

Art: The Spiritual Path to God

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Abstract: Art has long been a means of expression that serves to create aesthetic works and as a spiritual path that connects the individual to the transcendental dimension and God. In Islam, art has a vital role as a medium for achieving closeness to God, where works such as calligraphy, geometric art, and mosque architecture serve as decoration and meditative and reflective means. The background of this research is the increasingly strong influence of materialism and commercialization in modern art, which has led to the loss of spiritual dimension in artworks. This article uses literature study methodologies and case studies to explore how art remains relevant as a spiritual path in traditional and modern contexts. In the literature study, the author examines works that discuss the relationship between art and spirituality in the Islamic tradition and the contribution of Islamic art in strengthening awareness of God. The results of this study show that although the modern art world is often focused on the commercial aspect, art still has excellent potential to be a spiritual means that can connect individuals with God, personally and collectively. Contemporary Islamic art, through digital technology and interactive media, has managed to create an immersive and immersive spiritual experience for its connoisseurs.

Keywords: Art, Spirituality, God, Contemporary Islamic Art.

A. Introduction

Art has long been an inseparable part of human life. It is not only present as a means of aesthetic expression but also as a medium to convey deep meanings that transcend the material dimension.¹ Art is often a bridge between humans and something divine or transcendental in various cultures and traditions.² Through art, humans have space to reflect on their existence, the meaning of life, and their relationship with God. As a form of soul expression, art involves a combination of creativity, intuition, and a deep awareness of existence. Many artists

¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987).

² Anwar Sanusi; Hajam; Aditia Muara Padiarta, "Sufism and Hybrid Spirituality: The Brai Performance in Cirebon-Indonesia," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (June 19, 2019): 117-130.

describe their creation experiences as a spiritual journey where they feel connected to something bigger than themselves. This aligns with the view that art has a metaphysical dimension that allows humans to connect worldly experiences with higher dimensions. Art has long been an inseparable part of human life. It is not only present as a means of aesthetic expression but also as a medium to convey deep meanings that transcend the material dimension.³ Art is often a bridge between humans and something divine or transcendental in various cultures and traditions.⁴ Through art, humans have space to reflect on their existence, the meaning of life, and their relationship with God. As a form of soul expression, art involves a combination of creativity, intuition, and a deep awareness of existence. Many artists In various religious traditions, art is used to get closer to God. For example, the art of calligraphy in the Islamic tradition serves as an aesthetic expression and a tribute to divine revelation. Meanwhile, in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the art of architecture and sculpture is often a symbol of the spiritual journey to enlightenment.

Through this work of art, humans witness beauty and experience the depth of spiritual meaning contained in it. However, the role of art as a spiritual path is not limited to the context of a particular religion. Art, in its various forms, allows humans to reflect on themselves and the meaning of life. The process of creating art is often a space for meditation and contemplation, where one can feel inner peace and find harmony with the universe. This is reinforced by research that shows that art has a therapeutic effect that can relieve stress and improve emotional well-being.⁵ However, art often loses its spiritual value in the modern world dominated by materialism and pragmatism. Art tends to be seen as a commodity product or just entertainment without realizing its spiritual potential. Art has the

³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987).

⁴ Anwar Sanusi; Hajam; Aditia Muara Padiarta, "Sufism and Hybrid Spirituality: The Brai Performance in Cirebon-Indonesia," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (June 19, 2019): 117-30, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2019.14.1.117-130>.

⁵ Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*.

power to be a gateway to an authentic divine experience, reminding humans of the existence of transcendental dimensions behind the physical world.⁶

In the modern era, art faces a significant challenge in maintaining its spiritual values amid materialism and commercialization, which are increasingly dominating. The focus of art, which was once centered on the search for spiritual meaning, is now often diverted to consumer products. Despite this, many contemporary artists strive to maintain spiritual values, making art a form of resistance to worldly emptiness. This proves that art still has excellent potential to be a gateway to an authentic divine experience.⁷ Art can transcend the individual dimension and present a transcendental collective experience. When people create or appreciate art, they often feel connected to something bigger: community, the universe, or a divine being. Thus, art becomes a medium that connects humans with God and fellow humans in the spirit of inclusive and universal spirituality. This makes art a spiritual quest path boundless by space and time.

In this context, this article aims to explore how art remains relevant as a spiritual path in facing the challenges of the modern world that is increasingly materialistic and individualistic. Interestingly, art serves as a personal spiritual means and has a collective potential that can build a shared consciousness. Art festivals, exhibitions, and performances are often spaces for communities to experience transcendental moments collectively. This shows that art can transcend the personal dimension and unite people in spiritual harmony. The novelty of this article lies in the exploration of the relationship between art and spirituality, with an emphasis on exploring the role of Islamic art as a spiritual path to God, with a focus on the art of calligraphy, mosque decorative art, and Islamic miniatures and integrating it with the development of contemporary Islamic art in the Islamic Arts and Architecture Study Program (ISAI) in UIN Walisongo Semarang.

B. Method

The study shows that Islamic art, both traditional and modern, continues to serve as a way to feel God's presence and reach spiritual depth

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957).

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001).

in everyday life. Islamic art is not just a visual expression of creativity but is firmly rooted in Islam's spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. In contrast to Western art, which often emphasizes realism or individual expression, Islamic art emphasizes the manifestation of divine unity (tawhid). It reflects God's creation's order, harmony, and beauty. This essence is seen in abstract and symbolic forms, such as intricate geometric patterns, arabesque, and calligraphy, which depict the impression of infinity and transcendence.⁸

Islamic art aims to guide its connoisseurs beyond the material realm towards a deeper awareness of divinity. This art is not intended to glorify the artist but to direct attention to God as the source of authentic beauty and creativity. Islamic art maintains its focus on spiritual messages rather than physical forms by avoiding figurative representations, mainly living beings. Ultimately, the essence of Islamic art lies in its ability to be a medium of spiritual reflection that invites individuals to reflect on their divinity and relationship with the Creator.

Art as a work not only conveys ideas but also functions as a link that allows the audience to feel the artist's experience and feelings. Through various forms of expression, such as visuals, sounds, and movements, art creates deep communication between individuals and society without relying on words. Thus, art becomes a means to convey deeper spiritual and cultural values, expanding our horizons about the world and life.⁹ On the other hand, Prof. Dr. HM. Quraish Shihab, M.A., explains art as a manifestation of beauty. Art is an expression of the human soul and culture that contains beauty, born from the depths of the human heart, driven by the desire to create beauty, whatever form it takes. This encouragement is an instinct or nature given by Allah to His people.¹⁰

⁸ Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*; Ismail R. Faruqi and Lois Lamy, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986).

⁹ Shubhi Mahmashony Harimurti, "Seni Pada Masa Pemerintahan Dinasti Abbasiyah Tahun 711 – 950 Masehi," *Jurnal Kajian Seni* 1, no. 2 (2015): 194–204, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/art.11642>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 385.

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Essence of Islamic Art

Quraish Shihab explained that works of art that are forbidden in Islam are those that lead to shirk. If it does not lead to shirk, then the work is not considered forbidden. He then mentioned two types of art that are often considered haram in Islam, namely (1) painting, sculpture, or sculpture, and (2) sound art. However, Quraish Shihab emphasized that both types of art are not prohibited, as there are references in the Quran that justify it. The following is a further explanation from Quraish Shihab.

First, about painting, sculpture, or sculpture. Quraish Shihab explains that the Qur'an discusses the statue in three letters (QS. al-Anbiya/21: 51-58; Saba/34: 12-13; and Ali Imran/3: 48-49 and al-Ma'idah/5: 110). QS. al-Anbiya/21:51-58 mentions the statues worshipped by the "father" of Prophet Ibrahim and his people. The Quran not only rejected the statues but also approved their destruction. It should be noted that the Prophet Ibrahim destroyed all idols except the greatest. According to Quraish Shihab, the action of the Prophet Ibrahim aims to affirm the importance of monotheism (approving Allah). Through the destruction of idols, Prophet Ibrahim wanted to show the worshippers that idols, no matter how small or large, are not worthy of worship. Therefore, what is in question is not the form of his idol but the attitude towards him and the role expected of him. If analyzed more deeply, in Surah Saba'/34:12-13, it can be seen that Allah gave the Prophet Solomon statues made of glass, marble, and copper, depicting the scholars and previous prophets. The statues, because they are not worshipped or objects of worship, are considered part of the divine grace and the skill to make and possess them. In Surah Ali Imran/3:48-49 and al-Ma'idah/5:110, it is mentioned that the miracles of the Prophet Isa, including creating a bird statue from clay that came to life after being blown, with the permission of Allah. Quraish Shihab emphasized that Allah allowed the making of a bird statue by the Prophet Isa because there was no element of shirk. Therefore, the Qur'an's rejection of the statue is not due to the existence of the statue but because of polytheism and worship of the statue.¹¹

In another section, Quraish Shihab explains the Qur'an's justification for the paintings and sculptures found in the Tsamuds. The Tsamudians were very

¹¹M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, h. 392.

proficient in painting and sculpting; even the reliefs they made were stunning and looked alive, decorating the mountains where they lived. Because these people refused to believe, they were given a miracle by their skills: a live camel coming out of the rock. They watched the camel eat, drink, and even drink its milk (al-A'raf/7:73 and al-Shu'ara/26:155-156). However, to them, the reliefs they made were meaningless compared to the miracle. Even so, the Tsamudites remained stubborn and ended up slaughtering the camel, which caused God to send punishment upon them (Qur'an al-Shams/91:13-15). Thus, the carving skills the Tsamud people possess are a gift of Allah that must be thanked and used to acknowledge His greatness and oneness. Quraish Shihab quotes the opinion of Shaykh Muhammad ath-Thahir bin Assyria and Muhammad 'Imarah, who summed up the position of painting and sculpture as follows:

“The verses that talk about the statues of the Prophet Sulaiman affirm that Islam forbids statues because this religion is rigorous in eradicating all forms of polytheism that are ingrained in the souls of the Arabs and people other than them at that time. Most idols are idols, so Islam forbids them for this reason, not because there is ugliness in the statue but because the statue is used as a means for polytheism. On this basis, it should be understood that the hadiths that prohibit drawing, painting, and sculpting living beings should be understood. If art brings benefits to humans, it beautifies their lives and decorations that are justified by religion, perpetuates noble values and purifies them, and develops and refines the sense of beauty in the human soul. Hence, the sunnah of the Prophet supports and does not oppose it. Because at that time, it has become one of the blessings of Allah bestowed on man.”¹²

Second, sound art. In the Quraish Shihab notes, there are three verses that are used as reasons by some scholars to prohibit—at least in the sense of “impairing”—singing, namely: QS. al-Isra/17: 64, al-Najm/53: 59-61, and Luqman/31: 6. The editors of these verses are QS al-Isra/17: 64; QS. Al-Najm/53: 59-61; and QS. Luqman/31: 6.

¹²M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, h. 393-394.

Deceive (O Satan) any one of them whom you can with your voice (your invitation). Deploy your cavalry and your army on foot against them. Fellowship with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them." The devil only promised them a mere deception (QS al-Isra/17: 64).

According to some scholars, the word "your voice" in the verse above is singing. Quraish Shihab disagrees with equating "voice" with "singing." Even though it is interpreted as "song", the song in question is the one Satan sings as the verse's redaction. However, when a non-demon sings a song, it is not necessarily one of those condemned by the verse.¹³

So, do you feel surprised by this news? You laugh and do not cry while you let your guard down(sāmidūn). (QS. Al-Najm/53: 59-61).

The word *sāmidūn* is often translated by those who prohibit sound arts as "in a state of singing." However, scholars disagree with this meaning, although the Himyar tribe (one of the Arab tribes) uses the word in such a sense. The more precise meaning based on language dictionaries—such as *Mu'jam Muqayis al-Lughah*—is that the root word *sāmidūn* comes from *samada*, which means to walk diligently without turning to the left and right, or in the *majazi* sense, it can be interpreted as serious or not paying attention to anything other than what it is facing. Therefore, the word *sāmidūn* in the verse can be understood as "carelessness" because a careless person tends to be serious about facing one thing and ignoring another.¹⁴

The word of Allah in QS. Luqman/31: 6 is often used as a postulate by some scholars to prohibit singing or listening to it. This verse mentions that some people use *lahwa al-ḥadīṣ* (useless words) to mislead people about the way of Allah without knowledge and make the way of Allah a mockery, resulting in them being humiliated and punished. Some interpret "useless words" (*lahwa al-ḥadīṣ*) as a song. However, according to Quraish Shihab, this opinion has no solid basis for rejecting sound art. Not only because *lahwa al-ḥadīṣ* does not mean singing, but also if the sentence is interpreted as singing, what is

¹³M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, h. 394-395.

¹⁴M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an*, h. 395.

condemned is the use of chanting to mislead people. Thus, the real problem lies not in singing but in the negative impact it causes.¹⁵

In addition to Quraish Shihab, another Indonesian Muslim scholar, Abdul Hadi WM, often discusses art's essence. According to him, every nation has its unique art and culture, and Islam did not come to erase it but to give life and space for the art to continue to develop. However, unfortunately, many Muslims do not understand art, so they do not appreciate its existence. Some jurists even forbid it. Therefore, Abdul Hadi WM emphasized that "Fiqh is inadequate for understanding art."¹⁶ Art is a cultural expression that cannot only be measured by fiqh law alone. In many cases, art serves as a means of conveying deeper spiritual and social values. In addition, the prohibition of art without a deep understanding often creates a gap between religious teachings and cultural development. Eventually, art becomes hampered even though it has the potential to enrich people's spiritual experience.

Abdul Hadi WM argues that art does not belong to the realm of jurisprudence. The discussion of art in Islam is more dominant in Sufism, which includes aesthetic and metaphysical aspects. Therefore, art is more talked about and practiced by Sufis or those connected to the Sufi order that has been passed down from generation to generation.¹⁷ This statement confirms that art in Islam is seen not only from the legal side but also as part of spiritual achievement. Sufis view art as a means to gain closeness to God. The practice of art in Sufism prioritizes the values of beauty that come from mystical experience and inner wisdom. Therefore, he affirmed:

"Yes, art jurisprudence is not based on strong enough sources. Muslims have been practicing art since the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina. Many forms of pre-Islamic Arabic art have been adopted by Islam, such as *kasidah*, both in poetry and singing. *Kasidah* is a tradition of the Arabs before Islam... Islam did not come to destroy art. Because the art and instruments, like the guitar, are neutral. It depends on whether we can put values in those instruments."¹⁸

Some hadiths are used as a basis for prohibiting playing the flute and guitar. According to Abdul Hadi WM, jurists are divided into two groups in

¹⁵ M. Quraish Shahab, *Waasan al-Qur'an*, h. 396-397.

¹⁶ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Seni Tak Bisa Dihalal-Haramkan," Jaringan Islam Liberal, 2001, <https://ahmad.web.id/sites/islamlib/seni-tak-bisa-dihalal-haramkan.htm>.

¹⁷ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Seni Tak Bisa Dihalal-Haramkan,"

¹⁸ Abdul Hadi W.M., ""Seni Tak Bisa Dihalal-Haramkan,"

responding to this. The first group argues that specific musical instruments, such as flutes and violins, are banned, while percussion instruments, such as drums and drums, are allowed. Meanwhile, the second group placed more emphasis on cultural reality, arguing that music is part of a tradition that varies between nations. They argued that Islam did not only belong to the Arabs but to all humanity, and the arrival of Islam gave new enthusiasm to the development of musical traditions without banning them.¹⁹ This approach shows that Islam can respect cultural diversity while promoting universal values. Music, in the view of the second group, is considered an acceptable cultural expression as long as it does not conflict with moral principles. Thus, Islam provides space for local traditions to develop within the framework of broader teachings.

Abdul Hadi WM explained that the difference between Islamic and non-Islamic art lies in the basis of aesthetics or the value system contained in these works. In Islam, music, for example, frees oneself from attachment to the material world. Sufis calls the term *jarred*, which refers to the attempt to break away from worldly things and move towards the spiritual dimension. In this view, musical instruments become a medium for achieving spiritual depth. This difference suggests that Islamic art serves as a means of transcendence, helping individuals to relate more closely to the divine dimension. Art for Sufis is considered an expression and a way to gain a deeper understanding of spirituality and religion. Therefore, art in Islam has a higher purpose: to bring a person to religious awareness and experience that cannot be achieved through ordinary rituals.²⁰ For Sufis, actual music comes from silence because silence is considered the origin of everything in the universe. The noisy and frenetic noises around us occur because they are independent of the source: silence and harmony. A creative person must be able to direct those chaotic sounds, rearrange them in harmony, and provide spiritual purpose.²¹ This process shows that music for Sufis is not just a sound but a means to achieve inner peace and harmony. By turning chaos into harmony, music is essential in cultivating the human soul to be more sensitive to spiritual values. This is in line with the purpose of civilization, which is to perfect the gross human traits towards higher peace and wisdom.

¹⁹ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Seni Tak Bisa Dihalal-Haramkan,"

²⁰ Hadi W.M.

²¹ Abdul Hadi W.M., *Cakrawala Budaya Islam: Sastra, Hikmah, Dan Sejarah, Dan Estetika* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2016).

In the Sufi tradition, form or sound is not used for its interests but rather to direct people from the physical world to the world of deeper meaning. This is because humans live in the world of forms, and the spiritual journey begins by coming into contact with those forms before transcending them. Therefore, form—both sound and form—serves as a tool that guides us toward the spiritual dimension. Although these forms are the veil that envelop the spiritual world, they also serve as symbols and ladders that allow us to achieve a mystical union with God.²² This view emphasizes that the physical world is not something to be avoided but rather understood as a way to achieve a higher understanding. Through art, music, and other forms, individuals can feel and become aware of a reality that is greater than it seems. These forms are not barriers but means of bringing man closer to spiritual experience and unity with the One. Therefore, form and sound are essential in the Sufi tradition's transcendence process.

Sufis assert that music can lead its listeners to inner peace. This explanation can be found in the teachings of Sheikh Ahmad Alawi, the founder of the Alawiyah Order in Algeria. According to Sheikh Alawi, the rhythm of gestures in Sufi practice only serves as a tool to support dhikr, which is interpreted as the concentration of all limbs towards the Divine truth symbolized by the name of Allah. Rhythm, in this case, is the link between shock and stillness, motion and stillness, and change and stability. What is constantly changing can only be overcome through the peace that comes from divine unity.²³ This view confirms that music and rhythm are physical expressions and tools to calm the soul and direct focus to God. In Sufi practice, music and body movements are not meant to satisfy lust but to achieve more profound spiritual harmony. The peace achieved through this rhythm creates space for mystical experiences that transcend the material world. As a bridge between the temporal and spiritual dimensions, music helps to form a deeper connection with God. Therefore, music in the Sufi tradition is seen as entertainment and a means of spiritual transformation.

Abdul Hadi W.M., referring to the opinion of A.K. Cmaraswamy, classified art into three categories: (1) Pure or pure art, which is art that is entirely related to spiritual and divine aspects, such as mystical verses in India and Java, or Sufism verses in Arabic, Persian, and Malay literature. This art is called purely because it has no worldly purpose but is created solely to improve the soul of its

²² Abdul Hadi W.M., *Cakrawala Budaya Islam*, 432.

²³ Abdul Hadi W.M., *Cakrawala Budaya Islam*, 432.

readers; (2) Dynamic art, which highlights social issues and human activities in the social, political, economic, governmental, and cultural fields; (3) Apathetic art, which is a work of art that is more entertainment, but still contains elements of teaching.²⁴ This classification suggests that art can be viewed from various perspectives, whether as a tool for spirituality, social reflection, or even entertainment. Fine art, with its focus on the development of the soul, plays a vital role in the spiritual traditions of many cultures, where artwork serves as a bridge to a deeper understanding of the self and God. On the other hand, dynamic art focuses more on the social aspect, reflecting the human struggle with contemporary problems. This type of artwork is a medium to arouse public awareness of social and political issues. While the art of apathy, although lighter, still has a role in educating and providing teaching through fun entertainment. Further references to art in cultural and spiritual contexts can be found in Cmaraswamy's works that discuss the relationship between art and religious philosophy, as well as in the study of art as a medium of contemplation in the Sufi tradition.

2. Art as Spiritual Expression in Islam

Art in the Islamic tradition is essential in connecting people with the spiritual dimension. As a form of human expression, Islamic art not only focuses on visual beauty but also on its deep meaning. One of the most famous examples is calligraphy, which became one of the most significant Islamic arts. In calligraphy, each stroke of the pen aims not only to produce beautiful shapes but also to channel the divine message and reflect on God's revelation. Calligraphy often contains verses from the Qur'an, prayers, or words that remind Muslims of God's presence. This art reflects the teaching that every aspect of life, even the simplest ones, can be used to draw closer to God. Calligraphy is not only aesthetic but also serves as a medium for spirituality, which touches the soul of every individual who appreciates it. Therefore, Islamic art often acts as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds.²⁵

²⁴ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Jagad Estetika Sastra Melayu" (Padang Panjang: ISI Padang Panjang, 2012).

²⁵ M. Kennet George, *Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld* (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

In addition to calligraphy, mosque architecture is an important spiritual expression in the Islamic tradition. Mosques, as places of worship, are designed very carefully to create an atmosphere conducive to the people's spirituality. The mosque's structure, with elements such as domes, mihrabs, and minarets, has a deep symbolic meaning.²⁶ The dome, for example, symbolizes the infinite sky and universe, creating a sense of harmony between humans and God's creation. In mosque architecture, the shape and how each physical element can increase the feeling of piety and closeness to God are considered.²⁷ For example, the use of natural light that enters through the windows or ceiling of a mosque can give the impression that a mosque is a place where humans feel close to the sky, to God. This architectural design emphasizes that art is not just about aesthetics but also about how art can connect humans with God through a space controlled by spiritual principles.²⁸

In addition, Islamic art also includes decorative arts that are often found in mosques and palaces, such as mosaics and carvings that contain religious symbols. These mosaics and carvings serve as decorations and a tool to create a sense of wonder that leads to an understanding of God's power. The geometric and floral patterns often used in Islamic art reflect the order and beauty of God's creation, which is pleasing to the eye and evokes a sense of humility.²⁹ In this regard, Islamic art shows that beauty cannot be separated from spiritual consciousness. The sense of awe at the beauty

²⁶ Machrus, "Simbol-Simbol Sosial Kebudayaan Jawa, Hindu Dan Islam Yang Direpresentasikan Dalam Artefak Masjid Agung Surakarta: Studi Semiotika Komunikasi Tentang Simbol-Simbol Sosial Kebudayaan Jawa, Hindu Dan Islam Yang Direpresentasikan Dalam Artefak Masjid Agung S" (Universitas Sebelas Maret, 2008), <https://digilib.uns.ac.id/dokumen/detail/16900/Simbol-simbol-sosial-kebudayaan-jawa-hindu-dan-islam-yang-direpresentasikan-dalam-arterfak-masjid-agung-Surakarta-studi-semiotika-komunikasi-tentang-simbol-simbol-sosial-kebudayaan-jawa-hindu-dan-islam-yang-direpresentasikan-dalam-arterfak-masjid-agung>.

²⁷ Supatmo Supatmo and Syafii Syafii, "Nilai Multukultural Ornamen Tradisional Masjid-Masjid Warisan Para Wali Di Pesisir Utara Jawa," *Imajinasi: Jurnal Seni* 13, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/imajinasi.v13i2.21918>.

²⁸ Akel Ismail Kahera, *Deconstructing The American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Sulaiman, "The Connection of Historical, Magical, and Guardian Emotions: An Analysis of the Kyai Gede Grand Mosque in West Kotawaringin, Central Kalimantan," *IBDA: Journal of Islamic and Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 85–99, <https://doi.org/10.24090/ibda.v12i1.438>.

²⁹ Faruqi and Lamy, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

created through decorative arts reminds Muslims of God's greatness that cannot be limited by space or time. Therefore, decorative arts in Islam enrich the ummah's spiritual experience by visualizing profound religious concepts.

In the modern world of Islamic art, despite the influence of Western culture and digital technology, art still retains deep spiritual values. In the contemporary era, Islamic artists are beginning to integrate new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-based art and digital art, into their work. Although the form is different, the primary purpose of the art remains the same: to create an immersive spiritual experience. This technology allows artists to explore new concepts in art, allowing for a more immersive and transcendental experience for observers. In addition, this modern Islamic art remains rooted in tradition by maintaining aesthetic principles and religious values passed down from generation to generation. In this way, art in Islam continues to evolve and remains relevant to bring people closer to God, even though the cultural and technological context has changed. Islamic art, both traditional and contemporary, has always reflected the strong connection between art and spirituality, enriching the spiritual journey of Muslims.

In this context, it is essential to note that Islamic art not only serves as a means of individual spiritual expression but also has a powerful collective dimension. Art, whether in the form of calligraphy, architecture, or decorative arts, is often used to reinforce a sense of community and solidarity within Muslim communities. For example, in a mosque, in addition to functioning as a place of worship, the artworks in it also create a deep atmosphere for worshippers, strengthening the people's sense of unity in seeking closeness to God.³⁰ This collective spiritual experience, such as that found in religious events or art festivals, allows the faithful to experience a transcendental experience together, strengthening their relationship with God and others. Thus, art in Islam focuses on personal spiritual achievement and serves as a tool that unites people in their standard search for meaning and closeness to God. This shows that art has an extensive role in the

³⁰ Sulaiman, "Pertautan Emosi Sejarah, Magis, Dan Penjaga Mazhab: Analisis Terhadap Masjid Agung Kyai Gede Di Kotawaringin Barat, Kalimantan Tengah," *Ibda': Jurnal Kebudayaan Islam* 12, no. 1 (2014): 85-99, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24090/ibda.v12i1.438>.

spiritual life of Islam, not only as a personal reflection but also as a medium to strengthen social and spiritual relations in society.

3. Meditative and Transcendental Dimensions in Islamic Art

Islamic art has a profound and spiritual dimension, connecting the creator of art and its connoisseurs with the transcendental world of the higher. One of the main dimensions of Islamic art is meditative, which focuses not only on visual and aesthetic aspects but also on achieving a deep inner state. Meditation in Islamic art is often used to direct attention inward and seek peace through reflection. For example, Islamic calligraphy, which usually includes verses from the Qur'an, is a beautiful work of art and a means of contemplating and remembering God. Each stroke of pen, letterform, and spatial arrangement in calligraphy is designed to calm the soul, leading individuals to a deeper understanding of the spiritual message contained within it. This concept is also present in the architecture of mosques, where the design and architectural elements serve as a physical place of worship and a means to achieve a state of meditation and higher spiritual awareness. Thus, Islamic art offers more than just a visual work; it is also a path to a profound and transcendental inner journey.³¹

In Islamic art, the meditative dimension is also manifested in repetitive geometric art, a famous art form in the Islamic world. Geometric patterns, found on mosque walls, floors, and even on architectural elements such as mihrabs, serve as aesthetic decorations and have a deeper spiritual purpose. According to the Islamic view, these patterns reflect the cosmic order and unity of the universe, which is the creation of the perfect God. This repetitive pattern in geometric art invites the viewer to transcend the physical world and contemplate the higher order in spiritual life. It is a form of visual meditation in which a focused view of these patterns brings the individual into an awareness of transcendent beauty, which depicts infinite divinity. Geometric art in Islam, as such, aims not only to admire form but also as a means to feel a direct connection with the divine dimension, which gives peace and inner tranquility.

³¹ Nugraha Arif Karyanta, "Terapi Puisi: Dasar-Dasar Penggunaan Puisi Sebagai Modalitas Dalam Psikoterapi," *Jurnal Wacana* 4, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.13057/wacana.v4i1.34>.

The transcendental dimension in Islamic art is often associated with creating spaces that lead to spiritual experiences. The architecture of the mosque is a prime example of this. With its magnificent design and use of certain elements, such as domes, minarets, and mihrabs, the mosque aims to create spaces that can facilitate an immersive spiritual experience. The dome symbolizes the sky or the universe, and the mihrab shows the direction of the Qibla, which directs Muslims to focus on God. The creation of this sacred space not only pays attention to practical functions but also considers psychological and spiritual aspects that can awaken transcendental consciousness. In a mosque, silence, beauty, and a sense of connection to the universe can lead individuals to an intense inner experience, as if they were directly connected to God. For example, many mosques are designed with soft natural lighting, creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere and facilitating a meditative and transcendental worship experience. Thus, mosque architecture is an art form designed to support the achievement of spiritual closeness to God.³²

Islamic art also includes works that contain transcendental dimensions through depicting nature. Although Islam explicitly prohibits the depiction of God or human figures, many Islamic artists use natural elements such as flowers, trees, and other natural elements to depict the beauty of God's creation.³³ The art of flora and fauna in Islamic artworks invites connoisseurs to reflect on the diversity of God's creation, which is so perfect and infinite. It depicts God's infinity, which cannot be explained in words. An example can be found in Islamic miniature art, where intricate floral motifs and living trees are often symbols of God's peerless life and creation. Using nature as a symbol in Islamic art teaches that all creation contains signs of God and should be considered part of a more significant spiritual experience. In this case, Islamic art serves as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds, with nature as a mediator that brings humans closer to God.

³² Kahera, *Deconstructing The American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics*.

³³ Makmur Harun and Muhammad Bukhari, "SENI KALIGRAFI CINA DAN KALIGRAFI ISLAMI: Kajian Pengaruh Karya-Karya Seni Kaligrafi Cina Dan Seni Kaligrafi Islami Terhadap Seni Dan Budaya Di Alam Melayu," ResearchGate, 2015, <https://www.researchgate.net/search.Search.html?query=Seni+Islam+juga+mencakup+karya-karya+seni+yang+mengandung+dimensi+transendental+melalui+penggambaran+alam&type=publication>.

Finally, in contemporary Islamic art, this meditative and transcendental dimension remains relevant despite the use of modern technology and mediums. Contemporary Islamic artists adapted traditional concepts, such as calligraphy and geometric art, with new techniques, including digital art and interactive installations. This approach allows the audience to experience a more immersive and transcendental experience. For example, technology-based art can create visual and sensory experiences that evoke viewers to feel their connection to the spiritual dimension. This shows that Islamic art, despite its development in the digital age, still retains its primary purpose: to connect humans with God and to create deep meditation spaces. In doing so, contemporary Islamic art retains the essence of its spiritual tradition: to create experiences that bring individuals to transcendental consciousness, inviting them to reflect on their lives, creations, and relationships with God.

4. Reflection: Responsibilities and Contributions of Academics

The most critical work that must be done by academics—especially academics from the Islamic Arts and Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Humanities, Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang—is the ability to combine the spirit of Islam with cultural developments both locally and globally to produce a new aesthetic then. The fusion and creation of a new aesthetic has been proven in history through the Mughal Dynasty under Sultan Akbar (1542-1605). Under Sultan Akbar, his Islamic spirit and aesthetic insight could easily absorb elements of local culture. These local elements are combined with the taste of Islamic art by creative devotees and lovers of beauty.³⁴ The result of the combination of aspects of Hindu tradition and the spirit of Islam has given birth to a new aesthetic in the fields of architecture, music, painting, fabric motifs, and carvings. In the era of Sultan Akbar, the results of this fusion were seen in Hindustani music, which had elements of Arabic, Persian, Central Asian, and Indian. During Akbar's time, new musical instruments also appeared, namely *the sarod*, the synthesis of Arabic rebab, and Indian vina, which the Muslim musician Tansen invented.³⁵

³⁴ Hadi W.M., *Cakrawala Budaya Islam*, 355.

³⁵ Hadi W.M., *Cakrawala Budaya Islam*, 356.

In the Islamic painting tradition, "time" and "eternity" are essential facets of human life. It overcomes change and transience. So, there is no dichotomy between time and eternity because just as space—as far as the creation of the universe is still ongoing—time is inherent in eternity. At the same time, temporality arises in the context of eternity. In embodying his longing for eternity, a painter does not need to create imaginary time, time that sticks to temporality and change. What matters is how to create eternity outside and beyond time. To that end, they seek to combine all the dimensions of space and time into a single whole.

According to Abdul Hadi W.M., in the Islamic aesthetic tradition, rejecting darkness causes their paintings to be full of overflowing and bright light. Even dark colors in a painting will become bright when they receive an overflow of light, usually expressed by a golden color or line. The impressive shadows of darkness are reduced. Darkness is not the essence of time and space, but rather something added to confirm the existence of light and the Light. After all, darkness is a symbol of despair, while Islam teaches that people should not despair under any circumstances. Dark is also a symbol of tyranny, ignorance, discrimination, and egocentrism.³⁶ Suppose art is lived by its expression to glorify life by preserving it and overcoming its crises (in contemplation). In that case, there will be peace living with humans and nature because that is where the identity of art lies, that is, taking care of life. There is no longer a discussion of sin and peace, but living it because both live their lives.³⁷

D. Conclusion

In its various forms and manifestations, Islamic art serves as an aesthetic expression and a profound spiritual means that connects the individual with transcendental and meditative dimensions. Through works such as calligraphy, geometric art, mosque architecture, and natural art, Islamic art invites people to reflect, feel closeness to God, and remind them of the order and beauty of His creation. Each element of this art has a meaning

³⁶ Abdul Hadi W.M., "A.D. Pirous Dan Estetika Lukisan Kaligrafi," in *Melukiskan Islam: Amal Dan Etika Islam Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2012).

³⁷ Mudji Sutrisno, "Seni Itu (Demi) Merawat Kehidupan," in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Estetika Nusantara* (Surakarta: Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta, 2010), 44.

beyond visual function, making it a medium that brings inner peace and higher spiritual awareness.

The meditative dimension in Islamic art, visual works, and physical spaces such as mosques create experiences that allow individuals to connect with the larger universe and, in turn, God. The geometric patterns and decorative elements used in Islamic art create visual beauty and become a means to feel the infinity and order that reflects God's power. Thus, Islamic art not only invites appreciation for aesthetics but also invites contemplation and spiritual reflection.

Along with the development of technology, contemporary Islamic art has retained its spiritual values, albeit with the use of new mediums such as digital art and interactive installations. By utilizing modern technology, contemporary Islamic artists can create immersive experiences that take art connoisseurs on a more immersive transcendental experience. This shows that Islamic art, despite its development in the digital age, still has strong relevance as a path to spiritual understanding and closeness to God. Overall, art in Islam serves as more than just an aesthetic work. It is a path to a more profound spiritual experience, bringing individuals and communities to feel God's presence daily. By retaining this meditative and transcendental dimension, Islamic art remains relevant in the modern world as a means of achieving inner peace, spiritual awareness, and authentic divine experience.

□

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