

# Skin of the Image

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*“Instead of a world in which the distinction between identity and change is clearly defined, with each being attributed to a different principle, we have a world in which objects cannot be considered to be entirely self-identical, one in which it seems as though form and content are mixed, the boundary between them blurred. Such a world lacks the rigid framework once provided by the uniform space of Euclid. We can no longer draw an absolute distinction between space and the things which occupy it, nor indeed between the pure idea of space and the concrete spectacle it presents to our senses.”<sup>1</sup>*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In Guido Casaretto’s work, the materialist and the representational dimensions of the image, haptical and optical perceptions confront each other on multiple levels. This confrontation should not be considered as a battle between two sides with definitively delineated borders and with an absolute result. Rather, we are talking about a conflict in which the sides are interwoven, constantly shifting their position, in which texture and detail encounter symbol and perspective, where the physical space meets optical illusion, constantly blurring their distinctions. This hybridity, one of the most typical qualities of contemporary images, is presented in Casaretto’s works as an artistic problematic.

In saying “haptical”, we are not talking about “contact” per se. While haptical refers to touching, it does not necessitate the act of touching physically. Laura U. Marks says that haptical visibility includes the body more than the optical. While the act of seeing is present in both, in haptical visibility, eyes function as “organs of touch”. On the other hand, optical visibility is completely centered on the eye and is strongly connected to the Cartesian mind-body dialectic. This eye which is equated to the mind “... was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with what later scientists would call ‘saccadic’ jumps from one focal point

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Algılanan Dünya*. İstanbul: Metis, 2005, s.21.

to another... ”<sup>2</sup>. What makes the eye constantly is perspective itself. This constance enables symbolism as well since in order to name objects, their positions should be identifiable. The constant position of the viewer in front of a specified stage such as painting, a screen, a curtain, or a window and the images that are placed in specified positions within the perspective, prepare the preconditions for symbolism. Haptical visuality belongs more to a universe of materialism than of symbolism. It presents a “superficiality” in which the material is perceived rather than an optical “depth” that is specific to perspective. This is precisely why “texture” has a central function in almost all of Casaretto’s works. It could even be said that some of the works problematize texture itself. The methods and materials used for drawing or coloring as well as the surfaces on which the work is realized have all been chosen to serve texture and tangibility.

In order to grasp these notions, it is necessary to have at least a cursory understanding of the “transfers” that the artist made from one medium to another. A deconstruction in this sense will enable us to move away from the aesthetic charm; from “description to conceptualism.”<sup>3</sup> The 3D virtual model “David” is an obvious example to illustrate this aspect: The model’s virtual skin is made up of photographic collages collated from real people’s photographs. Casaretto first produced a sculpture, taking David as a reference point. At this stage, the haptical dimension of the work can be considered to be activated. By looking at the model on the computer screen or at images derived from this model, the production that is realized has a mandatory relationship with the extension that is not optical. Specifically, behind the optical illusion on the screen, the relationship between a distance and another is “mapped” through the relationship of extensions of the environment that we are in. When the artist begins to depict a photorealistic skin using pencil on the surface of the sculpture that he produced, the situation becomes more complicated. The represented skin is a hand-produced copy, half of the algorithm of the virtual David that I mentioned above, the other half a texture formed by photographic references that are impossible to find the origins of. The three-dimensional illusion on the screen covered by the image, depicted by hand on the surface of a sculpture in the world we inhabit is again a transfer that we could dub as optical relationships being mapped by the haptical. The illusion of touching –”bumps” or

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<sup>2</sup> Jay, Martin. “*Scopic Regimes of Modernity*”, Editör: Hal Foster, *Vision and visuality*, Seattle: Bay 1988, s.7.

<sup>3</sup> Bu ifadeyi Hiperrealizm ile Fotorealizm arasındaki farkı açıklama amaçlı kullanan Yağız Özgen’den ödünç aldım. Özgen, Yağız. “*Betimlemeden Kavramsallığa Hiperrealizm*”, <http://apofani.org/2013/01/14/betimlemeden-kavramsalliga-hiperrealizm-2/> [Son Erişim: 2/17/2015]

“depths” of the virtual model’s skin- is equated to the pencil’s sculptural –three-dimensional “bumps” or “depths” of the trace of the coal...

In the artist’s works of this form, an unusual “engineering”, modeling the digital as analogue (we often discuss the reverse), is also at hand. It is necessary to consider the digital and the analogue not just in terms of their being media, but also as the differentiation between “sustainability” and “detachment” of texture. The optical presents a contour, a boundary and a depth; the boundary allows us to “mark” the objects and match them with concepts. Detachment is not only through borders, but also in the distinct distance between the viewer and the painting. Thus, the optical takes up from a digital universe. (From this perspective, a Renaissance painting is also digital.) The haptical takes texture at its center and makes it thus difficult to delineate the boundaries: it is not static but moving. Because of this, it is defined more easily through an analogue representational model. The result is this “New David” permeates the digital almost as a backdoor virus into the sculpture and painting tradition. When we approach the material through a representational perspective, the digital (just like the transformers in electronic devices) into the analogue. The artist choosing not to easily print or turn into objects through three-dimensional printer, instead using hand-produced surfaces must be this particular issue. Because what is produced by hand causes a “parasite.” The parasite is specific to the analogue universe. It will be sufficient to remember the static on old televisions to describe this. The parasites on the screens draw us back into the material, the surface of the screen rather than the illusion of the image inside the screen. The screen is transformed from a window that draws the subject in, into an object that can almost be touched.

Marks, in talking about cinematic perception, points out that this perception is not completely “visual” but rather “synesthetic.” In synesthesia, perception and sensation conceive separately. The image, outside of being a frame, a window or a mirror, comes into being as an experience specific to the extension.<sup>4</sup> Göz, işte bu nedenle bir dokunma organıdır. This is why the eye is a touching organ. Casaretto’s “*waterfront*” corresponds specifically to this situation—in this work, the artist transforms “the textures of a wavy sea painting in perspective” into a relief. The object in front of us shares optical and haptical visibility at the same time. What we see is more of a

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<sup>4</sup> Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, s. 127-194.

“sculpture of painting” rather than a sea painting and it does not only appeal to the sensation of seeing, but triggers other perceptions as well. Sartre explains a similar notion as such:

*“In fact the lemon is extended throughout its qualities, and each of its qualities is extended throughout each of the others. It is the sourness of the lemon which is yellow, it is the yellow of the lemon which is sour. We eat the color of a cake, and the taste of this cake is the instrument which reveals its shape and its color to what we may call the alimentary intuition...The fluidity, the tepidity, the bluish color, the undulating restlessness of the water in a pool are given at one stroke, each quality through the others; and it is this total interpenetration which we call the this.”<sup>5</sup>*

It is possible to interpret all the actions that the artist has realized as a specialized effort to remove figuration from the optical without abstract painting, attempting to make it belong to the material universe. We are living in a universe in which the resolution of the materials that hold the images are so small that we could not feel them, evoking a feeling of the images having lost their material dimension. In this eye-centered world, Guido Casaretto’s position in relation to the object, touching and looking become more prominent. Poetically, this could be interpreted as an attempt to give body to ghosts.

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<sup>5</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, Turhan Ilgaz, and Gaye C. Eksen. *Varlık Ve Hiçlik: Fenomenolojik Ontoloji Denemesi*. İstanbul: İthaki, 2009, s.665.

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