

# Reading the Environmental Pollution in Lefke Through the Works of Art

Mustafa Hastürk<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Near East University-Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, N. CYPRUS

Received 18 September 2017 • Revised 3 October 2017 • Accepted 7 October 2017

## ABSTRACT

A visual work of art carries various types of information on the context and period of its emergence. This information may be about the artist, the surrounding environment, society, and the theme of the work or all of these aspects. Besides, its mission of artistic existence, the work inherently transfers this information about the past. This inherent quality is sometimes referred to as the feature of documentation. The acceptance of artworks as documentation can be exemplified with the paintings of Venetian painters, which were used by experts to determine the rise in the sea water level of the city. Although documentation is one feature of art, the primary role of art is its societal mission, which suggests a translation of social problems into a universal artistic language. In this article, copper mining operated in Lefke region by Cyprus Mining Corporation (CMC) and its environmental effects are studied through the works of İnci Kansu. The purpose of reading the works is; to create an awareness of environmental pollution, also to it is also about reaching information about the time and conditions at the time of the event. For this purpose, the works of the artist on the subject will be read, interpreted, interpretation and judicial methods. All published article on the topic of the environmental pollution in Lefke region printed or verbal have been examined.

**Keywords:** art, CMC, Cyprus, environmental pollution, Lefke

## INTRODUCTION

Depicture was the means of communication prior to written language in the history of humanity. The first written languages are entitled as pictograms due to their pictorial elements. "Hyreoglyph used by the ancient Egyptians is an example of this" (Tansuğ, 1993). This feature marks the existential relationship between art and writing "Primitive humans believed that symbolic presentation of an event would make it come true" (Read, 2014).

Therefore, the urge to paint on the cave walls was necessitated at a philosophical basis and on a belief system rather than the simple function of the act. This definition of the act of painting is rightfully in line with the concept of modern art.

Painting as a visual language is also informative in respect to place, time and living conditions of its production besides the common definition of artistic pleasure and meaning. The reading of the inherent information is the duty of art sociology. There may be various reasons for reading and analysing a work of art in this respect. The reasons for such an analysis are not only social or structural reasons but also cultural and artistic reasons. The fact that Modern Art glorifies conceptualization instead of aesthetic values influences artists to inquire into social issues. This trend has increased the tendency of artists to dwell more on human and human related problems. "An artist may only subsume the opportunities that the period and conditions of the society the artist lives in". (Fisher, 2012)

Like many others, İnci Kansu who is a Cypriot artist has produced works of art filtered through from the life of society. In the works that will be studied here, Kansu has managed to conceptualize the environmental pollution caused by copper mining in the region of Lefke. This attitude of the artist suggests a clear conscious decision within contemporary. Rıza Ulker in his article "Turkish Children's Drawing of Nature in a Certain Way: The Sun, Couple of Clouds, a River Rising from the Mountains", suggests that the works of children from the same culture and ethnic origin share various common traits in their imagery; similarity in the symbols depicting the mountains,

#### Contribution of this paper to the literature

- The discussion of an environmental problem through the works of a socially prominent artist.
- To aid the development of literature on visual art in Cyprus.
- To promote and raise awareness of the informative aspect of art besides aesthetic and plastic values with respect to human life.

clouds, rivers and the sun. Kansu's conscious awareness of the issue probably also portrays the common trait mentioned here of geography and social values.

Kansu has produced many works of art focusing on environmental issues and lost values in her country. In this respect, one of the most influential works is the Cuprum project. The subject of this project is the environmental pollution caused by Cyprus Mining Corporation (CMC) in the region of Lefke, which depicts the environmental disaster and can be seen in line with the works of art that depict environmental and social issues such as Peter Bruegel's *The Peasant Wedding*, *The Shooting on May Third 1808* by Fransisco Goya, *The Potato Eaters* by Vincent Van Gogh. The study of these works requires an effort and knowledge in art sociology and methods of art analysis to read, interpret and analyse. Works of art harbor various conceptualizations and the analysis of these works is inevitably subjective.

### The Effects of CMC on the Environment and Life in Lefke

Lefke is a beautiful Turkish town in the western part of Cyprus. It is located between the descending hills at the edge of the Troodos Mountains. It is suitable for fruit production due to the water reserves fed from the Troodos Mountains and the gentle weather of the Mediterranean Sea. Its oranges, known as "Lefke Orange", have earned a reputation for its superior taste. It is decorated with palm trees, which reflect the features of Ottoman architecture, and it consists of houses with bay windows and inner courtyards, which add a different attraction to the town.

The natural advantages of this beautiful town include its fertile soil, water and mild climate along with mineral deposits. However, the combination of generosity of nature with the greed of humans towards economic profit has produced the catastrophic results of the current tragedy.

The introduction of mining in the region occurred a long time ago as Bağışkan explains, "The introduction of copper mining in Lefke date back to Middle-Bronze age (1900-1625 BC). The process continued with the Phoenicians and it halted at the end of the Roman Period (30 BC- 150 AD)" (Bağışkan, 2013).

In addition to the introduction of ancient mining in the region, Bağışkan (2013) also explains the history of CMC as, Charles Godfrey Gunther came to Cyprus, en route to Middle East from the United States with the aim of conducting a mine survey in 1912. In the research he conducted here, he discovered that a significant amount of copper and sulphur mines were found around Lefke's Foucassa Hill. Gunther encouraged CMC which was an American mining company to operate the reserves located in Lefke and the company hired the location from the British Colonial administration of Cyprus and began the extraction of ore deposits containing copper, gold, cobalt, nickel, lead, sulphur, gold, and other ore materials. However, CMC did not establish refineries to extract ore due to the high cost of dismantling the pulp. The mine pulp was transported abroad from the raw material separation pools to Gemikonağı Port and shipped abroad for processing. One of the carrier vessels in an unusable rustic state vessel and the closest Gemikonağı port and the pier deserted by the CMC can be seen in [Figure 1](#) (İlseven, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Gemikonağı Mining Pier

CMC created employment and the economic contribution between 1950 and 1963, Lefke received considerable immigration and had become a vital and important settlement. The introduction of agricultural machinery and machinery in different sectors had resulted in the unemployment of many labourers' especially rural people who had worked as planters, shepherds to flock to the region. According to sources, Lefke's population during the period had become twice the number of its current population.

Labour in mining became means of living despite its weariness and dangers. Biweekly payments were instrumental in establishing street markets named "Ödeme [Payment]" markets, which promoted commerce. Turkish and Greek Cypriots worked together in the mines without any discrimination until the events of 1963 that halted this process. The mine was closed during the clashes. Armed groups recruited most workers and the Turkish and Greek Cypriots who had worked together as mine workers faced each other on conflicting fronts of communal clashes.

For CMC, The intervention of Turkey in 1974 became the pretense of halting the operations and abandoning Cyprus although the mines had not been operated at full capacity and its economic profit was decreasing. The miners lost their jobs and it produced economic problems for the region. More importantly, the environmental disaster and its effects were realized with respect to the serious health problems it had created, especially cancer.

## RESULTS

There have been many scientific studies and reports on the environmental disaster in the region. Nonetheless, it is hard determine the extent of its negative impacts on the natural order and social life of the disaster. The commentary of Beratlı provides the scope of the environmental disaster in the region and its effects.

*In June 1999, a group of experts from Ege University prepared a report in which they stated that they had identified a number of heavy metal in the tailings and listed them as copper, iron, manganese, sulfur, zinc, cadmium, cobalt, lead, chromium and molibden. The researchers used the term "death valley" for the Lefke region after finding out these heavy metals were above the limits and could put human health at risk ... Researchers from Ege University rightly reported that "The problem is not just Lefke and the island of Cyprus ... but all Eastern Mediterranean countries and middle Mediterranean countries" (Nazım Beratlı, [http://nazimberatli.org/ow\\_userfiles/plugins/ifiles/Lefke%20Sevgilim.pdf](http://nazimberatli.org/ow_userfiles/plugins/ifiles/Lefke%20Sevgilim.pdf)).*

These social and environmental problems caused by CMC were gradually discussed when social awareness on the issue was raised. Currently, Lefke municipality has applied for Cittaslow membership (established by a municipality in Italy, which means a slow and a quiet city) and is trying to complete its preparations. The people of the region are aware of the need to get rid of the negative effects of environmental pollution as soon as possible. The negligence of the authorities on the issue has mobilised the environmental friendly NGOs. NGOs and artists have tried to raise awareness on the issue through various actions and activities in order to trigger the rehabilitation of the environmental population.



**Figure 2.** İnci Kansu, Tünel (Tunnel), 2002

One of these activities is the *Cuprum* project of İnci Kansu. Kansu expounded his project sensitive to such issues in his country, first in Lefke, then in other parts of her country and abroad.

### Cuprum Project and Lefke

“Art is the reality of a society. The artist is the supreme sorcerer who is necessary for the society]” (Fisher, 2012). Kansu is the outstanding sorcerer on the island of Cyprus who has made significant strides in her artistic adventure with handmade paper. He deals with important social issues through her contemporary works of art. The issue of environmental pollution left behind by the CMC in the Lefke was addressed by her contemporary art project *Cuprum*.

Kansu entitled his work with a phrase that has a mimetic relationship between the name of the project and the island; *Cuprum* as the root of Cyprus or the word “Cyprus” as the root word for *Cuprum*. This title represents one of the most important issues of the country. In the speech given in the opening of the exhibition Atilla Karaderi, President Lefke Environment and Promotion Association said: The works on display in this exhibition have an environmentally friendly identity and they are recognized around the world, and these underline the fact that İnci Kansu has a universal artist identity” (Cansu, 2002).

While creating the project *Cuprum*, Kansu created three-dimensional installations with the use of paper, which he produced from paper pulp. One of the works of *Cuprum* is the work titled *Tünel* (Figure 2).

The *Tünel* depicts the entrance to the tunnel of the mine, which is created by plates as material. White coloured plates are used to signify the entrance whilst the inner parts darken as you go deeper into the tunnel. On top of the tunnel’s entrance, figures of miners are seen with miner helmets worn for protection. Seven layers are ordered to resemble a tunnel from its mouth towards deeper parts and colour scheme was used to give the juxtaposition of the depth from a white plated tunnel entrance to dark depths of the tunnel. In contrary to the entrance pieces, the plates inside the represented tunnel had no clear descriptions on them. The inner plates resemble layers of soil. The colour work of the layers are fragmented, distorted and emerging images that cannot be recovered back to their former natural beauty which stands as a representation of the effects of mining which emerge as an intervention in nature.

In Kansu’s *Tünel*, the helmets of mining workers clearly represent all mining workers, irrespective of their ethnic background whether Turkish or Greek. In addition to fact that the miners worked together in a struggle to earn their living without any discrimination to each other due to their ethnic differences and miners have also established beautiful friendships. The layers of the tunnel portray the depth as if one goes deeper and deeper into a bottomless dark pit. This powerful and mind blowing depiction reminds the viewers of the tunnel journey of the miners and its links with death, pain, and sorrow. At the head plate of the tunnel’s entrance is a diagonal orange



**Figure 3.** İnci Kansu, Cuprum Anıtı (Cuprum Monument), 2002

strip, which cuts into the helmet of a mining worker. The orange colour used here, which cuts through protective gear represents the stratum of copper mine and the dangers and possible death that miners face whilst trying to earn their living under the ground. The handmade paper and sheets used on each layer vary; some are plain and some are lace-like. Although the colours are applied to fit the purpose of its topic, they form in-place contrasts and harmonious combinations in various places that appeal to the eyes of the viewer.

Kansu creates a critical awareness of this disaster experienced during colonialism and protests it with the handmade paper. The illustration of the tunnel installation is produced from a protesting stance. Kansu's attitude represents a peaceful, caring and avant-garde position in artistic sense. As stated before, the issues undertaken in the works of Kansu are environmental issues and the lost values of her country. Her intention is not merely an inquiry into the issue but it is more focused on the repair or remediation of the damage done to nature just like a "Shaman". Perhaps the artist's stance is strengthened her own stance by her reference to the artist Joseph Beuys.

*As a matter of fact, the Cuprum project, which are the creation of the artist's first series of works in the field of paper art focusing on the historical link of copper and the Cyprus island. The remaining layers of CMC mines in Lefke and traces of its past experiences are all transformed into art material of handmade paper, which overlaps the foundation of the phenomenon of memory and the contents of paper that revives as layers. Goodness and evil were stored in the natural memory formed from values accumulated on those layers.]" (Çakmak, 2014).*

Undoubtedly, the conceptual works produced by artists also contain ingredients from the artists' past lives on pain, sadness, happiness and emotional experiences especially in childhood. It is difficult to uphold the value and definition of art if the products lack this internal transfer and are soulless or dry.

The artist commented on "Cuprum Exhibition", which he had opened in Lefke region where the mining operation is located as;

*"the attractiveness of two different and contrasting themes was the reason for the production of the Cuprum project. One dimension consists of my lived experiences that settled in my memory from my childhood happiness. Another dimension is the perturbation of the ill heritage and the lethal print of waste that pollutes the environment and nature which has almost become synonymous with the name, history and social life of the island in a process that dates from ancient antiquity to today over the centuries..." (Lefke ve yöresinin Sesi, 2004).*

Another work of Cuprum project is an installation work of Cuprum Monument (Figure 3).



**Figure 4.** İnci Kansu, Cuprum Gazetesi (Cuprum Newspaper), 2005

It is a powerful representation that fully represents the environmental waste and environmental pollution. The dark brown colour of the work represents an industrial product with an oxidized and deformed appearance. The material used is handmade paper coloured with dark coffee colour and it has a soft velvet texture provides an aesthetic sensation that grasps the viewer alongside its conceptualized definition.

There is an object resembling the shape and size of a barrel located at the front towards the right standing on the black scale. The barrel figure incorporates another object that resembles its lid. The lid is fixed on the wall pinned at the centre, which carries a conscious compositional intent. The reason for the barrel lid appearing at the central background with lighter colour compared to the barrel at the front with darker colour is yet another conceptual or a possible manifestation of a plastic attitude. Trautmann summarizes this conceptual art project realized by Kansu with the following words:

*“Copper mines are still dangerous and unpleasant places today when compared to the past. The tailing of the mine is as dangerous as the sword hanging on a rope. The mining company abandoned acid used to separate copper from the other ores, and it drips from the cracked barrels and gets absorbed by the soil. / There are sculptures made of paper, mounted on painted corrugated cardboard or plexiglass-mounted to provide the necessary transparency, and there are some parts that are added to the sculptures by the artist; notes on salary bills, laboratory findings, copper fragments ... They are great placements” (Trautmann, 2010).*

Kansu’s *Cuprum* project also consists of a work titled Cuprum Newspaper (**Figure 4**).

The work consists of a ready-made object that is articulated to her study of the surface. It exhibits avant-garde posture besides the discourse. The artist is trying to create her own journal through this work. The work is a representation of the archive of Cuprum project that is made up of various newspapers.

It is highly probable that if we may take the Venetian paintings by Venetian painters in the Renaissance period can be a reference in the analysis of today’s structural problems than Kansu’s paintings also contribute to the debate in the future as a work of art. This work, which includes a contemporary artistic attitude, is one of the pioneering works of Turkish Cypriot art, in terms of both conceptual meaning and the work of installation. In addition, they must be fused with the important problems of the society that make them such powerful works of art. Another aspect of the work also deals with is an important period and geography in the recent past of Cyprus. “It is nothing more than a social judgment that gives art to an object. As the social structure and its social judgments change, the definition of art and the conditions of what we call art changes.” (Erinç, 2013) Considering this reference, Kansu’s work in the *Cuprum* series is a memoir of painful remembrances in a documentary period. These stones, which are knotted with their own knots and stitched together with layers and layers with great care are displayed in the art centers of many countries and cost the world.

Kansu's works is likely to be a reference point for various inquiries into the issue, just like the use of Venetian paintings from the period of Renaissance as a reference to solve a problem. The works, which depict her conceptual world, as installations, have pioneering qualities in Turkish Cypriot art. The strong impression these works of art leaves on viewer is due to the fact that they are kneaded with societal problems. This theme is a reminder of a recent past history, geography and lived experiences. "The object that is defined as art is nothing but a social judgement. The definition of art or what objects we define as art are everchanging social structures and judgements" (Erinç, 2013)

In this respect, Cuprum is not just a document but it is rather a monument of the bitter memories of a period. The artist kneaded, moulded and shredded the paper pulp to produce her own handmade paper and put them layer upon layer with great care to produce these vrave societal monuments that is a world heritage now.

## CONCLUSION

The researchers surely recognize the importance of visual depiction in the development of language in the history of humanity and culture. Although, the impact of visual depiction with respect to narrative function may be seen as lessened, it still remains a valid universal and visual language. However, the descriptions of visual works of art may not necessarily translate into written texts or spoken language. "If we take the picture as a text, the pleasure labyrinths devised in written text through vocabulary are limited when compared to the connotations of pleasure labyrinths of visual works." (Durmuş, 2006). The subjective narration conveyed in written language may be ignored. In contrast, the advantages of universal language of painting and visual arts could not be ignored.

Readings of a work of art require a certain amount of prior knowledge. Undoubtedly, this prior knowledge is linked to the context of the work's production. The interpretations of works of art do show variations. Nonetheless, the differences in the reception of works of art from one individual to another make the work of art more mysterious. The definition of works of art evolves from generation to generation and an example of this is the portrayal of Venus on the sea shell by Bothelli. However, as sunset spurs similar feelings in individuals of every nation, the language of art may one day become a universal language understood by all.

In this article, we have traced the environmental pollution in Lefke and its social consequences as much as the universal language will allow. The reading of works of art with respect to the established link with social life has been carried out. The reading required a closer look at the context of its topic; information and descriptions of the period that have been cited. The environmental disaster, which produced various social problems and health problems still felt today have been translated into a universal scope and language. Kansu's works as a representative of Turkish Cypriot visual arts carry social situation of the island to the world with the use of universal language. It is the primary duty of a work of art with respect to society similar to the mission and responsibility artists take as a existential responsibility of a super sorcerer.

As a result, Kansu has immortalized the effects of mine tailing on environment and society in the recent history of the country through an artistic language. Cuprum project has a universal attitude in the discipline of contemporary art. This attitude is stronger and has earned more respect than any political power will in the country until now.

## REFERENCES

- Akbulut, D. (2006). *Resim Neyi Anlatır*. İstanbul: İstiklal Kitabevi.
- Bağışkan, T. (2013). *Kıbrıs'ta Bakır Endüstrisinin Geçmişi*. Lefkoşa: Yay. Yenidüzen.
- Çakmak, H. (2014). *İnci Kansu*. Pasatempo Dergisi, Kıbrıs Gazetesi Ltd.
- Cansu, A. (2002). *İnci Kansu'dan "Cuprum" Sergisi [Cuprum Exhibition by İnci Kansu]*. Retrieved on 17 July 2002 from [www.kıbrısgazetesi.com](http://www.kıbrısgazetesi.com)
- Erinç, S. M. (2013). *Sanat sosyolojisine giriş*. Ütopya Yayınları.
- Fischer, E. (1995). *Sanatın gerekliliği* (8. Baskı). (Trans. C. Çapan). İstanbul: Payel Yayınevi.
- İlseven, S. (2017). *Kıbrısın Beşeri, Ekonomik ve Siyasi Coğrafyası*. Lefkoşa: Tipografit Basın Yayın.
- Lefke (2004). *"Cuprum" Sergisi Exhibition*. Lefke ve Yöresinin Sesi.
- "Lefke" (2017). Retrieved on 03.05.2017 from [nazimberatli.org/ow\\_userfiles/plugins/ifiles/Lefke.pdf](http://nazimberatli.org/ow_userfiles/plugins/ifiles/Lefke.pdf)
- Read, H. (1974). *Sanatın Anlamı* (Trans. Güner İnal, Nuşin Asgari). *Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları*, 87.
- Tansuğ, S. (1988). *Türk resminde yeni dönem*. İstanbul: Remzi kitabevi.
- Trautmann, H. (2013). *Art and Creativity in Cyprus*. Lefkoşa.

Ulker, R. (2012). Turkish Children's Drawing of Nature in a Certain Way: Range of Mountains in the Back, the Sun, Couple of Clouds, a River Rising from the Mountains. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 12(4), 3173-3180.

**<http://www.ejmste.com>**