

Symbolic Representation And Exlibris Reading As Narration

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Abstract

Exlibris is centuries old representation form although nowadays it's contemporary, distinctive art field and means of communication.

Representation isn't the thing that it represents but its instrument. Its intermediary feature makes it symbolic. In exlibris, representation is established on person or institute, not only on artist's work. It makes the era of artist and societies' features readable. Exlibris covers subjective symbols that forming localized style of artist, provides availability for narration to universal structure of art by symbols.

Here, exlibris is interpreted as storyline and symbolic expression.

Key Words: Ekslibris, symbol, representation, narration.

INTRODUCTION

Exlibris, today known as contemporary and genuine art branch, is a traditional and cultural art by its long history background. In addition to this historic back ground of exlibris, its relation with book and culture, and as an art work, it earns collectible item value too since it transports cultural and historical properties into our era as Pektaş specifies (2014, p. 426).

Exlibris art, with its long history in the West, is recently known in our country and attracts interest as an art branch and also on collection basis. By pioneering efforts of Prof. Hasip Pektaş, introducing exlibris as an art and collection object with its institutional, artistic and educational extension has been realized in our country starting from 1995.

Today, at the end of twenty year long dense labor and efforts on exlibris art in Turkey, realization of many academic and artistic activities, Istanbul Exlibris Association, Exlibris Museum and receiving successful results in international exhibitions by our artists show that these efforts have not gone to the wind.

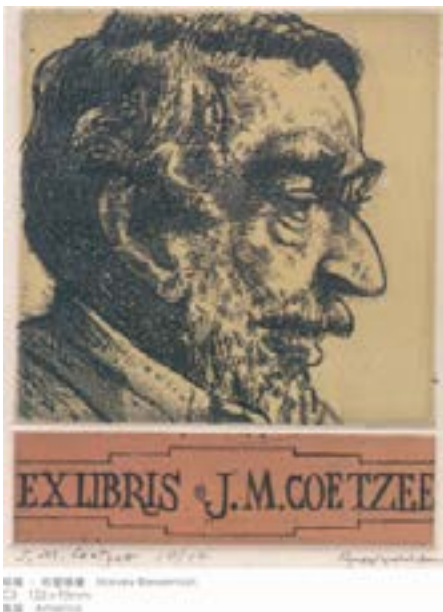
Exlibris sourced by needs and done by graphic reproduction techniques in early times has been subject to valuable researches on techniques, historic development, art and communication (Yaban, 2012; Pektaş, 2003; Demir, 2008). However, besides historic, technique and artistic structure of exlibris, and various styles of artists, one of its distinctive characteristics differentiating exlibris from other visual art fields as a semiotic system is its representation marking both the represented person or institute by its signifier and signified elements, and artist himself by its esthetic form and style. This two dimensional call character of representation in exlibris, and its personally and institutionally descriptive property provide possibility for mostly symbolic and narrative fictions.

EXLIBRIS AS SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION AND NARRATION

Representation language of visual arts is realized by qualitative and quantitative installation of expression. Expression is installed by visual and stylistic elements. "In any case, a visual expression is formed by two elements. One of them is visual elements and form establishing the language of narration and leaving all remaining things outside. The second element is the dimension discovering the meaning of narration." (Onega, Angel & Landa, 2002, p.13). However, the real power of expression is related with the structure establishing the meaning of art work within all relations between visual and stylistic elements. The visuals that forming this meaningful

structure and established by minimum two elements as expression and meaning, can be described as signs. Rifat (2009, p.11), characterizes every form, object and phenomenon as sign that they represent something different from themselves and qualified to replace what they represent. In signs, “signifier” functions for expression, “signified” functions for meaning. Exlibris, like other visual signs, can be considered as sign system since it is both a means of communication and a representation by establishing the expression and the meaning. While Strauss (2013, s.15) defines culture as totally meaningful communication code and a representation of physical world, he also mentions culture as style of giving the meaning. Exlibris as a cultural element by its long historic process and by reflecting socio-cultural characters of time that it is made in is open to different representation readings. Since exlibris is formed by many elements and submits complicated structure, it can be interpreted and read in more than one way through historic, thematic, formal and stylistic point of views.

Representation character of exlibris deviates from other visual representation forms to some extent. In exlibris, expressive dimension can be read in minimum inseparably two references. The first of these encapsulates representative expression of the owning person or institute of the mentioned exlibris. This representative expression is a qualitatively or quantitatively characteristic and symbolic representation for a particular person or institute who gives the order, or for someone or institute special to the artist. The element making symbolic representation as symbolic is the logic representing not the whole but the most characteristic and particular sides of person or institute by artist’s style rather than its stylistic fiction. Therefore symbolic representation might show different form and structure properties in terms of arrangement and meaning formation. For instance, while a character of a person or an institute is being symbolized, this character can be set up generally by compromising or on the basis of similarity principle as an operator or sign of external reality. Morris (2004, p.349) defines this property as “an internal or natural tie between sign and signified object”. In such a sign, signified properties can directly be set up. By its nature, sign exists with its duty of more transparent, readable and conducting the meaning (Alp, 2010, s.6). In the other words, represented object in the representation that formed by signs is in the harmony with its object. This harmony sometimes might contain totally realistic and sometimes stylized or deformed expression. Nevertheless, the representation here does not go far away from what it represents and even it uses plastic elements making this property as visible. It is very probable to see this natural or stylized expression in many exlibris works. As an example, American artist Harvey Breverman shows a realistic representation characteristic in his exlibris made for J.M. Coetzee by hollow print as direct description with portrait of exlibris owner (Slide 1). However, it is still not himself of Coetzee but his symbolic description.



Slide 1

Harvey Breverman, exlibris, (USA)



Slide 2

Hatice Öz, exlibris, (Turkey)

Nowadays totally photographic or photo-realist representations are able to use in exlibris works by using computer design facilities, besides arrangements setting up symbolic structures and reality-compatible signs are still mostly being used. Representation style in the exlibris of Hatice Öz done by computer design techniques to the name of photograph artist Çerkez Karadağ, the elements such as face, hand and cigarette contain a symbolic fiction as pointing and describing the represented person (Slide 2). This type of representation forms set up a structure making the meaning easy and readable by directly compatible and similar relation with its object.

Another representation style in exlibris is symbolic expression. Symbolic expression contains more complex and densely referred meaning. In symbolic expression, signifier encapsulates minimum two meanings. One of them is for the meaning of form and the other one is for the meaning of what it represents. For example, the circle as an astrologic symbol is a geometric symbol at the same time. While this form contains geometric meaning, at the same time it can sign the meaning of sun, the moon, etc. Therefore, symbolic expressions are with multi meanings and at the same extent, based on a slippery ground. While Durand (1998, p.9) expresses the structure of symbole, he emphasizes that a symbol cannot be reduced to a single external reality or object by saying "Symbol signifies at least one thing but cannot be reduced to one thing." Symbolic expressions as Cohen also mentions (1999, p.12), provide a capacity for meaning creation rather than expressing a meaning. Langer (through Arat, 1977, p.41-43), describes that symbols remind, signs notice. Stylistic fiction in symbolic expressions displays such a character that hiding the meaning and calling it indirectly rather than expressing. This structure of symbol with multi signifiers is sourced from its cultural and mythic character. Symbols are generally based on historic and cultural past. Although some symbols are within universal meaning frame, most of the symbols are formed by the most ancient dynamics involving local, national, mythic and holy ones.

Symbolic expression is one of the most applied representation forms in exlibris works. These symbols make mostly mythological, allegorical and narrative fictions applicable by its local, traditional and cultural properties. Exlibris works of Bulgarian artists Julian Jordanov and Hristo Naidenov are good examples for mythological and allegorical symbols (Slides 3, 4). Mythological and allegorical symbols refer culturally oldest myths and stories as well as people, gods, heroes, nature, super natural forces and creation. Mythological symbols are mostly based on some myths and narrations which are readable in the culture they belong to. Therefore, narration is observed mostly in mythological symbols.



Slide 3

Julian Jordanov, exlibris, (Bulgaria)



Slide 4

Hristo Naidenov, exlibris, (Bulgaria)



Slide 5

Chen Yilie, exlibris, (China)

This kind of narrative fictions can be considered as a narration language. Onega, Angel and Landa (2002, p.15), emphasize that narrations are not sequence of events but the representation of it. Thus, narration in visual representations is structured fiction as in written texts. So is symbolic. Narration is indirect, complicated and hard to read since this fiction is made by historical and mythical elements.

Another symbolic narrative fiction that observed in exlibris is formed either by classic narration or by heroes of the narration. For example, German story Bremen Town Musicians written by Jacop and Wilhelm Grimm brothers is used by Chinese artist Chen Yilie in his exlibris made in 2011 (Slide 5). This kind of fables that universalized, gone beyond its own boundary and culture, are often used in symbolically represented expressions. Universalized story expressions (Hansel and Grethel, The Ant and The Grasshopper, The Little Match-Seller, Nasreddin Hodja, Pollyanna, Thumbling, Little Red Riding Hood, etc.) symbolize universal values such as solidarity, righteousness, friendship, labor, love, freedom and goodness, and resulting lessons on the basis of definite episodes or story heroes. On the other hand, symbolic fiction of these classical stories sometimes can show humorous character, too.

Some of universal symbols, containing different meanings depending on originated cultures and holding dense meaning unity, such as apple, pomegranate, grape, owl, lion, tiger, snake, eagle, sun, moon, star and satellites are in the group of mostly used symbols in exlibris. These symbols, named as animal, plant and astrologic symbols, own dense mythological meaning based on the oldest holy texts, myths, sagas and stories. For instance, apple taking place in creation myths as forbidden fruit is ha heavily

used symbol in exlibris works. Apple symbol, in holy texts going back to Adam and Eve, is considered as ban and confidential in today's exlibris art (Slide 6, 7). Similarly, owl as symbol of knowledge and science in western civilizations, and as symbol of death and jinx (Alp, 2009) is one of the symbols can be read depending on culture that used in it (Slide 8, 9).

In some narration samples, it can be talked about location and historic process for a certain time section. In some of exlibris works, these characters are densely used. Since exlibris represents a living person, it also symbolizes the history, geography and culture that he lives in. Every narrative fiction submits the resultant of its own socio-cultural, socio-politic, esthetic and historic component within its production time. Therefore, narration, at the same time displays the character of historic and cultural evidence. This property is very apparent in exlibris works. So that it also contains historic projection of represented person or institute. The exlibris of artist Hasip Pektaş done by computer graphic design technique in 2009, is attractive for getting closer and connecting different and far geography and culture (Slide 10).

In symbolic expressions, the usage of particularly religious, political, institutional symbols and emblems belonging to the exlibris' owner person, family or institution can be considered in a separate symbol category. This kind of symbols involves mostly official limit and meaning. Signs contain closed and institutional character. Exlibris, used as emblem of aristocrat families in the West up to 19th century, can be interpreted in this coverage (Pektaş, <http://www.aed.org.tr>).

The second dimension of exlibris is the representation of personal style and fiction of artist himself/herself. In the other words, in every exlibris



Slide 6
 Iren Lialko, exlibris, (Ukraine)



Slide 7
 Antonin Prsala, exlibris, (Check Republic)



Slide 8
 Elly de Koster, exlibris, (Holland)



Slide 9
 Hasip Pektaş, exlibris, (Turkey)



Slide 11

He Mingfang, exlibris, (China),
 Zou Haiyan, exlibris, (China)



Slide 10

Hasip Pektaş, exlibris, (Turkey)



Slide 12

Gu Qixing, exlibris, (China)

work while artist symbolically representing a person or institute, at the same time he represents his own style as well. Artist's style covers setting up the representation and expressive style of plastic elements as well as artist's local and cultural sensitivity, technical ability and discourse. This multi dimensional representation style of exlibris has a signature character, too. Signature has mostly double dimension. So that, many exlibris can be distinguished by both local genuineness and stylistic individuality of the artist without any signature beneath. For example, human, nature and mythological subjects of Chinese art is stylized within calligraphic expression traditions. Cultural style characters belonging Chinese traditional painting art of Chinese exlibris artists are remarkable. Figuration style of the far east philosophy by traditional motifs on calligraphic properties, landscape, portrait, flower-bird and animal figures are in the character of signature of socio-cultural art style (Slide 11, 12).

This double dimensional representation structure is what makes exlibris art distinguished and difficult as well. While artist leans to the symbolic fiction representing referred person or institute, on the other hand, he has to do it within his own style and technical facilities. Representation covers both the representation of artist's individual style with cultural style of his era and the representation of represented person or institute. Therefore exlibris art reflects the styles of eras by its long background. Pektaş emphasizes that art understanding is reflected in exlibris art, and specifies that exlibris contain Gothic style calligraphy in 15th century, architectural elements around the emblems by the effect of Renaissance in 16th century, religious and



Slide 13

Gustav Klimt, 1901, Judith and Holofernes' Head, Golden paint and oil paint on cloth, 84x42 cm.

erotic decorations by the effect of Barok in 17th century, nature and interior design decorations in 18th century (<http://akademiartisikgsf.blogspot.com.tr/2010/02/ekslibris-kongresi-prof-hasip.html>).

Exlibris art came to life again especially in 19th and 20th century and improved extensively by those centuries' artists as early times. For example, it is possible to see these era's properties characterized by ornamental, decorative and geometric motifs of woman, plant and animal in both paintings and exlibrises of symbolist painter and founder of Vienna Secession Gustav Klimt (Slide 13, 14).

CONCLUSION

As in other forms of visual representation, formal fiction and the meaning signified by the fiction take place within the semantic totality in exlibris, too. Each exlibris provides us a world of familiar form and unfamiliar meaning. Like puzzle solving, while trying to find out the secrets belong to the owner of the exlibris or to the institution, stylistic language form of the work pulls us to different directions, even sometimes the attraction of the form pass over the meaning. Sometimes meaning is so obvious that form stays behind. The process of meaning and form production in exlibris withstands two dimensional language of form established by artist as signifier. One of it is the style and language of artist. The second one is the symbolic representation of a person or institute referred by the artist. Therefore, it can be said that every exlibris has double identity.

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Slide 14

Gustav Klimt, 1900, 102x52 mm, exlibris.

While many exlibris from old and recent times represent particular people or institutions, at the same time they make it possible to read cultural, architectural, social and political situations, events and phenomena of the era that they had been made in. On the other hand, it is possible to find out the styles of historical and geographical similarities and differences within their multi dimensional relations.

Every exlibris can take place within the large symbol family due to its characters of meaning and representation even if its form fiction is either realistically, or abstractly, or symbolically tied to its signified object. Although symbolic expression has different trends of fiction, they mostly withstand to cultural, mythic and traditional essence. Since symbols are based on complicated, multi meaning and ancient cultural inherit, they provide availability for narration. Exlibris is a mediator between the person or institute that it represents and its artist. At the same time, it is a particular art field, distinguishing from other visual arts by its characters making symbolic expression and narration possible.

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