

## **EXPLORING AND INTERPRETING THE SPIRITUALITY VALUES IN THE WORKS OF INDONESIAN ARTS (Case Study: The Art Works of Amrizal Salayan)**

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### **Abstract**

The spiritual experience of an individual must be different from one to another. The word ‘spirituality’ itself has two understandings, namely personal spirituality and religious spirituality. Personal spirituality is considered to be one’s experience that has an impact on his personal awareness which affects his behavior and attitudes, regardless of any religion he has. While religious spirituality is believed as one’s experience that has a connection with his religion, thus it influences his behavior and attitudes.

For particular artists, spiritual experience has special substance in their life phases. It inspires them to create their masterpieces. One of Indonesian professional artists whose works are laden with spiritual values is Amrizal Salayan. Undoubtedly, his masterpieces in each exhibition he followed had presented contemplative visual forms, such as his art works entitled “*Manusia Daun Pisang*” (Banana Leaf Man), “*Ia Ada dengan Ketiadaannya*” (There He is with His Absence), and others.

With the approaches of Islamic aesthetics and visual language, this research focuses on Amrizal Salayan’s works to be studied the spiritual values contained therein.

**Keywords:** spirituality, art works, Indonesian artist, Islamic aesthetics, visual language

### **1. Introduction**

The world of art has varied colors and creativity. It can be determined from the variety of visual forms and aesthetic expression presented by every artist. In each art exhibition we can see clearly how the art forms are presented. Certainly, they are not created arbitrarily but rather with certain concepts. For instance, in a contemporary Islamic Art Exhibition in Jakarta in 2011, one of the artists participating in it was Amrizal salayan with the peculiarities of his art works.

Amrizal Salayan, is one of Indonesian sculptors who has created many sculptures. His works have graced many placed not only in Indonesian but also abroad. Some of his works monumental art works are displayed in the buildings of People's Counselative Assembly/ People's Representative Council of Republic of Indonesia (*MPR/DPR RI*), in Bandung Army Command School (*SESKOAD-Bandung*), in Jalan Sudirman -Jakarta, Soekarno Hatta Airport, Ambon-Maluku, Papua Nugini, and in other places.

In addition to those monumental works, he also worked for the popularity needs that were often exhibited in some art work exhibitions both nationally and internationally. These works were crafted in three dimensions, in the form of sculptures. The themes of his art works mostly concerned spiritual values. What are the spiritual values contained in his masterpieces? This research attempts to reveal the answer.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Amrizal Salayan is a sculptor whose name has been well-known in art communities in Indonesia. This Institute of Technology Bandung (ITB) graduate has created many sculptures with various themes that were successfully exhibited in various events both nationally and internationally. One of them is the spiritual theme that makes the appreciator think and reflect.

In addition to working in the context of artistic expression, he also works in the context of artistic projects, such as monumental works which were graced in strategic spots. One of them is the sculpture of national hero, Leimena in Ambon, which was currently inaugurated by Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

In this study, the researcher used several theories of visual language and Islamic aesthetics for analyzing and explaining Amrizal Salayan's art works. The term 'Bahasa Rupa' (Visual Language), probably sounds unfamiliar for most of Indonesian people, since it is regarded a new scientific discipline in Indonesia. Furthermore, the literature dealing with this subject is extremely limited. In this research, the writer stands on the research carried out by Prof. Dr. Primadi Tabrani, concerning visual language as one of references to analyze an art work. With this discipline, we are able to read pictures nowadays.

Creativity is the subject which is mostly discussed in this visual language theory. The researchers compiled various definitions of creativity used in this research discussion. In understanding the meaning of creativity, we are dealing with confusion due to its varied meanings. Many people believe it strongly deals with art, some say it deals with attitudes and behavior, while others consider it only deals with the way of thinking.

Prof. Dr. Primadi Tabrani in his book entitled "Proses Kreasi, Apresiasi, Belajar" claims that creativity is:

*"Salah satu kemampuan manusia yang dapat membantu kemampuannya yang lain, hingga sebagai keseluruhan dapat mengintegrasikan stimulasi-luar (yang melandanya dari luar sekarang) dengan stimulasi-dalam (yang telah dimiliki sebelumnya- memori) hingga tercipta suatu kebulatan baru."*

According to J.E. Drevdahl cited by Elizabeth B. Hurlock, creativity is:

*"Kemampuan seseorang untuk menghasilkan komposisi, product atau gagasan apa saja yang pada dasarnya baru dan sebelumnya tidak dikenal pembuatnya. Kreatifitas dapat berupa kegiatan imajinatif atau sintesis pemikiran yang hasilnya bukan hanya perangkuman. Kreatifitas mungkin mencakup pembentukan pola dan gabungan informasi yang diperoleh dari pengalaman sebelumnya dan pencangkakan hubungan lama ke situasi baru dan mungkin mencakup pembentukan korelasi baru. Kreatifitas harus mempunyai maksud dan tujuan yang ditentukan, bukan fantasi semata, walaupun merupakan hasil yang sempurna dan lengkap. Kreatifitas mungkin dapat berupa produk seni, kesusasteraan, produk ilmiah atau mungkin bersifat procedural atau metodologis."*

Furthermore, Irma Damayanti, M. Sn. in her book entitled "Psikologi Seni", states that creativity is derived from English language 'to create' which means 'mencipta' in Indonesian language. Hence, creativity is assumed an effective skill to create. The values of "novelty" and "authenticity" are always correlated with creativity.

From these three definitions of the word 'creativity' above, it can be inferred that creativity is about creating innovative and original thoughts, products, ideas even methodology which are

inspired by the previous experiences or the prior knowledge of the creators/ artists, based on certain purposes.

In this study, the researcher correlated the artist' creativity with the spirituality values containing in some works, as the research samples. From the spirituality values, the researcher takes many theories of Islamic aesthetics that have various discourse, thoughts and values of art and aesthetics. They were written by some Moslem figures, such as Seyyed Hosein Nasr, Ismail Raji Al Faruqi and Lois Lamy Al Faruqi, Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, Yusuf Qardhawi, Oliver Leaman, and others. In Indonesia, those who contributed their thoughts about Islamic Aesthetics are Endang Saefudin Anshari, Ahmad Sadali, Abay Subarna, Setiawan Sabana, Yustiono and others.

In order to understand Islamic aesthetics, Sayyed Hossein Nasr in his book *Spiritualitas dan Seni Islam* (1987:16) (Sprituality and Islamic Arts) states:

*Teologi (kalam) atau ilmu hukum (fikih) yang dapat memberikan penjelasan tentang masalah-masalah seni dan estetika Islam. Sedangkan sumber seni Islam adalah dari Al-Quran dan barakah Nabi. Tanpa adanya dua sumber tersebut, tidak akan mungkin ada seni Islam.*

The thought of Sayyed Hossein Nasr's is firmly based on Islamic art on the Holy Koran and al-Hadits. Koran (*Al-Qur'an*) is a holy book containing the words of Allah (God) and becomes the guidance of all Moslem around the world. Hadits is defined as each speech, actions, and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad which was recorded and made becoming Moslem's guidance. Both of them contain commands and prohibitions of God. Thus, each action and deed of the believers have to be based on them, including art.

A popular Moslem philosopher, Ismail Raji Faruqi and Lois Lamy Al-Faaruci in their book entitled *Atlas Budaya Islam* (Islamic Cultural Atlas/Map) (1998: 124), state that *Tauhid sebagai prinsip pertama estetika* or Monotheism is the basic principle of the aesthetics. Avoiding figurative descriptions is the form of monotheism. Lord must be free from the tendency of natural forms. The existence of Lord that cannot be visually described is the highest esthetic purposes. The basic principle that becomes the Islamic art concepts is derived from *Al-Qur'an*.

"...seni peradaban Islam harus dipandang sebagai ungkapan estetis yang asal-usul dan realisasinya sama. Ya, seni Islam sungguh merupakan seni Qurani" (ibid:196). This statement claims that the aesthetics should be taken from the Qur'an therefore Islamic civilization will refer to the same standard and implementation.

Al Faruqi in his statement emphasizes that the Islamic art works should have high spiritual meanings, which is monotheism in this case. Avoiding depiction that resembles nature (naturalism) is emphasized as mentioned in Qur'an that Lord cannot be described in the images of humans or animals, "And there is none co-equal and comparable unto Him" (QS 113:4). Those verses explain that the nature of Lord cannot be captured by the means of senses, either in the forms of humans, animals, or figural symbols of nature. This is a challenge for Moslems in creative art. Therefore the art of Moslem often refer to infinite patterns or so-called *Arabesques*.

### 3. Results



**Figure 1. Ia Ada Dengan Ketiadaannya-2003,**  
 Com Stone, Installation

The visual image of the following Amrizal Salayan's art work, entitled '*Ia Ada dengan Ketiadaan-Nya- 2003*' (There He is with His Absence), displays the nine pieces of human statues, describing a man standing and folding his hands like a praying person. The leftmost human statue was made very realistic, lining up as many as nine pieces, the right to the abstract.

Referring to the title of the art work above, then what has been created by the artist is extremely contemplative. A human is born and physically developed, there and visible, but in the time God takes his life, there he is not. There is the body but his spirit returns to God. As what reveals in one of the Surahs in Qur'an, Q.S 2: 28 " How can you disbelieve in Allah (Lord)? Seeing that you were dead and then He gave you life. Then He will give you death, then again will bring you yo life (on the Day of Resurrection) and then unto Him you will return."



**Figure 2. Maut Sudah Berada Di Depan Beranda Rumah Kita-2005,**  
 Com. Stone, Bamboo, Installation; Dimension Variable

Another art work of Amrizal Salayan is entitled *Maut Sudah Berada di Beranda Rumah Kita* (Death Already Being at Our Home). His work describes several human statues lying

among bamboo trees and shrub grass. They represent the corpses lying. This site reminds us, the humans, that there will be the time returning to our Creator.

It is not complicated for the art appreciator to understand these works due to their realistic titles and visual images. The art appreciator is easily able to interpret that these art works have strong spiritual values.

#### 4. Conclusion

The spiritual values in the art works of Amrizal Salayan are strongly seen, besides their contemplative and religious titles. They are also indicated in the concepts and ideas of the artist who quite often follows the contemporary Islamic art exhibitions. Amrizal is capable to demonstrate his creativity integrated with the spiritual concepts shown in his works.

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