

Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2011

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Of the package of concepts inherited from nineteenth and early-twentieth century art historical studies, it is the idea of a passive and a-historical non-Western art that is probably undergoing the most reconsideration in today's visual studies. In *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*, Wendy Shaw contributes significantly to the revisionist cultural studies challenging the western / non-western art dichotomy and offers a valuable story of one of the modern art world's overlooked margins; Ottoman painting. Shaw's aim is to explore the interaction between the Western and Ottoman artistic practices in its own creative, mutual and historical context via the story of modern art practices, institutions, and artists spanning from the eighteenth century to the 1930s. In the course of six chapters, Shaw attempts to find an answer to one of the most interesting yet also troubling questions within art historical discourse: What was the impact of artistic modernity in the non-Western world? More specifically, how was Western art received in the Ottoman context, whose modern artworks have been "left 'outside the pale' of art history?" (3)

To that end, Shaw opens her book with a general discussion of colonial/postcolonial theory, noting that modern Ottoman painting falls into neither the category of Islamic art, nor that of modern art, but "partakes of both" (3). Shaw claims that "the practice of painting which emerged within the nineteenth century paradigm shift in Ottoman culture was a translation, not a transcription, of the artistic languages of the West, thereby inscribing new meanings on adopted practices" (10). In fact, in the following six chapters, Shaw explores how this "translation" underwent a shift from "exotic import to tool of national expression." (10)

In her first chapter, "From Old Niches to New Paintings," Shaw concentrates on how traditional manuscript painting and the Islamic *giriş* were gradually replaced first by landscape mural paintings decorating the walls of palaces, elite homes and even mosques in the eighteenth century and later by portable oil paintings on canvas commissioned mostly from European painters and being exhibited again on the walls of palaces and elite homes in the nineteenth century. In order to answer the question she raises in the beginning of her chapter about the meanings generated by painting as it established itself in Ottoman visual culture (11), Shaw benefits from the history of Ahmed Lütfi Efendi (1816-1907), the Ottoman official chronicler

of the period 1826-1876, and the memoirs of Celal Esad Arseven (1876-1971), the painter and art historian of the late-Ottoman and early Republic. The issues that arise from this inquiry into the introduction of Western practices to the Ottoman cultural sphere constitute a helpful historical background for the following chapters.

In chapter two, "Digesting Western Art: The Academy and Realism," Shaw concentrates on the first Muslim Ottoman artists educated in Paris around 1860 against the historical background of local westernisation programmes, and particularly the professionalization and institutionalisation of the arts in the Empire via the painting classes in the civilian and military schools from the late eighteenth century onwards and the foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi Alisi*) in 1883. The chapter also stages an extended discussion of how far artists such as Şeker Ahmed Paşa, Osman Hamdi and Süleyman Seyyid were affiliated to the ruling block and/or the Young Ottoman ideology. In a comparison between the Parisian avant-garde and Ottoman cultural milieu, Shaw concludes that the first generation of Ottoman artists were "well aware" of their responsible role in "making an entire cultural practice part of their own culture" (77).

Chapter three, "A New World of Art," continues this chronology, focusing on the subsequent generations of artists in the early twentieth century. Shaw here argues that new functions for Ottoman art emerged during the turn of the century; while painters such as Namık İsmail and Ömer Adil popularised the female figure as a sign of modernization, for others, including Ali Rıza, Hüseyin Zekai and Ahmed Ziya, landscape and architectural paintings were a means of preservation and "creating national patrimony" (91). In contrast to the first Ottoman artists trained in Paris, Shaw contends that this generation of landscape and figural painters were more "interested in developing a pragmatic role" (91) for Western Painting in Ottoman society.

The following two chapters, "Art Goes Public" and "Ten Long Years of War," map the developments of art organizations, publications and exhibitions over the period of the Second Constitutional Revolution from 1908 to 1923; the period when Ottoman society faced rebellions, revolutions and a series of exhausting wars. Yet, as Shaw notes; "arts organization, support and production flourished" in this turbulent environment (107). This artistic growth was exemplified above all by the foundation of the Society of Ottoman Artists in 1909 and their eighteen-issue art Journal. Shaw then turns to the younger generation of artists in this Society—those educated in Paris and returning to the Empire with the beginning of World War I, and known in Turkish art historical discourse as the "Generation of 1914" or "Turkish Impressionists." She emphasises that these painters "resisted their own academically-oriented teachers," producing an "understanding of representation, Impressionism, and subject matter [which] established artistic

parameters until the 1930s” (132). Here, Shaw briefly looks at key artists among this generation, especially, Feyhaman, Halil, Ruhi, Hüseyin Avni and Çallı İbrahim. In chapter five, she also devotes a subsection to women painters, exploring the political, social and cultural challenges to their achievements as artists.

The last chapter, “Art for a New Nation”, looks at the period starting with the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, concentrating on how the end of the empire and changing political regime informed the agenda of artists, art intuitions, art criticism and artworks in the country. Central to much of the debate in the chapter are the art works depicting symbols of the new republic, including Ankara, the new capital, Turkish women as a “trope of modernity” (166), and, of course, the national leader, Mustafa Kemal himself. Shaw’s objective here is to explore how post-1923 artworks became signals of modern and national identity. She analyses several paintings produced by the artists of the Generation of 1914 and later by the members of the newly founded artistic organizations, such as the Union of Independent Painters and Sculptors (*Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltıraşlar Birliği*) and the “d Group” (d Grubu). Shaw concludes that “painting in the early republic engaged with the tradition of Western painting only to lose its interpretative spirit with the codification of patriotic expression” (176).

Whilst many Ottoman and Turkish artists and art works have been analysed in separate studies published in Turkey, these studies have been mostly restricted to the genres of individual biography or exhibition catalogues. Shaw, however, manages to lucidly combine developments in the political, social and cultural spheres of this era. *Ottoman Painting* is organised chronologically, with each chapter is divided into thematic sections, and the eighty-three reproductions in this slim volume manage to give the general reader the gist of the story of modern Ottoman painting and its transformation over the last two centuries. Nevertheless, while Shaw’s references to modern philosophy and postcolonial theory seem to gesture towards an academic readership, specialists may be disappointed by the fact that the book references few primary sources and is not as comprehensive or original a piece of research as her previous study on the Ottoman museum, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (University of California Press, 2003). As it is, *Ottoman Painting* would serve as a useful textbook for second and third year art courses.

One criticism is that, although the book presents a much more inclusive story of modern art in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic by including non-Muslim artists, it still follows the canon of artists and art works created by Turkish Republican art historians, and hence takes for granted that same list of artists (such as, Osman Hamdi, Şeker Ahmed, the “Generation of

1914") confirmed by pre-revisionist art history. Furthermore, while Shaw convincingly argues that the aim of the Ottoman artists was not to make a claim to originality or innovation but to "change the discourse of society through the application of artistic styles," (183) the argument becomes problematic when she assumes the existence of a political message, or any political propensity, in given art works or artists. Painters may have been self-conscious of their role in Ottoman society, yet it is questionable whether they were constantly adorning their works with overloaded political messages either supporting or criticising the ruling block. Last but not least, though artworks are certainly open to multiple interpretations, Shaw sometimes appears to be applying a pre-conceived conceptual framework for the history of Ottoman modern art, and cherry-picking these particular artists and artworks to epitomize an already-assumed narrative.

A comprehensive and unbiased account of Western art is already difficult to present, let alone when trying to understand it in a non-western context. In other words, writing of modernism beyond the limits of canonical Western artistic traditions is an immensely fruitful but equally challenging aim for the art historian. Shaw's book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of modern Ottoman/Turkish art history and to global art history writing, as modern Ottoman painting provides an excellent opportunity to understand artistic modernity in the non-Western world. It is an invaluable and enjoyable resource which will hopefully encourage debate and future publications in the field.

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