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Art Appreciation on Mughal Miniature Paintings from Islamic Art Museum Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the art appreciation on Mughal miniature paintings from Islamic Art Museum Kuala Lumpur. The focus of appreciation is from five miniature painting had been exhibited at IAMM. Namely The exhibition of 14 Dynasties and a Region: The History and Culture of the Muslim World from 8th June until 16th October 2022. The analysis of the artwork is focused on the layout composition, variation of colors and the style The discipline of art history has been pioneered by the west and directly inevitably their formulas are also used in analyzing Islamic works of art.

Keywords: Miniature Painting, Art Appreciation, Mughal Art, Islamic Art museum Kuala Lumpur

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1.0 Introduction

The exhibition of 14 Dynasties and Region: The History and Culture of the Muslim World was first held at the Tokyo National Museum's Asian Gallery (Toyokan) from 5th July 2021 until 20th February 2022, in conjunction with the 2021 Tokyo summer Olympics. This initiative was taken by the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia as step to promote a deeper understanding of Muslim history and culture in Japan and to introduce 205 artefacts to share the beauty of Islamic art. The exhibition managed to receive a very encouraging response, with a total of 130,000 visitors throughout the exhibition even though during that time Malaysia and Japan were recorded such a high number of Covid-19 cases. The exhibition symbolizes the successful collaboration between two museums.

After two years of enduring Covid-19. The exhibition of 14 Dynasties and a Region: The History and Culture of the Muslim World was held for the very first time in Islamic Art Museum Malaysia Kuala Lumpur (IAMM). The showcases a selection of 150 artefacts from the IAMM collection. Ranging from the first centuries of Islam (7th -8th century) to pre-modern era (18th – 19th century). It covers 14 major dynasties from North Africa to Western China and the Malay world. The exhibition aims to exposure and appreciate the glory of Islamic culture and civilizations over a period of more than a thousand years, with the formation of Muslim regions expanding from the Iberian Peninsula to Southeast Asia and China. This special exhibition has been started from 8 June until 16th October 2022.

Therefore, based on an art exhibition: of 14 Dynasties and A Region; The History and Culture of the Muslim World supported by Yayasan Al Bukhari Foundation and MOTAC Malaysia. Four miniature paintings from Mughal period were selected as a sample of artefact due to establish and understanding Islamic art concepts and its styles from Mughal Dynasty

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Islamic Art of India

There are many different cultures in India. Religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism are all embedded throughout the cultural landscape of India. Additionally, India has a cultural history with Islam, which was embedded in the culture of the Mughals. But what is Mughal? The Mughal Empire was an early but modern Islamic empire that dominated South Asia and the Indian subcontinent from 1526 until its dissolution in 1857. The empire grew out of a sustained military campaign that established a new government and administration. The Mughal Empire was established in 1526 by the warrior chieftain of Andijan, Babur, who defeated the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi, and then the Rajput's and Afghans before expanding down into the plains of upper India.

The Mughal Empire was located in south Asia, in the countries that are now India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The largest part of the Mughal empire was the Deccan Plateau, a valley territory with lots of rivers, perfect for agriculture. Their marine (sea) territory was the Bay of Bengal, and also the Arabian Sea. They used these areas for growing spices, cotton and tea. Their natural borders were the Himalayas at the North and the Hindu Kush in the West, which prevented them from moving. Geography played an important role in the shaping of the Mughal Empire. The area of land ruled over by the Mughals, was essentially split up into a couple different parts: the Indus river plains and river valley, the Ganges River plains and delta, the Deccan plateau, the east coast, and the west coast. These different regions that divide up the empire also divide up the religious cultural beliefs of the empire. Therefore, geography was more than just where the empire was but, also who was where in the empire and how the emperor did unite them.

The Mughal dynasty was founded in 1526 when Babur, a Central Asian Muslim prince, followed the example of his ancestor Timur (d.1405) and invaded the land he knew as Hindustan (the Indian subcontinent). He seized the Delhi Sultanate from its ruler, Ibrahim Lodi, and laid the foundations of what would become one of the world's great empires. Through his mother's line, Babur was also descended from the Mongol ruler Genghis Khan (about 1162 – 1227), and the dynasty would become known by the Persian word for Mongol. At his death in 1530, his kingdom incorporated the major cities of Kabul, Lahore, Agra and Delhi, but his control remained fragile. Babur was succeeded by his son, Humayun, who lacked his father's determination and military brilliance.

Within ten years, Humayun was forced out of Hindustan by the Afghan Sher Shah Suri, who took over Mughal territory and ruled from Delhi. His kingdom was short-lived, but he instituted an extremely effective administrative system that was his lasting legacy. However, at the time of his death, in 1530, he had not yet transformed his territorial acquisitions into an empire. This task was left to Humayun, Babur's son and successor, who unfortunately lacked the military genius of his father and soon forfeited the Mughal foothold in India. Only through Persian military intervention did he manage to regain the capital cities of Agra and Delhi in 1555. Yet it is Humayun's son Akbar who can be credited with the real foundation of the Mughal empire.

2.2 Mughal painting

Mughal painting developed out of Persian and Islamic style influences that Emperor Humayun was exposed to and promoted in his court. Humayun specifically brought artists to India in order to commission them in helping develop a Mughal Empire style of painting or Mughal aesthetic. The Mughal artistic tradition became mainly expressed in painted miniatures or small portraits or paintings that could fit inside books as their illustrations. Miniature paintings usually accompanied some work of philosophy, poetry, history, or religious scripture. The paintings used vibrant colors originally inspired by Persian works to depict the eccentric and vibrant clothes of subjects. The color schemes later evolved to mimic the various color schemes throughout other aspects of Indian culture and the variety of colors throughout the biodiversity of India.

Indian miniature painting had existed in various forms since the 9th century, but there was no cohesive vision. Certain styles began to coalesce in the 15th century, but it wasn't until the Mughal Empire was established in 1526 that miniature painting came into its own. Mughal miniatures are a blend of the bold, vivid colors favored by Indian painters; the fine, delicate lines preferred by Persian painters; and a European influence. Just like the empire they came from, Mughal miniatures drew from India, Persia, and Europe to create something entirely new.

Mughal miniatures were small (many not more than a few square inches), brightly colored, and highly detailed paintings mostly used to illustrate manuscripts and art books. Despite their tiny sizes, they are incredibly precise, with some lines painted using brushes composed of a single hair. Akbar's son and successor, Emperor Jahangir, had an even more single-minded obsession with painting. Rogers describes him as a "visual glutton," recalling an incident when, rather than help a dying man who asked for aid, Jahangir had his painters "take a portrait... [of his] emaciated face." Stories like this underscore the way painting was intimately tied to the court, and, by extension, to the desires of the emperor. It was only through the emphasis and funding provided by Humāyūn and his descendants that court painting in the form of Mughal miniatures came to be seen as the highest form of sophistication and elegance. (Surya Tubach, 2018)

Akbar is usually credited for establishing Mughal miniature art in India, it was his father Humayun who acquired painters Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad Khan from the Persian court during his exile in 1540. These painters founded an academy of over 100 painters and artists from various parts of India who went on to create extraordinary works under Mughal patronage. The Persian influence is apparent both in the miniature medium itself and in the delicate and fine lines of the Nasta'liq script. However, Mughal miniatures are truly a blend of both Indian and Persian styles distinct from the Safavid form. (Maya M. Tola, 2019)

The Mughals' achievements were all-embracing. Every aspect of court life was beautified without restraint. They took as much interest in fashion as jewellery, and their architectural achievements remain unrivalled. The India Gallery provides a glimpse into the public and private worlds of the Mughals. There are many features of Mughal art that diverge from the Islamic mainstream. The most obvious of these is a delight in portraiture. As well as reveling in figural representations, this dynasty pioneered a new approach to detail. The enduring fascination with these miniature paintings is partly due to their elegance, and also to the insights they provide into life as it was lived in

those lavish times. Miniatures from this era are filled with images of rulers, courtiers and horses, along with useful vignettes of fashion and interior design. (Islamic Art Museum Malaysia Kuala Lumpur)

From the records, the process of Mughal painting was divided into three stages, first, the initial sketch for the composition. Second, the portraits of the faces and third, the coloring. There were also provide three styles of painting in Mughal art and these were used accordingly with the subject matter of the paintings. The first style is fictional subject matter such as legends or fables. The second style is historical subject matter and the third style is contemporary histories, depicted in a more realistic manner with more accurate landscapes scenes, human behaviors and emotions. (Dr Nasim Akhtar et al., 2002)

Mughal painting forms a dramatic episode in the history of India. It's aims and standpoint are secular and realistic: it is interested in passing events and most typically in the exact delineation of individual character in the portraiture of men and animals. It is dramatic rather than static, aristocratic more than surreal and academic rather than vocational. Mughal Court paintings provide an insight into the life and times of rules of the period. These painting also reflect the contemporary social and political condition of the people. Social customs and courtly tradition are vividly depicted in the paintings. (Sanobar Haider, 2017)

Today, this courtly sophistication appears highly stylized. Certain attributes define the style of painting that flourished in the empire. The characters are fixed, but the hues of the paintings are vibrant and full of life. The bright, jewel-like colors evoke the dazzling hues still beloved in contemporary India: vivid saris and Holi powders, bright orange desserts and multicolored cargo trucks. The vivid colors are as constant in the paintings as the emphasis on courtly pleasure.

3.0 Methodology

Islamic artists interpret their understanding of Monotheism by depicting reference examples from the real nature of God's creation to facilitate general understanding (salvation). Complex and magical things are simplified with various visual language techniques to help reason in the cognitive activity and thinking power of the audience. Artists need to think and understand the existing knowledge base in a person's life. The creator needs to think and understand the basis of existing knowledge in a person's life and through his imagination organize the details of that knowledge to enable him to acquire new knowledge. Ultimately, both of them (the artist and the audience) are indirectly involved with the process of thinking, analyzing and interpreting. The fundamental processes involved in the production of Islamic art will sharpen the senses and minds of the treasures of Islamic art.

Therefore, D'zul Haimi has developed four basic work processes in a nutshell. The first step is shahadah. The second step is imitation, i.e. imitating something that is admired in the matter of God's creation. The process of imitating nature allows artists to understand, learn and appreciate the beauty of God's creation. Islamic artists put confidence, sovereignty and humility that cannot match the beauty and greatness of God's creation. Indeed, what is achieved is an illusion that follows the interpretation of the artist himself, and it is not absolute.

The third process is styling. Islamic artists continue to develop their works of art that depart from depictions of nature that have naturally disappeared. At this stage, Islamic artists apply their knowledge of their creative formula for the purpose of beautifying Islamic works of art. At this stage, Islamic artists apply their knowledge of their creative formula for the purpose of beautifying Islamic works of art. The last process which is the fourth is Abstraction. The depiction of nature has been analyzed and interpreted through imitation, denaturalization and styling until it finally becomes the essence of accepting something abstract. Abstraction is the process of discussing implicit concepts of the universe. This concept has been embodied, stylized and celebrated in two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms.

4.0 Result and Findings

a. Shah Jahan Seated with Attendants, Mughal India, Early 17th century, Paper, colored and gold pigment, H. 19.6 cm, W. 13.5 cm



For background space: Shah Jahan is an active Mughal Atelier. Late 17th century. The color pallet richness and active. Shows interest in miniature painting and established an atelier within the palace. Shah Jahan was the main patron for several court artists. The painting

focuses on luxury and court life and portrait. Also, this painting is part of royal album project. Collected and mounted during the emperor's reign



For middle ground space: Exemplify the formal and rigid style. The figure has no facial expression and less natural posture. Seated on a golden chair. The emperor holds a flower, the rest also structured in an active action. Starts to allow more naturalistic expression'



For fore ground space: Minimal of details in fore ground thus embedded in its middle ground. The whole structured looks flat and abstract

b. Miniature Panting of Nawab Aliwardhi Khan Seated with A Visitor, Murshidabad, India, 1750-1760, Media: Paper, colored and gold pigment, Dimension: H. 40.3 cm, W. 31



For background space: The artist applies the light blue and some spot of yellow. The flat color pseudo cloud.



For middle ground space: Under a pink canopy in a garden setting Nawab 'Aliwardi Khan of Bengal dressed in a silver Jama. Two attendants hold up mortars. Characteristic of the Murshidabad painting style are the stiffly upright. Composition under a canopy was often painted. Unfinished painting such as the carpet. He was a patron for the Mughal arts.



For fore ground space: The fountain situated at the middle of the picture frame. The element of water is a part of accessories for the court or garden.

c. Shah Jahan Embracing His Son Aurangzeb, Mughal India, ca.: 1750, Paper, colored and gold pigment, H. 20.8 cm, W. 13.7 cm



For back ground space: Halo represent important and honorable man. Flat stroke for river and simplified water effect. Golden halo – shows the magnificent of the emperor. Simplification 6 putti adorning the scene in an unprecedented interpretation of emotions. The winged being was introduced by Jesuit missionaries in late 16th centuries.



For middle ground space: Stylization of mountain and trees. Only impression of mountain. The floor looks floating with minimal illusion of perspective. The jewelries and costume indicate Indian culture and styles.



For fore ground space: Simplification of figure. Stylization of figure, parts of figures, costume and object. Flat and side view. Show character of father who support his son. Bended posture show respect and obey

d. Nawab Ghazi Al-Din Haydar , Nawab Ghazi Al-Din Haydar, Lucknow, India, 19th century, Paper, colored and gold pigment, H. 18



For back ground space: The last Nawab Vizier of Oudh (1814-1818). The first King of Oudh (1818-27) by the East India Company. Space identified but demolishing space quality. Flatness and simplification of background images. He welcomed to the Royal Atelier the British artists Robert Home and George Duncan Beechey.



For middle ground space: Unclear curtain position. Flat color of floor



For fore ground space: Printed cotton garments. Motif of architectural within Islamic culture. Nawab seated on a chair. Wearing intricate turban. Emerald and diamond incised turban ornament (sarpech). Portrait set on a balcony Classical green drapes. Roman marble column. European setting and approaches

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Islamic artists interpret their understanding of Tawhid by illustrating examples of references from the tangible nature of God's creation to facilitate public understanding (salvation). Complex and miraculous matters are made easier by various visual language techniques to help reason in cognitive activities and the thinking power of the audience. The artists need to think and understand the basics of existing knowledge in the life of the person. and through his imagination arrange the details of the knowledge to enable it to acquire new knowledge. Finally, both of them (artist and viewer) were indirectly involved with thinking, analyzing and interpreting process.

The way Islamic artist view and appreciate things is different compared to western approach. The four creative art process such as Shahada, imitation, stylization and abstraction are clearly applied in Mughal art. The way they manifested their belief through art – Tauhid. The understanding of concept Alam al Mithal are applied among Mughal artist which assists artist to communicate in visual vocabularies. Mughal Miniature paintings had different format on its own style (combination of Persian, Indian, Mughal and later on European approaches). The significant of Islamic art is about sharing the shahada while creating and appreciating art both for the artists, patrons and audiences.

The recipes, materials and equipment used by Mughal artists during the process of embellishing artwork are inventive and trailblazing. So that the artworks look splendor, attractive and stunning. Without abandoning Tawhid's concepts and principles, Islamic artists produce Islamic artworks in accordance with their own feature's cultural topography. At this point, the artists expected the art works success achieving at the glorious and amazing level. However, the impact of this expression is remaining in controlled manners and unexaggerated.

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