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**CONTENT AND FORM ANALYSES
WITHIN THE FRAME OF NEO
EXPRESSIONIST TREND**

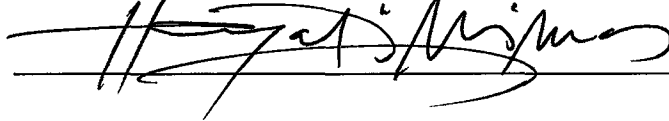
**A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
FINE ARTS
AND THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
OF BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

By

Elif F. Okur(Tolun)

February, 1994

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



Assoc.Prof. Hayati Misman (Principal Advisor)

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



Prof. Mürşide İçmeli

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



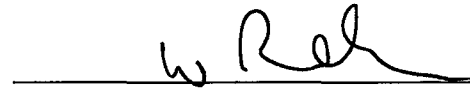
Visiting Prof. Witold Janowski

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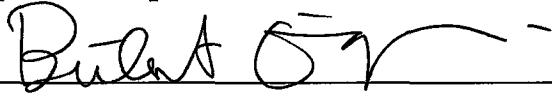
Assoc.Prof.Dr. Halil Akdeniz

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



Visiting Assist.Prof. Wieslaw Zaremba

Approved by the Institute of Fine Arts



Prof.Dr. Bülent Özgüç, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

CONTENT AND FORM ANALYSES WITHIN THE FRAME OF NEO EXPRESSIONIST TREND

Elif F. Okur(Tolun)

M.F.A. in Fine Arts

Supervisor: Assoc.Prof. Hayati Misman

February, 1994

This thesis is aimed at discussing neo-expressionism which has become one of the most prevailing forms of expression that is still popular since the 1980s.

First the structure and progression of neo-expressionism is examined by looking at its past starting from expressionism that simultaneously showed up in various geographies including Turkey.

Secondly within the neo-expressionism topics like form and discourse importation, the concept of patch while displaying the existing structure in Turkey on one hand, increased the readability of my paintings and stated the problematic of my studies.

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism, Expressionism, Neo Expressionism.

ÖZET

RESİMDE NEO EKSPRESYONİST ANLAYIŞ ÇERÇEVESİNDE İÇERİK VE BİÇİM BAĞLAMINDA ÇÖZÜMLEMELER

Elif F. Okur(Tolun)

Güzel Sanatlar Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Hayati Misman

Şubat 1994

Bu tezde, 1980 sonrası gündeme gelen ve günümüzde en yaygın anlatım biçimlerinden biri olarak varlığını sürdüren neo-ekspresyonizm'in tartışılması amaçlanmıştır.

Ekspresyonizm'den neo-ekspresyonizm'e kadar olan tarihsel geçmişe bakarak, bugün Türkiye de dahil olmak üzere farklı coğrafyalarda eş zamanlı olarak yaşanan neo-ekspresyonizm'in yapısı ve gelişimi incelenmektedir.

Neo-ekspresyonizmle birlikte incelenen biçim ve söylem ithali, yama kavramı gibi konular bir yandan Türkiye'deki yapıyı sergilerken diğer yandan da resimlerimin okunmasını kolaylaştırmakta ve çalışmaların problematiğini belirtmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekspresyonizm, Neo Ekspresyonizm, Soyut Ekspresyonizm.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"I am not a previously determined thing. I am an entity who loves, moves about, and has desires. An entity by himself. An entity who selects"

Simone de Beauvoir

All human action is expressive. In fact, most forms of art is expressive as well. However, some categories of art is all about conveying messages full of emotions and sentimentality in order to affect humans with certain visual gestures. This kind of art is expressive. This tendency has shown itself not only in plastic arts, but in literature, architecture, and music etc. For the purposes of this thesis we have limited ourselves to fine arts only.

Expressionism which continued throughout the twentieth century intermittently in various geographies has also determined the understanding of art during the 80s. The dullness in conceptual and minimal arts, social authority, mechanization and alienation have led to individualism and sentimentality in the 80s. While neo-expressionism is discussed in different geographies, as a result of the fact

that this tendency refers to the previous trends, in Chapter 2 an historic account of neo-expressionism together with expressionism and abstract expressionism will be given.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the formation of neo-expressionism in Turkey during the 80s. Its development and detailed information on my works will also be given in this chapter. These include form and discourse importation and the concept of patch and an account of my recent works.

Conclusions are given in Chapter 4. Finally photographs of my paintings and other artists' paintings are included as Appendix.

2. FROM EXPRESSIONISM TO NEO EXPRESSIONISM

2.1 Expressionism as a Term

When we talk about expressionism we see that it is not a new concept or trend. Lionel Richard summarize expressionism in his Encyclopedia of Art History as follows:

"...Most writers claim that the term expressionism entered Germany through the author of the book Abstraction and Empathy, Wilhelm Worringer and was first used in 1911 by him. On the other hand this honour is given to Paul Cassirer.

The answer given to a question by Cassirer in 1910 in front of a picture of Peckstein whether it was still an example of Impressionism. He replied that it was an example of expressionism.

Many researchers have analyzed the term expressionism from etymological side. For example, Armin Arnold in an article published in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine in 1950, mentioned expressionist school of modern art. Additionally in the article Arnold was said to have proved that in a talk given by Charles Howley on modern painters in 1880 that their focus had been expressionists and had used this term for describing persons who liked to express their feelings and desires. According to Armin Arnold, there had been a group named expressionists in the novel, The Bohemian by Charles de Kay published in the United States in 1878"¹

2.2 History of Expressionism

"...Around the beginning of the century the seemingly steady and leisurely developments in the art suddenly appeared to be shattered. This undoubtedly reflected a similar change in man's view of the world as a whole. Social, political, and economic changes paralleled philosophical and scientific developments and the gradual collapse of traditional authoritarian systems and values, not necessarily in terms of their loss of power but in their self-assured security and long term survival. Modern art movements and concepts were intentional, purposeful, directed and programmed from the very start. They were accompanied by manifestos, documents and programmatic declarations. Each movement was deliberately created to make a point; artists and often critics, formed platforms to launch movements. Modern art movements were essentially 'conceptual'; works of art are considered in terms of the concepts which they exemplify"²

The history of visual arts within 40 years has been the story of movements and "isms" broader than expressionism. Tendencies have followed one another in a fast tempo. Haftman states that each movement was effected by the preceding movements and in turn affected the movements that came after.³

"...All human action is expressive; a gesture is an intentionally expressive action. All art is expressive-of its author and of the situation in which he works-but some art is intended to move us through visual gestures that transmit, and perhaps give release to, emotions and emotionally charged messages. Such art is expressionist. A lot of twentieth century art, especially in Central Europe, has been of this kind and the label "expressionism" has been attached to it(as also to comparable tendencies in literature, architecture and music). Periods of crisis especially seem to produce artists who channel the anxieties of their time into their work. Once the personality of an artist was admitted as a factor determining the character of a work of art, as it was increasingly so during the Renaissance, art could function more and more openly as a means of self-revelation. In the context of modern individualism this could be taken to extremes but the only true innovation that modern expressionism can show was the discovery that abstract compositions could serve at least as effectively as subject pictures. The subject, having served as the vehicle for expressive gestures, could, it was found, be abandoned entirely. The expressive power of colors and shapes, of brush strokes and texture, of size and scale was shown to be sufficient."⁴

Although Expressionism has been formed as a reaction to impressionism, it could not override similar individualistic characteristics.

"...I saw this, dreamt this, lived this, this looked to me like this, I as an artist am providing you with this life. I am not afraid of these colors since I am involved with them all day long. This pattern which you may think clumsy is like this because I wanted it that way."⁵

These words explain the reaction of expressionists to the previous art and express their own understanding of art.

Despite being an individualistic tendency expressionist artists deform patterns, and also by including a political content into their structure preferred a sentimental approach. They gave importance to any rhythm which increase expressiveness, color rather than form, and sentimentality rather than rationality. Lionel stated that expressionists purpose have never been that of esthetics.

"The expressionism trend not only denies esthetics forms but brings to light as a vision of the world and becomes active in all forms of expression and also contains notions about the society."⁶

According to Baykam the artist rather than relying on the art's doctrines trusts his/her own instincts.⁷ Nolde stated that instinct was tenfold more important than the knowledge.⁸

"...Figures symbolize man's conflicts with the world rather than being a pioneer of the organism. Impressionists comforting scenes have been left to dirty alleys in Berlin, rough figures, prostitutes lives and to screams of hopelessness. Paint becoming heavier, colors being crude and thus displaying man's feelings and desires in its nakedness."⁹ (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

Emil Nolde, The Dance round the Golden Calf, 1910, oil on canvas.

So we see that the main element that unites expressionists are the chaos and concern for the future. "Expressionists aim at shaking mankind by saving him/her from motionless and fatalist attitude and to prepare them for the future. In expressionism there is a longing for a new man, a conscious society, a completely reformed life."¹⁰

In those days perhaps one of the most important factors that caused this inquiry was the state of the society. The society who lived this up fully and who still has its marks is Germans. The social and political developments that has taken place in those days' Germany can be summarized as follows:

- Establishment of the German Republic (1918)
- Foundation of the German National Socialist Party (1919)
- Crisis in German capitalism (1923)
- German Nazis seize power (1933)¹¹

Expressionism as described by Lionel is a product of Einstein's research on matter and energy and Freud's work on consciousness together with this historic period and state of the societies stated above. Despite the fact that expressionism is not derived from Fouvians the artists who created this trend has been affected from their impact and has also been in close interaction with them.¹²

For this reason the Austrian author Hermann Bahr in his book published in 1914 has written that among the people who created expressionism were Matisse, Braque, Picasso, Futurists and Fauvists, members of the German groups Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, Viennese Oscar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele. "Now, those who do not want to express reality, to convey the same and to imitate was regarded as an expressionist."¹³ The grouping within this perspective was first seen in Germany in 1905. Erich Heckel, Fritz Bleyl, Karl Schmidt Rottluff formed a group named "Bridge" (Die Brücke), under Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's patronage. "The group gave importance to color, and its symbolic and exuberant values however at the same time by employing a linear language they saw primitiveness and roughness in people's art to slip through the tradition."¹⁴ Kirchner explains group's manifest and approach in a wood cut as (Figure 2):

" We call on the youth to unite because we believe in a creative, progressive, and intuitive generation. As a founder of the future we want freedom to work and to live against old established forces. Everyone who feels the creative power inside directly and without being hypocritical can join us."¹⁵.

Emil Nolde and Max Peckstein joined the group later on. Expressionism shows itself through Die Himmelblaue Rose Society in 1906 and through the exhibitions organized by the Der Blaue Reiter group formed by Der Sturm Magazine and Kandinsky, Jawlensky, Delaunay, Franz Marc and Paul Klee in 1911-12.



Figure 2.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Brücke
Manifest, 1906, wood cut.

"...Der Blau Reiter group took the expressionism in a more theoretical and intellectual order. Especially Kandinsky developed theories on abstract art and placed expressionism somewhere between music and painting in his own understanding of art. Kandinsky and Der Blau Reiter group gave importance to the symbolic and psychological values of color and especially Kandinsky was working on musicality of the color. He attached utmost importance to the internal requirements."¹⁶

The dynamism that was observed in German art in the beginning of the twentieth century has been interrupted by the war in 1914. In 1945 the wars were over. After the war the world was at a stage where there were social, political and economic changes on the one hand and philosophical and scientific developments on the other. It was not possible for art not to be influenced from these changes.

The artists had a concern over the dimension of the relationship between the work and spectator and therefore the artist sought a different style of description. The artists have refused all the previously accepted values and instead tried to construct the nature according to their own perceptions. This modernist approach and continuous inquiry have spread after the World War II. After the war the Europe lost its power, was in an exhausted state. Most of the artists in the countries invaded by Germany have immigrated to the United States because of its dissenting results and pressure. United states at that time provided the artists with more freedom than the Europe could give and was in a much better socio-economic state when compared to Europe. America wanted to have a say in the art as well as in other areas.

For a country who does not have a deep historic past this was a good opportunity to shift the center of the art world from Paris to New York. After the war the Europe has lost both the economic power and the important role it played in the domain of art. America's cultural and economic power have begun to show itself in the art. With the help of theoreticians and critics it stopped "Abstract expressionism's" pioneering role in Paris. No doubt before showing up in the America abstract expressionism had a formation and development period in Europe.

In its last stages expressionism has reached abstract expressionism in the works of Kandinsky after 1912 through his compositions and improvisations which is similar to the case for reaching the geometric abstract by Mondrian in the last stages of cubism.

Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg are the important critics of the post-war era.

"...Greenberg established the modernist criticism based on the formational analysis skill he learned from Hans Hofmann by combining avantgardism, historical evolution and surface mechanics. Towards the end of 1950s Greenberg presented form as a modern art history in an evolutionary perspective. According to this the milestones of the modernist picture are Impressionism, Analytic Cubism, the last stages of Synthetic Cubism, and Abstract Expressionism."¹⁷

Ad Reinhardt said the following in a group discussion in 1950:

"What about the reality of the everyday world and the reality of painting? They are not the same realities. What is this creative thing that you have struggled to get and

where did it come from? What reference or values does it have, outside of the painting itself?"¹⁸

It can be seen that there is a freedom for the artist to integrate this with a suitable medium such as plastics, metal, canvas etc. and call it art.

"...One wants to establish a view of Abstract Expressionism which is broadly "heuristic" rather than "dogmatic"; a view which caters to a need for some reliable understanding of painters' formal and technical concerns and their relationships to previous art, without at the same time denying the possibility of insight into the painters' more general and metaphysical notions of the significance of their actions and their assertions. One needs also to maintain some truth to a world which allowed the coexistence, and at certain levels the compatibility of very different characters and characteristics."¹⁹

The above mentioned existentialism together with automatism and Jung's theory form the basis for abstract expressionism.

First Freud and then Jung concentrated their work on psychological research on the subconsciousness. They claimed that instincts and feelings are in the depths of subconsciousness. Thus they caused some of the artists who felt that they are in a chaos to turn into themselves. This trend, at the same time, symbolize the development of high-technology and industry in the United States during 40s. Abstract expressionists react strongly to the materialist system in the United States.

In America abstract expressionism's most distinguishing side is the Action Painting of Jackson Pollock. Coined by Harold Rosenberg action painting was against logical. All of the pre-painting preparations and trials of colors are completely removed. Painting is mainly done by gestures and hand and arm movements of the painter. Pure automatism is the starting point of the action painting. Pollock believed that to bring about subconsciousness one has to put himself into a state of trans. This style of explanation is almost similar to be in ecstasy in a ritual. In all these actions basis there is an escape, alienation, protest, personal happiness, and a wish to return to the inside. From the point of view of both their style and content, Pollock's paintings reflect his isolation and the infinity of the American continent (Figure 3).

Coincidental painting is the major principle of Abstract expressionism and stems from the surrealists' automatism.

Critics who give support to Abstract expressionism have explained the trend's purpose as

" a person's expression of himself in a deep and unconcerned style by avoiding traditions which limit the modern art and in order to provide this if required the artist to contribute with his body and power."²⁰

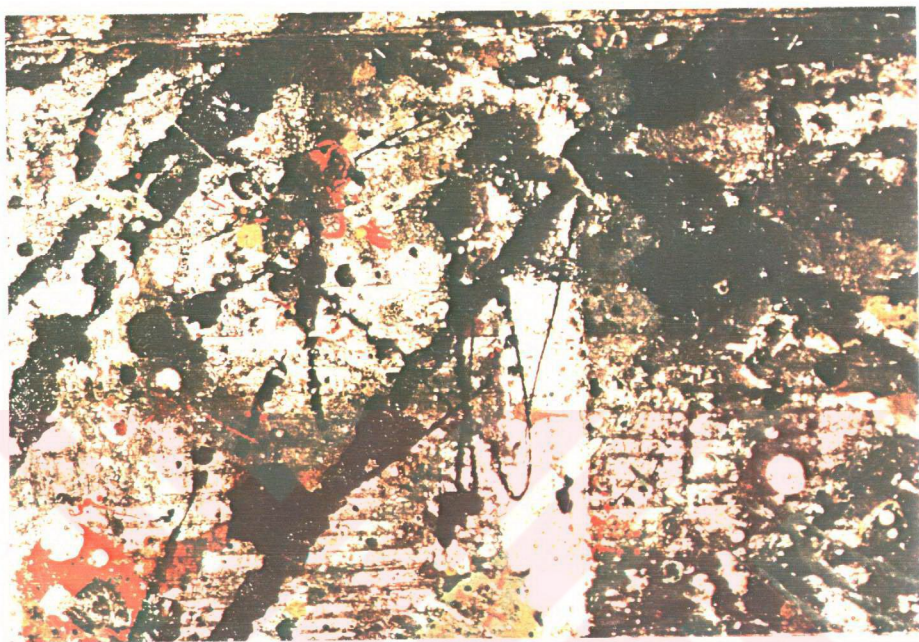


Figure 3.

Jackson Pollock, Blue Poles, 1953, oil on canvas.

When we turn our attention to Willem De Kooning we see that abstraction and expression have priority over the abstract painting notion. Kooning neither approaches to figurative descriptions nor adheres to the abstract. Kooning's "Women" series have become a symbol in America in the mid twentieth century (Figure 4). In these paintings the figures and their surroundings are considered alike. Line is not taken as a contour but is an active element of the picture. Paintings surface has turned into an infinite surface.

Kooning's repeated choice of women as the subject of his paintings reflects the continuity of sex symbol in the American society. This often shows itself in a sensual and soft manner in M. Monroe for instance. Pop artists have later emphasized De Kooning's M. Monroe image in a more obvious fashion. Again Larry Rivers' work show a move from abstract expressionism to Pop Art by using abstract expressionism's taste of paint. De Kooning's "Women" series with its usage of figures and rebellious taste of paint is a forerunner of neo-expressionism in the 80s.



Figure 4.

Willem De Kooning, Woman I, 1950-2,
oil on canvas.

2.3 Return to Conventional Painting in the 1980s and Neo-Expressionism

2.3.1 From Modernism to Neo-Expressionism

"The new is a long for new and not the new itself"

Theodor Adorno

The fact that 1980s gave new meanings and techniques to art which led to an increased inquiry on the part of the artist, this inquiry was not directed towards novelty and advancement but as stated by Adorno it was a look at and longing to the past.

"...It is not so much that tradition is impossible from the perspective of the present as that the very meaning of historicity-its implications of smooth continuity, of the easy inevitability that seems to make events flow into one another-has been bankrupted by a new sense of what it means to be in the present. To be modern, as Jung says, means to be "fully conscious of the present", and that full consciousness is not possible from the point of view of traditionalism. As Jung says, man 'is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which things may grow.' Modernism in art intends to give us the pure present as a complete openness to being, an openness out of which new worlds are likely to emerge. Yet this openness remains bound by presentness, and so-remains an abstract charge making the concrete presence of the art work more 'pregnant'." ²¹

Perhaps as a result of the structure formed by modernism the art after the 80s has taken past as its reference rather than creating new stuff. Neo-expressionism has a nostalgic structure because it adopts the past as its reference.

The term post-modernism means the nostalgia to seek the past which has no difference. According to this the art which adopts images and styles from other cultures or trends can be defined as post-modern. According to Roberts, neo-expressionism became post-modern when it began to use the old images of expressionism rather than actively involving with the world.²²

The era between 60s to 80s includes various tendencies like minimalism, pop art, hyperrealism, happening and conceptual art.

Some of the trends that appeared such as new abstraction, motif and decoration were regarded by some of the critics as the last minutes of modernist painting. However, others thought that it meant pluralism and origin of the post-modern term towards the end of 1970s.

According to Thomas Lawson while modernism was a creative power it was against the dominant culture. Especially it was against the bourgeois.

"...To this end it developed a rhetoric of immediacy, eschewing not only the mimetic tradition of Western art, but also the aesthetic distance implied by the structure of representation...With modernism art became declarative; we moved into the era of the manifesto and the artist's statement...Modernism's insistence on immediacy and the foreclosure of distance inevitably resulted in a denial of history, in an ever greater emphasis on not just the present, but the presence of the artist. Expressive symbolism gave way to self-expression; art history developed into autobiography. Vanguard art became a practice concerned only with itself, its own rules and procedures. The most startling result was the liberation of technique; the least useful result was the pursuit of novelty. As the modernist idea became debased, its deliberate sparseness worn through overuse..."²³

Second World War has caused many important issues in our century but perhaps from our point of view it led to the appearance of new art forms. Today most of the ideologies were resolved. The people who marked the understanding of art in the 80s have been born in this restructuring period and who lived contradictions. We can generally observe in them spontaneous actions rather than a search for the disciplined imaginative power. These people are luckier than those expressionists in the beginning of the century because they experienced less reaction. Although they have chosen neo-expressionism as a way of self-expression what really matters is not the expression but figurative painting and return to the paint on canvas. In the basis of this trend lies the emptiness created by the conceptual and minimal arts. Neo-expressionism aims at bringing forth these illogical motives which are suppressed by these trends.

Neo-expressionism is a reaction to the pressure of the social authority on the individual, and to mechanization and alienation.

"...Neo-expressionism contained a reaction to German expressionism in its subconsciousness. German expressionism started off as an assault to the conventional but after a while it became conventional itself." ²⁴

In fact we can say that neo-expressionism developed as a reaction to modernism. "So much as expressive art's important names like Chia, Cucchi, Baselitz, Lüpertz, Fetting, Kiefer, Schnabel emphasized that they were not after the finding and re-evaluation of the

tradition, on the contrary they stated that they were trying to prove the bankruptcy of the tradition."²⁵

The importance of neo-expressionism is that it questions the spiritual deficiency and that it tries to free the visual forces.

"...80s have brought back expressionism enriched with new features. These features are: computers, video, TV, conceptual art, photography, collage, cartoon, comic strip and especially graffiti. Neo-expressionism is based on banality and finds its source in the street."²⁶

Behind neo-expressionism are the traces of the post war, politic tension, economic imbalance, degeneration, identity crisis and mediatic developments.

With neo-expressionism the boundaries between the platforms of sculpture-architecture-painting are removed. The neo-expressionist artist makes much more use of previous trends than the expressionist artist. The neo-expressionist artist can put together different manners as well as can arrange different topics, images, and techniques together.

The anti-thesis for neo-expressionism is provided by Donald Kuspit.²⁷ In this article he states that neo-expressionism is a false expressionism. Kuspit further states that the medium today is quite different from the one that created expressionism and explains neo-expressionism as the visual side of expressionism and qualifies this as wearing a

fashionable avant-garde costume.

When we look at positive and negative approaches we see that neo-expressionism is not based on sound foundations but it has nevertheless a characteristic of soothing and bringing a new wave of excitement to the society.

Neo-expressionism has an importance as an artistic tendency for indicating today's purposelessness and symbolizing the search for an aim. However, this also leads to a greater freedom. As a result of this it turns back to expressionism in different geographies in the 80s. As a result of this disorder, during the 1980s simultaneously and quite independent from one another there has been a return to expressionism in various geographies.

2.3.2 Neo-expressionism in Different Geographies

The expressionism of the pre and post World War I has been dominated by the Germans. The German expressionists in the beginning of the Modernist period were affected by Fauvists but they were also conscious about their deep German roots.

The expressionism after the World War II gave more importance to radical and political content than the pre-war tendencies did. All German neo-expressionists are

essentially interested with the idea of being German. Artists living in West-Germany were affected by the dark ages of the post-war era. However, it is not possible to say the same for artists living in East Germany.

As a person who lived the separation between the East and West Baselitz started his art productions in the West with the series named "Heroes" having been expelled from the East for socio-political immaturity. Baselitz told the following about this period in an interview in 1983:

"Gradually the idea dawned on me that I could launch myself into painting. I thought that to do a picture I did not necessarily have to have an interesting subject. The object had no intrinsic importance any more. So I chose insignificant things... The object expresses nothing. Painting is not a means to an end. On the contrary painting is autonomous."²⁸

All these ideas do not fit into the structure of neo-expressionism because they always have a "story" to tell.

Towards the end of 1960s Baselitz reacted to this line of thought and moved closer to the neo-expressionists. In his pictures pure abstraction leaves itself to upside down figures and partitioned areas. Which is of course, to adopt the abstraction of conserving the figure (Figure 5).

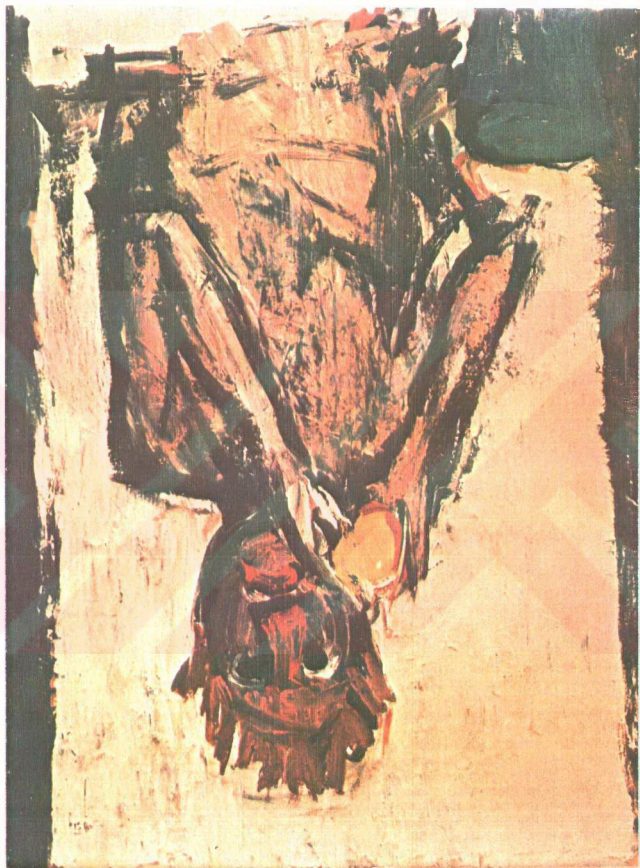


Figure 5.

Georg Baselitz, *Orange Eater II*, 1981,
oil on canvas.

During the 1970s Lüpertz began to show an interest to social and historic events. He uses motives of national socialism in his paintings (especially steel helmet, military cap and the ear of corn). These motifs are used in conjunction with the colors of German flag (Figure 6).

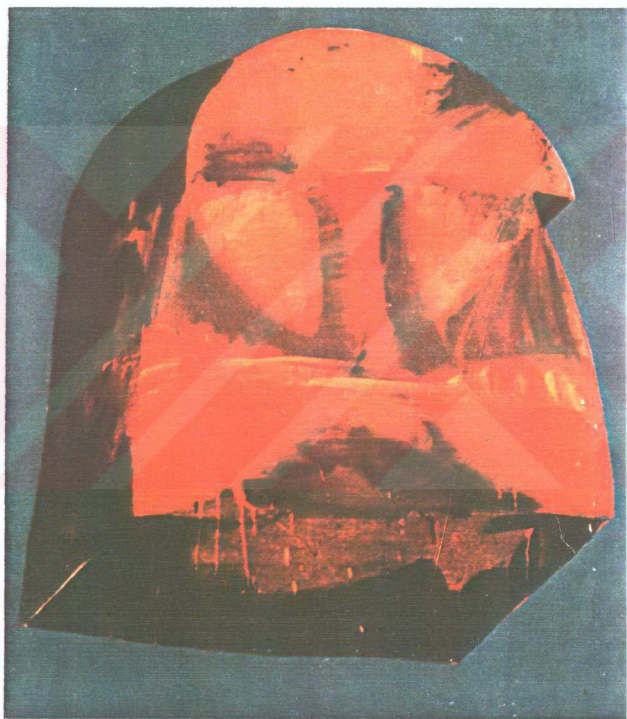


Figure 6.

Markus Lüpertz, Dithyrambe, 1964, oil on canvas.

Baselitz with his broken and upside down images, Lüpertz with his political symbols, Immendorf with his clear and detailed political messages, Horst Hodick with his different style which converts human bodies into obscure animal figures, were all against the political polarization and division in Germany.

On the other hand Salome, Middendorf, Fetting and Kiefer by focusing on the more dramatic human figures have shown intimacy to national traditions.

Kiefer whose paintings are full of history not only questions the society's past in which he lives but also brings the spectator closer to the problems which the society has to cope with. Kiefer seeks answer to the question how can a country boasting to be at the peak of civilization in the mid twentieth century can downgrade itself with the Jewish genocide. Rather going back to war era, Kiefer tried to enlighten the past from the traces it left today. Kiefer states his purpose as follows in an interview with Kuspit:

"I do not paint unhappy. I always have a hope for the spiritual purification. My works are both spiritual and psychological. I want to see the spiritual and psychological connection in my environment. I want to show something hoping to change something. Disagreement comprise the main theme of my works."²⁹.

When we look at Kiefer's paintings we notice that they are old looking (Figure 7). Of course this changes according to the context. "Kiefer's images shows how the past is activated and thus it leads to neutralization and destruction. This process is similar to the operation of memory." ³⁰



Figure 7.

Anselm Kiefer, Die Meistersinger,
1982, mixed media.

Among the Italian artists are Sandro Chia, Mimmo Paladino and Francesco Clemente (Figure 8). "Their painting tends to refer not to a single stylistic moment but to all historic styles in general... Chia made an ironic commentary on the heroics of the past...Clemente has been interested in non-European cultures...His imagery is very much of the moment-a wild mixture of allusions to different cultures and creeds."³¹.

German and Italian neo-expressionists were met with enthusiasm in America. The return to conventional formats and the variety of content were alike greeted with relief. Quite different from Germany, in America an extension of pop culture is seen in the 80s. David Salle states "the starting point in my work is the deep interest in popular culture and the images that I have used are from various pop culture sources."³² This statement stresses the importance of pop culture (Figure 9).

In his paintings Salle forms an eclectic structure with stereotype images which are taken from the world of art and media images. Salle's point "I want to see all of the images at once."³³ reflects itself in the painting by putting media images on top of the other. Salle's main point however, is to stress the cultural pressure in his environment to oppose aesthetic discourse.

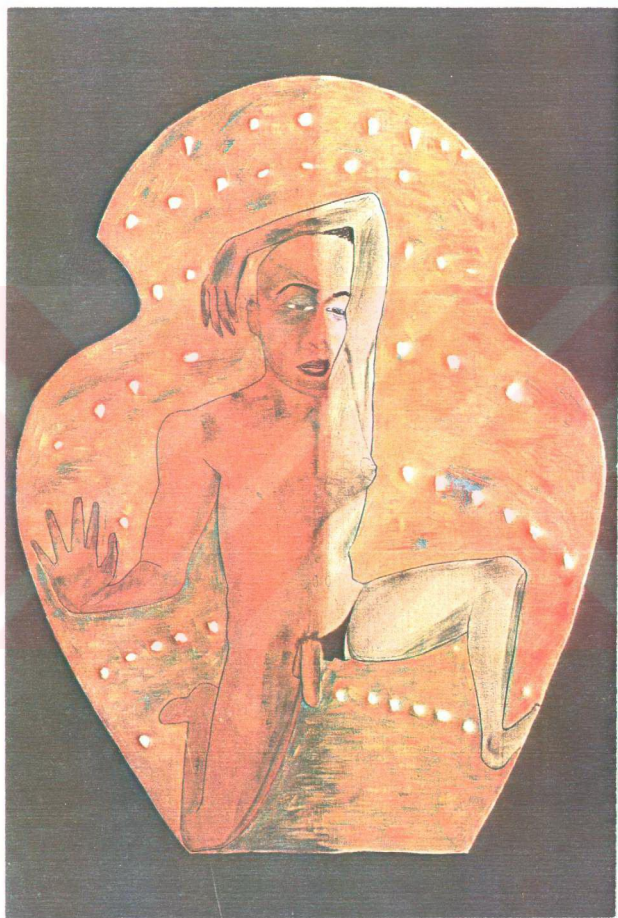


Figure 8.

Francesco Clemente, *Paradigm*, 1988,
pigment on linen.

American expressionists such as Schnabel, Basquiat and Scharf have included a fantastic interpretation of surrealism to pop artists' subjects. These artists have aimed to provide a personal interpretation to daily events and images.³⁴ Schnabel was trying to portray the aggression and disorder in the society with broken dishes (Figure 10) while Basquiat and Scharf, on the other hand, used tools of the popular culture such as advertisement, comic strip and graffiti (Figures 11, 12).

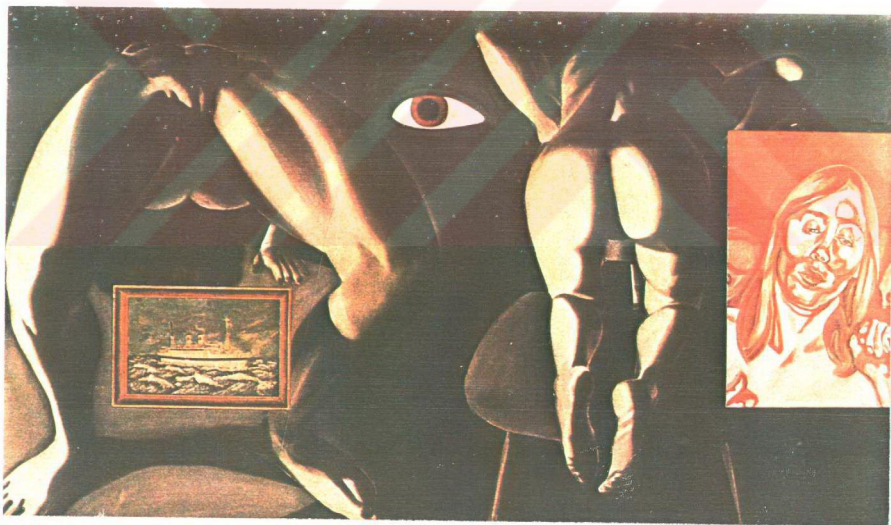


Figure 9.

David Salle, Saltimbanques, 1986, acrylic and oil on wood and canvas.

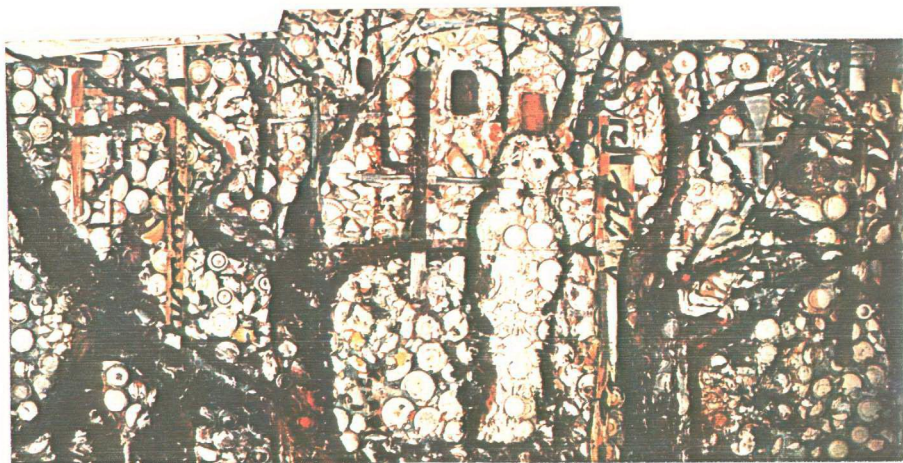


Figure 10. Julian Schnabel, The student of Prague, 1983, oil, plate, and gelatine on wood.

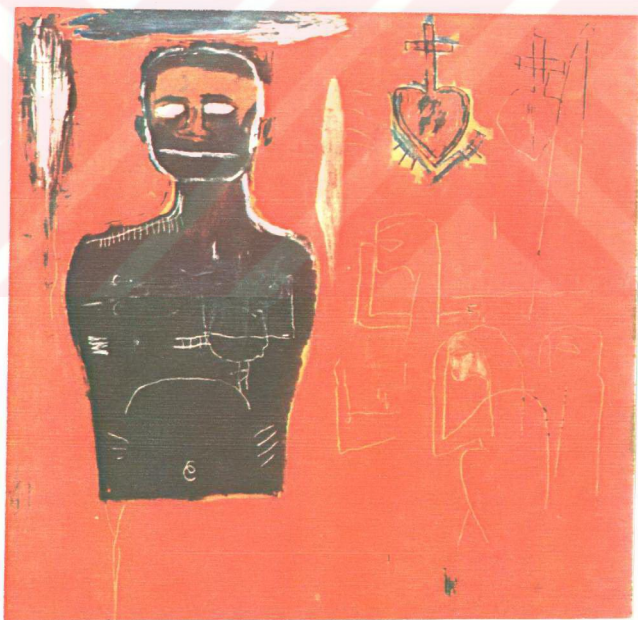


Figure 11. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Untitled, 1984, acrylic and mixed media on canvas.



Figure 12.

Kenny Scharf, *Untitled-Elroys*, 1981,
acrylic on plastic.

3. NEO EXPRESSIONISM IN TURKEY

As stated in Chapter 1 while changes were taking place one after the other in the west how was the situation in Turkey? Were these developments natural for us when we were under the continuous bombardment, unable to prevent the reflections of new developments?

Looking from a general perspective the west produced new ideas and together with technological developments seemed to have achieved modernism's leadership while eastern societies could not keep in step. Most of the eastern societies had to define their history according to the western model. Thus we encounter an eastern society having inconsistencies and contradictions between its past and the developments that has taken place in the west.

When expressionism was flourishing and spreading in Germany the situation Turkey was in can be stated in broad terms as follows: In 1910s our country did not possess a democratic society. Furthermore religion played an important role. There was an economic crisis in the country. Since there was no state policy regarding art and culture it can be said that it was an unproductive era in terms of art and culture.

After Tanzimat* important changes have taken place in the society. For instance measures taken for the army drifted to several institutions of the society, to the economy and to the land order. When we take a look at art we see that those changes were not drastic. The artists continued painting under auspices of the sultan. This situation has changed considerably with the foundation of the Turkish Republic. During this period while the West was having continuous art movements, Turkey was trying to be democratic and reflections of these were seen in art movements. Painters known as 1914 generation** were sent abroad under the westernization framework. Although it was quite natural to have got influenced from what had happened there 1914 generation painters, despite being in Europe, managed to stay out of the new movements and changes. Having obtained a classical education discipline, these painters brought the almost obsolete impressionism to Turkey. Yet western societies were living movements like expressionism and shortly afterwards Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism. In fact we can state that expressionism's birth and development as mentioned in section 2.2 has not been accomplished in Turkey as it has been in the west. Although there was no mention about the expressionist trend concept, some of the artists had a desire to comprehend and apply

*Political reforms of Abdülmejid in 1839 and the period following.

**Under the 1914 generation artists İbrahim Çallı, Namık İsmail, Feyhaman Duran, and Hikmet Onat are listed.

expressionism's basis as form and content.

The first personality who adopted an expressionist style in Turkey is Ali Çelebi. Being in Germany when expressionist movement was on he was affected by the confused state and political events that took place in Germany.

"...In Ali Çelebi's paintings we can observe deformed figures and striking usage of color which is one of most prominent features of expressionist trend. Deformation contributes to the expressiveness of the painting as well as serving as a tool for expression. Color makes up the form with large and reckless stains. Color does not break up the form but assembles it which shows a certain degree of closeness to Die Brücke. Another aspect which reminds Die Brücke is that the starting point for the painting is the Nature."³⁵

The second personality who produced work in an expressionist trend is Zeki Faik Izer from the "D Group".* In his paintings he search for the musicality of picture and with his spiritual stand has an expressionist characteristic. He describes his purpose as follows:

"The picture has its own musicality. I am forming a relationship between it and the music but I am not depicting Beethoven or Wagner. In Missa Solemnis I felt the feelings of a German composer and felt the enthusiasm conveyed through his hand and as a painter I wanted to convey the same spiritual state through my paintings."³⁶

"...His pictures are based on color, action and opposite concepts. The only thing that does not change in Zeki Faik Izer's paintings is the expressiveness. In Turkish painting the tendency towards the abstract reflects both the geometric abstract and expressionist abstract. In Izer we mostly observe the latter."³⁷

*Group D was formed by artists Nurullah Berk, Abidin Dino, Zeki Faik Izer, Elif Naci, Cemal Tollu, and Zühtü Müridoğlu.

In the 1950s among the popular abstract art we can list Nejat Devrim as having an expressionist tendency. He was in close contact with the post-war French abstract expressionists and his ideas were that "in sharing a form the process should continue until there nothing left since the first initiative."³⁸

One of the pioneers of the abstract expressionism in Turkey is Adnan Turani. While he was dealing with the problems of the painting closely, he creates contradictions by using pictorial elements such as color, stain and line. In time his brush strokes tend to leave themselves to arm movements.

If we compare the developments in Turkey with the west, we see that the trends which led to abstract expressionism, such as surrealism, automatism, and existentialism do not appear in Turkish painting as previously stated in section 2.2.

When we look at Turkey in the 80s after a brief summary, we notice that several changes have taken place. In the first half of the 80s military coup, pressure, ban, and state terror was effective and in the second half the individual gained importance and the dominant factors were freedom, modern and civil authority. Perhaps those years were restrictive in terms of freedom but in fact, those restrictions have led to new consequences.

Turkey had a leap forward to catch up with the information age during the 80s as a result of mediatic developments. One of the foremost technological developments which is a result of the information age is telecommunications and especially cable TV has led to structural changes in the lives of people. People also enjoyed freedom in consumption and in staying out of institutions or at least they felt in this way. Suddenly there was a desire to retain the culture. While books were put on fire in the first half of 80s, the second half witnessed an increased number of new publications including a large number of translations into Turkish. Feminism for the first time has been strongly emphasized. Women for the first time had their voices heard.

What had happened in the 80s was a breakdown of the whole and to exhibit its components. Having its roots going back to the 70s the oriental music(arabesque) originated during the 80s. People who does this type of music believe that it is a combination of the east and the west and looks like a synthesis of both. It meets somewhere between urban and rural cultures and can be perceived as data for the intermediate culture.

After these general remarks, we can say that the developments that have taken place during the 80s have reflected themselves to the art movements. For the first time Turkey had a movement at the same time with the rest

of the world. That movement was neo-expressionism. The neo-expressionism in Turkey have brought to being the artists questioning themselves and their environment and for the first time to destroy aesthetic values. The political and social events that took place formed a suitable platform for this movement and neo-expressionism was established on these grounds. Perhaps it was this feature that distinguished neo-expressionism from the other trends.

We see all of these and effects of this structure in Bedri Baykam's paintings. He presents his paintings as a product of his feelings and spontaneous practice. He forms his art in front of his canvas without paying any attention to theoretical approaches by establishing a link between himself and the material he utilize. The paintings produced by Baykam are not theoretical in the sense that they were produced as a result of spontaneous actions.

Peter Selz explains artists' work as follows:

"Most reflect art circles' near past consciously and forcefully, in essence they stem from their life. In their brush there are drippings of abstract expressionism. In their images there are supernatural features and borrowing from people's culture. Their paintings are conceived from show and action art. In their paintings there are strong effects of fluency of cinema pictures. Their work have an open relation with politics and especially politics of art."³⁹

B. Baykam touches upon topics like sexuality and even banned topics such as torture. He also tries to touch upon events that he lived. His aim is to combine elite culture

with the popular culture but in doing this his ego is in the first place. These remarks are exhibited in almost every painting of his. Among his numerous paintings Have you bought your book burner?(Figure 13), Police beating quite protesters (Figure 14), Democracy box*, Simply beating is not really a torture** symbolizes some of the events of the 80s while Prostitute's room***, and I wish I had a harem**** describes an unconditional stressing of sex. This has been done before***** criticizes the art critics in Turkey and worlds view of an eastern country. Often he is quite satiric about these issues.

He ridicules art critics, history of art, events, and thoughts. This is a personal and sentimental opposition to the established values.

*Mixed media, wood construction. 110 x 110 x 220 cm. Installation view from "a cross section of avant-garde Turkish Art", Istanbul 1987.

**Mixed media. 130 x 180 cm. 1988.

***Mixed technique. 120 x 240 cm. 1981.

****Photo-collage. 140 x 194 cm. 1987.

*****Acrylic on canvas. 162 x 202 cm. 1987.



Figure 13.

Bedri Baykam, Madonna: Did you buy your 'book burner'?, 1988, photo-news on wood.

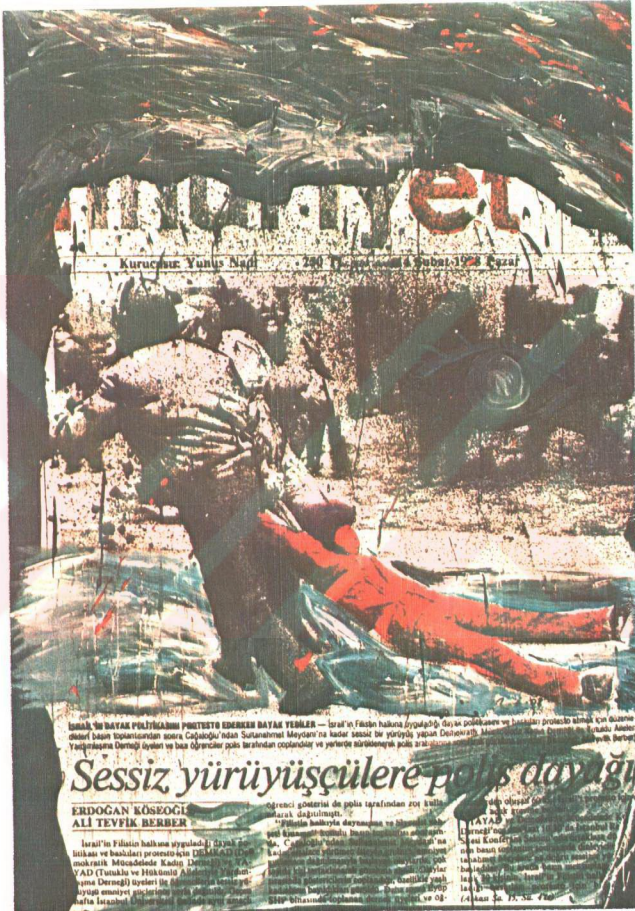


Figure 14.

Bedri Baykam, Police beats up silent protesters, 1988, photo-news on wood.

He describes this attitude in E.M. Donahue Gallery catalogue as:

Art is

"...To clean your hands on your pants. To be naughty boy. To scare the establishment. To be liked by the bourgeoisie 51 years later. To live every day as Saturday. To find a blue sun. To find a totally new color called "Teota". To create while you make love. To consider "being sworn to" as "pride" and to be attacked as "the proof of power". To think that you are the best while you feel insufficient. To dare. To push upon things. Not to become prisoner of one's self. To document passing moments. To impress beautiful women and intelligent people. To caress and to slap the critics. Forever search for an exit in a labyrinth without one. To make a huge painting over the ocean. To walk over the ocean and leave marks. Not to hide your weapons for tomorrow. To be ready for big victories and big defeats. Not to let them get used to you. To fool the devil. To destroy reached goals. To live a love story after 102 years. To set the standards. To create gossip. To be hard headed. To be insolent. To create history. To knead history. To be the compulsory friend of dinosaurs. To wipe out the racists. Not to leave 'bills' on your back. To be 'odd'. To use money as oxygen and toilet paper, according to the day. To watch thick ropes break from their thin end. To get poisoned from paint. To overflow from inside the time to outside. To watch the genetic evolution of your thought process. To feed the stomach. To dress the painting the way you undress a girl. Even when talking about the moment, to know that what matters is only 'actions in space'. To decide not to go on vacation. To refuse reincarnation. To sign. To love one's signature."⁴⁰

Mehmet Güleriyüz with his personal style of expressionism is another artist that we come across between 1970s and 80s. His paintings are quite different from the customary painting principles. Man converted to beasts reflects wildness and society's sexual and perverse feelings. Güleriyüz points at man's existence in environment and space but while investigating this discusses his own existence through a satiric and uncompromising way. On the figures

he questions established values and systems. After Baykam, Senol Yoroğlu, Mehmet Gün, Kemal Önsoy, Yusuf Taktak, Emre Zeytinoğlu, Gonca Sezer, Arzu Basaran, Hale Arpacioğlu have adopted and continued this trend. These artists tried to established a newly acquired western trend. Their general tendency is more like an extension of Fauvism and it is possible to find imported forms in their paintings.

3.1 Form and Discourse Importation and the Concept of "Patch"

"...We as a peripheral people are living the time of contradictions between different information blocks. We have fallen into a crack between repulsive and deforming, uncompromising worlds. When taken care with a bright mind and without revenge this duality makes us richer, can improve information records and widens up accuracy spectrum. Compelled from the information criticism domain the same duality causes declinations and injures the vision and in the same way a broken mirror is, deforms reality of the world and spiritual images."⁴¹

Daryush Shayegan

Above Shayegan expresses cultural schizophrenia appears in traditional societies as a result of contradictions. When we look at the structure of the society today, instead of modernism's homogeneous and settled down society, a new form of eclectic and refugee society emerges.

This structure is really an integration of several patches coming together. Patching means linking far away societies that are dissimilar. The patch combines different conceptual structures and is an outcome of mediatic developments.

Nowadays both the international and local issues are intertwined. Due to developments in telecommunication systems all over the world the world now lives the same moment thus achieving a transparent society. One can watch everything (even a war) sitting in the armchair or can live in a different world few districts away. For the lunch McDonald's hamburgers may be taken, however for the dinner Turkish cuisine might be more attractive. So, we witness the collection of different cultures which emerged in different periods of time.

The changes in the life style as a result of mediatic developments and circulation of international images have led to integration with imported form and discourse. These images are taken away from the geographies and cultures where they belong to and enter into universal circulation. During this period the images experience changes in meaning through the intervention of the local culture or individuals. Some of the images may have an entirely different meaning far away from its original aspiration. Examples to this end are the Israeli soldiers' boots which are now quite popular among the bourgeois youth and Levis jeans* which have a rather different usage now.

*Levis jeans were created by Levi Strauss in 1850 as a worker's fittings.

3.2 Explanation of My Works

It becomes possible to comprehend the present existence and produced works by only looking at the past history. Since I began to do paintings the conceptual issues have shown changes but the thing that never changed was the expressionist style of these works which contain sentimentality without rejecting personal expression and individualism.

In my paintings, the environment in which we live (pollution, shanty towns, etc.) and the structure of the society, the state of the culture today and its reflections into images, are very important. From the very beginning to the present I tried to demonstrate environment consciousness of people and also their reactions to this. This line of thought which naturally unites with expressionists, continues in my paintings with a slight change.

3.2.1 Barrels

I have addressed barrels between 1989-90. Barrels have come into my paintings to reflect technological developments, as well as pollution and destruction of the nature.

The oil barrel which is a product of an industrial process is used as a dust bin later on in certain countries such

as ours. The barrel initially contains oil and after being emptied the same barrel is used again. But this time as a garbage can to collect waste material. Thus barrel contains diverse concepts such as production-consumption and order-disorder (Figure 15).



Figure 15.

Elif Okur, Barrels, 1989, oil on canvas.

Since urban societies will always produce garbage and waste material as result of their existence, the barrel may represent not only garbage but also is considered as a proof or evidence of the existence of human societies. Perhaps as a witness of their productive systems and living standards. Though this simple metallic object (the barrel) produced by man according to his needs I tried to look into different meanings of its existence.

According to its subject the technique and utilized material in my paintings show a change. The same subject was painted on canvas using oil paint, and was supported by waste material. On the other hand different printing techniques such as lithography and gravure was employed in order to have a variety of techniques in expressing my work (Figures 16, 17).

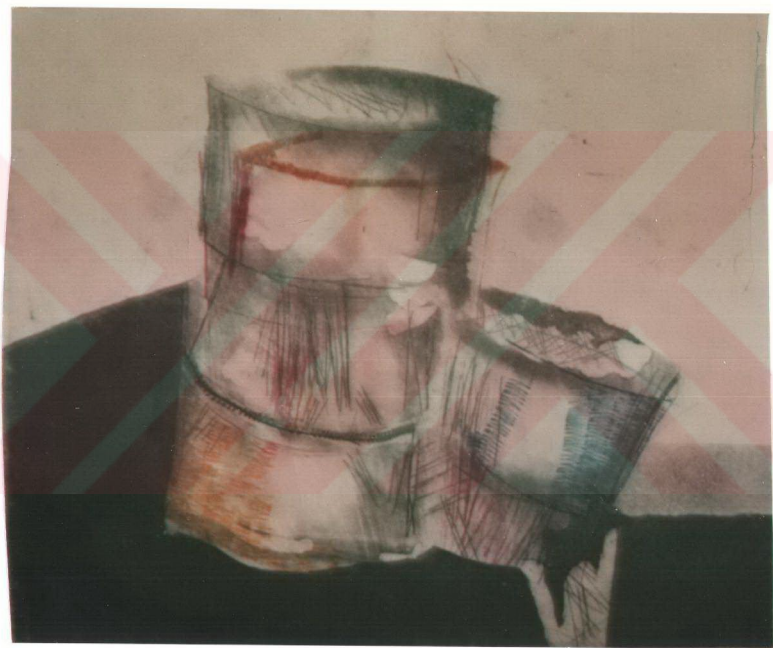


Figure 16.

Elif Okur, *Transparent Barrels*, 1989,
print-making (gravure).

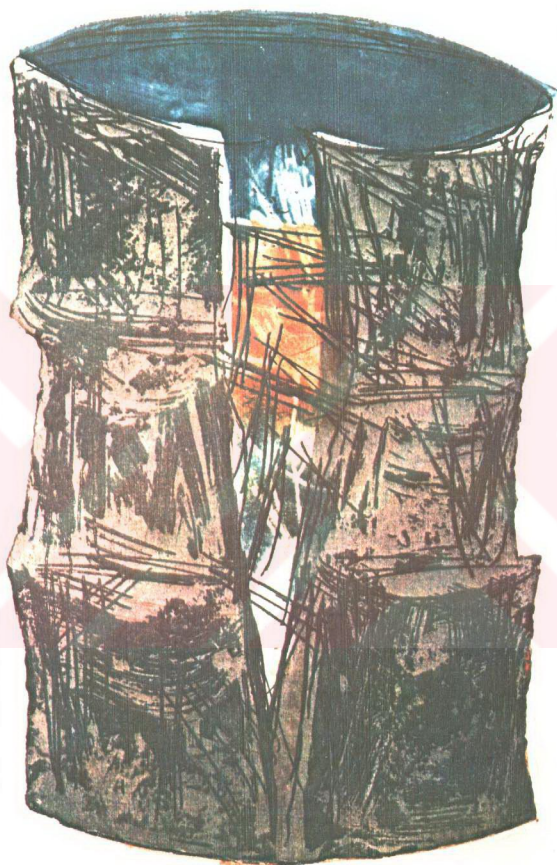


Figure 17.

Elif Okur, Barrel, 1990, gravure.

3.2.2 Time, Change, and Trace

In my works between 1990-91, I wanted to alter this approach of direct expression. Because the paintings should not contain what I call "locked up" thoughts. However, they should be rich in terms of their contents. During these years I re-evaluated all of my paintings that I have done since then, including the barrel.

The effect of time and phases of change which took place for the barrel have left itself in self-forming traces. These traces which are shown by several layers of paint are in fact an indirect way of showing the concept. While there is a structure indicating existence in the paintings, the layers of paint rejecting this, is an indicator of destruction(Figure 18). Objects that were subjected to transformation in time(like rusty pieces of can) have entered to my paintings as pictorial elements(Figure 19). Paintings show the transition process between the present and the past while reminding the past.

Afterwards I did a series of paintings on paper to show the destruction of the nature. These started off by tearing the papers and then continued by sticking one on top of the other and is concluded with occasional painting. In these paintings there is no rectangle and its borders and condition are self- determining. With its thickness and

form of its peripheral and with its emptiness and fullness these paintings are purely coincidental. Here action turns into form as an expression. But which form it will take is not known and it happens by itself. Moreover, we can state that these are coincidental objects (Figures 20-24).



Figure 18.

Elif Okur, From Barrel to the Abstract, 1990, oil on canvas.

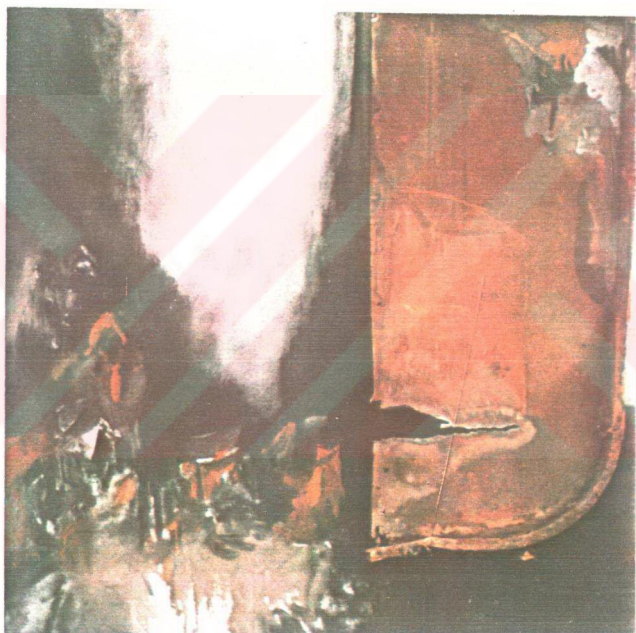


Figure 19.

Elif Okur, Transformation, 1991, oil
on canvas.



Figure 20.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.



Figure 21.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.

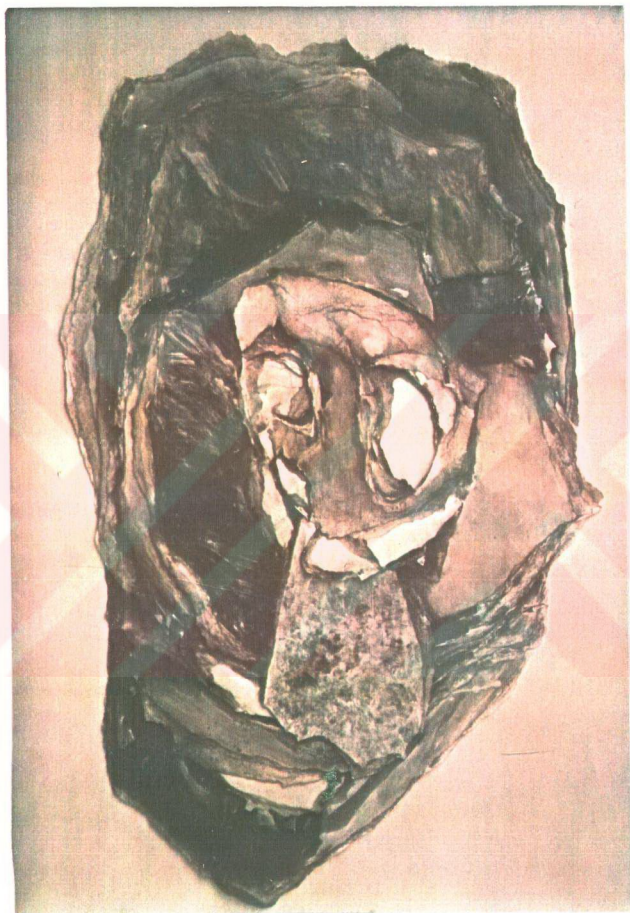


Figure 22.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.



Figure 23.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.



Figure 24.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.

3.2.3 The patch

In this particular series of paintings which I have described in section 3.1, lies the concept of patch. In this concept an eclectic structure is formed whereby several ideas that have no determination and continuity combine with different styles and systems. Here the patch is a merger of different philosophical concepts and far away worlds integration. This brings to life the usage of different elements on top of the old-new process in the paintings (Figures 25, 26).

I have tried to express the concept of patch in my paintings as get together of incompatible forms and colors on top of a different surface that come from the past (Figures 27-30).

In my paintings there is an obvious going back to the old like Kiefer's as described in section 2.3.2. But this is not exactly like his where there is a past full of history. My paintings exhibit a feeling of being worn out carrying the traces of past. Every color put on it is in fact a patch and at the same time depicts the mixture of different structures. These different elements seem contrary to one another as well as to the overall structure of the painting. In these paintings there is a natural structure reminding the past and another one constituting from synthetic colors and forms, thus making both structures

which are at the same surface repel one and other.

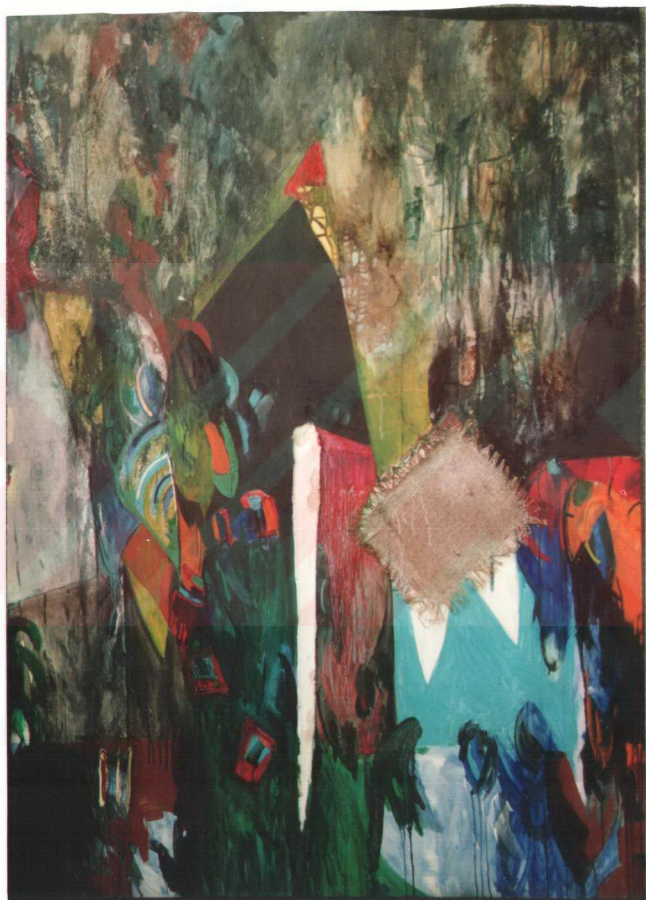


Figure 25.

Elif Okur, Piece-whole I, 1993, oil on canvas.

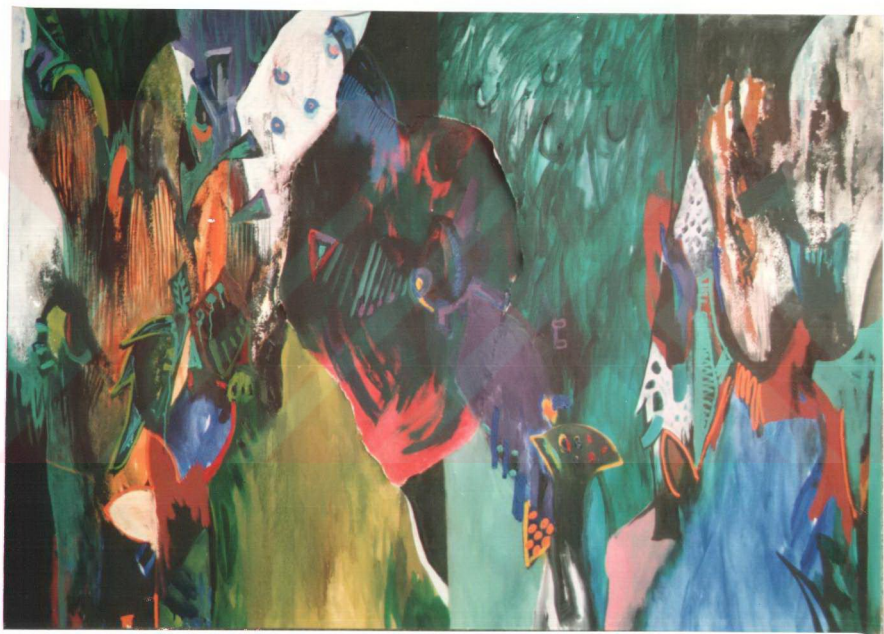


Figure 26.

Elif Okur, Piece-whole II, 1993, mixed media on canvas.

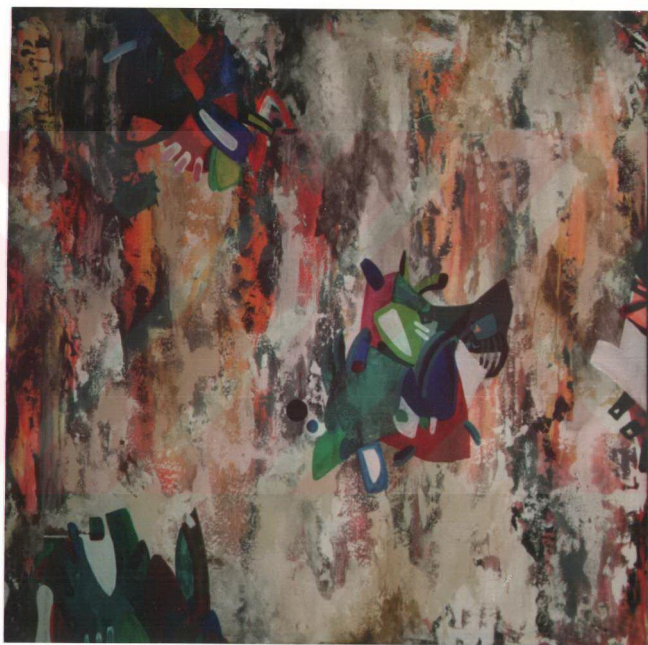


Figure 27.

Elif Okur, Patch I, 1993, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 28.

Elif Okur, Patch II, 1993, acrylic on canvas.

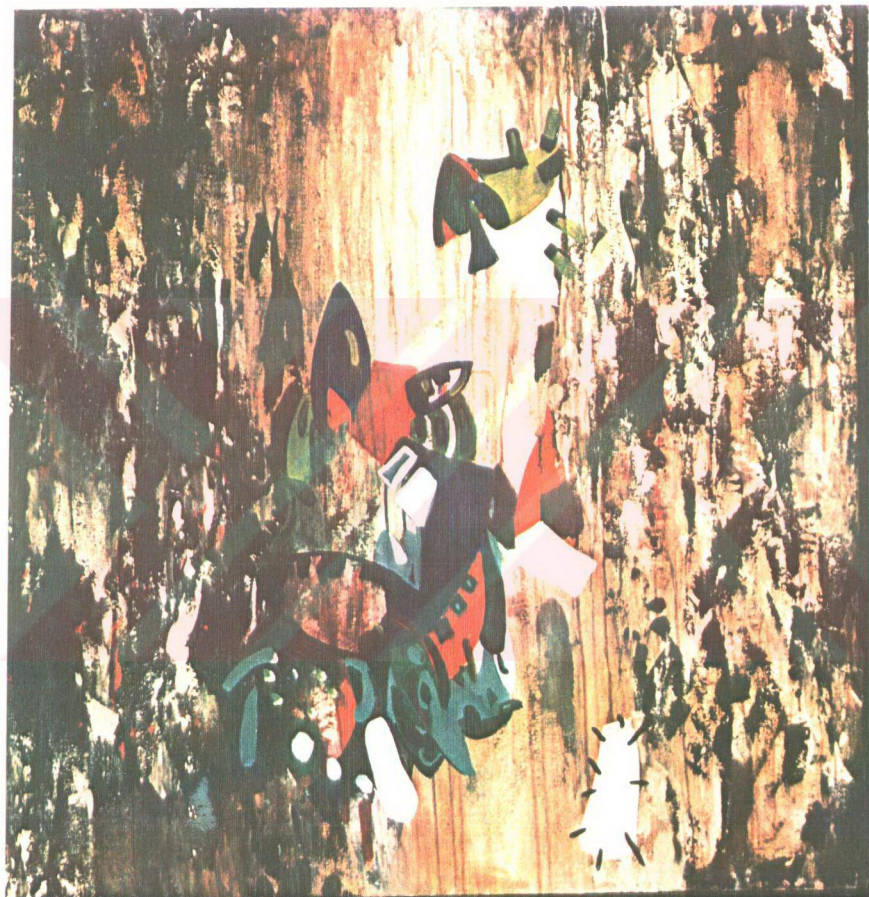


Figure 29.

Elif Okur, Patch III, 1993, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 30.

Elif Okur, Patch IV, 1993, acrylic on canvas.

3.2.4 Imported Images

When mentioning the patch concept in section 3.2.1 and producing pictures to this end, I headed towards the contextual changes of daily images that we come across.

Images experience a change when they circulate on an international scale likewise patching different ideas and philosophical structures. Being universal and being local are mixed up as a result. The regional differences in Turkey, as a result of mediatic developments and new cultural acquisitions, produce different images and at the same time cause changes in some of the old images. Societies live in an environment full of chaos. This brings about destruction, re-structuring and the patch.

Imported images series have been developed with this reasoning. Chosen images were the ones used out of their context but some of them have been moved out of their context in my paintings. For example, the Israeli soldiers' boots which are now quite popular among the bourgeois youth. Produced according to the climate and economic needs of the day these boots are now being used for a different purpose by an entirely different consumer population in a different geography. Levis jeans was initially conceived as a workers' costume because of its lasting properties but today it is being worn for the purposes of comfort in a quite contradictory style in conjunction with high-heel

shoes.

The "Alaturka" print under the Mc Donalds logo emphasizes the concept of patch. Alaturka is an expression for presenting a local dish in a fast-food manner. All of these paintings were trying to patch a new discourse on top of an old content by using certain images (Figures 31-34).



Figure 31.

Elif Okur, Alaturca-Mc, 1993, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 32.

Elif Okur, Palladium, 1993, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 33.

Elif Okur, Jean, 1993, mixed media.



Figure 34.

Elif Okur, Untitled, 1993, mixed media.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis is a theoretical framework reflecting my approach to art and contains an analysis of neo-expressionism that appeared in many societies in the 1980s. Despite being a theoretical study, the paintings produced as part of this work cannot be exactly called theoretical. The paintings were formed by having a certain conviction on the subject. My main aim has been to express my line of thoughts and to form a natural correlation between paint, canvas, and material. As topics change in time they affect my paintings indirectly. However, there is a feature in my paintings which does not change over the time, which is their expressiveness. Though neo-expressionism may be considered as a patch or necessity which fills up the emptiness of the 80s its importance lies in being a sociological phenomena that showed up independently in various geographies.

We observe variations in the development of neo-expressionism. For instance in Germany it shows itself as the protection of inheritance and to create the German art, and in America it is an extension of popular culture and pop art. In Italy it is a resurgence to history in a

mystical sense. In Turkey it is a destruction of aesthetic values. Additionally, appearance of neo-expressionism at same time with political events is noteworthy.

As Lawson stated the art is left in an unimportant position because it was thought of as a background or framework to be put on ego as one likes.⁴²

Now old concepts are replaced by new contexts and presented over and over again. Even though this is hard to state, we have to note that some art forms are not worth pursuing, but we still see art as a means for cultural communication.

Art of the 80s is understood either as a return to the historical and traditional or renewal of modern radicalism. Neo-expressionism has been quite appropriate to this structure.

Art is an action that starts off by questioning and settling up matters with yourself and without depriving your feelings it is possessing the courage for doing whatever comes into your mind.

NOTES

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3. Werner Haftman, Painting in the Twentieth Century, vol. 1. (New York: Praeger, 1960) p.22.
4. Lynton, Concepts of Modern Art p.30.
5. Norbert Lynton, Modern Sanatın Öyküsü, trans. Cevat Çapan, Sadi Özis, (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1982), p.38.
6. Nilgün Özayten, "Disavurumculuk," Kalın Dergisi 7 (1988): N. pag. (p.40).
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8. Ibid., p.55.
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