

THOSE WHO SHAPED TURKISH PAINTING I

Editörs

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PREFACE

Turkish painting has developed a rich and multilayered visual culture through the interaction of diverse artistic approaches, aesthetic orientations, and individual styles over the course of its development from the modernization process that gained momentum in the late Ottoman period to the present day. This is not merely a history of works, movements, and technical pursuits; it is also a history of artists' relationships with their times, the education they received, the intellectual positions they developed, and the legacy they left to subsequent generations. Examining artists' lives and practices through scholarly methods is therefore one of the principal means of understanding the continuities, transformations, and distinctive dynamics of Turkish art history.

Those Who Shaped Turkish Painting I has been prepared as the first volume of an academic series that examines, from a holistic perspective, the artists who played a defining role in the formation and development of Turkish painting. Each volume considers a selected artist's biography, artistic education, creative development, stylistic characteristics, major works, and contributions to Turkish art within their historical, aesthetic, and cultural contexts. The series thus seeks not merely to present biographical portraits, but to clarify the place of each artist's work within its own period and within the broader trajectory of Turkish painting.

Artist monographs do more than record an individual life and body of work; they render visible the intellectual and aesthetic accumulation that shapes a society's cultural memory. The environment in which an artist was formed, the education they received, the social and political conditions they encountered, and the aesthetic position they adopted cannot be separated from the world of meaning embodied in their work. The studies included in this series therefore approach the artist not in isolation, but as part of the historical and cultural network within which artistic production takes place. Grounded in current scholarship and art-historical research methods, this approach offers a reliable point of reference for researchers, academics, graduate students, art educators, museum professionals, curators, collectors, and readers interested in art history.

The preservation of cultural heritage is not limited to safeguarding the physical existence of works of art. Documenting, interpreting, critically reassessing, and transmitting that heritage to future generations are equally part of this responsibility. Recording the lives and practices of the artists who shaped Turkish painting will help address overlooked areas of our art history while also making this artistic legacy more visible nationally and internationally.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the researchers who contributed to this volume; to the artists and artists' families who shared information, documents, and images; and to the institutions, archives, museums, libraries, and collectors who supported its preparation. We hope that this series will become a lasting reference work that not only preserves the past but also opens it to renewed reflection.

Editors

Prof. Dr. Fahrettin GEÇEN

Assoc. Prof. Tuğba GÜNGÖR

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We would like to thank Lecturer Ümit PARSIL for his contributions.

CHAPTER 1

BLUE PAINTER ORHAN ZAFER AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO TURKISH PAINTING

Banu DAVUN¹

ABSTRACT

Orhan Zafer is a contemporary Turkish artist recognized for his multidisciplinary practice as a painter, photographer, and cartoonist. He received his degree in Art Education from the Department of Art Education, Faculty of Education, Ondokuz Mayıs University. Throughout his career, he has combined artistic practice with art education, making significant contributions to both fields. He served as a senior art educator and Head of the Painting Department at Ordu Fine Arts High School and concurrently chaired the Art Council of the Ordu Art Center (ORSEV). Following his retirement, he settled in Yalova, Türkiye, where he continues to pursue his artistic practice.

The natural, cultural, and social characteristics of the Black Sea region constitute the primary sources of inspiration in Zafer's artistic practice. Drawing particularly on the deep blue hues of the Black Sea, the artist has become widely known by the epithet **"The Blue Painter"** due to his distinctive and expressive use of blue. In his paintings, blue functions not merely as an aesthetic preference but as a powerful visual language symbolizing emotion, freedom, determination, dynamism, and the ever-changing spirit of nature. Serene landscapes, figurative compositions, and symbolic narratives form the essential components of his distinctive artistic style.

Zafer's paintings integrate poetic sensibility with aesthetic depth. Influenced by his extensive experience in watercolor painting, he creates expansive pictorial spaces characterized by atmospheric depth, subtle color transitions,

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- Additional information and biographical data were obtained directly from the artist.

CHAPTER 2

IN SOYLU'S ART, THE BADI'IYYAT'S LAYERS OF MYSTICAL AURA

Arif Esen BAYKURT¹

ABSTRACT

Light is the essence because it allows us to see colors. In the picture, there is a reflection of the human inner world. I create 'mystical impressions'; I interpret art and aesthetics in my spiritual world through colors. I am an abstract painter and colorist; however, I also reflect our cultural values in my works. Occasionally, I include calligraphy like the beautiful names of Allah, sometimes the Kaaba, and sometimes people performing Tawaf in my compositions. In fact, some of my works feature a depiction of the Kaaba in outer space, with angel figures seemingly dancing around it. Because I don't explicitly define these elements, they are invisible from the outside, which makes me an abstract painter. "Sometimes I create monochrome (single-color) works, and sometimes I use the eye's ability to distinguish hundreds of colors to find different tones and transfer them to the canvas, trying to realize my own spiritual expression," says Rasim Soylu (Baltacı, 2024).

INTRODUCTION

Art is defined as the expression of feelings and thoughts with esthetic pleasure and attitude. Concepts such as recognizing, perceiving, feeling, and loving beauty and delicacy constitute the content of esthetics and art. Therefore, art is a universal language that conveys the artist's message to their audience in the most beautiful way. An artist is a person who carries concepts such as es-

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Figure 26. From the Witnesses of Victory series

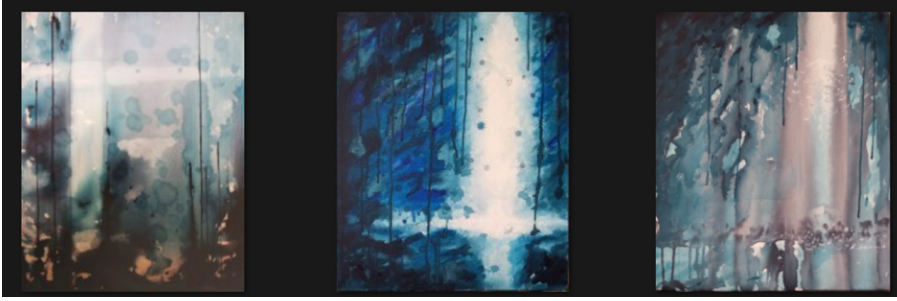


Figure 27. His latest works, 50x60 cm. 2025.

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CHAPTER 3

INTERPRETING ÖZLEM GÖK'S ART USING THE MAGNETIC FIELD METHOD

*Tuncay Murat ATAL*¹

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary art production, the aesthetic experience is not limited to the formal organization of the art object. Contemporary art practice creates a multilayered fictional universe that engages the viewer's memory, bodily experience, cultural layers, and unconscious associations. For this reason, evaluating contemporary artwork solely within the framework of art historical chronology may prove insufficient in fully elucidating the aesthetic space the work establishes. Particularly in contemporary art practices that are shaped around the issues of trauma, the body, memory, fragility, and identity, the viewer's mode of perception becomes an essential component of the work's semantic field.

This study aims to apply the Magnetic Field Method -developed by Beliz Güçbilmez (2023), a contemporary thinker and colleague of the vegan contemporary artist Özlem Gök- to Gök's art. The Magnetic Field Method was developed as a practice of creative literacy aimed at analyzing fiction; it proposes an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to make the workings of the fictional universe visible through the concepts of core, element, metaphor, and magnetic field.

The central argument of this article is that Özlem Gök's art is not merely a space of visual representation; but also a dynamic fictional universe that acti-

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- Image 2:** From the artist's personal archive. Courtesy of the artist.
- Image 3:** From the artist's personal archive. Courtesy of the artist.
- Image 4:** From the artist's personal archive. Courtesy of the artist.
- Image 5:** From the artist's personal archive. Courtesy of the artist.
- Image 6:** <https://guzelsanat.erciyes.edu.tr/tr/haber-detay/doc-ozlem-gok-3-festival-de-la-tierra-da-yer-aldi?shem=rimspswouoe> (Accessed on: 06/07/2026)

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES IN THE PAINTINGS OF ŞÜKRAN PEKMEZCI

Seyhan MERCAN KALAYCI ¹

Bilge ŞENGÜL ²

Tahir ÇELIKBAĞ ³

INTRODUCTION

Art is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of human history. Discussions about what art is and how it can be understood have been among the important issues occupying people's minds (along with religion, God, and similar topics) throughout history (Balkır, 2020). Art emerges as one of the ways in which humankind expresses itself through imagination and life experiences since its existence. According to Kant, art has no purpose other than itself. Its only purpose is itself (Kargın, 2024). Art is the embodiment of a feeling or thought in its most beautiful and aesthetic form in a visual-auditory medium. It is known that artworks reflecting both similar and different aspects of art have existed in civilizations throughout history. Art varies according to societies' lifestyles, geographical locations, beliefs, outlooks on life, and forms of government. Artists embrace the works they create, infusing them with their emotions and outlook on life. In order to sustain their existence, artists express their creativity, establishing a relationship between art and the artist. They see and hear what other people cannot see or hear, and reflect this in their works. Creativity is an important phenomenon for artists.

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The artist is an important figure who assimilates Turkish culture, bases her paintings on traces of the past and mythological allusions, and translates contemporary social events into the language of painting. In this respect, her works stand out as a synthesis that brings together both traditional and contemporary tendencies. One of the most intriguing aspects of the mystical and aesthetic narrative in her works is the creation of mystical meanings through color contrasts, light and dark values, and the opposition of light and darkness. This approach allows viewers to connect deeply with the works.

She depicts social scenes with a documentary approach, remaining true to their essence. While reflecting the geography she lives in and traditional architecture, the artist visualizes her artistic style with a poetic approach. The main themes she addresses while depicting traces of the past and contemporary social phenomena include weddings, mourning, and child marriage. She has also drawn on subjects such as the sacred tree and rituals, as well as contemporary issues like the pandemic. The connection between figurative elements and nature, sometimes creating contrast and sometimes unity, forms the basis of the composition in her paintings.

While reflecting individual emotions and collective feelings over time with social sensitivity, her works present the expressions of the figures in a simple yet evocative manner. In her paintings, happy moments such as ceremonies and weddings stand side by side with contrasting themes that reflect mourning and social solidarity, offering viewers a wide range of emotions.

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CHAPTER5

THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF THE CAUCASUS IN THE HORSE FIGURE OF EROL YILDIR

*İlyas SEVİNDİK*¹

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, art has served as a universal form of expression that re-shapes and gives meaning to human experience through a visual language. Basic values such as plastic and aesthetics values play important functions in the formation of emotional, psychological and narrative layers as well as the formal components of the composition. Through these elements, visual arts express the complex geographies of individual and collective memory as well as of the inner worlds, thus establishing a deep interaction between the viewer and the artist. The renewed importance of figurative painting, especially in modern and contemporary periods, has enabled individual and social narratives to become visible on the canvas. In this context, Erol Yıldır's figurative paintings convey historical and psychological narratives onto the canvas through plastic and aesthetic values. One of the most prominent elements that draws attention in the artist's long-term works is the central role of the horse figure. The horse, which is a symbol of movement, freedom, and the inner bond between nature and human, also opens up a metaphorical space for strength, endurance, and the cyclicity of time. Similarly, architectural elements specific to the region, especially the depiction of historical towers in painting, embody this continuity in a spatial dimension. While Erol Yıldır brings together individual experience with universal themes, he reconstructs the visual language of the Caucasus with artistic elements centered on the horse figure. Color palette choices, the spatial and emotional use of shadow and the arrangement of figures lead the

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around the horse figure, goes beyond a mere figurative choice and becomes a representation of a historical, geographical and cultural narrative. The dynamic forms of the horses, combined with the expansive and free spatial fictions unique to the Caucasian landscape, draw the viewer into both an aesthetic experience and a multilayered narrative imbued with inner and historical connotations. While the defensive architectural elements prominent in Yıldır's compositions symbolically reveal the region's collective resistance and struggle for existence, the endurance of these structures against time aligns with art's desire for permanence. The contrast between the towers's structural rigidity and the horses' organic dynamism demonstrates that the artist's fiction is conceptually constructed as well as formally refined. This original fiction makes Yıldır's art a pioneering example of the cultural intersection between Anatolian and Caucasian geographies within contemporary art terminology.

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CHAPTER 6

PROF. EMİN BARIN AS A MULTIFACETED ARTIS

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INTRODUCTION

Prof. Emin Barin, one of the prominent artists raised during the Republican era, is regarded as one of the most significant figures in Turkish art history for successfully synthesizing tradition and modernity within a unified artistic framework. Through his works particularly in the fields of calligraphy, book-binding, and graphic design, he acquired not only the identity of an artist but also that of a cultural transmitter. Integrating the aesthetic heritage of the past with contemporary interpretations, Barin made substantial contributions to the revaluation and revitalization of the artistic tradition extending from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic in modern Türkiye.

Having pursued academic work at the university for many years, Emin Barin left a lasting imprint on the development of Turkish art through both the students he trained and the works he produced. His approach to calligraphy—treating it not merely as a traditional art form but as an integral component of modern design—enabled him to establish a distinctive position within the art world. His oeuvre, ranging from book cover designs to typographic compositions, is notable not only for its aesthetic sensibility but also for its cultural depth.

Today, the works of Emin Barin are regarded as significant examples of the strong connection he established between the traditional roots of Turkish art and contemporary modes of expression. His artistic approach not only shaped

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and Savaş Çevik—carried his artistic vision into different domains, thereby establishing an influential school within Turkish graphic and calligraphic art. This situation demonstrates that Barın’s art was not limited to individual production alone but also functioned as a form of artistic “school” with a lasting pedagogical impact..

In addition, one of the most significant contributions of Emin Barın lies in his ability to integrate traditional Turkish-Islamic arts with modern design disciplines, thereby developing an aesthetic language compatible with an international artistic context. His work with the Latin alphabet—particularly his interpretations of Latin Kufic and Latin Ma’kılı—enabled writing to be reimagined as a universal visual form. This approach can be regarded as a distinctive turning point in the history of Turkish graphic design.

In conclusion, the art of Emin Barın constitutes a concrete example of a balanced aesthetic approach established between tradition and modernity. His works should be regarded in Turkish art history not merely as products of a transitional period, but also as a lasting aesthetic paradigm. The artistic vision he developed continues to influence contemporary practices in graphic design, typography, and calligraphy, maintaining its relevance as one of the most compelling examples of the relationship between cultural continuity and innovation.

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CHAPTER 7

LINES, PLANES, AND FREEDOM: MACHINE AESTHETICS IN THE ART OF ÇETİN EROKA

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INTRODUCTION

The history of modern Turkish painting is often narrated through successive stylistic shifts, beginning with late Ottoman realism, moving through the Republican synthesis of figurative modernism, and culminating in the abstraction of the mid-20th century. The 1950s marked a decisive moment for abstract tendencies (Öndin, 2020, p. 88), while the post-2000 era introduced new dynamics that reshaped this legacy. This later period was influenced not only by the impact of neoliberal cultural policies, which increased the role of private capital in the arts (Sülün, 2020, p. 458), but also by growing ideological conflicts. These conflicts occasionally produced hostility toward art, expressed through censorship and public controversy surrounding artworks (Yaldızkum, 2019, p. 11). By contrast, the earlier decades were marked by debates on the abstract–concrete dichotomy (Özsezgin, 1968, as cited in Yasa-Yaman, 2012, p. 65) and by the state-led modernization project of the Republican era, which was dramatically disrupted by the 1960 military coup, a turning point that reconfigured the relationship between culture, politics, and modernity (Smith, 2022, p. 15).

Within this complex trajectory, abstraction developed in multiple directions: gestural, lyrical, and geometric. Abstract art evolved within a sociopolitical landscape where artists navigated the tensions between local traditions and global influences to shape a uniquely Turkish modernism (Tansuğ, 1986,

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Within the Turkish context, Erokay stands as one of the most disciplined practitioners of geometric abstraction, distinguished by his integration of symbolic motifs and cultural memory into a language often associated with universalism and detachment. In the global context, his works resonate with the structural clarity of Mondrian, the precision of Max Bill, and the optical systems of Vasarely, yet he redefines these legacies by infusing them with local references and existential metaphors. Through this dual orientation, he bridges the gap between local memory and global modernism, between rational structure and poetic resonance.

Erokay's contribution, therefore, lies not only in his individual works but also in the example he offers for rethinking abstraction as a global language. His art challenges the boundaries of modernism by demonstrating that geometry can carry the weight of cultural heritage, that abstraction can host existential reflection, and that modernism, far from being a purely Western narrative, can be enriched by voices from different geographies.

In conclusion, Çetin Erokay should be recognized as a pivotal figure who expanded the possibilities of geometric abstraction. His *Geo Art* is not simply a style but a philosophy—an aesthetic of balance, rhythm, and symbolic resonance. Through it, he constructed a visual world that is both disciplined and contemplative, local and universal. Erokay's synthesis of machine aesthetics and cultural symbolism exemplifies how artists of his generation negotiated postwar ideologies of economic development within the realm of modern art (Smith, 2022, p. 15); his practice can thus be read not only as a stylistic choice but as a profound response to the era's metrics of modernity. His work ensures that Turkish modernism, and the broader global history of abstraction, cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the depth and originality of this contribution.

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CHAPTER 8

NATURE, FIGURE AND MEMORY IN THE ART OF FATİH BAŞBUĞ IN THE CONTEXT OF VISUAL COMMUNICATIO

Tuğba GÜNGÖR¹

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Turkish painting, Prof. Dr. Fatih Başbuğ, who builds a dynamic bridge between his academic identity and his artistic production, stands out for establishing a profound visual communication language that extends beyond aesthetic concerns in his works. Başbuğ integrates the intellectual foundations nourished by his academic background and observational power with the productivity he demonstrates in his artistic practice. He constructs his composition on the painting surface based on a conscious narrative system. This approach transforms the narrative language of the composition into a communication tool that transcends aesthetic boundaries and creates a multi-layered pattern of meaning. Başbuğ occupies an important position among the original artists in contemporary Turkish painting who approach figures and nature in line with memory-focused composition. The artist's approach to figures and nature is based on individual memory shaped by personal experience and observation. This individual memory expands by connecting with elements of collective memory found in the historical past of Turkish culture. In this respect, the artist's thematic field takes on a multifaceted structure, ranging from everyday life to historical events, from symbols that form cultural identity to social emotional states. In his figurative compositions, he emphasizes the personal emotional states, social position and cultural identity of human beings, while in his depictions of nature, he reaches the spatial and emotional

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CHAPTER 9

A SILENT NARRATOR IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH ART: MAHMUT KARATOPRAK

Aygül AYKUT¹

INTRODUCTION

When we encounter Mahmut Karatoprak's paintings, the first thing that strikes us is tranquility. The warm surface of the wood, controlled colour fields, female figures that carry anatomy without shouting, and here and there the vibration of old Turkish writings... The surface appears to open without haste, but beneath this tranquility, a much more tense line is at work: the pressure of memory, the historical weight placed on the female body, the fragile gestures of daily life, and a subtle humor that seeps through all of this.

Karatoprak's practice is situated on the tense line between the "old" and the "new" in figurative painting in Turkey, drawing on historical iconography while reconstructing it with contemporary sensitivity. In her retrospective exhibitions – such as "Orange Season," "The Curl of Light Was Broken," "Secret," and "Broken Hawthorn" – the female figures depicted on wooden surfaces combine the language of contemporary iconography with the silent stories of Anatolian women.

In this section, I examine Mahmut Karatoprak's artworks within both a biographical/autobiographical context and a historical and conceptual framework. Then, by conducting detailed analyses of selected works, I propose a theoretical framework that interprets the relationship between figure, memory, and material. The language of the text builds particularly on the tone and conceptual structure of the exhibition texts I have written previously; there-

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This map traces not only the artist's own life, but also what it means to be a woman in this geography, the forms of daily relationships with ordinary objects, and the emotions that oscillate between the past and the future.

Karatoprak's work can be summarised in the following sentence: "Silent witnesses of the past, today they not only tell the story of the past but also offer clues about how the future can be built with sensitivity." Therefore, I didn't want the section dedicated to Mahmut Karatoprak in this book to be just a biography or an exhibition list. In this text, I have attempted to unpack the layers of his art and to concretize my own way of reading art, centered on the concepts of memory, figure, and ethical distance.

Karatoprak's wooden women will likely remain silent from now on. Still, as long as we continue to listen to the polyphonic memory within their silence, that silence will stand exactly where it should be: at the heart of art.

FIGURE REFERENCES

Personal Access

CHAPTER 10

THE ONTOLOGY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE WORKS OF İLYAS SEVİNDİ

Ümit DİKMEN¹

INTRODUCTION

This study examines how İlyas Sevindik synthesises his perspective on art with both traditional and modern artistic approaches, and how he conveys the ontological traces of cultural memory in his works. Drawing inspiration from Anatolia's rich heritage, the artist has created a shift in expression from realism towards abstraction by combining local elements with a universal aesthetic form. The artist's works are not merely visual artefacts; they depict a symbolic universe in which Turkish miniature art, Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman architectural forms, and the Mevlevi Order interact with one another. In particular, concepts such as 'nothingness', 'spiritual ascension' and 'cultural belonging' form the central themes of the compositions he designs in his works.

This article analyses the formal interpretations in the artist's works, examining both the transformation of architectural elements into geometric abstract forms and the processes by which figurative forms are rendered using a gestural approach. Furthermore, using his work on the theme of Sarıkamış as a case study, the article aims to reveal how the tragedy and collective memory are interpreted through an artistic discipline, how cultural codes inherited from the past have evolved within today's understanding of contemporary art, and the ontological relationship created between the local and the modern.

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- Figure 3:** The image was provided by the artist themselves
- Figure 4:** The image was provided by the artist themselves
- Figure 5:** The image was provided by the artist themselves
- Figure 6:** The image was provided by the artist themselves
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