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### **Perceptions of Visual Culture by University Art Educators in Turkey**

This study explores the concept of visual culture in pre-service art teacher education in Turkey. Using a phenomenological case study method, 8 Turkish university art teacher education instructors' perceptions regarding visual culture and their views on the ways to effectively incorporate visual culture in art teacher education are examined. As globalization impacts Turkish culture, the training and preparation of art teachers is important because these individuals will play a key role in teaching children how to become visually literate in a quickly changing world.

A phenomenological method has been chosen because it is the most well suited inquiry method for the research. This method places emphasis upon human experiences that are linked to social realities. In addition, local realities are reflected with an interpretive analytical approach with a focus on everyday meaning. The nature of this study required an interpretative approach that outlines the meaning of visual culture in the context of Turkey based on in-depth interviews. Through a purposive sampling, 8 art teacher education instructors who met the predetermined criteria were interviewed in four different universities in Turkey.

Visual culture is examined from an art education perspective that focuses on the perception and critical analysis of popular culture, everyday cultural experiences (Duncum, 1999, 2001, 2002; Freedman, 2003, Eisenhauer, 2006, Tavin, 2000), and analysis of media including television programs, computer games, Internet, and advertisements. Critical pedagogy, a teaching approach that enables students to question and challenge oppressive systems and structures, is another key teaching approach that permeates visual culture art education (Freedman, 2001). It is important to investigate visual culture because it is embedded in local culture and it deals with social economic and political ties of artifacts and performances as they represent the society. To understand what works in diverse places, a comparison is made between what visual culture and perceptions related to visual culture mean in Turkey and what the same

concepts mean in the U.S. There may be great variation in the understanding of the social and ritual meanings of visual forms from culture to culture. The fact that different societies create identity through visual culture (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004) holds significance in the study.

Yet, equally interesting is the observation of similarities. Like many other developed and/or developing countries, Turkey is facing the explosion in the production and consumption of visual imagery. As well as visual imagery, other elements of visual culture like the media, Internet, advertisements, and shopping malls are integrated into the lives of people so quickly that it results in a superficial copying of the Western ways without a natural development taking place. This ultimately results in the failure to digest and reflect upon what is experienced and what is seen – defined as ‘visual illiteracy’. If visual illiteracy is an issue, particularly in Turkey, it is worth asking what responsibilities do art teacher education instructors have in fostering visually literate individuals in relation to visual culture.

This investigation of visual culture in the context of art teacher education in Turkey is an important contribution to the exploration of what it means to be visually literate in today’s world.