

AN ESSAY ON MURAT PULAT'S PAINTING AESTHETICS

Everywhere I go I find a poet has been there before me.

Sigmund Freud

Within all forms art, “contemporary art” contains a dynamic unseen in any other art discipline: It’s a state of tension created by being contemporary, as imprinted in its name. Because, since the beginning of the last century and especially with the split in the 60s, contemporary art has persistently felt the need to be the pioneer of all art disciplines, an intellectual vehicle, and a revolutionary wave. This paves the way for the necessity to continue its existence in terms of difficult issues from various aspects from the point of view of contemporary artists, viewers, critics and interpreters. “Aesthetics” may possibly be the leading subject where this prevails. Where does the aesthetic value of a contemporary work of art begin and when does it hold a superior place in terms of aesthetic judgment?

Immense complications arise even when contemporary art is the subject of this question. Because, contemporary art is concretized above all as an attack and critique of traditional aesthetic values. As an ideological channel, it’s quite clear that this structure is one of the dynamics that contemporary art is grounded on and, by also establishing its own inner mechanism, it has become institutionalized, as a new aesthetic language in terms of being local and settled in a Deleuzian sense. On the other hand, especially with the effects of the pop art movement, it has expanded by including a consumption age aesthetic in which the current cultural production network codes are once again utilized. In this sense, contemporary art, in many ways, continues to exist as a complicated and difficult but expanding area.

An essay on the aesthetics of Murat Pulat’s paintings will, I believe, allow an opportunity to understand his brilliantly intelligent strategy within a continuing process. Rather than being an assessment of the intellectualness of Murat Pulat’s work, this study is an attempt to understand how these paintings can be sensed as ‘aesthetic’ of a superior nature. In this sense, putting aside contemporary art’s own inner arguments, this essay does not intend to go beyond simply being an assessment where the thoughts of Lacan and Benjamin are used.

Lacanian Gaze and Desire

According to Lacan, the “gaze” is where from where “desire” originates. This is a fact that goes beyond simply seeing. When we look at a person, what we actually see is half of what that person really is, at the most. Hence, we create the other half based on how we feel that day, previous experiences with that particular person, expectations and prejudices. In other words, we are actually making up the “desire” with what’s not there with this “gaze”. In summary, the gaze is a skewed ‘look’. Desire, which doesn’t want to reveal itself and which is anamorphic in itself, can only be realized by embracing things like death and subjectivity using a psychoanalytical theory/perspective which is different to what is usual.

If we approach Murat Pulat's painting with a Lacanian view in this sense, we can comfortably borrow this theory that's been commonly used especially in terms of cinema theory, for his paintings as well. Murat Pulat carries the cinematic image to his paintings. The artist who carries images from films that are especially 'auteur' to the field of desire, increases the impact tenfold with the technique he has developed in oil painting. The oil painting grains that resemble screen 'pixels' sometimes flow horizontally and sometimes vertically; and sometimes, they disperse in a circular motion from a specific point. As is the case in cinema, the actual image can only be perceived properly from a certain distance.

According to Lacan, what makes a subject desirable is what we refer to as libidinal transaction. In other words, it's the melding of the subject together with this more or less structured image that we carry with us in various ways. When an individual is in love, it is actually his/her own ego that he/she loves. What the individual makes real on an imaginary level is his/her own ego (Silverman, K., 2007: 73). Exploring further into psychoanalytical theory from here, we can continue our efforts to understand the aesthetic equivalent of Pulat's paintings. Again, the Lacanian theory exposes the structured subject specified above with the "mirror stage" theory. The Mirror Stage is when a 6-8 month child excitedly recognizes his/her image, as a whole, in the mirror. When a person captures him/herself from an image, through mediation, (this reflector can also be the mother) that reflects back, it predicts that the person can fictionalize him/herself thanks to the image that's reflected to him/her by another person. (Kızıltan, H., 2012)

The subject that has strong desires to get closer generally reflects insufficiency not fullness, incongruity and confusion instead of preciseness. The subject indistinctly distinguishes the irreducible heterogeneity of the physical ego using the distance from the regular ideal of the inner- receptive coordinates, and this can only be done with extremely dystopic segments using physical fantasy. This fantasy will result in a deadly competition to occupy the frame of this idealized image in the face of extreme feelings of aggressiveness toward anyone who is considered perfect or complete. Idealizing this image is actually assuming it as a desired mirror. This superior value of the mirror image comes from the ability to replace what's lost when the subject is mentioned. (Silverman, K., 2007: 75)

The mirror image is a "mirage" that prevents the subject from distinguishing its basic nihilism or its "being-toward-death", it's an attractive bait that encourages the subject to continuously chase that imaginary abundance, for which the inevitable end is physical disintegration. The subject's attempt to come closer to the ideal imago can be interpreted as definite proof of imperfection. Nonetheless, the subject protects itself due to its lack of knowledge again with this imago (Silverman, K., 2007: 75). Setting off from here, Kaja Silverman approaches cinema using Lacanian psychoanalytical theory and states that cinematic identification actually emerged from internalizing an external image in an imaginary sense. (Silverman, K., 2007: 137).

In short, the cinema images created by Murat Pulat on canvas act as a way to complete the insufficient subject, the most basic psychological need of the viewer. From this perspective especially, he presents an image that operates on a fantasmic level. In Žižek's words: "The thing that fantasy stages is not a stage where our desire is fulfilled or fully met. Instead, it is the stage that fulfils the desire itself and what actually stages it". (Žižek, S., 2008: 20). Murat Pulat makes the images he has borrowed from the films of directors like Godard, Truffaut, and Bergman as the prime

“mirror images” for the viewer. The female figures chosen especially make us consider that the artist is completing his own personal image of a projective mother. The most prominent of these women is no doubt Anna Karina.

Benjamin’s “Aura”*

In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Benjamin suggests that parallel to the change of technological processes related to the production and distribution of art and reification of life, the essence and nature of the art work also changes. From here he introduced “aura”, one of his famous theories. “Aura” is defined as a unique illumination or brightness that surrounds an original work of art. Uniqueness is given to works of art with the emotions of “here” and “now”. Hence, setting off from a person or a subject, the “aura” that can be defined as an unworldly cover surrounding it exists in nature, and is shaped by any distance forming a vision of its own. This inaccessibility is the fundamental quality of the “aura” or works of art. The exclusivity of a work of art is related to the impossibility of it being separated from its position within tradition. (Sevim, B., A., 2010)

When attempting to determine which aesthetic conditions “aura” gives to something, it’s extremely important to remember that Benjamin does not simply relate “aura” to distance. Benjamin argues that distance should be perceived relatively with what is close. In saying so, he emphasizes the need for identification between the viewer and the subject with “aura”, and this can actually be made possible by simple idealization, or elevating the subject to a “cult image”. This elevation, beyond everything else, is added to an area which is complicated enough to illuminate the subject in new ways, as is the case in psychics, in this way, necessitates that the viewer demands an imaginary relationship with what will otherwise remain alien. (Silverman, K., 2007: 155)

It’s in this sense exactly that Murat Pulat puts forward a painting language that allows the viewer to enter the imaginary*** and that makes the “aura” possible. The cult films of cinema transform into captivating aesthetic subjects with all their originality in the eyes of the viewer in oil paintings, which have held a privileged place ever since the Renaissance. In this way, the two sides of the contradictory world of contemporary art are able to come together.

*Aura: “Aura” is defined as a unique illumination or brightness that surrounds an original work of art. The halo around the figure of Jesus is a good example.

**Reification is one of the most striking and most easily understood concepts among those used to define the destruction imposed on social relationships by capitalism. Used to define the concrete effects of capital on the conscience, the concept found life through Marx’s analysis of “commodity fetishism” and his 1844 handwritings on the concept of “depersonalization”. It was later developed in Lukac’s historically significant “History and Class Consciousness”.

***Imaginary: The Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are the main concepts of Lacan’s theoretic psychoanalysis. Lacan assesses these concepts while explaining the road that a child, what is a biological being, takes towards becoming human, in other words, becoming a cultural object. The ego and its living area firstly belong to the Imaginary. This is a phase that is yet to separate from what’s not natural. Later, when the Name-of-the-Father comes into play, the Symbolic structure suppresses what is imaginary.

Sources

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