

## Transformation of Object in Contemporary Art Within the Context of 'Process' Concept

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**Abstract:** The 'object' has the potential to be a tool in the process of conveying the feelings and thoughts of the artist to the audience in the formation of contemporary art. While 'process' emphasizes the production stages of the work or the time period from the beginning to the end of the work in some works of art, in some works it refers to the changes and transformations experienced in the physical structures of the objects used by the artists. Emphasizing the potential of the concept of 'process' in Contemporary Art, the aim of this research is to enable the audience or art buyers to perceive contemporary art forms. This research, in which the intellectual foundations of the movement towards the change and transformation of the object in art after 1960 are tried to be revealed, is important in terms of having a resource potential that can be used in the formation process of different works to be done in the context of contemporary art.

**Keywords:** Art, Process, Process art, Object, Contemporary art

### Introduction

Although the phenomenon of 'process' in art refers to the performative motivations that the Abstract Expressionist artist Jackson Pollock put forth in his artistic works in the 1950s, it can be said that the effects of this concept in art were also encountered in the works of Dadaist artists in the 1910s. The radical changes in art after 1960 have revealed many different art movements. The phenomenon of 'process', which is among the important values that form many of these art movements, emerges as a component that needs to be examined in terms of perceiving contemporary art. In this research, the eclectic structures of the concepts of object and process in art are mentioned and the physical and semantic mobility of the object (change-transformation) is mentioned.

“Painting has ceased to be what 'represents' directly or symbolically; it became a space that bears the traces of the painter's movements, reveals it with the 'traces' of the paint, and freezes all the movements he made in a period of time like a movie frame” (Lynton, 2009: 230). Especially in the art movements that emerged after 1960, the concept of 'process' appears intensely. The focus of this study is to reveal the changes and transformations that the objects used in works of art have undergone in the context of 'process', both in formal

and semantic dimensions. In the study, examples from the works of Vincent van Gogh, Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Kosuth were given, and the 'chair' image used in these works was evaluated considering the development process of art.

## Method

The information obtained in this study, which was produced within the framework of the concepts of 'art, process, process art, object and contemporary art', was reached by using the scanning method. In the study titled 'Transformation of Object in Contemporary Art With the Context of 'Process' Concept', a work of Vincent van Gogh, Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Kosuth were evaluated for the purpose of the study.

## Results

### The Object of Art to the Art of the Object

When we look at the sources of art history, in the petroglyphs belonging to the periods before Christ and in the drawings made on the stones or the cave walls, indicators pointing to the socio-cultural structure of the period are encountered. Spears, knives, arrows, etc. are used in the art practices of societies, especially those who live by hunting. It is seen that objects that are a part of daily life are commonly used. In the later periods of art, it is seen that objects are used intensively in order to perceive the subject in the paintings of the artists. The main theme of this study is to express the changes and transformations in the context of form and content that occur in the context of the 'process' of the 'object' phenomenon in artists' practices (art-works). These changes and transformations are revealed by examining the works of *Vincent van Gogh* (Image 1), *Robert Rauschenberg* (Image 2), and *Joseph Kosuth* (Image 3).

Artists have attributed meanings to the objects they use while shaping their works in every period of art. Vincent van Gogh, one of the important representatives of modern art, reflected the socio-cultural events around him in a social and realistic context. The artist, who produces works in Impressionist and Expressionist styles, in his work named '*Van Gogh's Chair -1888*' in *Image 1* with the chair image he used, did not only represent the chair object used in daily life, but also emphasized the connotative dimension of the empty chair.



Image 1. Vincent van Gogh - Van Gogh's Chair -1888

(<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/a22090dd-eca0-4a96-acb0-86e91e1414b9>

Date of Access: 21.11.2021).

According to Martin Bailey, “*Van Gogh's wicker-covered armchair and chair are a simple, rustic piece of furniture that reflects how the artist saw himself as a humble man. The objects on the armchair, the pipe and the tobacco pouch, are very personal, suggestive of Van Gogh's thoughtful personality. Smoking was his constant pleasure and helped him relax. For these reasons the painting can almost be seen as a self-portrait. The significance of the intriguing, signed box at the back, apparently filled with sprouting onions, remains a mystery*”<sup>2</sup>.

According to Fineberg, objects used in daily life are seen intensely in Rauschenberg's works after the 1950s. The artist did not find the objects he would use in his works by searching the junkyards or he did not construct his works in a planned way before creating them. While creating his works by acting with an abstract expressionist logic, “...he wanted to use the objects and thoughts that emerged out of nowhere” (Fineberg, 2014: 171). In Robert Rauschenberg's work named '*Pilgrim-1960*' in Image 2, who uses the chair object in his works, the chair object appears with an unusual design concept.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Bailey. “A separated pair: the story behind Van Gogh’s famed empty chairs”, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/11/20/a-separated-pair-the-story-behind-van-goghs-famed-empty-chairs> Date of Access: 26.11.2021).



Image 2. Robert Rauschenberg- Pilgrim- 1960

<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/bd2cb66a-37f8-436d-8a44-e95bf2b6bad8>

Date of Access: 22.11.2021).

Starting from the lower right corner of a nearly square canvas hanging on the wall, a chair comes into contact with the floor. When we look at the work hanging on the wall, we see the effects of the abstract expressionist movement. The composition setup created with light, medium and dark spots on the canvas does not give us the signs of an object or image that actually exists. In other words, the stains on the canvas do not contain the characteristics of the representative painting. However, the 'chair', an object of daily life, starting from the lower right corner of the canvas and touching the floor, creates an eclectic structure with the canvas hanging on the wall. 'Object'-based applications are frequently seen in Rauschenberg's understanding of art. In this study, the chair object, which appears as if it came out of a two-dimensional art form, presents a three-dimensional structure. The harmony of colors used on the canvas and the chair can be considered as the artist's effort to strengthen the connection between art and life. The artist could also depict the image of the chair in his work. However, Rauschenberg opened a unique field for art by feeding on the object-based art practices that Duchamp put forward against the known patterns of art. Carrying the colors used on the canvas on the chair also creates balance in the whole composition. The chair used by Rauschenberg in his work titled '*Pilgrim*' in *Image 2* was no longer the chair used in daily life, the 'chair' object used by the artist in his work was elevated to the status of an art object. The chair used in this work has been purged of its function in daily life and has been put into the reproduction process with the coding of the artwork. In this context, it can be said that the 'chair' object used in

Rauschenberg's work named *'Pilgrim' in Image 2* has undergone a transformation in terms of 'process'.

In Robert Rauschenberg's work named *'Pilgrim-1960' in Image 2*, the articulation of objects that are a part of everyday life to the form and technical concept of traditional art forms brings together the concepts of *'representation'* and *'reality'*. In this work of the artist, the compositional setup caught between the concepts of modernism and postmodernism points to the transition from modern art to postmodern art. The fact that Rauschenberg searches for the aesthetic phenomenon in the objects used in daily life in his work points to the change and transformation in art.



Image 3. Joseph Kosuth - One and Three Chairs-1965

(<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/29ce9d26-041d-4400-b080-6bf66726ea59>

Date of Access: 22.11.2021).

Joseph Kosuth is among the important representatives of conceptual art that emerged after 1960. In conceptual art, rather than the formal characteristics of forms, the message/idea to be given with forms is at the forefront. According to Schianchi, Joseph Kosuth's work *'One and Three Chairs-1965'* is considered among the earliest examples of conceptual art. In conceptual art, the idea is at the forefront. *"Conceptual art sets aside technical skills and considerations of composition, form, and color, among other traditional concerns with the production and analysis of a work of art"*. Although Conceptual Art was shaped by the art practices of Marcel Duchamp in the early 20th century and by Fluxus artists in some of their works in the 1960s, Kosuth is in a different position from previous works of art in terms of shaping a work of art on *'language, representation and presentation'*. Joseph Kosuth's work *'One and Three Chairs'* was created within the framework of the concepts of *'language, representation and presentation'*. In this work, *"...a real chair, a photograph of this chair actually placed in the room, and the definition of the word 'chair' reveal a disturbing mental and conceptual game in the form of a work of art"* (Schianchi, 2011: 259).

The 'chair' indicator used by Joseph Kosuth in his work named '*One and Three Chairs-1965*' has been evaluated at three different points in the work. We can express these points as follows: First, it is the linguistic equivalent of the chair object used in the work that is tried to be expressed with the dictionary meaning of the chair. So, '*c-h-a-i-r*' is the language encoding. The second is the reflection/design of the chair object used in daily life in the human mind, which is tried to be explained with the photograph of the chair. The third is the real-life three-dimensional form of the chair. With this work, it may have been emphasized that each sign has different meanings beyond the visible and that these indicators should be evaluated in the context of the signifier and the signified.

## Conclusion

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the 'representational' feature of art has been in the way that the artist observing nature shapes his works. In the resulting compositions, the 'object' was an element of the work. With the metaphorical meanings attributed to the objects, the desired message was given. Especially the avant-garde movements experienced in art after the 20th century have placed the position of the 'object' in art on a different axis. In this process, Marcel Duchamp's art practices that center the ready-made object are important. It can be said that as a result of the removal of the object from its potential in real life and its promotion to the status of an art object, formal transformations in art as well as philosophical dimensions have emerged.

In this study, titled 'Transformation of Object in Contemporary Art Within the Context of 'Process' Concept', it was tried to reveal the changing structures of the objects used in the works of the artists in the context of the process during the development of the objects. Both in the context of painting and in contemporary art forms, artists ascribed metaphorical meanings to objects while shaping their works. In this study, which examines the works of *Vincent van Gogh* (Image 1), *Robert Rauschenberg* (Image 2) and *Joseph Kosuth* (Image 3), in which the artists shaped their works using the chair object. The process that started with the 'representational' transfer of objects used in real life in the development process of art has turned into a structure in which the real form of the object is used. As a result, the transition process from '*the object of art to the art of the object*' has emerged.

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## Image References

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**Image 2:** Robert Rauschenberg- Pilgrim- 1960. (<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/bd2cb66a-37f8-436d-8a44-e95bf2b6bad8> Date of Access: 22.11.2021).

**Image 3:** Joseph Kosuth - One and Three Chairs-1965. (<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/29ce9d26-041d-4400-b080-6bf66726ea59> Date of Access: 22.11.2021).