

YFoT NEWS - Interviewing Young Artist Atalay Yavuz

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Young Friends of Turkey was invited to view the Protocinema intervention in Istanbul recently and our Vice-President had the chance to ask the young artist, Atalay Yavuz, some questions.



Teresa: You have a few pieces showing in your Protocinema intervention in a bakkal, a Turkish convenience store, in Istanbul. How do you feel about your work being displayed in a convenience store?

Atalay Yavuz: When we started to conceive this project with Mari Spirito, Founding Director of Protocinema, I really wanted to show the pieces in a grocery store, a kind of half-private, half-public space. In the works I created, I used materials associated more with the cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. I thought of it as a challenge to exhibit art works made from these same materials. The idea is that you see the product on the shelf and beside it you are confronted with the artwork made of the same thing. Choosing to exhibit the works this way prompts us to ask the question: what makes it a work of art? Why is it not art when it is sitting on a shelf? I believe this is why it was very logical for me to work with Protocinema. Mari organizes site-aware exhibitions, choosing the space after deciding the context and concept of the show.

Secondly, when someone entering the store as a consumer to make a purchase, they are not aware that there is an exhibition going on. At some point their attention shifts and they are met with *Nightblue* the clockpiece, which hangs unintrusively from the ceiling. It is only at that moment the customer is able to ask themselves what it could be and may start to question whether it is for sale or not. The idea is that the person may enter the shop as a customer but might also leave as an art viewer or vice-versa. The person whom enters to view the artwork may ultimately end up buying something from the grocery store, therefore becoming a consumer. I like that idea.

Thirdly, every day you enter these stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, I like the idea of encounter. You enter a place and you are met with an artwork you may have not, psychologically speaking, specifically allocated time to view art. This may also provoke one to see everything as art. For me it was very experimental and I took it as a challenge to be honest, people could also criticize me and ask what am I trying to say by putting my work in an entirely commercial environment. People always think and talk about art fairs and the



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economics of selling and buying art. In that sense the place is one hundred percent commercial. We respected the space and the rules of the space. For example, the show opens at around 2 o'clock and closes at 2 am. I spoke with the owner Davut-bey beforehand, and I asked him what his opening hours are and we kept them. We did not try to convert the convenience store to a gallery. That's also why we chose to display only three works. The art works are not intended to disturb, nor are they 'shouting' about their presence; 'We are here, we are artwork!'. You either notice them or you don't.

Teresa: What would you say your inspiration is for your work?

Atalay Yavuz: I try to analyze the things we see and use every day. Everything from food to cosmetics - whatever.... Everything we touch, see or smell every day. I try to look at the relationship between the materials and us and I create a story out of that by using the material at the same time. For example for the work, *Night Blue*, I used that particular type of eye-make-up remover because I realized when I went to a store that all the eye-make-up removers looked like that, they have these two parts, mostly blue – which is also weird – and clear. Blue and clear. I thought that women must always use this before they go to bed, taking off their make-up leading me in to thinking about how I could convert this into an artwork in a way that was abstract enough to provoke stories. I always try to keep the balance between making something abstract and opening stories for people. I want people to feel linked to the material. What was the question? I got carried away...



Teresa: Your inspiration.

Atalay Yavuz: Ah yes, so my inspiration is the materials we encounter everyday and our relationship with them basically.

Teresa: You are actually a trained pharmacist, so you could open your own pharmacy. Now you've accepted a place at a fine arts school to study art. What made you decide to change your career?

Atalay Yavuz: I started to think about art and artwork(s) around four years ago in 2010, and at that time, I suppose I had already decided to make art. I was very sure I would finish my pharmacy degree. I really felt I learnt something from my studies but it doesn't mean that particular experience exclusively influences my work. It's like a puzzle maybe. When I create something, I don't think about specific elements from my experiences and consciously utilize them. I just make the works and when people see them, they may link them to different elements of my background.

Teresa: Like the ultra-sound gel?

Atalay Yavuz: Yes, like that. The materials I use are really the materials that everyone knows or uses. They are not really interesting materials from chemistry. Then it would be very boring and didactic. That's why I use methylated spirits or toothpaste. Maybe there is a connection? I suppose there should be as, after all, I studied pharmacy for five years but it's not a very obvious one.



Teresa: When was your first contact with art?

Atalay Yavuz: That makes it sound like an illness!

Teresa: When did you become aware of art as a thing?

Atalay Yavuz: I was going to exhibitions and biennials and so on. I never thought about making artwork before that. Then in 2010, there was a three-day conference organized by the Istanbul Biennial. The two curators, Jens Hoffmann and Ardiano Pedrosa invited artists and curators from previous Istanbul Biennials, all these art professionals spoke about their work and their Biennial experiences. I attended this conference for the full three days and that was when I started to think about art more. Maybe it opened a door? I was feeling so excited. I started to read more about art. In school I had no contact with art, instead I chose to explore it in my own time. I started attending workshops and conferences and reading thesis and books about many art forms, as well as contemporary art. Then I thought to myself, 'if I create something, where can I show it?'. I entered a competition for emerging young artists, I did an installation and subsequently this piece was chosen. As a result this encouraged me to make more art, and then more and more.

Teresa: **How would you say the fact that you are Turkish influences your work and what you do?**

Atalay Yavuz: To be honest, as an artist, if I look at my own works, I don't see that there is much of a connection to Turkish culture. I'm not sure if it's good or bad. I think it's better not to find a connection to a specific culture. Everything is so global now. If the work had a Turkish narrative, it would perhaps be relevant to the Turkish audience, but not abroad. It would probably need a title or even a text as an explanation. I try to use everyday materials that are used not only in Turkey but also all over the world like cosmetics, coffee, cigarettes et cetera... I try to create an international visual language and not one that belongs to a specific country. Maybe people can see connections to the Turkish culture but I don't.

Teresa: **How do you feel about going to study in Europe?**

Atalay Yavuz: I'm so excited! I just wanted to go to experience what it is like to be in an art school and to understand further an art based academic education. Until now I have just been creating on my own. I want to learn if it's good or bad to study art. I want to go and see. I would also like to work in a studio and have contact with people. Until now I was creating my pieces and documenting them and speaking with people afterwards but in a school you are speaking to people as you are creating. The most important part is perhaps the lectures in school and the theoretical aspect.



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