

# **SUFISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART OF MALAYSIA**

Dr. AhmadRashidi Bin Hasan  
Dr. Mizan Bin Hitam  
Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Cawangan Melaka

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Dr. Ahmadrashidi Bin Hasan  
Prof. Madya Mizan Hitam  
Faculty of Art and Design,  
UiTM Cawangan Melaka.

### **Abstract**

Sufism is the higher thought of Islam that venture into the domain of spirituality (*bathin*). It involved the perfection of the practice (*al-syari'ah*) process of the path (*al-tariqah*), the ideology of the truth (*al-haqiqah*), the philosophy of the knowing (*al-makrifah*). The knowing (*al-makrifah*) involved the process of unifying to gain the unity of practice (*tauhidul af'al*), the unity of character (*tauhidul sifat*), unity in name (*tauhidul asma*) and the unifying of the essence (*tauhidul Dzat*) with the only existing essence (*Dzat wajibal wujud*). The nobility of the ideology (*haal*) and the beauty of the experience (*zauq*) of sufism si only felt among its practitioner. This paper disclosed some of the artists who observed to express Sufism , both ideological and experiential. It discussed the content analysis of their artworks on aspects like image, subject and their meaning from the perspectives of Sufism and also the formalistic aspects which involved the style and visuals. Artists appeared to used the implicit manifestation of expression which involved metaphorical and abstract representation . It is established that there are artists in Malaysia who expressed the ideology of Sufism or expressed the beauty of the spiritual experience of the Sufism.

### **Keyword**

Sufism, Sufistic Expression, Explicit Manifestation, Implicit Manifestation  
and Spiritual Expression.

# CONTENT

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....                          | 1  |
| 1.1 Background of the Study.....                      | 1  |
| 1.2 Research Objectives.....                          | 8  |
| 1.3 Research Significance.....                        | 9  |
| 1.4 Research Methodology .....                        | 10 |
| 1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations.....              | 12 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....                     | 13 |
| 2.1 Sufism.....                                       | 13 |
| 2.2 Element of Sufism.....                            | 21 |
| CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....                  | 28 |
| 3.1 Analytical Observation.....                       | 28 |
| 3.1.1 Population.....                                 | 29 |
| 3.1.2 Sampling.....                                   | 30 |
| 3.1.3 Content Analysis.....                           | 36 |
| 3.1.4 Classification and Categorization.....          | 39 |
| 3.2 Interviews.....                                   | 41 |
| 3.3 Findings and Conclusions.....                     | 42 |
| CHAPTER 4: STYLES OF EXPRESSIONS.....                 | 43 |
| 4.1 Styles and Types.....                             | 43 |
| 4.2 Naturalist Approach.....                          | 44 |
| 4.3 Expressionist Approach.....                       | 51 |
| 4.4 Conceptualist Approach.....                       | 58 |
| 4.5 Pattern and Decorative Art Approach.....          | 66 |
| 4.6 Conclusions.....                                  | 71 |
| CHAPTER 5: SUFISTIC MANIFESTATIONS.....               | 72 |
| 5.1 Explicit Manifestations of Sufis Expressions..... | 73 |
| 5.1.1 The Expression of Sufis Knowledge.....          | 73 |
| 5.1.2 Expression of Spiritual Expression.....         | 85 |
| 5.2 Implicit Manifestations of Sufis Expressions..... | 89 |
| 5.3 Conclusions.....                                  | 99 |

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER 6: CONTENT EXPRESSIONS..... | 100 |
| 6.1 Metaphorical Expressions.....   | 100 |
| 6.2 Spiritual Expressions.....      | 122 |
| 6.3 Popular Terms.....              | 128 |
| 6.4 Conclusions.....                | 132 |
| CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS.....         | 134 |
| 7.1 Approaches of Expressions.....  | 134 |
| 7.2 Sufis Style.....                | 137 |
| 7.3 Content.....                    | 140 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                   | 143 |
| APPENDICES.....                     | 145 |

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Sufism (*Tasawuf*) is regarded as one of the highest order of Islamic 'ilm (knowledge) (Al-Ghazalli, 1999:60<sup>1</sup>). The knowledge ('ilm) of Sufism can be described broadly as the intensification of Islamic faith and practice, or to strive for a personal engagement with the Divine Reality (*wajib al wujud*). The term 'Sufi', which is Arabic, had been defined with variations over the past centuries both by proponents and opponents of Sufism. The diversion of the interpretations of Sufism was due to the sources of understanding, primary and secondary sources. For those who practiced Sufism, the primary sources, interpreted Sufism as living the spiritual (*akhirah*) dimension in the worldly life. For some, they perceived Sufism as a movement that engaged 'Islamic mysticism' or 'Islamic esotericism.' Such terms are vague and often imply a negative value judgment and sometimes discourage people not to fit into the preconceive concept of Sufism.

The birth of Sufism was concomitant with the birth of Islam. Since, the first revelation of Verses (*Āyah*) 1 to 3 of Surah Al-Iqraq, (A. Yusof Ali, 1983:1760) the Jibril, the angel of revelation, idea of Sufism is already incorporated.

*Iqraq Bismirabika al-ladzi khalaq  
Khalaqakal insāna min 'alaq*

Proclaim! With the name of your Rabb who creates  
Creating Man from the 'alaq

The two main matters revealed here is the *Rabb*, the creator which is the essence (*Dzat*), and the created (*khalaqa*) which the manifested (*tajalli*). The *Rabb* or the