the beauty and harmony of God's creation. It is also a form of communication that connects people across time and space. Calligraphy in Islamic art is a rich and diverse tradition that continues to inspire artists and admirers today.²⁰

Basically, calligraphy art or *khat* art is part of the work activity that uses fern (*resam* or *handam*) or khat pen to write Arabic letters whether it is the passage of the Quranic verse, hadith, poetry, and so on. The Arabic letter is used as an art object of aesthetic value as an expression of ideas, inspiration, and artistic sensitivity in artworks. Islamic *khat* is clearly inseparable from the soul of Islam. Muslim artists interpret khat writing in their work as an expression of artistic and aesthetic feelings. Today's *khat* artwork is seen as more likely to take a very clear indication as written in surah al-'Alaq verses 3-4, which means: "Recite, in the name of your Most Gracious God. Who teaches (people) with *al-qalam*",²¹ And also Surah al-Qalam verse 1: "Nun, for the sake of the words and what they write".²²

The meaning of these two surahs is that Allah SWT teaches people by writing and reading. The essence of this foundation is undeniable and the miracle Qur'an is the beginning of the art of khat writing.

The rapid spread of Islam has led to the development of Arabic writing from a simple kufi-style form (*Kufi Mushafi*) and eventually a complex form (*khat Thuluth*). In fact, it has become a widely used writing throughout the Islamic world. The art of khat has been developed in various styles of art and is usually seen in the order of verses of the Qur'an, the writing of hadiths, government correspondence, letters of covenant, historical declarations and religious books. Sheila S. Blair noted that it is also used as decoration on buildings, walls, pulpit domes, and so on to enhance the visual appeal of the building²³ apart from being used in various media. There is no doubt that the beauty and superiority of Islamic khat can be seen in terms of the construction of writing methods, letter structures, letter arches and its beautiful anatomy. It is not surprising that the *khat* art has gained recognition through UNESCO for its enormous contribution in the development of the history, culture and heritage of the world community.²⁴ The UNESCO listing is a positive impact in the effort to preserve traditional khat writing arts in line with the rapid modernization.

Rules and Method In Writing Khat

According to Abdul Baki Abu Bakar (2016), writing khat also has regulations and measures to be followed. Obviously, although it is called khat Arabic, it is not compulsory to understand Arabic to write *khat* as it can also be written in Jawi. The original intention is to learn khat so that we can write the verses of the Quran beautifully and people can read it well. We are writing God's word (Quranic verses), it is a great sin to miswrite. If it's miswritten, people would read it wrong and we (*khattat*) will get a sin. Likewise, if people read the Qur'an and get a reward, we (*khattat*) who wrote the Qur'an verses also can be rewarded. It's charity (*amal*) for us."

Artists who lack of knowledge in writing khat often make mistakes such as cutting the verse of the Qur'an and destroying the meaning of the verse. There are also artists who deliberately creating sarcastic artworks using verses of the Qur'an. The artists are intent on making fun and insulting Muslims in a visual metaphor painting. Sheikh Ghazali Abdul Rahman - Syariah Legal Adviser, Attorney General's Chambers said the efforts of the groups that hide behind the liberalism, pluralism and human rights movements can only be prevented if

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ al-Quran. al-'Alaq: 3-4.

²² al-Quran. al-Qalam: 1.

²³ Sheila S. Blair. (2006). *Islamic Calligraphy*. United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, pg 4.

²⁴ Adli Effendi, (2021). Kaligrafi Arab Terserai Dalam Wawasan UNESCO, <https://ummahtoday.com.my/kaligrafi-arab-terserai-dalam-warisan-unesco/> (accessed on 20/10/2023)

Muslims are united in views or actions. What is even more depressing is that the absurdity of Muslims today has given the space to the enemy to attack Islam & the believers through various angles on art and social media.²⁵

Following this issue, the *muzakarah*²⁶ of the 69th session of the Fatwa Committee of The National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia which convened on 13-15 June 2005 has imposed a prohibition on writing verses of the Qur'an according to the design of toys, plants etc.²⁷ *Muzakarah* has decided that;

1. The writing of verses of the Qur'an in the form of excessive decoration that may cause confusion and difficulty to the reader is prohibited;
2. The calligraphy of verses of the Qur'an can be made on the condition that they are written correctly and can be read;
3. The calligraphy of verses of the Qur'an must not be mixed with other verses so as to confuse the reader;
4. The calligraphy of the verses of the Qur'an must be written perfectly and the order of the verses must not be interrupted so as to distort or confuse or change the meaning; and
5. Calligraphy of verses of the Qur'an that are made in various forms so as to cause confusion and remove the purpose of the verses of the Qur'an revealed, which is to be read, understood and appreciated, is prohibited.

The original ruling of drawing images of living things is based on the hadith of the Prophet PBUH; *"Whoever paints or carves a picture, Allah will punish him so that he will not be able to do so forever."*²⁸ This is also strengthened by a situation that has been told by Aisyah r.a; *"The Prophet PBUH came home from safar and I covered my little room with a cloth on which there were pictures of inanimate objects. When the Prophet PBUH saw that, the Prophet PBUH saw him eat it as he said: "Indeed, the most terrible people on the Day of Resurrection are those who do something resembling Allah's creatures. Aisyah said: "We made it a pillow or two."*²⁹

According to the *muzakarah* Mufti of the Malaysia Federal Territory,³⁰ *"even if the painting is intended, that does not contradict to syara' as used for the purpose of learning, education or dakwah then it is permissible"*. Yusuf al-Qardawi said: *"The ruling of painting something as animate as humans and animals is khilaf³¹ among scholars"*. Jumhur said that it is *haram* and some scholars say it is permissible. In any case, the use of paintings in the mass media with the purpose of preaching and learning is not included in what is prohibited, even something that is claimed by *syara'*. It is a very important medium in conveying *da'wah* and knowledge that is beneficial to people and it is not a prohibited image that raises immoral, tyrannical and indecent images.³² Islamic artists should avoid creating artworks that are solely to obey and satisfy the demand of the community, as this action would only reflect the ignorance and unintellectual in a community.

Yusuf al-Qardawi stated that *"there is nothing wrong in drawing as long as the images do not depict nudity or other indecent representations. Also, the picture or image should not be*

²⁵ Berita Harian. (2014). Penghinaan terhadap Islam berterusan jika umat tidak bersatu - Tokoh Maal Hijrah. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2014/10/13595/penghinaan-terhadap-islam-berterusan-jika-umat-tidak-bersatu-tokoh> (accessed on 18/10/2023)

²⁶ Muzakarah - a discussion, an exchange of opinions or thoughts about Islamic affair, <https://en.bab.la/dictionary/malay-english/muzakarah#> (accessed on 20/10/2023)

²⁷ Muzakarah Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia Kali Ke-69 yang bersidang pada 13-15 Jun 2005.

²⁸ Hadith. al-Bukhari. 5963.

²⁹ Hadith. Abu Dawud. 4153.

³⁰ Mufti of Federal Territory's Office. (2018). Irsyad Al-Fatwa Series 213: The Ruling Of Drawing Comics Of The Companions. (2018). <https://muftiwp.gov.my/en/artikel/irsyad-fatwa/irsyad-fatwa-umum-cat/2271-irsyad-al-fatwa-siri-ke-213> (accessed on 20/10/2023)

³¹ *Khilaf* - Acceptable Disagreement/differing of opinion (*khilaf maqbul*), or, Non-Acceptable Disagreement/differing of opinions (*khilaf mazmum*). Mufti of Federal Territory's Office. (2015). Irsyad Al-Fatwa Series 72: Types Of Khilaf (Disagreements Or Differing Of Opinions) And The Causes. <https://www.muftiwp.gov.my/en/artikel/irsyad-fatwa/irsyad-fatwa-umum-cat/1914-irsyad-fatwa-series-72-types-of-khilaf-disagreements-differing-of-opinions-and-the-causes> (accessed on 21/10/2023)

³² Yusuf Qardawi. (1989). *Halal dan Haram dalam Islam*. Singapura: Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd, pg. 108

revered or glorified. The detested pictures and images are only those, which are worshiped and revered. Within these restrictions drawing humans, animals, natural scenes, etc. is permitted. What is prohibited is making a statue or a sculpture of a living being that has shade (depth or three dimensional)."³³

Following the above hadith and fatwa, the Mufti of the Federal Territory concluded as follows, "drawings that are sketched with such purpose are not prohibited as they are made not because they are adored or worshipped but it is one of the forms of education and dakwah for children in particular and it is considered as a general maslahat".

It is clear that these prohibitions are intended to close the door to damage as it is feared that the resulting work becomes an object of worship that can damage the faith. Islamic law prohibits the act of writing and drawing khat with the appearance of a clear animal as an example of writing a verse of the Qur'an, hadith and *dhikr* in the image of an animal or a living creature. However, drawing living beings in the context of learning is permissible if it is depicted in the form of flora, fauna or human figures that have been abstracted so that they are not the same as the original form.

The limits and limitations of *syara'* are also important as it is intended so that the artwork produced by Muslim workers shows the unity of ideas and thoughts. Although the artwork comes from different cultures and traditions, the acknowledgment of the faith of the Muslim employee is acknowledging the oneness of Allah SWT, glorifying His greatness, acknowledging the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's reverence and believing in the pillars of the Faith, producing a significant artistic feature with the teachings of Islam.

CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY PAINTING

Contemporary Islamic calligraphy painting is a creative painting on canvas that is combined with calligraphy, drawn with an abstract artistic composition, some are realistic, complicated and sophisticated and are even seen to carry specific meanings and play a specific symbolic role, coupled with decorative patterns with several concepts certain art ism. The positive impact of the idea of combining calligraphy with contemporary art has given new life to the emergence of contemporary calligraphy. The works produced still maintain the traditional method of writing khat using *resam* ³⁴ sticks and ink, bamboo, brushes, color media such as acrylic, oil paint, batik painted on canvas.

Issarezal Ismail and Humin Jusilin stated that latest visual artwork is often referred to as contemporary visual art. The contemporary nature of visual art can be said to be a reflection or reflection to the situation, symptom or phenomenon of the society and culture in which the work of visual art was created. Thus, scholars conclude that contemporary art is defined as the art that is most closely related to the most recent works of art.³⁵ According to Duaa Mohammed et al., contemporary painting calligraphers use modern materials and they do not follow any style or rule to draw the calligraphy to create their painting. Also, contemporary calligraphy painting utilises a variety of methods and it is not bound to the rules of tradition.³⁶

Today, the production of khat artwork is no exception to the influence of contemporary art and digital technology. Among those that can be observed are khat works combined with paint art i.e. paint painting on canvas, some are digitally designed and printed using several applications such as corel draw, adobe illustrator, canva, Auto CAD and various latest applications. There are also mural paintings on the walls of the building combined with khat to give a positive aura to the eyes who observe the mural painting.

This development has had a positive impact on the khat art which has been diversified through visual media such as the example of khat painting on canvas which is gaining a place

³³ Islamic articles on: *Taşwîr* (depiction of living things). Ikram Hawramani's Websites. (n.d). Islamic Articles On: *Taşwîr* (Depiction Of Living Things). <https://hawramani.com/tag/taswir-depiction-of-living-things/>. (accessed on 16/9/2023)

³⁴ *Resam* - Tree fern or common tree fern (*Dicranopteris linearis* syn. *Gleichenia linearis*) is a type of large fern tree species found in tropical forests of south east Asia. The stem can be used as a pen to write calligraphy.

³⁵ Ismail, I. ., & Jusilin, H. . (2020). Seni Visual Dalam Konteks Gejala Sosial Di Malaysia: Interpretasi Simbolik Pada Karya Catan Fawwaz Sukri. *Jurnal Gendang Alam (GA)*, 10.

³⁶ Duaa, M. A, Abd. Rahman, H, Nurazmallail, M. (2020). The Journey of Islamic Art Through Traditional and Contemporary Calligraphy Painting. *UMRAN – International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies*, 7(3), 01 – 11.

in the hearts of the Malaysian community. This combination of abstract and khat ideas breathes new life into the outbreak of contemporary khat art. The resulting works still retain the traditional khat writing method which uses *resam* sticks and ink, bamboo, brush, acrylic media, oil paint, batik painted on canvas. Figures 3 and 4 below are some interesting and creative examples of contemporary Islamic calligraphy painting.



Figure 3: Title of the work: Allahu Akbar (Allah is Great).
Khat Method: khat Diwani Jali, Style: batik, Size : 73 x 103 cm.
Media: Arkrilik on canvas, Year : 2021, Artist: Ahmad Rajaei Awang.



Figure 4: Title of the work: Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim.
Khat Method: khat Sunbuli, Style: Abstract Impasto, Size : 2' x 3'
Media: Arkrilik on canvas, Year : 2015, Artist: Ainun Jariah Yaacob

The creative and innovative ideas of the khat artist are not only about the production of painting but also wood carving, stone, pottery, copper and woven on fabric. The idea was further varied by combining khat on textiles, women's jewellery, fashion, ceramic products, sculptures, interior decoration products, corporate logo-shaped digital prints, banners, bunting, signboard, gifts (merchandise gift), t-shirt design, car stickers and many other latest khat products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

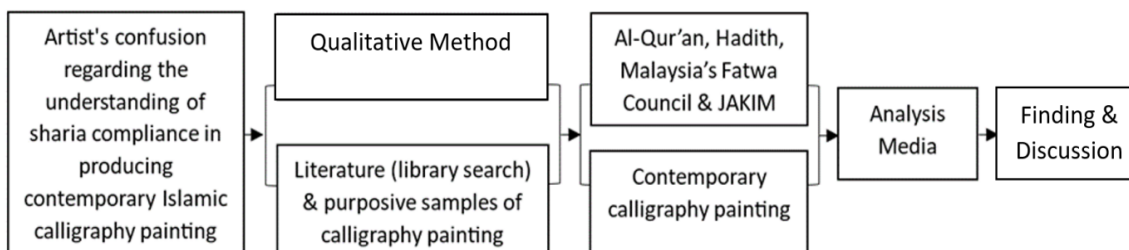


Figure 5: The figure above shows the workflow on how the study was conducted by the researcher

This study employed a qualitative research methodology with a content analysis research strategy. Content analysis method used to analyze visual or image systematically. It can be applied to various types of content, such as documents, books, speeches, interviews, images, artwork etc. The researcher collected data using the library approach and purposive samples of calligraphy painting. The researcher picked six paintings from Malaysian calligraphy artists and contemporary artists as a sample of study. The analytical approach requires observation by using the main references of sharia which is Al-Qur'an, Hadis and Fatwa in visual analysis method. Conducting analysis on visual art involves evaluating the artwork to ensure it complies with Islamic principles and guidelines. Shari'ah compliance in art typically focuses on avoiding elements such as nudity, inappropriate content, and disrespect towards religious symbols.

Data Analysis

Researchers will focus on significant errors in contemporary khat painting where the main objective of this paper is to find out what is the confusion of the Malaysian artist in producing the calligraphy painting and the extent of their understanding in characteristic of the shariah compliance artworks that conform to the syara' and fatwa. This paper will discuss the practice and acceptance of issues occurring in contemporary Islamic calligraphy painting in Malaysia.

Samples of works for this study are from several selected samples produced between the years of 2000 and 2021. Researcher have studied several samples of contemporary calligraphy artworks painted with abstract compositions, some realistic, complex and sophisticated ones that are seen to carry a specific meaning and play a certain symbolic role, coupled with decorative patterns that reveal the image of living thing and non living thing. It is crucial to examine and determine whether or not the sample artwork collection complies with sharia.

Theme Analysis

Analyzing the visual content of calligraphy paintings using content analysis involves the systematic study of visual elements in artworks to identify patterns, themes and meanings. Meanwhile the analysis from the Shariah point of view can be subjective, and the interpretation can vary. Therefore, it is important to approach the analysis with sensitivity, respect, and a willingness to engage in dialogue with experts and the community to ensure a thorough evaluation of the artwork. The analysis's primary idea can be summed up as follows:

1. Reversed Script Verses of Qur'an

Using reversed script verses of the Qur'an, where the Arabic script of Quranic verses is flipped or reversed, is considered highly disrespectful and offensive in Islamic culture. This act distorts the sacred text and is seen as a form of desecration.

2. Using Symbols/Text/Icon as Insulting Purpose

Using symbols, text, or icons, including Quranic verses, in a disrespectful or insulting manner is deeply offensive to believers. Such usage is considered blasphemous and disrespectful, and it can cause significant outrage among religious communities.

3. Combining Verses of the Qur'an with Living Beings

a. Realistic Drawings of Living Beings:

Depicting realistic drawings of living beings alongside Quranic verses is generally discouraged in Islamic art. Realistic representations of living beings can be seen as imitating Allah's creation and are often avoided in traditional Islamic art.

b. Semi-Realistic Drawings of Living Beings

Semi-realistic depictions, although less detailed than realistic ones, can still be problematic in combination with Quranic verses. Islamic art often emphasizes calligraphy, geometric patterns, and arabesques rather than detailed depictions of living beings.



c. Drawing of Silhouetted Living Beings

Silhouetted representations of living beings, while less detailed than realistic or semi-realistic drawings, can still be controversial when combined with Quranic verses. Some interpretations of Islamic teachings discourage any form of representation of living beings, even in silhouette.

d. Vector-Shaped of Living Beings

Vector-shaped representations, even though stylized, can still be seen as inappropriate when combined with Quranic verses. The avoidance of detailed living beings is a general principle in traditional Islamic art.

In summary, it is crucial to approach these topics with sensitivity and respect for the beliefs and cultural norms of others. Disrespectful use of Quranic verses or offensive depictions of living beings can lead to significant backlash and should be avoided to promote understanding and harmony among diverse communities.

Number of Picture	Artist	Artwork Title & Year	Content Analysis	Theme Analysis					
				Reversed script verses of Qur'an	Using symbols/text/ icon as insulting purpose	Combining verses of the Qur'an with living beings			
						Realistic drawings of living beings	Semi-realistic drawings of living	Drawing of silhouetted living beings	Vector-shaped of living beings
1 	Anurendra Jagadeva	I is For Idiot (2013)	This work manipulates Roman text and Islamic calligraphy script as artistic elements to convey implicit ideas (metaphors). The text "Mission Complete" has been written as the background of the artwork, including the vector image of a soldier in red. The letter I (Islam) as idiot and the script 'Basmalah' in an inverted mirror image. The Fatimi Kufi script is written in reverse reflection so that the public cannot guess the written script. This kufic script is a representation of Islamic art. A picture of a monkey wearing a soldier's helmet and dressed as a civilian riding a bicycle is drawn in the middle of the canvas. He exhibited the work for public viewing at the art exhibition organized by Publika Gallery at Dutamas, Kuala Lumpur. The work has drawn the ire of Muslims, and it is an attempt to spark controversy and religious tensions among Muslims and Hindus in Malaysia. It is terribly unfortunate that there is no sharia empowerment in Malaysia's visual art issue. The controversial artist is not accused of insulting Islam, and the authorities just requested that he remove the sculpture and not exhibit it in public.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
2 	Ainun Jariah Yaacob	Keinsafan 1 (2002)	This painting is from the war's perspective that erupted in several Muslim countries around the world. This work is more geared towards graphical art and expressionism. The selection of surah Ar-Taubah is Verse 20, which means, "Indeed, those who believe, emigrate, and strive in the way of Allah SWT with their possessions and souls are greater and higher in rank with Allah SWT, and they are the successful." The depiction of the human figure in this work conveys a message to the Muslim community to come forward to fight (jihad) and to defend the sanctity of Islam, which is being trampled upon by the enemies of Islam. Drawings of human figures that appear to be 'sympathetic' are used to depict the lives of war victims. The figure of the mujahideen as a symbol of strength in Islam is armed with a high jihadist spirit, while the figure of the children playing in school signifies that children are the most suffering victims of war due to the destruction and human death. Khat al-Hirri is used to write the verses of the Qur'an on canvas. There is a lack of scrutiny in understanding the fundamentals of Islamic art and being influenced by Western art in trying to visualize the meaning of the Quranic verse without realizing that the act of drawing living beings accompanied by the written verses of the Qur'an is clearly haram.			✓			✓





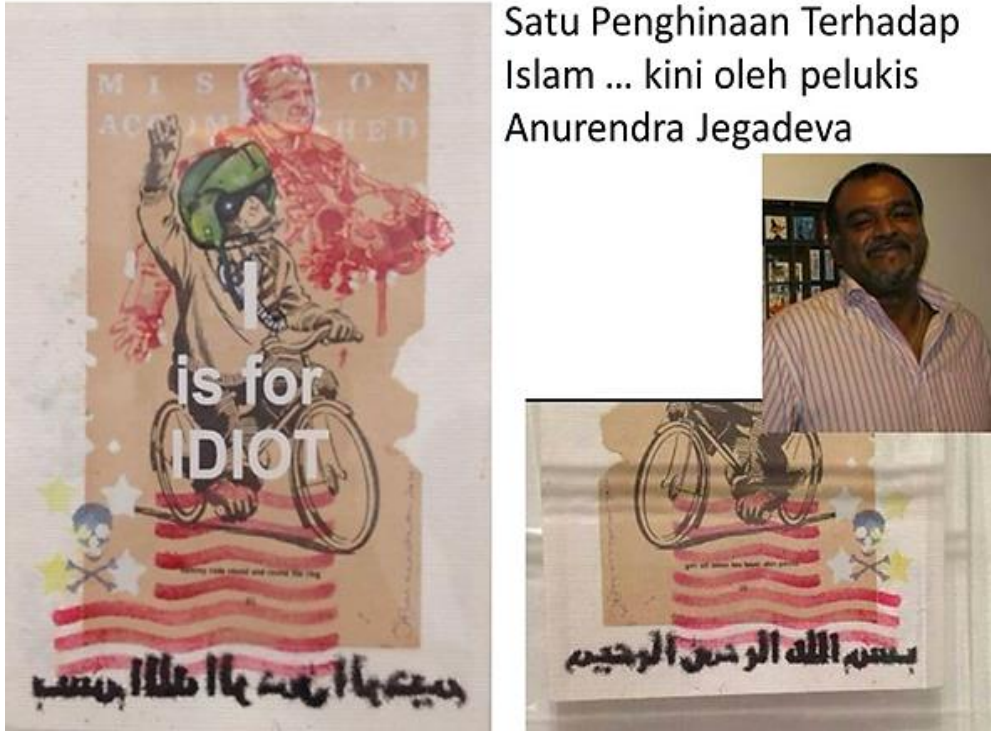
<p>3</p> 	<p>Ainun Jariah Yaacob</p>	<p>Keinsafan 2 (2003)</p>	<p>The artist choose to write the surah Ad-Dhariyat: Verses 20-21 which means "And on earth there are signs for those who are confident, and in yourselves. Why, then, do you not want to see and think about it?" using khat Al-Diwani Jali. Through this artwork, artists want to convey a message to the Muslim community to seek and see signs of God's existence via the creation of ocean life. By using the meaning of the Qur'anic passage, the artist attempted to illustrate the manifestations of Allah SWT's greatness. This demonstrated the artist's misunderstanding of the principles behind Islamic art. Whether it is as a result of the artist's exposure to Western art or a lack of knowledge in Islamic principle of art. According to the liberal arts, it is neither a mistake nor a sin to depict live things, such as marine life.</p>			<p>✓</p>			
<p>4</p> 	<p>Shah Tumin</p>	<p>Al-Musawwir (The Creator, Yg Maha Membentuk) (2017)</p>	<p>The image of a fish drawn on this painting is the artist's interpretation of the meaning of Al-Musawwir (Allah the Creator). The definition of Al-Musawwir is defined as "Allah SWT creates a creature with a variety of distinct faces and identities without being guided by any previous examples". Artists are likewise prone to be perplexed by the fundamentals of Sharia in an attempt to visualise the meaning of Al-Musawwir. The artist has painted a realistic image of the fish in a work written with the stylish khat of Diwani Jali.</p>			<p>✓</p>			
<p>5</p> 	<p>Zaim Durulaman</p>	<p>Tadabbur Series: Al-Kahfi (2021)</p>	<p>The contemporary calligraphy painting work entitled "Siri Tadabbur-Al-Kahfi" uses bitumen and acrylic media on jute. The artist wrote an excerpt from Surah Al-Kahfi with a silhouette depiction of a man of Ashabul Kahfi and a dog. The artist was also found to have a misunderstanding when trying to visualise the story of Ashabul Kahfi. The painting was derived from the artist's imagination using narrative illustration. The Nasakh script is written on canvas; at the back of a dark cave, there is a sketch of a human's silhouette and a dog. This clearly shows that there is artist's confusion in understanding the laws of Islamic art when drawing human and animal forms interspersed with verses from the Quran.</p>			<p>✓</p>			
<p>6</p> 	<p>Zaim Durulaman</p>	<p>Tadabbur Series: As-Soffat (2021)</p>	<p>The artist wrote an excerpt from Surah Surah As-Soffat, verses 141-148, using khat Nasakh at the surface of a large whale painting that seems to be in the middle of the ocean. This painting is also an attempt to portray the imagination of the artist in conveying the meaning of the Quranic verse. The painting is based on the concept of narrative art, accompanied by the surah As-Soffat inscription with the illustration of a large to achieve the meaning of the storytelling of the Prophet Yunus AS. There is a clear confusion of artists in understanding the laws of Islamic art in drawing animal forms interspersed with verses from the Quran.</p>			<p>✓</p>			

Table 1 : Summarises the content analysis and theme analysis of selected contemporary calligraphy painting.



Pic 1: Controversial work by Anurendra Jegadeva on display at Publika Gallery (2013).



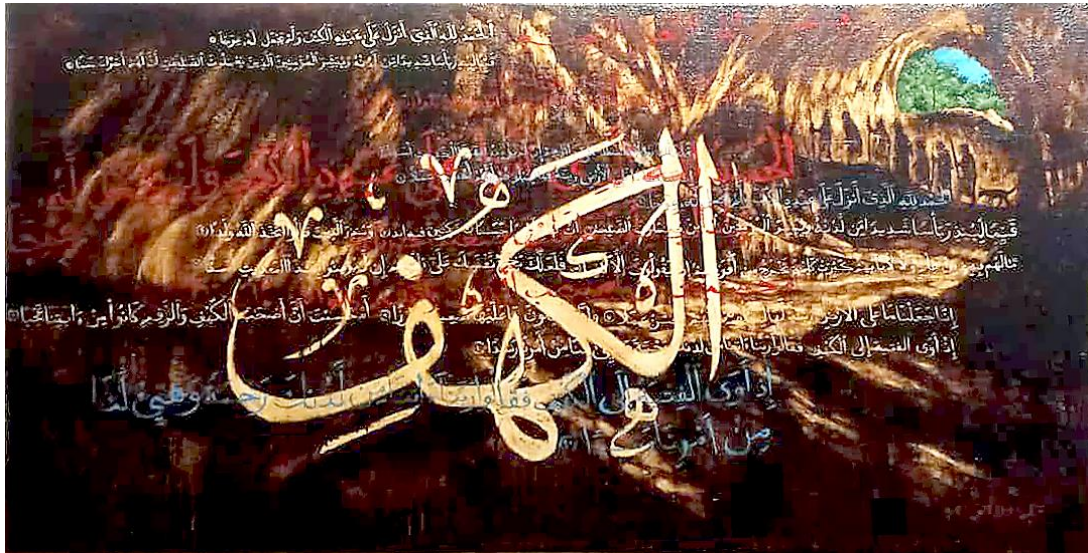
Pic 2: A work by Ainun Jariah Yaacob (2002) "Keinsafan 1" from al-Quran, al-Taubah: 20 "Those who believe and emigrate, and strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and soul, are higher in the sight of Allah. They are the ones who win."



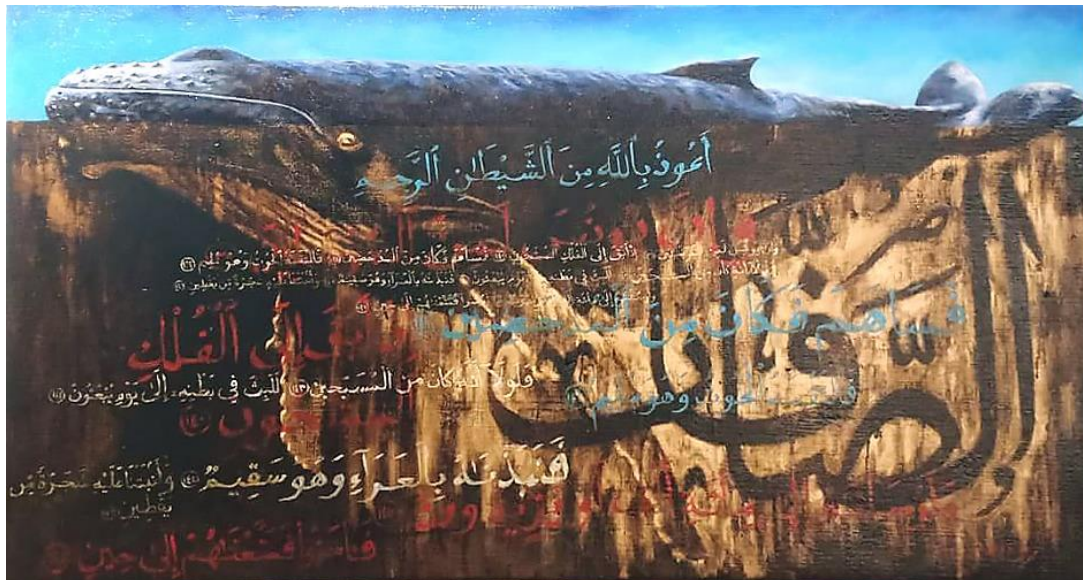
Pic 3: A work by Ainun Jariah Yaacob (2003) titled "Keinsafan 2" from al-Quran, al-Dharyat: 20-21 "On earth are signs for the believers. And (also) to yourselves, do you not pay attention? (the explicit and implicit verses of Allah)."



Pic 4: The work entitled Al-Al-Musawwir (Yg Maha Membentuk) by Shah Tumin's workman has won the first place prize in the competition organised by the Shah Alam Islamic Art Park Complex. Year: (2017).



Pic 5: Works titled : Al-Kahfi tadabbur series, Size : 76 x 153cm.
Media: bitumen and arcrylic on jute. Year: (2021). Artist: Zaim Durulaman.



Pic 6: Works titled : As-Soffat tadabbur series, Size : 76 x 153cm.
Media: bitumen and arcrylic over jute. Year: (2021). Artist: Zaim Durulaman.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of the importance of preserving the the Quran, *Zikrullah* and *Asmaul Husna* (name of Allah) is still lacking among Malaysian artists. This is due to the fact that there are works of calligraphy painting that contravene the fatwa. The artist combines Qur'anic phrases and zikr with the forms of living things (human and animal figures). What is more difficult is when the verses of the Quran are written with in a stylish calligraphy it will cause difficulty in reading and conflict with *syara'*.

The issue of interpreting or portraying the meaning of verses of the Quran with a visual representation from the artists imagination needs to be given serious attention so that the visual form drawn does not contradict the meaning of the Quran and comply with the fatwa guidelines from the National Fatwa Council.

It is suggested that calligraphy artists be encouraged to master calligraphy writing and Quran art in order to avoid them from violating sharia law and fatwas. It is critical for artists to learn how to prevent mistakes when writing al-Quran verses while producing calligraphy

products. It is also suggested that a specific guideline for Malaysian calligraphy artists to understand the *syara'* in Islamic art.

This research discussion highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by artists in navigating the stringent frameworks of shari'ah while striving to innovate within their artistic practices. The primary sources of confusion among artists revolve around the interpretation of shariah's prohibitions on imagery and the depiction of religious texts. These challenges are compounded by varying degrees of conservatism and liberalism within different Islamic communities, leading to diverse and often conflicting opinions on what constitutes acceptable art. This divergence is reflective of a broader dialogue within the Muslim world about the role of contemporary art and its place within an Islamic cultural context.

As a Muslim artist, this medium of art should be used as a platform to convey the *da'wah* and Islamic teachings through works of calligraphy painting. This is where Muslim artists are rewarded when they are able to bring the society towards goodness through the medium of visual art.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of this research reveals a complex interplay between traditional Islamic principles and modern artistic expression. Contemporary calligraphy painting, a field that fuses historical calligraphic techniques with innovative visual styles, stands at a unique crossroads where cultural heritage meets contemporary art.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of educational and interpretive frameworks that can bridge the gap between traditional religious teachings and contemporary artistic needs. The role of religious scholars and cultural critics is crucial in providing clear guidelines that respect both the sanctity of Islamic law and the creative freedoms of artists.

In conclusion, contemporary calligraphy painting exemplifies the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. Artists' confusion and varied approaches highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of Islamic art in the contemporary era. By fostering a deeper understanding and dialogue between artists and religious scholars, it is possible to pave the way for a harmonious integration of shari'ah principles with the innovative spirit of contemporary calligraphy painting. This integration not only preserves the cultural and religious heritage but also enriches the global art scene with unique and meaningful expressions.

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