

## SÜMERBANK TEXTILES AND THE MODERNIST AESTHETIC IN TURKISH INTERIORS

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of textiles in interiors and its effects on social life with the modernist aesthetic understanding in the world and Turkey, with a focus on Sümerbank company textiles, which was the government's leading textile manufacturer. The period of modernization had effects that completely changed the understanding of interior design in Turkey. The textiles of the period had a significant impact on the aesthetic preferences and the understanding of design of the society, whose lifestyle and mentality have changed completely in the newly industrialized country. The aim of this study is to examine modern Turkish textiles, which are one of the important elements of interiors with its different usage areas, pattern types, manufacturers, and its effects on social structure, and to establish its connection with today. Methods include analysis of images collected from publications and films of the period through archival work to understand the aesthetic tastes and interior textiles. With these analyzes the pattern selections were compared with Sümerbank fabric patterns produced in the same years. Findings show that, modern textiles have been as effective as modern furniture. Political changes and, accordingly, the country's external relations have affected the design as well as the public's perspective on design. The vibrantly colored dynamic designs in the textile designs of the post-1980s show that capitalism has increased its influence in the introverted country. The egalitarian structure of the company Sümerbank, which considers the benefit of the public, has caused the trends of the period to be felt in everyone's home. It has been observed that the designs of interior fabric patterns and Sümerbank fabric patterns reached through the archive work have changed according to the changes in social life and popular trends in the world. The reflection of these changes on the interior has been slower than the fashion.

**Keywords:** Modern interior design, Interior textiles, Modern textiles, Sümerbank, Populism in interiors.

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## TÜRK İÇ MEKÂNLARINDA SÜMERBANK TEKSTİLLERİ VE MODERN ESTETİK

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### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, dünyada ve Türkiye'de modernist estetik anlayışla tekstilin iç mekanlardaki rolünü ve sosyal hayata etkilerini, önde gelen tekstil üreticisi Sümerbank firması tekstillerine odaklanarak araştırmaktadır. Dönemin tekstilleri, yeni sanayileşen ülkede yaşam tarzı ve zihniyeti tamamen değişen toplumun estetik tercihleri ve tasarım anlayışı üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, farklı kullanım alanları, desen türleri, üreticileri ve toplumsal yapıya etkileri ile özellikle modernist dönemde iç mekânın önemli unsurlarından biri olan modern Türk tekstillerini incelemek ve günümüzle bağını kurmaktır. Yöntemler, arşiv çalışmaları yoluyla dönemin yayınlarından ve filmlerinden toplanan görüntülerin incelenmesini içerir. Filmler ve popüler dergiler, o dönemlerde modern yaşamın tanıtıldığı önemli yayın araçları olduğundan, bu görüntüler modern Türk iç mekânlarını gerçekçi bir şekilde göstermektedir. Bu analizlerle desen seçimleri aynı yıllarda üretilen Sümerbank kumaş desenleri ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Ayrıca ülkenin siyasi değişimlerinin toplumsal yapı üzerindeki etkisinin iç mekânlara nasıl yansıtıldığı incelenmektedir. Bulgular göstermektedir ki, gelenekten uzaklaşmaya çalışılarak sosyal yapısı değişmekte olan bir ülkede modern tekstiller de modern mobilyalar kadar etkili olmuştur. Siyasi değişimler ve buna bağlı olarak ülkenin dış ilişkileri, halkın tasarıma bakış açısının yanı sıra tasarımı stilini de etkilemiştir. 1980 sonrası tekstil tasarımlarındaki canlı renkli dinamik tasarımlar, kapitalizmin içe dönük ülkedeki etkisini artırdığını gösteriyor olabilir. Halk için faydaya odaklanan Sümerbank firmasının eşitlikçi yapısı, giyim kumaşlarının yanı sıra ev tekstili de sunarak dönemin trendlerinin herkesin evinde hissedilmesine neden olmuştur. Arşiv çalışmasıyla ulaşılan iç mekân kumaş desenlerinin ve Sümerbank kumaş desenlerinin tasarımlarının sosyal yaşamdaki değişimlere ve dünyadaki popüler trendlere göre değiştiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu değişikliklerin iç mekâna yansıtılması modadan daha yavaş olmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Modern iç mekân, Tekstil tasarımı, İç mekân tekstilleri, Modern tekstiller, Sümerbank.

**Tür:** Araştırma Makalesi

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Textiles have been an essential component of the interior space of houses throughout history. However, they are difficult to trace as they are constantly influenced by various external factors.

As part of the research framework, modern interiors and textiles are examined, with a particular focus on Turkish interiors and textiles used in modern Turkish interiors. The questions are taken further through defining the role of modern interior textile designs in influencing the modern aesthetic and design, and the case of Sümerbank as a major influential political component. The questions also dwell on archiving methods for textiles as a contributor to collective memory with the questions ‘What does modern textile design mean for the overall Turkish modernist message, interior atmosphere, and furniture?’, ‘What effects did textiles used in modern Turkish interiors have on various aspects of lifestyle?’ and ‘What designs and connected meanings did Sümerbank introduce to the Turkish modern interior?’.

### 1.1. Textiles and Interiors

Interior textiles have been seen as one of the key elements of a home and a reflection of the social status of the inhabitants. Since textiles are ephemeral elements of interiors, they document the short-term understanding of aesthetics and design. Textiles in interiors are especially valuable for tracing socio-cultural changes. Textiles have been essential to the everyday lives of all societies, providing protection and warmth, and fulfilling cultural, social, economic, legal, military, and symbolic functions (Jenkins, 2008). Textiles have gained a different meaning in the modern period because textiles provide an element of play for modern interiors: (Troy, 2019, p.3).

Textile work has historically functioned as a physical record of human ideas and actions, claims textile scientist Kraft (2004). Generally speaking, artifacts are seen as tangible representations of civilization. Human behavior requires pattern matching and the creation of patterns for the purpose of reducing complexity. The definition of "pattern" is an arrangement of dimension, symmetry, rhythm, and repetition: (Kraft, 2004, p.275).

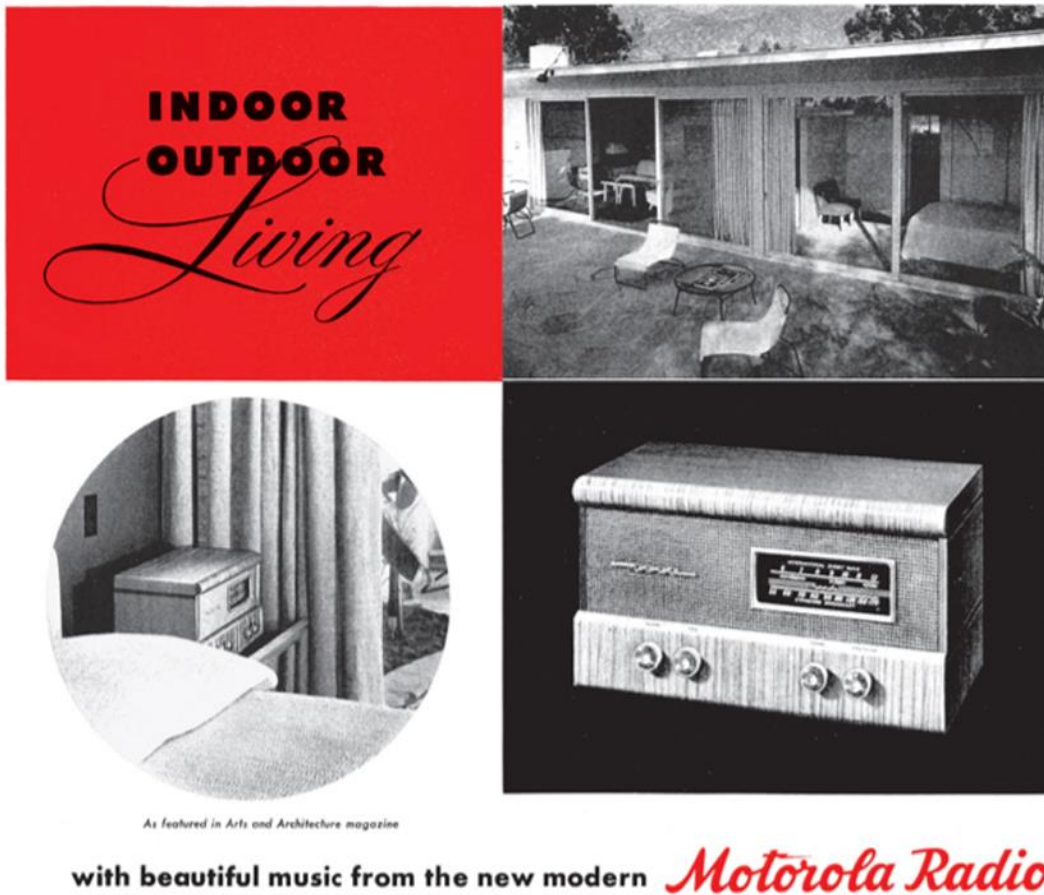
In 2015, with the scientific research project called TUDITA (Turkish Digital Textile Archive), both clothing and interior textile patterns from the 1950s to the 2000s produced in the Sümerbank factory were collected and archived. The project aimed to transmit to the next generation the cultural heritage of Turkish textile history: (Bulgun, Adanır and Hımmam, 2015, p.23).

### 1.2. Textiles and Modernist Aesthetic

In analyzing interior textiles, it is important to focus on the modern period to demonstrate the changes in consumption habits, structural changes, and the concept of the house related to industrialization. In order to illustrate how textiles have changed and transformed since that period, it is important to examine how the aesthetic understanding of modernists has changed and transformed interior spaces. These transformations reflected fast-paced eclecticism, and could not only be observed in popular journals but

also described in the literature of the day, surrounding novels and fiction, as an equal mix of Eastern and Western constituents (Mardin, 2006).

With the establishment of several textile plants and factories after the 1930s in Kayseri, Nazilli, Bursa, Malatya, and Konya Ereğlisi (Bozdoğan and Akcan, 2012), textiles gained significance at the forefront of industrial and design developments in the 1940s and 1950s for several reasons, with advancements in textile technology, artistry, promotion, and display. Beecher (1997) argues the concepts of freshness, simplicity, and flexibility, associated with beauty as an aesthetic critique, played a major role in popularizing the modern interior: (Beecher, 1997, p.62). In that period there was a promotion of the technical innovation and lifestyle benefits of modern architecture and large windows, with the emphasis on maximizing visual spaciousness (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** An example from the Arts & Architecture Magazine, 1947 ( Arts and architecture, 2022).

The relationship between modernism and textiles was discussed comprehensively by Baines in 1994. It analyzes transformative changes in representation, form, and terminology that contribute to a better understanding of modernism in design. According to Baines, modernist design is characterized by the use of pure geometry, mark-making, and experimentation with color in figurative design: (Baines,1994, p.43).

Textiles were intentionally constructed to combine color, pattern, and texture to generate unity in interior design. Modernists deemed patterns acceptable only if they offered focal points in a space, such as a painting, a distinctive cloth, or, increasingly, a rug of modern design (Figure 2). As the 1930s progressed, many linear and abstract rugs were produced that demonstrated the idea that rugs should be designed to match current ideas regarding modern architecture: (Boydell,1996, p.55; Şahin, Özbent, Hasırcı, 2022).



**Figure 2.** Modern Rugs and Interior Relation with the example from 1930s (Boydell, 1996, p.55).

### **1.3. Textiles in Modern Turkish Interiors**

Turkish society underwent a series of reforms related to Westernization and modernization during the early 20th century following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938): (Gürel et al., 2018). This is due to the fact that the modernization of the country with the founding of the Republic, in addition to being a crucial decision, led people to question tradition. This decision was in the direction of moving away from the past: (Hasırcı and Tuna Ultav, 2020; Yasa Yaman, 2013).

In terms of the organization of space, one of the most significant changes is the precise determination of service volumes such as kitchens and bathrooms. Tanyeli, 1998 discusses how the functional relation between these spaces, especially their relationship with other spaces, has evolved with the typification of the plan schemes: (Tanyeli, 1998). Modernization articles are written to make the process more

understandable, appealing to people in general, and particularly to women, with suggestions for a new way of living, new spaces and furniture: (Şahin, Özbent, Hasırcı, 2022; Yasa Yaman, 2013).

In 1965, apartment construction increased with the Flat Ownership Law that allowed individual ownership of apartments: (Gürel, 2009). Social and political changes became more significant by the 1970s. Following the 1970s, a phase of postmodernism predominated, particularly in housing applications, as the development and modification of building materials and construction technology led to a search for new forms: (Yaldız and Bahtiyar, 2021, p. 152). There was a real change in Turkey in the 1980s, and that interior design materials varied due to the increase in imports in the country, and this brought new applications and details to interiors: (Küçükerman, 2013, p,76).

Important examples of the relationship between textile and modern furniture in Turkey can be found in the DATUMM (Documenting and Archiving Turkish Modern Furniture) project, which examines modern furniture designed and produced in Turkey during the 20th century (Tuna Ultav, Hasırcı, Borvalı, and Atmaca, 2015) (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Moderno Company Living Room and Bedroom Set, 1950s, Önder Küçükerman and DATUMM Archives (Tuna Ultav, Z., Hasırcı, D., Borvalı, S. and Atmaca, H., (datumm.org, 2015).



#### 1.4. The Effect of Sümerbank Textiles in Modern Turkish Interiors

Sümerbank was one of the state-centered institutions founded in 1933 which was producing affordable printed cotton textiles. These fabrics led to development of a national textile design style creating a Sümerbank material culture in Turkey (Pasin and Himam, 2011). Large-scale Sümerbank factories, provided systematic design and production of textiles for a variety of purposes, including interior space (Bozdoğan, 2001).

The production of yarn, woven, printed and flannel fabrics has continued for many years to meet the needs of the public for all kinds of clothing and upholstery fabrics. During the Ottoman period, fabrics were valuable in monetary terms because they were made using valuable materials such as silk, gold, and silver: (Önder, 1995). Unlike the fabrics of the Ottoman period, Sümerbank fabrics were inexpensive, durable, high quality and elegant fabrics with unique patterns. Sümerbank's role in Turkish textile history, its use of domestic goods as a statist strategy, and its development politics through the country's economy all contributed to its cultural heritage (Figure 4). Despite the economic constraints that limited their material and color options, Sümerbank fabrics contributed to the creation of a national textile design aesthetic by introducing unique designs and their fabrics: (Bulgun, Adanır and Himam, 2015).



**Figure 4.** İstanbul Sümerbank Exhibition Pavilion Facade and The Textile Stand (Arkitekt, 1950).

In addition to its role in the industrialization of the Republic of Turkey, Sümerbank has influenced the socio-cultural advancement of the community. As Sümerbank enterprises expanded around the nation, they also developed into social facilities. The factories have theaters, cinemas, and libraries. Within the Nazilli establish of Sümerbank, a jazz group was formed, and numerous exhibitions of paintings and sculptures were planned. Additionally, sewing classes were made available to non-factory personnel. These have been the markers of the founding philosophies of Sümerbank: (Baydar, 1999).

## 2. ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Interior images from the 1950s to the end of the 90s were collected by means of magazines, films, and advertisements, and the visuals were compared with Sümerbank interior pattern samples by making detailed analyzes and completed with interpretations on modern interior textiles. For archival study, popular magazines, and architectural magazines and movies of the period from the 1950s to the 2000s were examined. Ses, Hayat, and Ev Dekorasyon are the popular magazines selected.

### 2.1. Advertisements

In the advertisements of the period, textile companies have promoted their products with the emphasis of 'elegant woman' and 'happy modern nuclear family'. In the Sümerbank poster, the rural and modern women are imagined together with the focus of unity of society. It is evident from this advertisement that Sümerbank manufactures upholstery and curtain materials in addition to woolen carpets. This picture, shows women dressed in contemporary attire looking to an ethnically patterned woolen carpet. 'Unique value' and 'variety' are highlighted in the introduction of carpets (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Sümerbank Advertisement from the 1950s (TUDITA, 2015, p.409).



## 2.2. Sümerbank Patterns

Examined is the Sümerbank pattern library, which was gathered as part of the TUDITA (Turkish Digital Textile archive) initiative; numerous interior and clothing fabric catalogs are published. The chronological arrangement of the archive helps to illustrate how the pattern that characterized Sümerbank changed between the 1950s and the 2000s.

Sümerbank has designed and sold fabrics for different domestic and foreign companies, especially after the 1970s. Among the companies it produces are foreign companies such as Stroyer Berger, H+M Sweden and Wolf (Figure 6). In the design approach of the fabrics produced for these companies, the European influence is seen with more geometrical patterns. The fact that Sümerbank designs are exported to Europe via various companies indicates that there is a correlation between the two and that Sümerbank's designs.

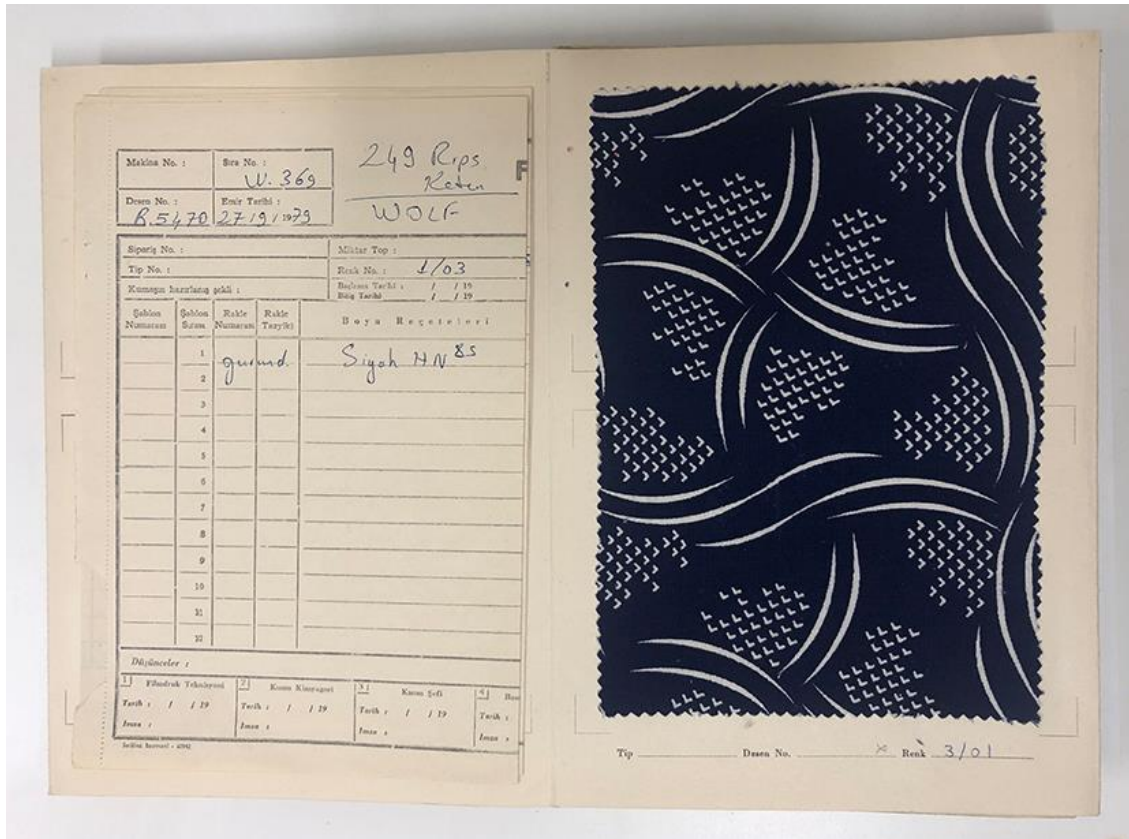


Figure 6. Sümerbank Pattern Design for Wolf Company in 1979 (TUDITA, 2015).

The 'Genis Otoman' upholstery fabric, which was created using the rotating printing technique, has been reported as designed in 1975 for the Ikea supplier Stroyer Berger company (Figure 7). The fabric pattern was created in three distinct colors, and it shows that the Art Deco and Western influences on the design language set it apart from the Sümerbank fabrics of the time.



**Figure 7.** Sümerbank Pattern Design for Ikea in 1975 (TUDITA, 2015).

Vibrant colors and abstract shapes were popular in textiles made in the 1990s for domestic as well as foreign companies (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Sümerbank Pattern Design for Dornbusch in 1993, (Source: TUDITA, 2015)



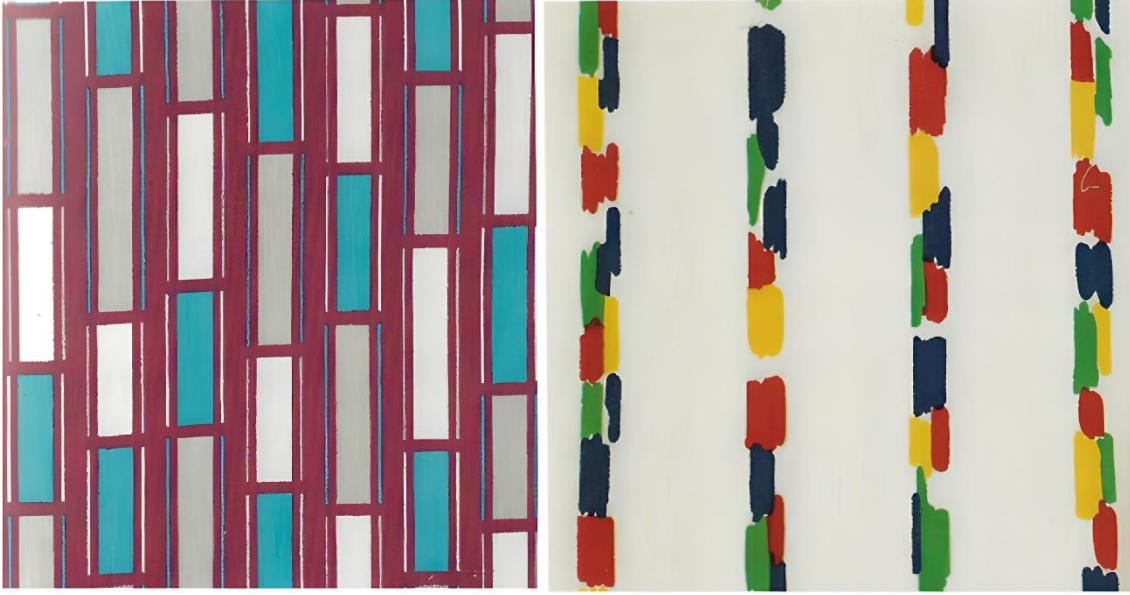
### 2.3. Interior Images from Popular Magazines

Popular magazines are important to understand the popularity of pattern types in interiors. In the magazines that have sections such as celebrity's homes reflect the textile trends in interiors. In 1960s compositions with big flowers were widely seen in interiors. In the same years, Sümerbank produces floral patterns with a regular composition.

In the 1970s living room geometrical patterns became popular. In the example, geometrical patterned curtain has rectangles arranged in a row (Figure 9). The patterns in the magazine example and the ones from the same period in Sümerbank are comparable, although the pattern's element distribution is less sequential. In the following years, Sümerbank's abstraction level increased and more vibrant colors were used in similar designs (Figure 10).



**Figure 9.** Homes of Celebrities, Ses, 26 December 1970 (Ses,1970).



**Figure 10.** Sümerbank Hometextile Example (Geometrical Pattern),1986 and 1991 (TUDITA, 2015, p.110).

A living room from the 1970s is shown in this image from Ev Dekorasyon (Home Decoration) magazine. The sofa set in this example is covered in plain green velvet fabric. While the seats do not have patterns, the curtain has a large, stylized flower pattern, and the Sümerbank samples are decorated with stylized large flower patterns as well (Figure 11). In the Sümerbank example, these figures are combined with small and stylized flower groups. In Sümerbank pattern examples, simple and abstract patterns were more common in the 1980s and 90s.



**Figure 11.** A Living room interior from Ev Dekorasyon Magazine, 1978 ( Yaldız and Bahtiyar, 2021, p.156) and Sümerbank Textile Example (Floral Pattern), 1976 (TUDITA, 2015, p.71).

## 2.4. Interior Scenes from Movies

In the film analysis section, 4 different films showing interior features of different years were examined and interior characteristics and textile uses were compared.

In the movies in the 60s, modern furniture, and traditional furniture, and textile products are used together. Striped patterns, polka dots, and leaf and floral patterns are also used together in the same interior space. Moreover, in the apartment scene, the carpet is the only patterned element as a focal point for the interior (Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** Movie Scenes from Kırık Hayatlar (Halit Refiğ,1965).

In the 1970s the transition is more visible. The living room has traditional carpets and chandeliers with a modular sofa set has striped pattern. Different types of tablecloths and curtains were used throughout this movie, including checkered, fruit-patterned, with figures, and small flowers (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Movie Scenes from Köyden İndim Şehire (Ertem Eğilmez, 1974).

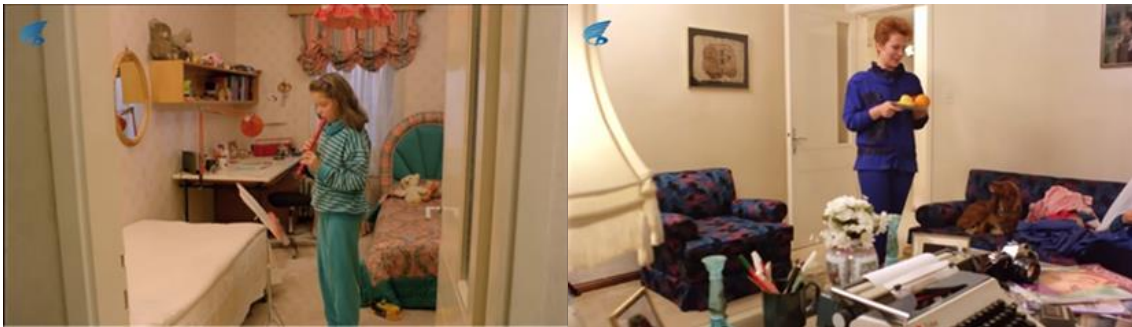


At the end of the 70s, vivid colors and large figures were popular. Large flower figures were combined with geometrical shapes. A clear aesthetic understanding of the period can be seen in the ceramics used in the kitchen and bathroom, which are parallel to the textiles used in the interior. There is a high degree of abstraction in the flower patterns on ceramics, and the flowers are two-dimensional, with a regular arrangement of the flowers (Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** Movie Scenes Ne Olacak Şimdi? (Atıf Yılmaz, 1979).

In the 90s, Textiles have bright colors and abstract patterns widely. It is possible to see a modern aesthetic studying area in the children's room of the apartment, with features such as a moving office chair and a modular lamp. There is a wall-to-wall carpet covering the floor of the room. There is a thick striped pattern on the curtains which is modern, although the curtains do not have a modern style. The bedspread is the same color as the curtain and features a large, abstract floral pattern, a style that is commonly seen in Sümerbank archives dating back to the 1990s. There is a modular sofa set in the room along with a large desk, and the upholstery fabric of this sofa set has an abstract pattern that was very popular in the 1990s (Figure 15).



**Figure 15.** Movie Scenes Bir Kadın (Ümit Efekan, 1991).

## 2.5. Findings and Discussion

When the visuals collected through the archive work and Sümerbank interior fabric patterns are compared by the 1960s geometric forms, polka dots, and small flowers were used in patterns widely. After the 60s, the reflection of freedom movements in the world was seen in the pattern designs. In the 70s the level of abstraction of figures increases in interior textiles. Patterns with large figures and vivid colors and striped patterns became more popular. The floral patterns are also stylized. In 80s and 90s abstract and geometrical patterns took the place of floral patterns in interiors. The effect of social events and trends was reflected first in the items that can be changed easily like tablecloths and curtains. The designs of the fabrics appear to be described with catalog numbers, usage, and purpose, in addition to client information if there is one. Vakko, Ikea, and Stroyer Berger Dornbusch companies can be found in archives as clients. The designs are parallel to international modern counterparts and are in direct contact with fashion trends of the day. Names of designers have not been documented in archives, as all patterns were produced in the name of Sümerbank.

**Table 1.** Popularity of Interior Textile Patterns According to Years.

1960s	Checkered Patterns Polka dots Small Flowers Paisley Patterns Animal Figures
1970s	Large Motifs Vivid Colors Striped Patterns
1980s and 1990s	Abstract Patterns Geometrical Patterns Vivid Colors

## 3.CONCLUSION

Textiles were vastly influential in physical comfort, and upholstery, soft textures, and the rich decoration of textiles were also thought to evoke emotional comfort by homemakers (Ponsonby, 2007, p.1781). In interiors, textile has become an important design tool besides its functional aspect. Textiles have played a role in promoting modern design concepts by establishing a relationship with fashion and trends, and in showing individuals, especially women, their own tastes in their homes and shaping the modern interior.

Textile design and printing workshops have been established in fine arts faculties both in the world and in Turkey. Trained textile designers and famous architects of the period emphasized the importance of

textiles. The effects of Bauhaus' textile workshop in the world and the textile designers it has trained have been influential in the understanding of textile design all over the world. Modernist architects and interior designers have used textiles as a focal point in their interior designs or to strengthen the design language, sometimes they have worked with textile designers.

The democratic design approach put forward by Sümerbank has aimed to reinforce the bond of all members of the society with a novel approach in terms of both clothing and home textiles in the modernization process. Small flowers, dots, and geometric patterns are characteristics of Sümerbank patterns, and these types of patterns are influential in all areas of the textile industry.

Interior fabric patterns and Sümerbank samples have gone through similar stages as in the world, from the 1950s to the present in Turkey. As Fogg stated, in the post-World War II period, floral patterns began to decline, and non-representational abstract patterns began to be designed more: (Fogg, 2011, p.9). In Sümerbank patterns and Turkish interiors, this transition process is seen in vividly colored patterns in which floral and geometric figures are used together.

The findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of these ephemeral components of interiors and their significant role in the modern Turkish interior and modern design culture. Socio-culturally, modern designed interior textile patterns have had an impact on public's accustoming to modernity and modern design. In domestic and public interiors, it has been seen that modern patterned fabrics such as modern furniture are also used to introduce modern design to the public and increase legitimacy of modern design through media. Textiles signify democracy and personalization for the overall Turkish modernist message, interior atmosphere, and furniture. In general, it is seen that the designs of Sümerbank fabrics are not only unique, but also tend to shape the design understanding of the society. The democratic design approach put forward by Sümerbank has strengthened society's bonds with progress in terms of both clothing and home textiles in the modernization process.

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