

IMAGERY EXPERIENCES OF THE SELF AND ITS SENSE OF PLACE

by

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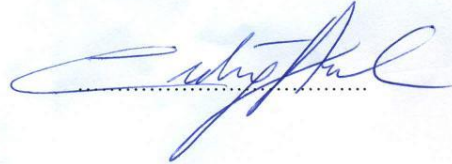
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ABSTRACT

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Münire Burçak Gezeroğlu

M.A. Thesis, June 2018

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Wieslaw Zaremba

Keywords: Imagery, Interior, Perception, Re/presentation, Sense of Place, Stillness

This thesis is a supplementary text to my paintings, which will be exhibited in the FASS Art Gallery. My aim is to explore how I perceive and represent my everyday shelters and my psychological moods through painting and, analyse the subject within a background of visual perception. This text will examine my reflections over everyday moments and its relation to the notions of the sense of place and habitus. I will start by analysing the notions of perception and representation and their continuous effect on me in the first chapter. In the second chapter, I will focus on the role of stillness in my perceptual experience and furthermore, I will concentrate on how it leads me to an interaction within myself. In the third chapter, I will analyse the notion of the sense of place and I will investigate how all these aspects make me transform my everyday shelters into psychological places on the canvas. I presume the text will be sufficient to reflect my mental background and thoughts about my painting practice.

ÖZET

KİŞİNİN GÖRSEL DENEYİMLERİ VE YER HİSSİ

Münire Burçak Gezeroğlu

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Haziran 2018

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Wieslaw Zaremba

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algı, Durağanlık, İç Mekân, İmgelem, Mekân Hissi, Temsil Etme

Bu, Fass Sanat Galerisi'ndeki mezuniyet sergimi destekleyici bir çalışmadır ve sergideki resimlerle bir arada konumlandırılacak bir metin olarak ele alınmalıdır. Amacım psikolojik durumlarımı ve içinde her gün vakit geçirdiğim 'barınak'larımı nasıl algıladığımı ve resim aracılığıyla nasıl yeniden sunduğumla ilgili bilgi verebilmektir. Niyetim yansıtmalarımın günlük anlarımda yarattığı etkiyi araştırmak ve bunu yer hissi ve habitus olgularıyla ve de resimlerimle ilişkilendirmek. İlk bölümde görsel algı ve temsil etme kavramlarını ve bunların sürekliliklerini analiz edeceğim. İkinci bölümde, durağanlığın algılama deneyimimdeki rolüne ve içimde yol açtığı etkileşime odaklanacağım. Üçüncü bölümde ise yer hissini imgesel bir açıdan araştırıp tüm bunların tuvalde nasıl psikolojik bir mekâna dönüşebileceğine odaklanacağım. Bu metnin çalışma sürecim ve altındaki zihinsel yapı hakkında yeterli ve açıklayıcı olacağını umut ediyorum.

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Destegini hi eksik etmeyen aileme,

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INTRODUCTION

Imagery Experiences of the Self and its Sense of Place

As a painter, my inspiration derives from everyday moments, more specifically, from the places I spend most of my time in. Where do I spend most of my time in? An ordinary answer to this question would be interiors. But a more specific answer would be my studio and the indoor spaces attached to it. I intend to visualize and express my imagery experiences from this indoor environment by painting. These paintings consist of interiors and self-portraits which could be defined as visions of my subjective reality.

Since I have started to take notes and do research about this thesis, I have come to realize that this process helped me establish a more substantial relationship with my paintings. My approach to my creative process has become more conscious. As my research continued, my creative process has started to evolve with it. The initial point for these paintings and this research has been the notion of stillness. I sought to investigate what stillness had to offer. Nor in other words, what would happen if stillness was used as a basis for what is coming next. As my research proceeded, I have found out that what comes after stillness for me is the distortion of the reality from a subjective point of view.

My inspiration derives from my experience within indoors and of course, within myself. In my art practice, my exploration of the term 'place' refers specifically to my working area which became my home as I work and sleep in it. Namely, I can say that I spend most of my time in the interior spaces of the big faculty which is constructed in a 'powerful' yet 'cold' manner. Making sense of places that belong to a lot of other individuals is challenging because they cannot be personalized. From my experience, there is a tension about longing for the security of a 'home' in public places. In my paintings, this state of anxiety is applied in forms of light and colour the way American painter Edward Hooper did in his *Sun in an Empty Room* painting.

CHAPTER 1

REPRESENTATION: PROJECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS OF THE SELF

1.1 Absent Element

Absent element is a term related to *representation*. To represent means; to serve, to express, to stand for, to symbolize. These are the most common definitions of the term, which makes one think that it only holds an option for the *real thing* which is being represented. General understandings of the term are extensively assumed to alternate for reality in the form of imagination, such as in the visual arts. This understanding of the term, that it is *a substitute for reality*, leads us to *realism*. Realism in the fine arts indicates the treatment of forms, colours, and space in such a way that they correspond to our everyday visual experience. ('Realism,' 2018) In this sense, representation is opposed to abstract art. Thus, understanding *representation as a substitute for reality* would lead us to a limited way of thinking about the term. Basically, to represent means to present again and is connected to what we have initially perceived about it. We could say that representation has a lot to do with our way of perceiving the external world.

French philosopher Bruno Latour states in his article *Visualization and Social Reproduction* that, two different regimes of representation have existed in western culture. In the first one, which Latour relates to medieval understandings of the term, mental representation signifies the represented item. An example to this would be accepting that my self-portrait represents the 'ever- present' me. (Fig:1) Although it does not, it represents my specific vision of myself. In the second one, which Latour relates to Cartesian understandings¹ of the term,

¹ In summary, Cartesianism is a species of rationalism. According to Cartesianism, knowledge can be derived through reason from innate ideas. For knowledge of events in the exterior world, humans rely on bodily motions. For Cartesians, knowledge of the exterior world is indirect; it contains inference and interpretation. (Watson, 2016)

representation stands in the place of an *absent object* as there is a gap between representation and reality. (Latour, 1988, 21)



Fig: 1. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 100x100 cm, 2017

This Cartesian understanding of representation is appealing to me. It eliminates the necessity of displaying ‘reality’ as it is and lets me create a basis for subjective distortions when painting. Accordingly, in this understanding, there is an inference of a gap between the referent and its representation. Latour also states that this Cartesian understanding of the term affects our conception of representation. It lets the artwork serve as a real object for something beyond itself, where this something is absent. To give an example, Edward Hopper’s *Sun in an Empty Room* painting stands for an image of contained space. It stands for a model, not for a re-presentation. The painting by itself shows a reality that does not exist anymore.

In his essay *The Vogue of Abstract Art*, Sir Ernst Hans Gombrich states that if the observer recognizes the depicted objects in the representation of the external

world in a picture, that picture is counted as successful and that it is a matter of 'making and matching'. According to this theory about pictorial representation, the 'making' part is where the painter traces a certain composition of lines and colours on the canvas. This is meant to provoke the recognition of certain objects in those who look at it. The 'matching' factor happens when a recognition of the objects the painter has depicted corresponds to the observer's visual experience of such objects in the external world. (Gombrich, 1963)

According to this 'making and matching' theory, my paintings might be described as 'colour abstract' as they do not resemble the objects they represent with their colours and are lacking information. Nevertheless, in my art practice, I idealize this lack of information, which causes errors in our perception of the external world. I project these errors on the canvas disguised in inaccurate perspectives or in dreamlike colours. In a way, I am ripping off these errors from my internals on to the canvas. This is how I gain a sense of control towards this lack of information through my art practice: by witnessing, memorizing and projecting it.

1.2 Visual Perception and its Representation

Proceeding with the relation between visual perception and representation, it can be said that to represent something first, it must be perceived via sensory experience. German physician Hermann von Helmholtz described visual perceptions as unconscious implications from sensory data. According to Helmholtz, perceptions are regarded as psychological projections into external space and are accepted as our actual reality. (Gregory, 1997) Therefore, what we perceive in the first place is distorted and forms our subjective 'reality'. It involves senses and intuitions and refers to the way in which we define a situation. And the way we define the situation becomes our immediate reality. For this reason, 'reality' embodies a base in which 'unreal' presences and sensations may occur. These separate passages by M. Merleau-Ponty from *Phenomenology of Perception* summarize what I seek to explain;

“...If I try to shut myself up in one of my senses and, for instance, project myself wholly into my eyes, and abandon myself to the blue of the sky, soon I am unaware that I am gazing and, just as I strive to make myself sight and nothing but sight, the sky stops being a ‘visual perception’, to become my world at the moment. Sensory experience is unstable, and alien to natural perception, which we achieve with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of inter-acting senses.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 225)

“When, in the concert hall, I open my eyes, visible space seems to me cramped compared to that other space through which, a moment ago, the music was being unfolded, and even if I keep my eyes open while the piece is being played, I have the impression that the music is not really contained within this circumscribed and unimpressive space. It brings a new dimension stealing through visible space, and in this it surges forward, just as, in victims of hallucinations, the clear space of things perceived is mysteriously duplicated by a ‘dark space’ in which other presences are possible.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 222)

To give an example from my process, at one stage, sleeping in the studio became frustrating for me as I knew that I was probably alone in the big faculty building. I was waking up from my sleep with every noise coming from the corridors and the classrooms and finding myself in panic. This panic reminded me of a childhood fear. Back then, I was afraid of being alone in big swimming pools and with fear, I used to imagine that a monstrous creature was chasing me. The feeling was so real that I would rush to get out of the pool. In this recent situation, I also found myself imagining unreal presences and became paralysed with panic and anxiety, even though I knew that it was nonsense.

As Ernst Gombrich states in *Art and Illusion* that “All representation relies to some extent on what we have called *guided projection*. Much of what we perceive is supplied from our memory, which means that knowledge is required.” (Gombrich, 1960, 170) Accordingly, when I was a child, there was a dark room in our home and I was afraid to go in there because I was simply afraid of ‘monsters’. To me, the darkness seemed to contain unreal presences. My fears have always been about darkness or being alone in big empty spaces and I have recognized a similar fear when sleeping in the studio at night. As the walls of the studio are black, the darkness increases when the lights are turned off. My point is that; our sensory experience has the potential to create alternate sensibilities

within each perceptive experience and, like my perception, much of what I project through my art practice is supplied from my memory.

Consequently, it could be said that to make sense of the outer world, we filter information that we receive from it. According to Michael Carroll, founder and course director of the NLP Academy in the United Kingdom, our beliefs, decisions, values, and memories constitute our internal filters. Carroll adds by stating that when experiencing an event, we operate the information connected to this event through our internal filters and as a consequence, a series of internal representations occur within our minds. (Carroll, 2011) According to this NLP teaching, internal representations appear in the form of sensory perceptions such as a picture with sounds, feelings, and smells. Each corresponding state are instant consequences of our internal representations.

In conclusion, the human sensory system could be considered as a filtering system which shapes our reality. Yet, how does my filtering system affect my painting process? I can state that my emotions control and filter my visual projections. What I experience emotionally whilst in my studio appears in forms of self-portraits and unrealistic interiors. This is how I evaluate the ‘lacked’ information I perceive.

1.3 Perception and Judgement

Based on the definitions given in the previous chapters, perception is how we take in information. Judgement, on the other hand, could be considered as the way we evaluate this information and form opinions based on it. Subsequently, perception is always followed by a judgement. But how do they interact with each other? Alexandre Lefebvre explains in his book *‘The Image of Law: Deleuze, Bergson, Spinoza’*, that “The primary function of perception is to motivate the manifestation of memory. “(Lefebvre, 2008, 166) With this quote in mind, it could be said that perception is useful to memory and not the other way around. Lefebvre defines this arrangement between memory and perception

as *inattentive judgement*. By using *judgement* rather than *perception*, Lefebvre declares that every perception performs a recollection and every perception is a judgement in a sense that it makes an affirmation of the subject. (Lefebvre, 2008, 167) Moreover, as stated in the previous chapter, a situation which is recognizable to us from a subconscious level calls up memories to act. These memories use perception towards a recognizable situation; thus, as a result, they might be considered to be judgements.

Considering perception and judgement together as the same consecutive process is crucial to me. In this way, I can state that my paintings represent the way I memorize myself and my indoor environment. In time; this environment has become an empty base for me to fill in by projecting my memories.

1.4 Continuum of Perceptual Experience

In this chapter, I would like to write about the term '*percipuum*' that American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce first used in his manuscript *On Telepathy* (Peirce, 1903). In this manuscript, Peirce defined perceptual experience as a composition of two elements. The first is the reaction against an external object, which is called *percept*. The second element associates to the interpretation system and is called *perceptual judgement*. Peirce states in the manuscript that, finding a connection between these two elements is important because in our experience we cannot notice a differentiation. Peirce offers a solution to this problem by introducing a new term which he calls *percipuum*.

“I propose to consider the percept as immediately interpreted in the perceptual judgement, under the name of *percipuum*.” (Peirce, 1903)

This term, which has an essential relation with continuum, represents our perceptual experience. Peirce adds to this by stating that the relation between time and perception is the same as the relation between continuity and perception. In Peirce's philosophy, time composes the dominant structure of perceptual

experience and is a continuum. Therefore, perceptual experience itself will have to be continuous. (Peirce, 1903)

Correspondingly, it could be argued that there is no room for pure observation which is free from interpretation. As Peirce states: “There is no percipuum so absolute as not to be subject to possible error.” (Rosenthal, 1994, 52) As has been declared in the previous chapters, our perceptual judgments can be false and external objects are appearances of whatever those judgements represent. It is the memorial and expectational processes that represent the perceptual object. Focusing on the fact that this process is melted into the present, into the continuity of time, it could be argued that we are living under the impact of our perceptual interpretations of the perceived objects.

Specifically, in my painting process, I treat my indoor environment as a perceptual object which represents my memories and emotions. For the past three years, I have been projecting my subjective distortions non-stop through my art practice and, in this way, the process itself has melted into the continuity of time and became a continuous daydream.

In conclusion, what I intend to mean by ‘representation’ is recalling and reflecting from memory and image recollections on the canvas. What I consider as ‘memory’ and ‘image recollection’ are simply my imagery experiences about my indoor environment. My intention is to consciously represent my experienced imageries on the canvas which I have internally filtered and recollected in my mind.

CHAPTER 2

REPRESENTING MENTAL IMAGERIES IN PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

2.1 Stillness

The university campus is located outside the city and because of that, there have been times when for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week that I was there. I have spent a great amount of time by myself in the studio day and night. In my experience, architectural structures provide an unnatural stillness that cannot be found in nature. This unnatural stillness provided me with a basis to reflect on my psychological states. For this reason, I would like to initiate this part by explaining the role of stillness as a basis for reflective interactions within myself.

Stillness recalls passivity to mind. However, according to an article about a project called *Open City*, stillness is generally presented as contradictory to velocity and speed. In other words, stillness and slowness have been deemed antiquated, as fastness and efficiency have become the privileged terms. (Cocker, 2009) There are several synonyms of stillness, but the one that interests me the most is ‘undisturbed’. To me, this synonym of the term appears to give sign to an opportunity that is waiting to be disturbed. This synonym also appears to give sign to an opportunity to make deep reflections.

Another definition of stillness, the ‘paralysation of velocity’ could be explained as a state of mind, just like the loop of motion and rest. Briefly, an object is said to be in motion if it changes its position in time. On the other hand, an object is said to be at rest if it does not change its position in time. The earth moving would be an obvious example. Therefore, motion and rest are relative terms because this example shows that an object which appears to be at rest, may actually be in motion.

In *Ethics*, Baruch Spinoza defines motion and rest as a ratio which compromises the existence of an individual’s body. To put it more explicitly, bodies and minds are defined as modes, not as objects. Briefly, a mode is the relation of speed and

slowness which provides a capacity for affecting and being affected both in the body and in thought processes. Spinoza affirms that “A body which moves or is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another, and so on, to infinity.” (Cook, 2007,58) In reference to this quote, it can be said that in the sense of motion and rest, bodies and minds are open to interaction with one another. Accordingly, stillness might be a ratio for interaction as well. We can arrive at this conclusion by the simple fact of our mind’s reflections on still moments.

I have experienced such moments especially whilst working in my studio. From time to time, the fact that I have isolated myself from my social circle to focus on my painting process made me feel a bit dull. There have been times that I have felt as if I was not moving forward in my life because I was always at the same place, living a still life. Thus, the visualisation of my memories and expectations about life got deeper and affected my painting process. Thereby, I can state that stillness has been an effective illusory device for me to benefit from when painting.

2.2 Mental Imagery

As explained in the previous chapters, imagery that is experienced mentally, rather than through external reality, has been described as “mental representations of something, not by direct perception but by memory or imagination. “(Hackmann and Holmes, 2004, 390) Proceeding with other definitions; according to an article written by Nigel Thomas, “Mental imagery is a *quasi-perceptual experience*; it resembles perceptual experience but occurs in the absence of the appropriate external stimuli.” (Thomas, 2014)

“Very often, imagery experiences are understood by their subjects as echoes, copies, or reconstructions of actual perceptual experiences from their past; at other times they may seem to anticipate possible, often desired or feared, future experiences.” (Thomas, 2014)

Hence, when thinking about mental imagery, visualities first comes to my mind, visualisations of echoes of something that is not present. This definition of mental imagery provides a basis for my painting process as well.

At any rate, according to American philosopher Ned Block, mental imagery should be referring to a type 'underlying representation' because it has an advantage of not demanding the question of whether the related representations are picture-like. (Block, 1981) Based on the statements given in the previous chapters, the source of representation comes from our mental recollections. We could also say that such mental recollections are stored representations. Therefore, these stored representations might be considered as pictorial images or descriptions of images of limited resolution. (Nicholas, 1977, 16) However, whether it is pictorial or descriptive, it is certain that the mental representation is different from the actual image in many ways. Nevertheless, in the context of this text, the term is based on a picture metaphor.

Nigel Thomas also declares that there are several kinds of mental images such as illusory images, oneiric images, thought images, consecutive images, hallucination images, corporal images and eidetic images. From these different kinds of mental images, illusory and oneiric images relate to my art practice the most. I would like to briefly analyse these two kinds of mental images.

An illusion is simply not perceiving things as they really are. Therefore, an illusory image could be defined as a misinterpretation of an external stimulus distorted by the one who perceives. Oneiric image, it is simply what dreams are made of. (Thomas, 2014) Before the article 'The Meaning of Dreams' (1901) was written by Sigmund Freud, dreams were taken as a kind of temporary insanity conditioned when sleeping. Thus, Freud brought a new perspective to this matter in his article. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he revealed that the psychic state of the dream is the same as that which occurs during other states of psychic life. (Freud, 2016, 778)

To share an example from my painting process; I started doing sketches of empty interiors during the beginning of the second semester of my graduate studies

when I had just moved out of the dormitory and settled into the studio. The days when I was not staying in the studio, I was at the hospital due to a family member's situation. I was spending my days in big empty spaces with a lot to reflect on. My dreams merged into my daydreams and became my reality at that moment, so, I started doing sketches about them. Before, my paintings had been composed of figures. However, during that period of my life, they seemed like artificial figures from magazines. Using figures in my paintings lost its meaning for me as I could no longer connect them with my process.

What I had been internally experiencing during the process of the painting below (Fig:3.), which I consider as the starting point for the series, showed itself in blue coloured walls on the canvas. The dreamlike colours and the false, illogical perspectives can be considered as visualized echoes of my internal representations of my indoor environment.

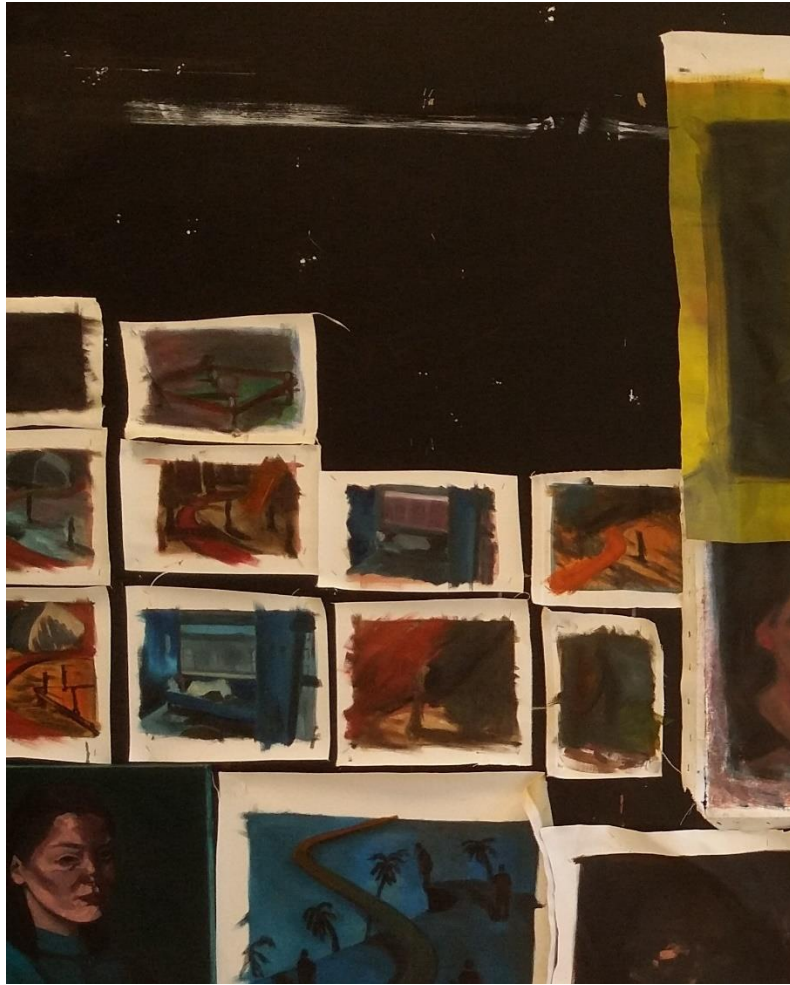


Fig: 2. Sketches



Fig: 3. *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 193x242 cm, 2016

2.2 Representing Mental Imageries

As stated earlier, we only know the external world through representation. But how do we make reason of it? In Aristotle's understanding, our mental representations have an akin form to the external object, thus, they can be used to reason about it. (Reeves, 2017, 17) According to this understanding, the similarity stands between the object and the mental representation and, it helps us to reason about the external world. Yet, this still leaves room to make mistakes. How do we represent similarity? Similarity and representation are two different notions indeed. In American philosopher Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*, resemblance is considered inadequate as a basis for representation. "An object resembles itself to the maximum degree but rarely represents itself; resemblance, unlike representation, is reflexive. Again, unlike representation, resemblance is symmetric: B is as much like A as A is like B, but while a painting may represent the Duke of Wellington, the Duke doesn't represent the painting...Plainly resemblance in any degree is no sufficient condition for representation." (Goodman, 1976, 4) Consequently, my paintings are my representations of my indoor environment, but they do not represent their actual locations with their colours and perspectives.

"It seems then that distortion, infidelity, lack of resemblance in some respect, may in general be crucial to the success of a representation". (van Fraassen, 2008, 13)

Thus, as for van Fraassen representations are naturally perspectival and requires human purpose. The source of this perspective is the choice or intent of a representation user. Therefore, distortion in representation is the point of this *perspectival* quality. (van fraassen, 2008, 24)

Regarding the context of my paintings, *perspectival* representation seems interesting to me. The conscious act of distortion and lack of resemblance is what I intend to apply to my paintings when reflecting a moment of myself or of an interior through my visual memories about them. My paintings represent my mental imageries, but, more explicitly, they represent the *cognitive collages* of the interiors I possess in my mind.

2.3 Cognitive Collage

When thinking about the external world, the first thing that comes to my mind is environment. This, among a wide variety of kinds, includes the social, natural, urban and indoor environments. However, in my paintings, I focused on representing my indoor environment. This understanding requires cognitive knowledge about such an environment. The following excerpt from the article *Transfer of Spatial Knowledge from Virtual to Real Environments* briefly explains one's need to obtain either a physical or a cognitive map in order to deal with environments.

“In large spaces, people are frequently required to move towards unseen goals and therefore they must plan their movements. To do so, spatial knowledge about the environment is required, which may be in the form of a physical map or a cognitive map.” (Peruch, Belingard, Thinus-Blanc, 2003, 253)

As pointed out in the previous chapters, we recognize the external world through our internal representations of it. How about cognitive mapping? It was Edward Tolman, American psychologist, who first coined the term, *cognitive map*.

“Cognitive map is an internal representation of the external environmental feature or landmark...It is almost like a model of that environment in one's brain.” (Tolman, 1948, 189)

According to an article by Elspeth Graham, a cognitive map is considered as an 'image' of the larger environment. It is defined as the result of the mental filtering and coding of sensory data and as something subjective and unique. Mental representations are considered as naturally distorted; therefore, cognitive maps are naturally defective. (Graham, 1976, 259)

In my mind, the 'image' of the indoor environment of the faculty is claustrophobic and monochromatic. In a way, it looks much like a labyrinth or, almost like a trap without exit. To give an example, even if there is light coming from the windows during the day, I remember it as if it is always dark. In addition, besides my studio, the walls of the corridors and the classrooms are light beige coloured but, in my mind, they are more yellowish than beige. I can state that my

paintings represent this ‘image’ of the faculty’s indoor environment, or, explicitly, its *cognitive collages*.

Therefore, cognitive mapping can be considered as a metaphor for the mental representations of the environment. However, for Barbara Tversky, professor of psychology and education, in utilising a cognitive map as a metaphor, the complex and rich knowledge about a person’s environment is not being reflected. Tversky suggests that using the term *cognitive collage* is more convenient since the information about spatial relations with objects, which contains mental representations, comes from many perspectives and is full of cognitive errors. Tversky adds to this by defining cognitive collage as a combination of perceptions from different perspectives and parts coming from various sources which have different qualities. (Tversky, 1992, 135)

Regarding the context of my paintings, using the term *cognitive collage* to define them seems more adequate. I consider the interiors I use in my paintings to be the cognitive collages of their actual locations. With my subjectivity reflected upon them, cognitive collages of my indoor environment could also be considered psychological places. Nevertheless, initially, I would like to write about the way I make sense of this indoor environment in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 3

A VISUAL SENSE OF A PLACE

3.1 A Sense of Place

Places are experienced in the context of everyday life and are mainly identified with stability. As Australian professor Kim Dovey states in his book *Becoming Places: Urbanism/ Architecture/ Identity/ Power*: “Places are identified with what does not change; their ‘sense of place’, ‘character’ or ‘identity’ is seen as relatively stable.” (Dovey, 2010, 3)

“Yet just as human identities are in a continuous process of change, I am interested here in the various ways in which places come into being.” (Dovey, 2010, 3)

This statement points out that human identities and places are in interaction with each other. Then, we could say that sense of place is a notion that transforms space into a place with variable characteristics for individuals. It is a process of transformation in terms of the relationship between people and their environments. With our subjectivity reflected in relation to a place, we gain a sense of it and, the place becomes a *constructed subjectivity*. (Dovey, 2010, 4)

As stated, for me, the place that I feel a *sense of place* for, is the place where I both work and live. Living and working on the campus, I have the luxury of isolating myself from society. I do not have to think about hot water, cleaning, or similar everyday tasks. It is almost like I am in an artist residency program where I can only focus on my art making process and do research about it. I have been in a continuous need for this kind of place, a place where I can work and live and put the problems of daily life aside. Moreover, I have begun to view the faculty as a building where my studio happens to be located. Over time, it has gone out of the context of a university for me. Therefore, while I am working in the studio, or when I am trying to sleep at night, any noise coming from outside starts

bothering me and making me feel like an uptight, complaining neighbour. It is possible that this has made me socially distant ‘protecting’ my territory.

Correspondingly, if we look at Abraham Maslow’s hierarchical needs, we see that the need for a place to live or work is one of them. In a way, we crave for a territory, which is defined as the degree of control one has over the use of a place. (Hall, 1969) And according to Gilles Deleuze, “It is a matter of keeping at a distance the forces of chaos knocking at the door.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 319)

In this sense, my studio has become my ‘cave’ in the last three years. Ever since I was given keys, I have been working and staying there as much as possible. Due to the fact that this space is given to me for only a certain amount of time made me wanted to make the best of it by staying there as much as possible. However, during this period, I willingly distanced myself from my social circle and it made me question myself from time to time. Even though I experience anxieties at night, this space has become my safe place. After all, to me, the opportunity to have a place to work and live in is worth it.

To this extent, the importance of having a territory is essential. Since the main purpose of having a territory is to gain privacy, it can only be achieved within the appropriate arrangement. My issue is that I have been trying to territorialize places which are essentially open to the public. Correspondingly, a kind of a conflict about this situation occurred within me. Anyhow, the only place I have control over this conflict is on the canvas. When I am painting, it is up to me to make the appropriate arrangement of these places with colours, lights and shadows.

3.2 Habitus

Habitus is a concept developed by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, as “a sense of one’s place...a sense of the other’s place.” (Bourdieu, 1990) Additionally, English author Jean Hillier declares in her article *Editorial: Habitus- a Sense of Place* that, habitus is loosely concerned with a sense of place. Hillier adds to this by declaring: ‘Habitus relates to our ways of thinking about or perceiving space and place and how these perceptions affect our actions; as planners, architects and other professionals involved in shaping the form of environments and also as residents, tourists or simply those who experience and interact with places. There is a clear and an important link between habitus and professional practice. (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 177)’ Thus, habitus gains a sociological aspect due to the ways in which people interact with. Hillier affirms that habitus is a concept that associates the physical, the social and the mental which are connected by complicated processes. (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 178)

Therefore, as a painter, student and resident, how do I interact with the university environment? I have stated that for me, this environment has gone out of the context of a campus. I feel like I am living in a ‘safe environment’ where I also happen to have a studio and some courses to attend. With such a feeling, the whole campus became my ‘home’. However, as a resident, I see the distinctive differentiation between the campus and the city. Observing that, I feel like I am living in an artificial environment. Anyhow, as a painter this feeling inspires me to reflect what I have mentally and emotionally experienced in this artificial habitat.

Correspondingly, when thinking about the term ‘habitat’, architecture first comes to mind. Kim Dovey states that: “Architecture is the practice of framing the habitat of everyday life, both literally and discursively.” (Dovey, 1999) Dovey defines *framing* as involving both the structure of a world and the way of seeing ourselves in it. In Dovey’s words: “at once a picture and a mirror.” (Dovey, 1999)

To give an example, during the daytime, the faculty is filled with people but, during the night time, it is filled with emptiness, it feels like the faculty’s indoor

spaces lose their meanings. Living there, I kept observing this cycle and through painting, I constructed another reality of this built environment. In this alternate reality, the only figure I use is myself, as a subject in self-portraits in small-sized canvases. They reflect the various states of mind I have experienced in this built environment. It is my way of ‘framing’ myself in my constructed subjectivity.

3.3 Identification of a Place

Within the context of the previous chapters, it could be said that first we ‘territorialize’, and then make sense of a place. French philosopher Michel de Certeau writes about a theory of territorialisation in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: “Through habitual processes of movement, by covering and recovering the same paths and routes, we come to familiarize ourselves with a territory, and thereby find meaning in that territory.” (de Certeau, 1984, 103) De Certeau acknowledges that space is a place made meaningful by practices that contextualize it. (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 299) Thereby, space becomes a place whilst being practiced. I am also interested in this quote of De Certeau in which he claims that to walk is to lack a place and that “it is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper.” (de Certeau, 1984, 103)

Therefore, by walking in the same space repeatedly, it is possible to make sense of that space through this action turned into practice. This point of view is specifically interesting to me because I find myself walking repeatedly through the same corridors of the same building. Through walking around my studio, in time I started to identify myself with the empty corridors and gained new ideas for my creations. Eventually, I began to territorialize them through painting.



Fig:4. Faculty

This image shows the university faculty's corridor where I find myself constantly walking. The image below is its adaptation on the canvas.



Fig:5. *Walk*, Oil on canvas, 200x335 cm, 2017

According to de Certeau, making sense of a place forms a mode of identification. (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 300) Consequently, British architect and theorist Neil Leach affirms that an equivalent process of ‘mirroring’s’ should be looked at for identification to occur within an architectural environment.

“This process would be dependent on the ‘introjection’ of the external world into the self, and the ‘projection’ of the self on to the external world, such that there is an equivalence – the one ‘reflects’ the other – and identification may take place.” (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 304)

This ‘mirroring’ process might be the basis of how we make sense of a place. It is because introjection and projection take place within the practices that contextualize the place. Hence, identification with place could be perceived as a mirroring between the subject and the environment over time. A part of one’s identity comes to be constituted by the environment which s/he identifies with. Therefore, in order to imprint the self into the environment, architecture provides a potential structure.

“If identity is a performative construct – if it is acted out like some kind of ‘film script’ – then architecture could be understood as the ‘film set’. But it is as a ‘film set’ that it derives its meaning from the activities that have taken place there. Memories of associated activities haunt architecture like a ghost.” (Hillier, Rooksby, 2016, 308)

I can say that the faculty’s architecture feels much like a film set where I tend to visualize my memories. What I have experienced in my life since the beginning of my graduate studies still feels very much alive. Positive and negative, I replay the memories over in my mind when I take a break from painting and daydream in the studio or walk around in the empty corridors of the faculty at night. Memories of my own associated activities haunt my habitat like a ghost. There have been too many mirroring’s which are highly subjective, and it looks like the faculty corridors became my home as well.

Analysing the process of ‘mirroring’ within the context of my paintings, I realize that they become psychological places on the canvas. This high subjectivity reflected on these spaces eventually led me to paint imaginary interiors as well. Even though I originate from the photographs I had taken in the studio or in the corridors, I do not consider any interior paintings of mine as realistic. Nevertheless, the ‘mirroring’ between me and this psychological environment created a rich basis which eventually led me to paint ‘imaginary’ interiors as well.

3.4 A Psychological Place on the Canvas

As stated, in campus, the buildings have a modern architectural structure and are built within an environmental plan. This ‘planned’ environment gave me the freedom to isolate myself from the architectural identity of Istanbul which, to me, seems quite disorganized. I am physically and mentally detached from the chaotic ways of the city. However, what I ‘read’ from the faculty building is the feeling of security and insecurity at the same time. Considering its physical aspects, the building is secured with its architectural structure and security guard system. However, the sense it gives me personally, is cold and insecure, especially at night, in my portable bed, when I assume that there is almost no one left in the

building. That is when I project my fears and anxiety towards the faculty the most. Yet, this is also where I live. Thus, senses of comfort and anxiety merge within each other when I paint.

In view of this, I would like to mention Vilhelm Hammershoi, a Danish painter who affected my vision of painting with his monochromatic and still interiors. Hammershoi mostly painted rooms of his apartment, in which he spent his life with his wife, Ida. In his paintings, the domestic interiors are treated as still life's. Empty space is painted as everything else in the painting and, almost monochromatic emphasis unifies all elements within each room. Many times, a piece of furniture is placed somewhere in the room where in real life it could serve no practical purpose. There is a strong sense of stillness in each room he painted. And in that stillness, one finds the space to make reflections.



Fig: 6. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Bedroom, Strangade 30*, 1906



Fig: 7. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *White Doors*, 1899

I believe that this quote of Hammershoi explains his obsession with domestic interiors:

“I have always thought there was such beauty about a room even though they weren’t any people in it, perhaps precisely when there weren’t any.”
(Hammershoi, 1907)

His interiors have an unreal atmosphere which reminds me of Edward Hopper’s paintings or of Danish film director Karl Theodor Dreyer’s cult film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

As stated, the places I use in my paintings are not domestic interiors. The spaces in the faculty building itself are strongly inspiring to me. Different from my studio, these places are empty of objects and evoke a sense of stillness in me. Although my studio is now private (for two students), it has the traces of being

used by former students with many paint stains and writings on the walls. Therefore, as I prepare the undercoat of each canvas, it feels as if I own the property. I metaphorically re-paint and organize the interiors within many layers on the canvas. I mostly apply strong monochromatic colours to make them look much more tempting. Additionally, to me, it creates a sense of unity and control towards my projected anxiety and fears about this built environment. There are no objects or figures to make them look domestic. The only traces they have are my psychological states disguised in colours, lights and shadows.

It can be said that the psychological reflection upon places could break the codes of an interior. That statement makes me think of Karl Theodor Dreyer's cult film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). The film is about the trial of Joan. Much of the film consists of close-ups of her. We never see the interiors clearly; we just get a sense of it as the film itself is in a psychological place. Dreyer delivered the film with a unity of time and place which creates an interior drama, not only of places but also of the soul. The close-ups of Joan make us focus on her spiritual interior rather than focusing on the external world. This film inspired me with its close-ups and its merge of the interiors with the spiritual reflection. The feel of the film is close to what I try to achieve in my paintings; the spiritual interior of the self.



Fig: 8. Still from *Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928

Additionally, the close-ups of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* remind me of the portraits of British painter John Kirby. I can say that his paintings, in general, inspire me, nevertheless, it is his portraits that affect me the most. To me, his portraits evoke a sense of loneliness and melancholy. Just as in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, the unnerving portraits give hints to the figures' spiritual interiors with a plain background. My self-portraits also have a plain background with close portraits in front of it. I consider them as silent watchers of their psychological states.

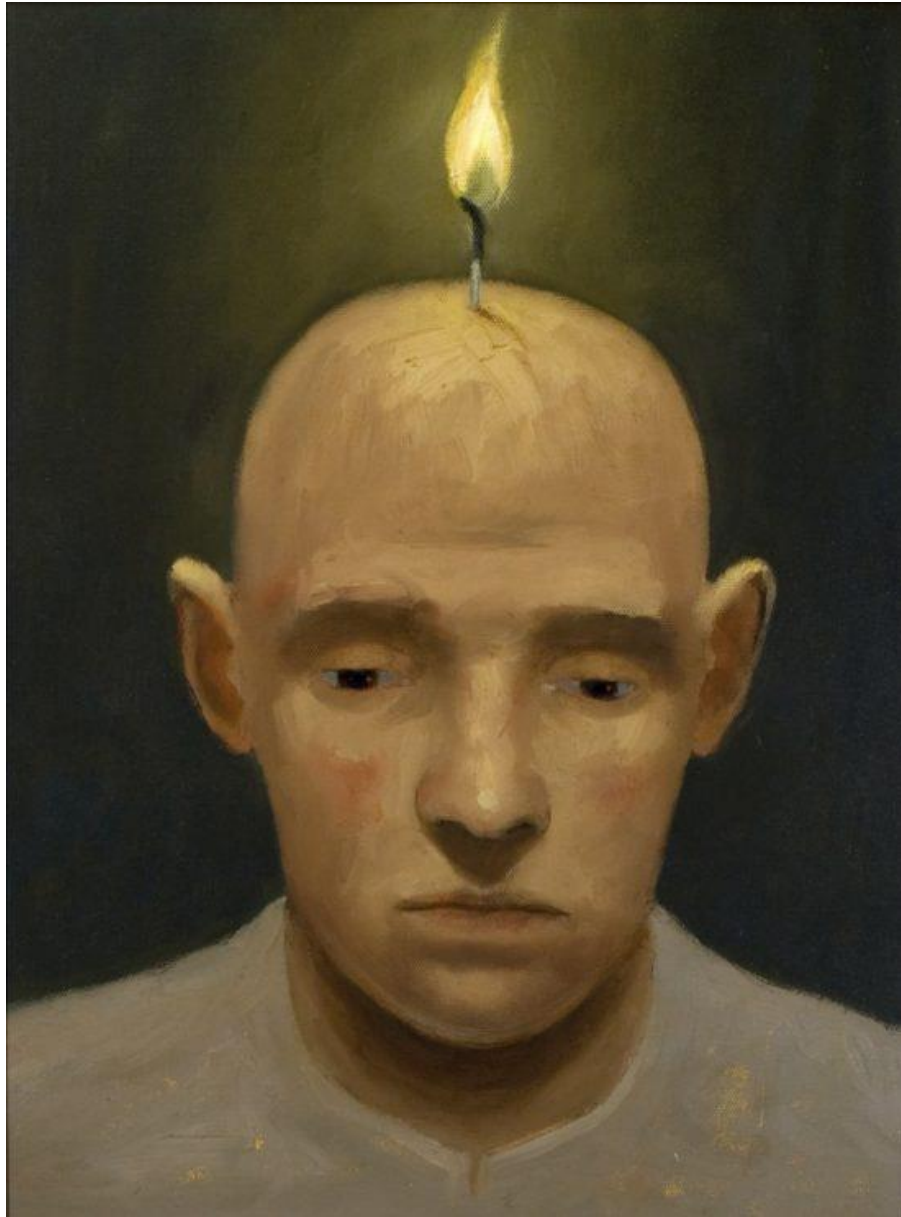


Fig: 9. John Kirby, *Head*, 2009

I am also very inspired by the paintings of Turkish painter Nuri Kuzucan. Kuzucan's works mainly focus on architectural structures which are void of human figures. Since Kuzucan does not add human figures in his paintings, there is only the act of looking to mention. The artist remains as a distant observer while depicting the architectural structures. In an interview from 2013, Kuzucan stated that the painting's humanity is acquired from the viewer:

“Painting should be emotionless, and people should be able to attach their own feelings...There are two parts to this. One is the process of creating. This is very personal, and I can paint to motivate myself, I can paint to make myself feel better. But when the painting is complete, I see it detached from me and I would expect the painting to create different effects according to the viewer. I create as simple a painting as possible, so people are not intimidated by it.” (Kuzucan, 2013)



Fig: 10. Nuri Kuzucan, *Open Space for Collective Work*, 2004

The solicitude in Kuzucan’s works reminds me of American painter Edward Hopper’s paintings. In both artists’ works, one can empathise with their modern and urban existence. Mentioning Edward Hopper, to me his paintings depict a sense of melancholy. We see the demonstration of lone individuals in urban spaces such as diners, hotel rooms and cinemas. Hopper uses these urban spaces to reflect his interior realm. After all, I think that there is an enormous complication behind the simplicity of his paintings.



Fig: 11. Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963

However, in *Sun in an Empty Room*, which is one of his last paintings, Hopper emphasizes on light and does not use any material object in this 'internal reality' of his. I have mentioned of this painting in the previous chapters as an example of *applied anxiety in forms of light and colour*. By that, it can be said that in the many lights and shadows in his paintings, we see the different states of Hopper's spiritual interior.

What fascinates me the most about these painters' paintings is the lack of details which invites the viewer to complete the image. It feels that they all create a space in which the spectator's own internal life can be observed; a base for reflection.

Another great inspiration to me is Dario Argento's classic horror film *Suspiria* (1977). What inspired me about this film is its twisted interiors. The film plays

in a dreamscape; it does not take place in real life. When thinking about the interiors of the film, it occurs that maybe the word interior is not sufficient at all and that it should rather be called landscape because it takes place in a dreamscape which is defined by its unnatural colours. The colours of the interiors are constant reminders that you are in a dream because they are simply inadequate.



Fig: 12. Still from *Suspiria*, 1977

I would not define my paintings as dreamscapes, even though the colours used are also unnatural and inadequate. I would rather define them as visions of a place.

“Bobby, may I share something with you? A vision I had in my sleep last night – as distinguished from a dream, which is a mere sorting and cataloguing of the day’s events by the subconscious. This was a vision. As

clear as a mountain stream, the mind revealing itself to itself.” (Twin Peaks, 1990) ²

This quote from the cult television series *Twin Peaks* summarizes my approach to my painting process. Simply, my mind revealing itself to itself within architectural forms and distorted lines on the canvas. In this context, my painting series demonstrates my vision of the external world.

3.5 An Analysis of My Painting Process

In this chapter, I would like to analyse the process of the painting series I have done during my graduate studies. I began this journey with the understanding of this quote by M.Merleau-Ponty:

“The quality occurs when instead of living the vision, I question myself about it, I want to try out my possibilities, I break the link between my vision and the world, between myself and my vision, in order to catch and describe it.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 264)

Keeping this quote in mind, I merged my vision with reality and described it in monochromatic colours, which to me created an alternate basis for my vision of a place to occur.

Overall, the interior paintings seem to fall into three main monochromatic colours; blue, red and yellow-green. As there is no specific reason for the choice of colours, I can say that I followed the mixture on my palette in an instinctive way. In the studio, there is enough space to work on more than one big painting. Therefore, I was usually working on two or more paintings at the same time. The same colour mixture on my palette was applied to all of them.

As I have mentioned, I prepare the undercoats of the canvases by myself with tempera and oil colour. In time, I have developed my own way of preparation with materials such as pigments, Venetian turpentine, eggs and cooked linseed oil. I usually do not wait for the final layer to dry and start painting right away.

² Twin Peaks (1990-1991, 2017) is an American television series created by David Lynch and Mark Frost.

To me, it is like an act of whitewashing the walls of an overused interior. It is a quick and momentary action which metaphorically displays my wish to erase all former human traces but mine. The same approach is applied for most of the paintings in the series. My palette is where my momentary actions on the canvas find its ground. In my painting process, I am unstable and anxious, as it is shown with many brush strokes in the paintings.

I mostly get inspired by the reflections of light coming from the windows, both in the studio and in the faculty corridors. While giving me a sense of the exterior world, such reflections also give me a strong sense of stillness. When I am painting, I follow reflections, both from my mind and from the external world. As shown in Fig:13, I did not hesitate to paint the actual light reflected on my canvas. The same applies for my self-portraits. I painted them while sitting in front of a mirror and reflected my psychological states. While the size of the interior paintings is varying from small to big, the self-portraits remain remarkably small in comparison. My intention in merging them into the same series was to create a tension; to make the interiors to be witnessed by my small sized yet keen self-portraits. It is my attempt to break the link between 'me' and my vision of the interiors.

I believe that this series shows the struggle and the tension I psychologically experienced during my graduate studies at Sabanci University.



Fig: 13. *Studio*



Fig: 14. *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 210x305 cm, 2016



Fig: 15. *To the Conference Room*, Oil on canvas, 145x145 cm, 2017



Fig: 16. *Faculty Corridor*



Fig: 17. *Corridor*, Oil on 2 canvases, 50x100 cm, 2017



Fig: 18. Studio



Fig: 19. Studio



Fig: 20. *Studio 1*, Oil on canvas, 140x212 cm, 2016



Fig: 21. *Studio 4*, Oil on canvas, 144x192 cm, 2017



Fig: 22. *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 35x50 cm, 2018



Fig: 23. *Stocky*, Oil on canvas, 50x70 cm, 2018



Fig: 24. *Stocky*, Oil on canvas, 15x15 cm, 2018



Fig: 25. *Stocky*, Oil on canvas, 15x15 cm, 2018



Fig: 26. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 18x24 cm, 2016

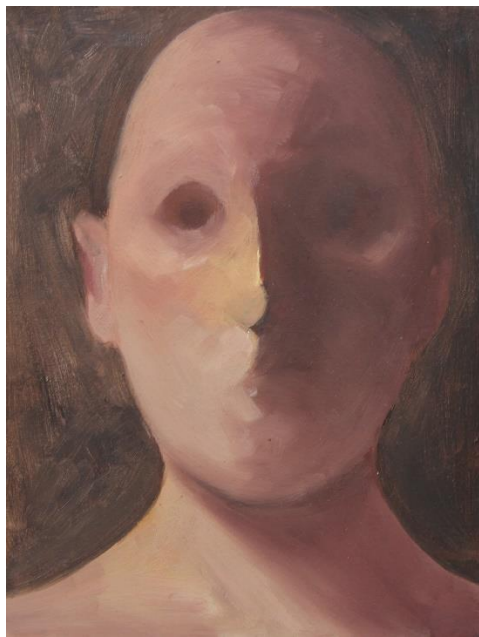


Fig: 27. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 18x24 cm, 2017



Fig: 28. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 15x20 cm, 2016



Fig: 29. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 15x20 cm, 2016

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this text was to analyse the notions of mental imagery and representation within the context of having a sense of place and to analyse their reflections on my paintings. I attempted to focus on the continuity of perceptual experience in depictions of interiors and self-portraits and the configured relationship between stillness, mental imageries and sense of place.

During my research and painting process, I started owning the interior spaces of my indoor environment through the anxiety I experienced in them and idealized it with painting. I have merged my personal experience and emotions within the monochromatic usage of colours. Even though my choice of colours was instantaneous, it has been my emotions which subconsciously directed my decisions. While working in the studio, I was not being disturbed by anybody and therefore, I have had the chance to experiment with various materials while preparing the background of the paintings. My own way of preparing the multiple layers of the undercoat of the canvases led me to find new ways of painting as well. I have found out my own way of composing a painting in which the emptiness and the colours used serve as a passage to enter to my method of constructed subjectivity.

I hope my paintings provide a way of communication with the viewers who may have experienced similar psychological states yet, were not able to transmit them through an art practice.

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