

THE EFFECTS OF MINIMALIST MOVEMENT ON PAINTING ARTS AND MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

The word minimalism which is derived from the word minimum in French means the least or the smallest amount needed for something. Minimalism in arts was founded at the end of 1960s in New York and it's called in the technical literature as Minimalist Art, ABC Art or Reductive Art. The most important particularity of this movement in arts is extreme simplicity and an objective approach. Painters and musicians gave particular importance to simplicity in their works. The minimalist movement which flourished during the last phase of paintings of Kazimir Malevich in 1913 has been a source of inspiration for the painters in the following decades. Minimalism has also been used in music where melody and harmony are simplified to minimize the emotional impressions.

The literature review has been used in this study. From the beginning of the minimalist movement, musicians and painters in this movement were studied in chronological order and particularities in their works were put under the scope. From among minimalist artist Ellsworth Kelly and Michael Nyman were chosen for sample surveys and their works were examined in terms of minimal particularities. In addition differences and similarities between the art styles of both artists were manifested. Consequences have been drawn from these particularities and suggestions were made in terms of interdisciplinary minimal studies.

Key Words: Minimalism, minimalism in painting, minimalism in music.

INTRODUCTION

The word minimalism which is derived from the word minimum in French means the least or the smallest amount needed for something. It's called minimalist art, ABC art or reductive art. The basic particularities of this movement are excessive simplicity and objective approach (Tdk, 1928:2008). "Minimalism in general can be defined as emphasising an idea with a minimum amount of colour, value, shape, line or texture." (Ishakoğlu, 2005:14).

In accordance with this definition, simplicity turns out to be the most important characteristic of artistic works produced in this movement. The common characteristic of painters and musicians in this movement are simplicity in form, minimal usage of notes and lines, clarity and comprehensibility in line and texture.

It can be said that like all other artistic movements minimalism can also be defined in a sense as a revolt against all other precedent movements and it brought new innovations to the old order. In 1961 which is the year in which this movement had its beginning Richard Wollheim defined it as an art "with a minimum content". Later this definition was used for three dimensional works of art and sculpture (Erzen, 1997). Minimalism which is indeed a kind of sculpture weighted abstract art was very effective in 1970s in the artistic environment in the United States. Minimalist artist has a geometrical approach "reducing the essence" of painting and music. Artists like Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Sol Le Witt were the pioneers of this movement and they

were supporters of extreme simplicity and excessive objectivism in arts (Tizgöl, 2008). We know that the first traces of minimal art can be found in the works of painter Kazimir Malevich in 1900s, but his art was not called in those days as minimal art; the modern denomination came years later. Malevich improved a new kind of original approach in terms of colour, form and style which was different than older approaches. "In modern painting art reductive trends were seen for the first time in the paintings "Black Square on White" and "White on White" of Russian painter Kazimir Malevich. The minimal art of painting which is the peak of this trend came up in 1950s as a subsection of American abstract expressionism as a reaction to abstract animation (Ishakoğlu, s.15:2005).

As we see from above explanations, the minimal art came out as a reaction to former forms of art. We can say that in this form of art, the balance, colour and form in paintings were more minimal, in more simplicity than before in a way to relay the emotional impression better.

These changes naturally affected other fields of art as well. Besides form and colour changes in painting art, the music of Eric Satie and aesthetical perception of John Cage were deeply affected by minimal art. These composers created their compositions in a simple and plain way reacting in sense to the complex structure of modern music.

The appearance of minimal art can be associated with events, wars, movements and such events occurred in advance of this movement. Thousands of pages can be written and detailed researches can be executed about such associations. Sources report that minimalism as an idea in arts can be traced back 1900s although its history dates back in older times. Today we can see effects of minimalism in various fields of art such as architecture, visual arts, sculpture, photography and web design. But in this study only the effects of minimal art in painting and music and on painters and musicians will be examined and the nascence and development of minimal painting and music will be put under scope. The works of a painter and a musician will be analyzed in terms of minimal characteristics and the analysis results will then be commented. Similar and different point of the effects of minimal art will be demonstrated. As this study shows similar and distinctive features of minimal painting and music, it's of great importance for artists in their studies on minimal painting and music. We also think that this study will be a guiding light for studies to be realised on minimal art movement in the future.

The Minimalist Movement in Music and its Effects

In a similar way as in other arts, minimalism in music came up as a reaction to excessive exaggeration in music and aimed at eliminating excessive sentimentalism and intellectual complexity. It's stated in Wikipedia that this term was used for the first time in 1968 by Michale Nyman to define the work *The Great Digest* of Cornelius Cardew. The term minimal movement used for the first time by Nyman as stated above also affected other artist and thus artist such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, John Adams, Tom Johnson and Terry Riley had all become representatives of minimal art.

Minimalist Music was born in the late 1960's and can be associated with a group of American composers classified as "minimalists". However, the origins of Minimalist music can be traced to the 'total serialism' music of Webern whose music was based on the mathematical control of the musical elements. Minimalist music consists of cells which are 'looped' at shifting time intervals. This creates a hypnotic quality to the music as the cells shift in and out of 'phase' with each other. One way of thinking about Minimalist Music is as the musical comparison of 'Splitting the Atom' or analyzing a DNA chain. Minimalist music could almost be described a 'molecular music'. (Khorkher, 2003).

Philip Glass is a minimal composer. As he was occupied with his country's music, he became interested in Indian music and he tried to create new approaches mixing and synthesising the western technique which was his field of expertise and the technique of the east. He began practising minimal music in 1990 and implemented minimal music in various compositions for percussion units, string quartets, orchestra and opera works and was able to demonstrate its effects.

Steve Reich is also another musician and composer who is occupied with minimal music. Using the cadences of western classical music, Reich created new approaches in his compositions comprising of structures, harmony and rhythms which are unusual in western music. Reich composed especially jazz music pieces. We can say he contributed to minimal music only with harmony techniques without distorting the traditional structure of western music.

Tom Johnson, who is also a minimal composer, brought forward in 1989 that the term minimalism is much broader than people think and it would comprise compositions composed with the least notes, the least lyrics and a limited number of instruments (Köksal, 2007).

The above mentioned composers and many others are the composers who used the minimal technique and characteristics of this movement effectively in their compositions in terms of form and harmony. If we examine the compositions of these composers, some common characteristics of minimal music emerge. The most distinguishing of these are as follows:

- Musical ideas are short. It's based on short and essential phrases which are like a summary of long phrases.
- The activity in the harmonic structure is limited. Structural harmonic integrity and the chords used are all simple.
- The chords and the tones used in the harmonic structure are matching.
- The rhythmical structure is harmonious and fascinating. Stableness and easy perception in rhythmical structure.
- Usage of lots of repetitions and sequences. Because of this the pieces are remembered easily.

As stated above, the main characteristics of minimal music are simplicity, plain, simplicity in harmony and exposition of rhythms in an order. We will examine the compositions of Michale Nyman in this concept:

Michael Nyman

Michael Nyman born in New York in 1936. Purcell and Handel, and collecting folk music in Romania. Later he wrote as a critic for several journals, including *The Spectator*, where, in a 1968 review of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Digest*, he became the first to apply the word 'minimalism' to music. That same year, a BBC broadcast of Steve Reich's *Come Out* opened his ears to further possibilities, and a route back to composition began to emerge. In 1968 he wrote the libretto for Harrison Birtwistle's 'dramatic pastoral' *Down by the Greenwood Side*. Later, Birtwistle, now Musical Director of the National Theatre, London, commissioned him to provide arrangements of 18th century Venetian songs for a 1976 production of Carlo Goldoni's *Il Campiello*, for which Nyman assembled what he would describe as 'the loudest unamplified street band' he could imagine: rebels, sackbuts, shows alongside banjo, bass drum and saxophone. Nyman kept the *Campiello Band* together after the play's run had finished, adding his own energetic piano-playing to the ensemble. However, a band needs repertoire, and Nyman set about providing it. The Band's line-up expanded, amplification was added and the name changed to the Michael Nyman Band. This was the medium in which Nyman formulated his compositional style around strong melodies, flexible yet assertive rhythms, and precisely articulated ensemble playing. Nyman's work ranges from compositions for the Michael Nyman Band, Symphony Orchestra, Vocal Works and soundtracks. His work as a minimalist composer also draws on Baroque influences; at times one can hear Vivaldi or Handel in his music. (Khorkher, 2003).

A structure based on phrases with repetitions and sequences is the main characteristic of Nyman's music. Nyman's compositions are comprised of note subtractions and additions in terms of harmony simplicity and rhythmic structure repetitions. He generally uses arpeggio technique and he repeats these arpeggio techniques in different harmonies by means of sequences. Below we see four scales of his piano work "The Heart Asks Pleasure First." This work was composed in the rhythm of 12/8. This rhythm is the double of 6/8. The part of the composition for the left hand begins with an arpeggio in A minor and the same structure comes down sequencing in 2 scales and in one tessitura. This is a reflection of minimal music characteristics. And it's noteworthy that he uses minimal harmony in this sequencing. Other 2 scales of the same hand demonstrate

stableness in rhythms. Usage of one – five – eight notes instead of treble notes in arpeggio facilitates an analysis in terms of harmony and the memorising the piece. On the right hand position the composer creates the arpeggio eith the same rhythmic movements. The melody shows itself with simplicity and colourfulness. The notes are stable in rhythm and they are used in a rich but simple way. This is also an evidence of minimal characteristic of this composition.

MICHAEL NYMAN

The Heart Asks Pleasure First

from the movie "The Piano"

After the MIDI sequence
and the original sound recor
transcribed by David JÜN

Con moto

Am/E G/D Am/C Am/E G/D Am/C D



mf
con

Più mosso (♩ = 180)
Am

f *simile* F G

The Promise

Music by Michael Nyman

♩ = 64-56

mp

Red.

sempre cantabile ma marcato il melodia



“The Promise”, another composition of Nyman, was composed in 6/8 rhythm. In some scales the composer uses the rhythm of 9/8 as if he wanted to use in those scales longer phrases. We see that fewer notes have been used in the part for the right hand making out the most important peculiarity of this composition. A simple expression, richer melodies with fewer notes and simplicity in harmony are main characteristics of Nyman’s music. We can also see it in this composition. It’s outstanding that he can mix simple melodies in harmonies without losing the beauty and the artistic value of the composition. We see that in this composition

Nyman could bring together his musical textures in simple harmony and sequences excellently. If we look at the parts for right hand in the first 5 scales, we can see that the structure of the work comprises of smooth rhythms and simple notes. The notes in the left hand part continue in dual spaces. The connections of tones are not exaggerated and simple to play on the piano. The rhythmical structure on the left hand continues with repetitions and the simplicity of playing comes to the forefront. In summary we can say that this composition also contains minimal music characteristics.

The special structural features of these compositions are as follows:

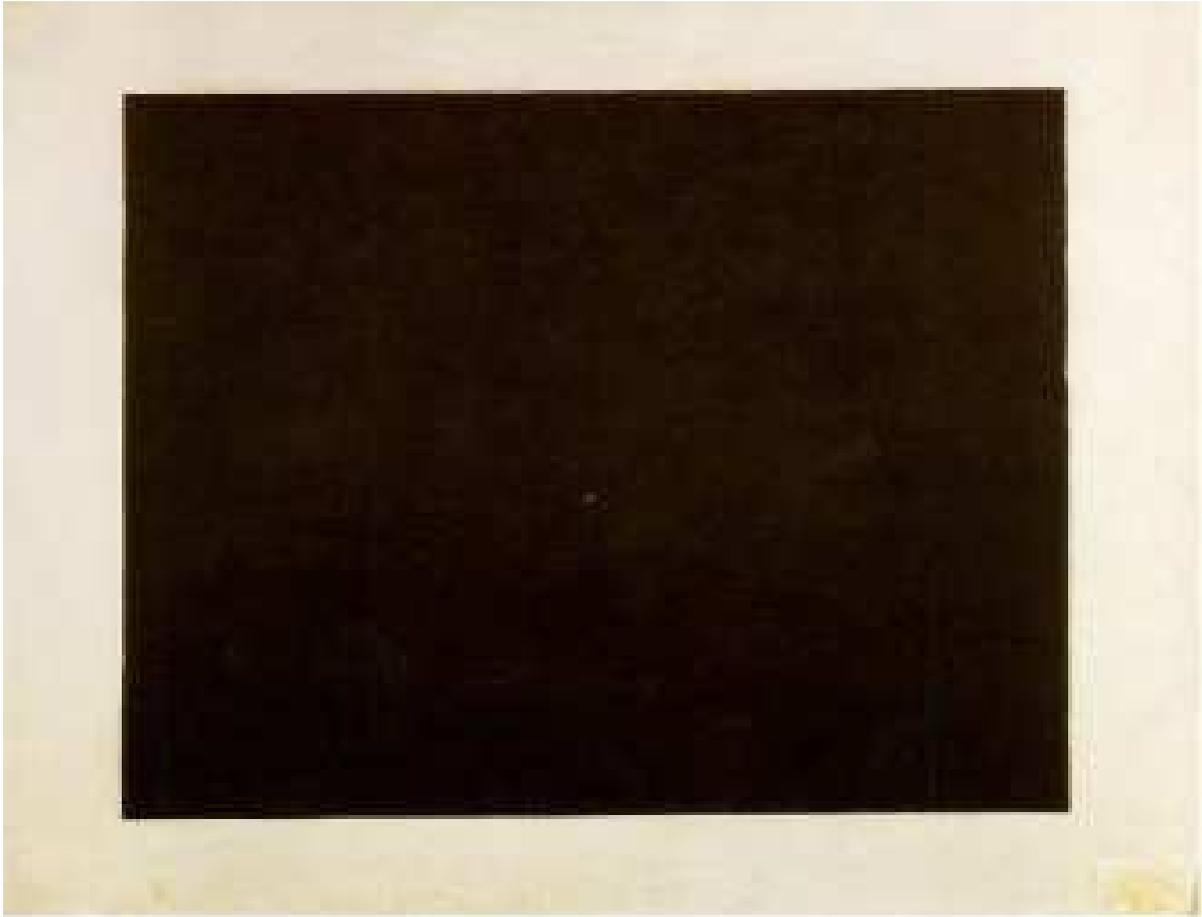
- Simplicity of harmony structure.
- Simplicity in terms of playing them.
- Simplicity and stability of rhythmical structure.
- Lots of sequences.
- The chords are easy to perceive.
- Simple melody structure.
- Simple pedal usage.
- Changing beat numbers with simple modifications.
- Phrasing is easy to understand.

General Characteristics of Minimalism in Painting Art

After having confirmed its place in painting, architecture and sculpture, minimalism was also implemented in other arts. This movement continues to be a source of inspiration for various artistic movements. Before we examine the works of minimalist painter Ellesworth Kelly, we give some information on the nascence and the general features of this artistic movement.

The term minimalism was used for the first time by David Burlyuk in 1929 in the catalogue of the exhibition which was held in Dudensighn Gallery in New York (Want, 2006). This term was also used in 1965 in an article written by Richard Wolheim, named "The Minimal Art" which was published in Art Magazine. "The notion of minimal art emerges as an idea in the Russian constructivists such as Tatlin, Rodchenko and Malevich (geometrical abstraction), in the works of painters belonging to the De Stijle group such as Mondrian, in pop art, in the works of Hard Edge and Frank Stella." (Garmaner, 1996:41). All these ideas have accumulated and have been a source of inspiration for artists until 1960. This movement emerged in the first place among American painters and sculptors and then it spread in Europe.

"Kazimir Malevich who put a black square on white ground in 1915 is the pioneer of an art conception finding its meaning in itself by demolishing the old conception of painting originating from the old perception that a painting shows and represents objects (Antmen, 2008:181). "When the black square of Malevich was put on exhibition, something appreciated by people and critics disappeared and was transformed into nothing. An extremely simple and striking square was an incomprehensible and dangerous form for them. It's not contextlessness, it's subjectlessness. The black square is intuition and the white ground is the emptiness beyond it. Malevich demolished all the understandings and perceptions of colours and forms imposed on us by nature and created an original language presenting new formats. He developed an expression based on lines. Most of minimal artists didn't entitle their works in order not to give them an identity (Ishakoğlu, 2005:14).



Picture 1: Black Square (1915).

When Minimalism came up in 1960s as an art movement, it was called “ABC Art”, “Rejecting Art”, “Cold Art” or “Basic Structure”. According to minimalists, a work of art represents nothing. It’s only what you see. The other thing doesn’t exist. They have an objective quietness. They have developed a kind of symmetry and order as the sign of a rational attitude. (Antmen, 2008:181).

The most important representatives of this art in painting are Donald Judd, Frank Stella, Kneed Nolland and Ellsworth Kelly, and in sculpture art Carl Andrea, Robert Morris and Richard Serra.

Reducing colour and form to a minimal state without transforming the material and creating a painting without compositional expressions are the main attitudes of minimalist painters.

The main characteristics of minimalist painting art are:

- It’s based on systemic repetitions. The painters create their works by repeating lines and colours. There are several repetitive works of their paintings.
- Simplicity plays an important role. No figures are used and these painters are never inspired by nature. Excessive simplicity is the main feature.
- Sharp geometrical forms are used. Squares, rectangles and circles are also often used.
- Meronymy exists on these works. Big and small units are used together to create an integrity relationship.
- Connotation and symbolisations are avoided.
- Materials are used fewer and less than normal.
- The painting ground is sometimes colourful, it comprises sometimes more than one colours.

- Simplicity, repetitions and symmetric geometrical forms are the main features. The artists prefer the simplest forms and use the repetitions abundantly. As repetitions facilitate perception in brain, simple perception was perhaps the main objective of these minimalist artists.
- Purified and reduced colours are used. Main colours are preferred.

Ellesworth Kelly

Ellsworth Kelly was born on May 31, 1923 in Newburgh, New York. Throughout his career, he crossed the traditional boundaries between painting, sculpture, and architecture. With clarity of vision and a sense of optimism, Kelly utilized abstraction to create a broad and diverse body of work that combines and expands the issues of form, ground, color and space.

Kelly began his studies at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn from 1941 to 1943. After serving military duty from 1942 to 1945, Ellsworth Kelly studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from 1946 to 1947. Kelly then left the U.S. to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he discovered Romanesque art and architecture, Byzantine art, Surrealism, and Neo-Plasticism. The automatic drawing of the surrealists led Kelly to experiment with the element of chance; Kelly was introduced to Jean Arp, and during this period he created shaped wood reliefs as well as collages incorporating this influence.

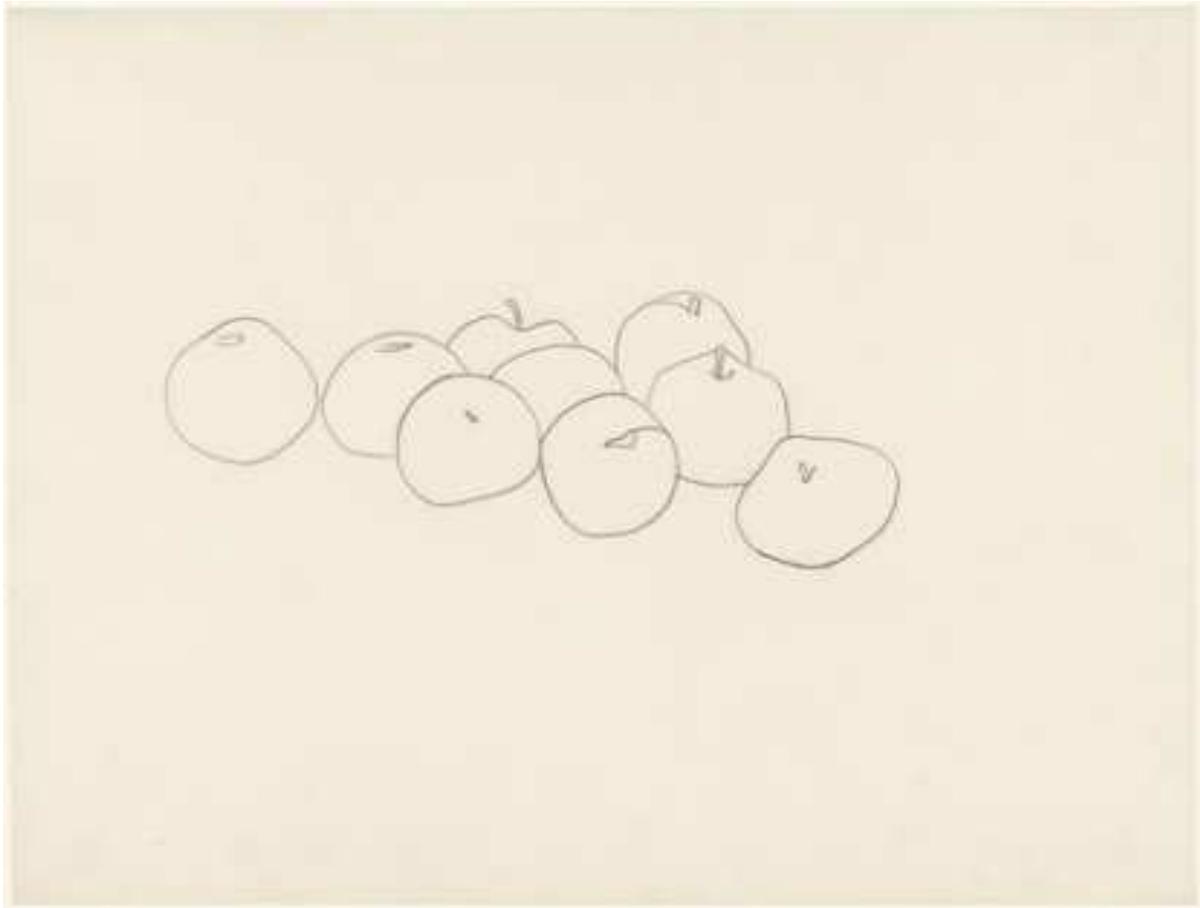
From 1950 to 1951, Ellsworth Kelly taught at the American School in Paris. "In addition to them in the natural environment. While his painting stressed shape and planar masses (often assuming non-rectilinear formats), his sculpture was insistently two-dimensional. For a period in the mid-1960s, Kelly came close to Op art in his use of geometric configurations and colour contrasts that stressed perceptual ambiguities." (Sims, 2009). http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=3048 His work of this period also provided a useful bridge from the vanguard American geometric abstraction of the 1930s and early 1940s to the Minimalism and reductive art of the mid-1960s and 1970s. His work consisted of an abstraction of forms observed in the real world, and he soon developed a style of geometric abstraction using bright, primary colors. This style expanded and Kelly began to create works made up of multiple separate panels that recombined to produce many alternate compositions. During this time the artist met Constantin Brancusi, Francis Picabia, Alexander Calder and Georges Vantongerloo. His first solo show took place at the Galerie Arnaud in Paris in 1951.

Returning to the U.S. in 1954, Ellsworth Kelly took residence at Coenties slip in lower Manhattan where he met James Rosenquist, Robert Indiana, Lenore Tawney and Jack Youngerman. During a span of ten years, his rounded, organic forms became sharp rectangles and his originally gestural style gained clarity with a more architectural approach. The artist then created wall-mounted installations consisting of multiple monochrome panels that could be seen both as sculptures and as paintings. In 1956, Kelly had his first New York solo show at the Betty Parsons Gallery. In 1958 he moved on to create freestanding sculptures, and was included in the Sixteen Americans exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

During the seventies, Ellsworth Kelly created a series of totemic sculptures executed in steel and aluminum, and eventually freed himself from his characteristically severe, closed planes, exchanging them for open-ended, infinite forms. He executed several public commissions, including a mural for UNESCO in Paris, 1969, a sculpture for the city of Barcelona in 1978, Houston Triptych, a bronze sculpture for the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, 1986, and a memorial for the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., 1993. He had his first Retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1973, and has been included in various retrospectives since, including a career retrospective in 1996 organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Today, Ellsworth Kelly lives in Spencertown, New York. (<http://www.lesliesacks.com/artists/ellsworth-kelly-1/bio>).

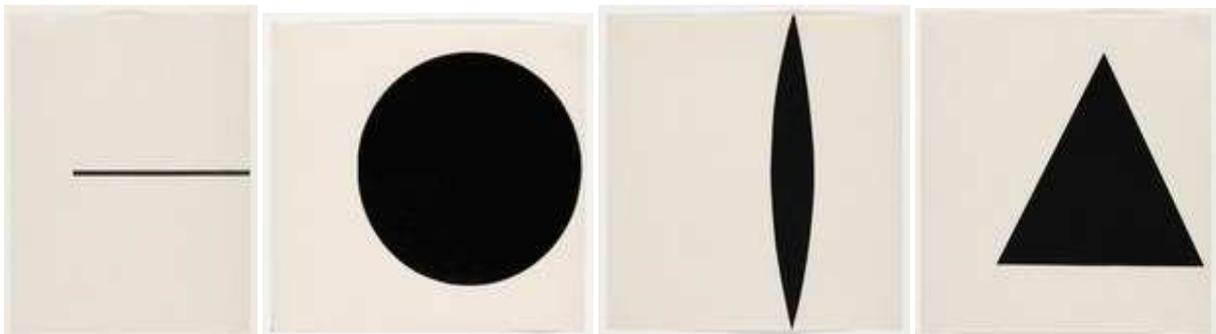
Kelly who was a painter, sculptor and graphic designer, is one of the most important implementer of the abstract art. Kelly was perceived in the beginning as a plant painter. Before she accepted minimalism as her artistic expression, he painted plants in simple geometrical lines. Later she also used line repetitions and geometrical forms as minimalist artists did. This well known painter was influenced by other movements such as sharp edges and pictorial abstraction, but she could create an original form developing all these movements

into an integral approach of her own. She found herself later in the minimalist movement and was called as a minimalist painter because of the new approach she found. Comments on the works of this artist are given below.



Picture 2: Apples – Paris 1949

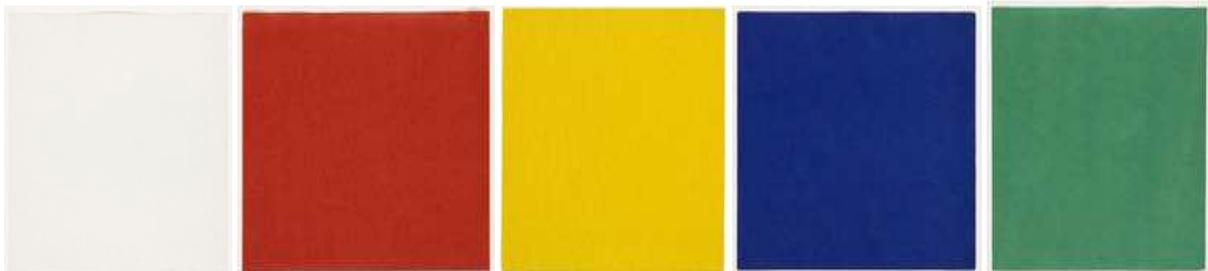
The painting we see above is an example why she is called a plant painter. Kelly reflected in such paintings things in nature using simple geometrical lines. If we look at the painting named “Apples” we see eight apples are painted in extraordinary good abstract forms.



Picture 3: Horizontal Line – Circle Form – Mandorla Form, - Triangle Form – 1951

These are geometrical works of Kelly painted in 1951 and they are exhibited today in the Moma Gallery. As we look at these works, the Black Square of Malevich comes into mind. Although the works of Malevich are not

considered in the movement of minimal art, we understand from these works that they influenced the minimal artists to a great extent. "Horizontal Line", the first painter seen above, is a horizontal black line over a white ground. The painting "Circle Form" is a black circle on white ground. The painting "Mandorla Form" is an almond form on white ground. In the painting "Triangle Form", black triangles are represented on white ground. The minimal characteristic of this painting are intuitivism and connotations and it tries to adopt the principle "What's seen, it's it".



Picture 4: Colors Serie 1951

Kelly's application of colours shows that the painter uses simple colours in repetitions in different colours and works especially with main colours. Kelly uses the colours white, red, yellow, blue and green separately and we see that he created a series of colours without using the secondary colours. The objective of Kelly is to have the paintings commented without perception and expression as we see them. In his works created later he united the main colours with their values but he created a new series of colours separating these colours from each other in a sharp way. He brought these colours with combinations of two and three colours. We see a sample of it on the table below.



Picture5: Red and Yellow, Blue and Red, Red Yellow Blue – Red Blue Yellow 1951.

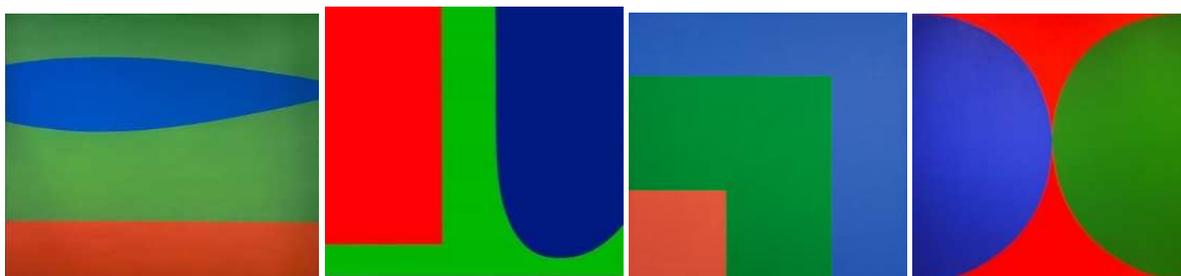
As explained above, we see on the paintings of Kelly that he used different colours together separating them with sharp lines. He created his paintings on paper with ink technique and gouache technique.



Pictures 6: Color for a Large Wall – Spectrum Colors Arranged by Change IV
 Spectrum Colors Arranged by Change II – Nine Colors 1951.

When we look at the Kelly's paintings above, we see minimal accents once more. In the painting "Colors for A Large Wall" we can observe the form repetition as used by other minimalist artists. In addition there is also

colour repetition in this painting. In the painting "Spectrum Colors Arranged by Change IV" we also see the same features as above. The difference on this painting is small square figures. Geometrical figures of different colours were used on this painting. Additionally we see sharp edges in his works. In the painting "Nine Colors" nine different colours are used with same geometric figures. White edge and black square ground are minimal art characteristics. We can say that these paintings have all the preparative features of this movement as though they can't be defined as minimal art.



Pictures 7: Blue Green Red Series 1962 – 1965.

Kelly aimed at creating a dynamism on flat surfaces and put special emphasis on separations between figures and ground. In his work Red Blue Green which is a painting in one of the most important series in which this motive has been explored, Kelly painted figures in deep red and blue with echoes and contrast as well in a sharp structure on sharp green ground. The relationship between the double balanced form and colour around it was a sign of the powerful deepness which we also see in the latter paintings of Kelly. Because of this, all these works are an important bridge between the plain and multi panel paintings and lamellar and sculptural works.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It's known that the minimal movement emerged as a reaction to the previous movements. These reactions all together came up as an art movement named Minimalism and it affected so many artists. But Minimalism isn't a movement which came up in a blow like in all other art movements. Naturally there are some events, reasons and processes which gave a start to Minimalism. For example Malevich is one of the most important painters who germinated the ideal structure of this movement. But his works are not considered to be minimal art. In conclusion we can say that the minimal movement was a preparation of the previous events and ideas.

When we examine the paintings and compositions included in this study we see that both arts are not so distinct from each other. The main reason for this is the events and processes in the same period. In addition artists in every period were influenced from each other in their works. The artists in the minimal movement also experienced such a process.

The minimal characteristics in painting and music which emerge as a result of analysis made by researchers and studies of related literature are as follows:

- Minimal painters created series bringing different forms in their paintings and repeating them. The minimal musicians also have this characteristic. Kelly used different geometrical forms on the same ground. Nymann created compositions with repetitions of the same expression in different forms in the same structure of harmony and form.
- The painters and musicians in the minimalist movements took care to use the notes, colours, form, style and harmony in their works in the simplest form possible. We also see this simplicity in the expression and presentation of the works to the audience/spectators.
- Purified elements are found stylistically in large amount in their works. The painters prefer simplicity in colours and forms. And the musicians also prefer simplicity in their melodies and try to express the maximum using minimum notes.

- Minimalist painters try to obtain an integrity creating contrasts by means of geometrical forms of every size. The musicians on the other side created various variations using the same forms and harmonies and tried to have an integrity by bringing these small differences together.
- Repetitions are the most important feature of the minimalist art movement. The painters repeat certain geometrical shapes in same and different colours and thus try to express themselves in this way. We also observe this characteristic at the musicians. Powerful sequences in the same tonality result in continuous repetitions.

Information from art history and music history resources was brought together for the purpose of this study. During the examination of resources for the study, we observed that there were only few researches addressing various arts. This has been a deficiency for us. But as we know, art movements are all effected from each other and they usually come up as reactions to previous movements. For this reason academicians and artists having different areas of expertise on the same field must address all the movements in a single study and take the initiative that they take their place in the related literature.

Lectures on art history and music history are given under different names in different departments in faculties. But though the differences reflect the needs of the related department, we can say that there exists an interdisciplinary relationship. For this reason it's suggested that these lectures should be combined under the title of fine arts and different fields of art should be given together. In addition extra lecture hours are needed after expanding the contents in faculty syllabus.

IJONTE's Note: This article was presented at 4th International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications - ICONTE, 25-27 April, 2013, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 5 Number 1 of IJONTE 2014 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.

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