

PRINTMAKING IN TURKEY AND PRECEDENT OF “MUSTAFA ASLIER”

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Abstract

Art which is carried on as a common language in various methods and forms by artists, with the effect of environment and era since the beginning of mankind. Interaction of printmaking, one of the art products that has been based its origin on very early ages, between the east and the west is incontrovertible. Due to its reproducibility, traditional printmaking that still continues its existence in the electronic media which has become widespread through the fast-growing technology has assisted artists to be able to reach audiences and convey their own ways of expressions.

The story about the existence of the printmaking within the borders of Turkey with a monumental quality that Mustafa Aslier, who has an important place amongst the Turkish printmaking artists, brought in his figures and their fictions by his plain and symbolist manner he acquired in his prints has been discussed in this study.

Key Words: Art, Printmaking, Mustafa Aslier.

Art which has started with Homo sapiens, provide the communication between the individuals and it is shaped with cultural events according to the circumstances of its era. The forms of art have taken shapes through impacts of the cultural and social circumstances in various ages. Art has progressed by the determination and increase of the elements and possibilities of formation. An artist has imbued with plenty of old-new traditions has created his/her own uniqueness through new expressions and interpretations. And the work of the artist arises as being a new way of expression delivering the message as artistic and/or inartistic.

Anatolia bridging between the East and West have a unique history and cultural wealth for those who use the art as an expressive language. It is known that the people living in Anatolia in ancient ages had made prints on clay using plates carved on soil or stones. These, produced by using flat or cylindrical seal plates in accordance with the relief printing techniques, are regarded as the earliest examples of the art of printmaking. The seals on which the forms of figures, animals and plants had been carved are cylindrical or stamp-shaped.

One of the examples of the folk art in Anatolia is kerchief-art made by carving woodblocks and then printing them onto cloths. Both compositions and colours of kerchiefs depend on the regions of Anatolia, and kerchief-art still carries on its existence now.

The Turkish term for “Printmaking” which has been used since 1972 in Turkey was adapted into our language by Mustafa Aslier. The history and use of printmaking in Turkey have dated back many centuries. It is known that in 1493 when print shops have gradually started to get into the act in Istanbul, a book has been printed by using the relief printing technique for the first time.

Almost two hundred years after this development, a book named ‘History of the West Indies (Tarihi Hindi Garbi)’ published by Ibrahim Müteferrika who is regarded as the founder and primary practitioner of the arts of graphic and printmaking is another example practiced in Istanbul (Akalan, 2000). It is known that there are pieces in this book, printed by relief printing techniques, as well as a world map made by an intaglio method.

After this book had been printed in 1730, pictured books developed and increased, but the printmaking hadn’t been generated as a single piece of artwork. Unique printmaking masterpieces started to be seen when the lithography technique was brought to Istanbul. The first lithographic book printed for the purpose of military education has been printed by the establishment of a publisher under the command of military. Representations of human figures and weapons, maps and schemes have been illustrated and described in the books and bulletins regarded as the first printmaking works including themes such as military education, weapon introduction, land surveying. The paintings by Hoca Ali Rıza Efendi who has an important place in Turkish painting art have been printed in lithography for military cadets to be exemplified. These works with the reproduction purposes are considered as the initiators of lithography in Turkish printmaking.

Since the early ages, one of the major aims of printmaking was to disseminate and represent religions. Illustrative books, thus, have been published for illiterate people. Although the purpose of printing books has been gradually differentiated in the course of time, illustrated folkloric books have been printed by using the lithographic process due to its effective way of communication and the possibility to have access to the masses simultaneously. Following the picture books which were available for the public, “Public Printmakings” which are known as “The Coffee House Pictures” are also respected as the unique and good samples of Turkish printmaking. Among the themes of these representations having all the characteristics of folk art that has adorned the walls of many coffee houses and working places are reflections of epics, significant events, ship representations, sultans and heros.

In Sanayi Nefise Mektebi, the first educational institution in Turkey at which a training in the field of fine arts was provided, founded in 1892, the department of Stylography (engraving) has been established and artistic courses have been taught along with master printer Stanisles Arthur Napier from France. The aim of this department, closed in 1924, was to train individuals to be able to meet the requirement in the field of printing and publishing.

Leopold Levy who has been tasked with the head of the Department of Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts (also known as Sanayi Nefise Mektebi) in 1937 has reestablished the atelier of Printmaking, and Sabri Berkel who worked in etching process while studying his art training in Belgrade and Florence has been put on the assistantship of the atelier by Levy. Along with this atelier, an environment for printmaking in which various printmaking processes could be used in artistic scales that artists could practice upon them, has been established in Turkey for the first time. Until the fire in 1948, the atelier has provided a suitable place for various technical practices such as relief printing, intaglio and lithography. The artists who have shaped the future of Turkish painting art including Turgut Zaim, Neşet Günel, Ferruh Başağa, Fethi Karabaş, Nuri İyem have produced prints in this atelier. In 1960s, the atelier has started to function again under the presidency of Professor Sabri Berkel, and outputs of contemporary printmaking have livened up in these years. (Özsezgin, K. and Aslier, M. 1989)

Another significant educational institution that led the art of printmaking to become widespread and to be understood in our country is Gazi Eğitim Enstitüsü (Gazi Institute of Education). The leading artists who contributed to Turkish art and art education such as Ferit

Apa, Nevzat Akoral, Mustafa Aslier, Adnan Turanî have graduated from this school. After their graduation, these artists headed for abroad including United States of America, United Kingdom and Germany for training as scholarship students. Mustafa Aslier took education in painting and printmaking in Germany, and along with his exhibition consisting of printmaking works in Stuttgart in 1957 he has become the very first Turkish artist who have showed an exhibition in this field.

The State College of Applied Fine Arts (Faculty of Fine Arts of Marmara University), founded in accordance with the technological possibilities and modern needs of the time in 1957, has begun education along with artists and academicians from both Turkey and Germany. Upon finishing his training in Germany, Mustafa Aslier has been tasked in the Department of Graphic Arts in 1958. Owing to the personal attempts and endeavors of Aslier, one of the pioneers of the time with his identity as both an artist and educator, the atelier of printmaking has been founded in 1960 and has begun to give lectures. It is clearly incontrovertible that the atelier in which many of independent artists have also drawn upon its possibilities has contributed to younger generation of printmaking artists after 1960s. This thought ambiance which is developed with the effect of artists, directed the students in this studio to research with visual shaping elements. And that became aware of everything which is new and unique, and interrogated the relation between the material, technique and human being. By examining the old and new values a path was formed to reach out to uniqueness.

Mustafa Aslier, who was born in Kırcaali/Bulgaria in 1926, has an important place in the art of printmaking. Inspired out from his culture, he made many printmakings and with his innovative interpretations he went over the boundaries. The artist, through a much simpler and more symbolic manner, caught up with the era over the years and carried his art to a contemporary arena.

Aslier in his realistic compositions edited cultural images which are akin to the region and the nature of People of Anatolia. And this is related with his scientific infrastructure's ability and the education did in Germany. He has been influenced by both the ways of thinking and works of Kandinsky and Klee in Germany. Aslier has tended towards abstractions after he has encountered with new works of art and made various experiments with methods, and questioned his own art. The natural appearance of the Anatolians formed over again through the Western-Eastern synthesis has become a genuine and monumental imagery by incorporating abstract inorganic lines. (Tosun, 2011).

Naturalistic expression which is based on the observation on his first pictures, and the effect of Daumier, in his monoprints called "The Putty Seller" created an impression of lithography. The artist's composition comprehension with starting from the figures which are at the front, spread on the axis of the perspective. The viewer firstly is around the static place of bright tones and described figures on the dark tones and moved from group around the tray of paste toward the mood of figures which are on back side. In printmaking which has a scene cross the street, despite the excitement provided the paste by disrupting the daily simplicity, the figures which continue to live their spirituality and they balanced each of them and the deep perspective felt its effect. Uneasiness of undecisive children and the abstention of the children who haven't got a pair of shoes with the feeling of desperation on the bottom of the wall creates a general pessimistic atmosphere on the picture. The conditions of life and the mood of the period unrolls in the prints. And three dimensional space perception is provided with the light and shadow effect.

One of the linocuts of Aslier made in 1947, which has been done in a realistic perception with the German Expressionists' effect consist of a basket and three villagers who are talking in

clothes of the period. On the dark space, figures clarifying with the light, had been placed on a horizontal axis and the powerful light's distribution of the space balanced it. Coming from somewhere, going to another, resting figures having a break, with the impression inside the exterior space with a closed stance composition is described. With the powerful effect of black and white, the simplicity of the figures and the moment far from exaggeration, is expressed effectively and clearly.

Even though, depth was provided with the notion of far and close later on two dimensional settings dominated the composition. When printmakings started to become simpler, it transformed into two dimensional geometric compositions. The figures which get clearer had a better appearance with tired but strong bodies. Generally the subject with perception of closed composition and supporting the main figure with fore and back relation the villagers, grease wrestlers, and the workers in the field are in which time they are belong.

The linocut work of Aslier, "Field" made in 1957, portrays two women working on the opposite directions in the field, with the effect of abstraction. The two dimensional main figure is described clearly with the relation to the figure in back which is smaller, more cleared dark spot form supports the effect of perspective with the dimension of the trees. Black and white balance which is provided with spots and lines, position of the peasant woman, is described in a mournful manner. Figure which is described by the artist with its clearing clothes is leaning on the anchor and presents a moment of connection.

The attempt to avoid decorative patterning consisting of plain shapes and having an aesthetic concern has forced the artist towards a much more abstract and simpler expression. He has no longer sought the anatomical structures of the human body, but their formal possibilities. Figures transforming into light-dark geometrical forms have differentiated the way of expression and the aim has become to be able to access to the simplest and the most abstract.

In the print "AB" of Aslier, the artist combined the rebellious language of woodcut, even if he gets far from the perception of organic form, powerful geometric expression could be seen. Searching and sad looking of his big eyes and with his moustache as the symbol of Turkish man, the role of the family man who is in charge of everything, describes the patriarchal Turkish family structure. Man figure with thick angular borders, is described as sensible and content with the things he carries on his shoulders. With two dimensional symbolic expression, A and B letters' connotation, Aslier's strong figure which is in the center of printmaking with the perception became a pattern with other figures and composed his own unity by pulling away from the space. The figures in the woodcuts of the times, perceived as a symbol, have been composed in a central axis in two dimensional spaces through vivid mark effects. Piles of fully-dressed figures have been portrayed with even tonal gradations in the overall surface of the works.

The abstractions being felt in the human figures in the works produced in 1957 by the artist has freed the figures from their cloths being an indication of appearance after 1960s; human figures were abstracted through an imagery close to the pure forms, and a geometric-like pictorial space was composed with a symbolical way of expression reflecting the styles of human behaviours. The monumental imagery exposed by a symbolical and stylistic expression and compositions in a simplified order has ensued both the subject and interpretation integrities in despite of the technical differences. The artist has felt himself free to use recurrently the images he found successful in his various works with a purpose of seeking the innovative.

Sober and plain expressive manner in the linocuts has been unified with the figures and planar smear conception in space in the intaglio process. The artist has focused on the intaglio process between the years of 1962-72 and experimented with the whole possibilities of the process. He has produced a significant body of prints (in relief and intaglio) by etching metal plates in various methods and even using today's experimental conceptions altogether.

Aslier's intaglio "My Mother" dates back to 1976 and with this masterpiece he turned back to the realistic phase. The expression on the eyes and gestures of the mother figure in the center of the picture, is supported with two dimensional expressions. The mother, an Anatolian woman of whom life is described in sections, and the impression of "a child that could only watch the life of his mother" is tried to be expressed.

Attempting to explain the individual to the society in a contemporary language in his lithographic works, Aslier thought that merely abstraction was not sufficient and adopted a realistic and painterly approach. With a central composition expression, "To My Mother" which is described in three parts and is the example of the comprehension of reformed images used by Aslier, and the main figure centered with more bright tones. The printmaking which has the portrait of the artist that transferred from artist's photograph, consist of many descriptions used many times before. On the right and left parts, more dark and linear values, and scenes from daily life of the villagers' takes place. The artist attempting to seek new exploits, the possibilities of new technology and new formation materials.

Whether it is realistic or symbolic, the figures in his prints constitute the major elements of his art. New expressions resulting from new techniques and materials enriching the language of artistic elements give the artist a possibility to find a personal independence. It is clear that Aslier, combining his own cultural values with the western conception of art, has used the arrangements of folk art in his works made between the years of 1970-1980. In these prints of the artist, dealing with the patriarchal structure of Turkish family model and the people of that time, the smear approach has been composed with a geometrical, abstractive manner. A space in which individual, society, art and technology exist altogether incorporates within a time integrity.

As a result, the outputs of the societies from the very primitive ages till now explicitly show us that art has been a natural process for people. Either positive or adverse impacts of any era can readily be seen in artworks. The art education and works which has to be left out from science and technological studies, aimed to become contemporary and economic recovery. Educational process must provide for the individual to live together with society and be able to understand social phenomena. Recently, the art of printmaking in Turkey has swiftly been climbing up the development ladder. Today, the Departments of Printmaking in Faculties of Fine Arts, The Association of Printmaking Artists and private studios are contributing to the development of printmaking in Turkey.

Mustafa Aslier who is seeking the the new with a lifelong enthusiasm started to his printmaking adventure with black-white relief print. Considering the needs of the era, he always avoided repetitions in his art, and was in search of the genuine by being aware of what has been really going on in the art world and the world itself. While his art is illuminating our country, he always cared for the education of the people and acted with the consciousness of many ways in art which have to be considered. He wasn't frightened of the youth so he always encouraged them to search and be original. Aslier has created an important history for printmaking art in Turkey and by making art works. He never gave up to share his knowledge and to be enthusiastic thus he proved that art and the artist went far beyond the boundaries.

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