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| Ayşe Türemiş: İstanbul, a water city akin to an artistic oasis |
| Just like those plants that look fragile but in fact rule the riverbank, Ayşe Türemiş handles her brush with ease and zest. As the light streams in through her windows, she wets a white paper and covers it with bright shades and washes of airy colors.Türemiş is a watercolorist who knows İstanbul’s Galata neighborhood like the back of her agile hand. Soon after she moved to the area, she started to sketch and paint its crumbling yet charming façades. And of that, Türemiş tells Today’s Zaman, she is not about to get weary or bored.Seven years ago, Türemiş moved to the north side of the Golden Horn. The artist, who holds a college degree in stage design, had been working for theaters since her post-graduation days. Yet only two years after she settled in Galata, Türemiş left the stage. “I could not take my eyes and brushes off the visual details on the buildings of the neighborhood,” she says.Since then Türemiş has used liters of water and pigment to picture just what she sees and feels. “My background includes architectural analysis and I decided to make a collection of paintings so that those buildings on the verge of collapse would live in memories,” she adds.Türemiş focuses on objects that are about to disappear, as if therein lies their artistic interest and beauty: “I do not work on restored facades and I do not paint people,” she notes. “I am far more interested in the places and surroundings where human beings live or used to live, than in human beings themselves.”In her eyes, watercolor suits İstanbul better than any other technique. “Why? Here is the romantic answer: Watercolor requires that you work fast and İstanbul is a city changing very fast. So to me, watercolor is the best way to visualize and paint İstanbul as it really is.” |

“Focus Galata” is how Türemiş named her first project, designed to be the introductory chapter of an ongoing work about İstanbul. “I walked around and took pictures of all the interesting buildings I could see,” she explains. “From the beginning, the idea was not to make postcards or to sell pictures that would then hang on the walls of a few CEOs. It was about making sketches and paintings of Galata.”

But when the owner of a printing office offered to sponsor her project, Türemiş was swift to accept. “The idea was to print 32 postcards of some 60 Galata paintings I had made,” she recalls. “Those postcards can now be found in Beyoğlu’s Arkeopera and Mektup bookstores. Still, I am not selling the original paintings.”

The artist reserves her work for the exhibitions she hopes to make in the future and although some paintings were showed in Prague in 2006, Türemiş is still longing for the day an exhibition will bear her single name. “I have no manager and no distribution network,” she says. “I would like to advertise my work more but I don’t know how to do it. I keep concentrating on my art.”

‘Watercolor not a favored technique’

But Türemiş knows the road is not a “long, quiet river.” In her own words, watercolor is far from being the most popular technique in Turkey. “I would even say that watercolor is not considered a worthy technique in Turkey, definitely not as much as oil painting… the ‘real painting.’ New techniques of expression in fine arts make watercolor seem somehow obsolete,” she says, before adding that traditional watercolor paintings of İstanbul picture buildings that any tourist would recognize: Dolmabahçe Palace, Hagia Sophia, the Grand Bazaar… “Those buildings don’t make much sense for a project such as mine,” Türemiş notes. “I am trying to do something different in terms of technique and content.”

Watercolor, Türemiş explains, is all about light and shadow; it does not focus on colorfulness, unlike oil painting. “It takes me a day to realize 75 percent of a painting,” she notes. “The remaining 25 percent might take from a week to a year. But whether that painting is going to be used or not is decided on that very first day.” For instance, Türemiş completed 120 paintings of the Galata district and discarded about 60 of them. “Watercolor paintings are not available for further changes over the painted surface and any mistake cannot be undone,” she says.

Türemiş describes Alexan-der Creswell, a contemporary British watercolorist, as the one artist who inspired her to use watercolor. “I found one of his books called ‘The Silent Houses of Britain.’ The book is a collection of paintings showing aristocratic British mansions that are about to be demolished or deserted. Ruined interiors and crumbling façades, I like that,” she smiles.

2010, the water project

Türemiş is currently working on a project for 2010, when İstanbul will be European Capital of Culture. The general topic of her project is water and the relation between water and architecture in İstanbul. Noting that İstanbul is a “water city” just as Venice is, she adds: “The Bosporus, the Princes Islands, the fountains, the yalıs… I am doing research about all architectural types and periods at the moment.”

And when she does not hold her brush, Türemiş spends her time making puppets, and small carton replicas of rooms depicted in novels, such as that of the titular character in Oscar Wilde’s “The Picture of Dorian Gray.”

“I read Oscar Wilde a lot, too. I am interested in 19th century art in general and I like Wilde’s novels, style and bitter sense of humor,” she says. Recently, Türemiş made a “watercolor study” of one of his short stories, “The Nightingale and the Rose.”

“The paintings I made go from pure white to deep red and reflect my reading of the story, in which the nightingale, who falls in love with a white rose, sticks the thorn of the rose into his heart so that the white rose turns red, stained by the blood of his heart,” Türemiş explains. Roses, too, might look fragile from the outside. But it only takes some time and care for them to grow beautifully. Türemiş knows that the recipe applies to her art as well.

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