

In Conversation With Deniz Beşer

By Yanca Keremoglu
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You studied Ceramic and Glass Design in the fine arts department of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University and then studied Painting at the Universidad de Sevilla. What kind of experiences you've been through finding yourself in the world of contemporary art?

Before starting college, I studied Plastic Arts in high school. I started establishing the conceptual roots of my interdisciplinary work throughout high school. During this time, I spent a lot of time visiting contemporary art exhibitions which led me to establish different perspectives. In time, it has become like a ritual for me to visit museums and galleries to see art exhibitions.

During my studies at the University of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts, I enrolled in painting, sculpture, graphic design and film studies courses. Studying Painting in Spain led me to develop my art practice. Throughout my graduation, I experienced working on various art discipline such as ceramics, sculpture, design, and comics. Since then, I have carried on my career in the production of contemporary art and curatorial studies. Currently, I'm interested in making painting, video, and fanzine works. One day, I may go back to reexperience making ceramics and glass works.

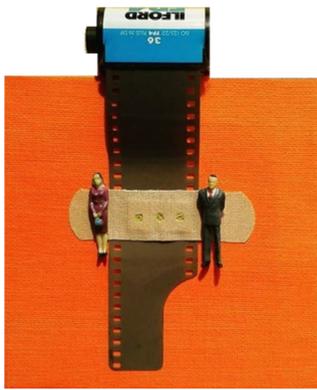
Can you give us an overview of the development of your art practice over the years. What are the memorable project/exhibition(s) that you regard as a milestone in your artistic journey?

I define my art practice dividing into two different periods as before college and after college. Studying Ceramics and getting basic art education during college changed my perception of forms in art and helped me to learn technical knowledge of various materials. Art education provided me a deeper understanding of the art history. I started to get to know more about performance art during college and did several performances in action painting. I created works and mural paintings under the influence of street art. I've learnt more about video art and put it together with my paintings after finishing college. At the same period, I've started organizing art events and exhibitions. I've been involved in producing fanzines with painting and getting in touch with fanzine enthusiasts since 2010. I can say that fanzines (photocopy magazine) are the publications that inspire me the most. In my latest works, I utilize humorous discussion approach to the problems of popular culture, politics, and everyday life.

One of the projects I consider as a milestone in my career is my solo exhibition the **Attention Wars** that took place in Vienna. In this exhibition, I presented a selection of painting, video, ready-made object and zine.

Among my exhibits, I would consider the **Letter Exhibition**, as another milestone. It's a mail art project which I began creating in my military service. I stored the quarter the letters I received from Turkey and abroad through an open call and sent visual and textual responses to all the mails in a different manner than usual soldier letters. Later, I exhibited the letters and their copies that I sent and the letters I received from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Süleyman Demirel University, which was located in the city where I served my military service and then I exhibited them at the Pasajist (Pasaj). The Letter Exhibition project had an intense schedule consisting of numerous concerts and events that took place for two weeks.

Another project that I consider as a significant exhibition in my career is Transformation des Geschehens, which I took part during an artist program in Germany. I designed an area according to the framework of this exhibition that consisted of large scale mural painting, an installation, a video, performance, and fanzine works that I created under the influence of the Gezi Movement that emerged in the very same period. I also consider **Open Studio Days** and **Book & Zine Fair** as milestones of my life.



Alongside your career in as an artist, you also coordinate art events such as Open Studio Days Istanbul, Fanzineist Vienna Art Book & Zine Fair, FanzineIST-Zine Fest of Istanbul. How do you manage to work both as an arts coordinator and an artist?

As an independent artist, I've noticed certain gaps in the arts sector. I decided to work on filling these gaps by organizing new projects by my own approach. In 2014, I've began to organize Open Studio Days Istanbul, a non-profit organization aiming to create artist solidarity. More than 240 different artists and 150 art studios have took part in Open Studio Days for the last six years.

I also started to organize Fanzineist-Zine Fest of Istanbul in 2016, after I had noticed the absence of a fanzine festival that runs in a professional manner in Turkey. For two years, we have welcomed artists and publishers from various countries for this event that consists of workshops, concerts, exhibitions, discussions and an extensive fanzine fair program. When I had moved to Vienna, I decided to organize it in Vienna under the name of Fanzineist Vienna Art Book & Zine Fair. In 2019, we organized the first edition of Fanzineist Vienna Art Book & Zine Fair.

I believe that working as a coordinator and as an artist with "do it yourself" approach contribute a lot to my art practice. Hard work lies in the essence of creating projects as an artist, an art coordinator and a curator. I work consistently and always try to enhance my efficiency. In this sense, I can describe myself as a cultural worker.

Who inspires you as an artist?

Thomas Hirschhorn, Gelitin, Shepard Fairey, Gaspar Noe, Ken Butler, Blixa Bargeld, Esat Başak, Ben Frost and zine makers who produce unique works are some of the figures that inspire me.

Are there any books that change the way you look at art?

It is very difficult to name only one book. Among the ones that comes to my mind are; Ferhan Sensoy's books with his humorous literature, Beat Period's writer Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Howard S. Becker's *The Art Worlds*, which deals with the functioning of different disciplines of art. Recently, I read *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*, that is both fiction and fanzine.

You're also the co-founder of the collective Heyt bel! Fanzin. How did the project come up?

Heyt Bel! Fanzin! was founded by me, Sedef Karakas and Baris Sinsi in 2010. Heyt bel! is a zine & artist collective, an independent art publication promoting analog rather than digital. The zine consists of various subjects from contemporary art, comics, illustration, artist interviews, literature, music to politics. All of the written content and visual materials were produced by the members of the team and artists from different countries of the world who have been invited through an open call by Heyt bel!. In this sense, Heyt bel!'s primary goal is to create an alternative exhibition in a fanzine form. At the same time, it makes zine meet with its enthusiasts through the organization of various exhibitions, workshops, and events, as well as participating in many art books & zine fairs, festivals, and exhibitions in Europe and America to promote the fanzine culture to a broader audience.

You must have a wide collection of fanzines. Which are the ones you like the most? What else do you like to collect?

My archive includes more than 3000 fanzines that I've collected over time from various countries. Art fanzines, comics, music and political fanzines are the most outstanding ones in this collection. My favorite fanzines in the collection are Turkey's '90s punk publications (Eblek Hardcore, Spastik Eroll ve Mondo Trasho) micro fanzines that I collected from Brazil, and the 3D fanzines which I discovered at the Vancouver Art Book Fair. I would like to collect more riso printing fanzines, illustration fanzines and artist books. But of course, there is no limit in collecting. It's a must to set a budget and space for collection to expand. These two factors makes it challenging. Besides collecting fanzines, I've always wanted to collect rare vinyls and interesting demo music albums.

Which cities have you lived in before? And how did it affect your art practice?

I was born and raised in Istanbul. I lived in cities like Houston and Sevilla before. Currently, I live in Vienna and Istanbul. Every country and culture have inspired me and my practice.

Can you talk about your upcoming projects? What's next for you?

Recently, I have been creating new paintings, drawings, videos, and fanzines for an exhibition which I intend to realize in 2021. Due to Coronavirus, we had to postpone or cancel all of our plans and projects. I was supposed to organize the Fanzineist Vienna Art Book & Zine Fair at Brunnenpassage in Vienna between 16th May and 17th May. The Austrian Government have canceled all its social and cultural activities until the 30th of August. Due to these unprecedented days, it's difficult for artists, cultural administrators, and art institutions to make future plans for exact days. We make discussions to organize Fanzineist Vienna in a different form. Besides that, due to the Pandemic, more than 10 art books and fanzine fairs that I plan to visit in Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey, were cancelled.

I plan to visit international fairs and organize Open Studio Days Istanbul in October 2020, if we return to the usual circumstances that we had before Covid-19. Besides, I currently consider transferring the Zine Matters: Self Publishing Exhibition From Prague to Vienna, which I curated in Vienna between February and March 2020, to the Phasebook Prague Art Book & Zine Fair, planned for December 2020. This year is the 10th year of Heyt bel! Fanzin and we would like to organize a special exhibition for this special night.

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