

Literary Element Order of Square Kufic in Malaysian Modern Paintings

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on Square Kufic, a historical classification system for Arabic writing styles. The researchers expected a complete record of the Square Kufic inscriptions with the appearance of essential collections of symbols of the Muslim world. Religious inscriptions, such as Square Kufic, have been neglected or recorded inconsistently. While fundamentally defined by its geometric and angular features, there is no universally accepted norm or standardisation regarding the use of Square Kufic. This research aims to study the types of Kufic in Islamic civilization, explore the characteristics of Square Kufic, and analyse the structural formation of Square Kufic in the painting. This study is based on both primary and secondary data. A semi-structured interview and observation are used to get primary data, whereas secondary data includes references from books, papers, journals, and the internet. The study's outcomes indicate the Kufic calligraphy style's specific features result in more modifications than the conventional style. The artists consequently came up with various forms and patterns to adapt their artwork following the period's rules and societal expectations. Square Kufic no longer applies as fixed due to its distinctive dynamism. A wide range of writing styles has developed in various mediums, giving the structure its visual life and transforming it into a modern art form that communicates insights. Hopefully, this study will contribute to disseminating knowledge and understanding about the Square Kufic in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Kufic, Scripts, Malaysia, Modern, Painting*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic calligraphy is a type of Islamic art practised in Malaysia. This art form is considered one of the artistic phenomena that have revived the world's traditional art. It is because the language of the Qur'an is the same as the Arabic script (Zumahiran, Ziad, & Nik Ahmed, 2020). Hence, calligraphy is regarded as the highest visual art form by Arabs and Muslims. They also enjoy mathematics and are well-known for

their contributions to its growth during the Middle Ages. Square Kufic calligraphy is one type of art that blends these two fascinating and distinct domains of human skill (Sakkal, 2003). The Arabic alphabet, first known as the Kufic script, had many applications and was composed of phonetic lines written with a reed pen from right to left (Tan, 1999).

Despite this, Islamic calligraphy got far less public and intellectual attention. According to Zakaria Ali (2013, as cited in Muhammad Faiz, Mumtaz, Muliyadi, 2019), the Malays have been influenced by Western culture introduced to them through technology and education. Artists of the twenty-first century respond to a socially and culturally varied global environment. Contemporary art viewers are challenged to determine if the work of art is just attractive to the eye or aesthetically pleasing after they comprehend its aesthetic intent. Methodological approaches were influenced by cultural biases, which resulted in the complete marginalisation of Square Kufic in particular and general disrespect for the vast majority of religious inscriptions.

Sakkal (2005) stated that Square Kufic originated in Iran and Afghanistan. The Kufic Script is the first writing style from the Islamic period in which art, delicacy, and beauty are visible. Although it was known in Mesopotamia before the creation of Kufa, it was developed in the city of Kufa and hence is known as "Kufic". This sort of script was already in use in several parts of Arabia at the time of the arrival of Islam. This script was used to write the first copies of the Qur'an (Salwa Ibraheem, 2016).

During the first three centuries of the Islamic period, the Qur'an was practically written and recorded in Kufic scripts, with calligraphers from all areas using their unique techniques and preference. There were no indicators in the early Kufic script to indicate correctly pronounced words. According to Salwa Ibraheem (2016), only the rubrics of Qur'anic passages and margins, vastly beautiful designs consisting of goldwork traces done on azure backgrounds, were written in Kufic script by Arab scribes.

Because the Kufic script was primarily utilised in the authoring of the holy Qur'an, several types of Kufic script became religious phenomena with a religious aspect. The Kufic script attained its pinnacle in the second half of the ninth century. During the early years of the faith, the script was utilised for Qur'an reproductions and architectural and other illumination materials, as evidenced by the narrow horizontal lines and rectangular format. According to Tan (1999), the script's simplicity in previous periods reflected the cultural and social challenges of the time.

However, when Islamic society matured and began to take on its traits, the Kufic script evolved to reflect these changes, and new illumination components emerged. Every letter in the Kufic script is written with strong, short strokes (Rawaa Talass, 2020). Kufic has established itself as one of those unique kinds of art that continues to fascinate and enchant the eyes and minds of spectators over time. Despite its basic appearance, Square Kufic necessitates a high level of talent since the craftsman must fit the calligraphy within predetermined limits so that all letters are evenly spaced (Sakkal, 2003). Kufic lettering was once used to accent figures with foliage and flowers. After that, the script's functional role was gone and solely utilised as a decorative feature. In contrast, the simplest version of Kufic, the rectangular script, has been used to build intricate geometrical designs (Tan, 1999).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development of Kufic Script in Islamic Civilization

Many calligraphers combine classical calligraphy skills with modern calligraphy (Parvez, 2018). Numerous Kufic kinds appear in history, including solid, flexible, simple, vegetal, braided, and geometric. The angular shapes of the lettering, which include broad and short upright strokes and horizontal strokes with extended lengths, distinguish this style. The "solid heavy" lettering style is formal writing usually done on hard surfaces like wood or stone. "Flexible script" is the second style. It has a simple writing

style and is also known as an editorial script, and it is mainly used for communication, writing, and registration.

Due to its colourful and aesthetic nature, various Kufic style varieties were later developed. Historians have classified it into four categories. First is the plain style of the "simple Kufic script", which is devoid of adornment or leaf-like features. This style became popular throughout the Islamic world's development and remained a popular writing style in the western Islamic world until the late Middle Ages.

The next form that flourished in Egypt and subsequently moved to the east and west of the Islamic world is the "Vegetal Kufic script". The letter endings in this design include vertical strokes and have leaf-like ornamentation. The "connected braided" style of Kufic calligraphy is the third kind. Letters are braided and connected in a stunning weaving-type framework. Kufic's "geometric" style, which has remained popular in Iran and Iraq, is the fourth variety. It is entirely decorative handwriting, and the interweaving pattern of letters makes it difficult to interpret most of its sentences.

However, calligraphy began schematizing for the first time during the Abbasids. Ibn Muqlah achieved the systematic creation of the Kufic style with some defined norms of shape and proportion during the first part of the 10th century. Since then, several generations of calligraphers have begun to embrace this style. It was able to remark that early versions of Kufic did not have the dots that eventually distinguished letters from one another, nor did they have any indications to convey the precise pronunciation of phrases.

While Sakkal (2006) stated that traditional Arabic calligraphy styles are divided into two categories, the Kufic group, which was used to write the Qur'an from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, and the Cursive group, which superseded Kufic as the favoured script to write the Qur'an. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, calligraphy was adapted to the surfaces of buildings using the patterns formed by laying bricks or mosaic tiles and the continuous development of the previous Kufic styles. Square Kufic is its name nowadays (Sakkal, 2005). As artists continue to utilise Square Kufic calligraphy in their graphic designs, it can be mysterious, dignified, ageless, simple or sophisticated, straightforward or ambiguous, and many other attributes. The recent rebirth of this style maintains a heritage that dates back over 700 years, and it appears to be brimming with fresh expression possibilities in the hands of skilled designers worldwide today.

Islamic Calligraphy in Malaysian Islamic Visual Art

The writing that emerged and impacted the style of Arabic Khat of them is Khat Kufic. In general, calligraphy is difficult to read for non-Arabs, necessitating research and a thorough comprehension of its techniques. The point on all the words did not appear in the Khat Kufic *Mushaf*, which was the primary writing of the Qur'an at the time, and it became a subject of contention for the non-Arab Muslim community to read it.

The companions utilised this handwriting to reproduce *mushaf* and write letters to powerful kingdoms such as Kisra in Persia, Hercules in Rome, and the monarch of Egypt in the early days of the Islamic Renaissance. The incorporation of Arabic characters into Malay writing and language shows that Islam has become a social habit and culture. Abd al-Fattah Ubadah stated that the Malay community used Arabic writing to write the Malay language during the reign of the Islamic government in Melaka. The Malay language had already received some Arabic words in commercial speech. The discovery of manuscripts and old Malay printed books demonstrates that calligraphy is important as the principal medium in transmitting knowledge among the community. As a result, it is not unexpected that the Malay community was once a country that was adamant about their Islam because the Malays' lives revolved around the Qur'an and Islamic knowledge.

Islamic art has its specific styles and traits, such as calligraphy to transform ordinary objects into works of art or the use of abstract motifs to beautify religious works. The constant migration of artists, patrons, and items around the Islamic world has influenced the dynamic aspect of the Islamic artistic legacy. The reasons are less evident in Malaysia, where products from the Malay culture include exquisite fabrics, manuscripts, and metalwork created by Muslims for Muslims and having an Islamic purpose. According to Irwin (1982, as cited in Wan Samiati, Dzul Haimi, Rahman Amin, 2013), Islamic Art is the art of Islamic cultures, not merely the arts associated with Islam.

Furthermore, Islamic art is neither a style nor a movement, nor does it belong to a specific age, region, or people. The motive, goal, and ethical value of Islamic and non-Islamic art distinguishes them. Islamic art's achievement contributes to Islamic civilization, with the main objection to Islamic art being the search for Allah. "Hardly any of the artworks reflect Islam except in a superficial way", Aminah Syed Muhammed (1995, as cited in Wan Samiati, Dzul Haimi, Rahman Amin, 2013) writes, and the roots of contemporary Muslim art are firmly planted in Western art rather than traditional Islamic art.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method is used in this study, with a semi-structured interview with Kufic's masters in Malaysia, Ariff Ashaari and Ahmad Jurjani. The researcher selected artists with a background of ten years more experience in applying the Square Kufic in contemporary painting. Ariff Ashaari is a 70-year-old Perak native, and Ahmad Jurjani is a 30-year-old from Selangor. The researchers also collected more detailed information about the characteristics and structural formation, particularly in Malaysia today. This study consulted books, papers, journals, and the internet for secondary data to get information on the subject.

The study employed a Theoretical Research Framework that was based on Art Appreciation Theory by Broudy (1905-1998), which consisted of four steps: (i) sensory properties, (ii) formal properties, (iii) technical properties, and (iv) expressive properties. In chapter five of his book 'The Uses of Schooling', Broudy (1988) claimed two major aspects to doing art appreciation: aesthetic perception and aesthetic criticism. "Beautiful literacy begins with the learning to comprehend the sensory, formal, and expressive characteristics of aesthetic images that convey human effect", according to Broudy (as cited in Maithreyi Subramaniam, 2017).

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Square Kufi

The art of Khat is viewed as the art of pen and an expression of the sacred in Islamic culture (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). It's a practice that's been researched for a long time. Since the creation of the Arabic language, calligraphy has evolved into one of the most important forms of artistic expression. Ahmad Jurjani is a Kufic calligrapher with 15 years of expertise. He has actively engaged in local and international exhibitions as a two-time champion of an international calligraphy competition. Ahmad Jurjani (personal communication, February 21, 2022) explained that perfecting the appropriate script takes time and devotion and requires tools only a professional artist comprehends. Square Kufic necessitates meticulous planning; its calligraphers were, and continue to be, more like architects of the arrangement, lettering, and decoration.

Ahmad Jurjani (personal communication, February 21, 2022) stated this design is unconcerned about legibility: it is assumed that the message, the Word, is present and that simply looking at it is enough to receive its blessing. Although literacy was once limited, beauty was always available to all, and the beauty of the pattern matters (Joumana Medlej, 2021). For example, in the artwork *Helikopter* the

shape is unrelated to the artwork's word, however the Square Kufic is only used to explore forms in calligraphy classes for learning purposes (Figure 1).

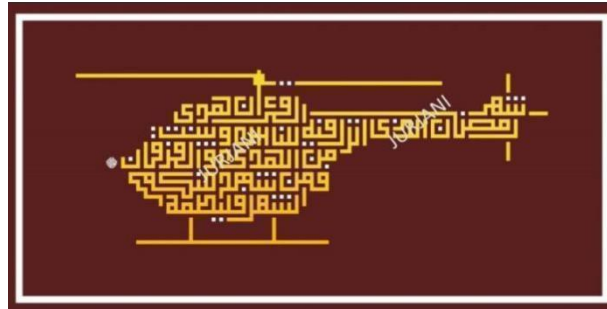


Figure 1. Ahmad Jurjani. *Helikopter*. 2018. Gold acrylic on canson.
100cm x 50cm

He does, however, highlight the use of colour, which he does conventionally. The text uses only three colours: yellow and white in the script and maroon in the backdrop. The golden colour selected, in his perspective, is similar to a rich gold tone. Even though the colours are muted, the colour scheme is the polar opposite, with a dark background and bright text colours. The diacritic dots (the dots that distinguish letters) are frequently omitted from Square Kufic compositions (Joumana Medlej, 2021). When used, they can offer visual appeal, which he can amplify by contrasting colours. It can be observed from the painting that he used a different colour for the dots than the words to differentiate them.

He utilised different colours on the dots from the text, similar to the artwork in *Iman, sosial, darjat*, and they contrast with the background (Figure 2). As previously said, his art incorporates a lot of classic hues. To demonstrate the prowess of the message behind it, he applied black for the writing on the sword blade as black is associated with elegance and power (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). While he chose the color maroon on the sword's handle to symbolise strength, reminding people to be faithful to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w throughout their lives (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022).



Figure 2. Ahmad Jurjani. *Iman, sosial, darjat*. 2014. Acrylic on canson.
100cm x 32cm

Figure 2, is Surah al-Fath:29 which touches on a Muslim's faith, social, and rank. And he underlines the work's beauty by putting "سُجَّدًا" at the end of the sword, which indicates prostration; when a man prostrated in prayer, he places their head (intellect) lower than the other limbs, which means they are degrading themselves in front of Allah. This deed serves as a reminder of Allah's power. This *surah* also touches on life and faith, emphasising the importance of Muslims always doing good to their fellow Muslims, regardless of religion or race. They must, however, defend their faith if the good name of Islam

is tarnished. And it is this that gives the concept of creation to the sword's symbol Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022.

Although Ahmad Jurjani employed a variety of forms in the creation of Square Kufic, some works use the primary form of squares. Square Kufic has only one specific rule: full and empty spaces must be the same size. For the creation process, this rule means that the artist must find ways to fill all of the space with no irregular white remains (Joumana Medlej, 2021). The following extraordinary liberties are taken to achieve this goal. However, he applied simple features to read, and the layout was appropriate for the target groups, with minimal themes and frills on the figures, referring to the artwork *Qiblat* (Figure 3) and the artwork *Khulafa ar-Rashidin* (Figure 4).

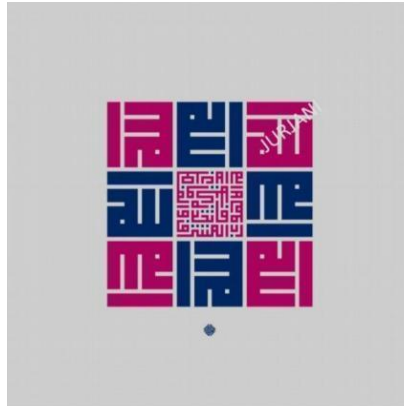


Figure 3. Ahmad Jurjani. *Qiblat*. 2013. Acrylic on canson. 70cm x 70cm

Ibn Majah and al-Tirmizi narrate that Prophet Muhammad s.a.w said, "What is between east and west is the Qibla," according to Abu Hurairah r.a. (Umar Mukhtar, 2019). Based on this hadith, it means that if you don't know where the Qibla is, you should approach it with solid guidelines because you'll still be facing Allah. He claims that this art is a reminder that Allah does exist everywhere and that he is always present in people's lives (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). As a result, he wrote 'Allah' in several directions to convey the concept. And he applied the different sizes of the writing to convey that humans are small and weak (represented by the verse in the middle) that always turn to Allah the almighty in any direction. Ahmad Jurjani created this piece to honour public opinion, particularly on colour selections. He began employing cool modern colours, such as pink and blue, although he previously utilised traditional colours.



Figure 4. Ahmad Jurjani. *Khulafa ar-Rashidin*. 2014. Acrylic on canson.

70cm x 70cm

In the artwork *Khulafa ar-Rashidin*, Ahmad Jurjani places 'Muhammad' (Prophet of Islam) in the center with a larger size, surrounded by the companions' names: Abu Bakar, Umar, Usman, and Ali (Figure 4). They were the four caliphs known as *Khulafa ar-Rasyidin*, a title granted to leaders after the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. died. They were also given the title of reigning in every element of government in the manner of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). He explained that the color choice is traditional but that the word Muhammad is green since it is the color of the *Sunnah*.

Meanwhile, Ariff Ashaari has practised Square Kufic for 12 years and is a full-time artist and the founder of the Friends of Kufic Square group (FoKS). He stated that Square Kufic is a distinctive art that entails writing in a limited space and using creativity to find answers. However, Square Kufic is geometry without a message; he opines that he can provide meaning to work and bring it to life as an artist (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). Phrases can be used as a source of inspiration for the public to practice in daily life simply by looking at the work, as seen in the artwork *Ayat Kursi* (Figure 5).

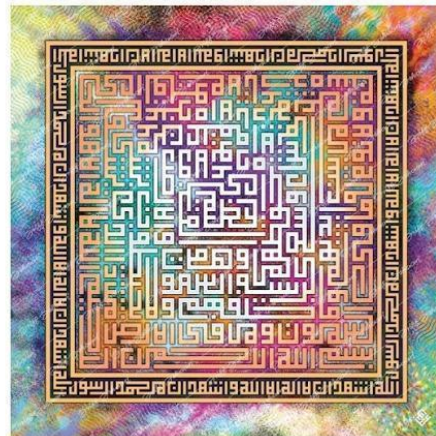


Figure 5. Ariff Ashaari. *Ayat Kursi*. 2017. Digital printing on canvas.
23cm x 23cm

"This verse of the surah has a very great position", Ibn Kathir said in his commentary. It is also stated in the genuine hadith of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w as the most delicate verse in the Qur'an (*Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim*). In addition to *Ayat Kursi*, Ariff Ashaari decorated it with the phrase *shahadah*. In keeping with the majesty of the *surah*, he used golden colour for the verse. In contrast, the background colour is an abstract treatment of primary and secondary colours combined with wavy lines that resemble contour lines, such as on a map or the effect of waves on a beach surface, or as if the wind was constantly changing direction (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022).

The artwork *Negaraku* is one of the Kufic collections with a 'patriot' theme, where there are fifteen more works from the Kufic series (Figure 6). It consists of songs for each country (thirteen pieces), and two more are *Negaraku* song and *Rukun Negara*. However, only this work, "*Negaraku*", has been explicitly reworked for previous exhibitions, the *Melayu Jawi*. For this work, he employed the Jawi for the writing to make it easier for the public to read and in accordance with the pronunciation of the Malay community (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). And this work also incorporates the same elements as the work on the artwork *Ayat Kursi*, the basic Kufic Square (Figure 5).



**Figure 6. Ariff Ashaari. *Negaraku*. 2018. Digital printing on canvas.
23cm x 23cm**

Every country has a national flag that instils societal pride. To apply the meaning for the public's understanding of the content of the word, Ariff Ashaari utilised the Malaysia flag as the colour of the text. He explained, this is one of the supports for the effort to return to the dignity of Jawi and his way of using the Square Kufic writing form. He also places free-flow Kufic writing at the bottom of the work to make it easier to read for the general audience because it is a fundamental conversion from cursive to square-shaped writing. He used the same format in his artwork as in the artwork *Negaraku* (Figure 6).

Ariff Ashaari also experimented with the aesthetic by presenting the Square Kufic with a balance of modern and traditional features, as in the artwork *Zikir* (Figure 7). Three phrases make up the artwork, according to Subhanallah: Glory be to Allah (*Tasbih*), Alhamdulillah: Praise be to Allah (*Tahmid*), and Allahu Akbar: Allah is Great (*Takbir*). He made it in the shape of a three-part knotted bond, which he wishes to express as a tangled bond with no prefix or suffix. Each three-word phrase is repeated, and the words are modified to serve as a reminder of Allah's practice's purification, praising, and glorification (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022).



**Figure 7. Ariff Ashaari. *Zikir*. 2018. digital printing on canvas.
23cm x 23cm**

The three zikr joined in one twisted link that appears to have no beginning or end reflects the concept that Allah is the only eternal thing, while all else is perishable (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). The same zikr recitation is on the backdrop and bottom, with the letters alif (ا) and lam (ل) drawn from high above are likened to the rope of Allah to demonstrate how close the relationship of the person who always practices zikr (remembering Allah). He aims to convey a

devout look of a servant to his Creator, set against a dark blue background. To emphasise the subject, he contrasts the bright colour of the text with the gloomy background.

As the year passes, Ariff Ashaari continues to expand his inventiveness in creating the Square Kufic, attempting to discover and create. He explored showing the Kufic Square in three dimensions in a more advanced approach in the artwork *Da'wah* (Figure 8). According to Ariff Ashaari (personal communication, February 28, 2022), Kufic Square is restricted to the surface and has various sides, like brickwork. Square Kufic has specific differences in the shapes and spaces occupied in structures. That is where the idea for the three-dimensional form originated. However, his colour selection is independent and unattached to any concept, as long as the colour is attractive. Because he stated that it is based on the opinion of the public to convey.



**Figure 8. Ariff Ashaari. *Da'wah*. 2017. Digital printing on canvas.
23cm x 23cm**

Despite the complexity of the characteristics used, he conveyed a simple message with Allah and Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., the two significant figures in Islam (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). The word 'Allah' in the middle draws the public's attention with a glow text effect. His purpose was to indicate that the end of human life will return to Allah, the Creator. Allah is written at the top of the page several times as if an 'echo' honours Him in every worship. On the other hand, the phrase '*Lailahaillallah Muhammadarrasulullah*' appears at the bottom like a twisted fiddlehead, symbolising the expansion of the wave of *da'wah* to worship Allah. The phrase means "there is no deity but Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah".

Structural Formation of Square Kufic

The Square Kufic gave the artist structure and form flexibility, which was one of the essential factors in creating calligraphy in Islamic art (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). He asserted that the letters could be shortened or stretched to achieve aesthetic perfection in calligraphy. The letters' shapes should be flexible, no rough movements, punctuation marks should be employed to make compositions, and the calligraphy should be presented as aesthetically pleasing as abstract artwork. As seen in the artwork *Helikopter*, Ahmad Jurjani created a helicopter design to demonstrate the script's versatility, which is not limited to being square (Figure 9).



Figure 9: *Helikopter* by Ahmad Jurjani (2018).

However, the letters must still link to one another in the way that they typically would and take the form that is suitable to their position in the word, but he arranged them to fill the space to excellent degrees. The artist demonstrates his inventiveness about the arrangement of forms through the use of dots on the blade of the helicopter.

One of the most significant aspects of writing is the process of visual composition. The artist avoided all irrelevancies of form in the design, based on spiritual geometry as natural beauty. Ahmad Jurjani (personal communication, February 21, 2022) stated that the calligrapher with the highest knowledge generated the best composition. What is essential is much practice in writing and adherence to calligraphy guidelines. Using the proper writing approach, he was also able to manipulate the shape of the Square Kufic. The artist produced the artwork to suit its concept, as shown in the artwork *Helikopter* (Figure 9).

Every calligraphy style has its measurement system. The only way to pile, link, extend, and assimilate letters in calligraphy is to use standard unit measures between letters. Square Kufic with a regular ratio (1:1, 1:2, 1:3) is a preference for Ahmad Jurjani since they may be constructed into squares and rotated more flexibly. This method is used in the artwork *Iman, sosial, darjat* at the sword's handle, where the words 'Allah' are the largest of all, followed by 'Muhammad' (Islam's Prophet), and finally *Surah al-Fath:29* (Figure 10). It emphasizes the beliefs of Muslims that is Allah and the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.



Figure 10: *Iman, sosial, darjat* by Ahmad Jurjani (2014).

Another illustration of this can be found in the artwork *Qiblat*; here, Ahmad Jurjani has positioned the word "Allah" in two distinct orientations, with the ratio of 1:1 for the *Surah Al-Muzammil* in the middle and a ratio of 2:1 for the phrase "Allah" around it (Figure 11). The word "Allah" is written in a larger font than the rest of the *surah*, which makes it simple and easy to read and creates a more aesthetically beautiful appearance overall.

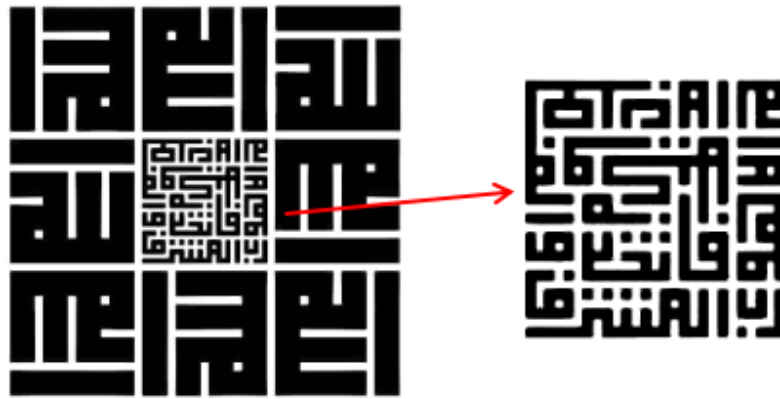


Figure 11: *Qiblat* by Ahmad Jurjani (2013).

Unlike symmetrical compositions, defining a name as a single module or unit and harmonising its geometric or optical extensions is far more complex. It is more challenging to give a static structure an aesthetic view than a dynamic system in a repeating composition. The vacant spaces in the design are squashed to achieve coherence. To put it another way, instead of employing a similar thickness technique (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). However, he used the basic layout for the *surah* in the middle as the connection of verse forms is called “حَلْوَنَةٌ”, meaning snail, like a spiral of the snail shell.

Many historical examples have a word or statement that fits in a square, or at the very least, a rectangle. Square Kufic is not an essential aspect, but it is convenient to make significant patterns. He stated that squares could be tiled without difficulty, whether by repetition, rotation, or a mix of the two—ensuring to leave half a unit all around. When two tiles are combined, they add up to one team, preserving the evenness criterion.

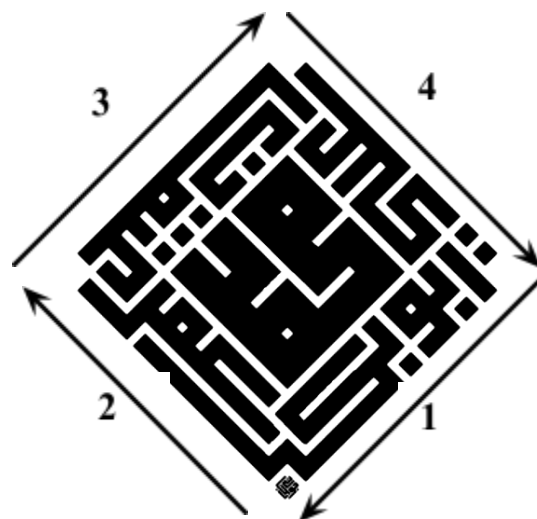


Figure 12: *Khulafa ar-Rashidin* by Ahmad Jurjani (2014).

In the artwork *Khulafa ar-Rashidin*, it is indicated that Ahmad Jurjani employed the traditional technique of reading Kufic writing, which was clockwise starting at 1 o'clock (Figure 12). He stated that reading should begin with Muhammad (Prophet of Islam) in the center, followed by the prophet's

companions, Abu Bakar, Umar, Usman, and Ali. He noted that following the reading sequence is not essential if people can read and understand the writing. This feature provides calligraphy with the same admiration as a spectator of an abstract painting's beauty in colour and figure harmony. Start with a band of square Kufic calligraphy and divide the words along the four edges of the square to make a square pattern. Then, to bind the ends of the letters together and fill the middle of the square, make a central design (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022).

Ariff Ashaari (personal communication, February 28, 2022) explains the phases of forming a square Kufic. To create a square design, start with a band of square Kufic calligraphy with a free flow of Kufic writing, and divide the words along the four sides for the layout. As seen in the artwork *Ayat Kursi*, the connection of verse forms like a spiral (Figure 13). One of the Square Kufic script features is that it comprises straight horizontal and vertical lines, lines, and spaces between them of equal width. The script's unique qualities have spawned various piling methods and configurations. He emphasised starting the writing at the bottom on the right (horizontal line) and ending in the middle for a basic Kufic Square (if possible). As a result, the reading will be in the clockwise direction.

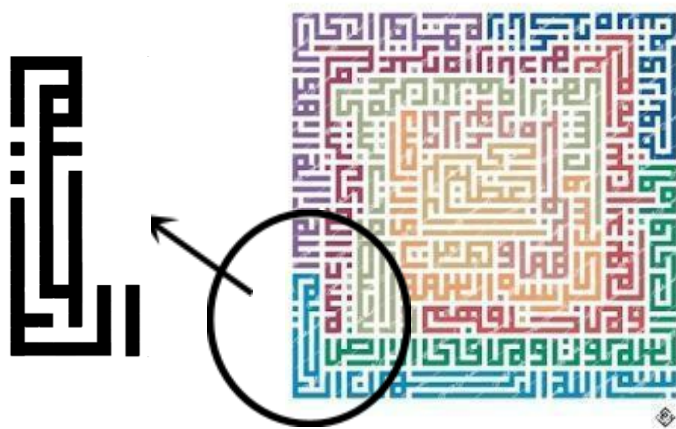


Figure 13. *Ayat Kursi*. Ariff Ashaari (2017).

In addition to the symmetrical Kufic compositions, the artwork *Negaraku* shows an example of a straight or asymmetrical design (Figure 14). On the other hand, a well-balanced piece is developed by considering visual aesthetic harmony and integrating the letters and writings. The lines and measurements are required to generate balanced lines, and the script is closely connected with architecture (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). The artwork is austere in its most basic form. Its beauty comes from the purity of its austerity; nonetheless, it lends itself to ingenious, even playful variants that are only limited by one's imagination. However, he stated, because the selection of writing is a familiar and well-known *surah*, no tajweed symbols are placed.

According to Ariff Ashaari (personal communication, February 28, 2022), to assure that writing can occupy space, an artist must first comprehend the nature of letters, and only then can he tackle the difficulty of space limits in letter composition. Each word can face differently in a Square Kufic art text. Every horizontal and vertical axis in the grid could be used as a baseline. Furthermore, as shown in the artwork *Ayat Kursi* in a rendition of "*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*": after the lam (ل) in الرَّحِيمِ, and likewise in the artwork *Negaraku* which is "*Tanah*": after the ta (ت) in تانه, the connecting line rotates 90-degree angle and continues upward, so that the last two characters are on a perpendicular baseline to the original (Figure 13, Figure 14). This makes the sentence fit inside a square efficiently (a desirable shape because it looks complete and can be used as a tiling unit).

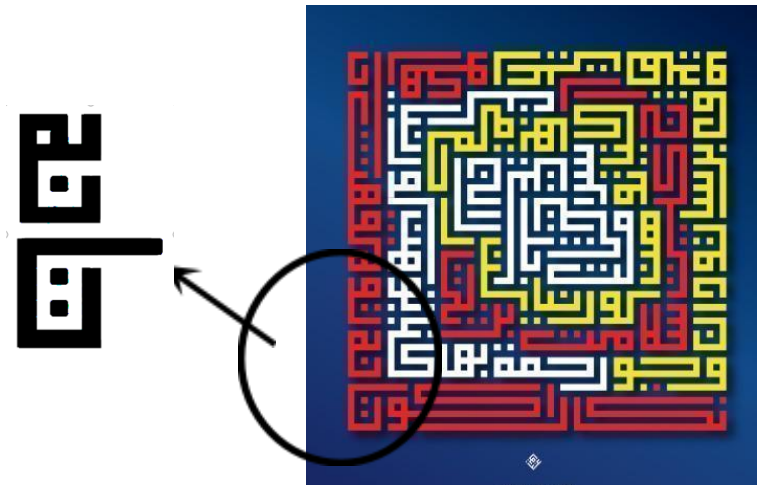

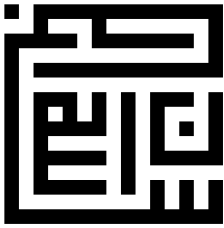


Figure 14. Ariff Ashaari. *Negaraku*. 2018.

When arranging by space, however, Ariff Ashaari noted that the phrase from the sentence or verse should be considered and not separated randomly. He explained that there are disciplines that must be adhered to for the characteristics of the letters to be accurate (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). The words have been liberally arranged (in addition to being rotated) to suit. He always performs a free flow of Square Kufic as a guide to ensure that no letters or words are misplaced so that the terms are next to the words they precede and follow in the sentence.

Ariff Ashaari began to concentrate on the art of performance after learning the peculiarities of each letter, where he began to innovate with different letter combinations. Table of the artwork *Zikir* shows how the Square Kufic script can be utilised in a modern setting while maintaining traditional elements (Table 1). He constructed a repetition of three terms made from basic Square Kufic and hinted at the message by positioning the free-flow writing (refer Figure 15). As the artistic forms that were probably difficult for the public to understand.

Table 1: *Zikir* by Ariff Ashaari (2018).

No.	Phrase	Artwork Image	Illustration
1.	Subhanallah		


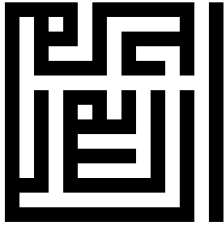

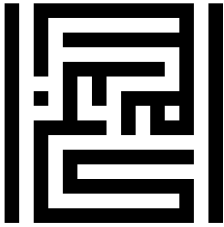
2.	Alhamdulillah		
3.	Allahu Akbar		



Figure 15: The free flow writing in *Zikir* (2018).

In this piece, Ariff Ashaari emphasised that the writing has neither beginning nor end, implying that the public can engage in the reading as often as they prefer because the phrase is a kind of Islamic meditation they can repeatedly say. He asserted that he succeeded in placing the braided system with the features of the letters resulting in the writing being parallel. As a result, the letters' extensions are still square. Even the spaces between letters in the composition are the same width according to the principles of form. The text appears to act as decorative features when arranged according to form (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022). It is the most distinctive feature of Square Kufic compositions, also in Figure 8.

The classical forms of the names Allah and Muhammad were employed by Ariff Ashaari in the artwork for Da'wah (refer Figure 16 and 17). The linear pattern with seven bars; the heights of the individual words are all measured uniformly over all seven bars to maintain consistency in the way the letters are organised (Ariff Ashaari, personal communication, February 28, 2022).

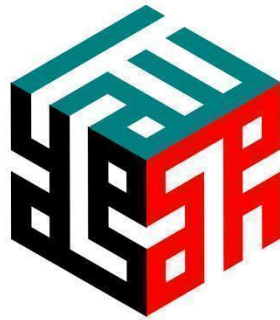


Figure 16: The phrases Allah and Muhammad are based on the artwork.

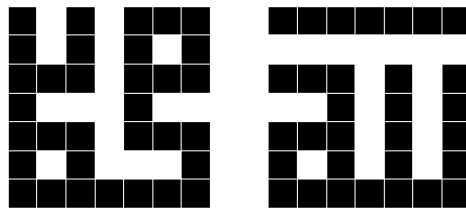


Figure 17: The phrases Allah and Muhammad in layout.

However, because not all words can be rendered uniformly three-dimensionally, the preference of these two phrases is also taken into account. Ariff Ashaari, (personal communication, February 28, 2022) asserted he placed the word 'Allah' on the cube's top surface from a technical standpoint. While the term 'Muhammad' is written on the two lower right and left sides, with each side of the surface of the letters linked. The Square Kufic design that connects three characters creates a single cube, which is then attached to other cubes, resulting in a separate space constraint and synchronisation.

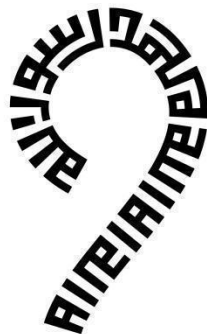


Figure 18: The phrase '*Lailahailallah Muhammadarrasulullah*' is based on the artwork, *Da'wah* (2017).



Figure 19: The phrase 'Lailahailallah Muhammadarrasulullah' in layout.

The phrase 'Lailahailallah Muhammadarrasulullah' is written in a five-bar layout. The significant features of this symmetric design are the motionless movement and a stable geometric form provided by the repetition, where the phrase is twirled into a twisted shot, as referred to in Figure 18 and 19. The elements complement and support each other as autonomous modules that repeat inside a geometric structure. It created a lively movement in the design, and the repetition effect is simple to follow. However, Ariff Ashaari (personal communication, February 28, 2022) pointed out that this method is complex because he must do each letter in a 5-bar pattern.

CONCLUSION

Calligraphy has ascended to the pinnacle of Islamic arts. It is because of the importance of writing in society since its inception. With its substance, unity among figures, and attractive structure, writing would attempt to generate a heavenly and visual influence to transmit the sacred messages of the Islam faith. In early Islamic periods, the Kufic script was primarily and most frequently used for reproducing the holy book, the Qur'an, and so had a significant influence on the creation and development of Islamic calligraphy (Tan, 1999). Kufic is recognized for fostering the growth and development of the illumination arts, which society had never used in the script before the ninth century.

This research observed the development of the Square Kufic script in Malaysian modern art, particularly in the Islamic art scene. People might argue that the Square Kufic script, rather than calligraphy, is the most decorative characteristic if we remove writing from drawing. People can never call the letters static or stagnant because their characteristic horizontal lines have been enlarged. Because of the diversity in form, Square Kufic has a particular dynamic. The visual vitality is formed by mixing sharply written script letters with long horizontal lines.

Although the artistic styles of Ariff Ashaari and Ahmad Jurjani differ, they share comparable manufacturing principles. The only thing that distinguishes the two is how the procedure is built up by the growth of the individual's own creativity. According to Ariff Ashaari (personal communication, February 28, 2022), writing Square Kufic is a unique art that requires employing imagination to arrange the letters in a way that preserves the shape of the letters while writing in a constrained space. He thus experimented with different spatial structures and colours related to the artworks' concept and significance. Additionally, the layouts deviate from the standard square design in favour of being more flexible and contemporary. Meanwhile, Ahmad Jurjani has consistently committed to the fundamentals of Square Kufi. The art of Khat is viewed as the art of pen and expression of the sacred in Islamic culture (Ahmad Jurjani, personal communication, February 21, 2022). He used minimal elements in his artworks and solely focused on the calligraphy rather than excessively putting additional components to support the notion he intended to convey.

The legibility issue is raised by the complexity of the composition and lettering. It addressed questions about the meaning and function of these Square Kufic inscriptions. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Square Kufic was designated as a script for religious literature during its growth. The abrupt shift from strictly to secular writing literature can be explained through this research. The studies proved that the artists wrote identical secular texts, which Square Kufic inscriptions have not vanished. Or no analogous attempts in secular writings are abandoned because the script obscured the text and legibility. As a result, the researchers concluded that the Islamic art of calligraphy and the Square

Kufic form emerged simultaneously. A wide range of writing forms evolved and developed in such a medium. According to studies, the script has evolved into a modern art form that delivers messages.

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