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Rumi, Mevlevi, and Whirling in Plastic Arts

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Rumi, Mevlevi, and Whirling in Plastic Arts

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Abstract

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi who described his life saying "Hamdım, yandım, piştim" which means "The summary of my life is these three statements; I was immature, I became experienced; I became enlightened" was one of the most significant philosophers of 13th century. He has been accepted by different cultures and beliefs all over the world. He was not only a poet and philosopher; he was also a man of Allah and the start of Mevlevi belief. Mevlevi under the leadership of Rumi is to devote oneself to Allah. Whirling as the most important aspect of Mevlevi is thought to be an inspiring ritual by the people all over the world. Whirling is a way for people to exhibit their love to Allah. Whirling, which is remarkable in many aspects, is also aesthetical and inspiring in terms of art. Today, artists of different nationalities and from different fields mention whirling in their own fields of art. Artists use the dance, music and clothes of whirling as the theme of art especially in plastic arts. The aim of this manifesto is to reveal the meaning and aesthetical value of whirling in the branches of art through example works of artists.

Keywords: Art, Mevlana, Mevlevi, Whirling.

Introduction

Hız. Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi who was the most respected Islamic thinker, and contributed to the history of humanity in 13th century, has been accepted by different cultures and beliefs all over the world. Mevlana, who won the hearts and confidences of people during the period when he lived and whose works have been translated into different languages since that time, was not only a thinker, he was also a man of Allah and a poet. As a result of this sophistication, books are written and research is done on Rumi even today.

Mevlana is the start of the belief of Mevlevi. The Mevlevi order is an order where followers, are connected to Allah in line with Mevlana's teachings. People who set their heart on this order try hard to be a proper servant of Allah, to discipline their desires and maintain a model life. "Whirling", which is a way of worshipping in Mevlevi, is an admirable ritual in the world. In this ritual, whirling dervishes connected to Mevleviyeh order spin with love and enthusiasm to express their love and longing for Allah. A whirling dervish becomes distant from all his earthly thoughts and worries and sets out on a spiritual journey. A Whirling dervish who is on the course of disciplining his desires gives his soul, body and self in to Allah. This whirling state which indicates submission and being a proper servant is the symbol of Mevlevi. Whirling is quite fascinating spiritually and aesthetic visually, and it has an important place in art. Whirling has been a source of inspiration not only literature, music, dance and traditional hand crafts but also plastic arts such as painting, sculpture and ceramics.

Hız. Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, Mevleviyeh and Whirling Ceremony

Mevlana Celaleddin Muhammed or with his more well known name Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was one of the most important poets and thinkers of Turkish Islamic Sufism history. According to written sources, he was born in city of Belh in Horasan, which is in Afghanistan today on 30th September 1207 (Bakırcı, 2010: 4). The source of his fondness for humanity, nature, universe and existence is the love of God. He elaborately narrated his love and longing for his God in his work. In Mesnevi, which is accepted as his most significant work, he frequently mentioned having good moral, justice, innocence and being patient and also the hazards of having bad intentions, jealousy, and arrogance on people.

Although Mevlana was not the founder of Mevlevi order, he was accepted as Master by the followers. Mevlevi, which was founded after Mevlana's death in Konya on 17th December 1273 (Bakırcı, 2010: 16) is based on Mevlana's teachings and with a love of Allah. Mevlevi whose foundations were laid by Mevlana's student, Hüsameddin Çelebi, and his older son Sultan Veled at the beginning of 14th century and it developed and became established in later years (Kara, 2007: 70).

People who wish to belong to this order undergo a difficult training process. In this training called. "Suffering for one hundred and one days",

the spirit, patience, ethics and ideas of the person are tested. These people who undergo such a challenging training are tested both spiritually and physically. The main point of life in dervish lodge, with its strict a body of rules, is to become perfect. People who want to become perfect human beings by disciplining their desires and getting away from earthly lives, discipline their spirits by Whirling.

Figure 1. *An image from Mevlevi lodge*



Whirling, which is a way of worshipping for a Sufi to show his love for Allah, is of Arabic origin and means to hear, to listen.¹ "The meaning of the word Whirling in other words hearing can be described as to meet requirements of what is heard. Whirling dervishes hear universal realities during Whirling ceremony and then, they try to behave as required" (Menteş, 2011: 26). This ritual, which has been performed since the period of Hz. Master, was organized with established rules were established by the founders and followers of the order although there were not any regulations stipulated by Mevlana.

Figure 2. *An image from the Whirling Ceremony*



¹ Turkish Language Society Turkish dictionary, Retrieved from goo.gl/2Uw19u. [Accessed: 8 April 2016]

Whirling ceremony as accepted today has very deep meanings. The clothes that whirling dervishes wear and their movements have specific symbolic meanings. Depicted the uniqueness and the oneness of Allah on the basis of the Whirling ceremony. Red hide (The default symbolic line in the place where the show is held) in the building where Mevlevi dervishes perform whirling represents Hz. Master's position. In the symbolism of whirling ceremony "Sikke" is the whirling dervish's camel's hair hat represent the tombstone of the ego and "tennure" is wide, white skirt represent to the ego's shroud (Menteş, 2011: 45 – 49). All these symbols explain that a whirling dervish looks for the truth, Grow up and turn to Allah and his love destroys his own ego. He gets away from earthly worries and keeps on living to serve Allah as a servant who is aware of existence and his own individualism.

Mevleviyeh in the Plastic Arts and Whirling

As it has been expected, Mevleviyeh and Whirling, which have deep meanings and long-standing backgrounds, have been a source of inspiration for artists in many branches of art. Mevlevi tradition trains people with the approach of fine arts and science. Mevlevi tradition prepares the person, who dedicates himself to Sufism, with a specific belief system and methods based on tradition. In Mevlevi belief, a person reaches the necessary maturity level with methods such as poetry, handicrafts and music which nourish the soul of human. According to Elibol:

Mevleviis internally grounded on monotheism; however, it interprets the universe and the creatures in the universe as divine objects. In short, it believes in the trilogy of universe-god-human. The source of this belief is Sufism. Philosophical facts which are accepted by Mevlevi are not new. Its origins go "Neo Platonism" that. Was situated a thousand years ago. New one is only ceremony and lodge. (Elibol, 2012: 94)

A large number of artists who are affected by the philosophy of Hz. Mevlana and the internal intention of Mevlevi, include dervishes, their lives and Whirling scenes in their works. The reason why this theme was treated by many artists from different cultures and beliefs throughout the history of art is that the spirituality of Sufism belief, being aesthetical figures of whirling dervishes and extraordinary lifestyles of dervishes. Mehmet Başbuğ and Fatih Başbuğ tell about the effects of Mevlevi with these words:

Mevlana Philosophy arouses the attention of literate people from East and West, becomes a sources of inspiration for painters and it is a philosophy which has deep and strong meanings and deals with "Divine Love" in a sufistic manner. This philosophy has been accepted by every sector of societies regardless of religion and analyzed with admiration (Başbuğ and Başbuğ, 2007: 488).

There are many artists affected by Mevlevi ideas, the lives of dervishes and Whirling and use these as sources of inspiration in their works. Among these artists, maybe the most prominent one is Dutch artist Rembrandt. It is known that the artist, who often depicted stories from the Bible, researched and analyzed different cultures. His work called (Figure 3) which was thought to be produced inspired by an Indian miniature is a good example. Four dervishes are seen in the painting, dressed in their traditional clothes. They sit around a table and they are under a tree. This pen, ink and wash on paper is now in Völkerkunde Museum in Berlin (Başbuğ and Başbuğ, 2007: 491).

Figure 3. *Rembrandt, Four Dervishes*



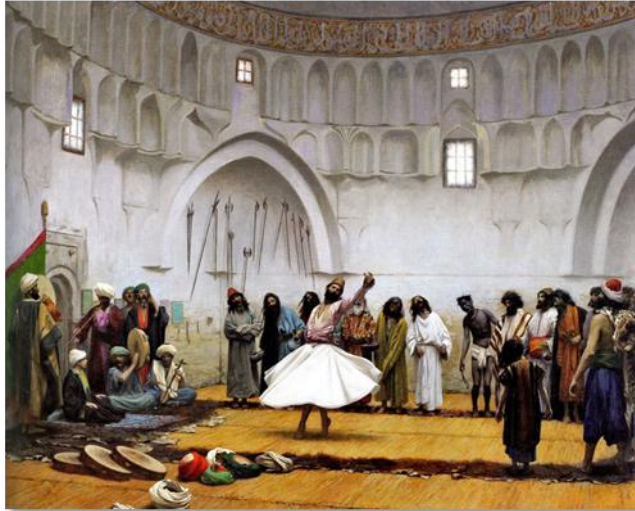
Another 17th century artist Flemish - French Jean-Baptiste van Mour, preferred Mevlevi belief and whirling dervishes as his theme. Van Mour lived in İstanbul during the Tulip Era (Period) and he usually painted portraits, İstanbul scenes and historical buildings on his canvases. His undated *Mevlevi Dervishes Whirling in Pera* (Figure 4) is elaborately worked. "The artists depicted the place in such a realistic way that the person wearing white clothes and standing in the painting is Kutb- I nayi Osman Dede who was the head, sheikh of Galata Mevlevi Lodge until 1729" (Başbuğ and Başbuğ, 2007: 493).

Figure 4. *Jean –Baptiste van Mour, Mevlevi Dervishes in Pera*



French orientalist artist Jean-Leon Gerome also produced works of art about dervishes. He is one of the pioneer artists of orientalism movement. He visited Turkey, Egypt and North Africa. One of his works of art which he produced with a quite realistic style is his painting called "The Whirling Dervish". In this 1889 oil painting, a whirling dervish is whirling in front of a crowded group.² Because of its difference from known whirling ceremonies, people think that probably the artist had never a ritually seen a ceremony, however, he depicted the scene on the basis of his research. The painting is quite remarkable in terms of both the qualities of the place and color diversity (Bal, 2007: 532).

Figure 5. Jean – Leon Gerome *Dervish*, 1889



Another artist inspired by Whirling dervishes and produced works of art is Aldo Mondino. In his painting series called *Turcata* whit its theme of talks is Mevlevis, plain postures of whirling dervishes can be seen. Bal talks about the style of Mondino with these lines "... he was interested in the historical, cultural and artistic accumulation and mystic aspects of Anatolia. Sufistic elements, dhikring (remembrance of Allah, chant) dervishes are depicted in a contemporary figurative approach in the painting" (Bal, 2007: 536).

² Retrieved from goo.gl/3yzfVJ. [Accessed: 18 January 2016]

Figure 6. Aldo Mondino *Tuecata* 1999



Figure 7. Aldo Mondino, *Dervisci - Maestro*, 2003



Artist Fahrelnisa Zeid who has an important place in Turkish art history, is among the artists inspired by Whirling. In her painting called *Dance*, which she created in 1980, in the foreground is Mutrib Heyeti, which is the musician group in ceremonies; they are seen from their backs. The middle part of the painting shows stylized whirling dervishes and figures watching the ceremony in the background. The artist depicted a classical whirling scene on canvas by her own style and using rich and vivid colors.

Figure 8. Fahrelnissa Zeid, *Dance*, 1980



Whirling of dervishes with love and original clothes of Mevleviyeh do not only affect painters, they also affect ceramic artists and sculptures. Each artist conveys aspects of Whirling that affect his or her imagination and spirit in the works of art they create. Ceramics artist Mutlu who has searched about Mevlana, Mevlevi, Whirling and the lives of dervishes explains his ideas about the place of Whirling in plastics art with these words:

Endless love of Mevlana and passionate apprehension of whirling have been frequently treated in the arts of pattern, lithography and paintings of Western painters and miniature, illuminated manuscripts and calligraphy of Islamic world. Apart from painting, Mevlana is also among the themes of audio visual arts such as film, music, sculpture and ceramics. However, Mevlana who is limitedly depicted in today's art of ceramics could not go beyond the stereotypes. (Mutlu, 2007: 48)

Egyptian artist Khaled Zaki who is interested in Sufism ideas and Mevlevi beliefs, depicts the plain posture of a Sufi with different materials in his sculptures. As a significant sculptures sculptures today, Zaki displayed success with his work called *The Sufi*. stylizes the postures of Sufis in his works prefers to use simple lines in his forms. One of his sculptures in this theme is the marble sculpture created at Gaziantep University's 1st International Stone Sculpture Symposium. Another similar form made of bronze was displayed in 55th Venice Biennial in 2013.

Figure 9. Khaled Zaki, *Sufi Marble*, Gaziantep, 2014



Figure 10. *Khaled Zaki, The Sufi Bronze, Venedik, 2013*



Another artist who stands out with her works is Tuba Önder Demircioğlu. She completed her undergraduate education in Eskişehir Anadolu University under the leadership of Zehra Çobanlı and her graduate education in Marmara University, Institute of Fine arts as a student of Erdiñ Bakla. She also had the change to work with Atilla Galatalı and Filiz Özgüven Galatalı. In her series works called "Dans Edenler (dancing ones)" which she created in 2015, the effects of Sufi philosophy can be seen. Önder who prefers to work with porcelain material tells about her collection "Dans Edenler" with these words:

With my sculptures which represent spiritual world, are fitted in their dancing bodies and have traces of traditional culture I tried to express my ideas about Sufism with clay, which I used as a cloth, and my formal pursuit, which determines then postures or body movements of sculptures, in an artistic way. Sculptures which depict spiritual advance, invocation, sharing, loving and modesty are simple but I tried to create them with the dynamism of a moment as if they would move any minute.³

³ Retrieved from goo.gl/aUJFJ0 [Accessed: 12 January 2016]

Figure 11. *Tuba Önder Demircioğlu, Those inside, Artistic styling, Porcelain 1250°C, 20 x 18 x 30 cm, 2015*



Figure 12. *Tuba Önder Demircioğlu Cycle IV, Artistic styling, Porcelain 1250°C 20 x 14 x 29 cm, 2015*



Hikmet Serdar Mutlu, who completed his undergraduate and graduate education in Hacettepe University, department of Ceramics, has created his artistic and academic works of art on the basis of Mevlana's world of ideas. The artist has not just stuck to the figurative forms of whirling dervishes, he has also interpreted the concepts which Mevlevi ideas evoke in his mind, the coins of whirling dervishes, the instruments used in Whirling ceremony with his artistic abilities.

Figure 13. *H. Serdar Mutlu, Hello of Dervis*



Figure 14. *H. Serdar Mutlu, Devran, Diameter=36 cm*



The artist tells about the symbolic meaning of his work called "*Devran*" with these words:

The red hide in the middle and the dervishes sitting with their caps around the hide and 4 lines on the side of the plate represent true religions. People who are connected to Mevlana are stylized with the view from the top and textures like fingerprints around them represent the men of the world. Movements on the circular plate were stabilized with black glaze, and relief and sgraffito methods were applied with white and light green glaze. (Mutlu, 2007: 51)

Profound meaning which Mevleviyeh and Whirling have and the moral values that are evoked by these meanings are also reflected in my works. Whirling reminds me of patience, being constant, resignation, purity and being whiter than white. The concepts visually take the form of the clothes of whirling dervishes. Each figure in the Whirling are elaborately thought; they are elegant and can be the subjects of the art aesthetically., Plastic texture Especially and potentiality provided by the Art of Ceramics help artists to convey the emotions and ideas to be reflected to the viewer easily.

It is also thought that the message to be conveyed can be expressed in a remarkable way. Based on these ideas, the works of art in Figures 15 and 16 are implemented.

Figure 15. *Gökçe Uysal Being One I 45x30x15 cm. Modular mold forming, Casting clay, 940°C, 2015*



Figure16. *Gökçe Uysal "Vuslat" h:15cm, Ø:30cm, Modular mold forming, Porcelain, 950°C, 2015*



Assessment

It is seen that the ideas of Hz. Mevlana have directed many fields and given meaning to his own period as well as to the centuries following his period. Mevlevi culture and Whirling not only have affected literature, philosophy, psychology and social sciences, but they also have affected the art which has an important place in the development of humanity. It is possible to see the effects of Mevlana's teachings in the history of art and it is also possible that properties belonging to Mevlevi culture have been treated by many artists from different cultures. Especially in the plastic arts, aesthetical values provided by visuality of Whirling are conveyed to the viewer by the tools of art both as color and as forms.

Consequently, Mevleviy belief and the reflections of Whirling on plastic arts such as painting, sculpture, ceramics which maintain the

thinking system of Mevlana are going to be explained in this study. The common point of the works of the example artists is to transfer the visuality created by Whirling dervishes during, Whirling ceremony to the other branches of art either by being abstracted or in exactly the same way. Painters usually depict the scenes from the ceremony as they are, however, sculptures and ceramics artists prefer to abstract the figures. It does not matter in which way they are conveyed, the messages about peace and love which Mevlana wanted to transfer to humanity take visual forms in the works of the artists.

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