

Original Research Article

The Manifestation of the Mystical Thoughts of Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallāj in the Works of Erol Akyavash & Mansoureh Hosseini*

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Abstract

The examination and understanding of the concepts and teachings of Islamic mysticism within the underlying structure of painting, and reflection upon them, constitute essential research requirements in the contemporary era. Mysticism is an intuitive and love-centered perspective on existence, and art within Islamic civilization has drawn upon this outlook, thereby attaining a status distinct from that of art in the West. The presence of the artist in Islamic civilization extends beyond that of a mere creator of works; it is a presence imbued with knowledge of the Truth—knowledge rooted in wisdom and esoteric beliefs that manifests itself through lines, geometric motifs, letters, and colors. This study investigates the manner in which the ideas of Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallāj have influenced and been reflected in the works of contemporary artists in the Islamic world, with Especially the works of Erol Akyavash and Mansoureh Hosseini. The research aims to identify the impact of mystical thought on the works of artists in the Islamic world and to examine symbolic expression in the selection of visual elements, employing a descriptive–analytical methodology and drawing on documentary sources. The findings of the research indicate that Iranian–Islamic mysticism is present throughout the surviving works of these two contemporary artists, and that in certain themes—particularly in relation to the thought of Ḥallaj—they exhibit a perceptible affinity. Moreover, a number of contemporary artists of the Islamic world have drawn inspiration from al-Ḥallāj’s ideas, incorporating them into their artistic works in the form of abstract compositions with an emphasis on textual and discursive elements.

Keywords: *Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallāj, Contemporary Art of the Islamic World, Erol Akyavash, Mansoureh Hosseini.*

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Mansoureh Hoseini)” that under supervision of Dr. “Hojat Amani” which has been done at Sepehr Non-Governmental Higher Education Institute, Isfahan, Iran in 2023.

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Introduction

The relationship between spirituality and art is an interdisciplinary topic. The artist in the traditional world, like a mystic or a seeker refines their soul for deeper intuition and understanding, and art reflects the artist's beliefs, worldview, and inner states. In the historical and cultural evolution of Islamic societies, painting influenced by the thought and aesthetic sensibility of Iranian-Islamic mysticism is considered an art form that links the function of art, mystical taste, and speaks of the absolute in a distinct mode of expression. One of the most fundamental concepts in theoretical mysticism is the notion of the Unity of Being, a concept to which all other mystical principles ultimately refer, either directly or indirectly from the mystics' perspective, existence is nothing but the manifestation of a single reality namely, the being of the divine and what appears as diverse beings is merely the determinations, relational states, domains, and manifestations of that absolute reality entities that possess no independent existence of their own. If these manifestations are viewed as separate from that singular reality, they amount to nothing but non-existence; yet when regarded through a divine perspective grounded in unity, their existence becomes meaningful and real (Jafari, 2009, 73–96). A considerable number of contemporary artists in the Islamic world, inspired by mysticism particularly the thought of al-Hallaj and drawing upon their personal experiences and emotions, have created innovative works. Their aim has been to evoke emotions and cultivate shared sentiments with their audiences in order to establish a spiritual connection. Traditional thought regards art as a symbol and manifestation of meaning and spirituality arising from the heart and soul of the enlightened and mystically inclined human being. Nevertheless, in the contemporary world despite the remarkable expansion of artistic branches and tendencies the spirit of "spirituality"

within art has witnessed a marked decline. Consequently, the necessity of such studies serves as a reminder for contemporary artists to ensure that their creative works remain connected to the source of truth, beauty, and the spirit of spirituality, for any endeavor undertaken without divine guidance is bound to be unstable. Within this context, the present study aims to analyze the influence of mystical thought particularly the teachings of Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallāj on two prominent contemporary artists of the Islamic world: Erol Akyavash (a Turkish Muslim artist) and Mansoureh Hosseini (an Iranian artist). This research seeks to elucidate the connection between art and mysticism in their works, while also emphasizing the necessity of spirituality in contemporary art.

Research Background

In the field of Eastern literature and knowledge, numerous studies have been conducted on the theology and mysticism of Ḥallaj; however, research on the influence of his ideas on contemporary art remains limited. In the context of examining the works of the two artists, Akyavash and Hosseini, studies have been conducted in the form of theses, articles, and books. An article titled "The Position of Mansour Ḥallaj in Turkish Literature with an Emphasis on His Influence on Akyavash's Works" (Ounel, 2003). The article provides a brief definition of the concepts of Sufi and Sufism and introduces Ḥallaj in Turkish literature, making a concise and selective reference to Akyavash's limited use of mystical love symbols derived from Ḥallaj's teachings. Another article titled Erol Akyavash was published in Istanbul by Inankur (2007) The article discusses the life and works of Akyavash, briefly highlighting the artist's influence by Sufism and Islamic mysticism. Another article titled "Analysis and Examination of Erol Akyavash's Calligraphic

Works within the Context of Modern Turkish Culture” (Hejazi & Amani, 2022) was published in the *Art and Civilization of the East* journal, focusing exclusively on Akyavash’s calligraphic works. Another article titled “The Evolution of Islamic Calligraphy in Contemporary Turkey” (Amani & Farahmand Daro, 2021) discusses the significance of calligraphy in Islamic societies, its prominence in Turkey, and the trends of its transformation in recent years. In addition, a number of articles on Akyavash’s works have been published, primarily in Turkish or English, which briefly reference the presence of Islamic mystical concepts in his art; however, a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between his works and Ḥallaj’s ideas has not yet been provided. Regarding Mansoureh Hosseini, a study titled “Examining the Use of Script in the Works of Contemporary Iranian Female Modernist Painters” (Afshari, 2020) has been conducted, which analyzes her works from a formalist perspective. Overall, no study has yet explored the influence of Islamic mysticism, and Sufi thought—particularly the ideas of Ḥallaj—manifested in the written elements of these artists’ works. The present research aims to fill this gap and provide a detailed examination of the subject.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in key concepts of Islamic mysticism, such as the Unity of Being, the Perfect Human, and the controversial notion of “Anā al-Ḥaqq”. These concepts, among the most significant epistemological and intuitive foundations of Muslim mystics, can be directly traced in Ḥallaj’s thought and conduct, and over the centuries have served as a source of inspiration for numerous artists across various fields, particularly in the visual arts. Within the context of Islamic mysticism, the concept of the Unity of Being refers to an intuitive understanding of the oneness of existence, in

which the distinction between Creator and creation diminishes in the mystical experience. The concept of the Unity of Being, which was systematized in the medieval period, particularly through the ideas of Ibn Arabi, refers to the oneness of the essence of existence. A mystically inclined artist manifests this unity in their work through abstract forms, modernist approaches, and dissolving structures (Ibn Arabi, 2002; Nasr, 2010). Artists inspired by this perspective often move away from formalist structures and toward the depiction of infinity, light, and symbolism, which embody signs of unity and annihilation. The concept of the Perfect Human, which was emphasized in Ḥallaj’s thought and later in the works of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, represents the comprehensive manifestation of divine names and attributes. In art, this concept is expressed through depictions of sacred faces, bodies imbued with transcendental grandeur, or symbols of intuitive power and creativity, represented via color, light, or motifs such as circles, mirrors, and trees, serving as artistic metaphors for the Perfect Human (Chittick, 2007). However, the most significant and prominent element in Ḥallaj’s thought, particularly reflected in art, is the written expression “Anā al-Ḥaqq,” a phrase arising not from assertion, but from the experience of mystical unity and annihilation. This phrase has been controversial not only in the history of Islamic thought but has also been reinterpreted in artistic works, often through indicators such as the omission of the face, the use of light or flames, the segmentation of the body, and the presence of letters or script in an abstract manner. This phrase has not only been a subject of controversy throughout the history of Islamic thought, but it has also been reinterpreted within artistic practices through visual strategies such as the erasure of the face, the use of light or flame, the fragmentation of the body, and the incorporation of highly abstracted letters or script.

These reflections are most often conveyed through a visual language that, rather than offering direct representation, encodes meanings and evokes mystical contemplation. In this regard, employing reflection theories in art combined with a mystical and semiotic reading of the works makes it possible to analyze how these concepts are embodied in contemporary painting. Such an approach enables the researcher to uncover the hidden semantic layers within artistic creations and to elucidate their relationship to the mystical thought of Ḥallaj. Themes, creativity, and visual relationships such as forms, colors, shapes, and the distinctive cultural and regional elements of Islamic countries constitute key features that shape the identity of painting within the Islamic world. Motifs freed from inherent denotations shaped under the dominance of abstract painting are indebted to interpretations that employ the abstraction of these forms as a medium for attaining spirituality in art (Khademi, 2002).

Research Method

From a methodological standpoint, this study is a developmental theoretical research endeavor aimed at expanding mystical concepts within the analysis of contemporary art. Methodologically, this study employs a descriptive analytical approach, focusing on the comparative examination of symbolic and semantic content in relation to established mystical concepts. It aims to elucidate and analyze the reflection of Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallāj, such as the Unity of Being, the Perfect Human, and “Anā al-Ḥaqq” in the paintings of two contemporary artists from the Islamic world. Data collection has been conducted through library-based research, drawing upon classical mystical texts (such as the works of Ḥallāj, Ibn ‘Arabī, etc.), contemporary interpretations, as well as articles, catalogues, and artistic documents related to the works and artistic careers of Akyavash

and Hosseini. Data analysis has been carried out through an interpretive method aimed at uncovering messages, signs, and meanings embedded within the works, enabling the researcher to explore the hidden semantic layers of the artworks in relation to mystical concepts. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the research population consists of contemporary Islamic paintings with mystical themes, in which references or inspirations from Ḥallaj’s thought are evident. The research samples have been selected purposively and selectively. Among these, the works of Akyavash, a Turkish artist, employ Islamic architecture, calligraphy, and mystical myths to convey the concepts of the Unity of Being and annihilation, and the works of Hosseini, an Iranian painter who employs line and form to embody mystical and intuitive experiences, have been selected as the study samples. For data analysis, a qualitative content analysis method was employed, focusing on uncovering the messages, signs, and meanings within the text or phenomenon.

Findings

In this study, content analysis, as a qualitative and interpretive method, is considered an effective tool for exploring the hidden layers and latent meanings within artworks. By identifying and describing the main features and elements of Iranian mysticism, examining Ḥallaj’s ideas, and introducing its symbols and codes, this approach enables the analysis of selected works and the elucidation of the mystical symbols manifested in these artists’ creations according to their personal language and style. In the conducted studies, besides the few artists influenced by Ḥallaj’s life and thought, a case study analysis was carried out on the works of Erol Akyavash (over 50 works on Iranian–Islamic mysticism and 14 works titled “Ḥallaj” as a collection) and Mansoureh Hosseini (a significant number of works related to mysticism and Ḥallaj’s

ideas) to examine how specific mystical concepts, such as the Unity of Being, the Perfect Human, and “Anā al-Ḥaqq,” are reflected in the works of these contemporary artists.

• **Erol Akyavash (1932–1999 CE / 1311–1378 SH)**

“The dervish who turned his brush into a rosary and spoke dhikr upon the canvas.”

The contemporary Turkish-Muslim artist establishes a connection between painting and Islamic architecture in his works, reflecting profound mystical concepts such as the Unity of Being and annihilation. The visual structure of his works, utilizing geometric forms, curved lines, and contrasting color combinations, reflects his mystical worldview. A study of Akyavash’s personal life indicates that he was profoundly influenced in his artistic journey by Iranian mystical texts, including Shabistari’s *Golshan Raz* and the poetry of Rumi. *Golshan Raz*, composed in response to the questions of Amirhosseini Haravi¹ particularly in its seventh, eighth, and tenth questions, addresses topics such as the mystery of unity, the recognition of the mystic, and the utterance of “Anā al-Ḥaqq” by the perfected ones. It is evident that through reflection on these themes, Akyavash attained an intuitive understanding of Iranian mysticism, particularly the ideas of Ḥallāj, and endeavored to convey them to the audience through the language of visual art. The coexistence of contrasting elements in his works reflects the mystic’s experience of confronting the absolute Truth. In particular, the use of vivid colors and abstract structures may allude to the moment of the soul’s dissolution and annihilation in God (*fana fi-Allah*). On the other hand, the use of broken lines, abstract forms, and the avoidance of direct representation conveys a sense of ‘facelessness,’ which, in Islamic mysticism, is interpreted as transcending the external manifestations and attaining the divine essence. This tendency is evident in Akyavash’s

works, particularly in the set of 14 pieces related to al-Hallaj, where the direct influence of al-Hallaj’s thought on their conceptual and visual structure can be traced. In his works, Akyavash does not merely represent the outward appearance of mystical concepts; rather, through his unique visual language, he depicts the inner, lived experience of notions such as Ana al-Ḥaqq. In this context, his works can be regarded as a sincere reflection of Iranian-Islamic mysticism within a contemporary framework (Table 1).

Fig. 1, presented within a horizontal frame dominated by shades of blue, creates a contemplative and dreamlike atmosphere. The curved, undulating lines that stretch diagonally across the canvas convey an inner fluidity and a concealed movement that invites the viewer to transcend perceptible boundaries and enter an experience beyond the material world. This movement symbolizes the passage from darkness to light (Shariati, 1993). The focal point of the work is the phrase “Ana al-Ḥaqq”, which appears at the center, emphasized in gray. Beyond its visual function, this phrase carries a symbolic and ontological significance, evoking the process of moving from ignorance and darkness toward the light of truth. The placement of “Ana” within the darker area and “al-Ḥaqq” within the illuminated section reflects a monistic worldview, one that regards absolute existence as belonging solely to the Divine essence and understands the material world as a manifestation of this unity. The presence of this phrase not only alludes to the story of al-Hallaj’s death and the burning of his body, but also depicts the manifestation of the union between the divine (*lahūt*) and the human realm (*nāsūt*). In Akyavash’s fourteen works titled al-Hallaj, seven of them (Figs. 2, 3 & 4) maintain the same framing and similar dimensions, employing identical techniques and tools. Although their structural layout and overall composition resemble

Table 1. Visual and textual elements employed in the works of Erol Akyavash. Source: Authors.

Visual elements	Mystical/Sufi meanings
Ana al-Haqq	Meaning “I am God”; symbolizes the union of the lover with the beloved, unity of existence, and expresses al-Hallaj’s spiritual state.
Dot	The smallest visual element symbolizes the origin of existence, the creator, absolute unity; the starting point of letters in calligraphy; Ibn Arabi: “The One is the dot.”
Circle	Symbol of the movement of existence, unity, the Perfect Human, and al-Hallaj’s inner spiritual journey. Tawasin: “The circle indicates one who has attained the truth.”
Square	Four equal sides symbolize stability, justice, balance, and the union of opposites in Islamic architecture (four-iwan design); the esoteric interpretation of the Kaaba represents harmony as the highest virtue and complete knowledge leading to absolute truth.
Triangle	A multifaceted symbol; three sides and three vertices represent the three stages of the soul: commanding (nafs ammāra), reproachful (nafs lawwāma), and tranquil (nafs mutmāinna); signifies the return to the origin and unity through every birth and death.
Cube	Three-dimensional shape referencing the Kaaba, the center of the Earth, symbolizes the manifestation of unity within multiplicity; it indicates the Qibla direction and spiritual center in Islamic art.
Black	Veiling of truth; burning love infused with ecstasy; grandeur and light of the Divine essence; seventh rank relates to majesty, symbol of transcendence; associated with the Kaaba’s black curtain; Night of Ascension; Rumi: “The night was brighter than the day at that moment.”
White	Light, purity, divine beauty, clarity, innocence; unity in multiplicity; garments of Ihram; light of primordial nature.
Blue	Symbolizes infinity and eternity; dark water signifies mourning among Sufis; sky and deep water represent connection to the beyond.
Red	Martyrdom, suffering, and execution of al-Hallaj symbolize freedom and courage. al-Hallaj: “I cut my heart with my own hand.”
Gold	Light of Truth; manifestation of divine names; illumination in Persian miniature and gilding.
Gray	Moderation, neutrality; burning of al-Hallaj; boundary between existence and non-existence.
Purple	Royal and rare color in spiritual practice symbolizes spiritual transformation.
Letter Alif	Upright and vertical; symbolizes the oneness of God and absolute unity.
Letter Waw	Connector between creation and Creator; love; linking ring in “Hu” or the “Waw of Union” in Sufism.
Labyrinth	Complex path of spiritual journey; difficult stages of mystical practice; wonder (“Labyrinth of existence”) in Islamic–Platonic philosophy.
Illegible letters and lines	Visual disorder symbolizes mystery, the unheard language of mystics, and awe.
Vertical structure	Up–down extension; spiritual ascent; connection to the beyond; reminiscent of minarets and the Tree of Tuba.
Horizontal structure	Calmness, stability; dwelling in the stage of vision; horizon in miniature painting; River Tigris.
Diagonal/ slanted structure	Movement, journey, crossing material boundaries; intersection of the earthly and celestial realms.

one another, each painting is rendered uniquely through distinct chromatic arrangements and Each work carries different meanings within the framework of a single mystical theme, and this diversity reflects the artist’s intuitive perception

and profound understanding of Sufism and al-Hallaj’s thought.

The circular element holds a prominent position within this series. In Islamic mysticism, the circle symbolizes perfection, unity, and the perpetual



Fig. 1. Akyavash, al-Hallaj, 1987, 190 × 350 cm, acrylic on canvas. Source: <https://artam.com/sanatcilar/erol-akyavas-1932-1999>



Fig. 2. Akyavash, al-Hallaj, 1988, 57 × 80 cm, acrylic on handmade Indian paper. Source: <https://artam.com/sanatcilar/Erol-akyavash-1932-1999>



Fig. 3. Akyavash, al-Hallaj, 1989, 70 × 92 cm, acrylic on handmade Indian paper. Source: <https://www.alifart.com/erol-akyavas/2013:68>

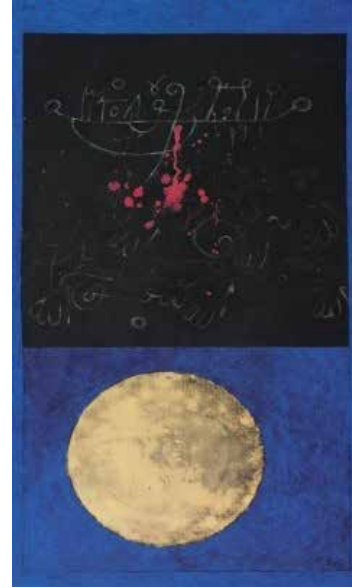


Fig. 4. Akyavash, al-Hallaj, 1989, 73 × 131 cm, mixed media on canvas. Source: <https://artam.com/muzayede/262-cagdas-sanat-eserleri/erol-akyavas-1932-1999-hallac-i-mansur-2>

motion of the soul; its central point, as both the origin and the goal of existence, represents the absolute truth (Ibn Arabi, 2014). By employing this symbol, Akyavash highlights concepts such as the Perfect Human, al-Hallaj, and the manifestation of divine truth in the human form. In the *Tawasin* treatise attributed to al-Hallaj, the circle is also interpreted as a sign of the realization of truth and the culmination of the spiritual journey, al-Hallaj writes: “He who attains the truth has no way to enter or exit, but becomes lost at the center of the truth.”

“I rested in peace, like a compass at ease
Yet the course of fate finally enclosed me within a
point”² (Hafiz Shirazi, 2007)

For example, in the composition of Fig. 2, a red rectangle is placed within a larger black rectangle. In the semiotic system of Islamic mysticism, red, in addition to alluding to blood and martyrdom, signifies the warmth of love and the burning of the lover in the fire of divine knowledge—a love not of suffering, but “a pleasure that is attained only through burning” (Rumi, 1996). It is worth

noting the correspondence of this work with a Qudsi hadith, in which divine love reaches its peak, to the extent that the Beloved slays the lover and personally pays the blood-price: “مَنْ طَلَبَنِي وَجَدَنِي و...، و مَنْ قَتَلْتَهُ فَعَلَيْ دِينِهِ، و مَنْ عَلَيَّ دِينَهُ فَأَنَا دِينُهُ.” (Hassanzadeh, 1986)³. This hadith forms the foundation of al-Hallaj’s love-centered worldview; he even composed a verse affirming its meaning:

انى لراض بما يُرضيك من تلفى
يا قاتلى و لما تختارُ أختارُ (Sheibi, 1993)

“I am indeed content to be destroyed by Your will. O my slayer! You are the one who chooses, and whatever path you choose, I choose as well.” Overall, in these seven works, Akyavash employs form, color, and calligraphic signs to depict concepts such as the Perfect Human, divine love, annihilation (*fanā*), consent to death, and the union of the lover and the Beloved. Without relying on narrative representation, these images offer an affective–conceptual reinterpretation of al-Hallaj’s thought, mystical station, and his love-infused martyrdom—an aspect repeatedly emphasized within the Islamic mystical tradition.

• **Mansoureh Hosseini (1926–2012 CE/1305–1391 SH)**

“If, after my death, I were to become white patches dancing across the blue expanse of the sky, that would be the most beautiful image of death.”

She is a pioneering Iranian modernist artist and among the first figures to detach Persian script from the context of classical calligraphy and introduce it into the realm of modern painting. In many of her works, the script becomes detached from its linguistic meaning and transforms into a vehicle for expressing mystical intuition. In her works, these lines are not merely the inscription of letters, but rather a representation of an “inner movement of the spirit,” shaped by the artist’s personal experiences and her mystical perspective. Given that, in Islamic mysticism, the Perfect Human is regarded as the manifestation of all divine

attributes, Hosseini’s use of vivid, intense colors combined with geometric lines can be interpreted as an allusion to the concept of the Perfect Human. Through the combination of linear forms and vibrant colors within an abstract approach, she reflects mystical concepts such as *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being), *fana* (annihilation), and *ana al-haqq* in her works. For her, painting is a path toward *fana*—as if with every brushstroke she draws herself closer to annihilation to unveil the truth (Table 2).

Fig. 5, *Ana al-Haqq* by Mansoureh Hosseini, is not merely a reflection of Iranian-Islamic mysticism within modern art; rather, it represents the manifestation of the innermost layers of the artist’s soul, which could not have been created—or rendered enduring—without establishing a connection with her own divinity. In visual analysis, the composition of the work is square-shaped; in spiritual geometry, the square signifies stability, balance, structure, perfection, and presence, holding a fundamental role in Islamic architecture and calligraphy. The blue background and the free, intertwined brushstrokes evoke the turbulence of a river, as well as purity and infinity. This blue can be interpreted as the manifestation of the Tigris River, which is both the historical site of al-Hallaj’s martyrdom and a metaphor for the continuous journey of the human spirit toward the Divine. The phrase *Ana al-Haqq*—this resonant expression—represents al-Hallaj’s fiery proclamation before the truth. Rendered in red and inverted at the center of the composition, it does not appear as ordinary writing but in a reversed form. This inversion is not merely a visual play; rather, it constitutes the most thought-provoking interpretive aspect of the work. The phrase or letters are to be read in a mirror reflection. Here, the mirror serves as a metaphor for whose inner self? Is the mirror a metaphor for the artist’s inner self, proclaiming the truth from within? Or is the

Table 2. Visual and textual elements employed in the works of Mansoureh Hosseini. Source: Authors.

Visual elements	Mystical/Sufi meanings
Ana al-Haqq	Unity of existence; reference to al-Hallaj; annihilation of the self before the Divine; full manifestation of fanā fi Allāh.
Ali	The Perfect Human, spiritual pole (Qutb); manifestation of knowledge, divine love, absolute justice; esoteric interpreter of the Qur'an.
Simurgh	The Perfect Human: symbol of the Divine essence; manifestation of multiplicity within unity; mystical ascent in Attar's Conference of the Birds.
Square	Symbol of the Throne, four elements, four human temperaments; balance and stability; a static but profoundly harmonious structure.
Broad, curved brushstrokes	Evokes traditional Islamic architecture: domes, prayer halls, reminiscent of spiritual spaces in mosques and inner mystical journeys.
Floral motif (Boteh Jogh)	Free-spirited woman; symbol of growth, rebirth, immortality; in Sufism, represents the moving soul.
White	Sacredness, purity, innocence; unity within multiplicity; pure light.
Gold	Spirit, knowledge, Divine light, radiance of Truth; the highest rank of existence.
Red	Blood, martyrdom, burning love, suffering, and annihilation symbolize al-Hallaj and the status of the martyr.
Blue	The Divine, infinity, sky, River Tigris, Divine mercy; mystical introspection.
Green	Spirituality, guidance, the saints (Awliyā'), the Ahl al-Bayt; the highest mystical concepts.
Illegible lines	Symbol of the unseen truth; language of the mystics; points to the incapacity of reason to fully grasp mystical vision.
Fragmented letters and words	Multiplicity within unity; manifestation of Divine Names and Attributes; transformation of "Name" into "Meaning."
Vertical structure	Elevation, ascent, spiritual journey (Mi'rāj); movement from earth to heavens; the seeker's path toward the Divine.
Horizontal structure	Expanses of existence, river of life, flow of mystical vision; movement through time and space; in some works, symbolizes the River Tigris.



Fig. 5. Hosseini, Ana al-Haqq, 1978, oil on canvas. Source: Delzendeh, 2016, 342.

viewer, as an observer, meant to confront this visual mirror and read the truth within the reflection of their own soul? Or perhaps it represents Mansour al-Hallaj at the moment of unity with the Divine, speaking no longer in the language of mortals but in the language of the Truth, with this inversion signifying higher mystical insight and direct apprehension of reality.

Your radiant face has become the mirror of the soul

My soul and yours have been one⁴ (Rumi, 1967)

Mansoureh Hosseini's Ana al-Haqq is, in terms of structure and form, an abstract and modern painting; yet in its essence and meaning, it is a deeply mystical work, rooted in the exploration of transcendental concepts such as fana, martyrdom,

unity, and contemplation of the Truth. This work clearly demonstrates how Iranian modern art can establish a profound and generative coexistence with Islamic mysticism.

“Yad-e Yek Hamaseh” (Fig. 6) offers a visual expression of a multilayered and dimensional truth, which, through the language of abstract visuality, invites the viewer to a profound contemplation of martyrdom, divine love, and unity. The title of the work, its colors, the composition of lines, and the dynamic movement of the brush all serve to represent a spiritual-historical event. The horizontal rectangular frame conveys a sense of flow, continuity, and expansion across time and space, rendering the work’s space like a flowing river—the Tigris River, the very place where al-Hallaj’s ashes were scattered. The dark and light blue brushstrokes evoke a visual sense of waves, turbulence, depth, and infinity. In mysticism, particularly in Hosseini’s works, blue is associated with concepts such as mercy, purification, manifestation, and inner movement. The red brushstrokes, as in *Ana al-Haqq*, not only convey a dramatic and emotional effect but, within the mystical tradition, are associated with *fana fi-Allah* (annihilation in God), divine love, and the trials of the path to Truth. In this work, the patches of color, lines, and calligraphic movements, with a graceful and harmonious upward rotation, suggest the shapes of letters, through which the name “Hussein” can be discerned at a holistic glance.



Fig. 6. Hosseini, *Yad-e Yek Hamaseh* (In Memory of an Epic), 1990, 80 × 190 cm, oil on canvas. Source: <https://toosfoundation.com/fa/mansoureh-hosseini-fa>

This, in turn, is the point where the symbolic essence of the work is revealed. Although the name “Hussein” and the title of the work may immediately evoke the event of Karbala⁵ the visual structure and signs in the painting—as well as the absence of explicit Ashura motifs and the predominance of blue, clearly linked to the river—along with the work’s abstract quality and mystical serenity, all lead to the conclusion that interpreting the piece as a reference to the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Mansour al-Hallaj is more appropriate. The same individual “whose ashes were scattered into the Tigris so that no trace of him would remain, yet with each passing wave, the proclamation of *Ana al-Haqq* grew louder.” From a mystical perspective, al-Hallaj’s martyrdom embodies the manifestation of absolute love for God. He is the one who declared, “*Ana al-Haqq*,” meaning not “I,” but that his entire being has been annihilated in the Truth. This work, without directly depicting a face or phrase, conveys a narrative of *fana*, martyrdom, and unity through form, line, color, and brush movement. If in *Ana al-Haqq* the Truth was manifested through words, here the Truth emerges through movement and visual composition. “*Yad-e Yek Hamaseh*” can be seen as representative of a stage in Mansoureh Hosseini’s artistic journey, in which writing transforms into image and meaning into movement. This work is an embodiment of the flowing Truth, which, emerging from martyrdom and *fana*, attains unity and immortality.

The influence of al-Hallaj’s ideas is also manifested in the works of other contemporary artists, expressed according to their own sensibilities, interpretations, and artistic styles and techniques. Fig. 7, A video art⁶ piece on al-Hallaj by Simindokht Karamati, featuring elements such as the Sema dance, red light, a sword, and Sufi attire. Karamati employs movement and light to represent mystical insight, the soul’s

journey toward the Divine, fana, martyrdom, mystical ecstasy, and the manifestation of Ana al-Haqq. Her technique is primarily performative and experimental, conveying an intuitive understanding of al-Hallaj's death and martyrdom. **Fig. 8**, A work by Metlohan Taş, an Istanbul-based artist. Drawing on his research background in Islamic art philosophy, he achieves a form of spiritual abstraction in his works, utilizing



Fig. 7. Video art. Source: Spiritual art exhibition catalog, 2003, 111.



Fig. 8. Mixed media, 2009. Source: <https://www.dunyabizim.com/kitap/dini-islam-tavri-sunnet-bir-sik-hz-hallac-h16390.html>

calligraphy and Islamic geometric forms, and has created pieces focused on al-Hallaj. **Fig. 9**, Fana (al-Hallaj) by Bachi Jincharadze, a Georgian artist. By directly titling the work Fana, he explicitly references one of the key concepts in Islamic mysticism and al-Hallaj's teachings, depicting it visually in a fragmented and multilayered manner.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in conducting this research.

Endnotes

1. One of the mystics, poets, and writers of the 7th and 8th centuries AH.
2. Ghazal 87
3. مَنْ طَلَبَنِي وَجَدَنِي، وَ مَنْ وَجَدَنِي عَرَفَنِي، وَ مَنْ عَرَفَنِي أَحَبَّنِي، وَ مَنْ أَحَبَّنِي عَشَقَنِي، وَ مَنْ عَشَقَنِي عَشَقْتُهُ، وَ مَنْ عَشَقْتُهُ قَتَلْتُهُ، وَ مَنْ قَتَلْتُهُ فَعَلَيْ دِيْتِهِ، وَ مَنْ عَلَي دِيْتِهِ فَاَنَا دِيْتُهُ
Whoever seeks Me will find Me, and whoever finds Me will know Me, and whoever knows Me will love Me, and whoever loves Me will be passionately devoted to Me, and whoever is passionately devoted to Me, I will be devoted to him, and whoever I am devoted to, I will kill him, and whoever I kill, the blood-price is Mine; and whoever's blood-price is upon Me, I am his blood-price.
4. Divan of Shams, Ghazal No. 2243
5. The Saba News Agency (sabakhabar.ir) has interpreted this work as referring to the event of Karbala and has attributed the name "Husayn" in it to Husayn ibn 'Ali
6. A form of art: the moving image.



Fig. 9. Mixed media on paper. Source: <https://www.artmajeur.com/bachijincharadze/en/artworks/14007935/fana-mansour-al-al-Hallaj>

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