

Two Artists in London

EASTERN ART REPORT talked to two young Turkish artists living in England, Selvi Tektash and Tracey Emin. Excerpts:

Selvi Tektash: My interest in art started when I was at primary school in Ankara. Then I went to the Fine Art Faculty of the University of Istanbul, formerly the Fine Art Academy, where I did a five-year academic study.

After I finished the university I had my first art exhibition in Istanbul in 1987. Then I came to England intending to learn English and after one year I decided to stay here longer and study art as well.

I have been accepted at the Royal Academy School of Art for a three-year fulltime degree course in painting and printmaking.

Q. Is there a certain trend that you'd like to follow?

A. This is the question my teacher asked me when I was graduating from university! For old master painters, I can say Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and I like Botticelli very much.

Also the different Renaissance artists ... I don't mind what country they are from. All I am looking for is something in their art which reaches me.

... I like my art as me. I don't think in national terms. I frankly want to paint for myself and everything that's surrounding me. That's how I want to do my art. Otherwise, if I don't try and understand myself, if I don't try and understand what's happening around me, I don't know what I can do. Get ideas from this artist, or that that artist?

I like looking at other artists' work and — I don't know — they might affect me subconsciously.

Tracey Emin: I've been painting seriously for about eight years. I don't feel that I fit into any category anyway and I certainly wouldn't say I'm 'Inner City.' I'm half Turkish (my father is Turkish Cypriot), and I think I take a lot from the East — especially the colours.

I like the materials which are used in Turkey. I like miniature painting; it's a source of inspiration. In a bigger sense it's a spiritual thing.

I have just graduated from the Royal College of Art with a Masters

degree. I have sold some of my work, not that I'm really into selling, but money seems to be the passport to the world.

... What I find generally with a lot of Turkish artists is that they are overinfluenced by the West. They are not actually looking into their own culture and the richness of what they actually have at the ends of their fingers. They keep looking too far and they are very influenced by Western ideas, like for example impressionism, expressionism, Picasso.

I paint watercolours and oil on canvas, but for years I was very influenced by the miniature painting, and the idea that such a small space can open such a large world.

... I feel I have quite an affinity with Byzantine art — which is a cross between the East and the West.

Q. Through your art, do you want to say something. Do you have a message?

A. Yes, definitely. It sounds corny, but I think that art is the most harmless thing in the world. It really causes nobody any harm.

Q. Do you feel that art has a purpose?

A. Yes, I do. People can convey different messages. People have different things which they wish to say. Some people have personal grudges to bear which they take out on their art. I am not interested in that. I'm interested in a broader universal spiritual thing which everybody can understand, which is for all nationalities, all religions, all people.