

Hungarian University of Fine Arts
Doctoral School

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMAGE

in context of the black rectangle and the human figure

DLA theses

Réka Nemere

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Supervisor

Dr. habil. Eszter Radák DLA,
professor

The theoretical framework of the dissertation

The title and theme of the doctoral dissertation is *The Philosophical Perspective of the Image*. In this dissertation, the fundamental proposition was discussed in the context of the specific artistic connection between the black rectangle and the human figure. In my dissertation, I am investigating the distinct and interrelating aspects of this question. On the one hand, I am examining the artistic decisions, the tools that were deployed and the theoretical-philosophical framework in which the black rectangle and the figure appear in different art historical eras from the Renaissance up to today. On the other hand, I am examining the intentions and external theoretical factors behind the black rectangle becoming later the contemplated image itself. Apart from this, I am observing the similarities and differences that appear during the comparison of religious, cultic artworks and autonomous 20th-century pieces regarding their philosophical perspectives.

During my research process and the writing of my dissertation, I investigated five paintings from various art historical periods, concentrating on the interpretation of these images, observing the methods of the depiction of pictorial space, placing an emphasis on the differences and connections between two-dimensional imagery and the illusionistic depiction of space. The five paintings that form the core of my dissertation have interested me for an extended period of time, and are the following in chronological order:



List of images

1. Fra Angelico, *Entombment of Christ*, circa 1438-40, oil on wooden panel, 37,9 x 46,4 cm
2. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, oil on canvas, 94,8 x 74,8 cm
3. Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915, oil on canvas, 79,5 x 79,5 cm
4. Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract painting No. 4*, 1961, oil on canvas, 152 x 152 cm
5. Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988, oil on canvas, 102 x 72 cm

Apart from the painting by Caspar David Friedrich, the images I have chosen are connected by the common formal and painterly element of the black rectangle or square. The figurative paintings are similar in the fact that they all have an underlying triangular composition.

Theses:

1. While further interpreting the images, I re-examine my thesis, that the black rectangle could be understood as a special, abstract, transcendental pictorial element, that represents a location of transit between different dimensions.
2. Furthermore, I inspect my thesis that the black rectangle as a pictorial element could denote a visual obstacle. I consider the examination of this hypothesis crucial, based on the assertion that the black rectangle functions as a portal or an obstacle between temporal and spatial layers due to its optically obtrusive nature.
3. I recognise a similar visual obstacle exemplified in certain staffage figures, and in the case of certain stylised figures. Due to the relevance of the analogy, I will also examine this thesis in my dissertation.

As I aim to present in my dissertation the similarities and differences between the images I have chosen according to the theoretical framework suggested by my hypotheses, I am going to connect the chronologically initially created, early Renaissance painting, with the other images created in the 19-20th century, due to the common pictorial element of the black rectangle.

While I was writing my dissertation I was concentrating on the observation of the separate artworks, but I also wanted to discern within the distinct art historical eras – from the Renaissance up to today – the artistic decisions, the artistic tools and the need to represent a certain theoretical framework, in order to investigate what reinforced the black rectangle, the figure, the staffage figure in becoming part of the image. I also wanted to investigate the reason – the intentions and external theoretical - philosophical factors – that drove the black rectangle to become the image itself.

As the human figure – a defining element of the philosophical perspective of the image– appears with equal gravitas as the black rectangle in the case of two of the five images I discuss, I also interpret the relationship between the figure and the black rectangle in certain chapters of my dissertation. I additionally investigate the differences and similarities between the theoretical and philosophical background of the figurative paintings.