

2023 Visiting Faculty Lecture, July 28

Ajay Kurian: [with static slide on screen behind him] How we doing? {hoots, applause, cheering} Let's begin. {laughter}

A bomb disposal technician, a suspicious bag, a soldier, two security dogs, a suicide bomber, his wife in wheelchair, and his daughter, have come to cross a river. They've discovered a small boat. The boat can carry only two people, or one person and one dog, or one item – sorry, and one dog or item at, at his present. The suicide bomber cannot be left with any of the dogs unless the soldier is present. The soldier cannot be left with any of the suicide bomber's family members unless the suicide bomber is present. Only the soldier, suicide bomber, and bomb disposal technician know how to use the boat. How would they cross the river? This is a piece by Ahmet Ogüt from 2010 called *River Crossing Puzzle*. The piece comprises a wall text that I just read along with moveable 2D life-size figures corresponding to the puzzle, drawn in a style that feels like a realistic comic. It's kind of a fucked up piece. {laughter} It's funny, and sad, and strange, and real in ways that are somewhat confounding, because it doesn't resolve – it doesn't really give you a single way to resolve it, even if there are ways to solve it.

Ahmet has been making work for over twenty years now, and in spending some time with his output, these two words stick out from a variety of interviews: sabotage, and continuation. Ahmet cites the impulse to sabotage from the philosopher Gayatri Spivak's term 'affirmative sabotage,' where the impulse is not necessarily to, quote, 'destroy, but to repurpose and use tools for something else.' In many of Ahmet's earlier works, this desire to sabotage is both funny, raw, and politically sensitive. A work that gets shown often is *Somebody Else's Car*, where it's two projections moving, moving through images of the artist taking parked vehicles and applying sheets of colored paper to them to transform their appearance into taxicabs or police cars. He then disappears. A part of me can't help but imagine this work re-done in 2023, in the age of TikTok, and how that would function. Another car-based work is a work called *Across the Slope*, from 2008, where two models of a Fiat 131 Miafiori are welded together and painted black, like a stretch limo. The comically long car is stranded on a four-foot hump rising from the gallery floor, seesawing in the air. The car was in many ways a symbol of modernity, and the middle class, in Turkey, where it became quite common for people to customize the vehicle. It also became a symbol of international production and manufacturing, as it was imported in many foreign markets, but assembled locally. The elongation references Western luxury cars, and the stranding might suggest an individual who has given up their nimbleness in an infrastructure that requires it. Without it, you're literally stranded. Sabotage is a form of nimbleness, as a way of rerouting the rules to not remain stranded.

In *Exploded City*, a work begun in 2009 and ongoing, Ahmet re-creates buildings that have been destroyed in terrorist attacks as maquettes. They're often buildings that are not remarked about in the media, but distinctly remembered by local population. The buildings have come from all over: Belfast, London, Madrid, Mumbai, Oklahoma, and others. When it was first displayed in the Museum Villa Stuck, in Munich, there was an added element to the exhibition design, where the ceiling of the museum was lowered to the point where

visitors had to hunch over to circulate throughout. There's the obvious sense that to shift one's posture gives one a new orientation, a new way of looking, but there's also something more absurd about the gesture, something that insists that the darkness and gravity of the work remain in conflict with our way of being around it. Imagine everyone in a room, hunched over, their heads consistently hitting the ceiling, inconvenienced. There's a mercurial vein of absurdity in many of Ahmet's early works that strikes a tone that permits a smirk, where an appraisal and commitment to memory and memorial is coupled with an acknowledgement of the insanity that these are the things that we need to remember. (00:04:59)

I'm dwelling on these earlier works to give you a sense of the kinds of provocations and forms of sabotage that were of interest to Ahmet, and, and how he, and how that transformed into a dialectic of sabotage and continuation with his projects to come. It was in 2012 that Ahmet founded the Silent University. The roots of its name date back to 1873, when the writer and educator Anna Eliot Ticknor founded The Society to Encourage Studies at Home. This was a Boston-based network of women teaching women by mail that the literary scholar Harriet F. Bergmann recently dubbed the silent university. Ahmet's university is a solidarity-based – I'm quoting here – is 'a solidarity-based knowledge exchange platform by displaced people and forced migrants.' Note that he does not use the word refugee. It is led by a group of lecturers, consultants, and research fellows. It an educational platform outside the restrictions of migration laws, language limitations, and other bureaucratic obstacles. Since 2012, the Silent University has involved those that have had a professional life and academic training in their home countries, that are unable to use their skills or professional training due to a variety of reasons related to their status. Working together, the participants have developed lectures, discussions, events, resource archives, and publications. The Silent University started initially in London in 2012, in collaboration with Delfina Foundation, with the Delfina Foundation and the Tate Museum in London, and later hosted by The Showroom. It now has offshoots in Sweden, Hamburg, Amman, Jordan, and Athens. Again, quoting from their website, 'The Silent University aims to address and re-activate the knowledge of participants and make the exchange process mutually beneficial by inventing alternative currencies, in place of money or free voluntary services. The Silent University's aim is to challenge the idea of silence as a passive state, and explore its powerful potential through performance, writing, and group reflection. These explorations attempt to make apparent the systemic failure and the loss of skills and knowledge experienced through the silencing process of people seeking asylum.' The profundity of this project cannot be understated. This is a generous way to think about collaboration, to think about affirmative sabotage, alongside continuity, and even a way to understand dependency as necessity, as we have learned from Park, Jason, and Tina. I quote Ahmet here: 'From the beginning, we immediately started writing down practical and ideological principles to make collaboration easier. We knew that institutions do not radically change over the course of a meeting. They cannot change their structure, but what they can do is collaborate with an institution that practices these principles. By working with us, they are slowly transformed. Each time we partnered with institutions, we saw immediate changes for those involved - those, for those involved in the university, visa, and citizenship application processes all got faster. Legal obstacles are ways of sabotaging knowledge. The years pass and knowledge disappears. The other obstacle is language and

training. Even if you have all your legal documents, it can take years to retrain. What happens to that knowledge in the meantime? It's not about colonial or decolonial discussions, unlearning or learning. It's about offering an immediate recognition of individuals, rather than waiting for their knowledge to receive official authorization.'

We can learn a lot from Ahmet's ways of thinking, ways of making, and ways of creating. We're all beginning to think about what life will be after Skowhegan, and I think it's absolutely fitting that Ahmet is here with us now, at this particular junction. We're all getting a little stir crazy, and perhaps starting to think about sabotage. {laughter} I hope, I hope that when those thoughts start to linger, we think of how to anchor them in a longer politic, where we dwell on what we want to break or shift or cull in the present, alongside what we want to build, remake, and cultivate. I was thinking about the importance of Venus being in retrograde right now, and what that means for artists and creatives, and how that's not necessarily a time when things are out of whack, or where we can't find our artistic way, but instead a moment to rewind, retrace, remember why we do what we do, to reappraise. We're in a moment where we can think about affirmative sabotage for ourselves, for our ways of being and making, as well as how we want to redraw the structures of our time. (00:09:58)

Ahmet really believes in the power that art has, largely because he knows when to let art go, and wear a different hat. There was a self-conscious transformation from a 'prankster' into a – these are his words – into an initiator, interventionist, negotiator, and mediator, alongside so many other roles. I hope we all take note at how our urges, our impulses and desires to fuck shit up can be cultivated in ways that believe in a different future.

In sitting with all the projects, and exhibitions, and texts, and campaigns that Ahmet has been a part of, fostered, led, and/or created, I see a genuine hope for utopia, followed, or alongside, the impulse to look at the world as it is and to say, this is fucking stupid. What's so profoundly inspiring, though, is that it feels like he's able to laugh, cry, grieve, side eye, speak, and find silence, but then finally, and without fail, get to work. It isn't enough to question or to criticize the symbolic and lived structures of our world; we must change them. And in his work, he shows us how. Please, let's all give a warm welcome to Ahmet Ogüt. {applause, cheering}

Ahmet Ogüt: Thank you. [PHRASE UNCLEAR] Oh my god, I did not know that coming, I couldn't see. [switches slide]

I think I almost met everyone, the last few days. Is there someone I haven't said hi yet, probably, but there's still two more days. I'm just [switches slide, then back] honored to be part of – briefly – part of this summer, this program, and this legendary program. I've heard a lot about it, and now, finally, being here, with you guys, it will stay with me for the rest of my life for sure. {laughs} It's fun! I was like, I could just go play soccer outside. {laughter} You are doing the job. Oh, I'm gonna take the painting down. And I might, oh, I have this mic, so I don't have to use that. Let's take this away. Great. I will put it back up towards the end, so you can see it. And, so, I studied painting, in high school, at university,

so it's what made me me, but I stopped painting after I graduated. Until the right time comes, and it seems like the right time has arrived after twenty years, last April. So I started to do this set of paintings, and I happened to do one of them here, because I am not sharing them online. You can only see it offline, and I cannot show the other ones, but there's one here, so feel free to look at it. You can also take a photo, but please don't post it anywhere. I want to treat it differently, because all my other practice, everything I do, travels with the images. There are people who happen to be there, [switches slide], like in this terrace, but also most of it travels with rumor, and rumor has a lot of power.

So this whole lecture, this was a lecture, was designed around the rumor. I invited everyone, it was during a [WORD UNCLEAR] biennial opening, it was 2013, right after, like three months after the uprising, and all the public projects were cancelled. So biennial announced that as kind of a strategic decision not to compete with people who were organizing the uprising. But I felt something was wrong about it, like, the whole idea of biennial, and the way I was interested in was taking over the public space, or reclaiming, reshaping, or, you know, redefining the idea of public space. And public space, concept of public space, by the way, in Istanbul, is not the same concept of public space in Europe and probably in US. It's very different, all of them very different than each other. So, I decided to do something outside, and I invite everyone to this terrace, and right opposite of terrace there is [switches slide] a tower, Galata Tower, if you have been in Istanbul. (00:15:04) It used to be the highest point, so you could see the entire city, on top of the hill. And, and I was never up there, you know, it's a touristic thing to do, so I'd never been up there until the performance. So, I told everyone, I'm gonna be here [switches slide] giving a talk, and quite many people showed up. There is this guy here [points to slide], he has a binocular. His name is Ozgür [?], you can see him here [switches slide], regular, there. He's first lip reader in Turkey. Official, first official lip reader. And he's the one guy. So he's the funder, director of the lip readers' association, and everyone goes to Ozgür. Maybe by now, there is maybe a few other ones, but at the time, it was the only one. So for any legal case, they would go to Ozgür, and he will be the person, expert to go talk to, you know, in case something happens to the parliament, you say something bad, so he would lip read, or, in the stadium, or on the streets. He was even teaching the police, even the snipers, how to lip read criminals {laughs} so he was this one guy, and also started this disabled people lip reading institution as well. So he was doing all of it. And I asked him if he could collaborate with me on this lecture performance, where he will be at the terrace waiting with the other people, and nobody knows that they all expect me to be at this terrace, and instead I was just opposite side, shoved up with the tourists up there, so you see me standing there. And instead of having a microphone, megaphone, anything like that, or speakers, I was just speaking, and Ozgür could lip read me and tell everyone the story I am – and I was talking about five works, I had five of my works, and with the instructions Ozgür gave me, so I had to speak a little bit like this, and cut my mustache very short, and so he could understand most of it. So half of it was lost in translation, and the rest, whatever people can hear. So there was all this like cacophony, they were looking for the location, they find location, I am not there, and then some of them spotted me on the tower, on the other side, and it was just whole rumor happening in the space. And, and I didn't get permission, so one way was to get permission to go up the tower, the other way, queue with the tourists, get a ticket, go up there. So I just did that. Because it was kind of time, impossible, it was impossible to get

permission from the government. And more or less like that, like you don't look for permissions, just look for, like, the moments that you can create in public space in order to bring the art to public space. [switches slide] Yeah. [switches slide]

And this work has been described, was pretty much the beginning of many things. Let's look. [switches slide] Oh. [switches slide, plays slideshow] It's a slideshow. Yeah. I was still student, and living in Istanbul, and I went to a car park without permission of the owners of the cars, and transformed them into Istanbul taxi, which is always yellow, and has the sign, using cardboard. It takes ten minutes to transform one car, and, and then the other car into a police car, again with cardboard, and tape, and it didn't take so much time. A kind of slideshow corresponding almost real time. So the owners don't know, so, and they see their cars, I was hiding somewhere and observing what's happening. Of course, I didn't document the moment, it was not a hidden camera, candid camera thing, and, but it was very funny, like nobody could find their cars, and, you know, later I made ten, many cars, at the opening of the biennial, it was like during the press conference, so you enter the car park right next door, and we did all that. So I could see the reactions of people. It was mostly funny, nobody was hating it. So it was not permanently changing the cars, it was not destroying the cars, it was not doing anything like that, it was just this moment of illusion. And I tried to keep up, like, this, like, I just made it myself, it happened to be invited to the biennial later, but I was just like producing zero budget, with my own motivation, no cost also almost, you know, super low cost, and that spirit I always try to remind myself, in my, like, rest of my practice, after many, many years, still some of my work comes inspired by this work. (00:20:00) The way I produce the work. Because I happened to be commissioned a lot afterwards, so there was almost, at times, there was no chance to actually have my own moment and come up with my own ideas and produce them for my own interest, you know. So. [switches slide] So, let's go back to this work, so, I wanted to start with that.

This is a commission piece, so this is something I couldn't do without an institution, but it had been two years until one institution says, okay, let's do it. So I just wanted to cover the floor of the gallery space with asphalt, tarmac, and was just seeing, intending this conceptual art to the curators, and at the end, one day, one visionary {laughs} curator was, uh, let's do it. So the first one was in Istanbul, and this one was in Berlin, for the Berlin Biennial in 2008, so I am showing some of the key works, and also the differences between the works, you know, like some really low-cost, self-motivation, and institutionally commissioned piece. But even there's a difference between, like, when I have done this piece in Istanbul, it was actually like, you know, institutions were just forming, so we didn't have, like, museums that are there already a hundred years. So, you have to kind of like imagine everything. And when we imagined this work, it was at a space just transformed into art space, almost, and then we got this one guy who had the company, he could just send us a truck, and the workers could do it in three hours, and that's it, for free, you know? Just sponsoring it. Berlin, it took many, many months, it cost so much money, to install, to remove, and it was completely and utter experience. On the other side, [switches slide] like you can see how people were just like walking and talking, on it, so kids were running on it. I had to negotiate with the curators that this cannot be with the other works, otherwise it comes as just design, exhibition design or decoration. Luckily, they understood it, so we were able to exhibit it like that, and for the German crowd, or international crowd, it was

hard to immediately understand. They felt the work, you know, it's sticky, and it gets dust immediately, it looks like an old road right away, so it's very physical work, and the smell is very strong. It looks very minimal in the pictures, but you don't get any of the smell or elements in the pictures. But in the space, it worked very well as a minimal concept piece, but, in Turkey, it was a political tool.

So we were still in times, like I also remember the times, when asphalt arrives, it's like that town, that territory, that place is basically claimed by the government and [WORD UNCLEAR]. So the first arrival of asphalt, like, my generation witnessed that, and in Germany, probably their grandparents witnessed that, or their parents. So it's a different kind of relationship. And how government instrumentalized this, in the places where there's, there was no process of regular modernism, but like fast forward modernism, and this is usually a very ideological tool to use, you know, bringing facilities to the people, all roads, physically claiming and marking the territories.

[switches slide] Same year, when I did second time this asphalt piece, I ended up in Arizona for a research project for something else, and I ended up making this video piece, I just want to show. I made small video pieces, short ones, back then, and just one example from them, like, little part. [video plays 00:23:38 – 00:24:27] Yeah, I mean, this, this one was filmed at this huge airplane graveyard, I don't know if you know about it, it's in Tucson, a military airplane graveyard, in the middle of nowhere, in the desert. They have thousands of planes, military planes that are just sitting, sleeping, or standing there, in this condition, so they're protected from the dust. And some of them maybe sometimes they use some parts, but all this, each one of them – there are thousands of them there – each one of them, you need a special permission to go there, and so on, and I was part of that art program which you could get me permission for me to get there back then. (00:25:13) Each one of these planes has a long story, so they were used in destruction all around the world, like, during all the big wars, you can imagine, you know, Vietnam, and Iraq, or in Afghanistan, everywhere. And soldiers there, doing the tour, they know each one of them, so they can explain you which one did what kind of damage. And for me, the information was already so much, to look at the planes, standing in the desert, you know, no humans, just the planes, and the mountains, and the sky. And it was so much information already, so it was, I remove all the other information, so all the information about each planes and what they did. And instead, I put counting, and I asked my cousin, who never traveled outside of Turkey, he's Kurdish, he was forced to go to school in Turkish, and he was excited to learn English, so he learned how to count in English, until two hundred. And so he was counting the planes, in the three languages, like, native language, forceful education language, and then the one that he wants to, the wishing language. And so I thought it would be interesting also, because like bringing the planes back to the territories where the destruction happened, but then they come back as if none of this happened, and they just harmlessly stand there forever. [video plays 00:26:38 – 00:26:44] [switches slide]

So I had all these parallel works, basically, like, you know, interventions, and, and also this kind of topics that I wanted to talk about, and find a way, and sometimes humor would be more, sometimes less. And sometimes it's impossible to bring humor in, but somehow then maybe poetry replace it. This was a work I did first for the Venice Biennial

Pavilion of Turkey, and it was interesting times because I could do such work without any censorship, and also travel the work. This is from the display in Berkeley, when we took it there. [switches slide] And Berkeley Art Museum. So, this was a collection of buildings, they were all, I did the work in 2009, and from 2000, from 1990/1991, to 2008, all the recent attacks of this locations, many of them, were included in this installation, so you have significant buildings, locally very famous, but internationally not really. So, here, maybe some of you might recognize the largest attack in US was, before the Twin Towers, 9/11, it was in 1995 in Oklahoma federal building, so it's in the installation. So I decided to choose a building that's, you know, very well known locally in that country, and also partly known internationally, but not over, like, you know, some of the other examples, like, you know, there's too much already, popular, publicized meanings around them. So it just kind of semi-anonymous city, inspired from *Invisible Cities* of Italo Calvino, Italian writer, and I also wrote the story how it would feel to live in such a city, so I have a poetic text that goes with it.

And you have in the middle, Europa Hotel, which is from Belfast, which is the most attacked building, I think it was attacked thirty-three times, and I was able to visit it some years later, when I was in Belfast for some conference, I went to have a tea in that building, and it's funny that it's still standing there, when it was attacked thirty-three times. And there are other cases also, several times, same building attacked, but you have a lot of buildings from Yugoslavia, there was a time in Yugoslavia, the war in Yugoslavia started, and some from Istanbul, like some buildings, some from Turkey, some I actually know how they used to look like before the attack, and it was interesting to put it in Venice context, with the international audience, everyone was connected to different buildings. Some of them were in this like, in this hospital in Belgrade, or the mosque in Bosnia, or the Future TV building in Beirut. They could connect with it, so it was this sort of short-term research project, 2009. [switches slide] Back then I didn't have lifetime projects yet. So I'd start with a short-term research project, it's different. (00:29:59)

[switches slide] And at some point, I, when I do put it in a solo show context, I play with the space a lot, as well, so I want to make it even more difficult, because it's such a long text goes with it, and I put it in a space where it's 150 centimeters so mostly no one, most people can't stand in that exhibition space, so we lower the ceiling, and people had to look at the work this way. And they actually end up spending more time with the installation, when I change the space. And they read the text, the full text, like, so I found a way to read the text, too. [switches slide]

Going back a little bit back to humor, and the stories usually come back from real life, and it usually, like, looks like something I come up with. The story of someone called Mehmet Yildiz, and that person happened to be a soccer player, but at the time, I find out in one newspaper that there are two hundred three professional football players, soccer players in Turkey, they are all called same name and last name, they are all called Mehmet Yildiz. Yildiz means star, so, Mehmet Star, Mehmet the star. So there was 203 active football players. So I, I was, I went to the Eurosports office in Istanbul, and talked to a sportcaster, and he announced this fictional match between all the players that have the same name and last name. So he actually {laughter}, it's in Turkish but you can hear, there's like a little part,

sound part, he actually designed the whole thing, and put all the players in place, and he was just doing ninety minutes. And after ten minutes I lost the track, which Mehmet is which Mehmet, which team. So, all-star teams, and all-star collective, having a match between – let's see the sound. [recording plays 00:32:01 – 00:33:07]

So it was like, Daghan was like, first of all, he was open to my ideas. This guy is busy, everybody knows his voice, {laughs} you know? So he was like yeah, this is great, I always wanted to do something like this. {laughter} And then he's so good at it, you know? He's so good at it, he does it every day, so he doesn't mind if all the players are same name. It's like, wait, we need referees {laughs} and just a quick research, and we found three referees, all called Mehmet Yildiz as well {laughs} so he did this kind of contribution to the piece. I always forget about this piece, but today I somehow remembered it, because I wanted to go a little bit chronological, and go different [switches slide] sides of my practice.

Now we are in New Zealand, so also this was 2010, 2011, you know, the first car piece was 2005, when I started traveling, first time in my life, also for exhibitions. So I was in New Zealand 2011, well, I was supposed to participate in this public art biennial. But then, that, and I went to Christchurch, and at the time, none of the crazy things had happened by now in Christchurch, didn't happen yet. So it looked like a copy of a little British town, and one church in the middle, just four roads, they had only one bus, like, tiny, tiny town. And I was looking at the public transportation, nobody needs it, it's like really almost like cardboard fairy tale kind of town. So I decided to do something corresponding to that in public space, and I made this bus station that turns twenty-four hours all the time, but very slow, so you can go wait for a bus while sitting and turning, and {laughs} I proposed this idea, and, you know, it's a fun project, you can see [switches slide] like a little video of that here. (00:35:01) [switches slide] Why cannot I – don't know how to play that, though. Anyways, this is from – ah, yeah. Okay, good. [video plays 00:35:14 – 00:36:10] We don't need the sound, so I can talk over. So you can see a little bit what it looks like, it's super slow, turning, merry go round, and waiting for a bus. So it became, well, this was happening after the whole crazy thing happened. So I went, I did the proposal, they produced the work. And then, earthquake happened. So the next time I was supposed to go, a year later, there was a 7.1 or 2, like big earthquake happened in Christchurch, which didn't happen before, in that level, and so this was a public art biennial, and they just didn't have the public space anymore, pretty much. So, that, when that happened, couldn't even get in touch with the office for six months, and I was about to go there, so a few days, in a few days, I was about to go, and the earthquake happened, and I told them, like, okay, maybe we don't need this work anymore, because the whole situation changed. And they said they need it because all the young people are leaving the town, and they want to bring joy to the public space again, so they actually show the piece a year later, and this is when you see, and they kept it also, municipality wanted to keep the piece for a few years, kept the piece in Christchurch. So this was like the first moment, one of the first experiences when I was like trying to focus on my art, and to respond to the site-specific situation, and a major crisis happened. Later, I found myself in those contexts many, many times.

[switches slide] Also, like, this is still 2012, and I was still trying to focus on my art, and every time I tried it, it doesn't really work, so this was a work that really

metaphorically was supposed to be there, which is in a small town in Belgium, and it's kind of referring to Magritte's famous mysterious flying castle painting, also the, on top of the work, there is no mysterious building, it's actually the socialist corporation, cooperative they have in Ghent, it's called Vooruit. So I saw the building, and they said this was collectively run building, with the idea of socialist cooperation, and they also have a building in New York, actually, it says Vooruit on it, in East Village, with the same font and everything. So the building is still there, and now it's a museum, culture center, but for almost a hundred years it was running as an example, bringing socialist ideas and cooperative ideas together. So, I thought I could do work like this, it looks like a random building, but everyone knows this building. It was also next to the original building. And we put it up, and it was a thirty-meter diameter, like large, heavy balloon, and five days later, it was done. So, museum said, there was a storm, because of that, so we sent back to the company to fix it, and they said they found six bullets inside. {laughs} So it was shot down. And then I was like, why this collective was asking me at the opening, aren't you afraid that your work might be shot down? I was like, aren't we like in central Europe, I wasn't so afraid of it, you know? {laughter} He didn't tell me one detail: Ghent, the city, in Belgium, has the most privately owned guns in Europe, {laughing} that town. I didn't know that. So I come up with a work like this, and they shot down. So they fix it, they bring it back, it takes a couple of weeks, you know, it's an expensive production, and then it comes, it goes up – somebody cuts the rope, this time, so it flies, and since it's an emergency thing, it lands in the – so every time it's in the local newspaper, police is next to it, you know, and there's like something. {laughter} So, it became like, every time, on the front cover of the local newspaper.

So this time is lands in a central street, and they do the same process, send it back, it's fixed, it comes back. Third time, meanwhile, months passing, somebody shoots it again, and it was down again. But it's a balloon, you can always fix it, so I actually showed it many times, and versions, [switches slide] and this is the one I showed in Berlin, one of the recent, recent times. But – is this too much exposure from me, or? (00:39:58) Yeah, anyways, I still have the work, it traveled many places, it was only shot down in Belgium. {laughs}

[switches slide] Yeah. Then year 2013, so I tried to show almost one piece from each year. This, still right now a version of this ongoing in Athens, this was, I was invited to an art fair context, and I'm like the type of artist they always want to invite for projects, you know, to do a project in whatever commercial context also. And I was like, I don't want to see this as two different worlds. I always try to figure out the way, like, how we can bring them together. And, and it, they said, can you come and do an education project? By that time, I was already, I initiated Silent University, which I don't put in my normal artist talks, but I can show you, if you have questions, some slides after this. And so, people knew me with my connection to re-thinking education systems, and they were like, can you do an education program in an art fair context, and I, for like three days. And I said, okay. Do you have interns? And they're like, yes, we have interns, ninety of them. And are they paid? No, unpaid interns. Do they have a place to hang out? No. Art Dubai has at least three VIP lounges, a [WORD UNCLEAR] VIP lounge, normal VIP lounge, or [WORD UNCLEAR]. So if you are a normal VIP, you can't go to [WORD UNCLEAR] or [WORD UNCLEAR]. Like, all

these hierarchies. So I made a fourth VIP lounge, and it was like the most central place. Somehow, and we had the largest logo, so all the VIPs, they thought this was – they didn't read the intern part. So they tried to enter this one first, because when they entered the fair, they see this space. And they were kindly escorted, {laughter} and they were not allowed in. So, then the rumors, going back to rumor, got big, huge, in the whole fair, like, a lot of collectors want to get in there, they want to find a way to get in there, and {laughs} meanwhile inside I wanted to create – it was also not easy, so, our budget was not huge. There was good budget, but not huge, compared to other VIP lounges. So instead of spending the money on expensive champagnes, I wanted to get a really good facility, so we had massage service, chocolate fountain, table tennis, a lot of snacks and everything available, like more stuff, except the champagne, everything else, you can find in our VIP lounge.

And I still put a program, film program, about working space, office space, so there was a list of artworks, the, like, from Haruki to [NAME UNCLEAR] to [NAME UNCLEAR], [NAME UNCLEAR], resistance works about office and work spaces. It was screened, but they didn't have to watch them. And there was also speakers invited, people like [NAME UNCLEAR] and some other people, like, who happened to be there, that I invited them to give talks. They didn't know who are these people. So they didn't, like maybe three people will sit in the front, the rest will just play tennis in the back, or the others like have chocolate fountain – like chocolate fountain behind us, they go pick up the chocolate, dip something in. {laughs} So it was like a super relaxed place. But those few, they would really concentrate on the program, and the rest were really having their time, have a break, because they were busy also, doing the art fair work, as well.

So, it started like a kind of gesture, and only interns and invited guests can see the place, and the rest can't. And then it traveled around, so there was like one angry collector from Rome, I love a lot, Mr. Giuliani [?] goes there and then he fights with the people at the door, {laughs} and, and he doesn't get let in. And he sees me after in the fair, and he's like, Ahmet, it's a great work; I was so angry! {laughter} Yeah.

[switches slide] Anyway, so later, it moves to, we did another version in Pompidou, it was in an exhibition context, so we didn't have three days, so three months, and I figured, in France, they had a movement called, by a collective called Precarious Generation, and they actually changed the government policy, all the interns has to be paid after that movement, so it was some years before, when I did this VIP lounge for interns. So they were, they were there, activists were there, artists were there, so they used this really kind of like definitely an educational space. And we put all the never-seen artworks from the collection. So I asked Pompidou, any art works from your collection that were never on display? And they gave me like a book like this, like thousands. {laughs} So, and very random stuff. So we picked fifty of them, and the curator put them in the space, we got the furniture from the director's room, so it was really possible to do it. (00:44:59) And anyone interning in Paris at the time could use the space. [switches slide]

Ah, there is so much to tell, but yeah, I'm supposed to go faster. Also, if you feel like any questions, please, drop it now, you can also ask later, but feel free to ask now also. This

was a project in Helsinki, and I worked with firefighters. So, I told you, I work with lip readers, lawyers, also for other cases, or hairdressers, or, you know, all kinds of people from other disciplines. I was first working with artists, other artist friends, I was into collaboration, and I realized soon after, I actually would like to work with others from other professions, because it really expands my knowledge also. And different kind of process. So, [switches slide] I worked with this group of firefighters in Helsinki, and they were in Espoo, next to Helsinki, and Jaakko was the chief, and they didn't really speak English, so I went with the curator from the project to the fire station, and they were working. They had to leave, and there's an announcement. In that moment, I had to explain them the film, and the book, *Fahrenheit 451*, and the story that in this dystopian future, firefighters are burning books, and nobody's allowed to read books, and so on. So why don't we just print books? And they listen to this little lecture I give to the firefighters, in the fire station, and, with the translator, and they were on, on board, so we used one of the firetrucks, [switches slide] and they went all around town, we replaced the tools with the printing machines, in the truck, and I was with them one or two days, and then they just kept doing, I think they printed 1,500 books, they were all, the selected books were all, we worked with an underground publisher, they were all censored books, in different countries. Let's watch a little bit. [video plays 00:47:07 – 00:50:31, muted at 00:48:16] Yeah, anyway, they didn't know even how to approach people - in Finland, nobody approach each other, normally. It's a very unusual situation here. So they were like, how are we gonna talk to people if they don't ever come to us; I was like, just go there, they will come. You look fancy. {laughter} So we design a costume with my mom, inspired by the movie, so they were wearing those science fiction kind of costumes, but the helmet and everything else is their own, uh, usual ones.

And it was very funny to also do a printing workshop with them, because during that time they were still actively working, so we would do, like, learn how to do folding machine, glue machine, print, everything like really old school, and they would have an announcement, in {snaps} less than thirty seconds, they're dress up, they go, take care of a fire, they come back, and still fold books, and {laughter} little things like that, so {laughs} they were the best collectively organized group I worked with. Like, they were – they needed so well how to make books, and so fast, and they look like proper books, it's not like a joke. It's not just photocopy. And so it was a fun process, and people really approach, and they were, so the list wasn't, I was trying to find censored books not for obvious reasons, but stupid reasons, or silly reasons, like there's a schoolbook banned in Texas, I think, because it's like children's book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Something like that, like children book, and in the book there's a red bird, something like that – ah, no, that wasn't the red bird, it was the writer, the writer's name was same as a Marxist philosopher, but they thought, this is from that writer, different book, so they censorship the book. (00:50:07) Excessive. Which is available everywhere else. So, this kind of stories. In China, they censored *Alice in Wonderland* because animals cannot speak like humans, and this kind of reasons, those books were censored. So we were re-printing those, in public spaces, different locations, and at some point I think they also went [switches slide] oops, this is tough. Okay, okay. I will just show you one scene here. Ah. We also delivered through the window as well. [video plays 00:50:45 – 00:51:01] Happy customer. {laughter}

[switches slide] Okay. Going back to sculpture works, I have this set of modular works that are stories of nail houses, maybe you know them, there is even a Pixar movie about them. Nail houses, there's one in Seattle, so the movie, Pixar movie was about that one, but mostly you see them in China, usually like this. [switches slide] They look like this, they're like in the middle of a construction site, standing alone. Because one owner of that one house refused to sell it. So a big corporation or the government comes and the whole, wants to transform the whole neighborhood. And then often one owner of this one house can refuse. And when that happens, it becomes this legal battle, and then the fight, and, and I saw one of this happening actually in the neighborhood in Istanbul where I used to live, so I felt more connected at the time, and then I start making more research, and I saw like in Brazil, in China, and many different countries, even in Zurich, there was a case that started [switches slide] three-di - this was the Zurich one, three-dimensionally kind of archiving them, so the sculpture's actually real earth, involved. [switches slide] This is the one in Istanbul. Stand for two or three years there, and there was a big fight. And they cut the electricity, water, so they make it like, not livable, that place, but it became like really a symbol, like, for a lot of people. Of this, like, one individual resisting.

[switches slide] Back to US. I was invited to do a small project which grew later, with, yeah, with an institution and some other artists, and at the end I decided to focus on this topic. I don't know if you heard of Krzysztof Wodiczko, who's one of those artists who did homeless shelters, and projections, large projections, and works also with war veterans and so on. So with him, we were invited to do a little bit of kind of exhibition, and we were discussing, and we were both like, okay, what's the most urgent issue, at the time, this was like 2014, 2013, 2014 years, in US, I mean to say, okay, the most urgent topic is student debt. So, let's think about that, that's what we can do. Let's see what we can do around it. [switches slide] And I was, happened to be here during the Occupy Wall Street, doing another funny work, but then later I met one, some of those guys who started a collective called Strike Debt. Strike Debt was formed by the artists, lawyers, and other activists, and they also started a crazy project called Rolling Jubilee. So Rolling Jubilee was like, after the Occupy, they wanted to find a way to do something long term, and they decided to become one of those agencies which government actually gives all the bank loans, collect the money from the students, so these are private agencies. So they decided, okay, they could also be one of those agencies, and buy very cheap loans from the government, or from the banks, and abolish it. And they did it. This actually, like this was not so long ago, this is the screenshot I got, they could fundraise seven hundred thousand dollars and abolish thirty-one million dollars of debt. This one project, you know. So it was quite successful, and they still work on following, follow-up projects.

[switches slide] So I collaborated with them, I said, okay, I wanna fundraise for you guys. You already know how to fundraise, but I want to fundraise through artists, through artworks. (00:55:02) And that was also kind of the time I started working with lawyers, and doing conceptual contracts. After this, I had a few works with conceptual contracts. So I invited five artists, including Krzysztof, Natasha Sadr Haghighian, and Martha Rosler, Dan Perjovschi, Superflex. I also did one sculpture myself. [switches slide] So, each one, each sculpture [switches slide] is, this is like a vortex, coin vortex Martha Rosler did, piece. So they designed specific sculptures for this project. [switches slide] And I had, I worked with

the lawyer, first in US and then later in UK, because it traveled there, and they, artists come up with their own idea, so it's either donation box, or it's a coin-operated machine. So mine was this monolith, standing cubic monolith, exact same size, and there was a podcast inside when you put money in it. So, every money collected in every show was sent to this organization. So, if the show was touring, or any of these works are touring, they collect money for the same activist organization, but also if they are sold in the art market, if this one day, these works are sold in the art market, that money also goes to the organization, so it's double strategy, counter strategy for, for double fundraising, counter financial strategy. So, speculative art market and exactly like an object, they collect money. We did fundraise a lot with each show, and so on. And there's still more potential and possibility to fundraise [switches slide] when the works are sold.

So it traveled to UK because UK education system was getting fucked up at the time, and I was invited to a British art show to do the UK version of this, and we traveled in quite many cities, and there I asked Susan Hiller, Liam Gillick, and Goshka Macuga to make, design a new sculpture for the UK version. And they did, this was Goshka's piece. [switches slide] This is Liam's donation box, with a quotation from Mauricio Lazzarato, and then next to it is Susan Hiller's piece, listening, *Thanks for Listening* piece.

[switches slide] From that contract project – nobody wants to ask questions yet, right? They're saving that, later. {laughs} I'm trying to go as fast as possible, like I'm trying to, I don't do this chronologic anymore, cause there are too many works now. I'm testing it now. But you can also stop me in that year, and we can just talk from 2015, or 2017, until then, you know? As if this lecture is done then. Please, feel free. I can go on forever otherwise.

So this is the latest version of this piece, but this became one of the key works, and traveled to different countries and different museums. Until it was always a proposal, until it wasn't. This last one, but before this last one, the one before, finally, the work was not just a proposal. And this image is from Oberlin last summer, at the college museum, and [WORD UNCLEAR] art museum, and with their collection. So I create barricades, with all the junk, and the cars, and on top of that, we put original works from the collection. So we go through the collection, we go to the basement, we go to the storage, we have a lot of challenging criterias, and in this case it was actually beautiful because I collaborated with the students, so they also get to propose and make research about each artist, not only who is the artist, but also like political view of the artist, gender of the artist, and so on, like, if there's any conflict in there, we would exclude it, that work we didn't include in there. So it was really like extended kind of practice, choosing the works for this version.

So, [switches slide] where the idea comes from, [switches slide] let's go to the original first one – I first did it in Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, in 2015, and for me, this first museum does work like this are important, and also the ones who sees it more than just metaphoric thing, also important. But to be the first one is harder. So I talked to the collection department, curator, and I said look, there is this idea of Mikhail Bakunin, who proposed to his friends in Dresden, in 1849, during uprising there against Prussian army; army's coming closer, so all the artists, opera singers, they go, they make

barricades (01:00:06). This is like French movements, like the same thing happening in Dresden, and Bakunin happened to be there as a writer for a local newspaper. So he tells his friends, like, hey, why don't we get original artworks from the national museum in Dresden and put them in front of the barricades so the army might hesitate to destroy this barricade. And they find this idea silly, so it never happens. So he had this contemporary art idea back in the, back during those days, and his friends doesn't think it makes sense. So, the rumor, it's also the rumor, we don't know even if he proposed that, but it's written in some books, and I saw it in an academic article, this quote, and I was very interested. So I was like, okay, let's ask this museum, in 2015, in Netherlands, if they can do this proposal. So, I told them, can you make a barricade with original artworks, but it comes with a contract. Conceptual contract, I work with the museum lawyer, in case there's an uprising in the near future in Netherlands, that fits all criterias, which we went through, with the lawyer, people can borrow this work back to the public space, during the uprising. And we sit down with the lawyer, we drafted the contract, and we defined what is uprising according to what, you know, we based it on human right declaration, so when people don't have their basic rights, and if the uprising match with it in scale, and it starts because of that reason, not for nationalist reasons or other reasons, then it could fit the criterias, and with the examples, you know, the uprising in Seattle end the 90s, or [WORD UNCLEAR] uprising, or the one in Hong Kong, or even lately with Black Lives Matter, as well, as an example. So, we drafted, we exhibited original works – here you can see Picasso, or Léger, or Marlene Dumas, or [WORD UNCLEAR] piece, and [switches slide] here, in Cologne, other pieces. So, it traveled as a proposal. Because this museum didn't buy this piece; they just love to show it, but they didn't buy it. And they allowed me to put original artworks, but they didn't - [switches slide] until, this is in Copenhagen, [switches slide] this is in Dresden, it's funny, it traveled back to Dresden at some point. [switches slide] And this was in Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, in 2020. And until then, people were like, yeah, this is just a fantasy, no museum will buy such piece, with such conditions that to return to the public space, and Stedelijk Museum actually, here you can see a Malevich, I think it's eighteen million euro insurance value, standing there next to that broken window, and next to it, Käthe Kollwitz, and under it, Marlene Dumas. And then Nan Goldin, and so on. So, they said, let's do it. So, they got the piece to the collection, I work another year with the lawyers, with, edited the contract, so it's in a shape that they feel comfortable with it, in the future as well, and it happened, eventually. We can talk more about this if you have questions, because it's a very interesting process, you know, it goes through the security guard, to the cleaners, to everyone working in the collection department, and the back offices, everybody involved in this installation.

[switches slide] I'm not one hour yet even, right? We started after eight, yeah. Because I really want to move to the Q&A part. {laughs} But there is a lot more to show. I'll try to end somewhere. This is a work, I think at one of the most interesting group shows I took part, which is still on; it started in 2015 in Fukushima, at the radioactive zone, inside the radioactive zone, and when the exhibition and the project started, no humans can visit, except special permissions and artists who are involved, and curators. And still, the part, I did my work -I mean, I loved the idea that someone invited me, and it took me three years to go there, also; I went there in 2018, the show was still up, with no human visitors. But with the special permission, and dressed up like that, we went in, and with the risk, of

course, but if you stay less than five hours, you are good, supposed to be, which is less than a long flight, you know, the amount of radioactivity you could get. (01:04:58) But you always check, also; you don't end in a part that there's so much radioactivity. It was quite crazy experience that everything was frozen in 2011, when the incident happened, and grass kept growing, and everything, the kitchen, the car, the everything just left in that moment. So it was quite extreme experience. And I proposed them do a work, I collaborated with a samurai, he's a samurai, but he is also a dentist, he had this four hundred years-old samurai costume collection, which he was very generous to give one of them to, to us, for this project. And we did a samurai costume and that protects from radioactivity, so it's combined with a hazmat costume. In Japan, samurais learn how to be strong, or they try to swim, with the samurai costumes, so they have these weird things. And they also test it in water as well, later.

So we have this installation there, in one of the houses, sometimes it moves. Sometimes it's attacked by wild animals, {laughs} and then when I went there, we fixed the work, it was on the floor because it was attacked by a wild pig, and {laughter} so there are other visitors, you know? {laughs} It's a very alive exhibition. So every now and then, there's another trip. And the zone is getting small, close, eh, smaller, because it becomes safer, so they opened some parts for people to visit. My, my work is still in the zone, maybe – so it was no, no, you know, panic, no stress that the show will open, whenever you can visit, and maybe in twenty years, actually, people can see this exhibition. So when we did this exhibition, 2018, there was some really angry journalists. I remember one was from *Guardian*, and he was like, what a silly exhibition, you design an exhibition where a human cannot visit. And shortly after, COVID happened, so everyone had exhibitions no one can visit. {laughs} I really want to meet this journalist now. It became like, really interesting kind of experience that's, yes, it might have some, like, silly idea, but then there was this, you know, durational three months, six months exhibition, like what do we do with that, you know? Why? So, it was really good to think in rather longer-term experience.

[switches slide] Mm. I skip it. From now on, you can say, stop, tell about it, or keep it. {laughter} Skip or stay?

Audience members: Stay! Stay!

Ogüt: Then you gotta stay for everything. {laughs} Okay, these are {laughs} – okay. [activates GIFs in slides, eliciting laughter] Good I stayed? {laughs} So, these are performance spinning monitors that are showing sign spinners. So, {laughter} so I, I, a little bit connected to *Intern VIP Lounge*, I wanted to create, it's called *Fair Wage for a Made-Up Job*, this job does not exist, you just hang the monitor normally, so I decided to create a job for performers, so they can perform it. Meanwhile, their wage should be fixed – this was first done in an art fair context, in Switzerland, so I told them, per hour, they will be paid as much as the director of the art fair. Including all the VIP accesses, with the BMW cars and all this. So those performers were really treated very well. And every time I just did an [WORD UNCLEAR], saying we fix it with the national director's hourly payment; this is from Berlin version, which was fixed, the parliament member hourly payment. So they get the same pay. So it's kind of the opposite of the sign-spinning job, which is the lowest pay, one

of the lowest pay jobs in the US. I filmed those when I was in, there was a couple of them, I was briefly in LA.

[switches slide] Stay or leave? {laughter}

Audience: Stay! Stay! Stay! {laughter}

Ogüt: Leave, leave, leave! {laughter} Leave, alright, stay. Stay – one person just keeps saying louder, stay. {laughter} Okay, stay. Stay.

Audience: Stay!

Ogüt: Okay, I stay. Stay. I stay.

This was a work in 2016/17, so now we are in 2016/17, yeah. It was synchronized, like it was simultaneously done in Guangzhou, in Korea, and in Istanbul, Turkey. (01:10:04) So I had one show coming up in Istanbul, and it was same time as the Guangzhou Biennial, where I was invited to do a work, and it was the same year South Korea did an agreement with Turkey for a big deal for a tear gas. You know, some millions of tear gas that was gonna be sold to Turkey, and it was also kind of not so long after the uprising, so I'm still thinking about that, and I thought, okay, I know this story, there are many stories, like, kids accidentally shot by tear gas, and they die. And you know, police officers are supposed to shoot this way, and they sometimes do like this, and then it just kills somebody, who usually happened to be a child, or a teenager passing by, dies from it. So it's very common, it was very common case, also in Turkey, so there was this one Kurdish kid in my hometown, dies, this seven years old kid, and I found a very similar story in Korea. And then the whole story of like, there, it starts with this guy, you know, which was basically like the funeral of the guy, that, in South Korea today, it was millions attended that, and he was a teenager, Lee Han-yeol, teenager in university, and accidentally he was shot by that, by a police with tear gas cannister, and he dies. And then he becomes national hero, and there's even a museum about him. On the contrary, the kid in Turkey, nobody knows, like, Enes, eight-year-old kid, dies. But actually the police was punished, who killed him, in Turkey, in the courts later. So it's kind of like a solved case.

I made an animation that tells the parallel story; I showed the Korean version in Istanbul, and the Kurdish kid's version in Guangzhou, at the same time. In a public screen. [video plays 01:12:10 – 01:12:38] This just a little trailer. I worked with an animation company to do it. [switches slide] Yeah, so, we were showing in this public screen, and the public screen, we were supposed to show in Istanbul, this show, we could show it inside there, but there was a public screen in Istanbul which was censored by the government, because of another project. So we couldn't show it in a public space in Istanbul. But we were able to show it in an exhibition there.

[switches slide] Okay. Alright, skip this. {laughs} [switches slide] Skip it, yes. [switches slide] {laughs} Skip it, skip.

Audience: Stay!

Ogüt: Stay. {laughter} Are you gonna edit this part out? Skip stay part? {laughs} [switches slide] And where's the video, yeah, little video. [video plays 01:13:36 – 01:15:04] You can loop. So I was invited to Echigo-Tsumari Triennial, in the north of Japan, and it's like, in the mountains, by the highway, there are a lot of artworks they commission every three years, and some of them stays also, so I decided to respond to it with a little idea like, that comes from somewhere else, but the source is there, so Toyota cars, in Japan, never used for drifting, like, this drifting culture. It was used in Middle East. So, they were the first, one of the first company going to the Middle East, and they invest in all this Kuwait, Dubai, all the cities that there was nothing, no industry yet, so then those cars became so good for those kind of landscapes, people started using them a lot, and then they start this subculture of drifting culture, going on two wheels. So I thought, okay, it would be funny to bring it back to, back to the origins, which never was a subculture in Japan, especially in the north of Japan, and in those mountains. So I put this car as if somebody's drifting; I could actually go in and climb up, like, it's really solid. It could only be made, this work, in Japan I think. It was done by a local car fixer, and he found the solution to do it, and when you go even closer, you don't even see how it's done, like [switches slide] it's brilliant, brilliantly done. [loop resumes, 01:15:07 – 01:15:14] But people, nobody cared about my reference I was trying to do for drifters and so on. [switches slide] All they did was [switches slide] this. So {laughter} you know – that's me also there. {laughs} So, they, they just like got super powerous, and they just had fun with it, and all this stuff. So I started thinking about, okay, like they, also the very reason we could construct this piece is the engineer's skills, that people have, that they're also used to natural disasters, so when they see something like this, they probably make more relation like linked to earthquake, and tsunami, and all disasters. And they are just used to living with those, or being prepared for disasters. And that's why they {laughs} they took it in a completely different way, and I just found those images online, I was just enjoying how they take it. So sometimes, it goes a completely different way, but I really enjoy when that happens, that the life takes over.

[switches slide] I skip this? [screen goes black] I'm going faster, I'm coming to the end. [switches slide] Let's keep it a little more slow. I'm skipping this. [switches slide] Also skipping now. [switches slide] I'm skipping this. Yeah, it's sound, so, bye, skipping. [switches slide] Skipping. [audience objecting] {laughs} I skip this also, [switches slide] you just see, it's an image. [switches slide] {laughter} [switches slide] It's nice tease, actually, I've never done that before. {laughter} And, skip, also?

Audience: Stay! Stay!

Ogüt: Stay! Stay, stay. {laughs} This actually, I never really had a big show in Istanbul, finally I had this one. Still, it was a little bit by force, because I wasn't invited by any museum, or institution, I was invited by a commercial gallery. So I ended up telling this gallery, I can do a show at your space, they have the budget, they have the space, but it's not the gallery show, if it's a museum exhibition. And they were like, what do you mean? And I'm like, museum exhibition means I can use the budget, and you're not gonna want it back. {laughs} Until I call it an artwork. Like if I call it, eh, this is an artwork, then we can talk

again, but until that moment, you forget about all the money you invest in this show. And they would say yes, so we did the show. [switches slide] And you enter the gallery, you don't see nothing except this front part of the bus, like almost like everybody else coming out, and it's the only way to enter the exhibition, you have to walk into the bus. And from inside the bus, you can see the rest of the exhibition, but there was a lot more happening in the back. So people would sit in the bus, and the bus chairs going back versus traveling, so you're like seen [switches slide] from the gallery. You see people just going like this. They become like a performer. If you enter from the back, back door, so it takes a bit of time, there are always different people inside the gallery, then the ones in the bus. So they constantly perform for each other. And the ones in the gallery had a surprise, too, so I put this Istanbul street pavement, which had hidden water underneath, so if you step on the wrong corners, you had water splashes, like this most annoying experience, which is very big local experience there. The government keep fixing, it's breaking, because it's cheap material, so they want to commission another company, so corrupted, so you end up walking on a street, always water splashing out of the pavement. So people had that experience in the space, so they were performing for each other, basically. There was a lot of other elements, but I'm gonna skip that, just.

[switches slide] Skip. [switches through slides] I skip. [switches slide] This maybe I don't skip? {laughter} Skip? Don't skip? {laughs} Now everybody's tired. {laughter} I am tired. {laughter} I am not, I am not. {laughs}

Okay, I'm almost ending, really, promise. Maybe one more thing, maybe not. This is kind of linked to the very first work I showed, so I was really happy that finally I can again have an idea that doesn't cost anything, I was doing in Macedonia this piece at the former Yugoslav giant museum, which is now, like, falling apart. (01:20:08) The country's not there anymore, they have incredible collection, because this museum was built after the earthquake in the '60s, so a lot of known artists back then donated them in solidarity, back then Yugoslavia, a lot of artworks. So you can see, Victor Vasarely or David Hockney pieces. They were donated pieces, after the earthquake. So I wanted to think about the earthquake, but also not creating a lot of drama, you know, based on people's traumas there. So I picked works from, again, collection, and hang them above eye level, so the only way to see them in eye level, people had to jump on this trampoline. So it's very simple work, and it cost nothing, so I was very happy to be able to do this kind of idea. Now it travels, also super easily, and it can be adapted to any museum, so it was in many different places after that also. [switches slide] This is the Berlin version. So I always go with different collections, and we can travel this work.

[switches slide] This is very fast, so I don't even need to skip it. When I Googled two words, appointed curators, this is the first images {laughter} first images that comes on Google search. I'm not kidding, maybe the second page I arrived, and I already had the collection, you know, of – so after this work, I did it last year, already some appointed curators, or directors, changed their posture. They also refer this work. {laughs} Yeah. [switches slide] It also became a meme. {laughter, applause} I know. This could be good moment to finish. Should I finish? There's one more thing maybe I can tell.

Audience: More, more! Stay!

Ogüt: Yeah? {laughter} Okay, I haven't shown that one. I'm gonna skip this one [switches slide] in order to tell –

Audience: No!

Ogüt: I'm skipping that. Skipping. [switches slide] And I'm, ciao to this one. Bye, guys. That is also recent. [switches slide] [switches slide] I'm gonna talk about that. I'm gonna talk about this one. I didn't show this yet, because it just happened now. Because this will also link us back to the painting story. So, in my hometown, there was no contemporary art institutions, no museums, no art books. Nothing. In, you know, when I was little, in '90s, just fine art high school opened, and the fine art department opened, and my uncle was the first person who entered the first year of the fine art university, and did the fine art department, in painting department. So every summer, he was doing courses, teaching drawings and paintings. He was kind of like the first-ever artist I ever saw alive, you know? In real life. And, so, keep him on the side. I was just like asked, em, not so long ago, and the show is just open, from, got an email from Picasso Foundation, and they say they are doing this, uh, big exhibition, inviting fifty contemporary artists, with fifty artworks from Picasso's last, you know, years, and they are all untitled, because he was lazy, he never liked to name them or something, and asked us fifty artists to name or recontextualize or whatever, do the criticism, of whether they liked. So, they asked me if I'm interested. And I said yes, and then they send me one of the random selection of the Picasso painting, which was this one, which I don't like. And {laughs} so I got the painting, and I immediately had, even before I got the painting, I immediately had an idea, because that uncle of mine, some years later, so I was going to his course, and soon after, like, I was also teaching with him, and I was still in high school, and then I finally went to another city and studied painting, it was already, for me, an achievement, and he, he took me very, like, highly, and serious, and he was also supporting me. So one day he calls me, like, some years later, I'm already living in Ankara, in another city, and he calls me and saying, 'Ahmet, I have something important to tell you.' I'm like, what's going on? And he's like, I'm opening a café, and this café, I've been thinking about the name for many days, and have an idea now. (01:24:59) But I was like thinking a lot. Okay, what is it, what did you come up with? And he's like, Picasso Café. And I was like, {laughing} okay, Picasso Café, interesting. You took many days to think about this, great. So I didn't tell him anything, I was like silent, I was like, great idea, do it, you know. So in the city there is no museum, nothing, and this guy started the first-ever like painting course, and did the first year. He had the idea open a café, art café, and it has to be called Picasso Café. So he did it, he had a neon light with the signature of Picasso, and it became one of the other. So when I was asked by the foundation, I called him, years later. So I say, I have a question: I'm asked by the foundation, Picasso Foundation, there's a Picasso painting, they asked me to name it, and I want to ask you to name it for me. And then he was like, are you sure it's real? And I'm like, yeah yeah, it's real. It's not fake. {laughs} So it take a while, I convince that it's real. He's like, oh, but that signature doesn't look like Picasso's signature. I'm like, yeah, it's real, uncle, it's fine. {laughs} And then finally he's convinced, and then he take it really serious, he think about it, oh, this is the last period of him, and he's probably afraid of dying, and let's call it *Looking At The End*. Like, okay,

great, thank you so much. So I decided to call, telling this whole story, so this label, so we just had a title, so it became *Looking at the End Café*, the title, official title of this Picasso painting, so it kind of like, full circle around, it was basically, I went back to the beginning of the journey. Because, you know, actually, it was not just the Picasso café, whatever café it was, it was the only way for the lower educated Kurdish kids to go to higher education, to go through these drawing exams, which I also went through the university education, because we were, there was no other way you can enter university education, and government all technically and systematically made it difficult. So, those drawing courses over the summers made so many people go to universities, and they became painting teachers. And it created, like, this whole generation, there are actually quite many of them.

Anyways, I'm happy to talk about it for the first time, and the painting I am happy to share with you offline, you can see after the Q&A, or if you want to go see it, we will put it back up. It's part of a series, so after twenty years of break, I started painting again, because I was like, after the university, I decided I really want to focus on the ideas, and not stuck with unique artworks, and paintings are like the most dangerous of them, because the moment it's in wrong hands, or even you think it's right hands, it can have completely another story than what you can design. So, this contracts, I hired lawyers, and everything, with all the other conceptual pieces, it's about, like, the possibilities that can happen in the future, and how you can liberate the artwork. So I was thinking too much about this part, as you can see in my other project, I completely disqualified painting. It's something I love, and I really, it always was very close to my heart. But I didn't prioritize my things, my own preferences and needs, that I know this, I love this medium, but it was not good enough reason for me to make it the center of my art practice. Now, it became like any other thing, luckily, finally, after twenty years, I started doing it again, and it's really have completely different functions, and, but I decided to keep it offline. Because all my other works travel with rumor, this can also travel through rumor, but not through images, maybe, and through online presence, I kind of wanted to, especially in these times, when everything is automated, go with this series, it's a conceptual series, but with the medium of painting, I keep it offline. That's why it's not presented here.

I also didn't present the Silent University, which is an important part of my practice, which was very present in the introduction text, and, but I am happy to answer questions, I really hope there are some questions, I think I'm done my part. {applause, cheering}

Audience member #1: Hi. (01:30:07) I was wondering what the wages were for the people spinning the signs in the video?

Ogüt: Ah. What is that about, that work?

Audience member #2: What the wages were?

Audience member #3: The wages.

Audience member #1: The, sorry, the –

Ogüt: Ah, the wages, with the protest?

Audience member #1: No, spinning the signs, in the video, the people in LA?

Ogüt: Ah, yeah yeah yeah yeah.

Audience member #1: I was wondering what their wages were.

Ogüt: Yeah, I mean the wage was fixed with the art fair director, which was, we calculated was around like fifty euros per hour. But then plus all the other accesses and, you know, food, car access, everything, whatever the director had access from. Yeah.

Audience member #1: Sorry, I just want to clarify – I mean the people that were in the video.

Ogüt: The spinning ones, yeah, they have terri – probably five, one dollar, five dollar per hour?

Audience member #1: Okay.

Ogüt: Something like that, right? I think it's terrible, terribly paid job. Terribly paid job, yeah. Yeah, but I didn't hire them, you know. I didn't hire them; they were there doing the job already.

Do you want to add something? Yeah? Okay.

Audience member #4: Hello. I'm here.

Ogüt: Hi.

Audience member #4: My question is more about, like, um, well, first of all, you skipped your exhibition in Yarat.

Ogüt: First of all. For you, it's like the heart of my practice, that exhibition! {laughs}

Audience member #4: We could talk about it later.

Ogüt: Okay.

Audience member #4: So, my question is more about the, like, what's your response to when your work's context change when it leaves the Turkey, because in Turkey, your practice considered very political, and it gets censored a lot. But in other places, it has a different context to it, or the response is very different from the audience. How do you work with that?

Ogüt: Well, you know, sometimes I see something is coming, like when I was invited to do a show in Baku, I knew something might be coming, you know. Um, sometimes, I, like in Belgium, I did not expect that it's coming, you know, like somebody's gonna shoot down that work. Like, aggressively. And that the museum would be so passive – it comes like total surprise. Like in Istanbul, I am prepared. I don't ask for the permission, I take the ticket, I go, I climb up, I take the risk, you know? Just like more improvised. Or I have a lot of censorship stories, but I have a lot of freedoms there, too, because I know how it works very well. I had no idea about Azerbaijan, though. I thought Azerbaijan is a little bit better than Turkey, in like levels of censorship, it was the other way around. You know, so, it was not that I was censored at all, that's why I could do the exhibition there, and I was not censored at all about what topic I - but I was carefully choosing my topic, inserting there an Armenian symbolized cat, in a, on a giant screen, in central [WORD UNCLEAR], in the largest institution, I thought that was fun. You know? And only Armenians recognize that. You know, when Armenians see that word, they say, why the Armenian cat is here? Or when a Kurd sees that word, a Kurdish cat is here. And then Turk says, it's a Turkish cat. And Azeriks [?], they don't identify with it. {laughs} And I find this really, I thought, subtle way to deal with it.

Meanwhile, COVID happened, meanwhile, war happened, after 1994, for the first time in that intensity, during my show, which was supposed to be over by then, but then CO, because of COVID it was extended, meanwhile, director was fired, meanwhile, you know, then I had to do this internations [?] statement, you know, in the middle of the war. No artist want to be in that position. And it's very {laughing} impossible, almost, to get out of that position. But, I had my integrity to do my work, and I expected whatever institution I worked with, in a totalitarian regime country, doesn't matter. Each institution comes with the promise that they have the autonomy, right? A certain amount of autonomy. I ask these questions before. So, am I gonna get censorship from the institution, or do I have to do auto-censorship, or am I gonna be, like, able to do it, even in that country? So it looked like that, and I was able to do it, but then it became impossible, then, literally, the art institution was run by the state; when the art director left, it was run by the state, and they put my banner next to flag, that was twenty meters, huge flag, whole façade, and my giant name next to the giant flag, and saying, Karabakh is Azerbaijan; like, this is not my statement. (01:35:11) You know, and I didn't even know they do this, and then posters all, were all over, you know. That's what they, I mean, this is very, uh, that's something that could be done only locally, because if that institution claims to be international, that was the only internationally claiming to be international institution in that scale, in, in that country. It wasn't smart for them, I told them, are you sure you don't want to take down that – first I gave them a chance. Take down my banner; I know you don't have to take down your flag, you want to do any propaganda, you can do it, it's your country, but take down my banner, I am not gonna be instrumentalizing this. And they said, we don't, we cannot. If you take down this Instagram post, or Facebook post, or, we, it's disrespect to the flag, disrespect to the country. So it became this national statement. And I am not part of it. So for me, at that moment, there is no art institution anymore, it's the complete state-controlled space, that's not even art space. So for me, that space had zero integrity to its own artists. It shouldn't be my responsibility to respond to that. So, but then I had to tell them shut down my exhibition. Even that was manipulated in the newspaper and, uh, on the TV; it's not the first

time this happened, it happened to me in Australia as well, like we were targeted by the local, like, newspapers and TVs because of another case in the Sydney Biennial that was even a bigger situation. But, I'm used to that. Because then you have international media; they don't have to be biased, so just, you know, even if there are biased ones, they look at the picture, so, my statement was translated into five different languages, by the morning I was called by all the art magazines you can imagine – which, I don't like to be in the center of such stuff, you know, it is not fun. You don't want to be in the center of that. But, I ended up, I found all the smart ways to avoid, I ended up, because of the world, pandemic, war happening, it's just all fun at that moment, yeah. But I am glad there are things happening, like through you now I know that there are still things independently, somehow, can happen, [WORD UNCLEAR] which is good, which is promising.

You standing there quite a long time, so. Yeah. Yeah.

Audience member #5: Hey, Ahmet. What is, um, student loans, or, uh, or a carnival work, museum work, and the way they set up the barricades; whether it's --

Ogüt: I cannot see you.

Audience member #5: Oh, I'm right here, I'm right here! Yeah.

Ogüt: Oh, it's you, yeah. {laughs}

Audience member #5: Dark skin.

Ogüt: Yeah, sure thing. {laughing} I'm like, where are you?

Audience member #5: I blend in. How, how – do you think you could do that here? Do you think you could do that in America? I mean, we have, like, a lot of, we have the most in debt, we have the makers of tear gas, we, like, a lot of the issues that you tackle are, like, central, a lot of those, you know, like the planes, and like a lot of your work takes on what we produce. Do you think that artists here could actually do that? Like, do you think that artists, art institutes here are, like, actually, you know, separate from the state given that we get a lot of state money? And, do you think we could actually do that, you know?

Ogüt: Yeah, I mean, it's not any better in Turkey. You know? Every time, because [mic feedback] – I need to step back, sorry, sorry. Okay. Every time I travel from Berlin to Turkey, then something crazy happening that they're like, is it safe to go there, you know? I go. You know? I don't have to, like, they are used to – which is very funny, because when there was every two or three weeks a bomb being attacked in Istanbul in 2015, because some political reasons, that was convenient for some people to, we could even calculate, but then, back then, American embassy was issuing, don't go to this neighborhood, don't go to this restaurant. Beforehand. They would get the information, you know. So, if I am with my American friends who happen to be in town, they already know they are not supposed to go, but as we locals, we don't know, {laughing} you know, we don't get the information. (01:39:59) The same with the Dutch embassy or German embassy, you know; that's why

they always ask, like, isn't it dangerous to go there, they always read something in local newspaper, it's dangerous to go there, you know. But, from the local perspective, you know, like US, or Turkey, or Azerbaijan, you know, we can think of any country, an artist, not so detached from that also, it's about this conversation about integrity, you know? If the art institution is pretending, when it really hits, to the line, you know, the border, it's pretending, or it's actually really trying to do this code of ethics they have, you know, activated.

And in US, with the student loan, I had this que - answer, with some institutions, they wanted to do it, but they were afraid, because they thought they would lose their license if they are involved with direct politics. Yeah. I heard that from several institutions in New York, and some of them were like, you know, curators, they were like, I consider friends, I consider like people with freedom, you know, freedom of speech in their life. But at that moment I realized they don't really have much. Would I be in that position? I don't want to be in their shoes. You know?

And then suddenly, I am in this university museum in East Lansing, near Detroit, you know, they do the project, because there is a visionary creative director, incredible person who passed away now, historically very important. Said, let's do this, otherwise I wasn't able to do it. And I also wasn't able to also travel that student loan piece in the US. I was able to travel it in UK. You know? And, which is, which tells a lot. Like, when it's really becomes – and I was not doing, like, as much as like that strike debt collective is doing. You know. And all these collectives, like, but they are also interested in wage, and others – they kind of bring an institution to that agreement, that they need to either be true to themselves – it's not about artists having integrity to their practice or not. You can only question that with yourself. If you are sincere or not. It's very simple. {laughs} If you are not, sooner or later, it will collapse. You know? You will look political, you will look this, you will look that, you will collapse. Next case, the other case – but that is the same for an institution; they will look sensitive, they will look like they're there for the public, they will, you know, they will look like everything that is part of their code of ethics, but they are not even reading what they wrote in their code of ethics. You know. Which is all supposed to be public, you know, you could go to any institutions, Rockefeller Foundation, public, go, code of ethics is there.

There are a lot of wrong things about those institutions, you know, the way there are sponsors, how they collaborate with people, the way they fundraise. In the US, a lot of things are about fundraising. It's not about always the artist's issue, you know? It's not that the artist is supposed to feel so bad. It's about everybody asking themselves the right questions, and if they put themselves in the right place or not, you know?

And marginalizing is no solution also, like, we need to deal with those institutions that we are not completely happy with, in order to transform them, so I'm not, like, I'm really trying to make sure that I don't marginalize myself too much. Sometimes I think I did too much, because I probably could talk too much sometimes, but it's very important to have the dialogue with those institutions that you don't a hundred percent agree with, you know. You just push them to your side, instead of they push you back to their side. And they turn

you into something fake, you know? And it can happen, if you become like a poster person of some sort of ideology of the institution that they, they just use you, instrumentalize you. Although it looks like, it's good for your career, it's good for your visibility, you know, and you can always give this interview saying that, you know, artist only for, no metaphor, it's not about changing things, and stuff like that, right. Or we're all complicit. It's very easy to give that answer, we're all complicit, isn't it? It's like, oh, why are you going with that institution if you even work with that? You still choose, right? Like, I still choose not to go to some countries at all. And some I test, it doesn't work, I fail, and then I step back. Some, I find a way. It's not that that country's better than another, it's just like, I don't want to be doing that fight, I don't want to do all the fights; I want to do my art, {laughing} you know? So, it's really important to have enough space for your art, too. But it really becomes a lot about those negotiations, and I really don't want to do any collective statement, or solo statement of any sort anymore. (01:44:58) I want to sort it out before, or be more careful not to be in those situations where I end up, you know, I dropped from a show that was patron, patronaged by Putin, before the war, and ninety artists look at me that I am like this black sheep. And most of them called political artists; I am not a political artist, by the way. And they were like, {laughing} looking at me, they're like, why are you messing this thing up? Like, why are you just making this fuss? I'm like, guys, this is too much, like, they, they said okay to do a show in Russia, you need to have Putin named symbolically, but they are putting it everywhere. They are like, really pushing it, like really instrumentalizing. It's not about unification of Europe and Russia. The show is fake. But that moment, no artists wanted to leave. War started, often, not all of them, quite plenty of them left the show. After the war started. This is different guy? {laughing} You know, it was suddenly publicly and by press supported action. And they thought they were being dipshits staying in the show. You know? It's not, it's no good for they like, to have it on their CV. You know? But, for me, some of them that I thought, these artists have integrity, not, it's just a normal person for me. Like, in the future, when a situation like that happens, I won't rely myself on that person anymore. No matter what political topic works, that person is doing works about, yeah. {burst of applause} It's a lifetime thing, yeah.

Thank you for a brilliant question.

Audience member #6: Hello? Hello? Can you hear me? Yeah. You can hear me. Yes, I, uh, have a question, because it was big influence for me after Tina and Park and Jason, I started thinking about accessibility, and disability for disabled people, and for people with condition, and I'm curious about your jumping project, if you thought about this, and if it was on purpose, or, what is your thoughts about this.

Ogüt: When I was installing last the jumping project, one of the curators was on wheelchair, she is normally walking, but she injured her leg. So I arrived to Bangladesh, and she was in the wheelchair, and we're installing together the jump piece, you know. So, health and safety security departments of the museum – it's very important to talk about everybody's able to see the works in a cool way. Even hanging the works eye level is not designed for disabled people. There's already a problem there. You don't need to put a trampoline there. The eye level thing you call is not for people who are in wheelchair. You know, it's wrong way of hanging artworks. So all the artworks hanging in the museum are

hanged wrong, at the moment. This is one thing. So, the, you can go correcting all this according to everybody's needs. Actually there is a brilliant project now, right now being done, all the ads, disability acts project, I can't remember the name now, but I met them in May. They, anyone who complain about any art institution, through them, can complain to the institution to change that regulation, and, or bring in that new regulation by being paid by that institution. So they created this complaint system by anyone who has certain kind of disability can apply them and do that, and so on. This kind of project are brilliant. But health and safety, there is a thing there as well. A lot of works that are done, like, artworks in '70s and '80s, they were not thinking of any of the things we are thinking now. I would like to create a kind of parallel reality, always thinking the others as well. But always creating, like I create works that are even difficult for people who have a little vertigo, you know, these works, they could not enter the room. They have vertigo, or they cannot climb up, or they cannot, you know? And I don't myself go into those works, like, if I don't find I need to do that, it requires an action, I don't. So artist needs to take that responsibility that, you know, not everybody will see that work. Not because of their disability, because of the way you designed work, it's not possible for everyone to see it equally. But, also, we need to keep the possibility of taking risk, and surprise alive. (01:49:56)

So need health and safety regulations of the museum, needs, like my exhibition in Istanbul, we talk about like disabled people. Like, he cannot climb up that room I made in the back, that they cannot, no way they can go in that main room. So we said, okay, we gonna use just video, a video call kind of thing, and then somebody walks for them, and they have the experience like that. We talk about those options. And of course anyone entering, they take their own risk. But I cannot do that work in Europe in any museum. No way. At the moment, that work doesn't go to any museum, especially in northern part of Europe, because of the regulation. And a lot of work they have in their collections from '70s, '80s, the '60s, they cannot even take out from the storage, you know, like Kounellis' *Horses*, they cannot, Tate has this collection, they cannot exhibit it right now. It's a weird work, it doesn't make sense, and no artist should do that work right now also. Back then it looked like avant-garde, you know, it looked like provoking, important piece of conceptual art bringing live animals in a museum setting, you know. Even taxidermy animals, like, this was such a common thing to do in 90s, you know, 2000s. Artists were like so, they were thinking, whatever we were thinking normal is not normal, which is good. But it shouldn't be decided by the, these specific people hired for this department, they have nothing to do with creativity and interest in creativity, interest in culture space, you know? They're just there like, even to apply more rules on any kind of freedom that can bring in the institution to experiment on many things. So we have to distinguish two things, and of course we should be considerate about all the, you know, limits and already structurally existing issues within institutions. I think they should commission, for each issue, an artist, not like have another, stronger health and safety security department, that doesn't allow inside many possibilities, you know. So those institutions become really boring, also. So better not to go there at all, also, you know, so it's very important to keep the excitement, keep the, you know, this risk, and magic, and all these elements, without killing all of them, be considerate of everyone that is coming. It can be different way; a work can be experienced multiple ways, you just have to have an idea already for it, and then you can design it in that way, you know.

How I believe. Of course, when there is a complaint, I never got a complaint like that, but when there is a complaint, it should be considered also, even during the show. You know? But not from the security people. {applause, cheering}

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