

n.paradoxa

online, issue 2

February 1997

Editor: Katy Deepwell

Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issue 2, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue2.pdf>
Dec 1997, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

All articles are copyright to the author
All reproduction & distribution rights reserved to n.paradoxa and KT press.
No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or
by any electronic, mechanical or other means, including photocopying and recording,
information storage or retrieval, without permission in writing from the editor of
n.paradoxa.

Views expressed in the online journal are those of the contributors
and not necessarily those of the editor or publishers.

Editor: ktpress@ktpress.co.uk
International Editorial Board: Hilary Robinson, Renee Baert,
Janis Jefferies, Joanna Frueh, Hagiwara Hiroko, Olabisi Silva.
www.ktpress.co.uk

The following articles were republished in
Volume 1, *n.paradoxa* (print version) January 1998 :
Liz Ellis 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang?' An account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art
Practice an analysis of the Britpack phenomenon
Tomur Atagök A View of Contemporary Women Artists in Turkey
Hilary Robinson Nine Snapshots from living and working in Belfast
Katy Deepwell Questioning stereotypes of feminist art practice as 'Feminist Aesthetics in an
International Frame'
Shelley Hornstein 'Of Identities and Nationalism seen from Far and Near: Narelle Jubelin and the
Politics of Space'

List of Contents

Liz Ellis 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang?'	
An account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice, an analysis of the Britpack phenomenon	4
Tomur Atagök A View of Contemporary Women Artists in Turkey	20
Paradoxes and Orthodoxes : An Invitation to Dialogue from the Editor	26
N.Paradoxa: An Interview with Marina Abramovic	29
N.Paradoxa: Dialogue with Australian artist, Jill Scott	39
<i>Feminist Art Criticism in an International Perspective: Three Papers from the joint American and Canadian Association of Aesthetics Conference from Montreal , October 1996:</i>	
Hilary Robinson Nine Snapshots from living and working in Belfast	48
Katy Deepwell Questioning stereotypes of feminist art practice	55
Shelley Hornstein Of Identities and Nationalism seen from Far and Near: Narelle Jubelin and the Politics of Space	63

Contemporary Turkish Women Artists

Tomur Atagök

In the course of globalisation and given our present standpoint between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, everything is subject to re-evaluation and change. Both contemporary issues and universal value systems have forced a re-examination of our ideas at a time when questions about the center and the peripheries, the local as opposed to the universal, East and West, part and whole are being raised. Within the context of culture and an opening of its borders and disciplines, the creative process, and the conditions as well as the politics that shape it, are bringing to our attention the work of non-western participants both minorities and the once-silent majorities. The reassessment of the issues around artistic activity has been raised by many people who would not previously have had a voice in the making of contemporary art. Following the airing of many issues concerning human rights and the development of policies for equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, country, religion and sex, women artists, curators and museum people are focusing on the near-absence of women artists in the mainstream of arts.

Turkey which has always been a geographical bridge between the East and the West, is becoming a focus once again for these debates, and is forced to look back at its own history in order to reconsider its own status in the emerging debate on multiculturalism and synchronize its own artistic performance with the present Western-centered art context.

We only have to go back to the last century to compare Turkish women's standing with those in the West. We too can talk of significant dates in the education of women and women's rights like 1858 :for example, the founding of the first Secondary School for Girls, 1870: the first Teacher's College for Girls, 1883: the founding of the Academy of Fine



Nese Erdok Sick Child (1993)

Arts, 1914; and the founding of an Academy of Fine Arts for girls in Istanbul.

We can even elaborate on the social background of all the early women artists families and come up with a picture reflecting their society, Islamic in religion but very progressive in its attitudes towards women taking their up a place in that society. We may elaborate further, by stating that the Westernization that started in the last quarter of 1800's was accelerated by the founding of Turkish Republic in 1923, opening up new avenues for women while cutting to some extent their ties with the traditions and traditional arts. We may even underline the fact that artists wanting to depict reality moved into a

new terrain, adopting the Western way of seeing away from their Eastern way of constructing the visual world. We can also note that the tendency of early works by many artists was towards portraits of people closest to them and studies of interiors showing their rebellious attitude to both Islamic traditions as well as their joy in their newly found ability to portray the society in which they lived.

However, without forgetting the continuation of Western influences in the first half of 20th century, let us dwell on Turkish women artists since the seventies for the sake of picturing the contemporary art scene.

In a society where women are traditionally taught and furthermore encouraged to engage themselves in weaving, embroidery and knitting, learning to paint is already an acceptable accomplishment. More than half of today's Turkish artists are women. Although the University Art Departments all have women as the majority of their students, the number of women artists who survive the professional struggle is few. Even more women artists gain a private training and it is after this that they too join the field. It is also striking that there are very few women educators in the faculties of the art departments while the ratio in other fields such as architecture and sciences is today more evenly balanced.

There are many possibilities for exhibiting works in metropolitan Istanbul and in the capital city Ankora. Both young and amateur artists have a chance to exhibit at the state or municipal galleries as well as the art galleries of Banks. This relatively positive picture starts to darken when one looks at the past of Turkish art in the 20th Century where few women artists appear among the leaders in the mainstream of art until one reaches the 1960s. From this point on, women artists seem to take the lead in arts because of their experimental and individualistic attitude and the fact that they move away from using the close-knit surface of painting that is a result of following the centuries-old arts of the Islamic Culture. The ingrained quality of



left :Candeger Furtun *Untitled* (1994)
Macka Sanat Gallery, Istanbul.
right: Isik Tuzuner

surface decoration and schematic imagery which is a tradition in Turkey seems to have been overcome by several strong willed women using different media and techniques to express themselves.

This generation of women have a few common characteristics between them. They come from educated and above middle-class families; most are bilingual, and have travelled or studied in another country, and they are well informed about what is taking place in the mainstream of art. These women take an interest in status of women in their society, and with this knowledge and the influence of the contemporary issues, they have gradually developed a new synthesis in their content, although their medium and approach is different in each case. From their different points of view, they take up different social and cultural issues which merge with their own history, environment and approaches to working in specific sites. The artist, as an observer and social critic of today, observes the individual as a psychological and social being, thus arriving at the important question of identity. Some of these women further their creativity in writing, curating and organizing activities to provide a context for their work. This is never a group-action; each looks at the world around and is individually motivated by what they see. So, in this article, the content of these women's artists work has been the first criteria in grouping their approaches and identifying the styles which each artist has followed.

Bilge Alkor (1936), Nese Erdok (1940), Nur Koçak (1941) are all painters. Their works vary from abstractions of human relations in the soft and lyrical figures of Bilge Alkor, to group portraits which indicate human relationships in the work of Nese Erdok (see above).

*Bilge Alkor Adam's
Dream (1987-1990)*



n.paradoxa online issue no.2 Feb 1997

ISSN: 1462-0426

Nur Koçak uses photographic depiction of women's clothes or the possessions of women in order to convey how they place themselves in the world. Nur Koçak is the most direct amongst these artists regarding the position on women confronting her viewer while remaining indirect because of the absence of women in her paintings.



Nur Koçak Stripes or Special to the Bath with Garden (1992/1993)

Tomur Atagök (1939), Ipek Aksügür (1940), Inci Eviner (1956), Hale Arpacioğlu (1951), Selma Gürbüz (1960), Canan Tolon (1955) who are all painters, and the sculptors, Candeger Furtun (1936) and Isik Tüzüner (1954, now based in Amsterdam), make up another group. These women use mixed-media techniques along with symbols and generally fragment the figure. Hale Arpacioğlu looks at the human being from the psychological point of view in an altogether expressionistic style.



Tomur Atagök Target (1983)

Tomur Atagök, Ipek Aksügür, Inci Eviner are all concerned with the question of identity, and as a consequence their works are more thought- and message- oriented. Their women or figures are dissected, fragmented and made into symbols.

Inci Eviner's work seeks to open up an interior life-world. While my own work because of my experience as a commentator on women issues for a long time, depicts women in both present and past societies through symbols such as the vertebrae of womanhood. Ipek Aksügür takes a different approach with photos of her body, which she multiplies using photo-copies, and then turns them into motifs of Anatolian goddesses.



Inci Eviner Torso (1993)

Selma Gürbüz and Canan Tolon also use Anatolian motifs repeating or multiplying variations of this imagery. Their works are rooted in reconsidering the past but multiplication/repetition becomes a strong factor in their sculptures or installations. Candeger Furtun is a ceramist sculptor who turns carefully modeled parts of body into symbols repeating the fragmented forms in a manner similar to Selma Gürbüz and Canan Tolon. Isik Tüzüner is another sculptor who works with left-over materials painting over them to create fragmented forms. The issues of environmental protection are often suggested by her work.



Gülsün Karamustafa *Eleven Mirrors with Plastic Stripes* (1990)



Above: Nil Yalter
Below: Canan Beykal *Library detail from Chambers* (1992)



Hale Tenger *Decent Death Watch: Boznia-Herzegovina* (1992) jar, water, photo-copy, audio tape recordings



n.paradoxa online issue no.2 Feb 1997

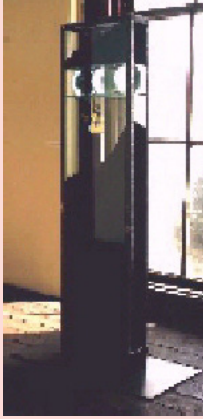
Nil Yalter (1937), Canan Beykal (1948), Gülsün Karamustafa (1946), and Hale Tenger (1960) make up another group of social and cultural commentators. These women work in installation, moving from 2-dimensions into the 3-dimensional physical space. Gülsün Karamustafa (1946) has worked for a long-time commenting upon how different cultures live together, using stories or fragments of stories to convey ideas even if these fragments work through connotation. Canan Beykal is another early conceptual artist who uses light, writing, voice, video as well as 2 or 3 dimensional visual materials. Her work dwells on ethical issues and dilemmas.

Nil Yalter (1937), based in Paris, is probably the pioneer in this work of social commentary. She is the most active in the International arena. Photography, documents, computer-video or performance are all used to reach audiences with work about human rights in an inter-active way.

Hale Tenger (1960) is the youngest but the most active of all installation artists and is another social-cultural commentator. Using large panels with an army of popular ready-mades or film from documentaries, she makes a deep impression on the viewers.

Füsün Onur (1938), Ayse Erkmen (1949) and Handan Börüteçene (1957) all work with space considering how it evokes memory. Their constructions tend to eliminate details or rather load images, materials and objects with new meanings. Handan Börüteçene reconsiders the past with reference to particular historical sites while Ayse Erkmen, a DAAD Scholar and another international artist, is interested mainly in reducing the forms to its essentials to convey a sense of the present site. Füsün Onur frequently uses unexpected or second-hand materials in a different way to make personal statements about her life.

Whether it is through representation or abstraction, by the elimination, distortion or fragmentation of imagery, these artists all deal with



Above, right: Handan Börüteçene *Between Earth and Sky* (1993)

Centre: Hale Arpacioğlu *Portrait*

Left : Füsün Onur *Ataturk's Mother*.

Below, right: Canan Tolon *Print IV* (1983)

left: Ayse Erkmen *Der Weg* (1994)



the cultural environment and a social-political culture through art. Form merges with content. Life is commented upon directly or indirectly as the artist uses her chosen media to convey her observations, feelings but more precisely her thoughts. This is a long way from the anonymous women of Anatolia, who weave and embroider their hopes and sorrows in the privacy of their homes.

Tomur Atagök, Yildiz Technical University

Copyright © Tomur Atagök
n.paradoxa Issue No.2 Feb 1997