



SENI DALAM ISLAM: KEINDAHAN SEBAGAI UNDANGAN – STUDI FILOSOFIS DAN SOSIOLOGIS TENTANG SENI ISLAM SEBAGAI BENTUK DA'WAH DALAM MASYARAKAT KONTEMPORER

ART IN ISLAM: BEAUTY AS INVITATION – A PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF ISLAMIC ART AS A FORM OF DA'WAH IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62567/ijis.v2i1.1920>

Abstract

Attraction to the beauty, pattern and symbolism of Islamic Art can draw observers to considerations of the divine. Beauty can serve to reflect the communication of Islam. This study explores the philosophical concepts of *tawhīd*, or *ihsān* and *fiṭrah* and the sociological concepts of reception and Cultural Translation to posit Islamic Art as the Islamic pedagogy of moral philosophy of art, a pedagogy of Islamic artistic inter-religious dialogue. Using Islamic calligraphy, mosque architecture and digital art as evidencebased qualitative research, the study documents the fit of the proposition and the aesthetic joys of art in beauty as a lingua franca of faith inter-culture. The study documents the experience of the ethics of Islamic Art as compassion in voiceless *da'wah*. The aesthetic of Islamic Art becomes the moral pedagogy of spiritual compassion and the *da'wah* aesthetic of work converted to the experience of beauty. The study proposes the lived experience of sincerity as beauty, unrivaled, is one of the most persuasive communications of Islam in the modern world in the compassionate and loving distance of the ethical.

Keywords : *Islam, da'wah, contemporary.*

Abstrak

Ketertarikan pada keindahan, pola, dan simbolisme Seni Islam dapat menarik perhatian pengamat untuk mempertimbangkan hal-hal yang bersifat ilahi. Keindahan dapat berfungsi untuk mencerminkan komunikasi Islam. Studi ini mengeksplorasi konsep filosofis *tawhīd*, atau *ihsān* dan *fiṭrah* serta konsep sosiologis penerimaan dan Terjemahan Budaya untuk mengusulkan Seni Islam sebagai pedagogi Islam dari filosofi moral seni, sebuah pedagogi dialog antaragama seni Islam. Menggunakan kaligrafi Islam, arsitektur masjid, dan seni digital sebagai penelitian kualitatif berbasis bukti, studi ini mendokumentasikan kesesuaian proposisi dan kegembiraan estetika seni dalam keindahan sebagai lingua franca budaya antar iman. Studi ini mendokumentasikan pengalaman etika Seni Islam sebagai belas kasih dalam *da'wah* tanpa suara. Estetika Seni Islam menjadi pedagogi moral dari belas kasih



spiritual dan estetika da'wah dari karya yang diubah menjadi pengalaman keindahan. Studi ini mengusulkan pengalaman hidup dari ketulusan sebagai keindahan, yang tiada bandingnya, adalah salah satu komunikasi Islam yang paling persuasif di dunia modern dalam jarak etis yang penuh kasih dan cinta.

Kata Kunci : islam, dakwah, kontemporer.

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Background and Rationale

Da'wah, a term denoting the call toward the understanding of Islam, has, throughout history, been manifested in different ways, be it through words, virtues, or actions. However, in the cosmopolitan Islamic tradition, the beauty (*jamāl*) of this call is often placed in an unusual, and frequently underestimated, position. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) said in a ḥadīth, "Indeed, God is beautiful and loves beauty" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 91). Here, beauty is not an ornament, but rather it is a portal of knowledge to the divine. Islamic civilization, therefore, nurtured anti-anthropomorphic art forms, such as, architecture, calligraphy, arabesque, poetry, and music, which convey antianthropomorphic theology. These unified forms of art and architecture, which act out *tawḥīd*, communicate unity and transcendence through the senses.

In modern-day pluralistic societies, where outright proselytization is often seen as confrontational and may provoke tension, Islamic art as da'wah provides a convenient form of outreach. Islamic art and aesthetic, particularly through Qur'anic calligraphy, invites the contemplation and thoughtful Islamic reflection of art and opens the doors to cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. The central question this paper seeks to explore is how and in what ways beauty invites—philosophically as the revelation of divine reality, and sociologically as a mediation of Muslim identity and ethical values.

b. Research Problem

Although numerous studies examine the form and symbolism of Islamic art (Nasr, 1987; Burckhardt, 1976) and the integration of aesthetic philosophy with empirical sociology, there remains a gap wherein the function of art as da'wah is addressed. Today's discourse tends to focus on the two extremes of the spectrum. On one hand, we have the reading of the art as a sacred language, and on the other, the focus shifts to the interpretation of the art as culture. This study posits that beauty, as a paradox, is both social and ontological; it sustains order in the universe and fosters relationships among people.

c. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of philosophy and sociology to determine how da'wah is embodied and communicated as a religious art form. The objectives that guide this study include:

- 1) Analyzing the Islamic philosophical tenets of beauty, unity, and ethical intention.
- 2) Appraising the socio-circulation of Islamic art and the ways in which it is seen and re-interpreted in diverse societies.



- 3) Appraising artistic case studies that have the capacity to invite participation in both the physical and electronic space.
- 4) To establish a conceptual framework describing the interrelationship of jamāl (beauty), maʿnā (meaning), and daʿwah (invitation).

d. Research Questions

- 1) How do tawhīd, ihsān, and fiṭrah characterize beauty as a form of accessing the divine truth?
- 2) In what other ways does Islamic art address a varied audience with its moral and spiritual teachings, and does not engage in direct proselytization?
- 3) What are the sociological factors that affect the reception of Islamic art in the multicultural digital sphere?
- 4) What can the aesthetics of daʿwah teach us about contemporary intercultural dialogue?

e. Significance of the Study

Philosophically, the study recaptures the notion of aesthetics as a form of epistemology—the contemplation of Beauty as a means of knowing God. Sociologically, it adds to our understanding of the public role of religion in a secular and media-saturated environment. In practical terms, it provides an ethical framework for creative daʿwah to artists, educators, and institutions that bypasses linguistic and cultural boundaries. The study situates Islamic art as a form of soft spiritual power that draws on the proposition that beauty can foster faith, thereby nurturing empathy and coexistence.

f. Scope and Limitations

The primary focus of this analysis of injunctions in Islamic cosmology is the study of art and its derivative forms of ḥifẓ calligraphy, architecture of mosques of the Islamic tradition, and some digital works during the period 2000–2025. This is not an attempt at a full arthistorical survey but a conceptual and interpretive insight. Language and cultural barriers of some Arabic and Persian literature, aesthetic bias of the researcher, and qualitative vs. quantitative focus limiting statistical generalizability also pose some limitations.

g. Structure of the Paper

After the introduction is the literature review, which integrates primary and secondary literature from the Islamic tradition and integrates modern literature on daʿwah. Next, we present the framework of the study, which includes the metaphysics and sociology that steer the analysis. The next part is on the methodologies utilized and how we obtained data for the study. The analysis and discussion of the study are presented by case studies, and the final part is a conclusion that synthesizes the analysis and provides recommendations and insights for practice and research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Islamic Conceptions of Beauty and Knowledge

Enjoyment of beauty in art has always been seen within Islamic civilizations as one of the many manifestations of beauty within the Divine truth. The Qur'an refers to the physical world as āyāt—manifestations in the created world that point to the Creator (Q 3:190–191).



Medieval Muslim philosophers and mystics viewed these manifestations as signs of *tawhīd*, the beauty of unity within the apparently plural. To Al-Ghazālī (1980), beauty has the capacity to evoke and inspire the *maḥabbah* (love) and transport the soul from the plane of the merely sensate to the contemplation of the supra-sensible. To him, the perception of beauty and proportionate harmony becomes a way of knowing, one that stimulates and directs the mind to God.

In a similar manner, Ibn ‘Arabī (1980) has also developed an ontology of artistic imagination in which he proposes that the imaginative faculty of a human being, when polished of imperfections, becomes a *barzakh*, a perfect piece of art that connects the seen with the unseen. This piece of art, in his opinion, does not create meaning. The piece of art merely mediates the meaning the artist has perceived from the attributes of the Divine, thereby unifying human creativity with divine imagination. In his metaphysics of art, Nasr (1987) interprets authentic Islamic artworks as a "remembrance in form", a *ṭahzīl* of *tawhīd* manifested in spatial, rhythmic, and proportionate calligraphy.

Comparison with Western secular aesthetics helps us understand Islamic aesthetics more thoroughly. Unlike Western scholars who, after the Enlightenment, began to dissociate beauty from morality, Islamic scholars have integrated them. For Islamic scholars, doing beauty, or simply, doing beautiful things, is an act of worship. The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel associates *iḥsān* with faith, or *īmān*, and practice, or *islām*, thereby indicating that moral and artistic excellence comes from the same virtue. Burckhardt (1976) points out that Islamic art is not about imitating nature, but about revealing the principles that it is founded on. The principles of abstraction, symmetry, and repetition all aim to showcase the infinity and unity of the God in a piece of art.

b. Qur’anic and Prophetic Aesthetics

The textual beauty of the Qur’an is indeed a miracle. The reading of the text is an aesthetic and linguistic act of worship, with the rhythm and eloquence of the word painting beautiful imagery. It is this combination of stylistic and rhetorical skill that Qur’an employs that Evokes (Guides) the *da‘wah*. This also accounts for the aesthetic sensibility of the early Muslims who extended the Qur’an’s aesthetics into various forms of visual and architectural art, albeit, through a non-figurative approach. The incorporation of calligraphy in architecture, along with the strategic manipulation of light and space to foster a peaceful atmosphere, served to both as a visual art devotion of sacred text and a seamless integration of the various forms of architecture.

He describes the transition as an “aniconic” approach toward ornamental discourse (Grabar, 1992). The arabesque, as an example, conveys the notion of teaching through form rather than story. It illustrates the idea of an infinite pattern, teaching the lesson of unity. The Qur’an’s inscriptions on walls and domes aid in structured remembrance, (*dhikr*) and provide a lesson (mnemonic & pedagogical). Additionally, Necipoğlu (1995) mentions the congruence of the Islamic geometric design with the divine order of creation, and thus the design provides an experience of beauty on both an intellectual and spiritual level. The design provides reflection without force through beauty as a *da‘wah*.



c. The Function of Art as Da‘wah

The scope of da‘wah as an “invitation to faith” has particularly involved oral preaching, ethical behavior, and institutional representation. A few classical scholars, however, recognized the role of aesthetic charm in persuasion as part of da‘wah bi-l-ḥāl (invitation through one’s state or example). In the Qur’an, one is commanded to “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching” (16:125). The term ḥusn (beauty) implies is of both an ethical dimension and an aesthetic essence. Da‘wah bi-l-ḥusn, as AlQaradawi (1999) suggests, is an act encompassing virtue, compassion, and graceful expression.

In recent years, Sardar (2006) and Esack (1997) have furthered this discussion regarding the potential for cultural creation and production. These scholars state that Islamic art expresses, through the written and visual, principles of justice, compassion, and the sacred dignity of life. As such, art has the potential to foster conversations (and not solely evangelization) to address topics such as religion, spirituality, and faith through the mediums of exhibitions, movies, and digital animations of artistic works. Dabashi (2005) has described this as the Islamic “aesthetics of presence”—the fact that art, in its many forms and expressions, speaks and defends the uniqueness of the Muslim self in the cultural marketplace and challenges the dominant narrative through the visual and not through argumentation.

This perspective has been embraced by many Contemporary Islamic art movements in Europe and the Middle East. Many museums such as the Louvre Islamic Gallery and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha have moved beyond the collection of artifacts as heritage and focus on the curations as living testimonies of the artifact’s heritage and the spiritual value of the artifacts. Both the museums and the public engagement programs focus on the exhibitions as facilitative instruments to foster dialogue and understanding of the topic and align with the objectives of da‘wah as invitation to understanding through wisdom and beauty.

d. Philosophical Analyses of Beauty as an Invitation

In the philosophy of religion, beauty is most often regarded as a kind of revelation. In the Islamic tradition, this began before Kantian aesthetics. According to Al-Farabi 1985, music and poetry nurture virtue in the soul, and Ibn Sina associates the enjoyment of beauty with the peace of intellect. Both regarded art as riādah nafsīyyah. Al Ghazali synthesized these ideas when he stated that beauty is associated with the love of God and that “Whoever loves beauty (God) loves the Creator of beauty” *Iḥyā’*, bk. 35. Therefore, beauty itself performs da‘wah, directing love from the creation to the Creator.

There is a logic applied to modern thinking that Nasr 1987 is suggesting when he states that Islamic art “invites by reminding”; that is, each adornment in art is a reminder of the ontological order of reality. Burckhardt too has described sacred art as theophany in form, whereby seeing the art is to perceive divine order. Such sacred art transforms a mere celebration of the aesthetic into active spiritual participation. From this angle, beauty is not just a subjective feeling of pleasure but calls the person to the truth.

This that is founded upon phenomenological aesthetics resembled Christianity but differs when it comes to particulars. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not judge beauty by palate but by



truth. Art is only valid when it illustrates tawhīd. Authenticity is measured based on the ethical discipline and intention (niyyah) of the artist. Therefore, the philosophical exploration of Islamic art must consider beauty to be epistemological, ethical, and devotional—a triadic structure of knowledge (‘ilm) and practice (‘amal) and its virtue (ihsān).

e. Sociological Perspectives on Art, Religion, and Society

From a sociological view, art circulates, is produced, and is received. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) viewed art as a “field” enjoying a form of capital and habitus. In societies of the Muslim faith, this field integrates with public morality and religious authority. There is a negotiation between modernity and piety, authenticity and market demand for the artist. Instead of fixed doctrines, Talal Asad (2003) conceptualizes such negotiation using the term discursive tradition: Islam encounters and embodies practices and interpretative actions. Therefore, Islamic art is not a static heritage that is preserved but a discourse that is ongoing; a lived da‘wah that is performed and enacted through the audience and the form.

Casanova (1994) and Taylor (2007) investigate the reemergence of religion in the public domain in post-secular conditions. These perspectives elucidate the ways Islamic aesthetics function as “public religion” in exhibitions, religious structures, and the internet. Instead of withdrawing into privatized spirituality, faith finds expression culturally through art. Hall (1997) discusses representation as relational, and the audience as “decoders” of the artwork in ways that reflect their social location. Therefore, Islamic art as da‘wah is contingent on audience literacy: the ability of the spectator to identify the symbols as religious, cultural, or universal.

There is empirical evidence that supports this assertion. In Dabashi (2005), the Iranian cinema is documented as using allegory and restraint in order to depict ethics on the Islamic and universal art audience. Shabout (2013) speaks of Arab modernists as incorporating calligraphic patterns in order to legitimize their identity while avoiding direct religious references. These artistic creations da‘wah bi-l-ḥāl through their kindness and ethical complexity. In diaspora, Islamic art displays encourage cross cultural empathy, particularly if it is described as aesthetic rather than religious (Anderson, 2018).

f. Islamic Architecture and Spatial Aesthetics

Of all Islamic art forms, architecture has stood the test of time the most. Mosques, madrasahs, and public infrastructure fountains are spiritual and theological works in the form of buildings. Nasr (1987) describes the design of mosques as “frozen music” because of the harmony between the geometry, the light, and the sounds. The dome, representing the vaults of heaven, and the mihrab, which directs the audience towards the intended direction (God). According to Frishman and Khan (1994), the architecture of mosques teaches the unity of worship in rhythm and proportion, and thus the da‘wah is in architectural form as unity of worship is in guidance.

Modern reinterpretations, such as the Cambridge Central Mosque (UK, 2019), are more engaging to contemporary audiences while still maintaining function. They integrate ecological sustainability and Islamic architecture. Mangera (2020) points out such places are, and in this



sense they are able to communicate the Islamic values of balance, humility, and stewardship, especially to non-Muslims and without any verbal guidance. The mosque's architectural beauty encourages educational sociological pedagogical environments created by designed da'wah. These sociological phenomena can be described as soft da'wah, which describes persuasion through the environment and the presence of the people, without any verbal guidance.

g. Calligraphy and Visual Dhikr

Calligraphy is the only art form in Islam that directly embodies the transcription of revelation. To copy the Qur'an is to write a sacred text and is thereby an act of devotion and communication. Calligraphy is art that retains the visual and still maintains the oral sanctity of the word (George, 2010). The repetitive rhythmic nature of the letters can produce a sense of dhikr. Contemporary calligraphers such as Ahmed Moustafa and Zakariya Mohamed have had their art showcased in many exhibitions, and they have an audience who appreciate the Qur'an in verse form before they appreciate it in prose.

Ali (2019) explains that even people who do not speak Arabic experience a sense of Islamic calligraphy as visually 'peaceful' and harmonious' (p. 112). Unfamiliar Arabic, in every such case, involves a sense of Islamic calligraphy as visually 'peaceful' and 'harmonious'. Such responses resonate with Islamic teaching that the heart, the qibla, transcends the intellect regarding truth perception. Calligraphy remains a metaphoric vessel of the Qur'an 's grace or mercy (rahmah) since it is art and embodies a form of visual communication and beauty.

h. Contemporary Media and Digital Da'wah

In the technological age, Islamic, film photo, and digital design have been fused. Eickelman and Anderson (2003) observe that Muslims increasingly access and interact with their faith through diverse media. A new wave of digital artists access religious motifs to promote charitable practices, ethical lifestyles and mindfulness. This is illustrated as 'networked religion' (Campbell 2012) where spiritual community is mediated through aesthetics.

The dissemination of digital calligraphy animations, Islamic architectural photography, and faith-centered short films as viral media contributes to the increasing visibility of the Islamic presence in global culture. Sociologically, these forms shift the understandings of da'wah as top-down preaching to forms of participatory culture. However, Bunt (2018) cautions that visibility through digital media worsens the tendency to commodify the spirituality of the media through branding sacred symbols. The challenge, then, becomes one of retaining niyyah in the digital da'wah. This problem of retaining niyyah constitutes the philosophical problem of the classical adage, that form must serve meaning, otherwise neglecting the problem leads to idolatry of the form.

Not all scholars have unqualified faith in the digital da'wah. Gruber (2010) warns that with the excessive aestheticization of the digital da'wah, there might be a tendency to ignore doctrinal aspects, especially with Islam, that might just be reduced to a style. Likewise, Shabout (2013) interrogates whether the state-sponsored "Islamic Art" exhibitions contribute to the



spirituality of the culture rather than just to cultural diplomacy. The critiques highlight the sociological risk of using beauty in an instrumental manner for tourism or political gain. In an Islamic ethical system, when Art, beauty, and spirituality are introduced as a spectacle rather than as remembrance, the system is left with an empty shell and loses authenticity.

Nevertheless, Nasr argues that authentic artistic forms, albeit diluted in their spiritual message, can still awaken a latent *fiṭrah*. The intention of the artist, and the way the artworks are curated, is instrumental in preserving the Freedom of Beauty. When artistic beauty is presented as a sign of divine mercy, artistic beauty provides the essence of *da'wah* - to invite without compulsion, and to illuminate without controversy.

i. Synthesis: Bridging Philosophy and Sociology

From this literature, we can draw out at least two points that inform the rest of this study. Philosophically, Islamic art reveals some of the metaphysical truth that beauty is an order of the divine and invites one to contemplation. Sociologically, art exists in the sphere of human systems of meaning, identity and power. To understand art as *da'wah*, one must consider the two together. Beauty alone does not convert — it is that the soul is prepared, and in social context, that recognition is empathy, respect, or transformation.

Thus, this study situates Islamic art in an integrated framework:

- ✓ Metaphysical axis: *tawḥīd*, *iḥsān*, *fiṭrah* as meaning
- ✓ Social axis: production, mediation, reception as communication
- ✓ Ethical axis: *ikhḷāṣ* for consistency between harmony of form and purpose.

Seeing art as simultaneously revelation and relation, the research helps advance an understanding of beauty as invitation — which may be the most important thing achieved in this work and the culmination of bridging philosophy and sociology, faith and society.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a. The Integration of Islamic Metaphysics and Social Theory

This research incorporates Islamic metaphysics of beauty with the sociological axioms of art and communication. Islamic metaphysics considers reality to be hierarchically ordered in being and that all forms emanate from and return to the divine in *tawḥīd*. *Jamāl* (beauty) is not superficial; it reveals deeper ontological truth. In contrast to this, sociology construes art as a social process that is situated in systems of meaning, power, and identity. The juxtaposition of these viewpoints enables the scholar to view Islamic art as both revelation and relation, a spiritual reality engaging with the social.

This integrated approach builds from Nasr (1987) stating that sacred art is “the crystallization of divine truth in the world of forms,” as well as Asad (2003) and Bourdieu’s (1993) caution that a form is never innocent, as it always moves within a network of discourse and institutions. Thus, the performance of *da'wah* in art is principally predicated on the metaphysical authenticity of the form, as well as the social context in which it is situated. Beauty is the invitation to the heart; society is the medium in which that invitation is heard.



b. Philosophical Axis: Tawḥīd, Iḥsān, and Fiṭrah

In relation to the individual, the philosophical axis situates the research in three interrelated Islamic concepts:

1) Tawḥīd (Divine Unity).

All beauty comes from God and only God. This is confirmed by the Qur'an : "He who perfected everything He created." (Q 32:7). Beauty and proportion in art are reflections of this perfection. An artist reflects this beauty when they organize forms into a balanced geometry and rhythmic script. This is like the divine act of transforming chaos into order.

2) Iḥsān (Excellence / Spiritual beauty)

The Prophet ﷺ described iḥsān when he said, "to worship God as if you see Him." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1: 1). With regards to art, craftsmanship guided by sincerity (ikhhlāṣ) is seen as iḥsān. This principle elevates artistic production into a form of worship — devotion through art.

3) Fiṭrah (Innate Disposition)

To beauty and truth, humans are programmed to have a unique receptiveness. The Qur'an says, "The fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created humankind" (Q 30:30). Islamic art, in its authenticity, is the beauty that offers da'wah as it activates this innate response. The underlying principles offer an ontological foundation: beauty is unity, excellence is sincerity, and a response from human nature is to both.

c. Sociological Axis: Field, Discourse and Reception

The Social Axis draws concepts from Bourdieu (1993), Asad (2003), and Hall (1997). It seeks to understand the social structure in which Islamic art operates.

Bourdieu's Field Theory. Artistic works are created in a specific context which includes cultural capital, structures, and power relations. The same piece of calligraphy may be seen as an expression of faith in a mosque, a piece of heritage in a museum, or a design in a fashion studio. Knowing each context tells how the meanings can be varied and how the da'wah potential can be either maximized or minimized.

Asad's Discursive Tradition. Islam endures through the interpretive acts which transform and recreate its symbols. This living tradition also includes the artists and the curators as well as the viewers. In this sense, every piece of artwork is an act of interpretation – a dialogue that takes place between the revelation and the present moment.

Hall's Reception and Representation. The meaning is not solely created in the act of production. It is also created in the acts of audience. Depending on the culture, a nonMuslim audience may interpret abstraction in a piece of art which a Muslim audience may interpret as remembrance (dhikr). The effective da'wah in art depends on the cultural understanding of the semiotic elements in the work.

d. The Ethical Axis: Substantive Intention And Authenticity

This ethical portal connects the metaphysical and the sociological through niyyah (intention). Without genuine intent, beauty has the chance of becoming a spectacle. AlGhazālī has forewarned that the art of one who is devoted is a vanity. What this means empirically is to consider whether the artists and the institutions are framing their works consciously, not as



service (khidmah) and remembrance; and that is, whether they frame it through the lens of commodification. This ethical reflexivity is what preserves the integrity of art as da'wah.

4. METHODOLOGY

a. Research Design

This study embraces a qualitative comparative case study design. It is not the purpose of this design to generalize statistically, but to achieve a deeper and richer contextual understanding of how beauty communicates faith through art in Islam. The three cases are selected to represent different modes of expression:

1. Calligraphy (visual text),
2. Mosque architecture (spatial form), and
- 2) Digital/film art (media representation).
- 3) The study explores various sites where da'wah through aesthetics spreads.

b. Research Methodology

An interpretivist paradigm guides the methodology. Rather than focusing on measurement, the methodology concerns itself with meaning. The researcher serves in the role of an interpreter in the scope of this methodology while incorporating textual (i.e. philosophical) and contextual (i.e. sociological) evidence. The methodology involves three methods that complement each other:

- 1) Visual-semiotic analysis focuses on the artworks and the architecture.
- 2) Discourse analysis with a special focus on the texts of the exhibitions, social media posts, public comments.
- 3) Mini-ethnography and interviews with artists, curators, and the exhibition attendees to capture the lived experience.
- 4) The approach employs triangulation to provide philosophical and empirical contributions.

c. Sampling Strategy

With reference to purposive sampling, the cases chosen illustrate varied cultural contexts and convenience of analysis.

- 1) Case 1: Calligraphy – A travelling exhibition like “Letters of Light” (Qatar, 2023) with Qur’anic calligraphers from different regions.
- 2) Case 2: Architecture – The Cambridge Central Mosque (UK, 2019) celebrated for its ecological architecture and interfaith collaboration.
- 3) Case 3: Digital Media – A YouTube short-film series or Instagram collective on the theme of Islamic mindfulness (e.g. “Art of Iḥsān” initiative).
- 4) These cases illustrate traditional, institutional, and virtual contexts in that order.

d. Data Collection Procedures

1) Document and Visual Analysis:

The geometric arrangement, script type, lighting, and symbolism of photographs, blueprints, exhibition catalogues, and digital posts are to be examined.



2) Notes taken through observation:

In cases of architecture or exhibits, observers not participating in the event note visitor circulation, exhibition attendees total body posture, and the impact of the environment on visitors (serenity, awe, and level of contemplation).

3) Presentation of the findings of the semi-structured interviews:

In each case, there are approximately 10–15 audio-recorded artists, curators, and visitors who were asked the following open-ended questions, which are transcribed verbatim:

- ✓ What inspired you to create or come to this event?
- ✓ What do you think is the beauty or message in this art?
- ✓ What are your thoughts on spiritual and/or ethical communication?

e. Analysis of the Collect Impact

Data are thematically coded by employing a hybrid deductive-inductive strategy whereby:

- ✓ From the selected theoretical framework are deductive codes: tawhīd, ihsān, fiṭrah, intention, reception, mediation.
- ✓ Serenity, curiosity, misunderstanding, identity pride, interfaith empathy are some of the inductive codes from the field data.
- ✓ The integration of the constant comparison method allows the identification of distinct themes which are synthesized to create interpretive narratives establishing a relationship between aesthetic form and communicative function.

f. Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Alignment is strengthened through a combination of methodical approaches and additional sources, member checking with certain interviewees, and peer discussions with professors. Consistency is achieved by preserving a paper trail of decisions made during an analysis. Reflexivity is rather important: a researcher who is trained in Islamic studies has an inner spiritual connection with sacred art, and as such, mental neutrality is employed. Potential biases and shifts in interpretation are documented through journaling.

g. Limitations of the Methodology Some limitations are acknowledged:

- ✓ Accessibility: Some institutions have policies against photography in their premises or speaking with their staff.
- ✓ Language: Differences in cultural context may lead non-Arabic speakers to misunderstand the symbols presented.
- ✓ Range: Three case studies can hardly encapsulate the richness of the Islamic art tradition while nonetheless still offering glimpse of its recurring themes.
- ✓ Time restrictions: Digital practices are subject to rapid evolution, and the information processed in a state of time may capture a trend rather than a sustained use.
- ✓ In relation to depth, triangulation, and interpretive transparency, these constraints are managed.



5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

a. Introduction to the Analysis

This part involves the integration of the philosophical and sociological dimensions of the three case study disciplines - calligraphy, architecture and digitized or film media - to illustrate the invitational aspect of beauty in Islamic art. Each case study deals with a particular form of da'wah: the first with a textual focus, the second with a spatial focus, and the third with mediated participatory focus. In all three, beauty plays an instrumental role in the transformation of the revelatory experience and its reception in the form of a conversion from mere appreciation of the beauty to an ethical response.

b. Case Study 1: Calligraphy as Visual Dhikr

1) Form and Meaning

Islamic calligraphy is a case in point of how the sacred scriptural language embodies an art form that manifests visualised meditative contemplation. The Qur'an is an art form in and of itself as it is a message, miracle, and divine revelation that one can audibly hear and, in the art form of calligraphy, silently see. Calligraphy transforms the audibly and visually spatialised art form of divine revelation by rhythmically and spatially structuring it. The calligraphic works of Mohamed Zakariya or Ahmed Moustafa, for example, were hand-drawn or carefully crafted with the aid of modern computers and are composed of precise geometrical designs that evoke the harmony of the Qur'an. As is the case in many calligraphic works, the repeated use of the letters alif and lām is an artistic representation of tawhīd (divine oneness), whereas the geometric designs are symbolically suggestive of the concept of the infinite.

2) Reception by Audiences

Attendance at the exhibition *Letters of Light* (Doha, 2023) showed spectators, both Muslims and non-Muslims, showing a variety of emotional responses. Muslims cried; non-Muslims showed expressions of peacefulness or curiosity. Interview participants expressed a "feeling of peace," even if they were unable to fully comprehend the prose. These findings correlate with Ali (2019) who noted that "peace of mind ... and art" go together. The calligraphy in this case exemplifies the definition of da'wah bi-l-ḥāl 'invitation through being,' which signifies the operationalization of emotions, perhaps by the calligraphy being accompanied with prose."

3) Reflection on Philosophy

Metaphysically, to write or inscribe the divine word is to imitate a 'creation' act. The artist, to a degree, partakes in divine pedagogy, as God himself "taught with the pen" (Q 96:4). The calligrapher, who defines one's breath and the motion of the wrist as proportioned, is doing *iḥsān*, that is, admirable; not for fame but for the task itself. The decoration of beauty that is a visual situation here is to "educate" the soul: to train it to focus, be humble, and to love. The act of remembering that one does is *dhikr*, indeed, the "soul-" photograph is for posterity at the "echo of *dhikr*."



c. Case Study 2: Mosque Architecture as Lived Pedagogy

1) Spatial Theology

The intertwining of architecture and theology. Cambridge Central Mosque (UK, 2019) was chosen for its appropriately symbolic, although unconventional, design, and its commitment to ecological principles. Its wooden vaults are symbols of treetops and are metaphors for the Qur'anic tree of light (Q 24:35). The mosque ticks all the boxes of stewardship (khilāfah), as it incorporates natural ventilation, daylight, and recycled materials. Environmental tawhīd (1987) is achieved in Nasr's sense.

2) Observation and Reception

Visitor's reactions through the field observation recorded during the open days, showing that non-Muslims were tranquillized, light-played, and weighted. Symbolism and lightplay, while Muslim participants expressed pride. Tours, while framing the virtue of Islamic sustainable architecture, were aimed at the general public and converted the language of theology into ecological ethics. Subsequently, the design objectives of the mosque were to communicate rahmah (mercy).

3) Sociological Implications

Using Bourdieu's field approach, the mosque operates as a religious as well as a civic institution. Its aesthetic capital, however, is countering Islamophobic stereotypes while providing moral legitimacy in multicultural Britain. Bourdieu's aesthetics becomes soft power—a public religion (Casanova, 1994) re-inscribing Islam into the urban fabric of secular post modernity.

d. Case Study 3: Digital and Film Aesthetics as Contemporary Da'wah

1) The Rise of Digital Aesthetics

In the 21st century, digital platforms have become the main mediums of representation. Muslim creators on Instagram and Youtube utilize ephemeral videos and still images, as well as digital artistry, to demonstrate their faith. The Art of I ḥ s ān collective (fictionalized composite case) pairs minimalist designs with Qur' ā nic verses, creating a global following. The interactive component of social media transforms passive participants into contributors: users' comments and shares, triggering a da'wah network.

2) Networked Religion Analysis

In relation to Campbell's (2012) understanding of networked religion, digital art collapses the schism of the holy and the mundane. A 60-second animation of the Basmalah, which may trigger mindfulness, is able to slip in between non-religious content. The sociological dimension is tied to the ebb and flow of beauty interacted passively. As content creators explain in interviews, the intention to 'feel calm and think of God' served as an ethical anchor in their work.

3) Challenges and Ambiguities

Spectacle and novelty contribute to commodification in problematic ways, to which Bunt (2018) cautions about the potential for digital spirituality to become branding. Ikhlās (sincerity) sustains the relationship, but data shows that mediated beauty fosters empathy, resulting in



non-polemic gratitude and curiosity. Within the constraints of commercialization, the digital realm also preserves beauty for the purposes of da'wah.

e. Comparative Discussion

1) The Aesthetic as a Universal Language

In all instances, beauty serves as an invisible bridge. Calligraphy captivates through rhythm and light, while architecture does so through the ambient space and digital art through repetition and availability. All of them assist in transforming tawhīd into an ordered sensuous experience. As noted by Burckhardt (1976), the message is universally harmonized through the abstraction. Empirical evidence validating the experience corroborates the pedagogy of the Qur'an that states the signs are perceived by the heart before they are articulated.

2) Ethical Mediation

Intention Why, then, should the issue of sincerity be considered, the trueness of one's expression, intent, and overall integrity of one's sincerity? Because, rather than being institutionalized, artists and their works as well as their performers see and understand their works and the acts of performance as worship, and, being such, they exhibit greater humility and self-restraint than those institutions that seek to beautify the commodification of their presentations. Participants in the interview recounted that audiences can and do compute consonance and detect sincerity, and that such reconciliation of apparent contradictions between serenity and outward exhibit via deception of alien attitudes is skepticism.

3) Sociological Translation Art is by its nature invitational.

Its contextualization, positive, negative, and with the majority and minority and the absence of it—will further encourage or dissuade such invitation. In majority-Muslim contexts, it reinforces identity; in other minority contexts, it negotiates visibility, while online, it constructs a transnational community. Using Hall (1997)'s framework, the decoding of communication within a given community or society may vary in relation to the socio-cultural and other variables with which that community or society functions. In our case, it is the community or society that is Western, more particularly its audience, who may, in their aestheticized non-functional view of objects, what Muslims in that context have otherwise placed a spirituality behind it. For da'wah to be effective, there is no doubt that some sort of curatorial mediation is required, be it in the form of captions to the images, a guided tour, or the provision of subtitles in other languages which may be needed.

4) From Aesthetic

To Ethical Transformation Observation reveals that one does not need to doctrinally embrace a set of beliefs to experience a transformation in one's perception through beauty that is Islamic, in particular. This was the case for certain non-Muslim participants who, upon initially encountering the art, expressed a heightened degree of respect toward Islamic culture, and therefore, it can be surmised that Taylor's (2007) thesis, which proposes the idea of the aesthetic experience in secular society as one that allows for the emergence of "porous selves," holds some measure of truth. Aesthetic experience undeniably enhances and reaffirms the idea of beauty that exists in the public sphere and, as a result, allows for a form of communication



that comprises ethical discourse where other forms of discourse may be more constraining or difficult to utilize.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Summary of Findings

This research aimed to understand the role of self-expression in art among *tawhīd*, *iḥsān*, and *fiṭrah*. Works of art, Islamic or otherwise, act universally as invitations through reflective beauty rather than mere conversion. In a sociological sense, art mediates beauty and order through the facilitation of identity and discourse. The metaphysical and social convergence of art portrays Islam positively in a rich pluralistic society.

b. Theoretical Implications

- ✓ The Aesthetics of God suggests that the perception of beauty is an act of knowledge concerning God, extending Islamic epistemology from the written word to an experience.
- ✓ Da‘wah as Communication Theory suggests that the triadic model of da‘wah is participatory communication rather than mere persuasive.
- ✓ Public Religion through Art proposes Islamic aesthetics as an example of morality envision the public domain.

c. Practical Recommendations

- ✓ Artists should aspire to self-expression through intentional design, solely to preserve *iḥsān* and not to gain recognition.
- ✓ Educators and curators should provide contextual frameworks that assist in maintaining a balance of faith and artistry.
- ✓ Institutions of Da‘wah should develop visual and spatial projects that address digital campaigns, films, and museums constructed on the ethics of beauty and compassion.
- ✓ Researchers should conduct audience-response studies in the domain of performance arts (e.g., theatre or music) to create a fuller assessment of changes in attitudes over time because of the work.

d. Limitations and Future Research

Generalization of our findings was hindered due to geographical and sampling diversity. Future research could integrate quantitative forms of surveys and span multiple continents, specific areas of artistic da‘wah, and the role of algorithms in digital dissemination. However, the results suggest that in a time of division, the most persuasive advocate of Islam is beauty.

e. Concluding Reflection

Islamic perspective, beauty is not form without content, it is the visible manifestation of mercy. This journey of beauty was summed up by the prophetic saying, “God is beautiful and loves beauty.” The beauty of art, when it is ordered, bathed in harmony and proportions, is a memory that opens to the divine. Therefore, it is not a metaphor, that da‘wah, which is the most profound speech, is an invitation to beauty that addresses the innermost feelings of all humanity.

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