

DIFFERENT WORLDS, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

By

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ABSTRACT

My work blends together the two different cultures that have come to define me: Turkey and America. It aims to show the deep emotional challenges of being an international student and traveler in a country far from one's homeland. I created each of my works by exploring my own experiences of different places, of meeting different people, and confronting different emotions during my visits. My exposure to difference and change during my education at West Texas A&M University helped me to understand my own identity better and to discover how art, perhaps better than any other form of communication, can cross between worlds and people.

I chose to work on painting for my thesis because it provides an ideal way for me to express my ideas and experiences. Paintings can be abstract but also colorful. It confronts the viewer head-on with its dramatic presence in a gallery. I have undertaken several steps to create my paintings, such as photographing architectural places, making abstract compositions from the pictures that I took, doing sketches of my compositions, then drawing the actual composition on canvas, and, finally, painting my designs in color. Architectural abstraction became my primary means of expression during my education in Canyon, as it allowed me to express ideas conceptually instead of literally. Mixing different colors, using diverse tones, and playing with architectural shapes and edges on canvas are the main ways for me to convey the feelings and experiences of my life, but because the forms are abstract

they reach beyond the personal and become relatable more broadly by my viewers. I love to use bright and dark colors together because it creates tension and also symbolizes the differences of my thoughts as they relate to various places and times in my life. I want my viewers to feel the vibration of diverse colors as they relate to their own personal thoughts and perspectives. There is a transition between two different cultures in my work. Seeking to find myself as an artist in a place far removed from my familiar habits, culture, and family is the key theme of my works. And I appreciate that I had this opportunity to discover myself and my art as a Turkish person living and working in America.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My thesis focuses on the challenges of being away from my home country for an extended period of time. Such displacement from one's home offers opportunities for growth but also many difficulties. I have had much time to think about my life during my MFA program in Canyon. In particular, I have thought about my two different lives that I have had in two different countries: America and Turkey. It is not easy to live in a new place for a foreign student who has a different culture, different language, and different habits in everyday life. Thus, my thesis is the outcome of my two-and-a-half year school experience as an international student in Canyon, Texas. During my first two semesters of my graduate program, I used to paint realistic paintings of my own cropped portrait as it appeared in photographs. Then, I realized how my art could be more than that. There needs to be actual meaning behind your art that you can talk about. This can be something from your past, your present, or your future. It doesn't matter. So I chose my thesis from my present and past. I combine my cultures, which represent my past in Turkey and my present in Canyon.

I have grown up in a Middle Eastern culture because I am Turkish. I have traveled and lived in different cities in Turkey. Most recently, my family and I lived in

the capital of Istanbul. Istanbul is not only the biggest city in my country, but also the most cultured and a diverse, highly metropolitan place in Turkey. One important landmark in Istanbul is a bridge that connects the Asian and European sides of the city, which is called Boğaziçi Köprüsü (Bosphorus Bridge). It is the main bridge of Istanbul and was designed by Sir Gilbert Roberts and William Brown, and was built in 1973. For me, this bridge has become a metaphor for my own transitions between Middle Eastern and Western cultures. In short, I consider myself as being symbolically that bridge across my two lives in Turkey and America.

My work explores several things that I am sure every international student experiences, such as culture shock, time difference, and homesickness. For example, there are eight hours difference between America and Turkey. Thus, when I talk to my family on the internet when I am awake in Texas, it is night time over there. I feel like I am simultaneously existing in two different times and places: day and night, East and West. I feel fragmented between these two time zones, but also connected across time and space. This theme plays out in my work, as I explore bridges and thresholds that cross between times and places. I also did not know what homesick meant until I lived away from my family and my home for such a long time. Sometimes, it is really difficult to control your feelings because you miss things that you were born with and took for granted as normal and universal. My work explores how no culture or experience is universal and that “normal” is relative and changing when you change locations. These different experiences have been collecting in my mind since I came to America. According to Ernst Gombrich in the renowned study *Art and Illusion*, art

begins and lives in our minds.¹ Art is dependent upon human perception and no perception is universal for all humans at the same time. We all experience memories, culture, education, nature, and human relationships in our minds. We store these experiences in our minds as in a library; we collect things and then use them to understand the world around us. This is how art starts. It is a response to the artist's world and perspective, and its interpretation is dependent upon the viewers' worlds and perspectives.

While I was searching for a way to put these experiences and emotions in my work, my professor and advisor, Jon Revett, guided me about how I can actually focus on architectural abstraction. He showed me many examples of architectural works of art and I was immediately drawn to the aesthetics of architecture: the stark geometry and the structures that build spaces and bridges for the use of humans. Then, I thought that architecture could be something that I could combine and use to create different compositions for my works. I began to take landscape photographs when I went to Istanbul last summer, especially of scenes that feature architectural structures. I did the same photo-research process for my American travels as well, including my visits to Dallas and Florida and my residence in Canyon and Amarillo in Texas. I now have a source collection of images that I used as the basis of my thesis work. From this collection, I chose a set of photographs that most represented my theme of cross-cultural experiences. I then did sketches of these selected photographs, creating different compositions from these recordings of time and place, sometimes even combining

¹ Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2000).

images from different places. Architectural abstractions became a way for me to capture and narrate my emotions and experiences in my work.

The connections between my landscape pictures and my personal life is very strong. I collect the images through photography, allowing me to compare the images of place and space to each other to see both the differences and the similarities. For instance, when I started to compare my photographs, I noticed how many emphasized linear perspective. That was a calling for me. As Erwin Panofsky reminds us, “perspective” can symbolize many things and is itself a “symbolic form” for people and cultures.² It represents the different views and different windows onto people’s thoughts or feelings. However, linear perspective creates an illusion of tremendous depth on a flat image, and this illusion sucks the viewer into the image, creating a time and space that is both shared with the viewer but separate from her, an imagined and unreal space. My work deals with linear perspective not as a universal way of seeing but as a means to reveal the disjointed feeling you have when you are simultaneously in two worlds or have two homes that you claim as your own.

Every person looks at the world from a different window. Their opinions, experiences, culture, and education shape the perspective of their standpoint. Everyone should have the freedom to talk about or share his or her thoughts. For me this freedom is like a door for people, whether they choose to stay or leave, to walk through that door or ignore it. However, sometimes it is difficult to say what you actually think, especially when dealing with linguistic and cultural divisions. Sometimes it is also difficult to

² Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1996).

leave and embrace individual freedoms because of your familial, cultural, or career responsibilities. There are invisible walls around us that sometimes we cannot surpass. My thesis uses architectural spaces and structures to represent these doors and walls, the opportunities and challenges we all face as humans. Do people really have total freedom? I do not think so. There are always rules of nature and culture that we have to follow in life. I learned this best when I had to adapt to a new culture and a new place during my time at West Texas A&M University.

When I think about architectural style, it has its own freedom but at the same time it is surrounded with its rules. When depicting architecture, you cannot be free like when you use other painting or drawing styles. Architecture demands mathematics and geometry rather than chaos. My work shows hard edges of architectural forms, which should be clean, straight, and ordered. To create these lines, I use the tools of a ruler and tape. Even though I am free to create different compositions on my canvas, I need to follow some fixed processes to reach the result. Thus, I feel the rules in each of our lives and the rules of rendering architecture mirror one another in my mind. For me, freedom is a word that has value only when you realize you are not entirely free.

I usually choose my subjects based on the most striking differences or similarities between America and Turkey. For instance, social rules are different, traditional food is different, culture is different, institutions are different, architectural styles are different, habitation is different, and people are different. Yet, humanity's needs and basic nature are more universal. This balance of difference and universality are the inspirations for my work. So I put into my works what I experience, how I live

in both places, how I see western and eastern cultures, and also my memories, moments, and emotions as an international person who has lived in different countries.

When I think about how many millions of people live on this earth, I hear only one word: “miracle.” Because the variation of creation is fascinating. There are millions of people and nobody looks exactly like each other. At the same time, there are so many cultures, languages, and religions that exist simultaneously. People share the same emotions but put those emotions into words differently. Most of them believe in a god but in different ways. But we all share the same things, the same shared world, and the same unfolding of time. We build architectural structures to our god or gods with the same solid forms and open spaces. As Gombrich states in *Art and Illusion*, we can all “see the same life, but with different eyes.”³ We all comment on life from different angles with different phrases.

I believe that art has the power to be universal. You do not have to speak different languages fluently to create it and to reach out to a broader community than your own. For me, I build my own space on canvas and then it exists. Sometimes I use really bright colors, especially neon colors, in my paintings. I paint bright colors because they represent my strong emotions, such as happiness, love, and excitement, but I blend these with dark colors to show the frustrations and depression I feel given the vast difference of time and space between Istanbul and Canyon. I like to paint opposite colors because it creates tension. It is same as tasting and experiencing two different cultures. They are in some ways opposed worlds but not entirely because they co-exist

³ Gombrich, 12.

at the same time. There is a beauty in the bridging of these two different worlds that I feel when western and eastern cultures come together. Thus, seeing and digesting the differences of people, thoughts, and ideas inspires me and overwhelms me with emotion. For me, this joining is miraculous. It is like the creation of life itself, blending the genes of two parents into one new human.

My works are a mix of places that I have been and seen before. Thus, they are all images and memories collected in my head that I then express on canvas. There are different architectural structures in my paintings. Even though the lines and edges might look similar, I paint buildings on opposite sides of the globe, located either in Turkey and America. My architectural structures also draw upon both Islamic and Christian traditions, just as churches like Hagia Sophia in Istanbul have been used in both the Christian and Muslim religious contexts. Jon Revett in particular inspired my interest not only in Islamic architecture but also Islamic styles of geometric abstraction. He helped me to see my own culture from a totally new perspective because abstraction is very different from the realism with which I began my graduate work. My works are still about me, but unlike my earlier self-portraits that show only my face on the surface, my architectural abstractions render my existence more deeply and more complexly. I have learned how to crop images and experiment with the combination of shapes and colors. My style now expresses the similarities of the shared worlds of geometry, architecture, and abstraction to explore the inspiring differences of global cultures.

My thesis expresses my perception of two dissimilar cultures and dissimilar countries and what I have experienced during a two-and-a-half year period of my life.

But it also reveals my own discoveries of cross-cultural similarities and the bridges I have found between these two places on opposite sides of the globe. Every person has a different perspective of their world, based in their own mind. People see the life with different eyes and this is the richness of our world. The creation of the earth and all its living creatures is based on both similarity and dissimilarity. The beauty of diversity is everywhere; it does not matter wherever you go. But we all share the same world, so my work emphasizes this beauty of difference and the inspiration of shared understanding.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

My thesis deals with the concept of bridges, especially bridges between cultures, but I have also found connections and built bridges between my own work and the work of other artists and thinkers. For example, my work has drawn upon the creative approach of Audrey Flack. Her book *Art & Soul* is so relatable for me, and I find aspects of myself in her writing and her art. Flack has a photorealistic style in her paintings and sculptures. Although, her style does not match with my architectural abstract style, I have found her ideas and her way of thinking influential for me. According to Flack, “art is a calling.”⁴ I have always believed this to be true. In her art, Flack responds to her own reality as an artist and as a woman. I work in the same way, responding to my reality as an international person. My work displays a similar reality for me, but not with a photorealistic style. Instead, I draw upon places that I have seen with my own eyes and recorded with my camera, which I then manipulate into an abstract composition. For instance, Flack’s painting *Chanel* expresses her feelings in a photorealistic style. The painting has feminine materials such as jewelry, make-up, perfume, nail polish, and fruit that symbolize women, female beauty, and power. The painting looks shiny and attractive, playing upon our expectations for women in modern

⁴ Audrey Flack, *Art & Soul* (New York: Penguin Books, Arkana, 1991), 3.

society, especially modern Western society. So the painting and its style explain what Flack felt and how she saw her own identity when she created the work. For me, I express my feelings in the same way. For example, my *Insomnia* (**Figure 1**) expresses that I had difficulties falling asleep at night during my time living in Canyon. It was a picture from Canyon that has concrete pieces next to each other and long shadows that looked distinctly like a house shape from the outside. So I created this composition from my photograph. The homey feel of the painting symbolizes my apartment where I lived in Canyon. Inside the house that I painted the shadows are black, representing the nights that I could not sleep. The light red and dark red colors of the work symbolize eight hours' time difference between Turkey and America. When it is afternoon in Canyon, it is night time in Istanbul. So, I wanted to use sunset colors on my painting because I never talked to my family on the internet in the mornings. It was always afternoon like three or four so it reminds me warm colors like sunset. The black color in the painting also expresses my depressed and worried feelings. I share how I feel with the colors that I choose and with the composition that I create. Thus, I explain myself with abstraction and with the attraction and tension of colors. Flack uses a hyper-realistic style that obviously she felt more comfortable with in order to express her deep feelings. For me, art expresses who I am and what my experiences are and this is why I chose to make art.

Another artist whose style has been important for my work is the conceptual and abstract artist Sol Lewitt. Lewitt's work has clean edges and his compositions are very organized and effective at communicating ideas poetically rather than literally. For instance, in the wall drawing *Pyramid*, he created a clever composition in which he used perspective rules and grey tones to draw the viewer into the work. The work has five

dissimilar parts that have five different grey tones, which start from the one point and get bigger until the end, creating a sense of the third dimension in the work. Also the edges of the wall drawing are very clean. We can see that he obviously used his composition and skills as a colorist effectively for *Pyramid*. Flack's work shows objects realistically and literally, while Lewitt organizes compositions symbolically rather than realistically. But both artists create works in which the forms hold deeper meaning.

My work, like Flack's, responds directly to my own reality and the world around me as it also draws upon an abstract style like that of Lewitt. For instance, I created *Differences* (**Figure 3**) according to my own thoughts and beliefs. The big window in the painting that has dark and light orange stripes symbolizes people's different visions and views. The perspective of the window emphasizes different perspectives of thoughts and beliefs. Because people look at things in different angles. We all look to the same world in a different way, just as we all look out the same window but see different things. While the composition of my painting symbolizes differences of thoughts, it also has meaning that highlights the difference between the two different countries of America and Turkey. And it does so in both a realistic and abstract way, such as the time difference represented by actual colors observed during the day and at night, such as my dark blue and bright orange colors. Lewitt's skills of using repetition, pattern, and geometry are particularly inspiring for me, especially when I decided to move beyond literal close-up images of my face and into an architecturally-based and minimal style for my thesis project. For example, Lewitt's geometric wall drawings, especially *Six Geometric Figures* and *New Wall Drawings*, really inspire me. For *New Wall Drawings*, he uses basic colors and tones, such as green, yellow, blue, and red with hard-edged

geometric three-dimensional shapes. As Lewitt explains, “color, surface, texture, and the shape only emphasize the physical aspects of the work.” (Harrison and Wood 849). What he means by physical, I believe, has to do with the material presence of his work. The work strikes the viewer physically with its color palette, then inspires to viewer to think more deeply beyond the physical plane to think about conceptual meaning. Similarly, I believe most of my works with their vivid colors, striking shapes, and constructions of space on a flat surface have both a material presence and also deeper meanings for my viewers. For instance, one of my works entitled *Time Zone* (**Figure 4**) has a perspective into the distance that symbolizes the time transition between my two different countries America and Turkey. It looks like an illusionistic box or room that has different size lines of perspective that pulls you in strongly and rapidly. The painting depicts spaces in both pink and black, again symbolizing the contrast of my two countries and the dissimilarity of them which is the basic tension between bright light pink and dark rich black that shows the difference I refer to. Thus, I believe people can feel that something is going on in my paintings rather than simply seeing only geometrical shapes and not feeling anything emotional or conceptual about them.

Lewitt is one of the leaders of Op Art, or Optical Art, which plays with three-dimensional perspectives on two-dimensional surfaces. My works draw upon the Op Art tradition of emphasizing geometry, perspective, and color relationships rather than realistic rendering of natural forms. The illusion of perspective in Lewitt’s art is what draws me to it as a model. For me, it is important to make the viewer feel the space of a work of art, even if the space is merely an optical illusion. That illusion is what makes

viewers feel something deeper about my work, I hope. My pieces are somewhat less illusionistic and optical than LeWitt's, but they still create spaces for viewers to imagine themselves existing within. For instance, in *On the Road 1* (**Figure 8**), there is not so much perspectival illusionism that exists. It has more space through the variation of flat grey colors and a blue flat shape. There is also a bright red line that divides the space in the painting, again creative a form of perspective. My source for this painting was a photograph that I took from a road nearby Istanbul's ferry station, which has yellow lines in it. For me, these are mental spaces of memory as much as physical spaces. Flack also creates spaces of memory for viewers to enter and contemplate, using illusions to render believable objects on a flat surface with photographic realism. Therefore, my work draws on the creation of imaginary spaces for viewers drawing upon the approaches of both Flack and Lewitt.

In addition, linear perspective in art creates a three-dimensional illusion that makes your eyes move differently than looking at a flat painting or image that remains only on the surface. This perspective plays with your perception of seeing. For example, in *The Double Screen*, Wu Hung observes how “in modern art-historical studies, the creation of a pictorial space is conventionally associated with a certain perspective system – a graphic method that allows the artist to pursue a three-dimensional spatial representation on a flat surface.”⁵ When I think about the meaning of illusion in my work, I can say it is a blend of several forms of perspective, including traditional linear perspective but also moving beyond this tradition. Perspective in my paintings creates deep space on a flat surface but it creates imaginary and mental spaces as well. If we

⁵ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1996), 18.

think about Panofsky's argument that he outlines in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, linear perspective "involved extensive abstraction from the psychophysiological structure of space" for the Renaissance period.⁶ Panofsky continues, claiming that "perspective seals off religious art from the realm of the magical."⁷ For Panofsky, perspective is dogmatic, symbolic, and religious for certain cultures. On the other hand, Wu Hung shows us that there is something other than linear perspective in traditional Chinese screens that viewer can read and engage with differently than with Renaissance linear perspective. In such screens, the space might appear awkward, but it is poetic instead of mathematical and appeals to our emotions. Wu Hung shows that art can be flat but also architectural, shaping space literally but also mentally, and creating surfaces on which to project poetic mental images. For me, I create my own spaces within using perspective literally or sometimes awkwardly, as with the Chinese screen tradition, but every piece of my paintings have their own stories. The spaces I create can be spaces of freedom and also spaces of confinement. Traveling to a new place, like Canyon for me, was liberating but also constricting at the same time. My work creates architectural spaces that appear enclosed at times but also open-ended at other times. I want viewers to feel enclosed by my spaces but not entirely confined.

Bridget Riley is another influence for me, especially in her geometric compositions that can be classified as Op Art. Both Riley and Lewitt work with hard edges in their art and I have drawn upon this approach in my work as well. I create my architectural and mental spaces with distinct straight lines, diagonals, and sharp,

⁶ Panofsky, 63.

⁷ Ibid., 72.

geometric edges and shapes. Both Riley and Lewitt use repetition of linearity in their work, as I do as well. For example, we can see the repetition of straight both dark and light orange lines and sharp, geometric edges in my work *Differences* (**Figure 3**), which includes dark and light blue shapes, and dark green line going through the orange stripes. Riley uses variation of color repetition in her works with straight lines as well. In particular, Riley plays with linearity and perspective as we can see on her painting *Cataract 3*. The painting has intense wave lines. The black bluish color of wave lines turn in to pinkish waves thru the bottom from the top, and the painting ends with the black bluish lines again. She tricks the viewer's eyes with the perspective of powerful wavy lines and the transition of pink, blue, and black colors. She has intense repetition, whereas the repetition of my works is not as dominant. I usually blend repetition with space in my works. For instance, I played with the orange straight lines by using perspective to trick the eyes in my *Jet Lag* (**Figure 5**); however, I have the dark blue space under those lines that helps the orange lines, while the big red shape balances the space. Here repetitions create optical illusions that draw in the viewer in an almost hypnotic way. Riley usually chooses to paint either with bright colors or only black and white. I do not have any black and white works except my sketches for which I use ink, sharpie marker, or charcoal. For instance, I used variations of blue color on my painting *On the Road 2* (**Figure 9**) with both angled and distinct straight lines that relates to Riley's color style. Riley has always been meticulous in her choice of colors. She uses a restricted palette, but combines her tones carefully to create a lively interaction. In Riley's work, the two main colors are yellow ochre and light blue, but hints of violet and rose are also threaded into the composition (Zaczek, Chilvers,

Hosack 243). I use three or four different colors in my paintings. For example, I pick three different colors but then combine those with their tones to make new colors if I needed. However, I can say Riley's color palette is softer than mine. Also, I sometimes use neon colors in my paintings to create tension and attract the viewer's attention almost violently. In this way, my works are more eye-catching than Riley's. To be sure, neon colors became one of characteristic aspects of my work. By neon colors, I mean very bright, bold, and vivid colors that people use generic term 'neon' for it.

Another artist who has inspired my approach to painting is Georgia O'Keeffe. Whereas she is mostly known for her flower paintings or responses to natural landscapes, she also did many architectural paintings that apply her style of abstraction and simplification to the rendering of particular and highly personal spaces for her. For instance, I am especially drawn to her *Black Door with Red* from 1954. She focuses her work on a simple, angular black door. On the one hand, that door is just a door that she saw; on the other, it could be the door to a place that she is drawn to spiritually and emotionally. It also resonates as a symbolic door or a mental door that might hold deep meaning about her life, her hopes, or her fears. I use simplified architectural forms in a similar way. They come from a particular place—such as Istanbul or Canyon—that I have been and seen and recorded with my camera. But they also come from my mental experiences of that place and in their simplification, they can mean something for my viewers as well. They represent challenges, fears, and hopes like O'Keeffe's door. Like O'Keeffe, I sometimes paint doors, windows, walkways, or entrances in my paintings. For me, these structures symbolize the different perspectives and different worlds that I have experienced. They can show both freedom and

confinement. For instance, if I talk about myself, I have always had the option to leave America and go back to Turkey, but I chose to stay in Canyon, which was my individual decision. Similarly, it was my decision to come to America and study at West Texas A&M University, so I left my “home door” and walked through a new door to come to a new place. These doors for me, new and old, are connected but also separated and distinct. The door to go home is always there. We can choose to stay or leave. We have a choice about our destiny and which door we enter or leave behind. O’Keeffe’s individuality as an artist, and her way of representing a highly personal reality in a way that become symbolic beyond herself, have inspired my own approaches to art, as a woman, as a traveler, and as a painter.

I also draw on photographers in my work, including Andreas Gursky. His large scale images of landscapes and architectural structures have helped me create my own compositions, which start by taking architectural photographs and end with an abstract painting on canvas. For example, in his *Times Square* photograph which taken in 2001, there is a big yellow building that has many floor lines in the photograph. The angles of the building’s five linear lines which at the right and left sides show depth in the picture. The parallel and vertical lines of the architecture create visual illusion for the viewer. Gursky’s perspective of seeing architectural structures inspires me and helps me to find and construct good compositions for my works. For instance, I can compare my *Jet Lag* (**Figure 5**) work with Gursky’s *Times Square*. *Jet Lag* was based on a photograph that I took from Canyon because the perspective of the wood columns of the structure inspired me. The perspective of orange lines and the deep view of my work is similar to Gursky’s view in *Times Square*. Especially the parallel lines of the structure in his photo

show some similarity with my work, too. In fact, the aesthetic of Gursky's art helps me to improve my skills to take architectural photographs and create my own source material.

My advisor, Jon Revett, has likewise been an influence for me and for my work. His style of abstraction has helped me learn to construct an abstract composition. Over the course of my time at WTAMU, abstraction has become more than just a style for me; it became as a lifestyle. Revett also draws heavily on the geometric and linear patterning of Islamic art. For example, his *The Glacier Project*, *Bazarom*, and *The Coronation of the Virgin #2* each have obvious geometric shapes drawing from Islamic art. We can see the blending and transition of star shapes, which exists in almost every mosque's ornament. He is interested in architectural forms as well. My work draws less on patterning and geometrical shapes such as the star symbol, and more on structural shapes and linearity. My working relationship with my advisor has been yet another bridge between cultures; he was raised in the West in America but has drawn on my native Islamic culture, while I have learned to draw from traditions of Western art, such as linear perspective, Minimalism, and Op Art to construct my abstract compositions. I find the flow of information, traditions, and styles between people and cultures to be highly inspiring and a central theme of my thesis project.

Finally, my most important influences have been the streets where I have walked, the people who I have met, and the photographs that I have taken to record the spaces and places I have found myself over the last few years. My body of course cannot be in two places at one time, but through technology, I feel simultaneously

connected to two homes at once. This distance and simultaneity are the basis of my work.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNIQUES, MATERIALS AND PROCESSES

The process of making my work includes a great deal of research prior to picking up a brush. I start with my camera to create art. I take photographs wherever I travel. I follow my instincts to guide me when I take shots of the places to create my own source material. Then I edit the photographs that I took, selecting ones on which to focus, and using the computer and my own drawings, allowing me to add my imagination into them. I blend my thoughts and feelings with architectural shapes and forms. My process includes, along with the selection and computer editing of photographic compositions, a long investigation of those compositions through drawings, both in ink and in different color of sharpies. Once I have settled on a composition to transfer to the canvas, I begin to prepare the canvas, building the stretcher bars, stretching the canvas, and adding gesso on the canvas. My drawing process also includes drawing directly on the canvas by using pencil and ruler. The ruler is an important tool for me to draw straight lines on the canvas and also to follow the rules of perspective. Then to produce the precision I desire in my lines, I use tape and sealant to edge the areas of paint. Finally, after painting my compositions on the prepared canvas, I finish and fix the piece using tiny brushes if there is a mistake on the canvas or if there is paint out of the tape lines.

In addition, my master's program has exposed me to new methods in artistic production. For instance, I have a Bachelor's Degree in Ceramics, but decided to expand my approach in my graduate work to focus on painting and drawing, both of which are used in ceramic production, so I had a foundation for this change of focus. However, I had little direct experience of painting on canvas, and had to learn many new methods during my time at WTAMU. For me, this change and expansion has been very good for my artistic career, as it has offered me new modes of creative expression that I will continue to use in the future. I now consider myself a painter above all.

A major portion of my methodology is producing the preliminary photographs. This step sometimes happens spontaneously. I usually take pictures wherever I go, which is an advantage for me. It is a way that I interact with my environment and record my observations about the places where I find myself. These photographs become an archive of source material that I use to create different compositions. I attempt above all to catch interesting architectural perspectives with my camera. Most of my photographs have a strong sense of linear perspective in them, and they also have strong chiaroscuro or contrasts of light and dark in their shadowing effects. I let my instincts guide me when I take pictures. It is easier for me to find what I actually want as a composition in my work of art after doing this photographic research. As Gombrich mentions in *Art and Illusion*, "you cannot create a faithful image out of nothing. You must have learned the trick if only from other pictures you have seen."⁸ The beginning of my art is a collection that I create in digital images, that becomes

⁸ Gombrich, 83.

imprinted on my mind, representing time and space and place for me. The source material I use needs to be unique and special and personally meaningful. That is why I use my own photographs of places where I have been and experienced both physically and emotionally, rather than just finding photographs on the internet that other people have taken.

Then, after I have enough source material, I sift through the images that I have, editing them for the compositions that resonate most with me. I usually pick ones that emphasize geometry and linear perspective, because for me these create the most dramatic sense of space and place. Sometimes, I discover an interaction between different photographs. For instance, I found some images that seem similar in their compositions even though I took them when I was in very different places, such as Texas and Istanbul. In fact, I noticed that I can often catch the same perspective view or create comparable compositions with my camera without even realizing it. As described in Vernon Hyde Minor's *Art History's History*, our superego is always watching us (Minor 195). That seeing is all about our perception of life (as also Gombrich emphasizes), including what we discover regarding our personal thoughts, desires, and instincts. We all do things without realizing it. Artists who can find these subconscious desires and ideas within themselves are more aware of discovering things both inside and around them. Listening to what you feel always guides you to find the right things. It is only in reviewing my photographic archive that I begin to see similarities between these two disparate places. When I am in them physically, I am too distracted by the sights and smells and sounds that are locally distinct. But when I go back over my photographs, I see that these places are not in fact entirely different. This process

becomes interesting for me because I start to compose similar things from different geographical and cultural places on the same canvas. And it makes me feel like I can be present and exist in the two places at the same time; it brings them together into the same time and space and moment, like they exist in my mind and memory. I blend several images to create exciting and also personally meaningful compositions, whether they have a positive tone or a tone of bitterness and unhappiness. It depends on my moods at the time of the photo or at the time I am researching whether the work will take on a tone of being depressive, happy, unstable or full of yearning.

Next, after choosing the source images to create one overall composition. I work on finalizing that composition through drawings. I usually print my photographs in color to play with and edit the images. I feel more comfortable when I can touch the printed photos so I can flip or turn them to find interesting views. I often invert them from their original orientation, allowing for new designs to emerge out of the original place where they were photographed. Then, after selecting the source images, I begin the process of sketching that will result in the final composition to be painted.

In fact, however, these two steps often overlap, as I continue editing the source photographs even while I am sketching my chosen compositions. Doing sketches is important to see if the composition works well or not, and to become intimately connected to my final designs. If I do not like the sketch of a design, I either choose a different photograph or change some parts of the sketch. I usually use ink or sharpie to do my sketches. Even though I can achieve great tones by using charcoal, I rarely use it for my sketches because it is messy and slows down or distracts me from my creative

process. So I prefer to use color sharpies or I only use liquid ink with its black to light gray tones rather than charcoal. The idea too of using a permanent and bold tool like a sharpie marker at this stage is also something that reaches beyond practicality. It allows me again to draw on my subconscious and to make strong marks without being timid, which taps into my memory of the places I have been.

In addition, I use a ruler or straight edge when I do my drawings. Architectural drawings need more control and precision and method than freestyle drawings. However, I also do free hand sketches when I brainstorm on small-sized papers. Then, for my actual drawings, I use a ruler for my hard edges and straight lines. This combination of freeform and control responds to how I feel when I am in the place, being washed over by feelings, emotions, sights, sounds and smells, but then photographing them and bring them order. And it is that experience of the union of control and chaos that I want to appear in my final works. I carry this controlled aspect even further, as I do some math calculations during my sketching process. Sometimes it is necessary to do math to fit the composition on a paper. When I have a linear perspective based vision in my design, a ruler is very useful, too, because linear perspective is such a thing that you need to control in order to produce the illusion of three-dimensional space that you want in your composition. And when objects are close to you, they get larger but when they are further away, they get smaller. So you need to find the right size and scale for your design to construct that comprehensive visual illusion.

Then, I do my color sketches after deciding my best pre-sketches so that I can select exactly which colors I want to paint on my canvas. I usually pick three or four colors that I want to work with. If I wanted to talk about my colors specifically, I would say I usually choose either one neon or one bright color, one dark color, and one medium color. It is important to pick the right colors to make a composition match the mood or tone that the place draws up for me. Of course, it depends on the content and the meaning of my composition what color I choose. I usually use acrylic paint for my color sketches, which is the same material I use on my canvas therefore allowing me to get the exact color tones in my sketches that will appear in the final work. Thus, my color practice considers both form and content.

Next, I prepare my canvases for painting. I stretch the material and put at least two coats of gesso on them, so I can get that smooth look that I want. Then, I draw my composition on canvas. I use ruler and HB pencil for that step. For me, fitting the exact size and scale of the composition on my canvas is important. Especially if there is strong linear perspective in the design, catching the right spatial illusion is the key to make the viewer feel it and experience what I saw and felt in that place. For example, the composition of *Time Zone* (**Figure 4**), *Jet Lag* (**Figure 5**), and *Differences* (**Figure 3**) took more time to fit the exact perspective on the canvases than usual. I had to do math and measure every single line so it could fit the stripes for the trick of perspective view as well.

After I finish the drawing on my canvas, I start the actual painting process. First, I start with a primer layer. I tape the lines I have drawn on the canvas carefully, then put

sealant inside the edges of the tape on canvas. I wait for the sealant to dry. Usually it takes fifteen to twenty minutes to dry, then I can put the first layer of the color acrylic paint and wait for it to dry. After it dries, I put a second layer on it. I repeat layering until I am satisfied with the thickness of paint and the boldness of the color. Then I tape the other sides of my painting and repeat the same process. If I have thin lines in my composition, I prefer to paint at least three layers because they stand out in the work and can be seen without getting lost. Sometimes I use a spatula to paint the thinnest lines on my paintings. A spatula makes the line smoother than with a brush so I do not have to put so many layers to cover the brush strokes up. For instance, I used a spatula for *Time Zone* (**Figure 4**) and *Homesickness* (**Figure 11**) to fill the thinnest neon green and pink lines in them. Neon colors are especially transparent so you have to repeat layering until the color looks satiated. Also when I take the tape off of my canvas, there are some tiny paint marks that even tape cannot prevent and therefore I have to fix them. Usually these unruly marks happen because of the thinness of the paint or if I put too many layers on the canvas. So I use a very tiny brush to fix those tiny paint marks that distract from the precision I desire. Fixing them is the last step of my process.

In my work, I try to balance dark and bright colors. For example, I use a lot of black and dark blue. So I try to use neon or bright colors to the same extent. Though, for painting, such balancing does not simply mean using exactly the same amount of paint on different areas of canvas. It means balancing the perception of my viewers' eyes. For example, I painted a very thin neon pink line by the black thick line on my *Homesickness* (**Figure 11**). So the thin pink neon line catches the viewer's eye and also creates balance and tension in the composition. The same eye-catching effect can be

seen in *On the Road 2* (**Figure 9**) and *Time Zone* (**Figure 4**). Using bright and dark colors together creates unity through a balanced tension, both visually and emotionally. It is a kind of game that plays with our eyes. Neon is such a bright tone that it almost hurts the eyes. The pain and shock value of the neon tones contrasts with the calm subdued quality of the blacks and blues. However, stark black can be shocking at times too, and my paintings draw on this balance between quiet and loud or soft and bold tones. Also you can see the impact of one color next to several other colors throughout my painting. For instance, on *Decision* (**Figure 2**) or *Differences* (**Figure 3**) you can see how a thin line of one color goes through areas of different colors and changes the effects of those colors as it does.

As I said above, I effectively learned to paint on canvas during my graduate studies in West Texas. That is what I improved and worked on for my thesis. I have learned ways of thinking through photography, sketching, and painting that has given me a method of expressing what is real to me: the blending of cultures and the sharing of homes across time, space, and geography.

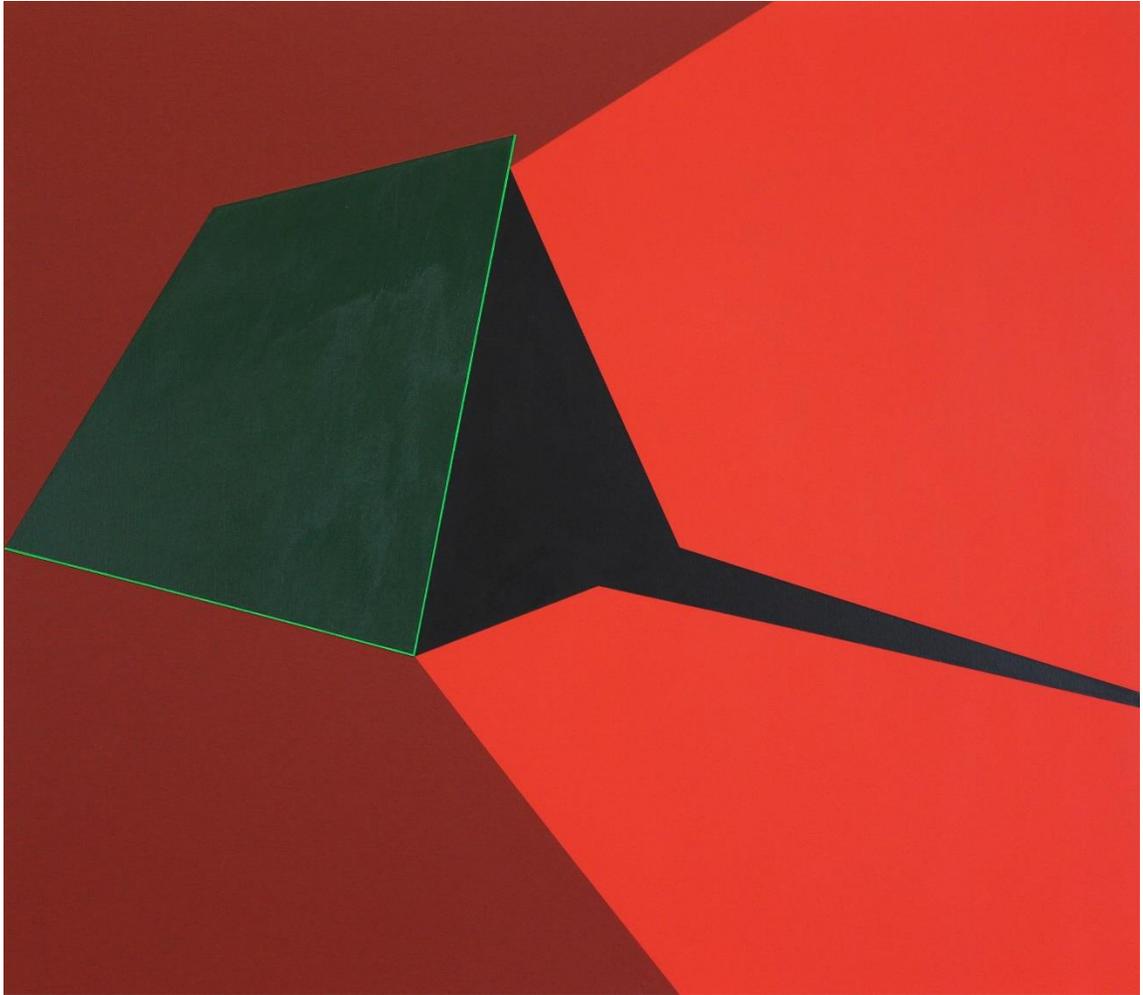
CHAPTER IV

THE PROJECT

I feel that I discovered the right style for my paintings during my academic career at WTAMU. I can blend architectural shapes with my imagination and this gives me strength in my art. Using colors according to my emotions pleases me. I have twelve paintings in my graduation exhibition. Each of my works has its own story or maybe I should say “my story.” When I see all my paintings in the gallery, I see almost three years of my life in Canyon blended with my life in Turkey. The mood of my works is very colorful but also you can feel the dark aspects and sorrow in some of them. That is because life is not always fair for people. You have to deal and pass the difficult periods in your life whether you like it or not. It is the rule of life. We all have hard times such as problems with friends or family, loneliness, homesickness, lack of money, or depression. But there are good times and memories that we also have in this life.

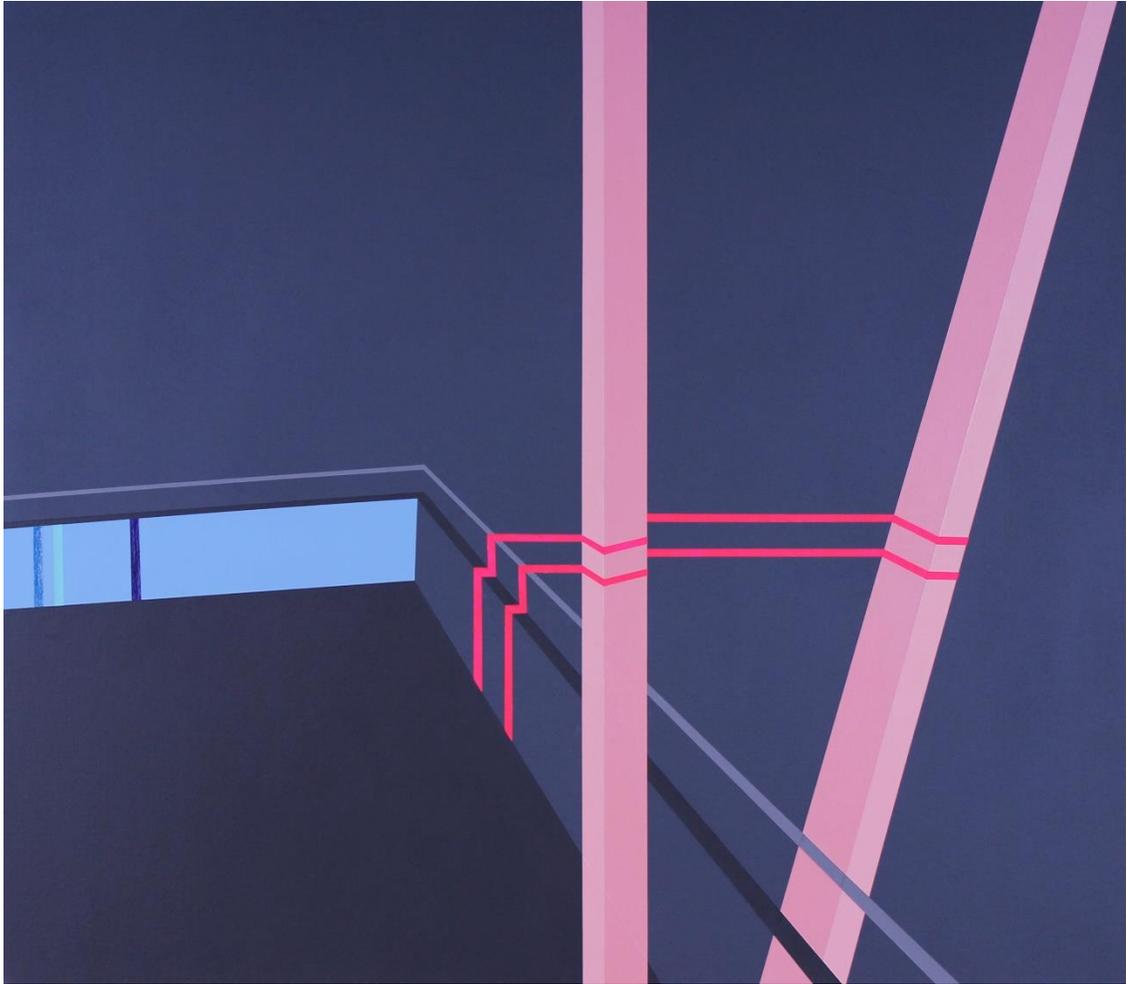
I organized the different colors of my paintings next to each other in the gallery. For example, if there is dark colored painting on the wall, I hung a bright painting next to it. In fact, the contrasts of colors among my painting highlight the overall balance in

design and mood. This also attracts even more attention among my viewers. The style of my work, such as their clean edges, makes the colors appear even more vibrant in my works. I also use neon colors to catch the viewers' attention. It helps me to balance the composition of colors on my canvas. I usually picked three or four main colors for my compositions. I used variations of the main colors to fill the space. I mostly trust my instincts when I paint. My feelings guide me to find the right colors for my compositions.



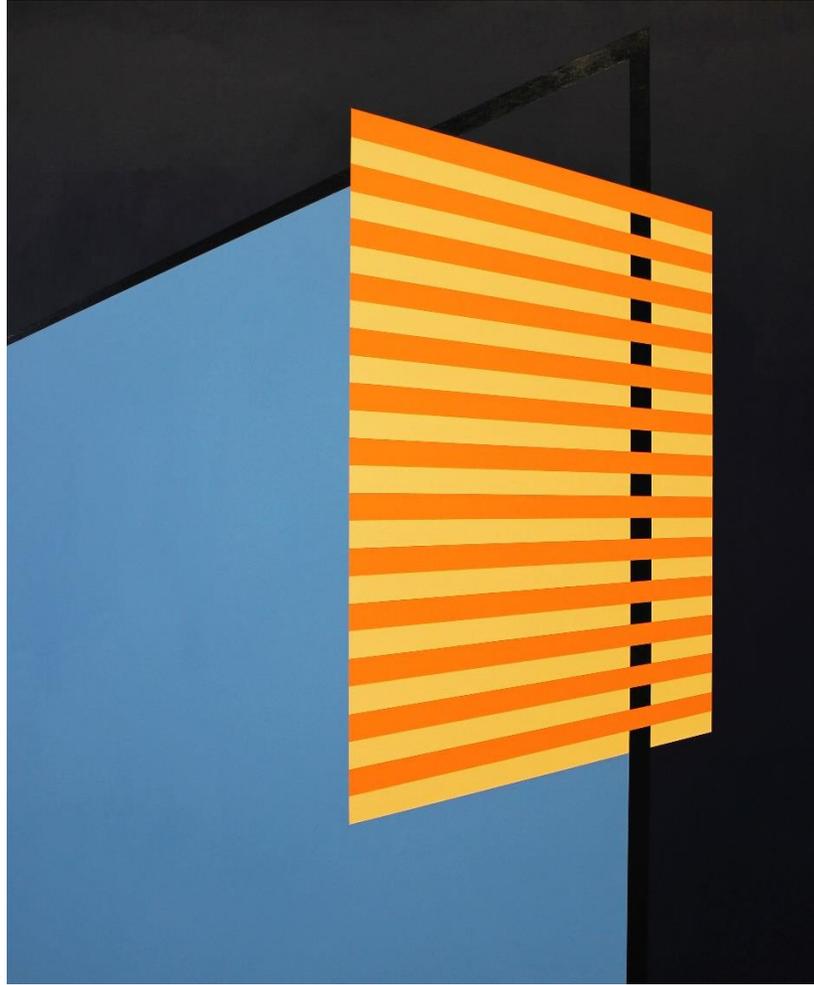
Insomnia, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35'' x 40''

This work leads the nights I had difficulty to sleep in my apartment in Canyon. The deep emotions sometimes make you think too much at nights. Being away from my home country and missing my family might have affected me during my living term in America. Also it is because I am a night person, too. Thus, inside the place which symbolizes my heavy feelings in the composition is black and outside is bright. The brightness is because your thoughts are awake in your mind even though your room is dark and you cannot shut your mind off.



Decision, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35” x 40”

I believe it is really difficult to choose whether to stay in America or to go back to your home country after your education period for every international student. It is like you are in the middle of a serious decision that you have to decide. You have two different ways to walk on but which one is better for you? In the painting, two pink lines are tied to each other by tiny neon pink lines. This motion emphasizes that one of your part wants to leave but another part of you holds you from leaving. I used dark grey for the background because the dilemma that you have makes you depressed and unhappy.



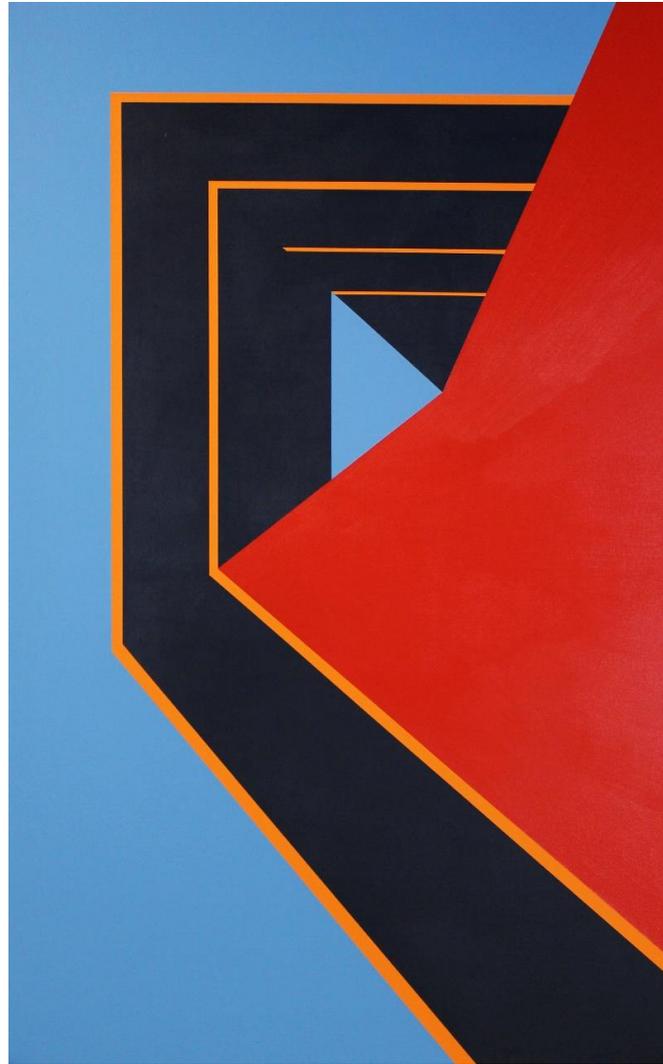
Differences, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 72”

The window shape in the painting symbolizes different thoughts and views of people. Moreover, every person has their own freedom in this life but we are all surrounded by the walls of life and its rules. So the dark green line through the orange stripes symbolizes the distraction because of the rules of the life in the composition. Also I painted dark colors representing night in the background and daytime orange colors in the window, which also reminds that when it is daytime in Turkey, it is night in America.



Time Zone, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 72"

This work describes the time difference between Canyon and Istanbul. I chose red and black colors because they emphasize dark and light concepts for day and night. The black lines trick the eyes by their implied linear perspective and their contrast of red and black. Also the neon green thin line catches the viewers' eyes and balances the composition of the painting.



Jet Lag, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 34" x 55"

As the name of the work says, this piece explains long term travels by airplane and the challenges they bring. It is really frustrating to have a long flight from one place to a different place. Also the body feels tired because of the time changing so the orange perspective lines emphasizes the transition between two different places when you travel. The cool and warm (red-blue) color relationship on the canvas also symbolizes differences of the time.



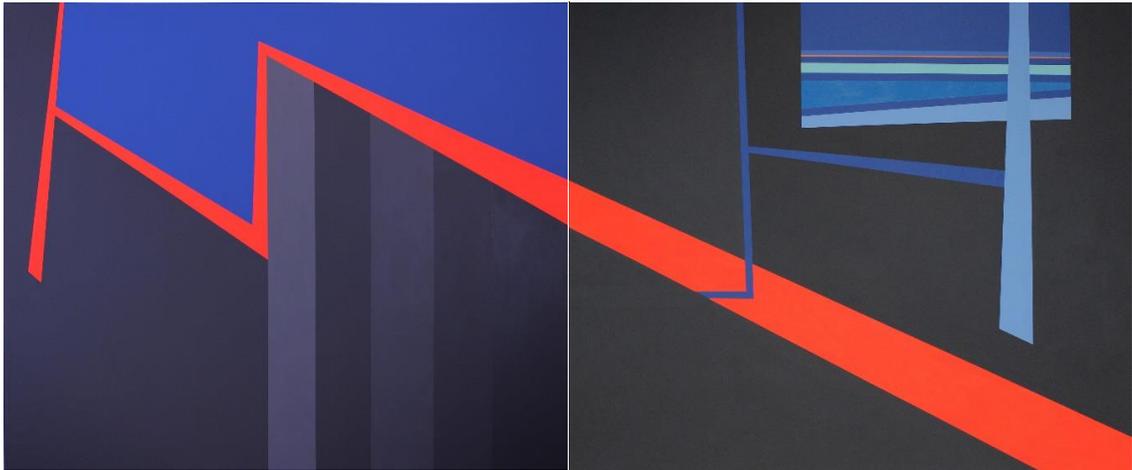
Transition, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 34" x 55"

The work shows forms of transition between different places when you travel. It also reflects personal and emotional transitions such as culture shock, and differences experienced when living among places, people, and beliefs that are not your own cultural traditions. Red and blue colors creates contrast in the composition. And the tiny orange line completes the painting for the eyes.



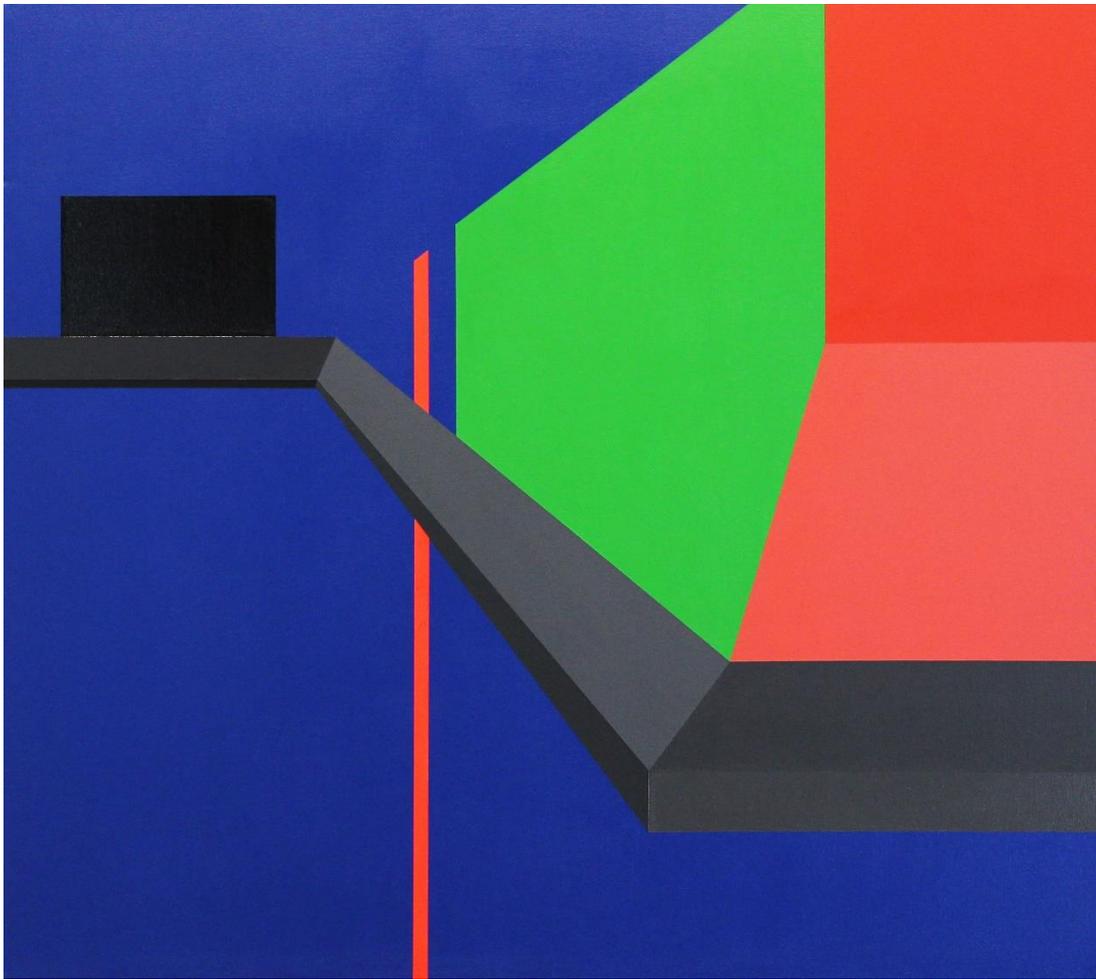
Palo Duro, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 40"

This composition stems from a picture that I took in Palo Duro Canyon. I mostly used warm colors for the background because in the summer, Texas weather is really hot. So you can get that warm weather feeling from the painting. And I used cool colors such as variations of blue that balance the red and pink colors in the composition. And the blue stripes give a sort of depth for the viewer.



On the Road 1&2, 2014, Acrylic on Canvas, 60” x 72”

These compositions are a blend of two different photographs from Istanbul and Canyon. I painted one composition on two separate canvases because I wanted to emphasize how the two different places are independent and far away from each other but also they are attached to each other by me. The neon line that goes on the two canvases was a yellow line on the road that taken from a gang board of Istanbul. And the blue space represents the sea of the Europe Side of Istanbul. The other blue shape on the second canvas was a shadow on the road that taken from Canyon. So there is a meeting on the road of the two different places Istanbul and Canyon on the two separated canvases in the same composition.



Time Difference, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 40"

As it says, the work leads the time difference between different countries. There are eight hour difference between Turkey and America. So I tried to emphasize the difference by different colors such as black, blue, red, and green in my composition. Also I painted the red neon line as a door because when I talk to my family on the internet, I feel like I open a door through to my home. It is like visiting my home for an hour, have a conversation with the family, then close the door at the end of the conversation and go back to your daily life in Canyon.



Homesickness, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 40"

This piece shows my yearning to my country, family, and my life that I used live to in Turkey. There is an inside place in the composition and there comes a light through the window. The place is only painted variations of black because there are no exciting feelings inside you when you are homesick. But there is always a hope that you can think of good things are going to be happen in the future and you have good memories from your family/home to reminisce.



Coordination, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 40"

If you are an international person in a different place, for sure you try to coordinate things that you are not use to. Every country even the places in a country has sort of its own tradition and special things. People are different, language/accent are different, food/drink are different, transportation is different, religion is different etc. In fact, this painting emphasizes your effort of coordination of different tastes of cultures and life. The variation of blue, orange, and red colors are the differences of the life with its geometrical shapes.

PART V
CONCLUSION

My work responds to differences I have experienced in two distinct parts of the world, especially regarding cultures, thoughts, countries, and people. My work deals with my two homes in Turkey and America during the two-and-a-half years I have spent completing my academic career. Many of my works are hybrids because I blend photographs from the places I have seen and visited in different countries. I aim to make my works more relatable through this blending, as they can reach audiences on a multicultural level.

I provide for my viewers several distinct spaces in my paintings because every person needs some space to have empathy as the basis for understanding. Most of my works play upon elements of depth and linear perspective. They also have bold and dark colors brought together as East and West have been joined in my life; these places and cultures are different from each other but their dissimilarities, like the contrast of my painted colors, create beauty and attraction. I usually think that dissimilar things complete each other because of their richness of diverse characters. Thus, when I use

cool and warm, or bright and dark colors together, I feel like the colors complete each other as do the differences in my life as a transnational traveler and resident.

Architectural abstraction also gave me the opportunity to represent exactly how I felt about my life and its multiple cultural perspectives. Architectural design has its own rules and order that you need to follow, but it also gives an ordered freedom that reflects our own limited or circumscribed liberty as humans in this diverse world. We all are responsible for the life we have, for the people around us, and the nature that been given to us. Within these responsibilities, we can express ourselves individually, as I have done in my work; but we can never ignore our social and cultural backgrounds and restrictions.

All in all, I tried to combine my thoughts and experiences during my process of adaptation to a new home in America, even while I tried to hold onto aspects of my native country of Turkey. The years of my life in a country different than my original home was an amazing experience for me. I feel more open-minded about everything now because I saw the realities and possibilities of a more diverse life. The spaces in my work represent the challenges and struggles I felt in my new life in America, but they also reflect also opportunities I have had to grow and change. I am very satisfied about the results of my MFA education and I hope that my thesis work can help viewers recognize the positive benefits in finding new homes and new ways of life.

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