

Iconographic Continuity and Contemporary Reinterpretation of the Style of Baba Nakkaş, Chief Court Painter of the Reign of Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed The Conqueror): Mehmet Koçer's Original Plate Compositions Featuring Gazelle and Crane Figures

Funda Kocer

Abstract

In the fifteenth century, Ottoman tile art was shaped by the blue-and-white decorative style developed by Baba Nakkaş, the chief painter during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. Characterized by *hatâyî*, *rûmî*, rosette, curved branch, and cloud motifs arranged in balanced compositions, this style became the foundation of classical Ottoman tile art. Historical examples of the Baba Nakkaş repertoire, however, do not include animal figures such as gazelles or cranes.

This study examines the plate compositions with gazelle and crane figures created by contemporary tile artist Mehmet Koçer in the Baba Nakkaş style from art historical, stylistic, and iconographic perspectives. It aims to identify the artist's original contributions while remaining within the framework of the traditional style. The research is limited to Koçer's plate designs featuring these two figures.

A qualitative research method was employed. Data were collected through a literature review, artwork analysis, and a semi-structured interview with the artist. The works were comparatively evaluated in terms of motif repertoire, composition, line quality, color scheme, and iconographic characteristics.

The findings reveal that Koçer preserves the characteristic motifs, compositional balance, and aesthetic principles of the Baba Nakkaş tradition while introducing gazelle and crane figures as central elements, thereby expanding its iconographic vocabulary. The gazelle symbolizes elegance, serenity, and inner peace, whereas the crane represents news, journey, loyalty, and spiritual communication. Furthermore, the artist enriches the traditional blue-and-white palette with magenta and turquoise tones, strengthening light–shadow effects and integrating the figures harmoniously into the classical decorative system. The study demonstrates that the Baba Nakkaş style can sustain both stylistic continuity and iconographic innovation through contemporary artistic interpretation.

Keywords

Baba Nakkaş, Mehmet Koçer, Ottoman tile art, gazelle, crane, iconography, plate composition.

Introduction

Ottoman tile art, as one of the most important areas of expression of the Turkish-Islamic decorative tradition, has constantly developed technically, aesthetically and iconographically for centuries. The new understanding of decoration developed in the palace embroidery house, especially in the Fifteenth century, played a decisive role in the formation of the classical style of Ottoman art. In this process, Baba Nakkaş, who was accepted as the chief

painter of the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, is important not only as a pattern designer, but also as one of the artists who systematized the aesthetic principles of Ottoman decoration art. The blue-white composition understanding he developed, the composition setup that brought together the *hatâyî* and *rûmî* motifs in a unique order, and the balanced surface organization became one of the basic formal references of later Ottoman tile art.



Although there are many studies on the historical development, motif repertoire and technical features of Baba Nakkaş style in the art history literature, research examining how this style has been reinterpreted by contemporary artists is very limited. In particular, the issue of preserving the traditional Ottoman decoration system and developing it with new iconographic elements has not been adequately discussed in the literature. This situation makes it necessary to evaluate the transformation of traditional arts in today's understanding of art.

Mehmet Koçer, one of the important representatives of contemporary tile art, draws attention with his long-standing research and practices on the Baba Nakkaş style. While preserving the technical and aesthetic features of the classical style, the artist added a new iconographic dimension to the traditional repertoire by including the gazelle figure, which is not included in historical examples, in his compositions. Thus, while the formal continuity of the historical style was preserved, an original language of expression suitable for the contemporary understanding of art was developed. The main purpose of this research is to examine Mehmet Koçer's gazelle figure plate compositions in the style of Baba Nakkaş in the context of art history and iconography and to reveal the artist's original contribution to the traditional style.

Rather than reconsidering the historical development of Baba Nakkaş's style, the study aims to reveal how the style in question is reproduced by a contemporary artist and enriched with new iconographic elements. In this respect, it is considered that the research will make original contributions to the literature on stylistic continuity, iconographic transformation and contemporary interpretation processes in traditional Turkish tile art.

To establish the visual analysis framework, the formal and stylistic characteristics of the Baba Nakkaş style were first identified through the relevant art historical literature. Particular attention was given to the motif repertoire, compositional organization, line rhythm and character, color use, and the relationship between figurative and ornamental elements that characterize the style. These dimensions were then used as the primary analytical categories for examining Mehmet Koçer's plate compositions. The visual analysis focused on how the artist maintains the characteristic formal principles of the Baba Nakkaş style while introducing gazelle and crane figures that are absent from its historical repertoire. In addition to the formal examination of the artworks, the iconographic meanings of the animal figures and their relationship with the surrounding decorative elements were considered. The findings obtained through the artwork analysis were also

evaluated in conjunction with the information obtained from the semi-structured interview with the artist, particularly regarding the aesthetic and symbolic intentions underlying the selection and placement of the figures. Accordingly, the visual analysis framework was constructed as a comparative framework integrating stylistic, formal, chromatic, compositional, and iconographic dimensions, enabling the continuity and contemporary reinterpretation of the Baba Nakkaş style to be examined systematically.

In the works examined within the scope of the research, it was determined that Mehmet Koçer largely preserved his classical composition order, line rhythm, motif repertoire and blue-white color understanding. However, the artist placed gazelle and crane figures at the center of the composition, creating a new iconographic layer that was not present in the historical repertoire. This situation brings together the formal continuity of the traditional style and the original interpretation of the contemporary art understanding in the same composition.

Especially the gazelle figure constitutes one of the most striking findings of the study. The gazelle, which is associated with concepts such as holiness, elegance, guidance and abundance in Turkish cultural history, is not directly used as a narrative or mythological element in Koçer's works. Instead, the figure is reconstructed as an aesthetic component to adapt to the linear rhythm and surface organization of Baba Nakkaş's style. Thus, a balanced relationship is established between iconographic meaning and formal organization. In addition to the gazelle figure, the plate compositions featuring the crane bird are quite striking. In the style of Baba Nakkaş, it is seen in *hatâyî*, *penç*, leaf, cypress motifs, as well as *rûmî*, knot, cloud, geometric motifs, *zencirek* and writing motifs. However, the gazelle and crane figures included in the composition, especially by Mehmet Koçer, are discussed in detail. The aforementioned motifs are thought to be mentioned only as names in order to preserve the integrity of the subject.

Baba Nakkaş and His Artistic Identity

Baba Nakkaş, who is stated to be of Uzbek origin, came to Istanbul during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed and was appointed as the head of the palace mural house thanks to his artistic background, design power and aesthetic understanding. Sources of the period show that Fatih Sultan Mehmed consulted his views on art-related issues and that Baba Nakkaş was in the sultan's close circle. It is also

known that he maintained his relationship with the palace during the reign of Bayezid II (Özçelik, 2020, p. 28).

As the chief painter of the palace mural house organized within the Topkapı Palace, Baba Nakkaş not only managed the production activities, but was also influential in determining the aesthetic orientations of Ottoman palace art. In the sources, it is stated that Fatih Sultan Mehmed, who was interested in illumination, miniature, bookbinding, calligraphy and other decorative arts, was the author and teacher. The artist, who worked as the chief muralist in the palace workshop, directed the design activities carried out in different fields of art such as tile decorations, book arts, illumination, bookbinding, writing decoration, wall paintings and metal decorations, and played a decisive role in shaping the understanding of art of the workshop where many artists took part (Ünver, 1958, p. 8).

It is understood from the archive records that Kutlubey Village near Çatalca was given to him by Fatih Sultan Mehmed in 1465-1466, that he had a mosque built here and dedicated it to the village (Ünver, 1954: 17). The drawing album, which is kept in the Istanbul University Library, includes design drawings of square, rectangular and crenellated border tiles attributed to Baba Nakkaş, the chief painter of Mehmed the Conqueror. In Evliya Çelebi's Travel Book, Baba Nakkaş is introduced as a muralist of Uzbek origin and refers to him as the artist who prepared the hand-drawn decorations of the palace buildings in Istanbul during the reign of Bayezid II. These patterns in the Istanbul University Library reveal that Baba Nakkaş's design approach reflected the Ottoman palace aesthetics and played a decisive role in the formation of the classical decoration repertoire that developed at the end of the Fifteenth century (Necipoğlu, 1990, p. 138).

The patterns prepared by Baba Nakkaş in the palace tile workshops operating under the Ehl-i Hiref organization were applied by the master tile makers of the period. It is understood from the records of Ehl-i Hiref from 1526 that tile production was carried out in workshops under the management of Master Habib from Tabriz. The prepared patterns were transferred to the tile surface, glazed and fired and completed for use in the palace. In the same records, it is stated that Ali was the artist who received the highest salary in Master Habib's workshop. In the records of 1527, it is seen that Ali took the responsibility of the workshop instead of Master Habib from Tabriz. This suggests that Habib may have died around these dates. The account books belonging to the years 1527-1528 show that the tile workshop in Istanbul was renovated. Although the exact location of the workshop is not known, in a document dated 1568-1569 about the Kırkçeşme waterways, it is stated that

there was a kâşihâne fed by an old water line in Tekfur Palace (Necipoğlu, 1990, p. 139).

A signed work belonging to Baba Nakkaş has not survived to the present day. The main reason for this is that the understanding of collective production was adopted in Ottoman palace art rather than the identity of individual artists. In the Ehl-i Hiref organization operating within the palace, production stages such as pattern preparation, drawing, dyeing and application were carried out by different artisans. Baba Nakkaş, on the other hand, is thought to be responsible for the creation of the design, the provision of artistic control, and the general coordination of the production (Ünver, 1954, p. 22).

The importance of Baba Nakkaş in the history of Ottoman art stems not only from the fact that he managed the palace mural house, but also from the fact that he developed an original design language that laid the foundations of classical Ottoman decorative art by synthesizing the Timurid-Turkmen decoration tradition with the Ottoman aesthetic understanding in the second half of the Fifteenth century. In this understanding of decoration, which is called the "Baba Nakkaş Style" by the researchers, there are clear traces of the Fifteenth century Timurid art with the limited effects of Chinese art. However, these effects were not directly imitated; they were reinterpreted in line with the aesthetic understanding of the Ottoman palace and transformed into a unique style. This design language, which was shaped by the arrangement of Rûmî and hatâyî motifs in a new composition approach, was not limited to tile art, but was also effective in illumination, bookbinding, hand-drawn work and other decorative arts; it continued to exist as the basic style of Ottoman decorative art until the end of the sixteenth century. Later, the style of Baba Nakkaş, which paved the way for the development of Şahkulu's saz style and Kara Memi's naturalistic style, is accepted as one of the basic stages in the formation of classical Ottoman decorative art (Necipoğlu, 1990, p. 139).

Characteristics of Baba Nakkaş Style

The style of Baba Nakkaş is one of the most important decoration concepts that shaped the Ottoman tile art from the last quarter of the Fifteenth century to the first years of the Sixteenth century. The effects of the style emerged in the last years of the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, continued its development during the reigns of Bayezid II (1481-1512) and Selim I (1512-1520), and continued its influence until the first years of Sultan Suleiman the Great. This style, which was dominant in Ottoman palace art between approximately 1470 and 1520, played an important

role in the formation of the basic formal character of classical Ottoman decorative art.

The cultural relations established by the Ottoman Empire with Iranian, Azerbaijani and Timurid art circles were effective in the emergence of the style. The understanding of decoration, especially seen in Timurid and Ottoman metal art, was reinterpreted in the palace mural shop and transferred to different fields such as tile, illumination and book arts. In addition, Chinese blue-white porcelains, which attracted great attention in the Fifteenth century, were also influential on Ottoman artists, but these effects were reinterpreted within the Ottoman aesthetic understanding instead of being directly imitated (Denny, 2004, p. 59).

From a technical point of view, quartz-based fritted mud was used in the style of Baba Nakkaş. Thanks to this artificial dough, which was developed due to the absence of kaolin in the Islamic world, whiter, thinner and harder bodies were obtained; thus, it became possible to produce high-quality ceramics resembling porcelain (Dönmez, 2000, p. 11). The application of transparent glaze and different shades of cobalt blue are also among the basic elements that make up the technical character of the style.

The motif repertoire of the Baba Nakkaş style mainly consists of *hatâyî*, *rûmî*, *penç*, *bud*, leaf, curved branch and Chinese cloud motifs. These motifs are designed to create a volume effect, unlike previous periods. A three-dimensional appearance was obtained by curling the leaf tips inward and animating them with parallel lines. The plastic effect, especially seen in the *hatâyî* and *penç* motifs, is one of the distinguishing features of the style (Dönmez, 2000; Raby, 1989).

In color understanding, cobalt blue and white are the basic elements. During the reign of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, the white leaving technique was applied in the compositions dominated by dark cobalt blue, while during the reign of Bayezid II, it is seen that lighter blue tones were preferred. The use of turquoise color from the beginning of the Sixteenth century constituted the first stages of the transition to the understanding of multicolored decoration in Ottoman tile art (Atasoy and Raby, 1989; Öney and Çobanlı, 2007).

In terms of composition, the style draws attention with its arabesque arrangements that require intensive planning. The motifs are distributed in a balanced rhythm along the surface, connected to each other by means of curved branches, and a holistic decoration approach is created without leaving any gaps. The shading of arabesque leaves, the inward curvature of flower petals and their support with thin *tahrir* lines created a distinct volume and depth effect in

the compositions. These features made the Baba Nakkaş style one of the most mature decoration understandings of early Ottoman tile art.

From the second quarter of the Sixteenth century, the style of Baba Nakkaş began to be replaced by the *saz yolu* style developed by Şahkulu and later by Karamemi's naturalistic understanding of flowers. However, the motif repertoire consisting of *hatâyî*, *rûmî*, *penç* and curved branches continued to be used in the Ottoman decorative art, thus the style of Baba Nakkaş continued to be one of the main sources of the art understandings of the later period (Öney and Çobanlı, 2007, p. 292).



a. sixteenth century Baba Nakkaş style footed bowl (www.iznikciniveseramikleri.com)

b. sixteenth century Baba Nakkaş style cube (www.britishmuseum.org)

c. sixteenth century Baba Nakkaş style footed basin (www.vam.ac.uk)

d. sixteenth century Baba Nakkaş style bowl (www.metmuseum.org)

e. sixteenth century Baba Nakkaş style mosque lamp (www.britishmuseum.org)

Mehmet Koçer's Life and Artist Identity

Mehmet Koçer, one of the important representatives of contemporary Turkish tile art, is among the artists who reinterpret the technical and aesthetic heritage of traditional Ottoman tile art in line with today's understanding of art. Mehmet Koçer was born on September 2, 1951 in the Ağ district of Elazığ. He completed his primary education at Ağ Abdullah Lütü Primary School, his secondary education at Ağ Secondary School, and his high school education at Tunceli Male Teacher Training School and graduated in 1969 (Koçer, 2026).

After his graduation, he started to work as a teacher at Esenköy Primary School in Mut district of Mersin in the same year, and after completing his military service as a private teacher at Ankara Mamak Communication School, he continued to work as a teacher in Altıntaş district of Kütahya. Koçer, who turned to art education during his years as a teacher, started studying at Ankara Gazi Education Institute, Department of Painting in 1974 (Koçer, 2026).

One of the most important turning points in Koçer's art life was his interest in tile art with the guidance of Güner Özkan, who taught modeling lessons. In line with Özkan's suggestion, he conducted research on Kütahya tile making, made examinations in workshops, and successfully completed his thesis in this field in 1977 (Koçer, 2026).

After being appointed as an art teacher at Kütahya Imam Hatip High School in 1977, he received motif, composition and pattern training on classical Turkish decorative art from İnci Ayan Birol and Çiçek Derman. This education was decisive in the artist's systematic learning of the classical Ottoman decoration understanding and formed the basis of his works in the style of Baba Nakkaş, which he would develop in the following years (Koçer, 2026).

Koçer, who started to work as a production manager and designer at Altın Çini ve Seramik Sanayi, which was established in 1982, carried out important studies for the reinterpretation of traditional tile art. He has worked as a designer in many national and international projects such as Ankara Hamdi Akseki Mosque, Ankara Kocatepe Mosque, restoration of Selimiye Mosque portico tiles, Jordanian and Omani palaces, Hatay Nebatat Museum, Eskişehir Turkish World Science Culture and Art Center and Amasya Princes Museum.

Koçer, who also made significant contributions in the academic field, taught tiles and ceramics at Gazi University Faculty of Vocational Education between 1985-1988, was appointed as a lecturer to Dumlupınar University Kütahya Vocational School Tile Processing Program in 1989 and retired in 2004. He also took part in the establishment of the Tile-Ceramics Department of Kütahya Industrial Vocational High School and contributed to the preparation of the Ministry of National Education's primary education programs in the field of tile-ceramics (Koçer, 2026). He is married and has three children.

Mehmet Koçer's Contemporary Interpretation of Baba Nakkaş Style

At the center of Koçer's understanding of art is the correct learning of traditional styles and their development with

original interpretations without imitation. According to the artist, the defining quality of an artist is that he can create a unique language of expression over time while making use of different styles. In line with this understanding, he examined the style of Baba Nakkaş in detail and reinterpreted the characteristic motifs of this style with a contemporary design approach.

Koçer's works especially focus on Fifteenth century Ottoman blue-white tiles. He conducted important research on the revival of classical blue-and-white production in Kütahya. He carried out experimental studies on the paint recipes, brush techniques and dough properties of the period. In this process, he succeeded in re-applying the classical production approach by examining not only the pattern repertoire but also the materials, paints and technical features used (Koçer, 2026).

The artist stated that tile art is not just about pattern knowledge. He emphasizes that dough, glaze, pigment, firing technology and brush dominance should be evaluated together. According to the artist, a successful tile production emerges as a result of the integration of material knowledge and aesthetic understanding. For this reason, he has carried out applied studies on mud recipes, porosity, dye behavior and firing properties for many years.

In Koçer's understanding of art, the style of Baba Nakkaş does not only mean copying historical patterns. The artist developed new leaf, bud and penç designs while preserving the basic character of the classical style; thus, he integrated traditional aesthetic principles with contemporary design understanding. In this respect, his works are a continuation of the classical style and have original composition features. According to the artist, in order to produce successful works in the style of Baba Nakkaş, it is necessary to have a strong pattern setup, advanced brush command and classical decoration rules, as well as motif knowledge. The rhythm of the lines, the balance between the motifs, and the integrity of the composition are among the main determinants of this style (Koçer, 2026).

Koçer evaluates tile art in three basic dimensions: craft, art and industrial production. According to him, these three fields are not alternatives to each other, but complementary. However, for the sustainability of traditional tile art, it is of great importance to preserve aesthetic values, develop original designs and create the artist's individual style.

The works of Mehmet Koçer, who has taken part in many national and international exhibitions, symposiums and competitions, are today in museums, public buildings and private collections in various countries as well as in Turkey. In particular, his research and practices on the style of Baba

Nakkaş have made significant contributions to the reinterpretation of classical Ottoman tile art today; therefore, he has been evaluated among the leading representatives of contemporary Turkish tile art (Koçer, 2026).

Formal Innovations Brought by Mehmet Koçer to the Baba Nakkaş Style

The motif repertoire of the Baba Nakkaş style mainly consists of *hatâyî*, *penç*, *bud*, leaf, curved branch, Chinese cloud, *rûmî*, middle vineyard, hilly, writing, knot motifs. However, unlike classical examples, these motifs were interpreted with certain formal features and formed the distinctive identity of the style.

In *Hatâyî* motifs, flowers have gained a full voluminous appearance. The leaves curl inward and form a gnarled structure. While the outer contours exhibit an ovate form, the small leaves on the inside give depth to the flower (Dönmez, 2000, p. 15). The *penç* motifs, on the other hand, were interpreted in three dimensions to create a light-shadow effect by moving away from the flat surface understanding. The inward-curving structure of the leaves and the understanding of arrangement in the form of an arc are among the characteristic features of Baba Nakkaş's style (Dönmez, 2000, p. 17).

The leaf motifs are designed in a thin, elegant and dagger-tipped way. The veins are processed in drop form and the movement effect is strengthened. The curved branches connecting the motifs are drawn very thinly and arranged in a way to provide a rhythmic flow throughout the composition (Turan Bakır, 1993, p. 250). Its motifs were designed on a small scale and were made of curved leaves that fold inward as in *hatâyî*s.

Rûmî motifs are one of the most characteristic decoration elements of the style. These motifs, which are considered to be of vegetative development as well as of animal origin, are processed in a full, round and voluminous manner in the style of Baba Nakkaş; shaded to create a three-dimensional effect. The middle tie and hilly motifs used with the *Rûmî* motifs were also evaluated as binding elements that ensured the continuity of the composition in line with the same plastic understanding (Keskiner, 1995, p. 10).

In the blue-white ceramics of the Bayezid II period, it is seen that two important decoration elements were added to the motif repertoire of the Baba Nakkaş style. The first of these is the knot motifs created with different knitting patterns. These motifs, consisting of interlocking stripes, create a weaving effect on the surface, giving the composition both movement and a three-dimensional

appearance. The second important innovation is the inclusion of cloud strips, which were widely used in Akkoyunlu Turkmen art in Western Iran and Eastern Anatolia in the last quarter of the Fifteenth century, in the Ottoman decoration repertoire. This motif, which was adopted in the palace mural shop during the reign of Sultan Bayezid II, soon became one of the distinguishing elements of the Baba Nakkaş style. The use of dark-toned cobalt blue with intense and thick brush applications in the patterns of this period increased the volumetric effect of the motifs, providing a strong plastic effect and a distinct texture understanding on the surface (Raby, 1989, p. 94)

Mehmet Koçer has developed new interpretations in the line rhythm, leaf organization and volume understanding of the motifs, while preserving the formal character of the *hatâyî* and *penç* motifs, which constitute the basic motif repertoire of the Baba Nakkaş style. The artist designed new variations of *hatâyî* and *penç* without disturbing the aesthetic integrity of the classical style; thus, he brought original motif suggestions to the historical repertoire.

Animal Iconography Brought by Mehmet Koçer to the Baba Nakkaş Style

When the designs realized by Mehmet Koçer in the style of Baba Nakkaş are examined, it is seen that the artist did not only adopt a repetitive understanding of the Fifteenth century Ottoman mural tradition, but on the contrary, he reinterpreted this historical style within the contemporary aesthetic understanding. While Koçer largely preserves the floral repertoire consisting of flowing line order, balanced composition, *rûmî* and *hatâyî* motifs, curved branches, *penç* motifs and cypresses, which are characteristic features of Baba Nakkaş's style, he added a new iconographic dimension to the style by placing figures such as deer and cranes, which are not included in classical examples, at the center of the composition.

There is no figurative expression in the classical Baba Nakkaş compositions. The compositions are based on the floral decoration system and the effect of movement is provided by the rhythmic distribution of motifs and linear flow. Mehmet Koçer, on the other hand, placed the animal figures, which he handled with a naturalistic approach, in the vegetal weave without disturbing this traditional order. Thus, he created an organic integrity between the figure and the decoration, not a hierarchical opposition.

In the artist's works, the figure of an animal is not only a decorative element that adorns the composition. On the contrary, the visual center of gravity of the whole composition is shaped around the animal figure. The *rûmî*, *hatâyî* and curved branches that develop around the figure

constantly direct the viewer's gaze to the animal in the center. Thus, while the rhythmic surface understanding in traditional Ottoman decorative art is preserved, figurative expression becomes a new focal point.

The Symbolic Meaning of the Gazelle (Deer) Figure in Turkish Culture and the Iconographic Interpretation Mehmet Koçer's Baba Nakkaş Style

In Turkish cultural history, the deer (gazelle) has been one of the most important animal figures associated with concepts such as holiness, protection, fertility, rebirth and divine guidance since the earliest times. In the pre-Islamic Turkish belief system, the deer, which was evaluated together with the tree of life, mountain, water and sky cult, was accepted not only as a game animal, but also as a mythological being that mediated between man and the holy world. Especially in the Scythian-Siberian cultural environment, the deer, together with the tree of life, was seen as the symbol of the creative feminine principle and was associated with the beginning, continuity and renewal of the cosmic order. For this reason, deer has been considered as one of the sacred animals representing the cycle of life and death (Dalkesen, 2015, p. 59).

In Central Asian Turkish communities, the deer cult was not limited to mythological narratives, but also gained an important place in state ideology and social memory. In Göktürk narratives transmitted through Chinese sources, as well as in the creation narratives of the Altai and Yakut Turks and in Hun and Mongolian legends, the deer appears as a sacred being that guides, protects, and ensures the continuation of the lineage. It is known that in the narratives about the European Huns, the female deer guided the way to reach new homelands, and in Mongolian traditions, it was accepted as one of the founding elements of the lineage together with the blue wolf (Ögel, 2003, p.274)

In the Turkish epic tradition, the deer stands out as a symbol of wisdom and guidance. In the narratives of Oğuz Kağan and Ergenekon, it is sometimes depicted as the guide who leads the wolf to new homelands, and sometimes as the symbol of beauty, elegance and delicacy. In this respect, the deer is not merely a mythological figure; it has acquired the quality of a symbolic entity that guides, protects, and brings people to the truth in Turkish cultural memory (Gömeç, 2025).

This symbolic continuity did not completely disappear after the adoption of Islam; it continued to live by gaining new layers of meaning in Sufi culture. In Anatolia, the legends of Geyikli Baba are one of the examples that most strongly reflect the deer-saint relationship. The belief that the shaman established a relationship with the spirit world by

entering the deer frost in the pre-Islamic period was replaced by the spiritual relationship established by the saints with the deer in Anatolian Sufism. Thus, although the function changed, the deer preserved its symbolic identity as an intermediary between the sacred world and human beings (Çoruhlu, 2002, p.134).

As a matter of fact, the intense use of the deer figure in rock paintings, kurgan finds, Pazyryk Carpet, belt buckles, horse harnesses and various architectural works in a wide geography extending from Central Asia to Anatolia clearly reveals the continuity of this symbol in Turkish art (Alsan and Akın, 2020, p.220). This shows that the deer is not only an aesthetic decoration element, but also an important iconographic motif that carries cultural memory.

Mehmet Koçer's gazelle-shaped plate compositions developed in the style of Baba Nakkaş can also be considered as a contemporary interpretation of this historical and cultural continuity. The gazelle figure, which is not included in the classical Baba Nakkaş repertoire, was included in the composition by the artist by preserving the basic aesthetic principles of the historical style. Thus, rather than changing the motif repertoire of the historical style, Koçer gave it a new iconographic layer.

In the artist's works, the gazelle is positioned at the center of the composition; its surroundings are surrounded by *hatâyî*, *rûmî*, *penç*, curved branches, cypress trees and other classical Baba Nakkaş decoration elements. Thanks to this arrangement, the figure and the decoration are perceived not as two independent elements, but as integrated parts of the same compositional understanding. While the anatomical reality of the figure is preserved, the decoration system around it completely maintains the rhythmic line character of the Baba Nakkaş style. Thus, a balanced aesthetic integrity was created between the naturalistic figure and the stylized decoration.

In the semi-structured interview with the artist, it is understood that the choice of the gazelle figure was not only an iconographic choice, but also based on aesthetic and psychological reasons. According to Koçer, the basic character of Baba Nakkaş's style consists of flowing curved branches instead of hard breaks, balanced rhythm and linear movements that evoke a sense of peace in the viewer. For this reason, the figure to be included in the composition must have the same aesthetic language. The artist states that the gazelle's long and elegant anatomy and fluid movements create a natural harmony with this understanding; and that the soft rhythm of its gait, posture, and even its movement in flight evokes a sense of serenity, peace, and inner balance in the viewer (Koçer, personal interview, 2026).

In this direction, Koçer deliberately stayed away from animal figures that evoke brutality, aggression and tension; instead, he preferred the gazelle, which represents innocence, elegance and tranquility. Therefore, the artist's gazelle figure does not only reproduce a historical symbol; The linear rhythm of Baba Nakkaş's style becomes a contemporary interpretation that aims to create a sense of peace and balance in the audience by integrating with his understanding of composition and aesthetic philosophy.

The Symbolic Meaning of the Crane Figure in Turkish Culture and the Iconographic Interpretation Mehmet Koçer's Baba Nakkaş Style

The crane is one of the bird figures with the strongest symbolic meanings in Turkish cultural history. The crane, which is considered sacred in the Central Asian Turkish belief system. It has been associated with loyalty, abundance, protectiveness and the continuity of lineage. In the beliefs of the Altai and Yakut Turks, the crane is among the sacred beings. It is considered a bird that symbolizes migration, rebirth and continuity of life. It was considered forbidden to kill the crane, especially because of its devotion to its mate, and it was seen as one of the guardian spirits of the tribes (Temizkan, 2014, p. 166).

After the adoption of Islam, the crane figure gained new layers of meaning within the Sufi tradition. In the legends of Ahmed Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş Veli, the motif of "entering the crane frost" appears as one of the important narratives symbolizing the spiritual journeys of the holy people. In the Alevi-Bektashi tradition, the crane is associated with Hz. Ali and Karbala. It has been regarded as a sacred messenger that brings news, expresses longing and provides spiritual communication. In Anatolian folk culture, the crane has retained its symbolic significance as a bird representing values such as peace, abundance, loyalty, friendship, freedom and hope (Temizkan, 2014; Kuzu, 2018; Özçelik, 2023). For this reason, the crane has been one of the figures used in miniature, illumination, weaving, stone and tile art throughout history with symbolic meaning.

In the compositions developed by Mehmet Koçer in the style of Baba Nakkaş, the crane figure is among the original iconographic elements that are not found in the historical repertoire. The artist interpreted the figure in accordance with the characteristic line rhythm of the Baba Nakkaş style, integrating its long neck, slender legs, and graceful body movements with the curved branches and floral decoration system of the composition. Thus, the crane became not only an aesthetic figure that gives movement to the composition, but also a formal element that supports the visual rhythm of the historical style.

In the interview with the artist, it is understood that the crane figure was chosen consciously. According to Koçer, the crane represents the sacred messenger who brings news from Karbala in Turkish culture, especially in the Bektashi tradition. For this reason, the crane figure in the works is not merely a naturalistic depiction of a bird; it should also be considered an iconographic element symbolizing the concepts of news, longing, journey, spiritual devotion and inner search (Koçer, Personal Interview, 2026).

In this respect, Koçer's crane figure preserves the traditional aesthetic structure and gives it a new layer of symbolic expression, rather than changing the historical motif repertoire of Baba Nakkaş style. Thus, the artist establishes an iconographic continuity between tradition and contemporary art by reinterpreting the crane in harmony with the formal language of the historical style, as in the gazelle figure.

The Color Understanding of Baba Nakkaş Style and Mehmet Koçer's Contemporary Color Interpretation

The color understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style reflects the characteristic features of the Fifteenth century Ottoman blue-white ceramics. The basic color palette of the style is cobalt blue and white. The understanding of decoration is based on the strong contrast created by these two colors. During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, the white leaving technique came to the fore in applications dominated by dark cobalt blue, while during the reign of Bayezid II, it is seen that lighter blue tones were preferred. From the beginning of the Sixteenth century, the transition to the understanding of multicolored composition began with the inclusion of turquoise color in the decoration repertoire, and this development was one of the important stages that paved the way for the formation of the later saz yolu style (Atasoy and Raby, 1989; Öney and Çobanlı, 2007).

In his early applications of the Baba Nakkaş style, Mehmet Koçer adopted the traditional blue-white palette by adhering to the color understanding of historical examples. However, it is seen that the artist reconsiders this classical understanding of color with a contemporary interpretation in his gazelle iconography plate compositions. Especially the magenta tones used in the figures should be considered not only as a different color choice, but also as a plastic expression tool that strengthens the light-shadow effect and adds volume to the figures. Thus, gazelle figures are separated from the two-dimensional decoration surface, gain a stronger visual effect, and become a focal element in the composition.

In addition to the magenta color, turquoise tones used in water surfaces, cloud motifs and some auxiliary decoration elements add color variety, depth and movement to the compositions. These color transitions support the linear rhythm of Baba Nakkaş's style and strengthen the holistic aesthetic structure of the composition. The artist's color preferences can be considered as a result of his effort to reinterpret the characteristic blue-white aesthetic understanding of the historical style in line with the contemporary understanding of art, rather than completely abandoning it. Koçer's color preferences are also an important part of this aesthetic approach. The artist explains the reason why he especially prefers the color magenta with the feeling of eternity, peace and spiritual space desired to be reached by the purple tones created by the distant mountains on the horizon. According to him, magenta is not just a color, but has a psychological and symbolic value that guides people to inner serenity. For this reason, the magenta tones used in gazelle figures not only add volume by creating a light-shadow effect; they also determine the spiritual atmosphere of the composition.

As a result, Mehmet Koçer has both strengthened the plastic effect and created a unique color language without damaging the visual identity of the historical style by incorporating magenta and turquoise tones into the composition in a controlled manner while preserving the traditional color system of the Baba Nakkaş style. This approach reveals that the artist reinterprets the traditional style within the contemporary aesthetic understanding rather than imitating it.

The Compositional Understanding of Baba Nakkaş Style and Mehmet Koçer's Plate Compositions

The understanding of composition in the style of Baba Nakkaş is based on the evaluation of the surface in a balanced, rhythmic and holistic order. Especially in plate forms, the nested belt system consisting of the center, body and border was adopted. The decoration surface is enriched with floral and geometric motifs without leaving any empty space. During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, the compositions were characterized by intense decoration and multi-band arrangements, while during the reign of Bayezid II, it is seen that the central area was expanded, some belts were simplified and the visual balance in the composition was emphasized. At the beginning of the Sixteenth century, it is understood that vertically banded composition schemes resembling a fan slice started to develop (Dönmez, 2000, p. 25).

In the Baba Nakkaş style, three basic composition orders were applied: free, symmetrical and ulama. In free

compositions, motifs develop from a single starting point and spread to the surface in a spiral rhythm, while symmetrical compositions are based on axial balance. In ulama compositions, the principle of continuity based on the repetition of the pattern unit was adopted. A continuous decoration system was created on the surface with one-way, two-way and central arrangements (Turan Bakır, 1993, p. 267; Birol, 2014, p. 113)

When Mehmet Koçer's plate compositions in the style of Baba Nakkaş are examined, it is seen that the artist preserves the basic compositional principles of the historical style to a large extent. The center, body and border arrangement were preserved as in classical examples. Hatâyî, rûmî, penç, curved branch, stylized cypress, dagger leaves, cloud and other decoration elements are designed in accordance with the traditional settlement approach. Thus, the rhythmic flow of the composition, the intensity of decoration and the surface organization continue the basic character of Baba Nakkaş's aesthetics.

The artist's original contribution is revealed in the gazelle figures he places at the center of the composition. These figures, which are not included in the historical Baba Nakkaş repertoire, have been made the focal point of the composition and are designed to be compatible with the surrounding floral decoration system in terms of line character, proportion, rhythm and color. Thus, the gazelle figure did not remain a foreign element in the composition, but became a natural component of the existing decoration system.

In Koçer's plate compositions, gazelle figures are not handled with a uniform depiction approach. Different composition setups were created with the arrangements of the double gazelle and crane standing up, walking, resting, depicted with their offspring and placed opposite each other. This diversity is not just a practice to increase the number of figures, but reflects a conscious compositional approach that aims to create a different narrative language and visual balance on each plate.

As a result, while Mehmet Koçer preserved the compositional system and decoration organization of the Baba Nakkaş style, he added a new narrative dimension to the style by placing the iconography of gazelle and crane, which are not in the historical repertoire, at the center of this system. Thus, the artist made a unique contribution to the continuity of Baba Nakkaş's style by re-evaluating traditional composition principles with a contemporary interpretation.

Formal and Iconographic Analysis of Mehmet Koçer's Gazelle Figure Plate Compositions



Catalog no:1. Gazelle and Crane Figure Plate Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2026

Artifact analysis

The composition continues the circular arrangement characteristic of the Baba Nakkaş style. It consists of three main parts: the surface, center, and border. Small hatâyî and penç motifs placed on thin curved branches on the border surround the composition by creating a rhythmic repetition. In the central area, the free-growing curved branches, dagger leaves seen from the back included in the style by the artist, large hatâyî motifs, penç motifs, rûmî motifs and stylized cypress tree reflect the characteristic features of the classical Baba Nakkaş style. Although they have a voluminous and layered structure as in classical examples, the artist has made them look more plastic with the light-shadow effect.

The focal point of the composition is the gazelle positioned close to the central axis and the crane figure in the lower right section. The figures are designed as a natural part of the rhythmic system formed by the curved branches. Thus, a holistic compositional balance was established between figure and decoration. The dominant color in the composition is magenta. Instead of directly repeating the traditional blue-and-white understanding of Baba Nakkaş's style, the artist created the effect of volume and depth in the figures by using magenta tones. The turquoise tones used on the water surface and in the details of the crane figure add

vitality to the composition and strengthen the color balance. Color transitions are created with soft tones, away from harsh contrasts. Thus, a calm and peaceful atmosphere was created throughout the work.

While largely preserving the formal features of the Baba Nakkaş style, the work acquires a unique character through the inclusion of gazelle and crane figures, as well as dagger leaves, which are not found in the historical repertoire, in the composition without disturbing the aesthetic integrity. Instead of imitating the historical style, Mehmet Koçer reproduced its linear rhythm, motif system, and compositional principles through a contemporary iconographic interpretation; thus, he successfully established continuity between tradition and innovation.



Catalog No: 2. Reciprocal Gazelle Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2026

Artifact analysis

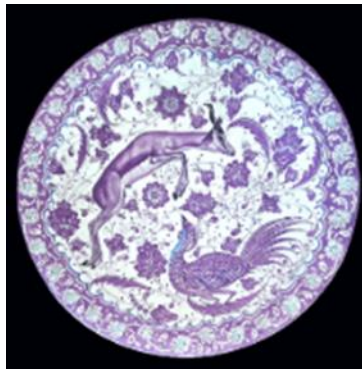
In this composition, Mehmet Koçer placed two gazelle figures facing each other in the center of the composition, while preserving the characteristic decoration understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style. The depiction of the figures with their heads bowed and their horns touching each other constitutes the main focus of the composition. Thus, a figurative expression that is not seen in the classical Baba Nakkaş style has been reinterpreted in an integrated manner with the historical decoration system.

The composition is based on an arabesque order that develops outward from the center in accordance with the circular plate form. Hatâyî, penç, rûmî, curved branch and

dagger leaf motifs circulate around the gazelle figures uninterruptedly, creating a rhythmic movement on the surface. The motifs are handled in a decoration system that surrounds the figures and ensures the integrity of the composition.

Gazelle figures are depicted with a naturalistic understanding of anatomy. Long and slender legs, graceful neck structure, muscle crossovers and curved horns are modeled based on careful observation. The artist strengthened movement and elegance by extending the leg lengths of gazelle figures. Especially the light-shadow applications created with the light and dark values of magenta tones added volume to the figures and optically separated them from the flat decoration surface. Thus, the artist created a controlled plastic effect in the figures without disturbing the two-dimensional decoration character of the Baba Nakkaş style. While the light turquoise details used in the border add liveliness to the composition, they provide color integrity between the decoration and the figures without diminishing the visual impact of the central figures.

The figures placed opposite each other in this composition evoke the idea of balance, harmony and unity rather than struggle. The moment when the horns come into contact can be considered a symbolic expression of the rhythmic movement and the cycle of life in nature, not the conflict. This approach also coincides with the artist's understanding of peace, serenity and inner balance emphasized in his works. While preserving the line rhythm, compositional balance and ornamental character of the historical style, the artist has developed a contemporary interpretation that expresses peace, harmony and continuity of life through gazelle figures.



Catalog No: 3. Gazelle and Crane Figure Composition (2020)

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2020

Artifact analysis

In this composition, Mehmet Koçer preserved the characteristic decoration system of the Baba Nakkaş style and brought together two symbolic figures, the gazelle and the crane, which are not found in the historical repertoire, in the same composition. The work is one of the most prominent examples of the new iconographic approach that the artist brought to the Baba Nakkaş style. Although the figures are at the center of the composition, they integrate with the dense vegetal decoration around them and become parts of a common aesthetic order rather than being two elements independent of the surface.

The composition is based on a spiral order that develops in accordance with the circular plate form. Hatâyî, penç, rûmî, curved branches and dagger leaves spread rhythmically from the center outwards, creating a continuous movement on the surface. While the sliced belt used in the inner border evokes the understanding of the belt seen in classical Baba Nakkaş compositions, the repeating oratory sequences on the outer border give the composition a strong frame effect. Thus, a balanced visual integrity is provided between the center and the border.

The gazelle figure in the upper part of the composition is depicted in motion. The fact that the front legs rise upwards and the body extends horizontally gives the figure a dynamic movement. On the other hand, anatomical proportions, long neck structure, slender legs and graceful horns are depicted with a naturalistic understanding of observation. The light and dark magenta tones used in the figure create a plastic appearance by highlighting the musculature and volume effect.

The crane figure in the lower section gives the composition a second axis of movement with its long neck, thin legs and long tail feathers that curl backwards. The figure's head raised and turned towards the gazelle establishes a silent visual dialogue between the two figures. The turquoise tones used in the chest, neck and wing details of the crane balance the overall magenta color scheme of the composition and increase the focal effect of the figure. Magenta tones are also dominant in color understanding. With the combination of magenta and turquoise, he strengthened the light-shadow effect and made the figures gain volume.

As a result, this work is one of Mehmet Koçer's original designs that not only continues the style of Baba Nakkaş stylistically, but also carries the historical style to a new iconographic plane by including gazelle and crane figures, which have important meanings in Turkish culture and Sufi tradition, in the composition. The harmony between figure, motif, color, and composition clearly demonstrates the artist's success in reinterpreting traditional aesthetic principles within a contemporary framework.



Catalog No: 4. Composition of Mother Gazelle and Her Cub

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date:2021

Artifact analysis

In this composition, Mehmet Koçer preserves the characteristic decoration system of the Baba Nakkaş style and places the mother gazelle and her baby in the center of the composition. This group of figures, which is not included in the classical Baba Nakkaş repertoire, has been transformed into a new iconographic expression by the artist without disturbing the linear rhythm and compositional integrity of the historical style.

The composition is built on a central setup in accordance with the circular plate surface. The surroundings of the figures are arranged in a balanced rhythm with *hatâyî*, *penç*, *rûmî*, curved branch and dagger leaf motifs; the surface has been evaluated without leaving any gaps in accordance with the characteristic arabesque understanding of Baba Nakkaş's style. While the sliced belt used in the inner border emphasizes the center of the composition, the repetitive lines of *hatâyî* and *penç* motifs on the outer border give the composition a strong frame effect.

The mother gazelle, who is at the center of the composition, displays a protective character with her upright stance and gaze directed towards the viewer. The baby gazelle in front of it turns its head towards its mother, expressing a sense of trust, devotion and protection. The touching postures of the figures are not only an anatomical union, but also a visual expression of an emotional relationship that highlights the feeling of motherhood. The artist painted the figures with long and elegant necks, thin legs and natural body proportions in a naturalistic approach; giving the figures volume and a plastic effect through light-shadow transitions in magenta tones.

The stylized cypress tree rising on the left side of the composition is not only an element that provides spatial balance. In Turkish-Islamic art, the cypress is considered a symbol of life, eternity, patience, and spirituality. The consideration of the mother and baby gazelle together with the cypress tree creates a symbolic unity that strengthens the idea of continuity of life, continuation of generation and divine order. Thus, the composition is not only figurative but also gains a deep symbolic expression.

In the understanding of color, magenta tones also form the basic color of the composition. While the light and dark tone transitions applied in the figures strengthen the volume effect, the turquoise colors used in the border and cypress details add liveliness and depth to the composition. This work is one of the most meaningful compositions that Mehmet Koçer brought to the Baba Nakkaş style. While preserving the classical decoration system, the artist added a new iconographic dimension to the style by placing the theme of mother and baby gazelle, which is not in the historical repertoire, at the center of the composition. This approach, which brings together the traditional language of form and universal human values, is a unique example that shows that the historical style can be reinterpreted within the contemporary understanding of art.



Catalog no.5. Double Gazelle Figure Plate Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2024

Artifact analysis

In this composition, the artist has developed a new iconographic expression through the two gazelle figures he placed in the center of the composition, while preserving the characteristic decoration understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style. One figure is depicted standing and observing its surroundings, while the other is depicted curled up in a resting position. Thus, movement and calmness, alertness and the feeling of trust are handled together on the same surface; The composition is given both a visual and symbolic balance.

The floral decoration system completely reflects the classical character of the Baba Nakkaş style. Motifs consisting of hatâyî, penç, rûmî, curved branches, and dagger leaves spread across the surface in a spiral rhythm, surrounding the figures and making them integral parts of the composition. The flowing line arrangement created by the motifs provides an uninterrupted visual continuity between the figures and the decoration. The geometric interlaced arrangement on the border frames the composition by referring to the classical Ottoman ornamental tradition.

Gazelle figures are depicted by adhering to anatomical reality. Thin and long legs, elegant neck structure, curved horns and light-shadow modeling of muscle volumes give the figures a naturalistic appearance. On the other hand, the figures were evaluated in formal harmony with the stylized decoration system around them; Thus, a successful synthesis was created between the realistic figure and the stylized ornamental language.

In the iconographic content of the composition, the gazelle represents meanings such as holiness, innocence, peace, elegance and divine guidance in Turkish culture and Sufi tradition. While the standing gazelle symbolizes the continuity of life, attention and alertness; The rested gazelle expresses trust, surrender and inner peace. This dual fiction transforms the natural balance of life between movement and tranquility into a symbolic expression.

The contemporary interpretation developed by the artist in the understanding of color is clearly seen. Although the

traditional blue-white aesthetics of the Baba Nakkaş style are preserved, the magenta tones used extensively in the figures strengthen the volume effect; Light purple transitions clarify the anatomical structure. The turquoise touches used in the border and motif details add liveliness to the composition and do not disturb the general color harmony.

This work shows that Mehmet Koçer did not only stylistically repeat the historical Baba Nakkaş style; It is one of the successful examples that shows that it has developed a new iconographic and aesthetic expression through the gazelle figure while preserving the traditional motif and composition principles. The inclusion of the resting gazelle figure in the composition reveals that the artist explores different moods and layers of symbolic meaning within the same theme. Thus, the work can be considered as an important application that brings together tradition and originality in the contemporary interpretation of Baba Nakkaş's style.



Catalogue no.6. Double Gazelle Figure Plate Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2024

Artifact analysis

This sixth plate is one of the most poetic and mystical examples in the series. Gazelle in previous plates; While walking, jumping, resting or in a family relationship, the theme of the gazelle drinking water is centered here. In Turkish-Islamic art, water is the symbol of life, purification and divine mercy. The relationship that the gazelle establishes with water can be considered not only as a description of a natural behavior, but also as the visual

equivalent of the idea of turning to truth and spiritual purification.

In this composition, while preserving the characteristic decoration understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style, a new iconographic expression that is not found in the historical repertoire has been developed with the figure of a gazelle drinking water in the center. In the center of the composition is a single gazelle that drinks water while bowing its head. While the figure reflects a realistic understanding of observation with its naturalistic anatomical proportions, long and graceful legs, thin neck structure and calm stance, the *hatâyî*, *penç*, curved branch and leaf motifs around it completely maintain the linear character of the Baba Nakkaş style. Thus, a strong aesthetic integrity was achieved between the realistic figure and the stylized decoration language.

The turquoise-colored water surface in the lower part of the composition is not only an element that forms the ground in the work. Turquoise tones, which are used in a limited way in the style of Baba Nakkaş, have been made one of the focal points of the composition by Mehmet Koçer by attributing a symbolic meaning. The curved lines on the water surface and the spiral cloud forms seen in the lower section evoke the Seljuk and early Ottoman decoration traditions, while the gazelle's directing its head to this water gives the composition a calm and introspective expression.

The dense floral decoration system surrounding the work creates a rhythmic movement area that surrounds the central figure without putting it under pressure. The *hatâyî*, *penç* and leaf motifs developing on thin curved branches continue uninterruptedly along the surface and preserve the arabesque order of the Baba Nakkaş style. The small-scale repeating flower motifs used in the border create a rhythmic frame in harmony with the central composition.

The artist's characteristic magenta interpretation of color understanding is also decisive in this work. While the light-shadow transitions applied in the gazelle figure strengthen the volume effect, the use of turquoise color only in the water part clarifies the focal point of the composition. Thus, a strong depth and visual balance was created within the limited color palette.

When evaluated iconographically, the gazelle drinking water can be read as the symbolic equivalent of purity, peace, innocence and orientation towards divine truth in Turkish culture and Sufi tradition. As the artist emphasizes in his personal statements, gazelle; It represents calmness, not aggression, trust, not fear, and inner peace, not tension. For this reason, the gazelle's orientation towards water in the composition can be considered not only as a depiction

of a natural behavior, but also as a symbolic expression of man's inner serenity and spiritual search.

This work shows that Mehmet Koçer did not only continue the style of Baba Nakkaş formally; It is one of the successful examples showing that Turkish culture has developed new iconographic interpretations by integrating the historical decoration system with the world of symbolic meaning. In particular, the triple relationship created by water, gazelle and floral decoration constitutes one of the most powerful mystical and symbolic expressions in the series.



Catalog no.7. Mother and Baby Gazelle Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2024

Artifact analysis

In this composition, Mehmet Koçer has developed a strong iconographic expression that is not found in the historical repertoire through the mother and baby gazelle figures, while preserving the classical decoration understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style. The mother gazelle and her suckling calf, which are at the center of the composition, do not only reflect a section of natural life; they also form a symbolic whole representing protection, abundance, continuity of lineage, and compassion. In this respect, the work is one of the most powerful compositions in the series that deals with the continuity of family and life.

While the mother gazelle is depicted with her head held high and looking out for her surroundings, the baby figure is depicted facing its mother and sucking milk. The anatomical structure of the figures is based on natural observation. Long and elegant legs, slender neck structure, balanced body proportions and soft light-shadow transitions reveal Mehmet Koçer's naturalistic understanding of the

figure. On the other hand, the hatâyî, penç, curved branch and leaf motifs surrounding the environment are completely handled within the characteristic decoration system of the Baba Nakkaş style. Thus, a balanced aesthetic unity was achieved between the realistic figure understanding and the stylized floral decoration.

The turquoise colored water strip in the lower part of the composition and the stylized reed plants rising by the water draw attention as important elements that connect the figures to the ground. Water is considered a symbol of life, fertility, and purification in Turkish culture, while reeds emphasize the natural habitat, enhancing the spatial integrity of the composition. The use of turquoise color only in the water section clarifies the focal point of the composition and adds visual balance to the color scheme dominated by magenta tones.

The vegetal decoration system creates a rhythmic movement along the surface. The hatâyî and penç motifs that develop on the thin curved branches surround the figures and make them an integral part of the composition. While the characteristic arabesque order of the Baba Nakkaş style is preserved, a new narrative dimension has been added to the historical style thanks to the mother and child figures in the center.

This work shows that Mehmet Koçer not only maintained the formal principles of the Baba Nakkaş style but also developed new iconographic expressions by integrating the symbolic values of Turkish culture with the historical decorative system. The peaceful atmosphere created by the mother and baby gazelle can be considered as one of the strongest examples of the understanding of tranquility, serenity and inner balance emphasized by the artist in his works.



Catalog no.8. Double Gazelle Composition

Artist: Mehmet Koçer

Technique: Underglaze technique

Form: Cheeked lenger plate

Diameter: 60 cm

Date: 2024

Artifact analysis

This plate is one of the examples that most strongly reflects the theme of unity, accompaniment and continuity among the compositions in the series. The two gazelle figures standing in the same direction combine the symmetrical balance understanding of the Baba Nakkaş style with a contemporary figure order. The gazelle figure, which is not included in the historical Baba Nakkaş repertoire, is placed in the center of the composition and a new iconographic content is added to the style.

The parallel posture of the two figures creates a rhythmic repetition in the composition, while turning the heads in different directions eliminates stagnation and increases visual movement. The thin and long body proportions, elegant leg structures and curved horns of gazelles are integrated in harmony with the hatâyî, rûmî and curved branch motifs surrounding the surroundings. Thus, the figures cease to be naturalistic depictions independent of the decoration elements and turn into an organic part of the ornament.

The floral motifs that fill the floor of the composition continue the characteristic decoration approach of the Baba Nakkaş style. The curved branches developing from the center to the periphery and the hatâyî and penç motifs arranged at different scales create a rhythmic movement around the figures and ensure the integrity of the surface. The classical rûmî decorations used on the outer border surround the composition and establish visual continuity between the center and the edge.

In the understanding of color, the traditional blue-white character of the Baba Nakkaş style has been preserved; however, the artist enriched this limited palette with shades of magenta, purple, and turquoise, enhancing the effect of volume in the figures. The light-shadow transitions applied especially on the body of gazelles strengthen the naturalistic expression without disturbing the classical decoration aesthetics.

From an iconographic point of view, two gazelles standing opposite each other evoke the idea of companionship, harmony, loyalty and coexistence in Turkish culture. While Koçer adhered to the formal rules of the historical Baba Nakkaş style, he added a new layer of meaning to the composition by handling the gazelle figure with a plural expression. In this respect, the work can be considered as one of the original examples where the preservation of the

traditional style and contemporary iconographic interpretation are brought together in a balanced way.

Conclusion

The style of Baba Nakkaş, which was shaped during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror in the Fifteenth century Ottoman tile art, is considered as one of the first mature decoration understandings of the Ottoman classical decorative art. This style, which was formed by the reinterpretation of the influences taken from Chinese blue-white porcelains, Timurid and Akkoyunlu art circles within the Ottoman aesthetic understanding. Its repertoire, consisting of motifs such as hatâyî, rûmî, penç, curved branches, and Chinese clouds, formed the basis of later Ottoman decorative art through its balanced compositional structure, rhythmic line order, and limited color palette.

The works examined in the research reveal that contemporary tile artist Mehmet Koçer reinterprets the style of Baba Nakkaş within the historical language of form. While the artist largely preserves the compositional system, line character, motif organization and decoration logic of the classical style, he added a new iconographic dimension to the style by placing gazelle and crane figures, which are not included in the historical repertoire, at the center of the compositions. Thus, the style of Baba Nakkaş was not only repeated formally, but was enriched with new symbolic meanings in line with the contemporary understanding of art.

The motif analyses conducted in this study demonstrate that Mehmet Koçer preserves the basic formal principles of the Baba Nakkaş style in his hatâyî and penç motifs; however, they also demonstrate that he expanded the repertoire through his treatment of volume, use of light and shadow, and development of new motifs. In particular, the use of magenta and turquoise tones transformed the historical blue-and-white color scheme into a contemporary visual expression and strengthened the perception of volume and depth in the motifs. In this respect, the artist's understanding of color can be considered as a result of his effort to develop new possibilities of expression without breaking away from traditional aesthetics.

Compositional examinations, on the other hand, reveal that the characteristic arabesque order of Baba Nakkaş's style was largely preserved by Mehmet Koçer. While curved branches, dagger leaves, rûmî motifs, hatâyî motifs, penç motifs and stylized cypress trees are continued in the classical order, gazelle and crane figures are made integral parts of the composition. The figures were not merely used as decorative elements; they became central focal points of

the compositions through their integration with line rhythm, directional movement, and surface organization.

The interview with the artist shows that the choice of figure is not just an aesthetic search. According to Koçer, the gazelle symbolizes elegance, serenity, and peace, whereas the crane symbolizes news, journey, loyalty, and spiritual communication. Both figures hold strong symbolic meanings in Turkish culture, mythology, and Sufi tradition, aligning naturally with the fluid line layout and serene aesthetic of Baba Nakkaş's style. This situation reveals that the artist bases his iconographic preferences not only on a formal but also on a cultural and intellectual basis.

The plate compositions examined in the catalog section show that the artist created original designs that do not repeat each other by developing gazelle and crane figures with different postures, movements and expressions within the same stylistic understanding. The organic relationship established by the figures with the floral decoration system around them reveals that continuity is successfully maintained in the contemporary interpretation of Baba Nakkaş's aesthetics.

In conclusion, Mehmet Koçer's work shows that the style of Baba Nakkaş can not only be preserved but also enhanced with new iconographic elements while maintaining its historical identity. Instead of copying the traditional style, the artist developed a contemporary interpretation by assimilating its aesthetic principles, thereby opening a new field of expression within an important historical style of Ottoman tile art. In this respect, the research is not only one of the first comprehensive studies documenting the continuity of Baba Nakkaş's style in today's tile art, but also serves as a theoretical and practical source for new research on contemporary interpretations of traditional arts. The research demonstrates that a historical style cannot be sustained merely through preservation; rather, when reinterpreted in accordance with its aesthetic principles and cultural codes, it can evolve into a living artistic tradition.

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