

## Factors that Shaped the Art of Turkish Painting in The Republic Period

### Cumhuriyet Dönemi Resim Sanatını Hazırlayan Etmenler

Huri Kiriş Büyükgüner, *Department of Painting, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 0000-0002-7318-9348*

#### Abstract

The roots of current Turkish painting can be traced back to the early 20th century. Until the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, painting did not emerge as one of the most important and influential art forms in Turkish culture. However, as a result of the historical processes spanning from the late period of the Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, the paradigm shift brought about by the Republic facilitated the formation and establishment of a unique art form known as Western style painting in the Turkish nation. The transformation from subjects of a monarchy to citizens of a nation, and from subjects to individual identities, which took place during the Republic era, enabled Turkish painting to acquire a national character through the influence of state patronage and the power of reforms. Although the Westernization movement and educational reforms that began during the Ottoman period led to a new formal direction influenced by the forms of the Western worldview, as well as the unique content of the Ottoman state's worldview, it was during the Republic era that Turkish painting found its characteristic forms and expressions. While the formal patterns of painting were influenced by Western styles of the time, the subject matter and content reflected the intellectual and revolutionary world of modern Turkish society, allowing for the emergence of a distinctive form of painting art under these circumstances.

**Keywords:** Turkish painting, painting, art, early Republic art, Westernization.

**Akademik disiplinler/alanlar:** Art history, Turkish painting history, painting.

#### Özet

Günümüz Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin resim sanatının kökleri 20. yüzyılın başlarına dayanmaktadır. Kadim Türk kültürünün içinde resim sanatı Türkiye Cumhuriyeti kurulana kadar, Türk kültürünün en önemli ve etkili sanat formları içine girmemiştir. Osmanlı Devleti'nin son dönemleri ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulmasına varacak tarihsel süreçlerin sonucunda Cumhuriyet'in getirdiği paradigma değişimi Türk ulusunun kendine ait bir sanat formu olarak Batılı anlamda bir resim geleneğinin oluşması ve yerleşmesini sağlamıştır. Tebaadan ulusa, kuldan bireye dönüşümün yaşandığı Cumhuriyet dönemi gerek devlet himayesi yoluyla gerekse inkılapların gücü etkisiyle Türk resim sanatının ulusal bir karakter kazanmasını sağlamıştır. Osmanlı döneminde başlayan Batılılaşma hareketi ve eğitim reformlarının gerektirdiği Batı dünya görüşünün formları ve Osmanlı devletinin kendine özgü dünya görüşünün içeriği sanat alanında yeni bir biçimsel yönelmeye sebep olsa da Türk resim sanatı diyebileceğimiz karakteristik form ve biçim dünyası kendini Cumhuriyet döneminde bulmuştur. Resim sanatının biçimsel kalıpları dönemin Batılı üsluplarından etkilense de konu ve içerik bakımından çağdaş Türk toplumunun düşünsel ve devrimci dünyası resim sanatının belirleyici unsuru olmuş, kendine has bir resim sanatı ancak bu koşullar altında ortaya çıkmayı başarabilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Türk resmi, resim, sanat, erken Cumhuriyet sanatı, Batılılaşma.

**Akademik disiplin(ler)/alan(lar):** Sanat tarihi, Türk resim tarihi, resim.

- **Corresponding Author:** Huri Kiriş Büyükgüner, Department of Painting, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University.
- **Adress:** Pürtelaş Hasan Efendi District, Meclisi Mebusan No:24, 34427 Beyoğlu/İstanbul.
- **e-mail:** huri.kiris@msgsu.edu.tr
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## 1. Introduction

Reflecting on the art of painting in the Republic of Türkiye, as we celebrate its centenary, presents a formidable challenge. While one might assume that dealing with a recent history would make our task easier, it quickly becomes apparent that compiling this history is far from straightforward when we delve into the inherited archive. Particularly in the field of art history, we are confronted with the difficulty of grappling with a constantly evolving terminology and the inherently interpretive nature of art-related issues. Over time, language and its associated terminology undergo transformations, rendering the usage of archival terms a hindrance to conveying intended meanings.

Furthermore, the diverse range of historical processes, political structures, and ideologies experienced by the Republic of Türkiye has also resulted in shifts in the connotations and implications of the terminology we employ. Therefore, it becomes necessary to clarify the scope of our discussion when addressing Turkish painting. Are we referring to the concept of Turkishness as an ethnic identity? Are we considering Turkishness in terms of citizenship and nationality? Or are we alluding to the term Turks used by Westerners to denote the Ottoman Empire and Muslims during a specific period?

By establishing a clear framework and contextualizing the terminology used, we can navigate the complexities of Turkish painting's development within the Republic era more effectively. Only through such clarification can we delve deeper into the factors that have shaped this unique form of artistic expression and gain a comprehensive understanding of its evolution over time.

When examining Turkish culture, it becomes evident that its origins can be traced back to Central Asia. The ethnic group associated with Turkish culture, particularly within the Anatolian region, has undergone a process of amalgamation with other ethnic groups, thereby becoming an integral part of the cultural fabric of the region. Consequently, when discussing the cultural landscape preceding the Republic era, especially in the context of art, it would be inappropriate to exclusively employ the term 'Turkish culture and art'. Instead, it is crucial to consider the prevailing conditions of that period and refer to the cultural and artistic milieu of the Ottoman Empire for a more accurate depiction.

We cannot consider the Seljuk and Ottoman States as Turkish states, and the opposite evaluation is nothing but a deception. However, these states were established thanks to the sacrifice of the Turkish nation and many things were achieved thanks to this sacrifice. We should not forget this. However, these sacrifices have never been reciprocated, and the Turks have never been able to take their deserved place within the state and society. (Yetkin, 1980, p. 470)

We can observe the transition from Ottomanism to Turkism in the example of the members of the Ottoman Painters Society, which was established in 1908. "Recognizing the end of the historical mission of the Ottoman Empire, they emphasized Ottomanism in 1921 and changed their name from Ottoman Painters Society to Turkish Painters Society by replacing the term Ottoman with Turkish." (Keser, 2006, p. 130).

The comprehensive definition of art history encompasses the entire span from the Republican era to the present-day Turkish art, categorized under the label of *Contemporary Turkish Art*. In this context, the term *contemporary* assumes its Western connotation, signifying modernity and relevance to the current era. However, in the realm of art, the term *contemporary* refers specifically to the art of the past thirty-five years. The primary source of confusion here lies not in finding an equivalent term for *contemporary* but rather in understanding its historical significance. By designating the art produced from the Republican era to the present as *Turkish contemporary art*, we imply that previous art forms, whether classical, traditional, or otherwise defined, also fall under the umbrella of Turkish art as a whole. This raises the question of what we mean by the term Turkish. Providing a definitive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, within the confines of this discussion, when we refer to Turkish art and painting, we are specifically addressing a historical period commencing with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, where artists are acknowledged as Turkish based on their citizenship, without delving into their ethnic backgrounds. In this context, the term *contemporary Turkish painting* will be utilized to denote the period that aligns with the internationally recognized historical range of contemporary art as determined by global art authorities. In this context, the terms 'Turkish art' and 'Turkish painting' refers to a period between 1920s and 1990s.

## 2. The Cultural Environment In The Late Ottoman Period

The history of Turkish painting, in comparison to Western art, is relatively brief. Nonetheless, within the context of the Modern Turkish Republic, it encompasses the entirety of the country's history. Throughout this relatively short history, we can observe the active role of painting in various aspects, ranging from the establishment of our nation to the development of national consciousness and the pursuit of a modern civilization. As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Republic, Turkish painting has solidified its position as a significant component of the country's cultural heritage, boasting a century-long legacy.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the art scene during the Republic's establishment, it is necessary to delve into the pre-Republic era. Within the Ottoman Empire, it is not accurate to claim the presence of a Western-style painting tradition. The art form that came closest to painting during that period was miniature art. However, it is implausible to assert that miniature art served as a direct source for the emerging painting art in terms of both form and content during the Ottoman era.

Miniature art, in terms of its spirit, worldview, artistic conception, craftsmanship, materials used, especially its scale, and above all, its role and function in the ancient society, did not align with the new plastic arts of Türkiye that were beginning to embrace Westernization. (Berk & Gezer, 1973, p. 14)

Exploring the reasons behind the limited development of painting as an art form in the Ottoman Empire requires thorough investigation, and various factors may contribute to this phenomenon. One plausible explanation could be the relatively low demand for painting within the artistic landscape of the empire. While the prohibition of figurative representation in Islamic religion is often cited, it alone is an inadequate argument to fully account for this situation, considering the presence of figures in miniature art, for instance. However, the influence of Islam and the Anatolian Islamic understanding, shaped by mystical perspectives, can still be observed in the artistic approach prevalent in Anatolia.

In Islamic belief, the concept of God is transcendent, and divinity and godliness are apprehended through internal contemplation rather than formal representation in the material world. This philosophical framework may have rendered the necessity for a painting art form less prominent compared to the Western context, where representational art played a more significant role. It is worth noting that the interest in painting during the Ottoman period also arose from other motives and needs beyond religious considerations.

In the efforts of Westernization that gained momentum with the declaration of Tanzimat Edict in the Ottoman Empire, Westernization became the predominant ideology that influenced the political, administrative, and social structure along with the Ottomanism ideology. With the proclamation of the Meşrutiyet Era, social changes began to take place, and a societal structure emerged where ideologies such as Westernization, Turkism, Positivism, Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism coexisted with the ideology of Ottomanism. Starting with the Balkan Wars, the ideology of Ottomanism gave way to Nationalism, and the foundations of national consciousness were laid. (Arslan Gül, 2021, p. 25)

In the era of Westernization, the art of painting in the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to educational reforms, which laid the foundation for its development. While earlier attempts had been made in the field of visual arts, it was during this period that a systematic and institutionalized approach to painting as a Western art form began to take shape.

A significant milestone in the integration of painting into the educational sphere occurred with the establishment of the Mühendishane-i Berrî-i Hümayun in 1793. Originally established for military engineering purposes, this institution introduced the first painting lessons with a particular emphasis on perspective and new techniques. The inclusion of painting in the curriculum aimed to enhance the accurate representation of nature and objects, complementing the knowledge gained in engineering. However, due to the lack of Turkish instructors proficient in painting, foreign experts were recruited to teach these courses.

To assist in the accurate representation of nature and objects and to complement engineering knowledge, painting lessons were included in the curriculum of the 'Mühendishane-i Berrî-i Hümayun.' Since there were no Turkish instructors available to teach these courses, foreigners were utilized. As time progressed, in

order to learn Western science and technology and subsequently teach what they had learned upon their return, students began to be sent to Europe starting from 1829. (Keser, 2006, p. 123)

Following the establishment of the Mühendishane, drawing and painting education provided in other modernized military schools also contributed to the emergence of the first paintings in the Western style. Consequently, military painters became the first individuals to receive formal education in the field of painting and make a significant impact. "Ferik İbrahim Pasha (1815-1899) was among the earliest graduates of the Mühendishane, while Ferik Tevfik Pasha (1819-1876) graduated from Harbiye." (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 51)

Soldier painters, who lived and produced artworks between the first quarter of the 19th century and the establishment and structuring period of the Republic of Türkiye, played a significant role in the social and cultural transformation that aimed to align with Western ideals. As part of their duties, soldier painters were not only present on the battlefields but also fulfilled the responsibilities bestowed upon them as artists. (Alkan, 2017, p. 15)

The organization of the first significant art exhibition in Istanbul can be attributed to the efforts of Ahmet Ali (Şeker Ahmet Pasha), which took place on April 27, 1873.

One of the facets of the educational reforms driven by the Westernization movement was related to culture and art. The influx of students who had studied abroad, bringing with them new artistic concepts, coupled with the desire to showcase the modernization efforts of the Ottoman Empire, led to the establishment of an institution for higher art education. *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi Âlisi*, which commenced its educational activities on March 3, 1883, was founded to fulfill this need.

Osman Hamdi Bey assumed the position of school director on January 1, 1882, while the sculptor Osman Yervant Efendi effectively served as the deputy director. In the school, where Osman Efendi also served as the instructor for the sculpture workshop, two foreign artists, Salvatore Valeri and Warnia Zarzecki, were responsible for the painting workshops. Zarzecki acted as the drawing instructor, while Valeri provided guidance on oil painting techniques. (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 104)

In light of these developments, as the 20th century commenced, we encounter a group of artists who had emerged during the period. This group, known as *Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti* (the Ottoman Painters Society), comprised artists such as M. Ruhi Arel, Sami Yetik, Şevket Dağ, Hikmet Onat, İbrahim Çallı, Hoca Ali Rıza, Ahmet Ziya Akbulut, Feyhaman Duran, Ömer Adil, Hüseyin Haşim, Hüseyin Avni Lifij, Mehmet Ali Laga, Vecihi Bereketoğlu, Namık İsmail, Celal Esad Arseven, Müfide Kadri, and Mihri Müşfik. In 1921, the society changed its name to *Türk Ressamlar Cemiyeti* (the Turkish Painters Society). Subsequently, in 1926, it adopted the name *Türk Sanayi-i Nefise Birliği* (the Turkish Fine Arts Association), and in 1929, it became *Güzel Sanatlar Birliği* (the Union of Fine Arts).

The artists affiliated with *Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti* played a pioneering role in the development of Turkish painting during the early years of the Republic. These artists, known by various titles such as *Asker Ressamlar* (Soldier Painters) or members of the *1914 Kuşağı* (1914 Generation), served as educators at the *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi*, artists within *Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltıraşlar Birliği* (the Independent Painters and Sculptors Union), art critics in magazine articles, and mentors to artists in the *D Grubu* (D Group), thus exerting a significant influence on shaping the subsequent art scene.

The achievements of the Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti and Sanayii Nefise Birliği during the period from 1914 to the 1940s are revolutionary and remarkable. The foundation of contemporary Turkish art and the emergence of our modern movements were established through the exhibitions organized by this collective. (Berk & Gezer, 1973, p. 41)

Concurrently, students who continued their education at the *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* and successfully passed the school's exams in 1910 were awarded government scholarships to study art abroad. However, with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, these students returned to their homeland.

Some of the artists from the 1914 kuşağı were directly from the *Sanayi-i Nefise*, while others, after completing the Naval War School, resigned from the military

as lieutenants and received art education at *Sanayi-i Nefise* (Ruhi Arel, Hikmet Onat, Ali Sami Boyar). (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 119)

*1914 Kuşağı* represents a significant turning point in Turkish painting. The activities of the artists who returned to the country in 1914 ensured the permanent establishment of Western-style painting in Türkiye. These artists assumed teaching positions at the *Sanayi-i Nefise*, the newly opened *İnas Sanayi-i Nefise (Girls's Fine Arts School)* schools, as well as some military and civilian high schools, and became the founders of a modern painting tradition that extended to future generations. "After their return, the participation of Çallı, Gürkan, N. İsmail, Onat, A.S. Boyar, and Feyhaman Duran at the *Sanayi-i Nefise* and *İnas Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* changed the starting point and philosophy of *Sanayi-i Nefise*" (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 121).

One of the notable endeavors of the Westernization movement was the establishment of the *İnas Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi*, an art school for girls. Founded in 1914, the school merged with the *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* in 1920, and as a result, the latter began admitting female students.

During the war period, the participation of returning artists in the Şişli Atelier became one of their most significant activities.

The establishment of the Şişli Atelier was commissioned by War Minister Enver Pasha, and the artists of the 1914 Kuşağı created paintings depicting war scenes and soldiers of various sizes within this atelier. These artworks were initially exhibited to the public at the Galatasaray Dormitory in Istanbul in 1918 and were later sent to Vienna and Berlin for further display. (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 151)

İbrahim Çallı, Feyhaman Duran, Namık İsmail, Hikmet Onat, Sami Yetik, Mehmet Ruhi Arel, Ali Sami Boyar, and Ali Cemal participated in this atelier, while Ömer Adil, Cevad Bey, Halil Pasha, Harika (Sirel Lifij), Hüseyin Avni (Lifij), İsmail Hakkı Bey, Ruşen Zamir Hanım, Seyid Bey, Şevket (Dağ), Diyarbakırlı Tahsin Bey, and Hüseyin Zekâi Pasha also contributed to the first exhibition held at the Galatasaray Dormitory with their artworks. (Alkan, 2017, p. 32)

While the *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* held a monopoly over art education, painter Mehmet Ruhi Arel and sculptor Ahmed İhsan Bey, dissatisfied with the school's activities and policies, established the *Serbest Resim Atölyesi (Free Painting Atelier)* in Istanbul's Çemberlitaş district in 1922. "Sculptor Ahmed İhsan, Sami Yetik, Feyhaman Duran, İbrahim Çallı, Şevket Dağ, and Mehmet Ruhi Arel, serving as art instructors, trained students at this private art school" (Alkan, 2017, p. 39).

### 3. The Republic Period

The deteriorating Ottoman Empire, in its pursuit to adapt to the changing times and maintain its integrity, implemented various reforms. However, the empire's eventual fragmentation and the emergence of different states within its territory became inevitable. The establishment of the Republic of Türkiye can be traced back to this reform process, and Turkish painting, the subject of our discussion, is inseparable from this history of reform.

"After approximately two centuries of Westernization, starting from the *II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi (the Second Constitutional Era)*, three political movements began to exert simultaneous influence in the political arena: Westernism, Islamism, and Turkism." (Keser, 2006, p. 157). In his book titled *Türk Halk Hareketleri ve Devrimler*, Çetin Yetkin (1980) explains that the westernization movements of the Ottoman Empire were primarily conservative in nature, rather than revolutionary and innovative, representing an attempt to preserve the waning imperial power through a restorative reflex. On the other hand, Islamism embraced religious governance as a means to safeguard the state, advocating for a complete alignment of the administration with Islamic society. "With these qualities, it opposes the collaborationist Ottoman bourgeoisie. Faced with the entry of capitalism and imperialism into the country along with Westernization, Islamic thought took a stand against this development." (Yetkin, 1980, p. 456). Among these ideas, the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti leaned towards Westernism and worked towards the renewal of the state. However, the changing demographics following the Balkan Wars rendered policies based on religious origins ineffective, and the concept of Turkism emerged as an idea that could unify the state. "When İttihat ve Terakki saw that Westernism and Ottomanism, Islamism, did not serve the purpose of saving the Ottoman Empire and perhaps because there was no other ethnic group left to rely on, they turned to Turkism." (Yetkin, 1980, p. 457). Eventually, as the Ottoman Empire dwindled to the Anatolian territories, the Republic

of Türkiye was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, with the aspiration to expand its borders based on the *Misak-ı Milli* (*the National Pact*).

In summary, the Ottoman Empire, which spanned several centuries, encountered internal and external challenges during the 19th and 20th centuries, leading to political and economic decline. These difficulties eventually led to the fragmentation of the empire and its ultimate dissolution. The establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 marked a new era, wherein the country inherited the remnants of the collapsed empire and embarked on a comprehensive reconstruction process aimed at revitalizing its economy, society, and aligning itself with the modern world. This new nation, comprising diverse ethnic groups that had coexisted for centuries and identified themselves as part of a collective nation, embraced a dominant Turkish identity and pursued the path of nation-building. Despite enduring significant losses, the new state managed to defend its territories through a remarkable victory, and during this transformative period, art became an influential medium, serving as a spokesperson for the revolutionary order.

In the early years of the Republic, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the governing elite, a nation-building policy was pursued, emphasizing principles of modernization, secularism, and populism. Within the framework of the state's cultural revolution, the role of fine arts held great significance. Cultural and artistic modernization was pursued through two main approaches. Firstly, efforts were made to research, exhibit, and present the nation's cultural heritage, which was intertwined with its historical legacy, to the general public. This aimed to foster a sense of national identity and pride by emphasizing the rich cultural history of Türkiye. Secondly, there was a deliberate endeavor to create a distinct Turkish art that incorporated contemporary Western art theories and methods while remaining firmly rooted in traditional Turkish artistic traditions. This synthesis sought to strike a balance between embracing global artistic trends and preserving the unique cultural identity of Türkiye.

As a result of the cultural policies pursued in the initial decade of the Republic, the state assumed a guiding, supportive, and protective role across all artistic domains. The government actively encouraged and promoted artistic endeavors, recognizing the importance of art in shaping and expressing the nation's cultural identity. During this period, several institutions played prominent roles in the field of culture and art. Foremost among these was Türk Ocağı, an organization established in 1912, which aimed to revive and propagate Turkish culture, history, and language. Additionally, Halkevleri and Köy Enstitüleri emerged as important cultural and educational institutions. Halkevleri, established in 1932, focused on adult education and cultural activities, including the organization of art exhibitions, theater performances, and music concerts. Köy Enstitüleri, established in the 1940s, aimed to modernize rural areas by providing education, including training in arts and crafts, to rural communities. These institutions played crucial roles in shaping the cultural landscape of the Republic and fostering artistic development. They provided platforms for artists to exhibit their works, encouraged the exploration and preservation of Turkish cultural heritage, and facilitated the dissemination of artistic knowledge and skills among the population. The state's involvement in guiding and supporting artistic endeavors reflected its broader vision of transforming Türkiye into a modern and progressive nation.

Overall, during the early years of the Republic, the convergence of nation-building efforts, cultural policies, and state support resulted in the promotion of Turkish art as a means of expressing the revolutionary ideals and aspirations of the new nation. Artistic expression became a powerful tool in shaping and conveying the evolving national identity, highlighting both the rich historical legacy and the contemporary ambitions of the Republic of Türkiye.

After the proclamation of the Republic, Türk Ocakları intensified its efforts in education, culture, and art, in line with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's desire. In this context, activities aimed at popular education were carried out, and the people who participated in various art, culture, and education events witnessed and experienced an innovation. (Kodal, 2014, p. 304)

In the realm of painting, the most prominent educational institution was *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* (*the School of Fine Arts*). During the occupation of Istanbul, which occurred in the years following 1917, the school faced challenges and had to relocate several times to ensure its continuity. Despite the adversities brought about by the war, *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* persevered and continued its educational activities during the Republican era. The art education system, which had initially focused on Western art during the Ottoman period, underwent further modernization and development in the early years of the Republic. The leaders, particularly Atatürk, attached great importance to preserving the cultural heritage inherited from the past, and the Republican governments exhibited heightened interest in cultural affairs, striving to foster creativity and promote artistic growth. Consequently, the school changed its name to *Sanayi-i Nefise*

*Akademisi (Fine Arts Academy)* between 1927 and 1929, and later adopted the name *Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi (Academy of Fine Arts)* from 1929 onwards.

In an effort to cultivate a robust cultural environment, the state embarked on the establishment of official museums with the aim of promoting Turkish art and artists, as well as preserving collective memory. In 1937, the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (*İstanbul Resim ve Heykel Müzesi*) was inaugurated as part of the Academy of Fine Arts, taking up residence in the Crown Prince's Chamber of Dolmabahçe Palace. The creation of this art museum was initiated by the order of Atatürk himself, with the objective of collecting artworks from all corners of the country and restoring damaged pieces. Previously acquired works held by various institutions and ministries were gathered to form the initial collection of the museum. Today, the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture stands as Türkiye's most extensive repository of art. Additionally, seven painting and sculpture museums have been established in different cities across the nation's history. Following Istanbul, museums were opened in Ankara, Izmir, Erzurum, Şanlıurfa, Mersin, and Aydın. While the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture is presently affiliated with Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, the remaining six museums operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

### 3.1. The State's Patronage of Art

The development of art in Western societies has long been intertwined with societal progress. As power and wealth became less concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite over time, the bourgeoisie emerged as the primary patrons of the arts, wielding significant influence in the cultural realm. However, in the early years of the Republic of Türkiye, the presence of a Turkish bourgeoisie was not viable. The nation had endured economic hardships resulting from consecutive wars, and there was no cohesive collective identity that could define the population in terms of governance, language, ethnicity, religious background, geographical distribution, or demographic characteristics. The absence of capital for artistic endeavors and the lack of a shared cultural foundation compelled the state to assume the role of the sole patron of the arts during the initial period of the Republic. It is reasonable to assert that this situation persisted until the end of the single-party era (*tek partili dönem*).

In this context, the state provided financial support in various forms to cultivate an artistic environment and incentivize artists. These efforts encompassed the enactment of laws to organize competitions, the acquisition of artworks for government institutions, the facilitation of exhibition arrangements, and the provision of scholarships for art education abroad. For instance, in the 1930s, a law was passed mandating the presence of artworks in all public buildings owned by the state, and during this period, newly established banks also began acquiring art pieces.

The state's financial support not only aimed to stimulate artistic production but also sought to shape the cultural landscape of the nascent Republic. By fostering an environment conducive to artistic expression and by actively collecting and exhibiting artworks, the state aimed to cultivate a national identity grounded in the rich heritage of Turkish art while embracing contemporary Western artistic theories and practices. The state's patronage played a pivotal role in the establishment of art institutions, the organization of cultural events, and the preservation and promotion of the country's artistic legacy.

It is worth noting that the state's exclusive patronage of the arts during the early years of the Republic has evolved over time. As the nation progressed economically and socially, and as private capital began to accumulate, the role of the state as the primary patron gradually transformed. Private individuals, corporations, and foundations have increasingly assumed a more significant role in supporting and promoting the arts. However, the state continues to play a vital role in providing a conducive environment and infrastructure for artistic production and dissemination, ensuring the continued development and preservation of Türkiye's vibrant artistic heritage.

One of the most significant challenges regarding art education in the early years of the Republic was the shortage of trained educators. To address this issue, the state began sending students abroad, particularly to Paris, with government support starting from 1924, in order to train educators in these fields.

In a period when the state was newly established, nothing was fully in place, not even enough restaurants or hotels in Ankara, Atatürk managed to send students to Europe, specifically to receive education in painting, sculpture, and music, with very limited budgets. (Uluskan, 2010, p. 515)

The first group of students with participation from other fields included artists such as Refik Ekipman, Cevat Dereli, Mahmut Cuda, Muhittin Sebati, Zeki Kocamemi, Şeref Akdik, Ali Avni Çelebi, and Hale Asaf.

With the transformation of Sanayii Nefise into the State Academy of Fine Arts following the declaration of the Republic, the program of sending students to the West continued until the 1980s, with efforts made to facilitate direct influence from the Western world in the development of painting and sculpture in Türkiye. (Tansuğ, 1991, p. 14)

During this period, although the number of artists was limited, there was also a scarcity of painting materials such as paint, brushes, and canvases. In addition to the financial difficulties associated with pursuing art, there was also a shortage of exhibition spaces, presenting another challenge. In this constrained environment, artists found themselves compelled to open joint exhibitions as a solution. *Güzel Sanatlar Birliđi (The Fine Arts Union)*, established before the Republic and predominantly consisting of artists from the *1914 Kuşuđı (1914 generation)*, continued its traditional Galatasaray exhibitions. However, in the 1923 Galatasaray Painting Exhibition, which was the first exhibition of the Republican era, there was now the patronage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. "The exhibition was introduced by İbrahim Çallı as the 'first national exhibition'. Government spokesperson Hamdullah Suphi Bey stated that they would provide both financial and moral support to the artists." (Özyiđit, 2018, p. 268). In this exhibition, three paintings were purchased on behalf of Mustafa Kemal.

Another exhibition opened in 1923 is the Ankara Painting Exhibition. The First Ankara Painting Exhibition was inaugurated on October 14, 1923, at the Ankara Türk Ocađı Building. The fact that Atatürk visited and expressed his admiration for this first art exhibition held in Ankara made it special. (Özyiđit, 2018, p. 268)

While the Galatasaray exhibitions in Istanbul continued, Ankara began to establish itself as an art environment where regular exhibitions were held. The Ankara exhibitions continued until 1931.

The Fine Arts Department of the Halkevleri, established in 1932, aimed to preserve Turkish cultural and artistic values in light of Atatürk's reforms and ideals. The goal of the Halkevleri was to increase the interest and proximity of the public and to spread the fine arts beyond Istanbul and Ankara throughout the country. To convince the public that the fine arts, which they seemed indifferent to, were actually their own property, the Halkevleri organized a total of 970 exhibitions in all regions. These exhibitions helped create environments where artists and the public could nourish each other and provided ideas on where the identity of Turkish painting art should be sought.

*İnkılap Sergileri (the Revolution Exhibitions)*, which started in 1933 and continued until 1937, *Yurt Gezileri (the Country Tours)* conducted by artists between 1938 and 1943, along with the exhibitions organized during these tours, and *Devlet Resim Heykel Sergileri (the State Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions)* starting from 1939, have taken their place as the most influential and significant artistic activities of this period.

One of the important initiatives undertaken by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) to popularize art was the Yurt Gezileri and the Yurt Gezileri Exhibitions. The purpose of the Yurt Gezileri was to send painters to various cities in the country to explore folklore values.

Between 1938 and 1943, during the conditions of World War II, 58 painters were sent to 63 provinces and one district on these tours. Among these painters, 17 were sent on these tours twice. The paintings created during the tours were exhibited in Ankara every year. In the collective exhibition held in Ankara in 1944, there were 675 works, but the number of paintings produced as a result of the tours, including the 50 paintings exhibited at the State Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions between 1939 and 1945, along with the ones kept by the artists themselves, amounts to nearly 800. (Bilen Buđra, 2018, p. 217)

The artists were supported through payments and rewards. The aim of this approach was to spread art to the public, give it a specific function, and enable the artist to become closely acquainted with the realities of the country.

As part of the exhibition system established by the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekâleti*) in 1939, the State Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions were initiated. These exhibitions, held in Ankara and open for one month, were a manifestation of the government's policy to support art and artists. As part of this policy, artworks were purchased to support the artists, and awards were given to the artists who achieved recognition by the juries formed for the exhibitions. The state aimed to encourage artists and did not discriminate among different art movements or artists. These exhibitions provided an opportunity for



artists from all generations and artistic trends to showcase their works and present them to state institutions, which were the primary art patrons.

After 1946, the practice of selecting and awarding the top three works among the exhibited pieces was discontinued, and instead, the selected works began to be purchased by the Ministry of Education. These exhibitions also served as a platform for certain artists who were not affiliated with any specific group but worked within or outside the Academy, such as Şefik Bursalı, İlhami Demirci, Nurettin Ergüven, Ayetullah Sümer, Hamit Görele, İbrahim Safi, and Ercüment Kalmık, to gain recognition. (Bilen Buğra, 2018, p. 221)

### 3.2. The General Themes In The Art Of The Early Republic

While the state's compulsory patronage opened the way for the instrumentalization of art as an ideological apparatus, it also laid the groundwork for the development of a new national consciousness and the realization of a project to transform subjects and servants into a nation and individuals. In Turkish painting, we observe attempts to establish a national identity with the support of power. The Republic must rapidly modernize and exhibit all the modernity inherent in art.

The Republic of Türkiye, in the process of establishing institutional structures, has invented its unique traditions, which are one of the fundamental principles of modernization. The main factor that facilitated the transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Türkiye was not national consciousness, but the struggle for liberation against imperialist occupation forces. This process of struggle brought forth national consciousness, leading to the formation of a parliament under the authority of identities that would establish national unity in the political arena and the establishment of a constitutional state order. The administration, which spared no sacrifice for the development of fine arts in Türkiye and believed that they played a crucial role in implementing and popularizing the modernization reforms, assigned an important mission to artists in this context.

*Halkçılık (populism)*, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Republic of Türkiye, along with its natural consequence of national sovereignty, also determined the orientation of the cultural and art policy. In the conditions where national sovereignty was realized, one of the program objectives was for the activities resulting from art education to reach all parts of the country. The state, as the sole demander, carried out the production of artworks in line with the ideology of the Republic. Artists of this period addressed topics such as the establishment of the Republic, Westernization, and the War of Independence in their works.

The works produced in the early years of the Republic are didactic and documentary in nature, mostly aimed at popularizing new values and contributing to the spread of art. For example, works reflecting principles and reforms were displayed on the walls of various state institutions. (Akengin & Koç, 2018, p. 147)

Among the visual images of the Republic ideology, the most significant one is the Turkish woman. The emancipation of women, whose individual identities were not recognized in the social structure of the Ottoman Empire, became one of the national development goals of the Republic of Türkiye. By radically altering the definitions based on Islamic morality regarding a woman's modesty and invisibility, the visibility of women was increased, and their citizenship rights were guaranteed. Important steps such as the abandonment of the veil (1924), the adoption of civil law (1926), and granting women the right to vote and be elected (1934) were taken to enable women to enter public spaces and gain citizenship rights in the newly established Turkish nation-state.

In the new secular social order, women transformed their maternal role into a teaching mission, and they were entrusted with the task of raising the new generation of the Republic. Educated and modern Turkish women actively engaged in social life, undergoing a mental and physical transformation, and emerged as a new figure of the contemporary Turkish Republic revolutions. "As the Young Republic was being established, cultural structuring was developed in parallel. Thus, a new environment was created both for grasping the principles and reforms and for the development of art" (Akengin & Koç, 2018, p. 147).

While these themes provide an insight into daily life, they also directly depict the Anatolian people in paintings, particularly through the Yurt Gezileri, paving the way towards social realism in later periods.

## 4. Conclusion

The antecedent artistic endeavors preceding the establishment of the Turkish Republic, serving as manifestations of Ottoman modernization endeavors, necessitate meticulous examination. This inquiry encompasses multifaceted dimensions, including the founding of the *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* (School of Fine Arts) and the establishment of the *Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltraşlar Birliği* (the Independent Artists and Sculptors Union). Additionally, we delve into the transformative influences introduced by the *D Grubu* (the D Group) and the emergence of a novel generation of artists, who came into being during the nascent years of the Republic. The participation of these artists in various collectives and associations forms another crucial facet of our exploration. Moreover, we must dissect the concurrent surge of industrialization in Türkiye and the concurrent emergence of novel cultural movements, notably expressionism and the pronounced shift towards abstract art. Simultaneously, it is imperative to scrutinize the far-reaching influences emanating from the post-1980 cultural and artistic milieu, which have indelibly shaped the artistic landscape. Finally, we must not disregard the profound impact of contemporary art on the realm of painting, a phenomenon that gained particular momentum starting from the 1990s. A comprehensive analysis of these interrelated themes stands to aid our endeavor in encapsulating the century-long odyssey of painting. Notwithstanding the intrinsic significance of each component within this framework, it becomes apparent that their isolated consideration is insufficient to fully grasp the profound importance of art, especially painting, in the philosophical underpinnings and principles of the Republic of Türkiye. Art, as an honorable constituent of the civilized world, has attained its current international eminence through the dedication of artists who create and the visionary early republican leaders and intellectuals who perceived the support of art as a national imperative.

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