

THE FALLILEN ICON



A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO
GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA'S ART
1981-1992

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BIO/CHRONO/GRAPHY



The story of this publication goes back to a much earlier idea, that of preparing a booklet on Gülsün Karamustafa's artistic practice in the context of the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial. The scope of the text, written by Deniz Şengel, was developed in 1992-1993 in collaboration with the artist. However, this work, prepared with meticulous attention to detail, was never published in book form.

The project was revived for *A Promised Exhibition* held at SALT in 2013-2014, and the book has now been transformed into an e-publication that remains faithful to the structure prepared many years ago by Şengel, who passed away in 2009. We would like to thank Deniz Şengel's sister Mine Şengel for her significant contribution during this process.



Deniz Şengel (1956-2009)

Deniz Şengel completed her secondary education at the İzmir American Girls' College, and in 1978 graduated from the Boğaziçi University Department of English Language and Literature. She continued her education in the US on a Fulbright Scholarship. From 1983 on she taught in various departments at New York University, Trinity College, The Catholic University of America and in Turkey, Mimar Sinan University, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul Bilgi University and Eskişehir Osmangazi University. In 1996 she completed her PhD with the Department of Comparative Literature at New York University. In 2002, she began to teach at the Izmir Institute of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, and the following year she became an associate professor. She carried out research in the fields of Renaissance culture and literature, humanism, poetics and rhetoric from antiquity to 1700, medieval and Renaissance cultures in 19th century historiography, Shakespeare, perception of the Turk in early Western literatures, the relationship of poetry and painting, literature and law, ethics, art theory,

the sonnet, linguistics, the relationship between the histories of philology and architecture, comparative research methods in Turkish literature and methodology in literary historiography. Her articles and papers have been published in journals, magazines and newspapers including *Arredamento Mimarlık*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Fol*, *Hürriyet Gösteri*, *Milliyet Sanat*, *ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi* [Journal of the METU Faculty of Architecture] and *Parşömen*. She edited the book *Çağdaş Düşünce ve Sanat* [Contemporary Thought and Art] (1991) with İpek Aksüğüdür Duben, and the books *Sanatçı Hakları: Seminer ve Panel Tartışmaları* [Artists' Rights: Seminar and Panel Discussions] (1992) and *Bilgi Olarak Sanat / Olgu Olarak Sanatçı: Yeni Ontoloji* [Art as Knowledge / Artist as Phenomenon: The New Ontology] (1992) with Gülsün Karamustafa. Her book *Dickens ve Sidney: İngiltere'de Ulusal Edebiyatın Kuruluşu* [Dickens and Sidney: The Foundation of National Literature in England] was published in 2002 by Istanbul Bilgi University Publishing.





Gülsün Karamustafa in the Italian Courtyard, Galata, 1981.
Photograph: İsa Çelik



PREFACE

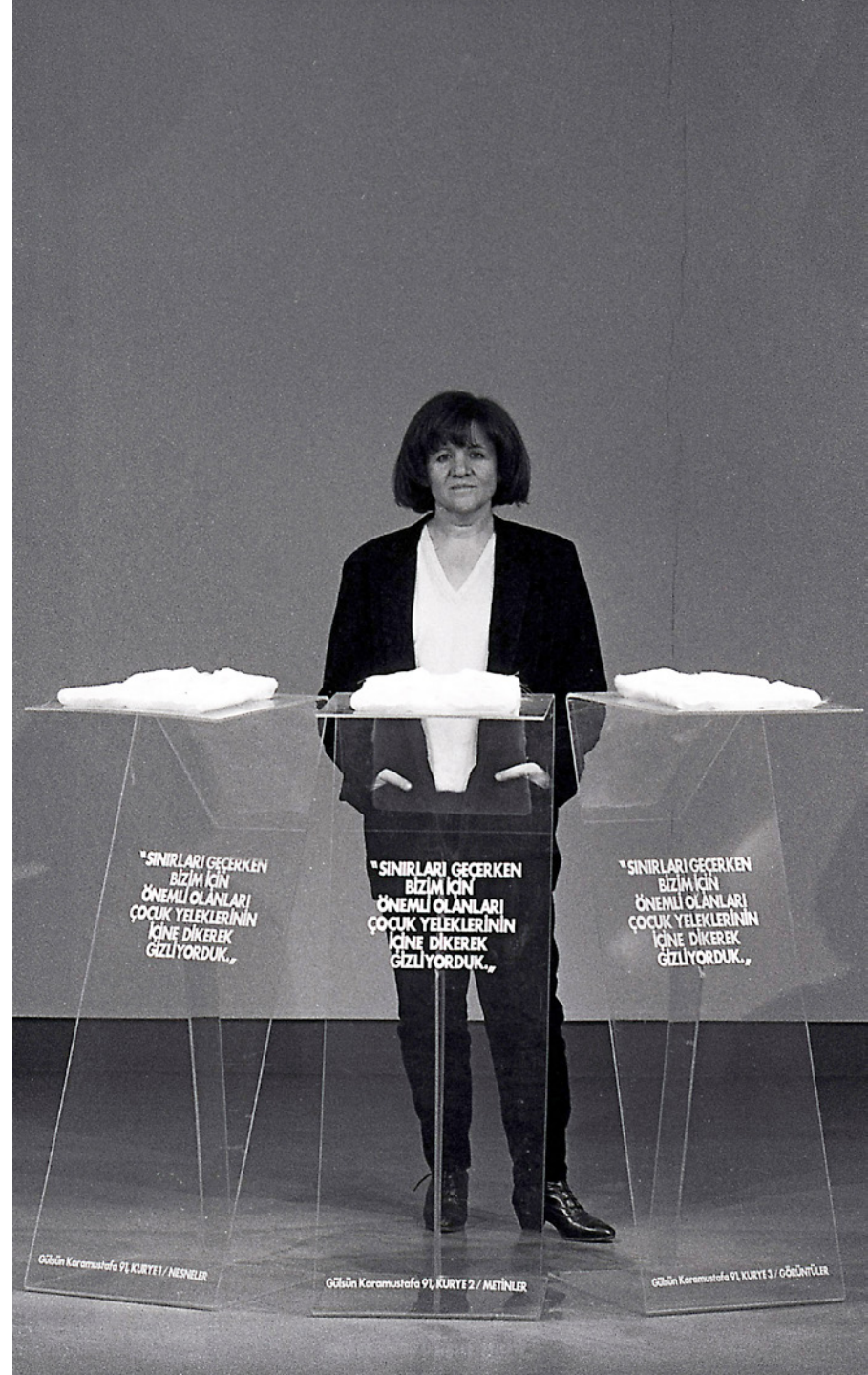
AN ATTEMPT THAT
FELL SHORT

Gülsün Karamustafa

I'm holding in my hand quite a thick file, its cover page states, "Deniz's Book." It contains the draft of a book that could not be completed for various reasons since 1994, and that I have hesitated to touch since. The writing of the main text began in 1992, on the occasion of the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial. The content was enriched later, and the structure was changed and developed by adding new material around the idea of forming a book, and this file was not touched again until the year 2009 when the author passed away. 22 years have passed since the first idea for this book, which is, and was, difficult to complete in every sense of the word, and now is the time to bring it to life.

I don't remember very clearly when we had the first in-depth conversation with Deniz Şengel, the author of this book. She had returned for a period from the United States, where she was carrying out research in comparative literature at

Gülsün Karamustafa with her work *Courier*, produced for the exhibition *Recollection/Memory I* (Taksim Art Gallery, Istanbul, 1991).



New York University, and she was newly getting to know art circles here.

The person who brought us together in the real sense of the word, and enabled us to enter a long and intense period of work together, was Vasif Kortun. Vasif had invited me, in December 1991, to take part in the *Recollection/Memory I* exhibition he was curating. This first exhibition in Istanbul to be curated around a specific theme, *Recollection/Memory I* adopted a different approach to present concepts we had newly become acquainted with. The exhibition had a very low budget, and our curator had a small brochure

published through his personal means. It was important to leave a document for the future.

When I received an invitation to the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial, it was Vasif, again, who reminded me that I may need a similar document for my own purposes. He would have wanted to write it himself, he stated, but it was not possible considering the workload of the biennial he was curating, and added that Deniz Şengel would do a very good job.

I had just finished my work to be exhibited in the biennial and transported it to the space.



Recollection/Memory I, Taksim Art Gallery, Istanbul, 1991.



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19. 5. 92

GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA DIKKATİNE

gön: Vasif Kortun

Sevgili Gülsün:

Dün akşam konuşmalarımızdan anladığım senin geç kalmış ya da artık zamanın bulmuş ciddi bir tanıtım ve anlatım nesnesi oluşturman.


Bu işin etkisini dağıtmamak ve emoği gereksiz yere harcamamak için sınırlım gerekli olan bir katalogdur. İngilizce-Türkçe çıkacak olan ve işlerinin tarihi bir dokümanı kapsamak gereken bir katalog. Buna hem resimler, hem hatılar hem de son yıllardaki işler dahil olmalı.

En azından iki yazı olmalı. Bunlardan birini bence sen yazmalısın. Yani bu bireysel bir serüvenin dokümanıdır ve bu serüveni o tarih içinde yaşayan sensin. Bence burada araya bir diğer anlatıcı girmemeli ve böylece de olmamalı. Sanatçılar kimi zaman yazarlarını buluyorlar. Belki bugün buna yakın olan insanlar çıkıyor ve 'kimyaların' birleşmesi ve dolayısıyla açılımların anlamlandırılması daha mümkün ancak sen bunları yaptığın zaman bunların artikülasyonu bugün yaptığımız gibi mümkün değildi. Bu da hedefini bulmamış belki de sen yaptığın zaman bile ortaya çıktığı an senin farkettiğin ama adını söyleyemediğin bir dünyaydı. Bu da başlıbaşına bir hikaye. Hem sen yelekleri naziz bedenlere giydirip taşıırken işte o taşıdıklarını bildiğin için bu taşımayı herkesden iyi anlatabilirsin. İkinci yazıyı ben yazmak çok isterdim ve benim yazacağım muhakkak başka yazılardan çok farklı olacaktı. Ama buna vakit yok. Bu yazıyı ve tabii ki aynı bir yazıyı herhalde ancak ve ancak Deniz yazabilir. Onun da programı ağır ama iki ayda bunu hazırlayabilir.

Ayrıca zamana dağılmış işlerden 20şer dialık poşetlere konmak üzere bir seçim yapılırsa bu da bağımsız bir tanıtım nesnesi olabilir. Bunları ise Biensel'den önce kullanabiliriz.

Mekanın aramızda kurgulanması üzerine de hafta sonundan itibaren konuşmaya başlayabiliriz. Peşinen söylüyorum lütfen kuzuruma bakma çünkü çalışma tempom jarip derecede yoğunlaşıyor. Ben ören gösteremediğim zaman sen beni uyar ve hatırlat.

Selamlar



19.5.92

TO THE ATTENTION OF GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA

Sent by: Vasıf Kortun

Dear Gülsün,

What I gathered from our conversation last night, is that you have been delayed in, or let's say, it is high time for you to form an effective tool of publicity and presentation.

In order not to weaken the impact of the work, and not to waste the effort put into it, I believe a catalog would be the best format. An English-Turkish catalog that would include an inventory of your work. This must include both paintings and carpets, and also your works in recent years.

There should be at least two articles. In my view, you should write about one of them. I mean, this is the inventory of a personal adventure and you are the one who has experienced this adventure within that history. I think a different narrator should not intervene at this point, and it should not be an interview, either. Artists, sometimes, find their writers. There are perhaps people today who are close to such a position, and it is perhaps more possible to share 'chemistries' and thus to make sense of openings; however, at the time when you produced this work, its articulation was not possible in the same manner that it is today. This was a world, that had not reached its target, and perhaps, even at the time you created it, one that you had noticed but not named as such: That, is a separate story in itself. You can explain, much better than anyone else, the act of carrying the vests worn by the humble bodies. I would have very much liked to have written the second article myself, and the article I would have written would definitely have been very different from others. Yet there is no time for that. This article, and no doubt, a very different article, can only be written by Deniz. Her program, too, is busy, but she can prepare the article in two months.

In addition to this, if a selection of 20 slides can be made from different periods, then this could also be an independent tool of publicity. We can use these before the biennial.

As for the design of the space, we can begin talking about that on the weekend. I would like to say in advance, please do not take offense, because my program has become abnormally loaded. Please warn me and remind me when I fail to show the necessary care and attention.

Regards



21.5.1992

Vasıf Kortun'un Dikkatine

Sevgili Vasıf

Meseleme ince ve dikkatli yaklaşımın beni çok sevindirdi. Katalog fikrine tamamen katılıyorum. Yazılardan birini benim yazmam düşüncesi de iyi ama bu her zamanki gibi sahyerek ve kişisel serüvenin tekrarından öteye gidemeyen bir yazı olacak biliyorum. Oysa en önemli ihtiyacım, özellikle bugün, nasıl olması gerektiğini çok iyi farkettiğin öteki yazıdır ki onu da herhalde gerçekleştireceğiz.

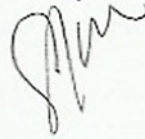
Denize bu konuyu ne şekilde açabiliriz?

20 lik poşet olabilecek diaları, alternatifli hazırlıyorum . Son kararı birlikte veririz.

Cuma günüm son derece yoğun. Cumartesi haberleşebilirsek ve çok kısa bir görüşme yapabilirsek iyi olur.

Sevgiler , selamlar.

Gülsün Karamustafa



21.5.92

To the Attention of Vasif Kortun

Dear Vasif,

I am very glad to hear about your meticulous and attentive approach to my issue. I completely agree with the idea of a catalog. The idea of me writing one of the articles is also fine, but I know well that, as always, this will turn out to be a naive article that fails to go beyond the re-narration of my personal adventure. Yet what I need most importantly, and especially today, is the other article – and I have now realized how it should be – and we will, I hope, realize that as well.

How can we discuss this with Deniz?

I am preparing the selection of 20 slides with alternatives. We can decide on the final selection together.

I'm very busy on Friday. It would be great if we could get in touch on Saturday and have a brief meeting.

Love, regards.

Gülsün Karamustafa



Deniz saw the work, was impressed and said she would finish the text as soon as possible. The dimensions of the booklet were determined. The biennial space was not ready yet, but we set up the work in a suitable corner and had photographs taken. In view of the limited period of time, Sadık Karamustafa immediately began work on the design. Color separation was completed using the pre-computer methods of the period, the draft was prepared and we began to wait for the text.

The issue we could not agree upon with our writer perhaps stemmed from the manner in which we began work. Deniz set it as a condition that the booklet contain a section for a biography in the professional sense. Unfortunately, during that period, no artist had the habit of compiling a comprehensive biography. When we met at my studio to discuss this, the scene she walked into was, in every sense, a modernist dump. With great effort, Deniz organized that mess, gathered the lost information and prepared a very comprehensive biography. This process was also spread across a much longer period of time than we expected, but it did bring together and complete many things I had left out until then.

When the article was delayed, the booklet could not be completed in time for the biennial. On the other hand, the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial themed “Production of Cultural Difference” evoked so much excitement in all of us, and gave us so many interesting clues regarding the coming days that I was not that affected by our failure to complete the booklet, because we had managed to communicate with the world without it anyway.

Another positive aspect of the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial was the exhibition organized in 1993 at the Stedelijk Museum in Schiedam, Netherlands, under the curatorship of Vasif Kortun and Paul Donker Duyvis. *A Foreigner= A Traveler*, which featured Vahap Avşar, Bedri Baykam, Hüseyin Alptekin and Michael Morris, Mehmet İleri, Hale Tenger and me, was the first international experience for many of us, and initiated a new communication channel between Dutch and Turkish artists. Deniz accompanied us during this trip to carry out press relations for the exhibition and to prepare a text. At this exhibition I presented my work from the period 1984 to 1990. This meant we had the means to collectively see and discuss, in an exhibition environment, works of the aforementioned period, and when

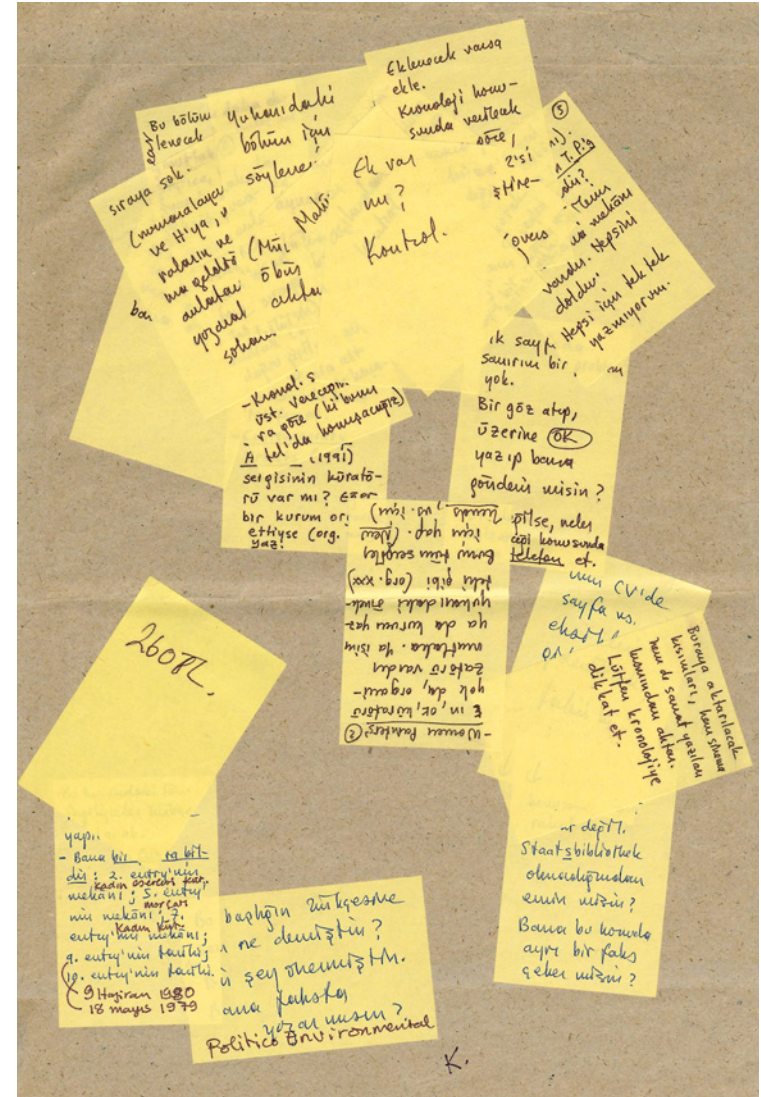
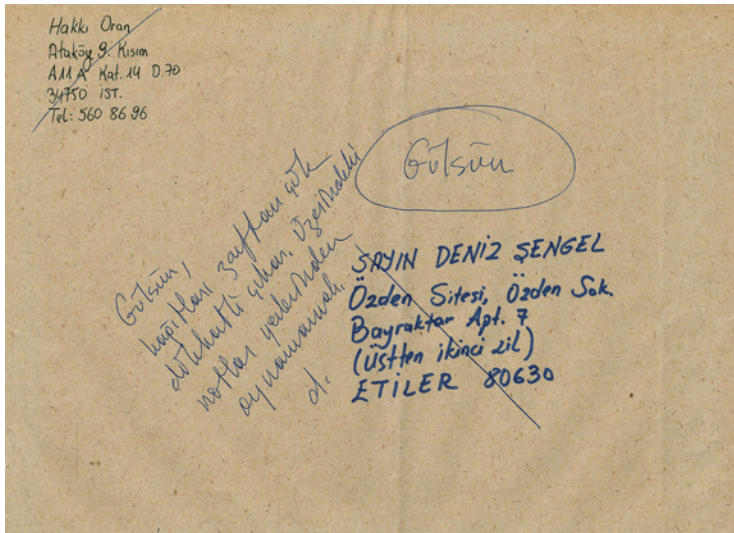




Vasıf Kortun, Deniz Şengel and Gülsün Karamustafa, *A Foreigner=A Traveler*, Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam, Netherlands, 1993.

we returned, we had a completely different idea to muster: the booklet we had considered in 1992 for the biennial could be expanded into a much more comprehensive publication and include my production from the 1980s. We went back to work.

In addition to my three-dimensional works of the period, Deniz also wanted to refer to the paintings I had made during the same period and which I had exhibited alongside the other works, and considered structuring the text around this combination. With discussions we held,



Notes between Deniz Şengel and Gülsün Karamustafa, 1992-1993.



the discovery of a detail, or a newly-added thought or visual, the content of the text constantly expanded. We were engaged in a heated dialogue. The text that exposed my work to comprehensive debate constantly passed between us, either by post or in the form of long paper rolls, by fax. Sometimes, even these methods proved inadequate, and when there was a correction or a new addition, we would immediately call a taxi with a driver we could trust from the stop, and send the text by car. Such were the pretty burdensome methods of the pre-e-mail age.

During this process, Deniz came up with another idea. This book presented my work from the 80s and early 90s, but what was there before that? What kind of an environment had contributed to the emergence of these works? Deniz thought that only I could write about this topic that needed a foundation. Whereas I thought that this would turn out to be an emotional narrative and would not fit well in the book. She eventually persuaded me; and had me –albeit by some force– write a text with two channels, about my personal past and also about the art environment in Turkey in the 70s and 80s. I still think this is an overly emotional text, however, in the sense that it contains facts

about that time, it is an important story that acts as an eyewitness account of a period that has yet to face honest assessment. And also, we have so few documents from that period... I was very glad when I found that text, which I had long forgotten in the file. In retrospect, I am very glad she had me write it.

As Deniz worked on the text, the scope of which we had decided to expand, a new situation appeared on our agenda that would bring us together in a very different way. The International Plastic Arts Association (UPSD), founded in 1989 in Istanbul in order to contribute to the organization of artists and to support an opening onto the international field and which gained increasing visibility with the attempts it displayed to capture the contemporary in the art field, asked us if we would act as editors for two books it would publish in 1993.

The first book in the series had been published in 1991, and its editor was İpek Duben who was the secretary general of the association at the time. İpek had, however, gone to New York for an extended period. At the next election, Hüsamettin Koçan was elected as the association's director, and I assumed responsibility as secretary general.



13.7.93

Dear Gülsün,

1. We need to find a title for your text.

- When you find the title, it needs to come both at the top of the text, and at page 3 in the book text in both English+Turkish.

- It will be added on Page 5, to the 'Contents' chart, to Appendix II. Like this: It will come right before the bit where I write Gülsün Karamustafa. English and Turkish, separately. I have thought long and hard about whether to include your text before or after the chronology we prepared beforehand. In the end, for reasons I can explain if they are not already clear to you, I decided it would be better to come after. Let's talk if you don't agree.

- It should be added on page 10, on the chart of the Appendix part, English+Turkish, again before where your name comes.

2. Gülsün, the Ali Akay idea was great. However, this is what I think: a. The book is full to the brim. It really doesn't need anything else. b. I also sensed, looking at the book in its final state, that the book is, in a very powerful way, something like a dialogue between two women (writer and artist) -it forms something like their understanding of each other. In other words, I have written about you in great detail, and you have approved of me by including my text there.

I deeply felt that it would damage everything to introduce another person, and especially a man, into the midst of this intimacy. This is, first and foremost, my feeling. But I think this feeling is also ideologically accurate. It would have been OK if it were a female sociologist (Nilüfer). But otherwise I feel that the book will lose one of its very significant dimensions and messages. What do you think?

d.



17.9.93

Denizciğim,

Sana kapayı ve copyright sayfasını
gönderiyorum. Sen denetledikten sonra diğerleri
ile birlikte düğmeye göndereceğim. Bir de
CV'yi istemiştin, onu ulaştırıyorum. Akşam
ma doğru bir fırsat bulur bulmaz araya -
cağım ama son derece zor bir gün geçire -
ceğim muhakkak. Sen bana fax çekersen
her halükârda akşam elim'e geçer.

Sevgiler.

Gülün.

Ayrıntılı bir koleksiyon listesi
hazırlıyorum. Bir iki eksik var tamam
layınca ulaştıracağım.

17.9.93

Dear Deniz,

I'm sending you the cover and the copyright page. I'll send it to be typeset with the others after you've checked it. You also asked for a CV. I'm sending you it now. I will call you in the evening the minute I have time, but I'm obviously going to have a very tough day. You can fax me, it should be here in the evening at any rate.

Love,
Gülsün

I'm preparing a detailed collection list. There are a few missing names, I will send the list off when I complete them.



This new proposal led to many changes on our part. For at least a certain period, we had to set aside our own book, and many other things as well, and focus on the publications¹ we had promised we would deliver. Deniz's meticulous approach did not allow for the slightest mistake, and the texts to be published in English were proofread over and over again. I still believe that the UPSD's series of four publications that was later discontinued, possesses historical significance with its content referencing the most important debates of the period.

The two books we prepared for publication were distributed at the congress held in December 1992; and we ended that year absolutely exhausted as a result of this breathless marathon.

We wanted to get back together and continue working on our book, however, new things constantly intervened. Deniz's lectures at university, the new works I produced, their exhibition and

my travels, prevented us from re-focusing and returning to our work on the book in the full sense of the word.

That was when something strange happened. The editor of *İstanbul* magazine published during that period told me that they would dedicate an issue² to the phenomenon of *arabesk*, and that they wanted to use visuals of the paintings and three-dimensional works I had produced in the 80s in that context. Probably out of my inexperience, it never occurred to me to ask how, precisely, they would use these visuals. I received a great surprise when the magazine was published. The visuals, each representing a specific work, had been used completely out of context, and sprinkled across different pages of the magazine as 'ornamental' elements. So much so, that the writers that had contributed to the magazine within the framework of specific topics, had vehemently objected to the presence of completely unrelated visuals on their pages. In the end, my right to respond in the next issue in order to explain the situation was recognized.

The best response in such a situation could have been to publish an in-depth text on

² *İstanbul*, issue: 6, July 1993.

¹ *Sanatçı Hakları: Seminer ve Panel Tartışmaları* [Artist's Rights: Seminar and Panel Discussions], PSD Publication Series 3, 1992 and *Bilgi Olarak Sanat / Olgu Olarak Sanatçı: Yeni Ontoloji* [Art as Knowledge / Artist as Phenomenon: New Ontology], PSD Publication Series 4, 1992.



the works in the visuals and in fact, we already had such a text. The constantly developing piece, Deniz had begun to write for the biennial booklet, could explain the topic very well. Deniz edited the text for the magazine format, and it was presented with a note on the reason for its publication. This was when the title “Fallen Icon” that best expressed the spirit of all my works produced during that period was coined, and found its deserved place as the title of the text. This article, featured in *İstanbul* magazine over more than six pages, is one of the main references of this lost book.

We continued to work on the book; meanwhile, I had exhibited my work *The Notebook* at the Women’s Library and Information Center. In 1994, when I exhibited my work *Chronographia* at the Tarık Zafer Tunaya Cultural Center (the former Beyoğlu Registry Office), one of the few exhibition spaces of the period, my field of interest had become a little clearer to others. The press had begun to allocate more space to new tendencies in art, and displayed an intent to publish decent, explanatory texts. This time, a request came from *Arredamento*³ magazine. At that time, Deniz

³ *Arredamento*,
issue: 57, March
1994, pp. 142-146.

had begun work on a chapter where she assessed two of my works together, *The Notebook* and *Courier*, a work I had made for the *Recollection/Memory I* exhibition in 1991.

When *Chronographia* was added to this, the sequel article titled “Epitaphs, Monuments and Inscription” was ready. It was a good idea to have the text that treated the issue very well and focused on *Chronographia* published in *Arredamento*. In this manner, two different articles from the book project in progress were shared in magazines and put down on record.

As for the text focusing on *Mystic Transport*, my work exhibited at the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial, which would have formed the book’s third chapter, it was never written.

I do not remember in fine detail how later years progressed, but it is true that I found myself in the thick of the very congested traffic of international exhibitions. We know that Deniz’s lecture schedule was no less dense than my program. And that she travelled to the US for a period, and then to Izmir... Under such circumstances, our communication was considerably reduced.



I saw no harm in copying the English translation of the text with the note “From a book to be published in the future” and share it, with her permission, with those who were interested, until 1998. Although unpublished, it was one of the most comprehensive and exceptional texts on my works.

Although our dialogue continued in later times, for a reason I cannot fathom, we never talked about this book again, and the book, on its own accord, gained invisibility.

The sorrow I felt when I received news of Deniz’s passing led me to believe that I had buried the book alongside her, yet certain things in life persist to exist.

When *A Promised Exhibition*, held at SALT Beyoğlu and SALT Ulus took shape, I remembered the ideas we spoke about and the discussions we held years ago on the works that formed the basis of this exhibition, and the persistent care and struggle she displayed for the text. What’s more, I realized how comprehensively all that we experienced back then overlapped with today’s contemporary art production and struggle. I then

believed that it was high time to let our failed attempt back then see the light of day.

Apologizing to Deniz, I opened the file. I was once again struck by the magnitude of the effort, and was assured that the contents of the file had to be brought together with special care. However much we try to complete it, this will always remain an incomplete project, yet one which is open to other possibilities.

The method adopted in the preparation of the e-publication turned into an archaeological study that would have given Deniz great excitement. We tried every method yet could not access the floppy disk –having once trusted it as a product of “the most advanced technology” of the period– containing Deniz’s working documents and our correspondence. We chose the English text finalized by its author, and the Turkish texts published in two separate magazines as our guide. The content was organized in the order determined by the author; and the information regarding visuals was also organized in the way she prepared. On the other hand, I realized I needed additional visuals describing that period for my own article. We had not discussed this, but I believe she would have



approved of my choice if she had seen it. In addition to these, we deemed it appropriate to include a selection of the fax pages that have now turned pale containing our heated discussions and endless correspondence.

It is my hope that Deniz, who always displayed a highly scrupulous attention to detail regarding her own work would be nothing but forgiving about this new arrangement.



THE FALLEN ICON:

A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO

GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA'S ART

1981-1992

Deniz Şengel



[1]



FALLEN ICON

The symmetrical, utterly formalized figure in *Against the Serpent*¹ indicates a geometrization of which nature offers no example. She is reminiscent of the earliest images of the Virgin, the *acheiropoietes*, and more specifically, of the type *Virgo Orans*. As in the mosaic images of the praying Virgin, her forearms are lifted in absolute symmetry and her hands are turned outward. The ritual gesture is identical to that of the Virgin of the Ravenna mosaic from the early twelfth century [2] and, though from a later date, of the Russian Blakernitissa [3].

What differentiates the figure in *Against the Serpent* from the primordial sacred archetypes is that she is not gazing directly at the viewer. In other words, the visual beam is not projected in front of her, which is what the frontal symmetry would have required. Her face is lifted upward, projecting a metaphysical entity above and exterior to her,

PLATE 5



Virgo Orans (Our Lady in Prayer), mosaic,
Ravenna, Beginning of 12th century, detail
Archiepiscopal Museum



toward which her eyes are directed. The direction of the gaze displaces the site of the sacred outside the field of the picture, and disclaims for the figure the metaphysical power her iconographic predecessors hold. But then, the monochrome,



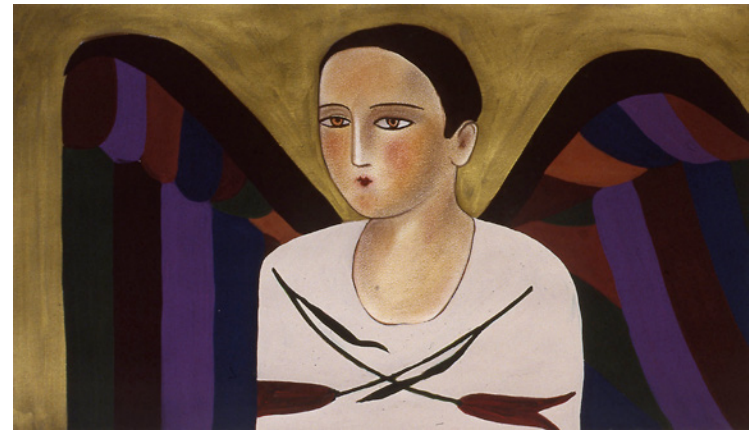
[3]

frontal mass of hair and the face are not coherent: The hair is that of a figure looking straight ahead, at the viewer, while the face is turned upward. But the hair that halos her head continues to order the outline of her face, much as sixth- to thirteenth-century pre-perspective images of the Virgin symmetrify the outline and structure of halo and face. In fact, the face in *Against the Serpent* is structured as if it were turned directly at the viewer. Cover the eyes, brows, nose and mouth: The indentation formed by the parting of the hair in the middle, which, with face turned upward, now is located to the left of the picture, finds its counterpart in the curve of the cheekbone, now on the right. The two indentures are in turn marks on a facial contour that runs along the lines of the oval shape of the hair mass. The apex of the chin, located on the right of the picture, finds its counterpart at the temple, a little above the point where the jawbone ends on the left. Cover the eyes, brows, nose and mouth, and the structure is of a face turned directly at the viewer. An imaginary line drawn straight down from the outer edge of the left brow divides the picture surface, the human figure, and the face into two equal halves. The triangle whose corners are marked by the outer ends of the brows and the mouth is inversely

repeated by another whose apex is located where the wider line of the central emblem disappears on the lower end of the picture, and whose base is a line drawn between the finger ends of the two hands; or, for yet another triangle, between the heads of the serpentine figures. The triangles may be multiplied. Though not meticulously or even deliberately pursued, but rather the result of an unreflected, as it were ‘tactile’ treatment of the picture surface and evidence for the subterranean, almost visceral sense of an artist bred in this geography, the repetition of triangles, the proportions, and the frontal symmetry bespeak the canon of the sacred icon.

For the artist who, without making believe that she is painting somewhere to the west of the Balkans, and faces head-on the Turkish tradition of visual art – which, from Islam’s prohibition of likeness-making to Byzantine iconoclasm, has placed a fundamental ban on the pictorial representation of the sacred and the human, and at its most lenient, legislated pictorial activity in utmost strictness – the face is a mask, something deployed upon the space of the canonical picture with the obliqueness of a mask.² Given the deployment of head and body on the picture surface, the figure in *Against the*

Serpent could be gazing at the viewer, reversing our relation to the image, as the omnipresent frontal gaze of the sacred defined the space of human existence as one of subjection and surveillance; reversing, in other words, the architectonic relation between picture and viewer, and, as Jean Paris has shown, thereby rendering the viewer the object of the divine gaze.³ The picture surface would then signify the threshold of the supernatural, with the third dimension indeed not in the background of the image, but in front of it, where we stand; not the depiction of deity for and in terms of human perception, but the image of the divine *per se*.⁴ The fact that the mural gold of sacred pictures, icons, and illuminations (and, among



[13]



[6]

Karamustafa's works, of *Male Angel* [13], *Two Angels* [6], *Angel* [7], *Snake Woman* [14], *An Ordinary Love* [15], *Motorcycle I* [16], *Fallen Variation on the Last Supper I* [17], *Buy One Get One Free* [18], *Prayer Rug with Elvis* [22]) has here become green would also not affect the workings of the principle of the icon, since the stark, solid green, which constitutes a totally frontal rectangle without shadows or nuances, is –the color of natural objects like leaves and grass notwithstanding– as far removed from any experiential context as would be the barrier posed upon human space and comprehension by gold.⁵



[14]



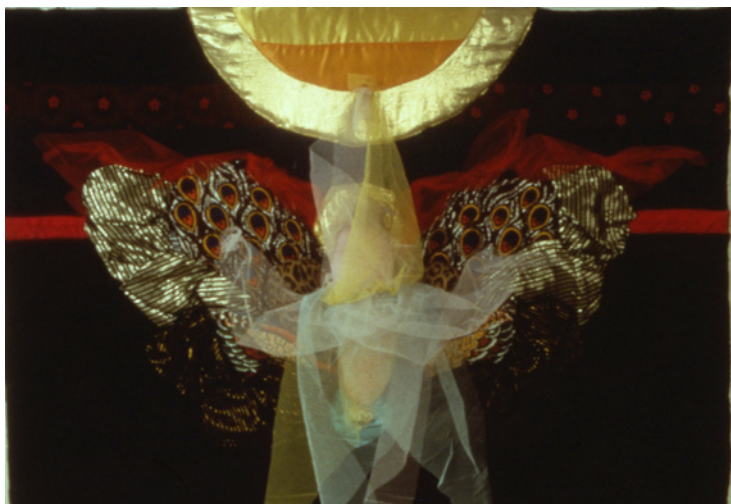
THE FALLEN ICON



[16]



[15]



[7]



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[17]



[22]

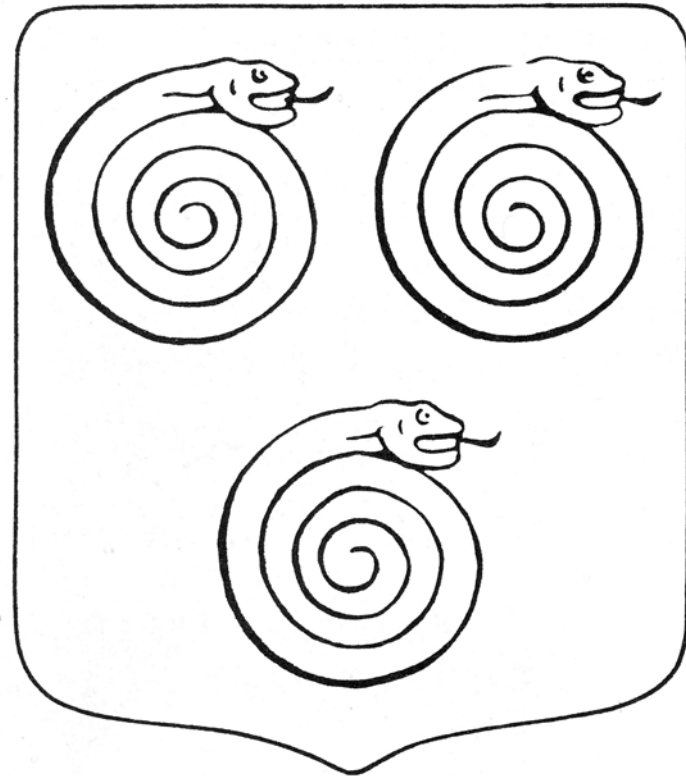


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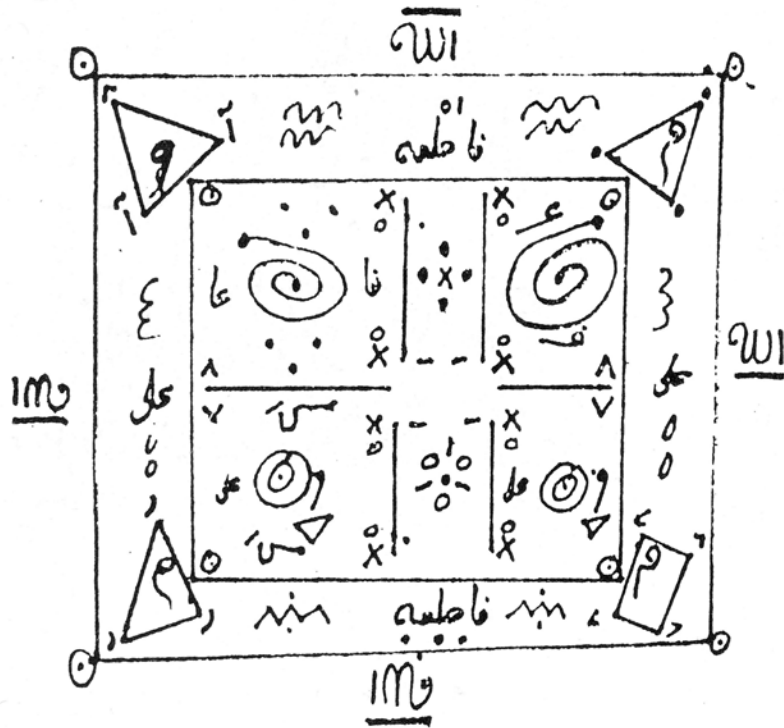


But the background against which the figure stands is not gold. The yellow of the emblem ornamenting the robe is an understated, and false, version of gold. The emblem itself is not an identifiable emblem, but obliquely indicative of any emblem: The emblem of an emblem. And the halo is not a halo, but hair –one of the three absolutely profane things, according to Plato, which, along with nail and slime, does not correspond to an Idea. The color of the body of the robe is indeed within the field, more specifically, the semantic field, of a color –purple– signifying sacred and imperial power, but it is a lighter shade, the dissemblance of the canonical color. The brocade or otherwise rich texture of the orthodox sacred robe has, in the fabric of the arms, become calico, displaying the typical print popular among peasants and rural migrants in urban areas, purchasable at any state-operated fabric store. The hieratic in collapse, or the downward inertia of history? The answer can hardly be so simple, or that harmless when the artistic mechanism at work is that of substitution. The moment the authenticity of the image –any image– is put into question, and specially when this is done by means of a substitution that shows the canon to consist of expendable, interchangeable items (and take that to be the canon

for anything, not only that of iconopoiesis), a far from innocent process gets underway. The process may start with a small distortion such as the substitution of yellow for gold, pink for purple, calico for brocade, but before long the entire texture of the fabric comes apart at an unsettling speed. The coiled serpents –the symbol of Saint Hilda



[19]



[20]

whose prayer had the power to transform dangerous snakes into stones [19]— become the sorceress' homeopathic fetishes [20], and the picture of the sacred becomes the icon of the demon [21]. And once the face turned to the sky in devotional submissiveness and inscribed upon the surface of a frontal head is revealed to be a mask, the lifted arms and extended hands of the praying Virgin

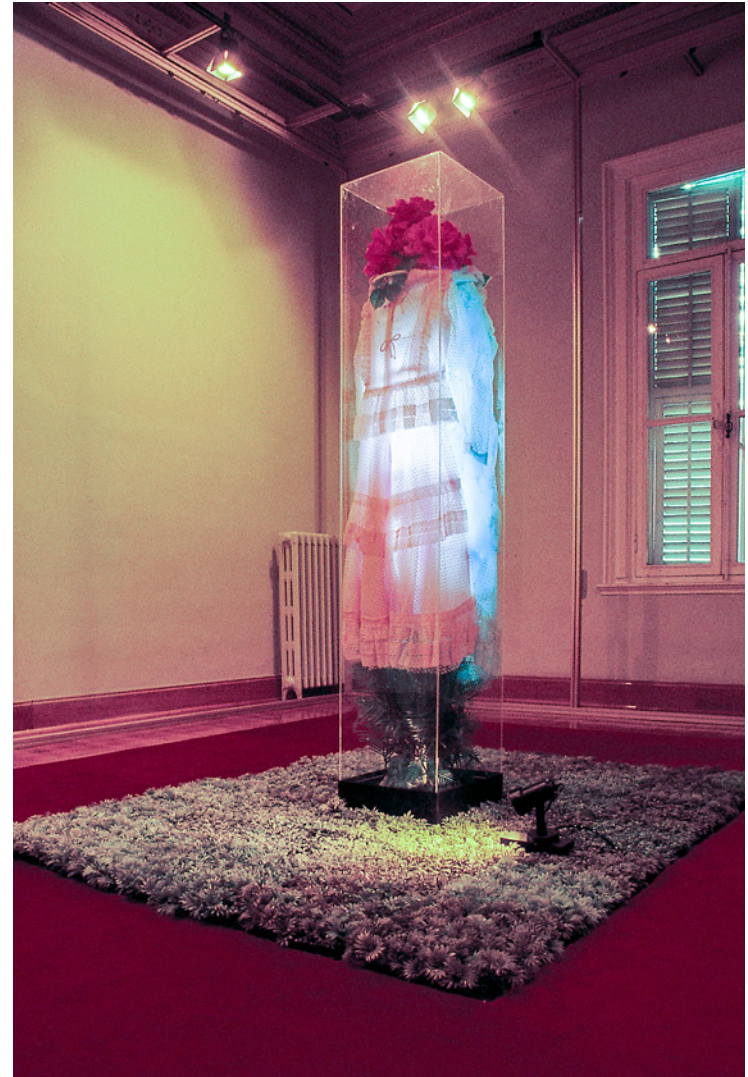


[21]



[26]

become the gesture and mime of a marionette. If low can be substituted for high (as in a litotes or understatement), so can high for low (as in a hyperbole), and the marionette can become the marionetteer that, far from being manipulated, may be holding the strings to the supernatural. The direction of the ligature may be reversed and the sky toward which the heraldic gaze is directed cease to indicate the oblique presence of the invisible, and become the earthly abyss. On the one hand, the convention of sacred iconography that pictures angels in pairs [26] can produce in orthodox continuity a painting like *Two Angels* [6].



[9]





[27]





[31]

On the other hand, the twice-framed transvestite figure of *Double Reality* [27] or the subversive division and repetitions in *Dagger* [28], *Grapes* [29], *Melon II* [30], *Prayer Rug with Elvis* [22], *2 x Jesus + Baby Gazelle* [23], *Fallen Variation on the Last Supper II* [31], *Monument II* [9], *A Mask for Each Hour of the Day* [32] can be substituted for the ‘rational’ and ‘natural’ couple figure a high tradition has reserved for angels and for Adam and Eve. What starts as a litotes, as in the use of a lighter shade of the canonical color (a prime instance of litotes in painting), contains within itself the power to become hyperbole. But more importantly than the capacity of one specific trope to turn into its op-

posite, such tropological commutations indicate the systematic undoing of the substantial claim implied by the use of a figure. Each destroys the universe produced by the other, breaking up the semblance of totality apparently posited by the work. True, the substitution of yellow for gold, pink for purple and of calico for brocade belongs to the domain of a trope –synecdoche– which, as the figure of the substitution of the part for the whole, remains the figure closest to the representation (or, since the praying figure is an icon of the past, we may for now use a temporal term: recollection) of a bygone totality, of lost truth and authenticity. And on this basis it may be claimed that the synecdoche is the figure *par excellence* that renders the ruin, the fragment and the decadent version of what once was whole and morally and aesthetically better; because it juxtaposes, as in Karamustafa’s work, calico with Byzantium, and replaces the Virgin of the medieval tapestry by rocker girls [16] and the sophisticated texture and design of the prayer rug by ready-mades featuring Elvis [22].

In fact, the work of Gülsün Karamustafa, whose every exhibition and installation has received wide recognition, has been consistently





[28]







taken up in terms of categories of psychological and socio-cultural decay that range from a vision of the work as a series of arguments on “arabesk sentimentality”⁶ and “fatalism,” to the “documentation” or “gratulatory illustration” of “decadence” and “rampant aesthetics of kitsch,” to the perception of the work as “transmitting to the viewer a certain dejection,” presumably about the loss of high culture, integrity and historical identity.⁷ Regardless of whether the orientation is sociological, psychological, or aesthetic, the shared error of these perceptions is the notion that the work of visual art is fundamentally a temporal object whose constitution can be genetically derived along a diachronic axis. In other words, they reify in temporal terms, as a diachrony of different cultural periods, what is in fact a synchronic tropological mechanism of mutual undoing. Fatalism (the future), nostalgia (the past), decadence (the present) and the socio-aesthetic categories (kitsch, arabesk, etc.) associated with them pertain to time, which means, they immediately belong with nature and with consciousness and not with art. ‘Decay,’ for example, whence ‘decadence’ derives, is a term that is applicable to natural objects and conscious objects, but not to art. Trees and flowers decay, and time may be felt to be pass-



[23]



[12 detail]

ing –in a term borrowed from nature– toward decay. Works of art, however, are not sentient, and it may very well be for that precise reason that they have the baffling power for substitution. The moment we are dealing with substitutions –as in synecdoche, hyperbole, understatement, askesis, metalepsis, and so on– we are dealing with artistic matter, with no alliance whatsoever to temporal categories that pertain to natural or psychological models (including the aesthetic, as *aesthesis*, perception, is an irredeemably psychological category)⁸: One cannot substitute pain for pleasure, happiness for unhappiness, night for day, and a river for the ocean, but one can always substi-

tute colors for one another, or words, or forms, or icons, such as Elvis and Christ [22, 23]. Or one can substitute cloth for paint, writing for picture [12, 35], or a wire basket for the canvas [24]. But this, one can do exclusively in the domain of art. The fact, therefore, that gold leaf and the image of Elvis are simultaneously present on a prayer rug [22] does not justify translating a synchronic juxtaposition into a temporal sequence (Byzantine gold leaf-Ottoman rug-modern Elvis), or into the hierarchical terms of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures. Elvis on the prayer rug is one more example of litotes in art, a substitution that desacralizes, or rather, problematizes the sacred because, like all tropes, litotes is a way of reading, which reveals a weakness in the original (here, the sacred rug). But not in the sense that the original thereby loses its sanctity for whoever wishes to continue to use a prayer rug to mark the space of devotion –not, in other words, pragmatically– but in the more fundamental mode of showing that the prayer rug or the icon are not in fact canonical. And though prayer rugs continue to be manufactured and prayed on in the world, on this fundamental level it is not possible to return to the sacred original from Karamustafa’s version. On the fundamental level, the tropological workings of art are irreversible.

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[24]



And it is here that the historical dimension, or, if you will, the historicity of art lies. Another way of saying this is that no prayer rug woven in devotional canonicity would today constitute art. Karamustafa's rug is neither kitsch nor an object of pop-art nor a modern myth put together from eclectic archeological fragments. But to see the work in this negative light, one has to circumvent the tendency of the nostalgic gaze to temporalize. Looking at Karamustafa's work, one finds oneself face to face with the sacred. This is a sacred that has met with the weakness at its origin, with its own historicity or contextuality, in other words, and yielded its place to art.

If low can be juxtaposed with high, so can high with low. But the hyperbolic direction here, put to work by the figure of Elvis on the prayer rug, falls rather short of sanctifying Elvis. That is to say, it does not decanonize the past, the devotional, and the high in order to canonize the modern, the profane, and the low, because, for one, there is not one Elvis on the rug, but three. Nothing of which there are three can be sacred. Nothing that is shown to admit of duplication and copy has ever been admitted into a canon or into the bounds of sanctity. Similarly, Kara-

mustafa's Christ tapestry shows not one but two Christs risen [23]. What is happening here, in other words, does not even remotely resemble what is at work, say, in a portrait of Elvis, regardless of how avant-garde the 'style' of portraiture might be. Nor is it affiliated with what is at work in a tapestry which simply depicts a pop star, as was the case, for example, in each of the original Elvis tapestries of which Karamustafa purchased three in the Grand Bazaar. In brief, there is no "arabesk sentimentality" here, no portrayal of "decadence," "fatalism," and "kitsch"; neither their "critical documentation" nor their "gratulatory illustration." Critics who feel "a certain dejection" upon beholding Karamustafa's work, because, they feel, she so "truthfully" expresses the waning of empire, history and "Istanbul," and the invasion of the irreverent rural squatter, can dry their tears. Karamustafa's work does not exactly protect the sacred domain of art from the mob's profane vehicles of expression. But critics may still want to take their ideologically charged demographic research not to her studio but into the vast squatter neighborhoods enveloping Istanbul, where, in interiors decorated with tapestries equally idolizing Elvis Presley, Jesus Christ, pilgrims at Mecca and Michael Jackson,



they will locate the ‘true’ objects of their commentary in the original state prior to the transfiguration they undergo in the artist’s hands. Yet, in those icons and tapestries revered by the miscellaneous citizen they may only behold, as in a grotesque mirror, the darker side of their own republican⁹ idolatry of the past. All the evidence history and works of art provide indicate that the desire for past and present, art and life to coincide is bound to be frustrated. Art and life are never farther apart than at the moment they seem to coincide. And when the foundation of hope becomes remembrance, specially the remembrance of past glory from the perspective of the ‘decay’ the present is assumed to yield, the way is opened up for desperate apocalyptic politics. And in the twentieth century, we know too well where those politics inevitably lead. On the other hand, the hyperbolic and metaleptic reversals in Karamustafa’s work, and the displacements of highly evocative artistic materials are nihilistic in a very specific, careful and positive sense: They represent a resistance and imply a critical stance that make possible the utterance of affirmative statements that go against the direction of an entire public opinion and undo everything of- ficial ideology says.

It is possible to understand critics’ reception of Karamustafa’s work in terms of the reception of allegorical works in general. The tropological breaking of the totality apparently posited by the work, we have said, is tantamount to the collapse of narrative temporality. The simplest description of allegory is that there is a radical difference between what an allegory says and what it means to say. What it says –what it indicates in the representational field of the signifier, in other words– can be plotted in narrative fashion, as Karamustafa’s critics immediately recognized, and the *Prayer Rug with Elvis* may be taken, according to the critic’s ideological stance, as the story of the appropriation of two cultures of the past by the present or as the modern’s loss of the past. Hegel explains the fact that readers do not tire of falling into this trap set by allegory, by the latter’s use of a more transparent signifier than that at work in other modes.¹⁰ The difficulty posed by allegory lies in the clarity of the signifier and the simplicity of its putative tale. It is possible to take any signifier –and not only that of allegory– and to derive a narrative from it on logical, representational grounds, and even to conjecture multiple, conflicting narratives. But in the allegorical work of visual art, that thing there, that fragment



of gold leaf or that Elvis figure is not a signifier opening up to a *logically* arguable semantic area, but a figure which has no mimetic connection whatsoever with the narrative field the signifier may be construed to indicate by convention.¹¹ To ‘see’ that figure is possible neither through narrative nor through any psychological vector based on time and desire. This look which breaks through Elvis’ iconic unity (posited elsewhere, in popular culture and in pop art) and disperses it along the texture of the prayer rug, and thereby pierces through the symbolic meaning and objective unity of all prayer rugs, is comparable only to a “lightning” moment.¹² What is broken up is the clarity and the visual, aesthetic, profane and hedonistic comprehensibility of the representational object. What allegory intends to say is something that cannot be said. Just as the highest truths and the deepest experiences of life, death and loss cannot be named and their stories told, what allegory wants to say too has no semantics or narrative.¹³ Therefore allegory always tells of *something else*. Still, it tells of something; in other words, on the level of the signifier, it lends itself to temporalization. But since the path of what it wants to say runs through figures, tropes and other kinds of indirection that break through the

consistency of the signifier, regardless of what it may say about life, the thesis of allegory on art is always iconoclastic. In other words, it negates the icon even as it employs the entire corpus of the latter’s convention. On the one hand, the visual, iconic aspect of the allegory derives from the necessity of assuming form.¹⁴ Because it cannot be represented, it must –in the Hegelian sense– fall into visual contingency which will be sublated by the same principle of necessity. On the other hand, the icon is always fallen on account of a purely artistic-technical reason: By definition, allegory repeats a signifier that temporally precedes it. Just as the figure in *Against the Serpent* [1] is a repetition of those in the Ravenna mosaic [2], the Firdevsî drawing [21] and the Blakerna icon [3], or the reflection of the Last Supper in the back panel mirror is the repetition of the Last Supper in the front in *Fallen Variation on the Last Supper II* [31]. The moment repetition is the case; the question of the meaning of the signifier becomes secondary in relation to its belatedness. While the meaning of the preceding signifier is pure anteriority, the repetition itself can no longer assume as its meaning a theme like ‘betrayal’ which the Last Supper incident may imply and which may be the meaning of a Last Supper work that came before. As long



as the work we are thinking about is Karamustafa's *Prayer Rug with Elvis* or *Fallen Variation on the Last Supper*, the Elvis tapestry in the Grand Bazaar, the prayer rug in the Blue Mosque, the icon in Hagia Sophia, and Leonardo's *Last Supper* may have meaning. But the meaning of Karamustafa's work is the fact that it is the repetition of a signifier that precedes it and with which it will never coincide. The meaning of allegory is the distance to the origin, and its language is a language built in this gap of temporal difference without nostalgia or the desire for identity with the source.

EPITAPHS, MONUMENTS AND INSCRIPTION

“As we crossed frontiers, we used to hide what was important for us by sewing them inside children’s vests”¹⁵. The sentence is apparently quite straightforward, expressing the simple fact of a past deed, which is also illustrated literally by the children’s vests laid to view on the flat tops of the plexiglass stands. Folded pieces of paper with writing on them have been sewn inside the vests. The quick stitches of a skilled hand criss-cross the loose and delicate threading of the little vests, which consist of layers of simple, gauzelike, semi-transparent material. One immediately re-



[12]

calls episodes from the oral history of the Russian War, the Balkan War and of the First World War. As the borders of the Empire are effaced, people start moving in a geography rapidly becoming Balkanized, with emergent frontiers where none had existed, and with military checkpoints clad in every imaginable uniform. The world is on the move and only those in uniform know where they belong. Centuries of autochthonic existence is dislocated. Only important things vestable on the body are taken along. Women sew and bind them on their and their children’s bodies, presumably



because these are the bodies to be assaulted last. The stories end with episodes of mutilation. The bodies of women and children *are* assaultable, it turns out, and the important things are lost along with the part of the body that carried them. The ancestral ring is lost along with the hand, the amulet on a chain intended for dispelling the occult and the evil, along with the neck. Karamustafa's children's vests are without bodies.

Taken up in the inevitable context of the oral history that constitutes as it were the collective unconscious of this culture, and is overlaid by the memory of the Resistance courier of the Second World War, of the Cold War on either side of the Curtain, and of the military regimes Turkey has endured, Karamustafa's work is overcharged to the point of driving the viewer to paralysis, barring all thought and consciousness as the viewer becomes the sheer body whose violent absence those vests indicate, and on the surface of which every prison memoir of Republican history is written, and re-written, and felt as multitudes' experience of what lies beyond the threshold of endurance converges in this one body. The collective subject "we" of the inscription calls for this convergence. The child's vest immediately

denotes the vulnerability and helplessness of the body. The fact that the words, "what was important for us" of the inscription find their objective counterpart in the manuscripted and printed material concealed inside the vests, immediately brings to mind the precious books one had to bury –on the eve of yet another military *coup*– even burn, at the risk of survival, with one's own hands: In the face of the illegitimation and forced disappearance of the book, the oral tradition of memory, unsurprisingly still alive in the culture, came to aid. The texts were memorized in order to be quoted and recited for the benefit of those who did not know, or to bring together with firmer ties still the community of the initiated. They were murmured, as in a prayer, with hopes of enchanting reality into imitating the text. The forbidden books were expected to function like sheets of holy Scripture or the hieroglyphic magic crypted by the local fortuneteller *cum* sorceress, folded to the miniscule size of the silver amulet to be worn protectively close to the heart. They were the shields. And when one talked, one pursued the necessary obliqueness of any persecuted speech that cannot openly say what it means. The public utterance concealed a repressed message. It did not say what it meant, and did not mean what





[10]



it said. Now that freedom seems to be here, one may want to think that this mode of operating of language has disappeared along with the political circumstances it was contingent upon.

To the extent that the process of interpreting a work becomes linked to the life of a society, reality and art, fact and fiction seem to coincide. As in the case of the persecuted speech and the crypted message, understanding seems to call for the communal recollection of a *we* that will help decipher the mediation at work between the sign and the referent. This very mediation, however, as something assignable to an external point in reality, far from being substantial, is itself something tropologically posited by the work. As an external point, it does not exist. Put in the language of representation, this is to say that the sentence inscribed on the stands is the speech of the dead. But the dead do not speak. The quotation marks enclosing the sentence only underline the absence of a speaking subject or a collective subject, or rather; they underline the hallucinatory nature of this speech. Where there is a quotation, the speaking subject is absent. The locus of the memory the *Courier* enunciates are the bodies whose absence the vests indicate: Not ‘memory’



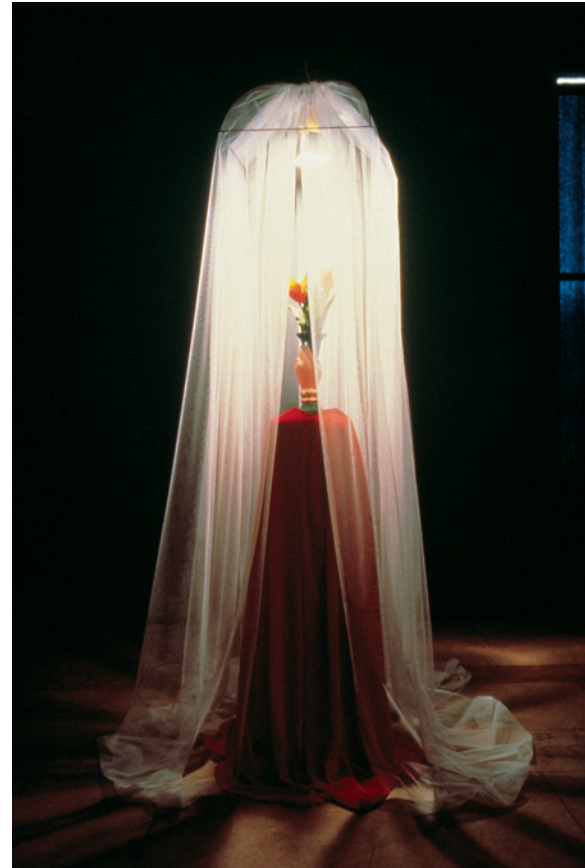
[35]

as the recollection of the dead by the living, but as a memory and a knowledge that is with the dead. The work explicitly gives the point of mediation – the collective deed and its remembrance – through an epitaph. The points of reference, the locus of collective memory, are the absent dead. Monuments and epitaphs are not alien to the space of Karamustafa’s work. Aside from the *Courier*, *Monuments I* and *II* [25, 9] and *Four Overlapping Istanbul Texts* [35] are works that explicitly take up the forms of the monument and the epitaph,



while others, notably the two Last Supper works [17, 31] engage the theme obliquely.

Uninscribed plexiglass stands first of all would have served as the transparent medium for the presentation of the vests, and secondly, they would have presented the vests as the textual burial ground of memory, posing the concealed texts' illegibility and the memory of the body as the fundamental problems. In other words, the Text, which would be reified in the printed and manuscripted material sewn inside the vests, would become the locus of memory, and in turn be identified with the body synecdochically given through the vests. But the inscription on the stands complicates matters.¹⁶ When writing is found side by side with a picture or some other version of visual art, naturally one may look first for a structure of *illustration* within which the visual and the verbal elucidate each other. To take up the *Courier* in the context of oral history is tantamount to regarding the visual as the objective illustration of the written. The fact that the sentence is given in quotation marks –the fact, in other words, that it conveys the semblance of something that was originally spoken, may reinforce the impression that the visual and the linguistic are here found



[25]

in a hierarchic relationship in which the former illustrates or elucidates the original linguistic phenomenon. On the other hand, if the work were to be taken as commentary on the museum presentation of the work of art, the inscription would indicate the explanatory discourse of art history.

But then, contrary to the impression of simple clarity created by the sentence upon first reading –for reasons indicated above– the sentence will turn out not to be as elucidating a gloss on the vests as it at first seemed. In brief, it is not quite possible to regard the sentence as belonging to the art historical discourse of the museum. All aside, art history does not speak plural. By the presence of the sentence, the stands cease to function as the medium for museological presentation, lose transparency, and assume voice. As pointed out before, the inscription is an epitaph voiced by the dead in the collective autobiographical mode. When the sentence becomes the inscription on an



[39]

epitaph, the vests become commemorative signs, made by the living, that adorn graves: Relics of the dead, or as in the case of the fragment of a hand holding a vase of flowers in *Monument I* [25], an offering to the dead. In that context, the conventional relationship of illustration and hierarchy between writing and the visual has disappeared, and yielded its place to a rhetoric which takes apart the cognitive aesthetic analysis the concept of ‘illustration’ entails. We know that the figure of conferring voice or speech upon an absent, dead or voiceless entity is prosopopeia, “the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave.”¹⁷ Conferring speech upon an absent, dead or voiceless entity implies endowing that entity with mouth, eyes, and further, with an entire face, as is indicated also by the meaning of the term ‘prosopopeia’, *proso-pon-poiein*: The making of a face. In that sense, prosopopeia is a chiasmic figure that attempts to cross the conditions of life and death with the attribute of speech. But when the dead speak, the living are silent: The conferring of speech upon the dead, which would cross the conditions of life and death, does not facilitate communion between the two modes, but, as determined by the very structure of a chiasmic figure, the two only exchange places. By making death speak, proso-



[8]

popeia converts the living into dumb entities. The wedge-like Z shape of the plexiglass stands becomes reminiscent of a wedge drawn into the continuity and communion that might be posited between the dead and the living, the past and the present, between the memory that remains with the dead, and the experience of now.¹⁸ It is not surprising that memory is located with the dead and conveyed as inaccessible to the living, in a work produced in a culture systematically forced, by the state, to forget. The mutilation the work invokes goes beyond that of the body, into the realm of the mind. The severance that separates the living from the dead separates the now from the past in the mode of the difference between the ordeal of historical time reduced to a perpetual present, and the knowledge of the dead which is beyond the grasp of politico-military power. But the nightmare of ubiquitous official history, of a past produced by the State Historical Society, in a language fabricated by the State Linguistic Society, and the virtually absolute wall, erected between the now and the past in the shape of commemorative granite, perhaps yield too representational, and therefore simplistic a frame within which to consider Karamustafa's work.

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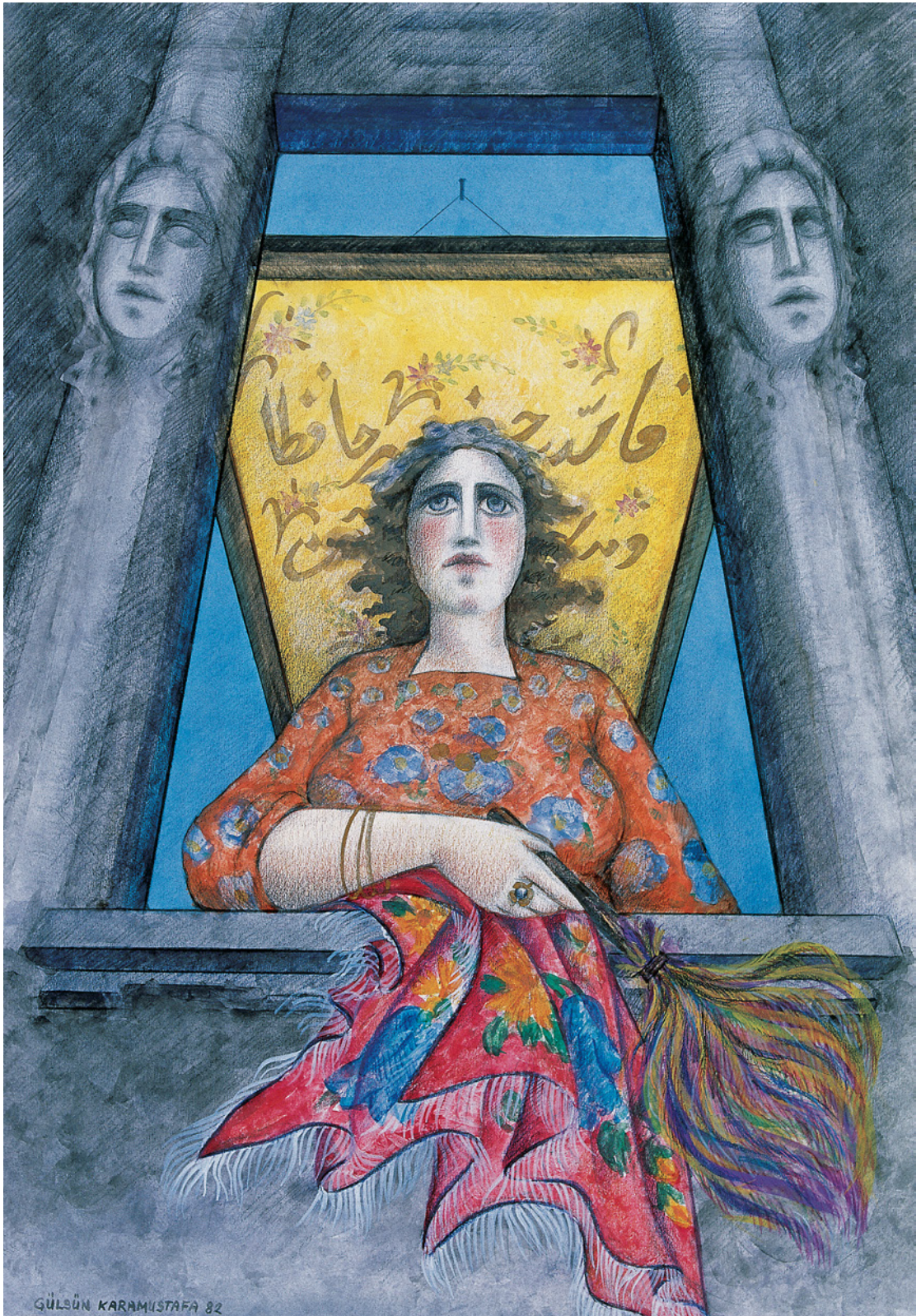


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THE FALLEN ICON



[38]





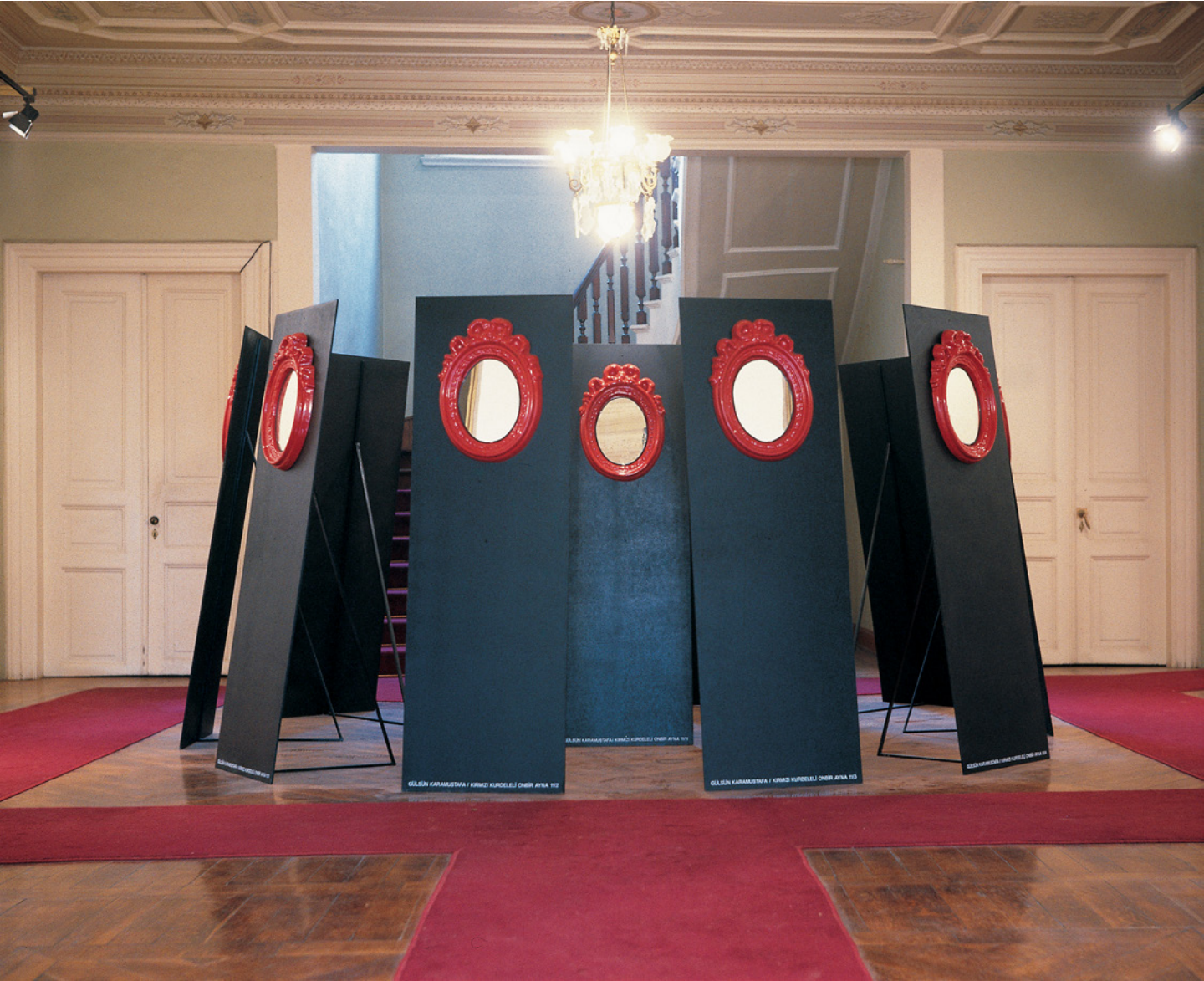
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But then, this knowledge of confinement and loss, of diaspora that can be spatial as well as temporal, which the experience of a certain kind of history conveys, perhaps is requisite to artistic sublimity.

With the prosopopeia, the figure of the making of faces, in the *Courier*, we return to the wider problem taken up in the artistic language of Gülşün Karamustafa and indicated in the beginning of this essay: It is needless to point out that the fundamental problem taken up in most of Kara-

mustafa's paintings is the problem of the face. From *Against the Serpent* to the sultans' portraits [18], *Angels Have Gender* [36], *Melon II* [30] and *The Balcony* [37] to *Hotel Istanbul* [38], we deal first with the problem of the face and the representation of the face. These measured, petrified, haunting faces, each of which come from within the pictorial convention of the icon, are obstinate encounters with the mimetic prohibition whose roots still run deep and firm within this culture. While the prohibition and the convention figure in Karamustafa's language as a mask, veil or in some other indirect mode [6] in the paintings, in the installations that come before the *Courier* they figure, again, as masks in the shape of hollow ready-mades [32] or as mirrors reflecting the face, or rather, implying the illusionary nature of mimesis [33]. The use of the mask (i.e., not the picture of a mask or of a masked face, but the use of a ready-made mask) or of the mirror, points toward the fact that mimesis itself is nothing but a trope, the figure of prosopopeia. The veiled face of the angel [4, 5] or the invisible, obliquely indicated faces in *Tiger Woman* [39] or *Two Angels* [6] indicate the prohibition in the form of parabasis, in the sense of a figure taken literally. They say, in other words, that the prohibition

THE FALLEN ICON



[33]



itself is nothing but the figuration of canonical tradition, of the fact that tradition is an exclusive canon. This is true even in a concrete historical sense: We know that the iconoclasts, Byzantine or Ottoman, had meticulously worked out pictorial canons, and that the Ottoman court -theocratic supervisor of that sacred law which included the ban on picture-making- developed its own pictorial conventions. Karamustafa's masks and faces show the tradition of the canon to be in fact the canon of tradition. In a sense, there is no difference between the revealed face in *Against the Serpent* and the covered faces in the *Veiled Angel* pictures. While one says that far from depicting empirical objects, all pictures rewrite an iconographic convention, the other leaves blank the page or the surface upon which this writing will be inscribed. The veiled angel is in fact not a covered face, but the truest of all pictures of the face, just as the blank handkerchief of Saint Veronica, the *Verum icon*, is the truest image of the face of Christ. The veil in the angel pictures is concretely a blank page: Radically different from the historically particular faces painted and to be painted, it is nevertheless the picture that makes possible all pictures, the original ground upon which every tropological attribution of a face takes place.



THE FALLEN ICON



[4]



[5]



This blank surface is the tradition itself, which is always open to defacement.

The topic of the face reaches the point of radical effacement in the *Courier*; or rather, of defacement, as we have here a work that belongs to the genre of the monument.¹⁹ The monumental, that is to say, sublimated preservation implied by an epitaph is not a simple preservation of history, but the desire of overcoming death, as the urge to leap out of the historical time reduced to a *now*, and to rise above the sense of confinement. In the *Courier* the face disappears along with the body. It becomes the sheer linguistic figure of the speech of the dead, literally the figure of speech of prosopopeia, in other words, that is devoid of all aesthetic presence, which has disappeared along with the face, the body and anything else that may be pictorial. The viewer becomes the eye that *reads* the text of the epitaph. She is no longer the viewer of an aesthetic object, but a reader drawn into an act of decipherment that is directed toward an art no longer simply ‘visual’ in the sense of being perceptual or aesthetic. The vests too, as the prime material and aesthetic elements of the work, beckon to the *reader*: Their material presence only serves the concealment of



[34]

the written. Viewing them does not help understand them. Literally displacing the eye, prime organ and biological ground of aesthetics, the hollow eyes of the masks in *A Mask for Each Hour of the Day* [32] constitute again a parabasis, or pun, on what the *Courier* narrates in greater detail and sophistication. The masks' hollow mouths, on the other hand, are closely reminiscent of an

image that cuts through the history of art: The open, singing mouth of (blind) Homer emblazoned upon Achilles' shield or depicted in the picture of the poet's bust which so frequently stands in a corner of the Pygmalion studio [34]: The *ut pictura poesis* paradigm that articulates the desire to overcome the aesthetic-material barrier on the way to profound and pure artistic speech, the desire of visual art to overcome its own visuality. The *Courier* projects this speech as the speech of the dead, the human absence that spells the radical negation of aesthetic consciousness.



NOTES

1. See figure 1. Henceforward, reference numbers to figures will be indicated in brackets in the text.
2. Otherwise it is veiled or concealed in some other manners [4, 5, 6, 7, 8] or it is absent along with the rest of the body [9, 10, 11, 12].
3. Jean Paris, *Painting and Linguistics* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University, 1975), pp. 31-72.
4. Paris, p. 39.
5. This green also belongs among heraldic tones. See W. Ellwood Post, *Saint, Signs, and Symbols* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1962; 1986), p. 13.
6. On 'arabesk' as a dimension of Turkish urban culture since the 1970's, see Martin Stokes, "Music, Fate and State: Turkey's Arabesk Debate," *Middle East Report*, September-October 1989, No. 160, pp. 27-30.
7. These citations are taken from 18 magazine articles and newspaper reviews on Gülsün Karamustafa, which were published between 1980 and 1992.
8. For the definition of the tropes, see Cicero, *De oratore*, III. xxxviii.155-xlii.169 [trans. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham, vol.2 (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1942; 1976)] and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII. vi.19ff., IX. i.5, iii.58ff. (*synecdoche*); VI.iii.52, 67, VIII.iv.29, vi.37ff., 67ff., IX.i.5, ii.106 [trans. H.E. Butler, vols. 2 and 3 (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1920; 1980)]. On *aesthesis*, see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), particularly pp. 28-64; for the etymological and biological sense of *aesthesis*, see D. Şengel, "'Postmodernizm' and Teori", *Çağdaş Düşünce ve Sanat*, eds. İpek Aksüğür Duben and D. Şengel (Istanbul: Plastik Sanatlar Derneği, 1991), particularly pp. 40-41, 46-47.
9. I am using the concept 'republican' as described by Régis Debray. See "Etes-vous démocrate ou républicain?", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 Novembre/6 Décembre 1989, pp. 49-55. Also, Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (Istanbul: Metis Books, 1991), particularly pp. 132ff.
10. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Theorie Werkausgabe 13 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), particularly I. v.
11. See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, 1983), pp.187-228.
12. See Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978; 1990), pp. 144ff.
13. See Friedrich Schlegel; "Das Höchste kann man eben weil es unaussprechlich ist, nur allegorisch sagen." "Gespräch über die Poesie", *Kritische Ausgabe*, Vol. 2, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796 -1801)*, ed. Hans Eichner (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967), p. 324. See also Paul de Man, "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion", *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981; 1986), pp. 1-25.
14. See G. W. F. Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Theorie Werkausgabe 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970; 1984), C.VII. c.



15. See figure 12. Henceforward, reference numbers to figures will be indicated in brackets in the text.
16. For the distinction between recollection and memory, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Theorie Werkausgabe 10 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), sections 453 ve 458.
17. See Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67-81, especially p. 77; and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, III.viii.49-52, VI.i.25, IX.ii.29, 37; vols. 1 and 2.
18. Roland Barthes' S/Z for the signification of the letter Z as the interruption of the code of continuity, reciprocity, and the rule of exchange (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970).
19. The English word 'de-facement' specifically refers to the disfiguring of an edifice, the disrespect of a monument. The Turkish word for the same, *tahrif*, means a changing, diverting or perverting. More importantly, it means the falsifying of a document by erasure or addition, the corruption of the orthography of a word, of a tradition by the alteration of a letter or a vowel, and further the corrupting of a word of *Quran* in recitation. Especially in the last sense, the word signifies the causing of a break in the tradition even as the letter appears to be observed, and a momentary fall, swing to an instantaneous slip.



THE FALLEN ICON

List of Illustrations

- 1
Against the Serpent
1986
37.5x22 cm
gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper
- 2
Virgo Orans, the Virgin in prayer
Beg. 12th century
Detail of the mosaic in Archiepiscopal Museum,
Ravenna
- 3
Virgo Orans Blakernitissa the Virgin in prayer,
Blakerna type
19th century
Russian icon in the Hagia Sophia Museum, Istanbul
Photo: Sami Güner
- 4
Veiled Angel I
1986
25x33 cm
gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper
- 5
Veiled Angel II
1986
25x33 cm
gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper
- 6
Two Angels
1986
100x85 cm
acrylic on canvas
- 7
Angel
1986
125x110x15 cm
fabric, synthetic cotton
- 8
Time in Me, Me in Time
1982
41x53 cm
gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper
- 9
Monument II
1988
140x140x175 cm
fabric, plexiglass, plastic
- 10
Ascension
1985
245x185x10 cm
fabric, plastic, synthetic cotton
Photo: Teoman Madra
- 11
Shield
1986
250x135x75 cm
fabric, plastic, synthetic sponge



THE FALLEN ICON

12

Courier

1991

125x40x40 cm, 3 pieces

fabric, synthetic cotton, plexiglass

Text: "As we crossed frontiers, we used to hide what was important for us by sewing them inside children's vests."

13

Male Angel

1986

47x275 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

14

Snake Woman

1986

50x85 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

15

An Ordinary Love

1984

245x175 cm

fabric, plastic

Photo: Teoman Madra

16

Motorcycle I

1986

110x75 cm

fabric, synthetic cotton

Photo: Laleper Aytek

17

Fallen Variation on the Last Supper I

1984

150x190 cm

fabric

Photo: Turgut Salgar

18

Buy One Get One Free

1991

ten 30x30 cm portraits, acrylic on canvas, plexiglass

19

Saint Hilda insignium, W. Ellwood Post, *Saints, Signs, and Symbols* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1962; 1986), p. 46.

20

Brick charm for obstructing lovers' union. İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, *Cinsel Büyüleri* [Sexual Spells]. Istanbul: Seçme Kitaplar, 1975, p. 164.

21

Image of the demon that lived before Adam, from *The Davetname of Firvesi the Long*, 15th century. Published in Malik Aksel, *Anadolu Halk Resimleri* [Anatolian Popular Pictures]. Istanbul: Publications of the School of Literature, Istanbul University, 1960, p. 141.

22

Prayer Rug with Elvis

1986

180x105 cm

fabric, synthetic cotton

Photo: Laleper Aytek



THE FALLEN ICON

23

2 x Jesus + Baby Gazelle

1984

185x230 cm

fabric

24

Mystic Transport

1992

twenty 60x45x90 cm fabric, cotton, iron

Photo: Laleper Aytek

Gülsün Karamustafa identifies the following passage in Jean Baudrillard's *Amérique* as the patronym of her work *Mystic Transport*: "A blue-green lorry with gleaming chromework is going down Seventh Avenue in the early morning sun, just after a snowfall. It bears on its sides, in gold metallic lettering, the words *Mystic Transport*. It sums up the whole of New York and its mystical view of decadence. Every special effect can be found here, from sublime verticality to decay on the ground, all the special effects of the mixing of races and empires. This is the fourth dimension of the city." (*America*. Trans. Chris Turner. London; New York: Verso, 1988; 1989, p. 21.)

25

Monument I

1987

200 cm

fabric, gypsum, plastic

Photo: Tülin Altılar

26

Annunciation, 15th century. Illumination detail from *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*.

Musée Condé, Chantilly.

Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

27

Double Reality

1987

190x170x170 cm

gypsum, fabric, iron, fluorescent paint

28

Dagger

1986

22x29 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

29

Grapes

1986

47x27.5 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

30

Melon II

1986

47x27.5 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

31

Fallen Variation on the Last Supper II

1984

65x45x40 cm

gypsum, fabric, mirror

Photo: Laleper Aytek

32

A Mask for Each Hour of the Day

1990

200x125 cm

plastic, canvas

Photo: Erdal Aksoy



33

Eleven Mirrors with Red Ribbons

1990

eleven 180x40 cm plastic, plywood, mirror

34

Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1890.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

35

Four Overlapping Istanbul Texts

1992

Detail from the computer design

Texts: Georg Ostrogorsky, *Bizans Devleti Tarihi* [Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates], trans. into Turkish, Fikret Işıltan (Ankara: Publication of the State's Historical Society, 1986), p. 165; Münir Aktepe, ed., *Şem'dâni-zade Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'i't-Tevahîr* [Annals by Master Şem'dâni-zade Süleyman of Fındıklı, Student of History], vol. I (Istanbul: Publications of the School of Literature, Istanbul University, 1986), p. 163; Ali Fuad Türkgeldi, *Görüp İşittiklerim* [Things I Have Seen and Heard], (Ankara: Publication of the State's Historical Society, 1949), p. 87; Emrullah Nutku, *Demokrat Parti Neden Çöktü ve Politikada Yitirdiğim Yıllar, 1946-1958* [Why The Democratic Party Collapsed and Years I Have Lost to Politics, 1946-1958], (Istanbul: Press of Faculties, 1979), p. 394; *İstanbul*, no 3, vol. I, October 1992, pp. 61-63.

36

Angels Have Gender

1986

60x52 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

37

Balcony

1982

52x57 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

Photo: Beysun Gökçin

38

Hotel Istanbul

1982

39.5x56 cm

gouache, water color, colored charcoal on paper

Photo: Beysun Gökçin

39

Tiger Woman

1983

55x75 cm

fabric, plywood



10.8.93 Gulsun, Yaziyi fakslıyorum, Perşembe'ye yeni cikisi kontrol edebilirsek iyi olur dusuncesiyle. Bu arada, genel notlar ciktikca buraya yazıyorum: 1. Daha birinci sayfada baslayan bir ilerici/tutucu ikilemi var ya? Bu ikilemi, ilk ciktiginda degistirdim. Fakat gerek "ilerici," gerekse de bunun esanlami olan "avangard" sekliyle ve de tutucu/ilerici ikilemi halinde sik sik geciyor yazida. Tabii, cunku konunun bir parcasi. Onun icin devamina elleyemedim. Sorun, tabii, senin 4. sayfada soyledigin mesele. Ama bu ilk kullanildigi yerlerde, pek fazla aciklama yapmadan kullanildigi icin, ikilem yazar tarafından benimseniyormus gibi duruyor gibi geldi. Ne dersin? Avangard diye bir sey yok. Bu tam da senin bu yazida anlattigin turden bir "tutucu" devlet kurumunun, kendi programinda farkli bir seyler yapan sanati oncu, ilerici, avangard diye siniflayip "halletme" arzusuyla dogmus bir kavram. GSA'nin sergi adlari da zaten bunu boylece ele almaya calisiyor; tabii ardindan bizim sanatcilar ortaya cikip kendi sergilerini yaptiklarinda ayni gorusu devam ettiriyorlar; kendilerine o reddettikleri kurumun acisindan bakmayi surduruyorlar. (Suna ne dersin: Sanatcilar "gruplar" olusturmaya devam ettikleri surece de bu boyle kalacaktır cunku "grup" hep avangard adina olusur. Grup, "ilerici"dir. Yani, bugun acisindan, gerici?) Sonunda da o sanatci inisiyatifli oncu sergiler kendi kendini lagvediyor (bunu idrak edip?) Aklima su geldi: Akademi'nin boyle bir "avangardi" denetleme arzusunun kalmayip, cagdasi akademiklestiren sergileri lagvetmesini guzel anlatiyorsun. Bundan sonra Akademi'nin orumcek tomarina donusup atalet icine dustugunu, o noktada biraz daha acik soylemek (1-2 kelimelik bir ekle) sana ters gelir mi?... tutucu olmayi sececekti kismini diyorum. "Tutucu" kelimesi, tabii akademi-nin kendi deyisi, kendi bilincdisi deyisi. Bunu bir sekilde belirtmeli mi? Bu, TC tarihinde bu aciklikla soylenecek, ilk soyleyen sensin. Let no one miss that. Oraya bu "tutucu" nun ne oldugunu aciklayan bir phrase getirmek de sorunu cozebilir. Ornegin (atiyorum:) ... tutucu olmayi sececek, kendini gecmiste kalan bir modernizmin degerlerini, o modernizmin en yaratıcı aninda, kendine ait hicbir ilkenin kemiklesmesine izin vermemek uzere gelistirdigi birtakim tutumların tekrarlanmasına adayacakti.. gibi bir sey, bunu oylesine yazdim; ciddiye alma). Bu soylediklerim, bu arada, yazinin ilk sayfasindaki, "... Dada'nin baskaldiran..., avangarddik" cumlesini kapsamiyor. O cumlede, ozellikle italik yazildigi icin, cuk oturuyor. Ve dogru tabii, oyleydiniz ve onun nefes aldirici bir yani vardi ve iyi ki de oyle oldu. Amma uzattim lafi: Ilk sayfanin sonundaki satirda, Akademi'nin ilericilik/tutuculuk tartismalarına karar verememis... hikayesi cok iyi mesela. O tartismaya karar verememis olan akademi. Ama tabii, tartisma akademik bir tartisma. Bunun, iste, belirtilmesi, acikca ortaya cikarilmasi gerekiyor. Bu ikilemin 2. sayfada soyledigin, resmi olanla onun disinda kalan ikilemine tekabul ettigi (kendi disinda kalana "avangard" diyor) daha acik konabilir. Belki de the problem doesn't exist. 2. Yazinin basina appendix numarasi

2.Yazinin basina appendix numarasi konulacak.Benim giris cumlelerinin puntosu kucultulecek.Senin yazi basligi ondan sonra gelecek.Yazi basligi tip falan,kitabın chapter basliklari gibi olabilir mi?3. O tirnak gibi kucuk isleri n'olur hallet.Bir bucuk ay sonra hala o konuyla ugrasiyoruz.4.Hala kelimesinin her iki a'sinin da uzerinde sapka var.Evet, dehset bir yazi oluyor. Deniz

top. ss. 7 ^{deniz}

Fax sent by Deniz Şengel to Gülsün Karamustafa, dated 10.08.1993.



10.8.93

Gülsün, I'm faxing you the article. Thinking it would be great if we could check the new print-out by Thursday. Meanwhile, I'll put down general notes here as I go:

1. You know there is this duality of progressive/conservative that starts already on the first page? I changed it when it first appeared. However, it is used a lot in the text, both as "progressive," and as "avant-garde," which is its synonym, and also as the duality of conservative/progressive. And that's natural, because it is part of the topic. That is why I could not touch the rest of the text.

The problem is, of course, for instance, what you say on page 4. But because it is used without too much explanation, it appears as if this duality is accepted by the author. What do you think? There is no such thing as the avant-garde. This is precisely the kind of concept you describe in this text, the kind borne from the desire of a "conservative" state institution in order to classify as pioneering, progressive or avant-garde and "sort out" any art which is doing something other than its own program.

This is how the exhibition titles of the State Academy of Fine Arts treat the issue; and of course, when our artists organize their own exhibitions they perpetuate the same view; they continue to adopt the viewpoint of the institution they reject. (What would you think about this: This will continue as long as artists continue to form "groups," because a "group" is always formed in the name of the avant-garde. The group is "progressive." In other words, conservative, from today's viewpoint?) In the end, those pioneering exhibitions formed by artists' initiative abolish themselves (having grasped this?).

This is what I thought: You describe well how the academy has lost the desire to inspect such an "avant-garde" and how it has abolished exhibitions that academize the contemporary. Would you be against following this by saying, a little more clearly (with an added 1-2 words) that the academy is now covered in cobwebs and has been overcome by inertia? I'm talking about the part that ends ...would choose to be conservative.



The word “conservative,” is of course, the academy’s own phrasing, its own unconscious phrasing. Should that be stated in some way? This has been never said before so clearly in the entire history of the Republic of Turkey, you are the first to say it. Let no one miss that. Adding a phrase there that explains what this “conservative” is may solve the problem. For instance (off the top of my head): ...would choose to become conservative, would commit itself, at the most creative moment of modernism, to the repetition of the values of a modernism that has been sentenced to the past, and to a set of attitudes developed in order to prevent the ossification of any principle that belongs to it... don’t take this seriously, I just wrote it for its own sake.

By the way, what I have just said does not include the sentence on the first page of the text which goes, “...the revolt... of Dada... we were avant-garde.” In that sentence, especially because it is set in italics, it fits precisely. And it is true, of course, you were precisely like that; and there was an aspect to it that let us breathe, and thanks to that. I’ve rambled on too much. For instance, in the sentence at the end of the first page, the story about Akad not being able to decide to take sides regarding the debate over progressivism/conservatism is very good. It is the academy that could not decide. But of course, the debate is an academic one. That has to be pointed out, and clearly revealed. The fact that this duality corresponds to the duality you mention on page 2, the one between the official discourse and what remains outside of it (it gives the title “avant-garde” to what remains outside of it) can be expressed more clearly. Or perhaps, *‘the problem doesn’t exist.’*

2. An appendix number must be added at the top of the text. The type size of my introductory sentences must be reduced. Your text title must come after that. Can the text title be of the same type as the chapter headings of the book?

3. Please sort out minor problems like that quotation mark. It’s been a month and a half and we’re still trying to get the same thing done.

4. Both *a*’s in the word *hâlâ* [still] have hats.

Yes, it’s coming on to be a terrific text.

Deniz



BIO/CHRONO/GRAPHY

Gülsün Karamustafa

BELOW IS A PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED TEXT BY GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA RECOUNTING THE ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES SHE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SINCE HER STUDENTSHIP AT THE STATE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TEXT STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT IT NOT ONLY PROVIDES KARAMUSTAFA'S ARTIST BIOGRAPHY, BUT THAT, IN A SENSE, IT TELLS THE STORY OF THE EMANCIPATION OF ART IN TURKEY, HOW ART DETACHED ITSELF FROM OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS, THE EMERGENCE OF CURATED EXHIBITIONS, AND A STEP BEYOND ALL THIS, THAT OF THE ARTIST'S INITIATIVE.

Bringing together the notes I kept for my biography, I realized that I was also forming the chronology of a period. What emerged was an art-historical time period full of meetings, separations, withdrawals, resistances and reunions. Browsing through catalogues of group exhibitions I have taken part in during the last fifteen years, I came across many details that I had not initially made note of, but were nevertheless significant. In order to better grasp this period, I went back to my student years in the second half of the 1960s, at



A photograph from Gülsün Karamustafa's first solo exhibition, held at TED Ankara College, 1963.

the State Academy of Fine Arts. Those days of dynamic disquiet (1964-1969) were also a time I shared with people I today continue to stand side by side within the art environment. Back then, the academy was an educational institution that had identified with the word “State” in its title. It defined itself by the annual State painting and sculpture exhibitions. With a teaching staff comprising exceptional lecturers, in contrast to similar institutions across the world that were known for their traditional structures, it hosted the contemporary alongside that which belonged to the past. One of the most important experiences of my studentship was witnessing how this duality gradually arrived at a parting of ways. We had caught up with the debate over abstract art, although we were a bit late. On the other hand, we were still the crazy, *revolting kids of Dada*, we were *avant-garde*. At the same time, we were able to acquaint ourselves with American *Pop Art* and with *happenings*. One after the



Gülsün Karamustafa's painting *The Sleeping Child*, which in 1961 was accepted to the State Painting and Sculpture Exhibition.

other, and within a short period of a few years, young teaching assistants who were carrying out their postgraduate studies in France on state grants returned and joined the teaching staff of the academy.

As a “child talented in painting,” my artistic career begins, in a family and school environment, with the support of my teachers Eşref Üren and Turgut Zaim. I get my big break in 1961, when as a high-school student, a watercolor painting of mine is accepted to the State painting and sculpture exhibition (whatsmore, the jury that elected my painting also included professors who would later train me at the academy). Later, until I eventually give up, my paintings, with one exception, are rejected by the jury of this exhibition. After I pass the entry exams of the State Academy of Fine Arts, I have difficulty choosing a studio, and following a long inner struggle, I decide to join the Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu studio. In my third year at the academy, in 1966, we four friends –Komet, Mustafa Şener, Figen Aydıntaşbaş and I– receive a proposal from Özer Kabaş who has recently returned from the United States and has begun to teach art at Robert College and opened an exhibition in the Social Hall of the College.



Celebration at Bedri Rahmi Eyübođlu's studio, State Academy of Fine Arts, 1967.





Mehmet Gülerüz, Lale Öztin, Duygu, Asım İşler and Gülsün Karamustafa in the courtyard of the State Academy of Fine Arts, 1965.



First European trip, Venice, summer 1966.

The contribution of the debates they initiated and the artistic experiments they attempted was very significant for an academic environment that had not yet decided between “progressivism” and “conservatism,” concepts the academy chose to interpret in its own way. The return, towards the end of my studentship, of Altan Gürman from Paris, and his joining us with a completely different approach to art, the friendship he established by lifting hierarchies, and the daring solo exhibition he held, opened the door to a brand new series of exciting moments and debates. The late 1960s became, in the field of art in Turkey, perhaps for the first time, a period when official discourse was challenged by what was left outside of it. On the other hand, these years were also the beginning of a political period that began as an extension of the '68 student movements across the world and went on to follow a path unique to Turkey, spread out

across a considerably long period of time and made us pay a heavy cost.

The 1970s arrived in a chaotic atmosphere, where stylistic, technical and ideological values thus far accepted in the field of art were shaken to the roots. The process of determining which new values would take the place of the old spread over a long period of time. As one private gallery opened after another, the importance of the State painting and sculpture exhibitions was reduced, and they were no longer deemed the only and central artistic events. A new period opened, during which all manners of painting, in line with the demands of the contemporary, began to be produced, even if this was done shyly at first. Meanwhile, in 1977, Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts initiated, under its own leadership, the exhibitions titled Istanbul Art Festival and *Exhibition of New Trends in Art*. If something new was to be done, it had to be done under the control of

Bedri Rahmi reprimands us, describing our initiative as “an attempted strike by apprentice devils” yet we immediately repeat it the next year with a wider group. The exhibition we hold at the Beyoğlu City Gallery under the title *Eleven Young Artists* features, in addition to the works of Komet, Figen Aydıntaşbaş, Mustafa Şener and myself, those of Metin Talayman, Nuray Ataş, Alaattin Aksoy, Abraham Torosyan, Utku Varlık, Tülin Akşin and Ali Aşuroğlu. We exhibit daring, transgressive paintings. We take part in the Peace Festival exhibitions, which bring together similar names, and where Altan Gürman, too, was with us. I take part in student demonstrations and the university building occupation that would last a month. Later, in 1969, I become the first student representative from the painting department with a right to speak at the departmental administration board. The moment I receive my diploma I set out on a long trip to Europe, following the tracks of pre-Renaissance painting that I am passionate about, staying at student hostels, travelling by train, or hitchhiking.





Gülsün Karamustafa, just after having completed preparations for the exhibition *A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art (3rd)*, at her studio on Kutlu Street, Gümüşsuyu, 1986.

the Academy. This was how the aim of *Exhibition of New Trends in Art* was described in the catalogue: “To bring universal dimensions of relationship to Turkish art, and dynamism and intensity to the art environment”¹ or to open “fields where bold initiatives and brave experiments that persistently seek to challenge classic measures can be carried out.”² A year after the inauguration of this biennial exhibition series that continued until 1987, the *Contemporary Artists Istanbul Exhibition* series, organized by the association formed within the body of The Museum of Painting and Sculpture as part of the Istanbul Art Festival program began, and it continues to form a field of existence for young artists today. In the meantime, the institutional status of the State Academy of Fine Arts was changed, and it became Mimar Sinan University. The 4th Istanbul Art Festival in 1983, which included the *Exhibition of New Trends in Art*, was slightly different than other exhibitions. It also included, un-

der the title “Galleries’83,” a section defined as “Contemporary Turkish Art,” and was composed as a painting exhibition. This additional show also formed a control mechanism on behalf of the university. These were, word-for-word, the sentences included in the exhibition catalogue: “This exhibition will display how well galleries fulfill their functions. It will also form a comparative environment within which new developments and their outcomes can be observed, and where those who stray away from the common goal can be warned and re-oriented with suggestions.”³

In 1984, the artists formed an interesting non-institutional alliance which was not affiliated either with galleries or the academy and would prove consistent in the long-term. The name of the exhibition realized within the scope of the International Istanbul Festival was *A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art*. The publicity text explained the nature of the

Later, I stay in London for around a year. I am in an environment where the Vietnam War, feminism and racism are heatedly discussed. Upon my return, I find myself in the midst of the political turmoil in Turkey. In 1975, I pass the exam to join the teaching staff of the State School of Applied Fine Arts as a teaching assistant in Basic Design. I open my first professional solo exhibition in 1978. It’s a painting exhibition, but the works I exhibit are not *peinture*. My subject matter includes cultural overlappings, juxtapositions and changes that enter my field of observation, topics I focus on during that period and would continue to work on in different dimensions and narrative techniques in the future. I follow this with my thesis titled “Resim Afiş Etkileşmesi” [The Interaction of Painting and Poster] and the exhibition I hold to accompany my thesis. I want to take part in the second *Exhibition of New Trends in Art* and the *Contemporary Artists Istanbul Exhibition* with my paintings. The jury rejects my work.



THE FALLEN ICON



Carpets, Bilsak, 1985.



alliance with the following words: “...this exhibition includes work of creators who truly knead contemporaneity and quality with their own individual tendencies. Views ranging from expressionism to the fantastic, to new realism and from there to conceptual art, in opposition to the negative traits of group exhibitions with a commercial basis, complete the festival with their progressive action that courageously defends contemporary reality.”⁴ The first exhibition was formed by nine artists, two of them producing works of conceptual art, and the others, paintings. This was how a series of exhibitions would in the future assume considerable weight in forming an understanding and acceptance of the concept of contemporary art, and its gain in independence in Turkey. The second *A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art* held in 1985 took place with the participation of a higher number of artists. This was also the stage when I joined the group. The increasing

percentage of artists who preferred three-dimensional contemporary expression could also be felt at the same year’s *Exhibition of New Trends in Art and Contemporary Artists Istanbul Exhibition*. The second pioneering art exhibition that was held at the halls and courtyard of Yıldız University opened with a number of mix-ups including examples of inexperience such as the erroneous installation of the work of Sarkis, who lived in France and had sent his work from there. The work titled *Gelip Geçilen Bir Kapı* [A Gate We Come and Pass Through] by Gürel Yontan, was ordered to be demolished by the university administration before the exhibition had closed on the pretext that it was blocking the path to the rectorate. This was protested only by the artists. However, it was becoming strikingly evident that another door was about to open.

The year 1987 was quite complex in terms of contemporary art

With the belief that I will act more independently as a creator, I leave my position at school and establish my own studio. The establishment of YÖK, the Council of Higher Education, also plays a part in my leaving school. I reject the controlled education it will lead to. The subject matter I focus on in my first exhibition, expands and becomes more colorful with the impact of the years of rapid change. In 1982, I exhibit my paintings under the title *Arabeskler* [Arabesques]. I follow this with my 1983 exhibition, the works here display a tendency to surge beyond pictorial dimensions. At this point, the third dimension, for me, is an extension my works choose in order to externalize the violence they possess in order to realize themselves. I fall in step with this narrative form, which is new to me, with no difficulty whatsoever, with natural flow. My relationship with cinema develops. I believe it is necessary to think in a comprehensive and multi-dimensional manner to produce contemporary art.



traffic in Istanbul. First, the academy, that in early 1980s had become Mimar Sinan University, abolished the *Exhibition of New Trends in Art*. This series of exhibitions, which had developed at an inverse ratio to the academic approach, yet despite all efforts had failed to meet expectations, no longer had a place within the body of the university. What's more, predominantly official institutions no longer had the desire to control and inspect an other that had declared its independence and taken steps towards emancipation. Now, assuming its real identity in the face of an artistic production that had escaped its surveillance, it would openly choose to be conservative, and commit itself to the repetition of the values of a modernism that was left in the past, and a series of attitudes that modernism had developed, at its most creative moment, in order to prevent the rigidification of any of its principles. The first International Istanbul Biennial was also

held the same year, 1987. The arrival of world-renowned names of contemporary art such as Michelangelo Pistoletto and François Morellet constituted a serious reality check for artists and art circles. A year later, in 1988, the last of the *A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art* exhibition opened; it had appeared as an artists' initiative, had continued its existence by undergoing changes within itself, and managed for a long period to host artists that had adopted different approaches without becoming too selective. It was significant that the disappearance of these exhibitions corresponded to the intense criticism and disappearance of the concept of the *avantgarde* across the world. In 1989, the second biennial was held. On this occasion the approach was different. This time, too, invited artists, including Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Daniel Buren and Jannis Kounellis, were among the important contemporary art masters of the world.

Film, too, is a medium where the visual artists can be creative. I first work as an art director in film in 1984. I gather a lot of material that I can transform into art from this experiment. In 1985, I exhibit my carpets and sculptures at Bilsak (a space which is not a gallery or an exhibition hall). Out of this intense pool of materials that appears infinite, there are only nine carpets and five sculptures that I have managed to transform into art products. The same year, one of my carpets is accepted to the *Contemporary Artists Istanbul Exhibition* and receives an award. Another carpet titled *Tigerella* is exhibited at *Exhibition of New Trends in Art*. In 1987 I take part in the *Exhibition of New Trends in Art* with a work titled *Double Reality*, which I produce using a male mannequin dressed in maternity wear, and receive the last achievement award before the exhibition series is discontinued. I exhibit *Monument for Kitsch II* at the exhibition *A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art* held at Hareket Köşkü.



The presentation was not ordinary either, it was based on the idea of “Contemporary Art in the Traditional Environment.” This time, with their own demands rather than that of Mimar Sinan University, and also because of the pressure they exerted, and the approval of administrators, galleries were included within the scope of this biennial. They were very powerful now, and this power was effective enough to present them as integrated with the contemporary art biennial, deflect the biennial from its path, and led to those artists who exhibited their paintings at these galleries throughout the period of the biennial to claim that they had taken part in the international biennial.

In 1990, some of the artists involved in *A Cross Section of Avant-garde Turkish Art*, assumed the inheritance of this exhibition, and opened the *10 Artists 10 Works* exhibition. They published a declaration claiming they had “purified” them-

selves of the excess within them. The exhibitions of this group has continued for four years also with the participation of artists from abroad. In 1991, installations were included within the scope of the second edition of *Grand Exhibition*, organized by a private company, Santral Holding. It was a positive step to include a different artistic approach in an environment which previously limited itself to products of the art of painting. Then, exhibitions organized around a concept, and often featuring non-painterly media proliferated. The *Sanat/TeXnh* exhibition, held in 1992 in the courtyard of the Painting and Sculpture Museum with the participation of 14 artists from Greece and Turkey, featured only three-dimensional works.

As for the exhibition titled *Recollection/Memory I*, opened in the last days of 1991, it was the first edition of another series of exhibitions. It brought together six artists from dif-

(*Monument for Kitsch I* was included in the previous edition of the series.) I take part in the 2nd International Istanbul Biennial, and realize *Funeral Gate of Hagia Sophia*. In 1990, I exhibit *Eleven Mirrors with Red Ribbons* at the *Grand Exhibition*. On the other hand, we strive to finalize the feature film project we began with Füzuzan. *Benim Sinemalarım* [My Cinemas] is finished in 1990. We travel to international film festivals in Cannes, Toronto, Cairo and Tehran for a year. The film wins the Special Jury Award in Tehran. In 1991, I exhibit *Courier* at the *Recollection/Memory I* exhibition. (This work was also shown, in 1993, at the exhibition *A Foreigner=A Traveler* held at the Schiedam City Museum in the Netherlands along with the tapestries.) I prepare *Mystic Transport* for the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial. In 1993, I open my exhibition titled *The Notebook* at the Women’s Library, I use one of my primary school notebooks and photocopies of a childhood photograph of mine as my materials.



ferent approaches and disciplines around a single concept, and was followed by its second edition in 1993. The 3rd International Istanbul Biennial held in 1992, would take place under a single roof at Feshane, and take shape around a single theme. Once again there were severe protests from art institutions, academics and art circles, yet now, the transition to another field, to the field of contemporary art which allowed for plurality and the freedom of expression in every sense had been completed.

NOTES

1. See Devrim Erbil, *Galeriler'83 Çağdaş Türk Sanatı Sergisi* [Galleries' 83 Contemporary Turkish Art Exhibition], exhibition catalogue (Istanbul: Mimar Sinan University, 1983).
2. See Orhan Şahinler, *Yeni Eğilimler* [Exhibition of New Trends in Art], exhibition catalogue (Istanbul: State Academy of Fine Arts, 1981).
3. See Devrim Erbil, *Galeriler'83 Çağdaş Türk Sanatı Sergisi* [Galleries' 83 Contemporary Turkish Art Exhibition], exhibition catalogue (Istanbul: Mimar Sinan University, 1983).
4. See Adnan Çoker, *Öncü Türk Sanatından Bir Kesit* [A Cross Section of Avantgarde Turkish Art], exhibition catalogue (Istanbul: Yıldız University, 1984).



Ek I

Mistik Nakliye Üzerine Not

Gülsün Karamustafa, *Mistik Nakliye* adlı işinin isim kaynağı olarak Jean Baudrillard'ın *Amérique* adlı kitabından şu bölümü veriyor:

Krom kaplamaları pırıl pırıl parlayan mavi-yeşil bir kamyon şafak sökerken Yedinci Cadde'de yeni düşmüş karlar üzerinde yol alıyor. Her iki yanında altın metal harflerle 'Mistik Nakliye' yazılı.

Bütün New York ve New York'un dekadansa mistik yaklaşımı burada özetleniyor. Yüce dikeylikten yerdeki çürümeye kadar her çeşit özel efekt, ırklar ve imparatorluklar karışımının tüm özel efektleri burada mevcut. Bu, şehrin dördüncü boyutu.

Türkçe metin, çev. Mustafa Dilber; İngilizce metin, America, çev. Chris Turner (Londra; New York: Verso, 1988; 1989), s. 21.

Appendix I

Note on Mystic Transport

Gülsün Karamustafa identifies the following passage in Jean Baudrillard's *Amérique* as the patronym of her work *Mystic Transport*:

A blue-green lorry with gleaming chromework is going down Seventh Avenue in the early morning sun, just after a snowfall. It bears on its sides, in gold metallic lettering, the words 'Mystic Transportation'.

It sums up the whole of New York and its mystical view of decadence. Every special effect can be found here, from sublime verticality to decay on the ground, all the special effects of the mixing of races and empires. This is the fourth dimension of the city.

English text, America, trans. Chris Turner (London; New York: Verso, 1988; 1989), p. 21;



Gülsün Karamustafa, working on *Veiled Angel II* at her studio on Kutlu Street, 1985.

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