ILKE ALKAN

ID: ALK14437890

Thesis question: How can we ensure the survival of the Istanbul Biennial in the recent political climate, through the curatorial motives of the 13th and 14th Istanbul Biennials, using the historical and contemporary case studies?

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Signature:

ILKE ALKAN

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ABSTRACT

Through this thesis, the question will be addressed of how we can ensure the survival of the Istanbul Biennial in the recent political climate, through the curatorial motives of last two Istanbul Biennials; "Mom, Am I Barbarian?"(13th Istanbul Biennial, 2013) and "Saltwater: A Theory of Thought Forms"(14th Istanbul Biennial, 2015), using historical and contemporary case studies.

The aim of this thesis is to look at how an interrogation of political debate has diminished over the course of Istanbul Biennial because of the political relationship between the art scene and the political climate. However, I argue that it is worth compromising political debate in order to keep the Istanbul Biennial in place. Through an exploration of these two Biennials, this essay will focus specifically on examples of curating that demonstrate how specific curatorial approaches have helped the Biennial become successful in its survival journey.

Keywords: Art, Curating, Istanbul Biennial, Curatorial motives, Exhibition, Art Scene, Political Climate, Curator, Artist, Contemporary Art

Table of contents

1.Introduction and research question

Through this thesis, the question will be addressed of how we can ensure the survival of the Istanbul Biennial in the recent political climate, through the curatorial motives of last two Istanbul Biennials; "Mom, Am I Barbarian?"(13th Istanbul Biennial, 2013)[1] and "Saltwater: A Theory of Thought Forms"(14th Istanbul Biennial, 2015)[2], using historical and contemporary case studies. The aim of this thesis is to look at how an interrogation of political debate has diminished over the course of Istanbul Biennial because of the political relationship between the art scene and the political climate. However, I argue that it is worth compromising political debate in order to keep the Istanbul Biennial in place. Through an exploration of these two Biennials, this essay will focus specifically on examples of curating that demonstrate how specific curatorial approaches have helped the Biennial become successful in its survival journey.

The essay will firstly refer to an interview with Vasıf Kortun, who worked as the curator in previous Istanbul Biennials[3], and is also a writer and teacher of contemporary art. Secondly, it references an interview with Ahu Antmen a lecturer, art critic and writer with works focusing on the Istanbul Biennial and finally an interview with Beral Madra, previous general coordinator of Istanbul Biennial. I will also draw on the Master's thesis by Gozde Robin, ' Rethinking Istanbul Biennial In The Process of Globalization' [4], who is now involved in the

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Catalog: Fulya Erdemci, ed., Anne,ben barbar mıyım? 13. İstanbul Bienali- Mom, am I barbarian? 13th Istanbul Biennial (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2013) Curator: Fulya Erdemci. Asistant Curators: Yael Messer, Rieke Vos, Danae Mossman, Javier Villa, Adnan Yıldız, Yael Messer, Gilad Reich, Ece Üçoluk, Dr. Andrea Phillips, Övül Durmuşoğlu, Dr. Andrea Phillips, Nermin Saybaşılı.

2 Catalog: Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev and Süreyya Evren, ed., Saltwater: A theory of thought forms 14th Istanbul Biennial- Tuzlu su: Düşünce biçimleri üzerine bir teori 14th Istanbul Bienali (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2015) Drafter: Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev. Assistant Curators: Elif Kamışlı, Sara Catenacci & Pelin Derviş.

3 3rd International Istanbul Biennial (Untitled) (17.10.1992-30.11.1992) and 9th International Istanbul Biennial "Istanbul" (16.09.2005-30.10.2005) Curator: Vasif Kortun.

4 Gözde Sütçü Robin's 'Rethinking Istanbul Biennial In The Process of Globalization' research for Erasmus Mundus Master of Arts Master Thesis Euroculture programme, University of Uppsala, Sweden (Home) University of Strasbourg, France (Host), January, 2015.

curatorial team of the Istanbul Biennial. Besides the interviews, an in depth research will be conducted based upon reviews[5], articles, books about the Istanbul Biennial.

The essay will consider the background and history of Istanbul Biennial so as to prove its significance for Turkey and why it needs to survive, then its focus will be on how the curators dealt with the political debate through investigation of the 13th and 14th Istanbul Biennials.

Methodology involves an assessment of the critical reflections from published analyses, and published reviews of the 13th and 14th Istanbul Biennials. I will be examining these two Biennials from curatorial, critical and public perspectives, in other words the concept, curatorial approach and attendance figures as a measure of its popularity. I will focus on the rationale for each Biennial and the curatorial strategy. The interviews with the curators of these two Biennials will be taken as the source for their curatorial approach. I will use reviews to ensure whether the curator has achieved his/her goals for the exhibition. Since I did not attend to the 13th Istanbul Biennial, I will be focusing on reviews. However, I attended the 14th Istanbul Biennial and therefore I will approach it slightly differently, by not only looking at the reviews, but also assuming the role of a critic, thanks to having first hand experience.

[5]Bell, K. (2017) *14th Istanbul Biennial Various venues Turkey*, Frieze.

Exhibition Critique Authors (2013) *Review: 13th Istanbul Biennial*, Exhibition Critique.

Istanbul The Guide(2016)*The 13th Istanbul Biennial: Mom, Am I Barbarian?*, Istanbul The Guide.

Muller, N., (2015) *Chasing Ghosts Through Bathhouses and Cisterns at the 14th Istanbul Biennial* ,Hyperallergic.

Searle, A. (2015) *Istanbul Biennial 2015: an overwhelming meditation on the tides of human misery*, The Guardian.

Snow, T. (2013)*13th Istanbul Biennial: A Retreat to the Institution*, Afterall.

Snow, T. (2015) *'SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms The 14th Istanbul Biennial 2015 '*, Ibraaz.

Thorne, S. (2013) *13th Istanbul Biennial*, Frieze.

Verhagen, M.(2017) *13th Istanbul Biennial by Marcus Verhagen*. Third Text.

Yılmaz, P. (2015) *14th Istanbul Biennial: Saltwater Dissolves Fiction in the Truth of Desolation* , Artslant.

2. Istanbul Biennial as an institution of culture

2.1. Turkey's Globalization's effect on its art scene - the birth of Istanbul Biennial

As claimed by Mustafa V. Koç who is a member of the Istanbul Biennial's establishers committee, 'Istanbul feeds the Biennial and the Biennial, in turn, feeds.' (IKSV, 2017) In order to discover whether his claim applies to the Istanbul Biennial's position and value for Turkey, I will discuss through certain assertions. As discussed by Robin, 1980's and 1990's were an era when the world witnessed a radical change through globalization which diminished the nation-state and triggered certain number of global cities afterwards. Global cities[6] became the centre of new commercial and financial geography. To add to their status, they organized transnational cultural events like festivals, art fairs and Biennials. (Robin, 2015, p.18).

To talk about when exactly Turkey aimed to be among these global cities worldwide, Burcu Pelvanoğlu[7] discussed, after Turkey adopted the liberal economic model when the Anavatan Party was elected to power in 1983, the first steps of globalization were taken. After these steps, the result affected cultural, social, economic and urban transformation. Especially in Istanbul during 1990's, Istanbul was chosen as a global centre for Turkey. (The Brooklyn Rail, 2017). Her claim gives us brief information on the political situation in Turkey in the 1980's, which has importance for this essay in being the reason behind the Istanbul Biennial's establishment. This sentiment is mirrored in my interview with Beral Madra, who claims that Istanbul Biennial '...started in late 80's when Turkey has transformed its economy from state capitalism to liberal capitalism; the private sector gained an open to the world power and used culture as a tool for recognition and visibility.' (Interview with Beral Madra, see Appendix 3).

[6] The first instances of the global cities were London, New York and Tokyo which became the centre of new commercial and financial geography. (Robin, 2015,p.18).

[7] Burcu Pelvanoğlu is a lecturer and art critic with articles focusing on art in Turkey after 1980 and Istanbul Biennial.

As claimed by the author Martinique[8] , ‘The core of Istanbul's art scene coalesced in the 1980's and '90's through the efforts of a few prominent figures such as curators Vasif Kortun, Ali Akay and Beral Madra…’. (Widewalls, 2017). Through my own in-depth research into the history of the Istanbul Biennial, I can confirm her claim. Vasif Kortun and Beral Madra had been playing an important role in the development of the Istanbul Biennial since its establishment as one of the most outstanding major art events in Turkey. As Martinique said, 'It is argued that the catalyst event for the contemporary art in Turkey has been the establishment of the Istanbul Biennial in 1987.' (Widewalls, 2017), and these words confirm my argument.

As discussed by Antmen, ‘Before the Biennial, contemporary trends geared towards conceptualism and alternative ways of making art had already begun, in the seventies, but had not found an outlet or sufficient critical acclaim.’ (Interview with Ahu Antmen, see Appendix 2). From her words, we can understand the significance of the Istanbul Biennial, which gave birth to to Turkey's contemporary art scene.

In order to discuss the current ambience of Istanbul's art scene, I will focus on statements by Hasegawa, Beral Madra, Vasif Kortun and Elena Martinique, comparing the shifting ideologies towards the art scene. These debates underlie the aims of this essay. That is, to discuss how as curators can ensure the survival of political debate within the Istanbul Biennial, not indulging in conflict between positions, but making compromises in order to survive.

Hasegawa, who wrote for the 7th Istanbul Biennial [9], claims that ‘the Istanbul Biennial serves as an important tool for the ongoing modernization and democratization processes in Turkey’. Here Hasagewa indicates the atmosphere during that era regarding the intended role of the Istanbul Biennial. (2013, p.190).

[8] Elena Martinique. Alias of Jelena Martinović. She is an author, a graduate of philosophy, interested in theory, politics and art.

[9] 7th Istanbul Biennial ‘EGOFUGAL: Fugue from Ego for the Next Emergence’ (21.09.2001-17.11-2001) Curator: Yuko Hasegawa. Hasegawa, Y.(2001) 7th International Istanbul Biennial, in Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (ed.), The 7th International Istanbul Biennial (Exhibition Catalogue), Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts.

As the curator Vasif Kortun describes during my interview[10] with him, when he curated the 3rd and 9th Istanbul Biennials, 'The late 1990's was quite mature in many ways. And you know, it was after the EU opening of the EU accession talks that the spirit was good. The spirit was really great. Turkey was looking forward to lots of things at that time.'(Interview with Vasif Kortun, see Appendix 1).

However, currently, as the curator Beral Madra[11] states, 'After 2010, with the socio-political-economic transition of Turkey from a semi-democratic state to conflictual Islamic-democracy, Istanbul Biennial became a manifestation of laic, secular, globally connected ideology of welfare and intellectual classes, and now it is experiencing another rupture from the art and culture ideology of majority of the population.' (Interview with Beral Madra, see Appendix 3).

Finally, the author Martinique mentions the fact that the cultural policy of Turkey is now adapting to the views of the government, which often ends up legitimizing censorship and limitations on freedom of artistic expression as a tool for providing ''national security'' and ''public morals'', according to their political and ideological reasons. (Widewall, 2017).

Reviewing the Istanbul art scene, Martinique observes how 'Last year, the government proposed a new law announcing the establishment of an 11-person council who would be appointed directly by the cabinet to fund art and allocate money to cultural institutions, examining project by project.' From this, we can understand Turkey's recent cultural policy, and that the reason Istanbul Biennial is under the risk of ending is because of political debate between the discordant political positions represented. (Widewall, 2017).

[10] My Interview with Vasıf Kortun. Curator of the 3rd and 9th Istanbul Biennials, Lecturer and Writer. Istanbul, Turkey. 8 February 2017. (Appendix 1).

[11] My Interview with Beral Madra, former coordinator of the Istanbul Biennial, Art Critic and Curator, Istanbul, Turkey. 7 June 2017. (Appendix 3).

2.2. History and overview

During its three decades of existence, the Istanbul Biennial has been evolving and developing its curatorial strategies, which in turn have made it a vital international cultural institution when it comes to contemporary art exhibitions. One thing that has been a constant in this three decade period is that Istanbul has represented itself using a national model rather than the more commonly used international model of other Biennials.(IKSV, 2017). According to IKSV [12], 'The exhibition model of Istanbul Biennial is supporting the idea of creating a dialogue between the audience with the works of art rather than exhibiting with a model of national representation.' (IKSV, 2017).

This essay considers the context for the Istanbul Biennial as part of Turkey's wish since the 1980's, to play a greater part in the global scene. On their website, IKSV describes how, over the years, the Istanbul Biennial has undertaken various functional roles, from serving as a bridge for Western cultural communication to contributing to Turkey's globalization journey. It also surpassed those roles to gain symbolic significance in the present moment as an international Biennial platform. (IKSV, 2017). Also, 'the fact that the beginning of this event coincides with a shift in neo-liberal economic policies and a more globalist cultural agenda should not be overlooked.' (My interview with Ahu Antmen, see Appendix 2).

One of the crucial factors that brought the idea of Istanbul Biennial to the fore, was the 1973 Istanbul Festival, which served as a catalyst for evolving into the first Istanbul Biennial in 1987. It is crucial to point this out because ever since its inception, it has been argued that Istanbul Biennial has remained the most vital large-scale exhibition event in Turkey. (IKSV, 2017). As claimed by Robin, the Istanbul Biennial went beyond its primary goal of contemporary art exhibiting, to enhancing cultural circumstances and building an international platform connecting artists, curators and audiences worldwide. It also promoted the long-term reputation of Istanbul as a global city, by virtue of reflecting involvement at a prominent level of socio-political and economic conditions unpack. (Robin, 2015, pp.20-25).

[12]IKSV stands for the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts.

Furthermore, by looking at Rodriguez's[13] claim ‘Every two years, the international Istanbul Biennial functions as a catalyst for the whole art scene. The more than 40 exhibitions and symposiums normally organized by the biennial prove this assertion.’ (2013, p.186). This indicates that the Istanbul Biennial is culturally valuable for Turkey, in the sense that the international art scene is brought to the city. This sentiment is mirrored in what Madra says. ‘Istanbul Biennial was born as the country's 150 years of art production was looking for ways to emerge from the individualist, pluralist and eclectic ambiance of 1980's.’ (2003, p.43).

We can ascertain from these two claims that the impact of the Istanbul Biennial was not only significant in coming to the international art world, but also in coming to the Turkish art world, since the field of contemporary art scene was lacking through such large scale exhibitions. Madra's point reflects transformations in Turkey during the 1980's due to the globalization process, which was a significant factor that encouraged art production and the Istanbul Biennial' s position in Turkey, especially in Istanbul.

Another aspect of the Istanbul Biennial discussed by Antmen regarding young local artists, is that the Istanbul Biennial functions as an ‘art magazine’, legitimizing alternative concepts and forms of contemporary art for students and later helps the young artists as a direct link for inspiration with their own productions for the Biennial. (2004, p.251).

Moreover, the Istanbul Biennials have played a significant role in the socio-political representation of Turkey. As Rodriguez claims, ‘During the 1980's and 1990's, a period of increasing religious fundamentalism and political extremism, the biennial was seen by the foreign press as an important symbol of the western-oriented elite's claim that Turkey is a modern, democratic and liberal society.’ (2013, p.186). His words demonstrate the Istanbul Biennial's socio-political benefit for Turkey, especially for Istanbul during the globalization process. This assertion can be also fortified by Yardimci's statement in her article[14], that ‘In Istanbul, we see the local art scene being used as an attraction, as a symbol and also a kind of

[13]‘ Turkey's Democratization Process’ (2013) by Carmen Rodriguez.

[14] ‘A Leap Forward by the Istanbul Biennial’ (2006) by Sibel Yardımcı. (online source)

entrance-ticket to the club of global cities. The International Istanbul Biennial is in this context the strongest symbol for promoting Istanbul as an established modern and western city that is developing into a global metropolis.' (Springerin, 2006)

Istanbul Biennial was established by the IKSV[15] in 1987. As a cultural institution that was to be non-profit and non-governmental, IKSV was established by art enthusiasts and businessmen under the leadership of Dr.Nejat Eczacıbaşı in 1973. (IKSV, 2017)

'The Istanbul Biennial is intended to take place every two years, each of which will be with diverse concepts'. (IKSV, 2017). For each Istanbul Biennial, the choice of the curators is decided by the committee of IKSV. When the Biennial first emerged, it was curated through the coordination[16] of Beral Madra. Later, after the first two Biennials, IKSV preferred the model of a single curator to be in charge of creating the concept, selecting the relevant artists and procuring the means from the government and financial institutions. It was the 3rd Istanbul Biennial in 1992 which employed the use of the single model curator, under the leadership of Vasıf Kortun. (IKSV, 2017). This was a significant change that contributed to the positive evolution of the Istanbul Biennial in the curatorial approach. The first two Istanbul Biennials[17] did not have concepts, they were arranged as international contemporary art exhibitions. After the single curator model, every Istanbul Biennial had different concepts by the selected curators.

The reason that Istanbul Biennial is able to have freedom in forming opinions and choosing specific concepts, is in that the funding of the Istanbul Biennial is mostly provided by IKSV and the sponsorships from the private sector. (IKSV, 2017). As stated in the website of the Exhibition Critique group, even though the Istanbul Biennial is under the monopoly of IKSV and mainly sponsored by private companies like Koç and Eczacıbaşı, it is as well funded by

[15] IKSV stands for Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts.

[16] Beral Madra was coordinating 12 curators to make International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibitions.

[17] 1st International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibitions (1987) and 2nd International İstanbul Biennial (1989) under the coordination of Beral Madra.

the promotion fund of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. (Widewall, 2017). As Bige Orer stated during an interview[18] , 'The Istanbul Biennial, because of the lack of government support, has the smallest funding compared to the other international events on similar scale.' (2013, p.16). Even if the biennial is not mainly dependent on the government support, now the private sector is also feeling responsible for the government. Thus, the Istanbul Biennial not only feels itself to be highly responsible towards the government, but also towards the art world and its audiences. Because of this, it can be assumed that its structures are not totally free.

2.3 Position and role amongst other Biennials

As defined by Hoskote in his article[19], a biennial is 'a vital platform for an inquiry into contemporary art, including its cultural and political conditions, as well as a new social form that brings artists, curators and viewers together in revitalized relationships.' (Biennial Foundation, 2017).

I argue that it is possible to classify the major Biennials in the world according to their background. I will discuss the views of Charlotte Bydler and Chin-Tao-Wy, who have relevant claims on this categorization of the major Biennials. According to Bydler, there exists three main categories, such as the Venice Biennale, Sao Paulo and Sydney Biennials, which are inside the category of ''philanthropic- capitalistic enterprises''. These all emerged during the early 20th century, when the Biennials were to serve as an expression of power and process. The second category that Bydler describes is the ''post-traumatic'' category, with instances such as Documenta, Havana and Manifesta. Their common features is that they serve as expressions of the post-war politics of 1948. They were born to heal the wounds of the World War II from the cultural aspect. Her third category is one of ''flexibility'', which relates to the contemporary cultural climate of the 1990's. She suggests that Istanbul Biennial can fit this category, since it is also flexible in its choices of venues for each biennial

[18]Bige Orer's statement during the interview by the Radikal Magazine. Radikal Magazine (1996-2016) was a daily liberal Turkish newspaper.

[19] Article: 'The Shapeshifting Trajectory of The Biennale' (2012) by Ranjit Hoskote.

and in terms of curatorial approach. Each year the curators choose appropriate themes in accordance with the changing priorities applied by the global conditions. (2011, p.103). This sentiment is mirrored in Robin G.'s research area. According to Robin, comparing the Istanbul Biennial with other prominent international Biennials, it is inevitable to identify its specific trajectory. Ever since its establishment, the Istanbul Biennial has been evolving in terms of format, concepts and curatorial strategy and this enabled it to become have a significant role on the international level. (Robin, 2015, p.43).

In Chin-Tao-Wu's classification of the Istanbul Biennial, it can be considered amongst the Biennials that are named after a city, arising out of city-based events. In accordance with this, (2011, p.103). I argue that the city of Istanbul itself plays an important role as a muse for the themes and the venues of the Biennial, as well as for the art works involved.

This aspect is also discussed by Lowry[20], 'Due to the geography of Istanbul itself, there were many alternatives for the curatorial approach in terms of the venues and locations of each Biennial.' (The Economist, 2012).

As Robin mentions, by stepping out of the limits of traditional transnational exhibitions, Istanbul Biennial developed its own multi-layered structure over time, establishing a major role among the significant Biennials around the world, including the Venice Biennial, Documenta and Sydney Biennial. (Robin, 2015, p.31) The ideas stated by Robin function as a proof for Rodriguez's claim that, in recent years, the International Istanbul Biennial has been evaluated as one of the strongest and most important biennials in the world. (2013, p.186).

As to the position of the Istanbul Biennial in relation to the Venice Biennale, Documenta and Sydney Biennial, Vasif Kortun[21] pointed out that 'Istanbul is an embedded Biennial. It is embedded in the city....Venice is a response to a different time, a different moment. It responds to an international art world, it doesn't have any local audience...Venice is ''world

[20] Glenn Lowry is an American art historian and director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City since 1995.

[21] During my interview with Vasif Kortun. Curator of the 3rd and 9th Istanbul Biennials, Lecturer and Writer. Istanbul, Turkey. 8 February 2017. (Appendix 1)

fair''. Documenta is ''post-World War Two'', never again anti-fascist world. Sydney fills between all of those things. Istanbul is a ''post-dictatorship'' again.' (Interview with Vasif Kortun, see Appendix 1).

The distinct features of the curatorial approach in the Istanbul Biennial when compared to the worldwide Biennials, according to Ahu Antmen[22], are that 'the Biennial's curatorial approach is based on individualist expression through the choice of venues, art and artworks.' (Interview with Ahu Antmen, see Appendix 2). She means since Istanbul Biennial is curated in a single curator model, it is based on the individualist expression of the selected curator. Also there is no fixed venue nor concept, it is up to the decision of the curator.

3.3 13th Istanbul Biennial

The 13th Istanbul Biennial, titled ''Mom, am I barbarian?'' [23], was held in 2013[24], under the curatorship of Fulya Erdemci. It hosted 337,429 visitors[25]. (IKSV, 2017). The title derives from a quote by Lale Mündür[26] . Fulya Erdemci cites Mündür in order to highlight the negative concepts represented in the word 'barbarian'[27], a theme running through the 13th Biennial. (Snow, 2013). In this biennial 'barbarians are the people in this city whose voices are repressed.' (Art in America, 2017). The notion of public space as a political forum was the focus of this Biennial's conceptual framework. (IKSV, 2017).

[22]My Interview with Ahu Antmen. Art Critic, Lecturer and Writer. Istanbul, Turkey. 2 March 2017. (Appendix 2)

[23] Catalog: Fulya Erdemci, ed., Anne,ben barbar mıyım? 13. İstanbul Bienali- Mom, am I barbarian? 13th Istanbul Biennial (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2013) Curator: Fulya Erdemci. Asistant Curators: Yael Messer, Rieke Vos, Danae Mossman, Javier Villa, Adnan Yıldız, Yael Messer, Gilad Reich, Ece Üçoluk, Dr. Andrea Phillips, Övül Durmuşoğlu, Dr. Andrea Phillips, Nermin Saybaşılı.

[24]The biennial was held between the dates (11.09.2013 – 02.11.2013).

[25] For the first time in the Istanbul Biennial history, no entry fee was taken it also keeps with the idea of art as part of the public domain.

[26] Lale Mündür is an Istanbul-based poet.

[27] Fulya Erdemci mentioned the relevance of the 'barbarian', during the interview by Berin Golonu, she expressed that in Ancient Greece somebody who could not speak Greek was therefore not accepted as a citizen and would be called a 'barbarian'. (Art in America, 2017).

As stated by Fulya Erdemci during an interview, ‘curatorial concept exists between three axes. The theoretical focus, or first axis, asks the question of how we can think about diverse publics coming together to create a political public forum. Praxis, which forms the second axis, takes the wild, unleashed urban transformation of Istanbul as its site of inquiry. It asks how we can think about the political public forum in terms of space. Müldür’s title fits into the third axis, which is the sphere of the imagination.’(Art in America, 2017).

As claimed briefly by Robin, ‘Erdemci questioned the politics of the space, in relation to freedom of expression, and aimed at unfolding the core question of the conceptual framework of the Biennial, which is the public domain.’ (Robin, 2015, p.64). Her comment is supported by Thorne, asking ‘What does it mean to be a good citizen today, in Istanbul for instance?’ (Thorne, 2013). Also he adds that 'Erdemci dedicated the biennial to the figure of the outsider, the anarchist, even the poet or artist.' (Thorne, 2013).

It is crucial to mention the fact Erdemci had to make adaptations to her original proposal for the Biennal concept (see above), because the Occupy Gezi[28] movement happened three months prior to the Biennial, which had a considerable impact on it. She explained that the proposal had originally been for 14 projects in urban public spaces, and that she had to cancel all of them. (Art in America, 2017). As Thorne mentions, the Biennial had to be minimised and so shrank to only 5 indoor venues[29]. (Thorne, 2013). The Biennial not only lost its initial goal to spread into the city but it also lost many art works. As Erdemci explained ‘Not all of the artists were able to rethink their projects for interior exhibition spaces, so some of these concepts have completely evaporated.’ (IKSV, 2017)

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[28] Gezi Resistance or Occupy Gezi began with a group of environmentalists camping out in the Gezi Park (a patch of land near Taksim square), Istanbul to prevent its demolition. The reason behind their action was due to the Prime Minister Erdogan's proposal to cut the trees to build a shopping mall, a mosque and military barracks on this space. Even though it was a crowded peaceful protest, the police brutality through the use of tear gas, water cannons and beating the activists triggered a huge occupy movement by the citizens, raised to a millon. Later on, a performance artist Erdem Gunduz found a clever way to convey the message. He started staring at the Ataturk Cultural Center in the Taksim Square (17th june) as a protest. He went viral as "the standing man" and was supported by people who replicated all over Turkey. Even though Occupy Gezi started a way to protect rights of people to have a natural environment, a park in the city center, it end up to protesting the overall political situation of Turkey for the citizens who are against Erdogan's decisions. As Robin stated "Afterwards it developed into being about factors relating to democracy, such as individual rights and freedom and taking decisions for one's own life, and habitat." (G. Robin)

[29] Arter and Salt Beyoğlu, artist run space 5533, Greek Primary School and a spacious warehouse Antrepo No.3.

At this point I would question, isn't it really disappointing for a curator to withdraw an important part of her concept, which is meant to be present in a Biennial, due to political debate?

As Erdemci stated ‘I believe that by withdrawing from urban public spaces, thus marking the presence through the absence, we can continue to the space of freedom, to the creative and participatory demonstrations and forums instigated by the Gezi resistance.’ (IKSV, 2017).

I believe that Erdemci's reasons[30] for her withdrawal were even more upsetting than the withdrawal itself. Rather than accepting it is due to state oppression, she came up with reasons like excuses. As the Exhibition Critique group stated at the time, ‘It seems to me that the idea to abandon public spaces was due to state oppression in Istanbul's public spaces rather than a noble decision of ‘‘not realizing’’ public projects.’ (2013, p.1). Their point is mirrored by Marcus’ comment , ‘Unconvincingly, she even argues that the decision not to realize the projects was itself a powerful political statement’. He criticized her in the sense that the Biennial was not intervening actively in the contested urban spaces of the city which failed it to ally itself with protesters on the ground. (Verhangen, 2013).

Erdemci not only had criticism towards her concept adaptation, but also was exposed to harsh criticism for the graphic design. As claimed by the Exhibition Critique team, ‘The Biennial tries to give a message through an untidy and disorganized, graphic design…’. (2013, p.1), This is an instance of a curator attempting to make art through their curating. My view is that the curator’s responsibility is showcasing the artworks and it is the sovereignty of the artist that needs to be present through their curation. It devalues their curation when they pass the boundary of curating to make art.

Moreover, as discussed by Marcus Verhangen[31], another issue that raised criticism was that the sponsor of the biennial, Koc, was also behind the same gentrification processes that the

[30]During Berin Golonu’s interview, Fulya Erdemci told her, 'I withdrew the biennial projects earmarked for public spaces. One reason for this is to highlight what has happened and is happening in urban public spaces together with the Gezi resistance. The second reason had to do with what it would mean to create artwork with the permission of the same authorities that had violently suppressed the people’s voices. Thirdly, some of the public sites we had earmarked for outdoor projects had recently been privatized.' (2013).

[31] Marcus Verhangen is the Program Director of MA Contemporary Art, at Sotheby’s Institute of Arts London.

biennial was resisting, and thus Erdemci's progress was disrupted by a group[32] of protesters during several public programme events. This situation compromised everything that the Biennial stood for, and put it in a contradictory situation with itself, so it was predictable that Erdemci would be criticized. However, it was more than Erdemci was able to handle[33], and the Biennial teams reactions[34] and the protestors actions[35] resulted in police arrests.(Verhangen, 2013)

However, the guide magazine claimed that the artworks in this Biennial, by an international range of artists, captured the feeling of disillusionment about the promises that had been made of urban regeneration and transformation of the environment, and that in the event things proceeded without public consultation. Artworks from less privileged countries[36] were specifically selected for the Biennial in an attempt to challenge the imbalanced nature of the art world. (Istanbul the Guide, 2016).

[32]A group called Conceptual Art Laboratory, consists of group artists and art critics. Their protests that can be accessed through the link: http://www.artforumçcom/diary/id=41191

[33] As it can be understood from the situation Fulya Erdem was in, I would definitely say she was a scapegoat of the political concept she came up with. First of all, it is not in her hands to stop the sponsorship of Koc for the Istanbul Biennial, so if she came up with such a concept that is contradicting by the idea, there is nothing left for her to handle by herself.

[34] During the public programme event, the protesters from The Conceptual Art Laboratory , 'At ten-minute intervals, someone would stand up from the crowd, show off a T-shirt and a faux-branded banner printed with the names of gentrifying neighborhoods in Istanbul, and then drape himself or herself on the floor in the middle of the room, only to be quickly picked up and hastily dispatched by three members of IKSV's loyal production team.'(https://www.artforum.com/diary/id=41191)

[35] 'Conceptual Art Laboratory's Niyazi Selçuk kept a video camera trained on Erdemci's face, which led to a long, drawn-out confrontation, ending well past midnight with both parties at a police station filing complaints and counter complaints against each other.'(https://www.artforum.com/diary/id=41191).

[36] While some works focused on issues within Turkey, as Erdemci mentioned the less privileged contributions from Brazil, Morocco, China, Palestine, Mexico,Thailand and Peru were chosen to emphasize on the global nature of these concerns.

Figure 1[37]

Amongst the artworks that stood out in this exhibition, I begin with a site-specific work (see Figure 1) by Ayse Erkmen, Bangbangbang[38], 2013. As Marcus commented, 'Erkmen made a kind of wrecking ball which demonstrates a clear curatorial statement of intent, due to the fact that the chosen venue Antrepo 3 is soon to be destroyed as a victim of urban regeneration. Also the recursive swinging suggests that anything build on this site would replaced in time'. (Verhangen, 2013). In this sense, I agree with the fact that the work not only itself reflected the purpose of the concept, but also its chosen venue was itself a criticism.

[37] **Figure 1:** Ayşe Erkmen(2013) *bangbangbang.*13th Istanbul Biennial, Antrepo no.3, Istanbul. Photo by Servet Dilber.(Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

[38] Placed just outside at the largest venue of the Biennial, Antrepo 3. It is made up of a large green ball which is in fact a buoy suspended from a crane on a long cable. It is not stable, it is arranged to swing and touch the building at hourly intervals.

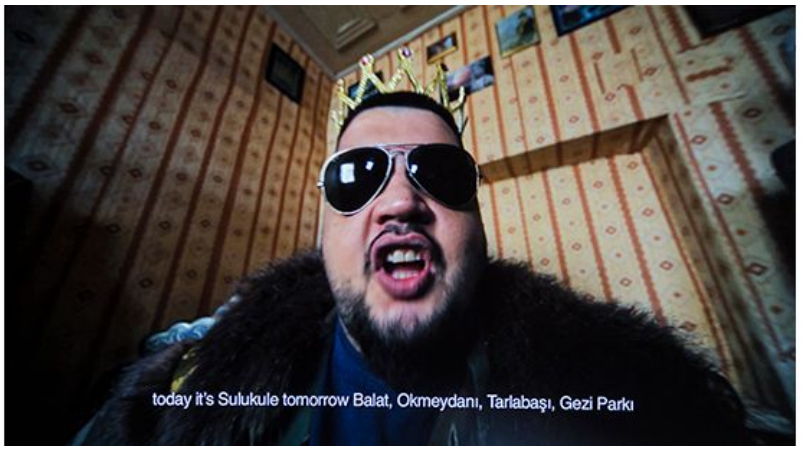

Figure 2[39]

Thorne discusses Halil Altındere's striking work (see Figure 2) Wonderland (2013) among his selection of key works. In this piece, Altındere collaborated with a hiphop group[40] to make this video[41] of young men rapping about their neighbourhood of Sulukule[42]. (Thorne, 2013). I agree with him on the fact that this work is among the strongest voice of protest around that central theme. The way the work is displayed the loudest at the Antrepo 3 venue, and the fact that the video itself demonstrates an angry group rapping, and the words they sing is a relevant choice for the biennial. The video stands as an aggressive protest for the urban regeneration that forced them out of their neighbourhood.

I discovered through the reviews that the works of which I agreed to be the most powerful, in that, amongst the artworks selected, they best reflected the concept, and were all displayed in Antrepo 3. Examples include the aforementioned two works[43] , and the works by Christoph

[39] **Figure 2:** Halil Altındere (February 2013) *Wonderland*, video, 8.25 minutes.13th Istanbul Biennial, Antrepo no.3, Istanbul. Photo by Servet Dilber. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

[40] Tahribad-I İsyan, a music group established in 2017, as a result of the Ocuppy Gezi.

[41] As a comment to the video, Marcus stated 'A pacy, engaging and intermittently violent music video that decribes the transformation of the old Roma quarter of Sulukule to the west of central Istanbul at the hands of the Public Housing Project(TOKİ).'(Verhangen,2013).

[42]Sulukule is a neigbourhood in Istanbul which demolished in 2006 due to urban transformation project.

[43] Ayse Erkmen's 'Bangbangbang' (2013) and Halil Altındere's 'Wonderland' (2013), both in the venue Antrepo 3.

Schäfer[44] and Wouter Osterholt & Elke Uitentuis[45] . It can be questioned whether Erdemci preferred such emphasis for the Antrepo 3 venue, or was it a coincidence.

Figure 3[46]

Christoph Schäfer's work (see Figure 3), which is made up of drawings reimagining the urban gentrification, is among the few works which directly approached to İstanbul's current situation.(Snow, 2013). 'His contribution that is inspired by the "present and recently destroyed" Yedikule market gardens as well as the Gezi Park protests. '(Istanbul the Guide,2016)

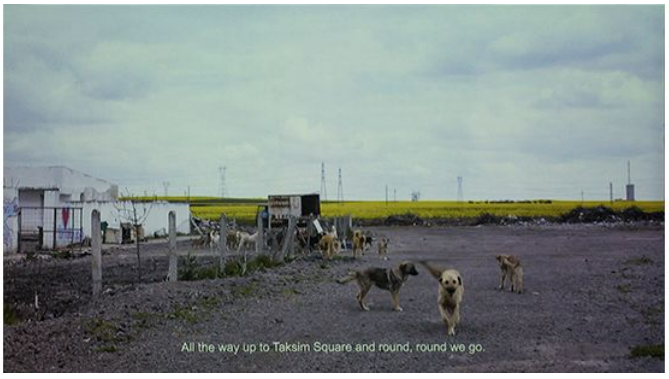

Figure 4[47]

[44] Christoph Schäfer's Bostanorama-A Marmaray Tunnel Excavation of the Collective Productions of Space Through Istanbul's Stadiums, Parks and Gardens(present and recently destroyed), January-September 2013.

[45] Wouter Osterholt & Elke Uitentuis's 'Monument to Humanity – Helping Hands' (2011-2013), Antrepo no.3.

[46] **Figure 3:** Christoph Schäfer(2013) *Bostanorama - A Marmaray Tunnel Excavation of the Collective Productions of Space Through Istanbul's Stadiums, Parks and Gardens (Present and Recently Destroyed),* series of drawings, Aquarellpen, charcoal, pastel, gouache, acrylic on paper, dimensions variable. 13th Istanbul Biennial,Antrepo no.3, Istanbul. Photo by:Servet Dilber. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

[47]**Figure 4:** Annika Eriksson(2013) *I am the dog that was always here*, HD video, seven minute loop. 13th Istanbul Biennial, Greek Primary School, Istanbul. Photo by Servet Dilber(Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

To explain the relevance of the video (see Figure 4) by Erikkson[48], as Marcus suggests, this is a poetic work with an analogy drawn between dogs and the victims of urban upscaling. In this work, a pack of dogs is referred to that were apparently moved by local authorities from their homes to spruce the neighbourhoods. (Verhangen, 2013). This work in Galata Greek Primary school is amongst several works based on allegorical responses.

Figure 5[49]

The last work (see Figure 5) I discuss will be a work by Osterholt & Uitentuis. This work aims to criticize the lack of public consultation in the setting up of public artworks. It is an intervention created from a controversial sculpture in Kars, which ended up being destroyed on the instructions of the Prime Minister. (Istanbul the Guide, 2016). It is a successful instance of how the possibilities of a public forum is ignored.

[48] Annika Eriksson's video, 'I am the dog that was always here' (2013). In Greek Primary School.

[49] **Figure 5:** Wouter Osterhold & Elke Uitentuis(2011-2013), *Monument to Humanity- Helping Hands.* 13th Istanbul Biennial,Antrepo no.3, Istanbul.Photo by Elif Savari Kızıl. (Accessed 3 June 2017)Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

3.4 14th Istanbul Biennial

The 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015)[50], entitled ‘‘SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms’’ [51], was drafted[52] by Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev. The Biennial reached the highest number in attendance figures[53] among all of the Istanbul Biennials,recorded at 545.000. (IKSV, 2017).

The significance of the name ‘‘SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms’’, as the name itself suggests, is that the Biennial was hovering around the material of salt water- the contrasting images of knots and waves, from a materialistic[54] perspective but also in a metaphorical[55]. way. It was a city-wide exhibition with works by over sixty artists and other participants on the Bosphorus, so the theme was to consider how the different frequencies and patterns of the waves, the current and density of the sea transforms and shapes the world both in visible and invisible ways. (IKSV, 2017). There are the waves of history and waves of insurgency, waves of outrage and commitment when a people decides to aggregate, come together, and draw the line.

[50]It was held between the dates 05.09.15-01.11.15.

[51] Catalog: Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev and Süreyya Evren, ed., Saltwater: A theory of thought forms 14th İstanbul Biennial- Tuzlu su: Düşünce biçimleri üzerine bir teori 14th Istanbul Bienali (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2015) Drafter: Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev. Assistant Curators: Elif Kamışlı, Sara Catenacci & Pelin Derviş. Christov-Bakargiev’s interlocutors and alliances are Anna Boghiguian, Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran, Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Cevdet Erek, Chus Martínez, Emin Özsoy, Elvan Zabunyan, Emre Hüner, Füsun Onur, Griselda Pollock, Marcos Lutyens, Pierre Huyghe, Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran, and William Kentridge.

[52] I have discovered that the 14th Biennial is also unique in the sense of the language surrounding it. Bakargiev preferred the Biennial to have "participants" not "artists" and the Biennial was "drafted" not "curated". When she was asked why she preferred this approach in its language, Bakargiev explained that "I am drafting this biennial, which means to draw or make a plan. I am interested in different fields of knowledge. It does not come from any curatorial concern but more from my wanting to live a life that is full and rich with ideas and knowledge – and to understand different fields and what they can contribute. It is not a curatorial thing; it is a life thing." (Bakargiev, 2015)

[53] Refer to Appendix 4 to see the constant rise in the attendance figures from 2005 to 2015.

[54] Materialistic in the way that some of the works were selected with direct link to the ‘saltwater’ and ‘waves’.

[55] Metaphorical way can be explained through the words by Bakargiev in her curatorial statement that ‘Perhaps a wave is simply time – the feeling of a difference between the high and the low points of a wave able to mark the experience of time, and thus of space, and thus of life. It is through the identification of waves, the seeing of waves, that we acknowledge patterns, underwater patterns of water, or patterns of wind.’ (IKSV, 2017)

The focus of the multi-layered concept of the Biennial aimed to create an inquiry into ‘‘knots of history’’.[56] It not only stood for the history of Istanbul but also was a symbol of the flow of the people around the globe, with their traumatic history represented by the waves and the idea of healing through the salt[57] and decomposition. (IKSV, 2017). The wounds to be touched in the Biennial included wars, ethnic cleansing, political uprisings, the conflicts between Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds, and more recently a wave of Syrian refugees – all these crises in the history of those lands were to be represented by some of those knots. (IKSV, 2017).

The locations[58] of the 14th Istanbul Biennial were museums and temporary venues[59] on land and sea. Moreover, there were specific sites with no access for the ‘‘imaginary’’[60] works included in the Biennial. (Artslant, 2016).

To focus on the idea behind the curatorial approach of Bakargiev I can mention, from my first-hand experience, that the 14th Istanbul Biennial was different from previous Istanbul Biennials. The distinctive feature from the previous Istanbul Biennials was that it did not only

[56] The fact that she focuses on the knots of history- as Bakargiev mentioned on her interview with Nicole O'Rourke, an art exhibition should not only be flattened into present but also to the past to be able to address what is happening today is to put it into perspective with what has happened before.

[57] As Bakargiev mentioned "Salty is the water of our tears, yet salt heals many illnesses and expresses the desires of charged ions, reassembling molecules into salt crystals, without which there would be no life on the planet." (IKSV, 2017)

[58] Locations: Northern Bosphorus: Rumeli Feneri, Riva Kumsalı. Şişli: Hrant Dink Foundation and Agos, Hrant Dink Foundation and Agos- Centre for Parrhesia. Beyoğlu: Adahan Hotel, Adahan Cistern, Arter, Casa Garibaldi, Cezayir, Store(Boğazkesen st.), House(Bostanbaşı st.), FLO Building(Anatolian Passage), French Orphanage, Galata Greek Primary School, The House Hotel Galatasaray, Istanbul Modern, Kasa Galeri, The Museum of Innocence, Garage(Boğazkesen st.), Garage(Çukurcuma st.), The Italian High School, Pera Museum, Salt Galata, DEPO, Vault Karakoy The House Hotel. Bosphorus: Fishing Boat. Old City: Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam. Kadiköy: Tunca Subaşı & Çağrı Saray Studio. Princes' Islands: Kaptan Paşa Sea Bus, Büyükada Public Library Çankaya 57, Trotsky House, Rizzo Palace, Mizzi Mansion, Hotel Splendid Palace, Sivriada.

[59] Venues: he politics in the exhibition have something to do with the venues chosen and their dispersion. For instance, her choice of buildings were linked to Armenian, Greek or Kurdish roots.

[60] Imaginary venues are actually not imaginary; they are very real in the sense that they exist as physical locations. They are Riva Beach,French Orphanage, Casa Garibaldi and a lighthouse. These venues are forbidden to be accessed due to various reasons.

focus on art. As mentioned by the curator Nicole O'Rourke[61], Istanbul was turned into a public sphere full of artworks, projects and panels under her creation of a multidisciplinary platform for various artists, scientists, curators, philosophers and cultural activists. (Time out, 2015).

To consider the political debates underpinning this Biennial, ideas of certain critics and Bakargiev's curatorial statement will be referred as well as my own ideas.[62] 'The politics of SALTWATER are immense and enormous, but they are folded into the exhibition in many different ways – and not always visible.' (IKSV, 2017).

The reason that Bakargiev wanted to approach her curation that way might be explained by the assumption of Kirsty Bell in her review of the Biennial, in that she thinks that learning from the previous Istanbul Biennial (2013), Bakargiev 'refrained from directly addressing specific political issues, preferring instead to take a metaphorical or historical approach.' (Bell, 2015). Bell's claims are mirrored by Nat Muller's review, 'Bakargiev should be commended from shying away from knee-jerk reactions to the current political situation.'(Muller, 2015). I agree with the assertions by these two critics because as I have discussed about the previous Biennial and the problems faced by the curator Fulya Erdemci, it was not a coincidence that Bakargiev approached that way. This is the reason that I agree with their evaluation, I understand that this could be read as a failure, however I do not think it is a lacking point for the Biennial since Bakargiev's curatorial approach can be considered an outstanding example for the forthcoming Istanbul Biennials, if they want the Biennial to survive.

[61]Nicole O'Rourke mentioned her view, during her interview with Bakargiev. For Timeout magazine, 2 September.

[62] Having seen the 14th Istanbul Biennial, with my first-hand experience, I assume the role of the critic.

Figure 6[63]

Focusing on the works supporting the theme and elevating the aims of the exhibition, the work (see Figure 6) ‘The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours’(2015) by Michael Rakowitz would be the first example. In 1910, in order to so-called modernize Istanbul, 80.000 dogs were brought to the 'useless island' to die. This ‘'dog massacre’ reflected by Rakowitz's installation created by his archive of molds, casts, rubbings of ornaments by Armenian craftspeople, and a collection of excavated dog bones, I find it definitely the strongest political work of the Biennial in the sense of its impact on the viewer. The work is so touching that it gives the viewer shivers. The idea to compare the way Armenian people were treated with the action taken to kill the dogs is speaking for itself. As also described by Nat Muller 'The cruelty perpetrated against “unwanted” animals and the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire merge. They are the ghosts of a presence in the city that is forever lost. ' (Muller, 2015).

Another work (see Figure 7) which also reflects the aim of the Biennial is ‘Red’ (2015) by Aslı Çavuşoğlu. Her work is simply red ink drawings, however the message is in the red ink she used, which is actually from the blood of cochineal bugs, collected in Armenia. The red pigment is a symbol of the forgotten history of Armenian genocide with the reminder of the

[63] **Figure 6**: Michael Rakowitz(2015) *The Flesh Is Yours The Bones Are Ours*.Installation view, 14th Istanbul Biennial, Galata Greek Primary School,Istanbul. Photo by Sahir Ugur Eren. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

blood spilled and the Turkish flag. It gives the message that killing the Armenians were as though killing bugs, in the sense that they killed so many of them without a doubt.

Figure 7[64]

However, the work (see Figure 8), I argue, that is the only one addressing the Biennial's concept directly is the 'Abyssal Plain' by Pierre Huyghe[65]. He made a sinking concrete stage in the middle of Marmara Sea to let it develop in the future by the life forms in the saltwater. It was direct reference to saltwater and the waves by placing a work directly in water to show the effect of time on it and the life forms interaction with it.

Figure 8[66]

[64] **Figure 7:** Aslı Çavuşoğlu(2015), *"Red/Red",* Armenian and Turkish red on worn-out papers and handmade notebooks. 14th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul. Photo by Sahir Ugur Eren. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

[65] His work is in progress from 2015 onwards. Materials: Concrete, marine life, rocks, mixed media.

[66] **Figure 8:** Pierre Huyghe(2015–ongoing) *Abyssal Plain*. Concrete, marine life, rocks, mixed media. Installation view. 14th Istanbul Biennial,Sivriada, Istanbul.Photo by Elif Kamışlı. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

Figure 9[67]

The last work (see Figure 9) I will discuss is by Adrián Villar Rojas [68] placed at the waterside, accessed by a walk from the ruins of Trotsky house on the Princes' Island. It was among the most eye-catching pieces of the Biennial in the sense that these brash lifesize sculptures perched in the water were where you never would expect them to be. However, I could not see a direct link with the Biennial's theme. Bell's comment in his review also supports my argument, 'Impressive, no doubt, but what this had to do with the exiled revolutionary, or Turkey for that matter, remained a matter of speculation.' (Bell, 2015). This can be accepted as one of many works that Bakargiev was criticized to have less connection or vague powerful statement.

[67] **Figure 9:** Adrian Villar Rojas, (2015) *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers*. Site-specific installation. Organic and inorganic materials. 14th Istanbul Biennial, Buyukada, Istanbul. Photo by Sahir Ugur Eren. (Accessed 3 June 2017) Courtesy the artist and Istanbul Biennial.

[68] Adrián Villar Rojas, 'The Most Beautiful of All Mothers', (2015).

4.Conclusion

Throughout this essay, in order to answer my question, I have made a historical case study in which the Istanbul Biennial has been discussed as a significant institution of culture for Turkey. I have not only focused on the Biennial and its journey through the last three decades, but also mentioned Turkey's art scene during the globalization phase worldwide, in order to clearly explain the reasons behind Istanbul Biennial's birth and the mission. Also its significance for the contemporary art scene in Istanbul is emphasized in order for my question's relevance. Moreover, its position and role among the other Biennials according to certain classifications are mentioned as a proof of its achievements so far. I have focused on the 13th and the 14th Istanbul Biennials in order serve as an example while answering my question. Having focused on the 13th Biennial, it is obvious that the concept was chosen to criticize a recent political issue[69] of Turkey. I believe I have previously mentioned the struggle Fulya Erdemci faced as the curator, from cancelling 14 venues, concepts, to facing protests by a group during public events and harsh reviews from the supporters of Occupy Gezi to ending up at the police station. She was only trying to create political debate in a Biennial platform, which is in theory what a biennial mainly is fed by. However, in Istanbul during the recent years, as I have mentioned, with the recent political situation and the new cultural policy these kind of approaches are only harming the curators and the Istanbul Biennial's position. The Istanbul Biennial can easily be stopped if it becomes a main target. I strongly argue that Istanbul Biennial is the most significant platform for the Contemporary Art scene which is not supported in Turkey, thus it is worth compromising political debate in order for Istanbul Biennial to survive. In this case the 14th Biennial, curated by Bakargiev, will be the perfect example. Rather than focusing on a recent wound through a political approach that would annoy the government, Bakargiev found a wide concept inhabited by many inner symbols. She did not make the Biennial a target. She was criticized in that she was too much protective and careful, following Fulya Erdemci's situation. However I strongly suggest that the forthcoming curators of the Istanbul Biennials should take her as a role model for the sake of the Istanbul Biennial remaining the most valuable source of Contemporary Art in Turkey.

[69] The' recent political issue' refers to the afore mentioned Occupy Gezi.

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My Interview with Ahu Antmen. Art Critic, Lecturer and Writer. İstanbul, Turkey. 2 March 2017. (Appendix 2)

My Interview with Beral Madra, Former coordinator of the Istanbul Biennial, Art Critic & Curator, Istanbul, 7 June 2017.(Appendix 3)

My Interview with Vasıf Kortun. Curator of the 3rd and 9th Istanbul Biennials, Lecturer and Writer. İstanbul, Turkey. 8 February 2017. (Appendix 1)

6.Appendix

Appendix 1: My Interview with Vasif Kortun, Curator of the 3rd and 9th Istanbul Biennials, Curator and Art Critic, Istanbul (08/02/17) :

1)In which ways do you think that Istanbul Biennial has significant impact on Turkey and worldwide?

Do you mean the art world or do you mean by that in terms of Impact. It would be impossible to say the exhibitions have in and all themselves have an impact, have a tangible and concrete impact on life, you know.That would be presumptions, but they certainly have impact on people who live. I mean the 3rd Biennial was in 1992, that was a very very different time. I don't know if you have read about it. I mean there is quite a few reviews on it, I would implore you to look at those. One was art forum at that time, arts in america, village voice and other publications. It was I guess the first Biennial that took place in Istanbul that was largely covered by International press, it was the year Documenta, 1992 Documenta so it was a very particular moment. And the audience, there was no audience for contemporary art at that time in Turkey, the first two Biennials were of course there as well but not quite like Biennials but they were more like international exhibitions of not really curated but a harch partial things. I should say. Mine was kind of a meta-curated project, I worked with 12 curators or I don't know how many curators I worked with. And I don't know how to discuss the impact I mean, that's not for me to tell, these things take time I mean, whereas you know the other Biennial the one in 2005 was in a very very different time and a very very different context. That was historically in many senses, it became a text of case, it was discussed locally and internationally to quite a degree. It was not only discussed in terms of contemporary art field but it was also discussed by in the context of city making, urbanism, arts place in the world, community. I mean 2005 was a very very different year. It was a good year. Also in Turkey as well. So, I mean. I don't know how to answer this one, this is a very big question.

Yes, it was a bit general, I agree, so I have more of the detailed ones. Yes it is a big one. Yes, it was a big question.

2)Then I can continue with my other question, I will just say having curated International Istanbul Biennial twice, how will you compare it with the Venice Biennial, Documenta and Sydney?

I don't compare it with those, I mean we can't compare with those. Istanbul is an embedded Biennial. It is embedded in the city. It was at least. Venice is Venice. Venice is response to a different time, a different moment. It responds to an international art world, it doesn't have any local audience, whatsoever, it is a tourist class project. Sydney, has been quite, let's not say irrelevant, but has not had quite an impact over in the last years. I don't know about Sydney so much. Documenta, did you say Documenta? Look, I mean you can not discuss Biennials like this, you know why I can't imagine. It wouldn't be appropriate to discuss a Biennial as an Institution. It is more appropriate to discuss a Biennial as a context, in a particular time with a particular curator in a concept in exhibitions that go with it. So it is widely diversifying. I mean diversified context. One Venice is very very different from another Venice or Istanbul Biennial that we curated with Charles in. 2005, it was super different from Jens Hoffman's and Irina Petroza's Biennial in 2011. Because they were also two different cities, two different art markets. Two different source of engagement with the public, so it is hard. But if you are looking at the question from a vantage point of how you place these in history, you know Venice is world fair. Documenta is post-world war II, never again anti-fasist world. Sydney fills between all of those things. Istanbul is a post-dictatorship again. New arrivals like, Johannesburg, Istanbul and Guanjo, Insol and all the others. So I mean that would be you know, I mean it can certainly be categorized but there are also many specificities that has to be taken into account. A Biennial is what you make it to be and how courageous you are with it at the same time.

3)Throughout research I've found out that you are the first curator of the Istanbul Biennial to use outdoor venues and what was your inspiration for that, in which ways you think it improved the Istanbul Biennial in the following years?

But I mean, actually I am not the first to use the outdoor venues in a way. I mean in 1987 and 1989 did use the historical city. When they used the historical city, it used outdoors but in a controlled outdoors way that its to say. There was stuff in the Topkapi Palace grounds, outside Aya Irini and things of this sort. And also on the walkway between, on the side of Hagia Sophia, you know, so basically the historical city they hippodrome and around it was utilized for the Biennial. So, that is a different outside, but it is an outside nevertheless. And then 1992 did not have, did not do anything at the street, 1995 did not do anything in the streets, again used a kind of a controlled outside. 1997 the same way. 1999 was the difficult year after the earthquake, did not use the outside. 2001 also controlled situation.2003 did not use the outside either. Then, with Charles in 2005, we did not so much use the outside but used the Biennial as a walk. You know, and that wasn't intentional in the first place. You know, because all the places we had selected and the city government was suppose to give us, they didn't give at the end of it, so they put us in a very difficult condition. And that was a very lucky problem we were faced with. So we had to find a situation very fast which, and that's when we decided to turn the Biennial to a degree into pedestrian experience. There is a lot to talk about that but in terms of the concept so it was a walk, during the walk there were different spaces that were used in different ways. And these spaces were defined in a different way. It was an art gallery, a former small opera or a theater place, a commercial place, a shop, an abandoned building a space that was used by Garanti Bank which was not being used at the time and then the street, zones on the street, like moments on the street that was connecting things and then it ended at the and yes we used the Depo which was the first time it was being used as a space. And then it ended at the port, area with the big storage, Antrepos. The part of the reason was to kind of pull the exhibition into a pedestrian, human, normal level to undo exhibition fatigue, to allow an engagement between the city that is otherwise not there. To make also people from different classes and situations and context meet each other or see each other face to face. So that is more of a civic democratic city context. And then, it was used in pretty much similar ways later on, not...It was like a structure it started and it moved on It was, yes, you know things get normalized, I mean when we did it there was a whole narrative behind it why we were doing this. And you can use it exactly the same way couple of years later but you may not have a narrative, you may not have a story. I think the story is important in that way.

4)So it was close to the first part we came about the comparison between the 3rd and 9th, so since you have curated the 3rd Biennial, how did things changed by the time you curated the 9th Biennial? And how did the curatorial expectation evolve and what were your further considerations to that time on?

I mean 1992 was very very early for lots of things. There weren't as many artists as there were in 2005. There were artists of course but kind of artist that could actually speak to a local situation in a very different way were not existing so many of them. The city was in a flux. In 1992 the city was in a beautiful flux. It was quite exciting, very very emerging city, lots of things happening all the time. At the end of the golden age, so to speak of Istanbul where there was just no rule of law in a way, you could do anything pretty much, all kinds of crazy things were happening. You know with 1992 I was trying to respond to a different locals context, which was very very conservative, which was very introverted. There was a power structure and there were hierarchies and I was supposed to be in that hierarchy, or I was supposed to obey the hierarchy which I didn't. I just wanted to explode it all in a way. Or disregard that there was a hierarchy or just imagine that it is not there. And I also really really wanted to internationalize the situation a little bit, it was too provincial and provincial not in a... I am not using provincial...It was too inbred. Let's say provincial would not be a right term. 2005 it was already an emerging city, it was a much stronger situation. You know, Istanbul Modern had opened, platform was around, smaller and bigger institutions were around, Sakip Sabanci Museum had opened years before that. It say there were galleries coming out and developing the art scene was that had grown into late 1990's was quite mature in many ways. And you know it was after the EU opening of the EU accession talks that the spirit was good. The spirit was really great. Turkey was looking forward to lots of things at that time.

5)You were the first curator in the Biennial to curate in a single curator system so?

It was not. In a way its like this. I mean it is a bit complicated. A bit more nuanced than that. You know, I can't say that I curated the Biennial, I did but in a different way. I knew for sure that this whole model of nation was certainly not working. Certainly, It wouldn't work for Turkey, It wouldn't work for anywhere else. But the problem is that, budget wise. There was no money. The first Iraq war had already taken place, people were afraid to come to Turkey in 1992. So there was all of this happening at the background. The economy was doing so well. The first two Biennials were supported by single donors who gave lots of money but they were already in prison. I think or problems, new capitalist situation normal. The Bosnia, the Yugoslavian wars had already started, It was all of these things that you have kind of. Meanwhile there was no space for the exhibition to take place so the lucky thing that I finally was able to find, the place was existing not that I found it but I was able to kind of insinuate it or promote it to the Eczacibasi family. Necati bey who was the father of Bulent bey and Pim Ben Kim is an incredible person. He took over a big chunk work. So, All if fhat was happening at the same time also didn't want to divide the exhibition into 10-20 different places, because I knew that technology didn't exist for Turkey to make exhibitions actually. There are no professional staff, nobody knows anything, you give it to technicians in different parts of the city. It is a mess. It wasn't working. I've experienced it before in 1989. So there were a lot things going in together, you know, to design this space, to be able to put everything under one roof, since I did not have the money, The Biennial didn't have the money, it is not like I can go around the world and see artists and work. You know, I did not have that luxury. There was 0 money for travel. So you are supposed to do a Biennial. There is no money for traveling. 0, you know 0! How are you gonna curate? So basically, I was developing a community of friends or network at that time. And these were a few people that I really really thrusted. And had very strong and long negotiations discussions with our ways of looking at the world was not far away from each other. Out of these, I worked with 12-11, I forgot how many curators alongside with them I looked at what they were suggesting and discussed etc. So I was meta-curating rather than curating. I created

our section but I meta-curated. I didn't do this with two parts of the exhibition with Italians and the Spanish. So that was a retrospective. I think the most week part. Or did not cohere with the rest of the project. And we did exhibition design with Mehmet Dogu, who was the exhibition designer of the exhibition, he was just coming from Kingston had worked at MoMA for exhibition design. So he was a kindred spirit, he was somebody I could talk to, work through the exhibitions' architecture. We made this plan where, although there were exhibitions of different countries, they were flowing into each other and they were I mean. It was a brilliant model. So it was not like a national exhibition but then two months before the exhibition after we built the walls, the architect of the restoration, Gaio Lenti, the Italian, a horrible person, she passed away. She said I want to see my building and we had this all argument and fight whatever we lost the argument and the fight. We has to make the exhibition much more rigid than it was before. So it was a transitional project. It was between those two things. But it at least, this opened the way for Rene to realize the exhibition in his own way. So it was a part of this kind of process. Before I took the exhibition, I took the Biennial over, it was like. I don't know I mean, every Turkish artist you knew was in the exhibition. It was just some kind of ridicules and not ridicules of course, I mean 70-80 something like this. But you know it is all part of this kind of process. It is a if. It would be impossible for the 1987 exhibition or 1989 exhibition to be curated. Because you do not have the means, you can not go out, you do not have the capacity, you can not know the world like we know the world today. Today is much, today is like making an international exhibition is very easy. It is very easy the way it is taken for granted that you travel, you do this, you do that you know.

6)Finally, my last question is as far as I know that you are not fond of the last three Biennials, and in which ways do you see their lacking points in the curatorial, critical, public level?

I don't like it. I don't like anything. It is nothing new. It is nothing against the Biennial, it is just, in 2005 Biennial has some really great exhibitions' work in it which I really really liked. There were moments that were really beautifully transcended like the Buyukada, parts of Buyukada. And also the Hamam. I mean a few other things, these were great and then there were moments by a great artist like Michael Rakowitz whose work turned out to be really

awful. Because it was just over abandoned and it just wouldn't stop. It was just like almost, invasive. But my problem with the project is not the exhibition itself, its how the exhibition is realized. That it has no, the public is treated like a let's say afterthought. It is not in the project, in the process itself. It was a private affair by big commercial galleries and big commercial blah blah. And big dealers and big buyers. I mean it was their Biennial. It was not our Biennial. We saw some work in public, some great work. But it does not mean that it was over, it was the public's Biennial, it wasn't! It was a completely privatized affair. That was my problem. 2013, completely different animal. I mean although they could have done a great exhibition after Gezi resistance. It was a very very difficult moment that Fulya Erdemci was caught in. It is hard. I mean I wouldn't. It could have been done in many different ways, maybe not. Problematic. It was certainly problematic. It was certainly

repeating the Gezi in ways that you can't, you should not. And the process that led to the exhibition was also a complicated, difficult, questionable process but you know, I mean who am I to say. I would not have been, I would not have wanted to be caught in her shoes at a moment like that. She was given took on an impossible challenge. And the public was very very kind so this was also good. Almost 300.000 people saw it so that is legendary I think. And 2011, that was like a gallery exhibition. Yes, I mean Jens has done some great work in the past, he continues to do so he is not, I think Adriana is just too slaw, too clean, you know, he has a style that's his style he reproduce it and I just don't think that was the show that Istanbul, maybe that's the show that of Istanbul because its when the market like at the peak and you know things were looking... It was just each Biennial for one reason another response to its time or becomes an exhibition of its time. I don't mean the general political context, but of its time. So 2015 is much more commercial than 2011. But when you look at 2015, the political, the social context. It tells you a different story that is somehow disengage from the political even if it is reflecting on it. Disengage from the political tells you that it was at this what I call kind of a post-public exhibition. But it is,
they are fine you know what I mean.

So these were all of my questions, thank you very much.

Most welcome.

Appendix 2: My Interview with the Author and Art critic Ahu Antmen, Istanbul (02/03/17) :

1)For you what were reasons that made Istanbul Biennial happen in the Istanbul Art scene, among the multiple factors which was the most triggering reason to make it happen?

The main reason in my view for the initiation of the Istanbul Biennial in the 1980s was an integration with the West, both culturally and artistically. That is, with an interest to be a part of, rather than a mere follower of artistic trends in the international arena in a contemporary sense. This has been a motivation of the Turkish art world since the 19th century, and the Istanbul Biennial represented that concern immensely. The fact that the beginning of this event coincides with a shift to neo-liberal economic policies and a more globalist cultural agenda should not be overlooked.

2)In which ways do you think that Istanbul biennial has significant impact on turkey and worldwide?

The impact of the Istanbul Biennial on the Turkish art scene has been very significant. Before the biennial, contemporary trends geared towards conceptualism and alternative ways of making art had already begun, in the seventies, but had not found an outlet or sufficient critical acclaim. The Istanbul Biennial through the years became a site in which artists, critics, educators, and all those involved in the world of art looked to as testing ground for creative efforts beyond the conventional modes of painting and sculpture focused on the ideology of artistic style alone. Thus many new alternative platforms have been formed in relation to the biennial. As for its worldwide impact, I am not so sure. It has surely become a very popular event with international appeal, but I'm not so sure that it offers an alternative model or a transformative arena of discussion in terms of the art biennial context.

3)How will you compare Istanbul biennial to the Venice Biennial, Documenta x, Manifesta in the curatorial approach?

I find the biennial's curatorial approach to be based on individual(ist) expression through the choice of venues, art and artworks, and very much contributing to the continuation of the star-system of the art world. This year, an artist duo will curate, but I don't think that makes a difference in the system. But then again, what could be the alternative? A biennial in the end is a part of the culture industry and generally follows its laws.

4)Through research I found out that Istanbul Biennial has been evolving since it first started, the changes were the single curator system, multiple venues including outdoor, less native artists but more from worldwide, making the student tickets free and etc. Is there any of the changes that you agree that it increased the level of success of the Istanbul Biennial in the curatorial, critical and public level or is there if any of the changes affected negatively?

The Istanbul Biennial has certainly been evolving throughout the years, first by moving from the old city to the Pera district with the 9th edition, critically engaging with Istanbul itself being on show as a touristic attraction. But I don't think that in a city like Istanbul the touristic aspect of the event can be easily surpassed.
The history of the place cannot easily be overlooked, sometimes the venues can become more interesting than the art on show as in the 14th edition. Thus the use of venues in a more consciously creative sense is an important aspect of the biennial that hasn't changed and has I think at times positively impacted the success. Trying to make the biennial more accessible, such as free entry can also be said to have a more positive effect in terms of the younger generation of spectators.

5)If asked to compare the 12th/13th and 14th Istanbul biennials, which one would you think as the most successful in the curatorial, critical and public level? Why?

This question requires a very long answer! But I think comparing the 12th, which was more in one place and within a more white cube structure and the 14th, which was widely dispersed and all over the city can be compared as two different approaches that attract attention in terms of the production of a biennial and how such choices contribute to the meaning of an event. I enjoyed the 14th because of the layers of culture it spoke from in terms of the history of Istanbul, but I'm not sure that this kind of personal experience is enough to say that the biennial was successful since most of the work was totally overshadowed by that personal experience of journeying around the city! I enjoyed the 12th because it was all very collected and I could focus on each work and concentrate on the political questions it brought forth in such a structured manner. I honestly don't think we have any consistent criteria to judge the success of these biennials, and I certainly don't think the number of spectators is criteria for success either, so I'm afraid I'll leave your question somewhat unanswered.

Appendix 3: My Interview with Beral Madra, former coordinator of Istanbul Biennial, Art Critic and Curator, Istanbul (07.06.17)

1) For you what were the reasons that made Istanbul Biennial happen in the Istanbul art scene and what do you think does help the Istanbul biennial to survive in such an atmosphere where political debate is existing? What preserve it and how does it reflect on the curatorial approach?

Istanbul Biennale, as a manifestation of 150 years Modern Art, started in late 80's when Turkey has transformed its economy from state capitalism to liberal capitalism; the private sector gained an open to the world power and used culture as a tool for recognition and visibility. However the transition from a Nation State programmed Modernism to Post-Modernism was only successful within the requests of consumption economy. In fact stanbul Biennale with its updated international content and artist profile created a rupture from the stagnated local art productions – stagnated in the sense that the majority of production consisted of abstract and figurative painting and sculpture until the late 80's. Only a group of new avant-garde artists started to produce conceptual art, installations, and photography from 1977 on. It has opened the horizon for for two generation of artists and influenced the education system in the art faculties of universities. During the 90's ad and the first decade of 2000 stanbul Biennale, with its international curators and artist profile gained visibility and significance in the global biennale system. The main aspect of stanbul Biennale is its ambition to create a mainstream position out of a peripheral art scene. At that time I published a book with my selection of articles under the title "Postperipheral Flux". During these two decades stanbul Biennale became a showcase of private sector art investment, with its positive and negative aspects. In 2010 stanbul European Culture Capital period with over 500 international art and culture projects and events stanbul art scene reached its peak of of its energy and visibility. After 2010 with the socio-political-economic transition of Turkey from a semi-democratic state to conflictual slamic-democracy, stanbul Biennale became a

manifestation of laic, secular, globally connected ideology of welfare and intellectual classes, and now it is experiencing another rupture from the art and culture ideology of majority of the population, despite the very valuable challenges of biennale realized in Çanakkale, Mardin and Sinop.

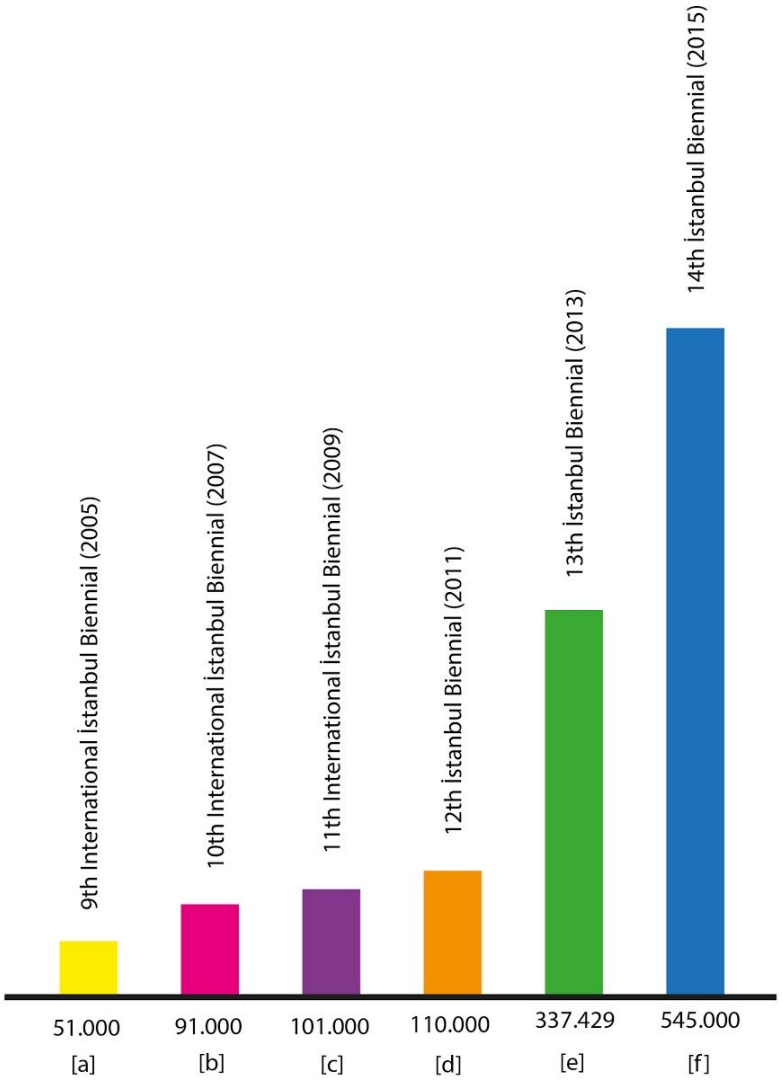
2)As an art critic could you witness an evolution in the aspect of the curatorial themes, artist choices and venues? Would you agree with me on the fact that on the recent Istanbul Biennials such as 12th and the 14th, the themes are played safe(except the 13th Biennial) to ensure its survival in political debate? Do you think it will help its survival? Why / Why not?

Evolution may be a too utopic term for art criticism and curatorial themes; there are many directions and perspectives, mostly bound to the socio-political and economic issues or to the geography; not the forget that global affairs are ubiquitously effecting the professional life of artists and curators. We are all aware of the domination of the art-market, mainly manipulated by auction houses, established galleries and collectors. On the other side there are independent official or private institutions, museums, art centers that support the independency of the art critics and artists. Famous intellectuals, scholars and academicians such as Zizek, Varoufakis, Rancier, Badiou etc. have endowed the impact of art and culture criticism. Social media is also positively influencing the expansions of contemporary art. As to the themes of İstanbul Biennale: The curators are no doubt sincere and serious in their manifestations. The problems for curators are as follows: İstanbul is a megapole (18M); extremely heterogeneous; contemporary art is in interests of an elite class (last biennale visitors: not over 400.000); the political scene is extremely instable; the venues are not adequate for contemporary art productions; only private sector is supporting/sponsoring the biennale; this private sector has already created a monopoly that effects the independency of the biennale…Now, we are looking forward to the next biennale under the difficult socio-political circumstances!

3)In which ways do you think that Istanbul Biennial has significant impact on Turkey and worldwide? How will you compare Istanbul Biennial's position to the Venice Biennial, Documenta X and Manifesta?

İstanbul Biennale, since the first one, with its non-national content, has opened the horizon for all the art scenes outside of Western Europe and during the years it gained a good reputation, no doubt with the presence of renown curators and artists. It is integrated into the biennale system with its positive or debatable aspects. However, I would wish to see a more artist-friendly and public-friendly approach; the capitalist system forces the biennale to be managed as a corporation rather than a foundation. On the other hand let us be realistic: No biennale can compete with Venice Biennale and Documenta, with their immense budgets and visitor numbers.

Appendix 4:



This chart demonstrates the public attendance from 9th Istanbul Biennial to 14th Istanbul Biennial.

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