

**IT WAS A
TIME OF
CONVERSATION**

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AUTHORS

Ali Akay

Head of the Department of Sociology, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University

Selim Birsell

Lecturer and artist

Burak Delier

Artist

Vasif Kortun

Director of Research and Programs, SALT

Emre Zeytinođlu

Lecturer and artist

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PREFACE

It was a time of conversation is an archive and research project. It revisits the story of three exhibitions that took place in the first half of the 1990s in Turkey: *Elli Numara: Anı Bellek II* [Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II], *GAR* [Railway Station] and *Küreselleşme–Devlet, Sefalet, Şiddet* [Globalization–State, Misery, Violence]. In 2012, SALT visualized the research in the form of an exhibition at SALT Galata in the Open Archive. This was followed by a more developed presentation of the exhibition at SALT Ulus in 2013.

It was a time of conversation is one of a number of research projects that derive from SALT's interest in revisiting and interpreting past exhibitions that expressed an urgency at the moment they were realized, and producing and/or witnessing critical ruptures.

The project emerged from a period of extensive research and the compilation of materials on these three unique curatorial and collaborative

exhibitions. Although only twenty years separates their occurrence from today, initially little information and very few documents about the exhibitions' creation, content and their critical response could be found. The surprising lack of reference material motivated SALT to structure an archive that would be accessible for further research. In the end, a number of sources allowed SALT to gather a wide variety of information, documents, videos and photographs in collaboration with the exhibitions' organizers, artists and assistants.

It was a time of conversation should not be considered as a completed project as it will continue to create and develop its own posthumous, living archive through time.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who supported SALT during the development of this project and specifically to those who shared their archival material and their memories



without which the realization of *It was a time of conversation* would not have been possible.

—Sezin Romi





It was a time of conversation, SALT Galata, 2012. Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



INTRODUCTION

Alternative and pioneering art movements came to a halt during the dictatorship of the September 12, 1980 military coup. Even after 1983, when a revival did occur, exhibitions were for the most part organized by artists themselves. The concept of “curatorship” did not enter the dialogue of Turkey’s art community until the 1990s, when individuals from diverse disciplines began to notice and discuss these changing frameworks.

It was a time of conversation, SALT’s second “Open Archive” project, calls for a reevaluation of three exhibitions from the first half of the 1990s in Turkey: *Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II*, *GAR* and *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence*. Examining these exhibitions, *It was a time of conversation* seeks to provide an overview of collective and non-commercial initiatives by artists who focused on collaboration and the exchange of ideas during the early ‘90s – a time when institutionalization was still at a minimum and expectations were low.

Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II was curated by Vasıf Kortun in 1993 at building #50 in Akaretler. After a banner for the exhibition was replaced with a Democrat Party poster, Kortun and the artists decided to close the exhibition prematurely. *GAR* was part of the Art and Taboos symposium organized by Sanart (the Association of Support for Visual Arts in Turkey) at the Ankara Railway Station in 1995, and was a collective initiative of Selim Birsell, Vahap Avşar, Claude Leon and Füsün Okutan. The works in the exhibition were removed by the Station Directorate one day after the opening. Curated by Ali Akay the same year, *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* was presented at Devlet Han in Beyoğlu – an artist space founded and run by Yasemin Baydar, Birol Demir, Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, İbrahim Şimşek and Emre Zeytinoglu.

This text was originally written for the exhibition *It was a time of conversation* (SALT Galata, 2012; SALT Uluş, 2013).



In *Number Fifty*, politics displaced art; *GAR* disturbed the authorities, who duly shut it down; while *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* had better luck in keeping with its oppositional stance in the context of the 4th Istanbul Biennial. *It was a time of conversation* brings together the archives of these three exhibitions, all organized during a period when individuals from different disciplines were beginning to see art as a “form of conversation” – when art itself emerged as an object of thought and the concept of the “curator” began to take hold. It takes these exhibitions – all products of collaboration and discussion – as a launching point, offering a new perspective on art in Turkey during the 1990s.





It was a time of conversation, SALT Ulus, 2013. Photo: Cemil Batur Gökçeer



ABOUT NUMBER FIFTY: MEMORY/RECOLLECTION II

Archival material preserved from the *Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II* exhibition provides the basis for its interpretation in *It was a time of conversation*. Initially designed as a series, *Memory/Recollection* opened at Taksim Art Gallery in 1991; this was the first curated exhibition in Turkey. The second exhibition in the series, *Memory/Recollection II*, was organized at building #50 in Akaretler, with this number added to its title. Although referenced in the project summary, *Memory/Recollection III* was never realized.

As a project, *Memory/Recollection* was carefully planned – from its title and venues, to its catalogue design and selection of artists and works. The documents outlining the search for funding and sponsorship during the early stages, production requests from artists, correspondence, budgets, permissions and press releases reveal that nothing in the exhibition’s development was coincidental.

Akaretler #50, the venue for *Memory/Recollection II*, was home to Ottoman court painter Fausto Zonaro until the beginning of the Union and Progress era in 1909. The building then served as the Republican People’s Party (CHP) Beşiktaş district branch until the military coup on September 12, 1980. It remained unused for a period, but was later purchased by Net Yapı Holding. The same address used by Zonaro on his exhibition invitations continued to be valid at the time the building hosted the CHP branch. Curator Vasıf Kortun wrote the following in a letter to Haluk Elver, CEO of Net Yapı Holding, asking for permission to use the building as an exhibition venue: “It is not every day that we come across a building so exciting, and with such a strong memory.”

The fact that building #50 had begun to lose its memory made it necessary to refer to its

This text was originally written for the exhibition *It was a time of conversation* (SALT Galata, 2012; SALT Ulus, 2013).



history as an important aspect of the exhibition. Zonaro's return to his old home was represented with the inclusion of one of his paintings in the exhibition. Organizers also tried to connect with members of CHP. Said Kortun: "We invited the Republican People's Party. We had a long conversation; I tried to tell them this building was their building as well, and offered to reserve a room for them, but they didn't accept."

Noted individuals from different disciplines were invited to the opening, including Cengiz Çandar, Orhan Pamuk, Aydın Uğur, Alev Alatlı, Nilüfer Göle and Ahmet Altan, with the objective of lending visibility to art and making it a subject of discussion across other fields. The exhibition catalogue was designed using Varlık Pocket Books as a model, and it was a deliberate choice to place the name of the curator above those of the artists. As Kortun later explained, "The curator has appeared as an author and determined the stage."

Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II was closed before the date announced, after an exhibition banner was replaced with a Democrat Party poster for May 14 celebrations. Documents in the archive clearly demonstrate the effort to

publicize the poster crisis through the press. Newspapers referred to the event only briefly, with headlines like "DP Poster Closes Exhibition" and "DP Against Art".





It was a time of conversation, SALT Ulus, 2013. Photo: Cemil Batur Gökçeer



**NUMBER FIFTY:
MEMORY/RECOLLECTION II
CATALOGUE TEXT**

Unlike “Memory/Recollection I,” “Number Fifty” is not a title about lost memory. “Number Fifty” was chosen in order for “Memory/Recollection” -which embodied an ironic attitude- to be read correctly, for it holds specific memories and recollections. Number 50 served as the street number of the building that hosted the exhibition, and also introduced it.

Istanbul is nothing but a construction site, and numbers here have a privileged insignificance. The student ID numbers from primary school, the street number of the house you lived in fifteen years ago, and the price of the first ice-cream you bought are easily forgotten. People give directions with reference to temporary landmarks. Urban immigration and the impossibility of settling down are coupled with continuously changing street numbers; in any case, finding the numerical signage is difficult. We make do with temporary, stenciled numbers. Number 50, however, has always been Number 50 since the

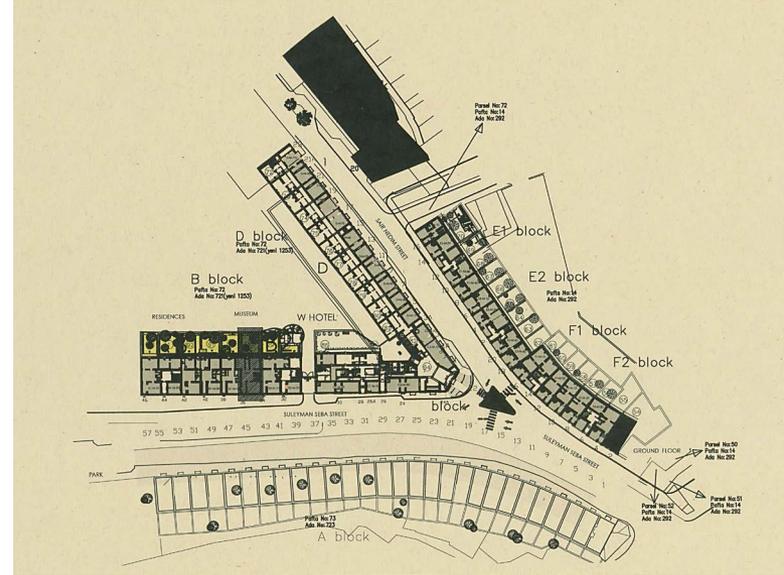
day the Akaretler Row Houses were built. This is a very important fact for collective memory.

The various row houses built around the end of the 19th century were usually designed for small merchants, artisans, and low-level bureaucrats. The Akaretler Row Houses, however, with their proximity to Dolmabahçe Palace, were exceptional for their fine style, the grandeur of the project and its contribution to urban design. The fact that other buildings cannot be interjected between these row houses engraves them forcibly and indelibly onto the memory of the city. In this sense, the Akaretler Row Houses are reminiscent of the buildings belonging to minority foundations, Armenian primary schools and Greek high schools, all of which cause a sudden interruption in the always-changing daily flow of life, denying our individual sense

This text was originally published in the catalogue of
Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II (1993).



of time. You have similar experiences in Pangaltı, around Şişli and on Sıraselviler Street. Our most intense contact with such buildings and memories takes place at the Akaretler Row Houses. Confronted with these places that confirm the inviolability of memory, frozen in their own time, and rejecting the present, the longing for the future expresses itself through “the past.” One of the Akaretler Row Houses occupies a special place in Istanbul’s history. This is Number 50, the most majestic building of Akaretler, standing at the intersection between Spor Avenue and Şair Nedim Avenue, dominating both. Fausto Zonaro, the court painter of Abdülhamid II, lived here from 1896 until the end of 1909. In this building, which was granted to him by Abdülhamid II, Zonaro held exhibitions and gave painting lessons. This lasted until he was deported by the Union and Progress Party along with other foreign artists serving the previous regime, even though he had given a reception for one of the Young Turk leaders Enver Paşa, painted his portrait, and supported him. The history of Number 50 that connects Zonaro with Union and Progress, leads us to the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and to the use of the building with which we are most familiar.



Akaretler Row Houses site plan showing ground floor plans

Until September 12, 1980, Number 50 served as the CHP Beşiktaş District Branch. Various courses for Fine Arts Academy candidates and other cultural activities were held here. Many Turkish artists have passed through this building. It is also of great significance to us that the building served CHP, because the myths concerning the foundation of CHP and the Republic of Turkey, as well as the single party era, are among the issues this exhibition addresses. The Applied Fine Arts Academy, as it used to be called, also





made use of this building during the first half of the 1980s.

This place is not simply a space in which works are placed, nor just a gallery that offers empty, plain white walls. Nor are the works here installed simply according to the limits dictated by the space. This place exists as a location in which collective memory is reconstructed.

September 12, 1980 was the harbinger of the end of an era for the building and the historical rupture that accelerated after the first political party of the Republic was closed down.



It is important for the art sector that the visual expressions of state myths are opened up for discussion; however belatedly, situations deeply affecting and displacing the artist should be discerned, and the artist should become civilian. Art has no time to waste with passé debates on painting vs. installation or the conceptual vs. the sensual, and such debates hold no interest whatsoever for us. Radical debates served through opposite stances are more a matter of claiming territory and dividing the market than anything else.

Akaretler #50, during the period it was served as the CHP Beşiktaş district branch



In his works entitled *Sıfır/Cypher* (1991), *Atatürk-Alfabe* [Atatürk-Alphabet] (1991) and *Anıtkabir* [Atatürk Mausoleum] (1990), Vahap Avşar represents ordinary visual objects, which some artists produce on request without any thought or any awareness in service of the military regime, perpetuating state myths, as they did in 1981, in unorthodox, skewed, and unexpected ways. It is a strange similarity that, here too, just as in socialist countries, the visual production of the state myth has been assigned to artists.

On the other hand, one can see the same artists produce a type of art that is called “modern;” art that has no personality, has lost all its geographical orientation, and makes only anonymous references. In any case, “modern art” is the name given to a kind of second-hand duplication that is far removed from its place of birth, causes no unrest, makes no noise, and follows the current of middle-of-the-road European movements. Avşar’s recent work resists all these. He deals with the foundation myths of the Republic and the ways in which these are represented, but he is also au courant with the latest debates in art, having his answers to offer, and this concerns how he functions across different fields.

The subject matter of an article I wrote years ago, one which preserves its urgency even today, was that the public monuments in Turkey, like the one in Taksim Square, are like a slap in the face from the powers that be for the people who, over the centuries, have seen none of the figures in their visual world as individuals, who have been unable to get used to such representations in the streets, and who cover the pictures in their homes with white muslin on holy days. The cover of a book entitled *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (1943), published when Lütfü Kırdar was the Mayor of İstanbul, depicts the Renaissance-style statue of İsmet İnönü, President at the time, looking majestic and powerful on horseback as he virtually tramples on the mosque that is photo-montaged onto the background. This has been the unique and coercive modernity of this place.

Avşar’s painting questions the logic of this establishment, and addresses the ironic stance in the representation of Atatürk, the sloppiness of the production of his busts, the presentation of the myth in a banal form, and the bad copies and mass produced versions that increasingly depart from the “original,” creating a closed-circuit of internal references. With the fall of the Soviet



Union, the factory that supplied the Soviet republics with mass-produced statues of Lenin in various forms and sizes had to stop production, and the factory yard became a dumping ground for Lenin statues due to a lack of demand. There used to be a workshop on the outskirts of Istanbul, right beside the E-5 highway, which produced Atatürk statues, with many samples in its yard – it may even still be there. It is usually under military regimes when bust and monument production increases.

The monumental statues in Stalin’s Russia, in National Socialist Germany, and in former Bulgaria and Brazil are as ugly and banal as the ones in Turkey. Moreover, as we are strangers to the idea of a “city” and because the first time we came into contact with public monuments was 500 years en retard, the ones that do exist are tragically bad. Our society does not ask for statues in its squares, and thus there are no works that inspire urban pride. Atatürk’s portrait, as represented in Avşar’s painting, is borrowed from ordinary, cheap bronze Atatürk statues. Their resemblance to Atatürk is questionable; if an exhibition comprising of these statues were to be organized one day, the sloppiness with which they were



Vahap Avşar, *Atatürk-Alfabe* [Atatürk-Alphabet], 1991



produced and the pathos of the situation would be exposed. Avşar's *Atatürk*, consisting of two pieces, however, is painted in a painterly manner in opposition to the conceptual attitude of the process. It is painted with bold expressionist brushstrokes with occasional dripping. The second canvas carries the letters of the new Turkish alphabet that are placed against the background of the map of Turkey. The letters stop at "Q" – there is no such letter in the Turkish alphabet...

The *Anıtkabir* painting also consists of two pieces – the Anıtkabir above opens up towards the viewer like the open spaces of Renaissance painting, similar to Piero della Francesca's *Ideal City* (c.1470). It transmits the agoraphobia one feels in De Chirico and the precisionism of the 1930s. One of the elements supporting the skewed quality of the painting arises from the difference between the subject of the painting and the style of painting – in other words, the co-existence of the surrealistic space with the two-dimensional surfaces that make up the painting and the expressionist painting style. The way the *Anıtkabir* stands is also reminiscent of the Primitives. Similar to the paintings of buildings in the garden of Yıldız Palace, this structure is also timeless and devoid



Vahap Avşar, *Anıtkabir* [Atatürk Mausoleum], 1990



of people. There are three figures against a background at the bottom of the painting, which are carried over into the upper section. Taken from the promenade leading up to Anıtkabir, these figures symbolize the three segments of the nation through the attire and accessories they bear: the “intellectual” with his book, the “shepherd” or “peasant” with his stick, and the “soldier” standing at attention...

Sıfır/Cypher (1991). Letters created out of tin cans, Sıfır (zero, safari, expeditionary, cypher). We cannot make out the order of the letters or what they say. These pieces of tin are important because they resemble typeface, while on a totally different level they remind one of the mystery of letters and their hidden power.

Letters are important, especially when they appear in large size on the entrances of tax offices or behind upholstered armchairs – in short, whenever they appear in important places. These letters are of such large dimensions, but they are made of recycled, cheap materials. They create a tension between superior and inferior production. Being part of such circulation is not in the nature of these materials or cans, but their



Vahap Avşar, *Sıfır/Cypher*, 1991

graphic appearance and their own mythologies are soon recycled, just like Kırlangıç olive oil or Vita cans. At the same time, *Sıfır/Cypher* uses old conceptual art tactics, but it is handmade. It reminds one of craft, thus shunning the cool stance of conceptual art, which insistently stands aloof from the handmade. It functions along a series of negations such as alphabet and republic, warning and state, art and craft, conceptualism and individualism, sophisticated promotion and vulgar ideology, calligraphy and sacredness.

A part of visual memory is formed in classrooms, military recruitment offices, and offices



of district governors. These sights repeat themselves in an exaggerated manner, which renders us both familiar with and indifferent to them. Just like certain smells, there are certain objects that recall specific periods and times. The bread carnet stamps on old IDs bring back the Second World War; Formica recalls the 1960s. The Varlık Pocket Book Series, which the design of this exhibition catalogue replicates, can still be found in many of our personal libraries. Varlık publications created their own style with their own unique sloppiness, and this visual object sets itself apart from what it reminds you of when you hold the brand new version in your hand today. Similarly, the works in the exhibition appear on postcards whose edges are cut to look like old photographs. Until very recently, these postcards were placed inside envelopes made of blue cover paper, which used to be the only kind available. The same blue cover paper was also used during the blackouts at the time of the Cyprus War.

The citizen of the Republic of Turkey forgets by learning and thus becomes “institutionalized.” Artists cannot paint what they have forgotten; they can only criticize what they “remember.”

Remembering, however, means taking risks, acting disgracefully, and embarking on unnecessary adventures.

Despite all this, Avşar’s *Anıtkabir* or the paintings he made using Atatürk’s bust are not surprising. It could be said that the agile-minded people of Turkey have finished with this debate and have already moved on to other issues, but what is at stake with the works here is not reaching reality through a myth, but rather the analysis of the myth itself. In any case, there is no real figure behind the myth. A myth is not a masked reality. It does not conceal anything other than the production of the myth itself. The artist is interested in the construction of that myth and its self-perpetuation.

We will not dwell upon the tragic damage caused by the Alphabet Reform, its radicalism or its denial of heritage. In various photographs, Atatürk stands before a portable blackboard in different places, but always outdoors, teaching the new alphabet. The Pasha is dressed impeccably, like a foreigner. Ülkü is in one of the photographs as well; “ülkü” (lit. ideal) is the child of the Republic, her father is the State!



The letters are written on the blackboard. This new alphabet allows everything to be re-written. This photograph has not been tampered with like the one depicting Atatürk at Kocatepe or similar photographs; but this moment, the photograph of a sacred occurrence, is like an icon. This moment, and this blackboard onto which the first letters have fallen from on high, have no need for a before or an after, just like an icon.

These photographs have been the subject of many paintings. Nazmi Ziya's painting entitled *Harf İnkılabı* [Alphabet Reform], made on the tenth anniversary of the Republic in 1933, was bought at the State Painting Exhibition for the equivalent of 5,000TL at the time. We do not know where or in which government office this huge painting was lost; it remains only a memory preserved in black-and-white photographs. Among similar paintings that pale in comparison are Şeref Akdik's *Harf İnkılabı/Millet Mektebi* [Alphabet Reform/School of the Nation], Cemal Tollu's *Alfabe Okuyan Köylüler* [Peasants Reading the Alphabet], and Şemsettin Arel's *Ders* [Course].

In Aydan Murtezaoğlu's painting, the blackboard is a monument on which the first letters

are inscribed. The letters do not say anything yet, but they will. This is the zero-point of recollection, but new sentences will emerge. The hand here emerges from a well-tailored suit. The severed hand is both a signifier and authority, and it points to a break. It builds and destroys. In Murtezaoğlu's painting, the arm seems to be resting on a box, which in turn is reminiscent of a dynamite box.

One of the concerns shared by the artists of the exhibition is the reference made by some



Aydan Murtezaoğlu, *Karatahta* [Blackboard], 1993



of these works to Turkey's history of modern art traditions. The statues and busts in Avşar's paintings make reference to various artists, and Murtezaoğlu's paintings are reminiscent of the state painting exhibitions of a particular era; the questions these works ask make the viewer think about the self-induced polite silence, censorship, and discrete support of the majority of the art tradition in Turkey over a long period. Regardless of his or her personal convictions, the artist exists as the guardian of order, and only a few are strong enough to be themselves. There has always been art that has kept itself in line with the state and marched to its beat since the founding of the Republic, maybe even since the return of the 1907 generation to Turkey, when they understandably began painting battle scenes in Abdülmecit Efendi's studio. For a long period the true customer was the state, and the artist was its servant. The artists had no individual buyers, and in order to continue their existence as artists, they had to take daytime jobs in state offices; consequently, they kept their peace and turned to the state for help with their projects.

Even though the weight of the state has comparatively decreased, with the exception of

short-lived vitalization periods, there are still no individual buyers with sophisticated taste. The number of artists that can respond to that sort of customer is limited. In such a state of limbo, it becomes all the more difficult for artists to define their problems. Without customers or readers, they have also been unable to form close relationships with other fields of intellectual inquiry. Individuals in those fields are similarly unequipped to talk about art. As a result, artists cannot fulfill their fundamental duties of asking questions, being in opposition, and committing sins in the name of others.

Art is political, but this does not mean art is a form of politics. Artists controlling their own bodies and making their preferences known is political, but not ill-humored. Taner Ceylan's painting is reminiscent of the homoerotic world of the Ottomans, like subterranean water flowing in its own bed, as depicted by writers like Reşat Ekrem Koçu, constructing its own universe and stories for centuries, and finding its way into the occasional miniature. The tiled room in the exhibition is a private world. The light in the room seems to be reflected off the blue tiles of the Harem at Topkapı Palace, and on one of the walls there is



a painting in an inappropriate position. A young boy, self-contented, is masturbating in proud solitude. The infatuation with himself is clear from the way his body bends over and from the metallic reflections on the floor. There are no clues as to whose dream this is – is it the viewer's or is the boy in the painting in his own dream? The way in which he moves on the boundary between being the subject of the dream or the object of desire, and the pronounced contours of his body are in the style of Pop Art, which is based on advertising and directness. Sexual orientation and gender preferences, along with the liberating nature



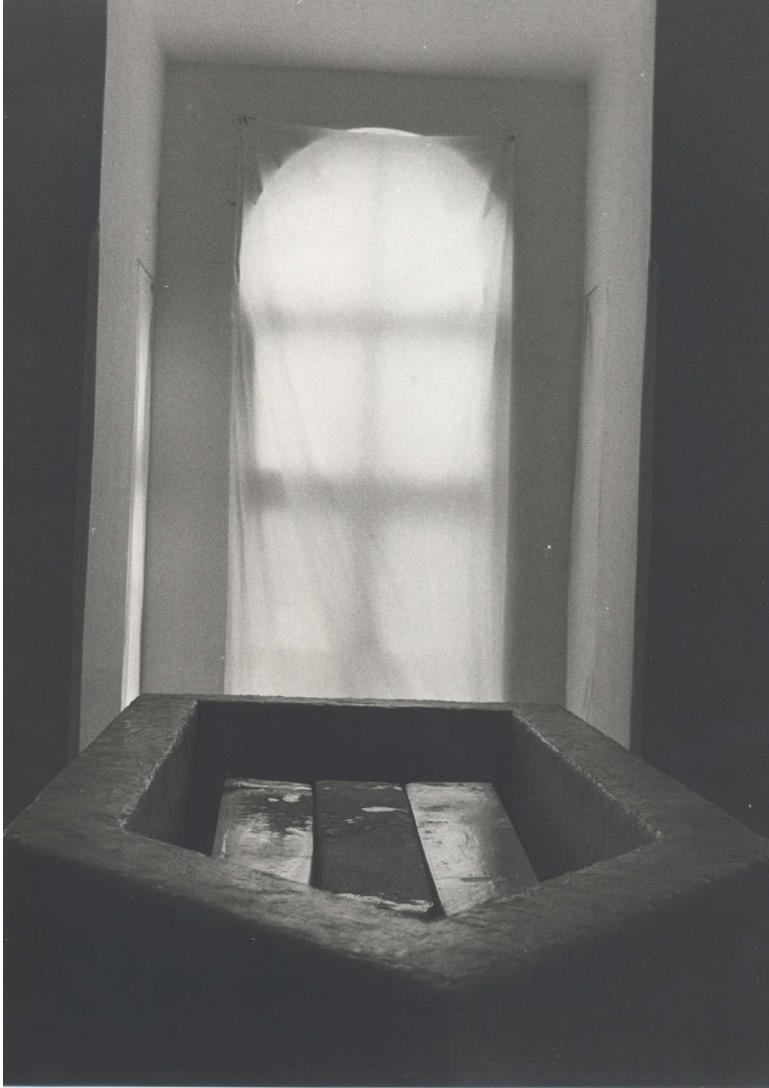
Taner Ceylan, *Çinili Oda* [Tiled Room], 1993

of being different, return to the Ottoman era in a hybrid way, using the synthetic aesthetics of the 1960s.

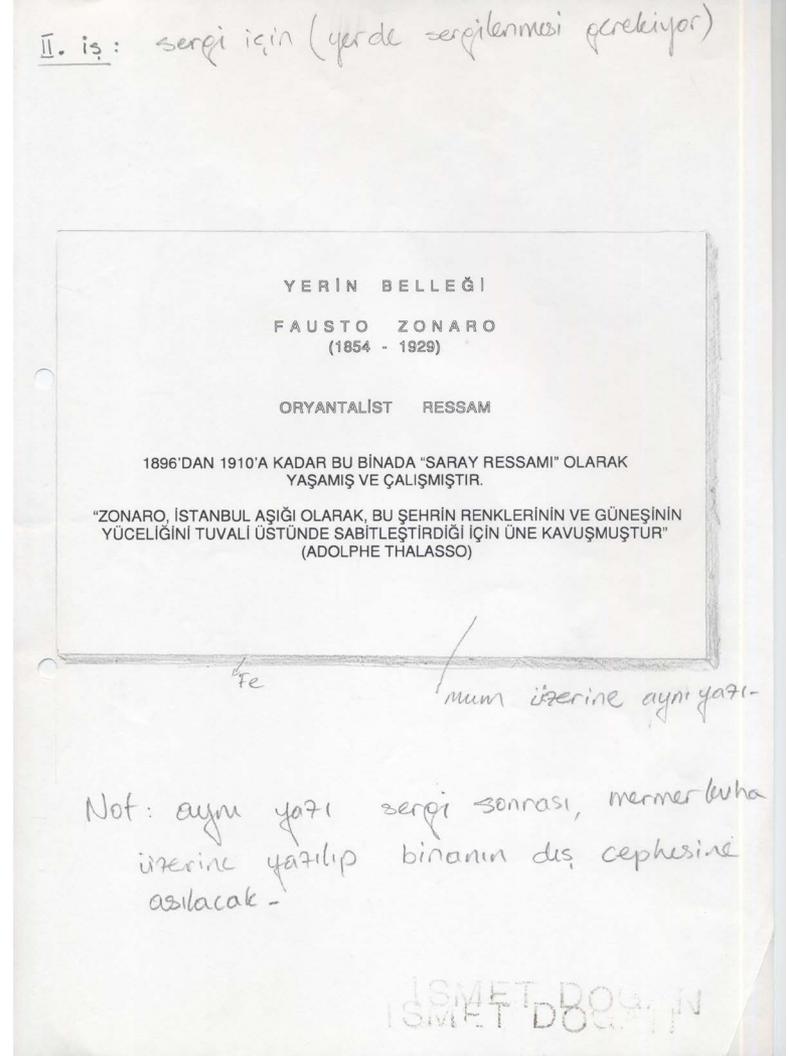
In another room that deals with, if not nothingness, then at least with death, stands a white sarcophagus made of wax by İsmet Doğan. Inside the sarcophagus there are ice blocks that are slowly melting. The interior is lit in a celestial manner with light passing through shroud-like curtains, reflected by stark white walls. On the floor is a text dedicated to Zonaro. This building where Doğan took his first painting lessons and where Zonaro lived; the founding principles of the party that used this building for many years, the temporary sarcophagus that will soon disappear as the ice inside turns into water: they all stand together, suspended in time.

The enforced and imposed modernism specific to Turkey and other peripheral countries has actually disintegrated in many areas of life. The act of disintegration and re-combination is not so very new either. But despite this disintegration, the last signs of resistance in the art sector as well as other sectors are very vocal. Sezer Tansuğ's attack on Sarkis towards the end of the





İsmet Doğan, *Lahit* [Sarcophagus], 1993



The draft of an artwork titled *Yerin Belleği* [Memory of the Space], prepared by İsmet Doğan, dedicated to Zonaro

summer of 1991 was meant for the media and was impulsive, without any artistic or intellectual meaning, and its motivation and aim were highly dubious. On the other hand, the answer it received, in terms of description and quality, was written in a modernist language that was just as threatening, patronizing, and colorless. The inadequacy of both arguments stemmed from the fact that they both remained as uninteresting tragedies not worth remembering except for the indictments and their close links with local power politics.

If these two opposite positions repeat themselves in various forms under different circumstances, there is a need for deconstruction and reconstruction. Naturally, what is required here is not the analysis of an already known image, since what needs to be analyzed is currently present, and as long as it is present, there is no point to this exercise. Murtezaoğlu, therefore, has to be an iconoclast. Ceylan has to make his paintings according to his own desires, without any regard for our expectations.

Of course, in Turkey, the streets are still ahead of the rest of us. What are the differences

between known street strategies and the things being done here; how can one think like the street? The way the street thinks and the way art thinks are contradictory. Even though the person with a bumper sticker claiming “The future is in Islam” and the radical stance of some of the works here seem to have a certain strategic affinity, there are two very fundamental differences between them, aside from their depth. The first strategy makes reference to one of Atatürk’s sayings – “The future is in the skies” – and it amends it in the process: “The future is in Islam.” But at the same time, this sentence exists as part of an advertising logic, along with other bumper stickers, such as “Champion” and “Power FM,” sharing the same intellectual level. Even though these stickers are produced by a few small and cunning retailers who are after easy money, and although we know that the quotation they think they appropriated from Atatürk does not actually belong to him, and the phrase can be seen in the paintings of Delaunay, Picasso, and Braque as early as 1909 (“Notre avenir est dans l’air”), and furthermore we are perfectly aware that the future does not in fact lie in the sky, and it is dubious as to whose “future” it is, and even though we had fun replacing



the word “gök” (sky) with the slang word “göt” (ass) when we were in primary school, there is another issue here before all else. This has to do with re-using the sanctity of a saying, which has been presumed to have that sanctity in the first place. This is unqualified restoration. It is conservative, because restoration means making something appear new again, giving back its original form. Above the door of the tax office it says, “Taxed earnings are sacred.” Consequently there is absolutely no difference between the two usages. The stance of the works here, however, is different. This has nothing to do with weakening one of the sanctified sayings and strengthening the other. In addition, taken one by one, none of these works is interested in reality in the least; they strip the myth itself and reconstruct it in strange ways. In every new construction there is something missing, a void.

In this sense, it is not sufficient for what exists to have begun changing places already; what is important is for the artist to show the internal architecture of what remains secret, covered, and unquestioningly accepted, to turn it inside out, and make it transparent. In doing that, artists should not remain emotionless,

cool, or diffident. They take into account and utilize existing means of communication and methods of explanation, within their collective and individual importance.

While talking with a Romanian friend about our common Ottoman past, the fact that we were both from Eastern Europe, living in politically different but metabolically similar regimes, I asked him if there was an equivalent in his country to the silence and self-satisfaction of art here. This is what he said: “In Romania, state art or art that was at peace with the state was not socialist realism or Ceaușescu portraits in various sizes. There are three types of votes: Yes! If you say ‘yes’ to the party and the order, your family and neighbors will shun you when you go home. No! If you say ‘no,’ there will be all kinds of trouble for you. Abstention! That’s your answer – if you abstain, you don’t get into trouble and you won’t lose your friends. And that’s modern art in Romania, that’s official art.” You can find that kind of art in out-of-the-way modern art museums from Romania to Argentina, from Turkey to South Korea. A kind of “Ecole de Paris” modernity. This is, ultimately, the periphery bootlegging the recollection of the center.



Memory of today is indubitably founded on spaces determined by communication. But are spaces such as tax offices and primary school desks also communication grounds? And, what good does it do to whip a dead donkey? Myths that no longer have a reason to exist are meaningful only to the extent that they question the creation of new myths. In Turkey, where people embrace their true leaders only after they are dead, and kill them through sanctification, it is dangerous and difficult to tackle myths and requires bravery if you do not have the backing of a group with common interests. It is of vital importance that this bravery based on inward conviction is expressed with moral rectitude. It is not the responsibility of the artist to seek supporters – they are the ones who commit sins in our name, express our dreams, and liberate thought.

The emergence of the Islamic movement in Turkey with a strong voice and means of expression is thus related to the dissolution of various myths, but it also indicates a development that is parallel to the strengthening of orthodoxy from Bulgaria to the northwest of Turkey; myths have collapsed, and new ones are desperately needed. It is the artist's responsibility to expose these

myths that hold society together, making reconciliation and collective action possible, their cracks and fissures in need of cover, the danger – which is not confined to religion – that they pose as they get stronger and it is also the artists' responsibility to point to those who are being excluded.

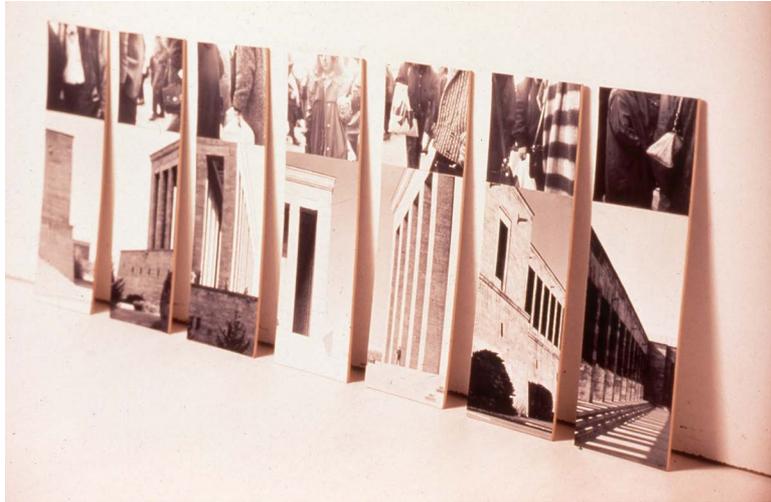
In this sense, none of the works in this exhibition reconstruct history. Memory must be preferred over history.

Ankara is the capital city founded with a claim to be thrifty, institutional and administrative. It culminates with the Anatolian Seljuks, but it is claimed to go back to the Hittites and the Roman Empire. In fact, however, it is an urban area consisting of a diplomatic modernity without memories; it was constructed for administrative purposes, with attention primarily given to appearances. As such, it is the republican utopia's capital city built from scratch. Unlike Istanbul, there are strict boundaries between its inside and the outside, the center and the periphery.

In Güven İncirlioğlu's work *Helter Skelter* (1992), a series of double photograph panels, there



are Anıtkabir scenes at the bottom with no one in sight, taken in bright light and presented with a clear modularity. At the top, there are figures, slightly out of focus, from the crowd at Kızılay Square, whom İncirlioğlu calls “middle-class heroes,” with an emphasis on certain details: a simple purse, a tote bag, etc. The extremely sharp Anıtkabir photographs were taken using a tripod and long exposures, the effect of which is multiplied by the sharpness of the building’s architecture, forming a contrast with the transiency and the instantaneity of the human figures, showing two distinct approaches in terms of photography.



Güven İncirlioğlu, *Helter Skelter*, 1992

These photographs make reference to the traditions of modern art in Turkey on the one hand, while reconstructing a situation on the other. Reconstruction and restoration are two separate things. The former puts together again something that exists but has been torn to pieces; this indicates a reality, as in this case, and asks a question, but in so doing it does not use the forms we already know and are accustomed to; instead, it makes it necessary to recombine these pieces in totally different and unsettling ways. This also provides an explanation for the use of modularity and elements of repetition in this work as an architectural attitude, which in turn concerns the history of photography. At the same time, it plays with the idea of Turkey as an enormous construction site. Restoration, on the other hand, is conservative and pro status quo. It endeavors to present the old as new, masquerading as if it is new, but never doing anything more than perpetuating a lie. It intends to erase the fact that we are unable to go back to that building or to its period, by attempting to conceal all the traces of time.

In a similar vein, on the right hand side of the vertical series of photographs depicting Ankara, one can see the steps of the eponymous



folk dance (“Zeybek”, 1992). As in İbrahim Çallı’s painting, the zeybeks in the mountains are the heroes of the War of Independence, but this Ankara panorama shows another face of Ankara: the shanty towns and garbage dumps.

The upper part of the work, entitled *LIBERAL* (1992), written in uppercase letters in English and in lowercase letters in Turkish, refers to Zeybek and shows a panoramic view taken from the Citadel of Ankara. Since Turkish characters have not been designed according to this alphabet, it is impossible to know where to put the dot on the “İ” – inside it, or above it? Above the Ankara view there are photographs of a lemon “L”(lma), the inside of a lemon “İ”(çi), pepper “B”(iber), apple “E”(lma), grater “R”(ende), “A”(pple), and “L”(emon). The only artificial object among them is the grater, which has an architectural look. Its duty is to shave and file.

After Ankara and Istanbul, there is a strange third city that looks like neither of them. The history of this city is told in a different way by all the nationalities living there, just like it is in Thessaloniki. Izmir, the frontier city in which the War of Independence came to a conclusion,



Güven İncirlioğlu, *Zeybek* [Zeibek], 1992



Güven İncirlioğlu, *LIBERAL*, 1992

is conveyed onto canvas by silkscreen printing in Bülent Şangar's two paintings. In one of them, as the Officer of the Supreme Command in charge of photography says, "This is the state of Izmir, the suffering city now delivered from enemy occupation, following the Great Fire." It is in ruins, like the entire country. In one of the paintings, there are two identical figures, and in the other, there is a group of boys playing, trying to fly a paper plane. This ironic boys' game that reminds one of Turkish boys' dream of becoming a pilot, is presented against a backdrop we ignore. These subjects (war, occupation) have been dwelt upon so much that it has become necessary to feel the lightness of flying

a paper plane. At the same time, we know the luxury of living in a country that, unlike its neighbors and most places in the world, has not seen war on its soil for many years, but we do not know the opposite. The child sees the ruins in a different way. The fire buckets in the third painting with the letters "Y" – "A" – "N" – "G" – "I" – "N" (F-I-R-E) written on them and arranged in strict order, as commonly seen in so many government offices, are more the depiction of bureaucratic installation art with the sole purpose of serving as décor, than a serious measure against fires. They also remind the viewer of the modular repetition and the identical blind objects of minimalist art. The only difference is that some are placed on a podium.

Bureaucratic installation art is also represented in Emre Zeytinoglu's work. In a room with walls painted in two different shades of gray and illuminated with fluorescent lighting, there are a great number of files.

The movie *Brazil* and the installations by the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov have repeatedly shown us how small boxes and blank official papers can govern life.





Bülent Şangar, Untitled, 1992



Bülent Şangar, Y. A. N. G. I. N. [F. I. R. E.], 1992

Government offices are places where the individual is confronted with “identity:” endless numbers, signatures and stamps, residence documents, copies of identification papers, clean bills of health, petitions... No one knows the use of these papers or of the people working there. In a country where a significant portion of the population has at one time or another been taken into custody or put in jail, where records are kept in places you cannot access, files remain important. A file is like a body – it swells with time, fades, and loses its shape. The sheets of poor quality paper that make your hands feel funny disintegrate over time. In this place where family genealogies are not kept, and the tradition of record-keeping has been forgotten; each and every one of the files represent a very objective and serious absurdity. The recollection of the file and that of the individuals represented inside it do not overlap; the existence of one depends on the alteration of the contents of the other. The memory inspected.

The point of this exhibition is not to eliminate the effects of a crisis that was experienced in childhood and became fixed in the unconscious through re-enactment. For years, society has been





Emre Zeytinoğlu, *Devletin Belleği* [Memory of the State], 1993

silent or monophonic, and within its controlled communications, people collectively remembered the consensual myth of the Republic of Turkey. It was this social consensus that made the collective recollection possible. When the consensus behind the myth dissolves, the myth also dissolves. It then becomes necessary to construct a social commitment that can replace social unity.

Michel de Certeau describes space as a “practiced” place, defined by the people living in it. In Eliza Proctor’s work at the *Serotonin II* exhibition in Gazhane, there were tea glasses filled with tea,



Emre Zeytinoğlu, *Devletin Belleği* [Memory of the State], 1993



equal to the number of workers in the factory, placed in the windows. Coal dust was gradually polluting the tea and reducing the amount of the liquid. In her work here, there are tea glasses in a big muslin bag, on which the traces of bodies have been imprinted using daylight. Muslin is transparent, filtering sunlight as well as the tea leaves. The tea glasses are heavy, pulling the muslin downwards, making it look like a heavy tote bag. This is the weight of the past as well as the weight of the future. What will be filtered out, what will be carried onwards, what will remain of the past? Tea and the tea glass are the most social manifestation of existence in this country. Proctor asks herself this question: “How do you go back to a place... a place that is not used anymore?” That is why the bag is consistent with the tea glass as well as the shape of the room it stands in, and the walls of the room have been scraped to make the layers of time visible.

In Lerzan Özer’s installation entitled *Beynim Kalbur Gibi* [By Brain is like a Sieve] (1993), Proctor’s idea of “filtering” is replaced by the idea of being full of holes like a sieve, standing still for an interval of time while everything slips away through your fingers. The covered boxes into



Eliza Proctor, *Çay Bardakları* [Tea Glasses], 1993





Eliza Proctor, *Mavi Işık* [Blue Light], 1993

which the remnants of the Six Principles fall do not correspond to a didactic protectionism. The remnants can be preserved and recycled and they are available for reconsideration. What will be left behind, and what will be carried forward into the future remains a question mark for everyone. These are not like the light bulbs arranged to form a silhouette of Atatürk, some burnt out, some fallen and not replaced, nor are they like the letters that have fallen off the walls of government buildings. A word that drops out of a sentence creates anxiety for that very sentence with the void it leaves behind it. The spear that emerges from the tree trunk in the middle of the hall constitutes a totally different, nomadic image. According to CHP's emblem with those highly-prized six arrows which resemble rays of sunlight that light the way, the spear that stands alone takes root in the tree trunk and makes us feel that it will survive, come what may.

—Vasif Kortun





Lerzan Özer, *Beynim Kalbur Gibi* [My Brain is like a Sieve], 1993



ANI BELLEK II - ÖN BÜTÇE

kalem	adet	birim maliyet	ara maliyet	minimum maliyet	maksimum maliyet
KATALOG	1000	30000		3000000	
DAVETİYE	1000	2000		2000000	
AFİŞ	100	10000		1000000	
BASIN DOSYASI					
metin yazımı	1	500000		500000	
fotoğraf	3	15000	45000	900000	
çoğaltım	20	500		10000	
dağıtım	20	15000		300000	
BASIN DOSYASI toplam maliyet				1710000	
PTT HARCAMALARI					
postalama					
y. içi	900			450000	
y. dışı	100			150000	
telefon ve fax		5000000		5000000	
PTT HARCAMALARI toplam maliyet				5600000	
FOTOĞRAF	80	15000		1200000	
YARDIMCI	2	1500000		3000000	
SANATÇI MASRAFLARI					
işlerin şehir içi taşınması				5000000	6000000
üretim masrafları				6000000	12000000
SANATÇI MASRAFLARI toplam maliyet				11000000	18000000
BEKÇİ				4000000	
DİĞER					
danışmanlık hizmetleri				14000000	
görünmeyen gider				1000000	
DİĞER toplam maliyet				15000000	
TOPLAM MASRAFLAR				74510000	110510000

VARF' CİM -
 ŞİMDİLİK GÖRÜŞÜM KALEMLER VE
 FİYATLANDIRMA, ÜÇ AŞAĞI - BEŞ YUKARI
 BU -

- 1) MAS BÜTÇESİ HAYATI BİRLEZ DİKA NET HALE GETİRELER
- 2) GRAFİKLER KAL PAPA İŞLEYELER?
- 3) GÖRÜŞÜM GİBİ VARF'A PAPA AYIRMADIM -
 NE DERDİM? BELKİ HATİLOĞ GELİRİNİ
 VEREBİLİRİZ, HA, NABİL FİNER?

Vasif Kortun
Serdarı Ekrem Sok 56, Dođan Apt 3, Kuledibi 80080, İstanbul
tel: 249 4334, fax: 240 7342 ya da 230 0376

ETIKETLER

SANATÇININ ADI
İŞİN ADI:
MALZEME:
YILI:
KOLEKSİYON:

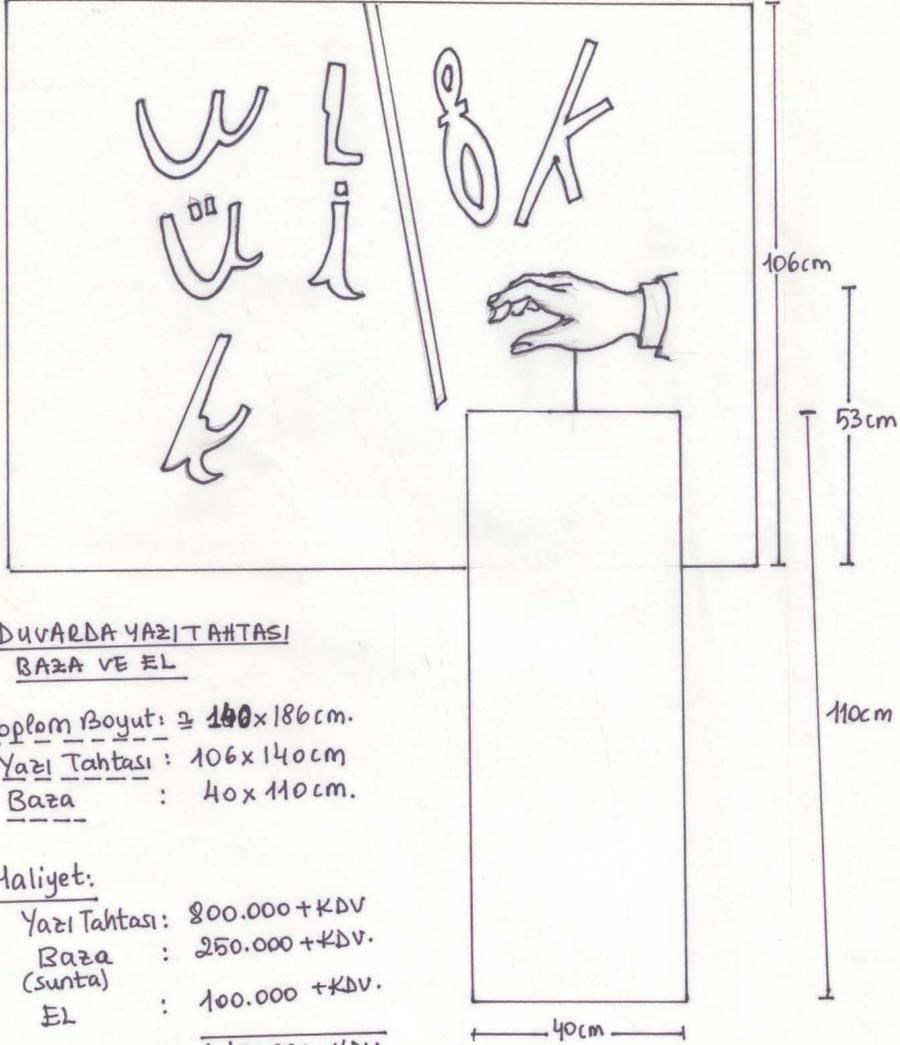
eđer sergide birden fazla işiniz var ise, bu sayfayı kopyalayarak, bilgileri her biri için veriniz.
etiket haricinde metine ihtiyaç var ise, benimle temasa geçiniz.

sergideki işinize bir alıcı çıkması halinde temasa geçilmesi gereken

KİŞİ
KURUM
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(%10)



The drawing and the material, budget details of Aydan Murtezaoğlu's artwork *Karatahta* [Blackboard]

OK
OK

Sn. Haluk Elver

fax: 265 2303
date: 8/3/93
bu sayfa dahil toplam 1 sayfa
iletimde sorun çıkarsa 2494334'ü arayınız

Vasif Kortun
Serdarı Ekrem Sok 56, Doğan Apt 3
Kuledibi, İstanbul 80080, Turkey
tel: 90 1 2494334
fax: 90 1 2407342

Sn. Haluk Bey:

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Bu herhangi bir sergi, yani "beyaz bir kutunun içi" olmadığı için, işlerin bu mekanın içinde nasıl duracağına, mekanla nasıl bir ilişki kurulacağına dair çok ince ayarlar gerekiyor. Bunun için, giriş mahalinin ve 2. katın yer planlarını ivedilikle edinmem gerekiyor.

Bu denli heyecan veren, hafızası kuvvetli bir mekanla her gün karşılaşmıyoruz. Serginin bu mekana yaraşır olması için hazırlıkların sıkı tutmak lazım.

Bu faksı takiben planlar ve realizasyon konusunda sizi telefonla arayacağım.

Saygılarımla,



Vasif Kortun

Fax sent from Vasif Kortun to Haluk Elver regarding Number Fifty

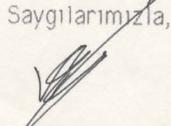
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Serdarı Ekrem Sok 56, Doğan Apt 3, Kuledibi 80080, İstanbul, Türkiye
tel: 249 4334, fax: 240 7342 / 230 0376

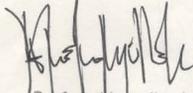
30/4/93

İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi
Başkanlığına

4-25 Mayıs 1993 tarihleri arasında, ana arter üzerinde olduğunu öğrendiğimiz, Beşiktaş Akaretler, Spor Caddesi 50 Numara'da gerçekleştirilecek ticari amacı olmayan görsel sanatlar sergisinin tanıtımında kullanılmak üzere, binanın cephesine, üzerinde sadece ve sadece serginin adı olan "ELLİ NUMARA"nın bulunduğu bir bez afiş asmak için izninizi rica ederiz. Sergi, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü ve İstanbul Bölge Müdürlüğü bilgisi dahilinde yapılmaktadır.

Saygılarımızla,


Vasif Kortun
Küratör


Defne Koryürek
Prodüktör

BEZ AFİŞTE YER ALACAK OLAN BİLGİ:
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BEZ AFİŞİN KALDIRIMDAN MINİMUM YÜKSEKLİĞİ
4.00 m.

BEZ AFİŞİN MAKSİMUM BOYUTLARI
dikey: 750 cms.
yatay: 200 cms.

AFİŞİN ASILMA ÖZELLİKLERİ
Bina cephesine paralel.

Request for permission regarding Number Fifty banner sent to Metropolitan
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vasıf kortun

anı/bellek II
elli numara
sergi

vahap avşar, taner ceylan, ismet doğan, güven incirliođlu,
aydan murtezaođlu, lerzan özer
eliza proctor, bülent şangar, emre zeytinođlu

4 -25 mayıs

açılış 4 Mayıs, 18:00

spor caddesi 50 numara, akaretler, spor ve şair nedim caddeleri köşesi





H A B E R B Ü L T E N İ

AKARETLER "50 NUMARA"DA SKANDAL!

Yasif Kortun'un küratörlüğünü yaptığı; Vahap Avcı, Eliza Proctor, İsmet Doğan, Taner Ceylan, Güven İncirlioğlu, Aydan Murtezaoğlu, Bülent Şangar, Lerzan Özer, Emre Zeytinoğlu'nun katıldığı "ELLİ NUMARA" adlı sergi, Demokrat Parti'nin 14 Mayıs "Demokrasi Bayramı" nın kurbanı oldu.

Akaretler'de, eski CHP İlçe Merkezi olan, II. Abdülhamit'in saray resamı, ünlü İtalyan ressam Fausto Zonaro'nun da 1896-1909 yılları arasında atölye ve ikametgah olarak kullandığı "50 Numara" lı bina, NET Şirketler Grubu tarafından Vakıflar'dan kiralanmış bulunması nedeniyle, Türkiye ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluş mitlerini konu alan söz konusu sergi için 4-25 Mayıs tarihleri arasında kullanılmak üzere, kısmi sponsorship anlayışı içinde düzenleyicilerine tahsis edilmişti.

Ne var ki, NET Grubu Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı Besim Tibuk'un Demokrat Parti İstanbul İl Başkanı olması nedeniyle, 14 Mayıs, Cuma günü Demokrat Parti tarafından "kutlanan" Demokrasi Bayramı adına, binanın üzerindeki "ELLİ NUMARA" ihareli sergi afişi izinsiz indirilmiş ve yerine "14 MAYIS DEMOKRASİ BAYRAMI...DP" afişi asılmıştır.

Sergi Prodüktörü Defne Koryürek'in tüm itirazlarına ve NET yöneticileri nezdindeki tüm yapıcı girişimlerine rağmen afişi indirmek mümkün olamadığı gibi; afişin, Besim Tibuk'un emirleriyle asıldığı ve bir hafta süre ile indirilmesinin de söz konusu olamayacağı bildirilmiştir. Bunun üzerine, sanatçıların da mutabakatı alınarak, sergi, öngörülen tarihten bir hafta önce kapatılmıştır.

Kortun ve Koryürek, sergiye katılan tüm sanatçılar adına ve kapatma kararına ilişkin olarak, "ANI/BELLEK sergilerinin ikincisi olan ELLİ NUMARA adlı, Türkiye ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluş mitlerini konu alan sergimizi, Celal Bayar ve Adnan Menderes tecrübeleri üzerine kurulan; adalet, ahlak ve hepsinden öte, demokrasi savunucusu Demokrat Parti'nin 1993 Türkiye'sinde sergilediği bu saygısız ve zorlamacı tutumunu protesto etmek amacı ile, kapatma kararı aldık. Afişin asılması olayını ve sorumlusu olduğunu öğrendiğimiz Besim Tibuk'u, *olaya göz yuman NET Yapı yöneticilerini ve 56 yılın Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi binasına bu afişi asma hazımsızlığını gösteren Demokrat Parti'yi kınıyoruz*" dediler.

Fausto Zonaro'nun da orijinal bir yapıtının yer aldığı "ELLİ NUMARA" adlı sergi, TRT 2'nin 25. Kare Programı'nda bu akşam (17 Mayıs) saat 20:20'de yer alacaktır.

Bilgi için: 249 43 34

ON THE ARCHIVE ROOM
IN THE MEMORY/
RECOLLECTION II
EXHIBITION

The 1990s went by searching for the meaning of globalization. How were political and economic changes to be understood and defined? What kind of link would be made between this new situation and established ideological approaches? Commentary on these subjects must exceed tens of thousands of pages by now, rendering it unnecessary to repeat them here. If, however, we are required to say a few words on the structure of discourse in Turkey, the following could be asserted: very broadly speaking, there were two main directions. On the one hand, some were trying to analyze the political and economic structure of globalization; on the other, a utopia of the very same process was being constructed.

One of these directions became more dominant, as is the nature of dynamism in the world: it must be clearly stated that those who constructed the utopia of globalization with impatient enthusiasm always defeated those trying to analyze and grasp the meaning of this process in a restrained

way. In other words, the utopists of globalization were able to rapidly impress the masses with promises, and very strong and – admittedly – attractive arguments, engendering a certain atmosphere of optimism. Globalization was taken, in general, to mean liberation, and was presented as a magic wand that would destroy central ideological structures and all of their institutions. In “the future,” “power” itself would disappear and “freedom” would be installed – thanks to the rising wave of “civil predominance.” This was the general perception pumped by new political figures, the media, certain intellectual groups and some representatives of capital within those groups, etc.; it was even possible to occasionally come across people who claimed Marx’s theories had come true *in toto*.

Economy, one of the irreplaceable cogwheels of globalization, turned into the primary factor threatening authoritarian rules. Free market economy offered all individuals the “equal” pos-



sibility of “becoming rich,” and as such was a promising source of “liberation.” The desire of the masses to have access, first, to economic means and, then, to consumer goods brought legitimacy to the demolition of outdated regimes. The role of promises for such unchecked “enrichment” and access to consumer goods in bringing down sealed-off authoritarian regimes is indisputable. Indeed, quite a few claimed there was a link between chasing the possibility of “becoming rich” and “getting rid of those in power” (and, thus, “becoming free”).

This change in mentality holding sway over daily life also transformed the philosophical milieu into a “usable” instrument. It is on record that the intellectual groups of the 1990s, in particular, were eager to support philosophers in step with new conditions. The problem here, however, was not that there appeared a sudden enthusiasm to read the new philosophers, but that forced links were being established between their texts and political preferences. Using the cut-and-paste method, certain paragraphs were selected and put together, reducing them to tools of a “utilitarian” politics. This wasn’t done solely to lend credibility to the promises of globaliza-

tion. It also served the purposes of another group that ignored the whole reality of the globalization process and was bent on denying it – and all its concomitant problems – with quite an emotional reflex. Rejecting these texts and “rejecting globalization” were the same thing, making the former a symbol of debate. Names like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, for example, were “filler” in superficial discussions among the political climate’s supporters and opponents, their texts regarded as texts on current politics. It is well known that in those years, politically there was no use for names like Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze or Félix Guattari, who as a result attracted those wanting to avoid this “vulgar” climate. Even though some intellectuals committed their texts to memory, a field of discourse that could provide an alternative to the political environment of the time outside the “supporter”-“opponent” conflict was not possible.

Artists were undoubtedly a part of this curious climate; they were keen to deny, desert or approve of “something.” They may have thought they had a responsibility to change or preserve this “something” in accordance with their own political functions. What would help them meet



such a responsibility were, usually, philosophical texts. Some artists tried to adapt references culled from these writings to their own works, thus actively participating in the new political climate. Their “text-works” established a link between intellectualism and the artist, inventing a new form of the “art-politics” relationship as politics entered art and vice versa. This relationship became ever more widespread with the development of new models of organization in the arts, including biennials and international exhibitions, which brought with them the institution of curatorship. One has to mention the other side of the same coin: the rest of the artists, who chose to remain loyal to traditional aesthetic norms, also came to prefer staying away from such organizations, retreating to the city’s “old school” galleries (which now had a more modest look compared to the new venues). It wouldn’t be incorrect to say they made a point of not using the “new” terms – that they had almost no interest in “us vs. the other,” “deterritorialization,” “migration-immigration,” “borders-permeability,” “identification-de-identification,” etc. One possible conclusion is that the politics of art was being clearly established based on factors like which terms gained legitimacy and which did not.

The fact that politics rested on such signs created a conflict between the “approvers” and those who refused to become more acrimonious; to the same extent, however, it also decontextualized all discussion. Why were Marxists still adamantly Marxist – what were their reasons? What reasons were given by those who claimed Marxist philosophies were past their use-by date? How would it be possible to determine the points of rupture and continuity between old and new philosophies (and, indeed, philosophers) in the field of aesthetics? And many more questions... These led to somewhat meaningful discussions among certain artists, but they never succeeded in becoming topics of general discussion. Stuck between “new legitimacies” and “staying outside of legitimacies,” and never witnessing a meaningful conversation or palpable political result, the art world reached perhaps its only original point with the help of “the other” – a factor recently pushed to the forefront after being articulated first by postmodernism and then by the process of globalization. If there is a sharply political dimension to what Turkey of the 1990s has to offer in the name of art, it was the result of the acknowledgment of Kurdish artists. Notwithstanding artistic criticism of the works of these artists, the sheer fact that they suc-



ceeded in existing despite their identity as “the other” was, in itself, a political breakthrough.

A short but very important observation is in order here: there was a link between art and politics in Turkey in the 1990s in one form or another (within the context mentioned above). Even though this connection did not attain significant results, apart from a case concerning “the other,” it was still seen as “the politicization of art and artists.” It is superfluous to argue this was not a case of politicization, regardless of how much criticism the process of politicization drew. The fact, however, that this period was described later (in the 2000s) as one when “artists in Turkey gained a political identity for the first time” is only an indication that the “vulgar” climate continues, and ignores the political identities and missions shouldered by artists both prior to and after the military coup in 1980.

The *Memory/Recollection II*¹ exhibition opened in 1993, at the most confusing time of the intellectual climate described above. Naturally, this was one of the political exhibitions of the period. The general feeling regarding the exhibition was that its works were closer to the “utopias of

globalization” – one of the two sides of the globalization debate (and conflicts). In other words, it would be correct to say that it spoke from within the framework of the promises of globalization. To put it more bluntly, the exhibition emphasized a critique of the current system and the promises of “approaching” globalization, and found considerable support as such among the media. What the artists of the exhibition were saying to themselves was, in fact, the following: “Let’s just get rid of the present situation one way or another, and we’ll think about what’s coming later.” It is not surprising to see an excess of criticism regarding the ideological structure of the state when one looks at the exhibition from this angle.

A gloomy and dilapidated room, typical of public offices... Black folders in file cabinets... Personal information in these folders belonging to individuals whose identities are hidden or perhaps already forgotten... The memories and recollections of individuals are managed and monitored

¹ *Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II*, İstanbul, 1993. Curated by Vasıf Kortun. Artists: Vahap Avşar, Taner Ceylan, İsmet Doğan, Güven İncirlioğlu, Aydan Murtezaoğlu, Lerzan Özer, Eliza Proctor, Bülent Şangar and Emre Zeytinoğlu.



by an authority other than themselves. The room is painted gray and illuminated with a dim fluorescent light. Entering the room, one feels a damp coolness on one's face... In this "archive room" resembling a sepulcher, everything seems to be left to rot. Recollections rot, and memory freezes. There is a small niche in the wall, illuminated with colorful neon lights. "Liberated" recollections and memories are presented here, but they can only be "free" after being stamped "Approved." There is a lot to tell about the things seen in this room... But the net result is a critique of the state, which as an authority monitors individuals, interferes with their spirits, and turns this interference into a spectacle...

I must confess that when one makes the connection between this installation and our present day, such a critique seems quite dull... In fact, the critical content of this installation has evaporated within merely two or three years. This is because the "criticisms" during the early 1990s were easy criticisms, directed solely at tearing down what was present and dreaming of getting rid of those in power. It was only later that people (at least a small group) began to understand that the conditions (and promises) of "what was coming" were precursors to a new form of power. Perhaps, in

this sense at least, the exhibition *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* was lucky to have opened at a time when the clues regarding this power were becoming clearer. Nonetheless, it is also evident that these two exhibitions, opened in 1993 and 1995, have illustrated the political climate in Turkey, parallel to global dynamics, very accurately.

—Emre Zeytinoglu





Emre Zeytinoğlu's installation titled *Devletin Belleği* [Memory of the State] (2012) from the exhibition *It was a time of conversation* at SALT Ulus, 2013. Photo: Cemil Batur Gökçeer



ABOUT GAR

The press release for the *GAR* exhibition, which opened at the Ankara Railway Station in 1995, read as follows: “Bringing together 12 artists from different generations and countries, the exhibition aims to get out of traditional exhibition venues and introduce works of art to a wider audience. The majority of artists in the exhibition work with installations, and they have created site-specific works for the railway station. These installations, which will be placed in the Gar Gallery as well as the station platforms, waiting hall, left luggage office and other areas, will take a variety of forms, from sculpture to video.”

The works in the *GAR* exhibition were removed by the Station Directorate a day after opening, purportedly because they “demoralized society.” The incident is described in detail in a letter sent to participants. Newspapers covered the story with headlines like “Art Systematically Censored,” “Ankara Station Closed to Art” and “Objectionable Sculptures Removed”.

Today, many people remember *GAR* as the “censored” or “cancelled” exhibition. On the other hand, the process leading to the cancellation of the exhibition surfaced through documents that most people don’t remember. The video *Dönüş* [Re-turning] by Vahap Avşar, one of the exhibition’s artists, was shot by turning 360 degrees inside the station. The work was shown on a television monitor in the waiting hall; it now serves as a time machine that takes the viewer back to *GAR*.

This text was originally written for the exhibition *It was a time of conversation* (SALT Galata, 2012; SALT Ulus, 2013).





It was a time of conversation, SALT Galata, 2012. Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



**GAR WAS YESTERDAY,
TOMORROW IS UNCERTAIN**

Whenever I occasionally think of the *GAR*¹ exhibition, I still ask myself: why did *GAR* cause such a stir? Because it was removed right after the opening? Or because the works in the exhibition offered, through art, an answer to the spirit of the time – to the social and political crisis in Turkey in 1995?

It was undoubtedly the bite, the social import, the disturbing aspect of some of the works that triggered the removal of *GAR*. The work I created (with the active participation of Şehsuvar Aktaş and Ayşe Selen) entitled *Kurşun Uykusu* [Lead Sleep] was one of these, having displeased some authorities. The work consisted of 12 body molds made of paper, painted with graphite and poster glue, lying on the ground. We had set up our workshop in front of the entrance to the restaurant by the first platform inside the Ankara Railway Station. Using Şehsuvar Aktaş as our model, we created four of the body molds between 4 and 6 pm. Ayşe Selen couldn't make

it at the last minute, not wanting to create a conflict with her employer, but she did send her overalls, which we laid on the ground. I think “I couldn't come because my boss didn't let me” was written on them. While I was preparing the paper, Şehsuvar chatted with people stopping by, answering questions and taking down their comments. Then he would lie down and get under the paper cover. The paper would dry in about 15 minutes, thanks to the electrical heater and the dry plains wind blowing through the station, hardening like a shell and taking the form of the body beneath it. My friend would then get up from under the mold and we would place it at the end of the line. The whole railway station had turned into a workshop for us – a place where we both created and exhibited our works.

¹ *GAR*, Ankara, 1995.
Artists: Vahap Avşar, Selim Birsnel, Ayşe Selen, Şehsuvar Aktaş, Cengiz Çekil, Paul Donker Duyvis, Ayşe Erkmen, Hasan Bülent Kahraman, Claude Leon, Aydan Murtezaoğlu, Ladan Naderi, Füsün Onur, Joseph Semah and Paolo Vitali.
(Created by Selim Birsnel as part of the Art and Taboos symposium organized by the Art Association of Ankara.)



IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION



Installing *Kurşun Uykusu* [Lead Sleep]



Paolo Vitali's work had quite an impact on those who could decipher its meaning – burgundy cloth flags, on which the German translation of certain verses from the Koran regarding taboos were written in light blue letters. These three long flags had been hung from above the entrance doors of the station leading to the platforms. Paolo got help from the station's cleaning personnel, who cleaned the hundreds of windows of the building using an electric forklift – a sight that passers-by found amazing. Some changed their path to be safe; some stopped and watched this unusual spectacle at length.





Installing *Kurşun Uykusu* [Lead Sleep]

Claude Leon's PVC pipes, fitted with mirrors to resemble periscopes and distributed all over the station, made up a work that spoke quite explicitly about being monitored and under surveillance. I think the best comment on this work came from a drunk homeless man living in the station: "...They are all watching us, there's another one over there, this one's looking at me, this is me! I'm watching myself, we're all watching each other..."

The barrels filled to different levels with a red liquid in Vahap Avşar's work *Son Damla* [The Last Drop] reminded the audience of blood. The barrels looked like objects to be sent out to



Preparing Paolo Vitali's work



Claude Leon, *Untitled*, 1995





Claude Leon, Untitled, 1995



Claude Leon, Untitled, 1995

Anatolia, or like people with their hands on their waists, waiting to board the train. Vahap also had a video being shown on a TV set in the waiting hall. This was a work he had recorded by turning 360 degrees inside the station hall. The video showed people watching TV in the waiting hall – the place they had just walked through. The video and the normal broadcast alternated on the same screen.

Aydan Murtezaoğlu's work made reference to the *10th Year March*; the lines that read “we weaved an iron web across the motherland” refer to the construction of railways, which by 1995 had





Vahap Avşar, *Son Damla* [Last Drop], 1995

become the cement and iron bases ornamenting *gecekodu* rooftops in preparation for adding another floor. Two wooden cases, filled with cement and bearing tall iron rods, were the same size as the columns of the waiting hall and had been placed adjacently so as to support them. It was on the occasion of this exhibition that Aydan and I met for the first time. During one of our conversations she told me that this was her first exhibition outside Istanbul, making her situation different from the other artists participating. Aydan had come from Istanbul by train, setting foot in Ankara after passing through the exhibition space.



Aydan Murtezaoğlu, *Filiz*/(demir ağlarla ördük ana yurdu dört baştan) [Bud/(we weaved an iron web across the motherland)], 1995 and Vahap Avşar, *Dönüş* [Re-Turning], 1995

Ayşe Erkmen created an installation of 12 monitors showing short scenes involving railways from various black-and-white films. I still remember the scenes from Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. I still remember that very familiar yet inescapable labyrinth and the variously colored monochromes cutting these scenes abruptly, giving a unique rhythm to the experience of watching and to the installation itself. Ayşe's work stood in the lively waiting hall of the second platform. At night, it sometimes became a place where people





Ayşe Erkmen, Yo1 [The Way], 1995

stayed until morning; it was more than possible for the TV sets and video players to be damaged or stolen. One of the Gar Gallery employees spent the night there.

The two works I have recalled here, by Ayşe and Aydan, did not especially disturb the visitors or the authorities. (A good work is not necessarily a disturbing one.) On the other hand, these were ingeniously thought out, plastically consistent and very subtly designed works.

In retrospect, its “disturbing aspect” seems to be the main reason why the exhibition was



Ayşe Erkmen, Yo1 [The Way], 1995

dismantled and removed. But who was disturbed, and what was it that disturbed them? Was it some of the realities presented? Was it the condition of living under oppression and surveillance? The blood flowing in the Southeast? The lead-colored empty human molds that looked like the dead bodies so frequently exhibited on TV? The homeless and hungry who would have to live through the hell of their old age? Yes, some had been disturbed. We had taken a risk, and awakened certain taboos.

Part of the exhibition was held in the public spaces of the railway station, while the rest was in



the Gar Gallery. Ordinary people never set foot in the gallery; to this day, the works exhibited there are less known and less remembered.

Ladan Shahkrokh Naderi contributed an installation in the form of a house plan and the name “Ali” embroidered on a soldier’s blanket, accompanied by the sounds of a fire and a voice shouting “Ali!” Another of her works in the exhibition was a silver spoon on a Formica canteen table, filled with what looked like granulated sugar, but was in fact pulverized glass.



Ladan Naderi, Untitled, 1995



Ladan Naderi, *Ali*, 1995

Cengiz Çekil’s installation *Mermerdeki Delik* [Hole in the Marble] consisted of a rectangular slab of white marble, heated by a light bulb from underneath, with a hole big enough for an index finger to go through. The work was accompanied by *Mum Akıntıları* [Candle Drip-pings], a series of paintings on the walls of the room made by dripping candle wax on canvas sheets. Like Aydan, Cengiz also came to Ankara by train, but from İzmir, walking directly into the exhibition space as he got off the train; he put aside the small drip paintings he had brought





Cengiz Çekil, *Mum Akıntılıları* [Candle Drippings], 1995



Cengiz Çekil, *Mermerdeki Delik* [Hole in the Marble], 1995

with him and went to his friend the sculptor Remzi Savaş's studio to create all his works for the exhibition in one night.

Füsun Onur's work in the exhibition was installed/concealed in Room Number 5. It consisted of five small gift packages with ribbons and the letters A, R, H, A, T written on them, along with a boat made of glossy blue paper with the name "Arhat"², which was positioned behind a curtain. Some visitors would leave without looking around carefully because the room appeared empty. Those who spent some time there came to see the various elements hidden in corners and standing on electric rails, and finally discovered the paper boat behind the curtain that would take them to Nirvana.

² A name in Sanskrit meaning a serious and worthy person. It is a title used in Buddhism for flawless people who have rid themselves of feelings like vengefulness, hatred and ignorance. This person is regarded as having passed the ten chains of the circle of causality, and aims to reach Nirvana by passing Samsar.

Paul Donker Duyvis contributed *Mozaik* [Mosaic], watering cans whispering in different ethnic languages, and a set of glass bells entitled *Uzlaşma* [Mediation]. One hour before the opening, the bells fell off the shelf mounted on the wall, which we watched in utter silence and

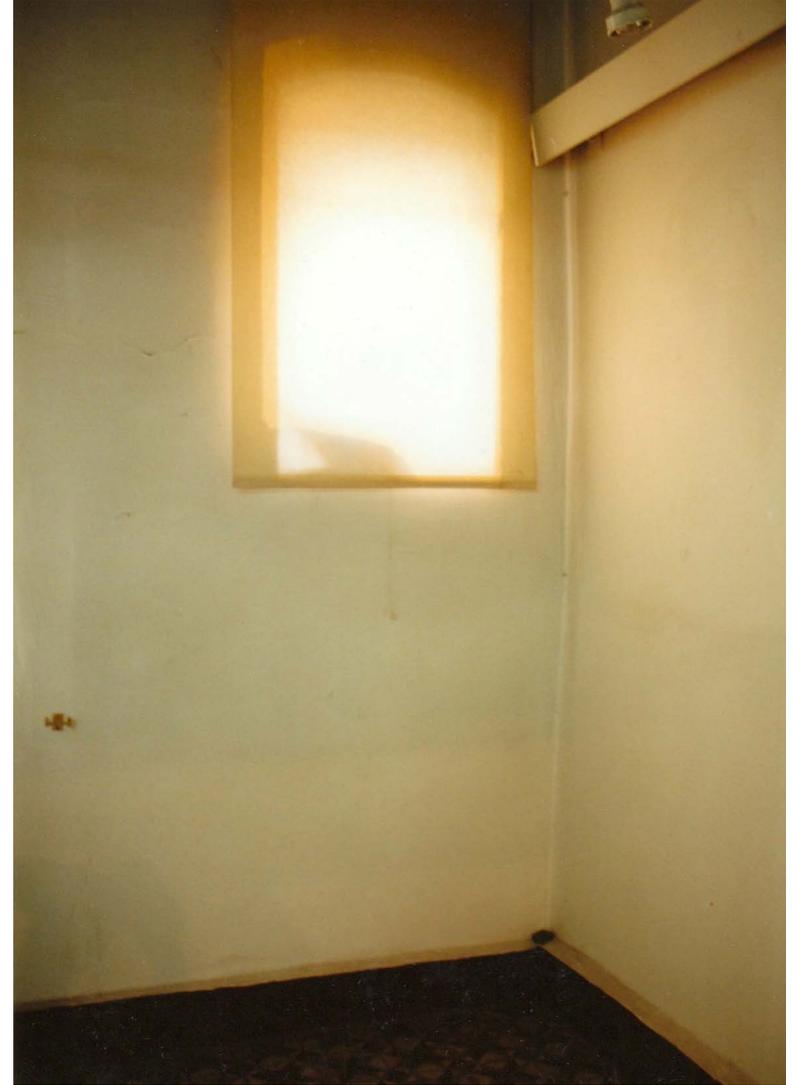




Füsun Onur, *Arhat*, 1995

shock. Paul re-interpreted his work right then and there. There was a photograph of a covered statue that accompanied this work, and the pieces of broken glass at its feet gave the work new meaning.

Joseph Semah's architectural icon *Görelî İfade Prensipline Giriş* [An Introduction to the Principle of Relative Expression], with its references to Judaism, met visitors at the Gar Gallery. Joseph was unable to come to Ankara; Paul brought a part of his work with him, which he and Vahap set up together.



Füsun Onur, *Arhat*, 1995





Paul Donker Duyvis, *Mozaik* [Mosaic], 1995



Joseph Semah, *Görelî İfade Prensibine Giriş* [An Introduction to the Principle of Relative Expression], 1995



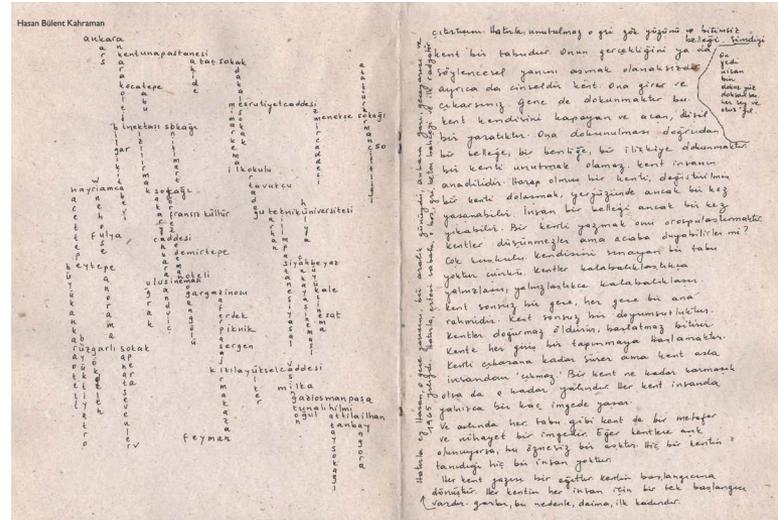
Paul Donker Duyvis, *Uzlaşma* [Mediation], 1995

Hasan Bülent Kahraman contributed to the exhibition as a writer, with an autobiographical text in the catalogue made up of acrostics that recounted his getting off the train and leaving the station to enter the city for the first time as a child. Hasan Bülent asked that his text be placed in the middle of the catalogue, which violated the alphabetical order, but that was how we did it. Today, I see this as an attempt to disrupt the presumed order of an exhibition catalogue. Hasan Bülent made a photocopy of this page and, using scotch tape, posted it somewhere in the middle of the station hall the day of the opening, attaching

a torch next to it. Within minutes, however, the torch was stolen and the page torn off.

I don't quite remember when we first began thinking of the GAR exhibition, but our conversations were always strewn with words like “necessity” and “urgency.” After long discussions over many evenings, we decided to stage an exhibition. I think the fact that we were in Ankara, in the middle of the plains, had something to do with this. One thing almost all the artists we invited had in common was the fact that they had changed places, or even continents, at some point in their lives for personal reasons or their art. It was important for us to bring artists from different cultures and generations together in the railway station to produce new works for the space.

We studied the station many times; we observed the shops selling military equipment, the barbershop, the restaurant, the people who walked in and out of these shops through the underpass connecting the platforms. Sanart helped us obtain permission from the stationmaster to stage an exhibition, on two conditions: we were not to use any images against Atatürk or the Turkish flag. We told them not to worry, and



Hasan Bülent Kahrman's artwork from the catalogue, 1995

accepted the restrictions. We even obtained an official statement of permission to take photographs and work in the station building. Each of us had a copy of it in our pockets, to be shown if anyone in a uniform came up and asked us what we were doing when the time came to mount the works. Before all that, however, we worked out a schedule and a plan. We made a trip to Istanbul to talk with the artists face-to-face in their studios or homes and told them about our project. We reached the artists in other cities by phone or fax. We were taking everything down, having progress meetings along the way. We had to be as orga-

nized as possible about questions like what, in which order, when, with how much budget, how to spend it, and who would be doing what.

I cannot go on writing without first expressing my gratitude to the many unsung heroes of this exhibition: Füsün Okutan, who introduced us to Sanart (the Association of Support for Visual Arts in Turkey), found us sponsors and took care of travel arrangements for artists coming from abroad; Jale Erzen and Emin Mahir Balcıoğlu from Sanart; Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz, Zekiye Sarıkartal, Eser Selem, Ebru Özseçen, Pınar Özdülek, Veysel Bayır and Mahi İyican, who assisted the artists in creating their works; Emrah Yücel and Solaris Graphics, who designed the catalogue; Mahmut Mutman, who advised us on various issues; Bülent Özgüç, who supported us both financially and spiritually; my cat, Corto; and my old green car, which carried everything and everyone without a peep. (Please forgive me if I have left anyone out.)

GAR opened the night of May 3, 1995. The exhibition made a great splash that night. After the opening, all the artists and everyone else involved went to Sakarya Fish Restaurant; it was truly a

festive night, and I barely seem to remember getting up and delivering a thank you speech with a glass of rakı in my hand. I was very happy and very tired, and I don't remember how I made it home. The next morning, everything was running smoothly at the exhibition, and I went to listen to the Art and Taboos symposium organized by Sanart, and to advertise our exhibition a little. The next morning, around 10 am, the lady from Gar Gallery called – a chilling call... It was over already.

In retrospect, I can say that *GAR* showed signs of quality and precision, included works that talked to each other, and had a strong curatorial structure. We weren't curators, and never have been. We were and still are artists, and only artists can overcome unexpected hurdles thanks to the invisible link that connects them; their voices are most effectively heard through their works. *GAR* was an exhibition that had to be. I am glad it happened, and I am glad we made it happen in 1995. I am truly happy to be one of the actors involved.

—Selim Birsnel





12.04.1995

Sayın Ayşe Selen,

Sanart'ın Mayıs ayında düzenlediği, Sanart'95 Sempozyumu çerçevesinde GAR Çağdaş plastik sanatçıları sergisinde sanatçı Selim Birsel ile ortak çalışmaya davet edilmiş bulunuyorsunuz. Sergi çalışmaları 28 Nisan-6 Mayıs 1995 tarihleri arasında Ankara TCDD Gar mekanlarında gerçekleştirilecektir. Sizi bu çalışmada aramızda görmekten mutluluk duyacağız.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Selim Birsel".

Selim Birsel
(Sergi Organizasyonu adına)

SANART
TÜRKİYE'DE GÖRSEL SANATLARI DESTEKLEME DERNEĞİ
ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF VISUAL ARTS IN TURKEY

Mahatma Gandhi Cad. 28/2 06700 GOP/Ankara
Tel/Fax: 90.312.446 69 39

Invitation letter sent by Selim Birsel to Ayşe Selen and Şehsuvar Aktaş



BASI-YAYIN VE HALKLA İLİŞKİLER MÜŞAVİRLİĞİ

B.11.2.DDY.0.63.00.00/10/ 1095

Ankara, 23/1995

2. BÖLGE BAŞMÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

İLGİ: SANART'ın 10.3.1995 tarihli başvurusu ile sergi projesi.

"Türkiye'de Görsel Sanatları Destekleme Derneği-SANART" ın, 1-15 Mayıs 1995 tarihleri arasında düzenleyeceği Uluslararası Sempozyum sırasında, Ankara Gar mekânının 1. ve 2. peronları da dahil olmak üzere bir bölümünü; Gar'daki gündelik akış ve düzene engel olmayacak şekilde bir "açıkhava sergisi" düzenlemek üzere kullanmak istemektedirler.

Bu proje ile demiryolu taşımacılığının önemi vurgulanarak, yurtiçi ve yurt dışı basında konuya ilgi uyandırılacağı belirtilmektedir.

Anılan tarihlerde SANART Derneği sanatçılarının Gar mekânından yararlandırılarak, projelerinin sunulması sırasında gerekli kolaylığın gösterilmesini rica ederim.

Ek: 8


GENEL MÜDÜR

Tayyar HINDISTAN
Genel Müdür Yardımcısı

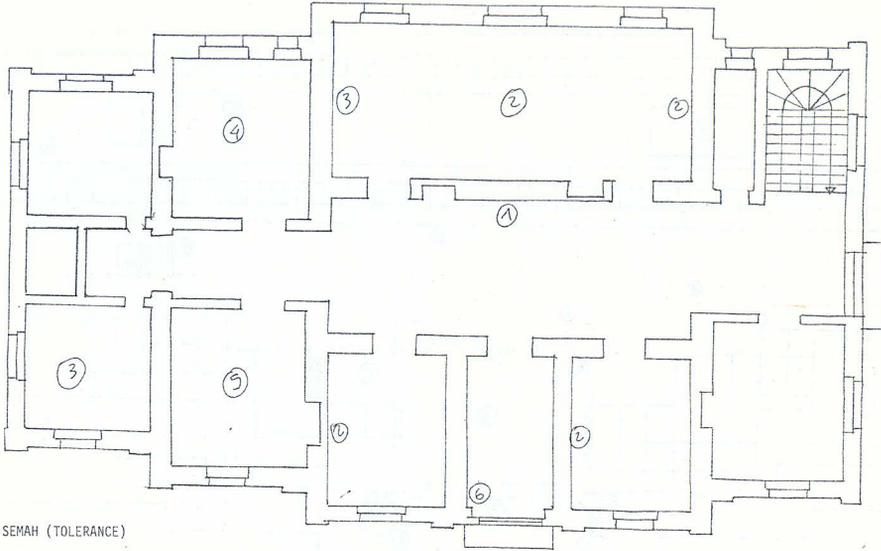
22/3/1995 Şb. Md.

S. SARIASLAN

.../3/1995 BYHİ Müşaviri T. DOLUDENİZ

IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION

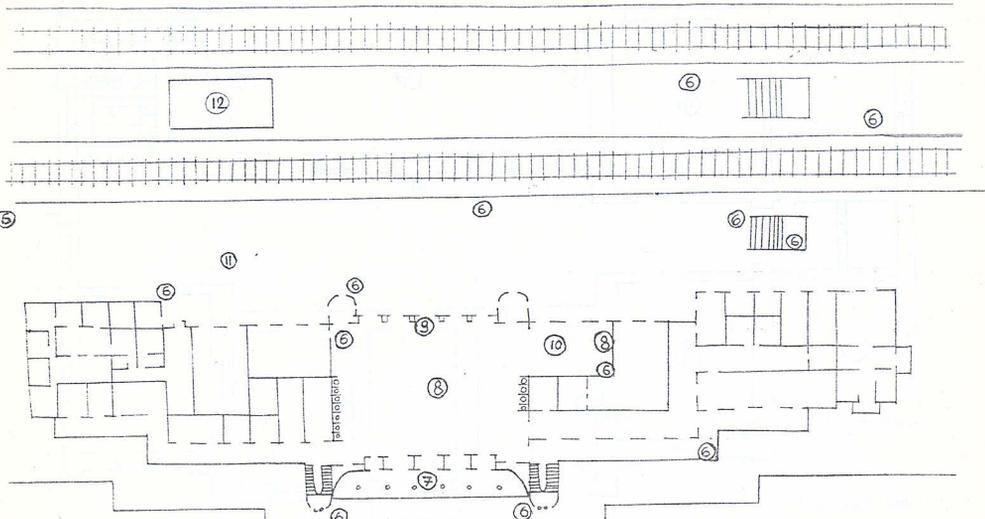
"GAR" 3/5- 15/5/95 ANKARA
(TCDD GAR)



- (1) JOSEPH SEMAH (TOLERANCE)
(2) PAUL DONKER DUYVIS
(3) LADAN SHAHROKH NADERI

- (4) FUSUN ONUR(4 Numaralı Sergi Salonu)
(5) CENGİZ ÇEKİL
(6) CLAUDE LEON

"GAR" 3/5- 15/5/95 ANKARA
(TCDD GAR)



- (6) CLAUDE LEON
(7) HASAN BÜLENT KAHRAMAN
(8) VAHAP AVŞAR

(12) AYŞE ERKMEK

- (9) PAOLO VITALI
(10) AYDAN MURTEZAĞLU (Demir ağlarla öremişiz anayurdu dört baştan)
(11) SELİM BİRSEL/AYŞE SELEN/SEHSUVAR AKTAS (KURSUN UYKUSU)

Exhibition plan

BASIN BÜLTENİ

GAR SERGİSİ

Sanat'95 Sempozyumları kapsamında Selim Bırsel, Claude Leon, Vahap Avşar ve Füsun Okutan tarafından düzenlenmekte olan "GAR" sergisi 3-15 Mayıs 1995 tarihleri arasında Ankara TCDD Gar Galerisi ve Gar mekanlarında görülebilecek.

Farklı kuşak ve ülkelerden 12 sanatçıyı biraraya getiren bu sergi geleneksel sergi mekanları dışına çıkarak sanat yapıtlarını daha geniş bir kitle ile buluşturmayı amaçlamakta. Sergideki sanatçıların büyük çoğunluğu "mekan düzenlemesi" (enstelasyon) yapmaktalar, bu sergide çalışmalarını Gar mekanları için hazırlamaktalar. Gar Galerisi yanında Gar peronları, bekleme salonu, emanet ve diğer alanlarda yerleştirilecek olan bu mekan düzenlemeleri heykelden videoya kadar çeşitlilik göstermekte.

Tekfen, Hollanda Büyükelçiliği ve Bilkent Üniversitesinin mali destekleriyle gerçekleştirilen serginin katalog tasarımı ise Solaris tarafından gerçekleştirildi.

Sergide yer alan sanatçılar;(Alfabetik sırayla)

Vahap AVŞAR
Selim BİRSEL-Ayşe SELEN, Şehsuvar AKTAŞ
Cengiz ÇEKİL
Paul Donker DUYVIS
Ayşe ERKİMEN
Hasan Bülent KAHRAMAN
Claude LEON
Ayden MÜRTEZAOĞLU
Ladan Shohrahk NADERİ
Füsun ONUR
Joseph SEMAH
Paolo VİTALİ

Daha fazla bilgi için; S.Bırsel, V.Avşar Tel 312. 266 40 40/1351, 1353
Fax 312. 266 41 27

Sevgili... *Ayşe ve Şaharvan*

Bu sergi bir sanatçı girişimi olarak ortaya çıkmıştır .Serginin oluşumu için tüm kararlar bize aittir.Bu sergi açıldıktan sonra başına gelen olayları ve diğer gelişmeleri sizlere anlatma ihtiyacını duyduk.

Problemlerimiz serginin açılışından sonra birinci günü başlıyor,Ayşe Erkmen in video enstalasyonu için gece bekçisi gar müdürlüğünün önceden söz vermesine rağmen bulunamadı.Bu yüzden ,birinci gün sonunda Ayşe Erkmen in enstalasyonunu kaldırmak zorunda kaldık , kendisinden özür dileriz.

Serginin ikinci günü sabah gelen bir telefon ile sergideki bazı işlerin toplum tarafından tepki gördüğü var sayımı ile gar müdürlüğü serginin gar mekanına yayılmış kısmını kaldırmak istediğini belirtti. Biz gelene kadar hiç bir işe dokunulmamasını istememize rağmen , işler yerlerinden sökülerek ve bazıları tamir edilmez hasarlar görerek toplanmıştı.Burada bulunan öteki sanatçı arkadaşlarla konuşarak galeri mekanındaki sergiyi de kaldırdık.Tüm sergiyi kapattık.

Tabii bu olay ,sanata yapılan baska bir saldırı olarak nitelendirildi ve SANART derneği serginin resmi sorumlusu olarak kınama mektuplarını TCDD Genel Müdürlüğüne ve basına gönderdi.Ancak ,basından hiç kimse organizator ve sanatçı olarak bizimle görüşmedi.Yalnız orada bulunan Necmi Sönmez ile Selim Birsnel görüşmüştür.Bu gelişmelerin ardından değişik yerlerden bu serginin tekrarlanması ve sergiyi oluşturan sanatçılara bir başka sergi yapmaları önerileri geliyor,(P.S.D.Vardiye resimleri ve Kültür Bakanlığı).Yalnız bu serginin sansasyonunu kullanmak sergiyi gerçekleştirme düşüncemize uymuyor ve iyi niyetli de olsa bu teklifleri red ediyoruz. Bu serginin ve bu sergiyi oluşturan tüm sanatçıların sansasyon değil serginin niteliği ,işlerinin içeriğiyle tanınmalarını daha doğru buluyoruz.Bunu sağlamak için talep geldiğinde malzeme ve bilgi vermeye hazırız ve sizinde bu yolda düşüneceğinizi tahmin ediyoruz.

Bu sergi davetimizi kabul ettiğiniz, Ankara ya gelip bizimle birlikte çalıştığınız, serginin sorunlarını paylaştığınız için teşekkür ederiz . Gelecekte baska bir sergi organizasyonunda bu aksaklıkların olmadığı bir sergide buluşmak dileğiyle.

Selim Birsnel

Claude Leon

Vahap Avşar

Füsun Okutan

Letter from exhibition organizers to artists following closure of the exhibition

GAR

I am writing this in August 2011. Approximately one month ago, July 14, armed clashes erupted in a rural area of Diyarbakır as the result of an “operation” conducted by the military against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), launching a debate over whether Turkey is “going back to the 1990s.” Turkish media presented the incident with one-sided figures, emphasizing the large number of military casualties or martyrs – 13 – without even mentioning the seven dead guerillas (PKK claims only two guerillas died in the clashes) and employing a language that sanctified a discourse of hatred and nationalism. Democratic Society Congress (DTK) announced democratic autonomy in Diyarbakır the same day. As events unfolded, Kurdish singer Aynur was booed by an audience at the Harbiye Open Air Theater for singing a Kurdish song during an Istanbul Jazz Festival concert. She was forced to stop the concert and leave the stage, as protesters stood to sing the national anthem.

All this happened 15 years after the GAR¹ exhibition was banned. Undoubtedly, there are differences between the two events – as are there continuities. We are not where we were 15 years ago. It is possible to see great change, especially in terms of the political struggle of the Kurds and the place of contemporary art. The Kurdish political movement demonstrates a creativity, intellect and dynamism that surpass the Turkish state and its narrow-minded policies. This movement, which seemed to have fallen prey to the supremacy of armed struggle during the 1990s, now has the potential (thanks to an intellectual capacity that supports emancipatory policies on every subject in Turkey) to overcome the 10% threshold if it were to enter elections under the aegis of a political party.

The traditional bureaucratic status quo in Turkey also seems to have found a way to renew itself through a symbiosis with its own periphery. Balancing the effects of capitalism, which under-



mine constancy and disrupt social ties, with its nationalist-conservative cultural structure the periphery has constructed the “new” status quo, creating a new authoritarian regime in alignment with finance capital.

As part of the same dynamics, contemporary art appears to have attained a relatively more stable position with the help of the private sector, in contrast to its weak institutional structure in the 1990s. Naturally, this new context will fundamentally transform the position from which contemporary art speaks – and the repercussions of what it says. Generally speaking, contemporary art circles in Turkey have lost nothing of their critical approach, which is both “anational” and questioning of modernity. Within this period, the change in contemporary art came about not through its internal dynamics, but from the outside. Contemporary art found support and “rose” as an instrument elevating the status of families and holdings in Turkey that wanted to enter an elite club with capital flowing between global cities.

This partial “professionalization” fundamentally altered the dynamic structure of contempo-

rary art – as evidenced most clearly at *GAR*. The exhibition was not afraid of making implicit or explicit references to social and political issues, and was nourished by the collective and amateur labor of artists, curators and art lovers. The importance of *GAR*, as seen from inside the contemporary, semi-professional world, doubtlessly stems from the amateur-collective quality of the work put in during the process of its actual emergence, and not the works it presented, it being one of the few public exhibitions in Turkey that has triggered debates around censorship.

It is impossible to consider *GAR* divorced from its context. Three main themes interacted in the exhibition: first, the Ankara Railway Station, with its specific history and symbolism; second, the social body filling the station, using it and feeding on its symbolism; and third, the collection of works that made up the *GAR* exhibition, which came into existence in the blink of an eye with the amateur-collective labor described above, was immediately dismantled and, perhaps for this reason only, became a legend. Even though most works were not site-specific, the space amplified the exhibition’s



resonance and readings of its works. In this sense, it is legitimate to ask whether a work of art can exist that does not derive energy from and interact with its spatial context. The works by Aydan Murtezaoglu, Ayşe Erkmen (though she showed archival footage on monitors) and Claude Leon were different from others in the exhibition, in the sense that they lent themselves to placement within the space and pointed to underlying narratives. They would have lost their meaning and voice had they been displayed in another context.

Beyond a “technical” reading of the works, the fact that the exhibition was positioned in a building like the Ankara Railway Station – itself a reflection of the archaic modernity (a type of Nazism) and the will to power of the nationalist movement of the 1930s – should be seen as a major event. It was an expression of the audacity to grab the social symbolic order by its throat; artists in Turkey (in film, poetry, literature, contemporary art, etc.) finally played – were able to play – the role of stretching the social body, memory, narrative and vocabulary. They invented attitudes and behaviors, which they hadn’t been able to do previously. Or, to put it differently, they

demonstrated an “ignorance” unique to art and artists. Naturally, I use this concept of ignorance in the Nietzschean sense: a positive “conscious ignoring” that increases one’s mobility. For me, such ignorance is the *sine qua non* quality of the small community producing art in Turkey. It is quite possible – dangerously so – that as soon as we begin to know, understand and digest, we begin to tame what we say; we constrict it and train it, thus limiting our own mobility.²

I place against this alternative the attitude of “consciously ignoring” observed in the *GAR* exhibition – but this may stem from an excessive goodwill or a sense of self-innocence. It was therefore not at all surprising that the exhibition was removed – the opposite would have been surprising. I find the banality of “the realities of Turkey” worth exploring and understanding. Things may be boring and commonplace, but this does not mean they don’t exist. We are reminded they exist only too much, and that we have to overcome the sense of futility and familiarity created by this state. One of the ways to fight banality is, of course, to understand how the mechanism works and to put it to various tests. I think *GAR* was a brave experiment in that sense.



It is of no consequence that the exhibition was removed. If it had not been removed, that might have been of consequence. But even that possibility is not worth dwelling on. The importance of the removal belongs to the present – to the period during which the exhibition was removed. *GAR* and its works were conceptualized, imagined and created; that’s what counts. A singularity lodged in a corner of the social body (or should I say “the community of amateur-collective contemporary artists”?) got up and settled into the very heart of the machine, only to be violently and immediately removed. It could not have been otherwise. As Ece Ayhan succinctly explains about artists’ place in the social topography: “The place of art in society is its placelessness.”

The Ankara Railway Station is a structure where the Republic of Turkey combines technology with a nationalist archaism; it is a structure that reflects a yearning for progress. During the days of the exhibition, however, it functioned as a mechanism through which soldiers passed on their way to the Southeast, where they would fight and die. As such, it is a symbol, suspended in time, of the country’s desire to reach the level of modern civilizations – a narrative that has since

lost its historical importance and meaning. Nonetheless, the mechanism continues to function, despite the fact that it has lost its vital importance, now transporting sleepwalking, half-dead bodies to a war zone. It is possible to see in this overwhelming structure the material form of the hardened, cruel body of Turkish society, having lost its mobility and ability to interact. This body operates as a paranoid machine of destruction. It allows no uncontrolled movement to upset its static state or create ripples within it. This becomes all the more evident when one considers the reasons the exhibition was removed. Vahap Avşar’s work *Son Damla* [Last Drop] was removed because the liquid in its barrels looked like the blood of guerillas and could be understood as a lament; Selim Birsal’s *Kurşun Uykusu* [Lead Sleep] was removed because it resembled both the bodies of martyrs lying on the ground and the bodies of guerrillas. If these were martyrs, they demoralized soldiers; if they were guerillas, the work might be seen as a memorial or eulogy. Either alternative is unbearable. These are the expressions of a half-dead society that has erased from its imagination and spirit any kind of mourning, contemplation or humane approach to the current catastrophe.



A social, spiritual and physical hardening may be the only common point between 1995 and 2011, when I am writing this. I don't think a satisfactory result can be obtained by trying to understand this, by relating it to practical concepts like "politics" or "freedom of expression." The mobs that removed the *GAR* exhibition in 1995 or "protested" Aynur in 2011 are signs of a zombie-like society – one that has lost its common purpose and is unable to do anything except repeat what it has learned by rote, scrambling to prevent even the slightest variation in language or attitude. Only social psychological terms can explain this urgency. The promise of freedom and equality by the Republic of Turkey was annulled with the suppression of the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, the Dersim Massacre in 1938 and, on the social and economic front, with the closing of the Village Institutes, which might have provided equality of symbolic and material capital. The Republic, like its antecedents, was an organization of evil based on exploitation, where social hierarchies were boldly drawn. Although the dream of a republic was strangled even before it was born, to this day, Turkish society has been unable to create another symbolic world to act as a reference for the country. The fact that artists organized an

exhibition at the Ankara Railway Station is in itself a symbolic gesture within the confines of this suffocated, rigid social body. It may be true that art cannot invent this narrative or new concepts, or be encompassed by such a task, but it can create the critical groundwork necessary for such a narrative and call for emotional flexibility.

Where do we stand in terms of the potential for social transformation when we look at *GAR*? If we are to think with concepts strewn with pitfalls, like the potential of art to transform and educate society (one of the arguments used in Turkey's modernization project and, these days, by the private sector to explain their support of the arts), what are the attitudes of artists? In other words, how do they reconcile remnants of the artist-intellectual function embedded in the state that are still part of Turkey's modern art memory? This is not a question to be answered solely within the context of the *GAR* exhibition, but generally speaking, we can say the policy of "contemporary art" in Turkey has been to make art amateur – to bring about its "demilitarization," as Ece Ayhan put it, or its "minorization," using the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari.³ How, then, is this policy evinced in the works themselves? The ex-



hibition does not speak from a didactic stance of trying to teach or tell society something. Neither does its position of “telling the truth,”⁴ criticize the current order. For the most part, the exhibition consists of works that create ripples in the exhibition space or on the surface of social memory. It presents no clear alternatives to outdated concepts, attitudes or goals, but offers feelings at the stage of potentiality.

Füsun Onur’s *Arhat*, small boxes covered with black paper and placed in the corners of the exhibition space, provides an example of this almost invisible existence, or of a mode of existence that conceals itself. The attitude of existing by hiding or concealing can be seen in the works of Selim Birsal and Füsun Onur; its effect is multiplied when one remembers they are at the center of the order – in plain sight of the public sphere. The attitude that resists being clearly visible is also the main argument legitimizing the exhibition’s removal. The political power wants to know, to hear, to forcefully get a confession: Whose bodies are these? What were your intentions in exhibiting them? Speak – who are you? ... In this sense, the exhibition does not function with an openly critical attitude. Rather, it attempts to open a

tightly sealed public space to different readings and to heal it – but it wants to do this without revealing itself. Cengiz Çekil’s ceremonial *Mum Akıntıları* [Candle Drippings] and Paul Donker Duyvis’s watering cans, both of which employ the various languages spoken in Turkey to communicate with the audience, are works where this attitude of healing is concentrated.

Another work we can read as drawing on the concepts of “closedness” and “exit/no exit” is Ladan Shahrokh Naderi’s *Ali*. A blanket with a simple plan of a closed space having no exit, and a telephone ringing beneath it, call us to break free of the trap by answering the phone. The name “Ali” and the Persian song are perhaps an expression of the bond established between Iran and the Alevi of Turkey. The ringing of the telephone therefore represents the impalpable, subterranean narratives that have oozed out of the cracks in the two major narratives that are Iran and Turkey. Another work in the exhibition taking a specific social sub-group as its subject comes in the form of Paolo Vitali’s large prints with a German translation of verses in the Koran that reference taboos. The size of these prints is reminiscent of the giant flags hung on national holidays. Their



format, which can be seen as an expression of hegemony and recognition – of marking a space and the world – turns into an instrument of the “minority” (the workers from Turkey who migrated to Germany in the 1960s?) as a result of the German verses written on it. “Us Turks,” the owners and masters of the social space and the official language, cannot react to these signs because we don’t understand them. We become foreigners in our own land. In this sense, closedness is used strategically in Vitali’s work, which, generally speaking, calls out not to the hegemonic group in society but to a sub-group, opening the exhibition space for a fleeting moment to this subnarrative.

Aydan Murtezaoglu and Claude Leon’s works approach space with a critical attitude and trigger social, political and economic readings. Murtezaoglu carries a well-known image in Turkey – iron rods on top of cement columns – into the railway station, while Leon places around the station pieces of surveillance equipment that, instead of glass, feature mirrors. These two works depart from the rest in their relationship with both the exhibition space and the history of Turkey. Leon’s work no doubt foretells the future and inverts the paranoid machine of the state. We are

being watched and listened to, but when we approach the equipment we are confronted with our own images. There is no entity ruling or watching us; whatever we do, we are doing it to ourselves. It may be that the real problem stems from this concept of “we”. Since its beginnings, Turkish society has not been able to construct a legitimate, clear and common “we”. In the absence of such a “we,” some people must always watch, control and suppress others. The space of Turkish society is not that of an organic transparency where it sees its own image in front of itself, but a hierarchical and authoritarian space continuously determined by divisions and oppositions, closed and opaque areas.

Aydan Murtezaoglu’s iron rods, left unfinished and in the open (to be used when there is enough money and material to construct the next floor), question the completed quality of the Ankara Railway Station. Considering that the ideology of progress upheld by the conservative-capitalist class – in power since the 1950s – is based on a vicious order of exploitation, engineering and construction, these unfinished columns embody the cul-de-sac of the modernization effort, ever unfinished and unfinishable, and the class



conflict it denies. Using the logic of this conflict, how can we explain the figure we see in the photograph, sitting with his foot resting comfortably on a column? The columns are not framed as art, and that is undoubtedly an important factor. But even more importantly, the unfinished columns belong to the daily life of Turkey's lower classes – the true users of the station. Nonetheless, the columns do not really belong in the station with their crushing, overpowering, unfinished bulk. With their protruding iron rods, they reveal the truth about Turkey's modernization. At the same time, they remind us how this conflict has been suppressed and rendered invisible by fascistic narratives like nationalism, conservatism and communitarianism. Walter Benjamin defines fascism as the attempt to organize masses without touching property rights, which are based on inequality and exploitation. It transfers the desire of the masses for self-realization to a few “elites,” using a leader and a national narrative. Thus, the masses experience their own narcissism through their reflection in the image of these elites. Murtezaoğlu's iron rods should be seen as a call for truth directed at the lower classes, with the objective of destroying a vicious reflection mechanism.

Almost all the works in the exhibition are filled with the echoes of silenced narratives, which the station building tries to cover up. The works in the corners, waiting rooms, halls, on the walls and windows, want to open the space to other attitudes and different ways of seeing and behaving. They want to give back to the Ankara Railway Station the quality of a space that opens to other worlds, whose image is conjured in our minds by a railway station, embodied in the railways seen in Ayşe Erkmen's work – belonging neither to where they are positioned, nor to where they lead. In other words, they belong both to their location and to another place. And because they succeeded in doing exactly that – because they opened Turkey's hardened body and presented it with the possibility of a different language and image – they were removed from the station in a great hurry and thrown away.

—Burak Delier



IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION

ANNOTATIONS

1. GAR, Ankara, 1995. Artists: Vahap Avşar, Selim Birsnel, Ayşe Selen, Şehsuvar Aktaş, Cengiz Çekil, Paul Donker Duyvis, Ayşe Erkmen, Hasan Bülent Kahraman, Claude Leon, Aydan Murtezaoğlu, Ladan Naderi, Füsün Onur, Joseph Semah and Paolo Vitali. (Created by Selim Birsnel as part of the Art and Taboos symposium organized by the Art Association of Ankara.)
2. It was exactly this sort of trained response that removed my work *Muhafız* [Guardian] from the *Serbest Vuruş* [Free Kick] exhibition organized by Halil Altındere as part of the 9th Istanbul Biennial in 2005. Twenty days before the opening, another exhibition at Karşı Sanat dealing with the incidents of September 6-7 was attacked by a group of nationalists who destroyed its photographs. The fear that a similar incident could occur during the Biennial formed the basis of this act of auto-censorship. Regarding auto-censorship, I think one must ask: What good is it? Whom or what does it save? What sort of psychological or mental state does it leave us with? In other words, does it work or not? This was what I tried to tell the artists who came to speak to me for a period of about two weeks before the opening, as they encouraged me to take down the photograph. It didn't take me long to realize I would not be successful. In the end, the photograph was taken down on the last day of the exhibition with my approval. Halil Altındere, who in those days was as stressed as I was – maybe even more than I was – was tried within the context of TCK 301. This was not because of the exhibition, but because he was the owner of the publishing house that published the exhibition catalogue; ultimately, he was acquitted. I see the removal of *Guardian* from the exhibition as a failure of the art community. It matters little whether it was or wasn't removed; the work was conceived and realized – that's what counts. But the arguments made during the process, the victimization of a single work, the way artists easily defended the removal of one work without engaging

in an ethical questioning of exhibiting one work and removing another – these all remain issues to be addressed. As artists in Turkey, or as people familiar with Turkey's history, we are all afraid; there's nothing more natural than that. But once we begin to create a logic for fear – once we begin to theorize about what can and cannot be exhibited in line with the rules of art and a society circumscribed by fear – we must remind ourselves that we are not the ones who should be afraid, but rather those others will be afraid of. The conspiracy between auto-censorship and the logic of censorship comes into being right here. Instead of learning and teaching fear, we must search for ways to overcome and understand it.

3. When capital and wealthy families began to appropriate “contemporary art” in the 2000s, it led to a crisis for the policies of “demilitarism,” “minorism” and amateurism. It can be stated that contemporary art circles, which had been able to develop various tools and concepts for use against the narratives of modernization and the state, could not match the strength of neoliberal narratives and were blown away. Moreover, Turkey's recent history shows that various archaisms like the state and capital/the private sector, neoliberalism and nationalism-conservatism can never be seen as separate from one another. Their modes of existence complement each other. The trap that contemporary art in Turkey, or perhaps even Turkish society itself, falls into is that it imagines neoliberal policies offer “freedom” and “expansion” (freedom of expression, freedom of identity, etc.) against the state and nationalism.

4. The “teller of truth,” discussed in Michel Foucault's *Discourse and Truth* and referenced in various ancient Greek texts, should be understood as the subject of a critical mode of discourse.



IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION



It was a time of conversation, SALT Ulus, 2013
Photo: Cemil Batur Gökçeer



It was a time of conversation, SALT Ulus, 2013
Photo: Cemil Batur Gökçeer



ABOUT GLOBALIZATION— STATE, MISERY, VIOLENCE

No documents or correspondence remain from the *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* exhibition. The catalogue, a few photographs, video recordings and stories provide the only traces of the project.

The process of the exhibition began when a number of artists who often got together socially to share their ideas – Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, İsmet Doğan, Gülsün Karamustafa, Michael Morris, Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, Bülent Şangar, Müşerref Zeytinoğlu and Emre Zeytinoğlu – decided to invite sociologist Ali Akay to join their conversations and provide feedback as someone from a different discipline. Long, in-depth discussions followed for the next two years, and ultimately lead to the *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* exhibition. This project materialized as a collective effort and, as such, differed from existing modes of production.

Coinciding with the 4th Istanbul Biennial, *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* focused on state violence, violence against the state and violence among individuals. Gaining wide popularity with its visitors, the exhibition was also covered extensively by the press.

This text was originally written for the exhibition *It was a time of conversation* (SALT Galata, 2012; SALT Ulus, 2013).





Globalization-State, Misery, Violence exhibition (İstanbul, 1995)



REWRITING AN EXHIBITION

The exhibition entitled *Globalization–State, Misery, Violence* was planned and realized in a globalizing Istanbul, between 1993 and 1995. During this period, we held meetings and sought financial sponsors and suitable venues. Some of the meetings in this two-year period took place with all the artists represented in the exhibition, while some were held with smaller groups. We discussed Europe and Turkey’s problems, comparing them and trying to find similarities and differences. I discussed the theoretical framework at great length with the artists. We made progress through these conversations, especially with Emre and Müşerref Zeytinoğlu (İsmet Doğan, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Bülent Şangar, Gülsün Karamustafa, Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, and Michael Morris were not present at these discussions). Later, these discussions gathered momentum, but on occasion we slowed down to re-evaluate our conversations. This goes to show that we all had the time to sit around and talk, doesn’t it? It was very important to have enough time, so the

conversations continued over dinner. We debated and worked over *raki* and *meze*. In a sense, we were combining art with enjoyment. Other artists joined us frequently, as well as various journalists, writers and poets... It was a growing platform.

This illustrates the prevailing atmosphere in Istanbul, Turkey during the 1990s. Anything and everything was open for discussion and debate. Not only books about art but also those on sociological and philosophical theory had begun to be translated and read. Both in my classes and at home together with visiting artists, I discussed books by post-structuralist French philosophers, which were not so easy to understand... Those years would later be remembered as a time when art and sociology began to converge. It was a very different environment from that of today. We were progressing in a domain exposed to new ways of thinking but one in which artistic production had not yet gathered speed, in which there



was very little demand. In one way, art had not yet been taken over by capitalism and there was only disdain for art that was involved with investment. We were pursuing the politics of thought and thinking about art, rather than looking for form itself. We criticized artists of the past who created paintings true to their established style. We debated whether painting on canvas was finished or not.

In such an Istanbul, the preparation for the exhibition continued over a long period of time, filled with discussion. Time belonged to us, and we had no idea of wasting it, unlike today where we are always chasing time... We did everything together, strolling through the city, sitting in newly opened cafés; these were also the years when women began to frequent restaurants freely.

Politically speaking, the renewed intellectual approach in Turkey was criticizing the modernism of the Republic and of the military with the specific consciousness of the postmodern era. In one case, Hüseyin Alptekin and Michael Morris traced the footsteps of the rise of Islam and the war in Bosnia, putting great emphasis on the Balkans issue. In the exhibition, they placed the

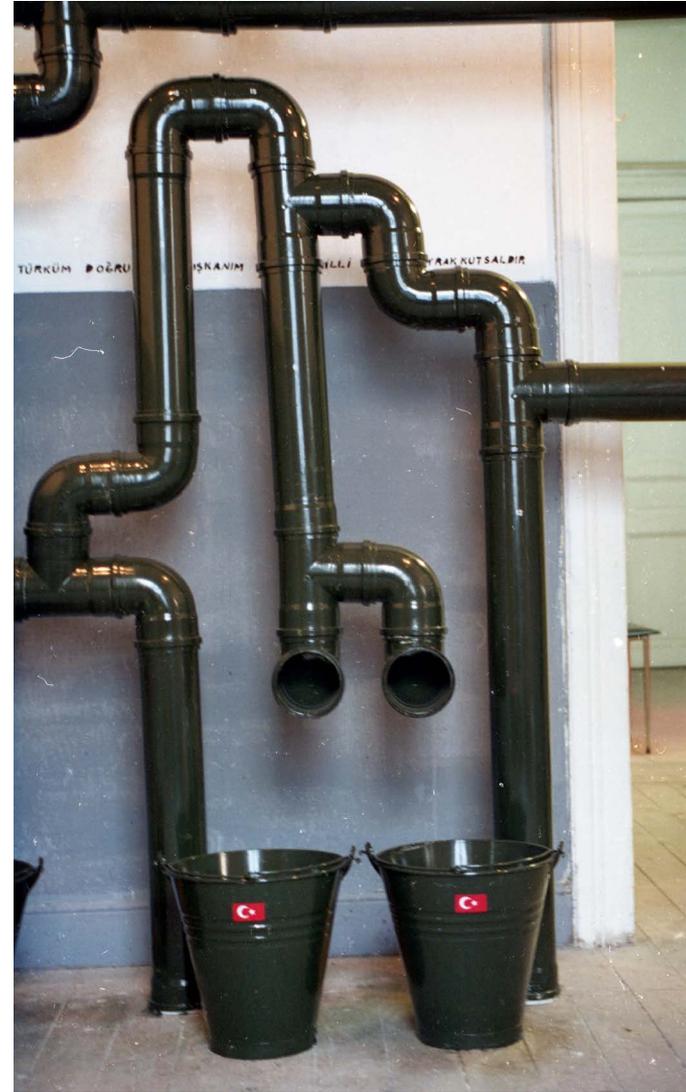
Bosnian flag on the sick bed of Hüseyin's father, who was a doctor. The bed was seen through a cracked window pane. Civil society was also a hot topic, with everyone emphasizing the opposition between state and society. I also worked on this duality between civil society and the state, attempting to use the anonymity of the Foucauldian concepts of "police" and "raison d'état" to go beyond this duality. The person with whom I talked about this most was probably Emre Zeytinoğlu, who had made an installation with khaki-colored pipes in which the water flowing through them was contaminated by both the state and civil society. Emre used pipes both in his paintings and his installations. At the time, Müşerref Zeytinoğlu was working on Yuppies who had recently become visible on the streets of Istanbul, or on those feeding off the state. She made spears using wood from the trees in the garden of their home in Sapanca, invoking the relationship between the military and the *Yeniçeris*. She used these *Yeniçeri* spears to allude to "parasites feeding off the state." Bülent Şangar exhibited a lightbox containing a photograph of himself as a person being beaten up by four other people – all himself in different poses. I think this was his first experiment with a lightbox. He also had an



IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION



Hüseyin B. Alptekin & Michael Morris, *Diagnosis Divan*, 1995



Emre Zeytinoğlu, *Atık Boruları [Waste Pipes]*, 1995



exhibit showing his own obituary as published in newspapers. Ahmet Müderrisoğlu was involved with the revolts and marches of the left and the unions. İsmet Doğan was interested in gun culture, the male identity, the representational link between the gun and the penis and the psycho-analytical aspect of this link. Gülsün Karamustafa had already been working on stories of the left, the immigrant culture in Turkey and arabesque forms, and her interest in these continued.

In the Istanbul of the 1990s, a new sociological change was under way: there was an influx of what may be called the new bourgeoisie from the Soviet Union and from the Eastern Block into the Aksaray-Laleli district. With the inclusion of these foreigners this area became connected to the Taksim axis, thus undergoing a transformation. A sociological study conducted by myself in 1992 dealt with the women from Russia and the Eastern Block in Istanbul and the young people who had migrated from various parts of Anatolia to Istanbul. The practice of going to brothels and paying for sex had been replaced by a type of prostitution based on “picking up,” an entirely new sector of the sex industry. This involved going to bars, making eyes at women and chatting

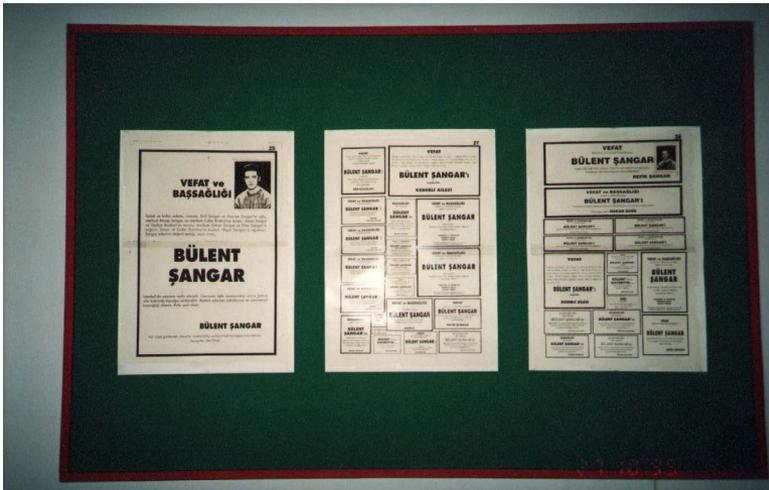
them up; this was yet another type of exchange based directly on money. Prostitution had begun a transformation into a “monetary economy” as a result of becoming a consumer activity. Around the same time, the connection between entertainment and humor or irony stopped determining politics and began to permeate daily life. Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin was interested in this world of Russia and the Balkans. The “suitcase trade” was an integrated part of Istanbul’s sociology. These were the years of Tarkan and the “de-mustached” masculine figure on the one hand, and on the other hand the years of Turkish men beginning to experience “globalized sex” with the “Natashas” of the Eastern Block and Russia through seduction and casual meeting: vodka, caviar and Istanbul.

Globalization–State, Misery, Violence opened in the midst of the debate on official ideology, the new historical approach and the changes in epistemic readings in Turkey; throughout the preparation stage of the exhibition, our discussions revolved around these issues. The questions unfolding at the time were: is globalization the result of state enforcement or what Foucault called “bio-power,” or is it generated by the grass-

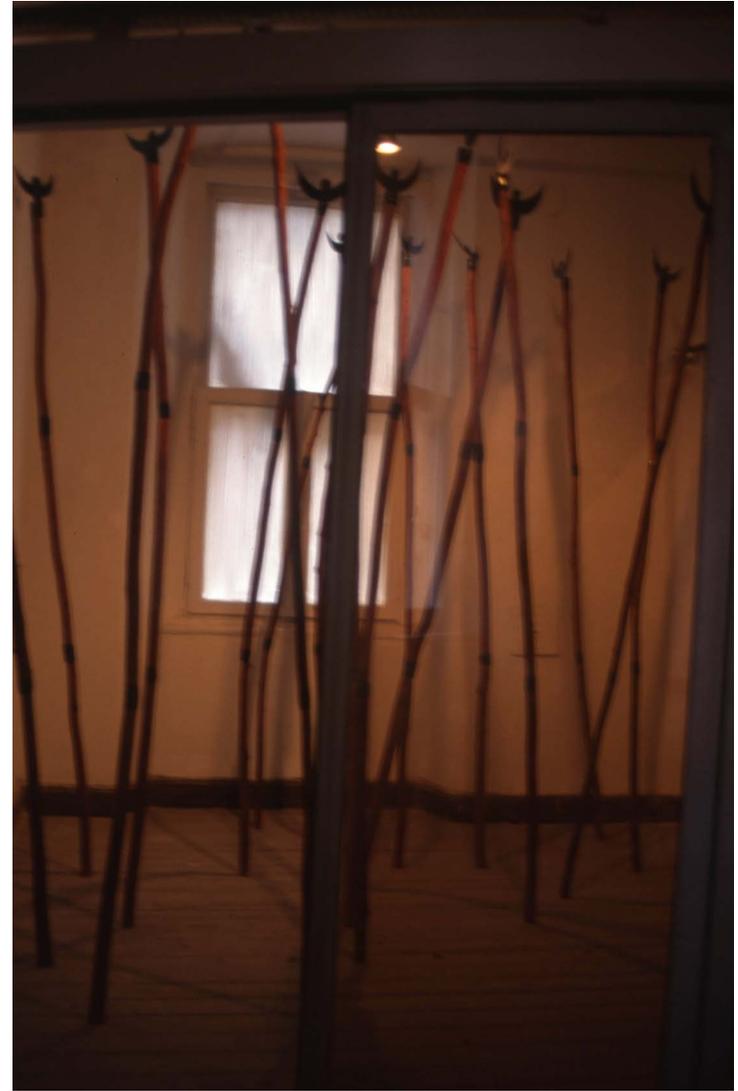




Bülent Şangar, *Globalization-State, Misery, Violence*, 1995



Bülent Şangar, *İsimsiz (Ölüm İlanı)* [Untitled (Death Notice)], 1994



Müşerref Zeytinoğlu, *Kapı Tutmak* [Holding the Door], 1995



IT WAS A TIME OF CONVERSATION



Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, *Untitled*, 1995



İsmet Doğan, *Untitled*, 1995



Gülsün Karamustafa, *Postpozisyon* [Postposition], 1995



roots? Is the concept of “freedom” beginning to be substituted by the concept of “resistance”? Do we need to start an analysis of the process by which power is no longer absolute but comes to depend on power relationships? In this sense, do we need to look at relationships instead of dichotomies? Power relationships? Surveillance society? Community becoming corporation? The effect of a neoliberal type of government on modernity? What sociological and political transformations are taking place in the transition from 18th- and 19th-century debates on mercantilist political economics to globalization? Why do we keep thinking in dichotomies? How should we be thinking, on the path from an emergent European model to bio-politics and globalism? What does it mean in the 1990s and 2000s to link the question of security to terrorism? When we look at the Foucauldian concepts of “raison d’état” and “police,” how will there be a “union” in Europe without any one state dominating the others, and when this state of affairs comes to pass in the age of globalization, where do we need to look to see the differences? Where should we look to in terms of the connection between this situation and the disintegration and strengthening of states? Are the artistic and philosophical questions we used

to ask not on the same parallel with the questions we ask today? Are we still envisioning a local Republic?¹

The approach above did not only aim to debate Turkey’s localness or the nationalism of the Republic but also to emphasize the fact that similar questions were being asked in other parts of the world. These two lines may in fact be connected to the contemporary art debates in Turkey, which began in the 1990s, continuing until the late 2000s. In other words, “localism” and “internationality” came to occupy an interesting place among the questions artists began to ask themselves during such debates; the answers to these questions sometimes arise from surrendering to the demands of “post-orientalism,” which I want to differentiate from classical Western orientalism, while at other times they point to international problems touching upon their own artistic quests.²

Sometimes, with the addition of Gülsün Karamustafa’s input, our discussions revolved around the difference between the praxis of 1968 in the West and in Turkey. Furthermore, these debates on contemporary art in those years in



Turkey were naturally reflected in the exhibition process and thus also in our own debates: on the one hand there was postmodernism and its critiques; on the other hand, there were the debates on “painting or installation?” still going strong, and the political Marxist Welfare State praxis debates between an étatist left and a “civil society”-defending liberal politics... In this political context, the subjects discussed most frequently were Şerif Mardin and Idris Küçükömer. In 1993, I even organized a series of seminars at BILAR³ on “Şerif Mardin and civil society.” Throughout this period, some of the exhibition’s artists participated in these seminars.

Also in 1993, I held seminars at Mimar Sinan University’s Department of Sociology on post-modernism, as well as civil society, the state, and the family, and on Hegel and Şerif Mardin. During these discussions, I advanced a standpoint that differed from Hegelian “stages”: in fact, I proposed another reading that was closer to Althusser’s theories, which progressed not in stages but in epistemological leaps. We also used to discuss civil society, the family and state violence. Actually, we had begun the groundwork for *State, Misery, Violence* at this time. I endeavored to replace

the state-civil society dichotomy with concepts such as “police,” “bio-politics” and “bio-power”. In other words, I replaced dichotomies with a “reading of multiplicity.”

Going back to my piece in the *State, Misery, Violence* catalog as I write about these debates, I see that there is no need to remind people once again of the difference between the spiritual and the material (God’s right and Caesar’s right) in the humanities; this difference informs the dichotomy between state and religion as well as the difference between that which is inspired by passion and that which is social. When the spiritual is treated as the opposite of the material, it is necessary to note the impossibility of the spirit having a psychology, because there can only be a psychology of the affects of the spirit. When David Hume asked himself, “How can I make passions become social?” he referred to the opposition between “passion” and “social,” because what was “spiritual” was not natural and therefore could not have a psychology. In that case, how could the spirit become human nature and thus psychological? For that to happen, it would be necessary first for passion to become identical with social and thus become part of human nature. In the mean-



time, the opposition between Passion and Understanding had to be emphasized: according to Hume, the true meaning of Understanding had to emerge through turning a Passion or an interest into something social, as far as the connotation of ideas went. In that sense, Passion and Understanding were set apart, but Understanding became an act of Passion, when it began to become social. Accordingly, Passion became social and thus part of man's nature, and Understanding was now an action of this nature.⁴

In this way, religion, which especially in Christianity seemed to exist separately from society, became rational through the conversion of the passionate action of society into "understanding" (Islam already involves the union of the worldly and the religious). In fact, we can talk here of a kind of rational "dogmatization" of religion, which in no way appears rational but becomes social and attempts to override the rationality of society's natural law. This is the only way in which it becomes possible to talk about a legal state in which sharia tries to regulate social rules, instead of a customary law that is determined according to these rules, customs, and mores. This was how the paradox between

religion and civil society on the one hand and the State on the other was created in Ottoman-Turkish society.⁵

As I have mentioned above, however, the spirit has no nature and is identical with the ideas of the spirit. An idea is a given, and a given can be subjected to experiment. An idea thus becomes a given as a result of experiment. In the context of *State, Misery, Violence*, the relationship between spirit and idea in Bülent Şangar's work in which, as I mentioned, he published his own obituary, is a dominant one; the spirit of those bodies who multiply themselves and beat themselves ends in a final death scene.

Globalization is a concept that emerged in the 1980s and appears to us as being concomitant with the postmodern situation. The concept of a "one-dimensional," "unipolar" world market was already being used during the years of the Eastern Block, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Even though economic and financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF already operated on a worldwide orbit, still it occurred to no one to talk about "the end of history." In 1980, Turkey experienced the September 12 coup while



suffering from fears of communism and religious fundamentalism; prior to the coup, with Özal serving as undersecretary, the economic program which came to be known as the “January 24 Decisions” had been announced, initiating a new era in which the liberal economy established ties with international financial circles, while transnational capital moved freely in Turkey, the balance between the social classes was being eroded and a cultural transformation began, culminating a decade later. The renewal movements in political economy and cultural formations, which would come to function at the center of the urban economy, had not even begun to think in terms of virtual appearance. This political economy had to wait until after the coup to be put into action: once Özal came to power with ANAP, Turkey began for the first time to adopt a liberal economy and roll out interest rate policies. This was the way in which globalization first exhibited itself.

At the time, nobody was asking how this recent “tale” would affect cultural formations: concepts such as “local,” “universal” or “international” were being used within the art milieu without contradiction. Artists especially seemed

to have embraced the concept of the “universal”; the “synthesist” Durkheimian/Gökalpian line of the early Republic was founded on combining the universal and the local. The ideological structure of the Republic had been based on the distinction between *hars* (culture) and *medeniyet*⁶ (civilization), aiming to bring together local culture and the civilization of the material world. In the 1960s, the reflection of this broken line tried to align itself with the mentality that used the concept of independence to question what was local or what belonged to the East. This line, which appeared as the Kemal Tahir movement on an intellectual and cultural level and was represented by Halit Refiğ and Metin Erksan in cinema, by Özer Kabaş in painting and by Baykan Sezer in sociology, argued that Turkey could not be analyzed using Western concepts.⁷ By the 1990s, we had begun to realize that we had left this problematic behind.

The concept of globalization, which rapidly gained ground in face of a rapidly retreating localness, moved hesitatingly forward, laden with new artistic formations. We were talking about a cultural and artistic milieu that contained a multitude of dynamics.



When we call this tendency “mondialization,”⁸ we may realize that we will come up against a concept that will put at least some distance between ourselves and that which is global.⁹ When we remember that being a “world citizen” means looking beyond national borders and culture, we can also surmise that “worldliness” functions separately from “globalization,” which deals with movement of capital. What is the difference in meaning between “mondialization” and “globalization”? This will take us to the conceptions of resistance and culture that distinguish the worldly from the global. It will be necessary to separate artistic and cultural efforts and ways of thinking from the prestige of capital, even when the former are sponsored by global corporations, because the separation that seems most significant lies in the causes. Why is it that when thinking about art, we don’t think about money? Why do capital groups think about money rather than art when supporting a cultural or artistic project? Why do “Public Relations” or “Advertising” agencies take into consideration prestige or the symbolic, rather than art itself, when acting as intermediaries in the financial relationships between art and capital?¹⁰ For someone coming from the milieu of these questions, asking them

shows an understanding of the differences in this area. The question, “Who thinks about what and when?” is one of the questions that need to be asked in order to grasp the difference between mondialization and globalization, so much so that what is being thought and what is being done will gain significance during the practical process. When some of the artists or curators no longer worry about which praxis will benefit the capital while creating their exhibitions, they will have already moved away from being in the service of global capital; whereas creating art or setting up exhibitions only according to the rules of capital will frustrate the intellectual and artistic dimension of the exhibition and diminish its effect. In that sense, a worldly culture or an art praxis sets itself apart from the way in which global capital moves and thinks.

It is evident that these topics remained in vogue from the 1990s until the first decade of the 2000s. We are still struggling with a multitude of problems we have not yet been able to solve. The dynamic behind the relatively intellectual and artistic foray of those years seems to have swept itself in different directions. It was, nevertheless, the experience of those years that prepared the



groundwork for today. There may have been less money and more artistic thought, but it was a period still in its infancy; the dynamics were those of a nascent cultural environment. Istanbul was not yet Istanbul, but it was in a state of preparation. Artists, thinkers, theories and intellectual practices based on them contributed greatly to this process. And it seems that this contribution will continue, unless flamboyance and money steals that away from us; otherwise, transnational capital, or what Negri and Hardt term “the empire,”¹¹ will escape to new fields; the dynamism of the global economy will follow science and artistic creation; in the absence of these, capital may go where there is research, scientific discovery and artistic creativity. Braudel and Duby are two of the most interesting thinker-historians who have shown this to us in “long term” historiography. It is our job to follow them.

—Ali Akay

ANNOTATIONS

1. “The Republic Vision” was a concept I used for the exhibition I held at Urart Art Gallery in 1998.
2. Ali Akay, “Şerif Mardin Sosyolojisinden Post-Oryantal Düşünceye: Bir Konuşma” [From Şerif Mardin’s Sociology to Post-Oriental Thought: A Conversation] in *Şerif Mardin Okumaları* [Şerif Mardin Readings], ed. Taşkın Takış (Ankara: Doğu Batı Publications, 2008).
3. In the aftermath of the coup of September 12, 1980, when universities were placed under the control of YÖK, and especially after 1983, when YÖK tightened its grip, Aziz Nesin founded the Science and Research Center so that more social and socialist theories could be discussed and lectures be given. The Center was located first at Tünel and later closer to Taksim, occupying the building diagonally opposite today’s Akbank Sanat.
4. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1739]).
5. See Şerif Mardin’s “civil society” articles, *Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset* [Society and Politics in Turkey], Vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim Publishing, 2006).
6. Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* [Turkification, Islamization, Modernization] (Ankara: Akçağ, 2006 [1918]).
7. This problematic appears to be valid for the Balkans and Russia as well. For examples of being Western or Eastern since the 19th century or of having a specific social administration and characteristic, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).



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8. Edouard Glissant, *L'imaginaire des langues* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010) and *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).
9. Examples of this can be found in the works of Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy.
10. Seen from this perspective, we are actually not far from what Hegel said about art; in the second part entitled "The Empirical Theories of Art," Hegel states that art's perspective is different from the practical interest of desire because art thinks of freedom when it looks at an object, setting freedom free from the hegemony of desire. Desire, however, uses the object for a specific purpose and utility, thus destroying it. See Hegel, Introduction à l'esthétique, p. 69. Hegel writes, "Art is interested in an individualist existence." I agree that, by being interested in existence, art stops itself from thinking about the egotistical self-interest of what is monetary and of the object. In fact, Hegel opens a window for modern psychoanalysis by pointing out that desire is directed towards an object; for Deleuze, on the other hand, desire has no object. It moves within a group. When a woman desires a dress, what she really desires is not the dress itself or its "absence," but a system of groups that revolves around it. It will be possible to find desire in a whole set of arrangements including stylishness, impressing others, earning accolades in the professional world, impressing her husband and his colleagues, making herself valuable, etc. Hegel writes (p.69) that when art and desire are separated, art is interested in the surface, the appearance, and the form of the object, whereas desire is interested in the object itself (its empirical and natural expansion, its concrete materialness). Art functions on the surface of the sensual, which finds itself elevated as an image, thanks to art. Art does not seek the sudden and pure materialness of the object (a stone, a flower, or organic life) but its idealness.

According to Hegel, works of art are the sensual shadows of the beautiful.

11. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).





Ahmet Müderrisoğlu, Gülsün Karamustafa, Müşerref Zeytinoğlu, İsmet Doğan, Ali Akay, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Emre Zeytinoğlu and Bülent Şangar in the exhibition opening



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Research and content: Sezin Romi (SALT Research)

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Research assistant: Ayşe Köklü

Send us your comments

and suggestions:

eyayin@saltonline.org

SALT

Bankalar Caddesi 11

Karaköy 34420 İstanbul

saltonline.org

