



From Tradition to Modern: The Artistic Journey of Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center

Üçbölük Köyü Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi: Gelenekten Moderne Uzayan Sanatsal Yolculuk

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Abstract

The Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, established in 1999 through the personal efforts of Recai Demirsöz in the Üçbölük Village of Safranbolu district in Karabük, is an important art and history center reflecting the region's cultural heritage. Situated in the village center, this Art Center was created by transforming a traditional village primary school after personal repair and renovation efforts, attracting attention with both its indoor and outdoor exhibition areas. The Culture and Art Center's collection encompasses a wide range from archaeological artifacts of the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods to traditional handicrafts and modern artworks. Notably, Recai Demirsöz's paintings and woodwork inspired by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Vincent Willem Van Gogh, and Edvard Munch define the Culture and Art Center's artistic identity. Beyond being a space where historical artifacts are displayed, the Culture and Art Center also contributes to the cultural and artistic development of the region by exhibiting the works of local artists. The Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center serves as a significant attraction for art and history enthusiasts both locally and internationally. The Art Center successfully fulfills its mission of preserving the region's rich cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations. Within the scope of this study, examinations were conducted at the Culture and Art Center, defined as a museum/art gallery, in 2018, 2019, 2025, and research was carried out on the Culture and Art Center's historical process and exhibition areas. This article utilizes qualitative and quantitative data obtained to provide information about the Culture and Art Center's historical process, describes the works on display, and ultimately attempts to emphasize the significance and importance of the subject.

Keywords: Culture and Art Center, Karabük, Safranbolu, Üçbölük Village.

Özet

Karabük ili Safranbolu ilçesi Üçbölük Köyü'nde 1999 yılında Recai Demirsöz'ün kişisel çabalarıyla kurulan Üçbölük Köyü Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi, bölgenin kültürel mirasını yansıtan önemli bir sanat ve tarih merkezidir. Köy merkezinde konumlanan bu sanat merkezi, geleneksel bir köy ilkokulunun kişisel onarım ve yenileme çalışmaları sonrası dönüştürülmesiyle oluşturulmuş olup, iç ve dış mekan sergileme alanlarıyla dikkat çekmektedir. Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi'nin koleksiyonu, Roma, Bizans ve Osmanlı dönemlerine ait arkeolojik eserlerden geleneksel el sanatları ve modern sanat eserlerine kadar geniş bir yelpazeyi

kapsamaktadır. Özellikle Recai Demirsöz'ün Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Vincent Willem Van Gogh ve Edvard Munch'tan ilham alan, resim ve ahşap sanat eserleri, Sanat Merkezi'nin sanatsal kimliğini tanımlamaktadır. Tarihi eserlerin sergilendiği bir mekan olmanın ötesinde, Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi aynı zamanda yerel sanatçıların eserlerine ev sahipliği yaparak bölgenin kültürel ve sanatsal gelişimine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Üçbölük Köyü Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi hem yerel hem de uluslararası düzeyde sanat ve tarih meraklıları için önemli bir cazibe merkezi olarak hizmet vermektedir. Sanat Merkezi, bölgenin zengin kültürel mirasını koruma ve gelecek nesillere aktarma misyonunu başarıyla yerine getirmektedir. Bu çalışma kapsamında, müze/sanat galerisi olarak tanımlanan Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi'nde 2018, 2019 ve 2025 yıllarında incelemeler yapılmış, Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi'nin tarihi süreci ve sergileme alanları üzerine araştırmalar yürütülmüştür. Bu makale, elde edilen nitel ve nicel verileri kullanarak Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi'nin tarihi süreci hakkında bilgi sunmakta, sergilenen eserleri betimlemekte ve nihayetinde konunun önem ve anlamını vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi, Karabük, Safranbolu, Üçbölük Köyü.

1. INTRODUCTION

Safranbolu, located within the province of Karabük in Turkey, constitutes one of its seven districts. It is a historical settlement with deep roots extending back to antiquity. Üçbölük Village, currently affiliated with Safranbolu and situated 16 km away, is a small settlement. Archaeological investigations, surface surveys, traveler accounts, and scholarly research conducted in the region indicate the active presence of diverse civilizations within this geography (Gökoğlu, 1952: 12; Ainsworth, 1842: 64-66; Kaya, 2023: 142; Belke, 1996: 268; Τριανταφυλλίδης, 2022: 473). During the Roman Empire, Safranbolu was situated within the borders of Paphlagonia (Cramer, 1832: 216-241; Ovat, 2003: 193), and with the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, it was incorporated into the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire (Haldon, 2007: 66).

Safranbolu and its surrounding settlements remained under Byzantine rule for an extended period before coming under the control of Abdülmelik, the commander of Harun al-Rashid, in the 8th century (Ramsay, 1890: 54). The region reverted to Byzantine administration and remained under their dominion from the 8th to the 11th centuries (Haldon, 2007: 102-104). In the 11th century, the influence of Kara-Tigin, the commander of Kutalmishoglu Suleiman Bey, in the region led to the weakening of Byzantine sovereignty by the 12th century. The area came under Turkish control in the 12th-13th centuries, and from 1402 onwards, Turkish families were settled in the region (Aygün, 1960: 37-39; Talbot, 1991: 359; Yazıcıoğlu and Al, 1982: 13).

During the Ottoman period, Safranbolu emerged as a significant production center and settlement, becoming a crucial hub within the transportation network connecting Ankara, Bartın, Kastamonu, Istanbul, and Zonguldak (Belke, 1996: 268). It is known that Muslim Turks and non-Muslims coexisted peacefully in Safranbolu until the 1922-1923 Population Exchange (Τριανταφυλλίδης, 2022: 474). Following 1924, the population of Safranbolu was recorded as approximately 5,000, whereas today this number has reached 70,000 (Doğanalp-Votzi, 2022: 321). Üçbölük Village, situated 16 km from Safranbolu, is currently inhabited by approximately 90 people. The scope of this study focuses on the Culture and Art Center located in Üçbölük Village, a settlement with a notable historical background.

The preservation of cultural heritage and heritage sites holds critical importance in strengthening the ties of societies with their past. In this context, Recai Demirsöz's endeavor in Üçbölük Village, affiliated with the Safranbolu district of Karabük, to restore a decommissioned former primary school building into a "Culture and Art Center" constitutes a significant example of a 26-year effort dedicated to the conservation and exhibition of local heritage. This center, as one of the pioneering village Culture and Art Center initiatives in the Western Black Sea Region, aims to embrace the history of the village and transmit this heritage to future generations.

The aim of this research is to examine the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center and the artistic understanding of Recai Demirsöz within the scope of Art History, thereby elucidating his role in the preservation of cultural heritage. The center's collection encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from archaeological artifacts to modern art works, and this diversity offers a unique experience for both national and international visitors. However, such local initiatives face various challenges, including sustainability, collection management, and visitor accessibility; these issues constitute one of the primary focal points of our research. This process has facilitated the convergence of numerous like-minded, non-materialistic art enthusiasts, culminating in the establishment of the Culture and Art Center on the scale of this heritage endeavor. Under the leadership of Safranbolu District Governor Celal Ulusoy (1998-2003), the transformation of the Culture and Art Center from a derelict school building into a modern art center was realized.

This center, which has not been previously addressed in a scientific study employing art historical methodology, has only been briefly mentioned in local research pertaining to Karabük and Safranbolu, or has remained limited to information found in interviews with Recai Demirsöz.

This research adopts both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the artifacts within the Culture and Art Center, evaluate its exhibition techniques, and analyze its impact on the local community. The study aims to contribute to art historical literature by assessing the efforts of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center in preserving and exhibiting cultural heritage as a reflection of local art and historical understanding. The preservation and exhibition of cultural heritage play a critical role in strengthening societies' connection to their past while simultaneously ensuring the transmission of artistic and historical values to future generations. In this context, the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, established through a local initiative in Üçbölük Village, part of the Safranbolu district renowned for its historical and cultural richness in Turkey, stands as a significant example of heritage preservation and exhibition. The Culture and Art Center emerged from the personal efforts to transform a former primary school building, reflecting the village's historical fabric, into an art and culture hub. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center within the context of Art History, thereby elucidating its role in the preservation and exhibition of local cultural heritage. The center's collection encompasses a wide range, from archaeological artifacts to modern artworks, offering a unique experience for both local and national visitors. However, the challenges faced by such personally initiated Culture and Art Centers's, particularly concerning sustainability, collection management, and visitor accessibility, constitute one of the focal points of this research.

This study aims to analyze the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center and the paintings of artist Recai Demirsöz, who produces his works there, within the context of Art History, thereby revealing the cultural and artistic value of the Culture and Art Center and aiming to establish a model for similar projects. The Culture and Art Center, which has not been comprehensively evaluated in any scientific publication to date, has only been briefly mentioned in studies prepared about Karabük and Safranbolu or has remained limited to information from interviews conducted with Recai Demirsöz. To this end, a qualitative and quantitative research approach has been adopted, employing methods such as the examination of the artworks in the Culture and Art Center, the evaluation of its exhibition techniques, and the analysis of the Culture and Art Center's impact on the local community. This research seeks to contribute to Art History literature by assessing the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center's efforts in preserving and exhibiting cultural heritage as a reflection of local art and historical understanding.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research has adopted a qualitative and quantitative research approach with the aim of examining the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center within the context of Art History. The steps followed during the research process are presented below under subheadings. Literature review; academic studies, articles, and publications concerning Culture and Art Center's in Safranbolu and its vicinity, particularly those established through personal initiatives, were examined. During this stage, the works of local researchers such as Dedeoğlu (1996, 2000), Ovat (2003), Zengin (2004), Kuşoğlu (2014), Ertok-Atmaca (2015), Gür and Yıldırım (2022), and Kaya (2023), which provide information about the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, were considered. Examination of the Art Center; the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center was visited on-site (2018, 2019, 2025) and examined in detail. Observations were made regarding the architectural structure of the Culture and Art Center, the types of exhibited works, the exhibition techniques employed, and the overall atmosphere. Oral interviews conducted with Recai Demirsöz and examinations of the artworks were included. Artworks; the artifacts and artworks exhibited in the Culture and Art Center were analyzed within the framework of Art History methodology. The periods, styles, artists (with a specific focus on the works of Recai Demirsöz), and cultural contexts of the pieces were evaluated. In particular, the influences of Vincent Willem Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, and Edvard Munch evident in Recai Demirsöz's paintings were examined in light of Naive Art and Art History literature. Oral interviews; oral history interviews conducted with Recai Demirsöz, the founder of the Culture and Art Center, provided firsthand information regarding the Culture and Art Center's establishment process, the formation of its collection, and its impact on the local community. The interviews also addressed Demirsöz's artistic approach and his vision for the future of the Culture and Art Center. Historical artifacts and Paintings; the paintings and archival documents within the Culture and Art Center were examined to gain information about the historical structures and rock tombs in the vicinity of the settlement. These documents were utilized to understand the exhibition strategy of the Culture and Art Center and its relationship with local history. Conclusion; this research aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center within the context of Art History and to establish a model for similar projects.

3. ÜÇBÖLÜK VILLAGE CULTURE AND ART CENTER

This research employs a qualitative and quantitative research approach to examine the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center within the framework of Art History. Culture and Art Center and museums affiliated with public institutions and legal entities in the central district of Karabük and Safranbolu have been operational for numerous years. In Safranbolu, various sites, including the Governor's Guest House, Turkish Coffee Museum, Tannery Museum, Safranbolu Historical Government Mansion, Sucu Hafız Guest House, Turkish Delight and Saffron Museum, Muratoğlu Mansion Village Museum, Nostalgia Guest House, Chocolate Museum, Automobile Museum, Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, and the Iron and Steel Industry Museum, have long accommodated both local and international tourists. Among these, the Culture and Art Center in Üçbölük Village is uniquely presented as follows.

Located in Üçbölük Village (formerly Ilbarıt), approximately 16 km from the Safranbolu district center, the historical school building has been arranged, painted, and repaired by Recai Demirsöz to be transformed into the Culture and Art Center. At the entrance of this privately owned Culture and Art Center, a panel displays the inscription "Republic of Turkey, Safranbolu Governorship, Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center." Since 1999, artifacts entirely collected or purchased by Recai Demirsöz from the surrounding settlements have been exhibited here.

In 1999, Demirsöz applied to the Safranbolu Governorship, expressing his desire to establish a Culture and Art Center in the village. He stated that his application was met with a positive response, and the derelict former primary school building was transformed into a Culture and Art Center through extensive effort and endeavor. The official opening of the Culture and Art Center took place in 1999, and its name was announced as the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center (Dedeoğlu, 1996: 24; Dedeoğlu, 2000: 43-47; Kuşoğlu, 2014: 45-46; Kaya, 2023: 75).

3.1. Literature Review

Academic studies, articles, and publications concerning culture and art center and museums in Safranbolu and its vicinity, particularly those established through personal initiatives, were examined. Studies focusing on Üçbölük Village have generally provided information regarding the historical background and rock tombs of the region. Researchers in this area have predominantly included information about the archaeological artifacts housed in the Culture and Art Center (Gür and Yıldırım, 2022: 125-157). Furthermore, publications and documentaries created by Dedeoğlu (1996, 2000), Ovat (2003), Zengin (2004), Kuşoğlu (2014), Ertok-Atmaca (2015), and Kaya (2023) have included general information about Recai Demirsöz and the Culture and Art Center. Notably, the article penned by Ertok-Atmaca (2015) provides, for the first time, information about the artist's life, paintings, and understanding of naive art.

3.2. Examination of the Culture and Art Center

The Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center was visited on-site and examined in detail. Observations were conducted regarding the Culture and Art Center's architectural structure, the types of exhibited works, the exhibition techniques employed, and the overall atmosphere of the art center. Despite its location distant from the city center, the Culture and Art Center, which is increasingly frequented by local and foreign tourists, receives an average of 300-320 local and 10-15 foreign visitors annually.

The Art Center comprises a single-story stone building with a hipped roof and an open-air exhibition area. Before entering the open-air exhibition space, a large phallos archaeological artifact is displayed in front of the gate. Accessible via a wooden door and a few steps leading down, the open-air exhibition area features columns, blocks, and tombstones dating from the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods, along with agricultural tools and wooden wheels belonging to carts. The Culture and Art Center's indoor exhibition section consists of two areas: the entrance and the main sections. In the entrance area of the indoor exhibition space, which facilitates visitor access, various fossils, stone artifacts from the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods, Ottoman-era agricultural implements, lighting devices, kitchen utensils, various tools, books, magazines, newspapers, and diverse archival documents and photographs are located. Notably, the photographs arranged in large framed panels depict historical structures and rock tombs in the vicinity of the settlement.

Accessible through a doorway, the large rectangular main space showcases handcrafted artworks produced by Recai Demirsöz, an individual known as a sound artist, painter, and accomplished wood craftsman. The walls predominantly feature oil paintings, many of which are inspired by the works of painter Pablo Picasso, while natural wood products are displayed on the floor. Demirsöz, who also acknowledges the influence of Salvador Dali and Edvard Munch, noted that he also created paintings addressing the global pandemic of 2019.

3.3. Artworks

The exhibited artworks and artifacts have been analyzed within the framework of Art History methodology, considering both the objects themselves and their respective locations

within the center. The periods, titles (where applicable), styles, artists (with a specific focus on the works of Recai Demirsöz), and cultural contexts of the pieces have been evaluated. In particular, the influences of Pablo Picasso, Edvard Munch, and Vincent Willem Van Gogh evident in Recai Demirsöz's paintings have been examined in light of Art History literature.

Among the archaeological artifacts are numerous fossils of marine organisms and architectural sculptures dating from the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods. The collection includes a phallos, columns and column capitals, an inscribed architectural block, a Corinthian column capital, a stele, tombstones, an altar base, mortars, and traditional Turkish tiles. The archaeological artifacts are displayed outside the Culture and Art Center's courtyard walls, in the open courtyard, and in the entrance section.

3.3.1. Ethnographic Artifacts

Ethnographic artifacts are exhibited both in the courtyard and the indoor sections of the Culture and Art Center. These artifacts predominantly consist of agricultural tools, transportation vehicles, and everyday household utensils. The collection includes items such as a seed separator, parts of an oxcart, animal bells, various types of cart and horse-drawn carriage wheels, yokes, zevle (a type of rake), düven (a threshing sledge), rakes, anvils, hammers, sickles, nails, drums, tambourines, churns, sieves, numerous pitchforks, hearths, kerosene lamps, lanterns, coffee roasting pans, cezves (small coffee pots), jugs, earthenware pots, honey pots, spinning wheels, vices (kirman – a spindle), coal irons, wooden door locks, hand saws, hatchets, various types of saws, wooden suitcases, pipes, pipe bowls, radios, wall clocks, sieves (for flour), wooden cradles, candlesticks, scissors, baskets, razors, planes, hand scales, ladles, steelyards, lead melting pans, basins, ewers, rifles, bone combs, school bells, okka (a unit of weight) and divit (ink pot and pen holder), boots, and numerous other unclassified artifacts. The majority of these are displayed piled on top of each other or directly on the floor.

3.3.2. Sculptures

More than ten sculptures created by the artist are present. Among these, male and female busts are predominant and are currently exhibited in the Culture and Art Center. In addition to these, hand and foot sculptures developed by the artist using the wood carving technique are also found in the indoor exhibition hall.

3.3.3. Paintings

The paintings of Recai Demirsöz are currently preserved in the Culture and Art Center and in the artist's village house. Demirsöz states that he has more than 200 paintings, 25 of which are exhibited in the Culture and Art Center's exhibition hall, hung on the walls. He also noted that dozens of his paintings are deteriorating in his village house. The paintings are dated between 1985 and 2019. Additionally, an oil painting of Atatürk in the form of a bust is displayed in the entrance section. As the artist did not title his paintings, they have been identified by numbering them from left to right. The portrait of Atatürk is located in the entrance section, while the others are in the indoor exhibition hall. The paintings are as follows: Painting 1 (1999): Oil painting on the theme of globalization. Painting 2 (1993): Oil painting on the theme of environmental destruction. Painting 3 (2008): Oil painting on the theme of the transience of time and the consumption of natural resources. Painting 4 (2014): Oil painting on the theme of the East-West conflict. Painting 5 (2014): Oil painting on the theme of those who hold global power. Painting 6 (2014): Oil painting on the theme of the individual oppressed by material forces. Painting 7 (2014): Oil painting on the theme of the Turkish Soma coal mine disaster. Painting 8 (1986): Oil painting depicting Nazım Hikmet Ran and Ruhi Su. Painting 9 (2009): Oil painting on the theme of agricultural production in Üçbölük Village. Painting 10 (2009): Oil painting on the theme of grape juice and molasses

production in Üçbölük Village. Painting 11 (2009): Oil painting on the theme of villagers selling grapes at the market. Painting 12 (2006): Oil painting on the theme of the craftsmen who created the Paphlagonian rock tombs. Painting 13 (1995): Oil painting on the theme of the Middle East and economic power. Painting 14 (2009): Oil painting on the theme of the Middle East and economic power. Painting 15 (1994): Oil painting on the theme of helplessness. Painting 16 (2015): Oil painting of the artist Recai Demirsöz's father, Satı Demirsöz, reading a book titled "Ben Bir İnsan Mıyım?" (Am I a Human?). Painting 17 (2011): Oil painting depicting his father (Satı Demirsöz) with the saz, zurna, keman (stringed instrument), and drum he produced himself. Painting 18 (2011): Oil painting depicting his father (Satı Demirsöz) holding a saz. Painting 19 (2006): Oil painting of the portrait of Aşık Veysel (a Turkish folk poet and musician). Painting 20 (1993): Oil painting on the theme of Uğur Mumcu (a Turkish investigative journalist) and freedom. Painting 21 (2019): Oil painting on the theme of screaming people, inspired by Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Painting 22 (2019): Oil painting on the theme of a world affected by epidemics and bloody tears. Painting 23 (2019): Oil painting on the theme of a screaming person, inspired by Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Painting 24 (1985): Oil painting on the theme of drought in Africa. Painting 25: An oil painting portrait of Atatürk displayed in the entrance section.

3.3.4. Other Works:

Recai Demirsöz has also created works by stripping the bark from naturally broken or dried tree branches and painting them with varnishes of various colors. More than 50 tree branches of different sizes and thicknesses are displayed on the floor in the exhibition hall. Additionally, the collection includes photographs of the rock tombs and wine workshops in the village, newspapers, magazines, and the 1957-1958 registry books of the primary school in Üçbölük Village.

3.4. Oral Interviews

Oral history interviews conducted with Recai Demirsöz, the founder of the Culture and Art Center, provided firsthand information regarding the Art Center's establishment process, the formation of its collection, and its impact on the local community. The interviews also explored Recai Demirsöz's artistic approach, his engagement with painting and music, the transformation of the former primary school into the Culture and Art Center, and his vision for the future of the Art Center, considering potential future developments. Notes from the interviews conducted with Demirsöz in 2018, 2019, and 2025 are presented below.

In our interviews with the artist, he describes himself and the developments regarding the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center as follows:

My name is Recai Demirsöz, and I was born in 1955 in Üçbölük Village. I am the middle child in a family of seven. My parents were farmers, and my father was also a local artist, someone deeply familiar with our region's folk songs and skilled in crafting his own instruments. He was born in 1910 and often mentioned that there were around fifty other local artists like him right here in Safranbolu. Due to family obligations and financial constraints, I wasn't able to complete my formal education, but ever since primary school, I've been drawn to instruments, learning from my father, and I've also continued to paint.

I see my art as something innate within me. I find myself engaging with both music and painting. I taught myself how to make and play the bağlama simply by watching videos. I don't sell the bağlamas I create. It's difficult to find kiln-dried wood, so I craft them from plum wood. To get the sound I desire, I combine Artvin spruce, which I source from Istanbul, with the plum wood. Inspired by the great Neşet Ertaş, I initially intended to design a 47-size bağlama, but a mistake in shaping the body led me to create it as a 43-size instrument. I still make bağlamas whenever I have the chance. I haven't painted in the last six years, though I do have sketch work.

Art, for me, is my life, almost my reason for being. I cherish my artworks as if they were my own children; how could someone sell their own children? Never. That's why I don't part with them. Especially, I feel a purpose in taking broken or dried trees from nature and bringing them back to life through art. This is a fundamental part of my existence.

My connection to Üçbölük Village is profound; I was born here, I grew up here, and this is where I belong. I will continue to live here and eventually pass away here. I have a deep attachment to the historical artifacts found in this village. I respect the past and the memories it holds, and I find joy in preserving these artifacts and passing them on to future generations. The primary school building in our village, which opened in 1981, became unused in 1986 when a centralized transportation system for education was introduced. In 1998, with the support of the Safranbolu Governorship, we made the decision to transform this abandoned school into a Culture and Art Center. We renovated the building with the help of 22 volunteers from Safranbolu. We also received financial contributions from 45 generous individuals and institutions in establishing the Art Center. We expressed our gratitude to them with a letter of thanks displayed on a panel at the entrance. Following the completion of the renovations, the official opening took place on October 29, 1999, marked by a significant gathering.

Before settling permanently in the village, I spent many years working in a bakery in Istanbul. My only day off was Sunday, and that day was solely for rest, far removed from any artistic pursuits. During my time at the bakery, I wasn't able to create any paintings. Eventually, I decided to return to the village. However, I lacked the knowledge of how to make canvases. The director of the Kazım Taşkent Gallery provided me with instructions on canvas construction. It's interesting to note that Maxim Gorky was also a baker. Back in the village, I started creating my own canvases, easels, and paintbrushes from discarded materials.

3.5. Recai Demirsöz's Artistic Understanding and Works

Within the limited resources of village life, Recai Demirsöz is a self-taught artist nourished by his father Satı Demirsöz's enlightened views and interest in world classics. Unable to continue his education after primary school due to financial constraints, Demirsöz became immersed in art during his years working in Istanbul, enriching his intellectual background by reading about the lives of painters, art movements, and philosophy. Returning to his village from Istanbul in 1980 and continuing to paint, Recai Demirsöz independently learned the oil painting technique and developed a unique artistic language. Demirsöz's paintings, while bearing the characteristic features of naive art, reflect the artist's social awareness and universal perspective. Adopting a figurative expression in his works, Demirsöz occasionally elevates figures to a surreal dimension through deliberate deformations and exaggerations. Human figures, portraits, and commentaries on social events are prominent in his paintings. The themes observed in the artist's works include figurative expression, social sensitivity, war, hunger, thirst, capitalism, imperialism, and environmental issues.

Recai Demirsöz focuses on universal themes in his works. His paintings addressing the issue of drought in Africa exemplify this perspective. The artist states that he identifies this theme with the water scarcity problem in his own village. While traces of Naive Art are evident in the artist's works, Demirsöz has developed a unique technique and expressive language in his art. Among the portraits he has created are depictions of people in his close circle, as well as artists and thinkers he admires. The portrait of his father, Satı Demirsöz, and the paintings of Ruhi Su and Nazım Hikmet Ran are examples of these (Ertok-Atmaca, 2015: 40-50).

The artist predominantly favors cool colors in his paintings. However, he also employs warm colors in some of his works to enhance his expression. Recai Demirsöz's artistic understanding, in

his own words, is based on the idea that "realities are gray." Consequently, he adopts a critical perspective when addressing social realities and the human condition in his paintings (Ertok-Atmaca, 2015: 40-50). Through his works, the artist invites the viewer to think and question. Demirsöz's oeuvre is exhibited in the village art gallery established by the Safranbolu Governorship. This gallery serves as an important venue for the preservation and display of the artist's works. The artworks found in the artist's home and studio further demonstrate his productivity and dedication to his art.

3.6. Historical Artifacts and Paintings

The paintings and archival documents within the Culture and Art Center were examined to gain information about the historical structures and rock tombs in the vicinity of the settlement. These documents were utilized to understand the Culture and Art Center's exhibition strategy and its relationship with local history. For the purpose of defining the Culture and Art Center and presenting its works, spatial units have been numbered as street (1), garden (2), entrance (3), and exhibition hall (4).

Before entering the courtyard and within the courtyard itself, archaeological artifacts are placed by excavating the soil ground. The corridor located between the gate opening to the courtyard and the gate providing entrance to the Culture and Art Center is paved with natural stones, with columns placed on both sides. Archaeological artifacts exhibited directly on the ground within the courtyard walls are presented to the interest of tourists. A large number of fossils and various ethnographic artifacts are located on the two-step staircase providing entrance to the Culture and Art Center (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Archaeological Artifacts in the Entrance Section of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center

Beyond the archaeological artifacts, numerous ethnographic artifacts are also located in the garden of the Culture and Art Center. These are exhibited directly against the courtyard and building walls or directly on the ground (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Archaeological Artifacts in the Entrance Section of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center

In the entrance section, alongside numerous archaeological and ethnographic artifacts, photographs of the rich archaeological finds in Üçbölük Village, additional archaeological and ethnographic items, an Atatürk portrait and wooden works by Recai Demirsöz, newspapers and magazines, and school registry books dating from 1957-1958 are exhibited (Figure 3-4).



Figure 3. Üçbölük Village, Culture and Art Center, Space Number 3, Archaeological and Ethnographic Artifacts



Figure 4. Üçbölük Village, Culture and Art Center, Space Number 3, Archaeological and Ethnographic Artifacts

In the indoor exhibition section of the Culture and Art Center, only paintings and wooden works created by Recai Demirsöz are displayed. The wooden works, resulting from his free artistic practice, include male and female busts, hand and foot sculptures, and numerous natural designs. The walls of the enclosed exhibition hall, which lacks any windows, showcase paintings created by the artist. These oil paintings on canvas are dated between 1985 and 2019 (Figure 5-7).



Figure 5. Üçbölük Village, Culture and Art Center, Space Number 4, Paintings and Wooden Works by Recai Demirsöz



Figure 6. Üçbölük Village, Culture and Art Center, Space Number 4, Paintings and Wooden Works by Recai Demirsöz



Figure 7. Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center: Recai Demirsöz and His Self-Made Bağlama (a Turkish stringed instrument).

4. EXHIBITION AND DISPLAY CONDITIONS

Established in 1999 entirely through individual initiatives and with the support of the Safranbolu Governorship, the Culture and Art Center faces various problems regarding exhibition and display conditions due to financial limitations. In the open-air exhibition area, the presence of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts directly on the soil or concrete ground accelerates the deterioration of stone and wooden pieces. Similarly, archaeological and ethnographic artifacts in the entrance section are displayed directly on the floor and piled on top of each other. In the indoor exhibition hall, paintings by Recai Demirsöz are hung directly on the walls without significant spacing between them. This situation makes it difficult for each artwork to be an individual focal point and can lead to visual clutter. The juxtaposition of works with different dimensions and styles, in particular, can distract the viewer and hinder the full appreciation of each work's unique qualities. In modern museology, art center and gallery standards, the negative space left between artworks allows each piece to "breathe" and be better absorbed by the viewer. In this context, the current display arrangement in the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center potentially diminishes the artistic value and impact of the works.

The word "naif," originating from the Latin root "nativus," signifies meanings such as pure, natural, and unpretentious. It is stated that these paintings, often depicting children, folk, and nature, are predominantly amateur works and generally reflect a benevolent perspective towards the environment and people (Öztütüncü, 2023: 184). This artistic understanding, which began in Turkey after 1955 and does not constitute a specific movement, emerged after the coincidental discovery of Hüseyin Yüce's paintings after 1960. Turkey has numerous representatives of the naive art movement (Kayalıoğlu, 2017: 623-643). Recai Demirsöz, one of these representatives, is a significant figure of naive art in Safranbolu. The cultural elements and local lifestyles of the Turkish peoples living on Anatolian lands have been the subject of many artists' works (Öztütüncü, 2023: 180). Art and society are intertwined. The most crucial key to both artistic and social development lies in the relationship between the old and the new (Zengin, 2004: 55; Sağlam, 2023: 54-61). The known history of Recai Demirsöz's village dates back at least 2000 years when evaluated in terms of rock tombs and workshops. The rock tombs identified in the village are dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. Archaeological excavations and surface surveys have indicated that the historical past of the region extends even further back (Yıldırım, 2022: 73-77; Dökü, 2022: 88-100). The vine branches and grape clusters on the rock tombs in Üçbölük (Gür and Yıldırım, 2022: 144-145) have been meticulously analyzed and reflected in Recai Demirsöz's art. In particular, his oil paintings numbered 10-12, exhibited in the showroom, are related to viticulture activities and rock tombs in and around Üçbölük Village. Furthermore, Demirsöz's paintings feature ethnographic artifacts that are currently displayed in the garden of the Culture and Art Center. The artist stated that he engaged in agriculture and viticulture for many years, like his father, and therefore reflected agricultural tools, ox carts, plows, and other agricultural activities in his paintings. Additionally, the artist frequently depicted his father, Satı Demirsöz, often with his saz (a Turkish stringed instrument), along with figures deeply rooted in Turkish society whom he admired, such as Aşık Veysel, Nazım Hikmet Ran, and Ruhi Su, to emphasize the strength of family ties and his father as a source of inspiration for his art. Demirsöz, who stated that he was influenced by Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Symbolism, Surrealism, and Modern Art movements, shows traces of the works of significant painters in his own paintings.

Furthermore, the height of the paintings from the ground is a noteworthy element. Some works are observed to be positioned quite low. Ideal exhibition height should allow the viewer to comfortably examine the artwork at eye level. Low positioning both reduces viewing comfort and can increase the risk of unintended contact with the artworks, especially by children or other

visitors. Another striking element is the decorative feature consisting of natural wooden branches that continues along the wall at floor level. While this element adds a rustic and natural ambiance to the space, it can pose some problems in terms of painting display. Particularly, these branches located in front of paintings positioned close to the ground can obstruct the full visibility of the works and create a visual barrier.

In spaces where artworks are exhibited, it is important to avoid distracting elements that impede the perception of the works. Decorative elements should be positioned in a way that is harmonious with the artworks and does not overshadow them.

The lighting in the Art Center is provided by spotlights located on the ceiling. However, there is no specific and focused lighting for each individual artwork. The correct illumination of artworks is crucial for revealing the vibrancy of their colors, emphasizing their textures, and enhancing the overall atmosphere of the work. Insufficient or misdirected light can cause the details of the works to be lost, their colors to appear faded, and even make them difficult to view due to reflections. In the current situation, the ceiling spotlights do not create a homogeneous effect on the artworks and cause shadows in some areas. In an ideal exhibition environment, adjustable spotlights or track lighting systems should be used for each artwork to provide light at the most appropriate angle and intensity. Furthermore, the type of light source used is also important. Light sources such as LED, which do not emit ultraviolet (UV) rays, should be preferred for the long-term preservation of the artworks.

Suitable climate control and ventilation conditions are lacking in the Culture and Art Center. The indoor exhibition hall, which remains constantly closed except during tourist visits and when Recai Demirsöz is creating his works, lacks ventilation and any heating. Consequently, a noticeable natural odor resulting from the lack of air circulation is present in the environment. Disposable shoe covers, acquired through personal initiatives, are worn by tourists visiting the hall over their shoes, allowing the paintings to be viewed without soiling the carpet on the floor.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, established in 1999 through the personal efforts of Recai Demirsöz in Üçbölük Village, affiliated with the Safranbolu district of Karabük, within the context of Art History. The findings indicate that the center plays a significant role in the preservation and exhibition of the region's archaeological and cultural heritage. However, the challenges faced by such personally initiated Culture and Art Center's regarding sustainability, collection management, and exhibition standards have also been clearly demonstrated. Crucial aspects regarding the preservation of artifacts and the visitation of the art center by tourists have been emphasized through necessary discussions with the Safranbolu Museum Directorate, an affiliated institution of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism¹.

The Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center represents a unique example brought to life by the personal motivation of a local actor. Our working hypothesis was that the center serves an important function in the preservation and exhibition of local cultural heritage, and the conducted examinations support this hypothesis. The archaeological and ethnographic artifacts in the center's collection reflect the historical depth and cultural diversity of the region. In particular, the paintings and wooden works produced by Recai Demirsöz with his original artistic understanding lend a distinctive artistic identity to the center. Observations and recommendations were

¹ The title deed of the Culture and Art Center (500 m², Sheet No.: F29-c-0B-d-1-a, Block No.: 117, Parcel No.: 2) currently belongs to the Üçbölük Village Headman's Office. The necessary permissions have been obtained from the relevant institution to conduct this study. Therefore, comprehensive information regarding the Art Center can be acquired by consulting the authorized personnel.

submitted to the Safranbolu Museum Directorate regarding identified issues, aiming to transform the culture and art center into a more distinctive institution through planned projects and initiatives.

The exhibition and display conditions of the Art Center fall short of modern museological standards. Exhibiting the artworks on unsuitable surfaces, piled on top of each other, and with inadequate lighting poses a risk to the preservation of the works and negatively impacts the visitor experience. This situation prevents the full realization of the center's potential. While the painting exhibition at the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center reflects the unique atmosphere of the space, it includes areas that need improvement in terms of professional exhibition standards. Increasing the spacing between artworks, determining the ideal exhibition height, re-evaluating distracting decorative elements, and establishing a focused and appropriate lighting system for each artwork would significantly contribute to enhancing the artistic value of the displayed paintings and the visitor experience. These improvements would enable the center to fulfill its cultural and artistic mission more effectively.

The findings of this study, while emphasizing the importance of personally initiated culture and art centers in preserving local cultural heritage, also reveal the necessity of professional support and guidance for the sustainability of such initiatives. Future research could focus on the visitor profile of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, its interaction with the local community, and its contribution to regional tourism. Furthermore, comparative studies on the challenges and success stories of other art centers established through similar personal initiatives could provide valuable information for the development of such centers. To fully realize the potential of the Üçbölük Village Culture and Art Center, it is necessary to improve exhibition standards, establish professional support mechanisms, and develop sustainability strategies. Steps taken in this direction will significantly contribute to the center gaining greater recognition both locally and nationally, and to the transmission of our cultural heritage to future generations.

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