

ISTANBUL THE GUIDE

Interview with Protocinema founder Mari Spirito

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Mari Spirito | Photo by Elif Savari Kızıl
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Mari Spirito is the founder of Protocinema, a non-profit art organization, and educational platform that is based between Istanbul and New York. She began traveling between the two cities in 2007, ultimately establishing Protocinema in 2011. Protocinema has put up site-aware exhibitions and performances by many important and emerging artists including Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Can Altay, and Dan Graham. The goal of Spirito's endeavor is to open up dialogue, expose artists to new audiences, and expand Protocinema's breadth evermore internationally.

How and why did you start Protocinema?

I had already been working at galleries for 20 years, and I wanted to figure out a way that I could still work with artists and make exhibitions while going back and forth between Istanbul and New York. I founded Protocinema because it was what fit my preferred lifestyle. I found a job to fit my life, instead of a life to fit my job.

Why Istanbul?

The art context is extremely interesting as a place to work because of all the major shifts that are happening here, politically, socially, in terms of urban development, and so on. But, the art community is also growing. It's small, but it's very intelligent, self-organized and motivated. There's not so many galleries, museums, art magazines, art schools, non-profits, or residencies, so there's room to do all of these things. There's also a growing audience here, as opposed to New York where there's lots of all these things, there's too much; if you ask someone in New York to go to an opening they have a panic attack because there are so many other openings that night. So, with Protocinema, I wanted to combine all of the resources of New York with the cultural landscape of Istanbul.

What are your upcoming plans for Protocinema?

Protocinema is going to Australia. We're doing a partnership with the Australian Cultural Council. We're bringing four curators that are working in Istanbul to Australia for ten days to research artists there. If we find something we like, we will show those artists here in Istanbul during Turkey's partnership year with Australia (2015). I'll be going there with Övül Durmuşoğlu, Başak Şenova and November Paynter. It will be really dynamic. In November, Protocinema is doing a partnership with the Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. We'll do an intervention initiated by Ahmet Ögüt, where he and five other artists will make sculptures that function as collection boxes, or coin operated machines, and we're collecting money and selling the art works to raise money for the Debt Collective, which is a movement that came out of Occupy Wall Street, where they buy back student debt.

What young Turkish artists are you currently interested in?

[Atalay Yavuz](#), who I showed here in an intervention at a bakkal (small food shop) in Cihangir, (was on view from September 18-October 16). He's an extremely interesting artist. He works with simple, everyday items as well as pharmaceutical items (as he studied Pharmacy). His approach is personal and poetic even though his background is more clinical and scientific.