

Interview

***Butterfly Effect Kadri Özayten*¹: The Curator between The Artist and The Professor**

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INTERVIEWER: PAS Bio:

Paul Ade SILVA graduated from Merton College, London in 1989 and studied at Huddersfield Polytechnic, later Huddersfield University where he earned a BA honours degree in 1992 and a postgraduate award in Education in 1994. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Literary Arts by Institut des Hautes Etudes Superieures Internationales de Marseille (IHESIM) under the supervision of Aix Marseille University in 2005. He is currently Professor of English New Media at Nisantasi University and was Professor, English Language and Literature, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University.

Prof. Dr. Silva is the publisher and editor-in-chief of the Journal Academic Marketing Mysticism Online (JAMMO). Amongst Paul Silva's contemporaries whom he has interviewed, and or, published or those who have mentored him are very renowned writers and poets such as John LANCASTER, Lemn SISSAY, Lesley JEFFRIES, Tina KENDAL, Adenrele AWOTONA, Simon ARMITAGE (UK Poet Laureate 2019-2029) Ian DUHIG, Meena ALEXANDER (deceased), Jackie SMART, David MORLEY, Benjamin ZEPHANIAH, Milner

¹ Milli Reasürans Sanat Galerisi (2019). *Kelebek Etkisi Butterfly Effect Kadri Özayten*. İstanbul: Milli Reasürans T.A.Ş. ISBN: 978-605-2391-11-2.

PLACE, Peter KALU, Nayantara SAHGAL; Maya ANGELOU (deceased), Buchi EMECHETA (deceased), Nissim EZEKIEL and Edward Archibald MARKHAM (both deceased) to name, but a few. Huddersfield Town, West Yorkshire has been the place that has contributed mostly to the nurturing of Paul's artistic talents apart from London in the early days and "I am forever grateful".

INTERVIEWEE: MG Bio:

Prof. Dr. Marcus Graf was born in 1974 in Germany. After studying Cultural Sciences and Esthetical Communication in the Institute for Fine Arts, Aesthetics and Art History at the University of Hildesheim in Germany, he received his PhD in 2010 from the Institute of Contemporary Art History, Aesthetic and Art Theory at Stuttgart Art Academy in Germany and became in 2017 Professor for Contemporary Art History and Theory at the Fine Art Faculty at Yeditepe University, where he has been teaching since 2003. He is currently the head of the Art and Cultural Department.

Graf has been living, working in Istanbul since 2001 and has been the curator of over 100 exhibitions in institutions such as Siemens Sanat, Milli Resürans, Akbank Sanat, Contemporary Istanbul, Baksı Museum, Elgiz Museum and Erimtan Museum. Currently, Marcus Graf is the resident curator of Plato Sanat.

In 2010, Graf was invited to create the exhibition, "Not a Lens but a Prism" for the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation in Evora, Portugal, as well as the exhibition, "Hans & Helga" for the gallery CDA Projects in Istanbul. In 2009, he was selected to curate the exhibition, "Temporary Harassment" for Istanbul 2010 – European Capital of Culture. In 2007, he was chosen to be the co-curator of the 10th Istanbul Biennial project; "nightcomers". He was the artistic director of Aviva Art Program (2006 - 2007). Between 2005 and 2007, Graf worked as the artistic director and curator of the mobile art space, "Under Construction". He was also the resident curator of the exhibition space, "Siemens Sanat" (2003 - 2007).

Marcus Graf is the author of numerous books, exhibition catalogues and publications on contemporary art and artists, and continues to live in Istanbul as academic, curator and art writer.

PART 1: THE CURATOR BETWEEN THE ARTIST AND THE PROFESSOR

PAS: I would like to start our discussion by introducing you to our national and international readers in your role as the former Program Director of the Contemporary Istanbul (CI). Talk to us briefly about CI and what you've been doing, so that we can explore the relevance and

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importance of your contribution to artistic production and presentation, protection and heritage vis-à-vis cultural cross-fertilisation between Istanbul and Europe.

MG: Since 2006, every Autumn, the local and international art scene meet at Contemporary Istanbul to present the latest trends in contemporary art and its market. As the leading art fair of Turkey and the region, it brings together around 80 galleries from Turkey and various countries abroad. Due to the approx. 100.000 art lovers who visit the fair, CI counts as among the most visited art fairs in the world. This number plus the wide media interest proves the steadily increasing interest in Contemporary Istanbul.

The fair also functions like an indicator for the situation of today's art and its market in Turkey. Reflecting the state of contemporary art's production, mediation and market, it is a great chance for the visitor to discover the character of visual art. Here, the fair addresses various kinds of art-lovers from the experienced art collector with a high budget to the new collector with modest possibilities, to various professionals, young art lovers as well as interested laymen. Due to its multifaceted character, its high number of strong galleries and attractive side events, the Contemporary Istanbul is the biggest art event in the country. Being aware of its cultural impact, the team around the founders Rabia and Ali Güreli constructed a multiple organizational structure consisting of communication, sale, and education for spreading today's art within wider audiences.

I worked as program director between 2014 and 2017, and curated and coordinated exhibitions like "The 90 Minutes Show", "CI Editions or CI Collectors' Stories". Also, I organized the "Dialogue Talk Series", in which an international group of experts discussed the character of today's art. So, you can say that I was in charge of projects besides sales and gallery issues. I am interested in the production, exhibition and mediation of contemporary art, that I could contribute my sense or contemporary curatorial thoughts and practice to the projects mentioned above.

PAS: When you reflect on the exhibition, Not a Lens but a Prism, (for the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation in Evora, Portugal, 2010), that you were the curator of, as well as the exhibition Hans & Helga for the gallery CDA Projects in Istanbul (2009) and the exhibition, "Temporary Harassment for Istanbul" (2010); what are the themes running through them and what are distinct in each of these exhibitions and what is your assessment of their impact on art and society? I invite you to help us understand how you see art and its role in society, as a curator of arts, as an artist, art historian and as an academic.

MG: These three exhibitions differ a lot from each other. I was invited to do a show. Not a Lens but a Prism was reflecting on how people see other cultures through the photographic

gaze. It was a photography show with Turkish artist being presented in Evora, Portugal. I wanted to trigger a visual exchange through an exhibition design that integrates the audience, and changes their role from being a passive receiver to an active contributor to the exhibition. In this sense, I tried to overcome cliché and false knowledge.

In Hans & Helga, I worked with German artists and foreign artists living in Germany. Together we questioned the notions of identity, ideology, and history through the review of clichés. That is the reason, why this show was about Germany by focusing on football, cars, beer, porno, money, sausages. It was an ironical, sometimes sarcastic exhibition about our knowledge about Germany and Germans.

In Temporary Harassment, Istanbul 2010, Capital of European Culture invited me to do a show. So, I designed a show that traveled through the city, and permanently changed its formal character. Just like the permanent flux in Istanbul, it was in a steady flow. The show was site and time specific. It critically reflected on gentrification and the urban chaos we live with every day.

In general, you see that all three shows reviewed current and pressing issues of today's world through the eyes of contemporary artists. Regarding the curatorial practice, all three shows proposed alternative strategies beyond the classic white cube method in order to adjust the show to the crazy pace of our world.

PAS: What has been your most challenging experience in your work as a curator to the present time and what has given you the most elation?

MG: I did more than 100 exhibitions so far, and believe me, in every exhibition there are challenges. Every new show is the most exciting, because in each exhibition I try new things. The exhibition series, "Under Construction" was challenging, as we showed contemporary installation art in containers on the streets of Istanbul. "Artifex Ludens", the show at Erimtan Museum was great, because I exhibited Toys, something that I have not done before. At Milli Reasürans I did two retrospective shows of deceased artists, which were highly delicate. At CI, the "90 Minutes Shows" were crazy because over the time of 5 days, every 90 minutes we did a solo show, and the CI Collectors Stories was difficult, because we installed a museum-like show of 120 large artworks in 1.5 days.

PAS: How's this even remotely possible, how did you manage it?

MG: The pace that we have developed, here, in Turkey is high. With a lot of assistants and a detailed preparation, we were able to make it possible since I knew that we had only one and

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a half day. So, in Istanbul, we know that we always have to be prepared for a lot of unknown parameters, which helps us with flexibility, and allows for a high level of improvisation talent.

PAS: What are the contradictions and contradistinctions in the types of art you were commissioning since the Istanbul Culture Capital of Europe Project to date?

MG: I am in the lucky position of choosing my projects, and therefore only do the shows that I am interested in and that I want to do. I can only say, that since 2010, the demand for exhibitions and the institutionalizing as well as professionalization increased so that I have been having much more work to do than before.

PAS: Explain to us the common and not so common uses of some images, motifs, colours, styles and techniques in contemporary arts that you think are worth paying attention to, by up and coming artists especially student-artists.

MG: Since the 1980s, there are no styles, schools or common tendencies anymore. Still, following the development of contemporary art, we can underline its transdisciplinary, eclectic and pluralist character. Instead of consistent oeuvres, project-based artists are prevailing. Also research based art, as well as relational aesthetic has become the main mode of working. In the end, art has become socio-politically engaged. So, is my curatorial work following these tendencies.

PAS: Give us some examples of your curatorial work becoming socio-politically engaged, and if you may, let us more in into how you make decisions to undertake a project when you're choosing your projects.

MG: My current exhibition "Regular Insanity" at Akbank Sanat is a good example for a show that is socio-political engaged and critical without being polemic or didactic. *Regular Insanity* is an international group exhibition of contemporary artists from various fields and disciplines at Akbank Sanat in Istanbul. The show reviews the concept of knowledge in our so-called information age, where most known is mediated through uncountable screens and media channels. While exposing a pluralist and holistic understanding of knowledge, the exhibition questions given intellectual hegemonies.

I chose the topics according to my field of interests. Also, the topic has to have a current value and meaning, maybe urgency in today's world, society or its art world. I chose issues that I am interested in, and which I feel are important to review with the help of artists.

PAS: What qualifies as Istanbul influence on Arts in terms of its uniqueness and diversity?

MG: The intercultural character of the city, its high speed of urban change, and the large number of young people give the city a highly dynamic character. This is reflected in art and culture. The urban flux is many times higher and stronger than in any city in Europe or the US. Besides, its many socio-political problems and tensions gives experts of art and culture very productive and meaningful ground to work on.

PAS: Do you see arts' purpose within culture as liberating, and, or, suffocating or dysfunctional in the super charged techno world of today?

MG: Only art and culture can save us and create a democratic and humanist society. This sounds naïve, idealist and utopic, but in dystopian times, such an approach is the opposition to the leading tendencies in the wild beast called capitalism and conservatism. Especially in information age, everything we know and see is based on digital visuals. This is the reason, why visual art can function as an institution, where artists create images and representation that go beyond simple simulations and post-truth postulations.

PAS: Discuss some stumbling blocks to working as an artist internationally for Turkish artists.

MG: The lack of official funding and private institutional support, as well as the weak situation of the art market cause economic problems. Only a few galleries and art institutions can bridge between the local and the international scene through collaborations or participations in foreign fairs. Besides this, visa problems (it is difficult to get a visa), create a barrier between local and international arts scene.

PAS: What damages or benefits do financial interests have on one of the important functions of arts as a critic of societal values?

MG: The interconnection between capitalism and the art world is over 500 years old. Also, the old masters were depending on the money of patrons, and collectors. It is highly difficult to free yourself from these boundaries, and only a few are really liberated. I believe that the challenge for artists today, lies in the possibility of finding a way through the market without selling your soul. It is possible, and I know a lot of examples.

MG: Ali Elmacı, Erdoğan Zümrütoğlu, Horasan and many more could be named. Today, it sometimes seems that being popular, famous and making money have become more important than artistic and intellectual concepts and interests. This is not the case for many artists. The ones I work with are definitely in the arts for the arts and its interconnection with society.

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PAS: Please expand on some of the artists that you know who have been able to escape the *Doctor Faustus's* snare, of selling their soul, to draw a contra example from one of Marlow's great characters.

PART 2: BUTTERFLY EFFECT KADRI ÖZAYTEN

PAS: Your last exhibition, *Butterfly Effect Kadri Özayten* at the Milli Reasürans Sanat Galerisi (2019) İstanbul relates to the documenting feature of art; how important is the legacy of Kadri Özayten as an artist, a social conscience and as an educator?

MG: Kadri Özayten counts among the early representative of a contemporary art practice that goes beyond traditional understanding of painting and sculpture. At the same time, he became an important figure at the university through his intellectual and conceptional approaches to art. Also, his combination of social-political criticism with minimal and conceptual approaches gave him an outstanding position in the art scene of the 1990s in Turkey. As person, artist and teacher, he was beloved and highly respected.

PAS: On page 14 of *Kelebek Etkisi Butterfly Effect Kadri Özayten's* catalogue, it's written that

[...] creating art may be individual, it is in relation to the society's cluster of thoughts.

Therefore, artistic creation takes place together with the material or spiritual, cultural heritage/memory/history of the societies of which we are a part of – or were made a part of. [...]

Can you elaborate on this with respect to Kadri Özayten work and his community or communities of artists, distinguishing or aligning the material, spiritual, cultural heritage and memory in the context of the history of his life? I suppose, I'm asking you to give us a broad stroke of his life in relation to the material and spiritual and reference some more of his contemporaries.

MG: Kadri Özayten experienced various socio-political struggles between the 1970s and 1990s as an artist inside and outside of Turkey. Various form of conflicts are reflected in his work through the references to military, war and violence. There is often a tension within the pieces. He reflects on social tension which had an impact on his psychological condition. Like Altan Gürman, Sarkis, or Serhat Kiraz, he became an early representative of a contemporary artist who draws on current and pressing socio-political topics in alternative formal and conceptual artistic form of expression.

PAS: What parts did Kadri Özyayten play during identity struggles in the 1970s Turkey especially given the transitional and bifurcation of the arts scene at the time?

MG: In the early 1970s, Kadri Özyayten's work is characterized by paintings and prints that are mainly based on his own biography. Here, emotionally driven figurative pieces reflect on his personal life. Also, during this time, the artist's interest in Anatolian iconography can be recognized through the combination of traditional motives with modern aesthetics.

PAS: Discuss Kadri's work in the 1980's in terms of globalization including his paintings on the nature of reality during the contemporary 'vanitas'.

MG: The works of the 1980s are characterized by personal traumata caused by socio-political incidents. Here, besides a rather dark range of colours, nameless blindfolded figures often appear in vast and anonymous landscapes. Özyayten's notion of composition and the painterly treatment of his protagonists aim towards simplification, minimalization and abstraction. This phase can also be understood as an interstation between the early pieces and the later, often interdisciplinary works of the 1990s, in which the artist directly reacts to the wars of the Balkan and the Gulf Area as well as to social and political national conflicts. It is also this time, when Kadri Özyayten besides his paintings focuses on collages, time- and site-specific installations as well as on pieces that were influenced by Fluxus and its process-oriented production methods. Also experiments with non-objective art and video art can be found during this period.

PAS: How can one understand Özyayten's creation in the millennium period especially during the Gulf War and the Balkan civil war of the 1990s?

MG: The 1990s meant a phase in his work, where the main symbols of Özyayten's oeuvre appeared: Butterflies, pebble stones, paper airplanes and camouflage textures became then his personal anti-war icons and hope. Indeed, in this highly tensed period, when wars and crises were shaking the world around him, a strong socio-political interest and sincere humanist engagement became the main forces that propelled his work.

Also, during this time, he went beyond traditional artistic methods and materials in order to work in Fluxus-like manners. Dealing with collage, assemblage as well as video art and installation, he created trans-disciplinary work that is critical and socio-politically engaged.

After 2000, the artist again has shifted his focus onto painting, and had created important series of large pieces, in which he had summarized the artistic efforts of 40 years of intensive research and hard work.

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PAS: Describe the quality of symbolism in relation to meaning within the spectrum of Kadri Özeyten's Butterfly Effect.

MG: Especially in the 1990s, Kadri Özeyten was using many symbols that referred to war, military and various forms of crises. Still, he managed not to fall into the trap of clichés, or polemical as well as didactic attitudes. His pieces are open enough to give the spectator space for his/ her own insights and considerations. At the same time, their criticism is concrete enough to point to the disasters of war. In the end, his oeuvre always contains hope, and the belief in the power of humanism.

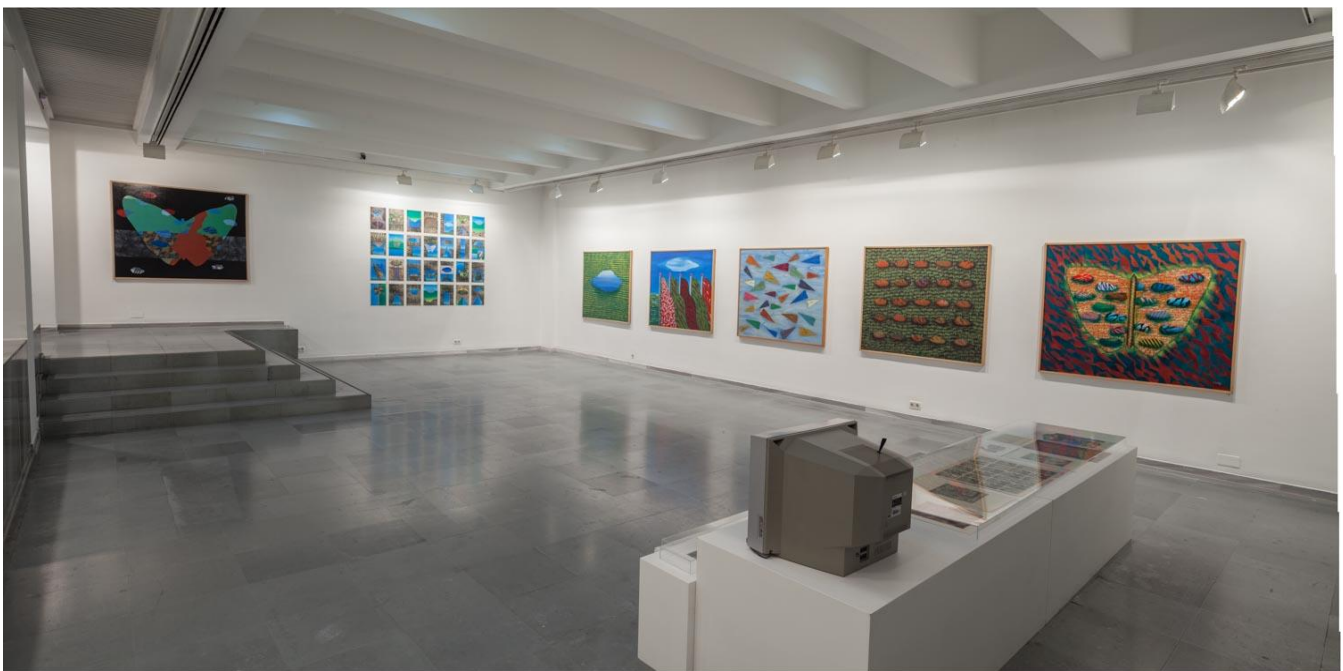
PAS: How would you describe the Butterfly Effect exhibition of Professor Kadri Özeyten when compared to some of your other exhibitions in terms of energy, style, scope and quality?

MG: *Butterfly Effect* is a retrospective analysis of the oeuvre of Kadri Özeyten. Spanning from the 1970s to the beginning of 2000, and exemplarily presenting drawings, prints, paintings, as well as collages and videos, the exhibition gives an insight into the work of a remarkable artist who knew how to relate art to politics through a brilliant balancing of aesthetic and intellectual matters. At Milli Reasürans, we tried to give an insight into the thoughts and practices of this important artist, which is still unknown to a large group of artists and art experts.

So, it was important to manage this goal, and I guess we achieved it. At the same time, we should remember that especially in Istanbul, many artists and instructors around the Marmara University knew him as artist, friend, colleague and teacher. This makes this exhibition highly delicate. I was curious whether we would fulfill their expectations. Nevertheless, the feedback that I received was very positive.

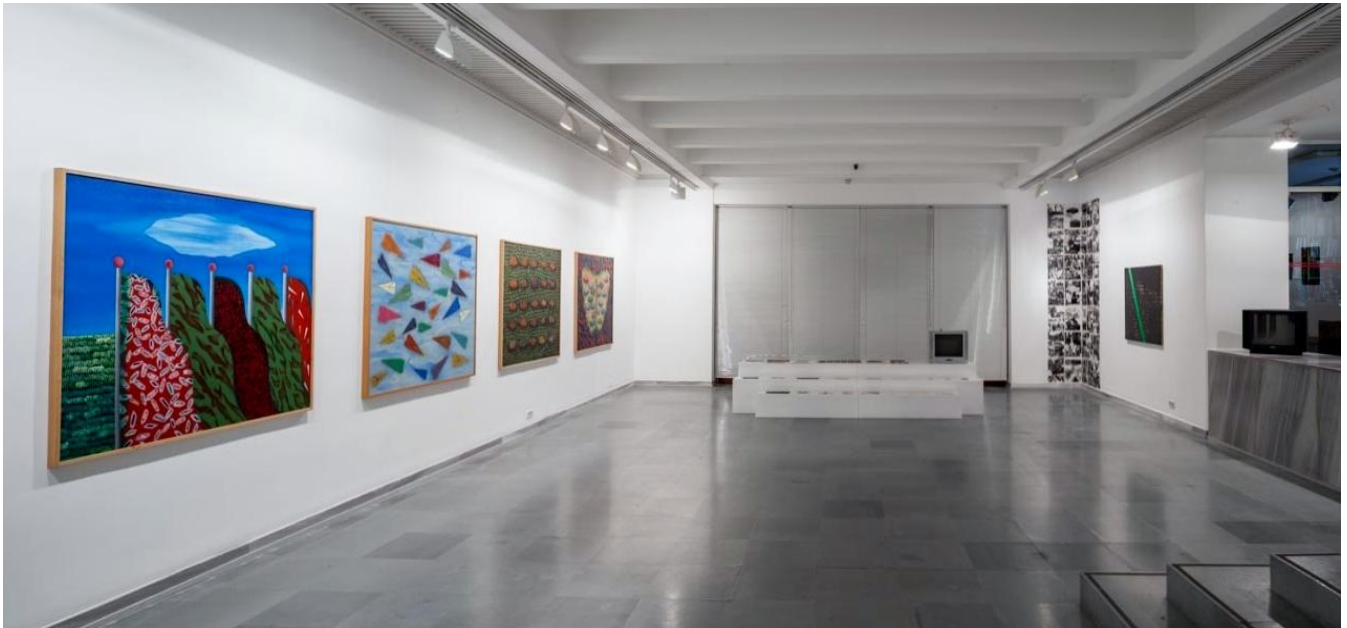


Picture 1

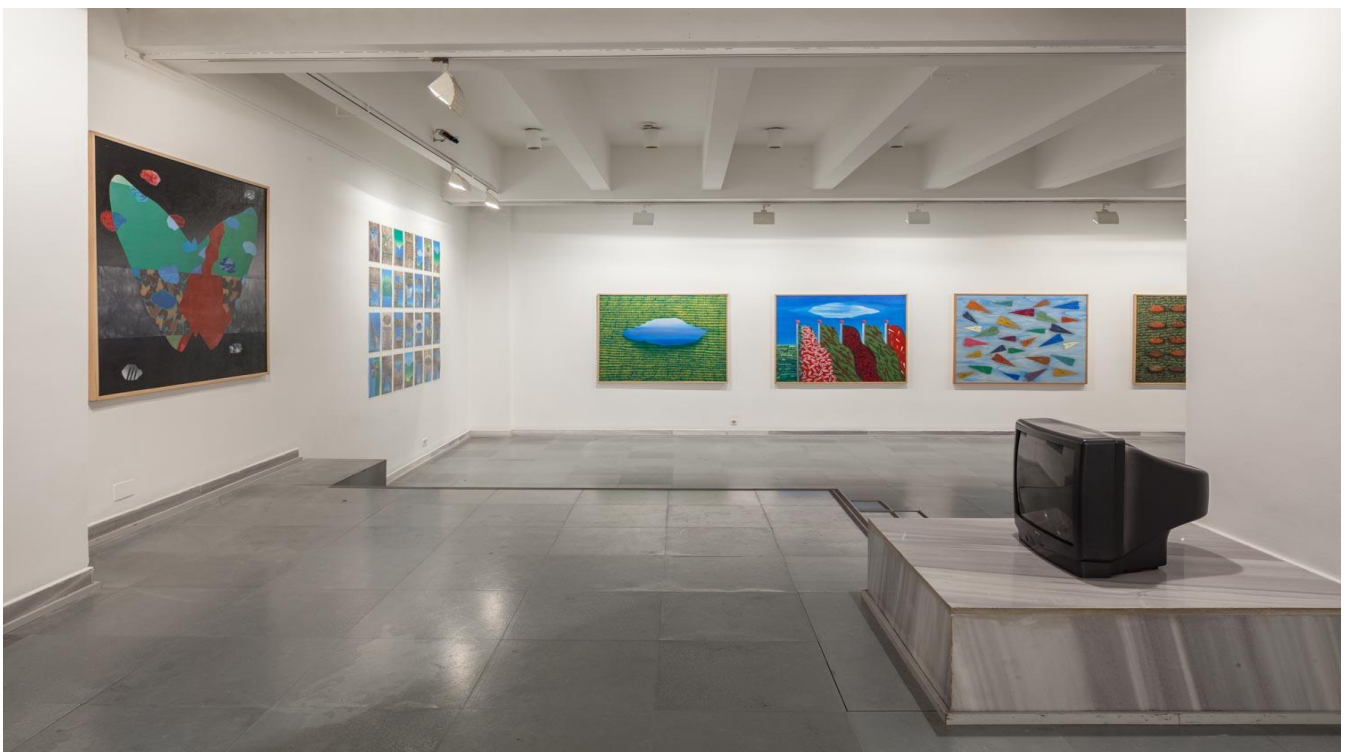


Picture 2

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Picture 3



Picture 4

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