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542 words

**The Newcomers Group**

The Newcomers Group (*Yeniler Grubu*) formed in 1940 while its members were still students under Leopold Levy **(**1840-1904) at the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts, and was active through 1952; it is also known as the Harbor Group (*Liman Grubu*) in reference to the theme of the collective’s first exhibition, which featured scenes of waterfront life in Istanbul. Similar to the art collective the D Group (1933-47), the Newcomers aimed to portray what they saw asuniquely Turkish social realities while using formal strategies associated with Western modernity, including Impressionist, Fauvist, and Cubist painting techniques. At the same time, the Newcomers claimed with greater urgency than the D Group that local artists were obligated to engage directly with Turkey’s general population. This preoccupation with the relationship of the artist as an elite social position to the larger national body was closely linked to ongoing debates in both state policy (reflected in the development of the Homeland Tours program from 1938-43, and the Village Institutes from 1940-54) and in the Turkish literary world. As a result, the Newcomers received ample press coverage and the support of major literary figures such as Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974) and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962), who also sought to develop national art forms rooted in Turkish popular experience. Haşmet Akal (1918-60), Agop Arad (1913-90), Avni Arbas (1919-2003), Turgut Atalay (1918-), Ferruh Başağa (1914-2010), Abidin Dino (1913-93), Nuri İyem (1915-2005), Fethi Karakaş (1916-77), Nejad Melih Devrim (1923-95), Selim Turan (1915-94), and Mümtaz Yener (1918-2007) were its core members, but other artists were frequently included in the group’s regular exhibitions.

The Newcomers initially favored realist portrayals of local life, which they saw as a more direct way to engage with the Turkish people than the D Group’s embrace of Cubist abstraction. They centered their activities on the banks of the Golden Horn, where they painted *en plein air* and honed in on Istanbul’s fishermen, boats, cranes, and coastal cafes. The Newcomers’ intent in painting in the street rather than in the studio was two-fold: not only to engage in close observation of life on the city’s wharves, but also to expose the residents of surrounding neighborhoods to their activities, that is, to actively generate a popular audience who might very well attend the exhibitions they held at the nearby Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts. Like the D Group, the Newcomers’ interest in folk culture was deeply colored by the Kemalist regime’s emphasis on the Turkish people (*halk*) as the source of an authentic Turkish identity. Although they were based in the country’s largest metropolis, the Newcomers portrayed Istanbul, and Turkey at large, as a series of idealized, semi-rural landscapes populated by humble villagers; there is no hint of the city’s changing demographics or rapid urban development, both of which would explode in the 1950s during a moment of increased postwar affluence. By the end of the 1940s, several of the Newcomers began to argue that abstraction was equally appropriate to the “dynamism, openness, and broad horizons” of modern Turkey, as the artist Ferruh Başağa put it. In many ways, the culmination of the group’s activities in 1952 marked a “draw” between artistic camps opposing social realism and abstraction in the Turkish art world.

**References and Further Reading**

Shaw, Wendy M. K., *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art in the Ottoman Empire.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2011.