

Visual Hermeneutics as Adaptation: Translating Sufi Mysticism Through The Aesthetics of Presence

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Abstract: This paper investigates the intersemiotic adaptation of Sufi mystical poetry into visual art through a phenomenological lens that privileges affective perception, embodied engagement, and contemplative receptivity. Moving beyond fidelity-based models of adaptation, the study proposes that visual forms can resonate with the metaphysical depth of Sufi verse without mimetically reproducing it. Here, the act of viewing becomes a spiritual event—an invitation to inhabit the artwork as a site of ontological encounter.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its application in visual studies, the artwork is theorized as a perceptual field where meaning arises through the interplay of presence and sensory experience. In Islamic visual traditions, figuration has historically accompanied abstraction and symbolism especially within Persianate aesthetics, where representations of dervishes, saints, and cosmic motifs are integral to mystical expression. These images are not mere illustrations but contemplative devices that mediate access to the ineffable.

Engaging the ecstatic poetics of Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri, the paper explores how visual elements such as the whirling dervish, the moon, turbans, and geometric patterns serve as vessels for spiritual signification. Theories of intersemiotic translation (Robert Stam) and adaptation as creation (Linda Hutcheon) position painting as an interpretive, embodied process. Reflecting on my own practice as both artist and researcher, I suggest that such adaptation is transformative, not descriptive. Generating a metaphysical dialogue between the viewer and the sacred, where visual becomes a mode of contemplative knowledge.

Keywords: Intersemiotic Adaptation; Phenomenology; Sufism; Visual Hermeneutics; Poetry

Introduction

The relationship between poetry and visual art has long been a matter of critical inquiry, but within the Sufi tradition, this intersemiotic translation assumes a distinctly metaphysical dimension. Mainstream adaptation theory, as articulated by critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, has tended to focus on the transfer of narrative across media—most often from novel to film—where questions of fidelity, authorship, and audience reception dominate. While such debates have yielded valuable insights, they remain largely tethered to narrative-centered and representational models.

This paper proposes a different framework: visual hermeneutics as adaptation. Rather than treating adaptation as a secondary act of reproduction, this approach foregrounds the interpretive and experiential possibilities that arise when mystical poetry is reconfigured in visual form. In the case of Sufi verse, where language is already straining toward the ineffable, adaptation must be understood not as translation in the ordinary sense but as a metaphysical dialogue between word and image, text and presence.

Sufi poetry, steeped in ecstatic love, divine longing, and ontological inquiry, often transcends linguistic boundaries by gesturing toward the ineffable. When such verse is transposed into visual form, the task is not to reproduce meaning mimetically but to evoke a resonance of presence—a contemplative field in which the viewer participates in mystical signification. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us, perception is never a neutral reception of the visible; rather, “the world is what we see and yet we must learn to see it” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 4).

Adaptation studies provides a fertile framework to articulate this process. In its classical formulation, adaptation was measured against a fidelity discourse: the success of an adaptation was judged by its faithfulness to an original text. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon argues, “adaptation is repetition without replication” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 7). Rather than treating the visual rendering of a poem as derivative, adaptation theory insists on its generative potential, its capacity to produce meaning in

a new medium, cultural context, and sensory register. Robert Stam likewise critiques fidelity language, urging us instead to view adaptation as “a dialogical process, an intertextual interplay across signifying systems” (*Literature through Film* 45).

This dialogical process becomes even more profound in the case of mystical verse, which already destabilizes the boundaries between word and silence, presence and absence. Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri do not merely write about love—they perform a metaphysics of love, inviting the reader into a state of ontological transformation. To adapt such verse visually is not to transfer content but to translate an experience. The painting does not “illustrate” the poem; it creates a parallel field where affect, symbol, and presence converge.

By foregrounding both adaptation theory and phenomenology, this paper situates the translation of Sufi mystical poetry into visual art as a transformative act rather than a representational one. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on adaptation by extending them into non-narrative, spiritual, and intermedial terrains—domains often neglected in adaptation studies, which tend to focus on literature-to-film. Here, adaptation becomes a metaphysical dialogue: a process whereby the sacred word assumes visual form, and the artwork itself becomes a site of ontological encounter.

Adaptation Beyond Fidelity: Intersemiotic Translation

Adaptation studies, once tethered to translation studies, has in recent decades consolidated itself as a discipline in its own right. While its earliest concerns revolved around questions of textual transfer—particularly the movement from literature to film—its present scope is far broader and more interdisciplinary. It now addresses “not simply a case of transferring content from one medium to another” but rather the dynamic processes of re-creation, transformation, and reception (Sharma 286). This shift was catalyzed by the “cultural turn” in translation studies, which prompted scholars to reconceive adaptation as a form of intersemiotic translation. Theorizing adaptation in these terms foregrounds its semiotic complexities: not fidelity to a fixed original, but interpretive re-performance across sign systems.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines adaptation as “the alteration of one thing to suit another” and, in a media context, as “an altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source” (OED). While serviceable, this definition falls short of the contemporary situation, where adaptation increasingly resembles the biological model of transformation. Like organisms, texts survive—or fail—in new environments by evolving their forms.

This evolutionary metaphor also applies to adaptation theory itself, which has undergone successive transformations in response to shifting cultural and media ecologies. Once dominated by fidelity discourse, the field is now shaped by post-literary and transmedia perspectives. As Thomas Leitch notes, adaptation no longer flows solely from literature to film but emerges from “non-literary and sometimes non-narrative sources”—video games, board games, theme park rides or even fan-fictional rewritings. Such developments illustrate the inadequacy of fidelity as a critical framework. The persistence of fidelity discourse, however, has long marked adaptation criticism. Robert Stam calls it “an unproductive hermeneutic model” since it “presupposes the existence of some single, transcendent, correct meaning of the text” (*Literature through Film* 15). Virginia Woolf’s condemnation of cinematic adaptation as a “parasite” feeding upon literature, or Tolstoy’s dismissal of film as a “direct attack on the methods of literary art,” exemplifies this long-standing suspicion. Fidelity-based rhetoric has produced a litany of pejorative tropes—“infidelity,” “betrayal,” “deformation,” “bastardization,” “vulgarisation,” and “desecration” (Sharma 289)—each reinforcing literature’s supposed superiority to film and other media. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us, adaptation is not “a pejorative sense of being a copy or a mere repetition” but a “creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 9).

This insight becomes even more crucial when dealing with mystical texts such as Sufi poetry. The discourse of fidelity presumes a singular, stable meaning, whereas Sufi texts overflow with metaphor, symbol, and surplus significance. Rumi's famous lines—

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.”

(*The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks, 36)

—do not describe a literal field but an ontological openness beyond binaries. A painting inspired by this verse cannot “translate” the field in mimetic terms; rather, it might enact expansiveness through color-fields, dissolving contours, or liminal light. Similarly, Amir Khusrau's verse—

Gori soye sej par, mukh par daale kes,
chal Khusrau ghar aapne, rain bhayi pardes.”

(The fair one lies on the bed, hair veiling her face;

Khusrau, go home now, for night has fallen in a foreign land).

—deploys pardes (foreign land) as a symbol of metaphysical estrangement from the Beloved.

A visual translation here cannot merely depict exile but must stage estrangement through fractured horizons, chiaroscuro, or displaced form.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of symbol helps illuminate this dynamic. The symbol gives rise to thought,” he writes (*The Symbolism of Evil* 15), because it harbors a “surplus of meaning” that continually exceeds interpretation (Interpretation Theory 88). Sufi images—the moth consumed in flame, the wine of divine intoxication, the tavern as annihilation of ego—function precisely in this register of inexhaustibility. To adapt them visually is not to capture meaning but to re-open it, staging what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons” (*Truth and Method* 306).

Hafiz captures this surplus in a luminous metaphor:

I am the hole in a flute / that the Christ s breath moves through—

listen to this music.”

(*The Gift*, trans. Daniel Ladinsky 3)

This is not a figure to be “illustrated” but an ontological dispossession, an emptied self-resonating with divine breath. A painter might evoke this not through the literal flute, but through negative space, luminous voids, or abstraction that renders presence audible through absence.

Thus, intersemiotic adaptation of Sufi verse demonstrates how adaptation, like biological metamorphosis, thrives not through fidelity but through transformation. Successful adaptations achieve “repetition without replication” (Sharma 289), carrying the aura of the original while amplifying it in new registers of experience. In this sense, visual adaptations of Sufi poetry do not betray or vulgarize their sources; rather, they enact what Walter Benjamin would call an expanded aura, renewing the mystical text in the language of another medium.

Having freed adaptation from fidelity, we now turn to phenomenology, which provides a vocabulary for understanding how such visual transformations are not representational but experiential acts of presence.

Phenomenology and the Aesthetics of Presence

Maurice Merleau-Ponty s phenomenology reorients our understanding of art from a representational object to a lived perceptual field in which meaning emerges through embodied encounter. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not a detached act of cognition but an event of intertwinement between the seer and the seen: “We must not say that our body is in space, nor for that matter in time. It inhabits space and time” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 139). Thus, the experience of viewing a painting cannot be reduced to optical reception but must be understood as a mode of dwelling—a participation in what the artwork discloses at the ontological level.

In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty insists that the painter “takes his body with him, and it is with his body that he sees” (162). Painting, therefore, is not reproduction but creation: “the painter s

vision is a continued birth of his own seeing; the act of painting does not reproduce a perception, it makes it” (13). Art is thus revelatory, “the visible raised to the second power” (166), a site where being is disclosed in and through the visible.

This orientation finds its roots in Edmund Husserl’s call to return “to the things themselves” (Ideas I 56–57). For Husserl, phenomenology seeks the essence of lived experience through reduction, both epoché (bracketing the natural attitude) and eidetic reduction (grasping essential meanings). Art, in Husserl’s view, is a privileged site for such disclosure. As he observes in *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, “Extraordinary profit can be drawn from art, which tower high above the products of our own fantasy... ‘Feigning [fiction] is the source from which the cognition of eternal truths is fed’” (Ideas I 160, qtd. in Wertz 2010).

Martin Heidegger extended this project by making art central to his hermeneutic phenomenology. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he famously reads Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes, discerning within them an entire world: “From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth” (14). The work of art here is not an illustration but an unconcealment (aletheia), a clearing in which being shines forth. Thus, “a work of art allows its truth to come to stand in the light of its being” (16).

Hans-Georg Gadamer similarly affirms that art reveals truth not by being an object of detached analysis but by being an event of play, in which viewer and artwork participate together: “The transformation is a transformation into the true ... the world of art ... is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that this is how things are” (*Truth and Method* 112). Paul Ricoeur, in turn, emphasizes the inexhaustibility of artistic meaning, noting that “metaphor provokes meaning” precisely by surpassing literal reference, opening a “new structure whereby a literal or static view of reality is surpassed” (qtd. in Freeman 310).

Jean-Luc Marion furthers this trajectory with his concept of the saturated phenomenon—phenomena that exceed the limits of intentional grasp and overwhelm perception. For Marion, the phenomenon gives itself in excess of what the concept can contain” (*Being Given*, 199). Mystical art, whether the ecstatic verses of Rūmī or the visual excess of Persian miniatures, can be read in this light: they are not objects to be decoded but overwhelming presences that appear more than we can see.” This resonates with the Sufi notion of tajallī (divine self-disclosure), where the divine manifests in forms that exceed rational containment and flood the perceiver with meaning.

Emmanuel Levinas contributes another dimension by positing that perception is fundamentally ethical. The face of the Other, he writes, is a living presence; it is expression” (*Totality and Infinity* 66). In Sufi poetry, the Beloved’s face functions in precisely this way: it is not merely an aesthetic object but a site of infinite responsibility and love. Gazing upon the Beloved is therefore not detached observation but a call to ethical transformation.

Such phenomenological insights converge with Islamic mystical epistemology. In Sufism, perception is not bifurcated into subject and object but understood as mushāhada (witnessing), an ontological unveiling in which the heart (qalb) perceives through both outer sight (baṣar) and inner vision (baṣīra). Ibn ‘Arabī famously describes imagination (khayāl) as a barzakh (isthmus) that mediates between the visible and invisible realms: The cosmos is all imagination, and he who perceives it knows it to be imagination within imagination” (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 125). The artwork, like imagination, is neither purely sensory nor purely intellectual but an in-between space where truth discloses itself.

Rūmī, too, emphasizes the primacy of the inner eye: Close both eyes to see with the other eye” (*Mathnawī I*: 3727). This resonates deeply with Merleau-Ponty’s insistence that true philosophy consists of re-learning to look at the world” (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxiii). Both perspectives insist that vision is not passive reception but a cultivated way of seeing that opens being to presence. This convergence is not limited to textual philosophy but extends into artistic practice. Islamic calligraphy, for instance, demands a mode of perception that is slow, embodied, and rhythmic,

mirroring the act of dhikr. The viewer traces with the eye what the calligrapher enacted with the body, transforming vision into remembrance. Similarly, the samā' of the Mevlevi dervishes is not a symbolic dance but an enactment of ontological truth: the turning body becomes the flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible* 147), where motion, perception, and being converge. In Kashmiri Shaivism, this echoes the practice of pratyabhijñā (recognition), where art and ritual awaken the perceiver to their identity with the universal consciousness.

Arts-based phenomenology makes this explicit. Max van Manen insists that "Art is not a tool to illustrate our understanding of experience. Rather, art enacts the meaning of experience itself" (*Arts-Based Phenomenological Research* 63). Aesthetic practice, therefore, "makes visible the invisible dimensions of lived meaning" (65)—a claim that parallels Merleau-Ponty's insight that the painter "gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" (*Eye and Mind* 166). Both affirm art as a mode of ontological disclosure.

The relational nature of this disclosure is crucial. As van Manen notes, "The meaning of art emerges in the lived relation between the work and the one who engages it" (74). Thus, a visual adaptation of Rūmī's metaphor of the moth and flame does not simply depict annihilation (fanā'); rather, in the trembling of brushwork and the vibrancy of color, it enacts the experiential intensity of mystical desire. Adaptation, here, is not illustrative but phenomenological: it opens a horizon of presence in which the beholder dwells.

In both Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Sufi aesthetics, art is not a secondary ornament but a mode of presence. Vision is no longer passive seeing but participatory dwelling in being. As van Manen concludes, "this world is not behind or beyond the work but is the work itself" (68). For the Sufi as for the phenomenologist, perception is a form of unveiling in which the depths of the Real (al-Ḥaqq) are disclosed.

The Artist's Practice: Translating Verse into Image

The translation of Sufi poetry into visual art involves more than an act of representation; it is an interpretive process where the metaphors of verse become living presences within color, form, and movement. Through this intersemiotic adaptation, the canvas becomes a hermeneutic space in which mystical symbols are not merely shown but enacted, inviting the viewer into a contemplative participation. Each Sufi poet—Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri—offers a symbolic grammar that lends itself to visual transposition. Their poetics, marked by metaphors of flight, radiance, nature, irony, and ego-death, open themselves to phenomenological adaptation, where painting does not reproduce but re-embodies their mystical vision.

As an artist, my engagement with Sufi poetry becomes an act of hermeneutic adaptation rather than mimetic illustration. The canvas is not a mirror of the text but a field of resonance in which the poetic word opens itself to visual embodiment. Each painting is titled after a verse or image drawn from the Sufi canon, yet the purpose is not to reproduce the literal but to generate what Paul Ricoeur terms “a surplus of meaning” (*Interpretation Theory* 88). In this process, the visual work becomes what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls an “event of understanding” (*Truth and Method* 306), where the horizon of the text and the horizon of the artist converge to create a new space of perception.



For instance, *Ku-e-Yaar (Abode of the Beloved)* translates the intimacy of longing into a visual metaphor. The poem—“Someone like you, a confidante of my heart, / I could not hope to find, no matter how hard I d search!”—is reimagined through luminous color fields and spiral forms, suggesting the inaccessibility of the Beloved and the eternal orbit of desire. The painting enacts what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the intertwining of vision and movement” (*Eye and Mind* 162), where perception itself becomes a gesture of reaching toward the ineffable.



Similarly, *Kharqa-e-Faqr (The Cloak of Transcendence)* draws upon Ghani Kashmiri's verse of the moth who finds repose in the lamp's flame. Rather than depicting moth and flame literally, the painting allows texture and chromatic layering to evoke the fragile ecstasy of self-annihilation. The cloak becomes both a garment and a shroud, an emblem of *fana* (annihilation of the self) and *baqa* (abiding in the divine). Here, the figural dissolves into the abstract, mirroring Islamic aesthetics where geometry and form intertwine as pathways to transcendence.



In *The Windowless Window*, inspired by Shah Niyaz Ahmad Barelvi's verse—"In the fervor of love, the threads of being seared, / The fabric of body, form, self; all charred now, come what may"—the painting captures the paradox of mystical perception: to see beyond vision itself. The motif of a window without transparency becomes a metaphor for unveiling that occurs precisely through veiling. The work aligns with Jean-Luc Marion's notion of the "saturated phenomenon" (*Being Given* 1998), where excess overwhelms the gaze, forcing the viewer into a posture of contemplative surrender.



In "The Spinning Wheel of Love," inspired by Bulleh Shah's verse—"Beloved, to catch a glimpse of Thee, I place my charkha in the lane outside. People think I spin cotton, but I truly weave the thread of Thy memory"—the everyday act of spinning is elevated into mystical remembrance. Using mixed media, the charkha is transposed into circular movements and textured threads across the canvas, enacting both material craft and spiritual weaving. This aligns with Sufi poetics, where ordinary labor

becomes a vehicle for divine memory, echoing Merleau-Ponty's idea that "the visible itself has an invisible inner framework" (*Eye and Mind* 150).



In *Wajd! (Ecstasy)*, inspired by Wasif Ali Wasif's verse—"Main shamm-e-farozan hoon, main aatish-e-larza hoon, / Main sozish-e-hijraan hoon, main manzil-e-parwana!"—the act of adaptation becomes an attempt to transpose the ineffable tremor of mystical ecstasy into visual presence. The bowed head and interlaced hands, poised above a swirling field of blue encircling a radiant moon, do not merely illustrate the poetic lines but enact their experiential intensity. Here, adaptation functions as a

hermeneutics of state (hāl), where the turbulence of longing and the stillness of surrender converge in painterly form.

The painting embodies what adaptation theory often overlooks: the transference not of narrative but of affect and ontology. As Linda Hutcheon insists, “adaptation is repetition without replication” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 7), and in this case, the painting repeats the ecstatic gesture of the poem without replicating its linguistic structure. The luminous vortex at the canvas’s center stages what Ibn ‘Arabi describes as the lifting of the veil, where “ecstasy is the unveiling of the Real to the heart” (*Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*). Thus, the visual form becomes a site where the metaphysics of love manifests beyond the discursive, a saturated phenomenon in Jean-Luc Marion’s sense—an excess that overwhelms representation and opens the viewer to presence.



Finally, Ghada (Pot), inspired by Shah Bahu's ecstatic verse, visualizes the dissolution of self into divine remembrance: "My constant remembrance of Your name merged me into You, / All trace of me was erased until there was nothing left but You!" The overflowing pot, spilling luminous colors, gestures toward the Sufi imagery of wine and intoxication, yet transfigures it into a cosmic event of union. The painting is not a static symbol but a performative outpouring, resonant with Ibn 'Arabi's

claim that divine love overflows from the Lover to the beloved, and from the beloved to the cosmos” (Futuhat al-Makkiyya).

Through these works, the practice of painting becomes a phenomenological encounter with mystical verse, not as object but as presence. The viewer is invited not to decode but to dwell, to inhabit the interstitial space where poetry and image meet. In this sense, the artwork does not belong to the artist alone but, as Gadamer insists, becomes a “festival” of shared meaning (*Truth and Method* 123), in which the sacred is disclosed anew in each act of beholding. Such artistic enactments reveal adaptation not as aesthetic decoration but as a metaphysical dialogue—where poet, painter, and viewer meet within the horizon of presence.

Adaptation as Metaphysical Dialogue

The study of Sufism has often oscillated between interpretations that reduce it to a cognitive construct and those that view it as a distinct religious order. Yet, as many scholars note, its seeds of asceticism and spirituality are universal, “found in every religion, both heavenly and non-heavenly” (Amin Yusuf 77). In Islam, this tendency manifests as the call to detach from worldly pleasures in pursuit of proximity to God. Sufism is therefore not an isolated sect but “a spiritual doctrine in life and a path for spiritual elevation” (al-Tusi 249), intimately tied to jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy. Its central epistemology rests upon experiential knowledge (*ma‘rifa*), which arises only through mutual love between the servant and the Lord—what Ibn ‘Arabi would call the “fusion with the divine self” (Futuhat II: 276). This relational knowledge defines the connection between the self and being, producing states of wonder that become both spiritual and aesthetic.

Such states have historically manifested through institutions like the *zawiya* (Sufi lodge), which in Algeria and elsewhere provided not only spiritual retreat but also education, social cohesion, and even resistance against occupation. The Sufi’s life, thus, cannot be understood outside its social and artistic dimensions. Clothing, for instance, was never merely material but symbolic of humility, detachment, and inner purity. As al-Sarraj noted in *al-Luma‘*, “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” (249). Yet, as the saint al-Daghoughi insisted, external appearance was never the essence: the color of the garment does not necessarily reflect the sincerity of the heart” (al-Tadili 222). Outward form functioned as a vehicle for inner meaning—a principle that resonates directly with visual art.

From its earliest expressions in calligraphy, symbolism, and abstraction, Islamic art was often understood as a Sufi gesture: a refusal of mere mimesis and a reaching toward the metaphysical.

When one abandons imitating nature,” Christoph observes, one achieves an ideal representation of nature in the artwork” (68). This principle reflects the Sufi’s own desire to transcend the sensible in order to reach the Real (al-ḥaqq). Henri Bremond, writing of mystical poetics, captured this continuity between Sufi states and aesthetics: 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” (qtd. in Edgar 93). Similarly, Bergson’s notion of intuition as “a kind of revelation or mystical witnessing” (Karima 78) echoes Ibn ‘Arabi’s claim that the heart must unite reason and imagination in order to perceive truth. Both the philosopher and the mystic insist that artistic vision is itself a metaphysical act.

This convergence also explains the deep intersections between Sufism and modern plastic art. Abstraction, in particular, shares with Sufism the desire to move beyond form into the domain of pure presence. As Afif Bahnassi argued, Abstraction is a search for pure, absolute beauty...a movement toward the absolute, toward beauty itself, abstracted from utility” (90). Artists like Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian thus created what Marcel Brion called “a new type of religious art with a much greater human meaning” (Bowness 204). Their quest parallels the Sufi’s, who, as Hujwiri explained, sees robe and cloak as equal once “a man understands the way” (al-Hasan 245). Just as the Sufi dissolves the distinction between appearance and essence, abstract art dissolves the boundary between representation and presence, opening a threshold into the ineffable.

Henry Corbin's remark that "the image is a mediatrix between the sensible and the intelligible" (Creative Imagination 12) helps us understand adaptation as a metaphysical dialogue. The visual translation of Sufi poetry is not a commentary but a threshold experience. The canvas, like the poem, mediates between the visible ('ālam al-shahāda) and the unseen ('ālam al-ghayb). Its brushstrokes, spirals, and textures do not explain but rather perform what the poem gestures toward—an opening of vision. Merleau-Ponty's claim that "the visible itself has an invisible inner framework, and it is this invisible which gives it depth and makes it a world" (*Eye and Mind* 150) resonates here, for the artwork functions as an "opening upon Being." It enacts, phenomenologically, what Jean-Luc Marion terms the "saturated phenomenon": a manifestation that overwhelms perception and exceeds conceptual grasp (*Being Given* 199).

Thus, the adaptation of Sufi poetry into visual art is not descriptive but transformative. It enacts the very logic of mystical knowing—ma'rifā—as presence. As Chittick explains of Ibn 'Arabi, "To know God is not to define Him, but to be present with Him" (*Sufi Path of Knowledge* 79). In this sense, the painting born of Sufi verse is not an object to be consumed but a site of spiritual hospitality, a dwelling place for the beholder. Each act of viewing becomes a rehearsal of mystical vision, a re-enactment of longing, and, potentially, a glimpse of the Real. Fidelity to the poem lies not in reproducing its form but in sustaining its gesture toward the ineffable—a metaphysical dialogue that unites the poet, the painter, and the viewer in the horizon of presence.

Conclusion

The act of translating Sufi mystical poetry into visual form cannot be contained within the logic of representation or fidelity. Rather, it must be understood as a hermeneutic and phenomenological process, one that enacts presence instead of reproducing text. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's claim that vision is a form of dwelling, Heidegger's understanding of art as the disclosure of being, and van Manen's insistence that art "enacts the meaning of experience," this study has argued that visual

adaptations of Sufi poetry should be seen as sites where perception itself becomes a form of mystical witnessing (*mushāhada*). In this way, adaptation emerges less as a derivative act and more as a creative participation in the unfolding of truth.

The intersemiotic translation of Sufi poetry into visual art cannot, therefore, be reduced to illustration. Within the mystical tradition, where language itself strains under the weight of the ineffable, adaptation becomes an extension of the poem's ontological gesture rather than its content. To paint Rūm's flight, Khusrau's color, or Bulleh Shah's *charkha* is not to fix meaning in pigment but to open a parallel field of resonance, where form, texture, and presence enact what words themselves intimate but cannot contain. As Gadamer reminds us, the artwork becomes a site of a "fusion of horizons" (*Truth and Method* 306), an imaginal threshold where the sacred is mediated through aesthetic presence.

Placed within the horizon of phenomenology and Sufi epistemology, the image is more than representation: it is mediation. Henry Corbin's insight that "the image is a mediatrix between the sensible and the intelligible" (*Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* 12) and Ibn 'Arabi's insistence that "the heart has two eyes, reason and imagination" (*Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* II: 276) find concrete enactment here. The adapted artwork unites rational interpretation with imaginal vision, staging what Merleau-Ponty called the "invisible inner framework" of the visible (*Eye and Mind* 150). Phenomenologically, the adapted artwork manifests as a "saturated phenomenon" in Jean-Luc Marion's sense (*Being Given* 199): it overwhelms conceptual grasp through its givenness, disclosing more than the eye can contain.

Such adaptations thus function not as commentaries on mystical poetry but as continuations of their ontological unfolding. They are less mirrors than doorways, less illustrations than prayers. To adapt visually is to engage in *dhikr* through form, a remembrance enacted in line, color, and texture. What emerges is what William Chittick calls *ma'rifa*: a knowledge born of being-with rather than

knowing-about (*Sufi Path of Knowledge* 79). The visual artwork, like the poem, is therefore not ancillary to mystical experience but constitutive of it, disclosing its truth by prolonging its resonance. Ultimately, adaptation here is not an end but a passage — a perpetual unveiling in which poet and painter, reader and viewer, remain pilgrims of the Real. The work of art becomes a site of hospitality, a festival of meaning in which the Beloved discloses Himself anew. In this sense, the intersemiotic translation of Sufi poetry affirms the profound kinship between phenomenology and Sufi aesthetics: both insist that art is not about mystical experience but one of its privileged sites of manifestation.

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