

ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS MASTER'S DEGREE
PROGRAM

FROM AYA IRINI TO THE PRINCE'S ISLANDS- DISCOURSES AND
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CITY IN ISTANBUL BIENNIAL CATALOGS

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ISTANBUL

2019

FROM AYA IRINI TO THE PRINCE'S ISLANDS - DISCOURSES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE
CITY IN ISTANBUL BIENNIAL CATALOGUES

Aya İrini'den Adalar'a - İstanbul Bienal Katalogları Üzerindeki Şehir Anlatım ve Temsilleri

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Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih : 16.09.2019

Toplam Sayfa Sayısı: 96

Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)

- 1) İstanbul Bienali
- 2) Bienal kültürü
- 3) Kültürel politika
- 4) Sergi Kataloğu
- 5) Kültür endüstrisi

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

- 1) İstanbul Biennial
- 2) Biennial Culture
- 3) Cultural Politics
- 4) Exhibition Catalog
- 5) Culture Industry

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Ivo Ozan Furman. He gave me his sincere support to motivate and encourage me during my thesis process and shared his experiences with me all the time. Also, I would like to thank you Esra Yıldız for her kind recommendations.

I thank my family for always supporting my decisions and keeping me up whatever I do.

It is great to feel their precious support.

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ABSTRACT

The notion of biennial has been evolved over the years since its beginning in 1895 into a brand and culture by itself to represent certain messages in a specific period. Almost every country started to organize its own biennial event to catch and keep international attention on them and this situation is accelerated after the 1970s all around the world. In 1987, Istanbul Biennials are started to express the current sociopolitical and cultural identity of the city and the country over the years. The brand of Istanbul has been reshaped continuously and the biennial is utilized to deliver the desired brand image of the city to the globe. As the tools of contemporary biennial serve the delivery of the desired messages this paper seeks to understand what kind of messages are produced through myths, direct and indirect narratives. The methodology of this paper is based on a semiotic and content analysis of biennial catalogs as permanent footprints of a seasonal event. Hence, this paper is analyzing preferred colors, wordings, photos, places, artists, curators, and their description texts to create a frame of the intended message of the event and its evolution over the years. Also, the results are utilized to compare produced messages and the current atmosphere of the city as well as the nation and periphery. At the end of this paper, the actors, their addressed messages, methods and the correlation between these elements will be unfolded regarding the reflections on biennial catalogs.

Keywords: Istanbul Biennial, biennial culture, culture industry, cultural politics, exhibition catalog

ÖZET

Bienal kavramı başladığı 1895 yılından bu yana evrimleşerek belli dönemlerin istenen mesajlarını yansıtmak üzere başlı başına bir kültür ve marka halini almıştır. 1970'li yıllardan itibaren ivmelenen bienal organizasyonu neredeyse her ülke tarafından benimsenmiş ve uluslararası ilgiyi yakalamak ve korumak amaçlı kullanılmıştır. 1987 yılında başlayan İstanbul Bienali, düzenlendiği ilk andan itibaren şehrin ve ülkenin dönemsel sosyal politikalarını ve kültürel kimliğini ifade etmek için bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır. İstanbul markası yıllar içerisinde defalarca yeniden şekillendirilmiş ve bienal hedeflenen imajın oluşturulmasında ve aktarılmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Güncel sanat bienalleri istenen mesajların aktarımı konusunda kritik bir rol oynadığı için bu tezde mitler, direkt ve dolaylı anlatımlar kullanılarak hangi mesajların aktarıldığı irdelenmiştir. Tezde içerik ve gösterge bilim analizi yöntemi kullanılarak dönemsel bir etkinliğin kalıcı mirası olan bienal katalogları incelenmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu tez kataloglar üzerinde kullanılan renk, font, kelime, fotoğraf, sergi mekânı, katılımcı sanatçı ve küratör seçimleri ile birlikte katalog içerisinde yer alan tanıtıcı metinlerin analizlerini yaparak bienallerin vermek istediği mesajı anlamamıza olarak sağlayan bir çerçeve çizmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bununla birlikte elde edilen sonuçlar şehir bağlamında tutulmayıp Türkiye ve komşu ülkelerinin dönemsel atmosferini anlamamıza yardımcı olacaktır. Tezin sonunda bienali oluşturan aktörler, hedefledikleri mesajlar, iletişim yöntemleri ve bu unsurlar arasındaki ilişkiler bienal katalogları vasıtasıyla gözler önüne serilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İstanbul Bienali, bienal kültürü, kültür endüstrisi, kültürel politika, sergi kataloğu

1. INTRODUCTION

An unforgettable summer night was happening in Aya Irini in 1973, long after its glamorous times of Byzantine. That night was going to be the revival of the old building after spending a humble life for hundreds of years. All the guests were wearing their fancy clothes and feeling excited about such a historical moment. Aya Irini was full of lights, and gabble. Aya Irini's walls and magnificent dome were welcoming all the guests for the city's milestone event. All guests shared a common admiration for both the spatial and temporal charm of the concert. The great yard of the historical church embraced all its guests and fascinated them with glory.



Figure 1.1 The first Istanbul Festival took place from 21 June to 15 July.

Nejat Eczacıbaşı, the one of the major founders of IKSŞ, took the stage to make the very first speech of the city's cultural phenomenon. He introduced the festival and the foundation to herald the persistence of the events for the future. That was a

significant moment for the guests because most of them were concerned whether the event was for once or continuous.



Figure 1.2 The speech of Nejat Eczacıbaşı on the opening ceremony of the Istanbul Festival

After the prominent speech of Nejat Eczacıbaşı, the first note played, and the guests hold their breath to record this moment in their mind. Hours passed like seconds and finally, the great night ended up with the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin and his accompanists Suna Kan and Ayla Erduran for the final performance (Baliç, Ermiş, 2013). It was the inception of the new era for Istanbul, which is the country's gate to the West.



Figure 1.3 Bucharest Madrigal Chorus Marin Constantin, conductor the 1st Istanbul Festival

That is a portrait of a moment to understand how the arts and culture evolved into a living mechanism more than a cold governmental occasion in Turkey. It was an event that brought “European sophistication” into the middle of “our” lives. I chose to use the inverted comma for particular two notions in my previous sentence because the first festival was embraced by a specific group that has a common interest and memory on European art events. Their taste was shaped by the European approach. Thus, it was the first attempt in Turkey which brings all these people together to celebrate Turkey’s, in fact particularly Istanbul’s, novel dimension; liberalization of arts and culture. Istanbul was considered as the “bridge” between East and West – still, it is -, and it has been positioned as a brand ambassador of the nation. Hence, the perception of Istanbul from abroad designated the image of Turkey at all. In that sense, the Istanbul Festival was organized in Istanbul, and it was a great deal for both business and government to create a “modern” image of the country.

On the other hand, Istanbul owned a tremendous and unique history which is a sort of challenge to combine with “European modernity”. Hence, the Istanbul Festival brought these two aspects together and created an event which is highly intellectual, in terms of the western point of view, and also quite “exotic” regarding the historical and oriental background. Although the festival had a magical atmosphere with this unique combination, the pre-organization period was not that smooth. The culture industry was inexperienced at all to cover a proper organization. That was the reason to establish a dedicated foundation to make sure the gratification of both world-famous artists and the modern class of the citizens. Any negative case could cause the cancelation of the festival for the next time. However, the primary goal of IKSIV and the expectations of participants were to create a continuous vibe and reflect the European potential of the city, so everything planned conscientiously to prevent any possible trouble. For instance, historical buildings were pleasant to be there to listen to a classical music concert but hard to use for this concert due to the infrastructural deficiencies. Aya Irini was full of dirt and broken glass pieces before the event, also the dome was reported as risky for

loud noise by the government. Moreover, there was not an appropriate piano in the country put at the disposal of a world-famous artist. IKSŞ was dealing with a short time, big problems and minimal budget. At that point, Nejat Eczacıbaşı and his companions planned the festival presciently. Even the first plan was to organize the festival in 1972; he canceled the event for the next year to get the maximum support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism under the 50th anniversary celebrations of the foundation of the republic. It was also an opportunity for the government to reinforce the contemporary image of Istanbul in the 50th year of the modern Turkish government. As a result of this, the mutual relationship between IKSŞ and the government officially started in 1973 to create a new Istanbul brand with a combination of exoticness, uniqueness, and modernity.

I chose to begin with this particular event to create a background image in the reader's mind for the rest of the thesis. We will try to construct a path to correlate art, city, medium and the message to create a complete picture of Istanbul Biennials in our minds. Since the biennial organization has a concrete structure and has its own particular dynamics, every country is supposed to follow a similar path to achieve the goals of the event which will be depicted in detail on the further parts of this paper. Thus, this paper intended to make an inquiry on Istanbul Biennial to observe the created brand image of the city regarding the socio-political atmosphere of each period. The crucial point is to clarify how a biennial produces and articulates particular messages in certain periods. Although the biennial studies are multiplied in recent years, there is still a way to go to analyze the structure of biennial culture and its impacts in social, transnational, global, political, cultural contexts as well as artistic production. Biennial is a tool for knowledge production and how it serves particular aims is needed to be depicted. Here, the reason for the selected materials should be explained. As every country utilizes its biennial to create an identity, the biennial is one of the key mediums of cities and also nations to reflect their unique characteristics. Even a biennial is considered as a medium by itself, it has its own mediums to reinforce the narrative and to communicate multichannel. Communication tools of a Biennial are the components of a general picture, and

they complete each other. All of these documents and narratives carry significant signs of the major message which is set by the constituents of the event mainly state and business sponsors. Although there are many biennial studies, there are a few of them which make an analysis of printed materials which are the temporary footprints of the event. In that sense, I would like to make an inquiry on exhibition catalogs of Istanbul Biennial to examine how they addressed a message about the city over two decades, and how they implied these messages on permanent communication tools of the event. By the end, this thesis is going to be an analysis of Istanbul Biennial to have an idea on the below question which aims to see how biennial correlates with the socio-political atmosphere of the city regarding the discourses and representations produced by the exhibition.

RESEARCH QUESTION: How does Istanbul biennial produce discourses and representations to create the brand of the city?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As far as we articulated about the structure of biennials, this thesis is based on the inquiry of the Istanbul Biennial's publications particularly exhibition catalogs. To make a precise examination, Saussure's theory of semiology might be useful here due to the articulative structure of contemporary biennials. Although Saussure's pioneer theory criticized by contemporary theoreticians for a while, it still interpretable within today's conditions. As Umberto Eco (1976) mentioned, in Saussurean semiology communication is intentional, whereas Peirce's semiotics as a whole also admits unintentional and natural sources of signs. Also, Saussurean semiology limits the signs as messages between senders and receivers (Chandler, 2007). For Saussure, "meaning" is interchangeable, it is the bipartite correspondence between the signifier and the signified. Hence, the Saussurean approach is more suitable in the biennial case to determine the major components of it. Also, content analysis will be the tool for defining and comparing keywords in texts of biennial catalogs to interpret the underlying context (Hsieh&Shannon, 2005). At that point, there is one more term missing until now that will enlighten us to depict the cultural and sociological impact of the biennials; it is the notion of "myth".

The concept of myth should be understood better to enlarge the vision of this inquiry. To begin with the concept of myth, we have to mention French critic Roland Barthes prelusively. His ideas are based on the foundations of pioneer theoreticians, significantly Saussure, and he adjusts the semiotic analysis to contemporary media. Linguistic, visual and other kinds of new media components are merged into contemporary media, and all of these create a meaning under the interpretation of existed culture. These components are signs not only for denotation but also for multiple connotations attached to them. According to Barthes, the combination of these signs with their connotations are the ingredients of a specific message which constitutes the myth. Myth refers to the delivery of a particular message to the viewer through the society's way of thinking about other

people, products, places or ideas (Bignell, 2002). All of these components constitute a holistic meaning. As Bignell mentioned, myth brings an existing sign and makes it perform as a signifier on another layer. The concept of myth is a particular form of language, which transforms existing signs into a new sign system. Myth, for Barthes, is the expression of social realities constituted by predominant ideology and it is the way to reflect realities outside of the political arena. As ideologies are always owned by certain groups in society and one group's ideology will often contradict with another's, myths occupy the current system of beliefs to display the “dominant ideology” as natural, commonsense and necessary. Barthes suggests that myth reflects the ideological interests of a certain group, which he describes as “the bourgeoisie” (1973). This term refers to the class of people who keeps control of the industrial, commercial, and political institutions. This class aims to maintain the solidity of society, in order to keep the power to remain unchanged and unchallenged. Hence, it is not an innocent language; it orders signs and their connotations intentionally to perform a particular social role. In the book of Barthes, *Mythologies*, he utilizes semiotics as an apparatus to analyze the aspects of everyday culture. As Barthes declares that myth is a type of speech generated in culture to relate a particular context and it creates social meanings acceptable as the commonsense reality. As Barthes uses the term of myth, it means signs are utilized as mediums to communicate a particular social and political message. Since the message always prevents the emergence of alternative messages, myth is accepted as the only truth, rather than one of several possible messages (Bigell, 2002). The connotations of signs have meanings based on each culture. Although some of these messages might be recognized consciously, others can only be realized unconsciously and only become apparent once someone looks for them. Thus, myth is a crucial term in this paper to dig out hidden or distinct meanings or to say messages of each İstanbul Biennials. The point here is “how to” or “what to” investigate to understand the structure of these myths of İstanbul Biennials. Lastly, we need to comprehend the significance of published materials to make sense of this thesis.

Even many of the publications of an exhibition seem like some ephemera; they are the major parts of the memory of the event. These materials function as the archive of the exhibition and pass the meaning of the biennial throughout time and space. In the biennial case, this situation gains more significance due to the continuous structure of the event. Biennials produce a trailer via its publications and create media content before, during and after the event. Thus, these materials transmit a wide range of messages and meanings. Also, published materials of biennials are one of the most effective elements of the contemporary exhibition model (Kompatsiaris, 2017). Publications, as archival artifacts, collect all displayed artworks together and make semiotic production of the “discourse” that the event articulates. However, while the biennial researches have been accelerated internationally, the exhibition catalogs are underrated among biennial studies (Gardner&Green, 2016). As some scholars emphasized, exhibition catalogs are the handbook of the art in a certain period and culture rather than a simple record of the exhibition. The color, content, form, material and even number of pages of these materials are the components of the meaning articulated within the biennial.



Figure 2.1 The Manifesta 10 Catalog



Figure 2.2 The catalog for the 27th Brno Biennial

Since we call contemporary biennials as “discursive”, their articulation is more than two-months long exhibition. Thus, catalogs bring the exhibitions’ legacy beyond the temporal and spatial levels. In this thesis, we will examine exhibition catalogs of each biennial with the help of “Semiology” and content analysis to unfold the messages created by curators, institutions, states and also artists in terms of political and commercial agendas from 1987 to 2017. We will elaborate on certain signs and texts to depict the positioning of Istanbul. In the analysis section, we will see some categorization among biennials in which some similarities could be observed in terms of their resemblance regarding political, social and cultural narratives used by them.

3. FROM 1895's VENICE TO 2017's ISTANBUL

Biennial is a term described in the dictionary (Oxford) as an event celebrated or taking place every two years. Although biennial refers to “occurring every two years” concept, triennials and also Documenta, which is an event taking place every five years, are included under the name of the biennial. Biennials have a significant role in the international scene to spread the art and design of many cultures. It has multiple dimensions including current politics, economic situations, cultural reflections so on (Bozdogan, Okur, 2017). Thus, today biennial mostly refers to contemporary art exhibitions in which countries and artists take a chance to represent themselves on an international platform. Hence, to examine the history of global biennials will be a proper beginning for a solid base to clarify the origins of Istanbul Biennial. We will go back in time for more than 100 years to see the evolution of the concept of biennial over the years from Venice to Istanbul. The biennial origins from Venice in 1895 in which the oldest and well-known international world fair occurred (Martini&Martini, 2011).



Figure 3.1 The first Venice Biennale exhibition in 1895 Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia – Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee

The success of this exhibition was to create a common ground for many nations' artists to represent their works and themselves as well as their nations. After the first Venice Biennial, the concept of such an international art fair widely appreciated and accepted by many nations, so they reconfigured it according to their cultural background. In certain times throughout history, these biennials took a prominent place to reflect the milestones and important little details of nations' temporary and permanent transformations. To give some examples, Venice Biennial utilized the silver wedding anniversary of Italy's King Umberto and Queen Margherita of Savoy, São Paulo Biennial was organized two years before the celebration of the city's four-hundredth anniversary (1951) and the Alexandria Biennale in Egypt (1955) was inaugurated on the occasion of the third anniversary of its national revolution (Martini&Martini, 2011). As Michael Bachtin (1979) defines, time becomes artistically visible on a biennial which could be considered as a chronotype.

The exhibition space brings meaning and measure to the notion of time. At the beginning period, Venice Biennial was based on nation-oriented separations which divide the exhibition space into two major parts. The first and most significant part was allocated to Italian artists, and the second part was for other nations' artists. However, these separate spaces caused unfair representation abilities as years passed. After the emergence of other outstanding biennials such as São Paulo (1951), Documenta in Kassel (1955) and Paris (1959), the critiques about Venice Biennial became more frequent and louder. Also, the exhibition was located in an area named "the Giardini", which is a public space taken away from the city, in order to become the seat of the exhibition exclusively (Martini&Martini, 2011).



Figure 3.2 Opening of the Austrian Pavilion in the Giardini della Biennale, the 12th of May 1934 (Courtesy of Pedro Kramreiter, Vienna)

Under these circumstances, the Venice Biennial started to lose its attraction among international artists, due to its strict rules which put space and national differences above the idea behind the art pieces. The progressive Italianization of the exhibition resulted in an urgent need for exhibition space for hosting foreign artists from 1895 to 1914 (West, 1995). Venice Biennial became a commercial organization, as the other biennials of those times, and promoted Italian artists. By the time, many other biennials are organized, and most of them refused the fragmentation of exhibition space. Thus, it was the period that Venice Biennial was suffering from the destruction of its cultural role and had to reintegrate itself into the international art scene again. As Pallucchini (1950) quotes, Venice Biennial was a “collection of samples” not an exhibition open for “dialogue and exchange”. During these discussions in Europe, there was the preparation of another world-shaking event in one of the south coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. By the year 1955, the Biennale de la Méditerranée, in Alexandria, has been officially announced which will be called the beginning of “The Southern Biennials” lately. It was the first attempt of regionally orientated biennials (Gardner&Green, 2013) and organized at the peak point of the Cold War. This biennial is a milestone that brings together

the artists from the Iron Curtain as well as oppressed ones from dictatorship and exclusion due to the post-fascist period of the third world (Gardner&Green, 2013). It could be called the democratization of contemporary art in the context of regionalism. Here, regionalism is a key term to emphasize the approach of the biennial as a platform to break the boundaries and to lower the tension between the Mediterranean countries. The biennial was narrated as a kind of resistance against western impositions and aims to create solidarity in the neighborhood. It was manifested as a transcultural and regional event of “non-aligned” nations (Gardner&Green, 2013). The major point of these “Southern Biennials” was to create political discourses rather than “cult” art pieces (Gardner&Green, 2013). Exhibition spaces were re-considered as laboratories for experimental approaches and discourses. Years after years many other biennials are involved in the southern category in which Istanbul Biennial was also going to be a part of this list after 20 years from the Biennale de la Méditerranée. Back in Europe to fill the blanks of the global biennial phenomenon, in 1957, a committee, which consists of many Italian specialists from art and museum-related fields, came together to discuss the crises of Venice Biennial. This moment was the milestone for contemporary art exhibitions to consider various contexts in terms of the ideal execution of an international art fair. Venice Biennial tried to transform itself for almost ten years, and as Russel emphasized in “Studio International” (1969) that the biennial system had to be based on “ideas”, not “nations” which is already manifested by the southern coast of Mediterranean Sea. By the end, to set up a “theme” and to rely on this have become the primary path of biennial organizations. In the 1970s’ Venice Biennial a theme determined, and all the national artists adhere to it. It was a milestone for the international art sphere and the idea of thematic biennials has been accelerated all around the world after the 1970s. Various nations’ exhibitions are represented all around the city regarding a consistent theme. The fairs of the 1970s and 80s are based on the pavilions which are the juxtaposition of various exhibition units. This system embraces the diversification of services and transformed exhibition spaces into centers of information, exchange, and production (Cherix, 2002). In the 1990s, the idea of biennial has been exploded all around the world,

and almost every country started to organize their biennial (Moulin, 2009). It was a significant opportunity for many countries to introduce and promote themselves into the international community (Okan, 2012) and many of them – including Turkey - took the advantage of the biennial organization with the Southern model.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the Istanbul Festival, the 1970s witnessed the prominent moments for the liberalization of art in Turkey. However, the liberalization was going on inside of the country as a closed mechanism, and there was still a long way to create global communication due to the Turkish political atmosphere. Those were the years of coalition governments and their rapid changes, and this situation affected not only political and economic aspects but also the social and cultural ones. Istanbul Festival has been organized under these circumstances, and it is based on the need for social and cultural expansion of the nation (Yılmaz, 2012). The Festival was a medium to break the silence and introduce the country to the globe, particularly to Europe. Since art is a way to communicate, a nation -like an artist- could represent itself with this tool to decrease the impacts of enforcing politics. In that sense, the Istanbul Festival needed to involve as much as different art disciplines including music, plastic arts, paintings, sculpture and so on to make sure the global awareness of the event. The festival continued many years in this structure, but after a while, it was necessary to split all categories into independent events. As biennial was an uprising trend all around the globe, the rise of artistic awareness and biennial culture also have been emerged in Turkey. The decay in between 1977 and 1987 was the trials of alteration on the Turkish art scene and many exhibitions organized such as “Sanatın Öteki Yüzü” (The other face of art), “Yeni Eğilimler” (New tendencies), and “Öncü Türk Sanatından Bir Kesit” (A section from Pioneer Turkish art).



Figure 3.3 A work of Canan Beykal in 1985

All of those exhibitions ground the first biennial attempt which is called “Asia-Europe Art Biennials” and held in Ankara from 1986 to 1992. These biennials were organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The selection committee has been selected by the Ministry, and the committee contacted other countries’ official sources to determine participants. “Asia-Europe Art Biennials” exhibited in Painting and Sculpture Museum owned by the government. First International Asia-Europe Art Biennial was executed with many controversial issues between the 2nd of May and the 30th of June. The selection committee was involving both local and foreign specialists who were assigned by the state’s Department of Fine Arts. Although the committee discussed the nominee works for all the members to see, many speculations occurred about favoritism for selected artists. Thus, many selected artists were declined their rejection to attend the exhibition (Pelvanoğlu, n.d.) During this controversial period, “Sanat Çevresi” Magazine, which is the main actor of speculations, conducted a questionnaire to select 15 artists to the biennial. However, every participant of the survey, who are gallery owners, art critics, and authors, promoted their own artists or friends. In addition to selection arguments, term president Kenan Evren initiated another discussion. He mentioned an art piece of Jan Dubkowski as “This is not art; this is

just ugly”. Then, the Ministry censored related art piece as soon as possible. It was the last straw for artists, and they declared their censure for all of these struggles they faced by the state. In addition to these mentally devastating problems, there are also many physical failures such as; unprepared exhibition space, the lack of a certain theme, empty walls, unrelated installations and even the lack of biennial catalog. Almost all of these problems are continued on 2nd and 3rd biennials, and on the 4th biennial lost all of its attraction to foreigner artists. Especially European countries cut their budget to attend the Asia-Europe Art Biennial. After the four-year journey, Asia-Europe Art Biennials canceled. However, Turkey’s biennial adventure did not over because of another biennial attempt. In 1987, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) took over the biennial organization and succeeded it. In 2019, 16th Istanbul Art Biennial is planning to be organized by IKSV, and it is expecting to get more audience at every turn.

At the beginning of Istanbul Biennial, Beral Madra was assigned as the curator of the exhibition. As she mentioned (Nirven, 1989), there was not a clear distinction between real and permanent art and sub-art in Turkey. The investments, which should be incumbent on permanent art, were directed to secondary art attempts because of misleading briefings and the lack of knowledge. We had to focus on the international art scene and wear typical nature portraits. Istanbul was a growing city in terms of substantial investments, but Beral Madra asked that, does Istanbul or the rest of Turkey ever be international and multi-cultural on arts and culture? She pointed out some crucial issues to deal with, and the exhibition theme was determined according to these goals and questions. The first aim was to promote Turkish art on the international art scene and also integrate global art trends into Turkish arts and culture. Thus, the first and second biennial theme was named “Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces” to introduce contemporary art to both Turkish audiences and artists.



Figure 3.4 Hagia Sophia – The 1st International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibitions "Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces" (1987)

The theme was consulted by particular international artists, and the primary concept was set as emphasizing Istanbul's historical values and utilizing historical indoors as exhibition spaces. In terms of this theme, Aya Irini Church was allocated for foreign artists, and Hagia Sophia Bath was used by local artists in the 1st International Contemporary Art Exhibition. In the second version, local artists exhibited their works in Aya Irini Church, and foreigner ones used Süleymaniye Cultural Center. On the third biennial Beral Madra left the curation to Vasıf Kortun in 1992 – even it was supposed to organize in 1991. The third biennial was delayed due to the Gulf War and also some controversies. IKSV had to decide on the future of biennial, whether the biennial organization should be continued, or it should be replaced by another annual exhibition on the plastic arts. In the end, these discussions were concentrated on two major points; the first one was unifying the exhibition space to highlight the art pieces more than the charm of the historical spaces; the second one was decentralization of the selection committee. Hence, the exhibition space was unified, and the selection of artists was determined by every

countries' own curator. "Feshane", a historical textile factory near the Golden Horn, was selected as the exhibition hall and it was divided into national pavilions.



Figure 3.5 The 3rd Istanbul Biennial and Feshane, November 1992

The unification of exhibition space allows the audience to have a holistic experience and to observe and compare different nations' works, the theme of the third biennial was designated as "Production of Cultural Difference" and all the works were created on this single theme. On the third biennial, the organization was based on the Venetian model, and Istanbul took much attention as a nominee of one of the cultural capitals in the world. Also, the works of Turkish artists on the 3rd Biennial had many similarities with international ones which shows the beginning of the integration of international art into the Turkish sphere. After this exhibition, many Turkish artists had a chance to represent themselves in the international area. On the 4th biennial (1995) René Block was assigned as the curator, and he left the pavilion-style. Local and foreign artists had equal spaces. The selection of artists was centralized again. René Block was responsible to set the theme, to select the artists and to organize the details about the exhibition. As the third curator of the biennial Vasıf Kortun mentioned, René Block embraced the classical model and

adapt it into the contemporary art scene. The theme was "Orient/ation - The Image of Art in a Paradoxical World". It aimed to manipulate an international dialogue between the artists, from the East, West, North, and South, whose perspectives go beyond the notion of nation. The theme of the exhibition, 'Orient/ation', suggests multi-dimensional meanings according to the place, language, and identity (Vogel, 2010). The central exhibition place was Antrepo, which is a converted customs depot, and many sub-places were utilized for special projects such as; Fluxus exhibition in Atatürk Cultural Center.



Figure 3.6 Sarkis, Rice and Discussion Place, 1995

The other significant point of this biennial, as the curator mentioned, on the 4th biennial, male dominance was demolished by female artists' outstanding works. The 5th biennial was curated by Rosa Martinez in 1997. The conceptual framework was identified by the city itself. Istanbul's unique patterns and dynamism inspired the theme of the biennial which is "On Life, Beauty, Translations and Other Difficulties". Rosa Martinez interpreted the theme in a poetic way. On the 6th biennial (1999) the curator, Paolo Colombo, maintained the poetic point of view and used the muse of Greek and Turkish narratives in Istanbul. "The Passion and the Wave" respected the origins of Istanbul city and compounded it with individual stories. The 7th Biennial was curated by Yuko Hasegawa under the theme EGOFUGAL: Fugue from Ego for the Next Emergence in 2001. This biennial is focused on "self", not on cultural contradictions or Istanbul itself. It questioned "egofugality" and the many notions about "self" such as self-esteem, selflessness,

self-sacrifice, etc. The 7th biennial was spread throughout the city and exhibited in many historical places once again. Imperial Mint, Aya Irini Museum, Yerebatan Cistern, Beylerbeyi Palace and many sub-places used as an exhibition hall. Many workshops and panels organized all around the city. As it is shown, the latest biennials were completely adapted to the world scene, and Istanbul Biennial was counted as a major art even in the international area after those years. 8th biennial (2003) held under the curation of Dan Cameron with the title "Poetic Justice". Eighty-five artists from 42 countries have been invited, and they represented their works in four major exhibition halls. In this biennial, the contradiction between poetry and justice have been discussed. The main exhibition hall was Antrepo and additional works were located in a 15th-century artillery factory, in Yerebatan Cistern, and Hagia Sophia. Other projects were dispersed throughout the city.

In the 9th biennial (2005), the theme was "Istanbul" again with the curation of Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun. The city of Istanbul considered a living



Figure 3.7 Doris Salcedo, Untitled, 2003. Photo by Muammer Yanmaz

mechanism and exhibition halls are determined to reflect daily issues of such a city. The Biennial did not use any of the historical monuments, preferring to more common spaces that reflect the everyday life of the city in the Beyoğlu and Galata neighborhoods. The 10th biennial (2007) was also integrated into the city and exhibited in three major venues in the name of "Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary — Optimism in the Age of Global War". The curator, Hou Hanru, invited 96 artists from 35 countries. His main aim was to emphasize

global wars that we are living in. This biennial used the geographic importance of Istanbul as a bridge between East and West to highlight such a global phenomenon. Besides, the biennial got many sponsors including Koç Group that supported the biennial organization from 2016 till today, and these sponsorships accelerated the awareness of the biennials both in the international and local areas. The 11th biennial (2009) was curated by the Zagreb collective named WHW / What, How & for Whom. It asked, "What Keeps Mankind Alive?". The 11th biennial asked political and economic questions as the 10th biennial did. The conceptual framework of this biennial proposes to begin re-thinking the past in terms of what has been lost in history. Also, it invites us to think about today's art regarding the age-old relationship between art for social change and aesthetic gestures (2009). This biennial also held in various venues in Istanbul, and 110.000 visitors came to see all of these works which is almost twofold of the 9th biennial. The 12th biennial (2011) was curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffmann in the name of "Untitled" which is inspired by the work of the Cuban-American artist Félix González-Torres (1957–1996). The curators divided the main theme into five sub-categories, and each of them consists of one big group of artists. It could be called as the first organized collaboration between artists in any Istanbul biennial. The 13th biennial (2013) was curated by Fulya Erdemci and the theme was "Mom, am I barbarian?". This was the year of Gezi Protests and the theme directly affected by these protests, so Taksim Square selected as one of the exhibition spaces.



Figure 3.8 A photo from the 13th Istanbul Biennial

The biennial conceptualized under a political framework and the utilization of public spaces reinforced these political messages. The 14th biennial was called SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms, was curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. The biennial was surrounding 36 venues on the European and Asian sides, and it takes place in museums as well as temporary spaces of habitation on land and sea such as boats, hotels, former banks, garages, gardens, schools, shops, and private homes. This biennial used the city’s most prominent symbol, Bosphorus, as a metaphor of “waves”.

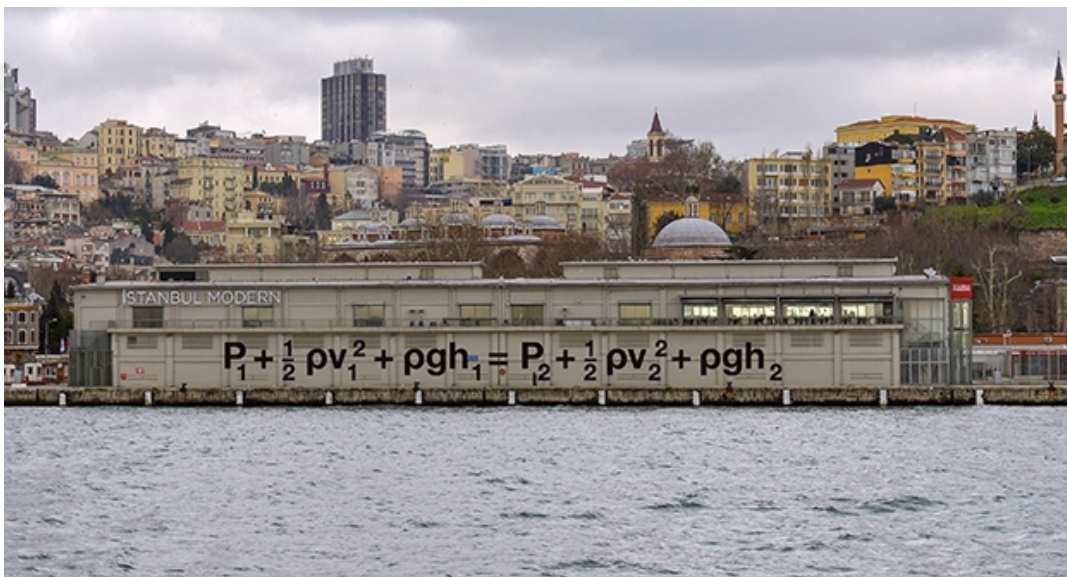


Figure 3.9 A photo of Istanbul Modern during the 14th Istanbul Biennial

Also, this biennial was the first one that was supported by a mobile app powered by a telecom sponsor, Vodafone. Visitors could get information about each of every work as well as directions and public transformations by a mobile app. The 15th and last biennial till now is “A Good Neighbour” was curated by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset. The biennial brought together artworks of 56 artists from 32 countries, and all of them were addressing different notions of home, belonging and neighborhood.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin with the literature review, we have to deliberate today's biennial culture. Biennial has always been a communication tool by itself since its beginning in 1895 in Venice. It has always been more than the sake of art; it involved many messages. However, contemporary art biennials give more than just a message, it deliberates and offers unique propositions in terms of arts, culture, politics, and society. The idea of contemporary biennials not only about aesthetics but also political interference (Niemojewski, 2010). Although there are many debates on whether biennials extend the circuit of art practice and make it democratized or it just makes it cheesy due to the political and economic interests of certain groups, we will stand at the positive side. Contemporary biennials, as it is called "Discursive biennials" by Panos Kompatsiaris (2015), forms the expressions and shapes of curating cultures. According to Kompatsiaris, this model utters many arguments related to class, labor, art and, politics. Also, it intends to bring forth dialogues on current social and political issues (Ferguson; Hoegsberg, 2010; Adajania, 2012; Papastergiadis; Martin, 2011). Contemporary biennials have multiple dimensions to dig in. They represent many discourses from various disciplines and involve many forms of articulations. In that sense, first of all, we have to clarify the terms of representation and articulation which are predominant concepts of biennials. Biennials, actually it is possible to say art in general, are mainly based on the relationship between an object and what it represents. The idea of representation enables an object as a medium that carries a message in terms of cultural validity. Contemporary biennials make more than a representation of particular messages; they articulate them. Biennial, as a medium of discourse, contains many forms of expressions such as, workshops, performances, discussions, experiments and most prominently social interactions in the public sphere that articulates politics, through aesthetic and emotional modes of communication (McGuigan, 2005). Thus, the discursive feature of contemporary biennials articulates the ideas behind the artworks and considers the exhibition as a whole art piece of the curator who is the author of the exhibition. Novel sort of biennials' exhibition model does not consist

of separate art pieces under one roof; it oppositely considers all the artworks as an integral part of the one theme which interrelates every piece of things – not just art pieces- to articulate some message. Thus, the exhibition is the holistic sign which perceived as the final product. Regarding many single works under the biennial, every each of them serves for knowledge production and complement each other to achieve single articulation. In terms of the multi-dimensional character of contemporary art biennials, we have to split our focus into three categories; first is “The Contemporary Biennial Culture”; second is “The Neoliberal Structure” which involves culture industry, institutions, government (current politics) and sponsors; the last one is “The Curators and Artists”. As it is seen on the below parts when the elements are juxtaposed and overlapped in particular notions due to the complementary structure of them.

3.1 The Contemporary Biennial Culture

If we are talking about “discursive” biennial, we have to examine the notion of “discourse” further. As Foucault proposed, the word discourse refers to the ideas and beliefs that circulate public space, and their capacity to form existence (Miller; Rose, 2008). In that sense, the contemporary biennial is not perceived as merely an event, but as a combination of dynamic relations of naming gestures, histories, exhibition formats, theoretical interventions and communicational interactions in public space (Kompatsiaris, 2015). Today biennial is re-conceptualized and considered as a space that presents high art, and produces meanings and socialities (Foster, 1988). The biennial is a well-recognized brand (Sassatelli, 2017), and the main objective of it is not to enforce specific values each time, it is proposing issues for public attention and articulate them in certain modalities. Since biennials build upon performance, material and meaning, one of the important curators Eshe called them as “part community center, part laboratory, part school”. It is not a conventional exhibition space anymore; it is “a social project” (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013) which enables resistance and protest. The art biennial transformed into an

alternative outlet for the circulation of knowledge and aesthetic forms of engagement not regularly met in traditional activist politics (Kompatsiaris, 2015).

The 1990s was the period for Turkey to prove itself and create an image that attracts Europe. Thus, IKS V was one of the pioneers on the rise of arts and culture in Istanbul. As it was mentioned in the previous chapters, there have been many milestone events from the 1970s to the 1990s to create a cultural gusto among the citizens and also to create a novel brand for Turkey, especially for Istanbul. Also, many artists could get the chance to improve themselves regarding European trends and found the opportunity to represent their art pieces on notable events. Those were the rising years of curatorial and conceptual exhibitions more than uniform representations (Bozdoğan, Okur, 2017). During this period, there have been many local and global exhibitions with the themes of current political alterations such as the dissociation of Soviet Russia and Eastern Block, the European integration process of Turkey, etc. According to Beral Madra (2010), the first curator of Istanbul Biennial, she had a hybrid practice of curation. She positioned herself according to current socio-economic circumstances. As she mentioned (2010), in the 1990s, the priority of biennials was the promotion of Istanbul, but in the 2000s which is the period of the intense cooperation of capital and art, the main focus shifted into a political context. As each specific local biennial is assumed as a brand that reinforces the identity of its institution and city, the themes and forms of these biennials shaped by expedience. Biennial cultures constitute and are constituted by the desired brand image of the organizers (Kompatsiaris, 2017). Biennial, as a “field-configuring event”, is varying from fashion shows to film festivals to biennials (Delgado; Cruz, 2014; Delacour; Leca, 2011). It owns the power to constitute tastes, tendencies, and preferences within the community; also, organizers have the power to form these biennials. Thus, as art critic Mick Wilson (2010) mentioned, relationships between practitioners, institutions, and audiences become reframed and reformulated via biennials.

Within this context, there is a paradox about the Istanbul Biennial, as the other world biennials have, whether it is a playground for neoliberal reinforcement

agendas, or it is a development platform for arts and culture. The desired brand of the city emerges from this agonistic relation of capitalism and art. Thus, in below two sections, we will interrogate these two contradictory elements to clarify the interrelations.

3.2 The Neoliberal Structure

In that part, we will examine concrete components of the biennial which constitute the event, including the culture industry, institutions, government (current politics), sponsors, curators, and artists. All of these elements ascribe a meaning to the biennial which is perceived by the audience directly or indirectly. Thus, the culture industry, institutions, government (current politics), sponsors, curators, and artists articulate something via the event of the biennial. To begin with, the cultural industry is needed to come out as a significant element of biennial culture which is dominated by a certain group: the state and the ruling class. We have to mention Adorno's writings here to depict the culture industry and its paradox with modern art. He compares high art with industrially produced consumer art as both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change, and both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up (Adorno, 1991). As he mentioned (1991), the culture industry has potentialities for promoting or blocking 'integral freedom'. However, these positive or negative potentialities for change are not naively or immediately available. For Adorno, as the Marxist theory proposes, it is an illusion that the capitalist powers of production are untied from capitalist relations of production to generate a free society. Capital does not own such emancipatory elements; the tendency of capitalist development is not towards freedom but further integration and domination. The culture industry, which consists of the production of works for reproduction and mass consumption, thereby manipulating 'free' time, keeps the domain of freedom under the principles of capital; exchange and equivalence. By doing that, it controls the sphere of production and represents the culture as a tool

for gratification, while in reality it reinforces the negative integration of society (Adorno, 1991).

The culture industry unifies many forms of production and compels them to obey the same rules of production as any other producer of commodities. Thus, cultural production becomes an integrated component of the capitalist economy. As all production is for the market, products are not generated for human needs and desires but serve for the sake of profit and further capital. Production for exchange, rather than use, is valuable for most economical forms. Thus, the culture industry directly interrelated with a dominated political system which is mainly neoliberal in today's world. Here, we have to examine the political influence on the biennial organization. Biennials are always embraced by neoliberal policies due to its perception as an 'intimation of global culture' (Papastergiadis & Martin, 2011). "Biennialization" is inevitably associated with the spectacle culture of neoliberalism, with state and corporate mix of sponsors who aim to enhance international tourism and gain straight on global trade (Baker, 2004). This is the differentiation of biennialization from "festivalization" in which art is not utilized for international commerce, politics, and power (Schjeldahl, 2015). When we look through the emergence of International Istanbul Biennial, it is also shown that we have to emphasize the liberalization period of Turkey to understand the roots of the uprising arts and cultural phenomenon. In the 1980s, Turkey was on a transition period of free-market economy parallel to the global conjuncture. Export-based economy limited the state's economic functions and encouraged private entrepreneurship (Öztürk Ötkünç, 2017). Before this period, Turkish policies were based on a closed economy and this situation affected either political and economic situation or cultural developments (Bozdoğan, Okur, 2017). All the aesthetic values were ignored because of the political mess. However, during the period of liberalization, the economic acceleration had to bring cultural innovations (Yılmaz, 2012:14). According to the gradual development plan economic, social, political and cultural aspects were considered as a whole, and the cultural plan was set to destroy geographical imbalance of citizens. As it was mentioned in Öztürk

Ötkünç's article (2017), these strategies, which are brought by neoliberal policies of the state, also led to the cultural liberalization period. Arts and culture were included by the network of consumption anymore. These transition policies evolved local events to international ones because Turkey was at the beginning of the integration process of Europe. In that sense, many institutions and galleries have been established according to the demands of both state and business. The biennials, as tools of progressive hegemonic politics, enabled intercultural exchange and pedagogies in the acceleratingly globalizing public sphere (Papastergiadis; Martin, 2011).

On the other hand, although almost every biennial is supported by states, it still is a unique platform to articulate counter-hegemonic narratives (Enwezor, 2010). Biennials are considered either as a 'cultural refinement of the new economic and political powers' (Stallabrass, 2004) or as platforms of resistance and democracy. This conflict revives already existed critiques of the culture (industry), commodification vs. resistance/emancipation (Sassatelli, 2017). It is a prominent question, asked by Green and Gardner (2016), that whether the biennials are the artistic playgrounds of neoliberal capitalism or they enable alternative, critical, even subtly subversive perspectives? For example, Fulya Erdemci, the curator of 13th Istanbul Biennial, gave the title as "Mom am I Barbarian?". 2013 was the year of Gezi protests, and the attitude of the government was harshly criticized by the biennial. Although there were many installations about current political conflicts, it is worth questioning the power of the state and the institution on the independence of these works. We will investigate this biennial in further chapters.

Another element of the biennial organization is the institutions and sponsors. As Charles Esche (2013) interpreted New Institutionalism as Experimental Institutionalism, the curators do not depend on artists, but they are expected to produce critical discourse through their institutional engagements (Möntmann, 2006; 2009). It is a sort of certain exhibition format which dominates contemporary biennials. This is called "biennial art" which blurs the division

between studio, gallery, and museum (Gardner&Green, 2016) to articulate one single message mostly defined by the political agenda of the institution. For the institutions, biennialization is a way to penetrate new commercial or cultural markets (Gardner&Green, 2016). As George Yudice (2003) has depicted, biennials and contemporary culture become a medium for contributing to the political and corporate interests of their sponsors. As Panos Kompatsiaris (2015, p. 241) mentioned;

The biennial is here seen as a valid political strategy within relatively stable social conditions, in which pacts between the state, the private sector, and the art institution can be justified, while it becomes ineffective when this condition breaks down.

As he also argues, the biennial inevitably turns into a façade in which the participants to arts and culture legitimizes an institution. This legitimization is the most effective way to gain power in the political structure. Since this legitimacy relates to the global brand-status, as Hlavajova (2010) notes, the biennial is an event owning a certain institutional power. Matei Bejenaru, the developer of a self-organized ingrained biennial initiative called Periferic in North-East Romania, explained the situation of third world city biennials as; “Through a focus on their locality and legitimizing themselves within contemporary art’s global system of validation and hierarchic differentiation” (van Hal, 2010, p. 22). Hence, the transformation of Istanbul via biennial culture should be evaluated in these senses. After the establishment of IKSŞ, cultural heritage of Istanbul came into prominence and utilized for international fame. From 2000, investment into Istanbul’s art infrastructure hit a peak (Polo, 2013). Many novel galleries and foundations are established such as Elgiz, Borusan, Pera, Istanbul Modern, Sakıp Sabancı Museum, ARTER, and SALT. Moreover, private universities opened programs in cultural and art management to enhance the professional knowledge of the culture industry and also to promote their economic interests (Molho, 2015). These are the places where the paradox of biennials occurs. Although they aim to create spaces for

activist and counter-hegemonic discourses of curators and artists, they are fully integrated into the mechanisms of global capitalism.

3.3 The Curators & Artists

Lastly, we will examine the situation of the curators and artists. As it was mentioned in previous chapters, the curator is regarded as the author of contemporary biennials. The curator might be regarded as a “recent reincarnation of the model of the independent intellectual” (Basualdo, 2010). The omnipresence of curators in contemporary art biennials leads them to be the cultural mediator of the “organization of emerging and open-ended cultural encounter, exchange, and enactment” (O’Neill&Wilson, 2010, p. 19). Regarding Paul O’neill’s (2007) critique, the curator positioned at the center of a broader stage to articulate desired messages in a creative and political way. The curator, as a maker, reframes the intention of the artist according to the ideological space of the exhibition (Gardner&Green, 2016). The emergence of contemporary curators is originated from Documenta 5 in which curators, rather than artists, would assume the roles of the primary decision-makers in this mega exhibition. Curators determine the context of biennials through their own nomination of themes interpreted through preferences and juxtapositions (Gardner&Green, 2016). As Charles Esche noted on the 3rd Athens Biennial (2010) that curators have to make crucial decisions to take actions; otherwise, it is impossible to achieve a balance between economic and cultural values. The criticality of contemporary biennials caused the emergence of superstar curators who have been legitimized by other institutions of the liberal state and civil society. These traveling curators matched with the goals of organizers to achieve social transformation (Kompatsiaris, 2015). As the social transformation gains importance in biennial culture, the curator is expected to control the exhibition process at all. This situation makes the curator act like the author of the exhibition in which there is a bunch of complicated balances between power relations, economic dependencies, and political agendas. Thus, as Kompatsiaris mentioned, the curator has to strategize, negotiate and compromise in order to achieve desired

goals. On the other hand, these curators still have a commitment to articulate counter-hegemonic discourses. As sociologist Tony Bennett mentioned in his text *The Exhibitionary Complex* (1995), although the function of contemporary exhibitions is to produce knowledge and power in terms of state's hegemonic position, curatorial practice produces anti-hegemonic aspirations in order to foster the variety of cultural and artistic production. As Mouffe (2007) theorizes, contemporary curators are dominated by two major ideas. The first is to challenge neoliberal hegemony by producing counter-hegemonic practice within existed institutions and the second is to reinvent artistic spaces of institutional art exhibitions as radical, agonistic and democratic platforms.

On the other hand, we can say that artists are less dependent on institutional boundaries than curatorial responsibilities. They are able to create more radical discourses within an averagely politicized institutional exhibition. Their counter-hegemonic narratives might be considered separate but mostly, in biennial practice, serves to the main message of the exhibition which is negotiated by the curator and the institution. Here a question arises; what is the significance of biennial for artist's practice? As contemporary art production considerably spread around the globe due to the world-shaking impact of particular international biennials, artists are offered to a sort of laboratory for experimental arts to participate, improve, disperse, decode and encode their ideas. Biennials reinforce the idea of contemporary art among society and are embraced by a more extensive group of the audience gradually (Gardner&Green, 2016). As Sassatelli (2017) expanded Bourdieu's suggest, biennials do not only add economic value to the final works of artists but also ascribe some meaning to work regarding the space it represented (Gell, 1996). Since the biennials arouse the interest of media, as well as broad participation, there is a competition between artists to represent themselves. However, this situation causes the rise of "popular" art among artists, which gives engagement more than enlightenment. This would be a further issue to discuss.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 A Western City with Oriental Details

We will examine the 1st (1987), 2nd (1989) and 3rd (1992) biennials together due to their common aspects and some outstanding differences. As we are going to see below, these three biennials are predominantly organized for the promotion of Istanbul and the country in the global arts and culture arena. Thus, they will be analyzed together with many similarities and differences between them and also their unique characteristics. To begin with, the major similarity between them is common Venetian nuances. The 1st and 2nd biennials use cult art pieces rather than a certain theme and the 3rd biennial uses the pavilion model which are main inspirations taken from Venice Biennial. Three of the exhibition catalogs have extracanonical shapes which are mainly designed for archival “design” books to impress the audience. While the 1st and 2nd biennial catalogs have the same proportions to emphasize the continuity, the 3rd catalog is much larger than the others and has apparent differences on the cover design which is the first clue of the alteration of curator and curatorial approach. The 1st and 2nd edition includes the name and logo of the institution and also the dates of the event. On the other hand, 3rd one just owns an abstraction of the number 3 on it and the name of the event on the near side, neither any institution nor the date included on the cover. The reason behind this is the positioning of the 3rd biennial which is exhibited in Feshane to announce the emergence of the expected “modern art museum” in Istanbul established by Nejat Eczacıbaşı. That is why the event itself has pushed aside in the exhibition catalog. It is mainly designed as a “book of international modern art museum”.

Although the proportional similarities of the 1st and 2nd editions, their graphic design language is oppositional. Whilst the first one has more serious, and monotone expression to probably solidify and dignify the event, the second edition

is tended to emphasize “artistic modernity” with clear lines and *De Stijl* associations with curly and domed – oriental – interpretation.



Figure 5.1.1 A caption from the 1st Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page



Figure 5.1.2 A caption from the 2nd Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page



Figure 5.1.3 A caption from the 3rd Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

When we look through the introductory pages, 1st and 2nd editions placed one of the Atatürk's quotes just on the beginning page. The citation mentions the significance of painting, sculpture, and science to become a developed nation.

*“Bir millet ki resim yapmaz,
bir millet ki heykel yapmaz,
bir millet ki fennin icap ettirdiği şeyleri yapmaz
itiraf etmeli ki
o milletin tarik-i terakkide yeri yoktur.”*

This is a myth in Turkish society to use the image of Atatürk as an expression of strict secularism. Thus, the institution and the state positioned the Istanbul Biennial as secular, which is the ideology of cultural hegemonic group in the country. In the beginning year of Istanbul Biennial, Nejat Eczacıbaşı (1987) explained the event as compensation of a missed opportunity to reach the level of the western art world. Regarding the quote of Necat Eczacıbaşı, it is definitely proved that biennial events evolved the Turkish art environment permanently. Also, there are similar introductory texts from Nejat Eczacıbaşı and Aydın Gün, the director of the 1st and 2nd biennials, who describes the mission of the event as international, global and multicultural. Interestingly, the English version of Nejat Eczacıbaşı's text has a significant difference from the Turkish one. English version involves the aims of the biennial in three bullet points which are mainly objected to the international importance of the biennial and also Istanbul as a metropole. The Turkish text of Nejat Eczacıbaşı compares Atatürk and Ottoman traditions to draw the picture of the future. The Ottoman and Islamic traditions are regretted by them as guilty of artistic underdevelopment. Aydın Gün particularly accuses Islamic tradition which prohibits the usage of figures because of idolater associations of them. According to him, the maintenance of tradition prevents development and transition. Thus, the symbolic value of the Ottoman and Islamic art is destroyed and the buildings as exhibition spaces remained as the only cultural value of them. Almost all the texts of organizers include the critique of the admiration of the past.

In that sense, Aydın Gün wrote an essay for the 2nd catalog in which the topic is “Penetrating Through the Darkness” which refers to Islamic tradition as darkness. As Sezer Tansuğ, the member of the consultant committee wrote his text from a western point of view with the critique of the east. He positioned the country, the city, and the biennial as neither western nor eastern but in between them, at the same time face to the west, facing away from “orient”. Thus, he also depicts Ottoman as traditional, Western as modern.

The discourses and structure of the 1st and 2nd biennial catalogs are almost the same because of the curatorial and managerial uniformity. Beral Madra coordinated – or curated – these two biennials and she highlights very similar opinions in her texts. She mentions Istanbul as the cultural capital which imports its artistic approach from Paris. According to her, Istanbul is coming up almost 150 years behind and has to close this gap by the light of these kinds of contemporary events. Within this context, she emphasizes the interest of the West through the East could be an advantage of Istanbul due to its geographical and cultural positioning. To say that, the branding of Istanbul remains a significant part of the text in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd biennial catalogs. Here, we can discuss different brand images of Istanbul in the 3rd edition. While the 1st and 2nd one features the cultural capital of Istanbul with outstanding Byzantine and Ottoman buildings, the 3rd edition ignores this heritage and focuses on its novel building – Feshane – as the emergence of “modern art museum”. Although Beral Madra, the coordinator (today the title might be interpreted as curator) of the first and the second biennial, emphasized the requirement of “modern art museum” in her texts, her exhibitions represented in various venues and buildings around Istanbul due to the lack of the proper exhibition space. Hence, she utilized historical buildings as a necessity and also as a brand identity of the city. However, the created image of Istanbul as a Western city with oriental ornaments is destroyed in the 3rd one, and completely westernized new building is embraced. Moreover, the structure of the exhibition and accordingly the exhibition catalog is changed as the buildings. The representation of cultural identity is shifted according to the point of view of the

management team. As the exhibition catalog represents, the 3rd biennial inspired by Venetian pavilion model in which every country has its own section to represent their selected artworks under one roof. Accordingly, the juxtaposition of the artworks is determined by the alphabetic order of the participant countries. That is why the Turkish artists' works and the curator of the third biennial Vasif Kortun's text placed at the end of the catalog. This is an interesting point because even he was described as the curator of the event, as we see in the catalog every country has its own curator to manage their pavilion. The multinational structure of this version of biennial might be correlated with some particular cultural developments of its period. The year of the 3rd biennial is pointing out the emergence of TRT International and TRT Avrasya which are the extensions of the national TV channel of Turkey for international audiences. Also, when we look through the news of that period it was the year of some international courtesy visits of prime ministers from France and Bulgaria. Thus, it is possible to match the super multinational structure of the 3rd biennial with the state's cultural development strategies of this period. Due to this multinational frame, the catalog involves disconnected and incompatible texts from various countries. Every country set their own theme to tell its own story which is not related to Istanbul and also the event itself. The catalog seems like a museum book that involves many different exhibitions under one roof rather than an event book. Otherwise, the 1st and 2nd editions are more likely event catalogs, but, without and proper navigation and theme. We can assume that the complicated structure of the catalog represents the confusion of the team who organizes the biennial. Since there are many places and artworks mentioned in the catalogs, there is no particular path to follow. Many names and works are included "spontaneously" just to prove the evolution of arts and culture in Turkey. Within this context, there are many pages at the end of the catalogs which represent the collections of prominent families – the ruling class- and galleries. It seems like the promotion of all the components of the culture industry. The ruling class has always wanted to create a cultural dominance to reinforce their ideological power. As Theodor Adorno describes in the concept of cultural industry, what is reproduced are not products, but people, who are just like counterfeits (Adorno & Horkheimer,

1944). Furthermore, each of the three catalogs also involves a section of thanks for top government officials including Kenan Evren known as a despot leader of the Turkish government. It is the reflection of the relationship between state and institution to organize such an organization. Although Kenan Evren is a symbol of strict military forces, the event is needed to thank him for strengthening the relations and make sure the possible budget support for further years of the event. No matter is the subject; it is obviously shown that the institution has to enhance government relations to take business opportunities. Besides political, curatorial and institutional discourses, we need to examine the representation of artists in three catalogs. Although there are some structural reasons, foreigner artists replaced at the beginning of all three catalogs. In the first one, the narrative of the catalog starts with Aya Irini in which international artists represented their works. As Sezer Tansuğ mentioned, they have the toughest task about the installation of their works in the spatial difficulties of the building. He also mentioned them as “cognoscenti” to figure out such a difficulty. These artists mainly aimed to create contrasts by using the historical building as a background for mainly very clean-finished artworks. In general, we are able to read foreigner artists’ works more political rather than local ones, with a few exceptions. There are many pages shared for the artistic biography of artists predominantly foreigner ones. Particularly in the 3rd edition, many other countries participated in the event and curated their own exhibition as we read above. Also, they write their own texts without any consistency between them. While some of them raise some questions about art in general, some of the others narrate their own stories such as Israel and Bulgaria. They nominate their artists to reflect socio-political issues in their own country, and most of them related their content with neither Istanbul nor biennial. That is because of the disconnection led by non-themed structure.

5.2 A Beautiful City as a Living Organism

The first three biennials create a canvas and frame for the concept of Istanbul Biennial and mainly interested in the positioning of Istanbul in the international platforms with its historical beauties and unique character. Following biennials are meant to draw desired images on this canvas. When we consider these five biennials, they are in a flow that passes through local and global problems. Although they have many similarities, it is better to examine them separately to get the meaning of the juxtaposition. The main common ground for these five biennials is the steady corporate identity and sponsor models of IKSv. Different from the previous ones, these catalogs have a consistent structure, language and -obviously- financial model. Also, Şakir Eczacıbaşı became the chairman of the IKSv from the 4th Istanbul Biennial till the 12th one, and he wrote a preface almost for each biennial. Due to his more artistic, less business-oriented background; global subjects, world-star curators, well-known artists, and novel modern buildings are involved in the biennial and the reputation of the following biennials are accelerated through these years.

The 4th Istanbul Biennial (1995) is launched with a theme named ORIENT/ATION The Vision of Art in a Paradoxical World. As it is represented on the cover of the catalog, the direction of Istanbul is not matched up with existed directions. From the beginning, the East-West and Local-International dialectic were pronounced. The biennial was positioned and promoted as a bridge between East and West, using the unique position of Istanbul. However, this biennial represents Istanbul as a unique place that belongs to neither the East nor the West. The illustration also questions the notion of direction. Thus, we expect to see the East and West conflict of Istanbul in upcoming sections.

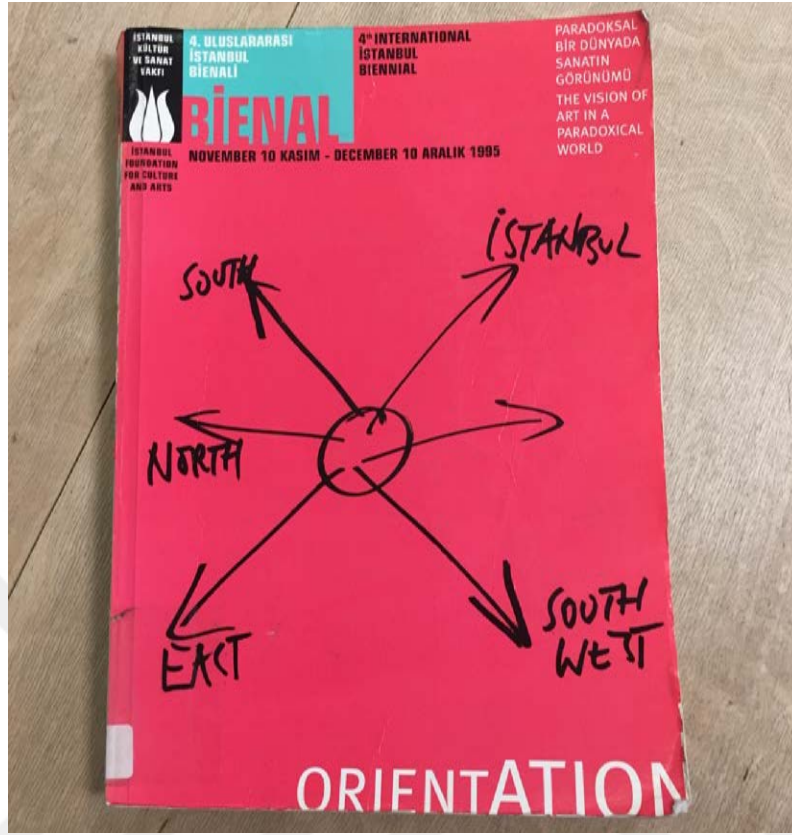


Figure 5.2.1 A capture from the 4th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

At the very beginning, the text of the Şakir Eczacıbaşı, he emphasizes the importance of sponsors to maintain the biennial organization. In another perspective, the text clarifies us about the importance of Istanbul Biennial for institutions and businesses. After that, the short history of IKSŞV highlights the long-standing background of the foundation from the beginning of the Istanbul Festival, 1973. As it is obviously shown on the increasing number of sponsors, this steady image of the foundation encourages the sponsors to rely on the quality of the event. The introduction pages are allocated for sponsors and vote of thanks, so the financial concerns bring these supporters to the forefront of the event. As the curator, René Block, also emphasizes the limitation of financial facilities to invite a huge range of artists from all around the world. It is interesting because the financial situation of the event does not utter by curators in general.

The text of René Block consists of an interview, not an aforesought article. According to him, as the root of the word orientation comes from “orient”, the root of everything comes from the orient. Among his speech, although there is not a clear definition, his perception of Istanbul seems like as it is oriental. Since he is the first foreigner curator of the event, biennial enables him to reinterpret the identity of the city from “a western point of view”. He describes Istanbul as a center of reconciliation and dialogue due to its geopolitical positioning. Within this context, he underlines the importance of invitation of young, new generation, multinational and multicultural artists from all around the world to enhance the ingredients of the dialogue. Hence, the conceptual framework of the biennial events enables young artists and curators to represent themselves on the international art scene (Bozdoğan&Okur, 2017). He also refuses the Venetian pavilion model, which is implied in previous Istanbul Biennial, due to its non-progressive structure. As he declares, alternative biennials such as Istanbul, Sao Paulo, Havana, etc. will create a novel platform for multinational dialogue by their laboratory features. At that point it would be fair to say on the 4th biennial, the model evolved into Southern category and drifted apart from Venetian muse. Due to the significance of global problems rather than local ones, these alternative platforms are supposed to function well in a global perspective. Although he mentioned these global concerns, for him Istanbul Biennial has to be for the sake of the city itself. Thus, the artists, particularly women, from Istanbul and its periphery are the focus of the event due to their solid relations with exhibition spaces. The artworks of the Turkish artists and also Middle Eastern artists, who live in exile, are aimed to be represented under equal conditions with western artists for the first time. This is also an expression of the eastern perception of the city by the curator. Lastly, he explains the selection of Antrepo as an exhibition space. On previous biennials, the interpretation of historical places with contemporary exhibitions and proposed notions, artists, selective committees, curators (Kaya Okan, 2012) made marks on the novel brand of Istanbul. However, they are not as sustainable as the developing contemporary art platform. Thus, Antrepo, as an old building, has a story behind – a social story rather than a historical one - and has a magnificent location. Its areas of loading –

when they are turned into glass windows - directly open to the Bosphorus and these huge glasses bring life into space. The decentralized character of the building allows visitors to explore more and matches the theme of biennial.

When we look through the text of Fulya Erdemci, the director of the biennial, she also uses decentralization emphasis. She refuses the east, west, south, and north for the cultural identities. However, although they both refuse the context of direction and centralization accordingly, they utilize these notions very much in their texts. Thus, the reader is confused about whether we regret them or accept them. Although the theme proposes a novel discourse; this biennial still continues to carry previous concerns. After pages of texts, which mainly argues the east and west situation in many dimensions, we see the representation of artworks in the following pages. The opening page belongs to Fluxus, the star artists of the exhibition, without any particular texts to define their works. The juxtaposition of artworks and their layout seem inconsistent. Whilst some of the artworks and artists are depicted in detail, some of the others are just a combination of photos, quotations, and names. Thus, it is hard to connect the artworks with the theme. It is more likely a collection of outstanding postmodern artworks. The ones with explanatory texts highlight the concept of “dialogue”. Also, the production-consumption conflicts are another prominent subject of the biennial, but we cannot consider them as “political” discourses. Since production and consumption are the matter of every layer of the society, governments and institutions let society to talk about them under control. It is not an offensive discourse, it makes the public to feel “politic” enough. Another thing to mention is the decrease in oil on canvas works. Performances, video installations, and sculptures are predominant works of the biennial, we can say that it is a transition point for the biennial from modern to postmodern.

After very long discussions of the 4th Istanbul Biennial about East and West conflict of the city, here the subject turns into the city itself as a living mechanism. The cover of the 5th Istanbul Biennial (1997) expresses the practical feature of the

Bosporus. Two ships pass through each other in opposite directions. Istanbul is a living mechanism as a single-center which opens to many directions, it does not have any particular direction. Also, the name of the biennial reflects the daily life of the city without any directional concerns. Istanbul has good things and bad things, but it is a unique mechanism.

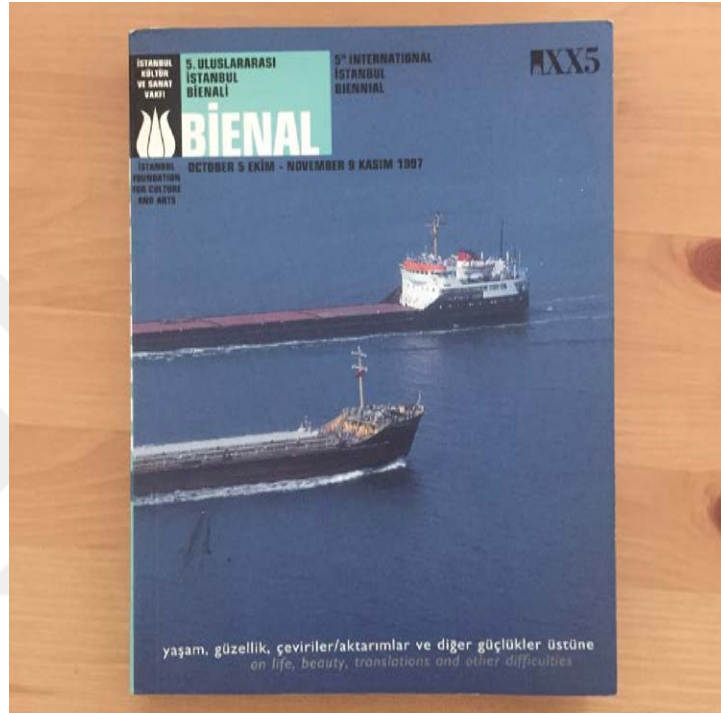


Figure 5.2.2 A capture from the 5th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

As Şakir Eczacıbaşı mentions in the opening text, Istanbul is a multicultural city which continuously alters and transforms. Although the city has chronic issues, it brings hope to its residents. He articulates the functional issues of the city and does not argue the global position of it. Also, Fulya Erdemci describes the city as chaotic, multilayered, polyphonic and full of conflicts. She emphasizes the necessity to examine the political realities within the daily functions of the city. As they articulated, Istanbul represents a passion, not any of the directions. Introductory pages also have photos of the city and the work of an artist throwing stones to the Bosphorus from the Asian side to the European side. The conflicts of the city are evaluated with the figures of the city itself. Also, another work from introductory pages argues the Europeanness and Asianness by the works named

“Europeanizer” and “Asianizer” as tools of industry. They bring us to one main idea, the creation of “true Istanbulities” without any directional separation.



Figure 5.2.3 A capture from the 5th Istanbul Biennial catalog – Europeanizer, Asianizer

The biennial focuses on the reformulation of the citizen, culture, and other ingredients which gives the city its essence. The curator expresses the theme as warm and humanistic, rather than politically correct. As the previous one suggested, this biennial also refuses the conventional pavilion model, the exhibition spaces spread through the city with a consistent theme. Outdoor executions such as excessive usage of billboards and video installation in Taksim Square bring the biennial in the middle of the city.

Moreover, the airport and railway stations are utilized as the “doors of the city” which give a conventional attribute to the city as “home”. Also, the usage of

Maiden's Tower as a metaphor, which represents to be in between everything, but not to be a center of anything, rejects the directional limitations. As it is examined, the selection of spaces is completely intentional to create poetic metaphors. The curator, Rosa Martinez, also has a poetic language rather than an academical one to reinforce a naive approach to the city. The storification of the theme reinforced by the usage of particular narratives such as the cavemen in the myth of Plato's *The Republic*, the island of sirens in *Odysseus* story, Edgar Allen Poe's "a descent into the maelstrom". These narratives enrich the humanistic and individualistic point of view. Human-focused narratives maintained through the representation of selected artworks. The representation of artists emphasizes the significance of individuality and originality by giving them separate pages to express themselves. Artists examine crucial points of the city's daily life in their own perspectives. Although the beauties of the city or new material proposals for functional usage of the city are expressed, gender equality emerges as the predominant issue throughout the artworks. This sub-theme is approached under many critical points; the identity of women in art, female circumcision, the perception of woman body, lesbian relationships, the perception of Muslim females among Muslim males, virginity, and patriarchy. For sure, that was not a coincidence. The curator intended to let the gender issue to be discussed more by the utilization of the Women's Library and Information Center as an exhibition space and the participation of an increased number of woman artists. As gender equality is one of the major problems in the daily life of the city, these critical issues are not only represented as art pieces and also found a platform to be discussed in detail. Within this context, we see the integration of panels to the biennial program which transforms the structure of it into a "discursive" model. Many attractive performances, workshops, conferences and movie screenings transformed traditional exhibition style into "festivalism" a supra-disciplinary approach.

The 6th Istanbul Biennial (1999) keeps the theme in the city of Istanbul as a specific mechanism and focuses on the emotions in the city rather than the function of it. The event organized right after the devastating earthquake which resulted in

the loss of thousands of people's lives. As Şakir Eczacıbaşı explained the reason not to cancel the biennial organization after the earthquake as the necessity of solidarity and the support of art for humanity. The theme of the biennial is "the passion and wave" which derives from the common ground of Greek and Turkish cultures. "Dalga" means wave in Turkish, and "Dalgas" means passion in the Greek language. As a Greek singer uses the nickname Dalgas and he sings songs about his love of Istanbul, the story of this singer brings two notions together and creates the theme of the Biennial. The myth here is the utilization of Greek history in the biennial theme. The Greeks are called our "brothers and sisters" for the secular part of Turkish society due to shared cultural values. On the other hand, for the nationalist side, Greeks are enemies from the Turkish war of independence. Thus, the story behind the biennial theme targets a particular group of audiences with this myth. However, the figure of Tulip also depicted as a flower of passion which is adopted by Ottoman culture and also used by IKSVM as a logo that expresses the passion of arts and culture. That is another point that might get the sympathy of the nationalist part of society. On the other hand, when we dig into the politics of the period, this was the year of the normalization of the relationship between Greek and Turkish government after the big crisis on islets of Imia/Kardak in 1996. Two nations were on the brink of war because of the undetermined sovereignty over a number of small islets in the Aegean Sea (İnan&Başeren, 1997; Yavuz, 2003). After the years of crisis, two nation came together to break the tension under the leadership of İsmail Cem and Yorgos Papandreou who are the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of this period in 1999. The relations of the two countries evolved into a more "human-centric" one from territory focused one. Two nations supported each other in many dimensions. After the devastating earthquake, the environment of solidarity produced leaves and Greece gave full support for the membership of Turkey to the EU (Yağcıoğlu, 2009). Hence, the theme of this biennial might be interpreted as a gesture of goodwill from Turkey to Greece also to bring normalization within the public atmosphere. Under these aims, the structure of the biennial constituted with the combination of individual stories to highlight the common ground of Greek and Turkish citizens without political conflicts between

countries over the years. As it is mentioned in a text, the biennial invites the audience to “allow themselves a huge ride on the waves of passion this great city inspires”. When we look through the cover of the catalog, there is a representation of an underwater scene in which there cannot be any wave. Underwater might be interpreted as a representation of daily life without any waves; without any passion.

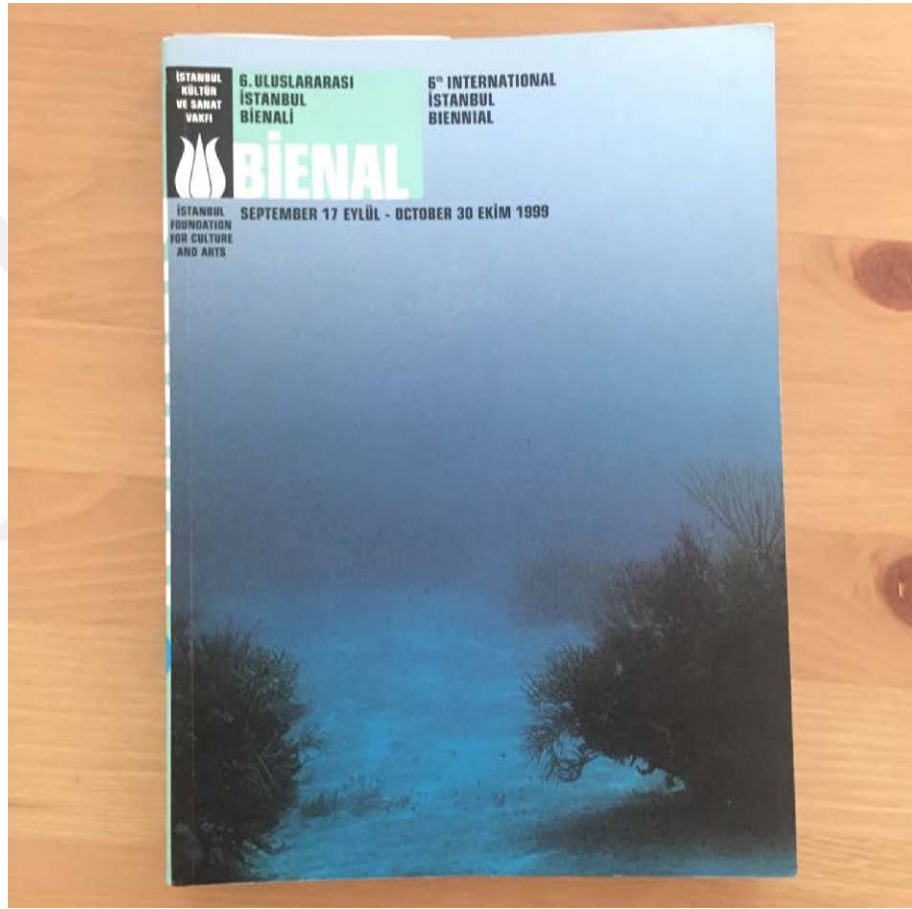


Figure 5.2.4 A capture from the 6th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

Since the structure of biennial based on individual narratives, the artworks are expected to tell micro-stories. As Fulya Erdemci mentions, the biennial proposes many relational approaches. Holistic narratives about history and geography of previous biennials are replaced by individualistic approaches in relation to artists' perception of life. The artists altered their works of art from the ones produced in corporate platforms to the ones analyzed and executed

individually with senses and sensitivity. The significance of political agendas seems to be replaced by individual narratives in the globalized world. The curator selected a poetic description of Istanbul, which represents the city as a capital embellished by cottages, gardens, and people living in there. Due to the domination of individual stories, biennial places are limited compared to the previous one. The histories of exhibition spaces are also shortened and kept in distance. The artists are objectified instead of places. They are not subject to this biennial, they are objects of it with long texts and descriptions about them. Their ages, places of birth, and places to live are represented as they are artworks. There is not a story of the city anymore, there are people's stories to fill the canvas of the city.

The 7th Istanbul Biennial (2001) narrows the subject down a little bit more and focuses on the inner world of individuals. The name of the biennial, EGOFUGAL - fugue from the ego for the next emergency, is generated by the curator Yuko Hasegawa. In her very long text, written in a very academic structure, the word "egofugal" is the combination of ego (self) and fugal (to escape). She questions the possibility of existence while diffusing away from ego. The notion addresses a novel model for the concept of the relation between the individuals and the collective entity. Egofugality proposes new relations between self and others, the individual and the collective, and the individual and space. According to the curator, egofugality maintains diversity among society. Both Şakir Eczacıbaşı and Yuko Hasegawa emphasize the significance of global problems rather than local issues and attribute global character to the Istanbul Biennial. The essay of the curator contains many samples from exhibited artworks which proves the very intentional selection of the works depended on the theme. Also, the cover of the catalog has nothing about Istanbul, it is a supplementary image of the theme; three floating bodies might be interpreted as ego-superego-id. The expression of inner worlds is the major message of the theme.

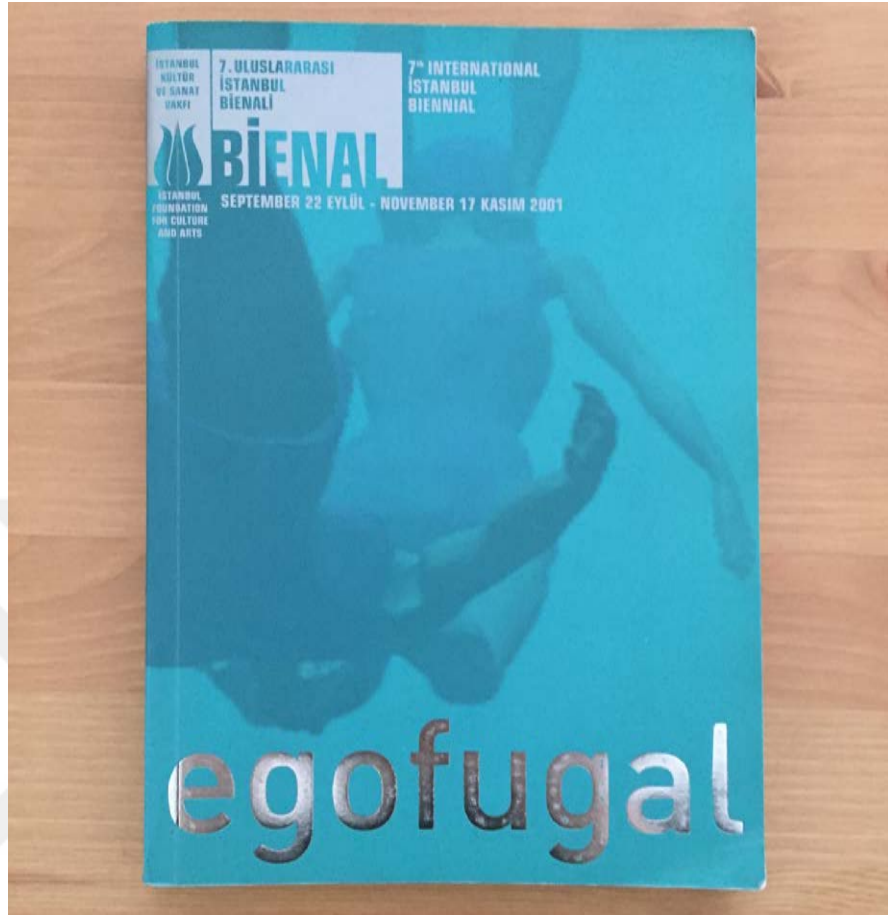


Figure 5.2.5 A capture from the 4th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

The artist and also her/his inner world become an object rather than a subject. The boundaries between audience and artists are also blurred and audiences are also transformed into objects of the exhibition in which the usage of Virtual Reality and participatory installations are enhanced. The relationship between the art, artist, and audience needed to be redefined. Moreover, all the exhibition persists on the necessity of reformulation of all kinds of individual relationships including currently emerged concepts; cyberspace, robotics, artificial intelligence, collective consciousness, interactive networks so on. In this sense, the text of Şakir Eczacıbaşı also underlines the significance of technology-oriented future. Although this is the peak year of the economic crisis, the theme has nothing to say about this critical situation. The only thing about the economy is the thanks of Şakir Eczacıbaşı for the sponsors. Art is not involved in socio-economic problems and kept the distance.

Artworks and texts based on the narration of Istanbul are very limited. Most of the works question the relation between, human and nature, human and technology, self and others, art and life, traditional objects and novel meanings, precious and ordinary, public and public space, boundaries and enriched cultures so on. The intersection of various disciplines, such as fashion, architecture, and sciences, enables these interrogations. Novel materials and technologies are preferred for video art and performance art. The performance changes its subject and object. Individuals create their own construction to interpret all of these relations. Since the artists interpret the exhibition space according to their imagination, the historical narratives of spaces are diminished. While there are many layers to relate, some of the artists also create virtual personalities to express their questionings. Within this context, the biennial environment completely shifted into a laboratory for singular investigations to create collective impacts. The last pages involve structured free spaces for artists to express who they are. Although these pages are structured, the artists are enabled to fill these spaces according to their demands. This might be interpreted as the summary of the 7th biennial; it lets the artists reflect their individual opinions, but in a structure determined by the institution. This can be called as freedom under corporate limitations.



Figure 5.2.6 A capture from the 7th Istanbul Biennial catalog – free spaces for artists to express who they are

After the drawing of people in detail to the metaphoric canvas that we create for the juxtaposition of Istanbul Biennials, the theme of the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003) is determined as “Poetic Justice” which brings some motion to the drawn figures of the canvas. “Poetic Justice” defines the relations of drawn figures and attributes them “discursive” personalities rather than an introvert character who examined binary relationships with her/his and outer world. Before the analysis of the catalog, we need to examine the name of the biennial and unfold the possible reasons behind the selection of the word “justice”. 2003 was the first biennial after the attacks of September 11th (2001), the Afghanistan War of the USA (2001), the selection of AKP (Justice and Development Party) (2002), the Iraq War of the USA (2003). Thus, the “hit” word of the year might be considered as “justice” all around the globe. At that point it would not be wrong to say that this version of the biennial was based on this political and social mess of the year; it also questioned the most crucial word of the year. As we see just on the opening page, the names of curator and artists are replaced at the forefront. As the curator, Dan Cameron defines the substance of subjects rather than objects is the approach of the biennial to create collective conscious for global problems. As Şakir Eczacıbaşı mentions on his text, the outstanding issue of the globe is the injustice which is caused by unbalanced income models of global capitalist systems. This problem is for everyone and needed to be questioned by everyone to figure it out. His text proposes many open-ended questions from a global perspective -more specifically peripheral perspective- rather than Istanbul-focused one. The artworks dwell on life without substantial classifications, and the artists aim to emphasize inequality by creating a collective narrative. The “poetic” adjective minimizes the political risks of the theme. Although the catalog articulates multiple messages under the theme of injustice, it keeps them in a poetic point of view to bring the attention of people from all strata. There are many poems used in between the texts and images to keep the subject calm and quite melancholic.



Figure 5.2.7 A capture from the 8th Istanbul Biennial catalog – poetic inserts

The curator's essay consists of the examination of outstanding global issues; the critique of the free-market economy and the Iraq war of the USA which enables the questioning of "justice for whom". He raises many questions about the USA issue which brings all the society against it. The USA is a common object to hate particularly for Turkish people. To say that, the theme targets everyone including institutions and states. He asks open-ended questions about the possibilities of justice without a nation, religion, and gender discriminations. Also, he proposes global citizenship to highlight invisible connections between each one of us. The only common ground of humanity is just "being human" beyond the discriminations of nation, religion, and gender. He combines poems and justice to prove the power of art on global issues. A proper dialogue is the only way to articulate a collective discourse to minimize cultural and geographical distances. According to his essay, art is a tool for awareness and its socio-political impact cannot be underrated. Since the rise of human rights abuses occurred during the period of cold wars, artists from all around the world are more responsible to articulate ignored realities. However, as he claims, the non-western artists have to be evaluated with non-western perspectives to perceive the realities of oppressed societies. This version of biennial articulates the fundamental need of justice for

everyone, and “so”, this version reaches maximum sponsor numbers. The claim of justice is always embraced by oppressed and oppressors, socialists, and capitalists, poor and rich so on. It is a symbolic value of the modern world.

5.3 A City Open for Criticism

Although there have been some political initiatives on some of the previous Istanbul Biennials, Istanbul has always been pictured as the city of charm. After the 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005), we have seen the harsh criticism on the city for the first time. This version of the biennial might be considered as a milestone for the politicization of contemporary Turkish art in the international context, and it is the beginning of acceptance of the problems of the city. The theme of this biennial is identified as “Istanbul”. The cover reflects an unplanned urbanization part of Istanbul rather than the beauties of the city, and also the name of the foundation is not placed on the cover page for the first time.

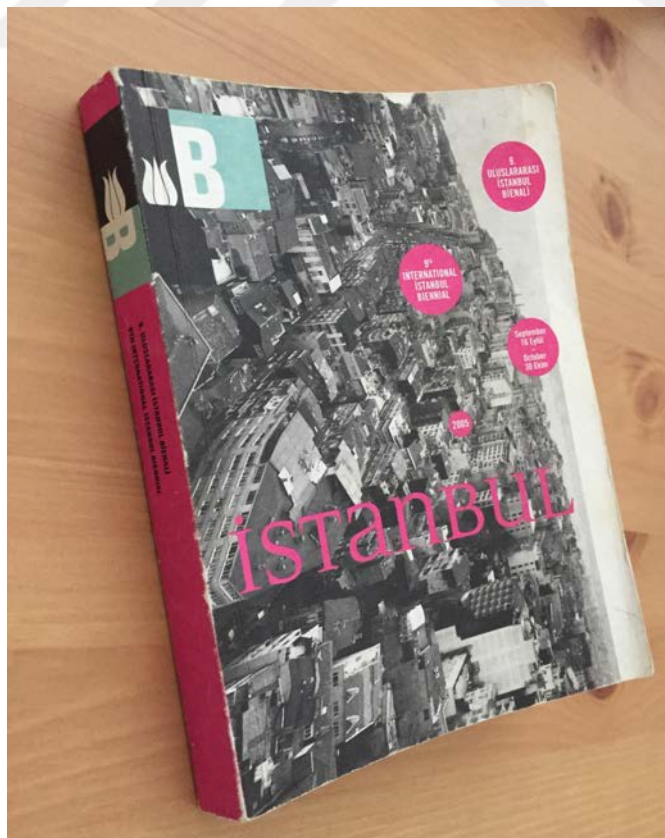


Figure 5.3.1 A capture from the 9th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

The photo on one of the introductory pages has a significant narrative behind that drives bilateral faces of the city; it combines ups and downs, subculture and superior culture, slum and high street. While the upper road of the photo goes through the historical and affluent street, the downward connects with embroiled side. This photo is associated with the essence of the city; the coherence between various cultures and manner of lives.



Figure 5.3.2 A capture from the 9th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The photo on one of the introductory pages.

The structure of the catalog is quite humble and consists of black and white mid-quality papers. The other thing to highlight is the lack of Şakir Eczacıbaşı's text; we can interrelate it with the political character of the biennial and business role of him. Although he supports the theme, he avoids praising it against current politics. Also, after a long while, a Turkish curator Vasıf Kortun is assigned for the biennial together with Charles Esche. Vasıf Kortun – probably- enables local and relatively underground political discourse. The selection of exhibition spaces shed light on the particularities of the city by using modern living spaces and working environments rather than dramatic and historical locations. The biennial does not mask the realities of the city; on the contrary, it highlights them. The conflicts of the city are unfolded, and it represents “the Istanbul of the Republic” and “the Istanbul full of arabesque”. Although these conflicted groups are living together, invisible walls are built between them (Koçak&Koçak, 2014). There is one other Istanbul in which its own citizens are just “living”, but real life is not in the showcase of the city. The essays do not directly manifest a political message, but the works are focusing on outstanding policies of current states which results in social segregation. The power relations on social, cultural and economic capital cause cursory urbanization and gentrification which eliminates the historical context of the city. Those were the years of the acceleration of particular construction companies such as TOKİ and Ağaoğlu which builds hundreds of “modern building complexes” in the protected areas of the city. These companies caused irreversible damages to forests and “beauties” of the city by the permission and support of the current government. Also, these policies destroyed the unique historical appearance of the city by doing traumatic architectural disorders. Moreover, the city got chronic problems which cause inconsistency between the real life and the showcase due to unrestrained gentrification projects of the government and its companions. In that sense, an example used by biennial is the contradiction of the positioning of Istiklal Street. The street is full of consulates, art, and cultural centers, banks, and bookshops for the visitors, but there is a real life there in which a violent history of capital, leisure, prostitution, and clandestine activities occur. Also, it is the stubborn endurance of the Saturday Mothers. This

biennial brings light on these realities and shows undesirable layers of the city and questions where the fact ends, and the spectacle begins. The more the biennial resonates with Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry, the more it reflects Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) Another point criticized by the biennial is that, in spite of multiple terror attacks, the city never gets a substantial measure of safety, it is only covered by safety embellishments made for the beauty of the city for its audiences. The catalog emphasizes the common issues of the city that has never been questioned and always delayed. The interesting thing about this narrative is the thanks section which involves the owners of criticized policies.

The 10th Istanbul Biennial (2007) is one of the most discursive biennials regarding its enriched texts and involved disciplines. It is the first biennial sponsored by Koç Holding one of the biggest companies in Turkey. The cover page is differentiated from previous ones with fitted corporate identity, and it holds the abbreviation of IKSIV for the first time.



Figure 5.3.3 A capture from the 10th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

While Şakir Eczacıbaşı wrote the historical process of the nation from Ottoman Empire till the contemporary evolution in current years, the curator, Hou Hanru, mentions the recent era of Turkish Republic and compares the current situation with global trends. The curator criticizes the top-down modernization reforms of the republic period which leads to chaos in the middle term. It is the first time we see criticism on a republican approach which is the first sign of resistance against existed cultural hegemony. Both Şakir Eczacıbaşı's and Hou Hanru's speeches complete each other to draw a general frame and reinforce the upcoming ideas. Both of them evaluates the urbanization impact of globalization among all nations, particularly the developing ones. The cities as Istanbul allowed an enormous number of immigrants and expanded unrestrainedly due to neoliberal policies. The rise of squatting, industrialization and also the price of the land caused unbalanced and irregular urbanization. As the previous biennial discusses the same topic, this biennial also criticizes the current gentrification and related policies of states. One of the introductory photos summarizes the issue as it is a historical and neglected building that holds one of the biennial posters.

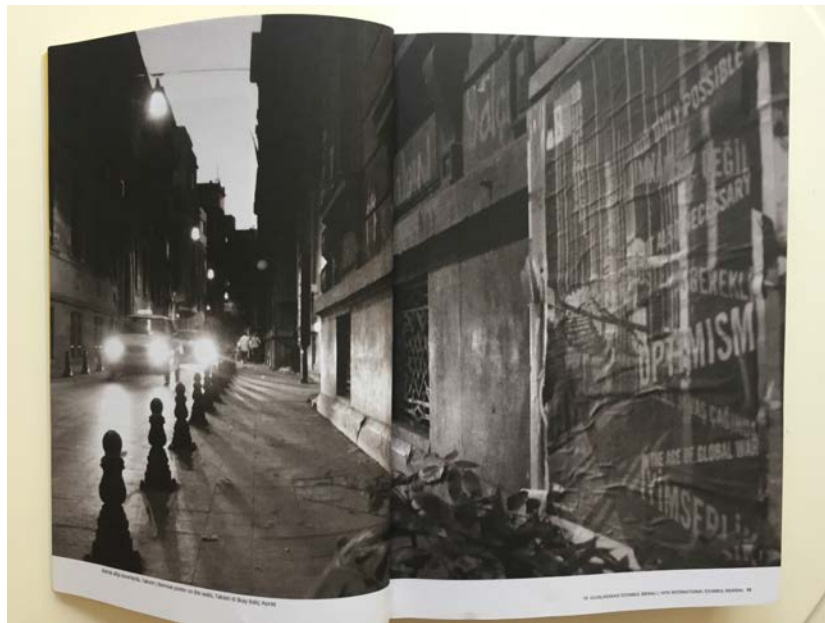


Figure 5.3.4 A capture from the 10th Istanbul Biennial catalog – historical and neglected building with a biennial poster

This biennial investigates the significant impacts of globalization on social, cultural, architectural and artistic fields rather than an economic one. This version of the biennial reinterprets the modern dynamism with utopian idealism and produces political critiques accordingly. Thus, the context of space is in the foreground of the exhibition, as we see all selected locations in personalized subthemes. Almost all the exhibition spaces are selected and interpreted for the first time. There are many articles and interviews about each of every space which has the cultural and historical background to depict. The curator spots light on the potential of the biennials of developing countries; Istanbul biennial is always connected with urban reality. This is the reason to spread the biennial among the city rather than particular locations. Although this biennial seems apart from political discourse in the first sight, the exposition of space might be understood as a criticism of current politics. As he mentions in the catalog “architecture has always been closely related to political projects”. The biennial opens a discussion about the alternative methods of urbanization. Hence, it is essential to describe the selected exhibition spaces to have a better idea of the desired articulation. Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM) is the primary place of cultural and political ceremonial events and performances of the city. Its archetypical socio-modernist appearance enables it to become a perfect symbol of the progressive vision of the Turkish Republic which is a secular and modern nation-state guided by Ataturk’s political power. On the other hand, the building is endangered by populist political power which causes many protests and discussions about. The building is a symbol of resistance against dominant forces which enforces new urbanity and social order. AKM is a political myth that represents the secular part of the society, and it is objectified by political debates of the current government.

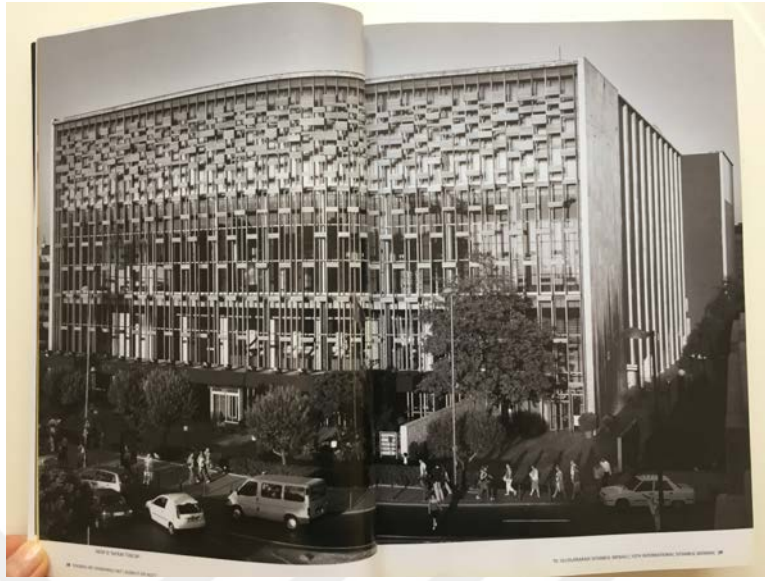


Figure 5.3.5 A capture from 10th Istanbul Biennial book – Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM)

Not only AKM but also Taksim square is identified as a scene for social mobilization. Thus, the biennial argues the reasons behind the decision of demolishing via the AKM myth, and it questions the relationship between mega construction projects and society. Interestingly, the following interview, with Murat Tabanlıoğlu, evaluates the historical background and construction details of the building which is designed by his father. Murat Tabanlıoğlu criticizes bureaucratic relationships based on the self-interest of the current government, but probably he did not know that he will be the upcoming constructor of the novel building which is a conflicted irony. The other building used as exhibition space is Istanbul Manufacturers Bazaar (İMÇ). It is also another masterpiece of modern Turkish architecture, and it has an original architecture which relates the building and surrounding urban conditions. However, it is in danger of demolition due to its recent dystopic character rather than a modern utopia.

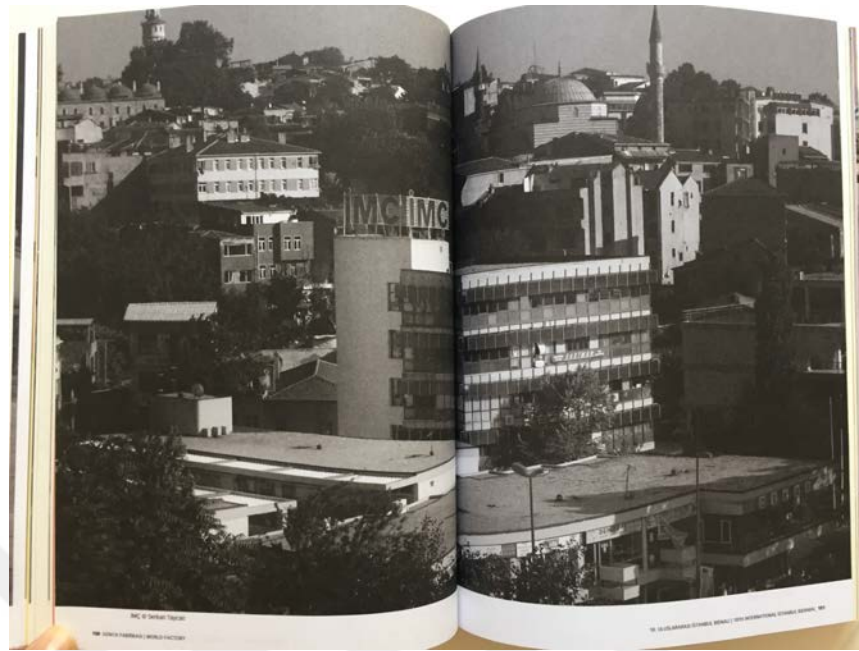


Figure 5.3.6 A capture from the 10th Istanbul Biennial catalog – Istanbul Manufacturers Bazaar (IMÇ)

The represented artworks here directly related to the characteristics of space. Many local and individual narratives, predominantly about the right of labor, oppressed and marginalized groups, are exhibited to associate the building as a unique living mechanism. These two buildings are considered as a symbol of resistance of modern Turkey. The other exhibition space is Antrepo 3 which is an exhibition space of Istanbul Modern Museum established in 2004. The major goal of the museum is to bring life into the middle of urban life. Thus, various experimental artworks and performances under the main theme are represented here to reinforce the laboratory identity of the museum. Apart from limited works that interpret urban space, the rest of the works are entirely irrelevant from substantial political discourse. In addition to these places, there was a supplementary project (Nightcomers mobile cinema project) spread through the 25 different districts of the city which consolidates the main claim of the biennial. The first aim of the project is to ensure that people, who are living in areas without access to high culture, have direct access to contemporary art. The second aim is to dive into the everyday life of the complex and dynamic metropolis. When we consider all of

these projects and public education sessions of the biennial, it is targeting the broadest range of audiences and enriching the discursive approach in a democratic and inclusionary way.

The 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009) is one of the most political ones. The chosen clear-cut font, colors and shapes of the figures might be associated with the leftist approach.

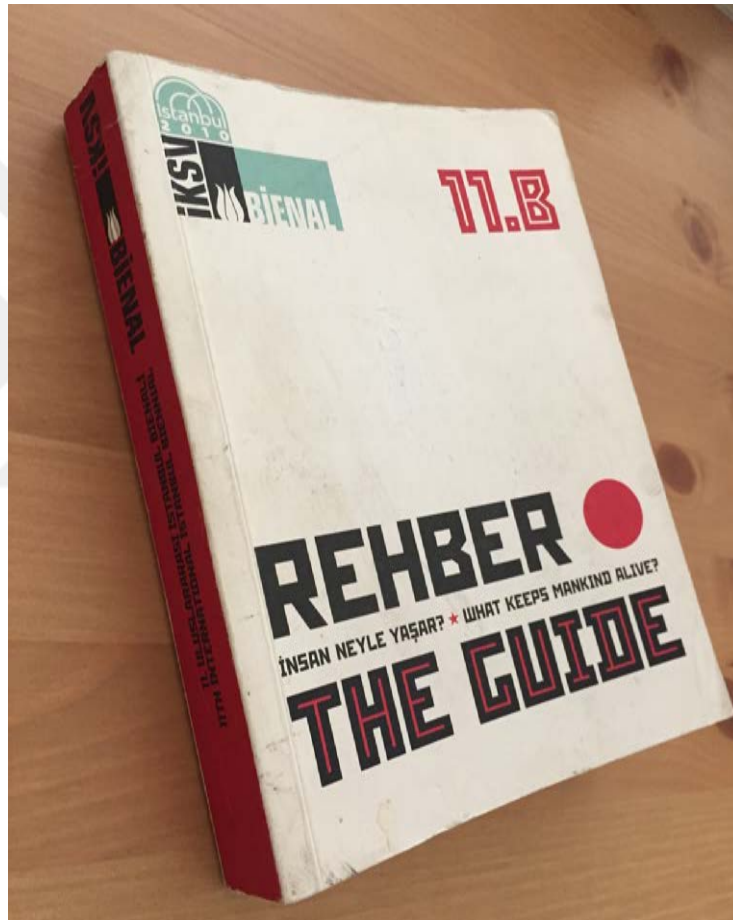


Figure 5.3.7 A capture from the 11th Istanbul Biennial catalog– The cover page

While only the names are written on the list of the artists, there is “Political posters of Lebanon’s civil war” explanation in the middle of pages to take the attention of the reader.



Figure 5.3.8 A capture from the 11th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The list of the artists

The theme of the exhibition, “What keeps mankind alive?” is brought from Bertolt Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* which criticizes the process of the redistribution of the commodity within bourgeois society and spots light on capitalist ideology. It is the most apparent confrontation regarding current politics and leftist ideology on an Istanbul Biennial. The selection of curator also reflects the approach; it is the first time on the biennial to be curated by a collective. What, How& for Whom / WHY collective curates the biennial in a radical way ever done before. They choose a quote of Brecht in one of the front pages, and the quote is dedicated to the students of the workers’ and peasants’ faculty. Also, they list not only utilized exhibition spaces but also unrealized exhibition spaces due to bureaucratic, financial and security reasons. In addition to that, they allocate many pages for statistical information including the ratio of women and man, age distribution, “countries of origin” of the artists, number of artists by region, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), financial sources of new productions, the overall budget allocation of the biennial; expenses and incomes. This is the most transparent approach among eleven biennials. Their claims are grounded well and became substantive by these statistics. The exhibition argues the close relationship between politics and the economy. They release the necessity of questioning the

impacts of the global economic crises on the novel structure of the world. They criticize the dependency of local relevancy of previous biennials and propose new ways of thinking regarding global issues. The critiques about the prior biennials prove the sharp tone of voice of this biennial. The choices of revolution, anarchism, socialism words reinforce the radical approach. Within this context, it is quite reasonable not to see the text of Şakir Eczacıbaşı as a business person. The political environment around Palestine, a collage dedicated to Lenin, the daily life under war conditions of Beirut and the situation of immigrants are outstanding works of the exhibition. Also, the political and geological presence of Armenian's exhibited in the biennial which is an unspoken and critical subject among nationalists of Turkey. After the assassination of Hrant Dink (Armenian Journalist), the polarization about Armenians in Turkey has been deepened during those years. The placement of this subject within the art pieces of biennial proves the secular positioning of the event rather than the nationalist and conservative side. Hence, this biennial is touching very crucial points of current political balances bravely. When we look through the socio-political details of this period, it is obviously shown that not only biennial but also the current politics was taking some brave and radical steps at that year. The initial steps of the "Resolution Process", which is the process of peace between Kurdish and Turkish war, was one of the critical attempts of democratization in the country and the dialogue is established through the representatives of HDP (Democratic Party of the Peoples). Also, the establishments of May 1st as a national holiday in 2008 was the other democratic attempt of the current government. Thus, these discourses on democratization correlate with both the state and one of the international art events of the country. Ironically, the sponsors of the biennial use the question of the theme to create their advertisement visuals but interpret them with a "marketing" perspective; "What keeps mankind alive? -health insurance" kind of answers has given as advertisement.



Figure 5.3.9 A capture from the 11th Istanbul Biennial catalog – Sponsor advertisement

In spite of the radical approach of the biennial, there are many sponsors involved. Since the biennial utilized high order of language for its narratives, and the governmental policies did not overreact to this kind of approaches -during this period-, the sponsors did not feel threatened in public perspective. This biennial is a kind of showdown against the city in front of international audiences. Interestingly, it is the year of Istanbul's nomination to European Cultural Capital selections, and the cover of the catalog holds the logo of this program. This political approach could be encouraged to reflect a democratic image of the country.

The 12th Biennial (2011) has one of the most straightforward covers and structures. The theme, Untitled, correlates with the cover which reflects any ideological side. The theme makes a reference to works of Felix Gonzales who

prefer untitled descriptions with parenthesis to leave the audience to make their own interpretation regarding current time and space.



Figure 5.3.10 A capture from the 12th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

After the loss of Şakir Eczacıbaşı, Bülent Eczacıbaşı becomes the chairman of the biennial, but he does not prefer to write an essay for the biennial catalog. After a long while, the biennial is organized under one single roof to gather all the attention on one point. In spite of some particular references of the city, the general frame is drawn apart from the context of a space. The reason behind this choice explained as an expression of political essence rather than spatial preferences. It might be interpreted as a return to the white cube which is outdated all around the world. The previous Istanbul Biennials took the art from the white cube into the public spaces. It is arguable to articulate political narratives in unpolitical, unhistorical, relatively confined spaces. White cube enables the commodification

of politics and also art pieces. Thus, at first glance, the biennial downgrades the political vibe which is created by the previous three biennials. The artist and their works are put forefront of the exhibition, and minimal aesthetics are praised in the exhibition.

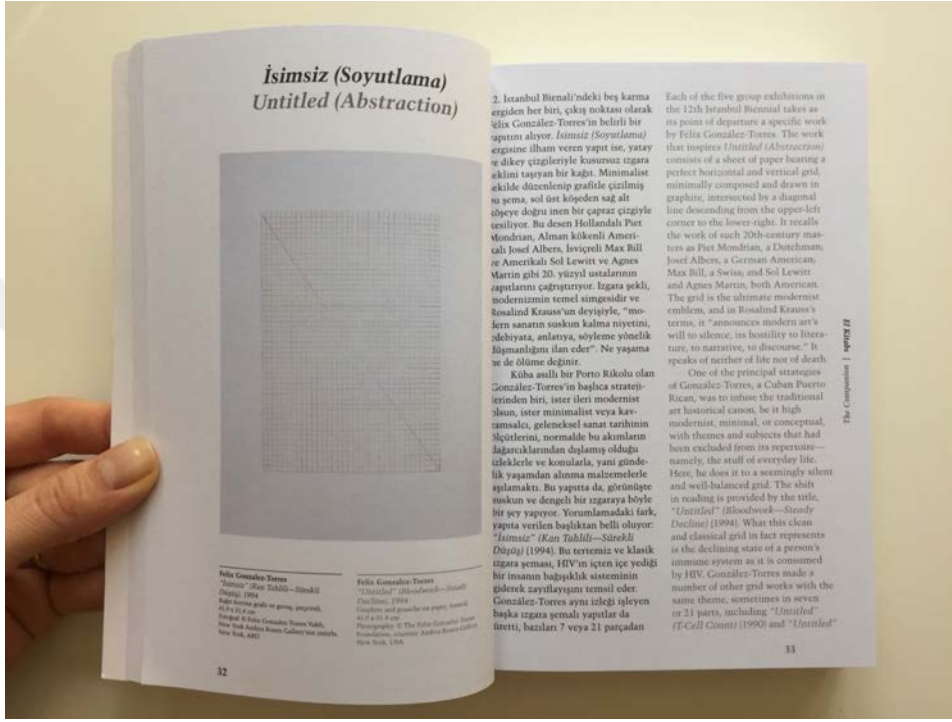


Figure 5.3.11 A capture from the 12th Istanbul Biennial catalog – An example for minimal aesthetics

Within this context, the curators', Jens Hoffmann and Adriano Pedrosa, claims that the political is personal, the personal is also politic. They aim to reformulate the relationship between politics, society, individuals, and art in terms of the city's own dynamics. The theme comes back to the city again, but far from real life in it. The texts of the biennial include many political words and sentences such as "focusing on politically innovative and outspoken words", but when we look through all catalog, the usage of politics seems like only verbal rather than practical. Although the claim of the curators is to be concerned about the issues on the periphery rather than aesthetic preferences, their narratives are spinning around common ideas on the relationship between society and politics. It is difficult to see novel discussions and propositions. They are interested in sterilized politics rather

than radical articulations. Also, the references of Felix Gonzales and his life are quite frequent, and it is not easy to follow the narrative and relate it with local values. In this sense, it seems like a biennial that might be organized everywhere in the world, but not belongs anywhere also. On the other hand, the curators are accorporated with some certain universities of Istanbul to determine the theme, make brainstorming sessions and workshops. They also collect these works under a unique exhibition as a part of the biennial. Although this biennial improves the discursive model, Istanbul is supposed to be one of the capitals of “museum art” as if there are not any chronical political problems to discuss.

The 13th Istanbul Biennial (2013), “Mom am I Barbarian?” is one of the most prominent ones due to the year of organization. 2013 is the year of Gezi Protests which refers to the mobilization of the secular part of Turkey after a long period of silence. Thus, the biennial was expected to be more political and braver than previous ones to articulate the messages of resistance. The name of the biennial directly correlates with the approach of the government to the protesters during the mobilization. The prime minister called the protesters “çapulcu” (marauder) and accused them of vandalism. Here, the name of the biennial correlates with this “label”. Thus, after many political discourses of previous biennials, this one supposed to be straightforward rather than implicative. According to the expectations, when we look through the cover, the catalog is defecated from corporate boundaries. The cover page is neither provocative nor apolitical; it does not seem agonistical at first glance. The defecation of corporate identity is to protect the foundation from both state and public reactions. On the cover page, the selection of the interrupted line expresses the interruptions to the mobilized public and also the transaction of borders in terms of geography and involved disciplines.

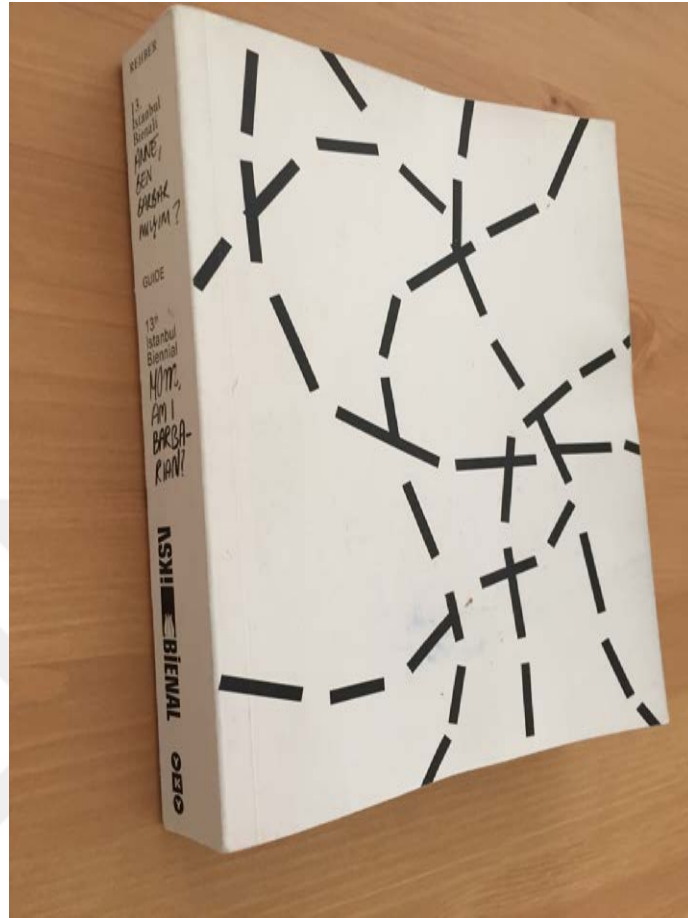


Figure 5.3.12 A capture from the 13th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

When we consider the approach of the Koç Group during the protests, it is not a surprise to see the emphasis on their sponsorship and publication support. Another essential thing to indicate is the removal of the entry fee to democratize and enhance participation. This is an important attempt to support the spirit of Gezi protests. The interrupted lines spread all through the pages to express certain messages. For example, the pages of artists include singular lines which might be interpreted as every single line represents individuals and their distinctive approaches. The combination of these lines creates a continuous line as a metaphor for mobilization. Also, the font choice proves the focus on subjectivity and the value of individual expressions for a holistic discourse.



Figure 5.3.13 A capture from the 13th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The font choice of the biennial

The primary claim of the biennial is the significance of the power of the public space regarding social opposition and art. The emphasis on public space is supported by free of charge participation which proves the consistency of structure and articulation. The gentrification and urbanization projects are the major points to discuss, so the spatial relations are highlighted in almost every work. The biennial has substantial articulations on the criticism of Neoliberal policies and the necessity of innovative discourses. The multilayered and multidisciplinary structure of biennial enables these novel discourses and perspectives to maintain the diversity of society. Thus, Istanbul Biennial is expected to create a platform for political oppositions and negotiations to support the resistance of the secular group. Maybe, here we have to examine the word choice of “secular”. The polarization of Turkish society creates two major groups: conservatives who have political hegemony and seculars who have cultural hegemony. Hence, the secular group needs a political sphere on the cultural field to express themselves. That is the most prominent point of Istanbul Biennial during the protests. The theme of the biennial is selected before the protests, but it directly matches to it. It would be a mistake to consider it as a coincidence because the misuse of the public sphere was an outstanding problem

of Istanbul for a while. Here, the myth of the public sphere is the suppression of the secular part of the city to express themselves against governmental authority and the manipulations of the state by muting the oppositional voices. The curator, Fulya Erdemci, has an oppositional text against the current state's authority which did not see before on previous biennials. This one was not a "general" attitude; it has a specific opposition to the current government. She emphasizes the reformulation of the public sphere regarding today's norms. However, the execution does not reflect these sharp edges of the written discourse. The selection of spaces, private art galleries, seems like a bordered playground for political discussions on the public sphere. Although their selection is explained as intentional to highlight the unrealizable situation of the public sphere, it seems like a deliberate choice to keep the event away from the non-target conservative group. On the other hand, inside the comfort zone, the biennial has many critics on capitalism, institutionalism, the commodification of society. The approaches of selected artists are more radical and sharper. The works are less sterilized than before, and exhibition spaces are utilized as workshop studios rather than a white cube. Also, many works from other cities of Anatolia are included in the exhibition to empower the local connections. Since, Istanbul is an international symbol for the nation, and also made up of various cultures from each side of Anatolia; the globalization trend is altered with localization due to the necessity to create a collective discourse for the opposition. The page of thanks, for the first time, does not include any names, it has only the names of state's establishments. This might be interpreted as a resistance against the owners of current policies. Interestingly, we see almost every newspaper as a sponsor for this biennial even the more conservative ones. After all these conflicts, it is possible to say that, this biennial supports the resistance directly and opposed the current state obviously in a determined playground to keep the event safe. Here to say, it is a summary of the current Turkish political system; say something but be careful about it to remain sustainable.

The 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015), Salt Water, has one of the most academical approaches rather than an artistic one. Almost two out of three of the

catalog pages are left for essays. As the curator, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, defines the exhibition as a book, the book includes many texts on multidisciplinary fields particularly politic, philosophical and artistic. The waves and nodes are described on the cover page as all the content based on these two notions. The introductory photo might be interpreted as a crash through the waves to exit from darkness to lightness. The waves are both harsh and soft, temporary and permanent, constructive and disruptive at the same time. Waves bring and take many things. Also, the name of the biennial might be identified with the situation of illegal immigrants and their fatal conditions during their transportation. This was the year of the devastating picture of the immigrant child's dead body came ashore. Thus, the name of the biennial gives clues about the context of it.

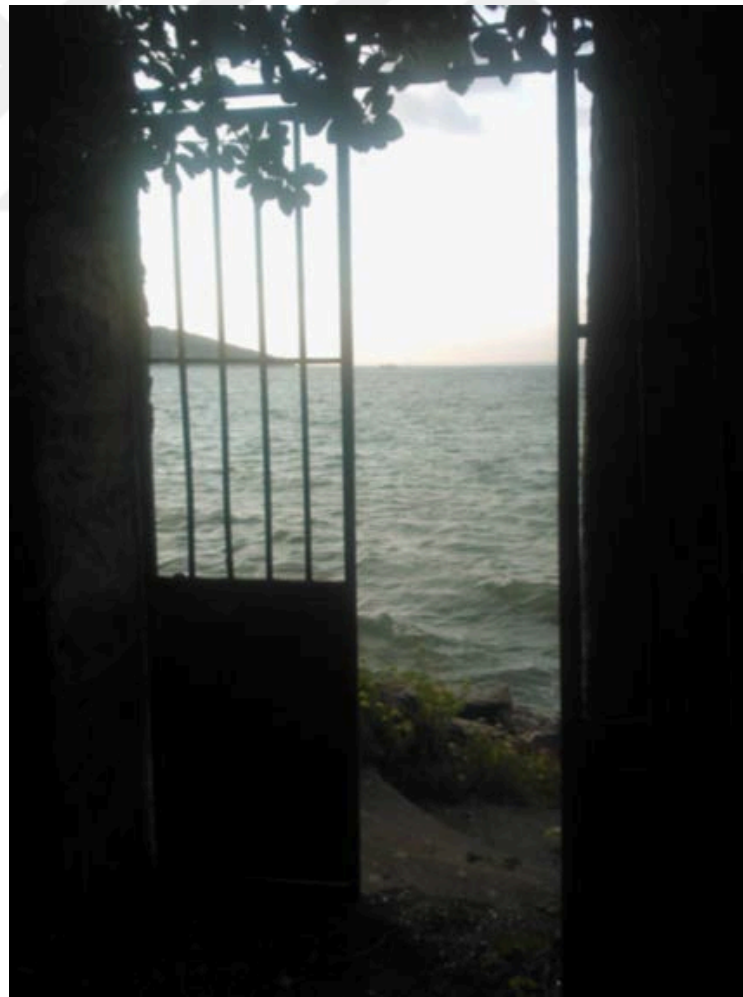


Figure 5.3.14 A capture from the 14th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The introductory photo

Thus, this city-wide exhibition is organized through the line of Bosphorus to consider different frequencies and patterns of waves that poetically and politically shape and transform the world. In that sense, the selection of the Prince Islands is directly correlating with the theme and also relates the exhibition to its political context. The exile of Trotsky and also the historical extermination of dogs in one of those islands empowers the political claims of the space selection. Since the texts of exhibited works are highly sophisticated, the number of exhibition spaces is enhanced to enable the audience to take more time diving into the works in detail. The narratives of the biennial use art as a medium, rather than a final product. As the biennial director, Bige Örer notes, the biennial is an apparatus to interrelate the dynamics around such as mathematics, science, neuroscience, architecture, and oceanography. As the verbal discourses are brought to the forefront of the catalog structure, in one of the introductory pages, a sentence is translated into many languages spoken at the periphery of Turkey. Here to say, this biennial does not only articulate local issues, but it is also interested in peripheral narratives. According to Beral Madra (2011), Istanbul Biennial served the post-Soviet region and the Middle East as well as Turkey itself, because it altered the fate of the remaining periphery.



Figure 5.3.15 A capture from the 14th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The translated sentence into many languages spoken at the periphery of Turkey

The production phase of the biennial reflects the inspirational perception of the city by artists since almost all artists produced their works in the city after a long investigation period. The positioning of Istanbul is quite more naïve than the previous biennials. It is not a political mass anymore; it is a modern muse again for various disciplines and the periphery also. The representation of works is connected with the Bosphorus where the most poetic view of Istanbul seems. Although poetic and philosophical expressions are predominant, the subtext is kept political. The metaphors of saltwater and waves are explained in various ways and contexts, but they are mainly associated with the transition and awakening of society. The narratives on Gezi Protests, devastating mine accident in Soma, the relationship between the trade of salt and slavery, the claims on the Armenian genocide, Kurdish struggle and Syrian immigrants, are based on a solid background with many academical references. It was the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the year of HDP to take an outstanding number of chairs in parliament, and the year of Syrian migration wretchedly. Thus, all the narratives of biennial correspond with the current socio-political atmosphere. Political narratives and philosophical expressions are interpenetrating all through the texts. Moreover, not only the texts of participant artists but also the significant texts from many authors are represented in the catalog. The selection of these authors reflects the multilayered approach of the biennial; the texts and sketches of Charles Bukowski, Virginia Woolf, Walter Benjamin, Carl Sagan, Ulus Baker, Bilge Karasu, Hrant Dink, Charles Darwin and more are utilized to create a system of thought and stir up substantial investigation rather than a visual feast.

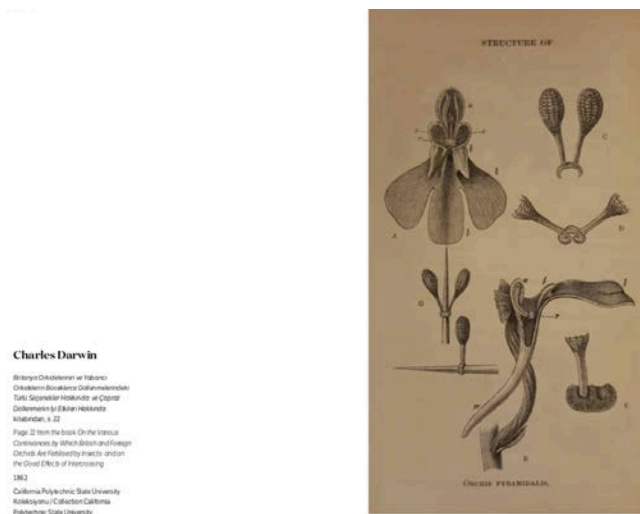


Figure 5.3.16 A capture from the 14th Istanbul Biennial catalog – A sketch of Charles Darwin

The continuation of the free of charge entry enables the democratization of knowledge. Within these contexts, the city is not reflected as an arena for political conflicts anymore, it is an inspirational place to create a novel system of thought.

The 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017) questions the notion of the neighborhood. The theme “a good neighbor” is determined by the curators, Elmgreen and Dragset. This was the period on which the discussions on Syrian migrants and their situation in cities are highly charged by the citizens. The deny of their existence in daily life brought -still brings- many arguments and disturbance among the existing residences. They are not accepted as our neighbors even they were migrated from one of our neighbor countries. The photo on the cover of the catalog shows a car with a Pakistani number plate that passes through a suffering person under a snowstorm. The myth of Pakistan is a good sample to represent the neighborhood crisis that occurs here between very similar common-grounded two countries; Pakistan and India. The car does not help the pedestrian even both of them have trouble under the storm. It is a picture of mutual uncertainty. They belong to the same origin – may be the same family - before the political crisis. These two demonstrate the manipulation of politics in the social order. Interestingly, this photo

is captured in Iceland rather than the actual location of the struggle. We might consider this situation as “East from the Western point of view” again, after many years of East and West discussion on Biennial.

iyi bir komşu **a good neighbour**



Figure 5.3.17 A capture from the 15th Istanbul Biennial catalog – The cover page

Thus, the biennial sheds light on the reasons behind social polarization and the situation of immigrants under the concept of neighborhood. The biennial owns this theme to simplify complicated issues and represent them in microenvironments to make it clear and understandable among all levels of knowledge. The curators emphasize the chaotic period of global politics which requires the representation of art as resistance. Thus, they examine global conflicts rather than local focus under the theme of the neighborhood. The intention here is to spread the discourses of

biennial throughout the globe and relate it with historical context. The predominant content here is the displacement of immigrants, considered as a major issue in the international arena. Also, nature is described as the closest neighbor of humankind and it is also devastated by the self-centered approach of the same neighbor. The construction of this exhibition is based on these roles and relations. The examination of the relationship between domesticity and gender roles, capitalism and dispossession, and also the intensification of the “habitus” creates an imbalance among society. The Neoliberal policies deepen the class discriminations, and these policies result in the polarization of society. The curators propose a resistance against polarization with personal stories connected with the theme. The city of Istanbul suffers from these policies as a fast-growing metropole. Accordingly, the centuries-old traditions, handicrafts, and individual character of the city are vanishing. The cultural codes and collective memory of the city are facing extinction. The gentrification policies deform the multicultural texture of the city. The boundaries between districts are bolded, and these borders empower the social, political and cultural disintegration. When they ask people to describe the “worst” neighbor options, people list homosexuals, alcoholics, Americans, Christians, and Jewish people. Thus, in the biennial, these irreversible deformations in Istanbul are argued under the theme of the neighborhood as a micro representation of the city, other cities, and even countries. The aim of the curators is to bring the politics to home, to its origins. As the theme does not seem political, it directly correlates with the cultural and social deformation policies of the government in power. Here Istanbul, like any other rapid-growing metropole equivalents of it, is represented as a victim of wild balances of power. The city loses its identity beyond the glamorous brand image created by the state, institutions, and business. The desired brand image of the city has always been varied according to the current ideology of the government thereby the represented citizens, and the environment shifted all through the nation’s history. The commodification of its beauty causes the loss of its sincere and unique character. Istanbul is utilized as an agent to demonstrate the conflicts in other developing countries.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the history of biennials, there is swinging between major themes from political messages to daily life problems, or from the city itself to global culture. However, even each of every theme seems random, they are determined according to the aimed message of the city through the globe. As the existence of the Southern Biennials articulates discourses within the context of current sociopolitical and cultural dynamics, Istanbul Biennial, as a part of the Southern category, draws a picture of current or to say “desired” image of the city as well as the nation. As it is shown above Istanbul Biennial, as any other contemporary art biennial, has its own agenda in the relations with many cultural, social, and political dynamics. There have been many narratives that represent the city according to the needs of the year throughout the two decades of the event. As is shown in the analysis, each of the Istanbul Biennials has its own characteristics and discourses according to the desires of constituents of the organization. However, there are significant similarities between some of them to create a canvas of the city and fill it with a hybrid narrative that involves eastern and western nuances. Although most of the messages serve to the brand identity of the city, some of them are also related to various dimensions of business and social dynamics. When we look through the biennial catalogs, there are some outstanding paths to create a particular message. Although the messages are delivered in traditional ways such as curator text or cover design of the catalog, some of the others are based on social myths. For instance, the selection of Atatürk’s quotes is directly associated with the secular representation of the city, or the selection of exhibition spaces varies from historical ones – Ottoman heritage – to Antrepo 5 as a dedicated Modern Art Museum. These decisions constitute the frame of the event and they are reshaped by the intended message. As these messages are examined in the analysis section, they are delivered by myths, direct and indirect narratives. These discourses vary from local and global backgrounds and converge at the knowledge production of the biennial event. Thus, the message of the biennial derives from a combination of these elements to create a certain discourse.

Also, we need to clarify the content creators of the event to have a solid base. As it is analyzed on biennial catalogs, the domination of these biennials does not only belong to a cultural foundation; there are many negotiations between business and states to create an event which represents the city and also the nation in the international arena. Thus, IKSŞ, government, sponsors, curators, and artists are the main component of the biennial structure that defines and delivers particular messages. Here, the question is how Istanbul Biennial produces discourses and representations to brand the city regarding the current socio-political atmosphere. After the semiotic and content analysis of biennial catalogs, some significant constituents shine out among the multilayered structure of the organization to produce and represent particular discourses about the city. These are the culture industry, the identity of the city and public and the manipulation of symbolic and cultural values.

To begin with, we have to elaborate on the culture industry as the main constituent to articulate certain messages for the event. Here, under this category, we also have to mention cultural hegemony, cultural identity, cultural reproduction as major components of the culture industry. What are cultural hegemony and its relation to the culture industry? According to Gramscian cultural hegemony theory, the cultural domination of a state over another is the way to constitute its own loyal commune. Thus, over the past 40 years, every government highlighted particular brand images according to their strategy and ideology. However, cultural hegemony is not always dependent on the state's power, it is interdependent with the ruling class of society. For instance, Istanbul Biennial reflected the liberalization process of Turkey in the meantime Yeditepe Biennial established as the showcase of the conservative identity of the current government. Although the current government is practicing a "stable" cultural strategy for more than 20 years (Yardımcı, 2005), it could not be possible to destroy existed cultural identity. Here, cultural identity as the second component of the culture industry rises. Every city has its own cultural identity which is mainly determined by cultural hegemony. This identity evolved

over many years and only radical changes in nations' history might affect it such as the establishment of the Turkish Republic after centuries of domination of Islamic Ottoman tradition. Since the novel identity of Turkey has been determined and owned by secularism, today the existed cultural identity keeps an important place to produce particular messages. However, even the existed cultural hegemony dominates the cultural production, there is one other Istanbul in which its own citizens are just "living" with many other identities and ideologies. Thus, all of these differences are also used by biennials as mediums to deliver particular messages about the city through its citizens and their lives. For instance, the 9th biennial used the content of the subculture to articulate its discourses against the gentrification policies. As Theodor Adorno describes in the concept of cultural industry, what is reproduced are not products, but people, who are just like counterfeits (Adorno&Horkheimer, 1944). Here, the actual problems such as illegal migration, Kurdish struggle, gender inequalities, etc. and the people who are living under these circumstances are the "content" and "showcase" of the art biennial. They are the "tools" of narratives that articulate particular messages about the positioning of the city and the nation. The more the biennial resonates with Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry, the more it reflects Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle (Baker, 2010). Here the other question is how the culture industry and cultural identity remain over the years? The answer brings us to the third component of the culture industry: cultural reproduction. Contemporary art biennials involve many attractive performances, workshops, conferences and movie screenings which transform it into "festivalism" a supra-disciplinary approach. Hence, cultural reproduction enables the domination of existed cultural identity which is defined by cultural hegemonic group by many tools of a contemporary biennial. However, as much as the festivalism is acknowledged, the art is embraced by the ordinary public and got rid of the dominance of elites (Köksal, 2008). In that sense, a biennial was not just an event that involves cultural reproduction (Griffin, 2003), it enhances "cultural innovation" which gives flexibility to the branding of the city. The 11th biennial is a good example for this situation, the positioning of the city was able to be evolved into a radical leftist line from "the city of beauties".

Secondly, the identity of the city and public has to be examined due to their own and permanent characteristics which affect the production of discourses and representations of the city. The city and its citizens bring a context to the event regarding their physical materiality. Istanbul is a metropole with historical embellishments and unique position between East and West. Thus, the branding of Istanbul has to be defined under these unalterable features of it. The biennial takes the opportunity of these unique functions of the city and positions it as the medium of communication. The marketing and branding of the city are based on the city's own identity and intense relationship between arts and economy brought new dimensions and discussions on this branding process. As Guy Debord (1967) mentioned, the modern production and consumption relations restrain social life into the dominance of image and representation. The city of the biennial considered a field of spectacle and embellished with arts and culture events to establish a dialogue in the global area. There is no hesitation that culture is one of the most impactful weapons in packaging and marketing cities (Koçak&Koçak, 2014). In the case of Istanbul Biennial, the city retains multiple packages due to its physical and cultural legacy (Barlas Bozkuş, 2010). The branding process of Istanbul shares two outstanding aims: The promotion of Istanbul's cultural actors such as; institutions, galleries, artists, collectors, at local and international levels; and emphasizing some particular characteristics of the city such as "semi-exotic", "semi-western" and "semi-oriental". Actually, one of these aspects of the city brought the forefront seasonally due to the aimed messages of each event. Although Western cultural hegemony is embraced by brand new Istanbul, regional links of the city perceived as a way of affirming Istanbul as a potential alternative new pole. As Molho (2015) examined, the branding of Istanbul as an art center is ambivalent: on the one hand, it makes a critique on its imperial legacies; on the other hand, it reinforces the city's imperial legacy. Since the West embraces Eastern images as "authentic" and uses them as a commodity (Mack, 2005) for their cultural practice, Istanbul Biennial benefited from these controversial positioning. The chronological issue of Europeanness and Asianness has always been a matter of Istanbul even in the description of two

sides of the sea Marmara (Azman, 2012). Since Istanbul has always been pushed to be international, which actually means westernization, Istanbul Biennials, as the first attempt of internationalization (Çalikoğlu, 2008), based on the “looking East from West” perspective. Thus, the city of Istanbul caught the biennial trend with the advantage of its geopolitical position, historical and cultural diversity to be the glories capital of the culture again after hundreds of years. Also, Istanbul involves many micro-communities which constitute the public identity and “locality” of Istanbul. Istanbul has an unplanned cosmopolite base (Hall, 2006) to describe and represent a precedent resident. The definition of Istanbul as a completely global city as described by Sassen (2001) or a third world city has never been possible because of its peculiar position that has been defined as “between global and local” by Çağlar Keyder (1999). The novel term “glocal” is used for this dilemma. Glocalization is a term mostly referring to the processes of adjustment of global systems, goods or services by particular localities (Robertson, 1995). Thus, these binary identities of citizens served and reinforced the desired messages of the Istanbul biennials. The public identity is used as a meta for discourse production of a biennial. Various layers of the public sphere serve to the delivery of certain messages. The community is perceived as a commodity as well as the city and the biennial. Whilst the city and community are aimed to be enriched and embellished by festivals, galleries, and international events to reinforce the brand of itself as the neoliberal country’s super-modern constituent, they transformed into a commodity available for consumption and became an instrument for both political and cultural capital (Koçak&Koçak, 2014).

The last elements of this chapter are the manipulation of cultural and symbolic values to articulate discourses. Here, we have to examine the notion of “value” which is “created” by contemporary biennials. Biennials arbitrate aesthetic tendencies and the legitimation of regimes of meaning and value (Sassatelli, 2017). As the art historian Jeannine Tang describes, using Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural field theory, a biennial requires to execute values both as an art exhibition and an industry. For Bourdieu (1993), the precondition of the art is to accomplish anti-

instrumental and anti-economic values in order to get the cultural attention (Kompatsiaris, 2015). As a significant structure of exhibition making and communicational interaction, the biennial establishes and promotes such values. Tang (2011) describes the exhibition as the enabler of symbolic value and, as she goes on to say, “the more outstanding the exhibition, curator and institution, the elevated the credibility of the artist and the work in question, and vice versa”. There is no hesitation that the exchange value of biennials provides economic, symbolic and cultural values for a heterogeneous range of participants such as artists, institutions, states, and cities. (Kompatsiaris, 2015). In the case of Istanbul Biennial, the organization was not only using the cultural values of Istanbul but also taking advantage of the country’s geographical location among the eastern part of the world. The reason to say the Eastern world is that Istanbul brand was associated with West in which some oriental embroideries are embedded. Thus, the Istanbul biennial generated a hybrid cultural capital which is a little bit confusing to understand whether it is Western or Eastern. On the other hand, cultural identity has been a vital commodity and symbolic value for a nation’s power playground. Symbolic and cultural values have always been used to impose desired ideology to the citizens, but in the Istanbul case, it gained much more importance due to the richness of its historical background and geographical position. Istanbul utilizes its cultural values as a marketing tool differentiating it from the other cities and want the flow of global tourism to enhance cultural values as physical capital (Koçak&Koçak, 2014). Apart from the city’s symbolic and cultural values, audiences and artists also have to be mentioned in this chapter. As Kompatsiaris (2017) mentioned, there is a bilateral process of art; getting closer to the critical theory and representing itself to new audiences with already existed cultural values. Also, there is no doubt that artists got substantial cultural capital from biennial outlets in which their artworks are represented by glamorous settings, and in which they are associated with superstar curators (Gardner&Green, 2016). As Kompatriaris (2017) cited the famous phrase of Adorno;

*... “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore”
then the evidence of art’s social usefulness needs to be constantly re-framed
not only in dialogue with its (supposedly) constitutive disinterestedness and
non-usefulness but also according to the moving substratum of social values
that can offer validity to art’s critical function.*



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