

THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS IN ART AND IT'S REFLECTIONS ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING

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Abstract

In this research, the definition and the meaning of concept of emptiness will be explored, and the relationship between the concept of nature and the concept of nature by the effect of sky, mountain, road and sea images in landscape paintings will be researched. In this process, not only landscape painting but also the changing ways of looking at the landscape are included. The aim of the research is to examine landscape painting in the context of the concept of emptiness by looking at major artists, groups and exhibitions from a conceptual framework. An artist working in the field of landscapes, regardless of the focus of the subject they are working on, first goes through a mental decision-making process. The artist's view of the landscape and the way they confine it within a delimited frame is subjective. Methodologically, this study is approached from two perspectives. The first is conceptual and the second is practical. Firstly, the conceptual framework on the subject was created and secondly, in line with the data obtained, the concept of emptiness and landscape painting in the course of history were examined formally, spiritually and conceptually in terms of selected painters and their works. The conclusion was that landscape paintings carry meditative elements that relax the mind in connection with the concept of emptiness and involve the viewer with the help of these elements.

Keywords: Emptiness; landscape; meditate; nature; space

INTRODUCTION

The concept of emptiness has different definitions in physics, philosophy, and architecture. Yet, it is also defined, like many other concepts, through its very opposite. At times, employing a single word for such a variety of definitions can lead to a contradiction of concepts. To prevent such confusion, in this thesis, the concept of 'emptiness' is used in relation with *being, absence, atoms, particles, space and astral space as well as locus*. According to the Turkish Language Association's Great Turkish Dictionary, 'boşluk' (emptiness) is defined as 'hollow, pit, unoccupied place', 'empty place', 'interruption, disconnection', 'sense of lacking, deprivation', 'state of being empty' (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr>).

In this dissertation, landscape paintings will be researched and explored in the context of emptiness through the relationship between the concept of nature and the effect of sky, mountain, road, and sea images. It is believed that by enabling mutual interaction, the concept of emptiness allows us to perceive the transformation between the sky and the earth. This belief is the inspiration reflected in all landscape paintings, especially Chinese landscapes which forms a part of this research where the concept of emptiness defined in the most sublime way. Wang Wei, 1st century Chinese poet, writer and politician, quotes: "a slim brush stroke creates the structure of emptiness, a way to infinite." The concept of inspiration associates with the concept of yin and yang in the philosophy of Tao, with its occurrence, the idea of polarity (opposition) manifests itself (Sky-Earth, Mountain-Water, Far-Near, etc.) on one hand, and on the other hand, Li, that is, the internal laws or internal contours of objects, come into play. The painting, that reaches maturity with these two opposing ideas, is no longer reflecting only the external appearances of objects but reaches to the inner layers and identifies the hidden relationships along these layers as well. Through the creativity process the painter's mind and inspiration accompany the landscape painting.

In addition of using the concept of emptiness in paintings by the methods that defined as negative space and white space, its communication and definition in other visual arts and design disciplines are also discussed. Mainly, the space as an active element, such as the earth, sky, and road, used in landscape paintings was inspected, and the examples were

emphasized. While examining these examples the principles of space were reviewed and Emptiness is analyzed as a concept, space, and form through art works.

The research consists of the historical development of landscape painting, far eastern landscape paintings, Chinese landscapes, the relationship between emptiness and perspective in Ukio-e Japanese landscapes, and the effects of the concept of emptiness in Western painting on contemporary art. In the history of landscape painting in Turkey, when we try to interpret landscape painting specifically through the concept of emptiness in Turkey, we encounter a landscape tradition that has been intensified by the influence of Islam; the passion for nature has been reflected in miniatures since the 16th century; and in the following process, it gradually formed the first examples of canvas paintings. In the course of history, the use of landscape as a theme is analyzed in terms of technical, stylistic, and pentural development until 1940s, and from those days to the present, the works of artists in the context of the concept of emptiness and creating works that refer to emptiness within the theme of landscape are exemplified.

In this process, not only landscape painting but also the changing perspectives to the landscape are included. The aim of the research is to examine landscape painting in the context of the concept of emptiness by inspecting major artists, groups and exhibitions from a conceptual framework. The artist, working in the field of landscapes, first goes through a mental decision-making process regardless of the subject he is focused. His view of the landscape and the way he confines it within a delimited frame is subjective. Methodologically, this study is discussed from two perspectives. The first is conceptual and the second is practical. Firstly, the conceptual framework on the subject was created and secondly, in line with the data obtained, the concept of emptiness and landscape painting in the course of history were examined formally, spiritually and conceptually in terms of selected painters and their works.

RESULTS

In this chapter, it will be examined how and within which contexts the concept of emptiness was addressed throughout art history with examples. The stories of processing the emptiness in relation to concepts of existence, fullness and mass as opposed to non-existence, absence will be explained through examples from artists. Tendencies of intellectual abstraction and the intellectual roots of reforming the nature reach way back to the philosophy of Kant. According to Kant, humans would recognize the nature in a different manner if their mental structure was shaped differently. Abstract intellectual structure determines the shapes of nature, which is compatible with Kant's idea that space and composition is an intellectual concept (Tunalı, 1983, p. 172). Defining artists as 'geniuses', Kant expresses that they are those who can reduce the mysteries of things to perceptible levels. According to this idea and style, we try to reflect intellectual reality by putting mental structures before nature.

Emptiness as a Concept

Gaining its form in 1920s, 'Abstract Art' brings together many artists demonstrating the essence of reality of art instead of external reality, therefore focusing on formal elements such as color, line, shape and space, and they create paintings extending from formal elements to philosophy, music, mathematics, and spirit. Kazimir Malevich, a representative of abstract art, also is a painter who painted according to a theory that he elevated almost to the level of religious belief for a long time in his artistic journey. From the moment the Moscow-born Russian painter began to simplify his compositions, traces of his philosophy began to appear in his art. In his monochrome works, he questioned the emptiness and the viewer who is a part of the emptiness. Malevich said that the abstract shapes in his paintings are filled with the absence of any object, therefore they are not empty, but each form is rife with meaning.

Figure 1. Black Square

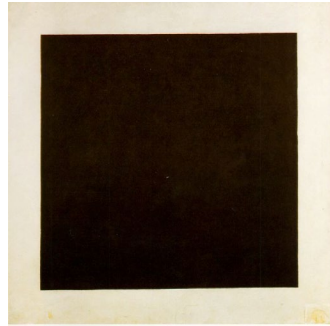


Image taken from Malevich, Kazimir Black Square, 1915, Oil painting, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg
St. Petersburg <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/kazimir-malevich-1561/five-ways-look-malevichs-black-square>, Date of Access: 09.01.2023

In suprematist paintings, the formal expression of the absolute and infinite was tried to be developed, and deep meanings were attributed to pure forms. One of the most important elements among these meanings is the square, which does not exist in the nature. Malevich portrayed emotion with the black square, and the emptiness beyond emotion with the white in his work 'Zero-Form' in 1918. He aimed to create new forms by changing the meaning of square, and imbued new forms with the function of representing emotions that birthed them into existence (Figure 1).

Starting from 1940s, the art carried from Europe to America with then-prevalent artistic style 'Abstract Expressionism' is fundamentally different in terms of art, form, and style of works created in 1920s and 1930s. During this period, art was heavily influenced by the transformation occurring within art, ideology and politics triangle. "According to the American art critic Harold Rosenberg, American painters who transform painting surface into some sort of stage made a certain struggle, an action visible instead of showing an object; therefore, created images as a result of this struggle they undertook (Antmen, 2008, p:148).

Figure 2. Black on Gray



Image taken from Mark Rothko, Untitled, Black on Gray, 1969
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3535>, Date of Access.09.01.2023

Mark Rothko defining his abstract paintings as 'realistic' or another American abstract expressionist Adolph Gottlieb's words 'Abstraction is the realism of our time' are an important clue concerning the état d'esprit of painters and sculptors of post-World War II period. It is no coincidence that painters born out of this dark period turned to the concept of Emptiness. Abstract expressionist artists, such as Rothko, who gave importance to the spirit and tried to achieve purity with colors in their artworks, assumed that the meaning of life in modern society was empty and that a connection with God was a necessity for human beings. Rothko argues that the main material of a painting is 'emptiness', and uses color fields and vibration to express it. With color, he produces a theatrical space. In his paintings, which are based on atmospheric effect and color rather than form, an active character and a vibration similar to sound waves are felt (Auping, 2007, p.p.139-140). In his paintings, color creates the effect of movement towards the viewer, pushing the limits of surface space towards classical space and contemporary space. Thus, he assigns a new function to the painting surface, which he rescues from being a plane of illusion, and develops it. His paintings merge with the wall surface on which they are hung, making the room they are in part of their own spatial experience (Auping, 2007, p.141).

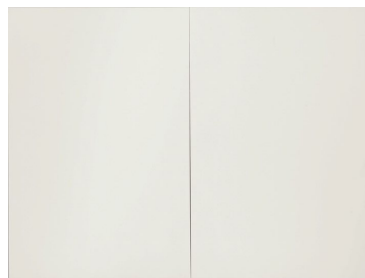
In Rothko's paintings 'Black and Gray (1970)', (Figure 2) created during his last days, the concept of emptiness makes itself felt together with the concept of death. It is said that the most important influence on Rothko was Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of the Tragedy*.

Nietzsche claims that Greek tragedy serves to rid humans of fears of mortal life, and in line with this motto, Rothko aims to rid modern humans of their spiritual void. He referred to his paintings only by numbers and refused to frame them in order to provide viewers a maximum level of interpretation.

With their works, post-1960 artists enable for concepts to be redefined and re-read. Although initially referred to as 'idea art' and information art, new trends in this genre were gathered under the title 'Conceptual Art' after the Minimalist artist Sol Lewitt published the article 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' in Artforum magazine in 1967 to emphasize the conceptuality of his own works, and conceptualism became an umbrella term that encompassed almost all alternative forms of expression of the period (Antmen; 2008, p:193).

Understanding of art as idea has leaned towards productions on ideal concept-level with language, philosophy, mathematics and physics. According to Kosuth, "there is no art without language." Kosuth, separating art into two categories as pre- and post- Duchamp in his article 'Art After Philosophy' published in 1969, questioned the meanings of words such as art, definition, painting, nothing in 'Art as Idea as Idea' he created with white writing on a black background; he examined the dynamics behind the mental processes that extend from visual perception to language, from language to concept.

Figure 3. White Painting



*Image taken from, Robert Rauschenberg White Painting 1951
<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/40/639> , Date of Access:15.12.2020*

Another example of the concept of emptiness. Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), who began making monochrome 'White Paintings' in 1951 while teaching at Black Mountain College (1933-1956 North Carolina, USA) (Figure 3). In these paintings, he aimed to create a more pristine experience by reducing painting to its essence, to the point zero. He described his experience during this period with the concepts of 'silence', 'being limited', 'absence', 'nothingness', 'pointing to a circle that begins and ends' and stated that the aura had reached to an end.

Figure 4. 1952, 4'33'' / 4'33''

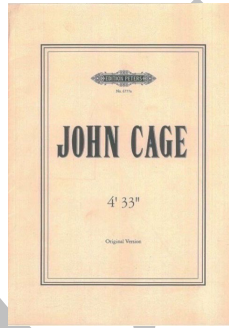


Image taken from, John Cage, 1952, 4'33'' / 4'33''. <https://goo.gl/4o8A0A> Date of Access: 12.12.2020

The equivalent of emptiness in music is silence. Symbols indicating the duration of this silence are also an important part of music. As much as the notes, the spaces between them are the elements that make music what it is.

American composer John Cage (1912-1992) was inspired by it while composing the piece entitled 4'33'' (Figure 4). In this piece, a pianist made the audience waiting for him to perform listen to the silence, while the audience becomes a part of this concert that lasts four minutes and thirty-three seconds without music. This work was considered a precursor to Conceptual Art (Mayer, 2000, p.21).

Figure 5. Spatial Concept: Expectations

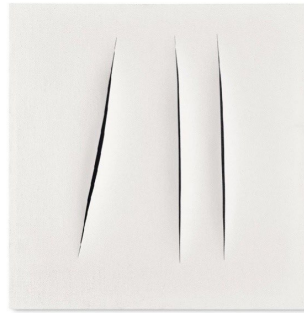


Image taken from Lucio Fontana, 1959, 'Spatial Concept: Expectations', 125x250,8cm, Synthetic Paint on Canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. <https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/89667/Lucio-Fontana-Concetto-spaziale-Attese> , Date of Access: 09.01.2023

Fontana, blurring the borders of physical space in his installation in his first spatial exhibition opened in 1949, tries to materialize Umberto Boccioni's non-material art dreams. In the same year, Fontana creates his first 'buchi' by making holes on a canvas, in a way reminding of galaxies and starry worlds with spiral and cosmic arrangements. Fontana, wanting to create objects with a similar texture to that of meteorites, achieves this texture with voids and clusters obtained by carving, piercing, ploughing the surface while also using various materials such as clay (Figure 5). His works begin when he slices the canvas in 1958 to expose what is beneath the space and he says "I do not want to make a painting; I want to open up space, create a new dimension, tie in the cosmos, as it endlessly expands beyond the confining plane of the picture." (Theberge, 1999, p.182)

According to the Futurist theory, Fontana depicted and painted nature with the objects of his imagination, which is related to space and the cosmos. Thus, Fontana introduced cosmos to the imaginative realm of mankind by physically limiting space.

Rothko, Newman, Fontana and Klein play an important role in guiding abstract space into philosophical, psychological and formal depths of new horizons.

Emptiness as Space

Increasing the dimensional perception in the space, in other words, rendering the space perceivable means the same thing as rendering the emptiness between objects forming it meaningful. Dimensional relations can be perceived only by experiencing spatial experiences in space. Such dimensional relations have varied in each period.

Perspective, along with the renaissance which laid the foundation for modernism, brought about a measurable and geometric understanding in lieu of spatial understanding of the Middle Age. This understanding, which requires looking at an object at a certain angle, is important in terms of maintaining the point of view and therefore sublimating the view of the individual. The conquest and rational organization of space develops the understanding of the individual and modernization. With modernization, time has been placed on a linear plane as past, present and future. The industrial revolution and technological advances have gradually made time more measurable, controllable and premeditable for individuals. In the 19th century, the concept of time is enriched with the development of historical understanding, the understanding that there is a history and time flow independent of religious history, and the understanding that the subjective, inner emotional world of the artist, which had developed with the romanticism movement in art, also contains a rhythm of time. Thus, in the face of a rapidly changing objective concept of time, the artist's effort to capture objective time within their subjective time constitutes the basic principle of the different styles emerging in contemporary art.

Perspective produces a calculable, measurable future. The use of linear perspective in painting dictates to the viewer what to look at and where to look from, and all modernist teachings use this visually.

With the transformation of perspective, we come to a point where we see down from above, we feel the need to define the place, the ground. With a vertical perspective, we can look from a perspective where we see down from above, and define the place, the ground. While modernism questions and defines time, postmodernism questions and defines space, and in doing so, it loses or redefines borders. Developments in navigation, satellite images, and images recorded with the widespread use of drones constitute these definitions. With vertical perspective, the sense of feeling changes, the balance changes, a whole new

visuality emerges. The linear perspective becomes obsolete and the vertical perspective becomes our point of view. The concepts of subject, object and space begin to reposition and change definition with the vertical perspective. Accessing and experiencing aerial imagery creates a sense of transmission from the human gaze to the God gaze. It creates a transition from static linear perspective to multiple perspectives. In vertical perspective, our sense of vision is not static, it dominates the whole and all angles.

As Hito Steyerl describes it in his essay 'Freefall'; suppose you are falling and there is no ground, if there is no ground, time and history cease to exist. The moment of falling is a moment of loss of boundaries and liberation. This is equivalent to 'emptiness'.

Figure 6. Untitled Anthropometry



*Image taken from. Yves Klein, 1960, 'Untitled Anthropometry' ,
www.yvesklein.com, , Date of Access: 18.11.2020*

'Leap into the Void' is a work by Klein; on November 27, 1960, he created a fake newspaper called *Dimanche-Le Journal d'un Seul Jour* (Sunday - Newspaper for one day only) for the 2nd Avant-Garde Festival and sold it on Paris newsstands for one day (Figure 6)." His work caught attention with the headline 'A man in the void! The painter of empty spaces leaves himself in the void!'

Figure 7.Void Room



Image taken from, Yves Klein, 1958 at the exhibition 'Void Room' Photo: Charles Wilp, www.yvesklein.com, 18.11.2020

In 1958, for his exhibition 'The Void' at the Iris Clert Gallery, Klein removed everything from the gallery (except for a cabinet with all surfaces painted white). The gallery with blank white walls turned into a space filled with emptiness, putting visitors into a metaphysical void (Figure 7). "Yves Klein revealed the space in all its reality, and instead of proposing a new formula for the space or the art object, he destroyed aesthetic perceptions/expectations with what he inherited from Dada. The viewer is dragged to an emotional void and left at the level of satisfaction (the viewers' feeling who has expectations from the work of art), the emptiness in which they were invited."

"The artist treats space as art itself. In this context, the gallery changes its raison d'être and transforms itself into a work. Klein created a metaphysical art space in the name of art." (Graf, 2019)

Figure 8.Descent into Limbo



Image taken from Anish Kapoor, Descent into Limbo, 1992, Museum de Pont, Tilburg, Date of Access 18.11.2020

In this work by Anish Kapoor, after entering the gallery, you realize that you see nothing but a black circle where you were expecting for a work of art and an object. You take a closer look. And after close investigation, you see that this is not merely a black circle, but a real pit in the ground (Figure 8). As the pit is covered in dark pigment, it appears bottomless. The unexpected emptiness in this room is a work of Anish Kapoor. Descent into Limbo evokes a sense of dread at first glance, but at the same time seduces us to investigate the possibility of disappearing underground. What is it that makes the void so attractive yet so scary?

"The void is not silent. I always thought of it more and more as a transitional space, an in-between space. It's very much to do with time. I have always been interested as an artist in how one can somehow look again for that very first moment of creativity where everything is possible and nothing has actually happened. It's a space of becoming... 'something' that dwells in the presence of the work... that allows it or forces it not to be what it states it is in the first instance." (Bhabha, 1998, p. 11-41).

Artists such as Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Morris Louis, and Frank Stella began to play with the shape and dimensions of the flat, two-dimensional painting surface (canvas), and to spread the painting out into the space by removing it from the easel on which it was being worked on, thus taking part in it instead of against it. Stella, on the other hand, gave the canvas a new form, aiming to transform it into an art object that should be evaluated not only as a surface on which thought is conveyed, but also with its physical presence.

Italian artist Salvatore Garau created a sculpture whose physical presence is invisible. The work titled 'I Am' was auctioned on March 18, 2021 for 15 thousand euros. There is no representation of the work in either print or digital format. The only way to verify its existence is a certificate of authenticity in the hands of the buyer. Garau describes his work as follows; "The vacuum is nothing more than a space full of energy, and even if we empty it and there is nothing left, according to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, (a principle proposed by Werner Heisenberg in 1927) that nothing has a weight. Therefore, it has energy that is condensed and transformed into particles, that is, into us. When I decide to

‘exhibit’ an immaterial sculpture in a given space, that space will concentrate a certain amount and density of thoughts at a precise point, creating a sculpture that, from my title, will only take the most varied forms." (Garau, 2022)

In art, as in the field of thought, definitions and concepts differ according to the characteristics of the age. These definitions also affect our perception and mental process. Today, we can make different interpretations of the concept of 'emptiness', which is being reinterpreted beyond its traditional meaning. Now the digital era is a new revolution because of its speed and enormous scale of change. The adaptation of new technology and social media platforms is creating noticeable changes in our global culture. It is a rapid process for artists and philosophers to adapt, express, create and influence culture.

Emptiness as Form

When we consider emptiness as a form within the discipline of art, we start from the relationship between shape and ground. Negative and positive space. In landscape painting, our perception of emptiness is revealed by the size and how the space left as the sky or land is treated. Based on the relationship between shape-ground, we can classify negative and positive space with Gestalt theorems. The German-American psychiatrist Fritz Perls founded his own method of psychoanalysis, which he named Gestalt. "*The word Gestalt means 'form', 'completion', 'integration' in German*". In time, Gestalt has been coined as psychology term by the psychologists researching how visual perception is shaped. In Gestalt theory, which originally means to organize in German, the mind, which focuses on the perception of the whole from incomplete parts, organizes the images it sees by associating them with each other (Uçar, 2004, p. 65).

Integrity in painting and visual design is more than merely incorporating additional parts. The balance and harmony that emerges by controlling the relationship and diversity of each incorporated element contributes to the perception of the image. In landscape paintings, this space is sometimes the sky, other times the sea or earth. Since each painted component serves to the perception of the whole, they cannot be evaluated separately from each other. Chaotic results can occur when variations and diversifications are not controlled. The white surface of the paper in its untouched state is perceived as an inactive space, whereas the moment a dot, line or other design element is placed, the empty space is activated. Filling

only a small area and recognizing the contrast in this area is similar to understanding the concept of light only in comparison to shadow (Frutiger, 1989, p. 21).

Figure 9. Day and Night

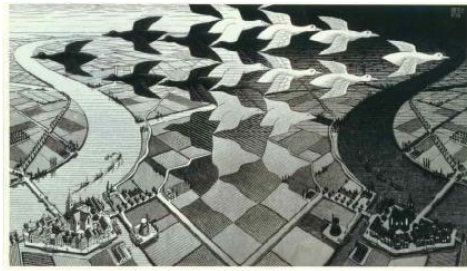


Image taken from, M.C. Escher, 1938, *Day and Night* <https://mcescher.com/2021>,
Date of Access: 01.12.2021

M.C. Escher, who transformed emptiness into form and dealt with the relationships between shape and ground with a mathematical definition, is famous for his paradoxical structures. The shape and the background in his works are so professionally rendered that emptiness and fullness are intertwined. It is hard to distinguish the ground from the figures, the eye is constantly moving from one figure to another. In Escher's 1938 engraving *Day and Night*, the forms and space created by contrasts are designed to play with our visual perception (Figure 9). Combining different images together, the space of the painting is quite filled. The spaces between the birds also turn into bird images. Empty and full switch places in line with our view. We see the chromatic contrast of night and day, and the fact that they emerge from each other and cover the surface of the earth. This is one of the best examples of emptiness and fullness. It symbolizes the interconnectedness of all opposites and their emergence from each other. All the images we see in the engraving are interconnected. Birds appear from landscape forms, the sky from birds; the darkness and light of the sky, day and night appear as a part of each other.

In contrast to the image above, Chinese landscapes, which employ large gaps in the painting space, contain many different alternatives to examine on emptiness and fullness.

In this example, we can see that the painter has left more than half of the painting space empty (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Returning Sails Off Distant Shore



Image taken from, Muxi: *Returning Sails Off Distant Shore*
<https://www.comuseum.com/product/muxi-returning-sails-off-distant-shore/> , Date of Access 01.12.2021

Since the main theme here is a storm, the emptiness of this space kindles curiosity and thrill, and shapes one's visual perception as such. Diverging from the engraving mentioned above, in this image, the ability to grasp the unclear nature buried under the misty void, and to complete the image is left to the viewer. This leads to feelings of excitement, panic, or even fright. Here, too, all the elements appear within each other, but unlike others, in a state of unknown. Emptiness leaves the concept of fullness to our perception.

Figure 11. Auspicious Cranes



Image taken from, Zhao Ji, Auspicious Cranes
<https://www.comuseum.com/product/muxi-returning-sails-off-distant-shore/> Date of Access 01.12.2021

It can be seen that the lower part of the image consists of mysterious temples covered in clouds. The void and the unknown manifest themselves as clouds hanging above the temples. In the sky that covers two-thirds of the area above the temples, we see the wandering storks. The clouds below, and the storks moving in rhythm above, as opposed to fixated, inanimate temples. The motion above and the stillness below completing each other (Figure 11).

Although there are over one hundred and fourteen Gestalt principles, artists and designers have focused on a small portion of these laws of perception to develop their two-dimensional works such as paintings, photographs and posters (Graham, 2008, cited by Aydın, 2015, p. 91).

Knowing these principles in controlling harmony and diversity in design helps to visualize the message to be conveyed. Some of the key principles in art and design are: shape-ground, similarity, continuity, unity, and proximity. The same principles apply while studying a painting to describe, define, analyze and transcribe it.

Parts of an image can be analyzed and evaluated as different components. The whole is more comprehensive than the sum of its parts. According to Gestalt principles, the background of a shape has a significant impact on perception. The simplest example of this impact on perception is the contrast between light and dark.

In the relationship between shape and ground, the eye seeks balance between the figure and the ground, the space and the mass. The relationship between those shapes visual perception. When the designer, who tries to achieve balance and harmony through shaping the space around and between the design elements, discovers that the space can become an active form on its own, the shape-ground relationship takes on another dimension. While describing the fundamental design principle, balance, (Becer, 2015) points out that the space that allows for momentary rest is sometimes more determinant than other visual elements in creating optical weight. The active use of negative space, i.e. emptiness, has

the ability to transform into something positive in a composition and can help render the deeply suggestive figure-ground relationship (Poulin, 2011, p. 102-103). In designs with this kind of shape-ground relationship, the ground can turn into a shape, resulting in void-free designs that appear active both in the background and foreground, according to the viewer's perspective.

The principle of unity contains the fact that the designer sometimes deliberately makes reductions in the whole picture instead of representing everything as they are while conveying the message. In paintings that are sometimes created unconsciously and randomly, as in Chinese calligraphy, in paintings made with a childish naivety and a longing for spontaneity, when these reductions in the unbounded incomplete image are made in the right amount, the eye completes the missing parts while perceiving the whole. This helps create designs that move away from boredom by creating a sense of discovery in the viewer (Ambrose & Aono-Billson, 2013, p. 57). It is possible to observe this in the works of mystic artists such as Kandinsky, Klee and Mondrian.

Landscape and Space

The intersection of the concept of emptiness and landscape will be analyzed in terms of perspective, the absence of people, the sky or landforms used to cover more than half of the picture area, leaving space for the viewer to create their own fiction, presence, absence, nothingness, and transformation.

When it comes to the concept of emptiness in landscape painting, space is one of the primary concepts. In this chapter, how the concept of 'space' has been used, how space has been defined until today, and its types will be examined in terms of place of painting, depth, and visual space.

Space in Chinese Landscape Paintings

Wang Wei, who researched the subject of space in terms of landscape, in his book *Shan-shui-fu*, defines perspective in three different phases:

1-Shen-Yuan Distance to Depth: It is the most used method in Chinese landscapes in which when the method applied, the viewer feels as if he is on a high hill and where he

stands he looks upon, and sees the landscape in a panoramic way (Figur 12). We find in Dong_yuan Works (Chang, 2006).

Figure 12. Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of the Mountains in Summer



Dong Yuan, *Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of the Mountains in Summer*, <https://www.comuseum.com/?s=dong+yuan> reached, 30.12.2022

2-Kao-Yuan Raised Distance: It is the method generally applied in vertical pictures. The viewer is located relatively low and directs his gaze upwards (Figure 13) The dominant horizon of the painting is designed a little higher accordingly, and the viewer's gaze shifts towards the elevations indicated by the placement of the mountains on top of each other at different levels; so each placement creates its own horizon.

Figure 13. Returning Late From A Spring Outing



Dai, Jin, *Returning Late From A Spring Outing*, <https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/dai-jin/returning-late-from-a-spring-outing/> reached, 30.12.2022

3-Ping-Yuan Flat Distance: The viewer's gaze stretching freely from a close position towards infinity (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Awaiting Ferry



Dong Yuan, Awaiting Ferry, <https://www.comuseum.com/?s=dong+yuan>, Date of Access 30.12.2022

The History Of Landscape Painting In Turkey Through The Concept Of Emptiness

When trying to read landscape painting in the context of Turkey and the concept of emptiness, we see an interest that develops especially under the influence of Islam. The passion for nature was reflected in miniatures from the 16th century onwards, and gradually formed the first examples of canvas paintings in the ongoing process. The use of landscape as a theme in the historical development process until the 1940s can be analyzed in terms of technical, stylistic and painterly development. In this section, historical development of landscape painting in Turkey will be addressed through selected artworks within the contexts of emptiness and nature.

The figurative approach in the miniatures has more to do with Eastern societies' conception of the object in general than with Islam itself. (Ergüven, M. 1995, p.24)

In the 16th century, the first landscape paintings, which was deemed to be significant only in the Ottomans among the Islamic world, are found in manuscripts documenting the routes and ranges of Suleiman the Magnificent's campaigns. Baghdad and Belgrade campaigns of the Ottoman Sultan were written and illustrated in 1558 by Matrakçı Nasuh, who was a military man. Starting from the 16th century when European painters commenced to work in the painting atelier (nakkaşhane) of the Ottoman Palace, western elements started to be sprinkled in the miniatures. During this period westernization process in painting has commenced. The another factor is that, in Süleymanname, the most prominent features of

the environment are tried to be reflected, as in other miniatures. The Ottomans prepared atlases by making use of Spanish and Portuguese maps to gradually establish the tradition of topographical painting in which every important detail can be seen together (R. M. Meriç,1970, p.p.167-196).

Painter Matrakçı Nasuh, who joined the significant campaigns of the Suleiman the Magnificent era, has documented the places where army stopped over just like a map. Matrakçı added an impression, a taste of nature to these topographical drawings, which can be considered as landscape painting experiment, by painting the hills in blue and green colors with brightly colored plants (Günsel, 1981, p.25).

The tradition of topographic painting ceased by the end of the 17th century, followed by miniaturists -especially one miniaturist, Nakshi, although somewhat primitively, tried to use perspective to reinforce the depth-effect in architectural depictions. Thus, the concept of three-dimensionality that was at once alien to the Islamic Art of Miniature but kin to Western Painting made its way into Ottoman miniatures.

The very first formation of the 'Westernization Movement' in The Ottoman Empire were the establishment of the military and engineering academies and schools. One should remember the two military academies, naming the Naval Engineering Academy and the Engineering and Artillery Academy that were facilitated the adaptation of western knowledge and technologies through education. Landscape was the first and foremost subject-matter of the painting classes that were given in these schools. It is known that the Engineering and Artillery Academy was the first to accommodate painting in its course curriculum in 1775. However, the education of painting of the period in question focused heavily on the understanding of topography and objects for knowledge of perspective was indispensable for one of the pillars of the military profession -artillery. Accordingly, it would not be wrong to consider such educational establishments in Türkiye as the gateways to let Western painting in. That is, the advent of painting in Türkiye going back to military schools does not necessarily bear any reference to any artistic purpose, nor any aesthetic concern. Turkish cadets trained by foreign professors but had to grow an interest in painting to better grasp the educational content. As the Ottoman elite and engineering students have realized that the perspective and technique in Western painting were so different that those

of miniaturists, this, in conjunction also with the politics of the era, have led to the 'fall from grace' of the art of miniatures.

Contemporary Landscape Paintings and The Concept of Emptiness

Today's landscape paintings show that the nature-human-culture relationship is interwoven with similarities. In this section, painters who produce works related to the concept of emptiness and their productions, as well as works that refer to the concept of emptiness and whose productions are on the theme of landscape are included.

Figure 15. Alışıldık Manzaranın Hiçliği



Devabil Kara, Alışıldık Manzaranın Hiçliği, Mixed media on canvas, 200 cm x 170 cm, 2011 <https://www.sanatgezgini.com/devabil-kara-tuval-uzerine-karisik-teknik-alisildik-manzaranin-hicligi> Date of Access: 20.06.2021

Devabil Kara is a painter working on emptiness and its perception. This is how he explains his painting The Nothingness of the Landscape: A color stain creates a different experience of space (Figure 15). This experience depends on whether it is placed in the center of the painting plane, or to the left and right, or up or down. Each individual relationship generates its own spatial sense. Existence of more than one stain increases the feeling of emptiness. When the objects to be displayed on the surface are carefully placed in different sizes and different colors, a more vivid spatial event occurs. When texture, tone and position changes

are added to these, even more intense and varied spatial experiences are obtained. (Kara, 2006).

Figure 16. Rise to the Surface



Ahmet Duru Rise to the Surface, 2020, pencil on paper, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/ahmet-duru-rise-to-the-surface> Date of Access: 20.06.2021

Ahmet Duru combines contemporary landscape painting with post-industrial ideas about nature to create a contemporary approach to making sense of the strange state of our world, and offers us a beautiful and powerful landscape of our minds. (Graf, 2015)

Ahmet Duru's landscapes push us to question emptiness and absence. His work, which opens up space for the viewer with his increasingly abstract approach, directs us to fill this emptiness (Figure 16). It charms the viewer sometimes into the transformation of the nature to destruction and arid lands and sometimes into a more hopeful color cycle.

Figure 17. Migration



Filiz Piyale Onat, Migration, IL.XIV.353 2016, 150x150 cm, mixed media on canvas <https://www.filizpiyale.com/series-iii-seri-iii?pgid=jt5sijaq-3c5e99b5-f585-446c-9528-09ab11227f3b> Date of Access. 11.10.2021

Filiz Piyale Onat, who produces mindscapes with wide perspective frames in her recent works, creates her works with stories that refer to the concept of emptiness in her paintings. In Onat's landscapes, images of nature untouched by human hands are seen together with man-made objects. It reflects the human state of belonging to nature and becoming one with it (Figure 17).

The formal similarity of Onat's landscape paintings with Chinese landscape paintings led him to question the relationship between nature and human beings, and provided a conceptual basis for the element of space, which he used extensively in his paintings. The artist's compositions building on opposites are related to the concepts of Yin and Yang in Chinese philosophy. Emptiness as a tertiary force which is necessary for Yin and Yang, described as harmony of opposites, to maintain its effect, is the most important complementary element in Onat's paintings.

DISCUSSION

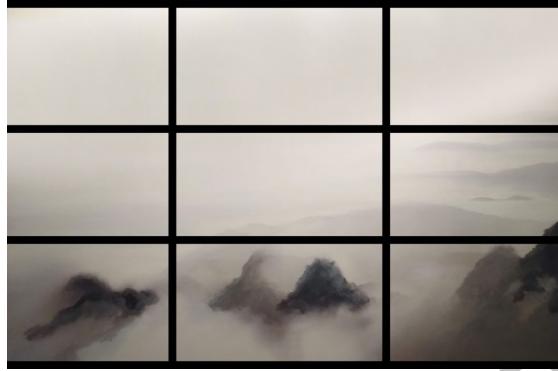
When we examine the concept of emptiness in landscape paintings and selected works in Turkey, we encounter artistic works shaped by different views at different times. These studies reveal that human beings, who are one with nature and a part of nature, are all parts of the same nature, albeit from different lands, different cultures, and different languages.

From Chinese landscape paintings to contemporary paintings, the world is evolving day by day to fill the void, to empty the full. The relationship between chaos and cosmos, light and dark, macro-cosmos and micro-cosmos, full and empty (solid-plane or solid-void), form and void, negative and positive space, and how the parts of a painting or design that we call full and empty to form the whole are the main contents of my research. All plastic art practices begin with emptiness. This space defines each of us to other with small differences, both materially, psychologically, socially, and technically. Like every concept, emptiness exists with its opposite, fullness. Although the works on nature are made in front of the landscape, the chosen frame reflects the mind map of the painter. There are many sources about the concept of emptiness. The works produced so far in the field of landscape painting are the position and feelings of man in the face of emptiness and space.

Emptiness, also called nothingness or non-existence in mysticism and religion, is a state of 'pure consciousness' in which the mind is emptied of all specific objects and images. Emptiness also describes the quality of undifferentiated reality (a world or reality without distinctions and diversity) projected by the emptied mind. We see that the concept of emptiness has historically been used in the Far East in conjunction with landscape painting as a means of meditation and relaxation of the mind. In the West, they tried to discover emptiness in connection with philosophy, physics, chemistry and mathematics respectively, and after trying to explain it with a positivist understanding starting from antiquity, the concept of emptiness led to the concept of existence during the transition to monotheistic religions, and the fear of the emptiness was closer to the style of the 'Horror Vacui' period. In the 15th century, with the Renaissance and especially with Romanticism, man's return to nature and scientific and artistic discoveries manifested themselves with different quests in art. In the 18th century, man evolved to discover his own inner journey and psychology, and the perception process of the human mind intensified, that man came to terms with the emptiness in the society and within himself. In the 20th century, with holistic approach, both the entire cosmos and human neuroscience studies gave us clearer explanations about the existence of the concept of emptiness.

Landscape painting creates a different mental space within the viewer after it has been created by the painter as a real view or mindscape.

Figure 18. Meditate 01



F. Selin Çöplü, Meditate 01, Acrylic Painting, 120X100 cm, 2019

In the works selected as the subject of this research, as given in the example above, the principle of using a grid consisting of nine sections, with two-thirds of the area depicted as earth, sea or sky spaces, was adhered to (Figure 18).

It allows us to understand and experience in our minds the transformation between the sky and the earth, and from there, we are able to realize the relationship between the concepts of space and time. The research has proven that landscape painting has a positive impact on the mind. As an interdisciplinary approach, in a study conducted on people working under stress, one group of participants were shown landscape pictures and the others shown the images created with mixed images, and it was observed that looking at landscape pictures reduced their stress rates. The fact that the proportion of the negative space in this landscape painting (the area of the sky and the sea) occupies two-thirds of the space suggests that the mind is optically looking for the negative space of the sky, the sea or the earth in a landscape painting. This optical space involves the viewer in the painting and creates space for the viewer.

(Viewing Landscapes Is More Stimulating Than Scrambled Images After a Stressor: A Cross-disciplinary Approach)
(<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03092/full>) (Date of Access 22.09.2022)

CONCLUSION

Today, with the social, intellectual and technological advancements, artists are facing onto different pursuits, which we also encounter in landscape paintings. Subjects such as satellite images, drone shots, artificial intelligence applications, new discoveries in space have led to diversifications in landscape paintings. With this diversification, the viewer's integration of self with the landscape and the emptiness in the landscape puts them in a situation where the boundaries between them and the art gradually melt. It gives way to a new representation, to the anthropocene period of entropy, in which emptiness is signified instead of fullness, the non-existent instead of the existent.

Preprint

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