Umbrella Beach

A long painting, in four horizontal sections: a busy Turkish beach, the sea, a Turkish city across the water, and the sky.

You're immediately struck by the beach — umbrellas everywhere. Not the beautiful, empty beach you would expect to be depicted in a painting. No sand; just umbrellas, and underneath, beach chairs, people. Swimmers out in the water, floats in the water, and boats yet further out. But again, no sand on the beach. And yet it's a beach. A highly densely populated beach, with these umbrellas up like domes, or let down and taking on a conical or pyramidal shape. A beach like a city. A city of umbrellas. We examine.

Instead of sand, the ground is a perfect green, like a putting green on a golf course. Too perfect, we astute viewers think. This must be fake grass. The kind found on a diving dock to keep barefoot people from slipping. Squares of fake grass, overlapping each other, forming a carpet that covers the entire length and width of whatever is under it — a wooden platform perhaps, certainly not sand. But this green base only shows in spots, in slivers. What we mostly see are the tops of umbrellas. Blue and white striped umbrellas. Brown and orange and yellow and white striped umbrellas. One next to the other. We hardly see anything underneath. We get glances here and there, of empty chaise folding lounge-chairs, or of shirtless men, or of women in full body hijabs resting in the shade, but mostly we just see the tops of umbrellas. No sunbathers, now that we think about it. For the women in the full body hijabs, it's against their religion. For the less conservative Muslim women, those in bathing suits, it's more fashionable to be pale.

Our eyes are led across the water, where children play on inflatable docks with inflatable ladders, and some with inflatable slides. The water is

crowded. The inflatable docks, not so much, perhaps too hot to stand on with bare feet, even for a second.

Beyond the swimmers is a floating lane line designating the end of the swimming area. Beyond the swimming area are boats of all shapes and sizes. But all motorboats. No sailboats. Motorboats of all shapes and sizes.

And then, we have the skyline across the sea. Brown and red. A dustiness. Towers and mosques. A cityscape that extends from end to end of this long, carefully detailed painting. The tops of the mosques mirror the tops of the umbrellas in the foreground. The skyscrapers mirror the umbrellas that have been let down, especially those closest to us. (The closest of which dominates the foreground like the tree in Van Gogh's "The Starry Night"). The beach is the city, and the city is the beach — not a reflection, but a refraction over water. One is a model for the other. Mosques like beach umbrellas like palm trees. Skyscrapers like the common sword that both defended and sacked old Constantinople. Like an umbrella pole planted in the ground, minus the umbrella. Like the trunk of any tree.