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On the Relationship of Landscape and Painting

Abstract: This paper intends to sketch out how the understanding of landscape has changed today, using painting as an interpretative tool. As this paper argues, the contemporary sense of landscape is considered through historical, political, social, cultural, and aesthetic facets. Differentiating from the Kantian notion of landscape as an aesthetic category in the domain of visual arts, it has achieved multiple layers of meaning, rather than only referring to gardens and agricultural areas. The extent of the landscape began to change in the 19th century due to industrialization, exploration of new territories, and the development of technology, botany, and geography. Since the 20th century, the concept has also included immaterial constituents in addition to technological, cultural, and social developments. It has become a social construct as an expression of ideas, memories, imagination, and feelings. Pointing to an active and flowing system, rather than a static and visual one, today, the landscape is grasped as an interdisciplinary and collaborative production. It defies distinct urban zonings and proposes ambiguity, vagueness, and contradiction, as it expands the issue through the concepts of anti-landscape and non-landscape. Anti-landscape indicates marginalized and unsuccessfully man-modified lands, whereas non-landscape describes unused and neglected lands. This paper traces the shift of landscape as a dynamic force in the recent paintings of the contemporary Turkish artist, Yıldız Arun. Her works in landscape, anti-landscape, and non-landscape reflect immateriality and immanence as a dynamic and interactive system. In her paintings, the landscape emerges as an affective field of an internal order with a capacity to transmit affects and sensations in Deleuzian sense. It becomes a force field, which flows into a multiplicity of intensities, revealed by layers of colors, lines, and brush strokes. The juxtaposition of spirituality and materiality turns her canvases into generative fields of multiple encounters affected by each stroke. As this paper shows, the landscape does not point to a pre-defined, extrinsic, static, and visual area, but a force field in flux, with a capacity to produce potentials, reciprocal relations, and immanent affects.

Keywords: landscape architecture; anti-landscape; non-landscape; landscape painting; visual arts; artist.

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Introduction

This paper argues that the contemporary sense of landscape is considered through historical, political, social, cultural, and aesthetic facets. It aims at sketching out how the understanding of landscape has changed today, using painting as an interpretative tool through the recent works of the contemporary Turkish artist, Yıldız Arun. Her works mostly focus on nature, space, and metaphysic issues;[1] yet this paper merely analyses her works in the landscape, anti-landscape, and non-landscape, which are the expressions of dynamic and interactive systems and reflection of immateriality and immanence.

A brief overview of the landscape in relation to visual arts

The conception of landscape in relation to visual arts has shifted through the centuries and across geographies. The most ancient landscape drawings ever created are found in the proto-city of Çatalhöyük in Turkey as a Neolithic drawing, or in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc Cave in France as cave drawings.[2] In the Eastern context, Chinese landscape paintings and gardens have been closely and historically associated.[3] In the 15th century, the landscape in visual arts became an expression of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, and appeared simultaneously with a new type of garden design and urban lifestyle.[4] Until the 17th century, the landscape was mostly used as a backdrop for portraits and epic scenes. In the 17th century, particularly in the paintings of Nicolas Poussin, the landscape was depicted autonomously as a subject and a poetic narrative by means of numerous allegories.[5]

The theory of the picturesque in the 18th century changed Poussin's understanding of the harmonic landscape and shifted the relationship of landscape and visual arts by merging beauty (in terms of composition and order) and the sublime (in terms of vastness and roughness).[6] William Gilpin developed the concept of the picturesque,

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[1] Yıldız Arun, "Yıldız Arun: Contemporary Artist & Traveler," acc. June 22, 2019, https://yildizarun.wixsite.com/yildizarun.

[2] Sebastien Nomade et al. "A 36,000-Year-Old Volcanic Eruption Depicted in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc Cave (Ardèche, France)?" *Plos One* 11, 1 (2016), acc. July 20, 2019, https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0146621#sec001; Axel K. Schmitt et al. "Identifying the Volcanic Eruption Depicted in a Neolithic Painting at Catalhoyuk, Central Anatolia, Turkey," *PLoS ONE* 9, 1 (2014), acc. July 20, 2019, https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id= 10.1371/journal.pone.0084711.

[3] Chuan Wang, "Historical Origins of Landscape Painting and Chinese Gardens," *Asian Social Science* 5, 10 (2009): 137, 139.

[4] Marc Antrop, "A Brief History of Landscape Research," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, and Emma Waterton (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 13, 14.

[5] Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3–9.

[6] William Gilpin, "On Picturesque Beauty," in *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 821–23, 857, 861.

with regard to the ideal beauty of a landscape painting, in his 1768 treatise, *Essay on Prints*. As a visual ideal and aesthetic effect, the presence of a picturesque landscape was dependent on being perceived by viewers.[7] Gilpin's contemporary, Immanuel Kant, tackled landscape as an aesthetic category in the domain of visual arts, considering it as only pleasing to the eye. As he elaborated in his 1790 treatise, *Critique of Judgment*, landscape gardening as the art of beautiful arrangement (of flowers, grasses, shrubs, trees, ponds, and so on) belonged to the domain of painting, which was regarded as beautiful art. Natural beauty, which consists of the beauty of form, colors, and sound, preceded artificial beauty; yet they had a close relationship. Gardens were beautiful since they imitated art, whereas the art of painting was considered beautiful as long as it resembled nature.[8] His ideas were manipulated by Frederick Law Olmsted (1997) in the 19th century, as he transformed landscape gardening into landscape architecture. He also handled landscape as a social device of democratization.

The Prussian geographer and explorer Alexander von Humboldt's naturalistic explorations paved the way to the holistic perception of the landscape. He emphasized the human and cultural aspects of landscape, which he also considered as mentally healing, rather than its aesthetic qualities.[9] On the other hand, the approach of Paul Vidal de la Blache, the French geographer, is more literary and historical, although he grasped landscape as a holistic unity like Humboldt. He highlighted the importance of local society and its lifestyle in organizing the landscape, thus leading to regional differentiation due to the fragmentation of culture, settlement patterns, and social territories.[10]

The Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution represented a turn towards rationality and technological upheaval. Being against the effects of industrialization and mechanical reproduction in visual arts, artists and designers used botanical nature as an important standpoint. Artists depicted naturalistic landscapes as creations of God and represented alienation due to developing industrialization, as seen particularly in the works of Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner. In the 19th century, the extent of the landscape began to change due to industrialization, exploration of new territories, and the development of technology, botany, and geography. In the first half of the 19th century, a variety of concepts were included in the conception of landscape in the USA, ranging from land to the worldwide circulation, networks, and economies of merchandise and people.[11] From the mid-19th century, the importance of landscape

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[7] Ibid., 857–60.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, ed. and trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 161,187–88.

[9] Malcolm Nicholson, *Historical Introduction: Alexander von Humboldt Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (London: Penguin, 1995).

[10] Paul Claval, "The Languages of Rural Landscapes," in *European Rural Landscapes: Persistence and Change in a Globalising Environment*, ed. Hannes Palang, Helen Sooväli, Marc Antrop, and Gunhild Setten (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 11.

[11] Rachael Ziady DeLue, "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds," in *Landscape Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Rachael Ziady DeLue (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 3, 5, 10.

began to increase in Europe in relation to the development of botany, zoology, history, geography, as well as industrialization, colonization, and economic globalization.[12] In the early 20th century, due to the beginning of degradation of nature and loss of traditional rural landscapes, movements for protecting nature, landscapes, sites, and monuments were initiated in numerous Western countries. For landscape, within this context, this was the beginning of being accepted as common heritage and establishing laws for protection.[13]

Unpacking landscape today

Since the 20th century, the concept has also included immaterial constituents in addition to technological, cultural, and social developments. The coalescence of land, technology, and vision paved the way to the merging of experience and representation.[14] The contemporary understanding of the landscape is considered through historical, political, social, cultural, and aesthetic facets. It has a different meaning for different regions: In the USA, it is seen as a configuration of spatial patterns and ecological processes, whereas in Europe, a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach emphasizes it as a common heritage that contains narratives and symbolic values.[15] Having achieved multiple layers of meaning, rather than only referring to gardens and agricultural areas, the landscape has become a social construct as an expression of ideas, memories, imagination, and feelings. Pointing to an active and flowing system, the contemporary understanding of the landscape is grasped as an interdisciplinary and collaborative production.

Land art of the mid-20th century and environmental movements at the end of the 20th century, which were initiated by architects and artists, paved the way to exploring the potentials of transforming ruined and abandoned industrial sites, and to produce new kinds of parks on brownfields, along waterfronts, on rooftops and in garbage dumps.[16] The contemporary understanding of landscape thus defies distinct urban zonings and proposes ambiguity, vagueness, and contradiction, as it expands the issue through the concepts of anti-landscape and non-landscape. Briefly, 'anti-landscape' indicates marginalized and unsuccessfully man-modified lands, whereas 'non-landscape' describes unused and neglected lands.

It may be argued that anti-landscape is in contrast with the landscape: Landscape is considered beautiful, natural, useful, and harmonious, whereas anti-landscape

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[12] Marc Antrop and Veerle Van Eetvelde, *Landscape Perspectives: The Holistic Nature of Landscape*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 14.

[13] Marc Antrop, "A Brief History of Landscape Research," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, and Emma Waterton (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 14, 15.

[14] Denis E. Cosgrove, "Introduction to *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*," in *Landscape Theory*, ed. James Elkins and Rachael Ziady DeLue (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 32.

[15] Antrop and Van Eetvelde, *Landscape Perspectives*, 24.

[16] Jayne Merkel, "Urban American Landscape," *Architectural Design* 77, 2 (2007): 37.

is seen as ugly, urban, useless, and chaotic.[17] Yet, the aesthetic qualifications of anti-landscape are so relational and dependent on the viewer that it can also be regarded as appealing and attractive. Its contrasting and conflicting features pave the way to experiencing it through the tension of limitation, fear, curiosity, failure, and disturbance. The representational character of anti-landscape may vary by different cultures and societies, but generally, it can be said that it emerges as four different forms: Firstly, as in the depiction of the desert in the Bible, the landscape can obtain a negative cultural meaning. Secondly, as in Chernobyl, it can occur through the failure of a cultural projection and material reality. Thirdly, as in science-fiction worlds, it can remain radically other and non-responsive to human ideas. Fourthly, as in the American-style suburb, which negates both city and countryside, rather than combining them, it can emerge as a failed transformation of landscape due to ideological contradictions.[18] Riuttavuori in Finland is also given as an example of anti-landscape, since it lacks social and cultural relations, practices and exchanges, and builds on the discursive landscape of memory.[19]

Non-landscape, on the other hand, is a spatial concept, which indicates that a community does not have any relation to an area. It is also called as "nonecumene", which associates with a land that is "not ours", meaning, not owned, controlled, or used by a community. The conception of non-landscape differs in every period and culture, ranging from a variety of terms, such as wilderness, wasteland, no-man's land, and non-place. For example, the wilderness is not regarded as non-landscape anymore in industrialized societies; yet, the variety of non-places has increased by now due to mobility and placelessness associated with modernity.[20]

Landscape in contemporary painting

Arun's paintings, within this context, are used as case studies, because they unveil what lurks beneath the apparent. They render the invisible forces, potentials, and dynamics of landscapes visible. Accordingly, as Deleuze argues, "In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces. For this reason no art is figurative […] The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible."[21] Through juxtapo-

[17] Maunu Häyrynen, "Lost Landscapes: Degraded Landscape as Anti-Landscape," in *The Anti-Landscape*, ed. David E. Nye and Sarah S. Elkind (Leiden: Rodopi, 2014), 147.

[18] Werner Bigell, "Fear and Fascination: Anti-Landscapes between Material Resistance and Material Transcendence," in *The Anti-Landscape*, ed. David E. Nye and Sarah S. Elkind (Leiden: Rodopi, 2014), 131.

[19] Häyrynen, "Lost Landscapes," 144, 145.

[20] Werner Bigell and Cheng Chang, "The Meanings of Landscape: Historical Development, Cultural Frames, Linguistic Variation, and Antonyms," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 5, 1 (2014): 100–102

[21] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 56.

sition and superimposition of colors and contours, Arun does not represent objects and figures *per se* but captures sensations through ambiguous possibilities of networks and relationships. She gives way to the emergence of the landscape from within the canvas and with a capacity to transmit affects and sensations. Deleuze defines sensation in-between subject and object, referring to instinct, event, and in contrast to the ready-made and the cliché.[22] Arun sees the landscape in the process of 'becoming' *ad infinitum*, ready to shift between anti and non-landscape, which reveal the nature of our urban, social, and cultural milieu.

In her paintings, the landscape becomes a force field, which flows into a multiplicity of intensities, exposed by layers of colors, contours, and brush strokes. In *Loneliness* and *Silhouettes* the flow of modulations reveals invisible forces that act in different directions (Figure 1; Figure 2). Shapes and depth give birth to each other in order to produce ever-changing landscapes. Deleuze unpacks modulation as "the relations between colors – which at the same time explains the unity of the whole, the distribution of each element, and the way each of them acts upon the others."[23] The traverse of invisible forces also occupies the surfaces of the paintings *Chaos* and *To the Village*, by means of modulations (Figure 3; Figure 4). Manifesting the interactions of environment and creatures – human beings and animals – they compose landscapes through traces – vivid ones that expose experiences and perceptions, and faded ones that turn into memories and dreams – since every interaction with our environment leaves a temporary or permanent trace. The juxtaposition of immateriality and materiality, transmitted through superimposed layers of colors and contours, turns her canvases into generative fields of multiple encounters as expressions of dynamic and interactive systems.

Landscapes always have the possibility of transforming into anti-landscapes, as elaborated in the previous section, with a sense of the uncanny concealed under its surface. The uncanny, or unhomeliness (*unheimlich*), is developed by Sigmund Freud and situated around the issues of identity and otherness.[24] He defines the uncanny as the reappearance of the familiar and the repressed in a peculiar and frightening way.[25] The sense of the uncanny in cities, as elaborated by Anthony Vidler is associated with the feeling of the alienation of the individual in all aspects of urban life. Its modern notion is initiated through heterogeneous crowds and new architectural scales and triggers the sense of individual security, spatial and temporal fear, and disorientation in the city.[26] Arun's painting, *The Rhythm of New York*, liberates the uncanny through the sense of getting lost in the crowds and the 'rhythm' of the city, as much as the act of dissolving one's identity and soul in the urban landscape (Figure 5). Through the

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[22] Ibid., 34.

[23] Ibid., 145.

[24] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. D. McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 124.

[25] Ibid., 152.

[26] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 1994), 4, 6.

dynamism and tension of the painting, intensified with the color red, it is difficult to differentiate the urban landscape from passers-by.

Arun's painting, *The Protector of the Last Tree on Earth*, is a critique of humanly altered barren lands (Figure 6). In contrast to the dynamism and hopefulness of her many other paintings, a large portion of the canvas transmits the timelessness and vastness of anti-landscape. While she evokes the possibility of an inhumane and greenless world, she also explores the allegories of maternity, life, and hope by pointing to the protector figure in the foreground. She thus transmits the dichotomy of contrasting forces that act on the canvas by means of the *sgraffito* technique and a collage of marbling art. This painting can also be considered as the implication of paintings such as *Shanghai*, *Industrial City*, and *Marina Bay* (Figure 7; Figure 8; Figure 9). These three paintings allow reading of both contemporary urban landscapes and anti-landscapes. The urban landscape of *Shanghai* uses contours and brush strokes to expose the problematic relationship between urbanization and greenery. It seems as if the skyscrapers and the colorful topography trigger the formation of each other under the nebulous sky, making it hard to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. In the *Industrial City*," the smoke and dirt of the urban landscape obscures the city and turns it into a blurry cloud of smudged colors. Likewise, in *Marina Bay*, the expression of speed as a fundamental element in the contemporary urban landscape renders the painting ambiguous. It looks as if the scene is a view from a fast-moving car in the city, where people, buildings, cars, lights, and other actions and spectacles superpose so that they all blend as a single entity. On the other hand, the network of high-tech infrastructure, or "electrified landscape" as defined by David Nye,[27] has the potential to transform into an anti-landscape. Blackout temporarily turns the 'landscape of light', which is an intrinsic part of our daily life, into a dysfunctional environment. Since anti-landscape refers to an uninhabitable land, Nye argues that a blackout as the cause of a paralyzed space is also an anti-landscape.[28] These three paintings also point to how our post-industrial urban landscapes have changed over time by situating residential uses into historical business districts. This new development of landscaped residential districts also pave the way to the rehabilitation of anti and non-landscapes, such as non-used waterfronts, derelict and old industrial areas, as well as using these landscapes for marketing and city branding that attract drivers and passers-by.[29] Called 'network cities', these urban landscapes that allow flexibility propose multicentred, heterotopic, and mixed-use urban sites that also emphasize local ecology, urban parks, and agriculture.[30]

Arun's paintings *Forbidden Lives* and *Metamorphosis* explore the aesthetic potential of wastelands, leaving aside the *clichéd* view of these alienated zones as gloomy and bleak badlands (Figure 10; Figure 11). Wastelands are defined as polluted areas

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[27] David E. Nye, "Are Blackouts Landscapes?" *American Studies in Scandinavia* 39, 2 (2007): 72.

[28] Ibid., 73, 76–77.

[29] Grahame Shane, "Recombinant Landscapes in the American City," *Architectural Design* 77, 2 (2007): 28.

[30] Ibid., 35.

or empty spaces of waste in relation to industrial areas in particular.[31] As non-landscapes, they tend to evoke monotonous and quiet or depressive feelings in paintings. On the contrary, in her paintings, Arun intends to express the essence of these non-landscapes.

In *Metamorphosis by the Sea*, the creature's transformation is channeled through the decomposition of the figure (Figure 12). The transition of vivid colors and the mixed techniques of acrylic painting and marbling art make the painting seem as if, along with the creature, the non-landscape is in the process of mutation, as well. *Volcano Burst*, another non-landscape painting, uncovers the aesthetics of the volcano, ready to burst out at any second (Figure 13). The occurrence of volcanos in nature and visual arts finds its formulation in Kant's concept of the sublime. Producing the feeling of respect, representing power, and elevating nature to a place beyond our reach, the sublime triggers the sense of impressiveness and fearsomeness simultaneously.[32] In Arun's painting, the stretching of modulations composes large fields of colors, on which the non-landscape of lava, rocks, and gas is loosely formed.

Conclusion

Through a case study, this paper unfolds the shift in the understanding of landscape as a dynamic force in order to evaluate its emergence as an affective field of an internal order with a capacity to produce affects and sensations in a Deleuzian sense. It shows how the depictions of landscape, anti-landscape, and non-landscape reflect immateriality and immanence. The understanding of landscape has undergone many stages. At some points, different disciplines considered landscape in different contexts and contents. However, there are still common points – like human experience – and terms such as non-landscape and anti-landscape that allows inter-disciplinary work. Artists, when they confront with nature, perceive landscapes with their hidden languages. Instead of direct communication, they create a new language of relations via space-time, harmonies, contrasts, and so on. In this regard, Arun's paintings create a language of new expressions that re-mythologize landscapes with strong contrasts. To sum up, the landscape today does not point to a pre-defined, extrinsic, static, and visual site, but a force field in flux, with a capacity to produce potentials, reciprocal relations, and immanent affects.

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[31] Ana Maria Moya Pellitero, "Wasteland as Landscape: the Need of a New Perceptual Approach," in *Landscape and Ruins: Planning and Design for the Regeneration of Derelict Places: Proceedings of the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools Conference*, ed. Adriana Ghersi, Francesca Mazzino (Genova: Alinea Editrice, 2009), 100.

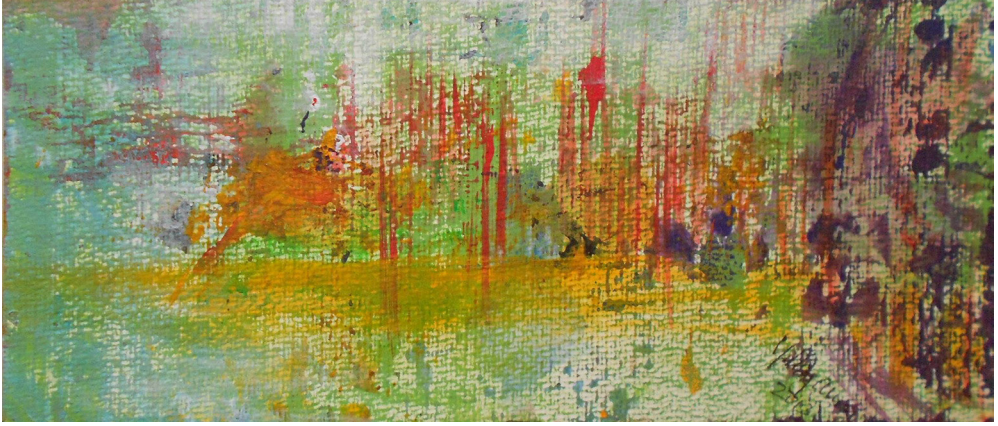[32] Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, 96, 119, 123.

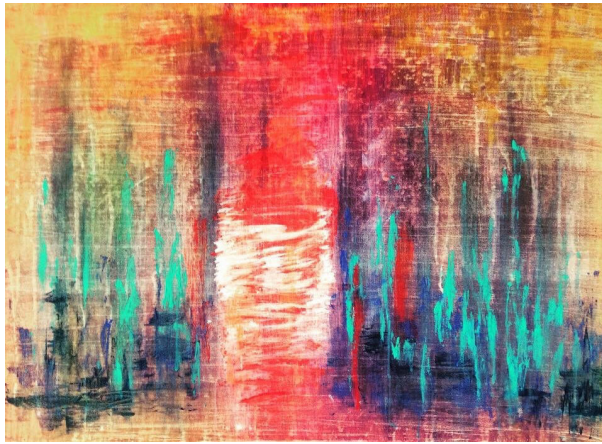**Figure 1:** Yıldız Arun, *Loneliness*, acrylic on paper, 2013

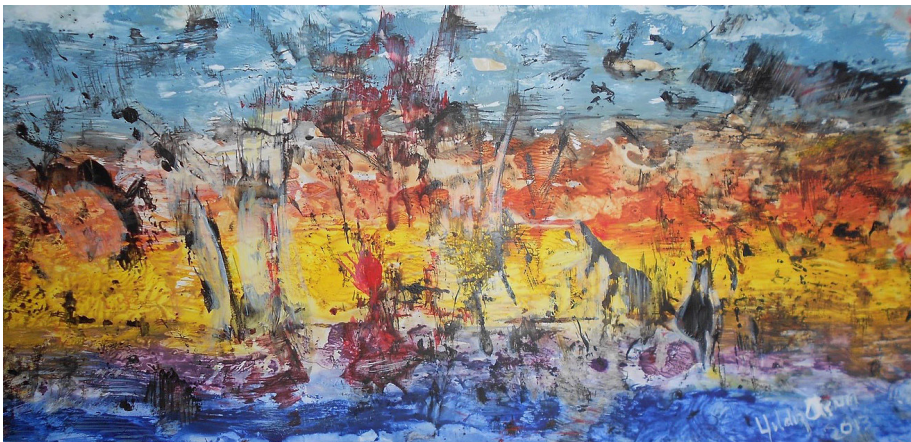**Figure 2:** Yıldız Arun, *Silhouettes*, acrylic on paper, 2015
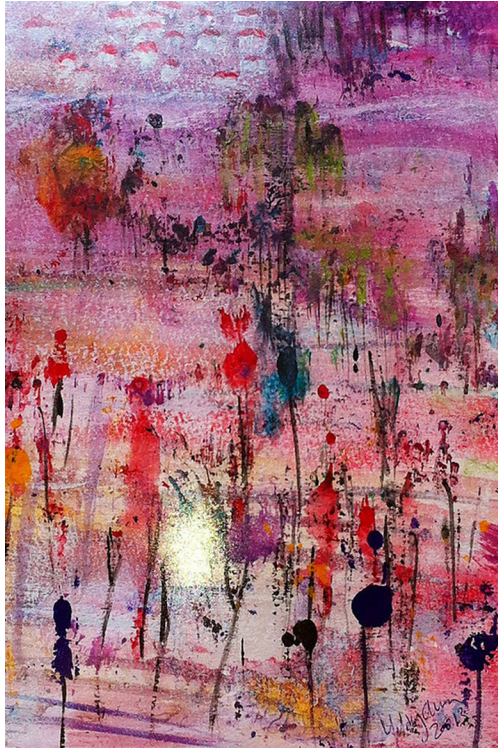

Figure 3: Yıldız Arun, *Chaos*, acrylic on paper, 2013

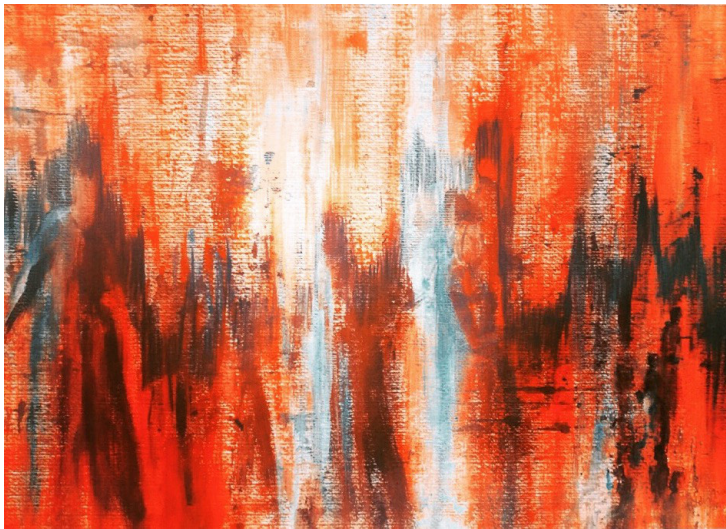**Figure 4:** Yıldız Arun, *To the village*, acrylic on paper, 2013

Figure 5: Yıldız Arun, *Rhythm of New York*, acrylic on paper, 2015

Figure 6: Yıldız Arun, *Protector of the last tree on earth*, mixed media on canvas, 2018

Figure 7: Yıldız Arun, *Shanghai*, acrylic on paper, 2015

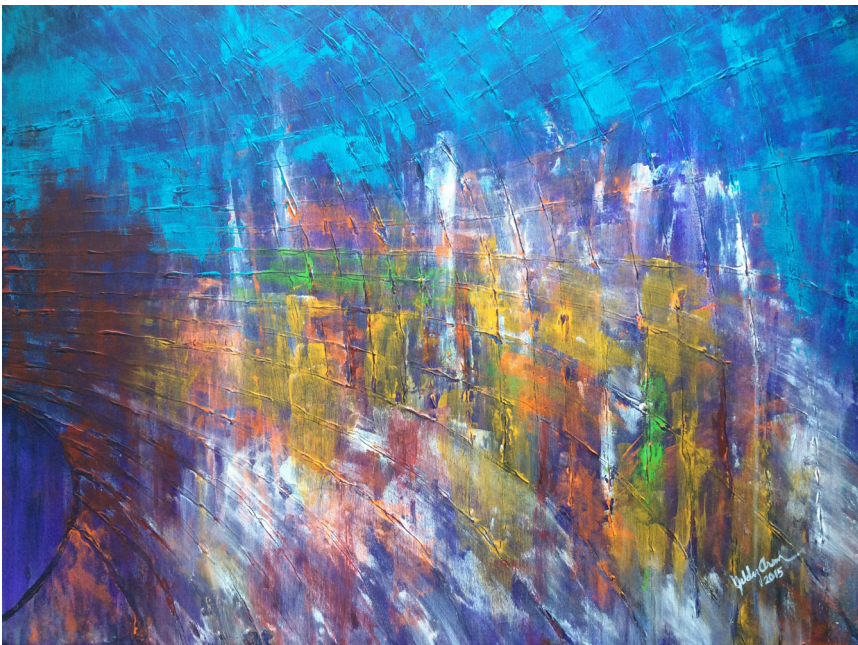**Figure 8:** Yıldız Arun, *Industrial city*, acrylic on canvas, 2016

Figure 9: Yıldız Arun, *Marina bay*, acrylic on canvas, 2015

Figure 10: Yıldız Arun, *Forbidden lives*, acrylic on canvas, 2016

Figure 11: Yıldız Arun, *Metamorphosis*, acrylic on canvas, 2016

Figure 12: Yıldız Arun, *Metamorphosis by the sea*, mixed media on canvas, 2017
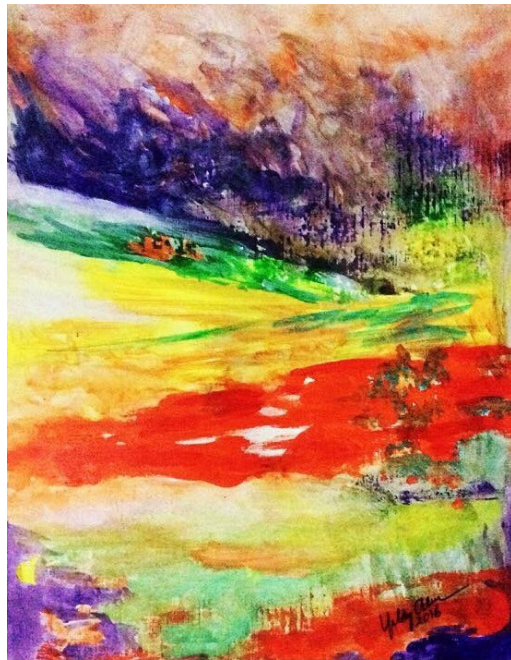

Figure 13: Yıldız Arun, *Volcano burst*, acrylic on paper, 2016

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