



Research Article

Sufi aesthetics and semiotics: reflections of Mevlana's Philosophy in the art of Mutluhan Taş

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Abstract

Sufism is a profound philosophical and spiritual approach centered on an individual's inner journey and quest for closeness to God. This understanding has profoundly influenced many artists throughout history who view art as a means of attaining truth. The symbolic language of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, along with concepts such as love and "wahdat al-wujud" (the unity of being), has been pivotal in transforming Sufism into an aesthetic form. This study explores the impact of Mevlana's philosophy on modern art and its reflections in the works of artist Mutluhan Taş, thereby uncovering the place of Sufi aesthetics in contemporary art. Adopting a semiotic approach, the study seeks to analyze the meanings of symbolic expressions in art associated with Sufism. This article endeavors to illustrate the influence of Mevlana's Sufi philosophy on Mutluhan Taş's artworks and to reveal the role of Sufi thought in modern art. The research employs a qualitative methodology structured within the framework of semiotic analysis. Based on the theoretical foundations of Mevlevi and Sufi thought, it examines the symbols used in artistic works and their spiritual messages. Selected works by Mutluhan Taş, particularly those featuring Sufi symbols and metaphysical dimensions, such as "Fana Fillah" and "Post Sema-i," are analyzed in detail for their visual representation of Sufi philosophy. The artworks are examined through semiotic analysis, evaluating the Sufi meanings of the symbols and their effects on the viewer and exploring how Sufi aesthetics integrate with contemporary art practices. In Mutluhan Taş's works, Mevlana's philosophy, combined with fundamental Sufi themes such as love, unity, and existence, imbues a metaphysical dimension. The symbols in these works stand out as metaphors reflecting an individual's inner journey and effort to reach divine truth. This study sheds light on the relationship between Sufi aesthetics and contemporary art, contributing to understanding how modern artists interpret Sufi philosophy. It is suggested that future research could examine the reflections of Sufi aesthetics in other artistic disciplines.

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Introduction

Sufism is defined within the tradition of Islamic thought as a path and system of teachings aimed at self-awareness, spiritual purification, and closeness to God. "The foundation of Sufism lies in the belief that there is only one being in the universe, and all other entities are reflections of that singular being on Earth" (Zangeneh, 2013, p. 825). This

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perspective asserts that God manifests in everything and that humans aim to comprehend and unify with this truth. Sufi philosophy holds that attaining absolute happiness in this world and the hereafter is only possible through spiritual guidance (Irshad). In this context, Sufism emphasizes: "God calls all humans to spiritual guidance because He wishes for humans—His most beloved creation—to live in happiness in both this world and the afterlife. Without spiritual guidance, a person cannot escape the tyranny of their ignorant self and will find neither happiness nor contentment in either life" (Boran, 2017, p. 11).

Mevlana's philosophy of Sufism combines the understanding of divine truth with a profound aesthetic sensibility. This aesthetic approach transcends mere perceptions of beauty, aiming instead to express human love and devotion to God (Çetin & Yıldız, 2021, p. 15).

As a branch of philosophy, aesthetics investigates the nature of beauty, taste, and art. According to Ziss (2009), aesthetics is defined as "the philosophical science that studies the fundamental principles and laws of the aesthetic perception of reality by humans" (p. 214). Aesthetics involves visual pleasure and the analysis of deep meanings embedded within beauty and perception. Balcı explains that "aesthetics was first defined as the science of contemplation on beauty derived from sensory knowledge in the book *Aesthetica* by the German philosopher Baumgarten in 1970" (2004, p. 11).

Sufi aesthetics addresses the concepts of beauty and aesthetics within the framework of Sufi spiritual values and the quest for union with God. This approach does not view beauty merely as a worldly pleasure or aesthetic experience but as a means to comprehend the perfection, love, and unity created by God. In this context, beauty is regarded as a manifestation of God's attributes and creations, and traces of divine beauty are sought in every being. Historically, Sufism and art have influenced one another, with art serving as a medium for Sufi representatives to express their thoughts through poetry, discourse, and music. At the same time, Sufism, in turn, has been an inspiration for many artistic creations.

Pioneering figures such as Hallaj al-Mansur, Ibn Arabi, Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, and Yunus Emre played a significant role in advancing Sufi thought to its zenith during the 13th century. These Sufi ideas became a source of inspiration for many Turkish artists after the 1980s. National and religiously themed symbols and inscriptions during this period found expression in art as a conscious manifestation of a philosophical foundation (Alakuş, 1997, p. 66).

The Place of Mevlana's Philosophy in Art

Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, a prominent scholar and poet of the 13th century, succeeded in expressing the depth of Sufism through art. "Celaleddin Rumi, the unique orchestrator of the heavens and the one who inspires Divine Secrets through the language of angels, was born on October 30, 1207, corresponding to 6 Rabi' al-Awwal 604 in the Islamic calendar, in Balkh" (Nasr, 2017:158, as cited in Tuncer, 2019, p. 69). Mevlana, known to have been educated under the spiritual guidance of his father and grandfather, was the son of Muhammed Bahauddin Walad, renowned as the Sultan of Scholars (Yigitler, 2017, p. 15). After traveling across Turkistan and Arabia, he settled in Konya with his family, where he lived until his death.

Following Mevlana's death, his son Sultan Walad and his disciples established the foundations of "Mevleviyeh," a Sufi order defined by its quest for love and divine truth. This order is based on the belief in unifying with holy power and emphasizes love, tolerance, and the purification of the self as a path to reach God. "Mevlana's philosophy profoundly influenced Anatolian Seljuk's art and cultural structures. Mevleviyeh is a mystical teaching and a significant source that enriches the inner essence of art and literature" (Arslan, 1996, p. 72).

Mevlana's philosophy connects the individual's inner journey with art through rituals, symbols, and literary texts. During the 13th century, Mevlana and other mystics transformed Anatolia into a science and art center. "Mevleviyeh, particularly with its concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (the unity of being), deepened symbolic expression in artworks" (Ocak, 2000, p. 94). Mevlana's art and aesthetic philosophy continue to influence modern art. Love and Wahdat al-Wujud are prominently used as symbolic tools in contemporary artworks. These concepts demonstrate that art is not merely a visual medium but also a profound expression of a spiritual journey (Yazıcı, 2018, p. 62).

In Mevlana's philosophy, concepts like "love" and "Wahdat al-Wujud" (the unity of being) serve as symbolic expressions in art and inspire artists to delve into spiritual depths. Mevlana, who viewed art as a realm beyond imitation and depiction, left a lasting impact on classical and modern artists through his symbolic language, which added spiritual depth to art (Tuncer, 2019, p. 80). "Mevlana's art, independent of national identity, is considered a universal language based on love for humanity" (Halman, 2015, p. 125).

"Sema," frequently mentioned in Mevlana's poems and works, holds profound meaning for artists as a symbol of detachment from the material world and closeness to God. This symbol has been employed in various artistic forms, such as painting and sculpture, as a metaphor for inner journeys, effectively communicating the artist's spiritual quest to the audience. Sufi imagery often manifests in art as abstract representations, conveying the individual's ascension and love through symbols. As Abidin Dino states, Mevlana's spiritual world is about "shaping plasticity and revealing the essence hidden in words, the most secret sap, and the most intense force" (Dino, 2000, p. 176).

In line with Sufi knowledge, Mevlana considered art to guide the path to truth, reflecting God's beauty and love. Art expresses human love for God, the desire for unity with existence, and the quest for divine reality. "Mevlana's understanding of art forms the universal language of divine love and peace. His poetry and prose serve as the voice of the human soul, aiming to lead people to God" (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019, pp. 71-75).

The Works of Mutluhan Taş and Mevlana's Philosophy

Mutluhan Taş is a contemporary artist who shapes his works under the influence of Mevlana's philosophical depth and Sufism. Describing Mevlana as "a syncretist who harmoniously integrates diverse Sufi conceptions" (Taş, 2010, p. 27), the artist has produced works reflecting a similar stylistic understanding. His creations merge inner thought with abstract forms, offering viewers a space for spiritual contemplation. The symbolic elements observed in Taş's works are closely tied to Mevlana's "inner purification" philosophy and "self-awareness." The artist employs abstract and minimalist forms, transforming symbols into gateways that invite viewers on a spiritual journey.

The symbols used in Mutluhan Taş's works often convey Mevlana's Sufi philosophy to the audience through abstract arrangements. The frequent use of circular and spiral forms in Taş's works can be seen as symbols of Mevlana's sema rituals. These forms represent a detachment from the worldly and a movement toward an inner center, symbolizing unity with God. Such symbols provide the viewer with an experience of individual purification and a sense of harmony with the universal. The continuity observed in Taş's forms parallels Mevlana's philosophy: "Wherever we turn, we eventually turn toward Him" (Kuban, 2024, p. 24).

Abidin Dino reflects on the transformation of Mevlana's spiritual world into the material world through art, stating: "Celaleddin Rumi heard the hammer of a goldsmith and was enraptured by its rhythm. Mevlana's art is a symbolism oriented toward the material world; just as the hammer leaves an imprint on gold, the artist's soul reflects in their art" (Dino, 2000, p. 176). Semiotic analysis is crucial for understanding how Mevlana's symbols materialize in Taş's artistic practice and how they affect the audience.

Research Objective

The primary aim of this research is to examine the impact of Sufi aesthetic understanding on contemporary Turkish art. Specifically, the study analyzes how Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's philosophy is a source of inspiration in contemporary Turkish art and how this philosophy is reflected in modern artworks through aesthetic elements. The research seeks to reveal the symbolic representations of Mevlana's Sufi values and aesthetic principles in the works of artists like Mutluhan Taş. By doing so, the study delves into the relationship between Sufi aesthetics and modern art, offering a deeper understanding of the interaction between these two domains.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative research method was adopted as the research design. The semiotic analysis method was the foundation for deciphering the meanings of symbols used in art. Document and artwork analysis methods were employed simultaneously during the research process. Selected works by Mutluhan Taş were meticulously examined for their

connections with Sufi aesthetics. The artist's abstract and minimalist creations inspired by Mevlana's philosophy were evaluated as primary documents for the analysis.

Semiotic analysis provides a valuable framework for understanding how spiritual values are reflected in art, mainly through symbols and metaphors. This method enables formal and contextual analysis of artistic works (Demir, 2019, p. 21).

Documents and Artworks

The research focused on Mutluhan Taş's Works, such as Tek Nefeste Aşk (Love in a Single Breath) and Post Sema. These pieces stand out as artistic expressions that convey Mevlana's philosophy through symbolic language. The artist was selected due to the direct relationship between the symbolic narratives in his works and Sufi values.

Analysis

Semiotic methods were applied during the analysis and supported by relevant sources. The symbols in the artworks were examined in connection with Sufi aesthetics and metaphysical values. Additionally, the spiritual messages conveyed by the artworks and their impact on viewers were evaluated.

Semiotics, as a discipline, studies the symbolic meaning of objects or expressions and the cultural and social contexts attached to those meanings. Emerging in the 20th century, semiotic theory "draws on the linguistic insights of Saussure, Barthes, Hjelmslev, and Martinet, adopting relevant concepts" (Aktulum, 2004:1, as cited in Güneş, 2013, p. 333). Semiotics investigates how sign systems influence societal and mental structures as semiotic frameworks. Particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, semiotics evolved to establish meaningful connections based on the observer's interpretation without deviating from the essence of the work. "According to Umberto Eco, every work of art requires a free and creative interpreter; without reinterpreting the work in alignment with the creative artist's vision, it is impossible to understand it truly" (Çağlar, 2012, p. 27).

The artist's series Tek Nefeste Aşk highlights indicators of Mevlana's symbol of love. "Mevlana defines love and spirituality as the ultimate purpose of the human soul. This love and spiritual quest are directly connected to art... Mevlana's aesthetic philosophy is rooted in the unity of love and beauty" (Yazıcı, 2012, p. 91). Through Mevlana's metaphorical language, love represents humanity's yearning to return to the Creator, a journey that begins with the divine breath at the origin of creation. In Sufism, breath is not only the source of life but also a means for humans to attain divine truth. Love, in turn, is the force that gives meaning to this breath, guiding individuals toward God and liberating them from worldly attachments.

In this series, considered a visual representation of Mevlana's tolerance and universal love, the artist employs unique artistic techniques while constructing a world of lines, shapes, and colors that transition from the external to the internal, often drawing from material culture elements. Large-scale canvases feature marbling art (ebru) overlaid with realistic depictions of dervishes, elders, tombstones, and inscriptions portrayed in their original forms (Enveroğlu, 2012).

Ethics

Ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the research process, and the consent of all artists was obtained. The documents used were selected from publicly available materials shared by the artist. Care was taken to avoid manipulation or misrepresentation. In the study, Mutluhan Taş's works, such as Tek Nefeste Aşk (Love in One Breath) and Post Sema, have been analyzed. These works stand out as art pieces that express the philosophy of Mevlana in a symbolic language. The reason for selecting the artist is that the symbolic expression in his works is directly related to Sufi values.

Findings

The research findings indicate that Mutluhan Taş's works interpret Mevlana's philosophy through an aesthetic language. His artwork's circular and spiral forms metaphorically represent the inner journey and the quest for union with God. These findings are significant in highlighting the role of Sufi aesthetics in contemporary art.



Figure 1. Mutluhan Taş, Love in a Single Breath Series, “Fana Fillah,” 50x140 cm, Oil on Canvas, 2004

Mutluhan Taş's artwork *Fana Fillah* reinterprets Sufi aesthetics and the concept of divine love through a modern artistic language. In this piece, the artist presents the essence of Sufism's “fana fillah” concept to the audience through imagery. This concept, which includes the idea of “dying before death,” depicts transcending the self to reach God. In this context, the work offers an aesthetic experience and a profound space for philosophical inquiry.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

The images, colors, and composition used in the work reveal deep layers of Sufi meaning:

Background and Texture: The background, featuring a light green surface with dark circular textures, evokes the divine tranquility and infinity frequently mentioned in Sufism. Light green conveys a sense of metaphysical comfort and spiritual balance, while the circular textures symbolize God's universal order and unity. This choice demonstrates the artist's intent to deepen the layers of meaning in every aspect of the composition.

Figure Composition: Two prominent human figures in the foreground, depicted with closed eyes, represent divine submission and the shedding of worldly selfhood. One figure faces forward, and the other faces backward, symbolizing the contradictory yet complementary stages of an individual's inner journey. The closed eyes reflect detachment from worldly ties and the pursuit of truth, aligning with Mevlana's advice to “close your eyes to see” (Poyraz, 2014).

Whirling Dervishes: Eight whirling dervishes, extending from the bottom to the top of the artwork, symbolize the spiritual transformation and turning toward God emphasized in Sufism. Their motion suggests a cyclical journey, representing the human desire to transcend the inner self and reach the Creator (Halman, 2015).

Tulip Imagery: Positioned at the top, the tulip serves as a symbolic representation of Sufi aesthetics, reflecting the attributes of God. With its minimal and elegant design, the tulip symbolizes unity and wholeness. It also frequently appears as a metaphor in Mevlana's philosophy, carrying deep symbolic meaning within Sufi thought (Zangeneh, 2013).

Tombstones: The eight tombstones at the bottom of the artwork symbolize spiritual death and rebirth achieved through self-purification. These images highlight the transience of worldly life and the aspiration for truth in the Sufi journey (Dino, 2000).

Light green background Metaphysical tranquility and universal order

Table 1. Narrative and Technical Indicators of the Artwork “Fana Fillah”

| Signifier | Signified |
|------------------------|--|
| Dark circular textures | Infinity of divine love |
| Human figures | Purification of the self and turning toward the Creator |
| Whirling dervishes | Spiritual ascension and reaching divine love |
| Dark circular textures | Infinity of divine love |
| Tulip | Symbolic representation of God's attributes |
| Tombstones | Transience of life and the Sufi understanding of spiritual death |

Analysis of the Work in Terms of Codes

Colors and Textures: The light green background expresses tranquility and spiritual balance, while the dark circular textures reference the omnipresent attributes of God (Balci, 2004). The interplay of these colors and textures strengthens the visual structure of the artwork.

Figures and Composition: The depiction of human figures from the shoulders upward refers to the process of detaching from worldly bonds. The balance of these figures within the composition visualizes the harmony and unity in Sufi aesthetics (Alakuş, 1997).

Metaphors and Symbols: The tulip and whirling dervish images symbolize divine love and truth. The tombstones reflect the human effort to transcend the self and turn toward the Creator. These symbols enrich the framework of Sufi philosophy through imagery (Taş, 2010).

Table 2. Sequential and Syntagmatic Structures in “Fana Fillah”

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Eight tombstones (bottom section) | Transience of life and liberation from worldly ties |
| Human figures (middle section) | Inner journey and divine love |
| Tulip (top section) | The pinnacle of reaching divine truth |

Mythical Structure of the Text

The images, such as whirling dervishes and the tulip, evoke the themes of divine love and unity in Sufism. The concept of “wahdat al-wujud” (unity of being), frequently emphasized in Mevlana's philosophy, is symbolically reflected in this artwork (Tuncer, 2019).

Intertextuality

The artwork Fana Fillah combines metaphors from Sufi literature with contemporary art, offering viewers a new aesthetic experience. The rotational movement of the whirling dervishes represents Mevlana's pursuit of divine love and truth, while images such as the tulip and tombstones underscore the depth of Sufi thought (Halman, 2015).

Interpretation and Evaluation

This piece effectively blends contemporary art with Sufi aesthetics. The images and colors used in the artwork vividly convey the inner journey of the individual and the effort to reach God. Mutluhan Taş's Fana Fillah is a masterpiece that visually and philosophically conveys the profound meanings of Sufism to its audience.



Figure 2. Mutluhan Taş, Love in a Single Breath Series, “Post Sema-1,” 150x250 cm, Oil on Canvas, 2004

Mutluhan Taş’s artwork *Post Sema-1* reshapes one of the core symbols in Mevlana’s artistic philosophy, the “Sema” ritual, through the aesthetic expression of modern art. This piece reflects the profound meanings of the Mevlevi tradition on both visual and philosophical levels, offering viewers a unique spiritual dimension.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

Figure and Composition: The figure in the artwork, with its head tilted toward the right shoulder, depicts the humble and submissive stance of Mevlevi dervishes. Painted in muted green and brown tones, the figure evokes humility in earthly life and a spiritual journey. The figure’s tightly wrapped robe symbolizes a desire for inner purification and protection (Dino, 2000).

Tombstones: The six tombstones rising in a wavy formation behind the figure represent the transience of worldly existence and the spiritual purification on the path to God. The orderly rise of the tombstones symbolizes the determination to persist on this journey (Boran, 2017).

Whirling Dervishes: The seven interconnected whirling dervishes depicted behind the tombstones symbolize the spiritual ascension and movement toward divine love emphasized in Mevlana’s sema ritual. The spiral arrangement of the dervishes aligns with the frequently cited Sufi metaphor of “ascending through turning” (Halman, 2015).

Color Palette and Vertical Composition: Dominated by muted greens, browns, and light tones, the color palette conveys serenity and tranquility. The vertical composition represents the ascent toward divine love and the step-by-step progress of the spiritual journey, like climbing a staircase (Zangeneh, 2013).

Table 3. “Narrative and Technical Indicators of the Artwork “Post Sema-1”

| Signifier | Signified |
|-------------------------|--|
| Figure with bowed head | Humility, submission, and inner journey |
| Muted green-brown tones | Spiritual tranquility and peace |
| Tombstones | Transience of earthly life and spiritual ascension |
| Spiral arrangement | Spiritual ascent and movement toward divine love |
| Whirling dervishes | Journey toward divine love and truth through sema |

Analysis of the Artwork in Terms of Codes

Meaning of Vertical Composition: The vertically depicted figures and objects symbolize an ascent toward God and the distancing of the self from worldly existence. This composition visualizes the quest for divine unity at the core of Sufi philosophy (Tuncer, 2019).

Spiral Arrangement and Motion: The spiral arrangement of the tombstones and whirling dervishes symbolizes the transformation and effort toward truth in the individual's inner journey. This motion relates to Mevlana's saying, "Sema is the art of turning toward God" (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019).

Figure and Details: The bowed head represents submission and humility, while the tightly wrapped robe signifies detachment from worldly ties. These details play a significant role in the symbolic representation of Sufi thought (Alakuş, 1997).

Table 4. "Sequential and Syntagmatic Structures in "Post Sema-1"

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Tombstones at the bottom | Transience of earthly existence |
| Figure in the middle section | Spiritual purification and turning toward God |
| Whirling dervishes at the top | Ascension to divine love and unity |

Mythical Structure of the Text

The artwork Post Sema-1 reinterprets the spiritual concepts of Mevlana's sema ritual through symbols. The spiral arrangement of the whirling dervishes visualizes Mevlana's philosophy: "To turn is to discover the secret of the universe's creation" (Balci, 2004).

Intertextuality

This piece by Mutluhan Taş directly connects with the concepts and sema ritual described in Mevlana's Masnavi. The spiral ascension of the figures reflects Mevlana's universal understanding of unity, expressed through a contemporary artistic language (Poyraz, 2014).

Interpretation and Evaluation

Post Sema-1 offers a structure that reshapes Sufi aesthetics with a modern approach. By harmonizing the same ritual with the aesthetic arrangement of figures and symbols, Taş provides viewers with a visual and spiritual experience. The imagery and composition in the artwork effectively reflect Mevlana's understanding of striving for truth and divine love.



Figure 3. Mutluhan Taş, Masnavi Stories Series, "The Collar," 50x35 cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2005

Mutluhan Taş's *The Collar* from the *Masnavi Stories Series* visually reinterprets Mevlana's philosophy, calling humanity spiritual unity. Through its color and figure arrangements, this artwork conveys the fundamental concepts of Sufism to the viewer.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

Central Composition: The central figure in the artwork represents Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi. This figure is emphasized in size and position, depicted in connection with the surrounding figures. This visualizes Mevlana's role as a spiritual leader (Poyraz, 2014).

Surrounding Human Figures: The artwork depicts twelve distinct figures surrounding Mevlana. Although they face different directions, they are geometrically connected to Mevlana, symbolizing the philosophy of "Come, whoever you are" (Halman, 2015).

Use of Color: The red tones at the bottom of the composition symbolize worldly desires and struggles, while the brown and green tones spreading upward express spiritual serenity and purification (Boran, 2017).

Geometric Forms: The connections between the figures symbolize unity and humanity's shared journey. These symbolic connections indicate Sufi philosophy's search for divine unity (Dino, 2000).

Table 5. Narrative and Technical Indicators of The Collar

| Signifier | Signified |
|----------------------------|--|
| Central large figure | Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi |
| Twelve surrounding figures | Humanity's connection and orientation toward Mevlana |
| Red tones | Worldly desires and struggles |
| Brown and green tones | Spiritual tranquility and peace |
| Geometric connections | Humanity's unity within divine oneness |

Analysis of the Artwork in Terms of Codes

Central and Peripheral Relations: The connections between the central figure and the surrounding figures symbolize the universality of Mevlana's philosophy and its embrace of all humanity (Tuncer, 2019).

Emotional Significance of Colors: Red represents the complexity and challenges of worldly desires, while brown and green symbolize the peace and serenity of the Sufi journey (Zangeneh, 2013).

Geometric Arrangement: The geometric connections between the figures emphasize the understanding of divine unity and humanity's spiritual journey (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019).

Table 6. Sequential and Syntagmatic Structures in The Collar

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|------------------------------|--|
| Central figure | Mevlana's spiritual guidance and centrality |
| Surrounding human figures | Humanity's connection and orientation toward Mevlana |
| Red tones at the bottom | Worldly desires and struggles |
| Green tones spreading upward | Spiritual tranquility and peace |
| Geometric connections | Unity and the shared journey in Sufism |

Mythical Structure of the Text

The Collar embodies Mevlana's philosophy of "Come, whoever you are." The central figure and surrounding people symbolize Sufi philosophy's universal unity and human diversity. In this sense, the artwork offers visual and philosophical depth (Poyraz, 2014).

Intertextuality

This artwork directly connects with Mevlana's Masnavi, precisely his philosophy of "Come, whoever you are." The differing identities and orientations of the surrounding figures visually represent the universal call emphasized in the Masnavi. The geometrically connected figures express Mevlana's belief in the spiritual unity of humanity, rendered through a contemporary artistic language.

This context ties the piece directly to passages from the Masnavi, such as: "With the poison flowing from the needle of envy, he saddened others to their very souls" (Masnavi, 1/438, as cited by Özdengül, 2005). The central figure

representing Mevlana reflects the Sufi philosophy of universal leadership and visually embodies the phrase: "The sweet comfort ended, a cold wind blew" (Masnavi, 1/746, as cited by Özdengül, 2005).

Interpretation and Evaluation

The Collar from the Masnavi Stories Series can be seen as a visual interpretation of Sufi thought through modern art. The central figure representing Mevlana invites the viewer on a profound spiritual journey. The combination of red and green tones highlights the coexistence of worldly struggles and spiritual peace. Taş's artwork reshapes Mevlana's unifying philosophy with striking aesthetics, encouraging viewers to contemplate Sufi.



Figure 4. Mutluhan Taş, Masnavi Stories Series, "If You Have a Goal, You Exist," 50x35 cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2005

Mutluhan Taş's *If You Have a Goal, You Exist* from the *Masnavi Stories Series* interprets the spiritual significance of the ney (reed flute) symbol in Sufism on an aesthetic plane. Through symbols such as the ney and the circle, the artwork narrates the human journey toward divine love.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

Ney Symbol: The ney symbolizes divine communication and the path to God in Sufism at the artwork's center. The depiction of the ney resembling a dervish's headgear emphasizes the spiritual process of becoming the "perfect human" (*insan-ı kâmil*) (Çetinkaya, 2019).

Circle Symbol: The circle through which the ney passes represents God's unity and divine truth. The division of the circle into four parts signifies the four stages in Sufi philosophy (Boran, 2017).

Use of Color and Texture: The dark brown and green tones represent the union of earthly and spiritual elements. These tones evoke tranquility and serenity in the context of Sufism (Halman, 2015).

Spiral Arrangement: The spiral arrangement around the circle and ney symbolizes the human journey and transformation toward God (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019).

Table 7. Narrative and technical indicators of if you have a goal, you exist

| Signifier | Signified |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Ney | Divine communication and turning toward God |
| Circle | God's unity and divine truth |
| Four sections of the circle | Representation of the four spiritual stages |
| Spiral arrangement | Spiritual ascension and transformation |
| Dark brown and green tones | Spiritual tranquility and serenity |

Analysis of the Artwork in Terms of Codes

Relationship Between Ney and Circle: Combining the ney and the circle represents the process of reaching divine unity in Sufism and symbolizes the human connection with God (Tuncer, 2019).

Spiritual Message of Colors: The colors used in the artwork visualize the tranquility and serenity of the Sufi journey, expressing the human effort to transcend earthly struggles and turn toward God (Zangeneh, 2013).

Spiral Arrangement and Movement: The spiral arrangement symbolizes humanity's transformation and spiritual journey, reflecting Mevlana's ascension metaphor through turning (Poyraz, 2014).

Table 8. Sequential and syntagmatic structures in if you have a goal, you exist

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Ney and circle | Symbols of the spiritual journey |
| Four sections of the circle | Representation of the spiritual stages |
| Dark color tones | Spiritual tranquility and serenity |
| Spiral arrangement | Spiritual ascension and turning toward divine love |

Mythical Structure of the Text

If You Have a Goal, You Exist visualizes the core philosophy of Sufism through the symbols of the ney and the circle. These symbols reflect the transformation and spiritual quest of humans turning toward God. The artwork offers both visual and philosophical depth (Poyraz, 2014).

Intertextuality

This piece represents Mevlana's philosophy of divine love, symbolized by the ney and the human journey to becoming the perfect human (insan-ı kâmil). The ney's symbolic depiction conveys the journey of reaching God through art. Symbols like the circle and spiral arrangement align with Mevlana's understanding of "universal unity." The artwork emphasizes the process of turning toward divine truth, connecting indirectly with Hallaj's philosophy of "Wahdat al-Wujud" (Unity of Being) (Çetinkaya, 2019).

Interpretation and Evaluation

If You Have a Goal, You Exist offers a structure that reshapes Sufi thought and aesthetics through the lens of contemporary art. The combination of the ney and circle powerfully conveys the human journey toward God on both a visual and philosophical plane. The dark tones and spiral arrangement draw viewers into this spiritual journey. By reinterpreting Mevlana's Sufi philosophy in a modern context, Taş's artwork provides a profound experience of meaning and aesthetics.



Figure 5. Mutluhan Taş, Hallaj al-Mansur Series, "The Point of Tasin," 100x130 cm, Acrylic on Canvas, 2011

Mutluhan Taş's *The Point of Tasin* interprets Sufi aesthetics through a symbolic lens. Inspired by the thoughts of Hallaj al-Mansur, a significant figure in Islamic mysticism, the artwork captivates viewers with its simplicity and balance. The use of calligraphy and symbols in the piece offers a metaphysical journey to its audience.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

Division of Composition: The artwork is vertically divided into two halves. The left side features complex dark red calligraphy, referencing the deep and rich textual tradition of Sufism. On the right side, a simple gold background contains the letter “waw,” symbolizing trust in and turning toward God (Boran, 2017).

The Letter “Waw”: In Islamic mysticism, “waw” symbolizes humility and submission. Its placement in the lower-right corner represents the spiritual journey from its beginning to its culmination (Halman, 2015).

Point and Line: The point at the top of the dividing line symbolizes the unity of God and the interconnectedness of all creation to this oneness in Islamic mysticism. This point can be associated with the metaphysical meaning of Hallaj al-Mansur’s statement, “I am the Truth,” as it reflects the balance between existence and nonexistence (Poyraz, 2014).

Table 9. Narrative and technical indicators of the point of tasin

| Signifier | Signified |
|---------------------|--|
| Complex calligraphy | Depth and richness of the Sufi textual tradition |
| Gold background | Spiritual purity and the divine light of God |
| “Waw” letter | Turning toward God, submission, and humility |
| Vertical line | Metaphysical connection between existence and nonexistence |
| Point | Unity of God and the source of creation |

Analysis of the Artwork in Terms of Codes

Contrast Between the Two Halves: The left side’s complex calligraphy represents the multilayered structure of earthly life and the human quest for spirituality. In contrast, the right side’s simple “waw” and blank gold background symbolize the human effort to attain spiritual tranquility (Zangeneh, 2013).

Significance of Gold: The spiritual meaning of gold in Sufism reflects the divine light of God. The background underscores the human struggle to transcend worldly life and reach divine illumination (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019).

Relationship Between “Waw” and the Point: While the “waw” symbolizes God’s greatness and human humility, the point represents God’s existence and absolute unity. Together, these elements directly connected to the Sufi concept of wahdat al-wujud (unity of being) (Tuncer, 2019).

Table 10. Sequential and syntagmatic structures in the point of tasin

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Complex calligraphy on the left | Earthly chaos and spiritual quest |
| Gold background and “waw” | Spiritual purity and submission to God |
| Point | Balance between existence and nonexistence |

Mythical Structure of the Text

The Point of Tasin can be interpreted as referencing Hallaj al-Mansur’s mystical philosophy, particularly his concept of “Ana al-Haqq” (I am the Truth). The symbols in the artwork represent the coexistence of existence and nonexistence and the human effort to comprehend this balance. While the point symbolizes the unity of God in creation, the “waw” letter depicts the human inclination toward God (Alakuş, 1997).

Intertextuality

This artwork draws inspiration from the thoughts of Hallaj al-Mansur and the symbols of Islamic mysticism. The complex calligraphy reflects the rich content of Sufi texts, while the “waw” and point establish connections with Mevlana’s philosophy of unity and humility (Poyraz, 2014).

Interpretation and Evaluation

The Point of Tasin presents Sufi aesthetics with a minimalist approach, inviting viewers to engage in spiritual introspection. Combining complex and straightforward elements effectively visualizes the human transition from

worldly chaos to spiritual purity. Taş's artwork serves as a modern reinterpretation of Mevlana's and Hallaj al-Mansur's philosophies, offering the audience a profound experience of meaning and aesthetics.



Figure 6: Mutluhan Taş, Hallaj al-Mansur Series, “In Honor of Hallaj,” 100x130 cm, Acrylic on Canvas, 2011

Mutluhan Taş's *In Honor of Hallaj* is a visual homage to the philosophical and mystical thoughts of Hallaj al-Mansur, one of the cornerstones of Islamic mysticism. Through metaphorical storytelling, the artist presents Hallaj's “Ana al-Haq” (I am the Truth) philosophy and the suffering endured for this belief.

Visual Narration and Key Semiotics of the Artwork

The Letter “Elif” and the Circle: The dark green tones in the background symbolize a spiritual void, while the central Elif letter represents the unity and greatness of God. The delicate circular form behind it signifies infinity and completeness in Sufism (Kuban, 2024).

Red Mark and Calligraphy: The vivid red stain on the left side of the composition symbolizes blood, sacrifice, and the hardships Hallaj al-Mansur endured for his Sufi values. The inscriptions on the stain evoke the mystical and profound meanings of Sufism (Ağırman & Bekalp, 2012).

Minimalist Expression: The placement of symbols, though simple, carries profound meanings, echoing Hallaj's powerful yet humble stance on the path of mysticism.

Table 11. Narrative and technical indicators of in honor of Hallaj

| Signifier | Signified |
|------------------------------|--|
| Elif letter | God's greatness, unity, and human devotion to Him |
| Circular form | Infinity, completeness, and a metaphor for the Sema |
| Red mark | Sacrifice, suffering, and Hallaj al-Mansur's struggles |
| Dark green background | Spiritual void, depth, and the human inner journey |
| Inscriptions on the red mark | Mystical and multi-layered meanings of Sufism |

Analysis of the Artwork in Terms of Codes

Contrast Between Elif and Red Elements: The Elif letter, paired with the circular form, symbolizes divine unity and infinite truth. In contrast, the red marks and inscriptions reflect human sacrifices to reach spiritual enlightenment (Zangeneh, 2013).

Spiritual Significance of Green and Red: The dark green background symbolizes depth and inner reflection, while the red emphasizes the pain and sacrifices integral to the Sufi path (Yousuf, Qadri & Osmanov, 2019).

Elif and Circle Relationship: The Elif letter embodies human devotion to God, and the circle behind it symbolizes divine truth's eternal and infinite nature. These two elements align with the Sufi concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) (Tuncer, 2019).

Table 12. Sequential and Syntagmatic Structures in In Honor of Hallaj

| Sequential Dimension | Syntagmatic Dimension |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Elif letter and circular form | Divine unity and infinity |
| Red mark and inscriptions | Sacrifice and mystical meanings of Sufism |
| Dark green background | Spiritual void and inner journey |

Mythical Structure of the Text

Honor of Hallaj directly connects to Hallaj al-Mansur's "Ana al-Haqq" philosophy. This narrative conveys the closeness between human and divine existence and the unity of being. While the Elif letter symbolizes human submission to God and the ultimate goal of this devotion, the red marks and inscriptions reflect the hardships and sacrifices of this journey (Poyraz, 2014).

Intertextuality

This artwork connects with Hallaj al-Mansur's mystical philosophy and Mevlana's Sema rituals. While the Elif letter and circular form resonate with Mevlana's interpretation of the Sema, the red mark symbolizes Hallaj's suffering and perseverance in his mystical quest (Zangeneh, 2013).

Interpretation and Evaluation

In Honor of Hallaj visualizes Sufi aesthetics and the spiritual journey of a pivotal figure in Islamic intellectual history using a contemporary artistic language. The artwork invites viewers into reflection and introspection by juxtaposing minimalistic elements with profound meanings. This piece exemplifies how simplicity in expression can convey layered, intricate meanings while fostering a deep engagement with the viewer's inner spiritual journey.

Conclusion

Mutluhan Taş's works stand out for their contemporary reinterpretation of Mevlana's Sufi philosophy and aesthetic symbolism through modern artistic language. These works visualize the core concepts of Sufi philosophy—such as the individual's inner journey, the pursuit of truth, and turning toward divine love—through a metaphysical and artistic perspective. Evaluated through the lens of semiotic analysis, the pieces bring together Mevlana's wahdat al-wujud (unity of being) philosophy and Hallaj al-Mansur's "Ana al-Haqq" (I am the Truth) concept using color palettes, geometric arrangements, and metaphors.

Spiral forms symbolize humanity's journey toward God and the constant motion within this pursuit. The richness of the colors and textures emphasizes transitions between spiritual tranquility and worldly chaos. For instance, red symbolizes sacrifice and the challenges of the spiritual journey, while circular forms express God's unity and infinity. Beyond being aesthetically pleasing, these artworks carry profound spiritual messages, inviting viewers on an inner journey.

Mutluhan Taş's works successfully merge the philosophies of Mevlana and Hallaj al-Mansur with modern art, creating a timeless layer of meaning. Mevlana's "Come, whoever you are" philosophy is visualized through multiple figures and tones, while Hallaj al-Mansur's "Ana al-Haqq" statement is expressed in abstract metaphysical elements and symbols. Spiral arrangements and other visual elements communicate the metaphors of turning and reaching truth in Sufism through a contemporary aesthetic, offering an inspiring artistic experience for viewers.

The geometric forms, symbols, and texts used in the works bridge the traditional and the modern by blending Sufi aesthetics with abstract expression. In this regard, Mutluhan Taş's works serve as an exemplary medium for conveying the universal messages of Sufi thought through the language of art. The pieces provide a visual feast and function as a spiritual exploration and purification tool, transforming viewers.

Recommendations

Suggestions for Future Studies

Sufi Art and Modernism: Further exploration of the interaction between Sufi aesthetics and modern art can be undertaken. Comparisons of how Sufi thought is reflected in the art of different cultures may yield insightful results.

Semiotic Analysis: A more comprehensive analysis of the symbols used in Sufi artworks through semiotic methods can deepen the understanding of Sufi philosophy's impact on art.

Art and Social Messages: Investigations into how Sufi aesthetics can be employed as a language of art to address contemporary social issues could provide valuable insights.

Suggestions for Practitioners

Sufism in Art Education: Introducing courses on Sufi aesthetics and symbols into art education curricula can give young artists a unique perspective.

Social Awareness Projects: Sufi aesthetics can be utilized in art projects that promote spiritual values. Such projects may serve as practical tools for raising awareness through social campaigns.

Artist Workshops and Exhibitions: Inspired by artists like Mutluhan Taş, Sufi-themed exhibitions and artist workshops can be organized. These events could showcase Sufi art's aesthetic and spiritual richness to art enthusiasts and broader audiences.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations. First, the research focuses solely on selected works of Mutluhan Taş, excluding a broader range of artists and artworks within the context of Sufi aesthetics. This restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the analyses were conducted using a semiotic approach, leaving out additional findings that could have been obtained through other analytical methods. Third, the documents used during the research process were limited to the artist's publicly available materials, excluding access to private documents or direct interviews with the artist, which could have provided a more in-depth examination. Finally, the interpretation of the artworks was shaped by the researcher's expertise and perspective, meaning that other researchers may provide alternative interpretations.

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- Figure 1.** Mutluhan Taş, Love in a Single Breath Series, “Fana Fillah” (2004). Artist's private collection.
- Figure 2.** Mutluhan Taş, Love in a Single Breath Series, “Post Sema-ı” (2004). Artist's private collection.
- Figure 3.** Mutluhan Taş, Masnavi Stories Series, “The Collar” (2005). Artist's private collection.
- Figure 4.** Mutluhan Taş, Masnavi Stories Series, “If You Have a Goal, You Exist” (2005)-Artist's private collection.
- Figure 5.** Mutluhan Taş, Hallaj al-Mansur Series, “The Point of Tasin” (2011). Artist's private collection.
- Figure 6.** Mutluhan Taş, Hallaj al-Mansur Series, “In Honor of Hallaj”