

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**THE UNDERLYING CONCEPT OF  
PERSIAN MINIATURE PAINTINGS:  
Persian Miniature Paintings Between  
14th to 17th Centuries**

**MOHAMMAD TIRANI**

Thesis submitted in fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Art and Design**

July 2017

## ABSTRACT

Since Nineteen century until now many fine artists and art historians from western countries and also Muslim scholars tried to reveal the underlying techniques and content behind the Persian Miniature Paintings. Most of the early outcome of Western analysis and research works emphasized on decorative concept of miniature paintings until past decades that some Western and Persian-Muslim scholars like Henry Corbin, Oleg Grabar, Robert Hillenbrand, SH NASR, M. M. Ashrafi and many others started new argument about philosophical-mystical concept behind the miniature works. To unlock the mysteries of creating miniature works researchers referred to mystical philosophy of Iran in that period. After that the great Sufis' names like as Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, Jami, Molana, Maulana Rumi, Ibn 'Arabi and many others entered the analytic language of Persian Miniature Arts. There are many publications and research works in the past decades that explained the relation between artists and Sufis but until now no one able to propose an aesthetical term and language for Persian miniature works. Beside historical, literal and formal analysis; researchers required to establish an acceptable and accurate terms which proved the connections between miniature works and mystical concepts. To find the missing linkage, this research tried to start with explanation of historical backgrounds, misunderstanding of Western scholars and definition of Alam al-Mithal as the main concept in Sufi practice and then use a methodology based on the contextual field of paintings which is Iran. Formal analysis of miniature works contained the major visual concepts like as Light, Time, Space, Color, Geometrical Composition and the paintings were selected from all four famous Persian Miniature Schools. At the same time in the next chapter this research tried to explain the visual terms of Alam al-Mithal to find out the similarity between visual terms of Persian Miniature Paintings and Alam al-Mithal. The researcher referred to many Iranian contemporary researchers whose works contains valuable information and concepts for understanding the underlying concept of Persian miniature paintings. Overlapping the visual terms of miniature paintings and Alam al-Mithal could help the Persian and all Muslim artists and researchers to build their works based on foundations which are His work on the foundations justifiable and understandable. The key terms for the research are Persian Miniature Painting, Islamic Art, Sufism, Alam al-Mithal, Contextual Research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I wish to thank God for giving me the opportunity to embark on my PhD and for completing this long and challenging journey successfully. My gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor Associate Professor Dr. Dzul Haimi bin Md. Zain who always been patiently and kindly helping me through every single step of my study, a special debt of gratitude is expressed to him.

There would be many names to thanks for their presence and attention in both life and study in Malaysia. Special thanks to Associate Professor Dr. Baharudin Ujang for his fully support during my Master and PHD study, Associate Professor Dr. Kamarudzaman Md. Isa, Professor Dr. Mustaffa Halabi Hj. Azahari, Associate Professor Ruslan Abd. Rahim, Professor Dr. Mulyadi Mohamood and Associate Professor Haji Ponirin Amin, Dr. Rosita Mohd Tajuddin, Associate Professor Ramlan @ Razlan Abdulah, Dr. Adzrool Idzwan Ismail, Dr. Mumtaz Mokhtar.

There would many names in the faculty of Art and Design who were kindly supporting me towards the progress of this research. Beside there are many people who were supporting in many ways to carry on my PHD and my life in Malaysia. First I would like to give my gratitude to my dear Malaysian brother Suzlee Ibrahim for all his supports and also to dear Professor Dr. Amir Hossein Zekrgoo and Associate Professor Dr. Mandana Barkeshli for their warm attention and supportive.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my very dear father and mother for the vision and determination to educate me. This piece of victory is dedicated to both of them.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Islamic art, especially the sacred art of Islam, is known as God's gift to the Muslim people. This art is admired by Muslims for its revivifying power of beauty, as it is linked to truth.<sup>1</sup>

Art is one of the most crucial and dominant mediums of religion. An artist has the astonishing aptitude to characterise a religious subject matter or communication all the way through painting or other art-forms or art-techniques.<sup>2</sup>

There are many significant artworks in the Persian tradition, often referred to by contemporary artists and researchers. The content of Islamic sacred art is located in the inner dimension of Islamic revelation and its spirituality<sup>3</sup>; it could be studied and researched by Muslim artists and researchers who are looking for new forms and identities, based on traditional Islamic art. It should also be studied in the light of its spiritual significance, rather than as a mere historical development.<sup>4</sup>

There are many art historians and scholars who would reject the spiritual concept and meaning of Islamic arts, by simply denying its Islamicity and claiming that such an art, no matter how beautiful, intelligible, or harmonious, has in fact little to do with the spirit or form of the Islamic revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Many Iranian-Islamic arts are without information of the patrons. Many a time, the concept of the artworks is subjected to challenge by many scholars to unveil the spiritual secret of these works:

<sup>1</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *"Islamic Art and Spirituality"*, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.201.

<sup>2</sup>Khawaja Muhammad Saeed, *"Islamic Art and Its Spiritual Message"*, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 1No. 2011.

<sup>3</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *"Islamic Art and Spirituality"*, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.201.

<sup>4</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *"Islamic Art and Spirituality"*, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.201.

<sup>5</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *"Islamic Art and Spirituality"*, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.196.