

Faridah Hassan · Ismah Osman ·
Erne Suzila Kassim · Balkis Haris ·
Rohana Hassan *Editors*

Contemporary Management and Science Issues in the Halal Industry

Proceedings of the International
Malaysia Halal Conference (IMHALAL)

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Chapter 1

The Application of Qur'anic Verses in Malaysian Contemporary Islamic Painting and Fashion: 1991–2016



Sallehuddin Mohamed, Mumtaz Mokhtar, Dzul Haimi Md Zain and Abd Rauf Hassan

Abstract The decision is made by the 13th *Muzakarah* of the Fatwa Committee on 1 and 2 July 1985, and the Non-Muslims are prohibited/not allowed to write, carve, shape, display and sell materials containing Qur'anic verses. In 2008, Malaysia Department of Islamic Development published a book titled 'Guideline on Manufacturing, Handling, and Disposing of Publishing and Decorative Materials which contain Quranic Verses'. Another book was produced by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia the Guideline on Department of Islamic Development Malaysia Volume 2 Year 2015 titled 'Guideline on Manufacturing, Handling, Selling and Disposing of Qur'anic verses'. In manufacturing, all activities related to manufacturing of materials containing Qur'anic verses must adhere to the guidelines. There are nine guidelines and one of the guidelines is related with the artworks on *Shari'ah* compliance. It is prohibited to write or shape Qur'anic verses in the form of animals, humans, buildings and game equipment such as the *wau*, plants, flowers and the like. The usage of the calligraphy in the creativity of the artists emerged the shape of human, fauna and alike by consciously and unconsciously. It is also the issues of the spelling mistakes, difficulty of reading the verses and designs' arrangement in the application of the Qur'anic verses in the artworks. Therefore, this research is to study the application of Qur'anic verses in Contemporary Islamic art: 1991–2016. It is the artworks produced after the establishment of the National Calligraphy Art Association (was established in 1985) and Yayasan Restu Foundation (was established in 1987). These institutions support the Islamic Art in Malaysia via education and exhibitions. This study reconsiders the JAKIM's *Fatwa* and the compliance of Islamic art in the application of Qur'anic verses. 120 artworks of variety of Qur'anic verses were collected from 36 artists as samples in the analysis of the stylistic of Qur'anic verses in the contemporary Islamic art. The context of the artworks is categorized into four categories: signs, *doa'*, *shifa'* and *dzikr*. It has four components (idea, tools, form and contents) and the Islamic tradition of deeds in contemporary Islamic faith. The artists do righteous deeds (*amal khair*) receive reward (*ajrun*) of journey to the paradise (*Jannah*). Thus, the thesis formulates towards the definition and philosophy of Islamic art.

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Keywords Contemporary islamic art · *Shari'ah* compliance · Calligraphy · Styles

1.1 A Brief Historical Background of Islam in Malaysia

The Islamic art began from the prophet Adam after he received knowledge and forgiveness from Allah (S.W.T). Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is the last and the final prophet. The beautiful knowledge of Islamic art was affected after the cleaning of the *Ka'abah* in Mecca by prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) (Haekal 1981). The paintings and crafted pictures of the Prophet Jesus, Mary the Jesus's mother, angels and idols were thrown and destroyed to avoid *shirk*. Allah has no partner and nothing same like him. The literate prisoners were released from prison to teach read and write the Arabic language to the illiterate Muslims and not yet Muslims. After that, figurative artworks in the shape of human being and animals were faded. Thus, the Arab calligraphy, geometrical and Arabesque became the significant artworks in Islamic culture.

Historically, the Muslim traders from Middle East, India and China came to Malaysia. They brought the teaching of Islam, Arab calligraphy, Islamic art and culture besides trading their goods. Islam means surrender, submission, obedience, sincerity and peace (Ahmad 2004). These traders are also known as *Musafir* and brought the good morals to the Malay society. Their morals are the Qur'an itself and the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Their character of spreading Islam: pray five times a day, reciting Qur'an, honest, polite, speak the truth, patient, helpful (Baz 2004), had attracted the Malay society to revert to Islam. After that, some of the Malay Muslims went to Middle East to do Hajj and further their studies on Islamic theology. When they came back to the Malay Peninsula, they taught the Islamic religion to the local society. Impact of their activities such as the Arabic language and calligraphy became popular and well accepted by the Malay society in the Malay Peninsula. The evidences of the popularity of the Arabic calligraphy are the artefacts of *batu bersurat*, Lord Minto Treaty, tombstones, mosques, etc. An example of the earlier artworks which has an application of the Qur'anic verses is the tombstones found in Pahang dated 1028 A.D. (Ali, 1994). It has Qur'anic quotations like Surah Al-Imran Verse 185:

Every soul shall have a taste of death: and only on the day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object of life. For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception.

and the Surah Yunus Verse 62:

Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah, there is no fear, nor shall they grieve.

The British intervention of the Malay states and the colonial rule introduced Roman calligraphy. The Malay society assimilated the roman calligraphy, and some books, magazines and newspaper were written in Roman calligraphy too. After Malaya independence, it formed Malaysia in 1963 where Sabah and Sarawak were

included. The government official letter was written in Roman and the usage of *Jawi* calligraphy faded. The fading of the *Jawi* calligraphy after the formation of Malaysia lead the Malaysian Muslim artists active in the usage of Islamic calligraphy and the application of Qur'anic verses in their artworks. In 1971, the National Congress of Culture was held. Islamic culture became the main topics in the discussions and seminars. The National Congress of Culture Policy defines three principles as guidelines for 'national culture' (Rogayah Estar bt Mohamed2008):

- i. The National Culture must be based on the indigenous Malay culture.
- ii. Suitable elements from the other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture.
- iii. Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture.

Since Islam is an important component in moulding the Malaysia National Culture; therefore, in 1975, the *Pameran Seni Khat* (Islamic Calligraphy Exhibitions) was organized by University of Malaya at Dewan Tuanku Canselor, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur and then it was exhibited at Kelantan, Johor, Trengganu and other states (Pamiran Seni Khat Pulau Pinan 1976). The exhibitions exhibited mostly the artworks which contained Qur'anic verses. The exhibition was a catalyst to the calligraphers and artists to form the National Islamic Calligraphy Society and National Art Gallery to organize exhibitions on Islamic art.

1.2 Background of the Study

Art and crafts had a great impact on Islamic art in Islamic civilization. The most dominant of Islamic art is the Islamic calligraphy. It can be seen in building, mosques, utensil and so on in Islamic countries as an artefact of Islamic art. Thus, the Islamic calligraphy and the application of Qur'anic verses appear as the background of the study in the contemporary art.

1.2.1 Islamic Calligraphy

Calligraphy means 'the art of beautiful writing' (Bevlin 1982). It is handwritten which is shaped as fine artwork (*Tulisan tangan yang diolah sebagai hasil seni halus*) (Rahman 1991). The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and it was written in Arabic calligraphy. Therefore, Islamic calligraphy is the Arabic calligraphy. It is also considered a holy practice because it is the tool used for writing the Qur'an, holy book of Islam (Zeyad 2004). The calligraphy paintings in Malaysia, historical perspective and the art of calligraphy painting are seen to co-exist from two distinct traditions of the arts that of west and east traditions (Nor Azlin Hamidon, D'zul Haimi Md. Zain, Rahmah Bujang and Mariana Janeri 2011). Nor Azlin Hamidon and Siti Mastura

Md. Ishak categorized the Styles of Contemporary Islamic Calligraphy Paintings in Malaysia into the following:

- (i). Traditional Calligraphy,
- (ii). Rudimentary Calligraphy,
- (iii). Abstract Calligraphy,
- (iv). Marginal Calligraphy and
- (v). Gestural/Pseudo-Calligraphy (Ishak, 4, April 2015).

Nevertheless, their main discussions are calligraphy and not on the Qur'anic verses.

1.2.2 *Qur'anic Verses*

The Qur'anic verses are the verses abstracted from the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. in Arabic language in 1400 years ago. Some Muslim scholars suggest that the book was named Qur'an because it encompasses the books revealed to the prophets before Muhammad S.A.W. (Zin 2014). The Qur'an is the contemporary book and sealed of all the books revealed to the prophets. It is the book of guidance for mankind.

1.2.3 *Contemporary Art*

In the *Glosari Seni Lukis* (Art Glossary), the term 'contemporary art' means '*Karya-karya yang dihasilkan dalam zaman yang sama*' and '*Karya seni masa kini*'. In English it means 'the art works produced in the same period' and 'the art works produced in this age' (Unknown 1993). Thomas Hoving in his book 'Art for Dummies' (Hoving, Art for Dummies 1999) suggests that:

Contemporary art is that all styles and modes of expression are now considered to be valid. The bad news about contemporary art is there is a lot of ugly stuff out there calling itself high art, ghastrly junk masquerading as "real art" with few experts willing to blow the whistle on it.¹

The most popular contemporary Islamic art at present is the usage of Islamic calligraphy styles and design. The applications of Qur'anic verses grew tremendously in contemporary Islamic art. The artists shaped the quotation of Qur'anic verses in many different styles of form in their artworks. For example, the verse *Basmalah* is a common Qur'anic verse used by the artists in the Islamic art creativity. Among them are Nik Zainal Abidin, Syed Mohthar Al-Shahab, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Omar Basaree and many others. The artwork titled *Basmalah* by Nik Zainal

¹Thomas Hoving. (1999). *Art for Dummies*. Foster City: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. p.175.

Abidin (see Plate 1.1) clearly shows the image of a bird. It was exhibited in 1984 at National Art Gallery.

The artwork by Syed Mohthar Al-Shahab in shape of pens or shape of a mosque with six minarets (see Plate 1.2) was exhibited at the National Art Gallery in 1992. Another example of the artworks (see Plate 1.3) in the form of vegetable was exhibited at the Malay Ethnography Museum, University of Malaya in 2010. One of the traditional styles suggested by Ismail R. Al-Faruqi is Imaginary Calligraphy because of the usage of the imaginary pattern with the calligraphy elements of multi-styles (AR 1997). Some of the calligrapher shaped the calligraphy artworks into a shape of vegetable (Artist: Nor Hamka bin Mohammad Zainal, see Plate 1.3), human, animals, building, music instruments or anything comes into their mind and the Iranian calligraphers are common in these forms of artworks.² Therefore, when we approach contemporary art, whether in museums, galleries, books or on television, we should think carefully about why artists use and adapt the forms they do and how these differ from previous or perhaps more 'conventional' ways of art making (Whitham 2003).

1.2.4 The Institutions that Support Islamic Calligraphy in Malaysia

The National Islamic Calligraphy Society known as PSKK (*Persatuan Seni Khat Kebangsaan*) was established in 1985 which the Non-Government Organization strived hard to spread the beautiful usage of the Islamic calligraphy and Islamic art. There are eight objectives of the PSKK. One of the objectives is to preserve and expand National Islamic Calligraphy as a national cultural heritage. The organization members run Islamic calligraphy courses to the students, government servants and public. Besides calligraphy, the organization teaches floral and geometrical design. They also organized exhibitions, workshops and competitions to encourage the public to learn the calligraphy and Islamic art. Some of the quotations of Qur'anic verses were applied as artworks in the calligraphy competitions.³ The Islamic calligraphy competitions, education, exhibitions and the demand of the Islamic artworks encouraged some of the artists to have their own studio and art gallery.

Besides this, another body strived hard on Islamic arts is *Yayasan Restu* (Restu Foundation). The Restu Foundation was established in 1987. Its aim is to spread the message of Islam throughout the world, to strengthen the faith of Muslims and revive the field of Islamic arts.⁴ It has gallery exhibiting artworks of Quranic verses at Shah Alam. The application of the Qur'anic verses consists of the usage of the calligraphy in the artistic styles of modern paintings, graphic design, decorative form

²Drs. D. Sirojuddin AR, 1997. *Serial Bina Kreativitas Anak dan Mitra Muda*, Belajar Kaligrafi. Jakarta: Darul Ulum.

³Calligraphy Competition 'Manifestasi Perdana Seni Khat'. This competition is held normally every 2 years joined organized by PSKK and Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

⁴<http://www.restu-art.com/>.

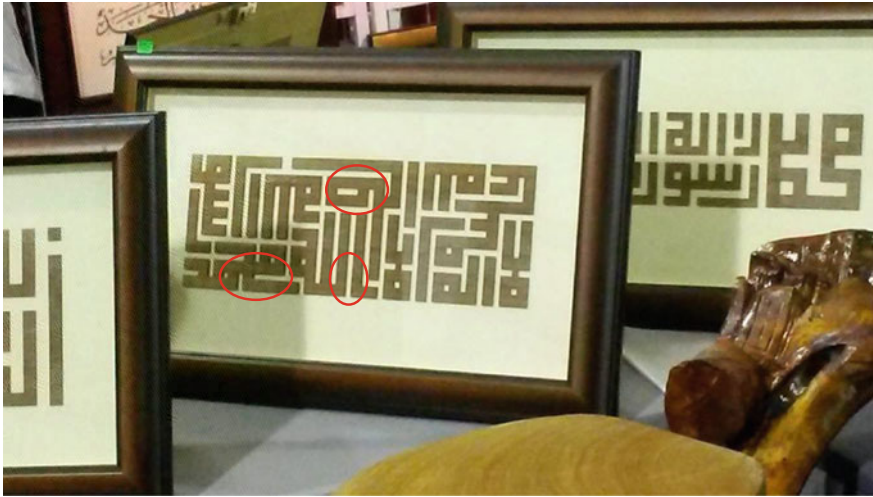


Fig. 1.1 The red circle lines show the mistakes in Kufi Murabba (Square Kufi) style (The photo was taken from an Art Gallery selling artworks in Selangor)

and sometimes calligraphy with the combination of geometrical and floral forms in Islamic cultures. In this research, the contemporary artworks before and after the establishment of PSKK and Restu Foundation were collected to investigate *shari'ah* compliance. The PSKK and Restu Foundation are seriously involved in educating the Malaysian in the usage of Islamic calligraphy and Islamic art activities.

1.3 Statement of the Problems

It is common in Malaysia that the Malaysian government will take action when there are issues or problems brought up by the public. The red circles show the mistakes in the calligraphy method (see Figs. 1.1 and 1.2).⁵ The Malay proverb says: *Tiada angin masa kan Pokok bergoyang* (In English it means: The tree would not shake if there is no wind).

Some contemporary fashion and ornamentation of wear applied the Qur'anic verses for examples on rings and slippers are selling in the shops (see Figs. 1.3 and 1.4).⁶ It is a very sensitive issue that the selling materials contain the sacred verses of Holy Qur'an by the Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia where they did not know what is *halal* and what is *haram* or sin in the method of handling the material. According to JAKIM (Malaysia Department of Islamic Development):

⁵<https://www.facebook.com/abdulwahabkhatboard/media>.

⁶<https://www.facebook.com/abwaartwork?fref=u>.



وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

Al-Baqarah: 110

يَا بَنِي آدَمُ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ

Lokman: 17

Fig. 1.2 The red circle lines show the mistakes found in the application of Qur'anic verses

Orang-orang bukan Islam adalah diharamkan/tidak boleh menulis, mengukir, membentuk, mempamerkan dan menjual barang-barang yang mengandungi ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an.

Translation:

Non-Muslims are prohibited/not allowed to write, carve, shape, display and sell materials containing Qur'anic verses.

Fig. 1.3 The application of Qur'anic verses in the Fashion of a Ring

(This ring cannot wear or bring in the toilet)



Fig. 1.4 The application of Qur'anic verses in the Fashion (ornamentation) of Slippers (These slippers cannot bring or wear in the toilet)

Fig. 1.5 Source <http://www.e-fatwa.gov.my/.../hukum-menulis-ayat-ayat-al-qura...>



The above statement was the decision made by the 13th *Muzakarah* of the Fatwa Committee on 1 and 2 July 1985.⁷ In 2008, Malaysia Department of Islamic Development published a book titled 'Guideline on Manufacturing, Handling, and Disposing of Publishing and Decorative Materials which contain Quranic Verses'. This first book was published in 2008 during Dato' Haji Wan Mohamad Bin Dato' Sheikh Abdul Aziz as Chief Director at the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia. Fatwah means a formal legal opinion or decision of a religious scholar on a matter of Islamic law (Karim, Muslims History and Civilization 2008). Currently, it is an issue of the spelling, difficulty of reading the verses and designs' arrangement in the application of the Qur'anic verses in the artworks. This situation might be due to the viewers' lack of Islamic calligraphy knowledge. Moreover, the usage of the calligraphy in the creativity of the artists emerged the shape of human, fauna and alike by consciously and unconsciously (see Fig. 1.5). Not all contemporary art and handling of Islamic art which contained Qur'anic verses are the *shari'ah* compliance.

Another book was produced by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia titled 'Guideline on Department of Islamic Development Malaysia Volume 2 Year 2015, Guideline on Manufacturing, Handling, Selling and Disposing of Qur'anic verses'. The book contents are same as before and it is to serve as a guideline for those involved in publishing and handling materials which contain Qur'anic Verses. In manufacturing, all activities related to manufacturing of materials containing Qur'anic verses must adhere to the guidelines. There are nine guidelines. One of the guidelines is related with the artworks on *Shari'ah* compliance:

It is prohibited to write or shape Qur'anic verses in the form of animals, humans, buildings, game equipment such as the *wau*, plants, flowers and the like.⁸

Shari'ah is Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (as-Siba'ee 2011). According to Ibn al-Qayyim (d.748AH/1347 CE):

Shari'ah is based on wisdom and achieving people's welfare in this life and afterlife. *Shari'ah* is all about justice, mercy, wisdom, and good. Thus, any ruling that replaces justice with injustice, mercy with its opposite, common good with mischief, or wisdom with nonsense, is a ruling that does not belong to the *Shari'ah*, even if it is claimed to be so according to

⁷ *Garis Panduan Pembuatan, Pengendalian, Penjualan dan Pelupsan Bahan-Bahan Penerbitan dan Perhiasan yang mengandungi Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an*. Kuala Lumpur: JAKIM. p.2.

⁸ www.islam.gov.my.

some interpretation. (Auda, *Maqasid l-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law, A System Approach* 2010).

On the other side, if we observe the artworks by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Atas (see Plate 1.4) in the form of animal. *Basmalah* is one of the Qur'anic verses. According to Syed Muhammad Naquib, his artwork the *Basmalah* in the form of a chanticleer first appeared in 1972 in his book on Islam in the history and culture of the Malays (NaquibAl-Attas 1990). He described that his artwork in the form of the chanticleer is a bird of dawn whose clarion call heralds the arrival of day. It is a symbol of the sun that casts light on things hidden in darkness by means of which the seeing eye knows their proper places. It is an emblem of wakefulness, of vigilance and activity tending towards awareness of affairs of the spirit in the sense illumination.

In another Syed Muhammad Naquib artwork (see Plate 1.5), he said:

The *Basmallah* in the form of the kingfisher first appeared in 1970 in my book on the Mysticism of *Hamzah Fansuri*. In this calligraphy the bird is a symbol of the spirit. The bird's azure plumage signifies rarefied atmosphere, the colour of the sky, which stands for the movement of thought. The eye of the bird is formed of the final letter *ha'* (ح) in the name of Allah. The hearth of the bird is the loop of the initial letter *mim* (م) in the name of Holy Prophet Muhammad. The kingfisher refers to water and to fish. Water is a symbol of knowledge. The Holy Qur'an says that God creates all things from water. The fish is a symbol of the soul. The symbolism in this calligraphy refers to the coincidence of spiritual and intellectual knowledge. (Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* 2014)

Syed Naquib Al-Attas is a well-known influential philosopher and thinker, he has written on the traditional Islamic sciences as well as Sufism, metaphysics and philosophy. He has served at various global academic institutions as an educator and lead administrator and is also a noted calligrapher. He founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization Malaysia (ISTAC), a world-class learned institution, where he taught and collected the unique multilingual library comprising more than one hundred and forty thousand volumes including rare books and manuscripts ([unknown The Official Website of international Islamic University Malaysia](#)).

Problems or Issues

- The above five samples of the artworks (by Nik Zainal Abidin, Syed Mohthar Al-Shahab, Nor Hamka bin Mohammad Zainal and Syed Muhammad Naquib) are the *Shari'ah* compliance or not compliance?
- Do the Muslim artists or calligraphers followed the JAKIM's Fatwa in contemporary Islamic art?
- What about the Art Galleries owned by non-Muslims in exhibiting and handling the artworks contained Qur'anic verses?

In the book titled *Seni dalam Islam* (Arts in Islam), according to Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, maybe the problem of the Islamic society is the matters involved in arts and entertainment. He added that most of the Muslims are in two different streamlines. They are a group of extremists in arts or entertainment and a group of extremists against it (Al-Qaradhawi 1999). Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi is an Egyptian Islamic theologian and well-known international Islamic scholar. He is best known

for his programme, *ash-Shari'ah wal-Hayat* ('Shari'ah and Life'), broadcast on Al Jazeera, which has an estimated audience of 40 million worldwide.⁹

There are Holy Hadiths stated about discouraging of painting live creatures. For example, one of the hadiths:

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah said that he entered a house in Medina where he saw someone who was painting (pictures of live creatures). He said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) say (that Allah said), 'Who is more oppressing than someone who intended to create what resembles My creation. Let them create a grain or ant.'" (*Authentic*) – *Al-Bukhari transmitted it* ('Omairat 2010)

Concisely, the hadith traditions are to avoid shirk or associating living things with Allah.

Allah (SWT) says, "Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the everlasting, Self-subsisting..." (The Holy Qur'an 2:255).

"He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him" (The Holy Qur'an 112: 3-4).

Yusuf al-Qaradhawi suggests that, the person who has expressed himself in this artwork, there is no limit free cessation. They even paint or sculpt statues of naked or half-naked women. Their drawing or forming symbol of idols and other religious teachings such as the cross, statues of idols and the like should not be accepted by a Muslim (al-Qaradhawi 2015). According to Muliyadi Mahamood, in the development of Islamic art, there are several major art forms, namely, calligraphy, painting, architecture, sculptures and decorative art. Forms of this art were guided by three major treatment concepts, i.e. styling, not individualized and repetition. These three concepts followed the form of Islamic art that avoids visualizing or imitating figures or nature exactly (Muliyadi Mahamood 1993). In other words, the treatment concept of the shape is not in the shape of nature. To date, no research studies on the application of Qur'anic verses in Malaysian contemporary art and defined the comprehensive definition of Islamic art (its context, styles, approach, purpose and meaning). The definition of Islamic art is related to this issue.

1.4 Aim and Objective

The aim is to establish the comprehensive definition of Islamic art and appreciation of Qur'anic verses in contemporary art.

In order to establish a comprehensive understanding of Islamic Art, this study plans the objective to be answered. The purpose of this study is to respond to the three objectives as follows:

- (a) To identify and evaluate the artworks which applied the Qur'anic verses in Malaysia Contemporary art.
- (b) To analyse the stylistic of Qur'anic verses in the contemporary Islamic art.

⁹http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/291803.Yusuf_Al_Qaradawi.

- (c) To develop the understanding of the meaning and concept featured in the Contemporary Islamic Art.

1.5 Research Questions

This study is to answer the following three questions.

- (a) Which are the artworks applied Qur'anic verses in Malaysian Contemporary art?
- (b) What are the meaning and concept of Malaysian contemporary Islamic art which consists of Qur'anic verses?
- (c) How Malaysian Contemporary artists explore Qur'anic verses in their artworks?

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The western definition of Islamic art and the orientalist concept are the visual art artefacts in Islamic world. The definition is blurred. In the *Glosari Seni Lukis*¹⁰ 'Islamic Art' means '*Keseluruhan citra hasil tamadun Islam*' (Jawatankuasa Istilah Seni Lukis 1993). In English, it means 'overall artworks of Islamic civilization'. Roughly, it means the Islamic art is the artefact of the Islamic civilization. The meaning might be depicted from the western concept of Islamic art and moreover, the JAKIM's Fatwa on Islamic art are not clear. The definition of Islamic art and the application of the Qur'anic verses in the Malaysian contemporary art are inter-related. Therefore, this research is to formulate the actual definition or the meaning of the Islamic art and the *Shari'ah* compliance in the application of Qur'anic verses in Malaysian Contemporary Art. Without clear definition of Islamic art, there will be prejudice in application of Quranic verses in Islamic art.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The western definition of Islamic art is the artefacts of Islamic civilization like the interior decorations, mosques, tombstones, coins, utensils, etc. Their Islamic concept of the artworks is in the form of calligraphy, geometrical design and floral design. Non-figurative art was used and calligraphy is the most dominant artefacts. Some of these artefacts contain the Qur'anic verses.

¹⁰*Glosari Seni Lukis, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur in 1993.*

In Malaysia, the application of Qur'anic verses in the artworks became sensitive issues and *fatwa* were brought out by the JAKIM.¹¹ The issue affected the creativity of the contemporary Malaysian artists and the interpretation of the Islamic art. Therefore, the study of the traditional attributes of Islamic art is important to search the actual definition or real meaning of Islamic art and the *Shari'ah* compliance in the application of Qur'anic verses in Malaysian contemporary art. It will also, *insha'* Allah, dispel the doubts and suspicions in the minds of hostile critics, and increase genuine seekers of truth in the understanding of the Islamic art. This search is important with the country's official religion, objectives, politic, industry, economy and regulations. Moreover, the National Principles of Malaysia are as follows: Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, the Supremacy of the Constitution, the Rule of Law, and Courtesy and Morality. Hopefully, this research will overcome the stated controversy, the usage of figurative art in Islamic culture and the application Qur'anic verses in Islamic art.

1.8 Delimitations

The most significant is selection of the artworks dated from 1991–2016 (25 years) collected in the research. The selected date is after 3 years of the legal establishment of the PSKK in 1989 (the establishment of PSKK was 1985), the establishment of *Yayasan Restu* in 1987,¹² and after the Exhibition on Mushaf Malaysia was held at Putra World Trade Center in Kuala Lumpur. *Yayasan Restu* too taught Islamic calligraphy and art after 2003. A few artworks in shape of fauna which dated before 1991 will be selected for further discussion on the controversy of the usage of fauna, flora, buildings and alike in the Islamic art. In this research, only artworks with Qur'anic verses and related are selected for discussion. It included the artworks which titled with the name of the Qur'anic surah (without the calligraphy form). The painting which are not related to the Qur'anic surah or the verses are not selected for discussion.

1.9 Literature Review

In the researcher's observation of Islamic art, historically Islamic art is derived from the Middle East the place where western historian regarded it as the Bible lands (Tubb 1991) and the ancient civilizations, the lands where 25 Prophets of Allah (God) are mentioned in the Qur'an and among them are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David,

¹¹Guideline on Manufacturing, Handling, Selling, and Disposing of Publishing and Decorative Materials Which Contain Quranic Verses (The guidelines were endorsed by the *Shariah* Expert Panel Meeting of Inter Jakim-82 on 17-19 June 2013).

¹²http://www.restu-art.com/?page_id=21.

Solomon, Jesus and Muhammad (Peace be upon them all). The reveal was to guide the life of mankind in the world (*dunya*) and to the hereafter (*akhirat*). The followers of the prophets were Muslims and their religion is Islam,¹³ the religion revealed to the Prophets. God (Allah) revealed Scrolls of Abraham, the Psalms (*Zabur*) the Holy book of Prophet David (*Dawud*), the Torah (*Tawrat*) the Holy book of Prophet Moses (Musa) and the Gospel (*Injil*) the Holy book of Prophet Jesus (*Isa*) (Al-Hassan 2010). Someone is void of his faith (*iman*) to Allah if he does not believe in all Allah messengers—starting from Adam to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Muhammad Noor Hj. Ibrahim 2015). The Qur'an is the final book and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the sealed of all the Prophets. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the cause of the renaissance in Islamic art to avoid *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). Islam is the religion of stated Prophets. Therefore, in terms of art the non-figural style of the Middle East played an important role in the development of Islamic art. Islamic art was originated from the Prophets of Allah (SWT).

According to David Samling, the characteristic of Islamic art emphasis on craftsmanship and the artist's personal ideas or feelings are not necessary in the artworks.¹⁴ Fatimah Ali and Md. Salleh Yaapar in their seminar paper said that:

Arts scholars that is only familiar with figurative arts-based, like Christian art, Hindu art and modern Western art, often find it difficult to appreciate the Muslims artworks. (Yaapar 1995)

According to Lois Lamyá' al-Faruqi, the orientalist and Western scholars rejected the expression of 'Islamic art'. They said that the early Muslim artists had nothing to contribute to the future architectural legacy of the Muslim peoples (Faruqi 1984). This means that the orientalist and Western scholars did not accept that there is Islamic Art. Lois Lamyá' al-Faruqi mentioned five causes of the rejection of the expression of 'Islamic Art' by the orientalist and Western scholars. The five main causes are as follows: (1) the problems of the Western scholars mentality, (2) the secularists leaders of the Muslim nations ignored the Qur'an and hadith, (3) the nationalists ignored the Muslim scholars, (4) fear of any emphasis on Islam or its influence which might disturb the security of their positions or future well-being by the secular rulers and (5) the conservative element within the Muslim community which fails to understand the relationship of Islam to the aesthetic products of the Muslim artists. Anyway, al-Faruqi had missed to mention another cause that is disregarded of the creed of Islam by the Muslim's society. The society had neglected the complete love for the Companions of Allah's Messenger (S.A.W.). They are one of the major foundations of the creed of *Ahlul Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah*. This is because they were the most perfect humans regarding faith, obedience towards Allah (S.W.T.) and His Messenger (S.A.W.) and strived hard in the cause of Allah S.W.T. The Muslim rulers and administrators ignore the *seerah* of the Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. and the *sunnah*. Thus, they are more on worldly (*dunya*) life rather thinking of hereafter. According to Thomas Hoving (the Former Director, Metropolitan Museum of Art), there is a powerful hedonistic element in Islamic art (Hoving 1999).

¹³The Prophet Muhammad is the sealed of all the Prophets.

¹⁴www.davidmus.dk.

This means that the Muslims are concentrated more on secularism's world (*dunya*) instead of hereafter. Majority of today's Muslims are found indulging in ways of the Jews, Christians and other Polytheists, while ignoring the guidance of Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) the correct Islamic *aqidah* (creed). Moreover, the Iran and Saudi Arabia have different doctrinal interpretations (O'Kane 2007). The population of Iran 89% are Shi'a and Saudi Arabia 100% are Muslims (Karim, Muslims History and Civilisation 2008). Therefore, they have different interpretations of Islamic *aqidah* (creed) and might be different in the definition Islamic Arts. Actually, there are no sects in early Islam and Allah condemned those who create dissension in Islam. There were no Islamic sects during Muhammad S.A.W. life. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيعًا أَسْتَمْتِ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

Verily, those who divide their religion and break up into sects, you (O Muhammad) have no concern in them in the least....¹⁵

During Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.), the Arabic language became an important role in spreading of Islam. The Prophet (S.A.W.) released the literate prisoners to let them teach the art of writing Arabic scripts and reading to the illiterate Muslims. Thus, it is the factor which made the Islamic art into a distinctive style. The Arabic scripts belong to the group of Semitic alphabetical scripts (Safadi 1992). The writing was originated from Semitic and became significant in Islamic art. On the other hand, some historian regarded as the development of Semitic Islamic calligraphy. The styles of the calligraphy developed and different places of Islamic states have different styles of Islamic calligraphy. The dynamic development of the Islamic calligraphy styles up the late ninth century and had been improved by Ibnu Muqlah by using rhombic dot as a unit of measurement of the alphabets.¹⁶ The development of the calligraphy and the existed of many styles had beautified the Islamic art world. Therefore, some script of the Qur'an and quotations of it verses were written with different styles of calligraphy. Nevertheless, the Islamic philosophy of art had a great impact on calligraphy and determined its fundamental role in the application of Quranic verses in Islamic art.

The study at doctoral level by Ahmadrashidi Hasan titled 'Contemporary Islamic Painting in Malaysia 1980 to 2000' took a few samples of Qur'anic verses of Islamic paintings in his research. His analysis is on the titles of the works: (1). An Explicit manifestation of Islam, (2). An Implicit Manifestation of Islam and (3). An Exclusive Manifestation of Islam (Hasan 2010). Nor Azlin Hamidon in her study at doctoral level titled 'Islamic Calligraphy in Contemporary Art of Malaysia' brought out the differentiation of the Islamic concepts on the interpretation of artwork within the Panofsky's theory and the Muslim philosopher, al-Ghazzali's theory (Hamidon 2012). Both researches had a few samples of the Quranic verses but their main studies are not on the application of Quranic verses on the Contemporary Islamic art

¹⁵Al-Qur'an, Al-An'am: 159.

¹⁶Yasin Hamid Safadi (1992). *Islamic Calligraphy*. New York: Thames and Hudson Inc. p. 17.

in Malaysia. In their conference paper, Nor Azlin Hamidon, D'zul Haimi Md. Zain, Rahmah Bujang and Mariana Janeri clarified that Calligraphy Paintings in Malaysia as an Artistic Tradition (Nor Azlin Hamidon 2011) and studied its Pre-Iconographical Description, Iconographical Analysis and Iconographical Interpretation. Their calligraphy samples have no discussion on the application of Qur'anic verses.

1.10 Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

Qualitative case study methodology is used for the research of this study. Qualitative data consist of written records of observed (Abbot 2011) historical knowledge of art that researcher analyse qualitatively. Participants in this study consisted of artists, professional calligraphers or artists, academicians and religious scholars. The writing of the professionals, academician and religious scholars were taken an account in this study. The calligraphers or artist artworks were selected for their involvement and experienced in the artworks, exhibitions and practice of art and design in the country.

Analysis of *Shari'ah* Compliance

The artworks are collected as samples in the research to observe the *shariah* compliance by referring to Al-Qur'an, Al-Hadith and the Muslim scholars. The Muslim scholars (Malaysian Muslims Scholars) Fatwa decision on the application of Qur'anic Verses in Islamic art are grounded theory in this research. The 69th Fatwa Committee of the National Council Discussion for Muslim Affairs Malaysia Meeting on 13–15 June 2005 discussed on the compliance of application of Qur'anic Verses in shape of game instruments like Malaysian kite (*Wau*), plants, flowers and alike (unknown, Bab 10. Sosial dan Syariah, page 210 2015). The discussion decided that:

- (i). The calligraphy scripts of Qur'anic verses in the extreme shape of ornament which can cause confusion and difficulty of reading are forbidden.
- (ii). The calligraphy scripts of Qur'anic verses are allowed with conditions of proper writing and can be read.
- (iii). The calligraphy scripts of Qur'anic verses are not allowed to mix with other verses which confused the readers.
- (iv). The calligraphy scripts of Qur'anic verses should be constructed properly and the arrangement of the verses cannot be broken which can cause misshaped or confused or changed the meaning; and
- (v). The calligraphy scripts of Qur'anic verses which are constructed in multiple shapes which caused confusion and lost its objective of revelations for reading, understand and appreciation are not allowed.

Reconsideration on the Fatwa

To formulate the above Fatwa, researcher deduced the theoretical framework of the method in observing the application of Qur'anic verses in Islamic art. The observer has to observe the artworks first with the guidance knowledge of Tawhid, second

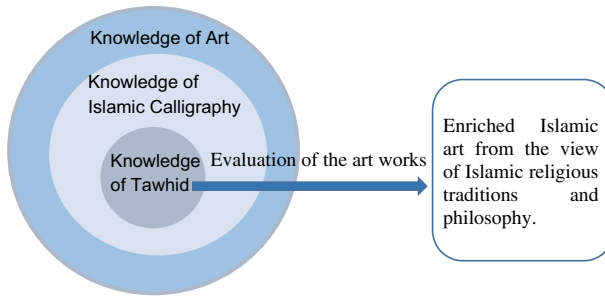


Fig. 1.6 Method of evaluating the application of Qur'anic verses in Islamic art

knowledge of Calligraphy and third knowledge of Art (see Fig. 1.6.). Tawhid is the divine unity, which Muslims seek to imitate in their personal and social lives by integrating their institutions and priorities, and by recognizing the overall sovereignty of God (Karim E 2008). Calligraphy is art of beautiful writing. There are many styles of Islamic calligraphy. Among the styles are *Naskh*, *Thuluth*, *Diwani*, *Riqaa* and *Kufi* to mention a few. Different styles of calligraphy have different styles of composition of artworks. Art is the formal expression of a conceived image or imagined conception in terms of a given medium (Ocvirk, Art Fundamentals 2002). Therefore, it is to suggest that the Fatwa members have to re-evaluate the decision of the application of Qur'anic verses in Islamic art at the angle of these three substances. Therefore, the Fatwa member specifically only artworks should be included the academicians from faculty of Art and Design UiTM and NGO active in Islamic art. To evaluate these rich artworks from an aesthetic view is the utmost must be Islamic religious traditions and philosophy.

Analysis of Content, Styles and compositions

120 artworks of variety of Qur'anic verses were selected from 36 artists. Analysis of the compositions, styles and content is based on the research design (see Fig. 1.7). Al-Qur'an is the book of signs (Unknown, The Book of Signs. A New Vision of Science Unknown). In this research, the artworks contents (see Fig. 1.8) are categorised into signs, *doa*, *shifa'/Sufi* Healing and *dzikr*. In the Qur'an, the signs are the guidance to the mankind. *Doa* means to ask something from Allah. *Shifa/sufi* healing is to cure certain sickness by reciting Qur'anic verses. *Dzikr* is the act of remembrance of the Creator. Signs (see Plate 1.6), *doa* (see Plates 1.7 and 1.8), *shifa'* (see Plate 1.9) and *dzikr* (see Plates 1.1 and 1.3) are some samples to be mentioned a few. To investigate the *shari'ah* compliance and definition of Islamic art, some questionnaires and interviews will be taken.

The theory of the Islamic styles from the components of PSKK styles (see Fig. 1.9) will support towards the philosophy of Islamic art.

Towards to the Definition of Islamic Art and its Philosophy

The literature review of this paper has mentioned that the religion of the Prophets as mentioned in the Scrolls of Abraham, the Psalms (*Zabur*) the Holy book of Prophet David (*Dawud*), the Torah (*Tawrat*) the Holy book of Prophet Moses (Musa) and the

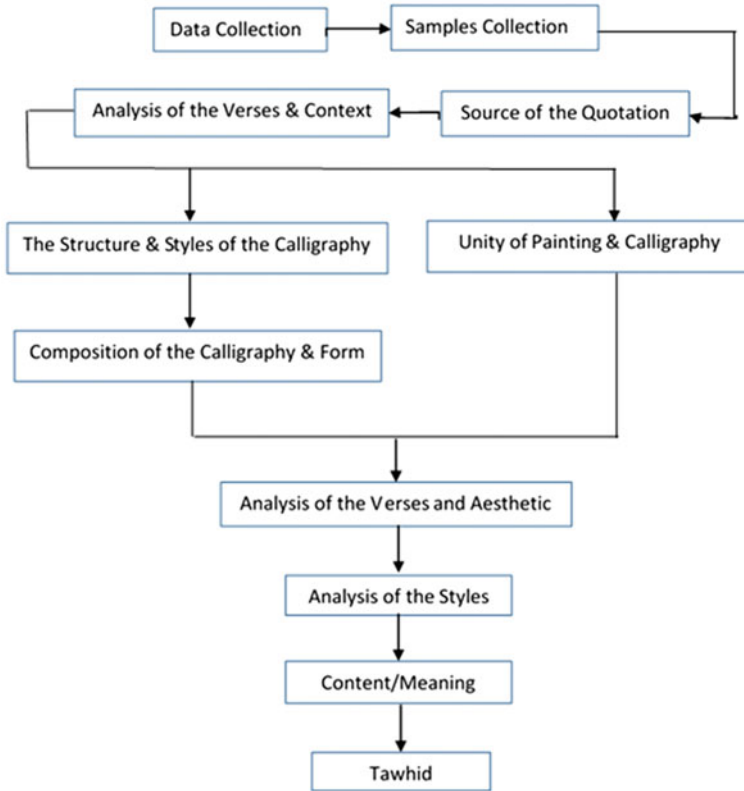


Fig. 1.7 Research design for the application of Qur'anic verses in contemporary Islamic art

Fig. 1.8 Analysis of styles and content

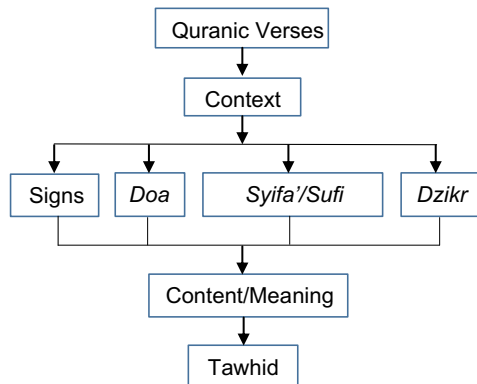
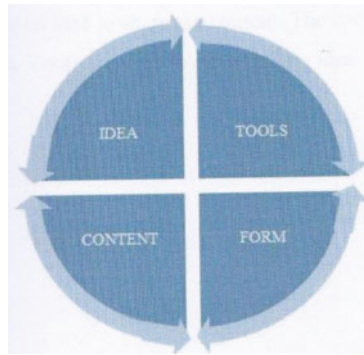


Fig. 1.9 The component of Islamic art styles (Sallehuddin bin Mohamed, *Persatuan Seni Khat Kebangsaan* (PSKK) 1985–2009: Its contributions and styles to the contemporary Islamic art in Malaysia, M.A. Thesis, Shah Alam: UiTM, 2014)



Clockwise Movement

Idea → *Tools* (*Idea to use tools*)

Tools → *Form* (*Tools to shape form*)

Form → *Content* (*Form to form*)

Form → *Tools* (*Form shapes by tools describe content*)

Content → *Idea* (*Content to visualize Idea*)

Anti-Clockwise Movement

Idea → *Content* (*Idea to form the content*)

Content → *Form* (*Content describes by*)

Tools → *Idea* (*Tools to compose idea*)

Gospel (*Injil*) the Holy book of Prophet Jesus is Islam. The word ‘Islam’ means ‘surrender, submission, obedience, sincerity and peace’. Those prophets and the followers are Muslims. The Muslim religion is Islam based on belief in one God and Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. is the sealed of all the Prophets. The Qur’an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. are the guidance for the Muslims.

The word ‘Art’ means ‘the use of imagination to express ideas or feelings, particularly in painting, drawing or sculpture’ (Joana Thurnbull 2015). Art is the formal expression of a conceived image or imagined conception in terms of given medium (Ocvirk 2002). The twentieth-century German artist Joseph Beuys suggests that anything anyone does might be considered as art.¹⁷ Grant Pooke and Graham Whitham suggest that there is no agreement on what art is. They added that the ‘Institutional Theory of Art’ bypasses questions about aesthetics, good and bad art or art as a response to wider social and historical conditions. According to Marcia Pointon, the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are problematic for art historians who are more concerned with whether artworks fulfil and satisfy the purposes for which they were created than whether they are estimable according to an assumed universal standard (Pointon 1994). Concisely, the meaning of the word art in Western concept is not clearcut.

Dr. Khawaja Muhammad Saeed suggests that Islamic art has a powerful source of inspiration in every aspect of human life (Saeed 2011). Anyway, researcher suggests that the inspiration should be in good deeds (*amal khair/عمل خير*). ‘Art’ is one of the Islamic traditions of deeds in contemporary Islamic faith (see Fig. 1.10.). There are

¹⁷Grant Pooke and Graham Whitham. 2003. *Art History*. London: Hodder Headline Ltd. p.2.

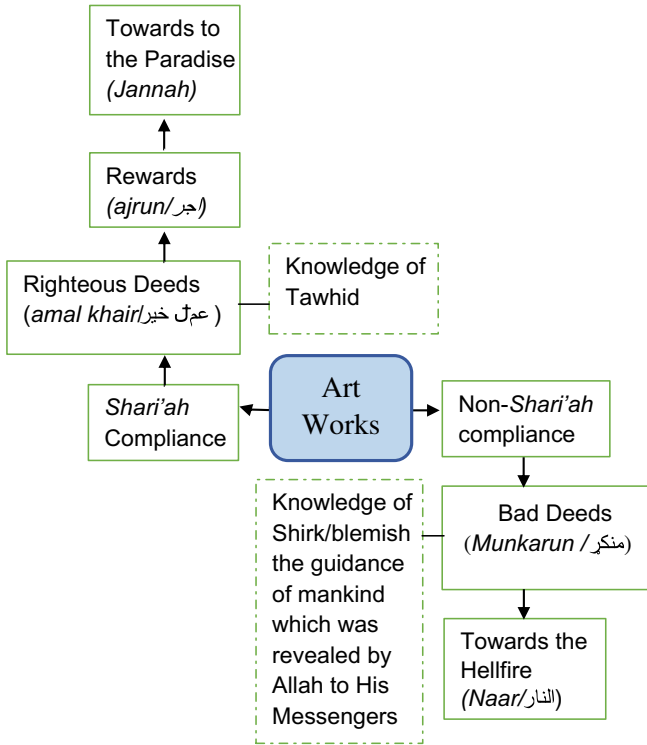


Fig. 1.10 The Islamic tradition of deeds

signs of art and culture blemished the guidance of mankind in the Qur’an and Hadiths. There are also signs or *ayat* as guidance to the mankind to the straight path, the path bestowed by Allah. It guided the mankind to do righteous deeds (*amal khair*) and receive reward (*ajrun*) of journey to the permanent place known as paradise (*Jannah*). One of the righteous deeds is the *Shari’ah* compliance artworks. For those who do the bad deeds (*Munkarun/ منكّر*), their journey is to the hellfire. In the Qur’an, Allah (SWT) says:

Thou will see the wrongdoers in fear on account of what they have earned, and [the burden of] that must [necessarily] fall on them. But those who believe and work righteous deeds will be in the luxuriant meads of the Gardens: they shall have, before their Lord, all that they wish for. That will indeed be the magnificent Bounty [of Allah].¹⁸

¹⁸Al-Qur’an, Surah Ash-Shura: 22.

1.11 Conclusion

Concisely, the *Shari'ah* compliance of contemporary art, the Islamic art definition and philosophy are the intellectual knowledge of doing the righteous deeds and receive rewards from Allah (S.W.T). In the book 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People', Stephen R. Covey suggests that we should have Emotional Bank account. This account is like bank account where we deposited some money (deposited rewards) and built up reserve from which we can withdraw when we need. The Emotional Bank is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust (amount of rewards) that has been built up in relationships with other human being. It is the deposits (rewards) being safe in the Emotional Bank Account through courtesy, kindness, honesty and other righteous deeds with another human being (Covey 1992). Allah (S.W.T.) says:

That is [the Bounty] whereof Allah gives Glad Tidings to His servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." And if any one earns any good, We shall give him an increase of good in respect thereof: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate [service].¹⁹

The research expressed some of the views concerning the art usage, styles, content and meaning. These artworks have been collected to study the application of the Quranic verses in the Malaysia contemporary paintings. This study is to search the Qur'anic verses applied in the paintings and the usage of the calligraphy in the contemporary art in Malaysia. The study provides recommendations for the definition of Islamic art based upon analysis of the collected data. Hopefully, the recommendations are consistent with the *shari'ah* compliance.

In preliminary conclusion, this research will overcome some confusion of definition in Islamic art. The philosophy in Islamic art is to guide the observers, art appreciators, artists and public to the right path. The path is the straight path Allah bestowed on His Grace.

Our Lord! You do we worship, and Your aid we seek. Show us the straight way. The way of those on whom You bestowed Your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray. Ameen... Ya Rabbal'alameen.

Appendix

See (Plates. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9)

¹⁹Al-Qur'an, Surah Ash-Shura: 23.