

A Different Glance at Osman Hamdi Bey's Paintings at the Sabanci University Sakıp Sabancı Museum

Conservation and scientific research on six paintings by Osman Hamdi Bey which are part of the Sakıp Sabancı Museum's Painting Collection have been completed. The 'Osman Hamdi Bey Beyond Vision' exhibition relating the process carried on as part of the Bank of America Merrill Lynch's global 'Art Conservation Project' opens at the Atlı Köşk on June 5.

Conservation and scientific research on the six paintings by Osman Hamdi Bey at the Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum's Painting Collection was started in 2016 and has recently been completed. The processes of the project which was carried on as part of the Bank of America Merrill Lynch's global 'Art Conservation Project' and which constitutes the most comprehensive conservation and scientific research on Osman Hamdi Bey's paintings in Turkey will be brought to the attention of art lovers at Atlı Köşk on June 5 with the 'Osman Hamdi Bey Beyond Vision' exhibition.

The project entailed a comparison of Osman Hamdi Bey's *Flowers in a Vase*, *The Hodja Reading the Qoran*, *Kokona Despina*, *Portrait of Naile Hanım*, *The Petitioner* and *The Mosque* whereby every detail from the artistic technique of this prominent name of Turkish art history to the restoration work these works had undergone was determined through scientific methods. The 'Osman Hamdi Bey Beyond Vision' exhibition brings the artist's creative processes to light while also constituting a detailed narration of conservation in art and a roadmap for future projects.

This pioneering project in Turkey proves that scientific methods can provide opportunities for studying the techniques of artists as well as giving information about methods for dating works of art. It also provides guidance for research on a comparative study of techniques and materials of paintings claimed to be by Osman Hamdi Bey.

The first step of the project which entailed a comprehensive perspective on the scientific analyses of the works was the analysis of previous restoration work, the use of paints with heavy metal and other elements on bottom layers not visible to the naked eye with X-ray imaging methods. This process revealed Osman Hamdi Bey's charcoal sketches prior painting, his painting techniques and the way his works evolved. This was followed by chemical analyses to determine the structure and color of the materials he used, the layers and texture of paint. The organic structure of the canvas material of the six paintings was analyzed through Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and the data was classified through the primary component analysis (PCA) method to determine their characteristics.

This project showed that the artist's paintings dating back to late 19th and early 20th centuries had suffered from cracks and fallen bits in paint as well as yellowing of the varnishes. They were cleaned and restored as part of the same project.

SSM Director Dr. Nazan Ölçer said, “The purpose of the ‘Scientific Analysis and Conservation of Osman Hamdi Bey’s Paintings’ project, which is the most comprehensive initiative undertaken in Turkey regarding conservation of the works of this prominent name in Turkish art history, is to provide the worlds of science and art a closer glance to the artist and his creative processes. The project carried on as part of Bank of America Merrill Lynch’s ‘Art Conservation Project’ entailed the analysis and conservation of the six paintings by Osman Hamdi Bey which are part of SSM’s Painting Collection. Thus, through Bank of America Merrill Lynch’s contribution, we had the opportunity to obtain additional information about these valuable works in our collection and contribute to Turkish art history studies and conservation efforts. We are happy to bring this exhibition which provides a comprehensive insight to the processes entailed in this project which is a basic source of reference for future studies to the attention of lovers of art.”

Bank of Merrill Lynch Turkey Country Executive Banu Başar said, “Our globally run ‘Art Conservation Project’ aims at conserving works of art while at the same time contributing to the cultural wealth and education of societies all over the world. Our objective is to create a medium of harmony and mutual respect among different cultures and traditions. Therefore we are proud of our cooperation with the Sakıp Sabancı Museum regarding the conservation of Osman Hamdi Bey paintings at its Painting Collection. We believe that this project will make a positive contribution to the education and interest in art of future generations.”

Başar added that the Bank of America Merrill Lynch ‘Art Conservation Project’ aimed at conserving works of art of artistic or cultural significance under threat, noting that more than 120 conservation projects run by museums in 30 different countries had been sponsored since its launching in 2010.

The project which enabled the conservation of Osman Hamdi Bey’s paintings was executed with the collaboration of Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Sabancı University, Koç University and Istanbul Technical University and with Getty Conservation Institute’s consultative contribution in the evaluation of test results.