

THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS REPRESENTATION:
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE and ISTANBUL
MODERN'S "NEW WORKS NEW HORIZONS" EXHIBITION

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is about the representation of women artists in the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, exploring how these artists unsettle the male gaze of the State historically founded in the Turkish Art Scene. The Constitution of 1908 brought about a rapid 'westernization/modernization' process, and the foundation of the Republic in 1923 assigned this move as a state policy. The art field was encouraged in this regard as a space reflecting the level of modernization of a country by this State led movement. The first Art Museum of Turkey founded in 1937 by the State as "the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture" could be considered as part of the Kemalist republican project of modernity. The artists in the collection consisted of the military painters and of some upper class families' children educated in Europe or at home by some tutors, as well as of some artists graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts founded in 1883. There are a limited number of women artists' works in the same collection. Many of those women artists graduated from the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts for Girls founded in 1914¹ -after 31 years of the first Academy-. After exploring the historical foundation of the male gaze in the sphere of art, this research in comparison with the State led art tradition, will seek to analyze the current representation of women artists in the private art museums founded in the last five years in Turkey through the example of Istanbul Modern. The frame of analysis will be Istanbul Modern's most comprehensive exhibition until now –New Works New Horizons- which claims to cover with an updated fresh look the history of Turkish Modern and Contemporary Art. The choice of artists and works will be explored with a feminist perspective to unveil what kind of a new historical narrative is offered and how the women artists and their works are positioned in it as well as how they challenge the female artist representation.

¹ The two academies were united in 1920

ÖZET

KADIN SANATÇILARIN TEMSİLİNDEKİ DÖNÜŞÜM: TARİHSEL ANLATININ ve İSTANBUL MODERN'İN “YENİ YAPITLAR YENİ UFUKLAR SERGİSİNİN FEMİNİST BİR ANALİZİ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın Sanatçılar, Kadın Ressamlar, Feminist Sanat Tarihi, İstanbul
Modern (İstanbul Modern Sanat Müzesi), Yeni Yapıtlar Yeni Ufuklar Sergisi

Tez İstanbul Modern Sanat Müzesi'nde yer alan kadın sanatçıların temsilini ve bu temsilin tarihsel olarak Türk Sanat sahnesine yerleşmiş olan devletin erkil bakışını nasıl dönüşüme uğrattığını araştırmaktadır. 1908 Anayasasının hız kazandırdığı batılılaşma / modernleşme çalışmaları 1923'te Cumhuriyet'in kuruluşuyla beraber bir devlet politikası haline gelmiştir. Devlet tarafından yönlendirilen bu atılım dahilinde resim sanatı da bir ülkenin modernleşme düzeyini gösteren bir alan olarak desteklenmiştir. 1937 yılında “İstanbul Devlet Resim ve Hetkel Müzesi” adı altında kurulan Türkiye'nin ilk Sanat Müzesi Kemalist modernleşme projesinin adımlarından biri olarak kabul edilebilir. Bu devlet müzesinin başlangıç koleksiyonundaki eserler çoğunlukla asker ressamalara, Avrupa'da ya da özel hocalarla eğitim görmüş üst sınıf ailelerin çocukları ile 1883 yılında kurulmuş olan Sanayi Nefise Mektebi'nde eğitim görmüş olan sanatçılara aittir. Koleksiyonda sınırlı sayıda kadın sanatçılara ait eserler de mevcuttur. Bu kadın sanatçıların çoğu 1941 yılında, yani sadece erkeklerin eğitim görebildiği ilk Akademiden 31 yıl sonra kurulan İnas Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi mezunlarından² Tez dahilinde öncelikle sanat alanında erkek bakışın yerleşme süreci tarihsel olarak incelenmektedir. Ardından 2005 yılından bu yana, yani son 5 yıl içerisinde Türkiye'de kurulmuş olan özel müzelerde kadın sanatçı temsilinin dönüşümü ve günümüzdeki durumu Devlet güdümündeki sanat geleneğinin kırılmasına paralel olarak İstanbul Modern örneği üzerinden analiz edilmektedir. Temel analiz çerçevesi İstanbul Modern'in Türk Modern ve Çağdaş Sanat tarihine güncellenmiş ve taze bir bakış vurgusuyla ortaya koyduğu “Yeni Yapıtlar Yeni Ufuklar” adlı sergisidir. Bu sergi aynı zamanda bu tezin yazıldığı zamana dek İstanbul Modern'de açılan Türk Modern ve Çağdaş Sanatı hakkındaki en kapsamlı sergi olma özelliği de taşımaktadır. Tez dahilinde bu sergiden seçilen sanatçılar ve işler feminist bir perspektif ile ele alınmaktadır. Bu örnekler üzerinden hangi anlamlarda yeni bir sanat tarihi anlatısının sunulduğu, kadın sanatçıların ve işlerinin bu anlatı içerisindeki yeri ile tarihsel kadın sanatçı temsilini nasıl dönüştürdükleri araştırılmaktadır.

² İki akademi 1920 yılında birleşmiştir.

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INTRODUCTION

Istanbul Modern was introduced in the art sphere as a new space which will meet the audience with the Turkish Modern and Contemporary art. The first exhibition entitled “Observation, Interpretation, Multiplicity” was presented as “the intent of presenting a fresh new perspective on Turkish painting history and of reinterpreting this history”¹. The need for a new perspective manifested itself with the retreat of the State from the art sphere as the only dominant figure. The authority of the State on visual arts, through the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts and its partner the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture, has already begun to wane since the 80s. The lack of interest and investment in the State museums has isolated them from the public, and it created a disconnection between the art museums and audience. However there was not a leading figure in this sphere to replace it, or in other words to reshape the art world. Istanbul Modern was not the only emerging institution in the privatization process of the culture following the liberalization politics set in the 80s. But it was in 2005 when Istanbul Modern was founded that a museum scale reconsideration of the Turkish modern art history was launched. More importantly, Istanbul Modern has reflected the dynamism of the Turkish contemporary art scene with its constantly growing collection through the acquisition of new works, and with the review of the main art historical narrative. This kind of review of the official historical narrative prevails currently in the international art scene as well.

I worked at Istanbul Modern for two years (2006-2008) as the exhibition management assistant and I was responsible for the registration of new acquisitions and

¹ *Observation, Interpretation, Multiplicity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2004) p.16

the installation process of the exhibitions. During that period, I was surprised by the number of new female artists' names that I heard for the first time. Each artist I encountered challenged the historical narrative of Turkish art that I had learned from my previous experiences in the State museum visits and the art history books that I had read. While I was registering the new acquisitions of the Museum, I was also updating my knowledge about women artists. The upstairs gallery of the Istanbul Modern hosts a selection from the museum collection and it is refreshed twice a year. After each new installation the representation I have in my mind about the female artists was changing with new works and artists I know. I was questioning myself about the reasons of my ignorance. Then the words of my friend who owns an art gallery made me question the gender discrimination the female artists were subjected to; she said that generally it was more difficult to sell women artists' works because people do not want to invest in an artist who will probably disappear from the art scene. That experience triggered many questions in my mind when I began to work on my thesis. I was curious about the operation of this gender discourse in the art world and how it was established historically. First I needed to decide on my position with regard to feminist theories, in other words what will be the lenses I will use to analyze the institutionalization of this masculinist discourse and the transformation that is taking place in the representation of female artists.

The State domination in the visual arts has mostly affected the women artists considering it adopted a male and patriarchal view towards the arts and history. The gender perspective adopted in this research aims to reveal how the patriarchal character of the State was founded in the art sphere and the ways it subjugated women artists and their production. For such a perspective, I draw on the representation theories of Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler. This thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first

chapter presents the theoretical framework I refer to throughout the research and an overview of the literature and gender approaches in the art. I first discuss the use of the term “woman” and the exclusions it creates through limiting representations, as well as the operation of gender ideology in the process of subject construction, “technologies of gender” as Lauretis defines it. (Lauretis, 1987) (Butler, 1990). Does it mean that we should not use the term “women”, should we get away with the category just when - although the internal debate of feminism perpetuates- women begin to speak on their own behalf? In the wake of this question I introduce the necessity of the use of this term while fighting against the binary gender system it reproduces. Louis Althusser’s ideology theory (Althusser, 2008) is another reference for me in this study. He argues that no one exists outside the system of ideology. Then how can I talk about the woman’s position within the ideology, within the existent system whereby the woman in a dominant gender system is reproduced, while avoiding to reproduce the same technology through my discourse? In order to have a chance of criticizing the gender ideology’s operation I have to acknowledge my interpellation within the ideology, hence my complicity with it. How should I say “woman” or “woman artist” in case I don’t want to reconstitute the foreclosed gender categories of the dominant discourse? Where do those allegedly “essential and universal” attributes of gender originate from? Who is speaking in the name of this “original woman”? Who are the women whom feminism seeks to represent? The discussions in the first chapter evolve basically around these questions. Then I review the feminist perspectives in the art and art history to have a general view of the male domination in painting, and to discover the universally patriarchal roots of art and the artist. What I try to find out is how the gender technologies reproducing through the institutionalized discourses function in the artistic realm.

In the second chapter, I discuss the masculinist foundations in the Turkish art sphere. How were the male-centered master narrative of Turkish art history and its canon constructed? And how do these work as technologies of gender? I explore the mutual reinforcement of the State and the male gaze in the visual arts. The monopoly of the State has played an important role in the exclusion and devaluation of women artists. I try to see the dynamics of this fact through the consideration of the State institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts which had been the Mimar Sinan University later, the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture and the State exhibitions. An overview of the women artists' representation and the absence of a feminist tradition in visual arts will be discussed in light of the State exhibitions, past interviews with artists and through the only book published about women artists.(Toros, 1987)

In the last chapter, I try to unveil the decrease of the State domination in the visual arts and the rise of private museums as the leading actors of the art field. How the recently founded private museums expanded the horizon of possible representations for women artists? In what ways do they challenge the male-centered old narrative? Istanbul Modern's most comprehensive exhibition –New Works New Horizons- about Turkish modern and contemporary art will be evaluated with regard to the transformations it reflected in the conception of male centered Turkish modern art history. In chapter three I focus on a number of works by woman artists exhibited in this show.

I also discuss the contribution of private museums through the example of Istanbul Modern to expand on the horizon of representations about women and women artists. How the “women artists” (re)produce those representations through their works as well as how they challenge them? I explore the positions of these female artists in

this new representational discourse compared to the old state formulated master narrative of Turkish Art History.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WOMAN, WOMEN AND GENDER

Before exploring the representation of “women artists” and their self-representation through their art works in Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, in this chapter the term “woman” and the conceptual frame referred with this word will be clarified. Thus, it will help me to clear up my position in feminist discourse as aware of the traps of staying in the binary system of gender opposition which reproduces by using the term of “woman” the very system of meanings feminism aims to dismantle. In other words, I would like to reveal my complicity to some degree with “the ideology of gender” -read heterosexism- referring to Althusserian terminology in a feminist context.

The term woman has been treated by the feminist discourses as a social constitution attributed to the sexual differences of “female” and “male”, as complementary as well as exclusive categories, which refers to a pregendered essential biological state upon which the unequal and hierarchical meanings of gender system are reflected. This mutual containment of gender and sexual difference, based on an essential binary distinction of sex, motivated feminism to claim for a more equal system of gender where the women subjects will be represented not through the dominant discourses of patriarchy maintaining their subjection, or not as misrepresentation, but through their “original” attributes, and by themselves. In the scope of this objective, woman will break away from their subjected positions assigned to them in the patriarchal system, when the appropriate representation of their gender emerge. However it became clear on the way that the pursued representation is more

complicated than envisaged in the first place. The original attributes common for the universal woman gender are conflicting. If gender is a construction, there is a paradox in referring to a correct gender construction having some essential attributes of womanhood. And if there is “core womanhood” that feminism stick up for, then it will lead us to another form of gender construction which is the “real one” taking its source directly from the sex -the vagina- without the distortion of patriarchy. Then this discourse won’t differ from the obsolete biology-is-destiny formulation since it brings us back to a conception of natural womanhood. Before getting into details about “women artists” representation, I will firstly discuss feminism’s concerns about the representation of “woman” and make clear my stance in this thesis.

1.1. “Woman” In Quotation Marks

The effort of feminism to reach an adequate representation freed from patriarchy’s distortion is meaningful since it implies the importance of representation for the existence of a subject position. Is it possible to incorporate in the feminist representation of woman, every different configuration of “womanhood”, to be able to stand in a representation position as exhaustive as covering the whole configurations of “woman gender”? Each representation of woman excludes some others to the desert of invisibility and/or non-existence. Accordingly, each claim to represent “woman” or to speak in the name of “the original woman” cannot be thought exempt of power’s insinuation. Gender, when correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies, is systematically linked to the organization of social inequality; which means that, other social differences such as class, race, and age etc. intersect with gender in favor or disfavor of certain positions. For instance when we talk about the “women artists” in this research, actually we do not take into consideration the ethnic or

class differences among these artists or many other axis of representation interconnected with the gender representation.

Feminism has come to terms about the importance of giving voice to personal experiences to avoid as far as possible the exclusion of different configurations of woman, and to expand the horizon of possibilities for the “woman” construction. However, the duality of the gender system inherently related to sexual disposition weights in the feminist discourse, as well as in the master narratives and the political unconscious of dominant culture. Hence we need to deconstruct the conception of a binary-sexuality-system defined in heterosexual matrix as Judith Butler delineates, forasmuch the heterosexual matrix brings us in full circle to the binary-gender-system erasing its relationship with the binary-sex-system, where the gender is the cause but not the consequence of “male” and “female” bodies. If gender is a construction, then why are we limited with two gender options? There should be a predisposition limiting the gender construction with two main titles.

The heterosexual matrix identifies itself with a binary-sexuality-construction (a binary-desire-system, in other words the male sexuality, and the female sexuality defined in contrast and in relation to the male) entailing two exclusive gender categories: man, and his subjugated and desired other, which is woman (Although there are various conceptions in gender theories about the construction of this otherness -to mention a few: Irigaray’s or Beauvoir’s- at this point I will reserve the discussion about the construction of woman as projection of man, and its consequences for later). While feminism operates in these given gender categories of heterosexual matrix, with the intention of correcting woman’s representation and eliminating the related inequalities, it reproduces within the system the subsidiary relation between gender and sex. This aforesaid contingent relation of gender and sex sustains the subjugation of Woman and

women, as well as all the field of imaginable gender constructions, while rendering them mute and invisible in the male-centered heterosexual system. In this close-circuit, the feminism searching the visibility and legitimacy for “woman,” re-produces the gender difference which works against feminism itself, considering the patriarchal domination is inherent to the male-centered heterosexual discourse and to the binary gender construction as its consequence. Every configuration of “woman” reproduces the gender system and excludes some subject positions. As delineated by Teresa de Lauretis, gender is a representation, and the representation of gender is both the product and the process of its construction². Also Judith Butler claims that “the language and politics which represents women as ‘the subject’ of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics”³.

Is it possible to think of a subject position outside of representation, or before representation, which is not intelligible in the social system of meanings? Althusser, while treating his concept of ideology, he precludes the possibility of a subject position before ideology’s interpellation.⁴ He describes ideology as “a representation of the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence” and people realize “the imaginary transposition of their real conditions of existence in order to represent to themselves their real conditions of existence” through interpellation.⁵ The ideology produces concrete individuals as subjects through interpellation. It assigns meanings to individuals within a social system through a pre-constructed system of representation. De Lauretis develops this conception of Althusser by saying that, the “gender ideology” has the function of constituting concrete individuals not only as

² Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender” in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.1-30

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) p.4

⁴ Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London, New York: Verso, 2008)

⁵ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994) p.123

subjects, but as “men and women”. In the same perspective some critic could be addressed to Foucault as well, who claims the sexuality to be a technology of power (technology of sex in the case of sexuality) producing subjects, as affirmed also by Lauretis in his wake. However Foucault neglects the gendered quality of the technology of sexuality. As the relative power promised by the man and woman positions are not the same; likewise, the technology of sexuality does not operate gender blindly, in contrast to what Foucault has introduced to be one and same for all, and consequently male.⁶ Gender is not a propriety of bodies but “the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations”⁷, yet it operates in a male-centered frame of reference within which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male-sexuality. The technology of sex has differential solicitations from male and female subjects investing in a conflictual manner in the discourses and practices of sexuality. As I mentioned previously, there are several interconnected sets of social relations, and men and women are affected differently in different sets considering they are positioned differently in these relations. This unequal and different positioning of women and men in the male-centered dominant discourse is significant in terms of the need to reuse the term “woman” in the feminist discourse reproducing the dual gender system, instead of abandoning it totally; but this recycling of “woman” term in the feminist discourse should not reproduce as a “universal” concept the hegemonic normativity, rather it should function in a subversive manner, which will be refined in this chapter.

In opposition to Althusser’s view, Judith Butler points out the possibility of proto-subjects before interpellation⁸, although they are still tend to be interpellated considering the current interpellating subject positions promise more or less power and

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990)

⁷ *ibid.* p.127

⁸ Judith Butler, “Conscience Doth Makes Subjects of Us All” in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories on Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997) p.106-131

existence in a social system. This power is what motivates individuals' 'investments' in discursive positions (not necessarily in a conscious or rational manner)⁹. People tend to be "men" and "women" to be able to exist, to get rid of their ghost status in the field of meaning of a given social system, despite the fact that the content of gender-differentiated meanings and positions are differently made available for men and women in discourse. Nonetheless, according to Butler the act of someone turning towards the hailing of current subject positions shows us, that there is a pre-subject before the interpellation of ideology -Butler defines this process as the expectation which ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates-. Otherwise how he/she would know that it is on his/her 'advantage' to respond to the appeal, that he/she should respond to the interpellation? This potential of the pre-subject before interpellation shows us the possibility of agency to expand the horizon of representations giving way to intelligible social identities. Especially this potential to change the dominant representations is more considerable in the performance of subjects who fail to replay it appropriately, in cases when the required performance of the already existent subject positions –representations- is much more different from the proto-subject before the interpellation. This conception of Butler sets out the relation of representation-subject as relatively mutual. While gender representation produces its subject, the subject through his/her performance produces gender representation in return; which means the potential of pre-subjectivity before interpellation can make some difference in established representations. Actually the performativity concept of Butler is the core argument of her agency conception. It opens up room for a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective level through everyday practices, considering subjects are not 'victims' of the ideology which is outside of them, but the

⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender" in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.1-30

category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology (Althusser). “Every relation and every practice is a site of potential as much as it is a site of reproduction”.¹⁰ The constitutedness of the subject by the already there representations doesn’t abandon us to despair for the possibility of agency. For Butler, *on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency* as long as it is aware of the inherence of its position to power and calls it into question. To be able to envision beyond the binary man-woman construction, we need to open it up for new meanings, and get the ability to conceive it in terms other than those dictated by the patriarchal contract in the scope of heterosexual matrix, outside or in the margins of oppressing hegemonic discourses as claimed Teresa de Lauretis’ quote below. However agency is not reserved only to those who occupy those margins, as long as the subject interrogates its position and be aware of the restrictedness of the universe of representations there is room for agency:

And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed – terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural productions of women, feminists, which inscribe that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and fourth of the boundaries-and of the limits – of sexual difference(s). (...) This is a movement between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or makes unrepresentable, (...)between the represented discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic

¹⁰ Wendy Hollway, “Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity” in eds. Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Wenn, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984) (In Lauretis tech of gender p.16)

discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses. (...) they coexist concurrently and in contradiction.¹¹

I would like to occupy the position theorized by Lauretis and Butler to not confine my conception frame. The ambiguity of gender must be retained considering, denying gender would also be *to deny the social relations of gender that constitute and validate the sexual oppression of women and also to remain “in ideology” which is self-serving to the male-gendered subject*. If I give up the use of “woman” then it will mean to ignore the very conditions of ideology’s reworking. It is clear that to androgynize or to desexualize gender¹², to be able to get out of the dominant heterosexual male-centered frame of reference is not the solution either –as sampled through Foucault’s gender blind technology of sexuality concept mentioned previously-. Teresa de Lauretis describes the position of the feminism’s subject *as inside and outside of the ideology of gender*, and conscious of being so. The feminist discourse should work through its complicity with ideology with an awareness of being so.

As for Judith Butler, she describes the unnecessary of requiring a stable subject prior to recourse for feminist politics which means that the feminism doesn’t need to conceptualize once and for all a foundational category of women to fight against the patriarchy. She also emphasizes that the point is not to do away with foundations. But we should leave open the foundation, the subject position of the feminist discourse for permanent contestation, to expand the possibilities of what it means to be a woman, to render possible new configurations of the term as a site of constant resignification. Considering the identity categories are always normative but never descriptive, hence

¹¹ Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender” in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.1-30p.25

¹² *ibid* p.11

exclusionary, we should be cautioned to not adopt the very models of domination by which women were oppressed. Then the precondition of a stable, frozen subject position, in other words a descriptive category for agency, will be refuted. Also another important point is the awareness about my own position; my subject position as the writer of this thesis is not beyond the play of power, as it is valid for every constituted subject position. The question of how we read is inextricably linked with the question of what we read as mentioned by Patrocinio P. Schweickart¹³, but also who reads.

When discussing the works of “women artists”, as well as their positioning in the narrative of Turkish Art History as artists who happens to be women, I have to reckon their assumed gender because it matters, but also to be cautioned to not reproduce it. What I aim to do is absolutely not looking for some common ground for all the “women artists” production depending on their sex or gender, or to confine them as “women artists” as if their only noteworthy qualification in the artistic realm is their gender. “Women” do not constitute a discrete class or a culture separable from larger social groups, no more than men do.¹⁴ Also I don’t want to use “gender” as a synonym for “women” as criticized by Joan W. Scott: “*To study women’s works in isolation will perpetuate the fiction that one sphere, the experience of one sex has nothing, or little to do with the other.*”¹⁵ However to unveil the patriarchy’s domination in the artistic field, and the technologies of gender that the system uses to constrain the oppressive pre-destined gender positions in this particular field, I still need to refer them as “women artists”. I would like to elaborate a little more the traps of my position related to the term “woman artist” that I use throughout the research, and I will also

¹³ Patrocinio P. Schweickart “Reading ourselves: Toward a feminist theory of reading” in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (with Nigel Wood), London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000, pp. 424-447.

¹⁴ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction Understanding Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁵ Joan W. Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis* in the *American Historical Review*, Vol.91, No.5 (Dec.,1986), pp.1053-1075, published by American Historical Association.

delineate the feminist debates in the art sphere concerning the term “woman artist” and its content.

1.2. “Woman Artist”- Outsider of the Art Scene

To refer a “woman artist” category brings the same discursive danger of perceiving “woman” as if it is an invariable or inclusive representation which will be defined completely one day, when the internal factionalizations of feminism will be solved. I don’t try to unify all the “women artists” under one rubric as if there are some essential artistic qualities taking their sources from their gender. To top it all, to refer to “women artists” reproduces firstly “woman” as a gender category that feminism fight against its construction in a male-centered sex-gender system¹⁶; but also secondly, it reproduces the idea that artists are men and if it’s a woman than we should mark it under the name of “woman artist” which imply her as an exception in a male universe. As in the case of “woman”, I continue to use “woman artists” in quotation marks, but not to place into question the urgency or credibility of them as political issues:

I place them in quotation marks to show that they are under contest, up for grabs, to initiate the contest, to question their traditional deployment, and call for some other. (...) but rather they show that the way their materiality is circumscribed is fully political. The effect of question marks is to denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debate.¹⁷

The historical subordination of women has perpetuated in the art world through various technologies such as objectifying women’s bodies, sexual exploitation of women, exclusionary criteria for women’s works and/or ignoring them...etc. The

¹⁶ Gayle, Rubin, “The Traffic in Women” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) pp.770-794.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations” in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange (Thinking Gender)* eds. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, (pp.35-59) p.57

conception of artist as male brought some kind of ghettoization of the “women artists” in a claustrophobic position in perspective of artistic production and limited the available representations of them. The conflation of the artistic production with man, forced women’s production in a restricted and devaluated “women’s art” area in the general artistic field, as if there is a “core womanhood” which will be reflected in “women’s art”. It generated some notions of an atemporal, eternal “feminine” style discredited fiercely by some contemporary “women artists”. However, the first generation of feminism in art has encouraged and supported “women’s art” to claim for equal representation in institutions and art history canons. Though the second generation has updated the feminist critiques towards the art world, in a manner that, instead of incorporating themselves in the already-there institutions as they are, second generation feminist interventions in art targeted directly the institutions and their discourses which reproduce this male-dominated system excluding the women artists and their production. However, before exploring these two generations of feminism in art, we should take a brief look at the construction of the artist as man.

The “women artist” category acquires meaning only in relation to dominant male paradigms of art and femininity. The male implication of “artist” has historical and cultural roots; the ways in which representations of “woman in art” in contrast to universal “artist” as white man are founded upon, and serve to reproduce indisputably accepted assumptions held by society in general about the sex-gender system. “The artist” was assumed to be a man since the very notion of the originary power of the artist, his status as creator of unique and valuable objects, is founded on a discourse of gender difference based on power inequality. What is qualified as art is much related with how the art production is imagined, and it shows us how theory produces and perpetuates gender bias in concepts of art and creativity. The myth of “genius”

endowed to some artists was specifically designed as male or masculine, and it works together with the idea of art work as a unique creation through an act of individual expression. The great artist conceived as one who has “genius” was thought of as having an atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person which set him off from others as one who creates being out of nothing.¹⁸ The notion of the creator of art is heavily gendered as a masculine ideal in spite of many women practitioners of arts.

How the artist was assumed to be man? The answer of this question goes back in the tradition of art-history-writing and the assumptions that underlie its hierarchies. The artist as a learned man and the work of art as the unique expression of a gifted individual first appear in Leon Battista Alberti’s treatise, *On Painting*, published in 1453¹⁹, but Giorgio Vasari’s documentation about the lives of Italian artists published in 1550 sets the tone for much subsequent publications²⁰. He traced chronologically from 13th century to 16th century, the artists of Renaissance through artists’ biographies. The use of biographies served to establish the artistic greatness, the spark of genius seeded in them, frequently as success stories in all kind of impossible conditions defeated thanks to the undeniable greatness or genius of the male artist. None of those geniuses were women despite the fact that he mentions thirteen women artists in his second edition of 1568. The male miraculas success stories have also served to justify that, those men have the ability to succeed despite all kind of impossibilities and disadvantages, because they are endowed with the genius invoking some kind of divinity, showing that if you are really talented, no matter what, sooner or later, your talent will be recognized and approved. According to this view, the absence of female genius in the art history is not a consequence of male-dominance, rather

¹⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Colorado: Icon Editions, 1988)

¹⁹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) p.17

²⁰ Giorgio Vasari, *The lives of the Artists* (Harmondworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1987)

another insidious sign that, the women artists just have not been as talented as their male counterparts, and they are incapable of greatness. As Nanette Salomon argues the biography has been used to celebrate men's artistic genius as individual and mystical, whereas it has worked to bind women's art as being inextricably linked and determined by biographical events.²¹ A few woman artists worthy to mention in Vasari's book were praised with their diligence to catch the level of their male counterparts endowed with a natural gift, considering they needed to compensate their "obvious" lack of talent, which is a frequent pattern in the western art history.

As discussed by Foucault²², power and knowledge are in mutual production, they have a correlative relationship which must be determined in its historical specificity. What is called the truth knowledge is not inherently opposed to power; knowledge is one of the defining components for the operation of power, and power has an important role in the formulation of the available knowledge without ruling out "the speaker's benefit" who is the western white man generally. Hence the discourse of the western art founding itself on the art historical canon is not exempt of power's penetration. "The way the art history has been studied and evaluated is not the exercise of neutral objective scholarship but an ideological practice"²³. Linda Nochlin in her essay "Women, Art, and Power" discuss the complex of "commonsense view" about "women" and "women artists" arising from male centered gender difference, through tracing the ideology's functioning in the iconography of western painting and how it reproduces itself in the art world as well:

²¹ Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission" in *(En)gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe* ed. Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) p.229

²² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and Other Writings* ed. by Colin Gordon; translated by Colin Gordon (New York: Prentice Hall, 1980)

²³ Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1981)

“Yet what I am interested in are the operations of power on the level of ideology, operations which manifest themselves in a much diffuse, more absolute, yet paradoxically more elusive sense, in what might be called the discourses of gender difference. I refer, of course, to the ways in which representations of women in art are founded upon and serve to reproduce indisputably accepted assumptions held by society in general, artists in particular about men’s power over, superiority to, difference from, and necessary control of women, assumptions which are manifested in the visual structures as well as the thematic choices of the pictures in question.”²⁴

Also it is very often in the western art history that the mentioned women artists are bestowed with the “female qualities” –i.e. female sensibility, grace- desirable for their gender position, affirming “essential” differences between men and women in choice of subject and manner of execution as another proof of masculine dominance and superiority in the visual arts.²⁵ It dooms those “women artists” by a set of male defined hierarchical qualities to a devaluated “woman’s art” sphere. Those same feminine qualities in some other cases, related women’s artistic skills to their womanhood, critics evaluated their works in terms of their gender -for instance, Mary Cassatt’s ability to paint children was considered to be related to her feminine nature²⁶-. Women either work too hard to success as their male genius counterparts, who don’t have to do so considering their natural talents; or they succeed in some exceptional subjects because of their “feminine nature”; the kind of approach ignoring the commitment, hard work, or artistic talent of them; in contrast to the artistic creation equated with male sexual energy. In that context, women’s emotional expression is too much a part of their nature. When they have and display emotions, their feelings are manifestations of

²⁴ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Colorado: Icon Editions, 1988) p.1-2

²⁵ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) p.37

²⁶ *ibid* p.41

something they are fashioned to do, not an accomplishment that extends beyond what nature dictates.²⁷ Not surprisingly, the “feminine subjects” in the painting, such as children or flowers, were located in low ranks within the male defined artistic hierarchies. We will also come later to some other prevalent subjects in painting, such as representation of female body for male viewing pleasure, which assign women as passive objects in art, rather than as active and creative subjects, and how it reinforces the male domination in art.

To find a place as “artist” in a heterosexual patriarchal playground where all the rules have been set by men would be almost impossible for “women”, furthermore they are not even considered as convenient players in the play; so maybe it is time to investigate the play itself even further than the mere interrogation of its rules. In her seminal essay “Why have there been no great women artists?”, Linda Nochlin questions the formulation itself, since terms like “greatness” “hero” or “master” return us to male defined notions of originality, intentionality and transcendence. Every attempt to answer it, tacitly reinforces its inherent gender distinction, and complicitly reproduces the white male Western view as natural. Nochlin underscores to what extent our consciousness of how things are in the world has been conditioned –and often falsified- by the way the most important questions are posed. The assumption that lies in the conception of genius is the imagination of art as an independent sphere from the social and cultural conditions, as an oasis for personal expressions of the great artist:

(...) their misconception –shared with the public at large- of what art is: with the naïve idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms. Art is almost never that, great art never is. The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally defined

²⁷Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction Understanding Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004) p.67

conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation. The language of art is, more materially, embodied in paint and line on canvas or paper, in stone or clay or plastic or metal –it is neither a sob story nor a confidential whisper.²⁸

Once this misconception is overtly put forth, the “genius artist” who happens to be always a man (!), appears as a mythical discourse hiding the social and cultural conditions as well as all kind of technologies of power producing “greatness” and “genius” representations in male defined terms, then creating the male subjects who will be hailed by those representations while excluding women artists as outsiders. However, in the art-history-writing many monographs devoted to those “great artists”, and the lack of publications for “women artists” sustain the same discourse and render invisible most of women’s production, as well as ignores the conditions productive of “great art”. It doesn’t mean that the “great artists” canon is formed of fake talents, but the conditions and terms of “greatness” has been possible only for men, hence the “greatness” is a male defined term, and not as “objective” as it has been presumed. The predestined conditions of it are indispensable for bourgeoning of whatever talent one has, and the “genius” is not detached from material and social as well as cultural conditions which creates or nourish the talent, or from the available representations in circulation calling its subjects. The institutional preconditions of creating art are inextricable from the individual ones, actually they determine the latest. Nochlin enumerates some examples such as the transmission of the artistic profession from father to son, the fact that sons of academicians were exempted from the customary fees or lessons, the fact of social class, availability of nude model for training, availability of apprenticeship system, rewards, educational facilities,

²⁸ Linda Nochlin, “Why There Have Been No Great Woman Artist?” in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Colorado: Icon Editions, 1988) p.149

encouragements...etc. to point out the differentiated availability of conditions in terms of gender on the way to “greatness” in the artistic production.

More importantly what should also be emphasized is, inequality doesn't lie only in the social, cultural or material conditions but also in the definition of greatness as well, or the category of “great” itself. Griselda Pollock asks if art is a category that should be discussed in terms of greatness, to criticize Nochlin for her effort to create a new kind of greatness which reinforces the patriarchal definition of man as the norm of humanity and woman as the disadvantaged other, whose freedom lies in becoming like man. The issue is not only to discuss the obstacles that have been laid in the path of woman in art, but to expose the archetypical masculine, egomaniacal, posturing personality of artist and the quintessentially masculine character of art making. But does it mean that there should be a different kind of greatness for women, alternative to the existent male one? An alternative space exclusive for “women artists”? It is not about creating a separate “female greatness” in artistic realm will mean to leave the existent hierarchies as they are, and to repeat the false assumption that art is a male occupation. Furthermore it leaves the boundaries of the field intact while also approving the social givenness of woman. It will also lead us to some kind of transhistorical essentialism as “woman's art”, taking as premises the binary sex-gender system which actually undermines feminism's motivation. This kind of attitude brushes of the differences of women from Woman and differences among women, also underestimates the task of feminism to some kind of correction and improvement.

We should conceive art as a social practice dependent to some conditions, and not as a suprasocial activity; but this approach is not enough to fight the inequalities in the artistic realm. The discursive level is not distinct from the social and material conditions, they constantly re-produce each other. The available subject positions are

decisive for the production of such subjects who will perform the related representations, and they render others invisible. Modernist art history can be shown to work ideologically to constrain what can and cannot be discussed in relation to the creation and reception of art, and in what terms. This is a selective tradition normalizing a particular and gendered set of practices. We are taught how to appreciate the greatness of the artist and the quality of the art work, and to adopt the key conceptions about creativity. How we represent the past set the tone for the present discourse about artists and their production. To put forth in a Foucaultian frame, certain regime of truth prevails to provide a framework of intelligibility and it brings the preference of some kinds of understandings while rendering some others even unthinkable.

1.3. First and Second Generation of Western Feminist Art Critique

The European and American feminist movements in art began in the late 1960s in the wake of the more general feminist movement and political activism of the mid 1960s. There have been many women's art organizations, centers and publications, such as the Women Artists in Revolution (New York, 1969), Women's Interart Center (New York, 1971), to meet the needs of the proliferation of art by women and the interest in women's art.²⁹ The debates over "greatness" were a big part of the discussions; the first wave tried to discover some "great women artists" in the past, to prove that there have been accomplished women artists in history. This first generation of art critics mostly tried to place women artists within the traditional historical framework, instead of questioning the validity of preexisting structures, which is ultimately a self-defeating discourse.

²⁹ Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Mathews, *The feminist Critique of Art History* in the *Art Bulletin* 69, no:3 (September, 1987) p.346

While the number of women artists was increasing, the first generation tended to set women's art against that of men's, and treated the difference of women's relation to artistic and social structures from men's as the cause of the repression; consequently they worked on changing those conditions, institutions and canons in a way to make them embrace the "women's difference in art" and to implicate it in the male-defined art sphere. However this attitude neither fought against the standard of male artistic values nor interrogated how the system has been reproducing in such a patriarchal way; "the female sensibility", "female imagery" was encouraged by feminist critics, which make them strive in a male-centered sex-gender system, but not against it. This kind of approach brought the effort to create a new women's canon in art history; however the integration of their art canon into the development of modern art has not been accomplished since it has been treated by the general discourse as an alternative, a satellite of "the real one" when the deconstruction of the master discourse is missing.

The themes of the first generation was based on finding out women's language in art which has been excluded till now and to restore its value confiscated by the patriarchal art sphere and discourse. This wake aimed to include "women" in the art history –but which women?-, as well as in the current art sphere under the title of "women's art" -or read "female sensibility"-; they considered their sex-gender difference and the consequent artistic differences as the instigator of inequalities and exclusion. So they struggled to be articulated into the patriarchal art sphere with their common artistic differences from men taking their sources from their gender, and tried to make these differences approved by the system; which is actually responsible for the creation of those differences. Without interrogating where those differences came from, they tried to locate themselves in the same system creating those differences. The essential deals of the first wake were revolving around the restitution of female

imagery and sensibility through art by “women” -including female sexuality enchained from male imagery, in touch with their own bodies and feelings-, the art versus craft movement, and the exploration of female stereotypes in art to demonstrate the normative hierarchy of male domination. The effort to unearth “great women artists” brought also the study of images of women by women, as sources of woman’s history in general, to reinterpret History with a capital h, considering till now the images addressed from the history as sources of references were equivalent of men’s perception of the world and consequently the cultural record of our experience has been a record of male experience.³⁰

What I will underscore in this chapter is the effort of first generation to explore historically some kind of “female sensibility”, as well to bring new subjects and aesthetic forms in art dictated by this “female sensibility” which goes generally together with the tendency to create historically a “great women artists” canon. They affirm the existence of fundamental differences between woman and man in their perception, experience and expectations of the world, which are carried over into the creative processes, as some kind of “celebration of otherness”. However it creates a double exclusion considering each representation operates some exclusion, first in the definition of “woman”, second in the definition of female sensibility of this “woman”. Who decides the content of these terms, and in the name of whom?

Nevertheless it doesn’t mean to push all of the first generation into a biologically deterministic camp. Although the first generation feminists tried to explore a common female sensibility in art, some of them considered these traits as culturally determined and changing throughout the history, referring to the definition of sex as biological difference, and to that of gender as a culturally constructed matter. However,

³⁰ Ibid p.334

an awareness of the power position implicated by universal claims, also of the trap to conceal the fact that the traits of “female sensibility” with which they identify themselves are products of the patriarchal domination, is indispensable.

The group assessing the nature of female sensibility as a biological construct tried to found a common base for artistic production of women through biology-is-destiny formulation referring to direct dependency from sex to gender, which they thought will be an empowering feminist attempt. This job of defining the specific difference of women’s art triggered a search for a vaginal iconography in art –also to challenge penis envy- and an effort to construct such a “man-free” space in artistic discourse, a wish to establish an alternative female culture. It tried to encourage women’s self-esteem through valorization of female experiences and bodily practices. However, it perpetuates the traditional body-mind dualism, which has worked -in the traditional Western hierarchy of mind over body- against woman identified with the body; only this time they try to reverse the equation in favor of the body, hence woman. This opposition is formulated in patriarchal discourse together with the other traditional male defined opposition of gender.

The artists like Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago were defending the use of forms in which open, central like shapes, and layered, often petal like images predominated. Chicago identified those forms as “a central core, my vagina, that which made me woman.” They describe the woman as being formed around a central core and who has a secret place which can be entered and which is also a passageway from which life emerges.³¹

The visual symbology that we have been describing must not be seen in a simplistic sense as “vaginal or womb art”. Rather, we are suggesting that women artists have used the central cavity which defines them as women

³¹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) p.358

as the framework for an imagery which allows for the complete reversal of the way in which women are seen by the culture. That is, to be a woman is to be an object of contempt, and the vagina, stamp of femaleness, is devalued. The woman artist, seeing herself as loathed, takes the very mark of her otherness and by asserting it as the hallmark of her iconography, establishes a vehicle by which to state the truth and beauty of her identity.³²

As above, the need to create a space for women artists culminated to imprison the women's artistic production into an iconography taking its source from the female body. It returns the feminism back to the fiercely attacked idea that womanhood is biological -related to body- and in contrast to manhood, the same old male-defined opposition of male-female, man-woman, denying the culturally constructedness of gender in patriarchal terms, and it ends up by reinforcing what it intends to subvert. Who decides to this iconography –some American white woman artists-, referring to which artistic production –some works created conditionally around this idea-, is just another problematical aspect of this approach besides the fact that it locates itself in a completely male defined framework. This effort tries to create a female normativity in art just like men's hierarchic normativity dominating women; it locks women's production in a new room inside man's house. However, as Audre Lorde claimed “the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house.”³³

The group defining the nature of “female sensibility” as a social construct defends the specificity of woman's experience while refuting the meanings given them as features of woman's natural and inevitable condition. They investigate specific traits that belong to woman, but such traits are seen as culturally determined and changing

³² Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, “Female Imagery” in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) pp.40-44, p.43.

³³ Lorde, Audre. “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) pp. 25-29

when those determinants change. This approach sees woman as an unfixed category, constantly in process, examined through her representations and ideological constructions within a male system.³⁴ They recognize the processes of sexual differentiation, the instability of gender positions, and the hopelessness of excavating a free or original femininity beneath the layers of patriarchal oppression.³⁵ They take a moment in the history to examine the representations of women artists who are subjected in terms of discourse to technologies of power, as well as to unequal material conditions; and to discover the effects of the patriarchal domination in that specific moment. The representations by woman created in that specific moment are considered as the symptoms of the institutions and gender ideologies, not as the products of common natural traits of those women. The art works by women give us insights about how they negotiate and refashion their gender position in the gender ideologies. Griselda Pollock propose a methodology which doesn't use the works of art to document the events, she is concerned with the complex nature of the works themselves to deal with the interplay of multiple histories, of the codes of art, the ideologies of art world, and the forms of production.³⁶ She studies the relations between women, art and ideology as a set of varying and unpredictable relationships:

To avoid the embrace of the feminine stereotype which homogenizes women's work determined by natural gender, we must stress the heterogeneity of women's art work, the specificity of individual producers and products. Yet we have to recognize what women share, the historically variable social systems which produce sexual differentiation.³⁷

³⁴ Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Mathews, *The feminist Critique of Art History* in the *Art Bulletin* 69, no:3 (September, 1987) p.346

³⁵ *Ibid* 329

³⁶ Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1981) p.39

³⁷ Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" in *Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988)

The second generation of feminist art criticism focuses on the mechanisms that re-produce the gender difference and the discursive operations engendering the differential perception of the world in terms of gender. The majority of them refer to deconstruction, theories of the subject, critiques of narratives of history and the boundaries between disciplines. Instead of exploring some common sensibility in art through the representations -taking its source from the shared traits of women – biological or social-, they tried to investigate the construction of gender difference. They are more concerned with desire, and the way women are imaged and ideologically constructed; the focus is on the reproduction of gender difference rather than the female per se. “They seek to ‘unfix’ the feminine rather than revealing its determinants based in male institutions and structures, and they expose myths rather than creating them”³⁸ since they consider that the reproduction of gender difference as occurring also in those discursive instances. Those instances create the illusion of some common gender qualities, even though when the “female traits” are photographed in a specific moment as the effects of shared ideological mechanisms such as delineated by Pollock as in the quote above. This kind of criticism as much as it is concerned with “woman’s” issues, its perspective and set of questions can be brought to bear on criticism of male artists’ work. It is only through a critical understanding of “representation” that a representation of woman, which would not be static but constantly contested, can occur.³⁹

Clearly, there is a need for the historical recovery of data about women artists, to know more about the art and lives of women artists in history to be able to seize the technologies of gender reproducing the male dominated gender difference, and limiting

³⁸ Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Mathews, *The feminist Critique of Art History* in the Art Bulletin 69, no:3 (September, 1987) p.347

³⁹ Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making” in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) pp.53-60, p.59.

the possible representations of women artists. However, this review should not take an apologetic tone in the name of those women artists, using only the materially discriminative conditions as an excuse, and ignoring the male defined representations of the dominant discourse. This recovery should function neither as an effort to add women into the already determined category of art, nor as an attempt to create an alternative “woman’s art” or “woman’s art history” in contrast to the master male ones. The deconstruction of masculinist myths of modernism should be carried out with deconstruction of the discipline of art history, and conceptualize what to study and how to do it. Considering the art and art historical discourse are constitutive of ideology and not merely illustrative of it, theorization and historical analysis of sex-gender difference is a requisite to not take as reference point the patriarchal framework of the art sphere. It would give us a sense of the historic subordination of women and an awareness of how art practices have perpetuated that subordination as well as reproduced it.

CHAPTER 2
THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS IN TURKISH ART
HISTORY

2.1. The Beginning of the Modern Painting Tradition in Turkey

As discussed in the first chapter, the representational possibilities offered to women artists are important in terms of available subject positions for them. The art history writing as the legitimizing discourse relied on what is qualified as “art” as well as who is to be crowned with the artist’s halo. Considering the fact that the tradition of modern painting, which does not have a long history in Turkey, was founded especially by the State in the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey, the State’s patriarchal discourse was decisive throughout the artistic field. Consequently, as in the case of western artistic discourse, the art and the artist were defined in male terms. In this chapter, I will trace the beginning of Turkish art history and try to uncover the roots of its patriarchal discourse, i.e. what kind of exclusions it created and what kind of limited and repressive representational positions it offered to women artists.

The last period of the Ottoman Empire witnessed the birth of modern painting in Turkey and prepared the conditions of the upcoming period in Turkish art. The reforms initiated by the state, to keep up with “western civilization”, especially in the army, brought social as well as political change in their wake. Technical drawing courses were introduced firstly in 1795 into the curriculum of the Imperial School of Engineering, then the anatomical drawings classes were initiated at the Medical School in 1826, and finally art lessons were opened at the Imperial Military Academy in c.1825-1835. These novelties started in the curriculum of the military education and consequently gave way

to a group of soldier painters known also as “The Primitives” in Turkish Art History. Considering their background of technical drawing and the strictly disciplined atmosphere of the military, they concentrated on paintings from photographs instead of getting involved in creative attempts or current movements of European painting, and chose to paint some scenes of parks, gardens, palaces and monuments, all void of human presence.⁴⁰ In the meantime, apart from the military painters educated in the army schools who were showing the overtly male roots of the Turkish art scene, some court families or high state officers sent their sons to Europe for education; Osman Hamdi Bey (1842-1920), who was the older son of the grand vezirier Ibrahim Ethem Bey –a court family-, stayed in Paris for 12 years to continue his law education and he attended some important painters’ studios like Jean-Léon Gérôme and Boulanger. Later, he played a central role in the foundation of the Academy of the Fine Arts in 1883, where he was the first director.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman court also began to develop an interest in painting; some foreign painters settled in Istanbul. For example, Fausto Zonaro -a very well known figure in the Turkish art history- who was hired as the “court painter” was one of those names. The studios of those painters located in Istanbul were also popular for some close to the court upper-class families to send their daughters interested in the art of painting. Those families did not consider painting lessons as a professional occupation for their daughters -considering women were not considered to be cut for professional occupations-, but treated them as enthusiasts of fine arts encouraged for painting as a hobby. With the desire to imitate western ways, the daughters of such

⁴⁰ Berke and Burçak İnel, “Discovering the Missing Heroines: The Role of Women Painters in Early Modernist Art in Turkey” in *Middle Eastern Studies Journal*, April 2002, vol.32, n.2, (Abington: Taylor and Francis) pp.205-212

families devoid of the possibility of a proper education locally⁴¹ or abroad, were tutored at home in languages, embroidery, music and painting. Some of them like Müfide Kadri and Mihri Hanım will be the first art teachers in establishing girls' schools. Müfide Kadri (1890-1912) died at a very early age when she was 22, however Mihri Hanım (1886-1954) passed through many struggles to survive, and more importantly to be mentioned as an artist. İnci Eviner (1956), a contemporary Turkish artist, defines the early State's conception about woman artist as an upper-middle class entertainment: "The girls were encouraged to play the piano or paint. It wasn't a threat for anyone; it wasn't a revolt against the established system. Just a nice distraction, a little sophisticated version of embroidery."⁴² Another contemporary artist, Nur Koçak, also denotes: "A woman knitting or making embroideries or painting; it doesn't make much difference in the eyes of the society."⁴³ In a society where women are traditionally thought and furthermore encouraged to engage themselves in weaving, embroidery and knitting, learning to paint is already an acceptable accomplishment.⁴⁴ In the early Republic and late Ottoman period, as long as the women act in the limits of the traditional roles redefined by men in their project of modernization, painting was an acceptable occupation for them.

In the history of painting, the distinction between amateur and professional is part of the discourse devaluating women's artistic production. The decoration, embroidery and even painting were not closed to women, but those kinds of endeavors were limited to the domestic place -to the private sphere-. They were considered to lack the kind of dedication and creativity an artist/a man will need. Since the renaissance,

⁴¹ 1858 - The founding of the first Secondary School for Girls, 1870 - The first Teacher's College for Girls, 1883 - The founding of the Academy of Fine Arts, 1914 - The founding of an Academy of Fine Arts for girls.

⁴² http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=979

⁴³ <http://www.arturk.net/artists/nuko/yazi2.htm>

⁴⁴ Tomur Atagök, "A View of Contemporary Women Artists in Turkey" in *Paradoxa* online magazine, n.2, February 1997, pp.20-26

fine art work was distinguished as produced for aesthetic value alone, in contrast to what is made for some practical function -like women's domestic production-; even what is made by a woman for decoration was considered to miss the aura of an art work considering any function allegedly limits free creativity. The division between art and craft had the effect of eliminating from the concept of art a number of genres where women had a prominent presence.⁴⁵ The treatment of woman artists as amateurs, and consideration of their products as pastime has roots in the tendency to attributing woman's artistic production the status of craft throughout history, in this way excluding them from the male dominated art sphere. When the artists such as Mihri Rasim (Müşfik) claimed to be mentioned as "painters" -a domain destined for men-, they had to struggle with the prejudices about women's production tossed aside as crafts or pastime, or amateur. The predestined position of women's art complicated the efforts of women to be accepted as artists. Such an aim was considered as a futile effort. Another interesting point would be to trace in gender perspective the power dynamics differentiating what would be qualified as art, and not. Pollock and Parker revealed in their book⁴⁶ with such a perspective the evolution of products -such as needlework- from art to craft. However such an endeavor will exceed the limits of this research.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul was founded in 1883, and Osman Hamdi Bey was assigned as the first director.⁴⁷ Most of the professors were foreigners living in Istanbul or from minorities such as Allexandro Vallaury, P. Bello, Salvator Valery, and Yervant Osgan. The foundation of the school was important considering that art (painting, sculpture and engraving) started to be considered as a professional endeavor, and also the students started to work on live models to deal the with figurative painting

⁴⁵ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, chapter 2 explains the evolution of products such as needlework from art to craft.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Mustafa Cezar, *Sanatta Batıya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi Bey* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 1971) p.449.

which set the main difference from the previous un-peopled military paintings. Also, the art of painting started to lose its military roots, although it kept its patriarchal structure intact. However to work on nude models has remained as an issue, for example the friendship of Nazmi Ziya Güran -a student of the school and a famous painter later-with Turkish wrestlers convinced some of them to model for the students. Also after 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian immigrants who escaped to Ottoman Empire were very helpful to solve the nude model problem since they needed to work, they did not refuse any offered job. In that period, the depiction of nude paintings by male painters could also be considered daring since the conservatism inherited from the Islamic tradition forbid the figurative representation in the painting⁴⁸, in addition to the fetishization of the female body by the voyeurism of the male gaze -as in the tradition of western nude painting-. Hence, to work on nude models was not an easy issue to handle for male painters as well. However, to work on models was an even more problematic issue for the students of the Academy of Fine Arts for Girls (İnas Sanayi Nefise Mektebi) founded in 1914, after 31 years of the opening of the Academy of Fine Arts. However Mihri Rasim (Müşfik) as the head of the Academy, has succeeded to bring some female hammam workers to pose, but to work on male models has remained impossible. Instead, they worked on some male sculptures' moulds brought from the Archeology Museum, thanks to the efforts of Mihri Müşfik, after covering the genitalia of those white stones.⁴⁹ The 31 years of difference in the institutional education for men and women and even then, the unequal educational conditions, such as the chance to work on nude models, are demonstrative of what Nochlin mentioned as the gender inequality to reach the material conditions paving the way for technical virtuosity.

⁴⁸ Beral Madra, "Under My Feet I Want the World not the Heaven" in *Istanbul Next Wave: Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Istanbul* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009) pp.92-103

⁴⁹ Malik Aksel, *Istanbul'un Ortası* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1977)

The foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts was also possible with the decisive efforts of Mihri Rasim. Unfortunately we don't have any records of other women who wished to make an artistic career but who had to give up because of the social and cultural drawbacks, as well as of the impossibility to have a proper education. Mihri Rasim's efforts are reflected in the quote below where she talks to Şükrü Bey, the Minister of Education of the time:

“Muhterem nazır beyefendi, memlekete meşrutiyetle birlikte hürriyet, müsavat, ulumet geldi.ama bütün bu nimetlerden sadece erkekler istifade ediyor. Kadınlar hala olduğu yerde, bir adım bile ileri gitmiş değiller. Acaba bu imtiyaz nerden geliyor? (...) Bugün her yerde müsavat ve adaletten söz ediliyor, fakat inas sanayi nefise mektebi nerde? Hep yapılanlar erkekler için!⁵⁰

This quote is significant since it shows us the women artists' own struggles to have the right to equal artistic education; in contrast to the patriarchal discourse of Turkish History representing the rights granted to women as bestowed to them by the State when they did not even ask for it. As Serpil Çakır⁵¹ showed in her research, the women were not passive recipients celebrating gladly the rights endowed them by the State, they struggled with their own means for better conditions. The opening of the Academy of Fine Arts for Girls was not enough alone to change the conception of artist as male and women's production as amateur endeavors. As discussed in the first chapter, the discursive representations are constitutive of the possible subjectivities and they encompass the possibilities of representative positions despite the change in the material conditions. An article by Kahramanzade Ferit Efendi, published in 1913 just before the

⁵⁰ Ibid p.104

⁵¹ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994)

opening of the Academy of Fine Arts for Girls, in the newspaper of Ottoman Painters Association⁵² is significant to give us insights about the conception of woman as artist:

İtiraf etmelidir ki bizde, bizim hususiyet-i hayatımızda ressamlık, hele ressamlık ile kadınlık hiçbir vakitte imtizaç etmemiş ve edememiştir (*uyuşamamıştır*). Ressam denince göz önüne paleti ile, fırçası ile hemen ekseriya fakir kisvesiyle, gözlerinde zaruretin acı gölgeleri dalgalandıran sanatkar gelir. Onun kalbi yoklansa burada bir muhit-i biiltifatın (*iltifat etmeyen çevrenin*) gubâr-ı nisyanı (*unutuşunun tozları*) altında uyanan ne emeller, ne saf arzular, hatta ne para, ne rağbet, yalnız bir kelime-i takdir bekleyen ne derin bir sanat aşkı muhtefidir (*saklıdır*). Bu, sönmek bilmeyen bir nurun saçılmayan ziyası haliyle fırça arar...Fıskırmak ihtiyacı ile cidar-ı muhafazasını tazyik eden buhar gibi daimi bir ittisaat (*genleşme*) ile kaynar durur...(…) Ressamlık böyle olunca kadınlığın buna ne kadar uzak ve yabancı kaldığını idrak etmek büyük bir zekâvete, arîz (*geniş*) ve amik (*derin*) bir tetkike ihtiyaç hasıl etmez.⁵³

The quote above repeats the very well known plot of the miraculous, non-determined and asocial nature of artistic achievement, the legend of the artist struggling against the most determined parental and social opposition, suffering the slings and narrows of social equilibrium like a martyr and succeeding against all odds⁵⁴, which has been criticized by the feminists as fostering the male defined genius concept. The artist qualities enumerated by Ferit Efendi are considered to be incompatible with “woman’s nature”, consequently the artist as woman remains unthinkable. Probably the timing of this article could be related with the discussions about the foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts for Girls, and his concerns to protect his field from the “invasion of women” by emphasizing the discrepancy of art and artist with woman. The conception of art as male occupation has persisted despite the foundation of the Academy for Girls.

⁵² Ottoman Painters Organization is the first painters organization active between 1908-1919

⁵³ “Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti Gazetesi” ed. Yaprak Zihnioğlu (Istanbul: Kitap yayınevi, 1997) p.181

⁵⁴ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Colorado: Icon Editions, 1988) p.155

Considering there is a gap of 31 years between the two Academies, the graduates of the first one reached important positions in the academia as well as in the art scene, they become authorities in their field. The institutionalization of the field by men has reinforced the patriarchal nature of art in Turkey. Some of them like Ibrahim Çallı, have been awarded state scholarships to continue their education in Europe and to work in artists' studios abroad. When they returned, they were assigned as professors in both Academies. Feyhaman Duran was one of those who became professor in the Academy of Fine Arts for Girls after graduating from the first Academy. The quote below is significant, considering it shows that the opening of the Academy for Girls has not eliminated the gender discrimination in the artistic field.

“İnas Sanayii Nefise Mektebini cumhuriyet yıllarına kadar ressam merhum Ömer Adil idare etmişti. Mektebin resim hocası Feyhaman Duran idi. Atölyesini dolduran hanım kızların bugün ne olduğunu hoca kendi de bilmez.”⁵⁵

As mentioned above, most of the girls were not able to pursue an artistic career. There were 33 students registered in the first year of the Academy for Girls, however only 11 of them continued to the second year.⁵⁶ The fact that most of the students left the university in the second year is significant. However, it was not possible to find out clearly the reasons behind these absences since the archives about the Academy for Girls were very limited because of a fire incident. In addition, even the saved archives about the first students were not helpful for an extensive research, because the women were registered before the law of the family name and only by their first names, consequently when they got married there were no clues left to trace them. This situation could be related to the oppressive expectation from women to drop their career

⁵⁵ Nurullah Berk, *Sanat Konuşmaları* (İstanbul: A.B. Neşriyatı, 1943) p.113

⁵⁶ Taha Toros, *İlk Kadın Ressamlarımız – The First Lady Artists of Turkey* (İstanbul: Ak Yayınları, 1988) p.42

for the sake of love, marriage and family. Deprived of encouragements, educational facilities and rewards, for a woman to opt for a career has required some kind of unconventionality. In the following years, some of the first graduates and women professors who were unwilling to compromise with the values of their society moved abroad, some left painting after marrying, and some of them had difficulties to cope with life. Mihri Hanım (1886-1954) who was subject to some criticisms with her life-style died in the USA. She fled to USA because of her close relations with the Union and Progress Party members. After the foundation of the Republic, the Republican casts and Atatürk has exiled the Union and Progress Party members, or opened juridical inquiries for them. Mihri Rasim was concerned about these operations and she left Istanbul for the States:

Ne var ki Paris'in çekici bohem hayatına kendilerini kaptıran gençler, Türk kolonisinde içkiye düşkün bir çift olarak tanındılar. Yurda dönüşlerinde de Paris'teki yaşamlarını sürdürdüler. 1922'lerin sonlarına doğru bazı kıskançlıklar, hatta dedikodular, Mihri Hanım'ın ikinci defa yurttan kaçışına; Müşfik Bey'le evliliklerinin de temelinden yıkılmasına neden oldu.⁵⁷

Ancak Mihri Hanım'ın yurtdundan ve kocasından kopuşunda, eski İttihat ve Terakki Partisi ileri gelenleri ile olan yakın ilişkisi ve onlardan bazılarının tatbikata uğramasının kendisine kadar bir uzantısı olabileceği vehmine kapıldığı anlaşılmaktadır.⁵⁸

As mentioned previously, the women painters of the first generations were coming from the upper classes, and their occupation was considered seriously neither by their family nor by the society in general. Most of the names were lost with their art works. However, most of them whose names have lasted till today do have well known male relatives or husbands; Celile Hanım, who is the mother of Nâzım Hikmet, Harika Lifij the wife of Avni Lifij, Güzin Duran the wife of Feyhaman Duran, Maide Arel the

⁵⁷ ibid p.12

⁵⁸ ibid p.16

wife of Şemsi Arel or Nazlı Ecevit the mother of Bülent Ecevit are few examples.⁵⁹ Their relatively important male relatives had an effect not on their career, but it helped their names to remain in the historical canon. Unfortunately, they were not mentioned as successful individuals but in the frame of successful men's biographies. Most of them were members of so called Westernized upper class families, well educated and cherished as talented "daughters", "sisters", and "spouses" assigning them to their socially approved roles. The example of Güzin Duran who was trying to change the subject to her husband and his art, when Canan Beykal interviewed her about her own art could be thought of in this context,⁶⁰ she had lost her self confidence and started to see herself as not worthy as an artist, especially when she had a successful artist husband: "Women are thought to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny."⁶¹ The following lines about Vildan Gezer (1889-1974) indicate the "appropriate feminine behavior" which is not to strive for fame and independence or to actually support herself through her art.: "Vildan Hanım, daha çok portrelerinde başarılı bir fırça sahibi idi. Ne var ki kültür ağırlıklı yaşamında, tevazuu ön safta yer aldığından, ne eserlerini sergiledi, ne de yayınladı."⁶²

The absence of records and shortage of sources about the artistic production of this first generation of women painters is also significant. Actually even today the monographies of woman artists are very limited. Unfortunately, most of their works were lost compared to their male colleagues' number of works surviving until today, but this lack inaccurately was related to the limited artistic production of women, which has

⁵⁹ Tomur Atagök, *Cumhuriyetten Günümüze Kadın Sanatçılar* sergi kataloğu (İstanbul: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Anıtlar ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1993)

⁶⁰ Burcu Pelvanoğlu, *Hale Asaf: Türk Resim Sanatında Bir Dönüm Noktası* (İstanbul:Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007) p.13

⁶¹ Judith Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978)

⁶² Taha Toros, *İlk Kadın Ressamlarımız – The First Lady Artists of Turkey* (İstanbul: Ak Yayınları, 1988) p.36

been one of the pretexts for the absence of monographies about those women's art; as if there are not enough material to publish a monography. The need for a different kind of credibility sets the historical narrative apart from fiction, and artistic productions of those women artists as well as monographies about them provide this kind of credibility about the presence of women artists in the Turkish Art History, or lack of it. Their absence in the canon of Turkish art history is important not only because the canon determines what we read, look at, see in the art museum; but also it is formed retrospectively by what artists select as their legitimating or enabling predecessors.

Regarding Michel Rolph Trouillot, silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).⁶³ These four processes interact mutually as delineated till now; the making of narratives about woman artist in the male-centered gender discourse was very determining in the making of sources and archives such as monographs or books about those women artists as well as the acquirement of their works in museum collections. However the feminist interventions in the history try to change the retrospective significance of women artists for art history. As emphasized by Trouillot, the past is only past because there is the present, the past does not exist independently from the present⁶⁴; so the absence of women artists was reproduced also from the present when there are only male artists in the canon to refer as predecessors. When the artists are left out of the records and ignored as part of the cultural heritage, the canon becomes an increasingly impoverished and impoverishing filter for the

⁶³ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) p.26

⁶⁴ *ibid* p.15

totality of cultural possibilities for women generation after generation.⁶⁵ On the other hand, how they are referred to in the canon matters as well; when they are grouped under the homogenizing “women artists” rubric, wiping out their artistic differences between them, it also reproduces “the woman” category’s male-centered representations about gender.

To take a look at the first and last monography about Turkish women artists would be a revealing example to understand how the representation of “women artists” creates some kind of repression and discrimination through discourse; “The First *Lady* Artists of Turkey” was written by Taha Toros in 1988⁶⁶. He announces in the preface, the end of gender discrimination thanks to the Republic.

“It is clearly revealed in the history of civilization that women in all the countries of the world have followed in the footsteps of their men to attain the levels they have achieved today. However, afterwards, in arts as in other fields, the discrimination between men and women has remained in the pages of history books. (...) The Turkish reforms in the republican era have provided equality between sexes as a requirement of the civilized life. (...) This work is prepared with the intention of reflecting the first attempts of the Turkish women in the field of fine arts and the first impressions they created.”⁶⁷

He clearly indicates above -as a general and natural fact- that women in all the countries and throughout history, as well as in every field, follow men’s footsteps in order to succeed. They are not able to create or achieve merit on their own, but need the encouragement of their male counterparts, or women need to imitate men to achieve success. In the wake of this conviction, the women’s rights bestowed by the Republic

⁶⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999)

⁶⁶ The book has been written in Turkish but includes English translations in some parts. He uses the term “lady” despite the use of “woman” in the Turkish original.

⁶⁷ Taha Toros, *İlk Kadın Ressamlarımız – The First Lady Artists of Turkey* (Istanbul: Ak Yayınları, 1988) p.7

are considered as the generosity of men which put an end to gender discrimination, and the women mentioned in the book are the samples of that grant. However, the artists in the book are presented only through their life stories, especially introducing their personal lives such as their marriages and through their beauty and physical appearance which are considered to be the source of inspiration for their male counterparts. In other words, they are evaluated with the traditional attributes of women in patriarchal discourse. As addressed by Mary Kelly in her article “Desiring Images, Imaging Desires”⁶⁸, the woman who is an artist sees her experience in terms of the feminine position -that is as object of the look-. But she must also account for the feeling she experiences as an artist occupying the masculine position -as subject of the look-, and she makes different strategies to negotiate this contradiction in the male defined art sphere. This ambivalence is displayed in Toros’ writings as well; the women artists are presented by Toros’ narrow patriarchal discourse, in their traditional roles in art: objects subjected to the male gaze. Consequently, interpretations or critiques about their art are missing; this could have been conflicting for him to discuss their artistic values since in Toros’ universe, the women artists are men’s shadows following in their footsteps. Those women have some other qualities praised by Toros when they are not rated as artists, some “gender qualities” attributed to them remain as qualifying matters. To mention a few related quotes: “Mihri Hanım, with her clear eyes and her beautiful white skin, was a muse for the poets of Edebiyat- Cedide.”⁶⁹ “When Tevfik Fikret died she came wearing a burka like a black butterfly, the mourning muse of the poet.”⁷⁰ “In the beginning of the 20th century, Celile Hanım was one of the most beautiful girls of

⁶⁸ Mary Kelly, “Desiring Images/Imaging Desire” in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) pp.72-76

⁶⁹ Taha Toros, *İlk Kadın Ressamlarımız – The First Lady Artists of Turkey* (Istanbul: Ak Yayınları, 1988) p.10

⁷⁰ Ibid p.14

Istanbul's high society.”⁷¹ This approach reflects the attribution to women the traditional passive position in art, their identification with physical appearance and with their bodies. This kind of mind and body dualism has permeated Western thought to divide human experience into a bodily and spiritual realm. “The female body becomes a metaphor for the corporeal pole of this dualism, representing nature and irrationality; images of the dangerous, appetitive female body stand in contrast to the masterful, masculine will, the locus of social power, rationality and self control.”⁷² Instead of being described as active agents producing art works, they inspire their colleagues as muses. The muses are ubiquitous figures in mythologies inspiring the male creator of art; it is a tradition of attributing to some feminine force the inspiration a man needs to create.

(...) For the most part, however, the personification of creative impulses in a feminine form does not record or honor actual feminine creativity. Quite the contrary, mythologizing feminine creativity by ascribing it to nonhuman beings pushes actual women to the margins of artistic creativity –in deceptively complimentary terms- and assigns to men the social role of actually creating art. (...) this is an example of the detachment of feminine concepts from real women and their appropriation by men to describe the creative process.⁷³

Another position about the representation of women artists in Turkish art history would be the republican version. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, as an extension of traditionally feminine embodiments of abstract concepts –i.e. justice-, women were used as a metaphor for the liberation and modernization of Turkey brought by the Republic. The rights “granted” to women and the allegedly new, emancipated

⁷¹ Ibid p.27

⁷² Kathy Davis, “Embodiment Theory” in *Embodied Practices, Feminist perspectives on the body*, ed. by Kathy Davis. (London: SAGE Publications, 1997) p.5

⁷³ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction Understanding Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004) p.20-21

social position of woman were promoted as the new face of modern Turkey. However once again, women were not treated as active agents but as passive pawns in the social and cultural reforms of the republican project of modernity.⁷⁴ The instrumentality of women in the project of modernity could be traced in the art sphere as well. The women painters of the early Republic, as well as the foundation of new institutions such as the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture were cheered as a “sign of westernization”.⁷⁵ The women’s purpose to be professional was mainly to be in the service of the modernizing nation provoked by state activism. It is still possible to trace the republican discourse about women artists in 1993, half a century after the foundation of the Republic. The first exhibition devoted only to women artists was organized by the Ministry of Culture in 1993, and the preface of the exhibition catalogue is reflective of the same ideological stance towards woman:

“When we view the tableau presented by this series of exhibitions, we can definitely claim that the women of the Turkish Republic justified the rights granted to them (...).”⁷⁶

“Equal educational opportunities and social equality for women introduced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s far-reaching reforms in the course of forging modern Turkey have enabled Turkish women to utilize their talents and creativity in the plastic arts, as in many other vocations. Consequently, women have figured prominently in a wide range of fields. In celebrating the seventieth anniversary of The Turkish Republic, this exhibition of works by contemporary women artists underscores the commitment of Turkish women to participation in every sphere of life, as envisaged by Atatürk. Art is a universal language forming links between each nation and the rest of the world, and artists are the cultural ambassadors of

⁷⁴ Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey", in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1997)

⁷⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar* (Istanbul: Metis Yayıncılık, 2007)

⁷⁶ D. Fikri Sağlar, Turkish Republic Minister of Culture, *Cumhuriyetten Günümüze Kadın Sanatçılar sergi kataloğu* (İstanbul: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Anıtlar ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1993) p.7

their country. The fact that Turkish women are making effective use of their artistic potential is an asset for the nation as a whole.”⁷⁷

The precondition of woman’s success as “to be useful” to the nation, denying the individual satisfaction or professionalism, was not compatible with the idea of “art” as the direct, personal expression of individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms.⁷⁸ Woman’s artistic production was not evaluated in terms of its technique or achievement, but was classified as symbol of modernization, as symbol of the Republic’s liberation. Their production was not considered as an outlet for their own talents as in the case of their male counterparts, since “to be useful” and “to be a great artist” -in terms of greatness defined by male-centered meta-historical premises- was in conflict. They were treated as signs of Turkish women’s existence in the artistic realm, as “samples” representing the level of modernization of the Republic, in other words as “show cases”.⁷⁹ Consequently, these women artists were not praised essentially by their works or artistic achievements.

Why did the acquirement of their works by the state museum collection mattered? The state museums were the leading actors in the construction of archives as they were the main collectors of the art works till the newly established private museums. The state museum of Istanbul was the only authority to determine through its collection, what will be labeled as art and whom will be entered in the art historical canon as well as whose art and name will be silenced in history. The art works which didn’t have the chance to enter in state collections were generally lost considering there was not a solid bourgeoisie investing in art through private collections. The state museum was the only instance for artists to be approved as professional successful

⁷⁷ Canan Pak, *Cumhuriyetten Günümüze Kadın Sanatçılar* sergi kataloğu (İstanbul: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Anıtlar ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1993) p.9

⁷⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Colorado: Icon Editions, 1988)

⁷⁹ Şirin Tekeli, *1980ler Türkiye’sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010)

artists, and it was the precondition to guarantee to stay within the history with their works and names. At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won.⁸⁰

2.2. Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture: The State Monopoly on the Arts

The idea of collecting paintings and establishing museums does not have a long history in Turkey. The Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (ISMPS) was opened in 1937 in the Crown Prince Chamber of Dolmabahçe Palace with a founding collection of 320 works (These works mostly consist of Elvah-ı Nakşiye Collection gathered together in 1910 in Academy of Fine Arts (Sanayi-i Nefise) with the objective of establishing an art museum –Imperial Museum- in the future, however this objective has not materialized until 1937 due to the First World War and to financial problems. The museum was associated in the same year with The Fine Arts Academy and both institutions were connected to each other. The works taken from the mansions of the *sadrzams* (grand viziers) and from the government offices all around Turkey constituted the rest of the ISMPS collection. They were exhibited under the name of “national painting collection” in the State museum of painting and sculpture. A limited number of donated works from the Galatasaray exhibitions, and Şişli Studios producing “war paintings” are worth mentioning, considering some of the works in the collection were acquired from those exhibitions.⁸¹ However, those “war paintings” were not open to women artists considering they do not have experience on the battlefield, they were

⁸⁰ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) p.5

⁸¹ Semra Germaner, “From the Elvah-I Nakşiye Collection to the Museum of Painting and Sculpture” in *the Exhibition’s Exhibition: Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum, 1937 Opening Collection* (Istanbul: Mimar Sinan University Press, 2009) pp.18-32

not considered to be compatible to paint accurately the heroism or bravery stories of Turkish soldiers. Despite the fact that there were many women such as nurses, or translators fighting for their country, when it comes to paint a heroic war scene it was considered to be more accurately accomplished by male painters.

The works in the collection were divided in three section: the primitives (artists from the beginning of 19th century till 1870), the middle section (1870-till the end of 19th century) and the modern section (artists born in the 1900s and who are younger than forty). In this founding collection, only 16 works of these 320 pieces were made by women artists.⁸² Today the collection has more than 3000 works (paintings, engravings and sculptures), however the women artists' proportion in this extended collection is still very low, and only around 200 works belong to female artists. The additional works have been included mostly in the 1940s and 50s by either the Ministry of Education, or by the Academy of Fine Arts, but especially from "state exhibitions" organized by the government which indicates the state centered character of the collection.⁸³

The state exhibitions constituted the primary sources for the acquirement of the new works to the ISMPS collection; they had a big impact on the art scene where the only authority in arts was the State Academy of Fine Arts⁸⁴ and ISMPS as its institution. After the opening of ISMPS, some artists were commissioned by the government to paint the life and nature of Anatolia, for this reason they were dispatched with official assignments all over the country ("Country Visits/Yurt Gezileri", 1938-44). However any women artists were not commissioned for such a mission. Subsequently the first State exhibition of Painting and Sculpture was organized in 1939 –in November, the tenth anniversary of the Republic- which could be considered as the milestone of

⁸² (Hale Asaf:3 works, Sabiha Bengütaş:4 works, Melek Celal Sofu:5 works, Eren Eyüboğlu:2 works, Iraida Barry:2 works) Serginin Sergisi

⁸³ *The Collection of Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture Mimar Sinan University* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996) p.19

⁸⁴ The Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts today

institutionalization of the State's male gaze in the arts, since the ISMPS collection dependent on the State was nourished from the selected works of these generally women-free exhibitions, organized again by the State. The State domination on the arts is clear on the quote below as well:

“Birinci Devlet Resim ve Heykel Sergisi, plastic sanatların bu şubelerindeki bütün mensuplarına, eserlerini halka arz etmek imkanını vermiştir. Bu topluluk ve beraberlik Türk Sanatı için çok hayırlı bir tekâmül safhası olacaktır kanaatindeyim.(...) Türkiye’de son 17 yıl içinde geniş bir sanat muhiti doğmaya başlamıştır. (...) Ayrıca Cumhuriyet Halk Partisinin muhtelif yurt köşelerine yolladığı ressamlarımız da mahallî, renk ve karakterleri tespit eden eserleriyle gerek kendileri, gerek Türk sanatı için büyük bir terakki hamlesi yapmışlardır. Sanatta milli benliği aramaya yol açan bu eserler sergiye hususi bir ehemmiyet kazandırmış ve onun zenginliğini arttırmıştır.”⁸⁵

In the official legislation of the State exhibitions, the regulations about the exhibition period and the practical matters were explained in a detailed way, but the object of this activity was not clearly defined. However it is possible to distil the objective of the State exhibitions from the opening speeches of Hasan Ali Yücel, the Minister of National Education. He emphasized the importance of gathering the Turkish art sphere and all its elements under the State's roof, to encourage the production (through the monetary prizes and the prestige of the exhibition) and to eliminate the “unnecessary disputes” among different artistic groups harmful to the rise of the Turkish Art:

“Plastik sanatlarımızın bütün elemanlarını bir araya getirme düşüncesi, Devlet sergisini doğuran ana fikirdir. Devletin koruyucu ve ilerletici görevini plastik sanatlar alanında da yerine getirmeye çalıştığını bilmeyen

⁸⁵ Ulus Gazetesi, 31 Ekim 1939, Hasan Ali Yücel, 1. Devlet Resim Sergisi açılış konuşması, vurgu bana ait

kalmamalıdır.(...) Uzun zaman ömürleri birbirlerinin muşambasını didikleme ve mermerlerini kazımakla geçmiş, görüşleri ve duyuları ayrı mekteplerin rahlesinde inkişaf etmiş sanatkarlar (müstakiller, D grubu mensupları ve grupsuzlar) şimdi kendi sanat görüşlerini kovalayarak ne güzel çalışıyorlar. Vaktiyle sırt sırta bile durmaya tahammülü olmayan eserler, şimdi yanyana gelince kavgalı geçen günlerinin hicabını duyuyor gibidirler. Yapıcı ve kurucu Devlet, aynı zamanda yaptırıcı kuvvettir. Bunun güzel eseri meydanda.(...)”⁸⁶

Some research about the participants eliminated by the selection committee, awarded artists, and the jury members show that the State’s claim to unify all the artists and to give a general view of Turkish Art through those State exhibitions and did not take women artists into much consideration. When we review the State exhibitions of 1939-1950 only one woman artist won the painting award (Melahat Ekici, 3rd exhibition in 1941) and one other won the sculpture award (Mari Gerekmezyan, 7th Exhibition in 1945). None of the jury members has ever been a woman. In those 11 exhibitions, 180 of 1055 were women and only 457 of 4517 exhibited works belonged to female artists’.⁸⁷

The silencing of women artists production worked through some gender filters as in the case of State exhibitions forming the base of the State museum collection. It manifests the irreducible distinction between what happened and that which is said to have happened⁸⁸. The limited number of works remaining from the first generation of women artists are not actually a sign of their allegedly low productivity, but it was related to some silencing mechanisms. Women artists of the next generations had to deal with this legacy because the constructed past itself was constitutive of the

⁸⁶ Ulus Gazetesi, Hasan Ali Yücel, 1 Kasım 1940, 2. Devlet Resim ve Heykel sergisi açılış konuşması

⁸⁷ Bkz. Ek1

⁸⁸ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

collectivity. And it effected the conception of art and artists, as well as the prevailing male dominant discourse within the modern and contemporary art making in Turkey. The ruse of ideology is to veil the power relations obtaining in society as the natural or given order⁸⁹ and it perpetuates complicity with the ones who exercise it or who fail to recognize it. The recognition of those silences and the silencing mechanisms serve to identify the technologies of gender working ideologically to repress women artists' representations.

2.3. An Overview about Women Artists from the 1930s till the 1990s

The constitutional rights of women have not always corresponded to changes in women's traditional position and status in society; so they didn't make the liberation effect in art as well, which is a field shaping by social and cultural dynamics and not isolated from them.⁹⁰ The painting remained reserved for upper class women considering it was almost impossible for them to earn a living as professional artists. They were able to maintain their profession as painters with the support of their families. Under these circumstances, feminism was mostly discussed under the term "women's issues" and remained as a state-led modernization policy during the early years of the Republic, and the Republican state policy remained to be a haunting ghost: "Why would there be a need for a feminist movement when the state has already bestowed women with their rights?"

The professional attempts of women artists which might be named as rupture from tradition finds examples in the 1950s and 1960s. In this late modernist period of

⁸⁹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994)

⁹⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated: Reflections on the Turkish Case", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Summer, 1987), pp. 317-338.

painting, the male artists were reflecting their artistic individuality more than before and the women artists started to discover new ways to escape from the authority of the State Academy of Fine Arts, and that of the Istanbul State Museum Painting and Sculpture as its institution. During the 1950s and 1960s the women artists ventured in to more individualist and independent art making.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Canan Beykal who was a student in 1968-72 in the Academy underlines the ongoing importance of the Academy at that date. She states her strategy as taking what she finds useful from there, but also to find a way to evade the oppression of it as soon as she can to be able to find her own voice as an artist:

“Genç sanatçılar için akademininkinden başka beslenecek bir platform olmadığı düşünüldüğünde (...) o dönemde Akademi'nin bir parçası olmak gerçekten önemliydi; zira orası sanat eğitimi veren tek kurumdu. Kurumsal yapısına rağmen seçilesi ve seçilinesi bir yerd. Ancak, özellikle o dönemde, sanatçı olacak gençler aynı zamanda aydın olacak potansiyele de sahiplerdi ve Akademi'nin verdiği eğitim yeterli değildi. En azından benim için yeterli değildi. Akademik doktrinler ve akademinin otoritesi tamamen usta çırak ilişkisine dayalıydı. Farketmeniz gereken, bir yandan disiplini öğrenip diğer yandan sıradan bir sanatçı olmaktan bilinçli olarak kaçınmanızın gerektiği bir zaman olduğuydu.”⁹²

Also, the quote below from an interview with Füsun Onur⁹³ who studied in 1956-60 in the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts shows that the male authority of the field of art and of the academy was still there:

-Babam çok önemserdi benim bu ilgimi. O da ressam olmak istermiş zaten, çok zevkliydi. Beni hep yüreklendirirdi. Ama ben o zaman kadınların

⁹¹ Beral Madra, “Under My Feet I Want the World not the Heaven” in *Istanbul Next Wave: Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Istanbul* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009) pp.92-103

⁹² Interview of Canan Beykal with Ömür Kula in “The Rupture in Visual Language: The Transition of Arts in Turkey 1970-80 and the Women Artists of the Period” (Sabancı University, 2006) unpublished master thesis, p.208-222.

⁹³ Interview of Füsun Onur with Ömür Kula in “The Rupture in Visual Language: The Transition of Arts in Turkey 1970-80 and the Women Artists of the Period” (Sabancı University, 2006) unpublished master thesis, p. 176-185.

heykeltras olamayacağını sanıyordum. Sırf erkekler olur sanıyordum. Sonra bir gün gördüm ki, bir kadın vardı, heykeltrasmıs, o zaman karar verdim akademiye girmeye.

-Akademiye dönüp hocalık yapmayı hiç düşündünüz mü?

-Yok, nasıl düşünüyüm?! Kadınları almıyorlardı ki akademiye o zaman.⁹⁴

The shift of arts from the conventional male centered tradition of canvas-painting and sculpture to new languages and medium such as collage, ready-mades, installations and performances from 1960s to 90s was significant and it opened up new rooms in the art sphere for women artists. The art scene started to liberate itself from the official modernist program and found its own orientations only after the 1970s. The 70-80s could be considered as a turning point in the history of the Turkish visual arts as new subject matters, forms and concepts are integrated within the artistic representation through the transformation of visual language manifesting itself against the dogmatic formations of modernism. The role of the material itself, the identity of the artist – his/her self-representation- and the reception of the work as well as the position of viewer have started to be considered as part of the art making process. However, the 1970s also witnessed the political and economic uncertainties, and the artists were still in need of the State’s financial support which meant to be dependent on the authority of the Academy and State Museum considering the only reliable collector was still the State Museum, and also the only constant source of income was to be an academician despite the newly flourishing art galleries and the emergence of some private collections. There was a wind of change; but, it was not enough to liberate artists completely from the state’s authority. Anyway, after the 1980s the state’s power left its place to that of the liberal economy and the “free-market” in the art scene.

⁹⁴Interview of Ayşe Erkmen with Ömür Kula in “The Rupture in Visual Language: The Transition of Arts in Turkey 1970-80 and the Women Artists of the Period” (Sabancı University, 2006) unpublished master thesis, p.186-207.

In the 1970s, the traditionally staked out limits of what the art was and who the artists were started to be questioned. However, although some women artists became more visible, the feminist bearings taking all Europe at that time were absent in the Turkish art scene, the questioning of art, art forms, and artists have not won a gender critical perspective although the women artists were aware of the gender inequalities they were exposed to, as Canan Beykal's, Ayşe Erkmen's and Füsun Onur's words below are reflective of:

Füsun Onur: "Evet çok sergiye katıldım ama zorluklar da vardı. Her zaman sergi alanı bulmak kolay değil. Formlar dolduruluyor, izin alınmıyor. Bir keresinde ben izin için başvurduğum, galeriden haber gelmiyor. Sonradan öğrendik ki benim işlerimi sergilemekten çekince duymuşlar, kimse almaz diyerek. Öyle şeyler oluyordu tabii. Bir keresinde de bir galeri sahibinin kadın sanatçılardan hoşlanmadığını duymuştum. Kimbilir."⁹⁵

Ayşe Erkmen: "Genel tavır görmezden gelmekti tabii, görünmezlikle uğraştık. Bu hala sorun, bugün bile. Ama bu kuvvetli görmezden gelme ve görünmezliğe rağmen, biz işler çıkarmaya devam ettik. Bunun için inatçı olmak lazım."⁹⁶

Canan Beykal: Sanat icra etme sürecini karmaşıklaştıran ana etkenlerden birinin, sanatın kadınlar için doğalarına zarafet katıp onları daha duygusal insanlar haline getirecek bir hobi, erkekler içinse bir meslek olarak anılması olduğunu düşünürüm. Bu tabii ki bir ayrımcılıktı. Zekanızın, kültürünüzün ve yaratıcı potansiyelinizin hakkaniyetli bir şekilde değerlendirilemeyeceği anlamına geliyordu. Doğruyu söylemek gerekirse, normlar ve otorite açısından eleştirdiğim herşeyle olan mücadele ve kavgam, büyük bir başarı değildi. Kırmaya çalıştığım otoritenin her parçası, başka bir otoritenin başlangıcıydı. (...) Her yönüyle kadın olmak ikilemini yaşıyordusam da, çalışmalarım da kadın olmak konusunu açıkça işlediğimi söyleyebilmem mümkün değil.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Despite their awareness about gender ideologies in the art scene, as we can discover in the quotes above, we can not refer to any groups, networks or alliances of Turkish women artists with feminist concerns on the base of a gender problematic, in contrast with the feminist waves in the western art scene. The same remark prevails even for the artists who problematize gender in their works. Platt, on women artists in the contemporary art scene in Istanbul, describes her experience with similar observations as follows:

Most of the women artists I met pursue scholarly research (some of them have doctorates), teaching, writing, curating, as well as making art. I found no groups, networks, or cooperatives, with the exception of two short-lived alliances of young artists. Alliances of women artists, so common in the United States, are absent in Turkey.⁹⁸

The dismissal of manifesting feminism could be related to reservations of women artists about being restrained in the reductive and essentialist “woman’s art” category. They were reluctant to be labeled as “woman artists”, because it would bring the omission of their other artistic agendas and motivations. Rosalyn Drexler’s quote would be relevant in that context: “I don’t object to being called a woman artist as long as the word woman isn’t used to define the kind of art I create”.⁹⁹ However making art is embedded in a social context, and the gender of the artist has an effect on the consideration of her art, no matter if she denies it. It doesn’t always mean that gender has a reflection on the art they create as claimed by the essentialists, but it has an effect on the position of the artist him/herself. The same concern about being trapped in the “woman artist” position when manifesting a feminist stand could also be revealed in the words of Füsün Onur extracted from a previous quote in this chapter: “Kırmaya çalıştığım otoritenin her

⁹⁸Susan Noyes Platt, “Public Politics and Domestic Rituals: Contemporary Art by Women in Turkey, 1980-2000” in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 24(1):(19-37) 2003.

⁹⁹ *Art and Sexual Politics: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* ed. Thomas Hess and Elizabeth C.Baker (New York: Collier, 1973)

parçası, başka bir otoritenin başlangıcıydı.” Hence the absence of feminist engagements in the Turkish art could be treated in this framework. The tension between a feminist perspective and being stuck in the “woman artist” position could be traced also in the quote below from Canan Beykal and Füsün Onur:

Canan Beykal: Bireysel ikilemlerin çözümü yalnızca kişisel seçim ve çabalara bağlı değil. Ulusların kendi inançlarına karar verme özgürlüğüne gerçekten inanırdık ama aynı özgürlüğe kendimiz için sahip çıkmakta başarısızdık çünkü koruma ve korunma yollarında çok güçlü olan maskülen, ataerkil bağlılığa karşı daha az güçlüydük. Bunlar tabii ki benim şahsi görüşlerim; belki diğer kadın sanatçılar aynı görüşleri paylaşmıyordur, belki ben bir kadın olmanın zorluklarıyla mücadele etmekte yeterince akıllı değilim, belki de diğerleri kadın olmanın yükünü hissetmediler bile. (...) Her yönüyle kadın olmak ikilemini yaşıyordusam da, çalışmalarımda kadın olmak konusunu açıkça islediğimi söyleyebilmem mümkün değil.¹⁰⁰

FO: Ben aklın ve duygunun birlikte bir harmoni içinde olması gerektiğini düşünüyorum, sonuna kadar. Direkt olmayı sevmiyorum, böyle direct mesajları sevmem. Slogan sevmem. Ben sert biri değilimdir, saldırgan değilimdir. Ne kadarı kadın olmakla alakalı bilmiyorum. Ama bazılarına göre daha romantik olan işlerim var evet. Ama özellikle erken işlerimde hiç kadınlıktan eser yok bence. (...) Kadın olduğumun farkında olarak yapmadım ki onları ben.¹⁰¹

Even denied by some women artists, gender does have some consequences on the position of women artists; we should notice that the ruse of ideology is to veil the power relations obtained in society as they natural or given order,¹⁰² and to act as if it doesn't exist will bring its perpetuation. As defined by Teresa de Lauretis, a feminist position should be in and out of ideology, which means it should be aware of its complicity with ideology while using the term “woman,” equally it also should fight

¹⁰⁰ interview

¹⁰¹ interview

¹⁰² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994)

against reproducing the same discourse about “woman” constructed by a male centered system. Artists as Rosalyn Drexler, try to break away from the gender discrimination with the strategy of denying it, she tries to be involved in the male universe of art by trivializing her gender considering to be called as “woman” in the art world is not rewarding. However, to abstain herself from the term of “woman artist” doesn’t put an end to the consequences of this position she is assigned for by the masculinist discourse even when she refuses it.

The distinction of Moira Roth between “feminist artists” and “feminist art” is relevant regarding the concerns of some women artists who do not problematize gender discrimination in their works; however who consider themselves as feminists. Roth defines feminist artist as “a woman who believes in and practices feminism outside her studio and thus comes to her work with a developed feminist sensibility; however, that does not mean inevitably that her work should be called ‘feminist’¹⁰³. This kind of distinction opens up some space for various production of artists who are feminists however who do have different motivations in their art making. The tension between being a feminist artist and having other ambitions in art than working on gender issues would be relieved; it would give women artists the possibility to engage in feminism to fight gender bias in the art world, while pursuing in their art different kind of quests and expressions.

¹⁰³ Moira Roth, “Visions and Re-visions: Rosa Luxemburg and the Artist’s Mother” in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology* ed. Cassandra L. Langer, Joanna Frueh (New York: Icon Editions, 1991)

CHAPTER 3

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS IN PRIVATE MUSEUMS

3.1. The Opening of Istanbul Modern

The opening of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (Istanbul Modern) in 2005 was the result of a process of neo-liberalization manifested by the withdrawal of the State from the field of culture, and the emergence of the private sector and its private institutions as the main actor. The turbulent 80s began to challenge the monopoly of the State in the visual arts and it has begun to be broken. The male-defined official art historical narrative was losing its former authority. Istanbul Modern, as a private art museum, has now claimed to bring new conceptions in art collecting, new museological approaches interactive with the public and new curatorial approaches to the Turkish modern art history. Most importantly the IM (Istanbul Modern) collection has appeared as the new authority in the local art field. Its position is important not only in terms of prestige and the reference for the Turkish Modern and Contemporary art history, but also in terms of the market value of artists' production. We are face to face with a growing art market in Turkey as the recent speculations in the art auctions shows us. Istanbul Modern could be considered as one of the determinant actors in this market.

The Istanbul Modern has a privileged position amongst the private museums due to the constant acquisitions for its collection. As delineated in Chapter II, the State Museum Collection had a big impact on the art sphere with the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts (Academy of Fine Arts) for a long time. However its authority has been lost from 80s on. Istanbul Modern has replaced this position in a

different manner considering the scene has been deeply changed. There are new actors called private collectors who have been missing in a State led art environment of old times. Today, in the midst of the racket of a newly rising art market where the galleries, dealers and auction houses speculate endlessly, Istanbul Modern seems to be the only reliable instance. IM is a non-profit institution constantly building up its collection with new acquisitions without having an agenda of resale which leaves out the speculative dimension. To enter in the IM collection means for artists more visibility with an average of 9000 visitors a week, a confirmation of their artistic success, guaranty to remain in the history as part of the collection and to become a safer investment for the private collectors, this means to have a more or less stable position in the art market.

This new private museum has presented exhibitions exploring contemporary art and most particularly the current art scene, besides the more traditional modern art which the State museums adopted. The increasing weight of contemporary art in Istanbul Modern is significant from different perspectives. The contemporary art works using new media such as video, and performance art have also entered in the private museum collections which in turn increased the visibility of women artists. Considering such new media in arts and new languages in the artistic expression have uncrowned the prior reign of the male-centered canvas art. In addition, the omission of some female artists from the chronological flow, working on canvas or not, such as Semiha Berksoy, Mihri Hanım, Nil Yalter etc. has been more or less restored. In this chapter, I will trace the transformation of women artists' representation with the impact of private museums through the case of Istanbul Modern. I will focus on Istanbul Modern through its constantly growing collection with new acquisitions of modern and contemporary art works, and with the

female artists the museum invited from the mist of the past. In this regard, I chose its most comprehensive exhibition about Turkish modern and contemporary art entitled “New Works New Horizons”. But first, I will take a brief look at the process which prepared the opening of Istanbul Modern.

The museum conception in Turkey was based on the protection and promotion of the historical and cultural heritage by the State. Moreover, this mission was evolving around the idea of this institution as an “indicator of westernization”.¹⁰⁴ This kind of conception about museums has brought the State’s patriarchal domination on the field and its museums, as delineated in Chapter II. The museum visiting experience in Turkey was considered as a national duty to be accomplished for once and for all, to commemorate the ‘last dwelling of Atatürk’ or ‘the glorious Ottoman history’ generally through school trips to Palace of Dolmabahçe and Topkapi. Meanwhile, in other cultural landscapes, the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture (ISMPS), the only visual art museum of Istanbul, has been closed most of its lifetime due to the lack of interest and investment by the State. It is still closed due to restorations in the building and it appears that this situation will continue since the declared re-opening date of 2010 has not been achieved. We can state that the ISMPS was the premiere authority figure for the art community until the 80s. However, this institution in joint partnership with the renowned Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts has also been mostly isolated from the public gaze despite its domination on professional art production for a long time.

Despite the permanent judicial deficiencies, the law allowing the foundation of private museums was enacted in 1973 and it paved the way for the later foundation of private museums. The privatization of the culture has been more

¹⁰⁴ Hale Özkasım ve Semra Ögel, “Türkiye’de Müzeciliğin Gelişimi” (Istanbul: İTÜ dergisi/b) Vol.2,n.1, pp.96-102.

fervent in the 80s with the changing role of the State in neo-liberal policies, such as the first Istanbul Biennial in 1987 organized by the Istanbul Culture and Art Foundation (IKSV) founded in 1973 by the Eczacıbasi Family, one of the leading high bourgeois families of Turkey who also founded Istanbul Modern. The delegation of the cultural sphere to the private sector has also been encouraged by some tax legislations, the exemption of income tax as 33% for the cultural investments has been well received by the wealthy families investing in culture. However, the incentive role of the State through such encouragements and through other kind of cooperations of private museums with municipalities and governmental authorities has been perpetuated in a more invisible and subtler manner; for example the building of Istanbul Modern was actually enabled by renting from the Istanbul Municipality in return for a small amount.

Such families had attained prestigious positions in the art sphere with their financial support by founding art and culture institutions, but also they supported artists by purchasing art works for their private collections. Their acquisitions mattered even more when those families opened art museums since the artists in their private collections gained visibility and were thus guaranteed to stay “in the history” through those private collections and art institutions. In the case of Istanbul Modern, the selection of the Eczacıbasi Family and their art advisors, as well as that of the museum curator, has become the yardstick in the decision of which art works are worthy of exhibition and/or acquisition for the collection. In a way, these wealthy families created new power politics in an art field that had been deprived of a necessary dialectical progression, but which could be considered primarily as a result of the ‘westernization’ process to catch up with ‘modernity’:

In an environment in which art is born, supported, and bought by or through state-controlled institutions, artists who are critical of the system, of being

and existence, or of Western rationalist intellectualism are unlikely to flourish and it would be a mistake to expect it to be otherwise. Where a state that is undergoing modernization and an artist who wants to be modern come together with a common attitude and goal, what likelihood is there of any avant-gardism that transcends the established order and its conventions?¹⁰⁵

Contemporary art thus gained importance in this process considering it reflects the valuable ‘present time’; in contrast to modern art exhibited in the traditional state museum referring to the past. Contemporary art was not enmeshed in the earlier dilemmas of westernization and the hierarchical values of modern painting set between the East and the West. Contemporary art has its own issues that the movement strives to address, such as identity troubles, confrontation with the Republican rupture and the imposed identities. It does not intend to position the artists in the international networks through their national identities but with their artistic production. Considering the fact that contemporary art does not refer to the past with a national affiliation, but deals with the present and thinks about the future, it had an impact on Istanbul Modern’s ability to join international networks in such a short period. For instance, it is too costly to make a post-war painting collection composed of masterpieces such as Jackson Pollock or Warhol; even if you have a very big budget they are all in museums or in great large collections. Also the promotion of contemporary art is more or less independent from a rooted art tradition as was necessary in the case of modern art. For example to promote a modern Turkish painting collection internationally would be a vain effort. However the enormously growing international contemporary art market is interested to discover new artists from all over the world. As emphasized by Oya Eczacıbası (the chair of board) in the first exhibition catalogue of the museum, Istanbul Modern’s objective is

¹⁰⁵ Levent Çalıkoğlu, “Modernization and Modernism in Ottoman and Republican Turkey” in *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Publications, 2009) p.23

to be in the same league with the prestigious modern museums such as MoMA or Tate Modern. But it will not try to do it through the global masterpieces of modern times –it has neither the budget nor the possibility-, it can only do it through the contemporary art works. The institutional vision of the museum is declared as “to be a reference point in the global art world as a modern and contemporary art museum.”¹⁰⁶ As the emphasis is clear the old school State Museums are not considered as counterparts. Instead the goal is to be compared with the globally known art institutions:

Istanbul Modern is finally giving our country the opportunity to acquire the modern art museum of international standards that it has yearned for. A dream encompassing the artistic and cultural values of East and West, a dream of preparing a future adorned with the most original works of cultural fusion and worthy of Istanbul’s past is finally being realized.(...) In launching Istanbul Modern, we aim to put forth, protect and benefit from our country’s accumulation of modern and contemporary art. With this intention in mind, our goal is to develop this museum into an institution which determines the artistic agenda, educates, introduces love of art, and reaches large segments of the public through its dynamic and multi-faced environment. (...) ¹⁰⁷

Also the contemporary art’s dynamic character has contributed to transforming the traditional museum visiting experience to a regular practice. Different from the ‘once and for all’ visits to State museums, the constantly updated permanent collection exhibitions and the temporary exhibitions hosting national and international art works has transformed Istanbul Modern into a center of attraction. This new position has increased its dominance in the art sphere considering the possibility such a centrality gives to the artists to reach bigger crowds. But Istanbul Modern which is

¹⁰⁶ Modern ve çağdaş bir sanat müzesi olarak global sanat dünyasında bir referans noktası olmak.

¹⁰⁷ Oya Eczacıbaşı, “Realizing a Dream” in *Observation, Interpretation, Multiplicity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2004) p.8-11

expected to represent today's Turkish art had to first take a fresh look into the traditional art historical narrative as mentioned by Levent Çalıkođlu, one of the curators of the first exhibition -the title of his essay is significant in this regard, "A New Turning Point for a New Beginning":

In this way, Istanbul Modern hopes to reveal the currents that have been flowing now for about a century and a half, to allow possible affinities among works whose production dates and emotional associations are quite disparate, and to create new areas of attention. Ultimately of course it hopes to present a new model and methodology that can be employed in writing the history of modern Turkish art, a subject which hitherto has not been given its rightful due.¹⁰⁸

The influence of this process on gender ideologies, triggered by private institutions in the historical narrative of the Turkish visual arts will constitute my line of thought to explore the representation of women artists and their works in the "New Works New Horizons" exhibition, the most comprehensive exhibition of the Istanbul Modern about Turkish Art. It will help to discover the transformations in perspective of gender ideologies, through the changes in the traditional historical narrative by insertion of new works and by new exhibition settings as well as by the new artistic attitudes of those artists.

3.2. "New Works New Horizons" Exhibition

Istanbul Modern is the only museum in Turkey with means, resources and vision to maintain a comprehensive permanent collection of modern and contemporary art. The "New Works New Horizons" exhibition, as the title implies,

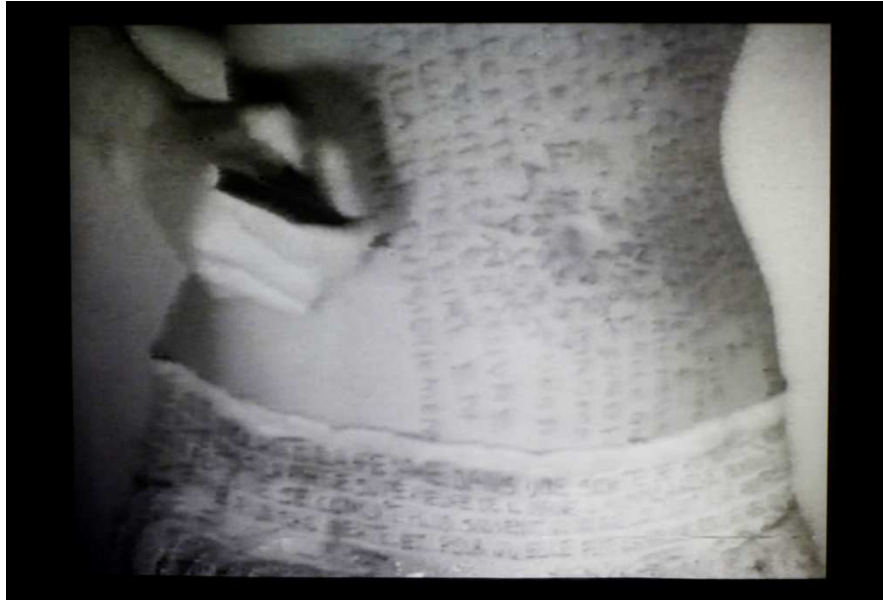
¹⁰⁸ Levent Çalıkođlu, "Istanbul Modern: A New Turning Point for A New Beginning" in *Observation, Interpretation, Multiplicity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2004) p.32-38

claims to present a fresh look at the evolution of the modern and contemporary art produced in Turkey, by showing off the museum's revamped and expanded collection. It is introduced as representing the adventure of modern and contemporary Turkish art through the seminal examples of its collection that broke new ground in the contemporary arts, as mentioned by the chairman of the board: "Our museum not only contributes towards a common cultural wisdom to be passed on to future generations but also provides a venue where different approaches and disciplines may come together."¹⁰⁹ The show includes 45 works from 32 Turkish women artists, and in this chapter I will focus on some works with a feminist approach to reveal the gender ideologies represented. The exhibition was displaced chronologically since the first paintings of The Primitives till today. But I will take account of the works of artists especially representing gender issues somehow, and leave out others considering this thesis won't be enough to cover all the works in the exhibition. The contemporary art works are the most distinctive part of the Istanbul Modern collection from State museums, accordingly they constitute the biggest difference from the historical narrative of State museums and they will be treated in privilege in this chapter. Considering the limits of this research I will limit myself with the works which I think will be most relevant and interesting in this context. These works newly embedded in the historical narrative of Turkish art history expand the possibilities for Turkish art and artists. As they gain visibility, new ways of representations for the works by women, as well as for women artists themselves is more and more possible. They transform the horizon of representations and open new discussions which have been silenced for a long time.

¹⁰⁹ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.5

3.2.1. The Selected Works

Nil Yalter (1938), “The Headless Woman or the Belly Dance” (1974, Single channel video on DVD, 24’):¹¹⁰



Nil Yalter (1938) groundbreaking work “The Headless Woman or the Belly Dance” despite its early date (1974) is considered as a contemporary art work with its language and choice of medium. This first video work made by a Turkish artist is considered as a milestone in French video art history as well since Yalter made this video while living in Paris, she lives in France since 1965. This work produced in 1974 was missing throughout the official art historical narrative with the artist herself. Despite her international success Nil Yalter was not a familiar name for the Turkish art historical canon until her work was acquired by and exhibited in Istanbul Modern as a pioneering artist.

The piece frames the artist’s bare belly while she writes around her navel as a widening spiral a passage from the book of René Nelli entitled “Erotique et

¹¹⁰ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.132-133

Civilizations”¹¹¹: “The woman is convex and concave at the same time. But what she needs is to not be deprived mentally or physically from the central part of her convexity: the clitoris (...). This aversion about clitoris corresponds to man’s ancestral horror from this virile and natural part of woman, this part which is capable of absolute orgasm”¹¹². She also reads it out loud in French with a belly dancing music in the background. Once it covers her whole belly she starts belly-dancing. What the viewer can see is only the cropped body part of the dancer: her belly; not her head or her face but only her belly dancing with the music, covered with writings which cannot be read clearly.

The quote adopted by Yalter highlights the essential difference of woman from men as physical. She makes the description of “the female body” as convex and concave at the same time. Her concavity is based on her vagina, and her convexity which is especially stressed in this cited quote is her clitoris. This description defines the womanhood as a physical condition which has been subject to man’s repression. The repression of this physicality gives rise to a mental repression of woman, and this double deprivation confiscates the power she naturally has in her disposition. With an almost Freudian approach she refers as the source of this repression to the horror of man from the potential that the clitoris possesses. This potential allows woman to reach an absolute orgasm and hence recognize her power. The clitoris could be treated here as a symbol of woman’s power. The paralysis of woman because of man’s physical and mental repression keeps her away from recognizing her convexity, hence her power. This unconsciousness gives the control to man and

¹¹¹ René Nelli, *Erotique et Civilisations*, (Paris: Weber, 1972)

¹¹² “*La femme est à la fois «convexe» et «concave». Mais encore faut-il qu’on ne l’ait point privé mentalement ou physiquement, du centre principal de sa convexité : le clitoris [...]. Cette haine du clitoris correspond en vérité à l’horreur ancestrale que l’homme a toujours éprouvé pour la composante virile et naturelle de la femme, celle qui, chez elle, conditionne l’orgasme absolu.*”

creates the illusion that she is not capable to stand on her own. The woman needs to know her convexity and the potential it offers if she ever needs to be liberated.

This conception based on a pregendered biological state reproduces the essential binary distinction of sex upon which the unequal gender system operates. In the scope of this quote, woman's concavity is considered as a threat neither by man nor by woman. The concavity –vagina- which constitutes the essential difference of woman from man is over passed. Regarding this quote, what she needs is not to embrace her essential difference from man which is her concavity, in other words her vagina. But it is especially to remark her convexity which gives her the possibility to compete with man's phallus, the assumed origin of power. The weight for woman's emancipation is reflected on her convexity which reflects her similarity with man. Here, the implied source of power is still the phallus. Yes woman is concave, yet "as a relief" she is convex at the same time and that's why man is horrified because it assigns her as a potential rival. This conception sets the biological difference of woman from man and then tries to compensate it with a similarity. She needs to work on her convexity because this is what will bring her the power and subjectivity in a masculinist system of thought. Within the Lacanian framework; this conception is the idea that the very condition of the arising subject is the identification with the phallus. The phallus is considered as "the transcendental signifier which protects the production of meaning at the same time it designates Woman as the imaginary, as the unreachable".¹¹³ To identify the convexity with the power will save woman from the invisibility of non-representation. In this sense, it is possible to discover in the omission of concavity some kind of abjection with reference to Julia Kristeva, woman can achieve the status of the subject only through the abjection of the phallic

¹¹³ Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* (Marryland: Rawman and Little field Publishers, Inc., 1999) p.68 (originally published New York: Routledge, 1991)

mother/concavity and the primordial identification imaginary father/phallus/convexity. She accepts the phallic order otherwise she remains as a nonreal.¹¹⁴ In the quote adopted by Yalter, women are invited to be part of the phallic order to be able to have their voice, to be a subject and to acquire a power position. The word choice of “convexity” to define clitoris is reflective of the metaphorical alliance between phallus and clitoris.

As discussed in the first chapter, we know from Lauretis and Butler that every configuration of woman defined as the representation of womanhood speaks from a power position. To repeat Butler’s seminal quote: “the language and politics of which represents women as ‘the subject’ of feminism is itself a discursive formation of given representational politics.” This work of Yalter constructs the subject of feminism as one who has a clitoris and a vagina. In this line of thought, for example one who has a male genitalia but who names herself as a woman in terms of gender is not considered as a woman. Or women who have been victim of female circumcision are excluded from that definition. The binary sex system is dominated by a masculinist and heterosexual view. It operates in a phallus centered system. However feminism should keep the gender categories in constant contestation to avoid a stable subject excluding some out of representation.

This critical reading of Yalter’s work does not aim to show how “the real feminist art” should be. On the contrary, this kind of critical reading is possible thanks to the bold artistic attitudes of those women. In the art climate of the 1970s Yalter was a pioneering artist. She is from the first generation of feminist art which transformed the art scene for good. The female nudes of canvas art painted for the

¹¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

male gaze have lost their prestigious position and they were questioned. In an art world where everyone has his own niche she started a new discussion. As a third world woman in France, it is significant that she chose the belly dancing for her work. The belly dancing which has erotic connotations has a different role here, it became the screen itself, it is actually used as a background. Yalter uses her own body actively to give a message and sabotages the usual scene unexpectedly. She disrupts the clichés about the oriental fantasies, and she uses them for her own purpose.

Semiha Berksoy (1910-2004), “Untitled” (1991, oil on canvas, 116x89cm) and “Phoenix: Self Portrait” (1997, oil on fiberboard, 130x80cm):¹¹⁵



Semiha Berksoy who was the first opera singer to gain international recognition was also a painter, and she turned more in the painting in her later years.

She was painting even when she was a little girl, considering her mother Saime Hanım was also a painter it was almost natural for her. She continued to Nazmi Ziya’s studio besides her musical education. She was a famous figure in the early Republic as an opera singer to represent the modern and westernized face of the Republic. But when the political climate changed in the 50s, she was excluded from her State Opera Singer position; it was not possible to fire her but instead, she was left behind to be forgotten,¹¹⁶ and sorted out from the historical narrative until the 1997 Istanbul Biennial. In the 1997 Istanbul Biennial, an 8 hour video work by Kutlug Ataman -Semiha B. Unplugged- where Semiha recounts some of the most dramatic episodes of her life, including her family history, operatic career and her paintings returned her popularity and her fame. She was rediscovered thanks to the Istanbul Biennial at her age of 85. Her paintings were also exhibited at the Venice Biennial in 2005 as very personal, unique pieces of art, which are outside of the main art movements and groups. She was an unusual woman figure for Turkey, as she refused to fit the stereotypical role set “woman”. In times when a painter needed the approval of the Academy to have such a title; she adopted an artistic position which doesn’t say “This is what painting is, look and learn” as the academic and republican approach uttered; instead, she said “This is me, and this is how I paint”.¹¹⁷

The paintings exhibited in “New Works New Horizons”, as in most of her paintings, have Semiha herself as the central figure. In the first painting chosen for the exhibition in question, she painted herself in the center of a vagina which is in the meantime her grave. In the second work entitled “Phoenix”, she identifies herself with the mythological Phoenix resurrected from her ashes. In the tradition of painting, the woman figures are generally painted through the male gaze. Despite the

¹¹⁷Semiha Berksoy, *I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2010)

fact that women are depicted much more than men they mostly seem to be there for the male gaze, and/or as objects of desire. They are metaphors representing something else, or bit players in stories told by men. However Semiha chose to tell her own story in her own terms, in all her paintings with no exception. She painted her fears, her love life, and fantasies which were not considered appropriate for a woman. Semiha Berksoy creates in her paintings her own mythology through her life experience. Berksoy's starting point in her paintings is always herself. She is always the central figure even when she paints a lover from the past or her beloved mother who died when she was 7 years old at the age of 26. Semiha Berksoy's art is inextricably connected with her own life and grows with it. The viewer can discover her inner world, her love life, her confrontation with Republican ideals and her disappointments. She never tries to represent anyone except herself, that's why she never calls herself a feminist; she never claims to represent women as a group. But she values her own unique experience as an artist as well as a woman, and ignores the modesty expected from women. She rejects the power position of representation and claims to represent only herself. In terms of Laetitia and Butler's representation theory, she doesn't offer a definition of "woman" or "womanhood" through her art. But through the representation of her own experience she expands the horizon of representations. She demonstrates the possibility of such a presence as an artist as well as a woman. She doesn't fight in the name of women but for her own art in a masculinist art world. However her attitude enables other unique configurations for women artists. By claiming to represent her own experience in terms of Semiha, not in terms of woman, she makes possible other artistic positions for women who can be valued for their art not in the rubric of "woman art" but as successful artists while at the same time refreshing the horizon of representations for women without clear cut

definitions. A male artist is never considered to represent men, however this correlation is considered almost natural for women artists. Does an artist have to deal with feminist issues if she is a woman? Or does she have to represent women artists or female art? Does she ever need to deal with feminist issues if she wants to change women's position in art? Semiha Berksoy's case is an answer to those questions as reflective of the possibility that artists who do not deal with feminist issues or who do not define themselves as such, are also contributing to keeping the woman category in contestation. She constantly breaks the categorization of her art with reference to a gender group. At the same time, she increases the possibilities of presence in a masculinist society through the representation of her own personal experience. Quoting from her "the whole world is in my room" reflects the degree of individuality she believes in "a room of her own".

Nur Koçak (1941), "Black Rose and a Kiss" (1989-1990, acrylic and oil on canvas, 97x146cm): ¹¹⁸



¹¹⁸ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.136-137

Nur Koçak after two years of high school in Washington returns to Turkey and starts her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts (Mimar Sinan Univ.) She gives a break to her graduate studies for four years when she worked in Switzerland as a technical painter. Then she returns and graduates in 1968 from the Academy. At the Academy of Fine Arts, she continues in Adnan Çoker and Neşet Günel studios. The following quote from Koçak about her professor Neşet Günel is significant to reflect the attitude at the Academy towards women artists at that time: “Neşet Günel beni kendi öğrencisi gibi hiç benimseyememişti. Zaten kız öğrencileri hiç ciddiye almamak gibi bir huyu vardı. Şasi, tuval, boya almak için harcadığımız paralara ailemiz adına üzülürdü.”¹¹⁹ The discrimination that she was subject to at the Academy was one of the motivation directing her art to focus on woman as the primary subject.

In 1970, she wins a scholarship and stays four years in France. She takes the subjects of her paintings from the modern everyday city life referring in terms of content to Pop Art, and pays attention to the commodification of women’s bodies in the consumerist culture. “She invests her canvases with reprovig arrangements of images selected from advertising posters and fashion photographs.”¹²⁰ “Black Rose and a Kiss” at first sight resembles an advertisement for sexy underwear with its stocking-clad women’s legs but then we realize it is not possible to tell if they are “real-life” limbs or mannequin parts. She uses a graphical language to create indeterminacy between the real women’s bodies and widespread practice of anonymizing those bodies for advertising purposes. She paints the women bodies not as desire objects for the male gaze, but as some surfaces without depth. She transforms the traditional subject of female bodies in the modern painting tradition

¹¹⁹ Nur Koçak ile görüşme, *Yeni Boyut Plastik Sanatlar Dergisi* (1983 Ocak) , s.2-9

¹²⁰ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.137

with a critical stance. She invites specially the female viewer to adopt a critical gaze. This painting is from her series entitled “Fetish Objects / Objectified Women”: “Çok basite indirgemek gerekirse bu resimlerde kadının kullanım nesnelere ile kadının nesne olarak kullanımı üzerinde duruyorum.”¹²¹ She shows the interchangeability of woman in the consumerist culture with the objects she uses. The representation of woman as an object to consume, which can be cropped or transformed for the sake of the advertisement is criticized in her paintings which seem at first sight to reproduce identically the exact image of the advertisements on the canvas surface. Her photo-realist (hyper-realist) technique creates the illusion that she repeats those images on the canvas. However despite the overrepresentation of female bodies in the press as well as in the advertisements reshaped for the male gaze, the absence of real women in them is displayed when they are transferred on canvas through Koçak.

She paints in another of her painting series “Our Happy Photographs” (1970s) where she renders visible the invisibility of real women. She makes those paintings from photographs published in a column with the same title in the *Kelebek* of *Hurriyet* Newspaper. Those photographs are sent to the newspaper by the readers. Despite the overrepresentation of female body everywhere, there are no women in any of those pictures. The *Kelebek* targeting a female audience does not have any woman pictures when it comes to the real life. When painted on canvas, these pictures show the exclusion of women from the social life and the male roots of the idea of society.

The transfer of those images on the canvas could never be the identical reproduction. The size of the images are changed and they are reflected on canvas through Koçak’s gaze, to refer Chuck Close who is a very famous painter using that

¹²¹ Nur Koçak, “Kendini Yazmak” in *Sanat Çevresi Dergisi* (İstanbul: Baha Matbaası, Ekim 1984, no:72) s.4-5

technique: “People think that there could only be one painting from a specific photograph. However there could be as many paintings from one photograph as there could be from a natural landscape.” Also the photographs chosen to reflect on canvas are not casual. They are intentional and subjective choice of Koçak. Her subjectivity involves being a woman in a masculinist society and to be exposed constantly to representations of woman shaped by the male gaze. She takes those representations and gives us back by the filter of her own gaze. When she repeats the current female representations on canvas she pushes the viewer to question those representations and de-familiarizes those images. She stands off from those representations she paints from, and this distance in the reproduction on canvas is critical to question the reliability of them as representations of women. By a very subtle way, she opens to contestation the representation and definition of womanhood in a masculinist society, and puts them in quotation marks as I discussed in the first chapter.

In the 70s she was criticized of not having the necessary creativity to generate something new and of reproducing the everyday images. Her technical virtuosity and the hard work she puts in her paintings was despised as a lack of talent when compared to her male contemporaries preferring mostly the abstract expressionist paintings. To translate, in their eyes she needed to work meticulously because she was not a “real painter.” Unfortunately there are not many bibliographical or critical essays about her art. She describes this situation as follows: “Ama kaynakçama şöyle bir bakıyor ve 3 kişisel serge ve sayısız toplu etkinliğin ardından hakkımda başkalarınca yazılanların yok denecek kadar az olduğunu görüyorum. Sanat tarihçi ve eleştirmenler katıldığım pekçok toplu sergide beni genellikle yok saymışlar çünkü. Kişisel sergilerim üzerine yalnızca iki yazı çıkmış basında; bunlardan biri işi dedikoduya dökmekle yetinmiş, öteki ise bilimsellik savıyla resimlerimin dışında ne

bulduysa çevresinde dolaşmış.” The absence of Koçak’s works in State Museums and a masculinist art scene was determinant in this lack of making archives. However the increasing success of contemporary art and the re-reading of the modern Turkish art history begin to rehabilitate this ignorance although there is still a long way to go.

İpek Aksüğüř Duben (1941), “Şerife 6-7-8” (1982, oil on canvas, 130x245cm):¹²²



İpek Duben graduated from New York Studio School and University of Chicago (MA) and received her Phd from Mimar Sinan University. She generally focuses on the question of demale identity in her works. “Şerife 6-7-8” is one of a series of twelve paintings she made, each depicting a woman’s dress. The triptych in the exhibition depicts three women’s dresses; but looking at the details of the paintings, the viewer realizes that the dresses are not empty, someone is wearing them, but this person is invisible. The dresses have volume and line suggesting the

¹²² *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.139

physical outline of an absent wearer. There are also some details expressing the emotional state of the invisible woman, such as flowers, buttons or changing colors. The woman who is the ultimate subject in the painting remains unseen. Duben's "Şerife" is "both concealed and revealed by the identity that enfolds her."¹²³ Male-oriented myths and fantasies about women are both projected onto women, and also reproduced by women themselves. While gender representation produces its subject, the subject reproduces in return the representation through its performance. She performs her male defined role in a masculinist society and reproduces it. Duben, avoids those male-centered women images in the male-dominated tradition of representing women in art. By representing Şerife invisible she interrupts this circuit.

The costume labels women according to some images which do not always originate from women themselves, women's costumes have also been used for political purposes or as symbols in Turkish History, ignoring the women who are wearing them. She reverses this kind of operation through the use of the dresses but this time without the women who were supposed to wear them.

"The artist avoids the pitfalls of incorporating a stereotyped representation of women by means of omission and elimination. More than empty objects, these dresses are emptied objects ready to be re-invested with new meaning. (...) Powers of resistance necessary to support the sense of group-and-self-identity against the alienating definitions of the world are expressed here."¹²⁴

İpek Duben describes the series as the visual autobiography of her effort to know more closely her model who was the 37 year-old Şerife. The sense of rhythm and the seriality of the paintings is like a journal of her relation with Şerife. Şerife refused Duben's proposition to paint her portrait since she considered it a sin, and was scared of her husband's reaction.¹²⁵ In contrast to the anonymous nude female

¹²³ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.139

¹²⁴ Tom Halman, May 1982, Cumhuriyet Newspaper.

¹²⁵ Yeni Boyut, Plastik Sanatlar Dergisi 2/16, Ekim 1983, Interview with İpek Duben, p.21.

models that appeared in modern paintings through the objectifying male-gaze of the western tradition; Duben by rendering her model invisible emphasizes her presence and delivers her individuality.

Fatma Tülin Öztürk (1950), “Nude” (1990, oil on canvas, 120x160cm)¹²⁶



“Still, from the beginning of my introduction to the art world until the present day, I have never belonged to a certain group or clique. A very significant factor in my productivity has been my choice of living alone and ‘single’. In fact, when I got married in 1990, I would realize that, at least for a certain period of time, I failed to be as productive as before.”¹²⁷

Fatma Tülin graduated from the Boğaziçi University English Philology and continued studying in Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu’s studio. As Semiha Berksoy, she was not coming from the Academy’s tradition and she acquired a characteristic and unique position, as a single-minded artist, remote from patriarchal dominance of the Academic art world. She expresses her urge to paint as follows: “Bir kendimi

¹²⁶ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.147

¹²⁷ *Fatma Tülin* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2010) p.19

anlatma, bir yaşama biçimi bu. Yaşadığının kanıtı gibi bir şey. Ben de varım, böyle söylüyorum, böyle bakıyorum diye. Bir ses duyurma ihtiyacı...”¹²⁸

The nude in the exhibition is not used as an instrument for the sake of eroticism, but forms the content of subjective experience precipitated in Fatma Tülin’s act of painting; in this sense the nude is now the artist herself.¹²⁹ Releasing herself from the outside gaze –in a sense by discovering herself- Fatma Tülin creates an expression with paint as an inevitable extension of her internal existence.¹³⁰

“In a society where the act of looking is to a large extent under the jurisdiction of men – the woman is the one who is looked at-, Öztürk takes back its privilege from the opposite sex. This has nothing to do with narcissism and is about an assertion of one’s rights over their own body. (...) The assumption that the naked body is not an object of exposure or commodity is the basic principle, and in fact its essential precondition.”¹³¹

She also paints almost obsessively fruits, vegetables, and seeds on big canvases. But those figures seem to float in an abstract space. They are isolated from the real world, detached from their stories and their natural environments, or from any reference but themselves. Even when she paints a composition for example with a loaf and an onion, they seem to be not connected at all in an abstract white space freed from gravity. As in the above painting, in some of her works, she comes so close to her subject that the viewer gets the feeling that the figure does not fit in the canvas limits. For the sake of approaching her subject she ignores the limits of the canvas. In her fruit paintings, those close-ups reveal the particularity of the seeds or the fruits and vegetables became lettuce become an abstraction.

¹²⁸ Boyut Dergisi, Nisan 1984, **Fatma Tülin Öztürk ile Söyleşi**, *Sezer Tansuğ*

¹²⁹ Mehmet Ergüven, “Tülin Öztürk Nudes”, *Hürriyet Newspaper*, Gösteri (September 1992)

¹³⁰ Ahu Antmen, “Pursuits in the Body’s Labryinth” *Cumhuriyet Newspaper*, 1998.

¹³¹ Levent Çalıkoğlu, “The Painting of Action, the Discovery of Truth”, *Adam Sanat Magazine*, 2000.

In this painting above, the body gains a massive volume, the details get bigger and deformed such as the knees of this nude. She expresses her approach as follows: “Son resimlerimdeki doku çalışması, insan bedeninin doğal dokusu değil, ama insan dokusundan daha çok insan dokusu. Mesele çağrışım gücündedir. Doğalın tıpkı basımı bir illüzyon yaratır, bu da doğal olanı çağrıştırmaz, aksine gerçeklik duygusunu yok eder. Ayrıntının bütünden daha çok bütün olduğu gibi, soyutlama da somutu daha çok elde etme, somutun ‘sınırlarını’ yıkma, genişletme, soyutu somutlama eylemidir.”¹³² Nur Koçak paints with a hyper-realist technique for the concrete objects and she creates a distance between the viewer and the image of the object on canvas, which is absent in everyday life between those two. However Fatma Tülin tries to eliminate this distance. It is possible to say that Koçak emphasizes this distance with a supposedly identical reproduction while Tülin thinks about the same distance with a subjective magnifying gesture. However both are aware of the distance between the representation and the real subject. The female bodies which are the subject of their paintings, they are both critical of the “male gaze” which idealizes and objectifies them.

¹³² Boyut Dergisi, Nisan 1984, **Fatma Tülin Öztürk ile Söyleşi**, *Sezer Tansuğ*

Gülsün Karamustafa (1946), “Memory of a Square -As Seen From Inside (Perceived from an Inerterio)-” (2005, double screen video project, 16’)



Gülsün Karamustafa graduated from the State Academy of Fine Arts. She uses many different media in her art including painting, installation, and videos. She was arrested and even imprisoned for a brief period in 1971 (yky, p.15). In this work, she explores through a double projection two different narratives which seem to be unrelated at first glance. One screen shows the documentary photos and footages from the Taksim square, the symbol of political activity in Istanbul. The images and footages start from the 30s and continue with the military interventions of 1960, 69, 71 and 80, and the “First of May incidents.” The other screen shows the domestic life of a middle class family whose story over 3 generations was depicted through 11 episodes. Through the use of two screens, the historical context is reflected at two levels: the official narrative of the State through the images of a Public space and through the eyes of women in the private space. By juxtaposing the glimpses of the private and public sphere, she demonstrates the differentiated memory of women from that of the square, and how the main official story differs from the individual narratives. In the domestic setting we see women knitting, cooking, casting lots and

¹³³ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.168-169

taking care of the little boy growing in that house. The memory of those women is not the same with the official history written by men, reflected through the memory of the square. The two screens which seem to be unrelated with each other if watched independently are actually parallel. Men in the first screen come and go into the domestic scene however women remain . The film is a silent movie, as the history of those women, the movie is mute. She recollects the past of Turkey, only this time “as seen from inside”, alongside the Taksim Squares’s memory representing the outside. Karamustafa calls the viewer to question whose history is accepted as the official one, and whose histories are ignored from the main historical narrative. She discusses the place of women in the narrative of Turkish history.

As the following quote from her reflects, she questions the official history from an individual point of view, and invites the viewer to dismiss the identification with it: “My work is constantly focused on memory. It carries the projection of my own experiences of our recent history. (...) My references are personal and local.”¹³⁴

3.2.2. The Exhibition Course

Four large size works welcome visitors in the foyer of the museum. The biggest one at the center is Fahrelnissa Zeid’s abstract painting entitled “My Hell” (205x508cm), the other four works are from Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Burhan Uygur, Erol Akyavaş and Sarkis. But Zeid’s big canvas is considered as the icon representing Istanbul Modern. The exhibition follows up a chronological historical line from the 1900s till 2010. The main artistic movements, the artist groups gathered together with their similar approaches to artistic production, in terms of content or technique, are exhibited in the same rooms aligned chronologically. In the first room

¹³⁴ YKY, söyleşi, p.7

there are works from the Levantines, the first Turkish painters, and Turkish late impressionists -the impressionism took place in Turkey with a 40years of delay from the West-. Mihri Rasim (Müşfik) was the only woman painter in this room, but the women artists who were her contemporaries (referred to in the second chapter) are still missing. The first woman artist generation's works are more difficult to insert in the narrative considering the archives –their paintings- are more difficult to find out. We can state that the crucial moments introducing silences in the history¹³⁵ operate more efficiently for the early years of the Turkish painting history. The making of sources and archives are more difficult to recover and the narratives are more ossified when new works or archives to bring to light are absent.

The second room covers the cubic-constructivist tendencies in the Turkish painting between (1923-30s) where we can find works from Eren Eyüboğlu and Hale Asaf as female artists. The following room represents the 1950-60s, and there are no works from women artists. The room reserved to figurative painting of the 60s gives place to Naile Akıncı as the only woman painter. Şükriye Dikmen and Aliye Berger who were active artists in this period are exhibited not here, but in a separate room for women painters breaking away the chronological flow. In the following 70s room there are works by Neş'e Erdok and Nevhiz Tanyeli followed by the works of Arzu Başaran and Fatma Tülin in the 80s room.

The main difference of this exhibition is actually the room mentioned a few lines above as breaking the chronological flow, this is the room reserved only to women artists. The positioning of this room as side by side by the 80s room is not a coincidence; the 80s are the period witnessing the birth of identity issues in Turkey. The reconsideration of the history with a gender perspective has begun in those

¹³⁵ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

years. The privatization of culture gave rise to the rediscovery of some women artists missing in the official history. The gender issues problematized by the feminist movements of the 80s reckoned the female artists in the history which were not appreciated as they deserved. Until the 2000s, these works could not meet with the viewers on a regular basis considering that the art galleries, and civil art initiatives did not have such spaces for permanent exhibitions. They also did not have collections, or even resources for that would enable acquisition. Istanbul Modern has rendered the works of those forgotten women artists together with those of the contemporary women artists. Hence they are visible to audiences and the Museum gave them a “home, as a place where the paths of viewers and artists intersect, as a shelter in which art may safely take refuge.”¹³⁶

The woman artists’ room does not constitute a ‘new economy of sameness’ which reproduces the male-defined category of ‘woman’ against which feminism has been fighting for. The artists in that room are gathered together not around their common artistic qualities taking their source from their gender. They are exhibited in a separate gallery because they are all different in different ways from the main historical narrative, and they all have an exceptional position which does not fit into the chronological ordering of works in a male history. Their common attribute is their difference from their male contemporaries, but they are different from each other in their difference. Hence to gather them in a room does not bring us to some kind of essentialism based on gender difference, considering that they are all different in different and unique ways. However when the chronological narrative of male-dominated art history is kept intact, those women had to be exhibited in a separate room because they do not fit into this flow.

¹³⁶ *New Works New Horizons* (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Publications, 2009) p.21

Semiha Berksoy (1920-2004) in this gallery, whose work was discussed previously, was drawn out of the history after the 80s. Her artistic production does nothing in common with her contemporaries. She tells her personal story in her paintings, and does not take the Academy or its authority seriously. Aliye Berger (1903-74) made engravings almost as embroidery, with such a virtuosity of needlework on metal plates in a period when her male contemporaries were not giving importance to engravings, and working on big size paintings. Nil Yalter used video in a period when nobody preferred this medium. Mehmet Gülerüz or Komet as prominent male painters of the same period were dealing again with big size canvases and video on that day was not even considered as “real art” considering the technical virtuosity as a painter needed to be showed off through big size canvases. Debbie Duffin¹³⁷ interprets the fact that big size canvases are not used by women as the tendency where women artists do not incline toward occupying space and “feel small”. In a male art universe that might be their only possibility of existence: to occupy small spaces to not threaten anybody. Considering the canvas painting of women was not taken seriously, Nil Yalter sought a new path to express herself. In that regard, today she is considered as a leading figure for Turkish art. Nur Koçak and İpek Duben whose works in the exhibition are explored previously in this chapter, are also exhibited in that separate room. They all differ from their contemporaries in terms of their subjects, medium and/or artistic expression so they needed to be positioned differently within the male centered narrative. They are different from their male contemporaries because they strive to express their individuality in a masculinist art system and each invented her own strategy to critique the system or just to formulate their own style in art.

¹³⁷ Kathy Deepwell, *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995) p.64

CONCLUSION

Since its beginning in the late Ottoman period, the field of modern painting in Turkey was embedded in a masculinist discourse. The interdictions of the figurative painting in Islam impede the possibility of an authentic course in modern painting tradition which should have grown up dialectically through its local dynamics and through the unique characteristics of artists. Hence the feeling of “belatedness” in the modernization process and the possibility of “catching up” through modern painting gave to a state led art scene in order to be modernized as hastily as possible. The patriarchal nature of State power reproduced in the art field the gender hierarchies prevalent in the society. The beginning of modern painting education in the Military School reinforced this masculinist character of the field.

Certainly the reproduced gender hierarchies in the art field dominating women are not special only to Turkish society. As reviewed in this study, the modern painting or the art field in general terms has been patriarchal since its beginning with the Renaissance. The conception of art, artist and artistic creativity as a male domain is deeply rooted in the European tradition of painting. The idea of genius and the limits of what should be considered as art were generated through a male dominated discourse. The gender ideology reproduced through this discourse has begun to be criticized only from the 60s onwards as a result of feminist movements.

The same masculinist conception of art and artist existed in the case in Turkey as well, and the domination of the State intensified the gender discrimination perpetuating in the art sphere since the Renaissance. The Foundation of the State Academy of Fine Arts for Women (1914) after 30 years from that of men’s (1883) legitimized the male domination in the Academy as well. The historical narrative of

modern Turkish art was founded within the State Academy of Fine Arts and the women were excluded from this institution until both Academies were united in 1926. However even then, the gender ideology and discrimination ingrained in the institutions has remained. In other words, it is possible to say women, their works and stories were excluded from the historical narrative of Turkish art.

Until the 80s, the biggest art collector was the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture dependent on the Academy. The bourgeoisie had not started investing in art and the only power instance of the scene was the two before mentioned state institutions. The artists were dependent on state institutions in order to earn their life either by selling their works to the State collection or by being an academician. The necessary critical distance to discuss the gender ideologies was missing in this web where they were all dependent on the State. As discussed in this study, the collection policies of State institutions were totally gender biased which shows that the barriers on the existence of woman artists in art history and on their actual artistic production were deeply rooted in them. To review the institutionalization of the art field in Turkey helped us to see the prejudices and discrimination in the level of institutions as well as in the level of discourse. The scarcity of resources about woman artists and their works is related to those processes. My biggest problem during the research was to find resources such as catalogues, books, essays or academic researches about the Turkish woman artists in the past. Today the references about woman artists are still very limited. Unfortunately this situation is considered by masculinist discourses as an indicator for the arguments such as “the lack of creativity”, “the low-production”, and “the very limited number” of woman artists. There is a need for detailed monographies about female artists to enable further researches. Oral history researches would also be very enlightening to display the masculinist character of the official historical narrative

and to reformulate it by including the individual stories of the excluded actors. The future research outputs would render visible the operation of gender ideology in the art field.

The feminist critique of the art scene introduced in the 60s in Europe didn't have any repercussions in Turkey. But this silence does not imply that the Turkish art scene is exempt from such a need for critical questioning. On the contrary, as the quotes from the artists put forth, the women artists have been very aware of the gender discrimination and the patriarchy and they suffer from it. They all managed in their own way to survive in this atmosphere. But interestingly, they all refrained from defining themselves as feminist. I think the reason of this deliberate distance from the feminist movement could be due to their reluctance about being labeled under the "woman artist" or "woman art" rubric. This kind of confinement will limit their representation and they will be exiled in such a claustrophobic position in a male defined field. But to have a more clearer view of their motivations, it is necessary to interview artists from different generations. I think such a research focusing on the reluctant relation of Turkish female artists with feminism would be very interesting and enlightening. But the scope of my research did not allow me to realize such interviews.

Another interesting point to analyze would be the absence of any feminist groups in the art sphere consisting of feminist critics, artists or initiatives. The artists have avoided any individual as well as feminist group activities despite the fact that they suffered from the problems that feminism sought to fight. Further studies will bring new perspectives in such a neglected field, however there is a limit to what can be accomplished in just one research. Although there could be many complementary analyses, the critical reading of male artists and their works is also missing in this study. A deeper analysis of their representation will help to grasp the dynamics of gender

ideology's operation and give us a bigger picture. This thesis is more likely a picture of the institutionalization process of the art field in Turkey and analysis of its transformation with new actors in perspective of feminist theory. This study is not an attempt to judge the artists or their works as if they are feminist enough or feminist at all. What has been explored in the previous pages is the changing representation of female artists and their works by following up a chronological installation until the current power instances' representation politics about them, and also how they transform in their turn the scene. As the illustrated examples display the new institutions in the field transform the representations of the artists, but also the artists in their turn change the existing representations.

The liberalization process of the 80s has enabled private enterprises in the culture and arts. The new art galleries and foundations and finally private museums eroded the power of State institutions. The opening of Istanbul Modern in 2005 and its collection policy has enabled new readings of history and invited omitted actors in the visual culture of Turkish art. But what should be the question of another research is the degree of autonomy of the private museums. The capital investing in them has tangled interests with the government as well as with the municipalities. These philanthropic investments increase the visibility and prestige hence they are in the benefit of the firms which founded them, but those are not their main activity. They do have investments in other economical sectors. Before declaring the replacement of the State authority by private institutions there is a need to analyze the intricate relations of the State with the private sector investing in art. Also the private museums have to cooperate with government authorities to survive considering it is almost impossible for them to make any financial benefits. They need to find for each exhibition some funds, tax exemptions

or other kind of cooperation with the government. The State authority in the art field could be lighter and subtler but it deserves a deeper analysis.

To sum up, Istanbul Modern involves new representations in a male dominated field by exhibiting new female artists and also by inviting from the past, works of forgotten ones. In this study I discussed in the frame of one collection exhibition how these artists transform their possibilities of existence and the art history retroactively. However Istanbul Modern's historical reading is an interpretation through its own collection, it is just another proposition which is open to discussion and critic. These discussions hopefully will trigger new readings and will keep away a dominant and stable conception. The visual art field in Turkey is very weak in terms of theoretical analysis and it is quite remote from being influence by the social sciences. Art criticism should not adhere only to the main narrative of art history and theory; there is a need in Turkey for a critical stance benefiting from different theoretical perspectives when dealing with institutional practices and individual works or exhibitions. Each study in this field will pave the way for others and give birth to new questions.

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