

From Text to Image: A Visual Interpretation of *Nakirah-Ma'rifah* Repetition in QS. Inshirah by @_zukkk

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Abstract. QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6 employs a distinctive rhetorical pattern through the repetition of *nakirah* and *ma'rifah*, conveying a layered theological message about hardship and relief. This study demonstrates that the shift from *al-'usr* in *ma'rifah* to *yusr* in *nakirah* rhetorically affirms the singularity of hardship and the multiplicity of ease, reinforcing a Qur'anic discourse of hope and resilience. Through a semiotic analysis of Zuk's Qur'an-inspired painting circulated on Instagram, the research further reveals how visual elements—such as light, spatial openness, and symbolic contrast—translate this linguistic meaning into a contemporary visual exegesis. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach that integrates Qur'anic *balaghah* analysis with Peircean semiotics, the study finds that digital visual interpretations function not merely as aesthetic expressions but as interpretive extensions that recontextualize Qur'anic messages for modern psychological and spiritual concerns. The findings highlight the emergence of visual *tafsir* in digital spaces as a significant development in contemporary Qur'anic studies and da'wah, expanding interpretive modalities beyond textual commentary into multimodal meaning-making.

Keywords: Qur'anic rhetoric; *Nakirah-Ma'rifah*; Visual Semiotics; Thematic Interpretation.

Introduction

The Qur'an, as the sacred scripture of Islam, not only contains normative guidelines and legal principles but also presents an unparalleled linguistic and aesthetic beauty.¹ Its rhetorical richness, such as the use of repetition (*al-tikrār*), the alternation between *nakirah* and *ma'rifah* forms, and the construction of sentences laden with implied meanings, renders the Qur'an perpetually relevant for multidimensional study.² QS. Al-Inshirah(94): 5-6 "*Fa inna ma'a al-'usr yusrā. Inna ma'a al-'usr yusrā*" exemplifies the stylistic uniqueness of the Qur'an, where repetition appears textually identical yet conveys layered semantic and spiritual nuances. In contemporary religious and social life, however, there is a tendency for verses of the Qur'an, especially those rich in linguistic symbolism and profound spiritual meanings, to be understood only literally.³ This challenge becomes more pressing in the face of modern realities marked by despair, psychological pressure, and loss of hope, particularly in the post-pandemic era.⁴ QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6 thus provides a highly contextual message of spiritual

¹ Abd. Aziz, "Al-Qur'an Dan Sastra: Antara Etika, Estetika, Dan Profetika," *Al Burhan: Kajian Ilmu Dan Pengembangan Budaya Al-Qur'an* 20, no. 1 (2020): 147–63.

² Wahyu Hanafi Putra, *Linguistik Al-Qur'an: Membedah Makna Dalam Konvensi Bahasa*, ed. Febri Hijroh Mukhlis (Indramayu: Penerbit Adab, 2020); Dinni Nazhifah, "Tafsir-Tafsir Modern Dan Kontemporer Abad Ke-19-21 M," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 2 (2021): 211–18, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v1i2.12302>.

³ Abd. Basid and Abd Ghani, "Konsep Ketentraman Hidup Perspektif Quraish Shihab (Studi Surah Al-Insyirah Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah)," *SYARLATI: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hukum* 9, no. 1 (2023): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariati.v9i1.4561>.

⁴ Arif Armanto, "Konflik Sosial Dalam Novel Mā Tabaqa Lakum Karya Ghassan Kanafani: Analisis Sosiologi Sastra," *Middle Eastern Culture & Religion Issues* 3, no. 1 (2024): 91–109, <https://doi.org/10.22146/mecri.v3i1.13391>.

resilience, in which every difficulty holds multiple forms of ease.⁵ Unfortunately, this message is not always conveyed through interpretive approaches that can bridge the depth of Qur'anic language with the symbolic and visual modes of understanding familiar to modern audiences.

Alongside the development of digital media and visual culture, expressions of Qur'anic meaning are no longer limited to written exegesis (*tafsir tahrīrī*). Still, they are increasingly articulated through visual and artistic media. A notable example is the emergence of Qur'an-inspired artworks shared by contemporary Muslim artists on platforms such as Instagram. One such case is Zuk's painting interpreting QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6, uploaded via his personal account (@_zukkk). Beyond aesthetic qualities of color and composition, the artwork communicates a profound spiritual resonance with the verse. Such creative practices open new horizons in the study of Qur'anic aesthetics and thematic exegesis, particularly through what has been termed *tafsir fanni* (art-based interpretation).

To date, however, no academic work has specifically examined how the rhetorical device of *nakirah* and *ma'rifah* repetition in the Qur'an, particularly in QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6} is visually represented in contemporary artworks circulated on social media. Existing studies on linguistic interpretation and *balāghah* generally remain confined to classical text-based analysis, while explorations of Qur'anic visual semiotics are rare and mostly disconnected from linguistic exegesis. For instance, Yulis et al. investigated *fawātiḥ al-suwar* in their work entitled "*Interpretation of the Verse of Fawatih al-Suwar Using Sighat Amr and Istifham Perspectives of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and al-Thabari*",⁶ Setiawan and Rokim studied *nakirah-ma'rifah* with the title "*Setiawan and Rokim, "Surat Al-Insyirah Dalam Perspektif Nakiroh Dan Ma'rifah"*,⁷ Zulaika and Vahlepi examined the semantics of "difficulty and ease" in Surah al-Syarḥ through semiotic analysis with the title "*Zulaika and Vahlepi, "Analisis Makna Kesulitan Dan Kemudahan Surat Al-Syarḥ Kajian Semiotika Al-Qur'an"*,⁸ Nurfazri et al. compared *i'rāb lafżī* and *i'rāb taqdīrī* with the title "*Analisis Komparatif I'rāb Dalam Dua Aspek: Studi Perbandingan Antara I'rāb Lafżī Dan I'rāb Taqdīrī*",⁹ Choiroh studied Bint al-Syāṭī's linguistic *tafsir* in *al-Tafsir al-Bayānī* with the title "*Tafsir Linguistik Bintu Syathi: Studi Atas Pendekatan Linguistik Dalam Kitab Tafsir Al-Tafsir Al-Bayani Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*",¹⁰ and Nasution and Alwizar analyzed the role of Arabic grammar in Qur'anic exegesis with the title "*Kaidah Bahasa Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an*".¹¹ Meanwhile, semiotic approaches to Qur'an-inspired artworks, such as Putri's analysis of Ameena Y. Khan's hijab paintings with the title "*Analisis Semiotika Pada Lukisan Wanita Berhijab Karya Ameena Y. Khan*" (*Makna Tanda Kreatifitas Non Verbal Seni Lukis Mengenai Representasi Identitas Perempuan Berhijab Di Amerika Serikat*)¹² and Sholeh's

⁵ Basid and Ghani, "Konsep Ketentraman Hidup Perspektif Quraish Shihab (Studi Surah Al-Insyirah Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah)"; Zulaika Zulaika and Sahrizal Vahlepi, "Analisis Makna Kesulitan Dan Kemudahan Surat Al-Syarḥ 'Kajian Semiotika Al-Qur'an,'" *Jurnal Ilmiah Dikdaya* 13, no. 2 (2023): 617, <https://doi.org/10.33087/dikdaya.v13i2.532>; Y Setiawan and M Rokim, "Surat Al-Insyirah Dalam Perspektif Nakiroh Dan Ma'rifah," *Ta'lim: Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu* 1, no. 2 (2022): 111–21.

⁶ Rama Yulis et al., "Interpretation of the Verse of Fawatih Al-Suwar Using Sighat Amr and Istifham Perspectives of Fakhr Al-Razi and Al-Thabari," *FOKUS: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 7, no. 1 (2022): 46–56, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v7i1.4064>.

⁷ Setiawan and Rokim, "Surat Al-Insyirah Dalam Perspektif Nakiroh Dan Ma'rifah."

⁸ Zulaika and Vahlepi, "Analisis Makna Kesulitan Dan Kemudahan Surat Al-Syarḥ 'Kajian Semiotika Al-Qur'an.'"

⁹ Nabil Eka Nurfazri et al., "Analisis Komparatif I'rāb Dalam Dua Aspek: Studi Perbandingan Antara I'rāb Lafżī Dan I'rāb Taqdīrī," *Al-Furqan : Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 4, no. 3 (2025): 1–23.

¹⁰ Wahyuni Nuryyatul Choiroh, "Tafsir Linguistik Bintu Syathi: Studi Atas Pendekatan Linguistik Dalam Kitab Tafsir Al-Tafsir Al-Bayani Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim," *Al-Mustafid: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 23–36, <https://doi.org/10.30984/mustafid.v2i1.560>.

¹¹ Husaini Nasution and Alwizar, "Kaidah Bahasa Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an," *Hamalatul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an* 5, no. 2 (2024): 98–111, <https://doi.org/10.37985/hq.v5i2.335>.

¹² Sheilla Imelda Putri, "Analisis Semiotika Pada Lukisan Wanita Berhijab Karya Ameena Y. Khan" (*Makna Tanda Kreatifitas Non Verbal Seni Lukis Mengenai Representasi Identitas Perempuan Berhijab Di Amerika Serikat*) (Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, 2018).

study of environmental critique in his painting of Surah al-Rum with the title “*Paradigma Dakwah Kultural: Kritik Sosial Terhadap Isu Lingkungan Dalam Lukisan ‘Ar Rum 41’*”,¹³ remain limited and largely disconnected from the linguistic dimension. This condition highlights a significant research gap: the lack of integration between Qur’anic linguistic interpretation, visual semiotic theory, and social media analysis as a platform of visual *da’wah*.

Accordingly, the present study aims to analyze the repetition of verses QS. Al-Inshirah(94): 5-6 through two main approaches: (1) linguistic aspects, focusing on the rules of *nakirah-ma’rifah* and their implications in Qur’anic *balaghah*, and (2) the visual aspects, employing semiotic analysis of Zuk’s paintings shared on Instagram. Additionally, this study explores the role of social media as a medium for the circulation and reception of Qur’an-inspired visual interpretation, offering an alternative model of exegesis that is communicative, affective, and contextually relevant. By combining textual and visual analyses, this research seeks to broaden the horizon of understanding the Qur’an and contribute to the development of thematic *tafsir*, Qur’anic linguistics, and visual interpretation within the framework of contemporary *da’wah*.

This research is based on a qualitative paradigm with an interpretive orientation, as the primary focus is to explore the deeper meaning of the linguistic structure of Qur’anic verses and their visual expression in painting. This approach examines symbolic realities that cannot be reduced to numbers or statistics but require interpretive engagement with the language of the Qur’an and the semiotic dimensions of visual symbols.¹⁴ Therefore, the qualitative method is employed to capture the hermeneutical dimensions of the sacred text and how human creativity embodies understandings of revelation.

Specifically, this study applies an intrinsic case study approach, which examines a single case for its uniqueness rather than for its generalizability.¹⁵ The case selected here is a painting by Zuk that visualizes the meaning of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5–6 and is disseminated via the social media platform Instagram. This painting is an intersection of sacred text and digital art expression, thereby opening a discursive space for interpreting the Qur’anic verses through visual media. This case-study method allows researchers to explore in detail the interaction between Qur’anic linguistic structures and symbolic representations within contemporary digital culture.

The research framework consists of three main components. *First*, the data sources used include primary data in the form of (1) the text of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5–6 as contained in the *muṣḥaf* and discussed in *tafsir* works, and (2) paintings by Zuk, which serve as the main visual objects, obtained directly from the artist’s official Instagram account (@_zukkk). In addition, secondary data include classical *tafsir* and works of *Ulūm al-Qur’ān* such as *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Itqān fī Ulūm al-Qur’ān* by al-Suyūṭī, as well as modern exegesis such as *Tafsir al-Misbah* by Quraish Shihab. Besides, theoretical references on semiotics, including the models of Charles Sanders Peirce (icon, index, symbol) and Roland Barthes, are used to support the visual analysis. *Second*, data collection is conducted through documentation and literature study. Documentation included tracing the verse’s linguistic structure, particularly the repetition of *nakirah-ma’rifah*, and observing the visual elements in Zuk’s painting (color, form, composition, and symbolic imagery). Literature studies examined the interpretation of the verse in classical and modern *tafsir* sources, as well as relevant semiotic theories for visual analysis. *Third*, data analysis. Data are analyzed

¹³ Akhmad Afifi, “Paradigma Dakwah Kultural: Kritik Sosial Terhadap Isu Lingkungan Dalam Lukisan ‘Ar Rum 41’ Karya Ahmad Sholeh” (UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, 2023).

¹⁴ Basri Bado, *Model Pendekatan Kualitatif: Telaah Dalam Metode Penelitian Ilmiah* (Sukoharjo: Tahta Media Group, 2022).

¹⁵ Gilang Asri Nurahma and Wiwin Hendriani, “Tinjauan Sistematis Studi Kasus Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif,” *MEDIAPSI* 7, no. 2 (2021): 119–29, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.mps.2021.007.02.4>.

through three types of analysis: (1) linguistic analysis, focusing on the repetition of *nakirah-ma'rifah* and the rhetorical implications of this structure within Qur'anic *balāghah*; (2) visual semiotic analysis, applying Peirce's triadic model to identify icons, indices, and symbols in Zuk's artwork; and (3) intertextual analysis, synthesizing findings from textual and visual analysis to uncover integrative layers of meaning between the Qur'anic verse and its artistic representation.

Through this methodological framework, this study aims to explain how the meaning of Qur'anic verses is not only conveyed through the deep structures of Arabic linguistics but can also be articulated in communicative, contextual, and aesthetic forms of visual representation, especially in today's digital society.

Discussion

Instagram account @_zukkk and the Painting of QS. Al-Inshirah(94): 5-6

The Instagram account @_zukkk, belonging to the artist Muhammad Marzuki (popularly known as Zuk), represents a contemporary intersection between fine art, emotional expression, and digital media. Established in May 2015 and verified in December 2024, the account has attracted more than 76,000 followers, reflecting significant public engagement with Zuk's visual works. His bio statement, '*Painting is just a side job, my main profession: loving you*', reveals a poetic and personal artistic identity that invites audiences into a deeper emotional connection with his art.

Zuk was born in Jember, East Java, and currently resides in Nganjuk. With a background as a *santri* of Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyyah Sukorejo, Situbondo, he later pursued formal art education at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta, majoring in Fine Arts (2016). As of May 2025, his account features more than 660 posts, including paintings, illustrations, and reels that highlight both the creative process and the final presentation of his artwork. His consistent use of color palettes and distinctive visual motifs has established a recognizable artistic identity within the Instagram art community.

Interaction with followers is another hallmark of Zuk's account. The comment section and Direct Message feature function as dialogical spaces, enabling mutual exchange between the artist and the audience. From the perspective of digital media studies, this dynamic exemplifies the phenomenon of participatory culture and the attention economy, in which the distinction between art creator and consumer becomes increasingly fluid.

One of Zuk's most notable works is a spiritual-themed painting uploaded on April 20, 2025, that visualizes verses from QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5–6: "Fa inna ma'a al-'usr yusrā, inna ma'a al-'usr yusrā", which means '*For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease*'. This painting is not only an aesthetic composition, but also a visual articulation of a profound Qur'anic message. The interplay of dark and light tones, the fluidity of ink strokes, and the contrasts in composition evoke a psychological transition from despair to hope. The caption accompanying the painting further reinforces this theme:

"How can a store sell a padlock without a key? Even the seller sometimes provides not just one key, but two or three keys at once (as a backup)."



Figure 1. Painting of Zuk (QS. Al-Inshirah(94): 5-6)

This metaphor resonates with the Qur'anic promise that hardship is never without ease, thereby recontextualizing divine reassurance in a form accessible to contemporary digital audiences.

From the perspective of Qur'anic *balaghah*, verses 5–6 of QS Al-Inshirah exemplify rhetorical repetition (*al-takrir*). Although the two verses are textually identical, the semantic implications are multilayered. The definite form *al-usr* (with the definite article *al*) signals a specific hardship, whereas the indefinite form *yusrā* suggests multiple, unspecified forms of ease.¹⁶ Classical *musassirūn*, such as al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, emphasize that the recurrence of the phrase is not tautological but reinforces divine assurance: that a single hardship will never outweigh the abundance of reliefs. Thus, the structural interplay of *nakirah-ma'rifah* in this verse functions both linguistically and theologically, affirming that diverse forms of divine facilitation always accompany every hardship.

The integration of Qur'anic linguistic structures and visual aesthetics illustrates how contemporary art circulating on social media can function as interpretive *da'wah*.¹⁷ It evokes emotional resonance while simultaneously inviting intellectual reflection on the Qur'an's rhetorical richness. Accordingly, Zuk's artwork is not merely a personal expression but contributes to thematic *tafsīr* through a visual-semiotic approach, enriching the discourse on Qur'anic interpretation in the digital age.

The Concept of Nakirah-Ma'rifah and Repetition in the Language of the Qur'an

In Arabic grammar, the concepts of *nakirah* (نَكِرَةٌ) and *ma'rifah* (مَعْرِفَةٌ) constitute fundamental categories in understanding the referential status of a noun (*isim*). A *nakirah* noun refers to something undefined or general, whereas a *ma'rifah* noun denotes something specific, recognized, or defined

¹⁶ Mufham Amin and Akhmad Rusydi, "Rahasia Pengulangan Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Al-Mubith: Jurnal Ilmu Qur'an Dan Hadits* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.35931/am.v2i1.3197>.

¹⁷ Achmad Arifulin Nuha and Moh. Sholeh, "Analisis Visual Pesan Dakwah Dalam Kaligrafi Kontemporer Di Instagram," *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 111–22, <https://ejournal.iaisyarifuddin.ac.id/index.php/dakwatuna/article/view/3130>.

either linguistically or contextually.¹⁸ This grammatical distinction plays a vital role in the construction of meaning in the Qur'an, since the choice between *nakirah* and *ma'rifah* often shapes both semantic depth and rhetorical effect.¹⁹ Within Qur'anic discourse, the phenomenon of noun repetition, whether in *nakirah* or *ma'rifah* form, cannot be regarded as mere formal duplication. Instead, it carries significant semantic, rhetorical, and aesthetic functions. Classical exegetes (*mufassirūn*) and scholars of *balāghah* (rhetoric) have identified four possible patterns of noun repetition in the Qur'an, each with distinct implications.²⁰

The four patterns of noun repetition in the Qur'an are:²¹

1. **Ma'rifah → Ma'rifah**

When both the first and second nouns are definite (*ma'rifah*), they usually refer to the same entity. Repetition in this pattern functions as affirmation and emphasis.

Example: QS. al-Hāqqah (69):1-2, "الْحَقَّةُ, مَا الْحَقَّةُ"

Both occurrences of *al-Hāqqah* denote the Day of Judgment. The repetition reinforces rhetorical intensity and creates an effect of astonishment (*ṣidmāh ma'na'yiyah*).

2. **Nakirah → Nakirah**

When both nouns appear in *nakirah* form, they may refer to different entities despite sharing the same lexical form. This pattern suggests a broadened generalization or multiple referents.

Example: QS. al-Baqarah (2):17, "مَتَّهُمْ كَمَّلَ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِئْرُهُمْ"

The word *nūr* (light) in *nakirah* form can indicate a different type or level of light each time.

3. **Nakirah → Ma'rifah**

In this structure, the first noun in *nakirah* form conveys a general reference, while the second in *ma'rifah* form specifies or clarifies it. This corresponds to the rhetorical principle of *al-ṣikr ba'd al-umūm* (mentioning after generalization).

Example: QS. Al-Qadr (97):1, "إِنَّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقُدْرِ"

The term *laylah* (night) is first understood in a general sense, then specified as *laylah al-qadr* (the Night of Power), providing clarity and heightened significance.

4. **Ma'rifah → Nakirah**

When the first mention is *ma'rifah* and the second is *nakirah*, it may indicate an additional quality, a shift in characterization, or even a different aspect of the same entity.

Example: QS. Al-Rahman (55): 56, "فِيهِنَّ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ لَمْ يَطْمَئِنُنَّ إِنْسُنٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا خَانٌ"

The indefinite form (*nakirah*) here adds descriptive attributes, enriching the imagery beyond the initial definite reference.

¹⁸ Abu Dzar Al Qifari, "Nakirah Dan Ma'rifah Fii Al-Qur'an," *Shaut Al-Arabiyah* 10, no. 1 (2022): 107–14, <https://doi.org/10.24252/saa.v10i1.29432>.

¹⁹ Nasution and Alwizar, "Kaidah Bahasa Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an"; Raden Sofwan, Miftah Ismail, and Raden Shinta Rahmi, "Kaidah Ma'rifat Pada Lafadz 'Ar-Rijalu Qawwamuna 'Ala an-Nisa" Dalam Al Qur'an Surat An-Nisa Ayat 34," *JIIP (Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan)* 7, no. 1 (2024): 409–15, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v7i1.3303>.

²⁰ Abu Fadl J Alaluddin Abdurrahman Ibnu Abu BAkar As-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Madinah: Maktab Al-Malik Fahd Li at-Taba'ah, 2008); Dahrani and Agustiar, "Al-Ta'rif Wa Al-Tankir Dalam Al-Quran Menurut Pandangan Imam Sayuti," *Al-Mikraj, Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 4, no. 2 (2024): 1609–17, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v4i02.5356>.

²¹ Sayyid Muhammad Alawi Al-Maliki Al-Hasani, *Al-Qawa'id Al-Asasiyah Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Jeddah: Maktabah Malik Fahd, 2002).

Table 1. Classification of the *Nakirah-Ma'rifah* Repetition in the Qur'an

No.	Repetition Pattern	Semantic Implications	Example	Explanation
1		Refers to the same entity; functions as affirmation	QS. Al-Haqqah [69]:1–2	Both nouns denote the Day of Judgment; repetition intensifies rhetorical impact.
2		May refer to different entities; suggests generalization or multiplicity	QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:17	<i>Nūr</i> in <i>nakirah</i> form points to different levels or types of light.
3		General-to-specific pattern; clarifies or identifies the referent	QS. Al-Qadr [97]:1	<i>Laylah</i> (night) is specified as <i>Laylah al-Qadr</i> (the Night of Power)
4		Adds new attributes or differentiates aspects of the referent	QS. Al-Rahman [55]:56	The <i>nakirah</i> form introduces additional descriptive qualities

This classification underscores that repetition in the Qur'an is never redundant. As Abdul-Raof highlights, Qur'anic repetition fulfills pedagogical functions (reinforcing memory), rhetorical functions (building emotional effect), and semantic functions (expanding or specifying meaning).²²

From an aesthetic perspective, repetitive structures in the Qur'an generate rhythm, symmetry, and phonetic beauty, reinforcing the textual eloquence of the *mushaf*. The interplay of *nakirah* and *ma'rifah* forms creates a balance between meaning and expression.²³ Thereby embedding semantic depth within linguistic artistry. Thus, within the framework of this study, the repetition of *nakirah-ma'rifah* in QS. Al-Inshirah provides the foundation for visual interpretation. Here, linguistic forms are translated into visual symbols and artistic elements, offering a bridge between Qur'anic semantics and aesthetic-spiritual representation.

The Theory of Visual Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes

The study of visual texts as representations of meaning in the Qur'anic context cannot be separated from the theoretical foundations of semiotics,²⁴ which serve as a methodological framework for examining the relationships among signs, meaning, and interpretation. In this context, the visual

²² Abdul Rouf, *Mozaik Tafsir Indonesia: Kajian Ensiklopedis* (Depok: Sahifa Publishing, 2020).

²³ Alfi Nur Azizah Abdullah, "Musikalisisasi Tuturan Dan Pesan Dari Al-Qur'an Surat Al-Ikhlaash, Al-Falaq Dan An-Naas," *Shaut Al Arabiyah* 10, no. 2 (2022): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.24252/saa.v10i2.34145>; Aminullah Nasution Nasution, "Surah An-Nasr Kajian Stilistika Al-Qur'an," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist* 5, no. 2 (2022): 187–205, <https://doi.org/10.35132/albayan.v5i2.217>.

²⁴ Arif Budiono, "Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Melalui Pendekatan Semiotika Dan Antropologi (Telaah Pemikiran Muhammad Arkoun)," *Miyah: Jurnal Studi Islam* XI, no. 02 (2015): 281–306, <https://doi.org/10.33754/miyah.v11i2.19>; Zainuddin Soga and Hadirman Hadirman, "Semiotika Signifikansi: Analisis Struktur Dan Penerapannya Dalam Alquran," *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality* 3, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.30984/ajip.v3i1.632>.

semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes provide two major foundations for interpreting paintings as forms of both aesthetic and hermeneutic engagement with the sacred text.

Peirce (1839–1914) classified signs into three main aspects: representamen, object, and interpretant.²⁵ The representamen is the physical form of the sign (e.g., a painting or visual symbol); the object refers to the reality signified by the representamen (either concrete or abstract); and the interpretant is the meaning or understanding generated in the mind of the interpreter. Furthermore, Peirce divides signs according to the relational mode between representamen and object into three principal categories: 1) Icon: a sign that resembles its object (e.g., the depiction of a mountain symbolizing firmness or steadfastness); 2) Index: a sign that has a causal or existential connection with its object (e.g., tears indicating sadness); and 3) Symbol: a sign whose meaning is constructed through convention or cultural agreement (e.g., the cube form as a symbol of the Ka'bah).²⁶

When applied to the case of this study, the triadic model is reflected in the visual interpretation of QS. Al-Inshirah. Icons are employed to represent openness of the chest (as a metaphor for relief after hardship); indices describe the psychological states of constriction and expansion of the soul, while symbols emerge through calligraphic elements, color schemes, and geometric arrangements that reflect the syntactic and semantic composition of the Qur'anic verse.

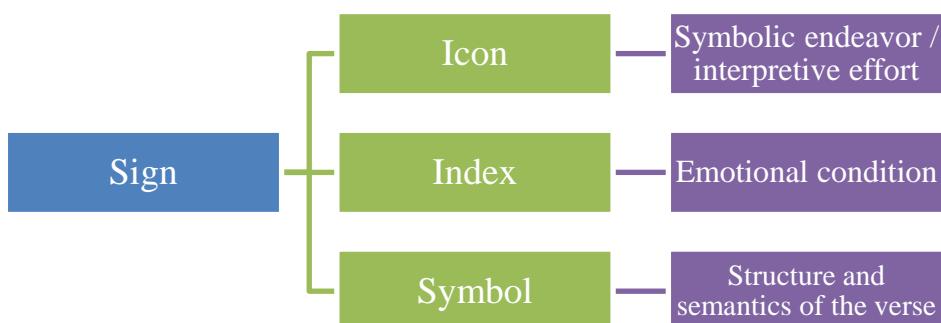


Figure 1. Peirce's Representamen, Object, and the Meaning of the Qur'anic Verse

Barthes (1915–1980), who developed visual semiotics in the context of culture and media, introduces a dual-layered approach to Reading signs: denotation and connotation.²⁷ Denotation refers to the literal or descriptive meaning of a sign, while connotation carries an additional layer of ideological, emotional, or cultural meaning.²⁸

²⁵ Nurun Nisaa Baihaqi, “Makna Salam Dalam Al-Qur'an (Analisis Semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce),” *Taqaddumi: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.12928/taqaddumi.v1i1.4108>.

²⁶ Liana Hutapea et al., “Analisis Semiotika Logo UIN Sumatera Utara: Pendekatan Tanda Dan Makna Menurut Teori Charles Sanders Peirce,” *Filosofi: Publikasi Ilmu Komunikasi, Desain, Seni Budaya* 2, no. 2 (2025): 60–70, <https://doi.org/10.62383/filosofi.v2i2.602>.

²⁷ Sahrul Umami, Erliana Efendi, and Haniyah Dhiya Mawwaddah, “Semiotika Roland Barthes Dalam Poster Film The Space Between,” *Visual Heritage: Jurnal Kreasi Seni Dan Budaya* 6, no. 3 (2024): 463–71, <https://doi.org/10.30998/vh.v6i3.11147>; Muhammad Ubaidillah and Mukhsin Patriansah, “Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Film Agak Laen Produser Studio Imajinari,” *Vi&ART: Jurnal Seni Rupa & Desain* 2, no. 1 (2024): 49–65, <https://doi.org/10.61930/visart.v2i1.664>; Asep Mulyaden, “Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes Terhadap Simbol Perempuan Dalam Al-Qur'an,” *Hanifya: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 4, no. 2 (2021): 139–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/hanifya.v4i2.13540>.

²⁸ Vina Siti Sri Nofia and Muhammad Rayhan Bustam, “Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Sampul Buku Five Little Pigs Karya Agatha Christie,” *MAHADAYA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya* 2, no. 2 (2022): 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.34010/mhd.v2i2.7795>.

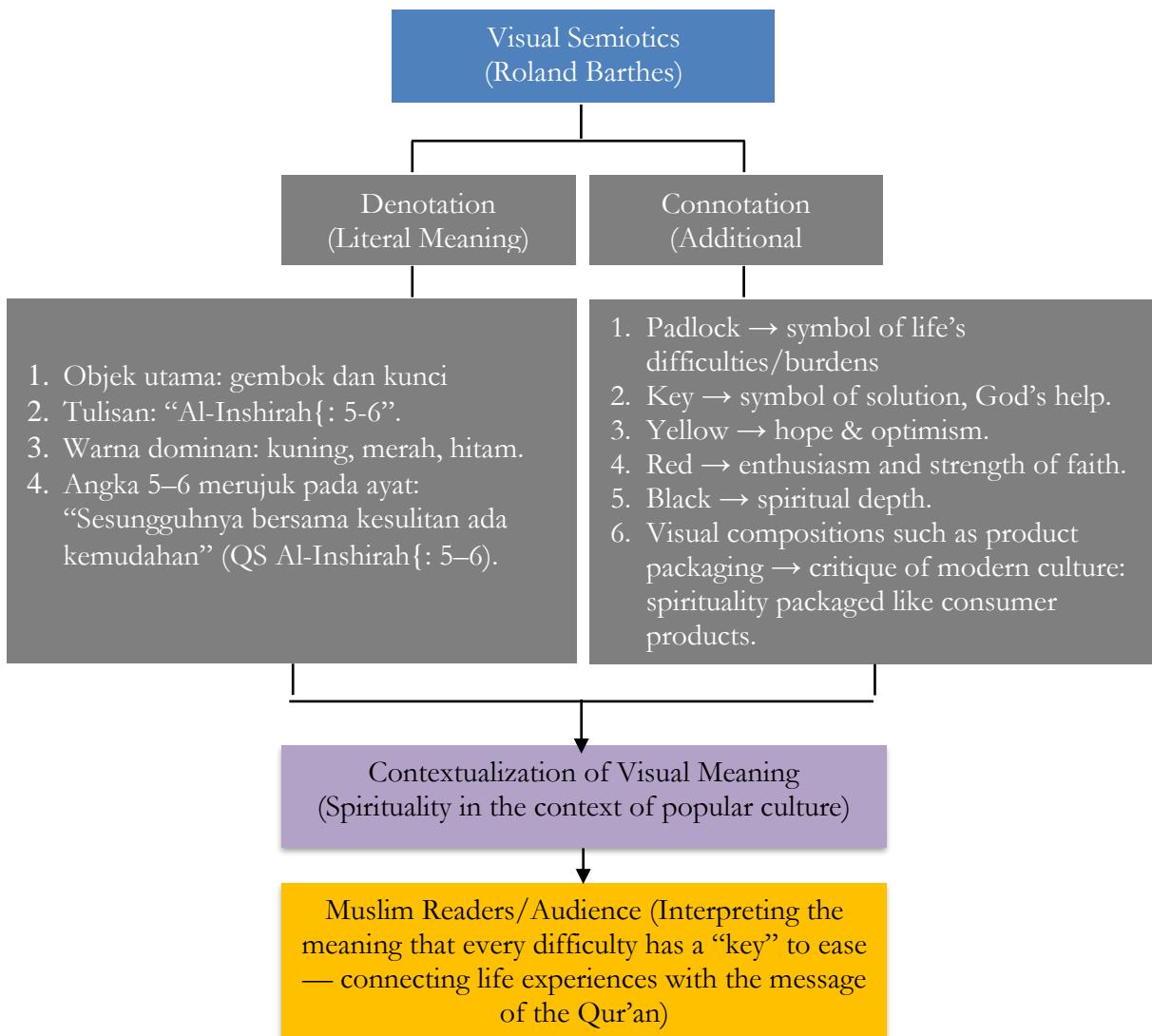


Figure 2. Barthes' Semiotics and Visualization of the Qur'an

For instance, in the visualization of Qur'anic verses through painting, denotative meaning may appear in figurative imagery such as wings, light, or hearts. Connotative meaning, however, might include symbolic color use (e.g., blue signifying spiritual tranquility) or compositional features (e.g., circular arrangements suggesting divine perfection).²⁹ This layered interpretation is highly contextual, shaped by the viewer's cultural, social, and spiritual horizons.

Barthes also emphasizes the role of myth, defined as a secondary layer of meaning that becomes naturalized within a culture.³⁰ In the case of QS. Al-Inshirah, the imagery of an open chest can form a myth that embodies the spiritual process of patience and *tawakkul*, deeply internalized within Islamic religious culture.

In this research, the combined application of Peirce and Barthes' theories enables a hybrid semiotic approach that explains how visual meaning in Qur'anic paintings encompasses not only literal

²⁹ Sasis Gunalan and Hasbullah Hasbullah, "Analisis Pemaknaan Semiotika Pada Karya Iklan Layanan Masyarakat," *Jurnal Nawala Visual* 2, no. 2 (2020): 44–51, <https://doi.org/10.35886/nawalavisual.v2i2.117>.

³⁰ Muhammad Yunan Harahap, "Studi Gender Dalam Islam," *Al-Habid III*, no. 2 (2018): 733–49; M. Alqodri Ramadhan, Revi Yudhistira, and Hizwah Naufal Muhammadi, "Komodifikasi Simbol Religi Dalam Iklan Marjan Edisi Bulan Ramadhan," *Jurnal Audiens* 2, no. 2 (2021): 180–91, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jas.v2i2.11652>.

and aesthetic dimensions but also spiritual and hermeneutical layers. The icons, indices, and symbols used in such artwork are not isolated artistic devices. Still, they are embedded within the Qur'an's own linguistic and rhetorical system, particularly visible in the *nakirah-ma'rifah* repetition in QS—Al-Inshirah, which emphasizes divine assurance through the stylistic principle of *al-takrīr* (repetition).

From this perspective, painting becomes not merely an artistic expression but a hermeneutical medium for the Qur'an, opening possibilities for *tafsīr* that engage with both textual and visual signs. Visual semiotics thus functions not only as a method of aesthetic analysis but also as *an interpretive strategy* in cross-media studies of the Qur'an, bridging the sacred text with contemporary artistic expression.

Visual Semiotics Analysis and the Rules of Ism Repetition in the Painting of QS. Al-Inshirah(94): 5-6

The verses of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6 read:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

“For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.”

It is important to emphasize that the repetition of *nakirah* and *ma'rifah* nouns in the Qur'an is not merely a grammatical feature, but is laden with semantic, rhetorical, and aesthetic dimensions. These patterns of repetition show how the Qur'an uses linguistic devices to reinforce theological messages and to unfold multilayered meanings. Through the classification of *nakirah-ma'rifah*, it becomes clear that each pattern not only conveys an emphatic affirmation but also opens possibilities for broader interpretations, both linguistically and spiritually.

In relation to the visual semiotics analysis and the rules of noun repetition in the painting of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6, the following table maps Peirce's semiotic categories:

Table 1. Peirce's Semiotic Analysis and Visualization of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6

No	Peirce Element	Academic Analysis
1	Representamen	The painting depicts a padlock (labeled <i>al-’usr</i> - العُسْر) and a key (labeled <i>yusr</i> - الْيُسْر), displayed as though packaged goods in a modern store.
2	Object	The concepts of difficulty (<i>al-’usr</i>) and ease (<i>al-yusr</i>) as stated in QS. Al-Inshirah: 5-6.
3	Interpretant	The meaning formed for the viewer is that hardship resembles a lock which, by its very nature, provides its own key (ease), not as an antagonist but as a complementary element.

From Table 1 above, Peirce's sign categories are: 1) Icon: The visual image of a padlock and key resembles the actual forms of these objects; 2) Index: The vibrational effect around the padlock indicate movement or transformation, signifying the process of transition from locked to unlocked (difficulty to ease); and 3) Symbol: The Arabic words “الْعُسْر” and “الْيُسْر” function as Qur'anic linguistic symbols that can only be fully understood by readers who understand the religious context.

Barthes' semiotic stages: denotation, connotation, and myth, can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis and Visualization of QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6

No	Barthes' Stages	Academic Analysis
1	Denotation	A packaged product: one padlock and one key in a blister pack.

2	Connotation	God portrays human life as a “packaged product”: every hardship (padlock) comes inseparably with its relief (key).
3	Myth	The belief that hardship inherently contains the potential for ease becomes a naturalized “myth” in Islamic culture. The painting affirms the Qur’anic principle as a universal truth.

The connotation can be further explained through visual codes: the yellow and red colors, commonly used in industrial product packaging Design. Here, it evokes a pop-culture aesthetic, emphasizing the Qur’anic message’s universality and relevance in modern discourse. The black and yellow stripes at the bottom resemble caution signs, suggesting that ease does not come without conscious effort. The “lock of life” may contain its key, but it must still be intentionally opened through human agency.

From the linguistic perspective, the verses employ a deliberate repetition of nouns: *al-’usr* (العُسْرُ), a *ma’rifah* noun (due to the definite article *al*), and *yusrā* (يُسْرًا), a *nakirah* noun (absence of *al*). This structure is identically repeated across two consecutive verses. From the standpoint of Arabic grammar and *balaghah*, this pattern exemplifies a well-established rhetorical device, falling under pattern 4 of the classification of repetition, while also resonating with the implications of other patterns. The repetition indicates that the hardships referenced are specific, recognizable, and experientially shared, whereas the accompanying ease is indefinite, open, and capable of manifesting in diverse forms.

The painting visually synthesizes three of the four repetition patterns (patterns 1, 2, and 4), highlighting the exegetical insight that hardship (*al-’usr*) is singular and limited, whereas ease (*yusrā*) is manifold and expansive. The metaphor of a “lock and key in one package” captures the theological principle that every test is paired with its solution, which is unified within divine wisdom, awaiting activation through human faith and effort.

Taken together, the three approaches, the rules of noun repetition, Peirce’s semiotics, and Barthes’ semiotics, demonstrate that painting functions not merely as an illustrative tool but as an interpretive medium that unites text and aesthetics. This integration opens the path to a Qur’anic visual hermeneutics, in which the structure of sacred language is read through visual objects, familiar cultural symbols become vessels of revelatory meaning, and interpretation becomes more affective, contextual, and pedagogical, particularly for 21st-century visual audiences.

Thus, this artwork is not only an artistic reflection of two concise yet profound verses of QS. Al-Inshirahis is also an exemplar of how the Qur’anic linguistic structure (*nakirah-ma’rifah* repetition) can be transposed into visual semiotics. The result is a spiritual understanding that is at once grounded in grammatical precision and elevated toward transcendent meaning. This interdisciplinary approach confirms that the Qur’anic text may be interpreted not only through oral and written exegesis but also through structured, symbolic, and deeply meaningful visual art.

Critique of the painting QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5–6 by Zuk

This painting effectively translates the Qur’anic text into a contemporary visual language that resonates with modern audiences more accustomed to visual expression than to verbal exegesis. Its major strengths include: 1) symbolic clarity: the lock-and-key accurately represents the semantic structure of “*ma’u al-’usr yusrā*.” The lock represents hardship, and the key represents ease; 2) narrative familiarity: the blister-pack Design echoes everyday consumer products, making the Qur’anic message feel immediate and relatable; and 3) semiotic richness: the work operates simultaneously as icon (visual resemblance), index (act of unlocking), and symbol (Arabic script), expanding interpretive layers.

However, these visual strengths also invite critique from the perspective of Qur'anic aesthetics and hermeneutics, first, reductionism. The painting risks reducing *al-'usr* and *al-yusr* to mere technical symbols (problem-solution), whereas the verse also conveys spiritual discipline, resilience, and divine assurance. *Second*, banality risk. Presenting Qur'anic imagery in mass-produced packaging may erode its sacred aura, flattening revelation into a market-like object.

From Barthesian semiotics, the denotation (lock-key) is clear, yet the connotation is ambiguous because: 1) not all viewers can read the Arabic (العسر / اليسر), so the textual depth may be lost; 2) the red-yellow color palette and caution-stripe Design connote danger, which could unintentionally burden the meaning of "hardship." 3) The one-key-one-lock image misrepresents the *nakirah-ma'rifah* structure: the verse promises multiple eases for a single hardship, but this plurality is absent. A more accurate visual would show more than one key. In addition, the caption in the Instagram post uses the word "sometimes" in describing the provision of keys, which contradicts the Qur'anic assurance. Since Allah's promise is sure, wording such as "*How can a seller offer a lock without a key? Indeed, keys are always provided, often more than one*" would better reflect the theological message

Thus, Zuk's painting successfully opens new ground for Qur'anic aesthetics in a digital context. Yet its effectiveness depends on being framed as an educational complement rather than a substitute for *tafsir*. To preserve the balance between aesthetics and meaning, visual interpretation should be accompanied by reference to classical and contemporary exegesis, ensuring that creativity enriches rather than overshadows the Qur'anic message.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the repetition of the *nakirah-ma'rifah* structure in QS. Al-Inshirah (94): 5-6 is not merely a linguistic repetition but contains complex rhetorical, semantic, and spiritual dimensions. By integrating a Qur'anic linguistic approach with the framework of visual semiotics through Zuk's paintings, this study demonstrates how divine messages in the sacred texts can be expressed and re-contextualized within the medium of contemporary visual art. The visual representations of padlocks and keys, as well as product packaging used as divine metaphors, demonstrate that visual interpretation can serve as a hermeneutical bridge between the language of revelation and the spiritual consciousness of today's digital society. These findings not only respond to the central question of how visualization can give meaning to the Qur'anic technique of repetition, but also expand the horizon of visual hermeneutics within contemporary thematic exegesis (*al-tafsir al-mawdu'i*).

Nonetheless, the limitations of this study lie in its single-case focus and the absence of empirical investigation into the audience's reception of such visual representations. Future research may therefore expand by examining visual interpretations of other Qur'anic passages with different symbolic registers and analyzing public engagement with art-based interpretations across digital platforms. Moreover, the study recommends exploring the sociological and cultural dimensions of visual-based *da'wah*, particularly within the dynamics of social media algorithms and segmented digital audiences.

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