‘God Is Beautiful and Loves Beauty’: Aesthetics and Ethics in Islam-Inspired Art

Virginia Hooker

Most Indonesian Muslims are familiar with the Prophet Muhammad’s saying, ‘God is Beautiful and loves beauty’, and the balancing statement, ‘God is Good and loves goodness’.¹ In Islam, ‘Beauty’ and ‘Goodness’ are two of the ‘99 Names’ that Muslims use to describe the attributes and qualities of God, qualities that are also the ‘the guiding principles for Islamic ethics, piety, and good moral conduct’.² The Prophet Muhammad urged Muslims to strive to acquire the characteristics of God as much as it is possible for humans to do, because the very effort will guide them to lead pious lives.

The two sayings have particular significance for Indonesian artists whose work is inspired by Islam. Quranic descriptions of God creating a universe of wonder and beauty to be a source of pleasure and enjoyment for all humans inspire them to express that beauty in their art.³ They believe that art inspired by the Quran bears witness to God’s majesty and power.

¹ Recorded in Imam Muslim’s (d. 875 CE) collection of hadith, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
³ For example, Quran Qaf 50: 6–10.
and to create such art is an act of worship. It follows, they believe, that when individuals are affected and moved by the beauty of Islam-inspired art to reflect on the power of God the Creator, they will want to follow His injunctions, apply them in their daily lives and thus live ethically and with goodness.\(^4\)

This chapter begins with an analysis of the works of three well-known Indonesian male artists to examine how they have combined aesthetics with Quranic values—that is, ethics—to create works that respond to events in Indonesian politics and society. It concludes by examining the contribution of a female artist who also questions the values and ethics of those with power, but in innovative ways that underline ‘the right of women to define for themselves their voice and their own language’.\(^5\)

It is a chapter about contexts and choices. Each of the male artists has acknowledged the influence of Indonesian history and social change on their work and has written or spoken about how their choices in life and art are shaped by Islam. Ahmad Sadali (1924–1987), A. D. Pirous (b. 1932) and Tisna Sanjaya (b. 1958) encourage their audiences to reflect on and engage with their work through the thoughts and emotions they experience when viewing it. The affect of the aesthetic of their works, they hope, will remind or prompt viewers to remember God the Creator of all beauty and to remember the Quranic values of goodness and ethical behaviour.

Sadali’s works demand the most effort from his audience, but he assists them with visual ‘clues’ that are integral parts of his arresting paintings. In his paintings, Pirous often uses Quranic verses in Arabic calligraphy to express the themes of his work and he refers to ‘visual ethics’ as part of his style. Sanjaya literally spells out his themes in keywords inscribed onto his works and in dialogues with members of his audience. In his performance installations, he includes prayers, rituals and images that symbolise the


metaphysical. These themes, and active audience participation in his works during his live performances, serve to engage viewers directly with the ethical issues that concern him and, he believes, will also concern them.

Each of these artists has an established reputation in Indonesia and is recognised internationally. Sadali and Sanjaya are from Sunda (West Java) and Pirous was born and grew up in Aceh (northern Sumatra) but moved to West Java in 1955 where he still lives (see Map 3). They were (and in Sanjaya’s case still are) senior staff members of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Indonesia’s oldest tertiary education institution. They each came to prominence at different times, yet they are linked by four factors: Islam as their source of inspiration, thinking and values; belief in the transformational power of art; the conviction that this transformational power is activated by the affect of beauty (aesthetics); and, lastly, their concerns about the negative effects of unethical behaviour and violence on their fellow Indonesians, Muslim and non-Muslim, and on the environment God created for all humans.

Sadali and Pirous went to school during the last years of Dutch colonialism and the Japanese occupation of Indonesia between 1942 and 1945. They saw Sukarno proclaim the birth of Indonesia as an independent nation-state in 1945, and experienced the bitter and bloody armed struggle against the Dutch to achieve full independence in 1950. Sadali, Pirous and Sanjaya have each, at different times, witnessed bitter civil violence and seen the effects of mass murders, or prolonged imprisonment, on hundreds of thousands of individuals and families. They have witnessed the division of local communities riven by prejudice, corruption, ideologies (communism and Islamic extremism) and inequality. On the plus side, they have each enjoyed international travel and periods of study in America, Europe, other parts of Asia and Australia. Their works have been shown and recognised in Muslim and non-Muslim societies outside Indonesia. They have experienced the honour of being recognised within Indonesia as among its leading cultural ambassadors and nationally acclaimed artists, despite the criticisms of aspects of Indonesia’s society and political leadership that are expressed in some of their artworks.6

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6 Examples of how these criticisms are expressed are given below.
They are linked also by their embrace of ‘the new’, particularly in exploring new ways of understanding their religion (as described later in the chapter), and new ways of expressing that understanding in their artistic practice. The Quran, the record of divine revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, provides the spiritual framework for all Muslims. Three of its messages are touchstones for most believers: first, the unity and uniqueness of God (tawhid); second, the belief that this physical, earthly life is ephemeral but after death will be followed by an eternal spiritual existence; third, the obligations of humans to God and to each other as expressed in the verses:

Hold fast to God’s rope all together; do not split into factions …
Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong; those who do this are the successful ones.²

Muslims interpret these verses as a description of the vertical ties (of spiritual belief and obligation) that link human beings to God and the horizontal ties between humans living together as social beings seeking peace and harmony. These vertical and horizontal relationships of trust and obligation are expressed symbolically in many artworks inspired by Islam.

The female artist is Arahmaiani Feisal (b. 1961). Her contribution to Indonesian contemporary art is widely acknowledged (see Chapter 7 by Caroline Turner). Like the male artists in this chapter, Arahmaiani has also embraced ‘the new’ and she communicates her art in diverse ways. In contrast to them, she travels regularly and widely to engage with members of various communities in different parts of the world as creators of and participants in collaborative projects. The projects often include performances by Arahmaiani and members of the community as integral parts of their process and these may be recorded on video and viewed by anyone with access to them.³ Many of her artistic references to Islam draw attention to its abuse by individuals and groups who have hijacked it for their own purposes of power and control or who interpret it extremely literally. Arahmaiani is a contemporary of Tisna Sanjaya and, like him, is from Bandung. There are other similarities that will be discussed in the final sections of the chapter.

² Qur'an Āl ‘Imrān 3: 103 and 104.
Artistic Ideologies

Sanento Yuliman (1941–1992) was formulating his ideas about modernity and art in Indonesia at about the same time as Sadali and Pirous were experimenting with new styles in their works. Although Yuliman does not specifically mention art inspired by Islam, he was very familiar with the artistic styles of both men who were his seniors in the faculty where each was employed. Ahmad Sadali was dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at ITB in 1976 when Yuliman published his long essay ‘Seni Lukis Baru Indonesia’ (New Indonesian painting; see Chapter 3).

Elly Kent alerts us to the importance of Yuliman’s identification of an emerging ideology in Indonesian art.9 Yuliman describes it as ‘a complexity of thought, attitude and emotion which becomes a shared basis for different individual practices and which extends across time periods’. Its two basic elements, according to Yuliman, are: first, ‘respect for the painter as an individual who is free to create their own form and style’; second, ‘that the elements of form and their arrangement, regardless of the object they depict, can give rise to, realise, or express valuable artistic emotions, sensations or experiences’.10 It is important to note that in Indonesian, as in English, the words for artist, painter, weaver, potter and so on indicate no gender discrimination.

Yuliman, as Kent shows, was also interested in the ways style influences how viewers experience art. For example, he argues that, in the style he terms ‘lyricism’:

A painting is an expressive field, a place where painters ‘project’ themselves and the beating of their feelings, recording the existence of their soul. The painting is thus seen as a realm of the imagination which has its own purpose, an imaginary or irreal world.11

By contrast, in a different style that Yuliman calls a form of ‘anti-lyricism’, artists choose not to filter or transform the objects in their art but to show the objects themselves:

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10  Quotations from Chapter 3 (this volume).
11  Ibid. (original emphasis).
The experience is intended to achieve the most concrete and actual form possible. Art works are not a slice of the imaginary world to be contemplated at a distance, but a concrete object that physically involves the viewer.\textsuperscript{12}

The inclusiveness of Yuliman’s ‘new artistic ideology’ can encompass the aesthetic ideology of artists who see beauty and goodness as the ethical foundation that supports their artistic practice. However, Yuliman’s distinction between styles of art that are experienced through the filter of the imagination, and art experienced directly and physically, is challenged by the works of artists described in this chapter. Had Yuliman lived longer he might well have revised this dichotomy as he indicates in the following quotation from his writings. In his determination to go beyond the approach to ‘modern’ Indonesian art in the 1960s, Yuliman wrote: ‘we must make astute empirical observations of artworks and artistic practice rather than turning to \textit{a priori} desires and ideas’, and thus ‘give birth to new perspectives, new knowledge, and new questions’.\textsuperscript{13}

The works of Sadali, Pirous and Sanjaya range in style from ‘abstract lyricism’ (Yuliman’s term for Sadali’s paintings) to performance installations in the case of Sanjaya (which Yuliman would categorise as ‘anti-lyricism’ in style). Yet, despite their contrasting styles, the Islam-inspired art of Sadali, Pirous and Sanjaya relies on the ‘affective impact’ of its aesthetic qualities to stimulate viewers’ sense of ethical values—values based on the Quran and centred around ‘goodness’. Their appeal is made through the aesthetics of their art so that empathy, imagination, memory, emotion and the responsibility to behave in an ethical way are the paramount links between art and its transformative impact through reflection and sensibility.

\textbf{Ahmad Sadali: ‘Because of God and for Humanity’}

Ahmad Sadali was born in 1924 in the very beautiful mountainous province of Sunda (West Java). His family owned businesses and land, and his father, a devout Muslim, was founder of the local Muhammadiyah

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
branch. Founded in Indonesia in 1912 and the oldest of Indonesia’s Muslim mass social organisations, Muhammadiyah members were inspired by the modernist thinking of the Egyptian religious scholar Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905). Muhammadiyah schools provided a Western secular and religious education. Sadali thus had a sound grounding in modernist attitudes to Islam, interpreting the Quran and Hadith in ways compatible with living in the contemporary world.

Sadali was 21 when Sukarno declared Indonesia’s independence and he started studying medicine. In 1948 he left that degree to enrol in the first intake of students in the Art Department (as it was then) at ITB. Indonesians regarded ITB during the 1950s as the centre of modernist aesthetics in Indonesia, valuing its appreciation of innovation, originality, rationalism and creativity in line with a culture of modernism oriented towards progress and universalism. The Dutch artist Ries Mulder (a follower of the cubist Jacques Villon) was highly regarded by his students (who included A. D. Pirous as well as Sadali) as a lecturer in painting. Considered an exceptional teacher, he taught using slides and large pictures of famous works. He encouraged his students to read widely and invited them to borrow books from his own extensive library, holding an open house for discussions with his students or other members of staff, and sharing classical music with them.

After graduation in 1953, Sadali was appointed a permanent lecturer. He represented Indonesia in international art events in Europe, Asia, the UK and the US. Awarded a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship, he studied in the US between 1956 and 1957. Sadali was chair of the ITB Department of Fine Arts between 1962 and 1968 and professor of Visual Art and Design from 1972 until his death in 1987. He was also one of the founders of Salman Mosque, the first mosque built on an Indonesian university campus, where he also gave lectures on Islam to ITB students.

14 See also Chapter 1 (this volume).
15 Astri Wright, Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Painters (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18–21, for her comparison of the art academies in Bandung and Yogyakarta. She also provides an insightful overview of Sadali’s thinking on his art, based on secondary sources because he died before she could interview him (pp. 70–71).
16 Details about Ries Mulder and modernism at ITB based on information in Yustiono, ‘Interpretasi Karya Ahmad Sadali dalam Konteks Modernitas dan Spiritualitas Islam dengan Pendekatan Hermeneutik’ [A hermeneutic approach to interpreting the works of Ahmad Sadali in the context of modernity and Islamic spirituality] (PhD diss., Bandung Institute of Technology, 2005), 84–88. It should be noted that, years later, Pirous told Kenneth M. George that ‘Mulder was too hard on me’ and that he felt humiliated by some of his comments. See Kenneth M. George, Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld (UK/US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32, doi.org/10.1002/9781444318265.
In 1968, when he was 44 and serving as dean of his faculty, Sadali seems to have made a deliberate decision about the relationship between his religion and his art. He publicly stated that his art would be ‘because of God and for humanity’.17 From 1968 onwards, his artistic style, which had previously been cubist or semi-abstract, became fully abstract; he is often referred to as ‘the father of Indonesian abstract art’.18

With hindsight, and drawing on Sadali’s public talks and writings, it becomes clear that he made a deliberate choice to respond to the massacres, repression and fear that characterised the post-1965 period of Indonesian history through his art. Only relatively recently have some Indonesians who lived through the violence of 1965–66 been willing to speak publicly or be interviewed about the effect of the violence and the climate of fear on those who survived.19 Art historian Wulan Dirgantoro has researched the effects of trauma on a range of artists who were teaching or studying in Sadali’s faculty during the mid to late 1960s for their impressions of that period. Some remembered rumours of pits or holes being dug by communists as burial sites for the ‘capitalists’ they planned to kill, and some of the art staff heard their names were on communist death lists because they had studied in America. After Suharto seized power in 1965–66, people remember that some staff and students disappeared and were never seen again, their colleagues assuming it was because they had communist affiliations. Wulan Dirgantoro argues that all who survived that period are ‘victims of the extreme violence and ongoing state terror campaigns’.20 It was in this atmosphere of fear, suspicion and post-violence trauma, followed by an increasing emphasis on the training of scientists and technologists, that Sadali painted, led the Faculty of Fine Arts at ITB and taught his students. At the same time, he was formulating the philosophy that became his moral, ethical and aesthetic guide for the rest of his life.

17 Sadali said this at a press conference held in 1968 as part of an exhibition of his works, see Yustiono, ‘Interpretasi Karya Ahmad Sadali’, 226.
Building Communities with Insight

As the nation’s oldest and most experienced university for education and research into science, engineering and technology, ITB was expected to lead the way in introducing new technologies that would transform Indonesia’s economy and raise living standards to reach the targets set out in Suharto’s five-year development plans. Sadali differed from his ITB colleagues, many of whom felt that there was no place for religion and spirituality in the modern, secular world. Sadali strongly believed that reason, feeling and faith were part of a whole, not dialectically opposed. He also knew that the exact sciences, for which ITB was famous, did not include courses on the humanities and religion and thus could not nurture the spiritual and ethical aspects of students’ lives.

Sadali has described how his days began with dawn prayers followed by reading the Quran and reflecting on what he had read before beginning to paint. He said his art expressed what he experienced and what he saw with the eyes of his heart after prayer and reflection, or after gazing on the beauty of the universe. He referred to this practice of inner reflection as ‘zikr’—being mindful of God through meditation. Sometime after 1968, Sadali conceived a spiritual response to materialism, developmentalism and fear, and he would talk, lecture and write about that response until his death in 1987.

Sadali’s response was based on two verses in the Quran. He interpreted them as God’s guidance to those who wished to gain understanding and insight about this world and the next, and the purpose of their existence. Taken from the Quran, chapter Āl ʿImrān 190–91, they read:

> There truly are signs [ayāt] in the creation of the heavens and earth, and in the alternation of night and day, for those with understanding/insight [uli-l-albāb], [191] who remember [yazkurūna] God standing, sitting, and lying down, who reflect [yatafakkarūna] on the creation of the heavens and earth: ‘Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose—You are far above that!—so protect us from the torment of the Fire’.

For Sadali, the key concepts in the verses are God’s creation of ‘signs’ or ‘clues’ in the universe (such as the alternation of night and day) that are intelligible by individuals who use their powers of reflection, meditation

and sensibility (zikr) as well as their powers of reason and logic (fikr) to understand this world and the next. Only by using these twin powers (of reason and logic, and inner reflection and emotions) would individuals be able to fully develop their potential and attain the status of ulī-l-albāb (people with knowledge and insight). Then they would understand God’s signs—both revealed and concealed—and understand that God alone has the power to grant eternal life.

The Eyes of the Heart: Beauty and Zikr

Sadali was concerned that all people strive to balance their reason and reflection and gain spiritual insight, but he also referred to the special ability of artists to perceive reality because of their heightened sensibility and inner awareness. He expanded on this in several talks he delivered to conferences in Malaysia and Pakistan, as well as in Indonesia, during the 1980s. The equilibrium between fikr and zikr remained the foundation for his thinking, but with his ‘art’ audiences he also talked about aesthetics. To do so, he linked the concepts of beauty (keindahan), inner reflection and sensibility (zikr), and art (seni).

Sadali drew on one of the works of the great twelfth-century Muslim scholar al-Ghazali to illustrate the two ways of ‘seeing’. In his Kimiyā’ Saʿāda, al-Ghazali explained that children and animals perceive external beauty with their ‘outer’ or physical eyes. Inner beauty, the deeper, concealed, eternal nature of God, can only be understood by adults through the ‘eyes of their soul and the light of vision’. For Sadali, the key to developing the ‘eyes of the soul’ was the practice of ‘zikr’:

The more developed the practice of zikr, the greater the capacity of the inner eyes and the outer eyes to see form aesthetically—in the broadest sense—that is [form] created by God including humans themselves and [form] created by humans as art. [And the practice of zikr enables it] to be expressed as art’ [as summarised by Yuliman].

The function of art, according to Sadali, was to serve as a reminder (tazkira), something that prompted reflection and connected viewers with God. Beauty touches the sensibilities and only through them can

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beauty be captured, experienced and appreciated. When beauty brings pleasure, he believed, it makes humans aware of God’s transcendence and omnipotence so that they give thanks.

In 1986, just a year before his death, Sadali was asked to write a catalogue note for his paintings being shown in a major exhibition in Jakarta. He responded with a poem entitled, ‘Like Life Itself’. In it he describes the process of integrating his lived experiences with his inner reflections and expressing that process through his art. He seems to allude to the massacres of 1965–66 and their aftermath when he refers to the judgement awaiting all in the Hereafter and the responsibility each individual bears for his or her own actions.

**Like Life Itself**

Like life itself  
to be attempted as well and as purely as possible  
though the result comes only later, in the Hereafter

Like a circle  
of which only a tiny part can be enclosed with words  
like all works without words  
the complete content is found only in the painting itself  
the amount that can be grasped depends on the capacities of the observer who approaches it

Every happening works for me  
new experiences  
each painting  
a different world  
different from those done previously  
sensations, intuition, mysterious inspiration  
process and the completion of process  
each unique, self-contained  
yet all tell a story  
about what is present on the canvas  
what takes shape in the process.  
How could it be otherwise?

The result is only then apparent  
After the process finally ends  
Like life itself.  

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Figure 4.1: Ahmad Sadali, *Gunungan dengan Garis Vertikal Biru* (Mountain Shape with Blue Vertical Line), 1974.

Acrylic on paper, 26 x 36 cm. Photograph courtesy Edwin Rahardjo. Permission: Ravi Ahmad Salim.
In his poem Sadali describes life as a process, an ongoing cycle of interaction between knowledge and experience gained in the material world, and the sensations and feelings those experiences evoke, leading to a sense of the metaphysical world. That interaction ends only when life ends, and it is that interaction that is the wellspring for his art.

The painting in Figure 4.1, completed in 1974, six years after Sadali declared publicly that his work would be inspired by Islam, is an example of his style, including his Rothko-like preference for minimalist titles.

The confident tone and bold colours in this work capture the viewer’s attention. The centrally placed vertical line of cobalt blue shoots up to the top of the painting, like the rope linking humans with God. Texturing breaks up the smooth surface, while earth tones—Sadali’s way of indicating the ephemeral—are mixed with, or perhaps layered beneath, the triangle of turquoise. The band of irregular shapes along the lower edge of the work provide the mountain’s foundation and are given life with flecks and spots of red on their ochre surfaces. Every viewer will notice different things in this complex painting, but each will probably feel (with the eyes of their heart) the power inherent in the work.

Sadali’s philosophy was not only a path to individual salvation. By emphasising personal responsibility for an individual’s actions, Sadali was offering all humans, Muslims and non-Muslims, a guide to ethical behaviour based on reflective responses to the aesthetics of his art.

**A. D. Pirous: ‘Aesthetic Pleasure and Ethical Pleasure Together’**

In 1970, while on a Rockefeller scholarship to study high-viscosity etching techniques in Rochester, New York, the 38-year-old Pirous visited as many art galleries and exhibitions as he could. For the first time, he could view the originals of modern artworks he had only seen as reproductions. He could find no examples of modern Indonesian art but, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and some private galleries, he came across works of ‘Islamic art’—‘sometimes plates, sometimes ceramic fragments, sometimes manuscripts, miniature paintings, or calligraphic writings’. He was struck by memories of his childhood in Aceh, where

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24 George, Picturing Islam, 61.
he was surrounded by similar things and thought: ‘This is a part of my own body, a part of my own blood. Why didn’t I see it before? How come I did not see it before?’ He realised that his art education in Bandung had included only European thought and materials and that his own culture had not been included. He had to go to New York to recognise his Islamic heritage. He seized it with the words: ‘This, this is my property, this is my treasure’.25

Pirous would later use the word ‘enlightenment’ to refer to his ‘discovery’ of Islamic art and its significance for him. Born in Aceh in 1932, Pirous’s parents were both devout Muslims. Although his mother was knowledgeable about the Quran and Arabic calligraphy and was interested in Sufism,26 he did not have a formal Islamic religious education. He left Aceh in 1950 to complete his secondary studies in cosmopolitan Medan (see Map 1). There he decided to train to become an artist and, in 1955, he left for Bandung to study at ITB’s Faculty of Fine Arts, in the same department as the older Sadali. Anthropologist Kenneth M. George, who has made a lifetime study of Pirous and his art, draws on descriptions by Sanento Yuliman of Pirous’s work between 1959 and 1965 in these words: ‘The work tended toward “lyric expression”—thematic or symbolic representations of nature, landscapes, everyday people, and everyday objects’.27

In 1964, Pirous was appointed a permanent staff member; he held his first solo exhibition in Jakarta in 1968. The following year he was in New York and about to experience his ‘enlightenment’.28

In 1970, after returning to Bandung from the US, Pirous began working on Islam-themed works, starting with abstract representations of Quranic calligraphy that were illegible and puzzled viewers. This made him think more carefully about his new style. The Quran recorded the sacred words of God, could not be altered in the slightest way and had to be treated

25 Ibid., 42–44 (original emphasis).
26 Sufism or mysticism (known in Islam as tasawuff) is one of the classical ‘sciences’ of Islam, together with the study of the Quran and the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic law and the history of Islam. It is considered the inner balance to Islamic law (sharia) and practices such as special prayers and inner reflection (zikr, as described by Sadali) are believed to facilitate a mystical awareness of God’s presence. See further Julia Day Howell, ‘Introduction: Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia Today’, Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs 46, no. 2 (2012): 1–24.
27 George, Picturing Islam, 33.
28 Ibid., 52–53 and Chapter 1 for biographical details of Pirous.
with the utmost reverence. After reflecting on this, Pirous felt it would be a service to others if he could combine his artistic creativity with the ethical values of the Quran. He described his realisation in this way:

Me what is my life all about? What is a good person? A good person is someone who is useful to others. If I give them something they want, I will be useful. And so I decided to be useful. This is the concept of *khairuqum an-fa‘a‘qum linnas*—a person useful to others … So I sacrificed myself, putting a limit on my free expression, but I came back to values that I could explore more frequently and more meaningfully in the Quran. I planted in the paintings concepts and philosophical values that would make them more enjoyable. *Aesthetic pleasure and ethical pleasure together.*

This, and other examples of Pirous’s reasoning, reveal how he uses self-questioning to examine his own motives and motivations for his decision to practise Quran-based art. Unlike Sadali, he does not quote the authority or works of Islamic scholars or religious authorities. He uses his own power of reflection, analysis and self-knowledge to reach his conclusions. This is evident too in his explanation of how he ‘uses’ the Quran:

The Holy Qur’an itself may not be changed, but to understand it, you must be free to interpret it. Each and every person may interpret it and glorify its essence, its message. So I take a verse and I try to animate it with my personal vision, with my personal understanding. Now why did I take that verse at that moment? And what is it that I want to say in such a personally meaningful way? If it all comes together and is read by someone else, that’s what you call expressiveness, that’s what you call spirituality. The meaningfulness might come from something I read, something I saw, something I dreamt about, or something I heard in a story and gets into the back of my head. And if it stirs me as an artist, I will want to put it onto my canvas. When I express it in *visual language*, that’s when I use my aesthetic knowledge: composition, color, texture, line, rhythm, everything. I use all of that to make my dream real, so that it can be felt. So that I can tell a story. At last, the painting, its meaning, the Qur’anic verse, all of it becomes clear.

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29 Ibid., 61, English translation by George (original emphasis).
30 Ibid., 85 (emphasis added).
Pirous and ‘Visual Language’

In the late 1980s, Pirous and several other prominent Indonesians persuaded President Suharto to support a large-scale exhibition of Islam-inspired art to be held in 1991 at Indonesia’s national mosque in Jakarta, Mesjid Istiqal (Independence Mosque). In his preface to the catalogue for the exhibition, Pirous noted that the exhibition was the first to use the national mosque as the venue for an exhibition of ‘modern Indonesian art inspired by Islam’, and that he hoped it would help the public to understand the nature of modern Islam-inspired art. Held during the holy fasting month of Ramadan in 1991, the exhibition attracted 6.5 million visitors. A second Islamic art exhibition held at the Independence Mosque to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Indonesia’s independence during Ramadan in 1995 was even more popular, attracting over 11 million viewers.

Figure 4.2: A. D. Pirous, Amanat kepada Sang Pemimpin: Tentang Mahligai Kefanaan, Tentang Awal Akhir Kehayatan (An Admonition to the Leader: Concerning the Transient Palace and the Beginning and End of Life), 1995.

Marble paste, gold leaf, acrylic on canvas, 175 x 260 cm. Photograph courtesy Kenneth M. George. Permission: A. D. Pirous.

31 Setiawan Sabana et al., eds, Katalog Seni Rupa Modern (Bandung: Badan Pelaksana Festival Istiqlal, 1991), 1.
32 Description taken from George, Picturing Islam, colour plate 18 following p. 46.
Pirous was closely involved with both exhibitions. In the second, he entered a large, eye-catching work, with impressive use of gold leaf (see Figure 4.2). Pirous described the context and stimulus for his painting in response to a comment I had emailed him. I had suggested that, although there are many expert commentaries and interpretations of the Quran, individual Muslims remain free to form their own understandings. This is his reply:

Indeed it is correct that the Quran is interpreted not translated by the experts. So there is a limited freedom for the exegetes, which later becomes the guide for Muslims. Certainly in the process of *ijtihād* [independent legal reasoning] the users from then on will give it a more contextual quality. This is what happened when I took Chapter Āl ‘Imrān, verses 26 and 27 to enrich the painting *An Admonition to the Leader*.

At that time there was a pressing situation that made me anxious and wanting to caution all parties to think again. Around 1995 the New Order government was very violent, many leaders in power went totally too far. It was as if power was something eternal and unending even though everything is transitory and every moment has an end as the Chapter Āl ‘Imrān verses 26 and 27 state. In the world of art certainly there is a freedom which is rather personal to express a message. It is as if there will be two identities which can become one, the identity through the language of visual expression (style) and the identity of conveying the message (content). Even if the content of the message is the same it will be expressed differently by a range of artists.

The English translation of verses 26 and 27 from Quran Āl ‘Imrān that Pirous includes in his painting reads as follows:

You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hand: You have power over everything. You merge night into day and day into night; You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living; You provide limitlessly for whoever You will.

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33 George, *Picturing Islam*, 104.
34 A. D. Pirous, personal email to Virginia Hooker, sent from Indonesia 13 June 2013, my translation.
Pirous’s motivation for choosing this Quranic verse was the sociopolitical situation in Indonesia in 1995. The early 1990s saw unprecedented levels of corruption, collusion, and nepotism in President Suharto’s regime, including the behaviour of Suharto’s own children. This period also saw the Dili massacre by Indonesian troops in East Timor (1991), followed by increasing brutality. Open displays of abuse of power at the highest levels of the regime prompted Pirous to remind President Suharto of the divine source and transitory nature of all power. Although President Suharto opened the exhibition and senior members of his New Order government attended, no public comment was made about the verses Pirous had chosen to inscribe onto his painting. Three years later, Suharto was forced to step down as president.35

**Tisna Sanjaya: ‘An Art Full of Spiritual Values’**36

The fall of Suharto in 1998, the irresistible push for change and a new millennium full of hope ushered in Indonesia’s Reformasi (Reform) era. There were more opportunities for open, public debate, the mushrooming of activist groups organised by members of civil society and a deepened sense of being part of global movements facilitated by internet platforms that Indonesians used with skill and enthusiasm. The new millennium also brought well-organised forms of extremist (sometimes termed ‘radical’) Islam, terrorism, ongoing incidents of sectarian violence, large-scale natural disasters and environmental degradation. Against this background, Tisna Sanjaya developed his mature forms of artistic practice.

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35 Pirous continues to paint. Between December 2020 and March 2021, Pirous and his family organised a virtual exhibition of his paintings entitled *Pameran Seni Rupa 88 tahun A. D. Pirous: ‘Tetap Bergulir Mengalir’, Tur Virtual Serambi Pirous* [Art exhibition for the 88 birthday of A. D. Pirous, ‘keep rolling flowing’, a virtual tour of gallery Serambi Pirous] featuring 26 new works. The works included both his ‘classic’ Islam-themed calligraphic art as well as studies of flowers and plants, thus bringing together his early and mature styles.

Born in Bandung, West Java, in 1958, Tisna Sanjaya describes himself as ‘an artist, a teacher and a bearer of culture’. Sanjaya remembers growing up surrounded by traditional Sundanese art and culture and in an atmosphere of pluralist and inclusive Islam that he refers to as ‘Islam pluralis’ (pluralist Islam). His appreciation of traditional Sundanese culture and Islam as a religion that embraces diversity of expression have remained lifelong influences on his art. His father founded and constructed the Nur al-Huda Mosque in Bandung and there gave lessons in Islam to his own and local children.

As a child, Sanjaya won prizes for drawing and he initially trained as an art teacher at the Bandung Teacher’s College between 1978 and 1979. But, like Sadali and Pirous, he wanted to be an artist so between 1980 and 1986 he studied drawing and etching in the Graphic Art Department of ITB’s Faculty of Fine Art and Design. Sadali and Pirous were senior staff members while he was a student, but he was in a different department and had little contact with them. After graduating from ITB, Sanjaya was awarded scholarships to study etching in Germany at undergraduate and masters levels. During this period he gave several solo exhibitions in Germany, Paris, Japan and Singapore. His exhibition in Paris in 1998, entitled *Art and Football for Peace*, expressed his passion for art, peace and football. He continued to exhibit in Indonesia throughout his period of study in Germany and to hold residencies in Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia.

37 The Indonesian reads, ‘perupa, pengajar dan budayawan’. This quote is taken from the curriculum vitae Sanjaya sent me via WhatsApp on 16 February 2020. I thank him for providing answers to my WhatsApp questions as well as visual materials of his work. Unless otherwise indicated, information about Dr Sanjaya’s work and art comes from his WhatsApp communications to me.

38 West Java, known as ‘Sunda’, proudly maintains a language and culture that is totally distinct from that of Central and East Java. Famous for a delicate vegetable and fish-based cuisine, distinctive dance and musical styles featuring bamboo instruments the angklung and suling flute and proudly Muslim, there are still pockets of ancestor worship, animism and belief in a mythical beast known as reak, which Sanjaya sometimes includes in his art. See further Ellen Kent, ‘Entanglement: Individual and Participatory Art Practice in Indonesia’ (PhD diss., The Australian National University, 2016), 243–45, doi.org/10.25911/5d5146060c32c. As well as the flat shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*), the Sundanese have their own distinctive rod puppets, *wayang golek*. Kent describes how Sanjaya has appropriated and developed a popular Sundanese folk character (who is used to teach children ‘correct behaviour’) called Si Kabayan, with himself playing an eccentric version of the character in a regular TV show. See Kent, ‘Entanglement’, 230ff.

39 For a thoughtful and astute assessment of Sanjaya’s life and work, see Kent, ‘Entanglement’, 229–63. Elly Kent generously shared her information with me and facilitated my contact with Tisna Sanjaya.
In 1999, when he had returned to Indonesia, Sanjaya was invited to participate in the Third Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery. Every year since then, his work has been included in major exhibitions of Indonesian art in Venice, North Asia, Southeast Asia, the United States and Australia, particularly at AsiaTOPA in Melbourne. Like Sadali and Pirous, Sanjaya’s art has been recognised with national and international awards. He is currently a lecturer in the graphic arts program in the Faculty of Fine Arts at ITB.

Sanjaya has noted that a distinguishing characteristic of his generation of Indonesian artists, those studying and graduating in the 1980s, is their confidence to experiment with developing their own approaches, style and ‘language’. For Sanjaya, this included incorporating performance into his etching, painting and installation works. He had formal theatre experience when he worked as a set designer and actor in productions of the Bandung Theatre Study Club (STB). Together with other art students who also performed with STB, Sanjaya is one of the earliest Bandung-based performance artists.

**Art Purifying Dialogue (Seni Penjernih Dialog)**

In 2019, Sanjaya completed an installation commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) for its exhibition, *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* (see Figure 4.3). Its considerable scale, three-dimensional form, complex elements and almost overwhelming detail would seem to be a complete contrast to the style of beauty and colour that characterise the works of Sadali and Pirous. Yet, Sanjaya’s choice of title for his installation, *Seni Penjernih Dialog*—meaning that art can purify dialogue—and the three words, ‘Etik, Pedagogik, Estetik’ (Ethics, Pedagogy, Aesthetics), written on each of the three steps leading onto the platform of his installation, align his work with the ideals of Sadali and Pirous.

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40 For more detail on Sanjaya’s exhibitions in Australia, see Edwin Jurriëns, ‘Art Is Capital: Between Cultural Memory and the Creative Industry’, *Art & the Public Sphere* 7, no. 1 (2018): 43–62, doi.org/10.1386/aps.7.1.43_1.

41 Ibid., 46. Jurriëns lists Arahmaiani, Isa Perkasa and Marintan Sirait as fellow performance artists shaped by STB.
Sanjaya has referred to his installation as a work with special meaning and purpose. In the book accompanying the *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* exhibition, he explained that his aim was to:

> Discover a new way, an alternative way, to bring peace, inspiring and never previously done. And also to try to find a balanced voice for humanity, a special local civility, and an art full of spiritual values.\(^{42}\)

The following sections analyse the installation and its component elements of art (the installation) and performance (purification and dialogue). The performance component was only possible when Sanjaya was physically present and he was in Canberra for about one week in June 2019 after the exhibition opened.\(^{43}\)

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42 My English translation of the original Indonesian, which reads ‘menemukan cara baru, cara alternatif untuk mengupayakan perdamaian, cara yang inspiratif dan belum pernah dilakukan. Juga berusaha untuk menemukan suara kemanusiaan yang imbang, kesantunan lokal yang khas, dan seni yang mengandung nilai-nilai spiritual’, as in Babington and Cains, *Contemporary Worlds*, 101.

43 Art historian Susan Ingham has identified the following general characteristics of Indonesian performance art: it is ephemeral, and the relationship between performer and audience varies according to context, place and the dominant culture of the audience. It is challenging to assess because each performance is unique. See further Indonesian Contemporary Art, ‘Going Global: Indonesian Visual Art in the 1990s’, accessed 20 February 2020, www.reformasiart.com/, especially ‘Global Artists’.
The Installation

Sanjaya’s installation dominates its space and demands attention. It is a life-sized, curved wooden boat, resting on a raised wooden platform that Sanjaya designed to be used for ‘installation art & for performance art to convey an artistic statement for peace’.

The boat is supported by a superstructure of sturdy wooden beams to resemble a traditional Sundanese ‘swing boat’ (kora-kora). ‘Swing boats’ are usually sited in public playgrounds or fairgrounds to provide fun rides. Sanjaya’s NGA version has a twin that is sited permanently on the bank of a river in Bandung. Sanjaya performed also on the Bandung swing boat and recorded a dialogue he had with a group of invited Bandung officials and residents. The artist linked the boats through a video recording of this Bandung dialogue played on a screen incorporated into the mast and ‘sail’ of the NGA boat. Thus, the Bandung-recorded dialogue, embedded in Sanjaya’s artwork, links Indonesia with Australia.

Three steps link the platform to the floor of the gallery. A word is written on each step: in descending order, ‘ESTETIK’, ‘PEDAGOGIK’, ‘ETIK’. On one side of the boat is written ‘AURA SENIMAN’ and on the other side ‘AURA IDEOLOGI’. At one end of the boat is a flag bearing the symbol of Pancasila (the national ideology of Indonesia, see Chapter 1); at the other end is a black flag on which is written in white Arabic script ‘Khilafa’ (Islamic governance or caliphate). The ideologies represented by the flags are in competition and tension in contemporary Indonesia, and Sanjaya signals this by placing them at opposite ends of the boat.

The point of stability and balance for a ‘swing boat’, as it moves from one side to the other, is the centre. Sanjaya has chosen a range of symbols to indicate the significance of this balance point, emphasising that it is neither ‘Pancasila’ nor ‘Khilafa’ but a point midway between them. A large ‘sail’ in the form of a ‘gunungan’ (a mountain shape, used in traditional Indonesian puppet dramas to indicate beginnings, endings

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44 My translation. See Sanjaya’s notes in Indonesian accompanying the sketch design of his installation that he provided to the curators of Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia. The Indonesian reads: ‘Idenya dari kora-kora ini tempat permainan warga, menjadi meja untuk seni instalasi & performance art untuk menyampaikan statemen seni untuk perdamaian’. See Babington and Cains, Contemporary Worlds, 100.
and transformations)\textsuperscript{45} is inscribed with a fantastical monster figure holding aloft, in each hand, a Pancasila icon and a weird mask-like head, all surrounded by a background of pseudo-Arabic script. Inserted into the gunungan is a small TV screen that shows a video loop of people in dialogue. Encircling the foot of the ‘mast’ are the figures of wayang golek, Sundanese doll-like rod puppets. Each of these symbols, like the loudspeaker at the top of the mast, reflect and amplify Sanjaya’s themes of pluralist Islam and traditional Sundanese culture in dialogue with Pancasila ideology and extremist Islam. The traditional Sundanese puppets, symbolising centuries of local culture and beliefs, seem to support and encourage a peaceful dialogue between extremist Islam and Pancasila.

One further aspect of the installation art is noteworthy. Sanjaya has painted a series of cameo sketches on panels around the edge of the platform on which the boat rests. They can be read as microcosmic and more detailed representations of the macro-themes represented by the boat and its ‘cargo’. It is not possible to do the cameo sketches justice here, except to say that many of them include figures executed in the ‘reak’ style of sketching that Sanjaya uses to capture the form and atmosphere of the trance-like rituals associated with a mythical Sundanese ghost creature.\textsuperscript{46}

One of the cameos, not in the reak style, is sited immediately next to the steps leading onto the platform and bears two pairs of imprints of Sanjaya’s hands (see Figure 4.4). The lowest pair serve as a base out of which ‘grows’ a stem that bears a red flower. At the base of the stem is written ‘ikhlas’ (sincere, pure) and halfway up the stem is a perfect circle—with no beginning and no end—that represents the eternal nature of God. Within the flower, the words ‘seni’ (art), ‘peace’ and ‘dialog’ are inscribed. Sweeping out of the base formed by the lowest pair of hands are black candelabra-like lines that end with imprints of the palm and fingers of Sanjaya’s hands. The left hand has Pancasila written above it and the word ‘setuju’ (agree), while the right hand has ‘chilafa’ (khilafa) written above, and several words of basic Islamic belief such as ‘tauhid’ (the unity


\textsuperscript{46} Kent, ‘Entanglement’, 233–37, 243–44, provides a detailed description and analysis of reak performances and Sanjaya’s visual representations of them.
of God) and ‘iman’ (faith). One reading of the cameo is that, at a point midway between Pancasila and Khilafa, the artist (Sanjaya’s hands) can create beauty that holds opportunities for dialogue and peace.

Figure 4.4: The artist bathing the feet of Dr Haula Noor, whom he had invited to participate in the performance on the day following the exhibition’s opening.

A scholar of Indonesian Islam, Dr Noor spoke to the audience about the Quran and peace. Note also cameo sketch of artist’s hands and flower as described above. Photograph courtesy Cut Nur kemala Muliani.
This reading can be extended to explain ‘AURA SENIMAN’ and ‘AURA IDEOLOGI’, the twin statements on each side of the swing boat. Sanjaya dedicates his art (aura seniman) to represent two ideologies (aura ideologi) in the hope that supporters of each can engage in a dialogue that respects diversity and difference and results in a new ethic of civility.

Performance Art as Purifier: Jeprut

Viewers familiar with Sanjaya’s performance art, in particular his ‘Art is a Prayer’ performance at AsiaTOPA in Melbourne in 2017, would note similarities with his performance two years later on and around the platform of his swing boat installation in Canberra. Accompanied by gamelan music, Sanjaya began each performance by quietly chanting prayers in Arabic and ritually cleansing himself, his performance space and his installation with water. Inviting a female spectator onto the performance platform, with her permission he removes her shoes and gently washes, dries and kisses her feet. In Canberra, Sanjaya then enveloped himself in a covering and, speaking quietly to himself, crawled and shuffled around the performance platform, before inviting viewers to ask questions or engage in dialogue. In this way, Sanjaya enacted the title of his work, ‘Art Purifying Dialogue’, by using water to purify himself and his art and then to engage in dialogue with his audience.

Sanjaya’s performances in Melbourne and Canberra were presented in a style he and several other artists pioneered in Bandung in the mid-1980s. It was later called ‘jeprut’, a Sundanese word for the sound made when something tight cracks or snaps, releasing a burst of energy. Indonesia studies specialist, Edwin Jurriëns, suggests that jeprut is performed by artists ‘who feel an imbalance between themselves and their surroundings, and who wish to obtain and share a full bodily and spiritual understanding of the problem that is disturbing them’. Sanjaya’s choice of a swing boat at rest as the subject of his installation as well as his emphasis on its point of equipoise, midway between the Pancasila emblem and the khilafa flag representing extremist Islam, highlights his concern with balance in its many contexts. Choosing jeprut as the mode for his performance enables

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48 The prayers Sanjaya recited are ‘Sholawat Nariyah’, as taught to him by his father, prayers Muslims offer to God when they seek successful and safe outcomes. I am grateful to Dr Muchammadun, State Islamic University of Mataram, Lombok, for explaining the significance of these prayers.
49 Jurriëns, ‘Art Is Capital’, 44.
Sanjaya to experience and to express the imbalance he perceives and feels between Pancasila as an inclusive national ideology and extremist Islam with its intolerance of diversity and pluralism.

**Agents of Change: ‘Be a Community That Calls for What Is Right’**

This chapter began with the suggestion of the late Sanento Yuliman that, rather than placing Indonesian works of art in pre-existing frameworks, ‘new perspectives, new knowledge, and new questions’ will emerge only as a result of ‘astute empirical observations of artworks and artistic practice’. The artistic ideologies of the three Islam-inspired artists outlined above acknowledge the Quran as the source of their understanding of aesthetics and ethics. Each artist chooses styles or modes of artistic expression that can be seen both by physical eyes and by ‘inner eyes’, which see, as al-Ghazali noted in the twelfth century, with the ‘eyes of the soul and the light of vision’. The dichotomy between ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ styles of art and the ways they are perceived becomes irrelevant if the ‘inner eyes’, which use the imagination and sensibility, are always engaged when viewing art.

Each artist has developed their individual spiritual practices of reflection or meditation (zikr) to connect with the metaphysical or ‘inner’ aspect of Islam that is experienced through emotion, sensibility and intuition. As Sadali and Pirous explain, reading the Quran often stimulates the inner reflections that inspire their art. Sadali’s ‘artistic ideology’ is also inspired by the Quran’s descriptions of the qualities of ‘insightful humans’, that is, individuals who strive to balance fikr and zikr (reason and sensibility).

There seem to be similarities between Sadali’s descriptions of zikr and the emotional and intuitive state of jeprut performers enter when seeking balance and solutions to problems that disturb them. It might not be taking the comparison between the mindful, metaphysical states of zikr and jeprut too far to remember that Sadali often referred to his works as ‘tazkira’ (from the Arabic root ‘zikr’)—‘reminders’ or, in contemporary language, ‘wake-up calls’ to viewers to engage with the works using their

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50 Quran Al ‘Imran 3: 104, a Quranic quotation that most Indonesian Muslims know and would automatically complete with the words, ‘and forbids what is wrong’.

51 Yuliman, Seni Lukis di Indonesia, 77, as discussed by Kent, ‘Untranslated Histories’, 3.
inner eyes, and to respond to the feelings and emotions they experience. In a similar way, Sanjaya’s *jeprut* performances in *Seni Penjernih Dialog* might be wake-up calls to his audience to attend to the themes of his installation and to take action to redress the imbalance he perceives in Indonesian society by connecting with God and with each other in peace and in dialogue. Elly Kent makes a similar point about Sanjaya’s performances in other contexts. Acknowledging the difficulty of assessing the impact of Sanjaya’s efforts, through art and performance, to influence change for the greater good at a local or national level, she describes her personal responses as follows:

My own experience of the affective power of Tisna’s performative participation and the resonance of his work in triggering emotion and feeling, demonstrated the aesthetic success of his work on an individual, experiential level.\(^{52}\)

### Arahmaiani Feisal: ‘A New Awareness of Humanity and a New Social Consciousness’

It is here we return to Arahmaiani Feisal, who, like Sanjaya, was an early member of the *jeprut* group in Bandung and an active member of the Bandung Theatre Club. She is also a talented dancer, singer and poet and developed her own style of performance. It is practised and creative and has its own aesthetic qualities that encompass her voice in speech and music, poetry as well as prose, combined with grace of bodily movement. In very obvious contrast to Sanjaya, her body is female, her voice is female and she offers her viewers a new form of activist art. As noted by Caroline Turner in Chapter 7, Arahmaiani’s courage in addressing ‘taboo’ subjects and her creativity seemed without bounds and in the 1990s her name became well known within and outside Indonesia.\(^{53}\)

In the context of this chapter, with its focus on Islam, ethics and aesthetics, it is revealing to refer to Turner’s description of Arahmaiani’s *Manifesto of a Sceptic*, a performance piece she presented at various times in the 2000s. During the performance, Arahmaiani described the role of art as ‘a liberating force’ that ‘should encourage a new awareness of humanity

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52 Kent, ‘Entanglement’, 263.
53 For examples of her courage in speaking out, and for further details of her education and theatre training, see Turner, Chapter 7 (this volume).
and a new social consciousness’ and a force that could affect values—we might even understand this as ethics—that are alternative, changed, or even values that are turned upside down.\footnote{Turner, Chapter 7 (this volume).} As Anissa Rahadiningtyas observes, from 2006, ‘performance and installation became Arahmaiani’s mediums of political and environmental activism, through which she progressively articulates the importance of collaboration as a strategy of reparation’. She notes also that, from that time, Arahmaiani’s works ‘seek to show the experience and reality of Muslims and women actively contributing to shaping the image of global Islam’. She quotes Arahmaiani as explaining how her participatory and collaborative art projects actively engage those who work on them, join in with them or see them ‘in building a foundation for a more open, democratic, equal, and tolerant society’.\footnote{Rahadiningtyas, ‘Arahmaiani: Nomadic Reparation Projects, Environmentalism, and Global Islam’.}

The videos Arahmaiani makes of these projects preserve this form of art in ways that a painting might, in the sense that aspects of the project are selected for filming and the visual choices of the person filming (and/or the choices of Arahmaiani herself) determine the content and form of the video. Editing, like erasure and changes to a painting, can further shape the final form of the film. But video has an advantage not available to painting. It transports an event out of a specific place so that it is not restricted to one site of exhibition or viewing. Video takes Arahmaiani’s art out of museums and galleries to screens anywhere and, similarly, brings her art project from Tibet, or Bali or Europe into any gallery or museum. Audiences do not have to come to her. Walls and international borders do not restrict the viewing of her work. She is indeed ‘shaping the image of global Islam’ and, perhaps, building foundations for political, social and economic change.\footnote{Some of Arahmaiani’s performances are professionally documented and edited. A few are posted on YouTube or Vimeo. Email communication from Anissa Rahadiningtyas, 5 October 2021.}

Were Sanento Yuliman still alive to witness the installation works of Sanjaya and Arahmaiani he might describe them as ‘anti-lyrical’. But their performances extend the installations with physical, musical, verbal presentations that add a level of aesthetic individualism to the installation that Yuliman might have found stretched his ‘anti-lyricism’ category. Whatever their form, the new millennium artistic enterprises of Sanjaya and Arahmaiani continue the broad and inclusive view that Quran-based ethics and values are essential pre-requisites for individual
and social welfare in all senses. Their art creates the space and inspiration for reflection and reparation and, as Sadali emphasised, the opportunity to build communities with insight.

With their deep commitment to balance in all spheres of human life, it is important to recognise that the artistic ideology of Islam-based aesthetics and ethics as developed by Islam-inspired artists is inclusive and addresses all human beings and all God’s creation. The art created by these artists is accessible to all who have sight and keeps Revelation relevant to contemporary times and particular issues. Art that grows out of these convictions takes Islam beyond the realm of the jurists and specialist religious scholars and makes it accessible to ‘ordinary’ people, Muslims and non-Muslims, across time and borders.

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