

# THE ART OF PETER GOULD



**D**uring the recent Austrade Lifestyle Australia Exhibition at KLCC from 16 to 20 May 2008, Peter Gould gave a twist to the event. He presented digital artworks from the perspective of an Australian Muslim with a combination of digital painting and photos. Muhammad Firdaus Ariff met Peter Gould to gain an insight of the artist and the artwork.

**Q: Tell us about yourself such as your background and interests?**

**A:** I was born in Sydney, Australia and have spent most of my 26 years there. I've always had a creative streak and a passion for the visual arts. I was particularly drawn to the possibilities of digital expression which led me to studying graphic design and to my current position running a small design studio and working as an artist.

**Q: When did you embrace Islam and what led you to it?**

**A:** It's a long story but I can give you the abridged version. I explored a spiritual path in my late teens and embraced Islam at the age of 20. I wasn't from a religious background but was curious when I came across a Muslim through mutual friends. She was patient with my questions, intelligent (and beautiful!) – over time I came to know more about her faith and attended lectures, read books and eventually after a year or more felt that Islam was the most logical and beautiful manifestation of Divine Creed. She is now my wife, alhamdulillah, and we are expecting our first child in August.

**Q: What inspired you to create artwork?**

**A:** In the past few years I have been fortunate to travel through many Muslim countries. As such, I started a process of recording and expressing those collective experiences through art and photography. I recall being profoundly moved during my time in Andalusia, Spain in 2003; the Alhambra in particular had a presence that awakened something in me and encouraged an investigation into Islamic arts.

**Q: Which creative processes are involved when creating the artworks?**

**A:** I usually sketch or jot down notes and ideas as I observe the world – inspiration often comes while travelling, reading, watching or listening to others. Once I formalise the sketches into some more solid drawn concepts I either do some initial creative work in natural media (paint) or jump directly onto my PC and work with the tablet.

The work evolves and comes to life while in a digital environment.

**Q: Some people say that such digital artworks are not real art. What's your opinion?**

**A:** I sometimes hear people claim that digital artwork is less effective than work using traditional media, but I challenge that. The technical methodology is very different but art will always fail without a strong concept and a visually cohesive result. I'm a huge fan of traditional painting and can spend hours jaw-dropped in galleries but I equally admire the creative possibilities in the digital realm.

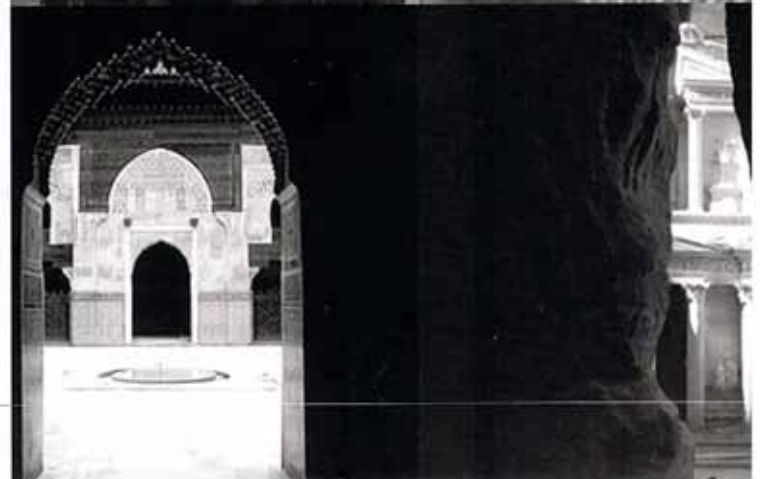
Is digital photography or digital music less effective than traditional photography or music? For the time being, both digital and traditional media continue to exist. Personally, the key advantage of digital art is that it could be reproduced en masse without degrading its quality. As such, more people are able to enjoy the artworks.

**Q: A picture tells a thousand words; can you share the story behind the photographs?**

**A:** One of the memorable photos is the one I took in Marrakesh, Morocco. I was haplessly lost in the maze of the alleyways when I suddenly saw a man stepping into a column of light. Immediately I captured the moment. The photo of the Dome of Rock in Jerusalem is also very special to me. It evokes the memories and emotions during my travel to Jerusalem. These photos serve like a key to recall the experience of my journeys.

Your photos seem to be exclusively in black and white as opposed to your largely colourful digital artworks. Is this intentional?

Yes, it is deliberately done to focus on the lines and shapes of the subjects portrayed in the photos. Furthermore, black and white photos have this timeless quality - you can't tell which year it was taken.





**Q:** Muslims are getting very bad reputation these days. How do you see the role of art in breaking such conceptions?

**A:** We in the West live in societies largely driven by marketing, advertising, branding and status – a visual culture where perception is reality for people without the time or inclination to read between the lines. I believe we could harness this opportunity through creative dialogue since art and music operate on a neutral platform unhindered by the bias or assumption that may come with traditional media. Insha Allah the beauty of Islamic art will continue to inspire, excite and touch the heart of man as it has done for many centuries, and be a catalyst for true understanding.

**Q:** What has been the public reaction your artworks?

**A:** Throughout my exhibition here in Kuala Lumpur the response had been very good. Some prints are already sold out on the first day. I could see that the people here are very much attracted to colourful prints. Too bad I didn't bring much of those.

The Muslim community in Sydney is extremely diverse and vibrant, representing many nationalities. Alhamdulillah those that discover my work are warm and encouraging, and appear genuinely pleased to see an Australian born Muslim working in this field. Sometimes it's an educational experience too - to my surprise I've often been asked by Muslims: "Spain... were there Muslims there?" and the follow-on conversation about Andalusia has their shifted understanding of the faith and its historic importance. Equally for non-Muslims it's an educational and hopefully engaging experience. I had an exhibition recently in a very public place with 20 works, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive, Alhamdulillah.

**Q:** What are your future plans?

**A:** I definitely want to come back to Malaysia, most likely a year from now. I heard that there are many unique mosques here in Malaysia with various architectural influences. That's definitely something I would like to see and record. Generally, I plan to keep evolving the work creatively and find ways to engage and inspire people, Insha'Allah.

**Thank you for your time. I'm looking forward to see you again in the near future.**

*Terima Kasih!* I look forward to visiting Malaysia again soon, it's a beautiful part of the world (and you have *Teb Tarik!*)

