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"Himmel über der Wüste" (The Sheltering Sky) is a 1949 novel by the American author Paul Bowles. The novel, shaped by existentialism, focuses on themes of self-discovery, alienation, and loneliness. Tennessee Williams wrote in 1949 about the book: "It is an allegory of the spiritual adventure of the fully conscious person into modern experience."

Sara Sizer presents us with two blocks of color. One wood block printed portion on the bottom and an upper block which is made up of bands of criss-crossed light blue paint. From this, a photorealistic image of a sandy desert landscape accidentally emerges. This desert landscape, with its black accents in the foreground, is complemented by a green steppe in the middle ground, which also defines the horizon line. Above this, a high, light blue sky can be seen. The proportions of the color fields in the foreground and middle ground roughly correspond to the compositional rule of the Golden Ratio in relation to the sky.

Content-wise, the artwork connects three pictorial metaphors within a fundamentally abstract image. The metaphor of the desert is regarded as the quintessential image of dystopia. By definition, it symbolizes sparse vegetation and animal populations, extreme heat or cold, and very little or no precipitation. A steppe, on the other hand, is an open, treeless grassland traditionally traversed by nomads and associated with livestock and migrating herds. The steppe and its inhabitants are seen as embodying freedom, self-determined, boundless, yet very modest lives. Finally, the light blue sky is an archetypal projection, with particular poignancy when floating over deserts. The word "sky" refers to the air, atmosphere, or space with the sun, moon, and stars above us, and traditionally has been considered the dwelling place of the divine, a common trope for the post-earthly realm. Traditionally, the sky represents a sacred, infinite, and eternal space.

We see a dystopian landscape, connecting three motifs: the desert as a symbol of a human-made dystopia, the steppe as a motif of boundless, modest but self-determined living, and the sky as a motif of a spiritual force, inscribed in the history of civilization and particularly in religion through conceptions of God and promises of salvation. This space is traditionally associated with infinity and eternity. The landscape is not only depicted as a dystopia but it also alludes to possible forms of existence and ultimately to the hope that arises from spirituality and respect for the infinite and eternal. Sizer refers to time—not the short, fast-paced time of daily life, but time as a civilizational phenomenon from the very beginning, presenting an image that humans have viewed with great wonder since they began to consciously perceive their environment.

Sara Sizer, as an artist, was influenced by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Rothko, Brice Marden and Agnes Martin as well as conceptual art and process art happening in America in the 1970's. Sizer's perspective is similar to Martin's, who, although her minimal canvases seem, at first glance, "conceptual", called herself an abstract expressionist never aligning herself with conceptual or minimal art. Martin's paintings were "inspired" and had titles sometimes reflecting emotional states or relationships. When Sizer applies her color medium on the silk surface, it is a purely formal artistic process but after the materials have coalesced, the forms can seem animated and can morph into landscapes or appear as abstracted "figures" which she may then accept or change again. Thus, the realistic appearance is the serendipitous result of a formally abstract process that begins non-objectively but has the potential to become differently understood over time. Remarkably, the overwhelming majority of viewers recognize a desert landscape in the image, despite it fundamentally being a composition of three color fields. We can assume that this phenomenon can extend to people with various cultural backgrounds and levels of education. The majority of people will recognize a desert landscape in the image. But why is this so?

It is an archetypal image that humans, since they became conscious of their world, have made of the world and the sky. This has, essentially, remained unchanged throughout human history. Today, people can observe space largely through telescopes and orbit the Earth in space stations, but the sublime moment of comprehending infinity still remains. Over time, it could be said that its effect has had a comparable influence in diverse cultures worldwide and

continues to do so. Based on Greek mythology, C.G. Jung developed the theory of archetypes in the 1930s. These archetypes are anchored in the collective unconscious. Typically, they correspond to something primordial or prototypical, serving as models or patterns. Archetypes allow us to communicate complex ideas and emotions in ways that are intuitively and universally understandable to most people. In this case, they may lead us to recognize, even though the work consists of three colors on a silk surface, a desert landscape. This reception is fundamentally an expression of a collective human experience, which arises and transcends time, place, and language. Jung would say that an archetype is a kind of primordial mental image that represents something in the human condition and is implicitly shared by all people. Generally, it simply refers to a universal idea, concept, or mental image. But why is this important?

We live in a time of significant human-made transformations, referred to as the Anthropocene. This term describes a new geological era in which humanity has the dominant geophysical influence on the Earth's system, and correspondingly, the responsibility for the planet's future. While our civilizational ancestors had to adapt to the planet's forces and changes, humanity today faces changes and societal forces that it has set in motion itself. This reminds one of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797), with the lines "The spirits I called, / I cannot get rid of them," which serve as a paradigm for the human-initiated process of transformation. Similarly, with the Anthropocene—the process set in motion by humanity in modern times—it is a process that can no longer be stopped. Climate change is human-made and not only alters the vegetation of the Earth's surface but also triggers desertification and processes that devastate once-vegetated and fertile lands. What is remarkable here is the cognitive dissonance between the recognition that these changes are human-made but somehow, that the individual is not responsible. Even in the case of floods and storms, terms like "century storm" or "100 year flood" are used to refer to the singularity of each event. The responsibility of the individual for these changes is not recognized, and thus, little or no action is taken. How can we overcome this cognitive dissonance? We need images that bring these processes into focus and raise awareness of their temporal and civilizational dimensions. We need images that are familiar and not entirely new but deeply embedded in the human consciousness—images like those of Sara Sizer, which illustrate these transformational processes. Desertification is not a new phenomenon. We see its results in the Middle East or North Africa, especially in the Sahel region. We need to understand that we are in the midst of this process, and we, as humans, are the driving force behind them. The result are landscapes where any future civilization is impossible. This is why images like this are important and thought-provoking because they show us, exemplarily, the existential threat to civilization.

Paul Bowles himself says about his aforementioned novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, that for him, the desert is the main protagonist. However, for Sara Sizer, it is always the human being who is the central protagonist in her art.

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