

INTRODUCTION

Art and Development: A New Framework for Postwar Art

IN APRIL 1964, THE FRENCH POET, art critic, and translator Edouard Roditi published a short article, “Introduction à la peinture turque de notre temps” (Introduction to Contemporary Turkish Painting), in the Portuguese art magazine *Colóquio*. Born in Paris and educated at Oxford, the multilingual Roditi had frequented French surrealist circles in the 1930s, served as an interpreter at the Nuremberg trials in the 1940s, and first encountered modern Turkish art in 1951 when he traveled to Ankara as a translator for the United Nations. In his 1964 essay, he criticizes European museums for treating Turkish art as secondary to art from other countries in the Council of Europe, emphasizing that Europe’s future was “more and more tightly bound” to Turkey’s.¹ To make his case, Roditi presents several artworks by Yüksel Arslan, Aliye Berger, and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, figures all now recognized as pioneers of modernism in Turkey. At the top of the essay, and covering nearly half the page, is a photograph of a 160-foot-long mosaic wall made by Eyüboğlu for Expo 58 in Brussels, the first international world’s fair to take place since World War II (figure 0.1).



FIGURE 0.1

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's mosaic wall at Expo 58 in Brussels, 1958. Courtesy SALT Research (Utarit İzgi archive) and Rahmi Eyüboğlu.

Yet rather than advocating for modern Turkish art in aesthetic terms, as one might expect, Roditi appeals to a political-economic concept: economic development. Roditi exhorts his readers to abandon the common assumption that Turkey's "underdeveloped economy" (*économie sous-développée*) predicts an equally underdeveloped art scene. "There is little causal relation between the degree of economic or technical development of a country and the quality of its art," boldly proposes Roditi in his opening salvo.² In fact, argues Roditi, the reverse is true. In Turkey, contends Roditi, the very same condition that "ensures economic underdevelopment"—plentiful leisure time—yields a vibrant modern art. By reframing the presumed vice of economic underdevelopment as a virtue, Roditi positions modern Turkish art as equally significant as the European practices privileged by a Western critical establishment.

By 1964, when Roditi's essay came out, such claims about the relationship of art, modernity, and economic development were actually rather commonplace. Since the mid-1940s, authorities at some of the most influential Euro-American organizations of the postwar period, such as UNESCO, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Museum of

Modern Art in New York, had vigorously debated the connection between artistic sophistication and economic development. Nearly twenty years before Roditi, UNESCO authorities had already concluded that “countries whose technical civilization is not highly developed are often among the most advanced in some branches of art.”³ In the United States, policy makers and cultural authorities concerned with their country’s diplomatic comportment argued that acknowledging the artistic advancements of economically underdeveloped nations was an important means to smooth relations between nations of unequal economic power. At the same time, many American authorities, such as the influential diplomat George F. Kennan, worried that the inconsistency between the “low” quality of American art and its “advanced” economic development undermined the United States’ legitimacy within an international community.⁴ But of course none were so concerned with the interrelationship of art and development as cultural elites in the so-called developing world, including Turkey. There, an artistic community had been raised since the 1920s to understand aesthetic modernism and socioeconomic modernization as advancing on parallel tracks within the frame of the nation-state, moving ever forward, and ever more rapidly, into the future.

How did discourses of economic development impact artistic modernisms in the developing world? This is the driving question of the present book, which takes the modern Turkish art world as a focused example that illuminates broader conjunctures of art and development after World War II. The early years of the Cold War were defined not only by military tensions between superpowers but also by conflicts about approaches to economic development, in what historian David Engerman calls an “economic Cold War” between Soviet-style state-driven industrialization and US-style capitalism.⁵ Minor powers like Turkey negotiated their position in this international community through their economic choices as much as their choices of political ideology.

Turkey, for example, made a definitive choice in the economic Cold War by abandoning its existing Soviet-inspired policies and signing on to the developmental regime prescribed by Western-bloc organizations such as the United Nations and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later the World Bank). Turkey’s growing alliance with the United States was confirmed when it became one of fifteen European countries to receive funding through the Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, in 1948. Spearheaded by the United States, the Marshall Plan was designed to help a ravaged Europe get back on its feet after World War II, but it was also intended to secure a bloc of anticommunist allies for the United States.

Scholars have long acknowledged art’s role as an ideological weapon of the Cold War, traditionally focusing on its use by American, European, and Soviet players to further their spheres of influence. *Metrics of Modernity* argues that artists, critics, and audiences in the developing world did not think only about aesthetics but engaged just as substantially with the *economic* dimensions of this global reordering—a widespread but overlooked phenomenon that *Metrics of Modernity* elucidates for the first time.

METRICS OF MODERNITY

This book explores the ways in which members of the modern Turkish art world—artists, critics, and gallery owners—negotiated postwar ideologies of economic development within the realm of modern art. In the wake of World War II, newly created programs and organizations such as the Marshall Plan, European Economic Commission (EEC), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the United Nations developed an array of economic metrics through which to measure and enforce nations' performance. Privatization, individual consumption, and integration into international markets became some of the most prominent metrics of modernity used to regulate the entrance of emergent states like Turkey into the capitalist free market.

While originating in the economic sphere, these metrics of modernity also gained traction in the artistic realm. In Turkey, the intelligentsia used these concepts as touchstones for evaluating and improving their country's "cultural level" (*kültür seviyesi*) as a correlate to its level of political and economic modernity. Sometimes the conversation between art and economics played out on canvas, where, for instance, the question of how to represent a national landscape transformed by industrialization posed an enduring aesthetic problem. At other times, such metrics of modernity shaped the ways that art was exhibited, consumed, and circulated, both by the state-run institutions that historically dominated the Turkish art world and the new private art initiatives that began to challenge them in the 1950s.

Metrics of Modernity focuses on the ten-year period between 1950, when Turkish leadership restructured the national economy in line with American-style models, and 1960, when this development experiment came to an abrupt end, culminating violently in a military coup and the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. In a series of chronologically organized case studies, I reconstruct the activities of influential cultural figures of the day and chronicle this artistic community's engagement with the most prominent metrics of modernity during this radical economic experiment.

My primary objects of analysis are important artworks of the period, exhibition ephemera, and an extensive archive of art criticism and political commentary in Turkish, French, and English. Cross-reading these three types of material, I reveal how the growing belief in the transformative powers of privatization played out at Turkey's first two modern art galleries, Gallery Maya (Istanbul, 1950) and the Helikon Association Derneği (Ankara, 1953) in the early 1950s. I track how the metric of individual consumption served as a new evaluative term within the Turkish art criticism that flourished alongside these galleries. I also explore the way that, in the mid- and late 1950s, growing doubts about the efficacy of Turkey's economic program manifested themselves in debates about how to visually represent "developing Turkey" through the distinct media of painting and ceramics. *Metrics of Modernity* ends in 1960, when a new regime reversed economic procedure, returning to the state-dominated models that had pertained before World War II. In the 1960s, the government began to

implement import substitution policies, building up local industrial sectors in order to reduce a reliance on foreign imports. This approach was similar to those already in use in other developing areas, such as Latin America. Throughout the 1960s, art and economic development continued to intertwine in Turkey, but in new media formats and in connection with a different set of economic issues, including urbanization, rapid industrialization, and the unionization of labor.

Metrics of Modernity tells the story of art's engagement with economic policies with which many nations across the developing world experimented after World War II. Focused on the twin goals of political liberalization and integration into international markets, national governments partnered with the United States to inject hundreds of millions of dollars into shaky new economies, to reorder national markets, and to transform consumer habits on a mass scale. Turkey's longer-term experience of modernization, which began in the 1830s with a series of modernizing reforms known as the *Tanzimat* (1839–71), was similar to that of other developing countries.⁶ But its ten-year experiment in the 1950s was also quite distinct—in the decisiveness with which it began and ended, in the extent of the structural changes that were undertaken and the amount of US capital invested, and in the rapidity of Turkey's transition from an isolated economic sphere to one integrated into international markets. The case of 1950s Turkey casts into particularly high relief the interrelationship of modern art and economic development in the postwar period, and it stands as a productive starting point for larger considerations about the interrelationship of art and modernization across the developing world.

This book's aim is neither to debate, with Roditi, whether economic development is harmful or beneficial for art nor to provide a qualitative study of an emergent art market in postwar Turkey. Nor do I pursue the rich possibilities of a materialist approach, which might consider how Turkey's fluctuating economic fortunes and the changing availability of basic artistic materials transformed the very substance of art. Rather, my aim is to show how an ever-present awareness of Turkey's relative position in an international economic hierarchy shaped the work of its artistic community. If art history has long acknowledged that the United States' status as the most affluent nation in the world was a central factor in postwar American art, we must also take seriously the ways that artistic producers in sites such as Turkey were shaped by the awareness of their position in an economic pecking order.

The notion of *metrics of modernity* cuts across artificially imposed divisions between the artistic and the economic, which have blinded scholarship to artists' interest in economic issues of the Cold War. *Metrics of Modernity* contends that artists do not produce work in an isolated aesthetic realm and then dispatch it to circulate within economic markets. Rather, I emphasize that their work is shaped, from the very outset, by an ambient awareness of the shifting conditions of a global economy, issues that suffuse critical discourse and enframe the question of what art, in the profoundest sense, *is*. By combining art history's traditional analytical approaches of formal

analysis and social and intellectual history with the insights of economic history and Cold War studies, *Metrics of Modernity* offers a new lens through which to understand transnational modernisms of the postwar period.

CHANGING VISIONS OF DEVELOPMENT, 1920S–1950S

Turkey's defining dilemma after World War II was whether it should revise its existing economic approaches, based in Soviet-inspired policies, in order to align itself with an ascendant United States. Much of the Turkish debate about this economic issue centered on an American named Max Weston Thornburg. A former oil executive and advisor to the US State Department, in 1947, Thornburg completed a highly publicized four-month survey of the Turkish economy at the behest of an American think tank called the Twentieth Century Fund (now the Century Foundation). At the many press conferences he gave along the way, Thornburg announced his aim to identify ways that the United States could "help the economic development of this beautiful country."⁷

The Turkish press breathlessly tracked Thornburg's arrivals and departures as he crisscrossed the country in a jeep. While many welcomed the American's resulting prescriptions, others were more skeptical. In a biting editorial in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the prominent Turkish economist and sociologist Ziyaeddin Fahri Findıkoğlu (1901–1974) observed sarcastically that Thornburg had managed to "diagnose what ails postwar Turkey" after visiting for just a few months. Findıkoğlu caustically summarized the American's primary conclusion in a single sentence: "Turkey is economically underdeveloped because it has not been accommodating [enough] to private enterprise."⁸

Findıkoğlu's reaction was not unprovoked. Thornburg had begun criticizing Turkey's existing economic policies almost as soon as he'd arrived. At regular press conferences, in the pages of *Fortune*, and in a 325-page report, Thornburg argued that Turkey should abandon its Soviet-inspired economic philosophy of étatism (*devletçilik*, or statism), which focused on industrialization under heavy state controls.⁹ If Turkey wanted to attract American dollars and be competitive in international markets, he announced, the government needed to be more accommodating to private capital, open the economy to foreign investment, focus on agricultural development instead of large-scale industrial projects, and work to integrate into a capitalist world system.

With this series of recommendations, Thornburg introduced the metrics of modernity that would preoccupy Turkey for the next decade. "Like all philosophies of histories, this one is exciting," acknowledged Findıkoğlu, noting that Thornburg made it seem as if the "spirit of personal initiative" that "made America what it is today" would easily yield the same results in Turkey. But, argued the Turkish academic, the choice between Soviet-style étatism and US-style market capitalism was not as simple as Thornburg made out, and he urged his readers to proceed "with caution" as they considered the American's proposals.¹⁰

Thornburg's presence in Turkey reflected the growing prevalence of the discourse of development, a new framework for viewing the world that coalesced after World War II

and became hegemonic by the early 1950s.¹¹ The world-scale reorganization of the immediate postwar years—the 1944 establishment of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, the 1944 creation of the World Bank, the 1948 launch of the Marshall Plan, and the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and NATO in 1949—produced a new way of seeing the world in essentially economic terms, as a collection of “developed” and “underdeveloped” nations that together made up a global economy. As these ideas intersected with the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War, both of the superpowers began to use economic aid to draw new allies into their respective orbits, citing the promise of increased productivity and a higher quality of life. By 1949, the discourse of development was so pervasive that President Harry S. Truman announced that the United States would begin using economic aid for “underdeveloped areas” as a complement to its military and ideological strategies for establishing a global democratic order.¹²

As the 1950s progressed, Turkey became a veritable laboratory for collaborative international experiments in development.¹³ As in other countries designated underdeveloped in the 1950s, such as India and many countries across Latin America, intellectuals in Turkey catalyzed, critiqued, and shaped the discourse of development in different ways. Sociologists like Niyazi Berkes, historians like Halil İnalcık and Kemal Karpat, and economists like Ömer Celâl Sarç served as expert informants, guides, and translators for an influx of visiting experts like Thornburg. In 1953, for example, the journalist, art critic, and future prime minister Bülent Ecevit formulated his own vision of an economic Cold War in a newspaper article titled “Economic Division,” in which he described the Cold War as a bipolar economic conflict between Soviet and US blocs, in which Turkey must choose a side.¹⁴ Members of the Turkish intelligentsia were also in conversation with a small community of Anglo-American scholars, such as Bernard Lewis and Lewis V. Thomas, who were originally trained in Turkish history and became the Western world’s primary informants about contemporary events there.¹⁵

In 1958, the American sociologist Daniel Lerner published his landmark volume, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, in which he uses Turkey to explain the basic tenets that defined the postwar discourse of development. The book’s central premise, illustrated concisely in a graphic table, is that all nations follow a common sequence of stages (figure 0.2). Lerner’s thesis is that each nation progresses gradually from “tradition” to “modernity,” a universal end point marked by mass literacy, a high quality of life, and full integration into the world economy. While scholars typically argue that Lerner’s text is significant because it is the first formal expression of American modernization theory, it is also important for another reason. *The Passing of Traditional Society* amplifies and formalizes an existing discourse of development that had gained force internationally throughout the preceding decade, and Lerner uses Thornburg’s 1947 report and the work of several Turkish academics as key evidence for his arguments.

Lerner’s book, and the American modernization theory that proliferated in its wake, helped disseminate the metrics of modernity that soon became a kind of

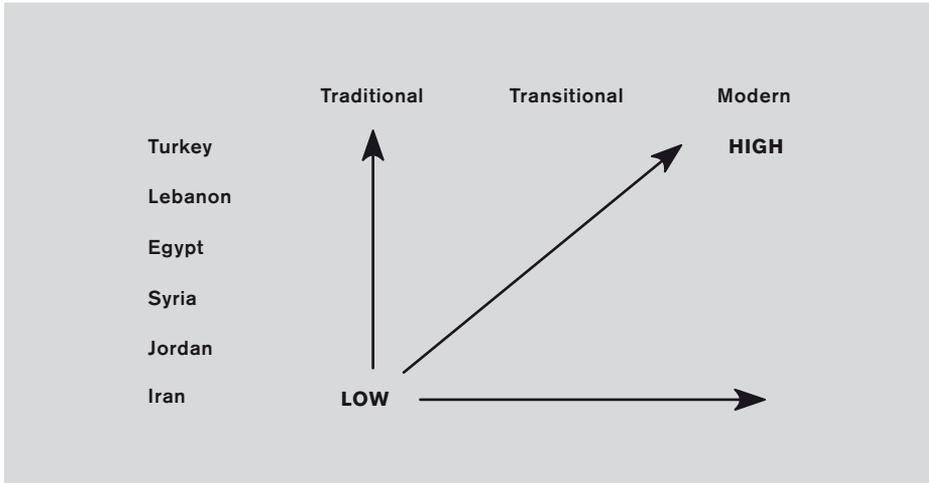


FIGURE 0.2

Daniel Lerner's diagram of the different levels of modernity of Middle Eastern nations. From *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* by Daniel Lerner. Copyright © 1958 by The Free Press, renewed © 1986 by Jean Lerner. Reprinted with the permission of The Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. All rights reserved. Current rendering by Kevin Guyer.

international lingua franca in their own right. It also helped to cement Turkey's new reputation as an exceptional case in the developing world, a nation whose economic progress observers declared "amazing," "phenomenal," and "impressive."¹⁶ Exceptional Turkey was, by the end of the 1950s, both a testing ground and poster child for how so-called degenerate states might be transformed into "respected and robust member[s] of the world community," as one scholar put it in 1951.¹⁷

In fact, "development" had been a defining concept of Turkish life since the Ottoman modernizing reforms (the *Tanzimat*) of 1839–71. In the early twentieth century, as the Turkish nationalist project gained traction, Ottoman commentators argued that the government should integrate the arts more substantially into the large-scale social and educational reforms it was undertaking. In 1911, for instance, a reader of the French-language newspaper *La Turquie* urged that it was "necessary to develop the instruction of drawing in schools, and the taste for art in all its forms," so as "to give the Ottoman people this powerful cultural ferment of civilization that emerges from the beautiful."¹⁸ The anonymous writer made their comments at a transitional moment, as the Ottoman imperial order was dissolving but before the republic was established. After the declaration of the republic in 1923, its architects linked such ideas of art and development to the cause of the nation, and in the 1950s they came up for reevaluation yet again. The statement thus attests to the longstanding relevance, from the late Ottoman period to the postwar period, of a consistent belief that art should not only function in the service of national ideals but should also be an integral part of developmental social change.¹⁹



FIGURE 0.3

Avni Lifiş, *Development—The Work of the Municipality* (*Kalkınma—Belediye Faaliyeti*), 1916. Oil on canvas, 173.5 × 505 cm. Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture. Courtesy İbrahim Şazi Sirel.

Avni Lifiş's 1916 painting *Development—The Work of the Municipality* (*Kalkınma—Belediye Faaliyeti*) is a case in point (figure 0.3). Lifiş (1886–1927) was a prominent member of the transitional generation of artists who spearheaded the nationalization of the Turkish art world in the 1920s and 1930s. This group was often called the 1914 Generation, as they had gone to Europe around 1909 and were recalled from their studies at the outbreak of World War I that year. After the declaration of the Turkish republic, Lifiş and his peers took up the cause of the nation with vigor, producing triumphant battle scenes; landscapes using loose, impressionist brushwork; and portraits of their new leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938). Lifiş painted *Development* for the central office of one of Istanbul's major municipalities, Kadıköy, where it was originally mounted around and above a doorframe (hence the rectangular gap at its center). As one of three panels intended to be on permanent display there, Lifiş's canvas was designed to illustrate the nature and substance of the improvements that emanated from the municipal authority.

The heroes of Lifiş's work are the group of workers who occupy the panel's foreground, where they lay down new city streets with the aid of a modern paving machine, located in the center of the composition, at its horizon line. It is a scene of progress and transition, in which the ramshackle old wooden houses pictured on the right will soon give way to the more imposing edifices pictured nearby. These include the marble facade on the left, whose columned portico puts the crumbling old houses to shame, and the newly opened Haydarpaşa train station (1909), whose iconic spires loom in the background. The most prominent of the workers is on the far left. Lifiş gives special attention to this figure, who faces outward and is illuminated by a shaft of sunlight, while his companions remain in the shade of a nearby tree. Lifting a heavy implement as he moves into the light, the brawny workman provides a human face to the process of development undertaken at the municipal level and, by extension, for the nation at large.

With the establishment of the republic in 1923, Ottoman imperial visions of development were newly linked to the nation-state. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Turkey functioned as a single-party system, in which its revolutionary founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his cadre imposed their ideological system from the top down. Atatürk deployed an ideology of Kemalism, or “national developmentalism,” which paralleled that used by early-twentieth-century leaders in Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, and Mexico.²⁰ Kemalism projected a vision of a unified nation whose citizens were undivided by class interests and were driven by the common mission to secure their homeland’s advantageous position in international markets. While Atatürk and his colleagues experimented with a range of economic approaches in the 1920s, Kemalism generally framed the advancement of the national economic sector as the responsibility of the state, as opposed to the American-style, liberal-capitalist vision of development that Turkey took up later in the 1950s. By the early 1930s, the republican leadership had landed on the state-directed economic philosophy of *devletçilik* (statism) and launched a Soviet-inspired sequence of five-year plans.²¹ The idea of “national development” (*millî inkişaf*) remained the new regime’s main rallying cry throughout the long 1930s, the period between the establishment of the republic (1923) and the World War II years (1939–45).²²

In order to disseminate his Kemalist political ideology, Atatürk executed a series of radical cultural reforms. He overhauled the political and legal system, abolishing the Islamic caliphate and replacing Islamic law with the Swiss civil code. The reforms suffused the public sphere and reached deep into citizens’ private lives. Individuals’ bodily comportment and daily routines were regulated through a new calendar (Gregorian rather than Islamic), a new day of rest (Sunday rather than Friday), a new clock, and laws requiring everyone to wear Western-style hats and apparel. These were complemented by an ensemble of new civic rituals and national holidays. A 1928 language reform replaced the Arabic alphabet with Latin letters, regularized vocabulary and grammar, and, for a time, rendered the entire nation illiterate.²³

Negotiating such a rapid, all-encompassing experience of national development was a defining challenge for modern Turkish art in the long 1930s. What should an art of “developing Turkey” look like? What were its subjects to be? Its styles? Who were its publics? In 1935, a twenty-four-year-old artist named Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu (1911–1975) offered one response to these foundational questions. Age twelve when the republic was founded, Eyüboğlu had experienced the full force of Atatürk’s development program. His painting *Villagers Watching the First Train* offers an affirmative vision of the resulting transformation of the national landscape (figure 0.4). A line of villagers extends horizontally across the center of the painting, their backs turned toward the viewer as they wave energetically at a train that passes in the distance. The spectators’ alert, upright posture, their raised handkerchiefs, and their intent focus on the train all convey the collective excitement experienced at their first sight of this mobile emblem of modernity. The engine has just passed a large factory and is already halfway across the canvas, its speed accentuated by the three vertical telegraph poles



FIGURE 0.4

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, *Villagers Watching the First Train* (*İlk Geçen Treni İzleyen Köylüler*), 1935. Oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm. Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture. Courtesy Rahmi Eyüboğlu.

that break up its movement into sequential frames. It will soon round a curve where more smokestacks await, bypassing a small village and disappearing into the hazy line of hills that marks the visual limits of the painting. Packed to bursting with the iconography of the developing nation, Eyüboğlu's brightly colored canvas stands as a painterly endorsement of the Kemalist development program of the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1946, eight years after Atatürk's death, Turkey made a momentous change in its political system, from a single-party to multi-party structure of government. Two new opposition parties, the National Development Party (Milli Kalkınma Partisi) and the Democrat Party (Demokrat Partisi), quickly formed as challengers to Atatürk's original party, the Republican People's Party (RPP). In May 1950, in a surprising turn of events that shook the country to its core, Turkish voters ousted the RPP from its place at the nation's helm. For twenty-five years, Atatürk's party had retained absolute control, ruling according to the maxim "for the people, in spite of the people" (*halk için halka rağmen*), an approach the RPP justified as an initial phase of democracy necessitated by the ignorance of Turkey's largely illiterate rural majority. The Democrat Party's arrival