

ANKARAD, 2020; 1(2): 481-501	ankaradergisi06@gmail.com
e-ISSN: 2717-9052	DOI:

A SAMPLE OF CULTURAL INTERACTION IN THE AGE OF MODERNISM: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE DOBRUJA TURK IN ROMANIAN PAINTING

Atanas KARACOBAN* - Dalila OZBAY**

Abstract: The present study attempts to bring to light an artistic experience almost unknown to the larger public, which is the representation of the Turkish people of Dobruja in the Romanian painting of the first half of the twentieth century, which is the period of modernism in art promoting freedom of artistic expression, innovation and experimentation. Among the origins of modernism, of primary importance stand the principles of romanticism, aestheticism, symbolism, and particularly in the case of painting, Impressionism, and the entire late nineteenth-century artistic reaction against realism and tradition. Along with these predecessors, in the case of Romanian artists, the rediscovery of Dobruca was another factor providing new concerns and perspectives in painting. The authors of this study are therefore also conscious of the influence of the Turkish community from Dobruja on the development of Romanian painting in the new context of territorial changes after the second Balkan War, the emphasis on which being another aim of the present study.

Key words: Art, Painting, Modernism, Impressionism, Dobruja.

MODERNİZM ÇAĞINDA KÜLTÜREL ETKİLEŞİMİN BİR ÖRNEĞİ: ROMANYA RESMİNDE DOBRUCA TÜRK'ÜNÜN BİR TASVİRİ

Öz: Bu çalışma, halkın çoğunluğu tarafından bilinmeyen bir sanatsal deneyime; sanatsal dışavurum, yenilik ve deneyselliği destekleyen, sanatta bir modernleşme çağı olan yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısındaki Romen resmindeki Dobrucalı Türklerin resmedilmesine

* Öğr. Gör., Gazi Üniversitesi, Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi, Ankara, Türkiye, akaracoban@gazi.edu.tr / Lecture, Gazi University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Ankara, Turkey, akaracoban@gazi.edu.tr.

** Doç. Dr., Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Güzel Sanatlar, Tasarım ve Mimarlık Fakültesi, Resim Bölümü, Tekirdağ, Türkiye, dozbay@nku.edu.tr / Assoc. Prof. Dr., Namik Kemal University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Painting, Tekirdag, Turkey, dozbay@nku.edu.tr.

ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Öncelikli olarak romantizmin prensipleri, estetisizm, sembolizm ve özellikle resim alanında Empresyonizm ve gerçekçilik ve gelenekselliğe karşı çıkan bütün geç on dokuzuncu yüzyıl sanatsal tepkileri Modernizm'in kökenleri arasında görülebilir. Bütün bu öncüllerin yanı sıra, Dobruca'nın yeniden keşfi Romen ressamların resimlerinde, resme yeni konular ve perspektifler getiren diğer bir faktör olmuştur. Bundan dolayı, bu çalışmanın yazarları İkinci Balkan Savaşı'ndan sonra oluşan sınır değişiklikleri kapsamında Dobruca'da kalan Türk halkının Romen resim sanatının gelişmesine yaptığı etkinin bilincindedir, ki söz konusu etmen bu çalışmanın diğer hedeflerinden biridir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sanat, resim, Modernizm, Empresyonizm, Dobruca.

Introduction

Modernism in art manifested in the first half of the twentieth century in music, visual arts, and literature (more precisely, it started at the beginning of the World War I and finished as a regular period in the early 1930s). Modernism was an international movement in art in general, a complex artistic manifestation and a period. The term “movement” is, actually, inappropriate since modernism is not a unified movement or trend but includes a number of different, and in some respects even contradictory, trends, movements, doctrines, and styles. Modernism is a quickly moving succession of artistic events and an agglomeration of ideas, theories and often conflicting interpretations concerning the human condition and the means of artistic expression. It is thus more appropriate to use “modernism” as a generic term to be applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde artistic and intellectual trends of the first half of the twentieth century, which, although different and often contradictory in matters of concern and technique, are unified by certain common aspects.

The artists, including painters, of Romania, who excelled in the first half of the twentieth century, came under the influence of modernism as well as of some of the major late nineteenth-century predecessors of modernism, among which impressionism.

The present study, however, focuses primarily on the rediscovery of Dobruja by the Romanian painters following its territorial annexation after second Balkan War; in particular, these painters manifested a great interest in the life of the Turkish minority.

In this respect, in the following we shall reveal the ways in which the Turkish people of Dobruja received their artistic expression in the art of painting

and consequently became another important factor of influence on Romanian art of that period.

Modernism in Art

After romanticism, “symbolism, impressionism, aestheticism, and decadence are regarded as the strongest reactions against the principles of realism and naturalism, and as influencing the rise of modernism directly”.¹ Romanticism, symbolism, impressionism, aestheticism, and decadence are among the main late nineteenth century precursors of modernism, although in the years following World War I “it became customary to see classicism and Romanticism as two radically different philosophies of life, and to place modernism on the side of the anti-Romantic”.² A more trenchant opinion, that of Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle* (1931), considers symbolism to be a development out of Romanticism and that “the literary history of our time is to a great extent that of the development of symbolism and its fusion or conflict with naturalism”.³

This opinion has been very popular, other critics maintaining that symbolism follows “the Romantics in their devotion to the imagination”⁴ and contains “within itself a shift from a Romantic to a modernly ironic aesthetic”.⁵ Symbolism developed in its turn into a more complex range of experimental and innovative trends and movements (surrealism, Dadaism, cubism, stream of consciousness novel, and so on) which are assembled and assigned together as “Modernism”. A major impact was provided by the new developments in philosophy and psychology which challenged the traditional values and views, and especially

Man's understanding of himself was changing. Anthropology was probing the primitive roots of religion: James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* appeared in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915. Philosophers like Nietzsche and Bergson had already emphasised the importance of instinct rather than reason. Psychologists like Freud and Jung were showing the power and significance of the unconscious.⁶

The rise of modernism was thus influenced by contemporary, early twentieth-century developments in philosophy, psychology and anthropology. In 1900 Freud published *Interpretation of Dreams*, and, in 1901, *The*

¹ Golban, 2019, p. 61.

² Hartman, 1993, p. 50.

³ Wilson, 1953, p. 25.

⁴ Faulkner, 1977, p. 11

⁵ Scott, 1991, p. 206.

⁶ Faulkner, 1977, p. 14.

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Psychopathology of Everyday Life; in 1905 Einstein published his *Special Theory of Relativity*, showing that there is no absolute truth, only relative truths; Edmund Husserl was preparing a revelation in philosophy, involving new considerations for the relation between the mind and phenomena, and Bertrand Russell prepared another in the field of logic. Changes were produced also in visual arts – the introduction of Cubism in 1907, for example—and in music. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* was published in 1909; in 1916, with the war at its most terrible stage, the Romanian Tristan Tzara and others in neutral Switzerland founded the movement "Dada", radical and influential, denying knowledge, morality, progress, logic, and past, and which manifested itself especially in poetry.

The rise of modernism was also influenced by the contemporary changes in the social and cultural background. Among them, the entire range of social and political attitudes sustained by the irrationalism of the World War I, the Russian Revolution, the rise of communism and the different versions of Socialism, the stronger than before feminist movements, the Great Depression, the rise of Fascism, and the threats of another world war. These aspects of the first half of the twentieth century rendered a period of crisis in the history of humanity and helped to radicalise a generation of writers who fused political radicalism and utopianism, moved to "the Left" and came to be known as exponents of modernist Marxism, such as Berthold Brecht, W. H. Auden, Andre Breton, Luis Aragon, and others. They opposed the modernists of "the Right", such as Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, and T. S. Eliot, who rejected mass popular culture from a conservative position and supported an elite culture that excluded the majority of the population.

One of the most visible changes of the first half of the twentieth century was the adoption of objects of modern production into daily life, particularly the telephone, photography, cars, and electricity. What were just occurrences in the 1880s became now parts of actual life, common aspects of daily existence, which came to answer the need for communication and which needed to be worked with and continuously developed. Modernism, influenced by the social, political and cultural experiences of its period, became a factor leading to new social organization, new forms of private and public life. In this respect, modernism produced inquiries into sex, infantile sexuality, and family bonds; modernism reshaped exhibitions, theatre, cinema, books, architecture, music, strengthening the public view that the world was changing. The life and conceptions of public changed as well, showing, in particular during the "Jazz Age" of the 1920s, considerable enthusiasm for the automobile, telephone, cinematography, air travel, and other technological advances. Many modernists embraced the new

technological discoveries similar to those who embraced the new political attitudes of the period. The modernists who were involved in design and architecture believed that the new technology rendered old styles, inherited from all the previous periods, obsolete, and that the new design of houses and furniture should answer to the requirements of the new consumer culture that developed in Europe and America at the turn of the century. Modernist architects and designers rejected the decorative motifs in design, preferring to emphasise the materials used and the pure geometrical forms. They emphasised simplicity and clarity of form, the open-plan interiors, and made the skyscraper the archetypal modernist building. Modernism is thus to be regarded in relation to the major social, political, and technological changes of the period, which were embraced by the modernists, in particular by those representing the so-called “consumer modernism”.

Modernism “entails first of all an intellectual and cultural set of movements, and many modernists, especially in literature and visual arts, are less pragmatic than focused on their own art, seeking to make their art more vivid and more difficult and force the audience to exercise at full the intellectual abilities”.⁷ These modernists are less interested in the social, political, and technological changes of the period, and represent the so-called “High Modernism”. The exponents of High Modernism react against the consumer culture (popular music, Hollywood film industry, advertising, etc.) which they see as commercial and materialistic, as “kitsch” with no difficult features and aimed simply at having maximum appeal. These modernists emphasise the psychological and the spiritual, and believe that by rejecting the depiction of material objects they help art move from a materialistic to a spiritualist phase of development. Also, many high modernists do not see themselves as part of a revolutionary culture, including the political field, and reject politics along with the artistic conventions. These modernists claim to be apolitical and believe that a revolution of consciousness has greater importance than a change in political structures.

The contrary to modernism aspect in the process of development of literature and other arts is the realistic and socially concerned type, both modernism and realism being parts of the distinction made between innovation and tradition, experimental and conservative, modern and contemporary. Modernism is distinguished from realism, in opposition to which the characteristics of modernism emerge clearer.

A painter like Picasso and Matisse or a writer like Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot is considered to be an exponent of modernism if this writer or painter is characterised by aesthetic concentration, creative intensity, imaginative

⁷ Golban, 2013, p. 408.

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freedom, emphasis on individual, namely psychological, experience, and the concern with psychological issues, the private consciousness and sensibility. The modernist is also characterised by the indifference to the objective actual reality of the present period or recent past and the inclination towards remote past, lack of social concern, and the attempt to develop new means of artistic expression and to explore new fields of human experience. An example for the new means of artistic expression would be the use of geometry in painting, or the interior monologue and the stream of consciousness technique in fiction.

Many modernists believe that by rejecting tradition and the rules they could discover radically new ways of making art. In music, for instance, Arnold Schoenberg rejects the traditional tonal harmony and the hierarchical system of organizing works of music, and discovers a wholly new way of organizing sound by the so-called "twelve-tone technique" based on the use of twelve-note rows. In painting, the abstract artists Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, taking as their examples the impressionists, reject the depiction of the natural world, proclaim colour and shape as the essential characteristics of art, and attempt to redefine art as the arrangement of pure colour.

The new theories stimulate the artists' interest in discovering new methods to show the fact that the human perception of actual phenomena is not reliable, which, among other things, questions the traditional concept of human self-control and self-responsibility, and recognises the imperfectability of the human being. In the discourse of the imaginative prose, for example, this perspective determines important changes in the character representation strategies. Rejecting the nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions in art, modernism embraces and at the same time confronts the changes of its contemporary period, the new economic, social and political aspects of an emerging fully industrialized world. These two aspects of acceptance and rejection give the consumer and high versions of the modernist culture. But the prevalence of the industrialised and consumer culture, as well as the social, political, and economic issues which became more stringent and critical by the early 1930s, led to the disappearance of the strict distinction between consumer and high versions of modernism. In its turn, the merging of elite modernist and mass consumerist culture led to a radical transformation of the meaning of modernism. Also, the economic and political problems turning into a period of crisis in the 1930s and the 1940s led to the weakening of modernism and determined the revival of traditional, realistic, and socially concerned art.

The Image of the Dobruja Turks in the Romanian Painting of the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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The representation of the Turkish people in Romanian art has a long tradition, of more than 500 years, given the political, military, social, economic, and cultural ties between the Romanian states and the Ottoman Empire. An example would be the Romanian mural painting, particularly covering the walls of various monasteries, which discloses the need of the Romanians to reflect historical and social movement of the epoch.



Voroneț

Coming closer to a more recent period – the first half of the twentieth century – it is to emphasize the changes which occurred in Romanian diachronic advancement of the arts, since most of the artists would study in Europe and consequently become influenced by the innovative tendencies of the period. Among them, Impressionism, a school of painting focused on work done en plein air and aimed at demonstrating that human beings do not see objects but light itself. Impressionism attempted to achieve a projection of the artist's immediate perceptions, to render the subtle evocation of atmosphere and the pure sensation, perceiving reality as a subjective projection of feelings and impressions.

Impression means the very instance of aesthetic representation and represents the highest form of truth, which “makes it a species of metaphor – a style of figuration that would reproduce the inchoate feelings that

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Impressionism locates between sensing and thinking”, where “impressions bring to consciousness the same kind of truth that metaphor brings to language”.⁸

Apart from Impressionism with regard to the artistic practice, concerning historical context, one of the most important events in the history of Romania preceding the twentieth century is the War of Independence of 1877-1878, which influenced the advancement of Romanian art, in general, and stimulated the artistic representation of the ottoman Turk, in particular. This representation would mainly concern the war and its related experiences, as in the following paintings.



Theodor Aman

⁸ Matz, 2001, p. 65.

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Theodor Aman



Nicolae Grigorescu

Following this period, the representation of the Turk embarks on a more rustic and pastoral perspective, with a lyrical mode of expression, in which one may observe the French influence with its clearer, more bright and luminous perception. The earlier, more narrative expression, as by Theodor Aman, of the Romanian fight for independence, is now replaced by a more poetic, lyrical vision, as in the following.

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Nicolae Tonitza

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Nicolae Grigorescu

Such images reveal the modesty and honesty of a simple man, which points to the artist having changed his attitude in order to express sympathy for common people in a pastoral context with calm and gentle figures.

The 1918 unification of the Romanian states and the whole of the inter-war period of the first half of the twentieth century would provide further changes in the representation of the Turk in the art of painting, which are first of all related to and determined by the new territorial modifications of Romania. The painters, schooled in their contemporary French and European tradition, rediscovered Dobruja; some of them settled there to paint, which led to the rise of the concern with an autochthonous, national heritage, including the ethnic origins of the Turkish minority, as with those artists who visited and worked in Balchik. The ethnic values of the Turks, rendered artistically under the influence of various European trends, particularly Impressionism, intermingle with Dobruja motives, Turkish peasants and their rustic universe as to prompt a new direction in contemporary Romanian art.

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Jean Alexandru Steriadi

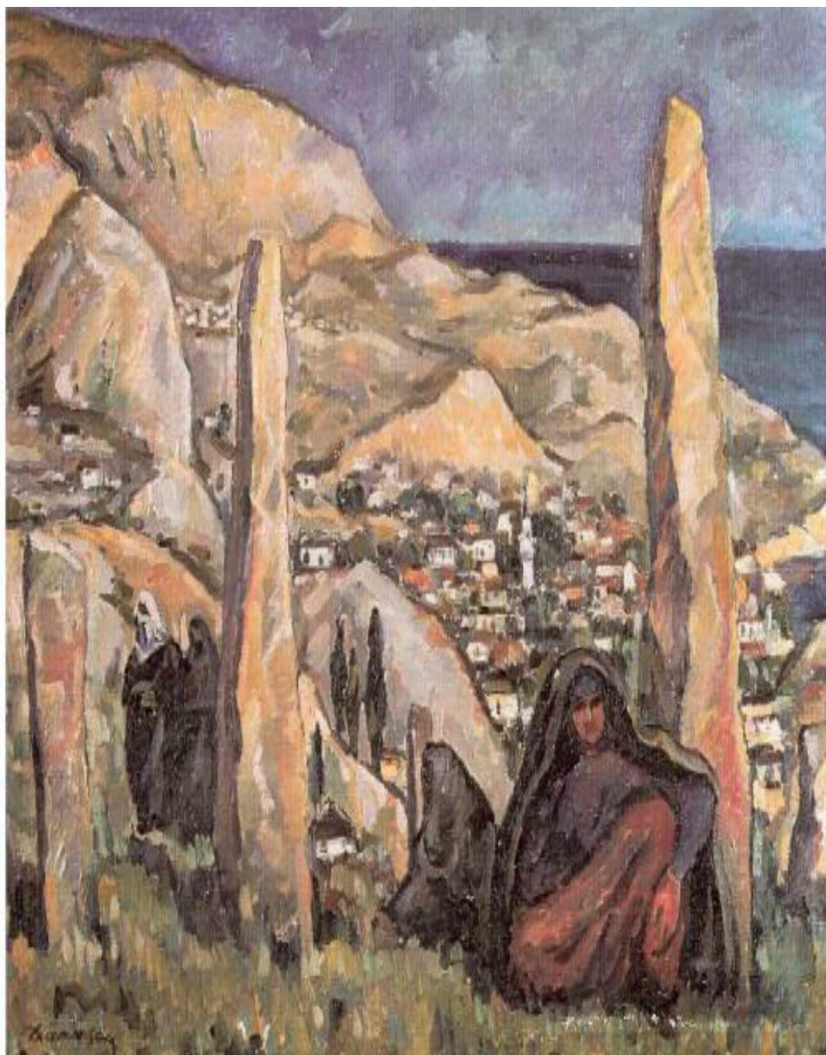


Ștefan Dimitrescu

Apart from the artistic works inspired by the life of the Turkish minority, the rediscovery of Dobruja allowed the artists to achieve the plein air representation, pictorial elucidation of light, predilection for landscape, which along with other aspects of their creativity marked the rise of the so-called

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Balchik School of Painting. The strong light and colours of the region, in particular, received a special concern as well as a different artistic expression since Dobruja was not an industrial area, keeping instead the purity of nature intermingled with the ethnic, cultural values of the local Turks and Tatars.



Nicolae Dărăscu

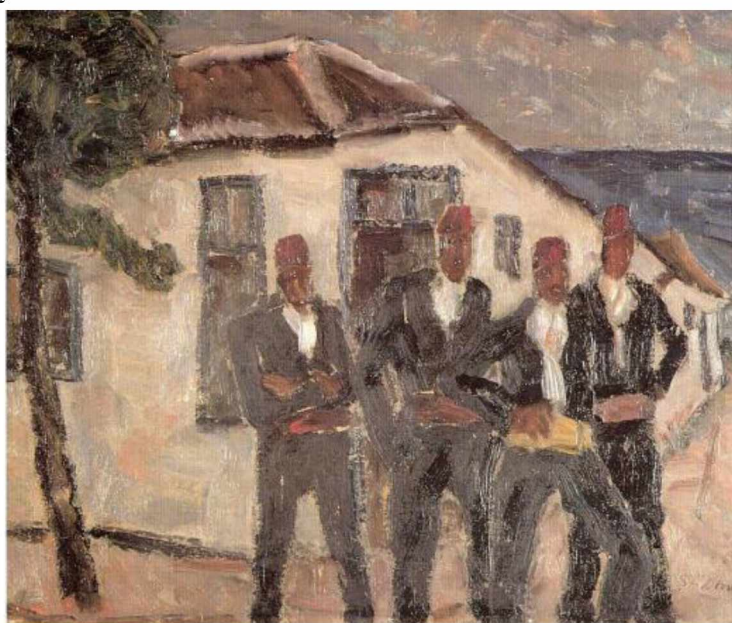
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Iosif Iser

The realism of the period mingled with the individual expressive form of the artist determine a particular character configuration which would disclose the sentimental relationship between the Romanian artist and Turkish minority, where the painter would emphasize the ethnic identity with simplicity and directness.

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However, in the age of Modernism of the first half of the twentieth century, the changed vision, concerns, and modes of artistic representation diversified the inter-war art produced in Romania, including the one created in Dobruja. Impressionism more than cubism and constructivism as well as realism determined the methods applied in the creative process as to render different aspects of the life of the Dobruja Turks in different contexts, yet combined into a whole of an ethnologic-ethnoaesthetic synthesis, as it can be seen in the following.



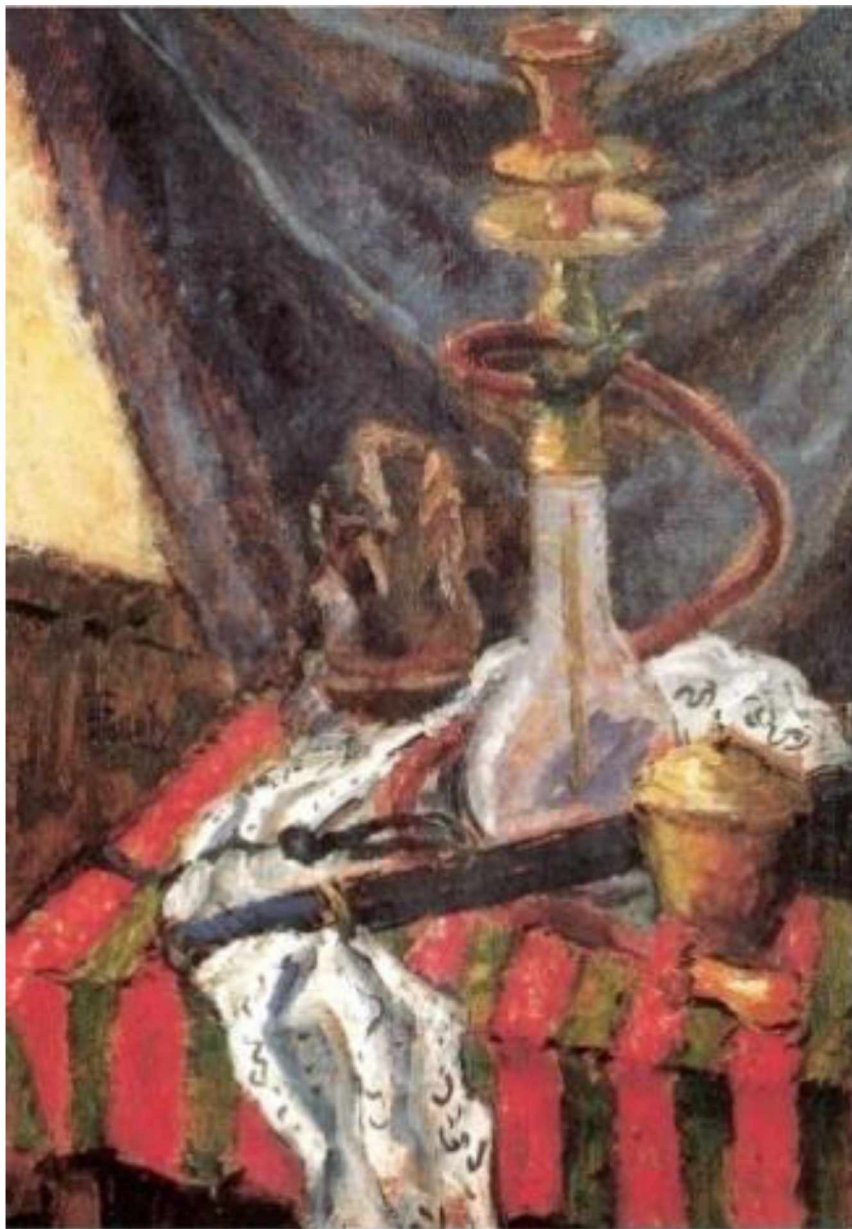
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Theodor Palady

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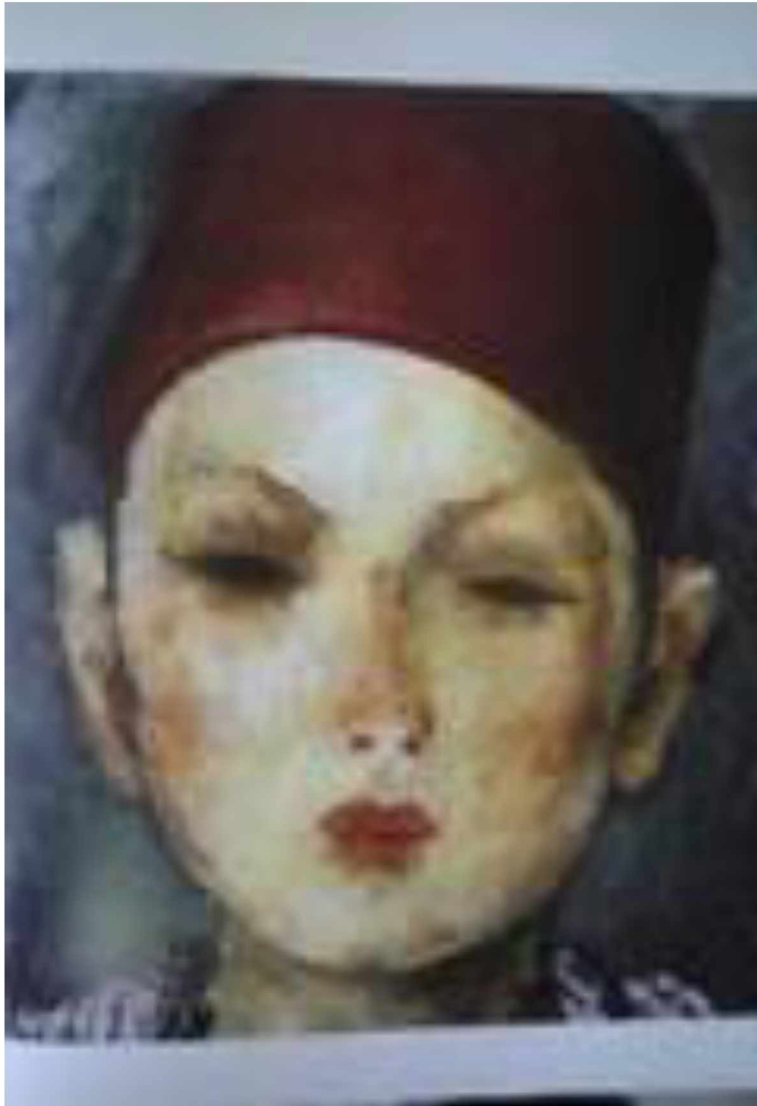
JEAN ALEXANDRU STERIADI (1880 – 1956) – TURC

16,5 x 23 cm;
38 x 44 cm (răsă)

Cărbune pe hârtie.
Studiu de portret de turc.
Semnat centru stânga jos în cărbune.
(TAP)

Jean Alexandru Steriadi

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Conclusion

Modernism, which is based on the rejection of tradition, has become a tradition of its own, an institutionalized type of art that has lost its innovative and experimental power. The involvement in social issues, together with holism and spirituality, are revived as alternatives to modernism by those who blame modernists of reductionism, of failing to see systemic and emergent effects, of conforming the individual creativity to the realities of

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technology, arguing, instead, that individual creative expression should focus on contemporary social and moral issues and make everyday life more emotionally acceptable.

The Romanian painters working in Dobruja managed to achieve this representation of everyday life as to make it more emotionally acceptable by focusing on particular aspects of a provincial, rustic existence, with its human types, clothes, activities, values, and so on, which was offered to painters by the Dobruja Turks and which, once represented in the art of painting, suggests the cultural mixedness of the Romanian and Turkish civilizations.

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