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Between Ethics and Aesthetics

Curation Methods for Contemporary Islamic Painting in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the curatorial methods of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, formed by a synthesis of ethics and aesthetics. Rooted in postcolonial history and the rise of diverse academic art institutions, a curatorial approach is developed that balances ethical principles and aesthetic innovation. With a qualitative descriptive method, data were gathered through interviews with artists and Islamic art curators, supported by curatorial and content analysis of exhibitions. Findings reveal that curators must harmonize Islamic ethical foundations with contemporary visual concepts through thematic organization, contextualization and audience segmentation. Curatorial reflexivity is essential to ensure impartiality and critical evaluation of form and style. The study identifies three curatorial themes (calligraphic, representational, and nonrepresentational) emerging since the 1995 Istiqlal II Festival. The study demonstrates continual aesthetic evolution within Islamic ethical boundaries.

Introduction

When discussing Islamic art, particularly Islamic painting, the first point that often arises is the prohibition on depicting living creatures (Cahyana, 2023; Mustofa, 2020; Yusuf, 2016). This is then considered one of the factors inhibiting the development of Islamic-themed painting in Indonesian art. Also related is form, which seems always to refer to the forms, symbols, and icons characteristic of Islamic art in the classical period, such as arabesques, floral ornaments, geometric shapes, and most prominently, Arabic calligraphy (Burckhardt, 2009; Hana'a et al., 2023). Without the presence of these elements in a painting, the painting is considered not characteristic of Islamic art. The slow development of Islamic painting is mainly due to many artists and religious leaders still believing that painting is forbidden, especially when depicting living creatures. Thus, modern Islamic painting has not developed because the understanding of art for art's sake remains deeply embedded in society (Cahyana et al., 2020).

The concept of art for art's sake is considered to separate religion from art, whereas in Islamic teachings, art is an integral part of how humans worship God. In Islam, every Muslim must be useful to himself and society, but sharia rules must still be obeyed. Therefore, in Islamic painting, ethical dimensions based on Islamic law must be adhered to and become part of the aesthetics (Kim, 2018). In Indonesia, Islamic painting is not well-developed, despite the majority of the population being Muslim, because many academic artists adhere to the principles of modern art, which they studied in Western modern art. This style differs significantly from the traditional art that existed before it. The principles of modern art emphasize novelty, originality, and autonomy with the motto "art for art's sake" (Comfort, 2011; Kharkhurin, 2014; Phùng & Fendler, 2015). However, Sudrajat et al. (2017) observed

that the motto is considered to separate religion from art. In contrast, Islamic rules view art as part of the human way of worshipping God, causing modern Muslim artists to be swept up in the great wave of Western modernism. As a result, Muslim artists see the heritage of Islamic art as no longer relevant to new trends, even calling the present the time of the death of Islamic art (Flood, 2012). Islamic art is now recognized as a testament to the past, evoking the golden age of Islam from the 13th to 18th centuries, characterized by arabesques, geometric patterns, miniatures, and calligraphy. In addition, Islamic art, often associated with the Arab region, has drawn the attention of historians to the region. In reality, each Muslim region has unique Islamic artworks that differ from those in Arabia (Fakih & Bakhtiar, 2021).

Indonesian modern art has developed since the early 19th century. However, it was only in the late 20th century that Islam became a central theme for several artists, such as Ahmad Sadali and A.D. Pirous (Cahyana et al., 2020; Hamzah, 2009). The development of contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting, Piliang (2022) concluded, represents a unique blend of art, culture, religion, and traditional identity in Indonesia. It has gained significant attention in recent years, both in Indonesia and on the global stage. The emergence of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia is not a coincidence; it is deeply rooted in the country's rich history, cultural diversity, and religious traditions.

The rise of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia can be traced back to the post-colonial era of the late 19th century, which was marked by the establishment of fine arts universities, whose graduates tended toward a formalist, abstract style until the resurgence of interest in Islamic art and culture (Yuliman & Kent, 2022). Indonesia has a long history of Islamic art traditions, but these traditions have evolved in response to changing sociopolitical and cultural dynamics (Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020). This evolution has given rise to a distinct genre of contemporary Islamic painting that blends Islamic ethics and aesthetics, resulting in a trend toward modern aesthetic themes, forms, and styles (Hooker, 2022).

In recent decades, this unique artform has become increasingly eminent as a means not only of cultural preservation but also cultural expression and communication (Blair & Bloom, 2003). Contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia reflects a complex interplay between ethics and aesthetics, where artists grapple with questions of identity, spirituality, and contemporary issues while adhering to ethical principles embedded in Islamic art sharia (Hooker, 2022). The curation of these artworks becomes valuable in facilitating different understandings of this dynamic interaction.

This research explores how curators navigate the balance between maintaining the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of these paintings while ensuring that different elements of society accept them. To this end, it examines the theoretical underpinnings of curation in contemporary Islamic painting and the complexities and challenges curators face in presenting this contemporary Islamic art to the public. It creates a new curatorial method that combines ethical elements based on the rules of art creation in Islamic law and aesthetics, reflecting the tendency of modern artistic themes, forms, and styles in the exhibition of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia.

Theoretical basis

Islamic Art

The term *Islamic art* in the general sense encompasses the visual arts produced in the Islamic world (Ettinghausen et al., 2003), while the Oxford reference is to art produced in the service of Islam, the monotheistic religion revealed to Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) in early 7th-century Arabia, which quickly spread throughout much of Eurasia and Africa to become a major world religion (Oxford Reference, n.d.). With reference to this definition, Islamic art products are diverse because they encompass all art products produced by Muslim communities with Islamic culture and following Islamic rules, which can be considered Islamic artworks. The spread of Islam from the 7th century to the present has reached a vast area characterized by cultural diversity; Islamic teachings greatly influenced different regions to form a distinctive Islamic culture and society (Bakry & Gunawan, 2018). If we refer to the meanings of the words *art* and *Islamic*, we gain a similar understanding. The word *art* in the *Oxford Dictionary* refers to the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works that are appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power (“art”, n.d.). The term *Islamic*, as understood by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, means connected with the Muslim religion or with people or countries that follow it (“Islamic”, n.d.). Based on the meanings of the terms, it can be said that Islamic art is the expression or application of creative skills through works of art related to Muslim beliefs or to the people or countries that have them.

The term *art* in *Islamic art* is more aimed at the field of fine arts produced in the golden age of Islam, including the architecture, calligraphy, arabesques, illuminations, miniatures, textiles, glass art, and geometric ornaments that later became the hallmark of Islamic decoration (Bonner, 2017; Dabbour, 2012; Hana'a et al., 2023; Majeed, 2020). All these fields were developed in the Middle East region from the seventh to the end of the ninth century, which explains the geographical scope that includes many countries (Alashari et al., 2019). With such a broad scope, but not representative of all Islamic art trends in each

region, Islamic art is often identified with Arabic art (Canby, 2005; Nurrohim & Setyorini, 2018). This situation cannot be separated from the Islamic historical writing, which is still influenced by the Eurocentric mindset of Western historians, who divide art into two categories: pure art and applied art (Shalem, 2012). In Islamic societies, this categorization is not well understood, and a new, more contextual perspective is needed to view Islamic art from different perspectives and approaches (Blair & Bloom, 2003).

The issue of Islamic characteristics in modern art has always been a matter of debate, not just in Indonesia but in most Muslim-majority countries. The view of Western historians and Orientalists in the past was that Islamic art was a product of applied art, and therefore, it could not be considered a form of fine art. Thus, Islamic art ultimately occupies an underappreciated position in art historical narratives, even relegated to the category of minor art in European art historiography. As a result, many works that could actually be called masterpieces (*Meisterwerke*) are instead considered traditional works or local crafts that are not equivalent to the concept of fine art (Shalem, 2012). In contrast, works of fine art have high value because they are intended to provide both the artist and the appreciator with aesthetic satisfaction. Therefore, the treatment of Islamic art by Western Islamic historians often focuses on classifying it in terms of media, technique, function, and the place where it was produced (Algosaibi, 2019). This different view of the concept of art is a problem in explaining modern Islamic art from the perspective of Western modern art.

Over the last two decades, this view has begun to shift, driven by the emergence of Islamic art historians from Muslim-majority countries. Trained in the West but critical of the West's view of Islamic culture, they brought new ideas about Islamic art. Likewise, Western scholars began to shift their perspective on Islamic art, primarily through curators who presented Islamic art in a more contextualized manner (Blair & Bloom, 2003), as evident in several Islamic art exhibitions in museums and galleries. The vast territory of Islam certainly produces a variety of works of art, and not all of them can be identified with Arabic art (Burckhardt, 2009). This change in perspective has led to different methods of presenting Islamic art allowing viewers to understand and appreciate the work's context.

The view of Islamic art cannot be separated from the exhibitions that display it. Through exhibitions at galleries and museums, Islamic art is introduced to a broader public. Traditional approaches to exhibiting Islamic art, which are considered incapable of providing new insights into Islamic art as a whole, is beginning to be abandoned (Necipoglu, 2012). Islamic culture should produce Islamic art with a high degree of diversity, as each region has unique characteristics. Regarding the diversity of Islamic art, an American expert on Islamic ornaments, Jay Bonner, refers to it as "Pan Islamic Art" (Ernst, 2005). In reality, there are still many assumptions that limit Islamic art to works produced by Muslim communities in the

Middle East, so in Islamic art exhibitions, the role of curators becomes crucial because it can affect public perception of Islamic art itself. There are many misconceptions about Islamic art, partly due to mistaken curatorial methods.

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Islamic Art

Islamic art encompasses a range of visual and conceptual elements. Its concept of beauty is based on philosophical ideas derived from traditional Islamic philosophy and religious thought that have character and function (AZ, 2015). This study explores these ideas and illustrates them as visual and material concepts. Islamic culture recognizes aesthetics as *ilmuljamal*, the science of beauty (Baslouh, 2020; Yustiono, 1993). The Qur'an contains many stories that discuss beauty. Since the 19th century, the concept of beauty in Islamic art has been studied from various perspectives without delving into its philosophical meaning. In fact, it is explored mainly through its historical context or examined in terms of its material and decorative qualities (Yustiono, 1993). Miranda Risang Ayu discusses how the foundation of aesthetics in Islamic art is based on man's relationship with the Creator (Yustiono, 1993). This led to a broad understanding of traditional Islamic art and influenced the creation of new, contemporary Islamic artworks. Al-Faruqi stated that all beauty produced by artists must originate from the primary source, namely the Qur'an. According to him, Islamic art is a Quranic expression comprising three levels: first, the Qur'an as an explanation of monotheism; second, the Qur'an as a model for art; and third, the Qur'an as iconography (al-Faruqi, 1999). Al-Faruqi's aesthetics, often referred to as the Art of Tawhid, is a brief depiction of the position of people who believe in the unity of Allah SWT. This unity will lead to artists who are no longer autonomous but instead position themselves as servants of Allah.

The spirit of Islam, with its strong concept of monotheism, underlies Islamic art. The concept of monotheism in Islam is strictly guarded from the beginning to the end of the world. Tawheed should not be polluted with shirk, as was done in the Jahiliyah era. The concept of monotheism, which is free from impurities in the form of idols or other images, is a central emphasis in Islam. In its early days, people who had just entered Islam frequently returned to idol worship, so it was very much emphasized to keep away from any form that had the potential to affect Islamic monotheism negatively. The concept of Islamic aesthetics based on this monotheism has been maintained for 14 centuries, so that Islamic works of art take the form of calligraphy, abstraction, ornamentation, geometry, stellation, and others that stay away from human or animal forms (Hadi, 2000; Leaman, 2005).

An effective form that helps avoid depicting animate beings in Islamic art is calligraphy. Calligraphy is an Islamic art form that has existed since the inception of Islam. Many claim that it is the highest art in Islam. AlFaruqi and Amri Yahya stated that calligraphy is an

aesthetic provision that reflects the ideas and imagination of the maker. Furthermore, calligraphy is an aesthetic expression, so neither the distribution nor the processes of creation or aesthetic achievement can be imitated or reproduced (Al-Faruqi, 1999; Yahya, 2001). Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg (1980) argued that calligraphy is a branch of art that occupies a high place in Islamic culture. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1993) stated that it has a special and unique position in Islam. Yusuf Qardhawi (1998) asserted that the art of calligraphy can enlighten civilization and make it unique. The Modern Art Catalog of Istiqlal Festival Jakarta 1991 mentioned that calligraphy is often referred to as "the art of Islamic art." The calligraphy referred to is that which holds high value in Islam, certainly not superficial calligraphy. The calligraphy that is meant is calligraphy that is done with seriousness, and the content that is poured into it is an expression of glorification of Allah SWT, not calligraphy that is superficial and empty of Islamic values.

The absence of standard boundaries for Islamic aesthetics provides an opportunity for the development of aesthetic expressions. On the other hand, there are ethical values in the Qur'an and Hadith that must be a reference for Muslim artists in the creation of art. These encompass the principles and guidelines of Islamic law, which embody noble virtues, including ethical, moral, social, and other values that promote a balanced and harmonious life. In Islam, the display of aurat as an object of art will indeed collide with the rules derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. If the realized work of Islamic art does not contradict the Qur'an, Hadith, or established norms, it is unlikely to be problematic from an ethical perspective.

Some Islamic scholars, such as Al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Endang Saefudin Anshari, when addressing the issue of Islamic aesthetics in the fine arts, firmly stated that the primary sources are the Qur'an and the Hadith. The influence of these two sources is clearly visible in the works created by the artists. Al-Faruqi has specialized in the manifestation of Islamic art in various forms, including calligraphy, arabesque, geometry, ornamentation, and abstraction. Al-Faruqi (1999) viewed calligraphy as the highest art form in Islam. This classification was not made without reason; he based his view on the principle of monotheism and asserted that calligraphy is the most sublime of Islamic art. However, Oliver Leaman (2005) is more modern; according to him, calligraphy is not the highest Islamic art. Calligraphy is limited to a series of forms that have beauty value. For people who do not know the meaning behind the writing, they only see the visual side, so calligraphy is not the highest art.

Based on the above explanation, in defining Islamic art from the perspective of sharia, all views are almost identical, namely that Islamic art or art based on Islam must be based on ethics: the rules listed in the Qur'an and Hadith. As for form, there are two views: the first

emphasizes abstraction and calligraphy as the highest achievements of Islamic art. The second view is that Islamic art does not have to be limited to abstraction and calligraphy; instead, Islamic aesthetic expression can be freely realized while still adhering to the principles of Islamic teachings. In the context of this research, the authors situate the first opinion within the framework of Islamic art produced during the golden age of Islamic civilization. However, the second opinion is more suitable for modern Islamic painting, which is not fixated on the visual idioms of classical Islamic art.

Contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting, which has diverse artistic tendencies, signifies that Islamic interpretations have multiple dimensions, are dynamic and reflect local culture. Islam and its visual manifestations often adopt the qualities of the region where they are practiced, just as they modify indigenous cultures (Asher, 2015). In modern painting, novelty and originality are closely tied to an artist's ability to convey a distinctive identity, which is realized in a unique form in their paintings. To display this identity, artists often draw on cultural sources closely related to their lives, and Islamic culture serves as a means for Muslim artists to discover their cultural identity. Modernism, as the basis of their work, eventually promoted modernization in Islamic painting, where Islam was interpreted through various themes and depicted in accordance with the principles of Western modern art. This is happening in contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, where Islam is interpreted into different themes and realized with different styles, techniques, and forms, resulting in considerable diversity. The emergence of these diverse trends has raised questions from Islamic art scholars about the definition and boundaries of contemporary Islamic painting. The search for Islamic elements in contemporary paintings is a primary challenge for those curating works with Islamic content. Therefore, an appropriate curation method is needed to identify Islamic elements in paintings and then classify them according to their thematic and aesthetic tendencies.

Curating an Exhibition of Islamic Art

An art exhibition is a node related not only to aesthetics and art history but also to broader cultural issues. An exhibition is always a representation of a system that produces meaning through language and the objects on display (Hujatnikajennong, 2015). Thus, exhibitions of Islamic paintings in Indonesia are not limited to artistic issues but related to the sociocultural issues surrounding them, as well as how the Muslim community views Islamic paintings. Exhibitions can change the perception of Islamic art. Exhibitions in museums and galleries that display Islamic art from various parts of the world are expected to provide new interpretations of Islamic art (Bier, 2017), thereby overcoming the public perception of Islamic art as monolithic, primitive, and unchanging (Reeve, 2018).

Therefore, there is a need for curatorial practices that provide clear and complete information about Islamic art, both past and present. The curation of contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia must encompass a multifaceted theoretical framework that encompasses art theory, Islamic aesthetics, cultural studies, and curatorial practice. This framework should recognize the need to achieve a harmonious balance between ethics and aesthetics. Contemporary Islamic art should be firmly rooted in Islamic tradition, emphasizing not only the aesthetic quality of art but also an ethical dimension related to Islamic law, morality, and spirituality.

In this context, Islamic aesthetic theories, such as those seen in the principles of *ihsan* (excellence) and *adab* (propriety), must guide curatorial decisions. These principles guide curators in selecting artworks that demonstrate artistic excellence and adhere to the ethical and moral guidelines of Islamic art. In addition, curators must consider the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of their audiences, which require careful negotiation between universality and specificity in the presentation of a painting.

Diversity is an inherent feature of Islamic art today, as it can be described as a blend of cultures and adapted in various ways without adhering to a single Islamic art formation (Shalem, 2012). Thus, framing Islamic art by limiting it to works from the Middle East is no longer relevant to artists who adopt secular practices that provide the freedom to interpret Islamic art in a more contextualized manner (Babaie, 2011), as can be seen in contemporary Islamic art exhibitions. Exhibitions that are displayed chronologically and geographically and divided into subdivisions, such as dynasties, materials, techniques, and themes, have complex and confusing narratives. According to Grinner (2020), framing theory is needed paired with Beverly Serrel's perspective on exhibition labels so that it can show the "big idea" that wants to be conveyed through the exhibition (Grinnell, 2020).

In Indonesia, the curation of Islamic art began with the exhibition of contemporary Islamic painting at the Istiqlal Festival in 1995 (Figure 1). The public was able to see firsthand contemporary Islamic paintings that were no longer limited to the framework of Islamic art from the Middle East. The diversity of themes, styles, and forms of Islamic painting, not all of which featured established Islamic art icons such as Arabic calligraphy, Arabesque, and Islamic geometric motifs. This was indeed a new thing for people in Indonesia, and it led to confusion about what characterized contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting. For Muslim curators and artists, the exhibition provided a new direction for the development of contemporary Islamic painting. This can be seen in exhibitions with Islamic themes, such as *Islam and Identity* (2009), *Sign & After of Contemporary Islamic Art* (2010), and *Bayang* (2011). The curatorial method employed in these exhibitions referred to the *Islamic*

Contemporary Painting Exhibition at the Istiqlal Festival, specifically in the process of identifying and curating artworks for the exhibition.

The problem that needs to be addressed in this research is whether the concept of curation used in the Istiqlal Festival can serve as the basis for developing curation methods for contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, and how it affects current Islamic painting. Furthermore, a theoretical foundation of curating contemporary Islamic painting must recognize the developmental nature of this art form. It must acknowledge that artists are continually pushing the boundaries of traditional Islamic art by incorporating contemporary themes, forms, styles, and techniques. Therefore, curators must use contemporary art theory and cultural studies to contextualize these artworks within the broader cultural and social milieu of Indonesia.

In brief, this theoretical foundation can serve as a guide for curators to navigate the complex terrain of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia. By understanding its complex theoretical ideas, curators can effectively curate exhibitions that respect the ethical principles of Islamic art and celebrate the aesthetic diversity and creativity of contemporary Islamic painters in Indonesia. This certainly broadens the interpretation of Islam in painting and makes it dependent on the social and cultural context that surrounds it. Likewise, contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia is highly diverse, which necessitates a curatorial method that can identify Islamic elements in paintings.

Literature Review

This section critically examines previous research conducted by leading scholars of contemporary Islamic painting and exhibition curation processes, with a focus on the specific local context of this research. It presents the current state of knowledge, highlights existing differences, and provides a context for the research's contribution to the evolving discourse on contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia. For example, Rahadi (2021) responds to and defies existing aesthetic conventions by using various representational languages to challenge doctrines, authorities, and moral teachings. Rahadi treats the terms *modern* and *Islam* as propositions and challenges rather than as fixed but vague categories. Rahadi's analysis of Islam and Islamic religiosity in the historiography of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia and Southeast Asia challenges secular narratives. Fakihi and Bakhtiar's (2021) research develops an eclectic aesthetic concept that bridges the dichotomy between those who avoid figural forms and those who prefer them, thereby linking exotericism and esotericism in visual aesthetics. The concept of gradual beauty is that natural forms are manifestations of God's unlimited beauty. Fakihi and Bakhtiar (2021) explain the shadow of God's closest beauty, which becomes the primary reference for all artistic imaginations,

known as eclectic aesthetics. The concept of eclectic aesthetics liberates visual art creativity and serves as an alternative in efforts to save the environment.

From these two perspectives, the development of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia represents a dynamic blend of art, culture, and religion. It is a manifestation of the complex interplay between ethics and aesthetics, reflecting the sociocultural context in which it was created. Cotter (2011) and Eastburn (2020) argued that curators act as mediators between artists, artworks, and appreciators, shaping narratives and discourses surrounding art. For contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, this mediation becomes particularly important due to the multifaceted nature of Islamic art, which often contains religious, cultural, and political dimensions.

The ethics of curating contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia have been explored by scholars such as Gonzalez (2022), who emphasized the responsibility of curators to ensure that artworks do not inadvertently offend religious sensibilities or cultural norms. This aligns with broader discussions about the representation of Islam in art and the importance of sensitivity to local values. Ethics based on Islamic law must be respected and integrated into the aesthetics. Necipoglu (2012) and Gonzalez (2018) argued that the visual language of Islamic art can transcend cultural and religious boundaries. In Indonesia, where diversity is celebrated, understanding the aesthetic preferences of different communities is necessary for creating an inclusive exhibition that can reach a broad audience.

To address the specific context of Indonesia, researchers such as Sembodo et al. (2021) have delved into the rich history of Islamic art in the archipelago. Their research highlights the syncretic nature of Indonesian Islamic art, which is influenced by indigenous cultures, Hindu-Buddhist heritage and global Islamic traditions. Curators who wish to present a comprehensive view of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia must understand this context.

Although existing research has explained various aspects of curating contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, there are still gaps in our understanding. First, a more comprehensive study is needed to investigate the curation of Islamic art exhibitions that prioritize ethical and aesthetic values as primary curatorial references. Second, the impact of political and socioeconomic factors on the curation and reception of Islamic art in Indonesia remains unexplored. Ultimately, a more in-depth examination of the challenges curators face in navigating Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape is needed.

In short, curating contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia is a complex endeavor that requires a balance between ethics and aesthetics. Researchers have provided valuable insights into the field and the importance of curatorial responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and a deep

understanding of the context. However, there is a knowledge gap that this research seeks to fill. The authors seek to lay a foundation for future research and deepen understanding of the complex relationship between ethics and aesthetics in curating contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative methods are used to collect data systematically. Helaluddin (in Ariffin et al., 2023) stated that qualitative approaches are used to understand complex phenomena and processes systematically. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with Islamic art curators that focused on their curatorial philosophies and strategies. The curators were Abdul Djalil Pirous (senior artist of Indonesian abstract painting and calligraphy), Rizki A. Zaelani (member of the Board of Curators of the National Gallery of Indonesia) and Zaenudin Ramli (curator of Indonesian Islamic art). Also interviewed were five Islamic artists and five young artists whose orientation is Islamic painting. Literature was also reviewed to identify relevant books, journals and other research sources. The descriptive approach involved curatorial and content analysis of contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting exhibitions. Fitrah (2018) argued that case studies are suitable for use in studies related to events, cultures and groups. The exhibitions used as research objects were a case study of the Istiqlal Festival II exhibition in 1995, the *Islam & Identity* exhibition in 2009 (Figure 5), the *Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art Exhibition* in 2010 (Figure 10) and the *Bayang* exhibition in 2011 (Figure 12). Data analysis was carried out in several stages with the following scheme: data identification, classification, selection, and analysis (Rachmadi et al., 2023).

First was data identification, in which verbal and visual data were collected, both obtained through the literature review, observation and interviews. The second stage, data classification, entailed the selection or grouping of data identified according to type and nature. The third stage was data selection, which required setting aside data that were less relevant and did not contribute to meeting the research objectives. The fourth stage involved data analysis in accordance with established theories; it utilized textual and contextual analysis, which is expressed here in written form (Widyo Harsanto & Raras Satuti, 2023).

Findings

Prophet Muhammad SAW urged Muslims to strive to practice the attributes of God as a guide to living a pious life. The Qur'an describes God as having created the universe with wonder and beauty, making the universe a source of joy and pleasure for all. It can also

inspire artists to express its beauty. Qur'an-inspired art testifies to the majesty and power of God, and the creation of such art is an act of worship. Therefore, when a person is affected and moved by the beauty of Islamic-inspired art to reflect the power of God, the Creator, he will follow His commandments, apply them in daily life, and thus, in the process of creating works of art, will apply and use Islamic ethics and aesthetics (Chirzin, 2020; Muthahhari, 2002).

Falah et al. (2016) explained that in Islamic art, ethics and aesthetics merge to form a harmonious unity that reflects both religious and moral principles. In creating works of art, artists are required to uphold the value of *ihsan*, which is a high level of dedication and commitment to achieve perfection in their work. In addition, beauty in art does not only refer to the visual aspect but should also reflect the values of goodness and morality as defined in Islam. Muhammad Rafles (2021) and Redjeki (2022) noted that in creating works of art, artists incorporate visual beauty but also convey deep ethical and moral messages. Islamic art emphasizes goodness, beauty, and submission to Islamic values. Art is considered a spiritual and creative expression that can inspire, teach, and remind viewers of religious and moral values.

Islamic art serves as a platform for spiritual expression, enabling artists to reflect on the religious significance of and reverence for God's creation (Burckhardt, 2009; Shaw, 2019; Wuthnow, 2001). However, when developing artwork, artists must adhere to Islam's strict ethical guidelines, avoiding the creation of images of Prophet Muhammad or elements that contradict religious teachings. Despite these guidelines, artists have space to express themselves personally through their art and present works that reflect their own vision and understanding of Islam (George, 2010).

Aesthetic concepts in Islamic art extensively utilize light (*Nur*), which conveys spiritual enlightenment, often symbolizing the knowledge and presence of God. The concept of space, which reflects emptiness and simplicity, is also used to create works that honor the principles of submission and modesty in Islam. Ultimately, the application of geometry in Islamic art underscores the potential inherent in the universe and highlights the order and structure inherent in God's creation. Thus, Islamic art creates works that integrate ethical values, beauty, spiritual expression, and conceptual elements, such as light, space, and geometry, to produce morally meaningful and profound works of art within the framework of Islamic teachings (Othman, 2018).

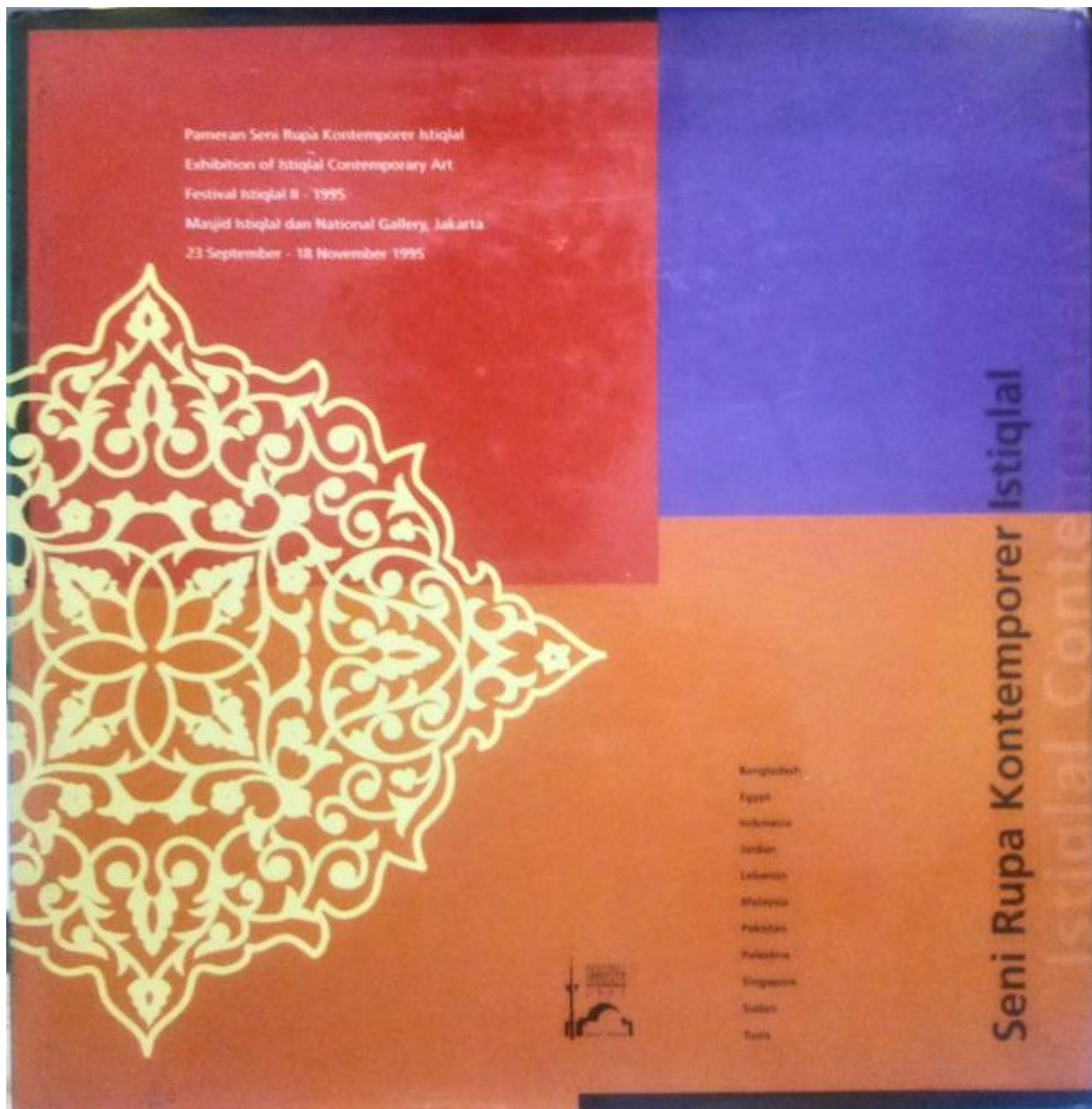
Hooker (2022) explained that the concept of beauty in Islam is familiar in the context of the Prophet Muhammad's saying "God is beautiful and loves beauty" and its counterpart, "God is good and loves goodness." In Islam, "beauty" and "goodness" are two of the "99 names of

God" that Muslims use to describe the attributes and qualities of God, qualities that are also "the guiding principles of Islamic work ethic, piety, and good moral behavior."

The concept of beauty in Islam is often associated with goodness, so a beautiful painting conveys a message of goodness and virtue. Beauty in Islam is reflected in the concept of *Al Jamaal*, a term in Arabic culture that, from a religious and artistic perspective, harmonizes Islamic rules with beauty. The spiritual, ethical, and personal aspects of expression are unified, reflecting Islamic art (Man, 2016). Therefore, when modern art was approached by Muslim artists, they encountered the concept of autonomous art, which is unrelated to external factors. The concept of art for art's sake posits that art exists solely as an expression of aesthetic beauty, free from ethical values, including those related to religion (Daud, 2013). The function of art in the West during the premodern era, which served the church or the palace, after the Enlightenment broke away from the support of the church and the palace; art creation was freed from the values set by the patron, and it could be autonomous (Hujatnikajennong, 2015). The concept of modern art gained prominence among Muslim artists after the West gained dominance through the colonization of Eastern territories. Through modern art education in non-Western countries, modernism became the primary reference for beauty, with all of its influences centered on Western modern art. This condition persisted from the 19th century through to the end of the 20th century Grabar, 2024).

The concept of modern art, which initially hindered the representation of Islamic identity in modern paintings, became apparent at the end of the 1970s with the emergence of modern paintings featuring Islamic themes. Modern art apparently encouraged Muslim artists to show new creativity in depicting Islamic identity. Arabic calligraphy is not only interpreted as an art of beautiful writing but becomes a formal element that can be used in painting. The tendency for Islamic identity to appear in modern paintings intensified in Muslim countries during the 1990s (Naef, 2003). In Indonesia, the Western modern art education that had been delivered since the 1950s produced Muslim artists who were able to display Islamic identity through modern paintings in the 1970s. The tendency to display Islamic identity became stronger, culminating in the holding of art exhibitions at the Istiqlal Festival in 1991 and 1995. The *Islamic Art Exhibition* at the Istiqlal Festival is significant in the development of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, as it demonstrated that Islamic identity can be expressed in contemporary art.

Istiqlal Festival II Exhibition Catalog cover. Source: Istiqlal Festival II Exhibition Catalog (1995). Istiqlal Contemporary Art



Ethical and Aesthetic Aspects

Exhibition of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Painting (1995)

The primary duty of a Muslim is to worship Allah in every aspect of their life; there is no single activity of a Muslim that is not in the context of worship. For any activity to be considered part of worship, it must comply with every rule (sharia) listed in the Qur'an and Hadith. The two primary sources of Islamic law serve as the legal basis for Muslims in their lives (Hooker, 2022). Likewise, a Muslim artist must adhere to Islamic law in their artistic practice. This ethical concept was adapted by the curatorial team of the Istiqlal Festival

exhibition, which made the ethical aspect a limitation in the development of Islamic art. On the other hand, boundlessness in the development of Islamic art is reflected in its characteristics, which provide the possibility of openness, diversity, innovation and responsiveness to various changes of the times.

Based on these ethical and aesthetic aspects, the curatorial team imposed a limitation: Islamic art is a form of art produced by Muslim artists who adhere to the rules of Islam. The form of obedience is reflected in works that align with Islamic values. In Islam, the sources of these values are the Qur'an and Hadith, and many interpretations of the values have equal validity (Hakim et al., 2018; Supriyatno et al., 2021). Thus, a Muslim artist who consistently applies Islamic teachings in his or her life will infuse his or her artwork with Islamic identity. Ethical restrictions do not mean that Muslim artists are limited in their work but rather encourage them to interpret Islamic characteristics and values in an unlimited way in an aesthetic context. The diversity of forms, themes, and styles in the exhibition indicated that Muslim artists could still adhere to Islamic teachings.

Figure 1

Artist A.D. Pirous's calligraphy painting titled Mandate to the Leader at the 1995 Istiqlal II Festival Exhibition. Source: Istiqlal Festival II Exhibition Catalog (1995).



Figure 2

Artist Barli Sasmitawinata's representational painting titled Wukuf di Arafah at the 1995 Istiqlal II Festival Exhibition. Source: Istiqlal Festival II Exhibition Catalog (1995).



Figure 3

Artist Sunaryo's nonrepresentational painting titled Wukuf at the 1995 Istiqlal II Festival Exhibition. Source: Istiqlal Festival II Exhibition Catalog (1995).



Meanwhile, to address the diversity of material and media trends, the curatorial team of the *Exhibition of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Painting (1995)* employed a thematic approach that encompassed calligraphic, representational and nonrepresentational themes. The Arabic calligraphy theme (see Figure 2) featured paintings that present Arabic calligraphy as retellings of verses (words of Allah from the Qur'an) or Hadith, as well as Sufi expressions. Calligraphy is present both independently and in combination with various possibilities, taking into account aesthetic considerations. In representational paintings (see

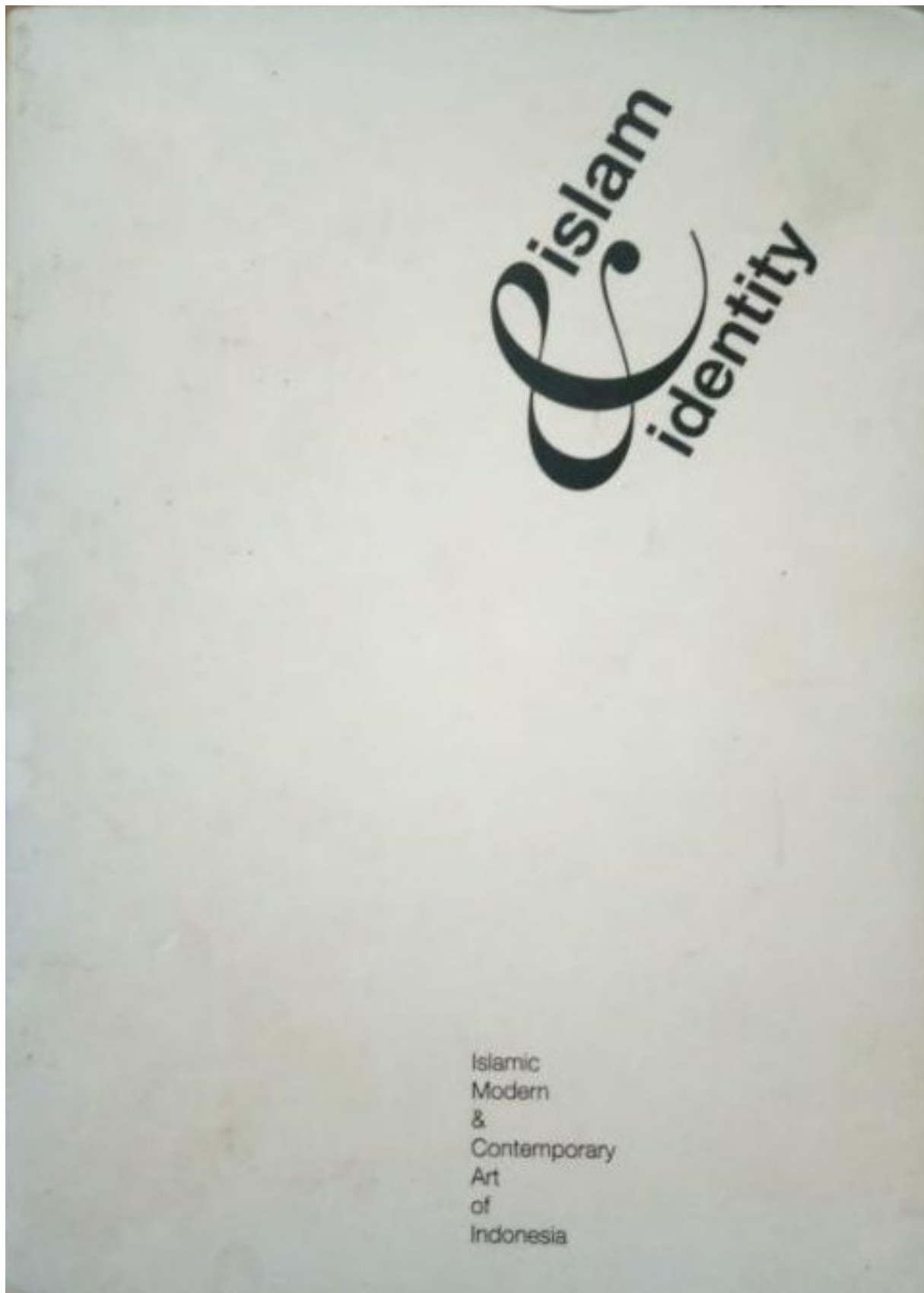
Figure 3), real forms of nature and its animas (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and biomorphic) as well as artificial objects are presented in various situations, conditions, and events, with appearances that serve as a style of expression and various media and techniques. The nonrepresentational theme (see Figure 4) encompassed paintings that do not depict natural forms or their elements. The nonrepresentational works are generally expressions of real forms that undergo a process of deepening meaning content (abstraction) and aesthetic disclosure. The presence of abstract elements can be as symbolic internal expression and completely *mujarad* (abstract).

Pameran Islam & Identity (2009)

In 2009, an exhibition entitled *Islam and Identity: Islamic Modern & Contemporary Art of Indonesia* was held at Bazaar Art I 2009. The curatorial concept of this exhibition was that the exhibited works illustrated the journey of contemporary Islamic painting, from the works of Ahmad Sadali in the 1970s to those of newer artists. The curator broadened the boundaries of Islamic art beyond the values of divinity to include those of social good, culture and other aspects. As was explained by Zaenudin Ramli in the exhibition catalog *Islam and Identity–Islamic Modern and Contemporary Art of Indonesia* (2009), Islamic art encompasses not only forms that contain only aspects of Islamic religiosity but also how Islamic values are represented in works of art. Here, Islamic values are understood as symbolic religious rituals as the identity of a way of life within a specific context. Based on the curator's explanation, the ethical aspect of obedience to Islamic teachings is presented as an identity and a way of life, allowing it to be represented in the work according to the circumstances of the era.

Figure 4

Islam & Identity Exhibition Catalog cover. Source: Islam & Identity Exhibition Catalog (2009).



With reference to the explanation above, this exhibition showcased a diverse range of Islamic artworks. Islam was interpreted in a broader sense associated with the sociopolitical phenomena surrounding it. The development of modern and contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia cannot be separated from the process of Islamization and the cultural growth of Islam in Indonesia. Commenting on the diversity of the works on display, Zaenudin Ramli, the curator of this exhibition, explained that when examining Islamic art, one must move beyond the Orientalist view that limits Islamic art to calligraphy, miniature painting, ceramics, carpets, and various ornamental and geometric designs. Muslim artists can liberate themselves from Western stereotypes and contribute to the emergence of Islamic art in the present context.

This view serves as the basis for interpreting the works in this exhibition, particularly in terms of the thematic tendencies they present. The terms *modern* and *contemporary* attached to the title of the exhibition can be a way of understanding the works on display. Roughly speaking, the works can be divided into two categories based on their thematic tendencies: the first comprises works with calligraphy and the second contains works without calligraphy. The noncalligraphic works on display can be divided into two major groups: representational works, which clearly depict objects, and nonrepresentational works, which do not depict objects that imitate those in nature and are therefore referred to as abstract. Representational works, when viewed based on the objects depicted, can be in the form of figurative works, which depict figures as objects, or nonfigurative works, which are paintings that do not depict figures, either human or other living things.

Figure 6 shows calligraphy in the form of a quote from a verse in the Qur'an as the main object. The work of Ahmad Sadali in Figure 7 is nonrepresentational: it displays melted gold on a wavy texture that gives the impression of contemplation. Ahmad Sadali is known as a modern painter who pioneered the Islamic-themed abstract trend in the 1970s and named his abstract style meditative abstract (Spanjaard, 2018). In representational paintings, two tendencies are evident. The first depicts figures as in Figure 8, which shows two figures: a woman praying and a man in a mirror's reflection. He is photographing her with a cellphone. With this painting, the painter conveys criticism of the phenomenon of piety as an image formed through social media, namely by making worship activity content to present oneself as a religious person (Piliang, 2011). Another type of representation is nonfigurative, such as in Figure 9, which depicts an object synonymous with Islam. The painting depicts the Laotze Mosque, the central place of Islamic worship in Indonesia. This Chinese-style mosque was built by the Chinese Muslim community in Bandung. The painting conveys a message about the diversity of Islamic culture in Indonesia.

Figure 5

*Abay D. Subarna, Transcendental Mihrab Arch (2009), oil on canvas, 200 cm × 110 cm.
Exhibition Catalog: Islam and Identity—Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art (2009).*

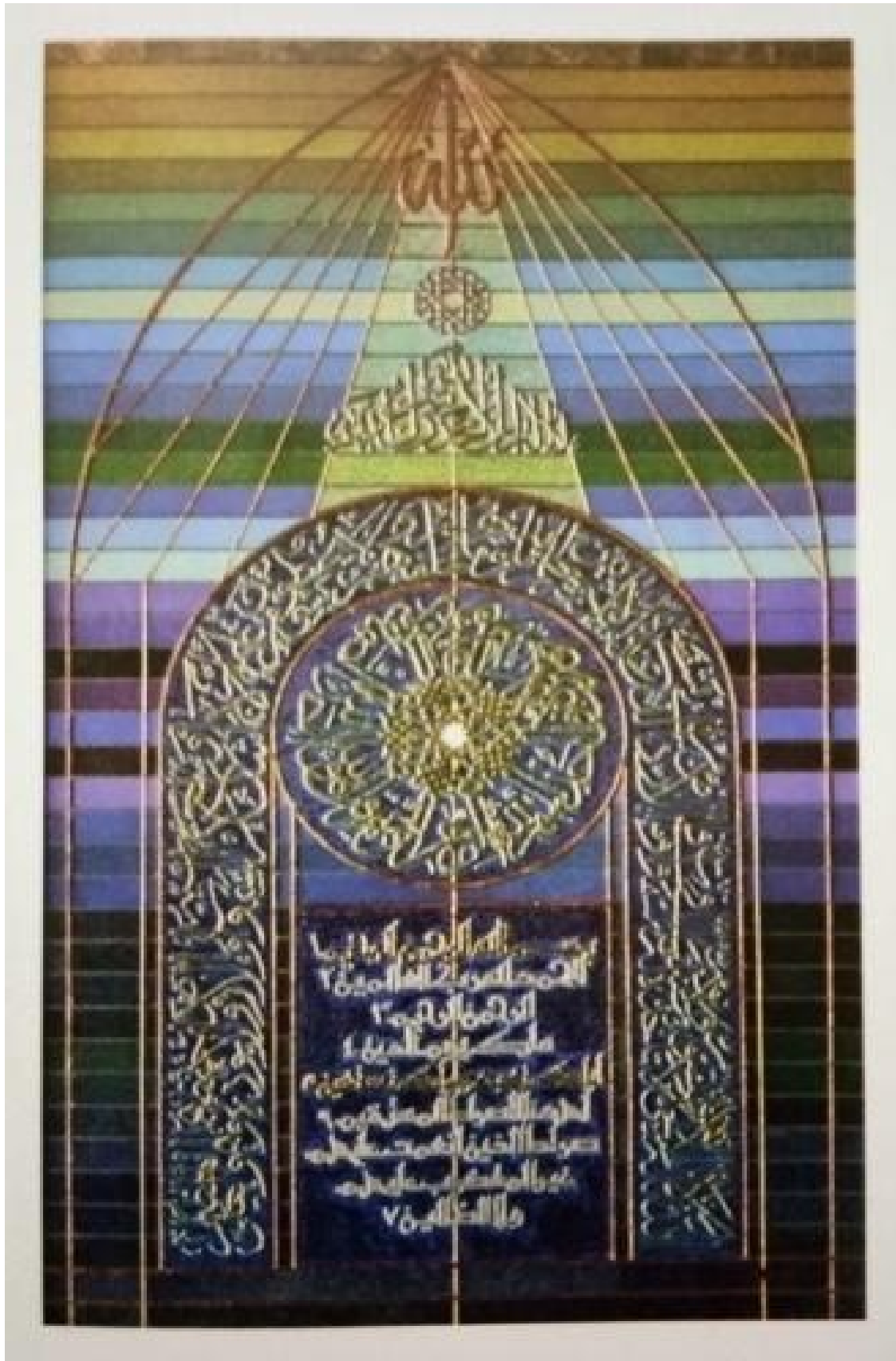


Figure 6

Ahmad Sadali, Gold on a Wrinkled Field (1973), mixed media on canvas. Exhibition Catalog: Islam and Identity-Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art (2009). Sources: Islam & Identity Exhibition Catalog (2009).



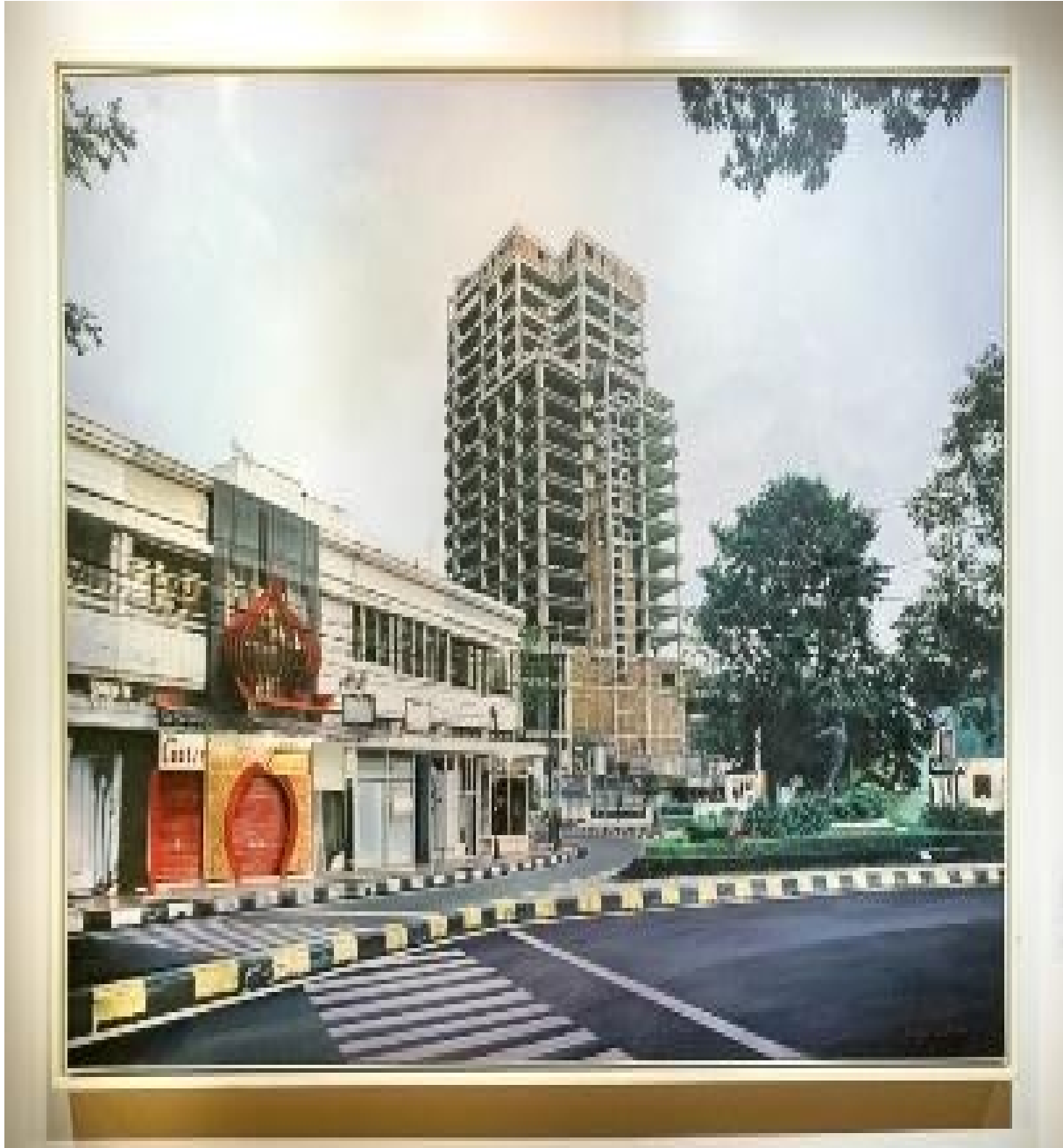
Figure 7

Yogie Ahmad Ginanjar, The Role of Husband & Wife (2009), oil on canvas, 110 cm × 80 cm.
Exhibition Catalog: Islam and Identity—Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art (2009).



Figure 8

Mariam Sofrina, Lautze Mosque (2009), oil on canvas, 100 cm × 130 cm. Exhibition Catalog: Islam and Identity—Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art (2009; Figure 9). Sources: Islam & Identity Exhibition Catalog (2009).



Pameran Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art (2010)

A fascinating exhibition in 2010 was *Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art*, held at Lawangwangi, Bandung. This exhibition featured a diverse range of participants. It encompassed various interpretations of "Islam," which is inextricably linked to the curator's intention to highlight the significant connection between aspects of art creation and matters of faith. The strength of expression in each work is the manifestation of each artist's aesthetic awareness, which then enacts a process of self-development and reflection. The works are diverse, offering a range of interpretations presented through various media. Old characteristics of Islamic art and novelty are united.

The artworks are based on different artistic approaches: in the first, the Qur'an is iconography and an artistic source, in the second, artworks show abstract forms, in the third, artworks use the tendency of form abstraction, and in the fourth, artworks contain narrative and figurative tendencies. The first group of works represents the Qur'an with Arabic calligraphy serving as the main subject. Each artist uses calligraphy as the primary element, indicating the current trend in this style. This is certainly different from the art of calligraphy as a form of beautiful writing, where adherence to rules is the main requirement in judging the beauty of the calligraphy. In these paintings utilizing calligraphy as a source of artistic inspiration, painters have the freedom to explore calligraphic forms in various ways, and legibility is not the primary concern.

In the second group, the spirit of Islam is presented through abstract forms that create an impression of order, tranquility and complexity, which indirectly conveys a spiritual impression. This is similar to what other abstract painters do when using various visual elements to express their inner moods. The third group of works depicts abstractions of forms found in nature, including figurative abstractions. The fourth group comprises works that exhibit both narrative and figurative tendencies. Many consider figurative and narrative works to be forms of artistic expression that diverge from the Islamic tradition. This assumption is related to the prohibition against the depiction of living beings. In this exhibition, works with narrative and figurative tendencies were presented, adhering to the ethical principles outlined in Islamic teachings, so that, in terms of appearance, they do not contravene Islamic law. This narrative depiction is a characteristic of Islamic painting in the classical period, as evident in the miniature paintings of book illustrations.

Figure 9

Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art Exhibition Catalog cover. Source: Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art Exhibition Catalog (2010).

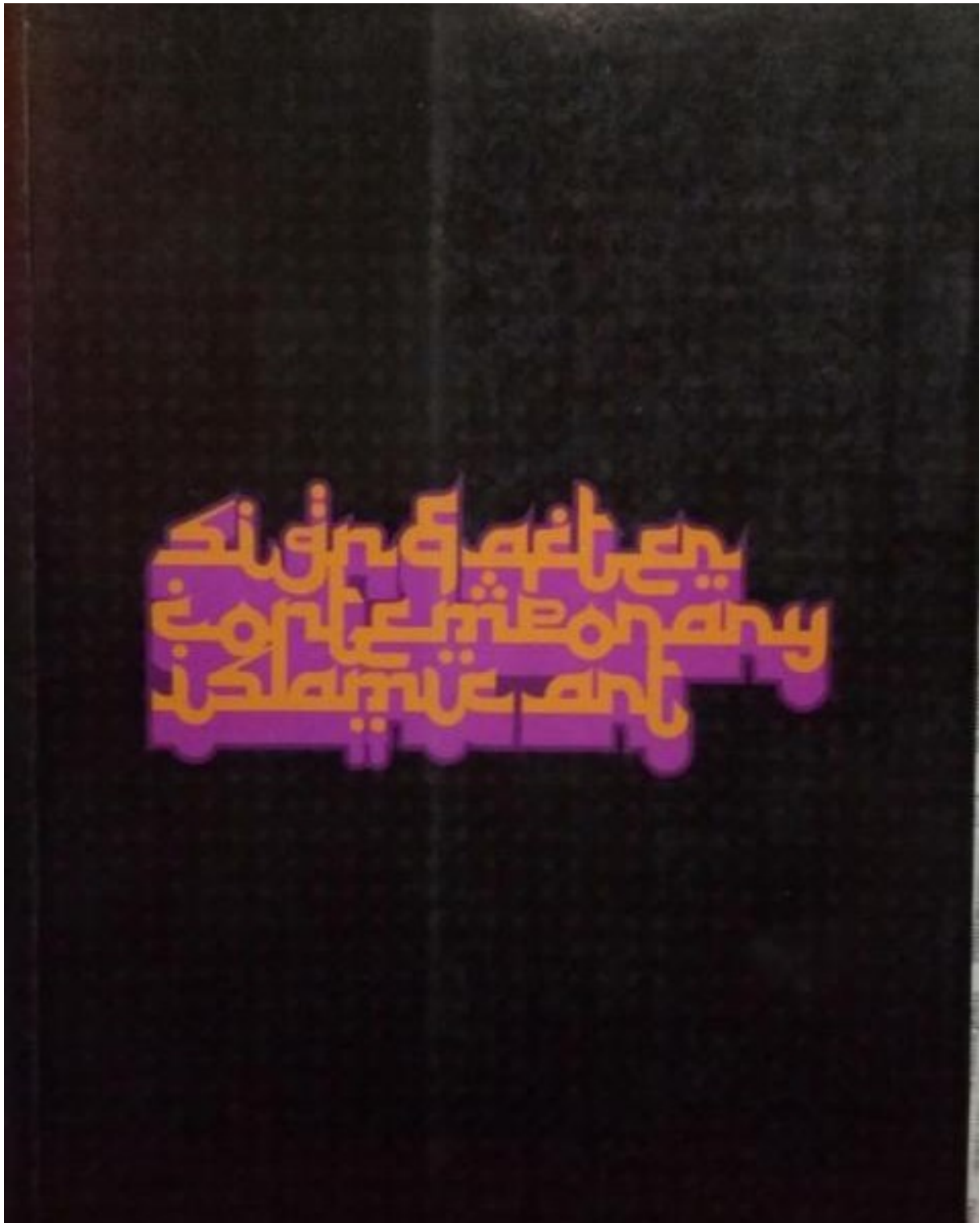
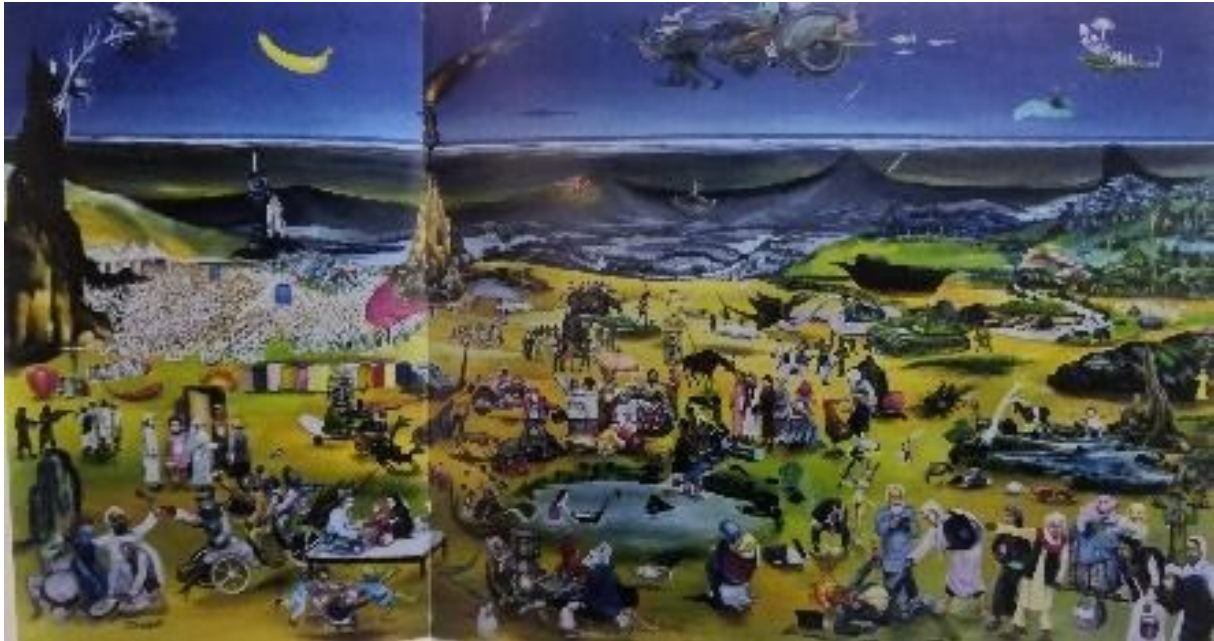


Figure 10

Agus Zimo, Grace for All Nature (2010), oil on canvas, 140 cm × 260 cm. Source: Sign & After Contemporary Islamic Art CatLog (2010).



The categorization of paintings into calligraphy, abstract, or figurative follows that of the exhibition; Figures 5 through 8 are comparable. What distinguishes it from the previous exhibition is the emergence of narrative paintings that present stories (Figure 11). The narrative painting style displayed is similar to Islamic miniature paintings in Persia and India during the golden age of Islam. The adaptation of the miniature style by Agus Zimo shows that painters have the freedom to display styles and take styles according to their wishes even with themes that are adapted to the artist's conditions. The eclectic tendency in contemporary painting turns out to be an opportunity for Muslim painters to represent Islam according to the conditions of their time. This once again proves that Islamic values can be presented without hindering the freedom of artists to create, as long as they obey Islamic rules. The tendency of narrative styles in this exhibition shows a curation method carried out by considering the element of novelty in interpreting the breath of Islam into new visual forms.

Pameran Bayang

Next is an exhibition of contemporary Indonesian Islamic art titled *Bayang* organized by ITB Alumni and the INISAF Foundation at the National Gallery from July 27 to August 14, 2011, curated by Rizki A. Zaelani and A. Rikrik Kusmara. The exhibition featured over 200 works in various forms, including two-dimensional, three-dimensional, installation and digital technology-based pieces. They represent the faces of contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia. Islam is a belief system that maintains a relevant life from the past to the present. The development of Islamic art today can be understood in the context of increasingly visual cultural changes. This shadow exhibition can be said to represent various trends in contemporary Indonesian Islamic art after the Istiqlal Festival.

The curatorial concept of this exhibition was based on the opinion of the prominent scholar Muhammad Qutb, who stated that Islamic art is an expression of the beauty of being and the Islamic perspective on nature, life, and humanity, leading to a perfect union between truth and beauty. Based on this opinion, the ethical and aesthetic aspects serve as the foundation for curating the exhibition. The ethical aspect is reflected in the principles of Islamic law, while the aesthetic aspect is reflected in beauty. A beauty that still prioritizes the element of truth endows the exhibited works with a variety of high aesthetic aspects. However, everything is presented in accordance with the rules of Islamic teachings. Based on Muhammad Quthb's explanation as the basis of curatorial thinking, in order to determine the types of works to be displayed, the curators classified them into three areas of rules, which is a tribute to the illuminationists who give an important role to them: imagination, intuition and imitation in the framework of work creation (Bier, 2017; Blair & Bloom, 2003).

With this curatorial concept, the works were diverse and open to new interpretations of Islam, as represented in them. According to Zaenudin Ramli, the curatorial concept of "shadow" was demonstrated by the artists. Aesthetic awareness encompasses a belief that places the role of artistic expression in the continuity of social and cultural life. In such reflective awareness, the realm of human interests, in which there is a conflicting situation between the issue of "self," which is specific (individual), and universal (shared) values, can be reconciled and experienced as a whole. When examined from the perspective of Islamic ideology, such unification is a necessity, where the highest foundation of aesthetic manifestation and beauty lies in worship and belief in submission to the greatness, glory, and beauty of Allah SWT.

Figure 11

Bayang Exhibition Catalog cover. Source: Bayang Exhibition Catalog (2011).



The curatorial process was nearly identical to that of the *Islam & Identity* exhibition, so there was not much addition to the visual arts of paintings. However, conceptually, the term *Bayang* (shadow) is interpreted as a "reflection" or reflection, which positions paintings as reflections of God's beauty, reflected in various ways by artists. The diversity of themes and objects seems to encapsulate all the artistic tendencies present in previous Islamic art exhibitions. The novelty of the *Bayang* exhibition was more focused on the participation of more invited painters, thus providing a more objective picture of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, which has a diversity that is adaptive to the development of current artistic discourse. Likewise, the issues presented remained related to the sociocultural conditions currently experienced by the Muslim community in Indonesia.

Discussion

The exhibition of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia, which began with the Istiqlal Festival in 1995, laid the groundwork for the curation of subsequent exhibitions. Problems regarding the boundaries of Islamic painting, which still refer to Western perspectives, began to be replaced by a curatorial concept that emphasizes ethical, aesthetic, and contextual aspects. The ethical concept, which refers to the rules outlined in Islamic teachings, serves as the basis for determining whether the exhibited works are in accordance with Islamic principles. When these ethical aspects are fulfilled, the artists have the freedom to interpret Islamic values (Hooker, 2022). The concept of limitations and boundlessness in the Istiqlal Festival offered a new perspective on the curation of Islamic painting. The restriction that Islamic art is art produced by Muslim artists serves as a reference for curators in determining which artists will display works in Islamic art exhibitions. The ethical aspects related to adhering to Islamic teachings were never clearly articulated but became one of the bases for curators of Islamic art exhibitions.

In the Istiqlal Festival exhibition, the ethical aspect was not explicitly stated. However, it was implicitly conveyed through advice on the importance of Islamic values in the creation of artworks. Post-Istiqlal exhibitions did not explicitly state that Islamic painting must follow Islamic rules. The understanding that Islamic painting must conform artistically to the ethical values outlined in Islamic teachings appears to have become an "unwritten rule" for curators when curating Islamic painting. To emphasize that this rule is the basis for determining whether a work has Islamic values or not, curators in some exhibitions display quotations from Islamic scholars or thinkers to support it. This is an interesting phenomenon because the ethical field does not seem to be part of the curator's task in determining the Islamic value of curated works. This situation affects the audience, who still perceive that contemporary Islamic painting lacks a distinctive identity or fails to reflect the Islamic

worldview of the artist. Thus, it is a challenge for curators to emphasize that ethical aspects are an integral part of the contemporary curatorial process of Islamic painting.

If the ethical aspect refers to the realm of limitations, the aesthetic aspect refers to the realm of infinity. In this aspect, artists have complete freedom to interpret Islamic values in the visual elements of the painting. This freedom gives rise to the variety of manifestations, themes, and styles that are prevalent in contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting of the 2000s. Various aesthetic tendencies that emerged in contemporary Indonesian painting in the 2000s became a reference for Muslim artists, so that the works presented are relatively the same styles, as are the themes presented. This is because the boundaries of Islamic painting formulated by curators free artists to interpret Islamic values in various aspects of life. This certainly makes the Islamic characteristics or identity more closely fused with contemporary painting in general, where the idioms used become similar.

The expansion of the interpretation of Islamic values and the freedom to use visual idioms that are not bound by the established idioms of Islamic art have created a new spirit for presenting Islam in different ways (Hana'a et al., 2023). Consequently, Muslim artists are required to present artworks that represent Islamic identity through unique idioms. The search for a unique Islamic identity in each region encourages Muslim artists to revisit the culture and environment in which they live. The spread of Islam to different regions of the world did not make the existing culture the same; what happened was that each region developed Islamic culture according to the distinctive character of the region. Similarly, Muslim artists today draw inspiration from their culture and environment to present an Islamic visual language that is relevant to their time. *Contextualize* is a crucial term to discuss the current trend in contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia (Babaie, 2011).

Contextualization in contemporary Indonesian Islamic painting is not limited to the objects depicted in the paintings but rather emphasizes thematic aspects. Islamic values are interpreted in themes related to spirituality, religiosity, social issues, environmental concerns and various contemporary issues. Thus, contemporary Islamic art not only focuses on artistic issues synonymous with classical Islamic art but also gives rise to a new trend: examining various social issues from the perspective of Islamic values.

Ethics and aesthetics have become an interesting topic in relation to Islamic art and a hotly debated one in the West, as evidenced by several articles discussing it (Carroll, 2010; Song, 2023; Tanner, 2003). The issue of ethics and aesthetics has been a constant topic since the emergence of postmodernism in the mid-20th century. This paved the way for the rebirth of the concept of the unity of beauty (aesthetics) and moral goodness (ethics), as echoed by Kant's followers, who argue that beauty is a symbol of morality (Schellekens, 2010).

Morality, the measure of good and evil, is determined by many aspects, such as culture and religion, although there is a universal humanitarian morality. Thus, ethical values derived from religious teachings, including Islam, can show how beauty in art is closely related to moral principles and goodness. Ethical values based on the rules contained in Islamic teachings are an inseparable part of beauty itself. Therefore, curating requires an understanding of the rules and laws related to them. Likewise, the legal basis that governs it states that painting is a permissible activity as long as it does not violate the law. The value of beauty is ultimately determined by adherence to the rules. Failure to comply with the rules automatically renders the beauty depicted in the painting worthless and even degrading (Nasr, 1993). This is evident in the works exhibited in the five sample exhibitions; none of the works depict prohibited female body parts (*aurat*), nor are there any depictions that suggest worship or use of symbols that suggest worship. Meanwhile, the prohibition against depicting living creatures is interpreted within the contemporary context, namely that it is not intended to worship or compete with God's creation. This is conveyed through figurative paintings depicting activities related to religious rituals so that the viewer's focus is not on the objects depicted but on the religious activities being performed.

Conclusion

The ethical and aesthetic issues raised in this study illustrate a phenomenon in countries that still firmly uphold a culture based on a particular religious teaching. Art cannot be separated from life, which in them is based on religious teachings; thus, art is tied to the religious beliefs of the community. The good and bad of a work of art are viewed not only from an aesthetic perspective but also from the ethical or moral aspects existing in society. The concept of art that frees it from religious influences is not universally applicable; modernity does not hinder Muslim artists from expressing their identity in modern paintings. Adherence to religious rules indirectly imposes ethical boundaries on artists, ensuring that the beauty displayed remains aligned with religious values. Thus, for Muslim artists, this form of obedience demonstrates Islamic identity.

The development of contemporary Islamic painting in Indonesia in the 2000s demonstrates a shift in Muslim artists' interpretation of Islamic values. Their observations of the sociocultural phenomena around them inspired them to develop themes related to Islam. The establishment of Islamic study centers and Islamic educational institutions, and the emergence of a growing number of young Islamic intellectuals in the 2000s, including young preachers, gave Muslim artists a new awareness to represent Islam in their works. Islamic painting is no longer limited to calligraphy, arabesques, or geometric shapes; it has expanded to encompass all stylistic, technical, and thematic trends in contemporary Indonesian art. This can be seen in exhibitions with "contemporary Islamic painting" in the

titles. On the one hand, the phenomenon marked the rise of a new style of Islamic painting. On the other, it marked the end of Islamic painting, as the Classical Islamic form of identity was no longer the basis for the creation of contemporary Islamic painting. In this situation, the role of the curator became more explicit in describing the ethical aspects of contemporary Islamic painting. Meanwhile, aesthetic aspects can be developed freely, but they remain subject to these ethical aspects. The concepts of goodness and beauty are the foundation for the development of contemporary Islamic painting, which will undoubtedly continue to evolve with the times. However, goodness and beauty will remain the foundation of every work of Islamic painting.

The curatorial method is crucial in organizing an exhibition showcasing contemporary Islamic painting. Ethical rules based on the Qur'an and Hadith can be interpreted both textually and contextually, depending on the curator's orientation and prevailing sociocultural conditions. This is evident in the paintings in the exhibitions that served as the object of research; none of them depict objects that violate Islamic values, such as depictions of nudity or symbols associated with the cult of beings other than God. Thus, the distinctive Islamic character of paintings is no longer confined to the forms or icons of past Islamic art but rather emphasizes Islamic values that can be interpreted in forms that reflect the spirit of the times. The diverse sociocultural conditions of Islamic societies are a primary consideration in curating, and curators must be sensitive to them. Misunderstanding sociocultural situations and conditions can have fatal consequences, including rejection, which may lead to legal action for perceived religious insults. This can occur because some Muslim communities still understand rules rigidly, which leaves no room for contextual interpretation.

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