

**"IT WAS A TIME OF  
CONVERSATION"  
INTERPRETATION PACK**

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# INTRODUCTION TO SALT

SALT explores critical and timely issues in visual and material culture, and cultivates innovative programs for research and experimental thinking. Assuming an open attitude and establishing itself as a site of learning and debate, SALT aims to challenge, excite and provoke its visitors by encouraging them to offer critique and response. SALT hosts exhibitions, conferences and public programs; engages in interdisciplinary research projects; and maintains a library and archive of recent art, architecture, design, urbanism, and social and economic histories to make them available for research and public use.

An essential part of SALT's programming is developing ongoing, collaborative partnerships with schools, community and civic organizations through its Interpretation Program. SALT Interpretation is free, and seeks to engage young people through exhibition tours, moving image programs and artist-led collaborative projects. SALT also creates online curriculum guides (Interpretation Packs) for schools and youth organizations, which feature discussion topics, activities and educational resources to accompany each exhibition.



SALT's activities are distributed between two landmark buildings located in walking distance to each other, and also shared via [www.saltonline.org](http://www.saltonline.org). The first building, SALT Beyoğlu, whose program and circulation interiors are dedicated to exhibition and event spaces, opened in April on Istiklal Avenue. The second building, SALT Galata, is the former 19th century Imperial Ottoman Bank headquarters designed by Alexandre Vallauray. SALT Galata opened November 2011.

# "IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION"

*It was a time of conversation*, SALT's second Open Archive project, calls for a reevaluation of three exhibitions from the first half of the 1990s in Turkey – *Elli Numara / Anı Bellek II* [Number Fifty / Memory/Recollection II], *GAR* [Railway Station] and *Küreselleşme – Devlet, Sefalet, Şiddet* [Globalization – State, Misery, Violence] – based on original documents from the period. These exhibitions initiated new curatorial approaches in Turkey, negotiating with unconventional venues as opposed to galleries, cultural centers or historical buildings. Examining these exhibitions, *It was a time of conversation* seeks to provide an overview of collective and non-commercial initiatives by artists who focused on collaboration and the exchange of ideas during the early '90s – a time when institutionalization was still at a minimum and expectations were low.

This project is the visualization of SALT Research's ongoing attempt to explore those exhibitions that have reached beyond commercial concerns, contributed to the clarification of new artistic and cultural moments, and produced ruptures – exhibitions that may have historic importance today. It is realized with the support of the exhibitions' participants, with comprehensive archives developed by SALT Research. This process was initiated by SALT Research's Sezin Romi in 2010, and has since continued in collaboration with the exhibitions' organizers, artists and assistants. The project brings together the archives of these three exhibitions, all organized during a period when individuals from different disciplines were beginning to see art as a "form of conversation" – when art itself emerged as an object of thought and the concept of the "curator" began to take hold. It takes these exhibitions – all products of collaboration and discussion – as a launching point, offering a new perspective on art in Turkey during the 1990s.



Emre Zeytinoğlu, *Devletin Belleği* [Memory of the State], *Elli Numara / Anı Bellek II* [Number Fifty / Memory/Recollection II] exhibition, 1993

# TO EDUCATORS

## HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

This SALT Interpretation Pack has been designed as a resource for you and your students as you explore the *It was a time of conversation* exhibition. It is our hope that, as a resource with the objective of stimulating dialogue, the following materials will not act as an authority on the concepts they introduce, but rather will encourage students towards further exploration and study, towards active discussion, and towards critical thinking about the exhibition and its themes.

Included in this Interpretation Pack are:

- *Opening Discussion: The Archive*
- *The Art of Collaboration*
- *Additional Resources*

Each unit includes classroom activities, multi-media resources, terminology and opportunities for discussion; we encourage you to adapt, shape and build upon these materials to best meet the needs of your students and teaching curriculum. for discussion; we encourage you to adapt, shape and build upon these materials to best meet the needs of your students and teaching curriculum.



Aydan Murtezaoglu, *Karatahta* [Blackboard], *Memory/Recollection II*, 1993

# OPENING DISCUSSION: THE ARCHIVE

As a cultural and research institution, SALT supports the notion that archives can become a shared and common resource with the participation of a multitude of users. Hence, an archive is never “complete” and is of value only when engaged in public use. Reflecting this belief, *It was a time of conversation* uses as its foundation the archival materials of three exhibitions organized in Turkey during the 1990s: *Number Fifty / Memory/Recollection II*, *GAR* and *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence*. Engaging with the physical traces of these projects, which have been digitized, preserved and made accessible by SALT Research, *It was a time of conversation* uses the archive as a tool to share this chapter in history with the widest and most diverse audience possible.

*It was a time of conversation* has been developed in the context of SALT’s Open Archive project. The mission of the Open Archive project is to explore possible relationships between archives, democracy and transparency; by creating access to archival materials, the institution hopes to stimulate dialogue and critical interpretation by users. The first exhibition in the Open Archive series, researcher/artist Tayfun Serttaş’s *Foto Galatasaray* (exhibited at SALT Galata from Nov. 22, 2011 – Jan. 22, 2012), presented the studio photography archive of Maryam Şahinyan. With images representing the extensive shifts in demographics and socio-economic transformation in İstanbul from 1935-1985, the physical archive of Foto Galatasaray is a rare surviving example of the classical photography studios of the city’s recent past. As the majority of the archive’s subjects were unknown, a critical aspect of the project was enlisting the public to “tag” themselves, family and friends in Şahinyan’s photographs, initiating an interactive process that now continues via an online forum.



GAR, Ankara Railway Station, 1995

As an entry point for students to explore the themes of *It was a time of conversation*, we suggest leading a discussion around archives, focusing on the Open Archive project and its prioritization of public engagement with archival materials. How do traditional definitions of an archive change when we open its materials to discussion and contribution – and how may an increase in accessibility impact the way we collect and interpret history?

## TERMINOLOGY

*Accessibility* — a term used to describe the degree to which a product, device, service, or environment is available to as many people as possible

*Archive* — a place in which public records or historical documents are preserved; also, the material preserved

*Democracy* — a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections

*History* — a chronological record of significant events

*Transparency* — characterized by visibility or accessibility of information

# THE ART OF COLLABORATION

## INTRODUCTION

A characteristic all three of the exhibitions explored in *It was a time of conversation* share is that they are products of collaboration between individuals from different disciplines. *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence*, for example, began when a number of artists who often got together socially to exchange ideas – Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, İsmet Doğan, Gülsün Karamustafa, Michael Morris, Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, Bülent Şangar, Müşerref Zeytinoğlu and Emre Zeytinoğlu – invited sociologist Ali Akay to join their conversations. Long, in-depth discussions followed, and ultimately led to the development of the exhibition. The project materialized as a collective effort and, as such, differed from existing modes of artistic production in Turkey.

The 1990s were the beginning of a new movement in the country's art scene. With a shift towards more collaborative ways of thinking, curatorship also emerged. While in the previous decade exhibitions were, for the most part, organized by artists themselves, as individuals from diverse disciplines began to talk about the changing frameworks of cultural production, the integration of a curator – someone who could oversee the presentation and interpretation of exhibitions – became crucial. *Memory/Recollection* (1991), for example (the exhibition that preceded *Number Fifty / Memory/Recollection II*), was the first curated exhibition in Turkey.

In THE ART OF COLLABORATION | SESSION ONE, students will explore the projects of *It was a time of conversation* in SALT Research and the Open Archive space, focusing on the collective nature of these exhibitions. They will have the opportunity to develop their own collectives in SESSION TWO, as – like the organizers of *GAR*, *Memory/Recollection II* and *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence* – students work with shared objectives to stimulate dialogue around a specific issue or problem.



Organizers of the *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence* exhibition, 1995

## TERMINOLOGY

*Collaboration* — to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor

*Collective* — a cooperative unit or organization

*Curatorship* — the role of a content specialist responsible for an institution's collections and who is involved in the interpretation of its material

*Discipline* — a field of study

*Mission statement* — a formal, short, written statement of the purpose of a company or organization

## OBJECTIVES

— To consider the changing dynamics of artistic production in Turkey in the 1990s

— To explore the concept of collectives, both in art and outside disciplines

— To use collaboration as a tool to solve a problem

# THE ART OF COLLABORATION

## SESSION ONE

1. In class, discuss with students the shift occurring within Turkey's art community during the 1990s. Key changes at this time included a growing focus on collaboration between individuals from different disciplines (for example, art, sociology, political science, literature) and the emergence of the role of a curator.

2. Organize a class visit to SALT Galata to see the *It was a time of conversation* exhibition. To make a reservation for a guided tour and discussion, e-mail [yorumlama@saltonline.org](mailto:yorumlama@saltonline.org).

3. Divide students into groups of four. Each group should select one of three exhibitions (*GAR*, *Memory/Recollection II* or *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence*) to explore.

4. Studying archival materials in SALT Research and the Open Archive space, each group should complete the worksheet on the following page, focusing on the ways their exhibition's artists and organizers worked together to achieve collective goals.



Akaretler #50, the venue for *Memory/Recollection II*, 1993



# THE ART OF COLLABORATION WORKSHEET

**NAMES OF STUDENTS IN GROUP:**

**EXHIBITION:**

*Where was this exhibition located? In what venue?*

*Who were the main artists and organizers involved in the exhibition? What were their roles in the project?*

*Looking through archival materials at SALT Galata, what evidence do you see that this exhibition's organizers were working as a team? How would you describe their collaboration?*

*What themes or issues did this exhibition address? How do you believe involving participants from different disciplines in the project impacted the presentation of these issues?*

*Have you seen similar models of artists and individuals from other fields working together to realize a project in your own community? Where?*

# THE ART OF COLLABORATION

## SESSION TWO

1. Back in class, revisit with students the definition of collaboration (see p. 7). Are they familiar with groups that, like those involved in the exhibitions of *It was a time of conversation*, work collectively? If not, have they seen the collective model in other disciplines – for example, labor unions or food cooperatives?

2. Ask students again to arrange themselves into groups of four. Each group will be forming a collective.

3. Each collective needs to brainstorm one issue or problem that its efforts will address. *Globalization – State, Misery, Violence*, for example, focused on state violence. This problem can be something that affects students personally, but it can also, for example, be a political or social issue that impacts their families, their communities or the world. If time allows, give students the opportunity to read the day's newspaper, in print or online, to give them an idea of current events and conflicts their collectives could potentially focus on.

4. Once students have a specific problem in mind, ask them to consider ways in which they might address this problem through art. How can a collective work together to evoke change – and how can art facilitate this process?

5. Each collective must establish a name that reflects its purpose, a mission statement and a set of values. Give your students time to develop their ideas into an organizational identity, and to research community organizations, businesses or individuals they could potentially collaborate with to achieve their missions.

6. Ask groups to present their newly formed collectives to the class.



GAR, Ankara Railway Station, 1995

### DISCUSSION

- *How did your group make decisions regarding its focus, name, mission and values? Was the collective decision-making process more or less difficult than working alone?*
- *Do you believe your collective's mission is attainable? Why or why not?*
- *As you watched classmates present their collectives to the class, were there any groups whose missions were similar to yours? Do you see potential to collaborate with any other groups to achieve your goals?*

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## WEB RESOURCES

SALT Online | [saltonline.org](http://saltonline.org)

SALT Research | [saltresearch.org](http://saltresearch.org)

## BOOKS & ARTICLES

*Memory/Recollection II* exhibition catalogue, 1993

*GAR* exhibition catalogue, 1995

*Globalization – State, Misery, Violence* exhibition catalogue, 1995



*GAR*, Ankara Railway Station, 1995

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