

Editorial Introduction

Ali KAYAALP*
Mertkan KARACA**

Canon, which means standard, criterion, law, rule that distinguishes right from wrong, is a concept that had been in circulation since Ancient Greece, and that was later used to manifest the accuracy of the holy books. Over time, it takes on a secular and humanistic character; and gains meaning within various sciences and disciplines.

In continental Europe, the canon is a well-known concept. During the Classical Age, the Greek sculptor Polykleitos wrote a text called *Κανών* (Canon) that outlined the rules for sculpting the human figure. Although the text itself did not survive, Polykleitos embodied the rules established by it in his statue *Δορυφόρος* (Doryphoros/Spear-Bearer), which was one of the earliest examples of canonization. The strong influence of Polykleitos' works, especially this sculpture, was not limited to his own period, but also heavily influenced the art of the Roman period, and its echoes can even be detected in the sculptures of the Renaissance period. Canon is exactly such a phenomenon: it determines the standard, prepares a selection of the best and highest quality elements, determines the way and procedure of accessing them, and builds a hierarchy from the combination of all. This hierarchy can be valid for centuries and can be one of the fundamental elements that shaped cultural or civilizational accumulation. Polykleitos's text and sculpture are good examples of the decisiveness and longevity of the canon phenomenon.

Literature and art canons compile a list of works that are meant to be constantly circulated in a nation's culture and hence helps establishing a national collective memory by ensuring their adoption by society. When the construction process of the collective memory is traced, it becomes clearer that the "incontestable" works making up the canon are a set of narratives based on certain motives.

In recent years, the Eurocentric, progressive, and male-dominated hero narratives of the canons have been questioned, and with the emergence of revisionist studies, this understanding opened paths for anti-canon and global narratives. Even though the concept of "canon" has not been used obviously since the 1960s, objections to the canon have been expressed by post-colonialist, feminist, postmodernist, and global approaches and by pointing out artists who have been marginalized.

Considering Türkiye, although the debates about the widespread use of the concept are generally recent, it is possible to trace the origins of canonization tendencies back to earlier times, when attempts at nation-building were shaped. It is not possible to read the efforts to create a "national literature" independently of canonization attempts. It can be said that the classics translated into Turkish by the Translation Bureau under Hasan Âli Yücel's aim was to introduce a largely Western canon to Turkish readers. Selections such as the "100 Temel Eser" determined by the Ministry of National Education should be considered to be the product of the effort to

* Asst. Prof. Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Art History Department, ali.kayaalp@msgsu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-0286-6804.

** Res. Asst. Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Art History Department, mertkan.karaca@msgsu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-7008-3679.

create a literary canon foreseen by the state. Founded in 1937, the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum is one of the first and most canonical narratives of the Republic, to determine the national art of the nation, at a time when the concept of canon had not yet been voiced in Türkiye. Although art criticism and publishing, which are amongst the other determining elements of the art canon, has less impact on the canonization process in the early period especially due to the lack of institutionalization of a general art criticism, it became influential with the emergence of new and critical historiography in the 1980s.

Although the studies published in foreign languages can be considered effective based on the accumulation of the last 20 years, works that reproduce the canon are still dominant. Silence continues regarding the identification and revisionist evaluation of canon and canonization, counter-canon, and alternative canons. The debate still continues on the following issues: in art and the history of art, on the relationship between the effort to integrate into a progressive and evolutionarily based grand narrative according to the modern order of Europe and the formation of a canon in Türkiye; and in the field of literature, on the establishment of a literary canon, especially in order to create a national culture since the proclamation of the Republic, the (non) consensus on the classics of Turkish, and the resistance to the acceptance of aesthetics as an autonomous field.

This issue of the *MSFAU Journal of Social Sciences* evaluates the canon phenomenon, especially in the context of the 100th Anniversary of the Republic. It evaluates the political and aesthetic factors of the canon and the canonization processes in Türkiye on various axes such as hierarchies, national narratives, conflicts and interventions, grouping and excusing strategies, and suggests reviewing the past 100 years.