



INFLUENCES of Islam

DEBORAH ISKANDAR
EXPLORES ISLAMIC ART AND
ARCHITECTURE IN INDONESIA

Evidence suggests that since the early 8th century, there have been Islamic merchants trading in Indonesia. However, the spread of Islam was gradual and it only began to really spread in the 13th century under the influence of the Malay kingdoms. Today, over 87% of the Indonesian population identifies as Muslim. As a religion, Islam is not as deeply rooted in Indonesian art and design. The development of Islamic art differs from one country to the next depending on other external cultural influences. For instance in Indonesia, traditional arts like batik and calligraphy are an amalgamation of various cultures from Europe and Asia, thus Islam is not the dominant force. Indonesian history has always been shaped by a strong cultural heritage and folklore, and through the emergence of Islamic art, it gained a new perspective.

Legendary calligrapher and artist A. D. Pirous is undoubtedly one of the best-known examples of Islam's impact on Indonesian art. As one of the fathers of modern Indonesian art, his career has spanned over 60 years, inspiring entire generations of artists. Originally from Aceh, he started studying the Koran and the temples of his hometown in the 1960s with the idea of creating a visual narrative. Ironically, it was during his studies in New York when he realised his true identity as a Muslim artist, after visiting an exhibition at the Islamic galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As a Muslim, his faith is reflected in his artworks.

With his career and his works resonating with deep spirituality, Pirous examines how the teaching of Islam, and religion in general, guides society in every aspect of life. Today, his

work aims to question modern society through contemporary calligraphy and verses from the Koran. In October 2017, Pirous and his wife Erna opened the Serambi Pirous Galeri to present the development of their work for the past 50 years and to educate the public about art and Islamic poetry.

Pirous has also served as a role model for another Indonesian painter, Ahmad Sadali, who is recognised as one of the foremost abstract and modernist artists in Indonesia. As a student of Dutch painter Ries Mulder, Sadali's work was strongly influenced by his teacher's cubist practice, although he developed a sense of harmony and balance in his works as a contrast to random abstraction. He was also a member of the Art Students League of New York in the 1960s, which in turn exposed him to the works of abstract expressionists such as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Arshile Gorky. Sadali used these influences to create his own unique style based on the principles of Islam, but rather than adopting a random approach to abstraction, his works are more comparable to those of Rothko with depth and precision. The use of geometry, gold and calligraphy in art was relatively new and unique in Indonesia and once a pioneer of his time, Sadali continues to inspire aspiring painters.

As a religion, Islam has not only shaped art, but architecture as well. One of the earliest instances when Islam and Indonesian architecture came together was in the development of mosques. Often noticeably different from

traditional towers with domes, the mosques in Indonesia adopted specific characteristics from the culture of the islands they were built on. Some defining traits of the early mosques were for instance pyramid like multi-tiered roofs, with open columns in-between. These were primarily found on the island of Java, as they were influenced by the surrounding temples and their architecture.

Some contemporary Indonesian architects are also bringing the spirituality of Islam into their designs. Isandra Matin Ahmad, the founder of Andramatin studio, is known for his distinctively clean and modern style. He is consid-



project comes from the house owner's children, who both have the word "nur", or light in Arabic, as part of their first names. Furthermore, the name inspired Aaksen to include the element of the sun into the design, which draws directly from Islamic religion and the prayer ritual, as the prayer is said five times a day, indicating the transition of the sun. The strong component of "nur" is felt in the prayer room where a triangular window, which provides natural daylight, was installed to accentuate the contrast of light and shadow. The word Allah is written on the window, its shadow projecting dramatically on the floor every time the sun is shining. Its airiness and white colour make NOR House stand out in the densely populated urban neighbourhood, and with its well-designed architecture, it is a modern interpretation of the connection between humans and the greatness of the Creator.

From modernist artists to contemporary architecture, Islamic art and style are an integral part of the cultural diversity in Indonesia. Islam has permanently left its beautiful mark on art, design and architecture, and its influence continues to thrive through young Indonesian innovators.

ered as one of the leading Indonesian avant-garde architects, with a vision to bring new meaning to Indonesian design. This vision is prominently crystallised in one of his latest projects, the As Sobur Mosque in Lampung, Indonesia. The unique mosque was designed with every detail of Islamic tradition in mind, including the implementation of Islamic numerology: the main platform's dimensions are 34m x 34m, taken from the number of sujud (prostrations to god) people do daily in their prayers, while the 99 light openings at the top of the tower represent the 99 names of Allah. These different elements, which are symbolic by nature, have now become a visual representation for a place of worship shared by many.

Features of Islamic architecture can also be found in private residences, such as the NOR House, a Bandung-based project under Head architect Yanuar Pratama Firdaus from Aaksen Responsible Aarchitecture. The name of the

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1. A.D. Pirous Pulanglah ke Syurgaku
2. Ahmad Sadali - Field and Fragments on Red
3. Masjid As Sobur at Tulang Bawang Barat, Photo Courtesy of Andramatin
4. NOR House by Aaksen Responsible Aarchitecture, photo courtesy of Aaksen Responsible Aarchitecture