

SÜLEYMAN SAİM TEKCAN RETROSPECTIVE

Süleyman Saim Tekcan is an artist who has a unique place in the Turkish art setting with his intense artistic work and his contribution to the development of original prints in Turkey.

While Süleyman Saim Tekcan who today has left over 45 years in artistic life has been distinguished in the memories of people with his original prints, he also produced oil paint, water color, patterns and bronze sculptures during his long artistic creation period. Süleyman Saim Tekcan is an artist who gives priority to experimentation in his works and developed a technique peculiar to him in the area of original print.

The artist ascribed an identity to his works of art emanating from his environs, from nature, from Anatolian civilizations and Ottoman art, while expressing them from the perspective of universal art criteria.

The artist whose childhood days were spent in Trabzon, enrolls as a student in the Ankara Gazi Education Institute, Department of Painting during 1958-1961. In the Institute he is trained by such professors as Refik Epikman, Şinasi Barutcu and Veysel Erüstün. Süleyman Saim Tekcan lives hand in hand with art in this institution which offers various opportunities in such areas as theater, music, sports and art with the resources provided by the government and apart from aesthetic knowledge he learns to become acquainted with and use materials and the function of labor and skill in the creation of a work of art which will be very important for him in the coming future.

In his becoming a superb educator, the role of the Education Institute is no doubt fundamental.

Apart from his taking part as an educator in İstanbul Atatürk Education Institute during 1968-75 and in Mimar Sinan University Fine Arts Faculty during 1975-1998, the artist also undertook administrative posts by serving as the dean and department head, while initiating gravure, lithography, and serigraphy workshops in the institutions he served.

In 1970-71 the works he performed on original print and original print education in the Munich Academy in Germany and many other art institutions brings a new breadth to the artist both as an educator and as an artist..

In the 1970s original print entered a period whereby it was appreciated more than the other branches of art and gained special prominence. In this period Süleyman Saim Tekcan established his first print workshop in 1974 in the Kuyubaşı Aralık Street, and began to produce his own prints. When he first established this workshop Tekcan intended to duplicate only his own gravure and serigraphy works and it was he himself who produced the gravure press,

serigraphy machine and drying racks of the workshop by applying sample projects he obtained from Germany. During a period where there was no adequate facilities in Turkey for original print production, he decides to make accessible his workshop--that commenced with print production under his design and manufacture skills--to the other artists, as well.

The first artist who produced original print in the workshop was Nurullah Berk. Following him Gündüz Gölönü, Ferruh Başağa, and Neşet Günal actualized their prints. The workshop conducted its works in Kuyubaşı from 1974 to the second half 1977. A wider space was in need, however, and the workshop moved to its new place in Söğütlüçeşme Dericî Zeynel Street in June 1977. This locality soon stopped being only a print workshop, and soon became a meeting place with its warm atmosphere where the artists much frequented, where art chats were conducted with enthusiasm. Artists like Cihat Burak, Avni Arbaş, Emin Barın, Nedim Günsur, Elif Naci, Semih Balcioğlu, Ali Teoman Germaner, Devrim Erbil, Mehmet Güleryüz, Özer Kabaş, Eren Eyüboğlu, and Veysel Erüstün both worked in this workshop and contributed to this special locality by conducting artistic chat assemblies. Among the frequenters of the workshop were names like Şahap Balcioğlu, Aziz Nesin, Bertan Onaran, Malik Aksel, Turhan Selçuk, Mehmet Ali Aybar and Hamit Kınaytürk.

After the political turmoil and distress of the 1970s, the 1980s would become a turning point both from the political and economic perspective and also for the arts and the artist. Whereas in the 1970s the art setting had oriented towards social topics and become introverted, in the 1980s the art setting established a much closer communication with the outer world and the artists slowly found the opportunity to exhibit their works in setting outside Turkey, as well. These relations brought to the agenda the place of the Turkish artist within contemporary art setting and its identity problematic. While in the previous years what was expected from the artist was to be influenced from the West and bring new trends to the country, now in the 1980s identity and originality would be the main topics that the artists pondered on. With this purpose, ancient Anatolian civilizations and as a new approach the Ottoman art became the sphere of interest of the artists as a resource that many artists researched and made use of.

Architecture with its simple geometric structure, miniature with its rich color and composition formation and calligraphy with its dynamic stripes provided new creation opportunities. Artists like Adnan Çoker, Erol Akyavaş, Burhan Doğançay, and Ergin İnan while sometimes reaching simple abstract expressions, also gave way to a-typical figurations and paleography.

During 1980-1987 artists like Elif Naci, Nurullah Berk, Cihat Burak, Veysel Erüstün, Ergin İnan and Erol Akyavaş gathered in the workshop in Söğütlüçeşme to actualize their prints. The main topic of their conversations on art is what form contemporary Turkish art should take. Süleyman Saim Tekcan evaluates the

workshop experience of those years and touches on the artists' common reflections with his words, "Erol Akyavaş was an artist who had joined and worked in the workshop during our miniature period. He was creating internal space works, he had made many works of art with bricks and internal space images and the prints he made in our workshop are an evidence of this evaluation. In the periods to follow Ergin İnan was working in the workshop. I was also influenced from this setting".

Works like "Civilizations" and "Horses and Calligraphy" that Süleyman Saim Tekcan created are examples that were influenced from the reflections of this period, that shared and reflected these opinions.

In 1984 Süleyman Saim Tekcan completed the construction of another workshop that possessed even more developed opportunities and opened the workshop with the name Artess Çamlıca Art House, the same year on October 13.

This new workshop embraced all the print techniques like serigraphy and gravure, and harbored all the opportunities that must be existent in a modern workshop. Moreover with its large galleries, a grand print archive, library and guest house it succeeded to become an ideal-- print workshop in international dimensions.¹

In the museum founded in 2004 with the name İMOGA (İstanbul Graphic Arts Museum) a collection is exhibited that encompasses all the original print techniques and embraces the grandeur works of art of the masters of Turkish art and actual print works are maintained.

WORKS OF ART

Figurative Works with Local Topic

Süleyman Saim Tekcan began his art adventure in the 1970s with the figurative works inspired by Trabzon folklore and concentrated on the Anatolian woman and children.

The 1970s was a period whereby turmoil was experienced influencing all scopes of life in Turkey and originating from the clash between different ideological gestalt. The tensions in political and social plan influenced deeply the cultural setting, and therefore the artists and their frame of mind. Throughout the 1970s "nationalism – universalism", "national culture – universal culture" polemics rose to the forefront among topics discussed.

The fact that politics penetrated daily life gave way to the artists' orienting towards more concrete figurative expressions thereby receding from the abstract

¹ Eda Tomba, 1970s and An Important Workshop in the Development of Original Print, Mimar Sinan University Social Sciences Institute (2001. Master's Thesis), pg. 14-16

expression that was popular since the 1960s, at least for a period. Moreover whether the work of art needs to be understood by a broader spectrum of people and become prevalent was among the topics of discussion.

The pattern Süleyman Saim Tekcan created in the 1970s under the influence of Trabzon folklore and Black Sea dances (R.1/book pg.24) and the linoleums, 1974 dated water color *Principal Sons* (R.2/book pg.25), 1978 dated oil paint *Mothers and Sons* (R.3/book pg.26) were all works that reflected the impacts of the era and which were composed using different techniques. The monumentalism apprehension and the understanding of a central composition are also valid for these works.

1976 – 1985 Civilizations Series

The year 1976 when the artist opened his first personal exhibition marks the beginning of his moving away from the figurative expressions, heading towards the abstract. During 1976-1991 the artist under the title *Civilizations Series* and among which he named as *Turkish Variations, Civilization Stack, Reference to the Hittite, Coming From Anatolia*, which he produced being inspired by the works of art of Anatolian Civilizations, main goddess figures, Hittite sun disk (güneş kursu), etandarlar (Not: etandarın Türkçesini birkaç sözlükte aradıysam da bulamadım. Bilginize, çevirmen Ayperi Okur) with deer, tombstones turned out to be his serigraphy (R.4/79s cd), (R.5/74s cd), (R.6/155s cd). These forms become the resource for the artist's works of art as images ingrained in his mind.

As a person who lived through all times, the artist reflects these impacts on his works of art not as a direct meaning but more as formal apprehensions.

As will be observed in Süleyman Saim Tekcan's works that he would compose in the coming years, what catches the eye first and foremost in these series is the existence of vertical and horizontal axes that build up balance and his search for monumentalism. The lighted forms that emerge from a dark background and move to the forefront constitute the originality of these series. These possess patterned surfaces that come from long time in the past and give the impression of being worn out.

In the prints dating 1985-87 and which belong to this series, we observe total abstraction of forms. They carry plans that are lined up consecutively with short distances in between, solid geometric forms and forms with linear quality which are mostly lighted and used together with the rest as a conflict element. His works *Red Has Taste* (R.7/Sh 50 book), and *Dance of Blue with Yellow* (R.8/Sh 51 book) are examples to this approach.

Respect to Rembrandt Series

A series of sepia gravures (aquatint) that Süleyman Saim Tekcan realized in 1980-1982 brings to the forefront the importance he ascribes to light in his works. In the examples of this series which blossoms as a respect for the grand master of light and shadow, Rembrandt, the artist purposefully does not use color but builds up his compositions with abstract forms in the preeminence of light and shadow. Light sometimes becomes more intense creating dynamism. (R.9/161cd without title). The textures derived with the opportunities provided by aquatint and the semi lighted regions created in the background add depth to the works of art and fortify the sense of space. In these examples where calligraphic impact is sought, the lines the artist constitutes by improvisation give movement to the composition with the help of light.

Objects of Nature

The artist who made a series of oil paint works in 1983-84 assigned them titles such as *That I Found in Nature* (R.12/book sh 77), *Thoughts Under the Oak Shadow*, *Objects of a Different World* (R.13/ book sh 89), *What I Fantasized and What I Found* (R.14/book sh 79), *Search* (R.15/book sh 88), and *Inside the Mind*. These forms which at first glance remind us of leaves, barks, oak bonitos, and seeds gradually compose organic structures within themselves and become abstract losing their natural images. The existence of a central composition, the preeminence of horizontal and vertical axes, the grouping of objects to form a totality within themselves and their appearance in front of a more stagnant background, and the usage of light all expose—as a natural outcome—a great closeness with the prints of the artist. These works of art display that Süleyman Saim Tekcan is in search of something—as the titles of his works also indicate. These examples which harbor impressions derived from nature as well as objects found in nature can be evaluated as the mingling of abstract thoughts and real images. In fact, such a view is relevant to the other periods of the artist, as well.

When we look at the works of art of Süleyman Saim Tekcan from a general perspective we see that the titles of the works that hold a place in his series are used as an association or attribution. The main concern of the artist is to create variations on the founding components of his work rather than give a direct message relevant to the topic or create an inherent meaning. For instance, in the “Respect for Rembrandt” series emphasizing the light coming out from dark sepia background as the main element of that work.

Monumental Works

Monumentalism is a component which is the main expression instrument in almost all compositions of the artist causing his work of art earn its major expression. However in his grand oil paint works he realized in 1990-1999 with their abstract, black and white posture and making reference to the old eras, the Anatolian civilizations are of the quality to emphasize this characteristic of him

more profoundly. His works draw attention not only because of the complex and placid knitting of the forms mingled into each other but also because of the use of light. These dramatic forms which create an effect of powerful monumentalism due to the inner cavities they account for reveal more the image of a sculpture rather than a painting. (R.17/book sh 45), (R.18/book sh 58).

Horses, Equestrians, Equestrians, Calligraphy

The horses that Süleyman Saim Tekcan observed and put on paper with passion since childhood began to appear in his work of art in the 1980s. The artist who is in search of plastic affluence and variations in his art that go beyond naturalist depictions uses also Ottoman period tughras, old coins, seals and paleography alongside his horses.

In the essence of this series we observe joy of life, yearning and devotion to life. Compared to the other series we sense a preeminence of forms with more color, more texture, elegance and movement.

In the year 1990 the artist owns a countryside house. Horses are raised in the extensive meadows around the house. Many patterns that are based on the observation of these horses are the products of this period. (R.19/ 168 without title), (R.20/127 s), (R21/book sh 120), (R.22/book sh 121) (Not: burada yazıyı metne alan kişinin bir notu var, bu yazılanlar burada unutulurak basılmasın diyor. Lütfen original metne bakınız, çevirmen Ayperi Okur).

The forms which were composed by exploiting the impressions he acquired from long observations are transformed into a mark that belongs to him just like his finger print. The forms that are attained as a result of such an internalization would naturally occupy the artist's creation schedule for a long time.

From 1990 up to the present, in the print and oil paint works and even in the sculptures and reliefs of Süleyman Saim Tekcan, the variations of the horse image takes place sometimes by itself but most of the time in the accompaniment of paleography which gives a patterned impact. According to the artist's own words the reason why paleography takes place alongside horse forms is because in the Ottoman house paleography were exhibited as a visual object hanging on the wall. In the Ottoman times paleography does not appear only inside the houses but also in the inner and outer surfaces of urban architectural elements like mosques, fountains, kiosks dispensing free water and on tombstones, i.e. it appears to the Ottoman individual at any moment. The artist who is also interested in the prevalence of original prints in society considered that he would make use of this convention of the past.

While the artist conveys the attractive bodies and the elegant movements of the horses he has observed in the Riva meadows unto his works, he, on the other hand, thinks of the role the horse plays as a legendary animal, considers the

horse as a culture bearer during the migration from Asia Central to Anatolia and all these considerations come to a conclusion in his works by maturing with the “experiments” that are performed one after the other. No matter what the meaning is, the artist’s approach is structured around experiments—especially in his prints.

In the “Horses and Equestrians” series which began in 1987, many times we see that the horse forms are used together with elements such as mother goddess, Hittite etandarı (Not: yine etandar geçiyor, karşılığını bulamadım, çevirmen Ayperi Okur), deer motives etc. that take place in the Civilizations series, and sometimes accompany the serenity in the Ottoman miniatures. (R.23/93s), (R.24/88s), (R.25/101s), (R.26/6755), (R.27/6756), (R.28/67s).

In the “Horses and Calligraphy” series Ottoman Calligraphy examples take place next to or above horse depictions. These are secular, enchanting and nice words about life. (R.29/98).

In using this paleography the artist utilized epitaphs, tombstones and Ottoman calligraphy examples. The rhythmic and calligraphic features of the scriptures were interpreted as a formal element adding a vivacious texture to the works of art.

In the artist’s works the horse figure and the paleography which are presented in a certain style were handled in endless variations and through them rhythm, color, transparency, depth and texture impacts were sought in the composition. When the totality of the artist’s periods are considered, it can be said that this series consists of his most colorful works. (R.30/48).

Carved forms, puckered seals or grouped paleography fixed on paper are typical features of the series (R.31/98), (R.32/97).

It is possible to say that given all these approaches, a modernist understanding that brings to the forefront plasticity rather than meaning is preeminent in this series of Süleyman Saim Tekcan. The “Süleymanname” book whereby the tughra written by Emin Barın takes place was realized in eight copies each in original prints and led calligraphy to be added to the works of the artist who previously worked on horse patterns. (R33/Süleymanname).

At the exhibition opened in year 2001 in Yıldız Palace Manage, the artist’s peculiar print techniques were explained in the paleography in the examples realized on 250 x 135 cm canvas with serigraphy. In the text written by Ahmet Ünver the explanation of the work method that the artist chose to express himself gave a unique meaning to the work.

Bronze Horses

The “Bronze Horses” Süleyman Saim Tekcan exhibited in 2001 is a derivative of this series. On “Bronze Horses” just like his other works seals, writings and old coins are used to create a texture. Some of these were casted as tablets, some were designed as a cylindrical form, and some as horse heads. (R.34/bronze horse tablet), (R.35/bronze horse cylinder), (R.36/bronze horse head), (R.37/casting sculptures from the final period).

All of these series each of which was composed of a different thematic, are in fact pieces of a whole, there exist clear connections in between, they almost are born from inside each other and witness the world of reflection of the artist.

Artistic Features and Print Methods

Süleyman Saim Tekcan possesses a researcher personality which is among the distinct attributes of the contemporary artist. Although he gathered his work under such titles as “Civilizations”, “Respect for Rembrandt” and “Horses and Calligraphy”, what is most important for him is elements like light, color, transparency, space, blemish and composition which constitute the major problems of the contemporary artist. His serigraphies which give the impression of oil paint are an outcome of his print methods created with years of experimental accumulation. Thematic aspect while coming secondary to the plastic problems, always keeps its presence. Abstraction and styles are an instrument that the artist refers to from the very beginning, and most of the time they together hold a place in his works.

A transparent composition which envisages the use of a paint which is here and there thin and light, textured surfaces as a contrast element, the appearance of another color from below a different paint layer and which gives the impression that it has been absorbed by the lower layer and blasting outwards again constitute the initiatory facets of a Süleyman Saim Tekcan work. With this method continuity is maintained between the upper and lower surfaces of the work of art. The role of the artist is to safeguard the independent energy of the colors without any hindering action. As if confirming the reflection of the American artist Helen Frankenthaler who said, “Each new technique implies a new form”, the new techniques Süleyman Saim Tekcan used lead to the prosperity and increase in variety of his artistic expression. No doubt the method which he developed and in which he found his artistic personality is serigraphy. Serigraphy which is actually a duplication method, transforms, in his hands, into a contemporary art instrument whereby paint features come to the forefront.

Coincidence is an important element in the implementations of Süleyman Saim Tekcan. In fact it is certain that his whole work is based on coincidence. Here coincidence is merely composed of nuances that appear on edited infrastructure. In constituting his work of art the artist first builds up a structure, coincidences appear during performance process, and compose texture and forms. These are

traces that belong to ancient civilizations, that the intellect records from nature or environment in advance.

Süleyman Saim Tekcan is an artist who composes his works with a unique technique he developed from within the broader serigraphy method. The artist who knows all of lithography, linoleum print, wood print, gravure, and serigraphy practicing them for many years, derived among them, at the end of his long research of serigraphy, the technique which is most suitable for his expression style.

In print, deriving different colors from the same model has always been a topic that constrains artists. Among them, serigraphy is a method that presents the most possibilities to the artist. However everything depends on the working style of the artist. Some artists such as William Hayter and his workshop became famous with the technique he himself developed in the field of colored gravures.

Serigraphy is a technique which necessitates the use of separate models for each pattern or color. Tekcan by developing the method called “damp on damp print” created a technique that was accepted in international literature with his name. Print is actualized by using approximately 4-5 serigraphy machines and by realizing damp on damp print. According to this method colors are rapidly printed on top of each other without the chance to firmly establish each. While printing enveloping but mostly transparent colors are initiated into the print machines without giving time for the paint to dry. When the major colors come together they form the intermediate colors; most of the time with the gathering of all the major colors is obtained an infinite color and texture scale. Because the retardants that are included in print paints during print counteract the process of drying during the print period, the color that is printed on the very bottom mixes with the color printed last and forms a new color combination.²

The artist who composes unique works with a method attributed to himself drew attention with his works in the Yugoslavia Graphics Art Biennale which is among the most competent exhibitions in the area of graphics arts and organized in Ljubljana in 1985. For the same reason the artist who was invited to Sarajevo Arts Academy in 1987 both opened a personal exhibition there and had the chance to organize a two-month original print seminar teaching the participants his unique method. In the meanwhile many print artists from Canada requested information by correspondence.

Among them American artist Bonnie Baxter³ came to İstanbul just to learn this technique. The information Tekcan gave him on his print method was enlightening for the artist’s technique.

² Ayşegül İzer Draşan, *Classic Techniques and New Ways of Searching in Original Print*, (Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Social Sciences Institute, competency thesis in art, İstanbul, 1992, pg. 192-193)

³ Bonnie Baxter who lives in Quebec since 1972 is the president of Atelier du Scarabee he founded in 1984.

“I think that it would be most appropriate for Tekcan to be remembered and awarded a prize with the innovations he brought to original print. He realizes his gravures with welding on grand lead panels and with the help of various cutters. On these panels are then printed aluminum plates that carry paleography reliefs giving puckered print impression. Through the use of traditional German and French ink, painted plates are handled with care. Not only it is not straightened with the pressure of the lead panels, but also the colors are oxidized and the appearance quality of the ink creates a much smoother and delicate impression compared to the plates processed with acid. In the serigraphies, on the other hand, the color variation and interaction opportunities that Hayter’s technique brought forth are developed and utilized as such. Inks are again oil based. Three models are used and all are Bristol cardboard models. The desired image is printed on the surface damp, whether with a model or not, that is by either obstructing the paint or mixing it in. While the model is removed from the surface that is amply smeared with ink, the absorbance power that appears leaves a relief-like impact on paper. Prints are realized on gleaming paper and the outcome reflects the glitter of precious jewelry.”⁴

This retrospective exhibition in spite of its rich technical research and a longing for carrying bygone values to the present reflects with a Modernistic understanding 45 years of accumulation of a master artist who reproduces for years. The point at issue is a collective observation of the resources he was nourished with till present, the phases he went through, what excites him, and what he thinks and envisages.

I finish this appraisal by wishing long and healthy years and new art adventures to Süleyman Saim Tekcan who successfully assimilated all those years of labor communicating it into an original synthesis.

Prof. Dr. Semra Germaner
March, 2006

⁴ *Anatolian Impressions Artists Prints from the Studio of Master Tekcan*. Bonnie Baxter, “Süleyman Saim Tekcan and Contemporary Printmaking in Turkey”, pg. 3-5 (Exhibition Catalogue, İstanbul, 2005)