

## Original Research Article

## Renovation of “Traditional Turkish Painting Art” in a New Way in Contemporary Turkey (from 1900 onward )

Sara Farahmand Drav<sup>1\*</sup>, Hojat Amani<sup>2</sup>

1. Ph.D. Student in Art research, Art university, Tehran, Iran

2. Ph. D in Analytical and Comparative History of Islamic Art, University of Tehran, Iran

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** From the end of the Ottoman Empire, the process of modernization in the social, economic, military, and artistic fields began in Turkey, and during the Republic, there was widespread propaganda to encourage Turkish artists to use the achievements of Western art. This led to the marginalization of traditional arts, including Ottoman painting. In recent decades, however, we have seen the re-approach of many Turkish artists in Ottoman painting, which seems to have a new language and has been formed for different purposes from the past.

**Research Objectives:** This study attempt to examine the influence of Turkish contemporary art on the characteristics of Ottoman traditional painting.

**Research Method:** In this article, a historical-analytical study on traditional Turkish painting was made, with reference to historical documents and study of works of prominent artists in the field of using Ottoman painting elements.

**Conclusion:** The tendency towards traditional arts, which began with the creation of nationalist movements, social will, and the encouragement of artistic institutions, caused many artists to take a new approach to traditional painting to revive national culture, achieve identity, and access a new language to express social and political issues. Comparison of these works in terms of content and structure with previous works showed that unlike traditional painting, which served to express court events and illustrate literary and historical texts, contemporary works, despite being influenced by the structure and visual components of the past, are more concerned with expressing political, social and everyday issues. In addition, the characteristics of contemporary painting have influenced other new media such as installation, animation, film, etc.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary Art, Ottoman Painting, Negargary, Miniature, Turkish Paintings, Renovation of traditional painting.*

### Introduction

A coherent and methodical presentation of

contemporary Turkish art is difficult due to its inseparable connection with historical complexities. In the preface to “ A History of Turkish Painting”, Oleg Grabar says:” How is

\*Corresponding author: +989121758941, rezvan.tayyar@ut.ac.ir

one to look at this art? Should it be from some more or less formulated, more or less accepted universal standpoint... since the middle of the nineteenth century, a Paris to New York mainline with exclusively European secondary branches? Should it be as the reflection of a unique cultural experience and should one think therefore in terms of national or regional standards? Should it be related to a past which is remote and dead but remains in some form of collective memory?" This may be due to the fact that the art of painting in Turkey underwent many changes during the modernization process, from the late Ottoman period, and traditional art was marginalized for many years. In recent decades, however, we have seen a resurgence in traditional Ottoman painting art in new ways. Therefore, due to the great importance of this art over the centuries in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, and to better understand its new methods in contemporary Turkey, it is necessary to first study the modernization of Turkish paintings from the late Ottoman Empire to the twentieth century, because the changes and events that took place in the society and politics of this country during this period have become the founders of the artistic tendencies of the last century. Therefore, after studying the historical contexts, the works of contemporary artists influenced by the characteristics of traditional Turkish painting will be studied to understand what was the purpose of reviving traditional Turkish painting in the present era? It should be noted that the reason for choosing the artists of this research is that most of them are famous in the contemporary era. This means that their paintings have been publicly exposed in a series of exhibitions and have become better known on reputable art websites.

### Problem statement

Turkey is one of the countries that has always had close cultural and political communications with Iran. This country has been influenced by Iranian art for many centuries during the Ottoman period.

The influences have been reflected in paintings, book decoration, and calligraphy, and many Iranian artists have emigrated to this country. In recent years, traditional Ottoman painting has flourished in a new style in this country. Therefore, due to the close relationship between Iran and Turkey, it is necessary to know what factors marginalized traditional Turkish painting and what are the differences between the characteristics of traditional painting in the recent era and the past, and also what is its current structure and content?

### Research method

The research method in this study is as follows: First, using the historical-analytical method, the context of marginalization of Turkish paintings in the Ottoman period was identified, then the approach to it is studied again after a period of orientation towards Western paintings. Then, well-known artists in the field of using the characteristics of traditional painting will be identified and their works will be analyzed. The method of collecting information in this way is documentary and the research aims to spread information in the field of contemporary art in Turkey. The method of selecting works and artists will be based on the most prominent artists in this field in terms of innovation, quality, number of works, exhibitions, and references in books, magazines, and on the Internet sites.

Also, from the research hypotheses is that: Traditional painting, which in the past was mostly used by kings to illustrate historical and literary books and to show the glory of the courtiers, in contemporary times has been used elements of traditional painting with different content and to express social and political problems.

This research will also answer questions such as:

- What is the approach of Turkish artists to traditional Ottoman painting in the contemporary era?
- What is the relationship between traditional Turkish painting and modern art?

- Why have so many contemporary Turkish artists turned to traditional Ottoman painting to express their social and political concerns?

## Literature Review

Turkey has always had close relations with Iran and has been influenced by Iranian art over the centuries, however, so far little research has been done in Persian on the characteristics of traditional Turkish painting in the contemporary era. To conduct this research, historical and artistic sources, mostly in English, have been studied. Among the works written about Turkish paintings is "A History of Turkish Painting", 1988, published by the University of Washington, a collective work by art historians that examines Western styles of Turkish art. Thesis, entitled "The Evolution of Turkey's Contemporary Art Scene Infrastructural Transformation and Globalization in an Emerging Market," was written in 2011 by Esra Marie Baldwin of Savannah University of the Arts, USA. This work covers the evolution of Turkish paintings from the late Ottoman period to modernization and contains the names and works of many Turkish artists in the Western style, but this dissertation does not mention contemporary painting.

The doctoral dissertation "The influence of Persian arts on the art of Ottomans, in the field of painting, from 16th to 17th centuries", Tarbiat Modares University, in 2012, written by Farzaneh Farrokhfar, deals with the effects of Safavid Iranian painting on Ottoman painting. This dissertation does not mention the recent developments in Turkish paintings after the Ottomans. The article "Honar dar khedmate Goftemane Nosazi: Motale'-ye moredi naghashi-e Osmani az avakhere emperatoori ta esteghrare jomhoori (Art in the Service of the Discourse of Modernization: A Case Study of Ottoman Painting from the Late Empire to the Establishment of the Republic)" by Mohammadzadeh, Sharifian, and Mehraein, published in 2016 in Tabriz Islamic Art University Journal, deals with the development of the discourse

of modern Ottoman art and the identification of this discourse in the Ottoman socio-political context. In this article, only the tendency towards modern art has been studied and the characteristics of traditional painting in the contemporary period have not been discussed.

"Contemporary Ottoman Miniatures", written by Imge Ozbilge, in 2016, based on the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK) Master's Thesis on Contemporary Turkish Painting, deals with the characteristics of traditional Ottoman painting in contemporary Turkey. This work gives a very brief description of the history of Western paintings in Turkey and the course of historical currents in which artists distance themselves from traditional painting is not clear. Therefore, this article will not be a complete source for understanding the factors influencing the approach of contemporary artists to the characteristics of traditional paintings. Nevertheless, this work is important in identifying contemporary Turkish artists who have worked in the field of traditional painting. Therefore, because the use of traditional painting features in contemporary Turkish art is a nascent art of recent decades, it seems that the current research can have an important impact in initiating further research on this subject.

## Definition of key concepts

**Negargary:** Delicate visual art with decorative quality that has been common in the East in various ways in the past (Pakbaz, 2007, 599). The word is used as the equivalent to the traditional Ottoman painting art or Miniatur in many texts. It is also used to refer to the illustration of literary, historical, and epic texts.

**Renovation of traditional painting art:** A trend in contemporary art that presents the elements and characteristics of traditional arts in the form of adaptations of Western art. A group of artists on the border between traditionalism and westernization believe that while preserving values, heritage, and traditions, new forms can be borrowed

and integrated with indigenous identity. These features have been seen in the contemporary art of many countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and African countries in recent years. The anti-colonial movements that took place in many countries in the years after World War II led many traditional countries to seek new patterns in the Western industrial world. These events triggered a wave of Westernization in various artistic, social, and economic fields. The passage of time, the emergence of political and social issues, and the creation of nationalist movements caused artists in many of these countries to take a new approach to their native and traditional arts.

**Contemporary era:** Contemporary in this article is used to mean “at the same time” or “at the same history” or “contemporary”. A group of contemporary artists around the world is now trying to redefine contemporaneity as a concept that emphasizes the significance of the present time. (Kashmirshakan, 2017, 343). In this article, “contemporary” is defined from 1900 onward, that is, from the years of the establishment of the Turkish Academy of Arts in a Western way until now.

### **Historical contexts influencing the renovation of traditional painting art in Turkey**

Turkey is a long, rectangular peninsula that connects Europe to Asia (Kinross, 16, 1994). The Ottoman state, which became a world empire in the 15th century, began its life as a branch of the Seljuks. The world that the Ottomans entered was medieval, where people believed in miracles and magic, but gradually Europe entered a new era and inevitably accepted the rules of the New World by the Ottoman Empire. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the political and historical events, Ottoman diplomats became more familiar with Western civilization and culture (Kinross, 376, 1994). During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire pursued a sustained

effort to reform the existing traditional system, during which the old Ottoman institutions were replaced by new ones. Thus, the first contexts of change and modernization that began in the era of Sultan Ahmad III (1730-1703 AD), coinciding with the “Tulip period”, During the reign of Sultan Selim III (1801-1761), Tanzimat period (1876-1739), and the first and second constitutions reached their peak. This process continued until the end of the Ottoman Empire (Arabkhani, 2008, 60). At this time, different subjects such as grammar, history, mathematics, French, Arabic, political science. were taught in schools, and students were sent to Europe for education. The idea gradually emerged that in order to maintain and develop the Ottoman empire, at the same time that Europe was technologically growing, the old and traditional ruling system should be abandoned. In 1860, foreign schools were established under the supervision of the Turkish Ministry of Education (J.Shaw -Volume II, 1991, 196). During the reconstruction of the constitution in 1908, a society with its doors closed to the outside world suddenly opened up. Censorship was removed and newspapers and magazines were published with social issues. Popular demonstrations in support of the new regime were held by various religious and ethnic groups (Feroz, 2003, 35). In 1922, by order of the Constituent Assembly led by Ataturk, the Ottoman Empire was overthrown and the conditions for a republic were prepared on October 29, 1923 (Feroz, 2003, 53). Mustafa Kemal, who served as President of Turkey for 15 years, aimed to transform Turkey into a modern European government and rid it of all reactionary elements. These changes also manifested themselves in the art world.

### **An overview of the history of Turkish traditional painting art**

#### **• Painting in the Ottoman era**

The Ottoman sultans tried to follow the Seljuk customs in promoting Iranian culture and literature

and the court system and administrative organization of the Seljuks, which was an imitation of the court system of Iran, was accepted as a political model by the Ottoman sultans (Farrokhfar, 2012, 163). In the 16th century, after the conquest of Tabriz by the Ottomans, due to the influence of the Iranians, a variety of heroic narratives, animal legends, literary works, and folk tales were illustrated by Turkish painters. Sultan Salim II took many Iranian artists to his palace. With the arrival of these artists, two different styles of painting were formed in Turkey. Topkapi-based Turkish artists worked mostly on historical subjects and documents of the royal family's life. Iranian artists mostly painted Persian poems. In this way, Turkish painting was gradually influenced by Iranian painting, and not only in the field of painting but also in the area of language, proverbs, and concepts, we witnessed the influence of the Iranian style. The Tulip period was one of the periods when traditional Ottoman painting began to be influenced by Western art. Ibrahim Pasha<sup>2</sup>, the Prime Minister and advisor to Ahmad III sent his ambassador, Mohammad Effendi<sup>3</sup>, to visit French civilization (Gocek, 2013, 17). While initially, the main goal of the Ottoman approach to the West was to acquire military technology, in the next century the Ottomans were influenced by the West in various aspects of cultural and naturalistic art. The Tulip period was especially important in the gradual elimination of Ottoman conservatism regarding the naturalistic depiction of the human face, an act considered pagan in Islam and strictly forbidden by Ottoman authorities for centuries (Marie Baldwin, 2011,42). During this period, many works from Western countries entered Turkey, and thus a new understanding of Eastern traditions and Western innovations was created. Artists drew men and women in various costumes and poses, such as drinking, playing and dancing, bathing, and so on. Levni<sup>4</sup>, the prominent painter of this period, and the illustrator of the famous book, *Surname-i Vehbi* was influenced by these figures in his paintings. Another painter was Abdullah Buhari,

an eighteenth-century painter of the Ottoman court. He is often cited with Levni as the most important artist of the Tulip period who painted women (Yildirim, 2016, 31); (Fig. 1) Buhari, who initially practiced miniature (traditional Ottoman painting), gradually experimented with three-dimensional painting in his works, influenced by Western art (Abazov, 2009, 121). This period can be considered as the end of the period of traditional Ottoman painting and the beginning of Westernism.

### History of Western painting in the pre-republican era

As mentioned earlier, Westernization began as a process of achieving modernity in court circles and gradually penetrated other social institutions. The new tendency of courtiers to Western art marginalized traditional art. In the military schools of this period, for the first time painting was included in the lessons, the main purpose of which was to teach technical skills to young officers to create topographic designs and technical drawings (Marie Baldwin, 2011,43). The establishment



Fig. 1. Abdullah Buhari, Sazende, 18th Century, Painting Influenced by Tulip Figures, Istanbul University Museum. Source: Pinterest.com

of the Academy of Fine Arts<sup>5</sup> in 1883 with eight masters and twenty students was another event that contributed to the development of Western painting and the separation of art education from military academies in Turkey. The institute was founded by Osman Hamdi Bey, a student of the French orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. Inspired by the Paris Academy (Ecole Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux-Arts) and composed of Ottoman, European, and Christian educators, the academy began its education with painting and sculpture classes (Keser, 2017, 3440). The establishment of this academy is important because it is the beginning of modern art in Turkey and also coincides with the transformation of the art education system in this country. Osman Hamdi, Seker Ahmed Pasha<sup>6</sup>, and Süleyman Seyyid were the first modern Ottoman painters to receive their first artistic training at the military academy. Before traveling to Europe to study painting, they became acquainted with Western tripod painting through Orientalists, thus inheriting the academic tradition and humanism in Turkish painting. In this way, they created works similar to their masters, both technically and thematically. In Paris, despite the presence of innovative artists such as Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, and Claude Monet, who had broken the rules and norms of art, they took academic art with them to the Ottomans and promoted it in the beautiful Academy of Istanbul. Osman Hamdi, for example, who is one of the pioneers of Turkish figurative painting and has maintained his dominance in the Turkish visual arts to this day, was a follower of French Romanticism and Orientalist artists in terms of his romantic style, genre, and oil painting technique (Mohammadzadeh, Sharifian & Mehraein, 2016,15). One of his most important works, “The Tortoise Trainer<sup>7</sup>”, broke the record of a local auction in Istanbul in 2004 (Fig. 2). He had a lasting influence on the development of Turkish painting in its early years. His works had a pioneering style that blended Eastern and Western aesthetics well.

His students, who formed the first generation of modern Ottoman artists, are also known for their academic and naturalistic style. The subjects of interest in this period were natural and urban landscapes, still life, flowers, trees, animals, and human figures (Mohammadzadeh et al., 15, 2016). The establishment of an Ottoman school in Paris increased the influence of the French aesthetic culture in the Turkish educational system. Thus, various painting schools began to be established in Turkey, and traditional painters were gradually replaced by new graduates. Seker Ahmed Pasha held the first painting exhibition in Turkey in 1873 and 1875. He held the first solo exhibition in 1902, thus paving the way for other artists to work in later years (Aslier, Turan, Ozsezgin, Renda & Turani 1988, 111). By the end of the nineteenth century, Istanbul had become an international hub inhabited by hundreds of nationalities, with communication routes connecting east to west. The result of these reforms in the art world was the formation of the “Ottoman Painters’ Association” by 1910 graduates of the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts. Many prominent members of the group migrated from Istanbul to countries such as France and Germany on scholarships, where the culture of galleries and museums was embedded and allowed these painters to progress. These painters returned to Istanbul with the outbreak of World War I, and many of them became the founders of the Impressionist style in Istanbul. The artists of 1914 were a group of leading artists whose achievement was to abandon the old style of landscape painting and to support new Western techniques such as French Impressionism, but this happened at a time that these styles were not in prosperity in Western Europe. Turkish Impressionists mostly choose topics such as everyday life, fashion, home interiors for their compositions (Marie Baldwin, 2011, 50-54).

#### • Westernism in Republican painting

With the beginning of the Republic of Turkey, a group of artists came together to help the

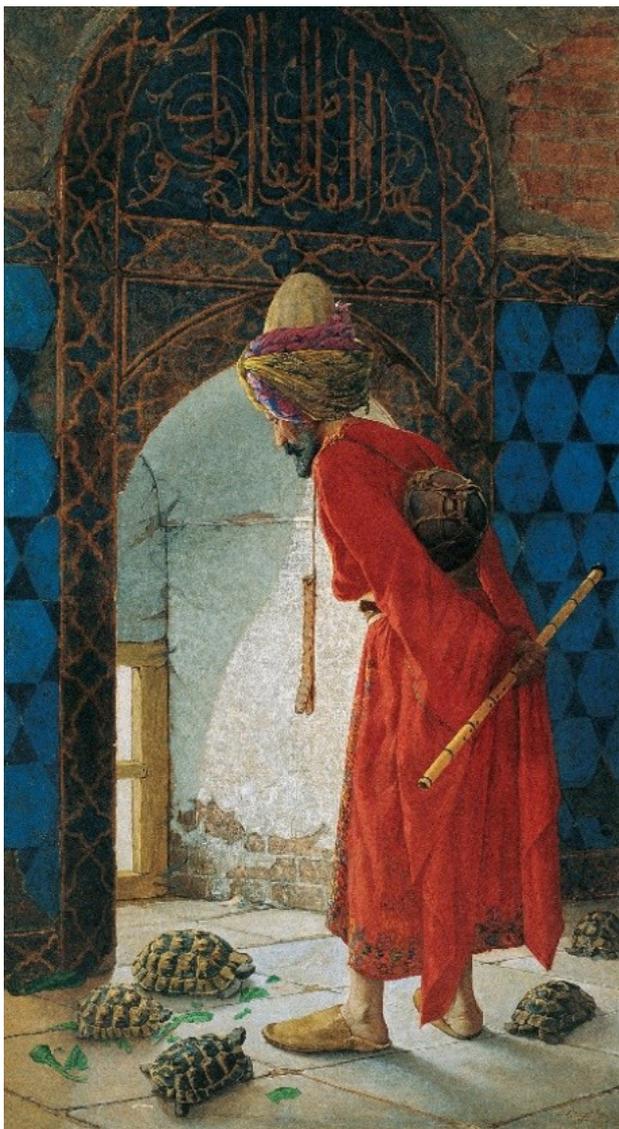


Fig. 2. Osman Hamdi, *The Tortoise Trainer*, 1906, Oil on Canvas, Pera Museum, Istanbul. Source: Wikipedia.com

development and redevelopment of Turkish painting and national fine arts. During this period many new art schools were established in Turkey. “New Painting Society” was founded in 1923. The group was very short-lived, and its artists often migrated to European countries to gain artistic experience. After that, the “Association of Independent Painters and Sculptors” was founded in 1928. The group’s indifference to the former arts provoked a reaction from the Turkish reactionary press and formed the first Turkish artistic discourses. Formed in 1933, the “D group” had a distinctive aesthetic approach to modern styles,

exhibiting them in the form of Turkish themes. One of the prominent painters of this group was Turgut Zaim. His work was a prelude to future generations of Turkish painters who wanted to create art that had a distinctive Turkish character, or in other words, art that properly blended Eastern and Western beauty elements in innovative ways (Fig. 3).

To better understand the approach of the groups formed in the early Republic, which played an important role in the process of Westernization of Turkish painting, Table 1, which is extracted from the content of Baldwin’s master’s thesis» *The Evolution of Turkey’s Contemporary Art Scene* «, can be helpful.

The trend of Westernization in Turkish paintings and the activities of various groups in this field, as shown in Table 1, continued until World War II, but during World War II, despite Turkey’s declaration of neutrality, Turkish artists lost contact with Western art centers, especially France. Many painters based in France emigrated to Africa or the United States or were drafted into the military, but artistic life in the newly established Republic of Turkey did not collapse, and art institutes continued to operate strictly. The art of this period in Turkey was a combination of Cubism, Fauvism, and Impressionism, which dealt less with structural issues and more with social concerns (Aslier et al., 1988, 237). Turkish painting in the sixties, in addition to the spread of abstract art, witnessed the spread of a kind of social realism. Along with these changes, many painters took advantage of everyday local themes rooted in the cultural heritage of Central Anatolia. During the political and social upheavals of the 1970s, in addition to the effects of European painting, artists were influenced by cultural traditions that encompassed a wide range of artistic trends. The production of art publications, which began in the late 1960s, led to a kind of rise in the level of artistic discourses and the interest in participating in art biennials. Advances in technology, especially in the media, have increased

the level of cultural exchange between societies and narrowed the gap between East and West. Cultural debates in Turkey against the Kemalists<sup>8</sup> turned to diversity and multiculturalism. Gradually, growing international art markets motivated Turkish artists to promote Turkish painting in other countries (Marie Baldwin, 2011, 75-78).

### A re-approach to traditional Ottoman painting

By studying the works of Turkish painters, it became clear that two aesthetic approaches can be recognized in their works from the nineteenth century onwards. The first is the general tendency of Turkish artists to be strongly influenced by Western tendencies and to adopt European styles and techniques, which is the result of a generation of artists leaving to study and acquire Western painting techniques. The first is the general tendency of Turkish artists to be strongly influenced by Western and European styles and techniques, which is the result of a generation of artists leaving to study in the West. The second approach is a kind of innate and instinctive tendency towards the artistic and cultural environment of Turkey. In the last century, the emergence of political and social

issues, the creation of nationalist movements, and the encouragement of artistic institutions have led Turkish artists, like many countries that were involved in Westernization, to take a renewed approach to traditional arts. These artists used new methods in traditional arts that were influenced by Western art both in technique and content. By revisiting their cultural and artistic treasures, they came up with innovations in painting. It is worth noting that this new style of art, according to Eric Hobsbawm's view of the "invention of tradition" in societies such as Turkey and Iran, which have undergone rapid social change, not in the traditional sense of being ancient, but in fact, it is the establishment of a new tradition referring to the previously known traditions. In this sense, "tradition" must be clearly distinguished from "Custom" (Hobsbawm, 2000, 3).

It has already been said that the influence of Western art on traditional Turkish painting was first seen in the works of Levni, the Ottoman painter of the Tulip period in the eighteenth century. By adding the features of Western art to traditional painting, he broke with the usual rules of painting for the first time, but never completely followed Western painting (Blair & Bloom, 2017, 628) (Fig. 4). After that, with the advancement of technology during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the use of printing and photography, and the beginning of the modernization process, this art lost its popularity and remained abandoned for a long time, until the beginning of 2000, a new phase began. The opening of the 'Istanbul Museum of Modern Art'<sup>10</sup> in 2004 played an important role in the revival of traditional Turkish art, which had been forgotten for years (Ozbilge, 2016, 2). Earlier in the 1960s, Professor Süheyl Ünver<sup>11</sup>, with his research on traditional Turkish art, made a significant impact on this process. Since the late Ottoman period, the Turkish curriculum has been Western-style, and universities have no plans to teach traditional arts in their curriculum. To fill this gap, Professor Ünver began to hold training



Fig. 3. Turgut Zaem, Chinese Decoration Eden Girl<sup>9</sup>, oil on canvas, size: 116 by 100 cm. Source: artnet.com.

seminars. All these activities have caused artists to take a new approach to traditional painting in recent decades, but this art in the contemporary era has different characteristics and components than in the past.

### Structural-Expressive Features of Traditional Painting art in Contemporary Times

Given the historical factors influencing Turkish painting art from the late Ottoman period to the Republic and the influence of Western art on Turkish artists, re-approaching the traditional painting art changed from the past. Artists who were now familiar with Western art took a new approach

to traditional painting. These differences can be expressed in several fundamental components:

- One of the basic components is the scale of works. In traditional Ottoman painting, sometimes called Ottoman miniatures, paintings were generally used on a small scale to illustrate historical, literary, and scientific books, or in the form of Muraqqa<sup>12</sup>. This size was changed in the contemporary era due to the different functions of the works and was used in different dimensions.
- The second characteristic is the use of new media, tools, and materials. In the contemporary era, the use of elements and structure of traditional painting

Table 1. Groups and institutions that influenced the process of Westernization in Turkish painting. Source: Marie Baldwin, 2011.

Group Name	The year of establishment	Prominent members	Goals	Dominant artistic styles
Academy of Fine Arts	1883	Osman Hamdi Bey and Yervant Voskan <sup>13</sup>	The first educational institute in the fine arts and architecture of Turkey, which was established with eight masters to teach aesthetics and art techniques in the late Ottoman period.	The academic style of Parisian artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme with an orientalist <sup>14</sup> perspective.
Ottoman Painters society	1914	İbrahim Çallı, Hikmet Onat, Ruhi Arel, Feyhaman Duran, Namik Ismail and Halil Pasha	Abandon the old landscape style and use new Western techniques	Impressionist
New Painting Society	1923	A group of graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts who later joined the Association of Independent Painters and Sculptors.	The members of this group considered themselves the representatives of the post-republican style. They used art for revolutionary, reformist themes, and to promote a model of free Turkey versus Ottoman-era Turkey.	Continuation of previous styles with revolutionary themes
Association of Independent Painters and Sculptors	1928	Most were members of the New Painting Society who returned to Turkey after studying in Western countries. Ali Çelebi, Hale Asaf, Muhittin Sebati, Ratip Aşır Acudoğlu, Zeki Kocamemi, Refik Epikman	Contributing to the redevelopment of Turkish painting and national painting, disregard for past formal art, European approaches.	The members of this group had autonomous and less cohesive styles that were influenced by post-Cubist and structuralist artistic styles. The group's main goals were structural and linear, rather than Impressionist colorist. They represented the best and most avant-garde contemporary styles in Turkish painting.
D group	1933	Nurullah Berk, Elif Naci, Abidin Dino, Cemal Sait Tolly, Eşref Üren, Turgut Zaim, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Zühtü Müridoğlu	Rejecting Impressionism and presenting Turkish themes in modern formats to achieve a national style. The group's ability to combine traditional painting and calligraphy elements with contemporary trends paved the way for the separation of Turkish painting from academic art, which it had dominated for years.	A distinct aesthetic approach to painting that combined Western tendencies such as Cubism, Constructivism, and Expressionism with specific Turkish themes. There is a lack of coherence in this group in artistic styles.



Fig. 4. Levnî Abdülcelil Çelebi, Surname-i Vehbi (folio 172a on the left and 171b on the right), with the influence of Western art in the figures, the treasure of Topkapı Palace. Source: Wikimedia.com

was used not only in painting or illustration but also in different artistic fields such as installation, animation, cinema, etc.

- The third is pluralism in new works of art. it means that the contemporary artists, due to their familiarity with the concept of the individuality of Western art, gained the freedom to use personal and individual language and expression in the creation of their works. In this way, they were able to express their desired concepts and problems in works of art by being influenced by the social and political issues of society. Hence, contemporary works of art found many conceptual and semantic differences from traditional art, which served only the Ottoman court and was formed for a specific purpose.

Now, according to the mentioned cases, some artists who have used the characteristics of painting in a contemporary way in a new way will be introduced.

#### - Contemporary artists influenced by the characteristics of traditional painting art

In this section, we will get acquainted with the works of some prominent contemporary Turkish artists, who, according to art critics, have innovated under the influence of Ottoman painting. Among these artists, some created works reminiscent of the old style of Ottoman painting. Nusret Çolpan is one of these artists who created works that are

sometimes similar to the works of the prominent Ottoman painter Nasuh Matrakçı<sup>15</sup>, with the difference that he used only the visual elements of the new world. In addition, the materials and colors used in his works never reached the level of traditional painting in terms of quality (Fig. 5). Therefore, such artists will not be the subject of this research, because traditional works have more creative value than new works. But alongside this group of artists, artists have emerged who have taken a new approach to traditional painting. This new approach is considered not only in the field of visual elements and composition but also in the field of concepts.

One of the pioneers of innovation in the use of traditional painting features in the contemporary era is Günseli Kato, a student of Süheyl Ünver. A study of her work shows that she has achieved a personal interpretation of traditional painting art. Among her works is the neo-traditional painting art of Bosphorus pier mansions. After studying at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan, she also achieved a combination of Japanese painting with traditional Turkish painting in her works. She has always emphasized that in the contemporary world, the characteristics of traditional painting should be presented in a new style. According to Kato, traditional painting should not only be used to illustrate manuscripts but also should apply on



Fig. 5. Right: A work by Nasuh Matrakçı from the Beyan-ı Menazil. Source: iranboom.ir. Left: A work by Nusret Çolpan, which uses the topographic methods of Matrakçı. Source: pinterest.com.

walls, gardens, and even in the form of video art (Ozbilge, 2016, 21). Fig. 6 shows an example of Kato's work. As can be seen in this and other works by Kato, her paintings despite using Ottoman and Japanese paintings motifs and elements, are simpler. In his works, he has mainly used the golden color, which is the color of the sun and the source of light and one of the most important colors of traditional painting. Also, the simplification of some shapes has given the effect a graphic feature to some extent (Fig. 6).

Canan Şenol has gained her fame by combining Iranian and Ottoman traditional painting with photographs, films, and sculptures. A graduate of the Marmara University of Fine Arts, she was influenced by the Bauhaus school of thought, a view in which the use of various artistic materials and objects is related to everyday life. Canan became interested in traditional painting and in 2006 studied in the traditional art department of Mimar Sinan University. She believes that when producing works of art, no matter what kind of art we are doing, we must add our spirit and emotions to the work (Senon, 2010b). In his view, the culture of Westernism that emerged during the Republic, as well as Western Orientalist patterns, alienated ordinary Turkish citizens from the culture of the past and also caused reading Ottoman culture as a primitive and medieval culture. She believes that



Fig. 6. Günseli Kato, Horse, Painting and Collage Influenced by Turkish and Japanese Painting. Source: Ozbilge, 2016.

these factors have led to a lack of knowledge about the native and traditional arts of Turkey (Senon, 2010a, 2). For this reason, in her works, Canan tries to make a connection between the historical events of the past and the conditions of the day, to fill the existing cultural gaps. One of the works she created with this approach is an animation using the traditional painting style called “ Vak Vak Tree “, which contains bold social criticism and political elements. This tree is symbolic in Islamic mythology and is often seen in ancient paintings. There are various interpretations of this tree in which the tree bears the heads of animals or humans instead of fruit. In Ottoman painting, the Vak Tree gives its name to an important historical event during which many soldiers were executed and hanged from a tree (Ozbilge, 2016, 30). According to Canan, the main function of the medium is to convey concepts. Video art, installation, painting, and animation are all created to form ideas. She has collages of many Ottoman paintings and is known for using Levni and Buhari's paintings. her goal is to make a connection between the past and the present through the use of traditional painting (Fig. 7).

Murat Palta used elements of popular culture in his painting. In his works, Eastern and Western cultures have achieved a kind of humorous harmony. Palta also intends to address the differences and



Fig. 7. Canan Şenol, May, Painting, Photography and Ink on Special Paper, 100 x 140 cm, 2010. Source: theguideistanbul.com

similarities in the historical, mythological, and literary events of Western and Eastern cultures. His work is as faithful to the Ottoman style of painting as possible, but his work technique is digital. He uses software such as Photoshop to try to recreate scenes from Hollywood movies. According to Palta, because of the similarities in the simplicity of the figures, the color, and the lack of shading between the traditional painting and the digital images, it would be possible to combine them well. His work also contains social and political critiques (Fig. 8).

Şiir Özbilge is another Turkish artist who has adopted the pseudonym “Chaostantinist”. Her works, which resemble children’s paintings, depict small figures in great detail on large canvases with no linear landscapes. These features have created similarities between her works and Ottoman



Fig. 8. Murat Palta, Star Wars (inspired by the movie of the same name), Monoprint, 70 x 46.5 cm, 2012. Source: artxist.com

paintings. The multicultural, multi-layered, and chaotic structure of Istanbul is the main subject of this artist’s work. Maybe that’s why she was nicknamed “Chaostantinist”. Her works also have similarities with the paintings of the Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel. While depicting the wars and devastations of time by creating violent themes in his work, Bruegel reminds us that we have all grown up with childish games and still have sensory commonalities. This is the message that Özbilge’s paintings convey to us: “There is absolutely nothing that can prevent people from gathering under the same big umbrella, as long as they all manage to remain as pure as children” (Özbilge, 2012). Özbilge’s works are very rich in color. She depicts her figures suspended in space. By doing so, she creates a sense of insecurity and uncertainty that is a metaphor for the current situation in Turkey. Özbilge also opposes any hierarchical representation in her work, and like Ottoman paintings, setting aside the landscape enables her to create a canvas without hierarchy. In Özbilge’s works, behind a humorous play, there is a lot of social criticism of the historical and political situation in Turkey.

Another artist who used collage in traditional painting is Gazi Sansoy. Sansoy is also known for his use of collages in Italian classical paintings. His collection of “Miniatur Pop” includes Levni’s paintings and photographs collected from newspapers. In these works, the same kind of visual language can be seen as in the works of Murat Palta. Sansoy’s paintings possessed a great deal of political content when they were presented in exhibitions so that these works were criticized by the government meanwhile the art community paid attention to them (Özbilge, 2016, 26); (Fig. 10).

What has been said includes only a few artworks by a few Turkish artists who have innovated in the field of traditional Ottoman painting (Negargary) in recent decades. There are other artists such as Inci Eviner, Murat Morava, etc. who are working in this



Fig. 9. Şiir Özbilge, Constantinople, from a collection of Istanbul short stories, illustrations influenced by the structure of Ottoman painting art. Source: siirozbilge.com/chaostantin.

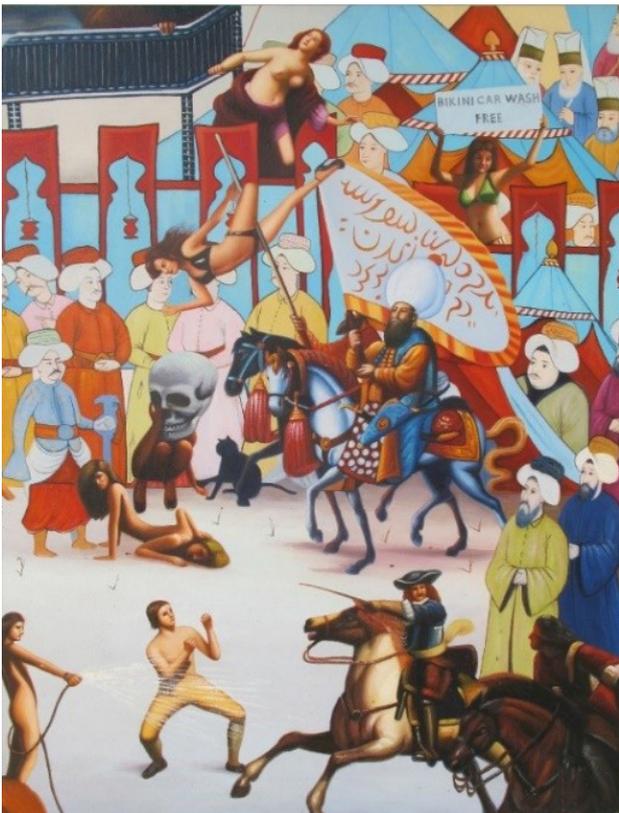


Fig. 10. Gazi Sansoy, a collection of pop miniatures, oil on canvas, the structure of a traditional Ottoman painting with pictorial elements of the New World, 80 by 60 cm, 2014. Source: sanatgezgini.com.

field. These artists were influenced by traditional painting at a time when Republican policymakers

were working hard to encourage artists to the West, and many schools, universities, and government agencies have taught and promoted Western art. In such an atmosphere, these artists used traditional painting as a medium to critique political and social issues and breathed new life into them. So that they disrupted the common view of traditional painting, or Negargary, as an art that is backward and belongs to the past. In a way, they sought to achieve the meaning that the traditions of a society have great values for its construction, and a society that is unaware of these traditions will suffer from a kind of anonymity.

### Discussion

Since the eighteenth century, the Turkish empire had been gradually losing its power for many reasons and this eventually led to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, the West was in the process of developing. This led the Ottomans to follow the West to compensate for their weakness in military and cultural fields. With the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Republic in 1923 and the presidency of Ataturk, the process of modernization of Turkey accelerated in various fields, including painting. At this time, artistic groups were formed, which were characterized by a disregard for the art of their predecessors. This changed the public view of traditional art as a conservative and backward art, and instead, the process of westernization and the tendency of artists to Western styles occurred at a rapid pace. But the situation did not remain the same. Passing the years and the emergence of various issues in Countries that were involved in Western colonization led to the formation of national movements to revive indigenous and traditional arts. In countries such as Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and many African countries, these events paved the way for artists to re-approach the treasure trove of indigenous and national art. In Turkey, artists such as Canan Şenol, Murat Palta, Gazi Sansoy, Günseli Kato, etc. turned to traditional Ottoman painting or Negargary, by

Table 2. Contemporary Turkish Artists and Innovation in the Approach to Ottoman traditional painting. Source: Authors.

Artist	Time interval	Media	Goals and Topics	Visual elements	Structure and Composition
Abdülcelil Çelebi(Levni)	18 <sup>th</sup> century	Negargary	depicting and illustrating court events and historical and literary books	Traditional, the beginning of the influence of Western paintings on figures	The structure of traditional Ottoman paintings
Nusret Çolpan	1952-2008	Painting and tiling	Drawing the cities of the world, especially Istanbul, in the form of traditional painting	Influenced by Western painting and modern technology	The traditional structure of Ottoman painting influenced by Nasuh Matrakçı
Günseli Kato	1956 so far	Painting, sculpture, and installation art	History topics, urban scenes, battles, and religious rites	Traditional with more simplification so that they look like graphic designs	Traditional Ottoman and Japanese painting with minimal elements and simplicity in design
Canan Şenol	1970 so far	Painting, photography, installation, and video art	Transfer of social, political, and historical concepts from the past to the present	Traditional and modern	The structure of traditional Ottoman paintings
Şiir Özbilge	1980 so far	Painting and drawing	Paintings with a childish atmosphere, expression of critiques, and social concepts in the form of urban scenes	Elements of children’s painting influenced by contemporary art	The structure of traditional Ottoman paintings, Bruegel paintings
Murat Palta	1992 so far	Drawing, illustration, digital art	Expressing critiques and social concepts and showing the elements of Eastern and Western culture	Elements of popular culture and cinema	The structure of traditional Ottoman paintings

using new techniques, media, and concepts. They try to present everyday concepts and topics in a new format using traditional art. A review of the works of the most prominent artists in this field and recognizing their different approaches, has well revealed how they are influenced by Eastern and Western arts, and also the extent of their creativity in using Ottoman traditional painting. Table 2, taken from the research text, shows a summary of these effects.

Finally, using the valuable research mentioned above, the trend of Westernization in Turkish painting was described, which has provided a platform for artists to create new works by combining it with traditional art. Through this research about the contemporary artists who were influenced by Ottoman paintings, due to the little research available in this field, a brief acquaintance was obtained. It is hoped that this research will provide a good basis for further research and

more detailed studies in the field of traditional painting in the region and open new ways for how new-generation artists deal with traditional arts in countries that are somehow involved in Westernization.

### Conclusion

The results of the analysis indicate that the use of traditional painting features in contemporary art in Turkey has been pursued with different goals and components compared to what was done in the Ottoman era. The size of the paintings has been changed from solely small size works, in the dimensions of book sheets and Muraqqas, to a variety of sizes. In addition to painting and illustration, contemporary artists have used elements of traditional painting art in various media such as cinema, animation, and installation. The limited themes of the Ottoman court, the depiction of past historical and literary texts, have now

given way to broader social, critical, and political issues. This shows that the political conditions of the present day in many countries, such as Turkey, have provided a challenge for artists to seek appropriate ways of expressing their historical sources and civilization to gain their national and cultural identity in the light of learning Western methods and teachings. For example, instead of communicating completely with a subject, they can use more subtle metaphors or sources to convey the message, and one of them is the use of traditional art as cultural support in new forms.

## Endnotes

1. Lâle Devri: The ambassador of the Austrian Empire, a prominent botanist, first introduced the tulip to the West in the 16th century. The European name Lâle is derived from the nickname given to it by the Turks. It was not long before the tulip was taken there by European traders and bred in large quantities in the Netherlands. In this way, over time, approximately one thousand and two hundred species of tulips emerged. This led to the madness of the tulip in the seventeenth century among the Ottoman aristocracy, and this era, which was between 1718 and 1730, was called the era of the tulip or Tulip period (Kinross, 1977, 388).
2. İbrahim Paşa
3. Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi
4. Abdülcelil Çelebi
5. Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi
6. Şeker Ahmet Paşa
7. Kaplumbağa Terbiyecisi
8. Kamalism: Advocates of Atatürk's theories on the homogeneity of cultural standardization (also known as Atatürkism).
9. Çini Dekore Eden Kız
10. İstanbul Modern Sanat Müzesi
11. Süheyl Ünver, (February 17, 1898, Istanbul - February 14, 1986, Istanbul), was a Turkish writer and physician. He had a medical education and at the same time learned the traditional Turkish arts. To revive traditional Turkish art, he held training courses at the Topkapı Palace Museum and trained students in the field. One of the books he has published in this field is "Turkish designs".
12. Muraqqa is an album normally from several different sources which containing traditional paintings (Negargary) and Islamic calligraphy.
13. Yervant Voskan (Oskan Efendi in Turkish) (1855-1914) was a prominent Armenian painter and sculptor from the Ottoman Empire. He is known as the first sculptor in Turkey.
14. Orientalism means depicting the Eastern world, which was one of the specialties of nineteenth-century academic art.
15. Nasuh Matrakçı was an artist during the reigns of Sultan Salim and Sultan Suleiman. He was a mathematician, historian, and writer who was also skilled in calligraphy and painting. He was one of Sultan Suleiman's companions on a trip to the western part of Iran in the 16th century. While presenting a report on this campaign, Matrakçı depicts most of the features of the Ottoman army. The result of his work is the Beyan-ı Menazil-i Sefer-i İrakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han, who Matrakçı has presented in the form of a part of his book entitled Süleymannâme.

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