WARHOLA
çağdaş sanat dergisi — contemporary art magazine

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEMAN S. DARICIOĞLU UPON PERFORMANCE ART AND HER LAST PERFORMANCE 'EMPOISONED PRINCESS'

'The Heart TC', 2016

Who is Leman Darıcıoğlu? What has she done so far?

I was born in İzmir in 1985. I came to Istanbul for the university and built a life here for myself. I caught the last phases of punk at the times when Istiklal Avenue was not transformed by shopping malls. Then, I studied for masters degree, of which's thesis I did not complete, at the sociology department of Mimar Sinan University, and thanks to it, I had the opportunity to take classes from very valuable professors such as Ali Akay, Sibel Yardımcı, Emre Zeytinoğlu, Meral Özbek, Yıldırım Şentürk who added new worlds to my world and expanded my horizon and I had the opportunity to share with them. I had been through numerous social movements such as anti-militarist movement, urban movement, immigrant movement, feminism, LGBTI+. I actively engaged in LGBT+ movement for a long time. Those were the years that made me. Because, LGBT+ movement is not only the field where press conferences and marches are organised but also a movement where a life together is established and where you explore an ethics, dailiness, language beyond heterosexualism. Today, I owe my perspective and stance to that time and to queers with whom I spent that time. Just then, one day I started moving out of the field of activism and making art by deciding that I construct my word from other fields. Art has become to be my map of possible utopias in which I investigate the ways of creation of the worlds I want to live in and since then, I created works sprouting from myself, my own agenda, sometimes from an emotional state that I could not deal with, and sometimes from an experience.

I started with video art in 2012 and mainly i have continued with performance since 2012. My first work was a video work called 'philia.' It gets its name from Deleuze's definition of 'filia': " a family liberated from kindredship. It was a work about a coexistence and ties that are out of heterosexual and dual systems.

While I was dealing with photography and video, I started to be engaged in with a performance collective called Queer Art Collective that took up a long term project called fluxus repetitions. In 2014, I and Burak Sevin joined the collective that is established by Tuna Erdem, Seda Egül, Onur Gökhan Gökçek. Thanks to this collective, I met performance art and started calling myself performance artist. For me, this definition meant that I will approach art as a field of exploration and experience. After making several video performances with the collective, the two alive performances and art's taking place in and within the body and it's unmediated power became driving forces shifting almost all of my art practice to this field. I think that having no interference between you and the audience gives performance a great deal of potential, and the performance art may be transformative for the performance artist the most because of it. This field provided me with an insight that deepens my relationship with life and things, makes me know myself, uncloaks my boundaries, fears, the things I can and cannot do, how do I do things and how do I not do things, my wounds, my joys, my wishes, my power and my weaknesses… At the same time, performance is a field that cannot be thought about without mentioning the duration and the process, that is to say the time. And to me, this point relates performance with death and life. Along with such thoughts and feelings, majority of my projects have been performances for the last three years. So far, I wander about many kinds of performances such as endurance performance, reading performance, performances where I used needles. Along with my personal projects and Istanbul Queer Art Collective, I took part as a performance artist at the projects of of other artists such as Işıl Eğrikavuk, Murat Adash, Ali Emir Tapan and made collaborative projects.

Besides, video and photography as the beginnings of my adventure are the fields where I could not yet return to, but still have feelings for. At the end of an intensive performance period, I discovered photomanipulation by needle on fabric while I was resting. Installation is something that I did before but recently I have some exciting ideas about. In the future, it is definitely going to take its place in my practice, because I increasingly liken creating a place to creating with the body.

My first curating experience was in 2016. I, Yehkan Pınarlıgil and Murat Alat set up an installation called 'The Dream Pavilion' at the 26th TUYAP Istanbul Art Fair. Unexpected Terrotories section of 'The Dream Pavilion' was calling you out off the mainland of the body and the sexuality. Queer art met with the audience at a contemporary art fair for the first time with its selected, comprehensive arts works of 38 artists ranging from video, installation, collage to photography, audio, etc. The fair was eight days, each day there was a film screening and I did a six day performance called 'Who Came Who Passed'. We had a quite hectic fair and many visitors during 'The Dream Pavilion'.

There is a queer performance project called 'Fuckmekitty' that I run since the May 2016. So far, I did queer performances offering an apprehension that is outside of dominant sexuality at the venues such as Soho House Istanbul, Altes Finanzamnt Berlin. Fuckmekitty works with collaborations and is a project that is shaped according to such collaborations. Its only principle is to open up a door outside of dominant sexuality. 6zm, Elif Domaniç, Harun Kohen, Seçkin Çınar, Derin Çankaya and Gizem Aksu are some of the names we collaborated so far. We are going to execute a performance combining a taste experiment called 'Bondage Dinner' with the BDSM language and aesthetics at Baki Koşar Festival organised by İzmir Black-Pink Triangle Association with Elif Domaniç. I will be doing 'Empoisoned Princess' at ALAN Istanbul. In the mean time, two of my works, my photomanipulation by needle on fabric work called 'Best Friends 4ever' and 'Silence II' will be exhibited at Harup in Kadıköy Yeldeğirmeni between February 10 and 19. These works are the two pieces of a series called 'History of Sexuality' that is a journey to past. And I made them in 2015 without talking about them and exhibited at Maumau during LGBT+ Pride Week. It starts with the vulnerability of the white, heterosexual family tale and undertakes the task of breaking the silence that this tale needs in order to survive. Lived however unspoken sexualities, ties of desire flows hidden in the name of friendship constituted the way of this series so far.

'The Dream Pavilion', Unexpected Terrotories, 26th Tuyap Istanbul Art Fair, 2016

Where do you position yourself in the performance art scene in Turkey and the world? What are the advantages and problems that you come across as a Turkish artist?

Performance is a huge field and it has infinite options and possibilities. Probably, the place I position myself is constituted by the pool that nourishes me. I could only respond that question as this. Today, I see myself being nourished by a pool of artists such as Abromovic, Bob Flanagan though I like John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Carole Scheeman, Jacki Apple, Yoko Ono and the happenings and such that were born from fluxus during the 50s and 60s. There are also artists such as Stelarc, Olivier de Sagazan, La Pocha Nostra, Ron Athey, Orlan, Yann Marussich, Moon Ribas, Quiver Rosa, Daniel Coleman Chaves in this pool. If I give examples from Turkey, Nezaket Ekici, Gülhatun Yıldırım, Ata Doğruel, Itır Demir are the first names that come to my mind. I see body both as a field that I work on and as a field that I work with. I often talk about seeing body as a source to be opened up when I describe my practice. This both explains my interest in body itself biologically and the idea behind my projects which's starting point is my own subjectivity. Lately, I more and more comprehend and approach body as a biological and chemical research field.

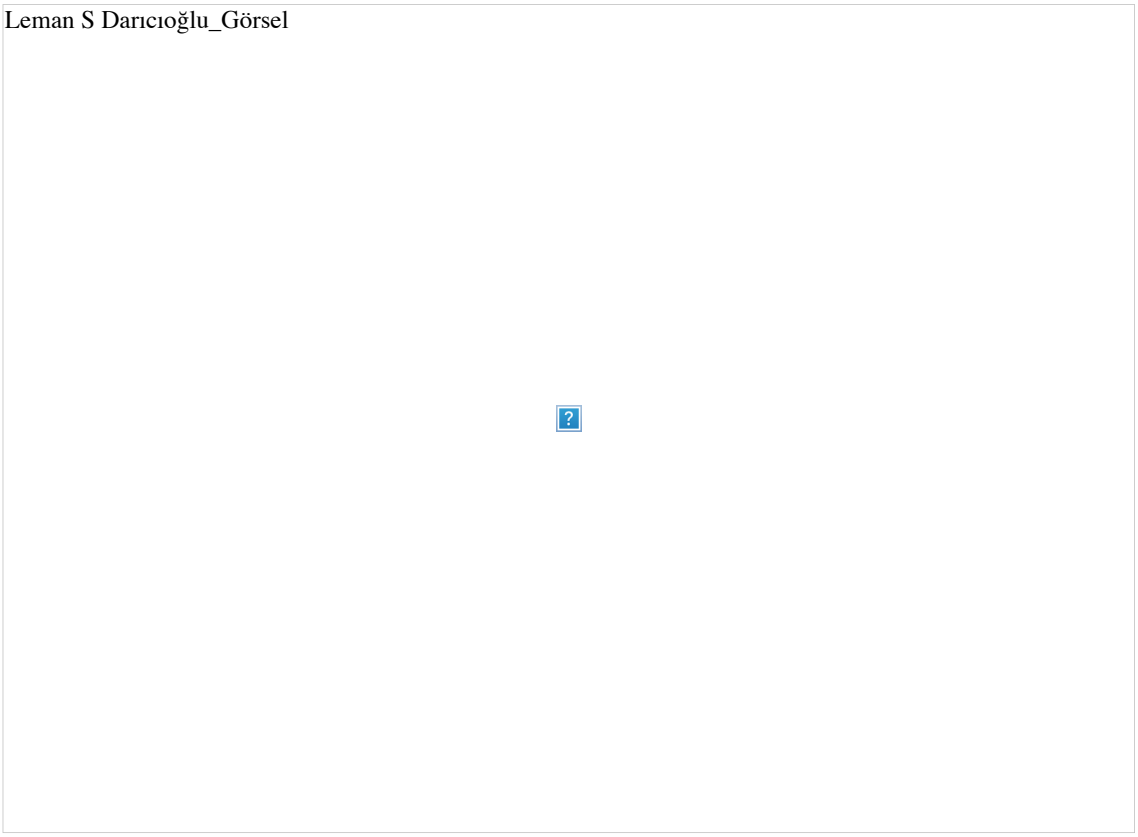
In addition, though it is difficult to make a fixed definition, I position myself in queer art. It is like this because of the way I look at life, the way I approach things, meaning my own world. Queer determines the quality of the field that I want to open up or investigate with my works and the quality of the statement I make. That it to say a multicentered, abnormal gaze, an approach that is beyond bipolar world of sex and sexuality concerning body or emerging from body and heterosexuality. It is something spreading from body to the world.

For the last couple of years, I have intensely thought and still am thinking about what having lived in a country like Turkey, not in a western country, brought to me and took away from me. I come from a middle class family, I am from Izmir. I studied at a French high school from the premier school until the university. I mean, even tough 'Izmir' and the culture of middle class are indecisive subjects, I can say that I was somehow raised in Western culture. If this means that I am from the privileged segment of Turkish society; I think, at the same time, I am from the unprivileged segment of the world considering Turkey's "in between" status, economical and social impossibilities. And in my opinion, this provides a different kind of knowledge about life and I am grateful to this.

Meanwhile, we have been often forced to live by such a political agenda for the last couple of years and so depressed because of it, it becomes so difficult to preserve your own centre. Even if my art practice is one of the greatest things helping me to breath while goings-on take away your joy of life and the feelings of depression, despair and powerlessness are intense, from time to time I am having difficult times. In a climate where we have hundreds of deaths with bombs and attacks and we have no belief in justice, it is impossible for my practice not to be affected by it. For example, losses, mourning and deaths that have recently been the subjects of my latest works are definitely not independent of the geography we live in. My last personal project 'Kalp TC' that I did as a part of Perde exhibition by Sevinç Altan was on this subject. I made a heart on my chest with the needles that have red threads attached to their tips, I wrote TC on the heart and handed over the threads to the audience.

Besides, as a person nourished by collectivity and as a performance artist, the rarity of venues where we can come together, the rarity of the institutions that support performance art are the primary problems that I could think about. I think Performistanbul is very promising in both of these regards. And in an environment as such, I find the collaboration of Performistanbul and Alan İstanbul and the opportunity to actualise a ten day performance such as Empoisoned Princess in a gallery space very valuable.

Leman S Darıcıoğlu_Görsel



'Empoisoned Princess', ALAN İstanbul, 2017

Usually, your performances address the social problems. 'Empoisoned Princess' made in collaboration with Performistanbul will take place at Alan Istanbul between February 6 and February 15 of 2017 focuses on Tarlabaşı and its cultural transformation. Can you tell us more about this performance that is partially relocated at a public space? What is the point of departure?

Though I have never lived in Tarlabaşı myself, I spent so much time with my friends living there, I shared my nights, my days with them in that neighbourhood. My interest in Tarlabaşı comes form such a personal history. I also think that Tarlabaşı shows us many things about Istanbul's identity because of its location next to Istanbul's entertainment centre, Taksim. What I am trying to say is that the urban transformation of Tarlabaşı manifests the urban transformation of Taksim and the urban transformation of Taksim manifests what kind of life package is offered to us.

As a result of non- Muslims' leaving the site because of Wealth Tax, September 6-7 incidents, 1964 Anotolian Greeks (Rum) Deportation, Tarlabaşı becomes a residential area for the local immigrants by 1960s. It has been trough a transformation by the opening of Tarlabaşı Avenue in 1984. Its historical and architectural texture are deteriorated and then Tarlabaşı's becoming the filthy backstreet of Beyoğlu started in the 60s is getting stronger. And Tarlabaşı we remember before the transformation is the neighbourhood where the majority of inhabitants were the cheap workforce of Beyoğlu, and were transexuals, local Kurdish immigrants and refugees. These people could not be on display, meaning they could not get a share from capital.

On the other hand, Pera has been the symbol of western life since 19th century. Even, the development of Tarlabaşı is due to the need for a residential area for levantines, ambassadors working for the embassies. When we read the notion of Pera's being the western face within the scope of Westernisation politics of Turkish Republic and look at today's transformation, I think that it probably indicates a breaking point about the history of republic. All of these features make me interested in Tarlabaşı.

And of course, this neighbourhood's being certainly an important centre of queer culture coincides with my personal history and social history. Memories that I heard about the transformation from trans-women at the hairdressers, at the famous Hülya Coiffeur, at the wigmakers on the avenue certainly incited my will to watch silently the destruction of this district.

By such departure points, I will let myself go to the streets of Tarlabaşı in the 6th of February; try to find today's Tarlabaşı, Tarlabaşı's; install the princess, look at the poison. Who knows? Maybe, I will find a Russian princess who came to Istanbul after October Revolution and bring her to the gallery…

This is going to be a process in which the boundaries among the fixed definitions of concepts such as performance, the production process of art work, the art work and personal history and social history are blurred. By using many different mediums, I will try to bring Tarlabaşı's

Empoisoned Princess in my body and in the body of gallery space.

Since this is a performance, not to determine what I am going to do and not to think about it as much as possible will be my policy until the 6th of February. I will open myself to what this process and Tarlabaşı bring to me. The only thing I know is that I'll be in Tarlabaşı for the 8 days of this 10 day and 4 hours per each day. And I'll be there different times for a few days so that I can see the dynamics of different hours. The things I bring, memories, feelings, photographs, voices, videos, etc. will be at the gallery. Maybe starting from here, I will investigate Tarlabaşı as it is, the city we live in, the traces of the past, the effects of neoliberal politics on living spaces and the memory.

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