

From what I understood Fulya Erdemci's edition of the Istanbul Biennale was – remarkably different to its predecessor - designated to enter the streets again and position works on site – are You continuing to do so or have You altered the concept?

Actually, the conceptual framework of the 13th Istanbul biennial articulates three axis: a theoretical one based on the notion of public domain as a probable political public forum, and a practical axis that takes the urban public spaces and the violent urban transformation as the praxis sites. As you know, the title of the biennial “Mom, am I barbarian?” is a quotation from a Turkish poet Lale Muldur that forms the artistic axis of the exhibition in terms of the unknown or yet to be invented languages as well as art's and social movements' relation with poetry. Certainly, before Gezi, we have planned to realize many projects that intervene with the urban public spaces of Istanbul including Gezi Park and Taksim square as well.

What is happening in Istanbul right now is larger than life and certainly, it is not comparable to any exhibition or art event. We are all very surprised, exalted and full of hope again. The so-called public sphere, which was merely a question of probability before, has been split open with such a creative energy that the streets have begun to talk, sing, dance, walk and interact. The questions posed in the conceptual framework of the İstanbul Biennial—which is directly related to public domain as a political forum and urban spaces as the spatial component of the democratic apparatus—have alchemically unfolded and entered into the domain of experience. This has changed, transformed us all. It has opened up new horizons we could never have anticipated.

During and just after the Gezi occupation (it was halted violently on the 15th and 16th of June), we didn't have much time to think and work on the biennial. As everything is very recent and still in the process, it is not easy to respond to the situation through an exhibition in biennial-scale. However, the conceptual framework of the biennial has already articulated these issues, and the art works and projects were selected in accordance with such considerations and criteria. I believe that the biennial exhibition can open up a space for thinking around the transformative experience that we have been going through. When I was structuring the exhibition before Gezi, I have never intended to commission or include the immediate/spontaneous activist/protest art that was supposed to happen in the streets directly in the biennial exhibition, as I believe that they shouldn't be domesticated or tamed in the institutional frames at which they are reacting. However, I was thinking that it was possible to highlight them if they were there already. Now the biennial is on the verge of radical changes: we are considering withdrawing from the public domain totally and giving the stage to what has happened and is still happening in the parks, streets and neighborhoods without capitalizing or framing them. After all, we seriously question what it means to collaborate with the authorities to realize

art projects on the streets with their permission while the same authorities have been trying to suppress the resistance violently, even the most innocent performances, actions and happenings such as Man Standing or the collective Ramadan dinners on the streets. Now we are making meetings and forums to ask the opinion of the artists, curators, critics and activists to reach a final decision.

Will there be any works of art on site in the streets, on public squares or in quarters of Istanbul?

Although we will decide on the idea of withdrawal from the urban public spaces shortly, I guess we won't.

Are artists still able to choose sites or suggest certain projects?

We are in contact with the artists that have already project proposals in the urban public spaces to ask to adopt or propose new projects for the exhibition venues. Besides, because of Gezi, we weren't able to discuss the project proposals with the artists from Turkey. Now we are at this stage.

After seeing Tanas-Exhibition, I very much appreciated the concept of the „street“ as a topic for the exhibition, do You think You will pick this up for the main exhibition?

Yes, certainly. It is in the heart of the conceptual framework and you will see diverse works in the biennial exhibition including some of the works that you have seen at Tanas prelude exhibition.

Do You already work with artists in Istanbul now? In how far is Your work influenced by what is going on? Do You have to alter certain projects? Do You feel that You can still prepare the exhibition in the way it was meant to be?

Certainly, we are in the process of revising certain projects and working with artists in Istanbul. However, as I mentioned briefly above, “barbarian” refers to languages, especially the ones that we don't know or yet to invent to call a new world that has just been appearing in the horizon. We all feel that the existing theories and formulas fall short to define new ways/models of living together and governance, but art can open up that possibility for the collective imagination. Therefore, art works in the biennial exhibition that are calling or intending to create novel unorthodox languages (or learn the unknowns ones) can help to understand the new collective culture and languages of the Resistance that have been appearing like a nebula. Furthermore, I believe that the biennial exhibition can function, not as a tool for an immediate change, but as a process of thinking, besides all, as a possible way of constructing new subjectivities symbolized

by the ‘barbarian’.

Have You planned any works that relate to the newly raised political questions? Many works that I have seen in „Agoraphobia“ seem to relate to the things that are going on in an almost narrative way. It was such a visionary exhibition and I wonder if You will continue to follow these topics.

Thank you for your comments on the “Agoraphobia” exhibition. Certainly, we will continue further in articulating these issues. However, I don’t want to ask artists to comment on Gezi yet as it is too early to digest or react, and thus, might lead to premature births. And yet, some artists have already hinted or foreseen such questions in their works and wanted to extend their ideas to connect with these new political questions raised by Gezi resistance, with whom I am in dialogue right now.

Do You feel a new pressure in working on site, in the streets, in public spaces – or are You able to continue Your preparations as freely as You had planned to?

Actually, from the beginning the authorities were disturbed by the concept of the biennial and especially my selection of the contested urban public spaces like Gezi park or the Taksim square. Although we have applied months ago, we haven’t heard from them yet and we don’t want to push them for collaboration right now with reasons I explained above.

Do You feel another awareness of art nowadays or would You expect the city to be so politically involved that the Biennale might be of less importance this year?

I think just the opposite of your second question as biennial is alchemically articulating what has happened and is happening now. However, we all have been leading different lives with ever-emerging urgencies or calls for collective actions. So, we cannot foresee right now what the situation or urgencies of political struggle will be during the biennial.

Would You agree that the freedom of Your curatorial work could be read as a markstone of how free artists can work in Turkey these days?

The biennial is an established institution with independent international advisory board structure through which it is able to create a free zone for curatorial practices and concepts. And that is how I was able to bring out my reflections in the biennial concept and selection of artistic practices. However, I am not totally sure if this is valid for all sites of artistic production in Turkey.