

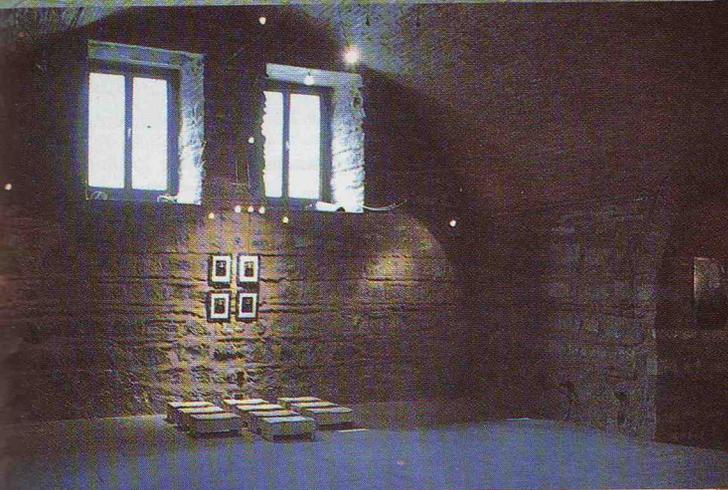
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# Flash Art



*John Maybury*  
*"Read Only Memory"*  
*Video Still*





Clockwise from top: CANDEGER FURTUN, *Untitled*, 1998. HALE TENGER, *Shroud*, 1996. GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA, *The Notebook*, 1993.

## Aperto Istanbul

Ahu Antmen

*"Aperto" is a Flash Art "virtual" exhibition, curated to highlight the art currently being shown in a particular city or region. It will soon be available for viewing on Flash Art's upcoming new Web site.*

The contemporary art scene in Turkey has flourished somewhat in recent years, due mainly to the international biennials. The opportunity to feel the wavelength of artists from all over the world has led, it seems, to an inner questioning of where Turkish contemporary art stands — or could stand — in a wider, global perspective. More and more young artists are tuning themselves to the world, tackling issues that have a relevance in a broader sense, questioning themselves in the eyes of the other, creating a visual language of shared vocabulary in the international contemporary art world. Identity, nature vs. technology, death, and body politics are themes usually

referred to, and the consciousness of being neither completely Eastern nor Western leads to an interesting, complex array of artistic production. Turkish artists are intrinsically post-modern, and the schizophrenia of this neither/nor situation, this dual existence in a space both modern and traditional, so old but so open to the new, bears a forest of inspiration.

The main group of artists that emerge from within this framework are, quite surprisingly, women. Let us not forget that it is a male-dominated society we are talking about, and although there is no overt discrimination against women in artistic circles, socially determined roles are still effective. The

Turkish contemporary art world in the eighties and nineties has seen a number of women artists emerging as the pioneers of a movement towards the contemporary: women artists' experiments in the styles of pop, conceptual and installation art have yielded interesting results, and few have shown in personal and group exhibitions or biennials abroad. The focal point for many of these women artists has been the cross-examination of the question of identity, and not only from a woman's perspective. A sensitive, yet active and forceful approach to this question in its psychological, sociological, and political aspects has created a contemporary visual history in which we see ourselves.

There have been various exhibitions in Istanbul celebrating the work of women artists, but not many attempts yet from the "West" to link the woman artists of Turkey to the international chain of so-called "women's exhibitions." Still, recent exhibitions such as the "Zij Sporen" in Brussels and the "Echlot" in Kassel brought Turkish artists Gülsün Karamustafa, Hale Tenger, Aye Erkmen together with artists such as Helen Chadwick, Mona Hatoum, etc. My aim here is to point out, by mentioning a few artists, that the artistic production by women in Turkey is relevant when compared to the art produced by women in the rest of the world, that more or less the



Gülsün Karamustafa, *Sergisi*

19 Mart - 6 Nisan 1993  
Kadın Eserleri Kitaphanesi  
Fener, PTT yanı (Batı bina)  
Hıdırlıca Bulvarı  
Tel: (1) 534 95 50



Top: **YNCI EVINER**, *Skinless*, 1996. Right: **NIL YALTER**, *Terra Nomade*, 1998.



YİNE GELDİ YAZ AYLAĞI  
GÖRBEĞİM ŞİMDENBERİ  
YAZ YAĞMURU SUDA OLUR  
BOŞAR FAĞLAR ŞİMDENBERİ

RETURN

NERT

Left: **GÜLSÜN KARAMUSTAFA**, *The Notebook*, 1993.

same problems constitute their driving force, and more interestingly, that the metaphorical place they inhabit can open up new possibilities for discussions in art and women's issues.

One of the leading artists in this context is undoubtedly Gülsün Karamustafa, who in the late 80s and 90s abandoned painting to pursue a visual language that would enable her to search for deeper meaning in the westernly influenced yet east-

back at her childhood and changing times, and *Karamustafa Import-Export*, a huge project that brings together artists from Istanbul and Vienna to commemorate the cultural ties between the two cities. Often using materials that are kitsch, Karamustafa is an interesting artist that identifies with the city of Istanbul itself: conscious of memory, yet so open to new possibilities.

*We Didn't Go Outside, We*

an unforgettable sound piece with musician Serdar Ateer, which was heard alongside an eerie installation presented in a laboratory-like atmosphere. Death has been a theme Hale Tenger has further explored in recent works such as *Shroud* of 1996, but it is in a metaphorical sense that we come across it: the loss of memory, the loss of identity, the schizophrenia of a society trying to catch up with time... Tenger's *I Know People*

from the whole suggest the many philosophical arguments concerning the body in recent years. Assembling a kind of "wasteland" with her skin-like sculptures and installations in the gallery space, Ynci Eviner poses questions of historical relevance. The spinal cord becomes a tree root, the body a vast land; the artist becomes the translator of a language that are the gestures of the body.

The concept of geography

## The spinal cord becomes a tree root, the body a vast land; the artist becomes the translator of a language that are the gestures of the body.

ernly based popular culture of Turkey. Using time as her underlying theme, Karamustafa explores the political, social, and thus psychological changes in a country where fast developments are sometimes too fast for individuals to handle. A politically active student in her youth, Karamustafa was banned from leaving Turkey for 16 years and this "exile within her own land" situation has had its effects on her work: she magnifies the cultural traditions, objects, and attitudes that surround her. Her recent work includes *The Genealogy of the Ottoman Female* where she explores the role of eastern and western women in the Ottoman dynasty, *My Roses*, *My Fantasies* where she looks

*Were Always on the Outside, We Didn't Go Inside, We Were Always on the Inside* is a work by Hale Tenger, another Turkish woman artist that explores the themes of identity, memory, and most notably, deterritorialization. Her main focus is the sense of being out of place, out of time, creating a Gogolesque atmosphere of the absurd. It was with *History of Time* in 1990 that she started her rewarding career as an artist, and this time voyage in all senses of the word has come to determine the character of her work. One of her most memorable exhibitions has been *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia-Herzegovina* in which she visited the refugee camps in Turkey, interviewed suffering Bosnians, and created

*Like This* created a furor in Turkey when she depicted the Turkish flag comprised of the infamous three monkey and Ali Baba statuettes (little men with big penises!), a work that summarized the social structure of a male dominated country.

An interesting artist that deals with the question of identity solely through gender is Ynci Eviner, whose recent exhibitions juxtaposing the body, geography, and history saw diverse reactions from the public. She suggests reading art history from artist's bodies and uses as her main material animal skin that has scars on it, referring to the skin as a storage of memory. Her material carries her message, body parts that are fragmented

takes a different turn in Nil Yalter's work, the Paris based Turkish artist who has been creating CD-ROM installations in recent years. *Terra Nomade* which was shown in Istanbul earlier this year, is a journey through land and time, tracing the roots of the rootless — the many people that have left Turkey to find work elsewhere, nomads that never manage to live in the "here and now" because of the burdens of memory and nostalgia they bear. Nil Yalter has created a world beyond the screen, a world of color, design and sound: the spectator is free to roam this virtual land...

*Ahu Antmen is a critic based in Istanbul.*