

Fantastic Surrealism and Erol Deneç

Fantastik Sürrealizm ve Erol Deneç

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ABSTRACT

Erol Deneç, one of the most important representatives of Turkish painting art and fantastic surrealism, is regarded as one of the most important representatives of the world with his works and philosophy of art, with the predictions and interpretations of academic and art circles at home and abroad. The message given by the artist, who has documentary and academic works at home and abroad, is based on the fusion of fantastic surrealism with mystical and historical elements. With this study, it is aimed to bring the artist's life story, art, works and the subject of his works, and the philosophy he put on his works to the art world with his own perspective. This master artist, who is the pioneer of surrealism in Turkey, is known internationally, although books have been written and documentaries have been made, he has not achieved the necessary value and fame in our country. The main purpose of this study is to bring the life story, art, works of the artist who is still alive, and the subject and philosophy of his works to the art world with his own perspective. The fact that the artist is alive forms the basis of the originality of this work. At this stage, the artist was contacted and his permission was sought to access original samples of his works. Because the artist's existence has allowed the interpretation and analysis of his works to be created on a solid ground. The investigation of the artist's inner world, which is reflected in his works by referring to his own comments as well as the studies made about him, will be a source for accurate results and interpretations.

Keywords: Erol Deneç, Metamorfoz, life, surrealism, picture, colour

ÖZ

Türk resim sanatının ve fantastik sürrealizmin en önemli temsilcilerinden olan Erol Deneç, çalışmaları ve sanat felsefesiyle yurt içi ve yurt dışında akademik ve sanat çevrelerinin ön görüşü ve yorumlarıyla dünyanın en önemli temsilcilerinden biri olarak kabul görmektedir. Ülkemizde ve başta yurt dışı olmak üzere hakkında belgeler akademik çalışmalar yapılan sanatçının yurt içi ve yurt dışındaki sergileriyle verdiği mesaj, fantastik sürrealizmle mistik ve tarihi öğelerin kaynaştırması üzerine kurgulanmıştır. Bu çalışma ile hayatta olan sanatçının yaşam öyküsü, sanatı, eserleri ve eserlerinin konusu, eserlerine yüklediği felsefeyi kendi bakış açısı ile sanat dünyasına kazandırabilmek amaçlanmıştır. Türkiye'de sürrealizmin öncüsü olan bu usta sanatçı uluslararası kapsamda tanınmış, adına kitaplar yazılmış, belgeler çekilmiş olmasına rağmen ülkemizde gereken kıymeti ve ünü elde edememiştir. Henüz hayatta olan sanatçının yaşam öyküsünü, sanatını, eserlerini ve eserlerinin konusunu, felsefesini, kendi bakış açısı ile sanat dünyasına kazandırabilmek, bu çalışmanın temel amacını oluşturmaktadır. Sanatçının hayatta olması bu çalışmanın orijinalliğinin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Bu aşamada sanatçı ile irtibata geçilmiş, eserlerinin orijinal örneklerine ulaşmak için iznine başvurulmuştur. Çünkü sanatçının hayatta olması eserleri üzerinde bizzat yorum ve analizlerin sağlam zeminde oluşturulmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Kendi üzerindeki yorumları hem de hakkında yapılmış çalışmalara başvurarak eserlerine yansıyan sanatçının iç dünyasının araştırılması, doğru sonuçlar ve yorumlara kaynaklık edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erol Deneç, Metamorfoz, hayatı, sürrealizm, resim, renk

Erol Deneç with an Artist Identity

Surrealism was named a term by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 (Yalur, 2019, p. 146). Erol Deneç, one of the most important representatives in Turkey and in the world today, has brought a new breath to fantastic surrealism. The active life of Erol Deneç, who is accepted as the most important representative of this field by academic and art circles abroad, under the appearance of calm and tranquility, can be interpreted as secondary ways of expressing the unceasing enthusiasm in his inner world. The fact that the artist still maintains an active artistic life as a painter and musician today is one of the most important proofs showing this. While the artist experiences the sweet excitement of transferring the ideal of art kneaded with his knowledge and experience to the young generations as well as his life full of both music and painting, he also makes the people around him feel this deeply. Because the responsibility of the artist has always felt and made us feel the responsibility of seeing the invisible, hearing the inaudible, feeling the invisible, and given by this special perception peculiar to artists. Before painting, Erol Deneç goes on a nature walk to concentrate on his feelings and listens to himself alone with the melody of the wind and birds. In fact, artists make a picture of this world by traveling to the world of dreams (Yalur, 2019, p. 147). Although this journey is seen as an ordinary walk in daily life, it is a walk that is mentally maintained in different dimensions and in the fantastic world of these dimensions. He is so concentrated and integrated into painting that he reflects the effects of art in his dreams on the canvas. Surrealism is an art movement that aims to create a reality that reflects the realities of the subconscious, away from the control of reason, logic, traditions and habits. From Salvador Dali's point

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of view, surrealism is trying to give shape to the world of dreams and subconscious phenomena. This unknown aspect of the human mind is thought to be suitable for artistic analysis (Demirarslan, 2021, p.743). Surrealism is a method of spontaneous writing, used to reveal the true workings of thought, whether verbally, in writing, or otherwise. This is the writing of thought without the control of the mind (as in the dream) except for all kinds of aesthetic and moral concerns (Demirarslan, 2021, p.743). Erol Deneç argues that in addition to the surreal paintings he made in the field of painting, the surrealist work in the field of music gave him as much pleasure as painting. By making instruments for himself with different materials, he keeps surrealism alive in this field as well. As he plays these notes, he feels that he is navigating the fantastical world of his paintings.

The "Vienna School of Fantastic Realism", which was founded by Rudolf Hausner, Ernst Fuchs, Wolfgang Hutter, Anton Lehmden and Arik Brauner, has an important place among the artists of the period who made him concentrate on Fantastic Realism, which had labor and influence on Erol Deneç. Thus, Erol Deneç will become one of Turkey's greatest surrealists without being aware of this school established in Vienna. He is the son of a carpenter father born in Kadıköy, Istanbul. There was no one in his family who was interested in art other than himself. Although he lives in the conditions of that day, he is extremely satisfied with his life and still misses his childhood years. Erol Deneç won the Istanbul Applied Fine Arts Academy (Marmara Academy) and had the opportunity to meet Anton Lehmden, who served as a guest in Turkey in those years, and then he would meet Ernst Fuchs and consciously perform his art in accordance with the Fantastic Realism school.

Although Erol Deneç was more influenced by his teacher Ernst Fuchs, he was not influenced by Dadaism as much as he was. (Vangölü, 2016, p. 872) In fact, Dadaism seems to have almost no influence on his works. Erol Deneç stands out more for his works that push the boundaries of fantastic Surrealism, which can be attributed to the positive atmosphere created in his spirit world by the family and environmental influences of his childhood and youth. Because his teacher Ernst Fuchs was forcibly baptized in his childhood (although Ernst Fuchs' mother was a Christian, his father was Jewish),¹ which would later be reflected in his paintings as an element of protest. The most distinctive common feature of Dadaism and surrealism movements is their rebellious attitude towards the past, pure rationalism, the dominance of bourgeois tastes in art and all the value systems that actually exist (Vangölü, 2016, p. 874).

The Impact of His Private Life on His Art

Erol Deneç's paintings do not include painful Images. It may be possible to attribute this to the happy family environment in which he spent his childhood. Because Erol Deneç's life was spent on the streets of Istanbul by drawing pictures and playing games on the cobblestones. His youth years with his family, who were far from the political and economic debates of that period, were lived in the same happy atmosphere. In his youth, he experienced only the uncertainties brought about by artistic concerns, which was short-lived and he moved to Europe and

became known by performing his art there. His teacher, Ernst Fuchs, grew up in the midst of problems with his family and found himself in the political and military events of that period. When we examine the paintings of both artists, it is seen that Erol Deneç uses warmer colors. He paints his dreams, his imagination, the stories he listens to and reads. Just as Surrealist writers wanted to "reveal the deep meanings of words and expressions rather than their apparent meaning and thus draw attention to the process of making sense of these words and expressions in the mind" (Vangölü, 2016, p.871), 871) Surrealist painters also aimed to reveal the deep meanings of the colors and Images shaped in their imaginations. The artist loves to dream and paint about the subjects he researches and learns (Image 1, Image 5, Image 8, Image 9). This dream that Osman Gazi had was the most important influence that led to the establishment of the Ottoman State. While researching this dream of Osman Gazi, Erol Deneç imagined the dream as if he had seen it himself and transferred it to the canvas. In Image 2, an alchemist is seen producing a potion to heal and sustain life without any problems. Alchemy is a term that covers both the study of nature and the environment in primitive ways and the work of early people in the field of philosophy. (<https://www.pushholder.com/tarihteki-onemli-simyacilar-ve-calismalar/>).



Image 1.
Osman Gazi'nin Rüyası

¹ * His teacher Ernst Fuchs was born in 1930. In March 1938, when the Nazis annexed Austria, Maximilian Fuchs decided to flee to Shanghai. Ernst stays in Vienna with his mother, Leopoldine. Newly enacted Nazi laws prevent his mother from raising Ernst. Ernst is sent by SS Officers to one of the Transit Camps, where children whose parents come from mixed cultures are detained. The SS told Leopoldine that she had to divorce her husband on paper and raise her child according to Christian cultures, or she would be sent from the camp where Ernst was located to a concentration camp. Leopoldine then follows the SS Officers' instructions one by one to save her child, whereupon the SS Officers take Ernst back from the train to the concentration camp and hand him over to Leopoldine, and Ernst escapes death. (Emed, C. (E.T. 2021.11 October) Ernst Fuchs and Fantastic Realism [Life of Ernst Fuchs]. <https://www.nouvar.net/ernst-fuchs-ve-fantastik-realizm/>)<https://www.nouvar.net/ernst-fuchs-ve-fantastik-realizm/>

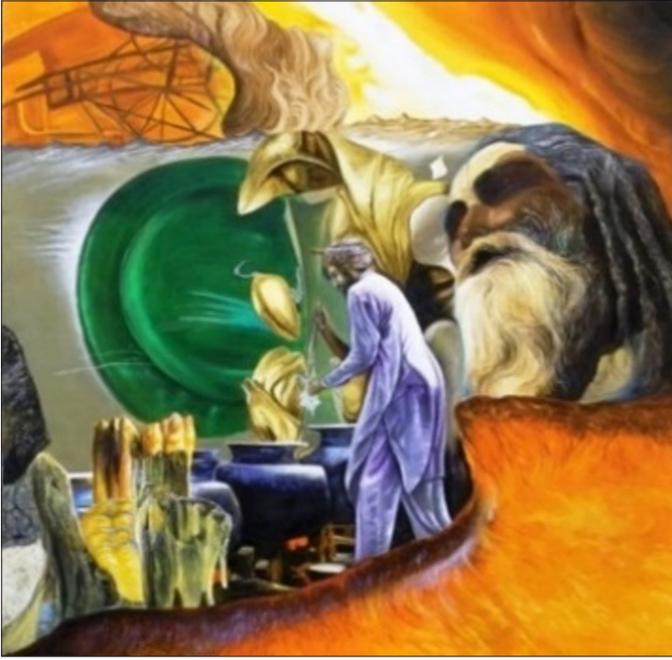


Image 2.
Simyacı [Alchemist], Istanbul, 2005, Osman Gazi's Dream], Istanbul, 2009, oil painting, 100x120cm oil on canvas, 100x100 cm

Spiritual Mystical Influences in Erol Deneç's Art

It is seen that spiritual details stand out in the artist's works. Especially in recent studies, these effects are felt more intensely. The leading Images of Turkish civilization are now the main heroes of these paintings and the focal points of the messages they will give to society. Mevlana, Yunus Emre (image 4), Osman Gazi (image 1) stand out as the spiritual heroes of this message. In his paintings, the important symbols of Turkish Culture, such as eagles, emeralds, horses and various Images, find a place with their rich meaning and philosophy that they want to transfer to future generations through the audience. His success in putting forward his art in the best way without breaking away from his own culture was also appreciated and highlighted by his teacher Ernst Fuchs. In fact, Ernst Fuchs, in his opening and presentation speech of an exhibition of Erol Deneç in Vienna in 1964, said: "Art means looking back. It means traveling to the beginning, to the past, to the essence. This is so far from the beginning that we are running to the source of the sound so that we can hear the old tunes again. We know that there can be no art without looking at the past. Is there something new under the sun? Erol hosts the whole East in his personality. The East means the soul of man. The center of man's personality is the place where the light that enables human development emerges, and the spiritual development of man depends on how close he approaches this light". His statements also show that Deneç has not forgotten his own culture, even though he was educated in Europe.

While the artist produces his works without forgetting the East and the source of art is the East, he mainly uses the materials of Eastern mysticism, although the traces of Europe are visible in these works. The tradition of showing important and big people in the center and large (Kaya & Şenol, 2021, p.227), which is a feature seen especially in the art of miniature, especially in Eastern art and artists, is also intensely seen in Erol Deneç's works.



Image 3.
Nefsiyle Yüzleşen [Confronting the Self]

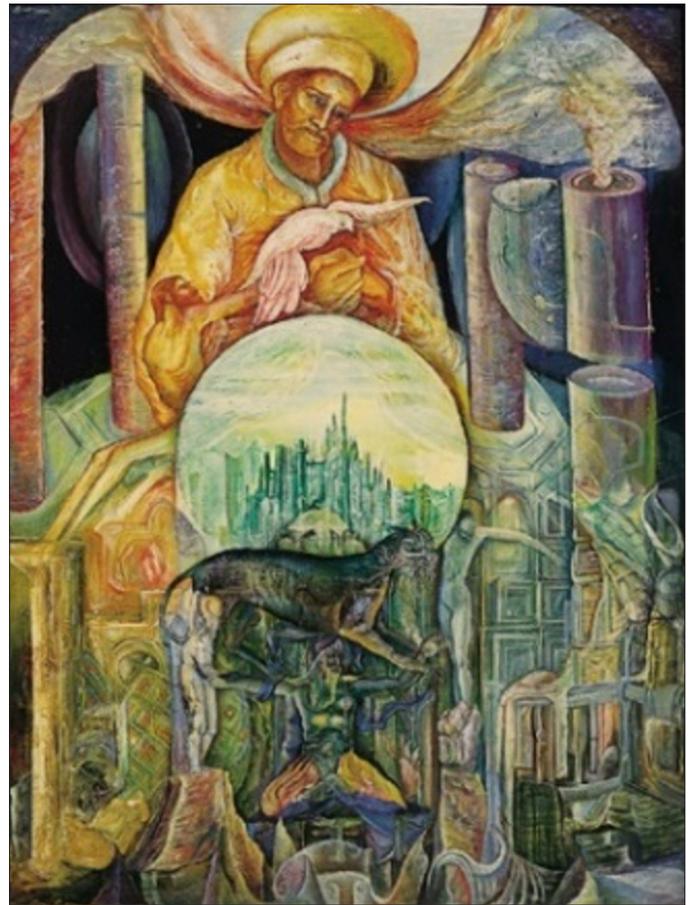


Image 4.
Yunus Emre, Bak Şu Dünyanın Haline [Yunus Emre, Look at the State of the World], Istanbul, 1993, oil painting, 50x70cm

He will use the headdresses used in the Turkish Islamic Sufi tradition instead of the cardinal hats (Can & Güngör, 2021, p.1024) that Christian cardinals wear on their heads in the paintings of his teacher Ernst Fuchs, which he was influenced by. Erol Deneç provides integrity with the use of colors in his paintings and reminds us of the existence of good and evil with the use of contrasting colors. The dark and evil Images in his paintings tell us about the existence of evil on earth, and the bright and good Images tell us about the good on earth (Image 3).



Image 5.
Simurg, Istanbul, 1995, oil painting, 51x95cm

Erol Deneç reflects the contrast of colors as well as the contrast of Images in his paintings and places portraits of real-life people between them. The artist, like his teacher Ernst Fuchs, gives a message by placing himself as the head Image (Image 6) in his paintings.

Meaning and Expression in the Colors Used by Erol Deneç

Although it is seen that dark colors dominate in his paintings, it is conveyed to us by contrasting the colors that this darkness is always opening to the light. The artist is not in favor of conveying the Images and the spaces as they are. He argues that it is more correct to reflect the unseen faces of art and to convey the inner world of Images and spaces to us. Surrealism emphasizes the importance of imagination in order to maximize aesthetics and subtlety in art (Yalur, 2019, p.151). The artist became involved in the art community in Austria and stayed at the house of his teacher Ernst Fuchs for a while, where he could be more interested in art



Image 6.
Selbs Portrait, Istanbul, 1995, oil painting, 30x55cm

at any time of the day. Just as Surrealist literati aim to reveal the deep meaning of words and expressions rather than their apparent meaning, and thus want to draw attention to the process of making sense of these words and expressions in the mind, Surrealist painters aim to reveal the deep meanings of the colors and Images shaped in their imaginations (Vangölü, 2016, p.877). The artist became involved in the art community in Austria and stayed at the house of his teacher Ernst Fuchs for a while, where he could be more interested in art at any time of the day. When the paintings of Ernst Fuchs and Erol Deneç are compared, it is possible to see the difficulties and barbaric attacks of Ernst Fuchs in that period both as color and as the functioning of the Images in his paintings. It is often seen that the traces of artists, their lifestyles and the pains and happiness they spent in their childhood affect their paintings.

Erol Deneç, a painter and musician, draws attention with the similarities of the abstract Images he made with his teacher Ernst



Image 7.
Mevleviler Sema Yapıyor [Mevlevi Performing Whirling Dervishes],
Istanbul, 2005, oil painting, 100x100cm

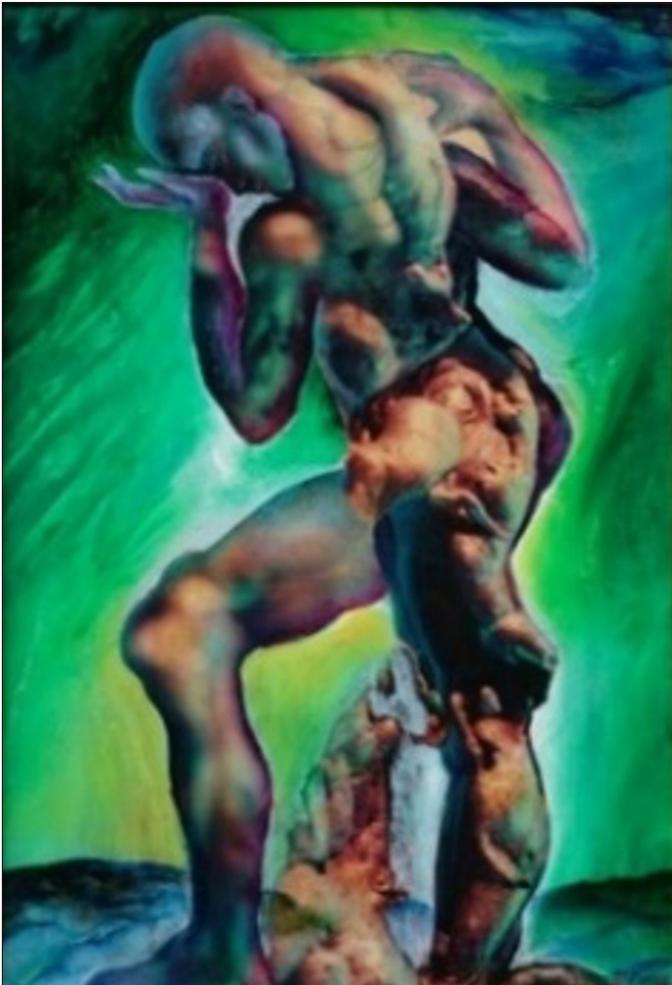


Image 8.
Hercules, Istanbul, 1998 oil on wood, 30x43cm oil on wood, 30x43cm

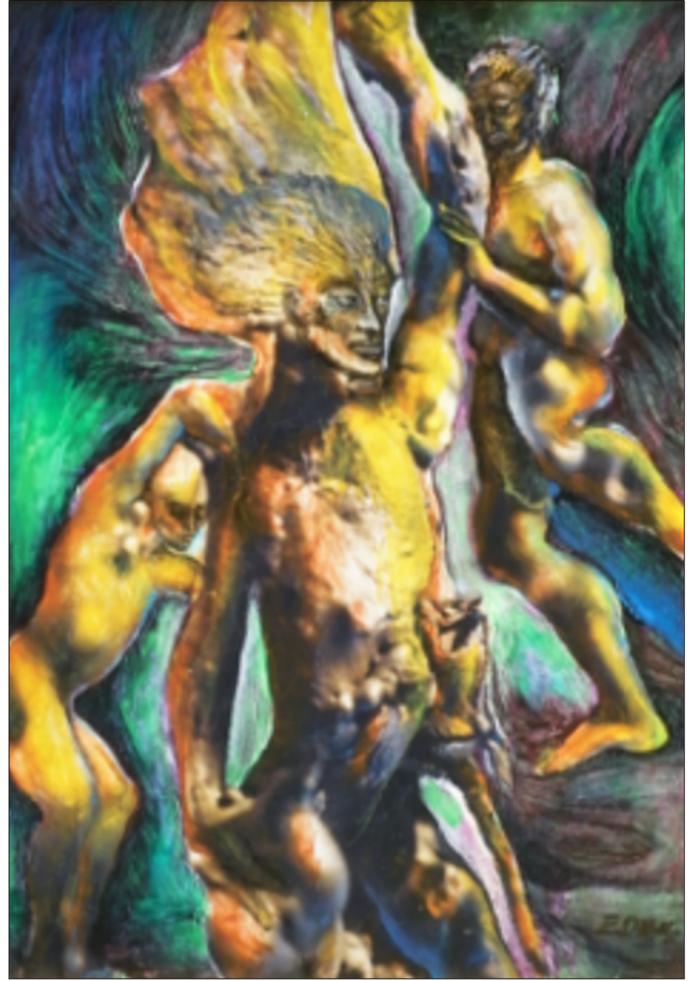


Image 9.
Laokoon, İstanbul, 1998

Fuchs. When we examine the paintings of both artists, it is seen that Ernst Fuchs deals with events and forms them according to his own style. Erol Deneç's contrasts as in the series of opposites, the distortion of the forms of the limbs, anatomy drawings, his self-portrait and his works about loneliness stand out with each other. The brush strokes and the gradation of colors are very similar. Warm and cold colors are also contrasted. Another common aspect of Erol Deneç and Ernst Fuchs is that both artists prefer to work on religious subjects and mythical elements, as observed in the works examined (Can & Güngör, 2021, p. 1028). The fact that his teacher Ernst Fuchs is on good terms with instruments is a similar behavior to Erol Deneç. Erol Deneç is very fond of musical instruments and has tried almost every instrument as best he can. He also made his own violin and appealed to the souls of art lovers with his own compositions. In fact, the relationship of artists, especially surrealists, with music will begin to become evident after the Second World War (Aydoğan, 2020, p. 23). Especially Surrealist artists' relations with jazz music will intensify in the West and Latin America (Aydoğan, 2020, p.23), and in the East, especially in Erol Deneç, this interest will manifest itself in classical and mystic music.

Deneç, who lives in Austria, grew up there and reflected his influences in his paintings, but the artist, who did not forget his essence, proved this by including traces of Turkish culture in his paintings (Image 7). Turkish artists acquired colors from materials



Image 10.
İstanbul'u Düşünürken [When Thinking About Istanbul], Istanbul, 1992, 130x60cm



Image 11.
Dağlar [Mountains], Istanbul, 1990, oil painting, oil on canvas, 50x70cm

in nature due to their interest in nature. When Erol Deneç first went to Austria, he had financial difficulties for a while and obtained his paints from nature just like Turkish painters. Artists inspired by nature in Turkish painting used pure colors (Ibid., p.150. Cited: Dabanlı, p.133). Erol Deneç used bright colors that took him to other worlds without polluting and leading to pessimism. The faces of the portraits in these paintings, which are made in a way that we can understand even without knowing the meaning of the colors, are made with pure colors (Image 3, Image 12). These pure colors, which describe goodness and cleanliness, are the opposite in some characters (Image 3).

Surrealist artists are seen to use bright, clean colors and strong contrasts in their paintings. In fauvism, avoidance of shading is observed to emphasize the effect of color; In cubism, the opposite path was followed. Cubist painters left color in the background and focused on the method of volumizing. In Expressionism, in order to reflect the impressions of daylight in their paintings, artists have completely investigated light and color, which are the basic elements of the art of painting. In Pop Art, light, color and form have become even more popular than they have ever been. Pop Art, which presents the most familiar objects in daily life as works of art, has used light sources as plastic objects (Dabanlı, 2017: 118).

Interaction with Other Artists in Erol Deneç's Works

The artist's resemblance with other painters has not been seen. When the works of Erol Deneç and Giorgio De Chirico are com-



Image 12.
Sema Eden Güzel [Whirling Beauty], Istanbul, 2009, oil painting, 40x90cm

pared, there is no similarity. In Giorgio De Chirico's paintings, light shadow applications stand out rather than color gradation. In the works of Giorgio De Chirico, it is seen that spaces are used and



Image 13.
Yorgun Savaşçılar [Tired Warriors], Istanbul, 1998, oil on wood, 30x43cm

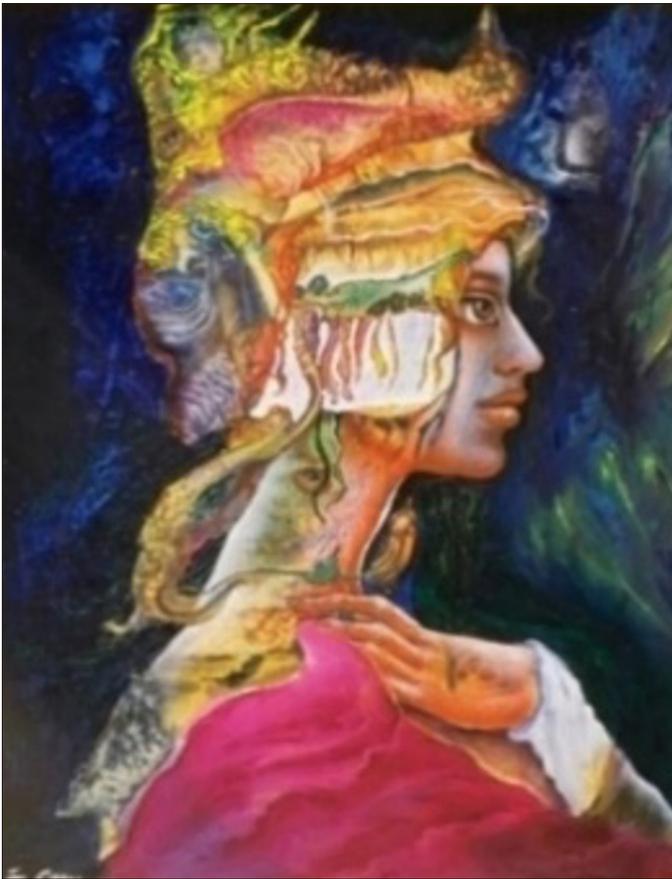


Image 14.
Nefertiti, Istanbul, 1998, oil on acrylic, 30x73cm

a depth is given in these spaces. For these reasons, there is no similarity with Erol Deneç.

It can be said that there is not much similarity between other painters, Max Ernst, and Erol Deneç except that they both break the forms and disrupt the balance of size and smallness.

Pablo Picasso's paintings feature Cubism and color contrasts. Erol Deneç's paintings, on the other hand, are intense with vivid

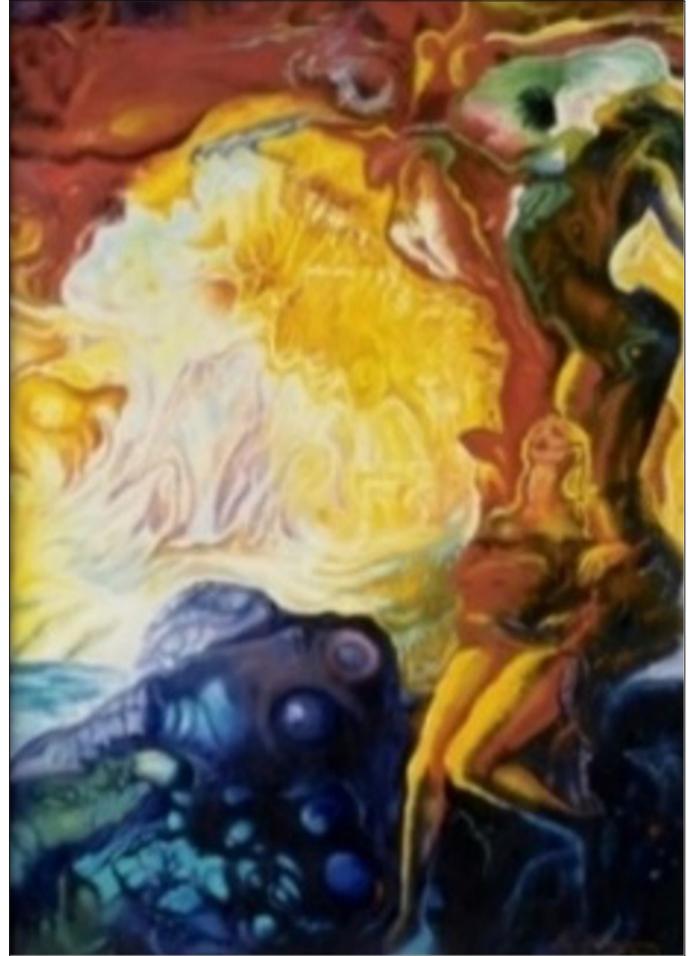


Image 15.
Metamorphosis, Istanbul, 2002, oil on wood, 50x70cm

and bright colors away from cubism and patterns where the limitlessness of fantastic emotions is forced.

Salvador Dali was a teacher of Ernst Fuchs and used surrealism in his works. In the works with spatial integrity, there are disconnected limbs. Salvador Dali also depicts himself in his works. Although the similarity is provided by the contrast of the colors, there is a connection with Erol Deneç in terms of processing the forms. Erol Deneç has published spatial paintings that have mostly included events and historical-mythological stories in his works. Therefore, it is seen that his paintings successfully provide the integrity of the space. When Erol Deneç's paintings are examined, it will be seen that the longing, love and the storms in his inner world related to them are successfully reflected outwards. In Surrealists, the relationship between women and love is handled to the degree of sacredness, and the fact that the concept of family is very strong in Erol Deneç reveals this fact (Altuner, 2020, p.154).

Serenity in Erol Deneç's Works

It is seen that the paintings made by Erol Deneç in his youth are warmer and calmer. These colorful works are like the breeze of the spring of youth. As he matures, the expression of the emotions he has experienced in the darkness of the colors and the intensity of the sea waves draws attention. In his youth, Erol Deneç reflects the accumulation of his longing for his family, homeland and friends on the canvas by not being able to keep it in his age



Image 16.
Derviş Khayyam, Vienna, 1977, oil painting on acrylic, 10x15cm

as he matures. This is one of the most important reasons for the stormy narratives in his works. Deneç, who said that he looked like a horse that was full of crazy when he was young, said that his wife Rana Deneç stopped him.

When Erol Deneç moved to Turkey, he lived a more active and art-oriented life. The artist, who uses the sea a lot in his paintings, used plenty of sea and sea-related materials in his works because his house looked at the Bosphorus (Image 10). Although the artist attributes this situation to the fact that he likes to paint ships, boats and the Maiden's Tower with his own expression, it would be a more explanatory approach to state that it is actually a reflection of the storms in the artist's inner world. The artist's atelier in Istanbul has students from all age groups. He uses real portraits in his paintings (Image 12). Deneç, who also paints his wife and himself in his paintings, likes to carry traces of his real life in his paintings. In some of her works, just like Dali, the female image comes to the fore (Demirarslan, 2021, p.739) (Image 14).

Erol Deneç's paintings, in addition to his surrealist works, also bear traces of daily life. In his paintings, some of his subjects and heroes present motifs from the depths of history that feed Turkish culture. Turkish culture and civilization, which already contains the first examples of metamorphosis studies (Berkli, 2011,

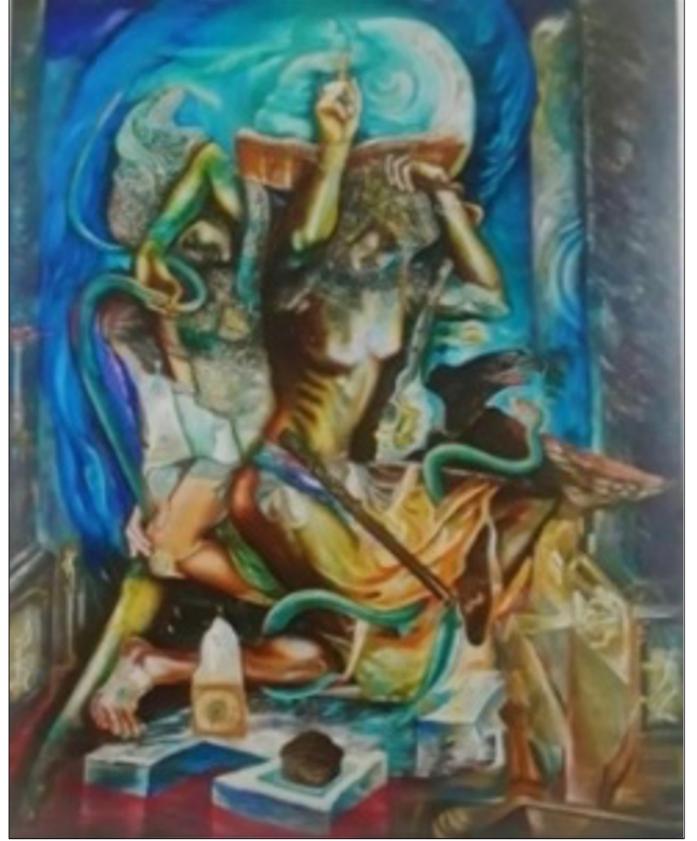


Image 17.
Bilgeliği Özleyiş [Longing for Wisdom], Istanbul, 1993, oil painting, 100x130cm

p.29), offers unlimited resources to Erol Deneç with the stories and heroes of this rich past (Image 18).

Erol Deneç has acquired and continues to acquire a lot of knowledge in the fields of metaphysics, philosophy, painting, science, music and literature. As a result of this research, his touches to his paintings gained an artistic dimension (Image 13, Image 14, Image 15, Image 16). The artist made all of his paintings with pleasure. Among his paintings, he likes his work, *Seeking Wisdom* (Image 17), the most. Our artist, who painted dreams, events and epics in his youth, continues his works with great devotion in order to bring together the beauties he has captured around him with his audience and to make sense of them during his maturity.

Conclusion

Erol Deneç is an artist who stands out with his surrealist works in his youth and art life in Europe. After returning to Turkey as a result of his experiences abroad, he continued his surrealist studies, and in these works, which we can call the maturity or classical period, he mainly included the subjects and heroes of the historical riches of Turkish Culture. Within these surrealist works, it is also possible to see traces of sections of daily life. Menkibes fed by the Turkish Sufi tradition and their heroes constitute the main subjects of these studies.

Erol Deneç is not only influenced by the events that take place around him, but also under the influence of the stories he reads, he also conveys the metamorphosis effects reflected on his canvas and his own imagination. The real stories that the artist was influenced by and the events he witnessed and the works he made



Image 18.
Floor or Wall Spread Felt Applique/Pazyriy Kurgan Hermitage Museum
(Yunus Berkli, 2011)

(Many of the artist's works express that he made his subject by being influenced by real events or dreams he saw). Among these, "Osman Gazi'nin rüyası, Simyacı, Nefsiyle yüzleşen, Gökkuşaağı ailesi, Simurg, Su perisi, Mevleviler sema yapıyor, Selbs portre, Sema eden güzel, Yorgun savaşçılar, Nefertiti, Metamorfoz, Derviş Hayyam, Bilgeliği özleyiş 1993, İstanbul'u düşünürken, Deniz ve Müzik, Dağlar, Manzara, Herkül, Laokoon, Amazon, Venüs", conveys to us the events that have circulated from language to language throughout history with his own interpretation. The artist, who paints the events he witnesses and what he sees in his dreams for us, expresses that he conveys even the tones of the colors as he sees them. While Erol Deneç says that even his dreams are fantastic, he also conveys the mystery of the fantastic world to art lovers. With these explanations, he contributes to the solution of the moods of surrealist art and the artists who are the practitioners of this art.

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