

# MİHRİ: A MIGRANT PAINTER OF MODERN TIMES

March 7 – June 9  
SALT Galata

Portrait painter Mihri (1885-1954) established herself as a prominent figure behind social change of her time by advocating the foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts for Women in the Ottoman Empire at the young age of twenty-nine. However, she remains barely referenced in the art historiography of Turkey since she spent a substantial part of her life abroad. As the artist grew increasingly estranged from her home country and little scholar research has been conducted on her story, certain details relating to “Mihri Rasim” or “Mihri Müşfik” remain shadowed to this day. *Mihri: A Migrant Painter of Modern Times* sheds light on the way of life and identity that Mihri reconstructed in tune with the social and intellectual climate prevalent in the countries where she successively settled. The exhibition also highlights the influence of artists over the modernization processes by offering insights into the cultural environment of the period and the first students of the Academy of Fine Arts for Women.

Mihri was born on December 13, 1885, in the household of Ahmet Rasim Pasha, in Kadıköy, Istanbul. Growing up in a privileged milieu as a member of a notable family, she had the means to start painting at a young age. Encouraged by Sultan Abdülhamit II—whom she had presented one of her early paintings during a family visit to the Imperial Palace of Yıldız—she took classes from Italian court painter Fausto Zonaro for a while before continuing her education in Europe. A heated defender of the women’s right to receive official art training, Mihri soon became the first female director and one of the painting teachers of the Academy of Fine Arts for Women, which was founded in Istanbul in 1914 thanks to her endeavour. Against all bureaucratic constraints, Mihri supported her students—including among others, Müzdan Arel, Güzin Duran, Nazlı Ecevit, and Fahrelnissa Zeid—in experimenting with *en plein air* painting and working with live models, as well as providing visibility to their works. In addition to crossing paths with some of the most eminent politicians, journalists, artists and scientists of her time, she also developed a particularly strong friendship with the “freedom poet” Tevfik Fikret.

Returned to Europe in 1922 and settled in Rome in 1923, Mihri spent time in London, Madrid and Vienna before she permanently moved to New York in 1927. There, alongside her work as a frequently exhibited painter and an educator, she became active in women’s rights organizations like the League of Women Voters and gave public lectures on the emancipation of women, and also on the young

Republic of Turkey. Her works of the period included portraits of important personalities such as the 32nd President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt, inventor Thomas Edison and poet Edwin Markham, as well as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, one of many which has not survived to this day.

***Mihri: A Migrant Painter of Modern Times*** reflects on how these years of personal production and experiences were staged within multiple historical turns, from world wars to economic depressions and from regime changes to technological advances. Bringing together a selection of the artist's works with archival documents including letters from the Rollins College Archives, as well as newspaper and magazine clippings, the exhibition proposes an elaborate account of the life of Mihri, a woman who, rather than being a passive bystander, chose to be an active participant and a true subject of her time.

### **Researchers**

Özlem Gülin Dağođlu and Gizem Tongo

### **Contributors**

Lorans Tanatar Baruh and Farah Aksoy (SALT) with Ahmet Ersoy

### **Translation to English**

Etienne Charrière

### **Design**

Emirhan Altuner and Özgür Şahin (SALT)

### **Acknowledgments**

Nezih Açıba, Zeynep Anamur Perek, Adnan Çoker, Asuman Demirkök, Edhem Eldem, Marlene Elwell, Berna Gençalp, Ahmet Kamil Gören, Frédéric Hitzel, Oya Karamızrak, Garo Kürkman, Erol Makzume, Selin McCallum, Ahmet Meray, Nilay Özlü, Bahattin Öztuncay, Gülru Paksoy, Burcu Pelvanođlu, Yavuz Selek, Ömer Faruk Şerifođlu, Mahinur Tuna, İrvin Cemil Schick, Ayhan Tuđlu, Seza Sinanlar Uslu, Fatma Ürekli, Nur Yalman, Uđur Yeđin

Beyazıt State Library, Cornell Fine Arts Museum - Rollins College, Presidential Archive of Republic of Turkey, Presidential State Archives of Republic of Turkey, Cumhuriyet Newspaper Archive, Aşıyan Museum - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Atatürk Library - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Istanbul Archaeology Museums, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul Şehir University Library, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Photography Workshop, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Olin Library - Rollins College, Pera Museum, Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Topkapı Palace Museum, Turkish Grand National Assembly Library, Yapı Kredi Culture and Arts

## **IMAGES**

**1.**

A portrait by Mihri (date unknown)

Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Collection - Donated by Semra Karamürsel

**2.**

Mihri (front row) with a group of students and teachers of the Academy of Fine Arts for Women in Istanbul, c. 1920

Courtesy Uğur Yeğın

**3.**

Announcement of Mihri's new position as an art teacher at the Rollins College in Florida, US, 1931

Olin Library - Rollins College

### **Press contact**

Zeynep Akan

[zeynep.akan@saltonline.org](mailto:zeynep.akan@saltonline.org)

+90 212 334 22 45