

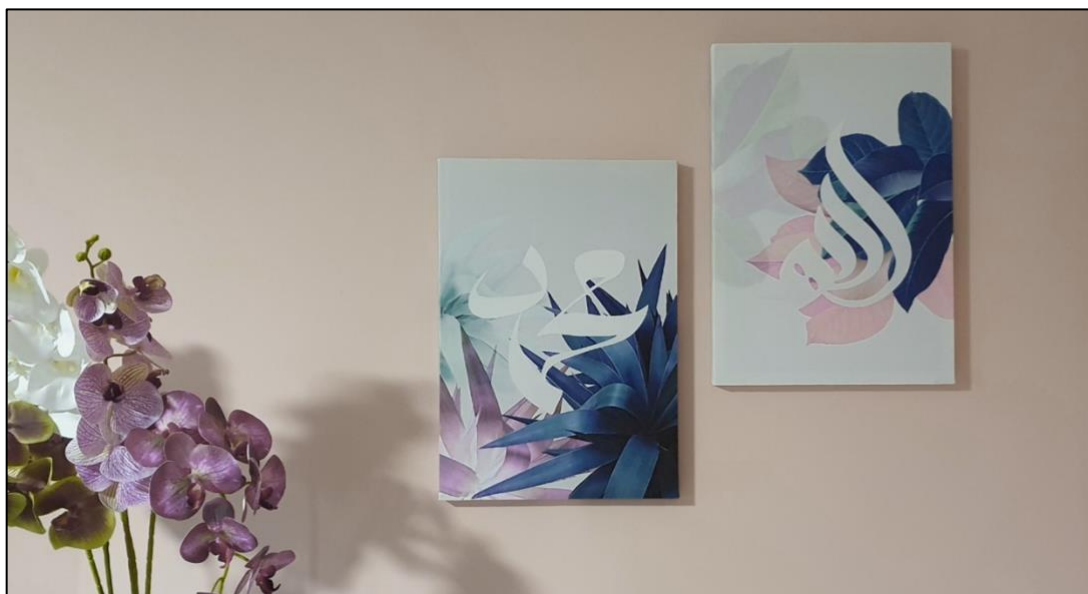
By Aliff Ghani

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Muhammad Noor Aliff Bin Ghani – that is my full name as indicated in my NRIC and any other official identification documents in Singapore. I think I can relate with those who have a long name – and the extra time taken in filling up documents, sometimes ending up with insufficient space or fields to complete my particulars (think: immigration arrival cards).

Accounts of my paternal and maternal family origins will generate keywords such as Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, Banjarese, and even Austronesian. One thing I know for sure – geographically we are from *Nusantara*, Maritime Southeast Asia, also commonly known as the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. In short, I'm simply Malay. And *Jawi*, an Arabic-based script, once upon a time the language writing system in this region, relates to my name: *Alif* ("A") is the first letter of this script.

I recollect going to weekend classes, memorising these Arabic letters, forming words and sentences in a "cursive" method. This is referred to as Arabic calligraphy, which continues to be the popular decorative art form in Malay-Muslim homes. It is seen in many different styles, from traditional ink and brush (paintings) to modern takes, in digital graphic print format.



Islamic calligraphy of *Allah* and *Muhammad* in Aliff's living room

This Chinese ink painting at ACM, in which the artist has created an image of a bird from the words of the *basmala* (phrase recited before each *surah* (chapter) of the Quran: "In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful") surely reminded me of home and the homes of my relatives. My Exhibitions team and I enjoyed sharing our own stories of Islamic calligraphy displayed in our homes as we installed the painting in the Islamic Art Gallery back in 2018



Left to right:

Bird calligram. Yusuf Chen Jinhui. China, 1996. Ink on rice paper. ACM, 1996-01738

Installation of **Bird calligram** painting in ACM's Islamic Art Gallery

Another supplementary class I used to attend was for the *Nusantara* martial art *Silat*. This technique of defense focuses on fixed hand positions, low stances, joint manipulation, and weaponry. *Silat* today is often associated with the *Keris* (kris), the primary weapon of this martial art, which is traditionally used as a last resort during combat.

A *keris* is a symbol of power and of ethnic pride. These subtly crafted pieces place emphasis on refined workmanship, and special ones are reserved for battle usage by the warrior masters known as *pendekars*. On the other hand, richly decorated *kerises*, appointed with gold and precious gems, are always seen on wealthy gentlemen and the Malay sultan or king. The closest I have come to holding a *keris* was when I was the king of the day – my wedding day!



Kris (Malay, *keris*). Indonesia, Madura Island, 20th century. Wood, copper, brass. ACM, XXXX-04648



Aliff Ghani as the Malay groom, with a *keris*

As my team continues to integrate and assimilate new objects into ACM exhibitions and galleries, I believe any one of you who visits us will surely ponder on at least one object that reminds you of *Home, and Away*.