

Original Research Article

Tree-Home: The Uncanny Trees in the Paintings of Davoud Emdadian

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Abstract | It would be a struggle to find a painter like Davoud Emdadian, who has been so faithful to the “tree” as an exclusive painting subject, within the history of Iranian landscape painting. Beyond the shape and placement of these trees in composition, their recurrence in his works has intensified their mystery. This study outlines said trees as an uncanny phenomenon and analyzes them in the same vein. The study adopts a psychological approach based on Sigmund Freud’s conceptual formulation of the “uncanny,” attempting to provide a coherent and precise analysis of the “how” of tree representation with the works of Emdadian. The study utilizes a descriptive-analytical method, employing purposive sampling to select works of art for analysis from Davoud Emdadian’s works, that could demonstrate the various dimensions and key components of tree representation. The study employed a library-based approach to data gathering. The research findings indicate that in terms of form, a similar structure is recurring in the majority of Emdadian’s works. In this structure, “something” is placed in the center of the work, covering most of the canvas, which often assumes the form of a tree. While alien and imposing, the tree is also familiar and close, possessing the fundamental dialectic that constructs the experience of “uncanny.” Typically, this massive tree is accompanied by signs of loss in the form of decay and ruin in the depiction of houses or small trees. These losses and the melancholic aspect gain a deeper and more pronounced dimension in the figures of massive central trees. This constant “repetition” of the uniform tree theme in Emdadian’s works could signify “repetition compulsion” and a transition from the principle of pleasure towards return, indicating a shift from residing in lost temporary dwellings towards an eternal tranquility at the borders of death, on to an eternal home.

Keywords | *Davoud Emdadian, Sigmund Freud, Landscape Painting, Tree, The Uncanny, Home.*

Introduction | The “tree” motif has been embodied in various forms and formats in the visual tradition of Iran. The trees occasionally provide a background for verbal narrative alongside other natural elements in this visual tradition, and sometimes acquire significant symbolic meanings, being depicted on diverse backgrounds as the archetype of the “tree of life.” Trees have garnered interest in contemporary Iranian art and painting as well, where Davoud Emdadian (1944-2004) boasts a unique position. It would be extremely hard to find a painter who has been so faithful to a single subject throughout his professional

career. A massive volume is seen in the center of the canvas in the majority of Emdadian’s works, and this “thing” is often interpreted as a “tree.” Consequently, “Emdadian trees” are recognized as a stylistic trademark in contemporary Iranian painting. These trees, while familiar, also appear untimely, formidable, and foreign, providing an overall scene of ambiguity and enigma in the work through their unique representation.

This article attempts to outline and analyze this expressive structure and the representation of trees in Davoud Emdadian’s works. To this end, the study employs a psychological approach based on Sigmund Freud’s

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conceptual formulation of the “uncanny” to provide the necessary theoretical expansion needed to create a conceptual framework for analyzing said works.

The “uncanny” “is among the critical concepts in the field of aesthetics that has been widely considered and reinterpreted by literary, political, feminist, philosophical, and psychological theorists (Connon, 2010, 49). Freud’s essay on the “uncanny” has played a central role in this context (*ibid.*, 34). Thus, it seems that employing this rich conceptual framework can aid in unraveling a number of the hidden semantic layers in these works. This article investigates the “how” of tree representation in Emdadian’s works at a single level. The examination of Emdadian’s works at this level attempts to describe the formal and structural aspects concerning the embodiment of these trees. Based on these rich descriptions, the study seeks to provide an analysis of the “why” of such representation at another level. In other words, the primary query of this study concerns “Why are trees depicted in Emdadian’s works in such a manner?” This analysis particularly benefits from the social expansion of Freud’s theory of the “uncanny,” utilizing this perspective to provide an explanation for the “repetition” of this theme in Emdadian’s works.

Research Background

Despite the abundance and influence of Davoud Emdadian’s paintings in the tradition of landscape painting in contemporary Iranian art, few studies have systematically examined and analyzed his works. Among these studies is a book (*Musée des ...*, 1993) published in French in 1993 on the occasion of an exhibition of Emdadian’s paintings at the Musée Municipal de Boulogne-Billancourt, where each author describes and examines the themes of these works from a different perspective. In an article titled “À l’ombre des grands arbres [In the Shadow of Massive Trees]”, Jean Tardieu (1993) provides a poetic description of the tree’s role in Emdadian’s works. Tardieu introduces Emdadian’s trees as “drowned in their own grandeur and closed off in their mystery”, attempting to describe these trees through dualities. The trees appear both real and imaginary to him while maintaining a threatening quality that also brings a sense of calmness. In an interesting interpretation at the conclusion of the article, the author speaks of the protection of plant song from humans, which somehow reminiscences an eternal return (*ibid.*, 32-37). The article “HISTOIRES O’ARBRES [The Story of Trees]” by Michelle Lefrançois (1993) examines modern European painting’s tree representations while analyzing Emdadian’s position and artistic influences. Charles Delloye (1993, 69) analyzes Emdadian’s aesthetic elements in “UN SYMBOLISME NON NARRATIF [Non-Narrative Symbolism: Davoud

Emdadian]” by studying the Barbizon school and artists Theodore Rousseau, Gustav Klimt, and Camille Corot. Delloye describes Emdadian’s artwork as having “an intellectual path with a metaphysical resonance that escapes any narrative tone”.

In a note titled “Natural Histories of Art”, Morad Montazemi investigates Davoud Emdadian’s works, stating that Emdadian approaches trees in his collection of works in a holistic and less decorative manner, thereby seeking to show human confrontation with the vertigos of civilization. From Montazemi’s perspective, the tree in Emdadian’s work is a prominent allegorical sign of the integration of the perceiving subject and the perceived object. Through this, the landscape no longer submits to human dominance and is not limited, merging the landscape and the human. Montazemi believes that “this subject-object merger reveals the painter’s desire to immerse himself in the painting”. By identifying the small image of the painter’s figure in some works, Montazemi considers this a hidden personal portrait of the painter that multiplies at the end of his life.

Mehrdad Omrani (2018) examines “trees” in Davoud Emdadian’s artwork through his note “Davoud Emdadian and the search for personal matters” Omrani establishes a connection between Emdadian’s self-taught painter status and his restricted subject matter at the beginning of his artistic development. Two distinct types of trees appear throughout Emdadian’s artistic works according to his research. The first group of trees maintains roots in the ground while showing clear signs of temporal change but the second group exists in an unreal realm where time stands still. Omrani establishes that the two opposing viewpoints show “a relatively firm and solid alignment with Todorov’s uncanny-marvelous distinction in relation to the fantastic”. The author provides only this single reference to these concepts and Todorov’s theory but does not expand their theoretical development or application. Through his note “The uncanny: Discovering Reality Again”, Vahid Hakim (2018) presents brief insights into the artistic works of Davoud Emdadian, Mohammad Khalili, and Shahriar Tavakoli. Hakim starts his analysis by defining the “marvelous” through Emdadian’s artwork where “certain elements... with their exaggerated magnificence appear on the image plane in a somewhat unexpected and unusual manner.” The author describes Emdadian’s works through this perspective but fails to expand or define the concept of “the marvelous” using specific theoretical approaches. Hakim explains that these trees exist at the edge of cliffs and shipsides.

Evidently, the writings surrounding Davoud Emdadian’s works are predominantly short notes with somewhat poetic tones. While these writings offer progressive descriptive insights, they lack comprehensive descriptive-

analytical detail or fail to adopt a specific theoretical approach commensurate with their function and place of publication. This article aims to present this theoretical unity and argumentative necessities in description and analysis systematically by adopting a specific theoretical framework.

Research Method

This article employed a psychological approach, expanding on Sigmund Freud's conceptual theory of the "uncanny" to investigate Davoud Emdadian's works, attempting to provide an interpretation of the "how" of tree representation in his works through a descriptive-analytical method. To this end, works that could demonstrate the dimensions and key components of how trees are represented in his works were purposefully sampled from Davoud Emdadian's oeuvre. The analyses of the works focused on the methods of formal visualization of the trees, with an emphasis on the use of visual elements and the diversity of compositions. An effort was made to investigate the form and thematic connections of said "trees" with other subjects of the works. Data gathering in this article was conducted through library research methods. Additionally, credible online sources were utilized to access the full range of works.

Theoretical Foundations: The Uncanny, Repetition, and Return

Very often, it is argued that Freud, in trying to make sense of the notion of the "uncanny," followed a never-ending chain of motifs and imagery, thus creating a series of composite and integrative interpretations of the uncanny. This perception is in line with Freud's understanding of the "uncanny" as an essentially unconscious occurrence (Masschelein, 2021). Freud (2021)'s paper "The Uncanny" is a representation of how he preferred to look for examples of the uncanny experience in an aesthetic rather than outlining it as a clinical phenomenon. Notably, Freud initially included this paper in a collection called *Art and Literature*.

The "Uncanny" (*ibid.*) article presents a detailed and precise analysis of the roots and the diverse meanings of the German word *Unheimlich* (uncanny) is provided. This etymology is of particular importance, as it reveals Freud's primary intention regarding this concept and its internal semantic contradiction. The German word *Unheimlich* is the opposite of the words *Heimlich* and *Heimisch*, the opposite of something familiar. Freud suggests that there is a temptation to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is unknown or unfamiliar. However, Freud's entire article can be interpreted as transcendence of the usual equation, "uncanny equals unfamiliar." From Freud's perspective, *Heimlich* is a word

with a "meaning proceeding along a path of ambiguity, until finally aligning with its opposite, *Unheimlich*." In the final line of the second section, Freud explicitly states that the *Un* prefix in *Unheimlich* signifies repression (*ibid.*). In other words, the uncanny is not something novel or alien but something familiar rooted in the mind that has become foreign only through repression.

The experience of encountering the "uncanny" is a frightening one. However, not every frightening thing is uncanny. Freud believes that the experience of the uncanny is anxiety-inducing. In this same article, Freud discusses the origin of anxiety, stating that "... if repressed, any emotional impulse of any kind, transforms into anxiety" (*ibid.*, 73). Freud concludes that among the frightening things, there is possibly a category that can be displayed to have a terrifying element of something repressed that returns. Thus, this category of frightening things creates the uncanny (*ibid.*). Freud quotes Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), the German Romantic philosopher: The uncanny must have remained hidden and concealed but has been seen and revealed (*ibid.*, 55). Freud provides numerous and highly diverse examples in his analysis of the "uncanny." In a notable interpretation, Johnson (2010, 26) summarizes the primary process underlying the anxiety related to Freud's uncanny as follows: "If I suppress the pain of losing someone or something, that pain returns in the form of anxiety. However, [this anxiety] can be triggered separately from the feeling that created it, by seeing an artwork or a place. When encountering the uncanny, something familiarly strange acts as a trigger for suppressed emotions and experiences, and the lost phenomenon is re-experienced. Consequently, the feeling of disorientation and confusion arising from the experience of the uncanny can also be positioned as a liberating process. At this moment, the experience creates an intersection of pain and pleasure as the unconscious force is released toward the consciousness. Johnson describes the experience of the uncanny as a melancholic reminder of loss and its preserver. From this perspective, the experience of "uncanny melancholy" enables enduring the intolerable memory (*ibid.*, 27-30).

The involuntary repetition of uncanny experiences is understandable from this perspective. Freud explicitly states in his article that anything that reminds us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny (*ibid.*, 70). According to Freud, in these cases, the involuntary repetition of something completely harmless creates a strange atmosphere and imposes the thought of something sinister and inescapable (*ibid.*, 69). Freud (2003, 33)'s most eloquent explanation of "involuntary repetition" is presented in the article "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". In this article, which was completed around the same time as "The

Uncanny,” Freud describes the compulsion to repeat as a fundamental activity of the “death drive.” Freud’s famous example in this regard is the analysis of a child’s “fort-da” game, which is based on the anxiety-inducing disappearance and joyful reappearance of a spool. Freud interprets this game of disappearance and reappearance as the child’s attempt to gain mastery over the psychological trauma of separation from the mother and to control that trauma through continuous repetition of this painful experience (Cohen, 2018, 150). For Freud, the compulsion to repeat begins life as a drive to seek dominance over experiences and feelings that threaten our integrity and [sexual] capability (ibid., 152). Moreover, Freud believes the process of continuously repeating the same thing is a sign of an essential personality that always remains untouched and is inevitably compelled to reveal itself through repetition (Freud, 2003, 40).

In the Article “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety,” Freud (2023, 118) introduces birth anxiety as the initial anxious experience and a prototype for traumatic reality. For Freud, there are two origins of anxiety in the life of an individual. One is involuntary and spontaneous... occurring when a dangerous situation similar to the birth arises, and the other... is created the moment a threat of such a situation exists, leading to evasion.

In “The Uncanny,” Freud (2021, 68) repeatedly returns to the issue of initial anxiety and separation from the mother’s body, using it in analyzing various experiences of the uncanny. In his writings on encounters with doppelgängers, he states: They are returns to early stages... a regression to a time when the self had not yet clearly separated and demarcated itself from the external world and from people. In my opinion, these factors are somewhat responsible for the feeling of uncanniness”. In another section of the essay (ibid., 78), he also notes that “this is a reference to the former home of all humans, a place where each of us once lived. Whenever a person dreams of a place or country and says to themselves while dreaming: this feels familiar...”.

The ultimate source of deception for Freud is reminiscent of the concept of “chora” in Julia Kristeva’s philosophy. Kristeva derives this term from Plato’s Timaeus dialogue and elaborates on it from a psychological perspective. This word has been translated as womb, vessel, or container. However, from Kristeva’s perspective, chora is a system and rhythm preceding language, or more precisely, preceding the “symbolic phenomenon” (McAfee, 2006, 37). For Kristeva, the child is initially immersed in this “semiotic chora” but can no longer remain in this warm cocoon (ibid., 40). Despite the separation from this space, the “semiotic chora” continues to threaten the “symbolic phenomenon” through movement or negativity, subverting existing meanings and laws, and persisting

(Barrett, 2023, 23). Thus, there is always an additional significance outside the symbolic signification that goes beyond naming, describing objects, and implicit or summary values. Kristeva connects this theme with a specific type of depression or melancholia, stating that “the lost object will never be an object, but something unnameable” in such a state (McAfee, 2006, 100). From Kristeva’s perspective, artistic creativity can be the result of a melancholic individual’s effort to name something they are mourning. Thus, the melancholic poet attempts to approach the lost thing through components of language (ibid., 115).

For Freud, the death drive acts in a reactive movement towards initial anxiety or a prior state (Falcao, 2023, 192). All organic drives are conservative and tend to restore a past condition (Freud, 2003, 55). Therefore, it seems that the compulsion to repeat is equivalent to a desire to “restore things to their previous state” (Boothby, 2021, 129). Such a tendency, “beyond the pleasure principle,” ultimately refers to the most initial state in its most fundamental sense, meaning a non-organic and non-living condition (Freud, 2003, 56). Perhaps one can utilize this point of view to understand the human tendency towards death as something uncanny. According to Freud, most uncanny feelings grow around cemetery spaces and the fear of buried individuals being alive (Kligerman, 2007, 32).

Discussion

In terms of form, most of Emdadian’s works include a recurring similar structure, where something is placed in the middle of each work, covering most of the canvas. This “thing” typically extends to the highest vertical level and is more elevated than any other subject, thus catching and stopping the gaze within itself. Only from the edges or foreground of this “thing” can glimpses of an infinite landscape or arrangement of subjects be seen. The painting “Silence” (Fig. 1) is an example of this structural visualization. In this work, this “thing” resembles a tree whose upper branches move to the painting’s edge and parallel to it, gaining a linear shape. Instead of representing the organic quality of a living tree’s branches, the tree gains a geometric character and appears in an emphasized state of the frame’s edge. The branches in the middle section of the tree also become geometric volumes reminiscent of the porous rocks of a massive mountain. This enormous tree catches the gaze’s movement towards the distant landscape’s horizon. Compared to this tree’s magnitude and grandeur, other elements cannot possess precise, detailed, or distinctive imagery. Therefore, it’s natural that one cannot observe the feeling or state of the individual standing beside this massive tree, though it’s clear they are unaware of the enormous tree next to them, with their gaze limited from an edge towards the distant horizon.

This way of looking at nature's infinite horizons brings to mind the human position in a number of Romantic period paintings, particularly works by Caspar David Friedrich, where the concept of "sublime" saw widespread use in describing such landscapes and states.

The sublime is a significant and fundamental concept in the history of aesthetics. Following centuries of the concept of beauty dominating the aesthetic realm, around Kant's era and during the Romantic period, the sublime finally became the focus of attention (Burnham, 2019, 140). Kant presented the most influential conceptual articulation in this area in his third critique (Critique of Judgment). On one hand, Kant (Kant, 2009, 164) believes the sublime is (quantitatively) absolutely large, meaning something in comparison to which everything else is small. Therefore, perception of the sublime involves a "negative pleasure." On the other hand (qualitatively), "nature... as an arouser of terror" is the embodiment of dynamic sublimity, meaning the irresistibility of nature's power, which compels us as natural beings to acknowledge our own inadequacy, simultaneously reveals a power over us (ibid., 180). This ultimate superior power for Kant is reason itself. It seems that for Kant, ultimately, the all-knowing reason is meant to dominate everything.

However, in this painting (Fig. 1), the subject is unaware of the terrifying grandeur of the "thing" near them. This magnitude and untimeliness are incomparable to the calm and infinite landscape before the subject. The subject experiences this presence as both natural and familiar, remaining unaware of its existence. The same lack of attention appears in Emdadian's previous work, "Los Angeles Night," from six years earlier as two people talk while walking between cliffs without noticing the large tree. It appears that one of these barely visible individuals is holding something resembling a painting canvas. In many of Emdadian's works, humans are present in various clothing and forms, either individually or in groups, but in none of his paintings do these individuals look at the massive object beside them, appearing as if the object both exists and does not exist at the same time. This dialectic is also at the core of Freud's interpretation of "uncanniness". Freud's entire effort is to find a contradictory meaning in the uncanny. In the uncanny, there is a familiar kernel. In Emdadian's trees, these trees also seem uncanny and familiar, perhaps appearing uncanny from excessive familiarity. Although they are untimely and disproportionate, they seem to be precisely where they should be.

In the painting "Beyond Dream" (Fig. 2), the massive tree is painted in a semi-observed manner, as if it encompasses all, including the boundless landscape, with its enormous dimensions. Similar to the previous work, the vertical sides of this tree have taken on a linear and geometric

form parallel to the frame. The blue of the sky is visible through the tree's branches and leaves. Inversely, the closer one gets to the tree trunk, the mistier and more transparent the tree becomes. It seems the tree is meant to encompass everything while simultaneously being

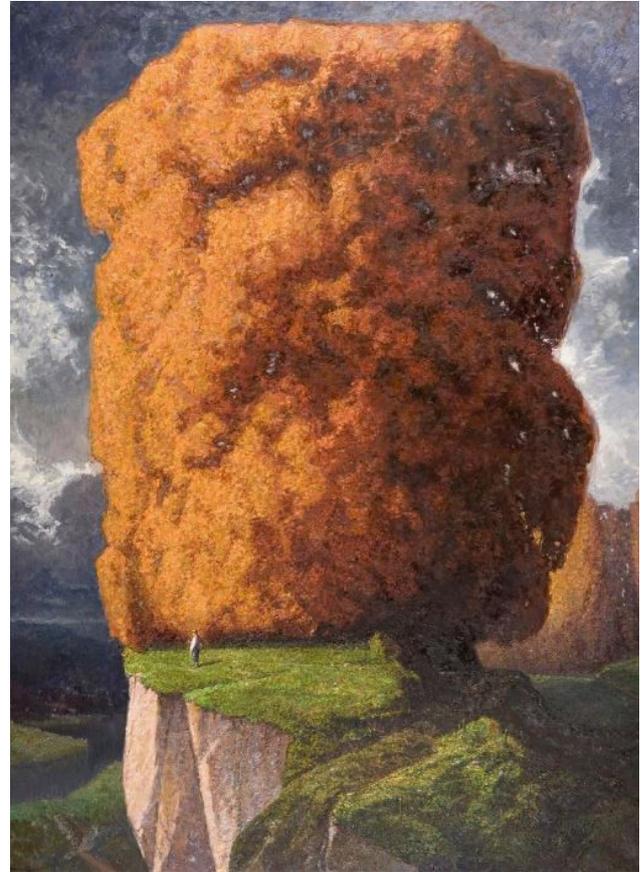


Fig. 1. «Silence» by Davoud Emdadian, oil painting, Dimensions: 150 x 195 centimeters. Source: Emdadian, 2017.



Fig. 2. «Beyond Dream» by Davoud Emdadian, oil painting, Dimensions: 150 x 150 centimeters, 1985. Source: Musée des ..., 1993, 6.

beyond them. The two previously discussed paintings demonstrate that Emdadian's trees move towards the top of the frame as much as possible in rectangular and vertical frame artworks, creating something unrivaled in height within the work. In one of his untitled works, the tree exceptionally still manages to span the center of the image at the horizon level in a horizontal rectangular frame (with dimensions of 183 x 73 centimeters), covering an endless plain to the edges. In most of Emdadian's works, the artwork's frame is square-like and regular, leading to a parallel state that can demonstrate the tree's presence across all directions and allow the existence of other elements like humans, animals, and other trees only in the tree's immediate vicinity. In a sense, everything seems to be positioned or placed near that massive tree, like an eternal or primordial "house." The balance existing in the square structural form can evoke a sense of peace and stillness, creating a tranquility that becomes possible beside this house. Anthony Vilder (1992, 3) provides an excellent explanation regarding such an aspect of aesthetic uncanny representation. For Vilder, the uncanny in the Freudian sense is "a specific type of fear situated between real fear and mild anxiety, aesthetically emerging from sublimity, an internal and domesticated review of absolute fear experienced in the comfort of home." This common frame format and the concept of home under a state of calm have been repeated in various forms in many of Emdadian's other works as well.

In one of Emdadian's earlier works (Fig. 3), a vertical line is visible on the left side of the painting, which can be reminiscent of a tree trunk. Compared to the previous painting (Fig. 2), it seems as if the blurred branches have now taken the form of color spots serving as the all-encompassing background. Two cubic volumes are visible in front of the narrow trunk within this work. The presence of these volumes beside and in front of the massive tree on a flat background is one of the recurring themes in Emdadian's works. In the collection of Fig. 4, one can clearly observe the form of repetition and origin of these volumes. Fig. 4-a illustrates a section of one of Emdadian's earlier works (from the late 70s), where a rural cottage with a tall pitched roof is visible in front of a massive tree and beside a small tree. In the same position within Fig. 4-b, a volume is seen that could be a transformed version or, more precisely, an abstract version of a house shape (mirroring the house in Fig. 4-a). This coexistence of a tree with a small house is observed in many of Emdadian's works, such as the example provided in Fig. 4-c. In a number of Emdadian's works, these small houses are depicted as temporary roofed shelters. Similar to Fig. 4-d, the position and dimensions of these volumes or houses are repeated in multiple works, consisting of a small volume/house

beside a vast surface of a tree or a "thing." Alternatively, the same position and structure are seen with a "small tree," an element clearly observable in the painting "Beyond Dream" (Fig. 2). In many of Emdadian's works, small volumes and trees are seen alongside the massive tree. What is clear is that this "smallness," which is in contrast with the tree's grandeur, and the coexistence and

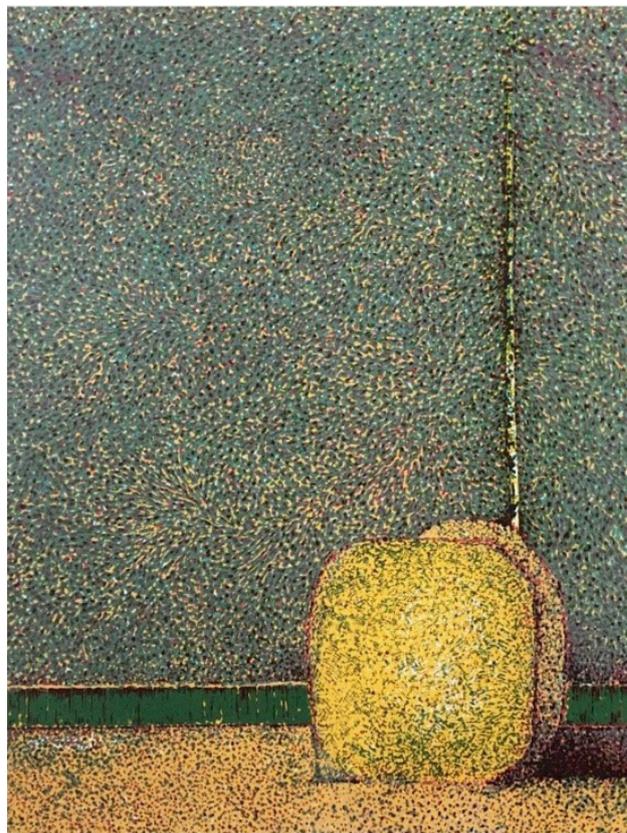


Fig. 3. «Untitled» by Davoud Emdadian, gouache on paper, dimensions: 65 x 65 centimeters, 1981. Source: Musée des ..., 1993, 62.

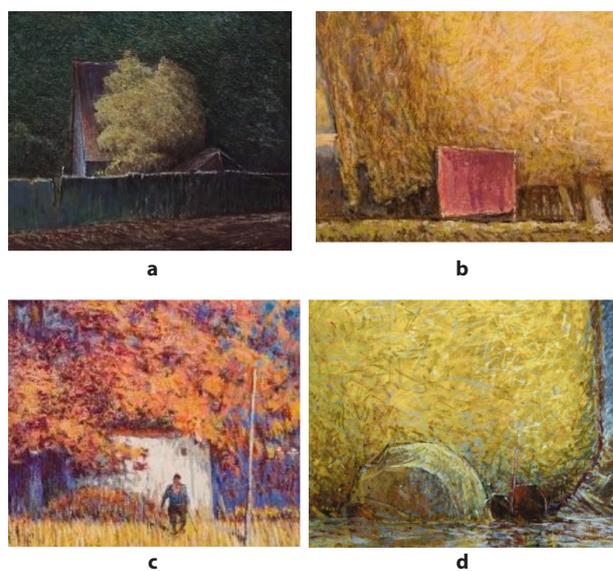


Fig. 4. Magnification of parts of Davoud Emdadian's works from 1970 to 2000. Source: Musée des ..., 1993.

connection between these motifs are frequently repeated in Emdadian's works.

In a number of Emdadian's works, the small trees are depicted as cut or dried out. However, the trunks of these cut or dried trees are extremely short and thin, making them barely visible, as if a long time has passed since their death. This theme can be observed more clearly in (Fig. 5). In this painting, at least two cut trunks can be seen beside the large tree. Instead of a small house, a collection of stones with somewhat regular cross-sections is visible, leaning on each other. These stones are located on a piece of land that is clearly cracked and seemingly in the process of "separating." This crack is also visible in the overall image beside the large tree, and there is an unclear spatial relationship between the large tree and the cliff. The coexistence of two cut trunks and carved stones in this image might be an indication of a small, ruined house, or in other words, a small lost house. The overall blue and cold background in this work also supports such an interpretation. Although the sky appears turbulent due to a special color, the large tree remains steadfast and magnificently spreads across the landscape, encompassing the space up to the highest part of the painting.

Partially regular cut stones, stone fragments, and rocks are seen in various forms beside the large tree in some of Emdadian's works, as evident in the example in (Fig. 6). Here, stone fragments are observed in a wider foreground area that could be reminiscent of the remains of a structure. These remnants are highly scattered, appearing as a cemetery of stones or ruins. An individual is reclining on a stone, looking ahead indifferently to the massive tree in a section of the work where the stones have a relatively more coherent arrangement. His reclining position brings to mind sitting in a house on a chair. At the same time, the individual's support is similar to a tombstone, and his gesture has a contemplative and melancholic state. The sense of a lost house and the loneliness of small dried trees beside the subject is repeated in this work as well.

Freud believes that uncanny feelings often grow around cemetery spaces. Freud suggests that this symbolizes a repressed desire to return to the mother's body (Kligerman, 2007, 32). Therefore, it seems that the foregrounds of Emdadian's works containing "death" signs can be suitable locations for cultivating the feeling of uncanniness. As Johnson (2010, 26) points out, uncanny encounters remind one of something lost. In these works, signs of loss have emerged in various forms and are indicators generally aggregated around the "home" in the broad sense of the word. Recovering this loss produces an anxiety that creates an intersection of simultaneous pain and pleasure. Beyond textual signs, there is evidence from Emdadian's life that supports such anxiety and a compulsion to repeat in painting. He was a painter

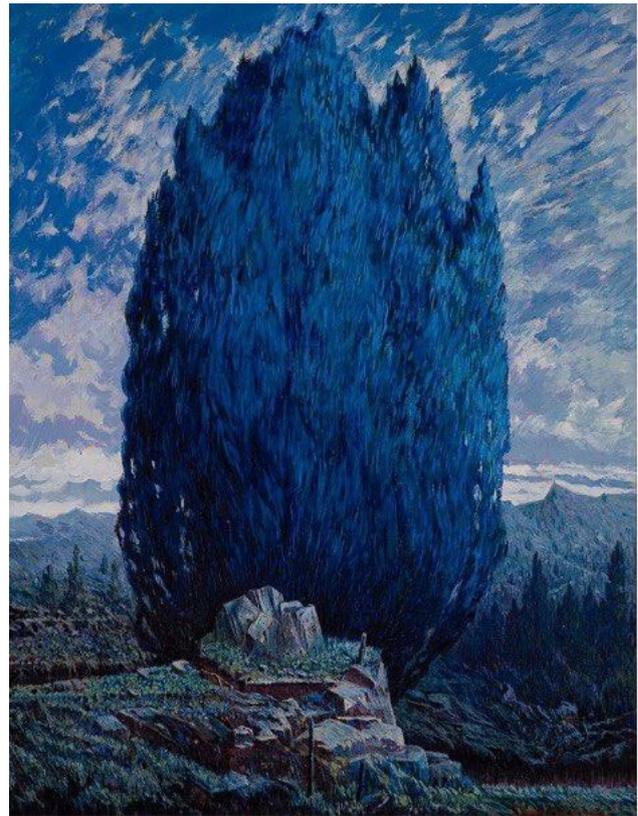


Fig. 5. «Untitled» by Davoud Emdadian, gouache on paper, dimensions: 51 x 66 centimeters, 1986. Source: Musée des ..., 1993, 70.

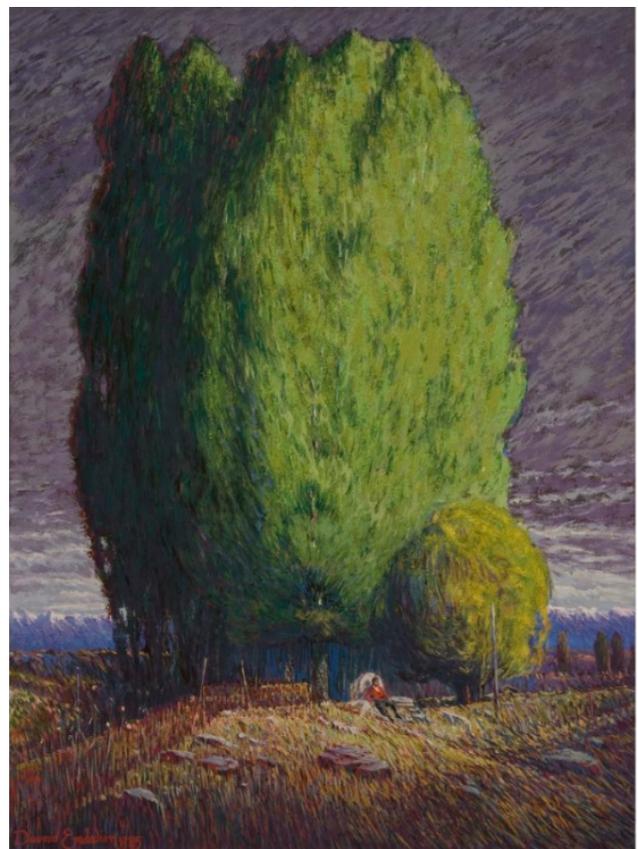


Fig. 6. «Untitled» by Davoud Emdadian, gouache on paper, Dimensions: 55 x 75 centimeters, 1985. Source: Musée des ..., 1993, 70.

separated from his homeland and would paint until 4 AM after his day job (Niknam, 2008, 5). It seems there was a compulsion to repeat in Emdadian's life, which is also evident in the selection of painting themes, particularly the "tree." According to Freud's interpretations, this repetition is a sign of moving beyond the pleasure principle towards "death."

In most of Emdadian's massive trees, magnified sections of branches appear like abstract and geometric volumes, as examined in Fig. 1. In the two previously studied works, a separate look, particularly at the upper parts of the trees, reveals their similarity to mountains. In a few of Emdadian's works, this massive thing or tree distinctly appears as a mountain in the middle of the painting. Fig. 7 is a specific example of such an instance where the mountain(s) acquire the same qualities as the tree in the first image. In fact, distinguishing or naming this "thing" becomes difficult. Similar to the first work, the lower section of this ambiguous or distant thing is less defined and more distant, as if its boundary with ordinary reality is blurred and indistinguishable. Furthermore, a group of individuals are moving towards that same ambiguity and distance.

This tendency showcases Freud's argument in "The Uncanny," where one of the optimal conditions for triggering the uncanny feeling occurs when there is intellectual doubt surrounding whether something is alive or not, and when an inanimate object strangely resembles something living (Freud, 2021, 64). Here too, "something" appears on the border between life and death. Then again, one must also address the issue of human subjects moving in that direction.

In some of Emdadian's works, a path or way can be discerned alongside a large tree. These paths seem to ultimately point to something left behind or lost. Although the state and actions of people on these paths differ, and details (such as the beginning or end of the path) are unclear, what is evident is that the mere existence of the path indicates a desire to move or return towards something. The form and actions of people in many of Emdadian's works resemble the figure of a "wanderer," someone without a home or someone who has been searching for something for a long time. In this work, the presence of a small tree beside the people is also noteworthy. It seems they must move from their small refuge towards something else.

This return and movement is more explicitly apparent in Fig. 8. This work is one of eight paintings Davoud Emdadian created for display in a museum commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Arnold Böcklin, a Swiss painter. Inspired by one of Böcklin's paintings, two people are moving in a boat towards something immense. Calm-waved waters surround this massive form. The immense form appears to be



Figure 7. «Untitled» by Davoud Emdadian, watercolor on paper, Dimensions: 37 x 37 centimeters. Source: Emdadian, 2021a.



Fig. 8. «Island of the Dead» by Davoud Emdadian, Pastel, Dimensions: 55 x 55 cm. Source: Emdadian, 2021b.

in a misty, ambiguous space, a combination of trees, mountains, and houses, but the sudden image breaks and intertwining of subjects suggest it might not be a collection of these elements, but perhaps a unified composition. A place where all these subjects merge and might share a common origin. It was often difficult to name this "thing" in the analyzed Emdadian's artworks. Perhaps, in Kristeva's interpretation, these elements constitute an "unnamable" entity. In this instance, this thing is depicted as a location, a mysterious island, in a school-like and organized manner. A form that might represent the foundations of life, or more precisely, as the

work's title suggests, the boundaries between death and life. As in many of Emdadian's other works, this place is shown as somewhere humans are struggling to return.

Conclusion

A consistent structure is repeated in the majority of Emdadian's works, particularly beginning in the late 1970s. There is a massive "thing" in the center of the work that captures and halts the gaze. It seems that everything else exists in relation to this central element. The various representations of this central "thing" show a typical appearance as a massive tree. The examination of these works shows that this enormous tree appears alongside small trees and temporary houses, which display signs of decay and ruin. The house functioned as a cabin, which stood "within" the trees in Emdadian's previous artistic creations. Later works show the house as broken architectural fragments which appear as scattered boulders throughout the compositions. These works repeatedly show dried and withered tree trunks. The artwork shows houses and trees as if they have disappeared. According to Freud melancholia develops when someone loses a beloved but fails to accept reality and continues to mourn indefinitely. By expanding the "melancholic" meaning in these works from Kristeva's perspective, one can say that these works bear signs of continuous and creative mourning in symbolic spaces. It seems these remnants could symbolize the painter's separation from his homeland, a homeland from which he had been separated since the 1970s.

In contrast to the temporary or small nature of these trees or lost houses, one can speak of the eternal and massive stature of the tree at the center of Emdadian's works. It

seems these temporary dwelling places share this "home," depicting a massive tree or house under whose shade life becomes possible. The humans are located near this massive tree in Emdadian's works but appear indifferent to it, as if this "majesty," vastness, and alienation are "familiar" or "internal" to them. This corresponds to the dialectic outlined by Freud regarding the concept of the "uncanny." In many of Emdadian's works, the subject is depicted beside or sheltered by this massive tree. This uncanny tree represents these dialectics through various visual means. They appear to be both distant and separate, yet close and near. In a number of Emdadian's works, human subjects are moving along a path toward these uncanny trees. In this case, being lost holds a deeper meaning, where the lost subject is, in Kristeva's interpretation, an "unnamable thing" that can be embodied or manifested in various symbolic forms. Considering the core of the experience of uncanniness from Freud's perspective, one can say that something lost is expressed in artistic works with an anxiety that creates an intersection of suffering and pleasure. Based on the concepts laid out by Johnson, one can state that these trees embody an "uncanny melancholia," signifying the "uncanny" call of something lost. The ceaseless consistent "repetition" of the tree motif in Emdadian's works is a sign of the "compulsion to repeat" and a progression from the pleasure principle towards this return, depicting a return from the pleasure of dwelling in temporary settlements towards an eternal peace, towards "home." A home that Kristeva refers to with the term "chora."

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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