Pure Hearts - I

A Quiet Aesthetic: A Selection from the Demsa Collection Exploring Everyday Life and Modernity

Pera Palace Hotel
1892

DEMSA
GROUP

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A Quiet Aesthetic Against Modernity and Everyday Life – A Selection from the Demsa Collection

Curator: Erkan Doğanay

February 17 – March 31, 2026

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A Silent Aesthetic Against Modernism in Daily Life: A Selection from the Demsa Collection

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“Messengers of a new and unspoiled world...”

Arthur Rimbaud

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A Quiet Aesthetic Against Modernity in Everyday Life: A Selection from the Demsa Collection

Curator: Erkan Doğanay

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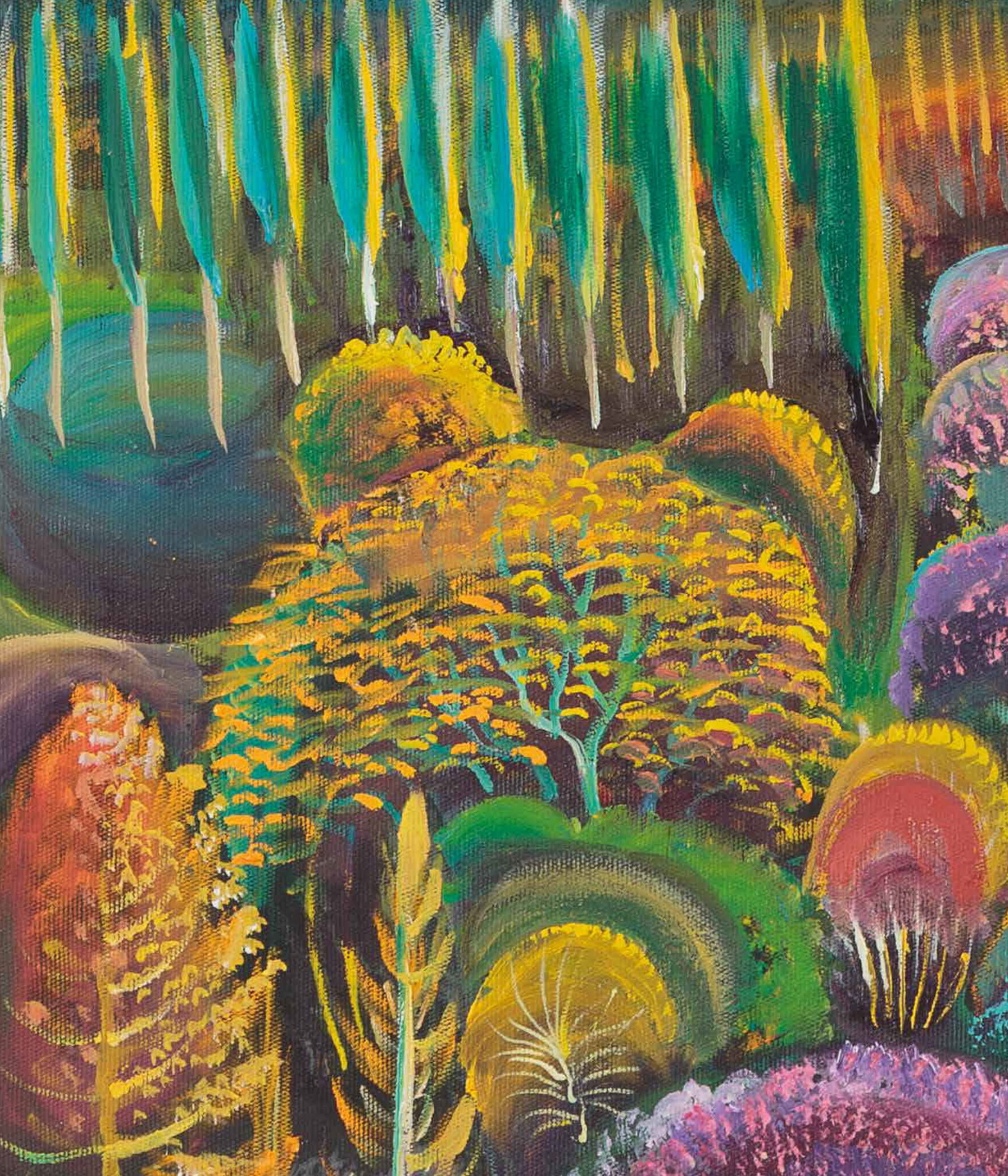


Detail: Hüseyin Yüce

Foreword

“Primitives of the Twentieth Century”*

Demet and Cengiz Çetindoğan

As Demsa Group, home to an impressive collection of significant works from both Turkish and world art, we carry forward our efforts with a deep sense of responsibility and a commitment to supporting Turkish art. The Demsa Collection is dedicated to sharing the story of Turkish art across a broad spectrum—from its earliest, primitive examples to contemporary pieces—offering a panoramic view of its evolution. Chronologically arranged, the collection highlights the journey and transformation of Turkish painting from its origins to the present day.

Through its layered dialogue between different eras and artistic styles, the Demsa Collection stands out as one of Turkey’s leading private art collections. Spanning Islamic arts, traditional forms, and extending all the way to modern and contemporary painting, the collection approaches artistic creation through the lens of historical continuity and cultural memory. Built over many years with care and dedication, the Demsa Art Collection is guided not only by the desire to collect art, but also by a commitment to preserving it, making it accessible, and passing it on to future generations.

This selection from the catalog brings together works by naïve painters featured in the rich Demsa Collection, aiming to share the collection’s inclusive and diverse perspective with viewers.

Often described in art history as “pure,” “instinctive,” or “untutored,” naïve painting actually offers a remarkably conscious, powerful, and resilient form of expression. The works by naïve artists gathered from the Demsa Art Collection demonstrate creativity that exists beyond academic conventions.

but it offers the viewer a way of seeing that feels incredibly close to life itself. Naive painters don't stick to the strict rules of perspective or anatomy—they paint the world they remember, long for, and carry within them. In their art, spaces may overlap, proportions can shift, and figures exist with a childlike simplicity yet deep emotion. This 'intentional innocence' is what sets naive art apart: it's not about what is seen, but about what is felt.

The works featured in the exhibition bring together everyday moments, memories from both rural and urban life, holidays, crowds, solitude, and dreamlike landscapes. While the stories told by naive artists often appear joyful on the surface, beneath that surface lies a memory resistant to time, a lost way of life, or a quiet sense of melancholy. In this sense, naive painting is not just an aesthetic choice—it's a powerful way of being and remembering. The years of experience gathered by the Demsa Art Collection make the unique place of naive art in Turkish art history visible in this exhibition. The naive works in the collection carry forward the voices of artists who remained outside of mainstream narratives but stubbornly preserved their own visual language. This voice greets viewers not with academic knowledge, but with genuine warmth.

The exhibition is divided into two sections: the first is dedicated to "naive artists," while the second features works by artists who, despite having formal training, have adopted "naivety" as a deliberate artistic style and attitude, creating their works in this spirit.

The "Naive Artists" exhibition invites you to do more than just look at paintings—it welcomes you into their world. In this world, there's no such thing as mistakes or excess; there's simply the urge to tell a story. And perhaps that's exactly why naive art remains so powerful and moving today.

* The title of the exhibition that naive artists opened in Paris in 1948.

Detay : Chermine Vidori

Introduction

From Everyday Life to Childlike Innocence

Curator: Erkan Doğanay

"Naïves" quietly but persistently carve out a space in opposition to narratives of progress, technical mastery, and academic expertise at the heart of modern art history. For years, this form of artistic expression was marginalized because it existed outside academic norms. Today, when reassessed, it can be seen not only as embodying a kind of formal "purity," but also as a cultural, social, and aesthetic form of resistance. The "Naïves" extend far beyond the so-called "Sunday painters" group that some sources and art professionals try to define. They are not simply hobbyists—such as homemakers, postal workers, or gardeners—who took up painting in their spare time out of necessity or curiosity. Their creative activity goes well beyond casual time-filling.

The term "Naïves" was first coined in the early 20th century and later recognized as a movement, a formation, and a group within the world of art. Initially connected to painting, this category and its name eventually found resonance in disciplines like literature, film, and music. There is neither a single, universally accepted definition nor a set of established rules for "naïvety," agreed upon by consensus or plural acceptance. Its broad meaning is shaped by content and the perspectives of those belonging to the movement, allowing everyone to describe it in their own way. At various times, particularly in France, naïve artists have been called "beloved masters of the people" or "painters with sacred hearts." The term "naivete" (naïve), which is still used today, was given to the most important French naïve artists

This term was coined by the German-born collector Wilhelm Uhde (1874-1947), who discovered these artists and helped them gain recognition in art circles. Because many of them painted in their spare time—after work or on holidays—they're sometimes referred to as "Sunday painters" in some sources.

Most of these artists began painting without formal academic training, relying instead on instinct and intuition, which is why they're often known as "autodidacts." Naïve painting emerged in France in the late 19th century, with a group of pioneering artists who spent their free time creating art. Collector Wilhelm Uhde was among the first to notice their work. Henri Rousseau, for example, worked as a customs officer and became recognized as a leader of modern art, celebrated for his authenticity, defiance of academic traditions, and unique style. The concept of "naïve" art surfaced soon after Uhde met Rousseau. The French term "naïveté" or "naïve," meaning "pure, simple, natural," is rooted in Latin "nativus," which means "innate, native, natural."

There's no exact date marking the emergence of naïve art—since creative works made since the dawn of art itself could be classified as folk or even naïve. However, there are specific periods when the style and movement have been discussed as distinct concepts. In literature from the 17th to 19th centuries, for example, the term described certain styles of expression and poetic detail, sometimes in a positive light and sometimes not.

used. According to Schiller, "naive poetry" is shaped by observing nature and writing with a sense of authenticity. Nature, art, and the ideal represent three phases, which are embodied in naive, sentimental, and synthetic poetry. The term made its way into the visual arts toward the end of the nineteenth century, as abstract art began to spread across the world, notably with Henri Rousseau. Another movement—supported by poets like Guillaume Apollinaire and emerging in Montmartre before World War I alongside Fauvism and Cubism—set the stage for "naive painting," but it was only after the war that this art style was fully embraced.

Whether formally trained or self-taught, artists who brought this style into their practice did so with a pure, childlike, instinctive freedom to create as they pleased. This approach allowed each artist to showcase their unique vision on canvas. In fact, in some ways, naive art even inspired academically trained artists who were seeking something new. As the exhibition title suggests, the works presented here by these "pure-hearted" creators—who painted for the sake of painting, free from any particular movement or tradition—demonstrate how different inner worlds can surface onto the canvas in truly original ways.

In the second half of the last century, with the rise of modernism, "Naive art" came to be seen simply as something unsophisticated. Those who worked in this style were not considered artists, and their creations were often described as the work of people who "didn't know what they were doing."

This perspective dismissed the imaginative thought behind the work and favored formal training and technique instead. Since then, however, this art form has embraced its unsophisticated nature, leaning freely into simple, childlike ideas and arrangements. As Walter Benjamin notes in his understanding of history, the notion of progress always brings along its own losses. Naive painting serves as a visual record of these losses. By focusing on the everyday moments, fading customs, and local experiences, it draws our attention to areas left out by modernization. In this sense, "Naive art" finds its place in what Benjamin describes as the "wreckage of history."

Throughout history, people have used art to share their surroundings, emotions, beliefs, and outlook on life. In other words, art is one of the most universal ways humans express themselves. Sometimes this expression follows academic rules; other times, it's entirely instinctive and free. One of these free forms is the "naive" or "pure-hearted" style, created by those who paint from within with a childlike spirit. These creators are typically self-taught, having never received formal artistic training.

Naïve art embraces works created by artists who paint straight from the heart, without worrying about technique. In this approach, what truly matters isn't perfection, but sincerity,

Henri Rousseau
The Sleeping Gypsy
1897, oil on canvas
129.5 x 200.7 cm
New York Museum of Modern Art

is all about sincerity and authenticity. Naive art offers viewers a simple world, but behind that simplicity lies deep emotion and strong storytelling. The methods and styles developed by naive artists are always unique and personal. They never model themselves after any artist from art history, nor do they ever copy one another. Not everyone who paints is considered "Naive." Another hallmark of this style is capturing the world around them with a childlike spontaneity, painting what they see as it comes naturally to them. These works often display a remarkable richness in detail. Rather than using academic tricks to imitate reality, naive artists perceive and depict the world with an almost "innocent eye," which gives their work genuine artistic value.

The quest to define the purest, most authentic form of art led to the term "naive" art; later, when even that seemed insufficient, new terms were coined. For instance, Dubuffet's "Art Brut," meaning "Raw Art," is used to describe creativity untouched by cultural influences. Artists may live in psychiatric hospitals or outside society, in environments free from educational, cultural, or traditional constraints. For Dubuffet, "Art Brut" is the purest form of visual creation, a flow from the spirit to the page. While "Art Brut" isn't as widely used, other terms have emerged, books have been written about them, and even museums have been opened (like the American Visionary Art Museum). "Neuve Invention" (New Invention) fits within the Art Brut category, but since Dubuffet defined its boundaries so narrowly, this term refers to works by artists more engaged with the world.

Naive art has also been the subject of serious study in Eastern European countries, where schools have been established and symposiums organized. In Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, a group gathered under the Insita magazine has organized exhibitions every three years. The term "Insita," introduced by Czech thinker Stefan Tcack (you'll find Tcack's historic statement and the Insita manifesto in the following pages), and his proposal for a new definition of this art form, sparked significant reactions in the art community and led to a series of ongoing meetings.

Despite all the efforts, this term is not widely used outside a few countries. The labels "Visionary Art" or "Intuitive Art" are broader in scope, covering works created from an inner impulse or a sense of divine calling, but their boundaries are not clearly defined.

The emergence of naïve art coincides with years marked by lively debates and shifts in the art world. During this period, there was a noticeable trend toward primitive and traditional art forms. A new movement known as Primitivism began to take shape. Artists in the West, inspired by folk art, first turned their attention to Japanese prints, then to the islands in the South Seas of Africa, and especially to the art of South American peoples. This fascination led them to challenge established artistic conventions and explore new creative paths. One of the era's leading primitivist artists, Gauguin, rejected academic norms and moved to Tahiti to study and immerse himself in the art and way of life there.

Henri Rousseau
Self-Portrait and Landscape
1890, oil on canvas
146 x 113 cm
National Gallery, Prague

These days, before any pottery, jewelry, household item, or clothing is made, it's first designed on paper. In contrast, in primitive societies, creations took shape directly in the artist's hands, without any preliminary sketches. The act of shaping the material itself was a source of immense pleasure for them. Perhaps this is why we're drawn to these native arts: they radiate pure originality and often convey strength and the intense, sometimes even bizarre, forms of life in the simplest ways.

Naïve Art, Folk Art, and Primitive Art are often confused with one another; while they share similarities and existed in overlapping eras, they are by no means the same. In the early 20th century, artists like Matisse, Derain, Picasso, and Vlaminck discovered African masks and art, and brought elements of primitive art into modern works. There are various claims about who first encountered African masks, with some saying it was Vlaminck. Perhaps the most famous interpretations of primitive art can be seen in Picasso's work.

Modern artists' admiration for "primitives" can be seen as part of a European tradition that idealizes non-Western cultures as happier, more natural, less knowledgeable, and less corrupt. While this perspective carries a hint of praise, it's also worth noting that modern artists celebrated the "primitivism" found in art produced by children, the mentally ill, and untrained "naive" adults.

At the same time, this is a reductive and somewhat condescending simplification. In a broader sense, "primitivism" includes expressive, non-academic art found within Western traditions too, like Medieval woodcarvings and Gothic sculpture.

Malik Aksel defines folk art as creations inspired by social and cultural events—like Japan's Edo-era woodblock prints (Ukiyo-e), tribal symbols and nature motifs from Mexico and Peru, or the Fayum portraits and carved decorations of Egypt. He explains, "We need to clarify what we mean by folk painting. Ongoing debates about 'naive' art make this clarification necessary." According to Aksel, folk paintings are made by artists without formal academic training, reflecting daily life, beliefs, traditions, and imagination with honesty, simplicity, and authenticity. For further clarity, Aksel highlights these key points:A. Folk art emerges from within the community, motivated more by the desire to tell and express than by artistic ambition.B. Tradition, belief, and lifestyle take center stage in folk art (weddings, battles, legends, religious scenes, and the like).

C. Technical flaws are overlooked; sincerity and expressive power matter most.
D. It relies not on Western academic rules, but on local tastes and folk aesthetics.

Malik Aksel
Self-Portrait
37.8 x 30 cm
Oil on cardboard
Demsa Collection

According to Nur Koçak, "Because they lack formal training, there can be similarities between naïve artists and folk artists. However, folk art is deeply rooted in long-standing, anonymous traditions, sustained over centuries. Folk art is a collective creation, not the product of a single individual. While the folk painter sees themselves as a 'craftsperson,' the naïve painter considers themselves an 'artist.'"

Naïve art is typically portrayed with a childlike innocence, and its creators are often self-taught, without formal art education. The most recognized figure in this field worldwide is Rousseau the Customs Officer, a contemporary of Picasso, who earned the admiration of Picasso and many other artists of his era.

Eventually, from the early twentieth century onward, naïve art began to be viewed as distinct from folk art. This approach, emerging outside the traditional academy, gradually came to include works by children, psychiatric patients, and rural painters. The 'Pure Hearts' group, formed by Rousseau and his friends, established themselves across a broader geography in the 1920s and 1930s, helping to integrate naïve art into modern artistic movements. After World War II, creative works by the poor, those with mental illness, and children started to be recognized under the name 'Art Brut,' led by Dubuffet. Since then, countless amateur painters have come to the forefront.

Since the 1950s, there has been a steady increase in publications and events focusing on naïve and self-taught art and artists. Following World War II, just as in the rest of the world, there was a growing curiosity in our country about naïve and self-taught works that modern art often overlooked, alongside an interest in children's creativity and alternative artistic movements outside academic circles. As a result, topics like 'abstract art,' 'folk art,' and 'peasant art'—which formalist critics typically ignored—began to draw more attention. Here, the term 'autodidact' is frequently used alongside naïve art. The word 'autodidact' comes from terms meaning 'self-taught' and refers to learning through deep thought, reflection, and focus—without relying on formal education or schools. The concept of autodidacticism was first mentioned in the 1160s in the philosophical novel 'Hayy' by Andalusian philosopher Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl. The story, which tells of a wild child from Marrakesh who invents tools and survives in nature on his own, emphasizes that it is not society or its rules that shape a person, but the individual themselves. The central idea is that 'human beings are the simplest form of knowledge.' One of history's most famous autodidacts is Leonardo da Vinci. Because of this similarity in terms, naïve artists are often called 'autodidacts' as well.

In the early 20th century, art movements like Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism moved away from dramatic themes and traditional cultural codes of the past. Artists with Dadaist approaches—like Marcel Duchamp—even recontextualized the meaning of everyday objects, challenging the conventional techniques of painting and making them seem irrelevant.

This form of art, once overlooked and left on the sidelines, gained recognition during and after World War II. The crisis of modernism that followed the war led to a reevaluation of the meaning, existential power, and purposefulness of artistic creation outside the realm of modern art. By the mid-twentieth century, there was a growing appreciation for creativity and imagination found in other traditions and cultures. Artworks by so-called primitive societies, children, and self-taught creators started to be valued, highlighting that the unique creativity of naive artists—who differ in their urge to imitate, comprehend, or resemble reality compared to works born from pure intellect—could no longer be ignored.

The lack of strict rules or defined theories in naive art is exactly what makes it so unique. Naive painters create from a deeply personal place, drawing on their own worlds and emotions. At the same time, we can say they share a spontaneous, unspoken visual language that connects their work.

Freedom is at the very heart of naive art. Naive artists paint without being tied down by rules of perspective, proportion, or anatomy. Because of this, their figures can sometimes look out of proportion, settings might feel unreal, and scenes can take on a dreamlike, storybook quality. But rather than weakening the art, this actually strengthens its expressive power. Naive art speaks directly to viewers, using clear images instead of complicated symbols. In this way, naive art creates visual works that anyone—no matter their age or background—can easily relate to and enjoy.

Yvon Dagle outlined twenty-three characteristics of naïve art. Among the most notable: creating with the heart rather than the eyes; painting for oneself; approaching art with joy, happiness, and playfulness; not giving much importance to shadows; expressing in two dimensions and flat spaces; ignoring color theories. Naïve art is intuitive and spontaneous, marked by vivid colors, detailed storytelling, and a compressed, flat sense of space. Compositions are often filled to avoid empty spaces, and objects are depicted by emphasizing their most distinctive features. Every element of the whole is considered individually. Figures, often drawn in full profile or frontal view, have exaggerated features like eyes, brows, or hair, lending a humorous touch. The sense of perspective and rhythm is fresh and unique—perspective differences make figures and objects appear to float or hover. The movement is frozen. Naïve art, with all these traits, first emerged globally in the nineteenth century. It was taken seriously as an art form, especially in Europe, where many examples exist. In Turkey, interest in naïve art developed later, though its tradition is old; even before the Republic, artists produced works under the label of folk art. The era of soldier painters, known as Primitives, saw some artists create remarkable pieces not even on canvas, yet still counted among successful works of painting.

In the early years of the Republic and throughout the period up to the 1950s, there was an effort to create a national art, especially in music.

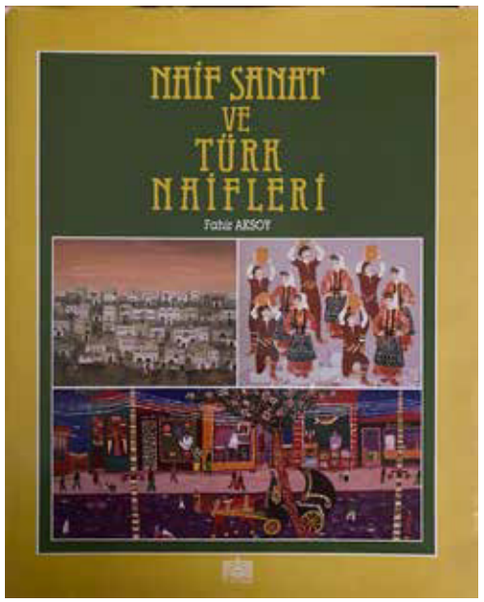
Polyphony and interest in local values within the visual arts led Cemal Tollu toward Hittite art, Turgut Zaim in part toward folk art, and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu also toward folk art. Sabri Berkel supported Nurullah Berk's efforts to move from the discipline of miniature painting to a national art.

In the 1950s, noticeable shifts began to take place in the art world. Alongside efforts to liberalize the socio-economic structure, artistic styles and behaviors started to reflect more personal characteristics. Artists began to highlight their inner worlds and individual experiences when choosing themes for their works. The freedom to interpret the natural and social environment in a subjective way became more common, and the debate over universal artistic values versus local and national cultural values grew stronger, keeping these issues at the forefront of discussions in the field of painting.

Some works often grouped under the term "folk art," which is closely associated with naïve art, were actually produced by artists with academic backgrounds. Notable figures who embraced this approach include Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Berna Türemen, Cihat Burak, Gülsün Karamustafa, Nedim Günsür, Oya Katoğlu, and Yalçın Gökçebağ—artists who successfully blended a naïve perspective with academic painting. Meanwhile, Turkish naïve artists without formal training include Aziz Alpagut, Bayram Gümüş, Belkıs Taşkeser, Emin Başaranbilek, Fahir Aksoy, Fatma Eye, Galip Onat, Hüseyin Yüce, İbrahim Balaban,

Among the notable figures in Turkish naïve art who did not receive formal academic training are Mehmet Ali Resimcioğlu, Mehmet Arpacık, Mehmet Tabanlıoğlu, Metin Akarslan, Muzaffer Genç, Nevin İşlek, Nihal Sıralar, Niyazi Toptoprak, Selçuk Toğul, Sema Çulam, Sevil Yetkin, Şebnem Tuncer, Uğural Gafuroğlu, Yusuf Karabıyık, Zeynep San, and Zuhal Amato.

In Turkey, naïve art stands out for its deep connections to folk culture and the everyday rhythms of Anatolian life. Turkish naïve painters have helped preserve cultural memory by capturing daily experiences, traditions, and values on canvas. For the exhibition featuring the 'Naïves' collection from the Demsa Collection, I aimed to define naïve art, describe its characteristics, and explore its role in world and Turkish art. There is a noticeable lack of comprehensive publications—both local and international—on this subject. While works abroad often touch on Henri Rousseau, there are few sources that trace the historical journey of folk art in this region. The most extensive reference remains Fahir Aksoy's "Naif Sanat ve Türk Naifleri" (Ak Yayınları, 1990), written by a naïve artist himself. Looking a bit further back, the SANAT Monthly Culture and Art Newspaper, published for several years in Ankara, featured significant articles by Kaya Özsezgin, Turan Erol, Nurullah Berk, and Nur Koçak. You can also find the file prepared by Kaya Özsezgin, Turan Erol, and Nur Koçak on 'Naïve Art' in the following pages of this book.



Book cover of "Naive Art and Turkish Naives" by Fahir Aksoy
Ak Publications Culture and Art Books, 1990

The Key Features of Naive Art

Distinctive characteristics of naive art can be outlined as follows:

A. A conscious or unconscious disregard for the rules of perspective,
B. Use of bold and vibrant colors,
C. Everyday life as the main subject matter,
D. Exaggeration and simplification in figures,
E. A whimsical, dreamlike atmosphere.

These features are what set naive art apart from academic art. For the naive artist, the goal isn't to reproduce what they see exactly, but to express what they feel.

The Emergence of Turkish Naive Art

In Turkey, naive painting developed with a strong sense of local identity and cultural memory. The everyday traditions of Anatolia, neighborhood life, the connection between people and nature, and communal rituals provide the foundation for these works. The Turkish art scene first encountered "naive art" in 1965 during an exhibition by Hüseyin Yüce, a self-taught painter from Kütahya. After meeting Cavit Atmaca, Yüce's talent gained recognition among naive artists worldwide, following exhibitions held first at the State Fine Arts Gallery in Kütahya and later in Ankara. Because naive art reflects the daily life of society so directly, it serves as a form of cultural memory. In particular, Turkish naive art visually preserves traditions and ways of life that are at risk of fading away

. In a world where our lifestyles are changing rapidly, naive art helps us reconnect with the past. This quality gives naive art not just an aesthetic value, but also makes it a cultural treasure.

With its simplicity and sincerity, naive art has carved out a unique place in the art world. In this approach, technical perfection isn't the main goal—what really matters are genuine feelings and authenticity. Naive art presents the artist's perspective in a direct, unfiltered way. Turkish naive art, especially, stands out as a vital storytelling method that reflects Anatolia's rich culture and social fabric. Through their works, Turkish naive painters have contributed both to artistic creativity and the preservation of cultural heritage. That's why naive art is so important for understanding the past and passing it on to future generations.

Turkish naive painters have depicted Anatolia's cultural richness and the lives of its people with a straightforward style. Common themes in their paintings include:

- Village weddings
- Farming and livestock activities
- Festivals and ceremonies
- Children's games
- Neighborhood and street life

These works serve not only as artistic expressions but also as important historical and sociological records. From Japan's iconic Edo-period woodblock prints, Ukiyo-e, to the tribal art of Mexico and Peru in South America,

Naive Art
Brodskaya, Nathalia
199 pages, Parkstone International, 2007

Naive Art
Brodskaya, Nathalia
120 Illustrations, United Kingdom, 2019
Naive Art: Innocence, simplicity, and
the poetry of an untrained perspective

Malik Aksel describes folk art—shaped by a rich tapestry of symbolic meanings, interpretations of nature, Egyptian Fayum portraits, stone carving, decorative traditions, stories, battles, and heroic deeds—as follows: "We need to clarify what we mean by folk painting to some extent. The fact that this topic is now being discussed, especially because of debates around 'naive' art, makes such clarification necessary." According to Aksel, folk painting consists of works created by artists without formal academic training, reflecting everyday life, beliefs, traditions, and imagination with sincerity, simplicity, and naturalness. To explain further, Aksel highlights these key points:

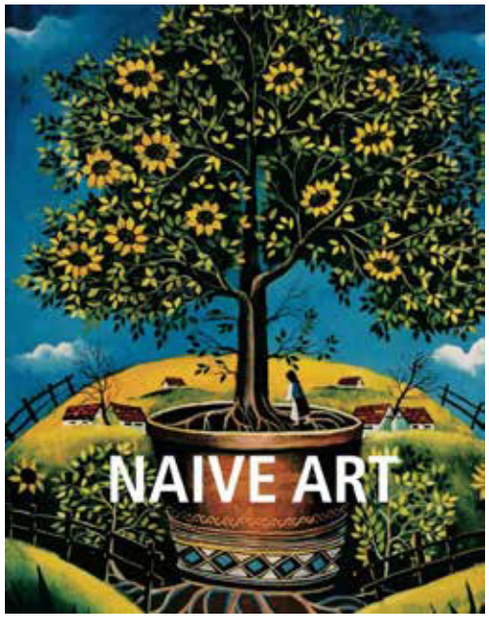
A. Folk art is born from the people themselves, driven more by a desire to tell and express than by artistic ambition.
B. In folk art, tradition, faith, and lifestyle take center stage (weddings, wars, legends, religious scenes, and the like).
C. Technical flaws are overlooked; what matters most is authenticity and expressive power.
D. It's based not on Western academic rules, but on local taste and the aesthetic sensibilities of the people.

According to Nur Koçak: "There might be a similarity between naive and folk artists due to their lack of formal training. However, folk art is rooted in long-standing traditions and collective anonymity. It's the shared creation of a group, not the work of an individual. A folk painter sees themselves as a 'craftsperson,' while a naive painter identifies as an 'artist.'"

Naive art is often depicted with a childlike innocence, created mostly by people without formal art education. Among its most renowned figures worldwide is Rousseau the Customs Officer, who was a contemporary of Picasso and earned the admiration of many artists of his time, including Picasso himself.

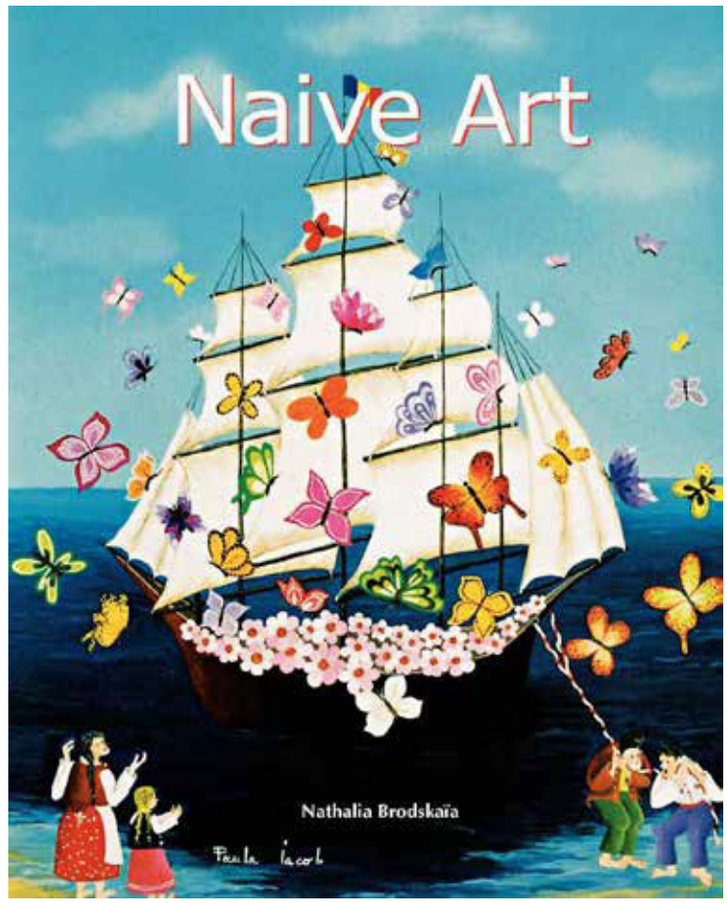
Eventually, Naive art began to be seen as separate from folk art starting in the early 20th century. This approach, which emerged outside of academic circles, gradually came to include works by children, people with mental illness, and rural painters. The "Pure Hearts" group, formed by Rousseau and his peers, spread across a wider region in the 1920s and 30s, helping Naive art carve out its place among modern art movements. After World War II, creative endeavors by the poor, the mentally ill, and children were grouped under "Art Brut" thanks to Dubuffet. Since then, a surge of amateur painters has appeared.

Since the 1950s, publications and events about Naive and self-taught art and artists have steadily increased. Just as happened globally after World War II, interest in works ignored by modern art—Naive and self-taught pieces, children's creativity, and movements outside the academy—grew, along with a curiosity for subjects like 'abstract art,' 'folk art,' and 'peasant art' that formalist critics had often overlooked. At this point, the term "self-taught" is used alongside Naive art.



The term 'autodidact' comes from words meaning self and teaching. It describes a way of learning that's all about thinking deeply, reflecting, truly absorbing, and focusing on understanding. Autodidacticism is learning that happens independently—through personal reflection, research, discussion, and hands-on work—without being tied to any formal school or educational system. The concept was first mentioned in the 1160s in the philosophical novel Hayy by Andalusian philosopher Abu Bakr Ibn-Tufayl. In this story, a wild child from Marrakesh invents his own tools and learns from his struggle with the natural world, highlighting that it's not society or its rules that shape a person, but the individual themselves. The main idea is that 'a person is the most basic form of knowledge.' One of history's most famous autodidacts is Leonardo da Vinci. Because of the similarity in terms, naïve artists are often also called 'autodidacts.'

This art form, left on the sidelines by early 20th-century movements like Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism—which all distanced themselves from dramatic themes of the past and cultural codes, and even went so far as to recontextualize the meaning of ready-made objects, rendering traditional painting techniques almost meaningless, as seen in the Dadaist approach of Marcel Duchamp—began to gain recognition during and after World War II. The crisis of modernism brought on by the war led to a reexamination of the value, existential strength, and drive to create art outside the mainstream modern art world. By the mid-20th century, creativity and imagination from other traditions and cultures, as well as the artistic expressions of primitive societies, children, and those without academic



training, were being reconsidered as legitimate forms of modern artistic creation. In the face of unique, original works produced by pure intuition, it became clear that the creativity hidden in the naive artist's desire to imitate, understand, and reflect reality could no longer be overlooked.

The lack of strict rules or a defined theory in naïve art is exactly what makes it truly one-of-a-kind. Naïve painters create emotional works drawn from their own unique worlds and personal experiences. Still, we can say they share a spontaneous, common language that connects their art.

Freedom is at the heart of naïve art. Naïve artists paint without being tied to rules of perspective, proportion, or anatomy. For this reason, their figures may be out of scale, spaces may appear surreal, and scenes can take on a dreamlike quality. Yet, this doesn't weaken the art's expressive power; in fact, it makes it stronger. Naïve art speaks directly to the viewer. Instead of complicated symbols, clear and understandable images are used. This makes naïve art visually accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Yvon Dagle outlined twenty-three characteristics of naïve art. Among the most notable: drawing from the heart rather than the eyes; creating art for oneself; working with happiness, joy, and a sense of play; not focusing heavily on shadows; expressing themselves in two dimensions and flat spaces; and disregarding color theory. Naïve art can be described as instinctive and spontaneous, with vivid colors, detailed storytelling, and a flattened, straightforward approach to space. Compositions in naïve paintings tend to fill every available area, avoiding empty spots. Objects are depicted by highlighting their most distinctive features. Every part that makes up the whole is considered separately. Figures are often painted in full profile or face-on, with exaggerated eyes, eyebrows, or hair, creating a whimsical effect. The use of perspective and rhythm is fresh and unique, making figures and objects appear as if they're floating or suspended. Movements are frozen in time. We know that naïve art, with all these traits, emerged worldwide in the nineteenth century. Especially in Europe, it became recognized as a serious artistic style with many examples. In Turkey, attention to naïve art came later, though its tradition is old; even before the Republic, artists created works under the banner of folk art. There was a period called the "primitives," when military painters contributed, and even works not painted on canvas are included among successful examples of art.

In the early years of the Republic and throughout the period leading up to the 1950s, there was an effort to create a national art, especially in music. Interest in polyphony in music and local values in the visual arts led Cemal Tollu towards Hittite art, Turgut Zaim partially to folk art, and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu again to folk art. Nurullah Berk's attempts to reach national art from miniature traditions were supported by Sabri Berkel.

In the 1950s, notable shifts began to appear in the art world: as the socio-economic environment started to open up, artistic behaviors and styles began to reflect more personal traits. Artists increasingly chose themes that highlighted their inner lives and personal experiences. Additionally, as artists began to freely exercise their right to subjective interpretation in representing the external natural and social world, questions about the value of local and national cultures gained prominence—even as the pursuit of universal artistic values continued to be a topic of discussion.

Some works often grouped under the term "folk art," a label commonly linked with naïve art, were actually created by academically trained artists. Figures such as Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Berna Türemen, Cihat Burak, Gülsün Karamustafa, Nedim Günsür, Oya Katoğlu, and Yalçın Gökçebağ are examples of artists who merged the spirit of naïve art with academic painting traditions. On the other hand, Turkish naïve artists without formal academic training include Aziz Alpagut, Bayram Gümüş, Belkıs Taşkeser, Emin Başaranbilek, Fahir Aksoy, Fatma Eye, Galip Onat, Hüseyin Yüce, and İbrahim Balaban, among others.

Names like Mehmet Ali Resimcioğlu, Mehmet Arpacık, Mehmet Tabanlıoğlu, Metin Akarslan, Muzaffer Genç, Nevin İşlek, Nihal Sıralar, Niyazi Toptoprak, Selçuk Toğul, Sema Çulam, Sevil Yetkin, Şebnem Tuncer, Uğural Gafuroğlu, Yusuf Karabıyık, Zeynep San, and Zuhal Amato can be listed as examples.

In Turkey, naïve art stands out for its reflection of folk culture and everyday life in Anatolia. Turkish naïve painters have captured the daily routines, traditions, and values of their communities on canvas, helping preserve cultural memory. For the exhibition featuring the "Naives" collection from the Demsa Collection, I explored the definition of naïve art, its characteristics, and its place in both world and Turkish art. Not many publications—local or foreign—have covered this subject so far. Although some resources about Henri Rousseau abroad touch on this topic, it's striking how few sources there are in this region, which has a rich history of folk art. The most comprehensive among the available works is the book "Naif Sanat ve Türk Naifleri" ("Naïve Art and Turkish Naives") published by Ak Yayınları in 1990 and written by Fahir Aksoy, himself a naïve artist. Going a bit further back, the SANAT Monthly Culture and Art Newspaper published in Ankara for several years featured notable articles by Kaya Özsezgin, Turan Erol, Nurullah Berk, and Nur Koçak. You'll also find the file prepared by Kaya Özsezgin, Turan Erol, and Nur Koçak on "Naïve Art" in the later pages of this book.

Key Features of Naïve Art

The defining features of naïve art can be outlined as follows:

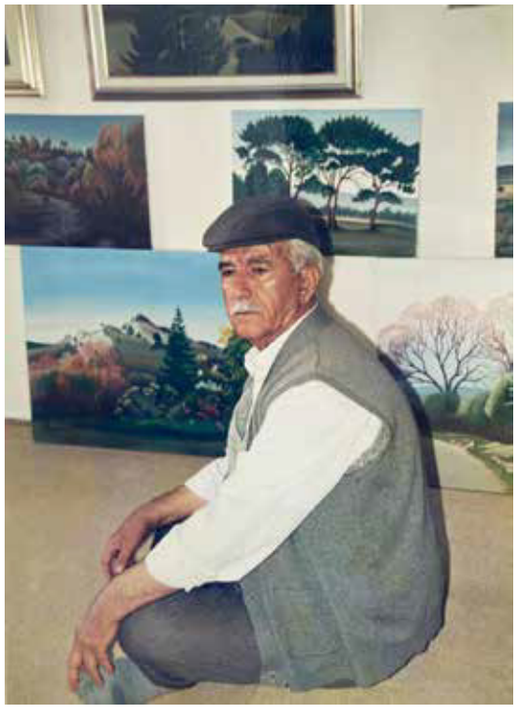
A. Disregard for perspective rules, whether intentional or not,
B. Use of vibrant and contrasting colors,
C. Subjects drawn from everyday life,
D. Exaggeration and simplification of figures,
E. A whimsical or dreamlike quality.

These qualities are what truly set naïve art apart from academic traditions. For the naïve artist, what matters isn't capturing exactly what they see, but expressing what they feel.

The Emergence of Turkish Naïve Art

In Turkey, naïve painting has evolved with a strong sense of local identity and cultural memory. Everyday life in Anatolia, neighborhood traditions, the connection between people and nature, and collective rituals all serve as the main storytelling elements in these works. The Turkish art scene first encountered naïve art in 1965, through an exhibition by Kütahya-born naïve painter Hüseyin Yüce. After organizing a show at the Kütahya State Fine Arts Gallery with the support of Cavit Atmaca, Yüce's talent was showcased again in Ankara, earning him recognition and admiration from naïve artists around the world.

Because naïve art directly reflects the everyday life of society, it acts as a cultural archive. Especially in Turkey, naïve art helps preserve traditions and ways of life that are on the verge of disappearing.



Hüseyin Yüce
The Turkish art scene first encountered "Naive art" in 1965, thanks to an exhibition by Hüseyin Yüce, a naive painter from Kütahya. At the time, Hüseyin Yüce was working in his home studio in Göveç village. Photo: Yahşi Baraz

records it visually. In today's rapidly changing world, naive art helps us connect with the past. In this sense, naive art holds not only aesthetic value but also significant cultural importance.

Naive art has carved out a unique place in the art world with its simplicity and sincerity. In this approach, technical perfection takes a back seat, while genuine human emotions and honesty come to the forefront. Naive art allows the artist to share their perspective openly and without filters. Turkish naive art, in particular, is a powerful form of expression that reflects the rich cultural heritage and social structure of Anatolia. Turkish naive painters have contributed both to artistic creation and the preservation of cultural heritage through their works. That's why naive art is so important—helping us understand the past and carry it into the future.

Turkish naïve painters have captured the rich culture of Anatolia and everyday life with a simple, honest style. The subjects most often depicted in their paintings include:

- Village weddings
- Farming and livestock activities
- Festivals and ceremonies
- Children's games
- Neighborhood and street life

These works serve not only as art but also as valuable historical and sociological records.

Hüseyin Yüce
(1928–2015), 40 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Detay : Hüseyin Sartaş

“Painters with Pure Hearts”

Turan Erol

Foreign sources writing about naïve painters tend to echo one another: these artists often started painting out of curiosity or need, usually during weekends or in their spare time. Among them are homemakers, postal workers, print shop employees, circus wrestlers, gardeners, cobblers, and bricklayers. French artists like Séraphine, Peyronnet, Vivin, Rimbert; Americans such as Grandma Moses, Sullivan, Hirsnfield; the British Scottie Wilson; Italian Metelli; Yugoslav Ivan Généralic; and from our country, Hüseyin Yüce—all are straightforward, genuine people from everyday backgrounds. They didn’t learn painting in schools. Despite their so-called lack of skill, they are determined to create well-executed, flawless works. They focus on the tiniest details—even counting the leaves on trees. Unlike trained artists, you won’t see effortless brushwork or hasty strokes; instead, they depict the world with deep affection, almost in a trance, maintaining meticulous craftsmanship. Henri Rousseau, considered the greatest among them, had his paintings accepted into the Louvre Museum in 1946.

There exists a style of painting that forms naturally, outside the well-trodden paths, untouched by formal instruction or education. It’s impossible to complete the panorama of modern art without mentioning this genre, known as 'naïve,' 'pure-hearted,' or childlike painting. Drawing its inspiration from the heart and taste of the people, this instinctive and personal creativity is not just an international phenomenon we strive to understand; it’s a matter we must accept without stirring up East-West divisions. Naïve or childlike art, the issue of 'pure-hearted' painters, is significant because these works are created without being shaped by training or teaching, unacquainted with the mastery, habits, definitions, or rules of formally schooled artists. In the paintings of these 'uninitiated' artists, it’s not far-fetched to find traces of popular genius.

Within the world of “pure-hearted” painters, there’s ongoing debate about whether their art has unique qualities, but its significance is clear: these artists haven’t been shaped by formal education or training. Unfamiliar with the skills, habits, labels, or rules of mainstream artists, these so-called “outsiders” create works where the spark of popular genius is never far from sight.

The question of naïve painters and naïve art really came into focus in the early 20th century, thanks to Henri Rousseau. Retiring from a humble customs post in Paris with a modest pension, Rousseau—astonishingly innocent and, in many ways, guileless—was initially met with ridicule, even mockery. Yet in a short time, the Parisian elite, including artists and intellectuals, began to take him seriously—and with good reason. Rousseau’s paintings brought together imagination and sharp observation with a kind of childlike clumsiness, producing something monumentally original. At the same time, as debates about representational art heated up, it made sense for avant-garde artists like Picasso to take an interest in the folk painters who would later be called “naïve.” In their hands, the world assumed a brand new guise. What’s more, these individuals took up painting without any of the usual groundwork—no schooling, no apprenticeships, no official entry into the art world. Without even being recognized as artists or accepted into artists’ circles, they took their first steps into painting, much as Cézanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, and even

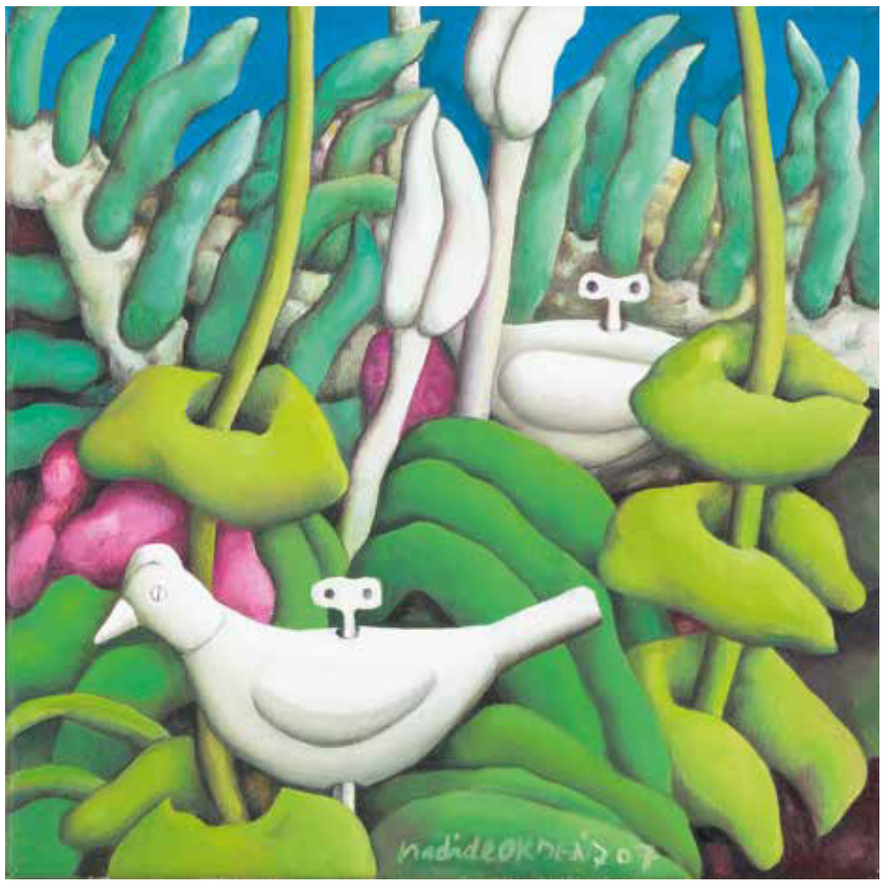
Wasn't there a certain similarity in Picasso's actions? These artists, too, rejected formal art education of their time and chose to paint on their own terms. According to their example, being a painter is less a profession and more a destiny. It's well known that Degas once said, "How strange, we spend our lives devoted to a profession we never truly understand."

Since the late nineteenth century, painters have taken it upon themselves to choose their tools and forge their own paths in art. Inspired by figures like Gauguin and van Gogh, those who decide to become artists—trusting in their own vision—won't seek advice or support; instead, they'll dive headfirst into the world of painting. This is what separates the "intellectual" artists from the naïve. Art critic Jean Cassou describes the attitude of the naïve artist perfectly: "There's a sudden, yet inevitable urge to paint—not because one thinks of oneself as a painter or treats painting as a career, but out of a personal need and the simple joy of expressing oneself, regardless of how this profession might look today."

This is especially true for naive artists. A naive painter is someone who creates in their own quiet corner, discovered there before anyone ever labels them as 'naive.' In these cases, it's no surprise that even experts and art dealers might sometimes mistake the genuine for the imitation.

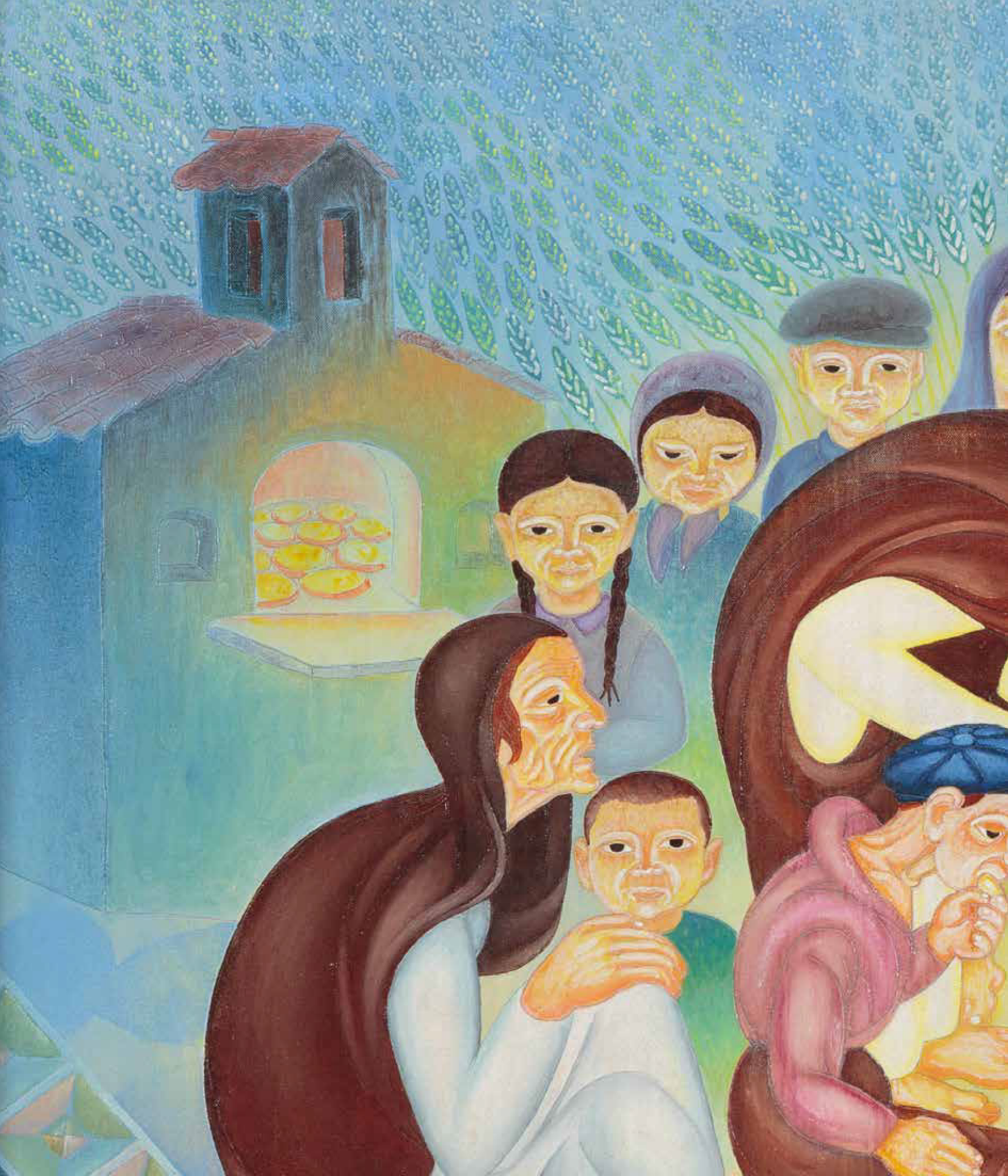
Anyone can paint—adults, children, the highly logical, the wildly imaginative—anyone who feels the need to express themselves. Some people start painting without ever considering becoming artists. Among them, you'll find those whose work is so sincere and convincing that you wouldn't dream of asking for something different; they've found the method that suits them best. Their creations are honest and genuine, leaving no doubt about their talent. They don't even try to persuade others of their abilities—their art speaks for itself.

ART, Monthly Fine Arts Newspaper, Issue: 4, January 15, 1972,



Nadide Akdeniz (1945-)
30x30 cm
Oil on canvas, 2007

Demsa Collection



Details: İbrahim Balaban

“Naive Painters and Naivety in Turkish Painting”

Kaya Özsezgin

“The passions we silence fill our dreams; believing we've outgrown childhood is, in itself, childlike.”

Attilâ İlhan

The Concept of Naïve

The term naïve comes from the Latin word “nativus.” Meaning natural, pure, and unaffected, it’s used to describe people who are noticeably more gentle and kind-hearted than most, but it also refers to artists who see and depict reality and nature with fresh eyes, develop an unrefined, inexperienced style, and express themselves in an unpretentious way. Since the early 20th century, alongside intellectual artists, it’s become tradition to call those who adopt this style—often seen as modest—“naïve painters” in overviews of art movements. Their works are marked by a kind of “naiveté,” a simplicity and sincerity that sets a standard for expressing thoughts and feelings in a natural way. Many dictionaries liken this “naiveté” to the innocence found in children, drawing parallels between this childlike purity and naïve artists. In this respect, naïve artists are considered “bonhommes”—their innocence (ingénuité) and style come from their lack of sophistication (maladresse) and simplicity (simplicité). Yet, these qualities haven’t prevented great masters from emerging among them in art history. In fact, purity and simplicity, as interpretations of nature, are common traits in works of artistic value. But naïve artists are those who push this purity to its limits, discovering its source—and for this reason, they’ve rightly become a “distinctive art phenomenon of the twentieth century.”

Because of the unique art they created, they’ve managed to capture the attention of many countries.

At different times, naive painters have been called beloved masters of everyday reality (maitres populaires de la réalité) or heartfelt painters (peintres du coeur sacré). The latter title was given by Wilhelm Uhde (1874–1947), a German-born collector who discovered some of the most important French naive artists and helped them gain recognition in the art world. Since many of these artists painted in their spare time or on holidays, some sources refer to them as 'Sunday painters' (peintre du dimanche). And because most began painting without any formal academic training, relying instead on instinct and feeling, they are often considered true 'autodidacts.'

In some references, the terms naive and primitive are used together, highlighting a close connection between the two. Art historian Muller suggests that trusting one’s feelings and senses over knowledge is typical of primitive people; in naturalist art, primitivism is restrained by prioritizing resemblance to reality, with primitive tendencies giving way to objectivity. Muller also argues that every art form contains at least a trace of primitive influence. The word primitive comes from the Latin 'primitivus,' meaning 'of the first order, original, preceding, characteristic of early periods, or less developed civilizations.'

Nedim Günsür (1924-1994)
Festival Square
115 x 162 cm
1992
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Summarized. In art history, the term used to mark the beginnings and early development of various periods found its true place among the 'quattrocento' artists—painters and sculptors who came before the Renaissance masters of the sixteenth century. Living in the fifteenth century, with Boticelli as the most renowned, these artists created works that foreshadowed the classical Renaissance and served as a bridge between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. They respected tradition and followed the technical and aesthetic rules of painting. Yet, the collective exhibition held by naïve painters in Paris in 1948 was titled 'Twentieth Century Primitives.' Perhaps for this reason, art historian Read discovered in the works of Rousseau, the most prominent and pioneering naïve painter of our era, a 'maturity that surpasses childhood,' describing him as 'both simple and profound.' Read even goes so far as to regard Rousseau, after Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin, as the 'most fascinating artist' in the history of modern art. The work published by Uhde in 1948 about naïve painters was called 'Five Primitive Masters: Rousseau, Bauchant, Bombois, Séraphine, Vivin.'

All of this points to the fact that, nowadays, naïve painters are also called primitive artists. While these two concepts share certain connections, both within and outside the world of art, there are important distinctions: naïve artists strictly avoid outside influences, choosing instead to seek pure authenticity from within themselves. Primitive artists, on the other hand, play a specific role in the history of art, engaging in technical and aesthetic exchanges with those who came before and after them. Although both groups are linked by a common element of purity, this quality reflects two entirely different worldviews, lifestyles, and ways of feeling. Their unique characteristics, expressed through form and color, are, in fact, quite distinct.

From an ethnological perspective, primitive art refers to the creative expressions of communities considered 'primitive.' Ethnologists usually see this art as an integral part of indigenous culture and strive to discover how these works were made, who commissioned them, who created them, and for what purpose. One distinguishing feature is that the art of these groups serves institutional and social goals before personal ones.

Therefore, to fairly evaluate primitive art, it's important to focus on the significance and function it holds within its environment, rather than just its aesthetic beauty. In contrast, when analyzing and appreciating the work of naive artists, the emphasis is less on purpose and function and more on the genuine sensitivity and authentic visions reflected in their creations.

is considered. Perhaps the main similarity is that neither naïve nor primitive art puts classical painting tastes and aesthetic standards at the forefront. In fact, like primitive artists, naïve painters seem to distance themselves from the prevailing artistic trends and aesthetic concerns of their era. This detachment can be intentional or unconscious, but ultimately, it reveals a vision unique to naïve artists. Additionally, primitive art is based, in a limited sense, on the master-apprentice relationship. An apprentice starts by creating their own tools and learning the specifics of the craft, then develops their skills by directly imitating the master until they reach a proficient level. Ethnologists studying the primitive art of African, Australian, and Native American peoples generally claim that this developmental pattern is a shared characteristic among these cultures.

Nevertheless, when you examine a painting by a naïve artist, it becomes clear that the work draws heavily from folk traditions. This is, in fact, true. Since naïve painters are entirely people of the community, they naturally carry within them the pure creative spirit of their background. For them, the urge to paint becomes a basic need that reflects their connection to everyday life, going even beyond the folk sensibility. Between the raw appearance of folk painting and the work of the naïve artist, there exists a subtle difference in awareness—one that allows a shared sensitivity to take shape through the essence of painting itself.

Chermine Vidori
Rome
29 x 29 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

The Past and Present of Naïve Art

The roots of naïve art can be traced back to the humble votive paintings and family portraits created by modest artisans with no grand ambitions. For a long time, these types of anonymous works—painted by regular folks—were ignored or even mocked in Europe. But at the dawn of the twentieth century, they suddenly captured widespread attention. This newfound appreciation was largely thanks to collectors, art dealers, and especially writers and literary figures. The poet Rimbaud was among the first to recognize the pure, untrained style of such paintings—doorway panels, decorative pieces, jester canvases, shop signs, and folk scenes—as glimpses into an untouched world. Until then, these works were dismissed by intellectuals and even amateur artists as "grotesque," considered too crude to be taken seriously. No one imagined that these clumsy (guacherie) paintings could offer any aesthetic pleasure, let alone contribute something new to contemporary art. Yet, artists began to embrace this style, some even turning it into a statement of artistic intent. Without a doubt, the most remarkable among them was Henri Rousseau—later known in art history as "Le Douanier Rousseau." This once-overlooked and ridiculed painter was suddenly promoted by a coalition of enthusiasts. The collector and writer Uhde, along with others who gathered around Rousseau—both for their unique styles and unusual lives—

was the first to give these artists the name "naïve painters."

We need to focus on Rousseau as a key example. He worked like a sharp-eyed observer, able to spot the unusual with remarkable intuition. It's no wonder he's now considered a master—his works are copied in museums and studied in depth. Muller points out that Rousseau's imagination is powerful, poetic, visually rich, and strong. By drawing inspiration from the past and adding enduring qualities to his subjects, Rousseau achieved a sense of monumentality that few of his contemporaries could match. It's fair to say that Muller's positive take helps explain why Rousseau's style is even more exciting than most traditionalists in modern art.

Rousseau was born in Laval as the fourth child of a poor tinsmith. While still in high school, he won an award for drawing and music. Before finishing his education, he was drafted into the army. The exotic details in his paintings hint that he took part in the Mexican War. For a time, he worked as a clerk for a legal officer, and later, he joined the Paris customs office. His life was mostly hard and unremarkable. He married for the first time in 1869. In 1884

As an amateur painter, he received permission to copy works in museums. He met Signac and took part in the Independent Artists exhibition, which had no selection committee. Except for the year 1900, from 1899 onward he contributed paintings to this show every year until his death. After losing his first wife, with whom he had seven children, he remarried. His painting “War,” submitted to the 1894 exhibition and now housed in the Louvre, is widely recognized as a strikingly original example of his style. His fellow townsman Alfred Jarry introduced him to Rémy de Gourmont, who published a lithograph of “War” in the magazine “L’Ymagler” in 1895. At the 1897 Independent Artists exhibition, he displayed his famous “Sleeping Gypsy,” which is now in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Initially, he tried to donate this painting to the Laval Municipality for almost nothing, but the mayor declined. After the death of his second wife, he sank into poverty and loneliness.

He tried to make a living by painting portraits of local merchants and created artworks with exotic themes. In 1905, he was accepted into the Autumn Exhibition by the Fauves. He met the poet Apollinaire and the painter Delaunay. In 1907, he was jailed over an unpaid check. To clear his name, he pawned his paintings. Collector Vollard recounts in his book "Memoirs of an Art Dealer" how things unfolded: "When the situation seemed hopeless, the lawyer brought one of the Douanier’s paintings and showed it to the judges one by one, then asked, ‘Do you still doubt my client’s innocence?’ The court must have been sufficiently convinced. The law had spoken."

Rousseau was convicted, but his sentence was suspended. Not wanting to leave the kindness of the judges unacknowledged, as he rose from the defendant’s chair, the artist offered to paint a portrait of the president’s wife free of charge."

Vollard recounts several similar stories about Rousseau in his book, each highlighting the artist’s remarkable innocence. There’s an unmistakable connection between these tales and the spirit of Rousseau’s paintings. In “The History of Surrealist Painting,” Passeron explains how some people mocked Rousseau’s simplicity, sometimes even to the point of cruelty, while the Cubists admired his “man of the people” quality most. This trait was not unique to Rousseau; it was a common thread running through all naïve artists.

The Cubists took a keen interest in Rousseau. Picasso’s grand banquet in the Bateau-Lavoir in his honor was a vivid demonstration of this admiration. Perhaps not wanting to be outdone, Rousseau hosted his own “family and musical” gathering for close friends and relatives at his home on Perrel Street. Art dealers like Vollard and Brumer bought his paintings. Despite his success, at fifty-four he fell in love with a woman named Léonie, whose presence brought him unhappiness and ultimately led to his demise. After venturing out one night while overheated, he fell ill and passed away at Necker Hospital. Later, his remains were transferred to Laval, his birthplace, and his friend, the poet Apollinaire, had a poem engraved on Rousseau’s headstone. It seems Rousseau himself never truly believed he would become a famous artist during his lifetime.

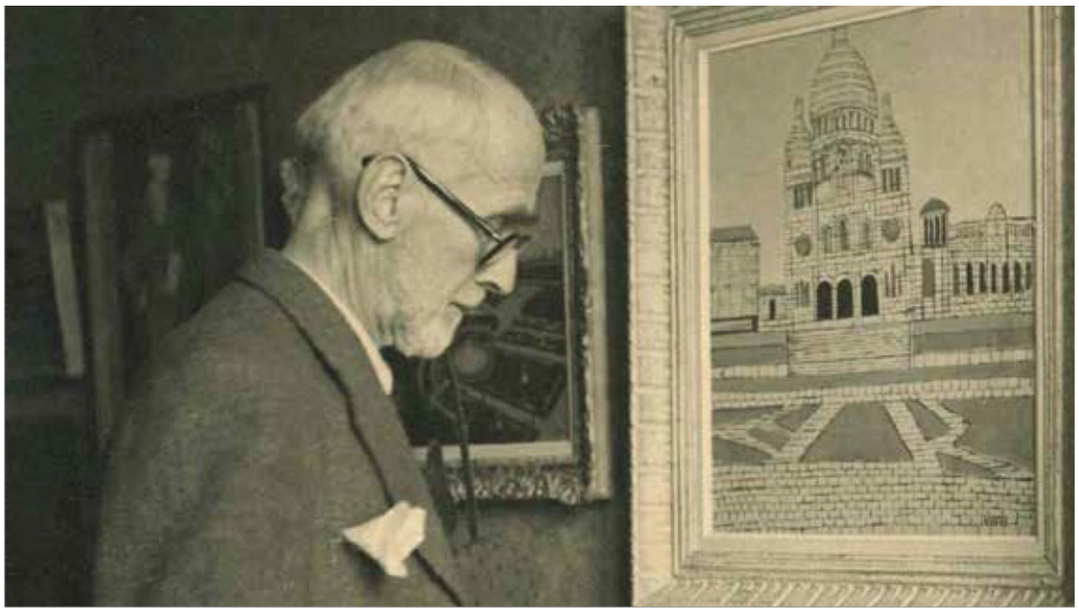
In his autobiography, he writes that trying to gain recognition from this point on would be incredibly challenging for him, just as it is for many artists.

However, as mentioned above, Rousseau was never viewed as insignificant by his contemporaries. On the contrary, those who sensed a peculiar 'mastery' within his simplicity and innocence, and those who gave him a respected place in exhibitions and major museums, were proven right by Rousseau's art. The fresh style that emerged under Rousseau's influence led to the rise and growing fame of other naïve painters in Paris, the cradle of all modern art movements. Over time, it became clear that not only in Paris but in many other countries around the world, there were genuine naïve artists who had remained unknown until then, creating art and sharing their vision. As research and studies expanded, these folk talents—discovered in the process—came to be seen as noteworthy for a human life nearly flattened by technological advances and mass production. Indeed, in naïve paintings, there were profound traces of distant, bygone worlds, along with personal experiences and an untouched sensitivity.

Naive art stands as a counterpoint to modern civilization, industry, and bourgeois society, as well as to traditional painting techniques and academic standards. At the same time, it answered many of the demands of a new era. Among the leading figures of naive painting in France, it's essential to mention Bauchant, Rimbert, Lefranc, Vivin, Bombois, Desnos, Lagru, and Séraphine Louis.

Of these artists, André Bauchant (1873–1958) was the son of a vineyard owner and earned his living as a horticulturist. In 1921, he exhibited sixteen paintings at the Salon d'Automne, attracting considerable attention. Architect Le Corbusier discovered a "new spirit" in his works. Collectors took a keen interest in his paintings. When the Charpentier Gallery hosted a retrospective in 1949 featuring 215 of Bauchant's paintings, his name reached a wider audience. Two of his major compositions were displayed in the Museum of Modern Art.

Chermine Vidori
Rome
40 x 40 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Wilhelm Uhde (1874–1947)

Rimbert (1896) worked as a clerk in the postal service. Max Jacob remarked that he was so captivating, he could rival the very silence of matter itself. Jules Lefranc (1887) hailed from the same town as Rousseau. He was known for his highly realistic paintings rendered in vivid colors. Louis Vivin (1861-1936), like Rimbert, was also a postal clerk. From childhood, he painted with supplies given to him by a priest. This artist, who mainly depicted cityscapes, was also discovered by the collector and writer Uhde.

Camille Bombois (1883) spent his childhood along the canals, as his father was a boatman. By age twelve, he worked as a farmhand. He started drawing rural scenes and, at one point, even became a wrestling champion. He worked in a traveling circus, and after moving to Paris, he found work as a laborer on construction sites. He also worked for a long time at a printing house. His first artworks were exhibited on the street, which caught Uhde's attention. His paintings eventually found their way into the National Museum of Modern Art.

Ferdinand Desnos (1901-1959) earned his living as a gamekeeper. After moving to Paris, he spent many years working as a doorman. He received strong encouragement from writers. He painted various subjects, often focusing on animal figures. Dominique Lagru (1873-1960) lost his parents at a young age. He began working as a shepherd at twelve. He created his first painting at seventy-five and held his first exhibition in 1951.

Séraphine de Senlis, also known as Séraphine Louis (1864-1934), was a shepherd early on, and became a housekeeper after moving to Senlis. Until being discovered by Uhde in 1912, she was completely unknown. Uhde purchased several of her paintings. She worked day and night by the light of a small lamp, facing an image of the Virgin Mary. Her paintings are marked by a mystical quality. In 1930, she lost her sanity and passed away in an asylum.

Outside of France, Yugoslavia stands out as one of the countries where naïve art truly flourished. In fact, naïve art there became an entire movement, giving rise to a remarkable number of folk artists. Since many of these artists grew up in or gathered in the village of Hlebine, they are collectively known as the "Hlebine School" of Yugoslav naïve art. Among the most renowned, with international acclaim, are Ivan Generalic (1914), Ivan Rabuzin (1919), and Mirko Virius (1889–1943). Others, such as Franjo Fillpovic, Dragan Gazi, Mijo Kovacic, and Mato Skurjeni, are also notable figures in the movement. What unites these artists is their vivid depiction of everyday rural life, painting as they see and feel it. Of all of them, Generalic is especially fascinating. In his autobiography, he writes: "I was born in the village of Hlebine in 1914. I attended elementary school there for five years. Coming from a poor family, I couldn't go on to higher education.

I began drawing in elementary school. After classes, out in the fields,

Wilhelm Uhde, a collector, was among the first to recognize the unique works of naïve artists. Henri Rousseau, who worked as a customs officer, became celebrated as a pioneer of modern art thanks to his authenticity, his resistance to academic norms, and his bold independence from tradition.

I worked as a swineherd and a cowherd. As I got older, like the other villagers, I worked in the fields. Whenever I had free time, I would quickly sketch patterns of various things onto sheets of paper.

Up until I turned sixteen, I drew on paper with pencil because I couldn't afford paint. Kristo Hegedusic, a professor at the Zagreb Academy of Art, heard about me and came to meet me. He always encouraged me to paint from my own imagination and never to copy anyone else. In 1931, I took part for the first time in the 'Zemlia' artists' association exhibition in Zagreb. A few of my works were sold at that show, and with the money I earned, I bought oil paints. From then on, I began exhibiting my paintings regularly, both at home and abroad. I still live in the countryside today, and whenever I find time away from the fields—on rainy winter days and Sundays—I paint. I prefer working with oil on glass and using fresco techniques. I am a member of the Yugoslav Painters' Association. It's clear that, for naive painters, Krsto Hegedusic in Yugoslavia played a role much like Wilhelm Uhde did in France: supporting these folk artists who worked quietly, unaware of the art world's developments, helping them uncover their hidden talents, and defining their place in the ever-changing panorama of artistic styles. Even when these artists leave their villages or towns for the big city, they never lose the essential spirit and unique character of their art, remaining true to it to the very end. Surely, the fact that they never received any formal or academic art education plays a significant role in this.

It's clear that the fact they never received formal or academic art training plays a major role in this. These artists aren't chasing after fame or fortune; their sole purpose is to keep their passion for painting alive, channeling their thoughts and emotions into colors and forms.

As a shared language of art, "naiveté" quickly made itself known, with artists from many countries being recognized. In the United States, figures like Grandma Moses, Mary Ann Wilson, O'Brady, Edward Hicks, Morris Hirshfield, and Samuel Koch stand out; in England, Bernard Carter, A. W. Chester, James Lloyd, and Bill Maynard; in Germany, Adalbert Trillhaase, Kasmieiczack, Hans Koehn, and F. Gerlach; in Italy, Rosina Viva, Carmelina, and B. Passotti Allegretti; in Spain, Miguel de Rivera Bagur and Miguel Vivancos; in Switzerland, Adolf Dietrich; in Poland, Nikifor and Zaneckzko; in Belgium, Van Hyfte; in Cuba, Rafael Moreno; from Georgia, Niko Pirosmani; in Ireland, Greta Bawen; in Egypt, Burchard Smeika; and in Haiti, Hector Hyppolite. Other notable naive painters include Philome Obin, Jean Gourgue, and Velasques from Honduras, among many others spread across different countries. Particularly, the folkloric, mystical qualities of these last artists—the Haitian naives—caught the special attention of André Breton.

In addition to the "Primitives of the Twentieth Century" exhibition held by naive painters in Paris in 1948, the "International Naive Painters" exhibition was organized in Brussels in 1958. That same year, the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris opened a gallery named after Wilhelm Uhde, a great patron of naive artists, dedicating the space entirely to artists working in this unique style.

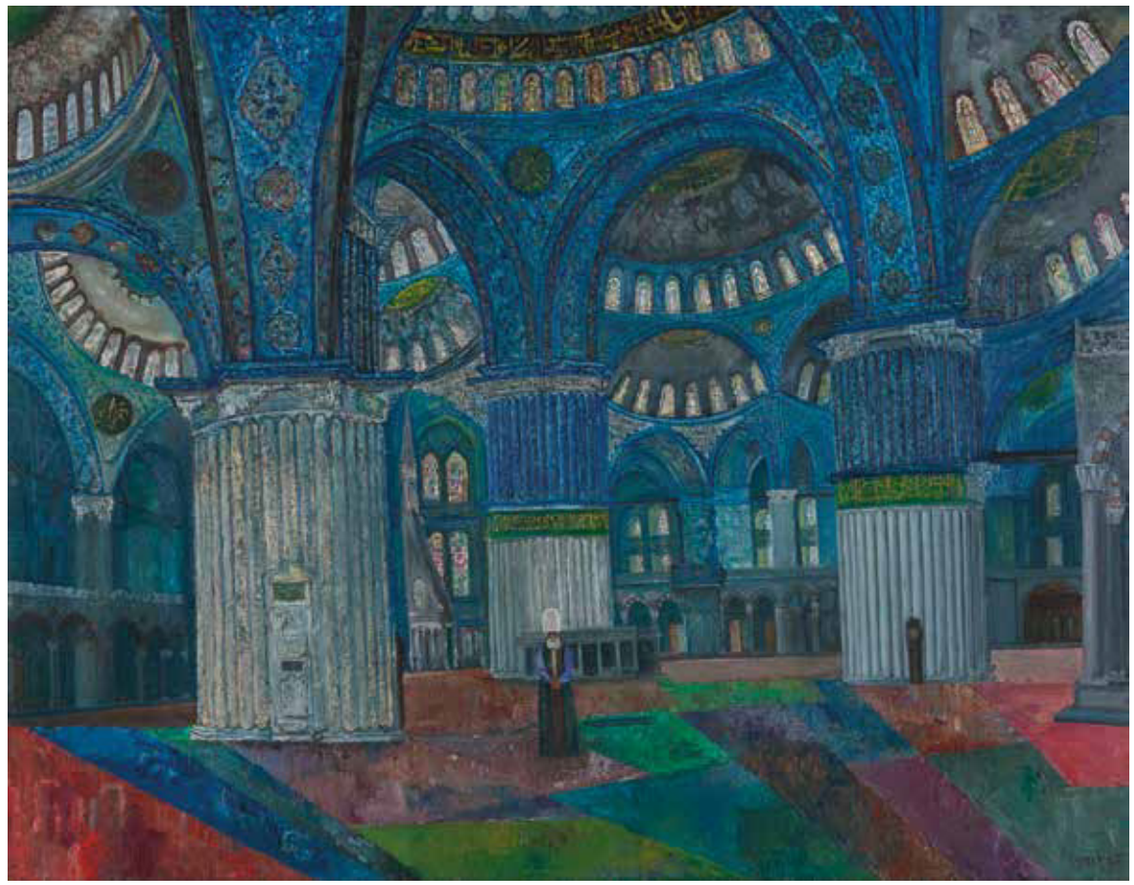
Finally, in 1967, Andrée Bordeaux-Lepecq established a museum of naïve art in Laval, the birthplace of Rousseau and Lefranc.

However, all these efforts around naïve art eventually led to a kind of naïve mannerism. Some, lacking genuine naïve qualities, began to exploit the authenticity and heartfelt sensitivity of naïve painters, presenting 'naiveté' as an artificial artistic language—much like the way faux abstractionists approach the subject superficially. Just as we distinguish fake abstractionists from the real ones today, it's equally important to separate true naïve artists from the imitators and give the genuine talents their rightful place.

Traces of naïve art can also be found in sculpture. Although there aren't as many examples as in painting, naïve sculptures—or works that fall into this category—have developed alongside painting, and most are anonymous pieces with unknown creators. Shepherds, prisoners, and sailors, who pioneered this kind of art, would spend their free time combining objects to create small sculptures. These works attracted the attention of art lovers and writers. Ferdinand Cheval (1836–1924) was the first to collect fantastic sculptures he discovered during his daily walks, assembling them at the "Palais du Facteur Cheval" in Drom. Rothéneuf (1819–1910) and Miller Lacoste also contributed in the nineteenth century by carving stone sculptures. Frédéric Céron (1876–1958), who decorated his garden along the Fontainbleau road with unusual sculptures and boxes filled with mysterious objects, is considered one of the pioneers of this style. His sculptures, featuring angel figures, dancers, and giraffes adorned with vibrant colors, create a unique effect. Another artist, Hippolyte Massé, crafted seashell creatures, sirens, ropes, and anchors in Vandée, blending baroque influences with Latin American flair. In Chartres, cemetery worker Raymond Isldore decorated his homes entirely with pieces of glass, porcelain, and mosaics. Vegetable farmer Joseph Marmin, after his work in the village of Essarts, made animal shapes from reeds, thread, and iron plates, bringing to life a vivid, naïve world.

Naïve art has also influenced modern creative approaches. Even among intellectual artists today, there are many who genuinely admire "naivete." Some see the qualities of naïve painting in masters like Le Nain, Chardin, Corot, and even Ingres. In artists such as Chagall, collective and folkloric inspirations are skillfully blended with aspects of naïve art. Belgian Edgar Tytgat, French Jean Fautrier, Germans Otto Dix and George Grosz, American Ben Shahn, and finally Spanish-born Pablo Picasso all display unmistakable naïve elements in their work.

Given all this, naive art, in its full complexity,



Cihat Burak (1915–1994)
Inside the Mosque
114 x 146 cm
Oil on hardboard, 1969
Demsa Collection

It's actually quite hard to define this precisely. Still, it's important to distinguish between artists who are truly naïve by nature and those whose work shows some naïve traits but don't fully belong to that category. Here are some key characteristics we often see in naïve artists:

1. Naïve artists usually come from everyday backgrounds and nearly all of them have other jobs outside of painting. Many work as shepherds, homemakers, postal workers, nursery workers, farmers, printshop employees, or laborers, supporting themselves through these professions.

2. They haven't received formal art training. Even for those with elementary or secondary education, their schooling didn't steer them toward art. And any private art lessons they might have had never really changed their inner world in a significant way.

3. All of them have remained outside the mainstream rules and trends of the art world. That's why their goal is to show things not as they appear, but as they truly are—"telles qu'elles sont."

They focus intently on details, often painting as if counting every leaf on a tree or every stone in a building. Rousseau and Vivin's paintings are perfect examples of this approach.

4. Their works make generous use of mystical and metaphysical themes, connecting them in some ways to surrealist painters.

5. They gained their first recognition mostly thanks to art dealers, collectors, and writers. Without their encouragement, we might not even know about the phenomenon of naïve painters today.

6. They use pure, vivid colors in their work. While they generally stay true to natural colors, they sometimes exaggerate hues and embrace a fantastical sense of color. Outlines around colors are crisp and clear.

7. As we mentioned earlier, there's a strong connection between their personal lives and their artistic identities.

Cihat Burak (1915-1994)
The Music Ensemble
32.5 x 37.4 in
Oil on canvas, 1956
Demsa Collection

8. Most people start painting later in life. Unlike professional artists, they tend to paint during their free time or on weekends and holidays. The term 'Sunday painter' (peintre du dimanche) describes this characteristic perfectly.

Let's clarify that the qualities listed above aren't universal traits for all naïve artists. However, most have a few of these features in their personality. The true strength of naïve painters lies in their profound sensitivity, their genuine awe for nature's brilliance, their heartfelt love for people, flowers, and animals, and their sincere affection for their surroundings. Their happiness springs from vast dreams and primal emotions. Nothing in their work seems out of the ordinary, yet as you observe how inexperienced hands give rise to such fascinating styles through creative sensitivity, you can't help but be amazed. In fact, it could be said that naïve artists are meant to remain naïve. Their appreciation for art seems to instinctively stand apart from intellectual trends right from the start.

Not knowing how to draw or use paint has become, for them, a kind of mark of quality. That 'authentic' look partly comes from this lack of formal training, untouched by the rules and traditions of art. For naïve painters, nothing guides them except their eyes and emotions. Real

They take a childlike delight in presenting objects in new visions without losing their sense of reality. Yet, what they create always goes beyond mere childlike sensitivity. It's as if, without even realizing it, they've rediscovered the innocence that lies at the heart of art.

All these qualities show that artists with a naïve spirit can emerge in any era—in fact, "naiveté" acts as a shared value connecting artists who rise from among the people. In other words, naïve art isn't the product of a particular period or set of social and economic conditions, so it doesn't follow the mold of an artistic movement. That's why we refer to "naive painters" rather than a "naive movement." Even in texts about twentieth-century art, this tendency isn't treated as an artistic movement like Cubism, Impressionism, or Fauvism; instead, it's simply recognized under the label of "naive painters." Without mentioning the impact of naive artists, whose presence became widely felt from the early twentieth century onward, it's impossible to paint a full picture of contemporary art.

Details: Selçuk Toğul

The Five Masters of Naive Art

Nur Koçak

Since the 1950s, naive art—developing outside mainstream contemporary movements and charting its own path—has steadily drawn more attention with each passing day. Perhaps it's best seen as a reaction to twentieth-century art, a challenge to today's paintings that constantly push our imaginations with their limited visual tools and speak more to our minds than our eyes.

Closely following this evolution, Amsterdam's renowned Stedelijk Museum organized an exhibition last year titled "Masters of Naive Painting," showcasing works by Rousseau, Vivin, Séraphina, Bauchant, and Bombois. The show attracted great interest, with the names of the first generation of naive painters listed chronologically. The oldest among them, Rousseau, is considered the first true naive artist—by both himself and others.

The German art critic and painting collector Wilhelm Uhde, who lived in Paris, first introduced the works of these five painters to the public in 1928. In an exhibition he organized at the Galerie des Quatre Chemins, he called the artists "Sacré-Cœur Painters." He later explained the reason for this name in his book, "The Five Masters of Naive Art"—not because the artists lived near or frequently painted the bright, white Sacré-Cœur Basilica, but because they worked with humility and hearts full of love and faith. In later exhibitions, these artists were also described as "Modern Primitive Painters" or "Realist Folk Painters," labels that stemmed from the idea that, like medieval societies, they lacked formal education or stayed closely connected to nature in their art. The artists were sometimes called "Sunday Painters" as well, since many painted in their free time. It's no coincidence that by the end of the 19th century, figures like Picasso, Apollinaire, and progressive circles in Paris began to recognize naive painters as true "artists." This shift was clearly influenced by changing aesthetic theories of the era, such as the sudden appreciation for primitive African and medieval art.

In short, defining Naive art isn't easy. Still, there are some traits common to all Naive painters: strong linear elements, a lack of skill in using light and shadow or creating depth, and a meticulous focus on detail. Most Naive artists choose subjects related to their own lives. Gardener Bauchant's portrait is a great example—his paintings are narrative, almost like anecdotes, built from elements lined up side by side. Vivin's painting "The Zoo" is another good illustration. Another key aspect is that, due to their unique inner worlds, Naive painters tend to remain untouched by outside influences. Their methods don't fit with today's realistic painting, nor do their ways of distorting nature match the Expressionist approach. While Expressionists intentionally distort nature for a purpose, Naive painters do it unconsciously, almost as if it happens naturally.

Because they lack formal training, there are similarities between naïve artists and folk artists. However, folk art is anonymous, rooted in centuries-old traditions, and is a collective creation—not the product of a single individual. Folk painters often see themselves as "craftsmen," while naïve painters consistently identify as "artists."

We can also compare naïve art to children's art, and find some resemblances. Yet this likeness only holds on the surface; when you look deeper, things change. Children's drawings are created during a stage with the least experience, and their eyes don't pick, sift, or judge. Since children approach common themes in similar ways, searching for personal impressions in their work doesn't really make sense.

There may be an indirect link between the art of psychiatric patients and naïve painting. While it's often hard to say where illness ends and health begins, we do have to recognize that the inner world that shields a naïve artist from outside influences is quite different from that of someone struggling with mental illness. The naïve artist is firmly rooted in their community, but the works of psychiatric patients often reveal a clear break with their past and the world around them. As their illness deepens, their artistic language becomes harder to understand, setting them apart from naïve painters.

Henri Rousseau (1844 – 1910), who worked as a customs officer, was born in Laval. According to rumors, he once traveled to Mexico as a musician in Napoleon III's army.

Years later, it turned out that this story wasn't true, and Rousseau's frequent paintings of tropical plants and animals weren't inspired by firsthand experience, but rather by his own obsession. As he spun more and more tales, Rousseau took on an almost fairytale-like persona, known for his pure-heartedness and his trusting—some might say naïve—nature.

During that time, Rousseau befriended some of the leading figures of his day and painted portraits of many of them. Among his most famous works is a portrait of Apollinaire. It's also known that he painted people he'd heard about but never actually met. A great example of this is his portrait of Pierre Loti (1856–1923), a naval officer and writer who was elected to the French Academy. In this highly stylized portrait, Rousseau divided Loti's face into several distinct planes, and the misplaced shadows make his features seem almost fractured and scattered. The red fez on his head, his hair, ears, mustache, stiff white collar, and hands look as though they've been pasted onto the canvas after the fact. Even the cigarette between Loti's fingers appears on the verge of slipping to the floor. All of this is a result of Rousseau's approach—he worked each element of the painting separately, one by one. Yet this method doesn't diminish the painting's impact; on the contrary, it makes it even more striking.

Louis Vivin (1861–1936) was the son of a teacher from Hadol. He dreamed of becoming a painter from a young age, but when his father strongly opposed the idea, Vivin moved to Paris in 1881 and took a job at the post office. Starting out as a mail carrier, he climbed the ranks through hard work and eventually became the Inspector for the Eastern Region.

In 1922, just as he was hoping for a promotion, he was forced to retire due to his age, which hit him hard.

Vivin created most of his artwork after this point; having retired, he could finally dedicate all his time to painting, and his works reflect the emotional struggles he overcame. Often drawing inspiration from postcards, Vivin's style puts a strong emphasis on linear elements and architectural structure. His human figures, however, are rendered with a certain awkwardness—like in his piece "Venice," where people appear either much too large or much too small compared to their surroundings. Even though Vivin described his work as realistic, the colors he chose—vivid blues, muted greens, and soft grays—are far removed from reality.

Séraphine Louis (1867–1942) was the daughter of a watchmaker from Ansy. After moving to Senlis in 1904, she began painting on all sorts of surfaces—pots, cardboard, wooden panels, and scraps of fabric—trading her art for food. This caught the attention of Wilhelm Uhde, who provided her with a monthly stipend so she could focus more on her painting. Unlike other naïve artists, Séraphine's works don't tell stories, but it would be wrong to call them purely decorative. Since her worsening illness made it hard for her to express her feelings in words, she poured her emotions into her paintings. Inspired by nature, Séraphine repeatedly painted motifs of flowers, leaves, and fruit, ultimately presenting them to us as vibrant, abstract bursts of color.

The artist was known for having various personal obsessions. Séraphine, who once claimed, "The fathers of my children are angels," was fearful of being watched and uneasy in open spaces. Although she explored similar themes as others struggling with mental illness, her paintings are more structured and harmonious in color. Take, for example, her work "Tree of Paradise," which is adorned with split-open fruit and leaves that also resemble long-lashed eyes or delicate, feathered lips. It's clear she was decisive in her choices of color and form. Even after all these years, her paint still shines with its original brightness and vitality.

Séraphine's use of light in her paintings is truly fascinating; the sun seems to burst from the very center of her canvases, casting no shadows at all. Looking at her work, you get the sense of breathing in the atmosphere of a great French cathedral.

Naive art first rose to popularity in the late 19th century. Before that, works created by self-taught artists—marked by their spontaneity and simplicity—weren't widely recognized by professional artists or critics. Influenced by primitive art, naive painting stands out for its fluid lines, lively energy, joyful colors, and clear, uncomplicated shapes. Artists like Henri Rousseau, Séraphine de Senlis, André Bauchant, and Camille Bombois are among its best-known representatives, while this movement has also gained fans abroad, including major names like Joan Miró, Guido Vedovato, Niko Pirosmani, and Ivan Generalic.

Naive Art
Brodskaya, Nathalia
120 Illustrations, England, 2019
Naive Art: Innocence, simplicity, and
the poetic vision of an untutored eye

Andre Bauchant (1873–1958) received his early education in his hometown of Chateauneault and worked in agriculture there until World War I broke out. Drafted in 1914, he was first sent to Greece and later took part in the Gallipoli campaign. Bauchant left the military in 1919 and decided, quite late in life, to pursue painting. At first, he followed popular trends, choosing historical subjects favored by the art establishment and focusing on classical scenes in his early works. However, his artistic approach differed noticeably from academic painters. In his canvases, gods and goddesses are rendered on a more human scale, often appearing more robust than their surroundings. Bauchant was particularly successful when painting mythological subjects, achieving greater strength in his simple, sparsely populated compositions that allowed for more creative freedom. During his lifetime, his paintings gained recognition—architect Le Corbusier and painter Ozenfant discovered and bought his works. Serge Diaghilev invited him to design sets for the Russian Ballet. With his reputation growing, Bauchant began exhibiting regularly at Jeanne Bucher's gallery in Paris.

Camille Bombois (1883–1970), who worked as a shepherd during his childhood, stands out as one of the most 'painterly' artists of the first generation of naive painters. Throughout his life, his artistic instincts always took precedence, and painting became his main pursuit. Self-taught, Bombois reached a high level in his work from the very beginning.

we frequently encounter robust, powerful human figures. This likely stems from the artist's own physical strength—after all, Bombois won a regional wrestling championship in 1903 and later performed feats of strength in traveling circuses. When he settled in Paris in 1907, he continued to make good use of his exceptional abilities, taking on all sorts of jobs, from working on subway construction to selling newspapers. In 1922, everything changed when he met journalist-poet Noel Bureau, who helped open the doors to success for Bombois. Bureau began publishing reviews about him in the magazine "Ritm et Senter." Around the same time, Bombois met art dealer Mathot and started selling his paintings. Bombois often painted landscapes or lively interior scenes crowded with figures. Sometimes, a single figure would fill the entire canvas. The way he lined up elements side by side, created a sense of depth with color, and layered thin coats of paint one over another reminds us of Flemish masters. The figures in his works are usually nude, full-bodied, and suggestive, but never vulgar. Take his painting "Brothel at 2 A.M." as an example—it avoids any sense of menace, even with its doll-faced, expressionless women. Today, his piece "Athlete at the Fair" is recognized as a symbol of strength. The athlete at the heart of the painting, the central focus for Bombois, has arms that don't quite match the body. The background figures, all standing stiffly with blank stares, fade into the blue tones that dominate the canvas, making the athlete's chubby, pink arms stand out even more!

Details: Bayram Gümüş

The Art of the Naive

(Die Kunst Der Naiven)

Munich Art House

We greet you, friend
Rousseau, you will hear us

Delaunay, my wife, Mr. Queval
and I
Let our suitcases pass through
the gate of the void without
customs

We brought you brush, paint
and canvas
So that you may paint
in the blessed process
of true light
The face of the stars
As once in my portrait

Apollinaire

(Translated into Turkish by Hazar Alapınar)

Naïve Painters

Nikoslav Mick

With the sudden global spread of what's often called abstract art, a renewed interest in naïve painters has emerged—something that's become a hallmark of today's artistic taste. There's no doubt these two movements share certain similarities. On one hand, this fascination is closely linked to trends in contemporary art; on the other, it resonates with the spirit of the times. In a way, it's a response to the increasing artificiality in art, a search for something genuine to fill that void. As our world races forward, and art tries to keep up with rapidly advancing science and technology, it has often lost touch with its natural sources of inspiration and its ties to everyday life. That's when the world of naïve painters captures our imagination—their childlike innocence and sincere perspective draw us back to the essence of being human. In their works, time seems to slow down or even stand still. In a world filled with difficulties and contradictions, they bring back the clarity and simplicity we thought was lost long ago. In a sense, they embody the endless creative potential of people within the framework of modern culture.

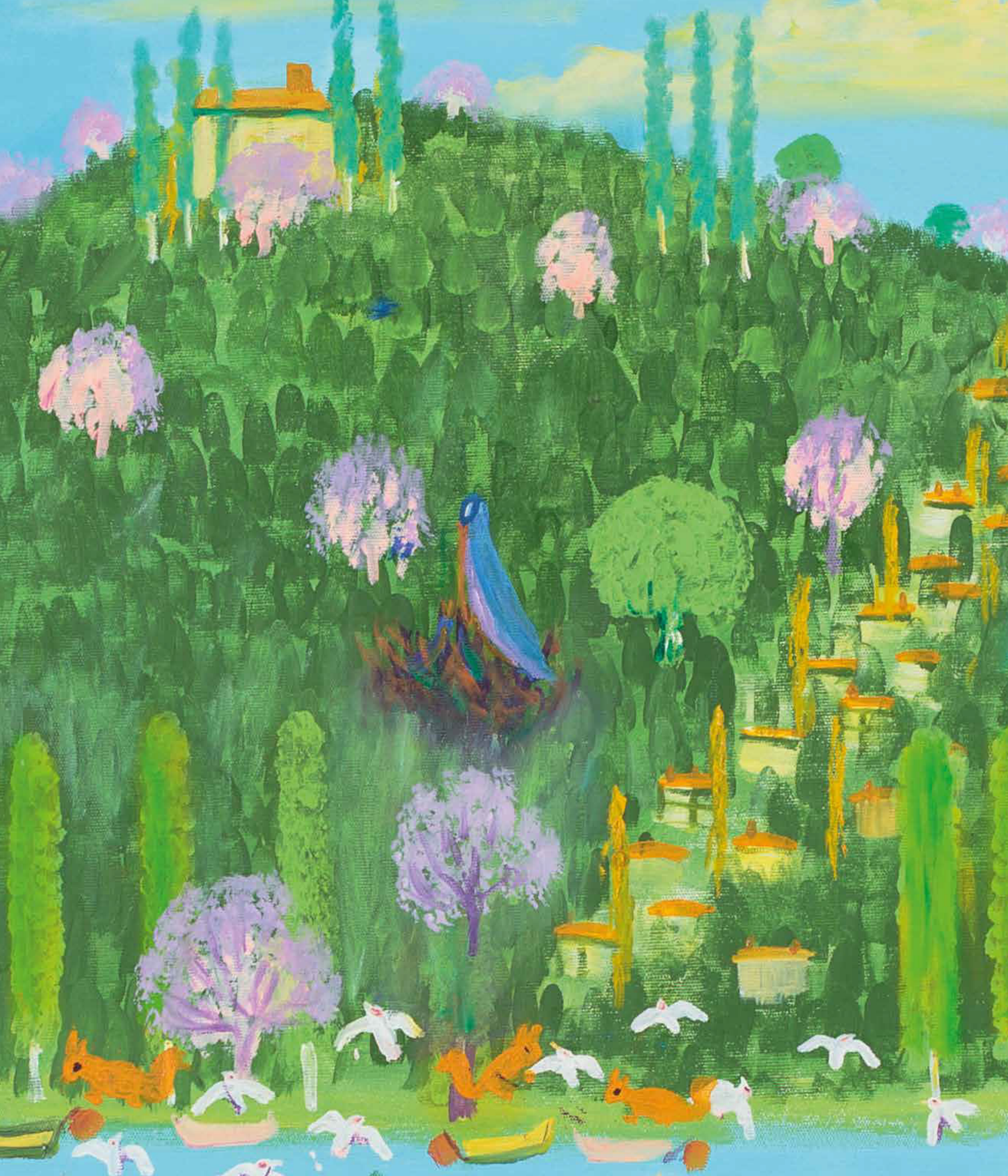
Even though we may have seen similar artists in the past, and even if their art doesn't always appear modern or contemporary, naïve painting is still recognized as a fresh and historically significant phenomenon. Anatole Jakovsky, attempting to shed light on this topic from the perspective of historical materialism, points out its economic and social roots. For example, in France, some talented individuals were left to their own devices. Aside from professional painters, there was a growing gap between traditional academic art and these self-taught, independent artists.

A group of self-taught amateur painters emerged, and the gap between them and traditional academic artists widened even further in the second half of the revolutionary era—especially as, in those days, ordinary people began to step into the spotlight of history and claimed their say not just in politics but also in matters of truth and beauty. In much the same way, as technological progress and the rise of democratic forces swept away the last traces of feudalism in some countries, large segments of society turned away from folk art and embraced more individualistic, personal forms of creative expression. Perhaps the most interesting among them were the so-called "Sunday painters"—people who painted in their spare time, just for themselves. Later on, especially in the 20th century, the luckiest of these artists managed to devote themselves to painting beyond weekends. Where folk art still thrives, you can often spot its vibrancy in the works of naïve painters. For instance, the primitive Yugoslav painters, who became widely known even outside their own country, started to gain recognition before World War II. Until then, many of these artists were anonymous and unrecognized, but around that period, they began to break away from traditional rules and express their own unique outlooks on life and the world, even as they continued to be inspired by their roots.

Insita Magazine

Hüseyin Yüce (1928–2015)
40 x 80 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Hüseyin Yüce (1928–2015)
50 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Details: Mehmet Arpacık

Naiveté in Turkish Painting

Kaya Özsezgin

Mehmet Pesen (1915–1994)
Bridal Green
28 x 38 cm
Oil on canvas
1989
Demsa Collection

Mehmet Pesen (1915–1994)
Karaköy
29 x 19 cm
Oil on canvas
1987
Demsa Collection

Turkish painting is typically grouped into two major periods. The first traces its roots from Central Asian Uyghur art, through Seljuk illustrations, and then to Ottoman miniatures—reaching its peak in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries before fading away at the end of the eighteenth century as Western influences grew. This was the era of traditional, two-dimensional art. The second period began right after, heralding the use of perspective, light and shadow, and Western techniques with the advent of oil painting.

The hallmark works of the first period, miniatures, were created by artists who learned their craft and style in the palace, mastering the art through an apprentice system. The illustrations were drawn two-dimensionally on book pages, often inspired by stage-like scenes and prioritizing stylization—an outcome of the Islamic artistic tradition. Over time, as this style evolved and adapted across regions, it became clear that, much like Western illustration, miniatures experienced distinct historical phases and met certain societal needs. As seen in many artistic traditions, one can speak of a certain purity in these miniatures as well.

For instance, in the works of Mehmet Siyahkalem from the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, Matrakçı Nasuh from the era of Suleiman the Magnificent, and Nakkaş Osman—who created some of the most intriguing pieces during Murad III's rule—one finds remarkable craftsmanship, a heartfelt gaze at nature, and at times, a touch of fantasy. Still, as the official court art style, these miniatures differ in their vision from woodblock prints in folk books, magical and talismanic illustrations, and shadow theater figures like Karagöz—each reflecting the people's sensibilities. While the miniature tradition evolved through the leadership of various masters, folk art preserved its authenticity and "purity" for centuries, remaining essentially unchanged. This authenticity, without a doubt, stems from the inherent spirit of anonymous folk art. In his "Folk Paintings of Anatolia," Malik Aksel notes that while intellectuals were drawn toward Iran and the Arab world in art and religion, the people remained true to their own identity. Even if one cannot fully agree with this verdict, it's undeniable that folk artists drew their creative power from their roots. Viewed from this angle, the works of folk artists—who blended the inspiration of the world around them with folklore and the subconscious, maintaining an anonymous sensibility—must be seen as the earliest examples of naïve art.

Meanwhile, by the late eighteenth century, the pioneers of Western-influenced Turkish painting—many of whom were military artists—became recognized as the primitives of modern Turkish art. Many of these early artists remain anonymous, belonging to a generation that had yet to connect with European studios or receive formal academic training. As a result, their works are seen as expressions of deeply personal and sincere emotion. Indeed, a closer look at their paintings reveals meticulous craftsmanship, a natural tranquility, and in their colors,

A refined appreciation for form stands out here. Still, the fact that these artists were in technical and aesthetic dialogue with certain paintings sets their craftsmanship apart from that found in folk art. Among this group—featuring well-known names like Fahri Kaptan, Hüseyin Giritli, Osman Nuri, and Salih Molla Askı—their works are displayed in the first hall of Istanbul's Painting and Sculpture Museum, under the banner of the first Turkish oil painters. All were deeply attuned to nature, prioritizing the faithful rendering of what they observed onto their canvases. Many of their paintings reflect the views from the gardens of Yıldız Palace. Yet, among those who traveled west and returned with academic training, artists like Şeker Ahmet Paşa managed to preserve their purity and primal sensitivity—even if only to a certain extent. However, this period was brief and had little impact until the arrival of figures like Turgut Zaim and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu. The first artist mentioned sought to blend the traditional miniature style with Western techniques from his own perspective, while the second aimed to fuse folk taste and the subtle elegance of handcrafted works into his unique artistic world, elevating and reinterpreting them. Some artists displayed traces of primitivism, others of "naiveté"—sometimes clearly, sometimes subtly—developing their art around these naïve qualities. It was only after 1955 that such artists began to gain recognition and influence in the art scene. This emergence also coincided with an era when discussions about returning to our own roots and local tastes began to intensify.

The era when conversations about returning to our own roots and local tastes became more prominent, naturally led to a fresh perspective on naive artistic leanings that had previously attracted little attention. For over a century, we've been closely intertwined with Western techniques and sensibilities.

It became necessary to take stock of this relationship, to outline what our cultural and artistic world gained from it and what was neglected—in short, to assess Turkish painting under Western influence. Artists with an awareness of their craft began to approach authentic works with more genuine appreciation, aiming to blend what they gained from these pieces into syntheses that wouldn't clash with modern artistic vision, and to understand their surroundings with a sensitive, artistic eye. These ideas were evaluated by artists with a strong sense of art, reigniting a spark that had nearly faded. Such developments were certainly positive. Still, it would be incomplete to attribute the rise of naive painters solely to these changes. On the land of Anatolia, where folk sensibility has pulsed like a heartbeat for centuries, there were naturally countless folk artists whose names remained unknown. Among their handcrafted, heartfelt creations, there were paintings adorning unexpected places. Their 'grotesque' forms and unpolished style not only reflected everyday life but also revealed the authentic essence of the people, unbound by formal rules or knowledge.

Cihat Burak (1915–1994)
Meeting Place
93 x 61 cm
Oil on canvas, 1971
Demsa Collection

Oya Zaim Katoğlu (1940–2024)
50 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas,
1972-1973
Demsa Collection

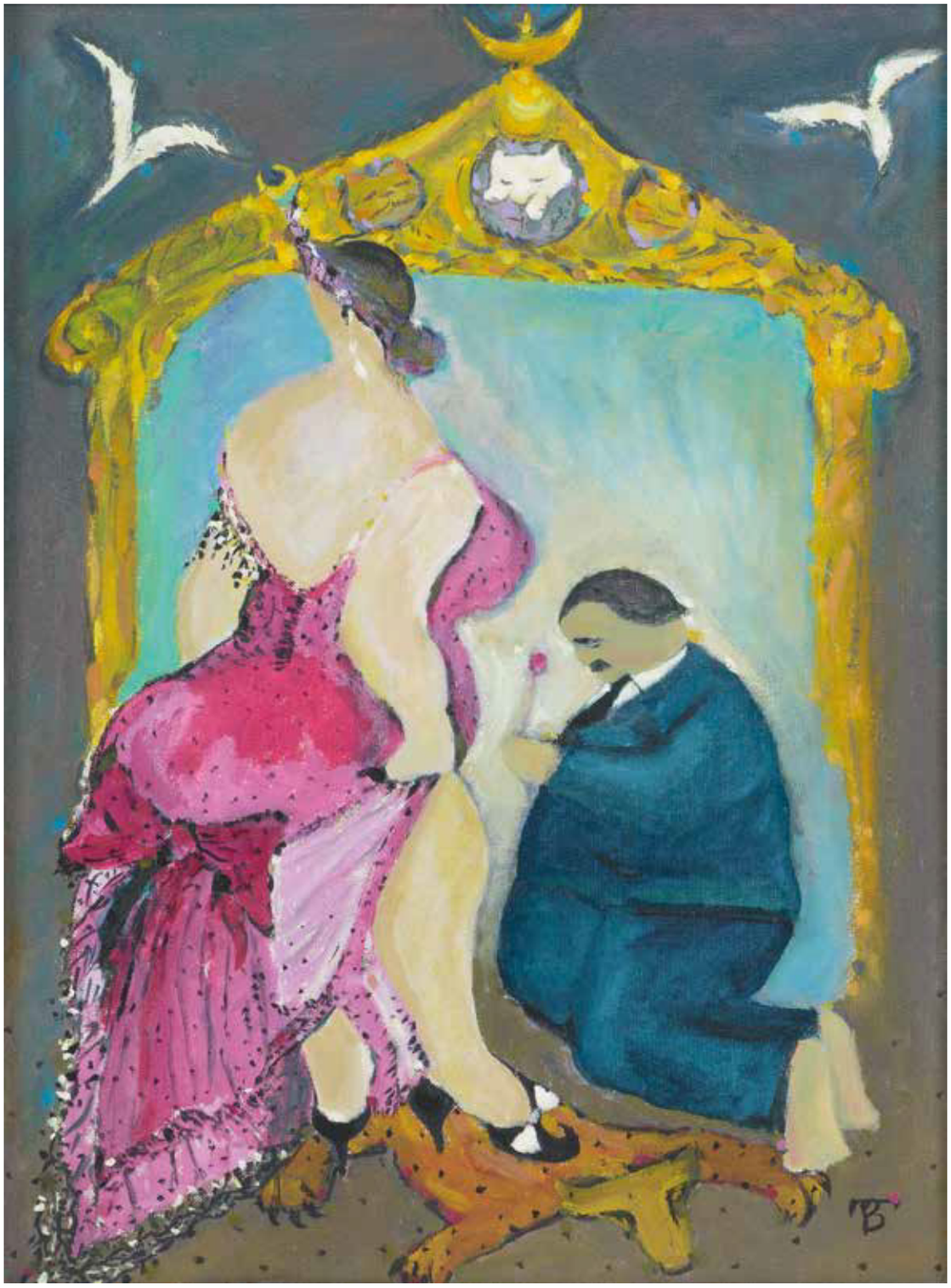
One of those who kept this admiration alive was Hüseyin Yüce, who was quietly painting in the village of Göveçci, Kütahya, when artist Cemal Bingöl discovered him. Soon, his works began to be exhibited in galleries in Ankara. Hüseyin Yüce (1928) was born in the same village. As a child, he started by herding sheep and attended night school for about a month. Since he didn't have a pencil when he was young, he drew pictures using charcoal and chalk. Later, he moved on to painting with colors. His first exhibition was held in Kütahya. He also participated in the traditional naïve artists' exhibition in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. In his autobiography, he says he prefers autumn and countryside scenes, doubts that people without formal training can become artists, but remains grateful to Cemal Bingöl for his support. He still works as a mason in his village and paints whenever he finds free time.

All the hallmarks of naive wit can be found in Hüseyin Yüce's paintings. These works, woven with pure colors, typically depict nature—mystical trees and houses that evoke powerful associations. From the sky all the way down to the earth, everything seems to be enveloped in a peculiar stillness. He approaches his art with meticulous observation, making sure not to overlook even the smallest detail as he strives to capture the fullness of nature on his canvas. In Yüce's works, traces of a tender sensitivity, tinged with melancholy, can always be found.

Although his main profession is architecture, even in Cihat Burak (1915), the spontaneous spirit of "naiveté" seeps into every tiny shows through in every detail. Even as a child, he was drawn to art. While studying at Galatasaray High School, he and a few close friends would use their breaks to paint together. At the end of each year, they would hold small exhibitions. Deep down, he always wanted to become a painter, but ended up enrolling in the Academy's architecture department. After graduating, he spent some time in Paris. In his biography, Cihat Burak remarks that his understanding and knowledge of painting have remained unchanged since his early student days, and that he never quite grasped the appeal of painters others found fascinating. He states, 'To me, painting feels like something apart from the intellectuals.' Indeed, the satirical and humorous, almost 'awkward' style in Burak's works creates a bond with the wit of everyday people, while at the same time embracing all the possibilities of naïve art. Still, his paintings never fail to reveal a refined sense of taste beneath it all, one that draws on creative imagination and a flair for variation, originality, and inventive energy.

Fahir Aksoy (1917–2008) began working as a journalist at a young age, after his family's finances took a downturn following his primary and secondary education. He also spent some time working in insurance. He developed close friendships with many writers, and contributed stories, essays, interviews, and critical pieces to various newspapers and magazines. His passion for painting didn't emerge until much later in life. He often exhibited his works not in major cities, but in local towns and villages across Anatolia. Despite his close circle of intellectual painter friends, the naïve character of his art never changed. His work is less about meticulous craftsmanship and more about,

Yalçın Gökçebağ (b. 1944) Oil on canvas, 60x80 cm
Demsa Collection



Berna Türemen (1945-)
Pleading
60 x 40 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

She reflects her pure impressions of events and scenes just as she feels them, without any pretense. Oya Katoğlu (1940–2024), daughter of Turgut Zaim, pursued art history after her primary and secondary education. She learned painting from her father. Her sweeping landscapes are painted on large canvases with meticulous craftsmanship. In Katoğlu's first solo exhibition, held in Ankara in 1966, nature, houses, and people stand out in her works, coming together in complementary scenes that rise like the stones of a building.

Alongside these artists, there are some whose works, despite their intellectual leanings, still reveal pure elements. Among such artists are Nedim Günsür, İhsan Cemal Karaburçak, Turgut Zaim, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Arslan Gündaş, Aziz Alpagut, İbrahim Balaban, Leylâ Gamsız, and Şükriye Dikmen...

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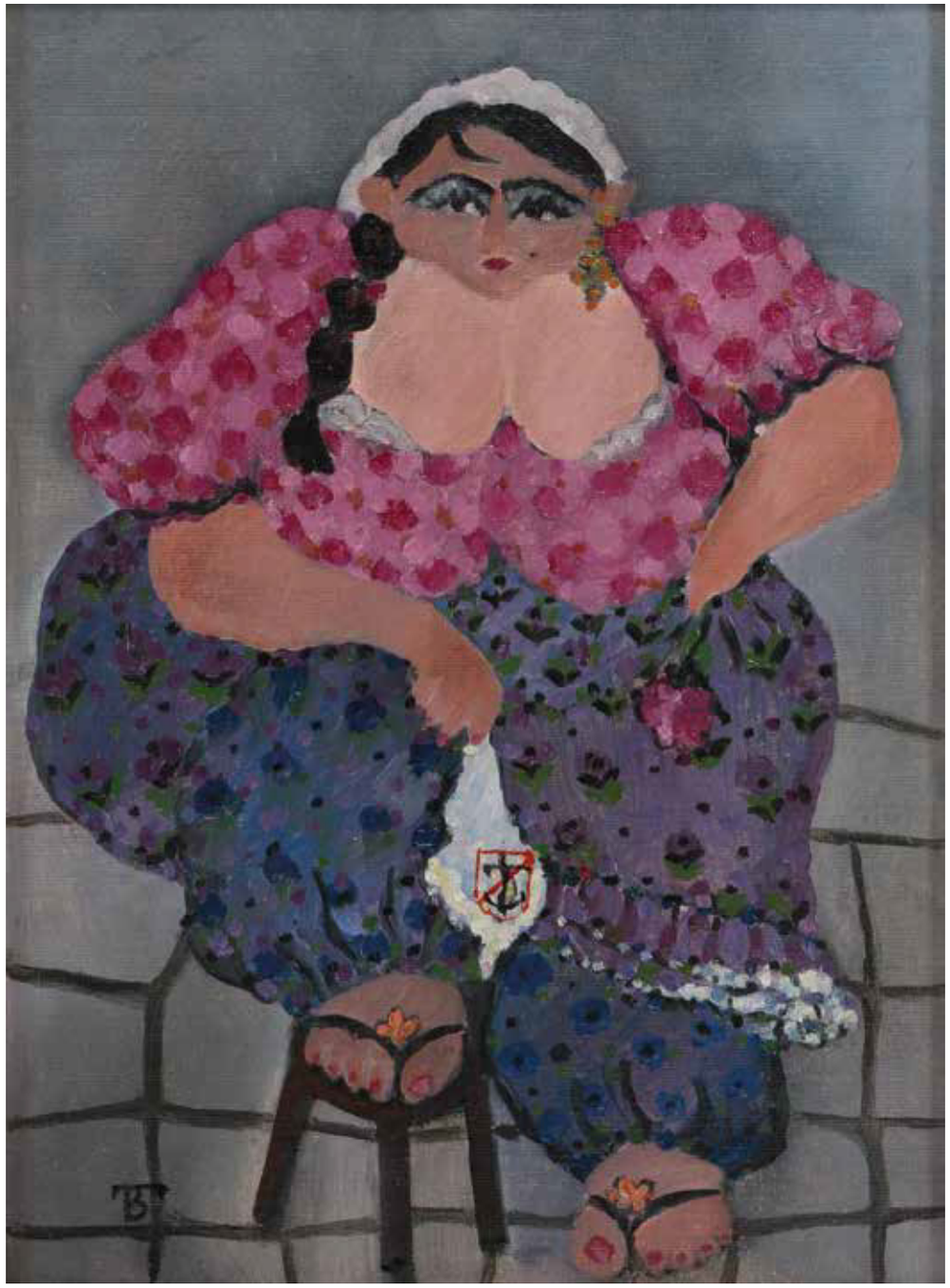
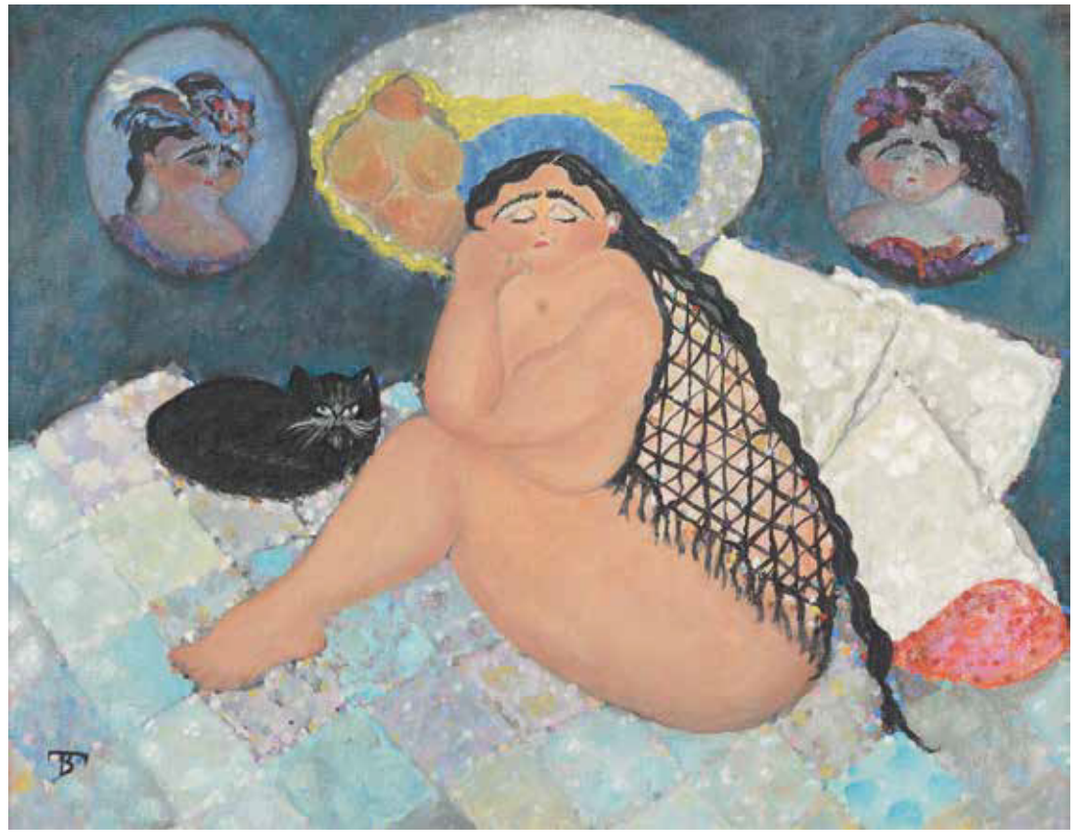
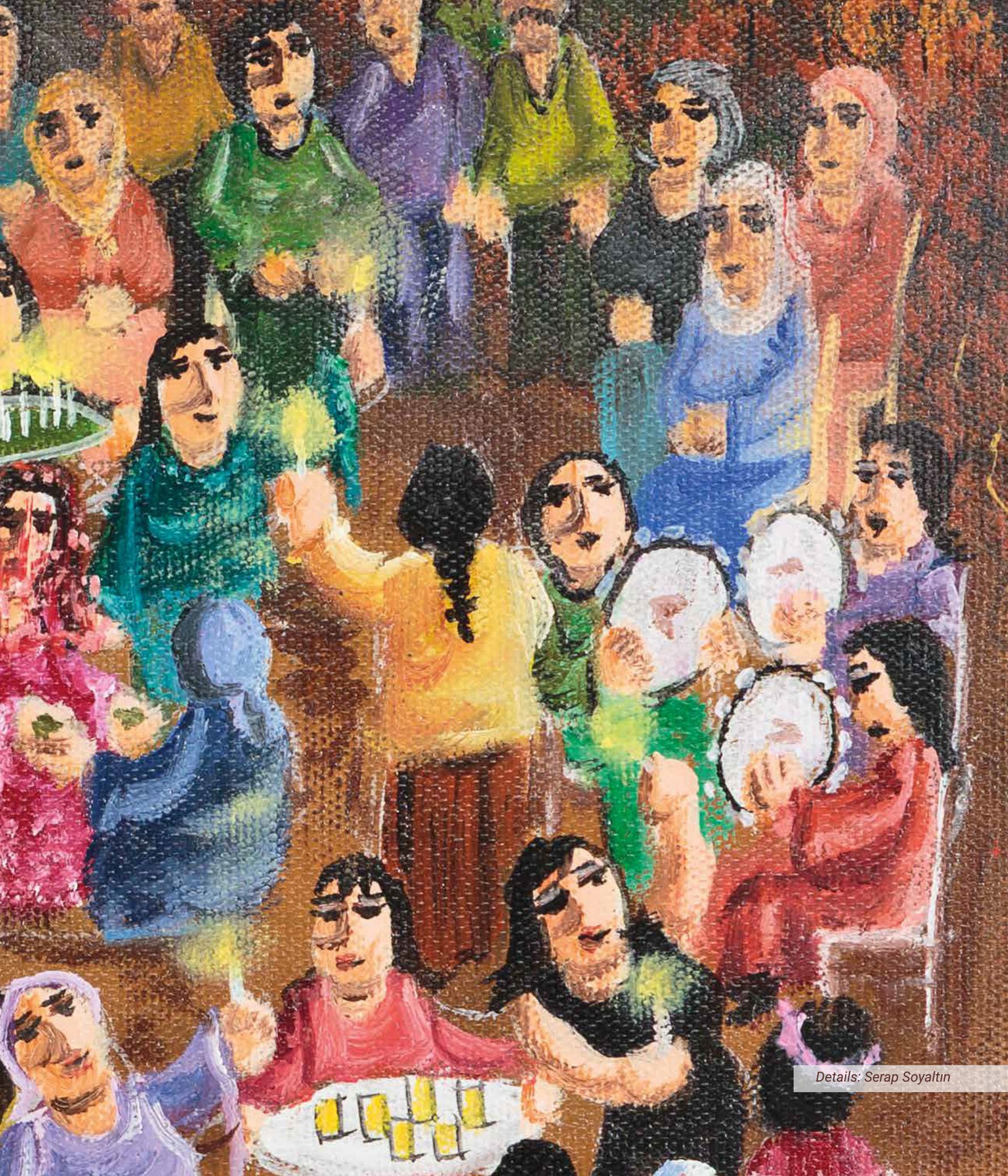
Berna Türemen (born
1945) 40 x 30 cm
Oil on canvasboard
Demsa Collection





Berna Türemen
Who Was Eftelya?
1983
Mixed media
on canvas
50 x 70 cm

Berna Türemen (1945–)
My Dear
45 x 55 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Details: Serap Soyaltın

A Brief Overview of Naive Art

Adolf Koupa

Naive art began to emerge at the end of the 19th century, shaped by social changes as cities gradually absorbed rural villages, and eventually took on its most commonplace (vulgar) forms. In our countries, this transformation happened later, during the 1920s and 1930s. As people left for small towns and villages, the rise of industry brought with it diluted tastes in art, filling these places with crafts lacking real artistic value. The people living in these rural areas often didn't know how to respond, but some realized these products couldn't satisfy their creative needs. This is how what we now call 'Naive Art' came into being. This explanation rings true. While I believe those who wanted to share their artistic values were seeking a way to express their inner lives and put themselves forward, I also think this perspective is valid. That's why, in the works of naive painters, we sense the joy of creation, the need for poetry to overflow—fundamental needs as basic as bread or air for every person. This is also why we find, within these works, humanity's eternal love for play and the desire to communicate. Deep down, everyone longs to leave lasting memories of their lives, dreams, and childhood, even if only for themselves, and to express those feelings outwardly. At the same time, within these works, we often see a quiet determination to surround oneself with beauty and to achieve a sense of lasting pride and permanence.

The primary elements of naive art are a focus on emotion, unspoiled lyricism (untainted by corruption), and pure-hearted vision tied to free inner

If we say that naive art is shaped by pure vision, heartfelt emotion, and a touch of fantasy, we'll find plenty of supporters for modern naive art. These are the direct and easily recognizable pioneers of the genre. From Emanuel Borijev Kasperides, a Polish folk artist at the start of the 19th century, to storyteller Cenek Manzura, versatile artist Jakob Svoboda, woodcarver, metalworker, ornament maker, and painter Alois Beer—there are many more. And beyond them, there are those who pour their hearts into their creations, elevating the value of naivety itself.

The drive for change in representation was just as much a passion for them as it is for today's naive artists. Nearly all of these works—painted souvenirs, landscape pictures, decorative shop art—were made by unknown, amateur artists.

Anyway, I truly believe that what's called the Publican (People's) paradise welcomes them all into the realm of naivety and poetry. One distinctive feature of Naive Art is that it didn't start out as a formal school or movement. Instead, over shorter or longer periods, it was gradually discovered, observed, and appreciated. The reason for this lies in how it progressed according to the demands for sensitivity and aesthetic standards of its era. In this sense, after World War I, naive art marched hand in hand with the major artistic movements that emerged. Naive art has always formed a kind of harmony with the latter,

It has become a crucial element. The ones most interested in it are poets and painters. Historian Wilhelm Uhde stands out as an exceptional example among the movements and discoveries fascinated by it. Rousseau is considered the father of modern naïve artists. Those who discovered and introduced him in this role were Jarry, Apollinaire, and Picasso. In our country (that is, Czechoslovakia), the situation regarding Rousseau is different for theorists and artists. Most of them came to know him only recently, around 1911, at the major exhibition held at the Salon des Indépendants. Antonin Matjcek, a prominent Czech historian, wrote the following about him.

"The exhibition of Publican (Folk) Rousseau is an exciting event for us. In his paintings, the rational artistic method expressed by Cezanne—which had become an unshakable dogma—is contrasted by an artistic approach shaped by the innocence of his feelings." That is why, in Paris, cubism supporters described it as an escape from an overly educated world. Braque's cubists rejected this, believing that such a non-intellectual approach to painting should not be taken.

Yet after 1918, with changing political and cultural circumstances, Rousseau's works and naïve art started to draw wider attention and interest. Much of this was thanks to the remarkable and unique presence of Guillaume Apollinaire. The poems that Apollinaire wrote about Rousseau had a profound impact on our artistic world —one that was unmatched anywhere else—and played a major role in this artistic movement.

The literary and artistic movement known as Poetism is defined by its aim to transform the world into poetry. In fact, Poetism recognized in Rousseau and naïve art a kinship with folk art, children's drawings, and the creativity of those outside the mainstream, and this connection sparked widespread interest.

The painters of the movement called "Devetsil" (Nine Forces) presented their works for the first time at the "Spring Exhibition" in 1922. Their style, labeled 'Poetic Naivety,' was clearly seen in the works of Alois Wachmann, Adolf Hoffmeister, František Muzika, and Bedřich Piskač.

Ever since "Publican (People's) Rousseau," playwrights, poets, and biographers have turned their attention to naïve artists. The artists themselves have also written about their own journeys. With pure hearts, they often felt compelled to express themselves not just through images, but with words and music too. Frequently, they peeled away the layers of poetry's hidden wells, breaking away from the rigid rules of language to reveal the true brilliance of words with humble sincerity. The anthology "Barefoot," proves this point: it features poems, stories, and memories from twenty naïve writers. Published in 1969, it was the first book of its kind in our country (Czechoslovakia). The most significant milestones in the recognition of Naïve Art were the two "Insite Art" triennials held in 1966 and 1969. A deeper exploration of these events goes beyond the scope of this article, but it must be said that their success owes much to the tireless spirit of Stefan Tkac.

and it was made possible thanks to their actions and ideas. Organizing an exhibition for the second triennial was also their initiative, creating an opportunity to compare contemporary naïve art with its historical counterparts and other artistic expressions. The panel discussions held during the event proved to be quite productive, bringing new challenges to light and at the very least, enabling a valuable exchange of ideas. Between the two triennials, the Brna Exhibition House hosted a show titled "The Mermaid Emerging from the Pool." The painting that gave the exhibit its name was by the recently discovered Czech naïve artist Vaclac Beranek. The exhibition was curated by Arsen Pohribny, and the posters included an explanatory note beneath the title.

Naïve art exhibitions aren't just held in major cities. These works are reaching wider audiences and what were once unknown creations are now being shared more broadly. The best pieces of naïve art are also being added to museum collections, showing a new, serious approach to this genre. The first and most notable collection of these works—both in quantity and quality—can be found at the Slovak National Gallery. Smaller displays are also featured in the Folk Art Department of the National Museum, in the Litomerica Regional Gallery, and a few other smaller institutions.

In general, we can say that the works of naive artists have become an integral part of our nations and our cultural heritage. This represents not just success and satisfaction, but something even greater. The first major exhibitions were initiated by Wilhelm Uhde. The earliest exhibition was held in Paris in 1926, thanks to Uhde's leadership. This was followed by shows in Zurich in 1932, Paris again in 1937, New York in 1938, Bern in 1944, Bratislava in 1946, and Belgrade in 1967. After 1967, especially in Bratislava, solo and group exhibitions increased dramatically and spread across the globe.

Naive artists have also contributed to publications that defend their art. Today, naive art stands as one of the era's most important artistic movements, holding its place alongside all modern, classical, abstract, and concrete schools and styles.

From now on, while many artists channel their emotions into refined, structured images to share with society, naive artists continue to express reality through their own childlike and passionate imagination. Over time, they have firmly established their place in the history of art.

Now, let's take a closer look at the next phase of naive art, marked by the adoption of the term "Insita," explore the stages of this development, and consider the thoughts of key thinkers on the subject. We'll wrap up this section with an article about Henri Rousseau, who passed away in 1910 at Paris' Necker Hospital, in poverty and solitude.

Insita Magazine

Detay : Mehmet Pesen

"Naive art is like the sound of a gunshot ringing out nearby."

André Derain

Abdullah Taktak

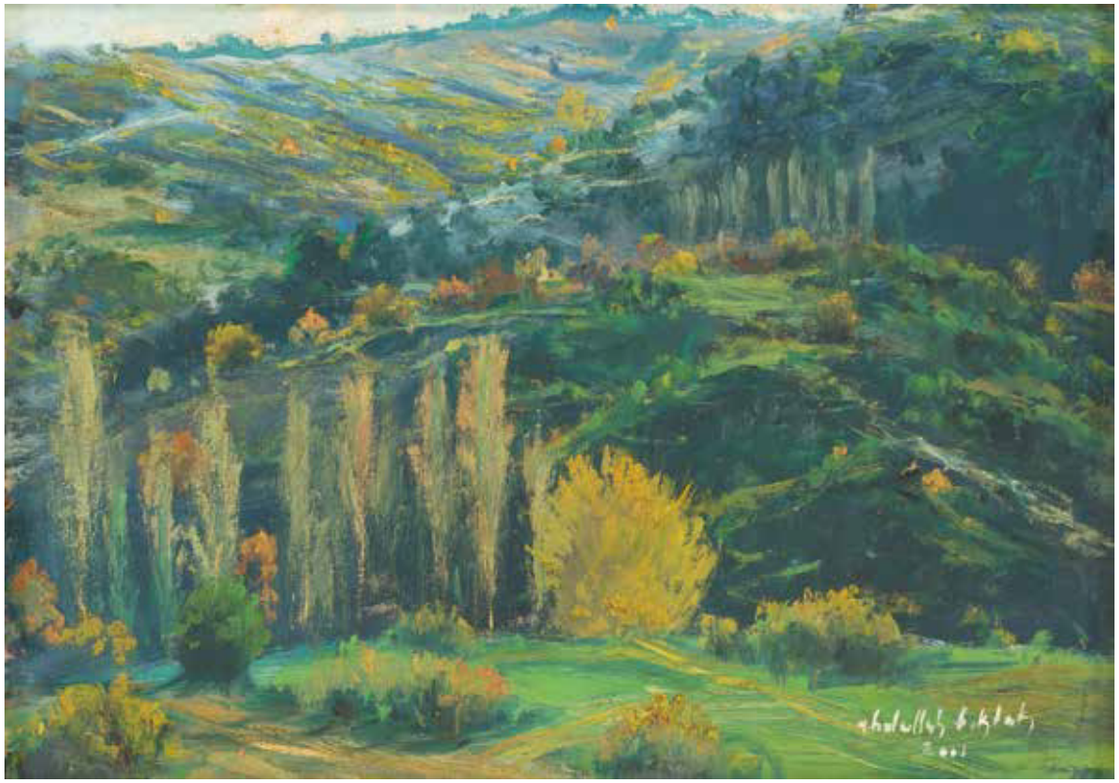
Abdullah Taktak, one of the gentle souls of Turkish painting, was born in Tavşanlı, Kütahya. He began elementary school in his hometown but left his studies early to start working, eventually joining the renowned chickpea roasting trade in Kütahya. According to stories, his age was recorded as older in the official registry, so he was drafted into the military at 16. After his discharge, he worked as a civil servant for eight years. It's believed he first picked up a paintbrush inspired by a night landscape during those years. Neyzen Painter Ahmet Yakupoğlu (1920–2016) had a significant influence on his artistic training and development.

Abdullah Taktak's works can be found in many public and private collections, and he has held solo exhibitions in cities such as Kütahya, Ankara, Istanbul, Bursa, Isparta, and even Dubai.

Taktak is remembered not only for his unique perspective and skillful brushwork—completing each piece with frames of his own creation—but also for his warm and witty personality.

Abdullah Taktak, 48x68 cm, oil on Duralit, 2001, Demsa Collection

Abdullah Taktak
48x68 cm
Oil on duralite panel
2001
Demsa Collection



Ayfer Yıldız

Born in Istanbul, Ayfer Yıldız completed high school and then spent two years studying Porcelain Decoration at Caferağa Medrese as an amateur. In 1997, she began working on oil paintings at the Yeşilyurt Art Club Studio. In 2000, her piece titled "Istanbul" won first prize at the International Naive Women Painters Competition. She is married and has two children. Ayfer loves to use the vibrant colors of nature that warm the soul in her artwork. Recently, her focus has been on recreating views of Istanbul. Unlike familiar, ordinary landscapes, she brings out the city's authenticity, history, and poetic spirit. Through her paintings, she offers new perspectives on Istanbul, helping viewers rediscover and fall in love with the city all over again.

Ayfer Yıldız, Oil on Canvas, 80x100 cm, Demsa Collection

Bayram Gümüş

The Painter in Pursuit of Purity: Bayram Gümüş

Was it his ability to see the world with naturalness and innocence that opened new paths for him? What we see gains a different form when felt by the heart. There's a subtlety here that goes beyond the surface. True vision isn't just with the eyes—it's with the heart, too. Purity... Isn't this the toughest question in art and literature?

Anyone who wishes can discover their own stories within these paintings. Isn't the beauty found in drawing out tales that differ from the artist's own? Especially when these colors reflect genuine emotions onto the canvas. The journey of life leaves its mark. What kind of journey was it, really? What can be remembered, will be remembered... Are the feelings evoked by those who enter the painting the echoes of what was left behind somewhere else?

What do you feel when the brush meets the canvas? Surely, a few thoughts cross your mind. And of course, a feeling follows. Actually, it's probably more about that feeling. And after that? You can never really know what comes next. That emotion will lead you where you need to go. The painting is actually waiting for you in a hidden place. What do you see, and what do you paint? It's not about imitation—it's about rebuilding what you see, through new paintings, lines, and brushstrokes. Isn't that when a painting truly becomes art?

How does a city find its voice within this purity? What do you discover along the shores you encounter? What stories are tucked away in those homes? The city is being rebuilt once again. With love. With care. So we can feel better about ourselves. Where do you arrive, together with these paintings? Istanbul reveals itself to you like a scene from a beautiful dream. This is exactly what the artist wants to show. The colors are here so you can live the lives you long for. Lost Istanbul is born anew, given new life. With touches from both today and inspiration from history. New explorations and steps taken find their worth here. The endless search within the painting is always present, just as it is in other forms of art. There's inspiration drawn from the traces left by history, too. And without a doubt, a unique interpretation of miniature art, crafted with great effort, emerges from Bayram Güler's brush. The lines marked by the artist... When it comes to paintings of Istanbul, it's impossible not to mention this important detail. What is the artist trying to accomplish here? The best answer is found in what they say and show.

The irresistible charm of naïve painting... Aren't children the ones who ask the most imaginative questions? Isn't it their innocence that makes their wonder so genuine? Does the world these paintings invite us into stand as a gentle protest against the hardships we face? Maybe, just maybe, we can rediscover our lost paradise in the colors that come alive on canvas. There's a touch of magic here. The painting draws us in. Harshness gives way to softness, roughness to kindness. This is a garden where an artist, guided by the heart's eye, insists on nurturing and sharing these feelings. You'll want to linger here. Isn't love our most essential value? Haven't we been searching for peace all along? That's what these pure-hearted paintings are all about. And in the end, aren't you seeing exactly what you wish to see?

Mario Levi

Bayram Gümüş, Oil on
Canvas, 35x45 cm,
Demsa Collection

Bayram Gümüş
60 x 89.5 cm
Oil on canvas
1990
Demsa Collection

Bayram Gümüş, Oil on canvas, 70x100 cm, 1996

Demsa Collection

Betül Bapir

Betül Bapir was born in Adana. She completed her elementary, middle, high school, and university education in Ankara. After earning a degree in tourism management, she was assigned to Istanbul as a teacher.

While continuing her teaching career, she spent two months studying painting techniques in a private studio, which inspired her to start creating her own works. A gallerist happened to see and appreciate some of her early pieces, leading to her first exhibition offer and launching her artistic journey. Since 1996, she has continued her work in her Istanbul studio.

According to the artist, she believes that within every person lies a pure, simple, childlike perspective on the world. She brings this outlook to the canvas, prioritizing expressive color over the concern for form, and conveys the desire for happiness through her art.

In this sense, her fascination with the resilient beauty that defines Istanbul—beauty that persists despite being squeezed among ugliness, chaos, traffic, and excess—draws its energy from this very place. By blending her imagination with the spirit of Istanbul on canvas, she offers a pure, uncluttered expression, distilling away all the confusion and overwhelming details through her own artistic lens.

Betül Bapir 60x40 cm,
2026 Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Betul Bapir
35 x 50 cm, created in 2026
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection

Betul Bapir
60 x 110 cm, 2026
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection

Betül Bapir
25 x 35 cm, 2026
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Chermine Vidori

Chermine Vidori
60 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

I discovered, almost by accident and with a sense of wonder, that I could paint with oils. It felt as if an angel gently guided my hand into the extraordinary world of painting. Toward the end of 1990, I was struggling with difficult personal worries and couldn't find any joy in life.

In September '91, I suddenly woke up with a desire to paint. Until then, I'd never drawn or painted, and never imagined I could. My friend, the painter Titty Saletti, helped me. Her technique involved using artificial colors on wood, and adopting her style felt completely natural to me.

My daughters gave me my first paints and an easel—both Titty and they believed in my talent. During my first sessions at my friend's studio, I made a copy of some objects arranged on a chair. I was nervous, but I tried anyway.

The results weren't clear at first, but my friend encouraged me, saying, "You're talented, keep going." She also suggested I add "my favorite object" to my paintings. That's how rag dolls first appeared in my art. When my teacher saw the beauty and innocence of the dolls I drew, we both realized I had created a world between dreams and imagination.

Feeling proud of my work, I found the courage to organize my first exhibition in Rieti, where I enthusiastically showcased thirty-five of my pieces. The success I had motivated me to keep going. I often try to capture my own emotions in my cloth dolls, giving them expressions that are sometimes playful, sometimes sad, but always deeply human. Through them, I rediscovered the joy of dreaming, felt the longing for childhood, and experienced anew the pure wonder of seeing the world's marvels with fresh eyes.

Planning a new project always excites me; in those moments, I feel completely at ease. Painting has taught me to observe everything more carefully, to focus on the smallest details, and to express so much through a simple facial expression.

Eventually, I learned to look at the world with curiosity instead of seeing myself at its center. I still don't know if I paint because I'm happy, or if painting is what makes me happy. Art has always moved me, but since I started making my own small contribution, my passion for it has only grown.


BEREK
Chemins Vidéo

Doğan Akça

He vividly captures the pure reality of nature and humanity, transforming heartfelt impressions into a rich, expressive visual language. Akça continues his journey with a fresh perspective, embracing aesthetics in new ways. Even as he evolves and changes, he never loses his unique touch—instead, he enhances his distinctive naive lines and storytelling with his signature embroidery technique, adding depth and originality every step of the way.

From the open sky, as if seen through the wings of a bird, the landscape below bursts into lively colors and shimmering halos; this boundless view brings an unconventional, lyrical definition to the aesthetic reality of his art.

Doğan Akça's art follows a gentle, ever-evolving path, presenting impressive examples of renewal and transformation. What truly matters is how this spirit of change stays true to his unique style, carrying it forward with a clear, heartfelt expression that adds a new layer of appreciation.

Ümit Gezgin
[Art Circle Magazine, April 2004]

Doğan Akça, Oil on Canvas, 80x60 cm, 2003, Private Collection

Doğan Akça, 50x70 cm, 2004, Oil on canvas, Private Collection

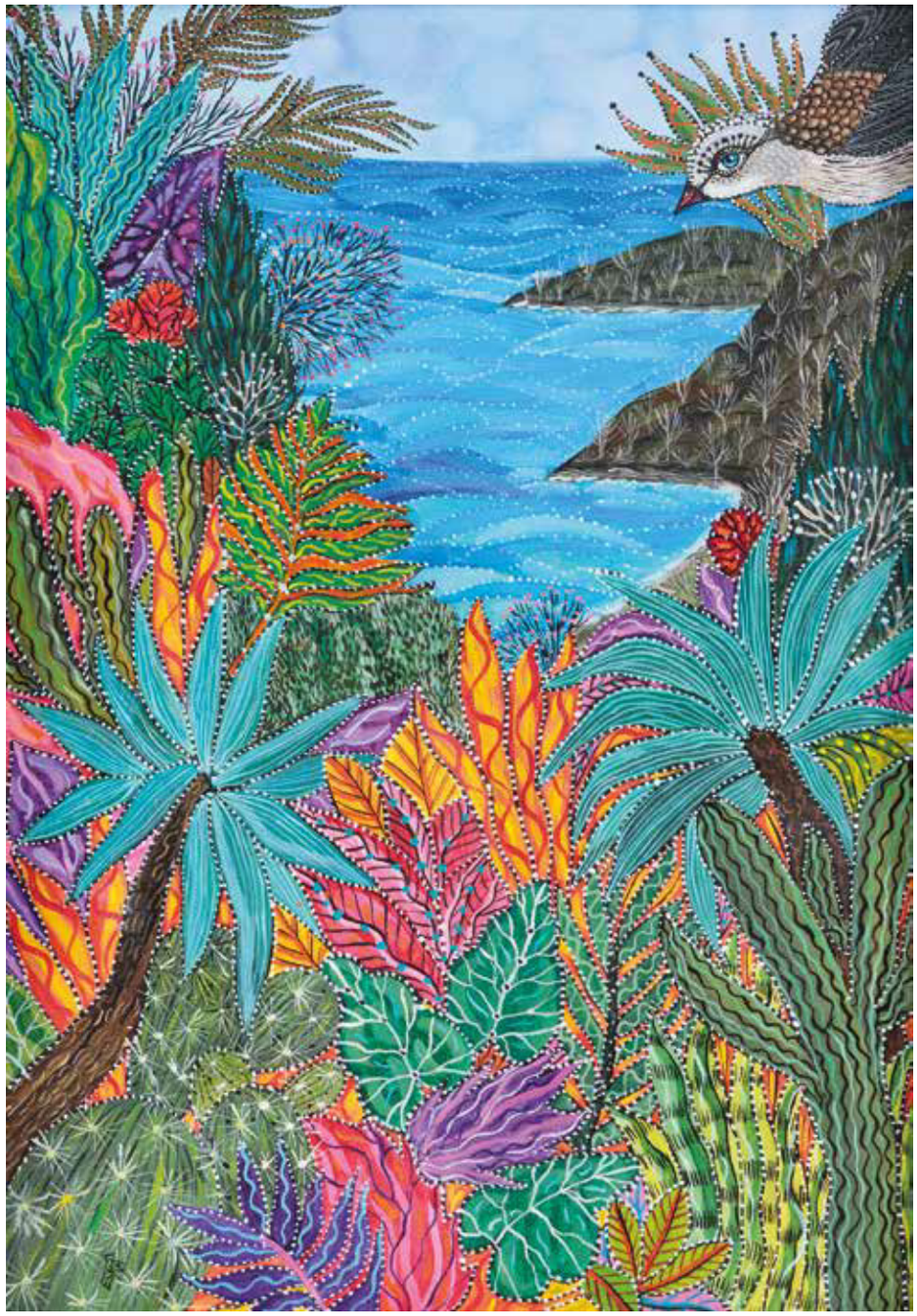
Esra Sirman

She graduated from Istanbul University's Faculty of Letters, Department of Classical Archaeology and Prehistory in 1980. In 1992, after Fahir Aksoy described her work as naïve, she joined the Turkish Naïve Artists group, participating in numerous group exhibitions and holding many solo shows. The artist continues her creative journey in her studios in Istanbul and Bodrum.

The most distinctive qualities of Sirman's paintings are the heartfelt enthusiasm and the dreamlike, whimsical atmosphere essential to the naïve art movement. Drawing on her cultural background and sharp observations, she fills her works with what she experiences, often weaving together fantastical and fairy-tale themes in a narrative style. Her meticulous paintings can be seen as expressions of her inner world. Colorful nature, animals—especially cats—exotic plants, and the mysterious realms unveiled by archaeology all find their place in her art.

Esra Sirman, 26x35 cm,
2002, Oil on duralite,
Demsa Collection

Esra Sirman, 35.5 x 50 cm, 2002, Oil on duralit, Demsa Collection



Esra Sirman, 25x35 cm,
2002, Oil on duralit,
Demsa Collection

Fahir Aksoy

Fahir Aksoy
60x70 cm, Oil on canvas, Demsa Collection

The stream of tired, outdated opinions about naïve art seems endless—concepts are distorted, and confusion reigns. Meanwhile, some so-called scholars parade around with incomplete definitions and misguided interpretations, while others toss around encyclopedia facts as if they're the final word. No one seems to consider that concepts and terms are living things that can evolve; instead, they cling to scraps of old ideas. Such mistaken attitudes have started to foster negative biases. Worse yet, there's a growing trend of people making a habit of mocking, belittling, or simply ignoring naïve art, quickly dismissing it as "primitive."

Even though naïve art—now often called insite art—in Turkey has moved toward greater understanding thanks to my articles, debates, and persistent efforts, negative attitudes still haven't faded away. The lack of translated or original publications in this field was a major shortcoming. While there were well-established works and lively debates in the West, none of these had been translated into Turkish, nor had all Western authors approached the subject correctly. Many preferred to label it as "primitive art," "folk art," or "children's art," sidestepping the real issues and oversimplifying the matter. Sadly, these misconceptions have even found their way into some art history books and encyclopedias.

I found it valuable to present this book as a kind of "original compilation," drawing from the works of leading Western thinkers on naive or insite art and including segments from a significant survey. I felt it was necessary to clarify the truth for those unfamiliar with the subject, and to counter dismissive attitudes with objective criteria and evidence. The most compelling proof for this defense comes from the exhibitions of Turkish insite artists held at the Atatürk Cultural Center and from the works showcased in this book through color photographs. Additionally, the exhibition in Paris yielded positive results, with M. Fournier, Director of the Paris Museum of Naïves, suggesting that the paintings be displayed at the museum the following year. I should also mention that part of my interest in this subject is due to my own paintings being described as "naive" by both Turkish and Western critics.

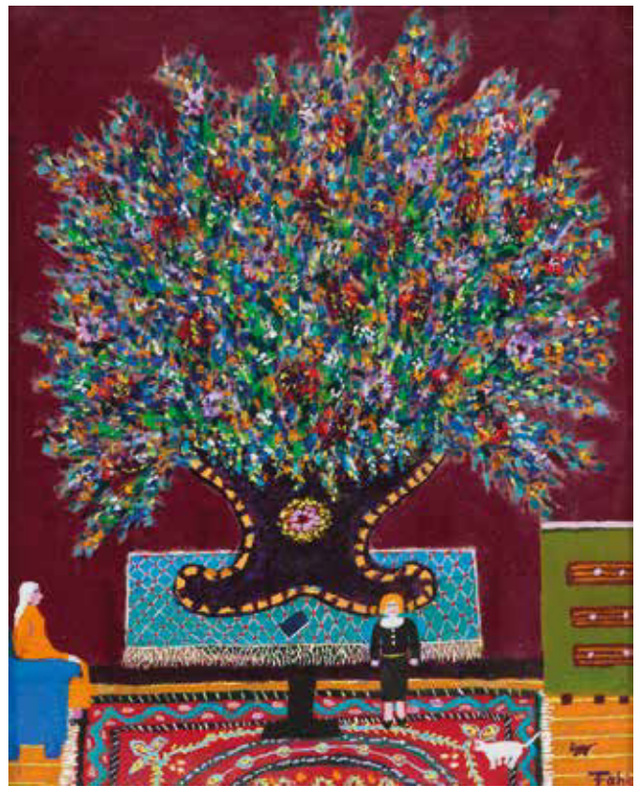
In defending insite art, I wanted to ground it on a solid foundation by briefly referencing the historical development of painting, especially the various stages Turkish painting has gone through. I also thought it would be helpful for readers to touch on folk art, primitive art, and the paintings of children and the mentally ill—genres that share an instinctual core with insite art—to explore how much they overlap and where they diverge. Since my goal was not to write a comprehensive history of all Turkish naïve artists, I limited myself to providing examples as I could collect them.

In the span of 30 years, only a handful have written on this subject: Rasih Güran, Ferit Edgü, Mübin Orhon, Sezer Tansuğ, Gültekin Elibal, Ahmet Köksal, Özdemir İnce, Zeki Çakaloz, Erhan Karaesmen, Beral Madra, Mehmet Ergüven, Kaya Özsezgin, Orhan Peker, and Nurullah Berk.

Insite art stands out as one of the most significant movements in twentieth-century art history—a phenomenon that, despite the collapse of speculative trends and playful tricks, remains unspoiled, deeply human, authentic, and continues to breathe new life into painting.

From the preface of Fahir Aksoy's book,
"Naive Art and Turkish Naives."

Fahir Aksoy
50 x 60 cm,
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Fahir Aksoy
50 x 40 cm, 2002
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Fahir Aksoy
50 x 60 cm, 1997
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Gülfidan Hitit Biçer

Born in Ankara, she completed her primary and secondary education in Bolu. After graduating from the Language Department of Gazi University, she worked as a teacher in Bolu between 1981 and 2003. She began her painting journey in 1995, continuing her artistic development within the 'Naive Artists Group' led by Fahir Aksoy. From 2000 to 2003, she carried out her creative work at 'Rainbow Studio,' which she founded in Bolu. Having lived in Bolu for many years, Gülfidan Hitit Biçer has been pursuing her art in Bodrum since 2003. Drawing inspiration primarily from her own life and surroundings, she brings authentic and heartfelt themes—often with a documentary quality and local flair—to her audience. Sometimes inspired by her environment, at other times expressing herself imaginatively, Gülfidan Hitit Biçer was described by Fahir Aksoy as 'one of the leading representatives of naïve art in our country.' She has held numerous solo exhibitions and participated in group shows in various cities, with her works included in both private and public collections.

Gülfidan Hitit Biçer Fahir Hoca's Birthday, Oil on cardboard, 34.5 x 50 cm, 2004, Demsa Collection

Gülfidan Hitit Biçer
Folk Dance
30.5 x 99.5 cm
Oil on canvas
2004
Demsa Collection

Gülfidan Hitit Biçer
Bridal Procession, Oil
on Canvas, 70 x 100.5
cm, 1996

Demsa Collection

Gülfidan Hitit Biçer
Whirling Dervishes
40x60 cm Acrylic on
Canvas 2009

Demsa Collection

Halil Akkurt

Born in 1945 in Dağyolu village, Narman district of Erzurum. He finished elementary school in Narman and attended middle school in Oltu. While working as a civil servant in Ankara, he took art classes to expand his knowledge. In 1974, he held his first solo art exhibition in Ankara. Since 1986, he has been creating large-scale paintings. He continues his work in his studio in Ankara.

Halil Akkurt
80 x 100 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection


Halil Akkurt
2026

Hayal Irtegün

Born in Izmir in 1975, Hayal Irtegün has been recognized for her artwork since her early school years. During high school, she experimented with cartoons, some of which were published in period magazines. In 1992, she completed the Nuri Aslan Workshop Courses at İ.R.H.M. Her professional painting career began in 1998 after meeting Naive Painter Fahir Aksoy and participating in group exhibitions with other naive artists. She has held numerous solo and group shows and continues her creative work in her studio in Urla, Izmir.

Although naive art in our country is often described as pure, innocent, childlike, and attentive to detail—sometimes not strictly following traditional art rules like perspective—it certainly carries a sense of utopia. Speaking for my own work, I see utopian ideals coming to life through color, intelligence, and of course, experience. I strive for meticulous, vibrant, imaginative pieces that can bring happiness, and sometimes the impressions I gather become undeniable influences in my art.

Naïve art from Turkey and around the world is gaining recognition at a remarkable pace, with stunning works emerging continually. In this respect, there are countless international artists whose work I follow—and, naturally, whose influence I feel.

When it comes to sources of inspiration, I believe nature is the brightest gem for all artists. I often experiment with different paints on a variety of surfaces, which is why I find the European term "Free Artist" perfectly fitting for myself.

Defining painting as an artist isn't so straightforward for me these days. It's been a journey—a way of life—since my very first artwork. Like life, like water, like time: fluid and always changing. Children's paintings, free from restrictive rules, are vivid, innocent, and genuinely expressive. You can see elements of naïve art in them. Since I'm not an educator, as an artist, I believe children should be allowed to express themselves freely through art.

In 2014, I was honored to be selected as one of the top twenty-two naïve artists representing my country at the "Musée International d'art naïf de Magog" in Canada, competing with artists from across the globe. My piece titled "Lavenders" earned a permanent place in the museum's collection. In 2015 and 2016, I was invited again to international group exhibitions of naïve art at a private gallery in Berlin.

Two of my works were displayed.

In 2016, I presented my solo exhibition at a private gallery in Urla, İzmir, where my studio is located. Since the beginning of the year, I've also participated in several group exhibitions and social responsibility projects. Additionally, I organize group shows myself.

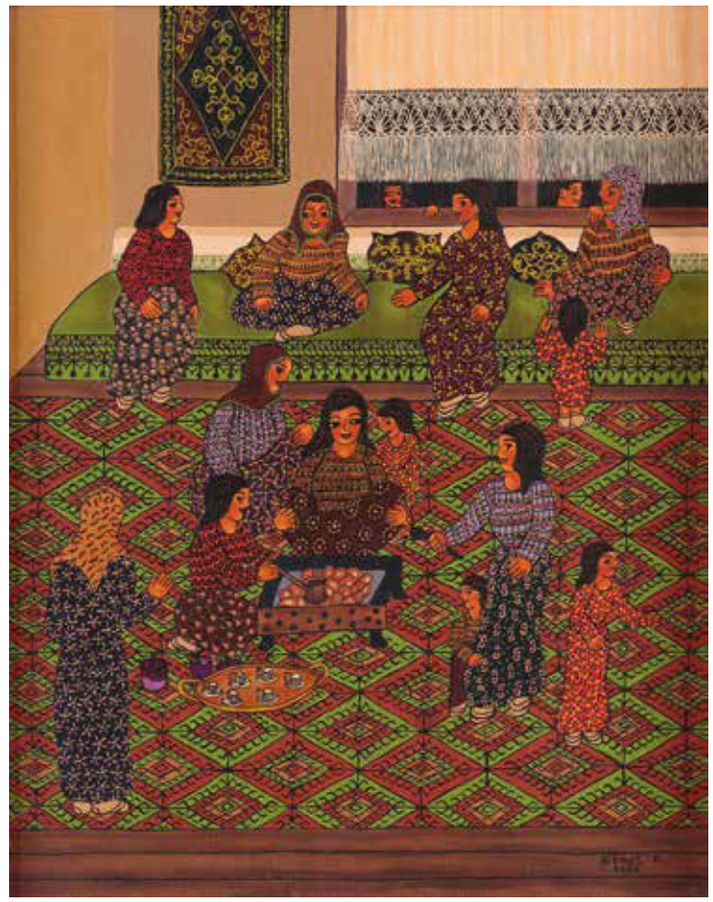
As an artist from İzmir, I see the city as a bright, deep blue painting filled with hope. I love this city and aspire to bring İzmir's palette to the art scenes of Istanbul, Ankara, and the world.

Hayal İrtegün
80 x 120 in
Oil on canvas
2026
Demsa Collection

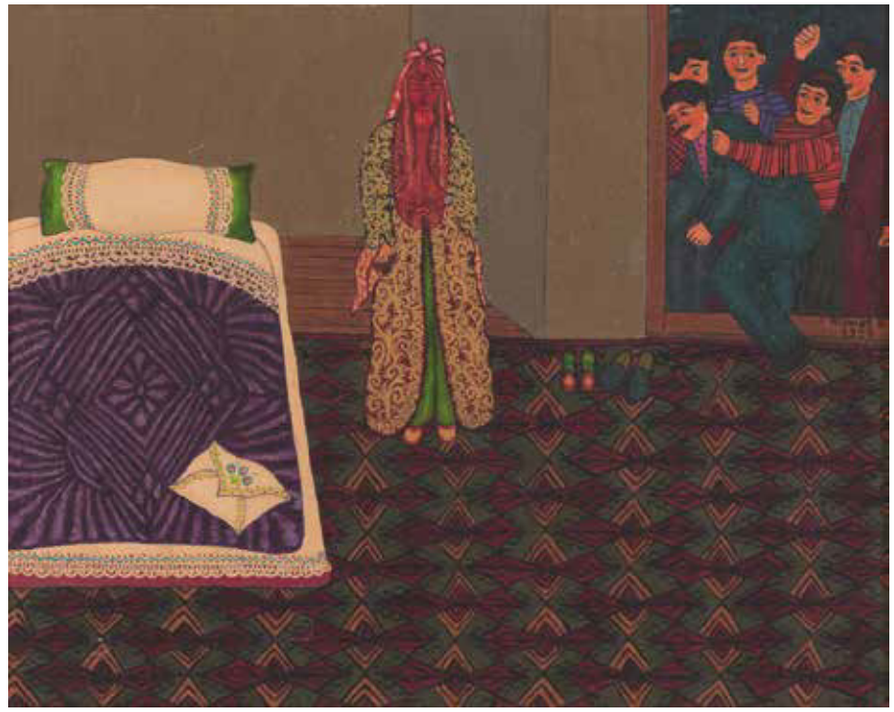
Hikmet Karabucak

Born in Kütahya in 1944, he completed his elementary education. His passion for painting emerged early in life. In 1988, he illustrated his published poetry, marking the beginning of his artistic journey, later described as 'naive.' He worked alongside Fahir Aksoy, eventually joining Aksoy's Naive Artists Group.

His artwork often depicts traditional neighborhood life, focusing on children and the familiar wedding rituals of Kütahya and beyond. Scenes like 'Henna Night,' 'Wedding Procession,' and 'Bathhouse'—all rooted in local culture—frequently appear in his compositions. Karabucak continues his creative work in his Adana studio, and his pieces are exhibited at the World Naive Art Museum in Paris.



Hikmet Karabucak
40 x 50 cm, 2006
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection



Hikmet Karabucak
Wedding Night
40 x 50 cm, 1997
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection

Hüseyin Sartaş

Born in Ankara in 1956, Hüseyin Sartaş was the youngest of seven siblings in a family that had immigrated from Thessaloniki. He started elementary school at age six. Noticing his talent, teachers encouraged him to pursue art. In the second year of middle school, financial struggles forced him to leave school and begin working as an apprentice panel beater. Even after becoming a skilled craftsman, he never stopped painting.

In the early days, Hüseyin Sartaş never imagined making money from his art. He would gift his paintings to friends. Once, he gave a piece to Ms. Zerrin, the customer representative at the auto repair shop where he worked. By chance, artist Yalçın Gökçebağ saw the painting and admired it, asking to meet Sartaş through Ms. Zerrin. Later, 28 of Sartaş's works were shown to art critic Önder Şenyapılı. This led to his first solo exhibition in Ankara in 1989. Afterward, he left his panel beating career behind to paint full-time and make a living as an artist.

In his works, Hüseyin Sartaş often depicted scenes from rural areas, village life, and children. The naïve artist, who opened solo exhibitions in various cities across Turkey and participated in group shows, received numerous art awards. He passed away in 2024.

Hüseyin Sartaş
Women Washing Rugs
50x40 cm, 2002
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Hüseyin Sartaş
73.5 x 138.5 cm, 2004
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection


SARTAS
2012

Hüseyin Yüce

Born in 1928 in the village of Göveçci, Kütahya, Hüseyin Yüce was a painter from Kütahya. He learned to read and write through evening courses organized by the state. His first lessons came from the village imam, who was also a calligrapher, sparking his early interest and familiarity with drawing and painting. When artist Necati Astarcıoğlu visited their village in Çamlıca to paint, Yüce's life took a turn—he watched him with fascination and curiosity. Using brushes crafted from goose wings and donkey hair, and oil paints purchased from a hardware store, Yüce began to paint. Inspired by his art teacher Necati Astarcıoğlu's encouragement, he set off on his artistic journey.

Cavit Atmaca, the director of the Kütahya State Fine Arts Gallery and a painter himself, recognized Yüce's talent. When Atmaca was transferred to the Izmir Painting and Sculpture Museum, his successor in 1971, artist M. Sabri Tezcan, introduced Yüce to canvas and oil paints sold in tubes. This introduction emboldened Yüce to create works in the naive style, allowing him to embrace painting wholeheartedly and become a symbol in the field. Finding a way to express himself through art, and encouraged by positive support and feedback from those around him, Yüce continued his work with enthusiasm. His paintings, which freely explore nature themes with pure colors from his imagination, would help him advance as a truly authentic naive painter.

Yüce spent much of his life working as a farmer and raising livestock. Over time, his passion for painting grew stronger, and the interest and demand he received inspired him to leave farming behind. He devoted most of his days to creating art in his humble home in Çamlıca-Güveççi village. His love for nature, fascination with color, and zest for life shine through in his warm palette and meticulous brushwork.

Hüseyin Yüce, shaping his art with care, broke away from tradition with his delicate, twisting trees and pink-purple skies, painting village and forest landscapes in a free, lyrical style that defied conventional rules.

With encouragement from the village teacher Ali Bey, Yüce held his first solo exhibition in 1965 at the Kütahya Fine Arts Gallery; his second solo show followed in 1968 at the Ankara Fine Arts Gallery. The naive painter Hüseyin Yüce participated in nearly 30 solo exhibitions and many group shows throughout Turkey.

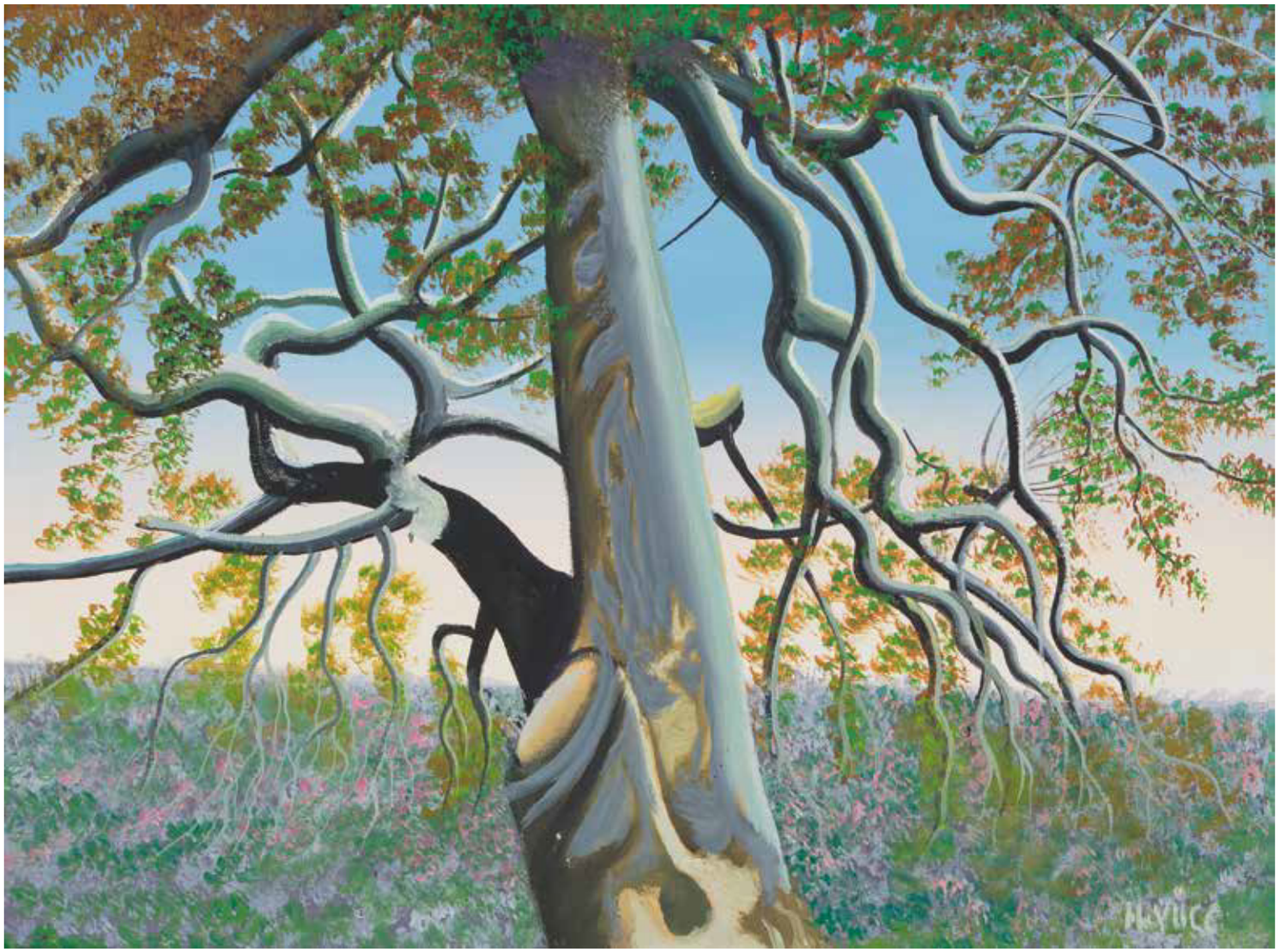
Yüce took part in various state exhibitions and twice received achievement awards at the State Painting and Sculpture Competition. He also won an honorable mention in a DYO painting contest, and in 1997, was honored with one of ten achievement awards presented by Istanbul TÜYAP. As a naive artist, Hüseyin Yüce exhibited his works abroad in countries such as France, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, India, Monaco, Romania, Egypt, Finland, and England, earning a place in private collections and making a name for himself internationally. Some exhibitions featured only painters' works, and Yüce's participation in these events successfully represented Turkey in the field of naive painting.

Hüseyin Yüce, Turkey's internationally renowned naïve painter, passed away at the age of 84 in his hometown of Kütahya on February 7, 2015. He was laid to rest in the family cemetery in Göveçci village, where he was born and lived.

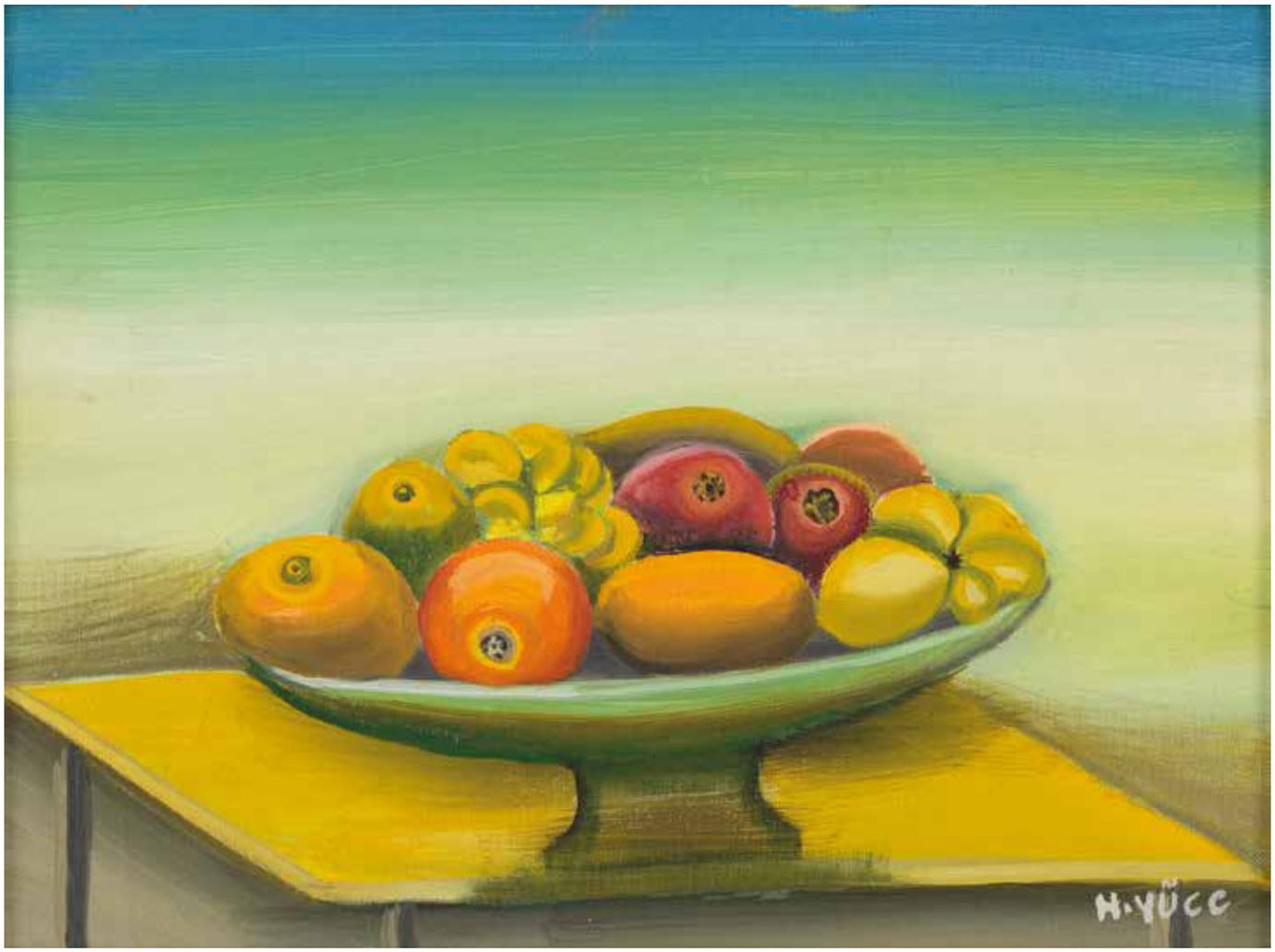
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pınar Yazkaç

Hüseyin Yüce
Foothills of Mount Vellice
70 x 50 cm
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection

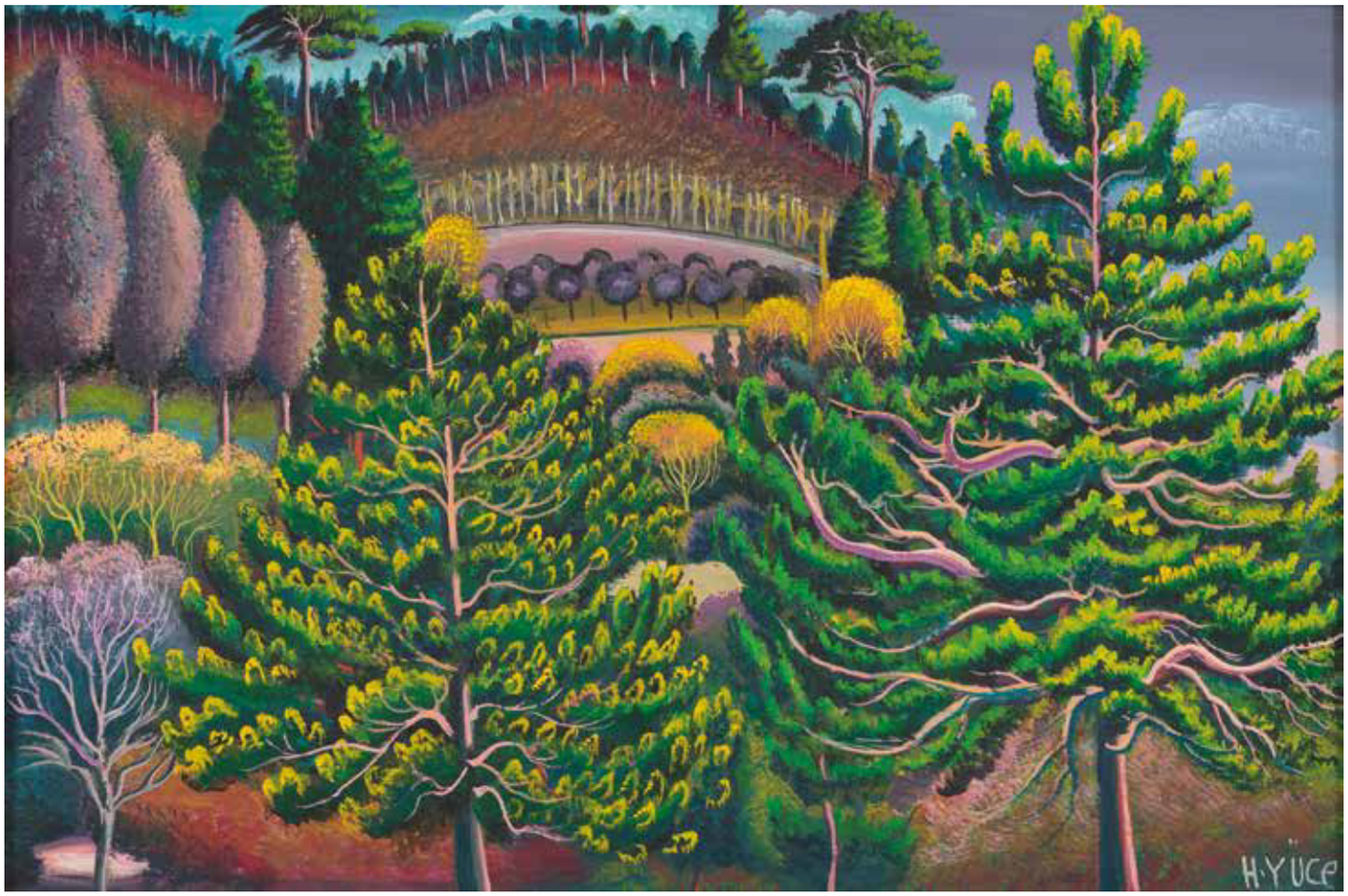
Huseyin Yuce
Tree
40 x 55 in
Oil paint on canvas
Demsa Collection



Hüseyin Yüce
Still Life
45 x 55.5 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

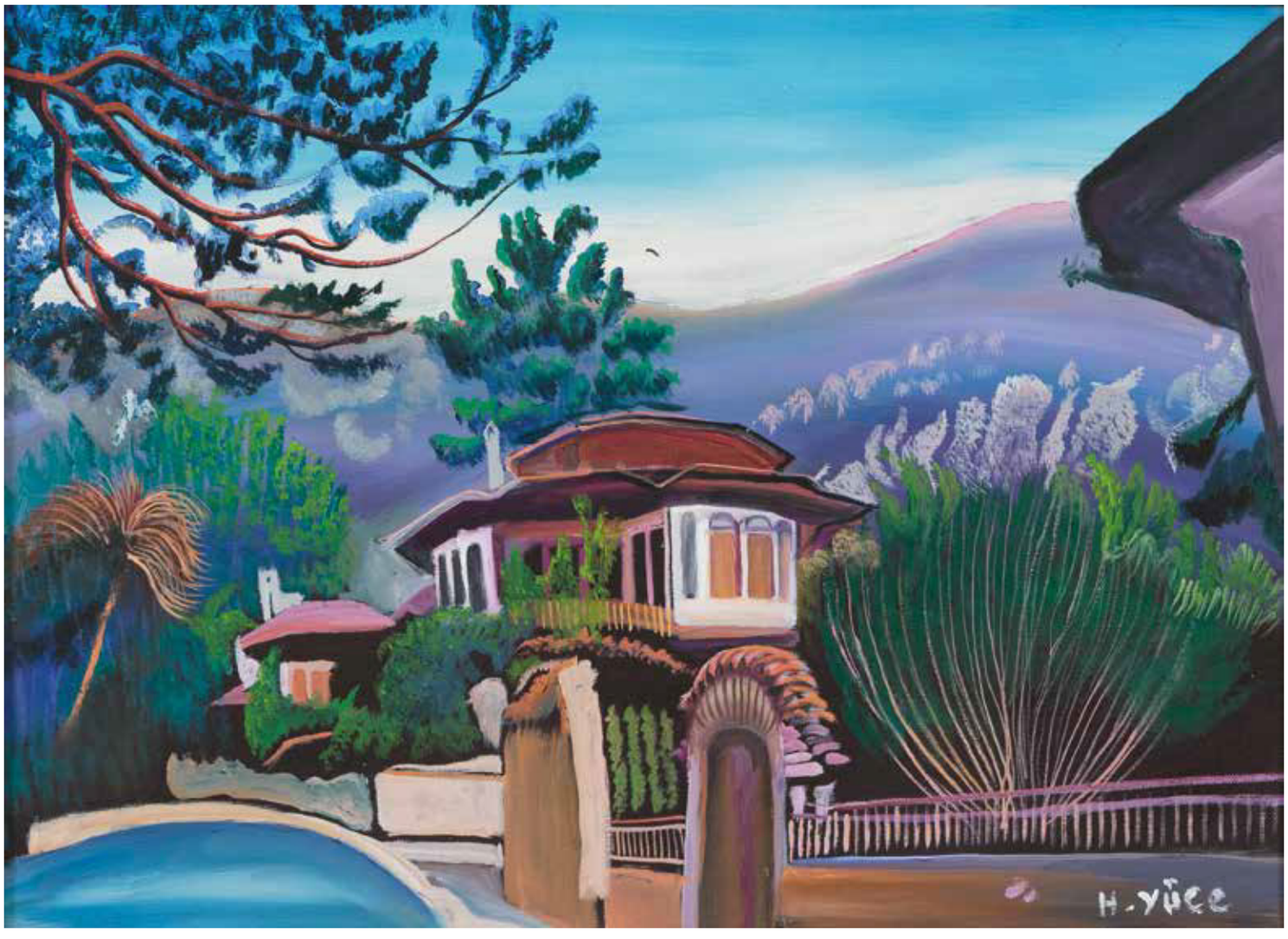


Hüseyin Yüce
A Symphony of Nature's Colors in
Güveççi, 60x40 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Hüseyin Yüce
Landscape
35 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Hüseyin Yüce
My Dream Home in Güveç, Kütahya
55 x 40 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Hüseyin Yüce, Oil on
Canvas, 44.5 x 59 cm,
Demsa Collection

Ibrahim Balaban

Ibrahim Balaban
70 x 100 cm, 1988 Oil
on canvas Demsa
Collection

"Art is a reflection of life. The subject is an essence, and every essence creates its own shell," says İbrahim Balaban, a self-taught painter. Drawing on the tradition of folk art, his works focus on rural life, the realities of Anatolian people, migration from villages to cities, and epic tales and legends. Breaking free from narrow boundaries, Balaban grounded his art in a contemporary context and developed a unique style in his distinctive compositions.

Born in Bursa in 1921, İbrahim Balaban entered prison at just 16. Meeting Nâzım Hikmet in Bursa Prison became a turning point in his life. With Hikmet's guidance and encouragement, Balaban discovered and honed his talent for painting. Nâzım Hikmet hoped to nurture Orhan Kemal as a storyteller and Balaban as a painter. While in prison, Balaban also gained practical knowledge in philosophy, sociology, and political economy. After being released in 1950 thanks to an amnesty, he participated in a group exhibition at Maya Gallery in Istanbul. He held his first solo show in 1953 at the French Cultural Center in Istanbul, embracing the movement of social realism. In 1961, Balaban was tried for one of his paintings displayed at the Yeni Dal Group exhibition, but was acquitted. He faced another trial in 1968 for a painting published in Gazi Magazine;

He was acquitted of that as well. In 1969, his artworks displayed in Adana were attacked. Throughout his long artistic career, Balaban held numerous exhibitions both within Turkey and internationally. While his early works focused on rural poverty and folk legends, over time he began to explore themes like migration from village to city and the struggle for democracy. In his later years, he depicted Anatolian sages and symbols of abundance. Balaban passed away on June 9, 2019. He expressed his unique views on art and society in books such as "Balaban" (1962), "Trace" (1965), "The Poet Father and Those Inside" (1968), and "Projection" (1969), all written in his distinctive voice.

Ibrahim Balaban
Senem and Garip,
50x60 cm, 1988, Oil on
Canvas, Demsa
Collection

Ibrahim Balaban
Lament

75x61 cm, 1972
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Ibrahim Balaban
2012
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Ibrahim Balaban
58 x 43 cm, 1970
Oil on duralite, Demsa Collection

Ihsan Cemal Karaburçak

Ihsan Cemal Karaburçak
Sail Symphony
81 x 123 cm, 1963
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

"I am a painter of color. Perhaps that's why I'm drawn to nature when the light dims, clouds gather, or after the rain has washed the earth, trees, and buildings and the colors truly come alive—because sunlight tends to dull them. I tend to favor deeper tones, especially when light is skillfully placed among them or when the glow comes from below, creating a captivating effect. Maybe it's a matter of temperament—perhaps a hint of pessimism or melancholy; who's to say? But whatever the reason, since I find fulfillment in what I create and I make art for art's sake, I am content with both my art and, by extension, my life."

İhsan Cemal Karaburçak, 1968

İhsan Cemal Karaburçak graduated from the Post and Telegraph Higher School and began painting during his first trip to Paris in 1930. Unsatisfied with the traditional art education he received there, he instead chose to study the works of modern masters like Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Henri Matisse. Over time, he developed his own visual language—rooted in carefully structured compositions and a limited palette of pure colors. While his works often start from realistic subjects such as landscapes and still lifes, they are primarily abstract in nature. The artist believes that the original sources of these references are not of great importance. For Karaburçak, painting should reflect the artist's perception, transforming reality into art.

Karaburçak maintains that artists must constantly research, stay connected with their own society, history, and identity, and also be aware of contemporary art on a global scale. Rather than focusing on turning Turkey into a modern state, he argued that artists should help Turkish society move beyond simple appreciation and gain the knowledge and experience to express thoughtful, critical perspectives on art. By emphasizing concepts such as abstraction, originality, and universality—the very foundations of painting—and by insisting that the individual artist must be a powerful creative force, Karaburçak demonstrated his deep understanding of the driving forces behind modernism.

Mehmet Arpacık

Born in Bartın in 1936, Mehmet Arpacık moved to Istanbul with his family at the age of fifteen after finishing elementary school. Over the years, he worked in various jobs but made his living as a shoemaker until his retirement. His passion for art was sparked in his thirties after visiting an exhibition by the painter Ali Demir. Without any formal training, Arpacık taught himself to paint. His style is characterized by a simple, heartfelt, and nature-inspired approach typical of naive art. His paintings often blend fantastical, dreamlike, and emotional elements in a clear and direct manner. Arpacık's work gained recognition not only in Turkey but also internationally, with exhibitions in numerous cities across Italy and the United States. His art features pastoral landscapes, scenes of village life, and offers a gentle interpretation of the atmosphere of Istanbul and Anatolia. Mehmet Arpacık passed away in 2025.

Mehmet Arpacık
Heybeliada
60 x 79 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Mehmet Arpacık
World Peace
120x120 cm, 2009
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Meral Atsan

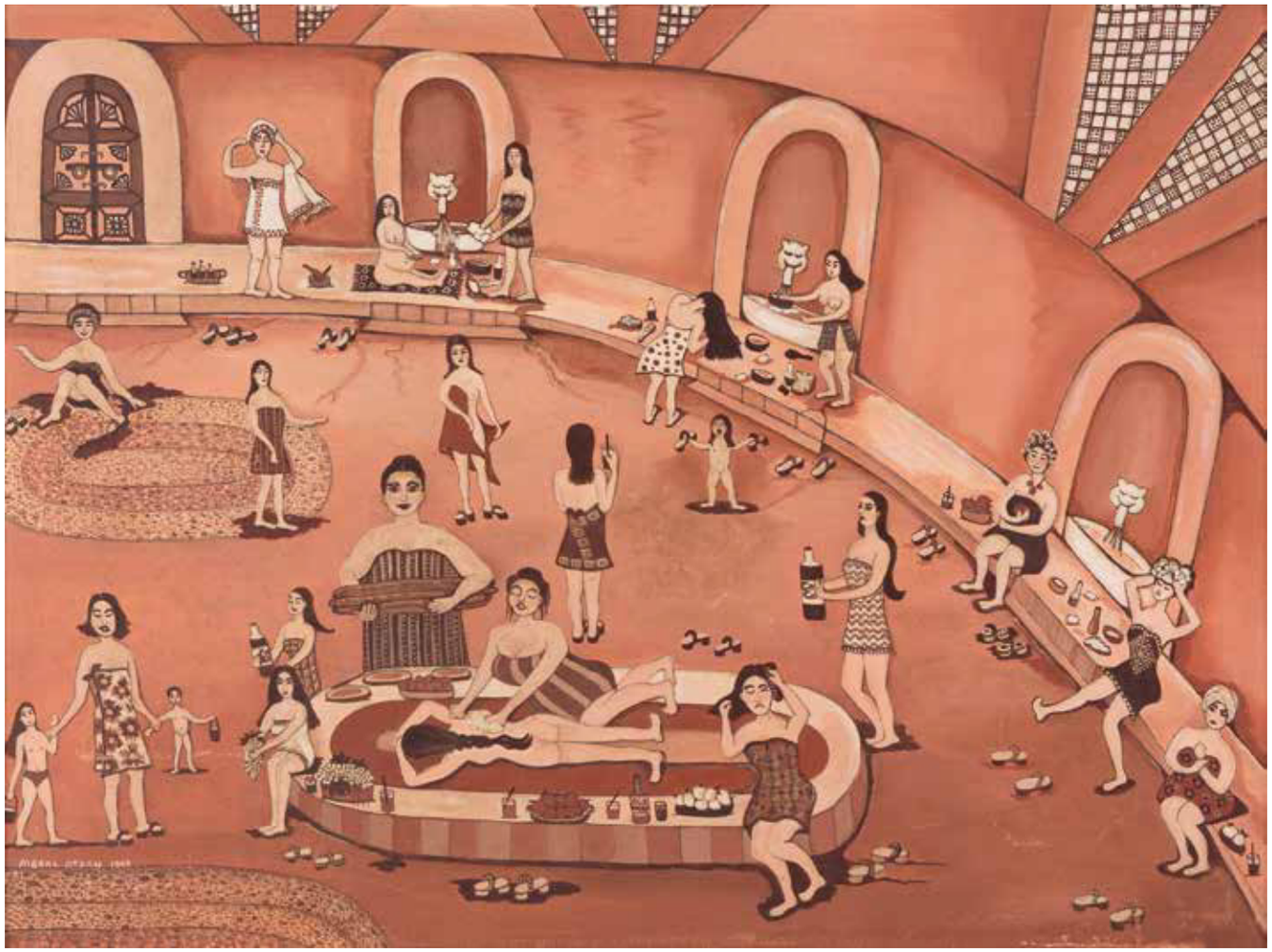
Born in Ereğli, Meral Atsan became a student of Osman Zeki Oral. After Oral retired from his post as Director of the Ankara Fine Arts Gallery and moved back to his hometown Ereğli, Atsan assisted him and further developed her own painting during this period. In 1999, she received an Honorable Mention at the Adana Cement Painting Competition. Guided by her mentor Zeki Oral, she focused on themes inspired by nature and Turkish motifs. She continues her artistic work in her studio in Ereğli.

Meral Atsan
Woman Giving Birth to a Baby Boy
40 x 50 cm, 1997
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection


PAMUK
MEKAL 97

Meral Atsan
Harvest Time
70 x 80 cm, 2001
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Meral Atsan
Bathhouse
60 x 80 cm, 1999
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



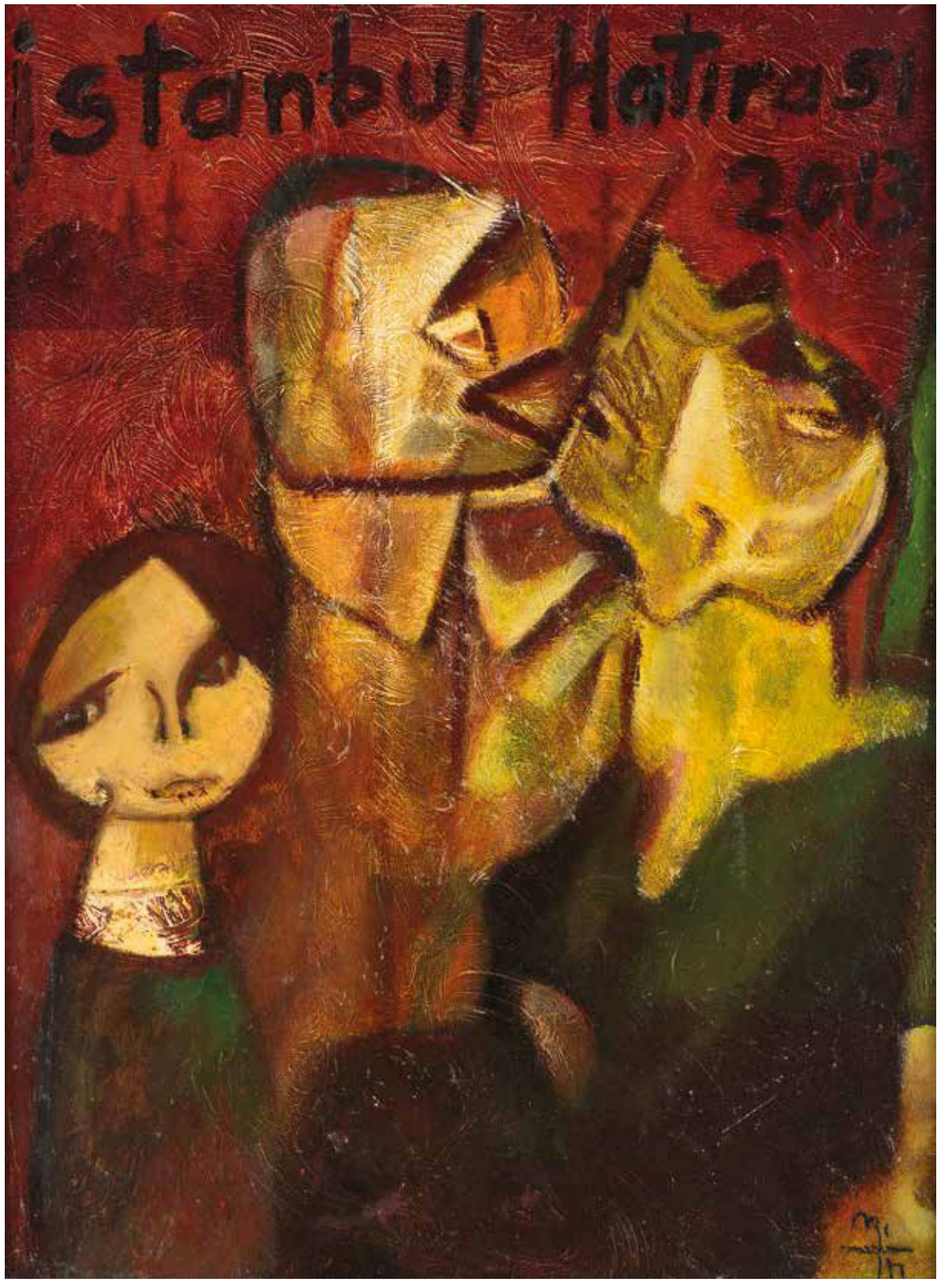
Metin Akarslan

Metin Akarslan
Sidikli Kontes
100 x 75 cm
Oil on hardboard
Demsa Collection

Born in 1939 in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, Metin Akarslan's earliest childhood memories are from his time in Karagümrük. His grandfather and father lived in Fındıklı; his grandfather was İbrahim Efendi, the master foreman of Tophane. Metin started his education at Karagümrük Elementary School, also known as the 27th Elementary, where he first discovered his passion for art. After elementary school, he continued at Sultanahmet Art School, but left before finishing to work at the mint. He worked there until his military service. His older brother İbrahim also worked at the mint. Later, Metin learned typesetting at a printing house, where 67-70 people would work overnight to complete print jobs.

Metin Akarslan's father practiced calligraphy and would draw inscriptions in mosques with his friend, the calligrapher Hamid Aytaç. His mother, who belonged to the Naqshbandi order, was known for her generosity and kindness. The women would gather in their homes for spiritual recitations and Metin was often stationed at the door as a lookout. These gatherings took place at the Akarslan home every forty days.

As a child, he once set out with a friend from Karagümrük to explore Beyazıt, only to be picked up by the police and taken to the wooden station in Şehzadebaşı. There, he discovered his father was actually the station chief. Later in life, he married Güler Akarslan. Their first son, Levent, was born, followed by their younger son, Bülent. He worked at the mint for a while, then moved on to the State Supplies Office. After work, he made time in the evenings to paint. When he began painting, landscapes and flowers were all the rage. He, too, painted landscapes. He became acquainted with an artist named Şaban Mavigöz, known for painting at building entrances. With an agreement, Şaban began selling his nightly paintings of crying children. Around this time, the family relocated from Acıbadem to Bahariye. It was in Bahariye that Akarslan met art teacher İsmet Toprak and watched him work. He mentioned that he painted for the market, and those popular commercial pieces were called "butcher paintings." With the rise of "Hayat" magazine, the French art movement also gained recognition in the country. The more he observed İsmet Toprak, the more his own artistic perspective developed, and eventually, he discovered his unique style. Over time, he became dependent on alcohol while painting, and when his addiction kept him from using a brush, he started painting with his fingers. To protect his hands from injury while painting without a brush, he began using cloth. This innovation made his name known in art circles, and he became known as "the brushless painter." During this period, he exhibited his work at the Hobi Art Gallery in Nişantaşı and later at Akbank in Bahariye. Around this time, he also developed osteoarthritis, a common occupational illness. Known as "the Brushless Painter," Akarslan passed away in 2019.


İstanbul Hatırası
2013

Metin Akarslan
80 x 80 cm
Oil on hardboard
Demsa Collection

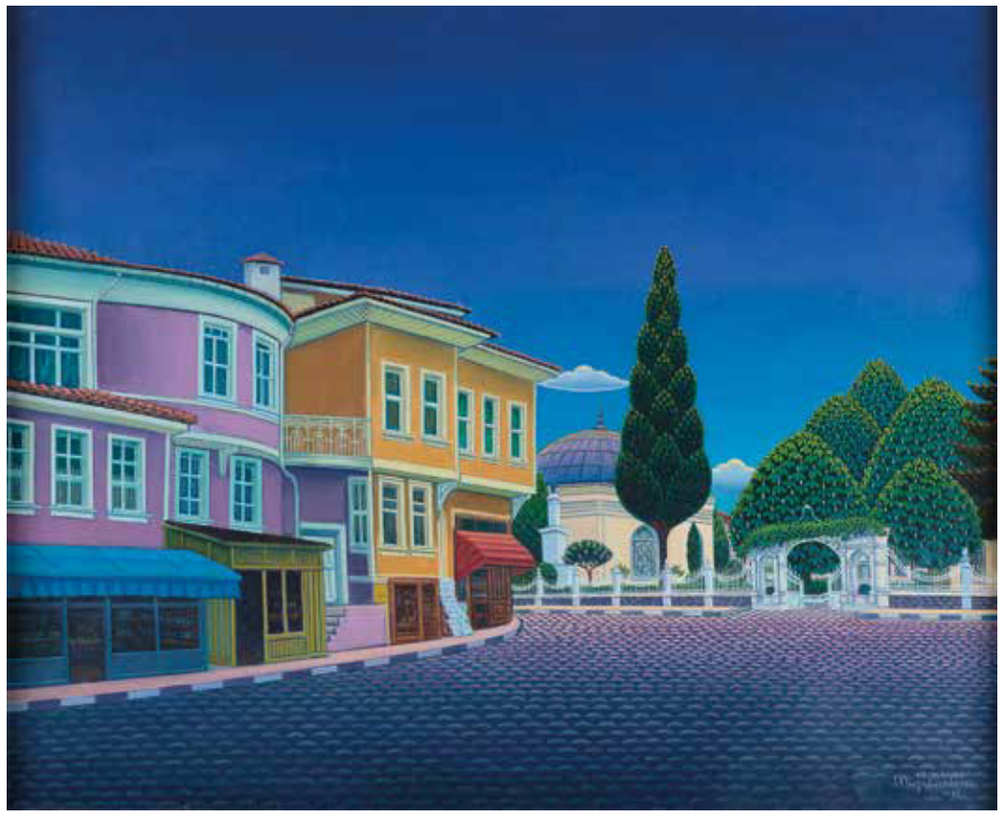
Metin Akarslan
Oil painting on Duralit,
80x60 cm
Demsa Collection

Muzaffer Genç

He never received formal education. From a young age, he was thrown into the struggles of life, working as a shepherd, farmer, and laborer. Driven by curiosity, he taught himself through constant reading in art, philosophy, psychology, religion, and sociology. In 1975, he moved to Bursa. Adjusting to city life, he worked in various jobs, such as construction laborer, metalworker, house painter, and sign maker. Although he became a state employee as a machinist in 1977, he resigned in 1981 to devote himself entirely to painting. At his second solo exhibition in Ankara, where he displayed both his paintings and his poetry, the press began calling him the 'Poet Painter.' Whenever time allowed, he continued writing poetry alongside his art. With support from the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, he helped establish Painters' Street in the old fortress ruins at the Tophane exit. On December 24, 1997, after a period of treatment, he passed away at Yüksek İhtisas Hospital. Genç summed up his philosophy with these words: 'An artist who doesn't think about painting every hour of the day, whose life isn't intertwined with art, cannot be a true painter.' Throughout his life, he held 18 solo exhibitions and participated in around 100 group shows.

Muzaffer Genç, Oil on canvas, 60x73 cm, 1988, Demsa Collection

Muzaffer Genç
Bursa
35x45 cm
Oil on canvas
1992
Demsa Collection



Neriman Oyman

Neriman Oyman was born on October 10, 1965, in Mecidiyeköy, Istanbul. The youngest in her elementary school class, she was more fascinated by the dreams in her head than her teacher's lessons. In fourth grade, she was diagnosed with rheumatic fever and was bedridden for six months. She was sent to Ernis, a village in Van, though it was not where her parents were originally from. Her Egyptian mother and Iranian father had only crossed paths there. In the village, she began using clay as her art material. Eventually, her parents reunited in Ernis. Though she was told she should attend high school, she never did, and instead began working at a garment workshop.

Neriman had been passionate about painting since childhood, and worked hard to develop her talent from an early age. However, her family believed that painting had no future and did not support her artistic ambitions. This shook her confidence, but she never gave up on art. Her first unrequited love was for her boss, Peyami, and she secretly started working on his portrait. When she finished a painting that looked just like Peyami, everyone was amazed.

One day, after spotting an ad in Cumhuriyet Newspaper, she found her way to Avni Memedoğlu's studio. There, she learned the basics of painting and sharpened her drawing skills. Guided by Memedoğlu's socialist perspective, she began depicting workers in overalls, doves rising from factory chimneys, and carnations. Her debut group exhibition featured three portraits of women. Memedoğlu was upset by her abstract works, but she refused to stray from her own artistic path. In 1992, she opened her very first studio.

Oyman has had to constantly overcome life's hardships. Yet, these challenges became woven into her creative journey. Through painting, she found a way to express herself, bringing her imagination into the real world and making a name for herself.

Oyman also created artwork for a film called "Kilit." She channeled the cries from the pressures in her personal life into her paintings. Over time, those cries began to reflect not just her own struggles, but the weight felt by society. In these pieces, she explored themes like women's social status, poverty, war, and migration.

Oyman's art not only tackles social themes but also powerfully celebrates the strength of women. She boldly expresses the female body and spirit, approaching her work from a feminist perspective. Symbols representing both the resilience and vulnerability of women are recurring motifs throughout her creations.

Over the course of her artistic career, Oyman has participated in numerous exhibitions, with her works displayed in many renowned museums. She has also earned several awards and received widespread recognition within the art world. Her pieces have been showcased internationally, including in countries such as Germany, Russia, England, and the United States.

Neriman Oyman
30 x 25 cm
Oil on canvas
2018
Demsa Collection

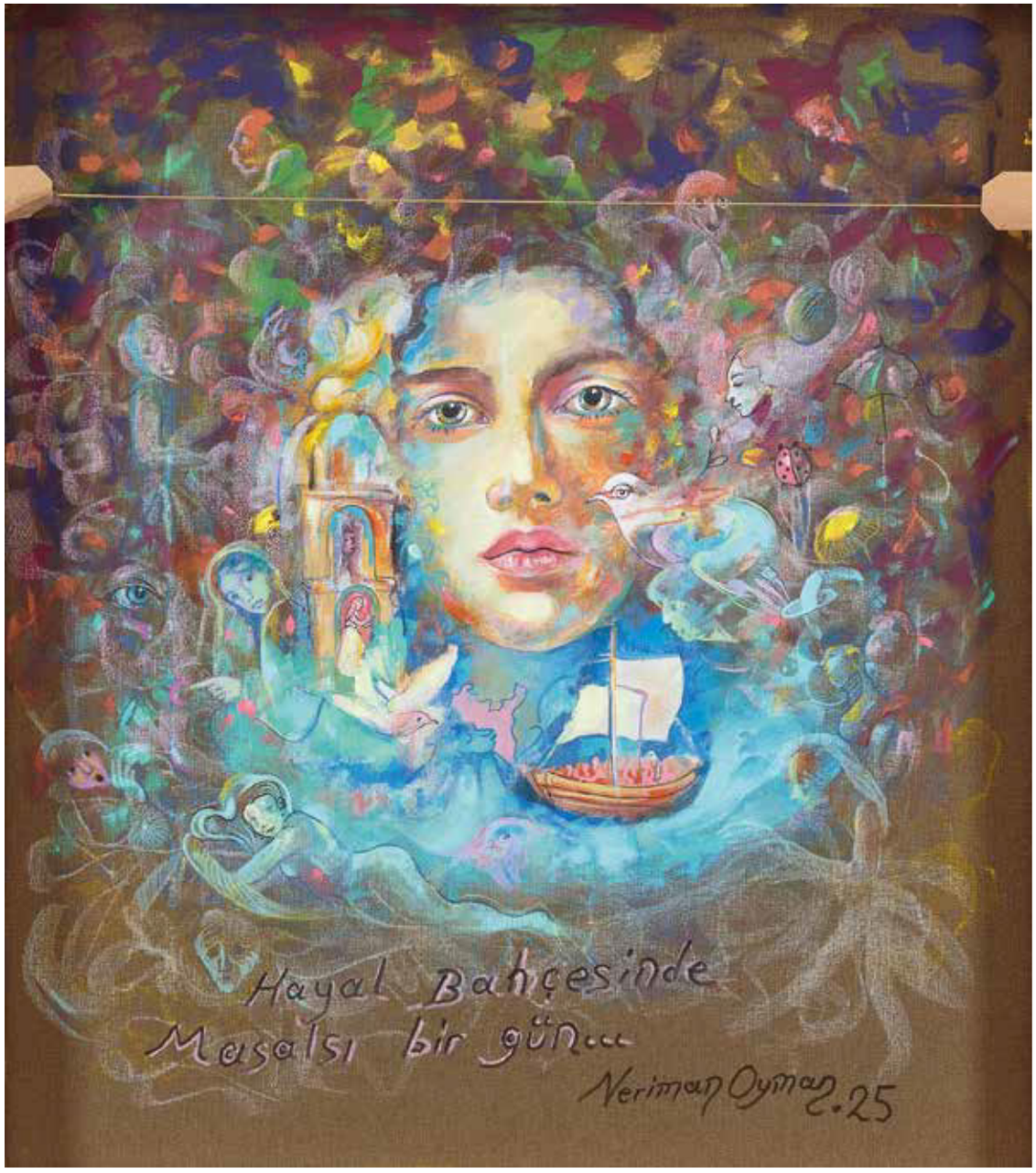
Neriman Oyman
28.5 x 28.5 cm
Oil on canvas
2011
Demsa Collection

Neriman Oyman
A Fairytale Day in a World of Dreams
90 x 80 cm
Oil on canvas
2025
Demsa Collection

Neriman Oyman

"A Magical Day in the World of Imagination"

The Story Behind the Artwork

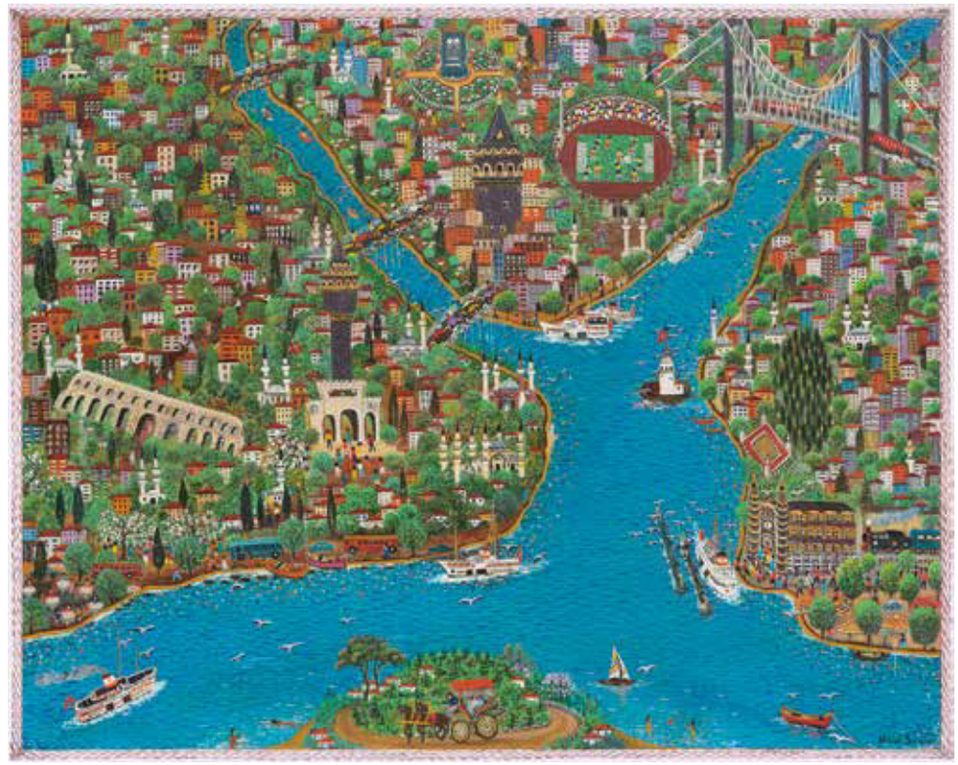


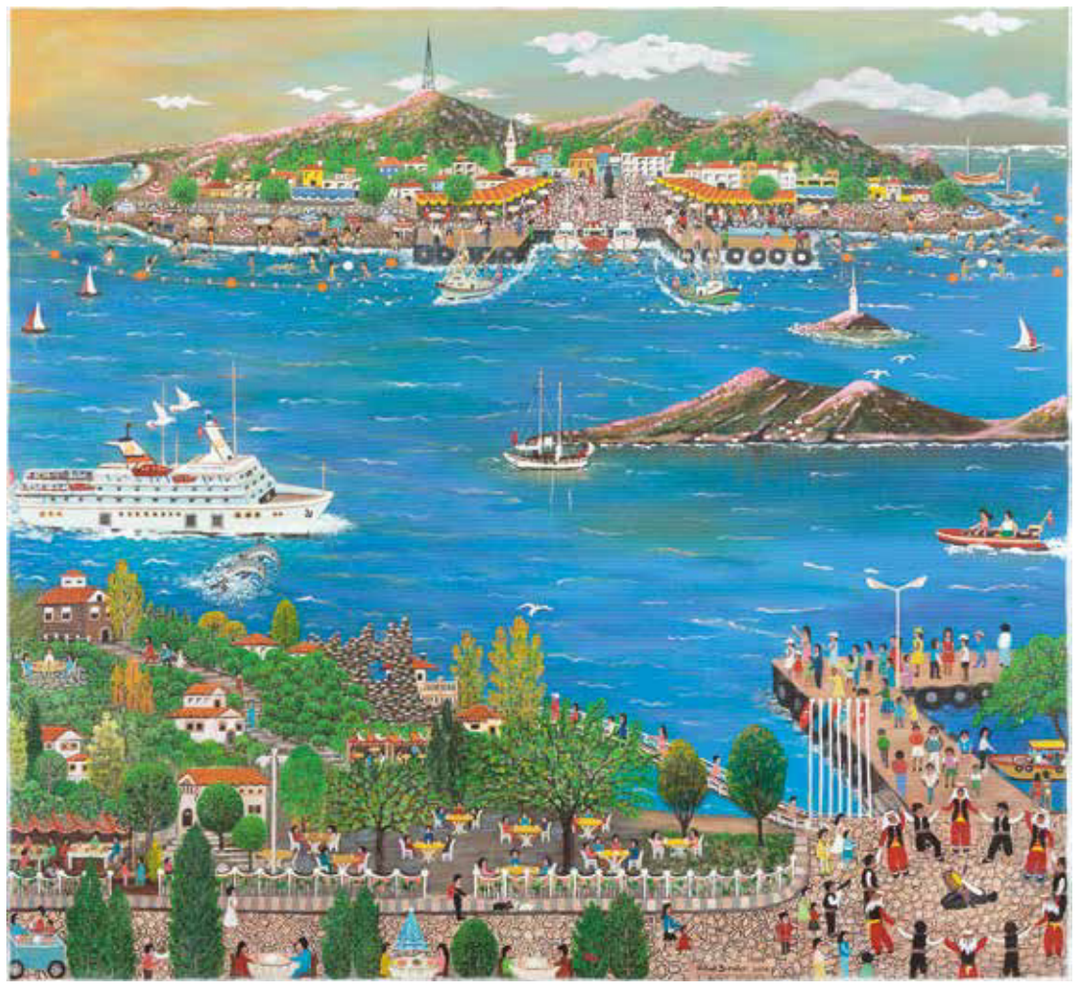
Nihal Sıralar

Born in Tarsus, Nihal Sıralar graduated from the Evening Girls' Art School. After many years applying her skills in various crafts, she met Fahir Aksoy in 1984. When Aksoy saw her paintings, he told her she was a 'naive' artist and invited her to join the Naive Artists Group, which he led. Aksoy described her artistic style this way: "Nihal Sıralar is one of the most consistent and typical artists of naive art. Her works, filled with emotions and thoughts that reflect her enthusiastic, patient, and sincere personality, stand out among others for their charm. Naive art is largely a product of imagination, and as its popularity grows around the world, we should look to artists like Nihal—who pave the way and nurture sincerity, the essence of aesthetics—as the reason for this rise. With her undiminished childlike sensitivity, Nihal Sıralar is a symbol among Turkish naive artists. I wish her great success." She painted every landscape that caught her attention, especially in Istanbul, often creating imaginative scenes and the people who inhabit them.

Nihal Sıralar
Ah, Beautiful Istanbul
105 x 130 cm
Acrylic on canvas
1998
Demsa Collection

Nihal Sıralar
Adalar
110 x 120 cm
Oil on canvas
2000
Demsa Collection





Niyazi Toptoprak

Born in Istanbul in 1950, he held his first solo art exhibition in 1969 and has since showcased his work in nearly 150 personal exhibitions. He has contributed to countless group shows. After graduating from Istanbul University's Faculty of Literature with a degree in Sociology, the artist received several awards and honorable mentions.

Painter Niyazi is known for having developed a distinctive style. He masterfully works with oil paints and pastels, adapting nature to fit his unique vision. While he creates various animal portraits, cats hold a special place in his art.

Niyazi Toptoprak stands out as a prominent figure in contemporary Turkish painting. His works often feature a blend of human forms, nature, and abstract elements, brought to life through his distinctive storytelling style. Masterfully weaving color and texture, Toptoprak captures inner emotions and social themes on canvas with a symbolic touch. His art reflects influences from both Anatolian culture and modern artistic movements. Having participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions at home and abroad, Toptoprak has earned a respected reputation in art circles.

Niyazi Toptoprak 69x48cm.
Oil on canvas, 2023 Demsa Collection

Niyazi Toptoprak
Çatalca
63 x 63 cm
Oil on canvas
2024
Demsa Collection

Niyazi Toptoprak, Oil on Canvas, 56x84 cm. Demsa Collection

Niyazi Toptoprak
60 x 80 cm, Oil on canvas, 2012

Demsa Collection

Selçuk Toğul

Born in Istanbul in 1950, the artist is recognized as one of the leading figures in Turkish naïve painting. After completing his education at the Italian High School Middle School and Suadiye Commercial High School, he held his first solo exhibition in 1979 at Cumalı Art Gallery. Toğul has participated in numerous group exhibitions both in Turkey and abroad, and in 1999, he won second place at the World Naïve Painters Exhibition in Bologna, Italy.

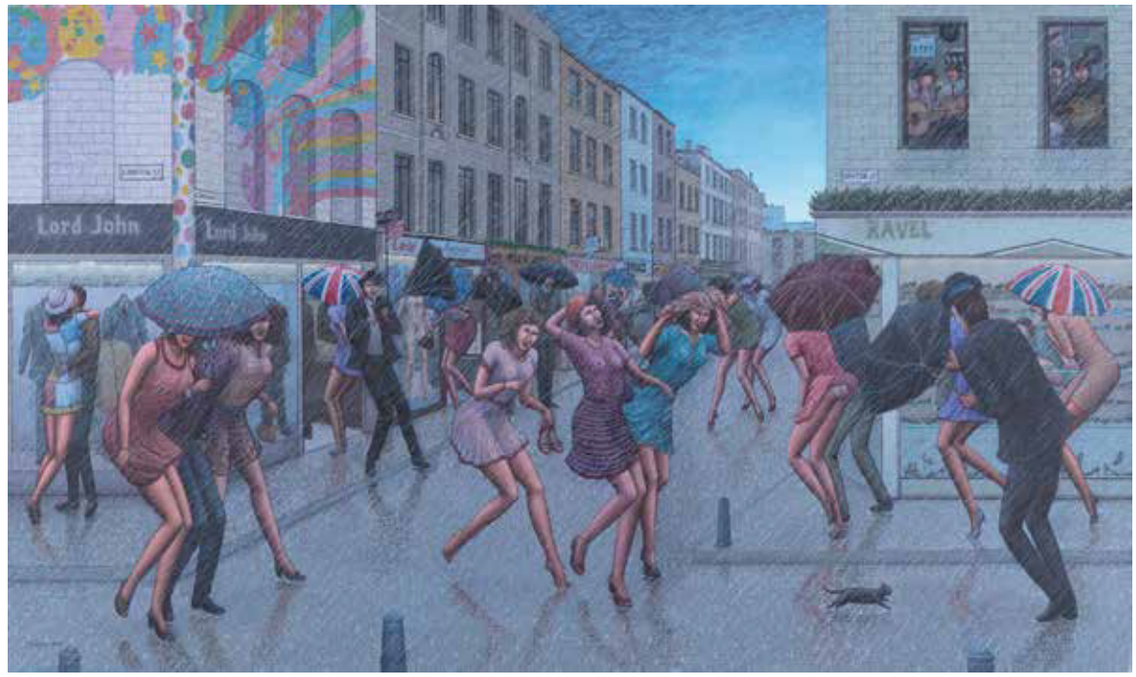
Selçuk Toğul's style gradually diverged from the perspective-free, almost motionless, childlike-naïve appearance often seen in self-taught naïve artists. Over time, the previously calm and static quality of his work became more dynamic, his human figures more stylized, and he began to depict moments of action.

Toğul's paintings captivate with intricate details and masterful use of color. He has made his mark through a lively, character-driven and witty style. Each piece tells a unique story, with details reflecting the influences and moments from his own life. In scenes inspired by topics like mythology, The Beatles, opera, Bodrum, women, cats, art literature, and cinema, he often features people he knows, including himself. In this way, Selçuk Toğul's works can be seen as a vibrant collage of his memories and imagination.

Selçuk Toğul Oil on canvas, 24x18 cm
Demsa Collection

Selçuk Toğul Forest People and Bay 100x160 cm. Oil on canvas, 2023

Demsa Collection



Selçuk Toğul
Oil on canvas, 96x160 cm
2015
Serap - Levend Kokuludağ Collection

Sema Çulam

Sema Çulam is one of Turkey's leading figures in naive painting, a field where she's earned numerous international awards. She's recognized for her works that highlight nature, women, and the value of labor. Her art often brings together figures intertwined with the natural world, scenes bathed in light, and a hopeful outlook on humanity. Although she left her formal art education unfinished, Sema Çulam spent many years creating works in an abstract and semi-abstract style before embracing naive art in the early 2000s. Since then, she's placed nature and especially hardworking rural women at the heart of her paintings. Through her creations, she reveals a world that city dwellers may know but seldom notice —a world uniquely ours. Naive artists are typically described as those who, without traditional training, rely on their instincts and interests, raising their art to an aesthetic level outside of conventional norms. In Turkey, another term is used for such artists: 'Safyürek'—those with a pure heart. To me, this term has a broader meaning: artists who put aside what they know, focus on simple narratives, and create freely, wherever they may be. That's why I prefer to call Sema Çulam's works 'safyürek' pieces, as they tell stories in a clear, narrative style that is both accessible and deeply expressive.

Nilgün Yüksel

Sema Çulam, Oil on Canvas, 30x20 cm, 2006 Demsa Collection


Sema Gulam

Sema Çulam
Poppy
30 x 84 cm
Oil on canvas
2008
Demsa Collection

Sema Çulam
In the Wheat Field
Oil on canvas, 40x70
cm
2022
Demsa Collection

Sema Çulam
25 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
2016
Demsa Collection

Sema Çulam
25 x 70 cm
Oil on canvas
2019
Demsa Collection

Serap Soyaltın

Born in Ankara, Soyaltın graduated from G. Ü. Clothing Department and the Private School of Fine Arts in Fashion Styling, then spent many years working as a fashion designer in the private sector. Later, under the guidance of her mentor Vahap Demirbaş, she began painting, gradually developing her own unique style. Among today's notable naïve painters, Soyaltın's works are instantly recognizable for their strong influence of Aegean life and atmosphere. Her paintings often spotlight the overlooked presence, diligence, and labor of women in society, as well as their femininity, attractiveness, and beauty, even in strong physical forms. The artist seeks to capture traditions, local culture, and the joyful, lively neighborhood life many of us nostalgically remember from childhood, using warm colors to evoke feelings of peace and happiness. Through her art, she hopes to leave a visual legacy that bridges the past, present, and future.

Serap Soyaltın
Every Tale Has Its Own Story
50 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
2025
Demsa Collection

Serap Soyaltın Henna Night 25x25 cm Oil on Canvas 2022

Demsa Collection

Sevil Yetkin

Yetkin began painting in 1970 and is a member of Fahir Aksoy's Naïve Artists group. Living in Izmir, Yetkin has taken part in exhibitions across Turkey, especially in Istanbul, and has held regular shows at a gallery in Paris.

Her paintings often capture nature scenes, city life, and everyday moments from people's lives. Sevil Yetkin typically brings a touch of fairy-tale magic to her artwork.

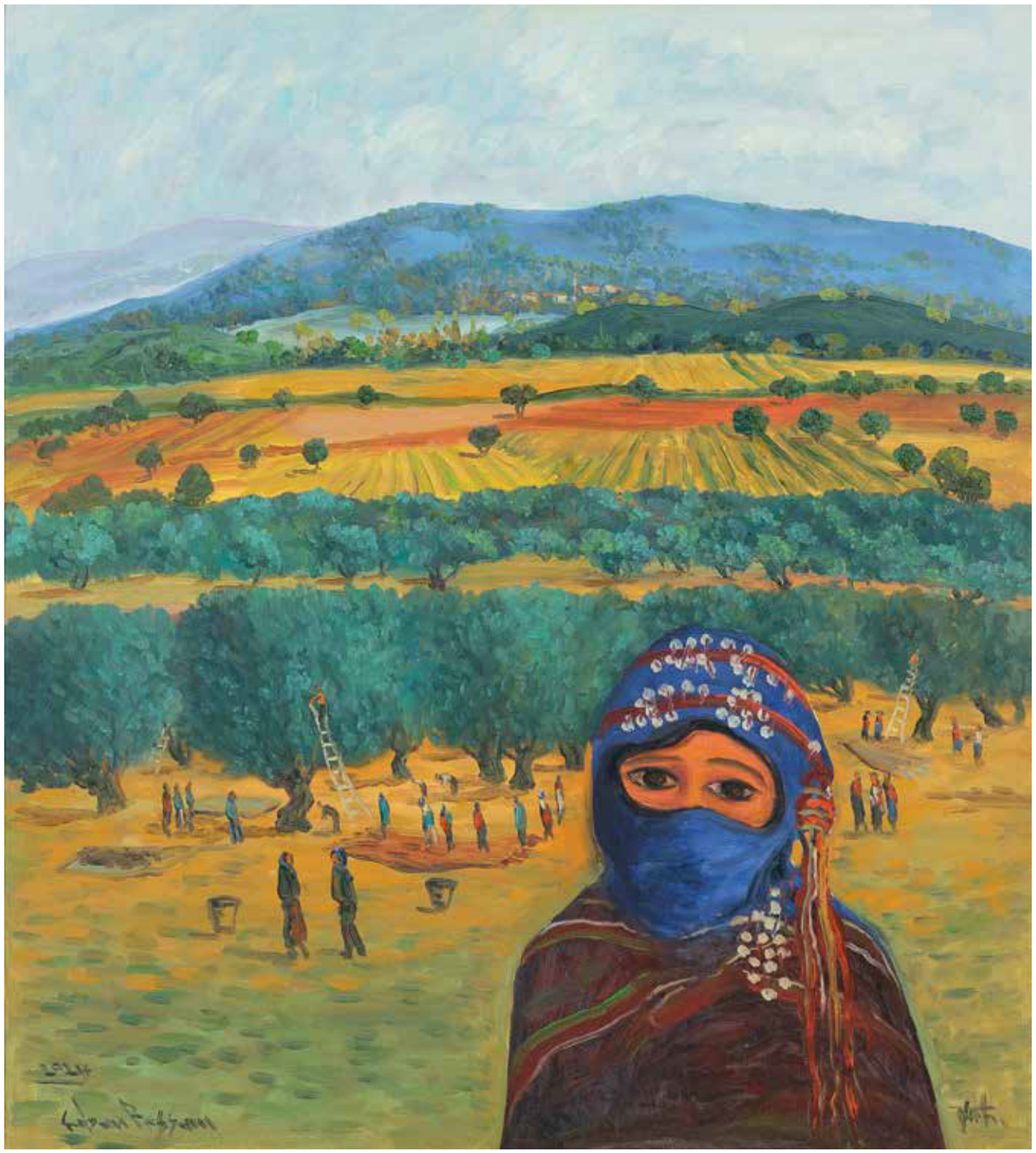
Sevil Yetkin 28.5x35.5 cm Oil on canvas 1986
Demsa Collection

Sevil Yetkin
30 x 40 cm
Oil on hardboard
Demsa Collection

Süleyman Şahin

He completed his education up to the fourth grade. In 1958, he moved to Ankara, and as a child, worked as a construction painter and shepherd to support himself. His passion and talent for painting led him toward an artistic path. By highlighting rural life in his works and drawing on his own experience as a shepherd, he became known as the "Shepherd Painter" in art circles. His first exhibition was held in 1968 at the İş Sanat Gallery in Ankara. After relocating to Bursa in 1973, he founded Painter's Alley in 1986, helping nurture young artists. He visited Paris several times and studied the art scenes of cities such as Rome, Venice, Turin, and Milan. In 1988, he won first prize in a painting competition themed "Ankara," organized by the Ankara Governor's Office. Recognized for his landscapes of Anatolia, Şahin used color to convey emotion, and his self-taught technique is evident in his works.

Süleyman Şahin, Oil on canvas, 100x90 cm, 2024 Demsa Collection



Şebnem Tuncer

"I've been painting for nearly 30 years now. My passion for art began a long time ago when I was searching for meaning in my life. My vocational high school had an art department, and my teacher was disappointed when I didn't choose it. That dream stayed with me, unfinished, waiting for the right moment. In 1982, I joined a drawing course at the İzmir Museum of Painting and Sculpture, and it felt like I was coming home. Since then, art and I have been inseparable. I met the naive artist Fahir Aksoy and spent a year in his studio, eager to learn about art materials and techniques. Most importantly, Fahir taught me something truly special: how to be myself."

After working with Fahir Aksoy for a year, nature became my greatest teacher. Since 1985, I've been living immersed in it, and I'm still discovering new things every day. Life itself is an art form. What I see isn't just lines and colors. For me, it's the gentle breeze, the flowing streams, the birds singing—all these have a positive effect on my spirit. Every spring, as nature renews itself, I reconnect and chase after beauty all over again. Whenever I stumble upon something new in nature or in my art, I wonder how I never noticed it before. It's all about dedication and years of hard work. It feels as if art is saying, 'The more you give yourself to me, the more I'll reveal my secrets.' I feel like I've reached a point where I simply can't let go. Like a running stream, the more I devote myself, the stronger it flows. Each new painting demands even more effort. Mastery doesn't make everything easier.

When I paint, my focus and my intent—something that now happens on its own—is to create joyful paintings filled with joyful women. I've tried to capture women who sing like birds and flow like streams, blending seamlessly with nature.

I always carry my sketchbook and pencil with me. No matter where I go, I end up drawing something. It might be a bird, people dancing at a village wedding, or folks working in the fields. Sometimes, compositions just come together on their own as I sketch. When spring arrives, I go out of my way to observe, feel the beauty of nature, and sketch what I see. Later, I sit in my studio and design small compositions, most often centered around themes of spring. The ever-renewing nature each spring brings me so much happiness. I love sharing the wonder of this awakening through my art. I hope those who see my work feel joy, and that in some small way, I can help them reconnect with nature—and with themselves.

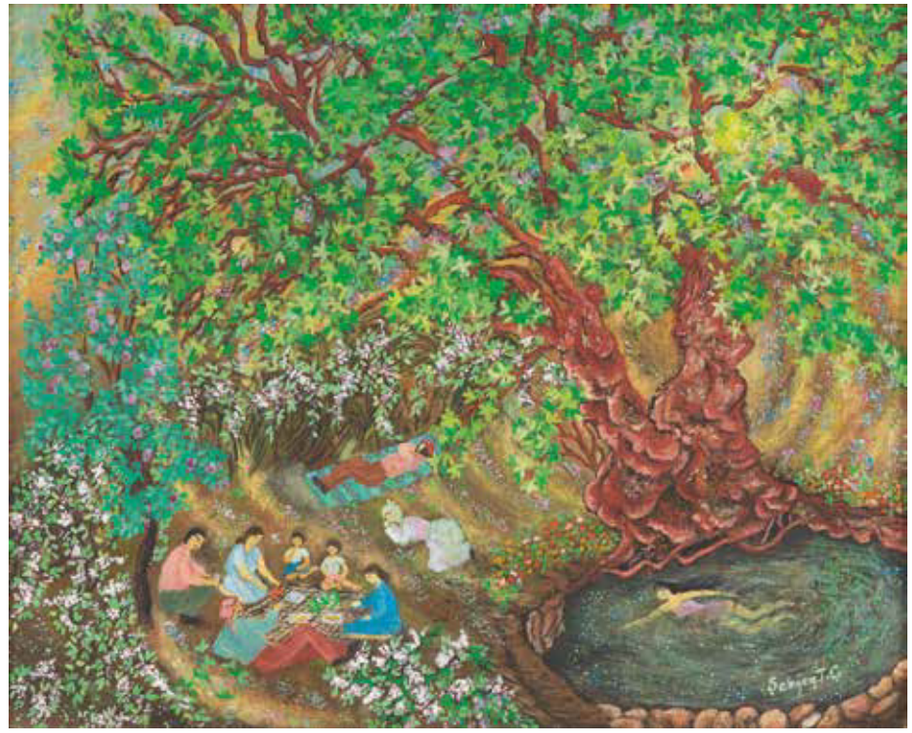
In naïve art, every artist pours their unique creative spirit onto the canvas. Living with a childlike excitement and passion naturally finds its way into the paintings of naïve artists. I've always felt that emotions each have their own colors. That's why those who chase happiness and follow vibrant colors are often the naïve artists themselves. The people who look at their art, created out of a desire for joy, always walk away with warm feelings. Another thing we share is a refined technique that develops over time. Our country is incredibly rich in history, and we carry that heritage within us. Years of dedication and the drive to reach something even more beautiful are what inspire our work. In naïve art, we truly experience that life and art are precious gifts, deserving of deep respect and care."

From the interview with Ümmühan Kazanç and Şebnem Tuncer. (March 16, 2016)

Şebnem Tuncer
Avcılar
35 x 70 in
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Şebnem Tuncer
5 Sacks of Bay Leaves
35 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Şebnem Tuncer
Bacchus
30 x 30 cm
Oil on primed canvas
Demsa Collection



Şebnem Tuncer
Poolside
40x50 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

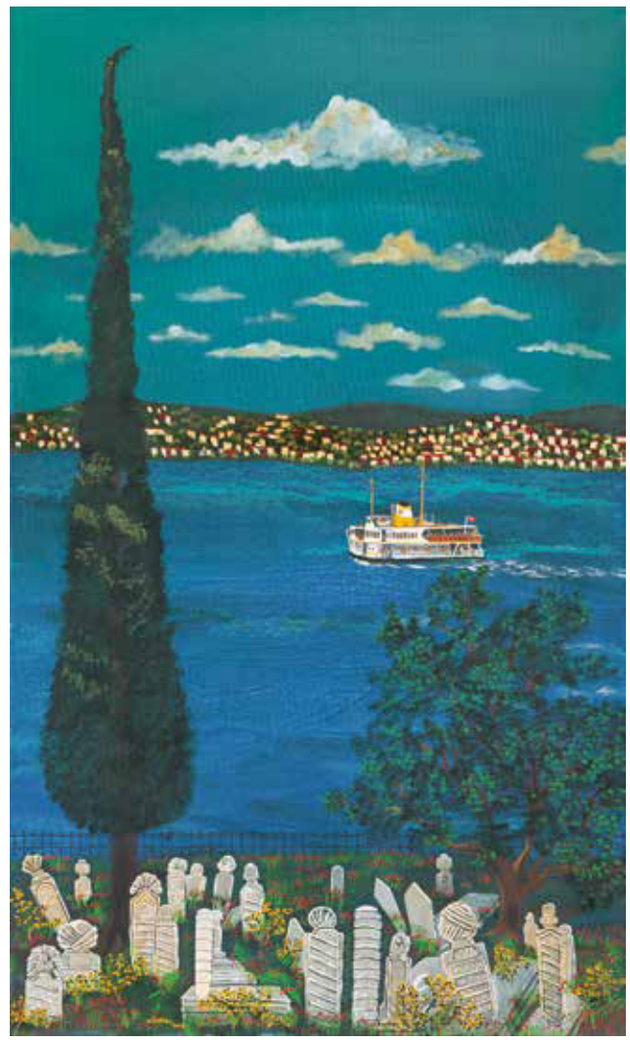
Şeyho Bulut

Şeyho Bulut was born in Elbistan in 1956. Driven by a deep passion, he began painting on his own in 1987, and this pursuit soon became a true obsession. He debuted with his first solo show at Sevince Art Gallery and participated in numerous group exhibitions. For many years, Bulut continued his artistic journey in his Mecidiyeköy studio. He passed away in Tekirdağ in 2022.

Şeyho Bulut 40x60 cm,
oil on canvas, 1998
Demsa Collection

Uğural Gafuroğlu

Uğural Gafuroğlu
Viewers of the
Bosphorus 100x60 cm
Oil on canvas Demsa
Collection



Born in Salihli in 1952, he graduated from TED Ankara College and later completed his studies at Boğaziçi University's Faculty of Administrative Sciences in 1976.

The artist began painting in 1986 and is featured in Fahir Aksoy's book "Naive Art and Turkish Naives" (Ak Publishing, 1990). Since the 1980s, his artistic journey has been marked by a genuine, childlike, and humanistic enthusiasm, always expressed in a direct way. His works never lack social critique and a touch of humor or irony.

By introducing new materials and themes inspired by nature into the traditional chain of paint and canvas, he explored fresh directions in his art. In this pursuit, canvas, pebbles, wood, and reverse glass painting became a continuous field of experimentation for the artist.

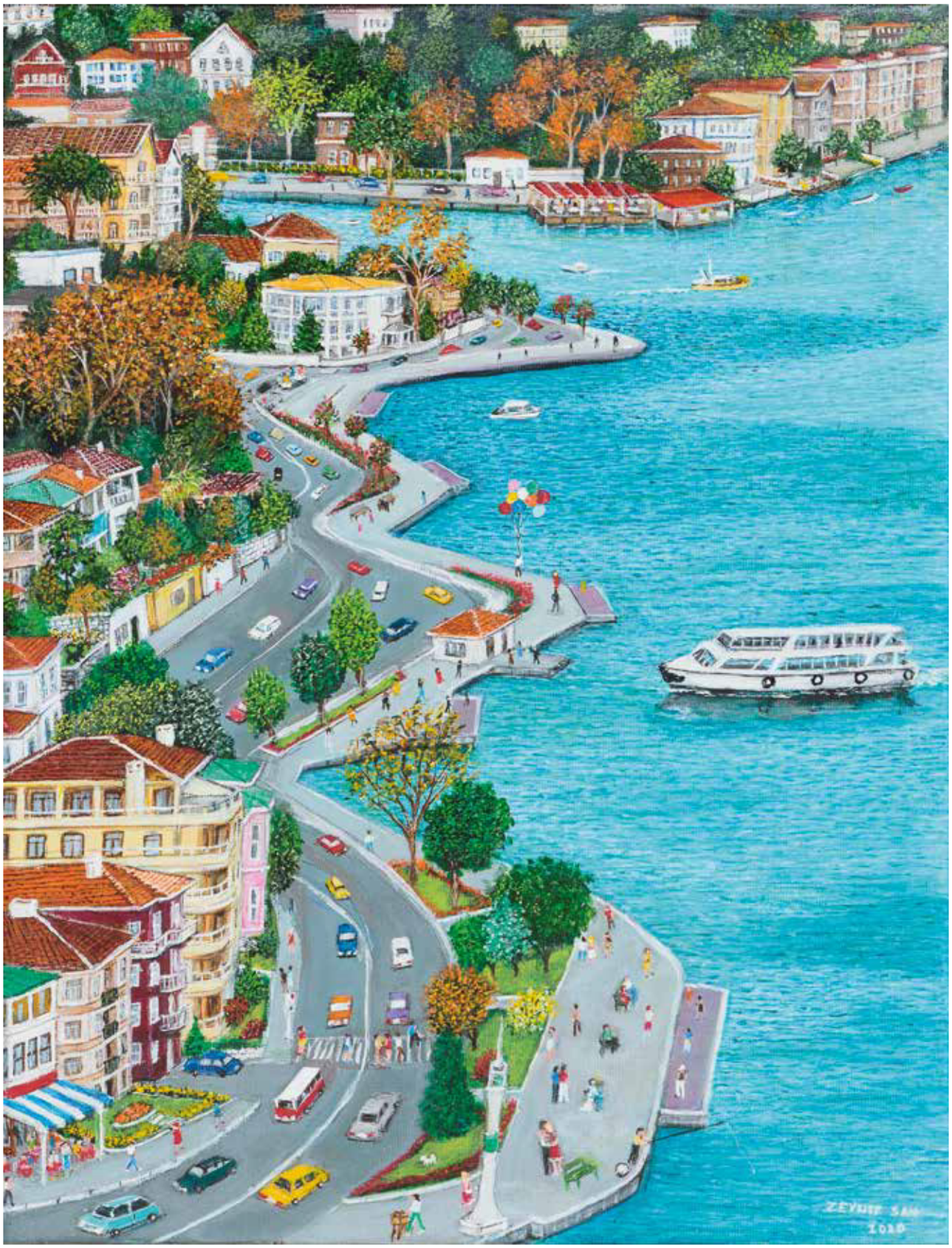
Uğural Gafuroğlu
Anadolu Fortress
60 x 100 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Zeynep San

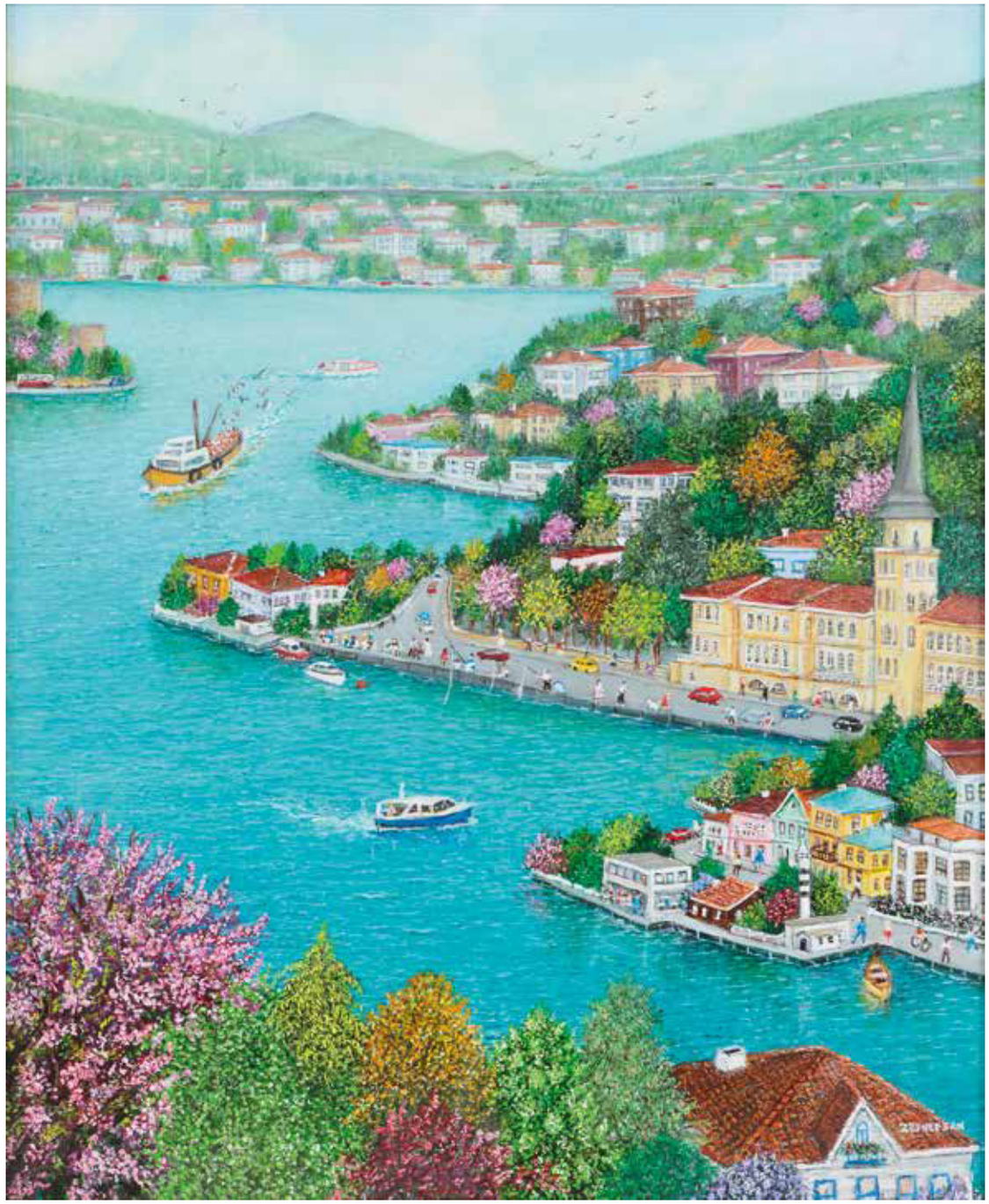
Born in Istanbul in 1947, Zeynep San studied Sociology at Istanbul University. Her journey into painting began in 1982 at Gülseren Südor's studio and continued at Kezban Arca Batıbeki's studio in 1990. It was there that she was discovered by Fahir Aksoy, a renowned figure among naïve painters, and she held her debut exhibition in 1994.

In her paintings, Zeynep San strives to gently capture the relationship between nature and people, a quality born from keen observation. She works within a classical perspective, yet carves out a unique space among naïve artists. Her distinctive approach to foreground and background, along with her balanced use of light and shadow, stand out in her work. San creates pieces that showcase various streets, squares, and scenes of social life in Istanbul. Since her first solo exhibition in 1994, she has continued to show her work both individually and as part of groups of naïve painters.

Zeynep San Autumn
in Emirgan 35x45 cm
Oil on Canvas 2020
Demsa Collection



Zeynep San
Kuleli
40 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection



Zeynep San
25 x 35 cm
Oil on canvas
Demsa Collection

Zeynep San
40 x 40 cm
Oil on canvas
2020
Demsa Collection

Details: Nihal Sıralar

There is no precise date as to when naive art emerged, because many productions made since the time art has existed could, in a sense, be defined as naive, even if they were called folk art; however, there are certain dates when naive art was discussed as a movement and a concept. In the 17th-19th centuries, it was used sometimes positively and sometimes negatively for the form of expression in literature and for detail in poetry. According to Schiller, "naive poetry" is that which is natural and written by looking at the object. Nature, art, and the ideal are three stages, and these three stages are identified with naive, sentimental, and synthetic poetry. The transition of this term into the field of visual arts as an expression begins with Henri Rousseau towards the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when abstract art was spreading across the world. The settling of another movement, which was born in Montmartre before World War I along with Fauvism and Cubism and was supported by poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire, into the track of "naive painting" and its full acceptance only points to post-war dates.

PERA PALACE HOTEL
1892

DEMSA
GROUP