

**ONCE UPON A TIME THERE IS or THERE IS NOT...
BİR ZAMANLAR BİR VARMIŞ BİR YOKMUŞ...**

(An Artist's Sketchbook / Bir Sanatçının Not Defteri)

by

M. ÖNER ÖZLÜ

Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences

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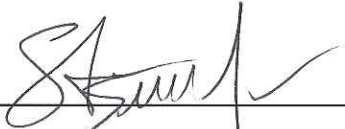
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Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design

Sabancı University

Fall 2009

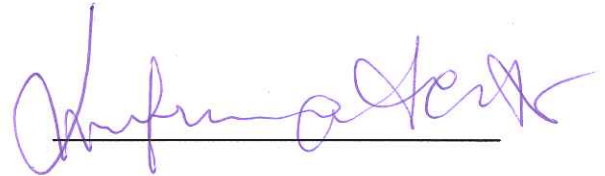
This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate,
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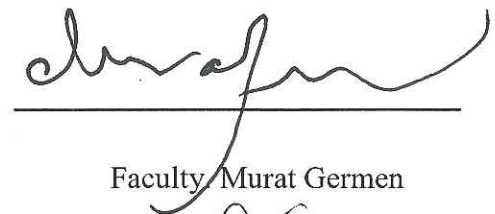
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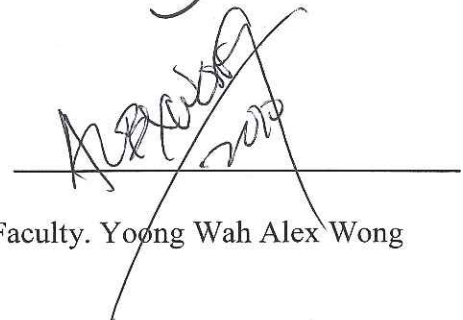
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18.01.2010

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ABSTRACT

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE IS or THERE IS NOT...

BİR ZAMANLAR BİR VARMIŞ BİR YOKMUŞ...

(An Artist's Sketchbook / Bir Sanatçının Not Defteri)

M. Öner Özlü

M.F.A., Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design

Supervisor: Selim Birsel

Fall 2009, vi + 39 pages

I am going to be a flaneur of my own work and of the process with which the work was created and of the space and the time within which the work existed or did not exist.

The process of creation of an artwork is complex and we try to understand this complexity by creating frameworks and structures that simplify this world of infinite connections and sources of inspiration.

Explaining this process is like inviting someone to join in a journey into the unknown. This is particularly so when the process of creation is still in fieri – it is still happening – and everything is in flux and in development.

Keywords: memory, reality, transform, repetition, time, mirror

ÖZ

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE IS or THERE IS NOT...

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Görsel Sanatlar Görsel İletişim Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Selim Birsal

Sonbahar 2009, vi + 39 sayfa

İşimin ve sürecinin bir gezgini olarak, nerde ve ne zaman var olup/olmadığını bilmeyerek bir serüvene çıkıyorum.

Bir sanat işinin üretim sürecinin karmaşıklığının, esinlenen kaynakların ve sonsuz bağlantılarının çerçevesini ve yapısını oluşturma hedefindeyim.

Bu süreci anlatmak, birini bilinmeyen bir yolculuğa davet etmek gibi; özellikle üretim süreci devam eden mecranın hâlâ olmakta ve gelişmekte olduğunu düşünürsek.

Anahtar kelimeler: hafıza, gerçeklik, dönüşüm, tekrar, zaman, ayna

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A rabbit was typing something with a typewriter, while a fox was passing in front of the rabbit. The fox asked the rabbit:

- Hey, what are you writing?
- I am writing my thesis.
- Wow, that's nice. What is the topic?
- The topic is how the rabbits eat foxs.
- Come on man. How can it be?
- Yes, it can be. Come, I'll show you.

They enter the home of the rabbit. After a while the rabbit comes out alone and continues to write its thesis.

After a while, a wolf was passing in front of the rabbit.

- Hey Rabbit, what are you typing?
- My thesis.
- About what?
- How rabbits eats wolfs.
- You won't publish it, right? Nobody will believe it.
- Don't you believe? Come, I'll show you.

They enter the home of the rabbit, again. After a while the rabbits comes out alone.

Are you curious about rabbit's home. Here is the scene:

At the corner there are the bones of fox, at the other corner there are the bones of wolf... At the another corner, there is a lion cleaning its theeth!

THE MESSAGE:

To be a master, the thesis is not important.

The subject is not important.

The importing thing is "the advisor".

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INTRODUCTION I

I am going to be a flaneur of my own work and of the process with which the work was created and of the space and the time within which the work existed or did not exist.

The process of creation of an artwork is complex and we try to understand this complexity by creating frameworks and structures that simplify this world of infinite connections and sources of inspiration.

Explaining this process is like inviting someone to join in a journey into the unknown. This is particularly so when the process of creation is still in fieri – it is still happening – and everything is in flux and in development.

The thesis in itself is not only a thesis but a method of sharing an aesthetic journey that one does not know where it will lead.

The journey can be called an ‘errare’ as Giuliana Bruno wrote in her book *Atlas of Emotions*¹. Errare means both a wandering without direction as well as making mistakes. This process of wandering and making mistakes, turns and alteration is a characteristic of contemporary aesthetic approaches and cultural analysis.

The thesis is inspired in its writing from the conceptual post-structuralists and

¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions*, (New York: Verso, 2002)

deconstructivists approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, re-contextualized in a territory - that of the mind of an artist living in Istanbul – made of contradictory memories, layered landscapes, sedimented architectures and accretions of believes and cultural interpretations of reality.

The journey to be shared with the reader will take the informal structure of a diary, an artists' diary of his processes of creation, doubts, notes, sketches and other ephemera that localize in time – if such a thing could ever be possible – the journey for the creation of an artwork.

Images drawn from my own personal experience, aesthetic comments, ideas abandoned and then revisited, digital notes, weblinks, stills from videos, photographs and photocopies, found materials, all of this will become the thread that will lead the reader and viewer through the complexity of the aesthetic visual representation.

Failed connections and wrong paths are part of the work, they determine the way in which things are shaped and created.



Today I uselessly tried to connect to the web from Sabanci University, after I have finished the discussion for my dissertation. I was trying to find Tim Burton's image of his new film, Alice in Wonderland (2010), to illustrate one of the sources of my inspiration for this work. The loosely connected ideas, paths and inspirations of the artistic work of the past two years will be weaved into this thesis as I have weaved my previous artworks into new ones.

The thesis will be characterized by this personal and informal writing style that finds its inspiration in the tradition of the sketchbook held by artists since the middle age across Europe. There will be technical notes, examples of artworks as well as references to academic text interspersed in the structure of the thesis.

INTRODUCTION II

Gaston Bachelard says:

"IMAGINATION IS NOT THE FACULTY OF BRINGING IMAGES TOGETHER, IT IS RATHER DISTORTING THEM."²

The power of mirroring/symmetry/repetition comes from their characteristics of renewal and transformation. If repetition was to be processed by memory, it would become subjective and as a consequence it would stay away from renewal. Repetition and its memory generates imagination and new perceptions of familiar and non familiar visual images. The tension between visual renewal and imagination starts exactly at this point.

My personal artistic adventure, which started with mechanical structures and architecture, continues with the attempt to involve humanity in the processes of mirroring, symmetry and repetition. By using digital extrapolations of human figures my artistic practice and aesthetics bring in the 21st century the photographic idea of the camera as an object that absorbs the human soul, as explained by Roland Barthes in **Camera Lucida** (1981).

² Edward K. Kaplan, Gaston Bachelard's Philosophy of Imagination: An Introduction - Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (Vol. 33, No. 1), (International Phenomenological Society, 1972) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2106717> (04.01.2010)

By bringing humanity in this equation time necessarily follows. The appearance of images in very fast or very slow motion does not always give the expected results and time acts as a fertile ground for the imagination to overlay the mirrored, symmetric and repeated image. While time becomes faster, as the same motion is repeated, the unexpected and imaginary results will start playing new unexpected tricks with the perception of the viewer.

The image becomes a revelation, as in the case of Lewis Carroll in **Alice in Wonderland** and in the interpretation of **The Aesthetic of Disappearance** by Paul Virilio. With the repetition of the same motion, of the same image, time will become faster/slower and at the fastest/slowest point time itself will stop and disappear... and the image of humanity will rest.

MEMORY

“The necessary condition for an image is sight,” Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: *“We photograph things in order to drive them **out of our minds**. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.”* The photograph must be silent.³

The photography does not necessarily show what is presented at the moment or what will be happen in the future, but only what has been. This difference is clear. While looking at a photograph, our minds are not necessarily forced to follow the nostalgic path of memory. To do not remember the moment and place of an old personal photograph and how it was shot, is better than to remember it. Because the memory will try to reform it and it will start to **loose its pureness**.

³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p.53

Virilio claims that⁴:

“Photography has never actually been anything more than the first of these ‘arts of light’ that have little by little contaminated the perceptible through a ‘photosensitivity’ whose history is yet to be written.

With the photogram, this resistance of materials came to an end, leaving room only for cognitive persistence – accordingly known as ‘retinal’ – that allows for perception of movement and its acceleration, from the cinematograph right up to the recent feats of real-time audiovisual videoscapy. Whence the term art-light for all that now enlists in the aesthetic of disappearance, whether filmic, analogical or digital.”

In an era when our perception of the world has changed from a wide view to a narrow view, how can we avoid from entity and deconstruction when we saw everything, experience *deja vu* and forget them immediately. How can we avoid the actions and their consequences in the reality, while the speed of real world takes away everything in its destiny?

Maurice Blanchot makes a comparison that⁵: **“Talking and writing are not the same as seeing.** Whence my apprehension when I see the written word move to visible. Even reading out loud is painful to me.” The same topic has been also discussed by Peter Greenaway in his Istanbul Lectures. He claimed⁶ that **cinema is not an illustration of a literary text**; cinema has its own visual language. We can

⁴ Paul Virilio, *Art As Far As The Eye Can See*, (London: Berg, 2007), p.117

⁵ Paul Virilio, *Art As Far As The Eye Can See*, (London: Berg, 2007), p.121

⁶ Peter Greenaway, *Istanbul Lectures*, (Istanbul: Sabanci University, 2009), DVD

adopt that claim to all formal works. If the text is good, let it stay as a text; so everybody can imagine the illustration of the text on their own. We see that similar approach also in Walt Disney, Tim Burton, George Lucas, Akira Kurosowa. They all use narration in their movies. But, is their aim narration or form? Let's think about a movie of lemon seller by each of these directors; we can understand immediately which director shot it. All of them will add their own characteristic signs in the movie. This is the aim of create the formal language of the form. The story should not have the form, the form has to have its own story. Otherwise the story will meet with memory and will loose its purity.

REALITY

“The art is the most beautiful way for man to learn that he has religious feelings.”⁷

Federico Fellini

In addition to this religious approach, art has a close relationship with faith. Even in times when culture and religion are distanced from each other, art tends to become a bridge between them.

In Ancient Greek during the legendary Golden Age, humans were hiding things, meritorious and sins from the Gods; because there was pressure by Gods on them. In that time, Plato claims in his philosophical expression “*the real is the invisible.*”⁸ Same issue was also can be seen in the stories of Prometheus hiding the **fire in a wet box** from Zeus and hiding part of **beef hidden inside an ox's stomach**

⁷ Paul Virilio, *Art As Far As The Eye Can See*, (London: Berg, 2007), p.69

⁸ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009), p.41

and giving the bull's meatless bones to Zeus.⁹

Heraclitus also says that sleepers are in separate worlds, the awake, in the same¹⁰. We can imagine the same discrimination between chemical photograph/movie film. There is a notched place which is a **limbo** combines two films, two different realities/dreams. The issue is what is going on at that place, how it connects the realities or disconnects while human eye sees it as one. Also same for digital sequences...

TRANSFORM

Only the beginnings are pure and simple; before transformation of the artwork while observing. We are not free to shut our eyes; other way, while reopening them, we would not experience the same form; we were constructed new worlds where we visit during the blackout; hosts of other worlds, times, dimension but not that original form which is interesting to discover. The return with our subjective approach to the work will not pure as at the beginning.

We live in a circle with **cinematic illusion;** the trick in perception of the information at a screen lets you accept what it serves you. That makes a two dimensional interactive relation. You become more forsaken in your own world; also more sequences in front of you will make you lazier and that loop will lower your perception level in time. The limitation in observing the work can be crashed if we let the work transform in its form and stays away from our memories.

⁹ Prometheus, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/prometheus>, 04.01.2010

¹⁰ Paul Virilio, The Aesthetics of Disappearance, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009), p.39

A painter/writer Marek Halter approach to topics transforming and works travel:¹¹

*“Pollock is the first painter who abandons the easel and places the canvas on the ground in order to take in the painting from above. It is like **a landscape seen from a plane**. European paintings are landscapes seen from the window of a train.”*

In addition to Halter, Virilio says that:¹²

*“To see **the landscape pass by a train or automobile window** or to look at a film or computer screen the way you look out of window, unless even the train or cockpit become in their turn projection rooms... train, car, jet, telephone, television... our whole life passes by in the prostheses of accelerated voyages, of which we are no longer even conscious... the need for peregrination has led to establishment in displacement itself of the very fixity of life.”*

¹¹ Paul Virilio, *Art As Far As The Eye Can See*, (London: Berg, 2007), p.36

¹² Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009), p.70

REPETITION

The narration period is not matching the vision, while trying to see, the narration becomes dramatically a disordering of vision of slow motion to be able to follow it. The importing point to catch them is the place of probes, what is there, when is there and not there. As in fairy tales the phrase “**once upon a time / bir varmış bir yokmuş**” in the intro of the story never changes.

“Captain Hatteras went out for long walks every day; but his walk was accomplished invariably according to an established pattern and in the direction of a certain path of Sten-Cottage. Once he got to the end of the path the Captain would start walking backwards. Had someone stopped him? He pointed to a fixed point in the sky... The doctor soon understood the motive force of this singular stubbornness; he guessed why this walk was always taken in the same direction, as in under the influence of a magnetic force. Captain John Hatteras walked invariably toward the north...”¹³

In these kinds of narrations, same methods have been used countless times. The repetitions in them make time faster and after a while our perception to narrations works without time as in tales ignore time issue.

¹³ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009), p.107

TIME

The development of speed varieties causes disequilibrium of perception that informs us our being.

If we would accept that time as only reality, we should also agree with Guyon, as the motor is being invented: “The idea of time can be reduced to a point of view: duration is made of transitory instants just as a straight line is made of points without depth.”

In 1903 Bierbaum opposes against this tendency¹⁴: “*Speed is not the goal!*” Bierbaum is in search of *humanist speed*, he calls; and he underlines, “*we would be embarking on a ‘carriage of fools’ that takes the place of the Ship of Fool; speed must become a particular cultural and time aspect that serves collective culture.*”

Photography tries to record/copy painting, movement, stillness which will disappear one after another. When it is mixed with motion, it becomes video. In the photography camera, the light passes through a tiny hole and recorded on something and remains there forever as single; image but in video, the light passes through the same tiny hole, the motor moves the chemical/digital material and records continuous sequences of images. This is a new way of perception/experience; therefore a new form of art comes into being; constructed on the earlier form.

¹⁴ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009), p.111

MIRROR

After the World War II, European Life was based on reconstruction, and it was reasonable for artist to follow this trend, to produce works to construct a new system for art and culture. No one could avoid staying in that movement.

Andy Warhol was a follower of mass production, consumption and as a result **massive reproduction**. As far as Michelangelo Pistoletto concerned¹⁵: “Immediately after the Mirror Pictures I multiplied works and styles as **I were twenty different artists at the same time**. Today, I don’t think that the mentality has really changed.”

Perhaps today the priority should be to create/discover new worlds/spaces and times; and travel in them. If we come back to the Mirror Picture of Pistoletto, as in his mirrors and the mirroring in my works are not walls but new artists; and their works are still not lived, everything that is not seen before is going to live tomorrow.

The key feature of photograph is that it mirrors only once. The Photograph automatically repeats what is not able to existence any more. In the frame, the form stays pure as long as the chemicals’ life and attempts immortality.

The photography includes the mortality in disappearing of object in time. To choose that specific object is the job of the artist, right after that **he is not the artist any more, becomes the curator. Now the mirror/-ing becomes the artist** and we should wait its surprises which makes tricks to play with our perceptions. The real space/world will be invisible in time; what we will see would not be as essential. So,

¹⁵ Maiten Bouisset, Mirror Effects – The Center of Contemporary Art of Vissiviere-en-Limousin, (Paris: Rochechouart, 1993), p.35

I trust in mirror!

CONCLUSION

The search about memory, reality, transform, repetition, time and mirror seems an endless research area that is going to continue in my entire personal artistic adventure. Because the power of my memory, my perception of my reality, how I transform and repeat it in a specific time in front or behind of a mirror is instable according where and when I am. But there will always be a stable fairly tale starts phrase: **“Once Upon A Time There Is or There Is Not / Bir zamanlar Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş.”**

I believe my works show that I have started them like a kid plays with his toys, breaks them then tries to repair them. I think it was coming from my inside, my childish feelings which was my purest point. My dream is to keep him alive...

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APPENDIX (FIGURES)

(visuals by M. Öner Özlü & Turgut Derbeder)



Figure 01 - bird's eye views without textures



Figure 02 - bird's eye views with textures



Figure 03 - plans of installation

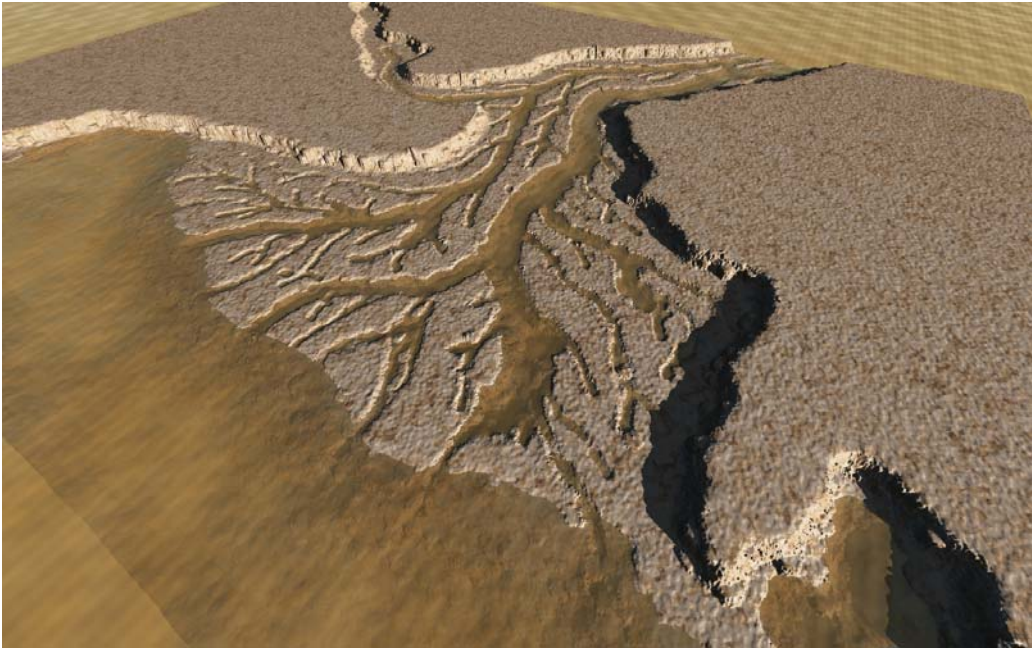


Figure 04 - waterways



Figure 05 - bridges

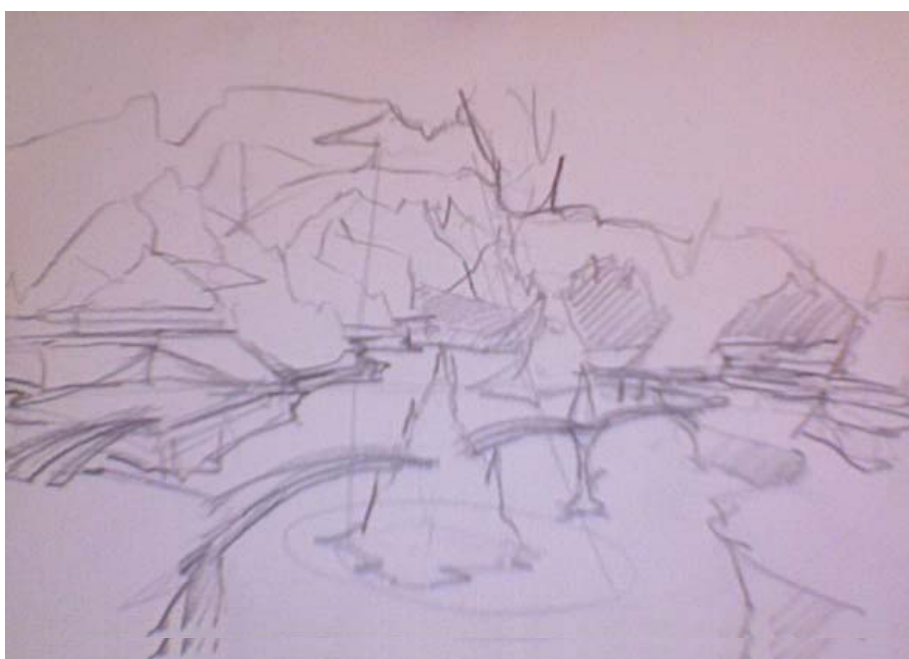


Figure 06/a - land design sketches



Figure 06/b - land design sketches



Figure 07 - land design sketches with color



Figure 08 - land design matte painting



Figure 09 - 3D land modeling / main land

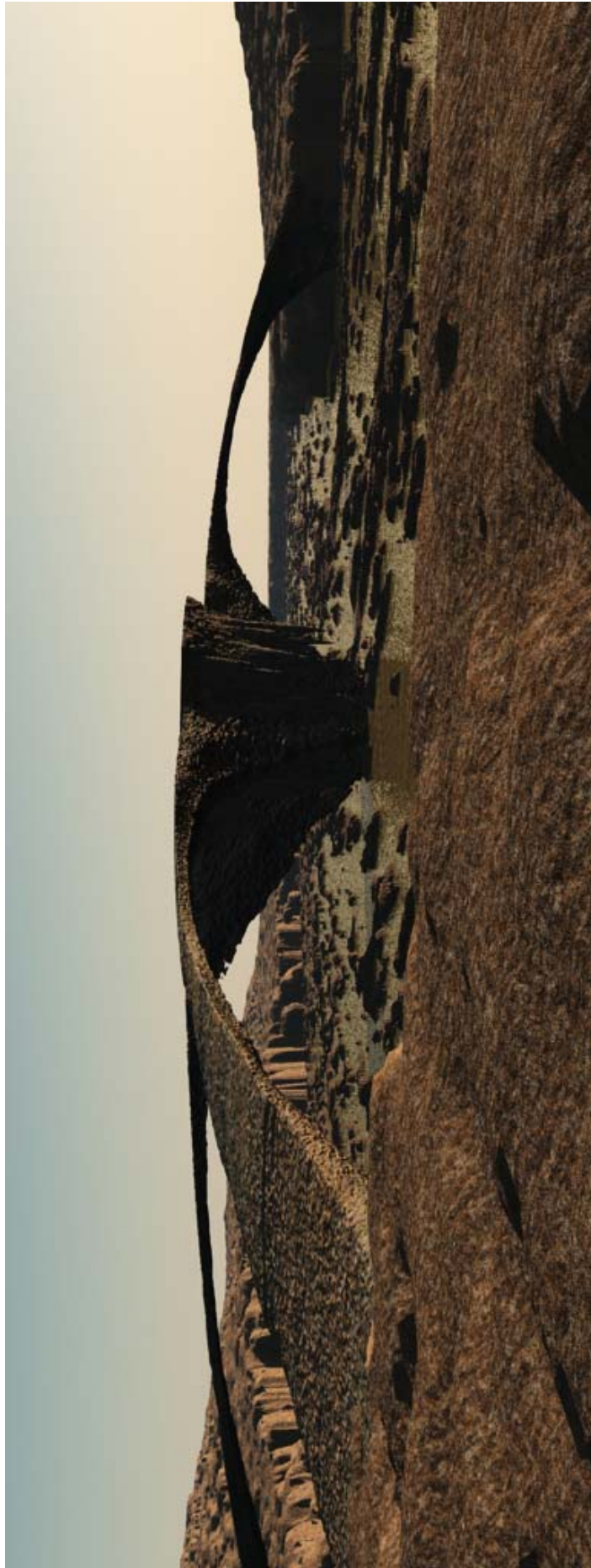


Figure 10 - 3D land modeling / island

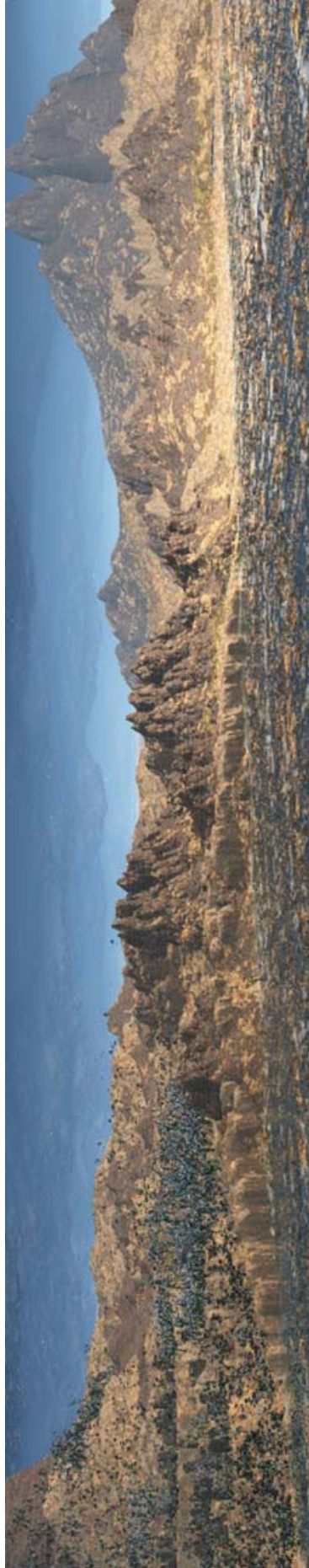


Figure 11 - 3D land modelling / sea and rocks

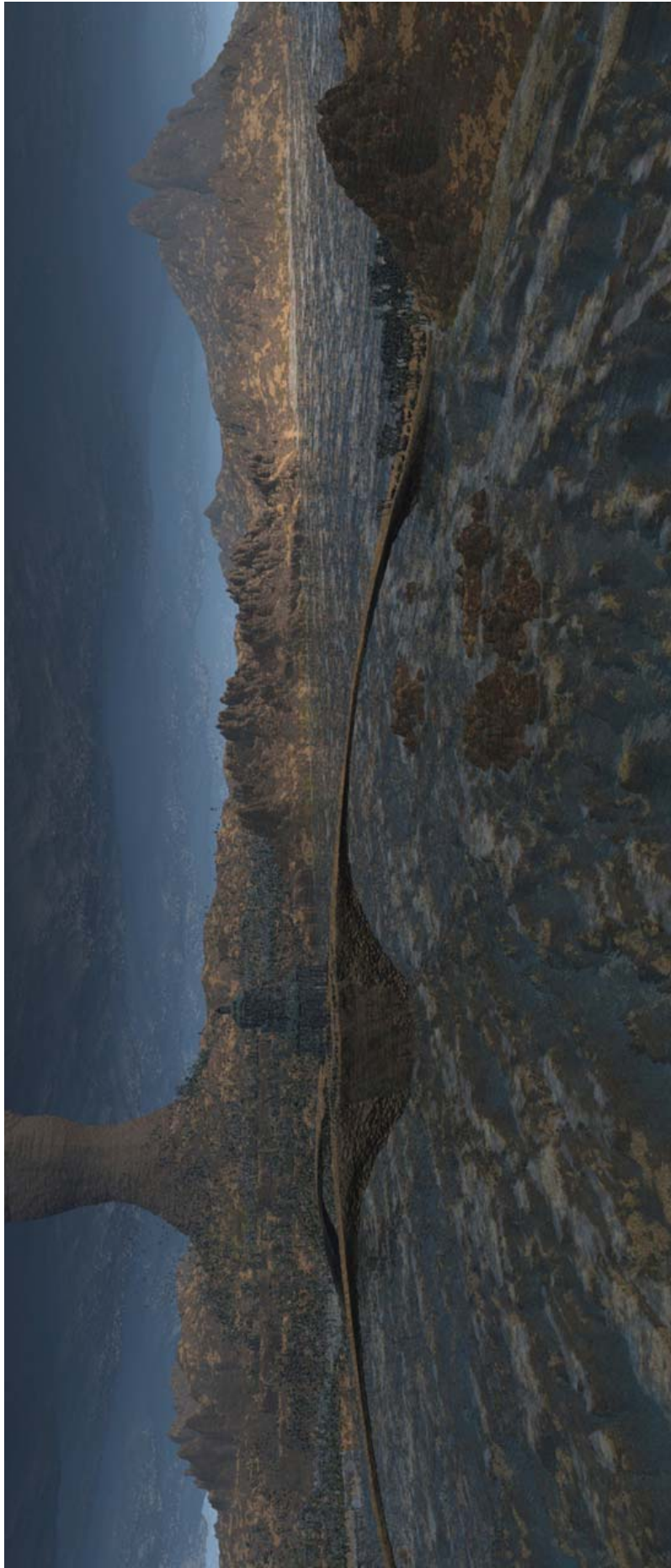


Figure 12 - 3D land modeling / sea, rock, land, island, bridge



Figure 13 - 3D land modeling / eastern region

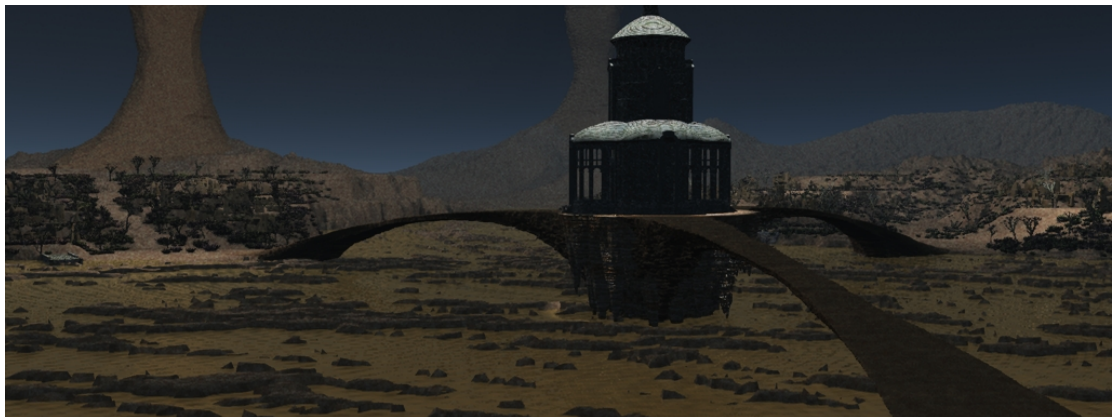
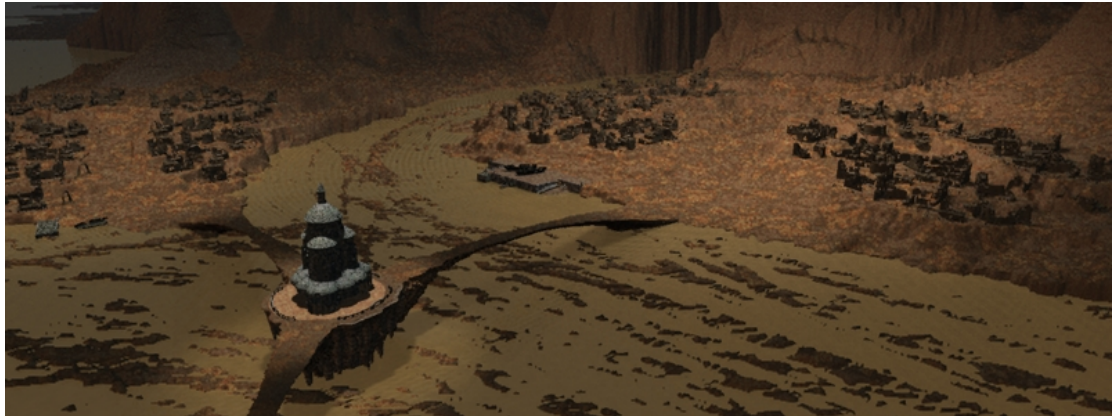
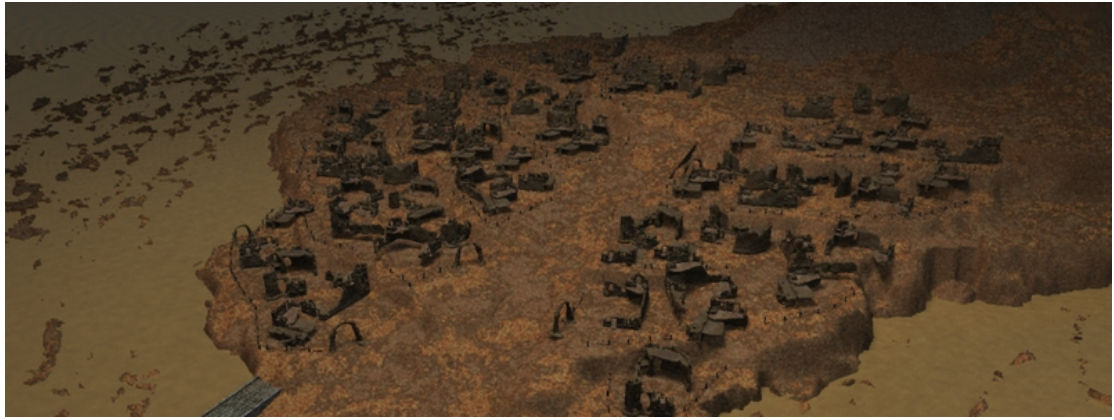


Figure 14 - 3D land modeling / house and plant installation

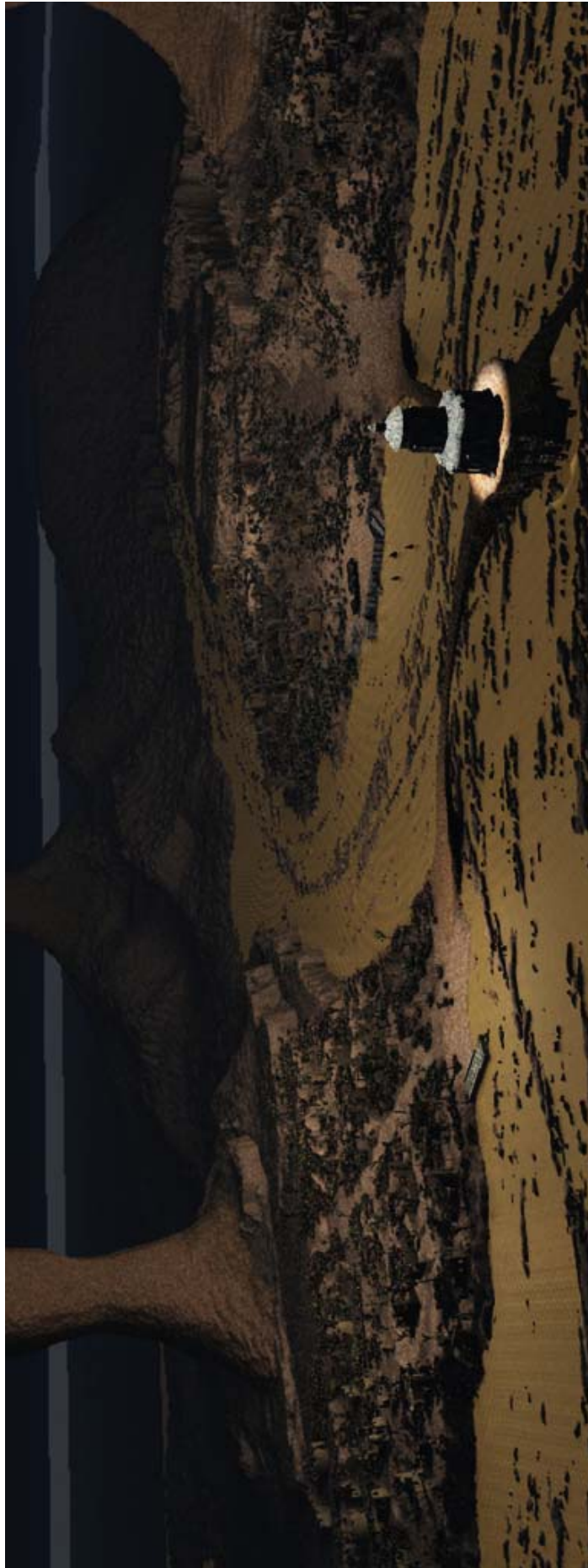


Figure 15 - 3D land modeling / general 1

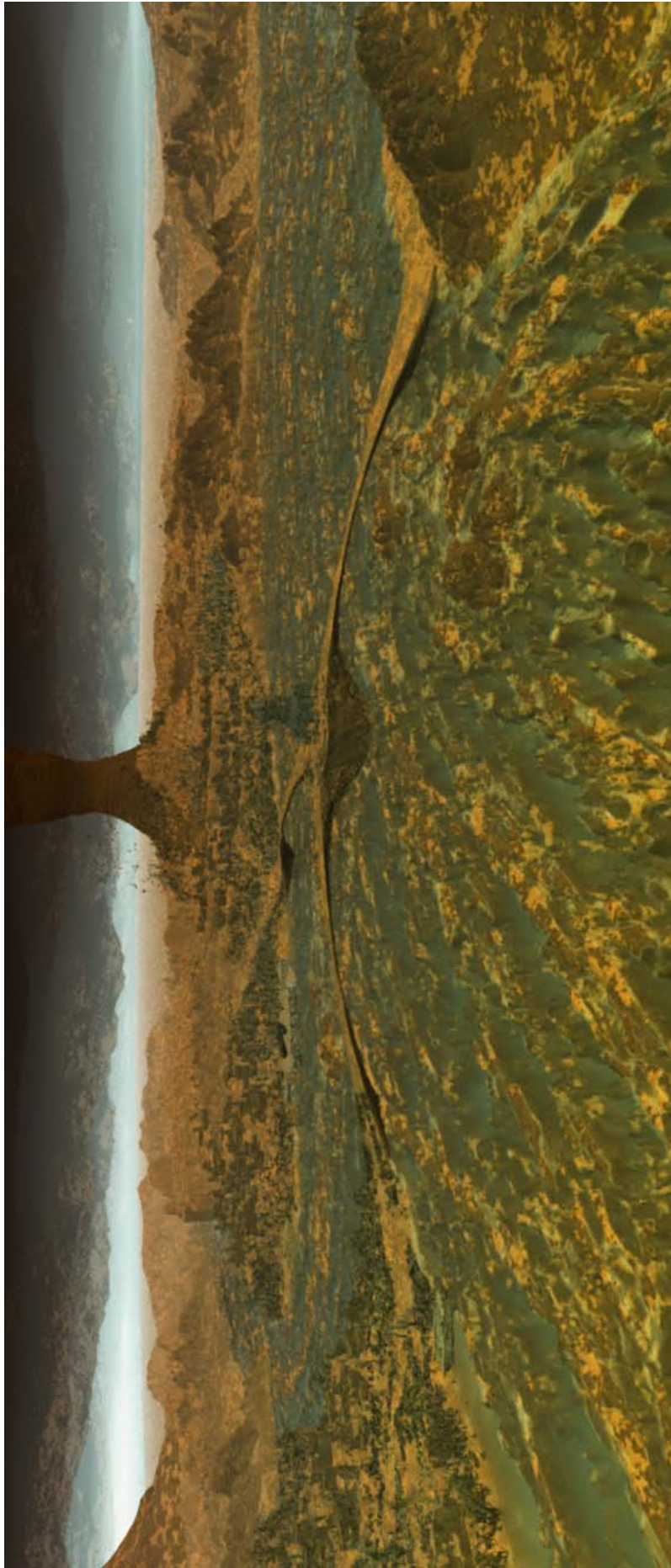


Figure 16 - 3D land modeling / general 2

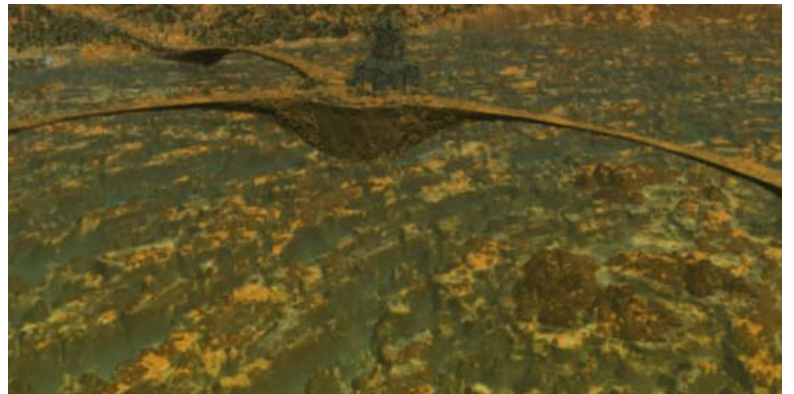
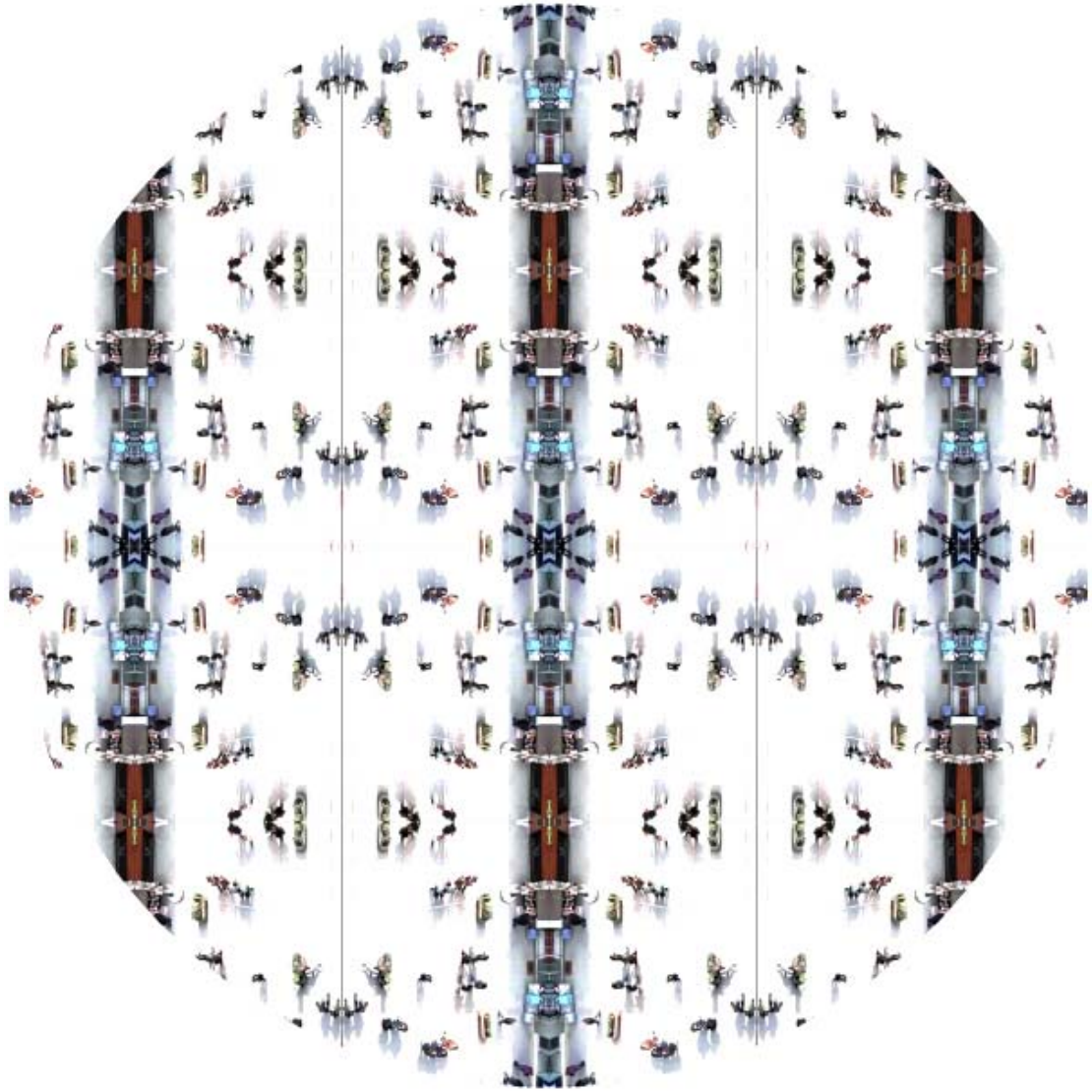


Figure 17 - The work is travelling

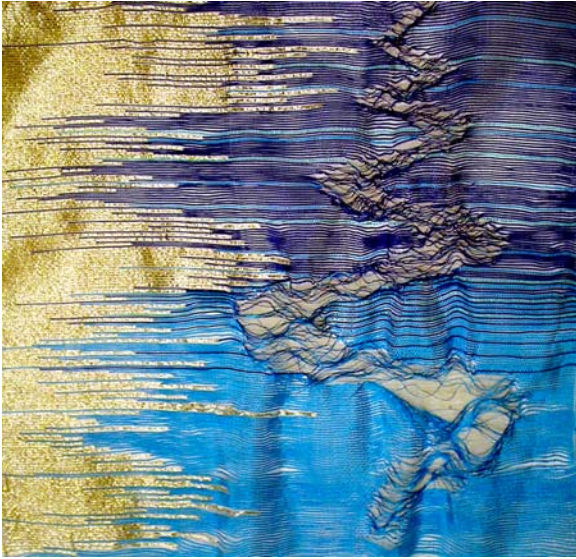


Figure 18 - costume design by Fırat Neziroğlu



Figure 19/a - tree design



Figure 19/b - tree design

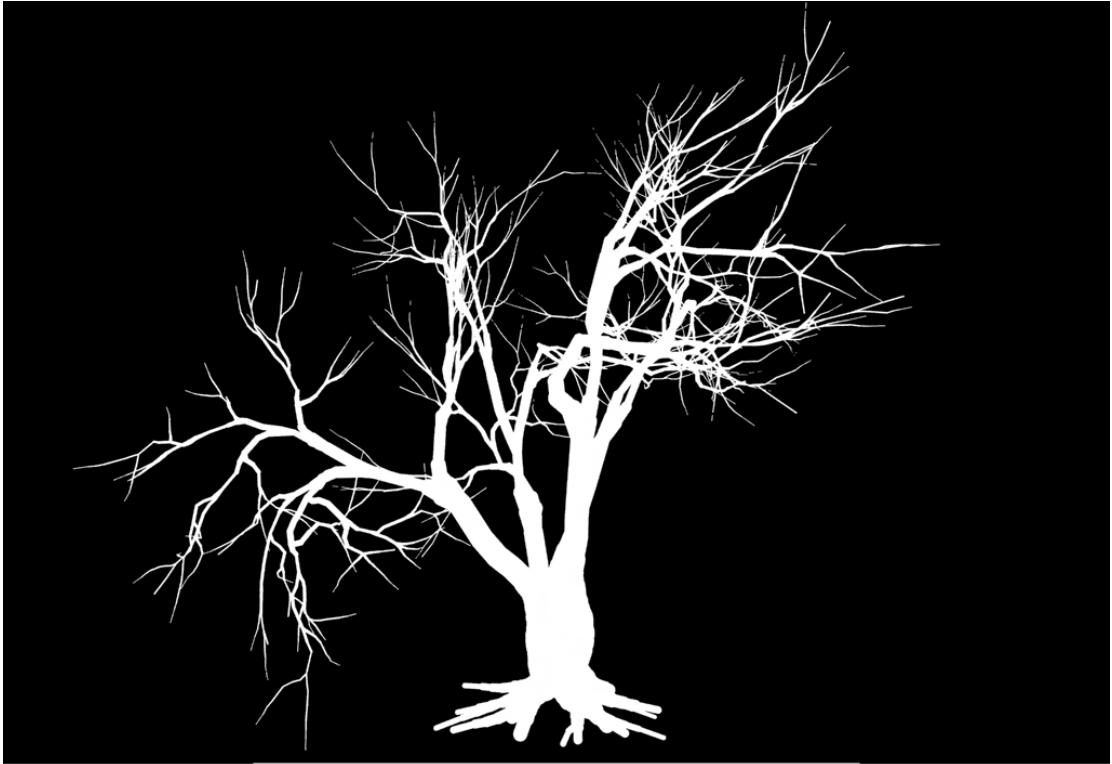


Figure 19/c - tree design



Figure 19/d - tree design



Figure 19/e - tree design



Figure 19/f - tree design