

Flowing Through Stillness: *The Dance of Enlightenment*

Art has long been a tool for introspection, offering both artists and viewers a path to deeper understanding of the external and internal world. Through its universal ability to transcend language and logic, art can evoke a meditative experience, inviting many to bridge the gap between the microcosm and macrocosm, Mobina Nouri, a multi-disciplinary Iranian artist, highlights this meditative notion in her works, especially in *The Dance of Enlightenment* (2024). By utilizing intricate flows of lines, it emphasizes harmony between the repetition of orbs and interwoven figures, creating a rhythmic balance that echoes the celestial life present in this piece. Nouri creates a dynamic landscape, one that is not just a visual experience, but a vehicle for a meditative process that allows a space for personal enlightenment to be fostered. Her art transforms the act of viewing into a contemplative journey, encouraging viewers to reflect on their inner worlds.

Mobina Nouri's *The Dance of Enlightenment* is an intricate piece with a clear emphasis on pattern and linework. Curvilinear lines dominate the composition, creating movement and flow that magnetize the viewer. The focal point is a large central circle containing a human-like figure curled into itself. This central form stands out due to its isolation, contrasting with the other figures mingling and "dancing" throughout the piece. Negative space, with a dark background against light lines, enhances the figures and shapes, while a minimal palette of gold and black emphasizes the linework. The composition achieves balance through harmonious distribution of patterns, and the repetition of circular and spiral forms creates unity. The artwork conceptualizes "non-duality," suggesting interconnectedness, cosmic unity, and the fluid nature of existence. Themes of rebirth and transformation emerge through the central figure's pose,

illustrating an interconnectedness of all things, from the boundless corners of space to the complex patterns of life.

The Dance of Enlightenment, serves as a visual expression for spiritual concepts, along with being a contemporary reinterpretation of Persian art. This work blends traditional aesthetics of Persian art and spiritual ideals with modern insights. Some stylistic and conceptual parallels that Nouri engages with are the usage of ornamentation and linework, Islamic geometric patterns and themes of mysticism. Persian art, particularly in manuscript illumination, often emphasizes intricate linework and elaborate ornamentation. Nouri's intention on detailed patterns echoes this tradition, as Persian manuscripts were stylistically complex, in order to use the decorative designs as a catalyst to draw the viewers into a meditative visual experience. The Sufi's were a group of Muslim mystics that originated in the eighth century, where they started a religious movement in regions of West Asia.¹ They prioritized inner and experiential dimensions of faith, and these ideals were often reflected in their art. They used rich imagery of the cosmos and used repetition of circular imagery, due to the belief that the visual repetition served as an "unending action" and could be used as a way to gain entrance into Heaven.² The symbolism of circular motifs are also prominent in Persian architectural designs such as domes and mosaics, symbolizing unity and cosmic harmony. The central circle in *The Dance of Enlightenment*, resonates with the traditional usage in Persian art, as it also continues to place a contemporary emphasis on spiritual symmetry and balance. The color palette of this piece also draws a parallel to traditional Persian craftsmanship, as it often employed the color gold in order to exemplify

¹ Knysh, Alexander. *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*. Princeton University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77j8m>.

² Schuyler V. R. Cammann. "Religious Symbolism in Persian Art." *History of Religions* 15, no. 3 (1976): 193–208. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062524>.

feelings of divinity and luxury, especially in sacred contexts. With Nouri using a gold and black color scheme, it is a modern take on these traditional visual codes, illustrating spiritual depth.

The most prominent figures in Sufism were Rumi and Hafez, where they were celebrated for their poems. Both of their writings reflect themes of divine love and the soul's yearning for transcendence, making them icons in Persian literature.³ Their poetry inspired Persian miniature paintings and calligraphy, along with enabling contemporary artists such as Nouri, reflecting the Sufi-inspired ethos of Rumi and Hafez's works. On Nouri's online portfolio she has a guidance section on the viewing of her art, where she states "I invite you to soften the gaze, quiet the mind, allow yourself to enter a receptive state and let these words speak directly to your subconscious. These poems are not written to be read, they are here to be felt. Feel the rhythm, repetition, emptiness, fullness and the visual melodies of music. This is not a normal poetry book that you can open and read. In fact, the mystery of the words is part of the whole experience. These poems are a channel to infinity".⁴ By calling her artworks "poems", Nouri aligns herself with the Sufi tradition of intertwining art and spirituality, creating an interconnectedness of her personal vision and mystical essence found in the works of Rumi and Hafez. It is a powerful statement for Nouri to describe her art as "poems", as *The Dance of Enlightenment*, reaches beyond visual art forms and serves as a meditative experience for viewers, speaking directly to the subconscious.

"The wound is a place where the light enters you"⁵, a quote by Rumi included on Nouri's online portfolio, illustrates the central role of spiritual transformation and healing in her art. This

³ Sorkhabi, Rasoul. "Some Remarks on Rumi's Poetry: Badi' Al-Zaman Forouzanfar." *Mawlana Rumi Review* 3 (2012): 173–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45236338>.

⁴ Mobina Nouri. "Bio." Mobina Nouri. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://mobinanouri.com/about>.

⁵ Mobina Nouri. "Bio." Mobina Nouri. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://mobinanouri.com/about>.

concept resonates with *The Dance of Enlightenment*, where the rhythmic patterns reflect the meditative qualities of Persian and Islamic art. The deliberate repetition in her linework expands on the spiritual practice of dhikr, a Sufi meditation technique that emphasizes rhythm and repetition to connect with the divine.⁶ Nouri's work meshes with the broader tradition of Persian art, where geometric and vegetal patterns are used to symbolize divine presence, evoking a space of introspection and self enlightenment for the viewers. While traditional Persian art often avoids naturalistic representations of human forms, Nouri is able to integrate stylized figures in her abstract compositions (Fig 1). The figures are composed as dancing among each other with a sense of unity, emphasizing the metaphysical traditions of Persian art. Just as Rumi and Hafez used words to explore the divine, Nouri uses line and repetition in order to create visual "poems" that invite viewers into a meditative experience to reflect on the infinite macrocosm.



Figure 1
The Dance of Enlightenment (2024). Acrylic on black canvas

⁶ Shannon, Jonathan H. "The Aesthetics of Spiritual Practice and the Creation of Moral and Musical Subjectivities in Aleppo, Syria." *Ethnology* 43, no. 4 (2004): 381–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3774034>.

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