

## THE Sufi FUNCTION IN ARTISTIC FEATURES: A REFERENCE READING IN MODERN EUROPEAN ARTS

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**Abstract:** Literary and artistic works have conveyed multiple discourses, particularly the Sufi indications, as a means of searching for absolute truth. This perspective is often embraced by a group that has led a life of asceticism, piety, and seclusion, to immerse the self in servitude and shed the reprehensible traits of human nature. The goal is to subject oneself to divine commands, find peace, and submit to the judgments of divine sovereignty. These influences have extended to global art schools, serving as material and psychological scientific discoveries of a lost dream that the self-strives to reach, particularly in plastic paintings. Various sciences, including anthropology and philosophy, have allowed us to deconstruct the relationship of art and Sufism. This has established harmony and coherence of the artist and the mystic, enabling them to journey with their individuality towards absolute truth and achieving cultural partnership among humans. The objective of the study is to investigate the role of Sufism in visual art, and its importance in contemporary European studies through artworks, considering that European thought is an integral part of the Sufi discourse, which was produced by its owners and appeared in their international literature. The study seeks to shed light on mysticism in contemporary art, as its importance lies in identifying the meaning of mysticism in art by going through the history of the concept of mysticism, its philosophical roots, and the products of artists with a mystical tendency in the modernist period. This research adopted the idea of mysticism in European art by identifying a temporal period represented by modernist art within the spatial limits in Europe, which showed the objective limits represented in plastic works representing the postmodern era.

*Keywords: Sufism, Art, Identification, Art Schools, Modern European Arts*

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## 1. Introduction

Scholars have debated Sufism, whether as a cognitive concept or a religious sect. Seeds of asceticism can be found in every religion, both heavenly and non-heavenly. In Islam, believers are encouraged to detach from worldly demands and disregard its pleasures. Sufism is closely linked to the foundations of jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy. It represents a spiritual doctrine in life and a path for spiritual elevation, required by human nature and instinct. Its spiritual, social, and educational roles in Algeria manifested through the establishment of *zawiyas* (Sufi lodges), providing education and spiritual refuge for those suffering from oppression and occupation, lacking the means to resist. This direct experiential knowledge is only achieved through mutual love between the servant and the Lord, representing the highest forms of piety stemming from a sincere fusion with the divine self. This defines the relationship between the self and existence, between the knowing self and the known object, increasing human wonder. The Sufi finds his solace in the kingdom of the Creator, where the meanings of majesty are revealed with the Sufis to the psychological dimension, reflecting their inner emotional states, and the aesthetic aspect (aesthetics) between them and the beauty and majesty of divinity. Here, we find a close relationship between plastic art and Sufism. Primitive art and some artistic styles like calligraphy in Arabic script, symbolism, abstraction, and surrealism could be seen as forms of Sufi expression.

From a social perspective, Sufism has worked to raise awareness, shelter the elderly and strangers, and spread Islam, expressing the essential needs of individuals and communities, and correcting the narrow readings and moral and religious accusations against it. It had a significant impact on social, cultural, and even political life in society. It also worked to resolve disputes between various societal groups and dissolve conflicts between clans and tribes, much like an artist when his Sufi experience transcended through a refined method, heartfelt practice, and emotional purification. The outcomes were as significant as the sacrifices, laden with sciences and reverence beyond the bounds of reason and apparent traditions. When Sufism in art transcended the conventional, the Sufi entered a creative movement toward the Creator, erasing connections and being truthful with God in dealings, understanding the value of what is sought, and living an eternal life with the Ever-Living, who never ceases. This concept seeks to envision the image of the Gnostic (one who knows God), which captivates the artist's imagination, crossing beauty with the logic of liberation from material constraints and the limited bounds of that freedom, surpassing the created ordeal in the nature of the artistic elements in the painting, from attire and color to facial features, Arabic calligraphy, Quranic verses, and other artistic elements, enabling us to express the transcendental according to standards translating the visible elements. This leads us to the experience of vision, the activity of imagination, and the entry of the plastic painting into the Sufi scene.

This parallel text, with its mirror-like nature, does not reflect or imitate Sufi texts but reveals the hidden and subtly seeping plastic text, akin to the delicacy of Sufi hearing. It does not aim to frame the Sufi experience but deals with it with a logic that does not lack cognitive transcendence, narrated to us by the plastic artist and even acknowledged by the European painter. Islamic and Arab characters are present with their facial features, clothes, glances, movements, and the humility of the soul, placing them in their irrational and imaginative framework, taking a central place in the spiritual and intellectual background and aligning with the norms of Sufi life's images, customs, and manifestations.

### *1.1 Study problem*

The study of Sufism in plastic art has not received as much attention as other studies in scientific research, despite the existence of Sufi intertwinements and representations in some productions of Islamic, European, and Orientalist art, especially in spiritually inclined paintings. Therefore, we found it necessary to delve into the research pursuits and its issues, posing the question: If Sufis and artists represent relative experiences, how did both declare the absolute? How can they perceive ideal beauty and reveal the absolute within the confines of time and space? How can the audience, through Sufi and aesthetic experiences, transcend themselves to absolute truth and happiness in form and content through the manifestations of plastic art?

The problem of the study can be formulated in the following questions:

- Art and literature are interconnected. We have seen how Sufism influenced literary genres, but can it be said that Sufism also influenced plastic art, and if so, in what context?
- Have plastic paintings become a rebellion against speech and language, and a revolution against the principles of verbal and conceptual expression?
- To what extent have Muslim and European artists been influenced by Sufism in their artistic works?

### *1.2 Study Objectives*

- This cognitive practice within the anthropological and philosophical framework grants us knowledge of Sufi discourse through plastic art, as it does not lack the uniqueness and specificity of artistic work. The audience can understand the Sufi path through plastic art.
- This study aims to highlight the way Sufi features and their connotations appear in artistic works, especially plastic art, and what lies behind the painting's surface.

### *1.3 Study Methodology*

This anthropological study involves investigating Sufism by following a historical method framework, along with descriptive and analytical methods in art to read the artistic image. This approach is most suitable for the nature of the material, capable of extracting useful results that contribute to shedding light on the subject of Sufi tendencies through artistic works.

## **2.Procedural Definitions and Conceptual Contexts**

### *2.1 Sufism and the Limits of the Concept*

Sufism acquired an Eastern flavor from its prolonged association with the Islamic religion. After Muslim thinkers realized the contributions of civilizations to the world and comprehended "the theories of Aristotle and Plato, which influenced Islamic thought, Muslim jurists, and Sufi philosophers perceived the world of ideals and eternal truths in divine and Sufi philosophy (Al-Miqdad, 2011, p. 94) . The first signs of Sufism among Muslims “emerged as a known phenomenon in the second century of Hijra, resulting from changes in Islamic society since the advent of Islam, characterized by Muslims' enthusiasm for religion and asceticism “ (Al-Ajam, 1999, p. 555). One of the main reasons for the emergence of “the Sufi trend was as a reaction to the luxurious and morally decadent lifestyle that prevailed at the end of the second century Hijra. It ran parallel to the trend of explicit love poetry and intoxicating poetry, contrasting with divine love, expressing asceticism and a tendency

towards God against the indulgence in worldly pleasures and blind pursuit of desires” (Al-Hussein, 2015, p. 36).

Sufism “originated as a focus on the hereafter, reacting to the political power struggles during the great sedition era. People pledged allegiance out of fear, and the Imams from Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family) were martyred. Some chose isolation and engaged in trade, while others opted to withdraw entirely from worldly life, focusing on self-purification from desires and whims, creating a spiritual heavenly city instead of a material earthly one, different from the cities of caliphate and emirate, but as a social-political reaction “ (Hanafi, 2009, p. 31) . The emergence of theological and philosophical sects, as one of the active parties in the dialectical movement with the Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, and philosophers, explored verses addressing God's essence and attributes, the tendency to deny destiny and revelation, as well as divine action and justice, and the obligation of judgments by transmission or reason, emphasizing the creation of human actions.

Since the establishment of the Abbasid state and the multiplicity of its jurisprudential schools, “during the third and fourth centuries Hijra, Sufism appeared in a form entirely different from its original one, extending beyond asceticism, striving, and discipline to a far-reaching goal, which is annihilation—the annihilation of the self and its union with its Lord. Some attribute this largely to its influence by ancient philosophical doctrines, such as Buddhism, Persian, and Greek, resulting from the Islamic conquests that led to cultural interactions” (Idris, 1998, p. 41) . However, it is redundant to attribute the confusion and misunderstanding arising from a flawed concept of Sufism to its methodological flaws, such as extremism, takfir (excommunication), or Freemasonry, among other historical misconceptions. “Sufism did not originate from Persian or Indian sources in the East, nor from Greek or Christian sources in the West due to methodological flaws in the influence and interaction approach. Persian dualities are a human nature found in every civilization, in ethics and Sufism. While some Sufis might have had Magian origins, others did not in Egypt, the Levant, and the Maghreb” (Hanafi, 2009, p. 28). Sufism originated purely from Islam but might have been influenced by external factors in its development. It is incorrect to say that Ibrahim ibn Adham was influenced by the life of Buddha. Neo-Platonism has elements of Eastern mysticism, and Christian mysticism follows human nature in its psychological conditions according to its environment, similar to Islamic mysticism without influence or being influenced. It is natural for Arabs to have connections with all religions, not just Christians, due to trade and pilgrimage to the sacred house, while asceticism is found in every civilization.

Objectively, it is also important to note that Sufism did not escape deviations and criticism from some who identified with it but had a flawed understanding of Islam, leading to errors and excesses. “They were deprived of reaching the roots, and those who erred in the branches—manners, morals, stations, states, actions, and words—resulted from their lack of knowledge of the roots, following their own whims and natural inclinations, as they did not approach those who would discipline them, make them endure bitterness, and guide them on the path leading to their goal” (Badawi, 1975, p. 73). Especially in North Africa, when “the Ottoman state adopted and supported them, providing resources and endowments. The dervishes carried bells and bones, shaved their beards, grew their mustaches, and carried wooden swords or curved plants in their hands, accompanied by drums and flutes, causing commotion, without regard for prayer or fasting” (Inalcik, 2002, p. 271).

Similarly, in Algeria, “the alliance between the Ottomans and the marabouts (Sufis) became widespread, increasing shrines and domes, and Sufi orders entered...true and false preachers spread their ideas and litanies among the people. At every building, people sought blessings, drew near, held gatherings..., and the neutral observer could not discern whether the

worshippers were worshipping God or the sheikhs and marabouts. Thus, Algeria in this era was immersed in Sufism and dervishism. Scholars boasted about adopting paths, litanies, the cloak, and the rosary...rulers showed all respect and veneration for both true and false Sufis” (Saadallah, 1998, p. 467). The public's fascination with the miracles of saints and belief in them reached the level of sanctification. Sufis considered litanies better than the Quran and equated marabouts with the Prophet, leading to deviation from the true path of Sufism, shifting from knowledge to superstition, and from sainthood to sorcery. Some even believed that God's saints were better than the prophets, prompting great Sufi sheikhs to restore the authentic concept of Islam, preserving it from distortion.

Sufism is a mode of intellectual discourse used by humans to attain truth and faith. It is a cognitive behavior that does not rely solely on sensory perception or reason in the search but gives a primary active role to intuition and the heart. “Sufis believe that the universe is divided into three higher ranks: intelligibles as a rank of meanings abstracted from materials, perceived by intellects; lower ranks as sensory perceptions perceived by senses; and intermediate ranks perceived by both, where meanings are formed in tangible images” (Al-Khatib, 1984-1985, p. 21). These miracles can only be attained by Muslim Sufis through Sharia, which guides them to the truth with its commands and prohibitions. They fear that a nation consuming unlawful food, nourished by it, and reaching their intestines and hearts, will be veiled from God, who accounts for every atom's weight. There is a difference between asceticism and Sufism, as seen by Mohammad Abdul Mun'im Khafaji: “Sufism is asceticism in the world to gain God's pleasure, and asceticism is abandoning the world to gain the reward of the hereafter. Sufism is an entry into the beauty of the higher realm, its spirit, and mercy, while asceticism is an entry into the realm of piety, fearing God's punishment, wrath, and might” (Khafaji, 1980, p. 07).

## *2.2 Derivation of the Word "Sufism"*

The word "Suf" in Arabic traditionally means the wool of a sheep and similar animals. It can also imply justice and wealth. The source from which the term "Sufism" (Tasawwuf) is derived has been a subject of much debate, with Sufis themselves providing various interpretations in an attempt to praise the term and sanctify its adherents, seeking a legitimate origin for it. Some believe that the term is not related to wool /sɔ:f/ but rather to purity /Sa:fa/. As Abu al-Fath al-Busti said: People have long disputed the term "Sufi" and differed in its origin, They thought it derived from /sɔ:f/ (wool), But I grant this name only to a man who is pure (safi), So, he was named a sɔ:f for his purity (al-Busti, 1989, p. 134).

Thus, the derivation of the term takes on different meanings. Some believe "Sufism" relates to the woolen garments they wore, so much so that some would emit the smell of sheep when they sweated or got wet from the rain. Others link it to purity, highlighting the purity of their hearts and their dealings with God. Another perspective ties it to "al-Suffa" (the shaded area attached to the Prophet's Mosque), which sheltered the poor immigrants with no home or wealth, hence associating Sufism with them due to the similarity in their characteristics. Alternatively, it could denote the "first row before God" due to their high aspirations and devout focus on God, standing with their innermost beings in His presence (al-Kalabadhi, 1994, p. 05).

In response to researchers' curiosity, the word's origin has been attributed to various sources. Some trace it back to Sa:fa, the ancestor of a tribe, who served the Kaaba, dedicating themselves to serving God or the pilgrims of His house (Jaafar, 1970, p. 02).

These varied interpretations converge on the intended meaning, asserting that Sufism is an Islamic doctrine rooted in the Quran and the Prophet's teachings. It also represents a moral, social, and psychological behavior where the community dedicates most of its time to worship.

Through Sufism, an individual seeks the fruits of faith in God, based on a duality of spiritual stations gifted by God. Sufism has its own methods, proofs, and notable figures. Thus, the different terminologies can be accepted as long as they derive from the original actions or objects, rather than the branches.

### *2.3 The Phenomenon of Clothing in Sufi Tendencies Between Artistic Requirements and Spiritual Dimensions*

The wearing of wool by Sufis was inspired by the prophets, the truthful, and the humble devout individuals, reflecting simplicity and opposing the luxurious clothing of the people. Some even wore garments woven by their wives from sacrificial wool as a form of self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the economic production and trade cycles. The significance of this practice was associated with humility before God, breaking down before Him, and preferring asceticism in worldly pleasures to achieve closeness to the Divine. This was a characteristic of the prophets and the righteous. Those who emulated them by wearing coarse clothing and the simplest attire were considered among the righteous (Amin Yusuf, 2002, p. 77).

The patched clothing often became a fundamental element of the Sufis' outward appearance. As narrated by Ahmad and Tirmidhi in the *Shama'il*, Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said, "The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to mend his shoes, sew his clothes, and work in his house as any of you does in his house." Likewise, his wife Aisha and Umar ibn al-Khattab wore patched garments. However, wearing wool is not a prerequisite to becoming a sufi. For instance, the saint Abdullah al-Daghoughi responded to those who criticized his elegant white clothing by stating that the color of the garment does not necessarily reflect the sincerity of the heart (al-Tadili, 1997, p. 222).

In his book '*Al-Luma*,' Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi mentioned that they would wear wool, felt, or patched garments if available, and if not, they wore whatever was available, maintaining dignity and majesty without being pretentious or selective. They preferred old clothes over new ones, disliked having many good clothes, and appreciated the few worn-out ones, striving for cleanliness and purity (al-Tusi, 1960, p. 249). This indicates that the main concern for some Sufis was not the type of clothing but modesty, avoiding desire, and drawing attention, focusing on functionality.

As Hujwiri stated, "When a man understands the way, both a robe and a cloak are equal to him (al-Hasan, 1980, p. 245) ." Wearing wool or other garments and their manner of dressing—whether by shortening, tearing, or patching, and varying by geography—were expressions of inner, abstract significations imbued with spirituality, revealing the intent behind the attire. On the other hand, it honored status and certification or directed the Sufi's behavior, producing various types and names, the most important of which are: the patched garment, the felt, the cloak, the dervish robe, and the gown.

### **3. Manifestations of Sufism in Plastic Arts**

Sufism imparts sacred phenomena in the literary and artistic fields. In this context, the writer and artist strive to establish or express an ideal city, influenced by the pedagogical doctrines and ethics of the Gnostics. In poetry, for instance, poets have competed to embellish their verses in praise of their followers and to champion their Sufi paths in numerous enduring literary epics. "The poet's experience of embodying his contemplations and ideas resembles the Sufi's experience in his stations and states" (Said, 2008, p. 138). Thus, Adonis called for poetry to draw from Sufism to reveal the struggle against rational logic. Sufism also embraced popular folklore through open celebrations and festivals with various forms of listening, accompanied by spiritual aspects, including collective chanting and dances.

Despite the disapproval of some Sufi scholars like al-Sarraj, al-Qushayri, and Hujwiri towards listening and dancing by the young and followers, Abu Sa'id believed that the young were not devoid of desire and were dominated by their whims. When they clapped, their desires dissipated from their hands, and when they stomped the ground, their whims lessened from their feet. Through this method, they could protect themselves from major sins. It was better to dissipate the fire of desire through listening rather than anything else (Isaad, 2004, p. 373). These various and intense movements aimed to rid sins abstractly and discharge negative energy materially. Some viewed them as superstitious or comical, yet they proved their effectiveness and seriousness when adopted by psychologists and physical education experts. They noted that engaging in physical exercises, especially group ones, imparts positive energy and discharges negative energy.

Additionally, the discharge of electrical charges in the body, manifesting as static electricity shocks from time to time in clothing, particularly those made of wool and synthetic fibers, was scientifically and physically proven to exist and accumulate in dry, moisture-free areas. This might indirectly relate to those movements as another means to achieve electrical balance in the human body. This aligns with the views of modern educators who see physical exercise as a means of elevating the thoughts of the youth and diverting them from deviance to what benefits them, akin to Abu Sa'id's early perspective (Isaad, 2004, p. 373).

In the field of plastic art, amidst the vast knowledge, philosophy, and psychology of Sufism, there is an intersection with experimental and theoretical plastic art. This arises from the experience of liberation from a material world where both the artist and the Sufi feel constrained. Some have termed it the Sufism of art, exploring the relationship between the abstract absolute in Sufism and the visual discourse in plastic art, as well as their views on existence and truth. This is achieved by blending the principles of Sufism with the principles of proper artistic taste. "When one abandons imitating nature, one achieves an ideal representation of nature in the artwork. The relationship between the artist's enthusiasm for nature is defined by authenticity and taste, with individual expressions for a higher purpose that defines the system, symmetry, and unity of nature. Proper taste becomes the judge of fine arts, an idea later adopted by Kant and integrated into his system" (Christoph, 2018, p. 68).

Nowadays, the fusion of art with literature, Sufism, aesthetics, and sciences is common. This is evident through the osmosis between aesthetic and Sufi states. When we reach the highest aesthetic emotion, we transcend the self through the feeling of the absolute, which is sufi. Henri Bremond highlighted the relationship between Sufi states and aesthetic contemplation. This priest and historian of religion considered us all to be mystics, poets, and inspired individuals, seeing a progressive continuity between poetry, intoxication, and ecstasy. For him, poetry, in its essence, is a unifying magic, inviting us to serenity. "Arts attract everyone, but each person, through his intermediary magic, joins in prayer." Bremond accurately defined the connection between poetry, aesthetics, and Sufism. Furthermore, in aesthetics, emotion finds its inner feeling not in religion but in its intensification before natural or human beauty, or before artistic musical works in particular (Edgar, 2019, p. 93).

Henri Bergson's philosophy confirms this from an artistic perspective, aiming for a metaphysical realism seeking higher knowledge of realities. The artist must rely on intuitive vision, devoid of utilitarianism, akin to Sufi purity. The artist can thus liberate from the necessities of material action, expressing through the vivid image rather than conceptual thinking or presented language, reaching a longing for the non-material life. Bergson clarifies this by stating, "Intuition is the artist's way to penetrate the reality of existence, bringing an aesthetic perception of things with a kind of revelation or mystical witnessing. Hence, aesthetic perception transforms into a vision that hardly distinguishes itself from the perceived object, or a sensory knowledge akin to touching or feeling" (Karima, 2013, p. 78).

This principle explains why painting and Sufism are inherently visible worlds. The world we observe is not the same as the one we saw a moment before, constantly changing according to the manifestation of the Sufi plastic painting. This painting does not reflect social and historical thought like other plastic works but rather opens up to themes with absolute connotations, encircling the imagination of the Sufi with the duality of divinity and humanity, and the artist with the infinite direction from the inner world to the knowledge of truth. These shared worlds reject all that is sensory and material, seeking the essence of things, the source of all existence. This involves everyone, both creators and appreciators, in a whirlpool of seeking alternative artistic expressions created by each genius. Sufis seek the power of creativity to purify their souls, while the artist strives for a salvational and liberating meaning, unleashed through creativity. Their mission converges in understanding any phenomenon that establishes a connection between humans and divinity, bearing a Sufi and aesthetic spirit. The attribution of beauty to God, being one of His attributes, elevates the value of beauty to the highest degrees in the eyes of the artist and the Muslim sufi, forming a fundamental principle for understanding the nature of beauty. Both works to clarify it, interpreting what we are usually unable to see in our minds.

### *3.1 Sufism and Principles in the Realist School*

When we delve into the world of Sufism in the arts and its realistic dimension, we find that the pioneer of Sufis and the Sheikh of ascetics, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, was a calligrapher who excelled in Thuluth script. Yahya al-Sufi was among the great calligraphers, and there are countless names from Islamic civilization to the present. If we consider the artist's works of engraving, ornamentation, painting, and meticulous crafting, we find that he keeps in mind that God is beautiful and loves beauty and that God loves His servant to excel in his work. In every part of the world, the phrase "There is no victor except God" was inscribed, even on sword sheaths, and with this, the Muslim artist transformed these phrases with their sacred meanings into aesthetic symbols, suggesting to the contemplative that they are in the presence of God.

As for the craftsman, the garment maker, and the creator of artistic artifacts, their work is driven by the principle that whoever cheats in his work is not from the Muslim community. They strive to convey meanings through their work without deceit, ensuring that what they present to people reflects genuine quality. This is akin to the spiritual meanings and Islamic values the Sufi practices in his seclusion. From this, we can infer another comparison: a religious spirit characterized by humility, aesthetic, and ethical ideas surrounds the heart of the gnostic, and what applies to him applies to the Muslim artist. This is not exclusive to Islam; the paintings found in caves, the depiction of religious rituals on murals, or icons in churches were "a means of praising through shapes and teaching through images, using beauty to play on the chord of its genius, to stir spiritual emotions and awaken latent feelings, generating faith in both the viewer and the worshipper" (Mahfoud, 2017, p. 43).

Anthropology has proven that images in temples, miniatures, and manuscripts decorated with illustrations throughout history, although created for artistic reasons, were often driven by a spiritual and religious devotional essence. The influence of Sufism on Islamic art differs from and surpasses the Sufi experiences found in ancient traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and European traditions, which agree that the sacred does not necessarily have to be beautiful. As German phenomenologist and scholar of religions Rudolf Otto noted, Religion always carries a tragic character, accompanied by a constant sense of deficiency in the religious person.



Rudolf believed that there should be a distinction between the concept of the sacred and the beautiful. It seemed that the Sufi felt that any merging between the sacred and the beautiful was a form of desecration of the transcendent divine idea. This notion was clearly manifested by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who distinguished between the sensory beauty existing in the tangible world and the inner beauty specific to the people of the heart, a beauty more complete than sensory beauty. In this sense, the virtuous is beautiful, even if it is distorted or outwardly unattractive (Khazam, 1995, pp. 62-63).

The artist and the Sufi both create, rebelling against reality in a positive sense, relieving their spirits and bringing joy and delight to the audience. Creativity is beauty, and beauty relieves the soul of distress, boredom, and fatigue. They share spiritual values measured by the need each has for them, attainable only to the extent of “our need for beauty in everything. The soul has an unquenchable thirst for beauty, and everything in it is an aspect of beauty. Even if our tastes differ on what we find ugly, we cannot deny that there is an absolute beauty in life that no two tastes can disagree on” (Naimy, 1991, p. 70). Despite the diversity of needs, they do not vary in essence but in the extent to which we feel them and their impact on us. Otherwise, how do we explain the enduring nature of works like the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, Shakespeare's plays, the Mu'allaqat, seminal books, the sayings of Ibn Ata' Allah, and the principles of Sufism, which filled the existence and immortalized their creators as conscious human beings striving to satisfy their utilitarian, aesthetic, and symbolic needs.

### *3.2 Sufism and Principles in the Symbolist School*

Both the Sufi and the artist benefit from the drawn and written signs found in holy books, as well as those on papyrus, amulets, coffins, hieroglyphics, and engraved talismans that appeared in myths. These texts read in an interweaving manner between the formal iconic sign and the symbolic sign, influenced by their doctrinal origins and artistic and philosophical methods. Symbolic images stick more firmly in minds and understandings, demonstrating their ability to innovate and imagine coupled with contemplation. “Symbols in Sufism reached unprecedented expressive heights, with meanings depicted as beautiful maidens, lamenting doves, or light and throne..., then changing from their expressive and faith-based connotations to accomplish things like magical talismans, number magic, and letter magic, establishing their dual legitimacy from the Quran and mythology in Sufism” (Khoualdiya, 2014, pp. 55, 166-167).

Thus, the semantic flexibility within the framework of plastic art and the sign and symbol's ability to transcend reality come into play. They transform, accumulate, and move to become signs for other signs, creating a culture or reaching other hidden meanings containing cultural codes. The genre of plastic art can perceive these through its coded language of color, line, and rhythm, combining emotional and subconscious states (emotional states), then penetrating the structures of the artwork to deconstruct them, leading to a high level of artistic taste. “The plastic style, with its coded elements of color, line, structure, rhythm, and light, reflects the artistic traditions of each art school. The style changes and evolves in response to the realistic changes in life. Light studies revealed Impressionism, chemical and pigment studies brought Fauvism, human behavior studies introduced Expressionism, and with war and politics, social and cultural visions emerged with Dadaism and Surrealism...Thus, with lived reality, the coded language of plastic works changes through the flexibility of artistic signs, sometimes to match reality and sometimes to anticipate the future “ (Yahya, 2002, p. 91).

This flexibility also seeks to align plastic art with the cultural characteristics of societies, including the cultural imagination of Sufism. Examples include hand drawings (such as the Hand of Fatima), green domes, pulpits, spiritual sessions, the symbolism of the Isra and Mi'raj,

miniatures, Arabic calligraphy, and letters considered by Ibn Arabi as one of God's secrets, among the most esteemed sciences hidden with God. Other symbols include numbers, spiral lines, the star and crescent, staffs, rosaries, cloaks, or the posture and sitting style in the squatting position, commonly adopted by Sufis in zawiyas, katateeb, and mosques, depicted in many Orientalist paintings of Arab and Islamic figures. A notable example is the portrait of Emir Abdelkader, whose Sufi features were intricately integrated into the artistic composition and shared among the elements of the painting, with his facial features occupying the focal point of the scene along with other elements like clothing and Sufi accessories.

These works continue to command great respect and appreciation among the most famous Orientalist artists who contemporized with Emir Abdelkader. For instance, the French artist Jean-Baptiste-Ange Tissier painted a piece titled 'Abdelkader during his detention at Château d'Amboise,' depicting the Emir standing, holding a brown rosary, a symbol of Sufism mentioned by Zarruq: "Handing over the rosary, taking the pledge, shaking hands, and interlocking fingers are part of the oral tradition, unless intended for a particular state, then it is for its sake (al-Barnusi, 2004, p. 204). Another painting by "Maxime David shows the Emir sitting in a squatting position, faithfully preserved by the artist. This realistic portrayal of his features, marked by sincerity and majesty, along with his penetrating gaze, conveys astuteness. "A servant's inner state is known by his outward condition, as outward appearances reflect the inner state and what lies within the heart. If one adheres to truth and prefers rightness, he is there...otherwise, he is not " (al-Barnusi, 2004, p. 195). Additionally, the woolen garment draped over his shoulders, adorned with tufts or small woolen decorations in the center of his chest, and his arms folded, indicate a reserved stance, with his right hand gripping his left wrist, both hands resting on his knees. This close description between the real and the figurative plastic representation highlights the Sufi connection with inner and spiritual contemplation, as embodied by the artist in the pursuit of delving into and revealing Sufism in Orientalist art.

### *3.3 Sufism and Principles in the Abstract School*

Marcel Brion states, "Abstract art, as it seems to me, is more capable than representational art of expressing deep spirituality because it is not tied to representational form and can directly evoke purer emotional and affective states than those triggered by representational form. The artist always seeks to express what is spiritual or divine, as seen in Islamic art, where the transcendent is always represented in a non-representational form " (Bahnassi, 1998, p. 257) . While the spiritual aspect in Western art expresses individual mysticism viewed subjectively and relatively by each artist, with humanity as the center of everything, the abstractions of the Muslim artist revolve around a broader, unified, and deeper meaning encompassing the entirety of existence, with God as the absolute center of everything. Critic and researcher Afif Bahnassi states, "Abstraction is a search for pure, absolute beauty. The tendency toward abstraction in Arab art is linked to a specific concept, aiming for the image to move toward the absolute, toward beauty itself, abstracted from utility, which is pure artistic beauty and not relative beauty, not the beauty of things subjected to material need and necessity (Bahnassi, 1997, p. 90).

Abstraction in its relationship with Sufism appears in "moving the trajectory of the image and its transformations in actual thinking methods and the stage of artistic work, as well as in some effects of the Sufi and aesthetic experience. These correlations provide clear evidence of the similarity between abstraction and Sufism, where the simple self, as the center of spiritual existence, forms the basis of Sufi psychology, which is placed in motion, something abstract artists sought and called for a return to ancient Eastern religions to extract a new artistic model (Al-Zaidi, 2009, p. 07) ." One prominent artist is Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), whose work 'Composition No. 07' in late 1913 utilized numbers and similar

compositions in various works, relating the universe and the music of celestial bodies to the idea of survival in paintings such as 'Judgment Day,' 'The Flood,' and 'All Saints' Day.' Despite the brevity of Sufi plastic artworks, "Kandinsky's attempt to abandon representationalism in his drawings was highly significant, paving the way for a new type of religious art with a much greater human meaning than had been achieved until then " (Bowness, 1990, p. 204).

Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935) also adopted a mystical perspective on art, drawing geometric shapes, crosses, and pure colors in his search for pure beauty, reaching extreme spiritual clarity in works like 'White Square on Black Square.' He referenced pure knowledge, eliminating the human form and merging it with abstract shapes that mean nothing and everything, removing tensions and influences while acknowledging the infinite absolute. Similarly, Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) was spiritually motivated and interested in the Theosophical movement launched by spiritual author Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). Inspired by her, Mondrian rejected imitation in art, which he considered a deceptive representation of reality. In his paintings, he expressed the spiritual in vertical forms and the natural in horizontal forms, combining them to create balanced symmetry and a pictorial fabric reflecting the dynamic equilibrium of the natural world and visual metaphors for existential meanings. He aimed to "eliminate the ego in art, making this elimination a primary goal. Art should be concerned with the universal artistic force, echoing our profound unconscious actions in the world we inhabit. This new formation seeks to achieve balance and harmony (Korg, 1989, p. 202).

### *3.4 Sufism and Principles in the Surrealist School*

In relation to Sufism and Surrealism, Adonis<sup>2</sup> strives in his book 'Sufism and Surrealism' to elevate Surrealism to a level that seems akin to Sufism, eliminating its religious aspect. For him, this study area is enticing for modernist studies, particularly since he adopts a project of criticizing religious intellect and undermining the authority of jurisprudence, viewed as rigid and opposed to creativity and innovation. As a modern poet and critic, he acknowledges his influence from Western culture and that his readings of Rimbaud, Nerval, and Breton led him to discover Sufism. Adonis equates Sufism with Surrealism, merging the latter with religion, a notion disputed by researchers since Sufism is tied to religion, while Surrealism is an atheistic movement not aiming for any heavenly salvation. However, from a plastic art perspective, his comparison helps clarify the idea.

Adonis believes that Sufism awakens things and unveils secrets. Everything, according to him, appears enigmatic, symbolizing a dream or an indication. Night is not night, wine is not wine, death is not death but another life, and love is not love between an equal pair. Sufism breaks familiar thought patterns, believes in invisible beings, and competes with prophecy. He says, "We have concluded that the aesthetics of the Sufi text, like the Surrealist text, relies primarily on metaphor, which, in their view, is not merely a style but a vision. The first violates religious legitimacy, and the second violates cultural and social institutional legitimacy, meaning that the structure of writing for both is based on a language of suspense, searching and questioning, seeking to know the unknown and engaging in the infinite movement " (Adonis, 2006, pp. 143-145). This metaphor and connection between Sufism and Surrealism, though modern, lead us to understand the shared element between them: the human soul's depths, which logic or rational rules cannot explain. Both are spontaneous symbolic narratives found in paintings by André Breton, Salvador Dalí, and Joan Miró,

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<sup>2</sup>- Ali Ahmad Said Esber, known by his pen name Adonis, is a Syrian poet with a degree in philosophy who adopted this name inspired by the Phoenician myth of Adonis.

representing panoramic collections related to faith or magical rituals enriched with engraved lines detailing the Sufi idea.

This dual relationship also maintains its power through dreamy and ironic visions, keeping the plastic discourse open to interpretive spaces. It provides answers to many phenomena faced by the artist at times and rolls into the self-teaching struggle with its contradictory symbolic indicators, where the artist expresses answers to the impossible questions repeatedly asked by the human mind. This feeling transcends geography and history in surrealist Sufism, which relies on historical and artistic references that have surpassed siege, obscurity, and suppression. The artist aligns these references with the breadth of his imagination and knowledge, as both Sufism and Surrealism explore metaphysical aspects beyond the human mind's capacity to comprehend.

#### **4. Color as the Ideal Measure in the Scope of Sufism**

Other plastic elements, even if they lack sensory presence like color, are subject to projections that are validated only by subconscious affirmations. For instance, regarding color, “there is no doubt that the significance of color remains tied to the specificities, beliefs, customs, and traditions of different peoples. For example, the color blue in Sufism has a different sensory and intellectual significance than it does in Europe, India, or China. However, this does not negate the fact that there is a true spiritual significance to this color (blue) that is closely linked to the absolute truth “ (Saleh, 2012, p. 07). It has also been said of absolute truth that man's inability to know the future does not stem from his lack of knowledge of the present, but rather from his inability to know the present.

However, some philosophers believe that absolute truth is possible as long as man possesses a thinking mind. This truth elevates man from the sensual to the abstract. They agree with those who assert that there is no absolute truth, in that if it exists, it is not in our physical world, but in an abstract world separate from ours.

The interaction and impact of these elements vary according to the artist's taste. What concerns us is the poetic nature of the artistic space within which the painting is constructed with all its elements, a process that comes from interpretation and the creation of meanings based on expressive form. This form is not realized solely through linguistic agreement and only ascends within socially and spatially agreed limits, meaning what is intuited and understood intellectually. For example, “the color red symbolizes love, revolution, and violence. Spiritually, it signifies inspiration and is the color of the inspired soul, as affirmed by the saints and gnostics. Therefore, the significance of color derived from some societies is not definitive in the precise sense “ (Saleh, 2012, p. 08).

Thus, one cannot rely on the accuracy of these significances in evaluating artworks universally. As we said, Sufism in plastic art is an artistic effect that is lived, not described, and translated only at the sensory and intellectual levels.

The interaction of colors in the painting reflects a spiritual atmosphere due to the imposed color sense in the artwork. White, extensively used by artists in Sufi clothing and to break other colors, “is the color beloved by the soul because it induces comfort and tranquility, symbolizing purity and innocence. This color has been a symbol of supreme divine power in many civilizations “ (Ali, 2002, p. 49), and is similarly referenced in Islam. The faces of the inhabitants of paradise, and the Sufis associate the tranquil soul with the white light, which is only attainable by the sincere and complete seeker, granting him visions of light in his dreams and with the guidance of the sheikh who teaches him the way and gives him special litanies and praises to elevate him to the rank of the contented soul (Saleh, 2012, p. 114).

Next, the color green expresses spirituality, clearly reflected in the individual who exhibits peaceful, calm, gentle, and safe characteristics, and denotes health and youth. These are indications noted by Wexner (1945) and Kouwwer (1949) (Ibrahim, 1983, p. 35), giving comfort and ease to the viewers' psyche, aligning closely with the Sufi vision. Ibn Arabi attributed the color green to joy, beauty, and positive outlook, which are undoubtedly eternal and absolute significances for the people of paradise. Those who seek this color must work correctly in worldly life to secure paradise, which, despite its beauty, remains temporary and subject to decay, which is the second truth (Saleh, 2012, pp. 39-38).

Critics see blue as a sign of stable, controlled emotions, symbolizing tranquility filled with optimism. It is associated with movement, depicted in the morning blue of the sky. Meanwhile, red is one of the most preferred colors among Arabs, expressing love and its intensity. Red is prevalent in national flags and "serves as a conduit for life-related subjects of particular importance, representing a burning issue, intense anger, or a strong emotional response, or it signifies a need for warmth, love, and affection (Saleh, 1986, pp. 86-87). Its boldness and strength make it attention-grabbing, so artists give this color space in their paintings in an unbalanced manner to draw attention to extraordinary historical figures, signaling an ideological stance that draws attention to icons defending the rights of the working class. Notable figures are not just transient phenomena but have enduring and renewable significances that can be repeated through new events and situations.

In Ottoman painting, Algerian popular culture, and Orientalist art, "red was associated with many meanings, symbolizing strength and victory, especially during the flourishing of Ottoman art (16th-17th centuries) and the expansion of the state. It was also linked to Sufi meanings like intense divine love and martyrdom for His sake, reflecting the spirit of the era and the dominance of the spirit of jihad" (Hanan, 2017, p. 435). Light yellow, which no artist's painting is without, expresses deceit and fraud in its darker shade in popular contexts. In ancient heritage, it was the emblem of kings and religious figures like Buddha and his temples, used in decorating mosques and churches. However, its light shade signifies "the light of the self-reproaching soul, inclining towards self-struggle and conformity to Shariah, with a tendency towards good deeds. But it also harbors hidden pride and hypocrisy, desiring to display its good deeds" (Saleh, 2012, p. 186).

These color significances remain at a standard or general level and do not necessarily retain their literal meanings. There is no room to discuss this further, but it gives a clear impression of the Sufi character and the artist's skill in conveying the strength of character and scene. The artist's mastery in combining different lines and the interplay of color contrast and harmony, merging warm and cool colors in the overall scene, highlights the details more, giving the artwork an aesthetic and spiritual dimension with Sufi metaphysical aspects, ending in sweet shadows and harmonious color transparency, imparting a beautiful and present face to the painting.

## **5. Conclusion**

Algeria is an integral part of the Sufi discourse produced by its adherents and reflected in their literature and arts, such as divine love poetry and the Muhammadan light. These philosophical ideas emerged in the Algerian Sufi thought and culture through zawiyas, which facilitated the spread of major Sufi orders, notably the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya in Tlemcen and western Algeria, as a widespread social and cultural phenomenon. The impact was particularly significant due to the contributions of figures like Abdul Rahman al-Tha'alibi, Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi, and Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Milyani, among others. This region also attracted significant Orientalist campaigns from prominent French plastic artists. The Arab world was seen as a realm of magic, mystery, and marvels, a Kaaba for adventurous

writers and artists who could not hide their admiration for Algeria nor the heroic behaviors and human attitudes of notable Algerian figures they encountered and incorporated into their artistic themes. This interaction aimed to win the affection and trust of the Algerian people on one hand and to gain global fame and local harmony on the other, thus creating a blending of European cultural values in various forms within Algerian society. It is unthinkable that such an endeavor would begin by instilling obscene images in the minds of a conservative Algerian culture.

Therefore, creating an Eastern model without undergoing this gradual enculturation process was impossible. It required a meticulously crafted plan to understand the strengths and weaknesses that stir this people's enthusiasm. "Preparatory movements will follow to integrate the Western system with all its cultural, economic, and social dimensions as an alternative to the Islamic system, attempting to strip Algerians of their beliefs and immerse them in Western thought, leading to the inevitable collapse of Algerian resistance." This task was entrusted to Orientalists who executed it with great precision (Habassi, 1998, p. 06), exploiting the weakened leadership and the tendency towards fragmentation within the Algerian populace. The colonizer's success in achieving these goals relied heavily on gradually integrating artists, making it appear to the public that a reconciliation had occurred between the French and Algerians.

This study aimed to answer the questions posed by the problematic. It can be concluded that Sufism, undoubtedly, has significantly contributed to the spread of aesthetic culture, with taste being the foundation of excellence in the arts. Thousands of Muslim Sufi artists have beautified Islamic cities with various colors, geometric shapes, Arabic calligraphy, and Islamic ornamentation on gravestones and shrines, documented and mentioned in the books of travelers during their visits. These can be seen in every city and village across Algeria, such as the shrine of Sidi Boumediene on the plateau of Al-Ubad in Tlemcen, among others. Some have disappeared, while others continue to withstand the test of time. "Europeans immortalize their greats and saints with statues, while we immortalize ours with domes. If European statues attract visitors to witness the grandeur of the arts, shrines and domes in Islamic lands attract visitors to witness the greatness of the arts" (Zaki, 2012, p. 365).

The influence of Sufism is also evident in other arts, such as coin minting during the reign of Jalaluddin Fateh Shah, the last Sultan of Bengal, who ruled in 1481 CE. "The influence of Sufism on Islamic coins was unique to the era of Fateh Shah, featuring Sufi inscriptions and titles. The coins bore the phrase 'Sheikh residing at the Prophet's foot, Jalal al-Din and al-Dunya,' and on the reverse, 'addressed by the Prophet, Sultan of the ascetics in wakefulness.' Analyzing these inscriptions reveals a clear Sufi influence with terms like neighbor, sheikh, jalal, and asceticism" (Hassan, 2017, pp. 533-537).

These observations show that the Sufi discourse has accompanied artistic expressions from its inception, manifesting in artists' works in symbolic language. This transformation into metaphors allows the plastic artist to draw from Sufism, seeking symbols across dialectical deserts and wilderness, aiming to uncover the ontological relationship between God and humans.

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