Representation of The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci in the Postmodern Era Using the Abstract-Minimalism Approach

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Abstract

The Event of the Last upper of Jesus Christ has always been considered as one of the most important events in Christianity. Many artists have addressed this event in their artwork; the most important and best-known representation of this event was addressed in Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper fresco that is displayed in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The importance of this painting emerges from the fact that new readings and interpretations of this work have been made even in the contemporary era. Multiple images represented have The Last Supper in the contemporary era, with changes in the concept and content according to the features and the problems of contemporary society. The goal here is to study the represented works of Da Vinci's The Last Supper in the era of postmodernism by following the period's characteristics and conditions of this time. The content and meanings of the represented works of the Last Supper have changed. There are many represented examples of da Vinci's The Last Supper of which, in this study, two sample images of artistic means (abstract-minimalism) have been analyzed and described. Data in this study has been collected by using documentations from the library, and finally, the images which represent the cultural aspects and the features of the society for audiences have been analyzed and described. In fact, these images are contemporary cultural objects which express new concepts. The word-types used were different, but meanings such as spirituality and holiness have been expressed by several signs in both works. By placing a timeless work of art in different positional contexts, therefore, new meanings are created.

Keywords

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Statement of the problem

Introduction

The importance of the painting of The Last Supper has always been considered as a religious issue. In the era of postmodernism, however, The Last Supper was observed from the perspective of cultural change, human ideals, attitudes, and beliefs. As culture changes, characters, who are carriers of culture, also change. In this period, art needs to be analyzed based on its relationship with contemporary ideals. Represented examples of painting The Last Supper in the contemporary period reflect the changes in human society. There are new concepts and meanings according to the social and cultural conditions. In the original text, the subject of the work expresses its content; the presence of characters and elements in the image and the applied principles of art are the factors pointing toward a single meaning in the image. In represented images, concepts and meanings are not so obvious, but the audience perceives new meanings by their understanding and the given signs in the represented images in the contemporary period. The main research questions are as follows:

1. What meanings were found in the artwork over time owing to sociocultural changes?
2. To what extents are the new readings of an artwork's representations based on the indicators of the text?

Since the represented works are formed in the modern era (postmodern), this research first investigates the issues related to postmodernism; then, according to the modern and postmodern principles and characteristics, two examples of the represented works of The Last Supper that tend to abstraction and minimalism have been analyzed and described.

Research History

In an article that reviews Leonardo's The Last Supper as a source of inspiration in the light of four stories of holly book; the works of da Vinci is compared with others and the narrative used has been discussed (Mousavi Rokni, 2016). Shakeri (2013) published a study entitled "Comparative Study of Three paintings of The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, Salvador Dali and Simon Patterson from the perspective of religious Semiotics". (Yassini, 2009), in an article entitled "Last Supper from the cellar grave to the field of modern art", has investigated the examples of The Last Supper painting from the Renaissance and modern and postmodern period. (Ismaili Sheikhani, 2007) conducted a study entitled "The Last Supper in the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Emil Nolde, Tintoretto, Frangelico, Boats aiming to investigate the similarities and differences between The Last Supper paintings of these artists". In the book "Young Leonardo and his life in the fifteenth century of Florence" (Larry, 2011) the author deals with different periods of the life of Leonardo da Vinci in Florence, and his activities until the formation of the initial ideas for The Last Supper and his many studies and for the formation of the painting. In the book "Secrets of The Last Supper" (Humphreys, 2011), the narrative of The Last Supper has been investigated following the Bible. Four Secret and mystery from the last week of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, The Last Supper problems, from The Last Supper to crucifixion and a new reconstruction of the last days of Jesus have been investigated. In the book of "Astounding inventions of Leonardo da Vinci" (Kemp, 2006) the Renaissance era, Leonardo da Vinci's biography and his inventions such as machine construction, flight tool, war inventions, etc. have been mentioned. The book "great Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci" (Barber, 2004) more investigates the life of Da Vinci, his artistic activities, and topics of interest in that period of his life. In the aforementioned books, Da Vinci's personality, his work, and his inventions have been discussed. In the papers, Da Vinci's The Last Supper and few other examples have been compared. In none of the studies, the represented images in contemporary era have been studied with a certain approach. In this study, two of the represented images of The Last Supper have been analyzed.
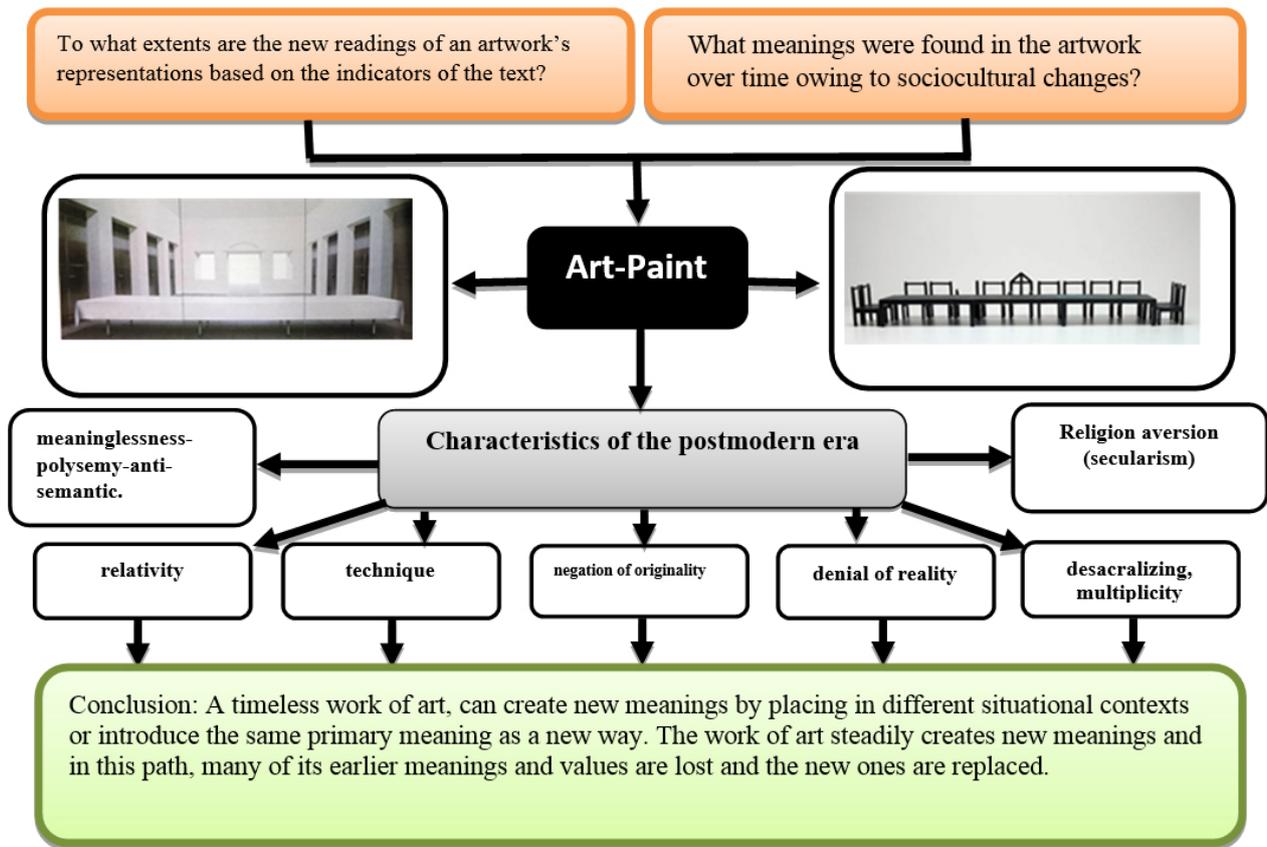
Diagram 1. Pattern of research process. Source: authors.

Research Method

The study used an analytic-descriptive and technical research method by utilizing library studies, taking notes, the internet, and documented information (Diagram 1).

Theoretical Fundamentals
Post Modernism

There is a movement in an advanced culture claiming that modern era has come to an end and now we live in a modern culture which is postmodern in which even the end of history has been named. The emergence of the word postmodern in 1917, Rudolph Panoits, the German philosopher used this term to describe the nihilism of the West of the twentieth century. He stated from Nietzsche (Gharabaghi, 1999: 46). Postmodernism as the prefix post implies, is a stream after modernism, whether it is known as the opposite and the critical aspects of modernism or the sequence

of modernism or after modernism (Bagheri, 1996: 71). Postmodernism knows all the sciences, arts, philosophy, ideals and beliefs relative and believes that there is no absolute issue and reality; all the facts are related to time, location, and human perception, and accordingly proves that many of realities are pretended and reconstructed for us (Shadqazvini, 2007: 170). Postmodern works present themselves through copy or reference to past works, from contemporary to ancient times. Artists adjust older works by changing the scale or relationships, and thus, works are seen in a new way (Yeganeh Doost, 2014: 467). Postmodernism literally does not mean a school of thought or intellectual movement that has a certain purpose or viewing angle, also does not have a unit spokesman or theorist. Thus, it is a complex and difficult concept, and there is a wide variety of views in this field (Mohammed, et al., 2007: 107). Postmodernism principles are; principle I: relativity,

Appropriation: This approach is influenced by Baudrillard and others, and means to reproduce or imitate the works of other artists.	Postmodernism approaches	**Neogeo:** A combination of minimalist abstract or with references to culture and popular goods.
Eclecticism: Many artists used images that were adapted from the intellectual culture and folk culture.	**New Expressionism:** Brutal, fast, large paintings of German artists.	**Trans-avant-garde:** An Italian movement that used traditional materials, imaginative subjects, and decorative elements.

Table 1. Postmodernism approaches. Source: Fakhr-Negaribi and Karami, 2013: 61. Setting up the author's picture.

principle II: denial of reality, principle III: Postmodernism means representation, principle IV: no meaning, principle V: Having doubts, principle VI: multiplicity. Artworks, much earlier have shown themselves in the form of manipulation in art signs. Art has come to routines, and endless reproducing.

Postmodernism Painting

Postmodern painting is the outcome of concept-orientation, pop art, and neo-expressionism. Here the painting act as deconstructing the text, which is full of meaning, always free of anything that we choose unless we experience it through the free participation of our presuppositions (Goudarzi, 2002: 96); (Table 1). Art and industry can exchange their indicators with each other, art can transform into a duplicating machine without losing its art nature (works of Andy Warhol) because this device is nothing but a sign. Production can also abandon its social end, that is, his own means of acknowledgment, and eventually be gloriously manifested in valid, exaggerated and aesthetic signs (Yazdanjoo, 2002: 30). Mass of the works represented by The Last Supper includes numerous meanings but in general, it can be said that, with the industrialization of societies and the progress resulted by it, the works of art are reproduced in large numbers and placed at the service of everyone. There is not the unique art work and on the other hand, the significance and value of a theme causes that, it can also be considered and represented in later periods. Composition, based on the representation and interactive meaning connects images to each other through the three ways:

Information Value: The elements are identified by their position in the composition. The role of any particular element depends on its position on the left or right, in the center or periphery or at the top or bottom of the image or screen (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2008: 147,148). Framing: Elements in a composition can have an individual identity or can be shown as part of each other. In other words, framing can link the elements together or separate them. This separation can be done in different ways using the empty spaces between the elements and also the contrast in faces and color or any other property of the image. In other words, the separation can be shown through any discontinuity, lack of communication or significant contrast (Ibid: 149). Salient: The term salient has been used by Kress and Van Leuven to specify the elements attracting eyes more than the other present elements. This can also be done in different ways, including the use of size, color contrast, intensity contrast, or anything else that makes an element more prominent around its environment (Ibid: 150). Elements of a picture or a page have been balanced based on their visual weight. This weight is caused by their salient features which is the result of a complex interaction and exchange relationship between a number of variables that from that aspect, resolution (or more generally the texture and detail shown), color contrast, location in the visual field, perspective and also specific cultural variables such

as the appearance of a human or an important cultural icon which may affect the perceptual salience can be noted (van Leeuwen, 2006: 198). In social semiotics, the meaning and concept are transmitted to the audience by means of elements that are present in the image. So, regarding the structure and characteristics in each picture in the context of its meaning, there are two types discussed 1. Narrative structures: in this model act or event is expressed. 2 Conceptual structures: here no action is expressed, but spaces or objects are defined, analyzed and classified. In fact, contributors represent what they are, what that means, or the group they belong to.

Research Findings
Image analysis

Leonardo's wall painting represents the moment when Jesus said; "certainly one of you will betray me". The composition is based on the reactions that the disciples show to this anticipation. When the hand of Judah becomes close to the container, the words of Christ come to mind: who closes his hand to the container with "me is the one who will betray me" (Mahernia, 2010: 15). In Da Vinci's The Last Supper painting, perspective creates the focus in the composition. Four important principles of underlying measures include proximity to the elements, the similarity between the elements, the continuation, and completion or closing the picture (Avakian, 2005: 23). The main character of Jesus Christ (PBUH) is located in the center; there is a window behind him positioned such that the sanctity of this character is emphasized because of white light. All elements in this image are in the service of the main and central character. Relationships and rhythmic coordination, whether by the other characters or through their hand and body gestures as well as the viewing angle of the characters, all refer to the focal point of the image in the end: the prominent character of Jesus (Diagram 2); (Fig. 1); (Fig. 2).

Diagram 2. The pattern of the influence of cultures and relationships throughout history on the drawing of the last dinner. Source: authors.

Fig. 1. Last dinner 1498. Mural painting 460.880 cm, Milan, at the Santa Maria delle Grazia Church (dining). Source: Mahernia, 2010: 9.
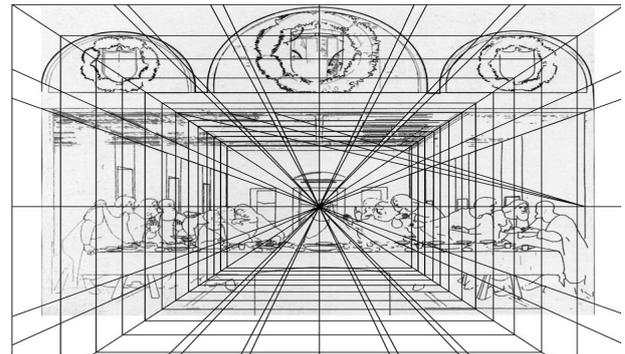

Fig. 2. Perspective analysis of the last dinner painting that points to the central point. Source: Kemp, 2006, 184.

Artistic aspect of abstract -minimalism

In the samples of The Last Supper represented by Ben Wilkins, we encounter with a space that features of postmodern art are obvious, including simplification, summarization and removing objects and elements in the image, there is no character in this represented sample. The characters have been removed but space is the space of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper with changes unique to the contemporary period (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Bon Villekins Last dinner 1976-1979 Acrylic on canvas, 300x600 cm. Source: St. Gallen, 2000: 203.

First, a table with a white tablecloth, and then, the three windows at the end of the wall attract the audience's attention. In this image, unlike The Last Supper by Da Vinci, there is no character whose connections, similarities, continuity, and placement can be considered. In fact, this empty space invites the viewer to search and communicate it. The communication was made with space and is conceptualized and has new concepts for the audience as well. In this case, abstract representative

images create different meanings for the audience; and like Da Vinci's painting The Last Supper, a

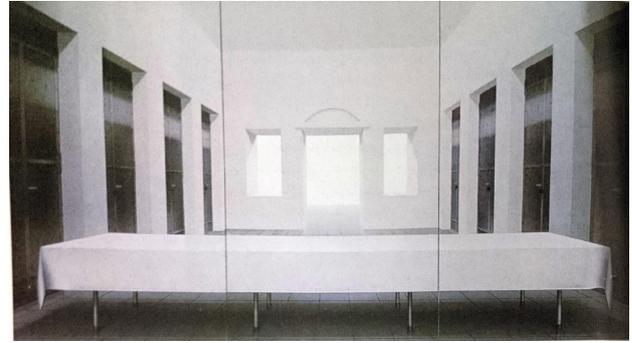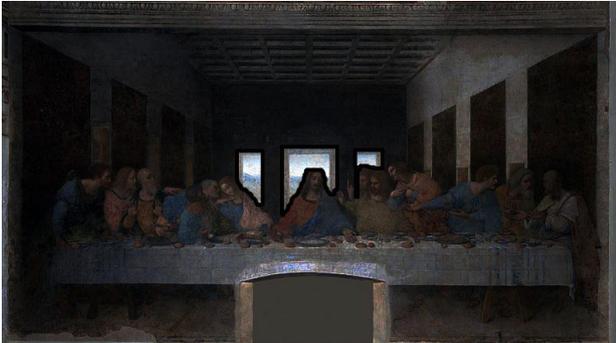certain unit meaning and concept is not available for the audience (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. The absence of characters compared to Da Vinci's last dinner. Source: authors.

In this image, we faced a space devoid of a character. The table, however, has an important feature compared to other works. We have a definition of the table: it is an object which will be meaningful due to the placement in space-location and position of the people behind it, in truth a table is an object that makes people gather around it and social, cultural, artistic, economic communication and interaction, etc. take place around it. In this image, the audience faces a table with nothing on it, and no character is also not behind it but it can be an empty space with a new representation of the spiritual atmosphere. White tablecloth, white walls, and white light are elements that emphasize the sanctity and spirituality of the image. White light is a divine light and in this space, the absence of characters and the dominance of white in the image indicates that the eliminated

characters are not ordinary characters; they are sacred and divine characters and white color dominating the represented image is indicative of their importance. Represented image in terms of color and light is quite different from Da Vinci's The Last Supper. In this image, the contrast of white dominates the overall work. White tablecloths, white walls, and white light entering from three windows help the emptiness and the spirituality of the space. However, in da Vinci's The Last Supper, there is a color image space. The dynamic and rhythmic movement caused by hand movements, the placement of the characters, and the type of clothes create a different space from the sample represented. The light source from the three terminal windows and coverings are also white-only (Fig. 5).

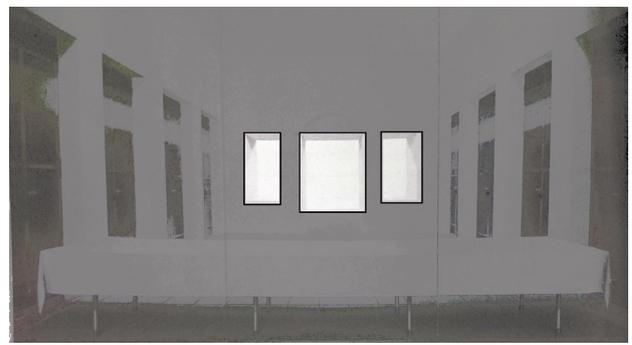Doors are on the adjacent walls and the table legs

Fig. 5. Light source in two images. Source: authors.

are made of metal; this adds to the coldness and the silence that exists in the space. In the Da Vinci's The Last Supper, however, wall-mounts have ensigns and the table legs are also made of wood (Fig. 6).

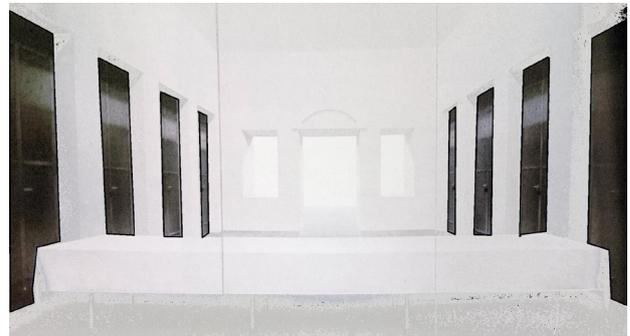The important point in this image is its large size format that is also a feature of the modern and

Fig. 6. The walls of the two paintings, which unfortunately have been destroyed due to the gradual destruction of Da Vinci's late dinner. Source: authors.

postmodern art. The image size causes the audience or viewer to make contact with the work in another way and integrate himself as a part of the work. This represented image is in the form of a wrap. The middle wrap is the central point of focus. Because the accumulation is a white light that pervades the entire work space also, the windows are in the same area. And in the original context, it is the position of Christ. So this part of the picture is more prominent than the other parts (Fig. 7).

This image has a conceptual structure because it shows a spiritual atmosphere using objects and visual
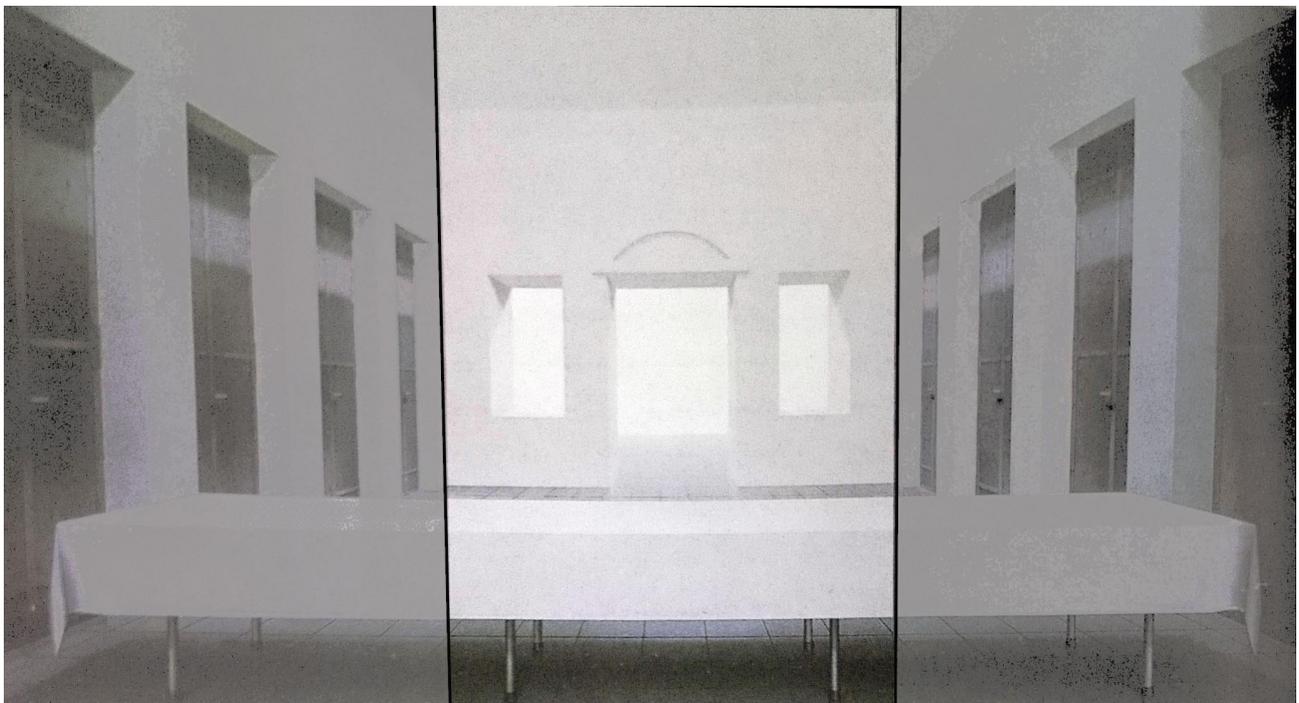

Fig. 7. The accumulation of light in the middle of the drawing. Source: authors.

elements in the contemporary period. Elements in the picture, the white color of the image and deletion of the characters are the signs of the image that create meaning. Object and color have replaced the characters; in fact, they are a new expression of the spiritual and sacred atmosphere in the contemporary period. The presence of the sacred and religious characters can be understood by the space. According to the fact that, the image has been represented in the contemporary period, no absolute definition and concept can be provided, everything is relative, and this depends on the audience understanding when dealing with images (Fig. 8).

In another example of contemporary representations of The Last Supper, objects have replaced characters. However, objects have identified the location of the
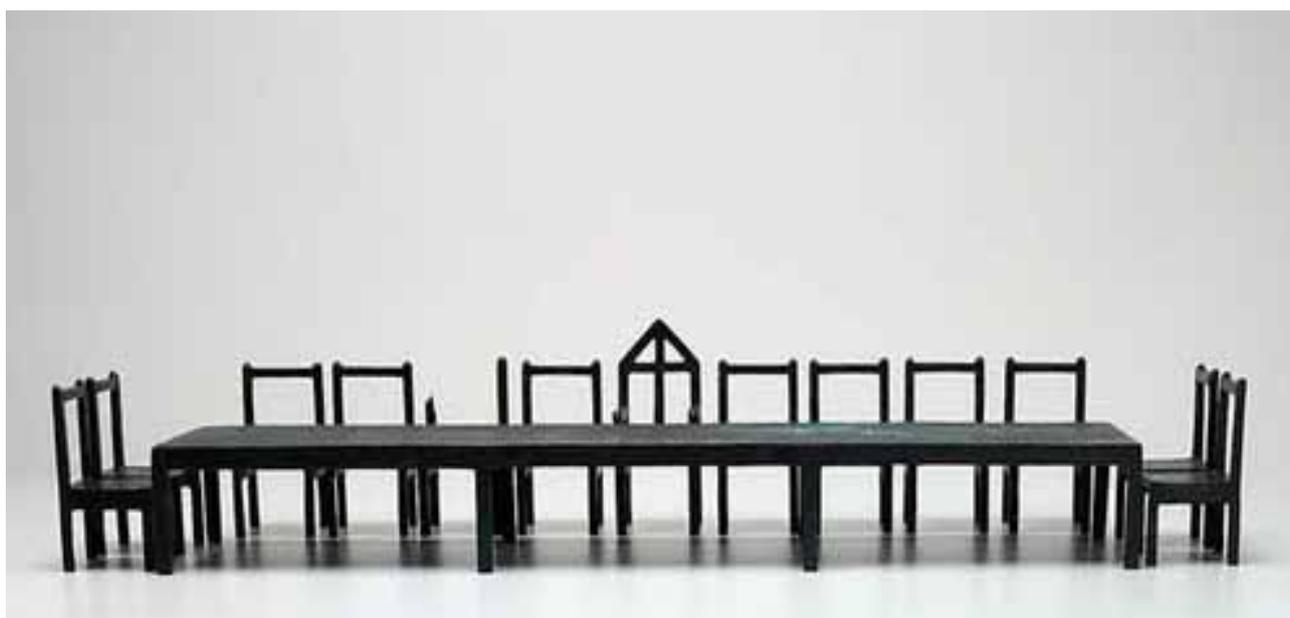

Fig. 8. Bob La. Bronze Scrolls 2004. England. Source: http://www.sciencedaily.com

characters, characters that the viewer cannot see them but from the overall structure of the work, he can recognize that this space is taken from the painting The Last Supper and objects in the picture indicates the character of The Last Supper. In fact, empty seats indicate the absence of people. In the picture, the seat which its back is in the form of a cross under a sharp roof refers to Christ and the Church. Here is the highlight of the image. Judah has broken a chair and other seats are all square, sturdy, healthy which are the signs of the apostles (Fig. 9).

The space, where the seats are located, is completely different with the atmosphere of Da Vinci's The Last *Supper*. In the example represented, the interior is
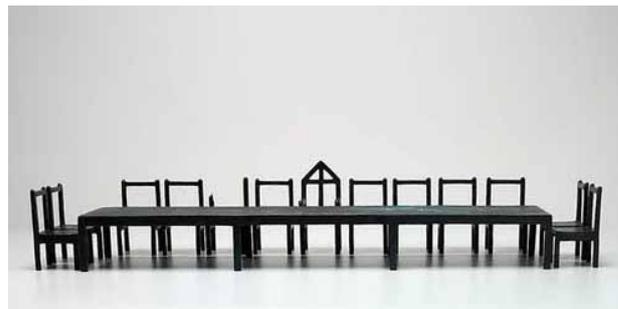

Fig. 9. Objects have been replaced by the last dinner paintings. Source: authors.

white. The sculptor has not attempted to provide a space same as in the original context. At this point, there is no sign of end windows of the picture, walls, and wall-mounts. Picture's space is free and the eyes of the viewer do not involve with anything else except the main objects which are chairs. The white space can be considered as an alternative light source in the original image. The overall space is white which can be considered as the replacement of light source in the main picture. White color refers to holiness. The presentation of these volumes in this space helps to express the theme (Fig. 10).

In this work, the table can be seen with a different color. In most cases, we face image with a white tablecloth while this work has a black volume. And the table is empty. The image represented is the
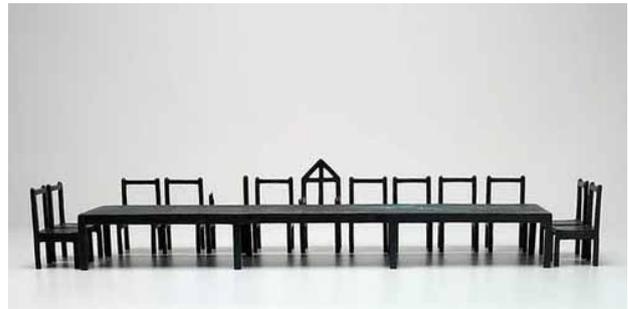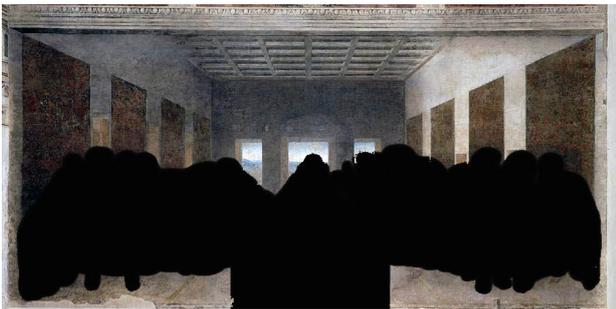
Fig. 10. Compare the space of two images. Source: authors.

opposite of da Vinci-painted The Last Supper. In Da Vinci's painting, a dark space, vibrant characters, a horizontal table with white tablecloth and the light source in the background have represented the subject with sacred characters while in the volume of represented sample, objects are in black and space is white, this displacement may indicate shifting of values in different time periods. The loss of values in contemporary period is of important and repeating features of represented images (Fig. 11).

The focus in this volume work is a chair that belongs to Christ (AS). Its different shape and sharp tip referred to above and the ascension of Christ. The layout of this volume work in space is continuous

Fig. 11. Table difference in two works. Source: authors.

like Da Vinci's painting where the characters communicated with each other. This volume work refers to the conceptual structure in terms of structure. Objects are alternative for The Last Supper characters but express the same content. The broken chair is a sign of Judah. Seat located in the center is the sign of Christ and the other seats are the sign of the apostles. Sculpture represent metaphors of The Last Supper. Chairs invite the viewer for multiple readings. The viewer understands it according to his perception and imagination such that there is no reality and according to the time and location conditions, his perception and understanding is different. These are basically the same features of postmodernism artworks in which there is no certainty and stability and everything is relative. In fact, it is the artist who made it possible for the audience to have an overall perception of the artwork and ultimately have his impressions and based on his imagination, complete the work in his mind. That kind of thinking leads to the formation of numerous works on the theme of The Last Supper.

Conclusion

In this research, the images represented by the painting The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci in the contemporary period have been studied. The purpose of this study is the analysis of represented artworks of The Last Supper in the contemporary period, in terms of form, structure, and content. Da Vinci's The Last Supper due to its formation in Renaissance period, the peak of humanism and the achievement of the principles and foundations of classical art, is an outstanding example among other "Last Supper" paintings. Elements in the picture are all serving to demonstrate the unity, sanctity of paramount sacred and religious character if Christ was compared to other characters. While representations of The Last Supper based on the context and change in location express the content and the features of the postmodern era. Multiple and diverse readings of The Last Supper have taken place through the period of postmodernism and have created new and different meanings compared to da Vinci's work. In this study, the dynamic feature of work has been discussed. The dynamics of Da Vinci's painting The Last Supper has led to its frequent consideration by artists in the contemporary era. The passage of time and the formation of new readings of The Last Supper have taken place along with the changes of sociocultural conditions. Modern and postmodern features in the works represented have a tendency toward abstraction, summarization, and simplification. These concepts have been proposed in the samples. In fact, the symptoms represent the meanings in the represented samples. This type of expression is different, but the meanings, such as spirituality and sanctity by the presence of white light, can be expressed in both works. So, a timeless work of art can create new meanings by being placed in different situational contexts or by being introduced to its primary meaning and concept in a new way.

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