

EIFFEL TOWER THROUGH THE EYES OF PAINTERS¹

RESSAMLARIN GÖZÜNDEN EYFEL KULESİ

Doç. Dr. Sibel ALMELEK İŞMAN

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Buca Eğitim Fakültesi, Güzel Sanatlar Eğitimi Bölümü,
sibel.almelek@deu.edu.tr, İzmir/Türkiye

ABSTRACT

The Eiffel Tower, named after its designer Gustave Eiffel, was erected as the entrance to the Paris International Exposition in 1889. It was a suitable centerpiece for the World Fair which celebrated the centennial of the French Revolution. The Eiffel Tower, became the global icon of France and served as the triumphal arch of science and industry.

Although the tower had been a subject of controversy and a petition called “Artists against the Eiffel Tower” was signed by three hundred people including some of the most important figures of the arts, many European painters were inspired by the majestic figure of the Eiffel Tower. They picturized the tower in their portraits and cityscapes.

Paul Louis Delance was the first artist to depict the symbol of modernity. His picture shows the unfinished tower under construction. Post Impressionist artists Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and Henri Rousseau painted the tower in the first decade of its existence.

Robert Delaunay, founder of Orphism and Marc Chagall, Russian artist of École de Paris, are the two artists who painted the tower most frequently. Raoul Dufy, Fernand Léger, Diego Rivera, Max Beckmann and Christian Schad can also be counted among the artists who used the image of the tower in their artworks. The Eiffel Tower had diverse appearances in the eyes of the painters: pointilist, expressionist, cubist, orphist and abstract.

Keywords: Eiffel Tower, European art, Painting.

ÖZ

Tasarımcısı Gustave Eiffel'den ismini alan Eyfel Kulesi, 1889 yılında Paris'te gerçekleştirilen Uluslararası Sergi'nin girişi için inşa edilmiştir. Fransız İhtilali'nin yüzüncü yılını kutlayan Dünya Fuarı için uygun bir yapıt olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Fransa'nın evrensel ikon haline gelen Eyfel Kulesi, bilim ve endüstrinin zafer takı olarak algılanabilir.

Tartışmalara konu olmasına ve sanat dünyasının en önemli isimlerinin de içinde bulunduğu üç yüz kişi tarafından “Eyfel Kulesi'ne Karşı Sanatçılar” adını taşıyan bir dilekçenin imzalanmasına karşın, pek çok Avrupalı sanatçı, Eyfel Kulesi'nin görkeminden ilham almışlardır. Sanatçılar, kuleyi portrelerinde ve kent manzaralarında görselliğe kavuşturmuşlardır.

Paul Louis Delance, modernlik sembolünü resmeden ilk sanatçı olmuştur. Eseri, henüz inşaat aşamasında olan kuleyi bitmemiş haliyle yansıtmıştır. Art İzlenimci ressamlar Georges Seurat, Paul Signac ve Henri Rousseau, kuleyi dikilmesinin ilk on senesi içinde betimlemişlerdir.

Orfizm akımının kurucusu Robert Delaunay ve Paris Okulu sanatçılarından Rus asıllı Marc Chagall, Eyfel Kulesi'nin en sık resmeden iki sanatçıdır. Raoul Dufy, Fernand Léger, Diego Rivera, Max Beckmann ve Christian Schad, kule imgesini resimlerinde kullanan sanatçılar arasında sayılabilir. Eyfel Kulesi, ressamların gözünde farklı görünümlere bürünmüştür: noktacı, dışavurumcu, kübist, orfist ve soyut.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eyfel Kulesi, Avrupa sanatı, Resim

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1.INTRODUCTION

It was the engineer Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923) who gave Paris its most remarkable and most visited monument. Eiffel, an engineer of exceptional distinction, had designed many bridges as well as the frame of the Statue of Liberty. The tower was the signpost of the Exposition Universelle of 1889, and for many years the world's tallest structure. However much disliked and criticized at the time, it was a work of engineering that demonstrated spatial possibilities for later structures and also for the decorative arts (Nuttgens 1997, 249).

The tower rests on four giant supports connected by gracefully arching open frame skirts that provide a pleasing mask for the heavy horizontal girders needed to strengthen the legs. The transparency of the structure blurs the distinction between interior and exterior to an extent never before achieved or even attempted (Kleiner 2009, 379).

In addition to its commercial, cultural and imperial aims, the 1889 International Exhibition also coincided with the centennial celebrations of the French Revolution. Within this context, the historian Miriam Levin considers the Eiffel Tower as a conscious and pragmatic artistic expression of the Republican social ideal. Its design, construction and materials are symbolic of the transformative powers of science and technology towards social progress and cohesion (Jones 2014, 27).

The tower was a gesture of faith in the new technology. Its metallic construction and use of prefabrication were not novel in themselves. The method chosen was more than a hundred years old: Abraham Darby's all iron bridge at Coalbrookdale in England had been built in 1779, and Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in 1851. What was novel about the Eiffel Tower was its flamboyant use of forms hitherto associated only with engineering rather than with architecture (Lucie-Smith 1996, 21).

The tower that served as a triumphal arch of science and industry, owed much of its success to the fact that for a small sum anyone could take its elevators to see a view of Paris that was previously reserved for the privileged few able to afford hot-air balloon rides. It thus helped to define a distinctive feature of modern architecture, one that it shares with modern technology as a whole: it acts on large masses of people without regard to social or economic class (Janson & Janson 2001, 773-774).

Once the tower was up, many French voices rose in anger against it. A petition of 300 names, including Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, Charles Garnier and Alexandre Dumas the younger was presented to the city government in protest at its construction. They expressed how strongly they disliked the tower: "*We, the writers, painters, sculptors, architects and lovers of the beauty of Paris, do protest with all our vigour and all our indignation, in the name of French taste against the useless and monstrous Eiffel Tower.*" The novelist Guy de Maupassant, who claimed to hate the tower, ate there everyday. Asked why, he replied that it was the one place in Paris you could not see it (Aaltonen 2008, 411-413).

On the other hand, it is the experience of climbing up the Eiffel Tower and viewing the expansive vista around him that the writer Francois Coppée described with such enthusiasm in his poem: "*Gripping the rail in my hand, / stunned, drunk with fresh air, / I climbed like a spider, / in the immense iron web, / Here I was able to see, covering leagues, / Paris, its towers, its dome of gold, / the circle of blue hills, / and in the distance more, more!*" (Foa 2015, 197).

Roland Barthes, the French philosopher, critic and semiotician, emphasized the powerful impact of the tower: "*it is an object when looked at, it becomes a lookout in its turn when visited. The tower is an object which sees, a glance which is seen.*" (Barthes 1997, 4).

Artists, inspired by this great symbol of Paris, created various depictions. The aim of this paper is to see the tower through the eyes of the painters.

2.DEPICCTIONS OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

French painter Paul Louis Delance (1848-1924) painted one of the first depictions of the Eiffel Tower (**Figure 1**), opened on March 31, 1889. Delance's oil painting is dated January 1889, three months before the grand opening. There are many photographs showing the construction phase of the masterpiece of the metallic industry. But a few paintings were executed during the stages of building. For this reason, Delance's work is precious (www.carnavalet.paris.fr).



Figure 1: Paul Louis Delance, *Eiffel Tower and Champ de Mars in January 1889*, 1889, oil on painting, 126,5 x 192,5 cm, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

French Pointillist artist Georges Seurat (1859-1891) depicted the tower (**Figure 2**) in the same year as Delance. Seurat drew inspiration from the art theoretician Charles Henry and saw himself as the pioneer of a scientific painting that based on objective principles and defined rules. Illuminating in this regard is a small wood panel which Seurat executed in 1889 showing the still unfinished Eiffel Tower. The tower was at that time painted in bright enamel which only served to heighten the revulsion for the structure felt by conservative minded artists. The choice of motif clearly reveals Seurat's acceptance of technology and progress, which he wanted to contribute to, in the field of art, through his pointillist method (Düchting 2000, 85).

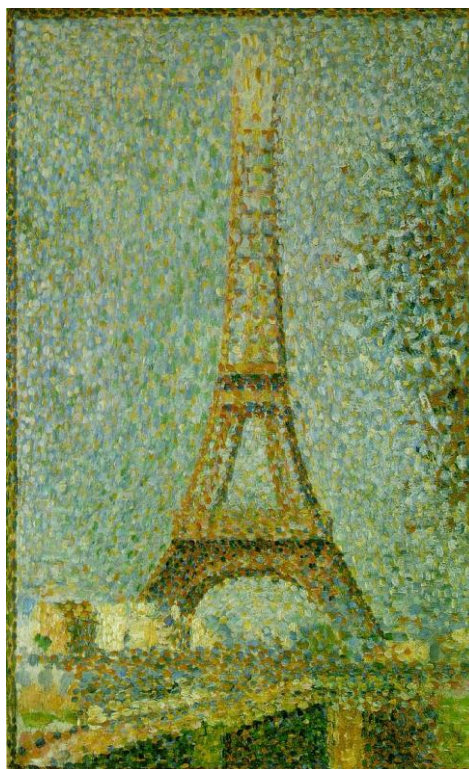


Figure 2: Georges Seurat, *The Eiffel Tower*, 1889, oil on wood, 15 x 24 cm, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco.

Spanish Impressionist artist Luis Jimenez Aranda (1845-1928) picturised the tower (**Figure 3**) as part of the Paris Exposition with the figure of an elegant lady in the same year of its opening. The painting shows a woman fashionably dressed with a black jacket over a white shirt and a small red hat on her head, leaning against a stone balustrade. In her right hand she holds a tan leather glove, and in her left hand she holds a closed red parasol. To her right are two chairs and a table. In the seat of one of the chairs is a black umbrella and on the table rests the newspaper *Le Figaro*, and two beer mugs. In the background, several pavilions of the Paris Exposition on the Champs de Mars, and a section of the Eiffel Tower in its original red brown color can be seen (www.meadowsmuseumdallas.org).



Figure 3: Luis Jimenez Aranda, *Lady at the Paris Exposition*, 1889, oil on canvas, 70,8 x 120,7 cm, Meadows Museum, Dallas.

French artist Robert Delaunay (1885-1941) was very interested in the image of the Eiffel Tower. He painted in an Impressionist style, but in 1906 he began the experiments with the abstract qualities of color that were to provide the central theme of his career. His starting point was Neo-Impressionism, but instead of using Seurat's pointillist technique he investigated the interaction of large areas of contrasting colors. He was particularly interested in the interconnections between color and movement. By 1910 he was making an individual contribution to Cubism combining its fragmented forms with vibrant colors and depicting the dynamism of city life rather than the standard repertoire of still life. He did a memorable series of paintings of the Eiffel Tower, in which the huge monument seems to be unleashing powerful bursts of energy (Chilvers 2009, 172-173).

In the spring of 1909 he produced the first of the interior views of the Gothic church of Saint Severin in Paris, which were his earliest mature works, and these were followed by his Eiffel Tower series mostly painted in 1910-1911 (Lucie-Smith 1996, 44). In both series, Delaunay varied his position and the perspective only minimally or not at all. Eiffel Tower series comprised over thirty pictures, among them oil paintings and works on paper. Delaunay took up the subject again from 1920 to 1930 (Ganteführer-Trier & Grosenick 2004, 54).

The Eiffel Tower dated 1911 (**Figure 4**), shows how Delaunay explored the developments of Cubist fragmentation more explicitly. In his series of paintings of the Eiffel Tower, the artist presented the tower and surrounding buildings from various perspectives. Delaunay chose a subject that allowed him to indulge his preference for a sense of vast space, atmosphere, and light, while evoking a sign of modernity and progress. Like the soaring vaults of Gothic cathedrals, the Eiffel Tower is a uniquely French symbol of invention and aspiration (www.guggenheim.org).



Figure 4: Robert Delaunay *The Eiffel Tower*, 1911, oil on canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

This painting titled *The Window* (1912) (**Figure 5**) belongs to a series of thirteen works produced between 1912 and 1913. Influenced by reading “The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors”, written in 1839 by the French chemist Gustave Chevreul, Delaunay constructed his composition using just color, which replaced design and drawing, volume, perspective, and chiaroscuro. During his “deconstructive” period, he painted volumes exploded by the action of light into colored areas, thereby losing illusionist depth. The *Windows* series ushered in a more “constructive” period, described by Guillaume Apollinaire as Orphic Cubism. The prism of colors is put back together in a two-dimensional space, while the image of the Eiffel Tower, an evocation of the modern world, can be just made out in the middle of the composition (museedegrenoble.fr).



Figure 5: Robert Delaunay *The Window*, 1912, oil on canvas, Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble.

The Russian artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985), who had a strong sense of fantasy, depicted the Eiffel Tower many times just like his friend Delaunay. Russia’s young artists were likelier to be better received in Paris than in their own country. Sergei Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet, the entire troupe of dancers, musicians, writers and painters had created a sensation there with their mixture of sublimity and exoticism. Alexei von

Jawlensky, Vassili Kandinsky, Jacques Lipchitz and all the artists who were to achieve worldwide fame, took advantage of the fashion to get to know modernism at its place of birth. Chagall expressed the inspirational significance of Paris for his work with the following words: “At that time I had grasped that I had to go to Paris. The soil that had nourished the roots of my art was Vitebsk; but my art needed Paris as much as a tree needs water. I had no other reason for leaving my homeland, and I believe that in my paintings I have always remained true to it.” (Walther & Metzger 2000, 15-16).

After Chagall moved to Paris from Russia in 1910, his paintings quickly came to reflect the latest avant-garde styles. In *Paris through my Window* dated 1913 (**Figure 6**) Chagall’s debt to the Orphic Cubism of his colleague Delaunay is clear in the semitransparent overlapping planes of vivid color in the sky above the city. For both artists Eiffel Tower served as a metaphor for Paris and perhaps modernity itself. Chagall’s parachutist might also refer to contemporary experience, since the first successful jump occurred in 1912. Other motifs suggest the artist’s native Vitebsk. This painting is an enlarged version of a window view in a self-portrait painted one year earlier, in which the artist contrasted his birthplace with Paris. The Janus figure has been read as the artist looking at once westward to his new home in France and eastward to Russia. Chagall, however, refused literal interpretations of his paintings, and it is perhaps best to think of them as lyrical evocations, similar to the allusive plastic poetry of the artist’s friends Blaise Cendrars (who named this canvas) and Guillaume Apollinaire (www.guggenheim.org).



Figure 6: Marc Chagall, *Paris through my Window*, 1913, oil on canvas, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Bridal Pair with the Eiffel Tower dated 1939 (**Figure 7**) is another sensational depiction of the Eiffel Tower by Chagall. His Jewish Russian memories can be traced in the traditional wedding scene, village houses, musical instruments and dear animals such as donkey and cockerel.

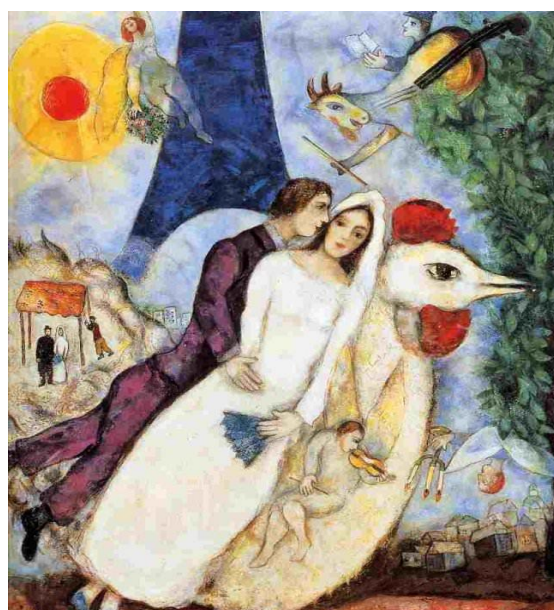


Figure 7: Marc Chagall, *The Bridal Pair with the Eiffel Tower*, 1939, oil on linen, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

Mexican artist Diego Rivera (1886-1957) had also contributed to the collection of Eiffel Tower images with a canvas dated 1914 (**Figure 8**). In the summer of 1914, as the European political situation was reaching a crisis point, Rivera and several other artists and writers traveled to the Balearic Islands off the Spanish coast for a walking and sketching tour. While executing naturalistic landscapes he continued his experiments with Cubism. Their sojourn was interrupted by the news of the eruption of World War I. Rivera, openly proclaimed his patriotism for France during the period. The painted record of his patriotic fervor, a work entitled *Eiffel Tower* was executed in Spain in November 1914. His innovative composition highlights the Eiffel Tower, merging its structure with the Great Wheel. The tower was also an appropriate symbol for France during the conflict, as it functioned as a radio transmitter and flashed electric light in the blue, white and red of the French tricolor. Rivera was not content with simply creating an homage to his adopted homeland, but added another banner on a building at lower right that echoes the Mexican national colors of green, white and red (www.nga.gov).

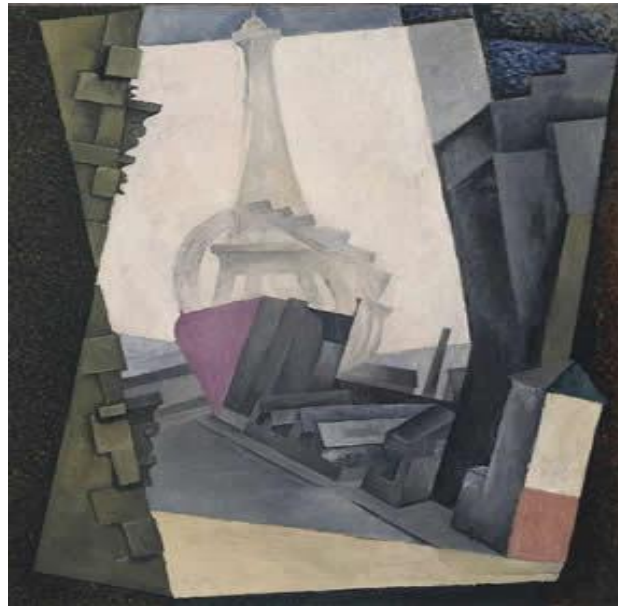


Figure 8: Diego Rivera, *Eiffel Tower*, 1914, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

French painter, graphic artist and designer Raoul Dufy (1877-1953) created several watercolor vistas of Paris including the images of the tower. *The Eiffel Tower* dated 1935 (**Figure 9**) is a good example of his mature style showing his love for the city. His early work was Impressionist in style but he became a convert to Fauvism in 1905. However he soon returned to a lighter style and in the next few years developed the highly distinctive personal manner for he has become famous. It is characterized both in oils and watercolors, by rapid calligraphic drawing on backgrounds of bright colors and was well suited to scenes of luxury and pleasure he favored (Chilvers & Graves-Smith 2009, 206).



Figure 9: Raoul Dufy, *The Eiffel Tower*, 1935, watercolor, Private Collection.

German artist Christian Schad (1894-1982) was associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), movement in German painting in the 1920s and early 1930s reflecting the resignation and cynicism of the postwar period (Chilvers, 2009, 499). As one of the leading exponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and according to the Austrian art historian and critic Wieland Schmied Schad is the prototypical possessor of the cool gaze which distinguishes this movement from earlier forms of Realism (Stremmel 2004, 82). Schad gained international fame with portraits of artists, intellectuals and aristocrats. He was born in Munich; lived in Zurich, Geneva, Vienna and Berlin, visited Rome and Naples (Dantini 2008, 96). Although he had experiences with many European cities, he preferred to depict his own image with the great symbol of Paris. In his *Portrait with Eiffel Tower* (**Figure 10**), a young but tired looking man in a suit can be seen with one of the feet of the tower in the background. The gaze of the artist as well as the weather of Paris is cool.



Figure 10: Christian Schad, *Portrait with Eiffel Tower*, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

3.CONCLUSION

The Eiffel Tower, symbol of modernity, the jewel of the Parisian skyline, had been an inspirational monument for the artists. Most naturally French painters included the image of the tower in their artworks. However, Spanish and German artists and even South American painter Rivera created compositions comprising the grand vista of the tower.

The pictorial Eiffel Tower contributions of the artists Delance, Seurat, Signac, Delaunay, Chagall, Dufy, Rivera and Schad are aforementioned. But there are many other significant names in the European art to immortalize the tower, such as Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Utrillo, Henri Rousseau, Jules Ernest Renoux, Louis Bérourd, Louis Welden Hawkins, Fernand Léger and Max Beckmann.

Some grand buildings become the emblem of a city with its great architecture and historical significance. Notre Dame Cathedral (1345), Arc de Triomphe (1836) and Garnier Opera (1875) may be counted among the symbols of Paris. Saint Mark's Basilica (1092), Doge's Palace (1340), Rialto Bridge (1591) and The Church of Santa Maria della Salute (1687) are the first magnificent buildings that come to mind when one think of Venice. Houses of Parliament (1860) and Westminster Bridge (1862) symbolise London whereas The Colosseum (70), Pantheon (120) and The Trevi Fountain (1762) remind Rome. There are many paintings depicting these grand works of architecture in European art history. Eiffel Tower is the most recent structure among these landmarks. Being built at the end the 19th century, it presaged and heralded the 20th century modern architecture.

It is interesting to see that sculptors were not keen on the The Eiffel as much as painters. It would be exciting and rewarding to see the image of the tower in three dimensions created by the hands of sculptors.

Since the first half of the 20th century witnessed various approaches to painting, Eiffel Tower had also different appearances reflecting the artistic styles of the time. Therefore it may be considered as natural to see the tower in pointillist, expressionist, orfist, cubist and abstract forms. Some artists regarded the tower as the city's new visual element. On the other hand, artists such Chagall and Schad created more personal pictures by adding their self portraits and autobiographical traces.

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