

ISLAMICHERITAGE
LEADS THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE UMMAH

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Editors

Hasan Bahrom
S. Salahudin Suyurno
Abdul Qayyum Abdul Razak

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Prakata

Sejarah warisan Islam telah memberikan impak yang cukup besar kepada perkembangan dunia hari ini. Ia bukan sahaja memberi sumbangan kepada aspek kerohanian malah turut menyumbang kepada aspek ekonomi, politik, pendidikan, sosial, kesenian, kebudayaan, sains dan teknologi. Perkembangan ini memperlihatkan bahawa pentingnya ketamadunan ilmu kepada ketamadunan dunia. Perkara ini selaras dengan tuntutan al-Quran yang menyatakan dengan jelas bahawa Allah SWT memuji sesiapa yang berusaha menuntut ilmu dan juga bertaqwa kepadaNya. Namun sejak akhir-akhir ini, sumbangan hasil pensejarahan Islam sering dipandang sepi oleh generasi muda. Sejarah warisan Islam tidak lagi dijadikan panduan dan iktibar dalam melebarkan ketamadunan ilmu Islam. Mereka lebih tertumpu kepada ketamadunan Barat yang dikatakan ‘kaya’ dengan khazanah ilmu. Sedangkan kemajuan hari ini seharusnya berlandaskan kepada ketamadunan Islam.

Penelitian atau pengkajian mengenai warisan Islam perlu direncanakan sebagai ketamadunan dunia. Idea-idea baru mengenai sejarah warisan Islam perlu diketengahkan, Oleh yang demikian, menerusi *1st International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015)* dilihat akan dapat membantu kepada perkembangan produksi seterusnya menjana idea-idea baru khususnya untuk memperkayakan kajian dalam bidang sejarah warisan Islam kepada masyarakat. Dengan penganjuran seminar ini secara tidak langsung membantu untuk menjalinkan hubungan antara para sarjana dalam bidang sejarah warisan Islam. Ini adalah satu cabaran dan membuka peluang baru untuk membina satu perpaduan intelektual merentas sempadan dunia.

Buku ini merupakan kompilasi diskusi ilmu antara para ilmunan yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pembentangan kertas kerja mereka dalam *1st International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015)* daripada pelbagai platform ilmu Islam antaranya Kesenian, Ketamadunan, Komunikasi, Pendidikan, Kewangan, Sains dan Teknologi dan lain-lain lagi. Semoga curahan ilmu melalui penulisan ini mampu memberi sumbangan dalam menambah khazanah ilmu Islam kepada masyarakat.

Editor,

1st International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015),

Akademi Pengajian Islam Kontemporari,

UiTM Melaka.

Kata Aluan Rektor UiTM Melaka

Dengan Nama Allah Yang Maha Pemurah Lagi Maha Pengasih
Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Segala puji bagi Allah, Tuhan seru sekalian alam, dengan limpah kurniaNya serta keizinanNya, kejayaan penganjuran *1st International Islamic Heritage Conference 2015* yang berlangsung di Hotel Mahkota Melaka pada 11-12 November 2015, telah menghasilkan banyak kertas kerja yang amat bermutu. Justeru, buku ini mengumpulkan puluhan penulisan para ilmuan dan cendekiawan dari dalam dan luar negara untuk bacaan semua.

Pelbagai isu telah dikupas termasuklah perihal seni Islam, budaya, politik, gendar, pendidikan, sejarah, kemasyarakatan, sains dan teknologi, ekonomi, kewangan, falsafah, bahasa dan komunikasi, kedermawanan dan pengurusan. Pembaca juga akan mendapati buku ini memuatkan kajian-kajian yang komited melaksanakan usaha mengintegrasikan antara ilmu duniawi dan ukhrawi. Ini membuktikan kesegaran keilmuan tamadun Islam itu sendiri.

Semoga perkongsian ilmu ini dapat meningkatkan komitmen umat dalam memartabatkan perintah Ilahi dalam kehidupan duniawi sebagai jambatan ukhrawi. Sekaligus ia bakal memberi manfaat pada alam sejagat.

Pihak UiTM Melaka merakamkan setinggi-tinggi tahniah dan ucapan terima kasih atas segala sokongan dalam bentuk material, tenaga dan sebagainya dalam merialisasikan seminar ini. Buat semua penaja yang telah memberikan sumbangan kepada wacana ini, sekalung penghargaan diucapkan. Semoga seminar dwi tahunan ini akan terus diperkasakan demi mengangkat martabat umat melalui kecemerlangan tamadun Islam yang diakui telah terbukti diseluruh jagat.

Sekian, terima kasih. Wassalam

PROF. MADYA DR MOHD ADNAN BIN HASHIM

Rektor ,
UiTM Melaka.

RE-THINKING THE DEPICTIONS OF TWO-DIMENSIONAL ‘LIVING BEINGS’ IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC ART

Lina Kattan³³

ABSTRACT

This paper principally discusses the religious aspects of Living Being’s representations within Sunni Islamic and Saudi art contexts. It first examines classic Islamic scholars’ visions (conservative and liberal) towards full-figure Living Being depictions, and then compares these visions with their contemporary counterparts. Both classic and contemporary visions tremendously differed. I argue that contemporary Islamic perspectives permitted full-figure representations on two-dimensional surfaces (with some limitations), and at the same time, continued to prohibit three-dimensional depictions. Due to the flatness of the drawn/painted illustration, this study discusses how two-dimensional full-figure Living Beings is no longer sinful as assumed before.

Keywords: *Living Beings, Figuration, Islamic Art, Saudi Art, Hadith, Two-Dimensional Art, Image, Picture, Sura, Tasweer, and Intentionality.*

INTRODUCTION

In general, entrenched Islamic beliefs and Arabian traditions impact Saudi art and visual representations³⁴. In this respect, Saudis grow up ‘believing’ that every law and all conventions (educational structures, economical covenants, societal interactions, and familial relationships) are based on Islamic doctrine³⁵. The case is similar with the younger generation who try to integrate different readings within Islamic ideology in a progressive way that does not conflict with their Islamic beliefs. A good example is the ‘re-examination’ or second look at the concept of depicting ‘Living Beings’ in two-dimensional art³⁶.

The term of Living Beings, in Islamic conception, refers to every creature made by Allah. These beings were given ‘souls’ by Allah to be alive, and only Allah can give and take souls out of bodies. The soul distinguishes Living Beings from any other object. While plants embody souls like every other Living Being, they are not as discouraged, as are other Living Beings, to be artistically depicted according to Saudi culture. The idea of depicting Living Beings as full-figures, or in a way that they can be living in real life (depicting a human figure with lost limbs for example), is the only discouraged notion in Saudi Islamic ideology. This means that depicting fragmented or partial figures Living Beings (such as painting a portrait for instance) is not completely rejected.

³³ Assistant Professor at the College of Art & Design, King Abdul-Aziz University, lina.m.kattan@gmail.com.

³⁴ Because the Saudi constitution abides by Islamic doctrine (*Sharia Law*), “[n]o other country on Earth is so regulated and influenced at all levels by any religion like Saudi Arabia is by Islam.” (Yamani, 1997, p. 12).

³⁵ This problem (some would not acknowledge it) may begin from poor education and inadequate upbringing. This is why it is very rare to hear Saudi parents complaining about what their children are being taught in schools especially concerning Islamic teachings. Unfortunately, students in schools are being taught that Saudi interpretation of Islamic scriptures (mistakenly favors males over females) can substitute any non-Saudi interpretations (women are excluded and marginalized). Sadly, these ideas may subconsciously be internalized in people’s minds.

³⁶ Because the term ‘Living Being’ has a particular definition within this paper, it will be capitalized throughout the study.

Islam and Two-Dimensional Representation

There is a long-held debate in the Islamic world regarding the concept of depicting Living Beings (either as full or incomplete figures). To some extent, this conflict between classic and contemporary Islamic scholars led many Muslim artists to avoid figurative art and instead rely on calligraphy, geometrical, and botanical designs. However, this does not mean that Islamic art is a non-figurative art. The most dangerous beliefs to Islamic perspective are paganism and concepts of vice in ethics, relationships, art, and humanities. Muslim scholars have been cautious when dealing with such concepts especially concerning artistic depictions. Accordingly, the Islamic art world has become full of distortions and deceptions, which in return construct a misleading conception of the arts. Thus, it was significant for this study to reveal the falsity of such concepts, and to re-evaluate the Islamic conception of two-dimensional arts, namely in drawing, painting, and to some extent in photography. Some of these misleading concepts concerning the arts in Islam are the idea that Islam is against many artistic expressions, not to mention the depiction of Living Beings. This gloomy and corruptive vision of Islamic art particularly affected the younger Muslim generations. Islam never despised the human nature, or opposed basic human instincts (*fitra*), or even prohibited any human from harmlessly expressing his/her emotions. For these reasons, I intend to explicate the grey areas between what is religiously permissible or not in regards to two-dimensional arts, depending on 'certified' Islamic resources in order to determine a contemporary Islamic art identity. The methodologies I pursue in this section rely on a 're-reading' of Islamic scriptures from a rational and a feminist perspective.

Many individuals (Muslims and non-Muslims) are ignorant of Islamic sensibilities, and have limited understanding of *Sharia Law* as it applies to art. Art in Islam expresses the marvel of the universe and its beauty, which in return, enlivens the individual's consciousness with high standards in order to make human beings more aware of their humanity. In fact albeit is common, art in Islam does not only focus on Islam and its sensibilities, laws, events, and personages; rather, art in Islam is all about locating a pure and genuine world, based on the perception of Allah's supreme divinity, denying polytheism, without contradicting nature. In contrast to paganism, Islam elevated humans from materialism to spirituality. Islam opposed paganism in four ways: Muslims do not worship the ideal-body; Muslims do not approve of the struggles between humans, Gods, or destiny; Muslims do not believe in polytheism and Allah's tangible personifications; and Muslims do not worship nature or material objects. Therefore, art in Islam does not believe nor approve of the Aristotelian idea that the artist completes what is missing from nature because nature, in Islam, is already perfected as one of Allah's miracles. "[It is He] Who has created the seven heavens one above another, you can see no fault in the creations of the Most Beneficent. Then look again: 'Can you see any rifts?' Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you in a state of humiliation and worn out" (Quran 67: 3-4). Art in Islam considers these subjects from a universal vision. "It is the art that enables the perfect link between beauty and virtue, because beauty is part of this universe, and virtue is the summit of beauty. Some attitudes such as the material vision, which focuses on eroticism and sexuality, rob individuals from their humanity and moral values. Accordingly, they both meet at the peak of all the universe's facts" (Qutub, 1983, p. 6). Art in Islam generated a vision of nature that is divinely created and thoroughly attached to humanity.

The Muslim artist therefore, does not separate art from morals, nor art from beauty. Accordingly, beauty in Islam is not a materialistic beauty but more of a deeper, all-encompassing beauty that is not related to immorality or even sexuality. Beauty is instead an instrument of knowledge and faith. It is a tool that enables humans to realize Allah's magnificence. In this regard, one may realize that post-modernism, which is based on individuality and on detaching humans from nature, contradicts the Islamic view of the arts. In Islam, art is that which depicts universal facts to stimulate morality and benevolence in the

human soul; art that is free from materialism and paganism; art that combines soul and mind; and art that contradicts immorality and vice by affirming justice, monotheism, and virtue. To sum up, art in Islam follows an important, systematic approach: neither radical nor moderate (radicalism focuses on a specific and limited point of view, whereas moderation may indicate naivety). Artistic approach in Islamic art, accordingly, reduces personal interests or prejudices, and conveys beauty as the peak of the universe created by Allah.

Hence, some Muslim scholars consider paintings (a two-dimensional art form) as a way of emulating Allah in His creation from nonentity³⁷. In their minds, only Allah can create *ex-nihilo* as a living-breathing being. Thus, the act of representing full-figure Living Beings forces the art of painting to be questioned; it is shunned from a religious perspective. For these reasons, painting 'naturalistic' or 'realistic' Living Beings is not as famous as other forms in Islamic art. Due to the diverse interpretations of *hadiths* (Prophet Mohammed's sayings), many Muslim artists have avoided depicting full-figure Living Beings (many did so just for the sake of safety), while others tend to depict fragmented/incomplete figures in order to avoid the well-known prohibition³⁸.

Classic Islamic Scholars' Perspectives

Given the Islamic concept of the arts, linking the human being to Allah, perceptions of the universe, and humanity, classic Islamic scholars have opposing positions concerning two dimensional imagery: *Conservatives* who strongly prohibited it, or *Liberals* who allowed it under certain circumstances (the long-held debate among scholars is due to the way Islamic scriptures have been interpreted)³⁹. Conservative classic Muslim scholars such as Abu-Bakr Ibn al-Arabi and Imam al-Nawawi believed that depicting Living Beings should be prohibited because they consider the act of painting is meant to rival Allah's in His act of creation. They depended on *hadiths* such as:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: I heard Mohammed saying, 'Whoever makes a **picture** in this world will be asked to put life into it on the Day of Resurrection, but he will not be able to do so.' (Bukhari, *hadith* 6029). And, Narrated Muslim: We were with Masruq at the house of Yasar bin Numair. Masruq saw **pictures** on his terrace and said, 'I heard Abdullah saying that he heard the Prophet saying, 'The people who will receive the severest punishment from Allah will be **the picture makers**.' (Bukhari, *hadith* 6015) (emphases mine).

On the other hand, liberal classic Muslim scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Ibn Hazm, al-Qasim Bin Mohammed, Imam Malik, and Imam al-Tahawi did not find any problem with figurative images by following the Prophet's Companions' elucidations⁴⁰. They relied on *hadiths* such as:

Abu Tilha ... reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) having said: 'Verily, angels do not enter the house in which there is a **picture**.' Busr reported: Zaid fell ill and we went to inquire after his health and (found) that there was hanging at his door a **curtain with a picture on it**. I said to Ubaidullah Khaulani who had been under the patronage of Maimuna, the wife of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him): Did not Zaid himself inform us before about (the Holy Prophet's command **pertaining to the pictures**), whereupon Ubaidullah said: Did you not hear when he said: 'Except **the prints on the cloth**'? (Muslim, *hadith* 5639). And, A'isha reported: We had a curtain with us which had **portraits of birds** upon it. Whenever a visitor came, he found them in front of him. Thereupon Allah's

³⁷ Essentially, painting is considered to be hand-created – a product of human art. The art of painting demands a plain surface that is encrusted and built up with materials.

³⁸ This relates to the *hadith* that was narrated by Ibn Omar.

³⁹ Even though classic scholars did not fully approve of naturalistic mimicry or full-figure deceptions, contemporary scholars deciphered this position.

⁴⁰ Depending on these renounced scholars, I made my conclusions more reliable in this issue.

Messenger (may peace be upon him) said to me: ‘Change them, for whenever I enter the room, I see them and it brings to my mind (the pleasures) of worldly life.’ She said: We had with us a sheet which had silk badges upon it and we **used to wear it**. This hadith has been transmitted on the authority of Ibn Muthanna but with this addition: Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) **did not command us to tear that**. (Muslim, *hadith* 5643) (emphases mine).

Despite the argument, ‘printed’ cloth did not have to be destroyed; therefore, two-dimensional imagery is excluded from the well-known prohibition. The image-making debate among Muslim scholars is confined only to *hadiths*. There is no clear indication of this issue in the Quran, which is considered (by all Muslims) more reliable than *hadiths*.

Classic Muslim scholars divided images/pictures (*suwar*) into two categories. First, images/pictures that have ‘shadows’ and are made out of gypsum, copper, stone, wood, etc., they are called sculptures, statues, figurines, or three-dimensional images/pictures (*tamatheel*) (al-Zamakhshari, 1922, p. 582). Tahir Ibn Manzoor, the father of Arabic linguistics, added: images are the created handiworks or anything that is created to imitate Allah’s creations (this addition generated some sort of confusion among scholars) (Ibn Manzoor, 1981, p. 2523). Second, ‘shadow-less’ images/pictures that are painted on paper, or carved on walls, portrayed on rugs, and so on. This category basically encompasses drawing, painting, engraving, print, and photography, which are flat and only have two-dimensions. To liberal classic Muslim scholars, depicting animate bodies such as humans and animals is nearly unlawful with the following exceptions: a) if the image/picture is fragmented/incomplete, or is not in a full-figure appearance, b) if the facial-features of the image had been erased or distorted, even if it is in a full-figure state, and c) if the head is not attached to its body, (even a drawn line across the neck would suffice). In short, Muslims’ conflict of depicting full-figure Living Beings in two-dimensional art ultimately relates to the idea that Living Beings’ creation is exclusive to Allah, and therefore, human beings ought not to imitate Allah in His actions. Moreover, some would relate the prohibition as an extracted/derived way of protecting Muslims by prohibiting what may eventually lead to committing sins. Finally, some classic scholars did not recommend depicting full-figure Living Beings because they did not desire Muslims to follow the example of non-Muslims, who create ‘idols’ for worshipping reasons.

Revised Islamic Scriptures and the Contemporary Scholars’ Visions

There are many differences between the Islamic schools of thought (*madhahib*) concerning the representation of Living Beings in art, and contemporary Muslim scholars take a distinct point of view.⁴¹ They consider that such *hadiths* (that prohibit image/picture making) are tied to particular situations and contexts during the Prophet’s lifetime. The issue of depicting full-figure Living Beings in Islamic visual representations thus became controversial because scholars offered different interpretations that considered the actual context of time and place.⁴² Contemporary scholars know that there is no ‘well-defined’ or ‘fully articulated’ prohibition for representing Living Beings in Islam except for reasons of idolatry. The idolatry condemnation originated through the use of the Arabic word *musawwir* (maker of pictures or sculptures, or artist) “as an epithet for Allah” (Figural Representation in Islamic Art, 2000). There are several *hadiths* that imply if an artist ‘intended’ to rival Allah, the work is considered sinful. While conservative classic visions relied on rigid interpretations of *hadiths*, neither intellectuals nor contemporary scholars consider *hadiths* as reliable as the

⁴¹ *Shia* is considered more liberal than *Sunni* scholars in this regard. For this reason, *Shia* art has many figurative depictions, including the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) as well as his companions

⁴² The Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) in the early Islamic period prohibited three-dimensional sculptures because Pagans worshipped them

Qur'anic scriptures. Contemporary scholars then, do not consider *hadith* as a reliable source for prohibition.

Some historians documented the existence of many images/pictures of prophets and righteous people portrayed in Islamic sanctuaries such as inside *al-Kaaba*. The existence of such images/pictures was intended to educate the public. However, the Prophet Mohammed recommended Muslims remove them because, at the time, he was attempting to avoid confusion for worshipping reasons (al-Qurtubi, 2006, p. 272). When tracing this debatable issue back in history, one cannot find any 'explicit' Islamic scriptures that prohibit depicting Living Beings, except for idolization. Therefore, contemporary Muslim scholars such as Mohammad Abdu, Abdul-Halim Mahmood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and Adnan Ibrahim introduced a new vision towards depicting Living Beings in Islamic art, which revolves around the idea that it should only be done in a limited way and for specific reasons.⁴³ As a matter of fact, these contemporary scholars did not articulate an entirely new vision; on the contrary, they relied on rational perspectives introduced by some liberal classic scholars such as al-Tahawi:

In the beginning, the Prophet (peace be on him) prohibited all types of figures, even if they were two dimensional, since the Muslims had only recently converted from the worship of images. Accordingly, everything of this type was prohibited. Later he **lifted the prohibition** from cloth with prints because of the **necessity** of wearing clothes. He also permitted figures which were not treated [sic] in a respectful manner (al-Qaradawi, 1997, p. 52) (emphases mine).

In short, varied attitudes towards image/picture making, in accountability and practice, had a scriptural bias toward refuting idolatry, but other types of images/pictures were permitted.

Contemporary scholars extended the re-evaluation of religious scriptures according to the historical context. According to this contemporary vision, many Islamic art schools, such as those in Andalusia, Iran, and India, flourished by depicting Living Beings. However, it was not very common for Andalusian, Indian or Iranian scholars to be against or complain about depicting full-figure Living Beings. In this way, what could generally be understood from the Prophet's sayings is that representing full-figure Living Beings is not completely prohibited, but rather, it is permissible with some particular limitations. In the pre-Islamic period (*jahiliya*), many newly converted Muslims would worship images/pictures; therefore, Islamic scriptures at the time emphatically prohibited picture making in order to detach such individuals from paganism. After the stability of the religion in people's hearts, prohibition was no longer needed, as long as Muslims refrained from pagan rituals. Contemporary scholars thus permitted two-dimensional full-figures (either fragmented or complete) because they are 'shadow-less,' and cannot encompass 'souls' in the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, flat two-dimensional images/pictures cannot rival Allah's creation because the obvious flatness makes it impossible to acquire life in the first place. Soul, in this context, cannot enliven a two-dimensional image, so to speak. This is why the Prophet and his companions did not find it problematic to use figurative (two-dimensional) coins and rings (Ibrahim, 2014). On the other hand, three-dimensional images were banned, especially if they were complete figures. This prohibition was namely for idolatry reasons. This is why 'Intentionality,' in which the artist intentionally aims to compete with Allah in His act of creation, plays a great role in determining whether or not such representations are

⁴³ Yusuf al-Qaradawi is a famous Egyptian theologian. He has published more than 120 books, and won 8 awards for his Islamic scholarly work. Among many contemporary Islamic scholars, he considers himself a *Wasati*: a point-of-view that is defined as being not extremist nor liberal, so one does not go beyond the limit set by Allah, and at the same time, does not neglect such limits. Due to his unique perspective on Islamic religious scriptures, many extremist clerics oppose his opinions and dismiss him as wicked and cursed.

permissible.⁴⁴ In short, intentionality is the primary factor that contemporary scholars consider when it comes to figurative imagery.

Confusion of terminology stirred the religious debate of Living Beings' representations in Islamic art. More specifically, the Arabic word for *image* (*sura/single - suwar/plural - musawwir/image-maker*) is the principal reason behind such confusion. The word *image* in Arabic can encompass both two and three-dimensional works. While the phrase *image-of/picture-of* (*sura/single - tasaweer/plural - musawwir/image-maker*) is limited to two-dimensional arts (Figure 1). In this respect, the act of depicting images/pictures is nothing more than creating artistic productions that *look similar-to* something that exists in nature. A two-dimensional image/picture acts as a *symbol-of* (*mithal*) of the depicted object. The concept of *craftsmanship in art* does not necessarily mean 'artistic handicraft.' Creativity is not associated with artistic skills but with experiment and innovation; crafts do not invoke any spiritual or psychological emotions; and handicrafts are basically transcribed through generations (from father to son) and have nothing to do with originality. This is why Saudis do not usually exhibit handicrafts in art galleries; crafts do not become renowned art.

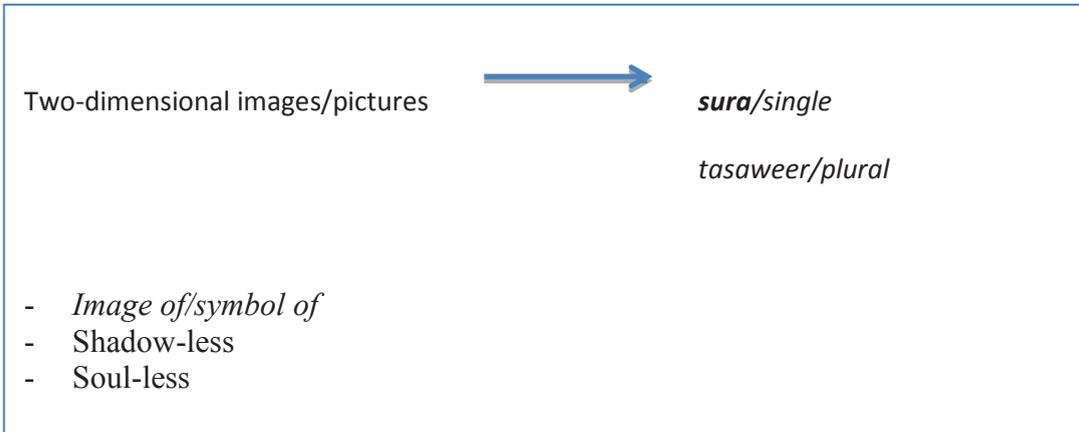


Figure 1 Arabic Terminology of Two-Dimensional Images/Pictures.

On the other hand, when creating three-dimensional images/pictures, the artist is making a *copy-of/example-of/imitation-of* the represented object (Figure 2). In this context, the act of creating idols is nothing more than making an 'exact copy' of Allah's creatures. In short, because many Islamic scholars have an incomplete understanding of the artistic practices, they confused two and three-dimensional arts, and have integrated the prohibition of creating three-dimensional idols within the two-dimensional realm.⁴⁵ Due to ambiguous terminology and an inability to blend the conservatives' scholars understanding of Arabic word-origins into the discipline of art, this study uses a sensible view that relies on marginalized views of the liberal classic scholars because many conservative classic scholars

⁴⁴ Many contemporary scholars depended on the fact that none of the divine religions (ethereal beliefs) were against figurative art as well.

⁴⁵ Many historians cited there were many sculptures as idols in Mecca during the pre-Islamic period. It has been said that a man called Amr Bin Lohai al-Khozai, prince of Khoza'a tribe, brought the first idols to Mecca. The Prophet Mohammed found about 360 sculptures surrounding *al-Kaaba*, and then he destroyed all of them because 'there is no God to worship but Allah.' Moreover, art historians documented the existence of many Islamic sculptures in the Caliphs' palaces. Even though such sculptures existed during the time of Islamic sovereignty, this does not mean that it was religiously permissible (Ibrahim, 2014).

were simply trying to be on the safe side. The artist's intention and the artistic content are key elements here. As long as the artist is not challenging Allah in His act of creation from nonentity, artists will be safe. This concept is against portraying pornographic, erotic, and nude subjects, and also against depicting content related to sexual behavior, lust, and sin. However, for every rule there is an exception. Because of the flexibility of Islamic laws, if there is a necessity in portraying such content, such as drawing a nude full-figure human body for educational purposes, this rule can be crossed without any limitations.⁴⁶

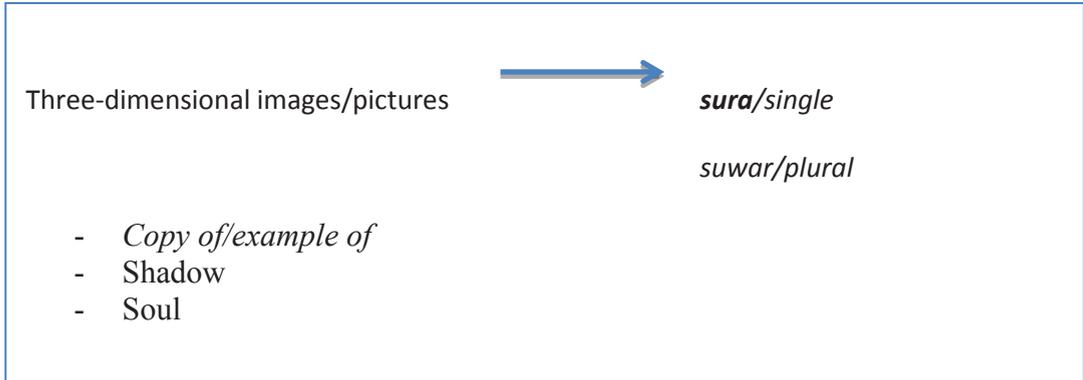


Figure 2 Arabic Terminology of Three-Dimensional Images/Pictures.

One may wonder: 'why Islam does not allow sculpture-making/collecting?' This could be due to many reasons: detaching Muslims from idolatry and paganism; avoiding worshipping other deities; eliminating the idea of infinite existence and immortalization; and cancelling any intentionality to rival Allah in His act of creation from nonentity. From this, there is an important issue concerning sculpture making, which in this case might make it permissible. Because the prohibition was focused and limited to full-figure statues, some scholars believed that partial/fragmented sculptures were permissible because they could not live this way (other extremist scholars still consider them prohibited). Even though it could be interpreted from *hadiths* that fragmented sculptures could be allowed, I may have a different interpretation. The idea that removing the head of the statue to be 'lifeless' can be feasible, but this act of eliminating has a deeper meaning. This missing part of the body helps to vandalize/deform it in a way to stop defecating/glorifying it due to the un-ideal character. In this respect, one could consider bust-figure statues put in squares for instance to be more anti-Islamic than the small full-figure figurines owned in houses for decorative reasons. When talking about small full-figure statues, one would question children's toys in Islam. And to support this personal perspective concerning the idea of vandalism and deformity, children's toys are wholly permissible in Islam not matter they are full- or fragmented (even extremists agree on this idea). This is because children dishonor/degrade their toys (by throwing them on the floor, for instance). Children, in this context, do not sanctify/deify toys.

Liberal scholars in the past and contemporary scholars have different views on two-dimensional images/pictures, though there is a shared common ground in what is exactly prohibited. To name a few instances: idolizing and sanctioning images that reach the level of sacredness; overly resembling luxury and sumptuousness; interrupting Muslim prayers; containing nude and sexual content; and of course, when the artist 'intentionally' aims to rival Allah in His act of creation from nonentity. In short, contemporary Islamic scholars inherited

⁴⁶ This is why, I completely limiting myself to two-dimensional images/pictures in this study, and three-dimensional images/pictures on the other hand require its own sort of study.

the marginalized understandings of liberal classic scholars, whom both agree on the prohibition of idolatry reasons and intentionality.

2. Saudi Attitudes to the Art World

Saudi scholars mainly adopt the classic opinions of Islamic scholars. Unfortunately, Saudi scholars tend to “prohibit what may lead to committing sins.”⁴⁷ For this reason, the idea of representing full-figure Living beings in children’s curriculum books is still questionable for both authorities and parents. Many Saudi parents discourage their children from painting full-figure Living Beings in school, while ironically; many do not mind hanging such full-figures on their walls or wear them as clothes. If asked, many would reply: ‘I did not do it myself; therefore, it someone else’s sin.’ Because there is nothing against wearing or owning figurative art in Islam, except for *hadiths* that present images that will scare the Angels of mercy out of homes, many Saudis do not find it sinful to own full-figure representations.⁴⁸ They know that the only exception is having such images/pictures in praying places, yet the lack of Angels at home is not a major concern to some of them. This contradictory notion compounds the confusion of the religious terms among Muslim scholars in the first place.

On the other hand, Photography has a different perception in Saudi culture: when it comes to figuration, photography is religiously and socially more accepted than drawing and painting. This is due to many reasons. First, photography is not an artistic creation because many Saudis believe that it is an exact representation/image of reality. The human uses the machine (camera) as a tool; thus, Man is ‘indirectly’ depicting reality.⁴⁹ In this context, the photographer is not imitating Allah in His act of creation because Man is only ‘transcribing’ Allah’s creation. Second, photography is not considered an art genre yet because Man has ‘nothing’ to do with it; the machine does everything. Accordingly, the photographer is not an artist, but simply one who wields technology.⁵⁰ In short, the perception is that because of photography’s likeness to documentation, it transcribes reality, but it does not attempt to rival Allah’s act of creation. In their minds, Saudis are avoiding rivaling Allah in photography because paradoxically, it is not an artistic domain of expression, and it is not a ‘created’ art from nothingness. While photography is more acceptable among Saudis than painting, it has not reached the level of being an ‘art’ because ‘the camera does everything.’ This might explain its exclusion from Saudi educational institutions. Unlike painting that is being taught in higher education, photography is being taught as an extra-curricular technique, nothing more.

CONCLUSION

This study principally discusses the religious aspects of Living Beings’ representations within Islamic and Saudi contexts. It first examines classic Islamic scholars’ visions (conservative and liberal) towards full-figure Living Being depictions, and then compared these visions with

⁴⁷ Instead of reworking the mind and rationalize critical modern issues, Saudi religious clerics prefer to be on the safe side, which is in this situation regressing.

⁴⁸ Angels of Mercy in Islam are known as the Guardian Angels in the West, which are good creatures to have around, unlike *genies* (devils or demons) that are not. Muslims depend on *hadiths* such as:

Narrated Aisha: I purchased a cushion with pictures on it. The Prophet (came and) stood at the door but did not enter. I said (to him), ‘I repent to Allah for what (the guilt) I have done.’ He said, ‘What is this cushion?’ I said, ‘It is for you to sit on and recline on.’ He said, ‘The makers of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it will be said to them, “Make alive what you have created.” Moreover, the angels do not enter a house where there are pictures’ (Bukhari, *Hadith* 6022).

⁴⁹ While man created both the machine (camera) and the brush as artistic tools, according to the Saudi mentality, they differ because the ‘absence’ of the artistic process in their eyes.

⁵⁰ This may explain why Saudis are willing to pay more for a painting than a photograph.

their contemporary counterparts. Both classic and contemporary visions tremendously differed. In regards to depicting full-figure Living Beings, conservative classic Islamic visions were against the whole idea of figuration, unless the image/picture was fragmented, distorted, faceless, or headless. Conversely, contemporary and liberal Islamic scholars were more flexible with interpreting religious scriptures (namely *hadiths*). Such scholars did not consider *hadiths*, which are considered non-reliable source of prohibition, as their definitive source justification. Correspondingly, they believed that such *hadiths* are confined to specific contexts of time and place. Therefore, classic scholars permitted two-dimensional representations in different ways from modern liberal artists. Two-dimensional full-figure Living Beings are permitted except for idolatry or reasons of luxury. Expressing notions of nudity or sexuality continues to be thought of as sinful. The artist's intentionality is most advised, especially if she or he anticipated rivaling Allah in His act of creation. While the paper mainly focuses on two-dimensional representations, terminology and a lack of artistic background is what actually confused many Islamic scholars. The word image/picture in Arabic (*sura*) can encompass both two and three-dimensional arts. Whereas the word *image-of/picture-of (sura: suwar)* is limited to only two-dimensional works, the artist can make a *copy-of/example-of/imitation-of (sura: tasaweer)* a three-dimensional object. Therefore, contemporary perspectives permitted full-figure representations on two-dimensional surfaces (with some limitations), and at the same time, continued to prohibit three-dimensional depictions. Due to the flatness of the drawn/painted illustration, this study discusses how two-dimensional full-figure Living Beings is no longer sinful as assumed before.

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