



Evaluation of Expressionist Artist Edvard Munch's Art Work "Melancholia" within The Scope of Freud's Article "Mourning and Melancholia" *

Ekspresyonist Ressam Edvard Munch'un "Melankoli" Adlı Eserinin Freud'un "Yas ve Melankoli" İsimli Makalesi Kapsamında Değerlendirilmesi

ABSTRACT

Expressionism, one of the 20th century modern art movements, rejected traditional style and prioritized individuality. Expressionist artists made color a symbolic element as a style and used it vividly and brightly. Lines and forms were also reshaped by the artists' subjective interpretations. Expressionist works were a reflection of the artists' characters and were able to bring the artist and the viewer together in a spiritual context. Edvard Munch, one of the pioneer artists of Expressionism, shared sections from his own life in his works. The artist's life was spent in a lonely and depressive mood. Munch's hopeless, depressive and melancholic perspective on life made his works unique. One of the artist's works, *Melancholia*, was shaped by the death of his loved ones and being left alone in his life. Melancholy became a theme in Munch's works as a depressive reaction. In addition, neurologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, also considered melancholia as a spiritual reaction and defined it in his article *Mourning and Melancholia*. Munch's work depicting the melancholic individual overlaps with Freud's this article. The purpose of the research is to define Expressionism, to examine the life of Expressionist artist Edvard Munch, and to evaluate Munch's work *Melancholia* within the scope of the melancholic personality structure and characteristics defined by Freud.

Keywords: Art, Expressionism, Edvard Munch, Sigmund Freud, Melancholia.

ÖZET

20. yüzyıl modern dönem sanat akımlarından Ekspresyonizm, geleneksel üslubu redderek bireyselliği ön planda tutmuştur. Sanatçılar, üslup olarak renk unsuru sembolik hale getirmiş olup canlı ve parlak kullanmışlardır. Çizgi ve biçim de sanatçıların öznel yorumlamaları ile yeniden şekil almıştır. Ekspresyonist yapıtlar, sanatçıların karakterlerinin birer yansıması olmuş ve sanatçı ile izleyiciyi ruhsal bağlamda bir araya getirebilmiştir. Ekspresyonizm'in öncü sanatçılarından Edvard Munch, yapıtlarında kendi yaşamından kesitleri paylaşmıştır. Sanatçının yaşamı yalnızlık ve depresif ruh hali içerisinde geçmiştir. Munch'un hayata umutsuz, depresif ve melankolik pencereden bakması, onun eserlerini benzersiz kılmıştır. Sanatçının yapıtlarından biri olan *Melankoli*, Munch'un yaşam içerisinde gerek sevdiği ölümüyle gerekse terk edilerek yalnız bırakılmasıyla biçimlenmiştir. Melankoli, depresif bir tepki olarak Munch'un eserine tema olmuştur. Ayrıca psikanalizin kurucusu nörolog ve psikanalist Sigmund Freud da melankoliyi ruhsal bir tepki olarak ele almış ve *Yas ve Melankoli* isimli makalesinde tanımlamıştır. Munch'un melankolik bireyi resmettiği eseri, Freud'un söz konusu makalesiyle örtüşmektedir. Araştırmanın amacı Ekspresyonizm'i tanımlamak, Ekspresyonist ressam Edvard Munch'un yaşamını ele almak, Munch'un *Melankoli* adlı eserini Freud'un tanımladığı melankolik kişilik yapısı ve özellikleri kapsamında değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanat, Ekspresyonizm, Edvard Munch, Sigmund Freud, Melankoli.

INTRODUCTION

Norwegian painter Edvard Munch was born in 1863. The artist, who lost his mother and sister to tuberculosis at a young age, began to mourn at a young age. After losing two objects, Munch's aunt Karen Bjørstads took responsibility for him and his siblings and ensured the formation of Munch's artistic identity. The painter completed his education in Oslo and later went to Paris to improve himself. Munch, who continued to receive training in workshops after his school life, developed his own style over time. The painter, who moved from Impressionism to Expressionism, made his inner world the theme in his works. Expressionism is an art movement that focuses on the inner world of the individual and seeks truth. Expressionists, who brought emotions and thoughts together with the symbolic quality of the color element, combined color with line and

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form and created the expressionist formal language. Expressionist formal language can take shape according to the artists' character traits. The works of the expressionist painter Munch are identified with his character and are shaped by traumatic events and emotions such as death, illness, love, hopelessness, and unhappiness. Munch's work *Melancholia* also expresses the artist's loneliness and the process of destroying his own self after the woman or women he saw as his object of love after his mother left him. The painter spent his life alone and in a depressive mood and died in 1944.

Melancholia was not only discussed by Munch, but also by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Austrian Freud was born in Freiberg, Moravia in 1856. Freud, who stood out as both a neurologist and a psychoanalyst, aimed to discover the inner world of the individual and to reveal what was hidden in the depths of the individual's mind. The psychoanalyst, who conducted numerous studies and observations for this purpose, also included numerous concepts and definitions in the literature. In 1917, Freud published an article called *Mourning and Melancholia* and included his observations and findings on mourning and melancholia in this article. Melancholia manifested itself as a depressive reaction after another reaction, mourning. While mourning is a reaction to the loss of an object, melancholia involves the process of destroying the individual's self by devaluing it. Melancholia caused the individual who lost the object of love to hate himself with a guilty psychology and feel angry with himself after the destruction. The melancholic individual destroys himself by withdrawing into himself, withdrawing from social life and abandoning himself to loneliness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

What is the Expressionism Art Movement?

Expressionism, which is included in the 20th century modern period art, emerged with its opposition to the art movements of Impressionism and Naturalism. Expressionism, which was on the rise especially in Germany, was able to appeal to the soul of the individual (Turani, 1990: 576; Sözen & Tanyeli, 2010: 97). Expressionism continued its effectiveness between 1905-1925 and played an active role in both the cultural and artistic fields (Eroğlu, 2021: 27). When we look at the origin of Expressionism, also known as Expressionism, it was first used as a term by Julien Auguste Hervé. In addition, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the pioneers of the Cubism art movement, used Expressionism as a concept to define and introduce their works (Batur, 2020: 295-297).

Expressionism has particularly shown itself in painting. Expressionists, who are against the order, ignored the existing order, that is, traditional understanding, and aimed to discover the essence, that is, the truth. Artists who brought sociological issues based on society to the agenda, focused on the harms of capitalism and brought the harm it caused to the individual to the forefront. Expressionism brought a new perspective to art by targeting the inner world of the individual (Eroğlu, 2018: 9).

Expressionists were able to transfer the inner world to the outer world by delving into the depths of the soul. Expressionists, who stopped using nature as a reference, created their own unique expressionist style by using color, line and form elements. Even in their landscape and still life works, artists stayed away from the traditional style and reconstructed the works with their own formal language. Expressionists, who advocated individuality and freedom, acted according to their instincts and impulsively made their works extraordinary. Expressionists used color in their works, especially very vividly and brightly. Color became the symbolic equivalent of emotions for painters. They preferred the line element not only static but also dynamically according to the theme they reflected (Turani, 1990: 577; Kaya, 2012: 42; Antmen, 2021: 33-34). Expressionists, who approached the form differently, rejected the formal understanding that passively rendered the activity of seeing and activated the way of seeing through the activity of individual evaluation and interpretation, and thus the artist and the viewer were able to communicate with each other on the work (Gögebakan & Kılınç, 2020: 28).

Thanks to the expressionist art movement, unseen or taboo realities were able to come to light. Expressionists demonstrated their independence in art with their unique expressionist style, proving the limitlessness of art. The works of limitless artists directed viewers to their inner worlds, allowing them to confront themselves in a spiritual context and discover the essence of their souls.

Who is Edvard Munch?

Edvard Munch was born in 1863 in the Norwegian town of Løten (Eroğlu, 2018: 70). The painter's father, Christian Munch, was a health care worker and was responsible for providing for the family, while his mother took responsibility for the house and the children. Munch lost his mother in 1868 and his sister in 1877 to tuberculosis. The artist's encounter with death in his childhood made him hopeless about life. Munch's aunt, Karen Bjørstad, took care of Munch and his siblings after the death of the painter's mother and sister, and did

the housework. Karen Bjørstad guided Munch towards art and began to build his future. The artist, who spent his childhood sick, recovered in time and was able to continue his school life (Ustvedt, 2020: 16-17).

Munch, who started studying at the Royal School of Design in 1881, left school after one year to set up a workshop. He went to Paris in 1885 (Thompson, 2022: 74). The painter went to the Louvre Museum in Paris and examined the works of master artists, and in 1889 he started to study at Léon Bonnat's art workshop, but he did not participate in the trainings sufficiently. After a while, Munch returned to Oslo and met Hans Jaeger there. Hans Jaeger was an anarchist, both a pioneer of the Kristiania (Oslo) Bohemians, and an activist, philosopher, and writer. The painter joined Jaeger's bohemian group and felt free within the group (Yüzgüller, 2021: 10-12).

Munch spent the summer months in Asgardstrand after 1889. The painter met Milly Thaulow in Asgardstrand, fell in love with her as he spent time with her, and this love inspired Munch's art. Munch also created motifs during his stay in Asgardstrand. The artist settled in a fisherman's hut outside the city in 1898, and during this period, other artists began to create and reveal their own unique styles. Munch ended his works produced in the impressionist style from 1885 onwards, and just like other artists, he set out to create his unique style, depicting his mood, memories, remembrances, and traumatic events in his works. The painter met Tulla Larsen in the 1900s, their relationship began during the process, and Larsen and Munch broke up after a while. The painter, who was not preferred by women, became hopeless and depressed, remaining alone (Ustvedt, 2020: 43-50). The expressionist artist turned to his inner world and created works based on emotions. The painter, who preferred death, illness, jealousy, and the moods created by love as themes, also included the problems he experienced in his works (Krausse, 2005: 82). In the works of the intuitive painter, vivid and bright colors showed his anger and rage, while cold and dull colors represented his hopeless and pessimistic mood. Munch participated in many exhibitions with the works that created his own style. The expressionist artist, who started his painting career with portraits, later included erotic expressions in his drawings (Ustvedt, 2020: 39-42).

The artist returned to Norway in 1908 and remained there until his death. During this period, simplicity and plainness are striking in Munch's works. The painter made paintings that reminded us of the old times of Norway and included stories and myths in these paintings. Munch's works deal with human life, especially from a psychological perspective. The artist also made engravings. Munch's black and white engravings are symbolic in nature and have an aesthetic aspect in an artistic context (Eroğlu, 2018: 70).

The artist died of pneumonia in his home in Ekely, Norway in 1944 (Thompson, 2022: 74). Munch's numerous works make the artist immortal. The painter's symbolic form language, combined with his unique and modern understanding of form, has left its mark on art history and has also become a source of inspiration for artists.

Freud's Reactions to "Mourning and Melancholy"

In 1917, Sigmund Freud wrote his article *Mourning and Melancholia*. In the article, the psychoanalyst, who expressed what mourning and melancholy reactions were and addressed the end of an idea based on love with the death of people's loved ones, explained how mourning and melancholy affected the individual's mood (Thurschwell, 2022: 114). As a reactive process, mourning includes the stages of ensuring that the loss comes back, accepting the loss, and recovering. The painful mourning process, when not completed in a healthy way, causes melancholic and depressive moods (Özakkaş, 2015: 82). Mourning includes not only emotional reactions but also physical, cognitive and behavioral reactions. With these reactions, the mourning process can be examined in three groups: normal, complex and traumatic (Zengin, 2015: 51). Freud stated that the subject experiencing object loss is now independent by associating the lost object with the lost object that he transformed into an object of love with his libido and that in order to find an object again, he must reach the acceptance stage in the aging process (Özkan & Baltacı, 2020: 323). The individual may lose self-confidence during the mourning process, become withdrawn and feel uneasy. In the stage of accepting the individual's object loss, the resistance mechanism becomes active, prevents the individual from reality, makes him delusional and allows him to develop a new attachment to the lost object he loves. However, the individual is expected to accept reality against resistance and continue his life (Freud, 2021: 9-10).

Melancholia, on the other hand, is a pathological depressive reaction that includes the anger and hatred that the individual feels towards himself (Özakkaş, 2022: 53). The individual who shows a melancholic reaction has withdrawn into himself, avoided activities, lost his self-esteem, and distanced himself from the ability to love along with the anger he feels towards himself (Thurschwell, 2022: 114). According to Freud, the individual will devalue himself by losing the feeling of shame along with the anger and hatred he feels towards himself, and will be satisfied after the act of devaluation (Freud, 2021: 9-13). The fact that melancholic individuals feel responsible as a result of the loss of the object causes melancholics to take on the character of the lost object.

The reason for carrying the character traits of the lost object is the desire to bring back the lost object (Thurschwell, 2022: 115). In melancholy, 'I' comes to the fore. The melancholic individual loses his own self rather than the loss of the object. Melancholics who make life meaningless actually make *the self* worthless and meaningless. Thus, the melancholic individual punishes himself, whom he sees as guilty.

Evaluation of Edvard Munch's "Melancholia"

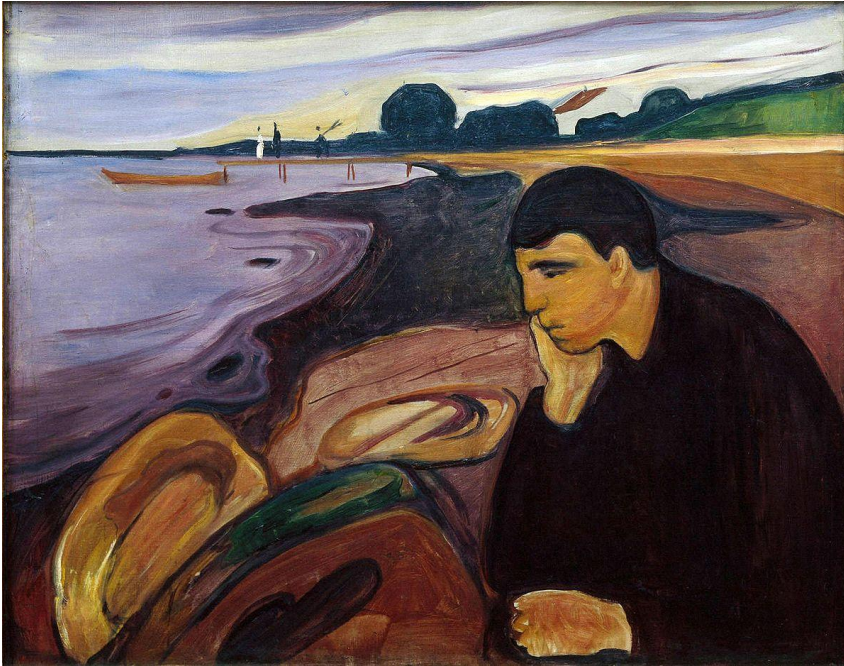


Image 1. Edvard Munch, *Melancholia*, 1894-95, Oil on canvas, 70 x 95.8 cm, Konstmuseum, Bergen
Reference: (Düchting, 2016: 19)

Melancholia, made between 1894-95, is designed in an open composition. The male figure is depicted outdoors in the work. The male figure is located in the lower right corner of the composition. The male figure, viewed from the side, draws attention in a pensive and thoughtful manner. The figure has brown hair and is depicted with a jacket painted in dark shades of blue and brown. The figure, depicted in a stationary position, has one hand on his knee and the other on his chin. The fact that the figure is depicted in this position supports the theme.

The outdoor area in the background of the figure in the work is the coastline. In the outdoor depiction, there is purple-toned water, brown-toned rocks in the lower left corner of the composition, an orange-colored boat in the water behind the rocks and a pier to which the boat is tied, trees and greenery behind the pier, and the sky painted in shades of blue, green and yellow in the background of the greenery.

The purple color and its tones used in water define sadness, grief, introversion and depressive mood (Kırık, 2013: 75). The brown used in the rocks, with its positive connotations, is realistic, determined, emotional and sincere, while its negative connotations are dull/matte, unexciting and predictable. The burnt orange used in the boat represents aggression and tension. The dark green used in the work symbolizes resentment and serenity, while the bright green symbolizes renewal and spring (Gülşen, 2022: 223-331). The blue color reflects both a depressive mood and peace and serenity, along with sensitivity (Arık, 2013: 6). The green color, along with awareness, describes being far from a realistic perspective and deceptiveness (Gülşen, 2022: 325). The yellow color also represents intuition and, with another connotation, joy (Kırık, 2013: 74). In addition, the fact that the figure's clothing is painted in tones close to black reflects his depressive mood.

The fact that the figure is alone in the open space and has no one around him shows that he has isolated himself from the outside world and withdrawn into himself. In his pensive and thoughtful state, the figure questions the reason for being left alone. The figure depicted alone may be a representation of the artist being abandoned and isolated by the women he loved. Munch could not enjoy love in his life because his relationships with the women he loved and desired did not last long. Not being loved caused the artist to become depressed. The melancholic figure depicted in the work fits Freud's definition of a melancholic individual. As a reflection of Munch's melancholic state, the figure could not mourn the separation after the woman or women left his life, and in fact, with the loss of the object of his love, he destroys his self with the hatred and anger he feels for himself, and by not losing his self-respect with a sense of guilt and making his life unlivable as punishment, he devalues himself.

CONCLUSION

Art is based on the individual as a means of communication from the past to the present. The adventure of painting, one of the branches of art, began on cave walls and gained momentum by developing over time. There have been many periods in painting, one of which was the modern period art. With the modern period, artists embarked on new pursuits and the resulting works gave clues about their personalities. One of the movements that left its mark on 20th century art was Expressionism. Expressionism, or Expressionism, revealed the rebellious aspects of artists and enabled them to reflect their characters in an extraordinary way. Expressionism, which addressed the individual from a spiritual perspective, reconstructed emotions and thoughts with color, line and form. While color gained a symbolic quality, line came together with color and formed the form, and the form was reinterpreted with the artist's free and rebellious nature. Edvard Munch, one of the pioneers of the Expressionist art movement, started his art life with his aunt and developed himself over time and became a master. Munch's expressionist style was shaped in line with his own life. The artist's loss of his mother and sister at a young age brought him face to face with death. Death was a traumatic event that deeply affected the painter, and the main themes of his works were illness and death. As Munch's life continued, the life experiences he gained pushed him into loneliness. The problems the artist experienced in his private life while his artistic career was on track caused him to have problems in the context of object relations. The women who entered Munch's life left the painter after a while. The abandonment of the women Munch determined as his objects of love made the artist depressed. One of the works that depicted the painter's depressive state of mind was " *Melancholia*. Melancholia, along with mourning, was also a subject addressed by the world-famous neurologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud examined mourning and melancholia separately and characterized mourning as a reaction to the loss of a dead object, and evaluated melancholia as a depressive reaction that occurs with the disappearance of the object of love and causes the individual to devalue themselves and lose their self-esteem. He also emphasized that melancholia harms the individual's own self. As a result of this study, Munch's work *Melancholia*, which was examined based on Freud's mourning and melancholy reactions, is directly associated with the artist's life, and the work represents the artist's being alone, the psychological effects of the woman or women who left Munch's life on him, the artist's anger at himself and not the women who left his life but his own self, and the painter's turning to his inner world and punishing himself by being alone with his self-hatred.

METHOD

The descriptive scanning model, one of the qualitative research techniques, was used in the research, and the data was collected by scanning both written and visual literature and analyzed using the work analysis technique (Karasar, 1998; Balcı, 2007).

Research Process

During the formation process of the research, research was conducted in the relevant field and information was collected. After the name of the research was determined, the characteristics of the Expressionism art movement were examined, the life of Edvard Munch was discussed, and Munch's work *Melancholia* was examined based on Freud's article *Mourning and Melancholia*.

Data Collection Tools

As part of the research, written and visual data were collected by examining the websites of international museums, articles, theses, and internet documents, primarily books.

Data Analysis

Data was obtained using the work analysis technique. The data obtained within the framework of literature review activities was compiled, organized, analyzed, divided into sections according to their subjects and titles, and used systematically in the study.

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