



Buket Altınoba; Die Istanbul Kunstakademie von ihrer Gründung bis heute. Moderne Kunst, Nationenbildung und Kulturtransfer in der Türkei; Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag 2016; 446 S., 18 farb. u. 162 s/w-Abb.; ISBN 978-3-7861-2731-4; € 69

Buket Altınoba's *Die Istanbul Kunstakademie von ihrer Gründung bis heute: Moderne Kunst, Nationenbildung und Kulturtransfer in der Türkei* presents a longitudinal study of Istanbul's academy of fine arts. Established in 1882 and originally named *Mekteb-i Sanayi-i Nefise-i Şâhâne*, the academy has gone through a myriad of transformations and is now called Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Integrating her findings into the larger institutional history of formal arts education and the establishment of the discipline of art history in the context of nation-building and modernization, Altınoba's study stretches from the later Ottoman Empire to present-day Turkey. Altınoba is especially interested in how this historical trajectory has shaped contemporary artistic production and what it tells us about different understandings of and roles accorded to art throughout the studied time period. Accordingly, her discussion of this history also tends to the formation of artistic positions and practices that illustrate how divergent notions of art have been negotiated in the different art historical – and socio-political – periods.

On a broader theoretical level Altınoba's study is animated by the question of how to move beyond persisting homogenizing, asymmetric, and ultimately orientalist understandings of modern art historical formations in 'non-Western' contexts. Drawing on critical art history, postcolonial theory, and debates on global art and bringing together a variety of sources in Turkish, German, and English (including unpublished theses), she prioritizes questions of knowledge transfer, which she conceptualizes as 'hybridization' and 'acculturation', to account for the lively transcultural exchanges that mark the periods under investigation. These exchanges are discussed in the form of study abroad experiences for artists from the Ottoman Empire and Turkey as well as through the work of foreign nationals (especially French and German) who taught at the academy in its different incarnations.

The introduction sets up this conceptual frame by discussing notions of Westernization and modernization on the background of the economic, social and political shifts that marked the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and the transition to the Turkish Republic. Here, Altınoba also situates developments in the visual arts within other artistic fields, such as literature, and in the art market as a vital factor in the development of the arts.

Part I of the study describes the lead-up to the establishment of the first formal (civilian) art academy in 1882 by focusing on the headways in foreshortened drawing first made in military education in the course of the 18th century. Centering on the emergent class of so-called officer-painters, it discusses the emergence of privately

founded art schools and the increase in public art shows in Istanbul, and especially in Beyoğlu (that intensified from the mid-19th century onwards). As in other parts of the book, Altınoba emphasizes that this period was marked by the transition from a multi-lingual, -ethnic, and -religious empire to a homogenously envisioned nation-state and – in contrast to the majority of previous studies – integrates non-Muslim artists into her account. How the violence, first and foremost the Armenian genocide (1915–1917), that made this transition possible and that led to the erasure of non-Muslim artists has shaped the institutional history of art in Turkey still remains to be explored.¹

Altınoba gives a detailed account of the founding of the academy, teasing out the politics of academic hires, admission processes, classes offered, and genres taught. Details abound too when it comes to changing orientations of the academy that were in dialogue with nascent nationalism and hence the question of what could and should constitute specifically ‘Turkish art’, first in the fields of painting and sculpture and later of architecture to which the author dedicates an excursus. Through the lens of artists studying abroad – especially those taking part in first Ottoman and then republican educational programs – Altınoba at times (e.g. in the early 20th century, 53) sees an affinity between the discourses surrounding art in Turkey to the arts and crafts movement in Europe. In other instances, questions of national particularity move to the forefront leading to further restructuring of the academy and to some (but by no means all) extent shape debates on style. A significant part of the study is dedicated to the impact that instructors from abroad had on academic developments in Turkey and to their interactions with local students. Yet, Altınoba also notes that their influence diminishes after 1958, when a significant number of exiles from Nazi Germany and from war-torn Europe overall return home. The breadth of the study at times shortens important discussions: For example, the university reforms after the 1980 coup that brought higher education under central state control and was formative for the arts field and its actors has to be restricted to a few pages (116–118).

Part I of the book also takes on the republican writing of art history and the establishment of the discipline at the arts academy in 1951. Altınoba opts to conceptualize this process as first imported and then developed further along local concerns (119) in the context of modernization. She notes how the writing of art history in the national key had to grapple with the question of how to divorce itself from Islamic cultural history – which Altınoba discusses under the rubric of secularization – as well as from the trajectory of “Arab art” (127). Part of this endeavor was claiming some art of the more recent past as “Turkish” instead of “Ottoman”² and increasingly bracketing out non-Muslim artists – an erasure that continues to haunt

1 Vazken Davidian, for instance, describes how Ottoman-Armenian painters have been doubly obscured, as they have been written out of Ottoman as well as Armenian art history. See Vazken Davidian, “Reframing Ottoman Art Histories: Bringing Silenced Voices Back into the Picture”, in: *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 6 (2015), pp. 7–17.

2 See also Burcu Dogramaci, *Kulturtransfer und nationale Identität. Deutschsprachige Architekten, Stadtplaner und Bildhauer nach 1927*, Berlin 2008.



Abb. 1: Das Gebäude der Istanbuler Kunstakademie in den 1920er Jahren, mit freundlicher Genehmigung Prof. Ataman Demir, Archiv der MSGSÜ (58)

Turkish art history to this day. But this alone would not suffice to construct a narrative of ‘Turkish art’ that was to project both the historicity necessary for nationalist discourse and the kind of new beginning and modernity that the republic claimed for itself. Altınoba sketches how the search for a ‘Turkish art’ thus led to the incorporation of archeology (and architecture) into the discipline of art history in order to craft a lineage that tried to bridge Turkic and Anatolian material culture and aesthetic repertoires (not all of which were deemed suitable for such a narrative, but that only as an aside).

Part II deepens the look at the development of the academy through the lens of nation-building by highlighting the topic of style and competing understandings of art. An early exploration in this part of the book focuses on how artists in the later Ottoman Empire positioned themselves towards Orientalist painting and knowledge production as oscillating between “alterity” and “intercultural communication” (151). Here, Altınoba joins Zeynep Çelik³ and others who argue that artist, scholar and founder of the academy, Osman Hamdi Bey, for instance, used the style to critique its very conceptual foundation (157). The described stylistic experimentations are again read alongside different phases of the institutional life of art in Istanbul and study-abroad opportunities (especially Paris) that existed at the time and are complemented by short case studies on artists and emergent associational structures in the artistic field. As in other chapters, Altınoba pays close attention to gender distribution and

³ Zeynep Çelik, “Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse”, in: *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, ed. by Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, Durham 2002, pp. 19–42.



Abb. 2: Das Gebäude der Istanbuler Kunstakademie in den 1930er Jahren, mit freundlicher Genehmigung Prof. Ataman Demir, Archiv der MSGSÜ (58)

notes the diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds of artists named. An excursus on photography and its Ottoman pioneers, including the Abdullah Frères in the mid-19th century, serves as window to discuss novel exhibition practices and patronage patterns. She follows this strand of inquiry throughout the first decades of the republic, where art was called upon to be in service of the state.⁴ While Ottoman artistic practices were increasingly de-emphasized, painting, sculpture, and graphic arts (not least in the form of poster art) along with the applied arts and photography were tasked to represent notions of Turkey's 'heroic past', its new beginnings and its modernization. Altınoba shows how this demand was also reflected in courses added to the academy's curriculum.

Altınoba follows the state-organized exhibitions and programs that academy artists took part in, including those realized with the Peoples' Houses (*Halkevleri*) and in the framework of the country painting tours (*Yurt Gezileri*) that were to serve simultaneously as sites of research for authentic 'Turkish culture' and as multiplication factors in the country's modernization and its developing art ecology. Altınoba draws attention to a number of the most striking controversies and debates of the time, including the question to what extent individuality or collectivity should guide artistic expression. Especially the latter point follows longstanding argumentations on

⁴ The answers artists gave to this call were, of course, varied. For the diversity of discussions waged among artists as to how to take part in this endeavor without being instrumentalized by it, see Duygu Köksal, "Art and Power in Turkey: Culture, Nationalism and Aesthetics during the Single Party Era", in: *New Perspectives on Turkey* 31 (2004), pp. 91–119.

Turkey as a corporatist society that warrant further interrogation in light of the conceptual frame that Altınoba lays out in the beginning of the study. Surveying the period between 1923 and 1950, she discusses this argument further by highlighting the tensions between avant-gardist thrusts in artistic production (shaped again according to Altınoba by experiences of international exchange as well as local debates) and the social critique that increasingly marked the arts from the 1940s onwards, especially in the figurative genre.

Altınoba situates the diversification of artistic practices and positions within the second part of the 20th century, and hence within the end of the single-party period in 1950. Among the indicators for this shift are the establishment of private galleries (e.g. Maya in 1950), the AICA (*Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art*) congress in Istanbul (1954), and the liberalization of the economy that facilitated a gradual shift from state towards private patronage. She proposes that this diversification paralleled developments in Europe and once again conceptualizes as this process as "acculturation" (254). Part of this diversification expressed itself in the emergence of object art (293) and from the later 1960s onwards segued into conceptual and installation art (300). These developments are vital for Altınoba's discussions of contemporary art that she situates after the 1980 coup, especially in the realm of conceptual and 'gender art'. The latter category harbors a fertile ground for further inquiry considering that many of the artists she discusses have been part of the women's and feminist movements both before and after 1980.

Part III of the book centers on the 'emancipatory strategies' with which artists from Turkey counter persistent orientalist frames of perception. Altınoba draws attention to the emergence and proliferation of artist-run spaces, to new arts institutions (including arts schools), and to the establishment of the curatorial system from the mid-1980s onwards. She analyzes how these developments have been connected to the art academy and to a certain degree have decentered its role. Notably, the final section of this part focuses on "autochthonous" (349ff.) elements of contemporary artistic production that Altınoba accords to nine artists and the illustrating portraits include Erol Akyavaş and Balkan Naci İslimyeli as well as Taner Ceylan, Şükran Moral, and İnci Eviner among others.

As the interest in contemporary art from Turkey has been largely unbroken since the 1990s, this book presents an important contribution to art historical scholarship on the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Interrogating debates on the continuities and ruptures in artistic practices and conceptions of art within the institutional history of art, it opens up potentials for further research, especially with regard to arts education and the role of cultural policy. In aiming to deconstruct asymmetric perceptions of non-Western art and move beyond discourses of alterity in favor of "intercultural communication" (383), the study also faces specific difficulties. One of the difficulties that it shares with other approaches in global art history stems from the fact that the study tends to one side of bi- or at times trilateral relations (through study abroad programs and instructors from abroad). It asks how these exchanges have informed the history of art in the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey

but not how they might have informed their counterparts, be it France or (imperial) Germany. It thus prioritizes one-directional processes of knowledge transfer, rather than considering instances of mutual exchange and dialogue. At the same time, it is exactly this focus that allows Altinoba to impressively detail local formations of artistic expression, make accessible complicated debates and processes in the artistic field, and create a vital source not just for art historians but also for anthropologists and sociologist who work on art from the later Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey.

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Andreas Neufert; Auf Liebe und Tod. Das Leben des Surrealisten Wolfgang Paalen; Berlin: Parthas Verlag 2015; 688 S., 111 Abb.; ISBN 978-3-86964-083-9; € 34,80

Der österreichisch-mexikanische Künstler Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959) ist in vielerlei Hinsicht eine Ausnahmeerscheinung der Kunstgeschichte. Geboren in Wien, wuchs Paalen in wohlhabenden Verhältnissen auf und verbrachte seine adulte Jugend größtenteils in Paris – dem Epizentrum der modernen Kunst. Dort war er Anfang der 1930er Jahre kurzzeitig Mitglied der Gruppe *Abstraction-Création*, bis er sich 1935 der surrealistischen Bewegung um André Breton anschloss. Als einer der ersten Surrealisten emigrierte er noch kurz vor Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges in die alte neue Welt jenseits des Atlantiks und ließ sich in Mexiko nieder. Von dort aus publizierte er zwischen 1942 und 1944 mit dem Periodikum *DYN* eines der faszinierendsten Kunstmagazine des 20. Jahrhunderts. Nach dem in *DYN* ostentativ lancierten Bruch mit dem Surrealismus, wandte er sich einer Synthese von kunstphilosophischen Ideen zu, deren Spektrum von der intensiven Auseinandersetzung mit der Quantenphysik über die Beschäftigung mit dem Werk John Deweys bis hin zur Erforschung des Totemismus und Animismus der präkolumbischen Kulturen Nord- und Mesoamerikas reichten. Paalen, der in den späten 1930er und frühen 1940er Jahren ein wohlgelittener und besonders in der New Yorker Kunstwelt intensiv rezeptierter Künstler und Theoretiker war, welcher maßgebliche Impulse an die sich formierende New York School sandte, hatte nach Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges mit beruflichen und privaten Schwierigkeiten zu kämpfen, die seinen Stern in relativ kurzer Zeit sinken ließen. Nach seinem Freitod im Jahre 1959 geriet er schnell in Vergessenheit und wurde von der Kunstgeschichtsschreibung der Moderne lange Zeit nahezu komplett ignoriert.

Einer der wenigen Personen, die sich der Paalen-Forschung verschrieben haben, ist der Berliner Kunsthistoriker Andreas Neufert – Autor der hier vorliegenden, bereits 2015 erschienen Biografie Paalens. Neufert, der sich schon in Magisterarbeit und