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THE DEER FIGURE AND ITS REFLECTION ON Prof. Dr. İLHAM ENVEROĞLU PAINTINGS

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Abstract. Art expresses an individual's feelings, thoughts and cultural accumulation, sometimes through symbols. Figurative art, on the other hand, can sometimes be shaped by the artist's observations and creativity in an effort to represent the real world. In Turkish art, animal figures carry especially symbolic meanings, and among these motifs, the deer figure symbolizes the mystical ties between nature and humans. Deer holds an important place in early Turkish art as a sacred being representing the elements of sky and earth and is used as a symbol of spiritual journeys in the Göktengri belief.

İlham Enveroğlu is a contemporary Turkish artist who blends traditional Turkish art with modern techniques and produces works with aesthetic and cultural meanings with the deer motif. In Enveroğlu's paintings, deer's relationships with both nature and humans are at the forefront. Enveroğlu's works with deer figures offer a comprehensive look at the historical development of figurative art in Turkestan, the role of symbolism and the cultural meaning of the deer figure in Turkish art.

Key words: Turkish art, mythology, art, painting, deer.

Introduction. Art is the process of expressing the individual's feelings and thoughts, cultural accumulation and life experiences in a plastic language through symbols and figures, and is a creative phenomenon shaped through aesthetic values.

Culture is an element that determines the differences between societies and also carries the characteristics of many geographies. There are many features that distinguish Turkish culture from most cultures in the world (Balkanal, 2019, 342). Communication is known as the process of transferring emotions, thoughts, information and beliefs between people. A number of tools are used while this process takes place (Değerli, 2021, 180). Picture is one of them.

Harmony and harmony in works of art gain a mystical dimension by reflecting the vital connection with the cycles they contain and the influence of superior powers. These works also carry the effects of the period in which they were created and the traces of the artists' life experiences with symbolic meanings and have an important place in the artistic sense.

"Art is a creation of man's mind, talent and sensitivity. Art is that which is shaped according to the sociopolitical conditions of the age in which it exists and progresses beyond it" (Değerli and Demir, 2022, 191). Figurative art, on the other hand, has an important place as an understanding that uses figures that refer to beings in the plastic field. In this understanding, the concept of figure dates back historically to the petrographic traces of the Paleolithic period. Figurative works shaped by elements such as light, shadow, form, line and color have emerged as an important part of contemporary art. Figurative understanding is not only a process of making a copy from reality, but also a process that reveals how the artist perceives the world and how it is interpreted.

E. H. Gombrich defines figurative art as an attempt to represent objects, people, or nature in the real world. According to Gombrich, figurative art is the process of imitating the outside world through the artist's observations and representation. This art form conveys visual reality while also reflecting the technical skills, aesthetic understanding and cultural context of the artist. Gombrich discusses the historical development of figurative art together with technical and stylistic evolutions in different periods. However, Gombrich emphasizes that figurative art is not an absolute imitation of reality, but is shaped by the artist's selective observations and creative interpretations. Artists state that they use different style and form languages according to the cultural, philosophical and technical understanding of each period when conveying their observations (Gombrich, 1960, 90). On the other hand, the use of figures in Turkish art with the expression "animal style" has

existed for thousands of years. The reasons for the emergence of animal style are entirely related to the necessity of Turkish culture and social life. Various issues such as the acceptance of animals as animal-ancestors from which people's lineage is based, the belief that they are protective spirits, respect for their remains, the belief that one has the power of an animal when disguised, have led to animal depictions and, over time, the emergence of an art style that focuses on this aspect. Turkish animal style differs from examples in other communities with its maturity and appearance on works made in the regions where Hun Turks dominated and lived (Çoruhlu, 2007, 148).

Divine animals, fantastic creatures, half-human, half-animal beings are the result of the belief revealed by totemism. Any animal can be considered the totem of an individual or family. Most of the time, people who wanted to inherit the power and abilities of the animal made the shape of this animal and carried it on their person, and sometimes decorated their horse or car harness. These are the reasons why deer is frequently used as an ornamental element in Turkish culture (Diyarbekirli, 1972, 115-117).

Animal figures are important in Turkish art not only for their aesthetic concern but also for their symbolic meaning. Reasons such as protection from animals and respect for their power were effective in this. The use of animal figures in Turkish art is important as a reflection of cultural codes, beliefs and social structures. In early Turkish art, "rams, sheep, rainbows, birds and various animal figures had an important place; One of these is the deer motif. Deer appears as an animal-ancestor, god or goddess in very early Turkish culture. White deer was considered a god. It is understood that in certain periods when he was not accepted as a god, a white deer was sacrificed to the Sky God. Red or brown deers were considered to be symbols of negative things, indicating the earth element (Çoruhlu, 2007, 292)."

Deer, which we encounter very richly in Turkish folklore, is one of the animals that has maintained its importance in Turkish culture, starting from petroglyphs and continuing until today (Aytaç, 2022, 209). The white deer was seen as more sacred, was associated with the sky and was considered female. The red deer is the soul of the earth. It is also believed that he ate the immortality herb on the sacred mountain and thus became immortal. Its horns symbolize the tree of life (Dalkesen, 2015, 62).

In Turkish mythology, deer is one of the animals that can appear and disappear instantly in the endless mountains and plains, and is an animal that was considered sacred in the pre-Islamic period. Deer, which has a very important place in ancient Turkish culture, is considered an animal to be tracked especially in long hunts, a sacrifice in funeral ceremonies, a guide in the soul's journey to the other world, a holy spirit and a totem. Beliefs such as the fallow deer showing the way also take place in Anatolian culture in a similar way. At the same time, as in the example of Geyikli Baba, its sanctity continues as an animal that accompanies dervishes and as a being wrapped in its fleece (Çetin et al., 2024, 150).

The deer is a figure that reflects the mythological, religious and lifestyle cultural values of the period. In Turkish art, deer are depicted in many areas of art, from paintings to carpet patterns. Due to the similarity of deer antlers to the branches of the tree of life, masks with deer antlers are seen to be worn especially on sacrificed horses. In a symbolic belief system revolving around the animal mother, the deer is seen as the mother, the tree of life, and the source of death and life (Jacobson, 1993, 47).

İlham Enveroglu and his art

Fig. 1. Prof. Dr. İlham Enveroğlu.

He was born in 1970 in Agcabedi, Azerbaijan. In 1989, Azim Azim-zade graduated from the Azerbaijan State Painting School, and in 1995 he graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Civil Engineers. The artist, who opened twenty-five personal exhibitions in many countries between 1992 and 2024, participated in nearly a hundred international painting exhibitions. Between 2007 and 2015, he served as the Head of Industrial Product Design Department at Selçuk University Faculty

of Fine Arts. He is one of the important artists who tried to combine tradition and modernity in Turkish art.

Prof. Dr. İlham Enveroğlu is one of the important representatives of contemporary Turkish painting. Since the 1990s, it has aimed to combine traditional Turkish art with modern techniques and forms. The artist, who has continued his education and art life in Turkey since 1995, tries to present the harmony of mythological symbols and colours, forms and textures with contemporary abstractions, as if trying to decipher the DNA codes of a deep-rooted culture extending from the depths of Central Asia to Anatolia. Enveroğlu reflected both the traces of the past and the spirit of the period by establishing the balance between figurative elements and abstract expression in his search for creativity inspired by the cultural accumulation of the lands we live on. The relationship between nature and humans constitutes an important theme in the artist's works. Enveroğlu, who frequently includes nature, human and animal figures in his paintings, has created a unique expression language by blending traditional Turkish art with a modern language.

The artist indirectly explains his own cultural accumulation through metaphors. It blends ancient Turkish mythology, epics and tales with an incredible imagination and language of symbols. The artist, who is as familiar with this language of expression as his mother tongue, consciously chooses the language of magnificent symbols as a means of self-expression. One of the mythological figures that attracts attention in Enveroğlu's works is the deer motif.

Deer holds an important place in Turkish art with both mythological and symbolic meanings, and in Enveroğlu's paintings, this figure contains deep aesthetic and cultural meanings. The deer appears in Enveroğlu's paintings both as a natural being and as a symbolic element. The deer figure is considered a sacred being in ancient Turkish and Altai mythology and represents concepts such as fertility, abundance and spiritual guidance. In Turkish culture, deer is seen as the guide of spiritual journeys, especially in Shamanism, and is an important symbol for nomadic communities. The fact that it is rendered in blue tones here emphasizes its connection with the sky and the spiritual world, while the black tones represent a mysterious, subconscious narrative.

Deer figure in İlham Enveroglu paintings

Fig. 2. "Prototürkler VII", Watercolor on paper, 20x25 cm (Enveroğlu, 1999, 11).

The painting was made with watercolor technique. The color palette is used effectively. An abstract composition is presented and made remarkable by the combination of dark tones and vibrant colors. The dominance of dark tones in the composition represents the night, the unknown and the spiritual world in Central Asian mythology; The emphasis on yellow and blue colors highlights the connection with the sun and celestial forces. In this context, it is seen that the work not only offers an abstract expression, but also reconsiders cultural and mythological elements with a modern art language.

To delve deeper into the cultural context of this work, the use of figures and symbols refers to ancient Turkish and Central Asian shamanistic art. Human, animal and abstract symbols, especially seen in Central Asian rock paintings and petroglyphs, are revived with a modern interpretation in this composition.

The linear symbols and abstract figures seen in the work are reminiscent of the stamps in the Orkhon and Yenisei inscriptions. This suggests that the work was inspired by the written and visual expression styles of the ancient Turks. The circular head structures and vertical body forms of the central figures offer an aesthetic similar to the stone balbals of the Göktürk and Uyghur periods, establishing a relationship with the cult of ancestors and the belief in life after death.

There is a deer symbol, human figures on the surface of the painting, and linear values resembling a deer's head and antlers in the center. While the brown and cream tones in the work carry a meaning related to soil and nature, this may represent the respect that ancient Turkish societies had for nature and

the spiritual bond they established with it. While the figures highlighted with black lines create a strong narrative language, minimalist human figures and linear structures reflect an aesthetic approach bearing the influences of Gokturk and Uyghur art.

When this work is evaluated in terms of its cultural context, the symbols and forms used contain important references to Central Asian and Turkish mythology. The deer figure was seen as a sacred being symbolizing the bond between nature and humans in ancient Turkish communities. Especially in Shamanism, the deer is thought to be a spiritual guide and is believed to provide the connection between the sky, the earth and the underground. In this context, the form at the center of the work, reminiscent of a deer head, can be considered as the symbol of a spiritual guide or a being that bridges nature and humans.

Overall, this work offers not only an abstract composition but also a cultural and mythological narrative. He makes a contemporary interpretation of traditional symbols by making connections with Turkish and Central Asian art. The combination of geometric forms with elements of nature also includes a philosophical approach to the connection between humans and the universe.

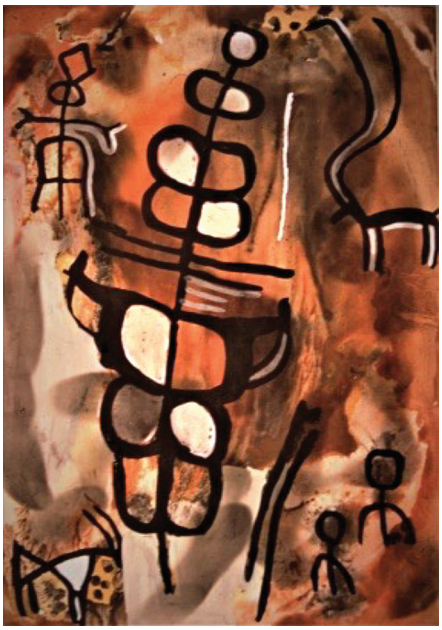

Fig. 3. "Prototürkler IX", watercolor on paper, 25x30 cm (Enveroğlu, 1999, 14).

Fig. 4. "Prototürkler II", watercolor on paper, 23x30 cm (Enveroğlu, 1999, 6).

The painting was created with gouache and watercolor techniques, using water-flowing and dripping techniques of paint pigments dominated by warm and cold tones. While the matte structure of gouache paint on the watercolor surface gives the effect of depth to the painting surface, a masterful balance has been achieved.

This work offers both an abstract and symbolic visuality with the strong linear expression and dynamic stain structure in its composition. The blue, white and black tones used, together with the brown background, create a deep atmosphere and create a mystical narrative. While the irregular and organic lines in the painting add movement and fluidity to the work, the dots and stains in the composition strengthen the connection with the sky and cosmic elements. White dots are used which may represent stars or spiritual energy. These points can be considered as symbols indicating a divine presence in the work.

The white deer figure in the center is associated with holiness in ancient Turkish and Central Asian mythology and is considered a spiritual guiding being. Especially in Shamanism, the deer is seen as a figure that connects with the world of spirits, and here it is depicted as a divine being. The deer is a frequently encountered motif in Gokturk and Uyghur art, and has been considered as a celestial guide or symbol of spiritual journey, especially in mythological narratives.

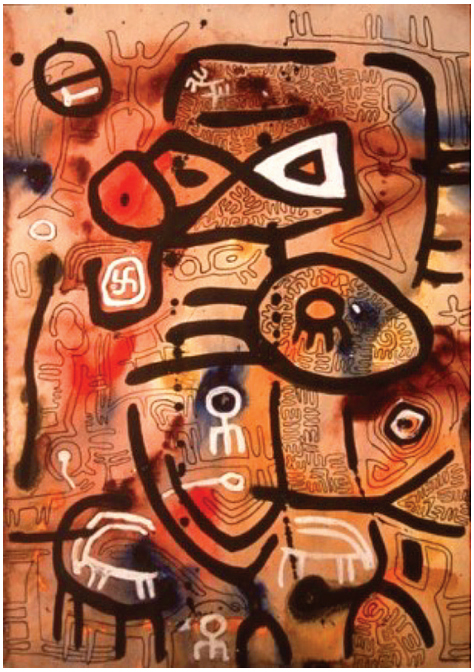

Fig. 5. "Prototürkler VIII", Watercolor on paper, 25x30 cm (Enveroğlu, 1999, 12).

The use of blue and white tones to contrast against the dark background directs the viewer's eye to certain figures. The blue lines are reminiscent of the abstract expressions frequently seen in old Turkish rock paintings. These lines are similar to sacred signs or ancient stamps used especially in shamanic rituals.

The painting was made with gouache and watercolor techniques. Dye pigments were used by water pouring and dripping techniques. A remarkable visual experience was

created by presenting an abstract composition. This work offers a composition with a strong cultural context, where symbolic and abstract elements come together. While the warm colors used add dynamism to the work, the forms emphasized with black lines increase the visual intensity. The intricate lines and stamp-like markings in the background evoke rock paintings and shamanic symbols found in ancient Turkish and Central Asian cultures. The large form in the center is created by the combination of geometric and organic shapes and symbolizes a mystical existence. This form is reminiscent of totemic figures considered sacred in ancient societies. Interlocking circles and spiral shapes bring to mind cosmic and spiritual cycle symbols frequently used in Central Asian and Anatolian civilizations. Especially the spiral and circular patterns in the center can be considered as visual codes representing the cyclicity of the universe and shamanic journeys.

The white deer figures positioned at the bottom of the work refer to the white deer myth. The white deer is considered a sacred guide in ancient Turkish mythology and is referred to as a spiritual figure that guides people to the right path. The white deer with long horns and distinctive stance used here symbolize the connection with celestial beings and emphasize the mystical relationship between humans and nature. The directions and placements of the white deer add movement to the composition of the work and direct the viewer to different interpretations. Some of the abstract figures in the work remind us of masks and totemic beings used in shamanic rituals. The swastika-like symbol in the upper left corner is known as a motif representing the cycle of life, the sun and cosmic balance in ancient Turkish and Central Asian societies. This sign points to a cultural memory that goes beyond time and space, in line with the ritualistic narrative found throughout the work.

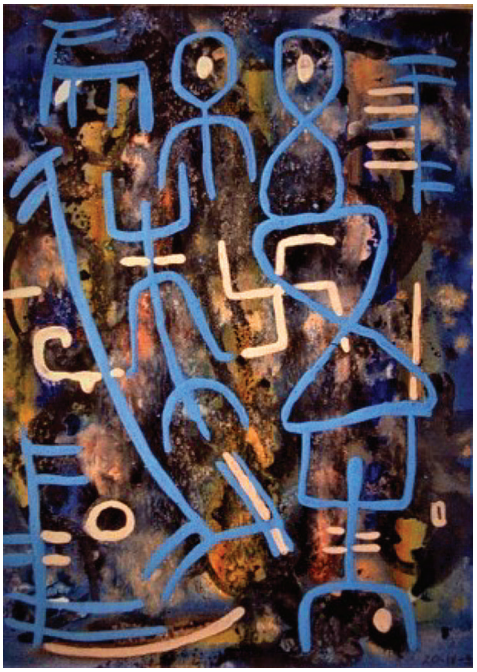

Fig. 6. "Prototürkler", on Paper, 29x21 cm, 1993 (Fotoğraf: İ. Enveroğlu arşivi).

In the work, blue, white and dark tones are in the foreground, while the blue lines make the figures clear, the dark tones in the background add depth and richness. The stylized human figures at the center of the work are similar to anthropomorphic figures in ancient Turkish and Central Asian rock paintings. These figures are based on mythological representations that describe the human-nature relationship of ancient communities. The fact that the figures are given in simple and abstract forms suggests that they can be considered in a divine or ritualistic context. In the Central Asian shamanic belief, human figures were often used as symbolic elements representing a spiritual journey or ritualistic dances.

The deer figures in the upper and lower left part of the picture are among the sacred beings frequently encountered in Turkish mythology. The deer was seen as a spiritual guide, especially in Shamanism, and was accepted as a symbol representing the power of nature. While the deer in the upper left exhibits a static composition, the figure in the lower left has a more dynamic stance. These two different narratives emphasize both the calm and active nature of the deer and represent its mystical connection between nature and humans.

It gives important clues about the cultural origins of the work by making references to some symbols and old Turkish tamgas in the work. Tamgas were used as signs conveying both lineage and sacred knowledge in nomadic Turkish societies. The placement of the tamgas here and their relationship with the figures symbolize the harmony between humans and nature. In addition, the orientation of some symbols gives the work a dynamic structure by evoking movement and the concept of time.

Fig. 7. "Hunlar V", watercolor on paper, 23x23 cm (Enveroğlu, 1999, 23).

The work has a square form and is created by combining different geometric shapes. The color palette consists of shades of blue, brown, black and white. One of the most

striking elements of the work is the stylized deer figure positioned in the lower right section. The deer here is depicted with geometric sharpness and layers of color, with a perspective that enhances the sense of movement. The fact that its horns are white and its body is in black and brown tones is emphasized by the play of light and shadow and increases the contrast of the figure. The deer is oriented towards the upper right, and this stance can be considered as a symbol of progress towards the future or a spiritual journey.

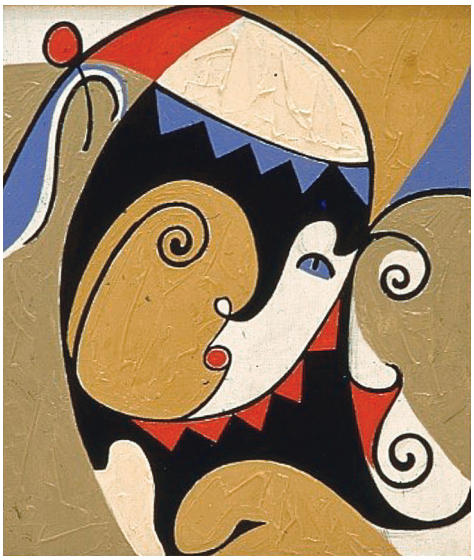

Fig. 8. "Hunlar Series", Oil on canvas, 50x65 cm (Fotoğraf: İ. Enveroğlu arşivi).

The general structure of the composition offers a contemporary interpretation of motifs in traditional Turkish and Central Asian art. The sharp angles and layered geometric structures in the work remind us of tile patterns or carpet weaving motifs from the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. At the same time, the abstraction used in figurative expression is similar to the primitive figurative approach seen in rock paintings in Central Asia. This reveals that the work reinterprets the cultural heritage of the past with the language of modern art.

Intense and vibrant colors are used in the work. This work offers a rich symbolic expression in which stylized figures are intertwined with dynamic and organic forms. The composition, dominated by red, black, white and gold tones, creates a strong contrast, while rhythmic folds and sharp geometric lines give movement to the work. The transitions between the figures deepen the abstraction by creating a feeling of unity that unites the individual forms.

The main figure in the work offers a theatrical expression with its exaggerated facial features and curvilinear form approach. The fluidity of the facial features shows that the artist moved the figure from a realistic portrait understanding to a symbolic and mythological narrative. The shapes hidden within the face and head form create a multi-layered narrative and emphasize the integration between the human figure and nature. The deer figure in

Fig. 9. "Hunlar Series", Watercolor on paper, 50x65 cm, (Fotoğraf: İ. Enveroğlu arşivi).

black and blue tones at the top of the composition displays a static and tense form. While this figure evokes the symbol of the deer, which is seen as a spiritual guide in traditional mythologies, the triangle and zigzag lines used on the head code it as a mystical being. In Central Asian Turkish culture, deer is considered a sacred animal and symbolizes the deep relationship between humans and nature. Here, the integration of the deer figure into the human face may have symbolized the individual's spiritual connection with nature and his inner journey.

Blue, white, black and brown tones are predominantly used in the work. While blue and white are emphasized in the center of the work, brown and orange tones in the background create a warmer atmosphere. The brown and orange tones in the background create an effect reminiscent of rock paintings. In particular, symbols and linear motifs similar to old Turkish tamgas establish a connection between the past and the present. This shows how the artist transforms and reinterprets cultural heritage with a contemporary understanding of art.

When evaluated in general, the work not only presents a visual composition but also deepens with layers of cultural and mythological meaning. This work, in which the artist skillfully combines traditional and contemporary art approaches in formal and conceptual terms, can be considered as a dynamic work that makes the viewer think and is open to different interpretations.

The work has a rich palette with red, black, white, blue and gold tones. Red and black create striking contrast, while white and blue provide a calmer balance. The golden color adds a luxurious atmosphere to the work. The intense use of gold color in the background gives the work an archaeological feel. Motifs reminiscent of old rock paintings, petroglyphs and tamgas strengthen the work's bond with the past. Such symbols can be considered as elements

that both activate the collective subconscious and provide important references to cultural memory.

When evaluated in general, the work has a culturally, mythologically and artistically rich narrative, and with the masterful use of colors and figures, it offers a structure that makes the audience think and is open to different interpretations. The work can be considered as a powerful composition that reinterprets cultural memory through art by blending traditional motifs with the language of contemporary art.

The work presents an abstract composition where different colors and shapes come together. The color palette is quite vibrant and red, blue, black, white and brown tones are used.

The combination of geometric abstraction and traditional figures in the work reflects both the modern understanding of art and the reinterpretation of ancient cultural symbols. The brown textures and linear patterns in the background evoke ancient rock paintings and petroglyphs, establishing a visual link between the past and the present. In this context, the work reconsiders the figurative expressions in traditional Turkish and Central Asian art with a contemporary understanding of abstraction.

The figures and colors of the work can express both a collective

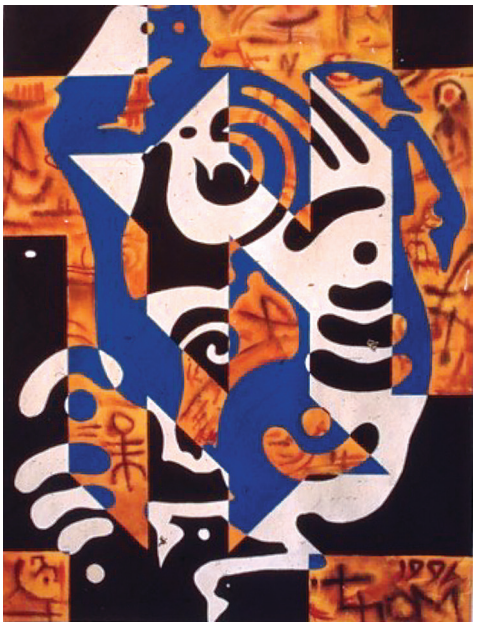

Fig. 10. "Hunlar Series", Watercolor on paper, 50x65 cm (Fotoğraf: İ. Enveroğlu arşivi).

Fig. 11. "Hunlar III", Watercolor on paper, 21x21 cm, 1995 (Enveroğlu, 1999, 20).

narrative and an individual journey. Fragmented and intertwined forms symbolize the integration of man with nature, as well as the transformations that the individual undergoes in his inner world. Deers looking in different directions and their geometric arrangements offer both a mythological and modern narrative language.

Conclusion. In Turkish culture, the deer figure has an important place as a multi-layered symbol intertwined with nature, mythology, folk literature and spirituality. The deer is important not only as an aesthetic element, but also as a figure symbolizing harmony with nature, holiness and the balance of the universe. In Göktengri belief and early Turkish art, deer is perceived as both a natural being and a guide of a spiritual journey. In this context, the deer figure has gained a universal meaning in Turkish mythology and has become an important symbol in aesthetic works that reflects both the cultural and religious elements of the period.

Some contemporary artists such as İsmail Acar, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Nedim Günsür, Fikret Mualla and Emin Çizenel used the deer figure, which is an important symbol in Turkish culture, in various forms in their works.

The fact that these traditional motifs are integrated with the deer figure in İlham Enveroğlu's works and come to life with a modern interpretation is a good example of the bridge between the past and the present and the continuity of cultural heritage. The deer figure in the artist's works has gained a place not only as an aesthetic element, but also as an element with deep symbolic meanings.

The linear deer forms used by İlham Enveroğlu can be perceived as a direct reference to the roots of Turkish art, especially the Turkestan culture. These figures are actually a reference to the deer figures found in the petroglyphs in regions such as Qobustan and Saymalıtaş, which are one of the important cultural heritages of the Turkestan geography. Qobustan and Saymalıtaş are historically located on the lands where the ancestors of Turkish tribes lived, and the rock paintings in these regions reflect the deep ties of Central Asian Turks with animal figures. In particular, the deer figure symbolizes both the relationship of Turkish people with nature and the symbolic meaning of this animal, as well as themes such as power, might and being in harmony with nature.

While İlham Enveroğlu reshapes traditional Turkish art in a modern language by blending figurative and abstract elements, he also brings

the mystical and cultural dimension of the deer figure to the present day. These works also attract attention because they reveal the evolution of Turkish art from past to present and how cultural values can be integrated with modern art.

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GEYİK FIGÜRÜ VE ONUN PROF. DR. İLHAM ENVEROĞLU RESİMLERİNE YANSIMASI

Sanat bireyin duygularını, düşüncelerini ve kültürel birikimini bazen semboller aracılığıyla ifade eder. Figüratif sanat ise kimi zaman gerçek dünyayı temsil etme çabasıyla sanatçının gözlemleri ve yaratıcılığıyla şekillenebilir. Türk sanatında hayvan figürleri, özellikle sembolik anlamlar taşır ve bu motiflerden geyik figürü, doğa ve insan arasındaki mistik bağları simgeler. Geyik, erken Türk sanatında gök ve yer unsurlarını temsil eden kutsal bir varlık olarak önemli bir yer tutar ve Göktengri inancında ruhsal yolculukların sembolü olarak kullanılır.

İlham Enveroğlu geleneksel Türk sanatını modern tekniklerle harmanlayarak geyik motifiyle estetik ve kültürel anlamlar taşıyan eserler üreten çağdaş bir Türk sanatçısıdır. Enveroğlu'nun resimlerinde, geyik hem doğa hem de insan ile olan ilişkileri ön plandadır. Enveroğlu'nun geyik figürlü eserleri, figüratif sanatın Türkistan'daki tarihsel gelişimi, sembolizmin rolü ve geyik figürünün Türk sanatındaki kültürel anlamına kapsamlı bir bakış sunar.

Anahtar kelime: Türk sanatı, mitoloji, sanat, resim, geyik.

Ахмет Айтач, Бахар Рюзгар *(Турция)*

ФИГУРА ОЛЕНЯ И ЕЕ ОТРАЖЕНИЕ В ЖИВОПИСИ ПРОФЕССОРА ИЛЬХАМАЭНВЕРОГЛУ

Искусство выражает индивидуальные чувства, мысли и культурный опыт и часто это происходит посредством символов. Фигуративное искусство, с другой стороны, в результате творчества художника способно воспроизвести реальный мир. В турецком искусстве фигуры животных являются носителями особых символических значений и среди этих мотивов фигура оленя символизирует мистические связи между природой и людьми. Олень занимает значительное место в раннем тюркском искусстве как сакральное олицетворение неба и вселенное и используется как символ духовного путешествия в религии Гей-Тенгри.

Ильхам Энвероглу является современным турецким художником, который совмещает традиционное тюркское искусство с продвинутыми техниками и создает произведения, несущие эстетику и культурные значения мотива оленя. В живописи Энвероглу взаимосвязи оленя с природой и людьми выдыигаются на передний план. Произведения Энвероглу с фигурой оленя предлагают объемную картину исторического развития фигуративного искусства в тюркском мире, новый взгляд на роль символизма и культурного значения фигуры оленя в турецком искусстве.

Ключевые слова: тюркское искусство, мифология, изобразительное искусство, рисунок, олень.