

## Hermeneutics as an Approach for the Interpretation of Hanging Textiles Design

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### Abstract:

This study highlights the role of hermeneutics as a philosophical approach to understand and interpret hanging textiles design as a type of artworks. Hermeneutics explains what is said in a strange language to others' awareness in what is known as the art of interpretation and perception which has developed from Schleiermacher to Gadamer including the elements of interpretation, understanding and dialogue. These elements depend on overcoming the alienation of aesthetic consciousness and reducing the gap between recipient and artwork as each artwork is created to say something and express a conceptual idea. Its interpretation depends on the wading in its parts and accepting its aesthetic truth and feeling. Depending on hermeneutic circle which includes relation between the whole and the parts, it will be possible to understand the whole of a hanging textile design by getting closer to it to reveal the aesthetics of its details. In this study, hermeneutic process or in other words hermeneutic in art is not just reading the meaning or evaluating the hanging textile design but rather it is an intuitive and transparent process which depends on entering the world of a hanging textile by considering the intellectual and unconscious processes through which the artwork is created. Thus, without the hermeneutic thought in art, the hanging textile will fall into nothingness once the instant admiration of it is over. Also, hanging textile will turn to be just a rag full of colors with a thousand barriers of vagueness and ambiguity separating the recipient from understanding and assimilating it.

### Keywords:

*Hermeneutics*  
*Hermeneutic Circle*  
*Artworks*  
*Hanging Textiles*  
*Design*  
*Paintings*

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### 1. Introduction:

There is something in the depth of hanging textiles can be explored if it is analyzed by hermeneutics. The concept of hermeneutics represents an independent intellectual approach to reveal the ambiguous sense in some artworks through applying artistic values when interpreting the creative skills produced in each part that are compelled by a personal drive. With this latter sense, it is possible to use the philosophy of hermeneutics in understanding the existential state of any work of art and interpret its parts.

The concept of hermeneutics has firstly evolved by Frederick Schleiermacher who generalized the use of hermeneutics as a basis for the linguistic understanding through the relation between the whole and the part. Wilhelm Dilthey introduced hermeneutics as a methodology to understand all the human sciences through the emotional

involvement. Martin Heidegger shifted the focus from interpretation to existential understanding as rooted in fundamental ontology or in other words interpretation of facticity which brought under concepts. Hans Gadamer pointed out that hermeneutics is an independent thought which is not based on a specific methodology but rather on philosophy of interpretation, understanding, dialogue and dialectic to unfold ambiguity and assimilate the artwork through recipients' understanding and their feelings. These feelings did not include objectivity or neutrality in general, but rather it requires fusion of horizons between artwork and recipient. According to Gadamer, understanding is changeable and always indicating new perspectives. Understandings are relative to differences in consideration and perception which could be considered a reason for the dialectic approach.

With regard on hermeneutics thought, Gadamer pointed out that art is a game or pastime dominating the artist and impact on creativity and self-expression. The recipient participates by dialogues and dialectical method to unfold the aesthetic consciousness and reduce the gap between an artwork and a recipient. This further elaborates the idea of hermeneutic in art which merging the artwork in recipient's reality. This study seeks to apply hermeneutics in art to understand canvas paintings designs as a kind of hanging textiles through historical, descriptive, and analytical methodology. As, being alien to a particular hanging textile is a condition of our understanding, all we can do is to apply values when interpreting its parts which form the whole artwork. This requires an attractive design structure of a hanging textile prompting the recipient to contemplate its details. Consequently, this issue includes a hermeneutic study in the context of analyzing abstract paintings as an autonomous event comes into being to interpret their ambiguity and reduce the gap between them and the recipient.

### Objectives

Application of hermeneutics and hermeneutic circle to understand and analyze canvas paintings designs as a kind of hanging textiles.

Overcome the alienation of the aesthetic awareness through the interpretation of hanging textile designs depending on hermeneutics concept.

### Methodology

This study depends on The historical methodology through including the most important emergence stages of the hermeneutics philosophy in art.

The descriptive and analytical methodology by the interpretation and understanding hanging textile designs.

### Theoretical Framework

#### 2. Definition of Hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics in its early beginnings relied on interpretation of the Bible texts that one feels alienated from because of its lack of understanding. Thus, hermeneutics associated with a specific purpose which is interpretation of all transcends human understanding and transforming it to the scope of understanding (Gaffar 2000, 24). Conveying the message, mood or symbolism from the lack of understanding to the state of understanding represents a kind of manifestation that leads to getting excited by the process of interpretation and understanding. Therefore, hermeneutical thought can be used as a philosophical approach based on understanding

and interpretation to explore ambiguity and vagueness in the hanging textile and exceed the evaluation view rejecting each change and causing a gap between the artwork and its recipients.

#### 3. The stages of the emergence of the Hermeneutics philosophy in art:

The term hermeneutics includes the act of interpretation but is not fully equivalent to it (El-Habashy 2011, 10). Interpretation is only a part of hermeneutics field. The concept of hermeneutics has changed, and the view of thinkers and philosophers has evolved throughout the history, and the following are the main points of the evolution of hermeneutics as a concept and the emergence of the philosophy of hermeneutical thought in art:

##### 3-1. Hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834):

Friedrich Schleiermacher turned hermeneutics from the interpretation of religious texts to a general hierarchy whose principles can provide a basis for interpreting all written texts. He stated that "The mission of hermeneutics is to understand the text as understood by its author, and better than he understood it." (Tawfiq 2002, 87). Thus, Schleiermacher provided a solution to avoid misunderstanding: knowledge of grammatical and psychological laws in trying to understand the text and his author. There arose in his time a fundamental shift from understanding not only the exact words and their objective meaning to the individuality of the author (Forster 2007, 120). Also, the text interpretation according to Schleiermacher depends on circular relationship as each particular can only be understood via the eral, of which it is a part, and vice versa (Bowie 1998, 24).

##### 3-2. Hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911):

Hermeneutics, from Dilthey perspective, can be applied to other types of arts and is based primarily on the understanding that includes empathy with the artist and emotional involvement. He stated that "We cannot understand or explain what another person is doing except by living what he feels," (Ahmed 2008, 31). The artworks with Dilthey are a means of conveying a certain human feeling to the recipient without the need from the artist to explain or clarify his artwork, as in the canvas paintings of Edvard Munch and Van Gogh, Figures (1,2).

##### 3-3. Hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976):

He linked the art hermeneutics to the ontological approach which aims to engage in the artwork and

search for the origin of its existence, and the origin of the artwork, from Heidegger perspective, is the artist himself. The art hermeneutics is based on giving ourselves to the artwork entirely through searching for the artist's personality and the factors influencing it which led to getting the artwork at its final look. For example, the anxiety and fear of Edward Munch, we find, which were a reason for his works to be manifested in this way, and he explained "my suffering is a part of me and my art" (Attia 2004, 28), and that appears in his most popular artwork, (Scream) painting, figure (3). Moreover, the selecting of topics and the prevalence of the blue color in a group of Pablo Picasso's paintings, figure (4), resulted from suffering from moral deterioration for a specific period of his life, which was a reason to call that period with the Blue Period (1900-1904) (Ahmed 2008, 31).

#### **3-4. Hermeneutics of Hans Gadamer (1900-2000):**

Hermeneutic process in Gadamer's point of view is not a methodology problem because the issue here is not just what we have to do, as which is important is what happened beyond our will and action. Gadamer saw that hermeneutics represents the basic property of the existence of the artwork itself and our ability to live a life comes from outside, a life cannot be ultimately controlled, so Gadamer added to Heidegger the dialogue and dialectic for the completion of the hermeneutic process in the art as well as understanding and interpretation. The recipient, from Gadamer perspective, plays a role that parallels or even surpasses the role of the artist, to achieve openness to this artwork on the way to what we are told. The artwork of Gadamer means moving within the open space created by the work and brought to light (Palmer 1969, 161). Therefore, Gadamer interpreted the work as a game (Mogheith 2005). As the game is what expresses the pattern of the artistic work, which is achieved by receiving, because the recipient is an authentic part involved in the game, and only the artwork is completed when it imposes itself on the recipient and brings him into his world. If the work itself is an expression of the geniality of the artist, the hermeneutic process is the geniality of the recipient through the understanding and interpretation resulting from the dialogue, and the dialogue depends on merging the horizons between the artwork and the recipient, which leads to light the horizon of the recipient, also dialectic is what helps to achieve dialogue by creating a state of openness to the artistic work. For example,

Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa took seven years to be finished (1503-1510). It is one of the most important hanging textiles ever, figure (5). Not only its importance in relying on the accuracy of drawing and colors, but by creating Da Vinci dialectic about his work through the identity of the Mona Lisa personality, the angle of painting and facial expressions that raised questions to the recipient, so the artwork imposed its control and many interpretations of this work have emerged throughout history, and in every interpretation, the recipient realizes that something is unknown to him and that things are not as he supposed. Furthermore, in Pablo Picasso's hanging textile of the *Jornica*, figure (6), which he painted in (1937) to protest against the savagery of war, did not follow traditional portrayal of a particular war situation and Picasso refused to explain its symbols, all he said was that they contained symbols of concepts and general meanings and accepted multiple interpretations to prompt the recipient to engage in the artistic experience to enter into a broader pattern of thinking (Attia 2004, 138), as each recipient interpret the artwork according to the fusion of his horizon and the horizon of the artwork. Even when there is no specific subject of the artwork, it can be explained in more than one way according to the aspects it shows to the recipient. When the artist creates a spontaneous and improvised art, we describe him as a brilliant and gifted artist because when we look at his artwork, it represents its hermeneutic identity and we interact with it (participate at the game) as the game in art includes the act of participation beside the self-characteristic of the artwork (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, and Marshall 2004, 278). In the hanging textile (*Black Square*) by Kazimir Malevich figure (7), which, despite its complete liberation from any representation of concrete reality, stimulates the recipient to think beyond the black square and the surface appearance of the chromatic layer which was a result of several complex processes where Malevich used a mixture of iron oxides and copper with oil colors, to make the black color thicker and reduce the usual gloss of the colors in the oil paintings. Through this artwork, there has been a transformation of the internal state of the artist to external one which can be shared by anyone who engage in a broad way of thinking through his/her view of the essence of Malevich. The process of interpretation, understanding and dialogue of any artwork in general goes according to hermeneutic circle.



Figure (1) Edvard Munch, sick child, 1907, oil on canvas, 120 x 118.5 cm (Singer, Aslaksby, Casadiego, and Tveitv 2010, 3).



Figure (2) Van Gogh, sorrowing old man, 1890, oil on canvas, 80 x 64 cm (Brown 2014, 3).



Figure (3) Edvard Munch, the scream, 1893, oil on canvas, 91 x 73 cm (Singer, Aslaksby, Casadiego, and Tveitv 2010, 7).



Figure (4) Pablo Picasso, the old guitarist, 1904, oil on canvas, 123 x 83 cm (Saied 1980).



Figure (5) Van Gogh, Mona Lisa, 1503, Oil on canvas, 77 x 53cm (Yehia 1996).



Figure (6) Pablo Picasso, guernica, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 x 777cm. (Plaza, Haarich, and Waldron 2013).



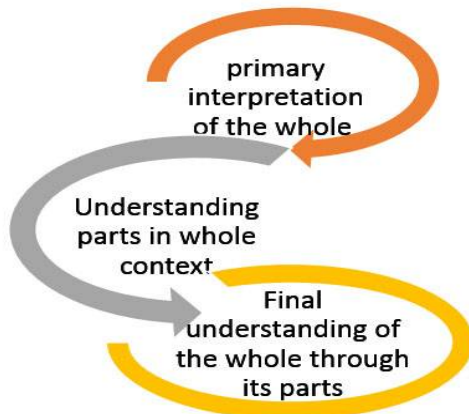
Figure (7) Kazimir Malevich, black square, 1915, mixture of iron and copper oxides with oil colors on canvas, 80 x 80cm (Drutt 2003, 16).

#### 4. Hermeneutic Circle:

Hermeneutic circle is based on the principle that understanding moves steadily between the whole and the parts. We cannot understand the whole except through its parts and the parts cannot be understood except in the context of the whole. The understanding moves steadily from the whole to the parts and returns again from the parts to the whole, as interpretation and understanding move through a circle and that is why we return from all to parts and vice versa (Gadamer, Weinsheimer,

and Marshall 2004, 280). Consequently, hermeneutic circle includes a steady expansion as long as the concept of the whole is relative and integrated into expansive contexts to influence the understanding of the individual parts.

Hermeneutics plays a key role in the process of understanding, through the intrinsic relationship between the part and the whole. At the end we suddenly receive all the individual elements of an artwork in complete enlightenment. In the field of hanging textiles design, it is necessary to the whole to be integrated through its parts (Abu Rayan 2002, 49). The completion of the construction of the hanging textile is measured by the general system, it includes, connecting its parts. The whole structure is greater than the sum of its parts, and our understanding of the whole precedes our perception of the parts (Abdel Hamid 2001, 163). At the same time, the final interdependence of the whole can be understood by interpreting its structure by dividing the hanging textile into its basic components, then examining the parts and how they interconnect with the general artistic entity. Thus, by looking at the hanging textile at the first glance, the recipient forms a primary interpretation of it as an integrated whole, but that is not enough, as there is no good artwork can be understood from the first glance. Therefore, the hermeneutic study requires looking at the parts and understanding them in the light of unity of a hanging textile to be fully understood and interpreted, as in figure (8).



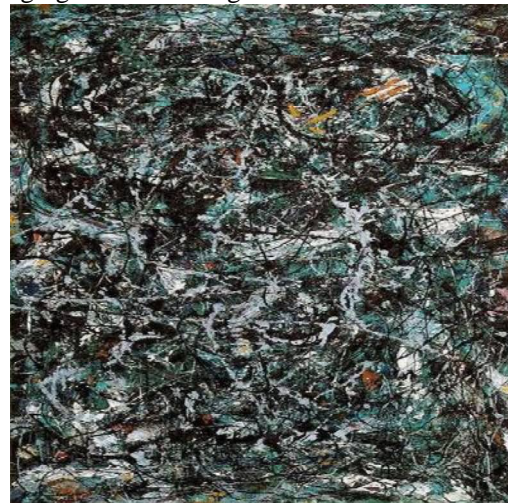
**Figure (8) Relationship between the whole and the parts in hermeneutics circle.**

The relationship here is circular because the total interpretation in which the whole is conceived becomes an actual understanding when the parts determined by the whole act to determine the whole too. In the hermeneutic study, any hanging textile is not based on the mere dismantling of the work into parts, but rather on the attempt to integrate with the work as a whole through the interpretation of some of its details that represent

the keys to the hermeneutics of the artwork through revealing its aesthetics, especially in designs belonging to the abstract art and that makes it alienated to the recipient, also the hanging textile design perfection lies in the exclusive relations between the elements of design and the effect of canvas as a textile material on the final form of the artwork. So, overcoming the alienation of aesthetic awareness, and the completeness in the structure of the design is determined by getting closer to the abstract hanging textile, interpreting some of its parts, revealing the spent mental effort to achieve it and understanding the overall structure. The hermeneutic study of some hanging textiles will be presented as follows:

#### **4-1. The first hanging textile:**

At first glance, when looking at Jackson Pollock's work, Figure (9), which is the first of his artworks to use the technique of dripping, shows his dependence on spontaneous activity. The hanging textile design appears in the form of a complex net of green lines, each of them has a life and a large emotional expressive energy, so that it dips inside to overlap with another line, sometimes rushing towards us and sometimes moving away from us, and we notice the thickness of the color layers of the lines, which leads us to open to the hanging textile and to get closer to its details.



**Figure(9) Jackson Pollock, Full Fathom Five, 1947, oil paintings, metal, plastic and wooden objects on canvas, 129.2 x 76.5cm (Collins, Welshman, Chandler, and Anfam 1987, 127).**

In Figure (10), we find between the colored layers a pencil and a plastic button. Also, we see dark green and black colors in the form of areas put on the surface of the canvas using a brush or a color knife, black and silver colors were poured in the form of spontaneous Pollock lines, and light stains of orange between lines and color layers.

In another part, figure (11) shows a pencil, a metallic color tube and a cigar between the colors layers, and areas of light green appear. We can notice in this part, the difference in the thickness of the lines in silver color and their nature which is different from the first part.

Figure (12), the density of white appears, in addition, the use of orange, yellow and light purple in this part which seems to be intended in a conscious way from a relatively close distance, unlike his spontaneous technique in other parts.



**Figure (10) part 1 from the painting figure (9).**



**Figure (11) Part 2 from the painting figure (9).**



**Figure (12) Part 3 from the painting figure (9).**



From the previous parts it is clear that Pollock broke into his canvas with many techniques, ranging from the use of paint knife and brush at close distance or pouring colors and dripping them from a far distance in which Pollock transferred his work from the carrier to the ground to gain more control of his work from all directions, taking full advantage from the possibilities of his whole body not only his hand. Moreover, Pollock controlled the viscosity of the color used as we find that the color is thick in some areas of the canvas and another color is less viscous to control the spontaneity and the continuance of the lines and prevent them from being cut in his artwork. The conscious mind of Pollock intervened by

adding small areas of orange, yellow and light purple. The diversity of the thickness and nature of the lines with the color spaces as a result of the tension or the relaxation of his hand and getting his hand closer or in a distant from the surface of his canvas which achieved irregular rhythm. The sense of the recipient with the third dimension and thickness of the layers of color is due to the manipulation of Pollock with the surface appearance of his canvas by including some of the different elements of wood and metal, adding colors and pouring them over it, resulting in their adhesion to the surface of the canvas after the colors dried so, they can barely be seen when getting closer to the surface of the painting. The

surface appearance seemed to be prominent and complex, and maybe one of these tools fell from Pollock spontaneously at first so he was impressed by their efficiency and repeated in different parts of his work, to satisfy his desire to explore everything new and create dialectic and questioning in the recipient's mind.

#### 4-2. The second hanging textile:

In the hanging textile, figure (13), Mark Rothko is distinguished by a group of horizontal color spaces that appear one after the other as floating forms above a large chromatic surface. It is a simplified abstraction that evokes the emotional visual responses of the recipient when he sees the hanging textile at the first glance. Rothko noted that "Artwork only lives through participation, expands and extends through the eyes of its recipient," (Collins, Welshman, Chandler, and Anfam 1987, 112).



Figure (13) Mark Rothko, No. 3/No. 13, 1949, oil on canvas, 216.5 x 164.8cm (Collins, Welshman, Chandler, and Anfam 1987, 127).

It is like a window that allows the viewer to view the worlds of color, requiring him to getting closer to the canvas surface and contemplate.

In Figure (14), it is clear that despite the use of Rothko for oil colors and dark green color, it did not completely obscure the orange color and deliberately left some gaps in which the orange is clearly visible below the green color. In addition to the non-sharp edges of the green color and the attempt to dissolve it with the background. Rothko managed to attract the attention of the receiver to all color areas in the canvas through the characteristics of advancing and receding, as the strength of orange color makes it closer to the recipient, despite of its existence behind the green. In figure (15), it is clear that the white layer is a mixture of several colors, such as light yellow and dark blue, used by Rothko with white and clearly seen by getting closer, and the brush strokes clearly show the movement of colors horizontally on the canvas and the use of the brush also appears at the edges to try to blend white and blue with the background and the adjacent color space.

The dark blue color occupies the largest part of the canvas and it appears opaque. The color, layer below it, is completely obscured, but its edges, appears in figure (16), overlapping with orange, white, purple and yellow in a creative manner. Warm and cold colors are mixed with a mechanism that is close to watercolor mixing technique and despite the contrasting colors, the consistency and harmony between them are obvious, So this part is in itself an integral design.



Figure (14) Part 1 from the painting figure (13).

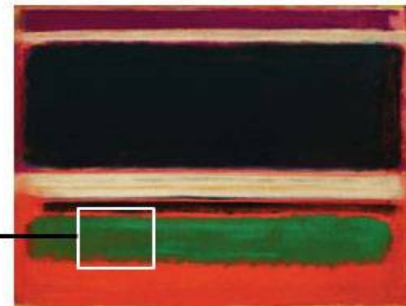
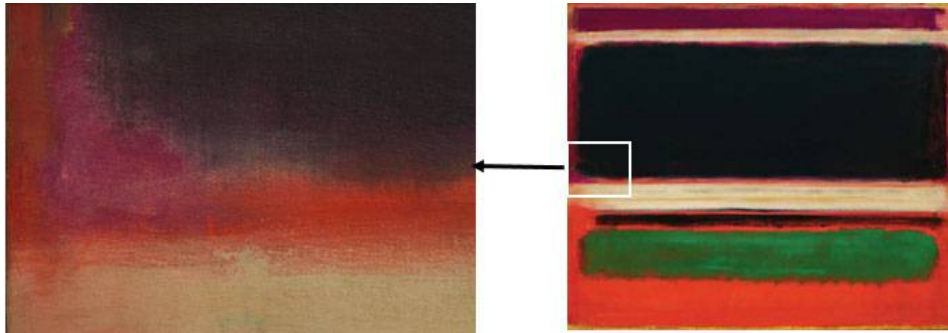


Figure (15) Part 2 from the painting figure (13).



**Figure (16) part 3 from the painting figure (13)**

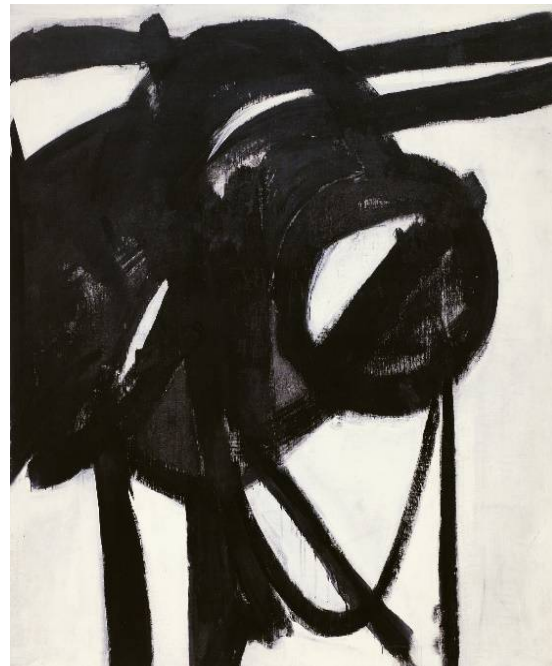
The explanation of the previous parts shows that consciousness and balance represent a large part of this hanging textile. Rothko explored, manipulated the possibilities of colors through it and allowed the background to appear in some parts through the foreground color and in other parts completely obscured the background to test the colors effect on each other and allow each color to affect the recipient with its full strength. It appears in the use of a strong color such as orange in the background as he did not seek to dominate a color on another and retain the emotional impact of each color. Each color, despite being different in size, has its own identity and entity. The change of the texture of the colors result from the movement of the brush appeared in parts of the canvas achieved the rhythm and increased the emotional impact of the recipient. Furthermore, the color areas seemed to have lost their edges as an echo of other colors in the canvas appeared at the edges of some of the color areas so, the colors, together and with the surrounding space, permeate, overlap and emphasize the interdependence between the parts of the canvas despite the contrast of colors and differences in their nature, in order to stimulate the imagination of the recipient as if he is diving through the colors themselves, especially when closely contemplating the hanging textile design.

#### **4-3. The third hanging textile:**

By looking at Franz Klein's hanging textile, figure (17), there is a collection of simple horizontal and vertical lines intersecting with curved lines and black areas on a white background with high speed and confidence that reflect a great spontaneity as with most of Franz Klein's canvas paintings. The lines of work may seem simple at first glance, but Klein's implementation of this work on a relatively large size came with the aim of arousing and drawing the attention of the recipient to the details and parts of his painting to fully understand it.

In Figure (18), the white color at the edges of the lines shows that Klein used it after using the black color. The effects of the flow of the black color on the edges of the lines below the white layer

indicate the use of Klein for colors with low viscosity, and the appearance of the brush effect in some places is due to the speed and strength of the Klein's brush strokes.



**Figure (17) Franz Kline, Chief, 1950, oil on canvas, 148.3 cm x 186.7 cm (Iezzi 2013, 171).**

As shown in this part, Figure (19), The irregular edges of the lines in black results from the effect of the Klein brush, which appears in this part more intensively, and also white color appears above the black color, and the texture of the fabric is obvious in some parts below the white layer, indicating that Klein, in this section, deliberately did not fully cover the surface of the canvas.

In Figure (20), the texture of white color in this part is changed, due to the density of the white layer and its full coverage of the surface of the fabric. The appearance of dark areas below the white layer indicates that Klein used white to cover the black color and adjust its edges in some parts of the painting.





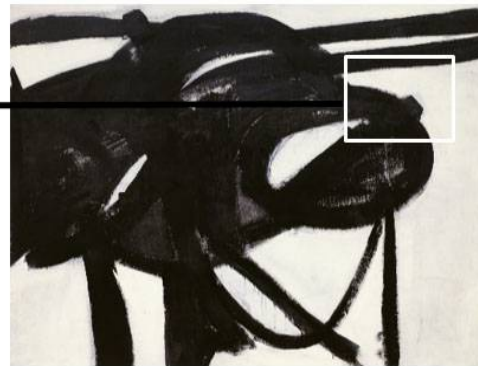
Figure (18) part 1 from the painting figure (17).



Figure (19) Part 2 from the painting figure (17).



Figure (20) Part 3 from the painting figure (17).



By noticing the previous parts, Klein didn't paint in black on a white background, but painted in both black and white with the same importance in his work. The low degree of viscosity of the color is due to the use of home paint in coloring to respond easily to the strength and continuity of brushes. The movement of lines and spontaneity like Scrambling towards the edges of the canvas that is relatively large to transcend it indicate that Klein did not rely on the movement of his hand only during painting but relied on the movement of his arm and body in a tense and continuous rhythm. So, we will about to feel with the inner emotion of Klein and the trembling of his hand recorded by his brushes, as the large size of the canvas has dominated and submerged both the artist and the recipient alike, and it is also clear that the artist's consciousness has merged with his

spontaneity in some stages as the work required a lot of thought, and that appeared when Klein used the white color in some parts to confirm and modify the edges of the lines and areas in black. Despite the use of white and black only, Klein showed different grades for both colors and different textures through brush strokes, density of the color layers, the canvas texture that achieved the irregular rhythm in the hanging textile design.

### 5. Conclusion:

The previous study, considered the hermeneutics' philosophy, its applicability to interpret hanging textiles design, and the stages of evolution of its concept from Schleiermacher, who depended on it to interpret all of the written texts. Wilhelm Dilthey, who made hermeneutics as an approach of interpreting all the arts through living what the

other feels, Heidegger, who saw that art as an expression of the artist immanence. According to Gadamer's view, the concept of hermeneutics has expanded to involve dialogue between the recipient and the artwork as well as understanding and interpretation and that depends on the existence of artworks that raise the dialectic of the recipient and merging him/her into the world of the artwork. Hermeneutic circle, includes a relationship between the whole and the parts, there is a fusion between the horizons, the experience of the artist and the recipient as the recipient begins to interpret the hanging textiles designs in principle, and then begins to get closer to them and contemplate the aesthetics inherent in the details of the parts which make the whole structure in this form of perfection. Besides, re-examines what is probed for the purpose of understanding, to form the final interpretation of the hanging textile as a whole through its parts, reveal what it is referring to, interpret what is ambiguous in its structure, and maybe another recipient depends on this hermeneutics thought, adds to this interpretation his/her own vision and views to reduce the gap between the hanging textile design and the recipients as a whole, and the alienation of the aesthetic awareness of recipients will be overcome.

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