

## **Necla Rüzgar's 'Damage Diagnosis'**

### **By Yücel Kayıran**

The works (including painting, watercolours and videos) in her fourth solo show held in Gallery Outlet-Istanbul, portray that Necla Rüzgar's art correlates with the term of Umberto Eco's open work', basing on both postmodernist conceptual approach, sociological point of view and image interpretations with respect to not only what 'spiritual universe', depicted in her paintings, is about, but also the poetic and esthetic expression of visual definition inside them. Although it seems arguable to what extent art works, based on performance or conceptual art, could be named as 'open work', I am in the opinion that it would be oversimplification to assess her works within these terms, for what Necla Rüzgar brings together in her works is entirely something different.

The problem of an artist existence and emergence of an art work, the historical conditions in which artists grew up, relations between artist and their political environment are undoubtedly metaphysical matter. This relationship finds a fertile expression possibility within the scope of monographic criticism through the language of essay kind. Notwithstanding, looking at art through philosophy, despite that it is not a casual phenomenon, is of significance in terms of analysing of what constitutes the background of an art work. By all means artistic creativity has nothing to do with historical ones but more to do with ontological ones regarding its emergence process. Nonetheless, examining the context of an art work gains a phenomenological importance as long as it is based on historical facts.

In order to perceive Necla Rüzgar's art in more detail one should delve into two significant historical periods. One of them is that the ending of Cold War, as a result of downfall of real socialism, in 1989. During the period of Cold War, it is quite notable that poets have been subjected to political investigations unlike painters. Of course I do not mean here that painters lack political and ideological attitudes. What is noteworthy here is that the spiritual assurance of both abstract painting and poetry, as long as they are out of political inclination, should be questioned. Figurative representations in art, within Westernization paradigma, have always tried to emerge and exist within possibilities of abstraction during the Cold War years. The distinctive character of Cold War, with regard to artistic existence, outsands on the one hand in censorship of what is happening in time and whilst in constant impact of a long tradition of art tendencies dating back to 19th century on the other. Despite that Cold War begun shortly after the Second World War yet in terms of its specific conditions, the period in Turkey prior to the World War 2, was not more different than Cold War' strategy. Both 1968 generation and the execution of Deniz Gezmiş, have not been portrayed in Turkish painting as themes in those years. Abstract art was excluding the problematic one from its historical context. Figurative art with no context, was actually a sort of realism within the possibility of Cold War. By the end of cold war, figurative painting came back again, relating with historical contexts. Spiritual universe in Necla Rüzgar's painting contains of what is happening in the World of Post- Cold War in terms of both conceptualizing and visualizing it.

The second transformation emerged in the September 11 attack in New York in 2001. September 11 changed center of poor people and periphery, switching attentions to somewhere different. Before September 11, the central attention point of the World was Africa and according to this understanding it was Africa where poor, homeless and black people used to live. Undoubtedly the quotation of Franz Fanon, 'black is beautiful' is of great importance in this sense. But this quotation addressed in 1960s, shifted after September 11 and the center slipped towards the regions where Muslims live. The general character of this region should appear as follows: Muslims are illiterate, impoverished and abandoned people by their governments, with no poets, painters, revolutionists and intellectuals, and left to poverty by rich people. What was prevailing before September 11 was the dominant idea that Muslims, as indicated by Daryush Shayegan, as one of underdeveloping countries which

were unable to adjust to modernism, were those who were 'on holiday in history. In this point, Orientalism and Orientalist interpretations, as a specific intention, were to do with 'what was on holiday in history' and 'what was at work in history' was side by side. Initially the former lost its ability of subjectivity. While trying to put forward the significant role of September 11 in Necla Rüzgar's paintings, what I mean basically is that it is possible to perceive her works through neither political relations nor visual perception stranded between Westernization and Orientalism but both historical transformations and the paradigmatic shifts in her perception towards the World. Therefore her paintings in her last solo show, 'Damage Diagnosis', allude to diagnosis process all about the subjects above-mentioned.

I expressed that diverse cultural components constitute a unity in Necla Rüzgar's works. In her works, one of the most notable images is that the way she interprets the Muslim World through female figures. Looking at these figures one realizes that women are portrayed in two different existance grounds, interior and public domain. This description refers also to the fact that sociological interpretation is a tensely relationship between tradition and modern. But what is in question here is that the tension between objectified woman (the one in her own privacy) and the one subjectified (in public domain). While those who are depicted in privacy, in terms of their dress style, seem to have given up make-up and overweight with traditional costumes, those who are in public domain look opposite. This is not the tension between what is modern and what is tradition but the conflict inside modernism instead. In other words, it is the tension between of giving up becoming subject of love and acceptance of becoming subject of love. To abandon loving, in existential term, means to cease bodily ambition towards love. It is about fate of human who stops looking after him/herself after a certain age that means giving up love also. In the works of 'Looks like Today But Yesterday', 'Forty Bowls of Water', 'The West Looking At Us', 'Perception Mistakes', 'Turkish Bath' it is this tension what lies behind them. The central images in 'Olympia' (Manet) 'Thomas The Sceptic' (Carravaggio), 'Woman in Bath' (Ingres), 'Rokeby Venus' (Velasquez), 'Death of Mara' (David), through *pastiche*, re-enactment and hipper-image, allude to both privacy and public as well as scenes from daily life. Especially considering 'The West Looking At Us', 'Turkish Bath' and 'Perception Mistakes', Muslim women are portrayed as nudes, replacing the common representations in Western painting, and this is the tension between modern and modern I tried to mean above. Here, if we put sociological one aside, what emerges as ontological one is that the painting entitled "Looks Like Today But Yesterday". The tension here, that is 'Thomas The Sceptic', looks as though he (Thomas) is transformed into a psychiatrist who confuses Muslim woman lacked subjectivity.

The co-existence of an imaginary atmosphere and figurative representations in Western painting and individual privacy of Turkish society as well as daily life in her works refers to a radical criticism of elitist approach peculiar to Cold War years. Today, we are experiencing a period where concrete depictions become prominent while abstract approaches withdraw as an inwardness of lyrical geometrical expression. The lyrical portrayals of beauty in esthetic harmony in abstract painting, as a compulsory necessity, was based on the fact that 'human is good in essence'. Because during the 20th century humanism has been representing religious images belong to lower class's spiritual one should not ignore its elitist nature. From this point of view, in her painting entitled 'Rothko Cannot Make This', Rüzgar shows her reaction against this kind of elitism, using Rothko's 'abstraction' as a background image where figures stand on. She seems to criticize elitist approach of humanism through the question of 'would Rothko trample humanism in his abstraction? One should also take into account the symbolical meaning of 'fish image' in this painting. I have to emphasize that the fish image in her paintings is of great importance in aspect of being both distinctive and meaningful element.

However 'Icarus', 'Romantic Leftist', 'If Only Everywhere Becomes Deniz/ Sea' and 'Stones In My Skirt', at first sight, are reminiscent of the execution of Deniz Gezmiş and arrestment and judgement process of youngsters in Turkey, they actually as phenomenon represent Deniz Gezmiş's story via sea image and figures at the bottom of the sea as well as the relationship between sea and flood. One should also dwell upon the significance of fish image once again. Whilst almost each figure seems to have died, the only live figure is the fish in these paintings. Let us recall that fish was considered to be a sacred animal in ancient times for not having neck or chest with head. Consequently, the fish figure reminds us of flood image. Especially, I need to point out the work named 'Icarus'. Accepted by many to be sacred image of Turkish Poetry, the myth of Icarus, unable to fly despite his wings, refers to 'downfall'. Whereas, 'Icarus' image in Necla Rüzgar's painting, the subject matter is 'rise' instead. The figure, which represents Jesus crucified at the bottom of the sea, seems to have its arms outstretched to the side. From both elbows there appear two fishes executed with ropes. 'Icarus' on the one hand seems as if he was not only executed but also pulled upwards. Accordingly, there is a strong relationship between the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the execution of Deniz Gezmiş. All the same, I do not include the Messiah context, moreover, I talk about the sanctity issue of being killed young, as it is indicated in Yunus Emre's line, 'I ache and weep for those who died young', with reference to sacred fish image.

Rüzgar's art demonstrates a spate of tension related to each other. It is the tension which is about actual matters that drew public attention, adopted facts by public and repetition of daily scenes as well. Another important tension is that the tragic resemblance between activities both oppressed and accepted politically. In fact, the works entitled 'To Exist in the World- I' and 'To Exist in The World-II', 'Mass', might be considered within this context. I also have to underline that this tension compels spectator to remain within critical and ironic consciousness.

**Translated By Ferhat Özgür**