

Development of Naive Art and Turkish Naive Artists

Tuğba GÜRKAN ŞENYAVAŞ
Uludağ University Faculty of Education
Department of Fine Arts Education
Art Education Program
Turkey

Abstract

Naive art that emerged in literature in the 17th century and in plastic arts in the 19th century has been an issue for its word meaning and artistic features. Mixed with concepts like children art, folkloric art, and primitive art; its difference was questioned. Necessary features of a 'naive' artwork, questioning if the naive artist educated or not and to what extent education affects naivety; are points of discussion regarding naive art. Based on these discussions, the article referred to views of different authors, and discussed the features of naive art and its differences and similarities with other forms of art. Also, the development of naive art in Turkey was mentioned briefly and Turkish naive artists were addressed. While discussing Turkish naive artists the classification of Fahir Aksoy, one of the prominent Turkish naives, was mentioned under two titles, 'naives educated on arts' and 'naives did not educated on art'.

Key words: Naive art, naive artist, İnsite art, Turkish naive artists

1. About Naive Art

The word *naive* means natural, simple, undisguised, and pure. In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries the word was used as the form of articulation in literature, and the detail in poetry; it was sometimes used positive, sometimes negative (Aksoy, 1990, pg.5).

The term of *naive art* was used in order to express the purest form of art; yet it was found to be insufficient and later different terms were elaborated.

For instance, Dubuffet's *Art Brut* term, which means *raw art*, was used to indicate *uncorrupted by the culture yet*. These types of artists live in an atmosphere, either in mental institution or outside, that is free from educational, cultural, and traditional effects (Manukyan, 1998, pg.40). Dubuffet rejects arts that are products of the acquired culture and became a vigorous advocate of *art brut*. Czech thinkers who continued activities around the journal *Insita* in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, published a notice that includes Stefan Tcack's term *Insite* and a suggestion about redefining the term. This had significant repercussions in art communities.

The term *insite* was derived from the Latin word, *institus*; and it means simple, pure, and undisguised. In 1966 a symposium was held in Czechoslovakia on this topic, the main purpose was to elaborate the relationship between *insite* and the other artistic expressions; and find a way to unite plethora of names under one common expression instead of using the adjectives like naive and primitive. The usage of the description, *insite art*, of which meaning in Latin completely coincides with the character of this area of art, was decided in this symposium (Aksoy, pg.23).

In the journal called *Insita*, which is published in Czechoslovakia and covers only topics related to naive art, Ana Jakovsky, one of the significant thinkers of that period says that;

Many women and men, independent from age, social status, and cultural development, may find themselves busy with art. They may even contribute substantially (...). But, from that point it is not possible to reach naive art. The artful emotional effect of naive art depends on the surprise of the unprecedented. This is such a form of art that ruins our habits of viewing object, shakes our knowledge, and force our intellectual comfort.

Still, despite all efforts the term *insite* could not become widespread except for a few countries; and the extant term *naive art* continued to be used.

The orientation towards simplicity as a naive approach emerged through post-impressionism and fauvism movements. The facts that Paul Gauguin went to Tahiti; in the following years Pablo Picasso was interested in the primitiveness of African art; and the rise of cubism, are indicators of the search for the pure and real art (Manukyan, pg.40). Concordantly, the usage of the word *naive* as a statement in the visual arts emerged towards the end of the 19th century with Henri Rousseau; it was a period when abstract art started to spread over the world (Aksoy, pg.5). Rousseau, who determined the norms of art in his period through his wild forest paintings and participated to the exhibition in *Salon des Indépendants*, proved that even a customs worker can be an artist. Picasso's close interest and support to Rousseau; and interests of some pioneers of modern art towards the arts of uneducated or mentally ill people, and children intimidated some certain circles.

The necessity of academic education of art, which had started in the 19th century and became widespread in the 20th century, started to be questioned and a decrease was observed in the importance attached to education. In this period there was an increase in interest in being out of line, counterculture, primitive, and simple; and the concept of real art was elaborated. Naive art completed its incubation phase during such a period and gained validity in the market of art. Another interesting formation is the case of orienting toward naive painting and appreciating it under the influence of folk culture. This formation took place in countries like Romania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Hungary, and especially Croatia that are isolated by the market of painting; which is monopolized by Central Europe and Central America. Naive art, which became widespread all around the world in time and formed a type; although later, revealed itself in Turkey in a different structure but in a parallel development (Manukyan, pg.40-43).

Gönül Gültekin (1992, pg.21); paid attention to the facts that in Turkish painting naive sensitivity is seen in Primitive painters' art works at the end of the 19th century; and the understanding of naive art was started after 1955. Yet, it is based on older tradition. Unlike Croatia, no school was established in Turkey in order to raise naive artists; however two interesting formations are worth elaborating.

The artworks of artists, who were affected by the influence of the great heritage of *Ottoman* and *folk art*, show similarities. Before the republic period there were artists who produced several artworks under the name of folk art. Although the effect of Western painting, some of the artists who brought folk art from past to present continued their works during their periods as the members of D Group and 10's Group. Those people educated in Academy of Fine Arts. For example, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu used local folkloric themes and motives in his work of art; Nedim Günsür formed an expressionist-expressive painting language, in which naive features appeared from place to place. Among schooled artists names like Mehmet Pesen, Turgut Zaim, Berna Türemen, and Canan Göknil were sometimes called as naive artist- although they never confirmed themselves - due to their themes and forms (Manukyan, pg.44).

Paintings, which were applied on any surfaces and classified under the name of folk art or traditional art in an attempt to find absolute art, after having entered to art galleries as artworks on canvas, people who produce artworks that reflect such features and those who did not receive an academic education on art and their arts were started to be called as 'naive' (Manukyan, pg.40)

In such paintings generally vivid colors are dominant and technical features are disregarded. Naive paintings, which are described as childish and pure, are generally about happiness and optimism and do not include negative feelings. Small houses that include the effects of miniature, people, village, and country life can be counted as the most common themes.

Yvon Daigle summarized the features of naive art under 23 articles. The most attractive ones are drawing with heart rather than eyes; painting for one's own self; painting playfully with joy and happiness; disregarding shadows, manifesting itself in two-dimension and flat space; ignoring the color theories (Manukyan, pg.45).

According to Klaus Jürgen-Fischer (Bihalji, 1984, pg.12); naive painter can gain a place regarding craft and can intensify his pictural observation. He stated it as following:

Sometimes his strength of expression gains importance, but does not flourish; it is not the case to pass through certain steps and ascend or exceed certain processes. Improvement towards maturity, a chance to be a high level art or rewarding for that aim, are synonymous with the death of naive art because its existence is intermingled with this maturity. These are what make naive art warm, attractive, and affable.

The sources of influence that naive artists have are so widespread. The biggest mistake is the attempt to associate them with certain norms. Sometimes they express themselves through imagination, fantastic elements; and sometimes through meticulous surrealism, expressionism. They are completely free. It is always claimed that Naives do not have the purpose of carrying messages through their arts. It is seen that although the expression does not have the rule of delivering a message, still sometimes few of them present dramatic slices of life of certain areas (Aksoy, pg.9).

French painter Andre Derain associated naive art with the sound of a gunshot that explodes near to us.

According to Arsen Pohribny; naive artist does not compliment to fashion of the day and he is not affected by technical and private taboos that can prevent a professional artist. He gives life to unique techniques that best reflect his own original values rather than applying techniques strange to himself.

According to Ayla Ersoy (1998, pg.162); the source of naive art is in the simplicity of human heart. A simple life; daily behaviors; a nice universe are reflected with flowers, children, stars in a joyful festive air and with a clear, understandable, elaborative visual language.

Naivety is not a talent issue; a quality. It is a kind of childishness. As Turan Erol also puts, it is *pure heartedness* (Berk and Özsezgin, 1983, pg.112).

One of the biggest debates on naive artists is whether naive painter received education or not. Some argue that a person who received art education cannot be naive; even a general education destroys an artist's naive features (Ersoy, pg.162).

Fusun Akatlı (Dost journal, vol. 24, no. 91) emphasized that in order to create naive artworks it is not necessary to be ignorant, uneducated, and unaware of rules and techniques; and to live in a limited cultural environment. She further claimed that the things that distinguish a naive artist from a professional artist are not education, schooling, or culture; they are sensitiveness, view of the world, intuition, and attitudes towards topics (Aksoy, pg.11-12).

Fahir Aksoy (pg.10) mentioned that naives benefit from traditions, modern school and trends even if just a bit; yet their assimilation and utilization mostly of techniques, do not change their naive characters. He also emphasized that this different look can be classified by privileged characteristics as 'impressionist naive, surrealist naive'; however they are still naive in essence. Considering the criticisms about the fact that an educated person with a general culture cannot paint naive paintings, he claims that those criticism are arguments of people who are superficial, ignorant of the issue's alphabet, and non profound. According to these critics, naive art is a production of ignorance. It is required to be uneducated, ignorant, and unaware. Given the facts that even if a person enters through and walk out the door of a school and visits a museum accidentally lead him to develop cultivation; therefore it is claimed that this person can no longer paint naive paintings. Aksoy describes these attitudes as ridiculous and stances against them.

There are two important reasons of the formation of baseless and negative arguments about naive art;

- a. These kind of painters are described as 'bazaar painters' or later 'outdoor painters' in encyclopedias or old publications,
- b. Their similarities with the arts of primitive, public, child, mentally ill people, amateur and autodidactic; and generally their common characteristic as being dependent on instincts (Aksoy, pg.14).

Distinct privileges of naive artists cannot only be explained by their dependency on their instincts. What is important is structural characteristic. Without mentioning these features it becomes harder to distinguish the relevance between them and their supporters, and the points that they unite and differ from each other.

Folkloric paint can be analyzed from two different perspectives, expressive paintings and trimmer paintings.

Expressive paints are art products that include lyric and romantic folk tales; and paintings that describe tales. They are created through symbols and signs as a defensive reaction in order to get rid of the fears stemming from natural phenomenon or myths.

Trimmer paintings are mostly seen in hand-painted kerchiefs, embroideries, knitting, and all sorts of embroideries.

Naive painters are clear; naive art does not have an anonymous character; every single artwork has unique features; it is subjected to change; and particular domination of childish sensitiveness on works of art, are points that separate naive painting from folkloric painting. The elements that unify them can be associated with the facts that artworks depend on intuition, and have simple and pure features (Aksoy, pg.13).

According to Ergüven (1984, p.g.11); in history of art there are no concepts like folk painter, architect, composer, or sculptor; because folk art that has an anonymous character is not related to painting and architecture.

Children's painting is a type of painting that greatly attracted some artists of the period and led them to make an effort to forget what they know through imitating children's paintings. Generally copying is a method of expression that children use commonly. When they become older and learn the rules, they tend to develop quickly and one day they start to draw like a grown up; their childishness is erased (...). Children's painting is very common in our day. Theorists argue that especially surrealists are inspired by Children's painting (Aksoy, pg.20).

In a conversion about naives Manfred de la Motte, the director of Hannover Union of Artists, links the determinative point between child or mentally ill patients and naives, to the *consciousness*. Thus a child who tries to understand the world through painting grasps some realities through this way, but in reality he is searching for himself. For mentally ill people, who think that they must work on the things that they previously experienced, the starting point is to make visible what is imaginary. That is, the motivation of both child and mentally ill person is the act of paint, not painting itself. In other words, the paintings in question do not have qualification as communication instrument. On the other hand, the primary element of naive art, which always tries to express something, is being communicative. For a naive painter what is important is the very thing that he expresses, not himself (Ergüven, pg.10).

It is seen that children, step by step, reflect a feeling, a thought, and an impression in their paintings, which always start as scratch paper. No doubt, one of their biggest sources is their intuitions. The closest thing to naive painting is Children's painting, therefore they are frequently compared. Primary elements that differ naive artists from them are, naives do not paint children paintings they paint with childish sensitiveness; it is not the case for them to change as fast as children; and naives are not like children who shape their painting style according to the rules and different understanding of painting that they learned.

According to paleontology, which is the study of prehistoric life, primitive paintings are prehistoric cave paintings locate in Spain and Africa. The other more developed version of this art is the *Bushman Art* in South and West Africa. It is seen that this art includes symbolic elements as far as it is naturalist (...). The points that separate primitive painting and naive paintings can be listed as, escaping from the struggle with laws of nature that dominated everything in primitive paintings, providing spiritual power like magic and amulet, the necessity to protect themselves, complete ignorance, and solecism (Aksoy, pg.23). Against the increase in artists imitating naive painting both in West and Turkey Fahir Aksoy (p.g.24) argues that:

It is not possible to be a naive painter. He is a painter of certain character. People who are passengers of artificial way should extend their ears up to their thoughts through their feelings; they should listen to impulse coming from consciousness. Then they do not have difficulty in finding their ways. The reason why I over-emphasize this issue is that it is not possible to have naive characteristic without education of art, because the unailing criteria that unfold personality are artworks. A person's life story, being educated or not, are not criteria; it is such a ridiculous way to lay down criterion (...). the unailing structure of a naive artist's characteristic is his childish sensitiveness; which appears in his paintings not in his background or life tales.

According to Aksoy (pg.26), naive art is neither educated ones' nor uneducated ones' art. Dominant element appears at childish sensitiveness. The reason why naive artists typically emerge among uneducated ones is that naives are mixed with folklore artists, primitives, amateurs, autodidacts, and children painters due to the similar features. They are all some sort of naive. In addition, after having received education of art, people with naive sensitivity were not always successful to act independent from what they learned, and re-direct their works without being affected by rules and conditioning (...). Folklore painter, primitive painter, child painter, amateur painter, autodidactic painter, and naive painter are all children of the same family with different appearances. They all drink from the same spring, but vary due to their different character structures formed by separate genes, and different spiritual tendencies. Disregarding this reality, evaluating all of them as similar entities, and continuing to the mistake of complicating things, bring about nothing but a contradiction in terms and muddy in water.

Naive artists became the advocates of an art that has social realism's sincere and 'unassertive' nature, and dominated mainly by subconscious and partly by consciousness; to a certain extent without departing from the traditions, and moving away from surrounding cultures. Including all its dimensions naive art achieved to appear as a value at the universal level and took its place within the history of modern art (Aksoy, pg.53).

All definitions and contradictions in terms regarding this type of art; all developments that naive art presented from past to present; the features that naive art has and debatable features that it has to have; ironically show that in reality the word 'naive' contains a lot of things; however, the art and artists that form this extension, in reality, do not care about these, and even they are unaware of these discussions.

It is thought that describing the artists who have never educated before (either in the field of art or not), and completely rely on their intuitions, as 'real naive' would be more accurate; yet it is thought that educated artists can also embrace naive understanding and draw paintings that include naive elements. In the related literature that evaluates how naive the artists are, using strengthening statements like 'real naive' and 'absolute naive' is very remarkable in term of better understanding the difference

While analyzing Turkish naive artists, the classification that Fahir Aksoy, who wrote a book about the subject and was seen as the master of naive artists during that period, made in his book was considered; and it was presented under two headings, 'Naive artists with art related academic background' and 'Naive artists without art related academic background'.

Some of the 'Naive artists without art related academic background' have never received education at all, while others were people who educated in different fields other than arts. It is very remarkable that the term naive is seen as a description item only for painting art, and it is not used in other fields of art.

1. Turkish Naive Artists

1.1. Naive artists with art related academic background

Nadide AKDENİZ

(Bachelor of Gazi Institute of Education
Department of Art Education)



Figure 1. *Buluşma*, 2004,
oil on canvas, 220x160 cm.

Cihat BURAK

(Bachelor of State Academy of Fine Art
Department of Architect)



Figure 2. *Askerlik Hatırası*, 1956,
oil on canvas, 95x63 cm.

Yalçın GÖKÇEBAĞ

(Bachelor of Gazi Institute of Education
Department of Art Education)



Figure 3. *Çay toplayan kadınlar*, 2001,
oil on canvas, 80x100 cm.

Nedim GÜNSÜR

(Bachelor of State Academy of Fine Art
Department of Painting)



Figure 4. *İskele*, oil on canvas,
37 x 28 cm.

Güler HAŞİMOĞLU

(Bachelor of State Academy of Fine Art
Department of Architect)

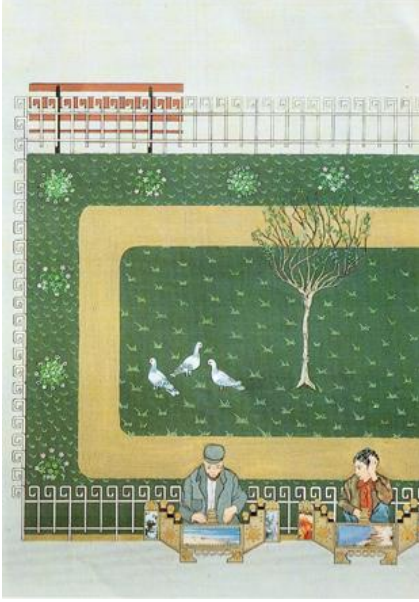


Figure 5. *Boyacılar*, oil on canvas,
35x60 cm.

Ayşe ÖZEL

(Bachelor of State Academy of Fine Art
Department of Painting)



Figure 7. *Çelişki*, 30x60 cm.

Oya KATOĞLU

(Bachelor of Ankara University
Faculty of Languages History and
Geography Department of Art History)



Figure 6. *Bursa'da Sabah*, oil on
canvas, 40x60 cm.

Berna TÜREMEN

(Bachelor of State School of Applied Arts
Department of Painting)



Figure 8. *Gezgin Giysici Ali*, 1978,
oil on canvas, 70 x 88 cm.

Mehmet PESEN

(Bachelor of State Academy of Fine Art
Department of Painting)

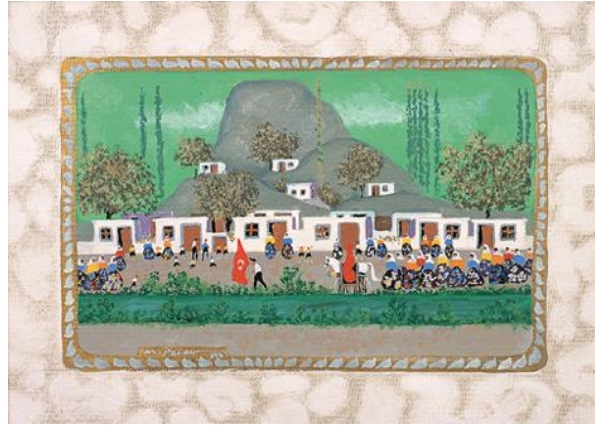


Figure 9. *Gelin*, 1997, oil on canvas,
36x46 cm.

1.2. Naive artists without art related academic background

Fahir AKSOY



Figure 10. *Kasaba*, 70x50 cm.

Zuhal AMATO

(Bachelor of Ege University
Faculty of Medicine)



Figure 11. *Yalnızlık*, 40x50 cm.

Aziz ALPAUT

(Bachelor of Estonya Dorpat University
Faculty of Law)



Figure 12. *Natürmort*, 25x35 cm
cm

Emin BAŞARANBİLEK

(Bachelor of Ankara University
Faculty of Languages History and
Geography Department of Protohistory and Near
Eastern Archeology)



Figure 13. *İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzesi*, 80x120

Uğural GAFUROĞLU

(Bachelor of Boğaziçi University
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Department of Marketing)



Figure 13. *Kırdan Yaşam*, 50x65 cm.

Bayram GÜMÜŞ



Figure 14. *Yaşadığım Kent*, 50x100 cm.

İhsan Cemal KARABURÇAK

(Bachelor of P.T.T. Mekteb-i Alisi)



Figure 15. *Vapurlar*, 1966, oil on canvas, cm.

Galip ONAT

(Bachelor of Military Academy)



Figure 16. *Anadolu Kasabası*, 40x60
76x100 cm.

Mehmet Ali RESİMCİOĞLU

(Bachelor of İzmir Institute of Craft
Department of Woodwork)



Figure 17. *İstasyon*, 1968, 40x50 cm.

Nihal SİRALAR



Figure 18. *Boğaz İçinden*, 60x70 cm.

Mehmet TABANLIOĞLU



Figure 19. *Çadırda Ocak*, 70x65 cm.

Belkıs TAŞKESER



Figure 20. *Ayı Oynatan*, 35x50 cm.

Şebnem TUNCER



Figure 21. *Cami içi*, 55x70 cm.

Selçuk TOĞUL

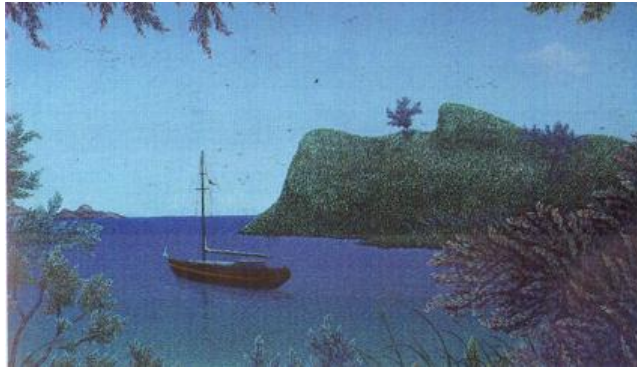


Figure 22. *Kıyı*, 28x40 cm.

Sevil YETKİN

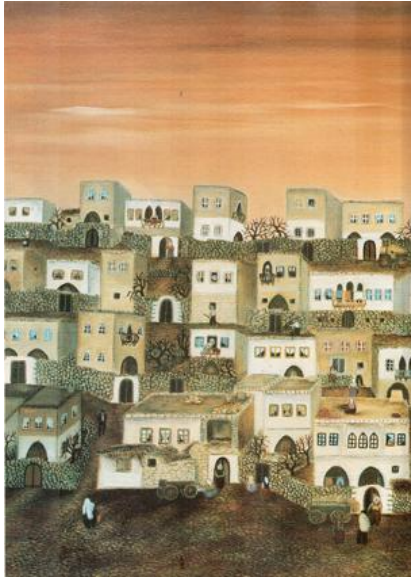


Figure 23. *Kasaba*, 1985, 40x55 cm.

Fatma EYE



Figure 24. 1989.

Hüseyin YÜCE



Figure 25. Oil on paperboard, 62 x 53 cm.

İbrahim BALABAN



Figure 26. *Ana ve Çocuk*, 2000, oil on canvas, 50x40 cm.

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