The visual arts of Sufism are explored in an exhibition organized by Ladan Akbarnia of the Brooklyn Museum and implemented by Akbarnia and Francesca Leoni of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The catalog takes the reader on a whirlwind tour through some of the main themes of this mystical Islamic practice through art objects spanning the Islamic medieval period to contemporary times.

Most Westerners recognize the name, Jalal al-Din Rumi, one of the more accessible of the Sufis, who greatly influenced Persian writing as well as Western thought. He is quoted discussing God as the master calligrapher, "in whose hands the heart is like a pen... He trims everyone according to the needs of the page He is going to write, and in the end, all the different letters, between A and Z, will form a meaningful text whose content they themselves cannot know" (p.99). The essence of this statement is found in many of the calligraphic works throughout the book, inviting viewers to find themselves within the Word of God. Samples of Rumi’s work in visual form serve as a focal point in many of the artworks. The authors delightfully juxtapose older examples of calligraphy with more modern examples, such as Fragments of Light 2, by artist Kelly Driscoll. In her piece the light of God literally shines through to us from the glass pages containing Rumi’s etched words. Others works of arts are inscribed with quotes from other Islamic mystics or the Qur’an and touch on themes of love and beauty, especially as found in our temporal world. Begging bowls, illuminated pages, lamps, and calligraphic tools are shown alongside photographic portraits of dervishes, Plexiglas objects, and modern jeweled rings that capture the light and flash of a dervish in motion. The contrast of old and new is stunning and wonderful.

At 160 pages, the material presented is carefully selected in order to be succinct. Writing, design, and reproductions are considerable while indexing, footnotes, and a selected bibliography are an asset to the work. The paperback format keeps the price down, but unfortunately may not be as durable as a library would wish. Lost Treasures of Persia: Persian Art in the Hermitage Museum (Vladimir Loukonine and Anatoli Ivanov. Mage Publishers, 1996) or Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources (Eleanor Sims, Yale University Press, 2002) offer broader insight into Islamic arts, but do not provide as much of a focus on the Sufi mystic tradition in art.

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