

# Epistemology of The Paintings Contained Qur'anic Verses

Sallehuddin Mohamed<sup>1</sup>, Mumtaz Mokhtar<sup>1</sup>, Abd. Rauf Hassan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam Selangor

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia

\*Corresponding Authors Email Address: solleh1951@gmail.com

Received: 1 October 2020 / Accepted: 15 November 2020 / Published online: 30 December 2020

---

## Abstract

The possession of the Art and Design knowledge, Islamic knowledge, Arabic scripts and memorised Qur'anic verses, enabled the Muslims artists to produce artworks contained Qur'anic verses. They believed that there is goodness in the painting contained the Qur'anic verses. The Qur'anic verses are from the Holy Qur'an, and it is the final revelation. The not yet Muslim's intellectuals who are searching for the true religion, reverted to Islam after study the Qur'an and found that the contents of the Qur'an are the true revelation. The Qur'an is "un-imitable" in its unparalleled language and literary style, its contents, and powerful spiritual impact. The Muslim artists and the Muslim art appreciators or viewers who recite the verses will receive good deeds. The good deeds (rewards) are the true gift and the Qur'an speaks the truth. The Qur'anic verses are the subject in the paintings and the main discourse towards the philosophy. The beauty and the contents of the paintings with the Qur'anic verse or verses have signs and messages that speak the truth for those who believed the unseen (al-ghaib). Therefore, the epistemology of the contemporary Islamic painting contained the Qur'anic verses visualised the goodness, good deeds, truth and beauty.

*Keywords - Epistemology. Paintings, Qur'anic Verses, Tadabbur*

---

## 1. Introduction

This topic is one of the findings in the research: "The Application of the Qur'anic Verses in Islamic Paintings". The paintings being studied are from the wise artists who having or showing experience, knowledge and good judgement in their paintings in the application of the Qur'anic verses. They know the meaning of Islam, have the knowledge of maqāsid al-sharīa (goals or objectives of sharīa), Qur'an, arts, Islamic calligraphy art, experience and possess the critical power of application. Most of them are involved in the calligraphy association, teaching calligraphy art and fine arts (Sallehuddin Mohamed, 2014). The concept of feeling peace, harmony and tranquillity in the paintings is a very interesting feeling in observing and identifying the philosophy of the Malaysian contemporary Islamic paintings contained the Qur'anic verses. One of the Objectives of this research is to develop the understanding of the meaning and concept featured in the painting contained Qur'anic Verses towards the Philosophy of the Contemporary Islamic Painting.

## 1. Research Method

The method of this research is descriptive-qualitative method of study. In the data collection the method of literally is the descriptive observation and the objective of the observation to describe the situations of the

application of the Qur'anic verses in Islamic art in Malaysia towards its philosophy. In this qualitative study, the data are the facts, features, information, evidence, material, statements and so on. There are 47 selected paintings samples from the art galleries, museums, annotation books and artist collection (two of the samples shown in Plate 1: *Surah-Al-Fātihah*; Source: The annotated book of the Islamic Calligraphy Art Exhibition, by Islamic Calligraphy Art Association, and Plate 2: *Surah Al-Ikhlās*: 1; Source: Melaka Art Gallery Exhibition) of the artworks, and the textual evidence. The main subject of the painting is the Qur'anic verses. Therefore, to *tadabbur* (ponder and think) and *tafsir* (interpretation) the Qur'anic verses is applied in the analysis of the meaning and content of the painting. Allah says in the Qur'an (Surah Sad: 29):

*“(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition.”.*



Figure 1. Title: Surah Al-Fātihah: 2; Artist: Abd. Rahman Hamzah; Medium: Acrylic; Dimension: 51 x 76 cm; Year: Unknown



Figure 2. Title: Surah Al Ikhlas: 1; Artist: Nor Azlin Hamidon; Medium: Mixed; Dimension: 40 x 40 cm; Year: 2015

## 2. Finding

According to Dr. Zakir Naik (international well-known personality in the Comparative religion), to prove the truth in this age of science and technology, if we put a test on science and technology to all the scriptures (Jews, Christianity, Buddhist, Hindu and so on) which we have today of all the religions of the world, all of them fail the test except the Qur'an. Science without a religion is nay and religion without science is blind. The Qur'an is

not a book of science, but it is the Book of Signs. Therefore, the contents of the paintings contained the Signs. The paintings visualized the contents which is something important and interesting about behaviour of mankind as stated in the Qur'an as shown in a sample Plate 1(Surah Al-Fatihah:2) and Figure 1. It is necessary that the passions in all the veins of the artist after application of the Qur'anic verses in the Islamic paintings become diluted (as far as the passions are concerned) and received hidāya (the guidance), and that the veins become filled with light as a result of the purity of worship (totally surrender to Allah). In the completing the painting artist soul present before the Divine and in the state of art appreciation to remain free while writing the Qur'anic verses in the painting from the temptations of the carnal soul. And the contents be achieved with certainty in the path of Divine Love speak the Truth (al-Haqq) as shown in the sample of the painting in Plate 1. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds. The background of the script is illuminated with brownish colour landscape with atmosphere, and the calligraphy is the symbol praised to Allah who created the universe. The verses abstracted and transferred into paintings are as reminder and guidance for those who belief the truth which Allah promised in the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'anic script or calligraphy is based upon a knowledge referred to by traditional masters of Islamic art as hikma or wisdom. Wisdom refers to the possession of experience and knowledge, and the power to apply them critically or practically (Sarwar, 2009). Literally, philosophy can mean the love of wisdom. The philosophy of Islamic painting is guided by the Qur'an, the Hadith and tawhid.

No	Title of the Painting	Zukhruf (Illumination) in the Painting	Tadabbur (Ponder and think) the Surah Al-Fatihah: 2		
			Observe the Related Verses	English Translation of the Verses	Descriptions
1	<p><i>Surah Al-Fatihah: 2.</i></p> <p>English Translation of the verse: "Praised be to Allah (God), Lord of the universe"</p> <p>*<i>Surah Al-Fatihah: 2</i> is the Qur'anic script as the subject of the painting.</p>	<p>*Landscape *Atmosphere</p> <p>The artist designed the landscape and atmosphere as the background of the subject (Qur'anic verse) to exaggerate the beauty of Allah (God) creations.</p> <p>*The Qur'anic script in the painting is the <i>Kufic Style (Qayrawani)</i> calligraphy developed by Muslims artist in Andalusia during the Andalusian Period (711 – 1492 CE).</p>	* <i>Al-Baqarah: 152</i>	Then do you remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and reject not Faith.	When we praise Allah, we are always in the <i>rahmat</i> Allah and feel peace, happy, calm, and receive good deeds
			* <i>Al-Hasyr: 19</i>	And be you not like those who forgot Allah; and He made them forget their own souls! Such are rebellious transgressors!	Allah do not like to those who do not praise Him. Forget Allah is sinful.
			* <i>An-Nisa: 142</i>	The Hypocrites – they think they are over-reaching Allah, but He will over-reach them: when they stand up prayer, they stand without earnestness, to be seen of men, but little do they hold Allah in remembrance.	The Characteristic of the <i>Munafiqin</i> (Hypocrites). To those who pretend to be Muslims will be in the lowest hell after hereafter because they did not praise Allah.
			* <i>Al-Ahzab: 41-42</i>	O you who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah, and do this often. And glory Him morning and evening.	Allah teach us to praise Him every day. He is the Lord of the universe.

Figure 3. Ponder and Think (tadabbur) the Content and Meaning of the Subject (Qur'anic Verses)

### 3. The Philosophy

Philosophy is the study of theories about the meaning of things such as life, knowledge, and beliefs (Macmillan English Dictionary). The Holy Qur'an is the true revelation as a guidance in its original form and unchanged up to date, more than 1400 years old. The philosophy of the Holy Qur'an explains the freedom to choose between good and bad, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood; and guidance to Hereafter (Ākhira). According to Al-Kindi, the philosophy is the knowledge of naqliyah (the knowledge of revelation and Hadith) and the knowledge of non-revelation aqliyah (faculty of intellect and human thinking). Knowledge received spiritual intention overcome animal soul developed individual personality. The 'aql develop the spiritual intention to understand the knowledge of the creed (īmān) to God, the Oneness of God, angels, holy books, prophets and hereafter (the day of resurrection). These knowledge from senses and unseen but can feel the existence. This knowledge is the epistemology of the paintings contained Qur'anic verses.

#### 3.1 The Epistemology of the Paintings Contained Qur'anic Verses

Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar suggest that the artist's philosophy is beauty (Sarwar, 2009). He added that the value of beauty dominates other values. Islam considers beauty to be a Divine Quality and teaches that God (Allah) loves beauty. The substance of art is beauty (Burckhardt, 2009). Applying of the Quranic verses in the paintings dispense with values of Goodness, Good Deeds, Truth and Beauty. Thus, Goodness, Good Deeds, Truth and Beauty are the philosophy of Islamic painting which contained Qur'anic verses.

##### 1. Goodness

In Islamic tradition, goodness is the purpose of all existence. The existence of human is the order to do good, right, nice, beneficial and useful things, and to avoid with bad, wrong, ugly, shirk and harmful things. In Islamic faith, every Muslims individual's ultimate duty to do goodness in their daily life.

One of the goodness of these blessing is the knowledge of creating the beautiful painting is one of the intentions (niyya) of the artist to create a beautiful painting. Obviously, the stronger messages are the application of the Qur'anic verses with the creative designs which are from personal intellectuality and worldly experiences of the artists. It is the mystical effect of religion on the script exposed the revelation (Qur'an) with the combination of art elements in the paintings. Those who read the Qur'anic verses in the painting received Good Deeds.

##### 2. Good Deeds

Islam is a religion that continually revealed from Prophet Adam through the messengers of Allah, and to the last final messenger is Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Islamic religion has been perfected through the stages of human history, and the most perfect is the Qur'an. It is to do good deeds that are demanded by God (Allah) with sincere faith. Good deeds are the metaphor of something like the "Emotional Bank Account". An Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that's been built up in a relationship (Stephen R. Covey, 1989). Good Deeds is a metaphor of Emotional Bank Account, is useful in worldly life and the Hereafter to the Paradise (Jannah) as shown in Fig. 2. It is the artists feeling of safeness with another human. The artists and art appreciators read or recite the Qur'anic verses in the painting receive good deeds. Therefore, they deposited the good deeds into Emotional Bank Account. Everyone should likewise habituate oneself to doing good deeds.

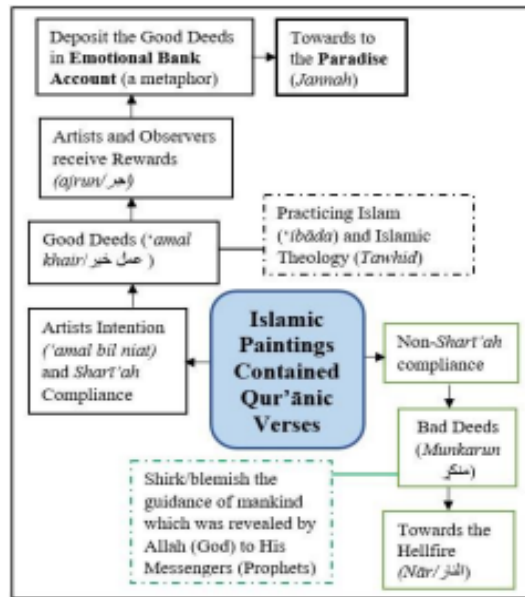


Figure 2. The Good Deeds deposited in Emotional Bank towards the Jannah (Paradise)

The scripts in the paintings abstracted from the Qur'ān translated from Arabic as the recitation of the words are intended to be spoken (recite) aloud (not too aloud). In doing so, the Muslims artists believe communicate directly with Allah (God) and receive good deeds. Good deeds mean an action of the person who is pure for the benefit of the receiving party in which the person expect on compensation, recognition, or thanks. It is an action for the sake of being a helpful part of the human ecosystem.

The Muslims artists who totally surrender to Allah the Almighty and their paintings are shari'a compliance received good deeds (rewards) towards to the Paradise (Jannah). It is the truth which the Almighty Allah (God) promised. Allah says in the Qur'an (Surah An-Nahl: 97):

*“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions”.*

### 3. Truth

The Holy Qur'ān speaks the Truth, but historically, a few people of the (Prophets') society followed the truth of the straight path revealed by Allah (S.WT.) to the Prophets. For those who are searching the Truth are be guided to the straight path. Therefore, the Qur'ānic verses in the painting direct to the point and speak the truth. According to Muslim philosopher Al-Kindi, the philosophy is the knowledge of truth (Dr. Hasyimsyah Nasution, 2002). The Truth in Painting specificity of the subject, of that "Arabic language" which painting is supposed to be. In Islamic visual art, the interested in the application of the Qur'ānic verses in the painting means interested in the reveled verses from God (Allah) to explore them in painting. The Qur'ānic verses applied in the paintings speak the truth.

Many books have been written by the Muslims scholars about the truth of the Qur'ān. The knowledge in the Qur'ān is accepted by most people as being true. The truth of the Qur'ān also has been proved by the intellectual researches, scientists and Christian theologians who admit the truth and reverted to Islam. Among them are the French Scientist Dr. Maurice Bucaille; Christian Minister Dr. Jerald Dirks; Christian preacher Professor Dr Gary Miller; the politicians Joram Van Klaveren and Armoud Van Doorm are to be mentioned a few of those who reverted to Islam. Mankind have 'aql (intellect, faculty of reason) and soul to choose the right path or not to choose. Islam is the true religion and the fastest growing religion in the world. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) speaks the truth and he is the sealed of all the Prophets is true. Therefore, the Islamic paintings

contained the Qur'anic verses speak the truth. We agreed that the meaning of the term 'truth' is the actual facts or information about something. It is the quality or condition of being the true and the Qur'anic verses "in painting," in the expression that the verses itself strongly the truth. There is no God but the Almighty Allah, the Creator of all, who has no partners, and nothing like Him. The selected artworks visualised the recognition that, there would be a resurrection and a day of judgement in which nothing would avail but devotion to God (Allah the Almighty). The paintings are one of the artists' devotion ('ibāda) to Allah the Almighty. The objective of the paintings is to appreciate the truth of the claim of the Qur'ān, namely, that it presents a message of universal significance. These are the contents of the truth that exaggerate the beauty of the Islamic paintings.

#### 4. Beauty

With the wisdom and knowledge, the artists abled to put a value on their work. Not a monetary value, but a value based on inspirational Islamic styles of creativity or the desire for creating a style of beauty. Arabic speakers have long held the Qur'ān as a Book of unique beauty even the idol-worshippers of Makkah were spellbound by its lyricism and failed to produce anything resembling it (Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami, 2003). It is natural that the viewer noticed the beauty of Qur'anic verses applied in the Islamic painting by different artists with different idea of design and approach. Their different design means the different experience in the role of the artists' creating the styles of design in the framework of the painting in hopping "angelic blessing" in Islamic view. It served the feeling of peace, harmony and totally surrender to Allah (God).

The beauty of the Islamic painting is the quality of being beautiful, good to look at and nice to read the Qur'anic verses. The beautiful admirable Islamic paintings may be perceived through a distinct vision that a special sense and perception of nature and the life. The language of the paintings speaks the truth of the worldly life towards the hereafter. In short, the goodness has good deeds, the good deeds are the truth, the truth is the beauty and beauty are the goodness; are ultimate values of Islamic paintings contained the Qur'anic verses. It is the epistemology in the contemporary Islamic paintings as shown in Fig. 3. Beauty is the goodness of human mind towards the good deeds.

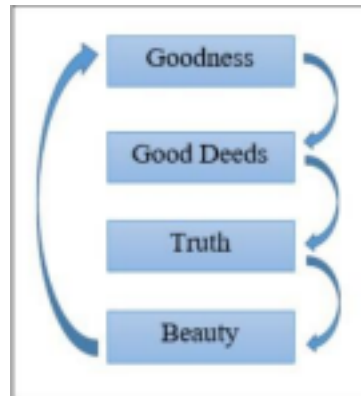


Figure 3. The Epistemology of the Qur'anic verses in the Contemporary Islamic Painting.

#### 4. Conclusion

The value of the paintings entirely aesthetic appreciated by those who love the aesthetic of the paintings and ponder (*tadabbur*) the Qur'anic verses (subject) in it. The artists have the love of wisdom to the possession of experience and knowledge and the power to apply them (the Qur'anic verses) critically or practically painting on canvas. Without the love of wisdom, the artists cannot succeed in applying the Qur'anic verses in the paintings. They must be patient, high morality and have the requisite experience and knowledge, especially the calligraphy styles and the Qur'anic verses together with the power of applying them critically and practically with colours. The features of the paintings are to 'ordering right and prohibiting wrong' (*'amar ma'ruf Nahi Munkar*). The artistic motifs of the Qur'anic verses are examples of the fusion of art with religious sentiments



manifested in the eyes of *qalb* (heart). The content of the artworks of the paintings exposed the truth of the signs in the Qur'an and propagate believe in one God (the English translation of the *Surah Al-Ikhlās* in the Plate 2: "Say: He is Allah, the One and Only") and not associating partners with Allah (God).

## References

- Abbot, K. S. (2011). *Research Design and Methods, A Process Approach*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Dr. Hasyimsyah Nasution. (2002). *Filsafat Islam*. Jakarta: Gaya Media Pratama Jakarta.
- Ehsanul Karim. (2008). *Muslim History and Civilisation*. Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen.
- Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar. (2009). *Philosophy of the Qur'an, On God, Creation and Evolution*. George Town: Straits G.T. of Intersocietal and Scientific (INAS).
- Imam Al-Ghazali. (2015). *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust.
- Marcia Pointon. (1992). *History of Art*. London: Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd.
- Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami. (2003). *The History of the Qur'anic Text, From Revelation to Compilation*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy Leicester.
- Rundell, M. (2007). *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Oxford: Macmillan
- Sallehuddin Mohamed. (2014). *Persatuan Seni Khat Kebangsaan (PSKK) 1985 -2009: Its Contributions and Styles to the Contemporary Art*. Shah Alam: Unpublished. (MA Thesis?)
- Sarwar, H. G. (2009). *Phlosophy of the Qur'an. On God, Creation and Evolution, page 5*. Penang: Straits G.T. (Heritage Series) of Intersocietal and Scientific (INAS).
- Seyyed Hossein Nasr. (1987). *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Stephen R. Covey. (1989). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. London: Franklin Covey Co. Titus
- Burckhardt, T. (2009). *Art of Islam, Language and meaning*. Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc.