
From cosmos to canvas: Interpreting arts education through the poetics method of Ahmad Sadali's Islamic art

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Abstract

This study interpreted Ahmad Sadali's Islamic art poetics as a conceptual and pedagogical framework for spiritually grounded art education. Drawing on Sadali's writings and artworks, the study employed a narrative literature review with hermeneutic analysis to explore how his creative process, rooted in *tawhid* (Islamic monotheism), contemplation, and inner spirituality, can inform contemporary Islamic art pedagogy. Sadali views artistic creation as visual *dhikr* (remembrance of God), emphasizing the intrinsic-internal environment as the source of creativity. His approach bridges aesthetics and spirituality, positioning art as a worship medium and moral reflection. The study found that integrating Sadali's poetics into arts education promotes character formation, spiritual awareness, and ethical sensitivity, offering a transformative learning model. It concludes that Sadali's thought provides theoretical and methodological contributions to value-based Islamic art education, aligning artistic practice with deeper metaphysical and cosmological understanding.

Keywords

Ahmad Sadali, Islamic art education, poetics, spiritual pedagogy, *tawhid*

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Introduction

Art is an aesthetic representation of human expression and reflects profound spiritual, cultural, and cosmological values. In the Islamic context, art has evolved as a medium for transcendence and inner contemplation, where the value of beauty is understood in physical terms and metaphysical dimensions. Globalization and modernism have brought new challenges to Islamic art, raising the need to reformulate conceptual foundations that bridge Islamic spirituality with contemporary expressions in art and education. In Indonesia, Islamic art has yet to gain a firm place within an education system predominantly shaped by technocratic and secular frameworks, despite its deep-rooted presence in the cultural history of the archipelago. Moreover, the limited spiritual dimension in arts education is feared to weaken students' character development, particularly their ability to integrate aesthetic appreciation with religiosity (Hasibuan, 2017; Yang, 2024).

At the academic level, Islamic aesthetics discourse remains dominated mainly by descriptive-historical approaches, with limited exploration of contemporary Muslim artists' pedagogical aspects and theoretical contributions to education. Ahmad Sadali, a pioneering figure in modern Islamic art in Indonesia, offers a profound conception of Islamic art poetics—a term here referring to an artist's creation method—yet his ideas have not been systematically explored within the framework of art education. Sadali did not merely create artworks; he formulated a philosophical foundation that integrates the principle of tawhid (Islamic monotheism), inner silence (*keheningan batin*), and a creative process grounded in divine inspiration (*ilham Ilahi*). This gap points to the need for conceptual and critical study to bridge Sadali's thoughts with contemporary theories of spiritually transformative art education (Grady, 2006).

Recent approaches in arts education—such as contemplative art pedagogy (Yang, 2024), the synergy of art and science in early childhood Islamic education (Damri et al., 2024), and the development of culturally educational environments in higher art institutions (Shetelya, 2021)—demonstrated that art can function as a transformative tool for values and spirituality in education. However, no theoretical framework has yet explicitly connected the thought of Indonesian Islamic art figures like Sadali to a modern Islamic art pedagogy model. Therefore, Ahmad Sadali's Islamic art poetics, which conceptualizes creation as visual *dhikr* (visual remembrance of God) and spiritual expression, needs further study and integration into global art education discourse. This notion aligned with Stoltz and da Veiga's (2021) view of the importance of spirituality as an inseparable aspect of personality and identity development in higher education.

The scholarly contribution of this article lies in two main aspects. First, it provides a conceptual elaboration of Ahmad Sadali's thought from both philosophical and pedagogical perspectives, which has been underdeveloped in the academic literature on Islamic art. Second, the synthesis of Sadali's methods with recent developments in educational arts enriches discourse on Islamic values-based art education and offers a new paradigm for developing an art curriculum that integrates spirituality, ethics, and aesthetic sensitivity. This viewpoint strengthens the idea that art education is not solely about developing technical skills but also about forming character and moral integrity (Yalanskyi, 2023). Furthermore, this approach

responds to the growing need for art learning that is more contextual, religious, and humanistic, as emphasized in the integrative studies of Binder (2016) and Rapatskaya (2020).

Methodology

This study employed a narrative literature review approach that is both conceptual and interpretative because the study focused on a deep exploration and reconstruction of the theoretical conception of Islamic art poetics—the method of artistic creation according to Ahmad Sadali. The review centered on the analysis of Sadali's documents featured in the exhibition “A Century of Sadali: Tracing the Earth, Piercing the Sky,” held at Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (SSAS) from September 19, 2024, to January 26, 2025. The interpretation of Sadali's documents was supported by a synthesis of recent academic literature indexed in Scopus and SINTA relevant to the context of arts education. This approach is commonly used in the study of art philosophy and aesthetic theology to holistically examine the ideas of influential figures within the domains of education and culture.

Data collection was conducted through two primary pathways. First, read the documents closely to identify direct quotations, theoretical propositions, and conceptual categories. Second, a literature search targeting reputable research published in the past ten years (2014–2024). The search process followed the systematic searching framework recommended by Xiao and Watson (2017), which included identification, preliminary screening, eligibility assessment, and final selection of relevant sources.

The unit of analysis in this study consisted of the theoretical ideas and constructions embedded in Sadali's documents, represented through narratives of Islamic aesthetics and spirituality. These were then analyzed for their relevance and contribution within the broader context of arts education. The data were examined using the narrative thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included five key stages: (1) familiarizing with the data through active reading; (2) coding the data based on Sadali's central themes; (3) identifying main themes and conceptual subthemes; (4) narrative synthesis by comparing primary findings with secondary literature; and (5) composing an interpretative academic narrative.

The final synthesis combines hermeneutic interpretation of Sadali's primary texts with evidence-based analysis of academic literature. This dual approach enabled a contextual articulation between Sadali's Islamic art poetics and the practice of modern Islamic art pedagogy, as called for by the paradigm of value-based art education (Binder, 2016). The study was expected to contribute methodologically and substantively to developing a theoretical and practical framework for Islamic values-based transformative arts education through this method.

Findings

This study accompanied the exhibition “A Century Sadali: Tracing the Earth Piercing the Sky” held at Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (SSAS), from September 19, 2024, to January 26, 2025. The researchers reconstructed Ahmad Sadali's thoughts about his creative process regarding the Islamic perspective, which is his mindset. This study was sourced from the notes

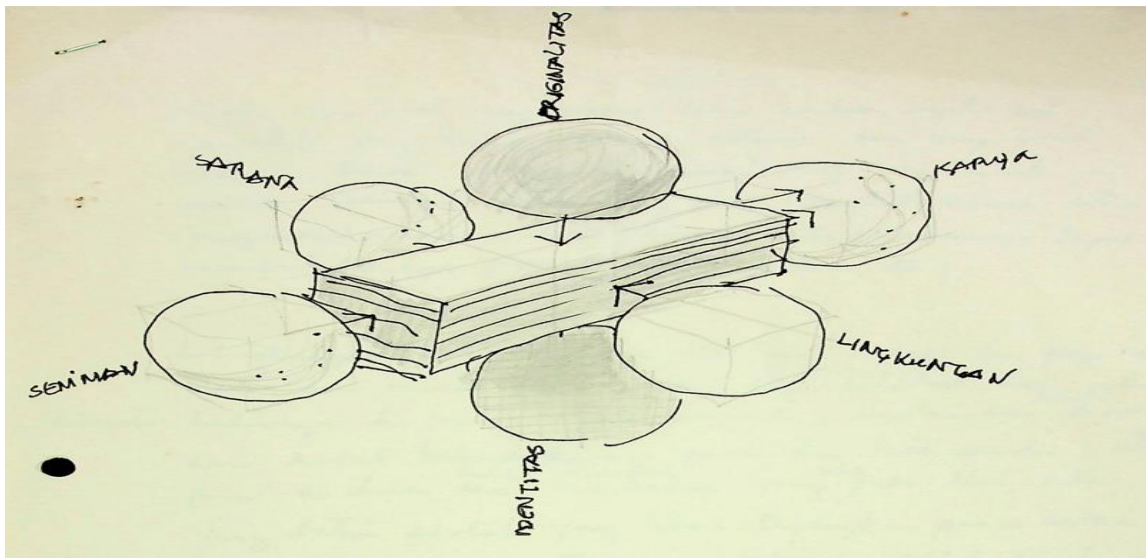
in which Ahmad Sadali consistently explained the connection between artists, environment, and God: “tracing the earth, piercing the sky.”

"Poetics" in the title above refers to the "method of creation," which is rooted in the word "poiesis" (Greek), namely, to make something exist or to create. At the same time, it also alludes to "*poetika*" in the sense of "poetics," referring to the sublime elements implied by what is explicitly written, which go beyond what is visible. Every artist has their own method and creation procedures—poetics—distinctive and rooted in their experience, education, and belief. Art always says something beyond what it appears to be. However, what is peculiar to Sadali's creation process is that, despite its Islamic overtones, it can contribute to the general development of arts education. This is what this study is all about.

Artists, personality, and environment

Sadali believes that an artist, as someone who inhabits a particular environment, takes benefits and livelihoods (*maaliyah*) from the environment in various ways, according to his or her calling and capabilities.

Figure 1. Notes on the environment where art takes benefit and life



The intensity of interaction between artists and the environment creates personality. For Sadali, personality is one's peculiar traits or basic character. Personality is identity and uniqueness shaped by the environment. When facing the work of another artist, although the work is a masterpiece and admirable, an artist would hear a whisper in his heart that he would do it differently. The suggestion is not necessarily a criticism or disclaimer but a desire for a different process, which signifies a different personality. A young artist faces an expansive range of choices and influences early on. As a part of learning methods, there are times when emulating other great artists is even mandatory. However, over time, along with the increase

of experience, the range of choice becomes narrower, and finally, he finds his own peculiar masterpiece. At that point, his unique personality reaches its ripeness.

For Sadali, personality is related to originality. Originality is a quality that discloses its uniqueness regardless of the circumstances; it shows up unexpectedly. It presents a fresh perspective on ideas, methods, or skills (products). For that, every artist is given facilities and infrastructure, the natural universe, and everything God has created. Undoubtedly, one's belief shapes such an experience. When it comes to the facilities for the creative process, this is what he said to Horizon magazine in an interview,

“Just like what I do. I just started to paint. I don't know the way to do it. I prepare paint and canvas if it is for two-dimensional. Or for three-dimensional, I prepare three-dimensional materials. I just work. Which one is before the other, I don't know. Whether it is a pencil, charcoal, or paper. At that time, I just worked. If I need to scratch with a nail, for instance, I do it first. I prepare the tools. Nails are many. I don't have to go look for it. Time is so precious. That is the time when inspiration is growing, *fu'jub* from Allah.”

However, besides facilities, Sadali emphasizes the existence of infrastructure within the very human self.

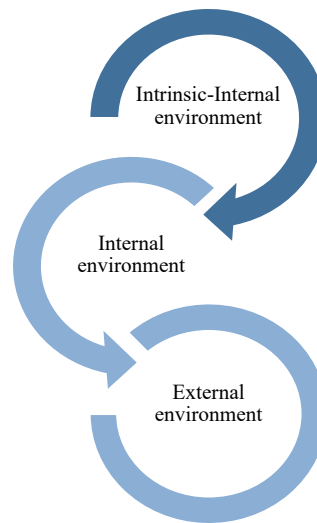
“Infrastructure consists of, first, desire or will; second, intelligence; and third, the ability to express; that is, the ability to express yourself in language, word, or language of expression. What is ‘expression’? The ability to realize anything inside him. So, with these, humans are made capable, able to support themselves, and become independent.

However, as previously mentioned, the environment inherently influences both facilities and infrastructure. These elements influence one another and often overlap, making it difficult to clearly define their boundaries.

Artists and the environment

The researchers have noticed that Sadali considers the environment important. That is because he has a specific understanding of the environment. An artist absorbs energy from the universe through his intense interaction with the environment during his life. The degree that he absorbs depends on the intensity of his interaction. In the process, the taste and talent influence the drive of the artist to accept and explore what he absorbs from the universe, such as tone, rhythm, and intensity from the environment. However, his personal character is expressed in other ways. These encapsulate the artist's space, time, and sphere, including his physical and non-physical background. In short, the whole life, personal or social, becomes a part of the artist's imagination. Sadali divides the environment into three types, which must be absorbed by an artist, and can be depicted as follows,

Figure 2. *Types of environments in Ahmad Sadali's thoughts*



The figure above is based on Ahmad Sadali's explanation from his notes entitled "*Lingkungan Tempat Seni Mengambil Manfaat dan Kehidupan*" (Environment Where Art Takes Benefits and Life) and affirmed in the article entitled "*Seni Lukis Modern—Tanggapan dan Implikasi yang Mencuat*" (Modern Painting—Responses and Emerging Implications),

“Allow me to summarize the concept of environment that covers physical and non-physical, real or abstract, material and spiritual—in short, everything encountered by an artist that can become an input for his perception in time and space that he can reach. Hence, the environment can be broken down into the external environment, the internal environment, and the intrinsic-internal environment. These elements are involved in the empirical field of an artist that can result in 1001 images and, in turn, provide more material for his creative process. While visual appearance is captured by external eyes, knowledge and experience—gained through readings, science, religion, tradition, or even simple habits—are captured by internal eyes. Whereas ‘intrinsic-internal environment’ refers to ‘meta-realm,’ that is, religious belief which is actively working in human life.”

External and internal environment

Sadali's notes refer to a model of art creation (poetics) derived from the capability of an artist to absorb the energy of the environment, which is then expressed in the form of various artistic works. The researchers have observed that Sadali categorizes the environment into three types: external, internal, and intrinsic-internal environments. To be more specific, Sadali explains it this way,

“The external environment is the environment that is palpable, visual, and factual; tangible, audible, and measurable; and can be empirically experienced. The internal environment refers to the non-physical world, besides the physical. The awareness of the existence of the non-physical world is not the result of rational thinking but rather the sensitivity of feeling possessed by every individual.”

Sadali believes there is such a ‘faculty of feeling,’ which, in an artist, is particularly fertile, especially during an artwork's creation or re-creation (appreciation). However, apart from that, a ‘faculty of belief’ also plays an important role in approaching the non-physical world. Software also belongs to the non-physical world, even though it appears in books, films, videos, diskettes, etc.

That said, Sadali still divides the external environment into the external-macro and external-micro environments. This is like cosmology: macrocosmos and microcosmos. Macrocosmos is the universe of nature, while microcosmos is the universe within the human self. However, what is unique about Sadali is that macro- and microsomes each have external and internal aspects. First, the external macrocosm is the natural universe, like planets and the surrounding objects. Second, the internal macrocosm is the forces that move it, the mechanisms that rule space and time.

“Macro and micro here are not seen in terms of their size or presence in space, but rather in the position related to us. The internal is unreachable by our senses, *ghaib*, unseen. This includes the rule of nature outside and the forces inside our world and our very selves. The internal forces are the forces that rule space and time, but also history and tradition, which grow and are inherited from one generation to another and move from blood to blood among individuals in society.”

Third, external microcosms are substances, *makebluq*, or components that form the life world, from the macro scale up to the finest and most miniscule stuff like atoms, viruses, plankton, etc., as far as they are reachable by the human mind, imagination, and feeling. Fourth, the internal microcosmos is the realm of ideas and images produced by our personal sensations, thoughts, intuition, and imagination, as Sadali affirms:

“...thoughts, ideas, or images generated from sensation, intuition, or personal imagination are internal micro-environments, which grow within and are owned by someone personally. ...especially those ideas and thoughts within one’s mind, unexpressed and kept inside, are internal microcosmic environments.”

Fifth, the Intrinsic-Internal Microcosm represents the essential, *hakiki*, or True Inner Environment. Sadali devotes special attention to the artist’s essential inner environment. This inner environment is built by understanding the external environment and the internal environment within the artist as the center of artistic creativity. The external environment is everything outside an artist. The physical distance between the artist and the external environment can range from being closely connected to his daily life to being so distant that it feels unrelated to his everyday experiences. For an artist, the external environment includes

the physical and the non-physical. That which is physical and close to the artist is where he was born, got his education, and developed his talent for the first time. Sadali takes Picasso as an example. Although he lived long enough in Paris, his native place in Spain always influenced his paintings until the end of his life. The same thing happened to Marc Chagall.

However, the external environment can develop and extend far from one's birthplace, reaching out to other countries and even the world. This depends on the movement and the dynamics of the artist's communication. The denser and more frequent the communication, the shorter the distance between the interlocutors, and the more influence they have on each other. For Sadali, influence refers to the ability or power to create an impression on others, either through direct means or indirectly.

However, in relation to interactions with the external environment, which can extend further, Sadali emphasizes the freedom of artists from the influence of the external environment where the artists reside. It will be revealed in his increasingly abstract artistic expressions. "Can we imagine that the more abstract the nature of the expression, the more liberated the painting becomes from the external environment where the painter resides?" said Sadali.

Internal environment "is everything that lives within the artist themselves, originating from both near and far environments, consisting of physical things as well as values." Furthermore, Sadali explains. "The inner environment is everything within the domain of the artist, in the form of potential depth, such as religious beliefs, habits (traditions), history, profession and types of work, motivation, attitude, maturity, and their imaginary world expressed in myths, legends, and epics, including levels of intelligence, knowledge, and so forth." All of that requires a pattern, rhythm, and form of the artistic creative process that will be reflected in the artwork.

Regarding the internal environment, Sadali emphasizes the importance of religious values and beliefs. It is also the element that makes up the inner world of an artist. Prohibition in Islam towards depicting living creatures, for example, affects the emergence of abstract art in the Islamic world, which is appreciated worldwide as a form of profound spiritual art. It reflects how inner-thinking artists, rooted in religious teachings, produce artwork that reflects spiritual essence. "In short, abstract art ... which actually brings Islamic art to a very high degree, is admired by the art world as '*world wonders*.'"

If we juxtapose Sadali's opinion within the framework of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Sadali's understanding is somewhat different. In "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," for Kandinsky, art must express the soul and the reality of spiritual vibrations that are not visible on the surface and beyond the senses' reach. Abstract art gives artists the freedom to convey things that cannot be expressed in words, as seen in Muslim artists inspired by the prohibition of figurative representation in Islam. However, for Sadali, what is contained in his painting is real. It does not reveal anything other than what is found in the painting. Everything in the painting expresses its content and meaning, even its message. Moreover, although Sadali is often categorized as an abstract/non-representational artist, he does not consider himself an abstract painter.

However, abstractionism also correlates with Sadali's concept of the inner-true microcosm, which is fundamentally not bound to physical reality. In this context, art functions as an object that pleases the eye (*zīnatan*) and as a medium representing a 'new world.' Symbols,

brush strokes, landscapes, and colors on the canvas evoke awareness for *dhiker*, an imaginative-artistic revelation to remember the greatness and beauty of the Divine.

"Anything born on the canvas becomes a new inhabitant in a new realm: paintings." The task of those inhabitants is to convey a logical broadcast, and in the imagination of the responder, they become symbols that radiate specific understanding and meaning. Understanding and meaning come naturally and are accepted by the senses (sensitivity), although the element of reason may play a role."

Source of Ahmad Sadali's Islamic poetics art

At its core, the source of Sadali's art poetics is the concept of the intrinsic-internal environment, or intrinsic-internal microcosm. This concept is based on the belief that, fundamentally, human nature is indeed directed towards God's existence as the universe's creator. According to Sadali, Islam is a belief that aligns with human nature. "In essence, there is no human who does not have instincts or who does not acknowledge the existence of God (atheist), only that their God may not necessarily be Allah. Maybe material things, knowledge, or even themselves." After humans believe in the existence of God, who always becomes their highest focus of attention, they believe in religion and all other internal environmental forces that are claimed to exist and function through religion.

From that description, the internal-intrinsic microcosm is the true and most important inner universe, representing the highest achievement of spiritual experience. In the esoteric context of Islam, the relationship between humans and God involves self-recognition as a path to recognizing God: "*arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu*." Meanwhile, for Sadali, the concept of the inner-true microcosm is also linked to the need for artists to understand their inner depths to express something essential and spiritual. Murata emphasizes that in Islam, the inner world, or human soul, reflects a greater spiritual reality, and by understanding their soul, artists or individuals can get closer to God. Sadali refers to it as religiosity in the process of human artistic creativity.

Transcendental motivation

Art is a form of profound spiritual expression. For Muslim artists, all artistic abilities are a gift from Allah, which must effectively convey goodness and humanity in a meaningful creative process. Art must transcend physical forms and representations of the real world, moving towards expressions of a deeper spiritual reality. For Sadali, art is a means to connect humans with the unseen and supernatural aspects of spirituality. Even art is a means to draw closer to God (Allah). He emphasized,

"The Muslim artist contemplates everything created by Allah, including himself and all the abilities within him, as well as the ability to create, and is always in a process of artistic creative endeavor. He believes there is no state and power except by the will of Allah. His strength and abilities are a gift that must be used effectively. It means having

high optimal quality so that he is helpful to himself and humanity. Therefore, this effort is always implicitly present in creating art by Muslim artists."

Figure 3. Calligraphic painting by Ahmad Sadali (1967).



In the framework of Islam and Sadali's view, the inner microcosm of humans reflects a larger macrocosm. This means that the role of spirituality in art becomes a manifestation of a deeper inner world, which opens new possibilities for artists to achieve freedom from their physical limitations while simultaneously expressing the spiritual aspects of reality artistically, from the visible to the invisible, from precise strokes to blurred ones, and repeatedly. Sadali reinforced his opinion by quoting QS. Al-A'raf, 7:31, "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid; eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are excessive." Sadali interprets this verse as follows:

"It means that all people commanded to take the jewelry must first have the jewelry; the jewelry must be made, created. Because *khudzu* is an imperative verb for the public, the existence of jewelry is also obligatory; therefore, creating it is also obligatory. Whereas jewelry is something that is liked, cherished, and thus valuable—not only materially but also as something beloved; no matter how expensive it is to buy, because it is appreciated, efforts are made to possess it. Besides providing both physical and spiritual satisfaction, decorative art serves as a means for Muslims to express gratitude and remind them of the greatness and power of Allah Swt. (*dhiker*). Works of art also possess such qualities. Thus, such a thing—*zinatun*—can also be interpreted as a work of art."

Art is not merely a visual representation but a medium for expressing humans' inner and spiritual life. In other words, Sadali views art as a part of worship, where humans are obliged to create beauty to draw closer to God, calling upon His names, remembering, and expressing gratitude for the greatness of Allah. Thus, awareness of the true inner self opens the door to inspiration, intuition, bursts, and explosions of creative sensations within the artist. This sensation, borrowing the term from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, is the sense of inner connection with the realities of *khazā'in al-ghāib* (the hidden treasures), thanks to submission to Allah.

Relationship of artistic creations

Nevertheless, in the context of the artistic and spiritual creativity of the artist, it must be acknowledged that there are also inevitabilities and limitations in the creation of art. Sadali understands that the term "creation" in the Qur'an's terminology is referred to as "*kbalaqa*" (خَلَقَ) and "*ja'ala*" (جَعَلَ). For him, artistic creativity is more accurately interpreted as *ja'ala*, which means creating from what already exists. This is because "*kbalaqa*" means creation from nothingness, from non-existence to existence. In other words, the word "*kbalaqa*" emphasizes God's power. In contrast, the word "*ja'ala*" emphasizes the benefits derived from His creation that can be explored, contemplated, and absorbed based on the interactive intensity of the artist with their environment, especially within the whirlpool of the intrinsic-internal microcosm. This is encapsulated in Sadali's following note.

Bisanya setelah dijabarkan sesuatu
menternya . جَعَلَ الشَّيْءَ
firmamentnya sudah ada .
jadi untuk manusia lebih tepat جَعَلَ

The above understanding shows that human art is not an absolute or original creation in the same sense as God's creation. For Sadali, humans can only create in the sense of 'recreative,' using materials God has already created. This simultaneously acknowledges the source of creativity from the divine, a relative creation in Islamic cosmology. In this view, human creativity always has its limits, both in the context of individual abilities and in the limitations of available and accessible materials, means, and environment. However, this limitation does not diminish the spiritual value of the creation process, so the purpose of art in Islam is the approach of humans to God: art expresses inner beauty. It reflects divine attributes, albeit in a limited and relative form. Sadali asserts,

“Likewise, the term "creation." Indeed, only Allah truly creates, for He is all that exists: everything begins with Him and returns to Him. Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed,

to Him we will return. Even if we use the term 'create' for humans, it is only in a relative sense, so it might be more accurate to use the term 'recreation' and not 'creation' for humans who act with materials Allah has created for them. That is, not creating with a capital 'C' but with a small 'c'."

Sadali's view also implies a cosmological basis, namely that humans must emulate the ideal attributes of God, including the characteristics of beauty (*al-Jamil*) and creation (*al-Khaliq*).

"It is not an exaggeration to say that Muslim artists can appreciate this verse as an encouragement to create works of art. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described Allah (the Exalted) as "Allah is beautiful and loves beauty." Meanwhile, Allah (the Exalted) Himself describes His Essence as the Creator of everything. He has created with beauty, truth, goodness, and justice (Q.S. as-Sajdah: 7). The *Asma'ulbusna* are not mentioned in vain or merely to showcase the perfection of Allah Swt., but also so that humans can idealize these ideal traits."

All of God's creations move, occupy space, and exist in perfect harmonious balance, and it is humanity's duty to maintain that balance in every action, including in the arts. Therefore, Sadali emphasizes that Muslim artists should create beautiful works that remain within reasonable limits and do not exceed the boundaries as stated in the Quran. The words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), "Indeed, Allah is beautiful and loves beauty; arrogance is rejecting the truth and belittling people" (HR. Muslim). Finally, for Sadali, a Muslim artist, there is nothing else but to be grateful for the guidance of a divine hand in creating beauty after beauty, the process of which, even for him, remains a closed secret. The beauty that emerges is the essence of Islam, which is understood as the attitude of submission to the laws established by Allah *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* in the universe. In essence, beauty originates from the most beautiful creator.

Discussion

Theoretical interpretation of Ahmad Sadali's Islamic art poetics

Ahmad Sadali's theoretical conception of the poetics of Islamic art lays a distinctive philosophical foundation regarding art as a spiritual medium sourced from religious consciousness, inner experience, and the profound relationship between humans and their God. This idea is framed within the concept of the intrinsic-internal environment (*Lingkungan Batin Hakiki*), which refers to the artist's inner universe that serves both as a creative center and a space for *dhikr* (remembrance) of God. Within this inner universe, a 'faculty of feeling' flourishes particularly during the processes of creation or recreation, alongside a 'faculty of belief' that helps navigate these inner dimensions. Our findings, Sadali emphasizes, show that Islamic art does not stop at its visual form but aims to direct attention to something transcendent and inner. Hence, Islamic art employs various visual "signs" to represent the unseen presence of God, so art serves as a symbol that guides individuals toward a spiritual experience through profound aesthetic reflection (Necipoglu, 2015). This also aligns with

Fuady (2023), who refers to the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, highlighting that Islamic art is rich in ethical values intertwined with a spiritual dimension. Art becomes a means of reminding us of the values of goodness, beauty, and truth, which are rooted in the teachings of revelation (Fuady, 2023).

The visual signs of Islamic art, as mentioned by Necipoğlu (2015), are displayed in the uniformity of forms in Islamic art, such as the use of calligraphy and geometric patterns, emerging from the relationship between Islamic worship and art, as well as the Quran's encouragement to reflect on God's creation constantly. It can be assured that the Quran has become the primary source of inspiration for art in Islam, shaping the spirit and essence of every building or work created. The manuscripts of the Qur'an in Islamic art are beautifully written and designed to radiate profound spiritual meaning through delicate and symmetrical visual elements (Raza et al., 2023). As in the paintings of Ahmad Sadali, which are also emphasized by Kutty (2021), geometric elements, calligraphy, and symmetrical patterns in Islamic art are not merely ornaments but rather representations of cosmic order and spiritual harmony.

Sadali constructs his thoughts very closely around monotheism, which states that every creation reflects God's unity. According to him, Muslim artists value everything Allah has created, including their own artistic creativity. Muslim artists must use this gift effectively and implicitly in their art creation. This philosophy has become a hallmark for Muslim artists in Indonesia, including those in Malaysia, who often employ the aesthetic approach of *mujarad*—spiritual abstraction—to express the principle of tauhid in visuals that reflect the transcendental essence, rather than just the outward form (Ismail & Zakaria, 2022). The concept of *Tawhid* in Sadali's Islamic art is reflected in the distinction between *khalaqa* (creation from nothingness, which belongs only to God) and *ja'ala* (creation from pre-existing materials, which belongs to humans), as proposed by Sadali. Moreover, abstraction in Islamic art serves as a theological response to the prohibition of figurative representation, expressing the effort to symbolically and spiritually imitate the perfection of God's creation (Najem, 2023).

Sadali also states that the creative process of these Muslim artists occurs through inspiration—an inner impulse that comes unexpectedly, even overflowing and incessantly. This sensation, borrowing the term from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, is a sense of inner connection with the realities of *khazāin al-ghāib* (the hidden treasures), thanks to submission to Allah and love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). (Al-barakah Al-Muhammadiyah) (Chittick, 2007; Nasr, 2003). In the process of intense interaction stemming from that inspiration, taste and talent influence the artist's drive to receive and explore the universe's absorptions. This thought aligns with Masud (2010), who suggested that the creation of artworks is driven by inner experiences, particularly through the influence of Sufi teachings and the concept of *fana* (the merging with God).

Ahmad Sadali's ethical awareness has become a hallmark of the works of Islamic artists in Indonesia, especially when compared to George's (2011) findings on the artist Abdul Djalil Pirous, a contemporary of Sadali. Referring to Pirous's works, the works of Islamic artists in Indonesia serve as a "spiritual record," not intended for sale, but rather as a means of inner reflection for themselves and the community (Schmidt, 2012). This notion is in line with Sadali's view that works of art are manifestations of worship and not merely objects of consumption. This affirmation is essential, meaning that Sadali's Islamic art is rooted in

traditional Islamic art, which aims to create a contemplative environment that allows Muslims to never forget the divine reality. This reinforces Sadali's statement about the "inner-true environment" as the primary source of all the creative and spiritual inspiration of the artist. In fact, Islamic aesthetics always aim to be a form of *dzikirullah*, not merely an expression of outward beauty. True beauty reflects the Divine Majesty, which requires deep and steadfast contemplation (Farzanyar, 2010; Widyawati, 2002).

Thus, Sadali's poetic conception has a strong theological and philosophical foundation and gains legitimacy from various cutting-edge studies on Islamic art. He constructs a framework for the creation of Islamic art as worship, remembrance, and spiritual responsibility, while simultaneously forming a cosmological narrative in which every human creation is merely a relative reflection of the Absolute Beauty named Allah.

The poetics of Islamic art by Ahmad Sadali as a method of art education

The theoretical conception of Islamic art poetics by Ahmad Sadali, based on inner spirituality (intrinsic-internal environment), can be further interpreted in the context of arts education as well as educational arts, which is a pedagogical approach that positions art as a transformative medium for shaping the character, spirituality, and aesthetic awareness of art learners. Sadali makes art a manifestation of visual *dhiker*, which inherently contains educational values (*riyadhab*), particularly education based on Islamic spirituality (*Tawhid*). Based on the findings above, it is explained that Sadali views art as an expression of gratitude and remembrance of Allah, even as a "spiritual record" of the artist, not merely a personal artistic expression. The creation process is understood as worship, and the visualization of forms is chosen carefully to avoid leading to idolatry. This is the aspect of pedagogy based on contemplative art capable of fostering spiritual values such as empathy and inner awareness through the activities of appreciation and the creation of artistic works (Yang, 2024).

Sadali also positions artists as subjects who continuously hone their nature, approaching God through visual skills and intertextual and intermedium exploration of their inner (spiritual) and outer (physical) environments in everyday culture. In the context of education, the importance of spiritual awareness and cultural engagement in art education that brings to life the awareness of the "true inner self" so that it can facilitate the integration of body, mind, and soul in art learning is in line with Sadali's inner narrative and significantly enhances social skills, such as communication and the ability to collaborate in diversity (Grady, 2006; Ismail et al., 2019).

Art education in the context of Islam cannot be separated from the approach of wisdom values. Islamic art and culture are sources of human values, creativity, and faith that significantly form civilization (Hasibuan, 2017). This aligns with Sadali's view of art as a "microcosm of the inner self" or a "new world" that creatively embodies the spiritual values of the artist. For Sadali, art must cultivate values and worship, not just formal aesthetics. This learning process can be started early to support the affective development of children from a young age, stimulate the brain, enhance empathy, and strengthen cultural appreciation. At the university level, spirituality-based art can be integrated into art education, where students are honed cognitively and directed to touch their existential dimensions (Ismail et al., 2019; Stoltz & da Veiga, 2021). A pedagogical approach to visual arts sensitive to Islamic values (etiquette,

prohibition of representationalism) can be implemented inclusively at the level of contemporary art education without losing its spiritual value, even within the framework of an international curriculum (Yusoff, 2024).

In the context of higher education in the arts, contemporary art education must balance personal creativity, spiritual values, and social needs (Yalanskyi, 2023). This affirms Sadali's principle that Islamic art is an inner reflection that should not be detached from the social functions and morals of the Muslim community. Thus, the poetic method of Sadali Islamic art believes that art education is a way to refine feelings and awaken the presence of God in daily life and artistic endeavors.

At the institutional level, creating a cultural and spiritual art education environment directly supports the development of students' character, readiness to work professionally, and the strengthening of universal and religious values. Especially in the humanities (liberal arts), spirituality can shape global competence and personal integrity in students (Logan & Curry, 2015; Shetelya, 2021). Such a statement is highly relevant to Sadali's poetic interpretation of the importance of creating an atmosphere of a "microcosm of values" within the ecosystem of Islamic art education, making art a channel of transcendence, not merely a technical skill.

Binder (2016) stated that art is considered a dialectical field between spiritual identity and cultural narratives, enriching the experience of human existence. Sadali uses a similar approach in crafting an aesthetic rich in symbols and meanings, not merely decorative or exploratory (Binder, 2016). Aside from visual arts, Binder and Sadali's views can be demonstrated in spiritual music education; for example, art can serve as a medium to understand and translate theological values into sound and musical works (Rapatskaya, 2020).

As a result, integrating the Sadali Islamic art's poetic interpretation into the framework of arts education solidifies art as a medium for holistic and transcendent spiritual education. It combines the transcendental dimension with the practice of contemporary art education, making art an aesthetic medium and a path for *tazkiyatun nafs*, moral development, and the instillation of tauhid values within a cross-level pedagogical context.

Conclusion

The results of the elaboration between documents containing the theoretical poetics of Islamic art by Ahmad Sadali, studied alongside scientific research, show that art, in Sadali's view, is not merely understood as an aesthetic product or personal expression, but rather as a spiritual manifestation rooted in the consciousness of monotheism and the inner presence of humans before God. Sadali constructs a theoretical framework firmly rooted in the intrinsic-internal environment (inner-true), where the creation of art functions as a medium of visual remembrance, a space for contemplation, and an embodiment of gratitude towards God's omnipotence. In this process, the artist does not "create" in the absolute sense, but rather "recreate" from God's creation as a form of worship and existential connection with the divine reality.

Sadali's poetics is relevant as a pedagogical paradigm in contemporary Islamic arts education. Integrating aesthetic values, spirituality, and the social function of art forms a holistic educational approach. Art education teaches technical skills and visual aesthetics and instills spiritual awareness, inner sensitivity, and the strengthening of character and manners.

Thus, art becomes a transformative medium that shapes artistic competence and fosters students' morals, empathy, and cosmological awareness.

On an empirical level, Sadali's document affirms that the process of creating Islamic art, particularly visual art, is a process of *tazkiyatun nafs*—purification of the soul—that must be accompanied by faith, contemplation, and sensitivity to divine symbols. This process can be transformed into value-based arts education through contemporary scientific literature that supports the approach of contemplative arts, the synergy between art and science, and the enhancement of cultural-educational environments in educational institutions.

Sadali's poetic conception can be concluded as a system of transcendental aesthetic thought capable of bridging spirituality while also serving as a method for creating Islamic art within the context of art education. It provides a theoretical contribution to the discourse of contemporary Islamic art. It offers an authentic epistemological and methodological proposal for developing a profound, comprehensive, and holistic Islamic-based art education curriculum that shapes a complete human being and produces other Islamic artists.

Disclosure statement

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