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The First National Style and the Contours of Art in the Late Ottoman Empire

In the late Ottoman Empire, the proliferation of the so-called First National Style coincided with the introduction of handicraft in public education. Indeed, in many cases the places and individuals involved in their development overlapped directly. The First National Style boosted traditional crafts, which it required for its characteristic historicist features. One of the main proponents of this style, Mimar Kemaleddin (1870–1927), directed the design of the new school building for the Teachers College (*Darülmüallimin*) in Istanbul in 1912. The Teachers College in turn had become the cradle of the reform of art education that introduced handicraft under the directorship of Satı' al-Husri (1880–1969) between 1909 and 1912. Moreover, al-Husri's key position in Ottoman education and Kemaleddin's directorship of the Technical Commission for Construction and Restoration (*İnşaat ve Tamirat Heyet-i Fenniyesi*), the state architecture office responsible for all new educational buildings in the Empire, established a close professional relationship between the two. The coincidence of the development of the First National Style and handicraft thus appears, at first sight, a perfectly organic correlation. And yet, a closer look at their underlying principles complicates that impression. Handicraft at the Teachers College shifted the artistic concern from the finished object to the process of its making. In contrast, the First National Style was heir to the object-centrism of contemporary art historiography. This talk investigates which specific object conceptions the First National Style absorbed and reproduced, and how these conceptions of art as object-bound interfered with the recognition of the process-oriented principles of handicraft at the Teachers College.

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